

Dr. Strangelove

How I Learned To Stop Worrying And Love The Bomb.

Chris Garcia's

**DRINK
TANK**

MO_2011

WorldCon! WorldCon!!! WORLDCON!!!!

It's coming and since it's in our backyard, BAarea fandom is getting a bunch of visitors. We're hosting James Bacon, John Down, Alan Stewart, TAFF Delegate John The Rock Coxon, Ed Meskeys, and on and on. A bunch of them are coming to the Computer History Museum, which is a good thing. I love showing fannish types around. It should be a good time!

The Fan Lounge is gonna be huge! I'm not sure it'll be GIANT, but at least it'll be epic! We've been collecting stuff for the Teen Lounge and the Fan Lounge. It looks like I'll be handing off the TAFF Auction items at last! Yay!

And I've got panels I'll be doing, including a lovely one with Connie Willis on Gambling. Now, the difference between being a problem gambler and a Professional is winning. The Difference between problem gambling and researching a panel is being programmed on one! Thanks, Renovation Programming!

There's so much going on. I can't wait and I especially want to see Tim Powers get all the recognition he deserves for a career that has always been spectacular. I wish he was nominated for a Hugo because to me, he's the biggest miss as far as great writers who have never won a Hugo. Greg Benford's right up there too.

And the Hugo ceremony will be on Saturday and I'm hopign that we'll see some fun winners. I'd be so happy for either Carrie Vaughn or Mary Robinette Kowal win for Best Short Story. Heck, Kij Johnson's story Pony is a fave too. I'm pretty sure we'll see John Picacio walk off with one. I'm pretty sure that StarShipSofa will win Best Fanizne and I'm not happy about it!

Also, as is always the case when I've got a big con and will have to be walking a lot, my foot has been working in hurtin' me. I was into work today on crutches, which I always hate. I hope that I'll be able to work through it like I did when I went to Westercon with a throbbing foot, but managed to manage it with a tight anklebrace and two pairs of socks on tight shoes.

So, this issue is about Dr. Strange Love and I love Love LOVE Mo's cover this time. Brad W. Foster also has another wonderful image for us, and Walt Wentz has a great piece in here!

And, up next... LoCs!!!!





Chris,

Drink Tank 288. Another interesting issue, another great Mo Starkey cover. Another educational article on a movie I haven't seen. I like the idea of an arty movie as a weird send up. Sounds confusing as hell. I guess to an extent a movie doesn't need to make sense because you can just sit and watch whatever is presented to you.

It's odd that you mention it. The extra time I watched Alphaville, I made a point of looking at all the ways in which the film referenced American films. It wasn't like they were just a few small points, but there were tons of tiny things that were obviously relating to the American wfilm thing.

Your story was amusing. I read a lot of noir detective stuff and that kind of fix is exactly what a lot of those guys find themselves in. Mike Hammer would be thinking, "There's got to be a gimmick." Then he'd find a way out. I'm sure he would. Hell, I recall he once managed to get out from under "three sweating negroes." The guy was unstoppable.

I need to read mor Spillane. I loved the old Mike Danger comic stuff he wrote, and I've read a lot of Hammer, but that was years ago.

What can I say about Taral's Loose Parts? Should I even be talking about Taral's loose parts in public?

Being as I don't live in Canada I hadn't heard about the plane boondoggle. Business as usual. Why, exactly does Canada need such planes anyway? To fend off an attack from who? Greenland? As far as I can see Canada shares its border with the US and, no offense, but if the US attacks Canada...well, I doubt those few planes would do much good, there are plenty more where they came from, and hundreds of billions worth of other military hardware, sad to say. Since we are not going to attack, or need to worry about defending ourselves from Canada, or Mexico, we don't need all the military crap either.

Can't argue with you on that point! One thing that a military is good for is keeping people employed, but it's best if they are employed and not deployed!

I love his description of the dream about having to deal with computer problems. I have also had dreams involving being at my computer. How pathetic is that when you come down to it?

I dream about computer problems, but only as a part of job security.

