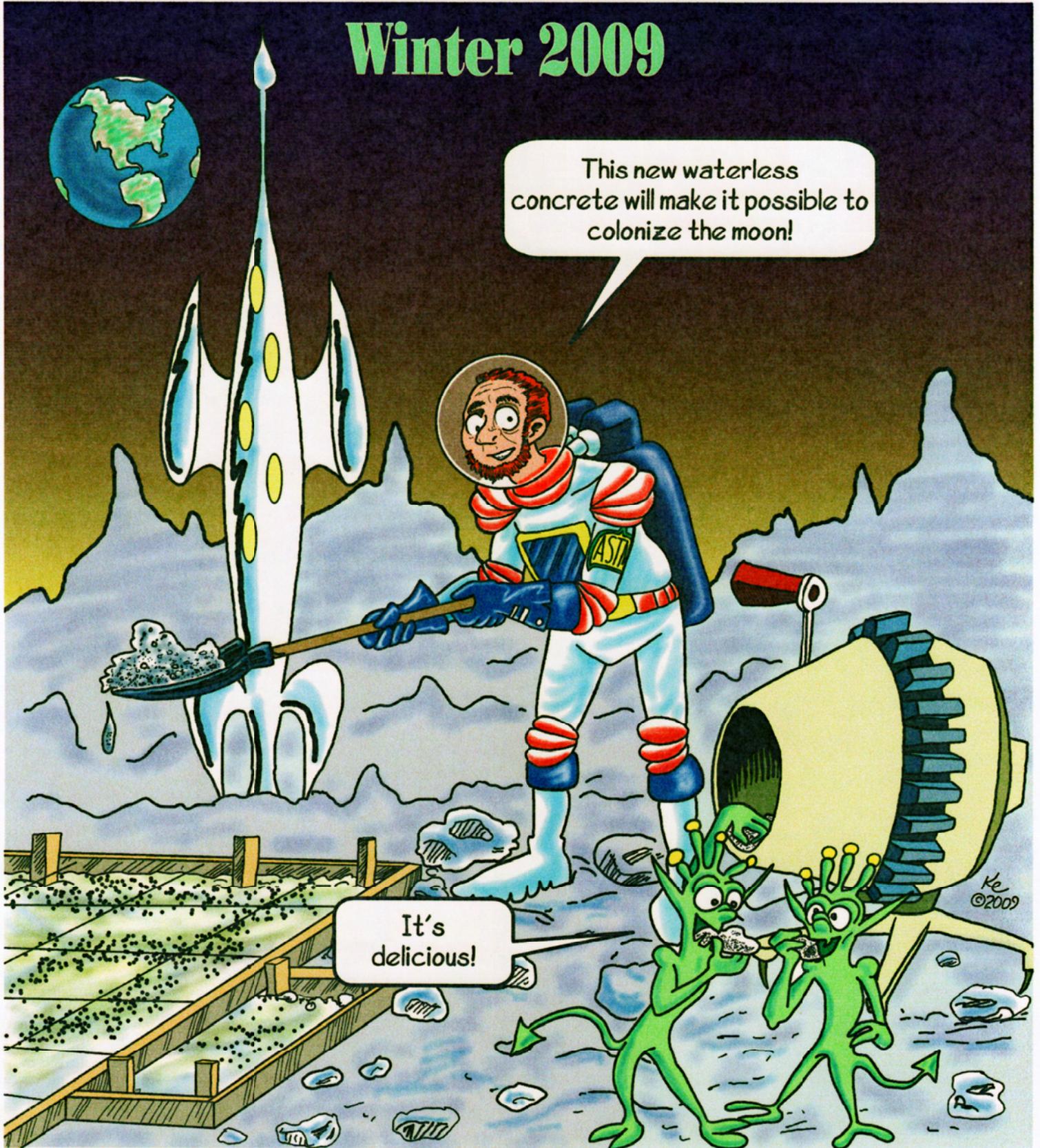


the Reluctant Famulus 68

Winter 2009



This new waterless concrete will make it possible to colonize the moon!

It's delicious!

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The Reluctant Famulus #68

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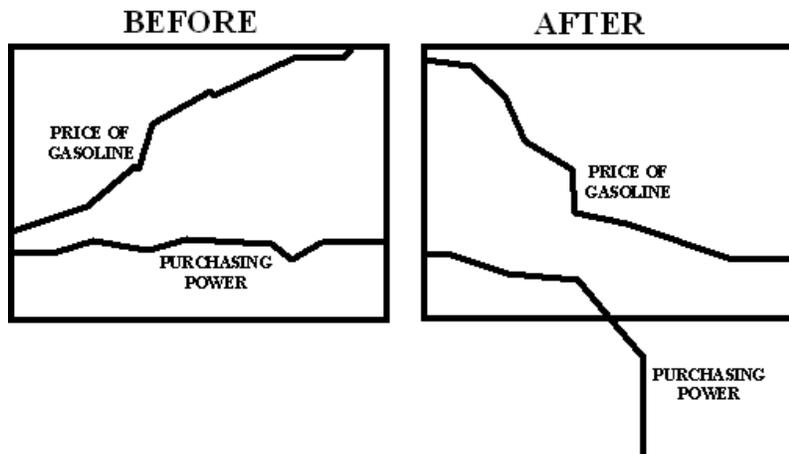
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The Reluctant Famulus

Be Careful What You Wish For . . .

It's interesting to note that only a few months back many people were angry and upset over the high costs of gasoline and the impact on their lives. A lot of those people wished that gasoline prices would return to a more reasonable level and not hit their wallets so painfully. Then they got their wish. Gas prices dropped to well under two dollars and though the price has gone up somewhat at this writing gasoline is still under two dollars.



Unfortunately in having the wish granted the entire economy, worldwide, also tanked, as we all now know. Gas prices are down but unemployment is up, more people are facing foreclosures on their homes, manufacturers are cutting back, stores are showing large business losses, and on and on. So having gas prices fall seems somehow a sort of pyrrhic victory and we're all worse off than before. To top it off, all those financial institutions that received bailout money show no signs of actually doing anything to help revive the economy or the general public. Indeed, the heads of those organizations won't even reveal how they're using the money and where it's going. It seems to me that this big bailout is being badly mis-managed by everyone concerned, the Federal govern

ment included. (And I personally, don't trust Henry "Hank" Paulsen at all. There's something about a bald-headed man)

And the incoming president now has his bailout plan which will cost us taxpayers even more with no assurances that it or the earlier one will actually do any good. Maybe it's time for a new taxpayer/voter revolution and "we, the people" should become involved in it. The alternative is to grit our teeth and hang on tight, come hell or high water.

Leaving behind that mess which may never be straightened out, we turn to something else equally unlikely and improbable.

Alexis Gilliland, in an earlier loc, pointed out some of the many obstacles to manned exploration of space that would need to be overcome.

In my wanderings online and off I chanced upon news articles the subject of which had a bearing on those problems. Whether or not anything work-

able results from the following is anyone's guess.

First. Scientists studying certain microscopic critters called tardigrades, or water bears, in a 2007 experiment, exposed a number of them to open-space conditions in low-Earth orbit. After bringing them back it was discovered that a significant number survived the vacuum of space, cold, and cosmic rays and some even withstood the hard, or UV radiation. It was known that on earth the water bears were very resistant to drying out during periods of extreme water shortage and could resurrect after years of dryness. The scientists presumably are pursuing further studies of the waterbears to see if there is some sort of natural process or biological mechanism which

allows them to withstand those conditions. Exactly what they plan to do with any knowledge acquired is anyone's guess.



Second. A professor at the University of Alabama in Huntsville (My mother's birthplace and hometown!), Dr. Houssam Toutanji published an article demonstrating a process for creating concrete structures on the Moon's surface without using water. Normal concrete consists of a binding agent of cement, water, and an aggregate (often crushed stone and/or sand). Research Toutanji conducted showed that the concrete he wrote about would use lunar soil as the aggregate and sulfur as the binding agent. If such a waterless concrete is possible then the problem of not having enough water for human use would be solved. Provided, of course, if there actually are any water sources on the Moon.

Third. An interesting concept which may prove feasible is that of a "force field" to protect spacecraft bearing humans. Researchers are conducting experiments based on knowledge about nuclear fusion to show it might be possible to shield spacecraft with a portable magnetosphere which would scatter the highly charged, ionized particles of solar wind and flares away from the spacecraft. Computer simulations done by researchers from IST Lisbon and Rutherford Appleton showed theoretical possibility a smaller shield of "only several hundred meters across" would be enough protection. A laboratory in the UK recreated a miniature piece of the solar wind and were able to confirm that "a small hole" is all that would be

needed. The miniature magnetosphere or shield would have to use such things as superconductors and magnetic confinement techniques used in nuclear fusion. Of course if such a field generator is possible it very likely would be a long time before it's perfected and put into use. Still, that shows a somewhat optimistic outlook for human exploration of space. Provided, of course, that ignorant, tight-fisted, short-sighted bureaucrats and politicians don't screw it all up.

On further consideration I believe even if any or all those theories actually work it won't matter at all because more likely there will either be an unmanned space program or none at all on the part of the U.S.. With the 1.2 trillion dollar deficit projected for 2009 and probably equally high or higher deficits in following years caused by still trying--futilely, I suspect--to bail out Wall Street and all the banks and finance companies money for a space program won't be there.

Welcome to a science fictional world more likely than anything a SF writer could conceive and only slightly less pessimistic than the stories of a world ruined by global nuclear war.

I don't know if I'm being pessimistic or realistic. Or maybe pessimistically realistic. Or realistically pessimistic. Or does it even matter?

More important, maybe I had better simply leave the preceding subject alone and go on to something else. Yeah--that's it.

In his LoC to TRF 67, Ned Brooks says "I didn't know that light ever failed to show element lines in a spectroscope." That got me to wondering if I had somehow misquoted from the article or left something out so I went back to the articles from which I drew the information. From an article on **Fox News.com** for September 16, 2008 comes this: "Astronomers led by U.C. Berkeley astrophysics grad student Kyle Barbary put the light coming from it through a mass spectrometer to see what it was made of—but couldn't get signatures for any known elements." and, "Because we can't see anything we recognize in the spectrum, we can't tell if it's even in [our] galaxy or in another

galaxy.” Barbary told *New Scientist Magazine*

From **NewScientistSpace**, on the same date, “The object's spectrum is also bizarre. It does not match that of anything seen in the mammoth Sloan Digital Sky Survey” “The spectrum shows a handful of spectral lines, but when astronomers try to trace any one of them to an element—such as magnesium, the other lines fail to match up with known elements.”

One of the problems astronomers are having is determining exactly how close or distant the object was whether in this galaxy or in another. The astronomers seem to be no nearer to an answer, as can be deduced from the extracts from an article which appeared in **ScienceDaily** an online science magazine.

(Jan. 8, 2009) “A mysterious flash of light from somewhere near or far in the universe is still keeping astronomers in the dark long after it was first detected by NASA's Hubble Space Telescope in 2006. It might represent an entirely new class of stellar phenomena that has previously gone undetected in the universe, say researchers.

“ . . . Hubble discovered the cosmic flash on February 21, 2006. It steadily rose in brightness for 100 days, and then dimmed back to oblivion after another 100 days.

”The rise and fall in brightness has a signature . . . never been recorded for any other type of celestial event. Supernovae peak after no more than 70 days, and gravitational lensing events are much shorter. . . . this observation defies a simple explanation, reports Kyle Barbary of the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (LBNL) in Berkeley, California “We have never seen anything like it,” he concludes.

“The spectral fingerprints of light coming from the object, cataloged as SCP 06F6, also have eluded identification as being due to any specific element. It could be the features are red-shifted molecular carbon absorption lines in a star roughly one billion light-years away.”

But searches through various astronomical survey catalogs haven't uncovered any evidence for a star or galaxy at the location of

the flash. The Supernova Cosmology Project at LBNL discovered it accidentally in a search for supernovae.

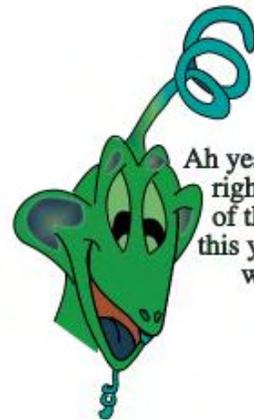
Hubble was aimed at a cluster of galaxies 8 billion light-years away in the constellation Bootes. But the mystery object could be anywhere in between, even in the halo of our own Milky Way galaxy.

Papers published by other researchers have suggested a bizarre zoo of possibilities: the core collapse and explosion of a carbon rich star, a collision between a white dwarf and an asteroid, or the collision of a white dwarf with a black hole.

But Barbary does not believe that any model offered so far fully explains the observations. “I don't think we really know what the discovery means until we can observe similar objects in the future.”

All-sky surveys for variable phenomena, such as those to be conducted with the planned Large Synoptic Survey Telescope, may ultimately find similar transient events in the universe.

Well, Ned, I don't know if that answers your question or not—and it's probably much more than you, I, or most everyone else cares to know—but all the basic information is laid out and so we can quietly steal away and let it lie in peace and go on to something much less puzzling..



Ah yes...
right there I see the start
of thoughts about
this year's *Hugo* nominations...
well done little fan!



Authors I Would Like to Read More of Robert Sabella

I have been reading science fiction for 45 years, and writing about it nearly as long, during which time I have discussed many of my favorite writers, such as Robert Silverberg, Roger Zelazny, Clifford D. Simak, Michael Bishop, John Varley, C.J. Cherryh, George R.R. Martin, Kim Stanley Robinson and others.

But no reader can possibly read every single author extensively (with the possibly exceptions of Don D'Amassa and Joseph Major), and there is a group of writers whose works I have read enough of to have whetted my appetite for more but, for one reason or another, I have not done so. So consider this my *Authors' Wish List* of writers I have inadvertently bypassed for too long a time. The list is in alphabetical author, not in priority order.

