

EMERALD CITY

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Introduction

Meanwhile, back in California...

Yeah, well, occasionally it would be nice to have a home rather than just a series of places I lodge along the way. Then again, I'm well fed, have a roof over my head, and have been fortunate enough to avoid any serious illness the like of which would probably bankrupt me should I contract in whilst out of the UK. Furthermore, I have my access to an ISDN line back again (thank you Michael) and I have a computer of my own once again. This means I can get back to restoring the tattered remnants of my electronic life, and at a reasonable price too.

The last couple of weeks in Australia were pretty hectic. My profuse apologies to everyone in Melbourne who must have wondered whether I'd left early, and especially to Bev and David for having to miss their engagement party. Because I was using borrowed machines, my email got messed up on a couple of occasions as well. If you haven't received a reply to something important, please let me know. Finally, the web site is more or less back in action. I didn't have all the facilities I needed to keep it up to date whilst I was in Melbourne, but I can put that right now.

This issue is something of a thematic one. I started with the idea of reviewing both the film and the book of *Starship Troopers*. However, as I couldn't find a single person who had a good word to say for the film, I decided to let Kevin off being dragged out to see it and do something else instead. The primary difference between the film and the book is that, whilst the former is just a war story set in space, the latter is philosophic treatise (or mindless rant depending on your prejudice) on the nature of war and its place in society. Given that I expected Heinlein to be at one end of a spectrum, I decided to see what other SF writers had to say about war.

In doing this I have avoided the masses of novels by the likes of Pournelle, Bujold and Feintuch which are, like the *Starship Troopers* film, largely war stories set in space, and concentrated instead on those books which are SF stories about war. The classic of this genre is Joe Haldeman's *Forever War*. I also had to hand *Genetic Soldier* by George Turner, which turned out to be more about human society than war but was a fascinating book nevertheless. Finally, with Potlatch looming, I turned my attention to its Book of Honour, H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* (1998 is the centenary of the book's publication). I think these novels make an interesting contrast. Here's hoping it works for you guys too.

Finally, should you happen to pick this 'zine up at Potlatch, hello, welcome, and please let me know what you think of it. I'll probably be in the con suite.

Down among the SMOF men

Before we get onto the subject of war, however, a little diversion into Boston.

SMOFcon is a small, friendly little convention that has found itself a niche in that lull in the hotel calendar between Thanksgiving and Christmas. It means it is quite often held in cold climes, but the room rates can be excellent. This year it was held in an all suites hotel on the banks of the Charles River in Cambridge, about half an hour's walk from the Harvard campus. It was cold, but crisp and clear and much preferable to the torrential rains that pounded the Bay Area that weekend.

The purpose of the gathering is to provide those people who run conventions with an opportunity to get together and talk about how they do it. SMOF, in case you didn't know, stands for Secret Masters of Fandom, and SMOFcon is where those Secret Masters get together and decide what will happen in fandom in the coming year. Not.

Because many fans are addicted to conspiracy theory, and because many fanzine fans seem to believe that their hobby has been stolen from them by evil conrunners, you will probably be able to find many people who will tell you that the folk who run Worldcons make a massive profit from it and that the site selection and Hugo ballots are all rigged. This is nonsense. The people you meet at a SMOFcon are generally a nice bunch of people who work themselves into the ground every Worldcon and who relish this opportunity to actually socialise with people they normally only see in committee meetings. There are some stand-offish types who think you have to prove yourself as a conrunner before you are worth talking to, but most of them are well aware that any newcomer is a potential extra pair of hands at the next convention. This makes the SMOFs one of the more welcoming branches of fandom.

For this year's convention, Sharon Sbarsky had tried hard to get new people to the convention and it seemed to have worked. There were a lot of locals, which is unusual for SMOFcon, including many of the people behind Arisia, the more media-oriented of Boston's two major conventions. The British contingent was quite sizeable, Jurgen Marzi came over from Germany, and Sharon was kind enough to mark my badge "Melbourne" rather than "homeless".

Other than a few "get to know each other" panels, the programme was largely of a "how to do" nature. How do you run effective meetings? How do you create a good programme book? What are the best procedures for keeping track of money at con? How do you ensure effective communication between a committee that is spread around the world? There was a lot of interesting stuff, and gatherings like this should be invaluable to anyone planning to put on a big convention. (It was noticeable that a lot of the Bucconeer staff were there, many of them commenting wryly that con chair Peggy Rae Pavlat had strongly suggested to them that they should go.)

But did it work? Did people learn things? Well, yes and no. The panel that Tom Whitmore did on effective meetings was excellent and many of the others were valuable. But the discussions often suffered badly from the fannish tendency to nit-pick. Instead of trying to find a solution

to a problem, we would find ourselves arguing endlessly over exactly what the problem was and rejecting every possible suggestion of action on the grounds that it wasn't perfect. This trend was exacerbated by the insistence of the programming team that all panels should be non-hierarchical. Tom took charge of the direction of debate in his panel; most other moderators simply let it drift, often to the detriment of the panel.