Good observations on the Addams Family. I enjoyed both the series and the movies and there's a rare example of both being worthwhile and somewhat different interpretations. But I must say, nobody topped Barbara Eden. Go take a look at some of her Jeanie photos on the Internet. You'll appreciate them even more than you did when you were a kid.

Sorry to hear about the money woes. I say it every time -- a full time job ought to pay a living wage. I'm not sure how you keep up your enthusiasm let alone your fanac under such stress. I say that from my own experiences with near poverty through most of my life. Good luck with the finances.

Yeah, it's getting better. These things come and go in cycles, often with teh purchase of motor-cycles. Also, it turns out someone got a hold of my card number, so once again, I've got to get a new one. When it rains, it rains all over!

Best,
Eric



It's Hell Being Popular Taral Wayne

You might find it hard to believe, but I'm not really a very sociable guy. I like spending endless amounts of time by myself, puttering around with my coins, model cars and toy guns. As long as I can call it "work," I don't feel too much like a deliberate recluse.

Lately, though, I've been swept up in a frenzy of social activities that have me frazzled.

I won't count last Saturday, when two old friends dropped by to drive me to the pet food outlet. That was almost a whistle stop. They took me where I needed to go and dropped me off at home again, all in less than an hour. Moreover, I had several days afterward to regain my composure.

Later in the week, I was invited to First Thursday. I don't go to the local fan gatherings on a regular basis. Socially, they consist mainly of the local bunch of fans who run the SF convention. I've gotten to know some of them, but they appear to know me better. In spite of this, I was invited to make an appearance. I'm a reasonably adaptable sort of person, and can enjoy myself most of the time I'm out of the house. To cope with those moments when I would much rather be home with my "work," I've learned a number of useful mental devices to mark time. I fold beer coasters into forts. I recite the kings of England in my head. I try to remember my sisters' birthdays (that one's a toughie). Sooner or later, something interesting happens or someone says something to catch my attention, and the program resumes. I don't attend First Thursdays regularly because I used to be involved in running conventions, myself. But that was many, many years ago and I know better than to get involved now. Since running the local con is mainly what the local fans talk about at First Thursdays, I have a perfectly valid reason to make my appearances rare.

When Friday came rolling along next day, as it usually does following a Thursday, I was prepared to settle down to some "work." That afternoon, though, I received a phone call from Steven B. He had run of the house that evening, and wondered if I would like to drop by. I hadn't been up to Steven's place in a couple of years. I had had to decline each invitation for one excellent reason or another – usually bad weather or bad health. As it happened, I was sound of mind and body and quite willing to visit Little Italy that night. We had a fine time mixing Mexican food with Italian gelato, then experimented late into the evening with his new, home espresso maker.

Freshly invigorated from so much social contact – and caffeine – I was ready to plunge into my "work" the next day. At least I was until I was reminded that there was a party on Saturday for John Coxon, the TAFF delegate, at Catherine & Colin's place. Trans Atlantic Fan Fund winners don't routinely stop in Toronto on their tour of North America before the Worldcon, so it was more or less compulsory that I attend. Once more, I hopped on a Lansdowne streetcar, rode it to the subway station and took the next train east. This time I stayed on the subway a couple of stops past Little Italy, and got off at Bathurst Street, across from Honest Ed's vast discount emporium.

I was a little early, so I spent some time browsing in a great used music and video store called Sonic Boom, where I bought a used copy of Captain Beefheart's Trout Mask Replica for ten bucks. The delay was well timed, I guess – not so much because I arrived at Catharine's door at correct hour, as because I ran into the guest of honour, going in the other direction. I thought he was abandoning us. John reassured me that he was only going for snacks, and would be returning. I proceeded to the party, fingers crossed and hoping it was the truth.

John was as good as his word. He arrived back at the party a little while later, carrying bags of East Indian Tim Bits. At least that's what they tasted like. "Tim Bits" is Canajun for "donut holes," by the way.

