



WORLD WATCH ONE

January 2021



WORLD WATCH ONE ☯ IN THIS ISSUE

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Acknowledgements

This was something of an unexpected issue. Way back in the summer of 2020, a collection of articles began to take shape intended for this issue, along with several other pieces in development. Well, the other pieces in development had other plans, additional ideas were inspired along the way...and here we are. The result is that we have yet another issue already in a significant state of completion, and this bonus New Year's issue in the bargain. My thanks to all of the staff and contributors—old and new—who weathered the twists and turns of this issue in an already ridiculous year. I am, now and always, in your debt.

In the hot seat: Interviewees. Wow. We had a few in this issue. Some have been waiting patiently for their moment in print. Others were asked at the last minute when the direction of the newsletter suddenly veered towards them. We are grateful to one and all: Terry J. Erdmann, Figure FETTish, Laura Harrington, Mrs. E. Johnson, Karl Lundstedt, Bruce McCorkindale, Earl Mac Rauch, W.D. Richter, and Billy Vera. Thanks also to Denise and Mike Okuda at the Banzai Institute Facebook page for their generous assistance in getting the word out about *World Watch One* and their contributions to Banzai fandom in general. We extend our appreciation to Dan Berger, Barry Chan, Matt Haley, and Mike Okuda for creating the graphic elements that appear in this issue. Thanks also go out to Chris “ArcLight” Wike for hosting the newsletter's presence on the interwebs at the [World Watch OnLine library](#) and Sean Murphy for doing the same at the [Buckaroo Banzai FAQ](#).

Many thanks to our regular contributors: Dan Berger, Steve Mattsson, Sean Murphy, Steven H Silver, and Scott Tate, for once again rising to the occasion. We would particularly like to thank Rich Ross and Colleen Method for stepping up and contributing to the cause with their articles. Special thanks to Sean Murphy and Steven H Silver for their proofing of this issue's contents, and Radford Polinsky for his contributions.

Welcome! Please join us in welcoming Barry Chan to the staff! Barry is a graphic designer extraordinaire and responsible for many of the full color graphic flourishes you will find in this issue. Glad to have you aboard!

Commendations go to Scott Tate for coming through in the later stages of the newsletter and essentially creating the last quarter of this issue. What started as one possible and somewhat tortured path to a book review turned into two reviews and two interviews with Banzai luminaries, along with additional and varied last minute writing projects. My goose would have been cooked without you, Scott. Well done.

Get in the game: *World Watch One* does not write or illustrate itself. All are invited to contribute to the next issue. Don't worry about making it perfect. We'd just love to hear from you. See below for contact information and further encouragement.

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Submissions to *World Watch One* are strongly encouraged. Really. I am dead serious. People, we know you're out there! All are welcome. Please contact us at dan.berger.2@gmail.com for details.



Front Cover: In his ongoing quest to Nagelize the entirety of Team Banzai, Editor-in-Chief Dan Berger created this image in honor of this issue's star attraction, Mrs. Johnson. This mash-up of the classic Bruce McBroom publicity photo featuring Laura Harrington's Mrs. J. and Patrick Nagel's iconic "Woman in a Yellow Sweater" attempts to capture the spirit of both subjects and the era in which they appeared. According to Dan, "Nagel's affinity for, westernization of, and modern take on traditional Japanese wood block prints has always appealed to me. Considering the 'East meets West' nature of the Banzai Institute, it's difficult to imagine a more natural fit than Nagle's style and Team Banzai's familiar faces."

Questions? Comments? Need a sympathetic ear and a kind word? That's why we're here; that and the snacks. Contact us at dan.berger.2@gmail.com.

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1 BANZAI INSTITUTE FOR BIOMEDICAL ENGINEERING AND STRATEGIC INFORMATION

Light it up!

During a family Zoom gathering in December last year (apologies to future generations trying to make sense of those words), I proposed that New York City should forgo the traditional ball drop in Times Square on New Years and replace it with a giant wicker “2020” sculpture to be burned at midnight instead. Pagan dancing would follow. Masks and social distancing would be mandatory, although it’s hard to say how well that would dovetail with the pagan dancing.

Sign of the times, I guess.

2020 reminds me a lot of a description I once heard in passing about Perfect Tommy, “Sometimes he’s a pretty smart feller. Most times he’s a pretty fart smeller.” Much of the last year has been memorable for its lingering aroma of awfulness and misery, but it also [had its moments of genius](#). Carbon emissions were down globally, voter turnout rose to historic numbers in the United States, COVID-19 vaccines began to make their way into the arms of first responders and medical personnel around the world, and [SpaceX made history](#) with the successful launch and return of a Dragon capsule piloted by real live astronauts to the International Space Station, slap dab in the middle of a summer desperately in need of a happy thought.

It’s not a stretch to say that happy thoughts were in broad demand and short supply last year, especially towards the end. Here on New Year’s Day, as I type this, there is a growing sense that things could maybe (Hopefully? Possibly?) get better. It’s a fragile hope, but the fact that it’s even on the radar is a comforting thought.

Which brings us to *Shōgatsu*.

[Shōgatsu](#) is a Japanese celebration of the New Year, and a perennial favorite on the Banzai Institute calendar. The traditions surrounding this celebration are many, but the two we reflect upon most in this issue are *oosouji* and *fukubukuro*. That’s a lot of Japanese and mostly adequate transliteration for you to chew on, so bear with me.

“Oosouji” roughly translates as “big cleaning.” The idea here is that every new year begins with a clean slate, starting with a household cleaning that includes often neglected areas, like under beds, refrigerators, and other furniture and large appliances. If ever a New Year needed a clean slate to start from, it would be 2021.

“Fukubukuro” is the tradition of retailers offering mystery bags for purchase. These bags are filled with items of a retail value typically exceeding the price charged, with uncertainty and risk adding to the allure of the bags’ unknown contents. 2021 feels like a spiritual cousin of this tradition. Who knows what we will find inside?

Come to think of it, every issue of *World Watch One* is a little like the Institute’s own *fukubukuro* offering. You never know what you’ll find inside, and this uncertainty is often mirrored in the process of putting them together. That said, we’re not above tossing a few spoilers in the mix. As the cover indicates, you’ll be hearing a lot about and from Mrs. Johnson in this issue; both from Laura Harrington—the actress who portrayed her in the docudrama—and the legend herself in their respective interviews. You will also hear from Institute veterans Terry Erdmann and Billy Vera, as they talk about their recently released books and memories from making and marketing *Buckaroo Banzai*, among other things. We are particularly delighted to include articles by two fellow Blue Blaze Irregulars, Colleen Method and Rich Ross; part of a growing wave of BBI’s willing to take us up on our open submissions policy.

Like the new year in front of us, there are plenty of surprises in store in this issue. So, let’s all gather around the embers of 2020 and toast some marshmallows. 2021 awaits, and the bar for improvement is low. And, for the duration of the pandemic, lithium is once again available on credit.



WORLD WATCH ONE

NEWSLETTER OF TEAM BANZAI

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In Memoriam: Jerry Peterson

By Steve Mattsson

Gerald “Jerry” Peterson died on December 8th, 2020 from complications of COVID-19. He was an alto, tenor, and baritone saxophone player, who was a charter member of Billy Vera & The Beaters. His other gigs included playing with Kim Carnes, Tanya Tucker, Smokey Robertson, The Temptations, Linda Ronstadt, Rick Danko, Robbie Robertson, Barbara Streisand, Olivia Newton-John, and .38 Special. You can check out his discography [here](#).

Jerry served in the Air Force during the Viet Nam War. He was the conspicuous “double sax” player during the Hong Kong Cavaliers’ gig at Artie’s Artery. He also worked for the bad ass carpet cleaning company, The Rugsuckers, who fought alongside Buckaroo during the assault on Yoyodyne.



Credit: The Billy Vera Collection

I had the good fortune of attending the “Getting the Band Back Together” signing and panel at the 2016 Comic-Con International in San Diego, California. In attendance were Pepe Serna, Damon Hines, Billy Vera, and Jerry Peterson. After dutifully waiting in line to meet the cast, I approached the table and saw that they had a variety of 8x10 glossies available for signing. I gravitated to one of Billy as Pinky Carruthers and Jerry as the double sax player for The Hong Kong Cavaliers. Billy was having an in depth conversation with another fan about music, when Jerry interrupted him with great enthusiasm, “Billy, Billy! He wants the one of you and me!” Jerry’s excitement about being part of *Buckaroo Banzai* was infectious more than thirty years after the movie debuted.

In the world of Team Banzai, I was always intrigued by Jerry’s character. He wasn’t part of Buckaroo’s inner circle who lived at the Institute. He had an ordinary 9-5 job as a carpet cleaner, but he still got to play with the band and he was on Buckaroo’s short list when the world was in danger. Nice work if you can get it.

During the panel, Billy told a story about the Beaters playing a bar band in the 1987 movie *Blind Date* with Bruce Willis and Kim Bassinger. Apparently, director Blake Edwards loved Jerry and all the shots of the band that made it into the film featured him on the sax—to the detriment of Billy and the rest of the musicians. Billy told the story with mock indignation that made clear his love and respect for Jerry as a partner in film and in music.

World Watch One reached out to Billy Vera for a few more words about Jerry, to which he graciously contributed the following:

“Jerry Peterson was a charter member of Billy Vera & the Beaters and a dear friend. Aside from playing his iconic saxophone solo on my song, “At This Moment,” he stood next to me onstage for forty-one years. The audience never failed to love it when he played two saxes at once on “[Millie, Make Some Chili](#).” Nobody loved the spotlight more than Jerry did. He was thrilled to be chosen to play the role of Rug Sucker in *Buckaroo Banzai*. He left a hole in our band that will never be filled.”

Rest in peace, Jerry.

Our heartfelt condolences go out to Jerry’s friends and family. Please wear a mask and maintain social distance for as long as it takes. We don’t want to lose any more.



Credit: Bruce McBroom/The Banzai Institute

For an interview with Billy Vera, turn to page 41.

Beauty in Everyday Life

By Rich Ross

Over the last several issues, *World Watch One* has put out the call for Blue Blaze Irregulars to send in short observations, thoughts, and personal experiences related to a specific subject. The first such Call for Submissions was for fan memories celebrating *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai's* thirty-fifth anniversary in our [August, 2019 issue](#). The next was a call for observations from the field from Blue Blaze Irregulars toeing the front lines of the pandemic, in many different capacities, for our [August, 2020 issue](#).

What a difference a year makes, eh?

We decided, once again, to ask BBI's around the globe to take a stab at a different topic; this time with the holidays in mind. For a New Year's issue, we thought messages of thankfulness and hope—the everyday observations of a world where beauty continues to live and kindness thrive in difficult times—would make a welcome addition. We sent out the call early in November. Then we sent it out again.

Only one man, Rich Ross, replied. His response appears below.

This year has been difficult, and the pandemic remains unforgiving. In spite of that, I firmly believe there is room for hope and a measure of gratitude for the goodness that these relentless days of sameness reveal at unexpected times. We can lay down and let the darkness of the day press in upon us, or we can defy it by recognizing the kinder moments that are often more difficult to parse from the gloom. That is what Rich was able to do in the paragraphs below.

Thanks, Octopodes. I owe ya. -DB

Living through this year has been hard for reasons which I am sure we are all overly aware. While the year isn't over, and there are still going to be hard times ahead, I can't help but think of some of the meaningful ways in which humanity has kept reminding us that all is not lost, not by a long shot. I am not talking about any grand gestures, more about the ways people have made joy and hope live in everyday life.

When we thought the pandemic was transmitted by everything and on every surface, when we were disinfecting our mail, people in my area started making sure there were antiseptic wipes for the delivery people if they needed them. When people were staying away from each other because they were afraid to get the disease, chalk phrases like “you matter and are loved” and “we can hug soon” started appearing on sidewalks all over town. When toilet paper, paper towels, and disinfectant were hard to come by, neighbors organized to make sure others that were high risk or already sick had what they needed. When things seemed to be at their worst in early summer, and systemic injustice was put front and center for all of us to see, those that could took precautions and



made their voices heard in inspiring and incredible numbers.

People are amazing. People can choose to be amazing. Some find it easy to fall into fear or despair, while some seem to naturally float on ebullience. I swing between the two, so to help me remember to be good in the world, I have the following hung in my workroom “The principles by which B. Banzai lives are known as the Five Stresses, the Four Beauties and the Three Loves. Things to be stressed are decorum, courtesy, public health, discipline, and morals. The Four Beauties are the beauties of mind, language, behavior, and environment. The Three Loves are love of others, love of justice, and love of freedom.” Every day, I try to embody at least one of the Stresses, the Beauties, and the Loves. Just one a day makes the world I move in better for me and those around me. We all get to choose. I look forward to seeing all of the things we do, big and small, to help make our experience of the world better.

Thank you all. Stay safe,
Rich “Octopodes” Ross

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Camping & All Weather Go-Bag Extras

by Colleen Method

In 2012, I volunteered for training in the [Community Emergency Response Team](#) (CERT), a U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency program for people to help in disasters or emergencies. After training, I created a Go-Bag packing list that incorporates the lessons learned in CERT classes.

For those unfamiliar, Go-Bags are prepared bags containing supplies and equipment for emergency situations. Other terms include Emergency Bags, FEMA Bags, Weather Gear, etc. Call them what you want as a family.

Since retiring actively from the BBI team, I asked my team members what portion of my wisdom they wanted me to share. They asked me to write down my packing list, which they have asked me for since 2012. A list of CERT kit additions is noted.

Feel free to add to or subtract things from the list as you see fit. I give you the following list for camping or extra items to consider for your all weather to go bags.

Extra water bottles

Water purifier drops or lozenges

Roll all clothes up and place in plastic storage bags

Any medications should be placed in storage bags with clothes

Extra rope (never know if you need it)

A small book to kill boredom

2 extra flashlights and batteries

Food stuffs, candy, and snacks (hold off on salty foods)

Pen, marker, and a notebook

Compass

Whistle

Map of area

Duct tape roll

Fold up axe and shovels

First aid kit

Eating utensils, cookware, and dishes

If Wifi is available—phone, tablet, or computer—if power is available

Solar powered phone and device chargers (fully charged and with cables)

Fold up camping furniture: chair, bed, etc.



Virtually surviving: During the pandemic, more than business meetings and family gatherings have become digitized, as demonstrated by Colleen Method's recent excursion into virtual camping pictured above. Credit: Colleen Method

Flint kit or matches—never use a refillable cigarette lighter for campfires. Flicking your Bic is ok.

Water bucket

Box of baking soda

Sleeping bag

Tent, camper, or rent a cabin

Baking soda note—Did you know that you can use baking soda for a lot of things? My favorite is to clean dishes where soap is not an option. Just put a pinch of baking soda on a dish and start cleaning. Do not use baking soda on good dishes or your daily silverware at home. It is best used on camping gear.

Weather emergency Go-Bags: This list can also be used to augment or add to your weather emergency go bag for the home or car. Just add a blanket, extra food stuffs, and keep in mind the weather extremes your area experiences. Keep clothes and medications with you and not the bag.

CERT Kit Gear additions to list: triage tape or tags, extra duct tape or masking tape, marker, helmet, vest or jacket, knee pads, and team requirements.

Hope this helps in setting people on the road to having fun in the wilderness.

Saddle Up: The CERT program—originally a product of the Los Angeles Fire Department in 1985—was created in an effort to train civilians to help meet immediate needs in the wake of large scale disasters and threats to public well-being. CERT became a national program in 1993, with community-based programs in all 50 states. Find out more about volunteer and training opportunities at <https://www.ready.gov/volunteer>.

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INTERVIEW: Bruce McCorkindale The Muppets Take the 8th Dimension!

By Dan Berger

On August 27, 2020, sharp-eyed Blue Blaze Irregular ArcLight shared an intriguing Facebook post by artist Bruce McCorkindale at the [Buckaroo Banzai: Blue Blaze Irregulars Club](#). The post featured an illustration of two Muppets acting out the shock tower scene from *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai*. How did such an improbable pastiche find its way into the world? We contacted McCorkindale to find out for ourselves.

Bruce McCorkindale is a freelance artist, born and bred in Omaha, NE, the city he still calls home with his wife, Rebecca, and two cats: Mews and Momo. He focused on comic art full-time in the 80s and 90s, working primarily as an inker for companies like DC, Malibu, and Image Comics. His work appeared in *Planet of the Apes: Blood of the Apes*, *Rune vs. Venom*, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, and many others. He shifted gears in the 2000s, working full-time with Terry Tidwell at Miracle Studios, creating comic-style artwork and animation for the advertising/editorial market. Since the 2010s, Bruce has re-focused on freelance comic art and classic comic art re-creations.

Dan Berger: A Muppet/Buckaroo Banzai mash-up is not something I expected to see...ever, but the concept works brilliantly. How did this illustration come about?

Bruce McCorkindale: In 2019, I decided to participate in [Inktober](#); the event where artists post one drawing a day in October on social media with the hashtag #Inktober. For a theme, I decided to do "Arthouse Muppets." I put Muppets into various arthouse/indie films like *The Seventh Seal*, *Throne of Blood*, etc., and it really caught on with Twitter. Patton Oswalt retweeted almost every one of my posts, and I went from close to a thousand followers to almost 10,000. After October, I offered to do commissions of Muppet-ized movies for people, and got a lot of responses. One of those requests was for a Muppet version of *Buckaroo*. I decided to put Link Hogthrob in the Lord John Whorfin role and Kermit as Buckaroo.

DB: Were you familiar with *Buckaroo* before taking on the commission?

