

# The Reluctant



*Who gets the Meals On Wheels?*

# Famulus 71

# *The Reluctant Famulus #71*

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# The Reluctant Famulus

## What is science fiction about, *really*?

Depending upon one's point of view, the above question is either 1) Really stupid; or 2) Rather profound. (Right now I'm sort of tending toward the former.) It is a subject that, if not discussed endlessly, has been debated often, sometimes heatedly and often inconclusively. So why should I even bother rehashing an old, tired, probably pointless, question anyway? Damned if I know. But I'm going ahead anyway, fool that I am. (I think I've even got a diploma from Fool's School around here somewhere.)

But before I launch into a subjective discourse on science fiction, I want to comment on one thing—and I have no doubt someone will disagree with me—I believe science fiction is *not* about, at least not consciously on the part of most SF writers. I don't believe SF is about predicting the future and never was. Contrary to what many believe certain individuals such as Michel de Nostredame, or Nostradamus, Edgar Cayce, the Delphic Oracle (How people could put their faith in the utterances of someone who inhaled fumes issuing from a crack in the earth is beyond me.) actually were able to predict events years, decades, or centuries in the future. It has been claimed that Nostradamus, in particular, phrased his "prophetic" quatrains in such an obscure or generic manner in order to avoid trouble with religious and political authorities. Having read some of the quatrains in translation, I admit I couldn't tell what specific events were involved. ^ It seems to be that way with most if not all such prophecies. In my view it's just about impossible to forecast specific future events because there are so many variables involved which could change any course of events and render the results of the prediction wrong. Heck, if I were conceited (or foolish) enough I could sit down and dream up prophecies of things to come and maybe even make them sound plausible and believable. But that wouldn't mean what I predicted would come true. More than likely the event would never

occur or the outcome would very different.

That brings me to the idea of science fiction predicting the future (if the writers actually were trying to forecast the future) and in most instances turning out wrong. As with you, gentle readers, I've read a lot of SF over the years since I first began reading things other than Dick and Jane books (We were pre-Dr. Seuss back then, weren't we?). I don't feel the writers of SF short stories and books were really setting out to tell us what the future **would** be like. They were simply doing what writers (and especially SF writers) do—but more about that later. Since we fans like to think of ourselves as generally possessing greater intelligence than most mundanes, surely we were and are smart enough to see that.

Does anyone really believe that Isaac Asimov, in writing his Foundation stories, was prediction that at some time in the (very distant) future there would arise a galactic version of the Roman Empire? Does anyone really believe that Sir Arthur C. Clark, in his novel *Childhood's End* was actually prophesying that the human race would become a gigantic hive-mind venturing off into space? Was Robert A. Heinlein in his novel *Stranger in a Strange Land* saying that at some time in the future there would come to Earth a human who had been raised on Mars by Martians? I would like to think the answer is no, of course not. What they were doing was exploring *possibilities* or intriguing ideas and telling a good story in the process; no prediction of the future was ever intended. But enough of predicting the future.

In the introductory material to Clute's & Nicholls' *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* there is a nearly two page long list of "themes" in science fiction, an enumeration much too long for me to tackle in this introduction. So I won't. Those of you who have copies of the *Encyclopedia* or access to a copy might want to check out that list. It is a long one, but there are perhaps some overlaps in those themes; subtle ones,

admittedly.

And now that brings me to my thoughts as to what science fiction is all about, really.

The obvious answer is, science fiction is about the future, space, rockets, other planets, and other intelligent life in the universe (I'm not sure about talking squids in space. Has anyone ever read any story involving such beings?). You know that crazy Buck Rogers stuff. But SF is about more than that. It's about exploring nearly endless possibilities. It's about wondering "what if . . .?" It's about venturing into space to learn as much as we can about what's out there. It's about the *possible* or *potential* effects of any new scientific knowledge and technology on humans in general. It's about envisioning what some other planet *might* look like or what some other intelligent, civilized life form possibly looks like and how that life differs from humans biologically, physiologically, culturally, and religiously (presuming they have and observe some form of religion).

In the pages of this fanzine, in an article I wrote for Bob Sabella's *Visions of Paradise*, and in the writings of others have been discussions on whether or not there's such a thing as good science fiction, is science fiction pessimistic or realistic, and so on. I believe that a consensus was established that, yes, there *is* good science fiction and at least some of it can be considered literature. Science fiction shares with Mainstream the fundamentals or essentials of good storytelling (and that, after all, is what good fiction is about, whether it's optimistic, pessimistic, or realistic): an interesting concept/idea, believable characters with whom the reader can identify, writing (superior use of words) which makes the story come to life, and a story that makes the reader think and/or remains long in the reader's memory.

To me, the great thing about science fiction as opposed to mainstream fiction is this: mainstream, for the most part, is restricted to this planet from the distant past to the present. Science fiction, on the other hand, has an entire universe and an infinity of time to explore in tales not just about Humans and Earth but a about great variety of possible non-Human beings\* and non-Earth worlds. I don't think that's bad.

But the most important thing science fiction is about—in spite of what critics and out-

siders may say—is people. SF may be a literature of ideas but it's people who come up with the ideas; it's people who created and developed science and technology (and, yes, religion); and it's people who must of necessity deal with the results and consequences of what they have created and of the world and universe around. Admittedly, during the early years of SF the people were two-dimensional, almost stereotypical, creations but the literature was growing and developing, and the better writers were striving to present more rounded characters. Additionally, newcomers to SF were also creating more real humans and helping to improve SF in general.

The great thing about science fiction, in my probably idiosyncratic opinion is that it tells about the good *and* the bad in the world and in people, and shows both optimistic and pessimistic *possible* futures. It tries to be accurately scientific—perhaps sometimes didactically—but does so from a *human* point of view by speculating on the possible consequences of what we learn and face in futures which might include the possibility of other kinds of intelligent life and how we humans deal with it all. Through all SF, in one way or another, to a greater or lesser degree, is the unifying theme of science whether overt or subtle, and people.

One thing I find almost comical are those some supposedly intelligent people—and ones with scientific training—who find fault with science fiction and seem to forget about the second word in the term. It makes me feel like shouting at them: "It's **fiction**, damn it! It's not real and wasn't meant to be. With the exception in certain cases of the use of real, accurate science it's all made up and and the writers themselves will admit the fact.

Science fiction is also about—and I suspect this will seem like a dirty word or be anathema to some—entertainment, taking the reader away from the real world for a while. Which isn't all that bad for entertainment doesn't have to be superficial and lightweight and if done properly can still carry a message (albeit, perhaps, a subtle one) and make the reader think. Fiction of any kind doesn't have to steamroll the reader with profundity, reality, or whatever truth the writer wishes to convey.

SF tries to portray possible futures good

and bad, utopias and dystopias, paradises and hells. It's about what, under certain circumstances, *might* be or *could* be, whether hopeful and optimistic or futile and pessimistic. But I don't believe any SF writer ever claimed or claims what he or she wrote was what *will* or *would* happen; they're much too smart for that.

SF is often deadly serious but it also can—and should be—humorous or at least light-hearted because even in real life there are moments of comedy and farce between the gloomy and unpleasant periods in life. There is an awful lot going on between birth and death and yet, pessimists notwithstanding, there *are* funny, pleasant, and hopeful moments whether the gloomy ones like it or not. So SF should be expected to reflect *all* the facets of human experience rather than insisting that for us humans life “is a bummer” or “nasty, short, and brutish”.

SF is about sense-of-wonder and the need to learn all we can, to see all we can, to know all we can. It's about diversity, human spirit, the drive to go where we've never been before and to see what we've never seen before. It's about human resilience in the face of danger and tragedy. It's about humans pushing themselves to the limits and overcoming the odds; it's about risking death and facing death and, if fortune allows, avoiding death.

It's about the statement ascribed to J. B. S Haldane that “The Universe is not only queerer than we imagine but queerer than we can imagine.”

SF is not just about using one's imagination but stretching that imagination (and, yes, possibly credibility too) to its greatest limits to create people, worlds, other lifeforms and intelligences that have never been, may never be and yet in some way we currently don't know could be possible. Maybe we humans will forever be earth-bound and never reach other planets or other stars nor meet other advanced beings but it's somehow encouraging to think such things might one day be possible. If, by some chance at some future time, using currently unknown technology we humans do leave our home world and venture into deep space then perhaps much of the science fiction we've read and enjoyed over the years may serve as a sort of guidebook on how to deal with what and who we encounter Out There. And that, too, is what science fiction is all about:

preparing those of us who are willing and eager to face the future whatever it may be. What's so bad about that?

Last but not least, SF is about optimism that, no matter what, one way or another there **will** be a future even if it's not exactly what we thought or expected it to be.

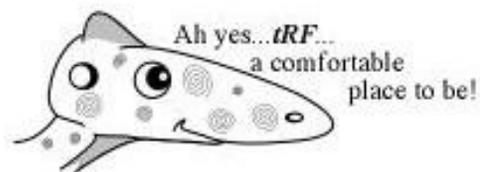
As with all literature, Science Fiction is evolving and changing--and, one hopes--improving in the process and that's all to the good. In its process of evolving, I hope science fiction will continue to focus on certain core factors in its nature: science, people, and the future whether good or bad but always with hope for the best.

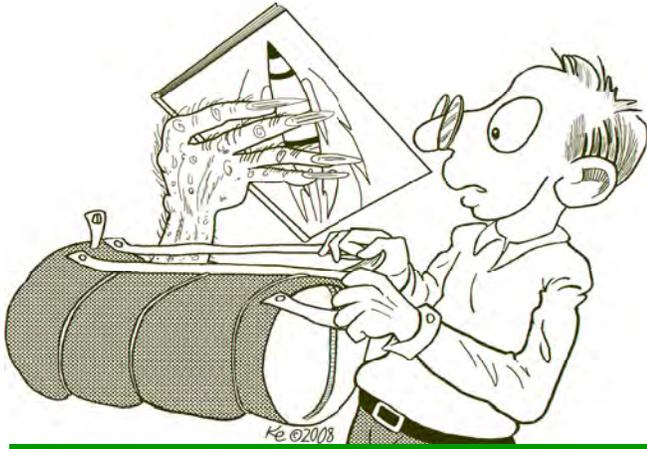


^ In one article about predicting the future, the writer observed that researchers have found some of Nostradamus' quatrains as being “untranslatably obscure phrases”.

` A side note: although not exactly a prediction as such, it is true that Robert Heinlein's story *Waldo*, about a genius with certain physical limitations who created remote devices to aid him in his work, subsequently led to adopting the term “waldo” to describe the sorts of remote controlled devices which became reality and are widely used in all sorts of research.. And in George Alec Effinger's Marid Audran novels *When Gravity Fails*, *A Fire in the Sun*, and *The Exile Kiss* what come very close to actual prediction is the the widespread use of what these days are called cell phones, though mentions of them were more in the nature of background detail.

\* And, yes, maybe even talking squids in space. But those are rare exceptions I think.





# The Old Kit Bag Bob Sabella

## #11: A Sciencefictional ABCdery

A	is for Isaac ASIMOV, one of the stalwarts of sf's "Golden Years"
B	is for Michael BISHOP, who wrote my favorite novel <b>Brittle Innings</b> in the 1990s. So where the heck has he been the past 15 years?
C	is for John W. CAMPBELL, one of the great writers of the 30s who became the most influential editor in the history of the genre.
D	is for Gordon R. DICKSON, one of those reliable story-tellers who always wrote on a high level that continuously raised sf above its pulp origins (such as Poul Anderson, Clifford D. Simak, Fredrik Pohl, Marion Zimmer Bradley, and many others)
E	is for George Allan ENGLAND, one of the overlooked giants of the pre- <b>Amazing Stories</b> years, best known for his <b>Darkness and Dawn</b> trilogy
F	is for Philip José FARMER, creator of two of the most exciting universes in science fiction, the <i>World of Tiers</i> and the <i>Riverworld</i>
G	is for <b>GALAXY Magazine</b> , my favorite prozine of the 1960s until Frederik Pohl retired in 1969 and left it in the incompetent hands of Ejler Jacobsson
H	is for Joe HALDEMAN, one of sf's finest writers for nearly 40 years, but who is so consistent that he is often overlooked in favor of other, flashier writers

I	is for <b>IF</b> , a three-time Hugo winner for Best Prozine in the 1960s, breaking the lockhold on that category held by <b>F&amp;SF</b> and <b>Astounding Analog</b>
J	is for The <b>JEWELS of Aptor</b> , which launched the career of 19-year old Samuel R. Delaney who was probably more responsible for making "space opera" more respectable than any other writer.
K	is for Damon KNIGHT, sf's renaissance man: outstanding author ( <b>The Best of Damon Knight, The Other Foot</b> ), influential critic, editor ( <b>Orbit</b> ) and founder of the Science Fiction Writers of America
L	is for Ursula K LE GUIN, whose <b>The Left Hand of Darkness</b> was one of those rare sf novels which burst onto the scene like a supernova, immediately influencing everything which followed it
M	is for Jack MCDEVITT, one of my favorite current writers who combines classic sf storytelling with an historical worldview and damned good mysteries
N	is for Larry NIVEN, who earned a reputation as a hard science fiction writer during the peak of the New Wave when such writing was considered passé by many fans and critics

O	is for <b>OMNI</b> , a popular science magazine which recognized the quality and importance of science fiction, but will be best remembered for hiring Ellen Datlow as its fiction editor near the end of its existence
P	is for Edgar Allan <b>POE</b> , a rare genius who helped define science fiction, mystery fiction, and horror fiction, thus deserving all the reminiscences on his 200th birthday
Q	is for <b>Don QUIXOTE</b> , one of the seminal quest novels which has influenced more fantasy than most people realize
R	is for Kim Stanley <b>ROBINSON</b> who walks the border between genre sf and literary sf so well in such novels as the <i>Mars</i> trilogy and <b>The Years of Rice and Salt</b>
S	is for Robert <b>SILVERBERG</b> , one of the “big three” for children of the New Wave era, along with Roger Zelazny and Ursula K Le Guin
T	is for William <b>TENN</b> , whose sharp satires (along with those of fellow writers such as Robert Sheckley, Pohl & Kornbluth, and Damon Knight) set the tone for much sf of the 1950s
U	is for <b>UNKNOWN Worlds</b> , one of the earliest genre prozines which treated fantasy with as much rigor as science fiction already contained
V	is for Jack <b>VANCE</b> , a master of sense of wonder in stories such as “The Dragon Masters”, “The Last Castle”, the <i>Demon Prince</i> series, and the <i>Galactic Cluster</i> novels
W	is for H. G. <b>WELLS</b> , the father of science fiction, who created both the format of science fiction as well as many of its seminal topics in works such as <b>The Time Machine</b> , <b>The War of the Worlds</b> , and <b>The Island of Doctor Moreau</b>
X	is for <b>XICCARPH</b> , by Clarke Ashton Smith, one of the many early influencers of sf who, along with Lord Dunsany, Mervyn Peake, William Hope Hodgson, and others, has been sadly neglected

Y	is for The <b>YIDDISH Policemen's Union</b> , last year's Hugo and Nebula winning novel which combined noir mystery with alternate history
Z	is for Roger <b>ZELAZNY</b> , who burst onto the sf scene with stories such as “A Rose For Ecceestias”, “He Who Shapes”, and “. . . And Call Me Conrad”



# Rat Stew

Gene Stewart



## “Some Comedy's Not Funny”

Prepare to call me curmudgeon, geezer, and worse, but remember: Most of us hate people laughing at them.

