



*Message
to
Stephen
Hawking
:
When
you
gonna
make
up
your
mind?*





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This issue is dedicated to:

Robert Anton Wilson, writer and deep thinker (and very funny man), who disincorporated on 1/11/07. Hail Eris!

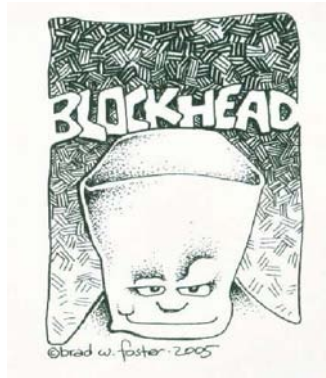
Barbaro, an equine marvel who probably never showed his true colors, but who made believers out of his doctors and many racing fans. Sadly, belief wasn't enough to end his pain; he crossed the Rainbow Bridge, his owners and doctors beside him, on 1/29/07. Hail Equus!

Gian Carlo Menotti, Italian-born U.S. composer and librettist, whose opera "Amahl and the Night Visitors" is one of the most sublime pieces of music I have had the privilege to hear. He died 2/1/07, aged 95. Ciao, Signore.

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Peregrine Nations supports HANA.

Official Eastlake Village Turtle Rescue Member.



Silent eLOCutions Letters of Comment

Marty Cantor
11825 Gilmore Street #105
North Hollywood, CA 91606

Despite my "good intentions" (or whatever they are), I never get around to reading many zines at efanzines.com -- zines get a better chance of getting read if

they are paper and I have them in-hand. I can only assume that this is the case because I always have too many things to do when I am at my computer, whereas I read zines whilst reclining in my, well, recliner on the opposite side of the room from my computer.

Which means, I guess, I hope I am not too late to request a return to paper. Thanks. [*No problem, Marty.*]

Brad W. Foster
PO Box 165246, Irving, TX 75016 bwfoster at junos dot com
www dot jabberwockygraphix dot com

Got my copy of PR 6.3 in the mail, odd feeling to see the mummy lady in print, since I'd really only seen it on the computer screen before while I was working on it. Now, at last, the drawing was "real"! Turned out nice, but the next one will be even better. (I like your "...she's come undone.." subtitle!) [*Courtesy of the Guess Who song of the same title; they were a Canadian band with a string of hit songs in the 1970s.*] The color work here was rather subtle, and I'm thinking I could try one of my more cartoony ideas, and get brighter and splashier with the color. Each of these is a new experiment to try to learn something. I don't think I'll ever get to Alan White's level of those vibrant colors with textures and levels and such, but still having

fun coloring in my little doodles!

I liked that Cy Chauvin remembered the Calvin & Hobbes cartoon about how the world itself used to be in black and white. When that was printed I clipped it from the paper, matted it and it hangs in my studio.

All the talk about "bad" dogs reminds me of our summer adventures with Butters, the "Pitbull"/Lab mix that someone abandoned in our cul-de-sac. He was a BIG dog, but with huge, sweet eyes. He would hang around here, not letting anyone approach him. Found out we weren't getting any mail delivery because the postman was too scared to get out of his truck when he saw this dog (that ran away from everyone, the big dog I saw sitting in the middle of the street, his tail wagging like crazy, his whole body yearning to go play with the kids around the corner playing in the street, but obviously also scared to approach them). And of course, we didn't get any sort of sign of what was going on until we called wondering why we had gotten no mail for five days. Anyway, we put some dog food and water out by the edge of our garage, hoping we could get him to get used to us and we might be able to help find a place for him. Some of the other neighbors would also put out food, though they didn't seem to be trying to help so much as giving him their leftovers. When we saw him trying to eat out of a chili can, we realized the neighbors were idiots, and Cindy worked her magic and got him to come to her, and moved him into our backyard.

This turned out to be the sweetest, most gentle-natured dog I'd ever met. He took to Cindy right away (but then about every living thing on the planet takes to Cindy, lucky I got to her first!), but would always be a bit nervous of me when I first approached, until he let me touch him. We figured somebody had treated him badly, then abandoned him when he didn't turn nasty, just scared. Cindy named him Butterscotch for his pretty golden color. I liked Butters after the character from "South Park" with the sweet disposition.

We found a local rescue group who looked for homes for big dogs, but they couldn't take him in, and we ended up being his

"Foster" parents for a couple of weeks. Then a young couple saw his pic on the web, and we passed him over to them. Visited a few weeks later, and while he remembered us, seemed very happy with them, especially since the man went running with him every afternoon. Big dogs need that room to run, and we had nothing like that here. So, we're in the "it's not the breed, it's the owner" camp as well when it comes to identifying problems.

Cindy has come under the spell of Donna Andrews with her mystery series as well. (Oh, I like them too, but Cindy is a major fan now!)

Oh, and thanks for the kind words about my cover, and the plug for the website. It is still unfinished, but hoping to polish things up in the next few months. Also thinking of how to turn my old Geocities site into a more fan-oriented edition than this business-oriented one. You know, it's like potato chips, you can't put up just ONE website!

E. B. Frohvet

4716 Dorey Hall Dr. #506, Ellicott City, MD 21042

Nov. 24, 2006

"It is understood that a man may own more than one name."

-- Chief Ven kelBatien Girisco, [The Tomorrow Log](#)

"I have mane names..."

-- the Lady of Green Silences, [Three Against the Witch World](#)

In the beginning there was the name on my birth certificate, which I have heard mangled so often that I recently walked out of a meeting, announcing, "I don't care to do business with someone who can't pronounce my name." In late 1992 I invented "E.B. Frohvet" for a single use; when I started my fanzine in 1996, it was available and

conveniently anonymous. I have also, briefly, used another fannish pen name. Lately I've taken to heading my return address as "No One of Any Importance" ... whatever it lacks in elegance, it recovers in being true. The prospect of having no name at all rather appeals to me. [*It's the allure of the freedom one imagines in such a disappearing act, I think; but then, how would you collect Social Security when you retire? <grin>*]

I recall the phrase "she's come undone" from a song lyric. It appears as if the young lady of **Brad Foster's** cover art would have come undone without her ribbons being disconnected; they were not going to take that kind of gravitational stress for long.

Sheryl Birkhead: Not sure how the topic came up, but you can buy 11-inch fireplace matches in many places. One admires your attempt to make sense of the Lost Cause numbers, but I have my doubts. For one, there's a lot of overlap between fanzine mailing lists; for another, as you say, many fanzine readers (me for one) do not attend Worldcon.

There's a petting zoo up the road at Clark's Farm -- still a working farm, but the extracurricular stuff probably helps pay the bills.

Jason K. Burnett: Far be it from me to point out that, e.g., *Mimosa* was a perennial Hugo nominee and received the award multiple times for years in which it produced only one issue. The problem with changing the rules is that the Business Meeting is run as a private fiefdom by BNFs and their friends, and they are under no obligation even to let anyone else speak. (The voice of experience...) I will differ with Ye Editrix's comment, in that the best of Andre Norton's work was before 1980, and most of those are no longer likely to be in public libraries. [*When's the last time you looked in your local library?*] I could send you a list of suggestions if you wish.

All the Dobermanns I have encountered either ignored me, or were aggressively vicious. On the other hand, I've never met a Golden Retriever who was not outgoingly friendly to everyone. All a matter of training? Sorry, I don't buy it. [*Please recall that I never said it was*

all a matter of training. I would say that most of the time, it's a matter of training -- the human, that is. When humans learn pack behavior and use it to live peacefully with their canines, there is no problem dog unless the dog has an organic problem (body chemistry imbalance, brain tumor, etc.). Watching Cesar Millan work with all kinds of "problem" dogs on "The Dog Whisperer" recently on the National Geographic Channel (if you don't get that channel, check your local library for DVDs of the episodes) has opened my eyes to this way of living with canines. I suggest you watch a few episodes. Many dogs are bred for specific characteristics, but they will all obey the pack law if humans understand it and implement it correctly. Additionally, I suspect you haven't met nearly as many dogs as I have (I go out of my way to meet them, because I'm keeping a dog life list, as birders keep bird life lists), therefore your sample is likely smaller and your experiences skewed as a result. Judging all Dobies only by the experiences you've had with them is like judging all the people in one state or of one political persuasion based on the few in those categories one has encountered. It's a prejudice you might consider trying to overcome.]

Lloyd Penney: The description of running into a moose ("The moose might look around to see what happened") reminded me of the charming scene in Palmer's Emergence in which the heroes have a similar encounter with a rhinoceros.

