

Sigma 432 March 2022



I'm told that all things must end.

I was never sure that was true. Like all cozy aphorisms and bits of folk knowledge, there is left much more to be said. In comic book panels, it is the space between the frames that is significant. In life, the space between thoughts, and beyond memory, in the extensions of all that is "over."

Carlo Rovelli, a physicist of note, has spent his life thinking about time. "(Time) ...is like holding a snowflake in your hands: gradually, as you study it, it melts between your fingers and vanishes"

I like to think I spend a portion of mine doing the same. Einstein twisted forever our notion of "now" with a thought experiment. Which has been confirmed over and over again. Time passes as differently for each of us as does our point of view. Rovelli reveals our quantum universe where there is no time. St. Augustine described time best, 'if nobody asks me, I know; but if I were desirous to explain it to one that should ask me, plainly I do not know.'

As I understand less and less of the social works that surround me, I still believe we are alive together, interacting, swimming in whatever it is we mean by time. We should all take pause and shiver side by side in contemplation of the totality of the cosmos.

It has never been science fiction that excited me, but it has been SCIENCE Fiction. It is the thought developed that tickles me. I am frequently more exhilarated by the work of an astronomer, or physicist, than a work of science fiction. More and more I can see I am fading away like Frodo and the Hobbits at the end of The Lord of the Rings. I take my fantasy by a flying vision, not with gooey downtrodden ersatz slice-of-life details. I take my horror with a proper frisson, not with gross bloodletting. Either "eu" or dys" -topian perspectives are not gardens I play in. All I revere is refreshed by a view of the deep and the dark night sky.

It is time for me to say, FADE
Goodbye. FADE

I am old and I do not wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled. Life's been good to me so far...wait...maybe that was Joe Walsh. In the past several months (or years) I have lost a portion my humor. It is a high time for me to go in search. To become whole in my writing

and my life. It is true to say, if I find it, I will not be back this way again.

Vesti la giubba e la faccia infarina? You betcha. A clown I was, I clown I'll be. Not in tragedy, but In joy. In hope. In spirit. A little song, a little dance, a little seltzer down my pants.

In the words of Groucho, "When truth goes out the door rumor comes flying innuendo." Not gonna repeat my gripes here, of which there are a-plenty or say any or all of my reasons for leavin'

I cannot express how deeply I thank all of those who contributed each month to Sigma. They worked and sacrificed each month to provide you with the contents which always exceeded our desires and demands. I look forward to reading them each month in the future.

I hope whoever follows as editor will be a better steward than I was. I discovered this newsletter is a tender thing. Take this from me, it is never too late to begin to learn, and if you are not learning something every day you are beginning the process of decay. I discovered the newsletter is a teaching mechanism.

