

WHY I HUNT FLYING SAUCERS & OTHER FANTASTICALS

HUGH A. D. SPENCER

SAMPLES

**WARNING: CONTAINS MATURE
CONTENT. READER
DISCRETION ADVISED.**

WHY I HUNT FLYING SAUCERS

When I pull myself out of bed I notice that my slippers are missing. Obviously aliens are responsible. They have been disrupting my domestic routine for a few weeks now, presumably to observe my reactions.

I smell something in the hallway. Briefly, I wonder if they've been playing with the kitchen range, but then my still half-dormant brain tells me that the smoke is coming from the wrong end of the house. With trepidation, I poke my head out of the bedroom door and see the spitting embers of a dying campfire sitting in the bathtub. The aliens have also deposited a string of marshmallows, luncheon meats, wieners and beans along the hallway leading from the kitchen to the bathroom. The sticky brown sauce from the pork and beans has been mixed with some kind of gooey xenoplasmic fluid; the mixture has soaked into the hallway carpet and the resulting mess looks incredibly difficult to clean. Damn those aliens.

Over a perfunctory breakfast I sip my tea and decide to call in some cleaners to deal with the second-encounter debris while I'm at work. Then I wonder, pointlessly I know, why have they done this to me? Is this some bizarre attempt to re-create some trivial moment from my Boy Scout days? Or some silly reference to humankind's origins as hunting and gathering species?

Putting on my coat, I go out to the driveway where I notice the telltale brown streaks under the car. Nothing serious, just another oil leak. Undoubtedly another sign of extraterrestrial activity.

Driving to the office, I sight a formation of cigar-shaped lights drifting over the city. I seem to be the only one who notices their ships on a regular basis. As I coast into the parking garage I see a pair of bulbous obsidian-black eyes floating in my rear-view mirror. The alien's huge eyes are set over the tiny triangular face with the customary green skin. The image of the face lingers for a fraction of a second, then I only see the concrete and orange paint of the garage. I hypothesize that the alien may have been using some time/space warp device to gather a microsecond's worth of observations of my driving behaviour. Who knows what information aliens think is important?

When these things first started happening to me I was terrified almost to the point of insanity. But lately I'm just feeling very, very put upon.

My morning at the office is reasonably uneventful. The aliens have decided to surround my desk with some kind of sensory distortion field, which temporarily removes my colour vision and alters my sense of hearing. For about two and a half hours everybody sounds like Oswald the Duck or one of those damned chipmunks. But living inside a Max Fleischer cartoon doesn't keep me from making a few calls to the names on my client list. Actually their helium voices make some of the customers a little easier to take.

Sometime after coffee the distortion field dissipates and I decide that it is safe to go find some lunch. Not surprisingly, I'm not the most popular person at the office and therefore no one volunteers to join me. I suppose my co-workers don't enjoy finding themselves breathing through their ears or finding a mass of otherworldly tendrils squirming out of their quiche and salad.

But today I don't get to feel lonely. Once I reach the sidewalk I feel a strange upward breeze bite at my cheek. I turn and see a bright halo of celestial light descending around me. Once again I find myself inside an alien spacecraft.

And as usual I'm lying naked on a cold metal slab. A billion years ahead of us and these BEMS haven't learned how to build a comfortable examination table. I twist my head to the side and see a screen displaying a three-dimensional projection of one of my undoubtedly fascinating mucous membranes.

The spindly forms of the aliens float up to the ceiling of the chamber:

"Human, we mean you no harm..."

One of the aliens removes a long tube from the polished curved wall.

"...just roll over onto your side and bring your knees up to your chest"

Great, another rectal probe.

I suppose it could be worse. Once they strapped me into a chair and stuck red-hot needles of light into my stomach and my skull. Another time they were taking secretion samples from my ears, nose and throat—it felt like they were pushing a lawn mower up my left nostril.

The absolute worst session was when they were taking spermatozoa specimens. I don't happen to find bug-eyed, bulb-headed E.T.s particularly sexually arousing, so they used this giant vacuum cleaner nozzle to generate the erection. They took 17 ejaculate samples. This was much less fun than you might imagine. Think ragged flesh.

So maybe just another rectal examination isn't so bad. Anyway, that's what I tell myself as I feel the cold metal of their probe pushing roughly through my anal sphincter.

* * *

I wake up on my living room couch. Two men dressed in black and wearing sunglasses sit across from me. The mirrored surfaces over their eyes make them look a little like aliens too.

"Are you conscious, now?" asks one of the men in black.

"Yes," I sigh.