There is certainly a place for free-form debate at SMOFcon. Sometimes only a brainstorming session will come up with new ideas. But if newcomers are to be encouraged to attend we should make sure that they get something useful out of the experience. If this means a group of "wise men" lecturing to them, so what? I also think that some practical sessions would be useful. Kent Bloom, who is chairing next year's convention in Colorado Springs, is a big fan of simulations. One of the workshops he has suggested is to get the plans of a local hotel and have several small groups of people plan how they would use the site for a Westercon. That sounds like a lot of fun.

A fair amount of extra-curricular activity was also provided. Trips were organised to local bookshops and breweries, but the planned visit to the NESFA clubhouse had to be cancelled after the local skunk, which nests under the clubhouse, objected to the idea, thus rendering the area uninhabitable for several days.

My one brewery trip was on the Sunday night to the North-Eastern Brewery Company. I managed to get in a group including Tim Illingworth, Martin Easterbrook, Robert Sheddon and Jurgen Marzi. If two Englishmen, one Scot, a German and a pseudo-Aussie can't provide a decent commentary on Boston beer, no one can. We all ordered the sampler and things got off to a good start with the "Bostonia Blonde Ale". Jurgen commented that it had a rather chemical taste, to which Robert replied, "aye, it must be a peroxide blonde".

Sadly the rest of the evening was less amusing, largely because the beers got a lot better. I was particularly taken with the "Triple Black", a wheat beer flavoured with black currant, blackberry and black raspberry. Robert treated the Scotch ale called "McFearsome" with the contempt it deserved, and we all sneered at the stout with the vanishing head, but the plum-flavoured "Christmas Ale" was well received.

We also did some shopping, and I must say thank you to TR Smith for introducing me to Trader Joe's. This chain of grocery stores specialises in stocking different and interesting stuff. Their selection of beers looked fascinating, but the main reason for my delight was that they stocked English cheese at reasonable prices. The Americans, for some bizarre reason, seem to think that Cheddar cheese should be soapy, tasteless and bright orange in colour. Up until now, the only way I've been able to get the real thing is from up-market delis that charge over \$15 a pound for it. Trader Joe's had an acceptable farmhouse Cheddar for only \$3.50 a pound. And they had Sage Derby too. Hooray!

And one final point. On the way home Kevin and I had to change planes at Memphis. Strolling through the airport, we chanced upon a bar with live music and the most wonderful smell of barbecued ribs. In almost every airport I have visited the food has been bland, overpriced and often inedible. In LAX I am often reduced to eating at McDonalds because it is no worse than everywhere else and a damn sight cheaper. The ribs were expensive, but they were tasty and the musician was great. Well done Memphis: airports don't have to be awful.

War in space: Heinlein

I've read quite a few of Robert Heinlein's books. Most of them were awful, though none as quintessentially so as *The Number of the Beast*. None of them, however, were earlier than *Stranger in a Strange Land*. Hard line Heinlein fans will tell you that book marked a watershed, the point where Heinlein stopped writing good novels and started writing rambling nonsense. Hard line Heinlein fans also have a disturbing tendency to be hard line Libertarians.

But you can't ignore the man. He's won two Hugos, been Worldcon Guest of Honour a staggering three times and has written an awful lot of books. With the translation of *Starship Troopers* to the big screen, his work is likely to experience a renaissance. I figured it was about time I read some of his earlier work, and what better book than the one that is currently in the news.

Long before the film hit the cinemas, fans around the world were already complaining that it was a travesty. "It's just an action movie", they wailed, "they've left out all of the philosophy". And so it proved. But just what is this philosophy that was so cruelly ignored? I approached *Starship Troopers*, the novel, in the expectation of finding a cogent, well-argued exposition of Heinlein's militarist philosophy. But the more I read, the flimsier the arguments became. In the end I found myself coming to the conclusion that, had Heinlein read the book with a critical eye, he would have demanded that the author be executed for criminal stupidity. Why this book is so revered is beyond me.

The basic setting for the book is an Earth ruled by a military aristocracy. It is quasi-democratic but, as in many other societies throughout history, it has a severely limited franchise. In ancient Rome, only citizens could vote; in 19th century Britain it was the gentry who were afforded that honour; in Heinlein's world, only retired members of the military may vote.

To be fair, Heinlein does make a token effort to make things seem slightly less restrictive. He points out that everyone has the right to volunteer for military service. If you want to sign up, you can, and the minimum term in peace time is only 2 years. But as soon as the action moves to Boot Camp it becomes obvious that "unsuitable" candidates are quickly weeded out. Should physical fitness be a requirement for voting rights? Heinlein seems to think it should. Furthermore, though he shrinks from stating this openly, it seems certain that candidates who are deemed politically suspect are also pressured to resign. One sure way of ensuring the continuation of a political system is to ensure that only those who support it can vote.

