

THE RELUCTANT FAMULUS



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The Reluctant Famulus #67 (Autumn, 2008)

Thomas D. Sadler, Editor/Publisher, etc.
305 Gill Branch Road, Owenton, KY 40359
Phone: 502-484-3720
E-mail tomfamulus@toast.net
or: thomassadler101@yahoo.com

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Artwork

Brad Foster	Cover, 5,14,29 (col. 2)
Tom Doubrrley	1,2,3
Kurt Erichsen	4, 6
Sheryl Birkhead	7,8,9,11, 29 (col.1)
Alexis Gilliland	20,21,23,26, 27
Schirm	Back cover

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The Reluctant Famulus

There are Strange Things in Outer Space

But first, something here on Earth.

The first part of September, after some ten years, the Large Hadron collider (a.k.a.: LHC and “the world's biggest atom smasher”) started up for the first time. Among the objectives for which the machine was built was to find or create Higgs Bosons, or the “God particles” which are theorized to give all other particles their mass. Scientists also hope to find at least a partial explanation for “dark matter”, which is thought to comprise a large portion of the material in space. So in early September the LHC was finally fired up for a small experiment to see how it would perform. A single bunch of protons was sent part-way around the 17 mile diameter collider. Then another bunch was sent all the way around, successfully. The results were satisfactory with all concerned. The next step is to send a bunch of protons around the collider in the other direction. Then the scientists hope sometime next year to send two bunches of protons in opposite directions and cause them to collide and possibly produce a variety of new particles.

But there are some who fear that the experiment will result in some sort of catastrophe. Those people are afraid the experiment will create some sort of unwelcome particles or other exotic stuff, mini-black holes which could cause major destruction, or something that could swallow up Earth or destroy the universe as we know it. In fact, a couple of Hawaiians started a lawsuit to stop the start-up of the LHC. A federal judge, however, ruled against that lawsuit, stating that American law had no jurisdiction over a European project. And so the collider, as mentioned, went ahead with its initial try-out.

Unfortunately, a faulty connection between two of the accelerator’s magnets and a helium leak (which requires warming up from -456.3° F to check and repair and then cool back down) have sidelined the LHC until

sometime in the Spring of 2009. I guess those fearful people can breath a long sigh of relief, temporary though it may be, that we’re all safe for a while. Of course, on the other side, there are those scientists who say there’s nothing to worry about even if mini-black holes were created; they’d have no appreciable affect. In fact it is claimed that collisions like those the LHC would create “have been produced by cosmic rays bombarding the Earth throughout its existence”.

That being the case, I think we can all safely go about our normal routines with no fear of total cosmic destruction.



And now to outer space and a star that exploded and no one noticed it at the time. It seems that back in October of 2007 the European Space Agency’s XMM-Newton telescope while scanning a particular portion of space detected an unexpected burst of cosmic x-rays. A check of the previous cosmic x-ray catalog failed to turn up a record of such activity in that area. So the ESA XMMNew

ton people looked up three possible candidates, one of them a normally faint star known only by its catalog number, USNO-A2.0 0450-03360039 (Whew! It could have had a simpler designation.).

Doing some more work, astronomers used the 6.5 meter Magellan-Clay telescope in Chile and found that USNO-A2.0 0450-03360039 had become 600 times brighter than normal. After analyzing the light from that source they determined that it could be classified as a nova. But there was a puzzle: an explosion of that type doesn't immediately release x-rays because the expanding cloud of debris created by the blow-up and temporarily hides them.

After some more sleuthing and contact with the robotic All Sky Automated survey it was found that the nova had taken place June 5, 2007 and would have been bright enough to see with the unaided eye. It was stated that anyone who had gone out that night and looked toward the constellation Puppis would have seen it. But,



apparently, no one had seen and reported it even though amateur and professional astronomers regularly search the night sky for stars or other objects that suddenly brighten.

The missed nova has now been named V598 Puppis and become one of the bright

est nova for nearly a decade even though no one spotted it during its brilliant peak. The discovery of the nova that nobody saw has astronomers wondering if there are other discoveries that have gone unnoticed. It does kinda make you wonder . . .

Going back in time to February 2006 and something that wasn't missed but is still a puzzle. In February 2006 a "mysterious object" suddenly flared up in an otherwise barren patch of sky. Astronomers working on the Supernova Cosmology Project had pointed the Hubble Space telescope at a star cluster 8.2 billion light-years away and noticed something else: a point of light where one hadn't been before. Over the following three months the object got brighter and brighter until it was 120 times its initial brightness. Then it gradually grew dimmer until by the end of 2006 it was gone.

Astronomers put the light coming from the object through a mass spectrometer to find out what it was made of but couldn't get markers for any known elements. Since they couldn't see anything recognizable in the spectrum, astronomers couldn't tell if the thing was even in our galaxy or in another one. They don't believe it was a supernova because those would have flared more quickly and died out more quickly. All the astronomers know is that it's not closer to Earth than 130 light-years and no farther than 11 billion light years. *Sky and Telescope* magazine said, "that leaves a lot of leeway". Ya think so? The astronomers are waiting to see if anyone else might have seen something like it or be able to provide an explanation.

Could it have been, say, a very large spacecraft from some highly advanced civilization using some fantastic power source that exploded? Or, maybe, was it an intentional signal from some other civilization trying to get other civilizations' attention?

Or was it some other advanced civilizations equivalent Large Hadron Collider producing some unfortunate unexpected results? Naw. That's pretty farfetched. It has to be

some sort of new, unknown natural phenomenon. Doesn't it?

I imagine most if not all you readers have heard of dark matter and dark energy, two theoretical components which make up 80-95% (it seems as if the amounts vary, apparently) of the "stuff" within the universe. Well now astronomers have observed "patches" of matter in the universe which appear to be moving at very high velocities and in a uniform direction and which apparently can't be explained by any known gravitational forces in the universe. They're now calling the phenomenon "dark flow".

The astronomers discovered this "dark flow" while studying some of the largest structures around giant clusters of galaxies. The clusters are collections of about a thousand galaxies and very hot gas which emits X-rays. They do so by observing the interaction of the X-rays with the "cosmic microwave background" (or CMB), the leftover radiation from the Big Bang. The X-rays scatter photons in the CMB, shifting its temperature in an effect known as the kinematic Sunyaev-Zel'dovich effect. Apparently the effect hadn't been observed as a result of galaxy clusters before. But a team of researchers found it when they studies a catalog of 700 clusters reaching out up to 6 billion light-years, almost halfway across the universe.

The clusters were moving at nearly two million miles per hour toward a region between the constellations Centaurus and Vela. The motion is different from the outward expansion of the universe, which is accelerated by "dark energy". The astronomers found a significant velocity that doesn't decrease with distance, as far as they can tell from measurements. They say the matter in the universe we see can't produce the flow they measure. The researchers conclude that whatever it is driving the movements of the clusters must lie beyond the known universe.

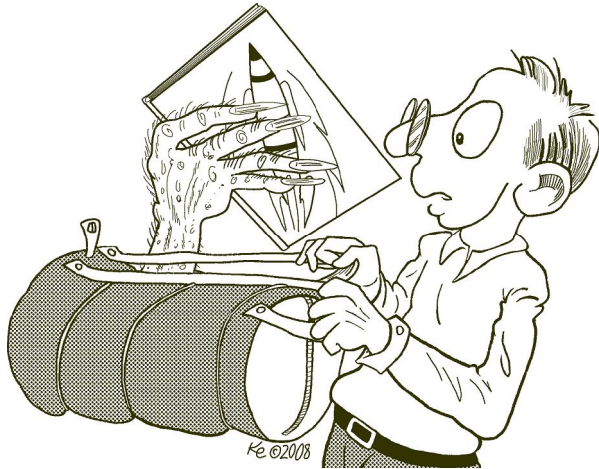
There is a theory called "inflation" that speculates the universe we see is only a small bubble of space-time that rapidly expanded

after the Big Bang and there are other parts of the cosmos beyond the bubble that we can't see. Furthermore it is possible that in the other regions space-time might be different, likely doesn't contain stars and galaxies, and could include massive structures bigger than anything in our own universe. It's those structures that astronomers think are pulling at the galaxy clusters and causing the flow. The structures responsible for that have been pushed so far away by inflation, maybe hundreds of billions of light-years, couldn't be seen by us because the light from them probably hasn't reached us yet. Finally, in order to create such a coherent flow they would have to be some really strange structures and maybe some warped space-time. But the researchers admit it's all just speculation at this point.



"Just speculation". Some of these theoreticians have wilder imaginations than a lot of science fiction writers. Whether or not any such things actually exist is anyone's guess, and we'll probably never know—at least a few hundred generations of us humans won't, assuming the human race exists that long. It's all interesting, at least, and might give writers food for thought for future stories.

And that's it for now. On with the rest of this issue . . .



The Old Kit Bag Bob Sabella

The Old Kit Bag #7: SFWA Grandmasters

Recently the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America announced that Harry Harrison will be the recipient of the Damon Knight Grandmaster Award for 2008. This is the most prestigious award the organization gives to living f&sf writers. Previous recipients have been:

Year Recipient

1974	Robert A. Heinlein
1975	Jack Williamson
1976	Clifford D. Simak
1978	L. Sprague de Camp
1981	Fritz Leiber
1983	Andre Norton
1985	Arthur C. Clarke
1986	Isaac Asimov
1987	Alfred Bester
1988	Ray Bradbury
1990	Lester del Rey
1992	Frederik Pohl
1994	Damon Knight
1995	A. E. van Vogt
1996	Jack Vance
1997	Poul Anderson
1998	Hal Clement
1999	Brian W. Aldiss
2000	Philip Jose Farmer

2003	Ursula K. LeGuin
2004	Robert Silverberg
2005	Anne McCaffrey
2006	Harlan Ellison
2007	James Gunn
2008	Michael Moorcock

Harry Harrison was one of the stalwarts of **Analog** in the 1960s, along with Poul Anderson, Gordon R. Dickson, James H. Schmitz, and Christopher Anvil.

Of course, Poul Anderson was the superstar of that group, having 27 Hugo and Nebula nominations in his career, along with winning 10 Hugo and Nebula Awards. He was the author of the classic "Call Me Joe" which was included in the SFWA **Science Fiction Hall of Fame** as one of the greatest f&sf novellas ever published, and he was selected as an SFWA Grandmaster in 1997.

Gordon R. Dickson was nominated for 10 Hugo and Nebula Awards, winning 4 of them.

James H. Schmitz had 6 Hugo and Nebula nominations, including one for the classic novella "The Witches of Karres," which was also included in the SFWA **Science Fiction Hall of Fame**. Christopher Anvil was nominated neither for a Nebula nor a Hugo Award during his career.

In comparison, Harry Harrison had 4 Hugo and Nebula nominations, his lone win being a Nebula Award for Best Dramatic Presentation for *Soylent Green*, which was based on his novel **Make Room! Make**

Room!

