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CONTENTS OF THIS ISSUE:

ART & GRAPHICS: ATom (2), D. Bruce Berry (23), Brad Foster (2), David Prosser (22), William Rotsler (5), Dan Steffan (6, 24, 60), Steve Stiles (cover, 21, 28, 31, 43) and Taral (38).

DOORWAY:

Those who read, write for, and publish fanzines are – as we all know and lament – an increasingly rare breed. It isn't often these days that someone previously unknown turns up in a fanzine and especially not in this one. So when I published a short letter of comment from a new name in last issue's "Ether," I wondered if anyone would notice. Only Mark Plummer did, and this possible new blood became not only a topic of discussion between him and Claire, but also prompted a long, entertaining letter from him that you will find later in this issue.

And there's another new name this time around. Rupert Fike is an old Farm friend I haven't seen in a very long time. I reconnected with him in recent years through – you guessed it! – Facebook. Rupert is an editor and a poet, and lives in Atlanta now. Some of his poetry readings are on YouTube, and his books – *Voices from the Farm*, an anthology he edited of Farm anecdotes, and *Lotus Buffet*, his first collection of poetry – are available on Amazon.

We met under rather unusual circumstances in May 1971 on the shoulder of a country road in Tennessee. This was in front of the "Martin Farm," 700

mostly heavily wooded acres with a small, level meadow along the creek at its rear. The bus caravan had permission from the owners of the Martin Farm to camp there for a few months until we found the land that would become the Farm. (For details, see my column in #28 for details; it's online at efanzines.com.)

Because my then wife and I had business in Nashville on the day everyone else drove to the Martin Farm, we missed some excitement. That day, the dozens of buses and other vehicles that made up the caravan had tried to drive onto the land. There was an existing road leading to the meadow, but it was situated along the property line between the Martin land and the farm next door. But that owner refused to let us use it – and he brandished a loaded shotgun to emphasize his point. Rather than antagonize a neighbor, albeit a short-term one, the group decided to pitch in with axes and saws – and very quickly a new road was cut through the oak trees to the meadow. With joyous whoops and hollers, everyone drove to the meadow and parked, but the joy was short-lived. Later that day it rained so hard and so long that the new road turned slick and muddy. Until it dried, no one could get out.

Rupert and his wife Kathy had arrived the day before and helped with the road clearing, so we quickly learned that we shared a problem. We had vehicles that were too low-slung to make it over the stumps on that new road. Since we were not trapped like everyone else, Rupert's VW van and our camperized mail truck were commandeered to fetch some needed supplies. We got them back each evening – sometimes on the annoyingly late side, but we were not left homeless. We spent the next several days slogging our way to the meadow to visit with the others, or hanging out in the cramped quarters of a large school bus belonging to those who had also arrived late.

Rupert was a mechanic – unlike me, whose knowledge of vehicle maintenance consisted of checking the vital fluids. At that time, Farm residents who had any mechanical knowledge coalesced quickly into the generically named "Motor Pool." As Rupert said:

"I started working in the Mo Pool from the start – at first to keep tabs on my 'baby,' the VW van I'd rebuilt in the upper Tenderloin of San Fran. Then I slowly gained responsibility and made it my gig until I was asked to become an EMT in '74 or so – at which point I went to the Tenn. classes, got certified, helped build the [Farm's] home-made ambulance and fire truck, and became the 'midwife mechanic' from which 'Soda Run' takes its point of view."

I feel that Rupert's poem is an enriching addition to what I've been writing about the Farm over the past few years. It's centered on his work at the Motor Pool, as he describes above, but branches out to reveal many other aspects of the Farm and daily life there. As a former resident I naturally understand all his references and nuances. But I don't think that having lived on the Farm is an essential prerequisite to Getting It. As Rupert says in his introduction about his audiences' reactions: "Somehow they understand the whole thing without knowing much of the back-story."

I hope you will, too.

When my wife and I left San Francisco to rejoin the Caravan, which was then in Nashville, our thoughts were focused on reconnecting with our dozens of friends from Stephen Gaskin's Monday Night Class meetings, whom we sorely missed. I'd given no consideration to what sort of work I might do if we stayed with the community for any length of time. Being a fan, I had of course taken along my portable typewriter and recall, early on, transcribing many tapes of Stephen Gaskin's talks – not exactly a farming-related skill. And I quickly learned from working in the small vegetable garden on the Martin Farm that the repetitive stoop labor involved in planting and harvesting crops was too hard on my back. I later figured out another strategy (see below).

Meanwhile, the community's search for a permanent place to live continued – and in the fall of '71, we purchased the 1,000-acre Black Swan Ranch – the original name of the land that became the Farm. Once we moved there, we traded our mail truck – which was too small for us after the birth of our first son – for a roomier school bus. We parked it next to a large oak tree that must have been a lightning-strike survivor. Its hollowed-out main trunk took a 90-degree turn about six feet up from the ground, and above it two large secondary trunks reached for the sky. A black snake (happily non-poisonous) lived in that hollow and would come out to sun itself, coiled around the trunk. One time it turned up in our utensil drawer, but that's another adventure.

I'd purchased a large one-man bow saw and an axe, and spent a lot of time that fall cutting small nearby oak trees for firewood, and managed to build up a decent supply. We were happy that our new home already had a wood-burning stove, because soon it turned cold enough for us to light our first fire.

That winter everyone took care of their own firewood needs, and miraculously we all got through it without hypothermia. But it was clear that this individual approach didn't leave us enough time for other tasks. This realization led to our putting together a firewood crew the following spring – half a dozen men [sic] dedicated entirely to cutting and storing wood so that others could do their jobs full-time and every household would have an ample supply when the weather turned cold again. I was asked to be part of the crew – my first real Farm job! I quickly learned how to operate a chainsaw, sharpen a dull chain with a file, and the best way to lift heavy rounds of firewood. Rotating these tasks, especially the latter one, saved my vulnerable back. The chainsaws we had at first were mostly small ones that struggled to cut through the larger oak and hickory trees. Luckily for us, a new resident that summer brought a full-sized saw with him that hugely improved our pace of production.

We learned the hard way that firewood burns best when it's had time to dry (or "season"). And another lesson we had to learn the hard way was how much firewood we would actually need. In the heat and humidity and frequent rain of the Tennessee summer, we spent many weeks cutting, hauling and stacking. Even so, the first winter we came up short.

As you might imagine, from all this hard labor I was physically in the best shape of my life. I also had a strong sense of accomplishment at holding up my part of the team effort. But after nearly two years on the same crew I felt it was time for a change. I had other skills and talents that were languishing, and I wanted an opportunity to use them in ways that would serve both me and the community.

In the spring of 1973 I was asked if I would take over running the Farm's grocery store and was only too happy to accept. For the next couple years it was my responsibility to seek out the best deals for everything we didn't grow ourselves and to supervise a small staff that handled the rationed distribution of my purchases. My budget would wax and wane depending on the community's finances, which sometimes made the work a juggling act. But when I rotated out of the job in 1975, it was to generally good reviews, and I had enjoyed the challenge.

My next assignment, which lasted for most of the rest of my time on the Farm, was with the generically named Book Publishing Company. Its catalogue included books on vegetarian cooking, natural birth control, home births, and several volumes of Stephen's writings (transcribed and edited from his many talks, but not by me). I first worked in the print shop operating the industrial paper cutter and helping out on the offset press that printed our books. I graduated to heading the shipping department, helping run a booth at electronics trade shows (our CB radio book was a best-seller in 1976-77), and taking short trips to sell books out of the back of a station wagon. The latter led to a year-long move of my entire family to the Bay Area, where

I sold books up and down the west coast. When we returned early in 1979, I was gratified to hear that my efforts had resulted in a high percentage of overall sales during that time.

Both before and after our California stint, I also did special assignments such as promoting the Farm Band's first album and the ad hoc buying of items like wood stoves and clothing. This was definitely my period of doing well by doing good.

But, alas, the honeymoon came to an end in December 1979. My marriage broke up and I found myself suddenly homeless, toting my duffel bag of clothing and such from one temporary accommodation to another. And the next day I was told that as a no longer married person I was not suited to represent the Farm, and I was fired from the publishing company. It was a very bad month.

I was assigned to the "Farm Hands" temporary worker pool. Every day for over a month I traveled with some other men to Nashville, fifty miles away, where we worked for a door and window manufacturer unloading and stacking boxcars full of lumber. This meant I had to get up *really* early, cram down some thick, vaguely sweet gruel (don't ask!) we called "Farmola" at a communal kitchen, and hit the road. I didn't get home until well after dark.

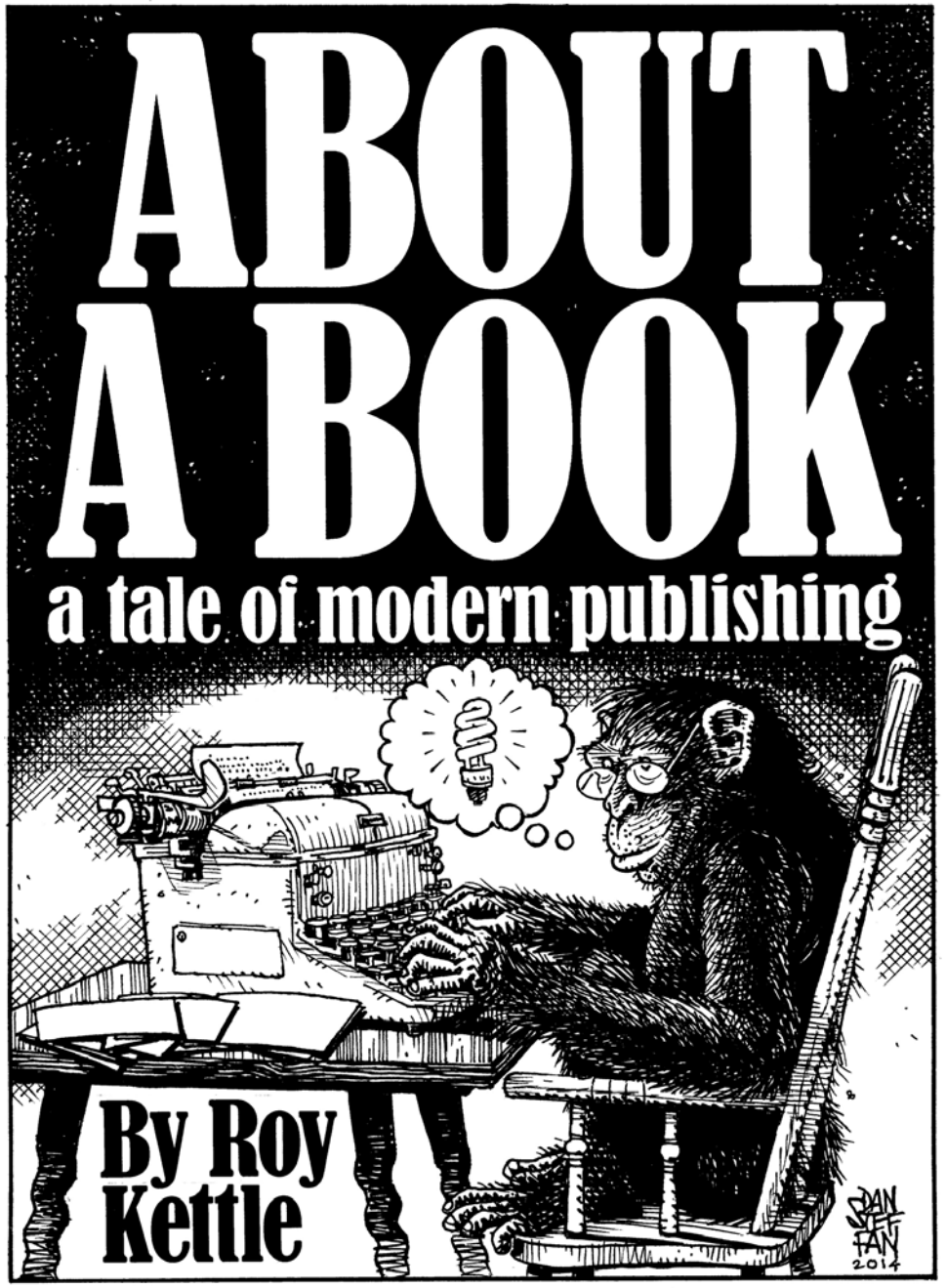
Eventually someone besides me noticed that with this insane work schedule I wasn't getting to spend any time with my four sons and that Something Had To Be Done. A job had opened up at the Farm's little gas station, which provided the solution. Located in front of the Motor Pool, it was a one-pump operation with a small shed that served as an office and a spare parts warehouse.

By then the Farm's communal financial agreements had evolved to where individual Farm "businesses" had accounts with the Motor Pool to pay for their fuel, parts and labor – none of which the mechanics, all working in-house, could finance on their own. Someone with the necessary skills to keep track of all this was essential. The previous person on the job had apparently broken an unwritten rule by stocking peripheral items such as flashlight batteries, cheap pens, pocket notebooks and – most objectionable – candy bars. These were some of the little luxuries people would buy in town when they had the money, but it was deemed somehow unacceptable to have them so easily available.

The job was now mine. I still got up early (but not quite as early as before). This was because the gas station had to be open in time for the crews who worked off the Farm. But being able to close in the late afternoon gave me more time to see my kids.

I did hanker for a permanent place to call home, though. When I reconnected with Paul Williams and he offered me work with his publishing company, Entwhistle Books, my path became clear. We made arrangements to meet at the booksellers' convention in Chicago in June 1980 and then to move to Glen Ellen.

I decided to make my final weeks on the Farm more interesting than just maintaining ledgers and supplies of transmission fluid. So when the aforementioned non-automotive extras sold out and people started asking after them, I restocked. I even expanded what was available. I was ready for a fight, but no one ever complained or tried to "bust" me as they had my predecessor. That felt good, and I thanked my accumulated good karma. It was a fine note on which to depart.



Ideas come easy

In 2004, I had an idea for an SF book. It wasn't a particularly original idea perhaps and there wasn't that much to it, but I felt it had the germ of something that could be developed.

As anyone who has read my piece on writing with John Brosnan in *Banana Wings*

knows, I wasn't much for writing anything professionally of a significant length on my own. John and I hadn't sold anything together since *Bedlam* in 1992, though we had tried working on other things but not for a while. He published what was to be his last novel, *Mothership*, in 2004.

At that time and for a while before, many of his friends had been trying to help him out both financially and with other support. But his health declined as his alcohol consumption either increased or stayed steadily excessive until he died in April 2005.

In April 2004, probably while he was working on the unfinished and unpublished sequel, *Mothership Awakening* (with its humorous and ironically inclined narrator consuming glass after glass of wine, but on a spaceship instead of in Ortygia House, South Harrow), I sent my idea to him. I was hoping to encourage him to work together again as I thought that collaborating might help him and it seemed like an idea he'd enjoy.

I didn't get very far. I'd sent it to John as a blurb for a real novel as if it was something I'd found on the internet. I thought that if he found it interesting, I could say it was actually my idea and we could work on it together. Quite why I took that approach rather than discussing the idea with him I can't recall – I suspect it was uncertainty about his state of mind but I think he must also have been uncertain as to mine.

His reply to my email was "What's all that about, you twit?"

"That went well," I thought and forgot about that particular idea for a while.

That's a depressing way to begin an article but that's where the subject matter started.

The idea, as put to John, was about a publisher looking for some good SF stories from the pulps that hadn't been reprinted. He'd heard of a suitable writer from the early 1950s who'd written for a magazine called *Awesome Tales*. However, he discovered that not only was it nearly impossible to find any of the stories but there had been a concerted effort to wipe away all references to the author and destroy all copies of the magazine. The publisher eventually finds some issues, and he sees that the author predicted every major scientific advance of the late 20th and early 21st century. Then he finds some stories about an alien invasion that was due to occur shortly after the author stopped writing and disappeared, but obviously no such invasion happened. Or did it? Then a new story supposedly by the author appears in the present time on the internet with a frightening prediction. The website is taken down and the person who ran it is found dead. The publisher is almost killed. Then things begin to get really scary….

Ok. That's what it was. The idea just stayed there, within reach of the back burner but not quite simmering away, for the next two years, almost to the day. This was partly because I was still working and partly because I was on chemotherapy with all the accompanying hoohah.

Early in 2006 Chris Evans and I were trying to develop an idea for a radio sitcom with the working title *Tempus Fugit* set only just in the future when time travel agencies were selling trips into the past to tourists. It was going all right and was fun developing. We got together most weeks to watch a film (often with another much-missed friend, Rob Holdstock) and always took a few minutes out of our time in the pub afterwards to discuss it. Rob's contribution often consisted of not laughing uproariously at the jokes. Maybe that was a sign. One evening in April, it had just been Chris and me, and – I'm not sure why – I mentioned the idea I'd had for a novel. It might have been that the sitcom idea wasn't going quite as well as we hoped. We didn't continue with it for more than a month or so after because we heard a radio comedy about time travel was going to be broadcast….

The day after our chat in the pub, I sent Chris a description of the idea. To the above "outline," I added an idea I'd had separately for an SF satire about right-wing evangelical Christians in the USA and the Rapture which I thought could be incorporated and I included in an extra invented pulp magazine called *Shocking Stories*.

But then the hard work

Chris was keen to press on and develop a plot for a novel. There were some very SF-y things I'd put in originally which we dropped fairly quickly. As we discussed it, and engaged in email iterations about a plot, we leaned more towards a thriller with an SF background and some SF ideas in it rather than an SF novel as such, although the distinction is perhaps a fine one. Though the trappings of science fiction that we both liked – fiction, conventions, magazine collecting, movies, writing, fanzines – didn't seem to figure much as background to thrillers, almost any other hobby or interest or work did. A thriller (or detective story, and the two overlap) might be set in a world of philately, photography, horse-racing, Punch and Judy – you name it. There *had* been some set in the SF world (Anthony Boucher's *Rocket to the Morgue* for one – a reference made only so that Robert's letters page is filled with lists of other novels) but none we were aware of squarely aimed at a wide and general audience. Or so we intended ours to be.

As our discussions continued, Chris was keen on making the "predictions" more ambiguous so that it wasn't necessarily clear whether the writer saw the future or not. Names changed as did a lot of the detail. The "publisher" became the owner of a small film company looking for a writer as interesting as Phil Dick but whose work hadn't been optioned. Many new characters came into being. We created a religious cult called The Ascendancy which had been founded by an old-time SF writer, one who was still alive. We invented the Senate Committee on the Influence of Science Fiction Satire on National Morale (like the famous one on Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency) which had looked into the unpatriotic effects of SF about consumerism and advertising in the 1950s at a time when there was a lot of such fiction (especially in *Galaxy*). We had an SF collector as a minor but important character, sections set at a fantasy film convention and a Worldcon, scenes set in an SF-themed amusement park, an FBI unit called the Strategic Forecasting Unit which looked to see if SF stories touched on sensitive security issues (for instance Cleve Cartmill's "Deadline") or indeed predicted anything worthwhile, a couple of invented SF writers and editors from the '50s still active today, a Welsh fan who produced an electronic SF newszine – and perceptive readers might see they bear no resemblance to Dave Langford and *Ansible*, an interesting reference to Ted White, action set in the UK and in the USA, a role for NASA and the space shuttle, ongoing threats from a new Eastern European state which moved the doomsday clock further on, and a conspiracy involving biological warfare.

As Chris would say, a rich mix, but we felt it all hung together.

We developed a very detailed plot with a chapter by chapter breakdown so we could both work to it and weren't making it up as we went along, though inevitably it only formed something to hang the developing novel on and not an exact blueprint.

Early in 2007 we had the first chapter drafted and we pretty much finished in 2010, edging into 2011. It felt like a long time. It *was* a long time. But with the iterative process, and the fact that Chris was working and had a young family and we both had other things going on anyway, time ticked by though, more than anything, because it was a *long* book. The initial process of drafting and exchanging alternative chapters was important in helping set the tone for the whole novel; but it was a slow one on which Chris, more than me, pressed us both forward.

Perhaps inevitably given his writing pedigree, Chris wrote much more of it than me, more so as the drafting went on, until he got the bit between his teeth (as he does when writing) and just got on with the last third himself. He's a proper (award-winning) SF writer and critic so had a clearer and stronger view of these things than me. Well, he's just a better fiction writer, in a nutshell. His continual efforts to draft, redraft and polish, and his better feeling for the sort of characters that were needed, were vital to the final work.

In the end, we had a novel that was over 180,000 words long. Stephen King and Steig

Larsson and Peter Hamilton long. But the fact that there *were* other books out there of similar length helped prevent us from thinking we had done something that we couldn't sell. There isn't much fat in the book – but there's a lot of plot and characters and events.

Working title

We both needed a title to use while we were working on the book, not just to have a means of referring to it other than "the book" but also because it gave us the feeling that it was something grounded. We decided on *Ascendant*, a reference to the cult we'd developed for the plot, and that lasted for some time as a working title. It didn't do it for us, however, as a real book title and, after much to-ing and fro-ing, we came up with *Future Perfect*. Even that was just a better working title to begin with but we grew comfortable with it. And it appeared not to be much used.

More recently, I've had to search for *Future Perfect* for various reasons and found over thirty on the review website Good Reads, plus a few more with Future Perfect in their title. They include tantalizing books like *Future Perfect* with its handsome, rugged stranger arriving at the B&B and offering the landlady everything that she never knew she wanted; *Future Perfect: A Guide to Personality and Popularity for the Junior Miss* from 1957; the "sometimes hilarious" *Future Perfect: How Star Trek Conquered the Planet Earth*, and *Future Perfect: a Collection of Fantastic Erotica* with its heroine who could see into the future every time she had an orgasm (clearly we were *almost* on the same wavelength there).

But by then we had settled on our title and couldn't change it even if we feared competition from *Future Perfect*, a philosophical meta-dystopian riff on cause and effect, past and future, individual and society, and truth vs. fiction.

Failing to sell

So, where next? We had a literary agent who took an outline from us so that he could try it on publishers as well as a prologue and first chapter. Things had changed a lot since John Brosnan and I were writing. In those days we could send a short outline and a chapter to an editor – even one we didn't know and whether through an agent or not – and expect a reply and quite possibly acceptance. But as Chris's and my agent had warned us was likely, no one was interested in buying from us on the basis of an outline and chapters. Some editors said they'd want to see the whole novel, which we took as encouragement but could well just have been their policy.

Our agent went through the full manuscript. He liked it and made some very helpful editing suggestions – he had indeed been a professional editor. And in 2011 the novel was sent out to half a dozen or so editors. It was pitched, at our request, as a scientific conspiracy thriller rather than a science fiction book. We weren't remotely worried about having an SF label tied on the book – indeed, we were both science fiction writers primarily – but we felt the book had the potential for a wider audience. Maybe that was a mistake on our part as the editors who saw it didn't seem to be, by and large, the editors who knew about SF as far as we know. But they *were* presumably the editors who knew what the audience we were aiming for liked.

After chasing by our agent, and more submissions to other editors, and after what again felt like a very long time, we only got two replies:

"Whilst I thought the pacing was great, I just didn't get that urgency to have it on the list. The author obviously knows how to construct a great story, but as I said, it just didn't totally drag me in screaming like it should. This of course is just my opinion and I'm sure another editor will have a completely different view."

"I didn't really get on with this, the first person narrative and the rather parochial tone of much of the book. Sorry."

One of them was obviously reasonably heartening. The other gave the impression of, well, being put off by the science fiction background. As well as being put off by a first person narrative which seemed very odd. Still, editors do their job.