I see the empty bottle and syringe sitting on the coffee table. Pentothal again. Their induced hypnotic trance is the only reason I am able to remember today's abduction.

The small man with a short blond crew-cut starts to pack his tape-recorder into his briefcase.

"There doesn't seem to be any obvious physical damage or psychological aberration. It seems to be the typical scenario..."

The larger man, who has an even shorter blond crew cut, stands up:

"...but we'd like you to stop by our offices in the next couple of days for a medical."

Just what I need, I think. Another examination.

Both men gather up their briefcases and walk toward the door.

"Don't bother to get up," the larger man says. "We've already contacted your office, and we gave your MasterCard number to the cleaners. I hope you don't mind, they had to put in a lot of work on the rug and they needed a deposit."

An irrational sense of propriety forces me to stand and follow the government agents to my door.

"Now don't put off the physical too long this time," the smaller man says.

"There is the possibility that the aliens are slowly modifying your DNA and turning you into something..." he pauses as he considers the implications "...not quite human."

"That's only one of the theories we're working on," the larger man adds. "It could be that they are using your body as the host for a fetal alien organism." Then he looks at me with what I'm sure he thinks is a sympathetic expression. "You must try and prepare yourself for the possibility that it could burst out of your intestines at any time."

"Well." I'm silent for a moment, trying to think of something appropriate to say. "I really appreciate your concern."

I sound very tired.

The two men let themselves out onto the porch.

"Do you have any more of those 'Missing-Time-At-Work' forms?" I ask. "I'm just about out and my boss can't get his insurance claims processed if I don't submit within 48 hours."

"We left some on the kitchen table," says the larger man.

The smaller man takes something from inside his jacket pocket. He hands me a paperback edition of *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ*.

"You look very tired, sir," he says with sincerity. "I wish you would let me send the missionaries over for a discussion. I know that a strong testimony of the revealed gospel of these latter days would be a great comfort to you."

"I appreciate your concern."

The larger man also hands me something. It is a colourful leaflet.

"But in the meantime you might want to cheer yourself up by purchasing any one of our fine Amway products."

"I appreciate..."

They walk to their car, a well-maintained AMC Hornet.

"Be sure to call me at home when you want to place orders," calls out the larger man as he opens the car door. "Don't place orders through my office."

"You can call me at home or the office," says the smaller man.

There is the sound of car doors slamming. The roar of an engine. And the men in black are gone.

The smaller agent's concern for my spiritual well-being must be overpowering since he seems to have forgotten that this is the third Book of Mormon he's given me. Walking toward the bedroom, I deposit his gift on the growing stack of latter-day religious literature on my bookshelf.

And true to its claims, the Amway catalogue does indeed contain a startling range of useful, attractive and unique household bargains. Including an attractive and affordable digital clock radio with simulated plasti-wood finish. Which will come in handy because the beings from another world have decided to melt my bedside clock after I left for work. Damn aliens.

I spend the rest of the day in bed. I'm too tired to read and the aliens have also transformed my collection of Ridley Scott and James Cameron videos into highlights of a Spanish language home-shopping channel. Aliens.



PORNZILLA

BEFORE

...*Meanwhile...*

Stewart Clarkman looked out his office window and saw the Forces of Evil descending on the parking lot.

"Gosh!" he thought, whipping off his horn-rimmed glasses and activating his optical sensors, "That's the fourth time this month!"

This time the Forces of Evil took the form of sixteen huge spiky robots with rocket launchers built into their chests and 16-millimetre cannons mounted on their heads. The big bad robots wobbled shakily on their hover disks.

"Miss Langley," Stewart pressed the intercom switch on his desk. "No calls for the next hour, I've got to write my speech for the Association of Mothers with Arithmetically Challenged House Pets."

Stewart knew this was a tremendously lame statement, but with so many attacks by the Forces of Evil he was simply running out of credible excuses.

"Yes, sir." Miss Langley's ever-efficient voice chirped back on the speaker.

Bless her heart, Stewart thought.

Stewart activated the image enhancers on his sensors and studied the big robots. Their eyes were single slits with a red orb continually bouncing back and forth.

Hmmm, he thought. Whomever designed those robots was obviously influenced by the *Battlestar Galactica* marathon they'd ran on the SF Channel last Easter.

"But..." Stewart began his next cognition aloud. ... was this just sloppy thinking or was it some kind of kind of homage?

It might be some kind of clue...

The robots deactivated their hover disks and started stomping down the street towards Scarborough Mall, smashing the occasional car with hydraulically powered fists as they went.

Then again, Stewart decided, perhaps there was no significance to this pop culture reference.