Of the four authors (other than Anderson), Dickson deserved a Grandmaster Award, which he would have undoubtedly won had he lived longer. Neither Schmitz nor Anvil were deserving of such a designation, while Harrison falls somewhere between the two levels in his writing career. He is probably best remembered for such sophisticated adventures as his *Deathworld* series and a few solo novels such as the aforementioned **Make Room! Make Room!** and perhaps the alternate fantasy **Tunnel Through the Deeps**. But are these really the qualifications of a *grandmaster*? Especially considering that many of the major writers who started in the late 1960s and early 1970s have not yet been so honored. Consider the following list:

Greg Benford (16 Hugo and Nebula nominations, 2 wins)

Michael Bishop (24 Hugo and Nebula nominations, 2 wins)

C.J. Cherryh (9 Hugo and Nebula nominations; 3 wins)

Samuel R. Delany (30 Hugo and Nebula nominations, 6 wins)

Joe Haldeman (17 Hugo and Nebula nominations, 10 wins)

George R.R. Martin (30 Hugo and Nebula nominations, 6 wins)

Larry Niven (27 Hugo and Nebula nominations, 6 wins)

John Varley (24 Hugo and Nebula nominations, 5 wins)

Kate Wilhelm (24 Hugo and Nebula nominations, 5 wins)

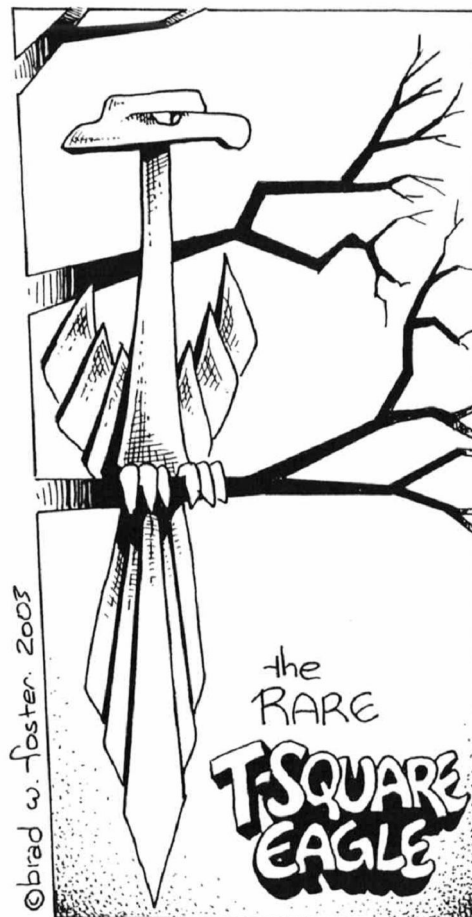
Gene Wolfe (28 Hugo and Nebula nominations, 2 wins)

Why is SFWA honoring a second-tier talent such as Harry Harrison while ignoring the great writers listed above, all of whom have been writing for at least 35 years? Is SFWA waiting for them all to die, such as Algis Budrys, Thomas M. Disch, Philip K. Dick, Theodore Sturgeon, and Roger Zelazny died,

in addition to Gordon R. Dickson, all of whom belong on any list of the field's grandmasters but, alas, never received one?

Or is the Grandmaster moving in the same direction as the Nebula Awards themselves, where the members honor their friends moreso than they honor truly deserving winners?

As an aside to all this, it seems time for the SFWA to create a second award for great writers who died without having won a Grandmaster, perhaps calling it the Grandmaster Memorial award. Just because a writer happens to die before SFWA gets around to noticing their achievements should not forever keep them from the organization's list of the best f&sf writers ever.



Rat Stew

Gene Stewart



Rising Above Miscegenation

Ursula K. LeGuin spoke of miscegenation between genre and mainstream fiction. She discussed briefly how the two are distinct in approach and form. She thought the mainstream benefited but wasn't too sure genre gained from such exchanges and mergers.

What mainstream fiction tends to get from genre is imaginative elements. Magic realism for the mainstream critics was what genre critics called fantasy all along, for instance. Such elements can enliven basics seen too many times before.

Genre fiction tends to take realism from mainstream fiction. A grittier sense of presence, a more realistic depiction of behavior or setting results. This can refresh tired ideas and threadbare executions.

In genre fiction, plot counts most. So do ideas. In mainstream fiction, character and setting are emphasized. This simple shift of emphasis has created a gap in American fiction that does not exist as strongly elsewhere in the world. Elsewhere—Britain for example—the differences are seen as valid variants, rather than distinctions. Genre and mainstream exist there intermingled. A writer can be considered serious while writing mystery or science fiction, there. Anthony Burgess is an example. In Britain, a genre writer can win serious literary awards for work that crosses or blurs genre lines. Martin Amis comes to mind.

Stateside, fen are upset by writers

perceived generally as literary who “pilfer” genre elements and end up being recognized for innovation. Fen grouse about Margaret Atwood for swooping down from her literary heights to scarf up some science fictional insight in *The Handmaid's Tale*, which went on to glean much acclaim and, incidentally, became a best-seller and major movie. Fen sneer at mystery writer P. D. James for using science fictional tricks in *Children of Men*, a book that also won acclaim, sold hugely well, and became a big movie. Mostly the fen resent all the attention the genre elements in such works receive from the mainstream critics, as if such things had never existed before, let alone been pioneered by pre-WW II pulp writers and their literary offspring.

Where, fen whine, is the mainstream or academic praise for Frank Herbert's *Dune* or for Johanna Russ's *The Female Man*?

Oh, but when Ursula K. LeGuin manages to jump the gap from a start in genre fiction to mainstream literary respectability, some fen wonder if she's sold out, or if she's even written “real” science fiction all along?

They pulled the same on Ray Bradbury. “He never really wrote science fiction or fantasy, it was always mainstream fabulism,” fen say, when the quality of his prose and the purity of his voice prompts mainstream recognition.

Of course, they skip over the work of Philip K. Dick, which has become a favorite of academics and has, oddly, been made into many movies since PKD's death. Hell, it's even been chosen for the Library of America fancy book gimmick, considered prestigious by collectors.

Suffice it to say that, stateside at least,

6 the standards to which fiction are held vary

between genre and mainstream. What are valid variations elsewhere are distinctions keeping groups separate here.

Miscegenation means inter-breeding between distinct races. It is an ugly term. It implies purity contaminated. It leads to terms like maroon and mulatto

And sure enough, as fans eagerly point out, genre fiction, particularly science fiction, has been singled out stateside for prejudicial treatment. It's been the victim of unwarranted slurs, scurrilous lies, and mean spirited analysis. It's been held in contempt and used as a reason for automatic and universal dismissal from serious contention for major literary prizes.

The very term genre fiction carries a stigma of cookie-cutter lack of quality. Unfairly, all examples are judged by the worst among them. Pulp fiction from 50 years ago continues to define academic response to genre fiction today.

This despite many mainstream writers pilfering genre tropes, fans complain. How come it's okay when they do it?

It's how they do it, comes the response from the snob side of the divide. Learn to write better, the mainstream critics sneer.

By whose standards? That should be the question. If it is acknowledged that different standards apply, then it must also be acknowledged that a given work may simultaneously be excellent and terrible, depending on what critic is making the assessment.

Can the standards merge?

In the 1970s, a New Wave hit genre fiction, especially science fiction. Writers brought many new tricks, from mainstream literary writing classes. Purists balked. Pulp standards of writing developed by scientists and engineers, who concentrated on idea and plot, became Golden, while the New Wave stuff was viewed as effete, affected, and ineffectual. Who wanted all those characters cluttering things up; genre fiction required only cardboard cut-outs as place markers for ideas.

And so the debate devolved at once into name calling and posturing. It remains acrimonious to this day, despite decades of excellent work meshing the competing standards.

Which brings us back to Ursula K.

LeGuin's remark about miscegenation. She's not sure genre benefits from an influx of mainstream elements?

First, consider the source of this comment; the latest issue of LOCUS, the newspaper of science fiction and fantasy publishing. She was speaking to a select audience and perhaps playing to its perceived prejudices.

Second, consider that LeGuin's work itself represents some of the finest merging -- miscegenation -- available. She has always written pure science fiction with high mainstream standards of prose and character, setting and theme. Her work is neither white nor black but bronze and brown, a burnished alloy combining the best of both.

Third, consider that miscegenation is an old-fashioned, outdated word, long overdue for an overhaul. Perhaps that is what we can learn from her comment, that the new mix, as with hybrids everywhere, is stronger and healthier than either of its parents.

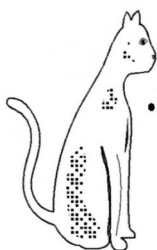
Of the New Wave herself, LeGuin may be looking forward to a time when the only consideration is not genre versus mainstream, but quality of writing. A good story well told is all that matters, in the end. Categorical thinking should be a thing of the past, an embarrassment like racism or any other kind of prejudice and bigotry.

Sure, some of us will always prefer stories with certain types of elements in them; that's a matter of taste and education. But excluding work, not even giving it a chance, simply because it emphasizes one set of standards over another, or contains one set of elements and not another, is absurd.

It simply does not matter what percentage of what kind of "blood" one carries from one's ancestry, and it simply does not matter what percentage of what arbitrary literary grouping a story contains.

We need to be better than that, like the best of today's fiction.





...and over here we have
Twinkle Toes and Obo...
Reggie



Fiona

Sheryl Birkhead

I volunteer with the local SPCA as their “medical coordinator”. This means that in a #good week for **me** I give them 20 hours and in a good week for **them** can be up to almost 60 hours. The organization is going through changes and would like to, eventually, have an impact on the dog and cat population (i.e. a spay/neuter plan) and not just trying to find homes for unwanted pets.

The group often gets calls to help out people most of the rest of the world labels as “collectors”...or maybe someone who is just plain dense. Frequently the call will be from someone who had a pair of cats and could not afford to spay and neuter. For some mysterious reason they seem to feel that as long as they keep these cats inside nothing will happen. Well...duh! So, we get a call when their “inside colony” reaches numbers that even they realize are out of hand.

For about six months the organization has been helping a former volunteer who is working with one such “collector”. The idea is to have the group pay for spay/neuter and also adopt out some that are highly adoptable. The first group we took was a litter of three-two females and a male. It was obvious that there is at least one Siamese in the “colony”one of the girls was a gorgeous blue tabby-point *Siamese* cross with the those blue eyes that pretty much guarantees a boatload of adoption applications. The other of the girls was a rust-coated looking tabbywith the Siamese body type... and juvenile cataracts. The fellah of the group was a beautiful white with brown tabby spots and the *Siamese* body type (and what

I call “wiggly eyeballs” to the uninitiated which screams *Siamese* heritage}who had an inner ear infection and walked a bit funny until that got cleared up. These were, all three, beautiful and loving 6 month old kittens-so I knew the “collector” was at least socializing them, but knew nothing about actual medical needs.