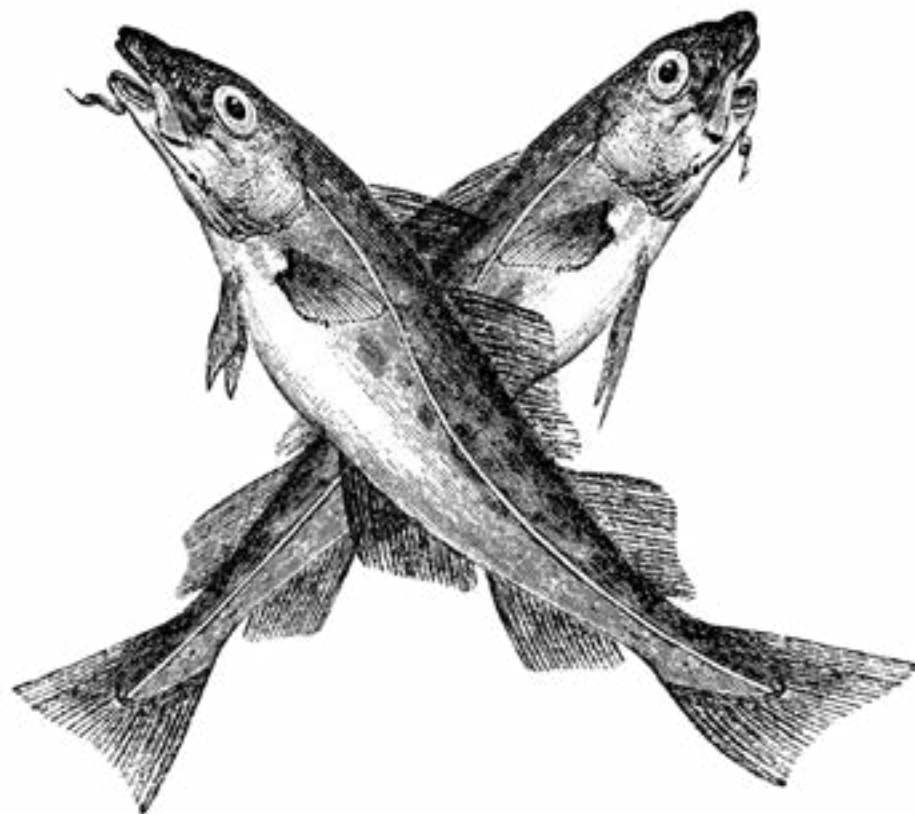
Editing Sigma has made me aware of layout and design. Something I never considered much at all. I hope I have some intuitive grasp and I know I made many tyro mistakes. I have been taking online courses to improve my layout skills. My drawing and graphic prowess, which are as untrained as a kindergarten student yet full of all the obstinate baggage of an adult, is also being challenged. Through some exploration and learning of those sketching muscles, I have a whole new vision of the world around me.

I hope that you and I, friends in Parsec, can continue our dialog. I don't plan to alakazam! disappear. In the future, you will find me at www.joecoluccio.com. There is some strange placeholder stuff there now, but in the following weeks, I will begin to transform it. I plan it to be a home for my re-imagined presentations which I have done for Parsec, Confluence, the Pitt Osher Program, and Pulp Fest. I intend to convert them into a form appropriate for the web.

If you are interested, send an email to joe@joecoluccio.com to receive the email/newsletter/some-kind-of-zine, I plan to develop with articles, artwork, comic panels, fiction, poetry concerned with all the faces of genre literature. I hope it has the aspect of the imaginary newsstand I visit in my dreams with a full scan of magazines and paperback about Science Fiction, Noir Mysteries, Fantasy, Westerns Horror, Sports, Humor you name it, on display. Something indicative of the popular culture follows us into this century. My dreams are real, my plans are fluid.

And, oh yeah, it is time to take a serious swipe at my writing.

To paraphrase Douglas Adams,
Ciao, and thanks for all the Baccalà.



Parsec Meeting, Saturday March 19th Meeting

PARSEC, Pittsburgh's premier Science Fiction & Fantasy Organization, is having a ZOOM meeting on Saturday March 19 at 1:00 pm. Agenda: organizing panels and this year's return to an in-person Confluence in July of 2022. The conference will be held in person this year on July 29, 30 and 31 at the Sheraton Pittsburgh Airport Hotel, 1160 Thorn Run Road, Coraopolis, PA 15108

At the March 19th Meeting we'll discuss, among other things, panel topics for the conference. Things like:

- **The Drake Equation and the Fermi Paradox.** If there are alien civilizations all around us, why are they invisible and silent?
- **Speculative Fiction as a Literature of Hope or Despair?** Should writers point out all the ways humanity is failing, or our opportunities to transcend?
- **How Science Deals with Death and Dying.** Have technology and medicine become new religions offering immortality?

These examples are just to generate ideas and discussion. Come work with us at the March 19th meeting to bring out the most challenging and imaginative panel topics we can think of!

Share the Excitement of Confluence 2022

Tell your friends:

Our Guest of Honor is Neil Clarke!

Neil Clarke is the editor of the Hugo and World Fantasy Award-winning Clarkesworld Magazine and several anthologies, including the Best Science Fiction of the Year series.