BM: I was sort of-kind of familiar with it. I had seen the film before, years ago, but it didn't particularly stick with me. I later became good friends with a fellow comic artist who was a big *Buckaroo* fan, so I was pleased to do something that he'd get a kick out of. It's always fun to research the films, whichever one I do. Some of my favorite pieces have been of films that I wasn't



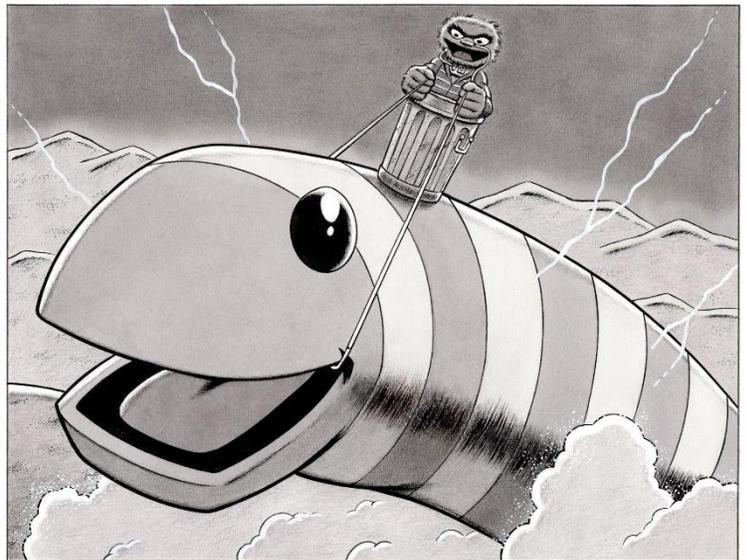
McCorkindale '20

It's not easy being green: Kermit faces the horrors of Link Hogthrob's diabolical Shock Tower in a Muppet Dimension version of *Buckaroo Banzai*. Credit: Bruce McCorkindale

necessarily a fan of. I love David Lynch, but his *Dune* is sort of a major exception. However, I really loved having Oscar the Grouch riding a Slimey sand worm!

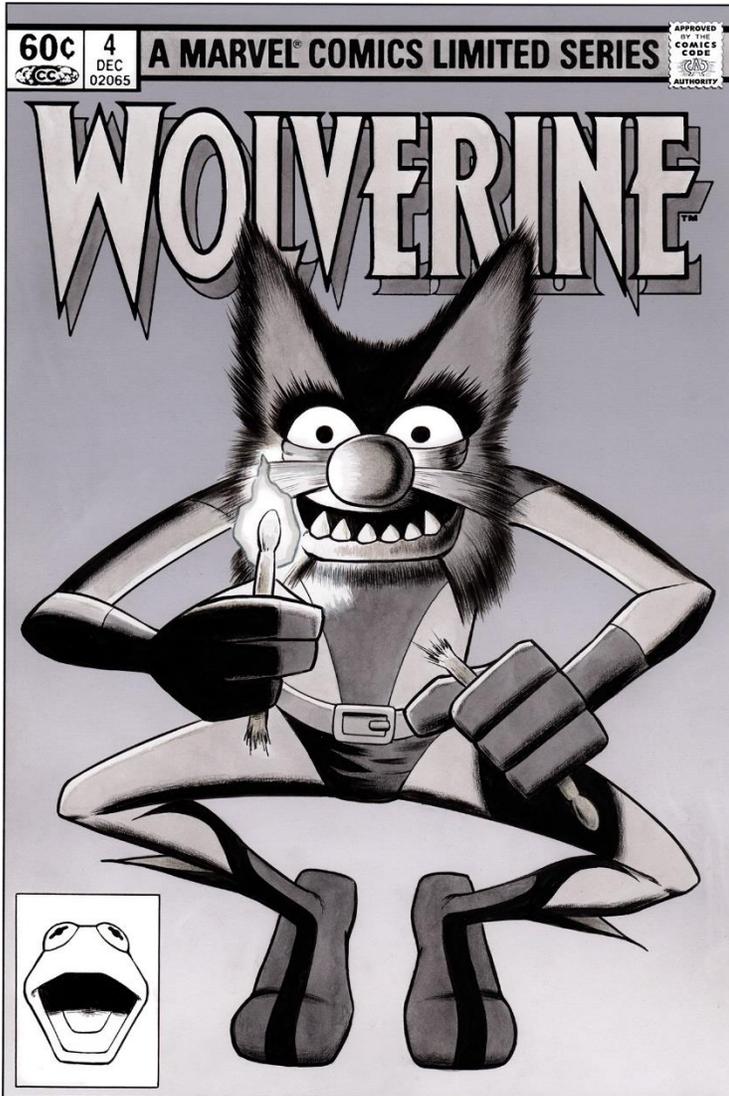
DB: What were some of the other memorable requests people made for Muppet commissions?

BM: I tend to pick unusual films myself, so I think it would be hard to shock me with movie choices! I haven't had a lot of specific requests for theme, because I warn people that I like to go my own way with the ideas. I had two requests that weren't films, so that was interesting.



McCorkindale '20

Oscar Atreides? Requests for Bruce McCorkindale's Muppet-inspired take on various arthouse and independent films has mutated over time to include Marvel comic book covers and Shakespearean plays, with quite a few 1980's cult films in the mix. Credit: Bruce McCorkindale



McCorkindale '20
Snikt! Credit: Bruce McCorkindale

One was a Muppet version of *King Lear* (with Bunsen and Beaker), and the other was a Muppet version of the cover to *Wolverine #4* with Animal in the lead.

DB: How did you decide on the specific scene and characters you used in your *Muppets/Buckaroo* image?

BM: Since I don't like to have a lot of preset ideas at the onset, I tell clients that I'm happy to take suggestions on choice of Muppet, scene, etc... as long as there's an understanding that I might go a whole other way with it. With *Buckaroo*, it was kind of a matter of scrubbing through to see what scenes immediately jumped out. I liked the idea of Kermit for Buckaroo, and for some reason I just immediately saw Link Hogthrob in the Lithgow role!

DB: What was your process like creating the image?

BM: I generally play around with a very rough sketch at the start, and then tweak things in Photoshop to make



McCorkindale '20
Under construction: The Shock Tower scene in progress, in pencil (top) and inks (bottom). Credit: Bruce McCorkindale

sure the elements work together, the perspective's right, etc. Then, I'll go to full pencils. I scan the pencils and do whatever tweaking might be needed in Photoshop. As I recall, Buckaroo didn't need a lot of tweaks. Once I'm happy with it, I print a light bluish-gray version of the pencils onto bristol board. I ink that up with pretty traditional tools: dip pens, brushes, and some permanent pen. The final stage is adding tones with liquid watercolors and watercolor pencils. This is often my favorite part...it's sort of like the dessert to the meal!

DB: Are you still accepting requests for commissions?

BM: Yes, I'm still open for commissions! I took October off to do another "Muppet a day" for what I'm calling "Muptober." I have a waiting list for commissions. I'm currently looking at February, 2021 for new requests. You can contact me at brucemccorkindale@gmail.com. I'm also easy to find on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)!

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Buckaroo Banzai Action Figures!

By Sean Murphy

Official merchandise related to *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the Eighth Dimension*, such as the [View-Master discs](#) and the [videogame](#), was released at the same time as the film. Sadly, no licensed action figures were ever made. As a child of the 1970s, this was disappointing. We'd grown up with *Star Wars* toys, and *Buckaroo Banzai* action figures seemed like a no-brainer. Knowing the complicated legal issues with the film, and understanding the fact that the film wasn't successful at the box office, it's not really a surprise that action figures didn't happen at the time.

Then, around the turn of the millennium, there was a brief moment when action figures almost did happen.

Unbeknownst to fans, *Buckaroo Banzai* action figures became a real possibility around the same time the DVD was released in 2002. Adam "Mojo" Lebowitz, interviewed in the [previous issue](#) about the *Ancient Secrets and New Mysteries* trailer, discussed the following incredibly cool tidbit. "There was interest from [McFarlane Toys](#) to do some *Buckaroo Banzai* action figures. That never materialized but I know they were keen on it." This revelation is more than a little heartbreaking when looking at how well-crafted and detailed McFarlane toys are and wondering what they'd have done with the various *Buckaroo Banzai* characters. Alas, it was not to be.

Luckily this did not turn out to be the end of the line.

Resin Underworld

Fast forward to April, 2020. The [BBI Club Facebook](#) page posted a link to [Figure FETTish's Instagram](#) page announcing that Resin Underworld would be creating *Buckaroo Banzai* action figures. The intention was to



Villains from the Underworld: (L to R) John Gomez, John O'Conner, and John Bigbooté come to life as they emerge from the molds of Resin Underworld. Credit: Resin Underworld

release five action figures from the film through the [Resin Underworld](#) website: Buckaroo Banzai in his Jet Car uniform, New Jersey in his cowboy outfit, and three Lectroids (John Gomez, John O'Conner, and John Bigbooté). Each figure would cost \$55.

Examining the Lectroids, it's easy to see how each figure was crafted to look exactly like the characters from the movie, from their facial features down to their costumes. Buckaroo is suited up and ready to hop into the Jet Car for his famous desert ride and New Jersey comes with a cowboy hat and two six guns. Although the cost of purchasing all five was high at \$275, the images alone were enough to show that a lot of love was poured into these action figures. This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to own these unique *Buckaroo Banzai* action figures and I decided to take the plunge. I wasn't disappointed when I received them.

The figures are all hand painted, stand on their own two feet, and have no moving parts. I was expecting the figures to be posable, like the articulated action figures I grew up with, but this wasn't a problem since they looked so cool. The backing card they are attached to, each one 10 inches x 7.5 inches, are very nicely done with the character's name and image. There is no character information on the back of the card as there was with the old *Star Wars* action figures. This feels like a bit of a missed opportunity as there is a lot of information out there, from the [press kit](#) for instance, that could be used to add content about the characters. It was a little surprising that the Jet Car costume was the "look" that Resin Underworld choose for their Buckaroo figure. The more obvious approach would be to have him dressed in the iconic suit with red bowtie.



John O'Conner, front and back of the package, by way of Resin Underworld. Credit: Resin Underworld

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Each figure comes packaged in its own clamshell blister pack, which can be opened without damaging the card it's attached to, which allows you to maintain the integrity of the packaging and backing card.

World Watch One reached out to the Resin Underworld folks to learn more about their *Buckaroo Banzai* figures. Figure FETTish was open to an interview. His answers were given a thumbs up from his partner, Magitarius.

World Watch One: Why did you decide to create *Buckaroo Banzai* resin figures?

Figure FETTish: This started out in a conversation about how we wished there'd been a toy-line produced from the film. Later on Magitarius and I traveled to California for a Designer Artists convention. While there, we visited the Aqueduct that was used in the end-credit scene of *Buckaroo Banzai*. We shot a short crude video, as well as we could, somewhat mimicking that scene. At some point later we were talking about the toys again and we decided to make a few of the characters.

WWO: How did you choose the first BB characters that you created?



Credit: Resin Underworld

FF: We knew we had to have good guys and bad guys, so the bad guys were going to be Red Lectroids, obviously. If you are going to do Red Lectroids, then of course you have to have John Bigbooté. From that choice we decided just to focus on the three Red Lectroids chasing down the overthruster. For the good guys we knew we had to have Buckaroo. We had a hard time deciding which version of him to make. We settled on the Jet Car version as the first one. We decided on New Jersey due to his portrayal in the movie and just the general popularity and likability of Jeff Goldblum. We thought

keeping it to the five characters was a manageable number until we could determine where we were going with these figures.

WWO: What other BB characters/designs were under consideration?

FF: Lord John Whorfin, another version of Buckaroo Banzai, and John Parker.

WWO: What was the response to the BB figures you created?

FF: We suspected that they would go over well at conventions. We had planned to release them at shows in 2020, but everything was cancelled because of COVID. We decided to do a small release over social media. We were surprised at the response from just that small effort.

WWO: Why resin figures instead of vinyl? How do resin toys compare to the *Star Wars* action figures we collected growing up?

FF: Resin is easy to work with, once you learn the materials, and does not require expensive machinery to produce an item. *Star Wars* figures were made, in the final stages, with an injection molding process, which takes expensive molds and machinery to produce the figures. Silicone molds and liquid resin is a way to go for small scale manufacturing.

WWO: What is the process of creating figures from beginning to end?

FF: Using action figures as the example, first you have to make up a figure to produce a mold from. The figure could be sculpted from scratch or [kitbashed](#) from other toys, or a combination of the two. Once you have the different pieces, arms, legs, head, body, etc., you use a silicon material to make your mold. Once you have a mold, you mix up a two part resin and pour it into the mold to let it cure. That is an over simplification to the process. There is a lot in determining how you will make your mold and how many molds there will need to be based on the parts that make up the figure. A lot of thought goes into figuring out how to make the vents in the mold. The vents are where air will escape from in order to remove bubbles in the resin, so it casts solid. This is a tricky process and one where you get better at it the more you do it.

WWO: What color is the figure when it comes out of the mold?

FF: It depends on the color tints you can use. You add them to the resin when mixing to give it a color. I often use a basic white, for figures I am going to paint or a



New Jersey rides again! (L to R) 1) A mold is opened to reveal a resin New Jersey figure. 2) A closer look at the mold. 3) The New Jersey figure, built and painted. Credit: Figure FETTish/Resin Underworld

base color if only highlighted areas are painted. The resin without any tints is clear with a slight amber tint. We believe, as it ages, the clear will become more amber - like a lot of 70's and 80's toys you have seen that have clear windshields/canopies.

WWO: How long does the process take from the initial idea to creating a mold, casting the figure, painting it, and creating the packaging?

FF: When things are rolling it could be days. It just really depends on how motivated you are and how much procrastination you can avoid.

WWO: Is it possible to make resin figures that have moveable arms and legs?

FF: It is very possible. We both have made figures with movable limbs. It does introduce additional work and considerations. For the Bionic Chewy we made, the arms were movable. We used the magnet technique to accomplish this. A lot of artists use magnets for head, arm, and leg articulation. It is not the best method, but it works. I am currently making some newer figs that have movable arms, which use a single shaft to allow the arms to move. They do not move individually, but they are allowed to move. This is primarily so they can fit in vehicles. When designing the BB figures, we went with a basic static figure. We both started this as collectors and making static figures is a good way to get started. You don't get overwhelmed by making a complex figure and

can focus on learning about the materials. We felt the BB figs were most likely going to be collected and displayed as opposed to being possibly posed or played with. That being said, later version may be made with articulation, such as ones that may come with vehicles.

WWO: How many figures do you make per production run?



Six Million Dollar Wookiee: Mash-ups are a frequently visited theme among-fan made action figures. *The Six Million Dollar Man's* "The Secret of Bigfoot" (1976) blends seamlessly with *Star War's* (1977) Chewbacca; two great tastes that taste great together. Credit: Resin Underworld

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FF: I keep my works in the 10's and usually limited runs. If something is popular, I may make more runs of them or do a new version 2.0 run of the figure. Gallery shows are typically limited runs or exclusives. Most gallery owners like for the items to be exclusive to the show you are submitting for.

WVO: Do you have any legal concerns from intellectual property rights holders in making these toys?

FF: Since I am not a lawyer, I have to put this into terms that I understand and have learned. Someone else could explain this better. These works fall into an art category, typically being fan-made, parody, satire, commentary, tribute, etc. A lot of my works are parodies and in no way am I saying these are made as official items from the franchise owner. For the *Buckaroo Banzai* figures, there are no existing toy lines and these are fan made pieces of art. They are also on a limited scale. We do not present them as some official product from the franchise, they are just pieces of fan produced hand-made art. What we have seen from other artists is that sometimes they may receive a cease-and-desist letter saying to stop making the pieces.

This is usually seen respectfully as a badge of honor. This is not about being a scofflaw or thumbing your noses at a franchise owner. It is more about the fact you produced something that was noticed by the owners that they felt was good enough to get the recognition. That is the best way I can put it. Most artists comply with the cease-and-desist and, in some cases, reach out to the owners to see about producing pieces for them or obtaining the rights.

WVO: What's been your worst production disaster?

FF: This typically revolves around meeting deadlines and getting pieces done for conventions or gallery shows. You are working on your pieces and then either you goof up a mold and the pieces don't come out right, or you get your figure done and then realize there are no blisters that fit the size of your figure readily available, so maybe you have to redesign your packaging. Also, running out of materials when you have to meet deadlines. All this is related to bad planning, like most things are. I have a tendency to jump first into a project with only quick planning ahead, which is when these issues arise later.

WVO: Will you make more BB figures in the future?

FF: We are planning on making another run of the previously made figures and adding some new ones. The new characters are TBD. There are so many characters to choose from. We want to make them all but we need to be selective. Some of the characters up for consideration are John Parker, Rawhide, Buckaroo in a different outfit,



[Resin Underworld](#) is the name of the collaboration between figure makers [Magitarius](#) and [Figure FETTish](#) for pieces to which they both contribute.

Figure FETTish got his start creating resin toys by collecting other artists' work. Eventually he had ideas of his own to explore. He slowly figured out the process of molding and began making his own toys. Magitarius was always interested in toys and wanted to make his own characters.

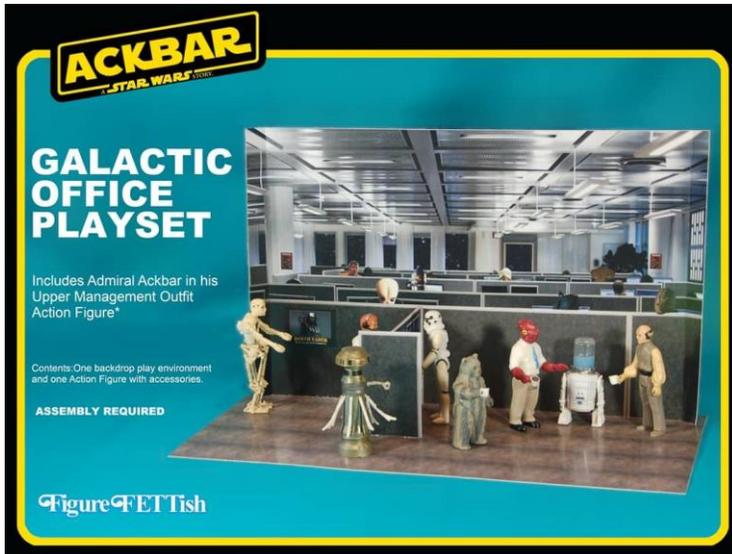
Figure FETTish said that their collaborations usually came from conversations about other toys, pop culture franchises, music, and other artworks. Eventually, one of them says "I wish there was a toy for that..."

Figure FETTish is partial to the *Star Wars* parody playsets that he makes independently, as well as the [Galactic Office Playset](#), which came with an Upper Management Ackbar figure, and the [Tatooine Discotek](#) that came with a Disco Greedo figure.

