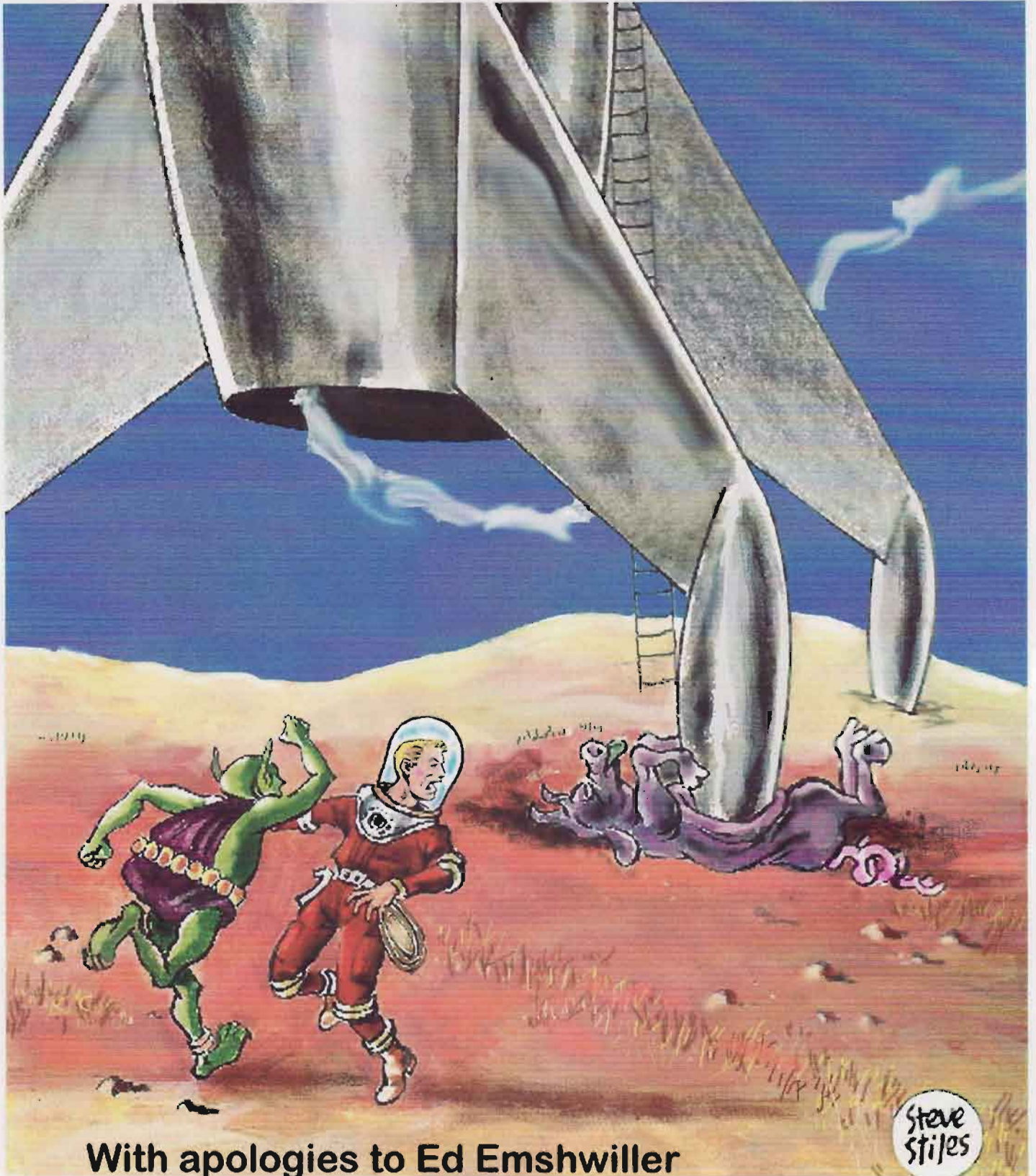


The Reluctant Famulus 66



The Reluctant Famulus #66

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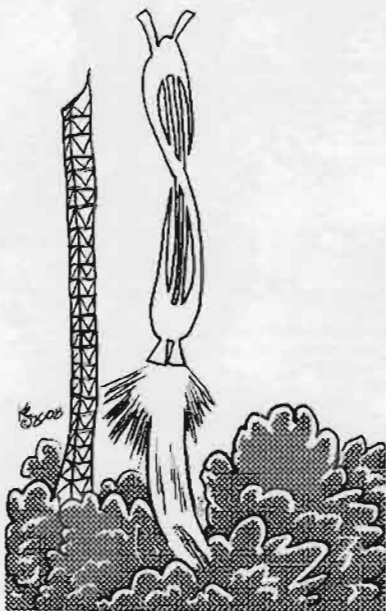
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The Reluctant Famulus

Introduction--Timidly Going Where No Man . . .

There are those against human exploration of space because, they say, it's much too costly and dangerous to human lives. Essentially they believe that we humans should stay, safe and secure, on this planet and send out robot probes to do all the exploration because it would be much cheaper and there would be no chance of anyone dying either on the way or after arriving at the chosen destination.



Yet we humans continue to wage wars over a vast spectrum of disagreements and which result in a far greater number of lives lost in those wars—and all because we so-called humans just seem to enjoy and delight in killing each other for any or no reason at all or for political ones. And we have spent great amounts of money on munitions and other materiel to fight those wars, money that could have gone to better, more useful purposes.

Also—as statistics probably support—more lives are lost in highway accidents on any given day/week/month than have been lost in space exploration since its beginnings. Yet we foolish humans continue to get into swift, lethal vehicles and take to the roads in spite of the danger.

Yes, we could play it safe and send out robot probes to explore deep space and the surfaces of other planets, taking minute samples of soil, rocks, the atmosphere and analyzing them so that we,

thousands or millions of miles away, can examine the results from our nice, safe, secure non-lethal (no—maybe not, because surely death could occur there as well) labs. We could follow by TV transmissions the progress or all that the probes see from those safe control room and oo and ahh at the wonders we can see—but never touch.

But to me there's something sadly lacking in that method of exploration. It's like standing atop a mountain and looking through binoculars or telescopes at another, distant, mountain or a valley or plain because it's too dangerous to go there. There might be raging rivers, man-eating beasts, deep chasms, blazing hot deserts, deadly jungles or forests, or who knows what other dire obstacles and someone might get hurt or killed along the way.

We seem to have forgotten about the brave explorers who crossed ocean for the first time to explore uncharted territories and learn what was there. Or those brave souls who came to North American to settle and build homes, villages, and cities and who left behind family and friends and safe, secure, familiar lives in hope of something better. Where would humankind be if everyone back then had taken the attitude that it's too costly and people's lives might be lost (as many were, as history records) on the way or after arriving at their destination. What would it be like now if people decided, "Let's just stay where we are and not take the chance. Better to face death we know here than the unexpected death over there."

When one stops to think about it, going on a highway trip of any length could be a dangerous and hazardous experience with the potential for death from the moment the traveler leaves home until the time he or she arrives at his or her destination whether it's to a workplace, the store, or simply to visit friends and relatives. I try not to think of it but now and then the picture of all those cars and trucks whizzing along the highway and the destruction and death they could cause makes me shudder and wonder if I really want to get into my van and go anywhere. Who knows what might happen. No matter how carefully I drive something could go

wrong; the laws of chance/probability and statistics almost demand it. A drunk driver going the wrong way, a driver suffering a heart attack, an out-of-control semi or automobile, a tire blowing out (on the vehicle I drive or another in my immediate vicinity) and causing a possibly fatal accident. One sees and hears news reports of such things frequently.

Outer space is probably the harshest environment in which a human could be—unprotected. And yet men and women have been there.

People climb mountains, not because they need to but because they want to. People have died climbing mountains. Let's face it, people are going to die no matter what they do or where they are. It's a tragedy, it's regrettable, but it's inevitable.

Yet, the eminent gentleman and theoretician Stephen Hawking believes that if mankind hopes to continue for thousands of years (Provided such a thing is possible and the course of evolution doesn't dictate otherwise.) humans "will have to boldly go where no man has gone before". Unfortunately, Dr. Hawking is one of a relatively small number of people who believes so and is vastly outnumbered by the majority and particularly too many short-sighted or timid politicians.

I shouldn't be so pessimistic, however, because there are still plans around for at least a limited amount of manned space explorations. According to a news report I read online there are at least half a dozen program in the works from various nations and nations' alliances.

First, of course, is NASA and its Project Constellation which intends to have a man on the moon by 2020, and a lunar outpost sometime thereafter. While the current shuttle program will be ending by 2010 NASA has some replacement spacecraft in the works. There are the Orion Crew Exploration Vehicle (CEV), somewhat larger than the earlier craft, at 16.5' in diameter. It's capable of holding up to four astronauts and support for them for up to four months. The Project Ares launch vehicles which consists of Ares I Launch Vehicle capable of lifting 55,000 pounds into space; Ares IV (no mention of numbers II & III) which can stay in low Earth orbit for up to three months; Ares V cargo launch vehicle which can lift 286,000 pounds into low Earth orbit; and, last, Altair Lander designed to hold up to four astronauts for travel on the Moon's surface with supplies to construct an outpost.

Europe and Russia have combined to develop the Advanced Crew Transport System (ACT). They

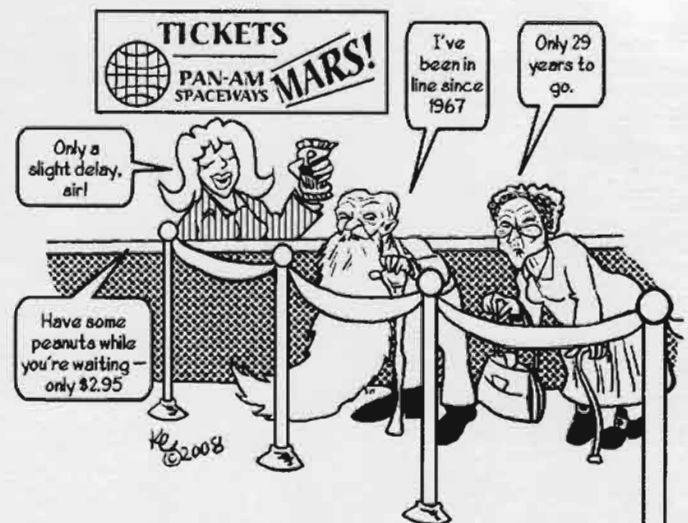
estimate their first manned launch in 2018 from the newly-built Russian spaceport. They also have the Russian Kliper launch vehicle which can carry up to thirteen tons for missions up to fifteen days and can remain in as much as 360 days in orbit.

Europe on its own has modified a space freighter called the Automated Transfer Vehicle to be a three-man craft to take astronauts into low-Earth orbit, and possibly to the International Space Station.

Asia, China, India, and Japan plan a manned mission with the Shenzhou spacecraft, to launch after the 2008 Beijing Olympics. India has the Chandrayaan 1 for scientific studies of the Moon. Japan has the HII Transfer Vehicle (HTV) which can carry six tons and would transport food, water, and project materials—presumably to the space station. There are also plans to put a man on the Moon by 2020 and a Lunar base by 2030.

Finally, NASA plans to have "a man on Mars by 2037"

Even so, I fear I shall have to resign myself to the inescapable fact that I'll never see in my lifetime a manned mission to Mars, or humans landing on any other non-terrestrial object but the Moon. What a shame the future couldn't be what it really should be, something more than iPods, Virtual Reality, MP3 players and all the other gadgets and gee gaws that entertain shallow, bored people with no great aspirations and limited imaginations.



The Old Kit Bag #6:

It's A Mystery To Me!

Part Two

By Robert Sabella

After reading Iain Pears' **An Instance of the Fingerpost** and **A Dream of Scipio** early in this decade, I pretty much stuck to future mysteries such as Jack McDevitt's *Alex Benedict* series. But my love of Italian history finally overwhelmed me and I decided to try Steven Saylor's acclaimed series of *Roma Sub Rosa* mysteries set during the time of Julius Caesar.

Reading them out of order, I started with the **The Judgment of Caesar**, the tale of Gordianus-the-Finder who has left Rome with his ailing wife Bethesda, his adopted son Rupa and two slave boys. Bethesda is a native Egyptian who is returning to swim in the Nile, while Rupa, another native, wants to scatter the ashes of his deceased sister in the same waters. When Gordianus encounters the fleet of Pompey, fleeing from a defeat at the hands of Julius Caesar, Gordianus' life is threatened since Pompey is his sworn enemy. After Pompey is killed by the Egyptians—in a fashion faithful to his actual historical death—Gordianus joins the retinue of teenaged king Ptolemy who is engaged in a civil war with his sister and wife Cleopatra for control of Egypt, countering the wishes of their dead father who wished them to serve as joint rulers.

