

# CHALLENGER



**Mike Resnick on Facebook:** Just received the following from a friend. "Being a modest man, when I checked into my hotel I said to the lady at the registration desk ... 'I hope the porn channel in my room is disabled.' To which she replied, 'No, it's regular porn, you sick bastard.'"

# CHALLENGER #34

**FALL-WINTER 2011**

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**Challenger #34 is GHLIII Press Publication #1111 in 2011.**

UH, GOSH, I JUST SAW YOU SITTING HERE  
IN THE PARK AND, WELL, JEEZ, YOU'RE SO  
SEXY IT DRIVES ME WACKY! IS THAT A  
KITTY YOU'RE PLAYING WITH? HO... GRUNT...  
DO YOU LIKE DIRTY BOOKS? BOY, I SURE  
DO! I HAD A GIRLFRIEND BUT I STRANGLED  
HER ACCIDENTALLY WITH AN ELECTRICAL  
CORD... GRUNT... \*SNIFF\*... AREN'T YOU  
PRETTY... BUSY TONIGHT? I HAVE LOTS A  
DIRTY BOOKS... DO YOU COME HERE OFTEN?  
I DO!! HO... GRUNT... I SURE LIKE DIRTY  
BOOKS!! GRUNT GRUNT!...

MARK URBAN

'1980

JESUS H. CHRIST!



*Ah, the themes to Challenger 34 ...*

**SEX & ROMANCE**



*And of a sudden he knew that when one woman gives herself to you, you possess all women. Women of every age and race and kind, and more than that, the moon, the stars, all miracles and legends are yours. Brown-skinned girls who inflame your senses with their play, cool yellow-haired women who entice and escape you, gentle ones who serve you, slender ones who torment you, the mothers who bore and suckled you; all women whom God created out of the teeming fullness of the earth, are yours in the love of one woman.*

From Rembrandt (Alexander Korda, 1936)

Ah, romance. Ah, sex. One promotes the other, the other exalts the one. This *Challenger*, in its own poor way, salutes them both.

But this *Challenger* is late ... months late. These are the closing days of 2011, and this issue should have come out before Renovation. What happened? The answer lies in

## HOW I SPENT MY “SUMMER” “VACATION”

*By little Guy Lillian, age 62*



At 4:30 I was pulling in beside an RV close to our little beach. I walked out to the water's edge and gazed across. Barely visible across the bay to the east, the Vehicle Assembly Building sat there like a great square Buddha. To its south, Pad 39A glowed with blazing white intensity, a pearl – the rocket indistinct at such a distance but the promise shining bright as the full moon.

The pad disappeared as dawn came – but since everyone anticipated a scrub, I figured I'd gaze on the awesome sight the next morning, too. Soon the Greens drove up with Rosy, soon joined by Melissa, Patty's veterinarian daughter, her friend JoElle and her kids, two tweeners and a 6-year-old girl, all blonde as Gestapo, all more interested in spotting crabs in the river than in the miracle about to occur across the river.

Time began to pass in a very strange way – there was a lot going on but the minutes crawled. Through binocs we kept scanning the horizon past the pleasure boats lining up parallel to our beach, seeking the distance-dimmed launchpad. So often the boats interfered. I mentally promised to torpedo any craft that got between us and the launch.

The kids crowded in around me. Rosy stood by my side. Any ... second ... now ...

I heard cheers. A tiny flame showed low to the horizon but rising across the wide waters, silent, steady, pulling a column of white smoke. I forced my binoculars on the little blonde girl. "Look! *Look!*" I leapt to my feet and danced about my mini-beach like God's own idiot. "Outer space!" I shouted. "*Outer space!*" Up the ferocious flame climbed, and up. It cut into and out of clouds, prompting new cheers every time it appeared. Up. Up. My first shuttle launch had knocked me out with power. This one amazed me with *height*. *How tall the sky!*

"Tell your grandchildren!" I exhorted the blonde babies. *Tell them you saw human beings mount to the heavens*. Moments later the sound of launch came, pop-pop-popping, soft then louder ... the shuttle itself was by now gone from sight, but its thunder remained ...

For quite a while, when silence fell again, the pillar of cloud lingered. I kept gawping at it – unwilling to let the incredible, last-of-its-kind experience go. Outer space. *Outer space*. When and how will Americans carry themselves there again?

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My "summer" "vacation", 2011, began in the spring, at 3:10PM on April 6, to be precise. Without warning, and as far as I'm concerned, without reason, my public defender gig crashed onto the reef of budgetary shortfall and political bullshit. I was, in a word, Out. Gobsnacked, staggered and staggering, it took the two most reliable people I have ever known to keep me on anything resembling an even keel.

These were my wife, Rose-Marie, and my brother, Lance. Cool and optimistic, Rosy assured me that our financial situation was such that we would be safe for at least two or three years. She was teaching and my inheritance/savings was fat enough to keep us afloat. To soften the blow, we applied a wad of the savings to covering our house note for a year, paid off our Mini Cooper loan from the account we'd set up as security, and I gobbled down my pride and phone-filed for unemployment insurance. It covered fanac. I'd be damned if I'd let my hobby slide.

Anyway, my brother's part in this was his usual one: to move me forward. L.E. has always been the Lillian with stability and sense. *Your new job is to find a job*, he said, *and here's a suggestion*. He forwarded me the web address of Louisiana's Civil Service – and a couple of job possibilities for attorneys. I typed up a generic on-line job app and sent it in.

I also started mailing resumes to public defender and district attorney offices throughout the state, CVs to universities and colleges and junior colleges (since in addition to my J.D., I have a Masters in Fine Arts and some small teaching chops). Idleness was vile; being a public defender meant not only a paycheck and bennies, it meant an *identity* and *value* – a sense of self-worth. There's something neurotic about depending on a job to give you that value – if you're sane, you should simply carry self-respect with you like you carry your heart. But I've never claimed to be sane. I felt useless.

So I called Mental Health, moved to do so by a mocking article in *Newsweek* about middleaged jobless professionals. Chortled the magazine, "They're toast!" Among the metrosexual journal's criticisms of guys in my predicament, we weren't using the opportunity to get in touch with our feminine, nurturing side (always a concern for *Newsweek*), and we avoided counseling. In our family, Rose-Marie takes care of the femininity, but it made sense to seek an objective ear to help me keep my balance while I waited out the long, hot summer. So I tried to contact a shrink ... and hit an obsidian wall.

The psych my internist recommended wouldn't take insurance and demanded humongous bucks up front – no doubt a stabilizing lesson for his charges in humility and responsibility. I'm humble and responsible enough. I'd gone onto Rosy's insurance when mine lapsed, but that policy would cover only one clinic in town, which when I called seemed staffed by *patients*. I couldn't get a doctor, nurse, or orderly to so much as come to the phone. So I fell back on the source of all decency and wisdom on this planet: *fandom*.

Many years ago, when I was in the clench of suffocating gloom after my divorce, a wonderful lady had approached me at a DeepSouthCon and asked if she could help. She was both an SFer and a psychotherapist. For years I'd treat her to lunch at every convention we'd shared, and we'd talked. She refused all fees – except the lunch tab – and did me several solar system's worth of good. I found her on Facebook and we began weekly phone sessions. This time I paid.

In the meantime, I'd had a couple of interviews. One was with the first place I'd applied, and seemed both promising and ideal.

First, the work was respectable, even noble: representing minors In Need of Care at various court hearings. It wasn't criminal defense, but it was still advocacy. Second, it was *civil service*, which meant security – no more sudden no-warning invitations to hit the bricks – and the potentiality of retirement with a pension. I'd worked for state government before, decades back: at Charity Hospital in New Orleans – a romp through the Pathology Department – and twice for the Unemployment Office. If I got on with civil service again, I could eventually buy back my retirement – and be *vested*. Having worked outside of Social Security most of my life, my federal payments would be pathetic, but combined with a state pension, my Golden years might actually be livable. As I turned 62 this summer, it's long past time for me to realize that this is an important concern.

The guy who interviewed me had seen me work as a PD, and thought me well suited to the job. He sent me for a second talk with the head of the agency in Baton Rouge, our state capital. The exchange was intense but cordial. I thought I had a chance.

And I *wanted* the chance. Because the third quality of this job was the most important. It was *local*. The office where I'd work was four mere miles from our house. No other possibilities had opened up in the Ark-La-Tex area, so if I'd found something else, I'd have to live apart from *la belle*. She was winning awards at her teaching gig – I would *not* yank her away from success. Also, we couldn't sell our handsome new house now without having to repay at once the \$8000 Obama grant. No, even though this job wouldn't pay nearly as much as I was making as a PD, in all other respects, it was perfect.

Didn't get it. Not enough experience working with kids.

I didn't give myself time to let disappointment morph into despair. Rosy had set off at the end of May for her annual visits with her parents, in Florida. I threw clothes, yorkies (all three of them) and self into our CRV – and booked it in pursuit.

Sick of the usual interstates, on which you drone for insufferable hours across the Florida panhandle, I opted for a back-country route on the old US highway system. Much better. On the old roads you get a much richer sense of the depth and variety and heritage of our American turf. Southern Alabama, for instance, is beautiful farm country, spotted with cool little cabins, evocative abandoned houses, and *history*. In Selma, beneath a blistering lightning storm, I took US 80 across the infamous Edmund Pettus Bridge. In the early sixties a peaceful civil rights march was mauled there by club-mad cops. It was a disgrace, of course. But as with many such sites, the Bridge is now a prideful place where a battle was lost, but a war was won.

Finally I reached our destination, West Palm Beach, and Nita Green's yorkies and mine were exulting at each other from opposite sides of her condo's door. Seeing Rosy erased the last 12 days like cool rain on a muddy windshield. And I must admit to delight at being, once again, in Nita's condo, a sanctuary of SF and folk art. Freas originals line her stairwell and adorn many walls. Fleets of hand-wrought model ships sail upon most shelves – the creation in earlier days of Rosy's stepfather Harold, war hero and restaurateur.

There I went with Rosy to the remastered *Fellowship of the Ring* – the extended version in IMAX. We lingered through the entire credits to cheer Norman Cates' name when it appeared. (The other segments of the trilogy delighted our next two Tuesdays.) Nita turned us loose on boxes of fannish memorabilia – worldcon papers and books – and a huge treasure trove of *Life* magazines. I savored the program books and progress reports from cons long past – especially Torcon 2 – and *Life* features on space program moments both immortal (*Friendship 7*, Apollo 8, Apollo 11) and forgotten (remember Apollo 10's lunar test flight of the LEM?). We left the *Life* issues for another time, but the fannish stuff came home with us.

And so we were off for our next stop – the Merritt Island home of Rosy's father Joe. We spent three weeks on Merritt Island with Rosy's father Joe and her stepmother, the indefatigable Patty. Joe is an amazing cat; at 80 he spends the first four hours of every day working on his writing. It was that dedication and discipline that brought *Gold the Man* (known in the US as *The World Behind the Eye*) and *Conscience Interplanetary* to light; it hasn't deserted him now. (The original Freas cover painting to *Conscience Interplanetary* hangs in his living room.) During our stay I watched the Casey Anthony trial to its verdict – with which I was forced to agree – and read. My shrink had recommended a workbook, *Mind over Mood*, and I spent an hour a day going over its wise and adult advice. She and I talked, a lot – and she told me not to lose hope. After all, one of her patients had been passed over for a job, then been told that the first choice had refused the position – so she was hired. Ridiculous to think it could happen again, but ...

Merritt Island is hard adjacent to Cape Canaveral and the Kennedy Space Center – Joe had made his career there – and the joint was jumpin'. The final shuttle launch was pending July 8<sup>th</sup>. Rosy and I took advantage of the time and the place. One splendid day we were joined by one of *la belle's* BFFs, Frankie MacDonald, and hit KSC. The Center is very like a theme park, with rockets and an IMAX and a huge souvenir shop and bus tours of America's space coast. The specific attraction this time was an exhibit of *Star Trek* costumes, props and sets, including a mock-up of the *Enterprise* bridge (see Captain James T. Jerk, *supra*) and the "glowing doughnut" from "City on the Edge of Forever". The show was reminiscent in a way of the *Star Wars* exhibit Rosy and I saw in Chicago, the very day we got engaged.

The three of us hopped a NASA bus to ride past the awesome Vehicle Assembly Building and along the shuttle crawlerway to a viewing tower a couple of miles from pad 39A – the launch site of Apollo 11 and, soon, *Atlantis*. Surrounding the pad was the Canaveral Wildlife Refuge. I wondered what the birdies and gators thought of their human cohabitants when we fired off one of our rockets.

I chickened out of joining Rosy on one of the KSC rides, a shuttle launch simulator, but I observed her through a monitor, and it quite made my day. Watching my girl wiggle and laugh as the simulator shivered and bounced through an obviously tame version of a launch, I fell in love all over again. We celebrated our tenth anniversary in Florida. How has a loser like me maintained such luck for ten years?

Last on our schedule was the Astronaut Hall of Fame, a museum of the U.S. space program, filled with relics of Mercury, Gemini, Apollo, Skylab, the Shuttle and the ISS. Wally Schirra's *Sigma 7* capsule – filled with cables, toggle switches, straps and buckles – seemed as crude as a Model A.

Tuesday morning Rosy and I sought a site to view the launch. A wide stretch of road near Port Canaveral seemed ideal – a clear view over water to the dim and distant VAB and pad 39A. We discovered a relatively isolated little cove guarding a tiny beach, no more than 12 feet across, and proclaimed it perfect. From that point we'd hail *Atlantis*.

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And so we did. Two days after the launch, we headed home. It was mid-July. I looked forward – if that's the phrase – to waiting and waiting for a PD job to work free, to collecting UI, to battling the sodden monster of hopelessness growing in my head with the help of my fannish shrink. En route we tarried in New Orleans, and while there an e-mail came. It was from the fella who had wanted to hire me for the children's advocate position. The lady they had first approached had turned them down. The job was open. Was I interested?

I started work on Monday, August 15.

That Wednesday was the first day of Renovation. So now you know why Rosy and I were not there to sit on the Iron Throne and cheer Chris Garcia's magnificent Hugo victory. And now you know why this *Challenger* is months late. I originally intended it to come out before worldcon. Since then, we've been preoccupied editing two Chicon 7 progress reports and attending FenCon in Dallas (the 49<sup>th</sup> Deep- SouthCon) and New Orleans' ContraFlow and I've had the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary SFPA mailing to put out.

All done.

The job? I have a lot to learn, but so far, so good. It's *heartbreaking* to stand up for a one-year-old who's had her eyes blackened by a psychopathic father, but it's *heartening* to see earnest professionals trying their best to rectify the crime – and flawed parents trying to right themselves and save their families. It's made me wish once again that Rosy and I had gotten together when having children was possible, but it's fruitless to regret the past.

I don't call my fannish shrink these days – she knows how right she was – but I still have the *Mind over Mood* book, and her phone number is still written in the back. Little Guy Lillian, age 62, has learned another lesson – the same one as I've had to learn a zillion times before. *You never can tell*.

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Noting that this *Challenger* is GHLIII Press Publication #1111, I thought to do something cool and enter it into my logs on 11-11-11. Unfortunately, I reached GHLIII Press Publication #1112 before that date, and couldn't establish this as the fencepost *Challenger*. That tragedy acknowledged, let us turn to

## the issue at hand ...

For a time I thought that no one in SF was interested in romance ... but plenty of people in sex. Eternal *Chall* pals Mike Resnick and Greg Benford joined fannish mentor Earl Kemp in talking about it, each from a different angle. Mike Estabrook's poetry bridges the gap between the mechanics or procreation and the reality of romance, where b'r'er fanziners Steven Silver and Chris Garcia toss in numbers. Eve Ackerm- ... excuses me, *Darlene Marshall* gives us insight into the creation of written romances, and Kent McDaniel provides fiction from that perspective. Taral Wayne casts a cold eye on the most romantic moment of 2011, and if you can't find sexy romance in a tale of the Joker, or a treasure found in family papers, or the works of one of SF's founders, or photos from long ago, then you've lost out: Joe Major, Binker Hughes, Joe Green and Anne Winston have given us happy pages you should appreciate. As have Richard Brandt and of course, *la belle* Rose-Marie. And the art – Brad Foster's hubbabubba cover, Randy Cleary's illo, the brilliant work of Marc Schirmeister, and Rosy's aforementioned BFF, Frankie MacDonald – well, what's the matter with you guys?

Next issue I'm trying another theme: *medicine*. And you can come at it from any direction you choose: personal, scientific, comic, philosophical, political, historical, prophetic ... or you can stay away from the subject altogether. Just say your say if you have something to say! We'd be honored if you said it here ...

Look for *Challenger* #35 beneath a brilliant Alan White cover sometime in the spring.



# **6 Songs, 7 Women**

*Christopher J Garcia*

*Illo by Randy Cleary*



### **Lisa – Depeche Mode’s *Blasphemous Rumors***

We sat in bed, reading. I had a copy of *The Great Gatsby*. She read some McCaffrey. Neither of us had left the bed since almost three and the morning sun was just about visible over the trees of The Common. Neither of us ad spoken since we disengaged, neither of us had left the bed. We simply stopped, both of us still panting, kissed a few times, then rolled to our respective sides, grabbed the books we had waiting there. I turned on the CD I’d bought at Nuggets the day before. In tableau, it would have been a terribly dull scene, two people who had smashed against each other for hours then, as if a curtain on another play had risen, turned to two people who had not a care in the world for the existence of the other in the bed.

Somehow, when things ended, I barely noticed.

### **Samantha – The Monkee’s *Last Train to Clarksville***

“Kiss me goodbye.”

“You’re not going anywhere.”

“Kiss me goodbye.”

I take her face in my hands and pull her close, place my lips against hers like Michael Corleone letting Fredo know he knew.

“Was that so hard?”

“What’s the plan?”

“I’m leaving you.”

“I kinda figured that, your flair for the dramatic taking hold as it were.”

“It’s my way.”

A near-infinite pause grips the room, the sounds of my roommates starting dinner filter upstairs. Marin always played the Monkees at volumes that should be reserved for dark metal or bouncing car hip-hop on Friday nights.

“I’m sorry, Sam.”

“I know.”

“I’m not breaking up with because you’re not sorry, Chris. I’m leaving you because you did it.”

“It was unfinished business.”

“I know.”

“She’s –“

“I know, Chris. I know.”

“OK.”

“Was it worth it?”

I stopped thinking. The only thing that reached me were the words from downstairs.

*We’ll have one more night together/*

*‘til the morning brings my train*

*And I must go.*

“It probably was.”

“I think so, too, Chris. You had to clean that up.”

She was right.

“Plus, I fucked Bryan last night, so it’s probably good it’s over.”

I laughed. Sometimes you gotta look at the hangman and just marvel at how you got to the gallows.

### **Carla – *SuperRad* by The Aquabats**

She had eyes that were blue like a poet’s cliché. The moment I saw her, while perhaps distracted by her well-shaped form, I often found myself enjoying those blue eyes. She was a lovely girl, all of eighteen to my world-weary and jaded twenty-two.

“You wanna get out of here, listen to my new CD?”

I walked with her from the Common Room back to her dormroom. Her roommate was back in Jersey for the weekend. I sat down on her bed. She unwrapped the CD and put it in the player. It was a ska CD and it was the most infectious music I'd ever heard. If she hadn't almost leapt to straddled my lap a second later I might have started dancing.

"So, you wanna make out?"

I took stock. Carla: young, beautiful, the kind of body you're willing to wait to download off the net. Carla: crazy, impetuous, willing to chase a guy down the hall screaming at him if she felt even mildly offended. I'd seen her throw her ex's clothes out the window onto Beacon Street one sun-crushed afternoon.

"You sure that's a good idea, Carla."

She didn't answer, just pulled off her t-shirt, undid her bra and pulled me forward.

"Of course it's a good idea, baby. I'm the girl of your dreams."

She possibly was, and the way she seemed to be grinding into me made a good case. I was leery, still. She stood up after I seemed to pause a bit longer than her liking and stripped off her jeans and underthings.

How did I end up in front of a woman that beautiful and that naked and not really interested in taking the plunge.

"You've got two choices, Chris: play my game or wish you had."

An interesting point. When would this happen to me again? What choice did I have? I could handle the post-fun craziness, no?

Bonk-Bonk-Bonk

"Chris, I'm locked out of the suite. I need your key."

It was Omar, my suitemate who was the one who always let me in.

"I'll be there in a minute." I called out to him. "You might wanna get dressed." I whispered to Carla.

She stared a scimitar into my gut at that moment, rushing across the room to grab a robe. I waited until she tied it off, covering the temple that was her body.

I got up and walked to the door.

A week or two later, I wasn't nearly as strong (read: I was far more drunk), and that experience proved I had the right idea all along.

### **Hannah – *Forever Young* by Alphaville**

These things happened, in this order, with this soundtrack. Even now, twenty-something years later, I can hear the song, almost taste the the interior, the scent of a late-September heat wave evening coming in through the rolled-down windows. Hannah and I are in my car, a 1963 Chevy Impala and I've put the radio to Live 105 which is doing Ten At Ten, and we're parked behind the D-wing of Santa Clara High.

I'm pretty sure.

*Let's Dance in style, let's dance for a while*

I kissed her neck and she giggled.

*Heaven can wait, we're only watching the skies*

Hannah worked her fingers through my hair, a miracle, and turned her head just a smidge, allowing me greater access to the neck that was soft and long and sensitive as a goth girl cutter.

*Hoping for the best but expecting the worst*

I worked a button loose. She worked a button loose. Parallel processing making the most of our time.

*Are you going to drop the bomb or not?*

I dropped my point of focus slightly lower, deeper, the mountains of the norther region. She gasps, wiggles, clears her throat.

How was I supposed to know that security guards watched the parking lots all night?

### **Jessica – Patsy Cline's *Crazy***

We walked hand in hand to the dance floor. I don't know why I agreed to The Saddle Rack. Post-Hank Williams Jr. country don't do nothin' for me. I think it's the lack of pedal steel guitars. I basically sat and watched Jess go off and line-dance.

Well, I drank too. A lot. A shot every twenty minutes. What the hell, I wasn't driving.

Jess came back after a couple of hours of dancing. She was sweating like a girl who had been dancing for a couple of hours, ignoring her boyfriend of almost two years.

"You OK, Chris?"

"I think I just rose my third sheet to the wind, babe."

She reached signaled to the bartender, asked for two waters. He dropped them off.

"Drink this." She said.

I tend to do as I am told.

The familiar tinkling piano of Crazy rose from the speakers. I love Patsy Cline.

"I asked Tim to play it at midnight." Jess took the water from my hand, stood and pulled me off the stool into a tight embrace, and we swayed.

And we danced.

And I forgot all about the hour before, about the shots I'd piled one atop another. I was just there dancing with a woman who I thought might be the love of my life.

"You're the best, darlin'" I said.

"Love you, too." She said.

We danced slow through Crazy and into I Can't Help Falling in Love With You by Elvis, which was a nice addition. They went back to Garth, and I went back to my stool. Jess gave me a kiss on the cheek and ran back to the dance floor. I didn't need her at my side at that moment, she'd given me just enough to make it through.

Three years later, I told this story at her funeral, choking hard on every word.

### **SaBean and Judith – *Do You Love Me* by Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds**

Once upon a time there were two sisters who were the same/different. SaBean was beautiful, her porcelain face fragile and at times showing the spiderweb-fine cracks she mostly brought on herself. Judith was beautiful, the strength of the base of a pillar, impossible to move but with amazing effort. SaBean hated Judith's deep power, found her cold and distant, even as a child. Judith hated SaBean's weakness, for reliance on outside pleasures to deal with her fragility. The sisters hated each other.

And I, foolishly, played between them. I cared for both, found SaBean alluringly damaged, Judith positively magnetically complete. I would call SaBean at five, before she left to Morpheus. I would call Judith at ten, when she would return from work, perhaps ready for company. My Fridays were SaBean's. Sundays were Judith's.

This was a Tuesday. Seven or so.

The phone. SaBean.

"I need to see you."

I made my way to her apartment, Boston slush soaking through my shoes. A walk up Beacon Hill, counting the purple panes as I made my way. When I arrived, I knocked on her door and she opened, clear-eyed and sober. Nick Cave's bitter Australian growl flooding out into the hallway.

"How you doin'?" I asked, figuring I knew the answer.

"You're sleeping with Judith." She said.

I was.

"You sobered up to confront me on this?" I was being cruel. She hated being confronted with her own shortcomings.

I wanted metaphorical blood, I guess.

She closed the door, I walked in, took a seat on her huge leather couch, a couple of new burn spots on the armrest.

"I don't mind you having your fun, but why do you have to do it with her? Why the one person in this world that I –" she stopped, fury arcing.

I didn't have time to react to her anger as the phone rang.

"Hello." She somehow got rid of all the anger.

"He's here."

There was yelling on the other end, suddenly SaBean hung-up, turned off the phone.

"That was your girlfriend," she said.

I couldn't answer the venom.

"I'm gonna go."

"You probably should." SaBean said, opening up the cigarettes she only smoked when her other supplies were not on hand.

"I'm sorry." I said.

"Come here." She said.

I did as I was told.

She looked at me like a horse on an auction bloc. She was neither confused nor certain. She wanted to find something that would answer the question: her or me. I had made up my mind ages ago. Neither of you truly, both of you as much as you'd let me. Judith had put the wall up firm. SaBean had dove deep into it.

"You gotta go?" She said, the voice she saved for those moment prior to as much intimacy as she was willing.

"I should." I said, but she stepped between me and my egress.

"You can wait a bit, no?"

I did. Thirty minutes. Maybe an hour.

"You should go." SaBean said, pulling on a sweatshirt. "Now."

I got up, walked to the door. I was at the front door when I saw Judith power-walking towards the building.

"You asshole!" she screamed.

"I know."

"You could have had it all, could have been the man who played both sides of the looking glass. But no, you had to give up the goods."

"I didn't say anything." I protested.

"Then how'd she find out?" Judith seldom let anything move her like this. Never as long as I'd known her.

"How the hell should I know." I said, my voice far louder than I'd expected.

"M fucking told me, idiots!" SaBean called down from her window, her smoking perch.

Judith seemed ready to let the dam burst, to send all the anger and hate she'd stored for Judith over the years flying in a series of what I was sure would be language bluer than Lenny Bruce.

I took her arm, and guided her away. I could feel her shaking.

"Yeah, get goin', bitches! You two assholes deserve each other!" SaBean called down at us.

We kept walking down to Beacon Street. Neither of us talked, and after we made our way to the her apartment, she stopped and turned.

"We're not talking again, you know?"

"I expected that."

She gave me a hug. It was as cold as she always seemed to other women who met her for the first time. We separated and I was hurting. I'd messed up playing this stupid game, but I had genuinely cared for both of them and I'll say it, the game was fun as long as it lasted. I was stupid.

It would be nearly a year before I talked to either of them again. It was much much longer before either of them forgave me. I still don't think I've ever forgiven myself.





# Donald Gilmore's Lechery Lessons

*Earl Kemp*

In San Diego during the 1960s, Donald H. Gilmore, Ph.D., was causing quite a stir. I didn't know it at the time, but he was very good at that, causing stirs, making a nuisance of himself. In almost no time at all, another Gilmore trademark, he had not only identified all the people in the area who were writing erotic fiction, but had made personal contact with them. And with me, coming to my office at Greenleaf Classics again and again, uninvited and without an appointment, and insisting on talking with me.

I kept putting him off, rejecting his efforts, delaying him, and holding him at arm's length. But he persisted, eventually becoming one of my most treasured best friends. Even today, after all the years that have passed, I still keep re-

membering things he did for me (even though, at the time, I thought he was doing them *to* me). He changed my life, for the better.

Parts of his plans included me. Gilmore wanted to be the No. 1 producer of pornography in the world and was rapidly working in that direction. With a large amount of very well-situated and financed help from unknown sources. I was never able to figure out all those bizarre and unexpected and very rapidly happening things, like who was financing Gilmore ... the only logical answer was the CIA.

Abruptly, as was his fashion, Gilmore closed up his operation in San Diego and flew directly to Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, where, overnight, he had leased the largest, most pretentious mansion in the largest, most pretentious neighborhood of Guadalajara. He found himself next door to the Bishop of Guadalajara and directly across the street from the chief of police. The family of the first lady of Mexico lived one block away and the first family was frequently seen passing Gilmore's house.

This mansion was very impressive. It contained a number of master bedroom suites all on the second floor. There was also a large, resident staff: a housekeeper, a cook, a mojo/gardener, twelve teenage maids, a seamstress/tailor, and, of all things, a resident cobbler (shoe maker). All these servants were housed on the third floor. There was a long balcony running all the way across the building and those maids would gather on the third-floor balcony, giggling, while watching the nude bathers in the huge swimming pool below them. Book-related people from all over continuously tried to get invitations to be houseguests in that house.

[That mansion, these days, has morphed into the State of Jalisco Department of Culture. Go figure!]

Gilmore's very best friend instantly acquired was the US Counsel to Guadalajara. Gilmore instantly found himself closely related to some very impressive first-families of Guadalajara: The Sauzas (tequila), the Canadas (shoes), and the Ybarras (Chocolate) in intimate situations. And, Gilmore was patron to and fund-raiser for the Salvation Army Orphanage. And Gilmore opened two book stores (Libros, Libros, Libros). Between doing all those things, Gilmore began investing in high-end residential properties.

Somehow Gilmore had also acquired some remarkably valuable inroads into the Mexican financial situation. He knew to the day, the minute, and the peso when the Mexican currency was to be devalued. Information not available to Mexican citizens. Using this knowledge Gilmore had a number of well-situated individuals investing hundreds of thousands of dollars in Mexican savings accounts paying high dividends. On Gilmore's word those investors would take their money out of the bank the day before the devaluation and return it the day afterward, never risking any loss.

As patron to the Salvation Army Orphanage, Gilmore was given great leeway to use their facilities and that was what he most wanted. It was to be the foundation of his pornography empire. Within the classrooms of the orphanage, Gilmore established his school for porno writers. Because he had also somehow instantly become president of the America Society (20,000 expatriate US citizens in permanent residence) he had access to all those people.

And, as he had done in San Diego, instantly, he identified and contacted all the potential writers with recognizable writing abilities from the America Society and gathered them together so he could teach them how to write porno novels. With Gilmore acting as agent for all their output, collecting revenue from their efforts, etc.

