

ARGENTUS

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From the Mine

Steven H Silver

Although numbered as *Argentus* 9, this is really the eleventh issue of *Argentus*, since both 2005 and 2009 saw special editions of the 'zine published early in the year. In 2005, there was the *Argentus Guide to Game Shows*, which needs to be updated following four more years of fans on game shows, including an impressive five-game run by Christine Valada on *Jeopardy!* This year's issue was *Argentus Presents the Art of the Con*, an 80 page look at con-running. I'd love to add articles to either or both of those special editions, so if you have anything you'd like included, please feel free to send it to me.

2009 also saw *Argentus* receive its second Hugo nomination, for which I would like to thank all the 2008 contributors and all the Hugo nominators. I take great pride in those nominations and although it is my name on the ballot as editor, *Argentus* would not be what it is without the efforts of the writers and artists who permit me to use their work in its pages. Similarly, *Argentus* was recognized by the video-blog *Chronic Rift* with its Roundtable Award, and although I wasn't able to record an acceptance speech in time for their subsequent award show, I want to thank the producers of *Chronic Rift* for the award on behalf of all *Argentus*'s contributors and also want to point them to the other great work being done with fanzines.

The opening article in this issue in non-science fictional in any way, although I've run portions of it in a variety of other fanzines. A look at six silent film comedians, which was tremendous fun to research. You can find parts of it in *Alexiad*, *Askance*, *Challenger*, *Chunga*, *The Drink Tank*, and *Reluctant Famulus*, or you can read the entire thing here, along with additional "DVD-extras."

Gregory Benford sent in a piece in which he talks about the predictive nature of his own science fiction and the one time he managed to predict the future. Later in the issue, several authors, ranging from Robert Silverberg to Michael Burstein, talk about the one story they've written which seems to have disappeared from public consciousness. No reviews, reprints, nominations. Perhaps it will inspire readers to track down copies of the original (and only) appearance and find out why these authors still have a warm spot in their heart for these stories.

At the Nebula Awards in Los Angeles in 2009, Janis Ian filked her own song, "At Seventeen." Not wanting to allow her cleverly re-written lyrics to go to waste, I approached her had she agreed to allow me to reprint them in *Argentus*, so just imagine sitting in a room a listening to Janis sing these words while accompanying herself on guitar.

And we give you travel, whether it is James Bacon's bookstore crawl through the wilds of South Africa, A description of Cat Valente's book event that took place as she rode *The City of New Orleans* from Chicago to the Gulf of Mexico, Larry Sanderson's tragic-comic attempt to fly to Viet Nam, Cheng-Ho's voyage of discovery for China, and the beginning of Steve Green's TAFF report (I refused to allow him to send me the portion of the report covering the time he stayed with me in Chicago...but I am looking

forward to reading it). After reading the beginning of Steve's piece, make sure you use the enclosed TAFF ballot to vote for either Anne Murphy/Brian Gray or Frank Wu to be the 2010 TAFF delegate.

Back in 2008, Howard Andrew Jones blogged about an idea he called Universe-R, a fictional alternative world where all the books and movies he wants to see, but won't be created, actually exist. I asked him to write something up for *Argentus*, but his schedule meant it wouldn't appear until this year. I know I'd love to see the second season of *Firefly* that exists in some alternate.

An off-hand comment by Ralph Roberts on the Mike Resnick discussion list has led to his reminiscences about working for NASA in the 1950s and 60s.

And Fred Lerner has contributed his usual insightful piece looking at the way critics attempt to constrain the boundaries of the genre by defining what does and does not belong.

For the mock section this time, I asked people to re-imagine various classic television shows as science fiction. See what a science fictional *Happy Days* or *Three's Company* would look like at the end of this issue.

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©2009 *Argentus*, Inc. *Argentus* is published annually by Steven H Silver. You can reach him at 707 Sapling Lane, Deerfield, IL 60015-3969 or via e-mail at shsilver@sfsite.com. His LiveJournal is at shsilver.livejournal.com and his website is at www.sfsite.com/~silverag. He's also on Facebook.