Figure FETTish really liked the [Bionic Chewy](#) figure that he and Magitius collaborated on for their Resin Underworld projects. This figure was Chewbacca as the Bionic Bigfoot and a tribute to Kenner's *Star Wars* and *Six Million Dollar Man* figures. The Bionic Chewy had an arm that could be replaced with weapons and tools included with the Action Pack. The most popular Resin Underworld collaborations to date are the [Bionic Chewy](#) and *Buckaroo Banzai* figures.

When considering what inspires him to create, FigureFETTish said that it's more about a concept than the actual toy. He described this journey as a search for some "Conceptual World" that moves him, where he can visualize characters to make figures as well as the vehicles and playsets to accompany them; something along the line of [Micronauts](#), only a totally new world and the characters that live there. -S. Murphy

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Just another day at the office: The parody side of homespun action figures is on full display in this “Galactic Office Playset” featuring an Admiral Akbar figure in his “Upper Management Outfit.” Credit: FigureFETTish

Perfect Tommy, Reno, Casper Lindley and his son. We liked the idea of having all of characters that are in the end credit scene. Maybe some other Red Lectroids. We will probably do a John Whorfin, but I think he is coming with a playset we are considering making.

WVO: What about making spacecraft from the movie?

FF: We have discussed making one vehicle—the thermal pod. We are both fascinated by the look of it. We think it will be off scale, like you see with a lot of other toy-line designs. What we mean by that is the ship will be smaller and not to scale compared to the figures, but the idea is that you can get Buckaroo Banzai and John Parker inside. Will it be difficult and expensive? Yes! However, the difficulty will just be making the initial pieces. We have a design concept to produce a vehicle-playset that will be reminiscent to some 70’s and 80’s toy playsets.

It is also a design that helps keep the end cost down since we are doing this as small scale manufacturing. A lot of what we do is about nostalgia and making a toy that is like one you had as a kid in terms of the design. We find something we want to make and then determine the method with which to make it. Some of those methods are also part of the nostalgia. An example being cardboard playsets.

More Banzai Action Figures?!?

As I worked on the interview for this article, two more action figures from *Buckaroo Banzai* became available, neither of which were from Resin Underworld. In September, 2020 the BBI Club Facebook group had a posting for a *Buckaroo Banzai* action figure on [eBay](#) for \$49. From the description on eBay: “This is a hand-

made item/custom/kitbash. Articulated. Fragile, not for young collectors. Paint is not as durable as factory, may wear at joints. May contain imperfections of this type of items; photos are of almost identical figure and card. Made for adult carded display.” Ironically, the figure was Buckaroo Banzai with the red bowtie.

Unfortunately, I missed the auction when it was available. I’ll admit that, after I got the first five BB action figures, I was hooked. Luckily a second auction for the figure appeared on eBay and I snapped it up. I reached out to the creator, plisnithus7, for more information, but he declined to be interviewed.

The backing card is slightly smaller (8.25 x 5.75 inches) than the Resin Underworld card, and misspells Banzai’s name as Bonsai on the front, but it does contain information about Buckaroo on the back. The clamshell blister pack is glued to the card and does not open, so I could only get to the figure by slightly damaging the packaging. The Buckaroo Banzai action figure is possible with arms that independently move up and down and legs that bend at the knee and hips.



Vive la différence: A Resin Underworld John Bigbooté (L) vs. the plisnithus7 Buckaroo Banzai fig (R). Credit: Sean Murphy

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Side by side, the size and painting differences become apparent. The Resin Underworld paint job is even and shiny, while the plisnithus7 paint job is a bit uneven and feels like a single scratch will peel the paint off. Overall, I'm still very pleased with this unique action figure.

Finally, I stumbled upon vast amounts of custom action figures from different movies and other franchises on [Etsy](#) while doing research for this article, including a one-of-a-kind [Lizardo action figure](#) going for \$250 from [Popculticons](#). It was listed as "For Display—Not Play. Figure is glued in a stationary position." The card backing is 6 inches x 9 inches. It was a little too rich for my blood, but I appreciated the figure's level of detail.

And just like that we've suddenly gone from zero Buckaroo Banzai action figures to seven with the Lizardo figure. Each is unique and not so much a toy to be played with as a piece of artwork to be displayed and admired. In this new world of custom action figures, the potential for more *Buckaroo Banzai* toys seems endless, and that warms the cockles of this big kid's heart. But the figures come with a price, and it makes my wallet scream. Time to start saving up. 🦋



Evil, pure and simple from the Etsy Dimension! Fan-made figures for *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai* continue to proliferate on internet crafter sites, like this stylish depiction of Dr. Emilio Lizardo/Lord John Whorfin. Just be advised; at \$250 for the item above, getting the bootleg figure collecting bug could set you back as much as a Maserati Bora. Credit: Popculticons



Credit: BBI Rolo Tomasi

EXTENDED CUT: Bootleg Toys and Admiral Jeff Blue-Jeans

By Sean Murphy

“Action figures built with spare parts and silicone molds are an art form born of nostalgia,” according to Rich Juzwiak in his *New York Times* article “[‘Bootleg Toys’ Are Their Own Kind of Collectibles](#)” from November 23rd, 2018. This is a great article and well worth reading to learn about this amazing toy scene.

Juzwiak described the custom action figure scene as follows, “There is something inherently bootleg about the medium. Artisanal action figures are usually molded and painted by hand, but also are frequently made up of repurposed parts. (The term “[kitbashing](#),” which refers to reusing parts from multiple model-building kits to create unique contraptions, is thrown around a lot in this field.) ... And appropriation is a distinct part of the appeal—the more esoteric the reference, the better. The pseudomercandising of the figures, including the blister packs they come in, is part of the allure of the toy.”

A perfect example of the cool, fascinating, and silly nature of bootleg toys is captured by the discussion of *The Fog* action figure. “Mr. Polydor’s best seller, for example, is based on John Carpenter’s 1980 horror film, *The Fog*. It’s [three-fourths of a cotton ball stretched out](#) into a blister pack glued to a piece of cardboard decorated with a scene from the movie about a vengeful, killer fog in California.

“‘It’s a joke,’ Mr. Polydor said. ‘It’s just garbage taped to other garbage.’ He has sold almost 100 pieces of this ‘garbage,’ for \$30 a pop.”

Bootleg toys have mostly remained a sub-culture under most people’s radars... until *The Mandalorian*’s season two episode, “The Siege.” In the episode, Greef Karga (Carl Weathers) and Cara Dune (Gina Carano) battle a platoon of stormtroopers inside the Imperial base on Nevarro. During the scene, a hapless member of the film crew appears in the background of one of the shots. Only half of the person is visible on screen with their green shirt, blue jeans, and watch. They were quickly dubbed [Admiral Jeff Blue-Jeans](#).

“The Siege” aired on November 20, 2020. By November 21st a Reddit post featuring a “Jeans Guy” figure appeared titled “[This holiday season’s hottest action figure!](#)” Although this action figure is not actually available, the creator [Bryan E. Ward](#) posted the original picture on [Twitter](#).

Has the custom action figure scene gone public? Only time will tell. But when you have an event as meme worthy as Admiral Jeff Blue-Jeans, how can it not? 🐼



Mom, wake up, look what I found on the beach! It may just be “garbage taped to other garbage,” but Mr. Polydor’s conceptually brilliant and hilarious “Fog” action figure was a best seller. Credit: Polydor



The other way to “fix it in post”: When *The Mandalorian* fails to digitally remove a crew member from a shot, the internet takes notice, and a bootleg figure idea is born. Credit: Disney/Bryan E. Ward

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FAN FOCUS: Karl Lundstedt

By Dan Berger

Karl Lundstedt is the owner/operator of “The Dark Arts Studio” in Merrimack, New Hampshire. He is also BBI Spider and a fan of *Buckaroo Banzai*. Karl mostly creates advertising and logo designs for local companies, but his primary interest is in creating art and t-shirt designs for local bands and creating special order props or art from classic movies for people.

We ran into Karl’s work on Facebook and reached out to him to learn more. Karl graciously obliged.



Credit: Karl Lundstedt

World Watch One: How did you find your way into Banzai fandom?

Karl Lundstedt: I have been a fan of *Buckaroo* since I saw that movie on opening day at my local theater when I was a kid. I was so excited to see it back then I was probably a fan even before I saw it.

WWO: When did you start creating Banzai art?

KL: Oh man, that’s a tough one...I guess I’ve always been doing something with *Buckaroo*. Back in the day there weren’t a lot of *Buckaroo Banzai* posters or toys, so I was always making my own. Back then I would take GI Joe figures apart to make custom figures or I would draw (very crude) posters for my room.

WWO: Did you start learning art with physical media first?

KL: I graduated from a Tech school after studying Commercial Art. We didn’t have computers back then so I learned to draw and paint by hand.

WWO: When did you switch to digital media? What precipitated that move?

KL: I had to switch to digital art after a few years. My graduating class was the last class before they brought computers in, so in a way, I’ve always been playing catch-up with what was the popular medium.

WWO: Could you walk us through how you start putting an image together and how you get to your end point?

KL: The process I use starts with my desire to have more adventures of *Buckaroo Banzai*. I feel there’s a huge void with the lack material that’s available to us fans. So, in my imagination, I get these little snapshots of ideas of stories I wish someone would write or film. I’m not one of those people who have the gift of telling a story, so the pics I create are more like 2 dimensional snippets of stories that I can’t translate into something film or novel-length.

WWO: Where can people find your work?

KL: I currently don’t have a website but I do have a Facebook page for my art/studio, “[The Dark Arts, the art of Karl Lundstedt](#)”.

WWO: We’ll be sure to check it out! Thanks for joining us this issue. 🐉



Credit: Karl Lundstedt

The Buckaroo Barrier

By Steven H Silver

I recently re-watched the 1920 Buster Keaton short film *One Week*, in which Keaton and bride Sybil Seely are given a kit to build a house and their construction efforts go awry. As it happened, my wife, who is not a fan of silent film, let alone black and white ones, entered the room as the movie was beginning and I managed to convince her to give it a chance. After all, it has a run-time of only about 25 minutes.

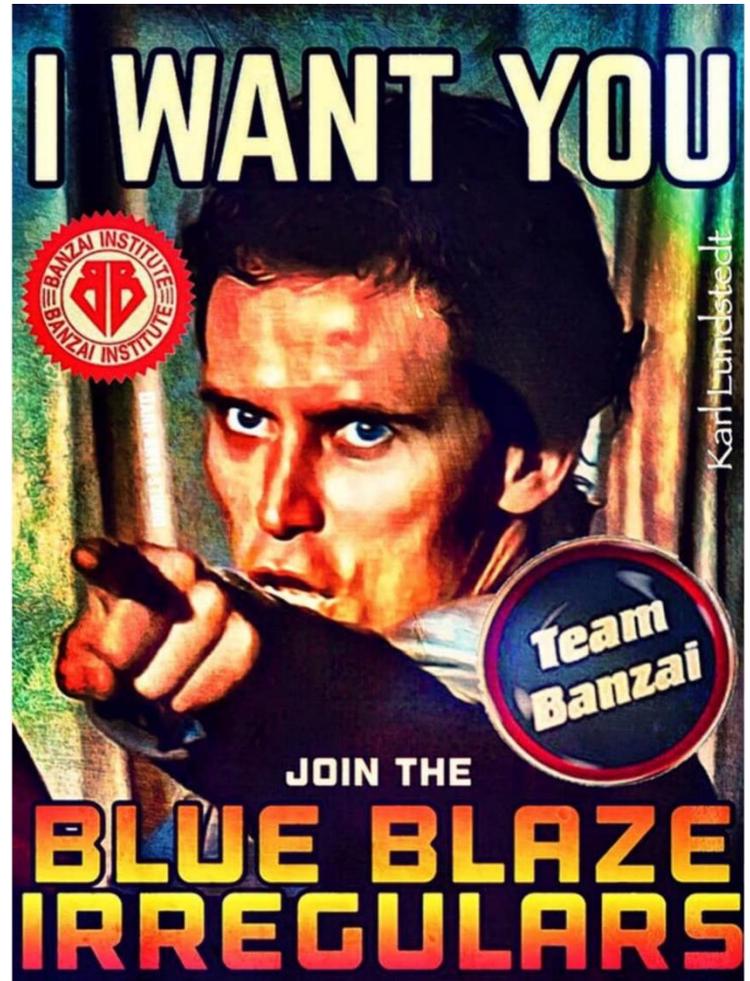
Although my wife seemed to enjoy the film, laughing at the appropriate parts, she also asked questions that indicated that at no time did she buy into the world that Keaton and Seely inhabited. I had an epiphany watching her reaction to this wonderful movie that relates to *Buckaroo Banzai*.

Several years ago, I showed *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the 8th Dimension* to a friend who I thought would appreciate the film. She watched it and responded with a reaction that I'm sure we've all seen: "What was that? Why did you make me watch it?" Around the same time, I showed the film to my younger daughter. She watched it and responded: "What was that? Why did you make me watch it?"

They didn't get it. They didn't understand the wonder that is Buckaroo Banzai and the Hong Kong Cavaliers. However...I suggested to my daughter that she watch the film again and my friend, on her own, decided to subject her husband to the film. The results were intriguing. Watching it a second time, both women came away with the appropriate appreciation of the film. My friend's husband, on the other hand, looked at her and asked, "What was that? Why did you make me watch it?"

And I realized that for many people, the first viewing of *Buckaroo Banzai* leaves them perplexed and not wanting more. We often look at the studio's lack of support for the film's lack of box office success, but part of the failure may also be that, much as we love the film, it puts up a barrier between itself and the vast majority of its viewers who may watch it once, but don't understand the film's genius. It is the second viewing that permits those viewers to fully grok the movie.

There is a literary theory that states that a science fiction novel teaches the reader how to read the book as they are reading it. In a mainstream novel, if the author writes, "Reno skulked away with his tail between his legs," the reader recognizes it as a metaphor, but in a science fiction novel, that same sentence can be taken literally if the author has introduced the concept of genetic modification of humans or a sentient species that has tails.



Credit: Karl Lundstedt

When a person first sits down to watch *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai*, they are expecting the first experience. The world is similar enough to our own that they think they know what to expect of the world. Therefore, they focus on the most obvious parts of the film. They look at the plot. They may look at the characters. The depth of the film, the worldbuilding, comes as an afterthought, if at all on that first viewing.

For these viewers, perhaps the vast majority of people who watch the film, the character whose eyes they see the film through most clearly is not Buckaroo, who is the ultimate insider in the film, or even Penny Priddy or New Jersey, who are new to the team and should provide the hook through which viewers can learn about the world, but rather President Widmark. While many of us focus on so many wonderful lines: "Don't be mean; we don't have to be mean, cuz, remember, no matter where you go, there you are," "Tell him yes on one and no on two," or "Laugh while you can, monkey-boy," for the Widmarkian viewer, the key line in the entire film is: "Buckaroo, I don't know what to say. Lectroids? Planet 10? Nuclear extortion? A girl named 'John'?"

The film throws a lot at the viewer, but the plot that first-timers are looking for is often subsumed beneath the gonzo elements that make the movie so unique and distinct. Unlike anything that has gone before, viewers in 1984 would have been comparing it to films that were much more familiar and straight forward. It was the same year sequels *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* (featuring the masterful acting of John Bigbooté, Christopher Lloyd) and *2010: Odyssey Two* (which includes another fine appearance by Lord John Whorfin, John Lithgow) were released, as well as *Dune* and *The Last Starfighter*, both of which offered a level of strangeness, but nothing like what *Buckaroo* was offering. Audience members who were expecting to see a reasonably straight-forward science fiction film like those would be confused upon their introduction to *Buckaroo*.

However...if you can get the *Buckaroo* neophyte to watch the film a second time, to get them past their confusion, they can watch in a different mindset.

No longer focused on the plot and having some familiarity with the characters, a second-timer can enjoy the weirdness that saturates the film. They understand the red and black Lectroids. They accept that existence of Planet Ten and the 8th dimension. The concept of a girl named John, or even an entire Yoyodyne Industries plant staffed solely by people named John, is no longer a stumbling block, but an in-joke that they can accept.

My daughter watched it a second time and enjoyed it for what it is. My friend came away from the screening where she introduced her husband to the film with an appreciation for the film that she lacked on her first viewing. Her husband, who has never returned for a second look, is still perplexed by the movie with no intention of rewatching it.

It would seem, therefore, that the key to finding new *Buckaroo Banzai* fans, is to arrange to show them the movie a second time. 🐾

Step aside Rocky: here comes Buckaroo Banzai

**'Buckaroo Banzai'
a confusing mess**

**If you like loony,
you'll love 'Buckaroo'**

**'Buckaroo Banzai' funny
ride in strange dimension**

**It's weird, it's inventive,
it's demented, it's . . .**

**Lithgow is counting
on a smash sci-fi film**

"Critical Mass" vs. "The Buckaroo Barrier"

"Weird." "Loony." "A confusing mess." Headlines from vintage 1984 film reviews for *Buckaroo Banzai* made it clear that not everyone was going to get this film. So, how did film critics who analyze films for a living fare in their attempts to "figure out" *Buckaroo*?

Rick Lyman's interview with John Lithgow for the Knight-Ridder News Service of March 1, 1984, five months before the film's release, shows a poor predictive sense at the very least. Speaking with Lithgow about his upcoming films, Lyman says, "Lithgow is pleasant enough while discussing *Footloose*, but at the mention of his next movie, he virtually glows. His eyes light up. He thinks he is sitting on top of a blockbuster."

However, a Lithgow quote later in the article, probably says more about his enjoyment of making *Buckaroo* than his belief in its box office potential, "I have tried to explain the story line to people, and it takes about an hour. I mean it—it's that complicated. But it's terrific. Everytime (sic) I tell people about it, I get so excited that I end it by saying, '*Buckaroo Banzai*'—remember where you heard it first!"

That inability to easily convey the substance of *Buckaroo* became the main theme in the days ahead. Gene Siskel crystalized the thought in his October 1, 1984 *Chicago Tribune* review, noting that, "Reading the 11 page synopsis provided to film critics doesn't help much either." What is interesting is that, like Lithgow, Siskel sees the anarchy as a virtue rather than an impediment, saying, "At some level this film doesn't expect you to be able to get all of its jokes or decipher its story, and I appreciate that, too. What's so great about having everything explained?"