With that, the youthful socially aware chartered accountant tore off his tie, pulled open his shirt to reveal the green spandex leotard beneath. The world-famous π^2 symbol on the leotard seemed to barely contain the massive chest and abdominal muscles of a super-

powered fighter of crime.

And with the quivering excitement that never seemed to dim with the passage of time, Stewart Clarkman spoke the magic formula for the factoring of quadratic equations... to become Math Man, the Algebraic Avenger!

Clutching his solar powered slide rule (an artifact from an earlier era of mathematical achievement—and a unique source of mystic power); Math Man flew out the office window.

I just hope... Math Man thought as the sun gleamed like a heroic beacon off his magnificently bald head... that I can dispatch these mechanisms before Miss Langley notices that I'm gone.

Math Man needn't have worried.

Because Lisa Langley, Stewart Clarkman's humble but perky secretary had a secret of her own!

"Thank goodness, he's gone!" Lisa whispered to herself as she ducked into a nearby powder room. Then, clicking on what seemed to be a normal ballpoint pen, Lisa Langley was instantly transformed into that paragon of super-effective super-empowerment: Logistics Lass!

Her optical sensors immediately revealed the most efficient route to the skies outside the office building—where she spotted Math Man circling the robots as they strode down toward the poorer part of town.

"Surrender immediately!" the superhero called down to the huffing and puffing mechanisms. "Or I'll reduce you all to a pile of improper fractions!"

"Up your vector space!" one of the robots growled back in a harsh metallic voice.

"Hey, big guy!" Logistics Lass laughed. "Save some of the bash-task for me!"

"The more the merrier!" Math Man said. As always he was delighted to see a fellow crime fighter on hand to help. Although, it was strange that Logistics Lass always seemed so close by recently, and come to think of it... why had he never seen her and Miss Langley in the same room together?

This chain of thought was interrupted by a blast from the head cannon of one of the bad robots.

As the battle of metal fists and calculation, rockets and logic continued, Math Man was able to explain the attack plan of the robots to Logistics Lass:

"It all seems to be a variation of the same pattern. Just about every other day, the Forces of Evil make another attempt to destroy

the non-HR neighborhoods," he said grimly as he tore the leg off one of the mechanisms.

The sound of the crash was so loud, that Logistics Lass had to raise her voice to be heard:

"But why? Because they think no one will bother to defend non-virtual people?" As she spoke, Logistics Lass deflected the aim of one of the robot missiles so that it destroyed three of its evil metal comrades.

"I doubt it," replied Math Man as he calculated the exact amount of finger pressure to pull off the head of another robot. "The details of my Code of Crime-Fighting Conduct are well-known."

"Absolutely!" laughed Logistics Lass as the toppling body of the third robot crushed another one that happened to be looking in the wrong direction. "Everybody knows that you are sworn to protect even analog communities."

"So why—" began Man Math.

"Oh, this is very naughty!" screamed a youthful voice.

"You bad robots have made a terrible mess of this neighbourhood!" echoed another.

"What the—?!" cried Logistics Lass.

Every Day is Play Day!

At first Math Man thought the voices might have belonged to the Pragmatic Four, a band of business-oriented superheroes who occasionally left their Bay Street enclave to assist with crises elsewhere in the MegaCity.

But no, this was not the equation he'd expected.

"Is that who I think it is?" said Logistics Lass.

There was no mistaking the silver-blond hair and the orange and pink plastic corvette convertible.

Blast, he realized. It was Stephanie and her Pals.

"What are they doing here?" For an instant, Logistics Lass looked as though she didn't have a plan.

"More importantly," Math Man replied through clenched teeth. "How did they get here?"

Stephanie and Penny didn't act as though they were out of their co-action field. They didn't even seem to be worried about being ground into silicon pellets by the most monstrous killer robots that SuperTown had ever generated.

The young models just jumped out of their car and strode over to the remaining robots.

"Didn't your mummies ever tell you not to break things when you

play?" Stephie waved her finger at the biggest of the bad robots.

"My mommie was a tank..." replied the robot.

"Well, that's no excuse!" Penny, the happy-go-lucky one, said. "Even mobile artillery have to mind their manners."

"Ah..." The sigh of the robot sounded like a blast furnace dying a slow death. "We're sorry."

"Well, if you're really sorry..." Stephie began.

"We are, we are!" the robots all nodded their heads—which was difficult because the cannons weighed quite a lot.

"I don't believe this!" Logistics Lass whispered in disgust.

Math Man was simply at a loss for words. It just didn't add up.

