

Motley

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Silverberg comments on Motley 6

The piece last issue by Greg, ENVISIONING STARFLIGHT FAILING, has garnered an e-mail from Bob Silverberg. Here's his comment and my reply:

"I did get a look at Greg's brilliantly argued piece on interstellar travel. Despite his eloquence, and the depth of his scientific thought (which took me out of my own depth in a couple of places) I remain unconvinced of the possibility of interstellar voyages. Of course I have the same romantic longing for the exploration of the stars that you and he have, or I would not have written all those stories about other worlds and alien life-forms. But for me, as (I'm pretty sure) for you, faster-than-light travel is nothing more than a fantasy, which leaves only the generation-ship method, and my own view of humanity, which if anything is darker than Stan Robinson's, brings me to the conclusion that the sealed environment of such a starship would lead ultimately to the intensifying of the pathological traits inherent in the human psyche under inbreeding, resulting, in a couple of hundred years' time, in the development of a Napoleon, or, worse, a Hitler, or, even worse (worse than Hitler!) an ISIS. It would all end very badly, especially if the voyage resulted, as it seems to do in AURORA, in the failure to find a habitable planet. Heinlein hinted at some of that in "Universe," in a more innocent era. I wouldn't want to be aboard such a ship and these days I'd rather not even read a story about one."

My reply to Bob:

As for starships, after Greg's piece received a great deal of attention on the Centauri – Dreams website, Steve Baxter and Joe Miller and I put together a more detailed scientific critique of Robinson's novel.

In this longer piece, running to 5000 words, commenting on *Aurora* from scientific, engineering and biological perspectives. We pretty well took apart his novel. It appeared on Centauri – Dreams a few months ago and has garnered about 100 comments. It's also was picked up by a couple print SF criticism magazines, starting with *NY Review of SF*.

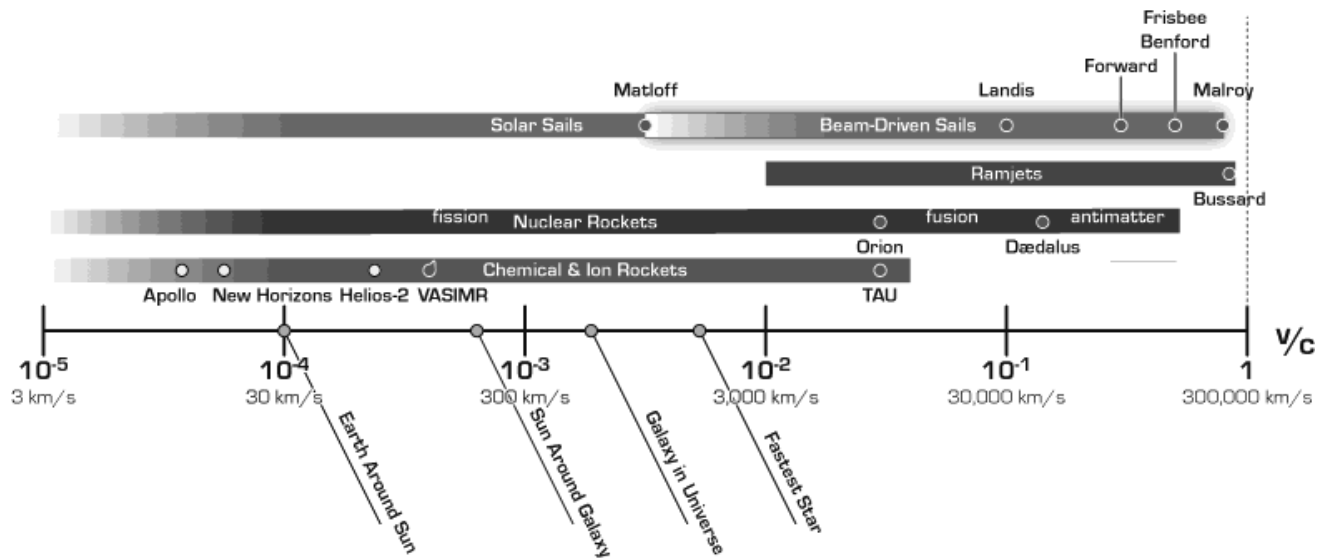
Now to your points. I too rule out faster-than-light, which of course is in the realm of fantasy. But World Ships are not the only possible answer. I'll attach here a figure I made up (see next page) a couple of years ago showing various types of propulsion for spacecraft on the vertical axis and velocity on a log scale on the horizontal axis. That shows what a vast increase in speed has to be made to get anywhere near interstellar. Recalling that kinetic energy goes the square of velocity, the problem is even more difficult. Interstellar openers, say 0.1c, is 5,000 times faster than the returning Apollo capsules, the fastest mankind has ever gone.