This begs the question about the film asked by William Wolf of Gannett News Service in his October 5, 1984 review, "But is it good?" Wolf thought so, "...if you like this type of loony, comic strip entertainment. There are enough such folk around to make 'Buckaroo Banzai' into a cult film even as others escape from its frenzy."

Thirty-six years later, some still flee the frenzy while others bask in it. Reading the reviews from 1984, it seems clear that most critics saw *Buckaroo's* audience bottleneck being that gonzo kaleidoscope of genres and plot that make the film all its own, and a surprising number of them saw that aspect of the film more as a feature than a flaw. It is equally clear that they could see *Buckaroo's* struggles in finding a broad audience from a mile away, as well as its future in the cult film lexicon. -D. Berger

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Lizardo (Undercover!) on SNL

By Sean Murphy

You never really know where Emilio Lizardo will pop up around the world or if he'll show up with a different name. If you recently placed your bets that the next time he'd appear was on *Saturday Night Live*, then it's time to collect your winnings.

Screenshots of John Lithgow, dressed as Emilio Lizardo from a *Saturday Night Live* skit, appeared on the [Buckaroo Banzai: Blue Blaze Irregulars Club Facebook page](#) where they were posted by James Collinge. This Lizardo sighting was news to the folks here at *World Watch One* and we quickly jumped into action to discover more.

The SNL episode in question is from the eleventh season and the fourth show to air on December 7, 1985. John Lithgow was the guest star and the musical guest was the band Mr. Mister.

Although John Lithgow looks like, dresses like, and sounds like Emilio Lizardo, his character is introduced as Dr. Federico when he bursts into the computer room of his assistant Bruce Winston, played by Robert Downey Jr.

Dr. Federico: "Curse you Bruce Winston! Don't you know better than to get me up at this time of the night? Don't you know I needa my beauty sleep?"

Bruce Winston: "Yes, I'm sorry Dr. Federico. But, according to my calculations, Halley's comet has changed its course and it's now heading directly toward the Earth."

[Halley's Comet](#), which is not predicted to ever hit the Earth, makes a return trip every 75 to 76 years and was due to make an appearance in 1986 soon after this episode aired.

The skit continues with a silly bit of back and forth about Winston using a monitor to observe the comet, which hangs there looking like a paper mâché rock with a sparkler sticking out of it. Winston uses the monitor's magnification incorrectly to zoom in too closely on the comet, and then on President Reagan's face (played by Randy Quaid), causing Federico and Winston to jump back in fear both times. This attempt at comedy is as lame as it sounds.

Once they've gotten the attention of the President, Dr. Federico tries to convince him of the imminent threat.

Dr. Federico: "You must fire a missile at the comet. It's the only way you're going to save the planet Earth."



Lord John Whorfin/Dr. Emilio Lizardo/Dr. Federico cohabitate John Lithgow's body in a 1985 SNL episode.



A very young Robert Downey Jr. reacts to the imminent threat of cheesy effects with Lithgow's "Dr. Federico."



Comet on a stick, anyone?: Nobody ever turned into SNL for the visual effects "magic." Schlock Factor 9, engaged! Credit for above photos: Broadway Video

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President Reagan: "I can't spare any of our nuclear warheads and I'll tell you why. While we have been sitting on our, well, fannies, the Soviets have been building up their forces, nuclear forces. If I were to give up just one of our nuclear missiles at this time, the Soviets would interpret this as a sign of weakness."

Bruce Winston jumps in at this point to try and help convince the President of the emergency but ends up telling a pointless story about his experience catching twenty fish and giving detailed descriptions of each one. Again, not very funny. The President, however, is done with the conversation.

President Reagan: "I have to go. I got to light that big Christmas tree."

Dr. Federico: "We are doomed. Soon all life as we know it will be extinguished."

Bruce Winston: "Even fish life?" [Editor's note: Ha?]

Dr. Federico: "We're all going to die. At least I have one consolation. For the next ninety minutes, we'll all be... live from New York...it's Saturday Night!"

Lithgow is in full Lizardo mode in this skit as he chews up the scenery. When this SNL episode aired, *The Adventures of Buckaroo* had come and gone from theaters four months previously. Perhaps it was Lithgow himself who wanted to bring Lizardo back to play him one more time?

While it's fun to see Lithgow as Lizardo once again, the skit is pretty forgettable. A little context on the troubles encountered during the eleventh season of SNL may explain why. SNL's tenth season was very popular and the producer, Dick Ebersol, wanted to change the format from live broadcast to prerecording the shows on tape. When he didn't get what he wanted, he left and former original SNL producer Lorne Michaels returned. Michaels hired a completely new cast and, according to the Wikipedia page on [Season Eleven](#), "The new cast failed to connect with audiences, due to the cast's inexperience in comedy. The show also featured a frustrated writing crew...who didn't know how to write sketches for such an eclectic cast. The season was plagued by harsh criticism, low ratings, and rumors of a possible cancellation." Only four members of the new cast would survive to appear in season twelve.

Looking at the skit in this light, the missed opportunity to do something really funny seems inevitable. At the end of the day, we'll take our faux Lizardo where we can find him, in this case trying to save the Earth for once. 🦎

The three and a half minute Halley's comet skit served as the cold open for the show. You can watch the entire SNL episode, including the opening skit, on the [Internet Archive](#) (Thanks to Matt Kitler for the link!).



Randy Quaid's President Reagan checks out from the conversation.



Live from New York...you can guess the rest.



One and done: Season Eleven of SNL saw a high casualty rate, many of whom went on to great success afterwards. Credit for above photos: Broadway Video

INTERVIEW: Laura Harrington

Mrs. Johnson is in the Bunkhouse!

By Steve Mattsson

[Laura Harrington](#) worked as a professional actress from 1979-2000 on Broadway, in television, and in film. *Buckaroo Banzai* fans loved her as the efficient Mrs. Johnson, who ran the Banzai Institute for Buckaroo. The general public knows her best from her roles as Amy Grape in *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* and as Brett in *Maximum Overdrive*. She has been a screenwriter for the past twenty-five years and has taught screenwriting at Loyola Marymount University. She is an avid rower and has won several Gold, Silver, and Bronze medals in regional and national competitions. She says her greatest achievement has been raising her twin children. Laura has been married for twenty-six years and she and her husband currently make their home in Los Angeles, California.

Steve Mattsson: Tell us how you got started as an actor.

Laura Harrington: I started acting when I was a young kid living in the country in Ann Arbor, Michigan. My father was a physics professor and I was the youngest of five kids. Before I knew what a play was, I was putting them on and recruiting the boy next door to play all the supporting roles. After I saw my first movies, *My Fair Lady* and *Limelight*, I dreamed of acting in films. If I saw a film once, I would memorize every scene and perform it tirelessly until it finally faded from memory. I was Charlie Chaplin, all The Beatles from *A Hard Day's Night*, and every character in *My Fair Lady* for an endless run that must have, in retrospect, been exhausting for my family.

I studied acting a Boston University where Charlie Kaufman was a close friend (we were shy together) and in my Junior year I left to join the cast of *Richard III* on Broadway with Al Pacino, my first professional job. Funnily, I first met Ellen Barkin when we read a new play for Joe Papp at the Public Theater in New York and played the two very competitive female leads across from each other. At the time, I felt she was as savvy as I was wide-eyed innocent, seriously determined to be a star.

Before Independent film had much cachet, I starred in two. A film directed by Jan Egleson called [Dark End of the Street](#) where, although it was not seen by many, every New York critic wrote about my performance extensively, which put me on the map. I also starred in Martha Coolidge's first feature called *City Girl*, which she shot guerrilla style. For a long and painful period I came in second for the lead in many films and was constantly being flown back and forth from New York to



Gearing Up and Taking Off: Laura Harrington poses in costume for this Continuity Polaroid from *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai* in 1983.



Independent Spirit: Laura Harrington in her film debut as Donna, in Jan Egleson's *The Dark End of the Street*.

Los Angeles for screen tests by Michael Mann, Brian De Palma, etc.

SM: [Charlie Kaufman](#) is my all-time favorite screenwriter—how did his creativity express itself while he was in college?

LH: He and I were in the acting program and because I was shy and he was a massive depressive so we bonded. The first performance I saw him give was as Charlie Brown—and I still laugh when I think about it. Our

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favorite thing to do was study for our boring “History of Theater” class together—he would draw pictures of all the other members of the class and put them around the room to create the right atmosphere and then we would challenge each other to memorize all the most useless information from the text—like the snacks served at The Globe.

I was bold on stage but barely spoke above a whisper otherwise and my acting teacher threatened to toss me from the program, where I had a full scholarship, if I didn’t speak up. He gave Charlie and me the assignment of performing the semi-pornographic play, [The Beard by Michael McClure](#)—Jean Harlow and Billy the Kid stuck in purgatory—and we really blew everyone away because we were both so intense. There is a lot to tell about that relationship—we had a lot of adventures together and he blames me for nearly getting him killed on a freeway (I created a treasure hunt for him and hid a clue at the top of a freeway tower). We did lay on the ice covered Charles River and talk at night often but we were never more than friends.



According to [an old thread on Reddit](#), the Japanese characters on Mrs. Johnson’s GEAR-UP shirt read “Kansai”. This refers to Japanese fashion designer [Yamamoto Kansai](#), who was popular in the ‘70s and ‘80s. The thread goes on to say that the shirt was a very fashionable import in the mid-80s. A few lucky fans have had access to very short run reproductions of the shirt in the past. Now it is available to all at the price of \$21.07 through [replicapropstore.com](#). Tell ‘em Mrs. Johnson sent you. -S. Mattsson

SM: What was the audition process for *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai* like?

LH: On one of those trips, I can't remember everything now; I auditioned for *Buckaroo Banzai*. I can't remember if it was my first job in LA or if it was Shelley Duvall's *Dancing Princesses* for HBO, where I played a twin. But I remember loving the director, W.D. Richter, in the audition, and his sense of fun. I also remember getting completely lost trying to find the set on the first day. The contract was elaborate because we were signing on for seven films. Mrs. Johnson was a minor character in the first film, the role really took off in the second when my husband Swede Johnson returned, so of course I was disappointed we only made the one movie.

SM: On an [episode of the Roll Call Podcast](#) you mentioned that story. How do you learn information about your character like that? I guess what I’m asking about is the collaborative process between the writer, director, and actor when developing a character...

LH: I believe the director verbally laid out the evolving story for us. There were also detailed discussions with my agent about how my part grew over the seven films. The scripts were not provided, likely not yet written, so this was not a collaborative process. The director was open to exploration on the set, however.

SM: Other cast members have said they had difficulty understanding the script. What was your initial take?

LH: The script was unlike anything I had seen. I can't remember my initial reaction to the script, except for an it's-a-brave-new-world feeling. An adventure. Seeing the costumes and the sets for the first time, helped me clue into who I was.

SM: Could you compare the style of long time writer and first time director W.D. Richter on *Buckaroo Banzai* to that of long time writer and first time director Stephen King on *Maximum Overdrive*?

LH: It’s interesting that both W. D. Richter and Stephen King picked first films with multiple characters that were also technically ambitious. The lack of CGI made their jobs particularly difficult. Both men were exceptionally kind and naturally funny. You mention other *Buckaroo* actors had difficulty understanding the script and I think it was so before its time we all were unsure how to execute the tone, whether the actions we were taking would make sense once the film was put together. With *Buckaroo Banzai*, I think we all trusted W.D. because, clearly, he was the man with the future vision. It was unfortunate when all of that footage was lost and the cinematographer was fired. It cast a pall on *Buckaroo Banzai*. W.D. had to operate with less money and less



Set for *Overdrive*: Stephen King and Laura Harrington pose for the cameras on the set of *Maximum Overdrive*.

goodwill. It was too bad because it was such a freak accident.*

Stephen never stopped being a writer. He explained to me then, he was compelled to write to assuage his fears—a substitute for therapy. So, every day before coming to set, he would have been up and writing for a few hours. Stephen began each shooting day in a huddle with his family, which was very sweet. I think the danger of the stunts he had to execute were daunting and gobbled up the time he might have spent rehearsing with actors. I always feel guilty about my performance. It should have been much better, and I would have made Stephen's job much easier—I admire the actors today who are truly brilliant working with green screen.

SM: It's seems like the air on the set of *Buckaroo Banzai* could have been heavy with testosterone—any anecdotes you can share?

*The *World Watch One* staff is familiar with the story of *Buckaroo Banzai*'s Producer, David Begelman, firing Director of Photography Jordan Cronenweth, but this is the first we'd heard of any lost footage. Director W.D. Richter's response: "The only lost footage was "underexposed" stuff that Jordan shot. He was absolutely positive Begelman got the MGM lab to screw around with the processing. The next day—a night shoot with BB being rescued by rope ladder—Jordan had two other WORLD-CLASS cinematographers ([Vilmos Zsigmond](#) and maybe [Lazlo Kovacs](#), but I really can't remember who the second guy was) on set with their light meters double checking his readings. All agreed...and the next batch of dailies was also underexposed. Begelman used the 'useless' footage to make his case that Jordan had to be fired. Begelman was human scum."

LH: I won't say anything about on-set behavior, but Jeff Goldblum was a notorious, lighthearted flirt—I don't believe any female person was spared his attentions, but no one was bothered by them either.

SM: Any other interesting stories about working on *Buckaroo Banzai*?

LH: One of the most joyous days I spent on the film was the day they brought four dolphins to a set swimming pool. They were amazing and nearly impossible to shoot because they were so curious about cameras every time one was aimed in their direction, they'd all surface to look at it and chat noisily about it—

SM: Any memories what the context of the dolphins was in the story?

LH: I believe they were just set dressing at the Banzai Institute. I can't remember them being specific to the plot. They may have lost their opportunity because they were too difficult to manage.

SM: Why did Buckaroo steal Mrs. Johnson's lollipop?

LH: I don't believe Peter taking my lollipop was planned. We were all playful and improvisational during shooting, so I think I came up with the sucker and he stole it on a whim.

SM: Tell us about your work as a writer.

LH: I have written screenplays for around twenty-five years now, for Warner Brothers, Disney, Paramount, MGM, and for some classy directors and actors. Currently, I'm working on an eight part limited series based on a novel, *The Good Liar*, for MGM and Renee Zellweger's company.

SM: What kind of reactions have you received from fans over the years for your work on *Buckaroo Banzai*?

LH: *Buckaroo Banzai* fans are really special. I was completely oblivious to the fact there were fans out there. I discovered its popularity in a funny way years after the film came out. I had gone to see a very heavy, four hour Russian classic at the Nuart Theater with a friend. Exiting the theater completely bleary-eyed, I noticed a long line of people waiting for the midnight film— and then, I noticed a number of people dressed like my character in *Buckaroo Banzai*. Then, just as I was seeing more fans dressed as *Buckaroo Banzai* characters someone screamed, "Mrs. Johnson!" I couldn't have been more surprised. It was a perfect moment. 🐘

The *World Watch One* staff would like to thank Laura Harrington for working this interview in and around her very busy schedule.

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Continuity Polaroids

By Steve Mattsson

The most chilling words ever spoken on a film set are, "We'll fix it in post." It's always better and cheaper to rectify a problem "in camera." It's better and cheaper still to prevent the problem from occurring in the first place.

Continuity of visual elements is difficult to maintain on a film set, where scenes are filmed out-of-sequence over a long period of time. In a bygone era, one of the tools used to maintain consistency was the "Continuity Polaroid." These continuity shots of Laura Herrington's Mrs. Johnson have handwritten notes by Linda Henriksen, who was the set costumer for the female characters on *Buckaroo Banzai*. The shots would be used as reference to make sure Mrs. Johnson always wears her polka dot bow on the right side of her head and she always has the same number of buttons unbuttoned on her outer blouse.

On modern sets digital cameras have replaced the instant Polaroid camera. The process is more efficient, but deprives audiences of seeing charming behind the scenes photos like these. 🐦



Keeping things straight: Continuity issues can take many forms, from ensuring that all characters remain in the same costumes throughout a scene to tracking changes to a character's appearance (wounds, wardrobe damage, a character rolling up their sleeves, etc.) that carry over into future scenes. Continuity is an ever looming hazard, even in the more digitally empowered filmmaking of the present. As in most disciplines, the tools are often less important than how well they are used. The Polaroid camera essentially served as both digital camera and portable printer all in one, and was an invaluable tool for its time.



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Mrs. Eunice Johnson:

The Institution Behind the Institute

By Dan Berger and Sean Murphy

The Banzai Institute is at once a tight-knit group and a sprawling assembly of experts, enthusiasts, and professionals of every description from every corner of the globe. With such a large and diverse cast of characters, it was inevitable that some of those individuals, even some of the most critical personnel, saw little or no screen time in *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai* docudrama.

Mrs. Johnson was one of those who appeared as a minor character in the film, but has always been a principal architect of the Institute's ongoing mission to engage the world's worst impulses and keep humanity on its best course, often in spite of itself. Sometimes the threats have been extraterrestrial, at other times existential. Through them all, Mrs. Johnson has been in the vanguard of those standing against the onslaught; a shield against devils of every description.

As Laura Harrington mentions in her interview in this issue, there were intentions to feature additional facets of Mrs. J. in the sequels to *Buckaroo Banzai*. That, of course, never happened. Fortunately, there is a lot more to be found about Mrs. Johnson beyond the docudrama, even without additional films.

First Looks: The Docudrama

Reviewing footage from the film gives us our first glimpse into Mrs. Johnson's duties and role at the Banzai Institute. It's not much at a grand total of three minutes and fifty-eight seconds, and she doesn't appear until forty-four minutes into the film, but there is a surprising amount of information that can be inferred from this brief window into her character.