Six Silent Clowns

Steven H Silver

Ben Turpin

Before there was Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, or Harold Lloyd, before even Roscoe Arbuckle, Ben Turpin stepped in front of the cameras at Essanay Studios in Chicago to help fill roles in the movies being made by Broncho Billy Anderson (the Ay in Essanay). Although Turpin's goal was to conquer the new medium of film, his primary role at Essanay was to work as a janitor, shipping clerk, a property boy and scenery shifter, a "telephone girl" and scenario writer despite having a long career in Vaudeville behind him.



Born Bernard Turpin in New Orleans on September 19, 1869, Turpin moved to New York with his parents in 1876. When he was seventeen, his father informed him that he was planning on moving back to New Orleans, but that Ben should try his hand in Chicago, and gave Ben \$100 in seed money. Turpin lost the money in a crap game in Jersey City and hopped a freightcar, living the life of a hobo and filling in the odd jobs with attempts to entertain people, specializing in pratfalls, tumbles, and tricks. According to Turpin, when he was thirty, a box fell on his head, permanently crossing his eyes, a condition he later claimed not only enhanced his comedic value, but which he also insured for \$25,000.

Shortly after Turpin married Carrie Le Mieux, he began working at Essanay from 1907 through 1910, making eighteen films before leaving the janitorial job and films behind. His first film, *An Awful Skate, or The Hobo on Rollers*, has the distinction of being Essanay's first film. The idea for the film was obvious since Essanay's original studio at 496 North Wells Street was also the home of the Richardson Roller Skate Company.

During that time, he scored a notable first in film history when he starred in 1909's *Mr. Flip*. Playing a character who flirts with every woman he meets, he became the first actor to receive a pie in the face on screen. It wouldn't be until 1914, when Mabel Normand threw a pie in Roscoe Arbuckle's face in *A Noise from the Deep* that an actor would actually throw a pie in someone's face.

In 1909, Turpin commented, "I had many a good fall, and many a good bump, and I think I have broken about twenty barrels of dishes, upset stoves, and also broken up many sets of beautiful furniture, had my eyes blackened, both ankles sprained and many bruises, and I am still on the go."

In 1913, after a few years in the cinematic wilderness, Turpin was befriended by Wallace Beery and played support roles in several of Beery's "Sweedie" movies, made for Essanay at their Niles, California studios. When Charles Chaplin came to Essanay, he befriended Turpin and made Turpin his second banana in a handful of films.

The men had different views of comedy, however, with Turpin looking more for the quick slapstick laugh and Chaplin wanting to create more complex films. After a few films, the two separated, with Turpin moving to Vogue Studios before hooking up with Mack Sennett

Sennett, who is best known for the Keystone Kops films, was nothing if not unsubtle, and his films demonstrate that. Turpin's own broad humor fit into Sennett's concept of film quite well, and he was willing to appear in several films cast against his physical type. In addition to the perennially crossed eyes, Turpin wore a small brush moustache and stood only 5'4", an inch shorter than Chaplin and Buster Keaton. Given his stature and odd appearance, Sennett cast Turpin in roles such as a Yukon prospector in *Yukon Jake* (1924) (a role that both Chaplin, 1925, and Keaton, 1922, also found themselves in).

Turpin's biggest success came when Sennett cast him in parodies of other film stars, most notably in *The Sheik of Araby* (1923), in which Turpin parodied Rudolph Valentino. Turpin similarly parodied Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., Erich von Stroheim, William S. Hart, and more.

In 1924, however, Turpin announced his retirement from films. His wife, who had lost her hearing in an accident several years earlier, suffered the first in a series of strokes and he decided to spend his time taking care of her. A series of shrewd investments allowed him the leisure to turn his back on films, as he had also become a real estate magnate



Turpin gets film's first pie in the a face in *Mr. Flip*.

in the Hollywood area. To further save money, for Turpin was quite frugal, he acted as the janitor in at least one of the apartment buildings he owned. Le Mieux had made 14

films, including eleven with her husband, but had been retired from acting since 1917. She died on October 1, 1925.

A month after Carrie's death, Turpin entered the hospital in Santa Barbara with acute appendicitis. While there, he met a nurse, Babette Dietz, and the two married in 1927, by which time Turpin had come out of retirement and rejoined Sennett. In 1928, however, Sennett liquidated his studios. Turpin signed a contract for ten shorts with Artclass, and also returned to the still thriving Vaudeville Circuit.