John Purcell: There's a very fine music school in Baltimore, called the Peabody Conservatory, and I'm sure they teach composition. There was a time when I used to go there fairly often; the student recitals were open to the public for nominal admission costs.

Peter Sullivan: Well, it's an actual dwarf orange tree, in a large green plastic pot, and I put in on the patio every year from May to September. If you can make something dirty out of that, I look forward to hearing it. "How many orange trees does it take to change a light bulb?" No, wait, that's not right...

Ah yes, the good ol' ICFA. While I think queer theory and, yes,

even feminist theory have been overlooked, the idea of examining the male character in "space opera, sword-and-sorcery, and superhero comics" seems unduly restrictive, if not dismissive of what SF ought to do. [It's an annual conference, they don't focus on the same thing every year.] One of the qualities I always liked about Andre Norton was precisely that her characters were not superheroes/heroines. [Dude, you gotta read some more graphic novels; superheroes have changed a lot in the last 20 years.] Come to think of it, that may be why Conan and that ilk never interested me. I get the sense that the ICFA is intended as a weekend off for slumming academics, rather than being for people who actually care about SF. [Not according to the conference reports from Arthur Hlavaty that I've read; you sequester yourself too much.]

Schenck's Steam Bird was an extrapolation of 1950s theoretical technology, never pursued on feasibility grounds, into a 1970s setting -- published in 1988. That does not meet my definition of SF. Heinlein's Starman Jones, which has computer operators translating from Arabic numbers to binary from printed tables, seems ludicrous now; but it was a reasonable extrapolation from state-of-the-art at the time, therefore, SF. [So I take it your definition of SF doesn't include fantasy, which Schenck's work appears to be? Would you not even call it science fantasy, as many have so labeled C.J. Cherryh's Morgaine novels?]

Joseph Major

1409 Christy Avenue, Louisville, Kentucky 40204-2040
jtmajor at iglou dot com Nov. 21, 2006

Silent eLOCutions:

Sheryl Birkhead: The Louisville Free Public Library also has free Internet access for people with a library card. Or for that matter with a wireless card. (I was going to say "laptop" but some people can and do lug in desktops.) This was how I played the "Matrix for Windows XP" cartoon in YouTube for Johnny Carruthers. (Neo:

“We’re trying to save the world.”

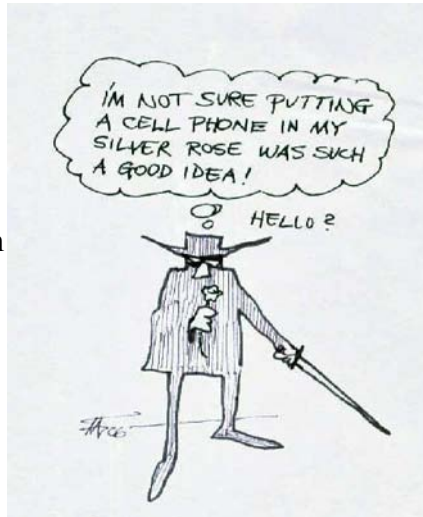
Bill: “Did you back it up first?”)

I don’t know about Fan Artist nominations, though I have been told that most of the nominees are those who appear at con art shows. Since there’s not much of an audience for fan writing at con shows (hm, a Con Fan Writing Display — well, we’ve seen weirder things) I seem to be even worse off.

Jason Burnett: Just off the top of my head, as I recall, when it was winning Hugos, *Science Fiction Review* had something like 64 pages/issue and was published quarterly. More recently, *Plokta* is more like 16-20 pages and had two issues last year (and two this year [2006], though no one outside of London has seen them). [*Actually, that’s not true: I have copies of both, and I trade with the Cabal. I asked if they minded trading paper copies of Plokta for PN via efanzines.com and they had no problem with that.*]

[*Note to all faneds: My e-mail notification list (which I use to tell fen that a new PN is up at efanzines.com) has 21 names on it; 15 fanzines are represented therein. My paper-version mailing list is restricted to 32 recipients or less. I’ve never had a problem getting locs or articles. If you’ve been opining that you don’t get enough locs because your fanzine is mostly or only online, maybe you need to look for the reason somewhere other than the media in which you produce your fanzine. I think it’s ridiculous to expect every faned to always send every other faned or fen all copies of their fanzine all the time. If one wants a copy of a fanzine, one should ask for it.*]

A little too late for everyone, I must have read Moon of Three Rings when I was in Frankfort in the Sixties. What I remember most, and very painfully, was losing half-a-dozen of their juvenile SF



books when a bag of them rolled into the Kentucky River. [*Ouch.*]

E. B. Frohvet: If there is a line between SF and techno-thrillers, it must be on the order of “this is what I say it is when I point to it.” Consider, as I’ve said, the equipment lists of Journey to the Center of the Earth (1864) which would fit in a Clancy novel. Or the ultimate ur-Clancy novel, The Battle of Dorking (1871), first in future wars — and that is clearly a work on the influence of technology on civilization, which is what some people say SF is.

I dunno, Mike Resnick once wondered if I was the fastest reader or the slowest eater in the world when I admitted to having read his The Science Fiction Professional over dinner one night. The former, of course.

Sue Jones: All too many series get stretched beyond their limit. I’d rather have had more books like Black Horses for the King than this year’s Dragon book from Anne McCaffrey. Authors have to make a living, and publishers a profit, though.

Eric Mayer: I know there was a Conan comic where he found himself in twentieth-century New York. Never did get down to Cross Plains . . .

Lyn McConchie wants to stick to cats because they do less damage. A Presa Canario will only rip out your throat if it doesn’t want to be bathed — and remember, cats never want to be bathed. [*Tell that to the cat who voluntarily (no hands on the cat) stood under running water in a bathtub in a video aired on Animal Planet’s “The Planet’s Funniest Animals.” It looked like it was enjoying the water. Many cats don’t like water, but some do.*]

Lloyd Penney: Starbucks is ridiculous per se, never mind their prices. But it’s also faddy, and does well in those towns of people with lots of dollars and no sense. [*Which, upon contemplation, can be quite a few towns, which is why Starbucks is still in business.*]

“How does anyone get to be well-read in SF?” I started in the Sixties, when that could be done. It could still be done up until about one publishing cycle after “Star Wars”. (From submission to release to bookstores.) Then there came too much to read. [*And I consider*

that A Good Thing.]

"Personal Liberty": Given that Islam covers all time and space, one can well imagine that some kafir being let into the dar al-Islam from the dar al-Harb should be punished for violating the sharia. [*Um, what? Am I misunderstanding if I reword this as "those who do not already believe should be in trouble for later believing"?*]]

Eric Mayer

Very interesting loccol ... Cy Chauvin mentions being disappointed upon rereading some old sf favorites. I've been luckier. I recently reread Alfred Bester's The Stars My Destination and Michael Moorcock's Elric of Melnibone and found them just as awesome as ever -- even if "awesome" has come and gone as trendy slang since then! At the time I read them they were "neat." Do you think some really old sf might've been "the cat's pajamas"? Doesn't feel right somehow.

Sensational cover by Brad Foster. I'll refrain from saying anything else because I can see some tasteless sexist comment on the way. But it really is an effective piece.

Lyn McConchie's article about the stupidity of national laws trying to regulate behavior all over the world was indeed horrify-ing. Imagine if every country made all its laws universally applicable? Laws have become more and more of a menace.

One thing that has happened during the past century or so is that the common law, based on legal principles handed down in court cases over the years, has been largely replaced by statutory law. A lot of the common law no doubt needed changing and was too slow to change. However, there was an underlying rationale to the common law. It arose and was refined over many years and generations by different jurists dealing with various situations. Today we have law by fiat, written by politicians trying to generate enough votes to win the next election or by whatever corporation bought the last election for said politicians. Seldom does anyone consider the larger ramifications of these laws, as Lyn does. Nor can statutory law be challenged or

changed by reference to larger, underlying legal principles in the way that the common law could, even if it was a glacial process.

When I was working at a law-school library long ago, a fellow came in off the street and demanded I show him "the law." That covers a lot of ground. What law, exactly, I wondered. After hemming and hawing he told me he wanted to see the law about crimes and guns and such. Well, there was a set of New York criminal statues at hand but that still entailed many volumes. What was the purpose of his inquiry? I want to see what they can get me for, he told me.

I'm afraid there are far more laws today than there were then and I will bet that there isn't anyone reading this fanzine (or anyone alive) who couldn't be got for something buried in those laws someplace.

