

THE RELUCTANT



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FAMULUS 70

The Reluctant Famulus #70

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The Reluctant Famulus

Introduction: A Missed Opportunity and An Unwelcome Event

A while back I was trying to recall how long ago an I started doing this fanzine. For the life of me I couldn't remember that information. Considering my pitiful and often faulty memory I shouldn't have been surprised. I have master copies of all those back issues (some, I think, on those 5.25 inch floppies and so now unavailable) as hardcopy but they're stored in boxes back at our house in Michigan and of course I don't remember which boxes.

A few days later, my wife and I were at our older daughter's and her husband's house for approximately a day and a half. By a fortuitous bit of luck I saw a pile of back issues of TRF that I had given to her or sent to her after she was married. On top pile was the very issue in which I was interested, the first. A quick look inside gave me the answer to my question and made me happy. When I found what the date was I wished I had thought about looking it up a few months earlier.

The first issue was dated November, 1988. 1988! Twenty years. That was a surprise because I had never thought it was that long ago. Now knowing that I thought to myself, "Damn! I could have worked up a 20th Anniversary issue for 2008. Nuts."

Then I remembered there was a period when I failed to put out issues. But for how long? A year? Eighteen months? Two years? Whatever the interval was, it put a damper on my belated enthusiasm. Because of that gap I couldn't properly have laid claim to a 20th anniversary. At the worst it would have been an 18th; at the best, a 19th. Neither has quite the same impact. Of course I could fudge and set a 20th Anniversary issue for either November 2009 or November 2010 depending on the gap.

Regardless of that, however I look at it, TRF has been around longer than I had realized and probably longer than some people

would have preferred. It's no big deal, really, only something I found interesting and of perhaps only of passing interest.

--Which is just as well since I have something of more compelling concern to occupy me. On May 16 we were planning to visit our daughter, son-in-law, and their children in Indiana. While my wife was still getting dressed I decided to take a couple of items out to our van. It had rained sometime during the night and before dawn so it was still wet outside. Keeping the conditions in mind I went down the front porch stairs very carefully close to the right side railing. I reached the bottom step, paused briefly and then with my right foot stepped down--right onto a very wet, slick spot.

An instant alter, a sharp pain, and I was sitting on the ground. I grabbed the railing and slowly pulled myself up and tried to stand. Immediate piercing pain. Still holding onto the railing I settled to my knees on the bottom step, turned around, sat down, and slowly, agonizingly, got up the steps. I reached the top, got as erect as possible, keeping my right foot from touching the porch, opened the storm door, and hopped into the house. I managed to prop myself against the back of the couch. My wife emerged from our bedroom, saw the expression on my face, and demanded to know what has happened.

"I think I sprained my ankle. I don't think we'll be going anywhere today." How right I was-

Ruth helped me hobble to the recliner so I could sit down and remove my right shoe and sock to inspect the damage. There was definite swelling but, curiously, no major bruising as there had been when I sprained my left ankle some forty years ago. That should have alerted us to the truth. We decided to try soaking my foot in warm water for a while. After I had done so, I went back to our bedroom to lie down for a while. (One of the

many odd things about me is that when I'm very sick or injured in some way my initial reaction is to sleep for a while. I've been that way since childhood.)

An hour or so later I got up, hopped back to my recliner and sat down. Ruth looked at my leg again and asked me if it might be a good idea to go to the emergency room. My response was an immediate yes. I had been thinking the same thing. I may be slow at times but good sense does eventually take charge.

We arrived at the hospital--excuse me, Medical Center (Even small towns like Owenton no longer use the term hospital.), went through the usual rigmarole and then I was examined and X-rayed. As you astute readers have already guessed, my leg was broken. In fact, both bones were broken above my ankles. And . . . And the physician on duty he was going to leave a message with a "bone specialist" so we could arrange for an appointment for him to repair the damage. He then put my leg in a splint that went from just above my heel to within a couple of inches of my knee and wrapped it all in two or three "Ace" bandages to keep my lower leg stable. We were given the phone number of an orthopedist in Frankfort (Our city of choice, it being much closer than the alternatives.) so Ruth could call to get me an appointment. I was of course ordered to keep off my feet as much as possible and my right leg elevated to get the swelling down and provided with a pair of crutches so I could get around for necessary reasons.

I was also given a prescription for a painkiller but after learning about its strength and certain side-effects we elected not to get it filled. I'm dopey enough as it is; there was no sense in taking something which would only aggravate that. Besides which, we had no idea what the cost would be. Even with an insurance co-pay it could be expensive unless there is a generic version. Better, we thought, to avoid the expense.

Monday Ruth called the orthopedist's

office in Frankfort and got me an appointment for Wednesday May 20. Came the day, we went through the usual process of paperwork (the documentation surrounding all these medical matters nation-wide must be staggering). After a not too bad wait, the doctor looked over the x-rays, unwrapped my leg, and examined it, and re-wrapped it. He explained the nature of the injury and its seriousness and how it would be handled. I would get a plate (of what sort of material it never occurred to me to ask) on each side of my leg with "a couple of screws" to better stabilize the bones. I was, of course, reminded to stay off that leg with absolutely no weight placed on it at all because the injury involved a weight-bearing situation. He scheduled a follow-up appointment for June 2 to see how it looked. If all was satisfactory I would receive a waterproof cast until the leg was completely healed. But before that follow-up, there was to be the surgery.

The doctor had one of his staff schedule me for surgery the following day, the 21st., at the Frankfort Medical Center across the street. To save us time the day of the surgery he suggested (and arranged for us to take care of the pre-operation business right after we left his office. Ruth and I then went across the street to take care of that red-tape so we wouldn't have to show up 3 hours before surgery. Once all that was done, Ruth and I returned home around 5:00 or 5:30 P.M. and had dinner.

Thursday we arrived a few minutes before the 12:30 time we were told to be at the hos--er the Medical Center. (Exactly when I would be having the surgery had not been set since the operation would be competing with whatever emergency treatment occurred. The nature and extent of the surgery being the deciding factor.) I was taken to a ready-room where I was to change into the dreaded "backless gown" and despite the rigmarole of the previous day there were still questions to answer and paperwork. Then it was a matter of settle in and wait.

Unfortunately during this time I was visited by various medical staff who carefully explained in detail what would occur prior to and during surgery. There were the various nurses, of course, and an anesthesiologist. I had opted for a general anesthetic. To me it was bad enough that I had managed to break my leg. I didn't feel like being conscious during the operation even if no pain would be involved. I would be given an initial anesthetic before going into surgery. Once in surgery, a tube would be inserted into my mouth to supply me with pure oxygen, and more anesthetic given by face mask.

Time passed. More time passed. Things could have gone quicker--or so I was told, somewhat apologetically--but unfortunately that day had gotten off to a bad start. As the day had progressed there was one complication after another, unforeseen problems with surgeries, and so on. Since I wasn't the only one waiting to be operated on (and I was certain others who had gone before me had been in much worse condition than I with only a broken leg) all I could do, as with the other patients, endure until my turn came.

After another long wait a couple of nurses came to me cubicle and wheeled me, with my wife Ruth following, to a what I called a "staging area" outside the surgery and parked me there to wait some more. At least this was definite progress. I was getting closer to my surgery. Unfortunately there was no sign of anyone appearing to alert me to when I would receive "a couple of cocktails", as one of the anesthesiologists had termed it. When I was in my cubicle I had been told I'd be receiving something to relax me before I went into surgery which would begin taking affect by the time I was in the operating room. But now I was more or less outside the surgery and worrying that the "cocktail" wouldn't kick in in time.

Sometime between 6:30 and 7:00 P. M., what I was looking for arrived. It was administered intravenously. Within seconds I felt dizzy. I think, but can't be sure, that I made a

comment about the dizziness. Then my gurney began moving.

The next thing I remember was someone talking very loudly to me and being shaken to get my attention. (This I had been told about prior to the surgery.) The operation was all over and they had this notion I should wake up so they could make certain I was still alive. Apparently I was being stubborn about waking up. (As I said early on, I always sought sleep under certain circumstances.) But with persistence on their part and somewhat reluctant effort on mine I wakened enough to answer a couple of questions to their satisfaction--did I know where I was, and why I was there. (A side note here: one of the staff said if I wasn't quite ready they could make room and keep me overnight. Ruth was adamant that wouldn't happen. To tell the truth, I fully agreed with her.) After allowing me a few more minutes I was given my clothes. It didn't take me long to get dressed, into a wheelchair, and then into our van.

We finally arrived home around 10:30 P.M.. I changed clothes and got into bed. That long (as much for Ruth as for me) day was over. In spite of the surgery of the occasional pain, and the major inconvenience of not being able to get up and move around except with crutches I think I'm darn lucky. I could have been injured glad I wasn't.

On June 2nd we returned for the post-op examination. The Ace bandages and splints were removed (There were no plates involved, only the splints.) and, which I found interesting, the staples (yes--staples, metal ones) were removed, 6 on the left side of my right leg and 4 or 5 on the right side. My leg was cleaned up and a cast (not of plaster) completed the treatment. If all goes well, maybe I'll be back on two feet by the end of June (The cast is supposed to come off on June 30.) or Independence Day at the latest. It'll be a little over 6 weeks all told, but that's much better than what I could have had to face. And I'm glad of that.

The Old Kit Bag

Is Science Fiction Optimistic?

Bob Sabella

There has been some discussion recently both in these pages and in my zine **Visions of Paradise** about the worldview of literature as compared to that of science fiction. In his column “Rat Stew” in **TRF** #68, Gene Stewart quoted Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. as stating, “All great literature is about what a bummer it is to be a human being.” Later in the column he stated, “Optimism is a keynote in science fiction, for instance.”

Tom Sadler’s reply was in his article “Great Literature” in the March issue of **VoP** in which he rebuts Vonnegut’s statement to some extent and then adds, “One of the things I like about science fiction is its optimism and sense of wonder, its attitude that humans are capable of good and great things in spite of human nature.”

Later he comments, “I hope it [science fiction] continues to keep its core values and principles, the things which made so many of us fall in love with the genre: optimism, sense-of wonder.”

Never one to shy away from a discussion, I’ve decided to add my two cents here. A lot of sf fans of my generation—those whose Golden Age was during the New Wave era—have become disillusioned with recent science fiction, largely rejecting it for the sf of their youth by such writers as Poul Anderson, Roger Zelazny, Robert Silverberg, Larry Niven, Greg Benford, and even earlier stalwarts such as Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, Alfred Bester and so on.

I believe there are three trends which have caused much of the disillusionment with contemporary science fiction, all three of

which have moved science fiction away from the types of stories which many longtime readers like best, the type of stories which appeared regularly from the 1950s through the 1970s.

One of them is the antithesis of what Tom Sadler stated earlier. I find less and less science fiction which is optimistic and wondrous. That trend started during the New Wave era by writers such as John Brunner and Thomas M. Disch. **Stand on Zanzibar**, **The Sheep Look Up**, **The Jagged Orbit**, **The Shockwave Rider**, **Camp Concentration**, **The Genocides** were all examples of what I label “near future dismal” sf. This trend peaked with the arrival of cyberpunk in the early 1980s when a new generation of writers deliberately rejected any sf which was not set in either the present or the very near future and which was not a realistic extrapolation of current trends, both technological and sociological. Probably the two most popular writers in this movement were William Gibson (**Neuromancer**, **Count Zero**) and Bruce Sterling (**Islands in the Net**). For most of the next twenty years, far-future sf was in the minority, although the popularity of the writers who bucked the trend (David Brin, Lois McMaster Bujold) indicated that quite a few readers who were not totally pleased with near-future dismal.

This trend was exasperated by the second trend which was science fiction spreading its tentacles and absorbing two other genres under its umbrella, horror and magic realism / slipstream. Both of these sub-genres tended toward the present and near-future as well as the cynical and depressing worldviews. In effect, science fiction spent the

greater part of two decades (from the early 80s through the early 00s) with very little interest in the far future, very little sense of wonder, and a lot of cynicism and despair.