Heinlein's rationale for this is some highly dubious moral philosophy. He goes to considerable lengths to make clear that the theory on which his society is structured is worked out according to rigorous proofs in symbolic logic, but he is never able to give these proofs, and when he does try to construct an argument he fails dismally. According to Heinlein, all morality is based on survival instincts. To survive yourself is good, to sacrifice yourself for your children is better, and to be willing to lay down your life in defence of your species is the ultimate good. Hence only the military are moral enough to be allowed to vote.

But think about this for a minute. If the only moral imperative is to survive and perpetuate your species, then it is perfectly moral to cheat, steal from and murder your neighbours, provided you don't get caught. Heinlein has thrown away any pretence at absolutes in morality, replacing it with, "What is good for me is OK". Yes, this is Libertarianism at its most raw, honest and repulsive.

Besides, the whole edifice is based on a misunderstanding of the workings of evolution. Heinlein assumes that all species must eventually compete with each other and one competitor must always wipe out its rival. He claims that violence, far from being a last resort, is the only way anything gets properly settled. The idea that some species may succeed in evolution because they develop a mechanism by which they co-exist better with other species is foreign to him. Nor does he consider that competition might be waged by means other than physical violence.

In the end, it all comes down to gut reaction. In one section, Heinlein is reduced to defending his society on the basis that it must be OK because it works. And in what is probably the worst passage of the book, he is reduced to pure macho garbage. The hero's father had always opposed his signing up. But later, with an interstellar war in place and the hero's mother dead in an enemy attack, he discovers that his father has joined his regiment. Here is the explanation the father gives for his change of mind.

*"I had to perform an act of faith. I had to prove to myself that I was a man. Not just a product-consuming economic animal ... but a **man**."* [Original text has the final 'man' in italics.]

Hello? Humanity calling ape, humanity calling ape. Look, if you'd stop beating your chest and yelling for a while you might hear something of interest.

It is a shame really. Heinlein does have some good points to make. He correctly identifies the fact that one of the great failings of mass democracy is that those who vote normally manage to avoid the consequences of their decisions. For example, those who vote for lower taxes are not those who will suffer from welfare cuts; those who vote against environmental measures are not those who will inherit a wasted planet. He also has some good points to make about military organisation, in particular that turning out toffee-nosed twits from the likes of Sandhurst, St. Cyr and West Point is no way to create an officer corps.

The saddest thing of all, however, is that the story Heinlein weaves contains the seeds of the destruction of the society he loves. First of all, by his own theory, it is entirely possible that humanity will lose the war with the Bugs. Heinlein obviously doesn't think we should, and he leaves the reader in no doubt what he thinks the great enemy represents. At one point he even describes their society as "perfect Communism". But never once does he give a cogent argument as to why mankind might win, and he gives many that suggest the Bugs will triumph in the end.

Secondly, it becomes clear as the story develops that Earth is getting desperate for military recruits. Heinlein, quite sensibly, is opposed to conscription. But many people who, in the past, would not dream of joining up, are now volunteering in droves. Nor can the military be quite so picky as to whom it lets through Boot Camp and whom it does not. In the end, if things go badly enough, conscription will be inevitable. Now suppose that the Earth wins. All of those

people who signed up during the war will get discharged. All of them will be entitled to vote. There will be near universal suffrage. And what does history tell us is the inevitable result of a post-war election? Those deemed responsible for the war are always voted out of office.

As to the film, I now have a certain sympathy with its producers. Other than the space setting, there isn't much SF in the book. The only piece of science of any interest is the power armour that the troopers wear. Heinlein may even have invented this concept. For some reason, presumably money, it doesn't get used in the film. The result, as someone at the MSFC commented to me, is that these futuristic troopers are being sent into battle with worse equipment than a modern infantryman carries.

But other than that, the book is ideal for adaptation to an action film. The philosophical stuff has to be left out, partly because it would be very dull in a movie, partly because it is so poorly argued, and partly because it would cause a political storm that no studio would wish to sail into. What is left is the thinnest of stories. Boy joins space marines; boy has tough time in boot camp; boy goes to war; boy gets to be a "real man". That's it. No more, no less. From that point of view, the film is a good reflection of the novel: vacuous.

Postscript. I was browsing through the list of the year's best sellers on Amazon.com and discovered, unsurprisingly, that *Starship Troopers* was the most popular SF title. There were a lot of reviews attached to the title's entry, and I was surprised to see how many of the Heinlein fans were trying to pretend that their hero hadn't really intended to promote a military dictatorship but rather was warning us against one. C'mon guys, get real. Tell me that *The X-Files* is a real-life documentary, it would be more believable.

