

Orion

THE CANADIAN MAGAZINE OF TIME AND SPACE • ISSUE #5 • FEBRUARY 2006



In this issue:

PLAYING SOLITAIRE

concludes!

POST-MODERN SUBLIME

William Gibson
interviewed!

CAPTAIN CANUCK: MILLENNIUM BLUES

continues!

FANDOM GOES HOLLYWOOD!

fanfilms explored!



MURPHY'S LAWYER

MARK SHAINBLUM'S LITTLE PIECE OF MIND

MY NEUROTRANSMITTERS ARE WHACK!

Hello! Sorry I missed you all last issue. I blew the deadline, but good. After about the eighth reminder e-mail, Mike wisely decided to push on without me.

This type of thing is a constant frustration in my life. These days, I'm finding it very difficult to balance a full-time job, marriage, friendships, ordinary life and writing my own stuff. To be fair to myself, I've never quite held a job like my current position as Manager of Communications at McGill University's Admissions, Recruitment and Registrar's (ARR) office. I really love the job, but I'm still not used to the 9-to-5 rhythm. By the end of the day I so hate the sight of monitors that I can't bring myself to boot up my computer when I get home.



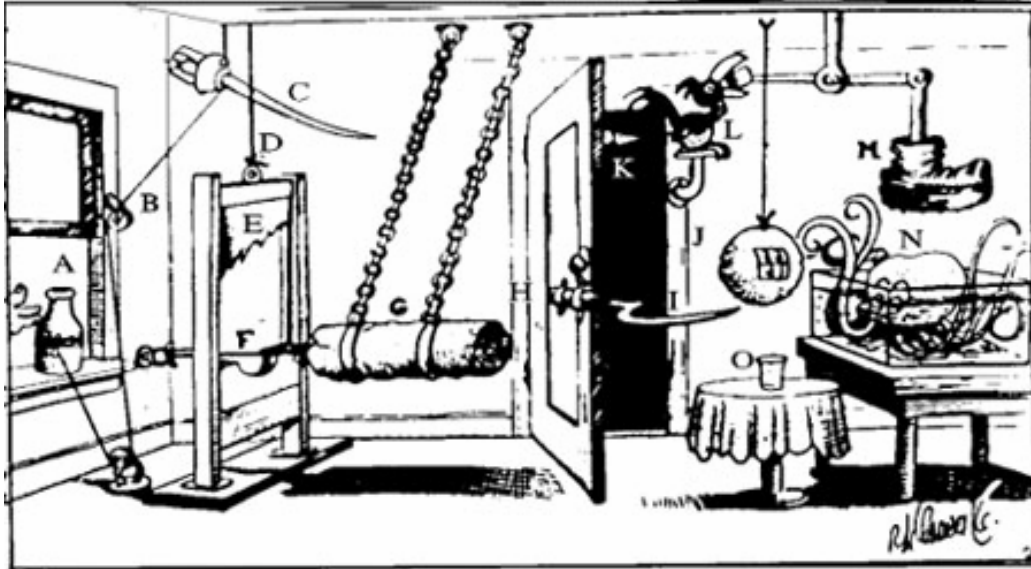
The wacky neurotransmitters inside my brain don't help, either. As Gabriel has mentioned previously, I discovered rather late in life that I have Attention Deficit Disorder. Though I've been treating it with behaviour modification and medication for the last (gasp!) eight years, there's no magic bullet. It waxes and wanes like the tides and interacts with some of my other health issues in unpredictable ways. Sometimes the wind just goes completely out of my sails, and completing even the most simple task becomes almost impossible.

That said, when I was first diagnosed, I swore that I would not use ADD as an all-purpose excuse machine, so please don't take these comments in that way. The world has enough self-appointed victims, and I refuse to see myself as a member of yet another oppressed minority group.

I already live in Quebec, the only place in the world where *everyone* is a minority and *everyone* is oppressed, it's gotten old.

Above: A panel from *Hyperfocus*, the "non-fiction graphic novel" about ADD that Gabriel and I are working on.

Illustration by Gabriel Morrissette.



Above: All-purpose excuse-machine (artist's impression)

ON SPEC'D!



Hey! Guess what? I just sold a short science fiction story entitled "The Art of Solitude®" to *On Spec*, the long-running "Canadian Magazine of the Fantastic" based in Edmonton. (And yes, the ® is an intrinsic part of the title, not copyright paranoia.) I've been wanting to see my by-line in *On Spec* for years. As my cartoon avatar says above, when I finally get around to submitting things, they often get published. It's the getting around to it part that's the problem. This story, to be honest, was rejected by both *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* and *Asimov's* before I sent it to *On Spec*, but they were such *nice* rejections, both going out of their way to say that they liked my writing in general, but not this particular story. It really encouraged me to keep it in circulation. That and Robert A. Heinlein's *Five Rules For Success in Writing*:

- 1) *You Must Write*
- 2) *You Must Finish What You Write*
- 3) *You Must Refrain From Re-Writing Except to Editorial Order*
- 4) *You Must Place It On The Market*
- 5) *You Must Keep It On The Market Until Sold*

Say what you will about good old Robert Anson Heinlein (and there's no question that his novels after *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* just got weirder and weirder to the point of no return), he knew what he was talking about when it came to the craft of writing and publishing short fiction. Of course, point #3 is very debatable. I re-wrote "The Art of Solitude®" at least twice before submitting and selling it, and I doubt most first drafts by most authors are publishable "as is."

However, I like the way Toronto SF writer Robert J. Sawyer has re-framed it: He chooses to interpret it as a warning against perfectionism and that tendency we all have to keep worrying away at our stories instead of simply *finishing* and *submitting* them. On that score, point #2 is utterly dependent on point #3.

HOLLYWOOD CALLING!

Okay, not Hollywood, but a film producer nonetheless. A local Montreal film producer named Christian Viel approached me mid-2005 with the apparently ludicrous idea of making a *Northguard* movie. Now, I've had so many harebrained schemes thrown my way over the years that I didn't take it seriously at all. Until I met Christian, that is, and discovered that he's actually got at least five feature films under his belt, all science fiction, horror or action-adventure. We hit it off very well, and came to a tentative agreement, and I started working on a script. It's been very slow going, what with everything else happening in my life, but progress is being made, and Christian has already had some test special effects shots done. You can see them on his blog at <http://www.movieseals.biz/BLOG/B1841170592/C70236309/index.html> or have a look at the screenshots below:



Dum-dum-dum-dee-dum, we're just flying merrily along. What could possibly go wrong?



Shit! I hadda ask!



This is gonna play hell on my insurance premiums.

More news about this as it develops.

COVER STORY

Many thanks to Jay Willson for his interpretation of Solitaire gracing this issue's cover. I originally asked him to do a spot illo I could run with the story, but I liked it so much I thought it should get more prominent placement. That's the third issue in a row with a female character on the cover! I wonder what that means?

And while I'm at it, thanks to Rob McGettigan for the totally unexpected guest shot of Solitaire on the cover of *Blam! Zap! Pow!* I'm glad the story inspired you enough to take pencil in hand, Rob, and you've really made me feel at home here in *Comicopialand*.

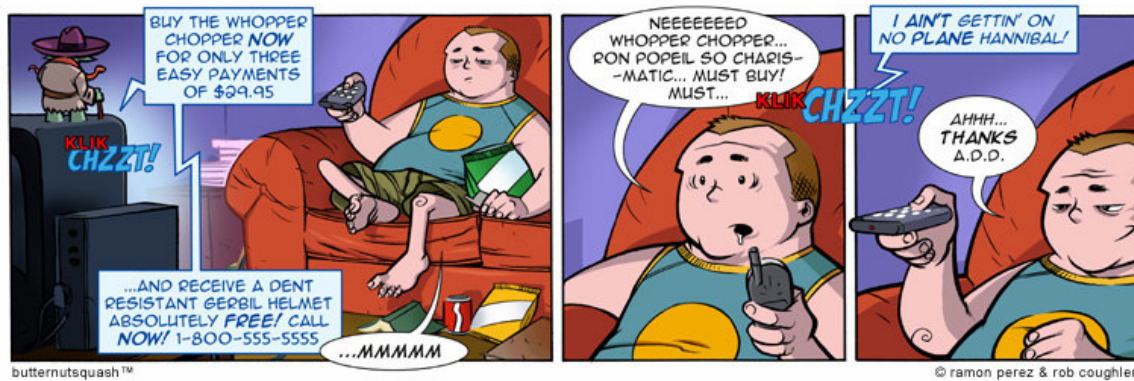
One final word on the subject of Solitaire. The illo on last issue's *Orion* cover was by illustrator Storn Cook, who painted it for publisher Cyber Age Adventures. It adorned the cover of the prose superhero anthology *Playing Solitaire and Other Stories* published by Cyber Age, and Storn

graciously gave me permission to reprint it in *Orion*. Unfortunately, last issue's cover didn't reproduce well at all, so I've decided to re-present the piece in on page 20. If you'd like to see more of Storn's work, check out his cool website at www.stornc.rpggallery.com. Cyber Age Adventures is still around too, though in slightly different form. Check them out at www.ihero.net.

That's about it for now! See you all next issue!

Best,

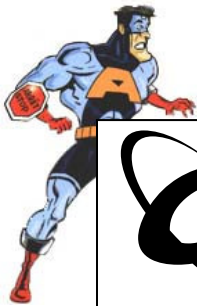
Mark Shainblum



butternutsquash™

© ramon perez & rob coughler

Above: Another view of ADD, courtesy of *Butternut Squash* by Ramón Pérez and Rob Coughler. Visit their brilliant webcomic at www.butternutsquash.net



Orion

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CAPTAIN CANUCK

"Millennium Blues"

Part Two

By Mark Shainblum and Richard Comely
with Sandy Carruthers and Peter Murphy

Welcome to the second instalment of *Captain Canuck: Millennium Blues!* First of all, apologies to Peter Murphy, who pencilled some of the earliest strips in this sequence. I accidentally left his name off last issue.

It's actually been a bit of adventure collecting up all these strips and scanning them. I've just discovered that I'm missing several episodes, but thankfully, that doesn't affect us this time out. Hopefully I'll be able to track them down by next issue. If not, well, I guess I'll do them in mime, or something.

This time out, I should forewarn you that there are at least a couple of instances where I dropped the deadline ball and Richard Comely wrote the episode himself. I'm sort of reluctant to point them out for politeness' sake, but I'm hoping you'll figure it out for yourselves easily enough.

As a small added bonus, below you'll find the original title strip of the whole story arc, which I didn't have in hand last time out. Needless to say, this isn't in sequence with the strips that follow.



OUR SECURITY WAS BREACHED! I WAS ATTACKED IN MY OWN OFFICE BY A MAN WITH SOME KIND OF PARANORMAL ABILITIES!

© 1998 RICHARD COMELY. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

I WAS HELD FLOATING FOUR FEET ABOVE MY DESK. HE SAID HE AND HIS PEOPLE "OWN THE MILLENNIUM" AND THAT WE ARE IN THEIR WAY!

358 SHAINBLLUM/COMELY

THAT SOUNDS LIKE A DECLARATION OF WAR TO ME!

© 1998 RICHARD COMELY. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

LEVITATING STRANGERS IN MIRRORSHADES? THE NATHAN I KNOW WOULD NEVER COOK UP A STORY LIKE THIS!

SHAINBLLUM/COMELY

COULD BE A THREAT, OAK. WE COULD BE FACING AN ARMY OF ALIENS BUT OCCAM'S RAZOR SAYS THAT ISN'T VERY LIKELY!

359 SHAINBLLUM/COMELY

WHAT ARE YOU BABBLING ABOUT BRAKO?

OCCAM'S RAZOR: THE SIMPLEST SOLUTION TO A PROBLEM USUALLY IS THE CORRECT ONE.

© 1998 RICHARD COMELY. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

WHAT IS MORE LIKELY HERE IS THAT THE PROBLEM IS YOU!

EVER HEAR OF ILLUMINATI SYNDROME?

© 1998 RICHARD COMELY. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

DIRECTING WORLD AFFAIRS IS A DIFFICULT GAME, OAK. IT CAN BE TOO MUCH FOR SOME OF US.

THINK ABOUT IT, WE HOLD ALL THE POWER, WE ANSWER TO NO ONE. IT'S A HUGE RESPONSIBILITY...

SOME CAN'T TAKE IT, SOME NEED SOMETHING MORE POWERFUL ABOVE THEM OR OPPOSING THEM!

360 SHAINBLLUM/COMELY

UH-OH, I DON'T LIKE THE TURN THIS IS TAKING!