A little to my surprise, most of Catherine and Colin's friends these days seem to be the same bunch of convention organizers I saw at First Thursday. I'm very much a member of an endangered species, you see. The

original sort of fan – who views fandom as an amateur activity involving the print medium – is a dying breed. I only count two others in the entire city of Toronto, and barely another dozen in all of Canada... if I stretch the definition a bit. Not all of fandom is functionally illiterate yet, but unquestionably 99% of fans would answer the question, “what is fandom about,” with the statement “fandom is going to or running a convention.” The odds being what they are, who should I have expected at the party? Even the TAFF winner explained to us, as a sort of afterthought, that he had once published a couple of small zines. In this decadent age, I doubt he would have been disqualified if he hadn’t.

It was a hell of a day. The sky was grey overcast, and humidity stood close to 100%. A light rain began about two blocks from the party house. Fortunately, it was over before midnight, when I left. By then, though, humidity stood at around 150%! After I got home, I nearly drowned when I pulled my t-shirt off – it was that soaked in sweat.

Damn trying experience, though! Three social events in as many days? That’s more than I normally see of people in a month. I thought my constitution would never stand the strain, but I came through with flying colours. I almost think I will be able to speak civilly to the pharmacist tomorrow, when I go to pick up my prescriptions.

What worries me is that I’m going to the Worldcon in Reno, and my flight is next Saturday. How will I ever stand five whole days being surrounded by noisy, excited fans, covered in badges, carrying groaning bags of books, half of them trying to park their scooters on your foot and the other half spilling drinks or food? While they drone on about Philip Jose Farmer or C.J. Cherry, I’ll be thinking about my nice cozy apartment, my loving cat, the articles that need writing and pictures that need drawing, wishing I were home. This is not taking into account the several days prior to the con that I’ll have to spend in Los Angeles, or the several days after the con that will be spent in San Francisco. It’s simply not humane to expect me to put up with humans that long!

Unfortunately, those busybodies Alan Rosenthal and Marc Schirmeister decided it would be a gosh-darn swell thing if I were to attend the Reno Worldcon. It would get me back to California for the first time in quite a few years, so that Schirm and I could drive in the desert again. I confess, I like the desert and look forward to seeing it for what might be one last time. If I were more robust and could hike the way I used to, I’d be tempted to say, “hang the Worldcon, who cares about a lot of conceited writers, and a Hugo award I won’t win anyway – let’s just get lost for a week in the desert.” But those days are gone. My back won’t permit that much strenuous walking, so I’m grateful for just the two-day drive getting from LA to Reno, and the two-day drive back.

It would be a hell of an embarrassment if I did win the Hugo for Best Fanartist. First of all, I haven’t written an acceptance speech, and I don’t have the least intention of writing yet another one that I don’t expect will ever be used. Secondly, I haven’t done all that much fanart of late, and it is just possible that I don’t actually deserve to win this time. Not deserving it has never stopped anyone from accepting a Hugo before, I grant you. If offered one, I won’t hesitate for a moment to accept the rocket. It’s just a question of whether I’ll have the restraint not to mutter, “about bloody time.”

Or maybe I could just confuse everyone by saying what a great honour it is for me to be accepting the Hugo Award for Steve Stiles, who couldn’t be here this evening...

Of course, just suggesting that I should attend Renovation would not have budged me from my comfortable home and numerous stacks of “work” that never diminish. I can’t afford the local con, which is a waste of a mere fifty bucks, let alone the staggering four-figure expense of a Worldcon.

For a start, Alan transferred his membership to me. (He and Jeanne Bowman have quite sufficient reasons not to go this year.) Alan is also using his frequent flyer points to put me on the plane, executive class, and is contributing ready cash for meals and expenses while away. Schirm will be putting me up (and putting up with me) while I’m in LA, as well as driving me both ways. He’s also sharing his room at the con. It’s hard to say “no” to such determination.

Damn. I didn’t know anyone cared. Well, now I know somebody does. All the same, whenever I’m out of the house for very long, I hear the sweet, siren song of my own sofa and my mind wanders to all the fascinating, compelling tasks that are waiting for me to resume when I get home. At such moments, I can’t help thinking that it’s hell being popular.