44:24—Banzai Institute-Night

We first encounter Mrs. Johnson at a desk littered with letters, books, magazines, a rolodex, pens and pencils, a water pitcher, and what looks like a vintage late 1970s or early 1980s computer monitor as she sits, reading mail. A doorbell rings and she stands up making her way to the Institute's front door. She peeks out the eyehole and lets out an exclamation as she unlatches the locks and opens the door to reveal Reno, Perfect Tommy, Penny Priddy, New Jersey, and Rawhide. For a moment she is caught up in the excitement of thinking that Penny is the departed Peggy Banzai, but she is quickly corrected by Reno. She gets the Cavaliers up to speed on the current state of affairs at the Institute as Rawhide hands her another stack of



The redoubtable Mrs. Johnson.

letters and heads to the Bunkhouse with the lads. Penny attempts to follow, but is rebuffed by Mrs. J. The scene ends at 45:07.

From this brief exchange, we begin to gather some sense of Mrs. J's function at the Institute. She is trusted and formidable enough to act as the "Keeper of the Gate" to the Banzai Institute itself, and is obviously someone who has their finger on the pulse of the goings on of Team Banzai. Much of the Institute's business appears to go through her in some capacity. Given her post, she also appears to be a face of the organization, given that she is the first person people see as they enter the Institute, and the last person they see when they leave.

53:00—Banzai Institute-Morning

Mrs. Johnson, lollipop in hand, runs to the Institute's front door to admit Buckaroo, Casper, and Scooter. Mrs. J gives Buckaroo a quick update of recent events when the Cavaliers show up, fresh from their discoveries about Yoyodyne's personnel and their connection to Orson Welles's *War of the Worlds* broadcast of 1938. Buckaroo snags Mrs. Johnson's lollipop at 53:08. Mrs. J. drops out of the scene at 53:17.

Mrs. J. soon shows up again when the Cavaliers gather to watch the message from John Emdall, popping up at 54:38. We last see her at 56:18 as John Emdall's message fades out.

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These very brief scenes further reenforce the notion that Mrs. J. is the go-to person who knows what's what at the Institute. She also appears to have broad access to "need to know" information like the John Emdall message, entering the scene as she does without preamble, or even knocking on the door first. This scene cements Mrs. Johnson as part of Buckaroo's inner circle, considering the importance and highly sensitive nature of the situation.

111:41—President Widmark's Hospital Room—Later That Day

This scene opens with Mrs. Johnson playing John Emdall's message to the President of the United States himself. There is some brief discussion among the president's staff about the message when the main lights suddenly dim and a warning light begins to strobe, prompting the POTUS to consider signing the feared Declaration of War—The Short Form. Mrs. J. is off camera at 112:19.

This scene seals the deal as far as demonstrating the level of trust Buckaroo holds for Mrs. Johnson and her abilities, relying on her to deliver a highly classified message to the POTUS himself, and a highly classified



Steve Mattsson's note 1: The continuity Polaroids show Mrs. Johnson wearing roller skates (**above**) for her scene in the President's hospital room. The skates are also mentioned in one of the versions of the script. Unfortunately, you don't see them in the finished film. [**Editor's Note:** The skates actually do appear in an extra scene from the Director's workprint. -DB]

piece of alien technology in the bargain. Clearly there is more to Mrs. Johnson than a really cool t-shirt.

A Fuller Picture: The Novelization

Given the limited scope of Mrs. Johnson's appearance in the docudrama, much *terra incognita* remained for future exploration of her role at the Banzai Institute as well as the substance of her character. Fortunately, writer Earl Mac Rauch was able to provide a deeper look into both Mrs. Johnson and Team Banzai's harrowing encounter with alien forces from the 8th dimension in the film's novelization.

Almost immediately, before the tale has even begun, we find some additional information about Mrs. Johnson in Reno's notes regarding the text and acknowledgements titled "To the Reader":

"Throughout, I have endeavored to be as faithful as possible to the events as they actually occurred and would like to thank Mrs. E. Johnson, archivist of the Banzai Institute, for her valued help and her many hours of selfless labor on behalf of the project ..."

Two details are of particular interest above. Readers now know that Mrs. J. is the Institute's archivist, although it seems clear from her character as portrayed in the film that her duties range far beyond that. We also get some indication of a first name, although it is anyone's guess at this point what the "E" in "Mrs. E. Johnson" could stand for.

We are soon introduced to Mrs. Johnson herself in the opening chapter of the novelization on pages 4-5. In this scene, Reno has cleaned up after Buckaroo's viewing the tragedy of the 1950s Jet Car fire in the Institute's screening room. Reno is returning the film to the archive vault when he encounters Mrs. J. as she listens to demo tapes submitted to the Hong Kong Cavaliers. Reno describes her as follows on page 4:

"One of those persons who languishes by day and does not seem to come fully alive until the middle of the night, Mrs. Johnson, at nineteen the premature widow of Flyboy*, was just gathering momentum. Over the indescribable din of a song called "Merry as a Monkey," she said hello and asked if Buckaroo had said anything about her going to the Jet Car test."

Reno explains to Mrs. Johnson all of the reasons why she won't be attending the test. She is currently serving her

***Steve Mattsson's note 2:** In her interview, Laura mentions that her character was the widow of Swede Johnson. It appears that Swede Johnson morphed into the female character Big Swede and Flyboy took his place.

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Institute apprenticeship, which prevents her from participating in certain operations. Mrs. J notes that she has been with the Institute for nearly six months—the time required to advance her to a resident and operational readiness. Reno’s primary concern, however, is “...the lurking menace of Xan, capable of the basest atrocities,” hovering over the Jet Car test as a grim potentiality. He concludes by saying, “Anyway, the problem is that with the Seminole Kid, Pecos, and the Argentine with Cousteau on the *Calypso*, we’re a little short handed around here.”

Mrs. Johnson responds by telling Reno to, “Go suck eggs.” Reno takes the abuse in stride, musing over one of Buckaroo’s Oriental maxims, “Young blood needs little flame to boil.”

Several more details become clearer regarding Mrs. Johnson’s personality. She is 19 years old, already a widow, and is a go-getter with lots of energy to burn. Reno characterizes her as a night owl, but she’s also a bit of a hothead. It isn’t clear if Mrs. J. is listening to demo tapes for business or pleasure, but it seems likely that she’s attempting to mix the two.

A flashback in Chapter 15 further demonstrates Mrs. Johnson’s versatility during a séance staged to suss out those responsible for Peggy Banzai’s murder. This scene comes straight out of the investigation popularly referred to as *Extradition from Hell*, in which Institute staffer Captain Happen reveals himself to be a possible agent of Hanoi Xan, and Peggy’s “death” is cast in an uncertain light. The ghost bride Peggy Banzai appears on page 80, precipitating certain revelations from Captain Happen before he jumps from a window and takes his own life. Mrs. Johnson emerges from Peggy’s wedding dress on page 81 in dramatic fashion, saying, “I don’t mind telling you, this thing gave me the creeps.”

Some crucial information emerges in this scene. Mrs. Johnson clearly has a Holmesian mastery of disguise. Buckaroo also appears to deem her cool enough under fire, even at this early point in her association with Team Banzai, to handle a delicate phase of an important investigation. Also of interest is the scene’s contributions to a timeline of recent events leading up to the present adventure. Given that Mrs. Johnson has only been with the Institute for approximately six months at the beginning of the book, it suggests that Peggy and Buckaroo were likely married sometime between January and June of 1981.

We don’t exactly learn anything new on page 203 as Mrs. Johnson’s go-phone call interrupts the aftermath of Rawhide’s death scene, exclaiming, “Three men—they’re taking [Penny] out of the compound!” This snippet simply deepens what we already knew, that Mrs. J is the



“Go suck eggs”: The Mrs. Johnson of the novelization has a bit more to say and do than her docudrama counterpart. “The more Mrs. Johnson, the better,” definitely applies.

one in the know, keeping Team Banzai apprised of developing events at critical moments. Twenty-five pages later, however, we are treated to an entirely new side of Mrs. E. Johnson, as well as an indication that the events of the docudrama may not be exactly as they happened in actual fact.

Pages 227-228 reveal that the assault on Yoyodyne is actually orchestrated by Reno and Perfect Tommy, using ariel photographs of the complex provided by none other than Scooter Lindley. Reno describes the plan thus:

“Once we have decimated their numbers, we move on to the principal objective, which must be Whorfin and the Panther ship. Mrs. Johnson’s team and Casper Lindley in the chopper will create myriad diversions to distract the creatures, while we burst in upon those in Hangar 23...”

So much for Mrs. Johnson not being ready to join an operation, and taking the helm as a team leader no less. This revelation is at extreme variance with the events as portrayed in the film, where Mrs. Johnson’s role is as a carrier of sensitive information and highly classified alien technology. Why the difference?

A possible explanation reveals itself on pages 237-238:

“11:26 P.M.—(Mrs. Johnson’s note)—After getting the word from Reno, I led my troops to a building

near the hangar, inside of which we surprised several Lectroids in a lunch room. They were snacking, I guess, is the only word for it. Nearby a couple of naked ones had lit a fire in the middle of the room and were performing a kind of ritual over the fire while others cheered them on. We tossed in a couple of grenades and kept moving. I didn't look back, but a second later all hell broke loose."

It is certain that audiences in the 1980s were not prepared for a vision of naked Lectroids performing alien rituals on film, and are unlikely to be any more eager to embrace that horror thirty-six years later. What is striking is Mrs. Johnson's studied command of the situation, her ability to shrug off alien strangeness and get down to the business at hand, and her ability to remain cool under fire. This scene more than any other demonstrates Mrs. J's mettle, and her innate leadership qualities well beyond her skills as an archivist and keeper of information.

It is clear that the novelization *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai* had substantial leeway to explore facets of the Red Lectroid incursion, and Team Banzai's many other adventures and personnel, that the docudrama would not or could not explore for a variety of reasons. Mrs. Johnson in particular comes into better focus in prose form. It is fortunate for us that a new source of information would reveal itself on the interwebs, further exploring and expanding the role of Mrs. Johnson.

A Deeper Dive: The Banzai Institute Website

In 1998, Mrs. Johnson turned 36 years old and had been a fixture at the Banzai Institute for 17 years. The Institute, in conjunction with Earl Mac Rauch, W. D. Richter, and Fox Television were deep into the process of bringing Team Banzai's legendary exploits to the small screen. As the Institute Archivist, Mrs. J was deeply involved in providing and curating content for the Institute website that emerged in support of the television initiative. She was instrumental in providing early glimpses into the screen writing process through her management of the website's archival offerings, as well as keeping an eye on the website's bunkhouse chat boards as both moderator and collector of information.

In the excerpts from an unpublished [Playboy Magazine](#) interview posted on the website, Mrs. E. Johnson is described as "An 'insider's insider,'" who runs the Institute "...with an iron hand in a kid glove." The preface to the interview goes on to say, "...every Hong Kong Cavalier, every Blue Blaze Irregular, every member of Team Banzai, and every Apostle in the Banzai Group suspects that Buckaroo couldn't run the place without her."

Mrs. Johnson also gets her say in about Reno's assessment of her nocturnal nature in the novelization:

"When we reminded her that she'd been described by Doctor Banzai's biographer, Reno Nevada, as "one of those persons who languishes by day and does not seem to come fully alive until the middle of the night," Mrs. J. replied with a twinkle, "That's because Mr. Nevada sleeps all day long himself and has no idea what the hell I'm up to from dawn to dusk."

The interview itself often finds Mrs. J. talking about subjects other than herself, but several new details emerge over the course of the discussion. First is a revelation behind her commitment to the Institute. To quote her directly, "...I signed on for life at the Institute after my husband was killed because we both believed that its greatest mission is to serve as an antidote to the vanishing American frontier." The interviewer, Barbi, describes that trend when she says, "...a feller can't very well move from New York to Phoenix to escape his sorry history." Mrs. Johnson agrees, then explains the Institute's mission:

"Too many data bases. Enter the Banzai Institute, a second-chance giver. We don't ask for a Social Security number. A mere handshake'll do. Men, women, and kids come knocking on our door, and no one is turned away. They stay for a day, a week, a year, a lifetime...working for no pay except three squares..."

This tidbit is immediately followed by the revelation that Mrs. Johnson is also responsible for a significant chunk of the Institute's revenue generation through the sales of her world-famous cinnamon buns. Barbi confirms that, "Hef orders them by the truckload," to which Mrs. Johnson replies, "So did Elvis."

Here we must pause to consider what exactly Mrs. J. means by saying, "So did Elvis." Given that Elvis died on August 6, 1977, and Mrs. Johnson was 19 years old and with the Banzai Institute for only six months as an apprentice in June of 1981 when the events of *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai* take place, this would make Mrs. J. 15 years old and unattached to the Institute at the time of The King's death on his Memphis throne. What's going on here?

Several theories present themselves. One is that, in her youth, Mrs. Johnson lived in Memphis and was acquainted with Elvis, and Elvis with her cinnamon buns. Given the varied and often unusual lives and circumstances of Team Banzai's membership, this seems as likely an explanation as any. Another is that Mrs. Johnson is one of those individuals with a flair for telling

tall tales, particularly to lend drama and pizzazz to something like, say, a *Playboy* interview. There is, however, the distinct possibility that the entire “Elvis lives” rumor that sprang up in the aftermath of his “death” isn’t just a rumor after all. As a keeper of highly sensitive information, it seems unlikely that Mrs. J. would make such a monumental slip as to reveal a “living Elvis” to a world led to believe he was long dead, but it is not beyond the realm of possibility.

As the interview progresses, we soon learn that Mrs. J’s culinary expertise extends well beyond her famous cinnamon buns:

“I’ve been spearheading research on an evolutionary new Combat Food Service System...or CFSS. We’ll be staging a wargame sometime next year during which I’m going to try, with only Kaintuck’s help, to feed 1,100 Blue Blaze Irregulars two hot meals a day for fifteen days, all of it carried in a single rehabbed C-141B during a BRD (Blaze Rapid Deployment) mission...We’re looking to dish up frequent, high-quality hot meals on the integrated battlefield and significantly reduce the number of food-service personnel put in harm’s way.”

So, we can now add developing experimental food delivery programs to Mrs. J’s constellation of duties as head factotum of the Institute. Her recipe formulation skills appear in the comic books as well, as we shall see.

The audio recording for the interview cuts out shortly after this quote, but by this time we have learned much. Sadly, the Institute’s efforts to bring a Banzai TV series to homes across the globe was unsuccessful, but those efforts did live on to see another day at Moonstone Books eight years later.

Character Counts: The Comic Books

Several sets of Buckaroo Banzai comics were released between 2006 and 2012 that ranged from a short story to a text story to stories that ran for one, two and three issues. The [Pop Apostle site](#) has a section dedicated to the *Buckaroo Banzai* comics and does a nice job of putting the stories in chronological order and doing a deep dive on each story.

The comics offer glimpses into many different facets of Mrs. Johnson’s personality, giving us more of a sense of who she is as a person even in the admittedly brief appearances. We have collected them below by story chronology, rather than publication chronology.

The Concerned Mrs. J

Her first appearance in the comic timeline is the two issue prequel story *Of Hunan Bondage* (2008) which

takes place before the events in the film. She’s mentioned in issue #1, page 16 when Rawhide and Buckaroo are discussing Wilbur Turnbull, a BB lookalike/soundalike who is filling in for Buckaroo on tour. Buckaroo has hurt his throat and needs time off from the tour to get some practical work done on his theoretical oscillation overthruster. However, Wilbur has grown overweight and is not looking very much like the real BB:

Inside, the “kitchen” of the “restaurant”—a secret laboratory filled with notebooks, Jet Car models, and exotic scientific equipment—Buckaroo, Peggy Priddy, and Rawhide discuss an urgent matter.

Rawhide: Damn straight we’re serious Buck. Have you seen Wilbur lately?

BB: I know he’s a little on the heavy side.

Rawhide: A little? He’s a fat slob...A beer belly out to here that we have to wrap in one of Mrs. Johnson’s girdles every time he goes on stage...

BB: He really wears a girdle?

Rawhide: And bandanas on his leg, as of yesterday.

Since when did Mrs. Johnson need a girdle? In all of her appearances in the movie and comics, she does not appear to need one. Maybe she makes them for others? Or likes to cosplay?

We actually see Mrs. Johnson in issue #2, page 25 when she makes an unexpectedly panicked call to Rawhide.:

Rawhide (answering the phone): Mrs. Johnson?

Mrs. Johnson: It’s Wilbur...He’s...gone. I mean, he’s dead... He choked on one of my meatball sandwiches.

Rawhide: He wouldn’t be the first one.

Mrs. Johnson: Wha!?! I can’t hear you.

Rawhide: Sorry...I’m sorry to hear that. We’ll be home soon, Mrs. Johnson.

Mrs. Johnson: What am I supposed to tell the reporters? There’s only about twenty of them already at the gate, and I’m not sure how long we can keep them out. There’s just me, Hikita, and Jack Matters from the legal department, and six interns...They think Buckaroo’s dead!!

Rawhide: Just tell them the truth. That’s always the best policy.

This interaction, and her response to it in the story, is interesting. While we think of Mrs. Johnson as the

stalwart face of the Institute, in this instance she decides to send out an intern named Indigo Skyy to talk to the reporters. We don't see Mrs. Johnson in this story again. Knowing that this is early in her tenure with the Institute, it's clear that she's still figuring out how to navigate all the various problems that crop up when Buckaroo Banzai is involved.

The Reliable Mrs. J

As noted earlier, Mrs. Johnson becomes a trusted advisor to Buckaroo very early in her Banzai Institute career. This fact is reinforced in the second comic story that she appears in, called "The Love that Hath No Name" from the *Phantom Double Shot: KGB Noir #3* issue, which is also set before the events of the film.

On pages 15 and 16 of the joint issue, but page 3 and 4 of the actual BB story, Mrs. Johnson finds herself behind the wheel of the Jet Car. She picks up a young woman named Brandy in one panel, and drops her off in a panel on the next page.

Mrs. Johnson: The bus should be by in about 20 minutes. Good luck, young lady.

Brandy: Thanks Mrs. Johnson. I'll miss you.

It appears the Mrs. Johnson has another fan in Brandy. It's hard to believe that just anyone at the Institute can take the Jet Car out for a spin, and Mrs. Johnson is obviously one of those few.

The assistant, klutzy, fainting, and formidable Mrs. J

Mrs. Johnson has a bigger role in the three issue *Return of the Screw* story that occurs sometime after the events of the film. She appears in all three issues, although she is only mentioned in the first one, when Buckaroo says he wants to, "maybe get some of Mrs. Johnson's famous son-of-a-gun soup concoction" for the feverish Widow Oh. Once again, her cooking/baking skills are called out, but this time in a more positive way than with the deadly meatball sandwich.

