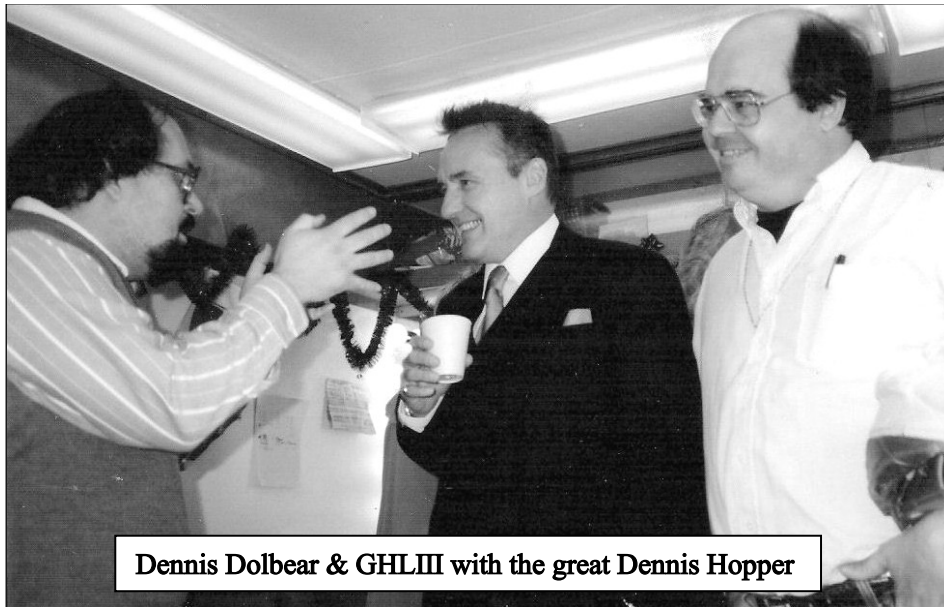


CHALLENGER 32



Summer 2010

Charles Williams



CHALLENGER 32

SUMMER 2010 | GUY H. LILLIAN III, editor

P.O. Box 163 Benton LA 71006 | GHLIII@yahoo.com | 318/797-1822 | 504/909-7084

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Cover by CHARLES WILLIAMS

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ALAS, BABYLON

There's been great stuff going on in my household this summer. Rosy and I bought and moved into our first house, a nice ranch job from the '50s. Both of our jobs changed, for the better. We watched Paprika, the humongous— for a yorkie — and alas, blind-as-a-bat daughter of Pepper and Ginger, bound and chew and pee and grow with exuberance and delight — just the ticket for a doggie in her first months of life.

Fannishly, I relished my “new” copy of Groff Conklin’s wonderful (and rare) 1954 anthology, *Science Fiction Thinking Machines*, which so lit my wits as a boy. (Ah, the smell of a great old book ... and the soul-igniting contents! Thank you, Bud Webster!) We edited — with Tim Miller’s guidance — the program book for ReConStruction, the 2010 NASFiC, which I believe came out well. As Official Editor of the Southern Fandom Press Alliance, I sent forth the July mailing. SFPA’s 50th anniversary is coming up next year; we’re trying to figure out a proper celebration. Finally, Rosy and I continued planning (and paying for) our Aussiecon 4 trip, due to begin short days after this *Challenger* goes forth.

I read Hugo nominees, the better to complete an informed ballot, and found Paolo Bacigalupi’s *The Windup Girl* most impressive. It’s been a strong season for SF film, too — Christopher Nolan’s PhilDickian *Inception*, a strong possibility for Reno’s Hugo ballot, the intriguing thriller *Splice*, the blunt but way-fun blasteroo *Predators*. But of course the major science fiction release of the summer is the major SF event of the year, if not the century so far, and as you see, I’ve telegraphed it through Charlie Williams’ cover and the collage that follows: the all-but-complete *Metropolis*.

Fritz Lang’s 1927 masterwork has been familiar for 80 years, of course, but in truncated form. My first experience with it was watching Justin Winston’s 8mm copy at his house, changing reels every eight minutes. What we believed was the Good Stuff was there — the model cityscape, the diabolic machines, the feminine robot. The ridiculous hero in jodhpurs was on hand, of course, falling so ridiculously for the purse-mouthed angel of the working class, Maria. His villainous capitalist father, the “master of Metropolis”, was there, and the jokey mad scientist Rotwang, so resembling Rat Packer Judd Nelson, so reminiscent of Dr. Strangelove with his artificial hand. And perhaps the reconciliatory message of the movie came through — *the heart must mediate between the head and the hand*. But the movie was *thin*. We were watching a butchered, truncated outline of *Metropolis*, with its own heart missing. The story of Babel was totally out of context; we had no idea why it was there. The figures of the Seven Deadly Sins appear — but why?

Over the decades, later versions emerged, as more and more film was discovered. Moroder wrote an original rock score for a colorized edition — his music drowned out the mockery of yuppies, often the movie’s only accompaniment, but ignored what Justin called the natural rhythm of the scenes, a rhythm already rendered totally askew by the thousand cuts *Metropolis* had endured.

But now — thanks to the Argentinean find — we have almost all of it back. *Metropolis* is all but complete. Only two brief scenes are missing, and only one of those is vital — a sermon on Revelations. Nevertheless, the scratched, grainy newfound footage adds so much. Now, we Get It. It feels now as if we’ve seen the movie.

We’ve seen, now, the scenes in the dramatic cadence in which Fritz Lang shot them. Thus the value of the snippets of a frame here, a second there — they restore the unspoken language of the film. We have never seen that before, so in truth, we have never seen *Metropolis* told the way it was meant to be told, before.

For the first time we've seen the vital contributions of the secondary characters Josaphat, "the Thin Man", and the worker known as 11811. For the first time we've seen the link binding Joh Fredersen, "Master of Metropolis", and the mad inventor, Rotwang: the lost Hel, loved by both.

And we've seen the purpose behind Rotwang's iconic robot – not merely a device created to provide tireless labor, or to reanimate the lost Hel, but a weapon to destroy Fredersen's son and city. The religious imagery throughout the movie now makes sense. Metropolis' fractured society mimics the Tower of Babel. The sybaritic insanity of the Rotwang's robot gains gravamen and terror. Seen in Biblical terms, she is the creature out of Revelations designed to destroy civilization through Dionysian nihilism and excess: the *Whore of Babylon*. Seen in that context, her goofy dance and the rich louts leering at it don't seem quite so silly: she is leading them to destruction and they are falling into step.

The characters have gained power and depth. The moral of the story has become coherent and compelling. *Metropolis* once again fills the eye and the heart.

And once again, in this summer of 2010, it makes tragic and terrible and tragic sense.

I keep remembering one particular person as I contemplate the British Petroleum oil spill and the murder of the Gulf of Mexico. She was a Cajun, Native American, blessed with skin like coffee, a smile brilliant as a bright day, and long, thick, fulgiant hair, hair thick and black and fluid as ... well, oil. She came to the Unemployment Insurance office where I worked when her job on the fishing boats ended with the season, smiling, resigned to being out of work for the moment, but having faith in the seasons, aware that with the turning of the wheel the fish would return and the boats would go out again and she'd be on one of them. I only saw her once, interviewing her for her little weekly check, but I've never forgotten that self-humorous smile nor that incredible black Indian mane.

She could stand for all of the people of the Gulf, fishermen and oystermen, all those toilers of the sea, people who work with hooks and nets to bring up the bounty of the ocean, the best food on the planet and the glory of our Coast. You could stand on the shore on Grand Isle, especially in the dead of night, as the moon seduced that deep, still water towards low tide, and feel in your every sense its riches and power. Those like my UI lady who worked the Gulf kept its faith and respected its aliveness, and now, thanks to men who respected only their own insatiability, all that is past. Yes, the well is capped – after weeks of incompetent experimentation that should not have been necessary – but our living, giving Gulf is ruined. Certainly for years; probably for the rest of our lives.

Babylon has returned in the glut of muck that was once the wonderful Gulf of Mexico. Our destruction has bubbled blackly to the surface, loosed by our thirst, our excess, our recklessness, our greed. Perhaps the Whore of Babylon is a clumsy metaphor for that recklessness and greed, but she is still a metaphor that fits: our society's insatiability, our consumptive need for more and more and more.

Who is at fault here? Of course it is British Petroleum. Their incompetence in first allowing the explosion and then in failing to stop the leak is worse than shameful. Accidents happen, certainly – as a Union Carbide brat (they employed my father for 30+ years), I well remember the horrors of Bhopal. But recklessness followed by incompetence coupled with bad faith equals criminal behavior. This spill is a crime, and the victims are not only the employees killed in a preventable accident, but the region that has been blighted, and the planet that has been despoiled. BP should be *skinned*.

Of course, I also hold the government responsible. The feds have been letting Big Oil risk our environment for decades, and that's been the case no matter what party held power. Both BP and the government should have been prepared to deal with this disaster from the first day of drilling. They were not. I insist on change. I want government to see to it that every drop of pollution is leeches from the Gulf. I want government to sue and prosecute BP in every legal fashion. Mostly, I want government to regulate future deep-water drilling with a fist of steel and be prepared to move in and take over any future snafus at *once*.

*And upon her forehead was a name written,
**MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE
 MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND
 ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.**
 Rev. 17:5*



The hacks who've chanted *Drill Baby Drill* should be tossed headlong into the Gulf and invited to swim for Cuba. See how they like it. But they won't stop. The clamor for more and immediate drilling goes on, and now that the well is more-or-less capped, the pressure – ha – will only grow. And Big Oil will win, of course. All they have to do is be patient, and our need for their money and our subservience to their product will overcome our anger and overwhelm our region's anguish. And someday this will happen again, and my poor Louisiana – which, as sediment collects on the delta, seems the depository for all of this nation's ugliness and ills – will suffer yet more.

None of this would have happened had Al Gore been allowed the presidency he won in 2000. None of it!



I didn't expect to whip out a *Challenger* in the month before Aussiecon 4, the 2010 worldcon – I expected the ReConStruction Program Book to leave neither time nor energy for personal projects. But *la belle* Rose-Marie, Tim Miller and I got the program book done by my birthday, July 20th, which gave me time, and viewing *Metropolis* and Murnau's *Faust* (with live music by a local rock band) boosted my fanzining spirits. So here it is. Many thanks to Charlie Williams and Kurt Erichsen for their quick, brilliant art, and to all of the *Chall* Pals herein who leant us their wit: James Bacon, Martin Morse Wooster, Mike Resnick, Greg Benford, Joe Green, Lester Boutillier, Binker Hughes, Mike Estabrook (I went to high school in the shadow of Mt. Diablo), and of course, *la belle* Rose-Marie.

Sorry for all the grim real-world stuff by *me*, but at least one piece *demand*ed reprinting in a zine themed on the demolition of civilization. Who could we call a Rotwang of the '60s? Whose minions were figurative robots sent forth to cause horror and destruction under the pretense of liberation? And who has tried ever since to shed her robot skin? It's tough reading, but take a look at my "Healter Skelter" later in this issue. See why I called the article that.

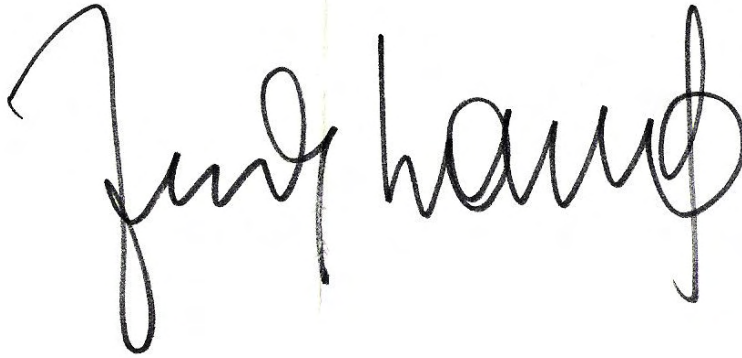
There are two losses I must note. **James Hogan** was a genuine *Chall* Pal, contributing humorous anecdotes and serious op-ed pieces to this journal, including a controversial article challenging (appropriately enough) the relationship of HIV with AIDS. (It was reprinted in a Baen collection of his essays.) Jim was a jolly companion at multitudinous Southern conventions, and even if his contrarian opinions varied celestially from mine, his camaraderie overwhelmed all. He will be a thousand times missed.

As for **Dennis Hopper**, it may seem like fan-boy hubris to note here the passing of such a famous, accomplished actor (who never wrote anything for *Challenger*), but I have personal reasons for doing so. Certainly his work was stellar throughout his career, and only improved as he lived his way through his private Hells. No one who saw *Blue Velvet* or *River's Edge* or *Apocalypse Now* or any of his distinctive, idiosyncratic work will ever forget him. Even the early TV work ... I think particularly of his amazing turn on *The Defenders* and his second-earliest performance, ever, on a show called ... *The Public Defender*!

But those lucky enough to personally encounter the man have better reasons to mourn his recent death. Liz Copeland and Dennis Dolbear will back me up on this: on both of the occasions when we met him, he was friendly, funny, and accommodating – a truly Great guy, who'd been through horrors, some of his own devising, and come forth, better. He exemplified a generation. He was *the* performer of our times.



Next issue, *Challenger* #33 – a **Military** theme! Cover by Alan White. Deadline, December. Between now and then, look for our Aussiecon report. If the reality is a tenth as grand as the anticipation, *The Aboriginal Route* should be quite a trip!

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Fritz Lang". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Fritz" and last name "Lang" clearly distinguishable.

Guy Lillian III

On November 10, 1969 Fritz Lang spoke in Berkeley. I went to see him. The auditorium was so crowded I had to sit in the aisle – almost literally at the great director’s feet.

That night we’d see Lang’s first sound film, *M*, which starred Peter Lorre and also happened to be *his* first movie. I thought Lang’s blue suit old-fashioned (“anachronistic,” I wrote in my diary) but the man himself? “*Magnificent!*”

He talked about his movies, which he called his “children, and told his stories, including the famous one that might be apocryphal: how Dr. Goebbels had called him to his office, offered him control over the entire German cinema, “and the next day I left Germany.” The crowd was stunned. You could hear everyone refiguring their degrees of separation from Hitler.

Lang answered our questions, usually irritably. One guy asked him if *Metropolis* ended with Fredersen’s handshake with the foreman. Lang said, “Look, did the movie *work* for you? Then that’s where it *should* have ended.” I asked him what freedom he allowed his cinematographer. Don’t laugh; I was 20 and it was all I could think of. Lang didn’t seem to understand what a cinematographer did. When someone explained, he grimaced and said, “Look, there can only be one director.”

After he spoke, a bunch of us approached him, I mentioned that I’d seen *Frau im Mond* that summer (at the worldcon). “Ach,” he shuddered. “You can’t love *all* your children!” And I handed him an envelope and asked for his autograph. “I hate you!” he muttered ... and signed. Then he left, and we watched *M*, which was – and remains – one of the great crime films of all time, and Lorre’s performance was his best, ever.

The print we saw was incomplete; it ended with the policeman’s hand coming down on Lorre’s shoulder. But Lang was right. We didn’t miss the trial scene that followed. The movie *worked* for us as was. That’s where it *should* have ended.



*Of course, I'm not the only one to see a silent movie of recent,,, here's a devoted **Chall** Pal on*

METROPOLIS ... ETC.

Martin Morse Wooster



July 2010 was a month for watching silent movies. On July 10, I saw the restored version of *Metropolis*; a week later, I spent a day at Slapsticon, the annual silent comedy film convention.

Metropolis was severely cut when it was first released in 1927; director Fritz Lang turned in seventeen reels, and before it was distributed in the U.S., Channing Pollock, who cut European films for American audiences, cut seven reels out of it. Since a reel is about ten minutes of film, this meant that the film was cut from 170 minutes to around 100. The last time I saw it was in the '80s, in the colorized version with the disco soundtrack by Giorgio Moroder. The colorized version replaced title cards with subtitles and reduced the running time to 80 minutes.

Ever since then, people have been finding more pieces of *Metropolis*; the most recent version, from 2005, was up to nearly two hours. But in 2008 the national film archive of Argentina found a version that had 25 minutes more footage. Another version in New Zealand had about the same amount of new footage, but it was cut somewhat differently. The F.W. Murnau Foundation in Germany combined both versions for a cut of *Metropolis* that is about 147 minutes,

For the modern viewer, *Metropolis* is hard to see for two reasons. First, we have a hard time adjusting to how silent films tell stories. Every actor wears too much makeup. Every gesture is too theatrical.

A second problem is similar to the person who thought Shakespeare was full of quotations. Lots of ideas in SF films that seem like clichés to us were invented for *Metropolis*. The future city with stacked highways filled with flying cars (best portrayed in *The Fifth Element*)? *Metropolis* had it first. By some accounts, Ralph McQuarrie based C3PO on the robot in *Metropolis*; the *Metropolis* robot looks like C3PO's grandmother. Fritz Lang even has a videophone in *Metropolis*, several years before experimental television got off the ground. (In later years, Lang grumbled that he should have patented the videophone when he had the chance.)

Metropolis can be interpreted in all sorts of ways. Fascists loved *Metropolis*, and Lang's wife and co-screenwriter, Thea von Harbou, became a fervent Nazi. But Lang fled Nazi Germany as soon as he could. Is *Metropolis* a left-wing film? There is class struggle in it, but the revolution fails and everyone at the end learns to get along. At least one feminist, art historian Julie Wosk, has an article in the April *Technology and Culture* where she sees *Metropolis* as a film with an artificial woman in it and all sorts of other useless stuff surrounding the woman's creation.

The new footage is interspersed with the original film; it's scratchy, compared to the crisp footage of the original. Moreover, seeing much of the footage you could understand why some of it was cut. "As the film went along," historian David Thomson noted in The New Republic Online, "I was thinking, 'Yes, I can see why they cut that.'"

But still, the uncut version of *Metropolis* has its own pleasures—Lang's magnificent ability to show crowds dynamically storming across the stage, and all the inventions thought up by the set designers. I also very much enjoyed listening to the original score by Gottfried Huppertz, which adds depth and power to Lang's vision.

"Fritz Lang was a great director in 1927," David Thomson notes. "His hysterical love of composition, the vision of geometric mass, and the terrifying crowd scenes are still overwhelming."

Finally, I should note that I saw this film at the Avalon Theatre, Washington's oldest and one of the three remaining theatres with a giant screen. It was a great pleasure to watch a 2-½ hour film that had no commentary from the audience, no crying babies, and no cell phones. The audience was silent, the film was impressive, and life for the length of Lang's impressive film was wonderful.



As for Slapsticon, it's the national silent comedy film convention. I don't know why it's in Washington, but it is. The fanatics buy four-day passes for \$100, but I bought a half-day pass, which was more than enough silent comedy for me.

The crowd (which was 90 percent male) is the people who have seen everything by Chaplin, Keaton, Lloyd, and others that are easily available and are hungry for more. They're the sort of fan who knows that the sentence "Buster Keaton worked for Educational Pictures" in the 1930s didn't mean he was working on films designed to educate children, but was working for Educational Pictures, a confusedly named low-budget producer that kept a lot of silent film comedians employed in the 1930s.

Slapsticon achieved international fame this year because it had the world premiere of *A Thief Catcher*, a Charlie Chaplin short from 1914 that was made just before he created his character "The Little Tramp." The short was lost until its rediscovery by collector Paul E. Gierucki at a yard sale in Taylor, Michigan.

I didn't see the Chaplin, but I did see ten minutes of Stan Laurel no one had seen in 80 years. Before Laurel met Hardy, he was the star of what the era called "travesties" and we would call parodies. The afternoon session was by Library of Congress preservationist Rob Stone, who unearthed the second half of Laurel's 1923 short *When Knights Were Cold*. I didn't find this medieval comedy funny, but

subsequently on YouTube discovered Laurel's parody *Dr. Prycke and Mr. Pryde*, which is a really funny Jekyll and Hyde parody that is well worth 20 minutes of your time.

Another discovery by Stone was the first ten minutes of the 1927 Lloyd Hamilton comedy *Up in Arms*, which is only notable for its director, Norman Taurog, whose 48 year career included directing nine Elvis films and the immortal *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine*.

Much of what I saw were far too many comedies with guys with scratchy coats and droopy mustaches, and if you asked me at the end of the day what the difference was between Snub Pollard and Larry Semon I'd flunk the quiz. The evening session was somewhat better. It included *The Round-Up*, which a 1920 film that was Fatty Arbuckle's only western. Fatty was the sheriff and surprisingly good at his job. Whenever a bad guy (particularly Wallace Berry) would tell Arbuckle that he could outdraw him, Fatty would pretend to roll a cigarette for about 30 seconds and then outdraw the bad guy.

The final film I saw was Edward Everett Horton's 1928 film *Horse Shy*. Baby Boomers remember Horton as the guy who narrated the Fractured Fairy Tales on "Rocky and Bullwinkle." But he did silent films too, and this film, about a goofy socialite who can't ride horses trying to pretend to a prospective girlfriend that he is a horse-riding champion, was magnificently silly.

All in all, it was a good day at Slapsticon, and I'll go back for another day next year. But if I tell you I am going to Slapsticon for four days, you have the right to tell me, "Martin—get a life!"

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The illustration atop this article is a production drawing by **Erich Kettelhut**. The sketch of Buster Keaton is by **Arye Zilberman**.*



CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS CHALLENGER INCLUDE

LESTER BOUTILLIER 2723 Castiglione St. New Orleans LA 70119

KURT ERICHSEN 2539 Scottwood Ave. Toledo OH 43610-1358

TARAL WAYNE 245 Dunn Ave. Apt. 2111 Toronto ON M6K 1S6 Canada

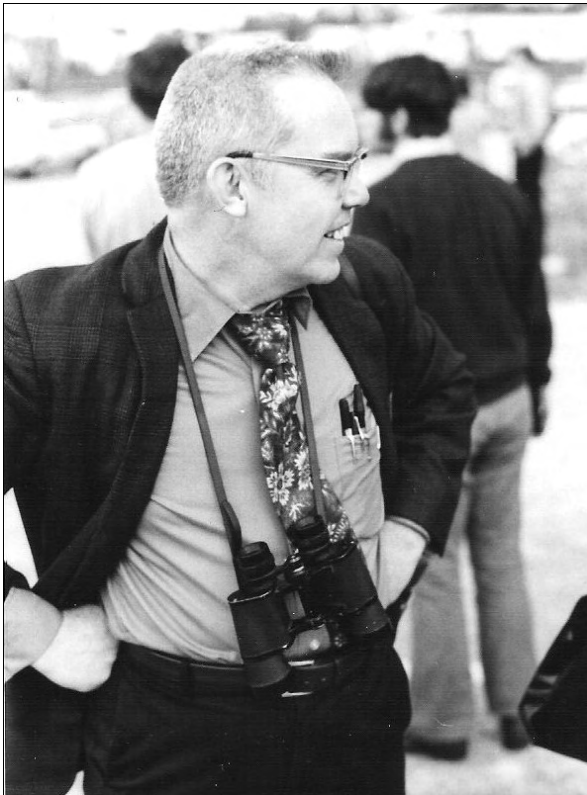
BRAD FOSTER P.O. Box 165246 Irving TX 75016

JOE MAJOR 1409 Christy Ave. Louisville KY 40204-2040

MIKE ESTABROOK 4 Valley Road Acton MA 01720

CHARLES WILLIAMS 1200 Woodcrest Dr. Knoxville TN 37918

BINKER HUGHES 11700 Wetherby Ave. Middletown KY 40243



Rosy's Photo Album

Rose-Marie Lillian

I would like to claim I took these photos, because they're such a perfect depiction of Polly and Frank Kelly Freas, but I can't. They were taken sometime in the early 1970s, at the press site at Kennedy Space Center, right before a moon launch. I can't narrow down the launch, except it wasn't Apollo XI or XVII.

Kelly, hands on hips, binoculars at the ready, is already grinning about the adventure to come. A wonderful curiosity guided his life and his talent. Unlike most of us, Kelly's gift allowed him to eternally convey the imagined worlds his sense of wonder took him to, and the rest of us are the lucky beneficiaries.

But Kelly's smile never quite managed the megawatt voltage of Polly's that you see here. A quick smile, a quick step, a quick laugh – and a quick mind – were just a few of the traits that drew people to her, over and over. She had that rare ability to lift the spirits of those around her, just by being her effervescent self.

Close family friend Charley Wise captured all that and more in these memorable shots that take us back to the future of the moon landings, and then make time still.



Remembering

RAY LAFFERTY

Joseph L. Green

Illo by Dany Frolich

In the 60s through 70s I attended a lot of Cons. I've forgotten the specific one at which I met Ray Lafferty, but am fairly sure it happened somewhere in the Southlands. At the time I had read only a little of his work, but been impressed by the short story "Slow Tuesday Night" – impressed by how unbelievable I found it. My thought at the time was "this guy isn't going very far". Over 40 years later I still think it was bad science fiction. But I remember "Slow Tuesday Night", while thousands of 'good' science fiction stories have faded away.

And that could serve as a metaphor for Ray's work in general. Bad science fiction (in my not-so-humble opinion, science fiction tropes worked into what was in reality fantasy) of such original and compelling character that it assaulted your mind, storming ashore like the U.S. marines, then taking up residence like the Vikings in England and France – there to stay.

At our first meeting Ray was kind enough to say he had read and enjoyed some of my work. We became casual friends, and afterward always found each other at the Cons we both attended. We had many conversations, more often on topics common to free-lancers – writing, markets, sales here and overseas, etc – than on the wild nature of his fiction, or the more science-oriented background of mine. Ray largely saved his far-out ideas and skewed views of life for his writing. We both had several novels selling in the European markets in those years, and

when we compared figures, it surprised me to learn my sales were better than his. The distinctive and highly idiosyncratic approach Ray Lafferty took to science fiction did not at first go over well with what were then somewhat conservative European tastes. (The rise of the New Wave, exemplified by Michael Moorcock, Ballard, and others, changed that, I think.)

In person Ray was an average height, middle-aged, balding man, with a mostly gray fringe of hair around prominent ears. He made casual dressing look like a bad idea, the image not helped by a large, protruding belly. But his most obvious physical attribute was bad teeth. He had lost most of them, but one long, yellow fang still hung from his upper jaw, becoming very obvious when he spoke. And he was usually half-drunk, or working hard to get that way. None of this changed the fact I very much enjoyed our chats. More often than not, when I knew he would be at a specific Con and went looking for him, I found him sitting alone in the bar. He clearly enjoyed conventions, and sought the company of fellow fans and writers; otherwise he wouldn't have attended so many. But at heart I think he was rather shy, happy to talk if someone sought him out, but reluctant to actively initiate social contacts.

In regard to his drinking . . . Ray had a reputation for being a drunk, and it's certainly true he drank heavily at Cons, the venue in which most fans saw him. But I'm reminded of something Gordy Dickson, who also had a reputation for heavy drinking, told me in person once while at the Greenhouse. Gordy said that the first drop of alcohol he consumed went straight to his brain, and turned off the creative writing center.

So he didn't drink at all when at home; he couldn't afford to. A person who drinks only at parties or other social occasions is not a drunk, and that certainly applies to Gordy Dickson. I never visited Ray Lafferty at his home in Tulsa, but I seriously doubt he drank while working. From the time in his forties when he started selling regularly,



through the next 20 years or more, he produced a very large body of work (see his bibliography on Wikipedia). Unless he was that very rare creature who could drink and still produce great writing, I think Ray, like Gordy, confined his drinking to social occasions.