Comedians court it.

Is it self-humiliation they seek? Perhaps, but most crave attention and to be liked, and we generally like them.

Do we like them because they let us feel superior?

Some comedians appeal to vanity, others to crasser aspects of human nature, and a new movie's ads prompted me to think about comedy's change and what it may mean to society.

Sacha Baron Cohen's new movie, BRUNO, shows scenes typical of the characters he revels in creating. As in BORAT, there is much humor derived from inappropriate behavior and awkward social situations. Confronting people with absurdity and laughing at their confusion is a standard ploy. A good deal of it is mean-spirited, intended to belittle the real-life gay Austrian TV host on which Cohen based his Bruno character.

Mean-spirited, belittling comedy is not funny in the sense that gain at others' cost is not humane. It's a form of usury, a coining of draconian interest burdens on small investments of innocence. Some find this witty, and claim wit is always mean but I disagree, wit being merely intelligence. It is a tool to be applied with, without, or even against kindness.

Comedy need not be gentle to remain compassionate, just as comedy is not wit even as it stems from it. Silliness is the harmless part of

the ridiculous, for example. Hurting feelings and exposing weakness is the harsh part. It's fine if focused on the powerful, especially the evil. They ask for it. It is sick, though, when focused on the weak, harmless, or innocent.

That's where Cohen goes, gleefully. He minces and prances in order to bully and hurt lesser people who are not in on the joke.

Comedy's function is to reduce us all to basic humanity. It provides insight and lets us identify with others we might otherwise find strange or distant. What Cohen does accomplishes the opposite by demonizing and setting up as figures of fun the defenseless and the hapless.

He kicks whomever is down and puts down anyone he can, all for a cheap laugh that reveals nothing more than a sadist's enjoyment of cruelty.

Jim Carrey's absurd Pet Detective is afforded dignity and humanity. The Three Stooges puncture snobbery and pretension. The Great Dictator reduced Hitler to a laughable idiot, which lessened his dark power and broke the spell he otherwise cast. The Little Tramp could not win but never gave up or lost optimism.

All these are admirable.

The TV show JACKASS, Cohen, and much contemporary comedy is mean and callous, harsh and corrosive, serving no higher purpose—it functions against humanity, lessens it. It is an exercise in self-hating misanthropy.

Even Twain and Bierce, in their often hilarious misanthropy, never struck at the good or the

innocent. They punctured sanctimony and perfidy, revealing hypocrisy and stripping poseurs of their stolen robes.

Today's worse comedy stomps on puppies, kittens, and baby seals in a desperate attempt to move beyond comedy styles it considers stale. It revels in atrocity because it is offensive, then laughs at our horror, at our being appalled. It is scornful of anything worthwhile in us, all the good, all the innocent. Those are dismissed as Emo and social suicide. Showing weakness is the last thing any of them would dare do, and all once held lofty and worthy is now sneered at.

In the great enemy sense, it is quite literally Satanic comedy, but calling it that would be a drama-queen's indulgence, so call it vile and be anagrammatically insouciant.

That'd be witty, at least.



Now for an item some may find interesting:

### NASA's New Moon Rover

NASA's current plans (subject to the whim of future presidential administrations and contrary congresses with other obsessions like fighting wars) for putting people on the Moon again by 2020 is concerned with three major projects before actually getting there. The first, of course, is the launch vehicle to get the astronauts there. As I mentioned in a previous issue of TRF that's the Constellation program. After that come the need for better surface exploration vehicles and improved spacesuits.

After 30 or 40 years, NASA has continued to remember the problems encountered on the first mission and the subsequent ones and are working on the vehicles and the spacesuits. The first "rovers" used on the Moon were more like Earthly dune buggies or something cobbled together by an amateur garage mechanic in his spare time. The vehicles worked but they were hardly attractive or exciting,

Now, however, that may change and instead of the scientific equivalent of a Volkswagon, the concept for the new Lunar rover will be more like a Cadillac (Or whatever favorite luxury vehi

cle your preference is.). The ride will be smoother and more pleasant. The old rovers carried spacesuited astronauts around in the open, like dune buggies on Earth and the exploration time was limited to no more than four and a half hours. Not so with the new vehicles.

The Lunar Electric Rover (LER), as it's called will have an enclosed cabin with bubble-shaped windows for a panoramic view. It will have a pressurized cabin so the astronauts can ride and work comfortably without their bulky suits. The seats inside will convert into beds for sleeping and bathroom and shower facilities onboard. If the astronauts need or want to venture outside they can slip into space suits attached to suitports at the back of the rover. The LER is designed so future moon explorers can travel abroad for extended periods, even weeks. The new rovers will have rechargeable lithium ion batteries similar to those in Toyota's Prius and other such vehicles.

It will be able to drive forward, backward and sideways thanks to rotating wheels which will allow it to navigate the Moon's hills and craters better. The chassis can also be used as a lunar truck. The LERs are designed to be more durable than their predecessors and although designed for the moon are also intended to serve as the basic transportation for future manned missions to Mars. (Should that ever happen. An iffy situation at this time.)

Doesn't that look and sound really sciencefictional?



# Master of Comedy: The Great Stone Face—Buster Keaton

Steven Silver



Even more than Charles Chaplin, whose parents were both performers, Joseph Frank Keaton VI, who was born on October 4, 1895 in Piqua, Kansas, was born into comedy. Keaton's parents had an act that toured on the Vaudeville circuit and rather than find someone to watch over their son, they

incorporated him into the act at a very early age. From almost as young an age, he was referred to by his nickname, Buster.

According to Keaton, he received his famous moniker when he was six months old and fell down a flight of stairs and came up grinning. Family friend and partner, Harry Houdini saw it and commented to Keaton's father, Joe, "That's quite a buster you've got there." The name stuck. However, while the incident may have happened, it probably didn't happen in April 1895 and Harry Houdini likely wasn't involved. When Joe Keaton first told the story in 1903, he stated it happened when Buster was 18 months old, in 1896. Joe didn't mention who gave Buster his nickname until a year later, when he attributed it to "legitimate comedian George Pardey," a minor Midwestern actor. In his own version of the story, Buster changed his age when the event happened, and by 1921 was claiming the name came from Harry Houdini. Neither Houdini, who died in 1926, or Joe appear to have publicly disputed Buster's version of the story.

Buster made his official debut on the stage on October 17, 1900 at Dockstadter's Theatre in Wilmington, Delaware. He was so popular that the Keatons were given a bonus for having Buster appear in evening shows as well as matinees. In addition to mimicry, one of Buster's specialties was the pratfall and he and his father worked out an ever-changing act that took full

advantage of Buster's physical abilities and his father's love of roughhouse play. The act also frequently brought the family into conflict with the Gerry Society, which existed to see that child labor laws were enforced, and the actress Sarah Bernhardt once asked, "How can you do this to this poor boy?" after seeing the way he was tossed around in the act. Other times, Joe and Myra were arrested for mistreating their son and on one instance, Buster was examined by doctors in the New York City Hall to ensure he didn't have any broken bones. Although this claim by Keaton could be dismissed as bragging and building mystique, it has been confirmed by fellow Vaudevillian Will Rawls.

In addition to the Gerry Society, the Keatons often ran afoul of child labor laws, but they became aware of which towns on the circuit enforced them and which didn't. When the laws weren't enforced, Buster seems to have been incorporated into the act as early as three years old. In the early days, part of his role was to stand behind his father, dressed like him, and mimic his actions. According to reviews of the act published in 1902, Keaton was brought on stage because having him in the act was easier than interrupting the act for his mother to take care of him.

In an interview when he was nineteen, Keaton explained that early on he learned how to "land limp" so he doesn't injure himself. In the same interview, he claimed that his father gets the worst of the treatment. However, by that time, in 1914, Joe Keaton had begun to turn to the bottle, partly because he realized that his success was based more on his son's ability than his own. In January 1917, Buster and his mother quit the act and left Joe stranded alone in California while they made their way east. Upon arriving in New York, Buster was cast in a Broadway play, *Schubert's Passing Show*.

On the eve of appearing in the play, Keaton had a chance encounter on Broadway with Lou Anger. Anger brought Keaton to the Comique

studio and introduced him to Roscoe Arbuckle. Arbuckle was about to begin work on his first film for Comique and cast Keaton in a bit-role in the film "The Butcher Boy." Arbuckle was so impressed with Keaton's performance on that first day, that he asked Keaton to appear in the rest of the film and join Arbuckle's crew. Although Keaton initially turned down Arbuckle's offer of a job, he took home a camera, disassembled it and reassembled it, and the next day broke his contract with Schubert and signed a much less lucrative contract with Arbuckle and producer Joseph Schenk.

Keaton quickly became an integral part of Arbuckle's troupe, which included Arbuckle's nephew, Al St. John. Keaton took on the role of assistant director and writer, and soon he was making nearly as much as he would have if he had kept his job on Broadway. His work also had a strong impact on the screen, with Arbuckle's films losing some of their intense slapstick nature and becoming increasingly sophisticated in the humor they used.

Later in his life, Keaton would acquire the nickname "Old Stoneface" because he refused to allow his character crack a smile. Some viewers believe he was either incapable of smiling or that he was not allowed to smile on film per his contract. Neither is the case. Keaton, who can be seen smiling, and even laughing, in some of his work with Arbuckle, such as *Coney Island*, early came to the conclusion that if the audience needed to be coaxed into seeing something was funny by on-screen reaction, it meant the joke had failed.



Keaton's rising star was temporarily sidetracked during World War I when he was called

up and served as both a cryptographer and an entertainer. His stint lasted about two years and when he returned, he found himself in California making films and becoming better known. Although not as well known or as successful at the time as Charles Chaplin or Harold Lloyd, Keaton was making two films a year and had control over his work. While his films may not have been as successful as Chaplin's, Keaton had a better grasp of the technical aspects of film making, which shows in nearly all the films he made in the 1920s.

One area in which Keaton excelled was the use of the camera in creating humor. He understood that the camera could fool the viewer into either seeing things that weren't there or things that were expected. This can be seen as early as *The Bell Boys* in which Keaton can be seen carefully polishing the glass in a phone booth, only to have it revealed that there is no glass to polish. In a later film, he created the split shot by showing numerous people getting out of a car. Covering half the film, he shot the sequence of people emerging from the car, then went back and shot the other half of the car so you couldn't see the people simply climbing through. Keaton also made sure to prop the car up so it wouldn't give away the trick with unintentional rocking.

Perhaps Keaton's most famous experiment in early film was *Sherlock, Jr.* (1924). This film features a film projectionist who falls asleep and begins to interact with the films he is showing, similar in many ways to Woody Allen's much later film *The Purple Rose of Cairo*.

Keaton's comedy wasn't just based on the tricks he could do with a camera. He employed slapstick and pratfalls, both essential for comedy in a silent period, but also brought the tricks he learned in Vaudeville to the screen. Finally, perhaps more than any of his contemporaries, Keaton was an excellent prop comic, using just about anything he could find in an offhand, almost elfin manner.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Keaton wasn't content to simply make comedy films. In response to D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, Keaton made his own Civil War epic, *The General*. Based on a true story, Keaton essentially made a serious Civil War film to run as the second story behind the more humorous tale of a

Confederate engineer. However, for all the humor of the main story, Keaton also interacts with the activity taking place behind him.



Off screen, Keaton's life wasn't light or cheerful, in part because of his choice of wife. During his days with Arbuckle and Comique, Keaton married Natalie Talmadge, Arbuckle's secretary and Schenk's sister-in-law. Natalie's sisters were silent film actresses Norma and Constance Talmadge. Although Keaton and Natalie appeared happy when they married in 1921, by the time their first son was born in 1922, things had begun to sour. They had apparently agreed to name their son Joseph Frank Keaton VII, and that is the way his name appears on his birth certificate, but when he was christened, Natalie had him named James Keaton. After their second son, Robert, was born in 1924, Natalie informed Keaton that they would never have sex again.

Keaton took to having affairs with other women and Natalie hired detectives to follow him. In a couple of cases, when Keaton tried to break off his affairs, he wound up as fodder for the Hollywood Press. Adding to his estrangement from Natalie was her need to live a lavish lifestyle. Although she didn't work in films, she felt the need to live up to the image Constance and Norma projected and spent Keaton's money lavishly, including building an enormous house (where she took up an entire wing) and purchasing expensive clothes (which she only wore once). Partly due to his marital problems, but perhaps more due to professional issues, Keaton also turned to alcohol. In 1932, Keaton and Talmadge would divorce. She officially changed their sons' last name to Talmadge and refused to allow them to see Keaton until 1939, when James was eighteen.

Following the release of *The General*, in 1927, United Artists insisted on reining in Keaton's work, which was costing too much money and not showing a consistent return on their investment. Unable to deal with their demands, Keaton left United Artists and signed a contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, where he quickly learned that he would have no independence at all. Furthermore, his switch came at a time when sound was beginning to play a big role in films and Keaton, along with other silent film comedians, had to adapt to the new form of film-maker (Harold Lloyd made a few more films before leaving the industry, Charles Chaplin ignored sound films for more than a decade and only made a couple of talkies).

At MGM, Keaton's roles were assigned to him by the heavy-handed studio system, and he was not only required to learn and stick to dialogue, but for the first time in his life was made to use stunt doubles. MGM attempted to create a comedy pairing of Keaton and Jimmy Durante, but after four films, they realized it wasn't working (although they would appear in a few more films together over the years). Keaton only remained at MGM for a couple of years before the studio released him from his contract. He found work in Europe and when he returned to the United States he was re-hired by MGM to work as a gag writer. Perhaps the most famous film he worked on was the Marx Brothers film *Go West* (itself a title of an earlier film in which Keaton starred, but not a remake). Keaton had only negative things to say about working with the Marxes, and Groucho indicated that nothing Keaton wrote for them wound up in the final film.

Buster married again in 1933, to a nurse named Mae Scriven. The two met while Buster was doing a short stint in a mental institution and Scriven later claimed that she didn't know Keaton's name until after they were married and Keaton claimed he was drunk and didn't remember the entire incident. They were divorced in 1936, causing Keaton to take another major financial hit. Following their divorce, Keaton began to date Eleanor Norris, who had a calming effect on him and helped wean him from alcohol. They married in 1940 and remained together until his death 26 years later.

Throughout the 1940s, Keaton began to

rebuild his career, playing numerous small roles in a variety of mostly forgettable films such as *L'il Abner* (1940) and *God's Country* (1946). Mostly, he worked for MGM as a gag-writer, earning less than a tenth of the salary he made as his height. According to Keaton, a lot of the time, he basically showed up for work and sat around all day. He also spent time on the stage in the 1940s, touring in plays in the US and Europe. It was during this time as a gag writer that he met a young chorus girl who had aspirations to become a comic, although she didn't have a comic's timing or imagination. Keaton taught her how to pace a joke and use physical comedy to her advantage and she eventually made a name for herself as a comedian, Lucille Ball. To see the difference Keaton (and training) made to Ball, just watch her in 1938's Marx Brothers' film *Room Service* and compare her to the work she did after she met Keaton.

