As scientists and engineers, aren’t we finally, once and for all, fed up with negative depictions of us in the mass media?

In Category B, the scientists and engineers are revealed to be vile and evil sociopaths whose greed, lust, and just plain old-fashioned cruelty threaten both the civilized and uncivilized world. (Hey, these guys don’t care one way or the other—they make no distinction!) To make matters even worse, the media persona of these scientists and engineers is often enhanced through the addition of some physical deformity or disability—like, they don’t have any legs and are propelled around by some incredibly complex device with more features than a fully loaded Infinity Q45 and more weaponry than a Black Hawk helicopter. They may have some terrible scar that is hidden by a not-much-more-attractive (but always functional in some disgusting way) prosthetic appendage. No matter how terrible their physical state is, however, one is never allowed to feel any sympathy for them. Often, it is not so clear or easy to divine from the plot of the story what is actually driving these scientists/engineer techno-fiends to go out and invent a device that is automatically going to annihilate the entire known world unless the hero or heroine disarms it at the last second. Frequently, however, there are hints that it was perhaps a childhood incident involving Play-Doh or maybe an unanticipated early IRS audit that actually lies at the root of their determination to wipe out every bloody living creature on the whole planet—you know, really credible and believable motivation! As opposed to the scientists and engineers depicted in Category A, these villains invariably wear some incredibly cool outfits (bizarre, admittedly, but cool). Additionally, and at least until they are justifiably totally destroyed, Category B scientist and engineer fiends always enjoy the company of some really stunning companionship. What is the moral message here? Is it, “crime can pay—but only for a little while”? (Clearly, recent news from the business world provides some evidence that this can actually be the case!)

As scientists and engineers, aren’t we finally, once and for all, fed up with negative depictions of us in the mass media? What a terrifying thought! So why can’t we have our own “Scientists’ and Engineers’ Anti-Defamation League”? Sure, part of that name is already taken, so we have to come up with some new and totally original name—like maybe the “Image Enhancement and Anti-Prejudice League of Women Scientists and Engineers.” Hmm, probably that may not be the best name either—but at least it’s a start!

I was asked to write three POSTERMINARIES and this is the third. Elton Kaufmann has written many of these, and I would like to acknowledge the inspiration of his early writings that led to my origination of the word “giantmagnanopersistence” that appeared in a previous column.

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