About a month after the first group arrived I got a call on a Saturday to let me know that two more from the same “colony” had arrived- and that the female was just *wunnerful!* I am not being sexist here, but in my experience, it is usually the toms that are more easygoing and friendly. True, there are a lot of queens that are sweet, but... The volunteer gushed over how great *Fiona* was ...and and that she was another of the blue-eyed tabby-point beauties. The tom, *Reggie*, was great too, but...

Some of the volunteers did not like the names they had just been given when turned over to us. I kinds liked them

Sunday is the day I go **in** and do routine care and exams. I was looking forward to meeting these two.

Fiona and *Reggie* were put in the same cage and- true to reputation were both spectacularly friendly head butting, talking and just plain people cats. I was hoping that the former volunteer would have the spay/neuter records so I could set up a complete files for these two and get them ready for what I felt would be a very short stay with us. No such luck. There was a hand written note saying she thought the surgery had been in February, but she

would look for the records at the clinic. Okay-no big deal.

Fiona had all the color and eyes of the *Siamese*, but lacked the body type of the breed-thicker head and neck and already starting to get a bit thick around the middle. *Reggie*, on the other hand, had only the *Siamese* body type and “wiggly eyeballs” to hint at parentage. Neither of them had *Siamese* voices or temperaments (whew!).

These two were so easy going that I managed to do physical exams on both without help. *Reggie* had a bit (ready for this?) of chin acne, but otherwise was healthy. All I could think of was if someone can look past *Fiona* at him they can see what a great cat he is.

I guessed they were about a year and a half old, but needed the surgical reports and their rabies certificates. I won't go into all the reasons, but it was best if they did not have to repeat rabies vaccination if they truly did not need it. So, I passed along my information and asked that someone really make an effort to dig out those records.

Right. Neuter and leukemia/FIV test on one white with brown tabby spots male and spay and tests on one blue tabby-point female... according to the Give Up sheet We'll get to it RSN.

The next Sunday I looked for records. Still not there. These two were so great it was

fun to just let them out and watch them tussle together or bat catnip mice around; not a mean or hissy bone in their bodies. But, by the next week, the SPCA was getting antsy and wanted to show these two for adoption. Legally we would be in hot water if one of them actually bit someone (Right. *Reggie*, open your mouth so I can insert my hand. Now bite down), so I managed to stall again, but promised that if the papers weren't there by the next weekend, I would go ahead and re-vaccinate them.

I stopped in to see them on Wednesday and for some reason did a butt check and then did a double take. Um . . . err . . . how do I say this diplomatically? *Siamese* color refers to their points as in seal-POINT, blue-POINT and so on. For the uninitiated, the points are the ears, nose, tail, feet and legs, and um . . . er . . . in the tom . . . uh . . . Suffice it to say, a rear view should show two color pointed spots beneath the tail. I turned *Fiona* upside down and got a good look, then did it again a second and a third time. I then went and got reinforcements asking for a second opinion. No question about it *Fiona* was actually *Philip*. No wonder the records could not be found for this pair. *She* is a terrific cat!

I guess it does pay always to check your facts! I felt really, really stupid! (Oh yeah just to be sure, *Reggie* got a butt check too; no need for a name change there.)



Adventures in the Laboratory: V

Alfred D. Byrd

Nowadays, I can walk down the hall and visit a pair of robots that can do, with admirable celerity and in impressive quantity, work that once consumed my days. “Long live the robots!” say I. What automation does now was once done by human hands with procedures that, if done by Macbeth’s three witches, would inspire them to chant:

DOUBLE HELIX, TOIL AND TROUBLE

Deoxyribonucleic acid is an amazingly strong molecule. It has to be, to keep us in existence, or to survive the tortures that researchers inflict on it in the lab.

The tortures starts with the researcher’s getting the DNA out of the cell that it has built around it to carry it from generation to generation. I’ve removed DNA from both bacterial and plant cells. For either type of cell, the procedure for removal is simply described: smash the cell! For bacteria, one grows up a large number of bacterial cells in a growth medium, spins the cells down out of the growth medium in a centrifuge, and grind up the resulting pellet of cells with a pestle. For plants, one grinds up plant material (grass, in my case) in a buffer into which the cells’ insides are released.

The DNA is now outside the cell, but mixed up with glop that would warm the cockles of H. P. Lovecraft’s heart. (Strange man, but others have told his story.) Now the researcher must separate glop from DNA. One can do so easily, but not, by the old ways, safely.

Separating DNA from glop depends on a chemical phenomenon called phase partition. DNA, being an acid, is hydrophilic, attracted to water. The glop, being for the most part fats and suchlike chemicals beneath the notice

of geneticists, is hydrophobic, attracted to chemicals that separate from water. To get the DNA out of the glop, all one has to do is mix DNA, glop, water, and hydrophobic chemicals together and let them separate. The DNA will come out in the water, and the glop will go away to its hydrophobic fate.

All sounds simple till you learn what the hydrophobic chemicals are. They form a witch’s brew of phenol, chloroform, and isoamyl alcohol chemicals that, if you read their Material Safety Data Sheets, will fill you with awe of how many ways and through how many portals they can harm, maim, or kill you. Of these chemicals, the worst is phenol, which you may know as carboic acid, and which Popeye was wont to call “carbolic acid” when his foes slipped it into his drink. A sorry fate was his! Phenol can produce instant, permanent scarring on your skin, produce cataracts in your eyes, burn up your nasal linings, and dissolve your liver and kidneys. Turn the page on your MSDS, and you’ll learn the bad effects!

It’s always amazed me how phenol was shipped to the lab. If you’ve never heard the “coosh-maker joke,” you’re about to hear it now. The phenol came inside a thick box of corrugated cardboard in which was a thick foil lining surrounding another thick box. Inside this was a layer of vermiculite (mica used for potting plants) around a thick aluminum can. Opening this, one found another layer of vermiculite in which was a thick plastic bag holding a bottle of breakable amber glass! This bottle held the phenol. In its packaging the bottle would survive a space shuttle’s explosion; outside its packaging the bottle was subject to the slings and arrows of outrageous lab workers. I guess that shippers counted for more than

we. Nor is the bottle's fragility a purely theoretical consideration. Once one of my colleagues dropped a bottle holding a liter of phenol, and its resulting reek drove off everyone in the lab for days.

In any case, if you've done all well, you have in your centrifuge tube an upper layer of mostly water holding your DNA, and a lower layer of death chemicals holding unwanted glop. As you pipette off the upper layer, take care to avoid the layer of white stuff on the meniscus between the upper and lower layers. No one can say what the white stuff (sorry for the technical language) is; it is known only that it will stop any biochemical reaction, including, one supposes, the ones in one's body. Now you can pour the lower layer into a suitable container, fill out a hazardous waste report form, and call Environmental and Health Safety to pick up your mess.

Your DNA dissolved in the upper layer does you no good. You have to get it out of this in a usable form by a process called precipitation. To precipitate DNA, you rely on ethanol. This must be chemically pure, free of the adulterants put into commercial industrial ethanol. (I doubt that whiskey, brandy, or tequila would work well for precipitating DNA either, though I've never heard of their being tried for the purpose.)

Because bibulous lab workers have poured absolute ethanol into other beverages for the sake of potation, government agencies such as the IRS and the ATF now require labs to document the use of every drop of chemically pure absolute ethanol. Gone are the days when one lab worker whom I know (not I!) decided to top off his can of Coke with some absolute ethanol. Alas, he didn't mix the latter with the former. The first sip from the can didn't quite cause the skin of his lips and tongue to slough off, but, as he described the sip to me, they felt as if they were sloughing off.

In any case, to get your DNA out of your upper layer, you mix this with several volumes of absolute ethanol. If your upper layer has

lots of DNA, it may just fall out of solution as a mucousy glob that you can fish out with a toothpick. (Mucus, after all, consists of starchy carbohydrates much like DNA.) If your upper layer holds lesser amounts of DNA, though, you'll have to centrifuge your DNA solution so that it will form a pellet at the bottom of its tube.

To get your DNA into a usable solution, you have to pour and pipette off most of the ethanol, and let the rest dry off of the pellet. If you're not in a hurry, you can let it dry in air; if, as is usual in the world of perish or publish, you are in a hurry, you can hasten the process by spinning down the pellet in a vacuum chamber.

In either case you're left with a dried pellet of DNA at the bottom of a tube, most likely of polypropylene. Now you face the last risky part of working with DNA. In its native form it's a highly charged ion, and it's sitting on plastic that itself can hold a charge. To handle the plastic tube without contaminating it, you must encase your hands in protective gloves that have an amazing ability to hold a static charge. If you're careless, you'll transmit this to the tube, which will transmit it to the DNA, and by the miracle of electrostatic repulsion you'll catapult your DNA out of the tube and into the unknown. Now it's back to growing cells to be crushed!

If all goes well, though, you can resuspend your DNA in a buffer in which you can treat your DNA with enzymes that will make it sit, shake hands, beg, and roll over. Now you're on your way to gathering data that will let you write papers, receive your degree, and earn fame and fortune.

Or at least enough money to buy a computer on which to write an article like this.



What's in a Plot?—or, alternatively, What Is a Plot

That is a subject which writers and critics have studied and perhaps debated for generations, back to when humans first began putting stories into words. According to what I remembered, there were supposedly only six plots in all of literature. Not trusting my memory, however, I did a little research and discovered I was off by one and even then that was only one of several theories about plots. But first, for those who might be interested or even care, a definition of plot. I took the following definition from a dictionary I have and use the most *Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition. Copyright 1999*. It may or may not agree with whatever dictionary you readers may own. Even so, it seems as reasonable a definition as any. After removing definitions relating to real estate, here is the definition (underlined emphasis is mine).

Plot, n, [[ME < OE . . . 4, the arrangements of the incidents in a play, novel, narrative poem, etc.; (vt. plotted, plotting) 3 to plan the action of (a story, etc.)*

While refreshing my memory on the actual number of plots in fiction I came upon the following article from the *Internet Public Library* site which quotes various “expert” sources) which I thought you readers might find of some small interest. It turns out that, depending on which “expert” one consults, there are between 1 and 36 basic plots in literature. They are as follows:

1 Plot:

Attempts to find the number of basic plots in literature can't be reduced any smaller than describing a single basic plot. Foster-Harris

claims that all plots stem from conflict. He describes this in terms of what the main character feels: “I have an inner conflict of emotions, feelings.... What, in any case, can I do to resolve the inner problems?” (p. 30-31) This is in accord with the canonical view that the basic elements of plot revolve around a problem dealt with in sequence: “Exposition - Rising Action - Climax - Falling Action - Denouement”. (Such description of plot can be found in many places, including: Holman, C. Hugh and William Harmon. *A Handbook to Literature*. 6th ed. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1992.) Foster-Harris' main argument is for 3 Plots (which are contained within this one), described below.