An Encounter With Gallic Humor by Walt Wentz

On Tuesday night, in the middle of a long meeting, I began feeling a peculiar pain. It was not a pain in the usual place associated with sitting in long meetings, but was instead centered under my wishbone; and after I got home and chugged a handful of antacids, it rapidly got no better. In an hour it had progressed from Painful Annoyance to Three-Alarm Fire. I briefly considered and promptly discarded the idea of Toughing It Out; in the background I seemed to hear all those cheerful old public service announcements about “Symptoms of Heart Attack,” and the sound of the old gentleman in the black nightgown whetting his rusty old scythe.

So I called my daughter Amber and asked her to drive me to the Emergency Room. Under the circumstances, driving myself seemed merely spitting in the eye of Fate.

It was apparently a slow night in the old ER, and everyone seemed happy and pleased to see a customer totter in. An iron-gray, no-nonsense nurse granted me an immediate interview, covering my medical history back to the Old Stone Age, and then directed my attention to a wall poster cheerfully titled “Measure Your Pain,” which is apparently a sort of hospital mascot. This is a chart depicting a row of cartoon faces, ranging from the silly smirk of the Wal-Mart mascot announcing a sale on Cheap Plastic Crap on Aisle 17, to a corporate CEO’s grimace of agony and despair on learning that a cherished old tax dodge has gone belly-up. On a scale of 1 to 10, I was required to estimate the degree of my discomfort. I opined it stood about an 8, and rising slowly.

(This sort of thing would continue throughout my stay. Every nurse and doctor and intern and volunteer candy-striper and stretcher-bearer who spoke to me would express a deep concern about just where I stood on the Pain Chart; and I would tell them that it was about a 6.3 and falling slowly, with indications of light precipitation in the afternoon, or that it was about 7.5 and rising, and to sell when the market hit 9. Then they would go away happy and content—it was always so easy to please them).

After I was shucked out of my shirt, I was stretched on a gurney and wheeled into the ER studio, where another nurse requested my favorite number on the Pain Hit Parade. When I reported it was still holding steady at 8, they hooked me up to an electronic octopus, whose sticky tentacles enmeshed me from ankles to esophagus. They surveyed the ballot returns with skepticism, and asked me again where I stood on the Pain Chart. Then the nurse gave me a tablet of nitroglycerine, which brought on an attack of the Slobbers, making

the old salivary glands “give down” like a prize Guernsey. She followed up with a shot of morphine, when dried them out like the Dust Bowl. I would gladly have stood aside and let the drugs fight it out between themselves, but apparently I was only the designated battlefield and so had no vote in the matter.

After a few more alternating hits of nitroglycerine and morphine, the election returns still being unsatisfactory, I was unhooked from the octopus and wheeled down the hall for X-rays, then wheeled back again, hooked up for another session with the octopus, and finally the judgment was rendered that the old ticker was OK.

The ER doctor, a big, cheery soul who looked like Mr. Clean without the earring, announced that he thought the culprit was the Gall Bladder, a humorous little organ that liked to imitate heart attacks. He made this announcement with a barely-repressed enthusiasm, a sort of proud and proprietary air that gave one the impression the Gall Bladder was his favorite organ, a good ol’ drinkin’ buddy of his, and that he invited old Blad over to the house every weekend for a hand of cards and a six-pack of Oly.

After asking for my current standing on the Pain-O-Meter, the nurse gave me some more morphine and I was wheeled down another corridor to visit the Sonogram operator.

This somber artiste slapped a pint of warm grease on my belly, then picked up a device resembling a small smoothing iron and thoughtfully began running it over my anatomy, like a “water witch” dowsing for a well on the back 40, all the while intently watching a screen where the ghostly, swirling images of various innards were depicted in real time.

Finally rewarded with an appreciative audience, the old Gall Bladder decided to pull out all the stops and put on a real show. By now I had four shots of morphine in me, but they were getting their little chemical butts kicked. When the Sonogram artiste rammed his little iron up under my ribcage, the pain gave up all pretense of being a harmless little heart attack and migrated south to set up shop there. That was when the Gall Bladder really rolled up its sleeves and went to town. My socks were full of cold sweat, my teeth were grinding like an old-fashioned coffee mill and I was breathing in short pants— which was odd, because I was still wearing long ones.