I don't know that I'm up to writing a real Conan/Hammer parody. It's so much easier to come up with ideas than execute them! The only first line I can come up with is "I walked into the room and shook the rain off my loincloth." [*It's a start. Look at it like it's just for fun and you might surprise yourself.*]

Lloyd Penney

1706-24 Eva Rd., Etobicoke, ON CANADA M9C 2B2

Dec. 23, 2006

Pray for us, the walking wounded at the end of the year. Me, with my eye operation still healing up, and Yvonne, who broke her little toe just the other day. [*Get well soon.*]

I see so much discussion about the N3F, and I have read the N3F's history. So many dislike the club for what it did in the past -- well, the club then is not the club now. It has its place today; otherwise, it wouldn't exist.

I wish all of you the best of luck in job hunting, especially in that some of it may rub off on me. I am underemployed, and would like a full-time job, thank you very much. At one point, I did have a medical transcription job, but it lasted a very short time; the doctor I

was transcribing for didn't like how I was doing it, but wouldn't tell how he did like it.

My loc -- yup, got the cooler back, and it sure came in handy for other small trips we took this fall. If we can keep it in one piece, I think we'll use it for local cons here. There's no need to cater to hotel restaurants. [*Speaking of cons and jobs, you might check out the Internet Review of Science Fiction at www.irosf.com; they're asking for con reports now. They pay pretty well, too.*]

Saving my locs in my LJ continues; I actually do have close to nine years of locs on my hard drive, but it would take me forever to put them online.

John Purcell

I really liked Brad Foster's cover art. From what everybody tells me, Photoshop is a lot of fun to play with. When I went to the last Aggiecon, there was a lot of Photoshopped artwork in the Art Show, and some of it was incredible. Now it certainly looks like Brad's getting the hang of working with Photoshop; fun stuff. Nice little lino bit on the cover from the Guess Who. I liked their music back in the day.

I definitely agree with **Sheryl Birkhead's** assessment of **Alan White**; he should at least be nominated for the Fan Artist Hugo. I used some of his work back in the 1980s. As much as I personally like **David Thayer**, he needs to get more stuff into fanzines again to justify the nomination. **Sheryl** is correct about "name recognition" getting your name on the Fan Hugo ballots. This is why **Dave Langford** wins every year. Granted, he's a fine, fine writer, but his output for zines in general is minimal. Here's another person who needs to get cracking again for zines. I have always loved his fan writing, and wish he'd do more. [*I would suspect that, from his perspective, if he's able to keep winning Hugos just for Ansible and the writing he does there, there's no point in writing for other fanzines unless he's specifically asked or owes someone something.*]

<grin> *The paying work for freelancers isn't all that numerous or well paid.*]

Sheryl's number crunching might be a bit off in actual numbers, but her basic theory is sound. Actual Hugo voters who are very aware of the fanzine world really do vote, but their numbers are small compared to Worldcon members. There are a lot of fanzine fans who do attend Worldcons, but the costs are going to keep a lot of them home. At the very least, fanzine fans can buy supporting memberships to gain voting rights: this is going to have to be my strategy for Worldcons, I am afraid, which is too bad. Getting to another Worldcon would be fun -- the last one I attended was in 1978 -- but I have to face the fact that costs are exorbitantly high, and will keep me away. Maybe if I sell one of my children.... Naw. The kids can stay. Maybe a worldcon will come to Texas again and I can drive over for a couple days.

Jason Burnett, congratulations on landing some kind of a job. When I worked for Blue Cross Blue Shield back in the 80s and early 90s, I did medical terminology and transcription. Good for you on getting ready for the actuarial exams. Any age is a good age to learn skills; it all depends on your interests and focus. I didn't get into teaching until 1997, when I was 43, and went back to school to finish off my BA and rattled off a Masters degree. Smartest thing I ever did. My hope is that you have the same success.

Alexis Gilliland: Wow! 29 years is a long time to even be involved in fandom, let alone hosting a weekly club gathering at your home. That is an impressive run. The club politics involved in choosing to move to another location are none of my business, so I really can't imagine how you feel. Even so, that was an awfully nice gesture of the club to present you with a plaque honoring your years of service to WSFA, I hope you will continue to be a presence in fandom through your fan art and writings, and that any ill feelings will dissipate, allowing you to contribute to WSFA in the future.

Okay, **Jan**, I think you need to install a pun tax for your lettercolumn. **Joseph Major** owes big time for that "turtle recall" pun.

[*Nope, can't do it, I love puns and spoonerisms too much.*] Speaking of **Joe**, I did know that Lassie was played by male collies over the years. As for Robert Jordan's version of Conan, I never cared for it. In fact, I haven't read anything by Jordan for over 20 years, and will probably not start again. Misogyny has no place in sf & f, as far as I'm concerned, but there's always going to be a pocket of this somewhere in the genre.

Speaking of writing, I really think **Eric Mayer** should get to writing that Mickey Spillane-Robert E. Howard character-combo novel. Sounds like a winning combination to me!

Hey, **Lloyd Penney**: I've told you this before, but your LiveJournal loc tracking is a source of fanzines for me to send my zines to.

So **Jan**, you and I have something else in common: we switched our music majors to English majors. Wonder how many other fans have changed their majors to English, or were music majors or minors in college? Just curious.

Lyn McConchie's article on "Personal Liberty" is scary insofar as laws are going to be corrupted by those who wish to distort and twist laws to their own advantage. President Bush is the latest in a long line of men who have done so. This new New Zealand law Lynn talks about here is rooted in a meaningful way, but it's another classic example of over-reaction to the need to do something about a moral problem. Is there anyway that you folks Down There Next Door can petition your government for modifying that law?

Finally, I get to your editorial. Like you, I heartily recommend people to peruse and enjoy Brad Foster's website. There is a wealth of wonderful art therein.

It is funny that **Chris Garcia** mentioned you as an "influence" in pubbing zines. Speaking for myself -- since I'm not you, so it would be silly of me to speak as you, especially since I'm a middle-aged male and ... oh, never mind -- I have never been cited as an influence on anybody, maybe more as a bad example of some sort. *sigh* But at least people like you are enjoying my e-zines. I do run off some hard

copies of *In A Prior Lifetime* and ...*and furthermore* to mail out to those Luddites in fandom who eschew the electronic medium. Not a big deal. [*Keep in mind not everyone has a computer, and many in that group cannot afford one.*] I still enjoy the zines I get in the mail. It is a reminder of my younger days in fandom, and in my mind, a zine is a zine by any other name, yet smelleth not like a spirit duplicator. Or something like that.

Alexander R. Slate

alex dot slate at brooks dot af dot mil

Sorry this is so late. Two reasons: one, it takes me time to get around to responding to zines (I've done about 4 of them today), and two, this still went to the Lasater address and was forwarded to Ohio, rather than to my SA address. Unfortunately, the Post Office will probably stop forwarding anything sent to the Lasater address soon (I can't remember what the time limit is for forwarding.)

I've always found it interesting that *Peregrine Nations* is distributed out of Europe, rather than here in the US. I know that I've heard the reason at least once, but it's still interesting since I thought that European postage is more expensive than US postage. I know that at least one other fanzine has used agents in Europe and Asia for the printing and distribution of the zine in those areas. [*If I recall right, Ansible and Plokta both use the agent system. I have a Really Nice Guy Named Peter Sullivan who's offered to act as publisher for PN.<grin>*]

Lyn McConchie's article "Personal Liberty" was extremely interesting. It does raise an ethical quandary, but it's not really surprising that the civil libertarians fell asleep on this issue. It's commonly known that you don't want to be a child molester in prisons, they come in for very rough treatment. Lyn brings forward a lot of reasons why such a law is "wrong," but the thought of siding with child molesters just makes me want to go take a shower to get the slime off. But, if you think about it, the war crimes tribunals are



somewhat similar in nature, at least in part. Now many of the war criminals are tried for what they did to citizens of other countries, but many were also tried for what they did to citizens of their own country. Again, philosophically there is something wrong with this kind of trial, but you just don't want to excuse the activities.

Now, legally, I don't see how New Zealand can get away with the law just from a legal philosophy question, the crime is committed out of their jurisdiction. But this is why most war crimes are tried in a world court, not a national court. This is also what makes the Afghanistan and

Iraq detainee issue such a sticky one in the US from a legal standpoint. It's not these people are or aren't necessarily terrorists, but that the Bush administration can insist on its own set of rules for these people (it is only worse that these rules violate most US laws as well).

Joy V. Smith

Interesting cover with the ankh and the mummy wrap-pings, unless she ran afoul of a shredder.

I was sorry to read of Susan Butcher's passing, but I appreciated your mentioning it because I hadn't heard. Good dedication.