1. I've read a handful of **Kage Baker** stories, including *Company* stories as well as three delightful novellas set on a near-future colonized Mars ("The Empress of Mars" series). I've never read any of her *Company* novels though because I did not want to start in the middle of a series, and the thought of reading 10 books is somewhat intimidating. But now she has published several stand-alone books, including **The Anvil of the World** (whose title novella I read and enjoyed in **Asimov**), its sequel **The House**

The Old Kit Bag Bob Sabella

of the Stag, and **The Empress of Mars**, presumably containing those wonderful Mars stories. I am anxious to read one or more of those books.

2. I have read numerous **Stephen Baxter** short stories in various original anthologies and best-of-the-year lists, so I bought his collection **Resplendent**, which was absolutely delightful and convinced me to read more Baxter fiction, especially one of his novels. But in the crush of books to read, I keep eying the award-winning **The Time Ships**, the epic **Evolution**, and his xeelee trilogy **Coalescent**, **Exultant** and **Transcendent**, without having bought any of them yet. I hope to change that situation real soon now.

3. When I was inventorying my sf collection this past summer, I realized that I have a total of 4—count 'em, four—books by **Arthur C. Clarke**. I am ashamed to admit that I only have the fabulous **Childhood's End**, the award-winning **The Fountains of Paradise**, the two-novella book **The Lion of Comarre and Against the Fall of Night**, and the collection **The Nine Billion Names of God**. That's it. No **The Sands of Mars**, **Earthlight**, **The Deep Range**, **A Fall of Moondust**, **Rendezvous With Rama**, etc. I need to rectify situation.

4. I absolutely loved E.L. Doctorow's **Ragtime**, one of my favorite books ever, and I have since bought other Doctorow books, including **The Book of Daniel**, **Billy Bathgate** and **The March**. But have I read any of them? No! So what the heck am I wait

ing for, especially since he has other books on my *wish list*, such as **World's Fair** and **Loon Lake**. This is a serious omission since his books are sitting on my bookshelf unread!

5. I loved both books I have read by Cecelia Holland, **Floating Worlds**, an sf book, and **The Death of Attila**, historical fiction. She has several books on my *wish list*, including her *Soul Thief* series and such novels as **Jerusalem**, **Belt of Gold**, **Pillar of the Sky** and **The Angel and the Sword**. I have been wanting to dip into her fiction more for several decades now, so it is time to do so.

6. Louis L'Amour is regarded as the leading writer of westerns, but in my opinion he cannot compare to **Elmer Kelton** who is the true master of western fiction. Other western writers must agree with that, since Kelton has won 7 Spur Awards for Best Western Novel, far more than any other writer. **The Day The Cowboys Quit** is a story about cowboys on a cattle drive who resent their low wages, so they go on strike! **The Wolf and The Buffalo** shows the interactions between a black soldier and a Native American. Those are the only Kelton novels I have read, and I am anxious to read **The Time It Never Rained**, **Buffalo Wagons**, **The Man Who Rode Midnight**, **The Way of the Coyote**, and his series about the founding of the Texas Rangers.

7. When I first discovered science fiction in my teens, I bought a novel called **The Sioux Spaceman** which I did not like very much. A decade later I bought another novel by the same author entitled **The Jargoan Pard** which I enjoyed a lot more, but for some reason I never bought another novel by its author **Andre Norton**, a failing which I would like to rectify. High on my Recommended Reading list are **The Stars Are Ours**, **Catseye**, and her *Solar Queen* and *Time Trader* series. *Baen Books have been bringing out her sf in two-in-one volumes, so I am hoping to buy one of them very shortly.*

8. Many years ago Orson Scott Card had a review column in some fanzine in which he raved about a novel by new writer **Robert Sawyer** entitled **Golden Fleece**. Trusting Card's judgment, I bought it and enjoyed it a

lot. Since then, Sawyer novels have appeared regularly on the Hugo Award Best Novel ballot, winning in 2003 for **Hominids**. But I've never read another Sawyer book, and would like to try some of his other award nominees such as **Frameshift** and **Factoring Humanity**. I'm not sure why I haven't done so long before this.

9. I have a relatively small collection of **Analogs**, most of which were given to me by a fellow teacher who was cleaning out his father's attic. I have read several serials and short fiction in those issues, mostly by authors I enjoy such as Poul Anderson and Gordon R. Dickson. Another author who was prevalent in those magazines was James H. Schmitz, whom I was familiar with because of **The Witches of Karres**, a thoroughly-enjoyable tongue-in-cheek space opera. So I read two other Schmitz' serials in **Analog**, **The Tuvela** and **The Lion Game**, and enjoyed both of them enough that I would like to read some of Schmitz' short fiction collections, which have also been published by Baen Books (and is it my imagination, but is Baen doing more to keep classic sf in print than any other mainstream publisher)?

10. If I am ashamed at having only 4 books by Arthur C. Clarke in my collection, that is double the number of books I have by another sf grandmaster, **Jack Williamson**. I have an old *Galaxy Magabook* containing two novellas, and his collaborative **Starchild** trilogy, written with Frederik Pohl. No **Legion of Space**, no **Humanoids**, and none of his late-career renaissance novels, such as **Terraforming Earth** and **The Stonehenge Gate**. I really need to rectify this situation too.

TRF 68

Rat Stew

Gene Stewart



Defying The Genre Embargo

Gene Stewart

The notion is childish that certain elements of or approaches to fiction belong strictly to one major camp and may not legitimately be used by any other camp. Yet this stance defines American writing, which has been called “. . . insular and too much under the sway of its own popular culture,” by the likes of Horace Engdahl, the permanent secretary of the Swedish Nobel Prize Academy.

How others see us may not matter much to our daily stint, but it certainly affects distribution, readership, and sales. It might offer useful insights, too.

Insular means, according to my on-board dictionary, “ignorant of or uninterested in cultures, ideas, or peoples outside one’s own experience; lacking contact with other people.” Provincial, in other words. Village idiots with no concept of a world larger than our own back yards. This view contrasts just slightly with our own view of ourselves as world-striding super-power champions of all we attempt, doesn't it?

And yet, look what we do to ourselves. Aside from the unblinking narcissism of our culture, and the self-congratulatory tone of our self-criticism, we divide our best efforts into partisan opponents. Mainstream versus genre fiction is the focus here. That dichotomy weakens both sides.

American literature as a whole keeps itself apart from World literature. Genre compounds the error by trying to seal itself off from the mainstream American fiction. This puts it twice-removed from World literature.

Genre fiction wants to be a private club. Mainstream wants an open door policy while reserving the right to sweep out the riff-raff when it’s time for a celebration of self. Both squabble as if exclusion is an answer in and of itself.

A palpable resentment shudders through fandom, the loose group of self-identified genre fiction enthusiasts, every time a writer whose work usually appears in mainstream market categories gains praise, sales, and often Hollywood options by using genre elements. That is how it’s perceived: “They” “stole” “our” genre elements. As if only writers whose work is marketed as genre are legitimately allowed to use such elements.

And, the complaint continues, even worse, genre works are never awarded attention, acclaim, or movie money—despite, they point out salaciously, the top-grossing movies of all time being genre.

Of course, don’t ask them how Hollywood succeeds on those rare occasions when it translates genre works to the big screen. That’s a whole other kettle of bile to be spilled on a separate discussion entirely.

So their shoulder chip is two-tier, a double-cheeseburger of lukewarm resentment; we’re excluded, and they steal from us. This leads to talk of the genre ghetto, exploitation, and east coast snobbery. And like most such bitterness, there is some truth in it. Yes, genre work is generally ignored by academics, liter

ary award committees, and serious mainstream critics. Yes, occasional genre elements are praised as if new by mainstream critics, who remain willfully unaware of the specifics and contents of genre fiction's pulp tradition.

When we examine the standards by which works are judged, however, we see a definite emphasis gap. For the most part, novels that have won the top genre awards are more concerned about idea and plot than writing quality, characterization, and exploration of themes. Mainstream award winners, genre readers complain, aren't about anything; they have no grand ideas; they focus on everyday minutiae; they have no action; they're boring . . .

Again, movies may be an instructive example. Blockbusters tend to be laden with stunts, special effects, and action peppered with catch phrases. Characters are sketched in brief, bold terms. Such movies take us away from our everyday world. They're generally called escapism.

Then there are the so-called serious movies. Many are costume pieces dealing in comedy of manners or courtship rituals from the Seventeenth century. Some are character portraits of people mired in hopeless lives. Some are examinations of the consequences of crisis, or some social ill such as alcoholism or spousal abuse. These movies tend to win awards but no big audiences. Art films, they're often called. Made for art's sake, not to please audiences or to allow the masses to escape the humdrum of their daily lives. Hell, some even have subtitles. If we wanted to read, we wouldn't have gone to the movies, they cry. And who are all these foreigners? Where's my favorite movie star?

Genre, for the most part, falls into the first category, escapism. This is not to say genre works can, must, or do not address serious themes. Many do. But the main goal is entertainment and, failing that, diversion, in genre fiction. This is a noble art in itself.

Mainstream fiction, for the most part, adds insight and commentary to escapism. Yes, many mainstream works are about taking us away from quotidian reality. Most, however, are also concerned with showing a

commonality among humanity's diverse specimens, or revealing the inner secrets of private lives, or making points about how and why society is decaying.

Vonnegut wrote: "Listen. All great literature is about what a bummer it is to be a human being: *Moby Dick*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, *Crime and Punishment*, the Bible and *The Charge of the Light Brigade*."

Genre fiction is often the opposite, about how great it is to be a humanoid primate conquering the universe and rearranging things so we're the center of it all. Optimism is a keynote in science fiction, for instance. As Harlan Ellison once pointed out, even dystopias are optimistic because they mean there is someone left to complain about how bad it is. Mysteries are optimistic about restoring order from chaos. Fantasy and Romance both speak to wish fulfillment, while even Horror deals with the bastards getting their comeuppance.

In modern political discourse—all the shouting and lying, yes—it's common to refer disparagingly to "reality-based" thinking. The 17 October 2004 New York Times Magazine ran an article by Ron Suskind. In it, an unnamed aide to George W. Bush said, "You're in what we call the reality-based community, people who believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality. That's not the way the world really works anymore. We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we'll act again, creating other realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do."

What sort of literature would come from such breathtaking solipsism? Would it not be literature that is insular and too much under the sway of its own culture?

And what of the escapist subset of such a literature? Would it not concern itself with mythic stories of conquest, and examinations of glorious dreams full of wish-fulfillment?

A wider world exists. Noticing it, find

ing out about it, and exploring it would expand our base of reference. Joining in and participating in a wider world outside this house of cards we've built would strengthen the global, which is to say human, appeal of our fiction. This would lead to much larger readership and all that a big audience can bring and bestow.

Isn't it time to stop hugging the elements of genre so tightly? Isn't it time to share them not only with our own mainstream, but to trade them with a wider world?

Isn't it time to defy the genre embargo?

There's something in the air . . .

A news story recently dealt with something fondly desired by those who hoped for the sort of future seen in the early days of science fiction: an actual, honest-to-god flying car. (See photo below.)



Called the Terrafugia *Transition* it can transform from a two-seater car to a plane in 15 seconds. The manufacturer claims it's easy to keep and run since it uses normal unleaded fuel and fits into a garage. The head of Terrafugia, said: "This is the first really integrated design where the wings fold up automatically and all the parts are in one vehicle."

The *Transition*, developed by former NASA engineers, is powered by the same 100 bhp engine on the ground and in the air. The company claims the car could fly up to 500 miles on a single tank of gas at a cruising speed of 115 mph. Up to now, however, it has only been tested on roads at up to 90 mph.

The *Transition* is expected to land in showrooms in about 18 months' time. But there are a few "minor" obstacles to widespread use: the retail price is \$200,000 (£132,000), getting insurance could be difficult, and finding somewhere to take off from may pose a large problem. Then, too, there is the fact that the owners of such vehicles very well may need to have a pilot's license. And of course think of all the debris raining down from mid-air collisions. Maybe it's not such a good idea after all . . .



DC 101 - Introduction to the Digital Converter Box

Welcome, class, this is DC 101. If you are looking for **Digital Cinematography**, that is down the hall. Okay I think I can still continue with only one student.

Please note that there is some mumbling, from Washington that due to the poor economy (meaning that a lot of people have merely dropped their cable, etc service to save money and therefore will not be prepared for this transition), there is a chance that the February conversion date may be postponed. Be warned that this may only give you more time to be frustrated.

My personal view is that this conversion is a poorly disguised ploy to force everyone to subscribe to some sort of television delivery. There are a lot of us out here who happily watch TV for (gasp) *free* and are perfectly happy with the current analog reception I currently get about 35 analog stations and know from irritating experience with the converter box that it cuts my reception number down by about two-thirds. All the literature warns you that the digital signal is weaker--even going so far as to let you know that leafy trees blowing in the breeze may interfere with reception. Yeah, must be great for those of us who have trees around the house.



Okay. So you don't have (and do not intend to get) cable or any other non-antennaed source of a television signal. I have a great deal of personal animosity against the local cable company that destroyed my yard by diving one of their trucks axle-deep across it in a muddy rainstorm. Their reply to

Sheryl Birkhead

request for repair of the damage was

that they were not responsible since they were merely repairing my cable. Ahem--is anybody listening: *I don't have cable*. Even if basic cable would fit into the budget; I would not willingly subscribe. Without cable (or some similar supplier, as you are informed multiple times throughout the day in TV commercials) you may lose your television reception when the conversion takes place. So the Federal government is "allowing" each household to apply for two converter coupons. These coupons look a lot like credit cards and can only be used for up to 90 days from the date they are mailed. Each coupon is good for \$40 off the purchase of an *authorized* box. Only some sellers accept the coupons (nope—*ebayers* are out of luck) so be sure to check on both the seller and the model.

Right. Let's presume you have done your research and are ready to go hunting. I got my coupons early in the game (turns out that was not such a great idea; not many models out yet and the coupons do expire). I went online and located a plethora of sites devoted to discussing the attributes of various models. The el cheapo model from *Wal-Mart* that I had selected got cut from the list ... as did most models currently being sold at *Best Buy*. Instead went to *Circuit City* and purchased the *Zenith DTT900*. It was energy star rated and everything! In case anyone is taking notes that model has been replaced by *DTT901* that allows analog pass through, which pretty much means what it says: allowing you to watch the analog signal, not only the digital signal.