Notwithstanding my painful wheezing, the sonogram artiste, with praiseworthy persistence, methodically took all the standard mug shots of the Prime Suspect— right profile, left profile, face-on, back view— and then apparently added a few candid photos and studio portraits for his home portfolio, and perhaps some gag shots for “America’s Funniest Home Innards” as well.

After the Gall Bladder had taken several triumphant curtain calls and left the stage, I was finally wheeled back down the corridor to ER, where the doctor asked me how my pain was doing. I told him my pain was doing just fine, in fact it seemed to be having a grand old time in there, although I really wasn’t enjoying the party much.

Since the morphine was obviously outmatched, the doctor decided to reinforce it with another painkiller, Bananadisulfozincoframmistan, and, like the Bad Guys in a tag-team wrestling match taking an Unfair Advantage, the two drugs ganged up on the pain and body-slammed it into sullen defeat— but it immediately announced a Big Grudge Rematch, tomorrow, same time, same arena, tickets available at all the usual outlets. From my supine position on the gurney, the ceiling tiles above my face now seemed to be shuttling back and forth like the view out a train window as it was taking up cars in a railroad station, but I was still capable of semi-rational speech with Amber and Shawn, who had continued to keep old Dad company with praiseworthy patience.

The Prime Suspect now being identified, the genial doctor gave us a mini-lecture on his favorite organ. The Gall Bladder, he explained, resembled the rubber squeeze bulb on an old-fashioned bike horn. Whenever you ate a fatty meal, the bulb would honk out a shot of bile to facilitate digestion. (Excess bile could be baled up for sale to political conventions). Sometimes, however, the Gall Bladder’s bile duct (like the reed on the bike horn), would get plugged up with solidified bile or rust or paint chips or something, and it would playfully signal this malfunction with sharp pains that resembled a heart attack. Judging from the sonograms, my own Gall Bladder contained a fine representative selection of gall stones, gall sand and gravel, and thick gooey bile like half-dried library paste. Although the bile duct was not, apparently, actually plugged, the Gall Bladder had decided to celebrate the New Year with fireworks anyhow.

When the doctor asked if we had any questions, I demanded to know what the hell the designers, engineers and contractors could have been thinking of. What evolutionary purpose could possibly have been served by putting nerve endings in the Gall Bladder, since our caveman ancestors could not get at the damn thing to ream it out with a corkscrew or whatever? Not without fatal consequences, at any rate.

Pretending to misunderstand my question, the doctor reacted to this implied criticism of the intestinal comedian with a firm declaration that the noble Gall Bladder was a fine, upstanding little organ that was only doing its bit to keep the wheels of the American medical industry turning.

He then admitted, perhaps reluctantly, that people could get along just fine without their Gall Bladders— although from his tone I suspected that its removal implied rank ingratitude for the comedic efforts of a maligned and misunderstood little jokester.

After the mills of the pills had ground slowly, slowly, to the decision that I should remain in the hospital overnight, I sent Amber and Shawn home.

It was 2:30 in the morning when I was wheeled along more corridors, up an elevator, down another corridor, and so into Good Old Room 530, where I was hooked up to Good Old IV Stand 055 I, my inseparable companion for the next two days, and which would accompany me, like a spastic giraffe on a very short leash, wherever I went. A parting barrage of dope permitted me to collect about three hours of sleep between the final blood pressure check and the cheerful chatter and trampling of Morning Shift Change.

Morning also brought a succession of medical visitors, all of whom inquired politely about where I stood on the Pain Scale (5.1 to 8.2 and rising, with indications of snow on high ground), and whether they could take my blood pressure, take my blood, take my temperature, take readings of my inner economy, or make polite conversation about my various symptoms and secretions.

This sort of thing went on for most of the morning, with my doctor of record finally joining the parade to suggest an immediate operation. Considering I had been permitted neither food nor water for the past 12 hours and my mouth felt like the inside of an old leather glove, this seemed a wonderful idea.

Just to make absolutely sure the Gall Bladder was indeed the culprit, however, a final test was proposed— the injection of a drug that would make the Gall Bladder constrict sharply. If I then screamed hysterically and coiled up like an angleworm on a hot griddle, the case was proven.