The beginning of the 1950s would see a slight resurgence as Keaton got his own short-lived comedy series in which Keaton would re-create many of his famous silent film gags on live television. Although Keaton's show didn't last long, it did lead to a wide variety of roles on television, from making commercials to a serious role in an adaptation of Nikolai Gogol's "The Overcoat" to an excellent episode of *The Twilight Zone* which casts him as a time traveler with the older sequences done as silent films.

The 1960s also saw Keaton return to films. In many cases, Keaton simply had a cameo appearance. They range from a brief shot in *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*, a film which like the earlier *Around the World in Eighty Days*, in which Keaton also appeared, almost seemed created to give cameos to as many former stars as possible, to slightly meatier roles, as in Keaton's last appearance, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. Keaton also starred in the experimental film *Film* (1965) which was written by Samuel Beckett. However, the sixties also saw the release of *The Railrodder*, a 24-minute long Canadian silent film which features Keaton on a trip across Canada on a small single-man rail maintenance vehicle. At the same time, a behind-the-scenes film called *Buster Keaton Rides Again* was made, which lasts nearly twice as long as the film it documents.

While Harold Lloyd and Charles Chaplin both

managed to retain control over the majority of their films, that was not the case for Buster Keaton and many of his earlier films were thought to be lost. It was through the efforts of Raymond Rohauer, who formed a partnership with Keaton in 1954, that many of Keaton's films were eventually found and archived. Rohauer was also responsible for launching a series of Keaton film festivals that helped spark the Keaton resurgence of the 1960s. Keaton died on February 1, 1966, having made more than 150 appearances in films or television shows. ❖



# A Trip... or Two ...

**Sheryl Birkhead**

I have been a veterinarian for 22 years. One of the things I have to do is determine cause of death if there is any potential threat to either people (as in rabies) or other animals (almost any contagious disease if there are littermates or other animals that may have been exposed). I am the veterinary medical coordinator (volunteer; big pay here) for a non-profit, the MCSPCA. Over the past two years we have lost 17 kittens. Until this past June either one (a singleton) kitten died or the whole litter died- so it was not imperative to figure out what was the actual (rather than presumptive) cause of death. In early June we lost the third kitten of a litter of seven and a fourth was fading rapidly. His name was Mars.

When I got the call that afternoon to say he had just died, it was sad, but not unexpected. Now I needed to figure out what had happened since there were littermates to worry about. Due to budgetary constraints (yeah ...) the state no longer will do necropsies (autopsies on non-humans) on pets, but they are connected to the pathology lab at Johns Hopkins University.

I called the MCSPCA to see if they would accept the \$120 charge. Yup. But how to get Mars from here to there? I called the shuttle service that JHU uses and the cost was \$80. Nope, that the MCSPCA would not accept. Okay, if this was going to happen, someone (two guesses who) would have to go Baltimore.

My brother, back in the Stone age, had gone to JHU, but I had not been anywhere near the place in several decades. I did what most people would do and checked out MapQuest. I was not thrilled over the hour transit time or the fact that I was familiar with only one of the roads, but at least I had the directions in hand. I called JHU back (long distance; remember, I work on a shoestring budget here) and asked for directions. The lab Director just rattled off roads and distances and I tried very hard to keep up (Mother always said I needed to learn shorthand, but ...). I was still writing madly when he said that would do it, he would see me the next day around noon,

and hung up. Yeah--sure . . .

The next morning, ice chest in car, I headed over to the clinic to get my little package. While waiting for them to have time to help, I looked at the two sets of directions. Uh oh--they had very little in common. What do I do now? I have very detailed Map Quest directions, but I had not found MQ to be all that reliable. On the other hand I had the Director's directions, but they were phonetic at best and incomplete at worst. Hmm.

I asked the staff what they would do and the consensus was to go for the complete directions from MQ. Okay. MQ it is.

The one road I knew in the directions was the first one. So off I went. About half an hour later I could see Baltimore in the near distance and figured I had this under control. Around the next bend I had to, suddenly, decide on straight or right. I went straight (probably the right thing for the directions, but the wrong thing for me). Within five minutes I was quickly (very) spiraling up over stacked layers of roads. I swear there must have been eight layers of roads stacked and I am not a heights person. Finally I reached the open road--well, it seemed that way. The concrete walls looked to be about 3 feet tall and I was looking waaaaaay out into space. I got that sick feeling in the pit of my stomach and for a fleeting moment thought if I just went straight over the edge . . . Agh. I had liked the idea that I was alone on the road so no one was pushing me one way or another, but now I felt very much alone; there wasn't even another car that I could focus on and just follow.

My hands got cold and wet. I dug in as hard as I could. The poor steering wheel still has those indentations. Just as I figured it was all over and I was going to die, I was heading down. I had no idea what I was supposed to do next. I had to decide (and believe me it was a toughie) whether or not to relax my death-grip on the steering wheel and pick up the MQ directions. Think good thoughts. Relax. I tried to read what street I

wanted next. Luckily there was a stoplight--red-- (Oh thank you God) so I had a moment to get the heart rate down and start looking around but the road simply wasn't there. I figured MQ had it wrong and that I was merely off by an intersection or two. Nope. Never did find it and that was the last time my location had any similarity to MQ's directions.



Inside I was shrieking. The streets were narrow with a lot of tall buildings smashed in together. There was no place to pull over and ask directions and I just kept going with the flow.

Of course I knew that I must be getting further and further from my goal, but what choice did I have?

Suddenly (from the right hand lane) I saw a sign: *Public parking--Next left*. I frantically waved at the car next to me and started yelling "Excuse me! EXCUSE ME." The driver looked over from his cell phone and as soon as I asked if I could pull over (yes, the light had changed and we were all moving...) he waved me in. I zipped the few feet and made the immediate left. I found the parking structure, figuring it would take about 30 seconds to go in, ask directions and get going, and pulled right in. Oops. I read the sign: you have to get a token. Press button. I did.

I could not find an attendant. The place appeared to be totally automated. I pulled into the first parking place I found, sat shaking a few seconds, then jumped out. The emergency cell phone I keep in the car got whipped out. I found the lab phone number. Oh, so that's what they mean about no reception. Still panicked, I hurried to the exit, feeling that somehow I would never make it home, that I was now doomed to drive aimlessly around downtown Baltimore. I looked down the street and saw a guy with a briefcase heading into the parking area and flagged him down. He was a bit reluctant to talk to me at first (can't imagine why), but as I babbled on he simply told me to calm down and give him the address of the lab. Whew. Saved!

I gave him the address. He admitted he had no idea how to get there but I probably needed to make the next left, follow it around, and I should be back on an MQ street. I weakly said thank

you and that I would call the lab--just in case. The Director answered the phone and asked where I was (Well, duh. If I knew where I was, I wouldn't be lost). Walking up to the corner I found the name of the next cross street and his only comment was "How did you get there? You are nowhere near where you should be."

Tell me something I don't already know.

He told me to go back to the parking garage and see if I could find an attendant, ask him for directions, and if still having trouble call him back. I went back inside and looked around. Across the lanes of parking places was a sign *CUSTOMER SERVICE*. I went over and knocked timidly on the glass. A young man reading a magazine looked up. I explained I was lost and needed directions. He couldn't hear me and came out of the cubbyhole. He did not seem to be able to speak English. Great--just great.

I resisted the urge to yell--he just didn't speak English, he wasn't deaf. I told him I needed a map and he disappeared back inside, reappearing with a Baltimore map. "You can read map?" he asked hesitantly.

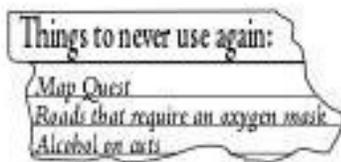
I said, "Yes, but I have no idea where I am."

That wasn't going to work, so I said thank you and went back outside to call the lab again. The Director apologized that he could not help me, but agreed that going up and making the next left sounded like a good idea. And, yes, if I needed to call back . . .

I tried to get out of the garage. Remember that token? I had to read the directions on how to exit several times. Luckily I had brought both change and ones with me in case I had to feed a meter while at the lab. What I had to do was drop in the token on a machine near the office, pick it up again as it rolled out, go over to a machine near the exit itself and drop it in again, pay the amount shown and pick the token up yet again. Then, as I actually exited the garage, drop that token in yet again and the gate would go up. By the time I had figured all this out I was afraid I had racked up even more time and would not be able to escape. As it was, my unproductive 15 minutes cost me \$4.

I turned left (this was a one way street so that was a no-brainer) and went up to the next left. According to what I guessed from MQ and the Director, all I had to do was follow that road around as it wove through the city. It would

change names, but be persistent. I drove, and drove, and drove.



None of the names I was desperately seeking appeared on any street sign. At that point I decided that I would

just keep driving until I found an exit and forget about this whole thing. I had had enough.

Wait! Abruptly I saw a building I thought I recognized. I had been there only once, but I thought it was the Convention Center. I had no idea how this helped, but somehow I felt comforted. Without thinking, I pulled over to the right beside a concrete island and hoped I was actually in a parking (waiting?) area and not in a turn lane and grabbed the cell phone again. I pulled out new reading glasses for the small directions from the lab guy, put on a headset so I could read and write with hands free and looked in the rearview mirror. People!

As two men walked past the car I yelled "Are you from Baltimore??" Wonderful, another lunatic on the loose. They looked at me, nodded yes, and kept right on walking.

In desperation, I tore the car door open and jumped (well, tried) out--the headset wires were wrapped around the seatbelt and they were getting away. I ripped the headset off and threw it into the car, ran around the rear of the car and raced toward them. At least I thought I did. Abruptly I was down on the pavement. The good news is that they came back. I had missed the curb (remember those new reading glasses?) and whomp! Not feeling much pain I got up. They asked if I was all right and I said no--but not because of the fall. The man closer to me got a funny look on his face and asked if my pants had looked like that before I fell? I looked down and said no, wondering what he meant. I could see the tear in the right knee of my jeans and bloody flesh below but there was no gushing blood and for now I had someone who might be able to help. I gave them the short version and they stared off at the cross streets, telling me they thought that if I went down and made the next left (I sensed a pattern here) I ought to be able to at least see the Hopkins buildings. I thanked them.

I called the lab yet again. This time I just said "Guess who?". The Director asked where I was now and I tried to tell him. He felt sure that next left would put me within eyeball distance of the lab. Before hanging up I asked him if he had a first aid kit. I was going to need it. He didn't even ask . . . Sigh.

I got back into the car, threw all the miscellaneous junk onto the seat, pulled back into traffic, and made that left. Hey, whaddya know! I recognized the street name! I drove--no--I crept down the street looking for the left I just knew was coming up. I never did find that left. I did however see buildings that said JHU so I knew I was closing in on the lab.

The Hopkins buildings disappeared and so did the shred of optimism I felt. Once more I pulled over to the curb and called the lab. The Director could not fathom how I had missed the turn, but told me to make that next left and look for Wolf, turn right, and the lab is a huge brick building--you can't miss it. Would you care to make a small wager?

I did as directed and made that infamous left. I found Wolf, made a right, and decided that was it--*finito*. No matter how close I was to the goal, I was going home, keep going straight and eventually I would end up out of this place and-- Instead, I suddenly made a left into an open truck bay. If this was not the right place then I no longer cared. A guy up a flight of stairs, looking out over the trucks pulling in, looked down at me. I yelled up, "Is this the pathology lab?"

Aw crap. He shook his head, no but came to the doorway, "But I'll get them."

I went back to the car and waited. The trip had taken almost three hours.

A man arrived. First Aid kit in hand, he identified himself as the Director. Unfortunately, the only disinfectant he had was alcohol and it stung like blazes. Fortunately a lot of the knee was numb. I stuck some gauze pads through the ripped spot and taped them down with adhesive tape. Now that I was almost ready to head home I simply wanted out. I did the paperwork and handed off the cooler. Almost as an afterthought I asked how to get home, but not until I had vented that I never, never, EVER wanted to come back to Baltimore.

He assured me getting home would be easier. I didn't believe him, but was willing to hear

what he had to say. One (count it ONE) right turn later I was on the road home.

It is now a little over two months later and the knee is almost healed. Oh yes--remember my whirlpool bath? When I got home, the knee sported a lot of gravel and dirt and I was too much of a coward to dig it all out. True, it was still a bit numb, but . . . Instead, I simply whirled away the dirt-- yes, it worked. I have now patched up the torn knee of the jeans and sewn on a red rose appliqué to mark the spot. I will admit that when I glance down and see the red, for a moment--just a moment--I am back on the streets of Baltimore . . .

Information found out after the fact: in the future, should I need laboratory services, Virginia Tech charges \$50 and accepts FedExed samples. Oh yeah! You betcha!

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## From the “For What It’s Worth Department”

Things I learned on the Internet that weren’t time-wasting. While the Moon may not have an atmosphere it isn’t totally devoid of useful minerals. Thanks to a 2006 survey of the Moon by the Hubble telescope, using ultra-violet light reflected off the Moon’s surface, scientists now have evidence of oxygen rich soil. Some of those scientists believe oxygen obtained from those deposits could be used to power rockets or as a source of breathable oxygen for astronaut missions on the Moon.

That’s not all. An Indian launched Moon orbiting satellite detected the presence of a variety of minerals. According to various articles there is evidence of silicon, iron, calcium, magnesium, anorthite (which is the Lunar equivalent of bauxite, from which aluminum is extracted), ilmenite (titanium dioxide), thorium, potassium, and hydrogen 3, which is concentrated at the poles. I haven’t seen any estimates of the possible quantities of those minerals but then that’s probably something which could only be determined by going to the Moon—provided we can make it back to the Moon. Even if the quantities aren’t large there might be enough to supply any lunar bases for years. It would seem, then, than

establishing a scientific base or bases on the Moon is not an impossibility and unachievable.

That is, assuming we **do** make it back to the Moon at all. According to an independent panel commissioned by President Obama and which includes an astronaut or two, the 108 billion dollar program for a return to the Moon by 2020 started by former President Bush can’t work because it would need at least 30 billion dollars more to get it through the target year. Also, NASA has a longstanding plan to junk the space station in around seven years. Should that happen, astronauts very well may not be going anywhere if there’s no Moon mission. And the special panel has been instructed by the White House to stay within the current budget.

Doing so of course severely limits what the space program can do. There are a few options available which are: pay more (but with a restricted budge, how?), do less (obvious with less money), change American space policy somehow, or turn over much of NASA’s duties to private companies (which, experience has shown, have problems sticking to budget constraints when the Federal government is involved.) Another possibility under discussion would be a joint venture between the U.S. and other countries (such as Russia and possibly China). Until it is told otherwise, NASA will continue with the Bush plan.

It doesn’t help much that in President Obama’s first budget, beginning in October, 3 billion dollars were cut from future spending on space exploration. NASA did, however, receive 400 million dollars from the Stimulus package.

But until something favorable (if possible) is worked out a return to the Moon begins to look even more doubtful. In which case the question of what usable minerals are on the Moon and in what quantities is of little value since we’d have to go to the Moon to find that out.

So I think many of us can cross off our list of things to do before we die the witnessing of America’s return to the Moon and watching the first humans setting foot on Mars and establishing scientific bases or colonies. After all, if we can’t make it back to the Moon then going to Mars—and beyond—is really out of the question. So much for Science Fiction’s optimistic “predictions” of a space-faring future. And thus, reality slaps us upside the head once more. ☒

# I Can Always Dream

Taral Wayne

As parties go, it isn't much, but there's this girl.