More interestingly, there was a professional review that made some interesting points about the film. Apparently Paul Verhoeven, the director, grew up during the Nazi occupation of his native Holland. The reviewer claimed that Verhoeven recognised the fascist elements of the book and tried to point this out in the film. Look out for subtly disguised Nazi imagery. Perhaps I ought to go see the film after all.

Starship Troopers - Robert Heinlein - Ace - softcover

War in space: Haldeman

Despite all his pro-military fervour, Heinlein did not have much of a military career. He joined the Navy, not the Marines, and was invalided out in 1934, just in time to miss WWII. Joe Haldeman, on the other hand, served with the Combat Engineers in Vietnam and was awarded the Purple Heart. Does he have a less romantic vision of war?

You bet. The contrast between Heinlein's version of military life and Haldeman's is stark. Take Boot Camp, for example. In Heinlein's world it is tough but eventually seen as fair and useful in turning the recruits into "real men". If people die in Heinlein's Boot Camp, it is either because they weren't up to the job, or because they had to be executed for bad politics. Haldeman, on the other hand, has no illusions. In *The Forever War* people die all the time in Boot Camp, for the silliest of reasons: because their power armour is badly designed, because their instructors get over-enthusiastic in live-ammo exercises, because their training planet is so dangerous that the slightest loss of concentration can be fatal. And when the recruits graduate they do not end up as dedicated members of an elite fighting force. They are elite killing machines, to be sure, but they hate the army just as much, if not more, than when they started.

Where Heinlein has only volunteer soldiers, Haldeman conscripts the smartest, fittest people on Earth (because only they have a chance of surviving). Where Heinlein describes glorious victories in which only a few of his elite troops are killed, Haldeman has Pyrrhic encounters in which more than half of the winning side, and all of the losing side, die. It is like comparing one of John Wayne's war movies with M.A.S.H.. One is a sanitised, romanticised view of army life, the other a detailed examination of its warts.

Another area where Haldeman easily outscores Heinlein is in the science of war in space. Heinlein, as I've said, pretty much glosses over it. Haldeman, on the other hand, goes into detail on such matters as how to walk, in power armour, on a sheet of frozen hydrogen. The most memorable part of the book is his refusal to find a magical solution to relativistic time debt. Just how do you fight a war when your strategic theatre is hundreds of light years across and a hundred years can pass on the home world whilst a strike force is spending 6 months securing an enemy base?

The less impressive parts of the book are those where Haldeman describes developments on Earth whilst the troops are away. His nervousness about homosexuality seems quaint and antiquated. (At one point in the book Earth government outlaws heterosexuality to help curb the population. The hero finds even social acceptance of homosexuality deeply disturbing.) Also his treatment of social and biological developments is lightweight, all the more so in comparison to the thoroughness of his physics. All in all, however, a fine book, and a far better commentary on war than Heinlein's romantic nonsense.

The Forever War - Joe Haldeman - Avonova - softcover

War in space: Turner

Like Haldeman, George Turner also had a distinguished military career. He didn't win any famous medals, but he survived several years' service in the Pacific theatre during WWII and was apparently well thought of by his superiors.

Like Heinlein, Turner has a certain degree of contempt for the non-military citizen. Whilst introducing his lead character, General Tommy Atkins, George has this to say:

Even the few Foresters who were familiar with Thomas Atkins addressed him as "Soldier", partly from habit, partly because of their uneasy feeling that his profession was not wholly justifiable although practiced in their defence. The paradox of preaching peace while being eternally ready for war was older than written history and defeated them as it had defeated their ancestors. It was too difficult for simple folk, and they called themselves "simple folk" when faced with hard questions.

Yes, ordinary folk can be silly when faced with military necessity, but unlike Heinlein's Johnny Rico, Atkins is not a murderous agent of the ongoing march of human supremacy, he is a peacekeeper who sees violence as a last resort.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. *Genetic Soldier* is not really a book about war. It is a book about first contact with an unknown planet: Earth. The basic plot is that a seed ship, the *Search*, sent out from an Earth falling into environmental collapse, has returned home. Failing to find any suitable planets to settle, the crew has mutinied and given up the quest. But whilst relativity and cryogenic sleep have aged them only a few decades, hundreds of years have passed on Earth and the society they find on their return is very different to the one they left. The people of Earth now live in small, isolated communities, very much at one with the land, and led by mystic elders who want nothing to do with representatives of a lost and discredited culture.

The bulk of the story consists of the efforts of the *Search's* crew to negotiate and, when that fails, force permission to settle. From the point of view of this series of reviews, the most interesting feature of the plot is that, whilst the elders are all for having the invaders from space attacked and massacred, Atkins insists on (and succeeds in creating) a non-violent solution to the problem. All through the book, he emphasises to the visitors that his duty as a soldier is to use minimal force and absolute honesty. Whereas Heinlein insists that only violence can ever solve a political dispute, Turner insists that violence only perpetuates the problem. No prizes for guessing which one of them I think has it right.