I was a close friend of one of the founders of New Orleans fandom, Harry B. Moore, Chairman of the 1951 Worldcon (Nolacon I) long before the current stalwarts – John Guidry, Justin Winston, Dennis Dolbear, et al – arrived on the scene. Pre-Katrina New Orleans was my favorite city, certainly the most visited, and I consider myself an honorary member of the N.O. fan group. About 1970 someone (who, now forgotten) came up with idea of holding ‘rump’ Nebula banquets in New Orleans, for those of us who didn’t really want to travel to New York. I always served as MC, and Don Walsh, John Guidry, Rick Norwood (then living in N.O) and other local fans did all the real work of organizing the event. Whoever in SFWA had the winners names provided them to me, and I made the announcement at roughly the same time the awards were being presented in New York. A fair number of writers chose to attend N.O. instead of New York, and I suspect had an easier trip, a better meal, and far more fun. But when Jerry Pournelle was elected SFWA president in 1973 (and I chaired the elections committee that year), he put a stop to them. Jerry wanted to hold the Nebula bash in Los Angeles on alternate years, with the intention of gaining financial support from the several large aerospace contractors in the area. (This never worked out, but he made a valiant effort.) Having an unofficial awards banquet in N.O. would work against this idea. I was informed I could no longer learn the winners in advance, which effectively killed the N.O. banquets.

I remember that at various times James Sallis, Joe Haldeman, various others -- plus of course the local writers like Dan Galouye – chose N.O. over New York. But one of our most regular attendees, I think catching every one, was Ray Lafferty. At some point during those years he had his teeth fixed, replacing the single long yellow fang with a set of nice and quite real-looking choppers. I also think the N.O. group, most strong Lafferty fans, did a better job than most of making him feel welcome, and at home. He seemed to mellow under the attention, and became more outgoing and obviously happy than when sitting alone in the bar at conventions.

Ray was in the audience in 1971, when I had the heartbreaking duty of announcing that Sturgeon’s “Slow Sculpture” had beaten out Ray’s “Continued On Next Rock” for the best novelette Nebula. (“Slow Sculpture” also took the Hugo that year.) While I agree that “Slow” is first-class, I thought “Continued” a better story; one of Ray’s best. And Sturgeon wasn’t there to hear me announce the winners; Ray was. I did, though, have the pleasure of seeing Ray, at Torcon II in 1973, slowly shuffling toward the stage to receive a Hugo for “Eurema’s Dam” – a split award with Pohl and Kornbluth’s “The Meeting”. I think his footing seemed uncertain because his eyes were blurred by tears. Despite his shyness, he very much wanted the approbation of fans, and recognition by his peers. That became his only Hugo or Nebula, despite numerous nominations.

On another occasion at one of the N.O. Nebula bashes, I threatened Ray’s life. Our programmed guest speaker hadn’t made it, and we urgently needed a substitute. One of the organizers urged me to take the spot, knowing I was a pretty good extemporaneous speaker, but I had what I thought a better idea. I found Ray, and asked him to give us a little talk. The dialog went something like this:

“Ray, our guest speaker didn’t make it, and we need someone to fill in. It doesn’t have to be anything major, just get up and tell us a little about your work.”

“Joe, you know I’m not a public speaker. I couldn’t get up there and give a talk if my life depended on it.”

Giving him my best steely glare, I said, “Ray, your life *does* depend on it, because if you don’t get up there and speak, I’m going to kill you.”

Ray Lafferty got up when I called on him, and gave a darn good extemporaneous talk, well received by an appreciative audience. If he ever gave another speech in public, I wasn’t there.

Ray is still a presence in the Greenhouse. In *The Devil Is Dead* he had a group of hard-drinking characters name each bottle of Scotch they emptied in an evening, on the theory that a good soldier who had done his duty shouldn’t go to his grave without a name. And they did it in alphabetical order; if you got down to G or H, that had been a pretty heavy evening. We adopted that custom in a modified form, wine instead of Scotch and the alphabetical numbering continuing over time. Also, the winning name has to be suitable to the particular occasion. Over the years we’ve gone through the alphabet several times.

Ray wrote very little after about 1980, and if he still went to Cons, he was not at the ones I attended. Until then I hadn’t made a serious effort to collect his works, just buying his books when I saw them. I started specifically looking for Lafferty, and found a number of lesser known short novels, often by semi-pro publishers. I also looked for his hard to find fact articles, eventually ending up with about 30 short special printings of essay and commentary. (I haven’t yet read them all; there will no more, and I enjoying knowing there’s still some original

Lafferty waiting in my future.) One of these, “At The Sleepy Sailor: A Tribute To R.A. Lafferty”, was edited by one Guy H. Lillian III. It contained articles by Harlan Ellison, Poul Anderson, Fred Chappell and others, with a closing appreciation by yours truly. I said then that he was one of the most original talents ever to grace our field, and I can’t think of any better short description now. “In both style and content, Ray Lafferty clears his own path through the forest of literature. And he walks it alone.”

Ray the man, like Ray the writer, was a highly original creation. He spoke much more eloquently through his work than in person, and that remains with us. But I miss Ray the man.



DAYS OF OUR LIVES

Binker Glock Hughes

One of the delights of being in a new century is that we get to enjoy days that haven't been seen since the start of the last century. Everybody's attention has been drawn to Same Days -- $1/1/1$, $2/2/2$, $3/3/3$, . . . $6/6/6$ [how 'beast'ly] . . . $12/12/12$ -- but we only have three of those left.

Some few have noticed Sequence Days -- $1/2/3$, $2/3/4$. . . $12/13/14$ -- but almost no one has commented on the equally rare Series Days, such as $1/3/5$ or $2/4/8$, or . . . [your choice of series-forming principle]. This leads, in turn, to Countdown Days -- $3/2/1$, $5/4/3$, and so on -- of which the last is this year's $12/11/10$. Enjoy it while it lasts!

Then there are Square Days, such as $2/2/4$, $3/3/9$, $4/4/16$, and the like, all of which are special cases of Product Days -- $2/4/8$, $3/4/12$, and so on. One could also argue for Square Root Days -- $4/2/2$, $9/3/3$ -- but we've already run out of those for this century, since 4 and 9 are the only numbers between 1 and 12 that have integral roots. Besides, Square Root Days are just a special case of Dividend Days, as in $8/4/2$, $12/3/4$, and so on. We're rapidly running out of those also, though, since $12/1/12$, while it 'counts' I suppose, is our last upcoming option.

There are also Difference Days [suitable for “making a difference” I suppose]. For example, $3/1/2$, $7/4/3$, $9/3/6$, and on and on. We're running out of those, too. $12/2/10$ and $12/1/11$ are the last ones we'll see this century.

My favorite, however, is Sum Day. Haven't you ever said, “Someday I'll . . .”? You were just spelling it wrong -- it's “Sum Day I'll do” And we've still got Sum Days ahead. The first was $1/1/2$, but from there on, the list is fairly extensive. For instance, in a day or two it will be $6/4/10$ [we've already had $1/9/10$, $2/8/10$, $3/7/10$, $4/6/10$, and $5/5/10$] -- use it or lose it! Our last Sum Day will be $12/31/34$, so you've still got a few to go.

One could stretch a point and say any $10/4$ is a day for turning Over a new leaf in your life and getting Out of a current mess, but I'll settle for those listed above. Except for Sum Days, however, they are quickly running out. I'd like to be “productive” on Product Days and reap dividends on Dividend Days, but I think I like Sum Days best. Now maybe I'll get done some of those things I've always said I'd do “sum day . . .”

A Law of Laws

Richard Feynman held that philosophy of science is as useful to scientists as ornithology is to birds. Often this is so. But the unavoidable question about physics is, Where do the laws come from?

Einstein hoped that God had no choice in making the universe. But philosophical issues seem unavoidable when we hear of the “landscape” of possible string-theory models. As now conjectured, the theory leads to 10,500 solution universes—a horrid violation of Occam’s Razor that we might term “Einstein’s nightmare.”

I once thought that the laws of our universe were unquestionable, in that there was no way for science to address the question. Now I’m not so sure. Can we hope to construct a model of how laws themselves arise?

Many scientists dislike even the idea of doing this, perhaps because it’s hard to know where to start. Perhaps ideas from the currently chic technology, computers, are a place to start. Suppose we treat the universe as a substrate carrying out computations, a metacomputer.

Suppose that precise laws require computation, which can never be infinitely exact. Such a limitation that might be explained by counting the computational capacity of a sphere around an “experiment” that tries to measure outcomes of those laws. The sphere expands at the speed of light, say, so longer experiment times give greater precision. Thinking mathematically, this sets a limit on how sharp differentials can be in our equations. A partial derivative of time cannot be better than the time to compute it.

In a sense, there may be an ultimate limit on how well-known any law can be, especially one that must describe all of spacetime, like classical relativity. It can’t be better than the total computational capacity of the universe, or the capacity within the light sphere we can see.

I wonder if this idea can somehow define the nature of laws, beyond the issue of their precision? For example, laws with higher derivatives will be less descriptive because their operations cannot be carried out in a given volume over a finite time.

Perhaps the infinite discreteness required for formulating any mathematical system could be the limiting bound on such discussions. There should be energy bounds, too, within a finite volume, and thus limits on processing power set by the laws of thermodynamics. Still, I don’t see how these arguments tell us enough to derive, say, general relativity.

Perhaps we need more ideas to derive a Law of Laws. Can we use the ideas of evolution? Perhaps invoke selection among laws that penalize those laws that lead to singularities—and thus taking those regions of spacetime out of the game? Lee Smolin tried a limited form of this by supposing universes reproduce through black-hole collapses. Ingenious, but that didn’t seem to lead very far. He imagined some variation in reproduction of budded-off generations of universes, so their fundamental parameters varied a bit. Then selection could work.

In a novel of a decade ago, *Cosmo*, I invoked intelligent life, rather than singularities, to determine selection for universes that can foster intelligence, as ours seems to. (I didn’t know about Lee’s ideas at the time.) The idea is that a universe hosting intelligence evolves creatures that find ways in the laboratory to make more universes, which bud off and can further engender more intelligence, and thus more experiments that make more universes. This avoids the problem of how the first universe started, of course. Maybe the Law of Laws could answer that, too?

*Greg-and-Jim's SETI-directed "Benford Beacons" were the subject of a **Time** article July 27, 2010.*



Interview with Gregory Benford

Chris Impey

Deputy Head of the Department
University Distinguished Professor
Ph.D., 1981, University of Edinburgh

Illos by BRAD FOSTER and WILLIAM ROTSLER

February 12, 2008

CI: You have an identical twin. How's that working out for you?

GB: I've always wondered what it would be like to be a singleton, as we call you people.

CI: You have a word for us? [Laughs]

GB: You have one for us. My brother Jim and I are mirror twins, the closest variety of twins. Beyond us lie the Siamese twins, who don't separate. It's great. I'm operating with a back-up copy. We've used that in our

lives. My brother had a burst appendix fifteen years after I had a burst appendix. I took three weeks to get out of the hospital. His didn't burst in his office as mine did, because he woke up in the middle of the night, felt this pain that I had described, realized it was the same thing, called the hospital, and his appendix burst on the operating table. He was out of the hospital in 2-3 days.

CI: The science-fiction writer in you must have projected the possibilities of having larger communal categories of experience. What would that be like, to have cultures where the twin sense, advantage, and experience are mapped out much more widely? Would that make an interesting context for science fiction?

GB: It hasn't been done. I haven't found a clear way to use that, yet, in a story. We now know things like intelligence are roughly 50% determined by genetics and the rest by environment. But there are also many epigenetic effects, which could lead to many paths. The simpatico I have with my twin comes from shared genetics *and* shared upbringing. We're extremely close. Twins typically have two states: they're very close to each other, or they have a well-defined distance between them. We're of the former. The advantages accrue mostly from being close. We don't have a *literal* private language, but we understand each other immediately, have the same buttons, and can quickly and easily work together. We've written about a dozen papers together. Those are great qualities. Trying to extrapolate that to a group of cloned people is different, though in Ursula Le Guin's early story "Nine Lives," about nine clones, they have great social utility.

CI: So much human misery and mayhem results from poor or inefficient communication. That's what you have: incredibly efficient and excellent, almost automatic communication. That's a great cultural advantage.

GB: It is. We grew up in a small town in southern Alabama. We literally went to a one-room schoolhouse, but we've both ended up having professional careers in California and are utterly unlike the other people in our family. Most of my first cousins are farmers, fishermen, and manual laborers. We extricated ourselves from a very different place and got where we wanted to be. A lot of it was working together. We went to undergraduate and graduate school together, and didn't stop living together until we married.

CI: You were a fanzine editor at age fourteen. How did you get started? How did you get the bug?

GB: The restless urge to write beset me, and still does. I got interested in science fiction at an early age, because it's the literature of ideas. I always think, "Gee, that's interesting. I wonder what it's like to *do* it." I do that with essentially everything. I don't watch sports, I play sports. I can't resist going into fields that are of interest to me, so I've worked in biology, physics, astrophysics, and language groups. Being a science-fiction fan is a great way to get deeply into the culture, to understand where ideas come from, and what kinds of people have ideas. Most scientists aren't like that, because most scientists do fairly well-defined research that isn't idea-intensive. I like idea-thick subjects. Most scientists have read science fiction. Isaac Asimov said to me once that by his informal questioning, the majority of all scientists read science fiction when they were young, and after graduate school, if they read anything, it's usually science fiction, but most of them don't read *anything* after graduate school!

CI: Most *people* don't read anything.

GB: Yes, sadly. Science fiction is deeply wrapped up in the doing of science. The most influential segment of modern times has been dominated by the scientists and the technologists who bring into being all the outcomes of scientific knowledge. When I began writing fiction, I realized that nobody wrote about their mindscape, the way they think and how that influences how they interact with the rest of the culture. There was a huge, pregnant possibility, and I could write about it because I came out of it. Science fiction was the obvious way to attack that. This is contrary to the view of conventional literature, which believes in a grand, canonical, ensemble model, the "great books" theory, which I think is almost completely false.

CI: Science fiction seems to take it from both sides. Scientists may have been weaned on science fiction, but then they put it aside and don't give it a lot of credibility; and it's more antagonistic from the literature crowd. It seems like the quality of the writing does not always determine opinion. It's the category. Do technology and science pose such a big cultural threat that people are unable to view them clearly?

GB: That's right. The literary mandarins are virtually unanimous in their fear of science and technology, which undermines conventional world views, and always will. It's the inherent revolutionary culture.

CI: They embrace someone who deconstructs the language in a clever way, so why wouldn't they embrace people who deconstruct cultural backdrops in a science fiction book?

GB: They don't come out of the scientific culture, so the scientific habits of mind are not natural to them. Since you used the word "deconstruct," I would comment that deconstructionism, whose train has lately left the station and will not soon be seen again, is in my view a way of resuscitating the political conflicts that beset the world academy. The 20th century has been doomed to act out the consequences of the ideas and the political and philosophical landscape of the 19th century: socialism, communism, and fascism. The winner and reigning champion turns out to be the 18th century—free speech, free elections, free markets. This conflict is not over. A lot of deconstructionism is a way of finding that all of human culture is a conspiracy to carry out the agenda of the ruling elite. Where have we heard this idea before? It's warmed-over Marxism, and Marxism exists in the academy today not in the department of economics, but in the department of literary criticism.

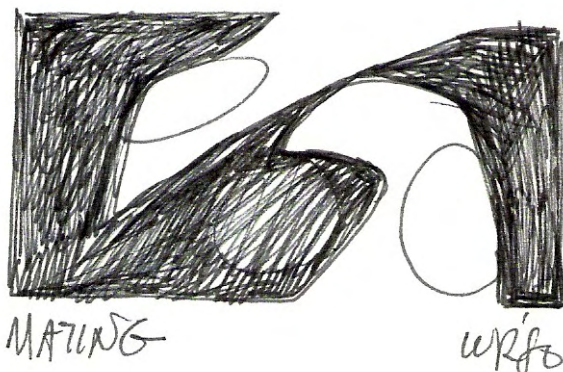
CI: The readers decide. People who care about ideas will gravitate towards the books that are rich in ideas, including science fiction. You were living a double life as a young man. You wrote your first story when you were a grad student, and were heading down the straight, academic, professorial track while you had this other life. Was there any tension there, or was it natural to do both things? Were there disincentives on the academic side for spending time writing, or having a literary persona?

GB: Sure, but I had to do it. I've never seen the point in not doing what you want to. Early on, I realized that no one could be good at doing something they don't like. What's the point of being a B- businessman when you could be an A+ sculptor? You only go around once, so why not? Most academics are content to do things as conventionally viewed. I didn't fit that mold. You always pay a price. A lot of people are unwilling to admit that they're motivated by envy, but we all know that most people are.

CI: The things that happened to Sagan are a good example of that.

GB: The rejection of Carl from the National Academy of Sciences is a scandal that will not go away. I was lucky enough to find an audience. I wrote because I enjoyed it, and it was astonishing to me that other people liked what I wrote and bought the books, and I had a career, which has made me a fairly large amount of money. That never wears well with academics.

CI: I presume there are no downsides the other way around; having the street cred of being a professor of physics can't hurt when you write hard science fiction. But was there ever a sense that this was so much fun that you didn't need the academic side at all?



GB: I wanted to do it, so I did it.

CI: You didn't feel the need to write more, that you didn't have enough time to deliver on everything you're thinking?

GB: I have never written *all* the ideas I thought of doing, but I've written a lot of books, and I've done it because I

always liked writing. It's therapy, and they pay you! [Laughs] I did it because it was enjoyable, and it was a blessing that it was highly productive. I've had books sell over a million copies, and books that have been published in over a dozen languages, and a lot of books still in print, and that's great. That's gravy, though, on top of the meat and potatoes that I *want* to do it. I would do it even if it never caught on.

CI: How do you define hard science fiction? Is it a useful category?

GB: I find hard SF very useful as a category, because it is the absolute core and center of science fiction. It is best seen as playing tennis with the net up, which is intrinsically more interesting than with the net down. It observes a scrupulous regard for the facts and also the method of science, and that includes the habits of mind of scientists, and it gives you the core realism about a part of society that has not had a voice that was more than a whisper. Writing about scientists, whom history will regard as far more important than the passing politicians, is the smart-money way to go in literature. Hard science fiction is the source from which radiates much of what then moves into the rest of so-called soft science fiction, social science fiction, futurology, and utopian novels.

CI: Even with hard science fiction as your category, you deal with religion, sentience, emotional landscapes, and linguistic issues. You've got enough humanism that it's not mechanistic.

GB: Right. Many people think hard science fiction is just fiction with all the ribbons showing.

CI: Or two-dimensional characters.

GB: Things like linguistics are actual sciences. They're not hard sciences, but those are areas of scientific investigation, so they're fair game. Novels are supposed to be *novel*, and include new insights. You use the light that comes through whatever window is open at the time.

CI: I agree. Hard science fiction hasn't won its fair share of Hugos. Within the realm of science fiction, and how the subgenres are perceived, do you sense any lack of respect for hard SF?

GB: There's a fair respect for hard SF, because most people agree with my characterization that it's at the core of the field. But awards are determined by essentially sociology and politics. The Hugo audience is interested mostly in great storytelling with lots of keen ideas, and that's perfectly fine. Most of them don't find it in hard SF. I haven't won a Hugo. I've been on the ballot a few times, but frankly I don't pay much attention to that. I'm in it for the life. I've won some other awards and that's fine. But who on his death bed says, "My life is worthwhile! I won the XYZ award!" instead of, "I enjoyed what I did."

CI: They're always giving Charles Barkley a hard time because he didn't get a ring, he didn't win an NBA title. But he had a great career and is considered one of the top fifty players. Titles go to a team. He's totally happy.

GB: It's a piece of metal, that award.

CI: When you look back at your books, you've written over thirty. Why was *Timescape* so huge? It's classic, it's like Led Zeppelin III. Do you know why it was so huge?



GB: *Timescape*'s popularity is somewhat mysterious to me. I finished the novel thinking, I've finally written the novel that completely indulges my pleasure in being able to write about my own experience. It's often said that review articles in a given field of science are actually forms of concealed autobiography. That's also true of novels. There's so much autobiography in *Timescape*. I appear as several different characters. Gregory Markham is me, and the two unidentified twins in graduate school at UCSD in 1962-63 are obviously me and Jim. It's about going to graduate school, being an assistant professor, and being a fellow at Cambridge, all of which I've done. I wrapped it around this plot that's always obsessed me, the sense of missed possibilities in our lives. The remark I made about the death bed is commonly said, but true. Nobody regrets on the death bed the things they did, but rather the things they didn't do. To echo Jackson Brown: "Although the future is there for anyone to say it changed, sometimes it seems it would be easier somehow to change the past."

CI: You've explained it succinctly. By coupling a classic science idea of tachyons to a deep-rooted human issue, regret, or the sense of things passed, you twinned a deep emotional thing to a deep physics thing. That's the core, that's the mother lode.

GB: That's a good way to describe it. But I didn't remotely sense that when I was writing the novel.

CI: But you were having a good time, so you knew you were writing a good book?

GB: I didn't know I had a good book. I knew I had a book that I liked. But so what? My second-favorite novel is the one right after that, *Against Infinity*, which is also the easiest book I ever wrote. Some people think that's good, but I think it's just as good as *Timescape*, and it's half the length.

CI: *Timescape* is probably for an audience that had never had this window. For people in the business, it's just their world, but you gave such a clear window into what it's like to do research and be an academic—the whole texture of that world. For people who don't know what it's like, you embedded them, and they probably had never seen that before.

GB: That surely must be part of the charm of it. It's been quoted in books about science and all over the place, and it's always the stuff about what it's like to do science. That still is a largely unexplored territory.

CI: I agree. When Leon Lederman was nearing retirement and wanting to go do good things in the schools in Chicago, he was spinning up all sorts of ideas, a lot of which he pitched strongly to the major networks. He said, "Have a reality show about scientists. Show scientists sharing a dorm." The producers said, "But they won't have any girlfriends. Where are the women?" Esteemed as he was, they said, "Nobody cares what scientists do."

GB: There's a sitcom running right now that does exactly this. It's funny, but it has the same few jokes—they don't have girlfriends, and they're non-realistic about the world. If you know real scientists, you realize that's not true at all.

CI: So it's still waiting to be done.

GB: The problem is that working scientists do have their exciting moments, but most of science, just like most police work, is about as interesting as watching paint dry.

CI: You need an audience that's willing to invest in the intellectual back story, the idea landscape, and develop that.

GB: Right, although no one wonders how many people went into archaeology and were disappointed because they watched Indiana Jones movies.

CI: You like to layer ideas in your books, develop and then redevelop. Is it because you had a thread that you hadn't mined enough and you wanted to return to it, or are you consciously interconnecting all these things as you build them?

GB: It's not conscious. I do a lot of my writing unconsciously. I let things mull around for a while and realize that there's a question I hadn't answered, and didn't understand. My first thoughts about *Timescape* were: Is time travel possible? You have to have the right physics. Is there any physics around today that might make it happen? Maybe tachyons. Suppose I was a real scientist—wait, I am a real scientist! What would I do first? Build some kind of phone booth that you walk into, and it turns you into tachyons and transports you? *That* sounds appetizing. [Laughs] Why don't we test these ideas by sending a couple of tachyons into the past to see if we can convey some information? My first notes said, *time telegraph*? I want to send a signal to the past, and that's actually enough. My God, if you do that, wow! Marconi wanted to send signals to other people; he didn't want to transport human beings through radio waves. It was the investigation of how I would do it, what would be the first step, that led me through the logic to build the novel. I never got around to the phone booth that transmits people into the past.

CI: *Bill and Ted* did that, eventually.

GB: I found that a really funny movie. *Timescape* has been ripped off for so many projects, I stopped making a list. There was even a segment of *Star Trek: Next Generation* titled "Timescape." It had no relationship to the novel except for the ideas. The title was trademarked with Simon & Schuster for ten years, and when it fell out of trademark, Simon & Schuster didn't let me know, so it fell into public domain. Within months, people had used it for all kinds of purposes. There are several books of that title, there's a Timescape corporation somewhere, and of course the *Star Trek* show.

CI: So you never clawed it back?

GB: No. I never trademarked it again. Although it's in the Oxford English Dictionary.

CI: So it's your gift to the world, then.

GB: It credits me with inventing the word, which seemed like a pretty straightforward word to me. People have now used "mindscapes" and other variants of the word. So what? Life is too busy and too short to try to hold onto everything.

CI: How well can hard science fiction inform astrobiology, this enterprise that hopes to start detecting biological traces in the next decade? Whether or not the SETI side bet ever pays off, we're moving in that direction. How do you view what you do in that realm as feeding into the enterprise of asking that big question?

GB: You can't do anything that you do not first imagine. Questions about alien life should be informed by science fiction, so that we properly think about what variations we can expect. Suppose the aliens aren't organic at all, but computers have taken over civilizations that eventually lost their original life forms, and the automatic cities and great spacecraft of some advanced civilization were all that remained. That's a whole suite of novels, the so-called *Galactic Center* series.

CI: Post-biological evolution is a real possibility in a lot of parts of the universe, if biology's common.



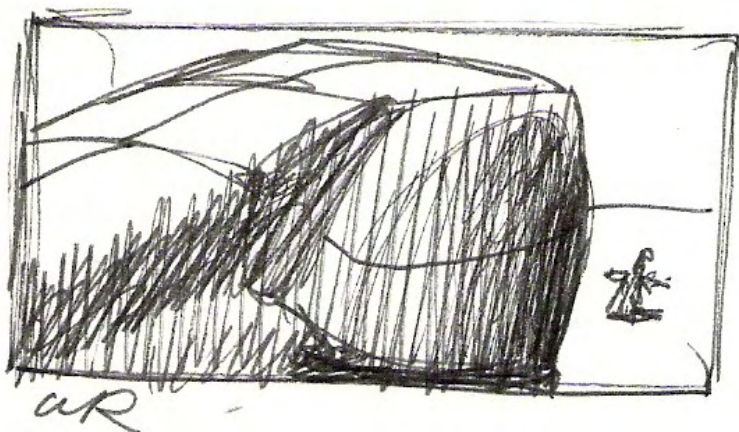
GB: Right. The extension of Darwinian mechanisms into other substrates is a straightforward idea. That idea largely came out of science fiction, not biologists. My brother and I have done a detailed compilation of what the beacon builders we imagine in SETI would actually have to do. How much money does it cost? How does the cost influence what the signal looks like? We did this in the face of what appears to be this slackening resolve about SETI. We have now been doing SETI for almost half a century, not well, not often, and we've found no signal. What does that mean? A plausible low-cost beacon will still cost maybe ten billion dollars to put together, and it will not be a continuously beamed signal. It will not be one cycle per second wide frequency, it will be broad; it will not be around the frequency used by cell phones, but rather at ten times larger frequency. This changes enormously how we should look for SETI beacons. That kind of interplay is the great advantage of hard science fiction. You try to imagine how it would really be, and the more concrete your imagination, the more useful its conclusions.

CI: We're all bounded in anthropocentric traps and ways of thinking, even the scientists who do astrobiology, especially the life scientists. The imagination of a writer must allow you to see those traps and potentially move beyond them. Are you conscious of trying to do that?

GB: Yes. The charm of ideas is new ones. How much can you push the parameters of biology? The most important thing to do in the entire space program is to find out if there's life on Mars, if it was the original life and colonized the Earth, and if it persists and holds out. How different is it, if it's there? Those questions will be answered with our space program in the next generation. That tells you what you ought to be doing in the real world, to make a scientific contribution. You shouldn't be using up all your money going around in circles in low-Earth orbit. You shouldn't be spending a lot of time on the Moon. You ought to attack the main problem. If you find something really fundamental on Mars, the field will explode. You'll have all kind of questions to ask. Then there are the other bodies in the Solar System which are much harder to explore, like the oceans under the ice of Europa, or Titan at 100 degrees Kelvin. Is there anything alive there? Those are going to take much longer to explore. You can't do Europa or Titan without the development of large-scale nuclear rockets. That's not going to happen next week. Mars is hard to do with chemical rockets, but pretty easy with nuclear rockets. That suggests what you ought to be doing next.