She first appears in the guise of caregiver in issue #2 on page 3 beginning on the bottom panel. She is wearing a yellow biohazard suit. The caption reads "Meanwhile at the hospital, Mrs. Johnson waits with the feverish Widow Oh..."

Buckaroo answers a call while on stage on page 9 and says "Yes, Mrs. Johnson? I'm here." He then announces Perfect Tommy who tears into a solo so Buckaroo can leave the stage.

On page 10 Buckaroo enters the Biosafety room, which is presently at Hazard Level 4, where Mrs. Johnson watches over the Widow Oh, who rests on a medical bed.



Mrs.J for the assist: Dressed in a Level B hazmat suit, Mrs. Johnson brings Buckaroo up to speed on his patient, the Widow Oh. Dr. Banzai's total lack of PPE looks particularly dubious in the early 2020s. Credit: Moonstone Books

Mrs. Johnson: As soon as you started to sing, something happened. Like magic...a miracle...

BB: Fever's down. Do you have anything smelly, Mrs. Johnson?

Mrs. J: You mean on my person? I have a protein shake in my purse, chock full of good nutritious wheat grass.

BB: That might do the trick. Mrs. Oh...Princess...Do you feel that? Can you hear me?

At that exact moment a man (actually a Lectroid) dressed in a giant pickle costume bursts into the room and flings Mrs. Johnson through a window. Both are saved when Happy Weiner enters the room, guns blazing.

On page 13 Buckaroo examines the body of the dead Lectroid.

BB: Mrs. Johnson!

Mrs. Johnson: EEEE!! A Lectroid!

BB: Yes, Ma'am. But it wasn't us he was after.

Buckaroo has discovered that the Widow Oh is actually a Lectroid herself. On page 16, Buckaroo says, "Mrs. J, I need the Widow's Botox."

On page 18, Mrs. Johnson comes into the room, trips, and accidentally stabs Buckaroo with a needle.

Mrs. Johnson: Buckaroo...I'm so sorry!

BB: Don't worry Mrs. Johnson – It's just a muscle relaxer. I have to talk to the president. Don't untie the Widow Oh.

Mrs. J: What if she gets hungry?

BB: Offer her a piece of fruit.

Buckaroo has his arm in a sling for the rest of the story.

On page 25, Mrs. Johnson is startled by a new turn of events with the Widow Oh.

Mrs. Johnson: My God!—She's having an orgasm!

BB: That's about the thrust of it...Find some blankets, we'll get her on the bus.

On page 28 Buckaroo performs surgery on the Widow Oh's head. Mrs. Johnson, still in her environmental hazard suit, assists.

Mrs. Johnson: Watch out for booby traps. How do you even know what you're looking for?

BB Good point: I don't...Kind of a cross between a sugar and a cricket, maybe in these yolk sacs or this squirting flower...or this vibrating bladder, all connected by sentient vaso-congested tendrils to a crab-like brain...brain or vagina?... I've no idea... but I think she's coming around from the last dose. Check the veterinarian kit, Mrs. Johnson, and get me a horse syringe.

Mrs. J: Yes, Doctor.

In issue #3, on page 1, Buckaroo wraps up the surgery on the Widow Oh.

Mrs. J: I thought you might need a glass of water.

BB: Thank you Mrs. Johnson. Put the Widow's young 'un in the fridge.

Mrs. J: It's a...child? Oh...

Mrs. Johnson faints and Buckaroo catches her in his one good arm. This is the last time we see Mrs. Johnson in the issue, although she is mentioned on page 28 after Lizardo is defeated.

Lady G: What about the Widow Oh?

BB: On that score, our very own Mrs. Johnson has stepped up to the plate and taken the Widow under her formidable wing.

There is a lot to unpack here about Mrs. Johnson. She acts as a nurse and guardian of the Widow Oh, working next to Buckaroo as he discovers who the Widow is and what that means. She makes mistakes (being klutzy with the needle), has a very intense reaction to seeing a Lectroid (fear), and is overwhelmed by the reality of the Lectroid baby (she faints). But she never wavers and remains by Buckaroo's side throughout. He never doubts her and, as he states at the end, he's happy to have her work with the Widow Oh moving forward. He knows she's in good hands with Mrs. J.

The actor, sex object, and religious Mrs. J

The Moonstone Holiday Super Spectacular contains holiday-themed stories of *The Phantom*, *Kolchak*, *The Spider*, *Buckaroo Banzai*, and *Sherlock Holmes*. The Buckaroo Banzai comic, 12 pages long and called "A Christmas Corral," is about giant worms from the Andromeda Nebula arriving on Earth. This story seems to follow Return of the Screw timeline-wise.

The story opens on page 45 with Mrs. Johnson on stage at an outdoor event that is being set up in the background. She is trying to stretch her wings as an actor in a holiday production Buckaroo is organizing.



Credit: Moonstone Books

BB: Nice, Mrs. Johnson. And the role you're auditioning for?

Mrs. Johnson: Virgin of Guadalupe...King Herod...Anywhere you can use me. We all know there are no small parts.

BB (Watching Perfect Tommy and Reno Fighting in Santa suits): Maybe not all of us.

Mrs. Johnson is then discussed by Buckaroo and Tommy on page 48 in a sexual way that we've not seen previously.

Perfect Tommy: Bring 'em on, Buck. We're loaded for Bear.

BB: Not now. First, get the plastic baby Jesus from Mrs. Johnson's Creche...

Perfect Tommy: You mean the cleavage between her breastesses?

BB: Her nativity scene, Tom. We need Jesus.

Perfect Tommy: Damn sure couldn't hurt.

The scene then jumps to Tommy talking to Mrs. Johnson about the plastic baby Jesus doll.

Perfect Tommy: Sorry, Mrs. J. I need him.

Mrs. Johnson: Oh, Tommy...If I only thought you'd really found the Lord. You'd better, if you want to keep eating my famous dumplings.

Perfect Tommy: I found him, but I aim to bring him back.

This short interaction gives us a glimpse into Mrs. Johnson's religious background and her desire to save at least one of the Hong Kong Cavaliers.

The caregiver Mrs. J

The story in the two issue "Tears of a Clone" comic is a sad tale where Buckaroo finds clones of himself and Penny, who age rapidly and die, but not without first giving birth to a child Buckaroo calls Polly. Mrs. Johnson appears in the second issue on page 19 where she acts as a caregiver, first to Buckaroo, then later to the two clones.

Mrs. J: Buckaroo, I made you some coffee and cinnamon rolls.

BB: Thanks, Mrs. Johnson. Couldn't sleep?

Mrs. J: Can you? Worried about the kids? You'll think of something.

BB: I appreciate the vote of confidence, but... I'm not their creator. It may be out of my hands.

The Next Day

Mrs. J: (Reading to the clones): 'And they lived happily ever after'...

Mrs. Johnson watches sadly as the clones wander off to ask someone else to read them a story. She knows that their time is short, but their limited intelligence is



Not exactly a storybook ending: Mrs. Johnson watches as the clones of Penny Priddy and Buckaroo innocently wander off in search of stories. It is a poignant moment for the comics, daring to swerve away from humor to meditate on the transience of life, the nature of happiness, and finding acceptance in the fleeting nature of it all. Credit: Moonstone Books

something of a relief in that they don't understand what is happening to them. It's plain that her heart aches for Buckaroo and the clones.

The Final Word?

After "Tears of a Clone" the current record on Mrs. Johnson's journey goes cold, until now.

It took some doing, but *World Watch One* managed to track down Mrs. Johnson in Japan of all places, thanks to a tip from Earl Mac Rauch by way of Reno. Ace staffer Sean Murphy was able to follow up on the lead and catch up with her for a brief interview, only to discover Mrs. J on a very different journey now; this one of her own design. You will see it soon enough in the pages ahead, so spoiling it makes little sense.

We've seen the astonishing resilience, resourcefulness, strength, and humanity of a person that, in 1984, we were only able to glimpse very briefly. Decades later we can write a seven page article about her and still only scratch the surface. Mrs. Johnson saying "We all know there are no small parts," in "Tears of a Clone" is more than just idle words. It's been her battle cry since day one at the Banzai Institute, and resonates like a clarion to clear the road ahead, wherever that may lead.



Catching up with Mrs. Johnson

By Sean Murphy (Vetted for publication by Reno)

Author's Note: You might think tracking down one of the most famous Hong Kong Cavaliers on the planet should be relatively easy, but when Mrs. Johnson doesn't want to be found, you quickly learn the error of that assumption.

Blue Blaze Irregulars all over the world are still discussing her sudden departure from the Banzai Institute in 2019 and I wanted to give her the opportunity to tell her side of the story. This interview was done during the freewheeling days before the Pandemic, when travel to other countries was not only possible but encouraged.

What follows is a brief interview with Mrs. Johnson from that visit. Special thanks to Reno and Earl Mac Rauch who were instrumental in convincing her to, at the very least, listen to my interview pitch. Per her request, photos of Mrs. Johnson were not made available for publication with this interview. -Sean M

I'm sitting in a spacious hotel restaurant in Takarazuka City, watching the lazy Muko River through the wraparound windows and waiting for Mrs. Johnson to arrive. Having followed her across the Pacific, I can only hope our interview will justify the reckless charges on my American Express card that I intend to report as stolen the minute I return home.

Another look at my watch and I'm starting to worry. After all the back-and-forth texts, what if she has a last-second change of heart and doesn't show up? So I read her last message: "I'm sorry you've landed here, Sean, but that doesn't change how I feel. If my feelings involve or inconvenience you, I'm sorry. I'm no longer the glue that holds everyone else together."

My eyes linger on the last damning phrase: "...the glue that holds everyone else together." Is that truly how she feels about her years at the Banzai Institute as Buckaroo's ace assistant, chief nutritionist, and organizer? And likewise her motivation for leaving the States to practice her love of dance choreography with the world-renowned all-female theater troupe, the [Takarazuka Revue](#)? Given her cryptic farewell announcement to Buckaroo and the worldwide Blue Blaze community, I am almost sure of it: "None of us wanted this to happen but I have at least chosen the time. Choking on my tears from sea to shining sea, I remain Mrs. Johnson."

Fans naturally excoriated her and who can blame them? Has she not popped our bubble, our distorted myth of a mini-utopia where the best and the brightest—veritable rock stars—labor to remake our world? But meanwhile the clock was always ticking and someone who had spent years tending to others feared wasting her own talents. How much longer, she had to wonder, until her time ran



Takarazuka in Hyōgo Prefecture, Japan, clings to the banks of the Muko River's unhurried waters. Credit: [Hiroyuki0904](#)

out. What could be more natural than to leave the familiar comforts of home and spread her artistic wings before it was too late?

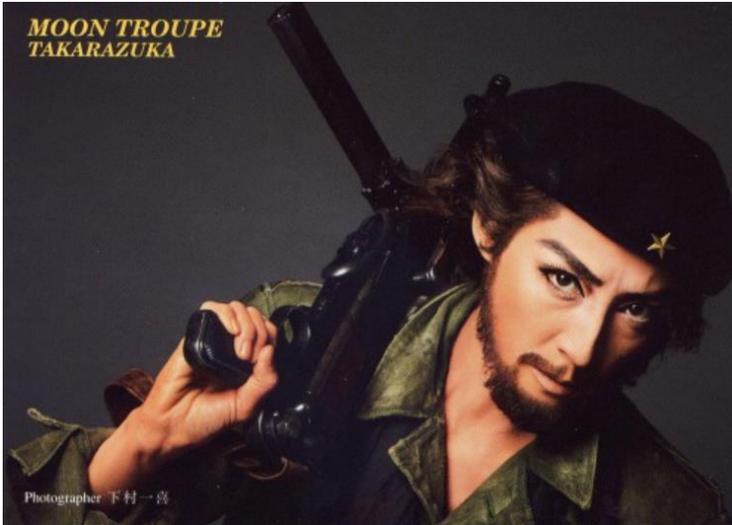
Half an hour passes before she arrives with her friend and close collaborator Yu Todoroki, one of the Revue's greatest stars and now a director of the company, famed for her iconic roles as Abraham Lincoln, Julius Caesar, "Che" Guevara, and Rhett Butler in *Gone with the Wind*.

They look lovely together in twin fedoras and it's fun to watch them play off one another as we exchange hugs and introductions facilitated by Mrs. Johnson's command of both languages. When I remind her of the only other time we met, at a press junket celebrating the release of the first Buckaroo Special Edition DVD, she smiles and says, "A long time ago, Sean. How lucky that we both still look the same! And how is dear sweet Mojo?"

But Todoroki is clearly the star here. She is royalty and waiters vie for the privilege of serving our table. She orders tea and the house shabu-shabu and I do my best to impress with my limited knowledge of her career and the storied revue in general. Again, Mrs. Johnson nods and listens, translating in her excellent Japanese.

By now I have noticed a rather dour-faced man watching us intently from the bar. Thinking he is an acquaintance of Ms. Todoroki, perhaps her bodyguard, I am corrected by Mrs. Johnson, who informs me the man is a local Blue Blaze martial arts instructor employed by Buckaroo to protect her against kidnapping threats from you know who.

This I take to be good news, however, as a sign that relations between her and the Institute are not entirely ruptured. "Oh, no," she says. "It's not that I was unhappy, Sean. I'll always love Buckaroo and everyone at



Yu Todoroki as Ernesto "Che" Guevara. Credit: Takarazuka Revue

the Institute, and love has been shown to me. It's just the feeling of looking around a room at all the brilliant people, feeling useful but with my voice muted."

"Forgive me for being skeptical," I reply, "but your voice muted, Mrs. Johnson? You're not exactly what I would call a wallflower."

"My voice is my dance, Sean, and the walls were saying, 'Get a life,'" she replies and touches my arm. "I'll forgive you, but do you know my first name?"

Embarrassed, I have to think a moment before venturing, "Is it Eunice?"

"Exactly," she says, but not in a way that tells me if I'm right or wrong or if it even matters. Instead she merely continues, "Here I was, a young promising dancer, before I drifted out west and married Mr. Johnson in the oil patch...having studied with [Jerome Robbins](#) and [Agnes de Mille](#), having performed and choreographed a dozen shows at the 92nd Street Y, and then an old friend from those days got in touch out of the blue and asked, "What ever happened to you?" She didn't mean to be patronizing, but it felt like she was calling me out and all I could do was back-pedal by mentioning that I was busy choreographing Buckaroo and the Hong Kong Cavaliers, all their stage shows...which hugely impressed her but left me feeling empty..."

She glances at the waiter and her voice trails off. The hot pot of shabu-shabu beckons and she and Todoroki turn the conversation to present and future collaborations. All that is left to be said will be said over wagashi sweets and in parting. What is the healthy balance between giving happiness to others and to oneself? Between working for others and for oneself? Between feeling shuffled along and shining one's own light? In short, what is happiness?



The 92nd Street Y: A Legacy of Dance

It's fun, as noted sociologists the Village People observed, to stay at the YMCA, but that's not the 92nd Street Y of which Mrs. Johnson speaks (see main article). This is instead the YM-YWHA: the Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Association, a community and cultural center dating back to 1874. Based at 92nd and Lexington in Manhattan's Upper East Side since 1930, it's a mecca of artistic and educational programs.

Between 1935 and 1969, educational director Dr. William Kolodney—possibly a distant relation of Buckaroo's allies, the Kolodny brothers—greatly expanded many of 92Y's programs, including dance. Agnes de Mille, with whom Mrs. J studied, once remarked of Kolodney that "He gave us a stage and an intelligent audience. He taught us to hope."

When exactly was Mrs. Johnson at 92Y? It's difficult to say, but "having performed and choreographed a dozen shows" there almost certainly bumps her up into at least her early twenties. That places us in the early to mid 1980s. Who might she have been rubbing elbows with? Other notable choreographers who put together performances at 92Y around that time include Pearl Lang, Bertram Ross, and the Ballet Hispanico of New York. She might have attended musical performances by the likes of Yo-Yo Ma, or workshopped fiction with Norman Mailer, Toni Morrison, Joyce Carol Oates, and Kurt Vonnegut. -S. Tate

Note: Since the onset of the Covid-19 virus and international travel bans, Mrs. Johnson has returned to the Institute to help out at the busy hospital. Her future plans are up in the air.

Our heartfelt thanks to Earl Mac Rauch for making this interview possible. Special thanks go to Mrs. Johnson and Ms. Todoroki for their time and invaluable insights, as well as the **Takarazuka Revue** for making both women available for this interview during a very busy 2019 season.

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Coming Attractions

By Scott Tate

2020's been a rough year on the movie and TV industries, knocking production and distribution schedules for a loop. Things are slowly bending back towards semi-normal. So when can you expect to see some familiar faces from *Buckaroo Banzai* filling your screens again in new roles? Well...

Peter Weller, who has previously appeared in a few episodes of CBS' *MacGyver* reboot as grudge-holding former special ops officer Elliot Mason, is expected to guest-star again sometime during the show's fifth season, which began airing in early December.



Peter Weller as Elliot Mason. Credit: CBS Television Studios

Ellen Barkin has a supporting role in the feature film *Breaking News in Yuba County*, a comedy/drama starring Allison Janney and Mila Kunis, currently scheduled for release on January 29th. She's also rumored to return for the upcoming fifth season of TNT's *Animal Kingdom*, where she's been regularly featured since 2016 in the role of "Smurf" Cody. Prior plot developments make Smurf's continued presence seem improbable so don't take the rumor as a certainty, but a good story can always work around that so time will tell. A premiere date for *Animal Kingdom*'s fifth season hasn't been announced.

Clancy Brown has a supporting role in the dark comedy thriller *Promising Young Woman*. The film already had a festival screening back in January, 2020 and went into wider release on Christmas. In *The SpongeBob Movie: Sponge on the Run*, he continues his longtime role voicing Mr. Krabs. This latest SpongeBob movie has already been seen by Canadian audiences but in the U.S. it's being held back for premium VOD, which will be handled by CBS All Access (soon to be rebranded as Paramount+) sometime in 2021. Look for Clancy later in the year alongside Charlie Hunnam, Morena Baccarin, Mel Gibson, and Dominic Monaghan in the crime thriller *Last Looks*. No official date for it has been set.