Neil has been a finalist for the Hugo Award for Best Editor (Short Form) nine times, won the Chesley Award for Best Art Director three times, and received the Solstice Award from SFWA in 2019. Learn more at www.neil-clarke.com

Our Featured Music Guest is Tim Griffin!

Tim Griffin is an award-winning teacher, musician, and storyteller with four albums out and more on the way. When he's not filking he runs an educational nonprofit called GriffinEd, using geeky music to teach science, math, history, and other stuff to grades K-8th online for free. Learn more at www.GriffinEd.org.

Writing Workshop Facilitator is Scott H. Andrews

Our facilitator this year will be Scott H. Andrews, Editor-In-Chief and Publisher of The Nine-Time Hugo Award Finalist And World Fantasy Award-Winning Online Fantasy Magazine Beneath Ceaseless Skies. Learn more at <https://www.beneath-ceaseless-skies.com/>

Registrations

Register for the March 19th PARSEC Zoom Meeting at <https://bit.ly/Parsec-Meeting> After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

Register for this year's Confluence SF & Fantasy Conference at <https://confluence-sff.org/reginfo/>



Feburary 2022 Minutes

Secretary Bill Hall

I entered the Zoom half an hour early to already find a casual discussion of ancient astronomy and the Yuval Noah Harari (non-fiction) book “Sapiens.” 22 people in all turned up, including Canadian spec-fic writer Angelique Fawns who essentially arrived just in time to rue missing everything. (President Joe appeared but made no comment.) Once more DreamForge’s Scot Noel moderated, but not before noting a French comedy, “Bigbug,” about an AI uprising, while Jane Noel mentioned “Arcane” and John Thompson found “Foundation” more interesting than the original books, raising the whole discussion of fiction driven by characters or by ideas.

The deadline for submissions to “Triangulation: Energy” is March 31, while short story contest submissions with the theme “Hearth, Song, Table” remain open until May 1. An impressive total of four poems from our “Triangulation: Habitats” have been nominated for the Rhysling award. Registration for Confluence 22 in the last three days of July is now open. Kyle Bostian said that his novel “Kat’s Cradle,” written under his nom de plume Karuna Das, has been published by D X Varos.

Our speaker was Bruce McAllister, whose “Dream Baby” is in DreamForge #9. The son of a naval officer and a cultural anthropologist, his first story appeared in Frederik Pohl’s magazine If, though he attempted a future history at age 14. In his years as a writer he has gotten to know individuals such as Barry Malzberg and Harry Harrison and now finds himself coaching newer writers. (He was nice enough to say that Scot reminded him of Pohl, in terms of preferring characters with some sense of agency.) Some tips from him can be summed up as “Get it out, whatever the magazine,” “Don’t throw away an old story,” and “Critique only the text.” He touched on workshops and the value of even one reader, a “kindred spirit,” who “gets” what you’re trying to do. I particularly appreciated his noting that a story exists three ways: in the writer’s mind, then on the page, and then in the reader’s mind, with great possible differences between each version. It’s simple and obvious, yet bears saying and recognizing. He also noted an exercise, ascribed to Hemingway, of choosing a favorite scene or passage, reading it over and over, then writing it yourself to discover your own writing inclinations.

Mary Soon Lee read us poems about Cassiopeians and “What Cacti Read.” We were apprised of a DreamForge writing challenge for DreamCaster supporters. Coming up in March, we’ll be holding our traditional brainstorming of Confluence panel topics, so think of suggestions now.

The 2022 Parsec Inc. Short Story Contest is open to submissions

The Parsec Short Story contest is sponsored by Parsec Inc., a 501(c)(3) organization. The theme this year is “Hearth, Song, and Table.”

This year we’ve added a new category and prize for authors ages 19 and under

Contest opens on January 1st and closes on May 1st 2022 at 11:59:59 pm EST.

Cash prizes and never any fee to enter!

Visit the [Short Story Contest](#) page for more information.