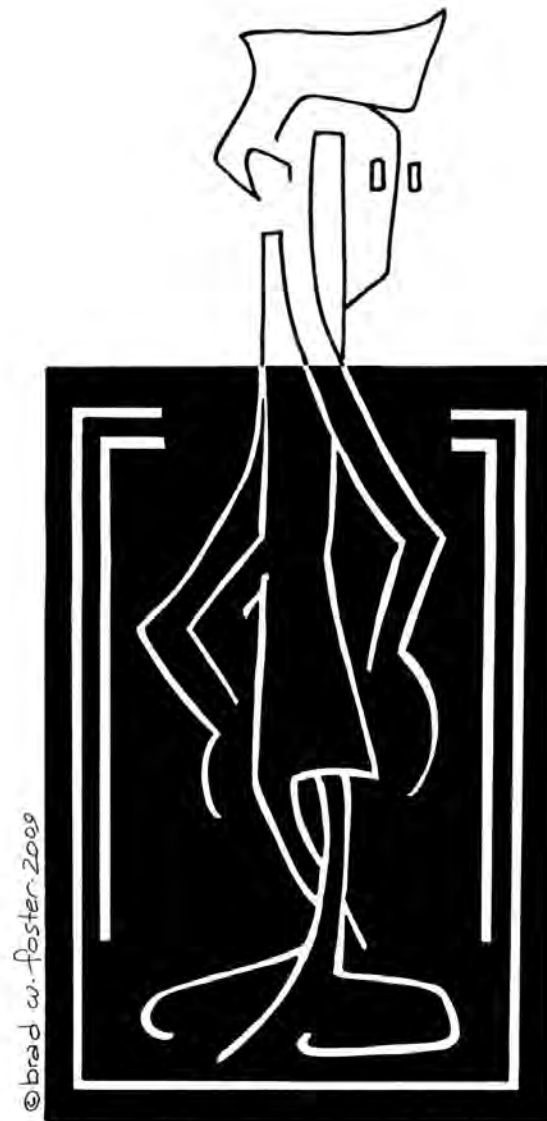
The third trend is partially a result of cyberpunk's preoccupation with the near future and a corresponding loss of hope for the future, a retreat into the past. Historical fantasies and alternate histories have become widespread in f&sf, and while these sub-genres are not necessarily "dismal," they offer little of the sense of wonder and optimism that longtime readers such as Tom Sadler (and myself) look for in science fiction.

The revival of Space Opera, the dominant trend of the current decade, has improved the situation somewhat. Stephen Baxter is definitely a throwback to the days of Arthur C. Clarke and Poul Anderson. Alastair Reynolds combines cutting edge technology with police procedurals and galaxy-spanning adventures. Other popular writers in this genre include Peter Hamilton, Neal Asher, Greg Egan and Ken MacLeod. While some of them, perhaps all of them, show the aftereffects of cyberpunk which causes their fiction to be more downbeat than similar sf of the 50s and 60s, the Space Opera revival has still spurred somewhat of a revival of excitement and sense of wonder.

But keep in mind that Space Opera is not the majority fiction of sf. It is still a considerable small corner of the genre, with much larger factions being near-future dismal interwoven with either mainstream or horror and retreats into the past via historical fantasy and alternate history.

Which brings us back to Theodore Sturgeon's famous statement (altered here slightly) that "90% of everything is crap." Not only is that true, but it is entirely possible that 90% of all the good stuff does not necessarily appeal to any individual reader. If true, that would leave about 1% of all published sf suitable for each reader. Estimating that there are approximately 1,200 new sf books published each year, does that mean

that only 12 of them are good reads for each particular reader? If so, it's no wonder the future is not nearly as optimistic as it was 30 years ago. ❖



MORE THAN THE SUM OF HIS PARTS.

Rat Stew

Inspiration And Other Sucker Bets

Gene Stewart

Take Anne Rice. Please.

Henny Youngman thus enters zine world and it can't be the first time, given how retro the sf'nal can be.

About Rice, she writes from inspiration and famously is not edited. She won't allow her prose poetry to be exposed to blue pencil rads. We see inspiration on the page and, to judge by her sales, a great many people are inspired by her vision and stories.

Rice is imbued with the breath of the gods when she writes. One imagines her transported by inspiration as words pour from her, as brilliant scenes illuminate her head. It's a mystical experience, it must be: She is channeling her fiction from rarefied realms few can imagine, let alone access.

It's shamanic.

It's also a sham.

Truth is, natural knack or not, Rice's books come from a lot of hard work. She puts down each and ever word -- unlike James Patterson -- and filters her vision and talent through hours of research, thinking, and time spent at the keyboard.

Myths of inspiration came from trying to explain -- as readers examine a novel, as writers look back over their cumulative accomplishment, so layered, subtle, and complex -- how a lone person managed to do all that amazing stuff good writing encompasses.

It makes some written works all more astounding that most writers can't talk all that well and look like anyone else. To meet most writers is to wonder how to equate their disheveled clothes, mussed hair, and average personae with the often jaw-dropping works they produce.

Anne Rice, trying to bridge this gap between creator and created, has in past public appearances resorted to elaborate cos

tumes straight out of Liz Taylor's Cleo closet. She has shown up for signings in a coffin carried on a horse-drawn hearse. She has, in short, kowtowed to inspiration's heady demands in trying to meet reader expectations.

As her son Christopher has testified, though, at home Rice is a typical mom in jeans, with diabetes and household chores, not a glamorous immortal from one of her stories.

What prompts her public fun is the acknowledgment that readers tend to expect writers to live up to the content of their work. Detective novelists must look tough and street smart, so Robert B. Parker poses in leather and scowls as he holds back a snarling Rottweiler. He tries to look like a tall cold stack of street cred but really he's an English professor. Some of Stephen King's early book jacket portraits showed a mysterious guy in deep shadow, hand on a skull, trying hard to look scary. Thank heavens this rarely extended to science fiction writers, or they would have been wearing Mork suits and Spock ears.

All this literary regional theater arises not only because marketers have no clue but because there is so little correlation between creator and created. That break -- HE made THAT? SHE wrote THAT? -- combined with a common experience among writers to create a need for the idea of inspiration. That common experience is the sense that stories often come to the writer from elsewhere, from outside the writer's mind. Some blame the subconscious others prefer to imagine a field of story, like a field of electromagnetism, in which stories float in potential stasis until fluxed into a writerly antenna.

Ancients shrugged when surprised at

what came from their pens and credited the gods or spirits. Genius means spirit, or daemon; the ancients shared credit with unseen beings. Invisible things brought such wild, subtle, and complex ideas to the writer's words.

They said this because it did not seem feasible that mere human beings had done such things. It's the same impulse that makes dullards look upon the Great Pyramids or other wonders like lasers or velcro and mutter, "No way mere people did THAT." And here come spirits or ancient astronauts or other imaginary beings to be blamed or praised.

This sells people short.

This sets aside the sheer flabbergasting subtlety & complexity, vividness & depth displayed by the work of some among us. People, ordinary humanoid primates, suffice to explain even novels like *Bleak House*, *Vanity Fair*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, *War and Peace*, and *Dune*.

A recent Golden Globe-winning and ten-time Oscar nominated movie called SLUM-DOG MILLIONAIRE underscores this craving so many have to deny the mysterious but very human ability to surpass appearances. In the movie, few can believe an uneducated kid from the slums can ace the trivia questions on a quiz show. He lacks the set of references must be cheating, they say of him. And they deny him his winnings and interrogate him, trying to find his methods or accomplices.

And then the movie shows us how he absorbed, in the course of his hectic, impoverished, yet very rich life, each bit of information he recalled during the quiz show.

Inspiration turns out not to be cheating, not to be the gods, not to be hidden cues or whispering cohorts, but is instead the result simply of paying attention to the hard work of ordinary life.

Inspiration is a sucker's bet because it's unreliable and sporadic. If we wrote only when we felt like it, only when transported by grand visions, we would not write enough to keep even today's diffident, price-shocked

readers busy.

When Edgar Rice Burroughs published *A Princess of Mars*, his first of dozens of brilliantly imaginative escapist tales that would make him rich and famous, he signed the manuscript "A normal bean". He meant that this wild, crazy, yet engaging tall tale he was submitting had indeed been written by an average and regular guy.

They changed it to A. Norman Bean when they published it, and his career was launched. Had he waited for inspiration, ERB might not have published anything more. Instead, he worked hard, and came up with Tarzan, and in the process helped distract millions of readers from the hardships of that first Great Depression.

If you have a story to tell, write it now. Don't wait "... 'til it feels right", or "... 'til I have time," or "... 'til I'm inspired". Those are sucker bets real writers laugh at.

Waiting for inspiration also leads to that other writerly myth, Writer's Block. Face it, some writers will do anything to avoid writing. They seek excuses and distractions. They hate their process. Norman Mailer famously called writing *The Bitch Goddess* and said, "Every one of my books killed me a little more." Such animosity toward writing is just another sucker bet ending in a failure to get words down.

One other thing: Words put down as part of a daily job of work usually end up at least as good as, and often better than, the inspired stuff. That's why we're best advised to kill our darlings; those fancy phrases and curly constructions we find so inspired are precisely the passages we'll be laughed at for later. There is a hell of a lot to be said for professionalism in attitude and behavior, in work habits and approach. So get to work killing your darlings; putting it off only makes things worse, not better. ☒

Kentuckiana III

An Eastern Kentuckian Memorial Day

Alfred D. Byrd

Last weekend I made a flying trip through Eastern Kentucky to decorate the graves of relatives on Memorial Day. The duty of decorating them devolved onto me as a more or less dying wish of my mother, who made sure of my knowing, as the saying goes, “where all of the bodies are buried.” Today’s article is a journey through space and time to let you know what Memorial Day means in the part of the world that I visited. This journey will take you many places, but will end in West Liberty, where the family began.

Non-Eastern Kentuckians to whom I describe “Decoration Day,” as many still call Memorial Day around here, often marvel at the attention that Eastern Kentuckians pay it. To us, to whom memories are long, and for whom genealogy is part of everyday life, the holiday is not a time for cookouts in the backyard, but for pilgrimages to sites where we left those who’d made us what we are.

My pilgrimage began in Lexington with my buying out all of the silk flowers left in Meijer’s and then heading east along Interstate 64. This took me to Ashland, in Kentucky’s far northeastern corner, to which my parents had retired from Michigan, where they’d lived over thirty years and borne me. My father wanted to retire to West Liberty; but my mother, vividly recalling life in a small town (a local historian there can tell me exactly which of my mother’s relatives spent exactly how much time in the county jail), insisted on “the big city.”

After being graduated from Michigan State University, I lived in Ashland two years while I earned money for graduate school at the University of Kentucky. In my bedroom in my parent’s house, in hills high above the Ohio River, I’d sometimes awake at night to

foghorns of distant barges, or to see clouds turn red from melts being poured at the local steel mill. Its yards, before the EPA horned in, made me think of the ash pits of Mordor.

My parents lie in a cemetery in Ashland, but as there’s no real family history connected with this cemetery I’ll move on. From Ashland, I head north on US 23 (“Country Music Highway”) to an obscure riverport, Greenup (named after a Colonel Greenup, but don’t ask me how he got *his* name), and then turn left onto Kentucky 1, the second windingest road on which I’ve driven.

This takes me to the Plum Grove Cemetery, where my father’s brother Estill and his descendents are buried. Uncle Estill married a first cousin of my mother’s, so that his children are both my first cousins on my father’s side and my first cousins once removed on my mother’s side. Bilbo Baggins and Peregrin Took would just nod knowingly at what I said, but for some reason it squicks everyone to whom I’ve told it, so I’ve likely just squicked you!

Plum Grove is on a side road that winds and winds and climbs and winds some more before it reaches a tiny, white frame church behind which the cemetery lies. For being the cemetery of low-acreage farmers in an out-of-the-way county, Plum Grove is elaborate, with fancy headstones, footstones as big as ordinary headstones, stone borders around each plot, and flowers galore. Amid saddle-blankets, urns, and wreaths, I sometimes feel that my own contributions to the plots are almost insulting to those remembered there. As I said, Decoration Day is serious business in these parts!

It’s easy to miss the turnoff to Plum Grove, as I learned at the funeral of Aunt

Anna, my father's sister, a woman whom all loved for her sense of humor. I was driving my father's car with my parents in the back seat as the chief mourners, and was thus right behind the hearse carrying my aunt when it overshot the turnoff and screeched to a halt. I screeched to a halt, too, along with the line of cars behind me, and I signaled for the line of cars to start backing up to give the hearse room to back up. It may be, though, that what I signaled was misinterpreted, as the hearse backed into my parent's car. At a boom louder than the minimal damage that it caused would indicate, all of us in the funeral party were scandalized. After a time, though, we reached the conclusion that Aunt Anna would've enjoyed being in an accident on the way to her burial.

Now that I've dealt with the outlying cemeteries, it's time for me to head on to Morgan County, home of West Liberty. In olden days I'd have to drive long miles on the curves of Kentucky 1 while my father pointed out bushes of multiflora roses that he'd planted to prevent erosion on hillsides back in the Depression as part of the Civilian Conservation Corps. Nowadays, I can cut east at Argillite and get onto the fancy new Industrial Parkway, which greatly cuts travel time from Greenup to I-64, but has absolutely no industry. What was meant as a boon to Eastern Kentucky has become a boondoggle, appropriately enough in the boondocks. My older relatives, though, have never tired of telling me, "The newspapers told us that we were in a Depression, but it never seemed to us any different from what came before or from what came after."