Re: "Silent eLOCutions" re: dogs. I wasn't going to throw myself into the fray, so to speak; but the only pit bulls and Dobies I knew personally were real sweeties. And I thought that all Labs were gentle till I saw an aggressive black Lab on "The Dog Whisperer." Depends on the dog, and, of course, the owner, though some dogs appear to be psychotic, though we don't have enough info on their background and circumstances. (For instance, the owner who was told she

should train her dog so she could remove its food...) And then there are humans...

Re: Fan fiction. Some authors got their start playing with their favorite characters and went on to invent their own worlds.

Joseph Major: Thanks for the background on Robert Jordan's Conan. Talk about taking liberties!

Thanks to **Lyn McConchie** for her book reviews. I certainly want to read Murder with Peacocks and the rest in the series. I believe I've heard good things about it before. I love a combination of humor, mystery, and interesting characters and plot.

Thanks for the fanzine and artist info.

[*Joy's blog includes helpful house hints & Architecture of the Imagination -- <http://journals.aol.com/pagadan/JoysJournal/>.]*

WAHF: Sheryl Birkhead, Paul Di Filippo, Alexis and Lee Gilliland (with a holiday letter and photo of Lee in a glitzy gold mouse-pantsuit -- congrats on that Rotsler, Alexis), John Hertz ("Hope you like the new Rotsler Award Web site..."), and Lyn McConchie (great letter, Lyn, just need a bit more space for your **other** writings...)

Murder in Much-Piddling-in-the-Marsh

by Lyn McConchie

I recently recommended a couple of village-based mystery series to a friend who lives in a large city. One was, naturally, the Miss Seeten books, and the other was Joan Hess's Maggody series. My friend, having read one of each agreed that I was right, she loved them and would probably read the lot -- but wondered if there really were any villages like those depicted in the books.

That made me smile. Overseas friends who read my own regular letters to them often wonder if it's just my own small village

that's peopled by eccentrics -- or other rural villages as well. To be frank, I'd say mine -- at some 330 people -- has no more (and no less) than most. There's two basic reasons for this sort of thing. One is that while few isolated rural villages here have been established much more than some 120 years, often they were settled en masse from another country or area where the incoming population had all been together a lot longer. Certainly here the majority came from an area in Scan-dinavia where they'd lived cheek by jowl for several hundred years already.

So you've often been getting a certain degree of inbreeding for quite a while -- or at least until cars became more common. After all, if it's good enough for Champion Bullswool Mortimer Chatsworth the third, it's good enough for his owners. Didn't do HIM any harm, did it? Not when he won last years Grand Champion at the Annual Agricultural Show and the judge said he was the finest specimen he'd ever seen.

The other reason is that in the city a neighbour who insists on counting all the fence posts around the area twice before he can run onto the rugby field tends to be quietly carted off to talk about that with someone in a white coat. In the country, and to all the kids who went through play school, primary school, intermediate, then High School with the guy, that's just Johhny. He's a damn useful player in the local Rugby club and all they do about his counting is to make sure that he arrives at the game early enough to count the posts before he's expected onto the field.

The attitude is additionally justified -- should any newcomer be silly enough to comment on it -- by the information that the guy holds down a good job in the local abattoir (where they put his desire to count things to good use in checking out boxes of export steaks) and he's devoted to his wife and kids. In a village life is live and let live.

No one much worries that Judy down the road likes to prowl around the local cemetery after dark. If you ask you'll be casually told that she's been a bit worried about body snatchers ever since, at age

five, she inadvertently watched a horror video on the topic and the next year her auntie Jackie of whom she was very fond died. Judy's been keeping an eye on Jackie's grave ever since. In both cases the village attitude is that neither person is doing any harm so why should anything be done about them?

A village, particularly a small isolated one, is a sort of niche evolution in action. A city may have a million people. So the post-counter, the half a dozen requisite inveterate busybodies, the three people who constantly write letters to the Editor, Judy, Mrs. Jackson who obsessively picks up litter in the local park, and the family who visit grandma's grave every Sunday to place deck chairs around it and chat to her about the week's doings are submerged in the higher numbers.

In a village they may form half of the resident population and hence are rather more obvious. This is compounded by most people in the village knowing most other people in the village -- and their business. In the 1970s when I lived in another small isolated rural village my phone was on a party line with three other farms as co-owners. One of the last areas in the country to have party-line phone system. I was rung one day by a city friend who was startled to have the phone answered by one of the other subscribers and be told, "It's no use ringing Lyn. Wednesday's she goes into town. She's usually home about six o'clock, you could ring then or I could take a message for her."

My friend left her name and I was given it on my return -- at six o'clock -- after which I rang her back. She was agog at the whole party-line idea, wanting to know if it wasn't an intrusion into my privacy? In some ways and at some times it was. But in an area like mine where it was a mile as the crow flies to the nearest other habitation it was a lifeline in case of trouble - and it saved my friend ringing and ringing for no reply.

Of course, it wasn't advisable to say anything on your phone that you didn't want the world to know about. But the local newspaper only came out once a week -- party-lines usefully covered the other

six days. When I stood my Welsh/Arab pony stallion at stud, and mentioned it to someone on my party-line, his book was filled in under two days, long before the paper announced it.

The people in small isolated villages are usually cooperative too. I've received mail here addressed as 'Lyn McConchie, Norsewood.' The post office knows that Norsewood is in the Manawatu Postal District. The main Manawatu sorting office knows that Norsewood mail goes out via the rural delivery office at Dannevirke. So the letter wends its way to Palmerston North in the Manawatu, then to Dannevirke in the Tararua, and from the depot there it goes to Kath and Denis who deliver to RD11, and who know every one of the hundred clients on their run.

Another examples of that sort of thing was my birthday several years ago when a friend in the city an hour south of Farside gave a pal of hers the gift to drop off in my mailbox for me. They, running late as they hurtled through Norsewood, (and not wanting to waste time hunting my place) stopped at the tearooms on the main street and gave it to the proprietor there saying it was for me. The tearooms chap wandered across the road to the arts and crafts shop run by my next door neighbour and gave my present to her. She closed her shop at

four am and, when half an hour later I went next door to give her my read newspaper as I did six nights a week, I received my present. Not bad as there was no address on it, and only 'for Lyn' as a direction.

As for eccentrics, I probably fall into that category myself. I work my sheep by hand since they are a semi-tame hobby-flock of only a couple of dozen. And with my previous cat, a harness-trained Ocicat I could sometimes be seen bringing in the sheep accompanied by a large spotted cat on a



leash. THAT used to interest the locals.

I went to a police auction in town in 1995, bought a cross-bow, and, thinking of a new book, (Ciara's Song published subsequently by Warner in 1998) absentmindedly wandered the length of the main street with the weapon over one shoulder, before hailing the taxi and heading home. No one - including the police or the taxi driver - blinked at that. As a writer it's assumed I do odd things. Although the tourist who was at the police station in town reporting his lost cellphone did give both me and the policeman I was talking to a very strange look when he overheard an enthusiastic discussion on how I could murder my neighbour without detection.

So yes, village murder mystery series can be a lot more realistic than those who live in cities, and who may never have spent time in a small rural village, realise. And there are pros and cons to living in that sort of place. Encapsulated in a (slight mis)quote from L.M. Montgomery. That "it's the sort of place where you can get up at midnight, go to your back paddock and cough. And in the morning everyone will ask you how your cold is."

I don't know about Avonlea. But they would here. Which means that you can't get away with much - but also that you'll never lie dead on your kitchen floor for months before you're found. In Norsewood -- or Much-Piddling-In-The-Marsh -- someone would have long since come to see where you were and why you'd missed the Woman's Institute/Tai Chi/Health Group meeting. And before the police arrived everyone would already have a good idea of how you'd died, what your will said, and who was getting the farm. I rather like that.

And for those who wondered where I came up with the title for this item, and possibly not being aware of any such English village, it comes from one of the "Carry On" movies. A train pulls into a very small rural railway station and as it slows you see the name of the station/village on the platform sign. It always makes me chuckle, and yes, we do have a similar joke in New Zealand. An isolated rural village here is generically referred to as Waikicamoochau. Work it out.



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[Editor's note: Chuck Connor, an eAPAn colleague, offered selections from his Granite of the Apes apazine for use here. GotA primarily concerns his sojourn on Gibraltar which began in 1994, an appropriate topic for PN under its "journeys" theme. I greatly enjoy Chuck's writing style and hope you will find it as enjoyable as I do. Bracketed italicized items in the text are Chuck's contemporary notes; those not familiar with British slang terms should not be alarmed at the use of certain words -- you'll see what I mean.]