Triangulation Update

This year's *Triangulation: Energy* cover illustration has been selected. Katerina Kireeva has illustrated the last two books in the *Triangulation* series of anthologies: *Extinction* and *Habitats* and we welcome her back to *Energy*. In addition to illustrating, Katerina studied physics and computer science at Carnegie Mellon University, fueled by hopes of making the utopias of science fiction our future reality. You can find her on Instagram: @nebular_inkstain.

Image Caption: Energy cover mock-up utilizing Kat's image. We're still fiddling with fonts and icons so the finished product may look slightly different.

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Triangulation: ENERGY

Parsec Ink

Triangulation:

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Edited by John Thompson and Storm Walden

Evil Eyes and Other Possible Eyes

Francis Graham

“And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee.”

Matt 5:29 But remember mirrors reverse right/left.

Ancient Greek philosophers had some questions about the cause of vision. Was vision something that came **to the eye**, and the eye was a detector; **OR** did the **eye emit** a ray of something that caused vision to occur when it hit an object to be seen? This latter theory suggested that there was a light emitted by the eye that came into contact with the object being viewed, and was called the *Visual Fire*. When the fire hit the object, it reflected back to the eye and the image was seen. Empedocles supported the theory of “visual fire”, and there are suggestions of it in Homer.

Of course now we know the answer to that, the eye receives light as a passive detector of light, and vision is processed as nerve impulses forming a “picture” in the brain.

But what **IF** it was the case that the eye *emitted* rays? This is the basis for the legends of the so-called “Evil Eye”. While I do not believe in that superstition, I can’t help but note the similarity to the Evil Eye legend and the ancient philosophers’ erroneous supposition.



The screaming girl is a finishing perfection for this excellent illustration. You can almost hear her scream.

In this Passage, we will explore WHAT IF vision were not light coming to our eyes, but WHAT IF rays had to emerge from our eyes to see anything? What kind of a Universe would we live in then? Light is so utterly fundamental to our Universe it would be a **very strange** Universe indeed if this were true. How strange, I wonder? HOW STRANGE?!?

Radar Eyes

The first possibility is if the eye emitted light, it bounced off the object that needed to be visible, and returned to the eye to be detected. This is similar to the principle of radar or sonar; in radar, radio waves are emitted and bounce off the surface to be detected when they return. Some deep sea organisms operate on this principle; they emit light so they can see anything at all at the great depths in which they live which are devoid of sunlight.

Radar was bounced off the Moon in the 1950's. Normally, we see the Moon as it was about 1.5 seconds as it was in the past. Using radar, we of necessity detect its radar surface 3 seconds in the past, as that was the time for the radio beam to get there and return. Radar was also bounced off the planet Venus using large radio telescopes. Normally we see Venus several minutes in the past, say, an average of 8 minutes in the past. With Earth based radar, the sub-cloud features detected by this method are seen when they are 16 minutes old.

So if we had radar eyes, and looked at Venus, it would take on average 16 minutes to see it. It would be blank empty space, and then 16 minutes Venus would come into view. To see the nearby stars would take many years. Distant galaxies would never be seen.



This deep sea fish emits the light it uses to see other fish with. And attract them. It has “radar-like” eyes.

Quantumly Entangled Eyes

Still another type of vision is possible. That is, if an alien eye sent out quantumly entangled bosons to “see” a distant object, but retained twin bosons in a perfectly reflective cavity in a quantumly entangled state. When the emitted bosons struck their target, the quantumly entangled states would collapse. This and quadrillions of similar collapses detected by nerve cells could then in the alien brain produce a “picture”, somewhat analogous to the way our eyes do with nerve impulses on our retinas. Here an interesting phenomenon would happen.

Nature, you see, has played a cruel trick on us. We cannot see anything as it is presently; we see the Sun as it was 8 minutes ago, Jupiter as it was 45 minutes ago, the Moon 1.5 seconds ago. Even objects in our room are delayed chronologically. Light travels at 11 inches per nanosecond; we see social distanced persons not as they **are** in the present, but as they **were** about 6 nanoseconds in the past. We are doomed to only see and remember a past we cannot change, and be unable to know, see and remember the future, which we can yet do something about. Not even can we apprehend the present. But with *quantumly entangled eyes* an alien being can know the present. When it can first see a distant object, it sees it with quantumly entangled eyes as it is in the present time that the alien experiences. When Jupiter aligns with Mars, as the alien would look at them both with quantumly entangled eyes, it would see them in the alien’s present. So if it stared at Venus, it would wait several minutes, and then see Venus as it is the instant the quantumly entangled bosons arrived there, simultaneous with the alien’s experience of that present moment. Beings with quantumly entangled eyes would see things as they are.



The Eye of Val in classic Star Trek.

Vision with Advanced Potentials

Now we consider a type of vision that we don't have a good modality for – yet. WHAT IF the eyes emitted radiation with advanced potentials so that we perceived the object *not when the emission reached the object*, but instead, *when eyes emitted the emission*? Light takes 45 minutes to reach Jupiter. But suppose we perceived it not when the emission reached Jupiter, but when we emitted it? In that case, we would see Jupiter 45 minutes in the future! With such eyes, we could look around the Universe and see what might be called an ***anti-celestial sphere***. Instantly a being with such vision would see distant galaxies as they would be an enormous time yet to come. Instead of seeing the microwave background of the Big Bang, such a being would see the end of the Universe.

You understand, when we look up at a starry night we see--from the horizon up--half of a sphere called the *celestial sphere*. The celestial sphere is all the light emission of the past reaching us after a light travel time corresponding to the distance of each object. We see each object at various times ago. With advanced potential vision, we would see objects as they will be following a light travel time corresponding to the distance of each object. What we would see then is the Anti-Celestial Sphere.

Unlike the radar eyes, or the quantumly entangled eyes, we don't have yet a good inkling of the physics of such a type of vision as vision with advanced potentials--or if it is possible at all. Does it cause causality violation? Maybe not! After all, I still require a light travel time or more to **affect** the object I see with vision with advanced potentials. So with advanced potential vision, I can see a future that I cannot do anything about until the time or later that a light signal reaches it. Hence no causality violation. So this type of vision may possibly not violate the norms of our Universe. Or is knowledge of the future itself an effect of a yet-to-happen cause?

Think of it this way. A crystal ball is useful--if it worked--in informing the user of a future that he/she could yet change. But what if the crystal ball informed me in the Pittsburgh only of events in China--say the roulette table in Macao-- only a small fraction of a second in advance? Even using fast computers and smart phones that could see in the crystal ball, I could not get a radio signal to my shill bettor's smart phone there in time to utilize the knowledge. I would know that in the next fraction of a second I would lose my big bet yet be unable to change it. What a useless crystal ball!

Let us try to defeat this with a Gedanken (thought) experiment. Suppose we placed a mirror one light hour away from Earth. And then suppose I placed a bet on a horse racing one-half hour past noon. If my horse lost, I would make a brilliant illumination (an enormous H-bomb explosion in the Nevada desert might suffice) such that the flash would be visible in the mirror. Using advanced potential vision, I look at the mirror and see it as it is an hour from now. Aha! Well, no. It would still take an hour for the flash to reach the mirror, although it is/ is not en route. So I see the mirror as it is at 1 pm using advanced potential vision, but not at 1:30 pm, which would be required to change my bet. But we come up against a Schrodingerisue feline situation: the yes/no is still on its way.

For this reason, advance potential vision may not on fundamental principles be ruled out of the physics of our Universe. But we as yet know no modality of it. But physicists don't get paid for figuring that out. That is a job for engineers.

Exercise for the reader

Calculate the consequences of quantumly entangled vision and advanced potential vision in relativity theory.

You've Got the Future Wrong. We All Do. By Scot Noel

This essay first appeared in DreamForge Anvil, Issue # 3

Depending on your background, education, socioeconomic status, and chosen tribal affiliations, you see the present differently than I do. Likely the future as well.

Are the centuries ahead a place of vast wealth inequality and climate catastrophe, of oppression of the masses and alternative facts that replace objective reality? Or will they bring a post-scarcity society where the purpose of being human is, as Captain Picard would say “to improve yourself. To enrich yourself. Enjoy it.”