While all this was going on, we had felt very optimistic (though less so as time passed and even less so with the rejections). We had been working on an idea of Chris's for not so much a sequel as another thriller with some SF-y undertones or even overtones. But work on that slowed and stopped with the discouragement we were feeling.

We showed the manuscript to a couple of friends, both of whom had been been professional editors and written books themselves. Chris' wife Fe and her mother, Carol, had both also read the book. They read a lot generally, and pretty eclectically, and both really enjoyed the book. (I can see the cover quotes now. "'We loved it,' Chris's wife and mother-in-law.") Our friends who read it enjoyed it too, but both felt it was a bit too long and perhaps too complex – too many plot threads. Chris did take a few thousand words out, but shortening it more substantially or removing elements of the plot, wasn't simply a matter of deleting chunks of manuscript, of course, not least because of the possible knock-on effect to what was left. It would require quite a lot of effort and time and by now we felt we'd spent enough of both on the book. In any event, we thought it worked fine as it was. Not that that stopped Chris from making further improvements whenever he could.

Why not an ebook?

I'm not sure when we came up with the idea of trying to publish the book ourselves as an ebook. I think it was before we'd totally given up hope of getting some publisher to look favourably on it. We talked about the idea as a fallback, reluctant to take a step which would stop us having a "proper" book as we saw it then. But, eventually, around the beginning of 2013, we began looking seriously into the idea.

The idea of self-publishing was getting increasingly well-established, even if it looked a lot like a poor relation of "proper" publishing. Articles appeared in the press, and the internet was awash with more help and advice and blogs and warnings and encouragement than I'd imagined.

Getting the book onto the various platforms, getting it promoted and making it look good enough for it to grab people amongst the myriad other self-published ebooks were things we talked about and researched, slowly, over many months.

But it didn't seem to us as straightforward as the thousands of people who have delighted us with ebooks in recent years seem to have found. I asked a friend about designing a cover in correspondence that rather petered out. Neither Chris nor I were on Facebook or Twitter, which are the predominant form of self-promotion for these sort of things. Neither of us had much inclination to fill a blog with the type of daily content that so many people manage. But we were genuinely in awe of the amount of time people who *have* self-published spend in giving often valuable advice to an invisible audience. I know it's often a way of self-promoting but there's also an element of people simply being generous and helpful, something that works in the internet from Wikipedia articles to advice on YouTube about how to change a particularly rare type of light bulb. And the Kindle documentation, though extensive – well, because it was extensive – was intimidating.

But we hadn't got this far to give up. We read a book on producing ebooks (not, ironically, an ebook itself) without huge amounts of illumination. It made the process sound more complicated than I had felt it ought to be, though it *was* trying to deal with the differences between various ebook platforms and be comprehensive but brief. Some of it was incredibly technical.

Then Chris found a website called draft2digital which offered the prospect of putting a book onto all the main ebook platforms quite painlessly, whilst taking a cut on top of the cut taken by the platforms. On the face of it, it was straightforward and the blogs we read by people who'd tried it confirmed that. The main similar alternative we found was something called Smashwords, and the differences weren't huge.

One tweak we found was the suggestion that, given that Kindle had 70% of the ebook

market, it might be best to put a book onto that directly and use draft2digital for the smaller platforms such as Nooks.

We sent a copy of the manuscript to Kim Newman and Stephen Baxter, both of whom were generous enough to say that they'd be happy to give us a cover quote if they liked the book and, fortunately, they both did.

But our search for a cover to put quotes on was proving difficult. Chris had an idea which sounded good and involved an old fashioned typewriter with pages spilling from it and, behind, the silhouette of the SF author writing. We thought we might be able to find the constituent parts online and Photoshop them together. Our unfamiliarity with Photoshop, other than using a free version to open images, hadn't given us the impression of it being much of a stumbling block until we actually came to try it. My own attempts at a cover were utterly shambolic, like an explosion in a graphics factory. It was soon clear that we were either going to be confronted with absorbing a mass of detailed instructions with the likelihood of some inadequate end product, or finding another solution.

The solution came accidentally through a friend who happened to know a professional cover designer who was (with what we felt was great generosity) prepared to do the work at the low budget we were comfortable with offering. After some discussion, he came up with twelve possible designs – the differences largely being in title fonts, background color, showing either a full old-fashioned typewriter or just some keys, and the possible inclusion of images of spores (rather than the typewriter) to illustrate the biological threat. No silhouette. He'd done a really excellent job and they were all striking and effective, but in the end we asked him if he could take one of the covers that we preferred and combine elements from other ones. (We dropped his idea of spores altogether as we thought it overemphasized the importance of a biological threat in the novel.) He did that really well and we ended up with a terrific cover for our ebook with short versions of a couple of very good quotes from Kim and Steve.

Indeed, why not a paperback?

Around this time, something that had been happening for me in parallel changed the direction of our thinking.

A few months before, I'd got an email forwarded to me by Sarah Biggs, the late Rob Holdstock's partner, who had had it passed to her by John Clute. The email was from Jon Eeds who ran a small publishing company called Bruin Books out of Eugene, Oregon, a city that Kathleen and I had traveled through on Amtrak on our way to Corflu in 2013. Jon had read *The Fungus* by John Brosnan and me (as Harry Adam Knight) when he was in England back in 1987 and he said he remembered it fondly – not a feeling often associated with the book. Currently, he published a line of good but long out of print crime and noir fiction, Bruin Crimeworks, by authors like James Hadley Chase, Fredric Brown and David Dodge. He was starting a line in horror books called Bruin Asylum and was interested in reprinting *The Fungus*, not seen in print since 1990.

Well, who could say no to that? John Brosnan's share of the advance was kept back (until his affairs are sorted, if ever) and Jon worked on getting a new edition of the book together. I gave him an introduction, extracted from the article I did for *Banana Wings* about writing with John, and he added "Letter-HAK" from *Inca*, the letters I'd written to famous people and organizations as if from Harry Adam Knight offering a mention in the imaginary forthcoming books that I outlined in exchange for a donation to a charity. These were to be included either as a bonus or a punishment, depending on your view.

Jon did a graphic design for a cover on his PC and sent me a copy. It looked eye-catching and rather splendid. I hadn't realized that this was just the first step, as he then sent that graphic design to Vietnam, where he occasionally went for work, and an oil painting was made of it there. This was then carefully scanned or photographed, and that formed the basis of the cover. He picked a font for the cover, put on a blurb and a quote from Clive Barker – "I had a wonderful time with this book" – and sent me a copy of that too. (Eventually he also sent me the oil painting itself – a really nice gesture.)

Jon had kindly arranged for me to have copies of a couple of Bruin books – one, *Feels Like Rain*, a book of Edward Anderson stories (he wrote *Thieves Like Us*, which was made by Nicholas Ray into *They Live By Night* and was also filmed by Robert Altman) and the other, *Cardinal Bishop, Inc.*, by Jon himself. They were put out under the Bruin Books imprint and looked very good and were well-produced. Always a fine start for a book.

A while later, in January 2014, Jon sent me a proof for *The Fungus*. The first thing I noticed – at the top of the first page of the proof – was a logo for CreateSpace. I'd heard of this – I'd seen references to it when researching ebooks – but didn't really know much about it. Looking a bit more, it was clearly a Print On Demand organization owned by Amazon. I also saw, on the last inside page of the two books Jon had sent me, that it said "Printed in Great Britain by Amazon.co.uk."

I realized later than I'd heard of CreateSpace a few months before that at Corflu in Portland when Michael Dobson gave me a copy of *Random Jottings* produced through that company. At the time, it hadn't registered as being something we could use because self-publishing hadn't really been on our horizon then.

I was also aware of Lulu for Print On Demand because Graham Charnock publishes his books on that platform. The book of his that I'd bought (the rather good *Lake*) looks fine as far as production goes, though it's a slim volume so I couldn't say how Lulu would handle a 550-page book like *Future Perfect* or the 626 pages of *Feels Like Rain*. One particular problem with Lulu for me was uncertainty about how readily its books got to buyers. At least with CreateSpace you knew it was immediately there on Amazon.

From what I then read on blogs, it looked as though CreateSpace was relatively easy to use. There were the inevitable simple-seeming guides and sites offering free advice on "10 things you need to know about…". I mentioned it to Chris and he was as keen as me. We both wanted a "real" book, not just an ebook. It was especially attractive when I mentioned the blog that said how easily we could transfer a book from CreateSpace to the Kindle platform, which would then leave draft2digital for the other ebook platforms as we'd planned. We could have the benefits of potential quantity for ebooks and the egoboo (and hopefully some sales) of a real book.

Inevitably, it wasn't *quite* that easy.

In fact, why not start a publishing house?

What became clear as we went through the process of looking into ebooks and Print On Demand was that we were acting out the old Irish joke. A tourist asks the way to Dublin and the Irishman replies, "Well, Sir, if I were you I wouldn't start from here."

"Here" for us was a long manuscript produced for a traditional publisher. Apparently, the best way to create an ebook or a POD book was to set it out from the beginning in Word, or whatever, in a way suited to ebooks or CreateSpace. But we obviously weren't going to retype the whole book into some appropriate template. Instead, we did quite a bit of retrofitting – with help from our friend Stu – some of which worked better than others. And John D. Berry gave us some very useful advice on suitable fonts.

At the same time we were also looking into what it took to make a published book look *proper*. In other words, we were self-publishing a book but wanted it not to look self-published. I guess there was an element of literary snobbery here but mostly it was a practical view that people would be more likely to buy a book if it was one (apparently) published by a publishing house than one, albeit of similar quality in production terms, that, well, didn't look like that. We knew there were famous exceptions to this – books that had sold extraordinarily well in self-published form, books that were picked up by traditional publishers eventually and so on – but that was all we knew. I don't think either of us had really seen a self-published book – not consciously so before the Bruin books – and, at that point, we didn't even know how many small imprints there were around the

country publishing great books, some by people we knew, and often using Print On Demand to do so. We had been thinking almost entirely in terms of ebooks up until then.

Actually starting up a publishing house is very easy – surprisingly so as far as I was concerned. It needn't be a company or anything complicated like that. But because there were two of us, we needed to set up a partnership. And it seemed best to open a business account. The first was simple – just an agreement between us. The second was fairly easy but took more time, banks being what they are, and there was no guarantee that the bank would allow us to have a business account. Our business model was very thin and, indeed, almost a work of speculative fiction in itself. But the bank was fine – free banking for fifteen months or so before charges kicked in. That seemed long enough for us to know if it was worth considering carrying on.

But before that we needed a name for the publishing house. We needed a name for the business account. A name for the cover. A name to get the books set up on CreateSpace. Preferably, the same name for all those.

That would, of course, be extremely easy. There were plenty of interesting flora, fauna, scientific terms, mythological figures, cosmic bodies, dynamic adverbs and wonderful adjectives, as long as we avoid bird names beginning with P which appeared to have been used up.

We considered hundreds of them. But as I've said, there are so many small imprints around now that a lot of great names have already been used. Some of those we thought of were ones that one of us liked but not the other. Some were just included because they were part of a list of things containing ones we liked. Some were the products of desperation. We tried anagrams of our names, our initials or extensions (Cerk Books, Cerkus Books – you search for the former and Google insists you want books about clerks and with the latter it wants you to buy books about performing elephants. Reck Books was asking for trouble.)

We wanted a word that didn't raise the wrong expectations. We knew people don't buy a Penguin book in the expectation of finding out about flightless winged birds. But we didn't want people thinking that they would be buying a book about Greek myths or astrology because of the name we'd chosen. Trying to reduce expectations wasn't a help. Meaningless Books didn't quite work, nor did Unnamed Press.

The other thing we were looking at was whether the word we chose had a web domain free because we had plans for a website. So between the number of small imprints that had sucked up most of the good names, and the number of websites that, even though they were nothing to do with publishing, still used the particular word we liked, we were only left with hundreds of thousands of words and phrases. Yet it was still difficult. And obviously from looking across the internet, we weren't alone in finding that. Adding symbols could make the name unique (Penguin+) but it didn't help with searches apparently when search engines ignored them.

But finally we plumped for Pitchblende Books. It worked for both of us and had both the .com and .uk domains free. And it linked only to a book of poems called *Pitchblende* by someone called Bruce Boston (coincidentally, a well-known science fiction poet, I gather), but now, I see, our website comes ahead in Google ranking. Sorry, Bruce. For now.

And while we're at it, what about a website?

And the website. That was something else. We didn't have a real view at this stage on how we might use it but it seemed to be something we should have and, short of becoming a company, we weren't sure how else to make the name our own. In our search for imprint names, we'd come across quite a few that had the same, or similar, names as each other as there was no copyright issue over the names. But buying the domains Pitchblendebooks.com and .co.uk appeared to give us some sort of ownership.

Neither of us had the remotest idea how to set up a website or any skills beyond the basic keyboard and PC skills most of us have developed over the last ten to twenty years. There were a lot of organizations out there offering to rent domains to us with website creation software so we plumped for one – GoDaddy. Quite a big one but almost certainly not the best. Still, it's what we got at the time and it offered a basic approach to website design which suited me (as it happened).

As to content, we'd had an idea almost at the beginning of writing the book that we might set up a website with some stories on by our imaginary SF writer and perhaps hint at conspiracies and so on that we thought might attract readers to the book. In the end, writing stories as if by a 1950s SF author, as well as writing a novel, proved too much so the idea went nowhere. But then we realized we both had some unpublished stories which we'd written as early as the '60s, which wasn't too long after the late '50s when our author was writing, and which might have passed muster in the sort of semi-pro magazines we thought *Awesome Adventures* (as it now was) and *Shocking Stories* would have been. I asked Bradley Schwartz, the guy who runs Pulp-O-Mizer – a clever and very entertaining part of his Thrilling Tales of the Downright Unusual website – if we could use the pulp magazine covers created by Pulp-O-Mizer (their use on digest-sized magazines cleverly explained away on our website). Not only did he allow them but he gave us special headings to use for our own two titles.

With help from Bill Burns we got a font that looked enough like a 1950s digest magazine might have used and, with much experimentation and luck, managed to put our stories into two-column facsimiles of magazine pages complete with adverts scanned in from real SF magazines of the time. Bill had suggested ways of giving the pages an aged look, like a pulp magazine would now have, but it wasn't quite right for a digest magazine and, anyway, it proved beyond my technical ability to do even with Bill's help.

Rather than put the stories onto the website just as, say, downloadable PDFs or Word documents, I found a couple of organizations that provided the means to make flip- or flash-books which would simulate the appearance of pages being turned – Issuu.com and Flipsnack. We went for the latter partly because the flip-books for the stories on Issuu.com allowed users to scroll down pretty readily to soft-core porn magazines. We didn't want competition.

We've been disappointed that the website hasn't attracted much in the way of comment because it was set up entirely to give some entertainment that we – and, we thought, a lot of people like us – might like: old-time SF fans and collectors. But as the novel was intended to be marketed to a wider audience, perhaps we couldn't have it both ways. Still, Malcolm Edwards did say: "I absolutely love the facsimile stories – the kind of thing big publishers ought to be able to do easily, but always fail to!"

The website also has links to Amazon, as well as carrying reviews of the books and readers' comments from Amazon.

Passing thoughts about Amazon

Just a slight pause here to comment on Amazon. When we started doing all this, the main problems with Amazon were the perennial one of being blamed for putting small bookshops (and maybe large ones) out of business, for mistreating their workers in various ways (overworking and underpaying) – an issue more written about in the USA than here until recently – and, more recently, for not paying its taxes. I guess some online shop or another would have got the blame for moving shopping onto the internet if Amazon didn't exist. Internet shopping has been growing enormously for some time and was going to do so whether or not the particular company (or companies as it might have been) was Amazon. Though one of the ways Amazon dominates the market is by taking advantage of tax loopholes – whether it's by paying lower taxes through an otherwise little-used Irish base or selling goods from the Channel Islands. Not paying their taxes – legally not paying them as appears to be the case – is for me more an issue for politicians to resolve than it is for Amazon simply to volunteer payment. But it looks as if poli-

ticians find it easier to blame the poor for the dubious need for austerity measures and take away their benefits than create a tax regime in which big companies pay the taxes needed to educate, keep healthy and transport their workforces.

One positive thing Amazon has contributed to is the huge expansion of self-publishing. They've done this through making it easy for authors to put their books onto Kindle and to use CreateSpace to publish hard copies, and to make those books available through Amazon online. And it's all (by and large) pretty easy. There are plenty of other companies that compete, to a greater or lesser extent, or offer services which support or use the Amazon self-publishing platforms. But Amazon has probably done most to promote the trend to virtually anyone being able to get a book published.

And passing thoughts about self-publishing

I guess a lot of self-published books aren't great at best and many are probably much worse. We may all have a book inside us but, like I do with my musical ability, it's sometimes best to leave it festering where it is. But if Sturgeon's Law is right – that 90% of *everything* is crap – then that still leaves a lot of books out there that might well not be crap.

I've no idea who buys self-published books and in what quantity, but there seem to be a reasonable number of people who make a living – or add to their living – out of it through some talent and some hard work. I'd guess that even the very worst books sell some copies. Overall, there are probably vast numbers sold. It must be that they're serving some sort of need. It might be a need for cheap books (some ebooks are actually free, occasionally for promotional purposes, occasionally as loss leaders for the rest of a series, occasionally to fulfil the writer's need for readers perhaps). But I think one of the needs is simply comfort and time-filling. It's like daytime TV where you can simply watch old shows, repeats of cookery programs, quiz shows, reality shows and so on if that's what you particularly like and you don't mind the quality. If you *really* like books about dragons, intelligent chickens, paranormal romances, endless fantasy series, vast space operas, or porn involving the cast of *Star Trek*, then it's out there in spades.

Traditional publishers fulfil a need for books that have been well written, professionally edited and might be expected to be of a particular standard (though forgive me for disbelieving that that is always the case) but they don't fulfill a need for limitless numbers of cheap books about zombie potatoes or karaoke on Mars. Unless publishers can find a way to process *some* degree of editorial control – cheap and cheerful though it would have to be – into producing a lot more affordable ebooks (as they would inevitably be) then I doubt they will tap significantly into this enormous market. Maybe, though, it's good to leave the market as it is. But the complaint that publishers find it difficult to develop a business model to meet the potential of the ebook world continues to be made.

That said, I've recently become aware of an attempt to crowdsource editing on self-published books – http://goo.gl/XKGkKF – which, if it works, could well improve the quality.

Hey, we have a book

So we launched our own venture into CreateSpace for a Print On Demand self-published book under our own publishing imprint. CreateSpace is pretty easy to use. You have to make some choices like matte or glossy cover, cream or white paper, but there's advice out there about these. And, as I said, it would have been easier had we been able to use the recommended Word templates. Jon, who published *The Fungus*, kindly created the right sort of PDF of the manuscript for me to download onto CreateSpace and Pete, our designer, had done the same with the cover – now one with a spine and a back. CreateSpace, understandably, had very precise instructions on how to get everything right, including the correct width for the bit of the cover that becomes the spine. But it also has a lot of great tools to help you through the process. One such is an online proof of the novel as well as a downloadable PDF of it. But it's obviously best, as we did, to order a couple of proper proofs in the form of the book. We had to do this twice, as we discovered many typos in the first proof despite a lot of assiduous checking beforehand. Those proofs might eventually form part of the Evans-Kettle bequest to some literary archive. Or possibly not.

All this seems easier as I write it than it was at the time. Every step (however simple CreateSpace tried to make it) was fraught with the possibility of major error. Blogs had so many dos and don'ts on that it became impossible to absorb them. It was a relief to find that the first proof was actually a book that looked like a book and had pages we could turn and words we could read (as well as the typos we could spot).

Once the paperback was finally available on Amazon, and not being bought by many millions of people, we focused back on the Kindle version. There were quite a few routes into this, one of which was simply getting CreateSpace to do it automatically. A bit of Googling suggested that might not be the best route. There were various websites offering conversion systems. I could use a free bit of software called Calibre to produce a Kindle version myself and – and what? I had no idea how to make it available for sale. It turns out that Kindle Direct Publishing, another arm of the Amazon publishing octopus, makes the process relatively easy. But, again, only if it's in the right format to begin with. The Calibre output *was* the right format, but the input to it hadn't really been. It did need quite a few tweaks re-entered through Calibre to get it right and eventually it came through the process well enough – well, just about well enough for the story but slightly less so for the front matter and the digital table of contents. The latter was relatively easy, if a bit time-consuming, to put right, but I never did get the front matter looking as nicely laid out as the paperback. I might have been able to do had I understood how to edit the Calibre metadata (I know, don't ask) but the bits I *did* change and improve were just a matter of trial and error and that had limits. Still, it was more than passable and the Kindle version is now out there too.

The other digital platforms await. Smashwords appears to be able to put the book onto other non-Kindle platforms but, as of writing this, I haven't yet managed to use it. Recently, a helpful guy from the Czech Republic has put me onto a bit of free software called Sigil which is easier to edit with than Calibre so that might well come in handy, too.

Two other minor problems remained. How did we get the book into bookshops and how did we make people aware of it? You know, *those*.

More hard work – self-promotion

Reading blogs and other advice reinforced the idea that we were playing catchup here. A lot of people suggested that being prepared for both these things was vital before publication. It was clear that some, perhaps many, self-published authors had laid the groundwork for publication months before. We, on the other hand, had not even broadcast the fact that *Future Perfect* was just about to be published – hoping, in our continued naivety, that announcing its arrival would be the publishing equivalent of the nova that appears at the beginning of the book. Well, not quite *that* naïve but neither of us was a master of social media so there seemed little else we could do.

By this time I was finding my way onto Facebook to connect with some old friends and relatives – and indeed new friends – having finally had a tutorial from our daughter Jen so that the mass of unconnected information I saw when I looked over her shoulder began to make sense. Kathleen had been on for a while, but largely to check up on our son Nathan when he went to Washington and we hadn't heard from him for a while.

Neither Chris nor I was – or is – on Twitter. I still don't entirely understand it. Neither of us did a blog or really had the enthusiasm, knowledge or time to do one. I'd begun setting up a spoof Harry Adam Knight one several years before with the intention of putting some of John's and my unpublished (but not always HAK) work on but that didn't get

anywhere, though I've begun experimenting with it again recently.

I did – and continue to – mention *Future Perfect* on Facebook and we both did the same on mail groups we happen to be members of. I recall seeing a jokey (and unrelated) post on Facebook where someone was announcing the publication of a book and they said "Now word-of mouth – do your stuff." Well, the obviously uncontrollable word-of-mouth has had some effect and we're grateful for what we have got. But *Future Perfect* isn't *50 Shades of Grey* nor is it the big-selling SF dystopia novel *Wool*. It's not even *50 Shades of Wool*, though some big blue balls might have helped sales.

The almost uniformly good comments from readers on Amazon have helped – well, have certainly helped our confidence. But I guess that the thing that has been most valuable in terms of (still modest) sales has been Eric Brown's review in *The Guardian*. However much people have enjoyed your previous work (quite a long time in the past for me, but less so for Chris) you're only as good as your next novel and this one was different from anything either of us had done before. But a review in a major newspaper gave some credibility to our personal assurances that it was, in fact, a pretty good read. Certainly it led to people who had previously said they might buy a copy now saying that they actually would. Kindle and paperback sales spiked significantly even if, and sadly I repeat, modestly.

