

Stranger with strange demand: Find proof of the firmament

To be read with April 1 in mind. I don't know why I thought the man in the University of Michigan's Ruthven Museum strange looking. His clothing was ordinary middle-class garb. Perhaps it was that I couldn't tell his age. He was slender and had the smooth skin of youth, but the eyes were deep-set like an old man's.

With an open notebook balanced on his hand, he studied a model of the ancient view of the universe: a flat continent surrounded by seas, a vaulted ceiling overhead, with stars set in the ceiling.

As he slapped the notebook shut, I caught the name of Bryan Williams on the cover. "Enough!" he said to no one in particular, but since I was the only person around, I judged he was addressing me.

"A pox on their space shots," he continued. I took it to mean the Columbus space mission which was in last week's news.

"You think space shots are a waste of money?" I asked.

"SECULAR," the old-young man replied. "The secular scientists alone



Tim Richard

have the ear of Congress. Every cent of scientific money they can get their ungody hands on, they use to promote their own perverted view of the universe.

"What is our national science money being used for?" Without waiting for my answer, he went on. "For purely secular science. Test-tube babies. Tampering with genes. Psychological experiments."

"Does any scientific money go for research into the soul? No. Only to study the chemistry and cells of the brain. Does anyone study the life in blood? No, only its chemical properties."

"And space shots — does anyone use them for anything but demonstrating the laws of purely physical science and secular geology?"

Common sense told me to get away from this guy, but the newsman's instinct prevailed over common sense. "What would you use our scientific money for?" I asked.

"A SPACE SHOT to the firmament," he shot back, the light in his dark eyes blowing brighter.

"A space shot to prove biblical science. Genesis 1:6: 'Then God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters to divide the waters. And so it was.' God made the firmament dividing the waters that were below the firmament from those that were above it."

That was why he was looking at the model of the ancient view of the universe. That vaulted ceiling over the world — that was the firmament. And he was proposing to shoot a United States rocket to reach it.

Bryan Williams went on: "Genesis 1:14: 'And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate day from night; let them serve as signs and for the fixing of seasons, days and years. . . and He made the stars. God set them in the firmament of the heavens to shed light upon the earth.'"

WILLIAMS DREW a paper from his notebook, a petition. "These space shots are childish," he said. "I propose to run for Congress and seek appropriations for the most visionary space shot of human history," he said, showing the petition to me.

"I want to put down, once and for all, this poppycock about a 'big bang' theory, with the galaxies exploding from a single point in the universe six billion years ago."

"What is out there, beyond all the planets, is not a juggle of galaxies. The firmament, a fixed ceiling with water above it, is out there, and the stars are embedded into the firmament. The revealed word of the Bible tells us so, and as a congressman I could see that money is appropriated to prove it."

"I mumbled my apologies and said I couldn't sign a petition because I'm a working newsman who shouldn't get involved, then finally told a lie and said I was Canadian."

Whew, a space shot to the firmament. I go to the Ruthven Museum to get away from suburban politics and study dinosaur fossils and bump into that guy.

No, I'll stick with Carl Pursell and the Gypsy Moths, thank you, April Fool.

What we need now is . . .

Every day I run into someone who wants to tell me what this country needs.

One day the days when all the country needed was a good five-cent cigar or a tomato that tasted like a tomato and not a catfished sponge.

Now we need, depending on your viewpoint, such things as either a massive public effort to stop nuclear weapon production in the U.S. and Russia, or a massive effort to equip us with enough warheads to deter the Soviets from running amok.

What we need, the Realtors say, is an easing off of the tight money policy so that hard-working Americans can once again realize the American dream of owning one's own mini-mansion in the suburbs.

ACCORDING TO one labor expert, a Ph.D. from Wayne State University, the country is going to take it on the chin because of the labor concessions.

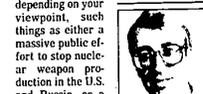
He said concessions — those already granted and those that will be granted in the future as a host of companies ask their employees to jump on the concession bandwagon — will lower the standard of living.

What this country needs, he said, are things which will save employers money without reducing the standard, such as a national health insurance plan. The plan could be funded with money from the federal arms budget, so taxes wouldn't have to be increased, he said.