3 Plots:

Foster-Harris. *The Basic Patterns of Plot*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959. Foster-Harris contends that there are three basic patterns of plot (p. 66):

1. “Type A, happy ending”; Foster-Harris argues that the “Type A” pattern results when the central character (which he calls the “I-nitial” character) makes a sacrifice (a decision that seems logically “wrong”) for the sake of another.

2. “Type B, unhappy ending”; this pattern follows when the “I-nitial” character does what seems logically “right” and thus fails to make the needed sacrifice.

3. “Type C, the literary plot, in which, no matter whether we start from the happy or the unhappy fork, proceeding backwards we arrive inevitably at the question, where we

stop to wail.” This pattern requires more explanation (Foster-Harris devotes a chapter to the literary plot.) In short, the “literary plot” is one that does not hinge upon decision, but fate; in it, the critical event takes place at the beginning of the story rather than the end. What follows from that event is inevitable, often tragedy. (This in fact coincides with the classical Greek notion of tragedy, which is that such events are fated and inexorable.)

7 Plots (and the ones of which I remembered 6)

7 basic plots as remembered from second grade by IPL volunteer librarian Jessamyn West:

1. [wo]man vs. nature
2. [wo]man vs. man
3. [wo]man vs. the environment
4. [wo]man vs. machines/technology
5. [wo]man vs. the supernatural
6. [wo]man vs. self
7. [wo]man vs. god/religion

20 Plots:

Tobias, Ronald B. *20 Master Plots*. Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 1993. (ISBN 0-89879-595-8)

This book proposes twenty basic plots:

1. Quest
2. Adventure
2. Pursuit
4. Rescue
5. Escape
6. Revenge
7. The Riddle
8. Rivalry
9. Underdog
10. Temptation
11. Metamorphosis
12. Transformation
13. Maturation
14. Love

15. Forbidden Love
16. Sacrifice
17. Discovery
18. Wretched Excess
19. Ascension
20. Descension.

36 Plots [[*After a while I remembered having read about this one.*]]

Polti, Georges. *The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations*. trans. Lucille Ray. Polti claims to be trying to reconstruct **the 36** plots that Goethe alleges someone named [Carlo] Gozzi came up with. (in the following list, the words in parentheses are our annotations to try to explain some of the less helpful titles.):

1. Supplication (in which the Supplicant must beg something from Power in authority)
2. Deliverance
3. Crime Pursued by Vengeance
4. Vengeance taken for kindred upon kindred
- 5 Pursuit
6. Disaster
7. Falling Prey to Cruelty of Misfortune
8. Revolt
9. Daring Enterprise
10. Abduction
11. The Enigma (temptation or a riddle)
12. Obtaining
13. Enmity of Kinsmen
14. Rivalry of Kinsmen
15. Murderous Adultery
16. Madness
17. Fatal Imprudence
18. Involuntary Crimes of Love (example: discovery that one has married one's mother, sister, etc.)
19. Slaying of a Kinsman Unrecognized
- 20 Self-Sacrificing for an Ideal
21. Self-Sacrifice for Kindred
22. All Sacrificed for Passion
23. Necessity of Sacrificing Loved Ones
24. Rivalry of Superior and Inferior
25. Adultery

26. Crimes of Love
27. Discovery of the Dishonor of a Loved One
28. Obstacles to Love
29. An Enemy Loved
30. Ambition
31. Conflict with a God
32. Mistaken Jealousy
33. Erroneous Judgment
34. Remorse
35. Recovery of a Lost One
36. Loss of Loved Ones.

Personally I think that Polti is splitting quite a few hairs there with his enumeration of the basic plots but what do I know. At any rate it appears that a plot can be as simple or as complex as the writer wants it to be and is, in some ways, merely the skeleton around which the flesh of the story is grown.

In the end, are we any better off learning about the preceding ideas concerning the nature of a plot? Probably not. But I'd like to toss in a notion which some may declare is stretching more than a little. It's something which has become a sort of mantra for journalists (and other groups) and which they have employed in writing news news copy. Kipling wrote a verse which appeared at the end of "*The Elephant's Child*", the first four lines of which go:

I keep six honest serving-men
 (They taught me all I knew);
 Their names are What and Why and When
 And How and Where and Who.

According to newspaper practice all copy should contain the following: Who, What, Where, When, Why, How or, rather, the answers to those questions.

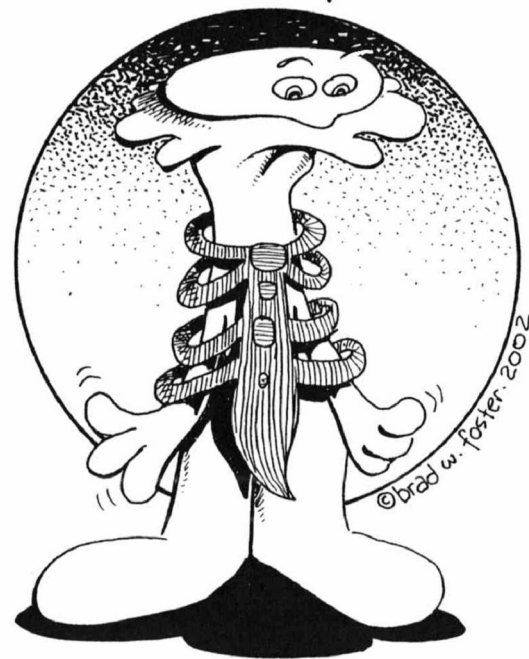
When one considers it, those "serving men" could also apply to fiction regardless of which basic plot one uses: Who = the protagonist; What = the protagonist's goal; Why = the protagonist's motivation; Where/When = the story's setting (physical and time-wise); and

how = the manner or method in which the goal or object is reached. If an astute reader—and one wouldn't have to have a high IQ or be a member of Mensa—is able to determine the presence of those "six serving men" then it seems fairly safe to say the story has a plot even if said plot refuses to leap from the pages, plant a big wet kiss on the reader's cheek and then, laughing fiendishly, return to whence it came. Or the reader could simply enjoy the story the writer has to tell.

But if anyone is **seriously** interested in knowing about plots and plotting, a trip to any good, well-stocked bookstore will turn up a fair number of books on writing: serious and dedicated, and, possibly, somewhat pedantic.

But then what do I know? I've been a serious reader for only 50+ years and a fool who thinks he can write.

LEONARD FINDS
 the NEW TREND
 IN MARTIAN
 NECKTIE DESIGN
 JUST A BIT...
 ... CONFINING.



An Evil Guest

Gene Wolfe

TOR Books, 2008; 304 pages,
including Cast of Characters

Another, for Gene Wolfe, short novel which, I think, is more accessible to the average reader not familiar with Gene's work. I should note that it, too, as with *Pirate Freedom*, *Castlevision*, *Pandora by Holly Hollander*, *Free Live Free*, and others, has a plot. It also suffers from the unfortunate fact that the cover blurbs are misleading as to the novel's nature as is the inside flaps of the dust-jacket. It makes me wonder what the publisher, Tor Books, was thinking when soliciting comments on the novel. Perhaps they should have asked people who had actually read and understood what was going on.

That aside, *AN EVIL GUEST*, is the story of Gideon Chase who is **not** a detective but rather, perhaps, a troubleshooter, one of those people who are hired to "put out fires" as the euphemism goes but principally Cassie (Cassiopeia) Casey. The story takes place sometime in the future when the then current president of the United States, summons Gideon Chase to discuss hiring him to find out the whereabouts of William "Bill" Reis, multi-millionaire who, among other things, is assumed to be a spy for a planet called Woldercan who somehow manages to bypass the high security of government installations and elude capture. The President wants Chase to capture and bring Reis to Federal authorities so they can extract the information from him.

After some "negotiations" Gideon Chase agrees to do what he can. From there by way of a somewhat cryptic note, Chase contacts an actress named Cassie Casey with the intent of convincing her to work for him. As an inducement, Chase promises her a small fortune and to make her a star. Cassie decides to take a chance and see exactly what Gideon Chase has in mind. They meet and Gideon provides more detail on what her job would be: to get close to Bill Reis and find out all she can about



him. Then Chase takes Cassie into Canada, to a certain "magic" mountain where he performs what he calls a "glamour", a certain mystical process which brings out latent qualities in a person. In Cassie's case it's the potential to become a true acting "star".

During the closing night of the play in which she acted, Cassie gave the performance of a lifetime and everyone about her remarks on the wonderful job she did. She begins to get the attention usually reserved for movie stars. But the play's run had ended and the case and crew were out of a job. That is, until during the cast party at a well-known restaurant they learn that a new play is in the works, a musical with the improbable title of *Dating the Volcano God*. The backer of the play is a very wealthy man calling himself Wallace Rosenquist who in reality just happens to be William Reis. Said "angel" is there at the cast party and so Cassie gets to meet him and thus begins her association with the man who Gideon Chase had told her about.

After a few more meetings with Chase and after he is injured in an attempt against his life and is compelled to go into hiding, the story revolves primarily around Cassie.

The musical becomes a reality, the play

goes into rehearsals and then on the road. Despite its rather absurd title, the play becomes a hit, as does Cassie's acting career. During all this she becomes more deeply involved with Bill Reis and his *alter ego* than Gideon Chase or she ever intended. She and Wally Rosenquist (Bill Reis) begin a romance, she knowing full well who he really is.

The book is fairly fast-paced with little puzzles and surprises along the way. Although Cassie, whenever she is in touch with him, tells Gideon Chase she loves him she finds herself also falling in love with Rosenquist/Reis. She gets deeper and deeper into her "mission", learning as much as she can about Reis and passing it along to Chase.

A few people are killed, some others kidnapped, and whether the kidnappers are the Good Guys or the Bad Guys isn't exactly clear. People are not always what they seem (something common to just about all of Wolfe's works) nor completely good or completely bad. In the course of all this there are hints of supernatural powers and mythical creatures such as shape-changers (or at least one who changes into a werewolf). There are a couple of strange flying beings who claim to be on Cassie's side looking out for her safety, and indeed they do get her out of some trouble. And there is a sort of indirect nod to good old HPL. (I kept thinking "R'lyeh")

An Evil Guest isn't as complex as many of Gene Wolfe's previous books but it is a reasonably good one which should (but probably won't) appeal to a larger audience. I think it might help if some of the blurb writers would quite throwing in comparisons to Melville and Dickens or statements such as "the greatest writer in the English language alive today!" (The exclamation is the blurb writer's doing.) Such praise seems to me somewhat fulsome. Simply saying something like "he's one heck of a good writer" should be enough. I also think Gene Wolfe may be a modest enough man to be embarrassed by that sort of thing. I hope so anyway. Φ

Interesting Times

"May you live in interesting times" is allegedly an ancient Chinese curse, though there doesn't seem to be any solid evidence to support the claim. I find myself perplexed by the idea it was a curse to live in interesting times. It could be that the originator of the "curse" had a different concept of "interesting times", one that was unfavorable. Or it may be the opposite idea was meant in the curse.