A girl. She's that young still. And pretty, and articulate. The person I'd wanted to meet for years, but who always turned out to be a devout Battlestar Galactica fan, or interested in well-dressed men with beards and regular jobs who can afford discos. Sandra, on the other hand, didn't seem to mind a naked chin, had spent jobless summers singing for a garage band, had known about science fiction fandom and wanted to know more. We talk, and for once the conversation isn't wrenched away to Star Trek the Next Franchise, or to the latest in the unending saga of Darkover. Wyeth, Pissaro, and Gaughin are on our lips as we discuss the petty bourgeoisie of fanart. Walt Willis is compared to Borges and found wanting. And yet we agree on the possibility of the perfect fanzine as great art. She wants to see my collection, and my artwork – how about next Saturday? I'm so happy I could snuff it right then.

“TARAL!”

“Huh, wuzzat?” I mumbled, waking from my dream in full command of my wits. “Are we there yet?”

“Look on the map! We crossed Interstate 81 three exits ago, but I haven't found the exit for I-95 yet!”

Victoria Vayne sounded more than usually panicky, so we must have been lost. “Jesus, just a minute.” I scrambled for the map in the back seat, fully awake then. In front of me, the map was 180 square inches (or a little more than 1,161 square centimeters) of intransigent red and blue and black lines, among which were the two that in some point in their wanderings intersect – the object of my frantic search. The half-light of evening was no help finding the junction. But, there, near fateful Hershey, Pennsylvania was the spot. The fourth exit from I-81 was indeed the one we wanted, and they were uniformly ten miles apart. “We want the next one.”

“I know that. Where is it?” she asked.

“How far back was the *last* exit?”

“Two miles. But I haven't seen any signs at

all. What do I do? Why don't they put up more signs?”

Ten minutes later – or maybe it was closer to an hour – Victoria finally let herself be reassured that we were on the right road, and that the highway wasn't as poorly marked as she'd imagined. I drifted toward sleep again.

Darker, the highway takes on a different character. The hills dissolve into the blackness, and the world becomes a neon display on the forward screen of the car. There's a *DNQ* to do when we get back. I think I'll have to write a review of *The Monthly Monthly*, and tear into it properly this time. A surge – Victoria passes a collection of headlights, brake lights, and red beacons. Still haven't finished the FAPAZine I owe either. And correspondence is piling up. I have to write to Randy, to Stu, to Jerry, to –

Lesleigh. I'd been deliberately starting correspondence with artists that interest me, and Les Dark's stuff immediately caught my attention when I first saw it in a fanzine. It was both stylistically and conceptually fresh. Unique, like Schirmeister is unique, and personal like Fletch. When I write, asking for illos, we start corresponding regularly. Lesleigh is also a fan of mine, it develops, and wanted to know everything about Dalmirin and other products of my imagination. But I don't know her gender until the third or fourth letter. She's done a special cover for me, a pastiche of own work, and in a later letter tells me that her club wants me as the fan guest at their next con. I'll have to write back, arranging to stay a few days at her place before the con...

“TARAL! Want to use the can? I have to fill the car. It's nearly half empty and maybe there won't be any more Exxon stations along the way. I can't use my card except at Exxon, Mobil, 76, 66, Conoco, Arco, and Beaver Gas Bars you know. What if there are none of the others? And I won't fill up anywhere with animals on the sign. Why don't you fill the tank while I go over and pay with my card?”

She was gone before I could mumble out anything. Lesleigh? Who the fuck was Lesleigh,

though? I didn't know any Lesleigh. I damned the luck that all my artist friends were guys.

*Sigh.* I was back in the real world, with a gas hose in hand. Damp chill, bugs flitting around the overhead lamps, impenetrable darkness surrounding a little island of artificial light, and the smell of gasoline were reality. The pump stopped. I rounded the amount out to \$12.50. Victoria, who waited in the cubicle to "save time", finished the rest of the transaction with her card while I took *my* turn to wait. I squeezed the bugs off the windshield instead.

Then she was back.

"Want to drive?"

"No. Sleepy."

In the passenger seat again, I propped my head against the window with a pillow as the car accelerated from the planet Exxon into the deep space of night. Trucks howled by in a stream of headlights and red back lights until we matched velocities. Foot off the gas, the weight lifted off our backs. Then Victoria asked, "TARAL, did you put the gas cap back?" I crane a look through the window. Everything was ship shape, but the stupid thing was that it *had* happened before. One time, after driving ten or twenty uneventful miles, a casual glance had revealed the chrome cap still sitting innocently on a rear fender. We had pulled over to the side of the road, that time, *very* slowly and carefully.

Lesli's con is a pretty small affair, even for the Pacific Northwest. But I enjoy being the pro guest there even more than I had enjoyed the honour at the previous Worldcon. Staying at my most admiring fan's country place is a new and exciting experience. I hadn't known that she had been left a millionaire by her father, and owns several square miles of coastal forest. It isn't her father's home, though. She built her own; a rambling complex of structures and tents that were, to greater and lesser degrees, indoors or outdoors, to suit her mood. She hadn't published before, but she suggests we co-edit a genzine. She can afford what we need easily, and thinks it would be best – for the zine of course – if I stay as long as I want as her guest. I stay and have my things shipped from Toronto.

The fanzine proposal is a fruitful one, but not as fulfilling as the walks we have through the forest, the overnight camps, the swimming, and the growing infatuation with each other. Who'd have guessed that holding hands would be as sat

isfying as this? And the pleasures beyond? I'm no gentleman, but I'm still not telling.

As the number one fan of Dalmirin and my race of Kjola, Lesli has more in mind than a conventional relationship though. She has The Creator at hand, and the years of secret medical research she supported have paid off. She's gone for a month. While I toy with another Hugo-winning issue of *Singularity*, she's having her bones reinforced with titanium cores, servo-mechanisms implanted in her muscles to speed her reflexes and strengthen her limbs, plastic surgery to reshape her face, and an artificial integument covers her natural skin forever. Four weeks later, I'm in the midst of typing stencils of part three of Harry Warner's history of 1960's fandom for the next ish. Lesli appears at the door, swathed in shimmery robes and veiled.

She calls my name, and though it's her contralto, it's somehow more exotic, as though produced by a synthesizer. When I turn to look, she lifts the veil. I'm stunned. Tossing the veil aside, she drops the silvery cover to the floor, and a naked Kjola-oid stands in the doorway. I goggle.

"It can be done," she says. Two men appear at her side, "now it's your turn." They come for...

"TARAL!"

"God, now what? Out of gas again? I don't want to drive."

"We can't afford to send out an issue of *Typo* with the next *DNQ*," she states.

"Why not? We haven't had a letter supplement for three issues now. People will stop writing locs! Why think of it now, anyway?"

"The next *DNQ* is 24 pages already. I just realized that the extra two sheets of paper will weigh two grams over the postage limit. What if they notice the excess and return all the copies? We'd have to mail them all over again, at even greater cost. I don't mind cheating, but I'm worried we'll get caught."

"No one will notice, and so maybe a couple of subbers will get stuck with postage due. We've done it before. Don't worry about it, Victoria."

"I can't stand it when people tell me not to worry. That's the way I am. I wouldn't worry if I had more money, but I don't get paid well. I never got paid well, even back working for Drug Trading Company. I was paid less than anyone

in the lab, and got the lowest raises. It was a shitty place. The boss...”

I don't think it was more than half an hour before Victoria came to the breath-taking conclusion of her adventures as the underpaid chemist at Drug Trading, ten years before. I imagine that she continued into episode two of her life, The Best and Least Paid Typist for Go-Temp, but I was dozing again. A sign announcing the turnoff for Gettysburg drifted through my hazy awareness.

It was beginning to be light by then, and I can see the hills slowly emerge from the void. Cemetery Ridge rolls away to the right of us, and tired lines of men asleep beneath our ship, protected by its silver bulk. Saara and I stand watch as the sun rises. The grey-clothed soldiers, tangled in the brush and stone breastworks down the slope, and up into the defile of rock faces called Devil's Den, sleep a more profound sleep than the Union men. They are dead. Beyond Devil's Den, where Sickles's men had been annihilated the day before, lay a glazed and blackened pit. We had caught the Time-Changer's ship there, and destroyed it before the Battle of Gettysburg had been irretrievably lost. All that day the Federal position had needed our support, so weakened it had been by Confederate assaults aided by laser fire and airborne munitions. But the Rebs had fallen back as night descended, and, in the morning light, Yankee possession of the field looks uncontested.

A breeze springs up, ruffling through our white and blue fur. The early morning heat of July 4th. dries the dew on us. After a day's fury, tearing limbs from young bodies, searing holes through defenseless flesh, and vaporizing whole columns of men who threatened Union lines, it was time to heal. The hospitals – where men in grey as well as blue lay groaning – wait for our compassion. “I'll see grey ghosts for centuries!” whispers Saara, “marching even under alien skies...”

“TARAL!”

“WHAT!”

“We're at the con.”

“Shit.” And it was still dark outside too.



Now for for the other major project of NASA:

## Future Moon Suits

A major limitation of the Apollo suits was degradation caused by the lunar dust, which wore down many instruments, and the joints were on the verge of failure because of the abrasive dust. NASA hopes to correct that with a new generation of spacesuits.

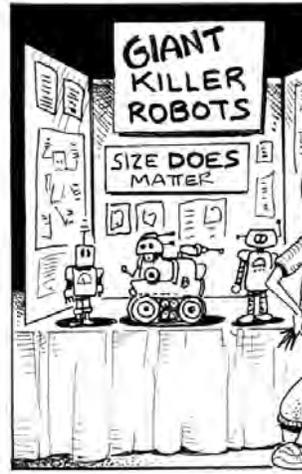
Future moon missions are slated to last days and even months. For that reason spacesuits will have to withstand a lot more use and harsh conditions. They will be built with more dust-resistant materials and fortified joints to keep out the fine particles. The new spacesuits being designed for NASA's return to the moon by 2020 will be lighter, sturdier more comfortable to wear and easier to move around in, with maneuverability allowing movement inside the cockpit of the Orion module and entering and exiting the module for outside exploration. Because they are intended to be used longer, the suits must be able to recycle resources such as oxygen and water. They will filter water from sweat and urine into [potable] drinking water, similar to a system on the International Space Station. The suits will also have fuel cells for power. All in all it sounds as if the future Lunar explorers will not only be safer and more comfortable but also able to concentrate on exploration and research.



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2009...

# JUNIOR MAD SCIENTIST SCIENCE FAIR

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# KENTUCKIANA 4: The Sorghum Festival by Alfred D. Byrd

Aficionados of trivia know that Kentucky has more counties than any other American state (though Kentucky styles itself as a “commonwealth,” not as a state) but Texas. Given that Kentucky is far smaller than Texas (though, if one hammered Kentucky flat, it might be far larger than Texas, as the old joke goes), it must be clear to any analytical mind that Kentucky has, on average, the smallest counties in the Union.

How did Kentucky come to be the commonwealth of tiny counties? It came to be so through a provision of the commonwealth’s constitution, which requires that the county seat of any county must lie (if politicians lie, why can’t county seats?) within a day’s ride of any resident of that county. Nowadays, thanks to President Eisenhower’s newfangled Interstate Highways, it’s no big deal for a driver to zip through six or seven counties an hour (especially given how drivers drive on I-64 between Morehead and Grayson!), but in the 1890’s, when Kentucky’s current constitution was written, a day’s ride was short indeed, especially in Appalachia.

How do these diminutive counties stand out from one another, and, more importantly, how do any of them generate revenue? One answer to this question is “Festivals!” These go back to the olden days, when once a month a county held court days. (In fact, the festival of Mt. Sterling, about a half hour’s [modern] drive east of Lexington, is still called Court Days, and one knows that it’s in session by traffic backed up in the eastbound right-hand lane of I-64 as festival-goers seek parking in a small town with little.) During court days a county’s residents came to the county seat, sat in on trials, schmoozed with neighbors and visitors seldom seen, and traded at the tents of hucksters present to part farmers from their hard-earned cash. We fen might think of a session of court days as Rusticon!

(Er, there isn’t already a Rusticon, is there? I’d feel embarrassed if there were.)

Court days are gone, except in Mt. Sterling, but they live anew, transmogrified into annual county festivals. Some of these coming up are

the Kentucky Bourbon Festival (Bardstown\*), the Casey County Apple Festival, the World Chicken Festival (London, home of the very first KFC, where I ate as a child before the chain went global) and, of course, the Sorghum Festival, held each year the last full weekend in September.

I suppose that I should stop just now and discuss sorghum for the sake of the agriculturally challenged, into whose ranks I normally fall. Sorghum is a cereal grass that, when milled, yields a syrup that, boiled down over time, becomes molasses. I don’t know that Morgan County was really a major center of sorghum-growing before the festival got going back in the early ‘70’s (it’s usually tobacco or corn, which our British cousins call maize, that I see in the fields there), but when the Morgan Countians decided to hold a festival they had to name it after something. It’s been my tradition to buy sorghum molasses, as a gift for those who actually enjoy it, the last thing before I depart from the festival. It used to be, sad to say, that much of the molasses sold at the festival was shipped in from elsewhere, but in recent years the molasses has come from home-grown sorghum, so the festival’s name is making itself come true.

The Sorghum Festival lasts three days, but, as I am at cons, I’m a daytripper, going only on Saturday. Timing my arrival there is something of an art, for, as you may have gathered from my remarks on Mt. Sterling’s Court Days, a parking space is far from guaranteed. West Liberty’s population is around 2,500 (and, if you drive down Main Street at most hours of any given day, you’ll wonder where any of that population is), but on Saturday of the Sorghum Festival the population swells to over 10,000. Back in my mispent youth, I used to come into town via the Mountain Parkway, Kentucky 205, and US 460: i.e., from the south, not that one has any sense of direction in the hills. From this direction I’d have to park high on the hill leading steeply down from the prison and walk downhill, across the river, and through the outskirts of town to reach the

main drag. The downside to parking there was that at day's end I would, carrying my load of sorghum molasses, have to walk through the outskirts of town, across the river, and uphill. Each year the walk gets harder. Fortunately for my decaying knees I've learned that by taking I-64, Kentucky 519, and US 460, and coming into town from the north, I can avail myself of the pay parking there and need walk only on level ground, but for one exception of which I'll tell you. Oh, yes, the timing. Show up by ten thirty in the morning, or you'll learn what an Appalachian traffic jam is like!

The festival's heart is the Big Tent, which covers all of Main Street from Court St. to Prestonsburg Ave. Under the tent lies a double row of booths in which all manner of handicrafts, souvenirs, and foodstuffs are sold everything, in fact, but sorghum molasses. (I'll tell you where to find this later.) In the festival's early days, the town's most famous former resident, the celebrated skeptic Joe Nickell, used to have a booth of his own, where he'd sell his books on Morgan County's history. My favorite of these books is *Raids and Skirmishes: The Civil War in Morgan*. After reading of the house-burnings, dry-gulchings, and lynchings (all right, some were technically hangings, as a drumhead court martial preceded them) that were daily fare in the hills in those days, I wonder how any of my ancestors lived long enough for me to be here. Joe is history now, as far as the festival is concerned, but you can still meet there his near kinsman, W. Lynn Nickell, a venerable, but friendly local historian who got Joe started in his trade. Lynn Nickell has a Civil War book of his own, one proclaiming the innocence of an ancestor of his who was guest of honor at one of the Union's necktie parties. After reading the book, I was uncertain of the defendant's guilt or innocence, but I will say that the testimony of some of the witnesses against him was some of the most clearly self-serving obfuscation that I've read.