Before I leave the obscure hamlet of Argillite, I should mention that a local once pointed out to me a farm that he said belonged to Billy Ray Cyrus, and that Billy Ray's superstar daughter, Miley, had been there just the week before. Having no idea of whether my leg was being pulled, I just said, "Billy Ray and Miley, huh?" Let the local wonder whether I'd been taken in!

To get to Morgan County from Argillite, one takes the Industrial Parkway south to I-64, the interstate west to Grayson, and Kentucky 7 thence south through seemingly endless miles of pine forests supplanted by more seemingly endless miles of small farms. One goes past Grayson Lake and over Laurel Gorge, and passes through the local metropolis of Sandy Hook, population few and falling except at the maximum-security prison nearby. Along Kentucky 7, every trailer that one passes has a satellite dish, but no cell phone will ever display anything but "Searching for Service." I'd ponder the vagaries of technology in Appalachia, but I'm too busy scanning the roadside for deer about to total my car.

Finally reaching West Liberty, I go first to Salyers Cemetery, on a high ridge north of town. This cemetery is the resting place of Uncle Hugh, my mother's brother, decorated veteran of World War II and the Korean War. At his funeral he'd chosen all of his nephews as pallbearers. My brother and I, both rather modestly built, worried about bearing the pall when we showed up early, as we knew the cemetery well. Relief set in, though, when Uncle Hugh's wife's brothers' sons, the May boys, showed up, as each of them would've made up the whole defensive line of a successful football team.

Even the May boys, though, were just barely enough when it came to carrying the coffin. My uncle, in typical Eastern Kentuckian fashion, had chosen a lead lined one, and his pallbearers had to carry it over typical Eastern Kentuckian terrain, up a steep ridge and down a steep ridge nearly a hundred yards. I never asked anyone the question, but I've long wondered what we nephews had done to tick off Uncle Hugh.

On to the most notorious stop on the tour, the Neal Valley Cemetery, where the bulk of my mother's family, the Wells family, lies. One reaches this cemetery by driving up and down the steepness of Wells Hill (where it's traditional for my relatives to

point out that no Wells now lives) and far along an ever narrowing road to a narrow ridge between pine woods on the right and a magnificent vista of well-kept cattle farms on the left.

On this ridge there used to take place annually an event that shocked the rest of Morgan County, the Wells Memorial Day Picnic. We Wellses would spread blankets under a tree at the cemetery's heart and pig out on chicken and dumplings, tuna salad, potato salad, and sweet potato casserole while we recalled events in the lives of those lying at rest around us. Not all of these events were to the credit of those involved in them, and not all of them were serious. Non-Wellses coming by sometimes shot sharp looks at the laughter coming from the Wellses. I never said so to my relatives, but I often felt like asking them whether I secretly had an aunt named Morticia and cousins named Wednesday and Pugsley.

Some Wellses by marriage found it difficult to get into the spirit of the occasion. My father, though, fit right in. One time he, feeling tired in his elderly years, sat down on the headstone nearest the picnic tree. When someone asked him whether he should be sitting there, he looked at the stone and said, "This is Mort Neal's. He was a hospitable guy. He wouldn't mind!"

If I were superstitious, I'd wonder whether old Mort did mind. It would've been appropriate for him to be behind the event that put an end to the Picnic in the Cemetery — the Year of the Snake Tree. One year, as we Wellses were sitting in our usual spot, eating our usual food, and telling the usual stories about the usual suspects, the picnic tree began to rain three-to-five-foot-long blacksnakes onto us. The more countrified of us said, "Oh, just pick them up and throw them over the hill," but the more citified of us wanted no part of the action. The faint of heart, alas, carried the day. From that year on, as long as there were enough Wellses to hold a picnic, it was moved to the

modern, snake-free facilities of Founder's Park downtown.

(For clarity let me mention that most of the Wellses were Baptists, not members of the Fire-Baptized Holiness movement. There were no true snake-handlers among us!)

Now it's time for me to head for the Mountain Parkway and back to Lexington. There's one last stop, though, at Grassy Creek, where members of my father's family lie. The cemetery there lies on another steep hillside, which to me seems yearly steeper. I climb it, though, to the tombstone of my grandparents and, turning and seating myself by my grandmother's side, look down the hill to a place that seems to me the most beautiful in the world. Beyond rows and rows of graves gaily bedecked with flowers, and lost among rolling fields amid pine woods, a tiny, white frame church nestles in a bend of the road. Set there, it seems timeless. Though memory may be playing tricks on me, I can't recall, in decades of my going there, one time when the sun didn't come out.

Next, the Sorghum Festival. ☒



Aw...C'mon...

you've got to be kidding

Sheryl Birkhead

In college I was sometimes known as “The Architect”--good at making mountains out of molehills. The question remains as to what to call it when every simple thing really does turn into a mountain.

When I moved into this house I really liked the “over the range” microwave oven. It is conveniently placed and doesn't take up any counter space. A no-brainer. About a year ago it began making intermittent clunking noises. The builder of the house had left a thick notebook of papers about various appliances and licenses for the house and in the stack was the receipt for this particular oven--1991. No one can complain about its longevity!

The clunking continued. The oven continued to do its thing.

I figured that I would let the oven limp along and as soon as it could no longer heat, simply replace it. I knew the time would come.... A few months ago things got worse and without warning the clunking and heating randomly stopped and started. I began looking for another oven. I knew that the timetable for replacement was speeding up and that oven death might be imminent. Sounds simple, right? Buy a new one, pull out the old one, plug in the new one and voil†. Not quite.

I went online and got a list of black over the range microwave ovens (still oblivious to the fact that this was not going to be simple...). I picked out a model and hunted for reviews--could only find five and all said not to go there. Okay-one model down.

For some reason I happened to measure the current oven and.. whaaa? Sometime in the intervening years the size of these ovens has changed. Great...just great. Luckily the width is still the same, but the new ovens are 2 1/2-4 inches taller than the one I have. I cut out a cardboard mock-up and at the new size I can't even see the top of the

stove...forget the building code that says there has to be at least 17” between stove top and oven bottom. Sigh.

You see, there are cabinets over the oven that go up to the ceiling...cabinets that all match. Just for grins I put the cardboard up at 17” above the stove and...I will have to lose about half the height of the cabinets. Hmm- is this even possible without major demolition?

Wait a minute—there are, um, things inside those upper cabinets. I got out a chair and took a look. Okay—galvanized aluminum takes up about one-third of the internal room and the plug for the oven is nested beside the metal. I was guessing that this was the vent for the oven, but I was not actually sure.

I called the guy who has been doing assorted minor jobs since I moved in and his number was disconnected. I went to his website...inactive. Guess this is the first up close recession casualty I have seen. I asked around and none of my friends are big on DIY projects.

I called the closest appliance store (gee-I thought they had all become casualties to the Internet) to get some education. I was told that, since this was on an internal wall, the oven probably vented into the room. Made sense. I read off the two model numbers I had tentatively chosen from the Consumer Guide evaluation from 2008- to see if the guy thought either or both might fit my needs. Well, they would have except he said they were now listed as obsolete models. Of course he had two new numbers for me. At this stage he said to just pick the one I wanted and they would order it. Please note there is no chance to actually see or use an oven before purchase. He benevolently said they would take back an oven if I did not want it. There is only a 25% re-shelving fee.... How much are these models? Well, one is \$369

(only for 30 days then it goes to its regular price of \$419--this is a new model sale-you must buy it now) and the other is \$469.

My next research step was to take these two models and do an Internet

search. It was an eye opener. The original model I chose was still available, but a bit difficult to find. The new models were, of course, available but at prices around the MSRP. Oh yeah, the MSRP on the cheaper model is \$319. Note that this is \$50 less than the local store sale price--so the local store is charging \$50 more than the manufacturer suggests, even at this sale price. Another hmm.

Next, I asked around and got the name of a guy who does cabinetry and had him come take a look. The first thing was to decide if this project was possible. He poked into the cabinet and said the galvanized aluminum was (as I suspected!) the external vent even though the oven is on an internal wall. Okay, but what is the verdict? He said it is "possible. The best he could do without actually seeing the exact model oven I want to put in was to estimate his part of the work at \$500 (possibly to even double if the existing outlet can't be raised whatever distance is required and an electrician has to be added into the mix). Over the range ovens have to vent the stove and run about \$300-\$600. Right- so we are now up to \$800-\$1500 just to "replace an oven! Agh. Oh yeah: apparently the different models each have different requirements for support at installation and even just that part usually requires professional help. They also run 50-100 pounds so one does not just pick it up and plug it in. Ah yes, and I thought all this would be so easy: just unplug old model and plug in new one. Not going to happen.

My one other option is not so great either. When the current microwave oven finally goes to the top, I need to do something. If I "choose" not to replace the oven, then I



Looks innocuous doesn't it??

would need to have a hood installed over the stove (and...um- do those nifty tiles on the wall actually go all the way up or is the wall going to have to be redone?). Either way this is not going to be a simple

project. It all seemed so simple. Of course I can just leave a non-functional oven in place and put in a counter top model, unless I decide to sell the house. But that would be another problem!

It would appear that, bassakwards, it is going to cost much more to get the work done for the oven--rather than spending money for the best oven for the job. Grumble. Okay, if that is going to be the case, I went back to *Google* and started hunting for the cheapest oven that seemed reasonable. I found two models that are made by GE and ought to work—at \$285 and \$346. Much better.

I think that about catches you up. I still have no certain model suggested for the microwave oven that is not getting installed. Oh yes, I also took the two cheaper model numbers—and looked for reviews—could only find two and each ended with the comment that the unit is so noisy that it was going to be "de-installed" and returned to the store. My current final decision is simply to wait for the oven to die and I'll deal with it then. So I am back to where this all began. Nowhere. I had fun getting here!

Oops, almost forgot. After measuring, the cabinet maker said the remaining cabinets would, most likely, be no more than 6' tall. So removing the doors (which could never be remade to match the others) and making-- get this- book shelves seemed the most likely solution. He said this apologetically. I told him to go ahead and take another look inside the cabinets. He did--already currently filled with books beside the vent. Not a deal breaker! A fan can never have too many bookshelves--no matter where they are.

The Great Blue Issue

..OR Bob & Doug McKenzie Review yer fanzines, eh?

Taral Wayne

The camera comes on, and Bob & Doug are sitting, as usual, in front of a blow-up of *Energumen*, with the words "The Great Blue Issue" across it. Stacks of fanzines and empty cartons of beer bottles flank a coffee table, upon which are a few bottles of Molson's, and a heap of beer-stained zines. Bob & Doug are facing each other, already talking:

"Boy, huh. An did'ja see the look on her face when I took it out... "

"Hey, we're on!"

"Oh, yeah. What?"

"We're on, eh, smarten up." The camera closes in on Bob. "Hi. Welcome back to *The Great Blue Issue*. I'm Bob McKenzie and he's my brother Doug. We're gonna review some fanzines we've been gettin, eh, and... aren't'cha gonna do it, Doug?" Camera swings over to Doug, who begins to crow their theme.

"Do do do do do do do doh... Do do do do do do do doh... !"

"Right," continues Bob, "Now



whatcha doin'?"

Doug has pulled his toque over his face.

"Get the camera off me."

"What?"

"Get the camera off me!" The camera obliges.

"Come offit, eh? Put the camera back on im."

"No, get off it, I don' wan'em to look at me. Okay, then,

I'm gonna sit with my back turned, eh?"

"Take off. Uh, folks? My brother an me, eh? We were down at the tavern havin us a couple a beers last night. An Doug, y'know, can take his likker as good as me, but he musta been drinkin on an empty stomach or sumthin, an, anyway, he got sick like."

"I did not!" Doug is still sitting with his back to the camera.

"You did too! You threw up all over the floor, an yer bran new duds. Well, look, anyway, he tosses his cookies, y'know, an two er three guys inna back think it's funny, but nobody else things nothing of it, so I take im out back to get some fresh air, y'know,

and this Paki goes by who sees Doug getting sick. An he comes up to us, eh, an this Paki tells Doug he shouldn't be foulin the streets like. The Paki, eh, like he owned the place or sumthin? Well Doug, y'know, tells him to fuck off, an tells him to go back where he came from if he don't like it here. So then this Paki, eh, calls him an animal an give us a lotta bullshit about belongin here like he was Cana-jun, y'know, and how we should learn to behave like him. Besides, he said he was born in Montreal, y'know.

"Yeah, he was really sassy for a Paki."

"So Doug he takes a swing at him. Ha, ha. An y'know, he wasn't a Paki at all, eh?"