Whatever the case, we seem to be living in some interesting times in both a positive and a negative (if that's what the original curse meant) sense. There is, of course, the state of the economy in this country and world wide. What's interesting is what happened. What's interesting is how it happened. And what's interesting is that so many people (people in the Federal government and heads of large corporations and on Wall Street) who probably should have known better allowed it to happen. But then such factors as greed, avarice, and the refusal to acknowledge obvious warning signs may have also figure prominently in the end result. All interesting and for the most part unpleasant to millions of people and not something a person wants to live through.

Of equal interest was the result of the recent presidential election. For the first time since this country's founding and the establishment of a stable (for the most part) government someone who was not a white male was elected president of the United States. Talk about interesting. For those (of all races) who welcome such a change the next four years may be interesting in a positive way. For those who are resistant to and fearful of a person of another race in such a position of power (and respect) the next four years will be interesting in a negative way and so a curse as the original Chinese intended. For those latter people I feel sorry.

From the Readers . . .

Cuyler W. 'Ned' Brooks Jr - 4817 Dean Lane,
Lilburn GA 30047-4720

September 17, 2008

Dear Tom,

Much thanks for *The Reluctant Famulus* 66. Great Stiles cover!

The carnage on the highways far exceeds the current wars in death toll, and the lives lost in space exploration are not even statistically significant - and were all of willing volunteers, which is more than can be said of the war and highways deaths. The recent rise in gas prices is saving about 1000 lives a month as people slow down to save gas. But I think the main reason for sending a probe rather than a man on a space mission is economic - the cyber-smarts of the probe are far smaller and lighter than a man and his life support, thus reducing fuel cost; and the man cost a lot to train and is well-paid.

There's a big difference between space exploration and earlier terrestrial exploration though - our roaming ancestors could be fairly confident that wherever they went, there would be air to breathe. We don't as yet have any space destination that we don't have to take our own air to.

Fascinating account of DNA sequencing technology, but I had to laugh at Alfred Byrd bemoaning being past 50.... I turned 70 this year, and in accordance with the Biblical prophecy, immediately began to fall apart. This summer I have had an MRI, an ultrasound, and fluid extracted from my swollen knee - and they don't know why it was swollen.

You left Sheryl Birkhead's name off her article about the whirlpool bath saga.... I

have always been wary of too much techno-voodoo, especially devices I could not possibly maintain myself. Of course I have some - cars, a refrigerator, this PC and its accessories. Not to mention central A/C and a water-heater. But the cars do not have electric seats or locks or windows and the refrigerator is the simplest model. Both my lawn-mowers are battery-powered - basically, they either work or they need a new battery. I suppose the DC motor could burn out - but one of them is 20 years old and the other one 30 and it hasn't happened yet. If you get enough such stuff you find that something always needs repair. This week I had to get a new battery for the older mower, which uses a 12-volt automotive battery - and the closest fit they had was an inch too tall for the battery tie-down clamp, so I had to make extensions. At my mother's house my sister noticed a small roof leak (in a new roof!) at the point where the power line comes in through a pipe on the roof - and noticed that the insulation on the power line was crumbling. I hope I fixed the leak with some roofing goop, but of course I had to e-mail Georgia Power about the power line.

I doubt the basic problem of the electric car can be overcome - no proposed battery improvement will allow the battery to be recharged in any reasonable time. I suppose if the battery could be made small enough, "filling stations" would simply remove it and put in a fully-charged one - but that would still take longer than pumping 10 gallons of gasoline. For my current use of a car, where I only drive 30 miles and then the car sits in the garage for 20 hours, an electric would be just fine - if it had the same space as my 1986 Corolla hatchback and I could afford it. Today's paper says the Chevrolet Volt, a plug-in electric with a small charger engine, will cost about \$40,000.

Alexis Gilliland has been drawing car-toons about as long as I have been collecting books - and I have about as many books as he has car-toons! An amazing project to put them all online. A lot of my books are inventoried online, but I did a lot of it as I went along, and didn't need a scanner.



nedbrooks@sprynet.com - 770-982-5062 - <http://home.sprynet.com/nedbrooks/home.htm>

[I liked the cover the instant I saw it. The spaceman is lucky that the animal's owner only punched-him out.//Willing or not, think of all the people who continue getting into and driving their cars, trucks and SUVs and taking it for granted that nothing will happen to them. Is it bravery or conceit that they'll always arrive safely? I'll agree that the recent high gas prices have been beneficial in saving lives not only by people slowing down but by many being more sensible and driving less than they used to by such tactics as combining trips. Drivers changing their habits also resulted in a smaller demand for gasoline and a larger surplus. As everyone has seen by now, the crude oil prices have slightly more than halved and gas prices have also fallen to significantly less than \$3.00 a gallon in most parts of the country. Not surprisingly, the oil producing and exporting nations have become worried and intend to decrease the amount of oil they produce in order to drive the prices back up. Naturally. Allah forbid that there should be any drop in those nations' incomes. They might even have to suffer like the rest of the world.//You make some good points on the space program and I can't disagree with you.//On aging. I'm only 8 years younger than you, so I haven't truly started falling apart. But I've discovered I can't work as long or hard as I used to and need

*to pace myself.//Actually, I tried to reproduce Sheryl 's article exactly as she has sent it to me and she's the one who left her name off (I'm not sure if it was forgetfulness on her part or modesty.) But then if I'd been thinking I'd have put it where it should have been.//I've considered getting an electric lawnmower but for some reason assumed they had to be plugged into an outlet, which would require an extension cord. (And for me where we 're living now, a really **long** extension cord.) But then you say yours are battery-powered so maybe an extension cord wouldn't be a consideration after all//That is the main stumbling block to electric cars: good, reliable, high performance batteries that aren't a major part of the car's cost and with a longer driving range. Maybe some day some "brain" will invent such a battery. But probably not in our lifetimes.]]*

ALEXIS GILLILAND
4030 8th Street South, Arlington, VA 22204
September 18, 2008

Dear Tom,

Thank you for TRF #66, with its excellent Steve Stiles cover. The contributing artists are mostly old friends, except for Tom Douberly. Your editorial on manned space exploration presented a comment hook or two. Back in the day, or days as the case may be, of the reigning Martian Princess (Zelazny's "A Rose For Ecclesiastes" was written immediately before NASA made fantasy out of what had been a science fiction staple) the consensus view of the Solar system had human-supporting life on the deserts of Mars and the swamps of Venus, while Heinlein's "The Rolling Stones" had a family with an upper middle class income bargaining about the

Solar System in their own space ship. The view from that era projected the American frontier experience into space, and as late as 1977 Gerard K. O'Neill could write "The High Frontier" which assumed that we (technically savvy Americans, of course) could go into space there to build high tech versions of John Winthrop's "City On The Hill." It should be noted that O'Neill wrote THE on an electric typewriter because word processors had not yet been invented, so in important respects he was a little behind the current state of the art. Since then, NASA has explored the Solar system with an assortment of robots and remotely directed machines, and what they have found is that there is no place beyond our atmosphere where humans can thrive or even survive without massive logistical support. The dream dies hard? Yes, or at least most of it, especially the joyful recapitulation of the American frontier in space. Humans in space, on a permanent basis, will necessitate the construction (by robots or remotely directed machines) of space habitats for them to live in at the end of their voyage. In other words, the government will have to build a New World before our heroic explorers ever go there, since the conquest of a non-existent New World is out of the question. What else has NASA found out that might push our well beloved science fiction across the line into (ugh*yuk) fantasy? Most notably the fact that cosmic radiation levels are much higher in deep space, enough higher so that a round trip to Mars would risk being fatal to the

unshielded astronaut. So sailing on the sea of space, even with the most elegant of solar sails, is pretty much out of the question. Any trips will be one-way and as short as possible.

The dream gets harder and harder, yes, but: What would it take for the government to build a space habitat? Well, if the thing were to happen at all somebody would have to make money doing it. In which case the engineers of Lockheed or Boeing or whoever, will be contracting their services to the government to provide the machines and their supervision. Why would the government be spending all that money? To get reelected and/or to pay off past contributors is the most likely answer. Where would such a habitat be built? The quick and dirty answer would be (a) where the water is and (b) where the construction is easy. For (a) consider that the habitat must enclose a self-sustaining biosphere capable of supporting a bunch of humans. Consider also that to grow a pound of grain requires a thousand pounds of water. For (b) consider that construction needs to be undertaken in the lowest gravity possible, since going in and out of a gravity well (even the dinky gravity well of Mars) is an expense to be avoided. My best estimate would be Jupiter's Trojan points, which would have asteroids with lots (thousands of gigasteres, aka cubic kilometers) of ice easily available in their negligible gravity wells. A second use for all that ice would be shielding against cosmic radiation. Thus, our habitat rotates to provide earth gravity, inside a stationary wall of ice 20

meters thick. That would be optically clear ice that transmits sunlight reflected into our habitat from mylar mirrors, even as the icewall reduces the cosmic radiation level to what is found at sea level on the mother planet. When the time comes to infest that pristine habitat with humanity, the government loads the settlers on an Orion-type space ship and they blast off, hopefully from high earth orbit so that fallout will not be a problem.

Work on the website continues, and the plan is to go up with about 500 cartoons (-5%) in the very near future. Getting it organized so that we can add the rest in an orderly fashion over the next year or so seems tedious but possible. A sheet of five cartoons is enclosed for your contemplation and possible use. If you use them, I hope that you don't reduce them quite so small as 15 and 16. My text, after all, should be easy to read (19 and 24 are just fine.) That should do for now.

Best wishes,

[[Hey! No fair! You and Ned have to be sensible and realistic about the problems associated with space exploration. I guess the early science fiction writers were much too optimistic about people going into space and colonizing the Moon, Mars, or some other planet. And yet, there are scientists who are working on trying to solve those problems. Unfortunately, the solutions may not appear for a century or more if at all. I remember reading an article about the higher cosmic radiation levels in space and a few ideas about how it could be overcome. But as with everything else associated with the space program any solutions would come at a high cost.//Your comments

about asteroids and ice and so on are very interesting and intriguing. Some sort of rocket powered asteroid habitats might be one answer to space exploration (And that's something I think has been dealt with fictionally somewhere) If I remember correctly from all the SF I've read over the years, space explorers were always looking for planets as much like Earth as possible on which to settle. That has also been one of the missions of astronomers' searches for other planets. So most likely, since Man requires a certain set of conditions in which to exist, computerized robot missions would make more sense at the outset. They would be sent out to locate potentially human-habitable planets with, of course, sufficient resources for humans to build dwellings and so on after arriving. Since people would most likely need tools to use in the construction of housing from the available materials on whatever planet was found, the necessary equipment could be sent ahead in unmanned spacecraft, ready to be used when humans arrived. The dream may not die hard but very likely it will remain dormant for a long time.]]