After touring the tent and talking with the sadly ever-diminishing number of relatives whom I meet there, I move on to the annex behind the old courthouse. There the local genealogical society proudly displays genealogies that are scandalous if true. I say so because in one of them my mother learned that, instead of being married to my father (according to common report, which I very much hope is true), Dorsa W.

Byrd, she was married to his cousin Dillard. For as long as my parents both would live she would drive him (Dorsa, not Dillard) crazy with jokes on his and her living in sin. I also visit the county's military museum, which would do credit to a national military park, but is the private project of a nephew of one of my uncles a cousin-in-law, perhaps? He disillusioned me about my uncle, locally renowned as a war hero, by telling me that, when my uncle was supposedly helping liberate North Africa, Sicily, and mainland Italy from the Nazis, he was actually liberating overseas saloons. On the off chance of sparing the guilty from retribution should this account transpire to my relatives, I've withheld names, but I suspect that a small town has nowhere for my cousin-in-law to hide.

Time for lunch. To feed hungry hordes, the con-com, er, the festival committee has set up picnic tables on what on ordinary days is a used-car lot, and surrounded the tables with trailers vending fare that will deplete your wallet and send your cholesterol into orbit. I myself always buy biscuits and country ham from the Ladies' Auxiliary. Someday, I must really ask them, "Auxiliary to what?" Locals, I guess, know; foreigners needn't.

Now it's time for me to take in the festival's expansion site. Heading down Prestonsburg Ave. to Riverside Dr. down a hillside that would make a fearsome ski-slope takes me to Founder's Park, where one can watch a mule trod an endless circle to drive a sorghum meal, where one can see (and smell the smoky sweetness of) vats of boiling sorghum syrup, and where one can actually buy sorghum molasses. (It's bad form to leave town without some, and it does taste good over biscuits.) The park also has booths where one can watch handicrafts being made, and buy them. My favorite booth, as it seems to be everyone else's, is the smithy, where a garrulous smith proudly explains his craft to you while, from a safe distance, you watch him make horseshoes. I really ought to buy one one of these years. While you eye crafts, you can listen to Bluegrass and Gospel from live bands in the park's bandstand, and you're welcome to sit a spell in the brand-new amphitheater beside it.

Now it's time to head back uphill (don't have bought too much molasses, or you'll be as slow as it!) and find a good spot along the closed-off section of US 460 for watching the annual

Sorghum Festival Parade. It's actually no real challenge to find a good spot, as there are more participants in the parade than spectators of it. It has beauty queens and kings in every age class from infant to elder, each with his and her court and driver. The parade has marching bands, majorettes, and cheerleaders from elementary school, middle school, and high school. Everyone who can sit a horse is riding one; everyone who can shoulder what looks like a musket and wear what looks like a uniform is marching in what bear vague resemblance to ranks. One outfit drags down US 460 a cannon (a Napoleon howitzer, if looks don't deceive me) that had no better sense of history than to wind up in West Liberty. Proud motorists toot their horns from fancy cars, fancy trucks, and chopped-up motorcycles. The parade has a float on which hunting dogs have treed a raccoon; I myself was happy when the live raccoon got replaced with a stuffed one. (The ASPCA must have a branch in the hills.) Bringing up the parade's rear are the Shriners, who motor about in absurd conveyances and play oriental-looking instruments that I suspect hide kazoos. (When you're a Thirty-Second Degree Mason of the Scottish Rite, or a Knight Templar of the York Rite, you need no longer stand on dignity.) As the parade passes, bystanders chat with participants on the cars and floats, and get showered with hard candy flung by all and sundry.

After the parade, the festival goes on, but we daytrippers must head back to our cars and up 205 or 519, as the case may be. After a while one can get a cell-phone signal again, and one re-enters a world that has more places to go and things to do, but less of a sense of belonging.

\* The Kentucky Bourbon festival can't be held in Bourbon County, where the eponymous beverage originated, as Bourbon County was dry when the festival began. I gather, however, that in Bardstown one has long been free to drink oneself fish eyed.



## A Questionable Future

Among the goals of making the Internet the main--if not only--source of information is digitizing books to make them available online. Project Gutenberg, the Internet Archives, and Google have made progress in that goal by digitizing written materials currently out of copyright. Magazines and newspapers have gone to online versions, as have TV news. Science fiction fanzines can be found online. Even libraries are considering eliminating print books and going digital. All this is leading to a future where millions of people will be spending all their free time either in front of a TV screen or a computer monitor-- when they're not listening to iPods or using Internet-capable cell phones. We and later generations will be connected to the world and yet isolated from most personal contact outside of work. With the prevalence of online vendors people wouldn't have to go stores for what they need. Place an order online and have it delivered. Even perishable food such as fresh meat, vegetables, and fruit. Nationwide pizza chains allow hungry patrons to go online and order pizzas to be delivered. Ordering from a grocery store wouldn't be so far-fetched..

That's all well and good but I suspect supporters of an everything Internet have forgotten about a couple of important issues. If you follow the news you must have heard about "cyberattacks" causing major disruption to certain parts of the Internet. Russia supposedly launched a cyberattack against the country of Georgia and, there have been attempts against the Pentagon and the White House. The possibility of concerted cyber attacks is a real threat to the Internet. In case anyone has forgotten, computers and servers are powered by electricity. Laptops are equipped with batteries so they can be used away from home and electrical outlets, but so far the battery life of even the best laptop is limited and eventually the batteries have to be re-charged--by plugging into an electrical outlet. Thousands, if not millions, of appliances require electricity. We've all heard about power outages. The nation's power-grid is reputed to be very susceptible to such outages and, also, possible cyberattacks, both very real possibilities. What would that mean to a future where **everything** can be found on the Internet? Think about it.

# From the readers . . .

From: **Ned Brooks**

Dear Tom -

Thanks for the zine - spectacular Brad Foster cover, looks like alien musical notation.

The publication record of The Reluctant Famulus in my inventory is -

> RELUCTANT FAMULUS

> USA

> SADLER, TOM

> 10 MAY/90 x AQ 36 Vol 2 No. 4

> 11 JUL/90 x AQ 28

> 12 SEP/90 x AQ 30

> 13 NOV/90 x AQ 28

> 14 JAN/91 x AQ 26

> 15 MAR/91 x AQ 32 Misnumbered No. 14 again.

> 16 MAY/91 x AQ 30

> 18 SEP/91 x AQ 34

> 19 NOV/91 x AQ 26

> 20 JAN/92 x AQ 34

> 21 MAR/92 x AQ 26

> 22 MAY/92 x AQ 30

> 23 JUL/92 x AQ 32

> 24 SEP/92 x AQ 38

> 26 JAN/93 x AQ 34

> 27 MAR/93 x AQ 34

> 28 MAY/93 x AQ 20

> 29 JUL/93 x AQ 20

> 30 SEP/93 x AQ 20

> 31 NOV/93 x AQ 44@

> 32 JAN/94 x AQ 24

> 33 MAR/94 x AQ 56

> 34 MAY/94 x AQ 34

> 35 JUL/94 x AQ 30

> 36 SEP/94 x AQ 38@

> 37 NOV/94 x AQ 42@

> 38 JAN/95 x AQ 40@

> 39 MAR/95 x AQ 44@

> 40 Jun/95 x AQ 44@

> 41 Aug/95 x AQ 40

> 42 Oct/95 x AQ 40@

> 43 Dec/95 x AQ 34@

> 44 Mar/96 x AQ 48@

> 45 Jun/96 x AQ 50@

> 46 Sep/96 x AQ 60@

> 47 Dec/96 x AQ 46@

> 48 Spr/97 x AQ 66@

> 49 Sum/97 x AQ 76@

> 50 Aut/97 x AQ 78@

> 51 Win/97 x AQ 64@

> 52 Spr/98 x AQ 70@

> 53 Aut/98 x AQ 74@

> 54 Win/98 x AQ 52@

> 55 Sum/99 x AQ 80@ [+ In Memoriam Buck Coulson]

> 56 Win/01 x AQ 42@

> 57 Aut/01 x AQ 56@

> 58 Spr/02 x AQ 34@

> 59 Win/02 x AQ 50@

> 60 Win/05 x AQ 24@

> 61 Win/06 x AQ 16@ [+ 61B Letters Spr/07 as "The > Resplendent Fool"]

> 62 Win/07 x AQ 26@ [as "The Resplendent Fool" but may > be temporary]

> 63 Sum/07 x AQ 20@

> 64 Feb/07 x AQ 26@

> 65 Jul/08 x AQ 26@

> 66 Sum/07 x AQ 32@

> 67 Aut/08 x AQ 34@

> 68 Win/09 x AQ 38@

> 69 Spr/09 x AQ 38@

> 70 Sum/09 x AQ 38@

I only have them from the 1990s on (@), entries before that were from Pickersgill's MemoryHole list. You are a far more energetic publisher than I am! You do seem to have missed doing one in 2003 or 2004.

Sorry to hear about your leg! I hope you have regained full use of it. Seems odd it would break both bones that easily. But I have torn muscles in each leg with much less stress than that.

I think most of the science fiction I remember is more on the pessimistic (or realistic) side - and just reading the daily paper often reminds me of Brunner's world of THE SHEEP LOOK UP. Is there any optimistic science fiction that, in retrospect, doesn't seem rather silly? David Zindell's "Neverness" books perhaps.

I'm not surprised that Sheryl couldn't replace an old built-in microwave oven - but the new ones are smaller for the same interior space. Why not just convert the space into a shelf and stick a

new one in there? The other thing that occurs to me is that the "clunking noise" had nothing to do with the electronics at all, but was a failure of the electro-mechanical platform rotation mechanism. A clever repairman might have been able to fix that. This house is too old for a microwave - it has a large built-in GE electric oven. If it died I would do without, I don't cook anyway.

Certainly the IDEA of a flying car has been popular, and I have seen pictures of the various designs. But they don't seem to have come into even as much actual use as those autos that could also be boats.

I hope the mysterious neighbors don't get the notion that you ratted them out to the cops.... Considering where you are, maybe they have a moonshine still up there....

The SSDI database is protected against illegal uses to some extent - there is a waiting period between the verification of a death and the release of the data - though not as long as I imagined. I see that on July 10, it notes that it was last updated on May 27. So perhaps a month is the mandated delay. You are right of course that not everyone would get in there - as a federal civil servant I would not. But for a long time now almost everyone has gotten a Social Security number quite aside from their employment. I was assigned one in Venezuela in the 1950s when my father got me employed for a few weeks by Orinoco Mining. I did not of course do any mining - I was put to work sorting paperwork in an un-airconditioned warehouse. As long as you have a number, you should wind up in the database once you shuffle off this mortal coil.

You should certainly read Flannery O'Connor, who was of the female persuasion. Her novel WISE BLOOD was made into an excellent movie by John Huston that turns up on cable ever so often and is available on DVD.

The metal plates in your leg, if any, are probably titanium. They might still alert the more sophisticated detectors - but once they saw that the metal was under your skin, they would know it was just a medical repair. The metal in my mouth hasn't set off any detectors - but I haven't been on an airplane or even to the airport in years.

Best- Ned

*[[I knew there was a gap in my publication shed-*

*ule but I couldn't remember just how large it was. It would appear the break was a large one and, apparently, around two years. Damn! You lose a lot of momentum in two years' time. I guess 2010 would more accurately mark twenty years of actual publication.//Right now I'm very close to full use of my leg. There is still some swelling in my right foot and occasionally it feels as if there's some sort of padding affixed to it. I don't walk quite as fast as I used to but am much more mobile and can drive our van again. Truthfully I was surprised at how easily both tibia and fibula broke but I suppose it's a matter of just how I slipped and fell--and I'm still not 100% clear on that, it occurred so fast.//A lot of SF does seem pessimistic, I suppose. That may be more a matter of writers striving hard to be realistic or else they don't think an optimistic future is possible. I would hope there has been some optimistic SF that doesn't seem silly. Maybe it's all in how a reader looks at it.//Re: your suggestions about a microwave. I hope Sheryl reads what you wrote and gives it some serious thought. It sounds like a reasonable solution to me.//Yeah--the idea of a flying car goes back a long, long way, into the 30s at least. The more I think about it the more I believe the airways filled with flying cars would be a bad idea and a disastrous one.//From what I've been able to observe I doubt the neighbors in question suspect us of having been informers. We've never been anywhere near their residence and have only observed their goings and comings, and these has been no obvious evidence of anything illegal going on.//The SSDI. My paternal grandfather, who died in 1948 isn't in the index. He had been, as far as I know, a farmer all his life. My paternal grandmother, however, is because she apparently had non-farm related jobs. Probably after my grandfather died.//I confess ignorance of Flannery O'Connor's gender, which is probably inexcusable considering that I could have Googled "Flannery O'Connor" and learned all I needed to know.//I know for certain I have a (small) metal plate on the right side of my right leg and two pins on each side of my ankle on the left side--if I understood correctly what the orthopaedic surgeon told me. I obtained a detailed list of everything involving the surgery--and I do mean everything. From the price of what I presume to be the pins and the plate they have to be titanium--or solid gold. ]]*

From: **Joseph Major**  
1409 Christy Avenue  
Louisville, KY 40204-2040  
jtmajor@iglou.com  
July 10, 2009

Dear Tom:

Ah yes, the joy of recovering old archived files. I had to get some files off one old computer for Lisa. The 3 1/2" drive was not working, so I had to copy the files to the 5 1/4" drive. Then I had to borrow a computer at work, with both kinds of drives, so I could copy the files to a 3 1/2" floppy. All the while people recommended that I plug into the USB port, something the computer lacked and if it had one it would have been inaccessible.

I've seen the Frankfort Regional Medical Center, from the highway. The hospital I remember, downtown, is now an apartment building.

The Old Kit Bag: I might add that Brunner and Disch inherited the "New Wave Gloom" from J. G. Ballard. And Ballard got his "gloom" from the crossing of the World Destruction Novel (which genre his first works were in) and his own personal experiences in the internment camp in Shanghai.

Kentuckiana III: If Alfred Byrd likes, I'll take him to Riverside Cemetery in Hopkinsville, where my parents and grandparents are buried, and spend the day pointing out my relatives' graves, the notorious one last. (He's buried in front of the chapel.) Then Lisa can drive him around Trigg County and show all her peoples' graves.

Some overlap, of course. Like the relative who had to have her headstone (in Riverside Cemetery) replaced when she finally passed on. When her husband died, they prepared a place for her, and it said, "Ophelia Thomas Ellis, 1899 — 19 " with the last two numbers to be filled in at the appropriate time.

Miz Ophelia lived to be a hundred and five. You do the math. They had to replace the entire monument.

LoCs: Ned Brooks: The SSDI is very helpful. I found Robert Heinlein's social security number on it, for example.

Ship paintings: You mean, like the ship painting at the bank where the ship was flying

signal flags that said PUT YOUR MONEY IN YOUR MATTRESS? Or the American bank which bought a number of such paintings from a British firm, displayed them, and only then noticed that every one was of an American ship surrendering to a British one during the War of 1812.

Grant transfers data from one computer to another using a system called LapLink. Like you said, it's possible to copy files over an ethernet cable. I also use a USB drive, or at home, all the computers are on the network, so I can copy files to the shared drives and then copy them to the computer in question.