"Naw," says Doug, facing the set still, "He was a fuckin Sikh."

"An he gives Doug two black eyes. We gotta go down to the station later to - "

"He did not give me two black eyes!" Doug turns back to the camera. He has two black eyes and a swollen lip.

"I fell onna ice."

"Yeah, sure, so why we gotta go down to the cop shop then, eh? I thought you were gonna charge im with abrogated assault?"

"I am."

"How y'gonna do that if he didn't puncher eyes? You fell down, remember?"

"He punched one eye."

"Which one?"

"How'd I know which eye he punched? The no-good fucker punched one of them an I hurt the other, so I couldn't see which one it was no more. Why dincha help me, eh, when that Goddamn Paki hit me?" Bob pouts with as much indignation as he can with a swollen mouth.

"I slipped onna ice too."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah, see." Bob puts down a beer, and indicates an eye with his finger. Doug leans over to look.

"But I got a technician to put some pancake makeup on it, y'know."

"Why dincha tell me that, instead a lettin me go on camera with two black eyes, y'hoser! I'm gonna sock you!"

"Take off, eh! We gotta go now, folks. We're outta time again, but next week fer sure we'll review all these fanzines, okay?"

...sound of scuffling comes from the stage as camera and pickup fade..

"Lay off, Doug. I'm warnin ya."

"Ydon't let me have any beer in my Molson's bottle either... "

End credits roll - "This program segment is published by the editor for the sole purpose of compliance with the Canadian Content in Fanzines Act of 1970. If you don't like it, take off, eh?"

The Medieval Machine., Jean Gimpel

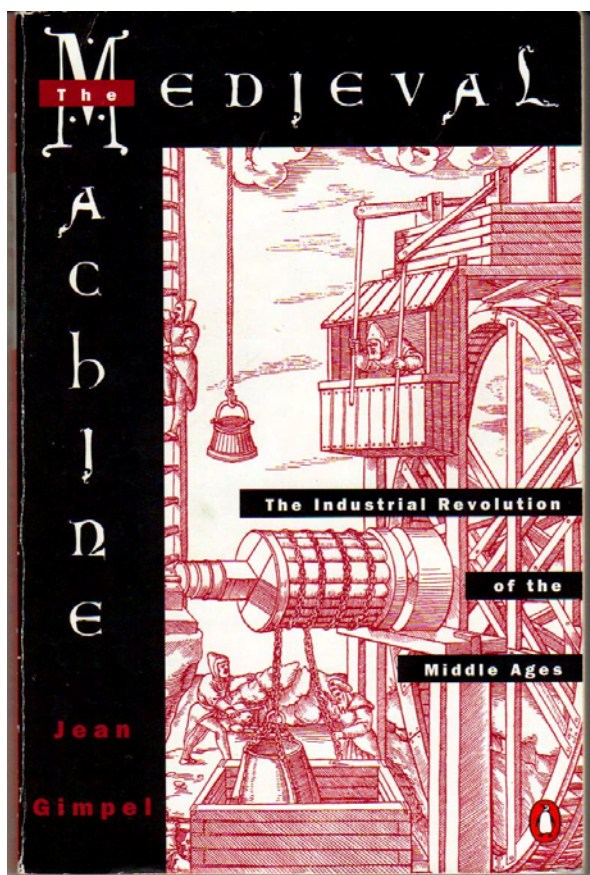
New York, NY: Penguin, 1977.

Reviewed by John Purcell

If there is one period in Western history that is misunderstood, it might very well be the Medieval World, a time-frame generally ranging from the 9th to 15th centuries. Anyone with a bent for history and technology might do well to check out this book, or at least order it online (*lots* of copies available there). Written by the French scholar Jean Gimpel (1918-1996), it postulates in a very clear and entertaining fashion that the Medieval Period - in particular, from the 10th century to the end of the 14th century - was a period of significant technological achievement that changed European society for ever more.

I have to admit that my concept of medieval Europe was that it was a “quaint world of tradition and custom...a low tech stable [sic] society where everyone knew their place” (historybooksreview). Most Western European history classes quickly skim through this period, noting basically that this was a period controlled by the Church – very true – and that a vast proportion of the public was uneducated – also true. This was the period which produced the first great Gothic cathedrals; how they were built has always fascinated me, especially so because I could not imagine how they could have risen from the hands of a largely uneducated populace. (For a vivid accounting of this sort of thing, Edward Rutherfurd’s epic *Sarum* provides a fictional chronology of the construction of the Salisbury Cathedral.) This is where *The Medieval Machine* makes its start. Gimpel’s book looks at the medieval world as one of great technological innovation with many long-term consequences, both good and ill.

The first three chapters cover three technological revolutions that were, in Gimpel’s view, just as important as the Industrial Rev-



olution of the 19th century: water power, agricultural, and mining. The technological changes resulting from the use of water mills (for grinding corn, but also for driving machines) coupled with the implementation of the three-field fallow crop system, for example, helped create the modern city, complete with large storage of foods and grains, but also the rise of unions, banks, and the formation of the first stock companies. In fact, a French mill owner’s organization originally formed in the late 14th century survived intact until it was nationalized after World War II (Yee). It is interesting to read of agricultural effects on diets and living standards. Not surprisingly, this resulted in a large in-

crease in population and the movement of people to centers of population and trade, resulting in the rise of the city. The modern harness, described in great detail in the second chapter, replaced the use of oxen with horses, which were found to be much more effective than oxen in plowing and pulling loads. The tables and charts Gimpel cites from records kept by Cistercian monks support his arguments with meticulous precision. The author's scholarly approach is remarkable not only for his well-supported claims, but he illustrates these developments with stories drawn from original documents from mill owners and (believe it or not) union records (!) besides the well-preserved book-keeping of the Cistercian monks.

Not surprisingly, these same monks played a critical role in the mining industries in medieval Europe. The most significant mining industries were stone quarrying and iron, but tin, lead, and silver were also very important. Gimpel notes how German miners gained a reputation for excellence and that they moved throughout Europe as their expertise was desired. Obviously, where the technology was needed, mobility became a necessity, and even differing languages began borrowing vocabulary from each other to make communication easier. Again, Gimpel cites data gathered and kept in – you guessed it – Cistercian monasteries, which were all over Europe; in the 12th century, there were 742 Cistercians monasteries (historybooksreview) scattered hither, thither and yon all over the landscape. These were essentially huge factories, harvesting and processing wool in England, making wine in France, olive oil in southern Europe, iron and other metals in Germany and other eastern European states. In Gimpel's view, these monasteries definitely hastened the growth and dependency on technology in Europe.

Gimpel equates many of the technological innovations of the 12th Century to be on a par with those of the Renaissance a few hundred years later. He notes that in the mediev-

al world, books of drawings of devices circulated widely among engineers and masons. Sure, many modern-day readers are impressed with the detail and imagination of Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks. However, all knowledge is built upon what has gone before; it would thus not be surprising if Villard de Honnecourt, a leading architect of the early thirteenth century (and the subject of chapter 6), might well have considered da Vinci's notebooks to be rather commonplace, if not expected of an engineer at that time. Villard had none of da Vinci's artistic talent, but he did have diagrams of a great many useful machines, such as water-powered saws and devices to keep mariners compasses level, all of which were either invented or improved upon during the medieval period. The illustrations in chapter 6 are, to put it mildly, interesting to study.

Perhaps the most sobering part of this book comes in the middle chapters, which detail environmental issues and the working conditions of medieval industries. It is intriguing to discover that pollution and a resulting concern about the quality of the environment are not modern phenomena; I did not know, for example, that England had national anti-pollution laws as early as 1388! Not only that, but working conditions differed drastically between these industries: miners and mining communities were granted exceptional privileges while workers in the textile industry were under the tight control of financial and commercial interests, which were under the control of the Cistercian monasteries; textile working conditions of that time foreshadowed those of the later 18th/19th century industrial revolution (Yee), perhaps even its equivalent 20th and 21st century labor sweat-shops of Southeast Asia. Gimpel even points out working conditions in the building industry were better in the medieval period than in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and strikes were not uncommon.

The chapters on the role of the great architect-engineers (focusing on Villard de

Honnecourt) and the construction of the cathedrals (chapter 6), considered as the pinnacle of medieval achievement, and on the development of the clock (chapter 7), are fascinating reading. The last chapter in the book looks at medieval science and its relationship with medieval technology. Here, Gimpel's intention is to point out how Leonardo and the other Renaissance humanists drew many of their ideas from earlier writers, who have received bad press from history textbooks which essentially wrote off the medieval world as a time of some achievement, but mostly consisting of developing nation states supported by uneducated peasants stuck in a permanent state of ignorant poverty.

The book provides an intriguing parallel between our 21st century world and what brought an end to all this technological innovation and growth. The medieval technological renaissance Gimpel describes came to an end when the leading banks of the era, the Bardis and the Peruzzi's, went bust. The latter went bust in 1345 and instigated a credit crunch from which northern Italy didn't really recover until the twentieth century (Yee). This is amazing. If Jean Gimpel hadn't died in 1996, I would suspect that right now he would be pointing his finger at us, stating flatly, "I warned you! But did any of you listen? Noooo....."

Gimpel's warning in the preface and epilogue is that the United States (as of the 1970s, when *The Medieval Machine* was first published) is going through a cycle of decay similar to that of medieval France. Gimpel posits this on the basis of society's reluctance or inability to change/adapt to changeover points between phases (e.g., agricultural society to industrial society). This idea sounds remarkably similar to Alvin Toffler's book *Future Shock*, which argued how necessary social changes will always lag behind technological advances. A reader may not agree with Gimpel's argument, but that does not detract from the enjoyment of reading *The*

Medieval Machine. All in all, this is a fascinating book and definitely recommended reading.

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From the Readers . . .

A late response to TRF 68:

From: **Eric Mayer**

Tom,

Thanks for reducing the Reluctant Famulus to electronic format. When I decided to resume engaging in a bit of fanac after many years away I also decided to limit my activity to the electronic aether so to speak.

I enjoyed issue 68 even if it is all about topics of which I know nothing. I do have some comments on Gene Stewart's article but unfortunately I already commented in a loc to Robert Sabella who quoted from the article in the most recent Visions of Paradise! Well, actually I can say that I doubt genre distinctions are going to change because genres really have nothing to do with literature, nor are they dreamt up by writers. Mostly genre distinctions provide for marketing niches. They have to do with commerce rather than art. To an extent the academic world categorizes literature for its own ends, which also ultimately impinge on people's abilities to make a living in academia. So in a way genre distinctions are irrelevant but writers who won't work within the commercially designated confines can have a hard time finding an outlet for their work.

Not that I am any authority on such matters. I grew up reading sf but stopped over 30 years ago. Maybe I ought to put a disclaimer on all my locs: This Loc contains 0% of the recommended daily requirements of knowledge of modern science fiction.

That bit about waterbears surviving in outer space interesting. Does this mean that the first emissaries from earth to reach some other planetary system will be sea monkeys? (Provided the alien planet has water to add) Or should humans be genetically engineered

so they can be grown from spores?

I also was intrigued by that weird, unexplained, interstellar object that's been discovered. I find it comforting to suppose we don't know as much about the universe as we think we do because look at where what we think we know has got us

I can't comment intelligently on Sheryl Birkhead's article about television converter boxes either except to say it gave me a shudder to read of her technological travails. I've never even owned a V.C.R. I do all my work on the computer. All my writing and editing jobs are sent back and forth electronically but basically I have learned exactly as much as I need to know and no more. We're still on dial-up out here in the boonies. No cell phone. No iPod. I solved the converter box problem by ceasing to watch television seven or eight years ago. Mary and I had watched less and less over the previous decade. The last series we watched with any regularity was the X-Files. When we moved out here, nestled down in the midst of mountains, we found we had virtually no reception and no longer watched enough to bother buying cable. I don't miss television at all, though I'm sure there are some good shows. Like all drugs, television causes brain damage when abused.

And then there's Alfred Byrd's piece--do I really have to tell you I've never been to Kentucky? But any sort of history fascinates me. My family doesn't go back as far in this country as Alfred's. When his ancestor was founding a town mine were still mostly in Germany.

Thanks again for the e-issue and I will look forward to future downloads.