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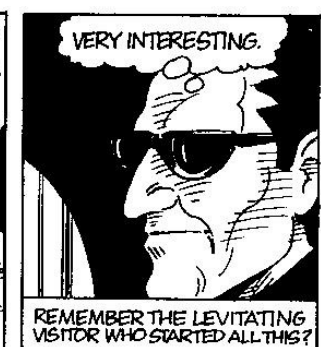
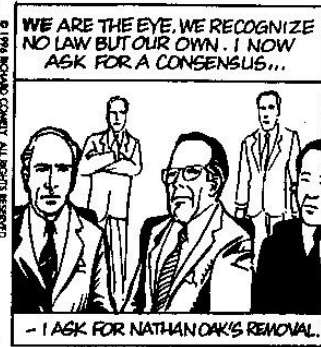
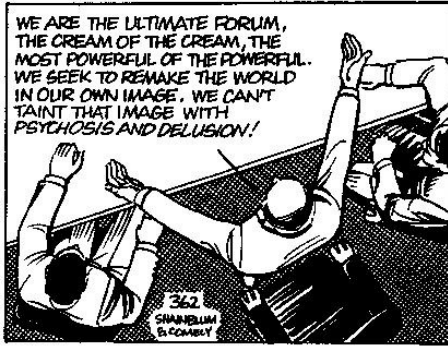
SO YOU'RE SAYING I'VE GONE NUTS, BRAKO. IS THAT IT?

DON'T BE SO HARD ON YOURSELF, OAK. YOU WOULDN'T BE THE FIRST AMONG US TO SUCCLUMB TO ILLUMINATI SYNDROME. IT USUALLY STRIKES THE STRONGEST. YOU MUST ADMIT THAT IT'S MORE LIKELY THAN ALIEN VISITORS.

1 361 SHAINBLLUM/COMELY

DON'T YOU DARE PUT WORDS INTO MY MOUTH! I NEVER SAID ANYTHING ABOUT ALIENS!

PARDON ME, MYSTERIOUS LEVITATING VISITORS.



Captain Canuck: "Millennium Blues" continues in the next issue of Orion!

A slightly different version of this article was published in

The Gazette

Montreal, Saturday, March 19, 2005

INTERNET: THE FAN'S FRONTIER

Sci-fi and fantasy buffs are creating independent films inspired by classic TV series and movies, usually distributed online. The most popular have audiences in the millions

By Mark Shainblum

"Space, the final frontier. These are the voyages of the Starship Enterprise..."

The classic theme song swells and the iconic first (and to some, only) Starship Enterprise swooshes by. It looks, sounds and feels like the original Star Trek circa 1968, but it's not. Unfamiliar names flash on the screen with every starship flyby: James Cawley as Captain Kirk. Jeffrey Quinn as Mr. Spock. John Kelley as Dr. McCoy. Charles Root as Mr. Scott.



What's going on? Have we tumbled into an evil mirror dimension? Has someone gone back in time and changed the course of television history as we know it?

Nope. This isn't the original Star Trek; it's not even television. We're watching an episode of Star Trek: New Voyages, a fan-produced independent production (or "fanfilm") striving to re-create the look, feel and style of the legendary original. For a web-based, non-profit film, it boasts surprisingly lush production values. The sets and costumes are all dead on, and Max Rem's sophisticated computer-generated special effects are light-years beyond anything even a major studio could do in the late 60's.

The first episode of New Voyages was downloaded six million times, and the second 15 million times by ardent fans from all over the world. It's turned its producers

and cast members into Internet celebrities in their own right, to the point where leading man James Cawley is now guest-starring in Star Trek fanfilms produced by other people. In fact – if you overlook the apples and oranges nature of the comparison – New Voyages is actually pulling in bigger audiences than the last "official" Paramount spin-off series, Star Trek: Enterprise, which was recently cancelled due to poor ratings. "Our second episode premiered the same night as Enterprise's fourth season," says Jack Marshall, executive producer and director of New Voyages. "Enterprise had two to three million viewers, and by the time the weekend was over, we had five or six million. It was mind-boggling."

The production boasts more than a huge viewership. Veteran character actors like Malachi Throne, Barbara Luna and William Windom – Trek alumni all – clamoured for guest-starring roles in the series' first two episodes, and even more dramatically, series regular Walter Koenig will be reprising his role as Pavel Chekov in the upcoming third episode. "I had pretty well determined that Star Trek and Chekov were part of my past," says Koenig. "But then the folks from New Voyages approached me and we started kicking around ideas for a Chekov story. It occurred to me that what we were coming up with was what every actor dreams of: a second chance to get it right. Talk about belated reward, talk about closure, talk about science fiction!"



New Voyages is part of a larger fanfilm movement that's been around since the late 1960's. Marv Newland's surrealistic 1969 animated short *Bambi Meets Godzilla* was hugely popular on the science fiction convention circuit, but the first true fanfilm of the modern era was Ernie Fosselius' *Hardware Wars*, a tongue-in-cheek retelling of *Star Wars* using kitchen utensils and power tools, released in 1977.

Things have changed immeasurably since then. With the rise of digital filmmaking, fanfilms have become progressively more sophisticated and are reaching much larger audiences through the Internet. The first Internet fanfilm breakthrough was Kevin Rubio's 1997 short *TROOPS*, a hilarious juxtaposition of *Star Wars* and Fox TV's *COPS*. Even back in 1997, that Internet-Paleolithic era of dial-up connections and 33.6 modems, *TROOPS* generated millions of downloads worldwide.

Fanfilmmakers seem particularly enamoured of *Star Wars*, in part because the producers of *Star Wars* are enamoured of them. While some entertainment conglomerates actively discourage the production of fanfilms, and others quietly tolerate them so long as no money changes hands, only George Lucas' Lucasfilm embraces them wholeheartedly. The company even sponsors an annual *Star Wars* fanfilm competition, which attracted almost 100 entrants in 2004.

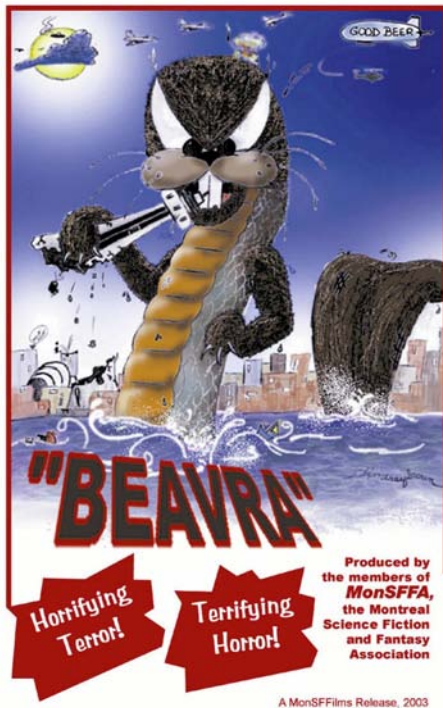
In a recent *Wired* interview, Lucasfilm head of fan relations Stan Sansweet said Lucas is enthusiastic about letting fans "play in the huge *Star Wars* galaxy... We believe our core fans are responsible for the continuing popularity of the series, and we want to encourage them."

Though Paramount's approach is less touchy-feely, Marshall and co-producer Cawley have no complaints. Even when they changed the production's working title from *Five Year Mission* to *Star Trek: New Voyages*, not a peep came out of the Paramount legal department. They were

emboldened to use the world-famous trademark when Eugene Roddenberry, son of Star Trek creator Gene Roddenberry, joined New Voyages as consulting producer.

According to New Voyages story editor and writer Erik Korngold, Roddenberry's involvement began at his 30th birthday party, when someone gave him an early shooting script. "He called to say he loved it and he wanted to be involved," says Korngold. "He wanted to help with what he called, 'the best Star Trek since Star Trek.' His only note on the script? 'My dad's show always had something to say. Make sure that's in there.'"

The original Star Trek certainly still says something to Toronto commercial illustrator and comic book artist Ron Boyd. He heard about New Voyages while it was still in pre-production and felt compelled to get involved. "I sent them a note practically begging to be a part of the project in any way I could," he says. Initially cast as an extra, Boyd unexpectedly found himself in an important supporting role when the actor scheduled to play Sulu suddenly backed out of the production. At the eleventh hour, Boyd was recast as Lt. DeSalle, a genuine (if little remembered) series regular from Star Trek's earliest days, and ended up with all of Sulu's lines in both New Voyages episodes produced to date.



However, not everyone in the fanfilm world plays – or wants to play – in the same league as New Voyages. Keith Braithwaite and his friends in the Montreal Science Fiction and Fantasy Association (MonSFFA) have been actively making their own fanfilms since 1996, including their 2003 Canadian-content Godzilla parody, *Beavra*, and their 2004 superhero pastiche, *MooseMan*. Though it was produced for something less than 300 dollars, *Beavra* was featured at Montreal's Fantasia film festival and was called "polished and hilarious" by author William Tsutsui in his recent book, *Godzilla on My Mind: Fifty Years of the King of Monsters*. All six MonSFFA-produced fanfilms parody elements of sci-fi TV, movies, comic books and popular culture, but Braithwaite isn't interested in making New Voyages-style re-creations.

"Simply redoing something that's already been done is not my cup of tea, fanfilm or professional production," says Braithwaite. "Case in point: the shot-for-shot remake of *Psycho* a few years back. What was the point of that?"

MonSFFA's films harken back to an earlier model of fanfilmmaking. They revel in their ultra-low-budgets, their insane two-day production schedules and the sheer fannishness of it all. Moreover, because they're not playing in someone else's sandbox, Braithwaite and MonSFFA are free to sell their movies on DVD, so you won't find them for download on the Internet.

New Voyages' Jack Marshall wishes he could do the same thing. The fanfilm series has opened a lot of doors in Hollywood for him and special effects wizard Max Rem, which means that the upcoming third episode of the web series will be their last. He would like to keep producing New Voyages, but, he says, he cannot work as a volunteer in copyright limbo indefinitely. "I think the

smart thing for the studios to do would be to license their products to fans. We would be happy to continue if we could get a license to do so and make money." After all, he adds, "With the cancellation of Enterprise, we're the only Trek out there."

Nevertheless, Marshall is preparing to leave New Voyages with no regrets, and a certain pride that he's helped resurrect Kirk, Spock and McCoy for a new generation. "I think these characters still have something to say to the 21st century. The lessons they taught us when I was growing up are ingrained in me," he says. "McCoy taught us how to be compassionate, Spock taught us how to think things through, and Kirk was the ultimate leader."

Ron Boyd concurs. Playing a part in the Star Trek mythos moved him deeply, like a die-hard Shakespearean finally getting a crack at Hamlet. "It was the fulfillment of pretty much every childhood dream I've ever had," he says. "I was sitting there in my perfect Trek uniform, on the perfect bridge of THE Enterprise, acting in front of Eugene Roddenberry. It was a moment I'll never forget."

+++

Fanfilms aren't hard to find on the web, but don't get discouraged if the first thing you sample is a clunker. For every dud featuring 20 minutes of lightsaber-waving, there are plenty of well-produced gems. You just have to know where to find them.

Note: Unless you want to tie up your phone line for hours, you really need high-speed Internet access to download most of these films.

Montreal Science Fiction and Fantasy Association (MonSFFA)

<http://www.monsffa.com>

Beavra, MooseMan and MonSFFA's other fanfilms are available on VHS and/or DVD directly from the association. Check the website for more information, or write to MonSFFA, P.O. Box 1186, Place du Parc, Montreal, Quebec H2X 4A7

GENERAL FANFILM SITES

TheForce.net Fanfilms

<http://www.theforce.net/fanfilms/>

A huge database of fanfilms, mostly Star Wars, but leavened with a decent smattering of other material.

Fanfilm Xchange

<http://www.fanfilmxchange.com/ffx/index.htm>

Another fanfilm database, which features downloads, reviews and interviews with filmmakers.

iFilm Fanfilms

<http://www.ifilm.com/?sctn=fanfilms&pg=fanfilms>

The surprisingly hard to find fanfilm section of the iFilm web portal.

STAR WARS FANFILMS

The Official Star Wars Fan Film Awards

<http://starwars.atomfilms.com>

TROOPS

<http://www.theforce.net/fanfilms/shortfilms/troops>

The 1997 classic which started it all. Imperial Stormtroopers meet Fox TV police reality show. What more needs to be said?

Escape from Tatooine

http://atomfilms.shockwave.com/af/content/escape_tatooine

Winner of the 2004 George Lucas Selects Award. Inspired by Star Wars and a certain ape-filled sci-fi classic.

Pink Five

<http://atomfilms.shockwave.com/af/content/pink5>

A California Valley Girl somehow ends up behind the controls of an X-Wing fighter. The sequel is... wait for it... Pink Five Strikes Back.

STAR TREK FANFILMS

Star Trek: New Voyages

<http://www.newvoyages.com>

A very slick revisiting of the original 1960's Star Trek. The best series of Trek fanfilms, by far.

Starship Exeter

<http://www.starshipexeter.com/>

A wonderfully cheesy fanfilm series, also set in the original Trek era. Gotta love the giant plasticene lizard.

Stone Trek

<http://www.stonetrek.com/>

The demented, cartoon love-child of Star Trek and The Flintstones, featuring William Shatrock as Captain Kirkstone and Leonard Alloy as Mr. Sprok.