Shortly afterwards Caesar's fleet arrives, causing great consternation through Alexandria. Does he intend to conquer Egypt as he has done so many other countries? Or will he take the side of one of the warring siblings and raise that person to the title of ruler of Egypt and sworn friend of Rome at the expense of the other? Caesar is another

old ally of Gordianus, although the Finder disapproves of his conquering ways and its inevitable slaughter. But what Gordianus resents the most is that his older adopted son Meto has become Caesar's closest companion and a partner in his conquest.

The Judgment of Caesar is a well-developed historical novel chronicling the events in Egypt following Caesar's arrival. Saylor has the ability to immerse the reader in the country, making Alexandria breathe and its citizens live. Throughout the book I felt that his Egypt was real, as were Caesar and Cleopatra. Although Caesar was not the viewpoint character of the novel, he was surely the most important character. This was historical fiction at its best, telling a fascinating story around real history

Perhaps the thorniest issue in writing a novel about Caesar and Cleopatra is dealing with their relationship as honestly as possible without being overly-influenced by the many dramas and movies about them. Saylor did a good job, wherever possible following Caesar's own journal and histories written at that time. Their relationship involved the infatuation of the 52-year old Caesar with the 21-year old queen who, in his own words, made him feel like a boy again. But they were both too much the quintessential politicians, and too pre-occupied with their own power and places in history, to let passion override their other concerns. Saylor realized this and his novel reflected that belief, which I feel was appropriate.

The mystery itself began 200+ pages into the novel but never distracted from the

historical events surrounding it. Instead Saylor used the mystery to deepen the characterization of the people involved, especially that of Gordianus and his estranged son Meto. The mystery's denouement, revealed in a conversation between Gordianus and Caesar, fit the book's accuracy so well I was more pleased with it than I expected.

*

Last Seen in Massilia is the story of the siege of Massilia by Roman forces. Massilia was an ancient Greek city which evolved into modern-day Marseilles. A former ally of Rome, the city supported Pompey in his civil war with Julius Caesar, and thus resisted Caesar's attempt to enter it with armed forces. While Caesar himself took the main body of his troops to Spain, he left behind an army large enough to subdue the city were they able to break through their enormous gates.

The main character is again Gordianus the Finder who comes to Massilia seeking his adopted son Meto who was a confidante of Caesar until he supposedly turned against him in support of the Massilians. Gordianus sneaks into the city and encounters a fascinating group of characters, mostly real historical figures, although so little is known about several of them that Saylor has the leeway to create mostly fictional lives for them. They include a disgraced Roman who was exiled by the Senate under the instigation of Cicero with help from Gordianus; the ruling First Timouchous of the city whose daughter is so malformed she hides herself behind layers of veils; and Hieryonomous, an official "scapegoat" appointed by the First Timouchous to bear all the sins of the population and who is treated likely royalty until his sacrificial death by suicide at the sacred Sacrifice Rock.

Of course there is a murder which involves the First Timouchous, but it really serves as an excuse for Gordianus to explore life in the city under siege more than drive the entire plot. The climax of the novel is the arrival of Caesar into Massilia which showed the true historical fate of the city moreso than the solution to the mystery which, as in **The Judgment of Caesar**, added to the depth of the story rather than overwhelming it.

Saylor is a phenomenal storyteller who creates a vibrant, breathing world filled with believable characters living during exciting times. I am anxious to read his historical epic **Roma** and see how well he handles the sprawling landscape of several centuries' growth of the Roman Republic and subsequent empire. ❖



Adventures in the Laboratory. IV

Alfred D. Byrd

Now that time has dragged me, whimpering into my fifties, I'm no longer on science's cutting edge. Instead, along with other technicians long on experience, but short on current knowledge of the field, I've become a conservator of tradition.



By that phrase I mean one who regales impressionable (all right, bored) young things with stories of when the world (or at least I) was young. During slow lab meetings my fellow conservators and I have spoken of when television had just three or four channels, one had to cross the room to change channel or volume, and one's father took one to the pharmacy to watch him test the television's vacuum tubes in the handy-dandy vacuum-tube tester. My fellow conservators and I have held younglings in terror with tales of when, to use a computer, one had to keypunch code into Hollerith cards. The true Hook-Hand stories of slow lab meetings, though, are tales of

The Human Genome Project changed the way we work in more ways than one. To sequence the human genome before the Heat-Death of the Universe, corporations had to develop automated sequencers. Today's young researcher needs only take his or her DNA to a service center and go home to watch DVD's. Within twenty-four hours the center will have e-mailed him or her more data than we conservators could have gathered in months of work. Thanks to the wonders of automated sequencing, today's young researcher can sequence a whole genome in less time than it took one of us conservators to sequence a single gene. Even more frustrating to us conservators is that today's young researcher need never encounter any of the unholy trinity of phenol-chloroform, radioisotopes, and polyacrylamide.

To avoid turning this reminiscence into a scientific paper, I'll fast-forward through the phenol-chloroform and radioisotopes. Basically, to get the stuff that you load onto your polyacrylamide gel, you grind up a once-living organism, use concentrated phenol and chloroform to separate its useless glop from DNA, concentrate the DNA with ethanol (woe to you if the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, not to mention Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, catches you drinking this!), digest your DNA with a restriction endonuclease, and locate a fragment of interest on an agarose gel. Don't blind yourself with high-intensity ultraviolet light as you do so!

Now you divide your fragment among four different mixtures containing DNA polymerase, a buffer containing magnesium to make the enzyme work, and deoxynucleotides. Each of the four

mixtures contains also one of four radiolabeled dideoxynucleotides, A, G, T, or C. When you let the mixture cook, the polymerase starts making copies of the fragment. These keep extending as long as they incorporate deoxys, which form ether bridges with the next deoxy down the line, but stop and fall off whenever they incorporate a dideoxy, which lacks the oxygen needed for an ether bridge.

The process that I've described is not without pitfalls. Maybe someday I'll describe these in an article that I'll call **DOUBLE HELIX, TOIL AND TROUBLE**, if someone hasn't already taken that title. In any case, at the end of the process you have four mixtures containing every possible length of sequence of the original fragment, each ending in a known nucleotide. If only you could spread these out and look at them, you could learn the complete sequence of the fragment.

Luckily for you, you can! Load each of your mixtures in a separate well at the top of a polyacrylamide gel that separates sequences by length, use high voltage to drive the sequences through the gel so that they separate, dry the gel down, and slap it onto X-ray film. When you develop your film, you'll have a ladder, four lanes side by side, each for one nucleotide. When you read the ladder from top to bottom, you'll know your sequence.

Nothing could go wrong with such an elegant procedure, could it?

I can just see the eyes of other old-timers light up as they get ready to tell you just what can go wrong. Too bad for them! I'm writing this article, so I'll tell the story for them.

Let me start with polyacrylamide. Material Safety Data Sheets tell you that this chemical is a potent neurotoxin in its liquid state. Sadly for researchers, the chemical must be liquid before it gels. We face the reality that persons who worked with their brains were daily exposing themselves to a chemical that could destroy their brains. We joked about madness and watched one another for signs of its incipient

arrival. In time, though, we saw our vigil's futility. In persons who worked long hours for low pay with deadly chemicals and radiation, who could recognize any additional madness?

Next came the traumatic process of actually pouring the gel. For a ladder to be readable, its bands must be as tight and far apart as they can. In principle, then, a gel must be as long and thin as it can. In practice, the gel had to be poured between glass plates that had the dimensions of the Tycho Monolith, and were separated by plastic spacers at most a millimeter thick. You clamped two glass plates together over their side spacers, slid in a bottom spacer to keep gel from pouring out, stood the plates on end, and started pipetting polyacrylamide in from the top.

Bubbles kill the deal, as electricity doesn't travel through them. To prevent bubbles, you had to make the plates as clean and dust free as you could. Some researchers even coated their plates with Rainex or like compounds to let polyacrylamide flow in as smoothly as it could. What lets something flow smoothly in will also let it flow smoothly out. Sometimes the plates sprung leaks around their spacers. The researcher would have to clean up a toxic spill and start over.

Sometimes, despite your best efforts, bubbles formed between the plates anyway. If you could get rid of the bubbles before the polyacrylamide gelled, though, you were good to go. If the bubbles formed at the top of the plates, you might lift them out by sliding a spacer between the plates and fishing the bubbles out of the still-liquid gel. If the bubbles formed farther down, you could try tapping on the plates to break the bubbles loose so that they would float to the top and burst. Some tapped with fingers, others with handles of screwdrivers, and still others with rubber mallets. I won't deny that some used fists from time to time. Some researchers clearly believed that sulfurous incantations aided bubble-removal. In

any case it was common to hear the air turn blue around sites of gel-pouring.

Sometimes the bubbles won. The researcher would have to start over . . .

I'll pass over putting wells into the top of gels, as well-forming was the least troublesome part of the procedure. In the end you had a gel ready to be loaded with your four mixtures and run.

I've mentioned high-voltage (along with respectable amperes!) electricity. To get this through your gel, you had to stick the bottom of the plates in a lower buffer chamber, and the top of the plate into a top buffer chamber. The chambers had to be sealed with gaskets and sealant to keep buffer from going everywhere. If you did everything perfectly and applied power, current flowed from the top through the gel to the bottom and back through the power supply in a circuit that would separate your sequences.

If you didn't do everything perfectly, you faced short-circuits. When you began your run, you had to keep your hand on the power switch to kill power as soon as a short-circuit occurred. Once, though, as some labmates and I were passing a lab where a run had just been started, we heard outcries from within, and saw flames burst from the top of a gel. Who knows what might have happened had not the professor for whom I work ran in, seized a fire extinguisher, and blanketed everything with dry chemical. When this had settled, he gave the researchers an icy look and said, "Clean up this mess and start over!" The researchers and the rest of us onlookers looked at him with awe as he left with the stride of a conquering hero.

If you managed to make your run, you ended up with gel between two plates that would block radiation from exposing X-ray film. You had to get the gel off of the plates, and, of course, it does X-ray film no good for you to put wet gel onto it. Thus, you had to pop the plates apart in such a way that all of the gel stayed on one plate. When, as the gel often did, it split between the two plates, researchers many

labs away froze as they heard roars of rage and anguish from one whose gel had split

If you got the gel onto one plate, you still had to dry it, and not onto the plate! Now you had to press atop the gel a piece of filter paper cut to the gel's dimensions and peel off the filter paper in such a way that all of the gel clung to it, but none to the plate. When, as the gel often did, it split between filter paper and plate . . .

If you got all of your gel onto the filter paper, you still had to dry the gel. To do so before the radioactivity decayed, you had to dry the gel with vacuum by placing the filter paper atop what looked like a waffle iron, starting a vacuum pump attached to the waffle iron, and pulling a plastic sheet tight over the gel-paper-waffle iron assembly to form a seal. If you formed the seal well, the gel would dry smoothly onto the paper. If you broke the seal after the vacuum was applied, but before the gel dried, what looked like a marathon of worms would run through your gel as it shattered. Researchers many labs away froze as they heard roars...



If you jumped all of the hurdles so far, exposing your dried gel to X-ray film was drop-dead easy, and then all that you had to do was read your ladder. You would stare at this and intone "ACT...CAT...TAG" while a colleague recorded your revelations. On a

good ladder, bands were crystal clear at the top of the film. Owing, though, to a process called diffusion, the bands grew ever fainter and broader towards the bottom of the film. I admired my colleagues who read far farther into diffusion than I dared read. I don't say that I always agreed with what they read.

In the war on diffusion, manufacturers of electrophoresis equipment adopted a strategy that NASA might have called "longer, thinner, hotter." By these terms I mean that plates had to be longer, spacers had to be thinner, and power supplies had to put out more power.

The strategy reached its culmination in an apparatus that those of us who used it called "Darth Vader" because the stands for holding the plates and buffer chambers were made of black plastic and resembled the helmet of the arch-villain of the *Star Wars* saga. In the Darth Vader system, plates were fully a meter long, and the width of spacers could be expressed with alarmingly few digits in micrometers.

Somehow, I got the task of pouring the first Darth Vader gel in these parts. Using the time-honored system, I clamped plates onto side spacers, slid in a bottom spacer, and began to pour gel between the plates from their top. Five times I tried to pour; five times leaks or bubbles killed the deal. Manfully, I bit down screams and objurgations.

Now, when the Darth Vader apparatus had come, my colleagues and I found with it a procedure for pouring gels horizontally, by capillary action. The consensus among my colleagues was that whoever had designed this procedure had read about capillary action in ninth-grade science class, but never used capillary action to pour a gel. We envisioned toxic solution water falling everywhere...

After five failures in a row, though, I was desperate enough to try the procedure. Even madness might work when reason has failed! (Mind you, don't put that line into a scientific paper!) Setting one plate horizontally on blocks, I attached spacers to it with a water seal and rested the top inch of the upper plate

on the bottom of the lower plate. Pouring polyacrylamide from an Erlenmeyer flask onto the juncture between plates, I started sliding the upper plate forward . . .