But Stephie certainly knew what to say:

"If you're sorry, you'll clean up this mess and go back home."

"Something's not quite right..." Math Man muttered.

Logistics Lass briefly wondered if this was some kind of hoax or imaginary tale.

But the robots, heads still down, walked back the way they came. Penny held the hand of the robot at the front of the line.

"Don't worry!" Stephie waved to the two superheroes who were now semi-hiding behind an antennae tower of a nearby building. "We'll take these silly robots back to where they belong."

"T-thanks!" Math Man found it difficult to call back, but he felt he had to make some kind of acknowledgement.

The two of them watched the robots and the doll-girls disappear down the street.

"This is too easy," Math Man said. "I just hope this isn't some kind of plot."

"Never mind about that!" Suddenly, Logistics Lass pushed Math Man flat onto the rooftop. "I want your super-jism!"

"*What the—?!*" Math Man gasped as his partner tore off his spandex shorts and grasped his penis. He noticed that Logistics Lass' breasts seemed to swell to twice their normal size and glow with a dangerous and unearthly erotic energy.

"Must resist—" he growled through clenched teeth.

Logistics Lass just growled.

His penis hardened in an incredible pulsing hulk of rigid flesh.

He couldn't resist.

So, they fucked for the next twelve hours.



PROBLEM PROJECT

PROGRESS REPORT

Sorry about missing the last scheduled transmission but I have a good excuse which will become clear as I continue. First, the administrative issues:

- 1. Send more drugs. The airborne contaminants in our region are far worse than we expected and some of the toxins are reacting with our reconstructive surgery. The Field Team personnel are uncomfortable and if we don't get some kind of treatment, I'm afraid somebody's face is going to melt.*
- 2. Has there been any progress in getting that Research Methodology Exemption? Central's restrictions on technology use and extra-planetary manifestations continue to be the single greatest source of frustration on this project. Trying to measure temporal anomalies and sub-space breakdown with Class 81 equipment is next to impossible. Please help us to do our job well.*
- 3. Now for the real news: in spite of your regulations, we are getting interesting results. More like disturbing results. There's lots we don't know yet, but one thing I can tell you is that we are dealing with more than a looped sequence pocket here. Every reliable reading from the Field Team has indicated that we have significant time-space breakdown here. I know it's not terribly helpful to tell you that things look bad, but right now, we don't know how bad or why. Of course, if we had better equipment...*

* * *

THERAPIST: Try to stay calm, Hal. Breathe slowly and tell me what's wrong.

HAL: It's burning me!

THERAPIST: Remember your exercises, Hal. Nothing can really hurt you. Whatever you see, it's just like watching it on a big screen in a movie theatre. Now, can you tell me what you see?

HAL: I don't want to look.

THERAPIST: Okay, let's go back to what happened before you became so frightened. Do you know how old you are in the dream?

HAL: I'm five years old, so it must be... 1960, 1961...

THERAPIST: And what are you doing?

HAL: I'm coming home from school. Mrs. Ratcliffe, my kindergarten teacher, told us to put away our scissors and glue and go home right away.

THERAPIST: Why did she do that?

HAL: It had something to do with the announcement from the Principal's office.

THERAPIST: What do you do next?

HAL: Watch TV. It's almost time for Colonel Bleep. Hey, the TV won't turn on!

THERAPIST: Why not?

HAL: I think there's no electricity, so I get up to tell my mom... oh, no! Now I'm scared again!

THERAPIST: What's frightening you?

HAL: I look out the glass doors that lead out to the patio. There's a trail from a jet up in the sky... I really hate this, can I wake up now?

THERAPIST: Nothing can hurt you, Hal, you have to look at what you're afraid of.

HAL: Wow! It's like a star exploded! Now I can't see and it feels like hot wax is running down my cheeks... I think my eyes have melted!

THERAPIST: Breathe slowly. Your eyes are fine. Now go back to that time and tell me what really happened.

HAL: Everything feels different, now. The cartoons are almost over and my dad turns the channel to the news; he says he wants to watch a speech by President Kennedy.

THERAPIST: That's what really happened? You watched television with your father?

HAL: I guess so. Like I said, everything feels different now.

* * *

Megan was on the phone when Hal got home. She did not look happy.

"No, no thank you," she said into the receiver.

Hal put his portfolio down and walked over to the kitchen. It was Wednesday, so it would be vegetarian lasagna. Delicious, nutritious and environmentally responsible. Megan grew most of the ingredients herself.

"I really think you're wasting your time," Megan continued. "Frankly, I wouldn't even allow your products into my house, so I doubt that I would be interested in a year's free supply."