Star Wreck

<http://www.starwreck.com>

A black comedy from Finland with jaw-dropping special effects. The Star Trek/Babylon 5 space battle really puts the "fan" in "fanfilm".

SUPERHERO FANFILMS

Losing Lois Lane

http://www.theforce.net/fanfilms/story/Losing_Lois_Lane_88390.asp

Spinal Tap meets Sex and the City meets DC Comics. Lois has kicked Superman out and he's sleeping on Jimmy Olsen's couch.

World's Finest

<http://www.theforce.net/fanfilms/nonsw/worldsfinest/index.asp>

A very convincing pseudo-trailer for a non-existent Superman/Batman movie. Warner Brothers should make this film!

Batman: Dead End

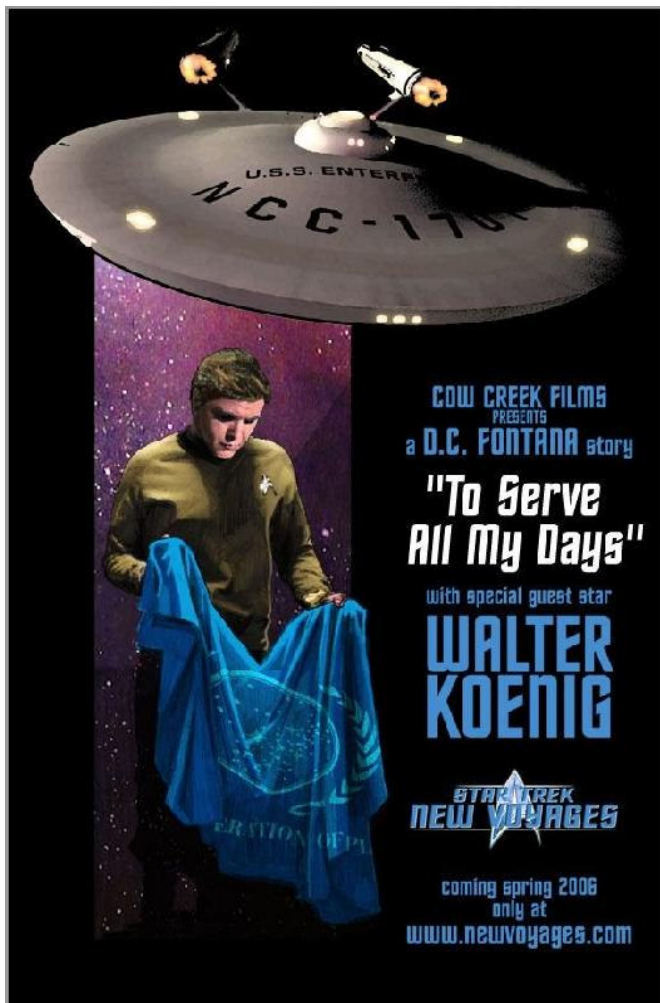
http://www.theforce.net/fanfilms/shortfilms/batman_deadend/

A visually slick short featuring Batman, the Joker and... well... it doesn't make much sense, but it looks cool.

Grayson

<http://www.theforce.net/fanfilms/nonsw/grayson/>

Batman's dead and his former protégé is out for vengeance in another slick pseudo-trailer. Visually overstuffed, but fun.



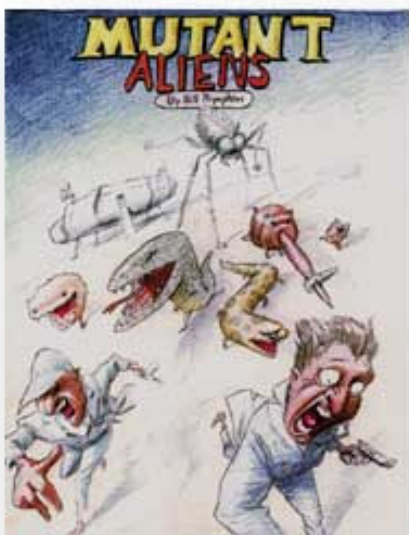
Left: Ron Hobbes' dramatic movie-style poster for "To Serve All My Days", the upcoming third installment of *Star Trek: New Voyages*, guest-starring Walter Koenig.

MEDIAWATCH

REVIEWS AND OVERVIEWS OF THIS AND THAT

IN THE LAND OF MUTANT ANIMATORS

Originally published on ArtStar.com, 1999



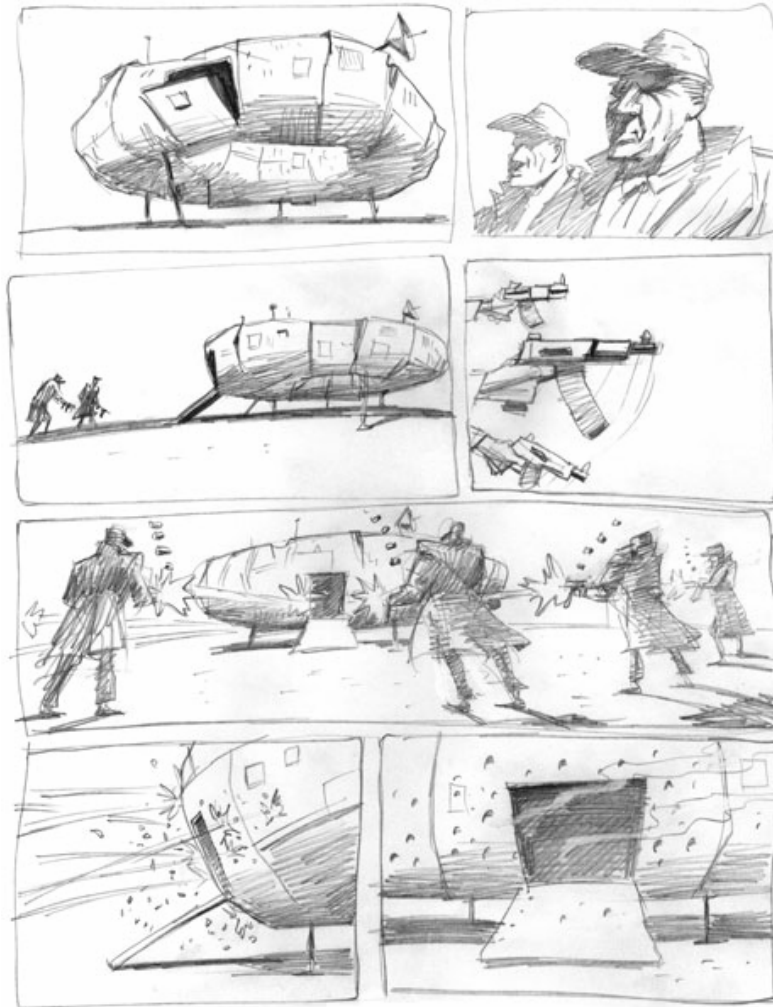
Which of the following statements is true?

- (a) Bill Plympton is a genius.
- (b) Bill Plympton is a pain in the ass.
- (c) All of the above.

I think most people familiar with Plympton's work would answer "c." The iconoclastic creator of such memorable animated short films as *How to Kiss* and *25 Ways to Quit Smoking* (collectively known as the "Plymptoons"), Plympton is renowned for his stubborn independence and his refusal to bow to commercial or artistic pressure. He has been making independent films since the mid-1970's, and recently branched out into longer feature length productions like *I Married a Strange Person*, released in late 1998.

While acknowledging the man's undeniable genius, it's also fair to say that Plympton's oeuvre is a decidedly mixed bag. Most of his films are brilliant bits of visual surrealism; essentially extended sight gags, playing off and challenging the viewer's preconceived notions of reality. When they work, they work very well. When they don't work, they really don't. A parallel can be drawn with the late, great Harvey Kurtzmann, a brilliant cartoonist who – in the 1950's while working for EC Comics – wrote, illustrated and edited some of the best American comic art of all time for the legendary comic publisher's line of war and science fiction comics. In his later years, after surviving the near-McCarthyite frenzy which almost destroyed the comic book field in the late 1950's, Kurtzmann seemed to lose some of his fire and he eventually whiled away his talent working on the technically brilliant but vapid *Little Annie Fanny* comic strip for *Playboy*. Plympton pushes the same buttons. He's a technically and visually brilliant creator who somehow seems to get lazy when it comes to telling a story. His films and comics are full of over-the-top sex and gross-out stuff that, in the year 2000, seem more laughable than shocking. Perhaps *Deseret News* film critic Jeff Vice said it best when – in an otherwise positive write-up -- he described Plympton's 1995 film *How to Make Love to a*

Woman “as an overly long and juvenile series of sex gags that seem like the work of a much younger artist.”



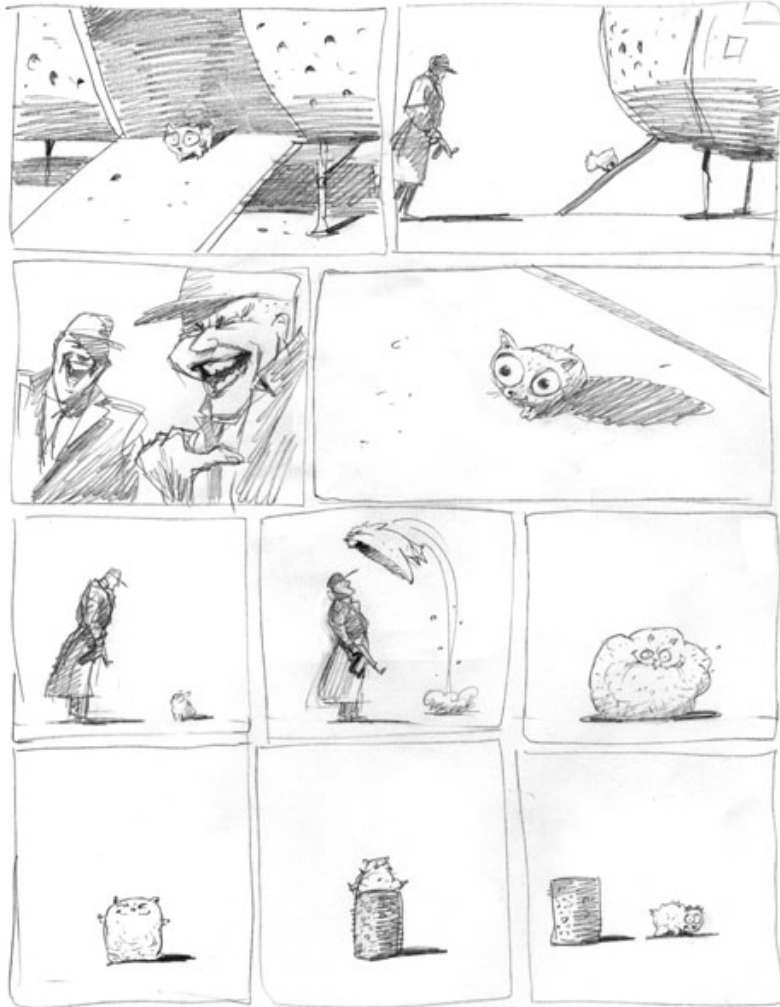
Mutant Aliens is a bit of an odd duck in artistic and media terms. It's essentially the storyboard for his next animated feature – a quirky, fable of an astronaut lost in space and his return to Earth years later. It's published in the form of a paperback graphic novel by Nantier, Beall, Minoustchine – an artsy New York small press best known for its line of translated Eurocomics. Mutant Aliens is very much an anomaly in the comic book/graphic novel world. Published in a non-standard (for the medium) size of 6 x 9, the book is reproduced in halftone directly from Plympton's pencil art, something rarely attempted in American comics. The usual technique (in mass-produced commercial comics and more iconoclastic offerings alike) is pencil and ink, often (though not exclusively) also colored in traditional

media or on computer. From a visual art standpoint, I have no quibbles with Mutant Aliens. Plympton is a wonderfully expressive cartoonist at the top of his form and viewing his sketches divorced from their context is a really joyful experience. There's no question that Plympton can draw circles around the vast majority of today's comic book and comic strip cartoonists. Viewed solely as a sketchbook or a film storyboard in book format, Mutant Aliens is a rousing success. The problem is, NBM Publishing calls it a “graphic novel.”

Sorry. Mutant Aliens isn't really a graphic novel or a comic book. It's an animation storyboard with dialogue balloons. Despite their superficial similarities, comics and animated films are vastly different creatures. Animators are filmmakers, children of D.W. Griffith just like Coppola and Spielberg. Comic books have a different pedigree, a different rhythm and a different visual language. Comic storytelling is utterly different from storytelling in film and in a few key places, Mutant Aliens just doesn't make the transition, muddying and confusing significant pieces of action. The comic artist works in the space between the panels, creating the illusion of movement on a static page. Who's pushing that button? Exactly which character is getting killed by the mutant alien? How did we get from the ground to the top of this missile gantry? Plympton's instincts as an animator are sound, but they lead Plympton the comic artist astray in a few places.

It's only in a few places to be sure, but it happens often enough to shatter the reader's willing suspension of disbelief. Lose that once in a work of fantasy and it's very hard to get it back.