Clancy Brown as Stanley Thomas, the father of protagonist Cassie Thomas in *Promising Young Woman*. Credit: Focus Entertainment

Jeff Goldblum is everywhere as usual. Disney+ confirms that *The World According to Jeff Goldblum* has been renewed for a second season. No airdate for that has been announced yet, but sometime in 2021 seems a safe assumption. He'll voice the new character Dr. Armstrong in the animated sequel *The Boss Baby: Family Business*, currently scheduled for March 26, 2021. He'll resume his role as the Grandmaster for at least one episode of *What If...?*, the upcoming animated Disney+ series which will offer alternate takes on the Marvel Cinematic Universe, coming in the summer of 2021. He'll also return as his signature character Ian Malcolm in *Jurassic World: Dominion*, currently listed for June 10, 2022. In the meantime you can always catch him in his ongoing role as Brad Bellflower in advertisements for [Apartments.com](https://www.apartments.com).



(L to R) Sam Neill, Laura Dern, and Jeff Goldblum pay tribute to fellow *Jurassic Park* star Richard Attenborough as shooting resumes on *Jurassic World: Dominion*. Credit: Instagram

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John Lithgow will be prominently featured in *The Old Man* starring Jeff Bridges, developed as a limited series for FX on Hulu, based on Thomas Perry's 2017 novel about a retired intelligence operative trying to live in peaceful anonymity. Lithgow will play Harper, who has another agenda in mind. As of November *The Old Man* was still filming, but had already finished shooting most of its episodes earlier in the year before being stalled by the pandemic and should be ready to stream sometime in 2021. Lithgow might also return to HBO's *Perry Mason*, where he appeared regularly this past summer as attorney E.B. Jonathan, but while a second season has been confirmed, a full cast list has not.



John Lithgow plays Harold Harper, a retired agent called back to service by the FBI to hunt down a fugitive played by Jeff Bridges, in *Old Man*. Credit: FX

Christopher Lloyd is another actor who keeps a lot of irons in the fire at any time. Look for him to have a prominent role in the upcoming thriller *Nobody*, currently scheduled for February 19, 2021. He'll be in the family-friendly fantasy comedy *Super Athlete*, which is complete and awaiting distribution but with no release date announced yet. That's the same status as *Tankhouse*, a comedy co-starring Lloyd and Richard Kind about two blackballed New York theater actors banished to Fargo, North Dakota. He'll also have a supporting role in *Never Too Late*, which *The Hollywood Reporter* describes as "Mean Girls meets Golden Girls" with Ellen Burstyn and Loretta Devine. A release date for that one is unknown but the film was presented to potential distributors at 2019's American Film Market.

Carl Lumbly has a supporting role in *I'm Charlie Walker*, a feature film detailing a real-life fight against institutional racism while cleaning up an ecological disaster in 1971 San Francisco. This is another of those projects originally expected to drop in 2020 but currently waiting in distribution limbo. He'll also be joining the Marvel Cinematic Universe's expansion onto Disney+ as part of the cast of *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier*. The series will begin streaming on



Carl Lumbly is confirmed to appear in an episode of *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier*, but as whom exactly? Credit: Unknown

March 19, 2021. Fan speculation aside, the name and nature of his character haven't been officially announced, and he's only verified for one episode so far.

Dan Hedaya plays a sheriff in the rural indie horror film *Slapface*, a feature-length expansion of what began as a 2017 short film. A "Coming Soon" poster hit the web back in July, but no date has been set.

Jonathan Banks will continue his role as Mike Ehrmantraut in the sixth and final season of *Better Call Saul*, which stalled in mid-production in 2020 but will presumably make it to air sometime in 2021.

Pushed back an extra year, **Jamie Lee Curtis** will still return as iconic [final girl](#) Laurie Strode in *Halloween Kills* and *Halloween Ends*, now rescheduled for October 2021 and 2022 respectively. She'll also be seen in Michelle Yeoh's interdimensional sci-fi action film *Everything Everywhere All At Once* and in the comedy mockumentary *Senior Entourage*, neither of which have announced dates yet.

Longtime Banzai supporters **Michael and Denise Okuda** serve as technical consultants on the Apple TV+ alternate history space race series *For All Mankind*. They will continue in that capacity with the show's second season, which is scheduled to debut on February 19, 2021. Look for an article about their experiences with that in our next issue, if the Russians don't beat us to it.

This one's a long and uncertain while off yet, but we know Perfect Tommy has some diehard fans, so... **Lewis Smith**, apparently playing a guy named Tommy, is expected to have a role in *Desert Dick*, a twisty comedic mystery reportedly in pre-production for anticipated shooting in 2021.

As always with entertainment projects and doubly so these days, any details may be subject to change. 🐦

BOOK REVIEW: *The Art of Star Trek Discovery*

By Scott Tate

Paula M. Block and Terry J. Erdmann are well known for their solid *Star Trek* credentials. Paula's been a fan since the days of the original series and focused that into a career, supervising the licensing of all Trek publications between 1989 and 2009. She also co-edited Pocket Books' popular *Strange New Worlds* annual anthology series of fan-submitted stories during its 1998-2007 run. Teaming with a longtime friend of Banzai fandom, her husband Terry, together they have co-authored several Trek-related and other companion books, including *The Secrets of Star Trek: Insurrection* (1998), *Star Trek: 101: A Practical Guide to Who, What, Where and Why* (2008), *Star Trek: The Original Series 365* (2010), *Star Trek: The Next Generation 365* (2012), *Star Trek Costumes: Five Decades of Fashion from the Final Frontier* (2016), and others. Their latest shared effort is *The Art of Star Trek Discovery* (2020).

Star Trek: Discovery launched on CBS All Access in 2017 and is currently streaming its third season. Filming of its fourth is already underway. Starring an ensemble cast centered around Sonequa Martin-Green, the series is set aboard the science vessel *U.S.S. Discovery* roughly a decade prior to the original *Star Trek* series...although aspects of that premise evolve as the series unfolds.

We've all seen behind-the-scenes art books for television and movies before, so you broadly know what to expect here. The material covers *Discovery's* first two seasons by showcasing concept sketches, storyboards, detailed photographs, and virtual renderings. You'll find interior and exterior views of the ships you'd expect to see from the show—the *Discovery*, the *Shenzhou*, T'Pol's *Sarcophagus*, Pike's *Enterprise*—and the usual array of costumes, aliens, landscapes, and key moments. That's not to dismiss it as formulaic, just an acknowledgment that it fulfills the intentions of this type of book.

Prop recreationists, make-up/prosthetics artists, and cosplayers may find useful material here. So will fans of world-building for cultures such as the Vulcans, the Kelpiens, and especially *Discovery's* distinct version of the Klingons. Thematic groupings of information are well organized. Although the book has no index, its table of contents is detailed enough to easily guide you to specific topics such as “*Short Treks*” or “The Red Angel.”

That being said, the table of contents does contain a couple of minor typos which will hopefully be corrected in later editions. It states that the section “Stretching Boundaries” is on page 186 when it's really 188, and that “Into the Rabbit-Hole” is on 204 when it's on 206. The entries falling between these two, and all the others, are



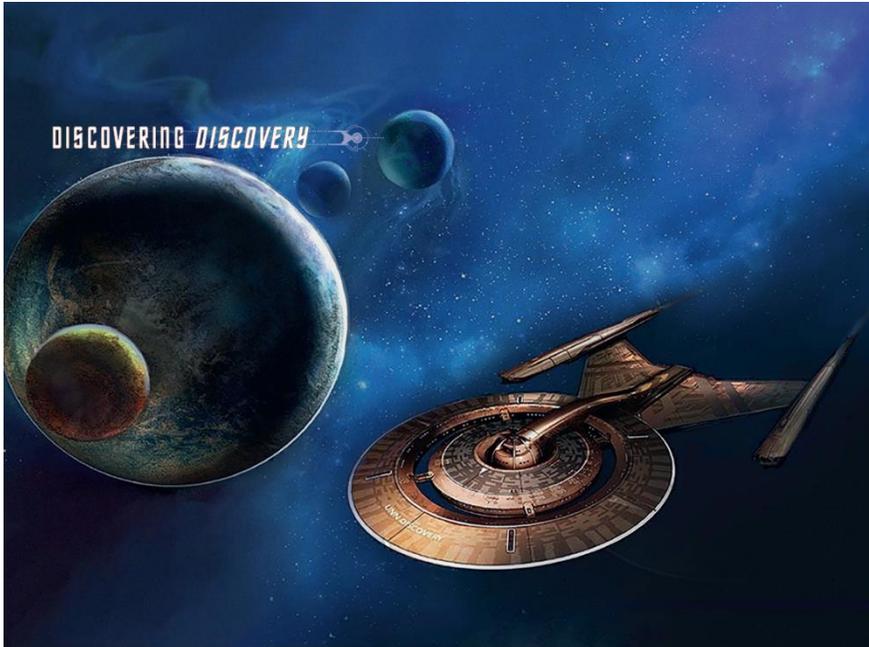
Art courtesy of CBS Television and Titan Books

accurately paginated. This obviously isn't a major obstacle to navigating the book, just one of those things that inevitably creeps into the typesetting process of every book somewhere along the line.

Other art books sometimes take a minimalist approach to the text, offering little more than captions and relying on the images to speak for themselves. That's not the case here, where the authors consistently complement and expand on the visuals without ever overwhelming them. Paula and Terry spoke with over two dozen people associated with *Discovery* in order to shape this book, giving us a curated perspective sprinkled with insights and frequent direct quotations from those involved. The tone is focused and informative without being dry, as a good tour guide should be. It often comes across feeling like attending a good convention panel.

Scattered throughout the book are interesting ideas that didn't make it onto the screen, or which only did so in highly modified form. For example, there was a character originally conceived as a potential series regular who ended up being replaced by a visual effect (pages 82-83). Or there's the nightmarish original design for Saru (page 123), described as resembling “Gibson's distinctive ‘Flying V’ electric guitar, customized with multiple sets of eyes.” Doug Jones might have ended up resembling a Biblical angel, an inversion of sorts of his Pale Man from Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth*, if the team hadn't settled on a more traditionally humanoid face for practical reasons.

Timing the release of this type of book as a media tie-in can sometimes be tricky. Scheduling it close to a show's initial debut can whet the appetite, or holding it back



Art courtesy of CBS Television and Titan Books

until the final season can capitalize on sentimentality. Releasing it while the series is still ongoing, not knowing its future prospects, is a gamble. The timing runs a risk of making the material feel dated.

In the case of *Discovery*, the publisher may have actually made a smart choice. By its nature, the content here focuses on the show's first two seasons. And if you've kept up, you know there's a significant shake-up of the status quo at the demarcation between the second and third seasons. So this book ends up being a time capsule of sorts, but not one that will necessarily come to feel obsolete. Instead it's a preserved slice of *Discovery's*

roots, contextualizing it prior to the next phase of what it becomes. And if someday that might lead to a follow-up volume to cover later seasons, so much the better.

In short, if you have any interest in *Discovery* at all, this is a worthwhile addition to your coffee table or reference shelf. If you want to go behind of the scenes of going behind the scenes, be sure to check out the interview with Terry elsewhere in this issue for insights about what went into the making of this book. *The Art of Star Trek Discovery*, by Paula M. Block and Terry J. Erdmann, contains approximately 200 pages and is published by Titan Books. It is currently available only in hardcover. 🐉



Art courtesy of CBS Television and Titan Books

INTERVIEW: Terry J. Erdmann

By Scott Tate

The name Terry J. Erdmann is a familiar one to most Blue Blaze Irregulars. He's part of the lore from the early days, having helped stir up interest in the film on behalf of Twentieth Century Fox by traveling around the country to science fiction conventions, presenting a 16-mm film clip and giving away fistfuls of those highly coveted headbands. He went on to help create marketing campaigns for such films as *Aliens* (1986), *Willow* (1988), and *Stargate* (1994), and served as unit publicist for *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier* (1989), *Dr. Giggles* (1992), *What's Love Got to Do with It* (1993), *Lord of Illusions* (1995), *Bio-Dome* (1996), *G.I. Jane* (1997), and *Eight Legged Freaks* (2002), among others. He's co-authored several books with his wife, the knowledgeable Paula M. Block, including *The Secrets of Star Trek: Insurrection* (1998), *The Deep Space Nine Companion* (2000), *Monk: The Official Episode Guide* (2006), *The 4400: The Official Companion* (2007), *Labyrinth: The Ultimate Visual History* (2016), and most recently *The Art of Star Trek Discovery* (2020). Terry was kind enough to sit down recently with us to reminisce about having given away all those headbands in a crazy whirlwind tour and to discuss his newest book.

Scott Tate: Your first time viewing *Buckaroo Banzai* was pre-release in 1983 with other members of the publicity team. Do you recall about how many people were present? Was Rosemary LaSalandra there that day? Or Ellen Pasternak? [Rosemary later arranged for the custom headbands to be manufactured. Ellen suggested Terry be the one to travel around handing them out.]

Terry J. Erdmann: The Twentieth Century Fox marketing department heard that Distribution had picked up a "turnaround" film from MGM. They set up an afternoon screening in one of the small studio screening rooms. Probably fifteen or so people attended, including publicists Rosemary LaSalandra, Ellen Pasternak, Elisabeth Landon, Barry Glasser, Claudia Gray, Diana Widom, and others, and assistants Randall Barton and me, along with others—plus department head Norman Levy. The print we saw was finished, exactly as it would be released into the theatres. Nobody understood what we'd just seen, although some of the people enjoyed it more than others. After a discussion about the "weirdness" of it, we went back to our desks. The movie was named *Buckaroo Banzai*. The very next morning, department head Levy, who really hated it, sent out a memo that he'd thought about it all night, and was retitling the film *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the Eighth Dimension*. We were never quite sure why that would help, but Norman thought it explained things a bit.



Photo by Michael Richardson

ST: During the headband giveaway tour, you visited conventions all over the country. Was it all a blur, or do specific stops stand out in your memories?

TJE: The colorful things were assigned to me and I was promoted to publicist in order to go on the road and promote the film. I went to about forty conventions, most in different cities, although I think I did New York several times. My favorite memory is of standing in hotel ballrooms holding a bundle of one hundred headbands and having fans' hands reaching in from all directions to pick one as though they were picking petals from a flower. It truly was fun. I remember being in San Jose, where I met the amazing artist Jim Van Over (soon to be hired at Paramount to work on *Star Trek*). Another standout was Miami, because the fans were so rabid that they started a club. A group of women in New York were so helpful and friendly that we stayed in touch for years. One contingency of fans hoped to publish fifteen-page articles in our four-page newsletter. When I edited the first article, one got so angry that he sent me a scathing letter about how I didn't know what I was doing and was an idiot. Yep—it wasn't all flower petals after all. The most important convention for me, of course, was



Terry Erdmann on stage in a much desired crew jacket.
(Photo by Paula M. Block)

MediaWest*Con in Lansing, MI, where I met Paula M. Block. I handed her a headband—and we’re still together 35 years later. See why those colorful cloths are important! †

ST: The headbands were obviously a big hit with fans. Did you get a sense at the time that fans appreciated that the headbands were something different than traditional giveaway items like buttons or keychains?

TJE: I knew right away that we’d come up with a winner. Buttons cost about 25 cents apiece, the headbands cost \$1.45 apiece, so we still owe the late Rosemary for having convinced Elisabeth and probably Norman for okaying the money. Rosemary was great, and we miss her. For a while the headbands became more important than the film, since no one knew what the film was about. When the movie came out they became even more “enticing.” Having handed out over 30,000—one at a time—remains a highlight of my life.

ST: Soon after *Buckaroo Banzai* you were involved with marketing another somewhat nontraditional science fiction movie for 20th Century Fox, *Cocoon*. How did that experience compare?

TJE: Twentieth had a string of sci-fi, fantasy, and horror films coming up (as well as other dramatic and comic movies). The releases started with *Return of the Jedi* (it was “Revenge” when we got it). I was assigned to work on *Jedi*, which, no surprise, became a hit. Next came

† Terry also recalls meeting *World Watch One*’s Steve Mattsson along the way. When we asked Steve about it, he had this to say: “When I first met Terry in the summer of ’84, I thought *Buckaroo Banzai* was going to be a huge hit and was looking forward to seeing *Against the World Crime League*. Things didn’t work out that way, but the friends I made among the Blue Blaze Irregulars have made this an amazing journey. I wouldn’t change a thing.”

Banzai, which put me full-time on the sci-fi track. Then came *Cocoon*. I made some “lenticular” buttons, cheaper than headbands, but more costly than ordinary buttons. I was thrilled to work with Ron Howard, taking him to a con in New York. And I made several visits to Industrial Light & Magic to watch the clouds and the flying saucer being created. Then I returned to the convention circuit, where more fans seemed interested in *Banzai* than in this upcoming alien creature movie. EVERYBODY asked me for a headband, even though I’d already given all of them away. *Cocoon*, luckily, was a good movie and a hit for the studio. After that I was assigned to *Aliens*, *Edward Scissorhands*, *The Fly*, etc. Not long after that I “resigned” to become a freelancer, which is how I worked on *Big Trouble in Little China*, *Spaceballs*, and a bunch more.

ST: Over time you’ve transitioned from film publicity to companion books. What brought on that shift?

TJE: The head of Lucasfilm marketing [at the time], Sidney Ganis, had worked with us on *Jedi*. He became president of Paramount Pictures and took Twentieth’s Diana Widom over to Paramount to head the publicity department. One day Diana called me, offering the job of Unit Publicist (on-set studio publicity guy) on the upcoming *Star Trek V*. I was thrilled. It gave me my first screen credit. For a couple of years I worked publicity on MGM movies, Disney movies, Universal movies, etc. Soon I was recognized around town for writing marketing material. One day an editor at Simon & Schuster wanted to do a behind-the-scenes book on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. Author names were tossed about and, in the end, they offered the job to me. I’d never written anything longer than ten pages, so I was a bit,



Terry Erdmann (L) and director W.D. (Rick) Richter (R) talk *Banzai* at a convention. (Photo by Paula M. Block)

shall we say, nervous. That first title became *The Star Trek Deep Space Nine Companion*, but before I'd completed it they'd already extended the offer and asked me to write—and publish—*Star Trek Action!*, *The Secrets of Star Trek: Insurrection*, and *The Magic of Tribbles*. Nobody was more surprised than me. Along the way, Paula began contributing to what I was doing (she knew about books!). So we became writing partners (as we already were in life). Since then, Paula and I have written (or ghost written—Don't ask!) over a dozen books, and contributed to several dozen others. It was a fluke. I didn't know that I knew how to write; I had just been trying to make my memos legible. Well, it turns out that a book is just a long memo.