In terms of further promotion – beyond telling Facebook that *The Guardian* likes us – we've done what we can or, at least, what we feel capable of. We've approached a few reviewers – *Locus*, dedicated SF review websites – with little success. There's a lot of competition for reviews out there and *Locus*, for example, wants access to books for review before publication which was something that just hadn't been on our horizon. We also looked at websites which promote books to their audiences. Mostly they do it for a fee and mostly the fee seems excessive. However, for a fee of $7 one called The Fussy Librarian would send an email out mentioning the book to around 10,000 people who'd signed up for genres like thrillers or SF. But all these paid-for promoters have some sort of filtering system other than an author's ability to use Paypal and that was having a good number of good-quality Amazon or Good Reads (for example) reviews. Initially, we didn't have those but when we did (average 4.6 stars on Amazon – buy a copy now) we signed up for The Fussy Librarian. It's been difficult, however, unpacking the effects of that precise promotion on sales from other things that have been going on.

We entered *The Guardian*'s Self-Published Book of the Month competition – but the book that won that month wasn't *Future Perfect*. It was *Café Insomniac* by Mark Capell – "a dreamily compulsive novel about a man who can't sleep and opens an establishment for nighthawks. But when a customer is murdered, his nocturnal life starts to unravel." It sounds interesting – buy a copy now.

Many self-published authors make use of complicated promotional schemes involving price reductions or zero-pricing for a week or so, changing price beforehand to make people think they're getting a better deal when the price is lowered, getting up very early on the day of promotion to add the book to the Kindle Forum thread, buying copies yourself as gifts to increase the Amazon ranking…. Though changing the price of self-published books isn't *that* difficult, it all seemed like much more trouble than it was worth. But obviously it *is* worth it for some people.

Probably the most successful – and prestigious – thing that happened other than having a review in *The Guardian* was being invited to do a signing session at LonCon, which took place a short time before the review appeared. This was largely because Chris was on the program (interviewing Malcolm Edwards) and that meant he was considered for inclusion in a session which probably wouldn't have been available otherwise.

On the day, Chris and I were sitting next to each other though on ends of separate two-person tables. I was on the same table as Ben Bova and Chris the same one as Greg Benford. A few friends like Jim Linwood, Jim and Carrie Mowatt and Curt Phillips did buy books – and others just came up to be supportive – and kindly hovered around to make it look as if we also had a queue. A few people we didn't know actually bought copies because it looked like an interesting book. And we confirmed their opinion as best we could. When his own real queue had died down, I had a chat with Ben Bova who was friendly and interesting. Maybe I should have read his 2011 book *The Craft of Writing Science Fiction That Sells*. One of his novels that I *had* read was *Cyberbooks* from 1990, a now outdated but at the time pretty innovative satire about the publishing industry after the invention of cyberbooks – "electronic books which eliminate the need for paper, printers, salesmen, distributors and even booksellers." Though I'd have liked to ask him about it in the context of modern self-publishing, it was only after we went our separate ways that I recalled it.

We'd arranged to have copies for sale from a couple of booksellers and we sold a reasonable number over the weekend – more than there were people in our queue so I guess it had some appeal amongst the many hundreds or thousands of other books available.

And even more hard work – selling books

Ah, "arranged to have copies for sale." There's a lot packed into that phrase. The main way for people to buy *Future Perfect* is through Amazon. Obviously we would like it to be in bookshops too. But it's a complicated, time-consuming and frustrating process.

No bookseller buys books from Amazon for resale of course. Most booksellers hate Amazon in fact. On the face of it, this limits the outlets for self-published books. CreateSpace does offer a service which purports to get books into bookshops but what it really appears to do is, at a price, make books *available* to be in bookshops. However, Lightning Source, another POD company, is actually owned by book distributors which could have some benefits in getting books into shops, though apparently it's not as easy to use.

But CreateSpace does make copies available, presumably like other self-publishing platforms, to the author – singly or in bulk – at a significant discount to the price that the author set (let's call it the Recommended Retail Price – RRP – though it's entirely a matter for the author within one or two constraints set by CreateSpace such as the need for them to make a profit).

I'd read a few times online about people who bought lots of copies of their books and sold them themselves. At the time, I thought this was yet another time-consuming and unwieldy process adopted by desperate self-published authors. As it turns out, and as usual with some caveats, they were right.

We could buy fifty (say) copies of *Future Perfect* which would be printed in Charleston, South Carolina, by CreateSpace and delivered to me here in the UK a week later for less per book (including postage) than half the RRP we'd set. (There's no CreateSpace "royalty" on books bought this way by the author.) That meant that we could sell the book in person to someone here, even at a price lower than the RRP (as we do) and still make significantly more profit per book than if individual copies were bought from Amazon by readers. The "royalty" from selling a CreateSpace book through Amazon is pretty meagre – possibly because ours is a big expensive book to produce and we felt we had to set a realistic price. (The "royalty" is proportionately much bigger on cheaper Kindle books.) But even for smaller books which would be cheaper to produce, the "royalty" would be low because then the RRP set by the author would be lower. I guess that a "royalty" of £1 or so a book isn't uncommon. But the profit could be much more – potentially £6 per book for us – by buying copies direct and selling them personally. And CreateSpace still makes money on the deal, of course.

The profit we get from selling copies to individual people in the UK doesn't take into account postal costs if we had to send someone a copy rather than just hand it over. Half that profit would be wiped out. And sending a copy abroad would be impossible – postage to the USA, for example is £8 and might take 28 days.

Well, not *quite* impossible. Recently I discovered that I could ask CreateSpace to send one copy to Australia (where it's not available) direct from Charleston, South Carolina, and it would do that for a total cost to Pitchblende Books of £9.77, which is less than just the RRP on Amazon of £11.99. And Createspace would still make a profit. And so would we if we charged the Australian customer the RRP. It seems remarkable. The economics of POD books still surprise me. Admittedly, the time taken to deliver it to Australia at the cheapest postage available from CreateSpace is upwards of two months so it might be quicker walking most of the way and carrying it; but for anyone with a few other books piled up to read in the meantime, it's not a bad option. And if it takes that long, presumably it's delivered by ship which would have a lower carbon footprint than the bulk orders flown here from the USA.

But for people prepared to put the work in of selling personally, there could be a good return. There were tales online of people humping suitcases full of books from bookshop to bookshop (presumably they lived in large towns or cities) and getting copies taken for sale at each one.

In our case, however, we only wanted a few copies to give to people who'd helped us plus other friends and relatives as well as selling the occasional copy to someone locally and, in the case of LonCon, copies for sale there. That was initially. Then things moved on a little.

Our experience here (which might well differ from that of real publishers) has been that book distribution to the one or two big bookshop chains still left, and maybe many of the independents, starts with a firm called Nielsen which acts as a source of information and help to people in the publishing industry. We had to buy ISBN numbers from them and, among many other things, they keep records of books' RRPs and notify publishers of any orders placed by bookshops. Pitchblende Books (for practical purposes, me) suddenly started getting emails from Nielsen, the first one of which notified me that an organization I'd never heard of wanted to buy a copy of our book. It turned out that this organization was one of a number of book distributors here (the big ones being Gardners and Bertrams) which act as a go-between from the publishers to the shops. So the first email I got said that Bertrams wanted a copy for some (inevitably unspecified) outlet.

I had no idea what to do so I phoned Bertrams and the conversation went:

Me – "Hi, I run a new small publishing outfit and wondered if you could help me. I've had this order and have no idea what to do next."

Friendly young woman – "Well, we agree on the discount that you'll offer us and then you send us the book and an invoice."

"What's the usual discount?"

"People generally offer us 40%."

"That's probably more than I can offer."

"Then you can offer us a lower discount and we can consider it."

"What sort of lower offer?"

"People sometimes start at 25%."

"How about 25%?"

"Done. And you pay the postage."

That has reduced to 20% since. Simply because I asked. That 20% discount has to be split between the distributor and the bookshop, including paying for the costs of transport between the two. My guess is that Gardners – who are the main distributor to the biggest bookstore chain here, Waterstones – are responding to sales that Waterstones had made to individual walk-in customers and that Bertrams was doing the same for one or more other bookshops. Making only a small profit on an individual book wasn't as important for the bookshop as pleasing a customer perhaps. Obviously the big profit is in books bought in bulk across all their stores. So the best thing for us would be to sell copies in bulk to Waterstones but the FAQs on the relevant websites said that, while Waterstones was prepared to handle self-published books, they would generally only be interested in books for which Gardners got a 60% discount. For that, we'd be selling books at a loss, the more so if we had to pay postage in sending them to the distributors but possibly the 60% discount included postage. A large bookshop like Foyles also is willing to consider self-published books but only if they see a copy eight weeks or so before publication (obviously no chance there) and even then they admit that they might simply never reply.

So we've been dealing with a number of orders for single, and occasionally more, copies. I managed to persuade our county library service to take four copies and I was aware when that order arrived (simply because it was for four). Forbidden Planet in London has taken a few copies as have two local independent bookshops, one of which has arranged a signing session for us. A London-based independent bookshop got in touch through our website – *www.pitchblendebooks.com* – and I dealt with them directly. And so on. Much of this has been done because of encouragement from, and research by, Kathleen.

Where does that leave us?

All this seems a bit of a bother for relatively little profit – well, for a small loss really at the moment I think given that we've paid for a few things such as the book cover design, business cards, ISBN numbers. But sales still tick over and we hope the loss will soon become a small profit. Other bothersome things include sorting out tax in America (a cumbersome affair) and the bureaucracy of it all.

The thing is, though, that it's a way of keeping the book alive in case there is a sudden surge of interest. At some point we'll stop if nothing much happens or if sales drop entirely or if we just get fed up. But there could be word of mouth just waiting to speak out or a movie producer's husband just about to give her a copy for Christmas.

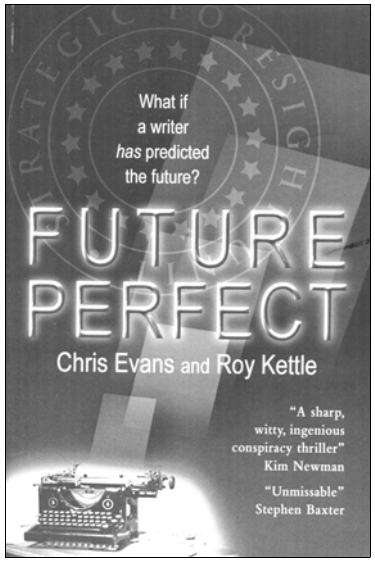
Even if we stop any of the limited promotion we're doing, the CreateSpace trade paperback will continue to be available through Amazon as will the Kindle version. They could be available forever apparently. In the old days, bookshops across the country might have several copies each of, say *The Fungus* but, when they'd been sold, no more would be ordered. (Not unless it was Stephen King's *The Fungus*.) Book sales would start at, say, up to three copies in most bookshops then go down to zero pretty quickly and forever. Now, it's almost the opposite. Book sales start at zero and slowly work up from there for authors like us.

But at least we have a good-looking book out that we're proud of and one which a lot of people have enjoyed. It continues to be a largely enjoyable and interesting experience and one which might have been easier or more difficult, more successful or less, judging from what other self-published authors have said. We've enjoyed the small successes and achievements along the way.

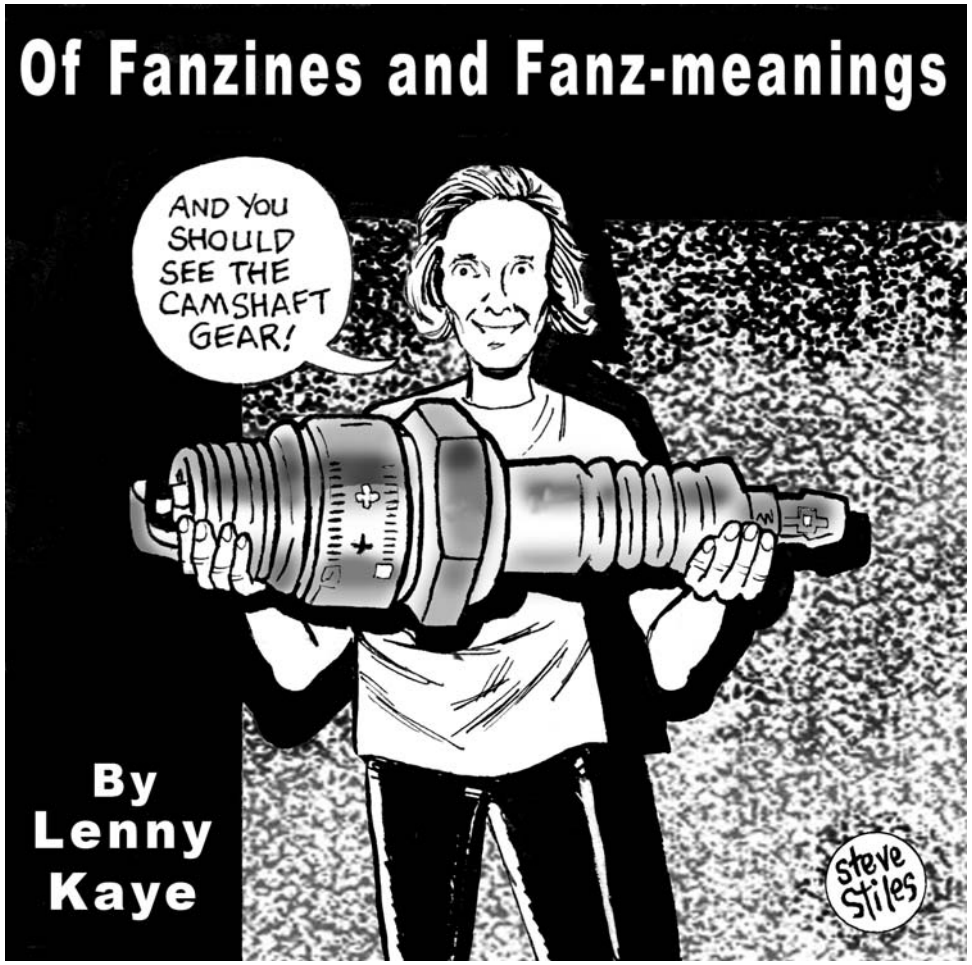
If we did it again, you might think we'd do it differently. But the truth is we'd probably change little, other than some very obvious and easy things. We're who we are and not self-publicists or book publishers.

So it's on to whatever might be our next books and whatever route, if any, through which they might be published. We're not holding our breath over *Future Perfect*'s success. Life goes on.

—Roy Kettle



Of Fanzines and Fanz-meanings



By Lenny Kaye

It's like seeing your life flash in front of your eyes, only for me – even at a remove of three thousand miles, due to my daughter's wedding on the other coast – it condenses a moment of liquid time. My faanish life, as it were, when the galactic universe revolved around an enveloping subculture that nurtured and manifested my creative leanings, who I would become and the becoming, the when and the why.

The occasion is the New York Art Book Fair; the display courtesy of Johan Kugelberg's Boo-Hooray Gallery in lower Manhattan, which specializes in pop culture outcroppings on the razor's edge of mainstream media, a curatorial mission that has taken him into the shadowy realms of alternative realities. At his Canal Street emporium, I've witnessed exhibitions of Ed Sanders' early underground 'zines – actual editions of the mythical *Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts*, where beatnik bohemia met the emerging hippy evolution head-on; hip-hop arcana; and most appreciatively, a tribute to Paul Williams and his founding of rock music fandom with *Crawdaddy!*, a forum for rock "critics" (though I've always shied away from that term, preferring the more neutral "writer") that began speaking of "and roll"-based popular music in a way that unraveled the music's inner consciousness and art. That the tribute happened in the latter moments of Paul's life on this mortal coil, when I believe he sensed a psychic salute and a lit candle of his accomplishments as he moved to the next level of being, provided a magical send-off for those whose lives he touched.

My fanzine years coincided with my early adolescence in the early 1960s, blooming sometime after my bar mitzvah in Brooklyn and subsequent move to the suburbs of central New Jersey. Leaving New York City was a strange cultural anomie for me, and my social awkwardness found refuge in science fiction, as it did for many misfits whose imaginations took root in the interstellar and the phantasmagoric. I spent virtually all of my high school years involved in the contretemps of fandom, attending conventions (the Phillycon of 1962 a high point), traveling to Newark for ESFA meetings (where, on one wondrous occasion, Sam Moskowitz discussed his favorite year and magazine, the 1934 *Astounding*, in such detail, that I was dazzled by his erudition, beyond any of the quasi-political controversies I would soon learn he participated in during that time), publishing three issues of my own genzine *Obelisk*, learning to operate a mimeograph and engage in obscure faanish banter. My youth makes much of what I wrote then somewhat gosh-wow cringe-inducing in retrospect, but I learned quickly to put sentences together and hone my typing skills and find a medium which pointed me toward the counter-culture that I would soon embrace. Freak freely! And so I did. And more amazingly, still do. (Perhaps a shout-out is due here to Pascal Thomas, who in last issue's *Trap Door* described what it was like to be on the receiving end of a Patti Smith show in the wilds of Nimes. And yes, we had a great time at that one, so thanks for being there!).

Inevitably, given my own concurrent obsessive interest in music and the timely arrival of the Beatles on these shores in February 1964, shortly after I had learned my first chords on the guitar, I transferred allegiance to another fandom, one that would soon result in a succession of what are now known as garage bands and be documented in the audio fanzine (may I call it that??) called *Nuggets: Original Artyfacts of the First Psychedelic Era*. Caught up in the turmoil of the 1960s, my fanac dropped off considerably, to the endpoint where the only sf fandom I was experiencing by the end of the decade was visiting Dick and Pat Lupoff in their upstate home in New York to take LSD (yes, a tale hangs in the balance there) and thus astrally commune with Steve Stiles, and thence visit them when they later moved to Berkeley. I psychedelically painted a portion of the outside wall of their house, leaving

it unfinished, symbolic of the remainder of my scientifictional career.

I always kept the fanzines from that time, however, being an inveterate collector (remind me to show you my spark plug collection from my days in vintage motorcycle fandom), moving them from one side of the basement to another and hardly looking inside their weighty boxes for years – okay, decades – at a time, though always respecting what they represented to me. And so it might have continued, the occasional dip into an old *Yandro* and marveling at the prices in *The Fantasy Collector*, until the fall of 2010, when a laundry hose broke and I returned home to find nearly a foot of water in my underground cavern. Luckily, the boxes with the fanzines were on a higher shelf, but the close call prompted me to think of what could be done with them before further cataclysms might befall their posterity for the future. Enter Johan, who brokers archival collections with college libraries, and after some negotiation, not to mention a day of bong-hit fun sorting through their accumulated sense of wonders, amazed at the names and addresses and outsized personalities that came readily to mind, the University of Miami took upon itself the task to preserve and protect. And so – at least until global warming raises tidal-plain sea levels (which prognostications foresee should happen within the next five years or so – as prophesized by J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World*), they are in a safe place for future scholars. Third Foundation, anyone?

I've said a good portion of this, and in greater detail, in the introduction to the catalogue Johan has put together of my collection's greatest hits, or at least their most fascinating covers (Boo-Hooray Gallery is at 265 Canal Street, 6th floor, New York City 10013). The only thing lacking in the reso-graphed volume – and I regret not thinking of this before it went to press – were reproductions of my own *Obelisk*ian contributions, from Dave Prosser's beautiful ankh-laden cat for my first issue, to D. Bruce Berry's rampaging Pharoah on the last. But I must say that though I couldn't be at the exhibition to receive all due egoboo, the

photographs I was sent of my displayed collection en masse impressed me in their sum-of-the-parts, a commemoration of the fannish spirit that awakens in me even now, surprisingly enough, a time-loop desire to start collecting them again. And again. My way of life in a godblessed hobby.

—Lenny Kaye

*So I do poetry slams and spoken word on the local circuit—and this is a Farm piece that audiences seem to love—somehow they understand the whole thing without knowing much of the back-story. And yes, I take a few liberties (all of this didn't happen on exactly the same day but it all did happen, more or less)—the *boy* is definitely a combination of several teens. I speak it at a fast pace.*

The boy and I have plans to siphon gas
from the Petty Cash Lady's Valiant
because we desperately need a run to Dunn's Store
home of big Dr. Peppers and nacho-cheese Doritos,
which sort of makes this a double crime against Farm humanity
for we're really not supposed to eat cheese,
and, of course, at a level we're stealing
from the Petty Cash Lady, but hey – we do hold all things
in common here, so the way we see it we're making
a spiritual statement – plus…at a level…she kind of deserves
this taxation on her gas tank because she drug her muffler

off again by not staying up on top of the frozen-mud ruts
out on 3rd and a half,
no, she wallowed down in them,
so now we have to braze the thing back together again,
what might even make it a safety issue, removing excess gas
from the tank before we crank up the torches . . .
so it's all justified, and actually it's the boy
who's going to be sucking on the plastic hose,
John, a fourteen-year old from Akron,
pretty much dumped here last month
by his mother, a smack-loving lap-dancer
who heard how judges sometimes send us troubled youth,
never mind she's the one who's troubled, not John,
she left him at the Gate with slurred assurances
she'd be back for him, but we all strongly
suspect otherwise, and now since the day he offered to be
my apprentice in the Motor Pool (after I helped him fix up
an old bike), we've been pretty much partners because, sure,
I need a helper what with being so maxed out
keeping the midwife trucks and jeeps running
(fifteen birthings this month), and last I heard
that Swedish woman down in the meadow is six centimeters,
at least she was this morning when I delivered
extra sets of examining gloves, what dropped the gas gauge
on the old service truck down close to E,
what I know won't get us to Dunn's store and back,
but before we can even get the siphoning started
the medical channel radio is breaking with my number –
another midwife call for gloves so I tell the boy
we'll definitely do the soda run when I get back,
but of course two women with laundry bags and diaper pails
on a red wagon immediately flag me down for a ride,
one of them carefully placing a baby food jar on the dash,
a jar that only contains a small glob of brownish-yellow goo,
what I so know
is a shit-sample heading down to the lab, and I say,
Please – could you put that giardia-laden fecal matter
in the bed of the truck…
because I also so know
which house these women live in, how hepatitis has
a hold on the place due to their outhouses
having unmended screen rips all summer allowing
the old flies-to-shit-to-mouth thing,
and the owner of the bottle says, "But it's Josiah's!"
and I say, I don't care whose shit it is –
…but I have to careful with my vibes because leaning
on a lady can get you in some serious shit, er, trouble,
and maybe I should mention right here how everyone
smells like wood smoke with an overlay of sour compost
combined with a hint of Dr. Bronner's, but just a hint…
so when I run into the clinic to pick up the examining gloves,
there's Doreen saying I'm supposed to give her a ride
to the birthing which is okay with me because
even though on one level Doreen is one of my spiritual sisters,
on another level I cannot deny that she is incredibly hot
in a kind of surfer-girl way, Doreen saying that the midwives
need her to be the Swedish woman's make-out partner
because the midwives know that some nipple-twists and
deep tongue action can restart a stalled cervix dilation,
what's usually the job of the husband or old man,
but with so many single women coming to have their baby,
they sometimes call on Doreen because she's, um,
obviously pleasant to kiss and rub on, man or woman,
so when we get to the birthing tent I hand over the gloves,
and Doreen hops on the bed and gets right to it making out
with Helga or Signe or whatever her name is,
the three midwives now like sports fans at a game
hollering, "Yay, go, Doreen! Good stuff! Kiss her back, Helga!
Okay, now Doreen rub the other tit, get her moaning. Yes!
Keep it up! Is there any food around? Wow, fudge,
where'd you get the sugar? More tongue!"
And me, I'm dismissed, forgotten, backing up to the tent flap
which is when I notice that no one is paying me any attention
so I just kind of stand there and watch it all go down
for a bit before the fear of getting caught overcomes
the enjoyment of getting a little hard, so, reluctantly…
just as the Swedish woman is going "Yah! Yah!! Yaaahhh!!"
I force myself out through the mud room, get in my truck
and head back up the hill to the Motor Pool
where the boy is, of course, waiting,
still intent on the soda run, which, hey, I want too,
but now the rusted-out F-100 service truck is way, way low on gas
…which brings us back to the Petty Cash Lady's Valiant –
easy pickings, or should I say, easy suckings,
the trick with siphoning being to not be too timid with
the first two sucks on the hose because that's what gets
the gas over the top, to that place where physics takes over,
but the boy gets a little too happy with the thought
of a Dr. Pepper coming his way,
and he gags on a big mouthful of regular,
what makes me laugh but not him – and then on the way
to Dunn's store, the boy's gasoline burps
are filling the cab of the truck so much they're worse
than the shit-sample was, and I have to roll down the window
in the late afternoon forty degrees,
and, when we get to Dunn's store
with the stuffed bobcat in the window it's filled
with the usual backwoods suspects,
coon-hunters, tire-changers and the like
the idea, as always, being to just

get your hippie ass in the store, buy some sodas and get out,
but today Ross Dunn is a bit tight and wants to talk.
"Heard there's a bunch of Jews down at y'all's camp."
And I say, "Yup. Buncha Jews. No doubt about it. Two Dr. Peppers please,"
me even buying the boy some saltines
to go with the nacho-cheese Doritos so maybe they can
sponge up some of the gas he swallowed because I have a few dollars
left over from the parts run yesterday, a few dollars
I did not turn back in to the Petty Cash Lady,
Ross Dunn smiling and saying "97 dollars or 97 cents,
whichever you want."
And on the way back,
the carbonated Dr. Pepper is making the boy's gas burps
worse than ever, which is when he pulls out this bomber joint
that I know he scammed somewhere, and I'm going,
"John, no! – if you light that, you'll probably blow us both up,
anyway – you know the rules – we're not supposed
to get high with the teen-agers."
him responding as always,
"What the fuck. I do a grown-up's work, don't I?"
And I have to say, "Well… Yes."
And he says, "So I get to use sacrament like the rest of you,"
And this kind of makes me shut up
because (a) he used our spiritual word for dope,
and (b) he does have a point,
but mostly I just want some myself,
because it's been a bit dry lately…
so, okay…we do up the bomber spliff
together on the ride back to
the land, us laughing about road ruts, mufflers,
soybean farts and the strict adults who we both
make fun of sometimes, me being totally two-faced of course,
until there's a little lull just after we turn onto Drake Lane
which is when I just up and tell John
that his mother is probably not coming back to get him,
news I had overheard the day before at a Gate meeting,
how she had called, crying, blubbering with excuses,
and I'm thinking it's really not right for everybody
else to be knowing something like that while
keeping it from him…and what he does when I tell him is this:
he just kind of keeps staring out the window
at the succession of our neighbors' frost-burned fields,
their leaning, fake-brick tar-paper houses surrounded
by pyramids of firewood near
the requisite junk cars up on blocks,
and as he keeps his face turned away from me,
in a voice I can barely hear, he says,
"Yeah…I knew that already…I knew that."