Alien Nation: Granite Of The Apes — Part #1 by Chuck Connor

It's difficult to try and describe Gibraltar without dropping into buzzwords, local expressions, or making use of a familiarity which goes back to 1976, when things really were duty free, when a sense of belonging was evident within the ex-pat community and when the border was still closed between Gibraltar and Spain. Since those barriers have been lifted there has been no end of change and trouble, but that's not going to give you any idea of what it's like out here, is it? No, start at the beginning and work your way down....

My arrival here was the 8th of August and it was still warm from the summer. Basic temperatures of 30°C sometimes hiking up to around 35° were not unusual. Summer routine on the Rock (as it is called) kicks off at 0800 CET (Central European Time) and goes through until 1400 when everything (everything? Yes, *everything*) closes down for the day — even the schools. I'm not sure about the population figures for Gib, but I think I have seen numbers something in the region of 30,000 — which is perfectly believable as, like Hong Kong, floorspace is a premium commodity here and although there are more and more blocks of flats going up even the older buildings are 4, 5 and 6 stories high. Well, let's face it, it's only about 3 to 3½ square miles all told.

Next, what I'm about to say next may seem a little harsh, but it isn't based on anything other than experience and knowledge, and that

is the fact that the National Product of Gibraltar is pure corruption. Not a single thing takes place, even charity events or the National Lottery, without someone skimming a slice of graft from them. There are buildings here which have been put up without proper planning authority but which have gotten by through local contacts. There used to be two air travel companies here (DanAir and GB Airways — the latter being the local concern) but due to the raising of the licence fees (again, only raised for foreign companies — this is something that can be checked out in the Hall of Records as it is there in black & white) DanAir has pulled out. The bastion of the supermarket trade, Safeways now has two large shops in Gibraltar City (the name of a 4-street town clinging to the side of a chunk of rock) and it is forced, by law, to employ 45% minimum local workforce. Talking to several of the floor managers, it transpires that in-store theft is rife but, in order to survive, the workforce ratio has to be retained. I should also point out here that the floor managers are also Gibraltarians....

Again, that sounds unkind, but then we move on to the "Winstons."

Over the water in one direction you have La Linea, Spain, but just across the water you have the top of Africa, and Morocco itself. Now, for reasons far too complicated to go into here, Winston cigarettes are like rocking horse excreta in both Morocco, and Spain, but are 65p a packet in Gib.

Consider the profit incentive therefore on one packet, check that for a carton of 200 (ie, 10 packets) and then run that for a case/box of 10,000.

Now consider the equation further by introducing the fag boats which can quite easily accommodate about 10 to 15 cases and still outrun the Customs & Excise people. Work a fleet of about 8 or 9 boats, of which, say, 6 are actually carrying and the other 3 are decoys. Run all of that times seven days per week and you have an illicit income of oodles-cubed per month.

This would be all well and good if it was done on the quiet, but.... Most of the fag barons are known to the police but little can be

done about it due to the flimsy chain of association. The big boys drive around in £20,000 cars smothered in an aerial array that confused me for a short time until someone showed me an illegal scanner (a Fuji machine, very sensitive and yet simple to control and fix with) and you suddenly realise that we are talking ship-shore VHF-FM 2-way, police scanners, customs scanners and maybe even slow scan TV surveillance (there's no such thing as a licence out here so you just get something with a big enough bandwidth to carry your signal data and off you go.)

Corruption, it's one of Gibraltar's stock in trades. Take my mate, Victor. For several decades he ran, and was the owner of, a greasy called Tattie's — the main claim to fame was that it stayed open until after Bucks threw out at 0400 in the morning, so you were always guaranteed warm food and a shot of Gibraltar Dog the following day. I have to admit that since being shorebased here I have cultivated a lot of associations with the bars, bar staff and owners out here — again, it's not what you know, but *who* you know that's important for both survival and for getting things done — and talking to Victor (never Vic) I got to realising that, despite losing Tattie's in a stupid move for a nightclub called Kiss (he left himself liable for two debts and could only pay one off) he's a front man for the local "Winstons" and "Mafia" (though I think the more older Cosa Nostra/ "This Thing of Ours" is more apt) as a money launderer. Due to his stupidity, he lost Tattie's, which has now become Charlie's (though the owner's name isn't Charlie). [*Charlie's has since changed hands again and is now called Moktah's*]

Then, of course, you can get political and have a look at the GNP (Gibraltar Nationalist Party). They want to drive the British out of Gibraltar (though they want to drive us out with us leaving behind our assets and businesses intact — I mean, never let it be said that a Gibraltarian politician put in an honest day's work, ever) but also retain their independence from Spain (which is looking for the first chance it can find to send in the sociopaths — the Guardia Civil; these people will have a paragraph all to themselves, I can assure you).

This also has nothing to do with the unrest in the Arab/Moroccan workforce which has migrated over to Gibraltar only to find that there's no such thing as Social Security (no dole whatsoever, though there *is* financial support for Gibraltarian unemployed, who are complaining that the Moroccans are taking the jobs away from them and creating a cheap labour market — don't worry if you're getting lost by now, it gets more complicated as we go along....). The unemployed Moroccans regularly stage protest rallies in the "City Square" by the Governor's house, where they sit around with assorted plastic buckets out on the pavement's edge for tourists to throw loose change into. Nice work if you can get it....

There is a proper Socialist Party (but I think the police have busted them for Winston running.)

The local youth (for want of a better description) are now getting a taste of unrest and although they leave the motor-scooters and motorbikes alone (and the cars out here are not worth the effort, believe me) they have taken to liberating pushbikes/ mountain bikes, along with prams, baby buggies etc — which I find annoying, mainly as one of the first things I have done since getting out here is to get a cheap mountain bike up and running. This would be just dandy (at least you know where to look and who to get beaten up) except that most of the passing Latvian merchant ships also steal pushbikes, mountain bikes, etc, take them onboard and then sell them to the public when they get back to their home ports.

In case you're wondering, the expression "Thieving Gypsy Bastards" may well have been coined from someone leaving Gibraltar after a night out with the locals, or Latvian seamen, come to that.

In the harbour is about the only really good thing going for Gibraltar, and that's FLOKS — the Eastern Block/Russian/CIS eye surgery ship. These have been the stuff of human interest/popular science documentaries, and there is a regular flocking (or, in this case FLOKS-ing, I suppose) of people who are forever hopeful of gaining some of their eyesight back. My driving instructor (Albert Hibbert — £6.00 an hour all in, generally nice guy and ex-local copper) has

gotten together enough cash to get his wife through for an operation on both eyes (apparent promised gain in sight being 60% improvement, maybe as high as 80% depending on how they settle down) and although I am positive there is no way I will go near the knives myself (£300 for just an eye test alone) I must admit that I'm curious as to how that will all turn out. If it brings even partial sight back to people then I'm all for it (though obviously I dislike the idea of the high fees — but again, they are only charged due to the high Gibraltarian docking fees themselves).

Having mentioned the fact, I'm getting some driving experience in — with the aim of passing the test out here and converting the licence over to a UK one. The test out here is actually harder, believe it or not, owing to what is quaintly called The Aggressive Mediterranean Style of Driving — more about that another time. Things are progressing (considering I haven't been driving at all for about 10 years, and I only started on the lessons again in November last) quite well and I'm looking for a test date in January — which isn't bad considering that they drive on the right hand side of the road out here, have some weirdo signs and also have hills and tunnels you just wouldn't believe. But, as I say, that can be kept for another time.

Moving on, we come to the Spanish border which, if rumour be true, may not be open for very much longer.

Okay, now what you need is a proper atlas for this part.

You have the rock sticking up, on reclaimed land (an awful lot of the new Gibraltar groundspace is reclaimed land — Lord knows what will happen if there is ever any subsidence) you have the airport. Okay, cycle over the runways (not using them as a racetrack, Connor, even though they are the only real flat space of land around and ideal for cranking the gears up) and you come to the Gibraltar side of the frontier. This side will give you very little problem if you are going into Spain (La Linea — not quite the pits of Spain, but certainly something around the U-bend), until you get to the Spanish side and come face to face with the sociopaths in green jackets. I'll come onto

them in another paragraph... The problems now arise if you are driving through — the waiting time has been known to be pushed out to five, or even seven hours — and once in line there is very little chance of turning back until you reach certain spots in the route.

Now we shall pause and have the Guardia Civil paragraph.