Ray Nelson, 333 Ramona Ave., El Cerrito CA 94530 LEX 4652

RayFaradayNelson@AOL.com 09/18/08

Dear Tom,

I see we are still talking about gas prices. continue to see the bicycle as the magic so-

lution to the pricey gasoline problem, and wish to point out that even here in the high hills of Berkeley, we bicycle people are doing just fine. Remember, modern bicycles have gear shifts.

However, for those who don't like bikes, I have a plan B. Regular cars get, with luck, around 30 miles to the gallon. Golf carts easily get around 70 miles to the gallon, and the only thing that keeps them off the roads is a lot of stupid state laws. Do the math!

As for your latest topic, let's take a fresh look at space travel. Aren't spaceships the safest mode of transportation known to Man, if we are figuring in terms of fatalities per mile?

For that matter, since during most of a space trip the ship is coasting, doesn't the spaceship get the best milage?

Except, of course, for the bicycle!

Your fan,
Ray Nelson

[[I don't at all dispute using bicycles as a viable alternative to gas-guzzling autos. They are indeed non-polluting. That is, of course, except for the bicyclist exhaling CO₂ and I think, methane from the other end, depending on the cyclist's diet. Golf carts wouldn't be a bad idea either. I've seen them for sale in various places. But, as you say, there are traffic laws which make golf carts a no-no. Another alternative, though one that uses gas, are motorcycles. I've seen some 3-wheelers which have built-in storage or trunks and small enclosed trailers also for storage much like car trunks. And they seat two people comfortably although one behind the other. I imagine the 3-wheelers would get nearly as good mileage as a regular motorcycle and certainly far better than a car. And of course there are the mopeds which I think I read somewhere can get something like 100 mpg.//Once a spaceship escapes Earth's gravity

well—and that requires the largest amount of energy—and gets into space it probably does, depending on the size of the payload. Still, as you point out, bicycles are the cheapest form of transportation except for shank" mare ...//



Greetings Tom ~

Got in issue 66 of The Reluctant Famulous this weekend, took it with me to the Jazz Festival I was selling my artwork at in Ft. worth over the weekend, and read through it in those too often gaps when we weren't getting much biz. (Actually, show turned out okay, just kind of slow during the days, but good crowds at night. And wonderful music at all times!)

Good to read there was a happy ending to Sheryl's tale of trying to get a whirlpool installed. Myself, I'm a big fan of hot soaking baths as well to work out the stiff muscles. But never have seen the advantage of having that water shoved against me. I've been in a couple of hot tubs, and aside from feeling kind of odd having the water moving around, never did have that "this feels great!" reaction so many others seem to. Guess I'm just too UN-sensitive?

(Oh, and as far as not wanting to get out of a hot tub into a cold house: I think that means what she originally had going there would be more of a Swedish Sauna, where

you sweat for an hour in a hot room, then leap naked through the door directly into a pile of snow. Gotta hand it to those Swedes, that's one way to either jump start, or completely halt, your heart.)

Gotta go, lots of paperwork to get to this week, then start packing for the next show. Just getting into the busy fall festival season, so time for fannish stuff gets tighter, too. But hey, can't stop entirely!

stay happy ~
Brad

Brad W Foster

[[Naturally Sheryl is even happier about having gotten the whirlpool in proper working order. Soaking in a nice, hot bath to relieve aching muscles sounds good. When we ordered the manufactured home we're living in we got what was called a "glamor bath" package which consisted of a shower and a large, square, deep tub along with the toilet and twin sinks. The last was a strange experience for us, having lived with a bathroom that had a single sink. So far we've only used the shower. No that you've pointed it out, I'm seriously thinking of filling up the tub and soaking a while. I tried a hot tub once; wasn't particularly impressed by the jets of water but probably didn't give it a good enough try. Saunas, now ... well the thought of rushing out from a hot, steamy room into a cold body of water or snow does not sound at all inviting. I'd probably not have my heart jump-started ... As far as I'm concerned, the Swedes can have that little bit of "joy" all to themselves]]

From: **Gene Stewart**

Dear Tom,

Nice Stiles cover.

TIMIDLY GOING - It's greed and short-sighted politics, with timidity used as excuse, that has demolished manned space

efforts.

OLD KIT BAG #6 - Iain Pears is a favorite of mine. Steven Saylor sounds good.

LAB ADVENTURES IV - You lost me at "Now..."

RAT STEW needs a logo.

GAME PLAYING - We ran out of \$ for repairs, let alone remodeling, so none of this applies to my household, where we're happy just to eat sometimes.

LoCs - So many misread RAT STEW that I'm obviously not as blunt as I'd thought.

JOE MAJOR mistook wordage for pages; a 400pp book may vary in wordage due to font, typesetting, design, and so on. Submit a book much over or under 100K today and the publisher will balk. They can only stretch or compress so far and don't bother much anymore.

BRAD FOSTER apparently thought I said thick = bloated. My favorite writer is Dickens and I consider his, and the better examples of Victorian's writing, concise in their thick books and the best novelists ever, whereas too many today are bloated even in short stories. My point in RAT STEW was that story should determine length, not how many books fit into shipping boxes. Page count is irrelevant to all but publishers.

JERRY KAUFMAN makes an AMADEUS reference at the expense of my column's point, which isn't cricket but is quite faanish.

BOB SABELLA concurs with my column's thesis and makes useful distinctions between stretched versus developed ideas.

SHERYL BIRKHEAD may wish to know that Dean Koontz did indeed have a female Golden Retriever named Trixie, a rescued seeing-eye dog who died not too long ago, but who lives on in USELESS NEWS, available for correspondence from Dean Koontz at USELESS NEWS, P.O. Box 9529, Newport Beach, CA 92658 - 9529.

HENRY WELCH also got the wrong point about bloat. Bloat is why genre traditionally sucks; bad writing finds its LCD in

genre. I agree with him about RAH having needed editing, especially in later years. He bullied editors and they took it because his work sold. That applies to Stephen King these days, sans bullying. No one dares cut him. Call it the Golden Goose syndrome.

Good issue.
--Gene Stewart

[[Unfortunately, greed and timidity are prevalent in all parts of our federal government (and state and local, of course). And because of the greed, as much on the part of contractors who win bids with the Feds too many projects have huge cost overruns which should never have been allowed if there had been honest people letting the bids and other honest people actually insuring that any over-runs would be within reason. The military has been a good example of that but so, too have been NASA projects which were let out. That will probably never change. Unfortunately.]]

IN THE LAND OF MORDOR
WHERE THE SHADOWS LIE



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

Tom:

Es bees a nice colorful cover on 66, and knowing the artist goes up for fan Hugos regularly. I see allegory in it, the purple cow and the one that jumped over the moon, here the modern moon-going technology impales it in a manner that reminds one of the holy cow also, and an outraged Martian going for the man who got on his private property and took out a head of his livestock. Connotations here of both John Carter and the original ENTERPRISE incident one expects of a cover relating to no particular story. Noting the apologies made to Emshwiller, I don't know if Emsh is still with us, but when he was he was not very gracious about the matter of apologies. But I don't know and I suppose Emsh wouldn't know either what the apology is about. The first time I ever saw the phrase "with apologies to" used was on a Jules Feiffer cartoon which said "with apologies to Dylan Thomas". There Dylan Thomas was portrayed reciting one of his essays to a child. But why did Feiffer apologize about it? One apologizes over a mistaken identity.

Somewhat of a rarity, I read over the issue while eating lunch, a sandwich on home-baked bread with two kinds of lunchmeat and a slice of cheese between them, and a jello/fruit cocktail "salad".

The title of your editorial reminds me that I've always wondered about the ST motto shouldn't that be "Where no man from Earth has gone before?" It's made in-obvious by the "fact" that ST keeps finding humans in the various places to which they go, many of whom describe themselves as being migratory due to their star going nova or some other thing. Well, no need to fare forth, either timidly or boldly; a person staying right on Earth is already boldly being where a man might have misgivings about going.

I certainly agree with you about an auto

mobile being a similar risk. I regard it as being a regular death-defying experience. A lot of the roads around here are like death-traps, in addition to the crowded highways filled with universal speeding being a one false move is death proposition.

Sabella might want to add Paul Levinson's "Unburning Alexandria" to the reading he describes himself as doing. It's got a lot of details similar to what he IS reading. In fact, Sabella's in to the latest *Analog* Forum hot topic, which includes Levinson assailing the forum with his concepts.

Alfred Byrd suggests more experimentation than I'd care for, but if I do follow some leads from his piece, I might want to make use of a book I've recently sent for from the Science Fiction Book Club, *SNEAKIEST USES FOR EVERYDAY THINGS*, which shows how to conduct such experiments with household materials.

Milt Stevens shows such equanimity over the gas prices that I suspect he has taken out an insurance policy at Geiko.

Say, don't worry people aren't reading TRF, there's enough science in it to interest anyone.

John Thiel

[[Perhaps Steve should have said, "in honor of Emsh ". He passed away in 1990, of cancer. His was a varied and remarkable career as an illustrator and filmmaker and possibly one of fandom's favorite artists.//Your comment about the Star Trek motto does make a point when one considers that indeed the Enterprise crew seemed to encounter a lot of other humans in deep space. But I suppose it's some sort of egocentric concept on the part of the people in Roddenberty's Star Trek "world ".//Yeah being in an automobile, especially in fast, highly concentrated traffic, can be death-defying as long as one arrives safely at her/his destination.//I don't know if Milt's showing equanimity or resignation at the gas prices. But then, as it turns out, currently gas prices at the pump have dropped consider-

ably and are closer to the \$2.00 mark, though still above it.(Correction. Since the preceding comments were written gas prices in some places were less than \$2.00/gallon.) Whether the prices will go down, remain the same, or go up is anybody's guess.]]

From: **Milt Stevens** September 23, 2008

Dear Tom,

I remember the Emshwiller cover Steve Stiles is parodying on the cover of *Reluctant Famulus* #66. Emshwiller did a fair number of humorous covers for *Galaxy* and some of the other magazines. (I think he did some for the Columbia magazines.) In the fifties, the December issues of *Galaxy* featured a four armed Santa shown facing various problems of being a Santa in outer space.

The cover reminded me of a story from fan Paula Lieberman. While Paula was in the Air Force, she spent two years with the Space Defense Force in Boulder, Colorado. The mission of the Space Defense Force was to keep track of orbiting objects. One of our satellites came down in Argentina killing a cow. Our government quite properly paid damages for it. Paying for a cow is inexpensive. If the satellite had come down in a major city it could have been a whole bunch expensive.