—Rupert Fike

THE COMPLETE TOOMEY EXPERIENCE

A MEMOIR FROM THE 1970s

GREG BENFORD

I met Bob Toomey in Sid Coleman's apartment, near the Harvard campus in the early 1970s. This reminiscence remains riveted in my mind, for reasons soon to emerge. I liked Bob on sight; he's just odd enough to be interesting. So very many of us are. He had a girl friend with him (comely, friendly, scent of maryjane; later his wife) and we spent a pleasant afternoon touring the bookshops and cloistered lanes of Cambridge, Massachusetts, isle of refinement. Compared with California, it is soft, rounded, damp, steeped in history. It's like England, though without the culture.

Bob is a character various in his pursuits: artist, writer, computer specialist, even a private detective for a while. Various, indeed. An sf and fanzine fan, he had met Sid long ago in the ancient era of great fanzines and much mirth. Sid cared about sf and had even written reviews for *F&SF* and founded Advent Press. It was an engaging hobby alongside his immense reputation as a theoretical physicist, known for dissecting pretentious theories with a penetrating, scalpel wit.

In one of these shops I saw a new Elwood-edited anthology containing a Ted White story. One of the lead characters, I found, was Dr. Gregory Benford. Did this make it not sf, but faaaan fiction? Spa fon! This somewhat unsettled me, though it's happened several times since at the hands of Allen Steele and Steve Baxter – but this unsettling was only openers.

We left Sid at Harvard, where he had to orally examine a student (well, that 's what he said, with a sly grin). Soon enough, time for my departure airportwards arrived, and I looked about for a cab.

"Oh no," Bob Toomey said. "I'll drive you."

"Well, I don't want to trouble you, it's out of your way, etc. etc." I tugged at my tie. I had been giving a seminar at Harvard and felt a Californian discomfort at being confined, throttled. Time to get out of the claustrophobic East. The air now seemed moistly cloying.

"No no! – we're going out of Cambridge that way. We'll take you."

It was one hour until my plane took off for

Philadelphia. (This will remind you nostalgically of how the world was when people dressed well to fly, did not face endless security screenings, and so could show up half an hour before departure. A loooong time ago.)

We were near Toomey's car, a huge chromed Detroit product of uncertain age. I shrugged and got in. The deceptively warm autumnal sunshine had lulled me.

Perhaps some of you recall the subway entrance at Harvard Square. It sits on a traffic island, accompanied by a small newspaper kiosk and a loyal gallery of drug dealers. In the lumbering Detroit iron we approached this island in the crawl of traffic when Bob, in a moment akin to John the Baptist's revelation in a bleak desert, decided we were going the wrong way. With masterly control he swung into the left lane, next to the island. "I'm going to turn around," he said.

"It's illegal," his girl said, alarmed.

"I wouldn't do that," I said from the back seat.

"I'm going to," he said. "Gotta."

"I wouldn't – " I said, but too late.

Toomey turned…over the curb…*across the island*…with the élan of a natural.

We cleared the first curb fine, and enjoyed a few pleasant microseconds of smooth ride across the concrete – drug dealers scattering like bowling pins – and the blurred face of the kiosk owner appeared briefly at my window, jaw agape.

Alas, all paradises fade. Without pause for a gasp, we then went over the second curb into the oncoming lane of traffic.

East coast traffic, I reminded myself. Nothing very fast, probably nothing fatal. Blaring horns, that's all.

Something scraped coming off the curb. A screech like the howling talons of Satan, say, when that angel was sliding down the granite resolve of God's rocky face, down into hell. Something like that.

"Damn, the muffler," Bob said.

I mourned the muffler but was distracted by a bus coming at us broadside.

"I think we lost the muffler," he said. "Damn."

"Bus!" I said.

"Oh…" A pause that ran on like a 1940s sf magazine serial. "…Yeah."

Screech of bus brakes, wide-eyed passengers, an infinity of reflecting on one's mortality – wrenching of wheel by good ol' Bob Toomey.

And much like another of God's miracles, we were into another, relatively clear, lane of traffic. Eden. Have an apple.

No buses in this paradise, anyway. I noticed a knot of onlookers, all smiling, one clapping. Like an Olympic event in slowmo.

We sped away. Two blocks further the muffler scrape became unbearable, like a heavy metal garage band on steroids. Nagging, nagging. We were dragging the muffler. Sparks flew from it; I could see them in their orange roadway fireworks, leaning out my window. Toomey sighed. We stopped.

"I'll have to crawl under and repair it," Bob said.

"Uh, really?"

His steely eyes were sure. "Stand and direct traffic away, so's they don't run over my legs."

I did so. This was the mysterious East, local flavor abounding.

About ten minutes passed. Toomey emerged, hands wrapped in cloth to keep away the hot muffler. "Can't get it."

"Uh, I would be happy to take a cab – "

"No, no, I'll be just a minute." He crawled under again. Grunts, swearing, smell of roasted cloth.

And emerged victorious! Some muffled wrenches, of course, screeching metal, acid-hot stench – and the job was done.

Hands fluttering like birds, the world speeding up now, Toomey is back behind the wheel and we are off, off, off into traffic.

I wondered why the tense kept changing in my mind. Adrenaline is a wonderful drug.

Nothing happened for three or four whole minutes. Warm moist luxury. Then we lost our way, stopped to ask an Italian gentleman – and were treated to a five-minute lecture on avoiding traffic patterns at rush hour, hand and arm gestures free of charge. We eventually located the general direction of the Mass Pike and were off again.

We came to an intersection carrying heavy commuter traffic, all bound for Mass Pike. Toomey 1eaned out the window and asked a nearby driver for advice – and the man points off along one road.

"That's not the way the Italian said," I volunteer.

"Hang on," Bob says. We followed the road. "Doesn't look right," his girl friend said emphatically. I noticed that she was smoking a joint. Fragrant, mellow. I joined in. After all, it might well be my last.

"Let's stop for directions," Bob decided, wrenching to a stop. I volunteered and got out and approached a gas station attendant. He gestured in the opposite direction, the Italian's direction. We turned around, slid into oncoming traffic and got in the mix. Brick buildings flashed by, open air groceries appeared and dissolved like metaphors; it is getting very Eastern metaphysical, and I have jumped tense again.

Languidly I drew in the aromas of soft air from passing restaurants, laced with frying greasy sausages and burning acrid rubber. A lot of time had passed by, a whole lifetime in Einsteinian terms – I thought of Sid's "oral exam" longingly – but now I am relativistically relaxed. 1 know we are not going to make it in time. Now the game is simply to see how close we can come without catching the plane. Think of it as existentialism in action.

Events telescope, as though we are in an experimental story from *New Worlds* (it was that long ago; no *Interzone* quite yet). Involuntarily conscripted into a Moorcock multiverse, of course. The world slips into, inevitably, the present tense – the way we actually live it.

We find the Mass Pike, a yawning concrete ribbon. A torrent of cars comes rushing on the on-ramp and we follow. Suddenly the muffler breaks loose and begins to bang around under the car, a demented hammering like a really bad rock band you never heard of. Traffic brackets us, all moving at…forty miles per hour.

Toomey stops. He backs up. Instead of rear-ending us, a large truck swerves to the side, blaring, and vanishes into the thickening gloom of the Boston night, coming on with sudden relativistic murk. Toomey backs up…backs up…backs up…until we reach a dead spot to the side, a calm blithe nook away from the mad, rushing tinny lanes.

We get out and find the muffler split, hot, fragrant, beyond repair. Toomey sees nothing for it, and neither do I. We wrench the muffler out, struggle with the joint connections, and snap it off. With one unperturbed gesture, the classic nonchalance of the elite, Toomey throws it in the back seat. On my suitcase, but never mind.

We get back in. The engine thrums. Destiny is on our side, maybe. The muffler reeks of tortured oily excess next to me. I had chosen to get into the back seat, since there is a small chance that, there in the slick plastic seating, I could survive this. Statistics said so.

The flat hard muffler blare is really bad now, roaring like a wounded Moskowitz from the fabled fan days of yore. But we are on the Mass Pike now, zoom zoom, we pass through a toll booth and suddenly there zoom-looms the…*turnoff for the airport*. We rush through the lanes, find the right terminal and…*stop*. Hard.

I thank them profusely, snatch up my bags and trot into the station. There are four minutes until the flight. I check in. Breathing easy now. Heart hammering, but still.

I find out that the plane is ailing. Takeoff will be delayed an hour.

Another example of relativity, I suppose. It ain't easy, y'know, being a theoretical physicist; the metaphors come all too intensely.

I decide to have a drink. An oral exam of the inner self. On the way across the terminal I spot a taxi driver and ask him how far it is to Harvard Square. "Not very far," he says. "You wanna – "

"No. How much time, by cab?"

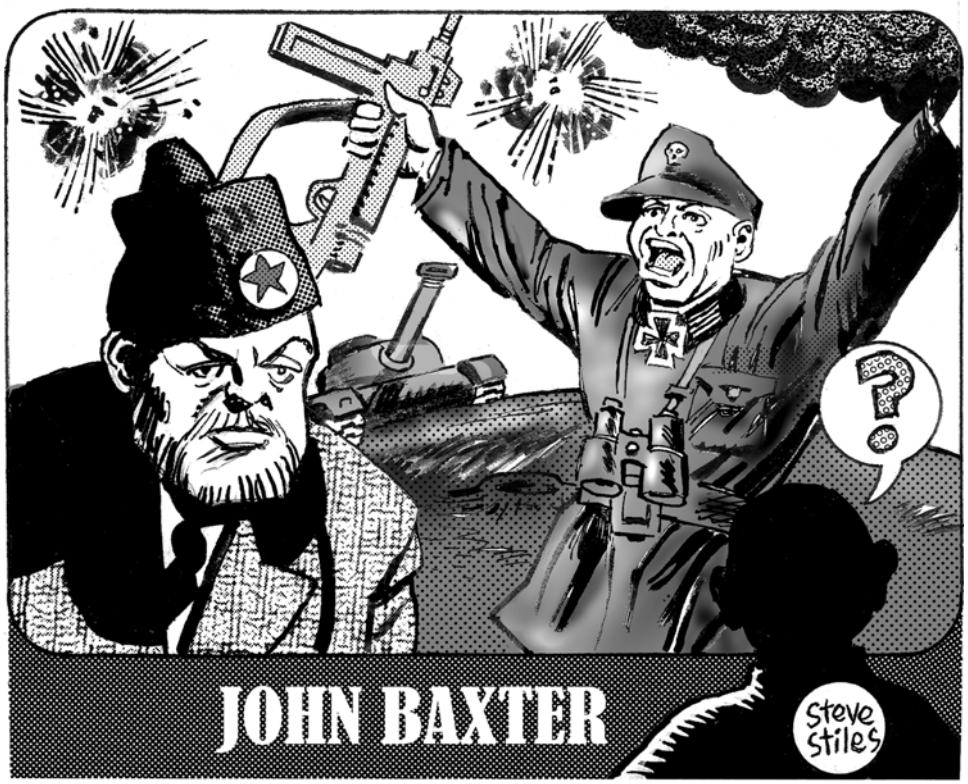
"Oh, well now," he ponders, frowning – "ten minutes, I'd say."

I have two drinks. Doubles.

—Greg Benford

LOVED BEN, HATED HUR:

MOVIE-GOING AT GUNPOINT AND OTHER ADVENTURES OF THE FILM TRADE



The Lido di Venezia, that former sandbank which for centuries has sheltered Venice from the worst surges of the Adriatic, is now so built up with hotels and villas, tennis courts and promenades that its lush plantings and brown stone walls constitutes, like so much else in Venice, a kind of fashion statement: a doormat on the city's front stoop, tinted in the familiar ochre and green of Gucci. Where better, then, to hold the annual Mostra del Cinema, aka the Venice Film Festival?

Epicenter of the event is the Palazzo del Cinema, a slab of Mussolini Modern architecture in grey/white marble that can't help reminding visitors of something the organizers would prefer us to forget—that the world's most venerable film festival was launched by Il Duce for the greater glory of fascism.

Not that politics was on the mind of the small group of film journalists, myself among them, assembled in August 1971 in the bar of the Hotel Excelsior, a little further up the island. Over inky espressos, each a single slurp, a caffeine hit, we were debating how most fittingly to put John Ford, an elite guest of that year's festival, in the ground.

In point of fact, the director of *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Stagecoach* wasn't dead. (He lived until 1973.) But from the glimpses we'd caught of him, hunched in a wheelchair, blind eye obscured by a black patch, he looked unlikely to last the week. To plant him in the style so often celebrated in his films was no more than courteous.

Ken Wlaschin, a lanky Nebraskan who directed Britain's National Film Theatre and the London Film Festival, had already been selected as the only suitable person to stand by the grave, sweep off his Stetson *a la* Duke Wayne, place it over his heart, look to heaven and say, "Sir, we commend to your keeping the soul of John Martin Feeney, known to you and to all here as John Ford." After that, we moved on to debate who could play the harmonica well enough to provide a suitably mournful musical accompaniment, and which would be more appropriate, *Red River Valley* or *Taps*.

Unbeknown to us, all this was premature. Even as we plotted his funeral, Ford was exhibiting unexpected signs of life. Electing to conduct his first interview of the festival from bed, he'd mortified the journalist by throwing off the covers to reveal he wore nothing below the waist. Ambling bare-assed across the room, he then pissed in the sink. Shortly after, news arrived of an incident while he was being transferred to a *vaporetto* water taxi for the trip across the lagoon to the Lido. A festival functionary, fearing rough water, placed something in his lap. Ford rose shakily to his feet and roared in Cyclopean fury, "a naval officer whose last rank in the US Navy was Rear Admiral – and you offer him a *barf bag?!*" Reports of his imminent demise were, it seemed, much exaggerated. But what more could you expect from Venice?

2.

None of what was taking place around me felt entirely real. Six months ago, I'd been holding down a dull job at the government documentary film studio in Sydney. Deciding that my talents deserved something better than composing press releases about films on the diseases of sheep, I wrote on studio stationery to every European film festival, informing them of my imminent arrival on a fact-finding tour.

Some, like Cannes, never responded. Festivals in Ireland and Finland, keen to justify their label "international," invited me to serve on their juries. Others offered room and board for the period of their festival, providing I got there on my own nickel. The most prestigious of these was Venice.

My girlfriend Monica and I took a cabin on one of the refurbished pre-war American liners, now Greek-owned, that ploughed a sedate thirty-day track between Sydney and Southampton. Outgoing, they carried Aussies eager for continental sophistication: incoming, discontented Europeans hungry for sun, sand and a living wage. Had two ships passed in mid-ocean, the passengers of both would undoubtedly have yelled to the other, "Go back! Go back!"

Life on this floating hotel was our introduction to the class system, alien to egalitarian Australia. As cabin-holders, we rated a porthole with a glimpse of ocean. Budget passengers languished below. "With two footballing companions," wrote another passenger on a similar voyage, "I inhabited a phone booth-sized cabinette on Deck Z, many feet below the waterline. One wall was curved. It was part of the propeller shaft housing. If one of us wanted to get dressed, the other two had to go back to bed."

3.

In England, we borrowed a cottage in the depths of the countryside. (Could Agatha Christie have invented a better address than "Fishpond Cottage, Cemetery Lane, East Bergholt, Suffolk"?) With finances dwindling, we discarded all thought of trains and planes. Instead, with a battered VW Beetle and a tent, we hit the road, hoping both would hold out as far as Venice .

Over the next two weeks, we experienced Europe from the underside: camp-sites, not hotels; coffee, beer, bread and cheese rather than *haute cuisine*; and an intimacy with those cafés which, for the price of a cappuccino, let us sponge off the worst of the sweat and grime in their washrooms.

Occasionally we caught a movie. In Australia, a night at "the pictures" was a rite, celebrated in purpose-built Palaces, Odeons and Alhambras. The cities of France, Germany and Italy still had such places, but once you left the bright lights behind, film-going had as much sense of occasion as a trip to the

supermarket. Invariably dubbed into the local language, films might be projected in the church hall or on a white-painted oblong of wall in the cement-floored yard behind a bar. You sat on canvas chairs, and *naturally* you took your glass of beer with you. Frequent breaks, usually in mid-scene, permitted toilet visits, the purchase of ice cream, candy and, of course, more beer.

Cinema here was just another thread in the fabric of daily life – not Cinema as Event but Cinema as Staple. Which did I prefer? Swept along by a Belgian vampire movie already incomprehensible before it was dubbed into Italian, I no longer cared. Lush dark women threw off their clothes and sank their fangs into chill Nordic virgins. In Australia, the mere glimpse of a nipple had the censor reaching for his scissors. Here the locals just nudged one another and took another gulp of Stella Artois.

4.

Before the coming of the Eurozone, a cultural festival, on the scale of civic improvements, rated roughly level with a new sewage farm. Most municipal authorities opted for the festival, since sewage didn't attract tourists – or at least not the sort of tourist they preferred.

All the same, the festival route was fraught with difficulties. Choosing a theme, for instance. As the best were already taken, most opted for novelty. For a while, the village where we spend our summers held a festival for majorettes. While brass bands blared and locals gaped, leggy girls in high boots and short skirts pranced and stamped along the narrow streets, as if Napoleon's *grande armée* had returned, but costumed by Josephine.

An easier option was to celebrate the folklore of their region. This trend brought out the acid in British critic Kenneth Tynan. Inventing an imaginary festival in the Belgian industrial town of Charleroi, he praised its retrospectives of Hollywood hack Jean Yarborough and concerts "drawn from the rich treasury of Walloon liturgical music."

As festivals went, movies were less trouble than opera, dance or pop. No need to put up bleachers or hire lighting and sound equipment. Screenings could take place in the town's cinemas or some picturesque local ruin. Because of this, there were few movie genres so obscure that some town didn't celebrate them. After Trieste (science fiction) and Avoriaz (horror films), there was Trento (mountaineering), Oberhausen (short films) , Annecy (animation) and dozens more devoted to documentaries, crime films…probably movies about dogs, cats and insects, if one was sufficiently diligent to track them down.

5.

Arriving outside Venice, Monica and I shook the wrinkles from our best clothes and took the car ferry to the Lido. We didn't fool the suave functionaries in the festival office, but they were tolerant, barely smirking as they handed over the vouchers that gave us two weeks' board and lodging.

The elite stayed in hotels. We were allocated a *pensione.* It turned out to be the run-down mansion of a languid ex-actress, forced to rent out the bedrooms where, she hinted broadly, stars of stage, screen and radio had once vied for her body.

About fifty feet from the bottom of her garden was one of the open-air cinemas to which we'd become accustomed. It shouldn't trouble us, she said casually, closing the shutters. Screenings seldom went later than one in the morning. Fortunately the sound system was too feeble to register in our room as more than a mumble, but this just made the looming images that much more omnipresent. Posses of riders, ominously silent, stampeded through our dreams, and giant lovers – the phantoms of our landlady's suitors? – murmured inaudible endearments.

Getting in with the press crowd proved easier than expected. Screenwriter John Gregory Dunne summarized film industry chat as "all context, shared references, and coded knowledge of the private idiosyncrasies of very public people." Newbies were only welcome if they could hold up their end of the conversation. Fortunately, I'd used my time in England to catch up on the latest scandals. Better still, I could sweeten the pot with stories of bad behavior by Hollywood personalities visiting Australia, news of which, they were convinced, would never get back to the real world. After I'd described Johnnie Ray, now-forgotten singer of the lachrymose hit "Cry," roaming the corridors of his hotel in the small hours, high on cocaine and dressed like Mrs. Bates in *Psycho*, my membership was assured.

6.

Most of the group was too movie-obsessed for Monica, but she found a kindred soul in John Coleman, long-time film critic of the left-wing weekly *New Statesman*.

"I think I reviewed one of your books," he said when we first met.

"You did," I replied. 'You said 'Baxter's book rides on surf of clichés.' "

"Did I really?" he said. "Let me top up your glass."