I still had polyacrylamide left when the top of the upper plate reached the top of the lower plate. I clamped the plates together, slid in a well-making comb, and inspected my handiwork. No leaks, no bubbles. Elapsed time: less than a minute.

Stunned by my encounter with a new order of reality, I wandered into the main lab, where I told my colleagues what I'd just done. I exaggerate little when I say that a photograph of the look on their faces has gone into the Oxford English Dictionary beside the definition of 'skepticism.'

No one quite said, "No procedure in science is valid unless it can be duplicated." Still, soon I found myself back in the gel-pouring lab as I repeated my work for a roomful of eyes. No leaks, no bubbles. Less than a minute.

None of my colleagues quite bowed to me, or offered me her firstborn son. Still, I could see that they were thinking of bowing and offering. I had achieved respect second only to that which the professor had won for putting out the fire.

The Darth Vader apparatus was the Yankee Clipper of sequencing's Age of Sail. Soon the steamships of automated sequencing sent Darth Vader to dry-dock, and those of us who had worked with Darth Vader to the old sailor's home. Time will not see our like again. Now if only these butterflies would stop fluttering around my head...



What Our Future Lost When We Found It

by
Gene Stewart

When Gernsback identified scientifiction as an extension of his electronics and radio oriented publications, he knew there was an audience of readers eager to think about, and to discuss, what would come not only next in technological advances, but what would come soon. They dreamed of personal jet packs, flying cars, and robots making everyone's life easier, and they could practically taste and smell that bright future.

While Bradbury supplied the mythology of this wonderland-to-come, Asimov, Clarke, and Heinlein issued reports of robots, colonies in space, and rolling roads as urgent as any breaking news story. Gernsbackians ate up such communiqués from the looming coolness the way toddlers gobble ice cream and cake at a party.

Anticipation gave way to adaptation. Kids who'd grown up on that science fiction mind rot chose to study science and engineering. They remembered their amazing stories and that thrilling sense of wonder and gradually, using science and technology, they made as much of that bright future as they could into something real.

Maybe the details differed from the fiction but the realities came hot and heavy. Future Shock went from trendy academics to a genuine malaise as it became increasingly difficult to keep up with the advances on all fronts. Computers changed business, let us go to the moon a dozen times, then spawned the

internet and put a PC first on everyone's desk at work, then on everyone's Xmas list.

We learned terms such as modular and digital. STAR TREK'S communicators -- a clumsy if accurately descriptive term -- became first a brick based on walkie-talkies, then a cellular phone, -- no wires, Ma! -- then a Razr to cut through fashion, and now they're an iPhone with touch screen, full internet and AV, and the memory of a PC.

All along, science fiction was being written. It didn't stop at Gernsback, nor even Campbell. At first it envisioned things, then it led the way. Soon it juggled cutting-edge innovation to show new combinations like cyberpunk and black market street nano.

By now, SF limps along and can't quite keep up, and if Kurzweil's right about the Singularity, pretty soon it will be left far behind, as quaint as a sestina or some steampunk gadget. Technology changes and its continual newness passes what's reflected in our mirrorshades. Changes are passed along to society so quickly, in fact, that, by the time an SF novel is conceived, written, and published, it's already fading or hopelessly outdated.

William Gibson, one of the most visionary of SF writers, has stated SF is no longer feasible. We're all writing either of the immediate past or, at best, trying to capture contemporary memory. The future's been and

gone. As Gibson says, it's here, but it's not widely distributed.

In response to this constant bombardment of scientific and technological advances, much SF began focusing on the far future, and took on a pretty, but blurry, fantasy tint.

This tint has by now hardened into a glaze of thousand-yard stares and kiln-fired shiny reality denial.

Realism is what our future lost when we found it. Or when it found us. Anticipation gave way to delight, then anxiety, then stress, and now shell shock. We are so battered by the pressure waves of newness in real life that we've withdrawn back into space opera, science fantasy, and other moribund forms from those good old days we recall so fondly.

Not all of us, no. Richard K. Morgan used the gritty tricks of Noir to heighten the realism of his near-future beginning in *Altered Carbon* while another Scotsman, Hal Duncan, took a page or several hundred from China Mieville's new weirdness to offer us the dense visionary palimpsest of *Vellum*. SF ashes mixed with literary spit and wire sculpted up Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* and M. John Harrison saw the Light.

It's a scrappy genre, SF, and stayed in the fight. It's still in there swinging, still ducking UFOs and weaving spells of stellar exploration, still trying to square the circle with literature's sweet science. It went down for a standing eight count, many claim, but may have a bell-ringing end-of-round hay maker left as it tries to adapt, as it tries to find a way to stay relevant even as it rides the shockwave.

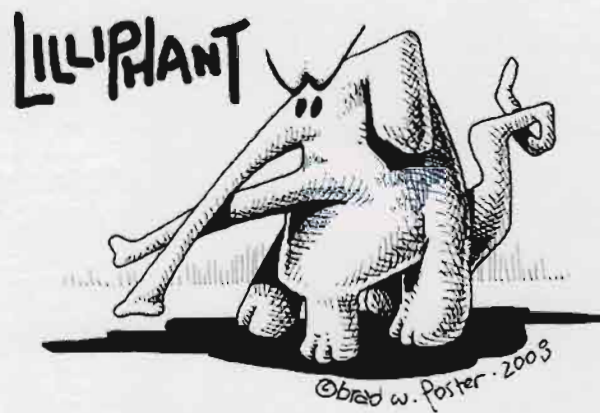
Maybe all it needs is to dream more realistically again. To specialize and not try to tackle it all at once. Maybe SF can use naturalism and realism, limit its scope to the

human scale, and focus on unbloated stories with a point. No more 100,000 words mandatory manuscript length. No more trilogies, please. Sf needs to use identifiable human details and concision, not page count or shipping size considerations, to recoup what our future has lost.

SF needs to focus on real people dealing with foreseeable changes and show us again a future we want to escape into, and the young readers will flock back.

After all, everyone likes to hear about themselves, and few will sit still for some old fart's dream, especially when it's related in mind-numbing detail. Kids read for clues on how to deal, how to cope, and how to thrive. They go where their language is being spoken and they weren't around in SF's Golden Age. They don't care what their parents' or grandparents' futures were like.

Bring back the realistic expectation that SF is showing us how we can prevail as things change. Make that old sense of wonder new, and newly pertinent to things today. Bring back the realism and the hope, and young readership, follows.



I'll see you one leak and
raise one cracked frame...

...only if the warranty
Comes with a 15' ladder

I Don't Think I Want To Play This Game Anymore!

Okay, for those in the class paying attention, we are now up to January 2008, after almost 3 months of trying to get a whirlpool bath purchased, installed, and working. The contractor has contacted the manufacturer and was told I would be contacted directly by their representative within 24 hours to set up a time to visit. In the meantime, the electrician returned to take a look. It was not at all inspiring when he looked at the, now installed, tub, opened the access hatch and sagely says--ooooohhhh. His assessment was that there was no place for him to move "stun" (very scientific—right?) . . . and gee, *he hadn't realized* . . . Oh, that's just marvelous for my confidence in his work . . . there just isn't any room . . . Okay, this is what I have, what **can** you do'?

I went away.

If I had stayed and watched, I would have either screamed or cried and neither would have accomplished anything (other than to make **me** feel better). I had him show me what he had done to the innards of the tub-hole. Uh . . . Er . . . because there simply was no room, all he had done was move the outlet box (now flopping loose) to the front of the opening, leaving enough room so that the motor ought to be able to start. Okay, I'll buy that.

The plumber came back to take another look. Nope, not his fault. He went away.

The "company representative" (read sub-contractor—I thought it would be a company employee—wrong!) did not call. I waited three days. The contractor called me. I called the representative. It turns out that the 24 hours has nothing to do with anything and is pulled out of thin air to keep the customer happy. A request for services was *faxed* to the sub-contractor and they would call me when they had plans to be in my state. Huh? Yes, you read that right: my **state**. However, since I was now on the line, they could give me a tentative time in a week and a half. Would that be satisfactory? Well, no, but

what choice did I have?

I got the routine of *clear time* from 8-5 and left a whole work day open. *Dave* arrived at about one in the afternoon and seemed to know exactly what to do. He gave me that same *oooohhh* when he opened the panel, but did not seem fazed by the spaghetti mess in there (not happy, but not suicidal either. I took this as a good sign). He didn't like the floppy outlet box but explained that the safeguards in place for wiring around water were there to be sure that current would only flow if the connection **was** safe. If he was happy, I was happy.

He filled the tub with water, pushed the button . . . Hey—it worked. Unfortunately he then peered around under the tub and declared that either the tub itself was cracked, or there was water leaking from at least one of the jets. Since the tub was crammed into the same spot as the previous "regular" tub, he could only use that handy mirror gadget we see on *CSI* to poke around all the space that was not actually visible. He did not like the idea that the tub was actually set in concrete, but told me we would just have to work with that.

I had visions of a totally non-functional whirlpool, now a liability rather than an asset and not much I could do about it. My dreams of a nice warm soaking/massage were fading rather rapidly.

Dave did the simplest thing first—he pulled all the jets and re-placed the silicone. He carefully dried up the water that had seeped from a place or places unknown and re-filled the tub. The specifications for the tub say it holds 65 gallons and that you need to fill it to at least 2" above the jets. This was using a lot of water for not much in the way of actual bathing. He appeared to bow his head for a few seconds and then pressed the magic button. "**We have lift off!!**"

Oh the excitement!

He dialed the jets from low through high, then took his dandy mirror thingy (another scientific term)

and examined all around the tub—drum roll if you please—and pronounced it dry! As if he had not just performed a miracle, he calmly packed up his tools, gave me a copy of the (warranty covered) bill and left.

I waited the 24 hours he had suggested and then fired this baby up. Oh yeaass... Yeaasss this was niice. I was pleased. The contractor was pleased. *Dave* was pleased.

But wait, there is more.

This house does not have zone heating, meaning that I have one hall thermostat. In order to get the bathroom warm I would have to heat the whole house. Because I can only actually live in one room at a time, I keep the thermostat set ridiculously low in the winter and use two wood-stove inserts (well, one is a stove and one is an insert, but . . .) to warm the rooms I most often use. The whirlpool has a heater. The trial run proved one thing: getting out of a heated tub into a cold house was not pleasant. I also found it is not wise to soak for hours on end no matter *how* good it feels on sore muscles; it makes the ability to walk a dubious talent.

Okay. Fair enough. I'll just use one of the showers in the house until the weather gets a bit warmer. Looking forward to the soak is so sweet.

Fast forward from January to April. Ah yes, flowers in bloom, *Mother Nature* at her best. Now that the air temperature had risen, I prepared to whirlpool (if that is not a verb, it ought to be!), including a new cd player.

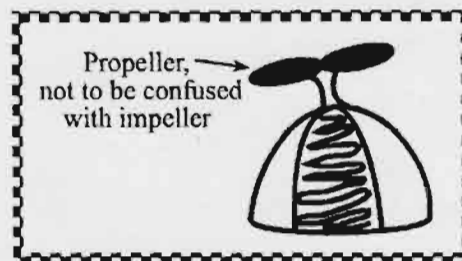
I repeated the same preparations. Got an audio book all set. Filled the tub with water and got all settled with the earpieces and pressed the button. Can you guess? Silence.

I won't bore you with the shock and tears. This had to be a bad dream. But, hey, this time I knew the drill! Mutter . . . Grumble . . .

Fast forward another week. *Dave* puts in his second appearance. This time the problem is a bit different. I had re-filled the tub and pressed that button a lot of times, praying that this time the motor would start. Instead of silence, I could hear a very faint hum as if the tub was trying its little heart out to start for me, but just couldn't quite make it. I called the contractor while waiting for *Dave*'s appointment and after listening, he agreed, said the armature just wasn't spinning. Uh yeah—this thingamajig was not able to do . . .

Dave, now knowing the situation yanked the panel, checked for water, then had me fill the tub. He pressed the button (and for a fleeting moment I

pictured feeling like an idiot. But, no—I am vindicated—it won't start). The good news is that there is still no water leaking. The bad news is that the impeller can't spin.



Then he asks the question that chills me to the bone “And what is on the other side of the wall?”

If you will recall this wall is a stairwell; specifically, the area of the tub is about 12 feet above the landing, and the wall is white. I have a feeling I know where this is headed and I don't like it.

He went on to explain that the motor is even designed to allow the homeowner to fix this problem, but (uh oh) you have to have access to the far side of the motor, where there is a built in channel for you to stick in a screwdriver and wiggle the impeller and it will spin. He then goes on to tell me that these smaller motors are not powerful enough to re-start if they have been sitting around idle—crap—why didn't you tell me this before!!! !@!?