CI: Given that the space age is obviously in its infancy, and all our technologies are in their infancy, how well can we even extrapolate? It's hard to plan more than an election cycle ahead for anything. The great pyramid building, the historical efforts that consume civilizations, took a hundred or more years. We don't seem to have that appetite.

GB: Some things do last. The American republic is older than the entire pyramid building era of the Pharaohs. To extrapolate the space program, you should learn from historical analogies. I'm fearful that the Lee Harkins conception that we are the Columbus of space is wrong, and that there's a good chance that we are going to be the Leif Erikssons of space. [Laughs] Europeans tried to get to North America and settle colonies before Columbus, and they failed. They even forgot about it! Failure *is* an option. Infrastructure, as we say now, is behind exploration.



The Europeans were lucky to explore the New World using caravels, which were developed for use in the Mediterranean. America was barely within reach using caravels. Within a century they had completely different classes of oceangoing craft. We can't do much more in the Solar System with chemical rockets. We've got to have new infrastructure. That will open up lots of great options, like asteroid mining. The use of resources on the Solar System scale is how we build a brand-new

culture such as the world has never seen. That's how we got to the New World last time.

The most important thing out of the New World was neither tobacco nor the potato. Those were pleasant, but the great outcome of the New World was new ideas. The greatest danger to modern society is the closed box of the Earth. It's going to get more crowded, and with crowding comes control. Controlled societies don't innovate much, so if you want to have an opening future, you have to open your frontiers. The existing paradigm for us, the only species of chimpanzee that got out of Africa, is the opening of human horizons. If you play that suit, you're probably going to keep winning. If you stop playing it, you're probably going to lose.

CI: One more topic before we wrap up. There's this dichotomy of "rare Earth" ideas, people who play the contingency card in what happened on this planet over four billion years, and other people who see convergence, inevitability, and the huge numbers of the real estate out there. Where do you sit in that debate? Do you think we're alone or not? Regardless of what you speculate and write, what do you really think?

GB: I doubt that we're alone in this galaxy, but I know we need more data. SETI is the fastest way to get the data. It's the best investment of our funds. Going to Mars and finding out if life arose there separately will cost us in the range of \$100 billion. SETI we can do for \$100 million. I believe the galaxy has given birth to life elsewhere, probably intelligent life, and it's quite possible there's a lot going on and we live so far out in the boondocks that we don't see it. The vast majority of the life-bearing stars in the galaxy are on average well over a billion years older than our star. Life-bearing environments have had a long opportunity to proliferate and get in good conversation, but they're all many thousands of light-years away, where the action is, in the big ball of stars that makes up the core of the Milky Way. We're out here in the suburbs wondering what life is like in the big city. The first thing we do is look for the search lights that have been broadcast by the wealthy people who have time to waste, over toward the galactic center, which is twenty-seven thousand light years away. That's the place to look.

CI: We're thinking of experiments of that nature with these new funding sources. I have one last question. Is it true you've broken something like ten bones?

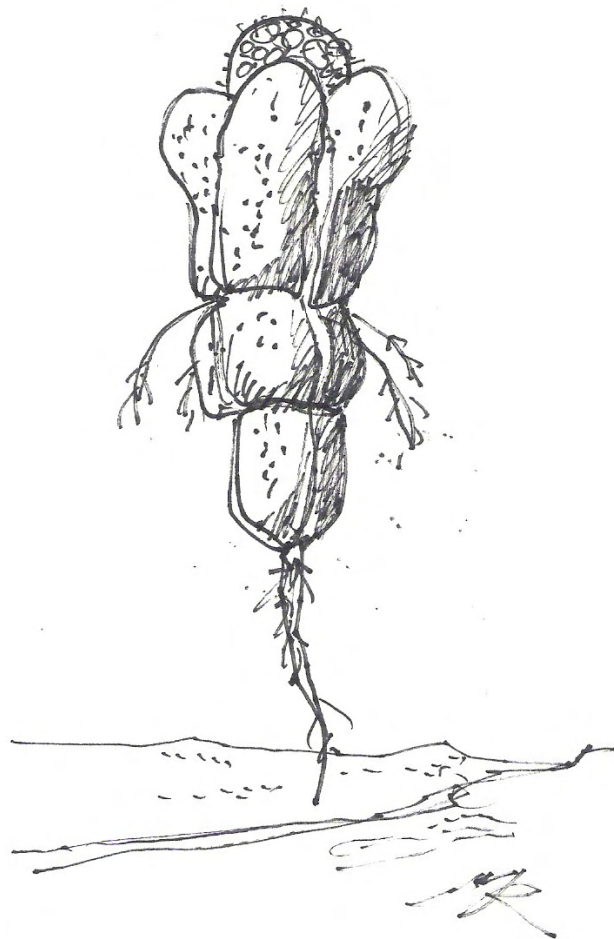
GB: Yes, from various sports.

CI: Not pugilistically, just in normal rough-and-tumble sports.

GB: No. My spine and my left shoulder surfing; then softball; and some ribs in various sports. I was exceeding the strength of materials.

CI: You have the badge of a doer. How about your twin—do you match on bones broken as well?

GB: No, my twin hasn't broken as many bones. I tend to take more risks. After all, he hasn't written much science fiction.



*Says the author: "James Bacon is currently working on a mammoth piece for **Challenger** on Marines. There is more of a science fiction connection than in this piece he sent, a stop gap, about Rugby. He is also working on another issue of **Journey Planet**, with Chris Garcia and Claire Brialey, available on efanzines.com."*

PICOCON 2010, NOT A CONVENTION REPORT AS WE KNOW IT. 13-20 TO THE VISITORS.

James Bacon

Ostensibly I was going to a science fiction convention because I read science fiction books. Now the con, in question, is run by students of Imperial College who form the Science Fiction Society, and they have guests and a programme and are themselves studying in one of Britain's finest establishment for student engineers and scientists.

But to be honest there has been some serious bad shit on the Internet this week – in our "community" – and I wasn't feeling like I wanted to engage too much mentally and really just relax and have a few beers.

I had pulled some serious moves to get the day off work, so I leisurely got up and couldn't be bothered turning on the PC. E-mails, Live Journal, all grim at the moment. I had some breakfast with my dogs, and filled the shoulder bag with cans of cider and headed into central London. It was still morning and once ensconced on the train at East Croydon, I cracked open a tin. Some people could not disguise their facial disgust, but I'd been on shift till half one in the morning and then finished some layout work on the dealers room for World Horrorcon as I couldn't sleep and I am enjoying working on that convention a lot and my body clock was a bit stuffed and I felt like a drink.

I drink very little annually because of the job. I cranked up *Rage Against the Machine*, always nice to have a Christmas song going, and read a fanzine. (Your zine, Guy.) You can have a beer on a mainline train in the UK at any time as you're a traveller. So I had 19 minutes to quench my thirst. No drinking booze on buses or tubes now, which is a good thing.

The one day convention is in South Kensington, an incredible address. The part of Imperial – and there is lots of it – that I wanted is next to the Royal Albert Hall, so from Victoria I got a bus. The tall old buildings seven and eight stories high, The Royal College of Music, the modern block of lecture rooms somewhat out of place in the salubrious settings of Prince Consort Road. Good old Albert, its such a pleasant and historic part of the City. A quick left, through an archway and into Beit Quadrangle and an open space with leafless trees, wet damp wooden furniture and many windows all about looking down onto a wet concrete space.

The con uses the lecture hall across the road, and then there is the dealers, gaming and registration here in the Union. Registering takes a moment and I am soon looking at whatever the porcupine books has to offer. I find two graphic novels, both of them *Judge Dredd*. I found an Arthur C. Clarke book about ideas of creativity and destruction. I didn't know about although it is just essays on the future with the title *Spring 1984 A Choice of Futures* – an interesting commercial gambit, for a book to be published in 1984. Clarke is somewhat contradictory,

saying he didn't like the work, "unsatisfactory as a piece of scientific prediction," yet later goes on to say "it's a unique piece of genius, beyond both praise and criticism."

The real find of the day was *Super Folks*, a satirical book of superhero stories from 1977. The edition I found was the UK 1980 print. I was stunned to find this book which is oft mentioned among comic fans, when it comes to the mature look at super heroes, mostly identified with *Watchmen*. It's been reprinted since, in 2003 and 2005, with amazing covers and introductions, but to find this book I do not have, I was really pleased.

I start chatting to John Birchby about fanzines; he is a recipient of *Journey Planet* and writes great LOCs. He wonders if I don't have any other hobbies to spend my spare money on, concerned at the postage for our (Claire/Chris/ James) latest fanzine. Trains, military history, books, comics.

We adjourned to the bar next door only to find the shutters down and quite surprised punters and committee. I meet some ZZ9 regulars, and offer some a drink, I have cans in my bag, and Doug Spencer and myself wander into the quadrangle and have a drink, it's raining, and the bar manager lets us know we can bring our cans into the bar, as there is a delay getting it open. Soon these are finished, and the bar is open and a big round is on the way.

I spend a lot of time chatting with Tony Keen. As well as a brilliant fan writer and expert comic and SF reader, he is a proper historian, we spend time talking about Tanks. He seems quite fond of the *Commet* and *Centurian*, and I talk up the idea of having a fanzine featuring Tanks; is that all wrong?

The bar was fairly empty, as Scotland took a thrashing from Italy, I got a drink in for John Birchby and Dave Langford, and I saw Pat Cadigan, and decided to be a fan. I have just been reading the *Mammoth book of Alternate History*, from Robinson press, and it is really very good, a collection of 25 stories edited by Ian Whates and Ian Watson and it's just brilliant. The selection of stories is varied, but all share a commonality, fine attention to detail.

Pat's is set in the late 60's in America. Bobby Kennedy was not assassinated, and with the election coming up, she uses a collection of journal entries and commentaries to give a number of differing perspectives on this era. It's really quite dystopian, in the sense that the conservatives go to extremes to battle the students and liberals, and the resulting America, only hinted and alluded at from documents decades later, is a bad place indeed. Pat said she based some of the consequences, on actions that were on the agenda for conservatives. I explained that I knew little, but what I did know I learnt from one of my favourite writers, Hunter S. Thompson, whom she approved of and his pointers and comments. So I know that although Kennedy might have, on a slim chance, beaten Humphrey for the nomination, at the time of his death, he was training and I wonder, as did Pat, how the anti-war demonstrations would have affected his chances against Nixon. Although Pat plays many more games and what about Wallace and LBJ, well, she has a gift.

The drinking in the bar continued, and I was chatting with Tony Cullen, chair of the British Science Fiction Association, mostly about Politics, as there is an election due here, in the UK, sometimes soon, and more than likely May. I hope to go to Mark and Claire's, and watch the results roll in overnight. Eric Arthur joined us, and as he left, John Medany and Mike Scott caught up.

There seems to be two bids for the 2012 Eastercon. Bid A is Olympus. The team that are running the 2010 and ran the 2008 Eastercons, again back to the Radisson Hotel at Heathrow London. Odyssey, this year's Eastercon, has 1055 members already, an incredible amount. Bid B is being run by a new team, although they have been coming to Eastercons for a few years, and run smaller events themselves. They are "new" to me, but this is a good thing, I feel. They are looking at Brighton, a seaside town, that is about ninety minutes by train from London, and

where the Worldcon was held in 1987. The idea of a contest, something that has not seriously happened in a while, is quite interesting, exciting even.

In the run up to bidding for 2009, there was going to be a competing bid, and despite all the positive “it’s a challenge” and “may the best team” win stuff, there is also a sickening feeling in the gut at the thought of losing, especially something like a con, it’s hard. It’s not mean-spirited, or resentful, it’s about being a loser, and although I would have taken it on the chin, I would not have enjoyed it.

So, at the moment, it’s all to play for, Brighton would have a strong contention, fans like to change sometimes, and despite the experience of Bid A, and excellent track record, it’s about democracy, which is fiercely fickle.

Of course, I also heard Bid B, may go for 2013, so that sort of wavering may turn into reality.

Then my wife calls, as she is joining us, she doesn’t really enjoy cons as much as I do, she has her reasons, one is that I am a bit more crap than usual at cons, but there are other reasons, which are her own, and as if on cue, Stef also turns up, he had been studying for a work opportunity.

There was a strange shift in atmosphere. Suddenly there were more people around, fellas in blue and white tops, and college track suits, with **RUGBY** emblazoned on the back. There were definitely two types of fans now in the Bar, a very obvious and notable split, of course, myself and Stef fall between two houses there.

I had already put my Irish Jersey on, and I had brought in a South African shirt for Stef, so he could be neutral. He does a brilliant Irish accent and its very impressive and convincing job, its worrisome, I must have spent too much time with him.

Soon enough, the bar was rammed, chairs were brought in from all over, and a huge screen was lowered, as it got close to 4 o’clock and kick off time. Where had the con gone to I wondered, as I tucked into my fifth or sixth pint.

My wife was also wearing a SAFA top, although she was there to cheer Ireland, which was good. Previously when I was in Imperial college watching the match I had met quite a crowd of Irish students, but they were in abeyance on this occasion. My wife, Simoné is a real sports woman. And I mean sports woman in the Canadian Hockey team sense. My wife loves sports, she was in six school teams in school, each team had a different style of track suit in the school colours. She was captain of the Netball team, going on to win all regional championships. She then got selected and played in provincial colours. (Playing for the State) Playing for two years and being deputy Captain for her last year. Sports was her life in school, as well as being a prefect and always top grader, she loved school.

If we are in America, she always wants to go and see sports games. She is the perfect supporter, she always understand the games, she knows the rules. Unfortunately she hasn’t been during football season, but she has seen the Padres, Dodgers, Angels, Yankees and been to Madison Square Garden to watch exhibitions with the likes of the Harlem Globetrotters. Here she has been to football matches and Rugby matches. In Dublin, we went to see Ireland beat South Africa at Lansdowne Road.

She has taught me everything I know about Rugby. She understand and knows the rules inside out, she is a huge Sharks fan, and knows Kings Park, Durban, like the back of her hand. She is a monstrous asset, and terribly cutting, she can scythe through any banter, balderdash or bravado, with clinical accuracy, not citing the rules, but the game, “Use it or Lose it” being a favourite.

And so the match began.

I was tense and nervous. It’s just such a big deal. Well, for me. If we lose, I will hear about it in work a bit, and elsewhere, but even in this environment, I am wearing my colours on my heart.

There isn’t really a grudge between Ireland and England, but I personally dislike Martin Johnson, the English Coach. In 2003 in Dublin, he made an arse of himself, he went out and

stood in the wrong place, and so did his whole team. Despite official protestations, and conversations, he would not move.

The beginning of the match is when the Irish President goes out to greet the teams. She must greet the visitors first. This is protocol, it's well known. He wouldn't budge. So the Irish who had been walking about the pitch waiting for a solution, went and stood to their Left, as they are meant to. The Irish President walked out, greeted the English team, continued walking in the correct direction, stepping off the red Carpet to do so. It was perhaps sports psychology, it was pissing on the pitch, he wasn't being specifically disrespectful to our President, it was about not being told what to do. England was at a peak, they were in great shape with some wonderful players and they beat Ireland 6-42. So it's great to see him lose, and I watched last year, which was very close, Ireland beat England by one point, and since that game in 2003, the two countries have played seven times, and Ireland has won six.

So for me, I don't like him, he took over back in April 2008, when Brian Ashton, who brought them moderate success, 2nd in the world, was unceremoniously dumped after a bad six nations. Under Johnson England have beaten Italy twice, Wales once, France once and the Pacific Islands. Yet they have lost to Ireland Twice, and to Wales once, lost against South Africa, New Zealand and Australia.

Great Coach. Ireland first played against England one hundred and thirty five years ago.

So the match beginning was tense, the room was now really full, the insertion of so much garden furniture and a late influx of white shirts and red roses was very apparent. Ireland were very lucky initially, winning the ball from Johnny Wilkins and using a grubber kick to score a beautiful try, and put 5 points on the board within 5 minutes. England got on the board after 15 minutes, with a Wilkinson Kick over the bar, but an exchange of penalties saw the match go in at half time, at 6-8 to Ireland. There had been a chance around 30 minutes, but Keith Earls couldn't reach it and I was gutted.

I was very happy to see that first try over, and was one a very few people, on my feet, punching the air and cheering. My wife and Stef also cheering on, and a group somewhere on the far side also sounding supportive. There were some girls at our table, one in a Scottish rugby top, and they seemed surprised by our enthusiasm. Sim noted that the table of Rugby players had looked over to see who was cheering, but turned away, when they saw "a big bearded, rough looking Irish Savage."

And so, while many friends are watching and others are chatting, the second half kicked off. Tension was on, England needed to get a handle on the game. They seemed to, and there was an exchange of penalties, and although Ireland Forwards (the big fellas) were playing well defending excellently, England were fighting hard and had nearly all the ball possession. England won a penalty, but then through ill-discipline, the penalty was reversed. Now, I talk about press, let's read what they say about this.

The England scrum had won a penalty but referee Lawrence reversed it after Care hauled Tomas O'Leary to the ground. *Irish Times*.

54 min: Ireland penalised and it kicks off with O'Leary and Care after the Irishman holds on to the ball. Care is penalised though for retaliating. *Irish Times live reporting*

Ireland scrum-half Tomas O'Leary refused to give the ball to Danny Care after being penalised and when Care tangled with his opposite number the England number nine was penalised for retaliation. *BBC*

56 mins: England penalty, Hayes with some dodgy binding, and we've got some handbags at Twickenham. O'Leary appeared to have stopped Care from playing quick ball, and The Brand and Stephen Ferris end up pushing and shoving like a couple of ladies. *BBC Live Reporting*

This was an incredible moment, essentially, a Scrum was occurring, the Irish side messed it up, so a penalty is awarded to England, as the whistle is blown and O'Leary was slow releasing a

ball, the English player Danny Care grabbed him from behind, he was physically thrown on the ground. Now, Care had his hands on the player, not the ball, and in less than a second, O'Leary was rolled back, then care shoved O'Leary again, a retaliation, and it was players charging in for a non ball confrontation, 6 Irish players, and about eight English were shoving and pushing, with the ref successfully separating three English players from one Irish. Now in Rugby, the side linesmen, are officials, and the ref consulted his one, he made it clear, O'Leary fouled, but then Care retaliated. The ref called both players, and told O'Leary he was penalised, but then he said, "However you cannot take the law into your own hands and dump a player, so the penalty is reversed." Modern technology allows us to hear what the refs say.

The foul was reversed.



Within seconds the ball was in the English 22, and a line out was won and Ireland had scored a try, bring it to 6-13 but failing to score the subsequent conversion. Even so it was a clinical score, really well done, and we were cheering lots.

England came back hard, and fought to win a try, forcing the ball over the line, in a fantastic push, and then Wilkinson converted, bringing it to 13 all. Then England Scored a drop kick, 3 points, putting them ahead. 16-13, I was gutted. I could see the game going wrong now, and need, wanted Ireland to do something. Our Captain, the great Brian O'Driscoll, was stretchered off. Much to the mirth and jeering of many, and mostly my wife, our own Paul O'Connell a huge massive man, had slammed straight into O'Driscoll, his knee making serious contact with O'Driscoll's head. Concussed for sure, our best player was off. And 16-13. My wife commented

that only Ireland would take out their own best player, and she would have had Wilkinson nailed very early on.

Behind, a place Ireland doesn't always like and have a record of late of coming back.

A stunning try is scored, with only six minutes to go, Tommy Bowe, who had scored the previous Irish Try got a fantastic pass from a line out, and just flies through the English Line, coming inside Wilkinson, and with a conversion from O'Gara, the score was 16-20.

A scrum decision, and some good luck in the maul, with a turnover, and England were denied any more scores, the tension right up to the last bit of play, a turnover and the ball booted out of play, just in time, England looking to fight back, right to the end.

I was very pleased, I was ecstatic, jumping and cheering.

There was a quiz, then, but we had made a dinner date back in Croydon, I realised I had not done very much at all at the convention, but catching up with friends, and the match was well worth it, and I enjoyed myself. The three of us made our way back towards Victoria station, and myself and Stef were very surprised to find a large group of Nuns, all going out for the evening, in Brighton.

After the match, Johnson said, "Games turn on things like that. It was silly but I don't think it was a penalty," in reference to the decision on Care.

Well, sore loser for you, everyone is to blame, except Johnson's choice of Johnny Wilkinson, who had a mediocre game, but who Johnson rates.



My wife will finish off analysis, from the Bar, for the day; "Ireland had little ball, 99 tackles against England, great defending, England had the ball lots, but did bugger all with it. Wilkinson's a good kicker and without him, England would have been lost, but kickers have good and bad days. Ireland is Lucky that in John Sexton, they have a superb apprentice to Ronan O'Gara, who has the highest point score ever in the six nations and the sixth in the world internationally. Johnson should think about his team finishing their moves, the team going forward gets the scrum, use it or lose it, play the game and stop questioning decisions."



The 1992 World Science Fiction Convention was one of the most memorable I've ever attended. Held in the heart of Orlando, right by America's favorite fantasyland – Disney World – it was a righteous dream. Right: the main hotel, the Peabody, complete with marching ducks.



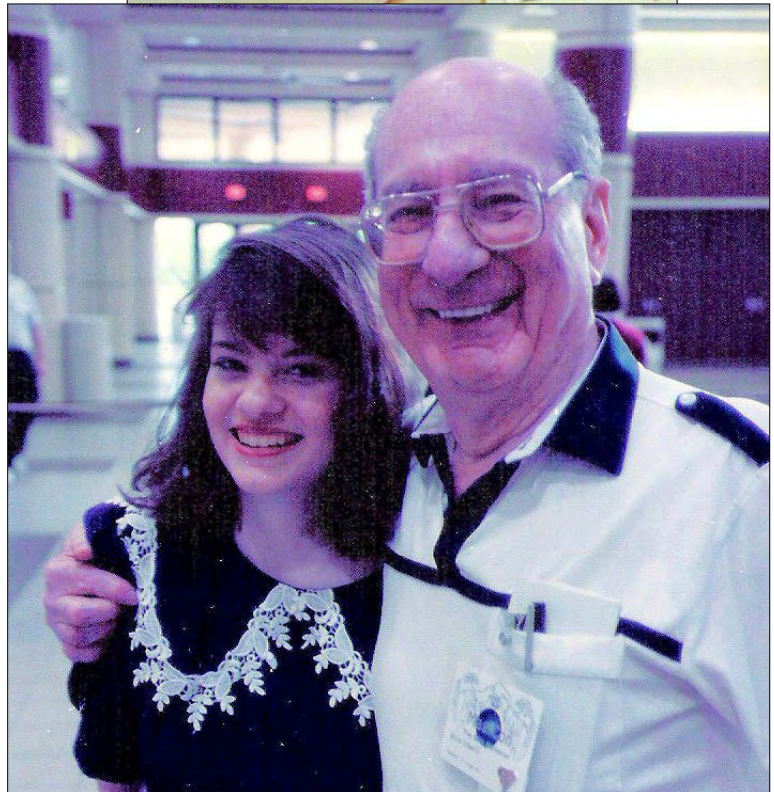
Magical MagiCon '92

*A photographic
reminiscence by
Guy Lillian III*



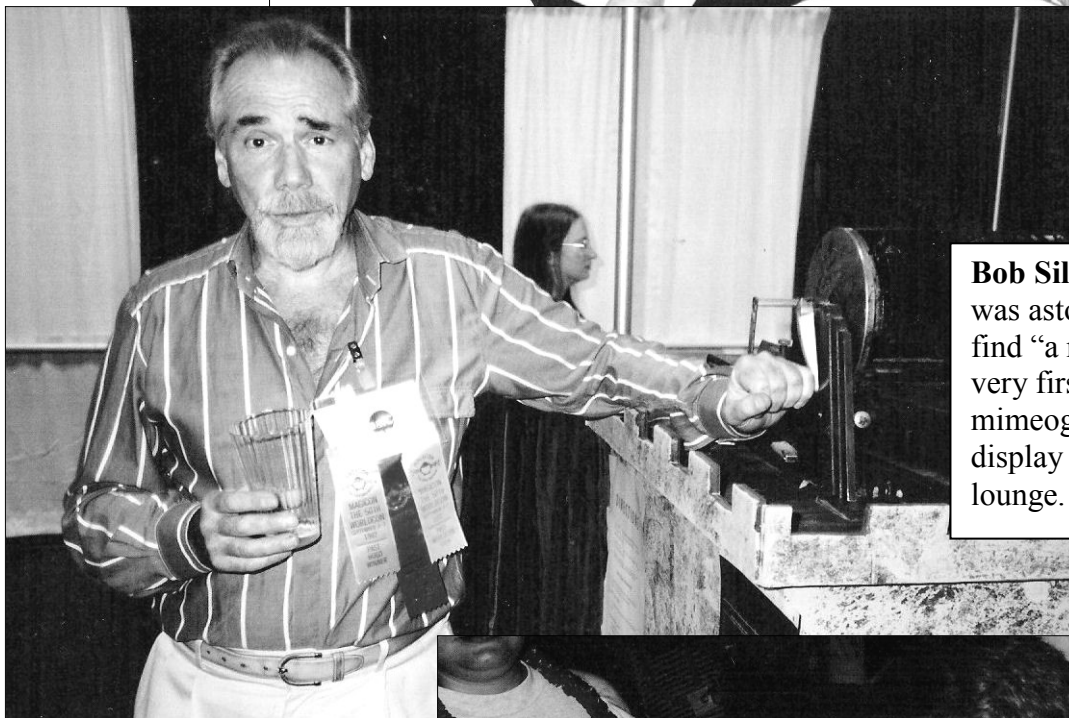
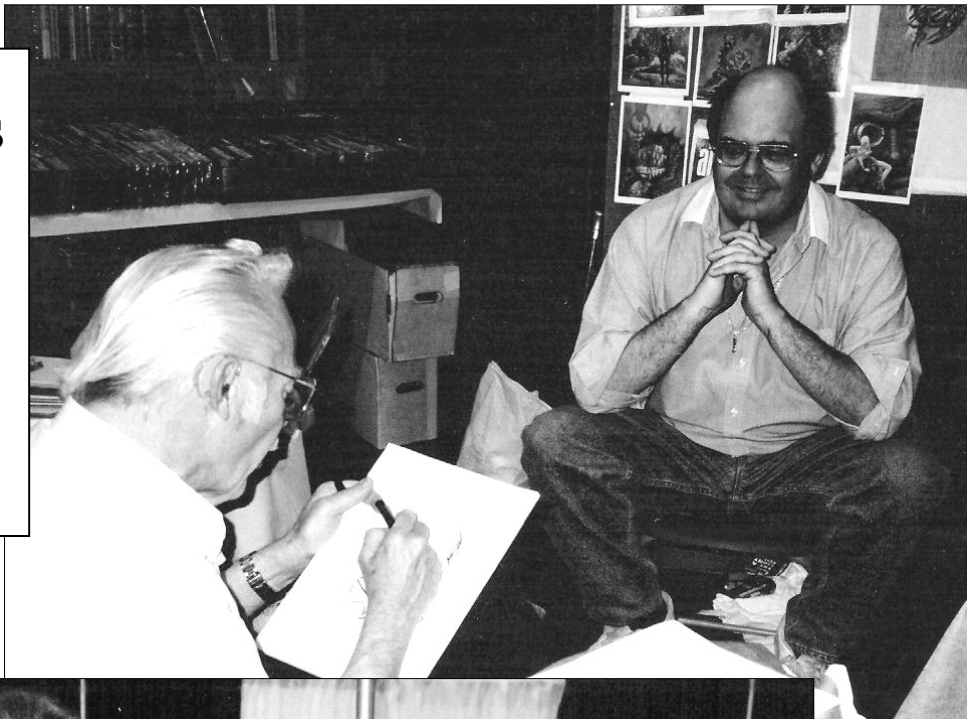
Rose-Marie Donovan and her family let me hang with them throughout much of MagiCon. Little did they dream they'd *never* get rid of me. To the left, two Florida ladies, Rose-Marie and Alice Mary "**Andre**" Norton confer. Doesn't Rosy look like Mary Steenberg?

