

# Blog Webpage Archive

## My Fascination With The Trollge Incident Series

[1,022]

Oh boy, here I go info-dumping about my hyper-fixations again! Horror is a very curious thing, we see it a lot in our popular culture, with each product from whatever decade it is from always attempting to capture the anxieties of the time, or tapping into something more primordial regarding humanity as a whole, with varying degrees of success.

The Trollge Incident series is an interesting form of internet horror, as it takes a nostalgic concept that was birthed recently after the internet, that which being the now infamous Rage Comics, and twisting it through the usual characteristics we see in things like Creepypasta's or internet horror stories.

The Incident, the words by themselves are ominous and almost foreboding in a sense.

What personally fascinates me about the series of incidents is how they all follow some sort of formula, much like the rage comics. There is some objective stated at the beginning, or a situation presented, then there are unusual steps and tools that the main character, usually the trollface, must take in order to solve said issue. Then everything goes horribly wrong, resulting in a lovecraftian form of ending, from madness, to esoteric discoveries that break the main character, or them becoming a monster themselves, with the video ending with "Date, The XYZ Incident."

But what exactly attracts so many people to these sorts of stories, they seem formulaic don't they? No, for while they do follow a formula, it is more of structure of storytelling rather than hard and fast mandates, some can break the rules, so long as it is done with purpose, to enrich the material.

The Incidents themselves twist the laws of reality, often using what are known as "Troll Physics," to further keep the viewers from being able to predict what could and could not happen. One such example is the May 2021 "Heaven Stairway Incident."

A simple formula that everyone knows, oil floats on water, wait for it to rain, cover yourself in oil, and fly.

Except here it is different, because the human skin already has oil. Humans rise to the sky, some plummeting to a cruel and brutal demise.

This is patient zero, the one to spawn forth what is known as The Incident Trend, but here is something you probably did not know, the original poster @ebola\_granola on twitter,

posted this on November 27th, 2020, making this a prediction of a future that never came to pass.

The fascinating thing about the Trollge incident series is that they are more than just another meme format, or another internet horror trend. Meme's are ideas spread and replicated, this specific trend is one that uses our collective fear of the future and sense of dread regarding the chaotic world we live in to generate monsters in which we can see our worst facets through. One example of this is the December 10th, 2022 "The Lone World Incident," in which a poor guy falls asleep in class, and he wakes up in a new world exactly like ours, but devoid of any life, and he lies there still, completely isolated and tears the world apart just looking for signs of life, his limbs malthusian, elongated and spindly.

That incident was published on March 27th, 2021.

It's a lovecraftian form of horror, dread distilled into a four panel comic, or a one-minute video. Sure, there are those that just make a cool monster and leave it at that, and befittingly, they often fail to capture that dreadful feeling.

The last aspect that I would like to discuss regarding Trollge and its mythology of terror, is what it does literally. As a writer, I tend to analyze movies, games and comics with a lot of scrutiny, and Trollge Incidents have shown me just what makes them tick by watching enough of them.

Let's go even further.

It is no coincidence that the world is more chaotic than ever before, that because of the constant flow of information, we always get news about what we as a species have done and are doing. First scroll: we have sent another species into extinction, second scroll; one of your greatest heroes turned out to be a malicious and horrid monster, third scroll; nothing is being done, we are all going to die, and those at the top show nothing but an arctic, cold indifference towards the circumstances.

We are on the cusp of great change, change that will not come from paper and quill but from fists and yell. And even then, our own view of the world is expanding, we are discovering things about our own world still, and the wide, eldritch expanse of space, dark matter, and long dead stars, become more and more known to us, making us feel smaller and smaller the more we part from our island of placidity.

These circumstances, while not equivalent, are very much similar to what happened during the Interwar Period, in which Howard Philip Lovecraft would get much of his anxieties and views of the world, that and his eldritch levels of racism, but this post is not about that.

Trollge incidents are lovecraftian monsters, as they can be seen as both extraterrestrial, or uncomfortably human. This meme could be seen as a modern expression of absurdism, that life in general is absurd and nonsensical, coupled with the dread of horror through a nostalgic lens. Why else would they use something as innocent as the Troll Face, that same character that made so many people laugh through its many rage comics? Because the only thing scarier than something completely unrecognizable is a distortion of the familiar.

The steps make no sense.

Logic does not exist.

Not even our own form of reasoning can help us in the face of something that pushes us forward, telling us to complete something, all for us to end up mangled beyond belief, mentally or physically, begging for an end to a silent madness that drowns out any noise that might ever exist.

Thank you for reading, and have a wonderful day!

Hopefully I didn't give you more existential dread than you already have.

## **Project Zomboid & The Fun Apocalypse**

[1,591]

Project Zomboid is an open-world, isometric survival horror video game which revolves around the player must survive the zombie apocalypse for as long as possible, all while being stuck in a zombie-infested exclusion zone barricaded by the military to contain the spread. The player must face the relentless zombies and the scarcity of resources to survive, not live or thrive however.

Because this game's story isn't about how your character beats the odds.

This is the story about how you died.

Alright I am sure that you have heard it all a million times already, zombie game, build stuff, make weapons, survive, probably (no) endgame, there's the fast ones, the slow ones, the ones that ate too much and are about to dispense their gastric acid all over you. It is no surprise that zombies are somewhat out of fashion, what with their overexposure in pop-culture from movies like "28 Days Later" and world renowned patient zero "Night Of The Living Dead," to games like "Left 4 Dead 2" and comics/tv shows such as "The Walking Dead." Zombies have been beaten to death like death horses, no pun intended.

But what exactly has driven so many people to this game? With an all time peak of more than 65,000 players and an average of 33,718.7 in the last thirty days as of the writing of this blog, there is clearly something that drives people to play, despite how worn out the zombie genre is.

Project Zomboid takes an interesting approach to the zombie apocalypse because it makes it fun, while still making it just as challenging to heighten its entertaining and rewarding aspects. Now, for the sake of showing an example, let us look at a game like "7 Days To Die," where the main concern is building from the ground up, your main concern is gathering resources and upgrading yourself by getting better equipment and leveling up through killing zombies or harvesting resources. The game is much more concerned about how you can exploit the mechanics of the game and how far you can prepare for the Blood Moon, rather than the more intricate and grueling aspects of realistic survival. The character customization is also limited, you get to customize the appearance of your character and make a new "build" as you play, focusing on intelligence or agility and so on.

As for Project Zomboid, this game allows you a bit more freedom. Because it allows you to make a very interesting choice at character creation; who were you before the apocalypse started? Were you a firefighter? Cook? Nurse? Addict? Unemployed? And not just that, but also pick your strengths and weaknesses, are you frail? Get stick easily? Are you

a slow reader? Are you obese to the point that it obstructs your movement? All of these can be properly chosen, awarding you with skill points, allowing you to buy certain strengths and abilities that can serve you in the game.