You cannot miss them, and believe me if you have led a life as pure as the Blessed Virgin, the Guardia will find *something* to have you legs-spread strip-searched with internals before you can ask which way to Malaga Airport. Basic self-preservation states you do not, repeat, not, fuck around at all with these people. They are armed with a particularly heavy duty 9mm, they have night sticks that put the Americans to shame, and they have the mindless power of unquestioning authority on their side. They don't even doll up their lead pipes with any rubber trimmings.

A couple of weeks ago, at the start of November [*'94*], they put the screws on car traffic going into Spain. You had to be carrying *all* registration papers for the vehicle and yourself, plus a fire extinguisher, two road hazard triangles, spare bulbs for your headlights (bit of a bastard if you have sealed units, huh?), an emergency spare fan belt (sorry, aunty Viv, your tights don't count), a travel rug, a medical kit including mandatory surgical rubber gloves (do-it-yourself internals?), spare tire and, if you happen to wear glasses then a spare pair of those as well. And if, in the process of searching your car (under the prevention of smuggling acts that have come into play of late), they cannot find a complete set of the above then you are turned back and cannot enter Spain.

This registration papers and spares gag, apart from being a pure buggerance factor, also applies to motor scooters which, in Gibraltar, are totally unregulated. Anything above 250cc and you need a provisional license and a crash helmet, but below that you can splatter yourself any which way but healthily. This has led to a total disregard and disrespect toward road users, and it's not unusual to see three scooters abreast of each other with the riders nattering amongst themselves. More of this another time, all I'm trying to do here is set

the atmosphere a little bit.

The routine at the border is slightly different for a scooter than for a car if you fail the registration papers check. They confiscate your scooter. Simple, isn't it. No ownership papers and for all they know you are shifting it across the line to sell it to some poor Spaniard who doesn't know any better. Like I say, they have the power of pure authority on their side and to try and buck it will just push you further and further towards the top of their shit list. Apparently, one night, they confiscated some 300 machines before word got back to the others in line about getting their papers together. Those scooters that were confiscated had dockets put on them with the owners' name and address on it for collection later when they came back with the correct paperwork.

Strangely enough, none of the Spanish cars or scooters re-entering Spain via Gibraltar seemed to get stopped, searched, or even impounded. Just luck of the draw and maybe the fact that all Gibraltar number plates start with a big letter G.

Whatever, where I've been using a mountain bike I've had little hassle with the bastards and have yet to be stopped and strip-searched (yes, I know, we can but hope, can't we....) Once across then the world is my oyster, and I normally head off to one of the hypermarkets — called Pryca, the other is called Contenente and is down near Algeciras — that have sprung up in competition to the duty-free zone around the border itself. Pryca has the attraction of being cheap and also being far enough away for me to get some exercise in as well. I have now come to terms with some of the measurements that abound throughout the EU/EEC/Europe (or whatever this week's buzz word is) and am also happy with the exchange rate on the potato — er, sorry, peseta — which is fluxing around the 200 to the £ mark at the moment.

Anyway, my bike (as yet unnamed) and I tootle around doing our shopping before heading back to the border and trying to get back into Gibraltar again. This isn't as easy as it sounds because you are supposed to declare your purchases provided they are not cut flowers

or are edible. This isn't a joke, I'm serious here. Such basics as washing powder, clothing, books & magazines, items of furniture, anything that you can't cram into your mouth and digest — not forgetting the cut flowers — has to be passed over to the customs people for price checking and duty imposition.

If you are on foot you stand no bloody chance of getting away with anything. If you are in a car then you are more than likely to be stopped and have your bags rummaged through.

Ah, but when you're sweating like a rabid bull elephant, standing up on the pedals jiggling in top gear, with a rucksack that looks like it's come from the Black Lagoon and is full of blank video tape, blank audio tape, bags of biological washing powder, shirts, trousers, sports gear and other assorted items you could do real mischief with, most Customs officers just wave you by. Sod knows how much I've popped over the line in the name of Connor's Free Enterprise, nor how much I shall continue to lump through the check points (I will stop if one of the nuggets jumps out at me, but until that happens — and even then I shall claim ignorance, bat my eyes and wear my best angelic face), but Christmas is coming and although the wines & spirits are of comparable prices, when I have to pay anything from 99p to £1.50 for a loaf of bread on the Gibraltar side of the line (and something like £5.00 for an E180 blank video, compared to £2.50 to £3.50 from Pryca) I shall have no qualms about ripping off the system and goodies-running to my heart's content.

And there you have it for now. Next [installment] will see me talking more about the service accommodation we have to live in (hot and cold running drafts, brown outs, water drops, and more besides) and by "we" that's me and "Topsy" Turner (strange guy, take my word for it), more on Gibraltar itself, and also of the more regular social life. Though, as has been said by John D. Rickett in a private letter, there really isn't that much to write home about — except when the Spanish Ecological Party start catapulting pollution over the border into Gibraltar, or the local library, or the second-hand book market, or the discovery of a piece of a lost library, or trying to get

involved with night classes, or how to do egg noodles with a toaster, or tell you about the rains, or the rock apes (the real ones, not the locals) or the Rock itself.



A Feast of Jackals

book reviews by divers hands

Artifact by Gregory Benford, 1987

An archeological expedition in Greece discovers a strange black cube with an amber cone within an ancient Greek burial chamber.

This novel has both a human story and adventure – a dispute between the woman who is the leader of the American expedition, and a Greek involved in a revolution in Greece – and an wonderfully intense scientific puzzle. Benford attempts to make

his characters real individuals, and there is a good thriller as the Americans attempt to escape from Greece, but both the thriller and the characters are overshadowed by the black cube. It's not an alien artifact, but a pair of singularities encased within black stone, stabilized by their own attraction/repulsion (like a pair of magnets?), if I can remember and interpret Benford's science correctly. I don't know if anyone has combined physics and archaeology together, but the book simply buzzes with that kind of excitement. I think I forgot how good a true hard science fiction novel can be.

But is the rest of the story really necessary? It does become something of a horrific cartoon when one of the separated singularities bores a hole through the Greek army officer (the novel's villain). Benford himself has often asked that very question about balancing hard science and the human story in sf, and what is more important, the science or the characters?

---Cy Chauvin

The Forge of God by Greg Bear, 1987

A dark volcanic cinder cone is discovered in Death Valley, and a strange granite rock formation in the great Victoria Desert in Australia. Both formations have never been seen before; are they alien spacecrafts?

This is a real hard science novel, and (perhaps) the ultimate disaster novel: in the end the physical earth is destroyed. The means of destruction is unusual -- two neutronium objects are dropped into the earth, and slowly orbit towards its core; these super-dense objects only find the earth's interior (comparatively) slightly thicker than air.

I don't care much for the multi-story split character technique adapted from the best-seller thriller mode as used in this novel. A couple of Bear's characters become real people by the novel's end, and while hard science is the star of this book, it could have been a better novel if there hadn't been so many characters and stories happening at one time.

The apparent motivation of the planet-eaters (the aliens who ultimately destroy the earth) is the quest for raw materials, but blowing up one earth-sized planet would yield materials for their self-reproducing robotic machines for millions of years. Bear explains how thin the crust is in comparison to the volume of the earth by noting that a pencil line would be a far too thick for the crust in an average drawing of the earth; the earth would have to be drawn to the size of a gymnasium for pencil-width to be proportionally representative of the crust.) Yet more than one earth-sized planet has been destroyed. (And why weren't Venus or Mars destroyed for their raw materials instead?)

But you have to give the author the benefit of the doubt, especially in regards to the motivations of aliens, otherwise there could be no novel. (And no, I don't think it is revealing too much to state that the earth is destroyed in this book, because that was revealed in this book's sequel, which was actually published first!)

---Cy Chauvin

Dead Witch Walking by Kim Harrison, May 2004

This book, first in a new series, is part of a new sub-genre trend, crossovers mixing mystery with dark fantasy. There have been a growing number of these over the past two years and this book is another of the predominantly mystery/vampire/witch ones.

Unfortunately it isn't a good example so far as I'm concerned. I found it to have neither

engrossing characters nor the touch of humor that others in the sub-genre usually provide and I found it almost impossible to get into.

Rachel Morgan used to work for a section of a police department, her superior disliked her, ruined her career, (reasons never satisfactorily explained) and eventually Rachel quit. With her went a vampire who worked for the same department and a pixie, both of whom became her partners in a new business, bounty-hunting.

The pixie is supposed to be the 'humor' I believe - unhappily he is merely irritating - and the vampire is supposed to provide the suspense and threat. Threat level and suspense provided are low-level at best, and the vampire character provides little in the way of interesting interaction with the other characters. There is a lot of gratuitous violence and exposition, very little genuine mystery, and the writing is mediocre.