CON PEOPLE. Clockwise from left, Guest of Honor **Jack Vance**, who didn't remember my nervy 1968 visit to his house ... Belovable **Becky Thomson** ... **Lillian van Hartesveldt** with Himself, **Julius Schwartz** ... and the ninth member of the world's most exclusive club, Moon-Walkers – Apollo 16 pilot **John Young**.



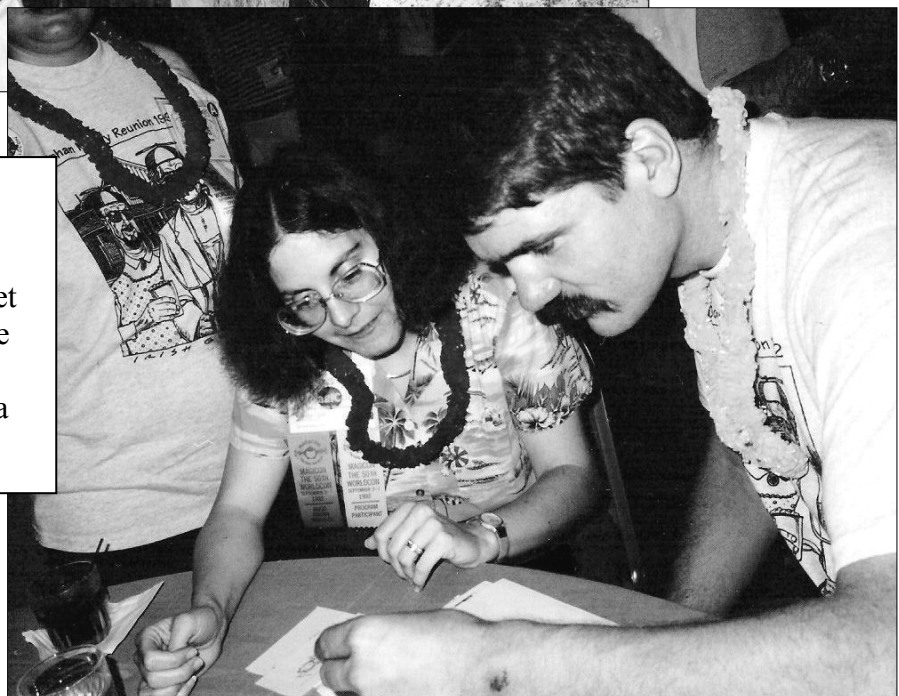
GOOD TIMES

abounded at
Magicon.
Right, **Frank
Kelly Freas**
works on the
GHLIII
caricature I
still use.
“Gotcha!” he
said.



Bob Silverberg
was astonished to
find “a relic,” his
very first
mimeograph , on
display in the fan
lounge.

Nicki Lynch and Aussie
DUFF winner **Roger
Weddell** check out
something cool at the Meet
the Guests party. Note the
leis – the perfect
accoutrement for a Florida
worldcon! Uh ... yeah.





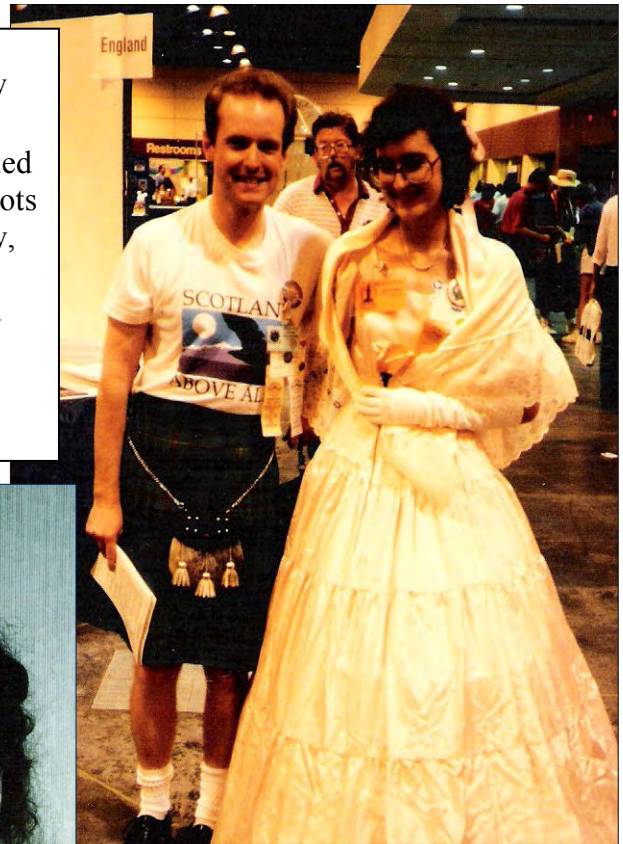
COSTUMES

Remember when hall costumes graced worldcon? Top, a foxy fellow and the eternal antagonists. Below, *not* what you think, and the Real Thing: **Laura Modine**



HUGOS & C. MagiCon saw an epic battle between Scotland and Atlanta – represented by **Vince Doherty** and an unidentified Southern belle – for the 1995 worldcon. The Scots won. Below, *la belle* Rose-Marie, and far below, **Nicki and Rich Lynch** celebrate *Mimosa's* first Hugo win. Remember the mistake that awarded the honor to the wrong zine ... and our chant of “We want Nicki!” that finally brought her to the stage?

Each MagiCon award was gold-plated to mark Hugo's 50th anniversary, boasted pieces of the original Redstone gantry and a gorgeous, unique starscape. A great Hugo moment ... a great Hugo ... and a great worldcon!!



EFFICIENCIES ON THE DARK CONTINENT, or, DARWIN WAS WRONG

Mike Resnick and Ralph Roberts

Africa is a big continent, so big that we can't confine this chapter to a single story or example. Bear with us.

Inefficiency is nothing new to Africa. That said, the fact remains that the Dark Continent is constantly finding new and better ways to be inefficient.

ONE OF OUR NAVIES IS MISSING

The most recent incident occurred in the fall of 2002, when an African nation lost its navy. Okay, it was a navy of just one ship, but still . . .

"The situation is absolutely under control," Transport Minister Ephraem Magagula assured the Swaziland parliament in Mbabane, according to the *Johannesburg Star*. "Our nation's navy is perfectly safe. We just don't know where it is, that's all." ` The navy in question was the landlocked country's only ship, the *Swazimar*. That's right—a navy of one ship. (Well, let's be reasonable. Just how many naval vessels does a tiny landlocked country need anyway?)

Explained Magagula: "We believe it is at sea somewhere. We did send a team of men to look for it, but there was a problem with drink and they failed to find it, and so, technically, yes, it's temporarily lost. But I categorically reject all suggestions of incompetence on the part of this government. The *Swazimar* is a big ship painted in the sort of nice bright colors you can see at night. Mark my words, it will turn up. The right honorable gentleman opposite is a very naughty man, and he will laugh on the other side of his face when my ship comes in."

When last we heard, Swaziland was still looking for its navy.

THE PUSSYCAT OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

While we're on the subject of Swaziland, let's consider young King Mswati II—one of the few absolute monarchs left anywhere in the world.

King Mswati is the marrying kind. He recently took his tenth wife, a 17-year-old schoolgirl. Of course, Mswati has quite a way to go to match his daddy, old King Sobhuza II, who died in 1986. (Sobhuza had 60 wives and made sure he could keep them by abolishing the constitution and all representative forms of government in Swaziland.)

Mswati realized that marrying so many women in this day and age might not sit well with his subjects, so he issued a decree that gave him total censorship over all the media in his country, on the not-unreasonable assumption that you can't get mad if you don't know what's going on.

Then, since he had so many wives to transport on state visits to the far reaches of his country (which happens to be considerably smaller than Florida), Mswati contracted to buy a \$50 million private jet while his nation of a million people is short on food and living on a per capita average of less than a dollar a day.

Or, as Mel Brooks says, "It's good to be the king!"
(And it's getting better. He just got engaged again.)

So how does the Studmuffin of Swaziland stack up against some of the recent African heads of state?

IT'S THE ECONOMY, STUPID

Well, the champ is the late Joseph Mobutu (who changed his name to Mobutu Sese Seku), dictator (in Africa the term is President-For-Life) of Zaire. Mobuto came to power at the height of the cold war, put his loyalty up for auction, and was purchased by the West. Over the years the United States and its allies gave Zaire \$10 billion in aid. At the time of his death, Mobuto's Swiss bank accounts and European real estate holdings were estimated to be worth more than \$9 billion.

Another African leader who won't be going hungry soon is Daniel arap Moi, President of Kenya from 1977 until 2003. He'd been a schoolteacher before Jomo Kenyatta tapped him as his vice president, and he succeeded to the presidency shortly thereafter. With no savings, and on the minimal salary paid to Kenya's president, Moi managed to acquire the ownership of every Mobil gas station in Kenya (renamed Kobil gas stations), every Mercedes taxi in Nairobi and Mombasa, the entire Air Kenya fleet of DC-3 airplanes, and a few hundred thousand acres of prime farmland in Kenya's White Highlands. The only conclusion: he must have brown-bagged a *lot* of lunches.

But never let it be said that every African dictator takes it all with him. When the Emperor Bokassa was being deposed in the Central African Republic, a mere handful of years after the French donated some \$25 million to his Ascendancy Ceremony, one of his last imperial acts was to stop by the nation's treasury and set it afire.

INVESTING IN AFRICAN REAL ESTATE

King Mswati uses his absolute rule for self-indulgence. Nothing unusual about that; being the top dog has always been a great way to get girls ... literally, in his case.

But Uganda's Idi Amin, who recently died in exile in Saudi Arabia, was a cat of a different stripe.

Being a total dictator, self-indulgent, and evil to boot, can start to wear on the old nerves. You need a holiday retreat of some sort. Old Idi had his – 23-acre Mukusu Island on beautiful Lake Victoria. There Idi whiled away many a pleasant afternoon indulging in his hobby of torturing a wide variety of victims and feeding them to the crocodiles.

Today, over twenty years after the end of Idi Amin's genocidal dictatorship, this island still bears the scars of his lazy afternoons there. You might stop by it sometime: a great little fixer-upper, with cattle prods, chains, and crocodiles included. (Idi called it Paradise Island—perhaps because of the many people he and the crocs dispatched to Paradise while he was there.)

Amin had some other little problems in the area of civilized behavior. It's said on good authority that he ate at least one of his infant sons. He declared that Adolf Hitler was his hero and erected a statue of him in the capital city of Kampala. Math was never his strong suit, and he simply never understood why he couldn't just print more money when he needed it. So print it he did—and there came a day when a loaf of bread cost in excess of a million Ugandan shillings.

He remained convinced (deluded is probably a more accurate word) that his people wanted him back, and he left his Saudi reservation a few years ago, certain they were ready to roll out a red, if not bloodstained, carpet for him. He got as far as the Zaire-Uganda border when he was recognized and refused entry.



THERE WERE PROBLEMS BEFORE IDI

Ruling Uganda stupidly didn't begin with Idi Amin, who took over in 1969. A few years earlier, the country was having a problem with tsetse flies.

Now, the tsetse fly tends to live on herbivores, usually wild ones—but if you bring enough cattle into an area, the tsetse isn't all that selective, and will just as happily live, breed and dine on domestic cattle. The problem is, wild game has a built-in immunity to the tsetse fly, and domestic animals don't.

Now, in any reasonable society, if your cattle were infested with tsetse flies, you'd spray heavily with DDT or something similar, and of course you'd begin dipping your livestock regularly.

But this was Uganda. Let us, they reasoned, get rid of the wildlife, and then the tsetse flies will have nowhere to go.

So they declared an unlimited open season on their game. Hunters came from all over. It's estimated that half a million animals were killed.

The result?

Well, some of the wounded game animals ran a thousand miles before dying, thus introducing their tsetse flies to areas that had never known them before. As for the bulk of the tsetse population, it moved lock, stock and barrel to the domestic livestock without losing a beat.

SPORTS MEDICINE

Being slow to pay your witch doctor is just about as stupid as living any place that Idi Amin would call Paradise Island. But a government minister in the Ivory Coast did just that. (Well, let's be fair. Maybe his Blue Cross didn't cover it.)

It seems that more than a decade after the Ivory Coast's soccer team managed its only African Nations Cup win, the local witch doctors were finally paid. Why? Because they are convinced they helped win the trophy by means of their professional services.

Back in 1992 the Minister of Sport decided to provide the national team with a bit of an edge and hired the witch doctors as spiritual consultants. Named the Elephants, the team managed a narrow win during a penalty shootout in Senegal.

Fine so far—but then the sports minister kinda sorta forgot to pay the bill. The witch doctors, who live in the village of Akradio, took this oversight rather poorly. They immediately put a hex on the team. And their magic worked again—no wins for the next ten years!

Finally bowing to pressure from disappointed fans, the Minister, one Moise Lida Kouassi, decided it was time to pay up. He offered humble apologies, a bottle of liquor, and two thousand dollars to the witch doctors.

There will be two signs by which we'll know if Kouassi's capitulation worked: the first will be that the Elephants win again; the second will be that his head doesn't fall off. The current odds are 6-to-5, pick 'em.

THE MOST RECENT COLONIAL WAR

Most people you talk to (except for Minister Kouassi of the Ivory Coast, who any moment now may find himself missing a head to talk with) will tell you that the age of colonialism is over, that all of Africa is independent now.

Not so. One of the oldest European colonial powers, Spain, still has several African possessions. In fact, you may recall a recent news article which reported that five Moroccan soldiers captured a small rock of an island claimed by Spain. The next day, nine Spanish troops recaptured it, thus ending the latest colonial war in Africa.

Obviously, armies have downsized since a force of 60 Tanzanian soldiers overthrew the government of the Seychelles back in 1977.

AFRICAN MATH

"I have promised to keep his identity confidential," Jack Maxim, a spokesman for the Sandton Sun Hotel in Johannesburg, told the *Cape Times*, "but I can confirm that he is no longer in our employment.

"We asked him to clean the lifts and he spent four days on the job. When I asked him why, he replied: 'Well, there are forty of them, two on each floor, and sometimes some of them aren't there.'

Eventually we realized that he thought each floor had a different lift, and he'd cleaned the same two twelve times. We had to let him go. I understand he is now working for GE."

With that kind of math being exported to GE, heaven help our next generation of space shuttles.

SO YOU'RE UNHAPPY WITH THE WAY WE RUN OUR AIRPORTS?

We'll admit that some of the cases we've discussed will stretch your credulity. Not this one. This one will throw it right out the window. Of an airplane. That isn't going anywhere. In Kenya.

"What's all the fuss about?" Weseka Sambu demanded at a hastily-convened news conference at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi. "A technical hitch like this could have happened anywhere in the world. You people are not patriots. You just want to cause trouble."

So what was Sambu's problem?

He is a spokesman for Kenya Airways, and he was explaining why a flight that was to originate in Kisumu, stop in Nairobi, and then continue on to Berlin, Germany just a tad behind schedule.

It all began when 42 passengers boarded the plane, ready to fly to Nairobi, when the pilot noticed that one of the tires had gone flat.

That could happen anywhere. But what came next could only happen in Africa.

First problem: Kenya Airways didn't have a spare tire at Kisumu.

Second problem: the airport's nitrogen canister was empty, so they decided to take the tire to a local gas station for repairs.

Third problem: someone had stolen the jack and they couldn't get the wheel off—so they tried to inflate the tire with a bicycle pump.

Fourth problem: the bicycle pump didn't work, so the pilot climbed out of the plane and tried to blow into the valve with his mouth.

Fifth problem: the pilot passed out from his efforts—and the tire remained flat. For all we know, it's still flat as we write these words.

"When I announced that the flight had to be abandoned," said Sambu, "one of the passengers, a Mr. Mutu, suddenly struck me about the face with a life-jacket whistle and said we were a national disgrace. I told him he was being ridiculous and that there would be another flight in a fortnight. And in the meantime, he would be able to enjoy the scenery around Kisumu, albeit at his own expense."

Okay, now tell us how much you resent the security lines at your local airport.

PROJECTS

The Italians spent \$300 million building roads in Somalia. What's peculiar about that? At the time, it came to more than \$200,000 per vehicle.

In 1990, Lilongwe, the capital city of Malawi, had a state of the art television broadcast tower. What's unusual about that? Except for the Capital Hotel in Lilongwe, the Mount Soche hotel in Blantyre, and the various palaces of President-For-Life Hastings Banda, there were less than 50 television sets in the country.

President Omar Bongo of Gabon talked the French into spending more than half a billion dollars building the most ambitious railroad on the continent. It required some 50 bridges, made with the finest hardwood, each spanning enormous canyons, but eventually it was done. What's unusual about that? Gabon's only export, the only thing they would ship to the coast aboard their state-of-the-art train, was hardwood; they used it all up building the railroad.

Remember our old pal, the deposed Emperor Bokassa? Everything was going well for him until he decided to build a factory that made uniforms for the local schoolchildren. And since it was his idea, and he was the Emperor, of course he owned it. What's unusual about that? Well, the average outfit cost \$100, and the average family earned about \$150 a year, so they were understandably reluctant to purchase the outfits. Then Bokassa passed a law—when you're the Emperor passing laws is pretty easy—making it mandatory that all schoolchildren wore his company's outfits. That's when the students, most of them not yet adolescents, marched on the capital in protest. And *that's* when Bokassa decided they were an irritant and

ordered them shot. And that was the beginning of the end for Bokassa.

The Ivory Coast's late President-For-Life Houphouët-Boigny, ruling a country that was saddled with one of Africa's biggest per-capita debts, built a huge cathedral in the capital of Abidjan. He was so pleased with it that, while rescheduling the country's debt payments, he decided to build the world's biggest church, and not in Abidjan, but in the little village of Yamoussoukro.

The structure, which was designed to dwarf St. Peter's basilica in Rome, was about halfway up when it was finally shown off to foreign journalists in 1987. An American writer asked if it might be considered folly to build the world's biggest church in the middle of the African bush, especially when so many of the people were hungry. The guide, who had been well-schooled by the 150 Frenchmen who were getting rich off the project, replied, "Don't you think there were starving and homeless people when the cornerstone was laid for Notre Dame?" End of discussion.

ECOLOGY, AFRICAN STYLE

The Nile perch sometimes grows to 300 pounds, and inhabits Lake Turkana in northern Kenya. Why not, reasoned the government, capture some young ones and put them into Lake Tanganyika, the largest fresh-water lake on the continent, and let them breed? Think of how much protein we can pull out of the lake in a few years to feed our hungry masses.

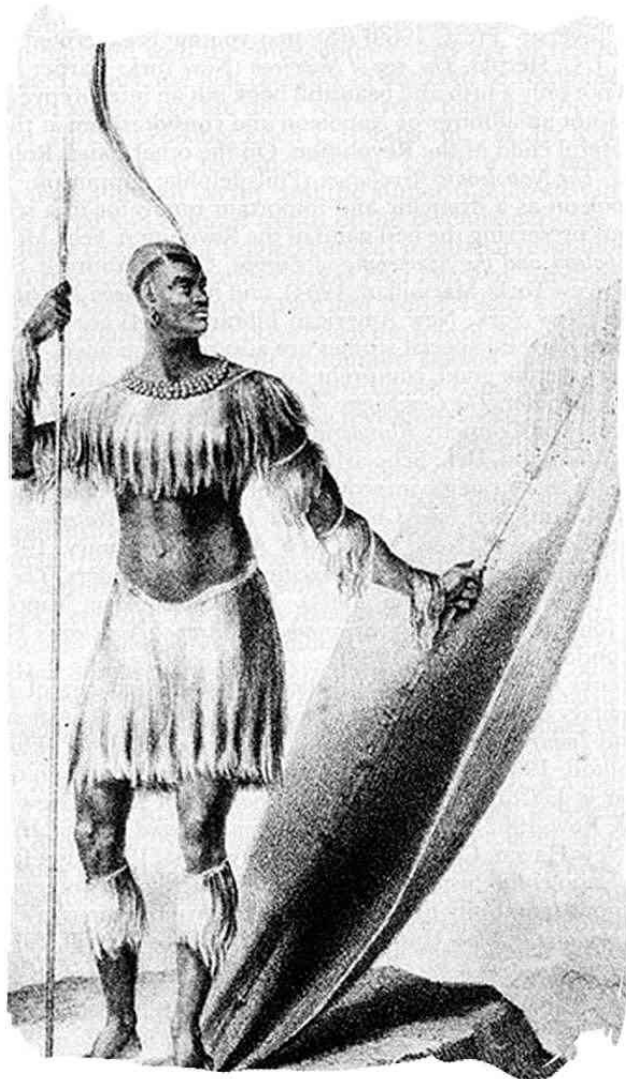
The Nile perch proceeded to eat almost everything else in the lake. They themselves made slow, easy targets for the thousands of crocodiles. It'll be

years before the last of them is dead and the lake's balance is restored.

The same geniuses put beautiful, flowering water hyacinths into Kenya's Lake Naivasha. Why not? They were lovely, and the hippos liked eating them.

But they multiplied a *lot* faster than the lake's hippos, and on any given day 40% to 50% of the lake's surface is covered by the things.

You can go too far the other direction. Botswana has done such a splendid job of protecting its elephant population—and word went out on the elephant grapevine, because elephants who were being decimated by poachers in Angola, Zimbabwe and Zambia migrated there—that suddenly what Botswana has is a lot of starving elephants. The Chobe National Park, which can reasonably support about 18,000 to 22,000, currently has 60,000 and the number is growing as the food supply is vanishing. But because Botswana is a signatory to the CITES agreement—a total continent-wide ban on ivory, created because other countries couldn't control their poachers—they cannot even cull their own herds and use the proceeds from the ivory to relocate some of the hungrier survivors.



SEE? IT'S NOT JUST MUGABE

It's generally considered that, after two decades in office, President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe has lost his sanity. It took him less than three years to bankrupt the country, turn a healthy populace into an army of starving beggars, and generally make himself a pariah among civilized leaders.

So why didn't the people rise up and throw him out of office?

Well, there are many reasons, including his death squads, but one reason no one has suggested to date is that it's harder to tell a Zimbabwe madman than you think.

Consider this item from a Bulawayo newspaper:

"While transporting mental patients from Harare to Bulawayo, the bus driver stopped at a roadside *shebeen* (beer hall) for a few beers. When he got back to his vehicle, he found it empty, with the 20 patients nowhere to be seen. Realizing the trouble he was in if the truth were uncovered, he halted his vehicle at the next bus stop and offered lifts to those in the queue. Letting 20 people board the bus, he then shut the doors and drove straight to the Bulawayo Mental Hospital, where he hastily handed over his 'charges,' warning the nurses that they were particularly excitable.

"Excitable was an understatement. Staff removed the furious passengers; it was three days later that suspicions were roused by the consistency of stories from the 20. As for the real patients: nothing more has been heard of them and they have apparently blended comfortably back into Zimbabwean society . . ."

WHAT'S NEXT?

It's hard to say. But for every Shaka Zulu, who began with a village the size of a football field and wound up with an empire three times the size of France, there's an Idi Amin, who began with a country like Uganda and wound up confined in a small house thousands of miles away. For every Albert Schweitzer who devotes his life to truth, there's a South African president who tells the press that AIDS is a capitalist myth. For every Jomo Kenyatta who outlaws hunting, there's likely to be a game department officer with a unique way of eradicating tsetse flies.

But they do keep things interesting, don't they?



*You'll note that the font used for the central word in the title is
"Jokerman" ...*

TWO JOKEY STORIES

Joseph Major



... ***"You want this, don't you?"*** The hate is swelling in you now. Take your Jedi weapon. Use it. I am unarmed. Strike me down with it. Give in to your anger. With each passing moment you make yourself more my servant."

"No," Luke said, but the words burned into his spirit.

"It is unavoidable. It is your destiny. You, like your father, are now mine!" The Emperor looked down upon them, his corrupted visage adorned with a malicious look of glee.

Luke felt his heart sink. He had failed and now everything he cared for would perish. He reached out in the Force, to draw the light-saber to him, and in the pain of his knowledge turned to confront Vader, to confront himself.

Low harsh laughs echoed through the darkness of the throne room. "And I thought ... *my* jokes ... were bad."

The man who emerged from the latticework beneath the Emperor's throne was bizarre. The first thing that struck one about him was the fixed, exaggerated smile that divided his face, limned in ragged, erratic red. His eyes were ringed in black, setting them against the extreme paleness of his skin. His purple clothing seemed only to accentuate his otherness.

"Do you want to know why I use a light-saber?" he said as he came up to them, fixing Vader with his burning gaze. "Blasters are too quick. You can't savor all the ... little emotions. In ... you see, in their last moments, people show you who they really are." And he laughed again.

His gaze flicked towards the Emperor and that chilling, upsetting laugh echoed throughout the room. One hand went out, and a wooden staff flickered into it. "Now, our operation is small, but there's a *lot* of potential for 'aggressive' expansion. So, which one of you fine gentlemen would like to join our team? Oh, there's only one spot open right now, so we're gonna have ... " As his voice faded, the staff snapped in two, the other half flying into his other hand. "... Tryouts."

As the parts of the broken staff flew from his hands towards Luke and Vader, he said, "Make it fast."

The light-saber hung useless at his side. Somehow, some way, the man in purple had drawn the Force into himself, to make their light-sabers useless. They would have to fight with the weapons he had given them.

And now the pale, pallid visage with its black-rimmed eyes turned upon Luke. "I know your friends better than you ever did. Would you like to know which of them were cowards?" he said, then broke into that insane laughter.

Luke cast the staff away. It rattled over the floor and he turned to face the Emperor and his . . . master? Padwan, or whatever passed for those among the Sith? Force-being? “You’ve failed. I am a Jedi, like my father before me.”

“Funny, I think he’s behind you!” And he laughed. “Do you hate your father? I hated my father!”

Luke felt something move behind and ducked, as the broken staff in Vader’s hands flicked through where he had been. Vader’s breath wheezed in his artificial breathing apparatus as he stabbed out. Luke had landed on the other broken staff; he rolled over and came up, pointing it at Vader.

“A little fight in you! I like that.”

While the Emperor said, “Young fool! Only now, at the end, do you understand that.”

“And . . . here . . . we . . . go!”

Luke had to parry a blow from the stick. Vader was attacking with desperation . . .

— Not created by Bob Kane or George Lucas

//

. . . Goldfinger allowed himself a half-smile of sympathy. ‘That is excellent news, Miss Galore. And now,’ he turned to face across the table, ‘Mr. Springer, might we ask if you have made up your mind?’

Slowly Mr Springer rose to his feet. He gave the controlled yawn of an opera goer. He followed the yawn with a small belch. He took out a fine linen handkerchief and patted his lips. His glazed eyes moved round the table and finally rested on Goldfinger. Slowly his head moved from side to side as if he was trying to exercise fibrositis in his neck muscles. He said gravely, like a bank manager refusing a loan, ‘Mr Gold, I fear your proposal would not find favour with my colleagues in Detroit.’ He gave a little bow which included everyone. ‘It only remains for me to thank you for a most interesting occasion. Good afternoon, gentlemen and madam.’ In the chilly silence, Mr Springer tucked his handkerchief carefully into the left-hand cuff of his immaculate pin-stripe, turned, and made to go to the door.