To finalize my mechanical analysis of Project Zomboid, the game makes sure that you work for what you want. You don't skills by leveling up and unlocking them, you get new skills by reading books, and strength by exercising, you accumulate resources and abilities in a methodical fashion, and even at the highest "level" to put it that way, there is always a risk of losing it all with one fatal mistake.

One bite, one infection, and you are dead.

Start over.

What will you do now? Live in the wilderness, explore the urban jungle, all your decisions, every step, how you use your time will decide how long you live and how you lose it all and die.

The customization aspect of Project Zomboid cannot be understated, not only do you get to choose who you were before the apocalypse but also how the apocalypse takes place. Is the world only populated by Sprinting Zombies? Done. Can you only be infected through saliva? Done. This part of the game allows it so that, if you think it is too hard, you can customize it so that it is much more enjoyable for you and your style of gameplay.

It has an incredible amount of detail, from the wound placement, to what is needed to heal them, sure it can feel a little too tedious and methodical at times, but that merely adds more challenge to the idea of surviving the apocalypse. But what about the zombies themselves?

The zombies of Project Zomboid offer a unique challenge to the game, mainly because of how they operate as an enemy for the player to confront. Visibly inspired by George Romero's "Shambling Zombies," the undead of Project Zomboid are a unique experience in an of sameness from various zombie games.

One of their key aspects being that they are not infected humans, but rather reanimated corpses. The main thing about these zombies is that because of the isometric aspect of the game, your character has a cone of vision in front of them, so while you will know if there are structures or walls behind you, something like a Zombie, you will not be able to see it unless you turn around. When you enter an unexplored room, zombies can and pop up in unexpected places, making for very organic jumpscare that don't just rely on suddenness and loud music to be shocking and tense.

Their behavior is interesting, while they retain some qualities from previous incarnations such as an attraction towards sound and lights, they take from other media franchises, such as the inclusion of zombies that can sprint and others that merely crawl because of broken legs. But none of this sounds very unique now does it? That is the idea.

When a Zombie detects you, notices you, so much as glimpses at you, the player enters a paranoid chase, sure they might be slow, but they follow you, they stalk you, they wait for you to tire, for you to stop and slowly get closer and closer, much like how we used to hunt animals in the old days. And that is without talking about how you could run into another while trying to lose the previous one, it's maddening!

Let us say you have a base, a family home with running water, electricity, and some food to last you some weeks, maybe even a month, in the apocalyptic world you are trapped in. If you so much as glimpse out of the window, a zombie, or many, could see you, and just like that, you have doomed your entire base to be overrun, and your character is no *Tallahassee* or *Columbus*, you will not be able to mow down hordes of zombies with your limited resources..

But let's say that it's only five right? Wrong! Because as they batter and pummel your door, they will make noise, and what will that attract? More of them, your gunfire will do so as well.

It's an apocalypse, a bleak, isolated and ludicrous apocalypse.

**But that is the fun of it.**

In a world where you are surrounded and stalked by loss, even the smallest of victories feels like a herculean triumph. All the punishment that Project Zomboid dispenses makes it feel like you are really fighting, and unlike other difficulty-heavy games like *Dark Souls* or *Ninja Gaiden* and *Contra*.

To finalize I would like to focus on some aspects of the game that I believe are pretty neat and other aspects that might entice others to play it.

The community. Games such as *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* has taught us all a very important if kind of uncomfortable lesson, that if the game falls short in any way, then the community will make mods that fix those flaws to make the game better for themselves and everyone. This game's community has a plethora of mods that add interesting content, from new types of zombies, to skateboarding, to merely enhancing already pre-existing features such as going through windows, where with a mod you can do like heroes in action films and jump through them, breaking them in the process.

And finally, my favorite aspect of Project Zomboid is you, the player. Something that this game does above all others is that it makes you manage your character in an interesting way, sure you have to eat and be healthy, but it also tells you to take care of your character mentally, from making them read to stave off boredom and insanity, to engage in leisurely activities to calm yourself, or maybe it is panicked so not all of its hits strike true, you are not playing a sock-puppet for a player, rather you are managing the life of a true survivor, who has needs much like you.

Project Zomboid perfectly mixes fun and challenging difficulty while still allowing users to customize it as much as they want in order to make an experience that is most suitable to them as players. Not only that, but it offers a truly grueling and.. well, apocalyptic zombie apocalypse that is sure to be enjoyable and fresh everytime you make a new character and start in a different map, or use the sandbox features to make your own. This game just exploded into popularity a whole decade after its release, and its success is a testament to the willpower and dedication of the developers.

So, give it a shot!

See how long you can last? Tell me what you think?

Thank you for reading and have a wonderful day!

## **Avatar 2: The Way Of Water (Ocean Or Puddle)**

[1,772]

Avatar was a monument for its time, at least for what was out at the time, people did not really see truly otherworldly environments in their movies, much less one that explored them to such a large extent. It awed the world with its technology, the realism of staring at such alien landscapes with interesting peoples and wildlife that seemed so alien, yet contained specific aspects of our world's beasts that we could not help but notice, such as the creature in the first film being pretty much a rhinoceros, but with the head of a hammerhead shark and a system of feathers similar to that of a peacock.

Avatar 2: The Way Of Water should feel like that correct? Then why does it, and why doesn't it. Spoilers ahead.

Let me open this exploration of my own thoughts regarding the sequel by making a brief aside; I liked the first avatar movie, and it's rewatchability made it very enjoyable for me and my family to watch, and while I watched it and enjoyed it, there always seemed to be more of an emphasis on spectacle rather than storytelling and character exploration, not that it was completely absent from the movie of course. Though its message was better implemented in other movies, this one still argued its own view on the subject, not different, but nevertheless worth hearing.

Now when it comes to Avatar 2: The Way Of Water, it is just more of the same, what already was in the first film, all the elements that first drew people to it, is also in this movie, so if you liked the first one, chances are you'll like this movie. But I would like to go a little deeper with what Avatar 2 did when it comes to the ground work already done by Avatar 1, because after all, a sequel should expand on the elements, story and themes of the previous one, correct? Which brings me to my first point.

Avatar 2: The Way Of Water is not a sequel. The building blocks of this movie take a lot from its predecessor, and not necessarily in the way that a sequel does, a lot of what we see storywise are beats we already saw from the previous movie, a group of outsiders being inducted into a new culture, having to learn their ways and adapt to their new environment and finally they must defend their new home from the humans, who are looking for a natural resource whose extraction would mean the destruction of a living organism.

The story of the movie itself is more of a re-establishment of the previous movie, we are given a new status quo, which will serve as the new jumping-off point for the next set of



movies. Now, with this established, I would like to address the main drive for people going into this film, or rather what most people took from it, its realism.