Hal had retrieved the glass dish from the oven and had scooped out a steaming brick of vegetable matter.

Megan rolled her eyes. Hal sat down at the table and started eating.

"Yes!" Megan cried. "I am completely serious. Now, I really can't spare you any more time. Good-bye!" She applied more than the necessary force to hang up the receiver. They had an old rotary phone, so Megan could express her opinions and feelings in this way.

Megan sat down across from Hal.

"Who was that?" he asked.

"Frozen waffles," replied Megan.

"I didn't know waffles knew how to use the telephone," said Hal.

"Seriously," she said. "These people have devised some new kind of freeze-dried waffle food product made from plastic molecules

designed to simulate milk and eggs. They just offered us a year's free supply if we would let them come over and administer a taste test."

Hal extracted a tomato seed from between his teeth. Megan viewed most convenience foods and their packaging as a clear and present danger to the health of the planetary eco-system. To Megan, helping people to market these products would be somewhere close to signing up as the sacrifice in a satanic ritual.

Hal continued eating. It was good lasagna.

"So..." Megan began, just a little carefully. "...did you make any progress in today's session?"

Probably not, Hal thought.

"I think so," was what he said. "She gave me some new relaxation exercises for the headaches."

* * *

PROGRESS REPORT

If you scan over to the end-files in this transmission you'll note that I have already completed the Official Reprimand Form which clearly outlines my technical violation, as well as the systems, procedures and materials involved. All you have to do is transmit the form on to Central.

But since nobody ever reads the end files, I will summarize the violation:

- 1. I gave the Field Team permission to use the matter transformer to turn an abandoned office building into a titanium temporal sensor. In my view this is only a technical violation because: a) nobody saw us do it (except perhaps a few stray animals), and b) we returned the structure to its original form when we were finished. The only permanent change was when the transformation process vaporized some refuse and litter inside the building (okay, maybe a rat or two, as well). So, c) the office building is cleaner than when we found it.*
- 2. But there was no other option, we needed as powerful a sensor as possible. We're looking at something far more serious than a time-travel hazard; these are the most extreme disruptions ever tracked. If they continue, the Whole Fabric could collapse.*
- 3. And since the End of the Known Universe could much limit our options for career advancement, I would say that we are looking at*

a Very Bad Thing here.

* * *

- THERAPIST: Why are you breathing so heavily?
- HAL: I'm trying to stay calm, like you taught me to.
- THERAPIST: Is something frightening you again?
- HAL: I'm pretty nervous. The sun is too hot.
- THERAPIST: What are you doing?
- HAL: I'm driving somewhere with my ex-wife, Susan. The air conditioning on the car has gone; every time we turn into the direct sunlight, the heat is almost unbearable. Susan is really out of it, so I'm pulling the car to the side of the road. I'm trying to find some shade under those trees over there... good god!
- THERAPIST: What is it? What do you see?
- HAL: I've stopped the car and I get out. I look up at the trees, the leaves are all shriveled up. All the trees are dead.
- THERAPIST: What do you think killed all the trees?
- HAL: The sun, it's getting hotter... now I see that the grass is all brown and gray... there's sparrows lying on the ground.
- THERAPIST: What does Susan say?
- HAL: Nothing. She's still in the car.
- THERAPIST: You look upset, Hal. Is there something wrong with Susan?
- HAL: I'm trying to wake her up—



"Are you taking more pills?" Megan's voice vibrated through the wood of the bathroom door.

"I have a headache." Hal washed down two blue capsules and closed the medicine cabinet.

"You're getting addicted to those things." Megan looked at Hal with disapproval as he opened the door into the bedroom.

"Maybe," was all Hal could say as he lowered himself onto the futon.

"You're ingesting chemical toxins," said Megan. "Your bloodstream is going to look like a PCB dumpsite."

Hal sighed. "Small price to pay."

Megan sat up and glared at him: "You had another of those dreams again, didn't you?"

Hal nodded. "It was the ozone hole one. You know, the one where Susan dies of radiation burns."

"Did you talk about it in your session this week?" Megan asked.

He rubbed his eyes. The drugs didn't really stop the headaches, they just made him apathetic about the pain.

"Yes, I did tell her," Hal replied wearily. "She thinks I may be repressing some long-term hostility about the break-up of my marriage."

"Really?" Megan looked skeptical, she had met Susan a few times.

"I'm having a little trouble with that analysis," Hal said. Relief, not anger, was the primary emotion associated with Susan's departure.

"Well..." Now Megan sounded hesitant. "I still think you ought to keep up with the sessions. It's got to be better than doping yourself up all the time."

"Okay," said Hal. "Nobody said hypnotherapy was a precision process."

They were silent for a time.

"Hal?"

"Yes, Megan?"

"How's the headache?"

"Still there."

"So, I guess sex is pretty much out of the question."

"It is if you want me to join you."

"I see." Megan tried hard not to sound annoyed.

More silence. Then:

"Hal?"

"Yes, Megan."

"Did you agree to participate in some voter demographics survey for the Libertarian Peoples Party?"

Hal knew this scenario from previous headaches. With the prospect of love-making impossible, the time before sleep would be used as a household planning meeting.

"Not that I remember," Hal replied.

"Well, they said you did," Megan said. "They said they wanted to come around to the house and get you to fill out a survey."

"I really don't know a thing about it," said Hal.

"Well, they sound like a bunch of Nazis."

Possibly, thought Hal.

"If you didn't agree to take their survey," continued Megan, "why don't you call them up and tell them to go away?"

"First thing."



(COPING WITH) NORM DEVIATION

When I think back on all that crap I learned in high school, it's a wonder I can think at all!

- Paul Simon

That's a quote from a song. The title is *Kodachrome* and I mention it because that particular film format is relevant to some things that I did back in 1972 when I was in high school. Kodachrome, as those of you who may remember when photography actually involved non-digital materials, gave you really great colours with a minimum of light.

In other words you could make some really good looking movies on a limited budget and with relatively little equipment.

OPENING SHOT, EXTERIOR, MORNING

We see an empty highway at the outskirts of town. Suddenly an unmarked black van rolls past.

CUT TO:

INTERIOR SHOT, VAN.

A SOCIAL CONTROL OFFICER, wearing black leather, sits in the back of the van studying the readings on a glowing orange screen. The Officer sees a blip on the screen and speaks to the khaki-uniformed driver.

OFFICER

I think we've got one.

CLOSE-UP

The driver looks grim and nods.

CUT TO:

EXTERIOR. BUS STOP. A FEW MINUTES LATER.

THE DEVIANT stands there. He holds a small stack of old paperbacks under one arm. Otherwise, the Deviant looks deceptively like an ordinary teenager: jeans, army jacket, T-shirt and running shoes. His hair is a little bit too long and pretty messy.

In the distance, the black van slowly comes to a stop. Since it is not the vehicle he's waiting for, the Deviant doesn't pay any attention.

ANOTHER ANGLE

The door of the van slides open and the Social Control Officer steps out. He now wears a helmet and his face is completely hidden by its mirrored visor.

CLOSE SHOT

The Deviant turns and watches the Officer walk towards him.

CLOSE-UP

The Officer stops and removes an ELECTRONIC GUN from his holster.

ANOTHER CLOSE-UP

At this point the Deviant looks alarmed.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP

There's a crackle of white-orange lightning as a bolt of electricity leaps from the gun barrel.

ANOTHER ANGLE

of the Deviant. He falls to the ground, unconscious.

The Officer, assisted by the driver, pick the Deviant up and drag him toward the van.

PAN TO CLOSE-UP

of the Deviant's books laying on the sidewalk. The CAMERA LINGERS on one of the covers. A woman is removing her heavy sweater revealing the undersides of rather full breasts. An astronaut fully covered in space armour stands in the distance. His leering face can be seen through the faceplate. Large yellow letters scream the book's cover: "SIN IN SPACE!"

Leo and I decided we were going to make a film. I wrote the script, Leo provided the equipment and would direct.

I quickly learned that it was a lot easier to write the words than to put them on film.

I met Leo Milgrom in my Grade 10 Visual Communications Class. I entered the course with great hopes of making exciting stuff, but I was definitely failing. For one thing I was trying to take videos of the daily and degrading lives of my fellow students—a subject nobody seemed too thrilled to help with. For another, I was using something that was ironically called a "portapack." It was a gigantic reel-to-reel videotape recorder unit that you strapped to your back and humped around while you pointed a camera about the size of a toaster oven at people and asked them not to notice you.

The problem was that I really wanted sound in the show, I wanted to get the voices of students talking about why it was important to smoke up and sit in the middle of the high way, why Black Sabbath is a great new band and why guys always lie about being virgins.

Even today, I still believe there was something of value to this project but I was facing certain disaster. I didn't have the technical and directorial skills to get decent footage and while I was staggering around the school with this massive gear there was the constant danger that I might trip and get trapped on my back like a doomed tortoise in the desert sun.

