

Michael Swanwick's Periodic Table of Science Fiction

13

Al

Aluminum

26.9815

Aluminum Foil

The only way to protect yourself from mind-control beams is to wrap your head in aluminum foil. Amateurs usually do a half-assed job of this. They cover the tops of their heads, leaving their eyes uncovered, or their nostrils. Don't make this mistake! Devise a periscope for your eyes, or a small television screen cabled to a camera duct-taped to your shoulder. Run rubber hoses up your nostrils so you can breathe. After a day or so, you stop noticing the smell. Swathe your head completely in three to five layers of foil.

There are many benefits to freeing yourself from mind-control beams. Loved ones speak to you more directly. Religious missionaries stop approaching you in airports. Most importantly, the world begins at last to make sense.

Even if you're under the influence of mind-control beams, it's possible to set yourself free. The first step is to admit that there's something wrong with reality. Not you/reality! Begin by paying attention to what you're doing. Ask yourself if it makes sense. That haircut you got the other day? What were you thinking? Those clothes in your closet that you've never gotten around to wearing? Would a sane person have spent money on plaid trousers? You don't even like plaid.

Stop! Right now! What are you doing? Reading an online story about mind-control beams and plaid trousers? Does that make any sense to you at all?

I didn't think so.

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The roll of Alcoa is in the kitchen, in the drawer by the sink. Go get it. Now. Cover your head entirely, using all of the roll just to be safe. Be sure it's loose enough so you can breathe. Leave a tiny slit to see through, about as wide as a line of type on your computer monitor. Lean your head forward, close to the CRT, so you can read these words, a line at a time. Are you ready? Good.

Now let's talk about the dangers of exposure to computer monitors.

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