We sat in the gardens around the casino, watching cigarette smoke rising into the soft evening air, and listening to his stories of how, as a young man, he'd lived in Paris, supporting himself by writing *The Itch* and *The Enormous Bed* for Maurice Girodias's pornographic Olympic Press. I remembered James Thurber's description of working on the Riviera edition of the *Chicago Tribune* during 1925/6: "Nice, in that indolent winter was full of knaves and rascals, adventurers and imposters, *pochards* and *indiscrets*, whose ingenious exploits, sometimes in full masquerade costume, sometimes in the nude, were easy and pleasant to report."

John never met malt he didn't like. Scotch was his downfall – literally. One night, we arrived at the casino to see him poised unsteadily at the top of its wide stone steps. Slowly, majestically, he toppled, rolling down the first flight to come to rest on the landing, dusty, but, with the luck of the very drunk, unhurt.

Though a few writers among the press crew had regular jobs, most worked where they could. Some of the Londoners manned the old pull-and-plug telephone exchanges that handled overnight UK-US traffic ("Long distance information? Give me Memphis, Tennessee"). This allowed them to quit work at 8 a.m., catch a 10 a.m. preview, scarf up some free snacks, find a matinee to doze through the afternoon, then attend a 6 p.m. magazine screening before heading back to work.

A few were more enterprising. One confessed over his fourth gin and tonic that he was the voice of Britain's talking clock ("The time when you hear the chimes will be ten forty seven and thirty seconds"). In return for a promise not to use his voice to promote sodas or soap, the Post Office paid him a generous retainer. Another, with the usual dreams of living in Los Angeles, decided to do something about it. Scanning a list of understaffed professions viewed favorably by the US Immigration Service, he chose "Mortician," took a course in cadavers, won his diploma, and caught the next boat, never to return.

These men at least wrote about the films they saw. Not everyone bothered. Some claimed to represent obscure quarterlies nobody ever read. Other publications no longer existed except as sheets of headed notepaper on which they faked their letters of accreditation. I didn't feel inclined to condemn them, since a variation of this ploy had got me to Europe in the first place.

The London Film Critics' Review was the scam sheet *par excellence.* A single page produced once a year by a man I'll call Simon Sponge, it contained nothing but his thumbnail summaries of movies released since the last issue. Most companies, wise to his fraud, banned Sponge from their previews. Refused entry to one screening, he skulked off. A few minutes later, cries of panic were heard from the men's room. He'd got stuck trying to climb in through a window.

He had his moment of glory, however. When the Marcos administration in the Philippines, hoping to launder its dismal image, announced the Manila Film Festival in 1975, the aristocracy of the movie press was flown there and accommodated in

luxury. To the horror of all, Sponge got included. After that, neither he nor his sorry sheet was heard of again. Some surmised London's senior critics clubbed together to take out a contract on his life.

7.

Each castle and chateau on the road to Venice reminded me of how much European history I'd learned from Hollywood.

Period epics used to came along once in a decade: D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance*, the silent *Ben–Hur*, or *Gone With the Wind*. Like comets, they heralded their arrival well in advance, and left a trail that didn't settle for years.

But all that changed in 1951, when MGM made *Quo Vadis?* with American stars but Roman extras and locations – the first "runaway" production. Shortly after, Twentieth Century-Fox announced its first feature in glorious Technicolor, breathtaking CinemaScope and stereophonic sound – another Biblical epic, to be shot partly in Rome, called *The Robe*. After that, Romans would always look to me like Robert Taylor or Victor Mature, and every emperor a clone of Charles Laughton or Frank Thring.

Europe answered the Hollywood epic-maker's prayer. Studio space there was cheap, real estate cheaper, and performers cheapest of all. Entire armies could be hired for the price of feeding them. No need even to build sets; the ancient world lay around in ruins, theirs for the asking.

We watched the epic flower with David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* and Bondarchuk's *War and Peace*, only to decline into *Ben Hur* and *Cleopatra*. Now, hardly a decade later, almost no sign remained. In England, Shepperton, Pinewood and Elstree had gone over to science fiction, providing locations for *Star Wars* and Kubrick's *2001*. Samuel Bronston's studios outside Madrid were bankrupt. At Cinecittà in Rome, the sound stages now housed game shows and TV commercials. Throughout the seventies, a symbol of the epic's decline stood just over the border between Italy and Yugoslavia. A dilapidated fort of logs built for the 1965 Omar Sharif vehicle *Genghis Khan*, it had become just another roadside attraction.

Even then, I couldn't know that I was destined to watch the final moment of its decline, the last gasp of the movie epic – at gun point.

8.

Venice's closing film that year was Dennis Hopper's much-hyped *The Last Movie*. Unlike lean, mean *Easy Rider*, this incoherent two-hour fable about the impact on a Peruvian village of a Hollywood film crew left the audience either numbed or furious. Its Critics' Prize was widely regarded as a fix, since nobody would admit having voted for it. Hopper, addled by cocaine and Southern Comfort, didn't direct another film for ten years.

The day after the festival, as the camp followers packed their bags and thought about heading back home, I sat with another old stager, Canadian Broadcasting's Gerald Pratley, while he articulated his failing enthusiasm for movies.

Tall, courtly and conservative, usually dressed in a linen jacket and a bow tie, Gerald knew everyone, and was generous with introductions in a way I'd never experienced. Buttonholing some famous face, he'd tell them, "Now you *must* meet my friends John and Monica. *Quite* the most interesting people here this year." In talent-starved Australia, acquaintance with a celebrity was jealously guarded, and introductions doled out only for favors promised in return. Against memories of that parsimony, Gerald's generosity stood out even more.

Venice was the last big festival of the continental circuit. Toronto, New York, Buenos Aires and Sydney had festivals too, but few buffs had the money to attend those. For the truly screen-begotten, however, seeking one last *grand bouffe* of celluloid before a retreat into hibernation, there was Pula in Croatia.

Almost opposite Venice on the other side of the Adriatic, it hosted an annual festival that showed every film produced that year in the regions testily allied as Yugoslavia. Gerald usually attended. However, the experience of *The Last Movie*, bloated, self-important but, above all, dull, had killed all desire for more films.

"Yugoslavian cinema," he sighed. On his lips, the words sounded like a disease.

"They have some good people though," I said.

In fact I only knew one, a libidinous Serb director named Dusan Makavajev. An enthusiast for sex therapist Wilhelm Reich, his lip-licking relish in describing his rejuvenation in one of Reich's orgone boxes hinted at rich, untapped reservoirs of Balkan sensuality.

Gerald perked up. "Would you like to go instead?"

"To Pula? How could I do that? What about CBC?"

"Oh, they won't mind. But we should get you accredited." He looked around. "We need a florist."

An hour later, cradling a dozen roses, he led me through a muddle of offices behind the Palazzo. In one of them, a lady in a little black dress and pearls beamed to see him, and even more when he presented the roses. Madame Jankovic, it transpired, dealt with relations between the festival and the Yugoslavian government. Gerald introduced me as "my protégé." Within minutes, I was not only accredited to the Pula Festival but invited to spend a week in Belgrade afterwards at government expense, catching up on the movies shown the previous year. And all for a bunch of roses. Obviously there were more types of flower power than were recognized on Haight-Ashbury.

9.

Hospitality at Venice had been generous, but that in Pula was on a different scale. No hair-splitting about full board vs *demi-pension*. The press was accommodated gratis in a tourist hotel on the ocean, fed three times a day, and entertained at a series of well-lubricated receptions which customarily commenced with dozens of maidens in peasant dress and festooned with flowers, dancing out with wine-filled jugs that never needed replenishing. We were also, for "expenses," given handfuls of *dinars*, worthless outside Yugoslavia but accepted without question in local restaurants and bars.

Each morning, the day's feature film previewed at a downtown cinema. Each night, the same film was shown to the public outdoors in an amphitheater built by the Romans in the first century AD. Usually we shunned these nocturnal screenings. Squirming on ass-numbing garden benches, strafed by mosquitoes, we foreigners struggled to follow the plot from toneless translations radioed from caravans parked against the back wall. We received these on handsets, the antenna of which had to be pointed at exactly the right angle if one was to hear the dialogue in English and not Finno-Ugric.

We made an exception, however, for the closing night film. A three-hour saga called *Bitka Na Neretvi* or *Battle of the River Naretva*, it celebrated the wartime exploits of former partisan leader and now president, Josip Broz, aka Marshal Tito. Not only would the film's producer Carlo Ponti attend, accompanied by his wife Sophia Loren, but Tito himself promised a rare visit to the mainland from his private island of Brioni.

As we found our seats, none of us expected to stay long. One look at the Strong Man of the Balkans and we planned to be off to spend the last of our free *dinars*. But from the start, nothing went right. First, our handsets were dead. Craning over the heads of the packed audience, we saw no translators' caravans. A large dais occupied their space, flanked by glowering security men. Well, we weren't staying anyway, so did it matter whether we heard the dialogue or not?

As darkness fell, the chuf-chuf of a helicopter overhead heralded the arrival of the official party, a mere half hour late. In front came a strutting and surprisingly short Tito, resplendent in a white uniform trimmed in gold. The roly-poly Ponti followed, a regal Sophia on his arm, diamonds glinting in the photoflashes. As the audience stood and applauded, we started inching our way to freedom.

I was the first to arrive at the end of the

row – and found the way barred by a young soldier with a well-rubbed and slightly battered but no doubt serviceable machine gun. I tried to push past. He shoved me back. I waved my press pass. He was indifferent. None of us knew Croatian and he spoke no English. But we got the message. Nobody, it seems, walked out on the Marshal's movie. So, with much grumbling, we settled down to watch *Bitka Na Neretvi*.

From the start, the film oozed that sense of labored compromise which characterizes those films that try to satisfy everyone.

I could sympathize with the screenwriters. Wartime Balkan politics were chaotic, with a score of groups jostling for power – the Serb separatist Ustachi, the Royalist Fascist Chetniks, Tito's Communists, not to mention the Germans and Italians, some of whom, like Franco Nero's tank commander in the film, confused things still more by switching sides. One could imagine the problems faced by the four screenwriters. Josef von Sternberg, who'd made a stab at epics himself as director of *The Scarlet Empress* and Robert Graves's *I, Claudius*, once said of a screenplay "Not only did everyone have his finger in the pie. A number immersed various parts of their anatomy in it."

Nor had these rivalries expired with the end of the war. The hisses and shouted insults that greeted the Chetnik and Ustachi characters dramatized what events of thirty years later would confirm; that the supposedly united Yugoslavia was nothing more than a loose confederation of warring states, held tenuously together by Soviet money and Tito. Once he died, carnage was waiting in the wings.

The Soviet Union came up with most of the money for *Neretva*, but it was produced and partly written in Rome. The cast came from the foreign legion of all-purpose performers who hung around Rome, ready to slip at a moment's notice into any costume from Roman toga to Wehrmacht grey. James Mason, cast as a Chinese in *Genghis Khan*, once confided, "My boy, it's the sort of part one takes to pay the alimony."

Scores of these hired guns could have played the characters in this film, but fate decreed Americans Orson Welles and Yul Brynner, Russian Sergei Bondarchuk, Germans Curd Jurgens and Hardy Kruger, and Italian Franco Nero. Jurgens and Kruger played stock Nazi officers. Welles, fitted with a dismal toupee and a tent-like double-breasted blue serge suit, impersonated a Chetnik senator shot for his pains, to cheers from sections of the audience. Bondarchuk, a sop to the Russians (and who, as director of the majestic *Waterloo* and *War and Peace*, could, like Welles, have managed this farrago with the skill and authority lacking in the committee of Croats in charge), was cast as a loud-mouthed partisan. The only performer of undiluted British stock, Scots actor Anthony Dawson, naturally played an Italian.

We sat it out: what choice did we have? Even without understanding the dialogue, one could follow the plot. The Nazis, Italians, Ustachi and Chetniks ganged up on Tito's Communist partisans, who managed to escape. By far the most convincing performance was given by the tanks, of which where was an enormous number.

Watching this avalanche of clichés, we all knew that such films were dinosaurs. While the epic wasn't finished as a genre – CGI would revivify the interplanetary variety – the history film was, appropriately, history. *Star Wars*, *The Matrix*, *The Lord of the Rings* might flourish, but for the likes of *Bitka na Naretvi*, the scrap-heap beckoned. Only very occasionally would one be made, and then only by someone with sufficiently deep pockets to ignore the realities of the market. Even then, part of the audience, as in our case, would only watch it at gunpoint.

10.

A few months later, back in London, a film editor friend phoned.

"You see all this European crap," he began. "Ever hear of something called…" He consulted his notes. "……*Battle of the River Ner…Nev…*"

[continued after Steve Stiles' article]

They called it Black Friday and it sucked. In mid-October 1995 the entire comic book industry crashed and burned, not unlike the Wall Street Crash of '29, taking with it my career and hopes and dreams of becoming the next Jack Kirby or John Byrne in the world of funny books and paneled narrative.

Who am I kidding? I was fifty-two years old way back then and had little aptitude or interest in drawing superhero comics, a form of story telling that involved lots and lots of endless bashing and smashing. True, that *is* fun (especially if you're a teenage fanboy), but there's so much of it that I can go with before my eyes start to glaze over. Luckily, I was able to make a living doing the kind of stories I did enjoy: humor, science fiction, and horror, categories that made up a *very* small part of the comics field of the nineties. When that industry crashed and burned, the only survivors left standing were the caped crusader types dripping testosterone in all their overly muscular glory.

So there I was: after some twenty years as a freelance cartoonist, I suddenly had to confront the prospect of returning to a (gulp!) "normal" living, maybe even to working in a cubicle! It was then that I discovered that accursed computer software programs had replaced all the commercial art skills that I picked up and honed in my dozen years in advertising, and there I was, middle-aged and unemployed with no computer and absolutely no marketable job skills.

Not only was I up the river without a paddle, but where the hell was the bloody *boat*?! ***D-OH!***

For the next seven years I moved from one temp job to the next. Some were okay, some were fun, a few were nasty. Most paid poorly but they did help to keep us afloat. A lot of those jobs were in warehouses, which helped whip my chair bound middle-aged body back into pretty good shape. (The refrigerated warehouse was the most nasty job; I quit when I noticed my fingertips were turning blue.)

My last two warehouse gigs were working for Random House; for fourteen months I worked in their Returns warehouse, doing data entry, repacking and reshipping. That employees were allowed ten free books

twelve times a year took a bit of the sting out of the low pay; once a month employees were allowed to go into a large room with a dozen large boxes, 48 x 40 x 36 inches. Each was filled to the brim with books of every kind and we had thirty minutes to grab our monthly quota; great fun, like being a kid on Christmas day!

Returns was in a relatively small warehouse with a laid-back small-town atmosphere which made socializing easy; I soon had a circle of work friends, a mixture of all ages, races and types, from Gen-X slackers to aging redneck hippies, people I enjoyed gabbing with on our breaks and lunch hours. After working in solitude at a drawing board for over two decades, it was pleasant to switch from an introvert to an extrovert mode.

My idyllic underachiever scene wasn't meant to last, however; shortly after 9/11, Random House decided it would much cheaper to move their returns operation to Tennessee and the operation was shut down, throwing over two hundred Maryland employees out of work and, worse, unable to score any more free books. I was one of the favored fortunates, though, transferred to Random House's main warehouse in Westminster, Maryland – but aside from keeping my salary and the free books, I didn't feel all that lucky. This warehouse was incredibly huge, with mechanized conveyor belts everywhere. The noise was deafening, making any kind of socializing impossible and the sheer size of the place was intimidating. I felt like Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times*.

I decided to look for other work. Elaine spotted a job opening for a bookstore in Columbia, Maryland. With my lack of experience I thought I didn't have a chance in hell of getting it but decided that I could least save face by giving it a try.

I was hired after a ten-minute interview. Two things worked in my favor: when my future manager, a Brit named Mark, asked me what my favorite band was, I rummaged through my mental list of many, many favorite bands, a list that changed from week to week, and came up with *The Stranglers*.

The Stranglers was *Mark's* favorite band!

The second thing was that Mark was looking for somebody willing to work on Sundays, and I'm Jewish: Steve Sachar Stiles, that's me. It certainly is lucky that I converted!

Daedalus Books was the name of the company. According to Wikipedia, it is an independent seller of books, music, and videos, and was founded in 1980. While it also sells new titles, Daedalus Books' specialty is the remaindered book. The company has a wholesale division and a retail division. The retail division sells via catalogs, a web site, and through a bricks and mortar store. Its primary location is its 120,000-square-foot warehouse and outlet store, and because I am very fond of Daedalus, I will plug it here: http://daedalusbooks.com/.

After finally mastering the twenty-seven different computer procedures – many of them multi-stepped and counterintuitive – necessary for working behind the register, and driving my trainer crazy while I tried to absorb all that, I was able to relax enough to start enjoying the job, dealing with the customers.

Like, for example, the one who wanted to know where our section was on the history of the Moabites *("Sorry, sold out, but we may have something on the Hittites.")*, or the patron who couldn't think of the author or the title of the book she was looking for was, but she *did* know that the first word in the title was *"The."* (A common variation on this is that the customer remembers that the cover was *blue*!) Then there was the man who wanted to know if we had any hollowed-out books (for a gun, poison, cocaine?), and the shopper who was looking for left-handed books.

Did we still take paper checks? Do those LED book lights work on a Kindle? Did we have any *small* books? *"Excuse me, do you have a copy of 'Water For Elephants' that isn't based on the movie?"*

"It must be great to work here: you don't have to think!"

"I've been in whorehouses that cost less than this store!"

"Oh, I didn't mean I wanted a book on astronomy; what I meant was that I wanted a book on two-dimensional design."

"Now Johnny, if you don't behave, mommy will have to take you home and give you <u>another</u> cold shower!" (WTF?!)

"I'd like to spend more time in here, but I've got to go home and finish working on Aaron's loincloth."

"I don't read books about tomatoes: I've already been insulted enough by Mother Nature!"

"Do you sell cork grease for wind instruments?"

"I'm looking for a book by John Czerniczck." (Me): "Can you spell that?" "J-O-H-N…"

(Me): "That will be $15.84, sir." "Well drop mah pants an' spank mah ass!"

"Excuse me; do you know everything?"

(Me): "Would you like a bag for those books, ma'am?" "No thanks; I only need them when I'm running low on toilet paper."

(Phone customer): I've got this Daedalus discount coupon that says 'Store Only'; does that mean I can't use it on the internet?"

"I notice that you don't have many books on Judaism in your Religion section. Is your management anti-Semitic?"

"Why are there so few books on Protestantism in your Religion section?"

"Why are there books on Islam in the Religion section?"

*(*And so on.)

These types, the cognitively challenged and the screwballs, were happily in the minority; lots of the people I sold books to were interesting and intelligent, and, when things were slow enough to socialize, it was enjoyable to have a chat with our regulars, people we had gotten to know and looked forward to seeing. Some impressed me, like the incredibly old African-American jazz buff who had seen the likes of Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and – most amazingly – Charlie Christian, perform in his youth. Others liked to talk art or politics, or were humorists or raconteurs. Some of our customers became friends of mine that I continue to see now that I've retired.

Having said that, there were times when dealing with customers could be a little awkward, like the time the huge muscular biker type came up to the counter radiating menace and carrying two books he wanted to buy: one was a history of the Waffen SS, the other a encyclopedia of rapid firing automatic weapons. His many tattoos depicted things like snarling hyenas and his large calloused hands looked capable of easily crushing bowling balls. He noticed a CD featuring Garrison Keillor, on display by the register.

*"That guy looks like a **<u>fag</u>**!"* he growled, scowling fiercely.

"You know, I always <u>thought</u> so!" I bravely replied, inwardly laughing my ass off.

About three times a year a very elderly man with a walker, accompanied by his nephew or grandson, would appear at the store with a thick handful of pages torn from many of Daedalus' catalogues, copious books that he wanted to buy checked off. He would explain that he had a difficult time walking; would the staff mind picking out these items for him? Fine, except for the fact that the man had a certain air about him, an air evocative of a long neglected Times Square subway urinal, a powerful nostril-hair wilting pong easily detected from about three feet away. Then the old reeker, the one who had a difficult time walking, accompanied me on my every step through the store, clumping along right at my elbow as I desperately tried to breathe through my mouth.

There was also the AfroCentric Feminist: that was the way she would sign her letters to local Baltimore papers. Each and every time she'd make a purchase she'd make a little speech informing me that slavery had been immoral and that women had been oppressed from time immemorial. I'd agree, as if it was all news to me *(well, I'll be darned!)* – but I knew she knew I was lying since I am a Euro-Centric Male Chauvinist Pig.

There were times when I actually knew the customer before I began working for the store – for example, the infrequent times when fellow science fiction fan Richard Eney would drop by the store with his wife Tamar Lindsay. Tamar I didn't know at all, but I did know Eney from the two ambitious fan publications he edited: *Fancyclopedia II* (1959), an updating of the original Jack Speer edition, and the mammoth 338-page *A Sense of Fapa* (1962).

The other thing I knew about Dick Eney was that he and Ted White, a friend of mine, had an association not dissimilar from Stalin and Trotsky's; part of the same Party, *but*…I certainly don't know what originally sparked this mutual animosity, but I'm sure Eney was well aware that I was part of the Ted White Group Mind (since then lobotomized!), and thus was a part of the Enemy Camp. It was a little discomfiting.

But not as discomfiting as the times when a certain woman would shop at Daedalus. I had started dating Susan E. shortly after I moved to Baltimore, after I had experienced a tremendously wrenching break-up of a relationship in Florida, an episode that had left me a devastated emotional basket case for about three years or more (as break-ups go, imagine Hiroshima). Even so, as a recovering heterosexual, I wanted to get back on my feet in associating with women and although I was still too shaken up to know if I dared take a lover, I did want female companionship of some kind, partly because I like women a lot but also perhaps partly to convince myself that I really wasn't low pond scum in female eyes – an affirmation that I needed quite badly.

Susan and I had three or four dates, platonic ones because she explained that she was "an old-fashioned girl" and didn't want to rush things. In my shaky state I wasn't going to demur but I thought the relationship was going well; we had good times on our dates, we had a lot in common, and she seemed to like me. Then, after those weeks of going out, she invited me to her place for Thanksgiving dinner! I thought this was a very definite sign that the bond between us had gotten deeper: ***Yay!***

It turned out that I was the *other* turkey at dinner that day; also seated at the feast was Susan E's new boyfriend, a mulleted dude wearing a torn t-shirt and spiked dog collar who was pawing and French-kissing the "old-fashioned girl" with greatly reciprocated enthusiasm! I left the table, left the apartment, walked out into the street and then threw up in the gutter: *Happy Thanksgiving, Steve!*

There are other, better, ways of breaking off with people: nice ways, gentle ways, adios methods with style and finesse and respect. To this day I still wonder whether Susan E. suffered from a severe case of Asperger's or was simply an out and out sadist. At any rate, whenever I saw her in the store I found that there were things I needed to attend to in the Daedalus warehouse.

I've saved the worst for last, an anecdote I call The Case Of The Chortling Idiot.

Periodically we'd get an out of town customer, someone who strongly reminded me of a human version of Walt Disney's Goofy, both physically and mentally. This man would habitually order very large quantities of books worth hundreds of dollars, which was good for the company, but…. The first time I dealt with him, after laboriously scanning each book and finally totaling the purchase up, he then said:

"Oh, didn't I tell yuh? I'm a book dealer—I get a 10% discount!"

And then he laughed: *"Hyuk, hyuk, hyuk, hyuk!"*

At this point I should mention that once a purchase total was reached and entered, our register computer couldn't alter the final amount: I'd simply have to go back to the very beginning and start all over again.