Fortunately, the staff surgeon, a serene and sensible lady of middle years, decided on the preponderance of evidence that this final test was superfluous, and proposed that we meet for an operation at 2:30 p.m. Immediately smitten by her air of calm assurance, I agreed. It was a date.

The minutes flew by like hours, until finally I was wheeled down more corridors, through another elevator and into Pre-Op, where the Operating Room Nurse, the Anesthesiologist, the Assistant Surgeon and the man who keeps gophers from digging under the foundations all inquired politely about my place on the Panorama of Pain (9.2 and rising).

Then I was wheeled through into the operating arena, where the staff were busily setting up shop, and the Anesthesiologist did his thing— and abruptly it was an hour later in the Recovery Room, and the large, dark-blue wad of pain under my ribcage was gone.

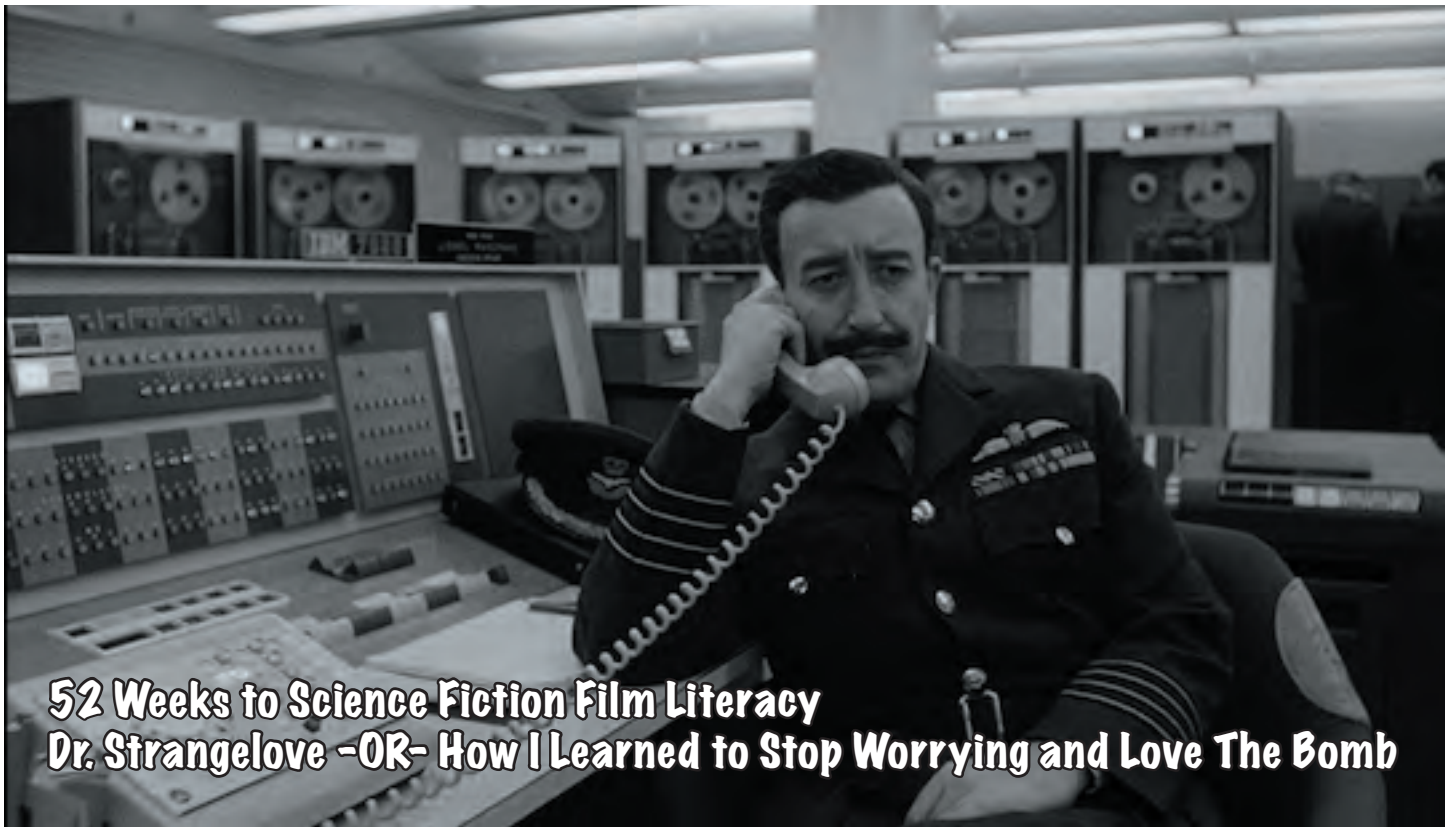
Since I had been totally unaware of the lurid details of the operation, the reader may be thankful I am unable to report them here.

