

# The RELUCTANT FAMULUS



## SEANCE FICTION ANALOGY

John Carson Mars:  
"Swordsmen of Stars"

*Edward Bryce Burrows*

Ann Francis Starr  
"For Benton's Planet"

*G. Thomas Doubrey*

"A Moment's Pause"

*G. Thomas Doubrey*

"The Star  
Dust"

*Alric Azmov*



TOMORROW

*The Deju View*

# The Reluctant Famulus #69

Spring 2009

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## Contents

Introduction, Editor	1
WOW by Gene Wolfe	3
Old Kit Bag by Robert Sabella	5
Odd News Tidbits	6, 9, 12, 16
Rat Stew by Gene Stewart	7
Kentuckiana II by Al Byrd	10
Taxes? by Sheryl Birkhead	13
LoCs	17

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John Thiel	9

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# *The Reluctant Famulus*

## *What in the world's going on down there?*

The home in which we live is the third one on the west side of a dead-end road. Adjacent to our property on the south is a vacant piece of acreage that, as far as I know, is still up for sale. Our closest neighbor is a few hundred feet north of us. The family consists of the father, who is a deputy Owen County Sheriff, his wife who is also employed but by whom we have no idea, and two children, a boy and a girl. They seem like a nice family though we've only spoken to the husband because we see him out and about more than his wife. They pretty much keep to themselves and mind their own business, as do we ours.

Things are somewhat different on the other side of the creek which, I suppose, is called Gill Branch though that's only a guess but one which seems likely. East of Gill Branch (Both road and creek.), directly across from us is a large, vacant field at the foot of a large hill, or ridge. A little way South of that property and almost across from the vacant land south of us is almost but not quite *Terra Incognita*. I say almost. We've never been to the dead-end of Gill Branch Road because we've never had any reason to go there. We do know, however, that a family lives there because we see a couple of teenage boys and a couple of teenage girls from time to time and their father, who often travels back and forth down the road in a beat-up old Ford pickup (I believe it is. I've never got that good a look.), doing what, we have no idea. They also pretty much keep to themselves even though we do see the kids and the father from time to time.

But there is an odd and puzzling thing (well, there are others but I'll pass over that for now.) about the family at that end of the

road. We have noticed in the time we've lived here a fair amount of vehicular traffic up and down Gill Branch Road. Cars, vans, and pickup trucks pass our house going to and coming from the dead-end of Gill Branch Road. That has lead us to wonder why there's so much traffic, even late at night. It could be that drivers turn onto Gill Branch Road thinking it is an outlet only to discover otherwise and have to return the way they came. But that doesn't make sense because there is a sign in plain view where Gill Branch Road comes to US-127 that states there is no outlet. It would be hard, I think, to miss seeing the sign though maybe an occasional driver might.

Because we moved to where we are now for the relative peace and quiet, we try not to worry too much about all the comings and goings. For the most part, the traffic isn't that bad and not very disruptive. Still, from time to time, we wonder why those vehicles go to that end of Gill Branch Road, stay a relatively brief time, and leave. And by relatively brief, I mean within a few minutes. I don't think the majority have ever stayed significantly longer. There are one or two vehicles going there which might belong to relatives of the people at the end of the road. At any rate, since the people living there don't bother us we reciprocate. This has worked out fairly well for us.

Then came the day when we really asked ourselves: "What in the world's going on down there?"

Several days ago, in relation to when this when this was written, in the forenoon my wife was letting our dog out when she called to me that something was going on next door at the deputy sheriff's house. I quickly joined her on the front porch to see what was hap-

pening. An ambulance and two police cars, along with the old beat-up pickup the neighbor south of us drives, and a dark green pickup were sitting alongside the road. We both thought at first that something had happened to the deputy (whose work schedule is such that he's home during the day while his wife is at work) or one of his children. My wife told me that they had taken a gurney from the ambulance to the house just before I came out.

We watched from our front porch, wisely deciding it would be better not to intrude on what was going on. At first there wasn't much to see. But then things began to become more interesting with the arrival of two state police cars and a Sheriff's car, later joined by another Sheriff's car. There were conversations among the various officers and movements back and forth between the house and the road. We were relieved to see our neighbor to the north emerge to join with the other members of the law. Then another man came out of the house who we thought might be our neighbor from the dead end and the driver of the old, beat-up pickup accompanied by a woman. EMT. They went to the rear of the ambulance and out of our sight. After a bit, the other EMT, a man, came from the house with the empty gurney and one of the Sheriff deputies followed with either a pillow or a folded sheet. Shortly after, the ambulance backed into the neighbor's driveway, turned, and went up Gill Branch Road to US-127. Once on US-127, the ambulance headed north to Owenton, its siren blaring.

Then things got even more interesting. The two state police cars drove down Gill Branch Road to the end, followed by one of the Sheriff's cars. They didn't return right away but remained there for, as far as we could tell, all afternoon and possibly part of the evening. Soon, a big dark red Ford pickup in a hurry went down Gill Branch followed by a greyish pickup, a couple of cars and an SUV driven by an elderly woman we'd seen before and thought might be a rela-

tive of the people at the dead end.

In the meantime, our deputy sheriff neighbor's wife arrived home and, as far as we knew, remained there the rest of the day. Later, the old, beat-up pickup was driven down to the end of the road. An occasional car or truck went by but as usual none of them remained long. There was no longer any real activity next door although late in the day we saw a state police car and the SUV the elderly woman drives parked there. She talked briefly to the state policeman, then got into her SUV, and went to the end of the road. From then on, nothing remarkable occurred and all was quiet. We never saw the state police cars and the Sheriff leave but it's reasonable to assume they did and we never noticed.

As of this writing, we still don't know exactly what happened and what was going on. We don't know what happened to the man who was put into the ambulance. Did he have some sort of seizure or a mild heart attack? Was he admitted to the hospital and kept there or later released? And we also still don't have the slightest idea why the sheriff's men and the state police were at the dead end and spent so much time there. If our neighbor to the south had had a seizure of some kind it doesn't make sense for the police to go to his residence and spend so much time there. But to speculate in any way with insufficient evidence is not a good idea. So we'll wait and see if we hear anything or might have an opportunity to speak with our deputy sheriff neighbor. There is, of course, the possibility he can't or won't tell us anything which would clear up what went on. You know how the police can be. My wife and I might well end up forever wondering, what in the world went on down there.

Then again, if we do hear anything, the answer when it's finally revealed more than likely will be mundane and disappointing and not at all like what unrestrained imagination would have led us to. That's often the way it is with real life.



# *WOW Day*

## *Gene Wolfe*

Lower education was new to me. I had taught for Florida Atlantic U., Columbia College, and a few others. I had spoken once, disastrously, to a group of bored high-school students; but I had never taught at a junior high school. That was why I agreed to take the gig. That, and because WOW Day sounded like such an interesting concept.

By the end of the day, I had decided it should be called *Wow Is This Ever Grueling Day!* It was a marathon, believe me.

Here's the concept. On a Friday afternoon all sorts of people show up at Rolling Meadows Junior High. Each person teaches four sessions of a half hour each, with a three minute (right, I said three minute) break between sessions. Each kid must sign up for four sessions, but can sign up for any four he or she chooses. We were to arrive at noon for lunch.

We – meaning Rosemary and I – did. Most of the other presenters did not. Our lunches (quite good) were in brown paper bags; this permitted the late arrivals to carry their lunches into their classrooms and munch while teaching. Having taught before, I knew how that would go over with the students.

I don't know how many presenters there were; twenty might be a good guess. The five we met at lunch were two cops, two FBI Agents, and one auto mechanic. Cops, I discovered, can be quite civic-minded; one of the cops was the chief of the Rolling Meadows Police. (The RMP as it says on their cars. I always feel they should wear red jackets and “Smokey Bear” campaign hats.)

Both the FBI men wore black suits. One wore sun glasses and one did not. The one without sun glasses seemed friendly and approachable; the one with aloof and slightly

hostile – good cop, bad cop in the flesh. They could have gone on TV.

The auto mechanic was surprisingly intelligent and articulate. He sometimes worked on racing cars, and had a good deal of interest to say about that. I wanted to ask him about restoring antique cars, but lunch was over much too soon. The kids, no doubt, had better luck.

Off we went to Mrs. Casey's room, Rosemary in her wheelchair, propelled by me. I was, frankly, dubious about having a real teacher in the room as I taught. In that I was wholly wrong. Moreover, a quick scan of the books she kept there to lend to students revealed titles by Ray Bradbury and Orson Scott Card. Home folks, I thought, and so it proved.

My first group was of twenty-four kids. The other three were each of twenty. Thus I taught, altogether, eighty-four. Whites predominated, Asians came in second, and browns (most from Latin America and some from India) third. There were no blacks. Junior high girls, I discovered, can be amazingly mature in appearance. A few years ago, I was stunned by the sudden maturation of our step-granddaughter Beverly. At thirteen, Beverly was taller than most women and could have passed for twenty-one. It is no exaggeration to say that she could have put on make-up, shorts, and a T-shirt and gotten a job at Hooters. Seeing the girls of Rolling Meadows Junior High, I realized that Beverly was by no means unique.

Years ago I saw Rudyard Kipling's class picture, taken just before he left his English private school. On first seeing that photograph, I searched in vain for Kipling among the students. Only after five minutes and more of that did I realize that the short, youth-

ful schoolmaster with the wire-rimmed glasses and the thick mustache was not a master at all, but the future author of *Kim*.

None of the boys I had were thus deceptive. None looked older than sixteen and several looked as though they should have been remanded to elementary school.

The amazing thing about the whole group, boys and girls, was that they were interested. I talked about technique and about the business end of writing — advances, publishers, contracts, agents, translations, and so forth. It didn't matter, they were interested in all of it. About half of them were writing already, and several had started novels. They were quite secretive, by the way, about just what they were writing. I don't know whether they were afraid I would ridicule them or afraid I would steal their ideas. Both, perhaps.

It's confusing, I found, to talk to one group for a short time and have them replaced by another, and those by a third and those by a fourth. I was afraid of repeating myself, and it meant that things I ought to have said to all four groups I said only to one. Notes would have helped, but I had been too ignorant of the situation to make them.

I had brought half a dozen of my titles for show and tell, and that was good. Props are always useful. I tried to explain that writing was wonderful in that you could do the other things and write, too. You could be a fireman, and a writer, an FBI Agent and a writer, a doctor and a writer, like Arthur Conan Doyle. It was a great temptation to mention the books of Gypsy Rose Lee; but I am of the unshakable opinion that those were ghosted by “Craig Rice” anyway. Craig Rice, of course, shows that you can be a public relations agent and a writer. Whether ghosted or not, Gypsy's “autobiography” is a genuine classic, and *THE G-STRING MURDERS* and *MOTHER FINDS A BODY* are good fun.

(The lady's real name seems to have been Georgiana Randolph, but she used other

surnames, including Walker and Craig. She sometimes shortened her first name to Georgia, as well.)

Nor was that all. We talked about characterization and plotting. I have a handout on characterization, and wished I had brought a hundred copies or so — but I didn't. I gave them the plot skeleton and tried to show them how it worked. It was all very brief, but one or two things may have stuck and saved a few of them months of wasted effort.

After the fourth period, a girl came up to the desk to look more closely at *AN EVIL GUEST*. I told her a little about the plot, and she said, “Wow! I'm going to have to find that.”

So I gave it to her and, at her request, signed it.

Before she could get it clear of the school, an adult grabbed her and persuaded her to donate it to the school library. So she didn't get the book, but she learned something about adults and schools.

So did I. The WOW in WOW Day stands for Widen Our World. I hope I did. Certainly, I widened my own. ✨





# The Old Kit Bag Bob Sabella

## *Jack McDevitt and The Devil's Eye*

When asked to name my favorite f&sf writers, the list generally consists of writers from the 60s through the 80s, names such as Robert Silverberg, Michael Bishop, Kim Stanley Robinson, Roger Zelazny, Clifford D. Simak, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Samuel R. Delany, Ursula K Le Guin, John Varley, Jack Vance, C.J. Cherryh, and George R. R. Martin. It is not that I do not like current sf writers, just that they have not “aged” enough to merit inclusion on that list.

If I were to name the f&sf writers whose post-2000 output I enjoy the most, the list would contain Stephen Baxter, Jeffrey Ford, Alastair Reynolds, Robert Reed and, likely topping the list, Jack McDevitt.

With the exception of a handful of stand-alone novels, McDevitt’s output generally consists of two series. The *Academy* series features pilot Priscilla Hutchins and are primarily space adventures built around archaeological mysteries. The mysteries are generally interesting, although sometimes McDevitt gets carried away with the adventures, such as in **Chindi**, which was one of his weakest novels.

His other, stronger series is the *Alex Benedict* novels, which are primarily historical mysteries. Benedict is an antiquities dealer who is always seeking some priceless relic either for himself to sell or for a client. Generally the relics are related to some historical mystery which Benedict and his sidekick

Chase Kolpath—the narrator of the books—investigate and inevitably solve. McDevitt is a good plotter, so his novels are briskly-written and contain numerous plot tentacles which tend to be absorbing and logically-developed, all coming together in a satisfying denouement.

But what really appeals to me the most in the *Alex Benedict* novels is McDevitt’s fascination with history. The stories are set several thousand years in the future when humanity is scattered through a Confederation of worlds. The novels are generally written as travelogues as Alex and Chase travel from world to world investigating the relics and the mysteries behind them. Inevitably, each world they visit has both an interesting culture of its own and a fascinating history, and McDevitt examines both of them in a brisk manner that avoids long expository lumps and does not slow down the story. Since I love history, including both historical fiction and future history, this aspect of the *Alex Benedict* novels is probably why they are my favorite recent sf series overall.