You truly feel like you are there, its environments, the detail and way the characters interact with the world around them is truly unique, with such a clean attention to the smallest feature, from the bubbles in the water or the movement of certain aquatic species of alien wildlife. Some small details that I really like is in the eyes, not in the forest Na'vi but in the newer species introduced in this film, known in the universe as the Metkayina Clan, who have eyes with specialized slits evolved to protect their eyes when they go into the water, similar to that ones that animals such as crocodiles have.

There is also the fact that their species seems like an actual evolutionary diversion from the forest Na'vi, with their lion-like tails being replaced with thicker, paddle shape that allows them to navigate through the water easier, never mind the fact that their chests also seem broader which would mean they have larger lungs and are thus capable of staying under the water for far longer periods of time.

The story like I have already stated is more of the first one, taking the same plot points, almost beat by beat and repeating them, the difference being that instead of having all of them happen to Jake Sully, they happen to his children, who would be the ones to drive the story more than the previous protagonist. Jake changes throughout the movie, he goes from A to B, or more accurately speaking he learns a lesson, he didn't suddenly become a coward after the first film, he is merely facing the reality that he has more to lose now than ever, he is a father, and if he can't protect his children... well the thought itself breaks Jake, so he goes from running to keep them safe to understanding that the only way for them to be safe is to eliminate the dangers that are stalking them, and we see exactly what happens when this is not done with the death of Neteyam, it's a father's worst fear realized.

Adapting to this new world and experiencing friction between cultures is something that was awarded to Neteyam and Lo'ak, but more so the latter than the former. They are both good characters, but here comes my first great problem with the movie, it has a lot of fat, things that could have been made shorter or cut out, to include things that we truly needed to show, like Spider's struggles with Neytiri and her not being accepting of him, or Neytiri's feelings for the culture of the Metkayina Clan, which would have greatly enriched the worldbuilding of the movie, her role overall was very diminished and was relegated more so to someone to contrast Jake's more militaristic style of parenting.

Heck, Spider is a fascinating character, and we get almost no exploration regarding his relationship with Neytiri and how she feels about him, we are only told, we are not

shown. Hell, she drags a dagger across his chest and we just... never acknowledge that? It also doesn't help that Jake does nothing to defend him from Neytiri's hypocrisy, after all, Jake himself used to be a human. If not a resolution, then at least the advancement of the plotline.

Lo'ak constantly tries to prove himself to his father, and Neteyam constantly covering for him gets worse and worse until Neteyam dies, turning him into a standard that Lo'ak can never possibly reach, but he serves the story better when he's dead, making his presence in the narrative much more sensitive and tension-inducing.

Kiri is a little simpler, but that doesn't mean she is obsolete, I believe her story is yet to be told and will be further corroborated by the next movie, though what we got from this movie was the basis for her character, not any real development for her, just discoveries of what she can and cannot do.

Quaritch is a serviceable villain, he still has the same personality but does not make the same mistakes he did the first film, he still sees himself as a patriot and as the most quintessential man, someone who carves nature to their will and is willing to do anything and go through anyone if it means accomplishing his objectives, though this is put to the test when he encounters Spider, his son.

And finally I would like to address a topic that is a little personal to me because of how much I enjoy doing it; culture and worldbuilding. Now it is no secret that a lot of research was done for both of these movies, not just the biology of the creatures, but the environment, music, day and night cycles, so much was done for the first movie that it was honestly quite insane, many people were hired for their expertise in a wide variety of fields, from meteorology, biology, ethnomusicologist (what the hell is even that, right?) and just so much more.

Now here is what I do not like when it comes to the Avatar universe is the way that it approaches its worldbuilding. A lot of stuff is merely relegated to the cutting room floor, not shown or implied in the movies but rather all left to the extra material to be fleshed out there, a "Pandora Survival Guide" came out plenty of time ago that detailed so many interesting aspects of Na'vi culture that were not even implied in the films, which brings me to my main point in this section, Avatar and James Cameron by association, is much more concerned with worldbuilding wider rather than deeper, throwing all of these interesting cultural aspects at us and implying so much more but not giving any of them time to breathe and fleshing them out. But there are some cases that do contradict me, such as in The Way Of Water when they talk

about... well, The Way Of Water, how it has no beginning and no end, explaining it as a form of philosophy from the Metkayina Clan, which is a neat little bit of worldbuilding.

But there is that phrase; “little bit.”

Avatar 2 blew people out of the water (pun completely intended) and while there are some inconsistencies, like where were the Metkayina in the final battle? They all suddenly disappeared before Jake went to fight Quaritch in the boat. But past that the film preaches a simple message and tells a simple but compelling story about family values and the connections we make, this movie feels much less like a movie and more of a passion project. The fact that the movie is simple does not mean that it is bad, and it makes me laugh that a lot of people can only criticize it by saying “AHA! It’s XYZ in space! That makes it terrible!” Even though that same concept could be applied to a lot of movies, it is fairer to say that it is what they do with the template that makes them good or bad.

I am not going to give Avatar 2: The Way Of Water a final score like I’m from Rotten Tomatoes because I believe that art cannot be truly rated on a numerical scale, because it means things for different people. But honestly, I do believe that it's good, it can seem a little hollow but it has a charm in its simplicity, though I do desperately want it to be more complex in order to capitalize on its world and characters better.

Watch the movie if you want. If you enjoyed the first movie, I am sure you will like this one as well.

## **RPGs Should Take Place In The Real World**

[2,759]

I love playing Dungeons & Dragons and other Tabletop Role Playing Games of its kind and that I enjoy playing them because of the fun, intrigue, suspense, and escapism that they can provide in the tumultuous world we live in. It is a fact that many people use media in order to escape what they see as the negative aspects of life, all the stressful and sometimes boring facets of it are not appealing, everyday it feels like the real world is becoming more and more inhospitable, so why would we want to experience a world so boring, when we can lose ourselves in the bizarrely fictional and fantastical?

The thing is, here is where me and a lot of other people differ. I think that RPG's and a lot more tabletop games should actually be set in the real world, with their own fictional features sure, but still the real, living, breathing world at the end of the day.

My first point here is that real life is not boring, not by a long shot. Fiction has to make sense, it must be straightforward, to an extent, in what it wants to accomplish, it has a three-act structure, recurring characters, and a climax in which everything falls into place or falls apart, the stories we tell through games like Dungeons & Dragons is similar, sure there might be some detours along the way, because God knows that plans concocted by the GM never survive first contact with the players, at least not fully.

But I hear so many people say that real life is just boring, that there is nothing interesting about it, and if they are not talking about all of history in general, then they are talking explicitly about the modern age, and I get that, we live in a world where we are constantly bombarded with information, we sent another animal into extinction yesterday, another forest has been turned into a parking lot, so on and so forth.

