

Canister and the Oracle's Necktie, 6 cards by Gerald Saul, 2013

When I was a kid, I traded bubble gum cards to be part of my social group, but I never cared if I had any specific sports players. Collecting sets only became important to me with the introduction of non-sports cards such as those based upon movies or tv shows: "Battlestar Galactica", "Charlie's Angels", or "Logan's Run". The cards were numbered and a set would give you a complete story told in photos and fragments of text. Returning to these cards years later, the narrative is far from clear. Instead of illuminating the events within the pictures, the text always seemed to allude to events that would only be comprehensible by someone who is imminently familiar with the original story. To a new reader, the illustrations were nothing short of baffling. With faded memory, these cards now substitute for any real understanding I had for the source material, forcing me to fill in new threads, writing a new film which may well be better than the original.

This series of "Canister and the Oracle's Necktie" cards uses obtuse didactics, illustrated by my photo collages, to suggest a fragmented story of much grander proportions than what can be presented here. As a reader struggles to make sense of the disparate ideas (suggested by the image as well as the text on the front and on the back of the card), a new narrative forms. I once learned the hard way that the story someone imagines from your suggestions is all too often better than the one you are actually telling. The key to a good tale is in what is not told.

As a professor of filmmaking at the University of Regina, it is necessary for me to maintain a active creative practice. However, since I prioritize my teaching duties, I find it difficult to create long works which require months of production to complete. Therefore, I focus on short films production, keeping my skills and imagination honed through the sporadic, but prolific, generation of diverse experimental, animated, documentary, or narrative projects. The use of appropriated video is one method of creativity I occasionally engage in, assembling post-modern pastiches from previously shot video or photographs of my own along with that of others.

The collage images within these "Canister" cards are constructed from frames of video extracted from 1940s-1960s films available in the public domain through the Prelinger Archive (part of the internet archive as www.archive.org). Prelinger is a collector of films of that era which were made for instructional purposes such as driver training or workplace safety. By using video, I am able to select frames where the individuals are in positions best suited to combine with photographs of me performing as the Canister character. For further incarnations of Canister and my "Rerun" research program, see <http://www.nmsl.uregina.ca/saul/Rerunresearch.html>

List of cards

1. Canister knew that the paisley design imparted the power of prophecy to the slender silk tie.
Good science fiction and magic never mix, so you know right away where this series is going. Besides, the tie in the picture clearly is checkered.
2. An x-ray of the princess's feet will reveal the location of all silk products she has hidden.
The second card stays close enough on topic to lure the reader into believing that the story will be cohesive. Canister is hanging his arms, most monster-like than usual. Even in the politically incorrect 1950s, I could find no reference to actual gypsies in any of the available films, so settled for a hospital setting and a pair of feet.
3. Canister falls into a trap laid by his arch nemesis, Professor Delusia.
Diverting the story away from the necktie, I introduced a new villain, who is another of my nom de plume Youtube characters. However, the mysterious professor is not shown in any of the cards because he is such a master of illusion, he is only photographed when he wants to be.
4. "I feel so conflicted that I might not even kill you".
This card is here to satisfy prior readers but confuse new readers through the revealing of the previously undisclosed sociopathic and psychopathic nature of the title character.
5. Looking to the future only makes you hesitate acting on your truly outrageous ideas.
I've recently become very interested in trickster characters in mythology and how we can come to understand our nature through their actions. In this case, a super villain is always ruined by knowing the future because the story demands that they fail. The only good villains are the ones who blind themselves from this inevitability.
6. "I don't need to understand the future, I only need to control it".
This reveals the value our leaders put on wisdom.