Which brings us to your editorial. There are some people who really object to those pro-peller heads wasting money exploring space when it could be better spent saving our idiot financial system. As of yesterday, the estimate for the bail-out was 400 billion dollars. It may be more today. If it were up to me, I'd throw the executives responsible for this situation to the dogs. By this, I do not mean I would subject them to a bankruptcy court. I mean real dogs who haven't eaten for about a week. Of course, some people might think I'm a little harsh on this.

Aside from the fact that this is the second time in a generation we've had this sort

of a mess, it is irritating because it shows just how silly the executive mythos really is. I'd actually like to believe that highly paid executives know what they are doing and should be in charge. Of course, I know that some people get to the top because of qualities other than brainpower, but I prefer not to think about it.

Robert Sabella reviews some historical mystery novels. While I'm no authority on mysteries, it does seem like mystery writers are resorting to stranger and stranger permutations. Hard-boiled detective on Mars stories are just the beginning. In regard to the novels Robert Sabella has been talking about, I have an opinion of Julius Caesar. From his writing I get the impression of a man with a very incisive mind. He doesn't seem like the sort of guy you would bullshit twice. His relationship with Cleopatra been considerably romanticized. They did have a couple of kids, but was that romance or the collateral damage of politics. One of their sons was ruling an area to the west of Egypt in the next generation. Seemingly, Caesar got around quite a bit sexually. According to one version of the story, Brutus was Caesar's illegitimate son, and the unkindest cut of all was a knife wound in the groin. In another story, a wiseass in the forum hails Pompey and Caesar as the king and queen of Rome. (That puts their civil war in a somewhat different light.) All of these stories add up to the fact that Caesar was a man of considerable energy.

Yours truly,

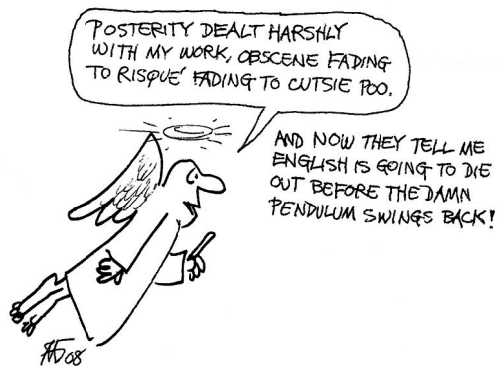
Milt Stevens

6325 Keystone St. Simi Valley, CA 93063
miltstevens@earthlink.net

[[Interesting story by Paula Lieberman. What a mess it would have been had the satellite fallen in a major city. Scary. Regarding strange permutations in mysteries—there are a few books which feature Groucho Marx as a detective. Now I liked Groucho—and his brothers—but featuring him as a detective seems

*more than a bit far-fetched. And then, if I remember correctly, someone wrote a mystery featuring one of my literary favorites, Mark Twain. One has to wonder about the writers who seem unable to conceive of an interesting detective of their own.//We all know by now that the "bail-out" Congress passed hit the 700 billion dollar mark with, as usual, all sorts of "pork" in it. Protection for rum makers in Puerto Rico and elsewhere? Or protection for makers of **wooden** arrows? Yeah as if *that's* going to benefit a lot of people. While throwing those executives (both Wall Street and in the Federal government) literally to the dogs might be gratifying very likely the ASP-CA and/or PETA might object on the grounds of cruelty to the dogs. It might be better to bring those executives down several notches and see how they would cope with living on the sort of wages an "average" citizen does; no mammoth bonuses, no golden parachutes, and so on. Judging from the resounding failure of the bail-out having any sort of tangible effect it would appear nobody on Wall Street or in the Federal government seems to know exactly what to do or how to handle what was recently passed And watching the head of Lehman Brothers responding to a congressional committee grilling was enlightening. The man appeared to me to fear he might be in deep trouble (which he should be) and trying to decide whether to tell the truth or lie, and if the latter, what sort of lie he should tell. He was hesitant and stumbling in his replies and seemed to be thinking hard. And Paulson, who was one of the main originators of a bail-out, was just as bad as the CEO of Lehman in the way he responded. Unhappily we, the American people, got and will continue to get the shaft. I'm afraid that maybe we taxpayers and corporation stockholders should probably think about those "qualities other than brainpower". Such as the tendency to obscene levels of greed when it comes to profit-making. The country is left with a major mess from which it is going to take a very long time to recover. It's going to be an awful ride for us*

average taxpayers who seem to be regarded as cash cows or geese with golden eggs//Some interesting comments about Julius Caesar. Perhaps just another example of the fact that the traits of politicians and leaders these days trace back to the Roman Empire and even before. And, unfortunately, will continue to exist into the distant future. I would ask "What did we taxpayers do to deserve such leaders?" But I know the answer: we voted them in and, despite seeing how most of them performed (on both sides), failed to do anything about it at the ballot box by voting them out. Was it apathy or were we all too busy trying to cope with making a living for ourselves and our families the best we could under the circumstances. I certainly have no good answer to that.]]



From: John Purcell

Tom,

Many thanks for sending me your latest issue in the mail. I just began printing copies of *ASKANCE* this past week, so I will make sure that you get one in return. A batch should be getting mailed out this coming week before I head up to Dallas for FenCon V next weekend, so keep your eyes open.

Overall, this is a really nice issue. Your musings while driving are things that bother me, too. When my family lived in Iowa, we thought that the idea behind ethanol blend

ed gas was a great idea. Now we're not so sure. I still am all in favor, however, of renewable energy sources, and ethanol should be part of the mixture that will be powering our nation in the future. If we get there, that is. What with the way things appear to be taking at the present time, that's a bit iffy right now.

See? I can be a bit of a gloomy Gus, too, if I want.

Gene Stewart's article makes a good point. Sometimes a book seems to be too big in page count, which can be a bit intimidating. Still, a well-written story will keep me reading. For example, Edward Rutherford's massive historical epics -SARUM, LONDON, THE FOREST, RUSSKA, etc. - run an average of 850 pages each, but they are so well written that I usually read somewhere between 50-75 pages at a sitting. The latest large book on my reading shelf is Harry Turtledove's *Opening Atlantis*. It's over 400 pages, but again, it's entertaining reading. A bit predictable, but his characters are believable and he tells a good story that mixes historical fact with interesting conjecture. That is the sort of combination that keeps me turning the pages.

Tell Sheryl Birkhead that she can turn any old bathtub into a hot tub with a half-dozen eunuchs kneeling on the floor and blowing into long straws to create that soothing bubble-effect. If that fails, then go ahead and sink in the big bucks to install a hot tub. Once it's ready, let me know so I can check it out. My aging bones could use a nice soak.

The other items in this zine were really good, too, Tom. Not much for me to comment on, but I can certainly identify with Al Byrd's moving adventures. Just over a year ago I had to move my office goodies across campus from the General classroom building, where I had been ensconced in one of the large adjunct offices, to my new and hopefully permanent digs in the Academic building. With luck I should be set for a while, at least until that proposed Humanities Building becomes a reality.

That will probably materialize some time in the next five years, so my departmental

moving days are not a major concern. I am glad to read that Al's move is over and done with. It is never a fun process, and he wrote about it well.

With that, enough is enough. But I do have to ask: was that loc on page 17 from one Robert J. Whitaker? If so, I ran some of his artwork in my first fanzine *This House* way the heck back around 1980. Let me know so that I can send him a copy of Askance, too.

A good ish, Tom. Again, thank you for sending it my way.

All the best,
JohnPurcell

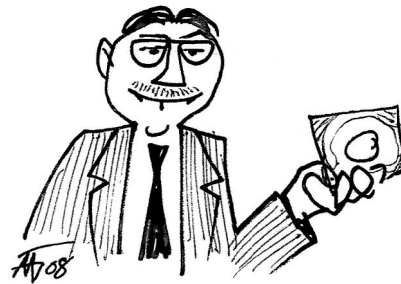
Read Askance #10 - the only fanzine produced during Hurricane Ike.

j_purcell54@yahoo.com

*[/Regarding the loc on page 17: that was back in the issue I stupidly screwed up by failing to identify the letter writers properly. Robert Kennedy was the loccer in question.//From all the reading I've been doing lately on the energy "crisis" it has become obvious that this country **has** to rely on a wider range of alternatives for fueling vehicles and for heating and electrically powering homes and businesses. T Boone Pickens has been pushing for the use of LPG in fueling vehicles because the U.S. has large reserves of it but, as with petroleum, eventually those resources would run out and we'd be back in the same situation. Since, as Heinlein has famously been quoted, TANSTAAFL; and no one single energy source will suffice. Maybe you and I (and doubtless a few million others) shouldn't be such gloomy Guses and hope someone somewhere will find better answers.//I read Rutherford's **LONDON** (in paperback; still a large book) and had no problem moving from start to finish. Although it isn't fiction, David McCullough's biography **Truman** came to 1,117 pages. Fortunately, only 992 were the actual biography; the remainder were sources, acknowledgments, and so on. I*

found it a fascinating book and learned a lot about Harry Truman and even came to appreciate him a bit more as a president. //Your comment to Sheryl about the eunuchs making bubbles in the bathtub reminds me of that commercial with an African-American (football player maybe?) soaking in a bathtub with two guys with straws at the foot of the tub doing just that. Bizarre.]]

THIS NEW ECONOMICS SOFTWARE WON'T LET YOU MAKE A BAD INVESTMENT. TRY AND IT CRASHES THE SYSTEM ON YOU! AT AUTHORIZED DEALERS EVERYWHERE, MICROSOFTS "DOS KAPITAL"!



1409 Christy Avenue
Louisville, KY 40204-2040 jtmajor@iglou.com
September 30, 2008

Dear Tom:

Wars are immunized from lawsuits. So far. Space exploration doesn't have that protection. The long legal carnival over the launching of the Galileo spacecraft with its plutonium power source, for example, which included a plea to forego the gravity boost to send it out to Jupiter since the probe just might

slip and enter Earth's atmosphere and disperse its plutonium and OMG OMG kill everyone in the world EEEE !!!

Those arguing that forget that if they were right, we're already dead, since Apollo 13's Lunar Module, which re-entered Earth's atmosphere, had a similar plutonium power source.

The guy who manages the Spirit and Opportunity Martian probe program, Steve Squyres, says, "What I really want, more than anything else, is boot prints in our wheel tracks at Eagle Crater." I still think the should have divided the sol (the Martian day) into zodes, xats, and tals.

The Old Kit Bag: I would be interested to learn what Sabena thinks of the other two major Roman Mystery writers, John Maddox Roberts and Lindsey Davis. When I first saw Roberts, at LoneStarCon in San Antonio (eleven years ago, sigh) he indicated that he and Saylor had to step very carefully around each other. (And now, Roberts says his other series, the *Hannibal's Children* alternate history, has been halted by the publisher, in the middle of a cliffhanger.)

Adventures In the Laboratory: "You would stare at this and intone 'ACT ... CAT ... TAG' while a colleague recorded your revelations." Would it have been more interesting if the colleague had replied "Harmony! Unity! Strength!" between each group of codes? See Robert Silverberg's *Tower of Glass* (1970) for that.