It may sound strange to say this about a comic book, but *Mutant Aliens* is also not nearly literary enough. Comics are a fusion medium, combining the panache of the visual arts with the interior landscape of prose fiction. Probably because it wasn't conceived as a comic, *Mutant Aliens* has



virtually no interior. Like a film, all the action takes place on the surface and emotions are painted in very broad strokes. How do we know the evil businessmen like the idea of launching a giant billboard into Earth orbit? They drool like starving dogs. This might be a funny bit in a film, but on paper it's simply too much, clubbing the reader over the head with a none-too-subtle moral message.

In fact, the entire *Mutant Aliens* plot is so perfunctory that it only barely functions as a story – even when viewed as surrealist fable of sorts. Worse, what little story there is pure cliché – like some weird retelling of Peter Hyams' terrible 1978 paranoia flick *Capricorn One*, with zero-gravity bestiality tossed in for good measure.

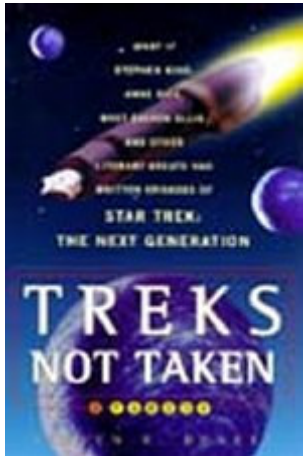
Many of the problems with *Mutant Aliens* lie in its hybrid (dare I say mutant?) nature. It awkwardly straddles a huge gap between paper and celluloid,

and many of the book's technical problems will likely disappear once Plympton transfers the story to film. Unfortunately, the book also suffers from a much deeper problem which a change of medium will not solve, and that's lies squarely in gap between Plympton's considerable talent as a visual artist and his relative immaturity as a storyteller.

TREKS NOT TAKEN

Steven R. Boyett
HarperPerennial Books, 192 pages

Originally published on the SFSite.com, 1998



Years ago -- for nothing other than my own amusement -- I wrote an Archie comics story in the gritty, revisionist style of British writer Alan Moore, creator of *Miracleman* and the *Watchmen*. To my chagrin, I've since lost the manuscript, but it went something like this:

The sky over Riverdale was pink and the clouds were impossibly fluffy and white. The comforting weight of my textbooks tugged at my arms. I had a 7:00 PM date with Ronnie and a joy buzzer in my pocket to pay Reggie back for yesterday's bucket over the door at Pop's. Everything was as it should be, all the elements of my life were in place.

But something was wrong, something nagged, something gnawed at my soul as I trudged along the riverbank...

Suddenly, I knew. Suddenly, with bone-shaking clarity my eyes opened and every red hair on the back of my neck vied with its neighbour for the privilege of standing on end first...

I had been in high school for fifty-seven years.

If you got that, you'll immediately twig to the conceit behind Steven Boyett's *Treks Not Taken*, and a lovely little conceit it is. What if Stephen King, Anne Rice, Kurt Vonnegut, J.D. Salinger and other famous writers had written episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*?

Boyett is a really good literary counterfeiter. His parodies in the style of Joyce, Kesey and Crichton are worth the price of the book by themselves, while Wesley Crusher as J.D. Salinger's cynical anti-hero, Holden Caulfield, in "The Crusher in the Rye," literally had me laughing so hard that I dropped the book.

"...The Enterprise had to be one of the crummiest places in the galaxy. You've never seen such a bunch of phonies in your life, really. Everyone on board is supposed to be so experienced and tops in their field -- the best of the best and all that. But I must have pulled their nuts out of the fire a dozen times. Me, a kid. Did anyone ever say, 'Thank you Wesden?' Not on your life. Ingrates. The ship was full of them."

You should also be warned about Captain Picard's first-person droogspeak narration in "A Clockwork Data." It's basically seizure-inducing.

"...Counselor Troy, this Betazed mozg-leech with bolshy groodies and an empathic rassoodock, gavoreeted in this husky type goloss that I had done a radostyful deed and a great and wonderful vesch. This made me so razdratz that I lifted a rooker to shlaga her nuking litso..."

I really enjoy Boyett's barely-concealed malice. *Treks Not Taken* is an unauthorized parody edition and, free of Paramount's cloying embrace, he lets loose with both phaser barrels at some

of the more egregious annoyances of the Star Trek phenomenon. He's also not always kind to the authors whose styles he appropriates. "Q Clearance" skewers Trek and Tom Clancy with equal abandon, technobabble and sexism at the forefront. Tom Robbins, Jackie Collins, and Anne Rice also get their harsh-but-fair literary desserts at Boyett's hand.

The only story which doesn't really work in *Treks Not Taken* is the pseudo-Dr. Seussian "Oh, the Treks You'll Take!". Boyett doesn't quite capture the good Doctor's demented rhythm, and Ken Mitchroney's cartoons are just not sufficiently Seuss-like.

A minor complaint about a superb little work of literary assassination. Gavoret your rassoodocks and vesch a copy before it's too late!

PLAYING SOLITAIRE

PART TWO

By Mark Shainblum
Illustration by Storm Cook



This story was originally published in the anthology Playing Solitaire and Other Stories (Cyber Age Adventures, 2001) and later distributed on a CD-ROM in the program book of the 2001 World Fantasy Convention held in Montreal.



“Shit!” Elliot said for the tenth time that night, kicking off the covers and getting heavily to his feet. Who did he think he was kidding? People like him didn’t get vacations. People like him didn’t get to pick and choose when they were on and when they were off.

He flipped on the light.

“This really isn’t fair,” he muttered, unzipping his suitcase again. He emptied it on the bed, and groped for a crackly cellophane package covered in Wal-Mart stickers. The label said simply Men’s Pajamas. Size ‘M’. Elliot tore the package open with his teeth. He slept nude. He never shopped at Wal-Mart. He had no idea what a Wal-Mart pajama package looked like, if such a thing even existed.

Luckily, neither did most people. The guy at Canadian customs had held the thing in his hands without giving it a second glance. Elliot crumpled the cellophane and unfolded the cool blue cotton garment it contained. He shook it twice to take out the wrinkles, then yanked the collar button like a lanyard. With a popping sound, electrochemicals in the fibre mixed and the very consistency of the fabric changed. It grew more rigid and the colour morphed from dark blue to bright yellow and black.

Elliot pulled it on. It wasn't quite right. The emergency backup suit didn't have the smooth, formfitting feel of the original—the one hidden back home in Rouse's Cove—but it would do.

He slipped on his glasses and pressed a hidden stud on the left temple. With a hiss the glasses reshaped themselves into something resembling World War II aviator goggles. Another hiss, and his head was covered with a black cowl. He looked at himself in the mirror. He straightened the shirt, making sure the stylized lowercase 'i' on his torso was recognizable. As if anybody would recognize him here. Everything else okay? No lettuce in his teeth? Good.

iMan rides again, he thought. *Big whoop.*

Now what? What would he do at home? Pump his police and media contacts for information, probably. Well, he could try. What was the name of that cop he'd seen on TV?

He turned towards the door, paused, and slapped himself in the forehead. "What an idiot!" He exclaimed, and started to undress. The electrochemical transformation was one-way only, so he'd have to sneak the uniform out of the hotel in his suitcase and find a phone booth somewhere to change in. Yeah right.



Solitaire was screaming.

That's very irritating, whispered the voice without a voice. *I wish you would stop.*

Solitaire kept screaming. She was flat on her back on cold rock, wrists and ankles pinioned by something invisible. She had no idea where she was. All she had was the sound of her own voice.

I'm not doing anything, the whisper continued. *At least have the decency to wait until I start torturing you.*

"FUCK you!"

The voice without a voice chuckled. It sounded like aluminium foil being crushed. *No one has done that in a very long time, dear.*

Solitaire blinked. Information? From Moëdoq?

"You mean—"

It means what it sounds like. I was once a bag of protoplasm just like you. I took my grunting slippery pleasures just like you.

Solitaire sobbed.

Women are interesting. You are one of the most powerful beings on the planet, and yet your greatest terror at this moment is that I will rape you. The aluminium chuckle rasped again. *How pedestrian.*

"You've already raped me, you son-of-a-bitch!"

Hyperbole is not reality, my dear Rachel. To be accurate, I possessed your sister and turned her against you. That was a pretty nasty thing to do, but it doesn't constitute rape.

"You raped my LIFE, you fucker! Sonya was the only family I had in the world, and you drove her away from me!"

Ah, ah. Hyperbole again. I just used fault lines that already existed. How often did you speak to dear, sweet Sonya before I came along?

Solitaire didn't respond. Her breath rasped in the darkness.

Thought so.



Getting to the heart of the action turned out to be surprisingly easy. Elliot changed clothes in a Chinatown alley, stashed his suitcase in a dumpster, and stumbled right into a Montreal cop car in the parking lot at the other end of the alley. The young cop on the passenger side did a classic double take, his eyes bulging out of his head, his paper cup of Dunkin' Donuts coffee splattering to the pavement.

"Calice!" He exclaimed. *"iMan, est-ce que c'est vraiment toi?"*

"I'm sorry, I don't speak French," Elliot replied. "And E-Man is somebody else. I'm iMan."

"Yeah, I know," said the flustered cop, snatching his radio mic. "That's what I said. In French, 'i' is 'e' and 'e' is 'i'."

Holy shit, thought Elliot. *They know who I am.*

The cop launched into an incomprehensible barrage of French. The only word Elliot understood was superhero. The radio crackled and a female French voice replied. The cop replied to the reply. The voice on the radio suddenly changed, more high-speed French was exchanged, and the young cop turned back to Elliot.

"They want confirmation that it's really you, iMan. And that you're here to help us?"

Elliot trained his gaze on a scrap cardboard box lying at the mouth of the alleyway. "Yes, it's really me," iMan replied as the box flashed and imploded. "And yes, I'm here to help."

The cop probably didn't expect the heavy sigh that followed.



Solitaire sobbed. Tears and snot covered her face, and there was nothing she could do to wipe them away.

You're not doing well, Rachel.

“Call me Solitaire, you disembodied piece of shit. You don’t have the right to use my real name.”

Well, that’s another interesting point, Rachel. Did you know that there is another costumed adventurer named Solitaire?

“You’re lying.”

And more, she’s had title to the name a lot longer than you have. Centuries longer. She’s a witch from a line of witches that stretches back into prehistory.

“You’re LYING!” Her voice cracked. “I’M Solitaire!”

Names are very important to people like her. Your name is power. Your name is a window to your soul. She would fight for her name, Rachel. She would probably kill for her name.

“Oh God. Oh God. Oh God.”

But names are important to everybody, dear. Not just to witches. Names help us define ourselves.

“Shut up, you bastard! Shut up!”

Would you kill for your name? Would you kill for Rachel? For Steinberg? For Solitaire?

“Stop it! Stop it! STOP IT!” she shrieked. “Please leave me something! Who I am is all I have left!”

I know the question sounds ridiculous, but people have died for their name. People have died for your name. Being a ‘Steinberg’ was a terminal condition sixty years ago, in some places.

Solitaire’s head lolled. “I can’t,” she said in dull, dead tones. “I can’t do this anymore, Moëdoq. You win. Kill me. Rape me. Blow up the whole damned island. Do what you want. I can’t stop you.”

There was no response.

“Didn’t you hear me?” Solitaire screamed. “I GIVE UP! You WIN!”

Now it’s you who’s lying, whispered the voice without a voice. I know you. You haven’t given up. You haven’t got the faintest idea how to give up.



A beautiful woman with silver hair and translucent wings was shouting into a cellphone as the police car pulled up to Fletcher’s Field. An intricate metal headpiece sat on her forehead. Her costume was jet black, with a silver emblem in the shape of a flower on her right shoulder. A long silver stem snaked from the flower across her back and down her left side to her ankle. iMan assumed this was Jacinthe, although the link between the wings and the flower imagery escaped him.

“I don’t want the goddamned Canadian army and its goddamned tinkertoy tanks! I’ll just have to protect them too! Can’t you put me in touch with Cold Squad?”

iMan cautiously got out of the police car and waited patiently for Jacinthe to finish her call. On closer inspection he realized her wings weren't made of solid matter. Their shape was artificial, like a sort of airfoil, but they shimmered and wavered like the images in a kaleidoscope.

Jacinthe's gaze fell on him and her eyes widened. She held up a finger to indicate that she'd just be a minute. iMan smiled and nodded. This was a far cry from the days when superheroes invariably started pounding one another the first time they met, if you believed the stories. That was all probably urban myth anyhow.

"What do you mean you don't know where they are? How many bloody superhero teams does this country have that you can afford to lose one?" Jacinthe nodded irritably. "I know it's not your fault. I understand. Yes. I'm just upset because Solitaire is...yes I know. Anyhow, it looks like I may have some help here after all, so I'll let you go." Jacinthe stabbed the phone's off button and tossed it to a nearby cop. "*Merci!*"

"*De rien,*" said the cop.