First the good news. This converter box was very easy to set up. It has pretty clear instructions on the screen and the digital pic

hmm...I think I'm analog...
so--some time before
February 2009 I need
to find a digital converter



ture is nice. To paraphrase—*when it's good it's very, very good but when it's bad it's horrid*. Within an hour of setting things up I hit a snag. I actually have mumble mumble televisions, but rarely watch shows as they are aired. Instead I tape many shows and watch them in chunks when I time while doing something else (such as typing this!) and can ignore the commercials. This is all pretty much standard with things the way they are now and my biggest worry is usually remembering to re-set the time after any power outage. So I read their instruction book on how to tape to a VCR. Yup the directions are right there. Hmm . . . Surely they forgot the rest of the instructions. So, I turned to the customer service number and got ready to get help. I felt very sheepish when I realized I had no idea on how to start dialing—at least not a certain idea—so I called the operator, and asked (yeah-go ahead and laugh) which key represented Z. Of course all of you out there are right: it is 9. but I swear my phone doesn't have a z on it. By the time I actually made the call I already fell like an idiot. I also found out that *Zenith* is now *LG*. So the answering message stopped me short and I had to ask if I really had the right number. *Yes*.

As I am sure you are aware, there is always a battery of questions to answer and I waded through them. Finally I got to the reason for the call and I explained that I knew I had the cables connected correctly. but could not figure out how to set up the programming to tape channel 4 at 8 p.m. and then channel 7 at 10 p.m. It sounded as if the line went dead, I waited patiently and the tech finally replied: *uh—you can't*. As soon as he explained it, the reason was obvious and I felt, well, betrayed. You see, just as you set your TV on (usually), channel 3, you now set you, VCR on channel 3. The converter box supplies the signal but it will *not* change channels. So taping is fine as long as you keep the convener box on when you have taping-planned (there goes any Energy savings!). AND you can only tape on channel, so I was stuck with channel 4 taping at both 8 and 10. After a great deal of wailing and gnashing of

teeth I went online and checked. Sure enough that was one of the newly listed shortcomings. Right. Don't panic yet. There is one model the, *DTVPal*, that will allow taping far multiple channels BUT it would not be available until after my coupons had expired Okay, okay. With multiple *TVs*, I would simply wait for the model to hit the market and pony up the full price. In the meantime, I would, learn how to utilize this box. I connected this box to one of two televisions that have rabbit ears—figuring it would have the poorest reception and I would learn from this while waiting.

I learned. I had lost a lot of the channels that had come in beautifully before For those of you who are saying, maybe those stations are just not broadcasting in digital yet, I checked and pretty much all the stations in the metropolitan *DC* and *Baltimore* areas are already using both signals. So, yes, I would not be able to view most of the stations I was used to watching. Using this time, I set-up and taped shows--making sure I remembered to program **both** the VCR **and** the converter box. Everything went well until some time in October. I had set things up and when I went back to watch the taped shows—not there. Because things had been going, so well I was fairly certain I had the procedure figured out. Then I looked at the time listed by the converter box and it was off by an hour. Hmm ...

I went through all the menus. Nary a hint as to how to re-set the time Sigh--call customer service again (but this time I knew how to dial the number!). By then I had figured out the problem: the time on the box was actually *Standard* time and we were still on *Daylight Savings* time. Okay how do I change the hour's time? Again there was another bout of dead air from the tech. Fully, a bit sheepishly, he let me know I could not. Trying to be helpful, he then added, that eventually the time would be right. He was correct of course, but now I had to remember *two different times* when I did the programming and remember to check in case the box had caught up with this year's reality. As you can tell, this is going to happen every time there is a time change that is not the same as

was set up in the original programming. Oh well . . .

At this point I was not exactly happy with the way things were going but I had learned how to deal with the way things **would** be. I creebed about changing a perfectly good system into something out of the dark regions. The bottom line was that I would have to accept the new (irritating) limitations and get on with learning the ins and outs of the box.

For several months I played with the VCR and the box. I felt I was getting pretty good at it but it was time to select another box and move onto another set. Now I figured that it would be a safe bet just to get another of the same boxes because I was already aware of the problems, but that was not to be! I went online poked around the same websites and found out—*oh glory be!*—the long awaited model that would allow taping from different channels was now on sale. Hey, it was even available at *Sears*.

This would be my *Christmas* present to me. I would let it sit quietly while I learned all about its features and there at *Christmas* set it right up.

Off I went plastic in hand--this time a real credit card since I would be paying, the full price. Fast forward a few hours. I thought I knew how to set the system up, but I read the instruction book just for good measure. *Joy unbound!* The manual said the sucker really did what the claims online said it would. Just sit and wait.

I read the manual cover to cover--several times. Then the moment arrived There were a few glitches when I totally lost the strongest analog signaled station but after moving the antenna a bit I lost even more of the weaker stations but brought in the one I was hunting.

Sometimes it doesn't take much to make one happy. I was just grateful I could now tape different channels. I already knew it would never be that I could watch one show while another was taping but that I could live with. Over the next few days I set up tapings from several channels. Usually I just tape stuff and stack the tapes as they fill up. At

any given time I am usually anywhere from 2-4 weeks behind in watching shows. I am just now getting to Christmas. I thought it might be nice to gloat over The superb images I was led to believe I was now taping I figured I ought to go ahead and take a look at some of the shows and see what a great image I was getting. Uh how do I say this without rancor and prejudice??? **The shows were not there!** Frantically scanned the tape forward and backward. I managed to find some taping amidst the snow but none of the shows I expected. Huh?

Now I had to locate the customer service number for this second company. Got it. Called and went the expected route of having to repeat information a half a dozen times. At this point I realized that the manufacturer of the box was actually a *dish service*, that was just, coincidentally making a stand alone box for people who did not have (read that as did not want) their service The company was making up for it by not having, a single customer service (and then technical service) representative who knew *anything* about the product. They first walked me through setting things up (yes indeed they read along the instruction book with me!) and agreed I had done that correctly. Okay, then why isn't it taping correctly? Hmm, no one seemed to know—but they asked politely if they could place me on hold while a technician was consulted. Sure, why not? While I was sitting there, waiting, I noticed a curious thing. I can call up the current time on the *TV* and set it if it is not accurate. I can call up the current time on the *VCR* and set it if it is not accurate. When I looked at the accurate time being shown on the (brand new to me!) all weather channels and compared that to the time being displayed by the converter box--there was virtually no similarity. **AHA.**

When the customer service agent got back on the phone, I explained what I had discovered. He thought I might be onto something. He asked if I had put in my correct zip code. Huh? Well to be honest--no. Across the street is one zip code and the actual city of "my" zip code is down the road about 13 miles. He got all enthusiastic-- saying **that**

was the problem and walked me through changing the zip code to my correct one. Did that change anything? I had to admit that it did. The converter box time was now 18 minutes behind that of the actual time instead of the previous 13 minutes.

Now I know what he told me next will take a bit of effort to believe—but I swear it is true. He told me to turn the box off when I went in bed that night. I hastened to tell him I did that every night. He then went on to say that if the unit had not *healed itself* overnight to call back. In all honesty it took me a minute to reply that I really didn't think that would happen (at that point I couldn't even believe he had said that) He assured me it might and thanked me for calling.

As soon as I hung up I went trawling through the various menus in see how I could change the time myself. *Zip, nada, nothing.*

The next day (bet you didn't see this coming!) I checked and now the box's time read 14 minutes earlier than the accurate time. I called back. Same hoops. Different customer service rep. She asked me about the zip code and I told her, proudly, that the correct one was entered. Then she pounced on the fact that this area observes *Daylight Savings Time* and asked if I had said yes to that question. Of course I had. She assured me that **this** was the source of the problem. Um—Er— I hesitantly asked, wouldn't that make the time off by an *hour*! She had to stop and think about that one and never did answer. I told her the instructors I had gotten from the day before. Silence. I asked her what the time was where she was. 9:48. Okay. That didn't sound right. Here it was mid-afternoon. Then I asked *Where are you?* More silence, then a quiet—*Korea*. I had been fooled; neither representative had an accent! She asked me to turn the unit off when I went to bed and if it— I stopped her right there and said “*You aren't to tell me it might heal itself are you?*” Another of those long silences then, “*No, I am trying not to say that.*” Fine. I agreed that if the time hadn't miraculously gone back to the actual time I would call back the next day. She assured me she would get upper lev

el tech people involved in research.

It does not take much to guess that the problem had not fixed itself the next day. Now the time was off by **15** minutes. Same hoops. same questions: *zip code, Daylight Savings Time*. It was obvious no one had the answer. Finally I was told to send the unit back and it would be replaced. Great! What would they like me to do with this unit (play nice now)? Oh, I would have to pay to send it back myself and then they would send the new one. I complained, knowing it would not get me anywhere. Not only had I paid **full price** for this box, I was now going to have to pay to ship it back during the Christmas season. and would probably not see it until the muddle of January. A very quiet *Yes*.

I had to content myself with a harshly worded note that I tucked into the box along with all the bits and pieces I had unpacked. But just to be cantankerous I kept the instruction book. Now they would have to replace that when they replaced this unit and sent it out again.

I checked online and guess what? This model has a problem with what I am calling **wandering time** and there is no way to fix it. Trying, to tape remotely is something like a grab-bag: you just hope what you tape bears some resemblance to any program you were hoping to tape. Wonderful—just wonderful.

I took out my receipt and called Sears. I figured I already knew the answer and I was right: I could not return the box. Even though it had sat in a guest room for a few months it had gone beyond the 90 days they listed as return time. So, it looks as if whatever I get back could have the same problem and about all I could do would be to donate it to a charity, take a tax deduction and let someone **ELSE** find out the problems.

To my surprise, a small box landed on the front porch just before New Year's Day. In anticipation I got out the instructions, prepared for the worst. *What the . . . !?* All that was in the box was the converter box---no remote control and no coaxial cables. Back to the phone.

I tried to be nice, I really did. I explained the problem and for some reason the guy con

nected me to technical service again. This time I listened closely and then apologized for what I was about to ask: “Where are you located?” I felt a great flood of relief when he said, “Texas.”

Once again I recounted all the calls and lack of progress. He apologized on behalf of the company and asked what my technical problem was. I explained that I was not sure why my call had been transferred but that for right now I simply had no idea if there **was** a technical problem or not since I had no way to connect the box or control it. He said he would take care of that. Another hold pause. When he returned I could hear the apology in his voice: the computer only had so many options and all he could send me was the remote control--no coaxial cables--but he would overnight it. He did go on to say I was being, good sport about all this but I was not sure what alternative I actually had. He suggested I go somewhere such as Wal-Mart and buy a coaxial cable. I asked *how long*. He said *short, just enough to go from the box to the TV*. I asked him to check the list of the box contents to see if the actual length was listed. No. I went to Wal-Mart and paid for a 3' cable.

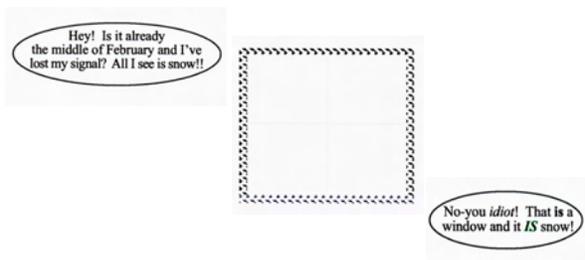
You'll never guess . . . The remote control arrived the next day but I forgot to stipulate I needed the batteries. Sigh.

As I type this I have set this replacement unit up. I am still a bit leery because today the time is off by a minute from yesterday. Is this the portent of things to come?

Being a glutton for punishment (and fervently hoping to find a unit that will work!) I, just an hour ago, received yet a third unit. This one also advertises that it allows that remote taping. I also know from reading about it that it has the problem of **wandering time**. This (*Taiwan.*) manufacturer built in the ability to go in and change the time yourself. My only concern is that (without having actually set it up) the instruction book seems to indicate, under *Taping*, that your choice does not include a daily show M—Fri, so you have to use up all the time slots (at least what I can see on the diagram). It also says that to set up taping you enter *GMT* for the

start but never mentions entering a stop time (let alone figuring out GMT). The only other concern I saw online is that the remote is very flimsy. We'll see . . . But it feels like a cereal box prize and only has a few buttons. Oh yes—we **will** see.

For now, the only positive thing I can say is that I have not (yet) spent the cost of a new television set or beyond the cost of a few months' cable service. So far I am still ahead of the game but the game may very well end up being called due to technical errors! If I can come up with some idiotic way to make this new and better digital system to work, then—**by gosh I've earned it!**



P.S.—Timely update. I tried to set the timer to tape the Inaugural swearing in and speech—it didn't.



KENTUCKIANA I.

A Trip to West Liberty

by Alfred Byrd

Over the past few years I've done an occasional column on humorous events in the laboratory in which I work at the University of Kentucky. As by now the humor has grown so recondite that it takes a scientific paper to explain it, I feel that it's time for me to move to a new topic. This will be Kentucky, the state (it calls itself a commonwealth) from which came all of my ancestors for several generations back, and to which I moved when I was twenty, more than three decades ago.

Today's topic will be West Liberty, the small town where both my father and my mother grew up, and the county seat of Morgan County. At once we face a problem: how can I tell you where Morgan County is? Generally, it lies in Eastern Kentucky's Appalachian foothills. Specifically, Morgan County lies in a triangle formed by Ashland, Morehead, and Pikeville. Now if only I could tell you where those places are...

Still, I can drive you there from Lexington, where I now live. Carl Sagan had the *Spaceship of the Imagination*; you must be content with the '91 Honda Civic of the Imagination. Getting onto eastbound I-64, we head through the Bluegrass, a region where horses live in better houses than humans live a situation that Jonathan Swift described in *Gulliver's Travels*. Just as hills start to loom ahead, we turn onto the Mountain Parkway (only one turn is possible) and head south-east.