Best,
Eric

[[Computers are great tools and I'm glad

they were invented and made within the reach of anyone who wants one. The same goes for the Internet. They are wonders and science fictional. But together they're major time wasters. Then, too, it seems to me that too many people seem to want to do everything by way of computers and the Internet and that tends toward less and less personal, face to face human interactions. That's scary.// A pity you couldn't have included what you commented on in your loc to Visions of Paradise. I think there are some readers of TRF who don't receive VoP. Buck Coulson (I still miss him after all these years.) and others have made the same point as you, that genre designations are more marketing strategy than anything else. Which isn't surprising. Ignoring the marketing aspect, writers who are dedicated to doing the best they can will produce good, well-written fiction no matter the genre or what the critics and snobs may think and say.// So you stopped reading SF sometime in the 70s. I think you probably missed out on some pretty good SF written since then. But that was your decision and I'm sure you're satisfied with it.// I doubt the first emissaries from Earth (assuming we still have a space program that includes manned exploration and finding other intelligent life) will be "sea Monkeys" or water bears. Nor, if genetically engineered, grown from spores. Exactly what Earth's emissaries will look like is anyone's guess. I'd like to think they will still be in a relatively familiar humanoid shape maybe clad in spacesuits which withstand the hard radiation in space or having modified metabolisms resistant to radiation.// My wife and I moved to a rural area for the peace and quiet and a more leisurely pace. Though I generally find little worth watching on television we do have satellite TV and a satellite Internet connection, both good ways of keeping up with what is going on in the world at large. (Unfortunately there's no door-to-door newspaper delivery service or I'd have newspaper subscriptions.) What you say about TV

causing brain damage when abused could also be applied to computers and the Internet (especially the latter where "Sturgeon's Law really applies and time-wasting is much too easy.) A pity you've never been to Kentucky; it's a lovely state. So is Michigan (our home state for decades) and Alabama (where I was born) and certain other states my wife and I have visited both with our children and after they were grown on on their own. But some people have either no interest in traveling to other states or no reason to. We are what we are.



From **Joseph T. Major**

Dear Tom:

I have the frightening suspicion that there is a meths lab down the road from you. The traffic pattern fits buyers.

WOW Day: Gene Wolfe "was stunned by the sudden maturation of our step-daughter Beverly." A few years ago, my cousin here in Louisville Jessie Bennett had over her

granddaughter Renée. She took Renée shopping. Renée mentioned to the clerk that she had just graduated and the clerk asked her which college she was going to.

Renée had just graduated from eighth grade.

As she told me this, I understood why the clerk might have been wrong. Not only did Renée *look like* she was a high school graduate, she acted like an adult. More so than many adults I've seen. And then, when she had graduated from university, she was more adult . . .

To make one thing clear — “Gypsy Rose Lee” was Rose Lee Hovick. “Craig Rice” was Georgiana Randolph, née Georgiana Ann Craig. And Gypsy Rose seems to have actually written *The G-String Murders*, even if it was very helpfully edited.

Kentuckiana 2: “just about all of us are related to one another in the degree of fourth cousin.” Sounds about right for Lisa and me. (No, we aren't related to each other, unlike my niece and her husband.)

If two of Alfred's great-grandfathers were in the Fifth Kentucky, then Alfred can join the Sons of Confederate Veterans, though I understand there is a little trouble there relating to neo-Confederate activity of late. The Fifth Kentucky Infantry CSA joined the First Kentucky “Orphan” Brigade in May of 1864, not long before they became mounted infantry. For more on that unit see:

<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~orphanhm/index.html>

Taxes . . . I Don't Pay No Steenkin' Taxes: Maybe Sheryl should go see her brother in Bardstown, and then one afternoon bring all her papers up to Louisville and have Robley do them for her. He was, after all, around when the Income Tax Amendment was passed.

My stepcousin Robley Rex does his own income taxes and used to, maybe still does, help the other vets at the VFW and American Legion do theirs. He will be a hundred and eight years old this May.

From the Readers: G. Thomas Doubtley (dec'd): When I found I'd jumped off a rock because the grades I got in seventh grade were not good enough, or something of the sort, I thought, “Well, there were days back then I felt like that.”

Ned Brooks: Flying cars have been popular for many years. I remember watching an episode of “You Asked For It” where they demonstrated the conversion of one flying car. It involved towing a trailer with the wings, which makes me wonder about the practicality of it all. Now “You Asked For It” ran from 1950 to 1959, so you can guess that I am old.

The idea of the show was that people would send in postcards describing things they wanted to see on the show, and the show would show these things because you [the viewer] asked for it. It didn't take much to entertain us in the fifties.

And then I found out that the original American paperback edition of *Casino Royale* was titled *You Asked for It*. Great. “And now, we're going to show secret agent Jimmy Bond about to be cut in half by a laser beam because — YOU ASKED FOR IT!”

Henry Welch: Louisville requires reformulated gasoline because of emissions considerations. Believe me, this is my job. Anyhow, this means that when we go to Lexington, we buy gas in Shelbyville if possible, and when we go to Henderson, we buy gas in Corydon if possible. It's a few pennies per gallon but every little bit helps.

Namarie,

Joseph T Major

[[The scanty evidence would suggest something illegal such as drug dealing (whether meth or pot) but as the old saying goes, looks can be deceiving. Unfortunately we haven't managed to learn anything about what was going on. Our immediate neighbors on the north, the deputy sheriff and his wife, have

managed to make themselves scarce, neither being outside at the same time as we or else being away from home. As for the neighbor to the south, the one who was taken to the hospital, it's very unlikely we'd get anything from him as we've never spoken with him and he leaves me, at least, as not being very friendly. (Which wouldn't be surprising if he actually were dealing drugs.) I'm convinced we'll never learn why he was sent to the hospital or exactly what went on while he was being treated. Then too there's the fact that all the lawmen who had apparently been searching the man's property left eventually left and the neighbor was back home either late that evening or early the next day point at the possibility there was nothing illegal going on. It also may be the police were following up on what proved to be an unsubstantiated complaint from some anonymous source. One small benefit is that the volume of back and forth traffic has decreased substantially.//To add to the topic of Gypsy Rose Lee . . . I finally remembered that Gypsy had been one of a pair of sisters who were in show business. They were, respectively, Rose Louise Hovic and her sister Ellen June Hovic who went by the stage name of June Havoc. Sister June appeared in a long list of movies, mostly musicals and was possibly as well-known as her sister. Both were successful in their chosen areas of entertainment. Enough said on that topic.



From: **Ned Brooks**

Hi Tom -

Much thanks for the zine! Funny spoof cover by Tom Doubrey—he sounds like even more of a hermit than I am. But I did not look for the name in the Social Security Death Index because I thought he was deceased; it's just a good way to tell whether an odd name is real or a typo, and how frequent it is. This database contains over 83 million names of real people—or at least people who were real enough for the government to collect Social Security taxes from them and issue pension checks if they lived long enough.

I would have guessed offhand that something illicit was for sale by your neighbors at the end of the road.... Meth or pot or moonshine.... Or maybe he just has a garden and chickens and sells veggies and eggs.

Interesting about Jack McDevitt's "Alex Benedict" novels, which I had never heard of. But back in the previous millenium I read a lot of the Michael Delving (a pseudonym for Jay Williams, I think) novels which have to do with an American antiques dealer, Dave Cannon, going to England on buying trips and getting involved in various adventures—in one he actually finds the Holy Grail. On the same shelf are a larger set of books by Jonathan Gash whose hero Lovejoy is somewhat less ethical than Cannon, but also an antiques dealer involved in murder mysteries.

I am amazed that you would publish such a heretical question as Gene Stewart's "Can there even be good science fiction?".... To my mind the only good mundane fiction is very like SF! Take Mervyn Peake's magnificent "Gormenghast" books, or the short stories of Flannery O'Connor—they are good because they have weird interesting characters, plots, and settings!

Richard Dengrove tells me he has seen a movie where an octopus about the size of a

house-cat walks on land on its 8 tentacles—I didn't know that ever happened.

The story about the Glynn County sheriff trying to serve a 1928 warrant for passing a bad check seems unlikely. Wouldn't the "statute of limitations" have expired on an 80 year old crime? My mother is 100, and would have been 20 in 1928, so it's not totally impossible that the suspect is still alive—but it's not very likely either.

I have used TurboTax for several years, and once I could download data from my broker had exactly the same problem that Sheryl did; the data will contain entries for small amounts that the software complains cannot be used because the "basis" (that is, the cost) and the date of acquisition are missing. I think I had 17 of these this year. I keep the paper records in ringbinders and can look these piddling items up; the entry usually says "cash in lieu of". It's apparently a book-keeping fiddle to adjust for fractional shares in mass transactions that were divided between varying numbers of clients. I just edit the form directly, putting in the "basis" as the same amount and some feasible date of acquisition. The software is happy, and if the IRS notices, they haven't said anything; the amounts are trivial.

There's a painting much like Tom Doubrey's of the sailing ship on the wall in the dining room at my mother's house. It's an oil by one of my father's aunts. The SSDI would know nothing about a man deceased in 1882; there was as yet no Social Security system in effect at that time. The SSDI database contains only people who had Social Security numbers. Which—I seem to remember—they told us would NEVER be used for identification. They apparently forgot all about that when they put them on driver's licenses. Georgia has now backtracked and the number on my license is much longer (there aren't that many people on Earth) and started with "0666"!

Powdered aluminum is thermite and will burn ferociously. . . Of course this requires

oxygen and would not matter in processes carried out in the lunar vacuum. If you Google "Luna!" or "The Stars Are Ours" you will find a website put up by a C D Carson in Texas to promote colonization of the Moon. He found my address in the British fanzine "Banana Wings" and sent me the first three issues of a newsletter, which I have filed with the fanzines.

For transferring files from the old PC to this one that I got the beginning of the year I got a "wireless router" for \$69 and installed it myself. It did not work, and I returned it and they sent me another. That one worked to the extent that both PCs could browse the Net through it at the same time, but I never succeeded in getting it to do what I wanted, which was to transfer files from the old PC to the new one. In the end I returned it and got my money back, and transferred the files with CDroms.

Best, Ned

[[Using the SSDI in the manner you did is something that never occurred to me and probably not to the majority of those who use that index. At least it wasn't for an illegal purpose. For those of us researching our family histories the SSDI has been a valuable resource for filling in some of the gaps. One would expect that all the people on the SSDI were real but there is always a chance, however small, of some sort of fraud. Fortunately most people who applied for Social Security cards were honest about the information they provided. Despite the large number of people on the SSDI not all gainfully employed people are recorded. Railroad employees were covered by a different system, and farmers weren't required to obtain cards. Why the latter were exempt I don't know unless they were considered as self-employed.//You mention two series of novels by writers I've never heard of (big deal). They sound interesting. About the latter featuring a protagonist named Lovejoy . . . It seems to me there was

a series (British?) on PBS titled Lovejoy. I wonder if the series was based on the books. I should have paid more attention to the promos about the TV series.//Perhaps Gene's question was heretical but I imagine there are many people (mostly unfamiliar with SF) who have asked that question and unfortunately in their ignorance (intolerance?) have answered No. Those people are hopeless. There has been and will continue to be good SF no matter what critics and clueless outsiders may say. I've heard of the Gormenghast books. They sound interesting and I'm considering purchasing them. I've also heard of Flannery O'Connor and so may try reading some of his stories.//Re the octopus movie. Does that mean octopuses are air breathers? I had always presumed otherwise. Or was the movie some sort of fantasy involving a mutated octopus? That must have been a strange sight, seeing the critter walking.// One would think there was some sort of statute of limitations on crimes like that. Considering the total amount of money involved it would seem absurd to pursue the matter and collect the money. Considering the factors of illness, disease, and accidents the suspect is most likely dead. That seems very likely. But I suppose an attempt could be made to collect from the man's estate, if any.//I've heard of thermite but never realized it was powdered aluminum. Interesting. What a versatile metal it is.//There is another process for transferring data from one computer to another by linking them with a data cable but I can't remember what the process is called. I'm sure some reader will know. I would have done the same as you and used CD roms for the transfer. That method also provides an additional backup of data in case of problems later on. With the increased storage capacity of thumb or flash drives a person could use one of those for data transfer.]]

From: **Gene Wolfe**

4/17/09

Dear Tom,

“What in the world's going on down there?” pushed a button for me. There was an ambulance. The state police were there; so was a sheriff's car. A man was taken out on a gurney, etc.

Where was the press? Why wasn't there somebody there from the local paper?

Perhaps twenty-five years ago our dog disappeared. I went out late at night, cruising the whole south end of town with a flashlight in search of a black dog; and I came to a street that had been blocked off by the police. There were half a dozen police cars, and officers on foot to make sure nobody went farther. I asked what was up, and they said a helicopter had made an emergency landing in the street, and that was all they knew. In my innocence I thought I'd be able to read more about this extraordinary incident in the Courier-Review. Wrong. There wasn't one word, which is why I no longer subscribe.

We read all sorts of moaning by professional newsmen (and women) about paper after paper going under. I believe I know why newspapers are going belly-up, and if those pros were half as smart as they think they are, they'd know too.