In my case, the far side of the motor is up against that wall that is the stairwell. You get the picture. His first suggestion is that I get a plexiglass panel installed up there on that white wall. Yeah, sure . . . So each time I need to access the motor, I drag in a ladder, keeping the wall white, and climb up . . . **Not going to happen.**

After thinking about the situation for a minute, *Dave* unplugs everything, uncouples the motor and, after strict admonitions to me not to try myself, reaches in and turns the impeller by hand. He then closes everything up and tells me to pray.

I do.

He presses the button and—the motor roars to life. Saved again. Okay, I get the idea: gotta be sure to use the tub at least once a week regardless of the room temperature. I can do that.

And I can—for 6 weeks. This is just long enough to be lulled into a false sense of security. Audio books waiting. Then it happened again—or rather it did NOT happen again.

I did not bother crying. I did not bother calling the contractor. I called *Kohler*, the manufacturer, and was told to call their representative directly since the

previous visit obviously had not solved the problem and it was Dave's fault!

The good news is that by now I knew the phone numbers and the drill. Just to spice things up the boss who made the appointment list was on vacation, but hey, if things had gone smoothly I wouldn't have recognized it as my life! I just waited for the call back to let me know when *Dave* would be back.

Dave showed up looking a bit more concerned than the last two times. I sincerely hoped we were not going to revisit that plexiglass business again, but I was beginning to wonder if there was any other alternative.

He asked the same questions he has asked before and I give him the same answers. He did the same things with mirrors and pronounced that the impellor is again, indeed, stuck. Then, he asked me to make a choice (oh don't do that—you are the professional here!). He can either replace the motor or take this one apart. Luckily he did not wait for an answer but just started tearing the resident motor down. Within 30 seconds he gave a loud **Aha!** and pulled, spaghetti style, white gunk out of its innards. He explained this was silicone (refer to previous visits) that had been installed at the factory, but somehow had gotten into

the pipes. Obviously it should not be there and . . .

By the time he was finished he had a very respectable pile of the problem causing stuff sitting there. We then re-visited the question: did I want the motor replaced or. . . I didn't want to be nasty about this and if the motor was okay, then why not just put it back, but if it happened again (oohhh, shudder). He carefully put everything back together and re-started the motor. It valiantly tried its best, but—nothing. Once again he took things apart and found even more of the insidious silicone. This time he did not even ask me what I wanted to do. He went out to the truck and brought in a new motor, informing me that, while the original motor had been fairly weak, this was the most powerful motor available for its size. He pattered around, opened things, rinsed things, then did it again.

This time when we (hmm, can't be called a dry run) tried things out again it roared (and I mean **roared**) to life.

He said thank you. I said thank you. I said that I never wanted to see him again.

And I haven't. At least not for the past month! We'll see—or not, as the case may be.

g^{tRF}g



And now--the LoCs . . .

From: **Joseph T. Major**

July 11, 2008

Dear Tom:

I don't know about now, but back when we drove through Canada for TorCon, we were sticking to the speed limit, 100 kph, and sure enough, all the locals were zooming past us.

Up a little north of you, in Madison, Indiana, Guy Townsend, one of the friends of the late and sadly missed First Fan Joe L. Hensley wrote a book titled *To Prove a Villain* (1985). Guy has a Ph.D. in history and was a practicing lawyer. The book is an analysis and refutation of Tey's story, told as its own detective story.

Joe brought Guy down to talk to us a couple of times. They had a lot of stories to tell.

I know that the limit for books used to be 70,000 words because that was about the limit of what could be bound. If the limit of 90k-100k Gene Stewart cites is laid down, it seems to have been laid down very weakly, since I see 400+ page works all the time.

After reading Alfred D. Byrd's story of the follies of the new Plant Sciences building, I can only say "It must have won a design prize." Read Donald A. Norman's *The Design of Everyday Things* (1998, 1990, originally titled *The Psychology of Everyday Things*) for an explanation. Or he could read Christopher Priest's *The Inverted World* (1973, 2008).

I liked Gene Wolfe's *Pirate Freedom*. It lacked a problem he has in his longer books, where he forgets to put in a plot. This had a plot.

Sheryl Birkhead: Bob Tucker (now there's another loss) observed that he woke up on 2001, looked around, saw nothing of what had been promised, and thought about going back to bed. So you aren't the only one. Courier is, it seems, the standard non-proportional font on computers.

While we would love to have you in Bardstown, I can see where a "no pets" circumstance might cause problems for a vet. Incidentally, I have a cousin who lives near Lexington who is a vet. It looks like his older daughter will follow him, so there's that.

The Kuttner's work was out of print because, or so I understand it, C. L. Moore's second husband didn't like SF, which makes me wonder why they got

married in the first place. Then he died and his daughter discovered she could make a lot of money. "The Last Mimzy" did the usual violence to the story but it did get *The Best of Henry Kuttner* reissued.

Ned Brooks ought to check out the LDS website (familysearch.org) where he could probably get something to convert his file into something that can be loaded by the current version of Personal Ancestral File (also available on the website). Family Tree Maker (which is what I use) can import PAF files and export files to a format PAF can use.

The English language came into existence so that Norman men-at-arms could get Saxon barmaids into bed. If you look at it you'll see that English has Anglo-Saxon and Romance vocabularies. Jorge Luis Borges remarked on that.

In Southhampton in the late sixteenth-century, early seventeenth-century period, which is where I date back to, the name "Major" was spelled "Mager", "Mauger", "Mayor", and "Maijor". Consistency in spelling was not an Elizabethian virtue.

To be clear, Leibnitz was claiming that the Elector of Hanover was the one descended from the close personal friend of Attila the Hun. As far as I can tell, the elector was descended from an Italian named Alberto Azzo d'Este.

If you like to look at horses, a visit to the Kentucky Horse Park is definitely in order. They have big horses, middle-size horses, and little horses. They have black horses, white horses, brown horses, red horses, and blue horses. They have new horses, they have old horses. Don't miss the International Museum of the Horse with its exhibit on the evolution of the horse. Before you go into the main park, visit the Standardbred Museum, which is on the grounds, in the lot not too far from the main entrance. It was reported that the Museum of the Morgan Horse was considering a move from Vermont to there, which would increase their attendance substantially. The park is open from nine to five, seven days a week, between March 15 and October 31, and nine to five Wednesday through Sunday November 1 to March 14. (Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Year's Eve, and New Year's Day) Don't miss the Southern Lights Festival.

I can do better than an evangelist. My mother and I once had the following conversation:

Mother: "Cousin Wade is going on a mission."

Me: "Where's he going?"

Mother: "Switzerland."

Me: "Some people have all the luck."

Mother: "They're Mormons."

Elizabeth Garrott's parents were, and her brother Jack and sister-in-law Cathy are, missionaries in Japan (Southern Baptist).

Which reminds me of my great-great-grandfather Major, married to Elizabeth's great-grandaunt, at an age (hers) that sounds remarkably rural (but I remember the case of the wedding of Will Durant and Chaya Kaufman (better known as Ariel Durant); she had to put down her roller skates). GGGfather was cut short at a comparatively young age by the husband of a woman he had been seeing. I hope I've grown up to be better than that.

For what it's worth, there was a TV movie made as a pilot a TV series based on Robert van Gulik's Judge Dee stories, starring Khigh Dheigh as the Judge, titled "Judge Dee and the Monastery Murders". In fact, it was (or so I've heard) the only Hollywood movie with an all-Oriental cast. Unfortunately, it seems unavailable on DVD or VHS.

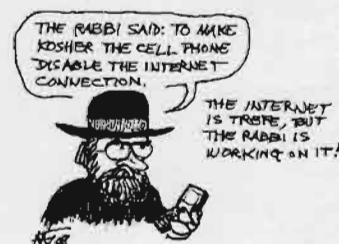
And now for what seems to be becoming my standard notice and request. I installed Windows XP™ SM © (R) Bill Gates is GOD! Service Pack 3 on my computer. It crashed and required a recovery. The recovery preserved every file save one; the Outlook email file. So I lost my email list for *Alexiad*. Anyone wanting to get back on the list, or get on the list, please email me at the address given with the letter.

Namarie,

Joseph T Major

[[I would surmise that, since the Canadians seem to have driven much as Americans do that many Canadian drivers continue to go as fast as they dare. It is interesting, though, that a fairly large number of drivers in this country had decreased their speeds and tried to avoid unnecessary trips as much as they can. According to news stories, there has been a noticeable increase of "surplus" gas as well as a significant decrease in nationwide miles driven over the past 8 months or so.//As far as word size of novels goes, I suppose a smaller word count made for easier book binding. But then stop and consider some of the books of long ago where the wordage appears to be over 70,000 words. Mark Twain, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and others produced some pretty large novels. Book printers/publishers back then didn't seem to have had any problems binding large

*books. Of course back then wages and materials costs were smaller (compared to these days anyway). I don't think Gene Wolfe's other books where "he forgets to put in a plot" are any more lacking in that regard than, say Charles Dickens' *Pickwick Papers*, which I recently read for the first time. That didn't seem to have any real overall plot. Of course it was written in installments that were later combined under one cover.//It may be sort of a "cute" theory that "The English language came into existence so that Norman men-at-arms could get Saxon barmaids into bed." but I suspect English came about the same way as other did: so that people would better understand each other. (Theoretically.) And as I noted to Ned Brooks, "English" borrowed from a variety of other languages, usually of the various conquerors of what was the region before it became called England. And variations in spelling were common before and after the Elizabethan era in England and its colonies.//Kheigh Dheigh--ah yes--Wo Fat from Hawaii 5-0. And from what I read somewhere, even he wasn't pure oriental nor was that his real name.]]*



From: Ned Brooks
nedbrooks@spynet.com

Thanks for the zine - even if it says "56" on the cover.... The business of a fuel for our cars awaits a new invention. I don't think electric is the answer (though it might suit me well enough, as I drive only 30 miles a day). But would there be enough of the lead-acid battery to supply everyone, considering the environmental burden of making and disposing of them? Or enough power to keep them charged? Ethanol from corn is (I'm told) a subsidized boondoggle - when the cost of fertilizer, processing and transportation are all accounted for, the solar energy obtained from the stuff as a fuel is less than the energy required to produce it. Direct solar power has been tried - the best efforts produced only a cramped flimsy vehicle with very little acceleration. The current level of hydrogen fuel cell design gives

a range of only 80 miles - and where would you get the hydrogen? Currently it's made from natural gas (methane) I think. Brazil is running cars on biogas - and destroying the Amazon rainforest. The answer may be that the private automobile is no longer feasible.

I had not heard of Gene Wolfe's pirate book. I liked a number of his early books, but had to give up on the later ones. I have nothing against pirates as a fictional device - I enjoyed *TREASURE ISLAND* and the Tim Powers pirate book, *THE STRESS OF HER REGARD*. Or am I thinking of *ON STRANGER TIDES*? But it's not the wordiness of a novel that bothers me, but the prose style and the charm of the characters.

The average value of a "rare" book has dropped precipitously since all the dealers started listing them online. Some books however are quite valuable however, and I think that would include a lot of the Arkham House titles. It's easy enough to get an estimate - just enter the title and author at <http://used.addall.com>

Best, Ned

[[Thanks for bringing the issue numbering to my attention. I had transposed the digits and never realized it.]] There are people who feel that electric cars would be the best bet--once the problem of storage batteries is overcome because they are non-polluting the way internal combustion engines are. Of course, with the kind of electric cars that would be recharged by plugging into a household outlet has the disadvantage of using electricity produced by plants which pollute the atmosphere. There are cars that "run on water"--but that's misleading because actually, according to what I've read, it's a system wherein water is broken down into hydrogen and oxygen by way of a "fuel cell" Those, too, would be nonpolluting. So far, however, as you noted, hydrogen cars and electric cars have a limited range and are better suited to urban areas rather than rural ones.]] I'm with you as far as the wordage of a book goes and am more drawn to "the prose style and the charm of the characters". I am and have been such a fast reader that I could finish a, say, 70,000 word novel much too soon to suit me and find myself wishing it had been longer. I like decently written books that I can immerse myself in even if it is a large size. I think if a writer is skilled enough and entertaining to present charming, engaging characters and events he or she can sustain a novel

through four hundred or more words. That's one of the reasons I read Gene Wolfe's books even if, as Joe Major claims, he forgot to put in a plot. But then not everyone likes all the same writers, and that's as it should be. Gene Wolfe manages to engage and entertain me with the stories he tells. So other people don't feel the same way. So what?]]