For a while we roll through the fringes of the Bluegrass; then we pass through a line of sharply defined hillforms known as the Knobs. Beyond these lies a region of sharp ridges and valleys that has made every pitiful subcompact car that I've owned gasp for breath. The Red River plays tag with the road for a hundred miles. To our right, beyond ridgelines, the Red River has dug sandstone into the Red River Gorge, a bizarre topography of canyons and natural bridges

that somehow just hasn't got the Press of like topography in America's Southwest. Someday the world will learn of the Gorge, and money will flow into Eastern Kentucky...

Sorry, a touch of highway hypnosis. After a drive that always surprises me with its length, we reach the turnoff for West Liberty. In a tiny hamlet named Helechewa (according to one etymological tale that I've heard, the place is named after an Indian princess who could never have been there), we turn onto a state highway that runs remarkably straightly for this part of the world through rolling fields that grow tobacco and pasture cattle. We're in Wolfe County now, but Morgan County lies just ahead.

Let me pause to tell you how Morgan County got its name. Contrary to popular belief, it doesn't come from General John Hunt Morgan, the dashing Confederate cavalry commander of the Civil War. He was but a gleam in his daddy's eye when my maternal great-great-great-grandfather founded the county. (More on him later.) Rather, Morgan County is named after General Daniel Morgan, victor over the British in the Battle of Cowpens in the Revolutionary War (known to our British cousins as the War of American Independence). Daniel's deeds in South Carolina passed through space and time to Eastern Kentucky. To the best of my knowledge (genealogists will correct me if I'm wrong!), Daniel Morgan is no relation to the illustrious Bluegrass Morgans, who, in addition to the notorious John Hunt, produced the Nobel-prize-winning geneticist, Thomas Hunt Morgan, of whom I learned much as a graduate student in microbiology at the University of Kentucky.

Still, John Hunt Morgan does play an odd little role in Morgan County lore. In the Civil War, during the Great Confederate Invasion of 1862, John Hunt Morgan was pursuing a Union general whose name was ironically George Morgan. John Hunt arranged with

another Confederate general to trap George at West Liberty, where John Hunt hoped for a battle of Morgans in Morgan's fields. The Battle of the Three Morgans would've drawn the world's eye to the sleepy county seat and filled its coffers with much needed tourist dollars. Alas, like most dreams of wealth in Appalachia, the dream of the great battle went unfulfilled. John Hunt's Confederate compatriot failed to make his rendezvous, and George escaped to Ohio to fight another day. Let Harry Turtledove make of this account what he will!

While I've been filling your ears with the non-deeds of Morgans, we've crossed the Morgan County line. We're coming up on Grassy Creek, the ancestral home of the Byrds, my father's family. Blink and you'll miss the place! Its central feature is Grassy Lick Baptist Church, a small, white frame building nestled at the bases of three hills. The one to the west of it holds the Grassy Creek Cemetery, which only the strong of shank can reach. Still, to climb to it on Memorial Day is to earn a reward. As one reaches the headstone of my grandparents, John D. and Cynthia Byrd, and turns to look down at the church, the sun invariably comes out, and one can view across flower-bedecked tombstones the tiny church nestled among pine-girt hills set off with flowering trees. What could be better?

Someday, I may bring you back to Grassy Creek for tales of its bucolic charm, but for now let's head on towards West Liberty. Turning right onto US-460, we pass through a region of well tended farms interspersed with flea markets. After a while we reach a crossroads called Index, which West Liberty's megalopolitan ambitions have annexed, but which longtime residents still call Index. Signs of civilization appear: a strip-mall and a McDonald's, and, perched on a hillside above them, a Comfort Inn. Sorry, when it came time to build the inn McDonald's had taken up the last of the level ground in these parts!

Climbing a steep ridge, we see a specimen of Appalachia's growth industry, a state penitentiary. West Liberty's is a recent addi-

tion to the landscape. Sprawling structures of cheery pink stone surrounded by razor-wire lower over the town proper, nestled in a bend of the Licking River. Maybe the penitentiary deters local youths from pursuing time-honored means of earning cash by running shine in a dry county or by growing Kentucky's "number-one cash crop," which, contrary to popular belief, isn't tobacco, at least of the legal kind. Those of us who've known West Liberty all of our lives hate what the prison has done to the landscape, but one can't stop progress.

Back to origins. West Liberty began with my maternal great-great-grandfather, Edmund Wells, a man of dubious antecedents. (Some genealogists claim that he came from Baltimore; others, not.) Marrying Sally Cassidy (or Cassity; her background is as obscure as her husband's), he settled what was at first called Wells Bend. There he built a tavern and a mill, and bought up land far around. When he and his neighbors met in his tavern to found a county, he donated the land of Wells Bend to the county as its county seat. This was named West Liberty after a town called Liberty, to the east. Liberty, in time, would disincorporate, and its name would be recycled by a town in western Kentucky; thus we have the historical anomaly that West Liberty is east of Liberty. Edmund's deeds live in monuments around town and in the placename Wells Hill, but none of his wealth has come down to his descendants, alas.

Now we're about to cross the bridge into West Liberty what's that? I've filled up an article already? Oh, well, I guess that I must leave you on the bridge for now. Still, I'll pick you up next time and tell you THINGS TO DO IN WEST LIBERTY.



Slings and Arrows . . .

11/24/08

From: **Henry Welch**

Tom:

Thanks for the latest issue of The Reluctant Famulus. You have some amazing sentiments where manned space flight is concerned.

My condolences on Sheryl's whirlpool tub problems. Plumbing always drives me nuts because it is a mess to take care of when not done properly.

In response to Joseph T. Major's service pack 3 issues, I installed SP3 on two laptops, one rather ancient at 5+ years, without issues. I waited a few weeks to see if there were going to be any generally reported problems. Then again, I steadfastly refuse to use Outlook....

Until next issue...

Henry L. Welch

Editor, *The Knarley Knews*

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[[And the thing is, it's not impossible to do plumbing right in the first place. But finding an honest, competent handyman or installer to do the work right to begin with and make certain it's correct seems nearly impossible.//I don't recall having had any problems installing SP3 on my computer--but then Windows (like it or hate it), as far as I know pretty much installs it automatically. I could be wrong but that's how it seemed to me]]

From: **Ned Brooks**

Hi Tom -

Thanks for the zine. You should have gotten *It Goes On The Shelf 30* if the mule made it up the mountain.

Strange Brad Foster cover! The one he did for my zine is dated 1985 - but quite apt. Yours must be his new psychedelic period! Do you really have an artist named "Tom

Doubrley"? Oho, I see that the SSDI website finds 5 Doubrelys that have died under Social Security, all in Georgia or SC.

Interesting about the Feb '06 "unknown object"! I didn't know that light ever failed to show element lines in a spectroscope. One of my first wind tunnel tests in a Mach 10 tunnel involved temperature-sensitive paint to show how hot a model surface got, and where. When the test was over we asked the photo lab to print the photos in true color for comparison with test strips. Alas, no one had told the photographer that he needed to put a known-color sample in the views.... Fortunately it occurred to me that the Schlieren system for that tunnel, which allowed us to see the shock wave, used a mercury bulb, so that all the photos had a blue background - the blue of the primary spectrum line for mercury - so we were able to give the photo lab the exact wavelength of that blue as a guide.

A curious element of layout design, to let the page numbers displace text in the text block corner. Was this intentional? I don't like it, it's a pointless distraction.

Words have power, and some have an evil power that we could do without.... "Miscenegation" implies that interracial mating is wrong, just as "ethnic cleansing" implies that some ethnicities are somehow "dirty". There are probably other examples!

I tried to read Gene Wolfe's CASTLEVIEW and got nowhere, so I don't know about AN EVIL GUEST.... If it turns up in the thrift store I will no doubt buy it! Interesting that Wolfe names a planet "Woldercan" - the name seems familiar. Aha, it's the city whose destruction is seen by the audience at the Circus of Dr. Lao in the Charles Finney book of that name. An *homage* perhaps.

I have been on at least two listservs with long strings seeking the origin of the supposed "Chinese" curse "May you live in interesting times". Results were inconclusive. At best there are old Chinese aphorisms that carry some hint of the idea that life can be too interesting. Some sites attribute the line to

pseudo-orientalist Ernest Bramah in his Kai Lung tales - but none can cite a specific story.

Our culture is built around the automobile, and it costs a lot of lives. People have little choice about joining the system - and while driving is probably the most dangerous thing most of us do, the probability of disaster on any one trip is still quite remote. I drive about 10,000 miles a year, and after 10 years (or 100,000 miles) in the Atlanta area, I have had just one accident - which could very well have been fatal, but was not. I was uninjured even though the car was totalled.

Cute trick scanning the LoC signatures onto the page! I'm not sure it's a good idea though - it could be used for malicious forgery.

I got a giggle out of Gilliland's "lying shadow"! People say "let sleeping dogs lie" and I always think - does that ever happen? How would you know if a dog was lying? Maybe if you noticed that it brought back a different stick than the one you threw.... Or it pretends it needs to "go" when it just wants to go out....

Best, Ned

[[Rest assured that "the mule made it up the mountain" —and down the other side safely. We've all heard how stubborn mules can be, either to get started or to stop. Ugly beasts that make gawdawful noises, but useful in many ways.//I am indeed fortunate to have artwork by a real, live Tom Doubrely. May he live a long and productive life!. Seeing as "my" Tom Doubrely lives in SC he might be somehow related to one of them.//I hope in my opening comments that I answered your question about the problems with the spectroscopic inspection of the strange light. Obviously you weren't the only puzzled person who was taken by surprise by the result.//The page numbering layout wasn't supposed to interfere with the text. The new program I was using was supposed to make text wrap around the page numbers. But as you can see, I've tried to avoid that problem in this issue.//Yes there are ugly words that we

*might possibly do without but then there are ugly realities which require appropriate—and unfortunately ugly—and accurate terminology.//In the little bit of research I did about that old Chinese phrase I found there wasn't any certainty about its origin. Possibly someone somewhere made it up and thought it sounded—I don't know, inscrutable or clever somehow. It never seemed like a real curse to me. But what do I know?//I would like to think that the recipients and readers of this fanzine are above such malicious forgery and wouldn't even consider anything shady like that.//Oh. Now **you're** playing with the alternate meaning of lie in regard to telling falsehoods as opposed to being situated in one place (As of course Alexis played with the word.). I have to wonder, though, if dogs are even capable of telling untruths, or lies. Cats may be capable of such deceit. But both species do like to lie napping and don't much care to be interrupted. So do a lot of humans.]]*



From: **Joseph T. Major**

Nov. 25, 2008

Dear Tom:

As I recall, a mini-black hole would be smaller than an atomic nucleus, so the chance of a collision will be insignificant before it evaporates. Oh, those things evaporate.

The Old Kit Bag: There was an article in *_Analog_* a while ago with statistics. Christopher Anvil was the leading contributor of all time to the magazine. Somewhat surprisingly, Randall Garrett with all his pseudonyms

was only third. I'd count him as a "stalwart of *Analog* in the sixties", since that was when most of the Lord Darcy stories were published there, for example.

From the Readers:

Ned Brooks: While it is more advantageous (from a matter of cost and bulk) to send a probe instead of a person (people) on such a mission, the advantage in investigation is substantial. For example, what probe would have obtained the "Genesis Rock" of Apollo 15?

Alexis Gilliland is one of the unheralded greats. He modestly passes over his own contribution to the space habitat genre, the Rosinante series. Which also had political intrigue, clever plot structuring (the second and third books each overlapped the last half of the previous books, from a different point of view), and clever wit. I mean, minting token-value coins and putting on them "FIAT LUCRE"? That Gilliland was not raised to the highest ranks (in advances, too) of SF lit shows how narrow-minded publishers are.

Brad W. Foster: I've found that hot tubs are an excellent aid at getting through a long and wearisome WorldCon, particularly as I become more of an old Fan, and tired.

John Thiel: "Where no man has gone before" is ST: TOS. For NextGen they changed it to "Where no one has gone before", which still doesn't solve that problem but does others.

Milt Stevens: The recent HBO series "Rome" had Caesar as that sort of person. I think he got the parents of Cleopatra's children mixed up. This is like knowing that the Emperor Claudius was the grandson of Augustus and Cleopatra. That is, his grandmother Livia married Augustus, and his grandfather Mark Antony married Cleopatra. (If I were saying this in *Alexiad* I would put in the full names . . .)

John Purcell. We have three eunuchs around the house, but the thought of getting a cat to blow through a straw borders on the far side of absurd. He was lucky, my family newsletter got delayed for a week because of Hurricane Ike. I was writing on it, the power went out, and it took an entire week to get the power back, during which the draft was stuck on

the computer's hard disk. I have been looking into backup generators.

Me: I advise anyone interested in the lives of the Musketeers to hunt up *The Four Musketeers: The True Story of d'Artagnan, Porthos, Aramis & Athos* by Kari Maund and Phil Nanson. You will learn a great many things, among them being that he was Charles de Batz-Castlemore, Seigneur d'Artagnan, and the other three guys were Messrs. de Portau, d'Aramitz, and d'Athos.

Sheryl Birkhead: I have to pay property tax very soon. It has gone up by about fifty percent from \$\$\$ to \$\$\$\$. Also my employer (to whom I pay aforesaid tax) is furloughing all inessential employees for three days during the coming six months. At least I still get medical insurance.

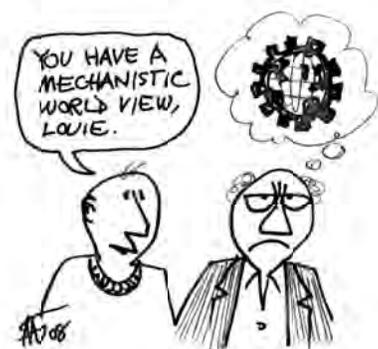
Last Words: There's still *It Goes on the Shelf*, which I am replying to on the same day. Sometimes it's money; Guy Lillian finds himself pinched, for example. And some of it is perceived convenience, as having had to endure a long shouted argument from Tim Bolgeo over how no one but no one does anything but email fanzines any more.