There is one final example of George's philosophy of war, but I can't describe it without giving away one of the twists in the ending, of which there are several. There are parts of the book that I found a little unsatisfactory, but all in all it is another one of George's winners. The more I read, the more I regret not having got to know him better.

Genetic Soldier - George Turner - Avonova - softcover

War in space: Wells

In contrast to the above writers, H.G. Wells was a pacifist, and yet he wrote what is probably still the most famous SF novel about a war: *The War of the Worlds*. Why did he do it, and is his take on war radically different from those we have already looked at?

It is probably just possible to read *The War of the Worlds* as a warning against the dangers of German imperialism, but Wells peppers the book with parallels between the Martian invasion and European treatment of native peoples in countries such as America, Africa and Australia. I think that there can be little doubt that he intended the novel as a criticism of Britain's treatment of its colonies.

He may have had another reason as well. It was Wells who coined the phrase "the war to end all wars" for WWI on the grounds that it was so horrible no one in their right minds would ever declare war again. Of course he was wrong. Turner would say it was because the Treaty of Versailles was a long way from a just settlement; Heinlein would say that it was because the allies failed to press on and wipe out the German race. Wells just got depressed. He didn't fail to commend the bravery of troops – the sacrifice of the *Thunder Child* is probably the most moving passage in the book – but the majority of the book focuses on the devastation caused by the war. To Wells, war is disastrous, not glorious, and he wanted other people to realise this.

It is interesting to compare the doom that visited south-east England in *The War of the Worlds* with the Scouring of the Shire in *The Lord of the Rings*. Both Wells and Tolkien describe the destruction of a sleepy, unsuspecting, complacent and very English society. But where Tolkien's message is one of vigilance, of the need to guard against the Godless minions of the Evil Empire in the East, Wells sees the whole thing as simply a manifestation of the great, uncaring universe. The Martians were smarter than us. There was little we could have done. Equally their demise was nothing to do with us. Earth was lucky, nothing more.

I'll return to the demise of the Martians in a little while, but first I'd like to consider Wells' characters.

There are only three major characters in *The War of the Worlds*: the narrator, the curate and the artilleryman (the brother is simply a device to allow the narrator to be in two places at once, he has no character of his own). Wells uses them to represent three very different groups in society: the clergy, the rationalists and the military.

The contempt that Wells had for organised religion is well known, and it is unsurprising that his curate is a miserable, selfish and useless fellow. Wells means us to conclude that placing your faith in religion is foolish if your God either does not exist or doesn't care about you. He never says which of those is the case, he simply leaves the curate to ponder on the uselessness of all those prayers, hymns and Sunday school classes.

In contrast, the narrator tries to look at things calmly and rationally. He tries not to fall into despair, and he takes every opportunity to try to understand the Martians and their technology. However, when faced by a situation that, to his analysis, is hopeless, he sees little alternative but to accept it. Mankind will be destroyed, and nothing can be done about it.

The artilleryman, on the other hand, doesn't give up. Faced by insurmountable odds, he is still determined to fight on and busily makes plans for survival and counter-attacks. He is just the

sort of fellow that Heinlein would admire. Indeed, he can easily be seen as the archetype for the many survivalist groups in America today. Yet what does Wells make of him? Sure he has fine ideas, but faced with the necessity to put them into operation, he quickly falls back into sloth and gluttony. That is Wells' message about the military. Sure they are fine fellows and have a role in society, but put them in charge and they'll soon be out for themselves. If the artilleryman had ever succeeded in setting up his underground resistance he would more likely be fighting similar rival groups for the remaining stores of champagne and cigars than fighting the Martians. If they all followed Heinlein's Libertarian creed, that is exactly what would happen.

The War of the Worlds is a very fine SF novel. It has well developed, non-anthropomorphic aliens, it has good astronomy, it has aircraft before the Wright brothers, it has robots over 20 years before Capek coined the term and lasers decades before their invention. It is even possible to argue that the Martian tripods are a form of power armour rather than a fighting vehicle, more akin to the Daleks than a Star Wars Imperial Walker. Most impressively to its readers, it predicted the horrors of Mustard Gas that soon came to haunt them. The only prediction I will not grant Wells is the invention of germ warfare.

Sure it was bacteria that were the eventual downfall of the Martians. But Wells did not see them as a weapon deployed by mankind against the invaders. Nor, as some later versions of the book have done, did he intend them to be symbolic of the Earth itself fighting back. As far as Wells was concerned, the Martian failure was due to a mistake of their own.