From: **Brad W Foster**

Greetings Tom~

Got in *THE RELUCTANT FAMULUS* #65 this week, thanks so much. Actually, I thought it was issue #56 going by the number on the cover. Had even entered it into my online records as such. It was just now when I was double-checking your email address inside the issue that I saw the "#65" at the top of the contents page. Wasn't sure at that point which number was correct, then found your opening for the locs confirming #65, and just corrected my listing on line. Whew! That was a close one for an anal-retentive list-keeper like me!!!

Fuel prices: this past year I've started to think of EVERY trip, large or small, in terms of miles-per-gallon-per-dollar. Just driving to get my mail at the post office can now cost around \$3. So down to once-a-week trips, combining that with any other errands I can. Getting it down to one trip a week if I can. I've recently switched to on-line bill paying which saves a couple of dollars in postage each month. That would have been a good feeling a year or so ago. Now, even saving \$5 just pops up the "hardly a single tank of gas" thought in my head. Some folks have pointed out we still pay less than people in Europe and elsewhere. But I don't think they saw a sudden jump in gas costs in such a short time as we have. No way to adjust a budget when you simply have to toss four times as much money at a cost there is no way around. Okay, enough whining...

I found Gene's assertion that a "thick" book automatically means it is a bloated, over written

book to be an interesting one that begs more questions: What is "too" thick? What is a "good" page count? What is to say that a 100 page story is better than a 300 page one? I mean, maybe the 300 had a lot of plot and things to say, and they worked their best to hold it down to just those 300 pages, whereas that 100 was just a short story that had been padded out. I don't see how going purely on page count can guarantee any sort of quality of reading myself.

As an offshoot of that page-count thing, I've heard of people complaining about the giant novels simply because they didn't want to read that much, while at the same time they will read several slimmer books; thus reading the same number of actual pages. Page-count alone seems a poor measure for whether or not to pick up a book.

I feel I have to respond here after reading your response to Ben Indick in the locs, where you wrote: "As for those who claim no interest in who their ancestors were--I very much pity them their lack of concern about those who came before. It's almost as if those people don't believe that anyone who lived before them were interesting, worthwhile people..." well, I'll stop the quote there. I have often had to defend myself when other people go on and on about their ancestors and I can only say I know who my grandparents were, and beyond that, I've no idea and no interest. That is NOT to say, as you imply here, that I don't think anyone in my past is not worth the effort to know. It's more a response to people who seem to feel it affects them personally if their ancestors were good or bad. It doesn't matter to me if my ancestors were kings or murderers, I've my own life to lead and feel no connection good or bad to them. If someone were to offer me a book outlining the lives of all my ancestors, I'd read it with interest. But to go out of my way to try to do research on these people, ONLY because they were related to me by blood, well, I just have other things I'd rather do. Your attitude seems a good one about valuing all people, but it is the minority of the response I've run into myself. Blood relations just mean very little to me personally as far as how I get on with my life, or think about myself, it's all just accident of birth. So fine with me if others want to do all that research, but please don't think my lack of interest in my own relatives is anything of a judgment on those ancestors. It's just not that important to me.

Okay, that went on for a bit, guess it's one of those things that had just been building up for a

while. Feel free to ignore it all! Gotta get back to the drawing board, looking forward to next ish!

Brad

[[I don't think your comments on the cost of gas was "whining". The cost of fuel is a legitimate concern of most people because it affects a large part of their lives from something as simple as picking up one's mail at the post office to the higher expense of driving to work and back, to doctor visits, to grocery shopping, to the cost of groceries and the many things people purchase that are transported by trucks. One reason, at least in England and Canada, that gas is more expensive is that they have higher fuel taxes than in this country. I think the gallon size overseas is a bit larger than in this country (5 quarts to 4 quarts). I don't recall seeing in the news any articles about fuel prices rising in other countries the way they have in America. I can't remember the exact numbers but a year ago gas was a dollar or so less than it is now.//I confess that in choosing a book, one of the criteria I use is the page count--in the opposite way: I tend to go for the longer novels. But I also check the book to see if I'll find it interesting or not and of course I'll look for writers with whose work I'm familiar and feel sure I'll enjoy. And the quality of a book and it's length don't always go hand in hand. I've seen long books that I felt weren't that good and short ones that were equally disappointing. But we all have different expectations and and different attention spans.//I'm glad you took the time to express your thoughts about genealogy and the obsessive people who proselytize it. That made me stop and think and realize how unfair and unjust my attitude was. You make some good points and reminded me that the U.S. from its beginnings has been a forward-looking nation not everyone dwells obsessively on things genealogical. We all have different interests and outlooks and that's what makes this country what it is. So thank you for taking the time to present your side.]]



From: **Jerry Kaufman**

Thanks for another entertaining issue. I have a comment or two to share.

As you say, every choice we make economically will have upsides and downsides. Solar energy, achieved with rechargeable fuel cells that can store the sun during sunny weather, and use it up during the night or in cloudy weather, would seem the ideal solution, but of course the people who currently make their living through the processing or sale of fossil fuels would be out of jobs.

You wonder how oil companies or others could meter and charge for the solar power. I think the way would be to control the manufacture and sale of the fuel cells. They could be leased, rather than sold, for example, requiring the users to pay a monthly or annual lease fee. Or the fuel cells could be made with a limited life, requiring periodic replacement. Or the chemical makeup of the cells could require periodic replacement of one or more of the chemical constituents. I think there's always a way; either physics or economics will see to that.

I sense there's something missing from Bob Sabella's review column. I'm sure you've heard from others that he says he's going to review five books by three authors, but that the column only includes three books by two authors. Are you holding over the last two reviews for next issue? In any case, I'll thank Bob for the information about Iain Pears. The books sound intriguing and I plan to seek them out. (I've already read *The Daughter of Time*, years ago, and enjoyed it. The only interesting bit I can add to Bob's summary is that the detective in the book was Tey's main character in most of her other books, and normally not confined to a hospital bed.)

In his column, Gene Stewart sounds a little like the Emperor Franz-Joseph in *Amadeus* when he told Mozart, "Too many notes."

Maybe Sheryl Birkhead should just have the contractor, manufacturer's rep and all the others give her massages. Sounds like she'd get more immediate relief for her back that way. Instead, she's still got the back pain, plus headaches, high blood pressure and other unpleasant side-effects.

I enjoyed Alfred Byrd's account of his lab's misadventures, and the Kurt Erichsen cartoons were perfect accompaniments.

Gene Wolfe is famous for using "unreliable narrators". I haven't read *Pirate Freedom*, but your description of the story makes it sound like Father Christopher is really unreliable. Maybe Wolfe

wanted you, the reader, to doubt aspects of the account Father Christopher gives. Could the whole thing be a fantasy that Father Christopher tells himself to explain his father's abandonment? I'll just have to read the book myself to answer that question.

Your consistent application of separators in the lettercol helped me a great deal. Thanks! Now if I can just figure out who robertk2cipcug.org is.

The Lovecraft collection I read recently was one of the annotated volumes edited by S.T.Joshi. He's a scholar who's made a career out of Lovecraft and other fantasists. I was a little distracted by all the notes (on odd words, publication history, historical or fictive events and people alluded to in the stories, and so forth) that the effect of the fiction was lessened a bit. I still enjoyed the stories (including "At the Mountains of Madness," "The Dunwich Horror," and "The Color out of Space"), though not with the intensity I felt as a teenager.

I was curious about the Arkham House Lovecraft collections, and did a few minutes Google research this morning. Based on this very brief effort, I found that the very first Lovecraft collection they did, in 1939, *The Outsider and Other Stories* (I may not have the title exactly right) is extremely rare and collectible. I found copies listed from \$1,200 to \$40,000. The former did not have its original dust jacket; the latter included a number of letters from Donald Wandrei, who did the cover art, and others associated with the publication. There was quite a range of prices in-between. Later collections seem to have been published first in the early 1960s, and are much less expensive than even the least expensive *Outsider*.

I'm not terribly interested in my family history, the oldest members of the preceding generation are nearly all gone, and my mother, still alive, never knew very much about her parents' past. I have cousins who are much more interested, however; one of them even collected names, dates and stories, and wrote up a family history. Even she could not collect information much prior to the arrival of our grandparents in the New World.

I really like the back cover. Do you own the fanzine this originally appeared on? Who was the editor? The style marks it as drawn directly onto stencil—it reminds me strongly of Ross Chamberlain's work. He used to do direct on stencil work in the 1960s through the 1980s while resident in Brooklyn. He currently lives in Las Vegas and still

draws for Las Vegas zines, though no longer for the mimeo medium.

Yours, Jerry

(I'll include my full address here for your convenience) P.O. Box 25075 Seattle, WA 98165

*[[Bob's last column installment was a two-parter, which was concluded in this issue. I should have made that more plain. My fault.//As you will have discovered from her article in this issue Sheryl's whirlpool problems appear to have ended. At least she (and I, for her sake) hopes so considering what she has gone through.//I encourage you to acquire a copy of **Pirate Freedom**, read it, and decide for yourself what you think. I don't know if Gene's narrators are unreliable, uncertain of their facts or unable to determine what's real and what isn't. I think he may be more concerned with the people and their attitudes and perceptions.//The back cover is the cover of the Autumn 1952 issue of **Phantasmagoria**, published by the late Derek Pickles. His wife Marjorie was co-editor, and Alan Hunter was the art editor. The cover was done by John Wilson and cut onto stencil by Alan Hunter. And I do have a copy of the original issue, courtesy of Derek a few years back along with several other issues. I nice legacy from a nice man and fan.]]*

WHAT'S NOT TO LOVE
ABOUT TECHNOLOGY?
THANKS TO BIOFUELS
THE POOR WILL STARVE
SO THE RICH CAN RIDE!



From: Alexis Gilliland
4030 8th Street South,
Arlington, VA 22204
July 20, 2008

Dear Tom,

Thank you for The Reluctant Famulus # 65 which arrived yesterday. Nicely turned out, it was, reflecting an apt use of the available technology, and

with a number of familiar names in the letter column. You solicit artwork, and a copy sheet of five cartoons is enclosed, the originals having been scanned to disc, and put in an envelope marked "used" so they won't be sent to other fanzines.

Did I mention available technology? Currently I am working with a Mac X, which drives a Hewlett-Packard ink jet printer that also does copy work, albeit at a leisurely pace. It advertises an ability to scan stuff to disc, but no, the HP scans slowly, excruciatingly so, and is also prone to all sorts of aggravation and glitches. So, since I had a lot of scanning to do, I went and bought an Epson 4490, which cost about three times what the printer did. A top of the line machine, yes, and the scanning which I tasked it with doing was putting my cartoons in electronic form. How many cartoons? Probably in excess of 10,000, reflecting the fact that I've been at it for more than forty years. What will be done with these cartoons? For a good many years Lee, my wife and computer guru, has suggested that we put them up on a website (www.alexisgilliland.com) in order to display them, and eventually I agreed to do so. It turned out to be a whole lot more work than either of us imagined when we started out, but it should be up and running by the end of summer. At least the website should be up with some fraction of my cartoons, anyway. The rest will be added bit by bit, including the ones I sent you.

What else? We saw "The Dark Knight" running about 2.5 hours, which I felt was a little too long. However, it was good movie, with some interesting ideas, and the late Heath Ledger was an arresting Joker. Probably it would help if one had read the graphic novel. That should do for now.

Best wishes,

[[Thank you for the cartoons. I liked all of them.// From my admittedly limited experience with such devices, it seems that the so-called all-in-one machines generally have a less than satisfactory output compared to the dedicated devices. That's why I have a separate printer and scanner (no fax). I think you were smart to buy the scanner despite its higher cost. When working with graphics/cartoons, etc. One would

want something that does justice to what he or she has produced.//Over 10,000 cartoons! My artistic ability is extremely poor and I doubt I could manage even 1 drawing of even mediocre quality. I've tried—and wisely destroyed the results to save people the agony of viewing my pitiful efforts.//I shall have to check your website.//I didn't go see "The Dark Knight". If I should watch it I'll probably do so after it comes out on DVD. The movies have certainly been light years different from the old TV series which was, admittedly, corny at times.]]

From: **Robert Sabella**

July 21, 2008

Hi Tom,

There were so many comment hooks in **TRF #65** that I have to struggle to keep this letter within publishable length. :)

I revived **Visions of Paradise** in 1986 (after a 12-year gafiation during which I devoted myself to writing fiction), but since I was not around for the first few years of **TRF** I don't know when you began or which of us has been publishing longer.

Making movies from novels: I have always felt that a novel is the worst source material for a movie because of its length. A good novel requires a six hour movie to do it justice. It would generally be better-served by a tv mini-series than stand-alone movie. They say the ideal length for sf is a novella, and I believe the ideal source for a story would also be a novella.

You commented that "Movies are a thrill ride, a roller-coaster trip requiring only that the viewer hang on tightly until the end." That certainly seems to be the case these days in which the vast majority of movies are action thrillers with their emphasis on special effects and car chases. But there are still a handful of movies being made which do try to challenge the viewer intellectually. Yes, even occasionally in genre movies. A recent example which comes to mind is *The Prestige* which was thought-provoking more than a thrill ride.