Namarie,

Joseph Major

*[[I had suspected that mini-black holes wouldn't pose much of a hazard to Human existence, being so very small. Unless thousands of them developed all at once and combined into a single, massive one. And I rather wondered at the lifespan of a mini-black hole. It very possibly could sort of fade away before anyone had a chance to worry about it.//The thought of getting a cat to do **anything** borders on the absurd.//I don't know how I could have forgotten Ned's **It Goes on the Shelf**. It has been one of the more memorable fanzines I receive and I look forward to it and Robert Lichtman's **TRAP Door**. But another print fanzine still being produced in John Thiel's **Pablo Lennis**, a strange and idiosyncratic publication that has been around for a long time. I can*

*understand the money part of fanzine publishing, especially when it comes to the uncertainty of how many people are actually reading a fanzine when the editor/publisher receives no indication of the the fact. Does the editor/publisher continue to bear the cost of printing X number of copies per issue having never heard **anything** from Y number of recipients? That has become a conundrum for me.]]*



From ALEXIS GILLILAND

4030 8th Street South,
Arlington, VA 22204
November 26, 2008
Dear Tom.

Thank you for The Reluctant Famulus, #67, which arrived in the mail today. A lovely cover by Brad Foster. Since you used the cartoons, a second sheet of five is enclosed, reflecting a bit on the recent election, which was not without its science fictional aspects. I am pleased to report that since your last issue, www.alexisgilliland.com, my website, has gone up, with lots of cartoons and more being added on a regular basis. It got a lot of favorable comment up at Philcon this past weekend. The Mapquest directions to the Philcon hotel seemed designed to lose you in the hinterlands of New Jersey, but we also printed out maps of the hotel and surrounding area, and saw that it was a straight shot up 295 and west on 70, going ten mile extra on two sides of the triangle instead of seeking a zig-zaggy and virtual hypotenuse. We talked to a number of people who had got

lost trying to use Mapquest. Other news is that the vet thinks our senior cat, Smoke, might be as old as 17. She is blind and slow moving, but she eats well and is still mobile, but she does spend most of her time sleeping. So putting her down wasn't necessary, but maybe we needed to bring her replacement on board a little early. Which we did, going down to the animal shelter to get Kitsele, or maybe The Kitsele, a five month old kitten who had been turned in for demanding too much attention. A very personable little cat, with a lot of bounce and sparkle, she gets on well with Smoke, and tolerably well with Pest. Certainly the whole entourage is a lot livelier than it had been.

Alternate energy sources include Nanosolar, which is offering solar cells for 99 cents a watt with a 20-year guarantee. They are currently a year or more back-ordered, but have just got a big loan to expand their production facilities. Also a lot of windmills are going up, especially in the Great Plains. The silver lining in the bear market cloud is that it reduces the demand for energy, so the price of energy—and oil, goes down. We filled up in NJ for \$1.79 a gallon. In the meantime, the Republicans have socialized the banks, while the cost of the bailout figures to be above a trillion dollars, maybe way above. The problem: all those companies that were too big to fail are also too big to bail out. What else? Honoring dead writers is for posterity, not SFWA. At Philcon, the agent Cherry Gottlieb told me how a young editor who was moving to another company wanted to keep in touch with her, but didn't recognize that Gottlieb's address, on Kipling Street, was named after Rudyard Kipling. Sigh. You'd think that "Easy As ABC" or "With The Night Mail" would at least be worth a Nebula nomination. That should do for now.

Best wishes,

[[I think I remember reading somewhere something about those low-cost solar cells. If they ever go into mass production or manu

factured by other companies the price should go down more although I'm sure there's a bottom line for profitability. I also read that it's possible one day in the not too distant future LEDs would replace not only incandescent lighting but also the newer type of fluorescent bulbs—the spiral ones—because LEDs don't require as much power to produce better light and they're much cooler burning.//An editor who didn't make the connection between Kipling Street and Rudyard Kipling! Good grief. How'd he—or she—manage to be so uninformed or unperceptive. It's not as if there are thousands of well-known Kiplings around. Of course after reading about a survey taken of young people (I don't know what age range or generation) many of them thought Winston Churchill and, I think, Franklin Roosevelt, were fictional people. How sad.]]



From **John Thiel**
30 N. 19th St.
Lafayette, IN 47904
November 27, 2008

Tom:

What if I sent you an issue of Pablo Lennis in exchange for The Reluctant Famulus on a regular basis, would you recall getting the issue? I notice you don't mention *Pablo Lennis* on your short list of "paper" fanzines still being published. Perhaps some BEM is reading the last copy I sent down at the Post Office? I doubt it; the cultural level of Pablo Lennis is above the BEM's level of under

standing.

Netzines have a greater quality of being here today and gone tomorrow. They are more transient than even a paper fanzine, and shorter as well. Sure, they keep annals [sic], but if a virus doesn't get their annals [sic] then something else is likely to happen that will make access difficult. And when they stop putting them up, nobody has anything to show for it. That isn't writing words that will last; the computer seems like a new elephant's graveyard except that it's modern enough to have a crematorium [?].

I'm glad to see someone who prefers the old hard way. I've got *Surprising Stories* going up, not to ignore a thread; but *Pablo Lennis* remains a paper-age output.

Alexis Gilliland might note than not only Camus, but all existentialists regard life as meaningless. They're sitting with Samuel Beckett (the playwright). However, readers of existentialism don't regard life as meaningless. They react to the challenge inadvertently proposed by those existentialists, and when they are writer, they try to find meaning for life. This is true of STAR TREK. The show has an existential background, but it works with it, doesn't succumb to it.

I like Gene Stewart's discussion of the merging of unorthodox with mainstream fiction. Surely that is a literary event of our times.

- John Thiel

[[I regret having forgotten to include Pablo Lennis among the paper fanzines still being published and don't know why it slipped my mind. Pure forgetfulness in my advancing age, I suppose. Sometimes my mind seems to wander So I don't forget this time: thanks for the issues of Pablo Lennis. I must admit to a small sense of awe that you're able to keep PL going for as long as you have.//I presume you mean that, like Vladimir and Estragon, they're waiting for Godot and probably for all eternity.

From: **Bob Sabella**

Hi Tom,

I was kind of blindsided when I received 2 issues of TRF so close together that I did not even have a chance to loc the first one. That's good news, of course (the frequency, not my lack of loccing!).

Sadly, I agree with Gene Stewart who, in referring to genre fiction, states "Unfairly...Pulp fiction from 50 years ago continues to define academic response to genre fiction today." SF is one of the few areas where people who are totally ignorant about it have strong opinions against it, usually based on either "B" movies or perhaps "A" movies which totally destroy the source material (*I, Robot* being one of my particular dislikes for how the director completely overturned Asimov's view of robots in favor of mindless chase scenes). Unfortunately, there is nothing we can do about people's ignorance or prejudices except accept that it is their loss, not ours.

Gene also comments that Ursula K (no period!) Le Guin is "not sure genre benefits from an influx of mainstream elements." While I believe that all forms of fiction benefit from adopting ideas from other forms, I can understand Ursula's trepidation. First and foremost, sf is a fiction of ideas and sense of wonder, and if adopting mainstream ideas weakens that aspect (as it does in some cases), then perhaps sf is better off without marginalization. But I doubt if Ursula really favors a totally rejection of mainstream ideas. As Gene noted, her own fiction defies that.

I chuckled when I got to Joe Major's loc. Who is this "Sabena" guy he is referring to? He seems to have many of the same interests that I do. (As to Joe's question about being "interested to learn what Sabena [sic] thinks of the other two major Roman Mystery writers, John Maddox Roberts and Lindsay Davis," I have not read either of them, and until I have recommendations that their historical fiction is more than just a genre mystery with a colorful setting, I probably will not do so.

Bob

[[I certainly didn't mean to blindside you with issues of TRF coming out so close together. It was just that I was fortunate enough to have sufficient material for the next issue sooner than expected along with a cover and artwork. And so I took the opportunity.//Your comments about SF and outsiders' perceptions of it pretty much agree with what I have maintained for a long time: the people unfamiliar with written SF associate it with the bulk of movie SF, to the great detriment of the written.. Those people just don't have a clue and, I sometimes think, steadfastly refuse to change their impression.I steadfastly refused to see I, Robot, and don't regret the decision. Will Smith is an all right actor but he seems to make some less than smart choices in his movie roles. SF may benefit from certain technical aspects of mainstream fiction but, as you say and as I along with others also maintain, SF is a literature of ideas and really should play with that strength and not become "too mainstream".// I got to wondering about the "Sabena" to whom you referred and in doing so discovered a horrible, glaring error which was my fault but which I'm at a loss to explain. In Joe Major's LoC he properly referred to you, "Sabella", and in examining the "master" copy of #67 "Sabella" appears, as it should. Yet somehow—and I could spend the rest of my life wondering how—your last name became Sabena. In the end, there's really no mystery about this "Sabena" guy. It was just one of my many stupid mistakes that I never discovered in time.]]

From: **Brad W Foster**
PO Box 165246,
Irving, TX 75016

Greetings Tom ~

Got in issue 67 of THE RELUCTANT FAMULUS this past week. Really cool to see the color cover. It's one of the odder little pieces I've done this year, so I'm glad you were happy to give it a home.

And, before on to the meat of the loc, I

see you've used up the rest of the stuff I have sent, so I will scan and attach 5 brand-new little bits of weirdness I hope you will also like enough to make use of. Tried to give you a variety of sizes/formats, to make it easier to fit them into those odd blank spaces that need fillos.

Oh, and I have a question... well, maybe more of a request. Evidently I had missed reading the full colophon info on previous issues, or at least didn't get past the bit where contributors retain their copyright to their work. That is kind of tossed out the window with the next bit about giving permission to anyone who wants to to reprint "material presented herein", with all they have to do is give a credit line. Would you be against rephrasing that in future issues to read: "Permission is granted to any persons who wish to reprint material written or produced by the Editor/Publisher presented herein, provided proper and due credit is given to both the Editor/Publisher and to the original publication in which it appeared. To use any other material, you must get permission from the individual writers or artists who created it." Is that doable? It's just a bit confusing as is phrased now, and would like to emphasize the point you are already doing, that you are not claiming any copyright yourself to anything in each issue you have not yourself created, and thus are not in a position to pass

any of those rights on to anyone else through a blanket permission to allow reprinting.

I used the new email you sent out a week or so back, but decided to cc to the one printed in the zine, just to make sure this all gets to you. We are having a hard time getting decent uninterrupted DSL connections here through our land lines, even in the middle of the Dallas-Ft. Worth metroplex. How happy are you so far with your Hughesnet connection? I've already got one small dish on the roof for satellite tv, be no problem to add another to get a decent, uninterrupted internet connection as well!

I had a couple of observations on the various lists you've come across in your article on what a plot might be:

Regarding "7 Plots", looks to me as if 1 and 3 are just different words for the same idea, as are 5 and 7. Of course, maybe that's just me...

Regarding "20 Plots", I was struck how you could almost (almost!) take that list, in the order it is given, as a plot outline of a single story, rather than plots for 20 different stories. The Quest is announced and set off on, and Adventure ensues! There is Pursuit and some are captured, so this is followed with a Rescue and an Escape. Of course, we must now have our Revenge, but this will involve solving the first Riddle, and so on and so on...

Regarding "36 Plots" I think it was miss



ing one: #37 “Cast locked in basement, reminiscences on the past to allow for cheap clip episode”.

As for your “Last Words”, specifically where you wonder if going electronic with TRF would affect the receiving of letters, I think recent years have shown clearly that online-only zines get much lower response than printed-and-mailed zines. There has been much discussion of this already, but aside from questions of ease or reading, etc etc, one of the core points many folks have agreed with is that a zine personally addressed and mailed to a person will make them feel a bit more obligated to reply, as it was directly and personally sent to THEM. Whereas the online zine, with it's “here it is, everyone click in” aspect, seems to separate many people from a direct connection. They will read it like any other free online content, then move on. Many editors right now seem to get around this by still keeping the print version going, thus keeping the loc-generating potential high, but ALSO posting an online version for ease of access in the future.

So, another great issue, and thanks gain for letting me play with a big piece of art. Like to try it again in a few issues down the road if you're game for it.
stay happy ~

Brad

[[I was very happy to be able to use your cover because it's just the sort of whimsical, odd stuff that appeals to me. Please do keep TRF in mind and try something like that again.//As I said in an e-mail and you will see on the ToC page, I took your suggestion, which is only fair and proper.//So far my experience with hughes.net has been fairly good. It's still not lightning fast but is much more so that the dial-up I had, the phone line isn't tied up and it's always available when I want it so there's no longer any doubt if I'll get connected or not.//The thing with those plots lists is that the longer the lists become the more duplication there is. Plotting isn't a simple matter but neither it is quite as complex as some of those experts would have it. As I noted, Kipling's “6 sailing men” are suf-

ficient to form the basis for just about all plots. The 36-plots list is, I think, far too large and overdoing it.]]



From: **Richard Lynch**

Mimosa web site: <http://jophan.org/mimosa/>
1960s Fan History Site:
<http://jophan.org/1960s/>

Hi, Tom

A short comment on your introductory comments in TRF67. Concerning the Large Hadron Collider, you wrote that:

“But there are some who fear that the experiment will result in some sort of catastrophe. Those people are afraid the experiment will create some sort of unwelcome particles or other exotic stuff, mini-black holes which could cause major destruction, or something that could swallow up Earth or destroy the universe as we know it.”

I now believe the machine is safe, but back in August (before I read all the technical papers about LHC safety) I wasn't so sure. It seemed to me that any potentially infinitely bad outcome should have exactly zero risk, and no scientist to my knowledge had said the risk from operation of the LHC was exactly zero. And that is still the case.

I don't think the LHC people have done all that good a job in public outreach. What we could have used is a layman's language version of the technical paper one of the LHC people wrote that painstakingly examined all the scenarios and mathematically

ruled each one out. What we, the public, got instead was a patronizing "Trust me on this." Is there any wonder that some people were skeptical?

Rich Lynch

[[I believe there were a couple of articles about the LHC which weren't as technical as anything written by people connected with the project but there could have been a better way of talking about potential problems with the device. I'm fairly confident the LHC is safe, too, but as with any such project there are bound to be problems of some sort. Even though I'm far from savvy enough to understand the more technical aspects of the LHC and black holes, I tend to think any problems wouldn't be due to the creation of mini-black holes. It would be something more prosaic, such as the glitches which shut down the project and things of a more mechanical nature. As for the "Trust me on this.", that's symptomatic of any highly technical project or program. When you think about it, in relation to the TARP (or bail-out) that's exactly the attitude of Henry Paulson, et al: "Trust me on this." (All the way to total destruction.) That's why so many of us average American taxpayers and voters are skeptical of the whole thing.]] I think I'm more afraid of the harm Paulson and crew have done than of anything the LHC might. In fact, I think that maybe TARP has turned Wall Street into a massive black hole

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From **Milt Stevens**
6325 Keystone St.
Simi Valley, CA 93063
miltstevens@earthlink.net

December 28, 2008

Dear Tom,

Reluctant Famulus begins with some comments on current scientific developments. I suspect I don't follow scientific developments the way I would have years ago. The discovery of new extrasolar planets

still gets my attention, but many things don't. Some science is just plain irrelevant to my concerns. I don't really care whether the universe has 11 or 23 dimensions. I'm slightly more interested in how many angels can dance on the head of the stupid pin. (If angels exhibit a propensity for dancing on the heads of pins, what does that say about the angels?) I don't much care about dark matter either. Apparently, it only exists so physicists can balance their books on the universe. I don't think the universe is going to go into foreclosure even if they don't balance their books. I honestly suspect dark matter doesn't exist, and we've made some sort of error which has caused us to believe that it does.

Bob Sabella wonders why SFWA does some of the things it does. Years ago, I used to wonder about SFWA. Then I realized they have no better idea of why they do things than I do. That makes it all better.

In Gene Stewart's article, using the word miscegenation to describe a mixing of genre and mainstream fiction is a curious choice of words. The term was used to describe an illegal and forbidden practice. The act is no longer illegal or forbidden, but the word still has negative connotations. If you used "cross pollination" to describe the same situation, it would sound much more positive. Of course, nobody is required to sound positive about the whole thing.

You ask "What is a Plot?" I would say it is the skeleton or framework of a story. Kids often mistake it for the purpose of a story. For an in depth consideration of things that are to be found in a novel, I recommend "Aspects of the Novel" by E. M. Forster.

I think I can think of an equation which will explain the number of possible fictional plots. When critic X proposes N as the number of possible fictional plots author Y will immediately devise plot N + 1. Thus, the value of N may be anything from zero to infinity, but it is never the last value that was mentioned. I think I may have devised Quantum Litcrit.

Yours truly,
Milt Stevens

*[[I don't follow most scientific developments closely myself; only those things which I find most interesting. As for how many dimensions there actually are, I find myself doubtful of the large number claimed by some theoreticians. Anything beyond the usual 3 dimensions of space and the one of time seems questionable to me. Especially when someone talks about a dimension that's incredibly small and somehow curls up tightly on itself. If such a dimension (or dimensions exist) exists, what good is it? It's so small that the vast number of Humans would never see it and somehow something that small would seem to have an infinitesimally small affect on our lives anyway. I don't even bother to speculate on how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. If they're so small that X number of them can dance on the head of a pin then they're of equally infinitesimally small importance to all the speculative dimensions. What good are angels that small? I'd rather have my angels at least life-size if not larger. Of course I suppose such small angels could conceivably fight off germs, bacteria, and so on which affect a person's health. Even so . . . //I ask "What's in a plot?" only rhetorically, presuming that readers of TRF are astute enough to have a relatively clear idea of the answer. Another good source about plots is the chapter "Conflict and Plot", from Arthur Koestler's book INSIGHT AND OUTLOOK. I pointed out that a plot "is, in some ways, merely the skeleton around which the flesh of the story is grown." And in an e-mail to Gene Stewart (and part of which I should have included in the Plot article) I also used the example of plot as being a framework around which the story is constructed. Sometimes great minds **do** think alike. Or at least a great mind like yours and whatever mind I possess.]]*

From **Lloyd Penney**

Dear Tom:

Happy New Year! I'm going to start it off with responding to issues 64 and 66 of The Reluctant Famulus as found on eFanzines.com. Once that's done, I can get

onto commenting on issue 67 and be up to date. You know, I checked my records to see what was the last issue of TRF I received and commented on, and that was issue 56 from 2001. It's good to be back.

64...I am still amazed that today, major research can be carried out with a computer, Google and a few minutes of time, and the results would be greater than months spent in public libraries say, 25 years ago. Any question you may have can be answered in minutes. We truly live in a science fictional world. My mother has told me that her grandfather did some genealogical research, and went as far back as the horse thief, and ended it right there. Perhaps he was afraid of who else he'd find... Religion is an interesting field to me, too, mostly because of what says about the people who follow them. It would seem that in this era, our lives are truly affected by extremists, whether they are in the Middle East, Jerusalem or the White House. I am hoping that with the fading of the religious right, and a new beginning on Inauguration Day, life will get a little less extreme.

I guess I enjoy space opera and all its connotations, given that I cut my skiffy eye teeth on it. It seems normal to explore and expand outwards, and the SF of the 50s and 60s that I read gave me the outer space sawunda that originally hooked me. Recently, I read some more of A. Bertram Chandler's John Grimes stories, and it was a return to fond old days. There are still some negative aspects to the term space opera, and perhaps they are the same aspects connected to the term "sci-fi".

Gene Stewart is right, escapism sells. At least, it sells to us. Escapism is a temporary vacation from a sometimes harsh reality. Today, is harsh reality being dealt with at all? Has escapism become complete avoidance? Fiction must deal in truth without being completely concerned by it, and the reader must feel comfortable enough to stand back and watch the details of the fiction happen without feeling they are being too heavily drawn into it. Escapist fiction shouldn't block your escape. I also think that while fiction must be based in truth, you must be care

ful as to how much it is anchored in it. Today, people demand completely factuality in the physics of their fiction. To me, this is a partial contradiction. I have read some SF in which one of the laws of physics is tweaked, and all other laws change slightly because of that tweak. How's that for a fictional reality?

I feel Sheryl Birkhead's pain. I've never built or remodeled a house, but I've lived through enough of it. My father is a professional carpenter and contractor, and it seems my entire childhood was spent in a house being remodeled or built up, live living in an eternal construction site. This meant that money and time for the kids was at a premium because Dad needed both to buy and put up the gyproc, or buy more nails, or the time to re-shingle the roof. There was some resentment on our part as kids, and perhaps that may be one of the reason I've never bought a house myself.

Ah, here's mention of the grand move. Miss Adrian, Michigan much? I'll hazard a guess that it's a little warmer. The winter here started early, and has been exceedingly cold at times, and we're not that far away from Adrian. Jeff Kaufman asks about faneds under 45...I think Garth Spencer and Graeme Cameron are over 50, Cathy Palmer-Lister in Montreal is a retired school teacher, and Sandi Marie McLaughlin in Ottawa is long retired. Then there's Dale Speirs, who I also think is 50+, and I am not sure about Taral. And, I turn 50 this coming June. That leaves Andrew Murdoch in Vancouver, who did produce some zines a while ago, and who was a teenager during the Winnipeg Worldcon, so I would estimate that he is in his mid-30s now.

Ever take up Milt's invitation to rejoin FAPA? I've been invited to join by a few members over the past couple of years, and nothing would please me more, but having to make a living always gets in the way. Reality intrudes, as always. Living in an SFnal world sound good on the outside, but after reading one too many dystopian books... I find that as you get older, the cutting edge of technology races away from your ability to comprehend it, so I imagine that in another ten years, I will be so out of it techwise.

Might be an idea to contact the Sadler's Brewery to ask about t-shirts or polo shirts... they'd be a hoot to wear at a convention.

66... We have to explore where we haven't been; it seems to be in our nature. One source of our societal frustrations is that there's no place left on this earth to explore and discover. There is some excitement at seeing how Spirit and Opportunity, the two Martian rovers, are still going and exploring after five years of operation, but we'd be much more excited if there was a human being on Mars right now. The more there's a human being involved, the more we'd be inclined to support financially such a mission. And, we could use the adventure, the excitement, the goshwow that the public rarely gets. NASA has a serious problem to deal with...the shuttle programme will be retired in a couple of years, and the Ares rockets will not be ready for a couple of years yet. Private launch companies have been contracted to take cargo and crew back and forth for the next few years...let's hope they work. Otherwise, the space station may have to be closed for a year or two. If only we could divert money that goes towards war and waste to space exploration...our dreams would come true.

Alfred Byrd's phrase "conservator of tradition"...for those of us who have retired from a lot of active fanac, like conrunning, club management and more, mostly because of fatigue and change outstripping our ability to comprehend it, that phrase certainly describes a lot of people I know, and it certainly describes me.

Gene Stewart, great essay. Our reality passed our imagination a while ago, and now, to compound our frustration over having nothing more to explore (see above), we are doubly frustrated that we have nothing more to imagine. We dreamed of our future, and when we got it, we dreamed of alternatives to it. We are in the future, and seem mostly unable to imagine a future future, if you will. We are the victims of our own imaginative success.

The local...Joseph Major, the limit here is 100 kph, and many ignore that because the

Ontario Provincial Police often fail to enforce it. Given the quality of the roads, which is fairly good, and the abilities of most of the drivers, I think the limit should be 110 or 115 kph. But then, I'm not a driver. I do have one of those t-shirts that says "English doesn't borrow from other languages. English follows other languages down dark alleys, knocks them over and goes through their pockets for loose grammar." That is a variation of something James Nicoll put on RASSF some years ago.

I think the conversation about the size of a book versus the size of the story within shows me (apologies to Gene Wolfe in advance) that writers will write not to contain the story but to pad the number of words they get paid for, and because they may be seen as working against the writers, the editors (often writers themselves) literally fail to edit. We remember marvelous stories by folks like Cliff Simak, a complete entertaining tale at 140 pages or so. I guess if the story is grand enough to fill three or four 1,000-page volumes, so be it, but it's easy to see many of these books as bloated.

Two issues down, one to go, and I will get that soon. I wanted to ask you if you would like to [publish a?] story from a series I am calling Tales of the Convention. I have written 20 vignettes of stories from the conventions I have attended over the years. I am not concentrating on any one fanzine; I'd like to get them all in print as soon as possible. The first few stories have already been published in the OSFS Statement and other zines, and John Purcell's Askance will have a story in it as soon as John gets it onto eFanzines.com. I have a logo set up as well...let me know if you'd like one of these stories for the next issue.

All done...after I send this to you, I now also put all my locs onto a LiveJournal account which I use as an archive. Take care, and I will get started on issue 67 very soon.

Yours,
Lloyd Penney.
1706-24 Eva Rd.
Etobicoke, ON

[[While it's true a lot of research can be done online there is still so much more information of all kinds that isn't online. Eventually, maybe, everything in every library, historical society, courthouse, or other repositories will be available by way of computer access, but who knows when that will be.//Religion in general isn't a bad thing. It's the result of people taking their religions to extremes that does the greatest damage and it's true of more than just Islamism; Catholicism has been just as guilty.//An interesting insight into life with a professional carpenter (builder or contractor). Fortunately you seem to have survived successfully.//We don't miss Adrian al that much even though my wife was born there and my father, mother, and I moved there sometime before the oldest of my younger brothers was born in June 1947. Nor do we miss the winter weather. Michigan winters, even in the southeastern part, can be pretty nasty. Too much cold, too much ice and snow—too much Winter in general which often seemed to be the longest season.//I'm still considering joining NAPA. Bob Sabella and Ben Indick have also tried to entice me to join. Whenever I feel I can contribute something worthwhile I will join.//I like your T-shirt and its message. How could I get one of them?//Re bloated novels. There are many novels outside SF and fantasy, such as thrillers and horror by a good many writers (dare I say hacks?) which were bloated and would have benefited from judicious cutting. I know. I've read some of them out of curiosity. Some are series books, each as huge as its predecessor. After a while it's the "same old same old", just different minor characters. And in fairness to Gene Wolfe—he hasn't written that many large novels and I've personally found more of interest than it those others.//I hadn't though of contacting Sadler's Brewery to see if they had any T-shirts. It's a thought and may be worth following. If they did have such things and I got one, I'd be obligated to attend a convention or two just to show it off.]]

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From **Lloyd Penney**
January 8, 2009

Dear Tom:

As promised, I am caught up, and I have here some commentary on *The Reluctant Famulus* 67.

The Large Hadron Collider should be up again in a couple of months, and then we will see if it forms a black hole under the surface of the earth, and gradually eats away the earth beneath us. They LHC and the feared consequences sound science fictional enough, but hey, let's see what happens. Maybe we can choose what goes into the mini black holes (evil grin)... I am a member of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, and I am certain that some of the higher-ups would say that the sky is a pretty big thing to study every night on a regular basis. And, I don't know if there are any professional sky-gazers, monitoring the skies on an 8-hour shift for a decent pay.

I don't know much about how SFWA works, or the internal politics function, but all I can do is look towards the experiences of Robert J. Sawyer, whose tenure as SFWA president was short and fiery. Rob came into the presidency with ideas, and I think he was slapped down for not keeping the status quo. I don't know much more, but a Nebula award is judged by your peers, so it sounds logical that the Lucite block is regularly given to those with the most friends within the organization. I dare daresayay there's few organizations that are different.

I try my best not to indulge in fannish pedantry, but I have so many taken to task, to put it mildly, over the phrase "May you live in interesting times" being described as Chinese. I'd have to look it up, but I keep reading that it is attributed to Eric Frank Russell under one of his pseudonyms.

The dream of going to Mars gets tougher all the time because we cannot yet join together to make such a mission work; we're too busy fighting with each other. Political will is lessening, and public apathy is increasing. There are times I wonder if this dream is

being kept alive long enough to keep the struggling aerospace industry afloat. I am also finding out about how some of the big names in space advocacy have left altruism behind, and are carving out personal empires and ego baths for themselves, usually out of the donations the true idealists are making to them. I am a little disillusioned, but not really surprised. And then, I think of folks like Steve Squyers who led a team to create a couple of Martian rovers who were designed to be tough and last three months...they are tougher than they thought, and the rovers are still going after five years. But as Squyers said, all the rover tire tracks are great, but nothing would beat a single boot print upon the surface of Mars.

Producing a paper fanzine doesn't make you an anachronism...there's lots of people who have never given up on the idea that a publication is actually put onto paper. I'm one of them. If such publications were anachronisms, there wouldn't be so many books and magazines available. A number of fan editors will produce a limited number of issues to send to those who either are major or long-time contributors to your zine, or those who don't have any way accessing the .pdf format, or who just don't like e-zines. The rest of us seem quite happy with .pdfs. For me, as much as I would like a paper copy, I understand the economics of large print runs, and the savings behind .pdfed versions, so I'll take the .pdf. Saves money, avoids mailing hassles, and bypasses the various postal services, so it will get to me in minutes instead of weeks.

If issue 65 is eventually posted to eFanzines.com, I'll whip up a loc, but in the meantime, I am caught up. Seeing that you list e-mail addresses in the local, could you list my home e-mail address, penneys@allstream.net, instead of the one these locs have come from? Many thanks. I look forward to seeing more issues.

Yours,

Lloyd Penney.

[[I'm of the opinion that nothing galactically

catastrophic will occur when the LHC goes into full service. I could be wrong—but I don't think so.//With the Hubble space telescope, various radio telescope arrays around the world, and other space telescopes in the works there is and will be a consistent automated sky survey.//Fannish pedantry aside, I did do some research (online, of course) about the "Chinese curse" and there seems to be no consensus as to where, how, and who originated it or if it really is Chinese. The curse was also attributed to Ernest Bramah. For all I know, some advertising copywriter someplace dreamed it up as part of some advertising campaign. But that's just silly speculation.//Indeed, ". . . a single boot print upon the surface of Mars . . ." (What! A one-legged astronaut?) would be wonderful. Two boot prints would be even better. The Mars rovers have been valuable in providing preliminary data but they lack the human facility of interpreting the results received.]]



From **Lloyd Penney**

January 15, 2009

Dear Tom:

Here I am getting entirely caught up with the last of the four Reluctant Famuli posted onto eFanzines.com. Comments follow on issue 65.

Time has passed, and the price of gasoline has changed wildly over time. as of writing, gasoline here is about 78 cents a litre, which is better than the \$1.45 a litre it was just last year. The value of the dollars also dare say fluctuate, so rather than trying to figure out the ultimate price of gasoline, we'll

just do what we would do anyway, and just buy it, no matter the price. It could be \$3/litre or \$8/gallon, and we'd still buy it. The downward trend of the price reflects the fact, though, that while we'd still buy gasoline, we'd use it a little more wisely. Gone are the days of the leisurely drive in the country; the gas is just too expensive to use it like that. Our children's lives will be different than ours are, but I think they'll be just as happy. They won't miss what they never had, and that may refer to gasoline at some point.

Gene Stewart's complaint about wordiness in books is my own. I remember thin paperbacks by giants in the field like Clifford Simak, who could write a full novel and full story, and make it fit in about 120 - 140 pages in a paperback. Simak used his journalistic experience to write clearly and concisely. However, in this age of payment by the word, and a higher price for a larger product, we get thick, \$10 paperbacks, each a part of a series that could stretch off into an infinology. Infinology isn't a word, but with the series that I see, it should be. Not only can't authors self-edit, editors can't edit, either. If they could, we'd have slightly cheaper books, thinner books that would provide a better read, and as Gene says, more books would fit into the packing case.

We all need a TARDiS...just wrote something similar in a loc to Chris Garcia. Our apartments would serve as lobbies to our personal TARDiSes, and the infinities within. Then we'd have enough room to store our stuff. We'd just have to make sure we don't get lost inside.

Sheryl Birkhead is trying to find relatives...I am finding that Facebook is great for finding relatives. After a huge fallout between my father and the rest of the family, I completely lost track of all of my aunts, uncles and cousins over the past 15 or so years. Facebook has allowed me to find my cousins, and find out what happened to my aunts and uncles. My aunt Jessie died just recently; I couldn't get to the funeral, but at least I was able to find out about it. I have gotten my father back in touch with his family, and I am now Facebook friends with five

cousins, and we are looking for more.

In reading Ned Brooks' loc, even though I am enjoying mostly classic SF from the 50s, 60s and 70s, I have to wonder how much of it, if any, would hold up today. Same goes for our fanac. Granted, we've used newer technologies to facilitate our magazine-style format of publication, and to distribute them without paper, but once we're all too old to pub our ish, will anyone else pub it? I don't think the magazine is a dying form, but in fandom it looks like it is. Yet, it is the most natural form of reading for humans. Start at the beginning, read until the end. I don't think it will go away, but it will be pushed aside by blogs and electronic bulletin boards on websites.

About filming *The Hobbit*...I had read elsewhere that the actual story of *The Hobbit* would be split in two for two movies, and I had wondered how that would be accomplished, and accomplished with two entertaining movies at the end. The idea of the first movie being *The Hobbit* and the second movie filling the gap between *Hobbit* and *LotR* sound better, but who'd create the creativity for the Gap movie? Did Tolkien ever write what took place between the two books, or will this writing be assigned to someone appointed by the Tolkien estate? Ian McKellen has become the definitive Gandalf; I hope they get Ian Holm to reprise Bilbo Baggins. If it wasn't for industrial squabbling and rights ownership and money, we would have had those movies before now. I know there are complaints about how the *LotR* movies weren't faithful to the books, but this is a fine example of how in some cases the book(s) shouldn't be followed faithfully. The movies were exciting and action-filled...what would the audience reaction have been to all of the great songs within the books, and the time spent with Tom Bombadil? As faithful readers, I think we would have liked to have seen those scenes, but for the average movie-goer, I think he would have been bored. Selective editing avoids that kiss of death for a movie; these are realities Peter Jackson and Fran Walsh realized in the moving of those movies. I have those

movies on DVD, and I would happily revisit Middle-Earth again and again, whether it's the books or the movies. It's a wonderful, nostalgic time each time.

Odd casting...just a day or so ago, Ricardo Montalban passed away, one of the best baddies the *Star Trek* franchise ever had. He was born in Mexico, and was a movie star there for a time, but then went to Hollywood, where he was cast in every Spanish New World-type character available, and he was even cast as a Japanese samurai. Anything is possible with the right make-up, I suppose, but the casting decisions in Hollywood still range from odd to racist, and everything in between.

Evangelicals traveling to Utah to convert the Mormons? Isn't that like going to the Vatican to convert the Catholics? There's having the conviction of your faith, and then...

I think I'd done here...I still have quite a stack of zines to respond to, and time always seems to be at a premium. I still have my evening job to go to, and I might have a little time for more writing then. Off this goes into the ether, and onto my LiveJournal archive, and I look forward to fresh issues of the *Famulus*. Thank you!

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

[[With all the emphasis on computers, the internet, and virtual reality, subsequent generations may never feel the need to use gasoline or whatever replaces it for travel. They'll all be too busy interacting with each other via computers, the internet, and virtual reality. Why bother leaving the house when there's the—to me fake—virtual reality everyone seems to wild about.]]Traditionally, writers are paid by the word for short stories (and, in the case of non-fiction articles) though there were--and probably still are--magazines that paid a flat fee for a story. In the case of novels the practice was to pay a certain advance the size of which depended on the writer's status and might have been only a few hundred dollars on up for the established writers, and percentage of profit royalties. My personal experience in that

area is very limited but I don't recall ever hearing of a writer being paid for a novel by the word. At any rate, the concept of the bloated size of books being due to payment by the word is, in a word, inaccurate unless the publishing industry has changed recently. There are other factors at work.//I agree about the movie treatment of the Rings trilogy. Certainly there were some interesting parts about Tom Bombadil but for the most part they really weren't absolutely essential to the overall story and were more a distraction.]]

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From: **Graeme Cameron**

Re TRF #67

Hi Tom!

Cheerful cover by Brad Foster. I'm so accustomed to seeing him as a B&W illo craftsman that his delightful use of colour always takes me by surprise (in a positive way).

When I first saw the lines around the text, I thought "Oh no, this is going to be hard to read. It would be so much better if the text was surrounded by white space, easier on the eyes." Yet I quickly became so fascinated with the 'Strange Things' article I no longer noticed the lines, it was as if they became invisible. So never mind....

Re: 'Strange things'; the 2006 'mysterious object' was probably Zaphod Beeblebrox (sp?) firing up the old hyper drive again. And the unexplained 'Dark Flow' is probably a consequence of adolescent alien dragsters messing up the stellarhood....

But then you mentioned "researchers conclude that whatever it is driving the movements of the clusters" (hit & run victims of dark flow) "must lie beyond the known universe." (!) and that this region "likely doesn't contain stars and galaxies, and could include massive structures bigger than anything in our own universe." This vividly hurled me back into the recesses of my memory to the images I conjured up reading a short story in

the early 1960s, can't remember the title or the author, involving space travel via what we would now call worm holes, with vistas of incomprehensible patterns of light & matter while en route, that turn out to actually be the guts of vast worm-like creatures. Something within the author's description evoked my sense of wonder; the beauty, the scale, something. Maybe the story was a tongue-in-cheek reference to the worm hole theory when that concept first appeared (that early?) but I remember the story as serious, somewhat dull, yet riveting in its imagery. Awesome in fact. Pity I can't remember who wrote it. Anyway, your article pushed one of my sensa-wonda memory buttons.

Bob Sabella has a point in his SFWA Grandmasters article, that there are more worthy recipients on hand than Harry Harrison who is slated to receive the 2009 award. But he is a generation older than the writers Bob suggests as better alternatives, and if Harrison is ever to get this award he should get it now. Besides, looking at the list of previous winners, some of them, like Jack Williamson & Van Vogt, were probably awarded on the basis of them being early pioneers; I think that Harrison is a better storyteller than either of them. And Harrison was at least as good as Lester del Rey or Damon Knight, in my opinion. I'm not talking about fluff like his 'Bill The Galactic Hero' or his 'Stainless Steel Rat' series, but the good stuff, like his 'Eden' books, or 'The Deathworld' series. I genuinely believe Harrison has earned the award. He's not a Pohl, or a Clarke, or a Simak, but he's a Harrison by Ghod, and that's good enough.

Gene Stewart's article on 'Rising Above Miscegenation' was interesting, not least because he points out that the uneasy relationship/conflict between genre & mainstream doesn't exist in England, or at least they are seen "as valid variants, rather than distinctions." Maybe. Or maybe they have more exceptionally good writers. Certainly William Gibson here in Canada ignores all distinctions. Even as far back as his student days at the University of BC he was arguing there were no distinctions. He refuses to be

ghettoized within the sci-fi genre, not because he's ashamed of SF, not simply because it's a savvy approach with critics, but because he doesn't believe the 'genre ghetto' exists; good writing is good writing. I, on the other hand, do believe there is a sci-fi ghetto, and I prefer it to mainstream. I stopped reading science fiction entirely when the New Wave came along. Enough with the angst already. Let's have a ripping good yarn! I got back into SF when excellent story tellers appeared, like Niven and Baxter. I guess I'm just an old-fashioned anti-miscegenist (but only in terms of literature I hasten to add).

I'm also an old-fashioned cat lover, so I enjoyed Sheryl Birkhead's article. Rather amusing. I myself would never volunteer for the SPCA; I just couldn't handle the fact so many beasties have to be put down, either because they're too savaged by their previous owners to nurse back to health, or because no one can be found to adopt them. I'd make a lousy farmer too. For a while my wife raised ducks (till we moved into an apartment). She loved them all, and loved to eat them too. I had mixed feelings whenever we sat down to a duck dinner. Now we just have one household duck, very much a pet. This is easier on me emotionally. I guess I can't become 'Dictator of the World' after all. Too soft. So much for my childhood dreams....

Alfred D. Byrd reveals how phenomenally dangerous separating out DNA is. All those nasty chemicals! Glad I failed chemistry in High School. On the other hand, I did win an award for my biology experiment – testing intelligence in crabs (they have none). Really I think I got the award because mine was the only experiment in class whose subjects survived to be released back into the wild. I considered studying biology at UBC, but rejected the idea because I didn't want to do any experiments that would harm the critters. So, being a softie again, I acquired a wildly useful BFA instead. Oh well.

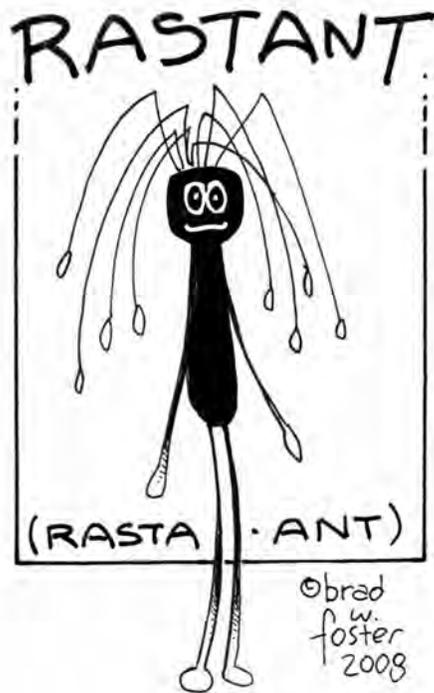
Enjoyed all the zine actually, but I've nattered on long enough. Looking forward to the next issue.

