

Marblehead Author Has a New Take on Science Fiction Dystopia

by Steve Krause, *The Daily Item*

MARBLEHEAD — You've undoubtedly seen this many times when reading science fiction novels or seeing the films. The climactic battle is full of violence, and is mostly fought with high-tech and otherworldly weapons whose purposes are to kill and destroy as expeditiously as possible.



"On Emerald Earth there is no prejudice," he writes, "no bigotry, no 'I'm-better-than-you.'"
"People from Emerald Earth live forever, so there's no rush. They are in constant perfect health, just by breathing the air. There is no politics, no religion, no 'races,' no wealth. Everyone on Emerald Earth is equal in ways

The end result is a sort of post-apocalyptic dystopia — a literal scorched-earth landscape. For reference, see the original "Planet of the Apes." Or, read "11/22/63" by Stephen King, which portrays a similarly desolate society in the alternate universe created by the main character's prevention of John F. Kennedy's assassination.

W. Mahlon "Bill" Purdin, an author and advertising professional from Marblehead, has a different approach.

Why should Sci-Fi always end up being what most writers seem to imagine it to be, he asks. Why can't it be the other way around? Why can't this type of literature portray hope for humanity instead of doom?

Purdin comes by his views the hard way. He spent 14 months in the U.S. Navy in Vietnam, and survived some fierce combat.

"I saw a lot of death," he says.

Always a voracious reader, both of prose and poetry (he has written 27 volumes of poetry), he began to detect a common theme in much of what he read — and didn't particularly go along with it.

"In times like these," he says, "we need stories of a world that works, of lives that all matter, and times of peace and prosperity that lasts forever. It's a story that needs to be told."

Toward that end, Purdin has built an elaborate world called "Emerald Earth" that he has chronicled in an ambitious trilogy of work called "The ScreenMasters." The three installments, "The Rise of Farson Uiost," "Sargasso" and "The Dreams of Ida Rothschild" have all been created in the last four years (though he began "Farson" in the 1990s) and they all have the same themes.

we have never even considered."

If that seems a little like the classic definition of utopia, Purdin, 71, who has lived in Marblehead most of his life, has no problem owning that.

"Most of the great and good things that come to you come from people who were kind to you, who mentored you, and who helped you along," he said.

Purdin became interested in science fiction because his father had a collection of vintage books in his attic that he found and read. He also became interested in poetry at an early age.

"I started writing it when I first got a guitar," he said, "so I sing my poetry too."

A lot of what he writes, and believes, comes from personal experience. He admits to feeling lost, and going through a period of substance abuse after returning from Vietnam; (Meeting his wife, Joy, got him out of that torpor, he says.)

"I actually heard the words 'we had to destroy the village to save it' said," he says.

He's also not happy with what he sees with the world today, especially with the way he sees the country headed.

"Instead of making enemies everywhere we go, it should be the other way around," he says.

Most importantly, he says, "we do not have to accept the dystopian view of the future. It seems that pessimistic people shape the future as an extension of their own lives. My books give you a future that's wide open, and so much fun to be in.

"We don't have to 'destroy the world to save it,'" Purdin says.