Many of your readers are discussing their own genealogy in the lettercol, so here's the 5¢ version of my family history: my mother's parents came to America from Naples as children in the very early days of the 20th century, and grew up in New Jersey.

My father's mother grew up in Brazil (where her parents had migrated from Southern Italy) while my paternal grandfather moved there as a teenager. They met, courted, married, and had 2 children in Brazil before returning to Italy where they had another child before migrating to New Jersey where they had 3 more children. As a result, my father grew up speaking both Portuguese and Calabrese (the dialect of the southern Italian province Calabria).

What was most interesting though is that my paternal grandfather was born and raised in a small fishing village *Porta Canon* which was an Albanian-speaking region of Italy. When I was in college I did some research in the Seton Hall University library and found mention of a royal Albanian family named Sabella which was overthrown and migrated to Italy. While that is not proof, it is strong evidence that I am descended from a disgraced ruling family. :)

Gene Stewart has a point about books being too long for their natural length. I miss the days when novels were 150-200 pages because those novels generally developed one idea over its natural length. Now a novel of 450-500 pages either develop several ideas simultaneously (which is the good novel), or else they just stretch and stretch and stretch (the bad novel). Years ago you could try a novel on a whim knowing the time investment was minor. Now with the time investment being considerably longer, reviews are necessary to give some idea if the longer novels are worthwhile or not.

Jean and I both read **Sheryl Birkhead's** comment "where does Bob Sabella find time to write anything for anyone, other than in his own zines?!!" and she is as befuddled as me by the reputation I seem to have developed as a hyper-active workaholic. It's not true! I actually waste far too much time doing piddly things when I could be accomplishing so much more! I am sure that somebody like **Joe Major** accomplished a heck of a lot more in a typical week than I do.

Take care,

Bob

[[I agree that a novel is not the best source for a movie because of the novel's depth of detail. A shorter work would be a much better source. But then again consider at all the Harry Potter movies and of course Peter Jackson's Rings trilogy movies (though his were—what?—twice as long as the

Potter movies? But how many average moviegoers have the patience to sit through 3+ hour-long movies?// Your observation about my comment on movies being roller coaster rides made me realize that I should have said, "many movies". There are indeed movies which are more thought-provoking—but those generally have a smaller turnout than the "blockbusters".//I found your genealogical offering very interesting. To think there's a possibility that you're descended from a disgraced royal family. . . //As I noted elsewhere, I enjoy large novels. But because, as you note, with the greater investment a large factor, I am very picky about what large novel I buy and try to get only those by authors with whose work I'm acquainted and count on or ones I feel reasonably sure I'll finish. But I agree that novels these days generally are oversized or bloated. I sometimes wonder if those authors produce such long novels because they have a lot worth saying or because they can do it, never mind the quality.// Regarding your comment about Sheryl's wondering where you find the time . . . I confess I, too, waste too much time doing "piddly little things". Must break myself of that habit. Must.]]

From: Sheryl Birkhead
25509 Jonnie Court
Gaithersburg, MD) 20882
August 8, 2008

Dear tRFers,

When I have the time (and remember!) I need to see if there is enough *Internet* information to research the *J. Wilson* as the artist on the lastish backcover. Thank you for running both the front and backcovers that you chose.

About the gas prices—unless I am missing something (and I might very well be) so far neither of the presidential candidates seem to be pushing alternative energy sources. Um . . . er . . . through the talking about increasing offshore drilling has either of them given serious contemplative time to what happens when the (non-renewable) resources are gone? Personally (and no one asked) I think the main push should be coming up with and refining alternative energies. I got a book as a reference for organic produce and products. In it, it says that, as of today, we are cashing 120% of checks against Mother Nature's ability to replace them. So, if, fairly quickly, "we" don't pull back on that it

would seem there will be a rather dramatic overdraw coming.

Saw on TV that the sellers of scooters can't keep them in stock . . . at 75 mpg, I can see why. If I recall, there was a long TV piece a few weeks back about the increase in golf carts on the road and a map showing what states allowed them. The town that was showcased (and no I do not remember the name or where) said that with a top speed of 10 miles per hour, at least any miscreant couldn't outrun him!

The gas station I switched to when the other one added a surcharge for credit cards has a small sticker that says ethanol added, on the pump (I thought it said 10%, but I might have misread that).

Methane powered whatever (cars/appliances/heat/cool) come about the closest to meeting your *BS* description. Again, the dim dark recesses of my mind recall (hopefully correctly) that there are some places in *China* already utilizing that technology (methane pits from animal wastes I believe). One of the big "problems" with using corn is that the amount of land used . . . well you get the idea; and if you use it for fuel, you don't have it for feed/food.

It's about time, again, that I did an online search of solar power companies in this state and see if I can convince someone to come out and take a look at my home's orientation to see what the maximum number of panels is that I could install. My discussion with the only (reliable) company I could locate 3-4 years ago ended when they realized the small dimension of the roof was of the requisite south orientation. So much for that idea.

I presume you saw the history breaking profits (note—this means *net* not gross!) that *Exxon* (I believe that was the one I saw on the news made last quarter.) Now, to me at least, if the pricing was *appropriate*, then the profits would be in keeping with those made previously—at least that's the way I have it figured. If the numbers had been on gross income, then that would have been a different situation.

Oh yes, before I forget—this will get to you after *Denvention 3* is history. I hope all and sundry had a ghreat time and look forward to see what their *Hugo* base looks like.

Tom Doubreley and *Kurt* did nice sets of illos for you. Of course *Brad* and *Alan Hunter* always please! For quite a while now my best thoughts have been with both *Alan Hunter* and *Terry Jeeves* on the physical/medical fronts. Both are ghreat fen who happen to also be ghreat fanartists!

As far as politics are (is?) concerned, no matter who “wins” (although why **anyone** wants that job is beyond me) the presidency he will have a lot of cleaning up to do. My personal view is that taxes will have to go up no matter what the promises or the man. There are just too many repairs that need to be done, let alone addressing things like universal health care. Money is required for such repairs and it has to come from somewhere; i.e. the people. We’ll (once again) see.

Lately I’ve been listening to *Dean Koontz’s* works in audio form. If memory serves me correctly, I think I saw both *Koontz* and *Alexi Panshin* years ago at some Pennsylvania convention. I had not thought about *Koontz* in some years and saw some audio books at the library and was pleased by them. The *Odd* series is one I care for, but ran into a roadblock since the library system doesn’t have the last 2-3 in the series. A pity. Now I’ve taken to selecting others by him as stand alones and enjoying them also. The last one I listened to was actually about a “supernatural” Golden retriever, a Golden Retriever rescue—and the person who set it up. Right now he is my fallback author. I am listening to different series in order and if none are available, go over and take out one of his audio books. So far I have not been disappointed. The big thing I have noted about his work is the minute fleshing out that he does. That, upon examination, the actual action might have been covered in much shorter order, but you don’t mind because all the details are so interesting. The dog one makes me wonder if he has/had a Golden because he seemed to know the breed so well.

Gene Stewart’s comments strike home. I do not buy many books simply due to costs. I recently actually special ordered two (# I and # II—not “different” books) at about \$15 each—for paperbacks. I immediately sat down to start #1. It still sits on the magazine rack and #2 still sits in the plastic *Borders* bag in the front hall. Yeah, what I thought I was going to read based on reputation did not bear out. All this does is reinforce the don't-bother-buying feeling. I’ll still keep looking.

Alfred’s lab story reminds me of the (now **many** years ago) new buildings built on my college (*Dickinson*) campus—a Chemistry building and a library. The library got all the books moved by a simple student chain; we all just lined up and began passing tomes along down the line from the old building to the new. Low Tech, but, hey, it worked. I was a Chemistry major and the new building had an

interesting problem. Due to those insidious budget cuts, all hall “shower” systems had been removed from the plans. When all was said and done, there was one chain in place that released 65 gallons of water **real** fast. Oh yes, I forgot—they didn’t bother with a floor drain. As students, we were told that if we needed that shower to go ahead, but be **sure** because we would have to mop up the water. No one, in my undergrad years there utilized the shower, but some were sorely tempted when experiments spat nasty things at them . . .

If you are really considering *Netflix* let me know. Every now and then they come out with a month free for current members to offer to others. Oh yeah, I think that if you go to their website they routinely offer a free two weeks trial. There is a plethora of plans available, so you might benefit from poking around—and looking at the 25,000 or so items available. Then too, at a bit cheaper I think, is the *Blockbuster* competition. I read it over and decided I am better off with the plan I have.

I think the *POD* was about \$25 a month storage fee. I cannot remember if there was any initiating fee. They were very timely and I only rented one—which was **quite** large. It allowed me to draw out the influx if possessions so I did not have to contend with one day *everything in*. I could pick when I wanted to finish off the move. Because my move was not too far, a small moving company moved the few large items I had. I guessed that steaming out the dent they made in the front door probably did involve a steam iron, but in case this was not a foolproof repair (and the heavy wooden door is painted) I simply did not want to make matters worse; the dent remains.

Um . . . comments on a vacation. Just had the guy who delivers my firewood and also does landscaping help me get the forest of plants under control. Because I am **not** a gardener, he told me to keep it looking like this **someone** will have to serious weeding and pruning at least twice a year. I like the way it looks but with the business clearing \$325 (no decimal error) last year and this year being worse I didn’t even ask what it would cost. At any rate, he asked me to buy a soaker hose since I candidly told him I would not remember/have the time to water the whole thing for at least a half an hour every day or so. While I was on the road he came in and finished the weeding, hooked up the hose and set the (expensive!) timer I had bought. I drove in just as they were leaving and he walked me through the things I needed to do (today I need to soak the sick

peonies with the spray he left me. In October I need to cut the roses ...) He went ahead and turned the hoe on, saying he had left it off in case I was on vacation. That got me to thinking. The last time I had a vacation was the year my Mother died—1991—we moved her (and the Golden *Paddington*) into a very close assisted care facility and they told me to *go away* for at least 10 days—so she could not call me and ask to come home—so I did. A few weeks later she died. I had been told that with the problems she had, she could go at any moment or live for 20 years. So that was the last time I actually went away. I've thought that maybe when *Pudge* goes, if I can find **any** money (highly unlikely when you are so far below the poverty level to start with), maybe I can get away. Hmm—just glad I chose to use my 1/3 of the farm proceeds to buy the house—totally—no mortgage, just routine costs. Ah, but I digress—greatly. . . .

Thank you to *Ben* for his kind remarks. As far as veterinary medicine is concerned, at its best it attracts those filled with compassion—and that very compassion can lead to burn-out. I have gotten a reputation for “good” euthanasia and get a fair number of calls from strangers who have been referred. To date, I have not gone to any of these callers. They do not always understand, but so far none have given me too rough a time. While they are losing a four-legged family member, there is someone who has to ease the way and that weighs heavy on the conscience—unbearably so if you do not agree with the decision. Again, off the track—sorry.

You mention horses. Last year the (I think this is the right number) three slaughterhouses that handled horses in the US were shut down and now the number of “pleasure- horses” crossing borders to both Canada and Mexico has skyrocketed. The young lady who helps me out on Wednesdays with the cats has two horses (one retired and one she uses for *dressage*). She is a nurse and works primarily to cover their boarding and vet bills. Two weeks ago she got a call while we were working and the upshot is that there is a website about horses to be sold for meat—they are willing to sell these animals to anyone at the price they would have gotten for meat. This past Wednesday she brought in two pictures of the horse she and a group of six other women got together and bought. The mare is a gorgeous bay 5 year old Thoroughbred. They paid 50 a pound=\$450. They got the papers and are now trying to figure out what they are doing—

wether to go for non-profit status or simple incorporation. One of the group is a trainer and will work on getting some sense into the horse. The mare raced and won a handful of races but the purses got smaller and smaller and the owner just wanted to get rid of her. She only knows how to run to the left and has two speeds: stop and full speed. Right now they are planning on getting her to the stage where she would be a nice pleasure or trail horse and then find a “forever home” for her. I don't think they have worked the kinks out of what they expect to get in return (cost of the mare only? cost of horse plus bills to that point?) when the “adoption” takes place. Sue said there is a website where you can see the horses that are going for meat—and already she wanted to find the money for this grey. . . .

If I remember, sow bugs are one of the oldest animals around. They seem to have gotten this survival thing down right.

I think *Borders* is taking advance orders for the *JK Rowling* book coming out in September. I think the book I saw mentioned is a group of tales translated by *Hermione*—ah, the empire continues! It will be interesting to see what these tales actually are and how (or, indeed if any *Hermione -etc.*) are involved in the book.