My teacher, Mr. Pozzi, a patient and essentially compassionate individual, assigned Leo to work with me. Leo immediately saw my narrative perspective as problematic.

"People hate seeing stuff like this about high school students," he

said. "It scares them and makes them pissed off at us."

"It's supposed to spark a reaction," I replied, annoyed but grateful that he didn't mention how out of focus all my shots were.

"They'll never let you finish it."

"So what are you saying, I have to pull my punches here?" I'm sure I sounded totally shrill.

"You gotta balance it with something positive, and visually interesting. Then you can say whatever bad stuff you like—because it makes it look as though high school students are worth caring about."

He had a point there.

"And we need movement, lots of music, too," Leo seemed to be talking more to himself than me at this point. "So far all we've got is talking heads with zits."

We ended up taping a modern dance recital in the school and cutting in the interviews around that. We got an A-. Would have been an A+ if Leo had done all the camera work.

Leo also introduced his pride and joy to the project. A Bolex Super 8 camera with a beautiful zoom lens and a single-frame switch so you could do animation and superimposures. Leo had also rigged a shared remote switch that linked the camera to a cassette tape recorder. This was the first evidence of Leo's technical genius because this set up now gave us:

- Limited synchronized sound.
- Colour (video on portapak was all black and white then).
- Mobility. The camera and tape recorder weighed less than five pounds, so we had the capacity to do some really cool camera movements.

This was the first summer of my parents' divorce and so it was the first year with no vacation trip. Having lots of time on my hands, I found myself standing with my bicycle in Leo's driveway. He had clipped his camera to the eyepiece of his uncle's reflector telescope and was filming the partial eclipse of the sun.

It was intimidating but too interesting to ride away from.

"Do you want to do another film?" Leo asked as he adjusted the focus.

"Really? Like on our own?" I felt like I'd just been invited to fly to Mars. "I mean school's out."

"That's the point, school would just limit us." Leo pressed the tiny disk at the end of an articulated cable and the little motor inside the

camera started whirring. "We want to tell more complex and important stories."

"Yeah, right."

"That means we're going to need a script."

That's all I needed to hear. After a few minutes of not looking at the sun, I pedalled myself home, took the cover off my mom's IBM Selectric and went to work.

I was an early-model geek, so of course, it was a science fiction film. Of course, I saw myself as a serious writer so it was going to be set in a dystopian near future society.

Just after midnight, I had finished the first (and only) draft of a script called *NORM DEVIATION!* and it was always understood that I was going to star as the protagonist Norm D. This was partly because the story was doing to be a deeply personal statement but mostly because Leo had to be the guy at the other end of the camera.

I got up just after seven and my mom helped me with the gestetner and I printed out half a dozen copies of the script. Then it was back on my bike to Leo's place. He chased his little brothers out of the kitchen and we read the script together over bowls of Captain Crunch and bottles of Orange Crush.

INTERIOR LABORATORY. CLOSE-UP

Norm D. opens his eyes and lifts up his head. He has been sleeping in his chair.

CLOSE SHOT. NORM D.'S POV.

A bowl and spoon have been placed on a tabletop in front of him. Next to the bowl is a completely white carton with the words "MILK" stencilled on one side. Behind the carton are three cereal boxes. There are no words on any of the cartons. One is red, the other green and the last one yellow.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Norm D. looks up at the clock. It reads: 6:55. Possibly it is morning.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Norm D. reaches out and picks up the yellow cereal box. There is a brief burst of orange energy. The young man howls and falls to the floor.

CUT TO:

INTERIOR OBSERVATION ROOM. A SECOND LATER.

BEHAVIOURAL SCIENTIST #1 AND #2 are watching Norm D on a black and white TV monitor. There is a shot of their subject writhing on the floor, clutching his hand. We see cathode rays flickering on the lenses of the scientists' glasses as they make brief notes on their clipboards.

Next to the shots with the Deviant Detector Van, this was one of the most complicated scenes we filmed. Which was kind of a surprise to me because when I wrote the script I thought it was just going to be some people sitting, standing and falling down in some rooms.

Of course it was all Leo's fault. He convinced me that we had to do this scene right. I just thought we should shoot the monitor from behind so we didn't actually didn't see Norm D. on the video screen.

Leo insisted that my approach was totally no good and that we had to see our poor hero on the screen. Video on film was pretty tricky to shoot back then because of the strobing effect you'd get on the final film. But Leo said it would end up looking really weird and cool and he was right.

The hard part was getting the shots of me rolling around on the floor on videotape. In a chain of unlikely events pretty much powered by constant nagging, I got my dad to let the building maintenance people make a tape with the lab security cameras and even use one of their monitors in the shots with the scientists.