Milt Stevens: I've never heard of that one fanzine, either, and I get or at least read all the others. The problem with the Hugo is that someone with a well-motivated circle of associates can get a fanzine on the ballot, even win. Hence Caz Cadessus's *ERB-Dom*.

Henry Welch: I did not need to pay \$89 to get a router installed. The price was quoted for the router and installation, and in any case, Grant did the latest installation after buying the new router himself.

Namarie,

Joseph T Major

*[[One of the problems with the advances in data storage is the way the old methods are superseded, antiquated, and thrown by the wayside. It doesn't help that people (and I'm one of them) don't back up their files on the floppies onto the newer media that replaces them. Regarding plugging into a USB port: Interestingly, I learned there are such things as external 3.5" floppy drives which plug into a USB port. I bought one through Amazon.com at a remarkable reasonable (cheap) price. I have not yet used it to transfer data from a bunch of 3.5" floppies I have lying around to a CD or DVD.]]Regarding the world destruction novels: I recall years (decades, really) ago reading many of them mostly dealing with the aftermath of a worldwide nuclear war, some natural catastrophe or, in a few cases, destruction by aliens from outer space.]]I can relate to your mention of Riverside Cemetery. After doing my own family history research I was intrigued to find that a cemetery near the town of Hazel Green, Alabama, called Charity Cemetery (It's*

adjacent to Charity Baptist Church and so doesn't refer to a cemetery for "charity" burials.) where several generations of Tanner (on my mother's side) ancestors are buried, and also those of various other families who married into my Tanner lines. Most of them are buried close to the church and, if I recall correctly, land for the cemetery was donated by one of my Tanner ancestors. That may or may not be true. I'd need to check county deeds to verify it. Then on my father's side most of the people buried in Borden Springs Church of Christ Cemetery near Borden Springs, Cleburne County, Alabama are in one way or another related to me. Ancestors besides my grandfather and grandmother Sadler, a couple of aunts and their husbands, one of grandpa's brothers and, allegedly--there are no stones to mark the locations, my great-grandfather and mother and my great-great-grandparents. I imagine such is the case in many cemeteries around the country where certain families have lived for generations. //Replacing an entire monument! Ouch! My great-grandmother Tanner in Charity Cemetery has a tall obelisk with a death year of 1888--which is wrong. My grandfather was born in 1894 and two of his brothers were born after that and great-grandma is enumerated on the 1900 Madison County, Alabama census. Grandpa didn't have an actual birth certificate but his birth was recorded in a ledger with great-grandpa' and great-grandma's names listed. At any rate, it's obvious no effort was made even to try to correct the death year. //If I understand the flag semaphore system, wouldn't the message "put your money in our mattress" require a lot of flags flying at the same time?. Wouldn't any messages being conveyed be more in the nature of warnings of various kinds or brief communications between naval ships during battles? It might be wise to be skeptical of the story. You know--"pulling a person's leg".]]



From: **Alexis Gilliland**

4030 8th Street South,

Arlington, VA 22204

July 11, 2009

Dear Tom,

Thank you for the Reluctant Famulus #70, with Brad Foster's elegant cover, as nice a piece of computer generated art as I've seen. Breaking your leg is unfortunate, but when it happens it tends to be sudden. Back in 1984 I slipped on the ice and broke my right fibula, just above the ankle. Getting around on crutches was a pain, and driving a stick shift with my leg in a cast was obviously a bad idea, so I let my wife drive. Even then it took me a long time to heal, and I am not eager to repeat the process. From the letter column, a bit of trivia; Ned Brooks says that "powdered aluminum is thermite," which is only partly correct. Thermite is a mixture of aluminum and iron oxide, which burns to aluminum oxide and liquid iron. The skin of the Hindenburg was painted with an iron oxide primer topped with an aluminum paint, so the fire on docking at Lakehurst Naval Air Station was possibly a thermite fire started by a static spark. Or maybe not, but after the event, the German company building zeppelins did change the formulation of their paint, which is suggestive.

John Thiel hopes for my comment on his cartoon on page 9 of the previous issue? He did drawing and caption with the same pen, with foreground smoke in front of his speech balloon to give a cluttered appearance. He might perhaps use a finer line for his caption, and organize his drawing so that the speech balloon stands alone. Was it funny? He has remarked that he often finds my cartoons incomprehensible, and I am afraid that in this case the feeling is mutual.

There is also some back and forth on the current economic crisis. I recommend "Bailout Nation" by Barry Ritholtz for an excellent discussion of how this thing came to pass. The Washington Post reports that Bernie Madoff's \$65 billion dollar Ponzi scheme eluded the watchful eye of the SEC when his niece married the supervisor of the woman who wanted to investigate Madoff. The new Madoff in-law kindly directed her attention to other miscreants, letting Madoff extend his successful run another few years.

What else? Over the 4th of July weekend we went to Westercon 62, aka Fiestacon out in Phoenix, where Lee threw a party for the 2010 Raleigh Nasfic bid, she having joined the committee to run the con suite. No good deed goes unpunished. Her Friday party reminded the smofs of Westercon 63 that there was a Nasfic coming up, so after the fireworks on Saturday, and a few beers, they went on Facebook to announce a combined Westercon/Nasfic bid at the Westercon hotel in Pasadena with the previously announced Westercon guests. Sigh. This is using the internet to give a hotfoot to the Raleigh Nasfic committee, and was supposed to be funny. Well, maybe in a Three Stooges sort of way it is. They were upfront about it being a non-serious bid, but it was still aggravating. A sheet of cartoons is enclosed.

Best wishes,

*[[The break to both my right leg bones was in approximately the same place as yours. Until I learned otherwise (and saw the x-rays) I'd never have thought I'd require surgery to the extent of a pair of pins and a small plate. When I saw the bill for my medical treatment that hurt almost as much as breaking my leg. At least insurance covered part of the cost. Yeah--getting around with crutches was a major pain and driving even a vehicle with an automatic transmission was forbidden by the orthopaedist. Using the gas pedal, and especially the brake pedal would have been unwise to say the least. It seems to be taking me a long time too--3+ months and it's still not completely healed. And I'm wondering what I'll go through when cold weather sets in. I scnd your statement, and I'm ". . . not eager to repeat the oricess" either. Ever.//I remember seeing some documentary or other about the Hindenberg and it was, I think, said neither the German or American inspectors could conclusively determine the exact cause. There was a mention of a spark setting it off. But what you say certainly is suggestive. The hydrogen used to inflate the Zeppelin didn't help matters either.//Your mention of the book "Bailout Nation" . . . I'll have to try to remember to locate a copy. From what I've read*

*in passing it would seem the SEC wasn't particularly watchful--as seems to be the case with many Federal agencies.//The Nasfic bid you mention. What seems funny at the time to some often turns out to be much less so. Since Nasfic iwill be held in Raleigh, I'm going to register for it. It may not be quite the same as a Worldcon but it's close enough for me (both in nature and distance.//Thanks for the cartoons. As usual they're pithy but not obscure.]]*



From: **Ben Indick**  
428 Sagamore Avenue  
Teaneck, N. J. 07666  
201-836-0211  
July 11, 2009

Dear Tom,

I see you still have those double Ds but this time with some justification. My memory of association with Tom Sadler easily goes back twenty years and more. I think I once talked you into joining an APA even, briefly. It was not your style and when you left, it was one of your departures. What I termed *double Ds* was your now abandoned habit of unnecessary apologies. No zinc receiving work (and brilliant cover art) as dazzling as Brad Foster's has need for apology for anything and that includes Bob Sabella, Sheryl Birkhead and especially the JRRT-flavored Alfred Byrd—who sees the beauty in a cemetery.

I am a month shy of 86, and not so hot. I wish you a speedy and complete recovery and the identical pleasure in publishing TRF. I wish I could join you.

Ben Indick

*[[I know I had a bad habit of always apologizing. I wasn't proud of it and tried--usually unsuc-*

cessfully--to break the habit.//I often regret having dropped out of the apa but at the time I thought I had more important priorities and good reasons. Maybe neither was very good.//By now your 86th birthday will have come and gone. Congratulations upon reaching that age. I wish you felt better and hope you can be around a while longer. I also wish you could join me. You're one of the "good ones" in fandom.]]



From: **Milt Stevens**  
 July 13, 2009  
 Dear Tom,

The cover on Reluctant Famulus #70 is a nice piece of design work by Brad Foster. It certainly is different from the soon to be nutso cat on the back cover. He's definitely versatile.

Your editorial deals with trying to remember things like when you did your first issue of a particular fanzine. Like most people of our age, my memory isn't as good as it used to be. However, I think I'm better at remembering fannish things in comparison with most things. Even at that, I have found myself looking at 40 year old photos of fans and not being able to remember all of the names. Things would be easier if people had their names tattooed on their foreheads.

Taking a nap when you don't feel well is certainly a good idea. Cats have been doing it for ages, and they don't seem to get sick as often as we do. They undoubtedly have less stress. Cats relax better than any other creatures I've ever seen. They give the impression that if they relaxed any more they might melt entirely.

Bob Sabella talks about whether SF is opti

mistic or not. I prefer optimistic SF but there is plenty of SF that doesn't fill the bill. Mainstream literature seems to be more pessimistic because being pessimistic is more profound than being optimistic. To be considered a serious writer it helps to be serious. Some comedy may be better written than most tragedies, but tragedy still gets the highest honor.

With most other genres, we never even think to ask whether they are optimistic or not. Is alternate history optimistic? If you show a sequence of events that is worse than the one which occurred in our history, is that optimistic or pessimistic? What about mysteries? People are always getting murdered in mystery stories. That really doesn't seem pessimistic even though it seems like it ought to be pessimistic.

A few months ago, I watched a Woody Allen movie titled "Matilda and Matilda." If anyone around me talked as much as Woody Allen characters talk, I would strangle them. In this movie, the totally pointless intellectuals are debating whether life is basically tragic or basically comic. It sounds like a pretty dumb topic to me, but that didn't stop a bunch of Woody Allen characters from discussing it for a couple hours anyway. I think the answer was maybe.

Yours truly,  
 Milt Stevens  
 6325 Keystone St.  
 Simi Valley, CA 93063  
 Miltstevens@earthlink.net

*[[I very much like Brad's artwork because he's inventive and offbeat, and I never quite know what to expect from him but it's always unusual, often bizarre, and of course humorous.//Yeah--it's a bummer not being able to remember things I'd like to when I want to and absurd when I can remember unimportant things, useless things, or stupid things not worth remembering. As for your idea about tatoeing--I dunno . . . tatoos are nearly permanent or at least more difficult to get rid of than to acquire. Maybe people should go around with ID badges with photos of what they looked like when they were younger. Or maybe not.//I've found that napping in such cases as an illness or injury has been helpful to me. Someone once humorously observed that cats sleep 23 hours out of 24. I think they just rest up*

during the day so they can stay up all night and get into trouble without being caught.//I'm not convinced that "being pessimistic is more profound than being optimistic." Profundity does not lie solely in pessimism (or maybe even reality for that matter). Maybe tragedy "gets the highest honor" because people secretly enjoy seeing someone else more miserable and unhappy than they and hate seeing others who are happier and enjoy life more. You have a good point about not questioning whether or not other genres are optimistic or not. I would think an alternate history with events worse than the ones in our history would hardly be optimistic except maybe to say, "See! We could be living in a worse time than we are." So in that way there's optimism because the story is saying "See? If events had gone this way it could have been even worse! So be glad for what we've got." With mysteries or murder mysteries in particular, it's a matter of the murderer being revealed, caught, tried, and punished. So even if there was the tragedy of a death there is a balancing out of sorts of justice or retribution, or whatever.//Mostly, it seems, Woody Allen has a pretty dismal outlook on life--and his in particular. But is that **really** the way he is or merely his comic shtick? Possibly the only answer to that question is--maybe..]]



From: **Brad Foster**  
Greetings Tom ~

Great job on printing my art on the cover of issue #70 here, even has a cool texture to the paper stock! You done me good there, Tom. If you need/want another color cover anytime, just let me know. 've got some things here that might work, and like how we've managed to put some rather "different" type images together so far for

TRF.

Regarding your opening comments on trying to find information on back issues of your own zine: I would like to suggest that, as a 20th anniversary project of your own, you see if you can dig through those boxes you mentioned to find the hard copies, and then get them all bound together nicely in a nice hardback volume, with something like "The Reluctant Famulus- the FIRST 20 Years" on the spine. (In gold, of course!) I've actually got a couple of sets of comic books bound up like that years back, a full run of "Not Brand Echh" and all the Russ Manning issues of "Magnus, Robot Fighter". My collection is nothing if it ain't broad ranging! But, in any event, they look cool on the shelf.

"Youch!" on the busted leg! I've been lucky enough not to have broken any personal pieces of my body... so far.

Gene's column on the expectations of some people that writers should reflect the style of stories they write reminds me of an observation Cindy and I made early on when we started going to conventions. That is, both writers and artists are people who can spend huge amounts of their time quite happily alone, working out their inspirations. The kind of folks who don't tend to be too outgoing, as they are always more interested in getting back to their keyboards or easels. Yet when invited to a convention, are suddenly expected to be entertaining and outgoing. Luckily there are a lot of creative people who are also fun in person, but it's an odd group to be sure.

Sheryl's tale of appliance sizing struck home here. This house is something like 60 years old now, and I think even when it was built they weren't working too close "to spec". Just about every appliance in the kitchen has given up the ghost in the past couple of years, and NONE of them have spare parts available anywhere, nor do the spaces they fit into fit with anything new. Cindy has been doing her cooking off a double hot plate, a counter top microwave and a small counter top oven for the past couple of years as we slowly try to set aside a few dollars each month to just rip it all out and get a working kitchen back again. sigh

Had our last outdoor show of the summer this past weekend. Temperatures were around 105 degrees all three days, and I don't want to

even think about what the actual temperature in my tent was with the heat radiating off the asphalt street. First time I've tried a mid-summer show here in Texas, and will most likely be the last! Nothing to make me leave the house now for a few weeks, so going to try and be an artist again for a little while!

stay happy~  
Brad

*[[When I first saw your cover I thought, "I've got to find a way to get it properly reproduced--and not at home with the equipment I have." So I had the covers done professionally at a cost probably roughly equal to the cost of the HP ink cartridge for my printer or my digital copier, maybe a bit less. I feel I got my money's worth and from now on that the only way I'll go with future color covers. (Hear that, Kurt E.?)//Your suggestion for a 20th Anniversary project is interesting. If I did undertake such a project I'd borrow the copies from my daughter, disassemble them and either copy or scan them in. It would involve a bit of work but would be easier than going through several boxes of paper to find the original masters. It would be interesting to see your collection.//Here's hoping you **never** break any part of your anatomy. I've suffered a sprained ankle, a broken left arm (I'm basically left-handed), and a broken right leg. I could have done without any of those injuries. Although, having the broken leg forced me to slow down a lot and take things easier as well as trying to be much more careful.//Yes, artists and writers can be very self-absorbed in choosing their chosen professions/avocations and are content being alone while they do so. The isolation aids in concentration, with no outside distractions. There is a phrase I rather like, "cacoethes scribendi" with loosely translates to "an itch to write". As with any itch, it **has** to be scratched. That's true with artists as well. There should be (and maybe is) an equivalent phrase for artists. It's contradiction or perhaps a surprise when fans of a writer or artist discover their favorite is not as entertaining in person as through his or her work. Fortunately, as you say, there are creative people who can be fun and entertaining in person.//I suspect the building industry decades ago had fewer standards of construction (that is, building codes) but also, as is true of most everything, there were*

*builders who cut costs any and every way they could or people who contracted construction of a house as inexpensively as possible. But even back then, as now, if one had the money to spend and the determination to see it done right a house could be built to perfection or near perfection. There has always been and probably always will be shoddy workmanship as long as people can get away with it. Here's hoping you and Cindy can get the kind of kitchen you want and need. I think it can be done right and without spending an outrageous amount of money.]]*



From: **Gregory Benford**

Tom:

I love Bob Sabella's term "near future dismal" -- laughed out loud, for he neatly pins the bleak side of much sf in the last 30+ years.