The natural/whole food reference book I mentioned earlier also discusses the movements to consume only (or mostly if that is all that is possible) foods produced within 100 miles, lowering transportation costs. Sheesh, this past week I went to two local farmers' markets and found tomatoes at one for \$5.00/lb and \$4.00 at the other. **But**, although I ended up paying more than a dollar for a small tomato, it **tasted** like a tomato and not cardboard. All in all, if this helps the environment, I am more than willing to pay that much (but I only need one or two a week since I turn them into delicious tomato sandwiches and not into salads--add too much liquid to them).

Thanks for this!

'Bye,

[[The cover artist for that issue of Phantasmagoria was John Wilson. That's all the information provided in that issue.//You didn't miss anything regarding the presidential candidates' position on energy. At the beginning of their campaigns they focused on the economy in general, the Iraq war, jobs, health care, and the usual promises. It has been only relatively lately that they's included gas prices

and energy concerns—and then, I suspect, mostly because their supporters (the voters, that is) have been letting them know how they feel. As far as I know, neither of the final candidates have given any really serious thought to what will happen when we run out of petroleum. I—and others, I'm sure—fear this country and others won't do anything until there is no more oil to be pumped. A lot of people remember back in the 70's when we had the same sort of petroleum problems and experts were warning of ultimately running out of crude oil. Very little was done then to prepare for that eventuality. There should have been some really strong efforts in that direction. Had there been, we might not be so worried now. With 30-some years to work on the problem, this country (and others) might have been able to avoid the current crisis, if crisis it can be called. Ultimately, as I have learned from reading various articles, there will have to be a variety of energy sources available rather than trying to rely on any one method. We'll need solar, wind, biofuels, nuclear, electric, liquid natural gas (LNG), liquid hydrogen and so on to supply power/energy for our needs.// You're correct about whoever wins the presidential election will have a lot of cleaning up to do. And that will take a long time, longer, I suspect, than their term or terms (if the winner should be re-elected to a second term). I too wonder why anyone would want the job of president of the U.S.. Masochists? Power-hungry fools? Regardless of why people want that office, it would be really nice if they and the people in congress would remember that they're supposed to be working for us, the people (the millions of average voters) rather than the oil companies, Big Business, and all the other "special interest" groups who throw large amounts of money around.//

From: Ray Nelson

08/20/08

Dear Tom,

As I read your editorial on the subject of energy, I kept waiting for you to present the true fannish option. You touched on vegetable oil, hydrogen, electricity, solar energy, even bullshit. I went on waiting.

Suddenly we were talking horses and wagons. Damn! You skipped right over it!

We Bohemians solved this problem way back in the Gay Nineties. When good queen Victoria sat on the throne of England, the French King of Artistic Bohemia, Alfred Jarry, presented to the world his solution to the fuel problem, the Metal Exoskeleton. We like to call it The Bicycle.

The Bicycle!

It gets you from point A to point B without using any other energy but your own. There's no pollution. There's no traffic jams. There's no noise. And it's even a powerful weapon in the Battle of the Belly.

During World War Two Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir took a bicycle trip all the way from Paris to Switzerland and back, waving to the Germans stranded in their gasoline powered tanks as they went by

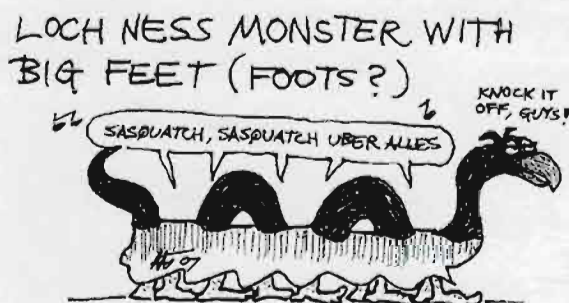
When I was in France, I had a bicycle. All my fannish and Bohemian friends had bicycles. My bicycle was war surplus. World War One, that is. It was a messenger bicycle built to last forever, and I'm sure it's still wheeling merrily along under some new owner.

So don't bother me about fuel problems. They have already been solved. Let's move on to the problem of building bridges that don't fall down.

They have a lot of them in Paris.

Your fan,

RayFaradayNelson@AOL.com



[[I completely forgot about bicycles. Yes, they're economical, non-polluting, convenient, and reliable and good exercise. Bikes are good for level ground and for going downhill, but going uphill... well I've never found that part of bike riding easy or pleasant. But then I'm so out-of-shape that I'd need to work up to the point where I could go any distance greater than a mile. Evidently even philosophers are/were in

better shape than I. I wonder if they ventured into the Swiss Alps. It wouldn't be at all surprising if that bike you had, providing it was reasonably well taken care of, wasn't still going strong for its rider. Fixing aging bridges in poor condition would be smart. At least a bicyclist wouldn't have to worry about a bridge collapsing while passing over it that a car driver would. Unless there was a car in front of or behind the cyclist. From what I've read here and there, a lot of people are either getting out their bicycles from storage or buying new ones. They're good if one lives in a reasonable-sized city or town. We're about 14 miles from the nearest city, Owenton. I'm not sure



From: **Robert Kennedy**

August 23, 2008

Dear Tom,

My thanks for #65. It appears that I never responded to #64. Since I can't seem to find it right now a search will have to be made. (If you could see the inside of my house you would understand the problem.)

I completely understand your commentary about the price of gasoline. I'm not happy about it either because I operate on a budget. When I was working there was X amount of dollars allocated to gas for my car. When I retired (15 years ago) that amount was left the same which resulted in my having a good excess amount in that account. From time to time I would dip into it for special expenses. That's no longer the case. In June for the first time my gas expenses exceeded the amount allocated. July was ok. I'll have to see what happens for August. I may have to increase the amount budgeted for car gas. Not a pleasant happening. (Heck, I may have to increase the amount budgeted for food too.)

By the way, I have not reduced my ultimate speed on freeways. I do, however, accelerate more slowly than previously. More of my driving now is around town. However, when I'm on a freeway I really like to move. Ever since I started driving some 60 years ago my brain has said that if the way is open I should be able to drive fast. That has resulted in several tickets.

The reason that European countries gas prices have been so much higher than here is that their taxes are much greater than ours. Actually, the tax and spend politicians that control our legislature here in California are probably happy with the high gas prices since we have a sales tax on gasoline and as the price goes up so does the money they get from the sale of gasoline. (The sales tax is in addition to the Federal and State excise taxes.) We have a problem with our highways, roads, and transportation system because part of the gas tax money that is supposed to be spent on them has been stolen by the politicians to partially cover their deficit spending. It will, of course, never be repaid because that would require even more taxes.

Contrary to charges made by many, I do not think that the gas companies are gouging the public and making excess profits. That would be very foolish on their part and they are not run by fools. As near as I can determine gas companies profit margin is around 8% and I do not consider that to be excessive. Rather, it is quite reasonable.

What we need is to begin drilling for oil in previously denied places, build new refineries, and build nuclear power plants. This should have been started 20 years ago, but better late than never. It will obviously take several years for this to pay off, but we have to start now.

Despite all the problems involving oil, I do not look forward to the day that I can no longer drive a car.

Yes, the cost of Worldcons can be expensive. The largest single cost is the hotel. The price of my airline ticket was \$281.00 which I do not consider bad. These two expenses are fixed. Food and other expenses can be somewhat controlled. At Denvention 3 I spent more than had been planned for books, etc. Oh well. I very much enjoyed the Worldcon. At my urging my niece and her husband were there for their first Worldcon and they had a great time. Also, Maggie Bonham (a very prolific author) who is married to a second cousin was there for her first WorldCon. (Do a Google search on her name.) It may just have been

my last Worldcon as I am finding it harder and harder to travel.

As someone else has commented, I don't see how Bob Sabella has the time to write articles for other fanzines considering the time his own fanzine must take as well as his incredibly busy schedule.

Sheryl Birkhead's continuing problems with her whirlpool bath causes me to never contemplate having one installed.

Your review of *Pirate Freedom* by Gene Wolfe was interesting. I had previously read the book and enjoyed it.

1779 CIPRIAN AVENUE
CAMARILLO, CALIFORNIA 93010-2451
(805) 987-2164
robertk@cipcug.org

[[As far as I know, I didn't receive a response to #64, and I have tried to be conscientious about checking for and saving locs so they won't get "lost"—and yours especially. We're both in the same boat, so to speak, as most retirees who are on fixed incomes and tight budgets. The price of gas has caused my wife and me to restrict our travels more than I'd have liked. Before retiring we had hoped to do a fair amount of traveling, some of it to places of some sort of genealogical importance but also because we'd never been to any of those places. Those plans have gone out the window. I've been known to drive faster than I really should which has also resulted in receiving speeding tickets. But after the last one I got—and I wasn't going that fast and the cost of gas I try hard to drive at a more prudent speed. It's not easy.//A sales tax on gasoline in addition to the state and Federal taxes! Ouch! Your California politicians sound a lot like the ones in Michigan and Kentucky (the two states with which I'm most familiar. After we moved to Kentucky I thought our property tax wasn't as bad as Michigan's—then I discovered Kentucky levies a property tax on automobiles, trailers, recreational vehicles, and so on. Michigan doesn't do that. But then neither Michigan nor Kentucky have a sales tax on gasoline.// I doubt oil company executives are fools but when the average citizen sees in the news the "profits" made they have to wonder . . . I agree with you that we should be drilling in more areas in this country, adding more refineries, and nuclear power plants. All in addition to developing other energy sources. I would hope that people would still be able to drive their own cars (as opposed to mass transit) even after gasoline and diesel are no longer available.]]

From: **Milt Stevens**

September 1, 2008

Dear Tom,

Reluctant Famulus #65 starts off with the currently popular topic of gas prices. Being retired and not driving as much as I once did, I'm not as concerned with this topic as I might have been years ago. I drive down to LASFS which is about 20 miles away about once a week. Aside from that, most of my driving is around Simi Valley. Strangely enough, my insurance company (greedy little bastards that they are) increased my rates, because they decided I was driving too much. Previously, I had been considered a low mileage driver driving less than 12,000 miles a year. In Southern California, 12,000 miles really isn't very much to drive in a year. However, they lowered the limit, and now you have to drive less than 7,500 miles a year to be considered a low mileage driver.

In regard to gas prices, it seems like we've been here a few times before. In fact, this has happened every few years for as long as I can remember. The situation is so familiar that TV stations can do the same sequence of news items each time it happens. First, newscasters announce the new prices, and then talking heads proclaiming the end of civilization. This is followed by several average yokels at gas pumps saying the increased gas prices will force them to go back to using flint hand axes. Somewhere in all this, some politicians may try to look serious while saying they will do something about the situation. This is about as likely as a poodle changing hair styles. The TV news shows never seem to do the last item in this series. It would be a man-on-the-street interview six months later. The man would be asked what he thought about the price increase, and he would reply "What price increase?"

Sheryl Birkhead's mention of having a hot tub installed at her home reminded me of an experience I had at the recent Westercon in Las Vegas. In the bathroom of my hotel room, I discovered what I initially thought was a bathtub built for two. It was only on closer inspection that I realized it was a jacuzzi. I've never been in a hotel room that has a jacuzzi before. Were I a younger man, I might have tried to find some female company to help me try it out. Unfortunately, I am not a younger man.

You note the lack of Chinese actors playing Chinese in Hollywood movies of the thirties and forties. There actually were some Chinese actors working, but they were all playing Japanese bad guys. The Japanese actors were busy being interned at the time. There are other examples of cross ethnicity in movies that are so anti-PC that they may be considered Forbidden Cinema. For instance, Amos and Andy were played by two white guys on radio. Those two white guys (Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll) also made some movies--in blackface. You won't see those movies on TV anytime soon.

Yours truly,
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[[I think I agree with you about insurance companies being "greedy little bastards". They're prepared to insure a vehicle and collect the premiums as long as the person wants to keep paying them but they seem to go into shock when they have to pay out to settle a claim. They may be worse than the oil companies. As far as the amount of personal driving one does, some people are probably less affected than others. But when you (generically speaking) stop to consider all the things transported by trucks—and remember that diesel prices are even higher than gasoline—that includes food, clothing, and so on the high price of fuel is a consideration because the higher cost ship-pers have is passed on to the consumer. Because my wife and I live in a rural area now, we have to rely on a contractor to pick up our trash and I've noticed that there is now a fuel surcharge "because of unexpected high costs" added to our trash bill.//I had to smile at your comment about "average yokels" being forced to go back to "using flint hand-axes". Certainly the situation isn't that dire but it's not something to be ignored. It's not just the high cost of fuel in general but the rapidly diminishing fuel resources that keep our factories and industries running that requires serious attention.// Gee, Milt, you should have looked around a bit—at a con you might have found some willing female to try out the jacuzzi.// Yeah—I recall the Amos & Andy characters and the actors who portrayed them. And you're right: that show and those movies would never appear on TV. It's amazing, though, the sort of things that were acceptable back then.]]