In *Aurora*, both fusion rockets and beam-driven sails, a la Bob Forward, are used. In Stan's novel, he makes basically contradictory arguments: The construction of World Ships with long flight times, of order 1% c, requiring stable societies in the 1st 90% of the book, yet cryosleep is invented on their way back to Earth. So that here's the way I put it in the essay with Baxter and Miller:

"As the Ship's systems collapse, the returning crew gets from Earth plans to build a cryonic cold sleep method, which allows the viewpoint characters to survive until they reach Earth. This technology logically undermines the problems of the early parts of the novel confront, and therefore undermines most of Robinson's point about the difficulty of interstellar travel: if only the colonists had waited a few centuries for cryo technology, it would all have been so much easier! But this contradicts Robinson's thesis."

So I think that the novel has many many flaws, basically made up to support his opinion that it will never happen.

If he were to be right, then it explains Fermi's original statement of his paradox: where are they? If interstellar travel is possible why haven't we seen any evidence of it in our own solar system since the universe is 13 billion years old?



Caption: Space travel propulsion technologies. Open circles are missions; dark circles are concepts along with their authors. Interplanetary velocities can be achieved from chemical and ion rockets and nuclear fission rockets. For interstellar travel thermonuclear fusion and antimatter rockets compete with directed energy beam-driven sails. Interstellar ramjets have been found to be implausible (thin interstellar medium, poor efficiency).

If that's true, then the remaining mystery why don't interstellar civilizations communicate in the radio? We haven't seen any evidence of that in even the more recent more sophisticated searches just completed by the Allen Array up in Northern California, but not yet published. Of course one explanation is that we're alone in the universe, we are entirely singular.

My own opinion is that life is commonplace in the universe but technical civilizations are rare. If civilizations are thousand light-years apart, communication between them becomes really difficult. But that would still be consistent with 10,000 civilizations in the galaxy.

Re-reading *Void*

From 1955 to 1959 I co-edited a fanzine, *Void*, which gradually attracted a lot of attention. Greg was my co-editor; we started in January 1955 in Germany and our last issue together was in early 1959, Number 13, in Dallas. Recently Greg bought the later issues, two bound volumes, from Steve Stiles. In the last few weeks I've read both volumes, which occurred largely between '59 and '62, issues 14 through 28. The 29th issue was created but not assembled or distributed until January 1969!

Reading through those 16 issues gives an interesting picture of fandom at that time. Greg gradually acquired co-editors, starting with Ted White in New York, who volunteered to take over production from Greg as soon as he heard that I had dropped out. (To pursue studying physics, resulting in a PhD 10 years later.) Ted merged his own fanzine, *Innuendo*, with *Void*. They soon were joined by Pete Graham and later by Terry Carr, fleeing divorce from Miriam Dyches (later Miriam Knight) in Berkeley. That allowed Terry to start a New York career in writing & editing.

The co-editors rapidly developed a persona as The *Void* Boys and Boob Stewart came along to introduce multipage covers showing them as a vaudeville act. The spirit of the times is very much alive in these issues. Many prominent fans came in as contributors and letter writers. Alas, most of them were gone now some 53 years after those issues were finished. Here are some of them: Walt Willis, Larry and Noreen Shaw, John Berry, Lee Hoffman Bob Shaw, Shelby Vick, Alva Rogers, John Koenig, Chuck Berry, Redd Boggs, Bob Tucker, Calvin Demmon, John Berry, Jerry Page, Harry Warner and.... I could go on for some time. Two of the co-editors, Pete & Terry are dead; Pete lived till 2004, 65 years old. Terry barely made it to 50, in 1987.