Jacinthe spun and looked straight into iMan's eyes. "Please tell me you're really who you appear to be," she said.

"I am he, in the flesh," Elliot replied, with a bow.

Jacinthe sighed. "Thank God. I don't know why you're in Montreal, iMan, and I'm not going to ask any questions. I just need all the help I can get right now."

iMan threw up his hands in confusion. "I'm afraid you have me at a bit of a disadvantage, Jaysinth," he said.

"Dja-senth," she corrected, giving it the correct French spin.

"Jaysinth," he repeated in English, helplessly. "I have no idea who you are or what's going on here, but I think your buddy Moëdoq gave me a wake-up call earlier this evening."

"Something inanimate grew teeth and tried to eat you?"

iMan nodded.

"It was Moëdoq," she sighed. "I am so damn tired of his psychotic mind games. Just once I wish we could beat them and they'd stay beaten."

"I'm sure they feel the same way about us."

Jacinthe shook her head. "I know what you're saying, but Moëdoq's different. We're not talking about some stupid punk with laser eyes—"

"Just for the record," iMan interrupted with a grin, "my eyes emit gravimetric pulses, not lasers."

Jacinthe sighed again. "iMan, you seem like a nice guy, but my friend's been abducted by a psychotic immortal entity who kills for pleasure. I just don't have a sense of humour right now."

“Sorry,” said iMan.

“You’ve never heard of Moëdoq? He caused a bloodbath during the 1998 ice storm.”

“Sorry,” he repeated.

Jacinte shook her head. “You know, Québec could just disappear off the map and CNN would bump the story if Monica Lewinsky bought a new bra that day.”

“Yes, we’re ignorant ugly Americans. Shall we get back to the business at hand?”

“Oui. *T’as raison*. Sorry. I’m stressed. It’s usually the anglos who get all shrill and anti-American.”

French-Canadians liked America better than the English-Canadians did? The same French-Canadians who wanted to separate from Canada because it was too English? iMan waved his hand in an erasing gesture. He would never figure this country out. “As the computer geeks say, let’s just Alt Control Delete. What do we know about this Moëdoq thing?”

Jacinte shrugged. “Not much. He manifests every few years, always within a month or so of the winter solstice, always on the island of Montreal.” She paused. “And always at the price of innocent lives.”

“What does he look like?”

“Whatever he wants to. I have no evidence that he’s really a HE, except a gut sense that his energy is masculine. When he manifests, it’s usually as a disembodied energy thing; like something from *Star Trek*. Although he once...” She paused.

“Yes,” prompted iMan.

“Forget it. It’s not my place to say. Solitaire can tell you the story when we find her.”

“Now you’re talking,” said iMan, “but I’m going to need a lot more background. Who are these Slipstream idiots, for one?”



Solitaire’s pupils were dilated saucer wide. She still couldn’t see anything in the pitch blackness. “What are you talking about?”

Do you think you’re the first of your kind I’ve ever faced? Do you think this ridiculous era of costumes and masks invented heroes?

Solitaire just shook her head. Inarticulate noises came from her throat.

His name doesn’t even translate. He was the shaman of a people who were the ancestors of the ancestors of the Algonquians. They lived on this island centuries before the name Hochelaga came to someone in a dream, millennia before someone else decided that this was a royal mountain belonging to a foreign king across the sea.

Solitaire's eyes snapped open in shock. "This? Are you saying that we're inside Mount Royal?"

I was a scourge on his people and on all the peoples of the east. I ruined their hunts. I stole their children. I violated their women and unmanned their men. Tralalala! Because I could. Because I wanted to.

Solitaire was no longer sobbing. She was listening.

Until he defeated me, using powers and abilities beyond those of mortal men. Haha! I've always wanted to say that. He stripped me from my flesh, discarded my body like it was so much meat, and bound my soul to the heart of this miserable hillock, this extinct baby volcano that was never much of anything even when the lava flowed.

"Except," said Solitaire.

Except that it is the heart of power, this little royal mountain. Said Moëdoq. Where do you think your power comes from? And why do you think it fades when you leave Montreal?

Solitaire gasped.

Did you think I didn't know? Did you think your little phobia was a secret? Moëdoq chuckled again. You haven't left the island of Montreal in twelve years. Not even to go to the suburbs. You were afraid of being powerless. Afraid of meeting me in the night with no way to defend yourself.

"You think very highly of yourself, Moëdoq."

He continued as if she hadn't spoken. *The irony is, off this island I don't even exist. I'm a myth. A campfire tale. A light breeze from the north.*

"My powers come from an accident at the McGill quantum mechanics lab," Solitaire insisted. "The artificial singularity—"

Moëdoq made an irritated noise. *Do you mistake the plug in the wall for the hydro-electric dam? Accidents are just conduits. The source is the heart of power. You tap it and I am chained to it. We are both bound to it, and one to the other.*

"I don't believe you," said Solitaire.

Believe what lets you sleep at night, replied Moëdoq. Not that you sleep very much. I wanted to thank you, though. Your tapping of the heart of power allows me to worm my way free every now and then. The shaman's binding naturally strengthens at the summer solstice and weakens in winter. You weaken it just that infinitesimal touch more—

"Oh no you don't," hissed Solitaire. "Don't you dare blame me for your crimes."

Moëdoq giggled. *Did Picasso blame the paintmaker? My art is my own. I share credit with no one.*

"Art?" whispered Solitaire. "Hundreds of brutal murders."

Let's not exaggerate. One hundred and sixty-seven, give or take. At least in your era.

Solitaire closed her eyes. "Is there a point to all this, Moëdoq?"

Well, yes, whispered the voice without a voice. *I guess it's now or never...*

Solitaire steeled herself for agony or death. She waited for her life to flash before her eyes. It stubbornly refused. Oh well. It hadn't been that wonderful on the first go-round.

I love you.

Solitaire burst out laughing. She laughed hysterically for almost a full minute, stopping only when she choked and started coughing.

You don't have to be insulting about it.

"You...you..." she started coughing again, "love me?"

I'll admit, it's a stretch. You're Jewish, I'm disembodied. I doubt your parents would have approved.

Solitaire started laughing again. "Well, at least you have a sense of humour. Women like that in a man."

If you think I'm joking, you're mistaken, whispered the voice. *I have never been more serious in 3000 years.*

Solitaire shook her head in stunned silence. "This has been an interesting life," she finally muttered. "The only person who'll admit to loving me is a psychopathic, murdering ghost."

Oh, get over yourself! whispered Moëdoq. *You're not going to die today. Would I have gone to all this trouble and humiliation just to kill you now? Actually...*

The cold stone under Solitaire's back suddenly lurched and bucked. The force binding her left wrist gave with an audible snap as the entire space that surrounded her was rocked by an explosion.

...it's me who will die.

Solitaire saw a dot of dull red in the absolute blackness that surrounded her. The dot expanded and grew brighter than a star. By the light it cast, Solitaire could finally see that she was in a natural rock vault of some sort. The white spot was in the far wall of the vault, perhaps fifteen feet away. Molten volcanic rock, solid matter for ten thousand years, flowed like water.

"What are you talking about?" she demanded.

Wait, whispered the voice. *No sense wasting exposition.*

The rock wall blew inward in a spray of lava. A glob of molten material landed on Solitaire's jacket, where it lay spitting, expending its energy on the heat-resistant fabric.

Jacinte floated through a new breach in the wall, her face a study in fury, energy wings glowing at maximum power. Another costumed figure followed her on foot, walking gingerly on the superheated cavern floor. He was stocky, youngish looking in a yellow and black outfit. Aviator goggles covered his eyes, and power glowed behind their mirrored lenses.

“iMan?” Solitaire said in surprise.

“You’re not the Solitaire I know,” he replied, “but glad to meet you anyhow.”

See? whispered the voice without a voice.

“Shut up,” said Solitaire.

Jacinte blinked in stunned surprise. “Umm, what’s going on here?”

“Reader’s Digest version,” said Solitaire, “he loves me, and he’s going to die.”

You make it sound so banal when you say it that way, complained Moëdoq. Where’s the drama? The pathos?

iMan leaned against a rock and crossed his arms. “Okay, it’s official. Canadians are the weirdest people I’ve ever met.”

Solitaire rolled to the right, twining her free left hand with her still-pinioned right. Blue energy flared, and her right arm came free with a pop.

All you had to do was ask, said the whisper. The force pinioning her legs gave way suddenly, and she fell to the ground with a thud and a groan. iMan rushed over and helped her to her feet.

“When did this become a comedy?” Jacinte asked no one in particular.

As Lenny Bruce said... began the whisper.

“Dying is easy, comedy is hard,” chorused the three superheroes.

My last day on Earth and they’re stepping on all my lines.

iMan grinned. “I like your local supervillains. They’re funny. The variety back in Rouse’s Cove tend to carry big guns and grimace a lot.”

Jacinte made an irritated shushing gesture. “What do you mean your last day on Earth? I thought you were immortal.”

I am, he replied, *as long as I choose to be. I no longer choose to be. Kill me, please.*

Stunned silence filled the rock chamber deep inside Mount Royal.

Was the request too complicated for you? Shall I use shorter words?

“But we don’t—” spluttered iMan.

Yes, yes, you respect all life. You wouldn't step on a ladybug. Blah blah blah. I know. I know. Rationalize it this way: By all rights I should have died thirty centuries ago.

The whisper paused.

I'm tired. I'm tired of this mountain. I'm tired of being chained to the solstice. I'm tired of being the bogeyman. I'm tired of death.

A sound like a strangled sob echoed through the cavern. *Kill me. I'm begging you.*

The three superheroes exchanged glances.

You'll forgive the cliché, but stop me before I kill again, Moëdoq sighed. Because I will, you know. Eventually.

A glowing white shape coalesced out of the darkness; an amoebae carved from fluorescent light. *Here, I'll make it easy for you!* A thick black X appeared at the centre of the white undulating mass. A black arrow emerged from the light, pointing directly at the X. Cartoonish type appeared, flashing like a sign at a carnival arcade. *Hit the X, and win a prize!* it read.

“How do we know—”

That this isn't a trick? You don't. But it's the only chance you'll have to get rid of me, once and for all. Take it.

The superheroes exchanged glances again.

Rachel, I had no choice but to love you.

Jacithe glanced nervously at iMan at the mention of her friend's real name. He raised his fingers to his lips and mimed turning a key. Jacithe nodded, satisfied.

You're the only being I've had any contact with in 28 centuries. I know you better than anyone else alive. I didn't realize it at first. I just reverted to type when you first freed me, but then...I understood.

“I don't know what to say,” said Solitaire.

I don't expect you to say anything. I understand what I am very well. What I am hasn't changed. You can't love me any more than I can not love you. But I feel I owe you something. A gift, if you will.

“Your death.”

So you may sleep at night. So you may escape the prison you have built for yourself. I've had 3000 years. I have no regrets. You're a mayfly. Your years are too short to live them alone, in terror.

Solitaire swallowed heavily.

But don't for a moment believe that I am your only problem. You are your own worst enemy, Rachel. You aren't Solitaire. That's the antithesis of who you are. You were listening to me whispering in the dark. You heard my aloneness and took it for your own.

Solitaire began crying again, softly. Even iMan sniffled and wiped at his nose.

I am death. You are life, and you must start acting that way.

iMan cleared his throat. "Excuse me," he began.

Just a minute, I'm talking, whispered Moëdoq.

"Sorry," said iMan.

There you go, apologizing again.

"Excuse me?"

I've watched you too. Not for long, but long enough. For such a powerful man, you sure let yourself get pushed around.

iMan blinked in surprise. "You know, people usually go to shrinks for analysis. My HMO doesn't cover therapy by supervillains."

Fine, whispered the voice. Kill the messenger. Mask your pain with quips. Go back to your pathetic little groupie and hate yourself.

"Groupie?" said Jacinthe, giving iMan a sidelong glance.

"It's a long story," he stammered. "One of my enemies kidnapped a young woman, a former student of mine. I saved her, but she found out my real identity in the process, and now she's, I guess, obsessed with me. Or with the costume. I don't know."

Why are you explaining? asked the whisper. *Why are you justifying yourself to a someone you barely know?*

"Shut up!" iMan snapped. "I'm getting very tired of you."

And you've only known me for two hours. Imagine how I feel after thirty centuries.

"No thanks."

It's okay. One last thing and I'll be out of your hair forever.

There was another pause.

Imagine that. I'm at a loss for words. That's a first. I just...for once I don't want to be the bogeyman. For once I don't want to be about death. I want to rejoin the Great Circle. I want to give you life from death.

"What do you mean?" asked Solitaire in a whisper.

In your culture, I think they call it bashert.

Solitaire and iMan both started at the sound of the word.

Jacinthe shook her head in confusion. “What’s *bashert*? What language is that?”

“It’s Hebrew,” answered iMan. “It means ‘fate’.”

Or ‘fated one’, whispered the voice without a voice. *Your fated, one true love.*

Solitaire and iMan stared at one another in shock. “Are you saying—?”