The likely truth is that the future will surprise adherents of both viewpoints. Perhaps even worse, whatever that future holds, it will not necessarily be either a recognizable or comfortable reality any alive today would hope for.

To Understand, Let's Start with the Past

It has always been this way. As a species, we've been around in our current physical bodies for about 300,000 years. As a culture that advances its technology, creates representational art, and allows for specialized learning of skills, perhaps we go back only 65,000 years. Even so, one of our Cro-Magnon ancestors from a mere 50,000 years ago could hardly be expected to take our modern world as a welcoming advancement.

50,000 years ago, the Sahara was wet and fertile. Continental ice sheets extended as far south as London in Europe and New York City in North America.

If we were able to bring one of our ancestors forward in time, the physical world would be unlike any she had experienced. How could she process the idea of cities filled with millions of people where once there had been mile high barriers of ice?

The natural world she knew would be extinct. Rhinoceros, hippopotami, and straight tusked elephants no longer roam Europe. After millions of years on the hunt, saber-tooth cats no longer prowl the grasslands of a vanished ecosphere.

Our languages would be babble, our food perhaps inedible (far too sweet and salty, I would guess), the noise unendurable, the people weirdly taller with thinner faces and no brow ridges, the weather unendurably hot and wet. Even our concepts of family and law, of justice and gender, of God and the good would likely prove foreign in the extreme.

Would modern life be a utopia or a hellscape? Would a mother of 50,000 years past ever accept our world as a future to which her progeny should aspire?

50,000 years may seem like an exaggeration too extreme to be valid. So, should we bring forward a Carthaginian nobleman of only 2,000 years past? How would his sense of self handle the fact that even the poorest nations today live in lands of artificial light, that we inhabit a world where ordinary people communicate across oceans with handheld devices, where vast wealth is digital, where plague, leprosy, and tuberculosis are no longer common scourges, and where its ancient history that Carthage fell to its Roman foes before the “common era” even began. (And, of course, today even the Roman empire is long gone.)

Perhaps this aristocrat, if he could be made to understand our world at all, would come to see his own once proud empire as an impoverished backwater in time, where all his dreams inevitably would have turned to ashes.

But future dissonance need not span much time at all. As recently as the steam age and the advent of early trains, it was known that humans couldn't breathe if moving over 30 miles per hour, or if such speeds were possible, certainly women were not designed travel at 50 miles per hour (their uteruses would fly out of their bodies at that speed), and as late as 1920, the New York Times proclaimed that no rocket could propel itself through space because it had nothing to push against in a vacuum.

Would someone from just 100 years ago have a difficult time dealing with our global realities today? Before 1920, women had no right to vote and few rights and privileges overall. The total expectation for the average young woman was to marry and bear children. At the same time, segregation, lynching, and the open oppression of black Americans was the common reality. Obviously, most of us would consider our present culture a bit of an improvement, even if many challenges in social justice remain.

That said, I'm certain my own parents — who passed away in the 1980s— would have a difficult time adjusting to the technological, cultural, and global changes of the 40 years since, if suddenly brought forward by some magical time machine.

And Look at the Challenges Ahead

The next few centuries are likely to be even more disruptive, and a trip to the future as disconcerting for us as a visit to Times Square would be for our Ice Age ancestors. Consider some of the following possibilities:

- A drastically changed natural world, with no polar ice and the extinction of today's megafauna and many other species.
- Advancing cyber integration of technology with biology, including physical and mental enhancements that will soon challenge our definition of what it is to be “naturally” human.
- A continuing erosion of personal privacy, where AI networks may not only know where you are but what you are thinking.
- Automated production of goods and services to a level that completely disrupts our current notions of personal worth and accomplishment. Even writers, artists, and musicians will soon be outdone by their AI competitors.
- Bodies by design, where race and gender may lose much of their meaning as humans move fluidly through physical preferences, fashions, and styles.
- The fall of nations, mass migrations, and language changes will all transform the landscape of civilization as we know it today.
- Wealth inequality may rise to the level of making some of us the owners of worlds, while many others make their home in digital utopias beyond our current comprehension.
- As always, mores, fashion, music, and the defining spirit of the age will change and change and change again in waves that echo down the halls of time.