The newest novel in the series **The Devil's Eye** actually breaks from the pattern of the earlier novels (**A Talent for War**, **Polaris** and **Seeker**) in not involving an antique at all. Rather, a famous horror writer whom Benedict does not know personally sends him an urgent message asking for his help. Soon afterwards, she undergoes what

is apparently a voluntary mind-wipe which for all practical purposes “kills” her as she becomes a different person with no memory of who she was previously or why she sent the message to Alex.

Curious, Alex and Chase investigate the writers’ activities prior to her sending the message. Initially, as usually happens, the mystery deepens as she seems to have been an upbeat, happy person with no apparent reason to either have panicked or undergone a mind-wipe. Eventually there are attempts on Alex and Chase’s life, which does not usually happen in this series, and **The Devil’s Eye** threatened to descend into a routine thriller. Fortunately, McDevitt avoids that trap as Alex and Chase escape the villains’ clutches and solve the mystery within a fairly concise 240 pages.

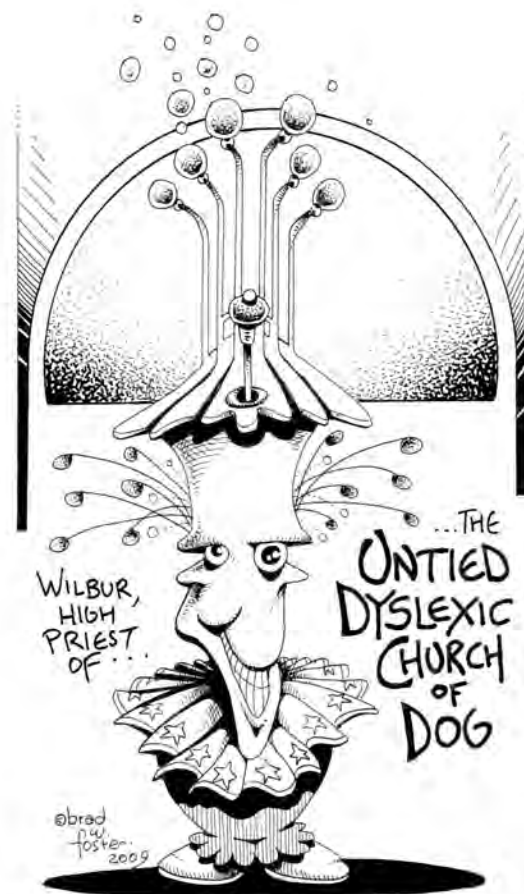
Except the book is 360 pages long! It turns out that the solution to the mystery uncovers a deadly crises to the world of its setting, and Alex and Chase are perhaps the only two people who can help deal with it because of their prior experience with Mutes, an alien race whose relationship with the human Confederation has never been good, in fact has been on the verge of war for several centuries, mostly because each race finds the other physically unsettling when in their presence.

It is not easy to segue from a historical mystery with aspects of a thriller into a humanitarian and political novel, but McDevitt does a decent job of it. Overall **The Devil’s Eye** is not quite as strong as **Seeker**, the prior novel in the *Alex Benedict* series, or **Infinity Beach**, a near-future stand-alone novel which mimics the series very well, but it is a strong novel which I recommend to fans of far-future sf, mysteries, or future history. Many reviewers have called McDevitt the logical heir to the likes of Asimov or Clarke, and while his works do not have the philosophical foundation of the best Clarke novels, otherwise that is not a bad comparison at all.

## Tidbits of News 1

According to an Associated Press news story, employees at the Santa Monica Pier Aquarium discovered their offices had been flooded with sea water. At first they apparently suspected it was some prankster but after some further investigation they came to an unusual conclusion. The staff decided that the culprit was an inquisitive and friendly female two-spotted octopus that managed somehow to open a valve, causing hundreds of gallons of water to overflow the octopus’s tank. Fortunately, according to the staff, none of the sea life was harmed. They think, however, there may be some damage to the new ecologically designed office floors. All I can say is:

*Yeah. Sure--blame the octopus . . .*





# Rat Stew

Gene Stewart



## *Good Stories Told Well*

In spite of mainstream sneering, is there such thing as good genre writing? Can there even be good science fiction?

First it must be understood that different metrics are being applied. Mainstream's standards and values differ from genre's in many particulars. They also overlap in some areas.

The overlap is common ground defining all good fiction. It must be coherent, it must engage us, move us, entertain and inform us, and leave us enriched or elevated somehow. At the least it must interest rather than bore.

Setting aside the details of what comprises common ground for now, let us examine where genre diverges.

One notices that genre tends to emphasize ideas and forms over character relationships and depiction of the world just outside our sunglasses.

Naturalism does not feature often in fantasy or science fiction. It shows up more often in horror in part because horror is more style than genre.

One attempt to distinguish genre from mainstream used the terms Imaginative versus Descriptive. This prompted laughter because all fiction, mainstream or not, is imaginative.

It focused on the fact that most genre fiction employs an imaginary setting, while most mainstream fiction uses the so-called real world or consensual reality. We must not bog down in epistemology.

Even here there is overlap, such as in the Magical Realism school exemplified by the work of Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

A constant refrain in mainstream dismissals of genre fiction is that the characters are types, or caricatures, cartoonish rather than realistically insightful. This held true more in Pulp days than today, when such pioneering work as Gregory Benford's *Timescape* exist. This was both a time-travel novel and a science procedural with very realistic characters.

William Gibson's first novel, *Neuromancer*, offered science fictional tropes in a mainstream tone and managed to distill a new sub genre, cyberpunk, all in one amazing work. Gibson's subsequent novels have remained mainstream in execution even as their content has recognized the blur between fictional futures rooted in extrapolated real science, and what keeps overtaking us in real life. His latest works are simply fiction and he has wondered aloud if writing science fiction, other than doing pastiche of past forms, is even possible today, given the pace of technological change.

As to pastiche, many genre writers are hearkening back to earlier idioms. Steam-punk, based on the notion that computing and high-tech kicked in during the Victorian and Edwardian ages, when steam power dominated, allows writers to employ a more relaxed

and engaging narrative tone to pursue comedic melodrama with surprisingly modern touches and applications. *The Difference Engine* by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling is generally cited as a prime example, although such writers as K. W. Jeter, Tim Powers, and James P. Blaylock led the way with droll spins on cyberpunk mixed with H. G. Wells and Jules Verne style plots.

This sensibility applies to fantasy as well as science fiction, along with many science fantasy hybrids. Diana Wynne Jones wrote the marvelous *Howl's Moving Castle*, which became an animated movie, using steampunk and fantasy motifs.

Steampunk's many fascinating brass-and-bakelite accouterments have spawned an entire subculture mingling Goth and cyberpunk with neo-Victorian and other aspects to create breathtaking velvet and leather clothing and even devices such as modern computers that look as if they were hand-crafted of ivory, brass, and wood, or intriguing jewelry made from polished machine parts.

This in turn has led to other historical referents being blended into cutting-edge genre fiction. *The Terror* by Dan Simmons uses the real plight of a wooden ship caught in the Arctic ice, made famous by Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins in their play, *The Frozen Deep*, as backdrop for a Lovecraftian horror. Interestingly, Simmons's next book is *Drood*, purportedly narrated by Collins about Dickens's final few years.

Knots within knots.

This glance back to older forms of popular entertainment has bled into literary heights, too, as witness Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day*, which features many types of pulp and penny-dreadful narratives, characters, and situations in a mad cascade of cliffhanging genre fun, all to complex, encoded literary ends.

More often each week we see mainstream works dipping into genre tropes for new elements, different angles of attack, and fresh viewpoints. At the same time we see

genre striving toward acceptance and respectability with reckless disregard for its tradition of rebellion and dissent.

Mainstream sneering thus holds much less venom these days, while genre grouching about literary poaching cuts little ice in face of the yard sale on tropes many writers are having as they blur the borders between high and popular culture. We're seeing a homogenization in these final days of hard copy publishing.

Good writing is good writing regardless of market category.

Almost everyone agrees with that, while continuing to disagree about what constitutes good writing. Nothing pleases everyone, and only the blandest try. We should celebrate diversity even as we eliminate prejudice. Yes, genre work can aspire to the literary stratosphere, even as yes, mainstream work can entertain our body paint off.

Sir Arthur C. Clarke once wrote that science fiction is the only form of literary endeavor to address and include technology and science in its content and as its subject matter. This, he figured, made it more realistic than mainstream stuff, with its narrow focus, in sf'nal view, on "suburban adultery and alcoholism".

This sneer from genre boosters was justified by the New Yorker school of writing, as exemplified by John O'Hara and later John Updike. Chronicling the flaws and foibles of the upper middle class east coast effete did somewhat limit the audience, but to be fair the basis for that sub-school was called, specifically, the New Yorker.

And the truth was far wider and more diverse all along. Writers in the southern, midwestern, and western states were also writing. Like Gregory Benford, William Faulkner was a Southerner; Mark Twain, Hemingway, and Vonnegut were midwesterners, and Jack London hailed from California.

By focusing solely on the New Yorker school as a target for their scorn, genre supporters cheated themselves of a lot a great

stuff, even as they ghettoized their beloved sub-genres by openly operating against the NYer's narrow set of elements.

How ridiculous need we be?

In Britain and generally in Europe there is no great divide between science fiction, or genre fiction as a whole, and other literary endeavor. A work is judged solely on its quality; is it good writing? Does it accomplish its evident goals? Is it a seamless work of art?

We're gradually, reluctantly getting closer to this kind of catholicism stateside, but too many of us continue to draw a line and, worse, stand insistently on one side of it versus the other. This is hurting everyone right when all writers and all readers are facing huge upheavals in publishing. Recent cut-backs, publishers forced to lay off staff, cut back production, and even close their doors, and dwindling distribution all speak of major changes to come. Perhaps it will be a shift from atoms to electrons. Maybe the digital age will save what it is also culling.

Maybe we will be reading on Kindle and Sony Reader platforms soon more often than on bound sheets of plant-stained plant fiber. Maybe we'll shift to other forms we can't envision just now. Or maybe we'll figure out sustainable lumber, stable publishing and distribution, and modern business methods allowing reasonable profits without pernicious overhead.

Yes we can, Obama famously sloganeered. Let's apply this to the stories we tell, and how we tell them. Yes, we can write good genre fiction, good mainstream fiction, and, better yet, yes we can stop making needless distinctions and start focusing on what matters.

Good stories told well is what matters, and to each another's.



## Tidbits of News 2: Octopus II

Not to be outdone, the East Coast also has its own mischievous octopus. Recently the staff and guests of the New England Aquarium in Boston, Massachusetts were “entertained” by an octopus with the name Truman. Truman is seven feet long, weighs thirty pounds, and has the usual eight arms. He also, apparently, suffers from a bit of impatience.

It seems workers at the aquarium often place food in locked boxes for the intelligent animals to figure out how to open for a reward. The aquarium employees call it an “enrichment activity”. Presumably the practice works fairly well—for the most part. Not in the case of Truman, however.

In this particular instance, workers locked some crabs into a box fourteen inches on a side, placed inside a bigger box. When Truman went for the crabs he got impatient. He bypassed the locks and squeezed his body through a two inch hole in the exterior box. He spent around thirty minutes inside and then worked his way back out, much to the delight of the staff and guests who witnessed the deed. He never got the smaller box open.

*All I can say is: At least he didn't make a big mess—and he **wasn't** claustrophobic.*

## KENTUCKIANA 2. A GUIDED TOUR OF WEST LIBERTY

Alfred D. Byrd

Let me start with an apology. Last time I ended my article by promising you an article called THINGS TO DO IN WEST LIBERTY. As I described the setting for these activities, though, I used up my wordage before I ever got to the action. Next time for sure.

Last time I left you on the bridge over the Licking River, about to enter the small town of West Liberty, county seat of Morgan County, in the Appalachian foothills of Eastern Kentucky. Now let me take you through the town proper.

Before we cross the bridge, let me mention that we've just passed the turnoff to Wells Hill, where my ancestors lived in fading glory till all of them sold their land and moved into town or out into the world. Beyond Wells Hill, on a winding, ever narrowing road, lies the Neal Valley Cemetery, scenically set on a long ridge between a pine woods and a broad, rolling meadow on which Charolais cattle gaze. (I know their name because I once asked my father what breed they are.) We'll later return to visit the generations of Wellses resting here and lament the loss of the fearsome snake-tree. Just now, though, let's head into town.

As we cross the dark, greenish-brown waters of the Licking River, shaded by scrub willows and brush for which I, botanically challenged though I work in a college of agriculture, know no name, spare me a moment to lament a bridge now lost to time. The present structure of a flat slab of concrete on pilings replaced, about thirty years ago, a narrow, rickety, Gothic-looking contraption of steel with side decks for pedestrians to cross and for fishers to linger on while they drowned worms. I recall myself as a small boy taking walks across these decks with my father, walks of slow progress, as he invari-

ably met a fisher whom he'd known as a boy, a fisher with whom he'd share reminiscences that lasted nearly as long as their childhoods together. I learned well the water's color as these reminiscences went on. No one takes walks across the new bridge or drowns worms there. Progress is better for cars than for fishers.

After we cross the bridge, if you look to your right, you'll see a baseball field of minor notoriety in the annals of skeptical inquiry. On this field Joe Nickell, the celebrated skeptical inquirer and perhaps West Liberty's best-known expatriate, showed how the Nazca Lines could have been drawn with pegs, rope, and chalk alone. You can learn more of his investigation into the Nazca Lines in his book *Ambrose Bierce is Missing: and Other Historical Mysteries*, still available on line. Distantly, I'm related to Joe Nickell, as both he and I are descendants of the town's founder, Edmund Wells, five generations back. I suspect, though, that just about all of us are related to one another in the degree of fourth cousin.