And there are some who are still with us: Greg and me of course, Elinor Busby, Gordon Eklund, Don Fitch, Arnie Katz, Johnny Berry and Ted White.

Void featured a good jovial positive atmosphere, most of the editorials being exchanges between the editors. Greg contributed his editorials from Oklahoma, where we were both in college. He's told me that he developed his comic style in those, and you can certainly see that happening. His pieces are much more carefully worked than the other editorials. I recall that the first story is sold in 1966 text was in the comedic mode.

The fifth anniversary issue, 1960?, dubbed the '**VANNISH**', was so large, it had to be mailed out in three installments.

Willis Willis is present in almost every issue, including many chapters of 'The Harp Stateside', because the campaign of the magazine was the 10th Anniversary Willis Fund, to bring 'the BNF of BNF's' him back to the US. It succeeded, resulting in Walt and Madeleine Willis coming to America for the 1962 Worldcon, ten years after Walt's first trip here.

It's very sound meeting back to see how many people I remember a time. I guess nostalgia appeals more and more as one gets older because there's more of the past to recall. I have a background feeling that 'here was my youth'. Now, a half-century later, I wish I could do it all over again.

Men in Tight Suits

In my travels in to so many cities (7 countries last year, about 10 cities), I've noticed a growing trend: men of all ages wearing extremely tight suits. These are suits, not just sport coats & pants. Maybe it's in order to Look Young, maybe the influence of gays. The cut of the suits is also designed to accentuate the slimness of the character wearing it. They look pretty uncomfortable a lot of time and are really at their best only when standing up. To me they look poorly tailored, jackets & pants too tight, pant legs too short. They take off their jackets and hitch up their pants first to make it easier to sit down. I think they must be a pain to wear.

Mailing Comments

Lofgeornost -Fred Lerner I always enjoy your writing. You have an interesting point of view and interesting experiences. A few comments: I'm very interested in seeing "King Charles III" should it appear. Thanks for the Kipling recommendations, which I shall follow up on.

The wolves are running-Keith Walker Interesting commentary on UK politics! I follow such pretty closely because I have an English wife and relatives. I've been to the UK about 40 times in the last 60 years. I saw the devastation of that Labor produced in the 1970s and rejoiced to see the comeback to the Thatcher years. Now that the Conservatives are fully in charge again, they're going to continue to reduce the size of government, which overgrew so much over the Labor years. They started 5 years ago with government 46% of GNP, now at 41% and headed in this term to 35%. Contrast that with the current 21% of the US federal government, roughly 10% for the states and local governments, total ~31%. So you, at the end of this term, will still have an economy more dominated by government than the US. So you will be in a good position when the recession, that's already building, hits. Note that the major European countries have governments with more than half of the economy, with France, at about 56%, having a very hard time keeping their economy going. Europe has mounting problems- migrants, unemployment, Russian incursions, debts-that they seem unable to face.

We've have rented a house in Pimlico for our 50th wedding anniversary for two weeks this August. Our daughters' family of five from Melbourne and our son's family of four from Maryland will be with us. Along with our relations on my wife's side, we will have about 40 at the party I look forward to showing my grandchildren some of the sites of the London area. What I mostly go to the museums and eat in the wonderful restaurants. London is in my opinion the best restaurant city in the world and has been for quite a while. Second is Melbourne; the Australians have become very inventive in cuisine.

Emc², Number One-Mike McNerney I enjoy reading your zines. You mentioned not having read, listened, watched a movie or eating in a restaurant for years! So what do you do? Somehow I doubt it's deep meditation. You certainly live in a great city so you should be able to go to many places, such as the Exploratorium./Your memories of New York days are interesting to me in part because the same characters overlap the *Voids* that I' reading.