Early in the book, Wells postulates that there are no bacteria on Mars. He gives two possible reasons for this: that they never evolved, or that Martian medical science had eradicated them. He must surely have known that the first explanation was highly unlikely: bacteria would be amongst the first types of life expected to evolve, and anyway are essential to digestion in higher species. No, Wells' point here was that the Martians were undone by their own cleverness.

A common theme running through Wells' fiction is the danger of scientific progress. It is ironic that one of the founders of the genre was an opponent of scientific progress rather than an advocate of it, but it seems to be true. In *The Time Machine*, technological advances have fatally weakened the Eloi; Dr. Moreau's dabblings in biology are disastrous; and in *The War of the Worlds* the Martian invasion failed because they had eradicated and then forgotten about bacteria. Were Wells alive today, he would probably point to things like the Asthma epidemic as proof of his theories. In shielding children from previously fatal illnesses, he would say, we are breeding a population of medical weaklings. Perhaps, once again, he is right.

The War of the Worlds - H.G. Wells - Signet - softcover

Alternative Martians

One of the interesting things about *The War of the Worlds* is that it cannot be easily presented to modern audiences. Wells quite deliberately set it in his contemporary society. The shock value of the Martians overrunning sleepy Victorian Surrey is far greater than it would have been had

they landed in, say, New York, or some future, imagined London. Anyone wishing to present the story today is forced to adapt it to use the same trick. Orson Welles, for example, did so to great advantage in his legendary radio play.

And not only is it necessary to change the location, the culture has to change to. Modern audiences, for example, would be mystified by the fact that, although Well's narrator spends much time worrying about his wife, he never once mentions her name. These days, a little bit more romance is expected.

I haven't been able to get hold of a full tape of the Orson Welles broadcast, but I've tried to get to as many other interpretations of the story as I can. My main interest was to see how much of the arguments Wells was making in the book have survived the adaptation.

The film version

In 1953 Hollywood had a go at the book in a film of the same name. I must admit that the special effects are impressive. What they achieved with models and trick photography is damn good and makes you question the millions of dollars that go into computer graphics for today's films. Unfortunately, at least to a lover of the original novel, the film has very little else to recommend itself.

To start with, Earth is not sleepy or unsuspecting. A few people hope to make money out of the Martians, but most of America is on the alert for invasion. That it comes from the Red Planet and not the Red Empire is neither here nor there. The US military is shown as brave, competent but hopelessly outgunned. Much praise is also heaped on the armies of other nations: France, India, Finland, Turkey; even Libya is shown fighting back with gusto. Special praise is reserved for the British who manage to hold out against the invaders when the rest of Europe has fallen. Strangely enough, there is no mention at all of Martian landings in Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union. Perhaps they were collaborating.

There is much pseudo-science in the film. The heat ray apparently generates a magnetic field over a distance of some miles which causes watches to stop. Quite how the Martins manage to continue firing it through the electromagnetic force field they erect, which is impervious to everything else, is a mystery to me. Eventually the army gets round to dropping an atom bomb - on a Martian encampment a few miles away from Los Angeles. The people of the city are told to shield their eyes and take cover from the blast. No mention is made of radiation. If Hollywood had any idea what really happened at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, they weren't about to tell the American people.

As might be expected, the artilleryman does not feature in the film at all. The curate makes a brief appearance, but is swiftly killed and his place taken by his pretty niece who, of course, should be expected to shriek, bawl and need rescuing at every available opportunity. No American man could possibly be shown to be as spineless as Wells' curate, but women are spineless by definition.

American scientists are shown to be active in the war effort and almost come up with a solution, but their equipment is wrecked when a mob attacks their trucks as they try to flee Los Angeles in the face of the Martian advance. Goodness only knows what happened to their

army protection given that the local commander had said they were vital to the war effort, but it would have spoiled the plot had they got away. The moral is 'we could have beaten them had we not been so selfish and uncontrolled in time of danger'. Bear this in mind when the Russians arrive.

In the final scenes the hero and heroine are taking shelter in churches with the rest of those Angelenos who were unable to get away. All over the city, the clergy and their congregations pray for a miracle, and lo, they get one. Crafty old God had put bacteria on Earth precisely for the reason of protecting us against Martian invasion and we never knew. How about that? From being the weakest, most ineffectual representatives of mankind in the novel, the clergy have been elevated to the saviours of planet. Wells would have been furious.

The musical

A musical version of the book was produced by Jeff Wayne in 1978. It includes narration by the incomparable Richard Burton and some good performances by many luminaries of 70's Brit pop, including David Essex (swoon), Justin Hayward of the Moody Blues, Phil Lynot of Thin Lizzy and Julie Covington (anyone else remember Rock Follies?). Although he has tried to keep close to the Victorian setting and plot line of the original, lyricist Gary Osborne makes a number of changes to make the story more palatable to his audience.