Very well, I did, after entering the necessary dealer's code. Fifteen minutes and many scanning clicks later:

"Oh, didn't I tell yuh? I want these books shipped! Hyuk, hyuk, hyuk, hyuk, hyuk!

Same deal: this information *had* to be entered *before* the transaction began, *not* after it closed out.

The next time I dealt with this gentleman, I covered all the above bases. Then:

"Oh, didn't I tell yuh? I want these shipped to a *different address! Hyuh, hyuk, hyuk, etcetera!"*

I made sure to remind all the other clerks about this man's *Didn't I Tell Yuhs* every time he appeared in the store but he pulled a new one with a newly hired clerk, a young woman who was a very sweet Radar O'Reilly type of person. I went over and began to pack the mammoth order of books in five boxes as April entered the total after she had entered his discount code and had made sure the shipping address was correct. And then:

"Oh noooo! I forgot that I left another cart of books over there in the corner! Gee, I hope I haven't put you to any trouble! Hyuk, hyuk, hyuk, hyuk!"

The final time I had to deal with Laughing Boy was close to closing time. On that occasion his method was to wait until I had totaled the first fifty books or so and then remember that he wanted those shipped to a separate address. After that had gotten straightened out, he chose to pay in the most inconvenient and tedious way possible – by cash, credit card, and gift certificate. It took a great deal of time and made doing the close-out paperwork much more difficult.

As with Susan E., to this day I still wonder if he was simply an idiot or a game-playing sadist.

Close-out involved counting the cash in the registers, tallying it with the computer's totals, and entering the number of different transactions on a paper form, then putting everything in a safe. Two employees did this each evening after 7 p.m., and during an eight-month period my close-out partner was an attractive young black woman named Sherise, who once told me that I was the blackest white guy she ever met.

I liked her off the wall sense of humor and we always enjoyed joking around together. Lots of laughs. (Was I *really* the blackest white guy she ever met?)

Anyway, Sherise decided that she wanted to go back to school and on her last night at the store, after close-out, she tapped me on the shoulder and I turned around to see her smiling and laughing and flashing a pair of very nice bare brown breasts at me.

Now *that's* a great way to say goodbye! Sherise, I will always happily remember you!

On my tenth anniversary on the job, July 15, 2012, I said goodbye to Daedalus and retired: I didn't flash a single soul. It had been, with a few exceptions, a good time at a good company; I liked the work and the people I worked with and the people I worked for. I count myself lucky that my last job in my working life was one that I was a little sad to leave.

--Steve Stiles

They may have claws on the ends
of their paws
But they're rarely used to harm us;
So buy your kitty something that's pretty –
WIDOWER'S CAT PAJAMAS.

Livejournal's passe, Twitter's shallow
And Facebook's full of tedium:
So try the greatest, the freshest and latest –
WIDOWERS SOCIAL MEDIUM.

—Sandra Bond

[John Baxter continued]

"Neretva," I supplied. "And yes. I've seen it. Why?"

"I'm supposed to cut it down for TV. They want ninety minutes. But I can't make any sense of it. Like, there's Orson Welles…."

"You never will," I said. "My advice is, just keep the tank battles."

"Yeah, I thought that," he said. "Usually best with this sort of film. Like they say about TV news, if it bleeds, it leads."

Three decades later, his words seemed prescient. In Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencranz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, the leader of a troupe of players explains the basis of their art. "We're more of the love, blood and rhetoric school. We can do you blood and love without the rhetoric, and we can do you blood and rhetoric without the love, and we can do you all three concurrent or consecutive. But we can't give you love and rhetoric without the blood. Blood is compulsory. They're all blood, you see."

Stoppard directed a film of the play in 1990. He shot it in Croatia. Blood, it seems, really was compulsory.

—John Baxter

BILL PLOTT

Thanks so much for the copy of *Trap Door* #30. I love Dan Stefan's cover, particularly since it ties in nicely with your piece on gafia/fafia and my own experience with the same. Actually, I like Arnie Katz's new term better than either of those. He came up with DAFIA, Drifted Away From It All, which is probably more of what happened in my case. I daresay my return to fandom may be record-breaking. I was away for something like forty years. Despite entreaties from Guy Lillian, I had no interest in returning until DeepCouth-Con50 was held in Huntsville, Alabama, in 2012 with my old friend David Hulan as Fan Guest of Honor. I figured it would be fun to see Dave again so I sent in my registration. And even though I only attended the first couple of days, the seed was planted. Within weeks afterward I had joined the Southern Fandom Press Alliance, which I helped found in 1961.

SFPA has been a joy. My resurrected apazine, *Sporadic*, has hit every mailing since returning. I attended DSC51 in Roswell, Georgia, and have registered for DSC52 at Bristol, Virginia, this spring. I just won the 2013 Egoboo Poll, largely on the strength of several one-shots. I published *The J. T. Oliver Photo Collection*, a bunch of photos of '50s fans and authors that JT, a fan of that era, gave me when I first got into fandom in the late '50s. Larry Montgomery and I then did *Remembering Al*, a tribute to Alfred McCoy Andrews, another founding member of SFPA and, like Harry Warner Jr., a letter writer without equal. My most recent effort, in the current SFPA mailing, is a one-shot of letters I received from Lloyd Biggle Jr., over a period of several years.

My first fanzine was a genzine called *Maelstrom*, a poorly reproduced and layout-challenged effort begun when I was in high school. I had my Arv Underman, also. My best friend was Howard Shockley, a year behind me in school. He helped with the zine, contributed several pieces. For a number of reasons too complex to go into here, we lost contact about the time I finished college in 1965. I heard unconfirmed report years ago that he had died. At my mother's funeral in 2011 I learned from a first cousin who had dated Howard that he was alive and well in South Carolina, having become a Presbyterian minister. When he returned home for his 50th class reunion I drove down to see him. We had a couple of wonderful catch-up hours over coffee and remain in contact.

Now, returning to Dan's cover. Although the vast scope of fandom today is mind-boggling, it is remarkable that such things as FIAWOL and FIJAGH remain as constants. It says something about this community that has been so important in our lives. And I felt it in Huntsville and Roswell. Although my reference points were hopelessly out-of-date, I felt as welcome as if I'd never been away.

I think my return will remain largely confined to provincial Southern connections such as SFPA and the Southern Fandom Classic forum. Even the DSCs were a little overwhelming to someone who remembered cons as being largely literary events. I do understand why Trekkies, gamers, costumers, comic fans, etc., have to be accommodated for financial viability, but the multi-layered program tracks are just too much for me. I think I can find a comfortable niche in the DSCs. The idea of a Worldcon has little appeal and a monstrous event like DragonCon has absolutely no appeal.

As someone who made a living in the printing world for many years, I enjoyed Jeff Schalles's piece. Unlike some of my colleagues, who were disdainful of production people, I always enjoyed the company of printers, sterotypers, engravers, etc. Greg Benford has me wanting to reread Phillip K. Dick. Andy Hooper's report of starry-eyed Ray Bradbury reminds me of the incredible rush I had at my first worldcon. Pascal J. Thomas pens an engaging travelogue and finally, Rob Hansen's humor with his genetic disorder was quite amusing. I'm happy that the disorder appears to be quite controllable for him.

Thanks again for sharing *Trap Door*. Since I have confined my fanac largely to a small apa, it is fun to see the occasional genzine and meet fans I won't encounter in my narrow world. Yours was a most enjoyable read.

JOHN BAXTER

Jeff Schalles' nostalgia for the lost valley prairie struck a chord, though probably not for the reasons you might imagine. In my childhood in the Australian outback, we kids were warned repeatedly of the dangers of just such undisciplined vegetation, infested as it was with various snakes, bugs and poisonous plants that flourished just as vigorously as the grasses and wildflowers. Aside from such snakes as the taipan, so venomous that a single bite will kill you and the horse you are riding, we have what you will be pleased to hear is known as the Trap Door spider and also a Funnel Web spider. Both lurked in a hole with a flip-up lid from which they could launch themselves up the trouser leg of the unsuspecting walker. The more country-wise among us wore "bowyangs": strings tied around the cuffs to frustrate such attacks. Harder to fend off was the even more poisonous Red Back, a small and speedy chap with a sporty crimson streak across his shiny black carapace. He lurked under the seats of outdoor privies (common back then), so bites tended to be on the more intimate parts of one's body. If bitten by a Red Back, you had three minutes to live and a major problem about where to place the tourniquet.

Andy Hooper's "Bradbury's Worldcon" was an exemplary piece of social history of a sort one hardly sees these days, so bogged down are academics in citations from Lacan and Baudrillard. Maybe he (or someone) can cast some light on a possibly spurious factoid of which my memory stubbornly refuses to let go, even though people insist I'm mistaken. The first time I visited Forry Ackerman in Los Angeles, he showed me a small vinyl record, only a few inches across, on which, he said, Bradbury had recorded his voice on an early visit to California. As I recalled it, the recording was made in a booth on the pier at Santa Monica. Forry had framed the record, and placed in a position of honor in that cluttered office. Later, he told me that the disc, along with a number of other treasures, had been stolen by one of the miscellaneous helpers who seemed to be wandering around the place each time I visited, but that it, along with most of the pilfered items, had been retrieved. Some years later, however, when I mentioned this to – I think – Bill Warren, who knew Forry as well as anyone, he denied ever having seen the disc, or knowing of its existence. Did I imagine the whole thing?

One of my abiding memories of Forry is the visit I paid with my ex-wife, who was American but from the south, and so had never encountered anyone quite so much larger than life. When she expressed interest in his Dracula ring, he took it out of the glass case and put it on. (Was there also a cloak? I forget.) Whereupon, sensing that it was what he had always hoped someone would do, she knelt down and kissed it. He beamed.

One could write an entire piece on Bradbury's script for *Moby Dick*, to which Andy refers in passing. Bradbury was inclined to become near-apoplectic about Huston's ruthless and self-serving behavior on that project, which culminated in Huston stealing credit for the screenplay. He said when he saw Huston at Humphrey Bogart's funeral, he was tempted to go over,

shake his hand, then try to kill him. The whole sorry story is quite well documented in the otherwise trashy but often illuminating *Ray Bradbury Uncensored* of Gene Beley.

Years later, when I was living in Ireland, sf writer and former fan John Brosnan recruited me to drive him on a location scouting tour of the east coast for a film he hoped to make. He needed an authentic Irish shipping village, but each one we found was marred by a cement works or power station scenically perched on the nearest hill or promontory. Finally, however, we topped a rise to look down into the perfect port, even including a few fishing boats moored to the stone quay, some picturesque fishermen mending nets and, of great interest to John, a rustic pub. It wasn't until we'd begun to down our first pint of Guinness that we noticed the framed photos on the walls. All showed Huston, Gregory Peck and others at ease in the same bar. No wonder if looked like the perfect movie setting. The whole place had been built for *Moby Dick*.

LENNY BAILES

Dan Steffan's cover, with its "30 Years of Celebrating the Fannish Experience" subtitle, adds a small mystery to your pages. The center "fan" proclaiming the celebration to your readers is clearly recognizable as a caricature of Joseph Stalin, but who are the other two? What internal mental processes led Dan to draw them? Are the three figures actually meant to suggest some larger, hidden joke that only the cognoscenti will be able to decipher?

I know I'm not the only *Trap Door* reader to speculate on this question. When #30 first appeared, in early January of this year, there were some discussions in the fevered ciphers of at least two email lists:

"Yeah, Stalin, OK, But why is Frank Lunney (or Jack Calvert) standing to Stalin's left clutching a copy of *Innuendo*? Well, that can't be Frank. He wouldn't be wearing the patented George Scithers checkered jacket. Isaac Asimov might be wearing it, but Julius Schwartz (who the caricature most resembles) wouldn't be. In a stretch, maybe the character is meant to be Donald A. Wollheim, a quasi-political figure.

"'I like pudding!' is a disclaimer statement in response to the FIAWOL/FIJAGH dichotomy expressed by the other two figures. Could this gentleman be meant to represent the insurgents? That would explain the copy of *Innuendo*. But who's guy on Stalin's right?"

Et cetera.

After giving the matter some thought, I've discarded the notion that all three figures are meant to be caricatures of politicians, even though the gentleman to Stalin's right does have a fatherly, political air about him. Ronald Reagan? It's tempting, but I have to reject it:

The checkered jacket and amulet that the right-most figure is wearing are the keys to deciphering the puzzle. Despite the center figure's clear resemblance to Stalin, the right-most one is an absurdist composite. (Frank Lunney is known to interject ironies into conversations, but he wouldn't be caught dead wearing that jacket! Don Wollheim wouldn't either. And Don wouldn't be extolling the virtues of pudding in response to the FIAWOL/FIJAGH exclamations. George Scithers or Isaac Asimov would not be clutching an issue of *Innuendo*, and neither would Julius Schwartz.)

The three figures shown celebrating the fannish experience are simply a da-da/surrealist montage that materialized from Dan's mind as he reflected upon the nature of the Fannish Experience. We gaze from left to right on the cover and Dan plays with our expectations, heightening the surrealism from the paternal figure on the left as we pan across to the elderly right-most figure who's wearing the amulet and checkered jacket. (The embodiment of fannish senility?)

FRED SMITH

Nice cover of Dan's, The features are so distinctive that they seem to represent real people – maybe with the sentiments shown? Who?

That's also a lovely drawing Steve Stiles has done for "Doorway" capturing Alice's frustration with the oversize key for the tiny door! Your biographical reminiscences are very interesting as usual. It's always nice to know how someone gets involved in fandom, maybe even why! And your capturing the collecting bug rings a bell. It's happened to all of us! At one time I had long runs of *Galaxy* and *F&SF* (both from the first issue) in addition to *aSF* and *Unknown*, of course.

Jeff Schalles "rural" article is okay but doesn't do anything for me particularly. and I don't understand what he means by "synched into the Cheech Wizard Scheme of Things." An obscure reference to a cartoon character that we don't see here conveys nothing!

The personal memoir that Greg Benford has written about Philip K. Dick, on the other hand, is straightforward and tells us something about the rather oddball character that PKD could be. It seems to me that these traits appeared in his later novels (and some short stories) where his earlier work was more, well almost, mainstream sf. Of all the Dick books I've read the novel Greg mentions, *Counter-Clock World*, is, probably, his least successful and most confusing.

In "Bradbury's Worldcon" Andy Hooper writes what almost amounts to a very full biography of Ray B., certainly about his trip to Nycon 1 but also quite a lot about his fanac (*Futuria Fantasia*, etc.) and his impressions of the fans and pros he encountered. First time I've learned that "Anthony Corvais" and "Guy Amory" were pseudonyms or imaginary friends of his (although I gather that the first name was also used by Bok). I wonder why, in a letter to *Unknown*, he described himself, "Corvais" and "Amory" as "The Three Fictioneers"! Could his "imaginary friends" have pressured him for a mention? Andy in his article almost seems to have intimate knowledge of Bradbury's views and opinions which makes me wonder if he has met and/or discussed these with RB or if they are all gleaned from Ray's own writings. Fascinating stuff, anyway!

Turning to "The Ether Still Vibrates," that's an engaging delve into old fanzines that Paul Skelton makes (and apologies, Paul, for appropriating your "engaged response" phrase up there!). In addition to your discovery of U.S. fans' fixation on birdbaths, I take it that it was in the course of your excavations that you found the accusations of mad dog kneeing that Harlan levelled at fans when he was trying to establish himself as the kingpin of Seventh Fandom. I'm assuming, Paul, that you were too young to have read this comedy in its original incarnation? It was a lo-o-ng time ago! A recent book by Bill Bryson, *One Summer: America 1927*, devotes quite a lot of space to baseball and, in particular, Babe Ruth and his friendly rivalry with Lou Gehrig. Although not a baseball fan, as mentioned before, Bryson's stories about these two (and others) are still intensely interesting because of their characters. As are his chapters on aviation and, of course, Lindbergh and his solo flight from New York to Paris, followed by Clarence Chamberlin (carrying the first transatlantic passenger!) and Richard E. Byrd (with three others), all in the same summer of 1927. Bryson goes on to the politics, the first talking pictures, the invention of television and other things that took place that year. He includes the anectode about the taciturn President Calvin Coolidge that Jerry Kaufman mentions in his loc but says that it has never been authenticated!

I can't appreciate Taral Wayne's dislike of whiskey and, by the way, do you include whisky (i.e. Scotch) in your dislike, Taral? Although a regular Scotch drinker I have also enjoyed Jack Daniels and Jim Beam (Smoo-ooth!) on occasion. Have you tried Jack Daniels mixed with American, or Canadian, Dry Ginger? Quite palatable. Your tale of the Franklin stove in the middle of the room with the stovepipe through the roof reminds me of the stoves we had in our R.A.F. huts which either roasted those sitting beside them or left the rest shivering!

The all-girl school reunions Yvonne Rousseau recounts impel me to note that in addition to the collective noun "a giggle of schoolgirls" we could now add "a clamour (or clamor) of reunited girls." Just a thought!

WILLIAM BREIDING

I congratulate you on 55 years of pubbing your ish, thirty years on this particular run. I raise my glass in a toast to another thirty years of *Trap Door*.

I appreciated your "genesis" editorial, the early days of a mild-mannered super-faned in the making. I saw that back room with the ditto machine and all that beautiful paper like a color-saturated Hollywood flashback. It took me right back to cranking my Speed-O-Print mimeo in San Francisco back in the mid-seventies.

I've long admired Jeff Schalles' occasional pieces in fanzines. The "Lost Valley Prairie" piece was no exception, the first several hundred words a gorgeous example of smooth transitional writing. The remaining bulk was a fine ramble in the country. Jeff writes with the same authority about gardening and the landscape of Minnesota as he has about the city-scape of New York and the film industry there. Inescapably, though, there is the tone of wisdom, and with it a kind of beauty. And as with best of this type of writing, a sense of longing is created.

Greg Benford's ongoing series of meetings with remarkable men have been enjoyable – little windows into small moments that create pithy depth. I think Greg missed the point, however, when PKD in OC said that you'd think a guy that

won a Hugo would do better with women. First, it's egoistically self-deprecating, but I'm betting PKD was riddled with doubts of his self-worth (did he deserve that Hugo, those women?), and second, I think he was being entirely self-aware of who he was, making a mischievous observation about himself for Greg's benefit.

I think it's probably time Boskone invited Andy Hooper to be fan GoH, and for NESFA Press to publish a lush collection of Andy's work to coincide. At one point while I was reading "Bradbury's Worldcon" I thought, "Andy set his sights too low on this one." No offence to you intended, Robert. Andy could still easily re-craft this piece. At first I was thinking the *New Yorker*, then *Harper's* (even with their hostility towards sf), but perhaps its probable other home could be *New York* magazine. In any event, it was a fabulously written, deeply researched profile of young Ray.

I have spent moments in my life sidetracked by fan history. I'm far from being an expert. Yet I have some knowledge of what went on Before. I was fascinated by the detail of Hannes Bok, Emil Petaja, and Henry Hasse being gay. It's hard to actually discern if "Bradbury was evidently not gay" just because he had a wife and four daughters. I know far too many gay men that are married with kids, some of them in our very midst, to take anything for granted. Not that it matters, particularly. But it adds interest for me, and perhaps a certain admiration for Bradbury as a man whose heart was in exact alignment with his mouth.

Pascal Thomas' "A Long, Live Night In Nimes" is the meandering tributary to the solid, flowing pieces by Jeff and Andy. Neil Young and Patti Smith are frequently touchstones for the rockin' afficionados of the Boomer generation. Certain songs by both have resonated with me, but somehow I was never captivated by their ongoing works. Certainly both have remained relevant. Pascal's description of his perch on the top tier of the Nimes Arena was vivid. I detest arena shows but could imagine myself for a moment wanting to be there amidst a collective experience.

I smiled all the way through Rob Hansen's "I Am Iron Man." I know someone who actually has haemochromatosis (unlike Rob!). Back in the 1980s my friend Vincent McHardy was an up and coming horror writer, with several of his stories chosen by Karl Edward Wagner for reprint in *The Year's Best Horror*. Unfortunately he got sidetracked trying to write usable screenplays for Hollywood, never succeeded, and never returned to writing horror. Alas. He had much the same ghoulish sense of humor about this odd disorder, making jokes about Vlad the Impaler, and Vince once told the technician drawing blood it would be far simpler just to return to leeches. A perfect genetic disorder for a horror writer. To my knowledge Vince never admitted to fantasies about laser beams firing from his arse, though.

As ever, Steve and Dan are awesome – Dan's cover was odd, the middle guy looking like some kind of Russian politician, the guy on the left a scientist, leaving the guy on the right being the truly fannish one! Steve's illo for the Benford piece was great, really nicely done. It deserves to be in a gallery somewhere. If I were a huge PKD fan I might enquire as to its availability for purchase. Beautiful.

JOHN PURCELL

Thank you very much for regaling us with How It All Began. Your story reminds me that the first issues of my early fanzine *This House* were run off on a twenty-dollar mimeo I bought at a St. Paul, Minnesota Goodwill store. Although I tried to clean it out and get it in decent working order, the first couple issues of that fanzine were…well, atrocious is an apt descriptor. In fact, it was so awful that Carol Kennedy, who has been a good friend for many years, reviewed the first and second issues in *Rune* – which she and Lee Pelton were editing at the time – and called it exactly what it was, a poorly produced fanzine, although she did acknowledge that my heart was in the right place. My head wasn't, obviously, and I never did get the hang of using that mimeograph, so I eventually sold it to Erik Biever (same price as I paid). He did know what he was doing, and when Erik eventually became a *Rune* co-editor in the 1980s, that very same mimeo was used to produce some fine issues.

I completely agree with you on the value of egoboo, even to oldphart fen like thee and me. It always feels good to not only finish an issue and put it in the mail, but getting responses in the forms of letters, artwork, articles and positive reviews makes the effort worthwhile. Like you, I learned from my early mistakes in zine writing, layout and production, and very glad that I have stuck with fanac for lo these forty-plus years now. The friends I have made over the years mean more to me than the fanzine itself, which has always been a means to stay in contact with them. This is why we pub, imho. Dare you disagree? I didn't think so.

This trip down memory lane leads very neatly into Jeff Schalles' fine article about his photography hobby, mainly because I have known Jeff for a long time, too. He's another one who did a fine job of editing Rune, and this article gives me a fuller understanding of Jeff's background, interests and talents. This was a fine article, and makes me want to see the photos he took of Lost Valley Prairie. Dan Steffan's header art for the article is a perfect lead-in, too. Nicely done.

As for the other selections this ish, all are excellent, but the one that I enjoyed the most was Andy Hooper's "Bradbury's Worldcon." This is probably the best article I have read by him, and that's saying a lot. In the past few years Andy has been quite prolific, especially considering his monthly *Flag* as part of his production. I have read quite a few accounts of the first Worldcon, but not one focused on just one attendee. This added an interesting perspective to that event, and as a result the article was very informative. For example, I never knew that Forry Ackerman bankrolled Ray's trip east. It also does a wonderful job of describing Bradbury's love for exploration and language. I found the quotes from his fanzine *Futuria Fantasia* funny to read for its exuberant faanishness when I consider the sheer poetry of his mature writing style. Boy, did Bradbury evolve as a writer. Who knew? Apparently Ackerman did, hence the funding for the trip.

MILT STEVENS

In *Trap Door* #30, "Doorway" deals with your earliest contacts with fanzines. I didn't get really involved in fanzines until Apa L started in 1964, and that was a good thing. I was in my last year of college. There wasn't enough time left for fanzine fanac to interfere with completing college. I had known about fanzines all the way back in the early fifties from reading fan columns in prozines. They sounded fascinating. I would have probably sent away some sticky quarters except that I was already spending all my sticky quarters on buying the prozines.