And they thrived, and became quite a cohesive group, socializing together, encouraging each other to greater, more erotic outputs all for the greater good of Donald H. Gilmore, Ph.D. (a purchased document, of course).

Don made all of his local connections available to me as he persuaded me that it was imperative that I move there, lease a house, and become a functioning local. All at the same time as I continued my job as editorial director of Greenleaf Classics in San Diego.

And I did, and doing so changed my life, and I can never thank Don enough for all the good things he did for and to me.

#

Many years later, I was in my office in San Diego and Don Gilmore walked in unexpected and unannounced. He told me that he had decided to return to San Diego and had made an abrupt decision to do just that. His Guadalajara household had been packed into a moving van that was already en route to San Diego and Gilmore had only one day to find a suitable house to move into. And he did...an impossible task...a large, pretentious mansion in an upscale neighborhood.

In Guadalajara that moving van and crew had packed up his entire household and, with the moving van sealed with US federal seals...inviolable...driven all the way to San Diego. The moving van crew unloaded their entire household, set everything up in their new residence, said "thank you very much" in Mexicano, and drove that empty van back home.

Mysterious movements for Don and Betty Gilmore who had also somehow been on the very last plane flying out of Havana...under heavy gunfire...after Castro kicked the criminal gringos out of his country. Talk about being well connected....

#

Remembering Don, and his lessons in lechery, brings back to mind many of the writing imperatives that Gilmore decreed essentials for profitable pornography. Most of them apply to any genre of fiction writing, of course, and here are some (certainly not all) of the things Gilmore taught his classes that I remember the fondest:

**The writer is God.**

**The writer takes total control of the reader right from the beginning and absolutely never allows the reader to interrupt that control.**

**He never allows the reader to even get close to asking a question (by never allowing a question to arise in the first place).**

**He never addresses the reader in any form of aside reference.**

**He writes from the omnipotent viewpoint, allowing himself great freedom of movement from time, space, point of view, etc.**

**He tries to never write from the first-person viewpoint because that allows the reader to reject parts of the writer's message and to want to have contrary dialogue with the writer. "Never happens that way," etc.**

**He writes in such a manner as to coincide with the experiences of most of his readers. In other words, commonplace words, situations, names, locations, etc. He writes slightly down (but never to the point of appearing to be condescending) to an IQ level that doesn't want to be stretched by reaching for superlatives.**

**He writes in clichés that, again, are commonplace and instantly recognizable.**

**He never attempts to be cute and vary said lines in dialogue, etc. "Hello," she smirked. "Get lost," he snarled. "What?" he wanted to know. (This is the worst possible substitute for the word "asked.") Etc.**

**Keep in mind all things commonplace to the majority of readers and use only those elements that resonate with their experiences and knowledge. No exotics, no world traveling, no castles, no rich people, no powerful politicians...just neighbors and associates.**

**Remember things like the automobile is having problems, one tire keeps whomping noisily, run out of gasoline, arrive late...anything the reader can instantly relate to from personal experi-**

ence. The dog gets sick and throws up on the carpet. The TV is on the blink. The light bulb burns out....

These are male-oriented books because they are the majority readers. At all times attempt to keep the emphasis on the penis to achieve automatic responses from the reader's anatomy which is, after all, the ultimate purpose of the writing in the first place.

Females will identify and insert their own reactions into the scenarios they are reading about.

Use the senses as often as possible, to the extreme of being boring. Fill in abundantly what it looks like, smells like, tastes, sounds, feels, etc. Don't forget what color it is, etc. details, details, details.

Illiterate because the reader does.

Whenever modifying any object, stretch the point and use three modifiers.

**USE YOUR DICTIONARY!** If you are the least bit uncertain of your spelling, **LOOK IT UP!**

Pay close attention to things like: blonde / blond, brunette / brunet

Watch out for the most frequently misspelled words: collectible, acknowledgment, judgment, irresistible.

There is no excuse for being wrong.

#

Go forth and multiply.



# BIG MAC

REMEMBERING

WORLDCON 1976

through the photos of

ANNE HEBERT WINSTON

MIDAMERICON — the 1976 worldcon in Kansas City — was historic for many reasons. Chair Ken Keller revolutionized convention pricing, Tim Kirk revolutionized Hugo base design, Tom Reamy revolutionized convention program books, Joe Haldeman's *The Forever War* won the Hugo, Guest of Honor Robert A. Heinlein proclaimed Bob Tucker his son and wore Patia Steinberg's pasties as epaulets, and I met a young lady named Rose-Marie Green for the first time in the lobby of the Muelenbach Hotel. Most to the point of these pages, however, was the revolution inspired by two girls from New Orleans, Anne Hebert (now Winston) and Linda Krawecka — who came to worldcon, picked it up, slammed it to the turf and tickled it till it said "Uncle!"







Linda and Annie conquered Mid-AmeriCon one party at a time, escorted – *guarded* is a better term – by New Orleans pals like **Ned Dameron**, **John Guidry**, and occasionally the skinny bozo below (hanging with **Liz Schwarzin**, now **Copeland**).

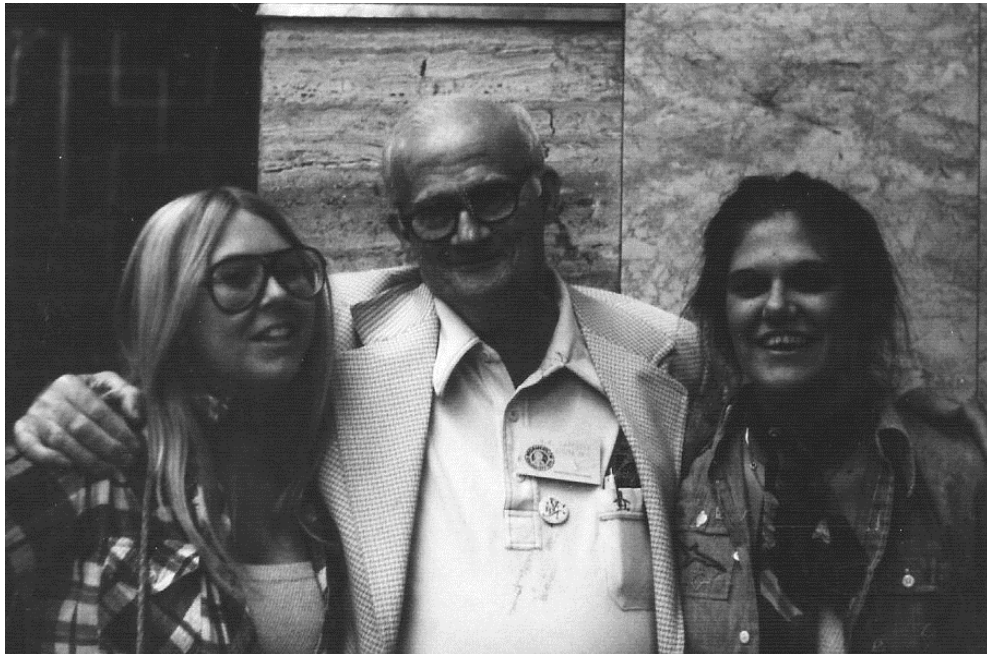
Our main challenge was getting in between the ladies and fandom's over-enthusiastic swains – not that they needed our help. One rejected suitor barked to Linda, "Someday you'll regret passing up the biggest name in fandom!" "Through my *fingertips*!" she wailed.



Big MAC featured some marvelous guests, none more unexpected or delightful than the great **Sally Rand**. Annie and Linda were – you'll excuse the expression – huge *fans*.



Sorry, buckos, you had to be one of the *good-looking* guys to win any time with Annie and Linda. For instance, here they are with **L. Sprague deCamp** and below, with himself, **Raphael Aloysius – R.A. – Lafferty**.



Annie and Linda had a glorious time at Big MAC. (Annie even remembers clambering through a ventilator shaft, but not why.) Possibly the best moment at the con came when Linda was handed a Hugo. “For some reason,” she said, “I feel a strange *attraction* for this.”

1976 was a long time ago, but you know what’s cool? Annie and Linda are still in fandom, Linda in London, Annie in New Orleans, and still knocking them – *us* – dead in our tracks. Then and now, you *rock*, ladies.



*Chicago is a great place for this sort of thing. I proposed to Rosy there too!*

# THE NIGHT I PROPOSED

*Steven Silver*

When 1991 rolled around, I decided it was time to propose to Elaine. We had been dating for several years in college and while I was in graduate school, and waiting to get married until I finished my PhD seemed like it would be forever in the future. The situation wasn't helped by Elaine working in Lexington, Kentucky at a television station while I worked on my Master's Degree in Bloomington, Indiana. Sure, we were only about 180 miles apart, but work and studies meant the distance didn't really matter. We weren't seeing enough of each other.

The situation was made worse when I decided to spend the summer back in the Chicago suburbs, working to make enough money to continue with grad school. Elaine and I realized that a trip I had planned to Lexington in July would be the first time we had seen each other in several months and I decided I would propose on that trip, having spoken to her parents about it on an earlier visit.

However, a change in Elaine's work schedule meant that she would be able to come up for a weekend visit in June. I knew that she was expecting the proposal to occur in July and I figured that the sudden visit to Chicago would add a nice element of surprise to my proposal.

I picked her up at O'Hare and after getting her luggage stowed at my parents' house, we headed out to a movie. Mistake.

I mentioned I was in graduate school. I was studying Medieval history, specifically Medieval English history. That meant that going to see a film set during that period was likely to cause me to focus on the anachronism, a problem exacerbated by the horrific pace at which those anachronisms were flung in my direction by the film *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*. Knowing that I was planning to propose that evening and not wanting to damage the mood, I stifled my complaints and sat through the execrable film (about the only good thing about it, naturally enough, was Alan Rickman). Every fiber of my being, however, wanted to complain about...but this isn't a movie review. Amazingly, the movie selection was not the worst choice I had made for the evening.

Following the movie, it was time to change for an evening in Chicago. Our dinner was slated for the 95<sup>th</sup> Floor, a restaurant perched, as the name would suggest, on the 95<sup>th</sup> floor of the John Hancock Center. When I made the reservation, I had mentioned that I was planning on proposing that evening and they made sure we had a seat next to the window overlooking Lake Michigan. As we ate, we could watch the planes coming in for a landing at Meigs Field, several storeys below us. Elaine notes that it was the only time in her life when she was at a restaurant where her menu did not contain prices. As we ate, Elaine commented that we had the best view of Chicago and I explained that she was incorrect. There were at least two other views that were better. The second best view of the city was from the top of the Sears Tower. The problem with both that view and the one we were enjoying while we ate, however, was that from one you couldn't see the Hancock Building and from the other you couldn't see the Sears Tower. I promised to show her the best view of Chicago before the end of the evening.

Following dinner, we headed back north to Victory Garden Theatre to see an original comedy entitled *Glass Houses*, by Jeff Helgeson. Earlier, I mentioned that *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* wasn't the worst selection I made for the evening...Yup, it was *Glass Houses*. I sat through the first act of the comedy, which turned out to be about a dysfunctional marriage. Helgeson's website describes the play as "an ironic/satiric [sic] transparency of contemporary American values, illusions, and behavior." I tend to think that reviewer Diana Spinrad got it right when she said, "The premise is banal enough, but Helgeson adds to the inanity with pointless exposition." As the play broke for intermission, I found myself wondering if perhaps I should take the play as an omen, or at least postpone my proposal until my visit to Lexington the following month. Thinking about how much I had spent on dinner and the play, on a graduate student's budget, I decided I could only afford to get engaged once and it would be that night. We considered leaving during intermission, but figured the play really couldn't get much worse. Elaine, meanwhile pointed out that as far as she could tell, the only comedy in the play was that Helgeson named his two main characters Barbie and Ken.

We suffered through the second act, brought closer together by the adversity of the play. When it was over, we walked back to the car and I told Elaine I would make good on my promise to show her the best view of the city of Chicago. This meant a drive back south, past the Hancock Center and out by the lake. We found parking behind the Adler Planetarium, which sits on the end of a man-made peninsula and walked to the front of the building. I carefully positioned Elaine so her back was to the Planetarium and she could see the lights of Chicago stretching out from Hyde Park at the south to Edgewater in the North, the mountain of lights reflecting the Loop straight ahead. After letting Elaine soak up the twinkling constellation of Chicago for a few moments, I stood in front of her (she says I knelt, so I get kneeling points), pulled the ring from my pocket and proposed to her. I found myself on the receiving end of a fantastic hug and, after a few moments, she remembered to give me an answer. We stood watching the lights of the city for a little while longer and were pulled from our reverie by the friendly Chicago Police Department driving through around the Planetarium and announcing, "The park is closed, please leave the park."

We drove up Lake Shore Drive, one of the most scenic drives within Chicago and through the Rogers Park neighborhood, passing within a couple of blocks of the building in which Elaine's parents lived when she was born. At Hollywood, Lake Shore Drive ended and we took Sheridan Road, which winds through a mixture of old wealth houses and university housing, giving views of the vast expanse of the Lake off to the right, before we arrived at my sister's house, where she had champagne chilling for us in the hope that Elaine gave the correct answer.

A year later, we were married, and twenty years after we saw *Glass Houses*, the play proved to be anything but an omen. We've successfully avoided Barbie and Ken's fate, "satric" or otherwise and are living out a life with our two kids, and, at times, even a little bit of romance.





*This article originally appeared as part of a longer piece in **F&SF**, September 1995, and is © Gregory Benford.*

# ***EXCEPT FOR THE PLUMBING***

*Gregory Benford*

I dwell in the universe of the university, where the humanists these days have a special set of definitions. Sometimes, even about the seemingly obvious.

Biology dictates that there are two sexes. Culture acting on biology, so the story goes, makes gender. Thus gender differences are "socially constructed", as the jargon--a combination of jargon and argot--has it.

I teach in the humanities core course for freshmen honors students each year, where such distinctions are crucial. Once I innocently asked how many genders there were, and the puzzled response was, well, two, of course. What about homosexuals? I asked. Don't they represent different persuasions, different cultural flavors? After culture operates on biology, why should there be a one-to-one mapping?

There followed an uncomfortable silence, in which it became clear that gender was just a code word for the latest academic cultural spin put on sex.

Homosexuality was, well, not an issue. Was it biologically determined? Well, no. It was socially constructed, as were attitudes toward it. Then why was it persistent in human societies? No answer.

Much in the humanities has no answer, for the language is innocent of data. They lack the rub of the real.

Yet issues of sexuality, of that old question--what is natural? --remain. We're a highly charged, sexy species, and such matters mean much to us.

Will technology take us beyond these issues? This is a science fictional question. Can we ever achieve a total detachment of gender from sex?--that is, switch roles utterly? A total polymorphousness? (Try saying that three times...)

These are curiously analytical questions to ask of a subject so steeped in legend and shadowy emotions. Permit me, then, a digression into--as the humanists would say--rhetoric.

#

To the American male the vagina has always been a dark realm, moist and mysterious, controlled by rhythms he could not sense or slake. Beyond that often-obliging passage lay the vast, dusky domain of the uterus, where the magical act of bringing forth life occurred, buried deep. He had mere abstract knowledge of that strange cavern territory, a geography forever beyond touch. He could only hear it, with an ear pressed against a wife's belly, listening to the random thumps of babies on the way, swimming in night.

So as the American turned from the dying frontier of the west, having reached the Pacific and found its oceanic turmoil a salty vastness, he set out to find a new land. The sac that surrounds the embryo has the same saline content as the ocean -- as does the blood that knocks in our veins -- echoing the Pacific's patient emptiness. So we began our twencen frontier there: the inner ocean, dark and engulfing, enclosing each of us at our most vulnerable beginnings.

The new frontier was opened in the name of sanitation, the same impulse that brought forth indoor plumbing in the 1890s; a Pasteur-driven passion to cleanse the world and make it fresh and new again. So woman was cleaned up, like a problem in municipal maintenance.

Douches, baths, tubes you insert to suck up the dismaying flood, sprays, anti-itch powders, diaphragm, foams, pills -- they all ran together as the decades raced through, one stopgap (quite literally) blending into the next as the distinction between hygiene and birth control blurred, and the old dark land yielded to invasions, thrusts deep into its territory, things that dried and sealed off and, after a first rough chill, became an accepted piece of that dimly lit landscape, a mild discomfort at best, an ... appliance.

An old tobacconist's saying, about drawing a customer in, goes, *Start with a pinch, end with a pound*. So it was with the saline frontier. The urge was not merely one more land rape, but the desire to mechanize, to make rich cropland from the untamed, moist forest.

(Could the rigid rectangularity of the checkerboard midwest have a great deal to do with their sex lives? The furrow lines in fields draw you forward to the infinity where parallels meet, over the horizon. In the grip of such geometry, such mathematical order, the impatient, snaky pant and slither of sex doesn't fit. The American instinct, pinned to the Euclidean landscape, has been to mechanize their own reproduction, just as they did to wheat.)

Agriculture isn't a hand-dominated industry anymore. *Why do all that work?* the ads say. Sure, they're talking about household chores, cleaners, toothpaste -- but what's the most basic home-making job a woman has? *No mess, no fuss* ... So medicine makes sex safe and dry, far from the moist dark territory of the primordial mind.

But how?

The first step is basic: disconnect the groin from the id.

Ever since Freud, we've thrown up temporary barriers to the unconscious -- the newly-elected seat of all our dark, base drives. But anyone who has been through traditional analysis -- or Jungian, or anything more trendy -- knows how badly *that* works. (A recent study of psychotherapy techniques showed that patients had just as good a chance of improving if they skipped their Freudian-based therapy sessions entirely, and went for a walk.) So if you can't wrestle the id to the ground, and handcuff it securely, what next?

Disconnect! Assume that sex organs are accidents of birth. Assume that sexuality is carried in the genitalia like incidental freight, neatly packaged. Sure, there are nasty hormones in the blood. (Including that worst offender, testosterone, one of the aggressors; and we know what the United Nations thinks of *them*.) But those hormones are easily fixed -- just tinker with the glands. Most of them are lodged in those dictatorial organs, the genitals. Outlying areas can be mopped up later.

So some feminists tell us that men and women are basically alike, except -- in a coolly analytical phrase I first heard from Matra Randall, an sf writer of the 1970s -- *except for the plumbing*. (Recall the 1890s. Here lies the final victory of the flush toilet.)

It is tempting to see sex as a set of detachable appliances, fitted to the basic human body frame at birth. Then we can all believe that, way down deep, we're really the same unisex model.

*E pluribus unum*. Chevy products are all the same car, you know -- even though the add-ons and extras are deceptive, the real car has the identical engine, gears, axle. As with products, why not with people?

Social behavior can be endlessly altered, trimmed, sanitized, so this argument goes -- if we'll just overlook the, uh, plumbing. The eternal edgy peace between men and women can then be smoothed over, and final treaties signed, if we apply a bit of operant conditioning -- that ugly but useful phrase that comes from Skinner's neoPavlovian work.

#

Seem too simple-minded? Orwellian? Something out of *Brave New World*?

Look at Heavy Metal's recurrent images: women coupling with things that are half-machine; androgyny rampant; high tech meets low lust. Nowhere is the American ambivalence about sexuality reflected better than in these images, saturated with the strange eroticism of the man-machine interface.

Or look to science fiction. The most interesting version of future sexuality to emerge in the 1970s was John Varley's quick-change utopia, in which people switch sexes whenever taste dictates. From The Ophiuchi Hotline through Steel Beach, he envisioned a society restless with change--indeed, alive with metamorphosis.

This ferment produces a remarkably laissez-faire society, in which family roles dissolve. All is optional. Varley assumes that there will be no more racism or sexism in such a world, because everyone will have the ability to be anything. When you can be the Other, there soon is none.

The next, subtle yet crucial assumption is that, when you switch, you take no baggage with you. The details of the process are high tech indeed -- you speed-grow a clone of yourself, have your brain transplanted -- or just "map" the brain -- and *zap* you're reborn.

Is this plausible? More to the point, do Varley's assumptions set the stage for a fiction that can tell us something about the nature of sexuality and society? Does the brain flip-flop from male to female, on orders from the hormones?

We now know by direct experiment that men use one local part on one side of their brains to process sound. Women, on the other hand, use both sides in a more diffuse manner. This may explain why girls have greater early verbal fluency, while men's abilities grown steadily greater from a slow start.

Why did our evolution select this substantial difference? Seldom is a trait taken on for a single cause, especially in the complex warrens of our neural labyrinths, where abilities cross-link. We will probably never know why our specializations arose. But the plain differences between men and women stand out; we are moderately shaped for specialized tasks.

Men are better at high-power work, using motor muscles. Their sense of spatial arrangement is better and appears earlier. Women can sit longer, do delicate hand-eye work more adeptly, have better color perception. (Partial color blindness, such as I have, is carried by the female, though; one of evolution's little jokes.)

We differ. Nature wanted it that way. On average, with a considerable spread in individual abilities within each sex. Plenty of women in my neighborhood can outrun their mates.

So consider an opposite tide of thought about sex, one moored in the molecular architecture. Edward Wilson's *Sociobiology* (1975) sounded the trumpet for an enduring genetic program, seated far back in the brain, not lodged in the organs. Hardwired sexuality that could not be pried out.

Wilson's *On Human Nature* (1978) enraged people across the entire political/social spectrum. Anyone who believed in the high merit and ultimate perfectibility of humans was offended -- from the gentle philosophical humanists, to the flinty-eyed, up-against-the-wall Stalinist-Marxists.

Wilson's point of view is simple, and comes from an essentially conservative notion: that much social behavior springs from genetic programming. Society itself -- insect or human -- is often a manifestation of genetic needs.

So are sexual roles. An example: Humans (and other primates) produce few children, and nurture them intensively. A female's reproductive potential is then limited by her ability to provide nurture. A male, though, can sire many more young than a single female can bear and raise. The more females he mates with, the greater his reproductive success -- i.e., how many of the next generation carry his genes. Males then compete to fertilize females, investing little in each offspring.

On the other hand, the female's preferred strategy is to choose a male who will lend a hand in bringing up the kids. A well-respected study of western women by anthropologist Heather Fowler found that women associate two basic symbols with sexually attractive men: money and status. Such men can provide good nurturing background, steadiness, security -- they're success-symbols. Similarly, men notoriously go for women with unwrinkled skin (therefore younger, able to reproduce better), large breasts (better nurture?) and a "certain sexual receptivity" (promising a ready "conquest").

Do men and women think this through? No! They're wired for it, through pleasure. In most societies, sex is widely regarded as something men seek and women dispense. This attitude is so common across cultures that it cannot be an accident.

Still, it's a wise man who knows his own son -- so cuckoldry is a rage-producing taboo. A man who dutifully rears children who do not, in fact, carrying his genetic code, never gets represented in the next generation. In our operas, he is the butt of jokes.

It's not surprising that evolution has selected for males who have strong views on such matters. The prime reason for murders of women by men, in both America and Africa, is suspected or actual female infidelity. It's even an important cause of murder among male gays. Its passions run deep.

Gays, in fact, represent one of the unexpected insights that a good scientific theory gives. The maladjustments many male gays have with their own sexual impulses represent something very deep -- an abiding sense of frustration over the conflict between genetically driven patterns and what society wants us to do. The family, after all, is a rickety cage, restraining male promiscuity, husbanding (literally) resources, providing continuity to all. Society shores up fami-

ly life in many ways, to build big, stable institutions based on the small, private virtues learned at home. This disguises some of our innate drives.

To see the naked patterns of sexual behavior, then, look to homosexual behavior. There, society's bonds are gone. Every study shows that gay males tend strongly toward one night stands. Lesbians are much more apt to pair-bond, forming long term relationships. The two divergent strategies laid bare.

Ironically, then, we can see our genetic heritage most clearly in the patterns of the homosexual outgroup. Doubly ironic, since this is the one group that passes on less of its genetic material than do the couples of suburbia.

Why, then, any homosexuality at all? The fashionable attitudes of our time hold that homosexuality is perfectly all right because it is a right, like free speech. The political language revolves around "sexual preference," trivializing a profound inner sense into a fashion choice. Who ever looked over the sexual opportunities, like shopping?

A more persuasive argument rests on biology itself. Homosexuality persists in all societies, and indeed, among the higher primates generally, because it has an evolutionary role.

Explaining why brought into play the idea of "kinship selection". The term itself came from studying why groups in the wild can manifest seemingly odd behaviors, ones not immediately useful in survival.

This means that a gay man or woman can work for the betterment of his relations, laboring in the tribe as specialized labor, free of the burden of child rearing. Gay males might have been leaders, or explorers, or craftsmen. They might have stayed close to the mothers, to protect while the other men were away. Lesbians could have done general service in child rearing, or helped hunt (women often have a better sense of smell). These are available, specialized labors, just as men's and women's bodies adapted to special tasks.

These ideas resemble "Just So"-style stories explaining why given traits emerged. The crucial point is that they did emerge, in the crucible of rapid human evolution.

The genes which can occasionally confer homosexuality (in about one percent of the human population) are shared by kinfolk. Usually the slight genetic influence does not manifest itself as homosexuality, and so gets transmitted through ordinary heterosexual bonds.

But because the gay brother or sister labors on, the tribe as a whole has a better chance of surviving. Homosexuality need not be accepted because it is a right, but rather because it is indeed natural. It is preferred as a minority strategy by evolution of the hunter-gatherer hominids we once were...and still are.

The ancient past speaks to us, but we seldom hear. I live in a town with about 30% gay population. The mayor is gay, and a friend of mine. He has been selected for, far back in Africa.

I suppose whatever he does in the bedroom does not fit the antiseptic American ideal. He does far more outside it, for our community, than I, standard issue heterosexual male, will ever do.

He belongs here. He is natural. So are the two lesbians on the city council.

I held, back in that humanities class, that we could productively consider both homosexual modes as alternate social/biological strategies which demonstrably propagate themselves. They have their own cultures, intermingling with the subcultures of men-alone and women-alone.

Perhaps, to make a distinction between the simple biological sexes and the cultural genders, we should speak of four genders. Four strategies.

#

So the evidence is in: there are deep currents in the human psyche, ingrained in the DNA, that drive human sexuality. We do not learn to be men and women solely from society. (Indeed, how could anybody who has passed through the hormonal roller coaster of adolescence possibly believe otherwise?)

Fast-changing society doesn't always like those deep drives. It does what it can, through conditioning, to shape them to its benefit.

The American impulse to mechanize its own sexuality has to be looked at this way. It seeks not just the victory of the vaginal deodorant tycoons; the Cause extends down to the soft-spoken socialists who dream of Perfectible Mankind, and to the feminists who long for the Good Male. Once we were devils, but we can become angels. Fine ideals, perhaps, but founded on the sand of bad science.

All such believers in social perfection are manipulators. They want to forget the press of the past, to dismiss evolution as a fever dream that will pass, if we merely Think Right.

A symptom of this has been the drift toward androgyny. The outright manifestation is the growing number of sex change operations. These are anatomically crude -- a long way from add-water-and-stir clones -- and psychologically high-risk.

Yet they spring from an underlying philosophy that is widespread: that you can fix up the hormones, tinker with the genitals, and make yourself over. Cast off your sexual hangups! Trade in that old set of synapses! Buy the new, *new*, NEW (fill in sex of your choice).

John Varley's sex-change utopia is not a useful fictional/laboratory for trying out our sexual stereotypes, because it, too, is based on a stereotype -- Malleable Man. Fictional lessons, if they are to be used, must make some contact with our real lives. And we are not infinitely changeable.

There are helically-stored, immutable instructions impressed into the human brain, and these cannot ultimately be ignored.

One of the central lessons of our century is that the opposite ideal has produced vast police states. The program of the Soviet Empire and its imitation, client states was to bring about the millennium by conditioning the populace. Orwell -- arguably the greatest English sf writer since Wells -- saw clearly that communists and Nazis alike thought they could produce a New Man from the tattered cloth of ordinary folk, given enough conditioning. Orwell was terrified that it work too well. Luckily, time has proven him wrong--but it was a near thing.

Why do we learn so little from such a clear case? A proper regard for the irreducible traits we carry would lighten the hand of the reformers, make a wiser world.

In sf, our concern for mind-body dualities and man-machine interfaces ignores a singular fact. Our minds aren't cleanly divided along a software/hardware divide. Our software, if you like, redesigns its hardware over time, laying down fresh pathways, modifying others. Synapses build anew as you sleep.

Our sexuality--polymorphous and powerful as it is--will not abide easy changes in the "software". Hormones and neurological wiring can't be neatly patched, trimmed, deleted, copied or edited.

The weight of what we have been is considerable. A woman who has been a man is not the same as a woman who has never been otherwise, or wished to be. Freedom, even the blithe liberty technology can convey, is both the ability to change vectors, and having the weight of character to make changes mean something.

Our dreams of escaping our selves, escaping even history, is in the end the longing for a kind of triviality. Trans-sexuals can strive for the Other, but they cannot ape the embedded hormones, the delicate balances of glands, the full and weighty life that the mind-body synthesis commands. Motherhood, fatherhood, the ecstasy of union--these are not experiences detachable from the rest of life.

To be interchangeable may make us more free, but it would also make our lives matter less. Sexuality, it seems to me, can be aided by technology only at the margin. Abortion, contraception, sanitation--all help. In the decades to come, biotechnology will far transcend these rather simple options, presenting us with fresh choices which will excite us, horrify us, tempt us, and provoke endless arguments--all dancing about one central question: who are we?

We are the thinking beings moored in the body. We will always have pangs of love, of jealousy, of loss. Men and women will always clash, because they have different sexual strategies. This struggle is part of the sexual specialization we see in our bodies, which evolution in old Africa has made moderately different.

Difference brings us agony and amusement alike. The tension between men and women is part of our power. The same stresses which make for romantic comedy helped us transcend the veldt.

Even in the glitzy techno-future, we cannot solve our problems and remain recognizably human by slicing up the human experience into sanitized, detachable parts. The unconscious, and the body it is deeply rooted in, will be heard.

*Comments (and objections!) to this column are welcome. Please send them to Gregory Benford, Physics Department, Univ. Calif., Irvine, CA 92717. For e-mail: gbenford@uci.edu.*

# ROSY'S PHOTO ALBUM



*Rose-Marie Lillian*

It was around 1968 when I accompanied my parents to Madeira Beach, near Tampa, and the Milford Writers' Conference hosted by Damon Knight. Anne McCaffrey and JoAnna Russ were two of the many top-flight writers there, and it's sad to realize that science fiction lost both of these great writers this year.

I hadn't read a word either had written, but everyone was kind to the newly minted teenager that was me. They even got on well together at the conference. I did my usual schtick of taking Polaroids one afternoon, asking each writer to to autograph the back of her portrait. No one refused either the photograph or the autograph.

John Campbell told us a few years later, that he got a kick out of Anne McCaffrey coming to the *Analog* offices wearing a long luxurious black cape.







*Darlene Marshall is the pen-name of SF fan Eve Ackerman [a friend and a Sista SFPA member]. Marshall writes historical romance featuring pirates, privateers, smugglers and a possum or two. You can read reviews and excerpts at her website, [www.darlenemarshall.com](http://www.darlenemarshall.com). Her latest novel, **Sea Change**, is available now in print and eBook editions, and she's hard at work on her next book.*

# I Love a Happy Ending

*Darlene Marshall*

In 2010, US book sales looked like this:

Religion/inspirational: \$759 million  
Mystery: \$682 million  
Science fiction/fantasy: \$559 million  
Classic literary fiction: \$455 million

And yet, which is the genre that gets the least respect, that garners the most snickers over the covers, that prompts people to ask me, "When are you going to write a serious novel?"

Hint: It's the genre that earns the most money. The Romance genre. In 2010 Romance book sales were *\$1.358 billion\** in the US.

I am proud to be an author writing award-winning historical romance, and I'm tired of justifying my career choice. But it's not just me. In *Everything I Know About Love I Learned from Romance Novels\*\**, Sarah Wendell of the noted website "Smart Bitches, Trashy Books" (<http://smartbitchestrashybooks.com>) says, "...many people who disdain the romance genre and look down on the women who read it presume that reading about courtship, emotional fulfillment, and rather fantastic orgasms leads to an unrealistic expectation of real life... That accusation implies that we don't know the difference between fantasy and real life, and frankly, it's sexist as well."

She's right, and she's not the only person who feels that way. Romance novels (and by that I mean the genre, not the historical definition of a literary romance, e.g. *Orlando Furioso*) are now taken seriously and studied in academia in Women's Studies programs and by organizations like the International Association for the Study of Popular Romance and the Journal of Popular Romance Studies. The publishing industry certainly pays attention and you can ask any big box bookstore what their sales would look like tomorrow if the Romance genre section was taken out. It's part of the economic force keeping those bricks & mortar stores alive. An independent bookstore that told me they wouldn't carry "those sorts of novels" when I approached them about stocking my books announced last week they're closing due to lack of sales. So it goes.

Not surprisingly, people who don't read romance novels tend to be puzzled by their appeal. Or perhaps they read one novel in the 80s, decided it was trash, and never tried another. Or romance novels don't fit their idea of what's "appropriate" reading material.

There's a video trailer getting a lot of hits right now by an author named Maya Rodale for her book *Dangerous Books for Girls—the Bad Reputation of Romance Novels Explained*. In the trailer, Rodale says romance novels,

“depict stories of women choosing to live and love to a higher standard, *and they are rewarded for it in the end.*” (Emphasis mine)

Contrast that with literary fiction, where the woman ends up alone or dead at the end of the book after making risky choices while she tried to live her life. *Madame Bovary*, anyone? It’s akin to when people tell me *Wuthering Heights* is a great romance novel and I want to leap up and scream, “*Jane Eyre* is a great romance novel, *Wuthering Heights* is literary fiction!” Heathcliff is a *putz* who dies as he deserves after abusing people (And abusing dogs! Dogs!), and Catherine is also dead at the end. *Jane Eyre*, on the other hand, is about a strong woman who overcomes adversity, isn’t willing to settle (Sinjin) and waits for her one true love (Rochester) to repent, grovel, be disasterized and come to realize they must be together to be happy. And at the end Jane is happy! Maybe happy ever after! What’s wrong with that? Nothing. Nothing at all.

The “lady novelist” or “authoress” was a profession that opened doors in past centuries, according to Rodale, and “brought women into the marketplace in a powerful way as both sellers and buyers.” Even today there are men who write romance under a female penname because they believe that women romance readers will trust the brand better if it’s written by another woman. According to RWA, “The author ‘is the key factor in both driving consumers to buy a book as well as making consumers aware of a particular book’...This is especially true of romance authors, as 50 percent of romance buyers stated the author was the reason for the book purchase.”

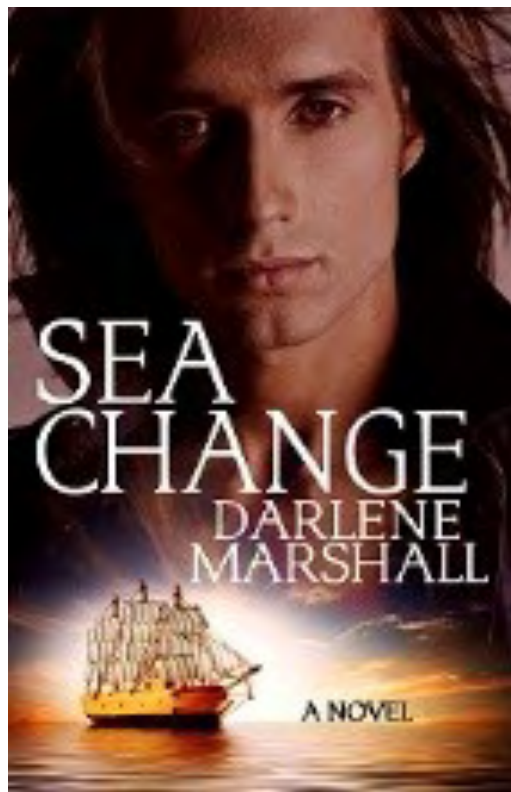
To that end, social media has become an extremely important marketing tool for most authors in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and romance authors were early users because we know how important that contact with our readers is to our sales.

My fannish friends often ask why I choose to write romance novels after 30 years in SF fandom.

The easy answer is the fake people in my head are 19<sup>th</sup> C. pirates, not aliens. I do love SF, especially the classic novels and short stories of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> C. But there’s a particular satisfaction I get reading romance novels, and I write the books I do because I want to share that love with others. Many fans remember a science fiction novel as being their favorite book in childhood. My favorite novel wasn’t SF, but was the historical *Mara, Daughter of the Nile* by Eloise Jarvis McGraw, a book still in print today for young readers. I have my own copy. *Mara* is the tale of a plucky slave girl in Ancient Egypt who gets caught up in spycraft and palace intrigue, and falls under the gaze of an enigmatic but handsome young priest who’s more than he seems. I loved it. Exotic settings, adventure, a heroine who has to forge her own path and a hunky hero. What more could I ask for? So when I began to think that maybe I could write a book and sell it, I asked myself, “What stories do you like?” and the answer was ones (with apologies to G. Keillor) where the women are strong and the men good-looking, where she can have adventures, save herself and him, and end up with happiness at the end.

That’s why I read romance novels, and that’s why other readers come back to the genre. We want a story that entertains, that brings us into other worlds, and that leaves us satisfied at the conclusion. A well-written tale is worth reading, no matter what genre. If you want tips on what romance novels to read, check out the shopping list in the back of *Everything I Know...* or write me at [darlenemarshall\[at\]darlenemarshall\[dot\]com](mailto:darlenemarshall[at]darlenemarshall[dot]com). I’m always happy to share my love of romance novels with other readers.

\*these and subsequent stats from ROMStats 2010, from Romance Writers of America: [http://www.rwa.org/cs/the\\_romance\\_genre/romance\\_literature\\_statistics/industry\\_statistics](http://www.rwa.org/cs/the_romance_genre/romance_literature_statistics/industry_statistics)



\*\*Full disclosure—I’m quoted at least three times in *Everything I Know About Love I Learned From Romance Novels*. I think that rocks.

# WHY SO SERIOUS?

*Joseph T. Major*

*When you were young and your heart was an open book  
You used to say live and let live  
(you know you did, you know you did, you know you did)  
But in this ever changing world in which we live in  
Makes you give in and choke  
Say, 'Live and let joke'.*

“... I will explain to you briefly,” continued The Big Man, ‘why it is that you are not dead, why you have been permitted to enjoy the sensation of pain instead of adding to the pollution of the Harlem River from the folds of what is peculiarly known as a cement overcoat.’”

He paused for a moment and then spoke.

“Mister Bond, I suffer from boredom. I am a prey to what the early Christians called ‘accide’, the deadly lethargy that envelops those who are sated, those who have no more desires. I am absolutely pre-eminent in my chosen profession, trusted by those who occasionally employ my talents, feared and instantly obeyed by those whom I myself employ. I have, literally, no more worlds to conquer within my chosen orbit. Alas, it is too late in my life to change that orbit for another one, and since power is the goal of all ambition, it is unlikely that I could possibly acquire more power in another sphere than I already possess in this one.”

Bond listened with part of his mind. With the other half he was already planning. He sensed the presence of Solitaire, but he kept his eyes off her. He gazed steadily across the table at the great grey face with its unwinking golden eyes.

The soft voice continued.

“Mister Bond, I take pleasure now only in artistry, in the polish and finesse which I can bring to my organization. It has become almost a mania with me to impart an absolute rightness, a high elegance, to the execution of my affairs. Each day, Mister Bond, I try and set myself still higher standards of subtlety and technical polish so that each of my proceedings may be a work of art, bearing my signature as clearly as the creations of, let us say, Benvenuto Cellini. I am content, for the time being, to be my only judge, but I sincerely believe, Mister Bond, that the approach to perfection which I am steadily achieving in my operations will ultimately win recognition in the history of our times.”

Mr Big paused. Bond saw that his great yellow eyes were wide, as if he saw visions. He’s a raving megalomaniac, thought Bond. And all the more dangerous because of it. The fault in most





criminal minds was that greed was their only impulse. A dedicated mind was another matter. This man was no gangster. He was a menace. Bond was fascinated and slightly awestruck.

The intercom buzzed. Mr Big made a brief moue of annoyance, and then pressed a switch.

"Somebody here for you. They say they've killed The Joker. They've come for the reward."

"They bring proof?"

"They say they've brought the body."

"Show them in. I wish to see it."

He raised his eyes from the mechanism and stared into Bond's again.

"You are about to see an example of my standards. A certain man has defied me. I found his actions to be disruptive. As I have said, I pride myself on my smoothness of action. This was a man who acted in an entirely antagonistic means towards the same end, a man who desired to be as disruptive and chaotic as human action could

achieve. He fancied himself immune to my retaliation. Such a man could not organize his thoughts for a sufficient time to realise the power of human greed. A mere proffer of five hundred thousand dollars for his demise was sufficient to overcome the imagined loyalty of his associates. Had they been able to deliver him alive, they would have received twice as much. I wished to have taught him some manners before I dealt with him."

The Joker had been able to escape the attentions of the American police authorities and of the Secret Service alike, as though he had had fern seed in his scarred mouth, thought Bond. If his associates could have been approached, their cupidity taken into account, perhaps their problems could have been solved by now.

The doors opened, and two men entered, carrying a long bundle draped in black. A woman followed them. She was athletic, in a manner that was peculiar to American women, who would take advantage of the vast leisure available to them by spending endless hours performing physical training exercises. The majority of them were converted to sexless, muscular creatures.

This woman was one of the fortunate few. She retained a womanly shape, though her body was patently strong. Her face was open and ingenuous, with two great hanks of fair hair tied up and standing out on either side of her head, and bright blue eyes. A certain familiarity in her posture and attitude nagged at the fringes of Bond's mind.

She must have been the one in charge, for she indicated to the two men to place the bundle on the desk in front of Mr Big. He got to his feet and unwrapped one end. Bond recognized the scarred white face and the verdigris hair that appeared. So much for that!

Mr Big gave a grunt of satisfaction and turned to face the woman.

"So. Dead you get five hundred . . ."

With one smooth motion the dead man got up from the desk and grappled Mr Big in a powerful grip. Behind him Bond could hear a thud, and Tee-Hee collapsed to the floor, unconscious if not dead. The Joker had a knife in one hand, which he thrust into Mr Big's mouth. "How about alive?" he said, in that jesting, threatening tone of his.

He tilted his head slightly.

"Do you want to know how I got these scars? My father was a drinker and a fiend. He'd beat Mommy right in front of me. One night he goes off crazier than usual, mommy gets the kitchen knife to defend herself. He doesn't like that. Not. One. Bit.

"So, me watching, he takes the knife to her, laughing while he does it. Turns to me and says, 'Why so serious?' Comes at me with the knife — 'Why so serious?' Sticks the blade in my mouth — 'Let's put a *smile* on that face,' and . . ."

He paused. Mr Big was as stunned as ever any man had ever been, all his intricate and perfect plans, all his perfectionistic and complicated schemes undone by a man who was immune to rational calculations. He looked into The



Joker's black-rimmed eyes, unable for once in his life to respond. In response, The Joker looked over his shoulder, at Bond, and then spoke.

*"Why so serious?"*

With one quick assassin's thrust The Joker drove the knife up through the roof of Mr Big's mouth, into his brain. The Big Man collapsed, dead, as his captor released him to fall on the floor.

The Joker looked again at Bond, put his hands together, and rested his face against them. "Why, if it isn't my old friend Mr. Bond! Ohhh . . . you're hurt. Now I believe whatever doesn't kill you simply makes you . . . stranger.

Harley, remember our old friend Mr. Bond?"

"Sure thing, Mr. J!" the girl said.

Bond remembered her now, the girl in the black and red jester outfit who had been as agile as a gymnast and strong as a man. Her voice was that of a naive girl. She came up to The Joker, stood on tiptoes, and kissed his scarred cheek.

"Now boys, go tend to the fortuneteller over there, and Harley . . . be a lamb and sweep out the trash."

"Now what are you going to do? What's your plan?" Bond said.

As the woman began dragging Mr Big's corpse away and the two hoods tied Solitaire to her chair, The Joker turned his scarred face towards Bond.

"As for you, do I really look like a guy with a plan? You know what I am? I'm a dog chasing cars. I wouldn't know what to do with one if I caught it. You know, I just . . . do things. The mob has plans, the cops have plans, the late Mr. Big here had plans. You know, they're schemers. Schemers trying to control their little worlds. I'm not a schemer. I try to show the schemers how pathetic their attempts to control things really are. So, when I say that you and your girlfriend here with the deck of cards were nothing personal, you know that I'm telling the truth. It's the schemers that put you where you are. You were a schemer, you had plans, and look where that got you.

"I just did what I do best. I took his little plan and I turned it on itself. Hmmm? You know . . . You know what I've noticed? Nobody panics when things go "according to plan." Even if the plan is horrifying! If, tomorrow, I tell the press that, like, a gang banger will get shot, or a truckload of soldiers will be blown up, nobody panics, because it's all "part of the plan." But when I say that one little old mob boss will die, well then everyone loses their minds!

"Introduce a little anarchy. Upset the established order, and everything becomes chaos. I'm an agent of chaos. Oh, and you know the thing about chaos? It's fair!"

He turned and handed a playing card to Solitaire, who had been tied to her chair by his thugs while he was talking.

"Why don't you give me a call when you want to start taking things a little more seriously? Here's my card."

He was holding it so that Bond could see the face. It was, perhaps inevitably, a joker.

— *Not created by Bob Kane or Ian Fleming*



*Frankie MacDonald*

**THE CHALLENGER**  
**TRIBUTE**

**BOBBI**  
**ARMBRUSTER**

The site was Miami, the occasion was Suncon, the year was 1977, and I was meeting Bobbi Armsuter for the first time. My first words to her sounded clever at the time. They fit in with a villain-themed titling schtick I had going in LASFAPA, the great Los Angeles-based amateur press association, of which I was a member and she was, well, queen.

They were “Son of Sam wants you!”

I can’t blame Mr. Berkowitz, although I would certainly throw myself in front of his Bulldog should he imperil Bobbi. She was, she remains, one of SF fandom’s glories, a worldcon workhorse, a light of LASFS and a great loyal friend to any and every. Bobbi’s latest project is as a “Flying Monkee” on the staff of Chicon 7, and next year’s worldcon could not ask for better.



*Linda Miller*

There are people you come to love in this fandom, and Bobbi Armbruster stands at the fore of them.



# The Predictions of H.G. Wells

Joseph Green



NOTE: Several years ago I did a study on the accuracy of science-fiction predictions by four acknowledged masters of the field, two older (Verne and Wells) and two modern (Heinlein and Clarke). That scholarly study appears elsewhere. This is a condensed and abridged version of the article on Wells, with the numerous accompanying notes either incorporated or discarded. The articles on the other three writers appeared in earlier issues of *Challenger*.

H. G. Wells has been, and remains, one of the two seminal figures in modern science fiction. He achieved this distinction by being the first major science fiction writer to explore, in fictional extrapolations, the effects of scientific discovery and technological innovation on society; a mainstay of the genre in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His means sometimes seemed unlikely, but the ends he achieved were penetrating and insightful comments on Man and society (more specifically, the English society of his day).

Wells was a very different writer from Jules Verne, who produced wonderful imaginary inventions but seldom attempted to explore in any detail the social changes these would engender. Wells was fully aware that his society was in a state of flux, inspired by recurring technological breakthroughs. He wanted to help shape and form the new social order he saw emerging from the ferment.

The MacMillan edition of *The Shape of Things to Come* specifically separates the "Books by H.G. Wells" front-matter page into "Novels", "Fantastic and Imaginative Romances", "Short Stories Collected Under the Following Titles", and "Books on Social, Religious and Political Questions". It was customary, when this book was published in 1933, to separate so-called 'serious works' from lightweight fancies such as science fiction or fantasy novels. Yet today it is clear that Wells' lasting works were the so-called romances, while the novels thought of as serious works have been largely forgotten. It's ironic that his attempts to be influential through semi-factual books were generally ineffective, while his fictional romances influenced untold millions of people; though perhaps in subtle and not easily provable ways. An examination of the accuracy of the fictional predictions in seven of his 'scientific romances' follows.

*The Time Machine*, Wells' first full-length science fiction novel, is an excellent work of speculative fiction, but not very scientific in either its presentation or conclusions. Wells provides no actual explanation of the principles underlying time travel. None of its projections have come true, or are likely to do so in the foreseeable future. It has the virtue of mental stimulation, of opening up the mind to new possibilities, but has little to offer in the way of future predictions that can be checked for accuracy today.

Wells' second scientific romance, *The Island Of Dr. Moreau*, is equally unscientific, but interesting for its concepts. The essence of the story is that the title character sets out to change animals into human analogues by means of drugs (unspecified) and surgery. He succeeds to a remarkable degree, including having most animals develop the ability to speak. After he is eventually killed by one of his creations, the numerous animals he changed start reverting to their original state, including surgically altered

bones returning to their pre-operation configuration (an unlikely prospect).

This novel has just a touch of scientific underpinning, not enough to convince a high school student of its credibility. The idea of selective breeding obviously occurred to Wells, but must have been discarded due to the lengths of time involved. He did not foresee genetic manipulation, which would have been a good intuitive leap forward and much more convincing.

Still, *The Island Of Dr. Moreau* has the virtue of an important concept, the idea that scientific intervention can quickly change the basic characteristics of an animal's form (including the human one). The beneficial aspects of such a capability are only beginning to emerge today. Despite its scientific implausibility this book has had, and continues to have, an impact on the public. It has been made into a movie several times. The prejudice this book, the movies, and their many imitators have created in the mind of the public is an unmeasured but very real handicap to serious biological researchers who must use animals in their work.

In *The Invisible Man*, Wells again shirks the scientific discovery needed to explain his invention, and instead substitutes an examination of how such a person might actually function in the society of Wells' day. There are no predictions worth mentioning, and the reactions of the English public to an invisible man roaming around are fairly obvious. This novel is far better as literature than as science fiction.

*The War of the Worlds* follows Wells' usual pattern, with interesting concepts and little real science. The Martians reach Earth riding inside huge shells fired from guns on Mars, a ridiculous idea perhaps stolen from Verne. Once here the Martians use miraculous weapons which are deadly against English armies circa 1900. One of these bears a strong resemblance to the modern laser, a good hit. But the book contains few other predictions that have come true. As a novel it is quite well done, and very effective as a work of literature. It too has had several movie incarnations, one fairly recently.

*The First Hen in the Moon* features an interesting science fiction concept which has been used many times since, the discovery of a material called Cavorite which is impervious to gravity. Unfortunately, this idea has yet to be translated into reality, and there seems no prospect of a breakthrough in this region of physics for the foreseeable future. The exact means by which the material is made opaque to gravity is not, of course, explained in detail.

Wells provided several speculations in this book which time has proven fairly accurate. One was that the stars would shine with supernal brightness if seen from above the atmosphere. Another was that the one-sixth gravity of the moon's surface would make humans extremely strong there, able to leap high, carry immense weights, etc. But he also predicted lunar craters filled with air which could grow plants during the sunlit hours, underground caverns where Selenites lived and were well supplied with air, a lunar civilization, etc., all of which were never plausible. In smaller details, he thought that being in zero gravity would decrease appetite, causing people to eat much less. We now know it takes as many if not more calories to sustain a person in zero G as on the ground.

*The Food of the Gods* is one of the most interesting of Wells' books, in addition to speculating in areas where real science has now made some major advances. The essential idea is that two scientists discover a food which makes any creature that eats it grow to a tremendous size. We now have growth hormones which can increase the size of livestock, and others which can correct genetic deficiencies and make (some) stunted human children grow to the normal expected size.



This novel is told in two parts, each essentially complete within itself. In the first the new discovery, Boomfood, is invented and through carelessness allowed to reach animals. Three types, rats, chickens, and hornets, are affected. All three grow to eight or ten times normal size. (Wells makes no allowance for the fact a hornet could not fly with that much weight and the same proportional wingspan.) The first book ends when all the animals have been captured or killed. This part of the novel has since inspired a thousand imitations, most of which appeared before the public as very poor movies.

In Books Two and Three the reader learns that Boomfood has been fed to a few human children as well, and this causes social complications. Children cannot simply be killed and forgotten. Wells does a very effective job of comparing the raising of such children to the human norm. (One idea, of more literary than scientific merit, is that any creature which eats Boomfood while young will die if the food is later taken away. Some such literary device is needed to make the story logic hang together.) He provides a fairly detailed description of how to raise a child to maximize its intelligence, one that sounds as if it came from modern child psychology books. For example, the affected babies were provided a stimulating environment, including educational toys, picture frames designed to have their contents changed at regular intervals, structural toys to be assembled, etc.

This book ends with the giant, highly intelligent children having reached young adulthood and come into serious conflict with the normal humans around them -- as one would expect. The issue of who will conquer is not resolved. The details of the growth of the children, their development into competent adults, and the final break with normal humans are convincingly worked out. Great physical growth without compensating structural change is poor biology, but as usual with Wells, the reader has no difficulty suspending disbelief for the sake of the story. The social interaction between the giant children and the society around them are the heart of the novel, and this is very well handled.

*In the Days of the Comet* is a very bad book indeed. The essential idea is that a comet passes near the Earth, immersing our planet in a gas which changes everybody into creatures of sweetness and light. The novel is long, boring, scientifically unbelievable, and with endless discursions on the evils of English society of the early 1900s. This book is best forgotten, if you like Wells.

Most of Wells' nonfiction works dealt with current social problems that have since passed from the scene. *The Shape of Things to Come* was his last major work; science fiction with most of the trappings of fiction removed. The book was published in 1933, and in it Wells accurately predicted World War II. He even had Japan enter the war on the Axis side. But after those two "hits" the "misses" dominate, and when the book moves into developments after the war it is far, far off from what actually happened.

Wells was best at opening up the mind to new possibilities, inspiring optimism toward the process of change, and creating an acceptance of science as a means of improving the world. He had one of the most fertile imaginations of his day, and a writing skill that usually exceeded that of his contemporaries. Most important of all, he was *first*! He explored most of the major concepts of modern science fiction, with the exception of interstellar travel, moving between dimensions, and a few others. He is justly called the father of sociological science fiction, the dominant preoccupation of most practicing writers in the genre today. His place in literature in general, and science fiction in particular, is secure.





## *The Windsors and I Go Way Back*

When I was only a little older than a yolk, the Royal Family was a Presence in Canada. If you took the change from your pocket, the tiny heads of George VI and Elizabeth II looked up at you, minted in copper, nickel and *real* silver. Occasionally, even George V or Edward VII looked back. It was the same with postage stamps. In those days, we licked plain, simple portraits of the royal profiles – none of the fancy four-colour, photographic, holographic, embossed and foil-accented objets d'art that today's philatelist delights in. In post offices, courtrooms, train stations, schools and churches across the land, faces of monarchy stared blindly as we passed by. We stood up to sing (or mime) "God Saves the Queen" before a movie show or football game. Morning in school was begun with the same warbling strains of "God save our graaashus Queen, God save our nooooo-bul Queen..." "If there were ever more fatuous lyrics, they could only have been sung by a very simple-minded downstairs maid. My mother couldn't stand it in her day, and rebelled by singing "God Save my Alley Cat, Feed It on Bread and Fat." Yet, the Royal Arms of Canada were stamped, painted or impressed on everything from cigarette packages to park benches. Before I was old enough to eat from an adult plate, I was fed from a Royal Doulton Bunnykins dish. By such subtle reminders we were made members of the Empire.

Like it or not, everything was "Royal" – the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Royal York Hotel, the Royal Canadian Navy, the Royal Mail, the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, the Royal Ontario College of Art, the Royal Ontario Museum, the Royal Alexandra Theatre, the Royal Bank, Royal Crown Cola, Royal Insurance, Royal cigarettes, Royal Pudding and (most of all) Royal Births and Weddings.

It's hard to recall just how many of the media orgasms we call a Royal Wedding that I have suffered through. Elizabeth's nuptials to Prince Philip were, thankfully, well before my time. I have dim memories of the Queen's coronation in 1952, though. Then there was her younger sister, Princess Margaret, who was married in 1960. I don't recall the first thing about it, for which I am grateful. But, then, why should I remember anything at all about such an inconsequential event? Margaret was a spare part in the Royal Family. After the birth of Prince Charles, she was no longer in line for the crown if Elizabeth II passed away – and the Family never did find any good use for her.

But Elizabeth produced heirs of her own, who *were* in line for the Throne.

Charles was born in 1948. This was three years before *my* own birth, so I was happily able to ignore *his*. Princess Anne is a year younger than her brother, sparing me *her* birth as well. Prince Andrew was born in 1960, though, and Prince

# Whose Royals Are They Anyway?



Sir Taral Wayne  
KGB, MI6, UFO

*A trifling Diversion in which the Author begs the Reader allow him to shed light upon several diverse Topics such as the Fraternity of Nations known to us as The British Commonwealth, Postage Stamps, Germans, Scots, Irish, and even Welshmen, the Misuse of the Medium known to us as Television, the Beheading of Monarchs, Pennies, Roses, Wizards and the Rare Aquatic Giraffe. If it so please, view these idle Thoughts and Speculations with an uncritical eye, inasmuch as they were penned by Yours Truly with Tongue Firmly in Place in that Part of the Mouth that is most commonly called the "Cheek!"*

Edward in 1964. I was quite old enough to be bored on both occasions. Worse was in store... all four would be *married*. In fact, all were married *more* than once, except for the one who was commonly suspected to be gay. So of course there were Royal divorces as well. All were treated as public spectacles, of course.

Some people ate up the Royal Soap Opera. The same sort of person who knows Oprah's weight that week and follows the criminal proceedings against Michael Jackson's personal physician are susceptible to relationships manufactured for them by the media, I presume. These are people with a desperate need to feel close to celebrities they've never met – and never will. The media is only too happy to provide such people with the illusion that they are intimates of the Royal Family, by covering Royal Marriages more thoroughly than most wars – and with more enthusiasm than any scientific advances less important than the first manned landing on the Moon.

To me, though, the never-ending flow of gossip and obsessive eavesdropping was far less compelling than watching a race between two rain puddles drying on the pavement. (Should I root for the one with the cigarette butt in it, or the one without?)

One of my two sisters seemed particularly affected by the Royal mania, however, and bought all the Diana memorabilia from collectors' plates to greeting cards. Inevitably, her obsession led to fights over the family TV. I took the position that there *must* be something more vital on another channel that we should be watching... even if only a curling match, figure skating finals or the Canadian Tour of the Antique Road Show. Unfortunately, it was risky to suggest alternatives. Her tastes were so-out-of-sync with mine that she was apt to take me up on suggestions that I had only meant sarcastically.

In all good time, Charles produced heirs of his own – William and Harry.

Let's put that into perspective – if and when the Queen ever dies, Chuck becomes Charles III. You have to wonder whether the old lady is mortal, though. She's phenomenally old – could the Royal Consort, Philip, actually be a vampire? Has anyone checked the Queen's neck for puncture marks or looked for her reflection recently?

Born in 1926, Elizabeth II is 85 years old. There have been no *older* English monarchs. Neither George III nor Victoria lived to be 82. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of May this year, our Lizzie will have sat on the throne a day longer than George III, but, at 59 years and 97 days, she will still be a number of years short of Queen Victoria's reign of 63 years and 213 days. However, it is not all that long until September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2015, when Elizabeth pushes the old dowager aside. Even then, she'll be a mere 89. Don't forget that the Queen's mother lived to be 101!

It's always possible that history will never make note of a King Charles III. Windsor men, so far, have not been remarkably long-lived, and Chuck is already in his sixties. Whether or not Charles ever wears the crown, however, his son will someday succeed as William V. In the somewhat event the elder brother forgets that he isn't behind the wheel of his Land Rover or Bentley, and drives an RAF helicopter into a pub by accident, the younger brother would be king instead. Harry would presumably become Henry IX rather than Harry I.

Henries have had a checkered career in British history. The first was a nobody – the 4<sup>th</sup> son of William the Conqueror. The second Henry was the compromise resolution to a long civil war in the 1040s between the daughter and son of the first Henry. The son, Stephen, kept the crown, but the daughter's son, Henry, became the second king of that name. He was a forceful ruler, and his feud with Becket has given English literature much to elaborate on. Henry III, on the other hand, was a weak, wavering and deceitful king, who much preferred to spend his time dancing in France rather than ruling his drizzly, down-at-heels realm in England. Worse, he gave all the best positions at court, and best crown lands, to his cronies across the channel. Another civil war broke out in which Simon de Montfort – a mere baron – emerged as virtual ruler of England for a number of years. The reign of Henry IV was only distinguished by the birth to the fifth of that name. Henry V had a relatively short reign, but a glorious one. He was well liked and victorious over the French at Agincourt. Being victorious over the French always played well in England. He was also the first English monarch to introduce a standardized form of English to court – previously, either French or Latin was used in all state affairs. Henry VI was king of England twice – the first time for nearly 40 years and the second time for only six months. He was naïve at best, and, by the time he was murdered, possibly insane as well.

Henry VII was a Welshman with ambitions he brought to Bosworth Field. Killing Richard III in the famous Shakespearian play of the same name, he spent most of his reign pinching pennies. He was so successfully frugal that it took nearly half of Henry VIII's long, extravagant reign to spend his patrimony. *That* Henry, as we all know, was mainly famous for



being married more often than Mickey Rooney. He also dissolved the monasteries in Britain after he had spent all his father's money. He separated the Anglican Church from Vatican control, to meet his needs for ready cash and a handy pad of divorce decrees. Yet, he also sent his ministers to the block for being too Protestant!

He was the last Henry, and a good thing, as it would be hard to beat an act like that! But perhaps he is best known for inspiring a vapid song, 450 years later, about a widow who had married "seven times before, and every one was an 'Enery." "Oi'm 'Enery the Ninth, Oi am" just doesn't *sound right*.

The Williams have done little better, even though there haven't been as many of them. The first was a trumped-up her-ring-eater whose family had squatted on the north coast of France long enough to become accepted as Frenchmen of a sort. His brother became William Rufus, or William II, and is notable only for being mistaken for a stag and shot by one of his own courtiers. William III was, frankly, a Dutchman. He married into the Stuart line, however, and when James II made clear his intentions to draw the realm back into Catholicism by increments, the English decided that another invasion from the continent and a 6<sup>th</sup> (and so far last) civil war might not be a bad thing. William IV might as well not even have reigned. He is a forgettable interlude between his father, Henry VIII, and his sister, Bloody Mary, and is the second-least memorable king of England, after Edward V.

But we're not here to talk about Edwards.

Charleses come as both good *and* bad. But there have only been two of them to date, so that's only one of each. It's hard to spot a trend so early. Charles I was a putz who meant well, but could not help but incriminate himself with the hysterical element in the Protestant Parliament, and paid for it with his head. Charles II was probably not the brightest bulb in the marquee, but by God he had *style* – and the good luck to be invited back to the English throne after people had grown well and truly sick of Puritan rule.

Which is pretty much the way I feel about Royal weddings, now that I've lived through so many of them. First, there was the wedding of Princess Anne, the Queen's only daughter. The marriage lasted almost 20 years – no mean feat for the House of Windsor – but it meant we all had to endure a Royal divorce and then a second Royal wedding. Charles was next to wed, and to treat us to a tacky, drawn-out Royal divorce, ending in a drunken traffic fatality that drew conspiracy theories as naturally as a presidential birth certificate. Prince Andrew married in 1986, and was a divorcée a mere ten years later. Next was the wedding of Prince Edward, apparently motivated as much to prove he wasn't gay as anything else. Rather surprisingly, he's the only Royal who *hasn't* divorced. Despite his involvement in British Theatre, perhaps he really wasn't gay after all. Finally, we had to witness Charles being married *all over again*. It was too much like an evening of Burlesque in which all the acts are melodrama followed by a pratfall.

And now this. Charles's own sons are come of age and have started marrying! Just a few days ago, one of my friends mentioned that the media had been obsessed with the wedding pageantry all day long. There are advantages to not having cable access – although aware a Royal Wedding was imminent, I had been lucky enough to miss the entire thing.

It's not that I'm altogether *against* Royal Weddings. Royals are an endangered species, like the Bald Assed Eagle, and should be encouraged to procreate. But, like rare species of arctic crocodile or aquatic giraffes, they are best left to do so in privacy. Has anyone considered whether the intense media scrutiny might not be the reason for so many failed Royal Liaisons? It is well known that many species will not reproduce in captivity.

For the sake of science, I can understand the public's interest in the future King's sex life. *He* will be King, after all... assuming he can outlive his mother. But what do the other members of the Royal Family amount to? Most of them are virtual nobodies, with little better chance of occupying a throne than you or I have. The recently wedded William will also be King someday, but that day appears to be a long way off. It might be twenty or even thirty years before William V sits to have his portrait taken for the penny.

### ***Roses by Any Other Names***

Not all will be lost should the current House of Windsor become extinct. When you think about it, Her Majesty has a tenuous grip on her throne. In theory, Elizabeth II is a descendent of William I – but how *real* is this descent? The Normans quickly married into a higher-class French family from Anjou, the Plantagenets. The direct line from William I

lasted only *four* generations, then passed to their in-laws. The Plantagenets, however, were blessed with longevity. They are associated with a small flowering perennial known as the common broom, and ruled England from 1154 to 1485 – over 330 years. In time, the clan fractured in Yorkists and Lancastrians, one side wearing the White Rose and the other side the Red Rose. During the 4<sup>th</sup> English civil war, both sides managed to lose to an upstart branch of Welsh Tudors – wearing a “Tudor” Rose that combined both the white and the red – thus bringing an end to quasi-French rule in England.

The Tudors didn’t do too shabbily, either, managing to survive until the death of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603. Since Elizabeth was “the Virgin Queen,” the crown was reluctantly handed over to the Scots to have a go at it. The unruly Stuarts made such a botch of it, though, that the second of the line, Charles I, ended up going to the block, touching off yet another civil war. (The one the English call “The” Civil War, as though there had only been *one* of them.)

The Puritan-dominated Commonwealth didn’t work out either, so the Stuarts were given a second chance. The result was much the same. James II was just a little too friendly with the Papists and French. At least the 4<sup>th</sup> of the line was merely chased out of the country, not beheaded. That was beginning to fall out of fashion by the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Yes, there *was* another civil war. Whipping the Stuarts was too easy, in fact. Just to make it more sporting, the English went to war with and beat the Irish as well. Although they had given the boot to the Scots, though, there was nowhere to turn to for legitimate issue but back to the Scots. Third time was luckier, no doubt of it, but the house of Stuart fizzled out after a single reign, when Mary II died in 1694. The trouble then was that her husband, the King, was a *Dutchman*. They had no children, though, and to find even a distant female relative with a shred of a claim to the ancient crown of William the Conqueror, the English had to search the Black Forests and Hartz Mountains of Darkest Mitteleuropa. The heir, such as she was, had married a minor princeling of a few hundred acres of fairy-tale encrusted back-country inhabited by wood-cutters and sausage makers. That was how the King of England got to be German.

Technically, he was a Hanoverian, as Germany wouldn’t be assembled from the crumbs of the Holy Roman Empire for another 157 years. As English kings went, the Hanoverians were fairly successful, doing little, but in their placidity they survived the gradual transition to Parliamentary rule and toward a rudimentary form of democracy quite well. The third George, of course, dropped the ball over the Thirteen Colonies. He was a bit of a traditionalist as well, labouring under the delusion that he ran government. Incidentally, he was insane for half his reign as well... Otherwise, the Germans reigned with little cause for excitement or complaint. Too many hangings, one might argue, but the propertied classes seemed undisturbed by it. Perhaps that was why, when the Royal line ran dry yet again, Parliament didn’t look far for a replacement. They simply married Queen Victoria, the last Hanoverian, to another German, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha.

This explains one of my favourite lines from Blackadder III. Blackadder is reminded that the British Royal Family is a English as crumpets and tea, but he mumbles under his breath, “no they aren’t, they’ll all Germans.” He was dead on. So much to the heart of the matter was the Heir Apparent’s butler that, at the outbreak of World War I, King George V changed the family name to Windsor. To keep the war effort aimed at the right bunch of Krauts, you understand?

So there you have it. The British Royal Family is a lot of Germans. Before that, they were mainly Scottish or French. Do we even have to bring DNA into this? Since family descent is only followed through the male line, and virtually every monarch in recorded history has had mistresses or lovers, and left the bar sinister strewn across the arms of half of European chivalry, who can say how much of William I’s or Henry V’s or Charles II’s blood runs through *anyone’s* veins? We are only *how* many generations distant from common ancestors? As far as Darwin is concerned, I dare say you or I are *every bit* as royal as the current bearer of crown and sceptre.



Then again, by the time the face of Prince William is struck on a penny, there probably won't be a penny anymore. What would it be worth? And the Pound might possibly have gone the way of the Franc and Mark. There is even some chance there won't be a King, let alone 1/100 part of a Pound.

### ***Whose Royals are They, Anyway?***

Many Canadians see no reason for a Royal Family. They cost a lot, and demand a lot of attention. Moreover, the connection between this country and the United Kingdom has grown hair-thin. The English atmosphere that pervaded everything outside of French Canada began to evaporate in the years after World War II. By the 1970s, we had stopped standing for "God Save the Queen" in theaters, and hockey games were quite properly begun with the *Canadian National Anthem* instead. The Queen's portrait probably still hangs in various clerkish offices in the remoter parts of Alberta and the Northwest Territories, and her face – updated to resemble the old lady she is and with her crown put away in a cardboard box, somewhere out of sight and out of mind – continues to scowl at us from our nickels and quarters. But 50% of the people in Toronto were born in a foreign country, and most of the rest have lived in this country for two or more generations. What connection has a Jamaican, Korean, Punjabi, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Portuguese, Italian, Polish, Lebanese, Iranian or Tibetan-born Canadian to the crown of Great Britain? As a Canadian of at least four generations, I may feel even *less* British than our immigrants.

Even the English have questioned whether they have outgrown the need of a monarchy. Polls, conducted in the aftermath of Charles' divorce with Diana, indicated that many Brits believed the Prince of Wales should be bypassed entirely, and the crown descend from the reigning Queen to William. For Charles it would be, "Do Not Pass Go, Do Not Collect \$200." There is no constitutional basis for this, thankfully. It would only lead to electing the king someday, and a popular soccer player or Hip-Hop artist moving into Buckingham Palace.

I will give Charles this. He is a crank. I *love* cranks. He's been outspoken about organic farming, the scourge of modern architecture, traditional village life, the environment, the arts, and has even voiced a wish to change from "Protector of the Faith" when he is King – i.e., the head of the established Anglican Church of England – to "Protector of the Faiths." This might be difficult. It isn't just a matter of changing some words on the £5 silver presentation coin that you can only buy from the Royal Mint for £49.95. Charles would likely have to persuade the Dali Lama, the Pope in Rome, and any number of Imams and Ayatollahs that the King of England is in some sense the head of *their* religions as well. I don't think this would be an easy sell. But you have to love a future Head of State who has such wonderfully eccentric ideas, especially as he will only reign and not rule. There isn't a hope in hell of his introducing a single one of his crackpot notions to the floor of Parliament, thank Gawd.

But William, the first son? Who can remember anything about William? He is bland and seamless, like those puddings the English love. Even his younger brother, Harry appears to be ever-so-slightly more interesting.

Whether or not the English ever begin to question the existence of the monarchy in any form, one only has to think of William to lose interest in the question. Europe never officially abolished the office of Roman Emperor, either. I recall a discussion from a public affairs program of few years ago. The talk was about the British monarchy, and one of the guests described the procedures it would take to abolish the crown. I can't remember the specifics, but they would certainly include long debates in the House of Commons, assent by the House of Lords and acceptance by the Armed Forces, the Double-O section of MI5, Lloyds and the Ministry of Wizardry. Should one of the Royal Family be married into the line of Hirohito, as depicted in Sue Townsend's provocative little novel, "The Queen and I," it might even be necessary to seek the permission of the Japanese. Summing it up, it would likely be easier to abolish Capitalism. I think we must accept that, dull as he is, William will someday be King of England.

By then, perhaps monarchy will at least have diminished to what it is in most European nations. William may still wear the crown of predecessors who believed in The Divine Right, but he may be reduced to a handful of properties at Buckingham Palace, Windsor and Balmoral. His second-cousins and grand-uncles may technically remain Dukes and Lords, but will no longer be entitled to handouts from the taxpayer to keep up the lifestyle their ancestors had been accustomed to. The main job of the King may be to open shopping malls, and serve drinks at important diplomatic affairs. Like those kings and queens of Denmark, Sweden, and The Netherlands, whose names so few of us can remember, the rest of the world may have a hard time remembering William.

It will be very different from the world I was born in. All those documentaries on Canada's role in World War I will make no sense at all. "For King and Country?" Not *our* country, and *whose* King was it, precisely? Why is one of the busiest highways in the Greater Toronto Area named the Queen Elizabeth Way, and why does every town and city in the country have a King Street? What obscurity is Alberta named for? Why is the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce "imperial?" Did I sleep through "The Canadian Empire?" The reasons for all of these relics of monarchy, and more, are almost gone. Soon they may be all gone, and an awareness of much of our history with it. It does almost make one sad.

It might have been so different.

Imagine a monarch with the dignity of Franklin Roosevelt, the foresight of Lincoln, the presence of Churchill, the glamour of JFK, the compassion of Gandhi, the statesmanship of Disraeli, the panache of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, the authority of Bismarck, the insatiable sexual appetite of Catherine the Great. Of course, it's too much to expect all of this from any one human being, however great their stature. But we could do worse – and almost always do – than a leader lacking this or that among so many desirable attributes. Frankly, we most often have to settle for leadership with *none* of them.

It isn't just the image of the King (or Queen) that needs refurbishment. The very *notion* of monarchy is outdated and stale. It exists not even as a symbol of something familiar, but as an idea of a symbol for something we long ago forgot... We may be even less willing to lose a thing when we are no longer altogether sure what it is anymore.

In all seriousness, when I was very young they still said, "The Sun Never Sets on the British Empire." I was older before I realized that the expression was not about the empire lasting forever, but something far more profound and actually less vainglorious. Somewhere on the Earth, the sun always shone over some part of the British Imperium. In places, the sun shone on little more than a booby-hatchery with an anchorage where the Royal Navy might drop anchor. It might shine over a South African veldt that extended to the four compass points. Or rise over the formidable Rock of Gibraltar. Or appear as the Midnight Sun on the horizon of the frozen tundra of Northern Canada. The British flag waved over them all, uniting black, white, red, yellow, ochre, and olive skins; unifying Christian, Jew, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh and Muslim; bringing together warriors, hunters, trappers, farmers, merchants, sailors, fishermen, factory hands, managers, bureaucrats and even wannabe cartoonists for Mad Magazine, all under one crown.

Okay, the empire had been mostly a lot of bagpipes and pipeclay. Once the red coats were exchanged for khaki, once the pith helmets were replaced by steel, the spell began to lift. Without the imperial razzle-dazzle, the empire was seen for the sham it was. The worldwide net of culture and trade fell apart. Local populations discovered that bwanas and sahibs and effendis were annoying to have around. The Royal Navy was no longer welcome in ports. The hotels and clubs that had once held the empire together were renamed to honour local deities or Marxist guerillas-turned-statesmen. Cricket gave way to soccer. The empire might have been largely a matter of maintaining an illusion, but such as it was, it had been believed in for the better part of a century, It's easy to dream that had there been no Kaiser Wilhelm and no Führer, perhaps the sun might still never set on the British Empire.

At the head of it all, a clever, forceful, dynamic, charismatic and devilishly handsome King.

All that is needed for that to be true is a fake time machine built by Baldrick to carry out a petty swindle. It only needs to fail in its purpose, and inadvertently cast inventor and schemer into the past. It only has to rewrite history and bring a truly, in fact *only*, really English Royal Family to the throne.

Three cheers, gentlemen, for the House of Blackadder. Huzzah for King Edmund III!



# IN SORTING FAMILY PAPERS

EMBH HUGHES

Sorting family paper has unexpected rewards. Going through an expanding file of early 1880s clippings of my great-grandfather's [C.H. Shackleton] — mostly from the LONDON *Figaro*, I came upon the following.

## *Review of a Texas production of "Queen Esther"*

THAT excellent paper, the *Boston Folio*, gives, from the pen of a correspondent, the following forcible description of the first performance of a sacred cantata, entitled "Queen Esther," in Texas:—

"We are too prone to form a bad opinion of the morals of Texas by the reports that are conveyed to our ears through the venal press. One would be led to think that every citizen carries from eight to ten revolvers, to say nothing of a few dirks and several torpedoes in his coat-tail pockets. Now, I am pleased to correct this false impression, having but recently returned from that State, where I attended a cantata of *Queen Esther*. Will you let me tell the gossipers how the affair passed off?

"St. Killiad is a pleasant town near the Mexican line. It is noted for its docility. No man is allowed to carry more than six pistols at once there, and the magistrate recently fined a dead man for carrying a shot-gun concealed about his person. The Sunday-school scholars are made to deposit their pistols in the vestibule before the school opens, and no minister is permitted to keep more than two shot-guns in the pulpit.

"The cantata, the first ever gotten up at St. Killiad, was a sublime affair. Hobson Hall was filled at an early hour. During the opening chorus a strange noise was heard behind the scenes and the manager said that *Haman* had accidentally shot himself while practising with *Mordecai* and that Bill Briggs was substituted. Bill forthwith made his appearance with pants stuck in boots, in the most nonchalant manner, and began to call *Mordecai* a second-hand clothing store and other pet names. I saw at once that Bill had the heart of the audience, for cries of 'Go in, Bill!' 'Give it to 'im!' came from every part of the house. I really think that Bill actually believed himself to be *Haman*; but he was finally coaxed from the stage by the muzzles of several shot-guns, that were poked at him from the wings, and *Ahasuerus* came on.

" 'Bully for *Ahaz*!' yelled a boy in the gallery.

"The Assyrian king stopped suddenly, and looked up at the enthusiastic youth.

" 'See here,' he said, 'this is a religious play, and decency has to be observed. That boy forgets this is the State of Texas, and we are going to have order if we've got to get it with the pistol. I'm playing *Ahasuerus* just now, but after the show I'll be Sam Turner again, and if any man wants to see me then, he can make his wants known.'

"The cantata proceeded, but I felt uneasy. I thought that, for an Assyrian, *Ahasuerus* handled his revolver in a very careless manner; but somebody said it was natural. The king had hardly got securely seated on his throne, when *Haman* rushed from one of the wings, and said that he understood that two Mexicans were in the house, and that he 'wouldn't play until the greasers were put out. A sacred cantata shouldn't be spoiled by the presence of a couple of dirty Mexicans.' His remarks were greeted with tumultuous applause, and a sudden tussle near the door followed. The next day the coroner held an inquest on the bodies of Riva Goliad and St. Jose Miguel, two Mexicans who had displayed bad sense in attending a sacred concert in St. Killiad. After the tussle just referred to, the cantata proceeded.



“*Mordecai* wasn’t the meek-looking fellow I expected to see. He was a six foot chap, with a piratical muustache, who remarked to *Haman* in the hearing of one-half of the audience that he was the ‘man-eatin’ alligator of Texas.’ He certainly in appearance bore out his remarks. He and *Ahasuerus* had several spirited interviews, and once, while *Esther* was singing for the king, *Mordecai*’s revolver was accidentally discharged; but the bullet went up, and did no damage except killing the boy who was overhead to manipulate the scenery. As the hanging of *Haman* approached, I moved toward the door. From some side remarks which I heard *Haman* drop on his downfall, I expected a lively time. I knew Bill Briggs would not be seized without a desperate resistance, so I sloped. It came just as I expected. The king and his body-guard made a rush for *Haman*, and the fun began. Bill got the dead drop everywhere. Bullets whistled through the auditorium, but not a man moved except one red-shirted fellow from Galveston , who jumped on the stage and knocked *Ahasuerus* down.

“The next morning I heard all this summed up as follows: *Haman* shot in the mouth; *Mordecai* dead; *Ahasuerus*’ nose broken and shot in the thigh; two Assyrian officers badly wounded; *Queen Esther* trampled — bodily bruised. The *St. Killian Weekly Buckshot* called it one of the liveliest cantatas ever witnessed in the State, and hoped that it would be repeated at an early day.”

ΩΩΩ

Yayyy, team!



# *The Trail*

*Richard Brandt*

My flatmate's former landlord once warned me that waking her in the morning was like waking a bear; and up to a point, he was right.

She's a mama bear, and every kid in the world is one of her cubs, and she would fight to the death to defend any one of them.

For example, one day while she was lounging by the pool, she started talking to some kids who were hanging out there, and found out they were staying in a homeless shelter, and came to the pool because they were kicked out each morning and had nowhere better to go. She told me to run to the Burger King and get every one of them a burger and some fries and a soda. They kept coming to the pool and we'd fix them a sandwich or even invite them into the apartment to hang out.

One night a young man – we'll call him W. – came into the bar where my flatmate works, told her his family knew the owner, and wondered if he could get some water. It turned out he was homeless as well, and my flatmate started treating him and a few of his friends to water or soda and some chips and fries.

"If you ever have any kind of trouble," she instructed them, "you come and see me. But if you're doing any drugs or getting into any kind of gang shit, I will whoop your ass."

One night she asked me to drive W. and a couple of his friend's home, not far down the street from the bar. His friends were a young lady we'll call K. – a diminutive 17-year-old who had gone all starry-eyed over a member of their little gang who I had not yet met – and a young man we'll call J., an innocuous 18-year-old with a passion for books and drawing and, as we discussed during the short drive, Shakespeare.

They asked me to drop them off by a pharmacy, around the corner from the shuttered hotel where they and their friends were squatting.

A few nights later, W. came into the bar with a bloody gash over his right eye. I immediately gave him a bar towel packed with ice I'd been using to nurse a sore wrist (golf injury), while my flatmate asked him what had happened.

He said he'd been walking through an alley when he heard someone calling his name, and when he turned around someone punched him in the face. The next thing he knew, he said, he was coming to on the ground after being out for an hour.

I took him into the men's room and applied a band-aid to the wound over his right eyebrow. Back at the bar, between looking him in the eyes and asking him repeatedly to confirm that he hadn't been doing any drugs, I asked how he was feeling.

"I feel a little light-headed," he admitted.

She called 911 and had the firefighters and an ambulance come take a look at him.

His friends showed up shortly after the ambulance took him to the hospital. I finally got to shake hands with K.'s boyfriend – who we will call the BF – a slight young man of mixed race. They speculated that W., who had a prescription for Ambien but not the funds to legitimately obtain it, might have simply passed out and hit his head on the pavement.

A few nights later still, I stopped at the bar after leaving the CIO 100 awards banquet at the Broadmoor. It was around 10:30. I found J. and K. sitting on the back porch of the bar. J., in particular, looked more than a little upset.

They said her BF and W. were both missing, and they were afraid there was some trouble between them.

My flatmate asked them why they were living on the streets. J. said his family threw him out when they found he was gay. K. said her mother had thrown her out because she was dating a black guy. (“I’ve asked every one of these kids why they’re homeless,” she told me once, “and every answer starts with ‘My mama...’”)

“Where is your boyfriend right now?” my flatmate asked.

“I don’t know,” K. admitted.

“Exactly,” she replied, and then started laying down The Lecture, in which the phrases “A man is not a financial plan,” “Ain’t no dick that good” and “You belong home with your mama, that woman loves you” are recurring themes.

Eventually she decided we were taking them home with us for the night, and had me drive them with me to the store so I could pick up some hamburger for dinner.

“My flatmate,” I confided to K. at the store, “didn’t see or talk to her mother for years. And she had a lot to forgive her mother for. A lot. But forgive her she did, and let me tell you something: after she did you never saw anyone love a human being more than she loved her mama.”

Back at the apartment, K. hit the sofa in my flatmate’s room and was out like a light before we could even get a plate of food to her. J. had his dinner and camped out in the living room in front of the television. I left for a little while to see the woman who was supposed to be paying me to drive her to New Orleans that week, but it didn’t look like that was going to happen, and I was back home by 2:30 in the morning.

The next day, after my flatmate went to work, K. finally got out of bed after ten, and I drove J. and K. down to Acacia Park downtown to drop them off for the day.

Before leaving them I looked K. straight in the eyes and said, “Your life hasn’t even started yet. Don’t start fucking it up now.”

That night J. called from a friend’s house, sounding pretty distraught, saying he’d seen K. in the company of three police officers and needed to talk to my flatmate really bad.

Not that long after, there was a knock at my door. It was two detectives from the Homicide/Assault division, there to inform me that a body had been found that morning along a trail behind our apartments, and they had some questions for me. They mentioned my flatmate by name (or her nickname, anyway) and asked if I knew her, and I answered that I did, and they wanted to know everything that we’d done the previous night, which I told them, pretty much as I’ve just told you. One detective handed me his card and said my flatmate should call them if she hadn’t already spoken to them by the time I saw her next.

When she came home later, I gave her the card and told her what had happened. She went back to her bar and found the police there waiting to ask her pretty much the same questions they’d asked me.

When she got home she asked for my phone and called back J.’s friend’s number and spoke with J. He said he knew something about the body behind our apartments, and she told him to stop right there, because he needed to be telling this to the police. She asked him to meet us by the Wendy’s down the street from that abandoned hotel, and on the way to the car we rang the police and told them where someone they wanted to talk to in a homicide investigation was meeting us.

After we’d waited at the Wendy’s parking lot for a little while, J. showed up, in tears and looking pretty scared, and told my flatmate that at around noon, the BF had shown up at the park and calmly informed J. and K. that he had killed W.

“No,” my flatmate said as she backed up with her hands over her mouth. “No. No. No. No.”

It didn’t take long for the police to show up, eventually three units, two marked cars and an unmarked van. Even for a traffic stop, CSPD always shows up in groups. The first officer started asking J. for his personal information, and, between J. sobbing that he didn’t want to die, got some of the story out of him.

“Make sure they get you to someplace safe,” I said to J. as they were leading him off to headquarters for questioning. My flatmate stood there as they were loading him into the car and tried to wave reassuringly as he was being driven away.

Back at the apartment, my flatmate sat on the couch, shaking her head, occasionally crying.

“They’re just kids,” she kept repeating, over and over.

## Epilogue

The next morning police arrested the BF. At age 19, three different women had already filed restraining orders against him, and he had plead guilty to failing to register as a sex offender after being convicted of sexual assault.

K., we heard through the grapevine, had returned to her mother's house.

J., after being held in protective custody and then for several days' observation in a mental health facility, drove back to his little home town in the Colorado mountains with his father and his grandfather.

One night after work my flatmate decided she wanted to see the trail where W.'s body was discovered. She parked at the far end of our apartments, walked around a barricade and began strolling down the path, but she wasn't alone. The trail appears to be a heavily trafficked thoroughfare for the homeless, as kids kept passing by with their back-packs and their blankets and their sleeping rolls.

They just keep coming.

ΩΩΩ

## THE "AL" SIDE

It's been a long time since *Challenger* paid homage to one of the two or three greatest fannish wits we have ever encountered ...

**Alan Hutchinson.** His incredible artwork, his hilarious text, his ridiculous looks ... wait, cancel that.

Anyway, here is a cover Alan did for my *Spiritus Mundi* in the Southern Fandom Press Alliance in late 1977, the King Tut Exhibition's New Orleans stop just concluded. Tru-fans George Inzer and Charles E. Spanier co-star with yhos (as King Tush).

And note the "King's Feaures" in-joke. Alan was proud of it!



IDEA: GRIII

Alan Hutchinson-77

# POEMS

Michael Estabrook

## Must be the water

I look up from my writer's notebook:  
"8-7-07 - Metropolitan Museum of Art –  
walked around the modern art galleries again:  
Jackson Pollack, Mark Rothko,  
Andy Warhol, Willem de Konig,  
not sure I understand it all that well yet,  
but it's amazing stuff, simply amazing,  
a fresh new way of seeing (and  
interpreting) the world."  
"Does your hair always  
feel different  
when you wash it in  
a place like this?" asks my wife  
standing naked and beautiful  
as a field of yellow flowers  
on the other side of our hotel room.  
I respond, "Yes, I think so."  
"Must be the water," she says,  
as she turns and drops her towel.



## 39 Years Ago

There she is drifting out of the bathroom,  
a white towel around her head  
and another wrapped around her body.  
And she's chattering about  
the bright sunny day ahead of us,  
about seeing *Measure for Measure* and later  
having dinner at the posh Red Lion Inn.

And her skin is still damp from her shower  
and so soft and smooth and gleaming, tugging  
at me from across the room  
like the Earth tugging on the Moon, trying  
to pull me helplessly in close  
so I can touch her and smell her  
and kiss her and feel her just like I did  
on the very first night we spent together  
39 years ago.



## **In the Super 8 Motel in Tilton, New Hampshire**

Alone finally in the room with my wife after dinner,  
she's usually good to me in hotel rooms.  
("There'll be hotel sex for you tonight if you're a good  
boy.")  
And she really seems to like what I'm doing to her,  
holding my head between both  
her hands, pulling me in harder,  
squirming and grimacing just enough  
to make me feel like a man,  
to make me feel as if  
I've accomplished something  
useful and beautiful, tender, sweet, and wonderful



## **Tryst**

My wife and I arrange our business  
trips so our paths would cross like our stars have  
in London and we could spend  
the weekend together. "We'll meet in London  
for a tryst," I quipped, smiling and winking.  
We didn't have time to experience  
too many things: a couple hours  
in the National Portrait Gallery, an interlude  
listening to Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* overture  
rehearsed in St. Martin-in-the-Fields Church,  
a glimpse of Shakespeare's reconstructed  
Globe Theater, a sanguine romantic  
dinner cruise down the Thames,  
the lights like beacons lighting the dark  
uncertain night, and finally some alone time  
together in our little hotel room doing  
what people having a real tryst  
would do which, needless to say,  
was the best part of the whole  
damn trip, if you ask me.

## Flesh

Must be simply her flesh  
that is so enticing, alluring,  
so sweetly feminine, yanking at me  
from across the room,  
tugging at me like the sun tugs  
on a planet –  
her flesh, her undeniably soft,  
smooth as syrup flesh.

I realize this thing I am feeling  
is only biology,  
a simple sexual thing,  
but then again it also isn't  
a simple sexual thing.  
Her beautiful, ethereal, female flesh  
reaches beyond sex,  
rises above the oceans and the mountains,  
piercing up through the glowing red heavens,  
pulling me along helplessly  
away from life itself and who I am,  
delivering me into another place, another realm.

But it doesn't matter that I am yanked away  
with such ferocious velocity,  
such determined mindlessness,  
nothing else matters in the entire glooming  
of my consciousness or in the universe  
as a whole, nothing else matters at this moment  
except for her flesh.

Her flesh tears me out beyond mere sex  
like being hurled over Niagara Falls  
down into the chaos below  
without a barrel.



## Photos of her trip to the Grand Canyon

Sitting close against each other on the sofa,  
as she's clicking through  
photos on her computer of her trip  
to the Grand Canyon.



“This amazing rock formation  
is called The Eagle’s Eye.”  
And she’s standing happy and smiling  
in front of this big round orifice in the rock.

“Here’s me up on my horse, Oreo,  
on our trek along the path up the mountain.”  
Such a pretty black and white stippling  
covering this cute little horse.

“This is my roommate Carol,  
we’re on our way to the helicopter.”  
I put my arm around her,  
squeeze in close to I can see the pictures better.

“This is our bunkhouse, all 15 of us  
sleeping inside like in a barracks.”  
And I can feel the heat of her body  
warming me right through our clothing.

“We stopped to take pictures of this elk  
walking right across the road.”  
But I’m not paying attention  
to the pictures, instead I’m leaning in  
closer and closer trying to see down her blouse –  
some things really never do change, ever.

*Art by Frankie MacDonald*

# THE KINGPIN

*Mike Resnick*

**Guy Lillian tells me** that this issue is about sex and romance. I'll leave the romance to others, and stick to the subject that I can address with professional authority: sex.

Now, a lot of guys have laid claim to the title: Kingpin of Porn. There was Larry Flynt. There was Bill Hamling. There was Milt Luros. There were others.

But there was really only one man who merited the title. His name was Reuben Sturman, and I worked for him for the better part of five years.

I didn't start out with that in mind. I was just a kid, recently married, fresh out of college—not with a degree or anything rash like that, just with a bunch of freelance sales—and I needed a job now that I was a husband-in-fact and a father-to-be. It just so happened that there was only one job open in the entire publishing field in Chicago at that time, so I took it—and found myself editing a couple of yellow tabloids, first *The National Tattler* and then *The National Insider*, as well as some (deservedly) short-lived men's magazines, the entire monthly budget of which couldn't buy me a new suit.

And it was while I was editing these things, circa 1966-1968, that I became aware that we weren't the only salacious publications in the field. There were *tons* of 'em. (*Playboy* was a class act, no matter how much I loathed Hugh Hefner's notion of The Good Life; so were *Rogue* – which was edited ten miles from where I was working by, in turn, Harlan Ellison, Algis Budrys, and Frank M. Robinson – and maybe a couple of others. I never considered *them* to be salacious.) So I started selling to softcore book editors, since we didn't publish any and thus it didn't constitute a conflict of interest, and the book editors whose companies didn't have tabloids or men's magazines started selling to me.

Along the way I met Joe Sturman, younger brother of The Kingpin. Joe was a nice Jewish guy who just wanted to live in wealthy obscurity, join the local Temple, and have a membership to an upscale country club. He was publishing softcore novels when I met him, as well as some tabloids, and he hated it. He couldn't stand seeing his photo, along with his brother's, on the front page of the Cleveland papers every time there was a bust (which was maybe once a month). He hated it when his wife was queried about his business or his kids were teased because of it. His father-in-law owned a nice, respectable, incredibly dull lead foundry, and Joe couldn't wait for the day that the old gentleman retired and left it to him and he could get out of the sex field forever.

I went fulltime freelance in 1968, at which time I was selling Joe a couple of books a month for \$1,000 apiece. (I was selling two other companies a monthly book as well, which was a pretty handsome income for a guy in his mid-20s back then.) Joe killed his book line three months later, which caused me considerable concern. We were friends by then, so I confided unhappily to him that I had just bought a large house on five acres and I'd been counting on that money for another year. The next morning he told me to call a California softcore publisher named Dick Sherwin, who knew all about me and told me he'd be happy to buy 24 books from me, at \$1,000 a book, during the next year.

And when the year was out, Joe, who was extricating himself piece by piece from the field, flew me out to Cleveland where he turned over three monthly tabloids to me: *Truth* and *The National Times*, both general all-purpose pieces of totally fictitious journalism, and *It's Happening*, the only tabloid aimed specifically at a black audience.

All went smoothly for four or five months, and then the day Joe had been praying for arrived: his father-in-law retired, and he took over the lead biz. Within a week he'd sold out all his softcore holdings to his brother, Reuben.

So I was flown out to Cleveland again to be evaluated by the Kingpin. We hit it off from the start. He was bright—incredibly bright. Unlike Bill Hamling, who felt the First Amendment was on his side and was happy, even eager, to present his various cases to the Supreme Court, Ruby (he never liked to be called Reuben) thought he was getting away with murder, and viewed his relationship with the feds and the courts as an exciting game. He loved playing tennis, was a major gambler on any and all sports (and to the day of his death swore that Bobby

Riggs threw his match against Billie Jean King), and from time to time admitted that he had put together his empire by luck and by accident.

He'd been a comic book jobber, and when the local distributor got some publications he didn't want to handle—"muscle books" and early girlie magazines—Ruby stepped in and distributed them himself.

Thus began the notion of "secondary distributors". Just as the *New York Times* prints all the news that's fit to print and *The National Inquirer* prints the rest, major distributors like Long Island News (in New York) and Charles Levy (in Chicago) would distribute all the magazines and books fit to distribute—and Ruby, taking a higher commission since no one else would handle them, would distribute the rest.

By the time I went to work for him, Ruby, under various corporate veils, owned 59 of the 65 secondary distribution agencies in the USA, and—again under corporate veils—owned more than 600 adult bookstores, the kind where (back then; I have no idea what they're like today) you paid a dollar to enter and browse, and got it refunded if you purchased something.

Ruby also owned some printing plants. What did this mean? Well, when I edited the *Insider*, our break-even point was something like 41%. In other words, if we sold 41% of our 300,000+ print run, we broke even. I had it selling up in the 70's for a couple of years (my record was 77% of a 410,000 print run one week in early 1966), but no one could sustain that without going totally legit or totally hardcore—they wouldn't give me the budget for the former, and I refused to do the latter—and by the time I left the *Insider* was back in the high 40's, pretty much where it was when I had taken it over.

But with Ruby's tabloids, it was a whole different story—he owned the national distributorship, the local distributorship, the printing plant and the stores. Our break-even point was, so help me, 9%—and since he *did* own the stores and the distributorships, no rival tabloid was even displayed before we'd sold out at least half of our print run.

(Does this sound familiar to Resnick readers? It should. I based Solomon Moody Moore, the sort-of-protagonist porn kingpin of my 1984 science fiction novel, *The Branch*, on Ruby.)

Anyway, I found that I was surrounded by millionaires. Ruby paid handsomely for what he wanted. We had an immediate conflict, because I wouldn't give him what he wanted. (No, it had nothing to do with hardcore ... which I also wouldn't give him.)

If you worked for Ruby, you were paid far better than anyone else in the field would pay you for the same job ... but there was a stipulation, mentioned once and never again, and never written down—and that was that of all the hundreds of people in the organization, the writers, the editors, the distributors, the comptrollers, the office managers, the stock boys, *everyone* was expected to take the fall before Ruby went to prison. Your family would be well-taken-care-of, your job would be waiting for you when you got out, it was understood that almost no one would ever be locked away for more than 18 months with good behavior and better lawyers—but that was the deal. If you wanted to be a young millionaire, you agreed to take the fall.

I didn't—and I never got to be a young millionaire. He never considered firing me and hiring someone who *would* take the fall. That wasn't the way Ruby worked. But while others were making half a million a year or more, I was making maybe \$75,000 to \$100,000—which was great pay in that or *any* era for a kid in his 20s who was still learning how to write and edit, but paltry compared to what I could have been making had I agreed to his terms.

Ruby had a huge Christmas party every year in Cleveland. (Why Cleveland? Well, he grew up there—and more to the point, Ohio, at that time, didn't have extradition treaties with other states except for capital crimes ... so as long as he didn't distribute his products in Ohio, he couldn't be arrested or "deported.") The party lasted two or three days. During the course of it, each employee had a meeting with Ruby. They never lasted as much as five minutes. If your division—be it tabloids, smut movies, peep shows, bookstores, whatever—had made as much or more than Ruby thought it should during the year, you were re-upped for another year. If not, you were fired. Simple as that.





We *all* feared those Christmas parties, yet I only knew two or three people who got fired in the five years I packaged tabloids for him.

When it became obvious the tabs were making money—*lots* of money, once Ruby finished paying off his brother with their profits—it came time for a raise. Ruby didn't want to give me any more money, but he wanted to reward me somehow, and finally he hit on the perfect solution: he gave me the classified ads in the backs of the papers. You know, the ones that read: "Oversexed leather-loving lady wants to meet middle-aged man for French, Greek, s&m, b&d, golden showers. No freaks." *That* kind of ad. The man answering the ad would write a letter, put it in an envelope, seal it, put our code on it, and send it, along with a dollar bill, to a post office box I had rented. Then I turned it over to a fellow colie breeder who needed a little pin money, and she forwarded it to the proper address.

The next year he gave me Doc Johnson, a fictional black man in an Elijah Muhammed hat who published a 32-page book, with a 3-digit number after every name, color, city, state, whatever, that I could think of. Doc sold his book (out of a different post office box) to numbers players, and I got a free half-page ad in each issue of each tabloid.

While I refused to do hardcore or play fast and loose with any laws, that didn't stop the rest of the crew—or Ruby himself. One of the staff's favorite stories concerned the day that Ruby was coming home from Europe with a suitcase full of hardcore porn movies featuring farm animals and teenaged girls, movies that would be duplicated and sold in all his stores. The British authorities had been tipped, and as he stopped at Heathrow to transfer planes, they converged on him and asked him what he had in his bag.

"Home movies," said Ruby calmly.

They screened a couple of his home movies, threw him out of the country, and told him that neither he nor any member of his family would ever be welcome in Britain again.

Ruby's headquarters was a large, nondescript office building—the lower floor was a warehouse—at 2075 East 65th Street. It probably hasn't existed for years now. I would be flown to Cleveland twice a year on average, and I learned after a couple of trips never to tell the cabbies where they were taking me until we were more than halfway there and it was financially unfeasible for them to drop me at a corner without being paid. Otherwise they would refuse to let me into their cabs at the airport. Evidently—once there I never left the building except to go home, so I am reporting this as hearsay—it was in one of the worst and most dangerous areas of Cleveland. Ruby chose it expressly for that reason—not for the low rent, but because he could hire an abundance of inexpensive, cop-hating lookouts in case of a bust.

Usually he had ample warning of a raid. Once he didn't, and at the last second he dove head-first into a chute to the warehouse, slid down into an open truck, and escaped under a pile of obscene magazines.

He was also a realist. I remember one morning I had just flown in, and he told me that Greenleaf's Bill Hamling and his editor, Earl Kemp, the former a one-time science fiction editor and publisher, the latter a Hugo winner and Worldcon chairman, were going to jail. I asked why, since they hadn't even been busted yet. He showed me their latest—an *illustrated* edition of *The President's Commission's Report on Obscenity*.

"But it's legal," I said. "Anyone can publish it. The government doesn't copyright anything it prints."

"They won't get them on obscenity," said Ruby. "But they'll get them on *something*—maybe a postal violation."

He was adamant—you simply couldn't illustrate that report during the Nixon administration . . . and sure enough, he turned out to be right.

Ruby had a girlfriend, and when the tabloids went semi-monthly and he added a fourth title—*Swing*—she became my assistant editor, which really meant co-packager, since every photo belonged to one of Reuben's companies and every article was house-written (i.e., Resnick-written).

At that point it was raining money, and I decided that if we could keep it up for a year I could finally get the hell out of the field—I wasn't ashamed of it, but I found it distasteful, and it took up so much of my time that I wasn't getting much serious writing done.

We came close. I think it lasted ten months. The girlfriend discovered a younger version of Ruby—his son, who had recently entered the business—and left Ruby for him. Ruby's gentle way of retaliating was to sell the tabloids to a friend in Chicago who was so cheap that neither I nor the ex-girlfriend could afford to work for him.

In a way I was relieved. I'd have liked a month or two more of that phenomenal cash flow, but it was time—long past time, really—to get out of the field, and from that day in early 1976 to this, I have never written under a pseudonym again.

I totally lost touch with Ruby. I exchanged holiday cards with Joe for a few years—he was the Sturman I always considered a friend—and then one day I heard that the feds had finally gotten Ruby the same way they got Al Capone: for tax evasion. I never understood why. It was all a game to him. He was worth well over \$100 million, had invested in a number of shopping malls, indeed had more invested in legit businesses than in pornography. How much better could he be living by not reporting a few million dollars of income? (But the feds were the opponents, and therefore the rules of the game made it mandatory that he lie to the IRS.)

Then came the most bizarre incident of all. It made all the papers, even the *Wall Street Journal*. Ruby, who was maybe 70 and serving so many consecutive terms that he was never going to get out, sued his lawyer.

Why?

Because, claimed Ruby, the lawyer had told him they could buy one of the jurors, Ruby gave him half a million to do it, and the lawyer pocketed the money.

You ready for the wild part? Ruby won his suit!

Oh, he didn't get released—he was guilty as, you should pardon the expression—sin. But his lawyer wound up just down the cell block from him.

Then I heard that he'd developed Alzheimer's, and shortly thereafter he died of a stroke.

Do I regret working for him?

Well, I'd rather have been a bestseller at 23, but thanks to Ruby I was able to keep my large, lovely house on 5 acres, we took trips all over the country, we were able to breed and extensively exhibit our show collies, I was able to buy my 7-year-old daughter a horse, and the whole time I worked for him I never had to worry about paying my bills.

Or going to jail, for that matter.

Regret it? Hell, no. Here I am, four decades later, still telling stories about him.



*Editor's Note: **Challenger** makes no claim that **Backstage Trio** is the responsibility of any party mentioned in this article.*



# THE CHORUS LINES

**Jinnie Cracknell**

**Cyberdestiny\_40@hotmail.com**

I loved your comments on Freedom of Speech. My take on it is that I agree with the quote *I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.* "According to Wikiquotes this is often mis-attributed to Voltaire, but was in fact written by Evelyn Beatrice Hall describing Voltaire's beliefs. I also was stunned to read Shelby Vick's religious opinions, as they quite closely match my own, which I sometimes humorously refer to as 60% Christianity, 30% New Age thinking and 10% Quantum Mechanics. "God said Let There Be Light, and the Big Bang happened.  $10^{-43}$  seconds passed, gravity separated from the electroweak and strong forces, and this was the first epoch." (Hmm... Maybe I'll expand on this and put it in a future issue of *Quantum B\*locks*, with mention of where I got the idea from of course :))

*Quantum B\*locks* is Jinnie's perzine, available on [eFanzines.com](http://eFanzines.com), and highly recommended.

**Brad Foster**

**PO Box 165246**

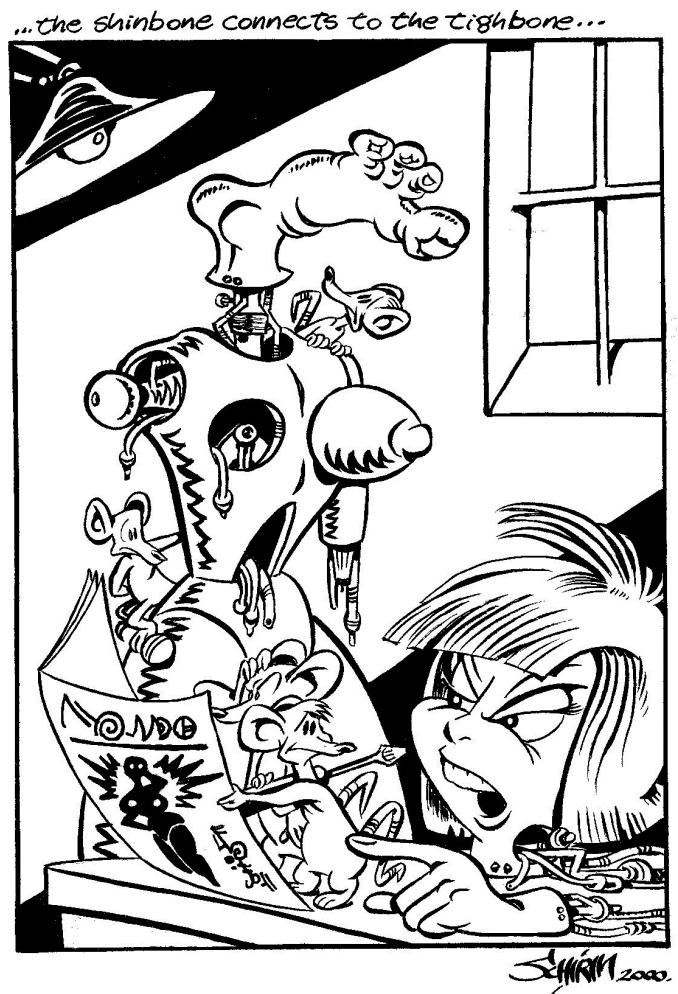
**Irving TX 75016**

I love how each new issue of *Challenger* kind of rules my little post office box with the sheer massiveness of the package. Usually there are just a couple of regular mail envelopes, maybe a thin manila package or two. And then there are the days I open it and everything is crowded over to one corner, looking in awe at the majesty that is another *Chall* delivery!

Now, I did indeed find the interesting ad you mentioned on page 58 to be not only interesting but, if I can say it, amazingly fantastic! Let's do it!

Loved the visual of "The Chart" from Dave Schlosser, and the fact that you ran two photos of it. If there had been just one, I might have assumed it was a static, locked-in-place kind of arrangement. But with the two photos can see it was all very loose, and could be basically tossed around and end up in different piles, while still maintaining the hard connections. [*"Hard connections." Really, Brad!*] What a great design for the data. Now, of course, someone needs to do it as an on-line 3D version. Or maybe not.

The thing that popped up for me from your own remembrance of the *Mad Mad House* program was the comment at the end from one of the folks involved that "...it wasn't as weird as they made it look on TV...". That's probably the base line for the vast majority of the "reality" shows, which have less to do with reality than some of the scripted shows. A friend of mine was on one of the "Wife Swap" things, and talked about the heavy editing, the moving of



comments around from different times, of things pulled out of context. The only "reality" programs I watch are things like *Mythbusters* and *Dirty Jobs*.

Tara's "Fabulous 'Nufties" was really funny. It was actually an idea I played with ages ago, that is, the making up of a second fannish persona, though never to go that far. Now I'm certainly glad I didn't even try that tiny bit of goofiness! I think my only problem would have been in trying to collect the mail for each character, as would still be doing physical mail, rather than simply different email accounts, and having to drive all over the county every couple of weeks to check the various postal boxes would have been a bit time consuming for sure.

Oh, and going by his comment in the footnote at the end, if this was originally written 28 years ago, that would be in 1983. And yet.... the artwork was created in 1980. Hmmm, maybe the hoax itself is a hoax, and this is all true? The mind boggles!

Loved, absolutely *loved*, the Gilliland "deficit looting" toon on page 78! Still the master.

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Oh, where to start, where to start... I know! In the lettercol, where else?

Actually, I think an update on my article about sorting through Dr. Atkins' books is in order. As it turns out, Susan Atkins, his widow, also discussed the books with Cait Coker at the Cushing Library, and Cait said that they aren't interested in current SF books (which is exactly what Dr. Atkins had in his collection) for the SF & F special collection at TAMU, but they would be more interested in acquiring any old and/or rare SF books. After perusing the stacks in his office, neither Susan nor I could find anything remotely meeting the criteria Cait gave us. Oh, well. At least I was able to help Susan get the office books organized for taking down to the Half-Price Bookstore, where she will probably get a nice price for the SF. That crap always sells. I am not sure what she will do with the remainder of the books, which are mostly about military history and other subject matter. Plus, I was able to come away with a couple dozen books to add to my collection at no cost (the ones I listed in *Challenger* #32). Either way, it was a good experience for me, and now I understand more about the process of donating possessions to a university library. That knowledge should come in handy some day – hopefully many "some days" into the future.

Definitely having the military theme for this issue worked out very well; you wound up getting all sorts of interesting articles from a good bunch of people. Of course, it does not hurt to start the issue off with that wonderful Alan White cover – yes, indeed, he deserves a Fan Artist Hugo nomination – to set the tone. He does such wonderful work. Alan has produced some of *Askance's* best covers – consider #22 on [efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com), and go back to the 19th issue, March 2010, or even further back to the second issue (May 2007). The guy is *good*! I am with you on getting his name out to the masses. Most of us in fanzine fandom are already very well aware of his fine work.

As for all the military articles in this issue, I really can't single any one out for commentary. James Bacon definitely steals the show for all of his contributions; then again, this kind of topic is right up his alley, and he meets the challenge (hah!) admirably. I think I liked his conversations with actual marines currently serving the best (pages 19-21); it certainly gives one pause to think of what our servicemen (and women!) are doing. James' interview with Elizabeth Moon was also good. (I reserve comment on Wiscon's decision to rescind her GoH-ship.) On this Memorial Day weekend (as I write this), let us all remember the sacrifices made by those who serve in all branches of the United States military.

Re-reading "One Fan's Unusual Religious Opinions" reminds me that I agree with many of ShelVy's views. Like him, I believe that Jesus was a real man, whose words and actions were preserved by his followers, and their writings have been subjected to multiple interpretations over the years. But then again, any religion does this. For that matter, the Bible is without question the most read, owned, and misinterpreted book in history. People have been reading their own beliefs into these words since they were first written. The way I look at it, I try to live by a code that some would call Christian: give others an even break, be courteous and respectful. If anything, this is just simply a humanist outlook. See, I do not view Jesus as *the* Christ - the "annointed one" or "messiah" - because that would imply that he was the only one chosen by God; yet, by his own teachings, Jesus repeatedly told his followers that they were *all* chosen by God, that we are *all* God's children. See, I don't really consider Jesus a trouble-maker (unlike how the Pharisees thought of him; heck, the Romans merely felt the guy was another quack prophet and were willing to ignore him), but more of a philosopher-teacher: Jesus was teaching us how to live humanly with others. Nothing wrong with that, except that it flew directly in the face of the culture in which Jesus was raised. In that sense, he was trouble to those who ran the show: the Pharisees.

Of course, this is all my personal interpretation of Jesus and the concept of religion, which I view as a personal choice. Looking at ShelVy's views, he and I really are not that far off from each other. The fact that he got this

response out of me says a lot about the article. Over the years this is how my personal belief system has developed. We all have one, you know, whether it's deeply religious or scientifically based. The scientific method is a belief system: it only works for those who accept a basic set of assumptions that underlie this system. Take it for what you will, but we all operate this way. A personal belief system gives everybody something to hang onto that makes dealing with daily life bearable. That is the way I look at it all. So thank you for running this article, Guy. It is thought-provoking, and it will be interesting to see what other responses it generates.

There are some other articles in this issue that deserve a brief call-out: Mike Resnick's "Wings O'Bannon Rides Again" (funny stuff); "They Call Us the 'Friendly Apa'" by David Schlosser (I was a twice-member of LASFAPA, and well aware of The Chart as it was being developed way back when; Nate Bucklin even wrote a song about it and has played it at cons before – again, way back when); and "The Predictions of Jules Verne" by Joseph L. Green (always a fine contributor to your zine). Geez, Guy, there is simply So Much Good Stuph in this issue that if I really wanted to make comments, I could go on for quite awhile.

With that, done for now. Many thanks for sending this monster zine. Well, not as monstrous as previous ones since #33 is a mere 90 pages long instead of 102 or 104 pages. But who's counting?

**Chris Garcia**

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Howdy, Guy!

Let me start by saying that Alan White is the MAN! He's been doing amazing art for as long as I can remember and longer! This cover is spectacular, and it reminds me of Master Chief from HALO. We have a life-size MasterChief in Revolution: The First 2000 Years of Computing in the Games gallery that I curated. I love it!

James Bacon. No question one of the most impressive writers right now. I'm lucky to get to do three zines with the guy. He's coming out to my neck of the woods on Thursday! We're going to the Nova Albion Steampunk Exhibition and then WonderCon! Always good to have James around, and this issue shows one of the reasons why.

His articles are thorough, sometimes tough, often powerful. His interview with Elizabeth Moon was a good one, one that addresses the person and not the controversy, which is a good thing. On the matter of the MoonDoggle, I've written an article for *File 770* about it, basically taking the stance that there was no good way to deal with it. Basically nothing to do, but I really enjoyed James' interview with her because I knew nothing about her because I don't read Military SF. I didn't know she had done Relational Database stuff in COBOL for sure! That's not an easy task.

The rest of James' stuff is equally awesome. My family had a long tradition of service dating back to the 1870s on one side (we came over in 1872 and almost immediately a couple of them signed up) and Vietnam vets on the other. My grandfather's story is the best of them though, now that I've sorted it out. He was excused from WWII since he was in college and had kids, but volunteered for Korea, where he was Company Paymaster and then, as you would expect from someone in my family tree, absconded with the company funds and was imprisoned and then dishonorably discharged. In the late 1950s, Grandpa volunteered *again*, was again made Paymaster and again, ran off with company

funds. In the 1960s, Grandpa signed up one last time, this time working in Signals and Crypto and did a much better job and after a tour in Vietnam that was very successful for him, he got an Honorable Discharge with Distinction. It's weird, but that's my family for ya.

I hated *Starship Troopers*. I mean I *hated* it. There is almost no Heinlein that I enjoyed, though I must admit I've got something of a place in my heart for *Stranger*. *Old Man's War* is a good read, though any of the follow-ons have left me flat. I do like Scalzi's writing quite a bit, but some of the characters leave me so dry. I have tried to read *The Forever War* but have never finished it, I don't think. I enjoyed the writing, but it felt a little too heavy for my reading frame at that point.

I'm something of a Jew. Really, my religious beliefs fall in the area of Judeo-Christian. Concepts like the Mitzvah are what inform my worldview. I think ShelVY has a good take on things. Me? I'm highly conflicted about some things, but I think that ultimately it's about being good to others. "We've got to be kind!" as Vonnegut said.

I've read very little Zelazny. I see that is a giant hole in my SF literacy. Go thee NOW and find "A Rose for Ecclesiastes", "For a Breath I Tarry", "The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth", **This Immortal** (a.k.a. "...And Call Me Conrad") and above all, **Lord of Light**. Those with fantasy emphases would also force the Avalon series into your hands and sit on you till you read one, after which, I am told, you would





not move on your own accord until you read the rest. Ah, for the days when Roger, Chip Delany and others represented the hope of the genre!

One writer I have read a good deal of is Verne. My buddy Mike Perschon is a Verne Scholar and I was at the Eaton Conference in 2009 where a bunch of folks delivered amazing talks and papers. I was really excited to be there. One take on the predictions, and apparent accuracy, of Verne is that so many innovations are actually incredibly obvious. Machines that calculate? Those have been around since the Egyptians. Hooking those machines together? That makes sense. The use of nuclear material to power stuff? The discovery of that material almost immediately led to that! Still, his stuff was amazing, and I'd probably consider him the superior to Wells if there were more good translations of his work ... or if I spoke French.

I spend a lot of time hanging around with Futurists. Joseph Korn's book *Yesterday's Tomorrow* is an excellent book. I've done a lot of paneling about views of the future that have not come true, so Tom's piece was very good to read.

I was a more-recent member of LASFAPA, and I was once involved in a version of The Chart that traced "intimate connections" in BArea Fandom. We gave up after about an hour when we had only gone through three people in the room and had filled up one entire sheet. These things happen.

*I reiterate that I have no knowledge of this "Chart" and no recollection of ever having been part of its pipe-cleaner-and-ping-pong-ball formulation ... and if I was, I was a victim of ... circumstances!*

Loved the Space Marine article. There was a game back in the early 1990s where you could play any number of different characters, one of which was a Space Marine, which was my fave as you could easily kill the other Ghouls, Orcs and Wizards with a good bolt rifle. I wish I could remember the name of it. I never saw *Mad Mad House*, though I recognize Fiona from some other project. Maybe a YouTube video or somesuch? The Modern Primitive, whose name is David Something I think, I've seen before at Lollapalooza. He did seem like a nice guy. The Neo-Primitives are a fun bunch to hang out with, even if their philosophies and mine don't really jibe.

On the matter of my LoC, I knew Robert Wise a little. I met him at Cinequest and at least two other times, once I think at Emerson, or at least in Boston. He was a nice guy, and the longest discussion I had with him, about two hours, was almost entirely about *The Magnificent Ambersons*, so I didn't even touch on *The Day The Earth Stood Still*, which is a double-shame as I'm working on the issue of 52 Weeks To Science Fiction Film Literacy about *TDTESS* and having some of his thoughts on the film would have been nice!

Great issue, as always!

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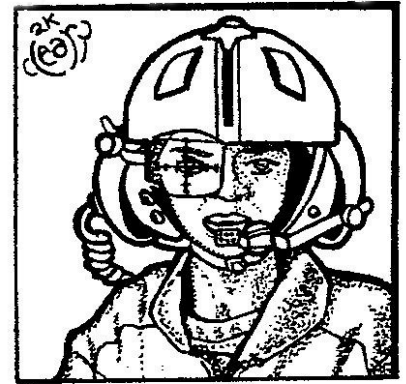
Alan White's cover for *Challenger 33* is particularly appropriate to an issue devoted mostly to war and the military. The cover entity may be human or may not be human, but it certainly looks warlike in either case. *Challenger* generally has the best covers in the field.

*Considering the splendid covers on such zines as **The Drink Tank** and **Askance**, I'm complimented. Thanks.*

James Bacon has some comments on the Marine Corps. My attitude on the Marine Corps is heavily influenced by the fact I was in the Navy. (In fact, I was a Lieutenant (j. g.) when Guy and I first met.) To explain the common Navy attitude, I should explain what the archetypical sailor is like. He is bright, practical, and innovative. Glory isn't one of his main interests. He'd much rather get laid, or get drunk, or otherwise amuse himself. Winning the war has to fit in there somewhere.

I think the Marines do good work. They are good people to have on your side. However, from the Navy perspective, they are just so washed, ironed, and starched. Years after I got out of the service, I worked with a police officer who seemed like an archetypical marine. Someone commented that he probably cleaned behind his refrigerator once a week. It was suspected that he alphabetized the cans in his kitchen cupboards. He was asked about that latter point. He said it was a ridiculous idea. He organized the cans in his kitchen cupboards by food group. Which all goes to show that sometimes suspicions are confirmed.

As Ian Nichols points out, there has been a lot of military SF. I agree that in Star Trek the Enterprise should have had a marine detachment. Of course, they would have been the ones to do the away missions. They also would have done the jobs the guys in the red jerseys usually did. It's amazing anyone ever volunteered to wear a red jersey in *Star Trek*. It was invariably fatal.



In *Star Trek TOS*, the uniforms pretty much looked like flight deck jerseys from the Navy of our era. Flight deck jerseys are color coded by job. Red jerseys are for ordinance-men. I seldom had to be on the flight deck during air ops, but I wore a white jersey when I did. Since I was handling nuclear weapons authenticators, I was referred to as a nuke spook.

The death of the last American WWI vet didn't seem to receive much publicity in comparison with the death of the last Civil War vet. As far as I know, the last Spanish-American War vet wasn't mentioned at all.

*Which reminds me of the doctor I knew at Charity Hospital in New Orleans – he was a classmate at Berkeley – who came in to see me one afternoon and glumly stated, “Well, I killed a veteran of the Spanish-American War today!” Translation: the old patient was too far gone to be helped, but my friend still blamed himself. This was the same guy with whom I exchanged horrible jokes while carrying a severed leg down 12 flights of stairs at Charity, a far less appealing story.*

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Many thanks for *Challenger* #33. Chris Garcia's comment about *London After Midnight* gives me a chance to pass on one of my favorite (probably untrue) film rumors, which appeared in one of David Skal's film books. Skal claimed that he had heard that the only known copy of *London After Midnight* was in the hands of a collector in Jersey City who was dying of AIDS-related dementia. The collector purportedly had the nitrate reels in his refrigerator and if the power went out the entire building could blow up at any time.

*Reminds me of the story of the Buster Keaton aficionado who visited the great comic at his home, and was shown Keaton's own stash of his movies. On that same explosive nitrate stock. Unrefrigerated. In piles on the floor. Keaton would unroll some of the reels and gesture at scenes with his lighted cigarette. The fan (and Keaton) somehow survived and the films were rescued.*

I've seen a couple of other silent films since my week with *Slapsticon* and *Metropolis*. In October, I went to the National Archives to see *Upstream*, a John Ford silent film from 1927 that was recently discovered in the New Zealand Film Archive. This was a very slight film about the worst member of a great acting family who ends up in a boardinghouse full of wacky characters and who makes a comeback after a London theatre asks for one member of the great acting family to play Hamlet. The film was fun but very very slight. It was however very cool to see a John Ford film that no one had seen in over 80 years. In March, I went to the American Film Institute to see *Blackmail*, Alfred Hitchcock's last silent and first sound film (he made two versions). I'd never seen a Hitchcock silent film before. The problem was that Hitchcock wasn't really Hitchcock when he made this film in 1927. The film wasn't very suspenseful, and is really only worth looking at to see techniques Hitchcock would develop when he matured and improved. For example, he is in the film for over a minute as a streetcar passenger. The Alloy Orchestra, which provided the score, was quite good but a good score can't redeem a poor film.

*My favorite Hitchcock silent is **The Lodger**, which is quite fine, and my favorite Hitchcock cameos were in **Psycho**, where he steals a glance at Janet Leigh's rear as she passes him on the street, and **To Catch a Thief**, where he catches Cary Grant's eye aboard a bus in a classic comic moment.*

Guy, I completely agree with you about the debacle of Elizabeth Moon's getting disinvited from Wiscon. I think we're both pretty fervent First Amendment fans, and banning Moon is no way to curb her opinions. Wiscon had the right to disinvite her but was wrong to do so. I haven't been to Wiscon since I fled the Midwest in 1980, but a con with a speech code can't be very much fun.

As for Marines, can I recommend the one novel I edited? *Breach* by Brooks Tucker is a very good “I was a first lieutenant in the Gulf War and this is what happened to me” novel. The author was a first lieutenant in the Marines in the Gulf War and then was a lieutenant colonel in the Iraq War. He should have sold the book to a major publisher but panicked and “sold” it to Author House. Anyone who likes James Jones or Jim Webb would enjoy this revealing look at military life.

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I recently finished reading your zine, for which I thank you. Considering the theme, I was afraid I might not enjoy it; but I did from cover to cover. Great Alan White cover.

I enjoyed the articles analyzing military SF, some of which I've read and enjoyed. I think Ian Nichols overlooked Jerry Pournelle and his CoDominion stories. James Bacon did some good work, both in the introduction and his interviews. Gregory Benford's memories were also enjoyable reads.

Joseph Major's "The World Is Mad" was very informative and enjoyable to read. He seems to know a lot about so many things.

*Agreed, Joe is a polymath. His **Alexiad** is one of the most reliable, interesting, and agreeable fanzines being published.*

I also enjoyed Shelby Vick's take on religion. I could go for what he's saying.

Nice article about Jules Verne by Joseph Green. I've read most of Verne's work in translation. I'm hoping to read some in French one of these years.

Enjoyable article by Tom Vasich on the future that never was. When I was in junior high, we received a monthly publication. One issue was dedicated to the future. The magazine made lots of rosy predictions, most of which we're still waiting for. The prediction about libraries is probably the closest to becoming reality, but it's taking a lot longer than we were led to believe. I wish I'd kept that issue.

David Schlosser's article on LASFAPA brings back a lot of memories.

*Of course you realize that I am totally mystified by what you are saying.*

Unlike Henry Welch, I have seen a tornado live. It was a mile away, so I wasn't in danger (I don't think), and I took a photo of it.

Lloyd Penney wonders which Benford twin he was talking to. When my sister and I were in junior high, her class had two sets of identical twins, one female and one male. I don't recall whether I could tell the female twins apart, but I could always tell the male twins apart. One was pudgier than the other; I don't mean fat, just sort of softer looking. The last time I saw the Benford twins, I noticed the same difference between them.

*I knew identical twins in high school and could tell them apart by their personalities – one girl was cheerful and outgoing, the other quiet and introspective. The set I've known since – Maxie Pertuit and her sister Jerre Rivers – don't look that much alike.*

Brad Foster wonders about the phrase "to rack one's brains". I found information to say that the "rack" in the phrase is related to the torture rack in the meaning of stretching.

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*Joe's letter of comment on **Challenger** #32 was mislaid ... until now.*

The sad thing is that 4SJ, he who longed so to be part of that future city, did not live to see the restoration of *Metropolis*.

*I understand the film was shown at the first worldcon – I wonder which version they saw?*



Talk about method acting: Brigitte Helm played the Robot. That is, she got into the suit. Oh the demands of those directors! Of course, what do I know? Says the guy who compares *M* to "The Long Halloween", the Batman graphic novel about the holiday murders.

*I understand Ms. Helm had to don the robot costume in a state of extreme naturalness. Must have been uncomfortable.*

Did the convention that Martin was at show Stan Laurel's film *The Lucky Dog* (1921)? It was the first film in which Laurel appeared with Ollie Hardy! Not as a team, just two characters in the same movie (Laurel is a guy accused of dognapping, Hardy is a real bandit who holds him up) but still.

*L&H fans need to see the silent version of **The Wizard of Oz**, in which Ollie appears as the Tin Woodsman. Several warnings, though: the flick's racism is repugnant – the skillful black actor playing the cowardly lion has to show him as a bug-eyed caricature – and the story is screwy: Oz is in Europe, for instance.*

Ray Lafferty: I met him at MidAmeriCon. The first night, after the Find the Pros Party (the Meet the Pros Party was by the outdoors pool, in the evening, in poor light, and I'm amazed nobody drowned) I asked him for an autograph and he took the eraser end of the pen (I made mistakes back then, too). I said "Maybe later" and got him in the morning when he was better connected to the world.

*Ray's method of signing an autograph was classic. "'R'," he'd say. "That was easy. 'A'. Okay. Now it gets tough."*

Days of Our Lives: A cousin who once lived around the corner from us will turn 91 on 10/10/10. But the big date and time was the counting one: 12:34:56 7/8/90.

I'd think Gregory Benford would find Lyndon Hardy's series – *Master of Five Magics* (1980), *Secret of the Sixth Magic* (1984), and *Realm of the Seven Realms* (1988) – conceptually interesting. The novels feature a system of types of magic and the complicated laws that govern them and their connections. He's a physicist, too.

"Efficiencies on the Dark Continent": Or as they said in *Esquire*, they don't call it the dark continent for nothing! Idi Amin did something even more egregious than all that. In the real world, he had joined the King's African Rifles in 1946, as a cook. However, once he became president, it became official history that he had been drafted and sent to the Burmese front, where he had performed prodigies of valor, or valour, ignored by the racist British authorities. Accordingly, now that he could do the right thing, he awarded this magnificent hero, himself, the Victoria Cross for his valour above and beyond the call of duty. (Also the Distinguished Service Order and the Military Cross, which then were both for officers, and the former still is.) The stiff-upper-lip brigade reported it with the dry footnote "\*Locally awarded".

"Fundie Follies": You did know that the Reverend Spooner was an albino? The big risk of which is that albinos usually also have vision problems. Which may explain his notorious incident when he was climbing in Switzerland and entered a valley full of erotic blacks. "Er, that's 'erratic blocks', Reverend, 'erratic blocks'." "Oh. Never mind."

"Ruff 'n' Reddy": I know I saw that, but I can only remember a line from the theme song: "They're tough 'n' steady, always Ruff 'n' Reddy!"

"The Chorus Lines": Brad W. Foster: I saw *The Three Stooges In Orbit* (1962) and *The Three Stooges Meet Hercules* (1962). Remember the submarine with the tracks? Robur's *Terror* about seventy years later?

Me: God, that cover for "The Lottery"! Was that what killed Shirley Jackson?

Milt Stevens: Did **Death to America Potato Chips** make anybody sick?  
*And on #33 ...*

If you're going to do an issue on Romance, you now have just about all the spread of contemporary SF&F for your topic. I mean, I go to the bookstore and the "science fiction" is just about all about the beautiful but lonely starship captain who has to choose between the sensitive but studly chief engineer and the studly but sensitive chief on the lost planet. Or the heroine in goggles and corset who is building a zeppelin out of brass and needs to capture the heart of the sensitive but studly man of mystery who may be working for her competitor.

Fantasy of course is now all about the beautiful but lonely vampire hunter who finds the one vampire who is sensitive but studly and really really regrets his life of blood-drinking which he is willing to give up for a Good meal . . . er Woman who will Understand him. Or a beautiful but lonely mercenary captain, the most able broadsword expert in the company, who is seeking a studly but sensitive prince . . . It's like the shopping mall and the shoe stores.

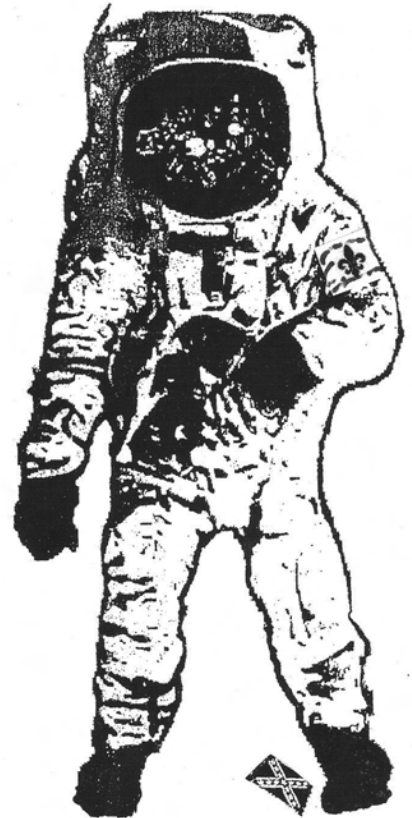
Free Speech: You'll notice that Phelps and his family don't picket gay rights marches or the funerals of AIDS victims or anything like that. If he did he would be shut up so fast your head would spin, and all the people who support his Freedom Of Speech would be saying that he had no right to intrude on such an intimate moment or disrupt a peaceful public assembly.

Intro: If Mr Bacon would peruse the pages of *Heinlein's Children*, by Yours Truly (adv.) he would find in the chapter on *Starship Troopers* a discussion of the organizational relationship between the Mobile Infantry and the Marine landing forces of the interwar U.S. Navy. He wrote what he knew.

"What Did You Do In the War, Daddy?": At last, someone else who recognizes how *The Battle of Dorking* (1871) was a significant early work of science fiction. It demonstrated the effect that technological change had on society. Previous works of "future wars", such as *The Reign of George VI: 1900-1925* (1963) had the technology unchanged from that of the time of writing of the book. (Incidentally, I looked and that book is available on the Net for download.)

Oh, yes, Ian ought to read *Heinlein's Children*, conveniently available from NESFA Press at a quite reasonable price (adv.).

If he wants to discuss the joys of mercenaries (cf. Dickson and Drake), it might be worthwhile reading *Lord Kalvan of Otherwhen* (1964) by H. Beam Piper (but not the sequels by others). Like Dickson, Piper took his impetus from the various Italian wars of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but he had a less positive view of mercenaries than



Dickson did. Dickson's Dorsai works were a part of a greater sweep of history, presenting the evolution of a new kind of humanity, beginning with Sir John Hawkwood of the White Company. Indeed, in one of the later Dorsai books his hero has a vision of reincarnations going back to Sir John.

(There is a story that when Hawkwood met a party of monks, who blessed him with "Peace be unto you," he replied, "May you be deprived of your livings!" They remonstrated. He replied that his trade was war and they were saying he should lose his job.)

Dickson had originally planned to write three historical novels, three current novels, and three futuristic novels. The futuristic novels grew in bulk and number as time went by, and the others seem only to have been notes or even perhaps only concepts. And then Dickson's health went downhill . . .

"Rosy's Photo Album": "I knew him as a science fiction writer before he cast himself in amber." **\*GROAN\*** But Zelazny was, like Dickson, a writer who had to bend his writing to the needs of his finances.

"The Actual Guys Out There": My father was a photo interpreter in the Army Air Force during the big war, rising to the rank of 1st Lieutenant before being discharged. Grant McCormick's father was a noncom in the AAF and then the Air Force, putting in twenty years before retirement. But the one John Purcell's father was most likely to have met was Lisa's father, who was on the destroyer USS *Bush* (DD-529), sunk off Okinawa on April 6, 1945.

The survivors hold a reunion every year, though fewer and fewer can make it. This year's will be in Nashville. Perhaps my cousin Vaden, who served on a tin can in the fifties, can drop by.

"The Predictions of Jules Verne": It's all very well to note that the location of the Columbiad in *De la Terre à la Lune* (1865, 1868) was not too far from le cap Canaveral. However, it's also in a hill that is 1800 feet high. Inspecting the area on Google Maps will reveal that the actual spot is flat and full of sinkholes. Perhaps the Gun Club should have chosen Texas, which had incredible natural resources, hardworking labor, and some of the cleanest filles de joie — er, high land suitable for boring 600 feet down without hitting the water table within reasonable distance of the coast. Verne needed to have done some reading about l'Amerique.

Verne did not think well of Wells, complaining that while Wells had invented l'bolonium, that is Cavorite, to send off *The First Men In the Moon* (1901) he had stuck strictly to known and established science and engineering, as shown in his four chapters on the subject. And in return, in his time, Wells wrote a review of *Metropolis* where he wondered what it was all these dull nigh-enslaved workers were making and who was buying it anyway?

"Back to the Future": *Popular Science* has begun a feature on what was in the magazine twenty-five, fifty, and one hundred years ago. Considering how little of this actually got off the drawing board, at best this seems self-deprecatory.

"Fer Yew Der Vor Iss Ober": Which my cousin Vaden's father also had to undergo. He was captured in the Battle of the Bulge. I have a copy of a letter he wrote home about his first few days in captivity. He sponsored a Yugoslav (it was Yugoslavia then) fellow prisoner who had helped him for citizenship in the U.S.

"The Sound of Nearby Gunfire": And, like the Benford father, Vaden's father commanded an artillery battalion. He had started in the Tennessee National Guard, then transferred to what had looked like at the time a good billet. Then one wintry day he heard the sound of nearby gunfire . . .

"Wings O'Bannion Rides Again": Why am I reminded of Jean Kerr's essay about a Readers' Theatre version of a Mickey Spillane novel? In the story Mike Hammer has a fist fight whenever he goes back to his apartment, and it isn't until the end that the assailant tells him that he's been going into the wrong apartment all this time. (Something like, "I forced my eye into his fist ...")

Elizabeth Moon: Has she ever read Martin van Creveld?

"The Fabulous 'Nufties": And here we have a description of a community, connected though it was, that yet could have encompassed a deception as broad as that. Nowadays anyone can create new identities at the drop of a keyboard, but don't actually do it because it'll break.

"A Bootneck Among the Leathernecks": And contrawise. When Three Commando Brigade sailed for the Falklands, it did so without its U.S.M.C. exchange officer, who protested bitterly and volubly that it was absolutely unfair to go to war without the U.S. Marines.





Of course, an entire unit of Bootnecks had been among the Leathernecks; 41 Commando RM was reformed and sent to Korea, where it was the reconnaissance unit for the First Marine Division. During the battle of Chosin, the Commando was caught out and had to fight its way back to the main perimeter. They stopped just outside it, though, to dress ranks and tidy up so as not to show an improper appearance to these chaps.

“The Chorus Lines”: John Purcell: Last Thursday (March 24) I had a doctor’s appointment, to get some new prescriptions. In the course of checking up, he asked me when I had last seen an eye doctor. “Yesterday.” He had examined my eyes and pronounced me free of both glaucoma and retinal bleeding. It was about the only good medical news I had that week.

ChrIs Garcia: Who speculated, as I recall, whether or not the latest restoration of *Metropolis* was eligible for the Best Dramatic Presentation Hugo. As Grant observed, no matter how lame the novels were, 2010 was a banner year for films, and it’ll face a severe competition.

*I’m afraid I disagree. Reno’s Hugo ballot had only one movie I found particularly adult and original – Inception -- and left off the year’s most effective SF film, Never Let Me Go.*

James Bacon. In 1836, 1841, and even 1849 the United States looked fairly well off. Now at seventy-five . . .

By now Bob Jennings presumably has a copy of the DVD edition of the *Complete Metropolis*. Whatever will they do when the last missing footage is found? Issue the *Compleat Complete Metropolis*?

*I hope someday to see it! Completely redigitized, too: sharp, perfect.*

Lloyd Penney: So your Russian fannish contacts all shut down about fifteen years ago, too? It seemed to me that most of the ex-Soviet Bloc fannish contacts went GAFIA about then. Dick Lynch did a report a few years later on Polish fandom and they did have a lot of zines, but all of them seemed to be clubzines. How are we going to re-establish these contacts?

Darrell Schweitzer: *The Oxford Book of Parodies* contains the complete text of Alan Sokol’s “The Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity”. Professor George Edward Challenger had a neat description of that paper: “Gibberish! That’s what I have been talking to you, sir—scientific gibberish!”

Incidentally, last year the Sherlock Holmes/Arthur Conan Doyle Symposium had a very nice item on the movie versions of *The Lost World*. And they also should be coming out with the revised *Annotated Lost World*.

*I trust that was the Willis O’Brien Lost World they discussed, and not the unwatchable Claude Rains version, which glued plastic horns onto iguanas and tried to call them dinosaurs. Thing is, that technique sort-of worked in Pat Boone’s Journey to the Center of the Earth.*

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Got some comments here on *Challenger* 33, and I am not sure what I can say... I am not pro-military at all, so I will self-censor to not offend, nor put myself in anyone’s crosshairs. (By the way, congrats on another Hugo nomination!)

*Thanks – but I’d argue that being “pro-military” is not the same as being “militaristic.” It can also mean “pro-soldier,” which I’ve almost always been.*

I lean to the left as does James Bacon, and cannot understand why a little socialism in the form of health insurance could be campaigned against. Health care for all is a gift Canadians gave to themselves some years ago, and we have Tommy Douglas to thank for that. Tommy Douglas is the grandfather of Kiefer Sutherland, by the way... Canadian troops did not go to Iraq, but did go to Afghanistan, where the mission is being concluded. I think the conflicts in these places, plus the attacks on Libya, have forced our countries to spend far more than we wanted to...winding up these conflicts will be the best support we can show for our troops, IMHO. Too many thousands have died, so let’s bring them home.

*Amen.*

Ah, Roger Zelazny. He made it to Toronto once for a convention, and was on his way back when he passed away, his bags packed and ready to go to the airport, I gather. Died too young, but don’t we all.

New Orleans in 2018? Nolacon III? So tempting, but I think we will be keeping with a promise we made to ourselves, that the London Worldcon in 2014, should they win it, of course, will be our last Worldcon. Right now, it’s a little tough to afford even local cons, and we are trying our best to save enough money for London. We figure three years ought to do it.

*Good luck – we want to be there too. But why make it your last worldcon?*

My letter...we [Canadians] had another federal election, and this time, we have a majority government. Unfortunately, it’s the Conservatives who are in power, which means that if past activities are any indication, our de-

mocracy is in danger. Stephen Harper governs for his supporters only, so many will be keeping an eye on him to see what stunts he pulls. As for work, I just finished a good assignment at the offices of the Ontario Association of Architects, and am actively looking for more work. I have seen a listing for Westercon 65, called ConClusion. Will this be the last Westercon as we know it?

Question for Jerry Kaufman...do you know who animated the Ruff and Reddy cartoons? I remember them, too, and I think it might have been Hanna-Barbera, but I'm not sure. [Yep.]

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Thank you for *Challenger* #33, featuring the good but not great Alan White cover, which suffers a little from being cluttered with its consequent lack of emphasis on any particular point.

For what it's worth, your editorial on *Snyder v. Phelps* was min agreement with my own thinking. FYI the Westboro Baptist Church is to some extent a creature of the extended Phelps family, and over time the WBC has driven out those family members in disagreement with Fred W. Phelps, Sr., the 80-year-old patriarch running the church. The bitter feelings engendered by this policy are illustrated by the *Washington Post* article which reported that a grandson of the patriarch had not only left the WBC but had married outside of the faith without inviting his parents to the wedding, nor let them meet his wife, nor visit with their grandchild. He was evidently not the only family member to leave rather than argue, so that in time the congregation lost its dissenting voices, embracing by default the rabidly anti-homosexual views of its fearless leader. I would imagine that the WBC's field trips to demonstrate at soldiers' funerals serve as a unifying activity, something to plan for and do, despite any softly voiced misgivings on the part of the younger members, and it is reasonable to expect that after the death of Fred W. Phelps, Sr., those demonstrations will grind to a halt for lack of charismatic leadership.

Shelby Vick's discussion of religion was interesting if not entirely consistent, in that he believes in the Big Bang, i.e. that the universe is 14 billion years old while then world is 4.3 billion years old, and also favors evolution, all recent developments which have been used to disassociate God from the Creation, itself a venerable philosophical tradition. Asked why God was not mentioned in his books on the subject, Laplace told Napoleon: "I have no need of that hypothesis." On the other hand, "I feel that the god-force is an eternal and infinite force that is aware of us and everything in the universe." If his god-force is different from the omnipotent, omniscient, and just God of the Old Testament, the difference is not made clear, though in a tip of the hat to Gnosticism Shelby later appears to suggest that prayer "within the rules" (a Gnostic would know those rules) might be more readily answered in the affirmative. Nor does he address how his god-force might use its knowledge of us, nor does he touch on subjects like the Last Judgment or life everlasting, the promise of punishment and reward that god holds out to those who believe in Him.

He then supposes he could be called a Christian because he believes that Jesus was a real, historical person. Sigh. Muslims, Jews and atheists are all able to believe the same thing without embracing Christianity. Would a Christian consider him to be a Christian on that basis? The Holy Inquisition most certainly would not, and other Christian churches might quibble with him on various aspects of the theology by which they have defined themselves. Perhaps to refute the idea that the Bible is the literal word of God, he says, "changes were made" in the Bible, citing a couple of translator's choices in the King James Bible. Which had, itself, been translated from a later Latin translation rather than an earlier Greek one. Historically it would appear that the Bible was never written as a coherent text but evolved over time, in that the books of the New Testament were the hand-written copies of copies setting down an oral tradition many years after the event. Eventually there was a large body of religious writing (theological fan fiction if you will) that was sorted out in 325 AD at the Council of Nicea, a meeting of bishops convened and overseen by the Emperor Constantine. The criteria for inclusion in the canon being whether or not the various texts were useful to the church rather than their truth.

I enjoyed the article discussing *The Wonderful Future that Never Was*, an engineering look at the then future seen from the vantage point of our recent past. Naturally, the book focuses on gadgetry rather than the consequences of those gadgets, and naturally the future seen from now differs from the future seen from back then. Thus, the bright prospect of atomic power has been dimmed by the Tohoku earthquake, which took down the six nuclear reactors at Fukushima Daiichia. The hopes of replacing coal burning power plants with nuclear ones in order to reduce the emissions of CO2 and thereby slow or stop global warming have been put on hold.



What would future-minded engineers be looking forward to 50 years from now? A hard question, and one most likely focused not on gadgets, but on the mitigation of the consequences of our past exuberance, “easy” technological fixes for intractable problems. This rather somber answer reflects the loss of optimism resulting from experience, such as the experience of NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory predicting a global sea level rise of six inches by 2050 due to the melting of the ice sheets on Greenland and Antarctica. Given that those six inches are about one percent of the ice available for melting, perhaps our lack of optimism is justified.

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I liked *Challenger* 33 and I have a whole passel of comments.

One piece I wish to comment on is your editorial on “The Cost of Freedom.” In fact, it is an editorial defending comments. Specifically, the right of Reverend Phelps and his Westboro Baptist horde to picket the funerals of soldiers because God is punishing America for tolerating gays. I agree with you. I defend his right not only for the reason you give: that it shows what a tolerant country we have: in addition, it will allow him to be his own worst enemy. Picketing soldiers’ funerals is as popular as a root canal.

*Much less popular. Root canals are necessary and good for the body. The Phelps case is the loathsome price of free speech. I’ve heard little of that odious fool and his odious church since the decision, and consider that quite ample information.*

In James Bacon’s “Intro To The Stuff,” I comment on a less weighty topic, phraseology. Is Space Marines the proper word. The idea behind Marines is that they have something to do with the sea. Wouldn’t it be better to call them Uranines or Celestines? From the point of view of associations, Uranine is properly better. I suspect Celestines sounds like a bunch of nuns.

Having given a trivial objection to James, I return to a heavier one for Shelby Vick. I’m sorry. I doubt God is, in the least, a rational concept. The idea is that if you can prove the universe had a maker, you are entitled to call him God. I disagree. The important aspect of God is not that he created the universe but that he is worthy of being worshiped. In practice, that he gives us meaning and purpose. Two feelings that are definitely emotional. By contrast, being the creator of the universe may not mean that he has anything to say to man. In fact, he is so vast the usual assumption is he couldn’t be bothered.

I retreat now, but possibly not that much, from great great topics. This is merely a great one, i.e., the future. About it, I am going to co-comment on Joseph Green’s “The Predictions of Jule Vernes” and Tom Vasich’s “Back To The Future.” The problem is nearly all futurologists are enamored of straight line projection. The future is now, just more of the same. Joe Green’s Jules Verne did, as did Tom Vasich’s *Popular Mechanics*. For that reason, everyone missed the computer and the diminution of the space program. Sometimes, futurologists have missed everything. I remember predictions of the future made in the sixties by a famous intellectual (Daniel Bell or Herman Kahn?), who claimed mathematical precision. None of his predictions worked out. For example, that we would all become hippies.

Now I retreat to one prediction, James Bacon’s idea, which he bounces off some knowledgeable individuals. The idea that marines may someday be sent via a suborbital vehicle to any part of the world. After reading all the comments, it sounds like it would be better having them burrow underground to the site of the police action. Or better still have them take public transportation. Certainly, however, neither would have the cachet of attack by rocketship.

As future predictions, so ancient clichés. Mike Resnick’s Wings O’ Bannon, in his “Wings O’ Bannon Rides Again,” is filled to the brim with clichés, and that makes it a great parody on the hard-boiled detective genre. For some reason, it reminds me of a parody that combined science fiction and the hard boiled detective I once read, Sam Space, in *Space for Hire*. I believe he goes to work for a three eyed Venusian beauty and gets waylaid to Pluto by Jupiterian mice. I liked that parody too. I wish I could remember who wrote it.

Could Wings or Sam be a girl? Elizabeth Moon in a “Chat With Elizabeth Moon,” says that girls are discouraged from becoming soldiers, and – I am sure – hardboiled detectives. Of course, some men and women fall through the gender gap and become, as it were, gender benders. And they don’t necessarily bend as far as hardboiled detectives or soldiers. I remember doing low level numbers work for the nutritionists in my agency, for whom a ‘lady’ doesn’t work with numbers. In another part of my agency were plenty of ladies doing numbers work, including lady accountants. Another endeavor a ‘lady’ didn’t undertake in my agency was being knowledgeable about computers. Of course, lots of women were dealing with computers and software at the time in the Information Technology Division.

*One of my favorite mystery characters is female, Kinsey Milhone. Speaking of whom, Sue Grafton has another alphabet-titled novel on the shelves ...*

While certain pre-occupations might not be appropriate to “ladies.” Hoaxing has been appropriate to fandom, even if it’s been lagging of late. Nonetheless, I frankly don’t believe Taral Wayne in “The Fabulous Nufties.” While it is

appropriate for fans to hoax, it isn't appropriate for fans to work in unison either to hoax or to uncover hoaxes. For me, Wally Pomfritt joins Gordon Eklund's fabulous druggy in *Trapdoor 26*, who was supposed to have teleported out of this world in 1967 and returned around 2003.

While hoaxing is appropriate to fans and only genteel occupations appropriate to 'ladies,' fighting is appropriate to soldiers, like Union Jack Jackson in James Bacon's "Union Jack." However, for a comic book hero, Union acts very realistic. Maybe that could be done in the '70s. Heroics have to be impossible these days. Even when Union does the impossible, the impossible is being assigned too many varied jobs in too many varied locales. That, we can forgive because it supplies an endless of stories.

On the other hand, *Rocky and His Friends* didn't just deal in the impossible; they dealt in the absurd. I have to agree with Taral Wayne's summation of the show in "The Chorus Line," 'most danged intelligent cartoon show' ever. My hands down favorite segment was "Peabody's Improbable History." I remember, in one, Lucretia Borgia's husband loved her and excused her poisoning as a hobby. Someday, I'm going to have to get the DVD collection.

I am glad that *Rocky and His Friends* is complete in a DVD set. Chris Garcia points out how many famous films are incomplete. He can add, I hear, *Horse Feathers* with the Marx Brothers. I hear there was a whole segment snipped where the Marx Brothers play cards as the university burns down.

A famous science fiction novel was incomplete in its own way, as far as I am concerned. Darryl Schweitzer claims that Heinlein was horrified that anyone should try to live the lifestyle described in *Stranger in a Strange Land*. He implied it would be impossible for a human being. I am not certain about that. My impression was that it was filled with vague but glittering generalities. Around the time of the hippies, people loved them or hated them. However, they could be anything you wanted.

I think Deconstructionists have a different problem. Darryl finds them unconvincing. I doubt they even try to convince. Their views are right and other people's views are wrong. In fact, if you are a certain type of person: capitalist, White, have hemorrhoids: all your views are ipso facto wrong. If you believe their views are not wrong: although you are not capitalist, White, et al: then you are a dupe of the Man. That's it. Logic and reason are disparaged as one of the tools the Man uses to enslave you.

More useful to mankind is the Vietnam Memorial. It was disparaged when it was first constructed. Veterans suspected it was avant-garde nonsense. However, in that avant-garde design was something very practical. By merely finding his name on the Memorial wall, it allowed my wife to get in touch with a friend who died in Vietnam. It also allowed Guy to get in touch with his Cousin Jimmy, who died there. Which he does in "Jimmy My Cousin Who Died in Vietnam."

*Putting aside (a very) few racial slurs directed against the architect by mental defectives, the major gripe about Maya Lin's Vietnam Memorial design was that it was insufficiently glorious – at least, that's what Ross Perot and the other complainers seemed to be saying. They called it "a black gash of shame" and insisted on having a more traditional statue added. Fortunately, the statue was effective – the men depicted seem to be searching the Wall for the names of comrades – and the Memorial has been one of the most moving sites on the National Mall. Contrast it with the hideous WWII Monument, good for nothing but cooling one's feet in its pool.*

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First, let me say I was blown away from the front cover. Beautiful piece of art by Alan White and the use of full color here brings out everything nicely and sets the tone for your military theme for the issue. I looked for any inside art by Citizen White inside but didn't see anything else. Maybe you could persuade him to do more art for your future issues.

I had somewhat mixed feels about the special James Bacon issue of *Challenger*. The general theme of "military" covers quite a lot of territory and there seemed to be a very wide shot pattern from this approach to the theme inside, even from James Bacon, the man who wrote most of it.

Let me not forget to mention the back cover article concerning the passing of Frank Buckles, the last surviving veteran of World War One. I dunno, I was just put off by the title of the piece—"Frank Buckles Reports for Duty". I'm sure that Buckles enjoyed his fame during his final years of life as both a WWI veteran and the head of the group that represented the surviving WWI military personnel, but the tone of this article just hit me wrong.

The problem I have here is that it implies that being a WWI survivor was the only important thing in Buckles' life, as though everything else he did in life, his years as a seaman, being in the shipping business, his career as a farmer, as a father and husband, were somehow not important, or certainly were far less important than the freak of circumstance that made him the last man standing from the American involvement in WWI. I find this offensive. When I finally keel over at age 106, researching and working on my next article, I sure don't want my death to be noted in the press as "final survivor of the Vietnam Conflict reports for active duty in the hereafter." No thank you. My military service was part of my life, but it was not the defining part of my life, and I'm pretty sure military service was not the defining moment of Frank Buckles' life either. He had some media attention from it in the closing years of his life, but it should be noted that he was not a professional soldier, and I doubt that in the afterlife, if there is one, he would want to be shuffled off to be stuck forever with a brigade of military types.

I have a problem with Joe Major's articles. It is clear that he knows the subjects he is writing about, and has made the mental jump of assuming that the people reading what he is about to write about also know a lot about those subjects, so he neglects to provide much in the way of background info, or the setups that would provide enough information that would lay the groundwork to establish the context of what he is discussing.

A pretty good example of what I'm talking about is his article "The World Is Mad"; which begins with a comment on people who apologize for missing major military action, and then jumps into a background about arctic explorers who happens to be exploring when WWI broke out. Now, I did a lot of reading and research on arctic explorers back in the late 1960s and early 1970s, much of which stuck with me, so I happen to know exactly who he is talking about and in what context this article is framed. I was mildly interested in learning how some of the participants in famous and not so famous explorers of arctic expeditions turned out over the years, but how many other people reading this article are going to know much, or any of that? Major knows, and then just assumes that because he knows, everybody else will automatically be able to follow his line of thought and his written comments. I don't think that's true at all. So while I enjoyed the article, I believe a lot of your readers are going to be fairly mystified trying to make sense out of these four pages.

The broad theme of everything military seems too wide a focus for me. So while I enjoyed some parts of the coverage, other parts left me cold. I liked the interview with Bill Gawne. He covered a lot of basic information about career soldiers, and he's still a science fiction reader. I remember some of this stuff myself. Somebody (maybe a lot of somebodies) said that soldering itself doesn't change much over the centuries, just the wars and the technology, and I think so far as human beings go that is true. The military is the ultimate hurry-up-and-wait government situation. You have periods of very intense activity followed by layoffs filled with stupid make-work and plenty of free time. When I was a soldier everybody read both comics and any book they could get their hands on. In the eighties and up the guys in the military that I knew thru my science fiction/comics/war games store were also heavily into fantasy role-playing and strategy war games. The brass were all in favor of that, since playing those games helped develop a wider imagination and a faster reaction sphere, plus it also meant that much less time was going to be spent by people drinking (or perhaps taking things stronger than alcoholic beverages.)

The article by Ian Nichols about the most notable military science fiction stories was interesting. Altho it is hard to argue with his choices for the best modern war related science fiction, he is entirely correct that war and the military involvement has been a major ongoing theme in science fiction since the very beginning. To sort of paraphrase Heinlein here, war is the ultimate solution to everything. If your enemies are all dead then they can't oppose your vision of the future. But I did think that Nichols overlooked a lot of older material that offered something worthwhile to the subject.

How could we forget, for example, "The Cold Cash War", a completely different look at war from a strictly economic viewpoint, a view which may well become reality in the future? When it costs a million bucks per soldier to send warriors into current combat, can one argue very strongly that in the future the actual cost of war may well be the most important factor in conflicts or whether they are any major armed conflicts in the future at all?

The other interesting point about military science fiction which everybody seems to have overlooked in these discussions is the fact that science fiction stories about war date very rapidly. They become outmoded and passé even faster than any other almost any other kind of science fiction because the art and the weapons of war change so rapidly.

In struggles of national survival, everything gets thrown into the conflict, so rapid changes in technology, trying to get the edge on your opponents, become paramount. Stories about the horrors of super fast air craft, or lightning fast light weight tanks, or poison gas, or even nerve gas, once common in science fiction before the advent of WWII now seem hopelessly quaint to modern readers because all that and even more futile guesses were eclipsed by the events and the actual advances of came out of that conflict. Super-dreadnaughts succumbed to the flying attacks of a thousand air planes launched from aircraft carriers. By the fifties atomic bombs that could wipe out vast numbers of people were loaded onto flying bomber squadrons that never landed, and were in turn eclipsed by guided missiles, and now, by unmanned drones and spy planes so small they are almost impossible to detect yet so versatile they can go almost anywhere to deliver death on demand. Now we have armored robo-suits that make individual soldiers into super fast tanks with



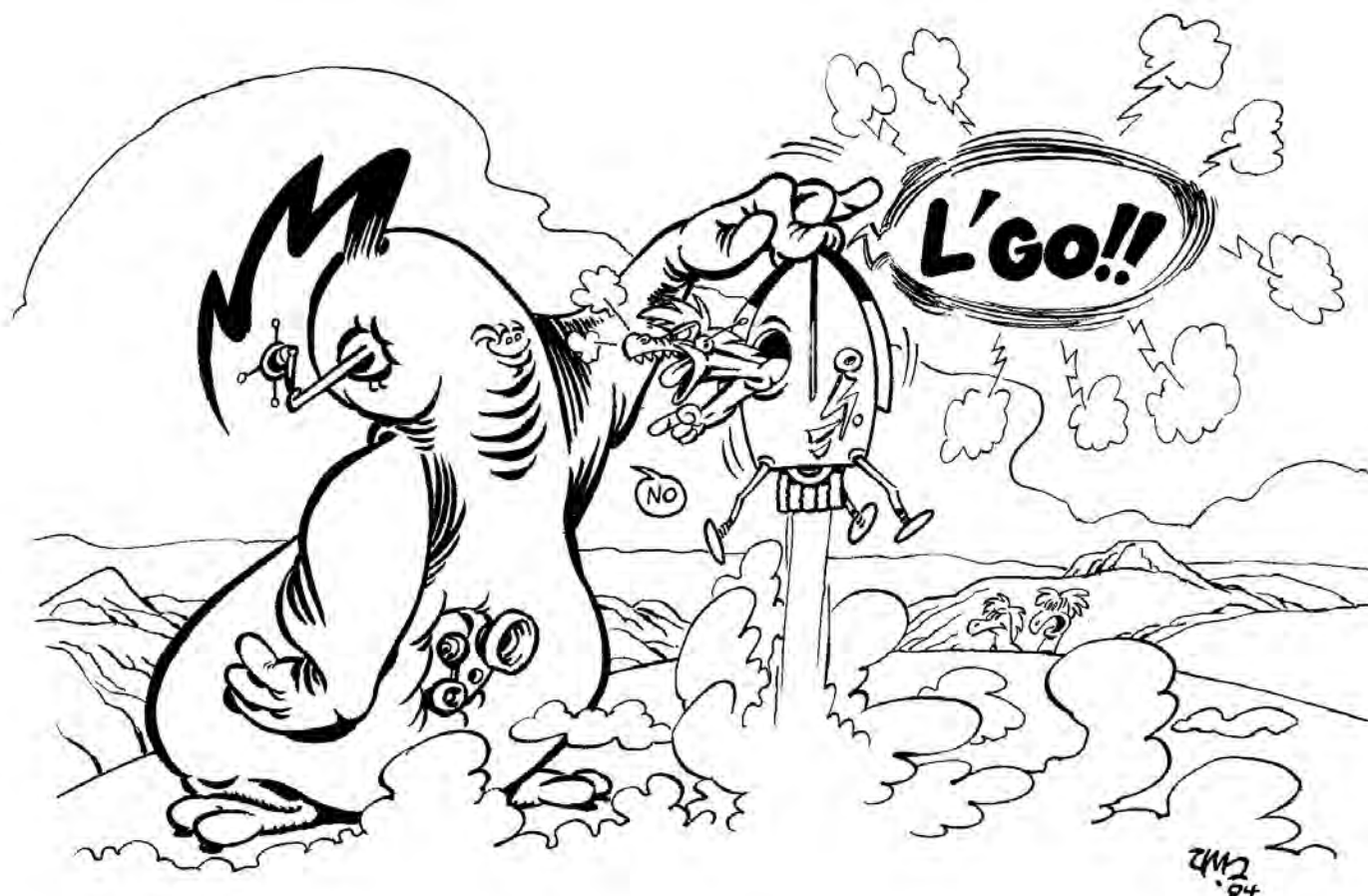
more firepower than the Panzer of WWII. War advances technology so fast and in such a wide variety of directions that science fiction can't even hope to keep up with it.

Which brings me to the article about Jules Verne and his predictions about the future. Verne was a fairly complex personality, not particularly well-understood even in his own time, and even more difficult to unravel a century or so after his death. He wrote for the money, first and foremost. He never seemed to doubt his ability as a good writer, and he exasperated his publisher by submitting revisions and changes to his works right up to and sometimes even as the presses were rolling printing out his books. He tried to ground his stories in science as he knew it and as he expected it to be used in the future, but he was first and foremost a speculative writer, so trying to make his stories jibe with future realities isn't going to be very productive, any more than trying to explain away his prejudices and foibles by using a modern social lens are.

No science fiction writer of any age who produced a reasonable body of work is going to be able to sustain his abilities as a predictor of the future, because you can't accurately predict the future. You can make some guesses, but most of your guesses are going to be wrong. That has always been true and always will be true, and I think it's unfair to judge Verne, or Wells, or Burroughs, or George England, or Robert Heinlein or Isaac Asimov or any other popular SF writer in this genre by his scientific predictions instead of the quality and readability of his stories. It's science fiction folks, not pseudo scientific psychic divination. Talk about the adventures, not the inventions.

Shelby Vick had a very unusual article this issue. I've followed Shelby's writing and fanzine career for decades and have always found him amusing, well read and a versatile writer. So I was fairly amazed when I read this thing about his religious views. It seemed very strange to me. Not his views about god and religion and life and the mystery of it all. All of those concepts seemed pretty much in agreement with what a fairly large number of people in modern western society seem to feel about deities and their relationships with them.

No, what struck me as being odd was his way of phrasing the points in the article; his delivery, even the title itself. It was written almost as though he were living in some kind of medieval theocracy where he expected that actually stating his personal views about his own private religious beliefs would somehow violate The Law and he might be hauled off instantly by officers of The Inquisition and imprisoned or burned at the stake for daring to express those views. How on earth did he ever reach that sort of situation? What the hell are the neighbors like down there where he's living these days that would force him to present his article in such hesitant, almost frightened tones? Is there more involved here than we know? There sure seems to be some kind of back-story here that would probably be more intriguing than all the words in his essay.



Nice illos of the fan personalities scattered thruout the issue. Some of the military hardware photos you used seem to have pixel glitches. Or maybe it was just that super-secret government stealth photo jamming that prevented some of those photos from coming thru clearly.

“Wings O’Bannon” was mildly amusing. I have seen these kind of hard-boiled detective cliché-ridden satires in zines before, but there were a couple of nice twists to the form here, and I suppose that every writer who does detective stuff has to get that stuff out of his system some way or the other.

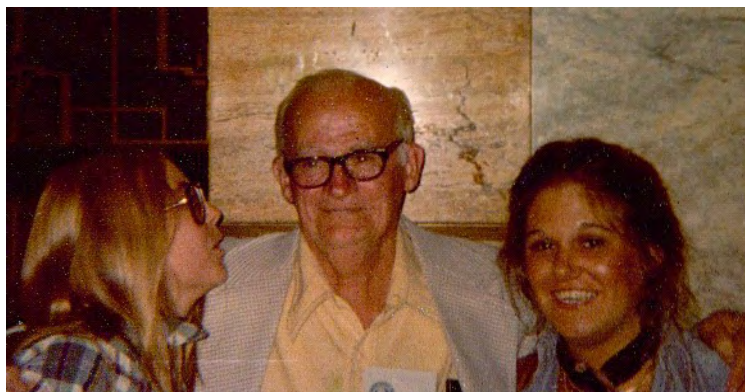
Hey, I never knew Elizabeth Moon was a Marine alumna. Good mini-interview about her service career.

Count me as one more male who is opposed to intentionally allowing women to go into combat. I’m generally in favor of gender equality, and yes, women have been unintentionally involved in some combat situations since forever. But of all the horrible situations the human animal can become involved with, war is one of the worst than can be imagined. This hideous situation should be the sole responsibility of the male. Protecting women and children and the family they represent have always been the ultimate goals of wars. If nations run mostly by men want to engage in wars for whatever reasons then I think that men as the protectors of the family should be the ones who fight those wars. Call me hopelessly old fashioned if you want. I think the mantra from WWII still works very well – where women were urged to take on war production and industrial and transportation jobs so more men could go into military service. Women were urged to join the branches of the military because every support job filled by a woman meant that one more man could be released to go into actual combat. That is a tactic I approve of, but not sending women into the horrors of armed combat.

Nice short article by Bacon on the Norse Warriors and their adoption of the skull symbol. The Punisher comic character may be the most visible modern use of the skull symbol, but it is hardly new. In comics The Black Terror had a skull and crossbones on his black costume, and skull headed heroes/villains from The Skull (himself!) thru King Kull, The Face, Ghost Rider (the western hero) to Ghost Rider (the flame headed Marvel character) have always been around. So far as military images go, the skull is also not hard to find, although mostly not with the good guys. The Nazi Waffen SS used the skull symbol, and so did some ancient armies.

Interesting article on *Union Jack Jackson*. I wish Bacon has expanded this article and included more details about the adventures and the way the stories developed thru the years. A few more words about the personalities of his fellow soldiers would not have been out of order either. It was a nice but too brief overview with some good supporting illos. The shot of Father Christmas carrying an Enfield with fixed bayonet depicted on the frocov of the 1955 Christmas Warlord special issue is a classic. Some enterprising fan might consider turning that shot into a poster. It would probably sell pretty well at most any convention these days.

Thanks for running my name with address and email in your *Challenger* letter column. For whatever stupid reason too many zines these days feature letter columns with names only, no addresses. How the hell are fans supposed to stay in touch with each other without come sort of contact information? Looking forward to *Challenger* #34, due out next month, right? Hey, don’t go aiming that rocket launcher my way; it was just a suggestion!





# E.R.B. GOES POSTAL

*Patrick H. Adkins*

There has never been a U.S. commemorative stamp devoted to a pulp writer of fantastic or science fiction. Soon that oversight will be rectified. Next year the U.S. Postal Service will begin selling stamps depicting Edgar Rice Burroughs and his most famous creation, Tarzan. This event is neatly timed to commemorate the one-hundredth anniversary of Burroughs' first publications, which appeared in *All-Story Magazine* in 1912. ("Under the Moons of Mars," retitled *A Princess of Mars* for book publication, was serialized beginning with the February issue and "Tarzan of the Apes" appeared complete in the October issue.) After years of literary disdain and even derision, Burroughs will finally join the ranks of Poe and Hawthorn, Melville and Twain, Faulkner and Hemingway — as well as Horatio Alger and Dr. Seuss.

This milestone has a long back story. Since at least the 1960's, Burroughs fans have organized campaigns to put ERB on a stamp. (I know; I wrote one of those unanswered letters to the stoic USPS Stamp Advisory Committee or its forerunner.) Such fruitless efforts have been repeated sporadically over the intervening years, with an equal lack of success. This time the timing has turned out to be flawless. The postal service has become notably less snobbish about whom it deigns to honor, probably after observing the runaway sales on their Elvis commemorative. And not only is 1912 a centennial year, but the first of Burroughs' century-old stories will premiere in the multimillion-dollar Disney PG-13 spectacular *John Carter*—in 3D and on Imax, no less—at about the same time that the stamp is introduced. Let's just say the Disney promotion machine has no equal.

Does Burroughs deserve such an honor? It would be difficult to name a writer with a wider range of influence. Writers? Robert E. Howard, Ray Bradbury, Leigh Brackett, Arthur C. Clarke, Robert A. Heinlein, Frank Herbert, Michael Moorcock, and Michael Crichton come readily to mind. Indeed, virtually any sf author who engages in worldbuilding is following in Burroughs' footsteps. Scientists? Jane Goodall, Carl Sagan, and a host of NASA personnel. Political influence? Ronald Reagan credited the idea for the Strategic Defense Initiative ("Star Wars") to Burroughs' Mars novels, which thereby arguably played a role in the downfall of the Soviet Union. (That sort of puts him in Harriet Beecher Stowe territory.) Popular Culture? Flash Gordon, Doc Savage, Superman, *Star Wars*, *Avatar*, and virtually any couplings of science fiction and feudalism owe him a debt of inspiration. And we've really only scraped the surface. Burroughs already has a crater named after him on Mars. It seems appropriate that his home planet honor him as well.

The artwork for the new stamp is attractive, if a bit simplified (Disneyfied? Many Burroughs fans would prefer something echoing the work of J. Allen St. John). But, as they say, it's the thought that counts, and we didn't even have to choose between the young Edgar and the old Edgar. Perhaps now we can look forward to stamps bearing the likenesses of Heinlein, Bradbury, and Asimov. I'd especially like to see a Theodore Sturgeon myself.

*You could walk into Platinum Plus clad like Napoleon at his coronation – a crown of gold, platinum and silver upon your brow, swathed in multiple layers of silk, ermine and mink, your fingers weighted with diamonds, sapphires, rubies and emeralds. You would leave wearing naught but a single sock and a rubber band to hide your shame. Now that **had** to be*

# THE GREATEST STRIP JOINT IN THE WORLD

**(Well, okay, “in America”; I’ve never been to Crazy Horse in Paris)**

*GHLIII*

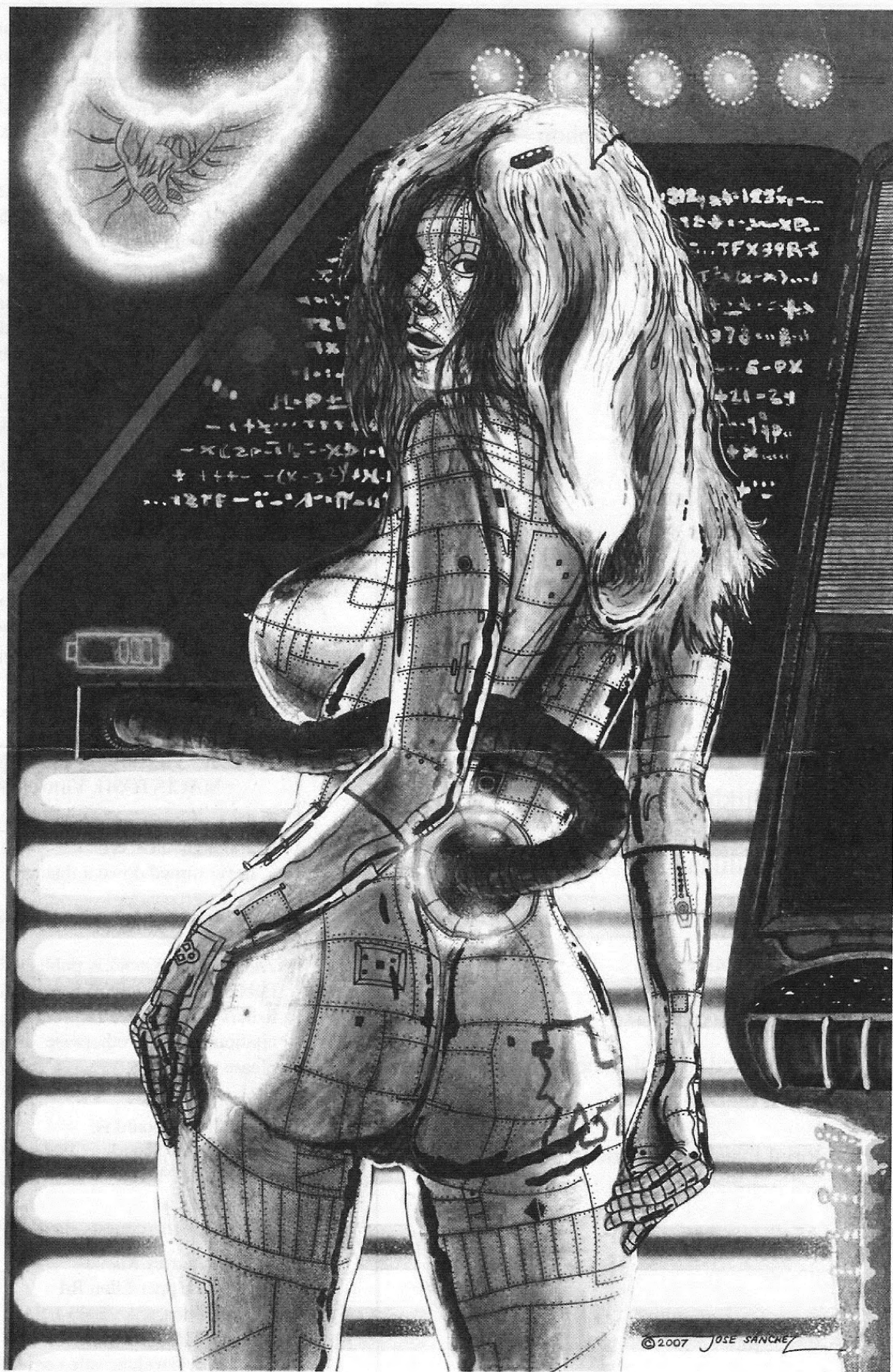
*Art by Jose Sanchez*

Many, many years ago, in the days of my callow, shallow youth, when Rose-Marie was a dream I knew I would never deserve and could never attain, and moved by a boy’s forgivable curiosity as to the hidden nature of the mysterious female form divine (my feminine acquaintances to date having affected the couture of nuns and polar explorers, with naught exposed to view but the tips of their noses), I allowed myself to be lured into the debauched but elegant provinces of the greatest Gentlemen’s Club on the continent: Platinum Plus in Memphis, Tennessee.

The exact reason I was in Memphis has slipped the coils of memory. Perhaps I had made the drive to that jewel on the Mississippi to view one of its superb museum exhibitions – unparalleled displays on the life of Napoleon, the terracotta armies of the Chinese emperors, or the sunken glories of the *Titanic*. Or perhaps I was passing through en route to or from New Orleans from or to Buffalo, there to visit my mother, dutiful son that I was. Whatever the rationale, in Memphis I was, in a cheap motel on the south side of the city, and there also was, down the street, a business advertising in garish neon **GIRLS GIRLS GIRLS**. Curious as to what that might mean, I entered.

Time has mercifully scoured my mind of the cacophony of noise and image that greeted me within. All I can now state is that I staggered, eyes ruptured from the foulness of what they had beheld, into the parking lot, where, weeping for debased humanity, I leaned helpless against my car. There I attracted the attention of a savior in mufti, a young fellow in neat moustache and goatee, who observed in kindness “You shouldn’t mess with a dump like this! Follow me and I’ll show you a *classy* place!” Innocent I was, pure from folly and pristine of soul, but nevertheless I had not been whelped the day before. The young man immediately noted my flinch of caution. “Don’t worry,” he said. “I’m a cop! I know all these places. Just follow me!” And he boarded an automobile and headed off.

I figured I had nothing to risk. If I didn’t like where this dude led me, I could always gun it and escape. I mounted my own set of wheels and followed.





We drove north on I-55 to I-240, the interstate ringing the city. One or two exits eastward his taillights – fiery red, like the eyes of a demon coaxing me to my doom – pulled into a parking lot beside a nondescript building much like any mall restaurant ... with blacked-out windows. The demanding blare of rhythmic racket seeped through the walls to the outside. My benefactor led me to and through a door. The music grew in intensity and volume. To the cashier at the door he flashed a badge and said “He’s with me.” Agog with insouciant curiosity, I entered Platinum Plus.

Like the Tardis, Platinum Plus seemed larger within than without. The front room was furnished with tables and chairs set back in dark crannies or gathered about a large, round, brightly illumined central stage. Surely, I thought, there trained monkeys, pigeons and dogs would go through their paces to the delight of the patrons – of which there were many, though strangely all male. The officer and I took seats abutting the stage. Immediately a young lady, seemingly attired for bed, appeared and applied herself liberally to the policeman’s *corpus*. Glancing at me over her shoulder, he said “You look like you’re settled. Enjoy yourself!” and departed thenceforth for the back room, which was enveloped in cavernous darkness.

I peeked down after them: the room was filled with back-broken couches and easy chairs. No doubt a place for weary travelers to rest and converse about politics or the latest John Grisham – or, as in the case of my erstwhile companion, a place to grab a quick 40 winks with one’s *spouse*, for what other explanation obtained?

Rather than intrude on their nuptial privacy, I returned to my seat by the stage. Other beings of the female persuasion – also attired, oddly enough, for slumber – were seen to wander table to table, whispering in patrons’ ears, and occasionally leading gentlemen by the hand back into the room of couches. A lot of married couples obviously frequented Platinum Plus, though the wives were just as obviously nearsighted, judging from the difficulty they had in locating their husbands. The fellows escorted to the back were seldom the first guys they approached.

My attention was then drawn to the circular stage. A young lady – also clothed for the night! did no one around there do anything but sleep? – assumed its center. But ... there were no dogs to leap through hoops! Nor trained seals to balance beach balls on their noses! I leaned forward to see what tricks the young damsel might assay, as she positioned herself mere inches from my face and as the music rose ...

*Could such things be?*

So what differentiated Platinum Plus from all the strip joints in all the towns in all the world? How can I append to it the title of “The Greatest”? The Memphis gendarme had it right, I think. It had – mock me if you will – a certain class, a certain sheen, and a certain *Robot*.

I’ll discuss the Robot in a nonce. There are other questions about such businesses that beg answer. For instance, *why?*

I once eavesdropped on an argument between a detestable chauvinist of my acquaintance and an earnest young feminist with this as the topic. Her point of view, rather angrily expressed, was that locales such as Platinum Plus exploit and denigrate the female gender by reducing its members to mere objects of sexual manipulation and craving. *His* arguments were two: first, that if any gender was being manipulated and exploited, it was the male, and secondly, as he put it, “*Don’t muck with the lizard brain.*” With shame I admit that I find this perspective persuasive.

For what is this reptilian intelligence that my loathsome friend bespoke? It is the seat of the most fundamental needs and impulses of our species. It is home to hunger, lust, fear, lust, anger, lust, thirst, lust ... and lust. From the furnace of its languageless depths come actions to meet these needs – and one should interfere with man’s search for basic satisfaction with great care. Anyone who has found himself positioned between a teenager and a potato should know that.

But civilization also exists, and civilization has created channels along which the forces salving our needs must flow. As that eminent masculine exemplar Leslie Nielsen put it in *Forbidden Planet*, “We’re all part monsters in our subconscious! That’s why we have laws, and religion! And Anne Francis!” Indeed ... and Woman.

“*Wo-man*,” muttered Boris Karloff, as Frankenstein’s creation. “*Friend ...*” As basic a desire as that for air or food. The *Other* – the source, the completion, the omega as well as the alpha. The goal of the great fundamental desire to be accepted, to be understood ... and to procreate. But Woman is different from the objects of other basic needs. Woman is not air. Woman is not food.

Woman, I am convinced, came to be to keep Man from devouring himself and the rest of Creation in constant conflict over his need. Just as it is only the teaching of our mothers that keeps us from feeding on street carrion and pooping where we stand, it is to assuage the other females of this world that Man does not prowl the planet in permanent pornographic priapism. Such is Woman’s gift to the species, Socialization, the advance in evolution that resulted from Man’s acknowledgment that getting killed over Woman makes no more sense than getting killed over Grapefruit.

But socialization notwithstanding, the hypothalamus – host of the lizard brain – persists. It still broadcasts its timeless message, that reptilian “*Gimme!*”, building an ever-increasing pressure within Man that civilized outlets cannot contain. Lest he explode, Man will find other ways to blow off steam. And thus the need for Platinum Plus.

So what does the lizard wit find at such establishments? I saw it during that first, traumatic visit, and mentioned it – her – above. Stalking the site in a state of extreme naturality, she *frightened* me on a cellular level. No, she was not Woman. She could not have been. She had to be *Robot*.

For there was no way that this was a human being. No human being could have flesh the color of pink marble with the suppleness of smoke, hair straight and glistening as platinum wire, a face blank and beauteous as the Moon, and a form that had to be an animatronic masterpiece designed by *Playboy* and constructed by Disney engineers. Real women are *organic*, almost savagely biochemical. They have labile moods and private whims, and furthermore ingest food and give forth waste. Gazing gap-jawed upon the Robot as she wandered the front and back rooms of Platinum Plus, I could not imagine this Galatea chowing down on a slice of pepperoni pizza, or Lord forbid, *voiding*. Can the *Mona Lisa* poop? Can Venus de Milo? (She’d be in trouble if she did.)

I could not claim any commonality of species with the Robot, but this ideal creature was instructive. If, as I have been oft-assured, Man does not understand the needs, whims, hopes and dreams of Woman, those needs, whims, hopes and dreams being *weird*, the contrary is certainly the case. Woman understands Man’s. And the Robot embodied them. For we may take it as true that she was not, in reality, a construct of platicene and wire, but a real girl, and I don’t mean Real in the sense of Lars’ Bianca. She was simply *hip to what we want*: a supremely empty and accessible being, of pristine but wanton sexuality — an embodiment of sterile carnality, free of blemish and more importantly *free of judgment* – a creature onto which the base desires of the lizard brain could be safely projected, from whom we should fear no contempt or rejection or ridicule. A female without femininity. A certainty, not a mystery. And all we had to do to achieve her was *pay*.

Oh yes. There was that. As I averred above my title, you did have to shell out the lucre at Platinum Plus – *lots* of it. You pay and you pay and you pay – and they know we’ll do it. So though the cosmic form of Woman may indeed suffer a sort of degradation and lack of respect at Platinum Plus, it was Man that was being fleeced. For who would pay anything, *everything*, to have the mystery of the Other become a certainty in one’s lap?

I ought to mention at this point that I no longer frequent establishments such as Platinum Plus, and there are several reasons. First, since dreams *do* come true, I’m a married man. One does not insult the Other who has chosen to join

you as One. Secondly, after one particular visit to a titty bar, I found myself after a time literally *stupefied* by too much input – the lizard brain was simply exhausted. Since then, I get bored after a fairly short time: all such places are expensive and the scams frankly get on my nerves. *Yeah, I know I'm a dumb male. So what?* And lastly, there was my final impression of Platinum Plus ... in fact, exactly that, because after this, I never returned. This was an occasion when, upon leaving the men's room, I discovered that *I was alone*.

There was no one else in the front room – no dancers cavorting on stage or prowling the tables, no suckers parked at those tables, not even a cashier at the register. I could have rifled the till. Where was everyone? I followed my ears to the back room, the room of stained and battered couches. It was, as ever, engulfed in shadow, but from that darkness I had sensed an undertone, barely audible beneath the blaring snarl of the music. A prelingual *moan* it was, as if the whole room had dissolved into a single groaning mass. It was a strange association to make, but I was reminded of the pile of hippydom I'd encountered at People's Park in 1969 – a human mass clinging together and chanting OMMMMMMMM ... Now, as then, I stood back. All I'd have to do is dive in, cash at the ready, and I'd've been *absorbed*. No more isolation. No more frustration. No more Me-and-the-Other. No more Me, period. So I left.

And now it's too late. Retreat into the simian bowels of Platinum Plus is impossible, and has been since December, 2006, when the local constabulary shut it down. I understand they arrested 75 people. I wonder if the cop who took me there in the first place was in on the raid.



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*Challenger doesn't often print fiction, but when a talented musician and wordsmith – and brother SFPAn – offers a tale such as follows, we couldn't resist.*

# AFTER THE MAGIC

*Kent McDaniel*

*Illo by Victor Hess*

On the courthouse lawn stood two gleaming statues of golden stone, a man and woman holding hands, smiling at each other. Both stood on no base but their own feet and possessed such detail it seemed they might stroll off. Before them, a mother and little girl stood bathed in twilight; the mother turned to an elderly man on a metal bench alone.

“We’ve been admiring the statues.” She lifted her hands. “So life-like....”

He pulled out a handkerchief and mopped his bald head. “Beautiful, aren’t they?”

The little girl looked from the statues to him. “Who made ‘em?”

His eyes shone. “Ah, you want to know about that?” He gestured beside him.

The girl plopped down beside him, and her mother sat beside her.

“Well, first off,” he said, “it’s a story about love. And magic. And a conjure woman named Ludeana Quinn.”

“Conjure woman?” The girl frowned.

“A woman who does magic.” He gazed at them. “All that interest you?”

The little girl nodded and bounced; her mother smiled.

“Well, then.” The old man slipped his handkerchief back in his shirt pocket.

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Back in 1954 Tom Norwood was almost twenty-seven and lonesome, real lonesome. Oh, he’d had an eye for the girls. Escorted many a girl to the dances, and many a girl waited for him to get serious. And waited. He was slim and strong; his brown hair was curly; his eyes were blue. He played the field, and if it started to shrink, he hardly noticed. Then June of fifty the North Koreans crossed the thirty-eighth parallel. He was never sure why, but at twenty-three Tom up and joined the Air Force.

He spent the Korean War in Okinawa, an airplane mechanic. Back home afterward, he couldn’t wait to play the field again. Only in those three and a half years, the field had plain disappeared. His friends’ kids were almost ready to start school, and he was too old for the girls in town. Before, he’d done light carpentry and house-painting; but now he took to sitting by the river. Or sometimes at Washington Park, he sat by the bandstand, like some ghost sang the blues up there. Sometimes he just followed his footsteps.

In May, one morning he found himself in front of the First Methodist Church. Across the street stood a two-story white house, and a sign in front said Miller’s Inn. Flowers bloomed by the front porch--geraniums, mountain daisies, pansies, irises. In a pale blue dress, Sara Miller stood watering them, and Tom’s heart went boom. Her blond hair glowed like the daisies; her face itself was delicate as a blossom. He’d known her since third grade, but this was like love at first sight. Heart thumping, he walked over to her.

She turned his way and blinked. “Tom, how are you?”

He shrugged. "Okay. Your flowers look good."

"They do, don't they?"

"You look pretty as ever."

A smile crossed her face, and he asked, "You think we could have lunch sometime?"

She turned off the water. "I don't think so, Tom." She hurried inside.

Where had her old smile gone, he asked himself, but really he knew: Cyrus West stole it. Back in seventh grade Sara had fallen for Cyrus, a gangly redhead, and they went steady through high school. After that, Cyrus went off to college, and Sara went to secretarial school across the river, in Riggsville. But he was home every weekend. After he graduated, they'd marry, and he'd go to law school. So much for plans. Three weeks before Cyrus graduated, he ran off and married Sara's cousin, Judy.

Sara's one friend, other than Cyrus, had been Judy. Her parents weren't people who could handle emotion. She was all torn up, with no one to talk to. When word got out, some girls at church snickered about Cyrus and Judy. Sara quit church, and before long her job, and left home less and less. She couldn't, or maybe wouldn't, deal with it all.

It'd all happened before Korea, and Tom had forgotten about it. But now in his mind, she kept smiling down on her flowers.

Next afternoon, he called her, his heart going like a jackhammer. "You know, Sara, *The Glen Miller Story* is showing over in Riggsville. I wondered if you'd like to go."

"Oh, I couldn't," she said. "Things are just too busy at the inn. But it was nice of you to ask."

Couple days later he tried again, with *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*. She turned him down and didn't bother with an excuse. He left his parents' house, across from Central School, and head hanging, walked down to Haley's Drug Store, by the courthouse. The girls had always liked him before.

In Haley's he carried a *Mechanics Illustrated* over to the soda fountain. A mom and dad with two boys were at the counter; he sat at the other end. He was slurping the last of a cherry phosphate through a straw, when someone tapped his shoulder. He turned, and Cyrus West was on the next stool, thirty pounds heavier than he'd been in high school, a lawyer now. Behind horn-rim glasses, his eyes twinkled, and he pointed at Tom's empty glass. "Looks like you could use another one."

Cyrus ordered Tom another and himself a Green River. Tom was puzzled: He and Cyrus had both played high school baseball, but they hadn't run around together. As Tom took a sip, Cyrus said, "I hear you have a soft spot in your heart for Sara Miller."

Tom leaned back. "Word does travel fast."

"Well," Cyrus said, "my wife *is* Sara's cousin."

"One morning I looked at her, and something just came over me."

Cyrus smiled, but he looked down.

"When I was a kid," Tom said, "I'd be last one to leave the playground every afternoon. I'd shoot baskets, everything quiet. That morning, seeing Sara was like somebody showing up at the playground." He turned to Cyrus. "Am I making sense?"

"Probably not." Cyrus slapped Tom's shoulder. "But I get you." He tapped the back of his hand against Tom's elbow. "I think it'd be great if you and Sara got together." And Cyrus would be glad. It might end his guilt--and Judy's. When they'd run off, it'd been like they lost their minds.

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That Saturday afternoon, Cyrus was at his parents', fidgeting, glancing outside, until finally he slapped his textbook shut. He went out to the garage for his bike, which had gathered dust for years. He was riding it toward the Tastee Freeze when Judy came his way on her bike. Quieter than Sara, with black hair and cat-like eyes, she wrote poems, liked to be alone.

She was headed out to the countryside, and Cyrus rode along. Soon they were rolling between meadows and fields--not a cloud in the sky. They stopped on a little bridge, and below, water splashed over stones. Beyond the





bridge, wildflowers bloomed all over a meadow. Honeysuckle, Alfalfa, Sweat Pea, Wall Flowers, Comfrey, and more; in the sunlight, they all glowed like they were electric. Cyrus and Judy strolled into them. Halfway across the field, a cloud of yellow butterflies--there must've been over a hundred--rose up around them. Judy held out her hand, and one lighted on her palm. Smiling, she moved closer to him and turned his palm up. She put her palm beside his, and the butterfly tiptoed onto his. With shining eyes they watched it rise and fly away, and then they turned to each other.

They kissed, and Cyrus's body sang. That kiss zapped his plans like an atom bomb and hit Judy just as hard. It was bad; they should've handled things better. What they did was run off and get married.

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The day after Tom talked with Cyrus, he called to invite Sara to an ice cream social at New Liberty Baptist.

Her mom answered. "No, Tom, I'm sorry,

Sara can't come to the phone."

He tried again next day, but her mom answered again. Sara couldn't come to the phone, he guessed, because it was him. He should forget it, but he couldn't. People had always said he was stubborn anyway. One morning a couple days before the ice cream social, he walked over to Sara's, and she was working in her geraniums. She stood and tried to smile, but couldn't quite make it work.

"Hello, Tom." She held her hands together at her waist.

"Hi," he said, "New Liberty is having an ice cream social. I wondered if you'd want to go."

She said soft-like, "I don't go out much."

He wondered how anyone could stay home all the time.

Like his thoughts showed, she said, "I read. I work in the garden."

"Well," he said, "maybe some other time." But it looked like it'd take a miracle.

Still, Monday he went over to ask her to the roller rink. When he got there, it wasn't Sara in the garden, but her mom.

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On the bench in the town square, the little girl tugged at the old man's shirt. "Why won't she go out with him? Was he ugly?"

The old man shook his head. "Tom was good-looking; people liked him too. She was scared, that's all."

The girl stared at him. "Of what?"

"Love. Friendship. Life..." He spread his hands, then dropped them.

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So now Sara wouldn't even come outside. Tom couldn't sleep at night, and still her face was there, before his eyes. Finally he bought a box-ad in the classifieds of the town's weekly newspaper: "Tom Likes Sara." He ordered flowers too, to be delivered to her on Wednesday, when the paper came out. That night, he went to Haley's and found Cyrus there at the soda fountain.

"Did you see the paper?" Tom asked. "I sent flowers too. I figured--"

"I saw it," Cyrus cut in. "And it's just too darn much."

Tom stared.

"You're embarrassing her, Tom. It's time to give it up."

"I can't," Tom insisted. "She's the one. I know it."

Cyrus shook his head. "Sounds like a case for Ludeana Quinn."

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Beside the old man, the little girl bobbed her head. "The woman who does magic, right?"

He nodded.

"What kinda magic?" Her eyes sparkled.

"Hold on." He held up his hands. "I'll get to that. Just give me a chance."

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People told stories about Ludeana Quinn, late at night. Back in the frontier days, when she was little, the Shawnee had captured adopted her. Eventually, people said, a shaman took her as an apprentice. When the Shawnee lost their land, she'd run away to the deep woods, and to this day there she remained.

People claimed she could make herself invisible. Had supernatural strength. Saw the future and the past. Read minds, brought rain, healed the sick, mended hearts. You could wander the woods for days, though, and never find her. Your chances were best under a full moon, but if you didn't find her then, you'd be smart to stop looking. Lest you disappear. And if you ever did reach her, whether she'd help or make you sorry was harder to predict than the rain or the winds. She'd seen her parents killed, and grew up a savage. War dance, torture, and starvation, she'd watched them all. A trance came natural to her, and she traveled in it. Her ideas might be way different from yours.

People told stories: lovers joined, calamities avoided, miracles. Darker ones too: people regretting their wish, chained to attic walls. They said a man named Joel Avery kept after her, until she gave him a skunk's body. The rest of his days, he snuck around the woods, head on the body of a polecat. But who could believe all the stories? Back in high school, boys and girls used to go looking for Ludeana Quinn in the moonlit woods. Far as Cyrus knew, nobody ever found her. When he said a case for Ludeana Quinn, he meant lost cause.

Still, Tom's eyes lit up. "Ludeana Quinn," he whispered.

"Aw, heck, Tom." Cyrus slapped the counter. "Are you nuts?"

Tom smiled. "Most likely."

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A week later under a big orange moon, Tom pulled his Studebaker into Cyrus's driveway. He beeped his horn, and Cyrus stomped out. He jerked the passenger door open and dropped onto the seat without closing the door. "You don't plan to go through with this, do you?"

Tom smiled. "You coming?"

They drove southeast. Tom left the highway at a blacktop road, and they rolled past soybeans and corn, past cottonwoods, meadows, and ponds. On the highway, they'd passed cars, but the blacktop was deserted. After several miles, they turned down a gravel road. Cows grazed in moonlit meadows, and here and there a maple or oak overhung the road. Then Tom left the gravel for a rutted dirt lane through tall slender trees-- hickories and elms and sycamores-- and a half-mile down, the lane ended. In the moonlight an abandoned house stood, paint worn away, windows broken, and he parked in front. Woods were all around, bugs hummed, and the moon was halfway up the sky. Something told Tom that from here, he needed to go alone, so he left Cyrus in the car and marched off.

Tom was thinking: The woods weren't that big, 2,500 acres, maybe a little more. So where did Ludeana Quinn hide? But people said that under a full moon, you could wander into clearings, climb mounds, and rest by ponds you might never find again. As the trees closed around him, Tom caught himself walking on tiptoes. He stopped and looked up. Pieces of moon peeked through the leaves, and somewhere a night bird screamed. Standing on a leaf-covered trail, he squared his shoulders and started walking. Again the night bird's wail echoed, and the hair on Tom's neck stood on end.

The trail wound into deeper woods. Among the other trees, stood smaller twisted ones he'd never seen.

The trail narrowed, and the leaves overhead got thicker. The twisted little trees, with black leaves and bark like thorns, lined the path. Here and there boulders blocked the path. Some, he could go around; some, he climbed over.

Finally leaves blocked the moon completely. His throat tight, he stopped in the pitch black. From his pocket he pulled a plastic flashlight the size of a harmonica, holding it like some good luck charm. Again the night bird screamed, bleak, mournful. Tom switched on his flashlight. Twenty feet down the trail a stone blocked it, ten feet high, trees right up to its edge. Several limbs stuck over the rock, inches away it.

Swinging his beam side to side, he stepped toward the stone. As he shone the beam across it, its surface moved. He stopped three feet away. All over the stone, blind, pasty maggots squirmed. He looked left and right. The trees were so thick both ways, you couldn't get through. No way. Trees that tight seemed impossible. He swallowed, and glanced down. Stuffing the flashlight into his pocket, he stepped up to the stone. Not only the wet maggots showed life; somehow the rock itself seemed to hum with it.

There was no reason to climb over. Even if he found Ludeana Quinn, who knew if she'd help? If she was even real. He lowered his head. Gritting his teeth, he pressed his hands and knees into the thick, squirming mass. Growling like a dog, he began to crawl up, grabbing at slimy handholds. Halfway up he slipped and slid back to the bottom. He jumped back onto the rock and scrambled up again. Maggots were under his t-shirt and squirming up his pants legs. He wanted to scream, but his face almost touched the maggots. He gritted his teeth and climbed. With sticky fingers he grabbed a knobby branch and scrambled up to the top. He lay on his back panting. Somewhere inside the branches, the night bird screamed. Like arms, the branches whipped down and wrapped around him, pinning his arms, choking him.

The night bird sang out, hoarse and triumphant. The limbs tightened, ripping Tom's skin. Desperate, he got his hand into his pants pocket and found his Barlow knife. He jerked it out, pried the blade open, and shoved its edge against a limb gripping his thigh. He dug the blade into the bark, then pulled it along the limb. A tremor ran through every branch, and their grip let up. He whipped the knife loose, and sank it into the limb on his neck. He shoved the knife ahead. Again a tremor shook the limbs, and they fell from him. He rolled across the rock and down the other side. He landed in a heap and got up bloody and trembling.

From the treetops two yellow eyes floated down, and six feet ahead, stopped level with Tom's waist. In Tom's flashlight's pale light, the night bird stood like some huge crow. For maybe a minute, they stared into each other's eyes. Then graceful as could be, the bird spread its wings and rose. So slow and smooth it seemed to float, it flew off down the trail.

Tom hurried after it, shifting the flashlight between the trail and up above. After a quarter hour he turned off the flashlight. The moon shone down, the twisted little trees were gone, and the hickories, elms and sycamores stood reasonable distances apart. He came to a stream, and on the other side sat a clearing, a wigwam at its back, a bonfire in the middle. Between the flames and the wigwam a figure sat outlined. Silent as a ghost, the night bird flew over to it.

Tom stepped onto a fallen elm that crossed the creek. Halfway across, he stopped and sat down. He eased into the chest-high water, and the stream washed over him. He splashed water over his face, then climbed back on the elm. Shoes squishing, he crossed the creek and walked to the fire. The night bird had vanished, but by the fire a woman sat cross-legged, her back straight. She was slender, and reddish brown hair fell past her shoulders, her long face beautiful, stern. Even though it was unlined, something about it suggested age, maybe her eyes, or the set of her features, maybe the air of power she had.

He stood in a puddle dripping from his clothes. She smiled without much warmth. "Enjoy your bath, Tom Norwood?"

He nodded as he sat down across the fire from her. "Well, I needed it, that's for sure."

She chuckled. "Oh, I would say so." Brown, gold and green shone in her eyes.

"You come," she said, "about Sara Miller." She stared into his eyes. "Why should I help you?"

He gave a shrug. "I don't know, I guess. But I hope you will, if you can. You *are* Ludeana Quinn, aren't you?" In the fire, wood crackled and shifted, sending up sparks.

She nodded. "You found me. Now let me ask. How can you be sure you want Sara Miller?"

He moved his head to one side and back. "I think I love her. Maybe I'm nuts. But I want to know." He leaned back. The moon had turned silver.

When his gaze came back to Ludeana Quinn, her face got softer. "An honest answer anyway."

He leaned toward her. "I'm not asking you to make her love me. I just want her back together, whole. Then, whatever happens, I can live with."

She closed her eyes. A breeze blew over them, and above the clearing, a few stars sparkled around the moon, the air sweet, everything quiet. After a time, she opened her eyes. "Very well. I'll do what I can."

He nodded.

She said, "Go to Sara Miller in the morning."

"How can I ever repay you?"

"Don't waste this gift." She put her hand into a deerskin pouch on her belt, and took out a black cloth, gold needles and a spool of silver thread. She waved him off.

He started back the way he'd come, and in five short minutes, found himself at the edge of the woods, where he'd come in. He glanced up the trail, and a piece of the darkness seemed to fly away. Two gold eyes stared for a second and were gone.

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That night Sara dreamed she was with Cyrus West, both of them thirteen, the afternoon they fell in love. They'd sat together at the Saturday matinee, and afterward strolled down to Washington Park, where tulips bloomed. On the swings they talked about movies, music, friends.

Suddenly she was riding bikes with Judy down First Street along the Ohio River, its waters sparkling. They were laughing. Then as she walked up to Haley's Drug Store, Cyrus and Judy strolled out, smiling into each other's face. They looked up at her, stricken. From somewhere, golden light came down and surrounded her. She gazed into Cyrus and Judy's guilty faces. Then many other faces swam in front of her, smirking at her loss, leering. Still the golden light was all around her, soothing, and she saw below the spite, to their shriveled hearts.

In the morning, after breakfast Sara went outside. The grass was wet, and a breeze was blowing. Her snap dragons were blooming; the buds on her Zinnias looked almost ready to open. As she watered the flowers, she glanced toward the street, and Tom Norwood was coming. He waved and strolled over; his eyes twinkled, but they were wary. He stopped five feet away, like she might run.

"Hi, Tom." She smiled.

He smiled back like a little boy. "Could you use any help here?" He pulled his hands back. "It's ok if you can't."

Together they pulled weeds, talking. They'd never been that close, but they'd known each other since third grade. After a while, her mom came out, carrying a tray with two glasses of iced tea. Rolling her eyes at her mother's smile, Sara took the tray and led Tom to the backyard. In the shade of an elm, they sat in a swing, the sky above very blue. Hostas grew by the house; chrysanthemums and sage grew by the backyard fence.

Tom finished his tea. "Well, I guess I should get going here."

"I'm glad you came by." Sara smiled.

"Yeah, me too," he answered. "You know, *Three Coins in a Fountain* is playing at The Columbia. Would you like go?"

She glanced around the backyard, then slowly a smile spread across her face. "Hey," she said, "I think that'd be great."

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After that, they went everywhere: baseball games, dancing, the movies, you name it. People were glad to see Sara's heart mend. Everyone who'd wondered if Tom would ever settle down was happy. And Cyrus and Judy were probably happier than anyone.

Fall rolled in, and then Thanksgiving and Christmastime. And what a season of smiles and laughter it was. To cap it all off, Christmas Eve at the Emmanuel Baptist Church, Sara stood up, sparkling like a Christmas tree, and said that come summer she and Tom were getting married.

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Now, if the story ended there, wouldn't it be nice?

One Saturday afternoon around the end of February, Sara was at her parents' kitchen table having coffee. Tom came in all bright-eyed--could hardly sit still while she got him a cup. When she sat back down, he said, "I got a surprise for you."

Grinning ear to ear, he handed her an envelope. Inside, she found a deed to three acres out on Obermark Lake.

"I'm gonna build you a dream house," he said, "out there on the lake."

The look on her face wiped the smile off his. "What's wrong?" he asked.

Sara held her hands up beside her head. "Tom, I was figuring we'd live here at Mom and Dad's."

His face twisted. "I'm talking about a dream house, Sara, built with my own hands, out on that beautiful lake."

"This *is* my dream house. And Mom and Dad need my help." She looked down at the table. "And my flowers..." "But, we need our own place."

She looked up. "I just wish you'd talked to me about it first."

"Yeah, well. Sorry you didn't like my surprise."

Sara tried to think of something to say.

"I guess I got a surprise, too." He walked out.

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Next day he went to church with Sara, and afterwards had fried chicken at her parents'. But he and Sara didn't say three words, and he was home by one-thirty. A couple hours later there was a knock at the front door. It was Cyrus West with a basketball, and under a grey sky, they crossed the street to the courts behind Central School. Their breath showing in little streamers, they took turns shooting. After a while Cyrus hit a long jump shot, and Tom passed the rebound back to him. Cyrus bounced the ball and caught it. "I heard you and Sara had a fight."

Tom told Cyrus about it.

Cyrus bounced the ball again. "Well, can't you compromise? Maybe you could still build a cottage out there. Spend the weekends."

"Or maybe," Tom said, "we could live out there. And Sara could drive in to help her parents. Since they need her help so bad."

"Well, main thing is, you're gonna be together." Cyrus held the ball against his hip. "Maybe *where*, doesn't matter."

"I'm right about this, Cyrus," Tom said. "And if Sara gets her way, that's how it'll be from here on."

Cyrus nodded, but his face was long. When he first fell for Judy, the world had started to sparkle. She could do no wrong, and he'd be crazy about her forever. She was like God's gift to him. The gift wasn't exactly what he thought at first, though. He had to deal with her sides that weren't perfect, and get through the daily grind with her. Right now, things with Tom and Sara looked bad: Like the first battle in a long war...

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Neither one gave an inch about the house. Then one evening in April, Tom was driving them to a dance over in Riggsville. As they crossed the bridge above The Ohio, he glanced at Sara, the sky wide and blue, sun not quite down, the river sparkling. He said, "Hey, Sara, I been thinking. About my best man."

"Oh?" She turned his way.

"What do you think about Cyrus?"

"Are you joking?"



Tom glanced her way. "Cyrus is my best friend these days."

"Have you forgotten what he did to me?"

Tom glanced away. "That's all behind you, I thought."

"Forgiving Cyrus is one thing." She crossed her arms. "Him standing up at my wedding is another."

After the dance, in a booth at Stout's Truck Stop, Tom said, "Back to my best man. How about Ricardo Perez?"

Sara said, "The guy from New York you were stationed with?"

He nodded.

She rolled her eyes. "Can't you find someone from around here? Who won't complicate everything?"

So he didn't bring up Ricardo Perez again, or any other best man.

Then when they got in another argument the next week, about their honeymoon, they postponed the wedding, until they could straighten things out. But they didn't set a new date. And with the months, it got so anything one said, the other disagreed, their voices always cold and hard. Cyrus hated how things were turning out. Tom was his friend; Sara was his childhood sweetheart. He'd helped bring them together, and it had come to this. He talked to Tom again. No good. Sara's parents talked to her. No good.

Late that August, under a full moon, Cyrus went to the woods. He had as much trouble getting to Ludeana Quinn as Tom had, but he did find her. They sat by her fire, and Cyrus asked, "Can you make it right?"

She said nothing, the flames throwing strange shadows. At last something sad came and went in her eyes. "I'll do what I can."

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Cyrus expected big things, but nothing seemed to change. Tom and Sara still marched around, their voices shrill. Cyrus figured maybe Ludeana Quinn couldn't work the same magic twice. Sunday morning Labor Day weekend, he went up to Haley's Drugstore. As he left with a Sunday paper, he looked over at the courthouse. Dressed in their Sunday best, Tom and Sara stomped across the lawn, sneering into each other's face, arguing. They stopped in the center of the lawn, and Sara jabbed a finger at Tom.

Ludeana Quinn stepped from behind a maple, no expression on her face. She spoke words Cyrus couldn't understand, raised her hands, and threw them down. More reds, blues, and golds than you could count flooded the square. When the last shreds of color finally seemed to blow away in the wind, she was gone. Cyrus stared at Tom and Sara through tears: Gold statues of sparkling stone, and now everything about them spoke of new love.

\*\*\*\*\*

On the bench, the mother, daughter, and old man sat. It was still dusk, but the streetlights had just winked on.

The girl gazed at the statues. "Is all that stuff true?"

"Well, I had to guess a few details." He nodded slowly. "But 99 percent of it's true, that I guarantee."

"How do you know?" she demanded.

"Oh..." He shrugged. "Everyone round here knows about each other."

A white-haired woman in blue jeans and a Daisy Duck t-shirt walked up to the bench and gazed at the old man.

"Thought you might be here." She smiled.

He pushed his hands against his knees to rise, and then hand in hand with the placid lady, wished mother and daughter a good night.

The mother watched the two cross the lawn. At the street's edge, the white-haired lady loosed her hand, patted her companion's back and spoke, her words faint but clear.

"Time to come home, Cyrus."

# HOW I SPENT MY “CHRISTMAS” “VACATION”

By *littler* Guy Lillian, age 62 ½

My next *Challenger* will have a **medical** theme – contributions of any sort solicited, with gratitude -- and talk about a segue... This Christmas/New Year's, 2011-2012, has taught me a lot about the bridge between Sex & Romance and good old Mortality.

On December 18, 2011, while shopping for Rosy's Christmas gift at a local superstore, the world turned white around me – much like my experience in the tornado – and I fainted. The beautiful lady doctor in the E.R. told me I was profoundly anemic. The cocky gastroenterologist with the moonwalker's name eventually found the cause – bleeding diverticulitis -- and two burly, confident surgeons corrected said matter by lopping out two feet of my guttywuts on Christmas Eve.

Kinda put the kibosh on our plans to visit Rosy's parents in Florida for the last week in December, but it did save my life – and provide both an intro to next issue's theme, and a capper to this one's.

For with me, every repulsive second of the way, was the most beautiful and supportive, optimistic and helpful person in the world. While I struggled with my entry into the Zipper Club -- I anticipate laying the tale on *Chall* readers next issue – Rosy was with me. Seeing and hearing and smelling things no human being should have to endure, she stuck with me – and I suppose it's an indication of my innate immaturity that I was and am astonished that a human being could be so unselfish. Well, watch and learn, fanboy.

I spoke about the bridge between Sex & Romance and Mortality. Well, it wasn't for nothing that I was born on July 20<sup>th</sup>, date of the collapse of The Bridge at San Luis Rey (cf. Thornton Wilder), because the bridge is love, a lesson it seems one is never too old to learn. See you in the spring.