A burst of wild, untrammelled laughter broke the silence. ‘And I thought . . . *my* jokes . . . were bad!’

Bond had thought the gangsters odd, but the man who had entered made them one and all appear normal. Like Billy Ring, he had a strangely contorted mouth, with a perpetual sinister smile seemingly carved into his face. His skin was unnaturally pale, almost white. By contrast, he wore a purple suit with a yellow shirt; it would have appeared horribly out of taste were it not so skillfully tailored. As he approached the table they could see that his hair was green, as if from some unfortunate accident at a hairdressers’ salon. He looked Mr Springer in the eyes and said, ‘Why so serious?’

Mr Springer did not allow the extraordinary apparition to break his concentration. ‘You appear to have found a patron worthy of you, Joker. Mr Gold here has proposed a plan of true insanity.’

‘And what’s wrong with that? It’s done *wonders* for me! As for the rest of you, do you want to see what all I can do for you, Mr . . . Gold, it is? How about a magic trick?’

By now he was at the foot of the table, only a foot or so from Mr Springer. Everyone else was dead still, appalled if not bewildered. The interloper pulled out a pencil, flourished it, then stuck the point into the table, with a force that seemed quite in keeping with his size. The maimed mouth smiled even further, if such a thing were possible. ‘I’m gonna make this pencil disappear.’

One white-gloved hand shot out and grabbed Mr Springer by the nape of the neck. He slammed the man’s head onto the table with immense force, then let him fall to the floor, dead. The pencil must have gone through the eye socket straight into the brain. The interloper waved his hand over the vacancy and said, ‘Ta-da! It’s . . . it’s gone. Oh, and about the suit. It wasn’t cheap. You oughta know, you bought it.’

Goldfinger finally broke the shocked silence. ‘The rest of you seem to know this man,’ he said, casually.

Mr Solo said, 'Damn straight. This clown here is The Joker, the best hit man and worker in the country. Don't let that face fool you. He can get anyone. Comes high but it's worth it.'

The Joker had plucked the gold bar out of Mr Springer's pocket, now he took the dead man's place and said, 'What's a gang of four-flushers like you doing that needs a two-timer like me?'

Goldfinger said, 'How did you get past my staff, and the gentlemens' and lady's assistants?'

The perpetual grin seemed to deepen, 'Oh, *all* the locals know me!'

Mr Billy Ring said, 'Mr Gold here has a proposal that will bring us each a billion dollars.'

The Joker said, 'Oooh, *money*! Do tell!' while he clapped his hands and laughed in childish glee.

Goldfinger heaved a sigh. 'Gentlemen and lady, it seems we have a new associate. Allow me to brief him while you refresh yourselves.'

And now Bond's mind was made up. He had worked out exactly what had to be done. The inches had been measured, the knife from his heel was under his coat and he had twisted the longest end of his seat belt round his left wrist. All he needed was one sign that Oddjob's body was turned away from the window,. It would be too much to expect Oddjob to go to sleep, but at least he could make himself comfortable. Bond's eyes never left the dim profile he could see reflected in the Perspex oblong of the window of the seat in front, but Oddjob sat stolidly under the reading light he had prudently kept burning, his eyes staring at the ceiling, his mouth slightly open and his hands held ready and relaxed on the arms of his chair.

One hour, two hours. Bond began to snore, rhythmically, drowsily, he hoped hypnotically. Now Oddjob's hands had moved to his lap. The head nodded once and pulled itself up, shifted to get more comfortable, then stiffened.

Bond stopped. What was happening with the man? Oddjob's body had lost its spring-wound tenseness. It stiffened, spreading outwards, as if he were being consumed from within. His eyes now stared blankly, unmoving, and his mouth slowly, gradually took on a contorted sinister grin.

Bond moved slowly, now, seeing if he would attract Oddjob's attention. The smile bothered him, where had he seen it before? The motion provoked no response. He listened, looked closely, then felt an icy shiver run through his body. Oddjob was dead, poisoned somehow, and the rictus of his face resembled too eerily that of the Joker's. Something Leiter had said came back to him. 'He has developed a delayed-action poison, something like tetanus in its effect.' Was this it?



The motion had drawn the attention of the other guard, the German, who came down the aisle, gun in hand. 'What the Hell . . .'

A sharp scream broke his attention. Bond leaped, knife in hand, and stabbed the man during the moment of distraction. He fell, and Bond swept up the Luger, running forward. Pussy Galore had got up from her seat and stood over Goldfinger. The man had the same stiffness, the same insane dead grin. She looked at him and said, 'It's the Joker Venom. He got them.'

'When did he have the opportunity? Not after he had baled out during all the shooting at Fort Knox, him and that girl of his in the harlequin suit. Probably saved his life, I expect Goldfinger would have shot him with the other gangsters.'

'You'd be surprised. You'd better go persuade the pilot. I'm not checked out for multi-engine, and I think we want to survive the landing.'

M brushed the list with his fingers. 'Colonel Smithers was a bit displeased that we did not recover all of the gold. The explanation was a trifle hard to believe.'

There was a sheet of paper in a glassine envelope on the desk. M looked at and said, 'Q Branch says there is no toxin in this but I fancy you will not wish to take the risk.' He handed the paper to Bond. He noted, casually, that it was written in purple ink in great looping letters. It read:

'The late unlamented Goldfinger just couldn't appreciate a good joke. You however have a proper appreciation and since you were my friend, I would kill you last.

'All the chic restaurants are charging a gratuity of twenty percent, and who am I to go against the opinion of our master eateries? I always say, if you're good at something, never do it for free.'

It was signed with a great sweeping letter 'J'. Bond looked up from the paper. 'How much was recovered?'

'Sixteen million pounds' worth. He seems to have taken twenty percent. Now about Miss Galore escaping after the plane landed at Gander . . .'

— *Not created by Bob Kane or Ian Fleming*



FUNDIE FOLLIES

Binker Glock Hughes

One of the delights of sorting family papers is finding the unexpected. In this case, I was scanning an 1881 pamphlet in which a gentleman named Fiske was decrying the polemical style and unscientific method of someone named Cook who, claiming to be a minister/etc., was unwisely attacking perfectly sound science that, moreover, agreed with Cook in most regards. Such dry reading has its rewards, however.

As a standard of comparison with Cook's tendency to take only partial and out of context quotes from his victims – a practice all too familiar from much 'reporting' these days – Fiske gave an example of "Fundie folly" I'm still howling over.

Apparently, some preacher took objection to a then-fashionable hairstyle, so decided to preach against it. He took for his text, "Top Knot – Come Down!" When some scripturally-literate listener objected that he had taken only a few words from the middle of a passage that meant something quite different, he apparently retorted that Every Word of Scripture was from God, and as true and binding in part as in whole. Oh, really?

It turns out that the *full* line read, "Let him that is on the housetop not come down." Hmmm. "Top Knot – Come Down" forsooth!

I'm still laughing every time I think about it. For its sheer and willful abuse of his own supposed scriptures, 'Top Knot – Come Down!' even outguns the Rev. Spooner's [source of the term 'spoonerism'] reported introduction of the hymn "From Greenland's Icy Mountains" as "We shall now sing, 'From Iceland's Greasy Mountains.'" At least, with Spooner, it was unintended.





If you ever hear me cast doubt on the jury system, whisper one word in ear: "Jarm"

HE SHE SAID

Guy Lillian III

Over May 10-12, the Bossier Parish District Attorney brought Jarmon D--- to trial on charge of Forcible Rape. No plea offer to a lesser offense had been made. D--- was a black man with incarceration for a drug charge on his record. The victim, P.K., was his former girlfriend, a white college graduate. According to her, after being released from jail D--- came to her house at 5AM, and after some conversation forced himself upon her. D--- maintained their sexual relations were consensual, and that therefore, there was no rape.

That's the first paragraph of a synopsis I wrote of my most recent jury trial. My boss, Pam, wanted it to show *her* bosses – the state public defenders' office. Naturally, I couldn't go into the *feelings* the case brought to me, but barring any wand'ring into confidential territory, I can certainly do so here.

As you can well imagine, sex crimes, especially rapes, are extremely tough to defend – tough on the brain, tough on the nerves. If the District Attorney has the slightest ability, if his case has the slightest verisimilitude, then your lawyerly skills get a righteous workout, for the only cases more likely to excite a jury's bias are crimes against children. You can pretty much count on a panel not only *able* to burn your client, but *anxious* to.

But such matters are also stressful on the nerves. Shame on you if this comes as a surprise, but defense lawyers hate rape as much as anybody else. I am certainly no exception. Two dear friends and several close acquaintances have gone through that ghastly experience. I want to drag the perps up and down the interstate by their busterbrowns. But I took an oath, as a lawyer, and take a paycheck, as a public defender. For a public defender, a rape case is a *job*. And let's not forget *Gideon v. Wainwright* – mine happens to be a job ordained by the U.S. Constitution. *Anyone* accused of *any* crime gets a fair trial – meaning a righteous defense.

So whatever I thought of the crime, whatever baggage I brought to the courtroom, I had to set it all aside – and *defend* Jarmon.

Trying the case for the prosecution were Delbert S---, one of the chief assistant D.A.s for the parish, and retired judge Benjamin J---, who acts as a consultant for the District Attorney domestic violence cases. The judge was Michael C---, and I handled the defense.

Since moving into Mike C's court I'd been frustrated by the dearth of Action. Delbert – a huge, gregarious fellow – conducts his business in a *unique* manner. Pre-trial, he seldom presents decent plea bargains. GAC: guilty as charged. Just prior to trial, however, since he seems to dislike the give-&-take of trials, he pulls acceptable offers out of his ... hat. So for a year-and-a-half, I hadn't gotten any exercise before a jury, and was feeling rusty. (And I don't mean Rusty *Hevelin*.)

Not that I expected success. I'd read the police report, of course, and interviewed Jarmon several times in jail. He was a wide-shouldered black guy, late 20's, respectably articulate and intelligent – but very definitely

Street. His race alone would have been enough to doom him in southern Louisiana, but my parish is in the far northwest corner of the Pelican State, where racial attitudes are dominated by the egalitarianism imposed by the area's biggest employer: the U.S. Air Force. However, Jarmon's Street-ishness, his attitude of toughness and arrogance, though perhaps necessary in the 'hood, would kill him in front of any jury on Earth. Besides which, he had a drug conviction. Were I to put him on the witness stand, that would have to come out. Ugly!

Compounding the seeming unwinnability of the case was the alleged victim, P.K. One winter day, Delbert – trying to convince me to convince Jarmon to plead – called me up to his office to meet her. Attractive white brunette in her 20s, a college grad, wearing hospital greens and an irritated 'tude.

I assured her that alleged rape victims were protected from abusive examinations in court, intimations that the crime was caused by their dress or deportment – that they were sluts, in other words. But I also told P.K. that I would have to question her closely on her memory, her observations, and her actions – which she said she understood. As a matter of fact, "I feel sorry for you having to defend this," she said. Don't worry, I replied; it won't be *me* going to jail.

P.K.'s story was this. She and Jarmon had lived together for a short while. She'd supported him and leant him \$2000. Jarmon was on probation for cocaine possession. He got revoked and was reintroduced to the parish jail. She visited him regularly and took his phone calls. At some point, however, it came to her attention that Jarmon had another girlfriend – one who was bearing his child. She stopped visiting. She stopped taking Jarmon's calls. She removed Jarmon's stuff from her house and took it back to his mother. And then found that guys from Street culture don't take a simple goodbye. A week or so after Jarmon was released, he came by her house – at 5AM. What happened then was the crux of the matter.

I've run into stories like J.S.'s for decades: young women who reach over the cultural divide because a dude tickles their fancy, and then find that the cultural divide has consequences. It has nothing to do with race, and everything to do with class: guys from the Street don't hear it when their girlfriends – past or not – say no.

The question was, though, *Did she consent?* Or rather, n.b.: *Could the prosecution prove she **didn't** consent?*

We seated a jury of five men, including one African-American, and seven women, two of whom were black.

Like I say, I hadn't done a jury trial since starting to work in Judge C's court. I *had* watched one one, however, and the A.D.A., Delbert, had enlisted help.

I hadn't been in this area when Benjamin J had been on the bench, but the very idea of facing off against a former judge was intimidating. As a lawyer, I'm loaded with weaknesses, but the strongest is my witlessness when it comes to *procedure*. Maintaining the way in which court is conducted is, of course, the judge's job, and an attorney usually doesn't get to be a judge without having a good deal of experience and expertise. (And heavy family connections.) I expected to get my tubes tied, but at least, I thought, I'd shake off some of my no-trial-for-18-months rust.

The former judge surprised me in the trial I watched – and took the defense lawyer completely off-guard. During *voir dire* – jury selection – he asked *one* question of the jury pool: "Can you obey the rulings of the court?" No queries about whether they knew the defendant, or the victim, or had criminal convictions themselves, or hated cops, or *anything*. I suppose he had seen too many lawyers annoy potential jurors with hours of repetitious, pedantic questioning, making a bad impression and injuring their cases. I'd seen such a *voir dire*: the attorney droned on for hours and dragged out his case for days – the jury couldn't wait to convict his client. His idea was to build a record for the appeal, but that's never been my philosophy; I think a defense attorney should go for the win from Jump Street.

And that does indeed require establishing rapport with the jury. This can be as basic as getting them to *like* you – I had one granny cougar tell a good-looking Jefferson Parish A.D.A. that she wanted to adopt him – but more importantly, to *respect* you. If you show a jury that you know your business, and *instruct them in their task* – with deference to the judge, of course – you're halfway home.

So when we faced Jarmon's jury pool, and Former-Judge Benjamin J tossed off his one-minute *voir dire*, I introduced myself – as always, addressing the whole room and joking that I was the only lawyer there who hadn't grown up with half the jury pool – and morphed into professorial mode. American judicial system emerged mumble-mumble Revolutionary War mumble-mumble balance power of state with rights of defendant

etcetera etcetera *Ground Rules*: Defendant is innocent till proven guilty. The government (*never* say “the people”, only “the prosecution” or “the state” or better still, the detestable “government”) has the entire burden of that proof. Defendant therefore can remain completely silent. And the level of proof needed is Beyond a Reasonable Doubt – a tough standard left up to the individual juror. (After all this, the judge is usually getting impatient, so I throw in a question to the jurors: “Whaddya think of all that? Too much?”)

I also made a point of asking what they’d think if it turned out Jarmon had a record. Would that give them the impression he was guilty of *this* crime, too? Just asking the question gave up the info, but it was important to our case to get it out there. The D.A. had two confessions to throw at the jury, after all, and I had an inkling of an idea on how to counteract it – involving Jarmon’s prison time.

At the end of the day, I felt pretty good about the jury. I had a nice mix of race, gender, age – I was glad we had some men on our jury. The ladies, I felt, would probably identify with P.K. and hang Jarmon just on general principles. The men might be more ... well, what? Objective?

We began. First up for the prosecution was the detective who had interviewed P.K., looked over the alleged crime scene, and then interviewed and arrested Jarmon. The cop, whom I rather liked, claimed Jarmon had admitted to him that he had forced P.K. into sex.

Two important elements of the prosecution's case were alleged confessions or admissions. One was made by Jarmon when he talked, voluntarily, to a Bossier City detective and another came when he violated his parole in order to get his time served. Both were allowed into evidence over defense objection. At trial, I tried to counter these statements by getting the detective to admit that Jarmon had maintained his innocence and had never made any statement admitting that he had proceeded with the act of intercourse over P.K.'s struggles and protests. The detective admitted that the tape of Jarmon's statement had been flawed and that no recording existed.

It proved easier to deal with Jarmon’s alleged confession to the cop than I thought. First of all, he had come in voluntarily to be interviewed, not the act of a man bearing conscious guilt. Secondly, the lack of a recording meant that the question of his admission was strictly he said/he said – Jarmon’s word against the officer’s. Ordinarily, this would have been easy points for the prosecution, but I got the detective to admit that he had literally *pestered* Jarmon into confessing. Jarmon told his story. The cop said he didn’t believe him. “Tell me again.” Jarmon told his story again. And again. And again. The cop didn’t stop pressuring Jarmon till he’d said what he wanted him to say.

All along I’d known that I would have to put Jarmon on the witness stand, and therefore admit that he had been in jail. On argument, I used that fact to undercut this first alleged confession. Jarmon had just been released from a situation where his well-being depended on the approval of guards ... police. If he said *anything* inculpatory, he was just trying to satisfy the man in control.

As for the parole waiver, Jarmon testified that he had simply signed whatever the parole officer had given him, trusting her assurance that he was admitting nothing and that his signature merely allowed him to serve his time while awaiting our trial. The p.o. did not testify.

This trial was originally scheduled for late 2009, but got put off when P.K. herself told us that there was medical evidence – photos taken during a SANE exam. She said that the pictures would show bruising and injuries to her privates that would prove she’d been badly sexually mistreated. But the pleasant nurse, when she testified, said no.

Medical evidence was inconclusive. Both the SANE nurse and the parish coroner, who simply interpreted P.K.'s records, stated that the micro-tears found in her genitalia were certainly indicative of sexual activity, but only perhaps an assault. Furthermore, it underscored the detective's story of faulty tapes when the digital photographs of J.S.'s gynecological exam were somehow lost.

I found it amazing – and a bit frightening – that in a rerun of the detective’s testimony, the recording of the evidence – i.e., the photos – had been lost! I danced all over the issue in closing – do we convict a man on the basis of lost evidence? And the nurse’s notes reflected only microscopic vaginal tears, which – I got the coroner to state – happens *every* time a woman has sexual relations.

It was just as I’d thought from the outset: there was no evidence, only testimony. He said ... she said. Everything would hinge on what the jury thought of the principals.

Both the defendant and the alleged victim testified. P.K. wept off-and-on during her testimony. My cross of P.K. revealed that she had freely admitted Jarmon to her home when he knocked (at 5 in the morning), had not called the police (despite stating that she was frightened of Jarmon and held a cellphone, 9-1-1 already dialed, without hitting "send"), and failed to flee the house when the opportunity arose. The fact that she had sat with D--- for some time smoking cigarettes at the kitchen table struck an odd note.

Still, I found P.K. – dressed in her hospital greens – pitiable and somewhat compelling on the stand. When she started crying, I detected no thespian phoniness – she really was upset. But was she *honest*? I believe I handled her with dignity and certainly with courtesy – she agreed that we’d talked before and I’d explained my duty.

But I didn’t trust all the details of her story. If she was so scared of Jarmon *why* did she admit him (at 5AM)? If she held a cellphone with 9-1-1 already dialed, why *didn’t* she hit “send”? She was at the front door – if she was so terrified, as she claimed, why didn’t she cut and run? All in all, though, she’d done all right – but not overwhelmingly. “It’s up to you,” I told Jarmon, and put him on the stand.

I led Jarmon through his relationship with P.K. – knowing that the jury would wonder how a rough-looking black guy would connect with a pretty college-educated white girl. I got him to tell about his previous conviction – no details, only that it was a drug rap, nothing violent (didn’t want them thinking this was part of a pattern) – and that his probation had been revoked while he was living with P.K. He told how she’d come to see him at the jail and taken his phone calls – and how all that had come to an end when the pregnancy of his *other* girlfriend had come to the fore.

I led him through the incident in question. I got him to describe the detective’s interrogation, and his signing of the parole waiver. Through it all, he did well, I thought – calm, seemingly honest. But the prosecution, of course, then got a crack at him.

Judge Benjamin’s cross-examination of Jarmon D--- focused on details of his record which he had missed during direct examination.

When I completed my direct questioning, I thought Jarmon had done well. But then the ex-judge got him talking.

Jarmon didn’t admit that he had forced P.K. into sex. He maintained what he’d always maintained, that the act was consensual. But Jarmon claimed that he’d left P.K. “before he was finished.” Ah, said Benjamin – but you’d left semen! Yeah, smirked Jarmon – but he wasn’t *finished*. He could have kept going and going! The machismo of the Street had taken over. I swear, the damned fool *smirked* as he left the stand.

I’m glad I wasn’t armed at that moment.

That was that: time for closing arguments. Vincent Bugliosi – whose name you’ll find in another article in this issue – has said that in a criminal trial, your preparation should *begin* with your *closing*. Everything you say, all the testimony you adduce, should support the conclusions you want the jury to hear – and believe.

Delbert began his close – and I thought he did very well. He was articulate, he was passionate, he had sincere sympathy for P.K. and obviously believed in what he said: that Jarmon needed to learn that No means No and you don’t force ladies into sex. No argument to be made there. Good job, I thought. Why was he so adverse to trials?

My turn.

I thanked the jury for their patient attention, blah blah, and apologized for the nastiness of the case. I gave my point of view of the testimony – underscoring its sloppiness (bad tapes, lost photos) and how little probative value it had. The nurse – and the coroner – found micro-tears in P.K.’s privates indicative only of intercourse, not necessarily of rape. The cop had questioned Jarmon over and over and over, in effect bullying him into “confessing.” (He’d also made a big deal out of finding evidence on P.K.’s couch of some sort of roughhouse had occurred on a couch. There had been DNA evidence recovered. No issue in any event – although the couch would have shown the same “evidence” had someone simply sat down on it.)

I went over P.K.’s testimony, *never* calling her a liar, simply underscoring details that sounded like *too much*. She’d been so scared of Jarmon that she’d held a cellphone with 9-1-1 punched in, but not sent. She’d wanted to flee – but didn’t when she had the chance. She’d sat with Jarmon for some time, smoking and talking. Odd behavior for someone terrified out of her wits.

Fundamentally, I emphasized that in a criminal trial, the issue in a He Said/She Said scenario is *not* which of the parties you believe or like – because I knew damn good and well that Jarmon had swallowed an anchor and jumped in the ocean in terms of likability. The issue here was not whether Jarmon had been a jerk or whether P.K. felt lousy about what happened. The issue was whether the prosecution had proven that the defendant had violated the law. *The law will not tolerate rape and punishes it severely.* (I wanted to remind them of the consequences of their verdict.) *But there’s something else the law will not tolerate: convicting a man when his guilt has not been proven beyond a reasonable doubt.*

When a defense lawyer falls back on the Constitution, that’s usually a sign of desperation. But I thought my argument fit in with the civics lesson of my *voir dire*, and Delbert complimented my delivery, so what the hey: at least I’d knocked off some of the rust.

The jury deliberated for almost 3 hours before returning a Not Guilty verdict. The vote was 10-2.

You know, when the court clerk read the verdict, I wasn’t *quite* surprised. Or maybe I convinced myself then and there that I’d always felt it was coming. Anyway, I slapped the defense table and jumped to my feet, whirling. Delbert and Ex-Judge Benjamin sat poleaxed. Behind them, the D.A.’s cute secretaries (the whole office had come down for the verdict) gawped.

I informally interviewed several of the jurors. They said that while they did not believe D---, they compared the facts of the case to the letter of the statute and decided that conviction was not a just option – a display of intelligence and integrity that both pleased and surprised me. The first thing I learned as a trial attorney was never to assume what twelve (or six) citizens will do in a jury situation. This trial taught me not to underestimate their commitment to the legal system and its values, no matter how horrid the crime.

The jury had apparently dealt with extraneous racial questions right off – one balck girl had asserted Jarmon was only being prosecuted because he was black. That nonsense was quickly silenced. The first vote was 7-5 to convict, but after that poll they’d taken the statutes against Forcible Rape and its included offenses (Simple Rape and Sexual Battery), and gone over them pixel by pixel. Jarmon’s conduct fit none. So even though they despised the guy, they followed the law.

It *hurt*; one of the younger girls on the panel was in tears. But they understood their job and they did it. They had integrity. So my closing probably didn’t matter; I could have clucked like a chicken and they still would have acquitted Jarmon. But perhaps I shouldn’t feel that way. A juror said that if he ever needed a public defender, he wanted me. Thanks, I think. Well, when *I* need another jury, I hope I get such people again.

Afterwards I got backslapped and high-fived by other lawyers all over the courthouse. One fella called me “the effin’ *Terminator*!” and a couple of people actually came to my office for advice. I got the idea that bad feeling against these particular A.D.A.s ran *deep* – Judge Benjamin had made enemies getting to the bench and Delbert’s “pleas” hadn’t put him on many Christmas card lists. I’m only human: all this felt great. But just in case you’re wondering, this *coda*:

Before we left court after the verdict, as Jarmon was beaming, I gave him two last bits of lawyerly advice. First, I said, do not contact P.K. at *all, ever, in any* way, not even to say he was sorry. Second, do himself an enormous favor and get his ass *out* of Louisiana.

A correction for Lester; the toucan on R'n'R debuted as a live bird, replaced by a puppet. Get it right!

MR. COUCH POTATOHEAD on:

Ruff'n'Reddy

Lester Boutillier

For a long time I watched *Howdy Doody* on Saturday mornings at 9:00 on NBC, followed by *Mighty Mouse* at 9:30 on CBS. These were the days of Zippy the chimp on *Howdy Doody*. Kids my age well remember Zippy. There was Zippy merchandise ranging from Little Golden Books to Zippy "lifesize dolls." What I didn't know at the time was that Zippy was originally from New Orleans.

Buffalo Bob Smith and the gang did promotional appearances across the country back then, and one of these was in New Orleans in 1951, the year I was born. They went out on Bourbon St. one night and saw a marquee advertising a stripper who did an act with a chimpanzee. "This," Buffalo Bob said, "we've gotta see." So they caught the show, and afterwards they offered the chimp's trainer a deal to put Zippy the chimp, minus the stripper, on *Howdy Doody* as a regular. He lasted a few years until one time he bit Buffalo Bob on the hand. That was the end of his *Howdy* stint. Whether he went back to strip shows on Bourbon St. I couldn't tell you. (You think I'm making this up, but I'm not.)

Anyway at some point in 1958 I decided to watch this cartoon show called *Ruff 'n' Reddy*, which came on right after *Howdy Doody* on NBC. And I was hooked. This was Hanna-Barbera's first TV cartoon, and it was a serial starring a cat named Ruff and a dog named Reddy. The show was hosted by a ventriloquist in a suit, with the aid of a parrot (who I thought was real) and later a talking toucan (who I knew wasn't real). In addition to the *Ruff 'n' Reddy* cartoons, the show featured Fox and the Crow cartoons from another studio – really moderne animation, baby – and others, like a really nifty one, to the tune of pounding jungle rhythms, about a big-game hunter pounding out his lion-hunting memoirs at the typewriter in his tent – until a real lion crept up and swallowed and ate him!

Ruff and Reddy had many adventures. The first began with them in an alley. Reddy seized upon a newspaper and began reading it. "UFO sighted! Police swamped with telephone calls!" (puts down paper) "Ruff, what's an *oof*?"

"Not *oof*, you gofo! That's U-F-O -- Unidentified Flying Object!"

Before too long our heroes were kidnapped and taken aboard a UFO which took them to the all--metal planet Muni-mula. (That's *aluminum* spelt backwards.) There they were taken to the planet's fearsome leader, The Big Thinker, a giant-headed robot who turned out to be operated inside by an Earth refugee, the absent-minded Professor Gizmo. Ruff 'n' Reddy joined forces with the prof and escaped back to Earth. Many other serials followed. In these others, the villains Killer and Diller (two western outlaws) alternated with two other villains, a sadistic sea captain and his first mate Salt Water Daffy. I never can remember the captain's name. But he talked like Peter Lorre, and he was always saying, "I'll *boil* you in *oil*, aheh, aheh!"

For some reason the only specific serials I remember, besides Muni-Mula, are two that involved Killer and Diller. One, the first K&D serial, had the outlaws trailing Ruff, Reddy, and Professor Gizmo as they searched for a rare prehistoric egg which, when hatched, turned out to contain the rare Goonie Bird. The other also saw our heroes vying with Killer and Diller for a prehistoric relic, teeny, tiny horses (eohorses).

I was such a fan of *Ruff 'n' Reddy* that I began the ambitious project of trying to draw all the episodes of all their adventures "panel by panel." I was mimicked in this by my best friend Vincent. We battled to see who could complete an adventure first. I don't remember who was the fastest cartoonist, but I know I was the best.

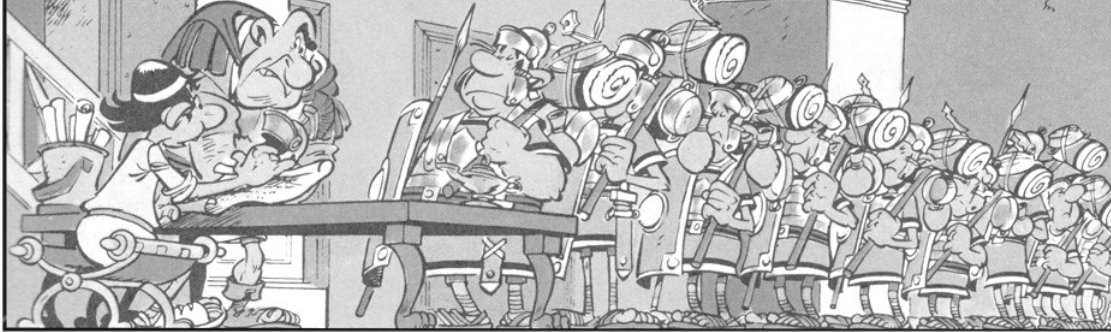
THE CHALLENGER TRIBUTE:
**DONNA
HANSON**

She was our hostess in Canberra in 2003 and has been our friend ever since, traveling across the world to join us for lunch in Denver and Montreal (and incidentally, attend worldcon). A boon companion and a great lady, we look forward to more awesome times downunder – in large part, thanks to her. Way to go, Donna!



CAVE HIRSVITVS CANEM

THE AUTHOR APOLOGIZES TO VDERZO & GOSCINNY FOR BEING SVCH A LAZY GIT.



IMP CAES TARAL WAYNVS AVG

“Soporiphus,” said the other drinker, “you’re full of it.”

“Not at all,” said the shock-haired Roman. “There is almost no limit to the stupidity to be found wearing a uniform. I’ve been around, I have. Baetica, Hispania Tarraconensis, Egypt, Cyrene, Pannonia, Upper and Lower Moesia, Britain... before my travels I spent my life in the Subura, where every block is an education in the ways of the world. I have seen peddlers who sold trash picked up from the street right in front of their costumers. I have dealt with customs officials who speak only one of the barbarous languages of the Indus. I have endured family dinners with my brother-in-law. But never, never have I seen as much honest incomprehension and insufficiency of wit as there stands in a pair of Legion-issue *caligae*.” Soporiphus was not a short man, but, stooped of stature and round of shoulder, he gave everyone that impression. He also had a nose that bent one way and then the other. Most people thought it was the momento of a late night encounter with the *Vigiles*, but in fact his nose was only out of joint because of an incident when he was quite a young lad. He had had trouble with a sandal strap while slightly sodden. He had gotten it more or less tied to his satisfaction in the end. Regardless, the lady wearing it had smashed his nose with the heel of the other sandal.

The other Roman, was a solid, square, unimaginative man who held onto friends mainly by two inarguable virtues. The nearly inexhaustible flow of *Ases* and *Dupondii* that he produced from his pockets when he was in a *caupona* was one. And his other virtue was the patience to listen to almost any cock-and-bull story that he was fed, and to give a very convincing impression that he believed it. He called himself Publius Thelonius, but his friends gave him the *cognomen* Monachus because he stayed sober longer than any of them thought possible. He had a defective sense of humour himself, and was incapable of recognizing that unimpaired quality in others. He worried endlessly about ulcers; so much so that it was giving him a case at the present moment.

Soporiphus, on the other hand, was the sort who could not be dissuaded from claiming that he might be one of the *frumentarii*, an Imperial spy, without realizing this was just that sort of careless “humour” that

attracted the actual *frumentarii* in these sadly degenerate days. His jokes more often than not meant trouble for someone, their mistress, or their master.

Thelonius could tell that his bar buddy was winding up for a long march home down the Via Appia. He sighed and ordered another jar of cheap *Posca*. It tasted like vinegar, but the night was young still. For a *Sestertius*, you could drink this sour wine and tepid water all night and still have a few quadrans change coming to you at closing time.

“Let me tell you about a recruit in northern Hispania,” continued Soporiphus. “I was speculating in bulls for the games in Cordoba later that year, and was close enough to the recruiting table to overhear a seasoned old Centurion of the XII Gemina trying to sign up one of the local boys. This grizzled veteran had probably fought over half the empire, and thought he’d been through every debacle and disaster there ever was. Not so. He hadn’t been on recruiting duty before, and was now thoroughly wishing he was fighting the Marcomanni with his bare hands. The chief difficulty he had was in making a 25-year stint in the Roman army – a life of ceaseless hard labour only put aside at unpredictable intervals to beat off ferocious hordes of Numidians or Parthians, a diet of corn gruel, and sleeping with a squad of unwashed men under a dirty leather tent – seem like a desirable career choice. Of course, it was an impossible job. A Centurion has to *lie* if there is to be any hope of recruiting anyone half-way rational. Some recruits, though, require a Centurion to raise lying to a High Art.”

Soporiphus paused for a moment, then ostentatiously tried to pour from the empty jar.

“You must be thirstier than you think, friend,” he said to Thelonius. “You’ve finished off a second jar already.”

“It must be the hot air. July in Rome is always sultry,” Thelonius retorted drily. “I’ll order another, if you like.”

For a moment the drinker looked at the glum Thelonius and wondered if he might have knowingly made a joke. He had never made one in their brief acquaintance so far, though, so it seemed unlikely. Soporiphus continued.

“Make it something nicer, friend,” Soporiphus hinted. “*Laeetani* or *Surrentine*... ? But never mind; I doubt this dive has anything even that passable. *Massic* will do, if the God’s favour it. Where was I with this story? That was the Centurion – now for the rustic Spaniard.”

A fresh jar of the same vile *Posca* appeared on the table and was in the hand of the story-teller before Thelonius could even think about it pouring one for himself.

“He was the sort of ill-favoured young man with the smell of cow pies between his toes that makes a Centurion wish he was recruiting for the enemy. He slouched like a sack of oats with a leak in the bottom. He was slack-jawed. He was pie-eyed. If his teeth were any indication, he had a Caledonian in the family woodpile. His forehead was nearly squeezed out between the hairline and a thick eyebrow that grew from ear to ear. In the presence of an officer, he was the sort to swivel a pinkie in his left ear in lieu of a proper salute. But, worst of all, he argued with the Centurion.” Soporiphus poured a second drink from the jar and made a perfunctory gesture toward the other man that might be interpreted as an invitation for him to drink up... the motion was so fleeting that it was hard to tell.

Soporiphus imitate a piping, wavering rustic accent: “What about sleeping arrangements?” the idiot asked. ‘I won’t sleep on the ground.’ He also wanted to know whether his mother and sisters could visit him in camp, and who would pay for the trip if he were garrisoned farther away than they could ride by mule cart. He asked if he could avoid cabbage in his meals because it gave him gas. Did the Centurions

shout at the men much, he wanted to know. And was it true that Persians were small, yellow men with buck teeth and bad eyesight, who didn't know how to fight like a proper Latin?"

"There's no question in my mind that the most heroic thing that recruiting Centurion ever did in his long and bloody career was to keep his temper and continue to sweet-talk this half-witted bumpkin into the Legions. I didn't know how much good it might have done the Legions if he was successful, but I suppose they also serve who stand and stop a *pilum* from splitting the breastbone of a better man behind him.

"The debate between Centurion and hayseed went on for more than half an hour. A line was slowly forming behind the would-be recruit – something any recruiting officer would normally jump for joy to see. But there was no joy on this Centurion's face. His real emotions would undoubtedly be rage, frustration, and a burning desire to gut the idiot farm boy and string his intestines out for the sun to dry and then braid them into a rope – with which the Centurion could then hang himself. But at last, it seemed as though he was close to getting the boy to sign."

"I'd be surprised if the boy *could* write," said Thelonius, while signaling for another pot of cheap wine. "Are you sure you aren't putting me on?"

"*Of course*, he couldn't sign his name by himself," said Soporiphus. "Nearly all Legionaries are illiterate. The recruiting officer normally puts down the name, then asks the recruit to make his mark on the ledger next to it."

"What if the Centurion came up from the ranks and didn't know how to write *himself*?"

"Don't be silly. Why do you think they go to Officer Candidate School for two years?"

Soporiphus hugged the next jar like a puppy that he had lost when he was six, and had only just now discovered in an alley after 35 years.

"Try to imagine the spectacle of the ultimate rube with a line of other rubes behind him. They're gradually losing patience to be off and see the world, and he's the only thing standing between them and the fleshpots of Alexandria. Imagine, too, the Centurion struggling to look as clam as he can at the recruiting table, but his fingernails are driven into the wood as though they'd been hammered. You can almost see the air wavering over his head, he's so hot under the *sagum*. But the hayseed is *almost* ready to sign!"

The storyteller knocked back the last of the jar and signaled to a servant for another.

"I'm beginning to feel that I might need a little of that myself in a minute," grumbled Thelonius, counting out some small bronze and copper coins for the inescapable tab.

"So, let me see if I have all this straight," drawled Soporiphus in the hayseed's wavery voice.

"As a Legionary, I get my pick of posts – even the South of Gaul or the Helvetian Alps. My day begins at the third hour of the sun, and I'm through for the day after no more than seven hours of duty. My three meals include fresh meat and vegetables, plenty of bread and cheese, as well as sugar cakes and wine. I get fresh uniforms with new boots four times a year, and any weapons lost or broken are replaced free of charge by the armourer. My starting pay is three hundred Denarii a month, and there's a raise every year."

"Yes," says the Centurion, "That's all correct so far. Now sign. *Sign*." Soporiphus spoke in a strained, gravelly voice for the recruiting officer.

“‘You also said that I get a two-day furlough once a month, as well as a two-week leave every year. The officers’ club runs banquets and entertainments for the enlisted legionaries. We don’t have to march because there’s a comfortable wagon with roof and seats for the men, and separate wagons for our packs and weapons. When we arrive at a new campsite, the slaves put up our tents, then bring in our cots, sheets, pillows and blankets. Meals are always brought to us in when we’re on the road, but in a regular garrison meals are served in a mess hall with musicians. And there’s a traveling brothel that follows us everywhere. Is that right?’

“‘Yessss,’ said the Centurion. I’m sure his smile was so tight he could have bitten through a rusty *pilum* shank. But the yokel wasn’t finished...

“The Centurion did not fail to notice that the yokel’s hand had not made any movement toward one of the *styli* on the table. ‘What is it *now*?’ he demanded.”

“‘Well, there’s just one more thing that bothers me,’ said the idiot. ‘What if we have to fight? I really don’t like violence.’”

“A small tic in the Centurion’s left eye betrayed just how close to madness he was. But he mastered to reply sothingly, ‘Neither do I. I try to avoid it at all costs. If there’s fighting involved, we hire auxiliaries from the Germans or Thracians to do it. Why waste soldiers on combat?’”

Soporiphus put the empty wine jug down, and looked hopefully at Thelonius. But Thelonius was studying a bug on the wall with extraordinary care. A slave brought a fresh pot without being ordered. Both men were regulars, and no-one knew better than slaves in a bar to respect their customers’ cues if they wanted a tip.

The storyteller took a deep draught and continued. “‘That sounds pretty good,’ said the hick. ‘But someday I’ll be retired, won’t I? I won’t have the Legion to feed and clothe and shelter me anymore. What will I do then?’ he asked.”

“The Centurion said – actually, he rather shouted in cracked voice – ‘Why, you get a handsome pension, you ninny! Twice what you earned as a legionary! You have a choice of a state-paid *domus* in Rome or any other city of your choice, or a free farmstead any-bloody-where you want it! You join an exclusive veterans’ club, and parade with them every year through the streets of Rome, marching right behind the Emperor’s chariot... who strews flowers in your path... and newly minted *Sestertii* with your portrait on them! You’d be surprised, too, how many fucking beautiful women throw themselves at old men with military decorations! And when finally, as must happen to all of us, you eventually pass away, your remains will be mourned by beautiful maidens, who will tenderly bathe your body in perfume and arrange you to look as peaceful as though only asleep! And after your corpse is burned, the ashes will be returned to your family, but not before you receive a magnificent state funeral in Forum Romanum. The Emperor himself will read the litany and light the pyre. You will receive posthumous honours, and your statue will be draped in medals and I have no doubt whatso-damn-ever that a major thoroughfare in the Eternal City will be renamed in your memory! Perhaps even the fucking Forum! Happy *now*?’”

The big smile on Soporiphus’ face after so much wine said that *he* was, at least.

“An expression that might pass for deep thought appears on the young man’s face for a long moment. Finally, he says, ‘Yes. I think all that is good enough reason to join up. Show me where to make my mark.’ The Centurion picked up a wax tabula from a pile next to him on his bench and points at the empty line at the bottom. ‘Just tell me your name, and I’ll write it down. Then you make your mark right-bloody-*here*.’ In his mind, the Centurion was celebrating a miniature triumph of his own, in which

the Emperor stood behind him with a wreath of honour, whispering in his ear, ‘You did it, you clever bastard, you did it!’ But then the hayseed’s hated voice spoke again.”

“‘Hold on, then.’ The Centurion’s face fell. His heart not only skipped a beat, it skipped a whole bar. His mouth hung open like the Cloaca Maxima on one of those hot summer days when the sewage trickles out of the Stygian darkness.”

“‘What,’” said Soporiphus in the wobbly voice of a half-wit farm boy, “‘if, somehow, I pass away *before* I retire?’

“The Centurion was visibly staggered. He had been so close, and yet *still* the Gods-forsaken imbecile came up with objections! Then, the Centurion had the most astonishing inspiration of his entire life. It was even more brilliant than the time he worked out how to pay his mistress the same silver Denarius over and over again without her getting any the wiser.”

“‘If you get killed before you die?’ he giggled. ‘You’re worried you might die *before* you can have your funeral and perfume girls and a street named after you? Why, that’s no problem at all!’”

Soporiphus finished the fifth pot of wine and struck the table with the empty for emphasis.

“‘Why, in that case, you’re entitled to *a second funeral!*’”

But the now *thoroughly* soused storyteller was speaking to an empty bench. Thelonius had left several *nummi* and hurried out into the street before he could hear any more.

“So the rube finally signed up, but of course the silly bugger was executed eight days later for desertion. Took one look at everything, said the army wasn’t for him after all and tried to go home. Didn’t you, Gustibus?” Soporiphus said, winking at the slave.

Glossary



Taral Wayne

In Order of Appearance in “Cave Hirsuitus Canem”

Baetica – A Roman province in southwest Spain, in the valley of the Guadalquivir River. One of the richest of the western provinces, Baetica was mainly known for three things: wine, olives and emperors. Trajan was born in Baetica, and though Hadrian was born in Rome, his family was from the same Spanish province. Another reason for the region’s success – no one had invented the art of painting bullfighters on black velvet yet.

Hispania Tarraconensis – This was a fancy name for Farther Spain, which, paradoxically enough, was nearer to Rome than the rest.

Cyrene – A province on the shore of North Africa, immediately west of Egypt. In Roman times it was full of Greeks. Today it is a parking lot for the fleet of unmarked cars used to chauffeur Muammar Gaddafi from the palace to his golf club.

Pannonia – A province of the Roman world at the upper end of the Adriatic Sea, bordering on the Danube. Today Pannonia is merely the western end of Hungary and is no more known for anything now than it seemingly was then.

Moesia – The Romans must have liked the name. It was given to two provinces, Upper and Lower Moesia, one of which was upriver on the Danube from the other.

Britain – A distant and misty land inhabited by “football” hooligans who shaved their heads.

The Subura – A relatively newly built part of the ancient city of Rome, added outside the walls and across the Tiber. Rather like Southwark or The Bronx, it had a reputation of being run-down, dangerous and inhabited by the scum of the Earth. Julius Caesar was born in the Subura.

Caligae – boots. Singular “calig,” as in “he had a calig in the clunis owing to him.” The emperor Gaius is better known by the nickname given to him by legionaries when he was a spoiled camp brat – Caligula, or “Little Boots.” I prefer Gaius, myself.

Vigiles – originally a watch established by Augustus to put out fires at night, the duties of the Vigiles Urbani expanded under later emperors to become a police force as well. They were known for surly behavior, sloppy appearance and unpredictable violent tempers. In other words, apart from being slaves, they were very much like many modern urban, law enforcement bodies.

Ases & Dupondii – These were two of the bronze coins used in the Roman Republic and throughout much of the Empire. In imperial times an As (pronounced Oz) was a brownish coin about the size of a quarter, with the face of the emperor on it. It almost always bore the initials S C on the reverse, which stood for Senatus Consultum. That is, you had better have the senate’s permission before you go and make any of these or you might end up in the *Tullianum*, waiting for the state strangler. On the other hand, the Dupondius was a coin about the size of a quarter with a brownish appearance. It usually had the initials S C on one side and the portrait of the emperor on the other. Simple to tell apart, eh? The trick was that the As was copper and the Dupondius was bronze. They did look quite different when new, and did tend to turn a *somewhat* different brown as they aged. A better indicator was the head of the emperor. Was he wearing a rayed crown? If he was, the coin was a Dupondius. *Most* of the time. Was the emperor facing left or right? If left, then it was an As. Most likely. You have to wonder why it took twenty more centuries to invent the credit card.

Caupona – People can be forgiven for assuming that a taberna was a tavern, but in fact a taberna was only a sort of stall or storefront from which anything might be sold – pots, pans, shoes, cloth, lamps, meat, confections or the Roman equivalent of Transformer Robots for the kiddies. Warm meals and wine were usually sold from a surprisingly modern looking sit-down buffet. The only present-day convenience missing was plastic seats, but one often had a choice of a fast bite from a bench and table, or a more traditional lay-down meal on couches. Caupona were considered shady by some emperors, who attempted to improve Rome’s morals by closing them. Since none of the poor could afford kitchens at home, and had nothing better to do when not eating but to drink, these efforts were inevitably futile. A dedicated bar was called a *thermopolia*. A dedicated drunk was an *ebriosus*.

Cognomen – Something like a nickname, but one you would find on your chariot license. It signified “also known as__.” The Romans had a logical system to name themselves, and it *is* fairly simple to learn. First your personal name, your *Praenomen*. Then your clan, or *Gens*. Last, your *Nomen*, or family name. However, the Romans only seemed to have about two dozen personal names – you can list most of them from memory if you’ve seen enough Hollywood movies about gladiators. Gaius, Caius, Publius, Marcus, Antonius, Quintilus, Sextus, Septimus, Octavius (yes – 5, 6, 7, 8), and another handful I won’t look up. *Biggus* is not on any list, I assure you. As a result of such a narrow choice, as well as a tendency to name sons after fathers or grandfathers, Roman history is choked with illustrious senators with identical names. Publius Servilius Nero? *That* Publius Servilius Nero, of course! So it was not uncommon to have yet another name, a *co-Nomen*, so to speak, so that people who talk about you might have a chance to guess who the gossip is about. So, you *didn’t* mean Publius Servilius Nero Grumble-Guts then, you meant Publius Servilius Nero Fish-Breath? Yet, unfortunately, the cognomen wasn’t as much help as you might think. Over time, it tended more and more to be viewed as an honorific. One might conquer Lusitania or the land of the Bythinians and call yourself Lusitanicus or Bythinicus. Think

of Pompey the Great. You don't think that was on little Pompey's birth certificate, do you? Or the senate might confer a cognomen on a particularly successful general – such as Augustus. For much of the first two centuries, prominent men had names like Marcus Metellus Nero Germanicus Pius, Nero Metellus Marcus Pius Germanicus, or Marcus Pius Nero Metellus Germanicus. No wonder we know so many emperors by outright nicknames like Caracalla (cloak), Caligula (boots) or Elagabalus (*Baal*, God).

Frumentarii – Originally the grain agents who procured rations for the Legions, under Hadrian they were put to the additional task of keeping an open ear and open eyes. They were, in short, spies. Their intelligence duties were rather informal, and they openly wore their army uniforms, apparently. Once appointed as official finks, they became enormously unpopular with the public at large. The emperor Diocletian abolished the Frumentarii 180 later. But he must have missed the information they provided, because he replaced them shortly with a far better organized and more powerful spy network called *Agentes in Rebus*. Curiously, they still hadn't learned the value of operating undercover.

Sestertius – As though having Asses and Dupondii weren't enough, the Romans also struck a bronze Sestertius. There was no mistaking it for either of the other coins, though, since it was the size of poker chip and just as thick. This was a *heavy* price to pay. The way it worked was that four Ases were worth one Sestertius. Two Dupondii were also worth one Sestertius, which meant that two Ases were the same as one Dupondius. However, I seem to have overlooked the Quadrans. Four Quadrans were worth one As, eight quadrans worth one Dupondius, and naturally sixteen Quadrans equaled one Sestertius. Or twelve Quadrans could be summed as a Dupondius and one As, a Dupondius and two Ases, or as just three Ases. Did I mention that at times the Romans minted an *Octans*? This is almost as bad as pre-decimal British coinage, and we haven't even started in on silver.

Hispania – Spain, of course. Even American school children know *that*. I think.

Cordoba – Cordova in Spain. Remember those “soft Corinthian leather” seat covers on the Chrysler Cordoba in the '70s that Ricardo Montalban was famous for? Bet you didn't know Ricardo Montalban was that old!

Centurion – A guy who lead a century of 80 men into battle. No... I didn't make this up, honestly.

Marcomanni – A tribe of barbarous Germans, who wore tasteless clothing and followed swastikas into battle. Where have we heard *that* before?

Numedians & Parthians – In a big gory battle between thousands and thousands of guys whaling on each other with swords and shields, the Numedians and Parthians were the ones wearing the black plumes in their helmets.

Posca –Ripple. The Roman version of Thunderbird or Mad Dog. Posca was overwhelmingly the drink of the poor and working class, who could only afford wine that was unacceptable to anyone with a palate, and mixed with water so that it wouldn't taste too sour to stomach. The ancient world's Coors.

Laeetani or Surrentine – Medium-quality ancient red wines that a more up-scale plebian might drink. It was still not to the palate of the upper classes. They preferred Caecuban, Alban, Setinian or Falernian – mainly white wines that were very sweet, very strong, and often flavoured with herbs, honey, or sugar of lead.

Caledonian – – Hoot mon, ye dinna ken wot be a Caledonian? Och, dinna fash yersel', Ayl be oonly too pleased to inform ye – forr a Pund. Did Ay say a Pund? Ay meant tew!

Pilum – What the Centurion had in mind, when he wished the recruit would take a 'pil,' is a long wood spear with an iron neck and a sharp point at the very end. The iron neck easily bends and ruins the spear

for a return throw. When stuck in the enemy's shield it becomes a fatal impediment. The German or Persian who is struggling with the end of a Roman pilum dragging on the ground or getting between his feet, the Roman legionary will cut him down with no sense of bad-sportsmanship.

Sagum – A military cloak, usually dyed red, no doubt so you can't tell if it's your blood on it or the other fellow's. The British army used the same gimmick in the 18th century, on the assumption that Irish recruits were too dumb to know they were dead without checking, and might go on fighting for a while after joining "the butcher's bill."

Denarii – A silver coin worth 4 Sestertii, 8 Dupondii, 16 Ases, or 64 Quadrans, but let's not get into that again. In the early empire, the common legionary was paid a meager 225 denarii three times a year, for a total of 900. This is several times what a desperate person living on the streets of Rome needed to survive every day. But the Legionary's pay was subject to numerous deductions. A substantial sum was put aside for compulsory savings, for one thing. More denarii were deducted to cover the cost of any fraternities he belonged to, and if he was smart he belonged to at least one. Further deductions were made for equipment he damaged or lost. The state did not usually replace them free. At the end of the year, those 900 silver coins may have been a lot nearer an amount needed to support a man, but not more.

Domus – A home. Usually an urban house in the traditional style, with atrium, vestibule, peristyle, garden, a lease and noisy neighbors.

Forum – Essentially an open field in which public assemblies or elections can be held. At other times it may be used as a market or casual gathering place. Many of Rome's most important temples and buildings were built along the sides of the eponymous Forum Romanum, on whose pattern all later forums were built. Before it was declared a sacred area, the original Forum was a swamp – somewhat like Washington D.C. had been.

Styli – Plural for stylus. "Stylii" would have to derive from the non-existent Latin word "Stylius". The pointed implement was used to write on a tabula of soft wax that folded closed. The other end of the styli was paddle shaped, to make erasures. The other method of making an erasure was to leave your tablet out in the sun.

Cloaca Maxima – A vast, noxious sewer running under the Forum Romanum and emptying into the Tiber. Originally dug to drain the swamp, it was found to be even more useful once running water was brought into the cit by aqueduct and the ancient flush toilet had been invented. Don't ask about the ancient flush toilet, or you may never be able to use a sponge again.

Stygian – Pertaining to the River Styx, that separates Hades from the land of the living. Dark, foreboding and unknowable, in other words – rather like the mind of Glenn Beck.

Nummi – Coins. Also *pecunia* and *moneta*. It doesn't matter *what* it's called; it's *cash*!



Brad W Foster
PO Box 165246
Irving, TX 75016

Greetings Guy~

Okay, right up front here, how many more of these extra-surprise covers do you have planned? That image has to be the strangest thing I've pulled out of an envelope in several months – and believe me, I get a LOT of strange things in the mails! I've even gone through the zine twice now, specifically looking for any info behind that cover image, and can find nothing. Am I blind, or are you just messing with your readers again, teasing us with this stuff?

Well, whatever, cool cover!

I liked your tale of the tornado, mainly because you did what I would have done, which goes against everything we are *told* to do. Again and again in books and TV shows and guides and whatnot, I've read that, if you are in a car when a tornado is near, you should leave the vehicle and seek shelter. They usually say a low spot like a ditch, but have even heard the phrase "lie flat on the ground" over staying inside the car. Of course, if I saw what you did, I too would put the pedal to the metal and try to get my ass out of there!

I've only seen one of the 3 Stooges movies, *Have Rocket Will Travel*. I think there were like a half dozen of them in the early sixties, but for some reason that first one is the only one that seems to

THE CHORUS LINES

keep showing up on tv. But I'll keep my eye out for *The Outlaws Is Coming*, just 'cause I love the idea that they brought in the TV kid show hosts who had been showing their old films all around the country in small roles. I checked info out at the IMDB listings, and found even more specific listings of names of many of those guys. I'm sure I would not recognize any of those faces, but the sheer idea of doing that is so, well, fannishly cool!

Also, on the subject of trying to remember things from the tube when I was a kid: I got *amazingly* excited when I got to page 44 and Lester talked about a movie with the sole survivors of a city being menaced by invading robots, and the Army ends up saving the day. I've got several "one-or-two-scene" memories in my head of movies I saw on TV when I was a little kid that have really hung with me, and I've always wondered what they were. One of those is, as I recall it, an eerie b&w flick with only a few people left in a totally abandoned city, and a single giant robot after them. I remember being creeped out mightily by that. So when I read his description, I thought I was on the right track at last.

And, I was, though had to go down some side roads. Turns out Peter Graves wasn't in this, though easy memory-mistake, since we've all seen him in so many of those '50s SF flicks. I had to go through a couple of levels of Google searching and several odd sites, but finally found it: *Target Earth* from 1954. You can IMDB it, or go direct to the page with <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0047559>. Reading about it, clearly not the greatest flick in the world but, again for a little kid, creepy enough to have hung in my mind all this time.

A few years ago I also finally found proof that a short run TV show I recalled called *W.O.G.: World of Giants* actually existed. *No one* I spoke to had ever heard of this, but I remembered it. And finally found others on the net, most of whom posted the same things I did... that is, finally they found someone else who recalled it! (TV series from 1959, 13 episodes, the adventures of a 6" tall spy!)

I too remember that show. It starred Marshall Thompson.

Now, if only someone can find the movie I recall with the cast of characters trapped in some sort of control room near a field full of large petroleum storage tanks, and at the end a giant blob-like thing bursts from one of those, that would be another weird child memory settled.



Enemy from Space, a.k.a. Quatermass 2, 1957, starring Brian Donlevy. Pretty good, as I recall.

Regarding living long and large, my own personal goal is to get at least to 111, 'cause I think it would be kind of cool to write one-one-one as my age. And, please note that goal is "at least"; I wouldn't mind going on a bit beyond if possible!

Finally, your letter column this time contained two of the scariest LOCs I believe I have ever read in a fanzine. I leave it up to your other readers to pick which two they find the scariest. I have mine, and don't want to see anymore. Be afraid!

Oh, Lester's harmless. Great working with you on the NASFiC program book!

Joy V. Smith
8925 Selph Road
Lakeland FL 33810

Powerful cover! And scary encounter with that tornado. I'm glad I could unwind with the photo of Ginger; she is an

adorable Yorkie!

You should see her daughter Paprika – or as we sometimes call her, Baby Huey. She's bigger than either of her parents!

What a wonderful compilation of articles. I am, of course, impressed by Lezli Robyn's blossoming career; and I enjoyed Chris Garcia's look at proliferating steampunk conventions. Fascinating article on Harpo Marx. Thanks to Steven Silver for that background article.

Good follow-up articles about Crusader Rabbit and The Three Stooges, Rocky and Bullwinkle, and the comprehensive article on *The Twilight Zone*. (I scroll marathons for my favorite episodes.) Thanks to Mike Resnick for the Anticipation con report and your DeepSouthCon report. "The Moon and Buzz" was poignant. I also gnashed my teeth...

I also enjoyed the interview, "The Last Mary Jane Story," the farm subsidies/food stamps piece, Mike Resnick's collaboration article, the other articles, and the photos and illos. Good use of a photo to introduce the LOCs too! I appreciate the variety of viewpoints in the LOCs, btw. And I loved Michael Estabrook's gentle poems.

Alexis Gilliland
4030 8th St. South
Arlington VA 22204

Thank you for *Challenger* #31, with the well-executed and mildly witty superhero cover by Andy Kubert. To achieve seriously witty, perhaps his Mouse should have sported a Disney style mustache instead of that trendy five o'clock shadow.

Greg Benford's "The Future of Longevity" was not only interesting, but provided comment hooks as well. It is impressive that the geriatric fruit flies lived 4.5 times as long as regular fruit flies, but this is still only about three months, and fruit fly morbidity is surely different from human morbidity. As we solve the problems of infectious disease and cancer (often the secondary result of virus infections) morbidity is increasingly the result of life style choices. Our vices, such as drinking, smoking, overeating, and thrill-seeking, to mention only a few, all detract from our longevity even as they gratify our immediate impulses. Would the prospect of 1,000 years instead of a mere 100 lead us to show more virtue, more self-control? Probably not. However, if a study of fruit fly genetics could show us how to improve human functionality between the ages of 50 and 100 that would be well worth the trouble, even if the age of death were not notably advanced.

One may ask what advantage accrues to the species by having the g-fruit flies competing with their great-great-great-grandchildren. In human terms, if people lived to be 1,000, such a competition would seem profoundly destructive to society, in that parents would continue to hold their property for more than 98 percent of the lives of their children instead of the much smaller percentage now in force. The struggle to control the world would be between the generations, as the older generation tried to enforce the voting age of 500, and all those younger generations rose up against the struldbugs that were keeping them in poverty. Even if the longevity procedures were merely expensive, you would run up against the ancient observation that if life were a thing that money could buy, the rich would live and the poor would die. Might the government provide longevity treatment to the masses? Such an ill-considered policy would bankrupt social security for sure.

In “The Food Stamp Challenge” Rich Dengrove discusses farm policy, which might properly be considered a food policy. Yes, most farmers still farming are, as he says, “fat cats,” which is the result of the mechanization of farming. In Thomas Jefferson’s time, farmers comprised 90 percent of the population, while today the figure is less than 3 percent. So while Congress may not be terribly concerned about the so-called “farm vote,” everybody eats, making it politically expedient to support the farmers as they produce our national supply of cheap and abundant food. Might the land be more economically owned and operated by the state, instead? The Soviet and Chinese experience with collective farms suggest that this is not the case, so we are stuck with our kulaks, upon whom our government lavishes beaucoup subsidies, but for the most part our nation has been famine-free, while for the poor the pangs of hunger are eased by food stamps. Worse policies are surely available.

In the letter column, Darrel Schweitzer points out several cusps in which the dominant theology of the Christian Church might have gone otherwise than it did. Well, yes, to paraphrase Ecclesiastes, the accepted texts are not always the truest nor written by the wisest, neither does a congregation always follow the holiest prelate, for time and chance play a part in all things. That said, it is doubtful that such changes would have had any significant influence. Rivers flow to the ocean by many possible channels, and by analogy history would have many different incidents leading to similar outcomes. Given time it is difficult to imagine that any alternate Catholic Church could have stayed sufficiently honest to avoid the equivalent of Martin Luther’s Reformation.

In his letter on religion, Lester Boutillier, a lapsed Catholic who has returned to the fold, chooses not to argue with “the highly articulate wordsmiths” filling the pages of *Challenger* #30, offering instead a list of eight books that he finds persuasive. Well, since Lester makes a point of having read the opposition (as opposed to those close-minded atheists and agnostics claiming they needn’t to bother), let me recommend Bart D. Ehrman’s *God’s Problem*, in which Dr. Ehrman, the James A. Gray Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at UNC Chapel Hill, a leading authority on the early Church and the life of Jesus, and the author of more than 20 books, including the bestselling *Misquoting Jesus*, explains how he came to lose his faith. Dr. Ehrman’s conclusion is that while he is unwilling to say that God does not exist, he does not believe in the omnipotent, omniscient and just God described in the Bible.

In Lester’s letter defending the rowdy Right as less awful than the thuggish Left with its evil Liberals, one may admire his passion even if one does not agree with it. He says that there is no evidence linking Bill O’Reilly to the murder of an abortion provider whose murder O’Reilly had advocated, which is correct but seriously beside the point. Those mullahs inciting the faithful to suicide bombing are equally disconnected with the practical results of their speech, and here in America they could equally be said to be exercising their First Amendment rights, just as Bill O’Reilly (who never apologized for what he had said, nor deplored what Lester calls a horrible act) had been doing. For the rest, editorial commentary dealt with Lester’s other points concisely and well.



Joseph T Major
1409 Christy Avenue
Louisville KY 40204-2040
E-mail: jtmajor@iglou.com
<http://members.iglou.com/jtmajor>
<http://www.efanzines.com/Alexiad/index.htm>

Captain Mickey, defender of the pandas ... a very interesting cover, and if the Poopy Panda Pals ever get their hands on it, you and Andy Kubert can look forward to at best being deprived of your rights.

And it's amazing that people actually go out to look at those things. They have the advantage of the flat Kansas plains where it's possible to cut across flat ground, use access roads built in various directions unhampered by the flat terrain, and see the storms coming a long way away because it's so flat. Did I mention that the state is flat?

So unfeeling I am that I did not notice the tornado that so exercised Lisa, back in February 2008. When the tornado hit Louisville in 1974, I just remember seeing the needle on the barograph in the physics professor's office drop and drop and drop. Before that, I remember getting annoyed that the signal had fuzzed up in the middle of a *Lucy Show* episode. (I was very young and it didn't take much to amuse me.) The signal had gone off because a tornado had gone over the house.

I turned 55 Christmas Eve, and my niece passed half my age. One can't help growing older but two can.

The yorkies look very cute, but I don't think a pup could survive Slim, the huge chocolate-point Siamese.

Never underestimate the power of constant pee.

XAPIIO MAPKC is pronounced "Kharpo Marks". If you type "exapno mapcase" into the Wikipedia search box, it will take you to the entry on Harpo. The story I have heard is that *Humor Risk* was shown to an audience, which didn't go for it. The only print was tossed into a closet and probably destroyed. (*Humor Risk*: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0209031/>) The only other listed stars are Mildred Davis (Harold Lloyd's wife and sometime costar) and Jobnya Ralston (who replaced Mildred after the marriage).

Love Happy pioneered product placement. This was because the production company had run out of money, so they sold advertising.

The other reporter who escorted Harpo in Moscow was Eugene Lyons, there because he was thought favorable to the Soviet Union. Observation caused Lyons to change his opinion.

I wonder if there is any contemporary report on the appearance of this American **Харпо Маркс** in any Soviet publication. Unfortunately, our Russian Fannish contacts all seem to have evaporated.

Nightmare at 20,000 Feet": thus the line in *Third Rock from the Sun*, "Dick's Big Giant Headache" where "Dick Solomon" (John Lithgow) says, "Yeah, the same thing happened to me."

Earl Hammer was a writer for *The Twilight Zone*, and then I saw some episodes of *The Waltons* that seemed only to need Serling to be *TZ* episodes. (The one with Elizabeth and the Ouija board, for example.) And then there's *Frequency* . . .

So Greg Benford has touched the hand that punched out Bart Sibrel. I sit in awe. (Can't write standing up.)

Mike Resnick recalls collaborating with the author of *She Lives!* I read that book. The bit where the guy tells his brother where he can put the golf club is interesting.

What can I say about *Rocky and Bullwinkle*? After I found myself getting up half an hour early in the morning so I could see the day's episode before going to work, not much. And this was in 1981.

Regarding the story about the fan who came on too strongly, and how he dealt with a restraining order against him, Milt Stevens should call to our minds the Breen-doggle. Which opened the way for the dominance of *Star Trek* . . .

*From Steve Goldin's blog I know a **little** about the Breendoggle, which most fans consider ample information. I **would** like to know how the scandal contributed to the ascension of Captain Kirk & Co. in our genre.*

Congressman Dickstein's work for the Soviet Union came after the conversion of the McCormick-Dickstein Special Committee on Un-American Activities into HUAC, a regular committee.

(Marty Helgesen no longer has time to write to fanzines, so you won't be seeing his otherwise-inevitable "correction" about "HCUA".) Somehow saying its activities were un-American does have a certain contextual appositeness.

Anyhow, the NKVD case officer who assigned code names showed a certain acuity when he gave Dickstein the code name of "CROOK". All he did was peddle old McCormick-Dickstein files. And his conduct during the hearings was remarkably prefigurative of "Tailgunner Joe" and his methods. Which gives Ted Morgan's secret history story – where Dickstein informs McCarthy that there is someone who will help out impoverished solons – a certain basis ...

Oddly enough, the weekend before *Challenger* came, I went to the Borders and saw an *Atom* comic book. The first page involved his asking the guy on the other end for his land line number, because he couldn't travel on wireless. Ah, the advance of technology goes on.

Panoramic Route: If Gettysburg to Knoxville is hard, Gettysburg to Louisville is slightly harder. Except, I suppose, you can't break in Covington to eat dinner at Wertheim's — one of the pleasures of driving to Dayton for the Sherlock Holmes/Arthur Conan Doyle Symposium.

Milt Stevens
6325 Keystone St.
Simi Valley, CA 93063

I don't know whether you know Chaz Baden or not, but the cover of *Challenger* #31 reminded me of him. It's the ears, of course. I've never seen him wear tights. I've never seen him run anywhere either. Several years ago, Chaz's father, an old time fan, attended a con wearing the same sort of ears Chaz always wears. The family resemblance was striking.

I remember the original *Twilight Zone* with a great deal of fondness. I was a senior in high school when the show was first aired. I not only watched the show, but just about everybody else I knew in high school watched it also. You could admit to watching *Twilight Zone* without any embarrassment. That was not true of many of the earlier TV efforts at SF. I liked the show so well that I even drank Sanka coffee for awhile, because Sanka sponsored the show. Even to this day, I remember that Sanka coffee was pretty damned dreadful. Although I really liked the show, I only watched it for a couple seasons before I became too enmeshed in college to watch TV at all.

Mike Resnick mentions that the program planning at Anticipation was on the poor side. I didn't notice. I'm usually willing to be on panels about just about anything with just about anybody at just about any old time. At Denver, I was on a 10 pm panel on Cannibalism in SF. A few times, I've been on panels where I didn't even know what the title meant ("Drama Lama Prevention"?). I've learned all sorts of strange things by being on panels at SF cons. That's how I found out about Steam Punk.

Chris Garcia mentions there are even Steam Punk cons these days. When I first found myself on a panel about Stem Punk I didn't know much of anything about the subject. So I asked at a LASFS meeting, and they referred me to the article in Wikipedia and *Girl Genius*. The Wikipedia article was quite helpful, and I really like *Girl Genius*. *Girl Genius* is a winning title. They certainly ought to make some movies or a TV series out of *Girl Genius*. I'm still wondering about Steam Punk as a lifestyle. There's more to a lifestyle than just wearing a particular set of costumes. The image of teenagers getting together in some garage to build clanks is a strange one.

Before reading Richard Dengrove's article, I hadn't thought about food stamps in many years. Thirty years ago, I recall seeing a woman leave food stamps as a tip in a bar. I understand that is against the rules, but maybe it wasn't always. When I worked at Southwest the captain's secretary had a particular dislike for food stamp recipients. To her, it



always seemed like food stamp recipients could afford better food than she could afford. The idea that she was paying taxes so some other non-working woman could buy steak did not please her.

Fans used to be the grand masters of living down. Pros were pretty good at it too. Ted Sturgeon's wife Wina spent so many years living on fifty percent of nothing that she eventually got her own radio show telling the general public how to live cheaply. I recall Dick Geis pointing out that you could buy a 50 pound bag of rice at a feed and grain store for very little. If it won't kill chickens, it won't kill you. A can of Campbell's soup with a cup of rice will make enough food for a day. If you go to a super market and ask to buy damaged canned goods at a discount, they will usually give them to you. Also, try for day old bread.

*New Orleans has a store which sells such stuff. Justin Winston once found perfectly usable bags of potato chips there, marked with Arabic labels. He had the labels translated, and found he'd been serving **Death to America Potato Chips** to his guests.*

I have mixed feeling about raising the allotment for food stamps. It sounds like a good idea. However, government programs can always be diddled. Anything that has any value at all can be traded for anything else. You just have to work on it a little. There are always stores that will sell you booze and cigarettes for food stamps and straighten out the paperwork. Of course, there is a discount. With a little more diddling you can convert your food stamps into dope. I don't think the government should bother worrying about such things. Just give a flat amount and don't worry what people are going to do with it. It isn't worth the time to do otherwise.

Robert Whitaker Sirignano
5482 Hay Point Landing
Smyrna DE 19977

On Harpo Marx: Harpo was indeed named Adolph, but changed it after his trip to Russia. He had taken a train from Paris to Moscow, and passed through Germany twice. He saw with his own eyes, and began to hear the tales. When he got back, he changed his name legally from Adolph Marx to Harpo. Recounted in his marvelous autobiography *Harpo Speaks!*, a book which I've read a few times and always got a laugh. Usually when an entertainer puts out a book, you can find it in a thrift store pretty quickly. I never saw one of these.

For someone who was pretty much uneducated, he seemed to attract the attention of a lot of writers. Much of the book is devoted to the Algonquin Round table and Alexander Woolcott. The "Benson" story seems to be from his earliest meeting of the group. Not picking up on anyone's name (or knowing who they really were), decided they were all Mr. Benson.

On *The Twilight Zone*: I seem to recall, with much fear attached, "Little Girl Lost". I saw it when I was 11. It was pretty close to what I was feeling – *something* is "next door" to us – since I lived in the same kind of house at the time, it seemed very creepy.

To remind those who, unlike us, don't have that episode memorized, what was "next door" was the fifth dimension.

Billy Mumy shares with Burgess Meredith the count of being in four episodes of *Twilight Zone*. Mumy went on to become half of a musical duo called "Barnes and Barnes". On the first album they did, a song titled "Something's in the Bag" features some lines from "It's a *Good Life*". Better known for "Fish Heads" than anything else, they also did a song that Spielberg's lawyers didn't like called "I Had Sex with E.T."

Lloyd Penney
1706-24 Eva Rd.
Etobicoke, ON
Canada M9C 2B2

Only with Disney buying Marvel could we possibly get away with Captain Mickey on the front cover. Eventually, only one company will own everything. Stuff, Inc.?

Tornado porn. I see that a lot of that on A&E, TLC and Discovery. Discovery also shows airline crashes. That when it gets the nickname ADC - the Aviation Disaster Channel. (Yvonne wants me to ask,

how does your little Mini Cooper drive? We went to our annual auto show in Toronto last month, and she fell in love with the Mini Clubman.)

"Little Red" drives like a dream – a happy dream. Good mileage, good feel on the road, comfy. Only complaint, as I've said: I have to drive either to Dallas or to Baton Rouge – over 300 miles, whichever I choose – for service.

An idea for the theme for next time... our favorite television programmes. You profile my all-time favorite in this issue, *The Twilight Zone*.

I would need to look up when *Commando Cody, Sky Marshal of the Universe* hit the silver screen, and I suspect that 50th anniversary is well past. Of course, *The Twilight Zone*, one of my favorite shows. No repeating characters to dwell upon until the characters are more important than the story, but the story itself is the star. Great stories, endings to make the pit of your stomach drop, and shivers up your spine. Even the open sequence used to scare the hell out of me as a kid. The stories illustrated that television could tell wonderful stories, and that people had a dark side, usually brought out by a moment of weakness, or a fact from the core of their personalities. I also liked the 80s revival, and taped a number of them. I'd love a full set on DVD, for I know I missed many of them. Guy, you mention "Paladin of the Lost Hour", the last bit of television to host the marvelous Danny Kaye, and *A Message From Charity and Her Pilgrim Soul* proved to me that Alan Brennert was a helluva good writer. Any TZ that can put a shiver up my back is a good one. Also, the second revival from about 8 years ago was not a good one, but provided a sequel to "It's A Good Life", and allowed Bill Mumy to introduce his daughter to television, with good results.

Steampunk conventions ... I hope to get to one soon. I read about the various conventions in California, especially the Nova Albion event that took place in Emeryville just a couple of months ago. I get reminders on Facebook about the upcoming events in Parsippany, NJ and Dearborn, MI, and cannot get to either. I can report that there are groups in Toronto and Hamilton who would also like to stage an event; I hope the two can merge and combine forces. We will see if certain egos can step back and allow this to happen, but I have my doubts.

There's someone I always wanted to meet, Arthur C. Clarke. Easy to say that, hoping there would be something in common we could talk about, but I had hoped to meet him, and now that can't happen. And, I wish I'd been able to stay longer at the *[Anticipation]* fan-editors' feast, but my department made sure that I had no support structure so that someone could look after things while I was gone.

Awards have their use as a feel-good item. Not everyone agrees, I think you know who I'm talking about, Guy, but I like them, too. They serve a purpose, and I have enjoyed getting two Auroras and five FAAns. Right now, I am an Aurora nominee, and a Hugo nominee, and the feelgood from that is terrific. If no one liked these awards, they wouldn't be handed out.

Joseph Major's LOC ... I wish there were more Canadian fanzines, but those that are there get little attention. Dale Speirs has won an Aurora with *Opuntia*, and Jeff Boman won the Aurora for Fan Achievement (Fanzine) at the Montreal Worldcon for *The Original Universe*. I am not sure a Canadian fanzine has ever won a Hugo, and I think Mike Glicksohn may have been the last Canadian to win a fan Hugo.

*And Peggy Ranson was the last (adopted) Louisianan to win a Hugo of any kind! (She was preceded to the dais by Camille Cazedessus and George Alec Effinge, also an immigrant.) As this Hugo drought is the **worst problem** facing the Pelican State, I call on all Hugo voters to **correct** matters by ... Hello?*

Mark Leeper
80 Lakeridge Drive
Matawan, NJ 07747
mleeper@optonline.net

I really enjoyed *Challenger* 31.

I was very interested to read Steven Silver's "Harpo Marx: The Spy Who Wouldn't Talk." In 2007 (on September 11 to be precise) the BBC broadcast a radio play called "Harpo Goes To Leningrad." It covered the same material that the article did right down to the secret letters taped to Harpo's leg. I heard it and did not know if it was true or fiction. But, as I say, it tells much the same story that Steven

did. (There are copies available on the Internet in spite of copyright infringement, which the BBC is very strict about.)

Guy wrote a really nice tribute to *Twilight Zone* (and thanks for the attribute to the *MT VOID*). Guy wrote what I would have liked to, time and talent permitting. A minor correction. "Where is Everybody?" was not the pilot. It was written as the third of three scripts that were intended to be pilots, but it became instead the premiere episode. The real pilot that was used as a pilot was "The Time Element." This story had William Bendix as a man who was seeing a psychiatrist because of his realistic nightmares of waking up at Pearl Harbor on December 6, 1941. In the dream he cannot convince anybody that the Japanese are going to attack the next day. "The Time Element" was broadcast on November 24, 1958 on 'Westinghouse Desilu Playhouse' to very strong public and critical response. The series actually began about ten months later.

LOCs on The Zine Dump #25 ...



Rich Dengrove
2651 Arlington Dr. #302
Alexandria VA 22306

I wonder if Edison filmed and exhibited the execution of the elephant in Luna Park, which the zine Brooklyn told about, because of his war with Tesla and Westinghouse. At one point, he was heavily invested in DC, direct current, and didn't want AC, alternate current, to succeed. I know he publicized electrocutions of humans to show how deadly AC was. Of an elephant?

Guy, commenting on your comments about *Chunga*, I think *Zine Dump* is an incredible achievement. I don't see how you keep up on all the zines. And, yes, you do get a variety. The only way you could be more diverse is purposely reviewing a zine for each general clique. Sort of like an Affirmative Action zine.

About your comment to my zine, *JOMP, JR*. I disagree that Newton failed. It's all a matter of what the objective of his research was. I doubt it was finding the Philosopher's Stone, which, he admitted, was far beyond him. In his own mind, I suspect, he believed he had made a first step in creating one, and it might help someone in the far future to complete the last step. In that, I bet he thought he had succeeded. On the other hand, if it is scientists who are evaluating his discoveries, his success was even greater. He succeeded in advancing science beyond the wildest dreams of most scientists.

You make a comment a propos to an article from Tim Bolgeo's *Hump Day* about the million-dollar *Action* and *Detective Comics*. In particular, *Action* #1. You ask how they survived. I imagine by luck. I don't imagine anyone thought such "trash" would be worth anything one day.

*I read somewhere that the million-dollar **Action** was found stuck between the pages of another magazine, which had protected it throughout the decades. I can imagine somebody's father picking up something to read for himself, then spotting this strange item called a "comic book" and deciding to get a little gift for his kid. I guess a million dollars 70+ years later qualifies as a little gift*

You comment to Garth Spenser that when he says he is giving up on success, what he is doing is not punishing himself for failure. Like you up above with *Action* #1, Garth underestimates the power of luck.

But he's properly estimating the power of attitude! I took his statement about giving up on "success" to mean that he no longer judged himself by other people's standards, which in my view is simply fundamental mental health.

In this age of typed words, will handwriting soon be illegible, as Bruce Gillespie believes? One species has to be, your signature. No one needs to read it because it is usually in print up above. However, it needs to differentiate itself sufficiently from other people's handwriting. That, in effect, means – be illegible.

In the Hugo nominations, you note the misspelling "Omination." Actually, the worst misspelling is for the word "public." And you can guess why copy editors dread it.

Arnie Katz
909 Eugene Cernan St.
Las Vegas NV 89145

There's one way I envy you "hard copy" folks. Since there is no way to deny someone access to an electronic fanzine, there is little leverage when it comes to soliciting letters of comment. This was not a problem for me during *Wild Heirs*, and *Vegas Fandom Weekly*, but *Home Kookin'* has had some trouble drawing letters of comment. It's likely because we started as a oneshot and had a couple of issues back there with substandard proofreading, but the fanzine is now quite varied and, I am pleased to say, much less beset by typos.

The inspiration for *Wild Heirs* was the L.A. Insurgents' fanzine *WILD HAIR*. We moved beyond that concept, of course, and eventually the fanzine that might be the nearest (though not that close) comparison would be *CRY*. Both fanzines blended a strong local group with contributors from around Fandom, both were clubziners and both featured rather sizable letter columns.

Thematically, our inspiration for *Home Kookin'* is pretty much what it has always been: the Fanoclasts of the 1960's, the L.A. Insurgents of the 1940's, Irish Fandom, Sixth Fandom (*Quandry* and such) and greats like Bob Tucker.

The concept of the zine, as it has evolved during its first year, is probably closest to *Shangri-L'affaires* of the late 1940's and early 1960's. It's entirely written by members of the Vegrants except for the annish, and tries to share individual and group adventures with out friends outside southern Nevada. We have some very skilled and experienced fans, but also a lot of relative newcomers, as evidenced by thefact that the Vegrants have taken two "Best New Fan" FAAn Awards in about the last three years and have had a couple of other fans place significantly in the balloting.

Home Kookin' is also meant to be a vehicle that can entice those newcomers into trying some creative fanac. The quality of fanzines is so high these days that it can be daunting to a first timer. When I got into Fandom, I saw some terrific fanzines, but the first ones I got were interesting, but not so good that I didn't feel I could learn to do even better.

I structured *HK* to give the timid a chance to start very small and increase the scope and depth of their contributions as talet, experience and desire prompted them. The process is working, I think, and we are starting to see its fruits in the form of articles by people like Jacq Monahan and Tee Cochran.



HEALTER SKELTER (introduction)

Recent articles by John Waters in his memoir *Role Models* and on *The Huffington Post* and the death last year of Mansonite Susan Atkins reminded me of the most amazing conversation I've ever had – and the most controversial piece I've ever written. Originally published in 1996 in *Challenger* #5, it was my interview with Leslie Van Houten. Reworked a bit, it follows.

I cannot describe how much hassle I endured after visiting a Manson family member. Some *Challenger* readers were disturbed, my cousin Mike accused me of trying to *get laid*, and some of my dopier peers in the Louisiana Bar embraced the idea that I made the 1860-mile trip to see Van Houten on a *routine basis*. (They also kept calling her “Squeaky”, which shows how sharp *they* were.) Obviously, I resented such bullshit, but can understand the bafflement behind it. The Tate/LaBianca murders of August, 1969 were just that: baffling. They were meaningless, pointless, purposeless massacre – even less comprehensible when explained. For many, they mark the essence of 1960s alienation, hatred, and violence. Visit someone who was part of that horror? *Why?*

My stock answer has always been, “Why not?” But I had more serious reasons. To an extent, my curiosity was generational. We Boomers are a strange lot, and in 1969 we were even stranger. Idealistic, irrational, courageous, crazy – capable *within the same week* of the wonders of Woodstock and the obscenity of Tate/LaBianca. I went to Corona for many reasons, but principally, it was to get a fix on the bleakest act of my times.

Beyond such grand ambitions, I think I also wanted to figure out Leslie herself. Within my limits, I think I did. The Leslie Van Houten of 1969 was mocked in *Helter Skelter* and other works of the time as a spoiled, petulant sociopath blind and deaf to the existence and value of others. I think not. When she joined the Family she was a teenage cipher, without any sense of *self* – or any idea of her own capacities or value as a human being.. Despite the seeming comfort of her home life, despite her popularity in high school – and isn't it ridiculous, even tragic, how those years resonate throughout our lives? – she just didn't have any idea who Leslie Van Houten was. So, she fell into the familiar cultish trap. She gave herself over to creeps, and groups, who gave her identity and acceptance. I think that's the simple key to her whole tragedy. She simply wanted to belong.