Jeff Schalles' article reminded me of a place called Lost Hills. The strangest thing about Lost Hills is that it is located in Los Angeles County. With nine million people in the county, it would take quite an effort to lose some hills. I only found out where the place was because there is a Lost Hills Station of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. I had to go out there a few times on business. For the record, Lost Hills is beyond the southwestern corner of the San Fernando Valley. I think it may actually be in the Conejo Valley.

As Andy Hooper's article recounts, Forry Ackerman loaned the young Ray Bradbury the money to attend the 1939 worldcon. Bradbury's youth is always mentioned. I've never seen it mentioned that Ackerman was only 22 at the time. From the perspective of most of your readers, that isn't very old. When I first met Ackerman in 1959, he was generally considered the Number One Fan. At the time, he was a man in his early forties and had been in fandom for about 25 years. Of course, organized fandom had only been around for about 25 years, so he was about as senior as anybody could be.

I don't think I've ever seen anyone suggest Bradbury as the father of the New Wave. His writing certainly emphasized style over science. Many young people tried to imitate Bradbury's writing style. Most discovered that what worked for Bradbury didn't work for anybody else.

It seems that Rob Hansen almost fell victim to one of those new conditions medical research is always discovering. There seems to be some sort of a rule that medical research must discover two new conditions for every new cure. Currently, my blood is tested for all sorts of things. I may have too much or too little of any of them. I might have a relevant opinion on the matter if I knew what any of the tested items were.

JIM LINWOOD

The identities of the three characters on Dan Steffan's cover will, no doubt, be revealed in #31. For a moment I thought they might be the same person at various stages of his life with changing views on fandom. The middle one looks like Joe Stalin – apologies to whomever it is.

Your account of your early days in fandom was fascinating – by the '60s you were well-known and respected in international fannish circles. I remember an evening in the Kingdon Road slan-shack in London in early 1963 when Bruce Burn and George Locke were composing their nomination for your TAFF candidacy. We felt that the middle-aged fannish establishment had too much of a say in such matters and it was the turn of someone of our generation to come over the Atlantic to a British EasterCon. Bruce

and George were concerned that their nomination sent to Ron Ellik might have been too late but we later learned that you had to withdraw because of college commitments. Nevertheless, Wally Weber was a popular winner.

Greg Benford's piece reminded me of the time I nearly had a close encounter with Phil Dick. In 1975 the Institute of Contempory Arts in London ran a series of lectures given by leading SF authors about the interface between SF and reality at which PKD was to deliver the final lecture. Marion attended the one given by Ursula K. Le Guin while I looked after our daughters. When I arrived at the ICA to hear my favorite author at that time, I was told what he was unable to attend due to illness and his place was taken by Bob Sheckley. Bob delivered a great lecture so I wasn't too disappointed. All the lectures appear in the book *Science Fiction at Large* edited by Peter Nicholls. One strange outcome of the lecture was that I told our daughters, Eleanor and Lis, that I was going to see the author whose books had pride of place in our bookshelves. As they were asleep when I got back home, I wasn't able to tell them what happened. Years later, when Lis was at Liverpool University, she met a fellow student who was a keen PKD fan and she boasted that her father had seen him when he came to London. He thought she was trying to impress him and angrily told her that PKD had never visited the UK.

ANDY SAWYER

Greg Benford on PKD ended with a coincidence and reading it was a kind of coincidence in itself because Greg mentions Dick's "interminable Exegesis," which I am currently reading in its UK Gollancz edition. It's not the kind of thing you can read continuously, so it's very much a pick-up-and-put-down thing (and at close to 950 pages it may well be that rather than erecting the bookshelf which did my back in) but it's fascinating in a bizarre sort of way. It's kind of like watching a very sharp and sensitive mind short-circuit itself, which may well be what happened in the first place. Dick's humor and paranoia (which again Greg notes) come through, but so intertwined you can't write him off as a paranoid nut – what struck me when reading the later novels like *Valis* and the earlier "Exegesis" extracts which were published in Sutin's *Selections* was that this was a mind which was watching itself go off in all sorts of strange directions and becoming increasingly amused at where it went. It may be something to skim rather than read through unless you're aiming to write a biography of Dick, but it's an interesting trip so far.

Andy Hooper's piece on Ray Bradbury was fascinating, particularly the reminder that going to a New York convention from Los Angeles meant missing at least two weeks of work in 1939 – quite a commitment!

But it was Pascal Thomas's piece that I enjoyed most because of the seethe of envy it created. Seeing Neil Young and Patti Smith and going to Nimes are three ambitions I still have unfulfilled – it would have been so wonderful to have checked all three off at once. (Young was to have played Liverpool last year but I don't remember what happened there – date cancelled because of an accident involving one of the band?) I'm not quite sure about the Shadows of Knight's version of "Gloria" being the best – for me the best is always the Them original – but certainly it's up there among the cover versions. And I may check out the novel by Roland Wagner Pascal mentions – I used to be able to read French enough to get through a novel, though I speak it hardly at all, but it's a long time since I tried.

And nice check by Yvonne Rousseau of Antonia Forest's school novels, in the context of Jo Walton's wonderful *Among Others*. I'd thought those novels long forgotten, and I'm pleased someone remembers them. I reckon it's not unlikely that Jo Walton read them (the British school story has a fandom of its own and just occasionally the spheres of readership bump into each other), but I do like the idea of magic at work here.

PAUL SKELTON

I liked Dan Steffan's cover for celebrating the *Trap Door* experience, though I didn't think any of the three characters on the cover *quite* captured you. At least not from my memory of the times I've seen you. Of course, from the years I've spent celebrating the fannish experience, that memory might just be a tad unreliable. Especially given that evening at Jeanne Bowman's back in '90 when for the life of me I simply could not stay awake. I'd drift off, snap briefly back to wakefulness (probably woken by the sound of my own snoring), see and hear you and Jeanne quietly smoffing in my absence, and immediately drift off again. Ah, lost opportunities.

Good as Dan's cover was, though, it came a poor second to his heading for Jeff Schalles piece (with so much neat detail), which I guess is only appropriate as to my mind Jeff's "Looking for the Lost Valley Prairie" was the stand-out item in *Trap Door* 30. Too good in fact, which is the main reason why this LoC has been so delayed. I've read it four times now and each time I finish it I think "Wow! Why haven't I had an interesting life like that?" It's just so outside my personal experience that I felt unable to comment adequately, unable to say anything other than how well written it was and how fascinating he made it all sound. Every time I read it, it would just pick me up and sweep me along, as if I'd tumbled into the river of his experiences.

I note incidentally that in those first two paragraphs I have used up my entire 2014 LoC quota of the word "experience" or its derivatives. How will I cope for the rest of the year?

So, I am finding myself responsively challenged. "Ha!" I say to myself, "Call yourself a LoCer? Harry Warner would have had two pages in the mail by return-of-post. Mike Glicksohn would have 1½ pages of uproarious detail about the night he 'lost' drinking Glen Valley scotch and Prairie Oysters at the Dry Gulch Steakhouse in Prescott, Arkansas. Why, Robert himself would, within the week, have responded with five pages about all the valleys and prairies he'd seen whilst driving about the country working for The Farm. Try harder! Do something different!"

So I did. I decided to just jump in at random and read bits out of context. There was the advice he was given in college, by Dr. Donnelly, to "Get a job…learn a trade…start a pension…Do your creative work on your own time, don't sell your gift…" – and I thought "Isn't this precisely what we are all doing through our involvement in fanzine fandom?" We leave full-time education, get jobs, learn a trade, and because we have this need to do something creative (even if for some of us it is only writing LoCs), we get involved in fanzines. Then there was the bit where he concluded that "Dr. Donnelly was right though; I made it through and now I'm about the happiest I've been since I was four years old." That happiness comes through very clearly in his writing.

In contrast I didn't so much "make it through" as "scrape through." The company I worked for was taken over by a US group which subsequently went into Chapter 11 and took the UK business, including its temporarily underfunded pension scheme, into Administration, which means that I'm now retired on a pension less than two-thirds of what I could have expected. We'll get by though, and whilst I won't guarantee that I've never been happier "since I was four years old" (I did after all gather up my fort and toy soldiers in order to leave home when I was five years old, which must have resulted from a degree of unhappiness, moving in with my best friend who lived just across the road…which his parents accepted with apparent equanimity and which lasted until my parents came and fetched me home later that evening), I am indeed pretty happy with the way my life has turned out.

I was taken by the remark that "You're not going to hurt anything. This stuff loves it when a bison herd comes through once in a while. In fact, the survival of a prairie depends on fire and trampling herds." I can see it now. Everywhere else in the world there are lots of signs about being careful to extinguish all campfires, and to carefully put out all matches and cigarettes, but the road to the Lost Valley Prairie will be lined with billboards reminding you to "Bring a Flamethrower!" Lots of luck with the herds of bison, too, though I suppose a sixty-acre prairie wouldn't need that big a herd. Even so, with fires and herds of trampling bison I don't think there's much down for those "special rare plants," pink tape notwithstanding.

The information that he'd been, until his retirement, a printer also brought back for me many good memories of my late father who was also a printer. Indeed it was his decision to buy, along with two of his colleagues and friends, a printing business in Stockport that ultimately started my life's journey on the first of the many roads it eventually took to arrive at my current state of happiness. I know these good memories and the associated reverie were purely incidental but, in that they were triggered by Jeff's piece, it simply puts the cherry on top and just makes the whole thing richer for me.

RICHARD DENGROVE

In "Looking for the Lost Valley Prairie," Jeff Schalles writes that in his youth he worked with his hands as well as his brain. I was afraid of working with my hands and avoided it. It is only in old age I've realized it won't bite me, and I don't do worse than a lot of others. I can assemble my own book shelves, I can inject an inch and a half needle into myself for Multiple Sclerosis, and

I can change my window wipers. Before this, I could only work with computer software without fearing I'd make a mess.

On the other hand, I felt good when I read Andy Hooper's "Bradbury's Worldcon." Authors, when they write articles, have to fight between making their articles interesting and tailoring them to some comprehensible purpose. Andy errs on the side of making his articles interesting. The right choice, I suspect, because articles that go too far in being purposeful can bore the reader to sleep.

Still, I came out of the article with what, I think, was Andy's purpose – to show that Ray Bradbury triumphed because he was an interesting, intelligent, talented young man. Of course, I noticed that it helped that he was in science fiction and science fiction fandom at the beginning when it was easiest to triumph.

GREG BENFORD

Admirable you've stuck with it so many years…though just think, you could've kept the *Frap* franchise and been up to half a century! *{Or maybe not – if I had the same 19-year gap as between* Frap *#6 and* Trap Door *#1, this issue would be #37.}*

Hecto was indeed cheap, so Jim & I did *Void* #1 on a Sears hecto before buying a German flatbed mimeo for #2 onward. We thought we were pretty high-tech for 13-year-olds!

Jeff Schalles evokes the splendor of the natural very well. He seems to have found his resting place now.

Andy Hooper's history of Bradbury had items I didn't know; surprising, especially the tenor of the times, making it come alive. The prewar USA was a crucial battleground of cultures, isolationist vs. pro-war, and we forget how tough it was then to even be a fan.

Pascal Thomas writes well of the feelings of going to rock concerts where much of the audience has grey hair, yet the vigor of the rapture past streams through them still.

Rob Hansen can get humor from a stone! Reminds me of Willis.

Ken Faig is right that most smart folk I know have filters so they don't have to deal with the public. Hawking has a secretary, agent, publicist and three full-time nurses now, as far as I know. (Milt Stevens is dead right on this: Hawking hates God, and his first wife clung to Him as solace, after what Hawking's disease laid upon her.) I have none of that of course – not even literary agents, as most have died! – but I do filter emails and have no office phone any longer, to fend off contacts. Anybody worth hearing from comes through channels that take some work to use. Martin Rees is much the same. To get him to speak at a Royal Astronomical Society one-day event Jim and I organized, I just emailed him. He was the hit of the day and stayed two hours after his talk, as the whole room wanted to discuss many ideas with him. He said to me, "I haven't had a good long idea fest like that in a long time." Since he's in the House of Lords, this is perhaps not surprising.

Lloyd Penney is right, I and Rob Sawyer see a lot of well known people. especially scientists – and they all want to talk about sf! The true trick is not just how to foresee the future, but how to invest in it. I did some of this by starting my genetics company, Genescient, which now has a Alzheimer's drug in human trials. Someday I may well need that!

BRAD FOSTER

Jeff Schalles' story of using film for his Fuji 6x9 that only gave him eight frames per roll, and thus forced him to think about each shot before taking it, struck home with me. I've had encounters with more than one person in the last couple of months who have wanted to show me a photo of something, and then spent the next two to five minutes flipping through screen after screen of the hundreds of photos they have taken with their cameras, piles of the same things from slightly different angles, bad shots, etc. Nothing edited, nothing thrown out, just piles of it. I want to grab the damn phones and start hitting "delete" for them!

Andy's long article on Bradbury was an interesting read, but the thing that struck me most was not Bradbury-related at all. I had no idea that Bok's real name was Wayne Woodard, that the Hannes Bok signature was just a pseudonym. That got me to doing some research on the net. And, although I found much mention of this real name, and in one place the information that the pseudonym derived from Johann Sebastian Bach, I've yet to find out *why* he didn't put his own name on his art, and wentthe Bok direction instead.

After so many long and serious pieces this issue (not a complaint, just an observation, as I enjoyed them all), was nice to read and laugh at Rob Hansen's short two-pager on "I Am Iron Man." Loved it.

PASCAL THOMAS

As usual, the arrival of *Trap Door* 30 was an incentive for me to read issue 29, so vividly evoked in the letter column. An inauspicious start, that: I'll start raving about the great pieces in issue 29, and that has been done already in issue 30. Yvonne Rousseau's letters read almost like scholarly articles, certainly teaching me a lot of things that help appreciate the articles they comment upon.

But I should mention, briefly, that I appreciated Lenny Bailes' thoughts about the evolution of fandom (in and out of the electronic medium) and the fabulous name-dropping recollections of Greg Benford (I has no idea those luminaries of physics had such an appreciation of SF; I haven't seen that much among my mathematical colleagues, although there are a few examples). David Redd about Welsh culture struck a chord in me, since I'm myself quite interested in the language and culture of, say, Southern France. But Occitan hasn't even fared as well as Welsh – our failure, I guess. And your story about looking for wood stoves seems infused with the same passion as the book hunting tale of *Trap Door* 27 (and of course evokes the feelings I had when I was book- or record-hunting, something I don't really indulge in nowadays). Don't use books as fuel for the stoves, though!

Now, as I see it, *Trap Door* 30 only has one shortcoming: all those other articles are too damn good, not a chance that mine will shine in comparison. Seriously, now, *Trap Door* is always enjoyable. There's comparatively a lot about SF in this issue; I really enjoyed the anecdote recounted by Greg Benford about P. K. Dick's hearing problem. And Rob Hansen wry humor, a welcome twist on the medical stories of previous issues. Even Jeff Schalles's seemingly low-key recollections were great, just as the prairie hides interesting biodiversity in what would seem to be merely tall grass.

Andy Hooper returns to the first Worldcon, seen through Ray Bradbury's participation in it. It's a fascinating glimpse, more cohesive than his previous piece; "A Tuesday in July" made for riveting reading, but I didn't really understand the connection with the facts about Julius Streicher, except of course through synchronicity. At any rate, the mood is lighter when we see that 1939 Worldcon through the eyes of the young Bradbury (even though context is wonderfully covered too). And I learned quite a number of things, leading me to wonder what where the sources of the facts recounted. I guess it's pretty obvious for some things, and that it just shows professional deformation on my part -- mathematicians need proof (and scholars in general pepper their works with footnotes and references). Still, it's not the first time that I have this feeling of "wow, so that is so" followed by "wow, how did they find out that it was so?" – the second question seeming more interesting as time goes on.

I am of course duly impressed, too, by the fact that you published your first fanzine the year I was born. So, to stay in character, I'll borrow a phrase from Neil Young and conclude with "Long May You Run." Run issues of your zine, of course.

NED BROOKS

Nice artwork! A great Dan Steffan cover, and the one by Steve Stiles on page 2 reminds me of the "Das ist Alles" joke. The idea of numbering only the pages where an article starts is novel, but what is the point? *{It allows for more words on the unnumbered pages.}*

You must be a bit younger than I am - I was an introverted teenager with no social life, but fandom didn't find me until a bit later, when I was an introverted engineer with no social life.

Jeff Schalles' mentor Joe Bageant was right – I never expected to make any money out of what I really liked, books and writing. I worked for NASA for 39 years as a moderately competent engineer and so had money for what I wanted to do. Interesting about the Lost Valley Prairie – I had imagined that a prairie was always very large and very flat!

Also interesting about Rob Hansen's "iron man" disease! At NASA we got a physical every year, with a blood analysis. One year I was told that I should see my doctor, because my "blood ferritin" was seven times normal. "Ferritin" is some form of blood iron. I had no symptoms, and also no doctor – I had not needed a doctor. So I hooked up with some convenient GP and he looked at the blood analysis and asked if I ate a lot of liver. But my diet was quite normal and did not include any extraordinary amount of dietary iron. So nothing was done – and after next year's physical, when I asked if the blood ferritin was still high, I was told that they didn't test for that any more! But I do like to play with magnets, so who knows.

JIM CAUGHRAN

If I were arrested for being a science fiction fan, would there be evidence to convict? Once in a while I have to write a loc to maintain my culpability.

Have you abandoned your yahoo email addresses? I was ready to send this to locs2trapdoor there, when I saw your colophon address. *{It's still Yahoo – several years ago they decided to revive the "ymail" and "rocketmail" addresses, and I immediately leaped in to claim some valuable virtual real estate before it was all gobbled up. I thought "rocketmail" was a very stfnal address and was happy to couple it with* Trap Door.*}*

My mother had a hectograph for – golf stuff? I may have published something on it, but it was before I found fandom. (I think I found Jesus at one time, but it didn't take.) The jelly was attached to sheets that were to be strung over a frame, not too bad a system. I published fanzines on a mimeo at my father's office, later.

"I was an introverted teenager…." So was I, and my self-esteem was at the point where I found it impossible to ask for contributions for my fanzine. People did not line up to contribute, sad to say.

Schalles: Given the job market now, trades look more and more attractive. My daughter (degree in Classics, courses in unemployable things) is considering being an electrician.

Hooper discusses things he can have no first-hand knowledge of, but does not cite sources. Good presentation of fan history, otherwise.

Hmm... I'm to be driving to Corflu with Murray Moore; his exploits with machinery make me wonder. Still, he and I both drive battered Priuses, his battered by hailstorms, mine by me. I rather doubt that driverless cars will be perfected before I'm no longer fit to drive, assuming that hasn't happened already. Pity.

Benford asks, "Is there another nationality that's a synonym for a bad trait?" While not a nationality, our language makes the Roma and "gypping" synonymous. "Jew" is used to mean "bargain". There are probably many more examples, unfortunately.

PAT CHARNOCK

The cover is ace. My daughter-in-law's friend had her second baby, a boy, a couple of weeks ago, and she showed me a photo. Now we all know that newborn babies are gorgeous – they have to be, it's a law of nature. But this one looked like the one on the right in Dan Steffan's excellent drawing, without the glasses.

I really enjoyed Jeff Schalles' piece. I also enjoyed Pascal Thomas' trip to see Patti Smith and Neil Young. I've long been a fan of Neil Young, but never really "got" Patti Smith. Maybe it's down to name envy. Hansen's piece, however, was amusing. Enjoyably amusing.

JERRY KAUFMAN

Thanks for the most recent issue of Trap Door (and thanks for all the earlier ones, too). Dan's cover resonated with me because, yes, I also like pudding.

I was really excited to read Pascal's account of his long night in Nimes. I didn't see Patti Smith when she was here, because she played a small venue and tickets were sold out long before I went online to the venue's site to order one. (The Neptune is an old, small movie theater that has been repurposed as a performance space. I think the capacity is around 300.)

I don't have much to say about the articles this time around. I enjoyed them, which does not go without saying – I need to say that now. I've always liked Jeff's updates on his life, which usually include some communing with nature, and Greg's thoughts on Phil Dick added to my picture of that sad and brilliant writer. I'd previously read Andy on Ray Bradbury's trip to the 1939 WorldCon when Andy contributed it to WOOF, but I was glad to read it again. I've no idea if he made any significant changes to it, and didn't notice anything that was unfamiliar. But I appreciated its richness more on second reading.

MARK PLUMMER

It seems ridiculous to say this, given it's only been a couple of weeks since *Trap Door* #30 arrived here, but I can't now remember which registered first, the unfamiliar name or the unfamiliar – or rather, unexpected – address in "The Ether Still Vibrates." It's a rare thing to see a new name in a fanzine letter column these days, and while the *Trap Door* iteration does occasionally host somebody I wouldn't ordinarily expect, when it does so it's more likely to provoke the thought, gosh, I didn't know s/he was still around rather than, I wonder who Alan Brignull is?

But in a way it's Alan's address that's more striking, because while it's not in Glasgow's Braidholm Crescent, Stockport's Mile End Crescent, or Seattle's 123rd Street, or even that Post Office box in Rundle Mall that's been housing Yvonne Rousseau since forever, it is kind of familiar although in a manner that's thoroughly out of context for *Trap Door* and fanzines in general.

"Robert Lichtman's got a new correspondent in *Wivenhoe*," I said to Claire the other night. "What, you mean *our* Wivenhoe and not Wivenhoe, Florida?" she said. Not that Claire had any reason to suspect there was a Wivenhoe in Florida specifically, but lots of UK place-names also turn out to be American or indeed Australian place-names. There are Croydons all over Australia, for instance. Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney all have one. And cursory research suggests there are also Croydons in Ontario, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania and Utah. Wivenhoes are less prevalent. Australia does have a clutch of them – there's a "Wivenhoe Pocket" in Queensland, I've just learned – but there's no Florida version, or indeed any US doppelgangers.

All of which is by the by because we are indeed talking about *our* Wivenhoe, by which I mean the small town in Essex, about three miles south-east of Colchester (Britain's oldest recorded town) which is itself about 50 miles north east of London. Just so you know where we're talking about.

And Claire referred to it as *our* Wivenhoe not just because it's in the UK but because it's very close to the neighborhoods where we both grew up although at the time we didn't know one another. In particular, the village where my parents live and Wivenhoe fall within the same secondary school catchment area, and so I did briefly wonder whether Alan Brignull and I might even have been at school together. A bit of further net noodling suggests probably not; that would have been too much of a coincidence.

Still, I spent a good deal of my time in Wivenhoe in the late seventies and early eighties and so I also wondered, if not Alan himself, did I perhaps know somebody in Heath Road because the address certainly has a ring of familiarity. I haven't been in the neighbourhood all that much in twenty-five years now, so I had to refresh my memory of the place using Google maps to overlay the street names onto a still clear mental image.

If you were to approach Wivenhoe from Colchester, traveling along Colchester Road funnily enough, Heath Road would be off to the right, after The Flag pub and just before the Horse and Groom. I know I definitely went in both of those a few times, but can't now be sure which of them was known locally as The Babe in Arms due to its more than usually liberal approach to under-age drinking.