You would never have met one another. You would have lived out your allotted years as half-people, knowing something was out there that you could never quite grasp. You would never have found love. You would never have found completion.

“Don’t listen to him,” shouted Jacinthe. “It’s some kind of trick! It’s a trap!”

The only trap, whispered the voice, *is the one you have built for yourself, Jacinthe. A prison built out of cynicism and bitterness. You are beyond help.*

“Go to hell,” said Jacinthe.

Probably will, replied the whisper. *Speaking of which...*

Solitaire swooned. The rock cavern swirled around her and she felt the future’s breath on her cheek. She saw a house, a nice little brick house on Notre Dame de Grace Avenue. She felt her husband’s weight on her naked body. She heard his moans of pleasure and joy, and her own. She saw the sons and daughters who were the product of their union. She reached for them, and they reached back.

“What?” Demanded iMan. “What is it?”

“It’s the future,” whispered Solitaire. “Our future. The matrix is stable, Elliot. I see it! I see it!”

“Elliot? How did you—?”

Interesting word, ‘matrix,’ whispered the voice without a voice. *It means ‘that within which something is created’. Most obviously a womb, of course. The source of life. Think about it, Rachel.*

She looked up. “I will, Moëdoq. I don’t forgive you for your crimes, but I thank you.”

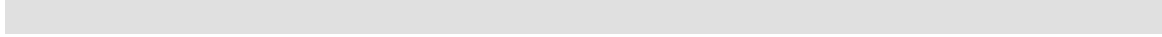
I don’t ask for forgiveness. Just an end.

The three superheroes looked at each other again and nodded. Without another word, they turned and unleashed their terrible power on the X at the center of Moëdoq’s shimmering form. The voice without a voice screamed in pain and joy, in death and in freedom. Pieces started to break off from the central mass and Moëdoq’s light began to fade.

His whisper was barely audible. *You know, it could be argued that there's no joy in defeating a depressed enemy. What is vengeance if your opponent wants to die? So much better to give them something to live for first.*

The three heroes halted their barrage and stared in horror.

Just kidding, said Moëdoq in the full, rich timbre of a man's voice. And then he died.



SCHADENFREUDE

WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO BAD PEOPLE





Cheney's Got a Gun

Parody by MooseFromPoland

From: www.amiright.com/parody/80s/aerosmith35.shtml

Cheney's got a gun, Cheney's got a gun
Went huntin' for some fun
Reputation's undone

What did Dick Cheney do?
He shot his pal, yes it's true...

They say when Cheney goes out huntin'
You try to stay the hell away...
But look out for what's comin' 'cause when Cheney's
got a gun
He might hit you with his shotgun's spray...!

Cheney's got a gun, Cheney's got a gun
Guess who is safe? No one
Everybody is on the run

Was the Vice Pres. high on glue?
What did Dick Cheney do?

He shot his friend, you know it's crazy
He hit him in the chest and head...
So don't get in the line of fire or else you may expire
The bastards lucky that he isn't dead...!

Shoot away...
Shoot away at the quail!
Shoot away...
Shoot away at the quail!
Shoot away...
Shoot away...
Shoot away...

Cheney's got a gun, Cheney's got a gun
Guess who is safe? No one
Now everybody is on the run

What did Dick Cheney do?
There's something I have to tell you

His rep's said sorry for the whole mess
The G.O.P. walks out okay
Well that is horse shit friends, I profess "cause with
guns they always say yes
But he'll go scotch free (unlike Delay...!)

Shoot away...
Shoot away at the quail!
Shoot away...
Shoot away at the quail!
Shoot away...
Shoot away...
Shoot away...

Cheney's got a gun...
Cheney's got a gun...
Cheney's got a gun...
Everybody is on the run...
Cheney's got a gun...
Guess who is safe? No one...
Everybody is on the run...
Cheney's got a gun...
Cheney's got a gun...
Guess who is safe? No one...
Everybody is on the one...
Cheney's got a gun...

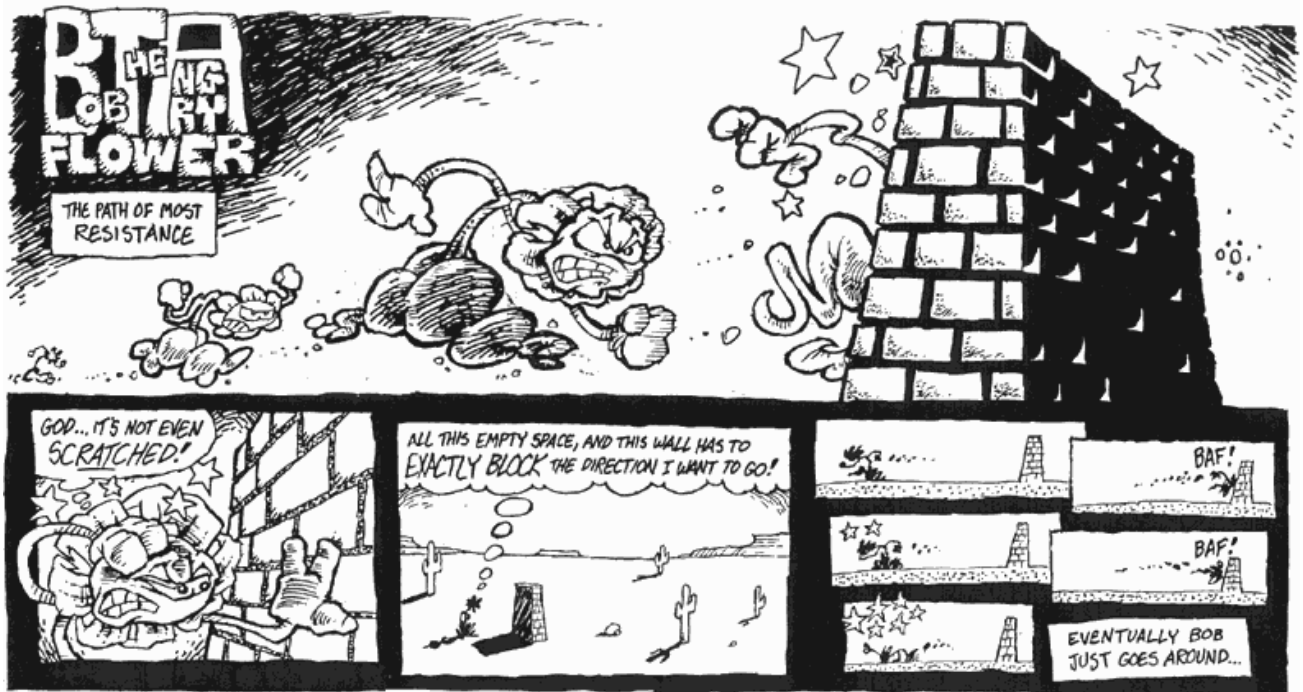
COMIC WATCH

MARK SHAINBLUM'S MAILING COMMENTS

Okay, here's the honest truth: I love you guys, but doing the mailing comments is the longest and most difficult part of this whole process for me.

I know mailing comments are at the core of the APA ideal, but (especially since my secret NSA mole tells that there are already bets going around about how long I'll last!) I need to adapt the process to my brain or I'll just crash and burn.

I'll experiment over the next couple of issues with different approaches. Please let me know how I'm doing. By necessity, I think I'll end up being more scattershot than some of you, so please, please, **please** don't take it the wrong way if I don't respond to all the comments aimed at me or if I miss mentioning your section. I don't hate you, I'm not a snob, and I'm not lazy, I swear! I just know what's likely to wear me down in the long run, and I'm trying to anticipate and avoid instead of running straight into a brick wall.



Like this. Brick walls are bad.

COVER, ISSUE #91

Loved the Jack Staff cover, Alan! Sounds like a series I'd enjoy. I'll really have to track it down.

COVER, ISSUE #92

Firestorm, Doctor Fate, Captain Atom and Breastgirl... I mean, Power Girl. Eclectic choice of characters, Greg. Nice, moody tones, I like it. The perspective on Power Girl's chest seems a little strange, however. (I mean, more than usual.)

MILLENNIUM GRAPHIX ISSUE #91

Thanks for the welcome, Don. Glad you feel like I've been here for a long time. I feel the same way, oddly enough.

I noticed that you mention your doctor diagnosed you with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). I may have it too, I get massively depressed in September/October. I urge you to look into it, even if medication doesn't work for you. There are other ways of treating it, most notably with light therapy. Years ago I purchased an SAD lamp called a SADelite from Northern Light Technologies here in Montreal (Website: www.northernlighttechnologies.com). You can now buy cheaper, made-in-China models at your local pharmacy. It works really well, but so does simply making sure you get as much light as possible, even in the winter.

I recently got a bunch of good tips from a nice little book on the subject, *Positive Options for Seasonal Affective Disorder*.

MILLENNIUM GRAPHIX ISSUE #92

RYMCT me: Thanks for the nice words. Glad you enjoyed the Wolfman interview. I have lots of interviews in my files which I hope to share with you guys in the future. Subjects include **Gene Day**, **Joe Matt**, **Arn Saba**, **William Gibson** and **Les (Leo Barker) Bache** to name just a few.



THE ENDLESS STRUGGLE ISSUE #91

Loved your Uslan story and your fast fiction piece, Jay. You really surprised and pleased me with that twist ending, and I usually hate twist-endings! And thanks again for the illustration of Solitaire! Love it!

BLAM! ZAP! POW! ISSUE #92

Good issue, Rob! Really liked your Quarter Bin reviews in particular. Ironically, Greg Brooks, the illustrator of the Crimson Avenger series you reviewed, was later convicted of murdering his girlfriend! Details in the column below:

Murder, He Drew

By Bob "The Answer Man" Rozakis
From: www.silverbulletcomicbooks.com/bobro/

103221432353142.htm

In your column awhile back, you described how the hunt for the "Son of Sam" led the police to DC. At the end you said, "It would be a few more years before someone in the comics business turned out to be a murderer. But that's another story..." Is there any chance you could tell us this story?

-- Brett Stuart (Brett.Stuart@Commercebank.com)

With thanks to my pal Bob Greenberger, who helped jostle my memory, here's the story: An artist named Greg Brooks, who did some work for DC back in the late '80s (including the CRIMSON AVENGER miniseries in 1988) lived on Staten Island with his wife and baby. His wife, Elizabeth Kessler, did some work for DC as well, coloring a couple of jobs (a story in DOOM PATROL #9 - the 80s version of the title - was one).

Elizabeth went missing and her body was eventually found by police at a construction site about a mile from their home. She had been beaten to death with a hammer and dumped there.

It turned out that Brooks and Kessler had been having problems in their relationship and she took up with another man. At one point, she returned for her things, got into an argument with Brooks, and while the baby was in the room, she bragged about what a better lover the new guy was. Enraged, he grabbed the hammer and struck her dead. Her body was dumped in the bathtub over night and at the crack of dawn, he wheeled her in a grocery cart to the construction site.

Brooks was charged and convicted of her murder and went to prison.

Turned out that was not then end of the story. Elizabeth Kessler was not really Elizabeth Kessler. She had "appropriated" the identity of her college roommate when she moved east from Kansas. And back home, she had another child who was being taken care of by her mother. Eventually, her mother ended up with custody of both children.

Bob Greenberger reports that he got a letter from Brooks while he was still in prison. He had been working on his art while incarcerated and Joe Rubinstein was helping him out by mail. Brooks was released from prison about two years ago, got a job as a bicycle messenger, and even made an appointment to bring his portfolio up to Bob to review. "He never showed up," says Bob, "and I haven't heard from him since."

And THAT is the story of the comic book murderer...



CAPTAIN NARCOLEPSY ISSUE #91

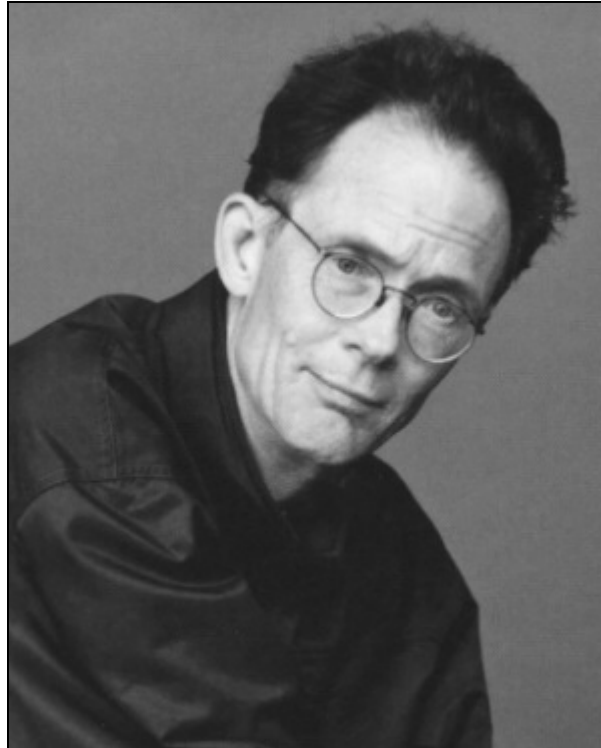
RYMC to me: So an editor at DC commissioned work from you and disappeared, eh? Sounds very familiar. In my case, the editor actually stayed at DC, he just stopped answering my phone calls. It's a long story which I may share another time.