In all this, there will remain conflict, ignorance, injustice, poverty, oppression, and strife.

Then Where Lies Hope?

It has been said that one person's utopia is another's dystopia, and that may be true. But there are trends and likely outcomes that — from most objective viewpoints— are hopeful for humanity. Over the next few centuries:

- Humanity will become a multi-planet and off-world species. No matter the scale of the natural or self-made disaster to come our way, it will be all but impossible to bring our species to extinction.
- Our ability to harness energy is certain to increase exponentially. Fusion, solar, geothermal, wind, and more will inevitably be available in levels beyond anything that fossil fuels could deliver. Orbital civilizations will grow largely on the power of the sun alone.
- The resources of the solar system will be unlocked. The wealth of the asteroid belt has been estimated to equal about \$100 billion for every person on Earth today.
- Increases in intelligence, health, wealth, and social mobility — while not equally distributed— will nevertheless be more widespread than in previous ages.

- As education and information spread through worldwide communication, more human potential will be liberated, leading to ever accelerating advances in technology, medicine, biology, physics, cosmology, and philosophy.
- Artificial Intelligence and self-replicating machinery are likely to take over the entire production chain at some point, from resource extraction through refinement and fabrication to delivery of finished products, including food supplies.
- Diversity in all its measures will increase as humans strive for ways to express freedom as they perceive it in their own ages.

The centuries ahead are certainly an undiscovered country, the landscape of which would seem unfamiliar at best and discomfoting certainly to all those who hoped for a utopia suited to the stylings of their own limited imagination.

But for humanity, it will be as H.G. Wells penned it for the Science Fiction Film “Things to Come” in 1936. The movie ends with a dramatic monologue, paraphrased below:

“When we have conquered all the deeps of space and all the mysteries of time, still we will be beginning. And if we’re no more than animals we must snatch each little scrap of happiness and live and suffer and pass, mattering no more than all the other animals do or have done. It is this-or that: all the universe or nothing... Which shall it be?”

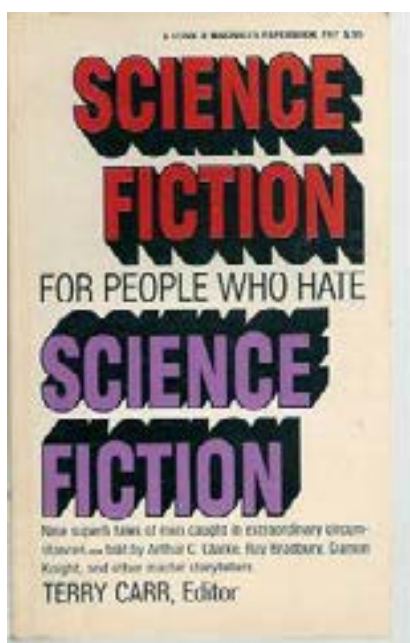
And whether we can ever see the future clearly or not, there’s Hope in that.



Brief Bios Eric Lief Davin

Laura Goforth, (? -?):

Goforth was a music teacher and the daughter of an attorney in Chattanooga, Tennessee. She married Futurian Chester Cohen in the early Fifties. They had three children, one of whom they named “Damon” after fellow Futurian and good friend Damon Knight. However, after his marriage to Kate Wilhelm in 1963, Knight broke off his friendship with the Cohens, as he wanted nothing to do with people he’d known while married to his previous wife.



Science Fiction For People Who Hate Science Fiction

By Carr, Terry (Editor): Arthur C. Clarke / Ray Bradbury / Robert A. Heinlein / H.L. Gold / Wilmar H. Shiras / Damon Knight / **Avram Davidson (With Laura Goforth)** / Fredric Brown / Edmond Hamilton

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The workshop committee is currently in the works.