To begin with, sensible geography is thrown to the winds in favour of keeping a single narrator. Osborne knows he can't get his hero to Harwich and back easily, so he has the refugee steamer depart from the Thames in London. Then he's stuck. The battle with the Thunder Child can hardly take place in such a confined waterway. He even describes one Martian as "plunging far out to sea" after the steamer. It is a heck of a way to the sea from central London.

The other main change is handled somewhat better. Not sharing Wells' contempt for religion, Osborne provides the curate with a wife who attempts to help him keep his faith. This results in a fine duet between Lynot and Covington that is one of the best parts of the musical.

There is one other point where I think the musical deviates from the main plot and that is in its description of the role of the bacteria. Osborne clearly sees them as a force for Earth fighting back against the invaders, even describing them as "our microscopic allies". This gives the musical a much more upbeat ending than the novel. I'm not sure whether this was a marketing ploy or a difference in opinion as to Wells' intention.

Independence Day

If the 1953 film is notable for turning Wells' messages on their heads, *Independence Day* is notable for having hardly any messages at all, save for a bit of good old patriotic tub-thumping. Heinlein would have loved it.

Yes, I know it isn't actually about an attack from Mars. They probably thought that no one would take that seriously any more. They moved the aliens, but the story is the same. The aliens are fleeing a dying planet (well, a whole string of them actually), their technology is far in advance of our own, they destroy the world's greatest city (well, the closest one to Hollywood) and they fall victim to a virus.

There the resemblance ends. Where Wells is downbeat and pessimistic, *Independence Day* is thoroughly gung ho. Humanity (well, Americans), although almost down and out, stick with it and beat the bad guys all by themselves. Mankind as Rocky Balboa. There's not a lot more to the film than that except a huge amount of money spent blowing up cars and stuff for the special effects. Oh, and did anyone notice how Jeff Goldblum's wife walked out on him because he was happy with his job with the cable company, but goes back to him after he's become a Real Man and saved the planet. Puke.

Worth seeing for fine performances from the ever so wonderful Will Smith and a very different looking Brent Spiner. But get it out on video, or better still, borrow it from a friend. Usefulness to discussion of *The War of the Worlds*: nil.

Mars Attacks

Strangely enough, although it is a very weird comedy, Tim Burton's *Mars Attacks* may just be the remake that is closest in spirit to the original. Why? Because it contains most of the plot elements and deals with them pretty much the way Wells did.

To start with, both Wells and Burton spend much of the early part of the story parodying the complacency of Earth society and the unrealistic expectations of the Earthlings. Roles that are single characters in the book are spread over several people in the film, but their purpose stays the same. We still have the bumbling, bombastic military, and the family in the trailer represent the survivalist part of the artilleryman's role. Clergy are much less important in modern America than they were in Victorian England, so Burton replaces them with equally spineless and ineffectual politicians. The press liason's weakness for women is used in place of the curate's drinking. And the heroes of the film are ordinary guys like Ricky and Byron who try to puzzle their way through the mess.

One thing that is probably missing is the demise of the Martians being the fault of their own advanced science, although it is their over-sized brains that explode so you could possibly argue that they failed because they were too smart. But what about the moral? Wells, you will remember, was using the Martian invasion as a means of protesting Britain's treatment of native peoples in the colonies. Does *Mars Attacks* have anything similar? Well, maybe.

I'm fairly sure that *Mars Attacks*, like *The War of the Worlds*, is intended to have an anti-science message. Professor Kessler assures the President that the Martians, as an advanced technological society, will be peaceful. The Martians then go on to prove that they are anything but. They hate wildlife, especially birds, and further show their contempt for nature by the bizarre experiments they perform on Kessler and Natalie. They seem to find the whole invasion a big joke, and clearly take great enjoyment from hunting down and slaughtering humans. All they lacked were the red coats and hunting horns. At the end of the film we see

Tom Jones at Lake Tahoe singing amidst a group of wild animals. Could it be that Burton is saying, "the Martians treated us like we treat animals". I think it could.

Only in America: Happy Holidays

"Happy what? Oh, you mean Christmas!"

"Absolutely not! This is a religion-tolerant society, sir. Have you no respect for your Jewish brethren?"

Yup, in the land of Fundamentalist Christianity, it is no longer PC to send Christmas cards. You go into a card shop and, alongside all the other specifically tailored cards for Mom, Pop, grandchildren and the cat is a section marked "religious". Should you be Jewish, you can find appropriate cards for your midwinter festival, and if you really want to go over the top Christian, come to California and head for the section marked "Feliz Navidad". Meanwhile, us Pagans can happily browse amongst the vast piles of cards simply marked "seasonal greetings". Card shopping hasn't been so easy in ages, apart from the fact that, unless you want something tailored, you seem to have to buy cards in packs of at least ten.