Let us look at the historical aspect first, you have the entirety of human kind's history at your disposal, what do you wanna do with it? You could make a game for your players set in the Golden Age Of Piracy, maybe one in the Napoleonic Wars, the beginning or the end of The Wild West, perhaps you could dig in deeper, what about the cold war? you could be spies. Or maybe even the Dark Ages, you could be knights and/or bandits trying to carve out a living as The Black Plague sweeps across Europe. The sky's the limit!

Want to be more recent? Sure! You and your friends are Miami Vice cops in search for the biggest drug bust in the history of the department. The party is now in Vietnam as a group of rogue journalists trying to get the truth out when they are intercepted by the Americans, or maybe you could drop them in Chernobyl as CIA Agents trying to sabotage

the nuclear power plant when it blows up on its own, with all of them suspecting some third-party fowl play.

Want it to be in the most recent time in history?

Well then, you could create your own situations, maybe there is a war, or a coup, or an espionage mission, or a smuggler for some big-shot in the criminal underworld. And even then there is just so much more.

Everyday in our world stories develop that could bring the most stoic man to tears. A man betrays his best friend for money and prestige, a child is forced to kill to save his family, an astrophotographer dies climbing a mountain to get the most perfect shot of the stars, a pianist loses his sight and must cope with a new reality. A million different, bizarre, weird, beautiful, ugly, sad and happy things happen all at once, but we often don't get to see them because of how our news feeds work, with what they try to feed us.

Reality is not truly boring, we just don't see enough of it to truly see what it has in store for us. Grittiness is another factor that I have to acknowledge, also known as being dark, edgy, violent and depressing, and I will not hide in naivete. Reality can be that and so much worse at times, not just depending on when but also where you live.

Pain is a part of reality, it is a very constant factor in our lives, but pain, misery and how it forces us to change is not what life revolves around, for some it is, because they let it, but not everyone is willing to submit themselves to that. Role-Playing Games are meant to be fun, and tell an interesting story with your friends, by setting your story in the real world you are giving your players more familiarity with the setting and allow them to explore their characters more so than the world, adding a layer of complexity to the game, but here comes to grittiness of reality; "People die, and everything sucks."

Our world is also full of beauty and splendor that many choose not to focus on, because they would much rather wallow in their own pessimism rather than even admit that the world has even a shred of, dare we even say, fantasy to it. There are so many stories that sound fictional, that sound like they were taken from a book, yet they happened, and we believed them.

Adding realism to your game always depends on what that realism accomplishes; do you want your players to feel tense? Or do you want to add certain realistic elements to make the world feel real? Maybe you think realism gets in the way of fun, and so you use it sparingly? Perfect, it's all just about making the game fun and interesting for your players.

It cannot be understated the sheer amount of potential that people are wasting by sticking to what feels comfortable and normal, by sticking to, usually, the same fantasy

setting with slight variations and no discernable differences other than a couple new names and new rulers. Variety is important in moderation, and using different settings, like taking from the real world, or just using the real world as a whole can be really rewarding, not just for the Game Master who will have an easier time coming up with environments, but also the players who might be fascinated by the setting and historical event, sometimes going out of their way to learn about it just to enjoy the game more.

Now, let us say that you do want to make a game set in the modern world, with as many fantastical aspects as you want, whether you lean more towards Fantasy or Science-Fiction, I only have one thing to tell you if you are going to do it;

Do **not** use Dungeons & Dragons for that game.

There is a very good reason why so many people get annoyed when someone insists that they utilize the D&D Fifth Edition system for games/campaigns that have almost nothing to do with D&D or fantasy in general, again it's because it's what they are used to, its baby's first RPG.

This last section of the blog is going to be a little more optional for you to read. If you are not interested in bringing more variety in games to your table, and merely want to stick to what you know and what your players like then that's perfectly fine. This part is more for those that are interested and would like some ideas for campaigns and actual games they could purchase in order to further explore the possibilities of table-top roleplaying games.

Here are some games you can buy for this purpose and why you should buy them;

## -GURPS

This neat masterpiece of a system also known as *Generic Universal RolePlaying System*, is by far one of the most in-depth and well-rounded RPG systems that can be used for almost anything you can dream up. If you can imagine it, chances are there is a set of instructions in *GURPS* to make that a reality. Aw, you have 362 spells in The Player's Handbook? Well *GURPS* magic users can pick from a total of 800+.

Whereas in Dungeons & Dragons you are chained to a class and what that class can do, *GURPS* allows you to be truly free and build things from the ground up, from your origin, your abilities, tools at hand, expertise, all of it. Bit of a warning however, it is a bit long, so I really suggest you start with *GURPS Lite*, its a basic distillations of all the rules in *GURPS*, its 32 pages if I remember correctly, then you can buy other versions of *GURPS* if you want to make a setting specific campaign, like *GURPS High Tech*, *GURPS Psionics*, *GURPS Camelot*, *GURPS Imperial Rome*, *Monster Hunters*, *World War 2*!

### -Kids On Bikes

Do you like *Stranger Things*? Do you also suffer from a crippling case of nostalgia for the 80s, a time you probably never even lived in? Then you are probably going to like this one a lot!

*Kids On Bikes* is a light-weight Sci-Fi RPG inspired by aesthetics and plots of popular stories like *Stephen King's IT*, *E.T The Extraterrestrial*, and shows like *Stranger Things*. In this Role-playing game you take control of a kid, teenager or older, who lives in a sleepy, suburban town, they might be going to school or have to deal with work, but they suddenly realize that something is invading their town, something much scarier than bullies, parents, or police.

The thing that I like most about this RPG is that the Game Master is not the only one to build the story and world, the players do that too! Before the game begins the players can collaborate with the GM to create the town, its residents, locations and more. If you want a game that is more collaborative in nature and allows you to take control of 80's cliches or more complex characters, from the geek to the jock, then *Kids On Bikes* is the game for you! Best part is that there is only one book you need to play it, and it's just 35 dollars on the company's website. There are also various add-ons for stuff, wanna be a witch or wizard? Buy *Kids On Brooms*.

### -Our Last Best Hope

Have you ever watched a disaster movie? Have you ever wondered what you would do if you were in a disaster movie? *Our Last Best Hope*, or OLBH abbreviated, is an RPG that lets you play a crew on a mission to save the world from a terrible catastrophe. If you have seen movies like *Armageddon*, *Deep Impact*, *The Core*, *Sunshine*, or more chaotic ones like *2012*, then I believe you will really like this one. Each game that you play is unique and interesting, every time that you play there will be a different crisis, different team with different skills, and the plan to save the world will either be the most convoluted mess imaginable or the most simple Michael Bay-esque maneuver ever.

It's a game for three to five players and it normal takes about two hours to play, and something that might turn you on or off about the game is that it does not require a Game Master for it to be played, nor do the players require any preptime before the game starts, the game is more so designed to be an epic one-shot experience that has a large variety of stories to tell! Give it a shot, if you enjoyed those movies, I'm sure you will like this.

## -GUMSHOE

This system is mostly designed to play games oriented towards mystery and suspense, to conduct investigations and emulate stories like those from *Clue* or *Sherlock Holmes/Hercule Poirot* novels, you take the clues you find and try to solve the mystery that is being a problem for the players.

GUMSHOE is an interesting system for those that want to create a thriller or mystery story and take the players through a suspenseful rollercoaster with twists and turns. The game is more about interpreting clues rather than just finding them, and the players will have to rely on their smarts and actual deductive reasoning in order to solve the problem at hand, there is also the fact that while the system itself is pretty simple, and it is not that hard to understand, there are plenty of other books for different settings that can spice up your game if you allow them, like *Ashen Stars* (2011) which is a gritty space opera in which the main characters are freelance troubleshooters working in a remote region of space known as The Bleed. There is *Bubblegumshoe* (2016) which is more about teenage detectives in modern, small USA towns. With my favorite ones being *The Esoterrorists* (2007), which is about the main characters combating occult terrorist who want to destroy the fabric of reality, and *Mutant City Blues* (2009) set in a world where 1% of the population has gained mutant powers, and the main characters are tasked with solving crimes in the mutant community.

If mystery and suspense is more your jam, then I really suggest you try out GUMSHOE.

## -Fate Core

The Fate Core system is incredibly varied and versatile, you can do almost anything in this system, it's quite like GURPS in the sense that you can build your character however you like, meaning you could also adapt it to work in the modern world and it won't take that much effort.

I am not going to go over the same points I made in the GURPS session, but there are plenty of campaigns that already exist that you can use however you want, there is one already that is based on the popular urban fantasy series *The Dresden Files*. Not only is it easier to learn than most RPGs but it is also a truly "Universal" RPG, I have played as a tiny mouse, I have played as a Cartoon Character that got transported to the real world, I have played as my cringeworthy OCs from when I was ten years old, the skies the limit here!



That and it's only 25\$ for the [book and pdf on its website](#), or you can just get the pdf for the price of your choice!

Ideas for campaigns, use them if you want:

-A group of children in the small town of Grimechapel, Missouri are being terrorized by a leathery, winged beast who forces the children to band together, face their fears and defeat the creature.

-Months before the Fall Of Rome, a small detachment of centurions receive a vision of Julius Caesar's assassinations at the hands of the senate, and Rome's demise. But they are not the only ones to have received visions of the future.

-During an exploration in the arctic tundra, the players discover a hidden, ancient city hidden underground, seemingly abandoned, but not completely deserted.

-As the player character's go on a relaxing summer cruise across the Atlantic, the captain notifies them that they have received a transmission from their sister ship, The Unquenchable, a ship that disappeared 50 years ago.

-Journey To The Center Of The Earth, or Around The World In Eighty Days... you know what just rip-off your favorite author, like Jules Verne, that usually works.

-In the vast reaches of Metropolis, a ritual has begun, meant to awaken an eldritch entity meant to destroy and remake the world anew, the players are tasked to discover and destroy the dastardly cult's plan.

-Take the role of the Knights Of The Round Table as you are sent out on quests ranging from rescuing damsels from wells, to slaying dragons in the world of Camelot

-When the god's decided that mankind is not worthy of its existence, a tournament is set up; The Greatest Champions Of Mankind VS The Greatest Of The Gods, but not everything is at it seems, pantheons scheme with one another, and an entity roams the halls of the tournament arena, killing unsuspecting participants.

-A group of friends hangs out in their apartment when a four-way battle between Kaiju's breaks out in their city. Alone, with no military support, no electricity and a constantly mutating environment, they must learn how to survive and escape with their lives.

-When the treasure of a great pirate is found by Queen Elizabeth I, a great race is organized to see who will win it; pirates, marines, merchants, all ready their ships to compete and walk away with the treasure known as The Bounty Of The New World.

## **Improving Romance In Role-Playing Games**

[1,425]

Romance is an interesting concept to talk about when we start discussing game mechanics, especially those in RPGs, be they in a videogame format or in a pen and paper game you can play with your friends online or in your house's basement. Relationships are complicated and require work from both parties in order to function, nevermind the fact that its not always NPC/PC but it might sometimes be between two player characters.

The problem comes from the fact that Romance, or relationship building more broadly, when it is in a game-like setting, is often more determined by mechanics rather than player input. Those being romanced are often just recipients of affection in videogames and don't have much agency, whereas players romancing characters created and portrayed by a GM have more options, since the mechanics of tabletop roleplaying games do not restrict roleplay too much. But is there any such way to improve them?

To start, we will go over what videogames do with Romance. More often than not, there comes a point in the game in which the player has a variety of options available for a romantic partner to pursue, oftentimes we have cliches and archetypes being used as the base for their personality, though unfortunately some of them don't evolve past these cliches, their simplicity sometimes being their appeal.

One is often picked and followed through with, usually it has to do with choosing just the right dialogue options (thank internet tutorials for that) and completing a quest-line related to their backstory or current predicament, then there it is, you are in their pants, congratulations.

Needless to say, while the system works perfectly, there is no reason as to why it cannot be improved, many video games have already done so, and the solutions I propose have more to do with making the relationship feel warm, organic, and good for the player to actively participate in.

We should take some cues from franchises like Witcher, which, regardless of the option picked, the stories between the player character and NPC are interesting to follow and a unique chemistry comes from such interactions. Another thing we could implement is the idea of "caring" for one's romance, small gestures like gifts, or dates, conversations, all serving towards the strengthening of the relationship. Though because this is a video game, there has to be some form of reward involved, which can take away from the story if we only pick a character to romance based on their healing skills, but such things are to be expected, every player deserves to play in whatever way they want, after all.

Though it might sound preposterous, relationships failing in these sorts of games, or at least the possibility of them failing might serve to implement more emotional stakes for the player. Even character death that cannot be undone is an option, sure, it is sadistic, but we create relationships despite the possibility of hurt and pain. It might break into the player's wish fulfillment, which I can understand and sympathize with, but these would make romance in video games more dynamic.

Heck, as an added bonus, you could have different endings for your character depending on who you pick as spouse, the story wouldn't be too affected, but you could be told what kind of life you lead with them after the story is over, it has potential.

Now, let us move on to the not-at-all tranquil world of tabletop roleplaying games. If browsing through RPG Horror Stories has taught me anything, it is that setting boundaries is extremely important, you must always quickly establish what your players are and aren't comfortable with, and work with that, do not try to force it or bend it, simply abide.

But before we discuss this further we must establish something really early on;

Why do you want to include romance in your game at all?

For some people, and quite understandably, romance might not be something they are looking for when they come to the table, not even the GM, and that is perfectly okay, because these games are that, games, and we are all here to have fun first and foremost. Romance can be fun, if done well, but in order to justify the following rants, here are some reasons why you might want to include romance in your game:

- It can be an interesting source of character development, creating bonds with others might cause the recluse rogue to open up and falling in love with someone might make them realize that they have finally found something they do not want to lose. Even unremarkable NPC's can become memorable if involved in something like a romance plot, though it is not intrinsically necessary.
- When it comes to romance between players, it can often be a natural outgrowth from their roleplay and social dynamic, so it makes sense that it would be pursued, in a comfortable manner of course.
- And finally; it's just fun, it can sometimes be a fun way for your players to fool around. So long as everyone is having fun and this is the type of game you want to play and run, there should be no issue. It can be an epic romance

that will play a role in the fall of kingdoms, or it can be a sitcom-tier romp that makes everyone laugh.

Now that you have established exactly why you want to have romance in your game, and established firm boundaries so that you don't make any other players uncomfortable, we can finally start with the suggestions I have concocted in order to make romance be more enjoyable and interesting for all the people involved in your adventures.

One of the first things I would like to say, and excuse me for giving up all purple prose to be blunt here but—

DO NOT USE D&D OR OTHER TABLETOP RPGS TO EXPLORE YOUR ROMANTIC FEELINGS FOR SOMEONE ELSE AT THE TABLE.

HALT!

CEASE!

NO!

ROLLED UP NEWSPAPER!

If you have romantic feelings for someone and want to pursue their character because of it, you need to wash your soul, deadass. Using such methods to get close to someone can feel very manipulative and abusive of a player's trust in you and the Game Master.

Other players not being alienated and remaining comfortable is paramount for people to have fun, remember that. Because sadly, sometimes romance can take a turn for the very awkward, be it because of the Game Master or the players themselves. Now, after firmly establishing boundaries and making sure that you do indeed want romance in your game, here are the following suggestions from me in order to make it better and more enjoyable.

The first one that when romance does happen, take it as seriously as the players want to take it seriously, unless there needs to be more dramatic tension and/or humorous relaxation, the thing is that usually players are the ones to initiate the romance plots and so when you (supposedly the GM) sees it, you must respond accordingly, relax and go with the flow. Though if the players are not mature enough to handle such subject-matter then don't even try.

Know how to administer your time as a GM, when your characters fall in love, don't turn them into instant Casanovas, and similarly, do not sacrifice the personality, conflicts and character traits of your non-player characters in order to facilitate romance for the players, their personality is what endeared them in the first place. And if two characters fall in love, make it believable, and give enough information for the players to care about what happens.

Also “evil villain falls for good hero” is an alright thing to do, but make it believable and interesting.

Another thing, and the more fun advise in this list is to mix things up, use married characters to highlight societal rules in a new nation the players are visiting, maybe one of your player characters unintentionally courted a highly coveted bachelor and now they must fight their hordes of suitors just so the player character will be left alone. One specific aspect I would like to highlight is that matches made in heaven are hardly interesting, conflict however, is. Allow your players to be comfortable and then give them a problem they can’t just solve with a good roll or magical abilities.

And finally, consider putting forth barriers that make the relationship workable but difficult, making things not just narratively interesting but make them seem like a fun challenge for the players themselves to tackle.

Also have fun!

Thank you for reading and have a wonderful day!

## **Tarkovski's STALKER & The Power Of Belief**

[1,675]

"Stalker is from the word 'to stalk'—to creep."

-Andrei Tarkovski.

*Journal Entry, 1976.*

Who are we at the end of the world? Can we cling on to what we believe in when the world around us changes, to the point that we no longer recognize it? The streets are uneven, eyes no longer look, but glare with suspicion and people refuse to believe in anything better or greater, be it themselves or something we can no longer see.

But we can see it, faith and belief can shape our reality, it can drive us forward or send us back, it can turn us into heroes for the oppressed and persecuted or twist us into monsters of rabid ignorance, but above all else, it helps us to see the world in ways we never dreamt of before.

I was raised Catholic for a large part of my life, and to this day, I still have doubts, not about God's existence, I am very certain that it can never be answered or truly proven and I am fine with that, but more so about if the way I see the world, through my own eyes, brown eyes, is real or not. Am I seeing the world in a way that makes me miserable or in one that makes me see light at the end of every tunnel?

STALKER follows three people, whose names we shall never know, a Writer, a Professor, the Stalker, as they go into the mysterious and forbidden place known simply as "The Zone." In this world, Stalkers are known as people that guide others through The Zone, often in the search of something they don't know if they'll ever find. All of them go into this deathly, beautiful place, where vegetation grows, unbroken by the might of capital and industry as they carve man-made structures to their will, where time and space are distant maybe's, all in search of a "Room," a place which is said to grant the wishes of those that step inside, so long as the wish is what they truly desire in their hearts.

The Stalker believes in the room without question, he has an unwavering belief in the power of it, seeing as how other people he has known have gotten what they have desired, even though some of them were worse off than others in the end; as shown by poor, poor Porcupine, who killed himself before the events of the story.

The Writer and the Professor go there for their own reasons. The Professor is fascinated by the idea of the Room and wants to see it for himself, questioning its very

existence much like the Writer. But what does the Writer want? He doesn't even know, he says he wants inspiration, he says he wants to be successful, he finally admits that he doesn't even know what he wants.

Throughout the film, as the three of them travel through The Zone, the Stalker performs very strange customs and rituals which don't make sense to either the Writer or the Professor, tossing metal bolts wrapped in white clothes in which-ever direction they are going. The Zone does not follow a clean form of logic, only the Stalker knows what it does, as he says all the "traps" The Zone lays change every time a new person enters it. The Stalker made them promise to follow his directions, but his two companions are consumed by their fears and doubts.

No one knows the true nature of the world, how things really work, not in the physical or scientific sense but rather in the meta-physical, we see no red strings when we make our choices, nor do we know what awaits us after every step, for any step we take can be our last, or our first. The Writer is someone I really related with in this story, as a fellow writer myself, though I may not be plagued with doubts regarding the state of the world, I am haunted by the idea that I may not know who I truly am or what I truly want.

*"My conscience wants vegetarianism to win over the world. And my subconscious is yearning for a piece of juicy meat. But what do I want?"*

The Writer is a figure of uncertainty, of yearning and desiring to be something more, yet he finds meaning within his art, he sees the world in the way an artist would, he marvels at the nature of The Zone and, though with uncertainty, trusts the Stalker to show them the way. Yet this man broke my heart yet again with how he spoke of his craft, because his carapace of contemplation hid something frail, something vulnerable.