ST: You and Paula have written some *Star Trek* fiction as well. In one of your *DS9* novellas, *Lust's Latinum Lost (and Found)* [2014] there's a sequence where Quark and his new apprentice Shmenge attend a publishing convention. Shmenge is delighted by all the giveaway items being handed out and gleefully accepts everything offered. Quark, on the other hand, dismisses it all as "promotional junk" and "worthless souvenirs." Is that your experience peeking through? A little personal observation on the two fundamentally diametric reactions to convention swag?

TJE: Ha. No, we just tried to write Quark in his own or Armin [Shimerman]'s voice. I can't imagine him seeing anything that is given away free as having value. As for the convention, Paula and I had been to the gaming convention E3 at the L.A. Convention Center, and it was so big, so bright, so ostentatious, so... gaudy, so... ridiculous, that by just describing it, most of our work was done. And we remembered that we'd come home with armloads of mostly worthless swag.

ST: Numerous Buckaroo Banzai Easter eggs have snuck into *Star Trek* over the years. You yourself might be considered as one, since an Okudagram displayed your name on a casualty list in one of *DS9*'s most powerful episodes, "In the Pale Moonlight" (So6E19, 1998).

TJE: All the Banzai Easter eggs have to be credited to Michael Okuda, Denise Okuda, and Jim Van Over. They keep the movie's memory going by being the most visible Irregulars and the busiest professionals. Plus, they're good friends, and just the best people one could ever hope to meet. I could point out, of course, that when they killed me in "Moonlight," they gave me an arbitrary middle initial ["P" instead of "J"], so for all we know that guy might be from some far distant branch of the family.

ST: Yours and Paula's latest book is *The Art of Star Trek Discovery*. What resources did you have access to while compiling it?

TJE: We interviewed 28 people for the book, department heads, producers, and the incomparable Jonathan Frakes, who we've interviewed for every book we've ever written. Seriously. John Van Citters of CBS gave us phone numbers for the principles, and "warned" them that we'd be calling. We were surprised how enthusiastically they answered—but it turned out that most of them owned our earlier books! I felt like Joan Wilder in the Colombian jungle (look it up).

ST: How long does it take to create a book like that?

TJE: Paula and I were given a deadline of six months. We turned in our first draft one week early. Our draft required very little editing and we had to do only a couple of days of follow-up work.

ST: How did it compare to a long, ongoing process like the years you put into *The DS9 Companion*?

TJE: While working on *The DS9 Companion*, I spent six years on the set gathering material. Because of that film-school level educational experience, I learned how to interview, so a phone call today can suffice. We did plan to travel to Toronto to see the *Discovery* sets. Then the pandemic hit—and that was that.

ST: Now that *The Art of Discovery* is out, do you have a next project in mind?

TJE: We never have a project in mind. We announced our retirement in 2008, and meant it. But the phone rings. Sigh. If we like the title of the project being offered, we ask three questions: What is the deadline? What is the word count? And what is the budget? Sometimes we say yes. We've turned down more books than we've accepted. Next project? I have three questions. 🐦



John Lithgow and Terry Erdmann attend a *Buckaroo Banzai* screening at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Theater in Beverly Hills. (Photo by Bruce Berliner.)

BOOK REVIEW: Brush Up on

A Dollop of Toothpaste

By Scott Tate

Musician **Billy Vera**, remembered by Banzai fans for having portrayed Pinky Carruthers, has written nonfiction before, such as his memoir ***Billy Vera: Harlem to Hollywood*** (2017) and ***Rip It Up: The Specialty Records Story*** (2019). Now he's expanded his repertoire by releasing his first novel.

A Dollop of Toothpaste defies easy categorization. There are touches of fantasy and science fiction to it, including that it's set in the near future with an opening chapter that begins on September 11, 2021, and builds from a backstory of a 2020 election cycle that played out very differently than in the real world. But that isn't what predominantly defines the tone. *Dollop* is more a tale of political satire and social commentary, with a thread of organized crime pulling strings, but that's only part of the picture as well. At its emotional core it's really about loyalty, about family both biological and chosen, and specifically it's a love story between aging guitarist Johnny Santoro and his new one-night-stand-turned-girlfriend, Paulette de Saint Marie, who is much younger and from a privileged background.

Johnny awakens with Paulette in a Texas hotel to a double dose of momentous news flooding the airwaves. Los Angeles has been destroyed by a nuclear attack, and moments later the power grid goes down for a large swath of the other side of the country. Within minutes, Johnny is summoned by his uncle Nicky, a coarse but charming New Orleans-based *Mafioso*.

If this sounds like it might resemble a Tom Clancy thriller...well, no, not really. There's suspense, a little action and some political intrigue, but this isn't that type of story and Johnny isn't that type of character. I won't say much about the plot here, because it often swerves in directions you might not expect. Besides, it sometimes takes a backseat for a while in favor of simply letting us watch as Johnny and Paulette grow closer. That's not to say that the crisis elements fade into the background, though. Nicky maintains a close interest in them throughout.

Part of the appeal of this book is Vera's eye for details. Meals are cataloged in such detail that you'll feel like you're sitting at the table yourself. Locales are described in ways that let you feel like a native. Many real-life figures are mentioned, with a few finding their way onto the page as characters.

Gentle readers should note that aspects of this novel won't meet everyone's tastes. There are casually spoken

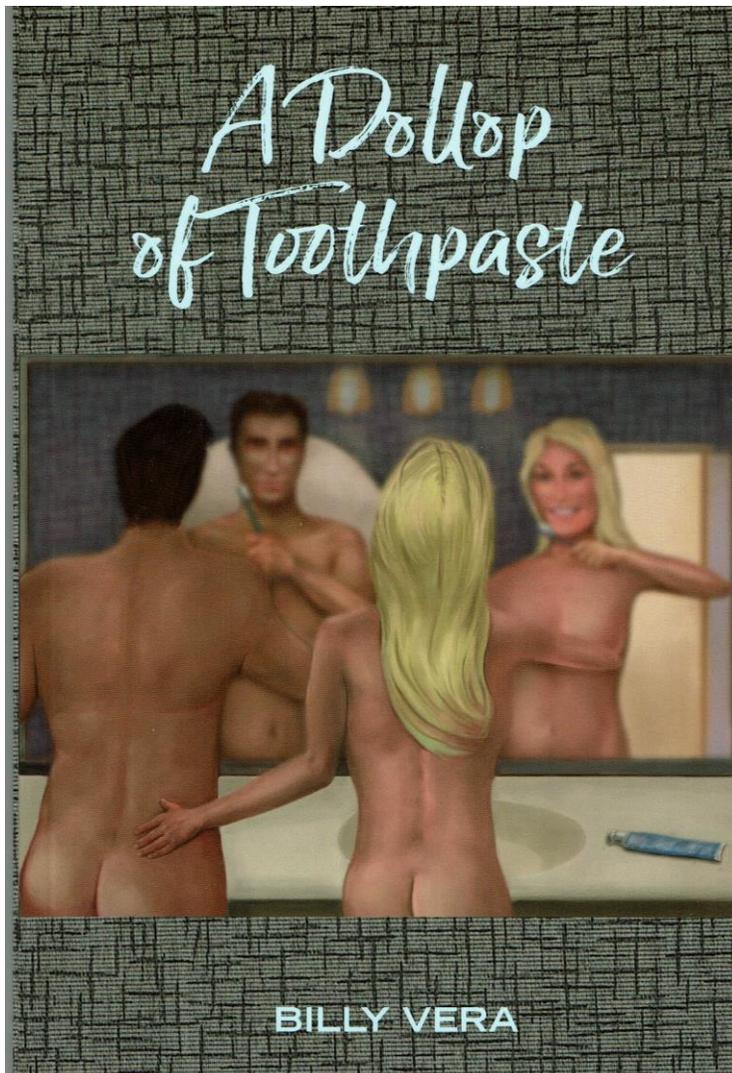


Image provided by Billy Vera

ethnic slurs, reflecting how some characters would realistically talk. There's a rape scene. There isn't much violence but when there is, it's harsh. All of these elements feel organically integrated into the telling rather than being gratuitous...but if these are red flags for you as a reader, be aware that they're present.

A Dollop of Toothpaste is an interesting and unusual book, and one I enjoyed. It's approximately 240 pages, was self-published by Vera via [BookBaby](#), and is currently available either as a softcover or in eBook formats for several popular devices. To find out a little more about what went into writing it, turn the page and read our interview with Billy Vera. 🐾



INTERVIEW: Billy Vera

By Scott Tate

Musician, actor, and newly minted novelist **Billy Vera** was generous enough to give us some of his time to discuss his recent novel, *A Dollop of Toothpaste*, reviewed elsewhere in this newsletter. The story centers around the relationship between guitarist Johnny Santoro and his new love, Paulette de Saint Marie. Billy talked with us about how it came about, and shared some memories of *Buckaroo Banzai* as well.

Scott Tate: As a musician, you're already one type of storyteller. Does writing a novel feel like a natural extension of that for you?

Billy Vera: I suppose so. I'd never even thought of writing a novel. My memoir, *From Harlem to Hollywood* [2017] and my other book, *Rip It Up: The Specialty Records Story* [2019] warmed me up for this one. I woke up one morning with the first scene in my mind in its entirety, so I went to my computer and wrote it down and it grew from there, each character coming to me, telling me who they were and what their goals, needs, and desires were.

ST: Johnny Santoro's career path has some obvious similarities to your own. What's the biggest difference between you and Johnny?

BV: First, Johnny isn't a singer and I've never been to prison.

ST: Are there any specific authors or novels that you consider as having influenced you?

BV: I love Michael Connelly and Nick Tosches for their attention to the details of time, place, and accuracy. I tried to make mine as accurate as possible, down to things like the characters' dialects and the food they like. Even in a work of fantasy, I felt the need for realism was imperative. [In the book, one of Johnny's bandmates also mentions Nick Toches as a favorite.]

ST: Any chance we'll see these characters again?

BV: If I can get through this sequel, many of the characters will reappear. [It turns out Billy's already begun a sequel, set to pick up some threads five years later.]

ST: Let's talk a little about filming the club scene in *Buckaroo Banzai*. Was looking like a musician on stage in a fake club substantially different for you than being in a real one?

BV: I can't speak for Jerry [Peterson], but he's a natural performer, but for me I was pretty comfortable in the



Image provided by Billy Vera

club scene. In the early 70s when my career wasn't doing so well, I worked as a back-up musician for some of the oldies groups, like the Shirelles, the Drifters, the Coasters, etc., so I was able to summon the feelings of being a background guy instead of the lead singer.

ST: As one of the professional musicians in the mix there, did anyone turn to you for tips about how to look authentic?

BV: The only one who needed tips was Weller. My real life guitarist and I went to his house and showed him what he needed to know about playing guitar.

ST: What was the mood like walking around Sepulveda with the cast for the end credits?

BV: We were marching to Billy Joel's "Uptown Girl" for the rhythm. In the middle of it, I got the impulse to steal the scene, so I did that little James Brown twirl, mainly to draw the viewers' attention to myself. Looking at that scene, I think it helped to show the playfulness of the group, rather than just their seriousness.

ST: You worked with director W.D. Richter again, in a voice role as a radio DJ in *Late for Dinner* [1991]. How did that come about?

BV: Richter called me. There was no on-camera place for me in that movie, but he has a thing for continuity and little inside jokes. I'm like that too in my songwriting, so it appealed to me.

ST: Let's say you and Johnny Santoro are hanging out one night, nobody around but the two of you. What one song do you guys decide to play?

BV: I'm guessing we might do [Alvin Robinson's] "Something You Got," one of the songs he plays at [New Orleans nightclub] Tipitina's in the book. 🐾

From the Bureau Office

Editor's Note: The pandemic continues to wreak havoc on the kinds of events and gatherings typically noted on our **Team Banzai Events Calendar**. In a vein similar to our August 2020 issue, we present to you instead some choice tidbits from the desk of the Chicago Bureau office. Look for the return of the Events Calendar post-pandemic. -DB

Free Virtual Tours

"You need to get out more," has become one of several unofficial taglines to the COVID-19 pandemic. Fortunately, the internet provides the opportunity to take us virtually anywhere, and everywhere; transforming stay-cations into digital tours of far-flung locales that, ideally, we will be able to visit in person sometime later this year.

Below is a sampling of places, both ancient and extraterrestrial, to visit during the downtime of your personal global health crisis. Sit back, relax, and enjoy the ride!

ANCIENT SECRETS

The warm, humid climate of both Mexico's Yucatan peninsula and Central America have long held an attraction to visitors eager for a change of scenery. These same locales were also the range of Mayan civilization, a culture rich in history, art, and architectural marvels.

Google Arts & Culture, in collaboration with the British Museum, provide a [wide ranging set of resources](#) to explore this fascinating civilization, including a virtual tour of [Palenque](#), a medium-sized site located in the far southern state of Chiapas, Mexico.

Those craving a more arid climate might favor these five [Egyptian Heritage sites](#), including the tomb of Meresankh III, the tomb of Menna, the Ben Ezra Synagogue, the Red Monastery, and the Mosque-Madrassa of Sultan Barquq. The tours are provided by [Egypt's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities](#), offering global access to the riches of history on your desktop.

For those who favor a more Mediterranean flavor, The Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports offers a virtual tour of [The Acropolis at Athens](#); a joint effort of the ministry's Acropolis Restoration Service (YSMA) and [Culturplay](#), a computer games studio located in Athens, Greece that specializes in history-based games. The tour begins with a map that allows you to select a number of different sites for exploration. Souvlaki and sea breezes not included.

NEW MYSTERIES

The Ancient World holds many marvels, but they are not for everyone. And let's face it; you can be excused for wanting to be anywhere else other than planet Earth at the moment. Lucky you; we have options.

Google and NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory have teamed up to provide you with a detailed 3D road trip on [Mars](#), courtesy of the Curiosity rover. Want to get away from it all? Now is your chance. The Red Planet awaits.

Still want more? NASA provides a [multitude of additional virtual tours](#), "...from actual video tours, or 360° virtual tours, inside our laboratories and facilities to curated photo galleries of images and video playlists." They even offer destinations beyond our own solar system by way of their [Exoplanet Travel Bureau](#).

One other tour to take in while it lasts is [Voyager 1 & 2's Interstellar Extravaganza](#). Launched in August and September of 1977, Voyagers 2 and 1 (yes, in reverse order) expanded human understanding of the solar system in ways that are difficult to overstate. Both Voyager probes are predicted to lose the power necessary to gather and transmit scientific data sometime in 2025. Don't wait. This is the tour of a lifetime.

Days of Note

[Bubble Wrap Appreciation Day](#) (Jan. 25).

The last Monday in January each year commemorates everybody's favorite bet-you-can't-pop-just-one packing material. Movie prop enthusiasts might appreciate the

mention of Buckaroo's holographic viewing bubble-wrap goggles found [here](#).

NASA Day of Remembrance Is still up in the air as of publication, but [solicitations for an art exhibition](#) in its honor point to a January 28 date as highly likely. Keep your eyes peeled, and take a moment to reflect on the fallen heroes of space exploration, including the mission crews of Apollo 1 and shuttles *Challenger* and *Columbia*.

[Lunar New Year](#) (Feb. 12). As the Year of the Rat departs, we greet the Year of the Ox.

[Hoodie Hoo Day](#) (Feb. 20, Northern Hemisphere). Shake off the winter blahs in that most sensible of ways, by going outside at noon local time and yelling "Hoodie hoo!" (Hoodie Hoo Day for the Southern Hemisphere is celebrated on August 22.)

[National Chili Day](#) (Feb. 25). The fourth Thursday of every February is set aside to warm up your belly and your taste buds. Find history, recipes, trivia, and more at the link.

[International Bagpipe Day](#) (March 10). Hey, has anybody ever played the Banzai March on one of these things? Let us know!

[Daylight Savings Time](#) begins (March 14 for most of North America). The only reason for time is so that everything doesn't happen all at once. All BBIs please make sure your chronometers are updated accordingly for mission preparedness.

[Pi Day](#) (March 14). Technically, it's an appreciation of the world's most famous nonrepeating infinite decimal. Realistically, for most of us it's an excuse to eat pie. With the right friends you can do both.

[National Alien Abduction Day](#) (March 20). Watch the skies and watch your back.

CAST BIRTHDAYS

JANUARY

Clancy Brown (Jan. 5), **Yakov Smirnoff** (24), **Tommy Huff** (29), **Read Morgan** (30), **Jonathan Banks** (31)

FEBRUARY

Mariclare Costello (Feb. 2), **Robert Gray** (10), **John David Ashton** (22)

MARCH

James Saito (Mar. 6), **Bill Henderson** (19)



Welcome to 2021!

All right. Fine. Six days after ringing in the New Year, 2021 made a point of reminding everyone that the end of 2020 didn't necessarily mean an end to the madness. On January 6th, a throng of armed and, in many cases, costumed demonstrators invaded Washington D.C. and overran the Capitol Building in what history will remember as "The Cosplay Insurrection." For all of 2020, people feared the spread of a virus. In the opening days of 2021, we are reminded that the ultimate virus is fear itself.

Well, that just won't do. For five blissful days in 2021 the New Year showed us that there is still room for hope in our future. On the sixth, it reminded us that there is still a need for vigilance; just like every other year.

There's an old saying, "If you fall off a horse, get back in the saddle." It's time to saddle up again and set to building on those first five days of 2021. It won't be much of a year if we stay down here in the dirt, cussing at the horse's ass.

Have a happy, healthy, and prosperous New Year everybody; no matter where you go or where you are.



GEAR-UP

寬齋

**BREAKS RELEASE
TAKE OFF**