But beyond a vague sense of familiarity none of this triggered any specific memories. Maybe it was simply that a couple of friends of mine, Debbie and John, lived relatively nearby in what I deduce from looking at the map must have been Mede Road. That would certainly mean I'd have walked past the end of Heath Road many, many times.

And as I looked at the map the road names started to come back to me, along with memories of all manner of friends, acquaintances and events I'd not thought about in years. If you were visiting Wivenhoe from Colchester, and if for some reason you decided not drop in on Alan, you would continue south along Colchester Road as it evolves into The Cross, and then Wivenhoe Cross, The Avenue and eventually The High Street. You would probably be noting that the town is not big on original street names. You would also now be heading downhill and, if you kept going you would be in the River Colne.

Before it comes to that, though, the High Street passes over the railway line that connects Colchester with the small seaside towns of Walton and Clacton. It's in almost all respects a singularly uninteresting bridge, but its brick sides once sported two of my top five pieces of graffiti.

Now here I feel a clarification is needed. I don"t consciously keep such a list. Who do you think I am, Bruce Gillespie? But still, if pushed to name my five favorite examples of this form of street art – and you never know, it could crop up – five examples do leap immediately to mind. None of them are particularly profound or witty in themselves. Rather I like them for what they imply.

One is quite new. It appeared on a wall at the top of Arundel Street in London, near the Royal Courts of Justice and Temple underground station, around about Christmas time. It says simply "Lottery Numbers" and then a string of digits. Of course my training as a science fiction reader predisposes me to see this as a message from some future time traveler, intended for a younger version of themselves. Being strictly accurate, the wording actually says "Lotarey Numbers" so clearly we're dealing with a post-literate future, and a not hugely intelligent one either as the message offers no clues as to which lottery and for which date these numbers apply. There also seem to be far too many numbers for any lottery I know

about. But perhaps that's part of the plan. The message is encoded such that only the younger version of the future time traveler can understand it. Yes, that must be it.

Another is, sad to say, no long with us. It's also a trifle obvious, at least for Londoners. For many years now, passengers on the left-hand side of trains out of London Bridge station heading north for Charing Cross or Blackfriars had been able to see the legend "Big Dave's Gusset" sprayed on the end of a brick wall in a parking lot of Southwark Street. It was sufficiently famous that at one point you could type the phrase into Google maps and it'd show you where it appeared. Because the internet eventually explains everything, there are now various online origin stories about the eponymous Dave and his gusset, and the wall has been knocked down by soulless property developers.

The train from which you might once have seen this slogan might also have traveled up from Brighton where you might also have visited a pub – the name of which escapes me – where the downstairs gents toilets sports the enigmatic slogan "Onions 14p a pound." Or at least it did about fifteen years ago. It's rather embarrassing that I had and have no idea whether that represents good value, although I do recall that after a group of fans visited the place the upstairs gents toilets sprouted a complimentary offer of "Onions 13p a pound – cheaper than downstairs".

And that's three which brings me back to Wivenhoe and its railway bridge. As you'll have deduced from earlier comments, Wivenhoe is on the River Colne and a few decades back, late seventies probably, there were moves to develop it as a port. This attracted a degree of local opposition from residents who were unaccountably unenthusiastic about large lorries hurtling down a really not very wide High Street. During the course of the protest movement, somebody wrote the slogan "Abort the Port" on the left-hand wall of the bridge.

It's not much, but as a slogan I think it's a classic piece of graffiti: it makes its point simply and in a very visible way, and it's also rather catchy. I could add, pulling on my Marty di Bergi baseball cap, "Don't look for it, it's not there now"; I noticed a few years back that it had vanished, possibly due to the ravages of weathering but more likely a victim of some unimaginative local government official who later went to work for the property developer who knocked down the "Big Dave's Gusset" wall. You'll just have to take my word for it that it was there once, and in retrospect I'm rather glad that myself and my friends never followed through our plan, hatched anew towards the tail-end of many a drunken evening, to go down to the bridge and append the words "... and bury the sherry."

But on the other side of the bridge there used to be what I think is my favorite piece of graffiti, presented in similar large white letters, and putting the population of Wivenhoe on notice by unnamed correspondents that "We're Still Annoyed, a Bit."

This slogan is more enigmatic which brings a different sort of charm. It doesn't have quite the same left-field quirkiness as that Brighton pub's "Onions 14p a pound," but it still presents a quadruple-layered mystery: whilst the slogan was something of a local landmark – it was, after all, hard to miss – nobody I knew had the faintest idea as to the identity of the authorial "we" and thus why they were ever annoyed in the first place, let alone why they were still (at the time of writing) annoyed and what had happened in the intervening period to ameliorate that annoyance. We would also wonder whether the anonymous authors remained annoyed several years after the inscribing of the slogan, and if so whether the annoyance had continued to diminish with the passage of time or whether things had changed to the extent that they were now pretty bloody pissed off indeed.

Anyway, this issue had been sort of simmering at the back of my mind for several years when I read a book about The Angry Brigade.

I already had a sort of half-memory of the Brigade's activities. I was born in 1964 so I can't claim to have any great contemporary understanding of current affairs in the late '60s and early '70s. At the time it seemed to me that "grown-up" news programmes were dominated by four themes, or at least there were four themes that stuck in the mind of the pre-teen me: the Apollo moon shots; the wars in Vietnam and the Middle East; the Troubles in Northern Ireland; and urban terrorism, in which latter respect The Angry Brigade played a major part, at least in the UK.

Anarchy in the UK: The Angry Brigade by Tom Vague (AK Press, 1997) is a chronological – and, it should be said, sympathetic – history of the Brigade's activities. Starting with their Situationist influences, the book traces the story of the bombing campaign, the steady flow of "Communiques" to the national and underground press, the trial of the Stoke Newington 8, all the way through to the fourteenth and final Communique from "Geronimo Cell" with its Fu Manchu-esque warning that "Sooner or later you will hear from us again..."

The world has changed since the days of that final Communique in December 1972. A newspaper article about the Brigade – I think around about the thirtieth anniversary – made the point that, for all that they were terrorists, there remains a wealth of difference between their bombing campaign and the sort of activities we've seen in recent years. Blowing up the back door of the Employment Secretary's house, while I'm sure it was a deeply traumatic experience for the Home Secretary and his family, is pretty clearly not really the kind of terrorism with which we are now At War; Angry Brigade attacks were targeted against property, not people, and in the 25 bombings attributed to them only one person was even hurt. The Spanish Embassy attack in 1970 seems typical and almost comic in retrospect. On 3 December, Brigade members machine-gunned the Embassy building in London as a gesture of support for Basque nationalists. Only one bullet actually hit the building – even though it was presumably a good deal larger than a barn door – and this was found behind a curtain by a cleaner, two days after the attack.

Much of the (hugely variable) thirty-years-on media coverage sought to address a question which, in fairness, has probably occurred to relatively few people in the preceding three decades: whatever happened to The Angry Brigade? Cartoonist Ken Pyne had a take on this which is reprinted in one of the later chapters of Vague's book (from the look of it, I suspect that it originally appeared in *Private Eye*). Three couples are seated around a table, seemingly enjoying an entirely conventional middle class dinner party. "Isn't this nice?" says the chap at the head of the table. "We must have these Angry Brigade reunions more often."

And this set me thinking...

See, some of the individuals linked to the Brigade had been at Essex University, then a hotbed of student radicalism (you know, in the days when students were still interested in that kind of thing grump, grump). Essex University sits between Colchester and Wivenhoe. Is it perhaps possible that in later years some of the former Brigadiers returned to their old stamping ground, maybe for an Angry Brigade reunion much like the one in the cartoon? And is it possible that, having consumed a few bottles of wine to lubricate the memories of what had made them angry in the first place, and noting that the anger hadn't entirely dissipated, somebody came up with the bright idea of making good on that final Geronimo Cell communique; and demonstrating that if it's no longer Angry *per se* the Brigade is at least Annoyed – a bit?

For a few years I thought this was a wholly original insight, although looking online I see a couple of forums where a poster has made the same connection. Oh well.

{A few days later…}

I have a bit of a confession to make. My previous letter about *Trap Door* #30 did, as you noted, make very little reference to the content of the fanzine, being derived entirely from the address of one of your correspondents. I had intended it to be something by way of an initial reaction acknowledgment, although I guess in word count if nothing else I rather exceeded my intentions. It was however with the expectation that your unhurried publication schedule would allow for more later, once I had in fact read *Trap Door* #30.

Because when I last wrote I'd only flicked through its pages – and there was a reason for that. You're going to want me to elaborate, I can tell.

I'm pretty sure the arrival of your latest issue had been prefigured through various online references to its existence, plus of course your now reasonably firmly embedded practice of producing your annual issue towards the end of the year. So it wasn't a surprise.

An even more indisputable if only subtly advanced prefiguring came from the manifestation of a yellowish half-sized envelope on the door mat. It sported your return address, and a further clue was provided – and I can't recall if I've mentioned this before – by the now-traditional misspelling of 'Croydon' on the mailing label which is a hallmark of your mailing list. I was thus reasonably confident that a new issue of *Trap Door* would soon be in my hands.

I duly opened the envelope – it seemed the fannish thing to do – and extracted a copy of *Trap Door* #30. And the center pages fell out.

While the arrival of a new *Trap Door* is indeed a joyous event, I'd hardly ripped the envelope apart in an excited frenzy like a five-year-old on

Christmas morning. I couldn't believe that I was responsible for this damage. So perhaps it was some simple stapling malfunction? No, not that. The center pages clearly had been stapled to the rest of the fanzine, but the staples had somehow pulled through. Flushed with pride at this piece of deduction, I looked for further signs that would enable me to extrapolate that the staples had been inserted by a 37-year-old man who had two dogs, had eaten a cheese sandwich for lunch, and was contemplating the purchase of a new sweater, but my Sherlockian abilities only extend so far.

So the center pages had presumably become detached in transit in some way. Yet how could that happen? To what bizarre contortions had the postal services of two continents subject the envelope to detach the center pages from everything else?

(Believe me, I really can spend all too long trying to figure out things like this. I used to have a habit of coming home from work and standing in the doorway, examining the day's post to try to work out what it was and who it had come from. Easy enough with overseas mail as that invariably sports a return address, but the practice is far from universal over here, leaving me to fall back on clues such as whether the handwriting was familiar or whether the postmark was clear. It was eventually pointed out to me that a further option was to simply open the damn envelope and stop blocking the doorway.)

I think, though, that there was another reason for this intense rumination: that it served as a kind of displacement activity as I came to terms with the reality that our copy of *Trap Door* #30 was not perfect.

Do I hold you – or rather your fanzine – up to unreasonable standards of perfection? Probably, yes. And here's why.

2003 was the second hiatus year in the relentless *Banana Wings* publishing schedule. The first had been 2001 when as best I can recall most of the year had been given over to watching videos of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. I'm sure it can't have taken all year, but it certainly felt like it. 2003, though, was the year that we resolved to move house. However as a necessary precursor to selling the old house we had to restore a degree of decorative order. The place was hardly a wreck, but rather it was all too clear that little had been done to it since some time before I'd moved in ten years previously. The "good decorative order" beloved of estate agents was probably beyond our abilities and timescale, but "decorative order" seemed a reasonable and probably necessary aspiration.

Decorating a house is easy. You just take everything out of it, decorate it, and then put everything back. At least, that's what they do on the makeover TV shows. The reality for the rest of us is that we shuffle things around the house, a bit like one of those puzzles where there are several squares in a grid with one missing and you shunt them around to make a pattern, and that takes a lot longer, especially if you inhabit one of those fan households which have developed a pseudo-scientific magnetic attraction for printed paper. And let's not forget, the presenters of makeover TV shows do indeed have day-jobs but these involve producing makeover TV shows. Most of the rest of us have day-jobs which don't, and so our makeovers have to take place in what might otherwise be termed "spare time," time which might otherwise be devoted to say, I don't know, producing fanzines.

So throughout the summer of 2003 I was coming home from work to strip wallpaper, properly shelve certain parts of the house to create an illusion of tidiness, and paint just about everything. It was probably just as well that we didn't have a cat. It all got a bit wearing, as I'm sure you'll understand.

Until one day – my records tell me it was Tuesday 10 June – I came home and discovered I had received a fanzine in the post. Not a hugely unusual event in itself, because even during our hiatus years people still sent us fanzines, perhaps in the hope that it would inspire us to revive our own publishing ventures but more likely to keep us busy so that we didn't. On this occasion it was one of those yellowish half-sized envelope, sporting your return address. I can't say for sure whether the address included the now-traditional misspelling of "Croydon" or whether that only arose once we'd moved to Shirley Road, but there were enough clues that I stood around blocking the doorway for only a few seconds, and anyway, there was nobody else behind me so it didn't matter anyway.

That envelope contained *Trap Door* #22, and I'm sure you don't need me to remind you that that was an atypical issue, consisting almost entirely of Gordon Eklund's "Sense of Wonder" (illustrated by Dan Steffan) bookended by a brief "Doorway" from you and a three-page Burbee reprint from 1946 (plus your still-missed tabulation of fanzines received, this time covering 1987-2002).

It was, I suppose, just a juxtaposition of circumstances. There had been several weeks during which I'd lost much of my notionally free time to domestic chores. Claire was out that evening. And now there was a new issue of *Trap Door*, and moreover one that structurally really demanded a straight read through rather than a fragmentary consumption. After dinner, I sat down on the sofa. I may have made myself a coffee first, maybe even grabbed a beer. I read *Trap Door* straight through, cover to cover.

I don't now recall all that much about Gordon's story. I do remember that it was a good, professional-quality story – as you'd expect – and also, predictably given that it was Dan's work, it was beautifully illustrated. And more, because it was *Trap Door*, the whole product was well-presented. The design was neat, the typeface clean, the whole thing eminently readable.

And I remember thinking that it was just what I needed there and then, just the right artefact for my mental space. Moreover, it had just turned up. I hadn't asked for it, it wasn't something I'd ordered; you'd just sent it to me because it's what you – what we – do. And that I thought was a rather fine thing indeed. *Trap Door* #22 was, I decided, perfect.

Thus ten-and-a-half years later, my consternation at receiving a less than perfect copy of *Trap Door* #30. Now honestly – and please don't take this the wrong way – I've never quite recaptured the perfect moment of *Trap Door* #22 with any of *Trap Door*s #23-29. That's not your fault because I think the perfection of #22 derives in part from external factors, but every time I find one of those yellowish half-sized envelopes on the door mat, sporting your return address and the now-traditional misspelling of "Croydon" on the mailing label, I know that it contains the possibility of perfection which is I think a wonderful thing in itself.

So I flicked through *Trap Door* #30 – just how did those center pages become detached? – and I noticed Alan Brignull's name and address, and then put it to one side for repair, because how could I read it properly with loose pages? And I was still getting around to dealing with that when an unrelated email from you prompted me to dash off my brief initial reaction acknowledgment, which wasn't exactly brief and hardly mentioned *Trap Door* #30 at all.

Rather like this letter, come to think of it.

Trap Door #30, then, is well-presented. The design is neat, the typeface clean, the whole thing eminently readable, at least once the staples have been removed and it's been restapled to attach the center pages. (My very much sub-Sherlockian deduction tells me it was re-stapled by a fifty-year-old balding British civil servant who lives in Croydon and who writes letters to fanzines which aren't about the fanzines in question.)

Your reference to *Trap Door*'s original aspiration to be "ensmalled" reminds me of one of those seemingly trivial incidents that's somehow stuck with me for a quarter century. It's from the 1989 Eastercon, during your TAFF trip, and there was a live fanzine review panel or something of that kind. The specific memory is of Michael Abbott talking about something in the then current *Trap Door*, and extrapolating I think it must have been #8 (December 1988).

I've just checked our copy, and I think Michael was quoting the first line of "Doorway" where you say, "This is *Trap Door*'s jiant ensmalled Fifth Annish." The point was about the use of in-community language – or, depending on your viewpoint, jargon – and whether it's alienating or whether it engenders the sense that here's something you want to understand even if you don't; or I suppose whether it's actually perfectly comprehensible to anybody who's prepared to give it a bit of thought anyway. I've no idea what the conclusion was, or why I remember it.

It has now prompted me to dig out *Trap Door* #8 and coincidences abound. *Trap Door* #30 is – one might say – your jiant ensmalled Thirtieth Annish, while *Trap Door* #8 represented your personal Thirtieth Annish. Both issues lead off with articles by Jeff Schalles (in 1988 he was "Looking for Sunset Mountain" while in 2014 he's "Looking for the Lost Valley Prairie"), and both letter columns lead off with Paul Skelton although I note that both he and you have moved in the intervening years. Sadly, two of the contributors to #8 are no longer with us (Paul Williams and rich brown) along with several correspondents, but while there are only two letter writers who appear in both #8 and #30 there are several who appear in one and wouldn't look out of place in the other. One stand-out, though: #8 features seventeen male and ten female correspondents, while #30 has, respectively, twenty and one. I'm not suggesting that's down to an editorial decision on your part, but I wonder what caused that dis-

crepancy? *{Looking at #8, I see that for most the part the discrepancy is due to those female correspondents no longer responding to fanzines and thus cut off my list for lack of same (which could be called an editorial decision, I suppose) – and sadly in five cases, because they've died.}*

See, I am at least now talking about *Trap Door*, even if it's not always the current issue.

Reading about your publishing roots and how you've recently reconnected with Arv Underman, I was wondering how he feels – always assuming he's noticed – that four-fifths of his internet footprint seems to be derived from his eighteen-month fanzine association with you from January 1959 to Summer 1960. I wonder, for instance, if he realizes that were he to walk into a Corflu a whole bunch of people he doesn't know and has never heard of would probably say, "Hey, aren't you the guy who used to do *Psi-Ph*i with Robert Lichtman?" even though many of them have never seen an issue.

I was surprised to read that when you started *Psi-Phi* you weren't aware that the term "sci fi" was generally disdained within the fan community. I really assumed it was a knowing reference to that, something similar to the "skiffy" formulation that came along later.

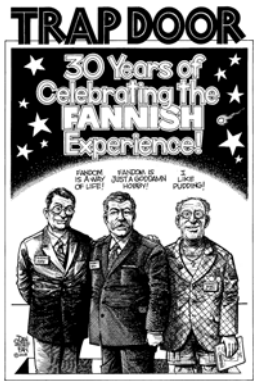
A good piece by Jeff Schalles. I was particularly charmed that he knows somebody who gives an "outdoor bread oven building class." I love my friends, but the reality is that most of them work in computing, academia or the public service. Well, OK, I know a film score composer – who's actually worked on some pretty high-profile movies – but that's an increasingly tenuous connection seeing as we haven't spoken in years. And I suppose I know a lot of writers, but then that feels like a fairly mundane occupation in the circles in which we move. I don't think I know anybody who does anything remotely like giving an "outdoor bread oven building class," although I'm guessing it's not Jeff's mate's primary occupation. Or are outdoor bread ovens really big business in your part of the world?

I think that, like Joseph Nicholas commenting on #29, I find that your other contributions are all good without necessarily provoking a response. Well, maybe Andy's "Bradbury's Worldcon" deserves at least a specific acknowledgment, for making me realize just how little I previously knew about the bloke. I fear it also makes me realize that for some reason I've read relatively little of his fiction.

Joseph himself does provoke a response with his suggestion that "... it might now be time to consider dropping the best fanzine Hugo." However, I don't think you or Joseph would thank me were I to supply a lengthy commentary on all the ways that this topic has been considered in the last couple of decades. Tangentially, though – because it's a Worldcon thing – I will mention to Lloyd Penney from my lofty position at the heart of Loncon 3 (where I do a series of mostly trivial things) that I'm not aware of any plans for Steven Hawking to attend the 2014 Worldcon. Sorry to dash any expectations he and Yvonne might have.

WE ALSO HEARD FROM:

JOHN HERTZ (About one of the fans on the cover: "With him, I like pudding; not only because its proof is in the eating"), **MURRAY MOORE (**"Dan Steffan's cover without its text, and without the copy of *Innuendo* in the left hand of the Oldcon 7 member on the right, causes me think of a reunion of Second World War veterans. The faces and bodies are classic American faces." American?) and **LLOYD PENNEY** ("Has there ever been a fannish anthology containing all the articles ever written about Philip K. Dick? Such articles crop up all the time, and I'd think they'd be ideal for collecting and reissuing. Next article is about Ray Bradbury, and I could make the same observation; an anthology of Bradbury articles would also be a welcome volume. Ray had a life and a set of friends most of us could only dream of. May those who come after us think the same of us.").



THE TRUTH BEHIND THE COVER: Who Are Those Guys, Dammit?

By Dan Steffan

Due to the overwhelming demand of a bunch of nosey old poops – I mean inquisitive fannish minds – I have been asked to explain the identity of the gentlemen depicted on the cover of *Trap Door* 30. Many people thought they recognized them, but nobody was sure of who they were. It's not too surprising, really, because even when they were around fandom they were quite obscure and it would be a surprise if anybody would have been able to figure out their identities based on my drawing.

First of all, while my drawing probably took some liberties with their likenesses, it was based on a 36-year old photograph taken at Suncon in 1977. It was a reunion photograph, as well, documenting the first time these three fellows had seen each other in many years. The last time they'd seen each other was at Chicon III in 1962 – which was also the last time anybody else had seen them, as well.

The story of what happened to them has been veiled in mystery for many years, but it was rumored to have had something to do with their arrests during an I.D. check at a Lenny Bruce show at The Gate of Horn, a Chicago nightclub, where the three were found to be in the possession of what the FBI determined were subversive pamphlets (possibly of a Communistic nature), as well as unidentified bottles of a strange blue narcotic called "correction fluid" that was determined to have some kind of an intoxicating effect when inhaled, but was otherwise of unexplainable and doubtful use.

After their arrests, they quickly disappeared from public view – and from fandom, in particular. Pete Graham noted their vanishing act in his editorial in *Void 26B* and christened them the *OneIshWonderkins* because they had each managed to publish only one issue of their fanzine before their infamous disappearance in Chicago. Their decision to reunite at the Suncon took no one by surprise because no one recognized them, though there were a few who – like the readers of *Trap Door* – thought they looked awfully familiar.

They are (left to right): Malcolm Feesence, who published only one issue of his fanzine, *Science Fiction Viewpoint Digest*, in November 1961. It was a serious constructive fanzine that was notable mostly for Walter Breen's bicycling column, "The Pedal File," and Harlan Ellison's fan advice column, "No, Fuck You!"

Next to him is Victor Spoils, who published only one issue of a rejected FAPAzine in August 1959. It was rejected because of its title, *Rocket To The Bedroom* was deemed to be too rude for circulation by G.M. Carr. The fanzine was then rejected a second time, despite Spoils changing the title to *Comet On My Face.* Enraged by the rejection, an angry Spoils ran for Official Editor of FAPA and managed to win by a small margin, only to be removed from office nine days later after he was caught trying to bulk mail sperm to Bjo Trimble.

The third fellow is Stillwell Phedd, the one-time editor of a fannish fanzine called *Lull*, published in early 1962. The fanzine proved to be as quirky as its editor, publishing such obscure gems as Walt Willis' unusual "The Harp That Couldn't Hold Down Solids" and "How Did You Get This Address?" the only fannish article ever written by Robert A. Heinlein – known to his disciples as the inspiration for RAH's well known quest for the blood of his readers.

After the reunion in Miami Beach, the three were reportedly spotted being scorted into black helicopters. To date there have been no new sightings of the men and no new issues of their fanzines. Aren't you glad you asked?

—Dan Steffan