I'm fading, guys, and if there's any hope at all of getting this in by deadline, I think I'll have to stop here. I think I'll need an "All Comments" issue soon to catch up!

Post Modern Sublime: The William Gibson Interview

by Mark Shainblum & Matthew Friedman



This never-before-published 1993 interview with cyberpunk superstar William Gibson — author of, among others, *Neuromancer*, *Burning Chrome*, and *Pattern Recognition* — may be over a decade old, but the author's perspicacious comments are, if anything, even more pertinent in the world of 2006.

This interview was conducted in advance of a wildly successful signing for Gibson's then-current novel *Virtual Light* held at Nebula, the legendary (and sadly defunct) Montreal bookshop founded by Claude Lalumière.

Mark Shainblum: I've just recently reread your first published story, which was "The Gernsback Continuum," if I'm not mistaken.

William Gibson: Actually, no. It was "Fragments of a Hologram Rose," and "The Gernsback Continuum" was my second.

MS: Whoops! I was misinformed. In any case, what I wanted was to start with the deliberate break with the past that you made in that story. In one sense that marked the end of the "rayguns and spaceships" era very dramatically.

WG: I was trying to make fun of something that I felt had remained in play in American science fiction. There's nothing in the story that would indicate that, but, in the context that it is a science-fiction story being published in 1982, it does rather poke fun at ... I don't know what to call it.

MS: The futurepast idea? The lost futures?

WG: Well, the idea that sciencefictional futures tend to lend themselves to a certain sort of fascist thinking.

MS: Truth, justice, and the American way in outer space.

WG: Yeah.

MS: Some people have expressed the idea that Star Trek is an extension of that. That and the whole popular culture notion of science fiction.

WG: I think that I wanted it to have a contemporary reverberation. I would have hoped that people would think about Star Trek and contemporary science fiction.

MS: Not too long ago I did an interview with a historian here who said that Canadian science fiction often has a suspicion of technology and the utopia. I know you weren't born in this country, but would you say you're part of that tradition?

WG: I really don't know. It's an odd question. I know I was somewhat taken aback last week when I read the William Gibson entry in the new Science Fiction Encyclopedia and found that what I had done was being considered in terms of its "Canadianness." I actually find that a bit odd because I think of myself as being a Southern writer.

MS: Really?

WG: Well, I'm from Virginia. My family's lived in Virginia for three or four hundred years. I grew up there. I don't feel particularly Canadian, although certainly I've shared some of the experience. I would be extremely dubious of an analysis of my work as Canadian SF. I suppose it would be fair to view it as something committed by an expatriate under the influence of late-twentieth-century Canada.

MS: Do perhaps Canada and the American South share that suspicion of the future and the technological, corporate society?

WG: No, I don't think they share much. They're very different, extremely different cultures in many ways. Which is one of the reasons I live in Canada.

MS: Can you expand on that? What attracted you here?

WG: Well, it's changed quite a bit, but I think what initially attracted me to Canada was that it felt as though it was run by an enormous department store.

MS: [LAUGHS]

Matthew Friedman: Eaton's.

WG: There was none of that really, really severe patriot thing.

MS: o you view that as a plus?

WG: h absolutely. All I like about Canada is its pragmatic globalism. Anytime it rears up and gets a sense of itself I cringe. Turn off the television set.

MF: To step back to technology for a minute, and the mistrust of technology: In the essay "Lessons of Cyberpunk" by Peter Fitting, he argues that what you're writing about is not the future but the present. I'm curious about what role the increased velocity of technical change plays in your work.

WG: Well, not having read the essay, if you're putting it correctly I think Fitting is certainly right. I'm less concerned with the increased velocity of technology than with science fiction's prison; its historical inability to predict anything. A lot of what I do, I suspect, is actually making fun of science fiction.

MF: It's interesting what has happened, and I wonder if it was unintentional, you've been described to me by science-fiction fans as almost a Tolkien of the information age, in the sense that you've become something of a mythologist.

WG: Holy shit! I've never heard that one before! That's really, really strange. Does that mean I have to be very Episcopalian?

MF: Well I think the thrust of it was that in, for example, *The Hacker Crackdown*, Bruce Sterling talks about how US federal agents would raid someone's living room and if they saw one of your novels lying around they would immediately suspect that they were part of the computer underground.

WG: Well, yes, I've heard that from some of those very same police persons.

MS: That ties into something I wanted to ask. There is a sense in your novels that you're hostile to capitalism and suspicious of large corporations. Is that part of your satire or is that a genuine fear...

WG: Well, I ... hmm ... how can I put it. This late in the ballgame I don't suppose I could claim to be a socialist. There don't really seem to be any. One of the things *Virtual Light* is about at some level is this totally capitalist world.

MS: You discuss the disappearance of the middle class.

WG: Yeah. But I don't know. I mean who in the world is looking at the world we have now— One has to be ambivalent about capitalism. But that's like saying one has to be ambivalent about reality.

MS: But is there a danger? You were projecting a world which is a more or less a continuation where we're getting all these potato-chip-sized states. Canada is broken into five different states. The US states are fracturing. Is the nation-state going to lose its ability to deal with the big corporations as time progresses?

WG: I don't know. That's not what I do. I am totally not about predicting the future. I just mess with the present.

MF: Are you a satirist?

WG: I think so. More so in *Virtual Light* than in my previous books, although it's only in North America that I've been taken absolutely seriously. Japan as well. They took me totally seriously. The British and the French assumed from the beginning that I was to some very large extent a humorist, and that's from *Neuromancer* on. There are things in *Neuromancer* that were very deliberately written to be quite funny. My North American readership, by and large, never got it.

MS: It went over their heads?

WG: Well, they just didn't have a sense of humour about it. That's kind of a different thing.

MS: Well, how does it make you feel that some people have elevated you to the status of a guru?

WG: My sense of what a guru does involves a kind of a give and take with the guru figure, something no-one can honestly claim to have with me. I think that's some sort of terrible, pathological social problem.

MS: I know that Robert Heinlein was very disturbed by similar stuff that happened after *Stranger in a Strange Land*.

WG: Well, he should have been, considering what he wrote. The crazy old fucker!

MS: [LAUGHS]

WG: And that was before he had his triple brain bypass.

MS: No, no. What do you really think?

MF: Well, what happens when you see a hacker using the vocabulary and the mythology of your novels?

WG: Well, it's actually kind of depressing. It should be clear after reading *Virtual Light* what I think of that simply by the way I've depicted the Republic of Desire. *Virtual Light* is, in one way, a much more naturalistic take on what that sort of thing would be like. When I wrote *Neuromancer* I didn't know that there were any hackers. I was sort of imagining them. Or there certainly weren't any hackers who had good black leather jackets.

MS/MF: [LAUGHS]

WG: They were mossy-toothed guys with lumpy flannel shirts.

MS: With plastic pocket protectors.

WG: Yeah. Hiding in basements.

MS: Well, I find it very eerie to see people using the terminology who don't even know who you are or what cyberpunk is.

WG: Yeah, but I don't really know what it is either.

MS: What is cyberpunk?

WG: I don't know. It's what Peter Fitting and what people of his ilk might call a "meme." Memes are these little free-floating bits of ideas that get out. And what they seem to do is recommodify. It's like a virus.

MS: Kind of like fast-food restaurants.

WG: Mmm, no. Fast food restaurants kind of have a DNA. You don't walk down the street and see a McDonald's selling Cajun Sushi. Memes are like that. Part of this thing attaches itself to something else. But the thing that keeps it going is the need to sell stuff. In the case of cyberpunk, it's like this thing that infected journalism. Cyberpunk, in the sense that it exists, is a symptom of the need to publish Sunday Supplement articles about something.

MS: And you lump all the cyber-magazines into the same category? The ones that portray themselves as being on the cutting edge?

WG: How many are there?

MS: Must be half a dozen by now.

WG: I know there are some little ones now, but on real newsstands now there's only...

MS: There's *Mondo 2000* and *Wired*...

WG: There's *Mondo* and *Wired*.

MF: The *Whole Earth Review* gets into it now.

WG: Oh no, they're much older. The Whole Earth Review is like my uncle, quite literally. The Whole Earth Catalog is what I was reading when I was twenty-two. They go way back, and they're attached to a lot of things. But actually, I don't think it's terribly important what cyberpunk is. I think it might be important, or at least interesting, if we could know what it's going to be. What we think of as cyberpunk is a kind of very incoherent precursor phenomenon. In the way that you could not have looked at some beatnik reading poetry in a coffee house in North Beach in the mid fifties and extrapolated Woodstock or Charlie Manson or the rest of the counterculture. My hunch would be that historically, looking back from the twenty-first century, the only thing that would be interesting about cyberpunk would be that it preceded something else. I have no idea what that would be, but I think it would be something that comes with ubiquitous computation and very, very transparent user interfaces.

MS: So we're talking about online technology as a way of life, as you do in your books.

WG: Yes, but the interfaces will be infinitely more transparent. There's that odd thing that, even though Case can plug the jack right into his head, he's always typing. It's because I was typing as I was writing it. None of these things that I've written were ever intended as blueprints for anything, particularly technology. People who take them that way are incredibly naive. They're really only about what we're doing now. Science fiction can't predict the future. Anyone who thinks science fiction is a hot ticket to the future deserves what they get.

MS: Do you think that there's a messiah complex among SF people? That we're going to save the world with science fiction?

WG: No, not particularly. Historically there have been a lot of fairly batty science-fiction writers. It tends to go with the territory; one kind of lunacy or another. But science-fiction writers — and I know this because in some odd sense I've been one all my life — science-fiction writers are charlatans. That's what we are. You can run away and join the circus or you can become a science-fiction writer. The only time when I find it alarming is when the science-fiction writer is getting up and telling you what the future is going to be. The thing that I'm finding quite essential to resist. I started out writing the books, and the books are commodified by the publisher, but then this whole other thing starts as they try to sell more books, and they try to commodify the writer.

MS: And turn you into an icon.

WG: Yeah. You wind up turning into an icon anyway if you sell enough books. There's really nothing to do.

MS: And does appearing in a cameo in [TV miniseries] Wild Palms contribute to that?

WG: Yes, it probably does. But I did it as a favour to my friend who wrote and created that series. But I quite enjoyed it. It was very funny, and fewer people noticed it than one would think. I think mainly only the people who already knew who I was.

MF: I've heard that you are pretty low-tech yourself, to cop one of your phrases.

WG: Oh no, I've got a really groovy PowerBook here. It doesn't belong to me, one of my publishers loaned it to me.

MF: I'm curious where the fascination with technology that we see in your novels comes from. Is that a social fascination, part of the satire? Or is that you?

WG: It always just seemed to be to me so much of what we're about as human beings. Certainly in the time that I've been alive. It's not like there's "us," and then there's the technology. Technology "R" Us. Already we're sort of half machine.

MF: And some of your characters are, in fact, half machine.

WG: Yeah, but not really much more than we are. We're supposed to have children at age fourteen and pretty much be dead by thirty. We don't do that. Technology's not something you can put back in the black box and return to Radio Shack. It's the vaccinations you've had and all that metal in your teeth. It's everything, the whole thing that makes us what we are. There is absolutely no option. Whatever it is, we're going there. We can't say "Oh no, back to nature!" because nature no longer exists. We messed with it too much.

MS: It would also mean killing two-thirds of the human race.

WG: Mmm, yeah. Although when you think about how very many of us there are, and how many of us there were initially... That's a scary thing. I don't like to think about that crisis too much.

MS: I'd like to go back to this idea of the science-fiction writer as charlatan. What is it that you do, then? What is science fiction, and what do SF writers do?

WG: I don't really know what other science-fiction writers do anymore, and I don't think I was ever too clued into it. There were a few people that I liked very much: Alfred Bester, Fritz Lieber. I always thought that those guys looked at what was going on around them and then did something else. I don't even know what to call it, but, whatever it is I make my living doing, that's what I do. I look around me and do the "other" thing. But I don't exactly know what it is. It's not extrapolation ... well, there are threads of extrapolation.

MS: I'd say you're more of an extrapolator than many people who claim they are.

WG: Well, I guess I am in a sense.

MS: All the technology in *Virtual Light* is conceivable technology. None of it is warp drives or phasers.

WG: Yeah, but I didn't have to invent any of it, that's the funny thing. There are only a few, tiny bits of extrapolated technology in there. Most of the stuff you could buy today, if you had the money.

MS: That's what I mean. You're using off-the-shelf or near-future technology to create science fiction.

WG: Yeah. Actually off-the-shelf technology is a very good way to describe what most of *Virtual Light* is. It's real technology that most people aren't familiar with, like the Chunker, the Israeli riot control device.

MS: That's real?