As we move on towards downtown, you'll see on your left an auto-parts shop. I, though, looking back through time, see Stamper's Motel, founded by a childhood friend of my father's, a friend who became a state senator whose long political career ended in a land scandal of such labyrinthine complexity that no one knows to this day whether Woodrow Stamper was the perpetrator or the victim of fraud. Regardless of his guilt or innocence, he was always glad to see my father. Stamper's employees gave him special rates when he and his family stayed at the senator's motel, and were always especially hospitable to us when we ate in its dining room, which served the best pan-fried catfish

for several counties around. Alas, about five years ago, after both Senator Stamper's and my father's deaths, the motel burned to the ground, and its homely hospitality has been replaced by the modernism of the Comfort Inn perched on the hillside above the McDonald's several miles back at Index.

Fire has led to the urban renewal of much of West Liberty over the years. As we reach the heart of town, we see on our right the town's main shopping district, a set of shops perched on a hillside so steep that the shops' foundations form almost perfect right triangles. (Between the buildings a sidewalk runs down to the street along the river. I've never summoned the daring to walk this sidewalk. According, though, to a local legend of dubious provenance, a resident of San Francisco once looked at the sidewalk and said, "Wow, now that's steep!") Twice within living memory fire has swept through this shopping district and burned its buildings to the ground. After the first fire a plucky entrepreneur built the Phoenix Theater, with only one screen, but with air conditioning and with popcorn of which aging moviegoers still speak with fondness. When this phoenix rose from the ashes of the second fire, the theater's owner, perhaps fearing to tempt fate again, changed the theater's name.

Across Main Street from the shopping district is the town's heart, the county courthouse, a rugged structure of native yellow stone sitting on a raised platform. Before the courthouse stands a giant millstone that a plaque beside it proclaims is the original millstone that the town's founder, Edmund Wells, used at Wells Mill. To the right of the courthouse, as you're facing it from the street, stands a series of war memorials dating back as far as the War to End All Wars. Behind the courthouse lies a sprawling set of annexes connected to the old county jail. A distant connection of mine by marriage has turned the annexes into a military museum of Morgan County history, with an astonishingly extensive, well preserved, and well displayed

collection of military paraphernalia donated by Morgan County residents and going back as far as the Mexican War. When I've talked with the curator, he's told me sordid details of my ancestors' military experience, as well as which of my uncles stayed how long for what reasons in the county jail. Black sheep, I gather, are immortal. If you happen to be in West Liberty on one of the none too frequent days when the museum is open, it's well worth a look.

Past the courthouse, US 460, on which we've been traveling, turns right. On the corner is an auto dealership that was once Don's, a restaurant that I recall fondly for candied crabapples better than any that I've had elsewhere. US 460 heads on past the old high school that Eleanor Roosevelt dedicated in person, and Salyers Cemetery, places that we'll visit later.

If we turned left, we'd go down a street so steep that it gave me nightmares when I had to drive up it in a car with a standard transmission. It still amazes me that my gyrations with clutch, accelerator, and parking brake always kept my car from rolling back into the car behind it. At the foot of the hill lies Founder's Park, named in honor of the ubiquitous Edmund Wells. We'll visit the park next trip, as the park is the site of two of the things to do.

If one goes straight, though, towards distant Morehead, one passes the Spite Houses, which, according to a tale that my mother told me over and over on car trips, were built by two sisters, each of whom went broke trying to build a bigger house than the other sister had built. As my mother was a Sunday-school teacher whose stories always had morals, I was supposed to learn to be content with what I had and not to be envious of others. Beyond the Spite Houses, the road enters a dynamited gorge and then passes a bottomland that few now know was the site of an ignominious defeat in the annals of the Confederacy.

In the Civil War's first full year, when

Kentucky's pretense at neutrality had expired in the rash actions of Leonidas K. Polk, CSA, and Ulysses S Grant, USA, in the far west of the commonwealth, a local Mexican War veteran, Colonel Andrew Jackson May, raised the Fifth Kentucky Infantry, CSA, in the hills around West Liberty. Two of my great-grandfathers, William F. Havens and Samuel P. Byrd, joined this outfit. One day, as May was drilling his green troops in the bottomland, Federal troops led by a former admiral, William Nelson, came over the ridge from Morehead and took the Confederate wannabes by complete surprise. Both sides agree on the Confederates' having shown considerable spryness in retreat. Great-grandfather Byrd, having seen the elephant and found the circus not to his liking, retired irregularly from military service. Great-grandfather Havens, though, persevered, serving with distinction, and being wounded in action at both Chickamauga and Dallas in Georgia. As for the victorious Bull Nelson, he went on to have a scandalous and brief career in Kentucky in the Civil War. Although his story is stranger than fiction, I may tell you it in a future installment in this series.

Now you've seen West Liberty, our road trip's goal. Next time, if the creek don't run dry, I really will tell you what I do on the three annual trips that I make to my family's hometown. ✨



## Tidbits of News 3 and 4

Mystery Object punches through the roof of a Dallas house

Police in Dallas, Texas say that an unidentified falling object fell from the sky with enough speed and force to put a hole through the roof and the second floor of a Dallas home. A spokesman for the police reported that a six pound piece of metal with two drill holes in it damaged the house while the resident who reported it wasn't home at the time. There were no injuries.

Police couldn't determine the source of the debris, and radioactive tests on the metal were negative. Various state agencies were notified of the incident but none offered a theory. Police also said there were no reports of similar incidents in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area.

*So that's where part of the satellite fell. Either that or it's a damn big paperweight.*

Tennessee Sheriff to serve old warrant.

While cleaning out a storage room in the Glynn County, Georgia Sheriff's Department recently clerks found an old outstanding warrant buried among other papers. After examining it they sent it to the Carter County, Tennessee Sheriff's Department. The Carter County Sheriff is now going to try to serve the warrant for the arrest of a man who wrote a bad check for \$30.00. The arrest warrant for J. A. Rowland was issued in August 1928. In it is a charge of \$30.00 for the bad check, a \$2.00 arrest fee, and 50 cents each for the affidavit and the warrant.

No one is sure if J. A. Rowland is even still alive. But the Carter County Sheriff told The Elizabethton Star that he is under a legal obligation to find Rowland and serve the warrant.

*Obviously, whether alive or dead, the offender **must** be punished and restitution made.*

# Taxes... I Don't Pay No Steenkin'

## Taxes

Sheryl Birkhead

1040...sounds sooo innocuous!

Okay- I think I have a schedule for every letter of the alphabet. Lock and load...I'm goin' in!

*Just a word of warning—the following pertained to doing my taxes in 2008. It has taken a year to get, mostly, over the trauma—and now it is almost that time again!*

It was a tax preparation day like any other day—no, wait, that's already been taken!

I was just sitting down to figure out my taxes. I have my own business (true, it's flirting with red ink, but still recognized as a business nonetheless) and have used TurboTax for a handful of years or so. Because I am always afraid that this might be the year that I actually make money, I always pay estimated tax, so I file early to get that little bit back, so I can plow it back into estimated taxes for the next year.

It was a Thursday. I had put aside the whole day and figured that should be more than ample time to get things done. Yeah, right.

I got lulled into a false sense of security starting with the complicated questions about name, address, and any changes since last year. Hey, I was going to be done by lunch!

Let me digress just a little. One of the main drawing points to TurboTax is that it boasts it will pull all the financial information in from any brokerage accounts for you. Several years ago I was doing this all myself and suddenly the computations took on gargantuan proportions. I tried to fill up the worksheet, ignoring any logic whatsoever, and merely entering the items requested.

When it came out that I had over \$125,000 in capital gains tax, I knew I had done something wrong. To this day I have no idea what happened to the tax code that year. That was the day I invested in the software

and, except for some repeating glitches, it has worked out fairly well.

Okay, back to the date at hand.

I had all the records and bits of paper I needed to get into the meat of this and dove in. Ever have the feeling you've jumped into a dry pool? Think.

I have what is now called a "vintage" Mac. That term makes me come to the defense of my perfectly functional 8 year-old computer, but it lets you know my computing ability is not exactly on the cutting edge. To keep costs minimal, I have one phone line. So, to get the financial records of my brokerage account into TurboTax, I had to log online and then connect to the account. No matter how minimal, all the little ends have to be tidied up and reported. Since I have done this before, I figured it would not be any big deal.

Dial-up. Login. Access information. Now, log-off and go back to TurboTax. Let it do its magic. That is what is supposed to happen. The first problem was an error message (well 24 errors to be exact). I looked into the first one and found out that that one error consisted of 33 transactions each of which was missing a purchase date, a sale date, a purchase price, and a selling price. Hmm. Somehow I thought that was what the program was supposed to do for me. (Let me hasten to explain that I, personally, did not buy and sell one company's stock. The company was bought out by someone else and they mandated that it be sold, not transferred, so all the old—and tiny—dividends now showed up as individual transactions that I had never wanted one in the first place.)

I pulled out the stack of reports I had

dutifully filed all year and pawed through it until I located the year end detail report. Okay. Here was a dividend of .0168 shares. Was it in the TurboTax listing? No, but there was an entry of .017 shares. Okay, okay. I see what happened: TurboTax, in its infinite wisdom, decided to round off and when it compared with the data nothing matched.

Right. Well, the day was early yet, so I matched up the report with the TurboTax “almost information” and started deleting each piece of information individually and replacing it with the exact figure as it appeared on the paperwork. TurboTax feels it has to re-calculate everything after each manipulation.

Since this seemed, in theory, to be easy, I simply started in. Two hours later I was not so convinced. I saved everything and called the broker, since they support TurboTax. Remember that I said I have used this software before? Well, a few other simple problems cropped up last year and I already knew that my consultant had absolutely no idea how to help and would tell me I had to talk with their Internet group. So I asked up front to talk with them. The helpful operator connected me to my consultant. My consultant was not there (and would not be for the next week), so his assistant picked up. I explained what seemed to be happening and she, after telling me that did not seem right—well, duh!—said I ought to call TurboTax directly.

Agh.

It is an 800 number. It is a half hour wait. TurboTax is geared to PCs. The best I could get from them was: start over and see if it happened again. No, wait, maybe it was my Mac. No, wait, maybe it was the browser.

I opened another file. I went back online. I opened a different browser. I imported the information. I got 21 error messages.

Back to the consultant again. I requested another copy of my report since I had been drawing neat lines through entries as I re-entered them and now could not read anything. By now it was almost 4p.m. I was

pis— The consultant (well, assistant) made the wise observation that maybe I ought to call it quits for the day since I was obviously getting angrier by the minute. I agreed.

But not to give up, I tried one last time. Same browser, new file. Background suspense music. Hit the return button and wait for the error messages. They didn’t come. That suddenly sank in. Aside from a total day wasted, it seemed that I was ready to actually start. Go for it!

This is all to get you ready for what was to come. I wanted you to feel my pain, know that I was highly motivated to get all this crap over now.

I was on a roll. When it got to charitable contributions, I had to go back online to get information. But, wait, what was this? My dial-up would not connect. I tried the main number and the alternate, multiple times. Nothing. I called the ISP. They said they had not heard of any problems, but their testing equipment was down and I should just keep trying. Convinced I had the problem almost licked, I said thank you, tried one more dial-up, then stopped for the ‘day’.

Fast forward to Saturday. I still could not make the dial-up connection. Not one to spend much time online, it was not (yet) a hardship, but it was time to get those taxes done. The ISP apologized saying they still could not test the lines. Give it one more day. Okay.

Sunday evening I tried again. Same story. This time I asked the ISP tech services if they had someone there who knew Macs. Sure thing! Fred comes on the line and agrees with me that things are not going well. He asks if he has my permission to check my account. Sure why not?

When he comes back on the line, his tone of voice has changed. Sorta like someone who has bad news to deliver and is not sure how to go about it. Er . . . It seems that my account has been suspended due to non-payment. That is a diplomatic way to say they had closed my account. As soon as he



said the word suspended, I knew what had happened.

Back in October I had to close out my credit card account for inappropriate Internet use. (A side note: this is the second time I have had to do this and both times the activity has been in London!) I pay my ISP by the year (in late January) and had simply forgotten to give them the new number. Whew! Mystery solved. Here, I'll just give you the new . . . Oh, you can't take it. I have to call customer service, not an 800 number, and they are only open 8-5 Pacific Mountain time M-F. Grumble, grumble.

Bright and early (well noon my time) I call Customer service and get that recording we all know so well: "If you have reached this recording during our normal business hours we are either away from the desk or on the line with another customer, leave a message and we will get back to you."

I leave the message along with all the appropriate information, then head out to the County Library to use their PCs. Once there, I email the ISP the same information and mention that I am not willing to put out the new credit card number online, but as soon as I can speak with them . . .

Tuesday I do the same thing but email them twice from the library.

Wednesday I call them and say that if I have not heard from someone by mid-afternoon I am going in search of another ISP.

Be careful what you threaten, you just might have to follow through.

Okay. So now I have to make good on my threat. Utilizing the library resources, I google as many dial-up services as I can, then I go for the cheapies. Next I check out Mac support and finally get the hours for in US tech support. I had thought there would be a voluminous listing to sift through. Well, this was a small volume. comprised of three entries. I ranked the three and then started with my top choice.

Toast.net came through with a \$7.95/month unlimited fee as long as you pay by

the year. By a large default, they won.