*"You put your heart and soul into your work and they devour you. They even devour the filth in your soul. They're all literate. They all have voracious appetites. They all keep crowding around - journalists, editors, critics, a constant stream of women. All of them clamoring for more. What kind of writer am I if I detest writing? It's torture for me, a painful, shameful occupation, something akin to extruding hemorrhoids. I used to think my books helped people to become better, but nobody needs me. If I die, in a couple of days, they'll find someone else to devour. I wanted to change them, but they've changed me to fit their own image."*

The Professor is a man that follows reason, he is the very first one to doubt the nature of The Zone as well as the mere existence of a "wish-granting room," a man seeking scientific discovery, even through illegal means such as entering The Zone. There are times in

which he debates the Writer, who talks about finding beauty and truth through art and science. Though he follows The Stalker's advice, he insists on taking his backpack with him and is more interested in earning a Nobel Prize for his scientific analysis of The Zone, which he finds ever-elusive and often contradictory. He shows us the way that some other people view the world, with a desire to find its secrets, and discover how it works as best they can, a noble pursuit to be perfectly honest.

But he is not here for a Nobel Prize.

Later on in the film, he reveals that in his backpack, he carries a small 20-Kiloton bomb which he plans to use to destroy the Room. And I could see why he wanted to, a room that grants a man's wishes is a dangerous thing, and could be used by evil men, and The Stalker is terrified, not by the idea of evil men using the room, but by the mere idea of destroying it.

**Stalker:** *What are you up to, Professor?*

**Professor:** *Imagine what will happen when everyone believes in this Room and when they all come hurrying here. It's only a question of time. Not today, but tomorrow. And in the thousands. All these would-be emperors, grand inquisitors, fuhrers of all shades. The so-called saviors of mankind! And not for money or inspiration, but to remake the world.*

**Stalker:** *I'll never bring that sort here.*

**Professor:** *What do you understand? You're not the only stalker in the world. No stalker knows what ideas the people you bring here take away with them.*

The Professor does not hate the room, but is not ignorant to the danger it poses, whereas The Stalker vehemently disagrees with him and the three of them fight over the bomb when they reach the Room, even though both The Writer and The Professor have trouble believing in the Room's power, which is never revealed to be truth or lie to the viewer.

Porcupine, that affectionate nickname, was given to the stalker that taught our Stalker, the one we see in the film, and is said to have become rich after entering the room. The Writer has a realization, everyone who enters the "Room" does not state their wishes, but instead listens to the wishes inside someone's heart, your deepest desires, whether you are conscious about them or not.

The reason Porcupine killed himself is because when he entered the "Room" to wish for his brother to be resurrected after he had died, the Room granted him immense wealth instead and he couldn't live with himself after realizing that he wanted to be wealthy more than he wanted his brother back.



The Writer realizes that no one in the whole world can know their true desires, therefore meaning that no one can use The Zone for selfish means, The Professor disarms the bomb and dumps each individual, disassembled part it in a nearby body of water in the industrial building where the Room is.

The Stalker is a man who is seeking asylum from the world, he sees everyone as lost, unable to see the world as beautiful or believing in anything greater than themselves. Everyone is miserable in STALKER, they are prisoners of an ugly time that chews them out, from the Stalker who feels like he has no purpose, to the Writer who feels lost in a world of literary madness, and the Professor, who can't see the world past what can be analyzed and understood.

All of them, all three of them are symbols of what it means to be human, to yearn for something that is simultaneously so far away we can barely see it, but is at the same time deep inside of us, able to be grasped for those that look inward with enough time. Faith is a powerful thing, it can shape worldviews, bridge gaps in understanding and make friends out of enemies, but faith can never be used as a substitute for humanity, for humanness and for the kindness we can show to those we can't always see in our lives in an increasingly hostile and ever-changing world, after all...

*“There's no need to speak. You must only - concentrate and recall all your past life. When a man thinks of the past, he becomes kinder.”*

## **The Absence Of Optimism In Modern Sci-fi**

[2,487]

Being an optimist is hard, rejecting nihilism and pessimism is hard, especially in tumultuous times such as these ones. We are connected more so than ever before, which reveals to us the way of living of many people and allows us to speak with them, but at the same time, we created an artificial environment that thrives on telling us how many species we sent into extinction in the past hour, how the world is doomed and we have no time, how climate change is unstoppable, and how we live in a system that will chew us up and spit us out with the least amount of regard for our safety, health or well-being. It seems, on all fronts and sides, that we are very far away from what our grandparents envisioned, what they fell in love with, when they thought that space was like the frontier, a place where a man could carve a place for his own with his two hands, a blaster and a crew of friends he could trust.

Sometimes I am happy that they are dead, for I fear what they would think if they lived in the horrid now.

Throughout human history and much of our daily lives, we cannot help but look towards the future, with what lens or emotions, it mainly comes down to the person envisioning it. As the current of times have eroded and shaped the rock that is the human race, we often did more than just speculate about how the future could or should be, we wrote and we wrote, and we spread our ideals all over the world, not just with friends or family. One such example, and a favorite of mine, is Jule Verne's *Paris In The 20th Century*, which predicted many things about our world, both economically and socially speaking. The technology described in the book is very similar to the ones in 1960, where the book's plot takes place. Cars powered by advanced combustion engines, primitive computers that can send messages through something very similar to the internet, weapons of mass destruction, wind power and mass higher education. Funnily enough, the initial publisher rejected it because he thought this book's predictions were "too unbelievable."

Well, we have all those things and more now.

The invention of the internet did something... grand, for us. The internet connected us, suddenly we could see how other people lived, what we could learn about the ocean, is the moon really made of cheese? Is God, in reality, a dragon? It was an infinite wellspring of information, and by its mere existence, a veil was lifted, a wall was broken.

Such an invention made us witness atrocities we would not have even heard of or seen on TV, we saw cruel and rabid men, genocide and crimes against the very concept of kindness and suddenly realized, that there are problems that a simple punch to the bad guys mouth can't fix, not forever at least. This flow of information made itself more refined, bigger, more efficient as the years went on, and we witnessed more... so much more, things that no child or man or elder should ever have to see in their lengthy years of life.

Our expectations of the future have changed because of what we have witnessed, some issues were revealed to us as systemic, meaning no single bad man was causing them, but an entire hierarchy, an entire system that was accepted as "perfect," when in reality it makes untold millions suffer under a cruel heel just for profit margins to be properly met. We saw the rise of an economic class that would rather watch us starve and die and suffer than for them to pay their fair share, we laid ourselves witness to wars and calamities that showed us the absolute worst of humankind, and what it can birth when we abandon all forms of kindness to our fellow man.

Everything around us just seems to be a constant cycle of stagnation and absurdity, long gone are the times when we trekked across the surface of the moon, times when men braved the oceans in search for adventure in the high seas, and long gone are the times in which we thought the world was just our neighborhoods and nothing more. Now we live in an era without achievements, without positive strives, the news cycle being a perpetual machine that tells us constantly how we are dying, how there is no hope, how we slaughtered an entire species of animals yesterday, and how it is *oh so great* that neither you nor your children will ever be able to afford a home of their own.

The human race is an organism that thrives on the idea "to persevere through," regardless of what it is, with the promise that a greener field lies beyond a thunderous ocean tide, a man will dive into that ocean and swim with its hands and feet to reach those fields, if only to build a bridge from those same green shores to the other side, so that others may join him and revel in the shade and the sunshine.