Cheers! The Graee

(fanned of **Space Cadet & WCSFAzine**)

*[[When I inquired of him about doing a cover for TRF Brad told me he was looking for an excuse to try something in color and so he seized the opportunity. For which I was very thankful. He also indicated that he'd like to try it again so there very well may be another Brad Foster color cover for TRF. I plan to hold him to his sort-of promise.//I don't know if good old Zaphod B. had anything to do with that unexplained flash of light. More likely it might have been the Vogons involved in some sort of galactic demolition work.//Interesting story you mentioned. Maybe you can remember the title and author. “. . . the guts of some vast worm-like creature . . .” Bizarre.//There will inevitably be disagreements over decisions such as SFWA's Grandmaster award. All the writers you mentioned have their good points and their bad, their strengths and their weaknesses. We readers have our most favorite writers and don't always agree about them. You feel “. . . Harrison is a better storyteller . . .” and that's your right and privilege.//As far as I'm concerned there is such a thing as science fiction as a genre—and as a valid form of literature—but the notion of it being a ghetto or ghettoized seems bizarre to me. Good writing should be encouraged in **any** form of fiction but none of them should be regarded with contempt because that particular branch of fiction doesn't comfortably fit someone's idea of “good fiction”. I think only bigoted, conceited, ignorant people strive to condemn SF in particular to a ghetto in order to make themselves feel superior to that or any type of fiction they don't fully understand and so disparage. As long as a story is well told, entertaining, and moving in some human way it shouldn't matter whether it's SF, fantasy, mystery, Historical, romance, or whatever. And now I'll get down off my soap box.]]*

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From *John Purcell*

Hi, Tom.

It's been a crazy week what with getting ready for the next semester and dealing with my address book being phished, but I have survived. So this means I have a bit of time to catch up on some loc-writing this morning.

That cover on your latest issue is really glorious. Brad Foster just keeps getting better and better, and this one has a bit of an oriental mystique in it. I really like it. I have something of his to use for the cover of my second annish, and it will be used unless something else comes through the electronic ether that knocks my socks off. We faneds are so lucky to have Brad doing artwork for us. The man deserves the awards and accolades he has received over the years.

While there may have been some concern that the Large Hadron Collider could have caused the End of Everything, such an event may be construed as A Good Thing, depending on one's perspective. Myself, there's good stuff coming down the pike, so I am not in favor of destroying the world, but this machinery makes me wonder if Marvin the Martian has one of these at his disposal.

Remember, the Earth is blocking his view of Venus. Can't have that now, can we, hmm?

Like you suggest in the rest of your editorial, maybe that missed supernova V598 Puppis was the result of some alien technology that went a bit haywire. Could be. I really like the way you point out the amount of leeway the astronomers gave for that supernova's location. Boy, those guys aren't hedging their bets, are they? Science is fun, and I am glad you provide the occasional updates in your zines. They are appreciated.

Harry Harrison is a fine addition to the Grandmaster list that Bob Sabella provided in his article. Harry has produced a ton of wonderful science fiction over the years, and I know I am not alone in enjoying the sense of humor with which he infuses his stories. The Stainless Steel Rat stories are so much fun to read, and it has been a while since I've read any of them. My collection (much smaller than it used to be due to the occasional weeding over the years) only has a smattering of the SSR canon; this needs to be corrected. Some year I hope to do some serious hole-filling in my SF&F collection. Probably after I've retired, is my guess.

I agree with Robert that Gordy Dickson should be on that Grandmaster list, and many others, too, as he noted. Excellent cases can be made for all of them, and it's only a matter of time before some of these authors are so honored, even posthumously. The way I look at it, excellent writers, whether living or dead, are always appreciated. And SF fans so love to debate this sort of thing. It is one of the reasons we read this Crazy Buck Rogers Stuff: it's fun to do.

I found Gene Stewart's article very interesting. Personally, I like the blending of certain genres, such as the way mystery mixes very well with SF, fantasy, and historical fiction. Some authors are very gifted at this (don't need to name names here), and one of my recent favorite writers is T. C. Boyle, who has a way of mixing reality with fantasy, mystery, or whatever, and the result is always an interesting and entertaining story. Which is how I look at the miscegenation of literary genres. I am not that much of a science fic-

tion purist that I immediately condemn writers who purloin stfnal elements into their stories. The way I see it, if it works effectively as a crucial element in that story, that's fine. I like reading stories and novels that are thoughtful, entertaining, and enlightening. That's probably why I like writers like Boyle, Le Guin, Octavia Butler, Joe R. Lansdale, Tim Powers, Joyce Carol Oates, and Jorge Luis Borges. Oh, there are more, I know, to discover, but in the hands of a skillful writer, blending genres can result in some wonderful reading material.

Sheryl Birkhead reminds me that we have to get Fossey, one of our dogs, fixed Real Soon Now. When that tax return arrives, that's one of the biggies. Of course, January is spay and neuter month down here (is that a national thing? I dunno), so there's still time to get in on the rebates being offered by vet clinics on these procedures.

As for that article on "What is Plot?", I am completely in agreement with you, Tom, with your concluding comment. After decades of being a reader, I think I know what I like to read, and what works or doesn't work in a story. College degrees notwithstanding, most diligent readers would agree with you. Plus, I really like the way this article dovetails with Gene's arkle; I would have placed this one right after Gene's and then added Sheryl's for a shift in topic variety, but that's just me. They are all good articles, no matter how they are ordered in a zine.

Your loc-column is very well put together, and much more readable in this format. Thank you for identifying the writers more clearly.

Say, you made a comment to Alexis Gilliland's loc about being "sensible and realistic about the problems associated with space exploration." That's true since we know so much more scientific fact about space travel and the physics involved compared to the SF of early science fiction writers. It is very interesting to see the development of SF from those days to now in terms of the science and literary styles. Remember, all creative arts are a reflection of the times that produce them, and science fiction is prob-

ably one of the more accurate mirrors of humanity and its faults. Or glories and achievements. I definitely enjoy the more realistic space exploration fictions currently being produced. By the way, I love that Gilliland cartoon right after his loc. Sounds like a line overheard in a consuite somewhere.

Well, I don't consider myself a Gloomy Gus when it comes down to the development of alternative energy sources. The way things usually work out, something will be produced in a frigging hurry once the reality of the situation hits home in a very real way. When it really hurts, something will be developed. History teaches us that lesson time and again. As the old saw goes, "Necessity is the mother of invention." Let's hope so.

Great issue, Tom. I really enjoyed from start to finish. Now to get more of mind off in the mail - of those that I am actually printing, that is. Take care, and have a merry one.

All the best,

John Purcell

*"Ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have."
- James Baldwin*

[[From my occasionally deeply pessimistic perspective the LHC causing The End of Everything and in particular Humans might be a good idea. Then it occurs to me we might be replaced by something even worse. In my optimistic moods (I do have them.) I find myself hoping that all sorts of good things will come about by way of all the scientific and technological research.//If Marvin the Martian did have a LHC at his command, given his track record, it would probably backfire on him—particularly if Bugs Bunny were around.//Although I lack the necessary mental capacity to understand fully the subjects, I have long been interested in astronomy, physics in general, and quantum physics. Some of those theoretical physicists' ideas are a bit on the wild side and seem incredible, but interesting none-the-less.//I

*confess that I have read and enjoyed Harry Harrison's Stainless Steel Rat stories, ridiculous though they may be. I enjoy serious, thoughtful SF but stuff like the SSR stories can be fun to read—at least by anyone with a sense of humor and the absurd. I have also—horror of horrors!—enjoyed Keith Laumer's Retief stories in spite of others' criticisms of them. There are times when the exploits of some people in real life are just as improbable and ridiculous and maybe even more so.//The inescapable fact is that no matter to whom the SFWA's Grandmaster award goes, **someone** is bound to take exception to the choice.//Maybe writers outside the SF genre appropriating certain aspects of SF may make “our” fiction acceptable and not harshly derided as it is now. The next step—if at all possible—is to educate those snooty critics who dismiss the entire SF genre because of their ignorance and unfamiliarity with the good stuff. (And there is some good stuff regardless of what those critics may say.)//My “Plot” article would have worked better following Gene's piece. I wish I had thought of that when I was putting the issue together.//It is only proper and reasonable to be sensible and realistic about the problems associated with space exploration and to learn as much as we can about the hazards. On the other hand, when all the evidence is in ,rather than being fatally pessimistic and and assuming it's impossible there should be a greater attitude of, well these are the problems—what can we do to overcome them and make space exploration a reality and safe for humans? If governments followed the attitudes taken toward fighting and winning wars and applied them to space exploration just think of what could be accomplished. That, I think, is one of the ways SF could be useful if only so many outsiders would look past the Hollywood-type SF to the good stuff. You're correct about science fiction being “one of the more accurate mirrors of humanity and its faults.” But enough of our soapboxing.//It's a good idea not to be a “Gloomy Gus” about alternative energy sources but rather realistic and pragmatic. It has always been the case that*

progress in certain areas was made when people were backed into a corner and faced with harsh, cruel reality. Necessity—and probably extreme at that—will be the mother of invention of new and viable energy sources. Either that or we all go back to living in caves, walking, or riding horses, and building fires for cooking, heating, and illumination. How's that for gloomy?]]

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Tom:

Thanks for the latest The Reluctant Famulus.

I cannot disagree with SFWA's choice of Harry Harrison for a Grand Master Award. His bibliography is much longer than Bob Sabella's article suggests, but perhaps much of it is less serious (e.g. The Stainless Steel Rat, The Technicolor Time Machine, and Star Smashers of the Galaxy Rangers) than is Bob's preference. In contrast I agree with Bob that a Grand Master Award is ultimately flawed to not recognize everyone who deserves it unless, like a Hall of Fame, they allow for multiple inductees every year.

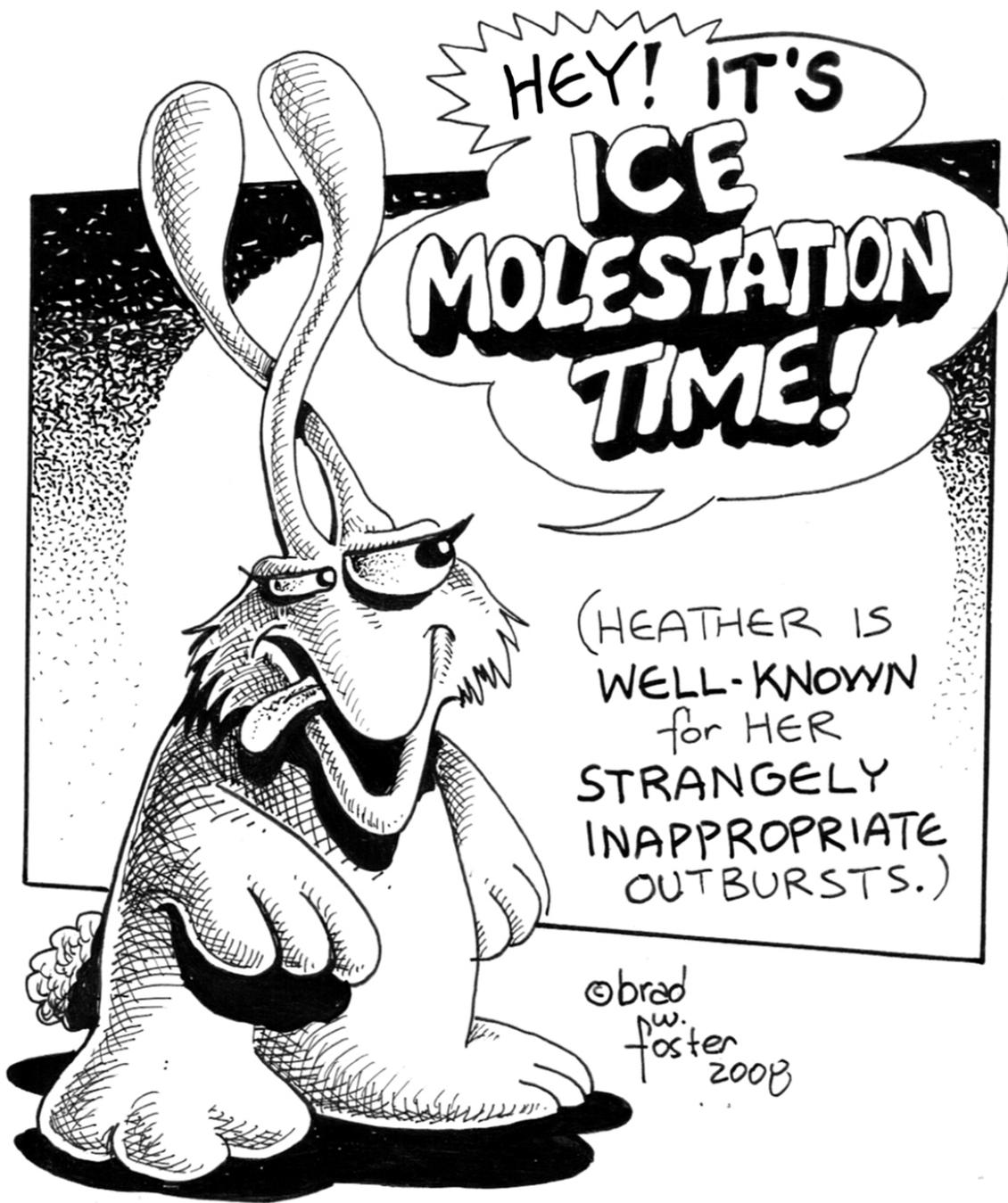
You can get a wireless router for your house for under \$100. If you have DSL or satellite it can also allow multiple computers to use the same internet gateway. I'm not certain, though, if that can be supported over dial up without making the dialing up computer a dedicated host for the rest of the wireless network.

Until next issue . . .

Henry L. Welch

[[People are always unhappy when someone they support isn't chosen for an award. It's all human nature and folks have to deal with it.//I do have satellite internet with Hughes.net. Maybe I should check into the possibility of getting a wireless router so that I could use my laptop in another room if I wanted. Figuring out how to connect it might be a bit of a challenge.]]

And that's it for this issue. Until next time—Full thrusters!



HEY! IT'S
ICE
MOLESTATION
TIME!

(HEATHER IS
WELL-KNOWN
for HER
STRANGELY
INAPPROPRIATE
OUTBURSTS.)

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w.
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