From: Henry Welch

Tom:

Thanks for the latest TRF.

I think Gene Stewart is decades too late in complaining about rambling loose prose in genre fiction. It is also ironic that he cites Heinlein who was among the worst offenders in his later novels, most of which could have used a thorough edit.

Condolences on Sheryl's bathtub problems.

We have a SAM-brand portable storage unit here at the rental house. It is a much cheaper option than a storage locker in California, more convenient (if you have the space), and I think they are better than the POD-brand as they are larger and have a translucent roof that eliminates the need for lighting during daylight.

==> Henry

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[[Overlong novels do seem to be a long-time phenomenon, going back a few decades. I wonder if Heinlein was over-reacting to the time when he had to contend with and abide by editors' insistence on removing what they felt was unnecessary verbiage.// Sheryl has been having a very bad time with her whirlpool tub but, as you will have seen in the last installment in this issue, there was a light at the end of the tunnel.//I wonder if either kind of storage unit (SAM or PoDS) could be used on a long-term basis. A storage unit on-site would be a lot more convenient than the usual ones located within a fenced-in compound. It would, I suppose, depend on the monthly rental rate. Or perhaps it would be less expensive to construct one's own storage unit (or shed). We still have a lot of possessions at our house in Michigan—which, in a sense, is being used as storage even though our oldest son is living there along with his own possessions, a dog, and several cats. I still have a dozen or so good-sized boxes of paperback books I'd like to bring to our Kentucky home—if I had a place to put them. Then, too, there are several boxes of model railroad buildings, scenery, etc. . . .]]

From: **John Thiel**

Tom—

Nice cover 65 is sporting. I was considering it from the scientific viewpoint of a study of weightlessness when it occurred to me that it was a lot like Dada art. Considered as such, it remains a study of weightlessness.

Your editorial hit hard on a big social problem, the increase in gas prices. It's been incredible for many years that there wasn't being such an increase, but now that there is one the fact is uncovered that a lot of people can't afford four dollars a gallon. It seems that minimum wage payments won't cover that and much else. But a lot of people who use autos on their jobs are in that minimum wage bracket. There's no reason to believe that gas prices won't continue to increase like the price of cigarettes and postage stamps. It seems to me the part of the inflationary cycle (the boom) that precedes collapse and depression (the bust). Then the economy has to be re-evaluated by the government. Lately I don't think they're in the mood for re-evaluating anything. So here's to surviving the coming depression. I just got a new Chrysler van (my, the leg room) and a full tank costs seventy dollars. Fortunately I don't have that many other high expenses. Just postage. The next issue of my fanzine will cost me over three hundred dollars including printing and postage. Good thing my circulation is not very large.

Lately all my modern inconveniences are malfunctioning at once. I've managed to do a little repair work but it just forestalls a trip to put my vehicle, for instance, in the hands of the trolls down at one of the garages and see what their price will be.

Caught on the technology of an inflationary spiral and plunge!

That's indeed the life of modern man.

Glad to see you're keeping Sabella on the ball with reviews outside his own zines. As usual, I read them with interest.

—John Thiel

[[And here I thought the cover was a picture of a large space-based telescope being serviced by a crew of astronauts. We Americans are lucky that gas prices haven't risen in a long time. What's bothered people the most is how quickly the prices have risen once they started going up. As much as I'd like to see gas prices drop a lot lower I'm pessimistic enough—or

realist enough—to know that's not likely to happen. Low cost, or cheap, fuel is a thing of the past and we all have to accept that and live with it. The economy may be in poor shape, as many people believe, but let's hope it isn't nearing a depression.//I feel very fortunate to have Bob providing a regular column for TRF. His contributions have been one of the mainstays of the zine, as have Sheryl's "adventures", Alfred's exploits, and Gene's observations. I owe them a lot for their work.]]

From: **Frank Denton**

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Aug. 26, 2008

Dear Tom,

My apologies for not responding more often. It seems that an old guy like me should have more time on his hands. Apparently not so. I've been meaning to write since you wrote about the furniture delivery debacle two issues back. Procrastination, thy name is Denton. Your threat discreetly placed at the bottom of the back cover has done its job. Well, onward.

The gas crunch seems to have dwindled a bit. The prices here have fallen by a half-dollar of late. But you are quite right. It will not go away. And so much depends up it that it impacts almost everything having to do with our daily life. Delivery of groceries and fresh produce, goods of all sorts, manufacturing essentials, and many other depend on transportation. Consequently prices rise. We have suddenly become aware of petroleum costs and see how they drive inflation. I read recently that China, India and Vietnam are seeking the American dream. That means owning a car. If everyone in China owned a car they would consume more gasoline per day than is produced. Leaving none for the rest of the world. That includes us. The automobile manufacturers are waking up, some more quickly than others, and looking for alternative sources of power. They can't do that fast enough, say I. One last thought; I often think that we old retired people have probably lived through the best years of anyone's life, in spite of our wars and threats of war. Future generation may never see the good times that we have seen.

I sympathize with Sheryl Birkhead. We have an outdoor hot tub and it gives relief to the body and sometimes to the soul. I certainly hope that the problems have been sorted by now and that she slip into the tub and get some relief for her back. I have a

similar bad back and can sympathize with her. I blame mine on arthritis, back, hips, knees, they all ache. Further blame goes to mountain climbing in my youth, hiking and walking as a hobby all my life, including a couple hundred miles on the Southwest Coastal Footpath in England. I don't regret a single step

Very interesting reviews from Bob Sabella and from yourself. It's been many years since I first read **A Daughter of Time** by Tey. I think that Iain Pears must have taken a different tack to his earlier writing, which were pretty straightforward mysteries set in the art world. As for **Pirate Freedom**, Gene Wolfe has always written in that rich prose with a vocabulary that delights. Sometimes I have quarreled with his plotting, although that seems not to be the case here. I always find his works not only entertaining but a bit challenging.

Oh, you wound me! You do not pull any punches in your dislike of horse racing and the fools who bet on them. My wife and I bought into a partnership in April and now own a small bit of two horses who run at Emerald Downs, our local race track and will run later at Portland Meadows. I've followed horse racing since I was a child and attended the old track near Seattle, Longacres. I love to watch the horses run. Yes, the loss of Eight Belles in the Derby was tragic. It happens in horse racing, for a variety of reasons. But perhaps no worse than the loss of human life due to automobile accidents. We are delighted to be even a small part of the racing game. But knowing your distaste I will quit here.

A good active letter column. You must be doing something right. Keep it up. And please don't throw me in the briar patch.

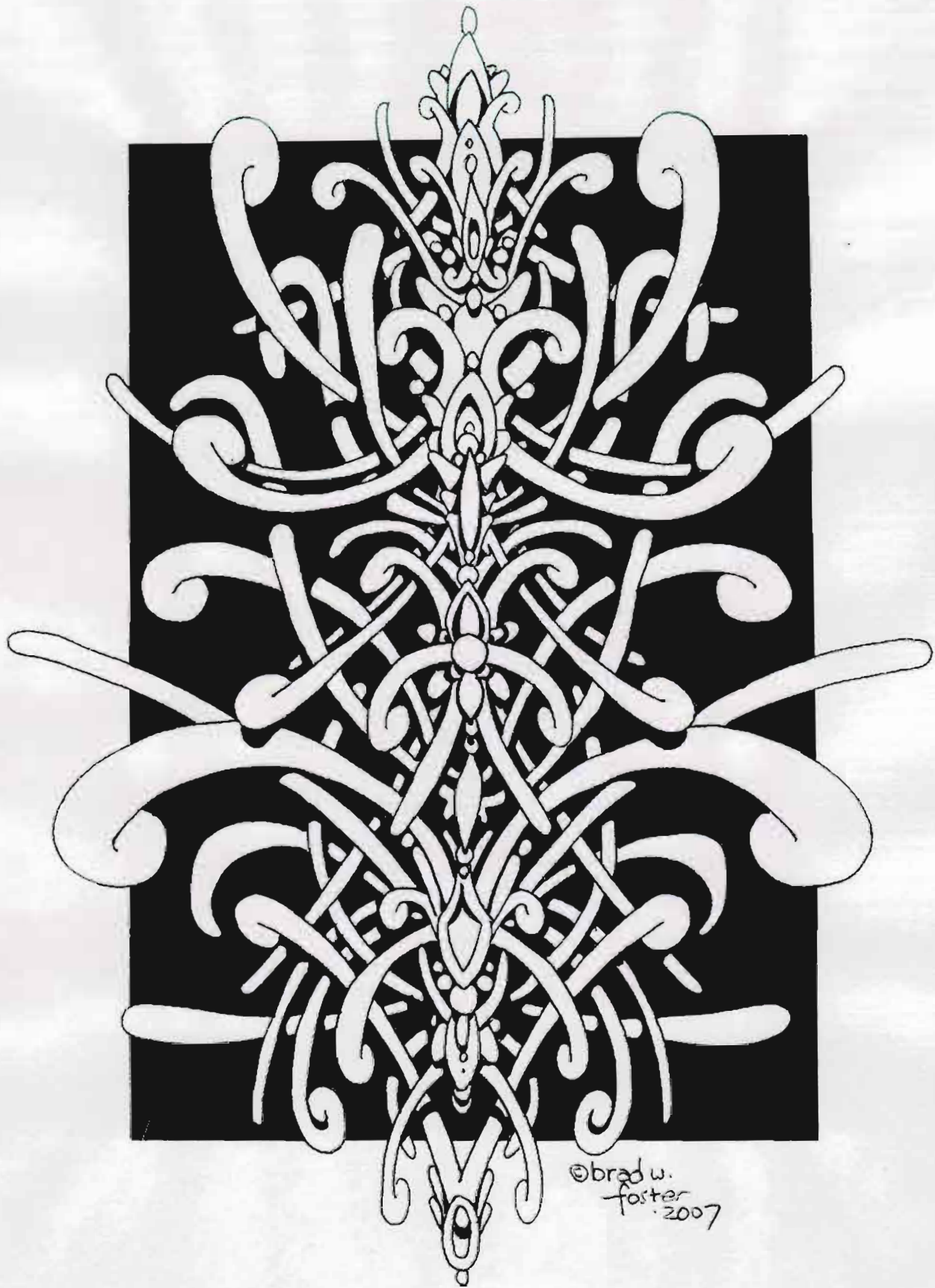
Sincerely,

Frank Denton

*[[I'm glad you responded to TRF even if I inadvertently sent you one of the copies with the little notice on it. After doing the last issue, it occurred to me that there was a good number of people to whom I send TRF and who never responded in any way. That got me to wondering if they never found anything worth responding to in any of the previous issues or if they never even bothered to read TRF. So I appended the little message to thirty copies of #64 and sent them out to see what would happen. You're the only one so far to respond—and you're one of the people I wasn't worried about since you send me **The Rogue Raven** whenever you produce an issue. Infrequent though it*

may be, it is more of a response than I've received from the others to whom I mailed those tagged copies. So don't feel bad about your "procrastination"//As you note—and after TRF #65 came out—gas prices have come down. The last time I fueled up, on Labor Day coming back from visiting our children and grandchildren in Michigan, the price was \$3.49 per gallon, down from \$3.99 not all that long ago. That was nice and somewhat gratifying but I harbor the feeling that it won't last long and the prices are liable to go back up. You're correct and the problem of high fuel prices and their associated effects won't go away. We all have to do something, from driving smarter and less to getting after our elected politicians on up to whoever becomes president to do something positive for all citizens in this country not just themselves. China in particular is rapidly becoming a heavy user of gasoline and that means less fuel for the U.S. And other nations. As smarter people than I have said, we should have done something thirty-plus years ago. Now we have to work even harder. I have to agree with you "... that we old retired people have probably lived through the best years of anyone's life, in spite of our wars and threats of war. Future generation may never see the good times that we have seen." And that's largely because the generation before ours and our generation didn't act when we should have. Those future generations may curse ours.//Again, as you will have discovered in this issue, Sheryl's problems have been sorted out and she's doing all right—until some new catastrophe befalls her. God forbid!//I'm sorry! I didn't mean to wound you in particular when I made those comments about horse-racing and the bettors. I just thought the horses deserved better than being trained to run around a circle to entertain and, occasionally, enrich some people. For all I know, most race-horses may very well enjoy running in the races. But, please, don't let what I wrote stop you from remarking on horse-racing. You're a good person and I don't hold your love of horse-racing against you. And I promise not to throw you into the briar patch, Br'er Rabbit.

Well that's it for this issue, folks. As you will have noticed, there was no Conclusion in this issue. That was partly because I didn't have anything I thought worth writing about and also as an experiment to see what it would be like not having any concluding remarks. If you found this issue worthwhile, please let me know some way, even if only by postcard or a short e-mail. Until next issue—Full thrusters!



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