A supporter, Karlene Faith, wrote the book I asked Leslie to pen: *The Long Prison Journey of Leslie Van Houten*. I was disappointed. It couched Leslie as a victim of sexism and Manson's brainwashing, and ignored the questions of responsibility, redemption and rehabilitation that sent me to Corona in the first place. Van Houten's acceptance of personal responsibility is at the heart of her life story. Were I more talented, I might have better conveyed that here. By all means check out film-maker John Waters' phenomenal articles advocating Leslie's parole for that reason in his *Role Models* and at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-waters/leslie-van-houten-a-frien_b_246953.html -- you'll find the enlightenment I sought to create.

Van Houten stopped corresponding shortly after our talk and I let her go. I've had an envelope addressed to her in my desk for years, but there it's stayed, and though I've returned to the L.A. area several times since 1996, I haven't visited. What could I say to her? In the years since our talk, everything has changed for me – marriage, career, Australia, Katrina – but what has changed for her? Annually she faces the parole board, annually her hopes for release are dashed. Now, her face is gaunt. Her hair is gray. There are wrinkles across the smiling lips. Year to year Leslie Van Houten simply grows old.

Which, I believe, only compounds the tragedy. Rosemary LaBianca's death was a disaster that can never be forgotten or repaid, but is it wrong to remember that had Leslie stayed away, *nothing would have changed?* Only her *own* fate would be different.

Several years after our visit I read a short story she'd written. Dealing with a young woman's adaptation to prison, it was both skillful and compelling. The talent, intelligence and compassion behind it were obvious. So I have to wonder, given better sense and truer humanity forty years ago, what might Van Houten have become? And more to the point, should she be kept behind bars until she rots for an atrocity she joined over 40 years ago? Would our concept of the value of life suffer if she was paroled? How much is enough to reclaim for her sin?

Always wanted a date with the Homecoming Queen.



HEALTER SKELTER

The place is awash in flies. The California State Institute for Women in Frontera (south of Corona, south of L.A.) is across the highway from a stockyard. Out of doors, you smell shit all the time, and inside or out, you constantly shoo away flies. Certainly that was so in early September, 1996, short days after the Los Angeles worldcon, when I went there to visit Leslie Van Houten.



In August of 1969, while I was waiting for St. Louiscon in New Orleans and just before Hurricane Camille ripped up nearby Biloxi, Leslie was a member of Charles Manson's so-called hippy cult in southern California. She had come out of a classic middle American life – class treasurer, prom princess – into the world of dope, where she met Bobby Beausoliel and through him, Manson. Two weeks before her 20th birthday, Leslie tagged along when Charlie had driven Tex Watson and Patricia Krenwinkel – who had spent a busy evening at Roman Polanski's house two nights before – to the L.A. home of a nice couple named Leno and Rosemary LaBianca. Manson surprised and bound the LaBiancas himself, then sent in his troops.

Since then, Leslie has always called Rosemary "Mrs. LaBianca," a gesture of respect, I guess. She believes the lady was already dead when Tex came to get her where she stood, "staring into an empty room." Commanded by Manson to "make sure everyone got their hands dirty,"

Watson handed her a knife and told her to "do something." On A&E's *Biography* Leslie says, "And then I stabbed Mrs. LaBianca in the lower back ... sixteen times."

In Leno's blood Krenwinkel wrote "something witchy," as instructed, on the refrigerator. Misspelling a word, she wrote, "Healter Skelter." Then the three invaders had a shower and made sandwiches in the kitchen.

After all was said and done, Leslie was convicted in three separate trials of first degree murder, and at one time faced death in the gas chamber. That sentence was commuted to life imprisonment by an unconnected Supreme Court case.

Many years passed.

In 1994 ABC's *Turning Point* interviewed Leslie and the other two "Manson girls," Pat Krenwinkel and Susan Atkins. It was the 25th anniversary of the crimes. The quarter century had made good use of Van Houten. Once cute, if monumentally vapid, the woman had become *beautiful*. Beauty grows out of cute, given years and character. The years were evident; the character, from what she said, fascinated me. Because Leslie Van Houten looked to be a clear and true example of principles I want to believe in: *rehabilitation* and *redemption*.

I had been talking about such principles with Eddie, the serial rapist I'd defended and with/about whom I was planning a book. Using Eddie as a rationale, I wrote Leslie a letter at the address given me by the California authorities. .

No excuses for this. I value my youth in the '60s. I kept away from drugs, thank Christ, but that didn't stop me from witnessing and experiencing the social upheaval of those great and terrible days. And here was Van Houten, a woman almost exactly my age who had shared, and in a perverse way, *made* the times. What could she tell me?

It took a while, but she replied to my letter. My feelings upon receiving that envelope were *wary* ... and so was her letter. She wasn't clear what I wanted of her. But a few more exchanges made my motives more obvious, at least to me. I may have begun our correspondence interested in Eddie, but actually, I was curious about *her*.

When I told her Eddie's story she called it "compelling," and compared it to the works of the great crime novelist, Jim Thompson. "Very haunting, actually." She said she hoped my book would be sympathetic to Eddie – not to his unforgivable crimes, of course, but wouldn't simply treat him as "a scumbag." She sounded like someone who didn't want to be thought of that way, either.

Her subsequent letters were thoughtful, if not chatty, and lonely, and sad. Her Christmas card seemed emblematic of her existence: a rabbit, alone in the snow.

In the spring, knowing I would be in the area for worldcon, I sent her the manuscript Eddie

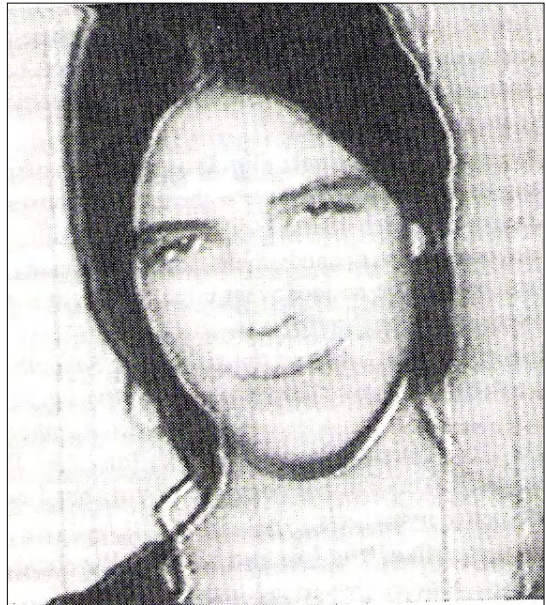
had written and broached the idea of a summer visit. I was worried she'd think me nervy or nutty, but she gave her assent, and had the prison send me the appropriate applications.

She wrote on the back of a xeroxed note which apparently went out to all the people who write to her. She was soon due – again – before the parole board, she said, and asked for our written support. I wrote back and wished her the best. Time passed, and though I got my okay from the prison authorities for my visit, I heard nothing about the parole hearing and nothing from Leslie.

When I called to set up a final date – the Friday following worldcon – the jail told me that, as always, the parole board had turned her down. Her own letter came just before I left New Orleans. It warned me not to wear jeans or "kaki" (the guards might think I was a female prisoner on hormones trying to escape), nor carry so much as a pen. She apologized for taking so long to answer. Time, she said, was beginning to flow together ... "the days weeks months years." Sometimes she just lost track. It was a letter that sang with profound despair.

I went out west.

Want to get the goods on a woman? Find out what other women think of her. The night before my visit I'd called a friend of the wife of one of my cousins. This lady had done a year in Corona and knew all three of the senior residents – Charlie's Angels. Patricia Krenwinkel, she said, was a good gal, fully adapted to life behind barbed wire; she taught firefighting at the prison and was widely liked. Susan Atkins, the little one, was physically fit and took lots of conjugal visits. Leslie? A princess. A *snob*. Full of herself. Stand-offish, self-centered, and condescending to short-termers. *Not* what I expected.



So I walked into the California Institute for Women not knowing what I would find. Leslie's face on the TV screen had, I thought, a kind of tragic *nobility*. What else would it hold? Grim remorse? Gloom? Condescending arrogance?

How about, "big brown eyes"?

After a gate search – including my *socks* – I was buzzed into a cool cafeteria-type room, chairs arranged about very low tables, boxed games on shelves, a painting of the prison on one wall: the backdrop for photos. I waited a few minutes. Then very suddenly a slim girl popped into view, clad in blue jeans and sweat shirt, with a wide-eyed happy wave and an infectious elastic smile.

Her brown hair was pulled back from graying roots; her fingers were slender and brown – and black ("been dyeing somebody's hair without gloves"). There was a birthmark on her forearm. More subjectively, she was *cute* – with *big* brown eyes, happy eyes, teasing eyes, and she was animated, limber, always in motion, twisting her arms and legs, flirtatiously flicking at flies when they buzzed near my head, leaning forward to talk, her laughing eyes mere inches from mine. I saw not a trace of despair, nor an inkling of obsessed remorse. No, she was exciting, teasing, *impish* – almost teenaged in her foxy vivacity. Simply told, the woman was *sexy*.

An involuntary smile of delight and flattery grew on my lips. I was at instant ease. A warm, flirtatious lady projects irresistible vibes. But I forced myself to remember that I was in a *prison* with a *convict* to satisfy serious curiosity and talk. So: we talked.

Right off the bat we talked about Eddie's m.s. One typo she had found "creepy": for "mirror" Eddie had written (or the typist had typed) "mirrow" and that, she thought, read like nasty mockery of Eddie's cleft lip. Eddie writes a lot about that deformity (which he hid under a moustache), and Leslie didn't think anyone should laugh at it. Good point. When Leslie says something is "creepy," that

something is *creepy*.

We talked about her parole. The California board is running out of reasons insofar as Leslie is concerned. Latest: the state's shrink had said he had "lingering doubts" that she'd "internalized her externals" ... which is to say, he'd seen the same regret and remorse that I had, but still thought she might be *acting*. How'd she feel about that? Shrugged. "I'm okay!" So much for depression.

Because I was interested, she told me about the state parole system. California utilizes a sentencing grid to determine just release dates - unlike Louisiana, which has no parole for first degree murder. Leslie pointed out that, with 27 years in the slammer, she was very near the top of the matrix. It takes different factors into account, including the circumstances of her crime.

I'd thought this a touchy subject But Leslie spoke the name Manson first and held nothing back. Without hesitation she talked about questions that will always surround that night in *chez LaBianca*. Why did Manson choose *her* for their midnight crawl? From what I'd read, she'd been a *babysitter* in the cult. What made that King of Creeps think that she would make a willing assassin? Her complex answer told me she didn't really know. Maybe it had to do with her youth, she said, even though Charlie had younger girls at his beck and call. Maybe, she said, it was because Manson knew her parents would come pick her up on a street corner if she called. Maybe, *I* thought, he saw something in her that I couldn't see. And maybe ... maybe she *volunteered* to go. I didn't ask. But she did bring up the central question. Why did she *do it*?

For this was not only an insanely notorious crime, it was a notoriously insane crime. I didn't understand it. I've read all the books, listened to all the interviews. But none – certainly not Bugliosi's



weird incite-a-racial-war hypothesis – made human sense. And every human action, no matter how cracked and evil, somehow, to someone, makes human sense. Why did she *do it*?

Leslie's explanation, I'm afraid, smacked of pop psychology. Charlie, she said, was a classic *abusive father figure*. He convinced her that she was stupid, told Krenwinkel she was ugly, and in the manner of a thousand generations of abused children, they'd felt their stupidity and ugliness was *their* fault and so would do anything to make up for their failings and win daddy's approval. Thus the killings. Thus the courtroom antics. Thus the "X" she burned into her forehead during the trial, in imitation of Charlie's swastika. I scanned her face for the scar. She caught me at it, too, but said nothing.

Leslie seemed thoroughly disgusted with Manson. Obviously, she now thinks the 20th

Century anti-Christ is, was, and always was an undereducated big-talking asshole and buffoon. But she feels less hatred for Manson than simple contempt for a hypocritical blowhard. "He pretends he's in lockdown because he's so *bad*. Bullshit!" and she glanced towards the desk to see if the guards had heard her swear. "They keep him in p.c. (protective custody) because the other inmates want to *kill* him!"

Quite possible, but a little pat, her theory of abuse and response. An alternative explanation appealed to me. One strong impression I got was that Leslie enjoyed the communal experience: the *cult itself*. Maybe she *went along to belong* - but to the *group* more than its nutburger leader. The call of the group is always strong, irresistible if you have identity problems of your own. At one point, while we talked, Leslie shrugged off her former middle American existence as life "in a bubble," a

phrase and a disillusionment straight out of 1969. The commune provided home, acceptance, identity – perverse though they were and if someone is empty enough and desperate enough and weak enough, she could do *anything* to keep them. *Anything*.

Nothing has erased that gratitude and loyalty. Leslie disparaged Ed Sanders' book, *The Family*, I bet because of its wiseass treatment of its title subject. She has warm feeling for Krenwinkel and Atkins – they've been sharing therapy since that *Turning Point* – and even argued for the sincerity of Tex Watson's religious conversion. "If he's faking it," she said, "he's been faking it for 25 years." (She disagreed with John Douglas' *Mind Hunter*, which theorized that Watson – bigger, stronger, smarter, handsomer and crazier than Manson – had challenged Charlie for leadership of their cadre, and thus driven him to blood his hounds. Never saw that, she declared, and responded to my comment that we outsiders knew less about her old beau than any of the rest of them with, "Tex is a very private person.")

In any event, we don't know enough about the supporting cast in the Manson saga. They've been demonized and caricatured – Cathey Paine's portrayal of Leslie in the *Helter Skelter* movie was so hammy it should be smeared with mustard and eaten for lunch – but they have never been understood. What turned these allegedly ordinary people to Charlie's service? Drugs? Leslie clearly felt dope had started her up "that crooked way." "First weed, then 'ludes, acid ..." (I told her she was lucky in one respect; she'd missed crack cocaine.) But again, that seems *too easy* an answer. Drug use may constitute rebellion – though Leslie didn't figure that, since she kept her doping secret – but there are adolescent snits and, then there's Tate/LaBianca.

Another prisoner walked past. Leslie threw her a wink.

I asked about my fellow barrister, the pitiable Ronald Hughes, who died during the trial. Vincent Bugliosi suggests in *Helter Skelter* that Manson ordered him murdered, but Leslie doubted Charlie had anything to do with it. Ron was so anxious to join the Family lifestyle, she said, that she could see him taking acid and falling into a flash flood – which is how he died. Leslie's former husband, whom she'd met from jail, was arrested with aerial maps of the prison and a female guard's uniform – but she said the schmuck was incapable of bagging groceries efficiently, let alone helping her escape. "I was cleared on that!" she insisted, and I didn't press.

Bugliosi? She hates his guts. Check out *Helter Skelter*. Note the pride the prosecutor took in winning a death penalty against her, in particular. Hypocrite! she all but shouted. During the first trial, she claimed, Bugliosi kept assuring the girls not to worry, capital punishment was about to be overturned ... as it was. His fervor to send her to the gas chamber was mere posturing, flummery for fame. Talking about him was the only time she showed real anger: she *hates* the L.A. district attorney's office – even the O.J. prosecutors, whom she's never known.

She told a story about her later nemesis, prosecutor Stephen Kay, a "brittle" man who's opposed her parole for decades. She'd delighted in teasing him during the trial. She'd imitate a fly, "Bzzzzzzzzzz," until he glanced her way. Then she'd clap her hands: "Gotcha!" She still giggled about that. I did too, despite knowing what Kay probably had in front of him: crime scene photos of Leno LaBianca with a fork in his gut.

You see how my mind could become seriously



mushed? You see, I never forgot to whom I was talking, but to whom I was talking to was *terrific*. She was responsive, she was interested, she was funny... she had me enraptured. At least twice I found myself staring into those big brown eyes, and shaking my head in disbelief. "I don't *believe* this," I said. "Me neither," she replied.

The lady drew me forth, and got *me* to talk. Though she has a rather "*ahem*" skeptical view of lawyers (she went to her last parole hearing without one), she listened with interest when I proffered my thoughts on her case. For instance, the first word out of my mouth had I been her lawyer would have been "Severance!" – to get her away from the other defendants. Manson made her fire the attorney who tried it.

And she should never have received the death penalty, even though she welcomed it at the time (the gas chamber freed her from confronting her guilt, she said). Louisiana statutes say it's mitigating when a murderer is under the mental domination of another. Citing the doctrine of "specific intent," necessary for a first degree conviction, I wondered if she'd *had* that intent. "But I knew people would die when we went out that night," she pointed out. Yeah, but she had to be *urged* to *act* ... literally seized by the shoulders, handed a knife, pushed towards her victim. I'd've argued that showed a lack of intent to kill Rosemary LaBianca – although it's doubtful how well such legalistic hair-splitting would stand up against 16 stab wounds.

I worried afterwards that I'd overstepped. Leslie has been mentally reliving that hellish night over and over and over and over for 27 years. She has accepted responsibility and on that acceptance built her rehabilitation. Interference with that process would be unforgivable.

We hit on books. As she had in her letters, she praised Jim Thompson (*The Killer Inside Me*) with genuine enthusiasm. That led me to expound on Phil Dick, like Thompson, another genius who never got his just recognition. She loved *Bladerunner*, but hadn't read the novel. She's not into SF; she knew *Stranger in a Strange Land*, of course, but was surprised to learn that Robert A. Heinlein was ramrod military. Another wry shake of her head. "We were so young when we read that." In a way those were the saddest words she said all day.

I was young once, too, and so up jumped People's Park, *my* 1969 counterculture story. I launch into my Park rap whenever I'm with someone I want to touch, or who's really touched me. I went into the Park tale with Leslie: the tiny mother trying to cross a police line with her two toddlers, and the three cops who stopped her. The KNOW sign, and the tear gas. The crewcut National Guardsman who shed his gasmask and stared into the face of his screaming officer "as if he were speaking Martian." Leslie has her '60s and I had mine; they weren't that far apart and they were as different as night and day. I insist that the Park was what 1969 and its hippy creators were *really* all about. "I wish you'd been there," I told her, *meaning it*. "My God, I wish you'd been there."

But now I wonder. The gentle creative anarchy of People's Park was met with savage establishment brutality. Kent State came down a year later. How convincing could an argument against psychotic violence be if civic authority burned out your throat with tear gas, and your parents' generation met such atrocity – as it did – with witless acquiescence? Who's to say it wasn't just such betrayal that sent Leslie on her horrible mission? To some, blood should be repaid with blood and hatred with hatred. Why should she



reject Charles Manson if our parents would so gladly massacre us for Richard Nixon's pleasure?
God, the '60s.

Leslie mentioned that she was freaked by "gruesome" *Silence of the Lambs*. Loved the last line, though. She'd seen it on the tube. That's how she's seen life in the last quarter-century, through TV. Regular TV; "I don't have cable." But she's seen enough to make a few calls.

This, she says, is a sick society. We have a giddy fascination with crime, she said, we *enjoy* it too much. Ted Bundy's execution, for instance, became a repulsive street party. Behind her walls Leslie had heard little about Bundy. She'd also never heard of shock rock's Marilyn Manson. Know what she doesn't remember? The moon landing, a month before Tate. But she *does* remember the JFK assassination. Simultaneously we named the schoolmates who'd told us about it. Talk about captivation with crime ... that's almost the ultimate example. Almost.

Want a surprise? Van Houten thinks prison sentences are too lenient. She really does look down on short-termers, because she thinks they're not learning any lessons from being jailed, not really trying to change. You're in prison for a reason, she said. Doing a few months, you're going to concentrate on *doing the few months*. She had pride in her fellow lifers; they were the ones who did things there, and they were the ones, she implied, who *were* facing themselves and trying to change.

Her own therapy is long term and ongoing – and is not yet finished. That's why she wasn't upset at having her parole refused: she still has important psychiatric ground to cover, she still has work to do. In shrink jargon, she's trying to learn to mourn – for herself, for the last 30 years, and for Rosemary LaBianca and all the people who loved and miss her.

More like it, I thought. Here was the Leslie I'd read in my letters and seen on the tube, the serious woman struggling back from damnation, her lips dusted with sulphur, her fingers daubed not with hair dye but innocent blood, fighting with authority earned at the cost of her soul for – no other term – *the good*.

I bought her numerous cups of coffee out of a vending machine (she wouldn't – couldn't – touch the money herself). I followed her out to the yard so she could have a smoke, until the heat and the flies drove us back. She had to ask permission to use the bathroom. Asking seemed second nature.

We talked about the mail she receives. Some of her correspondents are ghouls who want her autograph – to *sell*. I offered a lawyerly letter telling them to flake off, but she seemed to enjoy her duel of wits with such sleazebags. (I asked her to forbid me to sell her letters to me, and she intoned, "*I forbid you*," those big brown eyes laughing.) I asked her if kids, teens, ever wrote to her, and she told me about an angry girl who'd said Manson was right on. She *had* to respond to that girl, Leslie said, but wasn't sure how.

I had an idea of how, but was reluctant to broach it. I didn't want her to think I'd sought her out to *sell* something. "This is *not* why I came here," I insisted. "Do you believe me?" "I believe you," she said. "*Do you believe me?*" "I *believe you*," she repeated, eyes wide. She should write a book. She should focus her intelligence and encapsulate her experience and write her story. Had a title suggestion for her: *The Empty Room*.

I was there for three hours, and finally – I'm sure she was tired – she got me to say adieu. Her day to come included a therapy session and (right away) a tuna fish sandwich. Mine would be the first of three days of hard desert driving. She gave me a chaste hug, and unforgettably twisted her nimble body around the sign at the guard's desk: **NO PRISONERS ALLOWED BEYOND THIS POINT**. Eyes sparkling, she grinned, waved, said "Have a safe trip home," and I floated out the door through which she may never pass.

At the moment, I wasn't hitting on all cylinders. Literally. My car had a loose wire, and I think I did too.

It was two days later, in the middle of Texas, before I began to recover my wits – and lawyerly cynicism. I began to argue with myself against my "Leslie high." All the good deeds, the quilts for the homeless, the Christmas carols in September, the remedial reading classes, the N.A.

meetings, the constant therapy ... weren't they all a bit *much*? After all, reminded I to myself, all prison inmates are manipulators, and for some women – here comes trouble – it's basic instinct. Combine those factors and you have a person who knows what you want to hear and knows what to let you see. That's how she *survives*. That's how she hopes to *escape*.

GHLIII, I told myself, *she was playing you for a chump. That's why you've woken up the last two mornings thrilled and happy. You're a dumb male sap.* It was just that fundamental: those big brown eyes *do* stay with you.

So do questions, though. Should Van Houten be released? It could happen, now that she's reached the top of the parole grid; nothing keeps her inside but politics and the public's long memory for terror. But *should* she be let go? Were her regret, rehabilitation, remorse real? Has she truly *internalized her externals*? The tapes said yes. The letters said yes. The living person said yes, but with a grin that said *many* things. You know... I never saw tears, even when she spoke about Rosemary LaBianca, and her voice broke. *I never saw tears.* What did that mean? Is it fair to expect tears every single time she talks with a stranger about that horrible night so long, long ago? What about her pride in her fellow lifers, as people who had faced what needed to be faced, even if what needed to be faced was unspeakable? That was real, I was sure of that. Didn't that say yes, loudly, truly?

Leslie gave an interview in the 1970s. You can date the tape by her hairdo – a helmet cut with bangs – and the unlined face it framed. She told the tale of the Family and its crimes in a voice I'd describe as baffled. At the end, she recounted Manson's wacko fantasy of The Hole, the underearth

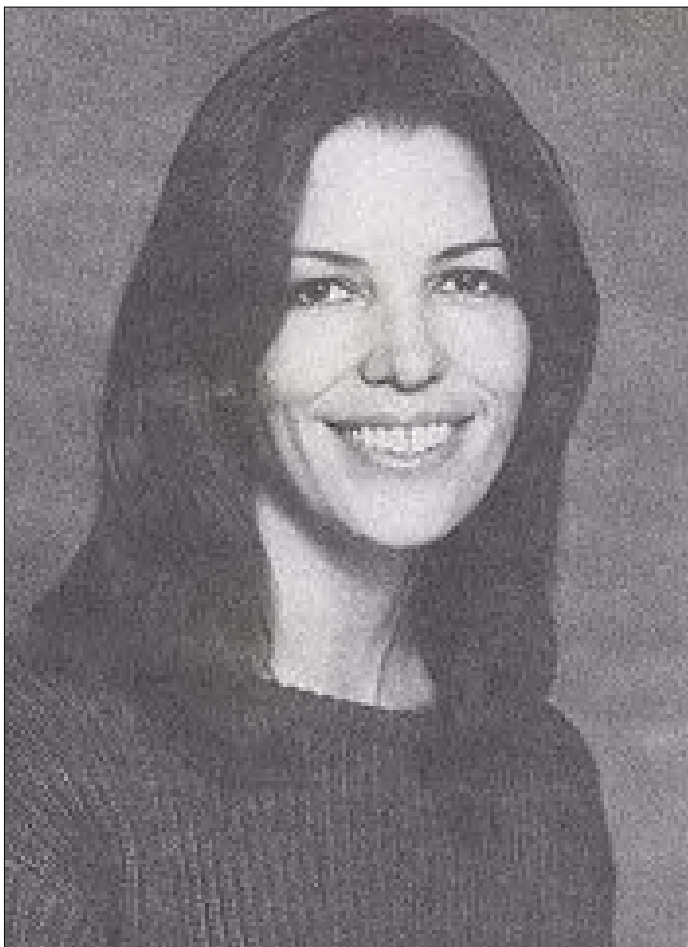
kingdom where the Family would wait out the black-white revolution he called Helter Skelter. "So after the crimes," she said, "we went into the desert to look for The Hole."

Then she was silent, gazing away into space and memory and ... whatever. I wonder what she saw. Maybe years of waste and loss, and all the pain into which she'd joined. The Hole, maybe. Maybe her Empty Room. Maybe Hell. After a long moment, and just for an instant, those big brown eyes shifted to stare into and through the camera. *Horrificed.*

I do know this. I'd been in the presence of a person unique, historic ... tragic, terrible ... and wondrous. If I was being fooled I was being *really* fooled, but part of the pleasure and part of the danger of meeting a magician is not knowing when or whether. And a woman; but a woman deserves faith.



Art by Paul McCall



The Wind off Mount Diablo

Mike Estabrook

Sitting out under the big new red
umbrella
in Dave's back yard reading
Martin Amis's "The War Against
Cliché"
when suddenly, floating in on the wind
coming down off Mount Diablo ,
it occurs to me that my life has slipped
by
and I hardly even noticed.

I wonder – can I do anything different,
begin life anew at 62, or am I stuck
right here
where I am for the duration –
however long (or short) that might be?
I don't know, I really don't know
the answer to that.
"But what do you want to do new
at this rather late stage of your life?"
the wind asks.

I'm silent for a long time
like the wind should be. I'm thinking,
"Well, nothing new really. I'd like
to do what I've tried to do for decades
now –

write a better poem."

"So do it," the wind replies,
with a bit of a flip attitude, almost a
sneer.

"But I don't know how." Silence finally
from the stupid wind. Then it slowly
occurs to me
that I need to try something new,
anything new and different perhaps
might inspire me to new heights,
or at least to a different vantage point
from which to observe life.
I recall how Dr. Moyer at Harvard
once told us
that he began learning the violin at 80:
"You're never too old to learn," he
said.

"So, I guess there's time yet for you
after all,"
the wind speaks up again, even after
I've asked him politely
to mind his own damn business