What Our Future Lost When We Found It: "William Gibson ... has stated that SF is no longer feasible." He can have it out with Alexei Panshin, who declared that SF was no longer feasible after 1945, and John Clute, who declared that SF was no longer feasible after 1956. Have a nice day.

LoCs: Me: The 70k limit had to do with paperbacks. Nowadays we get those massive paperbacks that have broken spines after the second reading.

Brad W. Foster: But those several slimmer books with the same number of actual pages will have several separate stories, not

one giant narrative bulked up with, oh say the description of a character's bite-by-bite consumption of a bowl of cereal.

The imperial gallon, formerly buyable in Canada before wise unelected regulation imposed the metric system, had larger "pints" and so on. Thus the comment by the character in 1984 that a liter was too much and a half-liter wasn't enough as compared to a pint; the pint he had consumed was more than a half-liter. I'm surprised the man wasn't liquidated the next day but perhaps the Thought Policeman assigned to that pub was in the loo at the time.

Jerry Kaufman: And when *THE OUTSIDER AND OTHERS* was published, August Derleth had trouble selling it. The copies cost way too much: five dollars.

Robert Sabena: The forthcoming Harry Potter movie will be in two parts, because of the length. Before that, Richard Lester found the story of the THREE MUSKETEERS too long, and brought out a movie titled "The Four Musketeers".

Rav Nelson: Yes, but the Mayor of London (not to be confused with the Lord Mayor of the City of London) is famous for riding a bicycle. This means that all right-thinking people have to oppose it.

Bob Kennedy: The year before she died, my mother pondered a clever plan to avoid taxes. She would move a few miles south, to Clarksville, Tennessee, but do her grocery shopping in Hopkinsville. You see: 1) Tennessee has no income tax; 2) Mississippi does not levy income tax on income earned there but paid to residents of adjoining states; 3) Kentucky does not levy sales tax on food. She had been paying two state income taxes.

This was why we sold the farm the year after she died. It was a link to family and all that, but we each had to pay Mississippi income tax (my younger brother was living in Iowa then) on a not that large income.

Namarie, Joseph T Major

[[It's amazing how fearful people are of the hazards of plutonium (admittedly one of the most deadly elements there is) and forget about other forms of radiation all around them which pose hazards almost as great. Like, for example, radiation from that great big yellow ball in the sky and cosmic rays //I like the quote of Steve Squyers. Using robotic probes to view celestial bodies from space and upon their surfaces is a safe, sensible method of exploration and probably cheaper though I'm rather doubtful of that but somehow looking at live images beamed from millions of miles away doesn't have quite the same impact as actually standing and walking upon a planet's or moon's surface. An observer can't feel the solidity of the planet/moon nor touch (albeit by way of gloved hands) hills and rocks, a handful of soil and look upward at a sky unlike that of Earth's or, if we ever find a planet with some sort of life, touching the equivalent of a terrestrial tree or shrub. Ah well. I expect far too much of space programs, especially in my lifetime.//As to SF's feasibility maybe it depends on what one expects from SF.//There have been some fairly hefty paperbacks and probably some that could have been a little less hefty if the book's author had exercised a little self-restraint. Indeed there is such a thing as too much detail in many of those fat novels. In some way maybe Heinlein's advice "to show, not tell" is to blame, curious as that may seem. It's as bad as those "expository lumps" about which readers and editors complain.//The Three Musketeers . . . Eventually there were four. At first it was Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. Later on D'Artagnan, who they met, eventually became a musketeer.//Because we kept our house in Michigan (It was all paid for, after all) we ended up paying property taxes in Michigan and Kentucky. And Michigan has "Summer taxes" and "Winter taxes". Ouch.]]



From: **Sheryl Birkhead**

25509 Jonnie Court

Gaithersburg, MD 20882

Sept. 25 (I think) 2008

Greetings and apologies (for the scrawl; waiting for car work to be done, and the laptop battery is now certifiably DEAD. New ones cost \$60—\$200 depending on quality, and the A/C adapter works fine when I have an outlet, so ...)

Wow - tip of the hat to Steve Stiles' cover - not just smooth but niice! Color just adds so much but I wonder (were Ed Em's pieces all in b/w printed in the prozines. No, guess covers were not) how it would have worked solely in sepia tones. Regardless ... NICE.

You forgot to mention a minor (but **real**) benefit from the Space program the offshoots from technology developed for the NASA trips. I'm not sure that if tech advancement was the **only** positive that space exploration would be the cheapest way to achieve this but, hey, it's a nice side-effect.

What an Sfish statement in the last paragraph of the editorial "I'll never see in my lifetime a manned mission to Mars or

humans landing on any other non-terrestrial object but the moon.” WOW that could well have been a sentence in an SF story from, say, 60 years ago!!

Ah TVs. I took a spin around Best Buy’s website to see what TVs (large to me; small to everyone else) and in my selection set [?] of criteria was “tube only” ONE “regular” TV in stock.

I, back in my lab days, did the DNA extraction; even saved some of the solvent bottles (with errors on their labels) and made them into lamps! That phenol did **nasty** things to hosery and skin.

Nice fillos throughout. Brad’s illo on pg 10 reminds me of a cat long gone. I heard a faint (very faint) mewing in sticker bushes and found a tiny black and white kiten (fit easily in the palm or my hand. I mean **small**). I named the [?] Lilliput figured a female would be Lilli and a male Putt. Putt grew up **big** and lived to only 12 but I still look for him beside the refrigerator.

--(Time scooted by, watching the Pres. Debates . . .)

I try (not too well) to make one (two if possible) no drive days. I **know** I’m driving less but (of course) my gasoline expenditure ... well, you know what I mean ... has skyrocketed. I stood in the garage and **looked** at the gas container for the lawn mower and decided I could get one or two more mowings out of what I have (and maybe, just **maybe** next year’s prices will be a bit lower).

Bike riding around here on the main road is downright dangerous. The roads are “fairly narrow”, no shoulders, and big drop-offs; no sidewalks, no public transport. I see bikers just about every Sunday when the weather is good--with traffic backed up and drivers getting angrier by the moment. Until it becomes safer, that’s not a realistic (here at least) way to get from point A to B.

Ah you are finding out about the “joy” of personal property tax! I ran into that in VA. Here in MD we don’t have that but since our state and local taxes are the fourth highest in

the country it really doesn’t make much difference.

Plumber came, removed the burning out motor of the laundry room ejection system. He re-routed the water line to the newer injection system from the bathroom completed several years ago. I have **not** had the nerve to try it out yet.

As always, a nice looking package ... ending with a pleasing Foster (Brad, that is, for those of us who remember other fanartists (at least one)) with the same name.

Thanks-

Sheryl

[[Emsh’s covers were full color. In fact, I found a place on the Internet that has most if not all of his covers. One was the cover that inspired Steve’s version for TRF.//There are many benefits from the space program which have had practical applications here on Earth.//Gee. I hadn’t thought of my comment in the last paragraph of the Introduction as being SFish. Pessimistic, maybe. But Sfish . . . Well, possibly. I’ll have to face the fact that the closest thing will be watching transmissions from Mars by robots either on TV or--should I get a high-speed connection--online. Reality . . . You can’t live without it--and sometimes you can’t live with it.//Digital TV is THE thing these days, having replaced conventional TV transmissions, and LCD TVs have replaced the cathode-ray tube TVs. That isn’t surprising considering transistor radios replaced the old tube-type radios, which generated a lot of heat.//Bike riding is cheap, reliable transportation and good exercise. But riding one on a highway or major street could be lethal considering the way lots of people drive.//I quickly got used to property tax on a home after our house in Michigan was paid for and there was no bank escrow account to make the property tax payments.]]

Some Last Words

I've begun to wonder if I've become an anachronism because I still produce and send out a paper and ink fanzine. So many fans these days have been posting their own fanzines online either at a personal web site or a venue such as e-Fanzines. Bob Sabells's *Visions of Paradise*, Guy Lillian's *Challenger*, Marty Cantor's *Holier Than Thou*, Mike Glycer's *File 770*, and on and on. One of several reasons I began putting out a fanzine (aside from the conceit that people might actually read it) was to receive fanzines in trade. That had worked nicely for many years. Of the past handful of years or so, however, the number of actual physical fanzines has diminished greatly. Joe Major still does *Alexiad*, Robert Lichtman's *Trap Door* is another, as is Henry Welch's *Knarly Knews*, and John Hertz' *Vana-monde*—and that seems to be about it. (As far as I can remember, which these days isn't very far.) The cost of postage is one of the major reasons fans are putting their 'zines online. Ease and convenience are other reasons. I can understand that and sympathize. But for me receiving a paper and ink fanzine was like a visit from the fan producing it even if he or she couldn't physically appear at my door. Somehow, going online to get a fanzine just doesn't seem quite the same. And it isn't that I'm a Luddite; I produce my fanzine with the use of a computer, printer, and digital copier, all the "newest" technology.

I wonder why I don't simply do as everyone else in fanzine fandom seems to be doing and put my fanzine online? Theoretically it would reach a larger readership. One of the ways of knowing, in the past, was by the receipt of letters of comment and the fanzines of other fans sent in trade. If I went the route of everyone else, how would I know if anyone actually read *the Reluctant Famulus*? Would I receive any letters of comment (electronically or otherwise)? Would someone else's

fanzine appear in my Inbox as a trade for mine? Would fan artists and fan writers send my material for use in my next issue? I have no idea and I'm rather dubious that there would be much—if any—response.

I'm left wondering whether I should or should not "pub my ish" online. I think it would be hard for me. That's the anachronistic part—I **like** paper and ink fanzines. They're more convenient. I can take them almost everywhere and I like the look and feel and holding something tangible that I can pick up and look at whenever I want. Even in places with no Internet connection of any kind (including the fast connections such as DSL via phone line and the cable service provided by cable TV companies). I have the misfortune of living in a somewhat backward area where the only connections available are by conventional dial-up and satellite which tie one down to a stationary point. My laptop is capable of connecting to "wireless" Internet servers. But we're in a dead zone with no wireless Internet service. Nearby Owenton, small though it is (about 13 or 14 miles away), and Frankfort, approximately the same distances, have wireless. But no one has attempted to bring wireless service to this anomalous part of Owen County. So if I want to look at some particular online fanzine when the mood strikes me I have to "fire up" my computer (desktop or laptop) and dial-up to connect. That's not nearly as convenient as taking a few steps to a pile of fanzines and picking up the one I want.

The same would hold true for me if I were to produce a fanzine for online placement. It just wouldn't be the same. But maybe I'm feeling sorry for myself and I should just knock it off and go with the times, impersonal though they seem to have become, and consign my fanzine to the vastness of the Internet. I guess

I'll have to think it over and maybe stop being an anachronism.

"CASUS BELLI"



2/1/08