Everyone from the serene surgeon on down came to my bedside to congratulate me sweetly on my successful divorce from a rogue organ.

The late Gall Bladder, I was repeatedly assured, had been “really sick.”

Having personally experienced its sense of humor, I was already well aware of that.





52 Weeks to Science Fiction Film Literacy Dr. Strangelove -OR- How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love The Bomb

With the exception of *Counterblast*, *Dr. Strangelove* is the least science fiction of all the films on this list. It's also one of the ones that shows exactly how much I love Kubrick. This is not the most Kubrick Kubrick, but it is a strong one and as a film, it might be the one that most mirrors my tastes in comedies.

Let's start with a look at the films of Stanley Kubrick. He burst on the scene in the late 1950s, but he was really the biggest star of the day when it came to high-minded commercial films. *Spartacus* was arguably the biggest film he ever directed. He was a commercial success, but was often on the outs with critics and sometimes with the mainstream. His later films like *Lolita* were often derided by the top critics, but some were richly praised. His style was easily identifiable. There was specifically something in how he dealt with sound and especially dialogue. His style was deliberate, spacious and slightly ponderous. In his films, there is often someone speaking, then a gap, a void of sound that is then filled by the response. Contrast this open concept with the sound and dialogue design just ten years later of Robert Altman, whose 'Over-lapping Dialogue' concept worked to fill every moment with sound, as if the world were crowding into the space inhabited by the film. With Kubrick, there is space for something else to exist. There is what I call a stream of silence, and it is in that stream that the genius of Kubrick exists.

Perhaps it is the concept of balance of sound, music and mise-en-scene that makes Kubrick's oeuvre so powerful. In *Dr. Strangelove*, the scenes in the War Room are the perfect example. There are many moments where the President has asked a question and there's this moment of pause that's completely not needed. The pause as if the character is thinking, but you can tell from the response that everything is already pre-answered, that this is all coming like a program out of a computer. There's no movement, just empty audio space. And then there's the answer, and it soaks in and there's another pause and then there's another question and all this time has passed and you can feel that time has a different meaning in Kubrick's world. There's the empty feeling which I say explains why he was the director who best captured the late 20th Century malaise.

Dr. Strangelove was based on a book called *Red Alert*. Maybe 'based on' is a bit too strong. 'Suggested by' would be more apt, I imagine. The book was a thriller and rather serious, in fact. I've never read it, but it was adapted into a film that wasn't a satire in the 1980s. A buddy of mine who was a giant Kubrick fan decided to read it and was not at all happy. The story is simple: a General goes a little nuts, orders planes to bomb the USSR, the President and the Joint Chiefs meet to figure out what to do and, in the end (and is it possible to give a spoiler to a nearly-50 year old film?), they manage to call all but one of the bombers back. That one bomber drops the

bomb on Russia, which triggers the Doomsday Device that'll lead the atmosphere to be irradiated for 93 year. The Joint Chiefs start working on a new plan after that which shows the continued paranoia.

The real strength of Dr. Strangelove is in three things: Kubrick's direction, the Script (partly written by Terry Southern) and Peter Sellers.

Let's start with the script. It's not a complicated script, it's pretty clean actually, but it's perfect for Kubrick's direction. The comedy is sly, simple, not based on back and forth but on perfectly delivered lines and situation. One of the funniest lines in the history of film has to be "You can't fight in her, this is the war room!" You can break down comedy in that line. It's so simple and it's a play on words that's so simple and yet so perfectly delivered by Peter Sellers.

Oh yeah, Peter Sellers.

He plays three parts. The first is an RAF Group Captain Lionel Mandrake. Sellers plays him as a traditional "stiff-upper" type Brit and against the insanely brassy Sterling Hayden as Brigadier General Jack D. Ripper, he's perfect. He tries to deal with the insanity with logic. The fact that he's shown with a computer, two actually (an IBM 1401 and an IBM 7090) and I've always thought that was to set him up. The RAF is about logic, control, data and right reaction. The USAF is all about emotion, playing from the groin as it were. The differences between Ripper and Mandrake show this beautifully.

Then there's President Merkin Muffley. He's a pretty amazing character. He's endlessly reasonable, but those around him are insane. Especially George C. Scott's General Buck Turgidson. It's pretty amazing. There's a great one-sided phone conversation between Muffley and the Soviet Premiere Dmitri Kisov. The conversation is like that between friends who are having a tiff. It's part of the genius not only that they're having this conversation where Muffley is more concerned about the Premiere's feelings. It's perfect.

And then there's Dr. Strangelove.

Dr. Strangelove is not from the book, which is obvious because he's straight comedy. He's sort of a combination of John Von Neumann, Wernher Von Braun and Edward Teller, a scientist who I met at Laurence

Livermore shortly before his death. The good doctor is apparently a former Nazi. Yes, there were former Nazi scientists working for the US, we know that, but this one is still sometimes referring the President as "Mein Führer." His arm also unconsciously gives the Nazi salute from time to time. Strangelove's only on-screen for a few minutes, but he's the last character to be focused on, with Sellers doing schtick for a bit until he stands up and yells "Mein Führer, I can walk!" and then we get footage of various nuclear bomb drops and tests while We'll Meet Again plays.

And that's the best way to end it, with a light and airy song playing on top of completely real, honest-to-Ghods bombs being dropped, including the one on Nagasaki. In the end, Kubrick went out with reality, heavy imagery over-top of the simple pop song. It's the entire message of the production: it's a serious matter, dealt with comically. It's subtle but so smart.

This is also probably George C. Scott's best role. Yes, I know about Patton, he was a genius in it, but here, he's insane in a way that perfectly defined the madness of the Military at the time. Or at least how people thought of them. He's over-the-top at times, even going over Sellers at time, but he's so right for the role and he really defines the sense of



the film. The first time we see Scott (and his assistant and lover Miss Scott) he basically proves that he's the most dangerous kind of nuts. He's reluctant until the moment he's face-to-face with it, when he turns into a serious maniac. It is such a great performance.

And overall, I'd say that the performances were strong. Sterling Hayden as Ripper was suitably, clinically insane. Slim Pickens as Major T.J. "King" Kong is hilarious. All the guys on the B52 bomber are all great. It's an impressive set of performances, all made possible by a script that, at no point, went into serious nuttiness, which is weird if you consider what the original ending was.

Originally, it all ended in a pie fight.

Now, story-wise, a pie fight made sense for a couple of reasons. First, it would show just how ridiculous this entire scenario was and how childish our leaders are. It would also have changed the entire tone of the film, leaving us with a broad comedy moment instead of a sober ending which plays better with the overall concept. The Pie Fight, while an interesting idea and one that worked within concept, would never have been able to deliver like the chosen ending did.

There are various other bits that we should talk about, the most important of which might be that there really was a Cold War and there was more than one time that we were almost plunged into End Game. The Cold War was a time of paranoia, but it was also the greatest motivational force we ever had for technological advancement. The modern computer was largely invented and improved as a reaction to the Cold War. SAGE, the

So, Dr. Strangelove is a great movie, not Kubrick's best (that would be 2001) but certainly a better comedy than most filmmakers would ever be able to create. It's almost the perfect black comedy. It's an amazing piece to study because it's not only got some remarkable filmmaking, but it is also so telling of the time it was created. The Cold War was a period of excessive technological change and political machinations, and this film not only points them out, but seriously skewers them in a way that both shows how prevalent these attitudes were and makes us laugh.