Faithfully,



[[Your question about the presence of a local news reporter is a good one. I don't recall seeing anyone who looked like a reporter or any marked vehicle for some TV news service on the scene. In a way that's not really surprising. It seems to me, these days, newspaper reporters seldom leave the newsroom but rely on the telephone to acquire the information rather than going to the scene of the

news. Of course it could be that the police refused to allow any reporters access. It's difficult to say why there was no coverage and there is probably no way of ever finding out. Even though we've lived here two years now I suspect we're still regarded as outsiders (and may be for a long time) and not to be trusted. There are, I think, parts of this country where such an attitude still persists no matter how long a newcomer has lived in an area.//It often seems as if most newspaper reporters try to take the easiest way of doing their jobs both in acquiring the news and in writing it up. And the quality of the writing seems to have declined greatly. When we lived in Adrian, Michigan there were occasions when something newsworthy (or what I thought was newsworthy) happened but nothing about those events ever appeared in the local paper. There were even times when I found local news stories in the Toledo Blade which never appeared in the Adrian paper. I get the impression sometimes that most newspapers tend more toward the superficial or non-controversial stories. I don't much like the idea of newspapers dying off but seeing what has become of many of them there are some which might not be missed.]]



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

Tom,

That's quite a harrowing experience you describe in the editorial of #69. I hope you learn the facts and will be telling us what was going on.

The cover's an outstanding work of art and a very amusing presentation of a hoax. I hope you will retain that artists so I can see more of him. It makes the issue one I like to leave visibly in the front room of the house, which hasn't usually been the case with fanzines, but on this occasion it is clear that I have a literate and interesting publication which is worth my time to be reading, hence it is a good display item.

I note that on the Net everyone is displaying excellent cover art. It seems that nothing less than a fine cover will suit a display of the issue on the Net. So I would say the Net is improving the output of fandom.

Falling object story--maybe a member of a rock band on tour threw some of his metal off an airplane.

--John Thiel

PS.: thanks for publishing the cartoon. I hope Alexis has some reaction to it.

[[Still no news on the mysterious goings-on. Curse it.//I intend to use Tom Doubrey's artwork for as long as he's willing to provide it. I've never been disappointed in it and I'm sure I never will. That goes for the work of Brad Foster, Alexis Gilliland, Kurt Erichsen, and Taral Wayne. I would like to have used something more from Schirm but he has never bothered to send me anything more. I'm gratified to learn you thought highly enough of the issue /cover to leave it out for others to see. The "Net" may be improving the output of the fanzines in certain ways but I'm not

sure the quality of writing may have. My opinion, of course and others may/will disagree.//Well your idea is one possible explanation for the falling object. I've not seen any follow-up of the story.]]

THE FANEDS LAMENT



ALEXIS GILLILAND

4030 8th Street South, Arlington, VA 22204
April 17, 2009

Dear Tom,

Thank you for “Reluctant Famulus” #69, which arrived on April 15, also known as Income Tax Day. For a long time I used to do my Form 1040, a necessary chore that went step by step over a couple of weeks. All of which was tedious when not aggravating (Sheryl Birkhead reminds me of the one year when I tried to use Turbo Tax, and had to give up on it) but things went well enough until about five years ago when the IRS came after me for a really large amount of money, and after a fruitless exchange of letters I went to a CPA who provided them with the information they wanted in the form they could understand. He also got me a refund I didn’t know I was entitled to, so we stayed with him. The ideal is always to have deductions equal taxes, but the year before last I wound up owing quite a bit, so I increased my deductions for this last year. Then the equalizing injustice of life kicked

in, and having overpaid (2008 was a bad year for lots of people,) I am now entitled to a refund and will probably need to adjust my deductions accordingly. As one grow older there is always a certain loss of functionality, but I must say that of all the functions that have gone bye-bye preparing my own tax return is the one I miss the least.

You also ponder about the “loss” of that \$7.3 trillion—about half the Gross National Product, which had seemingly vanished into thin air. The short version is that as the memory of the Great Depression faded, greed replaced fear in the hearts of the financiers and their regulators, so that caution was abandoned. This worked well for quite a long time, and the financial sector peaked at 41 percent of US business profits. For comparison, from 1973 to 1985 that figure averaged below 15 percent. Over time these enormous profits supported a lobbying effort which produced a whole series of deregulating policies: A major increase in the leverage permitted investment banks; Free movement of capital across borders; A congressional ban on the regulation of credit-default swaps; The repeal of Depression-era regulations separating commercial and investment banking; An international agreement allowing banks to evaluate their own riskiness; And, despite the rapid pace of financial innovation, the blocking of any attempt to regulate these new and profitable ideas. It wasn’t all lobbying, of course. Alan Greenspan’s faith in deregulation assured his own advancement and that same faith in deregulation inhibited the enforcement (How did Bernie Madoff and his \$50 billion Ponzi scheme get by the SEC?) of the regulations we had. Thus greed triumphed over fear, and Greenspan, a serial blower of financial bubbles, saw that it was good because the stock market kept going up and up.

Where did the money go? The investment banks were leveraged at 30 to 1, which meant that they had borrowed 30 times what they were worth in order to play the market.

When the market went up, up, up, the money came rolling in from all directions, but when the bear came out of hibernation and the market went down, down, down those investment banks suddenly had all these assets that nobody was willing to buy and massive debts which they could no longer repay or roll over. Lehman Brothers went belly up, and the rest of them were either taken over or reorganized into regular banks. The debt-inflated bubble had burst, and the stock market went from 14,000 to below 7,000, and has currently recovered to about 8,100. Might we have touched bottom? Don't ask me, because I don't know. So we just had a 20 percent rally? During the Great Depression we had three 20 percent rallies.

Currently, the Obama administration is studying the risk analysis of the 19 largest banks. It is possible that the bailout money available will be insufficient to save all of them, although J.P.Morgan says it will repay the government loan ASAP in order to get out of the program. Further down the food chain, perhaps five percent of all houses are now worth less than their outstanding mortgage. The result? Even people with secure jobs are now spending less and looking to save more. Standing in the wings is another trillion dollars of commercial debt (a big local developer just went into Chapter 11) that has to be rolled over in the next year or two, so times are tough, but you knew that already. On the bright side of things, most of that multi-trillion dollar loss was borne by the top 0.1 percent of the population, the super-rich, so that the gap between the rich and the poor is getting smaller for the first time in decades. Is there a solution? Muddling through is probably the best that can be done, re-regulating as necessary, and for those 19 Too Big To Fail banks, perhaps an insurance charge, a charge that goes away when they break up into 2-300 smaller banks.

A sulfur based cement on the Moon? I don't think so. The samples the astronauts brought back showed the Moon to be deplet

ed in volatiles, a totally unexpected finding. The volatiles included water, but also mercury and zinc, and sulfur as well. The best explanation for the observed fact, was that the protoEarth had captured a body about the size of Mars, which broke up as it reached the Roche limit, with its dense iron core falling to earth, as the fluffy stuff (rock, mostly) formed a ring of debris that consolidated itself to become the Moon.

After about ten million years in the molten state under conditions of high vacuum and low gravity the Moon was just naturally depleted in volatiles. If some sort of cement is needed to make Lunar concrete, it should use local materials, perhaps a low melting glass which would serve to bond the Lunar aggregate. That should do for now, a sheet of five cartoons is enclosed.

Best wishes,

Best wishes,



[[Over the years I have done our taxes myself, the easiest way I could. This year, after having looked over tried to understand the Kentucky tax form, I elected to have a professional do it for us. We didn't get a refund but owed money. To my relief the amount owed wasn't large. Avoiding the stress and uncertainty was worth it. In an effort to lessen the possibility of owing money next year I had money withheld from our Social Security benefits (I already had money withheld from my pension.). If I rough calculated correctly, at the worst we should owe nothing. Getting something back would of course be great but as long as we don't have to pay out again I'll be satisfied.//In my view, forgetfulness of the past (the Great Depression and other, less serious recessions) and greed in Wall Street and the real estate sector were the two greatest factors in last year's economic disaster. In my admittedly likely naive view, greed was the greater of the two caus

es. It seemed as if too many people were obsessively determined to accumulate unnecessarily large amounts of money regardless of the consequences to millions of average Americans. As stupid as I well may seem to be, I cannot understand why there are people who feel the need to acquire more money than they, their children, grand-children, and maybe even great-grandchildren could spend in their lifetimes. (I know that's an exaggeration.) I like to have nice things too but I don't need hundreds of millions of dollars to achieve that goal. No one else should. //At this writing the economy seems to be slowly recovering, as should be expected. It would be unrealistic to expect a rapid recovery. On the other hand, the price of crude oil has risen to slightly over double what it was two or three months ago and gas prices have also gone up and look to be approaching \$3.00 a gallon. Some so-called experts claim we won't see gas prices as high as they were late last year but I'm dubious of that. The economy still has a long way to go and unemployment is still higher than it has been in a long time. I'm beginning to wonder if there's going to be a repeat of last year as far as crude oil speculation goes and will screw up any recovery, setting it back. At this point I have strong doubts that those speculators have long enough memories or sufficient intelligence and sense to avoid a repeat. I fear that once again greed will supersede good sense.// Even if there were sulfur deposits on the moon there's still the problem of adequate amounts of powdered aluminum. The alternative, to transport the sulfur and aluminum by separate rockets may not be workable or economically feasible. Using materials totally native to the Moon would be the best bet. Either that or boring into the lunar surface to create underground bases. So is there now a new theory that the Moon wasn't the result of another body striking the Earth and knocking a big chunk into orbit? I imagine the theory you mention would make more sense. Dang laws of physics!]]

From: **Brad Foster**

Greetings Tom ~

Short response this time after getting in TRF #69. Mainly wanted to keep up my end of things here by restocking you with some new art, so attached please find four new pieces for your consideration. As always, if I send anything you don't care to use, feel free to let me know, and I'll send something else. Always doodling new bits of weirdness, and don't want anyone to feel they have to use something just because I mailed it!

Had a one-day group art show on Saturday that actually generated some income to pay some of the bills that also showed up in the mail along with this copy of TRF, so in a pretty good mood. The next three weekends we have big art festivals scheduled, so going to be busy working/prepping on those, and just trying to get ahead of things fannish this weekend. Like sending you this new art.

So, that's another thing I can check off the list...

stay happy~Brad

Brad W Foster

[[Thanks for keeping me supplied with your art. I know how busy you must be and appreciate your taking the time. So far I haven't seen anything I haven't wanted to use. That isn't likely to change. Glad to hear you made some money at the one day art show. I hope that keeps up and you added to your income at the other art festivals. I also hope the current state of the economy doesn't adversely affect the art festivals. Stay busy and keep doing the work that's unmistakably Brad Foster.]]

From: **Milt Stevens**

April 29, 2009

Dear Tom,

Thanks for the copy of the Hugo nominees you included in Reluctant Famulus #69. I had already printed out the nominees when they were announced, but this served as a reminder that I should actually vote for the damned things. I don't feel any particular enthusiasm for this year's short fiction nominees. It's probably me, but it might also have something to do with the nominees. The fan categories seem like the usual exercise in futility. I've never even heard of one of the fanzine nominees. That must be the one that's going to win. I see they have added a category for graphic novels. I don't have time to keep track of the things I'm more or less keeping up with. I certainly don't have time to read graphic novels.

Gene Wolfe found an interesting way of spending an afternoon. The people in charge of Rolling Meadows Junior High appear to be trying to find a way of interesting their students. I don't think that was ever tried when I was in junior high. If it was, it was a dismal failure. To me, junior high was one long struggle against being bored to death. Considering the chemical changes that were occupying quite a bit of my attention, I still managed to be utterly bored.

Gene had the opportunity of meeting a few law enforcement types. FBI agents have the reputation of being disdainful with the members of other law enforcement agencies. If that is the way they act with other law enforcement types, they must treat the general public with utter contempt. If they had ever acted the way movies show them acting (i.e. barging in and giving orders) with me, I would have been happy to obstruct them in every way possible. Actually, my dealings with the FBI were always polite, and I usually was able to give them what they wanted.

While I don't think most people are aware of it, FBI agents in recent times have commonly had an accounting background. The FBI has a lot of operations dealing with organized crime, and an accounting background is very useful in that sort of a situation.

Police types have all sorts of backgrounds and do all sorts of things aside from police work. I worked for one guy who had spent a year as visiting professor of communications science and the University of Ohio at Athens. He got that gig because of his involvement with the 911 system. When I worked for him he was the head of the crime analysis section. I also knew a police officer who taught graphic design at University of Southern California. He hired on as a police officer, but he spent the last 20 years of his career doing nothing but design work. He could make even the most mundane thing look good.

Yours truly,
Milt Stevens
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Simi Valley, CA 93063
miltstevens@earthlink.net

[[I can't get excited about some of the Hugo nominees/categories either. As for the Fan categories—yeah much of the same old same old with some who appear only online. I realize the last thing the Hugos need are more categories but I wonder if it would help to split the fanzines and fan writers into two categories: traditional print and electronic. Although computers are ubiquitous and the Internet is The Big Thing Everyone Should Embrace there are still fans who prefer such things as physical paper fanzines for good reasons and not because they are Luddites.// I don't bother with graphic novels either. I'm able to cope very well with novels full of words only and don't need lots of pictures to help me comprehend what's going on. I got past that when I went beyond "Dick and Jane", etc.//My junior high years were much

like yours I suspect, and I don't recall any efforts for teachers to liven things up or provide diversity. I, too, was bored throughout those years.//I imagine that, as with any occupation, there are good, dedicated, reasonable FBI agents and ones who need some sort of attitude improvement or adjustment. It's good to hear about law enforcement people who aren't stereotypical and have other interests and skills in their lives.]]



Robert Kennedy
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May 10, 2009

Dear Tom,

My thanks for #69

Interesting cover.

I hope that you now know what went on with the ambulance, Sheriff's people, etc.

The articles by Gene Wolfe, Bob Sabella, and Gene Stewart were enjoyed. Alfred Byrd's final report on West Liberty was as enjoyable as the first article. Sheryl Birkhead seems to have more problems than several people. Her writing as usual was interesting.

In a comment to Ned Brooks you say: "But if the federal government keeps printing

money at the rate it is, there might be real inflation." Yes, no doubt about it. The federal government obtains the money it spends from the following sources. 1) Taxes—With the economy down as it is and so many people out of work, Federal income from taxes will obviously take a hit. 2) Borrowing—Treasury Notes, Bills, etc. Interest on the national debt is already larger than the Defense Department budget. 3) Taking from funds like Social Security. Congress has taken the Social Security Trust Fund to cover part of their deficit spending and in return given Social Security nonnegotiable notes. Where is Congress going to obtain the money to repay Social Security and the other funds from which it has taken money? 4) Printing money—This, as you indicate, causes inflation. It's not a pretty picture. I fear for the future of our country. Not only what has been done by past administrations, but also what is being done by Obama and Congress and what they are doing to future generations

Alexis Gilliland: "The government remains clueless, talking about spending its way out of trouble..." Actually, I'm not sure that they are really clueless. Anyway, people cannot spend their way out of debt/trouble. Neither can the government without creating inflation.

[[As noted earlier, we're still in the dark about *exactly what went on that day and likely to stay so as the only people we could dare ask continue to make themselves scarce. We'd probably be told it was none of our business anyway. I wish we could find out but believe that will never be.//Sheryl certainly does seem to have more than her share of problems than most people. I marvel at how she manages to cope with all those problems.//The recession is as you say not a pretty picture and one which could conceivably get worse through people's stupidity. The hypocrisy of it all is that the people running the Federal government and all the "genius" economists are always telling us, the general*

public, we should work out a budget and do everything we can to live within that budget but the politicians running the government ignore that advice constantly and egregiously. Like many people, I wasn't happy with the way the past 8 years turned out and was looking and hoping for an improvement with the new administration. But I'm doubtful Obama, his administration, and Congress will actually be noticeably different or better. A good step would be for all the administration people, from Obama on down--in both political parties--would admit that they aren't as smart as they conceitedly believe they are, they don't always have the right answers, and quit spreading their bullshit. But I fear that will never happen.]]

From: **Henry Welch**

Tom:

Thanks for the latest The Reluctant Famulus.

Thanks for the Hugo nominations list.

I'd rather have enough interaction with my neighbors to avoid your speculation on the ambulance and police cars.

Gene Wolfe's WOW Day sounds a lot like a good career day or career fair. I actually enjoyed doing them for computer and software engineering. I have not had the opportunity to do one yet for lawyering.

Sheryl never told us how her taxes turned out. Mine took about seven hours between federal, two states, and conversion of a home to a rental property.

Why did Joseph T. Major have to pay \$89 to get a router installed. They are basically plug in and then use your web browser to access the default IP address and then you are basically done. Some don't even require set-up to make them useful.

Ken Follet's *The Pillars of the Earth* is a great book as was the sequel. I have both in audio form and they certainly consume a lot

of commute time.

Henry Welch

*[[I would like to have had more interaction with my neighbors but we've never had the opportunity. They've never been overtly unfriendly or hostile, just, I think, uninterested in or indifferent to making any effort.]] I think eventually Sheryl will produce a follow-up to her taxes article after she has had a chance to get over the experience. When she does it will be in TRF.]] I rather doubt th Joseph Major actually had a wireless router installed for \$89.00. He may have been exploring the possibility of getting one. I've hear that places like Radio Shack provide installation service for wireless routers. It's probably for people too lazy or too timorous to do it themselves and don't care how much it costs. I plan on getting a wireless router and after having researched them online and learning they are "basically plug-in" (and some brands have an installation CD to go with them) will install it myself. The one I'm considering (mid-range/price model) costs about \$40.00. I'll be damned if I'll pay some-one twice that or more to install it. That's the cheapskate in me.]] I haven't read the sequel to *The Pillars of the Earth* yet but will eventually.]]*

From: **Dave Haren**

Dear Sir,

I very much enjoyed your zine.

The end of WOW had me making up bad thoughts. As the adult teacher congratulated over blocking a child from taking a dreadful SF book home to read...those people who begin reading that stuff at a young age become strange...

Last time I looked there was no shortage of Sulfur in space, the trip is a bit beyond our current capacity but when we're ready there is an entire moon of it.

Mary Alice Norton, Andre Norton has a

number of books in the www.gutenberg.org site which is where to get free ebooks. There's also a lot of H beam Piper and some P K Dick is being added occasionally.

I think the count of available works is 28700+ right now.

Wizenbeak eh !! One of my favorites is the cartoons in GURPS Illuminati but you may not be cleared for that.

Anyway it is a great zine, and there are new readers online but you have to put stuff online to find them.

Regards

Dave Haren

[[“Dear Sir”. Usually when I receive something which starts that way it ends up being some sort of solicitation to convince me to part with my money. I’m glad in this instance that wasn’t the case.//I presume when you mentioned “bad thoughts” regarding Gene Wolfe’s article you were referring to the adult teacher conning the student out of a book given to her by the author. That wasn’t necessarily some sort of censorship but more likely a cheap way of adding to the school’s library.// I don’t know whether I’m “cleared” for GURPS Illuminati or not--and I don’t much care. To me, that’s one of the many time-wasters of computers and the Internet and a possible addiction I don’t want to have. I feel I have a wide enough range of interests as it is. GURPS isn’t in that range and probably never will be. No reflection on GURPS, just my personal view.//I’m sure there are potential new readers out there. That’s one of the reasons I began posting back issues of The Reluctant Famulus online. I started this fanzine as a physical paper one and will try to keep it so for as long as I can. I still much prefer the “traditional” paper fanzines. But times are changinh. On the other hand, once such things as my fanzine are put online those new readers have to know such things might be of

interest and where to look for them. With some people, locating things like my fanzine may be more a matter of chance or accident unless they are aware of such things as science fiction fanzines in the first place. At any rate, I’m glad you found my fanzine and I thank you for taking the time to comment on it. Now if I could only have more people out there discover The Reluctant Famulus.]]



From: **Frank Denton**

Hi, Tom,

Another interesting issue of the Reluctant Famulus. Tom Doubrely must have had a lot of fun creating the cover. I was impressed with Gene Wolfe volunteering to take part in WOW day at the local junior high. Back in the early sixties I taught junior high students for six years before I moved on. I found them to be pretty decent kids and I enjoyed that time. Now I look at the current crop of that age group and I don’t think it would be nearly as much fun to teach them. I hope that’s just not looking at it from an but probably not wiser age (mine). Anyway, Gene seems to have done very well. I’ve also done some of those guest gigs at middle school and junior high. They don’t always go well, some have been disasters. Gene is to be congratulated.

What frustration! Watching a crime scene in action, cops coming and going and

not really knowing what was happening. To me it sounds like two different, but possibly connected things going on. It sounds very much like drugs were being peddled from the house at the end of the road. I certainly hope you pass on any new information in your next issue.

John Thiel's cartoon of p. 9 reminds me of my father. He was a very good artist, and later in his life he took to woodburning. He used photos to copy the imagery. I remember that he did several of collies, which he and my mother raised (we had fifteen at one time, I remember). He also did scenes of Mt. Rainier. He was very much the artist and I recall that he was very careful in his choice of 'woodstock.'

I was going to write more, but I think I may be running out of time, so will send.

Cheers,

Frank Denton
14654 - 8th Ave. S.W.
Burien, WA 98166

[[I think Tom Doubrely had fun doing the cover and did a good job of it. Gene seemed to have enjoyed his time at WoW day, except for the incident with the teacher and the copy of Gene's book, and probably would do another if asked. I wish I had been there as an observer.// John had an ulterior motive when he asked me if I would mind printing his cartoon. It didn't get the response he'd hoped from one of the artwork contributors to TRF. Woodburning images of collies and Mt. Ranier. An interesting pair of subjects. I presume the collie raising was as a side business. Or was it because they just liked collies? Very pretty dogs, I might add, and good pets.// ". . . Running out of time . . ." "!! Urgent business? Drat! Maybe you'll have more time to respond to this issue--that is if you find anything in it worthy of commenting on.]]

From: **Lloyd Penney**
1706-24 Eva Rd.
Etobicoke, ON
CANADA M9C 2B2

May 17, 2009

Dear Thomas:

It's good to be receiving your fanzine again, and taking part in the letter column again. I had missed it. I've now got issue 69 of The Reluctant Famulus here, and a letter follows.

Fun cover. Séance fiction? I remember many years ago, Elst Weinstein used to call it sinus friction. Same old stuff, hurts your nose?

We are in an overly-careful age; you never know who your neighbours really are, and in many cases, you don't really want to know for fear you'll uncover something horrific. You mind your own business, and you don't get involved, and that is a shame. We are strangers to our fellow man. In our large apartment building, we don't know many of the people who live there. In fact, we know the dogs that live in the building better because the dogs are friendlier than their masters. That's another telling tale about society.

Hello to Gene Wolfe...the rare time that I see even high school students today, they are physically more mature than that age than I and my own peers were at that same age. I had a look at my high school yearbooks to confirm it. As you say, a 13-year-old that could pass for 21. Better nutrition, estrogen parallels in the food supply, precocious puberty setting for more and more kids. At that age, too, the girls look like women, and the boys look like...boys.

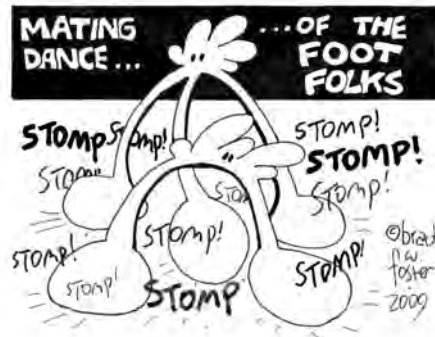
There can be good SF, in my opinion, and there can get great SF, and there has been. What we need are more accepting readers. Years ago, I had to deal with a friend who despised SF and chided me for reading "that garbage". I had a book to lend

her...*Science Fiction For Those Who Hate Science Fiction*, edited by Terry Carr. I gave her the book to read...she came back two days later, saying it was the worst of the garbage she'd read. I don't recall if she gave it back to me...she was the type who felt she'd be doing me a favour by dis-

posing of the book, and I think she did. We are victims of generations being told to get your head out of the clouds and put your feet firmly on the earth, and face reality, while forgetting that spending a little time with your head in the clouds have given us some of the greatest inventions the world has seen. Somehow, imagination has become foolish, and dealing with reality solely is being an adult. No wonder we josh about not wanting to grow up.

I am finding that the steampunk genre, while a good read, also provides some fans, including us with opportunities to pursue fanish fun with new ideas. Steampunk allows for new activities like tea socials, suggests a more genteel era while still fascinating, and has gotten Yvonne and I into costuming again, for the first time in more than 20 years. It is fun, a handful of local fans have gotten involved in this, and some old things are fresh again. There are two main avenues of steampunk, at least what I see, the steampunk styles seen at SF conventions, and steampunk in a more public consumption, that of a dance rave. The brass-and-bakelite accoutrements are definitely of interest, and perhaps appeal to those who long for a simpler era, but with many of the tech items that we enjoy today.