I immediately called them up. It was a plus that a real person answered the phone and transferred me to the right spot. They took my information, had all the right answers, and within 15 minutes told me my account was all set up and (most importantly) I was paying for a year's service.

They had provided me with 20 phone numbers that should work for my area code. Since I have only one phone line, they wished me luck, told me to call back any time within their working hours, and hung up.

Two hours later I had found out (after dutifully trying each number three, count 'em, **three** times) NONE of the numbers would connect. I had even written down the error message generated each time so I would not have to waste more time getting that information for them. They would get back to me.

Surprisingly, they did. The tech guy said he had just one last idea. They had a really, really old number that I could try. I tried it and twice out of five tries it sort of connected. I got back on the phone with Toast. Not too surprisingly the tone of voice was a bit different this time.

I explained this nifty submenu that kept popping up and refusing to let me proceed. *Post* and *riposte*. They said it was Mac. I said this selfsame Mac had been connecting to the Internet for seven years and this was the first time I had ever seen that screen, so I doubted . . . Their retort was a supervisor would get back to me in a day or so after researching the problem.

Without going into details, this same scenario repeated itself on a daily basis for three more weekdays. I would call, get the same reply, and then go to the library to check out Internet alternatives, then go home and fruitlessly keep trying to connect.

On the fourth day I had reached my absolute limit. This time when I called, I said it seemed it might be time to jump ship (pretty much an empty threat since there did not

seem to be other dial-ups with functional numbers; has something to do with old Macs). I just asked to talk to the supervisor—you remember—the one who was going to call me. Hint hint.

There was a profound lull in the conversation. A new voice came on the line and asked what he could do to help. I tried to encapsulate everything as much as I could and ended up saying I had been told a supervisor was going to research the problem and get back to me but that had not happened.

Again, there was a silence. The voice was steely cold, “I **am** the supervisor.” Oh.

He walked me through some acrobatics. Miraculously, the screen became friendly again and it looked as if connection was imminent (or would have been if I had two phone lines). I could barely contain my excitement. Sometimes it takes so very little to make me happy. I just got off the phone as soon as I could.

By George, I think we’ve got it!!

The connection was slow, the dial-up speed was even slower—but it existed!

Hey, do you want to hear about the phone message I just got letting me know the phone company just informed Toast that they are disconnecting one of the dial-up phone numbers? Do you want to take a guess which number? You get two tries and the second one doesn’t count.

Whee. ✕

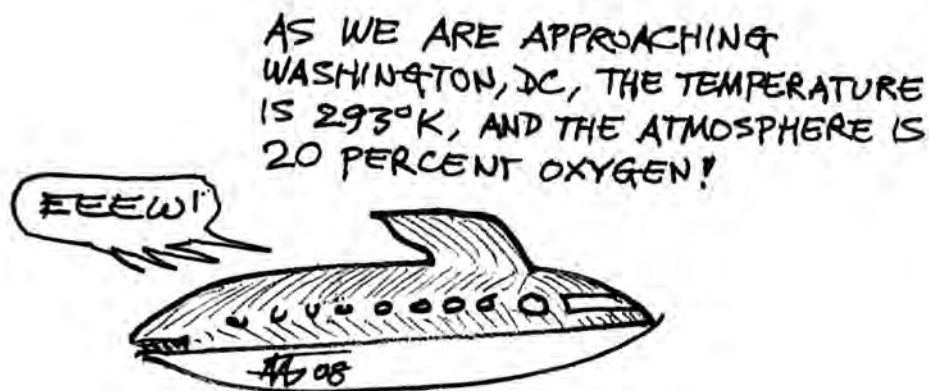
## Tidbits of News 5: Romanian Villagers Construct Their Own Bridge

Residents of the village of Marginea, tired of waiting for authorities to replace a bridge destroyed by floods in July last year took matters into their own hands—literally. In a single day (February 5) they built a bridge to reconnect the two parts of the village which is bisected by a river. When it was done they tested the bridge and limited its allowable weight to 2.5 tons. The problem is, they didn’t have a permit to do the work.

Now they’re the subject of a criminal investigation. Prosecutor Viorel Damu said police are trying to identify those who worked on the bridge. The guilty parties could be jailed for up to three years or fined up to 70,000 *lei* (\$20,800.00). Though police are investigating the situation the Prime Minister commended the villagers for their solidarity. The mayor of Marginea called the investigation “absurd” and said that they’ll tear it down, too—just as soon as authorities find time to build a new one.

But even the prosecutor might relent, saying the villagers could avoid punishment if the investigation determines they acted out of a “state of necessity”.

*The heck of it is, the villagers got it done on time and under budget. And it didn’t take a “stimulus package” to do it.*



# From the Readers . . .

*Sheryl's loc arrived too late for TRF 68 but I've included it here anyway.*

**From: Sheryl Birkhead  
25509 Jonnie Court  
Gaithersburg, MD 20882**

January 9-17, 2009

Dear *tRf-lers*,



Ah. The *Foster* cover on #67 looks as if New Year's confetti is putting in an appearance. Always a gheat pleasure to see *Brad's* work! Such pleasant colors. I especially enjoy it when work from fanartists that do not show up all that often (at least in the zines I get), such as *Doubrley* and *Erichsen*.

I hope the faster Internet connection is being as much of a gift as it sounds to be! It seems now that the president-elect is thinking about postponing the analog-digital conversion because so many people are unprepared for the transition (many who did not feel the need to become prepared felt the need to drop cable, etc. in order to save money). If that is the case, then maybe I can put off all the problems with the converter box and look at *DSL*. We shall see.

You mention the *Big Bang*. Just a "bit" off topic, have you watched the half-hour sitcom of that name? When I read the synopsis of the show to come, I was certain it would fall flat. I watched the first episode anyway and have not missed an episode since. Only the nerdy . . .

There for a few years I did a lot of phenol extractions. About the only thing I can say about phenol with certainty is that it ate through pantyhose and left a nifty white spot on the skin for a while; not a nice chemical to

play with for many reasons.

To any qualified to nominate, remember that with January 1 comes the open season (so to speak) for Hugo nominations.

Once upon a time (yeah, it was only a fairy tale) when I thought about writing, I quickly found the only thing holding me back was that I had absolutely **no** idea of plotting. That's about the first and last nail in the coffin for a (fiction!) writer. I tried the ploy of taking plot factors on cards and trying to write from what I was dealt and that was even **worse**. So much for that idea.

The plumber I mentioned last loc did a nice job with the re-routing to the ejection system with one **big** problem. I had no reason to go and check the job after he left. I did not go down to the laundry room for a week. When I did, to do laundry, I found **he had not plugged the freezer back in** after he completed working with the pipes. Naturally everything inside was thawed. But knowing the door had not been opened and exactly what was in there, I just plugged it back in. If I had had any meats in there things might have been different. I will remember to "mention" this to him the next time I need any plumbing done.

I have started seeing the *Smart Car* in traffic and they scare me! They are so tiny! I try to stay clear of the Interstate roads around here due to gridlock, but would **really** cringe if I saw one out there zipping (can they zip?) along at about 60 miles an hour (yeah, I know the speed limit is 55). They are cute but look as if you could actually pick one up and leave it in the front hallway overnight instead of the garage. I thought that 3-wheelers were actually not legal on the road but have seen one or two; didn't take the time to look and see if the license tag was there or

not. I haven't seen the motorbike around (as opposed to the motor scooter) for many years, but they might just have that little extra umph cyclists need to be of use more often. I also, if said motorbikes still exist, have no idea if technology has overcome the problem of the (relative to the bike) the heavy engine in making it easy to use. The golf carts have the (currently) problem that if they get into regular traffic, they just cannot move at the pace required. I do not believe they are legal here.

I have actually listened to a *Koontz* book on tape about a *Golden Retriever*. I think I also saw something mentioning his name in one of the not-quite professional magazines that all veterinarians get for free. Think it was *Family Dog* but not sure of that. I enjoyed listening to the book, mainly about the spirit that was there, so the supernatural was involved. I have been listening to his *Odd* series, but the library has not gotten the latest two books in any audio form yet. Here, due to the economy one of the Borders Books stores closed and I stopped by when there was pretty much only the dregs or things that (even with a hefty discount) were costly. I found his *Odd Hours* on DVD with an original price of \$44+ and even with the 40% off I was not willing to spring for it.

Around here I saw the gas prices drop to \$1.449 for one cash only station but they started going back up pretty sharply starting about a week ago. Luckily the prices are still substantially below the previous high. Once can only hope.

I just made an appointment to have regular service for the car. January 20. Something about that date sounded *very* familiar. Oh yeah: *Inauguration Day*. A lot of people around here are either going out of town or simply staying in because this is going to be one huge crush of people. Um, I will need to set up a *VCR* to tape things in case I do not get home early enough to watch them. That part may be a challenge.

You know, even if I did have the money

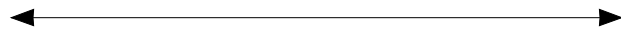
to afford a new computer, software that would work with that computer, and *DSL* (or whatever the fast connection would be at that time) there is still something about holding a zine in your hand, exactly the way the fan-ed made it. Even if I were able to download and print, it just would not look or feel the same. One way to look at it is as a craftsman, and nothing takes the place of the finished product a craftsman has created. Looking at a zine online just is **not** (for me) the same thing. Yeah, there may still be quite a few of us anachronisms out there.

Thanks for thish. May the year be a rewarding one (in many ways) for us all.

'bye Sheryl

*[[Brad was pleased to have the opportunity to do a color cover when I asked him and I was pleasantly surprised by the result. He has also provided me with another cover for issue #70 which should catch people's attention.//The internet connection I have doesn't seem to have quite the same speed as cable TV connections but it is much faster than the dial-up I had which was allegedly 56k but the actual speeds were mostly about half that. The new connection supposedly has a download speed of 1 Mb but is mostly just under. I'm not going to complain but hope that, eventually, this area will move further into the 21st century and provide reasonably priced wireless connections which, I think, don't involve dish antennas—but I could be wrong about that.//The digital conversion was postponed—more or less. But a lot of TV stations switched over on February 17 anyway.//I've watched a few episodes of the Big Bang TV show but I haven't become a constant viewer. It always seems as if I have other things to do when the show is on (such as reading a good book).//Shame on that plumber. But then such—probably to him—minor things are beneath his attention. He did what he was supposed to—why bother to tidy up little details?//Those smart cars*

*are tiny. Yet they're supposed to be roomy inside. I imagine they'd fit into some unconventional spots for parking.//So far gasoline prices are still under two dollars a gallon but there are those who project the average price will be around \$2.50 by Summer, which is pretty much traditional.//I'm glad I don't live anywhere near Washington DC. Inauguration Day must have been a traffic nightmare as well as the crowds of people attending.//I hope to keep producing a paper fanzine for as long as I can even if the number of copies sent out becomes smaller.]]*



From: **G. Thomas Doubrely**

Ned:

Yes, well, the spelling came from an immigrant ancestor who tried to “Americanize” his long cumbersome Welsh name, Doubberrelley. Without any appreciation of vowels and consonants, he ended up with all the vowels clustered in the middle and at the end.

Yes, Virginia, There is a Tom Doubrely, and I am (or was) an artist; actually a fairly good and semi-serious artist, at one time, lo, these ages past. One of the few records I still have on file from those days is below; a rendering in heavy oils I did on commission, eons ago:



Technically speaking, Tom Sadler doesn't exactly “have” me; it is just that I pret

ty much live under a rock behind an abandoned building at the end of an off-ramp near a rural community in a backwoods area. Tom is one of a handful of living entities that happens to know the address of the RFD group post box where I pick up my mail 2 or 3 times a month. I don't actually “do” art anymore, although at one time I did do some work for several magazines and companies, using G.Thomas Doubrely as a professional signature. Tom is an old friend (although we have never met), and we share the same name, and a lot of similarity in reading tastes and opinions, so I am happy to provide him with an occasional scribbling on request.

Uhm, Ned, why did you web-search for SSDI records? You could have done a Google by odd-spelling last name and gotten not only my previous incarnation as G. Thomas, but also my brother (auto mechanic, artist, inventor) and my half-sister (baker), and sister-in-law (gardner, chef, seamstress). The SSDI is a record of deceased family members. You didn't expect me to be listed there, did you? Sadler is a man of many talents, but I don't think channeling dead artists is one of them...

Out of morbid curiosity, I went to the SSDI and checked the names. Disturbingly, I **am** listed there: George Doubrely, deceased April, 1882. Hm. . . I was born in 1949. Due to the unusual spelling (all the other family lines use Douberely or Dubberly), I can trace my family all the way back to Wales. So far as I am aware, there are only two George Doubrelys. My grandfather, George Frederick, used his middle name, Frederick, and he passed away in 1968. I am the only one that used George. It is a bit unsettling to see yourself listed as deceased, especially 68 years before you were born. I made some inquiries, but all they could tell me is that I have an active SS record as a living citizen. They were unable to explain the death record for a duplicate name ancestor who never existed. I guess I will have to wait until I am 65 to find out if I get any benefits . . .

But if it is me, then Sadler really **does** have channeling-the-dead-vision, and I can share with you all that the afterlife isn't too bad, really, and there is internet after death.

Tom Doubrrley (Deceased)

*[[Not much I could add to your reply to Ned other than that I'm glad I found out about your art all those many years ago and I feel very fortunate that you are able to take time to provide me with illos and such when I need them.//Your family sounds like an interesting one. I had wondered what the origin of your name was. I doubt it would ever have occurred to me that it was Welsh. Your immigrant ancestor did what so many other immigrants did when they came to this country and wanted to fit themselves into their new homeland. It's interesting to note that it never occurred to me to wonder why Ned searched the SSDI, especially since I was pretty sure you were and are among the living. I know I'm certainly not capable of channeling dead artists nor would even know how to go about it anyway. I'm much more comfortable with living artists. I'm fairly sure you'd be the first to know whether or not you're dead. The reports of your death . . .]]*



From: **Brad W. Foster**  
Greetings Tom ~

Regarding TRF#68

Kick to see Kurt doing color work on the cover. I think for many of us fan artists, so used for so long to having b&w printing our only option, this opening up of color is kind of re-juicing the creative. . . well, juices!

Regarding your opening comments, and specifically the Before/After diagram, that pretty much shows how I feel about our own life here: We've always kind of lived on the edge of things, but now the drop OVER that edge is getting frighteningly deeper and deeper.

Sheryl's tales of converter box woes

sounds way too familiar, and more and more people will be going nuts over it all. I would like to suggest that she might look into putting the money into a new television, already set to get the new signals, and thus already able to do the channel shifting and such because it will be built in, rather than continuing to have to buy a series of only half-helpful boxes.

Got to keep this short, promised myself to get all the paperwork cleared off my desk this weekend, and already halfway through Saturday and I'm still just reading fanzines. Too much fun, not enough work done!

stay happy~

Brad

<http://www.jabberwockygraphix.com/>  
<Http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Quadrant/1956>

*[[I think Kurt was just as pleased at the opportunity to do a color cover as you were. I just wish my printer and copier had been capable of reproducing the colors better and faithfully.//The before and after diagram was, I fear, a bit inaccurate (and my fault for not making clear what I was trying to say) but I'm sure many people felt as if that was the case. The current state of the economy is very frightening—and the news media don't help matters by seemingly focusing on the unpleasantness almost constantly—but we have no choice but to accept the situation and deal with it as positively and bravely as we can. Those of us who either lived through the Great Depression or whose parents did know things were far worse then and yet people made it through that period and on to the end. I know my parents and grandparents lived through the Great Depression and survived it, though I'm sure they must have wondered at how they managed it. If we're patient and resourceful we'll make it through this recession. If only people would pay attention to and remember the history of this nation—and the world in general.]]*

Now that's one ghooood lookin'  
list of *Hugo* nominations!



From: **Ned Brooks**  
February 4, 2009

Dear Tom,

Thanks for the RELUCTANT FAMULUS 68. The old typesetter is gone - the last printer that could handle the LaserJet version of FancyFont has died. So I am doing letters in this very plain EditPad, and learning the Open Office DTP for fanzines.

Fancy cover - hard to imagine how waterless concrete might work! The Brad Foster back cover is funny.

Your economic analysis is a bit off in claiming that purchasing power has dropped off the chart - in fact there has been little change in inflation. It's jobs that have dropped, and the value of invested savings. But I have about given up reading about such stuff - it's worse than my attempts to master thermodynamics. Apparently the one thing you can be sure of in any attempt to goose the overall economy is that the side effects will outweigh the intended effect. What none of the gurus ever mentions is that our economy has long consisted too largely of attempts to sell things that no one actually needs; and that the infamous Bell Curve ensures that there will be ever larger numbers of people on the left hand (IQ<100) side for whom our technological society has no jobs.

Normal concrete get stronger with age as

the crystals formed in the reaction between Portland cement and water continue to grow and interlock. Does this happen with the proposed sulfur concrete? I can't really envision the procedure for using Toutanji's proposed building material. The Moon certainly has no shortage of aggregate—but after you mix this with the sulfur, then what? What reaction takes place to convert this mixture into a solid? But even if it works isn't the Moon just as short of sulfur as it is of water? It seems more likely to me that you might be able to use a solar furnace to melt moon dust into bricks, and then stick these together with epoxy.

I had read about the "portable magnetosphere" to protect astronauts from the solar wind. I guess it's a matter of the power needed to maintain the field, and whether it could be done without bugging all the other electronics.

Interesting about the undecipherable spectrometer readouts. There are only a relatively few discrete elements, while the spectrum is continuous, so there is certainly plenty of room for spectral lines that don't match any known element. But atomic theory only allows for a limited number of even unknown elements, so I suspect something else is going on here. Perhaps the light being analyzed has passed through some medium that distorts the spectral frequencies.

Gene Stewart's quote about the Bush empire "creating its own reality" faster than those of us who prefer rational governance could keep up with the changes is interesting. Apparently the Bushies really believed this was the way to go in the face of all the evidence that they were just digging us all into a deeper hellhole. I think it's basically mental laziness combined with excess power—it's easier to let off bombs and bullets in all directions rather than stop and think about what might actually be useful—and remember that there are many problems that cannot be solved by violence or cash, and some that cannot be solved at all. A good example is

the common cold (and other diseases such as cholera) which have no known cure; the treatment is to keep the patient alive until the disease runs its course.

The Terrafugia flying car looks like a bad idea to me. If the wings fold up automatically, between those surfaces and the large tail fins, the thing will not do at all well on the road in a cross-wind. They may have tested it at 90 mph but probably in still air. We already have too many planes falling on hapless groundlings without adding this to the mix.

Best — Ned

*[[Re: My analysis of purchasing power vs gas prices, That was a screw-up on my part. I didn't intend for people to believe that's what I thought. I'd like to believe that I know better even if my grasp of economics isn't very strong. I fear I must not have made my point properly and so gave people the wrong impression. As for the chart, I think Tom D was being perhaps a bit sarcastic or satirical. I'm sure that to some people it probably seems that way. Buying power hasn't changed but some people have less money to spend due to various factors and now try to spend what they have wisely. But if the Federal government keeps printing money at the rate it is, there might be real inflation. I've given up reading much about the economic factor and more and more I begin to wonder if anyone, economists and politicians especially actually have the slightest idea what will work and how to go about making it work. It's the old joke about getting 12 economists in a room and coming up with 13 economic theories (or whatever the number was).]]The article about the waterless concrete was very brief and left unanswered many questions. I found myself wondering about the things you mentioned, and others, such as would there be adequate deposits of recoverable sulfur, would it have to be brought along, or sent ahead? After TRF 68 went out, I read an article about another process for making concrete without the use of*

*water that could be used on the Moon. But there were a couple of drawbacks: 1) It used powdered aluminum (and turning a spacecraft into powdered aluminum was mentioned) with no hint as to how the astronauts would go about grinding up the aluminum source; and, 2) It was also a thermal process which required very high temperatures and the astronauts would have to make sure they were a good, long, safe distance when the reaction took place.]]The Terrafugia. Yeah. That was in my closing comment on the thing regardless of whether the aircraft were to die to a collision or to mechanical failure.]]*



From: **Joseph T. Major**  
February 4, 2009

Dear Tom:

You note the misuse and lack of control of bailout money. Every government project, especially these days, seems to have this problem. Homeland security funds seem to be being used to protect the Louis Mozarella Memorial Pee-Wee League Playing Field in South Succotash against the threat of Un-Islamic Activity. Lobbying and horse-trading (the reason that so many earmarks proliferated in budget bills) continue unabated.

Forcefields!? That gets rid of one problem with interstellar travel, where near-light speeds turn even the tiniest grain of dust into a lethal projectile.



**The Old Kit Bag:** I haven't read any of the works of two of the authors on Sabena's, er, Sabella's list. So here goes.

Kage Baker: I liked the first one or two Company books I read, and some of her tropes are amusing (i.e., showing Warner Brothers cartoons to pre-Columbian natives of what would become Washington state). As the series went on, the characters showed a decidedly casual attitude towards security and the promised resolution never resolved.

Stephen Baxter: Kind of mixed. I liked *Voyage* but found *Titan* less credible. If you like *Voyage* you might want to try Mark Whittington's *Children of Apollo*.

Sir Arthur C. Clarke: It is lovely to watch the colored shadows on the planets of eternal light.

E.L. Doctorow: One I haven't read, and looking at the plot of *The Book of Daniel*—one no longer supported by its original—I hope you will understand why.

Cecelia Holland: I've read some of her works, and I recall liking them.

Elmer Kelton: Now here's something worth looking for. As my brothers, and now Lisa, have become L'Amour fans (I read one, not a western, and while the story was all right he put in too many two-page info-dumps) I may have to take this up in self-defense.

André Norton: I read a lot of them when I was a kid, but she went her way and I went mine. The later books got stuck in a rut, and the very later books were written by the junior author.

Robert Sawyer: I read his Hugo-nominated novels, of course.

James H. Schmitz: I have all the short fiction collections from Baen. He portrays a rather ruthless galactic government, doesn't he?

Jack Williamson: Oh, the last mortal flask of wiiiine . . . Amazing, not to have ever encountered Giles Habibula!

DC 101: The conversion to digital transmission was justified as a means of freeing

up bandwidth for other demands. Since everything these days seems to be wireless, I can imagine the demand. And it's not as if it were unprecedented; remember why there's no Channel 1? (The bandwidth got sold to two-way radio.)

**Kentuckiana I:** West Liberty is east of Liberty. In a state that has Monkey's Eyebrow and 88 (technically Eighty-Eight, but originally the name of the town was the numerals) that sounds perfectly reasonable. Every little town has its stories, and these look to be interesting. Now I go west to get to Hopkinsville but that's another story.

**Slings and Arrows:** Reply to Me: I know about not getting responses. I've been cutting off recipients after a year with no response.

**Alexis Gilliland:** Routing problems with MapQuest and I've had problems with Microsoft Streets & Trips. Once it tried to direct me through central Manhattan.

**John Thiel** reports that existentialists regard life as meaningless. Indeed there are only two things they find important: frogs, power tools, and the Lincoln Memorial.

**Bob SABELLA:** I can assure him that neither the Roma Sub Rosa (Lindsay Davis) nor the S.P.Q.R. (John Maddox Roberts) series are just "genre mystery with a colorful setting". Had he looked in *Alexiad* he would have seen how the latest S.P.Q.R. book has to do with Decius Caecilius Metellus's political career. And one Roma Sub Rosa book had Falco dealing with Roman religion at several levels, from having to save his dog from being crucified to being condemned to death himself (and reprieved). I'm beginning to think that the historical novel field is at something of a dead end, so writers who want to write historical novels make them mysteries.

**Brad W. Foster:** Somehow that bit about "20 Plots" being the outline for one big series, that makes me fear that someone will write a series based on exactly that concept.

**Lloyd Penney:** Why be afraid being descended from a horse thief? There is an as-

sociation of descendants of members of the Jesse James Gang.

People used to tell me, “Don’t look up your family tree, you’ll never know what you’ll find.” However, we lived in the same city for eight years as the family pest, so those kind-speaking people were already too late.

I understand about the practicable speed being higher than the 100 kph speed limit. The problem is that as an outsider, I know I’d be held to the posted limit.

Tolkien wrote something of what happened between *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Some is covered in the latter book, more in the Appendices, and there is even a version of the events of *The Hobbit* from a different perspective, published in one of the *History of Middle-earth* books. However, I’m afraid that any second movie will be more “Arwen, Warrior Princess”.

**Henry Welch:** Grant pointed out to me that he found a wireless router for \$37 and the store would install it for \$89.

Namarie,  
Joseph T Major

*[[You’re correct about every government project having those problems these day. But of course that goes back many administrations, as history has shown, and probably all the way back to Washington’s administration. In an ideal world there wouldn’t be such things but of course we don’t live in an ideal world and so such practices will, as with the statement regarding the poor, “be with us always”.//Lethal grains of dust are among the many hazards of spaceflight. But we’ll have to wait until a prototype forcefield—or artificial magnetosphere—generator has been fully developed and field-tested to see how well it works.//I’m not familiar with Kage Baker’s work, have read only a little of Stephen Baxter, none of Cecelia Holland that I can recall, and, I think, only one thing by El. L. Doctorow. For some reason I’ve never been much interested in westerns, so I can’t com-*

*ment on Kelton or L’Amour. Clarke, Sawyer, and Williamson are writers with whom I’m more familiar. read a few things by Schmitz (But not, alas, The Witches of Karres.) and would like to read some more.//Speaking of the town of 88 . . . I subscribe to a magazine called Good Old Days. I was somewhat surprised to read a letter in the latest issue from a resident of 88, and that’s how she referred to the town, with the numbers. Kentucky isn’t alone in having cities and towns with odd names, or course. My birthplace state of Alabama for example, has places called Plevna, Fyffe, Susan Moore, Equal City, and Remlap, which supposedly is the name Palmer spelled backwards, among other odd names. //After a long time of sending copies of TRF apparently to be swallowed up by mini-black holes I’ve stopped sending them to non-responding recipients. Sadly, no one has written to complain about not receiving the latest issues.//“frogs, power tools and the Lincoln Memorial.” Hey! Wait a minute! I don’t know about frogs but I find power tools very useful and the Lincoln Memorial worth visiting. Unless you’re referring to people slaughtering frogs with power tools in the Lincoln Memorial.//I was never told not to look up my family tree because of unsavory ancestors I might find. So far, all my discoveries have been dull, boring, and mundane people. A naughty ancestor of some kind would spice things up a little. I have, though, had vague hints there were certain things about my ancestors that no one wanted to talk about. But I have no idea what sort of bad things (presumably) they were. Some sort of scandal or scandals? But what was scandalous back then might be considered tame now. Maybe some day—and I really hope that day comes—I will achieve enlightenment in those dark areas. And probably be disappointed. ]]*

**TRF 69**

So help me...if someone makes a number remark, I'll hit him up the side of his heads with my propellor beanie

From: **John Thiel**

Tom,

Nice looking fanzine, Winter 2009. I saw the fanzines you put up on the net at eFanzines.com and was surprised because I thought you had declared a couple of issues ago that you were not going over to the net, but I guess you meant that, net or not, you were giving up your paper, ground mail fanzine, and I'm glad to see that you have not.

Good sense of wonder in your editorial. I especially liked your description of the Hubble sighting.

On the matter of Clarke, I'd like to recommend *The Last Theorem* to Bob Sabella. I think he'd enjoy it and get more Clarke from it than he's ever had before, not that his choices were poor ones, but I think the book I am now reading shows what Clarke's about. Not only would I recommend this work to Sabella but to all and sundry. It's essential modern SF reading. I will not give away the plot of the book to those who have not yet seen it.

The Transition would have the police on it in two minutes around here. But it looks like a nice car to drive. One can only use one's imagination. But it would certainly be rugged to take off in one when the other traffic gets too offensive.

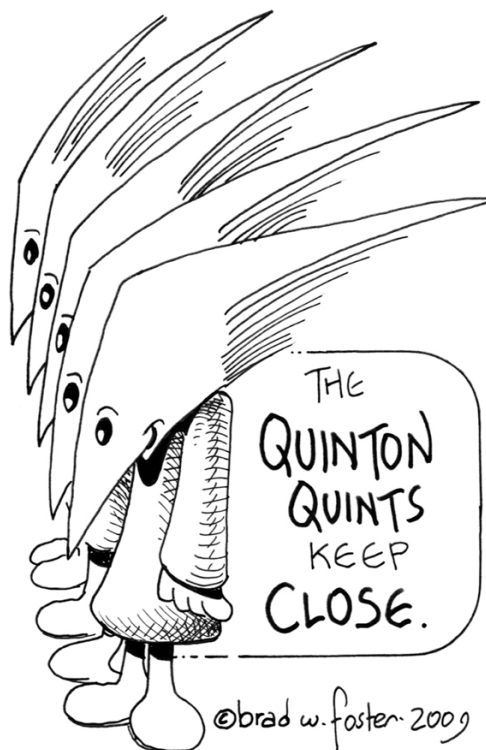
Good deal from Sheryl Birkhead. She's a competent humorist.

Usually I do not know what Alexis Gilliland's cartoons are about, but the recent election has brought his cartoonist's attitude into great clarity in this issue. On page 17 is the first Alexis cartoon that has ever amused me (aside from a few he did for PABLO LENNIS). The one on page 29 was outright hilarious. Yes, like Joseph Major, I have read his novels.

Sure, all televised SF is waiting for Godot.

Best, John Thiel

*[[Thanks for the recent issues of PABLO LENNIS, still going strong month after month. It's amazing that you can keep it up. I decided to post back issues of TRF on eFanzines more as another archive than anything else. I suspect the likelihood of attracting new readers is non-existent—at least as far as receiving feedback is concerned. //Regulations governing different kinds of vehicles on roads and highway will undoubtedly have to be revised to accommodate flying cars—if such vehicles become practical. But then having air-space as well as highways filled with those things might be a very bad idea unless they were Artificially Intelligently piloted and possessed all sorts of anti-collision devices and software and eliminate human stupidity somehow.//Unfortunately I've read only one of Alexis' books, **Wizenbeak**, which I enjoyed very much. I'll have to look around and see if I can locate copies of the others.]]*



**ALEXIS GILLILAND**  
4030 8th Street South,  
Arlington, VA 22204  
January 6, 2009

Dear Tom,

Thank you for The Reluctant Famulus #68, which was waiting for me when I got back from my regular dental check up. The pretty young dental technician who cleaned my teeth said I was looking good, leading me to wonder when was the last time a pretty young lady told me that. The dentist said the same thing, essentially, but added that if I was not comfortable with my partial, it was possible to implant teeth. Sigh. Leaving aside the expense, I have no doubt that the insertion of four molars would be seriously painful, and after nearly thirty years I'm used to my partial, so I passed on getting new teeth. In your editorial you continue to worry the issue of colonizing space. The first steps, of course, have already been taken, and the robotic exploration of the solar system continues, albeit at a leisurely pace. The next major step is likely to be the robotic construction of a Lunar observatory on the far side of the moon, developing the suite of technologies needed for the mining, refining and construction of high tech stuff in space. From the moon, or from Lunar orbit, electric rockets can take construction kits to wherever we choose to send them, eventually building habitats where water based life can thrive. Water based life, including humans, food for humans, and sewage treatment for human waste is a reminder that we happy humans are necessarily part of a biosphere, to the extent that about ten percent of our healthy weight is bacteria. You fret that this will be a slow and difficult process? In geologic terms, it will be blindingly fast. After billions of years life began in the oceans, hundreds of millions of years later the first plants came out of the sea to colonize the land, followed many more millions of years later by the first animals looking to feed on the plants. Then,

bang! All of a sudden there will be a robotic/mechanical presence in space creating habitats for water-based life.

Clearly these habitats will shape, constrain and otherwise affect the humans living in them. Our machines shape our culture, even as our culture shapes ourselves. A recent example is the nuclear devices we call "bombs." A bomb, of course is used in war to impose your will on the enemy, but as we came to realize, nuclear devices are out of scale to be applied to human conflicts, and so they have not been deployed since we lost our innocence in 1945 with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Note that Truman, hopelessly mired in the Korean War, refused to use them. Eisenhower promised to "go to Korea," and there his threat to use nuclear devices changed the stalemated status quo to an armed truce which has held for more than half a century. Was that the last time the threat to employ nuclear devices was used? No, the Cuban Missile crisis comes to mind, and certainly the deployment and counter deployment of missile silos and missile submarines constitutes threatening behavior, but nuclear testing has ceased, and so far no more nuclear devices have actually been used in a war. Space habitats should be similarly influential on human behavior, and perhaps on human evolution. Evolution? Consider that the differences between human tribes have historically been disputes over territory. In the future, disputes between human tribes living in space habitats could be settled by the creation of new real estate at far less cost than fighting a war. After a few thousand years, the human race may become adapted to live in a universe where war will be as unsuitable for settling human conflicts as nuclear devices are. Space habitats, be they never so robust, would still be bubbles of moist air maintaining life in an implacably hostile environment.

You also seem to think that the current economic crisis is being badly mismanaged. Given that the stock market lost \$7.3 trillion

(that's \$7,300 billion) and given that it is by no means certain that the crisis CAN be managed, it might be well to reserve judgment. The bubble that burst was the result of turbo-charging the economy with easy credit, which is to say the government and the households of the nation went ass over elbows into debt. The government remains clueless, talking about spending its way out of trouble while cutting taxes. However, the households of the nation (aka We The People,) whose spending drives 70 percent of the economy, have cut back on their spending as they seek to get out of debt and then save a little money. That necessarily means a smaller economy, though it is not clear how much smaller the post-bubble economy will be. A smaller economy generates less tax revenue, and—the Conservatives have talked for decades about starving the Beast by depriving it of taxes, but with our current load of debt the Beast may not be able to borrow the difference, as George Bush and the Republican Congress did. We may get ourselves a smaller government, but nobody, including the Conservatives, will be happy with it.

Speaking of Bush, Gene Stewart serves up this NY Times quote from an unnamed Bush aide: "You're in what we call the reality-based community" to the effect that since we're an empire now, we can act and create our own reality, and while you RBC nerds study that, we act again, creating more new reality to sort things out. The quote attributes to Bush the idea that acting without thinking (faith based action if you will) can lead to a desirable reality so nicely that it is probably too pat to be real. No Bush aide would be dumb enough to tell the NY Times anything of the sort, nor do I think any of them would describe liberals as being in "the reality-based community. Stewart asks what sort of literature would come from "such breathtaking solipsism?" Works of the opposition, perhaps, much as Stalinism produced Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's "Gulag Archipelago." Otherwise you get poster art and propaganda for

the cause du jour.

A nice cover by Kurt Erichsen, though I should have preferred the speech balloons to be hand-lettered. Also, the earth is almost the same intensity as the Lunar sky, when it should be a luminous blue streaked with white clouds against black. Many thanks to Joseph Major for his kind words about the *Rosinante* series, but after seven books I called it a career. My wife Dolly died in 1991, and my editor, Lester Del Rey died in 1992, which may have had something to do with my departure, but my sales were never better than mid list so the publishers are not at fault. That should do for now. A sheet of cartoons is enclosed.

Best wishes,



*[[Regarding your comment that I "continue to worry the issue of colonizing space". Silly old me. Here I thought all I was doing was passing along a trio of little news stories I thought might be of some interest to readers concerning the human exploration of space. Unfortunately I neglected assure readers those news bits and my commentary were to be the last I was going to publish about my views on the subject. I had decided it would be best to leave the topic alone and consider it a dead issue. As the old saying goes, "There's no point in flogging a dead horse." I hope, therefore, that from now on it will be considered so. There's little or nothing to be gained from a continued discourse on the subject. So you should have been gratified, therefore, to discover the introduction to this issue had **nothing** to do with economics or human exploration of space other than what is in my replies to locs.//About that \$7.3 trillion the stock market lost. "Lost" is an interesting way to put it and almost (I say **almost**) implies carelessness. People lose things all the time: keys, billfolds, jewelry, eyeglasses, and so on; mostly small stuff. But \$7.3 trillion dollars! I wonder where all that money*

went. Did it fall through a hole in somebody's pants pocket? Did somebody put pallets of money into a storeroom somewhere and then forget the room's location? Did it go overseas? Did it get sucked into a black hole? Did it go into those legendary Swiss bank accounts? Or did someone shovel piles of money into a dingy back room somewhere? Actually, I suppose it was one of those usual "paper losses" one reads about. With that much money lost by Wall Street, will the Feds shove another \$7.3 trillion (or more!) dollars at Wall Street to stimulate the economy? My trying to understand economics is about like my trying to understand String Theory or the formulae used to explain that there are anywhere from 4 to 11 (11?) dimensions. I get dizzy and develop a major headache and my eyes go out of focus. If you understand all this economic theory—good for you! Although I've never met you in person I think you're a pretty good guy and a pretty smart man. I hope some day I have the pleasure of meeting you in person somewhere. I have no doubt I could learn a lot from you. Whether you'd learn much from me is problematical. The older I get, the less I seem to know. (He said with a grin.)//In fairness to Kurt, the way the cover looked was **not** his doing. His original cover colors were as you described and the Earth was indeed a blue that stood out from the Lunar sky. My accursed printer and copier are to blame for not having reproduced the cover as they should have. I tried tweaking the output of both the printer the copier output as much as possible any way I could, in the hope the covers would look as Kurt had intended. I bear the blame for the end result, which frustrated me more than you can know, and I wouldn't blame Kurt if he never wanted to do another color cover for me again. For a better view of what his cover was supposed to look like, go to eFanzines.com, where TRF 68 will have been posted by the time you receive your copy of this issue.]]



From: [JAKaufmann@aol.com](mailto:JAKaufmann@aol.com)  
 Sent: Sunday, February 15, 2009  
 To: [tomfamulus@hughes.net](mailto:tomfamulus@hughes.net)

Thanks as before for another issue of TRF. The front and back covers both entertained me. Even if I'd never opened TRF and read the contents, I would have been satisfied.

But I did open it. Now I feel both mystified and educated by the excerpts from the scientific press that you included in your opening article. Spectral lines like nothing we've ever seen before? It's science fiction, man.

Robert Sabella talks about authors he intends to read more of. Andre Norton's stuff, his author number 7, was one of my main entry points into the heart of sf. I read many of her works when I was a teenager in Cleveland Height, Ohio. Her Time Trader series not only teased my sense of wonder about space and time travel, it also helped ignite an early interest in archaeology.

My own list of authors I should read includes Charles Darwin. I celebrated his birthday by buying used copies of his major works last weekend. *Voyage of the Beagle*, *Origin of Species* and *Descent of Man* now wait for my attention on the book pile. I want to understand this natural selection stuff better.

As I read through Gene Stewart's article this time, I found myself agreeing with him. I also found myself gasping a bit at the quote

from the Bush aide. The quote seems to me to echo the attitudes of the Nazis and other ideologues who believed in action over analysis and understanding. (I don't think that the Bush administration was fascist but I think their attitudes, with the right situation, could have gone that way.)

Sheryl Birkhead's piece made me very glad we have a digital television and subscribe to digital cable. This changeover's going to be a big mess for the millions of people who have analog tvs. (I read in the paper today that there are probably 80 million or more analog tvs still in use.) I laughed frequently at her problems. I hope Sheryl appreciates how much pleasure her pains have given me.

But I warn you, Tom, that at least once the laugh was at your proofreading - or lack thereof. Sheryl realizes at one point that she would not get a replacement box until "the muddle of January." Yes, January is often a muddle for us, too. Does Sheryl send these articles in handwriting, as she does her letters? That could explain why her pieces have so many more wrong words, missing words, or fluky punctuation marks than the rest of your material. (I note that you do have a way with typos elsewhere, such as "Sabena" for "Sabella" previously, or, in one letter in this issue, "Jeff Kaufman" for "Jerry Kaufman.")

Lloyd Penney in one of his letters says, "I hope they get Ian Holm to reprise Bilbo Baggins." I loved Holm in LOTR, but I think he'd be too old to play that character in *The Hobbit*, because it takes place so many years earlier. Beyond that negative thought, I have no idea who would be good for the young Bilbo.

Yours,

Jerry (not Jeff) Kaufman  
P.O. Box 25075  
Seattle, WA 98165

*[[Typos seem to be the bane of my existence. You have no idea how often I go over the text in each issue, truly. (In this issue I've gone*

*over it line by line and I'd be willing to bet there will still be something I missed.) No matter how hard I try to avoid them or find and correct them it seems there are always ones which somehow elude me. It drives me crazy when, after all the copies are printed and mailed out, I find a typo or two that I **still** missed or that someone points out. Sheryl sends me her articles in Acrobat's portable document format/ Since I have no way of converting from pdf text I have to go an alternate route which often results in all sorts of odd changes to her text. I went back over the article and it wasn't in as bad a shape as you made it seem. There weren't— as far as I could tell—"wrong words, missing words, or fluky punctuation marks". In fact, I tried to clean up Sheryl's article of as many of the idiosyncratic punctuation she use as I could. Maybe you think (and please don't take umbrage at this) such things as em dashes are fluky? I saw where I left out a period in one place, missed correcting the word "from" to "front and put a period in "VC.R" There were many more mistakes and typos I caught than I missed, and in an article that was around 3,600 words that isn't bad. For me, anyhow. I will continue my fight against typos and the other things you mentioned. //Personally, I didn't care much for Ian Holm as Bilbo Baggins (and I honestly don't know why), so having someone else play a younger Bilbo wouldn't bother me at all. I'm glad I'm not a casting director because I have no idea who I think would fill the role.]]*



From: **Milt Stevens**  
February 17, 2009

Dear Tom,

At first glance, I thought the cover on *Reluctant Famulus* #68 was by Steve Stiles. At second glance, I discovered I was wrong. I had to look at the ToC to find out the cover was by Kurt Erichsen. Have I seen his work before? He's good, so I think I will notice his work the next time I see it.

In your editorial, you discuss gas prices, economic recovery and other horrors of the economy. First off, I should mention the economy has never had much influence on my personal well being. I've done badly when the economy was doing well and done well when the economy was doing badly. Since I'm retired and don't commute anymore, the high price of gasoline didn't really bother me. The lower price is nice, and I'll always take what I can get. If my purchasing power is less in other areas, I haven't really noticed.

How will the economy affect fandom? To answer that, you would have to know how much fans resemble the general population economically. My gut level feeling is that fans are not economically average. The people who answer the *Locus* poll are better educated and more affluent than most. I suspect we will see some influence in fandom but not as much as in the rest of the economy.

I'm on the board of directors of LASFS. LASFS was in the hole by \$11,000 last year. We don't want to do that too often. Our problem was that we spent money on construction that we couldn't cover by income. In 2009, we will reduce expenditures in general. In one specific area, we decided not to provide a monthly printed newszine for free anymore. You can still get our monthly newszine for free if you get it electronically or get it on paper if you want to subscribe. With endlessly rising postage costs, we knew we were going to get rid of the printed newszine some

day. Conditions made this the day. With our annual convention Loscon, we will be more careful about expenditures and try to work a bit more on advertising. So we are cutting back which is not good for the economy but is likely to be good for us.

Economic recovery/stimulus packages are always good for a giggle. They sort of make sense if you accept that pork barrels are the things being stimulated. Before doing my taxes this year, I had forgotten that the government had sent me some money to stimulate the economy. I had to go on-line to find out how much it had been. It really didn't have any impact on my economic behavior.

Sheryl Birkhead writes about a problem I hadn't thought about in a long time. When I moved to Simi Valley in 1992 I knew that antenna TV reception was impossible. You can set up an antenna if you really want to, but all you will receive is some snow accompanied by some miscellaneous noise. The broadcast antennas that were set up for this part of Southern California half a century ago were set up for Los Angeles. There is a whole mountain range between those antennas and where I live. So it goes.

When I first move here I had a basic cable package from Time-Warner and wasn't very satisfied with it. After a few years, I switched to a comprehensive package from Directv, and I've been much happier with it. I receive a total of 139 channels, but I block out all but 22 of them. Those are mostly movie channels.

I watch a couple of movies per night, but I don't watch anything in real time. I can record anything from anytime and skip past any commercials. I think it's worth what I'm paying for it.

Yours truly,

Milt Stevens  
6325 Keystone St.  
Simi Valley, CA 93063



[[Kurt's work has appeared in TRF many times over the years, mostly as fillos and illos, and also in other fanzines. *Mimosa*, in particular, used Kurt's work. Perhaps its being a color cover was what threw you.//When I stop to think about it, my wife and I have been pretty lucky making it through economic downturns in better financial shape than a lot of people. We've been somewhat like you in that respect. We don't drive that much these days either except for occasional trips to Michigan. As has been pointed out to me—and which I apparently mislead people about—purchasing power hasn't decreased but a lot of people are being more careful about how they spend their money. Judging from the number of pope who attend world-cons no matter the con's location their incomes must be above average (or else they scrimp and save or, worse, use their credit cards to the maximum.//\$11,000.00! Did the club wonder if it shouldn't have undertaken the construction? Cutting back may not be good for the economy but we all need to decide what's best for us. After all, we can't legally print more money whenever we need it like the government can. Yes, Federal budgets have always been full of pork, only at one time it seemed as if the politicians tried hard to conceal the fact and sneaking the pork through. Now it almost seems as if they don't care who knows or how many people become angry about it. I haven't done my taxes yet but plan on having a professional do it in the hope they can find enough ways either for us to end up owing nothing or paying as little as possible. (Though getting money back would be much better.)//When we lived in Michigan we had cable TV for a long time or at least almost from the time the service was available. With no TV cable here we had to go with one of the two major dish services and I chose Directv, as you did. Though I don't watch as much TV as my wife does it's nice to have TV service available. We got the mid-range package at \$29.95 (not including the small print charges).]]



**From:** John Purcell

Well, Hello again, Tom. Thank you so much for the latest Reluctant Famulus. You most certainly aren't reluctant in getting your ish into the mail, are you?

Great cover by Kurt Erichsen. I have always enjoyed his artwork; his sense of humor is great. I must hound him for a cover for a future issue of *Askance*. Make a note, self.

Your editorial was quite interesting to read, especially the section about waterless concrete. This is exactly the kind of research that manned space exploration needs in order to create habitats on other worlds (or moons, for that matter). We must logically assume that our needs will not exist elsewhere, or maybe some basic elements will be present when we get to where-ever it is we're going, so developments like waterless concrete and exploring alternate propulsion systems to cover vast distances should be encouraged. I like the idea that our new president has in putting science back into the White House. Makes sense to me. But then again, I'm one of those nutty people who read that "crazy Buck Rogers stuff." Silly me for dreaming big or thinking about the future of mankind. As if that stuff really matters...

Well, Bob Sabella and I have the same sort of problem. Heck, all of us do, I am sure. There are some serious gaps in my reading history, and lately I've been trying to do something about it. The next book on my night-time reading shelf is *The Fuzzy Papers*, that SFBC edition of H. Beam Piper's two

Little Fuzzy novels. That should be fun reading. After that, who knows? The next non-fiction book is *Medieval Machine* by Jean Gimpele, which details the first true industrial revolution that occurred during the middle ages. It looks interesting, and may warrant a book review. Interested?

Unlike Sheryl Birkhead, we didn't have to acquire a Digital Converter Box since we've been on cable ever since we moved into this house. My heart goes out to her for the travails she has had to endure. Here's hoping all is well and she can start enjoying her life a teeny bit more.

Alfred Byrd's brief article reminds me that I have never been to Kentucky, and some day I should get there. I know Louisville has a good con or two each year, but the Civil War buff in me would definitely enjoy wandering the Kentucky countryside. Yes, indeed. I would like that very much.

Good solid lettercolumn, too, Tom, fleshed out mightily by six-count 'em, SIX-pages of Lloyd Penney locs and your comments attached thereto. It just makes you wonder how Lloyd would find the time to produce that fanzine he's threatening to do given all the loc-writing he produces. Egad! He'd be Canada's version of Chris Garcia! That's a scary thought.

As for your closing comment to my loc, I don't find that a gloomy scenario at all. I don't know about the living in caves thing, although people are Working On It as an alternative housing possibility for conserving energy and all, but I certainly don't mind the idea of walking or riding horses. I need the exercise anyway. Besides, we've recently sunk nearly \$500 in repairs to our primary car, and it will most likely need more before we finally get rid of that, that-thing. I love riding horses, too, so to me this is a no-brainer.

A fine, fine issue, Thomas. Many thanks, and now it is back to work on my second annish. Take care, and I'll look forward to the next RF.

All the best, John Purcell

*[[I got out that issue faster than I had expected, which hasn't happened in a **long** time. When I first started doing TRF I was producing issues 6 time a year. Looking back, I don't know how I did it.]]* The largest obstacles (aside from cost) to extensive space exploration are the deadly hard radiation of space and the length of time it requires to go from Earth to wherever, which is anywhere from months to scores of years. That means developing effective protection from the hard radiation and a working propulsion system that can reduce the time spent in transit in a major way. I suspect the latter will be a **long** time in coming. Decades at the least? Centuries? Maybe never? Your last three sentences in your third paragraph sound like what I would write and the way I feel.//Yes. Don't we **all** have gaps in our reading? I have several authors whose works I'd like to read more of and other authors none of whose works I've read but hope to. It doesn't help that I've developed a fixation on the Revolution and the Founding Fathers and the Civil War, Lincoln, and the notable generals on both sides. As the saying goes, "Too many books! Too little time!" And I recently purchased a copy of Ken Follet's **The Pillars of the Earth** (In paperback. 983 pages.) It sounded interesting. I'll know before long if I think the money was well spent.//Now that we're living in Kentucky we need to see more of the state than Mammoth Caves, Berea (an arts and crafts tourist trap), and Cumberland Falls. There are some Civil War battlefields I'd like to see but they're in Tennessee and Georgia and involve battles in which some of my ancestors supposedly fought, and some other battlegrounds in Virginia. We've been to Gettysburg and toured the battleground a couple of time but I'd like to return at least once more. Poor Lloyd. After discovering the latest issues of TRF posted on eFanzines he wanted to catch up. He has, so far.//I've never ridden a horse but I'd like to some day.]]

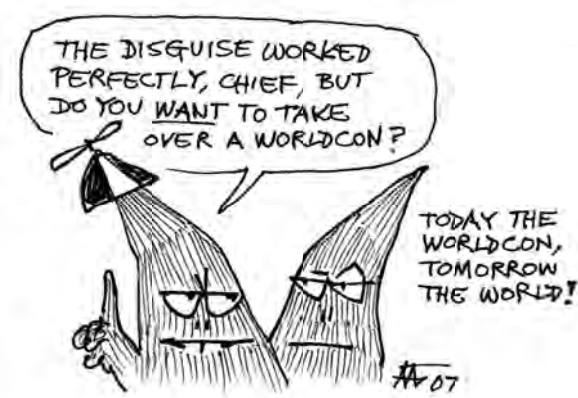
From: **Steve Green**  
33 Scott Road, Solihull, B92 7LQ  
stevegreen@livejournal.com

Hi Tom,

Sorry to read about Sheryl's problems entering the Digital Age. Everyone on this side of the Pond is facing similar hurdles, as the UK Govt proceeds with a staged shut-down of the old analogue signals. Of course, we've never had free television—the BBC and certain parts of the commercial network are funded via an annual licence fee—so those people living in areas of the country where the digital signal is weak or nonexistent (mostly isolated rural communities) are now looking at paying for both the standard licence *and* a cable connection or satellite dish. Needless to say, this is not one of the Labour Party's most popular policies.

All best -- Steve

*[[We used to have wide spread free TV here, too, which was received by antennas. But there were times when the reception was poor to terrible. It also helped to live reasonably close to a large metropolitan area which had good TV broadcast facilities and no major obstructions between. But that was also back when there were fewer networks. I have no doubt a lot of people here found the U.S. policy of changing over to digital very unpopular also.]]*



**Robert Kennedy**  
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March 3, 2009

Dear Tom,

My thanks for #68

Great cover. I just thought that it was funny until reading your commentary concerning waterless concrete being real.

"Be Careful What You Wish For...". Interesting concerning the relationship between the price of gasoline and purchasing power. You didn't trust Henry "Hank" Paulsen? How about the current Secretary of the Treasury who is a tax cheat? "Water Bears" survive in space, cold, and cosmic rays—incredible. Scientists may be able to actually create a "force field"—now that would be interesting. I think that you are a realistic pessimist. Nothing wrong with that.

Bob Sabella just keeps writing—"The Old Kit Bag". I don't know where he finds the time.

Sheryl Birkhead's commentary about her problems with the Digital converter Box was fascinating. It almost might cause one to give up watching television. I have three TV's—two analog and one digital. Luckily I am on cable. Hopefully, Sheryl has by now got the thing(s) to work correctly.

Alfred Byrd's article on his trip to West Liberty was quite enjoyable.

*[[Gee . . . I thought Kurt's cover was funny anyway, and I already knew the connection because he asked me for suggestions which would relate to the contents somehow. His cover was the result.//Well I saw and listened to Paulsen when he was being grilled by congress late last year. I missed watching the current Treasury Secretary when **he** was being questioned fairly recently. But since*

*you ask, from what I've seen of and read about him and his tax cheating—I don't think I trust him much either. It amazes me how such people think they can get away with doing what he and a couple of others (at least one of whom had the good grace to remove himself from consideration) did. He certainly didn't set a good example. And their reaction is always something like, "Oh, gee, I guess it slipped my mind." or "I was just too busy." or some other lame excuse. If we tried something like that the IRS would be all over us. And, worse, he seemed to lack the integrity to bow out of taking the job.//Yes. Apparently those little critters are very resilient. If scientists actually can create such a forcefield I'd like to see or hear about it in action. A realistic pessimist. Well that's better than being totally pessimistic and defeatist as well.//Bob always seems surprised that people wonder where he finds the time. I'm glad he does.//If I ever gave up watching TV it wouldn't be because of problems converting to digital but rather of finding enough of personal interest to me. But I'm probably just too choosy. With the exception of being able to record things she wants to watch, I think Sheryl pretty much has succeeded with the transition.//I hope you found the conclusion to Al's West Liberty trip interesting too.//*

←————→  
From: **Taral Wayne**

Loc to Reluctant Famulus 65, March 2009

I feel Sheryl Birkhead's pain. I was all in a tizzy myself about the upcoming and unnecessary change in broadcast formats. I've been assured, though, that the new digital nonsense ought to come through my little black box without me having to worry about it at all.

Still, it makes you wonder if TV isn't trying to kill itself. First, there's the gradual decay of network productions. Then there's the incredible, inexcusable, Reagan era unregulated rates for cable service. \$40, \$50 even

\$60 a month for a few volts worth of electricity a month, depending on whether or not you want stations halfway worth watching. And the cable companies don't even produce the material -- they rip it off PBS or the networks! Now digital. Go out and buy a box, folks, if you want to keep getting our shoddy product, which we aren't even paying to make. Don't complain if the signal is inferior, or if you can't get the stations you're accustomed to -- it's Science, and High Tech, and Very Very Superior for those reasons.

Actually, it's all being done to make more bandwidth available for an even greedier industry -- the people who provide service for cell phones, blackberries, and other trash needed if you aren't to keep up with the Six-Second-Attention-Span-Generation.

Fortunately, Science has provided me with a High Tech solution to get back some of my own. I have a satellite dish, and I pirate American TV through a black box that decodes the signal. It would be unconscionable to do this if I were living in the US. But pirating *US* signals in *Canada* isn't illegal, so I sleep well at night. Saving over \$40 a month may have something to do with that too.

*[[I doubt TV is trying to kill itself off. The people running the networks know there's a lot of money out there from advertising alone to make it worthwhile to keep going. I do agree, however, that the rates cable and dish TV services charge are absurd considering the millions of people who receive TV broadcasts that way. I doubt they'll ever reduce the rates as long as people pay them without question. Too many people these days require instant gratification and constant stimulation and aren't satisfied with cell phones that merely make phone calls. It's almost Henry Kuttner's story *The Marching Morons* made real.//Hmm. I wonder if pirating Canadian signals in the U.S. is illegal.]]*

Taral

From: **Henry Welch**

Tom:

Thanks for the latest The Reluctant Famulus. Glad to see you continuing to get issues out regularly.

Gas prices in California barely dropped below \$2/gallon.

Where is one supposed to get sulfur on the moon?

My library is as thin as Bob Sabella's where Clarke and Williamson are concerned.

Digital TV convertors and recording shows reminds me of the late 1980s when I had to deal with cable and the old VCR. I had to remember to tune the cable box before leaving so that the VCR, which only taped channel 3, would get the correct recording. You were doomed if there were two shows the same night and on different channels unless you were home to change the cable box. I know they made a VCR or add-on unit for a while that would send channel changing remote control commands prior to any recording so the correct channel would be captured.

Until next issue...

Henry L. Welch

Editor, The Knarley Knews

*[[I'm very surprised that I have been able to get out issues regularly these days. Doing so has been made much easier by having written material and artwork to publish.//Gas prices in California and Hawaii have, it seems, always been higher than in other states. I know that for California that's supposedly due to all the anti-pollution regulations and so on that require a "special" blend of gasoline.//Sulfur on the Moon. That's a little detail that wasn't mentioned in the very brief article about the waterless concrete. I'm not sure if the people who came up with the idea even thought about that. There's always some sort of complication, isn't there?]]*

From: **Sheryl Birkhead**

March 6, 2009

Dear *tRFers*,

Yeah, I know this will be a bit late, but better than that.... I have given myself the deadline of next weekend to work on taxes and will have my fingers crossed the whole time.

Very pretty cover and I thought I already commented on this, but don't see any notes on it, so here we go again. It is always a pleasure to see *Kurt Erichsen's* artwork. More please! (Out of curiosity, do you know if it was computer generated, or scanned from an original? If computer generated, I need someone to help me.)

I hear the news, but tune most of it out. About once a week or so, I take a look at the stock market, knowing there is not much I can do and it is too late to take my little bit out. Might as well be amused by the ride and watch where it goes. No point in stewing over it. Gonna be interesting.

Hopefully all the readers who are qualified to nominate for the *Hugos* did so. I kept waiting for the progress report to arrive with the ballot and it never did. As far as I can tell, a *PIN* and information was sent to email addresses only--so if you are not hooked into things electronic, it appears (not sure if this is really the case or not) you did not get the information about nominating. If that is true, I hope this is fixed before the final voting. It sounds as if, perhaps, some qualified fen never got the chance to nominate. If this is true I bet the tale will surface sooner or later. By nextish there ought to be a final slate to discuss.

Ah yeah, I look at the *Erichsen* illos on pages 4 and 6 ... and drool again--niice.

The plane-car sounds interesting, but the reality may be a tad less enticing--for the reasons you cite and a boatload more. It is fun to read about.

As I understand it, postage for a first class letter will go up to 44¢ in May. Right now I am not sure which other services will go up. I intend to buy a few of the *Forever* stamp booklets between now and then.

I'm not sure I agree with you in the choices that *Will Smith* makes in his movie roles--solely because he pretty much manages to make money in the ones he chooses. Now, that may not be the criterion you had in mind, but-hey-it works for him!

Seeing your and *Brad Foster's* comments about *Hughes*-- what services do you use and what does it cost? If memory serves me correctly, most of the services are pushing all three (TV, phone, Internet) at somewhere around \$100. Since I am now spending about \$45 and have a different ring (on the same line) for the business---faster service would have to be very cheap. I am always curious to see what the going rate is.

Man, if *Brad* is offering another cover go for it!

I am not sure if *Facebook* is the site I went to or not. At any rate, it requires that you register before entering even if all you want to do is look around and I draw the line at that. No thank you. I pretty much leave all the genealogy to my sister and, as a Mormon, I am fairly certain she enjoys it. Way back when I gave her the results of the study already done by a relative on my mother's side which easily covered coming over on the *Mayflower*. All I did was to get the copy to her and then let her archive and research to her heart's content after that. In my case a problem, as I see it is that there are at least a handful of ways to, phonetically, spell our last name--so you need to be open to other creative spellings also being related.

I am sure there will be a comment or two made on issue #69. I tried to locate a simple yin/yang symbol, but didn't have anything at hand and no Internet connection or reference books to do justice to it. With a tad of irony, if I can get one together, I'll include it with this and it will probably still be at least

one issue behind!

For *Graeme*- the group I volunteer with is private and no-kill. It took them many years to define what that meant and they settled on no euthanasia solely for population control. This leaves the door open for cases of illness or viciousness. Around here, the county shelter statistics for cats has not changed in at least 12 years. 85% of the cats that enter their doors do not leave. No, I could not work in such a place but I feel someone must as long as so many unwanted animals are born each year. I cannot remember which organization it is, but I think the prize is about a million dollars for the first non-surgical sterilization method for dogs and cats that is developed. That's a start. Then we need to review the consequences in not removing the reproductive (functional or not!) tissue--pyometra for the uterus and testicular cancer for the testes as simple examples---but that would affect far fewer than the current number of unwanted animals being born these days.

**John P** I think there is a national spay day (it was in February)--but I am not sure there is a national Spay/Neuter Month. I think February or March is veterinary dental month, but I am not sure of much beyond that. Agh- need to mail this NOW!!!

Sheryl

*[[That's a good question about Kurt's cover. I had automatically thought it was hand drawn and scanned. Maybe Kurt can enlighten you.]]I don't follow the stock market beyond scanning the headlines. Considering that my pension plan administrators invest in stocks and bonds I should pay more attention.]]I doubt the flying car will ever become a widespread reality and maybe that's for the best.]]Hughes.net is exclusively an internet service provider. It has three packages: \$59.99, \$79.99, and \$99.99; with three different connection speeds. Its main advantage (along with that of the cable TV services is*

*that it doesn't tie up a phone line when I'm online. Ah. So you're a Mayflower descendant. Long ago surnames were spelled different ways, often according to how they sounded. That has carried over into the present.]]//*

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The Ides of March, 2009

Dear Tom:

Many thanks for The Reluctant Famulus 68 via eFanzines. I may have missed some issues, but it is good to get it again. It's also good to see some Kurt Erichsen artwork; I don't think he does many covers. I hope those little green guys set firm. More inside...

Barack Obama has a bailout plan that is untried and untested, true. I don't hear the Republicans saying anything better, and right now, they're too busy trying to shut Rush Limbaugh's big mouth. Given the level of the American debt, will an extra trillion dollars make much difference? Seems not. Obama has a lot of smart people on his side, so I think his chances are good. Some people can brush Obama with the socialist label, and some may even stick, but the term socialist is not the evil word many Americans think it is. Much of Europe is in better financial shape, partially because of socialist policies. Canada has more of a socialist leaning, too, and with our financial policies, and national banks, we may come out of the recession before any one else. Socialism in America? Don't just react to the word; try it, and see if it helps. If it doesn't, try another path, but don't just react with Cold War memories that most people don't have now. (I heard the other day that Swiss banks plan to dispose of all secrecy to help with the worldwide economy. Some businessmen should be sweating bucks.)

Once again, the space programme seems to be on hold because of the recession, and

while the programme is on hold in the US, it may die elsewhere. The stimulus package Obama signed recently means that the government must buy American first, while paying attention to previously signed trade deals, like NAFTA. I am not sure if aerospace projects are covered by NAFTA; Canadian aerospace companies have done well working with NASA and other agencies in the past, but may now lose a lot of business due to protectionism. Obama said in an interview on Canadian television that we wouldn't have too much to worry about. I guess that means some worry; in this case, that the Canadian aerospace industry may wither and die, and that hurts the world's space programme, too.

Sheryl Birkhead's cartoon...we will find out who's won the FAAn Awards later today. They're being handed out at Corflu Zed, happening right now in Seattle. And, we may learn within the next week who's been nominated for the Hugos. Excitement builds...

Robert Sabella is right, more Clarke books. We have a full shelf of them here, all well-thumbed and much loved. I must get more Andre Norton myself, and one of Rob Sawyer's books is being turned into a series. If you pick up Rob's book *Illegal Alien*, you'll find that yours truly is a character in the book. Rob has Tuckerized a lot of fans from the Toronto and Ottawa areas. (By the way, isn't Sabena the national airline of Belgium?)

In reading mainly science fiction, I don't think I'm being insular, but placing a kind of limit on myself. There's only so much money and time, so I would want to find books I enjoy and that cater to my own unique interests, and science fiction fits the bill. I think we all knew that America is an empire; just never heard it admitted by an American source. It does get tiresome to constantly hear the differences between America and the rest of the world. Why don't you come and join the rest of us? We're not so foreign. Is there no room on the world's stage for the

rest of the world? Are the lead roles automatically assigned to American players? If so, America is the only one that thinks that way, and there's the biggest difference between it and the world. Just plain ego, and the rest of the world rolls its eyes.

I have seen that some American television stations in border cities like Buffalo have already made the transition from analog to digital. There seems to be the expectation that all Americans will have to buy digital sets, or do without TV, and for some, that's a devastating idea. If there's a converter box, great, but they cost, too. I think Canadian stations will make the switch in a few years, but for many close to the border, why spend the money when Canadian stations often purchase American shows to broadcast? Some Canadian shows are now being picked up by American networks, so programming is very similar. More and more now, people are watching their favorite shows on their computers, so analog versus digital may be moot very soon.

Getting fanzines by e-mail only may be Uncle Timmy's experience...I still get some through the mailslot of my front door, but I'd say that about 75% of the zines I get are now e-mailed. It's a financial necessity these days. I'd rather receive all my zines by e-mail than have no zines because they're too costly to print, package and mail. All of fanzines are transient, and moreso with e-versions. We're all collectors at heart, and any zine gets tucked away after it's read and enjoyed, and hopefully located.

Hello to Richard Lynch...I am still eager to see your book on 60s fandom, Rich, and it would be great to see an article detailing your progress. It's a big project, I can imagine, so let us know how it's going, and the odd reminder like this will preserve future sales of the book.

My locs...I purchased the t-shirt I referred to from Scott Merritt and Pegasus Publishing in Texas. I bought mine at a space conference in Dallas a couple of years ago; it

was run by fans, so there were a few dealers there. PegasusPublishing.com, if I recall. A TARDiS would finally have enough room for our stuff. Wonder if George Carlin has the same thing in mind?

I'm going to fold it up here, Tom and send it because I have to be out of here shortly for a convention committee meeting and then a party in the evening. It will be a busy day. Take care, and I look forward to next issue.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

*[[I would think that by now people (even those in his own party) would find it hard to take Rush Limbaugh seriously. But I suppose we need extremists on both sides just to make the rest of us feel better about ourselves and that we have more good sense.//According to the latest news Swiss banks will cooperate with the U.S. up to a point and also modify their banking practices—but not to the extent the U.S. would probably like. But then those Swiss banks have made so much money from their wealthy customers that they don't want to ruin that lucrative relationship.//The U.S. space program isn't quite on hold—it'll get a good chunk of money in the new budget—but it has slowed down.//The U.S. does have a poor reputation in many parts of the world these days. We can only hope the Obama administration will begin to clean up that image. America really does need to get along with the rest of the world better. Still, it is interesting to note how some countries vilify the U.S. but are quick to take as much foreign aid as they can—and even feel they should get more. And people from onther countries still come to this country to make it their new home. I think that, no matter what country they're from, people in general seem to need someone to hate and condemn as evil.]]*

Well that's it for this issue. Until next time--full thrusters.





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f.w.  
foster  
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