I have to say I wouldn't recommend this book (or series if it's going to be,) to any of the PN readers. It needs editing down by about 30%, and almost everything else needs beefing up. If you want to pay for something in this sub-genre, you can do a lot better with the Madelaine Harris "Sookie" books.

---Lyn McConchie

Tatja Grimm's World by Vernor Vinge, 2005

This is actually a fix-up of two shorter works previously published ("The Barbarian Princess" in *Analog*, Sept. 1986 and

"Grimm's Story" in the anthology *Orbit 4*, 1968) and the second and third parts were previously published as *Grimm's World* (Berkley, 1969), all in different forms (read: earlier versions, at the very least).

Tatja Grimm starts out as an apparent primitive in comparison to the shipboard conglomerate Tarulle Publishing Company (yes, publishing, as in books; whodathunk it?) employees, one of whom --a Coronadas Ascuasenya, long for Con -- notices Tatja minutely examining the shadow a stick in the mud makes. Through a series of hand gestures and pidgin language, Con finds out that Tatja has walked for many days from inland to the continental shore to find people with whom she can converse. But Con decides Tatja would make a perfect live actor for one of Tarulle's most popular characters from their magazine *Fantasia*, the barbarian queen Hrala; Tarulle keeps a small circus on hand to perform scenes from the stories the magazine publishes, in order to drum up business. She talks her boss into taking Tatja aboard, and thus begins the title character's journey from the primitive to the pinnacle.

This book has a very 1950s classic-SF style feel, but not in the best sense. This is a Competent Man story turned into a Competent Woman story, and the change in sex doesn't make the story any more interesting. The peripheral details -- that most of the featured planet's commerce is conducted by sailing ships, that a publisher sites his company on a ship instead of dry land, etc. -- don't make the story stand out enough to break it free of this mold, either. Tatja ditches those who helped her once she becomes queen, and because the story is told from other viewpoints than hers, the reader is only allowed to see her as a girl thirsting for knowledge who becomes a woman who'll use any means necessary to get off her home planet. I didn't much like her, and forming any attachment to other characters never happened, so it's difficult to care about what happens to them. Tatja Grimm's ascent to her goal -- to live among others who are as smart as she is -- is too fast, too easy, and too pat a plot.

Tatja Grimm's World is being touted as Vinge's first full-length novel. I think that's deceptive, and I think Vinge could have allowed

something more accomplished into print, given his later output and recognition. Vinge fans will want to have it for their collections, I suppose, but others can give it a pass and not miss anything.

---J.G. Stinson

Blood Rites by Jim Butcher, August 2004

This sixth book in the Dresden Files series featuring the detective/wizard Harry Dresden is another crossover series, where a mystery and another genre are blended. As I've made clear before in my reviews, while I love both SF/F and mysteries, that doesn't mean I automatically like any crossover book, and indeed, too many of them seem to be written at the expense of both genres -- and at unfair expense to any purchaser. This series is not, in my opinion, one of them.

Blood Rites also starts with a great mood-setting one-liner. "The building was on fire, and it wasn't my fault." See, sets the tone at once.

Harry is hired by a film producer to get to the bottom of some strange events on and off the set of his latest movie. For a start the women around him keep dying, and on set weird events keep happening. With brilliant intuition the producer leaps to the conclusion that someone is out to get him using some sort of curse, and a friend of Harry's implores him to help. With a client like that, who needs enemies, ditto friends who get Harry involved in such things, but Harry takes the case anyhow.

After that his life becomes more fraught than usual, although, considering Harry's usual life, that isn't saying a lot. It doesn't help that it's only after he's accepted the job that he discovers the movie is porn, and the producer a wellknown producer of a string of such films. Harry doesn't approve of that (and if the reader doesn't either -- and I don't much -- I can assure you there is nothing graphic or offensive in the book in that direction.) But it does present an ethical dilemma for Harry.

I brought the first in this series (Summer Knight) when it first came out since I liked the look of it, and I'm happy to say I've found the whole series worth buying ever since. There is a reasonable mystery in each, interesting characters, and a background which is believable -- things which emphatically do not apply to many of these crossover series.

The books in the series in order are: Summer Knight, Grave Peril, Fool Moon, Storm Front, Death Masks, Blood Rites and Dead Beat. Recommended to those who like an SF or fantasy/mystery crossover by an author who knows both fields and writes them well.

---Lyn McConchie



The Pub Crawl: Fanzine Reviews

by J.G. Stinson

Pixel 7(11/06) / 8 (12/06) / 9 (01/07) --
edited and published online by David
Burton (www.efanzines.com);
catchpenny at *mw dot net*

David Burton started out his latest round of fanac with *The Catchpenny Gazette*, and then something pinged his brain and he turned it into *Pixel*, and suddenly everything fell into place. Well, maybe it took longer than that, but it sounds good that way.

Like the eponymous dots of color in a television screen, the elements of *Pixel* are now discrete hues. Most of them are from specific sources (the columns "Notes from Byzantium" by Eric Mayer, "Much Nothings About Ado" by Lee Lavell, "Whither Fandom?" by

Ted White, "Found in Collection" by Chris Garcia, and "Being Frank" by Peter Sullivan) and ably reflect their writers' interests, styles and personalities. Dave Locke's contributions aren't in the form of a column but are quite indicative of his personal flair as well. This is a solid, nicely varied structure for a fanzine, and one has some regret that it isn't available in paper form for those not online (and let's face it, paper-based fanac continues to be too expensive for a lot of fen who might otherwise engage in it). But maybe some fen will print out copies for fan friends not online, so they can experience the quality writing contained in *Pixel*.

Of particular note in design terms concerning these three issues is the adoption of the lettercol structure wherein comments are grouped according to column title. This is a clever idea. If Dave is copying it from an earlier faned, I applaud his bringing it back where newer fen like me can exude praise for it. If it's original to Dave, dude, you rock even stronger for it. I wish I'd rediscovered/thought of it first. You cad. (Langford gets "You dog" from -- who is it, Pat Cadigan? -- and Dave Burton gets "You cad" from me; shouldn't everyone have a tag line?)

And then there's the overall design of the thing. It makes my design efforts look like a high-schooler's second-stage fanzine (one up from crudzine), and it makes my teeth gnash in envy. But then they stop because I am too pleased looking at such a fine publication to be envious for more than a moment. From the cover art to the interior illos (and will someone please tell Brad Foster that he needs to spread the wealth in that area? Yes, yes, I know I just had a color cover from him but I want MORE), Dave composes a lovely read, and barely lets the reader know he's there, most times.

One tiny nit to pick: that's the dropped-words syndrome that seems to have infected an otherwise pristine publication. As a proofreader, this has a slam-into-a-wall effect on me (and my own fanzine isn't perfect, let's get that out front) no matter what I'm reading (and I really despise it in printed books -- those people are PAID to have clean copy!). The only solution that I know of is to have

someone else read the text before publication, and even that doesn't give a 100% guarantee. So, I advise readers to do what I do: just run past it with your eyes squinted half-shut and pretend the word is actually there. It's not very painful, really -- just do so in a very large room.

In *Pixel 7*, Eric Mayer muses on corn huts, confused cats, Halloween truths, naming characters and windy days. Burton mines Mayer's online blog for these nuggets, so one must credit both for this column's content. I must say that, contrary to his own belief, Mayer writes engaging nonfiction, and I hope he continues to do so. Lee Lavell writes about the teaching gene and creating conspiracies; Ted White recounts some of the history of the mimeograph machine in fandom; Chris Garcia recounts giving a tour of the computer museum to Poul and Karen Anderson; and Peter Sullivan reviews quite a mountain of fanzines (...and furthermore 18 & 19, *Banana Wings* 27, *The Drink Tank* 100, *eAPA* 30, *eI* 28, *Nice Distinctions* 15, *Skyrack* 1-96, *Steam Engine Time* 5, and *Vegas Fandom Weekly* 86). (Thanks for the nice words about SET 5, Peter!) There are also a healthy set of locs and a "Finis" editorial from Burton himself. The only article I skimmed was White's, even though it was well written, because I have no emotional capital invested in mimeos or that era of fandom. I presume those who do enjoyed the article.

Ish 8 features Mayer musing on home and its meaning, Lavell on the myth of fractured fandom, Dave Locke on Godzilla, White on the politics of fandom and the WSFA incident (trying to be non-inflammatory here, folks), a cryptozoology piece by "newcomer" Tim E. Cassidy, more fanzine reviews from Sullivan (*The Drink Tank* 103, *In A Prior Lifetime* 16, *The Orphan Scrivener* 41, *It Goes on the Shelf* 28 [with a faboo Brad Foster cover featuring HPL, just had to mention it!], *Prolapse* 3, *Science Fiction/San Francisco*, and *Vegas Fandom Weekly* 87) and the lettercol. I read the whole thing this time, and it was a most absorbing read.