The average American, however, seems little affected by all this PCness. Indeed, America goes Christmas crazy with a vengeance. To start with, people, especially women, seem to have an obsession with seasonal clothing. Not just thick woollens, but things decorated with all sorts of Christmassy stuff: stars, trees, reindeer, elves and Santa. Then there are the outdoor decorations. Americans don't just light up a tree in the house, they put fairy lights everywhere. The front door, the windows, the roof, the garden fence and every tree or shrub in the garden capable of carrying them. Local papers run competitions for the best decorated house, and kids pester their parents to be taken round to see them all.

Shops and radio stations are, of course, full of Christmas music. The Virgin Megastore in San Francisco had several racks of "seasonal music", and some radio stations play nothing but Christmas pop on the day itself. America has come a long way since Elvis caused national outrage by recording a rock 'n' roll version of a carol. There is, however, one saving grace that America has over Britain. I haven't heard a single song by Cliff Richard.

TV, however, is another matter. Do you think that *Friends*, *Seinfeld* and *ER* can be budged from their normal Thursday night slots just because it is Christmas? No way, buddy. These are top rated shows, worth a fortune in advertising (*Seinfeld* is rumoured to gross \$2m in advertising per show). No one in their right minds would take them off in deference to the *Royal Variety Performance* and another repeat of a *Morecombe and Wise Christmas Show*.

Of course, having masses of TV stations to choose from does make a difference. If you have cable and satellite, you can find Christmas programming if you look hard enough. UK readers will be relieved to hear that one cable channel is indeed showing *Mary Poppins* on Christmas day. Another one is showing *Mars Attacks*, but sadly we can't get either.

Come to think of it, Christmas is a bit of a hiatus for TV companies, a brief pause in the action, a lull before the really big seasonal programming. The NFL playoffs start on December 27th and

continue through January building up to the biggest TV event of the year, Superbowl Sunday. Is this the season for serious religious observance? You bet!

Fan Scene

Attitude 12 has come and gone. This was the last issue - the editors had always planned only to do twelve - and there seemed to be a marked air of relief in their articles. The thing I found most odd was Mike Abbot talking about whether it had all been worth it in terms of how many people saw the 'zine and what they thought of it. To my mind, that is a sure path to folding. I write *Emerald City* because I enjoy it. If other people do as well, all well and good, but it isn't a necessity to me.

I've finally got a chance to look at this year's Hugo winning fanzine, *Mimosa*. I must say that it is very well put together - the closest thing I've seen yet to one of Bruce Gillespie's 'zines and way above the quality of *Nova Express*. As to content, well, it is very much a question of what your interests are. Aside from a brief Worldcon report, all that #21 contained was articles on fan history. Probably very good articles, certainly a distinguished collection of writers, but not my cup of tea at all. If you are interested, they have an excellent web site with all the back issues available. <http://smithway.org/mimosa/>.

Meanwhile in our ongoing search for good places to eat near our Worldcon site, Bay Area fans have been once again valiantly subjected themselves to culinary experiment. An SFSFC board meeting was held at James & Kathryn Daugherty's new city centre apartment. I'd taken the opportunity to go Christmas Shopping in the City and met up with the guys afterwards. At Dave Gallagher's suggestion, we went to an Italian restaurant called Buca di Beppo on Howard Street.

A warning, when an Italian restaurant in America calls itself "family style", what they mean is that everything comes in huge portions. The prices looked high, but we had three starters and four main courses between eight of us and we were stuffed. It is a fascinating place too. The walls are absolutely covered with photos of famous Italians and great shots of life in Italy. You could spend all evening walking round looking at the pictures. As for the toilet decorations, suffice it to say that Terry Frost would have loved them. Only five minutes from Moscone too. I think I can safely predict that this place will be booked solid every night of the convention.

Footnote

As many of you will know, well-known Sydney fan, Eric Lindsay, suffered a minor heart attack just before Christmas. Eric and I have had our differences over Aussiecon Three, but when we meet up at a convention we always end up having a beer or two together. The last

news I heard was that Eric is out of danger and being told to have a nice, restful holiday. Take care, Eric, mate.

Being in the midst of a frantic project when I put the last issue out, I managed to forget a couple of apologies. Firstly, Ian Gunn would like it known that the main reason he is not on the MSFC committee is not to maintain editorial independence but because he hates being on committees. Second, John Lorentz pointed out that he took over LoneStarCon registration 3 weeks before the con, not 2 months as my con report implied.

Next issue, amongst other things, the new Kim Newman and Eugene Byrne novel, *Back in the USSA*. Kevin has already read it and laughed himself silly.

If you guys think this issue worked, I may well do the same sort of thing in the near future only focussing on after the war. We have the Kevin Costner's film of David Brin's *The Postman* coming up. Other books I have in mind to go with it are *Dr. Bloodmoney* by Phil Dick and *This is the Way the World Ends* by James Morrow.

And finally, the very warmest of New Year greetings to all of you.

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl