

***Red River Radical***

***Issue 2***

***May 2011***

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***<http://redriverradical.wordpress.com>***

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***Red River Radical is a zine (like a mini-magazine) about politics, gender, culture and other stuff pertaining to the Red River valley and the rest of the world. We are anarchists, communists, radicals, feminists, anti-racists, and anti-colonialists. We're a little weird, but you do let us babysit your children, and feed you. Anytime you leave your house you risk running into us. Who knows, maybe we have more in common than you realize.***

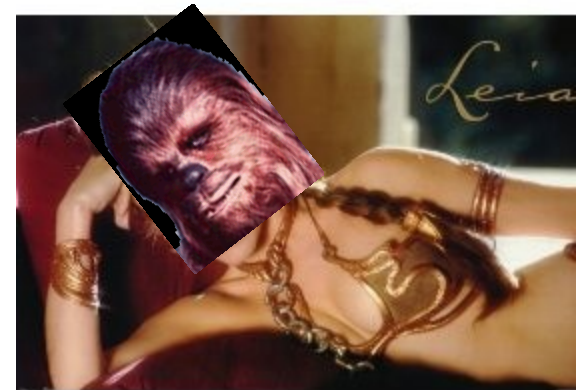
***We want to hear from you. Wanna get published? Hate our anti-American pinko viewpoints? Feed back is always welcome.***

***Science Fiction***

***Utopia***

***and the***

***Radical Imagination***



Science Fiction has become synonymous with movies with poorly written scripts and high special effects budgets. This is a long way from sci fi's origins as a bizarre genre of literature akin to Westerns and Romance novels. That major Hollywood movies are now sci fi has been largely detrimental to the critical aspects of science fiction literature and to its usefulness in cultivating a radical political imagination.



*Avatar aliens prey to the mother-goddess/their planet to save them*



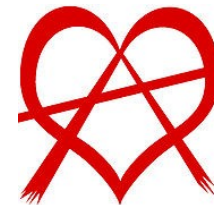
*Primitive islanders pray for King Kong to save them from the giant octopus*

A perfect example of this phenomenon is the 2009 movie Avatar. Released in 3D, it became the highest selling movie of all time. The visual effects are

Science fiction could offer discourse on how to become human in more novel, free, and beautiful ways. It could inspire more diverse, involved, and radical politics. It could provide a safe space for people to discuss radical perspectives around race, gender, and politics outside of academic settings. That it currently doesn't is indicative of the state of the popular imagination: dystopic, disillusioned, and depressed.



*The only way that will come true is if you believe that bullshit.*



***If you don't believe,  
You had better get superstitious***

The post-apocalyptic sub-genre of sci fi is the most popular currently. Environmental disaster, the collapse of civilization, very often induced by a zombie infestation show a bleak unhopeful future of humankind. There seems to be some reason Hollywood wants the future to be shit and seems interested in denying human cooperation. The zombie sub-genre is a perfect example of this: a mass of unthinking, unemotional, undead humans threatens an ill affected group of reluctant allies who must brutally make their way from point a to point b. Is this an allegory for freeway traffic or immigration?



*Which of these frightens you most? Would you use a chainsaw, shotgun, or baseball bat to handle any of these issues?*

stunning and the urge to ride a pterodactyl after viewing is very strong. Yet Avatar is hardly more than a remixed Dances With Wolves; a watered down anti-colonization story in which a white male is still the hero after his remake into the indigenous other. Avatar's story revolves around a typical teenage American romance; same gender roles, heteronormative and weirdly middle class. You get all this after traveling near the speed of light for six years to another solar system to conquer alien life. To James Cameron some stories are eternal – ignoring the bounds of time and space.

Avatar is based on a novel by Ben Bova titled *The Winds of Altair*. The first difference between *The Winds of Altair* and Avatar is the lack of the clear cut distinction between good and evil in Bova's book. Rather than an evil corporation bent on mining some miracle mineral at all costs a group of young students is transported deep into space to terraform a planet that will be their new home. This process will kill all the indigenous life on the planet. The students take direct action, taking over the main laboratory on the space station, to stop the process. Only then do they learn that the Christian fundamentalist church that sent them into space will not return to rescue them if they fail to terraform the planet Altair. The story is one of environmental degradation versus meeting human needs. The balancing act the young astronauts must follow does not give the satisfaction of simplistic thinking or huge grossing ticket sales that Cameron's rendition delivered.

Avatar is only one example of the dumbing down

of sci fi that takes place. Sci fi once performed a role of providing a safe space for critical discourse that is now largely the territory of academic feminist writing. The academic versions of feminism pump out literature on many of the same subjects sci fi treats: gender, anti-capitalism, race, and the environment. The academic feminist literature is not necessarily less fantastical than sci fi treatments of the same subjects, just less circulated, less understood, and ultimately less inspirational of radical imagination.



The project of sci fi as an inspiration of radical political imagination is explored beautifully in Margret Killjoy's new collection of interviews with anarchist fiction writers *Mythmakers and Lawbreakers*. The message of all the interviewed authors is that fiction, especially science fiction, is to expand the reader's notion of what is within the realm of possibility.

"Is that an alien?"  
 "No, that is an ambiguously gendered person."  
 "Oh. Looks like an alien to me."  
*Actual conversation taking place in a feminist space.*

Several such efforts of expanding the notion of the possible are evident in Ursula K. LeGuin's novels *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispos-*

*sessed*. *The Left Hand of Darkness* takes place on a planet in perpetual winter where the indigenous human life is totally hermaphroditic. The result is the lack of gender as modern Americans understand it. LeGuin explores the social constructedness of gender through her story in an engaging way that truly bends the imagination. *The Left Hand of Darkness* shares affinity with Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Yet LeGuin's novel enjoys much greater understanding and wider readership than Butler's, which is filled with academic jargon and lack of relate-ability to one's own life.

LeGuin's other novel *The Dispossessed* is the story of a scientist who is alienated from the anarchist society he lives in. He leaves his Utopian home planet to work as a wealthy government sponsored scientist on the nearby capitalist planet. On the capitalist planet the scientist becomes aware that his home he was previously disillusioned with is a truly better way of life and goes on to lead a revolution on the capitalist planet. LeGuin offered a way of viewing politics beyond the Cold War paradigm of Capitalism and Communism that was very welcome at the time and still has a great deal to offer the modern political imagination.

LeGuin shares this affinity with Philip Jose Farmer whose books posed the Cold War in the terms of a futuristic space race – with an important alternative of a political faction based on direct democracy and federation among the fascist capitalism and totalitarian communism of the competing blocs of nation-states.