Mayer warns readers about what moisture can do to increase your postage costs (I never even considered this, and have to thank

him for mentioning it) in Ish 9, and entertains thots on some winter holiday topics, while Brad Foster just rocks with the illos to accompany the column. In a fairer world, Foster would be making money hand over fist for his art. Maybe some day soon, in this world, he will. Lavell describes a school Christmas pageant with some whupsis and how things used to be in her neck of the woods. Chris Garcia explains how finding a copy of the 2002 Worldcon (Con Jose) programme book in a bok of stuff led him on a detecting adventure, and Dave Locke writes about a draft physical from the 1960s in another of his humorous medical stories.

Sullivan reviews the latest numbers of *Banana Wings*, *eI*, *Peregrine Nations* (thanks, Peter!), and *Science Fiction Five-Yearly*.

I deliberately saved Ted White's column for last mention here, because it personally involves me. Given the information he had at the time and from my personal perspective, Ted's recounting of the recent brouhaha on the fmzfen Internet mailing list is accurate. I was asked for, and provided, a response to this column installment by editor Burton, which was pubbed in the following ish of *Pixel*. If I were to comment further, I'd have to explain the whole thing, and it'd be better if you went and read it yourself. I'll only add that I liked the way Ted wrote it (structurally, with a faanish twist), that it's highly unlikely that our individual opinions about the N3F will ever change, and I'm willing to leave it at that.

Talk about Pixel to your friends who haven't seen it. Print out a copy for your friends who aren't online. It deserves a wider readership.

Prolapse Number 4, December 2006 -- edited by Peter Weston, 53 Wyvern Road, Sutton Coldfield, B74 2PS, UK. or pr dot weston at btinternet dot com." *The Usual* is presumed; inquire first.

After 23 years and the first two ishes of *Prolapse*, British fan Peter Weston (author of a fanhistory, *With Stars In My Eyes*, which garnered much praise) decided to pub yet another ish in 2006, and

provided printed and electronic versions nearly simultaneously (via efanzines.com). This time he's sent the printed version out first "to those who seem to want them" and then posted the PDF, due to a technical whupsis that he didn't know about until recipients of the PDF tried opening it with versions of Acrobat older than the current one (I think it's up to version 7 now).

Debates about the advisability of having the latest bells and whistles aside, *Prolapse 4* reflects on BSFA and conrunning (or not) on the occasion of *Vector's* 250th ish, the 1959 Brumcon (with lots of photos), what appears to be an Internet mailing-list discussion on Doc Weir, and a loccol. He's also announced: "...the previous *Prolapse* was unavoidably a time-travelling issue, and I think I'm going to carry on trawling around in the backwaters of British fan-history, even if this does rather limit my audience. Rob Hansen has done the hard work in recording facts and figures in his excellent *Then*, and now – as Ian Sorensen says elsewhere in this issue – there's a need for eyewitness accounts of some of these events without the objective voiceover of the historian. I feel there's a certain fascination in exhuming these old bones, with many good stories so far left untold. It's also amazing what can be unearthed with some research and a little good luck."

In P3, Weston presented a look back at the Birmingham sf fandom scene in the 1980s, from the viewpoints of William McCabe and Sandra Bond, among others, and featured a couple of Joseph Nicholas letters.

P4 contains the aftermath of that presentation. I thought Joseph Nicholas was an aberration of Britfandom, but it appears I was wrong. More than one person sent Peter Weston locs on P3 to say that Nicholas was, well, some things I don't generally print here, but then others said similar things about William McCabe's article.

It would be safe to say that no one has enough money to pay me to travel back in time to 1980s British SF fandom, ever. If there is even a hint of veracity in the descriptions from various sources of what went on back then, especially in Birmingham fandom, then that's the last place I'd ever want to go. It looks very much to me as though

Nicholas has no idea what effect his words have had on their targets, nor is he likely to understand the effect on those reading similar comments decades later. The kind of thing he characterizes as commonly used twenty years ago is nothing short of monstrous, regardless of the time period. How would you feel if you were, for instance, Thatfan and someone said "I'd rather stick to replaying my treasured memory of Thisfan telling Thatfan to 'f*ck off or I will kill you' at Whatevercon in 1990. Ah, *that's* better!" Is this the welcoming hand of fandom I heard so much about before I actually joined it? It is, if the other hand was a iron fist.

It's to Peter Weston's credit that he takes Joseph Nicholas (and others who are as casually brutal in their words as Nicholas is) to task for what he wrote then, and what he continues to write today. To their credit, other loccers in thish do the same as Weston. How anyone could commit the viciousness of such "natural give-and-take" is unthinkable to me. Don't we have enough problems in life without people who we thought were colleagues in the world of fandom calling us such horrendous things? From what's presented in *Prolapse*, fandom as Birmingham practiced it had a very sadomasochist attitude. Fen in general are different folk from the mainstream, and why anyone would make any fan feel even more like an outsider makes no sense. Maybe it's down to what Dr. Kari Maud called, in her loc, " 'territorial and clan warfare.' "

Of course, if one is a vicious snob who's already got an in-group put together and won't suffer anyone else to even consider becoming part of it, that kind of attitude makes perfect sense.

I loathe snobs.

I like Peter Weston for *Prolapse 4*. Thanks, Peter.

Fandom also owes him thanks for including what may be one of the very few photos in existence of Chris Garcia **not** smiling, and it's a very good photo too. I find that I like seeing a photo of the loccer with their loc; it makes me feel more of an immediate connection to each writer than I would otherwise experience. But I suppose that means that if I ever loc *Prolapse*, I might be asked to provide a photo,

unless Peter decides to use the one of me that Earl Kemp included in one of the early issues of *eI*. Either of those would be preferable to a current photo, as I desperately need a perm....



Will the Real Swamp Thing Please Stand Up?

editorial

I considered mentioning the events on *fmzfen* of a few months ago and my part in them, but decided against it because it's been delineated well enough by someone else. If you're interested, read Issues 9 and 10 of David Burton's most excellent fanzine *Pixel*, as well as my reviews of that fanzine in *this*. As far as I'm concerned, the matter is closed and I

choose not to discuss it further. My readers, however, may talk amongst themselves about it.

Several months ago, I decided to rent booths at as many holiday craft shows in my area as I thought I could reasonably manage. I ended up doing two of them. Fortunately for me, they were the two shows that are the best attended, so I probably did better in sales than I would have at smaller shows. I netted \$200 altogether, but when I sat down and did my accounts, I ended up about \$150 in the red (material costs, booth rentals, etc.) -- which I didn't think was too bad. I'd used a lot of free materials, so I count the venture a success. The "Pretty Things" ad in *this* showcases some of the wirework jewelry I make. If you're interested, you know how to reach me. I also do knitted and crocheted items, but I think my readers might be better off shopping locally for those handmade

items, or visiting Trinlay Khadro's Silly Kitty store on eBay. My mother is nuts about the Harry Potteresque (must say it that way to avoid trademark police) scarf Trin' made and I bought for her.

The Free Book Deal

Contest 19 trumpeted, "What's the exact name of the publisher of Joseph Major's Heinlein's Children?" Spelling and punctuation counted in this one, folks. The correct answer was Advent:Publishers, Inc. Thanks to all who entered.

The regular-mail contest has two winners. Why? Because I say so, and because both Jason K. Burnett and Lyn McConchie sent in entries and expressed specific interest in The Book of Ballads. As it happens, I ended up with two copies of the book, and would be glad to award one each to Jason and Lyn. Congratulations to you both.

There being no winner in the online contest (only one entry, and that was an incorrect answer), Ramsey Campbell's The Darkest Part of the Woods will be donated to my local library.

Contest 20 is announced. "What word does Gully Foyle have tattooed on his face in Alfred Bester's The Stars My Destination?" Any form of the word with the correct letters in the correct sequence will be counted as a correct answer (in homage to Bester's use of a variety of fonts and font sizes in the referenced work).

The regular-mail prize is Drum Warning (1st ed. hc, July 1996), Book One of The Drums of Chaos series by the late Jo Clayton. The online prize is Stealing the Elf-King's Roses by Diane Duane (1st printing pb, 2002), a particularly good genre crossover novel (mystery-fantasy) featuring L.A. prosecutor/detective/Sight-gifted Lee Enfield. **Deadline is April 3, 2007.**