WG: Oh yeah. The only things in the book that aren't real are nanotech and the VL glasses. Daryl Gates pushed very hard to get the Death Star in and the plans are still on the drawing board. I didn't make that up. I made up almost nothing. It's either stuff that you can get FedExed to your house right now, if you've got the money and a license for it. Or it's stuff that someone's proposed in the course of the last decade.

MF: So it all comes back to the fact that your future is in fact some sort of hyperkinetic present.

WG: What I think I'm probably doing, I sometimes get the feeling that I'm trying to connect people with what the present really is, as opposed to what we need to feel the present is in order to not lose it and start screaming. There are those rare moments when you get a sense of what the present is — and those moments for me are what Frederick Jamieson calls the postmodern sublime: a perfect mingling of ecstasy and dread. I can think of no other response to the world we live in than a perfect mingling of ecstasy and dread. It's utterly dreadful and fabulous at the same time. Not necessarily at the same time for everyone at once. It's astonishing, I was just in mid-town Manhattan, in a hotel across the street from the Trump Tower. You go down on the street to the most beautiful people in the world wearing \$6000 worth of clothing and God knows how much plastic surgery, and they're walking through dying people. People right there, literally dying publicly on the sidewalk. It's extraordinary. I mean, it's not new...

MS: It's new in the degree.

WG: Compared to what you would have seen on that very same street corner 120 years ago, it's really not different. But, for someone my age who grew up in that bubble of postwar prosperity that led to the sixties, it's pretty heavy.

MS: That era is beginning to seem like the fantasy.

WG: Oh yeah, it was a strange thing. I don't think it'll come back.

MS: I'm trying to clarify one idea: what's your view of the view we have of the present? Are we continuing to pretend we're still living in the fifties?

WG: I think I'm trying to give it to you with Mr. Yamazaki in *Virtual Light*, when he goes woolgathering about modernism and postmodernism. This is postmodern. We're living at the beginning of something else.

MS: And it doesn't even have a name.

WG: Well it looks as if it's going to be called the postmodern. Modern is not something that goes on indefinitely. T.S. Eliot and James Joyce were modern, and I know, intuitively, that I am something else. This is not Mr. Eliot's world. This is a whole different ballgame. We're at the end of an era, not just at the end of a century.

MS: And maybe the reaction to your work, the effect you've had is a reaction to that. Maybe you've tapped into that spirit.

WG: Well, I hope so. It's the only thing I can come up with to account for it. Although I don't know particularly why people jump on what I do as opposed to so many of the other writers who do the same stuff or stuff equally like it.

MS: You were the first?

WG: Well, I've never really felt that. The kind of thing I write, I just thought: "Well, I hope people like it."

MF: Though the initial reaction to cyberpunk and your writing wasn't entirely favourable, was it?

WG: Curiously enough, we wanted — particularly my colleagues, I think, were standing in the alley waiting to be hit. And nobody really did it. The science-fiction community came out and welcomed us with open arms, gave us lots of awards and turned us into middle-class homeowners. When you go back and look at the files, there was remarkably little Old Fart reaction to it. It wasn't at all what I expected.

MF: But does being a middle-class homeowner dull the edge? How much of the edge in the *Sprawl* books was the young, hungry writer?

WG: I don't know. It's hard to say. I wasn't that young, either. Science fiction's a scary thing that way, it's a very geriatric field. I think Harlan Ellison has only recently given up the mantle of "young writer." I don't know, I was in my mid to late twenties when I started to write this stuff, and I hope that I'm not becoming complacent and lazy. *Virtual Light* felt to me like a very risk-taking book, particularly in the subtextual way it tends to go back and deconstruct what I did before, before the academics could really have a chance to get to it. That was a very deliberate thing, that I would go back and make fun of it, reinterpret it in a very different light, and that I would do it myself. I'm never really satisfied with anything I write, but I'm very satisfied with *Virtual Light* in that regard.

MS: I have to say that I'm a little surprised. I didn't quite get that. In what sense were you deconstructing what you had done before?

WG: Well, look at who the hackers are, who the protagonists are.

MS: That's true. They're non-tech people.

WG: The fact that they have jobs that are like real jobs. They have to have them. If they don't have them they're going to die. There's never been anybody like that in any of my previous books. Which is one of the reasons they appealed to the young and the young at heart. Because they're very romantic, people aren't really worried about their paycheques. They're worried about getting laid or finding God or surviving some terrible onslaught. That's a very different thing, and it's okay, I'm not saying that I didn't mean it or that's not important. I'm very glad that I did some books like that when I was young enough to still do it. I think I'd be in sad shape if I was still able to do them at my age.

MS: An extension of the rebellious adolescent, cowboy mentality.

WG: Yeah, with *Neuromancer* I was in a really profound dialogue with my inner adolescent. You always have your inner adolescent.

MS: Sometimes you have to beat him to death with a baseball bat...

WG: Well, some people manage to. I don't. Mine erupts fairly frequently still. But as you get older, as you mature as a novelist, one would hope. What I look for in novelists that have been writing for awhile is a kind of deepening of resonance. And somehow getting closer to some ... I don't know what to call it... Truth? Maybe not. I'm not sure what that is. Your resonance deepens, you want to become a better instrument.

MF: It sounds very Zen.

WG: Well, it is! Most things are. Particularly things that involve making something or hitting something. Those are things Zen is quite applicable to.

MS: So the art just manifests itself through you more than you doing something?

WG: Yeah, I've certainly always felt that way. E.M. Forster said you weren't really doing it as a novelist if you were in control. You're only really doing it if the characters are in control. I think that's quite true, and I think that there's remarkably little science fiction written where the author's not in control.

MS: Because it's so plot-generated?

WG: Yeah, it's plot-driven. Although, you can say that *Virtual Light* is ridiculously plot-driven.

MS: It's funny. I wouldn't say that at all.

WG: Some of the reviews have said that there's this stupid little Alfred Hitchcock MacGuffin plot running through it. Welcome to the book. You want a plot, here it is. It's serviceable, it's not very complicated; the little girl stole the sunglasses and everybody wants to kill her. That's all there is to it. But on that, I hang all this other stuff. And it's the other stuff that I quite like. One very good friend whose opinion I value highly read it and said: "You know, I wish you didn't have to do that plot thing. I just wanted more *Bridge*." I did too in a way, but I couldn't make it do that. When I get these things going, I just show up for work every morning. And it's kind of like driving a truck that's out of control. There really isn't any way that I can pull back on it. That's not to say that I don't do a lot of revisions, but it's just this weird kind of unconscious thing that starts happening. Writing the last hundred pages of that I was just kind of holding my breath thinking "What the hell is this going to be?" I knew, sort of, what was going to happen, because the plot was in place. But I was wondering "What is this going to be? What are people going to think?" As it turns out, maybe it's a bit early to say, but people like it. It's doing quite well, it's going to be on the very bottom of the New York Times bestseller list. This is my first time on the New York Times list.

MS: Wasn't *Neuromancer* on the Times list?

WG: No! The New York Times took six years to review Neuromancer! Neuromancer was a tiny paperback original. They only printed four thousand copies of the initial print run. It never had any advertising or promotion at all.

MS: Welcome to the midlist.

WG: Yeah, but it's not really a midlist book because midlist books don't earn out. Or they just barely earn out, and they don't go back into print.

MS: When you were writing Neuromancer, were the sequels Burning Chrome and Mona Lisa Overdrive in your mind?

WG: I never planned that, and in fact that line at the end of Neuromancer, "And he never saw Molly again," was tacked on afterwards as this voodoo curse directed at myself to keep me from ever writing a sequel.

MF: And guess what?

WG: It just wouldn't leave me alone and kept spitting out these other things. Until it got to the end of the third one [Mona Lisa Overdrive] where I could see that the material was stretched so thin. It's kind of like trying to upholster a couch when you're an inch short. I go on tours and do book signings and people say "Aren't you going to write about Case and Molly again?" And I say "No," and they look at me with hang-dog eyes. You know the story of how Arthur Conan Doyle tried to kill Sherlock Holmes. Finally the psychic pressure of his readership forced him to bring him back from the bottom of Reichenbach Falls. I don't think that's going to happen with Neuromancer, I hope not. What I would do if I wanted to be a millionaire would be to write endless sequels to Neuromancer. My publisher would fall down moaning in ecstasy.

MS: Serials and sharecropping is the way of the present in the science-fiction field.

WG: Oh, that's so ugly.

MS: That's it! Let someone else write Neuromancer books.

WG: Actually I had an offer while I was in New York for an anthology of stories in the Neuromancer world. And they were going to give me all this money!

MS: William Gibson's Neuromancer City.

WG: Yeah. They were going to give me all this money, and I wouldn't have to do a thing except approve this book. But I wasn't going to do that. I hate that. It's such a shitty thing to do to the readers. It's like selling people styrofoam potato chips.

MF: In Virtual Light you have this interesting focus on fashion. The SWAT Trainers and so forth. There seemed to be sort of a snide comment on the whole idea.

WG: Oh I like fashion; I'm not anti-fashion. It's very interesting. I can tell you right now that I'm in Minneapolis, I've just flown from mid-town Manhattan, and I miss it. I miss it big time.

MF: But you're in Prince's home town.

MS: Or whatever he's called now.

WG: Well, Prince is the heaviest thing to ever come out of this place.

MS: I've heard it's like de facto Canada.

WG: Yeah, it's Calgary, Edmonton-like. Midwestern. It's very similar in many ways. The girls are all blonde, and there's only one way of looking cute. New York has eighteen hundred ways of looking cute.

MS: New York is perhaps further along towards the postmodern.

WG: Yeah, but I think New York was further along towards the postmodern in 1930. New York is always ahead.

MF: It's where fashion has taken on a life of its own.

WG: It's what they do. It's what it's about. The thing I like about fashion in New York is that it's not something you're being sold by Eaton's or some little boutique. It's this scary living entity. You'll be outside some incredibly expensive store that's selling some thing that's very hot and fashionable that week, and on blankets in front of the store are these completely illegal guys selling perfect copies of it. And where the original cost \$200, you can buy a fake for \$20. I'm not talking about T-shirts that say "Gucci" on the front, I'm talking about designer handbags that cost \$300. And you can buy a fake that might well have been made in the same factory by the same guy, but it doesn't have the label. That completely fascinates me. I'm a huge fan of New York.

MF: It's like the fashion abstract becomes a concrete living commodity.

WG: Yeah.

MS: Is that what Canada lacks a little bit? That energy?

WG: I don't know. Canada does lack something, and I don't know what it is. I live in Vancouver, and, in my neighbourhood, if anybody opens any kind of business that hasn't been there before — say an upscale Mexican craft shop— Someone opened one of those near my house a couple of months ago, and now there are five of them in the same block. Bad imitations of it. It's like a lack of creativity. That's one way to look at it. In other ways Canada is still very much in its creative infancy and is very smart and flexible, but it seems to lack that entrepreneurial thing. I like the entrepreneurial thing, and if you don't have it you don't have a vital cityscape. And I like the idea of individuals doing these things, of small groups of people going out and selling things. Actually it's guerrilla capitalism that Canada doesn't seem to be terribly good at. There is a theory, I never took CanLit, but I knew people who taught it, that Canadian literature is much more about group survival against a hostile, cold environment.

MS: That's Margaret Atwood's theory from *Survival*. Canada does not generate heroes who save or change society. They just maintain the status quo. They survive.

WG: I know, but that takes away all the fun. What you lose is the desperate heroic guy appearing on the corner saying "Wait a minute, I've done such and such!" And the people go, "Holy shit, we've never been able to buy such and such!" And he becomes a millionaire.

MS: I don't know if you would agree with the idea that Canada doesn't have a sense of itself in the future, or in the past. In the past it slides into the British Empire, in the future into some projected North American Federation.

WG: There's this Canadian character in Bruce Sterling's new novel who keeps wandering around saying "I'm from NAFTA, I've got a passport!" This is Bruce's response to what little time he's spent in Toronto. He says they speak Naftese.

MS: [LAUGHS]

WG: I'd like to see it be different, but I don't see how. I hate politics and politicians. The only politicians I concern myself with are very streetlevel.

MS: Local stuff. Who picks up the garbage.

MF: Guerrilla politics.

WG: Yeah. How people are behaving on the street and what flavour of CNN they're watching. The thing in Virtual Light where I establish that Canada's five or six countries. In a way that's my wake-up call to where I live. They never say anything about it, it's just there. Actually I don't think that would be a good idea, I wouldn't want to see Canada balkanize itself because it would be snapped up instantly by whoever happened to be sitting next door. But there is that tendency. All those big nineteenth-century colonial geopolitical entities are breaking down.

MS: The superstates.

WG: The Soviet Union was the very last one, and look at that. That's weird. It was the last really big one that held together.

MS: Well, actually, we are.

WG: That's a good way to look at it.

MS: Maybe it's because our origins weren't based on conquest to the same degree.

WG: I came to Canada on the eve of Trudeaumania and lived watching the mailboxes being painted beige over the royal red. It's a strange thing. Canada is such a good idea, I hope they can keep it going.