Personally, I feel that the country really needs a Richard Nixon. Not to lead the government out of the chaos that he helped lead it into, but to provide the kind of villain we can boo and hiss while we work on our last-ditch plan for survival.

IT WAS much more fun to yell and jeer about the government when we were learning how bad Nixon, Haldeman, Mitchell, Liddy, Hunt had carried on at the country's helm. Ronald Reagan and his appointees just don't constitute the necessary cast of no-goodniks.

You can only get so excited about James Watts and Donald Stockman.



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comment

The Oscar Losers:

Most of the so-called movie experts have made their predictions on who will win the Oscars at tonight's Academy Awards ceremony. But for another view of the Oscar hullabaloo, consider this exclusive list of nominees who will absolutely not win an award this evening.

These performances or parts were so bad that not even the shortsighted provincials and mawkish sentimentals who dominate the voting each year would include these on their ballots.

Best picture: Indiana Jones faces his toughest challenge. Can he snatch the Oscar off the pavilion for "Raiders of the Lost Ark" before the Fonda clan or the British pygmy men beat him to the loot? Non-stop action isn't enough. Jones will be trampled underfoot.

Best actor: Does a constant high-pitched, irritating laugh and stumbling around in a drunken stupor constitute a good performance these days? If so, Dudley Moore would have this category sewed up for "Arthur." Most voters don't drink as much as Arthur did.



Richard Lech

Best actress: Maybe if she billed herself as Mrs. Neil Simon, Marsha Mason would pull in some votes. All these "Only When I Laugh" nominations were thrown in just to pad out the list of nominees and tonight she won't even get a chuckle.

Best supporting actor: James Coco is a heavy contender but carries little weight with academy voters. His role in "Only When I Laugh" was so light that if he had jumped out of a second-story window it would have taken him a half-hour to land.

Best supporting actress: The suicide of Melinda Dillon's character did not come soon enough for suffering viewers of "Absence of Malice."

Best director: Steven Spielberg's "Raiders" was more fun than any of the nominated films. But award-winning directing is usually based on inducing acting performances, not arranging a series of stunning stunts.

And, yes, I have a list of blue-chippers. Here are the winners of tonight's Academy Awards. Not the films that should win, the films that will win.

In the best picture category, "On Golden Pond" will triumph, despite the fact that it is based on a

Anybody can pick the Oscar winners

terrible play. Much of the humor is based on old people belting out obscenities and 80-year-old (in the film) Henry Fonda lip-sing about lesbians.

Still, it's the kind of movie sentimentalists like and it has the added advantage of being bofo at the box office, something the balloters always enjoy. For an added filip, it follows the Hollywood vogue of having an abundance of four-letter words.

"Reds" will not win. It's a bad year for Communists, even for such an equivocating dramatization of the Russian Revolution. "Atlantic City" has won plenty of awards from the critics, but what do they know? As one old-time Hollywood producer would say, Atlantic has "the Art Taint." "Raiders of the Lost Ark" would be a sure winner if the average Academy member was 12 years old.

One of my colleagues insists "Chariots of Fire" will win because it's a good film. Hah, even if that were a consideration, Chariot is British and it's about track and field. Those two items provide the kiss of death and the coup de grace.

As for best actor, Henry Fonda obviously is going to win for "Golden Pond." He did a good job in the role and the entire movie was centered around the character he played. Since he's in failing health and has never before won an Oscar, there will be a congressional investigation if he doesn't win the award.

Katharine Hepburn is not as much of a shoo-in for best actress. No. 1, she's won the award several times previously. No. 2, she seems to be in much better health. No. 3, her role in "Pond" was dwarfed by the Fonda character. Kate will be challenged by Meryl Streep, but the sentimentalists will give her another Oscar.

"Arthur" was the most overpraised motion picture since "Easy Rider," but John Gielgud was excellent as the butler. That's only because he's excellent in any role he plays. He will win for the best supporting actor.

As for best supporting actress, I'm tempted to imitate Bill Murray and say, "Who cares?" Jane Fonda at 44 still impresses in her "Golden Pond" bathing-suit scenes, but that has nothing to do with acting. Maureen Stapleton for "Reds" gets the nod.

The smart money says Warren Beatty will get the best director award for "Reds" as compensation because the movie will not win best picture. That's sound reasoning, but not sound enough. Mark Rydell will ride "Golden Pond's" coattails to the honor.

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