And this looked way better than the 12 inch Sears portable from my bedroom.

So thank you Dad, Leo and building maintenance.

Dad also got us some labcoats for Margie and Rose to wear when they played the behavioural scientists. I suppose I could have just written them as "scientists" or "psychologists" but "behavioural scientists" sounded a lot more sinister.

It would have helped if the labcoats hadn't been four sizes too big but Leo shot Margie and Rose at angles that the bagginess didn't look too obvious. So that's Dad and Leo—always solving problems.

The big post-production project for that scene was the big burst of energy when Norm D. touches the wrong cereal box. We decided halfway through shooting to make the behavioural scientists try and condition Norm against the colour yellow.

We never got around to agreeing if the yellow-thing was just an arbitrary decision to test the power of their mind control techniques (in which case they could have decided to condition Mr. D. to fear umbrella stands) or if yellow was associated with some subversive future political movement (which also could have been represented by umbrella stands if you think about it).

Again, it was mostly Leo pushing the envelope again. I didn't think we needed any visuals at all when Norm D. touches the wrong box. We were talking about electricity here and under most conditions you wouldn't see the current.

"It's more realistic without the effect," I said.

"Reality looks boring on film sometimes," Leo replied. "Besides, it's too *Star Trek* last season."

Yeow! William Shatner grimacing and doubling over while he's attacked by yet another invisible (and cheap) energy field. Can't have that!

"We've got to have an effect," Leo said.

"Yeah." Yeah, he was right.

When we were editing, I was worried that when Leo was using a compass needle to scratch the emulsion, he would damage our only print.

"No worries," he said.

He was right. It was probably the best energy effect in the whole movie.

To our surprise, the cereal boxes and milk cartons were the most difficult bits of the whole scene. We wanted them to look like breakfast condiments from a depressing Orwellian future society so we wanted them to be uniform colours with just their contents stenciled on. No product placement here!

When I wrote this, I figured it would be no big deal to make them. I was mistaken about that.

I painted the boxes three times and Leo kept sending them back.

"Too streaky."

"The letters are on crooked."

"Now you're warping the boxes."

Leo knew that the camera can be pretty forgiving about the appearance of props so perfection in fabrication was not necessary. So this should give you some idea of just how bad those babies were.

My props were bad. *Mars Needs Women* bad.

After two days of unproductive manufacture, Leo called in Allison who he knew from his art class last spring. I'd seen her around but I hadn't taken art last semester and she was way too smart and pretty for me to come up with a credible reason for me to talk to her in any other context.

Of course, she had been friends with Leo for years.

Anyway, Allison shows up at my house and looks at my latest set of pathetic boxes (they were sitting on the basement floor, sagging in on themselves).

"What kind of paints are you using?"

My sister's tempera paints because they were left over from some fake stained glass windows she'd been making last December.

"Tempera's no good," Allison said. "It's very uneven on opaque surfaces and you have to use too much water for cardboard surfaces."

She said she had some acrylics she could use. "Not as good as an airbrush but it should look okay on screen."

I resisted the impulse to ask her what acrylics were, or an airbrush, as she picked up some unpainted cereal boxes and narrowed her eyes at them.

"What kind of bond is the paper you are using to cover the boxes before you paint them?"

Bond? Paper? Cover?

She gave me a smile that was incredibly condescending from someone so young.

"No wonder you were having so much trouble. You have to cover the boxes with paper before you paint. Otherwise you have to use tons of paint to hide the original illustrations on the box."

Oh.

Then in about 0.2 seconds, Allison undid the tabs on the boxes, folded them flat and packed them in her knapsack.

"I'll bring them back tomorrow."

Click. Whiz. Allison disappeared down the street on her ten-speed.

Next day she was back and there they were. Three perfect cereal boxes and a milk carton from a dystopian future.

I don't want to give you the impression that Allison was particularly stuck-up, or at least any more than she had right to be considering how clueless I was. Allison was just astonishingly

competent and focused about certain things. Once you put her on a project, she was going to make sure that it was done right. And that was the way it was going to be.

I discovered this feature of Allison's character when she insisted on being there for the shoot when we were using her props. Make no mistake; they were *her* props now.

She wasn't disruptive or anything but she made sure that those boxes and the carton were photographed to their very best effect. Leo did the best he could and it was rather interesting that he didn't object when Allison told us that she was going to stick around and work on all the other props as well.

I didn't object because Allison was female and not a relation. And she was pretty interesting.

We had a third producer.