Taxes...ick! The Canadian T1 is so much easier to fill out than the U.S. 1040. When we did our taxes for taxation year 2008, it took us an evening. However, when I filled out my form this year, I found I owed about \$15 and change, and I sent the Receiv



er-General a cheque for that amount. Then, they did some recalculations, and sent me a bill for about \$554 and change. I paid it begrudgingly, mostly because Yvonne, who has a lot of accounting experience, checked my own figures, and thought that they were correct. Not long after

sending in my taxes, an unexpected T4 (taxation record from a Canadian employer) arrived in the mail. I sent it off to the taxation office, with a note explaining why this was coming separately, and please do the recalculations. I got a reassessment notice saying I owed yet another amount, \$314 and change. I looked at the reassessment notice, noticed a discrepancy, called the number given, and convinced them that they'd made an error. My record is going for a re-reassessment, and I will probably have to pay a few more dollars, and that will be it. At least, it better be. There's always encouragement to process your taxes early, but for me, to be safe, I think I will send them in on time next year.

The local...the Smart cars have been in Canada for several years now, and they are still neat to see. We all want to be green and all that, but...the Smart cars may be well built, but they are so small, that if you're in an accident, well, you're dead.

The final conversion from analog to digital television for American viewer is less than a month off, says the Buffalo television stations. Meanwhile, for here, the conversion is still some distance away. I'm sure we'll go through the whole thing, too. However, all the Canadian networks, because of the recession, are having money problems, and they are starting to shut down local stations, even some they may have purchased a year ago. In the border cities, if one cannot afford to buy a digital television, they may have to put up with watching Canadian analog stations, for there may not be anything else they can

receive.

To Joseph Major...Yvonne and I have had some dealing with the local Mormons and their amazing genealogical libraries. They take their researches very seriously, but not so seriously that they can't joke that when you shake your family tree, you should beware of what nuts may fall out.

I had heard the Bush regime described as fascist by several foreign news source commentators. I think most of us can agree that the eight years of the Bush regime were among the darkest of the modern era, and that already we see much more light. I think Barack Obama is now finding out that there's great differences between what you'd like to do, what you promised to do, and what you must do as president. (I like the fact he likes science, and may fund it more once there's money for it, and has been described as the geek-in-chief.) Tom, I am a professional copy editor and proofreader, and I do notice the typos, but I am also experienced enough to overlook them and know what you meant to type. Besides, I may notice the typos, but I'm not getting paid to fix them...

Milt Stevens reminds me about what Yvonne and I often say—there is a recession going on, there's less money, spending is down, etc., but when you go to the shopping malls, the parking lots are full, new stores are opening, people are walking out with packages in their hands...what recession? I will qualify that by saying that reports show the recession hasn't hit Canada nearly as badly as other places, but still ... Even with all these reports of economic horror, life is pretty well going on as usual.

Hi, John...I got six pages of the letter column only because Tom got three issues of TRF on eFanzines, and I downloaded them all. I could never put out as many issues of a fanzine as Chris Garcia does...if I was to do a fanzine, and I'd still like to, it would have the old-fashioned magazine format, with articles, illustrations, short bits at the end to fill column inches left over, etc.

My loc...the Rob Sawyer book, Flashforward, is now being turned into a series recently picked up by ABC. It will be called Flash Forward, and Rob's been in Hollywood a couple of times now...episodes are being shot right now, and look for it in the fall.

Can't believe I got onto the third page here...my fingertips do run on, it seems. Thank you for another issue, and I will wait impatiently for the next one.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

[[I can't say that SF, or even "sinus friction" ever hurt my nose but a lot of mainstream stuff "smelled" bad.// It would be nice to get to know our neighbors better but so far none of them have seemed particularly interested in establishing some sort of relationship no matter how superficial. It is a shame. The days of our parents, grandparents, and earlier generations when family, friends, and neighbors worked together and pulled together in hard times and during crises are becoming a distant memory. We all seem to be determined to isolate ourselves from one another any and every way we can. The increasing prevalence and use of cell phones, iPods, computers, and the Internet only worsens the situation. And that is really sad.// It's a shame so many people totally lack a sense of wonder and the acceptance and appreciation of the strange and unusual. They would rather cling to the comfortable familiar and those who think the same as they. I think it is possible to face and cope with reality and still from time to time have our heads in the clouds or on other worlds. There can be a balance between the two extremes if we strive for it. Unfortunately there are those so dead set against even admitting the possibility of SF being good and having value commensurate with the mainstream and reality.// The only thing I know about Steampunk is that it's yet another fiction genre (and a bastard child of SF?). I've never felt a desire to read any. (Naughty

me. Clinging to the familiar.) I have a wide enough range of reading tastes to keep me satisfied for the rest of my life, however long that may be.//One of the major problems with the smart car is its low crash resistance, a major safety factor. There have been times, when driving somewhere, I've wondered if Ruth and I would be safer traveling an Abrams tank or one of those explosion resistant vehicles used in places like Iraq. Taking a Smart car out on one of the Interstates might almost be suicidal, given the way some people drive.

The Mormons do take their genealogy very seriously--even to the extent of "sealing" to the LDS church anyone and everyone for whom they have found records. Even those who lived and died well before the LDS church came into existence. Needless to say, this very much upsets non-LDS descendants of those people. Naturally there have been complaints . . . The Mormons need to stick with just keeping records for posterity and making sure they're accurate.

About the G. W. Bush 8 years, the less said, the better. It's over (except for certain lingering effects) and we Americans need to move on. I just hope the Obama administration doesn't become something as bad as Bush's or--God forbid!--worse. I hope, for Obama's sake and that of his administration, that reality sets in and there won't be a repeat or a new and different catastrophe.

I read somewhere about Rob Sawyer's book being made into a series. I hope his experiences with Hollywood won'd be too devastating and disillusioning.//



From: **Gregory Benford**

I liked the latest RF.

Gene Stewart's comments recall those blithe days in the 60s-70s when we thought the genre was moving into mainstream respect. But then Star Wars and mass media sf generally somehow shoved us into category again.

I appreciate his mentioning Timescape as an sf novel with mainstream methods and concerns, especially mood and character. Maybe that's why it's my most popular novel. Still, later novels like Cosm and Eater were, I think, equally mainstream in their approach, and Chiller (written under pseudonym Sterling Blake) did well, but is now out of print.

I hope he's right, and we're reaching a broader audience, even as mainstream writers move into our conceptual territories.

Gregory Benford

[[I'm glad you liked the latest RF and hope you find something worthwhile in this issue as well (assuming, of course, that you choose to read it).//I think we all, writers and readers of SF, were hopeful of our favorite literature becoming more respectable and acceptable to the mainstream. Unfortunately that hasn't been the case, at least not in the way we had hoped. And, yes, Star Wars (and Star Trek in some ways, along with the original Battlestar Galactica) didn't really help despite any possible good intentions of the creators ("Wagon Train" in space, indeed!). I wonder if SF ever will the the respect it deserves or that certain writers who have written what could be classed as SF will overcome their abhorrence of admitting that they wrote such stuff. Still there is always hope SF will become more widely accepted and perhaps respected as something other than or better than "that crazy Buck Rogers stuff" or "squids in space". As long as there are good, conscientious writers like you there is hope. Thank you for all the good stories that I and

others have read and enjoyed. Please keep it up.]]



From: **Sheryl Birkhead**

25509 Jonnie Court,
Gaithersburg, MD 20882

Greetings,

Sounds as if you had a day's entertainment with the neighbors. I hope you will have further bits of information.

Lovelee Kurt Erichsen art--puleeze get more!

Ah--so Gene Wolfe had not been in front of a class before!? He had an advantage--a "regular" teacher pretty much has students who are not interested in the subject matter--at least not at the junior high level.

Ah. Octopi fillers! Yeah.

Gas prices here are averaging about \$2.35 for regular--but goes over \$2.50 already

Interesting cover--so many neat tidbits hidden in the "blur[b]".

I like Brad's suggestion about getting a "digital" TV. I bought 2 Sonys about 2 years ago presuming they **were** digitally compatible--they are not. Aside from **any** spending, all my sets work and I hate waste. On the next hand, I did price sets and gave up. Wait until you hear what is quickly taking precedence for savings right now. (To date, health ins and med costs for monitoring has cost

over \$8,000 or about 135% of my income so far this year--so what's this about spare money??) The converter boxes run **about** \$50--\$80 (less if you have **not used** your "coupons" yet--I HAVE) but the TVs appear to start at about \$300-\$600. I was not happy to be told most manufacturers are not making the small 12" sets any more. It has also been--um--interesting to watch (well . . .) the loss of signal with a) wind, b) rain, c) pick a reason--and irritating to turn off the box and have crystal clear analog signals, soon to be history. Sigh.

Kurt E's art has been gracing fanzines for many years. His material is wonder-filled and would only be better if it appeared more often!!

Aha--so the digital conversion is more widespread than I thought. I'm slowly watching tapes for the last month or so. It is always an adventure when some show (obviously I can't tell which one) is all snow. I still have not figured this out and signals are not sorted properly. (On the other hand, the whirlpool tub is working fine--finally/still).

Ironically, the dial-up (@ \$7.95/mo on an annual basis) says I can **now** get DSL for \$23.95/mo on an annual basis. Last year I might have seriously considered it. Thi\$ year I can't. Oh yeah, they said they thought it would speed up my connection--no guarantee. The guarantee is that if it doesn't help, they go back to the dial-up with no "penalties". All moot now.

I try to buy the fanhistory books as they are pubbed. I didn't get into fandom until the early 70s but I enjoy reading about my fanish heritage. When the 60s book comes out, I'll be in line for a copy.

By the way, my Netflix queue still has over 350 items on it, even after three years. It seemed obvious to me to use it to get the TV programs I could not get on TV (either cable shows or Canadian/British/Australian--so far). This just means I'm **way** behind the watching curve for both movies **and** TV. Aha--so there **is** a way to watch cable with

out cable--more or less.

Need to get this into the mailbox---
Thanks for thish--as always!

Sheryl

[[Unfortunately for last issue and this one I didn't have any new Erichsen illos or fillos mainly because I failed to ask him. I don't know why. I'll try to get some for the next issue.// I got a kick out of the octopus news story and thought TRF readers might find it amusing.// The "experts" were saying gas prices wouldn't go as high as last year. Ha! Right now the average price is around \$2.65 a gallon (As I write this, and it isn't even the first day of Summer) an I saw on the news the other day where in some part of the country is was \$2.85 a gallon. That makes me wonder how soon it will hit \$3.00 and then how much over that amount it will go. And part of the reason, as some newscasters have observed, is speculators (yet again) are optimistic the economy is heading upward and getting better and so counting on something which may not come to pass. But enough of that. It does no good to dwell on it.// Having had television service by way of antennas, cable (once it became available in our former hometown) and now satellite I can attest to the fact that none of them is perfect and interruption free. The old antenna reception was worst affected but we've lost cable reception because of the weather taking down the overhead lines. The satellite service too has been affected by heavy cloud cover and strong wind and rain resulting in the dreaded blank screen with the little box saying "Searching for satellite signal". And of course since cable and satellite services employ decoder boxes which require an electrical connection, power outages. Of course with the power outages the tv doesn't work either.// Interesting about you dial-up's claim. DSL is supposed to involve improved phone lines which allow the transmission of telephone and Internet signals simultaneously so a person can surf the Internet and still make and receive phone calls.

Older phone lines lack that capability. And while not as fast as cable or satellite Internet, DSL is faster than conventional dial-up. I know. I had DSL Internet from Verizon before we moved to this part of Kentucky where DSL lines haven't been installed. If my memory is correct, my DSL speed was something like 128Kpbs. The dial-up I used to have was allegedly 56Kpbs (but in reality, on a good day was maybe half that or somewhere around 23-27Kpbs) The difference in speed of DSL and conventional dial-up wasn't dramatic but the DSL was noticeably faster. So if your area does have DSL service and you switched to that your connection speed should be faster. Unless of course your computer has a modem capable of only a maximum of 56Kpbs. Then all bets are off.



Addendum to the Introduction

Sometimes I will get an erroneous idea in my head and will be unable to get rid of it. In regard to my mention of repairing my broken leg with plates and screws I latched onto the notion that wasn't the case after all. Then, after thinking about it and having had a phone conversation with my older son, I decided I was wrong. Somehow I had gotten it into my head the plates would be *external*. Had I thought it over carefully to begin with I would have realized the plates would be placed *subcutaneously*. So of course I wouldn't have seen them when the splints and wrapping were removed prior to putting on a proper cast. Not it makes sense. Then it dawned on me that, if the plates were metal, when I tried to pass through one of those security devices I'd probably have some explaining to do. *"It's like this, officer, I broke my leg a while back and I've got these plates . . ."*

And that's it for this issue. Until next time--
Full thrusters!



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HAPPY LITTLE KITTEN, GIVING SUBTLE
VISUAL CUES IT'S ABOUT TO GO **NOTSO!**