But there is no sunshine.

Promises of greener fields stopped having an effect a long time ago.

The internet, and hundreds of doctors, professors and scientists told me the green fields died when we dumped toxic waste where they used to be. Now therein lies nothing but a field, a field of oil and ruin.

In other news, the profits of the company responsible just went up by 300% since last year.

Mental health is important, if the mind cannot get out of bed, if the mind cannot comprehend a task, how can you expect the body to do so? How can we be expected to work ourselves to death with a smile on our faces, when we barely have time to go home and enjoy a hobby or watch a movie or hang out with friends? Your life is meant to revolve around your work, and if you don't do so, then you are a lazy, filthy "silent-quitter" and you must be punished for not wanting to feed your soul to the cold, silent machine.

People have changed, because as technologies became more available, we are now subject to different problems and anxieties than those of our grandfathers and older family members, now they must continue with the honored tradition of telling their children; "Your problems do not compare to my own, I suffered more than you, and I didn't cry about it." Because their grandfathers did the exact same thing to them.

A rise in mental health awareness and illness has taught us that this constant pressure, not of just our workplace or physical selves but the very mind working against itself, will break us if we do not achieve proper balance between work and home. Your work does not need to be your life, your life is your life, your work is your work, just because your boss gave you a pizza party once doesn't mean you owe him your undying loyalty, not entirely, you owe loyalty to yourself, your interests and your well-being, because no one will look out for them for you.

It's up to you.

Optimism is hard in the face of overwhelming adversity, and I get that, it is very easy to fall into nihilism and pessimism, to believe that nothing is going to change and that it's hopeless to even think about change, that so long as you have your videogames or your mediocre hollywood movies and your junkfood you will be alright, so long as no one takes any of those things away from you, what's the point in revolutionary thought? What's the point of wanting to change things for the better?

Most of the science fiction we see produced today have been strongly worded warning about what will happen to us in the future should we allow rampant indifference and cruelty to flood our hearts and society (can't take that word seriously anymore) at large. We have seen many examples of this, one of my favorites is *The Fifth Element*.

You might be going; "What? *The Fifth Element*? What are you talking about? The movie did not revolve around a dystopia as a whole, it was more about aliens and love and...

stuff.” And I do understand your confusion, why wouldn’t I mention stories more shocking and horrible like *Blade Runner*, *Soylent Green* or *Children Of Men*? And while those movies are unnerving and are talked about plenty enough, the thing about *The Fifth Element* that really got under my skin about its dystopia was not all the aliens and mercenaries and difference between our world and its world.

But rather... in how similar everything was.

Its 2263.

240 years from me writing this blog.

And no matter how many flying cars I saw, no matter how many aliens or wonderful technologies I witnessed, society at large seemed to remain the same. A veteran needs to become a taxi driver because we haven’t sold poverty and homelessness yet. Entire industries are monopolistically controlled by the tycoons who hired millions of workers on a whim to save some money, and the poor workers who slave away for a chance at peace and placidity are bombarded with ads to luxurious space ship cruisers that they will never be able to afford, nothing but an attraction to the ultra-rich and powerful. Our government, the body of people meant to keep us safe, has shown time and time again that they are willing to sell us out if it means saving their necks.

Tell me, how is any of that any different from the world of today? Be honest.

*Children Of Men* showed us what would happen if people suddenly stopped having babies, specifically because of a sort of infertility, and after a war and a global pandemic pushing society to the brink.

Does that sound familiar?

The reason why we have so very few optimistic science fiction stories and why the ones we do have no longer succeed is because the warnings we were so often told about have come true, we don’t need anymore cyberpunk dystopia movies because we are in one, we just lack all the neon and cool prosthetics, we are already there in all but aesthetic aspects.

What is optimism?

I know the literal definition, but I am asking for a more personal truth, what does being an optimist mean to you?

Toxic positivity, the idea that we must always be positive and never allow ourselves to be sad or doubtful, is a damaging one, and I am not advocating for it, by all means, be fearful, be careful and unload your pain and frustrations in a healthy way. But what I am mostly

referring to is the idea that things will just work out and we just shouldn't do anything about the current state of the world because things will just magically figure themselves out.

That idea is a joke.

What I am referring to is the idea of still seeing possibilities for things to be better and following the steps necessary to enact change within your community, to have solidarity with your fellow man and work together to make the world a better place for all your human siblings, both those that work and those that don't.

Back in the old days, if we can even call them that anymore, we were witnessing an age of unprecedented technological advancement, never mind the social change that we were achieving, that cannot be undermined or underestimated either. This caused us to look to the future with wide eyes but ones that did not let themselves be blinded, in most of science fiction we wrote at the time, we treated space much like the Wild West, a place where men, women, everyone, would be able to carve nature to our will, where we would not have to worry about anything, even money, because we would grow past the need for such a thing.

We had many works of science fiction that exemplified such futures, Star Trek chief among them, though there were many after, that show, and its many movies and multimedia projects, still tell us of what the human race will achieve if we just set aside our differences and work together for the benefit of our fellow man.

And in my opinion, we should have more stories like that.

Now, do not get me wrong, we still need science fiction that slaps us in the face and shows us what terrible consequences will befall us if we do not get our act together and well... act. But we also need works of science fiction that shows us a comforting, if slightly ludicrous future, in order to inspire others to be better, heck, if doing that is pointless or just doesn't work as many claim, then why did so many people gravitate towards the myths and legends of their respective cultures and their heroes? Why do we still gravitate towards larger than life people who have never existed?

Superman.

Many people say that he is antiquated, that he needs to **wake up** and realize that his ways of optimism, of altruism are nothing but a thing of the past, and that he needs to move on, and those people, in their foolishness, confuse cynicism with wisdom, and align much more with Lex Luthor's view of the world, than they would with someone like Batman or even Spider-Man.

The reason why I choose to reference this is the fact that we can still make stories like this, and we still do, we just don't see them as much, because the media around us keep

bombarding us with the horrible facts of the world and those at the top laugh as they see things happen, because they know that it will never affect them.

But that should not and in fact cannot stop us from looking towards the future with hope. Just like how writing and making Superman interesting requires some form of skill and different forms of challenging him, we should look at the issues we have in our world today and reflect them in the science fiction we write, offering solutions and explaining in those movies how humanity in those realities fixed the problem. That should not be the only purpose of science fiction, entertainment and adventure are perfectly valid avenues to follow, but we must not forget that the original purpose of science fiction was to explore ideas.

To finalize, science fiction can be so much more than reflection of the dystopia we live in today, and we must balance both the optimism of tomorrow and the dangerous reality of today as best we can, so that we don't just overindulge in blind optimism or constantly wallow in self-apologetic despair.

Many thanks for reading.