Indeed, my Timescape is rather like that. I like to think I redeemed the environmental disaster of that novel with some scrupulous science, especially physics -- but the charge sticks. I've written a lot of Big Picture sf, especially the galactic center novels, but yes, I do tend toward optimism. Science often leads that way, the Baconian agenda writ in sf. Long may it wave (but not New Wave).

More!

Gregory

*[[I have to wonder why, exactly, some SF writers were producing what Bob called "near future dismal". Was it their idea of a realistic future or were they dedicated pessimistics. I also wonder what's wrong with portraying an optimistic future in spite of how dismal things look (or seem to) these days and in the next few years. I suppose I'll never find an answer.//I confess with some embarrassment that I've not read **Timescape** (So many books, so little time!). that is something I'll have to remedy even if there's a*

chance it's dismal and bleak, at least in part. I very much enjoyed your novel *The Sunborn* which seems to me to strive for realism without being either dismal or pessimistic. A while back I purchased a copy of *The Year's Best Science Fiction, 24th Annual Collection*. I began reading it but so far haven't managed to finish it. I found many of the stories personally disappointing and focused on AI and/or virtual reality. The only story I enjoyed so far was "Bow Shock" by Gregory Benford. I'd like to finish reading the collection and have considered reviewing the stories but realized there would be more negative reviews than positive ones and so have abandoned that idea. I hope you continue to write the sort of SF you have been so that I'll have something to look forward to, along with that of certain other SF writers who have been around a long time and whose writing I still enjoy. //Good grief! a reply longer than your e-loc!]]



From: **John Purcell**

Well since it's not yet 12:00 noon, good morning, Tom! Thank you for sending your latest issue, which arrived here two weeks ago. Let me start by saying that I really loved that Brad Foster cover. It looks like a surrealistic vision of a Kelmscott Press illuminated text. Very nice work, indeed. It has a rather late Victorian style to it; this makes me wonder if that's the effect that Brad had in mind when he created this. Even the lettering of the zine title and number fit. Brad certainly does nice work. We are so lucky to have him producing such covers for us. I sure hope he makes decent money at the art shows/auctions he displays his work at. (Crap! Ended that sentence with a preposition. I hate doing that!)

Oh, Thomas you had me wincing in pain

with your broken ankle story. I consider myself extraordinarily fortunate in that I have never suffered a broken bone that required surgery. Way back when I played Pony-Colt baseball at the age of 16, I sprained my left wrist two days before a starting assignment (I pitched and played first base/outfield, and I'm left-handed), and later that same season my right hand pinky got a teensy-tiny fracture above the last knuckle from a batted ball that had been rifled back up the middle. That hurt like crazy, but didn't require surgery. Even so, I am quite glad that you're doing well now. You really must take care of yourself, Thomas; at our advanced ages we have to be more careful. Brittleness comes with age -- and wisdom. Or does our wisdom become brittle? That's possible, I suppose.

Recently I have been reading more science fiction (again; I go through these spurts a couple times a year), so that question Bob Sabella asks -- Is science fiction optimistic? -- is a good one, but requires a two-part answer. The first one is the obvious answer: SF used to be optimistic. Those Golden Age writers he mentions were among the best at it, but I think some of our modern writers are rather optimistic, too. Last night I started reading S.M. Stirling's *The Sky People* and was struck by its vibrant tone and pacing. It definitely reminded me of old-style pulp writing, but with a very modern attitude. The deeper I get into it the more I might be able to say that it's an "optimistic" novel, but I'm not sure yet. It is certainly enjoyable so far.

Also, I think Alaster Reynolds, Gregory Benford and Connie Willis are writers who seem to write "optimistically" in terms of their future visions. Naturally, these kinds of stories are enjoyable since most readers find them entertaining, which is something that a writer hopes to accomplish. There are more literary minded SF authors out there right now, I am sure, but I am woefully uneducated as to who's writing what nowadays. Some year I am going to have to start reading these 21st century wordsmiths and see what kinds of worlds they're envisioning. In the meantime, I shall continue to read what looks interesting and holds my attention. And please don't bother giving me names to read: my bedtime reading shelf is stocked with books to the breaking point. If I could read as fast as Joe Major this wouldn't be so bad. As it is, there is a lot of good reading ahead, and that is A Good

Thing.

This leads very neatly into Gene Stewart's column, especially his comment "If you have a story to tell, write it now." Truer words were never spoken. Once in a great while the urge to write fiction slaps across the back of my head, and I do have a handful of completed -- and unpublished -- stories. The funny thing is, Gene's comment about researching and writing makes a lot of sense, too. Inspiration is one thing, but you have to work at it. Wasn't it Thomas Edison who said something like invention is 99% perspiration and 1% inspiration? With fiction writing, that makes a lot of sense. Maybe I am not cut out for being a fiction writer.

A couple quick comments more, and I'm done with this loc. Alfred Byrd's trip reports through Kentucky are interesting and appeal to the historian in me. I kind of like wandering through cemeteries, even if there are no relatives buried there. Just reading the headstones and noting their age and designs is historically interesting. Also, Sheryl Birkhead really needs to stop trying to fix things around her house. While she may be acquiring really good fan writing material -- which is good, I admit, and she writes it well -- her tales of woe make me feel so bad for her that all I want to do is give her a big hug and say, "Here. Have a beer and relax." That works for me whenever I get frustrated with homestead fix-ups. One has to learn when to say "fuck it" and let someone more qualified take care of things. The problem is, that costs a lot more money than I have. \*sigh\* Such is life in the big city.

One or two quick comments more from the loccol and that should do it. Really! I'm not kidding!

Eric Mayer's confession about not reading SF anymore is something I can identify with. I go through spurts (like I said before) of certain genres, and usually define my reading taste as eclectic. It all depends if I'm interested in something at the time. Anything historical is usually a good bet for me.

I like the Taral Wayne and Alexis Gilliland illoes gussying up the loccol. Good stuff, always. Keep up the good work. And holy cow, I haven't seen a loc from Frank Denton in positively decades! Thanks for pubbing his address; now I can send him the latest *Askance*. I used to trade zines with him back in the 70s and early 80s; *Rogue Raven* was a solid fanzine and always a

fun read. So is he still pubbing zines, or just running a blog? Doing a Google search on "Rogue Raven" revealed a blog by him of that name, and I may have to check that out more often.

A fine fanzine, Tom. Many thanks for sending it my way, and I shall wing the 15th *Askance* to you in return. So far I've got a dozen printed out, and should get them mailed in the next week or two. Take care, and enjoy the locs as they roll in.

All the best,

John Purcell

*[[I feel lucky to have Brad providing me with covers and fillos and often wish I had asked for art much sooner. I too hope he makes decent money at the art shows and auctions; he deserves it. I was tempted to correct the sentence for you but decided that since this is supposed to be a relaxed and easy-going little publication why be so stuffy. Besides, we know what you meant and we forgive you.//You can imagine the pained expression on my face when I broke my leg and fully realized what I had done. Not to mention the rise in blood pressure over the realization of the true nature of my injury and the prospect of what I would have to go through (seeing a doctor and receiving treatment) and what it would cost even with insurance grudgingly paying their portion for the treatment. Be very glad you never required surgery for a broken bone. You may be certain that I'm taking care of myself and will continue to do so. I would like to think our wisdom (such as we may have) does not become brittle with age; it's bad enough that our bones do.//Agreed that SF used to be optimistic. But I think maybe some of it still is. With a little effort on the parts of SF writers to overcome what seems to be a propensity for pessimism, it could be again.. I hope you have learned for certain by now whether or not **The Sky People** is optimistic.//I've not read anything by Alaister Reynolds that I recall but I do agree about Gregory Benford and Connie Willis. I sometimes wonder if some SF writers feel that pessimism in a story is more important than entertainment or is the same thing as realism. I must admit I'm not as up-to-date on the current SF writers either. I pretty much go with the writers who have been around a while and are still*

*producing SF that I can be sure of enjoying. Such writers as Silverberg, Pohl, Benford, Niven, Genw Wolfe (who, I fear, is an acquired taste), and others. Like you, I read what looks interesting to me and holds my interest and attention. I can read very fast when I want to but when I do I've finished the book much too soon to suit me and wish it had been longer. Now I take my time with books and try to make them last as long as I can. Life's too short to read books suggested by other, no matter how good they may be. I also have a stack of books-to-be-read and am adding to the stack whenever I see something promising that I might like.//I believe the quote you cite was indeed attributed to Thomas Edison. And, yes, even in fiction writing that certainly applies. The 99% involves the work of getting the story into proper shape.//Going to older cemeteries is much more interesting than seeing the newer ones, particularly those designed for "low maintenance" and requiring a uniform type of marker flush with the ground so that employees operating mowers don't have to trim carefully around markers. For the most part, older cemeteries with upright markers have much more interesting and ornate grave markers and in some ways shows a higher regard for the deceased than seems the case these days. The upright monuments also make it much easier to locate ancestors in cemeteries from a distance.]]*



From: **John Thiel**  
30 N. 19th Street, Lafayette, Indiana 47904  
July 23, 2009

Tom:

Kind of an awful experience you describe in the editorial. My brother's wife had a similar accident involving her ankle twice and another brother's lady friend just had one like it befall her a couple of weeks ago, so I'm familiar with accidents of that nature. Like they say, one has to look out for accidents occurring around the house just the same as for ones on the highways. After such a harrowing account, made none the less so by finding the next page upside down, I was glad to see that you were recovering.

Continuing into the Mirror Universe, Bob Sabella might be interested to hear that there is an editor getting together an anthology of cheerful science fiction, top secret as yet due to no one wanting to utter spoilers, but he can find mention of the book under the topic "Cheer Up, Universe", on the Asimov's Forum at [www.asimovs.com](http://www.asimovs.com).

It was interesting to see someone else reacting to my cartoon, Mr. Frank Denton. I think it would be proper of me to explain the cartoon, since Alexis did not react to it. I did not know him very well when he lived in Lafayette, and was unaware that he was or would become a science fiction fan and writer. Almost the only time I ever saw him was when he was out in a shed and everybody said that what he was doing in there was doing some woodburnings. It was a very trivial occurrence and I suppose he didn't remember it, but that's what I was getting at, fan meets fan without a secret handclasp being exchanged.

To Lloyd Penney, I don't drive a smart car, I drive a van. Nobody could sell me a smart car.

John Thiel

Tom, I think my recent letter of comment said the topic "Cheer Up Universe!" Was in the Asimov's forum. Actually it's in the Analog one and the URL should be <http://www.analogsf.com> .If you print the LoC, I hope you'll change that error, maybe even adding the info "under general topics". Thanks--John Thiel

*[[My experience definitely wasn't pleasant at all and pretty much ruined most of the Summer for me since I was housebound much of the time. I very much hope I never have such an experience again.//An upside down page! Damn. I thought I had got them all in the correct order and orientation. Your copy of this issue should have all the pages the way they should be. (I hope.)//An proposed anthology of cheerful SF. It sounds promising --I think. If such a project comes to completion there will undoubtedly be some readers and critics who'll decide there's too much cheerfulness.//As you will doubtless have discovered, Alexis **did** respond to your cartoon--in this issue. I suppose one fan's subtlety is another fan's obscurity. Maybe the incident was so trivial Alexis didn't bother to remember it. Who knows.//The Smart Cars are interesting vehicles but, to me, they seem too small (althou, alledgedly, a tall man can fit into one) and too close to the pavement so that I'd feel as if I were scootig along on my butt. They're almost like a glorified, fully enclosed golf cart. 18 holes, any-one?]]*

Ray Nelson

Winner 2003 William Rotsler National Award for Graphic Art  
Winner 2007 Emperor Norton Award for fantasy

07/25/09  
333 Ramona Ave., El Cerrito CA 94530  
RayFaradayNelson@AOL.com Lex #4652  
RayNelson.com

Dear Tom,

As usual your zine was terrific. There was only one place where I hit a serious speed bump, and that was Gene Stewart's "Rat Stew". As a long time friend of Anne Rice and old time chairman of the writers' group where she got started writing about vampires, I have to say that unless Anne has changed completely he has got it all wrong about her writing methods.

I know for a fact that the short story which has become her novel "Interview with the Vampire" was written in one week. On one thursday I asked her what kind of books she herself liked to read, as opposed to the kind of things her

somewhat famous husband Stan wrote. On the verge of tears she replied, "Cheap vampire stories."

Up to that time she had been writing realistic mainstream novels which nobody, not even her husband, liked.

She went home and started writing in a frenzy.

The following thursday she turned up with the short story version of "Interview with the Vampire". The group was totally mesmerized, and since the group contained Philip K. Dick, among other heavyweights, that's saying something.

We all agreed that she should expand her story into a novel, and that's what she did.

Every week, as regularly as a newspaper columnist, she turned up with another thrilling episode in the afterlife of Louis the Vampire, and when reading these episodes aloud for the group, I couldn't help but notice that, except for a few crossed out words, I was looking at a first draft, and not a greatly edited first draft either.

What I am saying is that Stewart's picture of Anne doing a lot of hard work and research is as much fantasy as anything she ever wrote. The picture of Anne being transported by inspiration, writing fast and not revising is exactly right. So far as I know, Anne has never done anything like research as we know it. She reads like a true bookworm all sorts of things, but never with the aim of checking facts for her own writing.

Another thing Stewart has wrong is that he seems to think that all her gothic costumes and hearse taxis are something Anne does unwillingly, just for the sake of publicity.

I have to tell you Anne loves this gothic stuff. She wallows in it. When she got rich from her vampire books, what did she do with the money? She bought a haunted house in New Orleans. You don't buy a haunted house just to publicize your books. You have got to really want a haunted house.

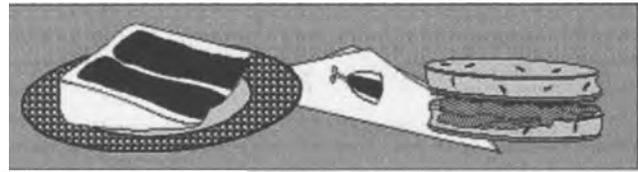
When I first met her she had never had so much as a letter to the editor published, but she was already deeply and profoundly weird. She had no weird books to publicize, but there she stood dressed in black from head to toe, with long black gloves even, and long black hair that formed a kind of tent from which her ghostly little face peered out like the face of an albino squirrel

rel in a bush.

Maybe Anne does wear jeans to do housework, but I'll bet they are black jeans. It really pisses me off when one of my weird friends spends her whole life becoming weird only to have some boringly normal critic come along and say, "Hey, you're just like me!"



*[[Gene has some strong opinions and doesn't hesitate to express them. I think, sometimes, he does it just to see what sort of reaction he'll get. I admit I know very little about Anne Rice beyond the fact that she wrot some vampire stories and, more recently, a fictional biograph, I guess, of Jesus Christ. But I found your account and memories of Anne Rice very interesting and revealing and of course shows us a real person behind the Name. Thank you much for your personal recollections of her. You'll never hear or read me saying of someone else, "Hey; you're just like me!" No one's just like me, and I'm sure many people are very thankful for that. When my kids were growing up they often told me I was weird.. No-- I was just me, slightly odd and, I think, looking at things a little bit different than most other people. But I was pretty much happy with being who I was. We're all different and, I suppose, even weird in our own ways--at least to mundanes. But then there are plenty of so--called mundanes who make most of us look normal. We are what we are, unique in onr own ways and diverse. The oddness, diversity and eager acceptance of things foreign and strange in SF is was drew us to fandom in the first place.]]*



..a tasty tidbit from..

From: **Sheryl Birkhead**

22509 Jonnie Court  
Gaithersburg, MD 20882 USA  
August 16, 2009

Dear tRF,

What a *lovely* color cover by the *ever-present* fanartist, Brad Foster. It reminds me of the kaleidoscopes we had as kids. I remember tearing one open because I simply could not believe the stones/plastic bits inside would just be sitting there randomly about with such beautiful images!

Yow . . . 22 years! I am curious (but not enough to actually do the work and poke through the files) about which was my first issue.

I have to admit that I am just now getting around to read #70. Forgive me? I have been carrying it around, just not getting a chance to actually read it--bhad fan!

One upon a time, my brother, sister, and I were playing hide and seek in the barn. I slipped off the top bale from a stack and whomped down on the barn floor. I hobbled back to the house, crying. My father merely told me to stop that--it didn't hurt--was only sprained. I beg to differ with you--it **hurt**. From then on I was very skeptical of all those TV characters that continued to run around on broken legs. It hurt, and it hurt for a looonng time. You have my sympathy.

FYI--about the generic analgesic--you can always mention your financial concerns to the physician. Most are willing to try to help you out. Aside from the side effects, there can always be the possibility of the ubiquitous free samples--if you are lucky.

(The plate is most likely stainless steel--not supposed to be any body reaction to it.) Hmm--what was the cast? The last time I had to apply one it was plaster-laden gauze that you moist

ened, wrapped and smoothed, but I have seen people sporting what I call pneumatic splints/casts. Just curious about what changes have taken place!

Updates: whirlpool working fine, digital converter boxes are not. Somehow the one box that is supposed to tape three shows M-F from two different channels arbitrarily decide to change the channels. I kid you not. I am running about 4 weeks behind in tape watching, so it has taken me that long to find this out--and for the next four weeks it will be extended news coverage, which I never watch. Taxes . . . Well, after glitches limped along. We'll see what happens next year (oh goody--I just can't wait!).

I am not exactly ecstatic over any of the fan Hugos this year. I do congratulate all the winners and pass such along to *Ben Indick* and *Andy Porter* for the Hall of Fame and Big Heart (sp?) awards respectively.

Nice to see a loc from *Frank Denton*. Hi, *Frank!*

To answer your comment--yup, my 2000 G-4 Mac has a 56K modem (for completeness with the dial-up it is less than 24K, so there is a large bottleneck about which I can do absolutely nothing!).

((When I get back from doing MCSPCA work I will see if I can scan this in and e-mail it--ah, technology--rather than printing it out and mailing it. So it will get to you sooner--again--so sorry to be so late!)

Thanks for this--hope the leg is still doing well. Wonder what happens to the plate in the winter? I'm curious--I understand the tibia was plated. Was the fibula plated as well? It is a much thinner/smaller bone and I just wondered.

bye-- Sheryl

*[[Since I couldn't remember when the first issue of this fanzine came out I won't dare attempt to recall the first issue I sent to you. If I do borrow the old back issue from my daughter, after looking them over I might be able to figure it out--or not.//I don't see how anyone could even stand up with a broken leg much less running or even walking. The pain from mine was deterrent enough for me to avoid putting any weight on it. Shame on your father. Even a badly sprained ankle can hurt a lot immediately after the sprain. That I*

*also know from experience, having had to go around with crutches and keeping weight off a leg with an Ace™ bandage tightly wrapped around it.//I wasn't concerned so much about the cost of a prescription painkiller. Even without the small co-pay our insurance has, the cost of the medication prescribed (probably a generic to begin with) was only about \$14.00 for a 30 tablet supply. We got the prescription filled once. The directions were to take one or two tablets every four to six hours, as needed.. Even though my leg hurt quite a lot at first I occasionally took only a single tablet to get me through the day. Most of the time I'd take a couple of generic acetaminophen pills. Usually I didn't repeat a dosage during a twenty-four hour period. I managed to make the prescription last quite a while because more often I'd take a tablet around bedtime, more to moderate the pain and help me sleep. I think I was more concerned about the potential for dependence on a prescription drug. That and the fact that I didn't want to take something that would block all the pain because sometimes feeling absolutely no pain while recovering from an injury isn't necessarily a good thing. The pain can be a sort of alarm system.//I still haven't asked the orthopaedist but I think the plate--and two pins--are titanium. When I was in the emergency room at the Owenton Medical Center what I presume was a nylon or some sort of plastic splint was applied and held in place with multiple Ace™ bandages. After the surgery, the splint was temporarily applied. Several days later, I went to the orthopaedist for his post-op examination to check the progress of the surgery. Satisfied with the outcome, he put my leg into what didn't look at all like the usual plaster cast. Before the doctor applied the cast, the nurse asked me what color I wanted. Thinking it was a joke I requested sky blue. She left the room, and came back shortly with several rolls of what looked like dark blue mesh of some kind (not sky blue) but wasn't actually gauze. The orthopaedist put a cotton sleeve on my leg followed by the cast material which he wrapped tightly and smoothed out. As he was shaping and smoothing the material I felt a very slight warming sensation. All I could think was the cast was "curing" or hardening. The end result was considerably lighter than the splint and much lighter than what I remembered*

*the cast on my broken arm to be so I'm guessing was a fiberglass cast. Because the break was at a critical, load-bearing location any sort of walking cast was out of the question for me. But I did see some boot-like casts which seemed to be made of nylon or some sort of plastic and apparently were held on with (probably) velcro™ straps to facilitate removal for washing the foot and ankle.]]*



From: **Al Byrd**

Dear Tom,

I've gotten out of the habit of loccing, but I thought that I'd respond to a couple of comments in TRF #70's loccol. The interest that a couple of readers expressed in Morgan County's history, and especially in the Civil War, made me think that they might like a series of articles on West Liberty in the Civil War. I have lots of material on that period of history, and it was far from boring. In any case, unless there's an objection, Kentuckiana will next deal with the three skirmishes fought at West Liberty, the alleged burning of the town by guerrillas, and assorted pillagings, murders, and hangings.

Joseph T. Major pointed out that I'm eligible to join the Sons of Confederate Veterans and mentioned the growth of Neo-Confederate activity in the organization. I do have a close friend who's a member of it, and he has mentioned to me some racial identity politics going on behind the scenes in it, but the real conflicts within the organization seem to him to be jealousy over who gets which promotions, and backbiting over who's to blame for this and that -- the same kind of conflicts that some allege caused the South to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory in the actual war! What goes on in business meetings of the SCV sounds to me depressingly like what goes on in business meetings of local churches

or synagogues. To squabble is human...

I did once spend a day in uniform with reenactors, but they were reenacting the Revolutionary War, not the Civil War. When I visited my SCV friend while he was stationed at Fort Stewart, Georgia, he took me far out into a swamp between there and Savannah to an encampment. There, I got to wear a full Continental Army private's uniform (the woolen jacket, worn even in the summer, was astonishingly heavy, but surprisingly cool on a typical Georgian summer day) and help fire an authentic Coehorn mortar. As the rounds fired were Spanish moss, we artillerymen did no harm to anything but the serenity of some blue herons, which flew off in a huff of wings. Authenticity gave way to comfort, though, when the unit cooked out hamburgers and hot dogs on a gas grill. If the Continentals had had gas grills at Valley Forge, they could've defeated the British far faster than in actual history.

In any case, thank you for putting out TRF and giving writers like me a place to publish our thoughts and lives.

Best wishes, Alfred D. Byrd  
[home.att.net/~adbyrd](http://home.att.net/~adbyrd)

*[[As the readers will find out in the next issue, I took up your "suggestion" and we'll start to learn about "West Liberty in the Civil War". I know I'm looking forward to the article.//I'm also eligible to become a member of the Sons of Confederate Veterans but whether or not I would join the organization is another matter. I just don't seem to be the sort who would fit in with any formal organization. After reading your comments on the jealousy and so on, I suspect I may never join. Of course in the unlikely event I changed my mind and did join I'd probably make myself far enough removed from that sort of thing that I could ignore it. Yes, "to squabble is human . . ." "It seems as if, when all else fails, we humans either want to fight each other or kill each other (figuratively or literally).//A full Continental Army private's uniform! That unit must have been uncommonly fortunate to have such adequate supplies and materiél. If accounts are to be believed (I would hope they weren't propaganda to get the Continental Congress to loosen their purse strings), Washington's troops and*

*undoubtedly others didn't fare so well. No uniforms and, often, not shoes. Trails of blood in the snow--or so it was claimed. I wonder what a soldier in the Continental Army would think of such things as hamburgers and hotdogs cooked over gas grills.//You're welcome and thank you and the other contributors for providing me with material to publish. Without you and the others, TRF wouldn't last long.]]*



From: **Lloyd Penney**  
1706-24 Eva Rd.  
Etobicoke, ON  
CANADA M9C 2B2  
August 16, 2009

Dear Tom:

Many thanks for issue 70 of *The Reluctant Famulus*. The Worldcon in Montréal has come and gone, and it was great fun, but it is time to catch up with the e-mountain of e-zines I have on hand.

In Montréal, I ran the fanzine lounge, and I brought with me a large box of zines to stock the tables. Some of those zines were early issues of *Famulus*, and I believe they were picked up. You might get some letters on those early issues soon. Twenty years, hm? Happy anniversary! It's not too late to prepare a 20th annish.

If you're going to damage yourself, it's no use taking half-measures. Do it right, or not at all. I still have a sprained wrist healing up from July. And, I won't tell you further about my eye surgery, because it just makes people feel squeamish. I didn't get enough anesthetic, while you may have gotten too much.

I always thought that science fiction was meant to optimistic, to say that we got past all

our present-day problems, and we surpassed our level of science to go to the stars. But more and more, science fiction is not so much concerned with superscience and space travel but with the inner space of the human mind, and much of that can be fairly negative. I think there is some backlash against this negativity, and sub-genres like steampunk are trying to bring some positivity back.

When I saw Taral's article, I had to wonder, how many people would remember or even recognize the McKenzie Brothers? Hm? (Not eh? These two hosers made far too many Americans think Canadians really talk like that.)

The letter column...computers are marvelous tools, and the Internet makes that tool a quantum leap more useful, but tools are only as good as the way they are used. The computer and Net can do anything, including waste time in a spectacular fashion. There's also many ways to abuse the tool. Most of us know that the Net is the world's biggest porn shop.

I remember the *Lovejoy* series, produced by the BBC and shown on PBS and other channels. I found the episodes as enjoyable as any of the *Sherlock Holmes* and *Hercule Poirot* mysteries. *Lovejoy* seemed to be a cross between *Holmes* and *Antiques Roadshow*, and Ian McShane's portrayal of the *Lovejoy* character was a lot of fun.

I could moan a little it about newspapers going under, but in this computer age, I'm not too surprised. I also find that many reporters lose their objectivity in their work, usually because their editors are enforcing the political opinions of the paper's owners. Also, some reporters lead with their egos, starting with the obits or covering minor league sports, while they really want to cover city hall or regional or national news. They all want to hit the top of our professions in record time, and not only do they expect to do it, but they are under big pressure from their editors to be Cronkites and Murrows within a few years.

The Hugo Awards were given out at the Worldcon in Montréal, and Yvonne and I were privileged to be able to give one out. There was a lot of complaining about who won and who should have won, but those who complain look frankly foolish when they freely admit that they don't go to Worldcon, and they don't buy even supporting memberships, and they cannot vote on the Hugos, but yet complain at top volume. If

they truly wanted to change the Hugos instead of simply demand their disappearance, they'd buy memberships and vote, and encourage others to do so. Money where their mouths are, and all that.

I might not have done a great job here, but here is my letter, as good as I can write it right now. It's just plain hot here, and the humidity

Yours,  
Lloyd Penney.

*[[I'm glad to hear you enjoyed the Worldcon. It's a good way to spend a few days with a bunch of good friends. I had thought of sending some copies of back issues but by the time I made up my mind it was too late to get them there in time. Yeah-, ". . . they were picked up"--and dropped into the nearest trash receptacle. (That's a joke, folks.) Pessimist that I often am, I doubt I'll receive any sorts of responses from anyone who might have picked up a copy or two even if the person or persons actually read the zine. I might work up som esort of 20th Anniversary project; I'm just not sure what it'll be.//Well I certainly didn't take a halfway measure when I broke my leg. I did a good job of it even if it was unintentional. That's okay if you choose not to elaborate on your eye surgery. There are some things I'd rather not hear about. (See, John! I just ended a sentence with a preposition. I think the Grammer God will firgive us.) It wouldn't surprise me if I had gotten a little too much anesthesia and that was why the operating room staff were concerned about the difficulty of getting me awake.//I too always thought science fiction was optimistic because it showed us possible futures involving travel to other planets, to the stars, and meeting intelligent non-human beings among other things. That science portrayed any future at all was optimistic that there would be a future of some kind.. Maybe there is too much emphasis on the negative part of the inner space of the human mind. I'm not saying wrtiers should ignore or minimize the negative but to treat it as only one facet of being human. By emphasizing the negative so much it seems as if writers are actually turning the characters in to the sorts of one-dimensional people readers and critics complained about in the early days of science fiction, the cardboard charac*

*ters.//I remember the McKenzie brothers even though I never saw much of them.//I can attest to what a time waster the Internet can be. I've wasted too much of my time that way. I know there is a tremendous amount of porn on the Internet (some of which can be found whether a person is actually looking for it,) but I lost interest in that a long time ago. For me, using the Internet is like trying to look up something in the dictionary. I start out looking for something particular and end up distracted by something else, and something else, and . . . //I'm sure if I wanted to take the time and part with the money I could find the Lovejoy series on DVD. But acquiring an interesting book I think I'll like is more enticing.//Re: newspapers. If you go way back far enough you'll find that newspapers back then had political biases and it has been so ever since. Up to and during the American Revolution newspapers were used a lot to promote political agendas and support for the revolution or for continued British rule. Occasionally the bias has been subtle or nearly so but it's there, and especially during election times. These days, it seems to me, besides the political emphasis newspapers are more focused on sports, celebrities, and scandals (well, it has been that way with scandals for a very long time, probably since the early newspaper publishers discovered how well their papers sold with a nice, juicy scandal or three), an doften superficial in nature. Even TV news, the Internet counterparts, and the online versions of newspapers follow suit. I coul db e wrong but I very much doubt there will be new versions of Cronkites and Murrows.//The less said about the Hugo results, the better. ]]*