Given Turpin's broad physical comedy, the sound era was not particularly kind to him. He continued to appear in numerous shorts, such as Paramount's *Lighthouse Love* with Mack Swain in 1932, where Turpin appears in only the final moments of the film. Although he continued making what were essentially cameos throughout the thirties, his career was mostly over and he was able to live on his real estate holdings. Turpin's final role was in the Laurel and Hardy film *Saps at Sea* in 1940, where he appears for a moment as the punchline of a joke.

A month after *Saps at Sea* hit the theatres, Turpin suffered a minor stroke, followed by an heart attack a week later. He died in a Santa Monica hospital at 1:50 AM on July 1, 1940. Between 1907 and 1940, he appeared in 230 films.

Mabel Normand

Even if you have never heard of Mabel Normand as an actress, there is a good chance that you've heard of a film character based on her. When Billy Wilder was writing the film "Sunset Boulevard," about a washed up silent film actress, he named



her Norma Desmond. Her first name came from Mabel Normand's last name. Norma Desmond's last name came from someone else who featured in her tragic story.

Mabel Normand was most likely born on November 9, 1892, the youngest of three children. She was born and raised on Staten Island, New York. For a while, she worked at the Butternick garment factory. In 1909, she left the garment industry and began taking on jobs as a model in New York City, posing for Charles Dana Gibson, creator of the Gibson Girl, and James Montgomery Flagg, who would go on to create the "Uncle Sam Wants You" recruitment posters for World War I. When another model, Alice Joyce, found work at the Kalem Film Company, Normand decided to follow suit, and made some films with D.W. Griffith's American Mutoscope and Biograph Film Company. While working her first season with Griffith, she met one of his directors, Mack Sennett. When Biograph moved to California to take advantage of the weather, Normand stayed behind making films for the Vitagraph Company with John Bunny (1863-1915). Normand wasn't happy working with the older Bunny, and when Biograph returned to film in New York, Mack Sennett lured her back to Biograph.

At Biograph, however, Normand was not given large parts, partly because Griffith felt that her humor was not appropriate for the more serious films he was making. She also distracted the other actresses while they were working. Nevertheless, Normand was effective in dramatic roles and began commuting west with the company during the winter months and making films with Griffith.

In 1912, Mack Sennett left Biograph to form his own company, Keystone Pictures, with the backing of Adam Kessel and Charles Baumann. In making his plans for a new studio which would bring comedy to the masses, Sennett convinced Normand that he would be able to give her larger roles in comedies that were not as sedate as the comedies that were being made at Biograph, since Griffith would no longer be able to dampen Sennett's style.

At some point, Sennett and Normand began a relationship, which was often stormy, but lasted for several years. Although the two never married, they were very close for several years and in the 1970s, a musical, "Mack and Mabel," starring Robert Preston and Bernadette Peters was created, although it was not successful.

In her films for Sennett, she created her own character, also called Mabel, just as Charles Chaplin created the Little Tramp, Harold Lloyd created Glasses, and Buster Keaton created Old Stoneface. Mabel's character was a happy-go-lucky mad-cap girl who was game for anything. In the years leading up to World War I, it was a character that appealed to the American public.

In 1913, Sennett paired her with Roscoe Arbuckle in the film *A Noise from the Deep*. In that film, Normand takes the pie in the face gag first used on film by Ben Turpin in *Mr. Flip* and takes it a step further, becoming the first person to throw a pie in another actor's face on screen. Arbuckle was the recipient of that first thrown pie.

In 1914, Normand was paired with a new arrival on the Keystone lot as Sennett took Charles Chaplin under contract. Chaplin was not happy on the Keystone lot and, in fact, didn't fit in well. Normand was one of the few people on the lot who befriended him and she and Chaplin appeared in several Keystone films together during the year he was with Sennett. Sennett dealt with the situation by having Normand direct Chaplin in *Mabel at the Wheel*, which did not sit well with Chaplin, although as the public began to see Chaplin in films and his popularity grew, Sennett backed off and Chaplin was able to work peacefully with Normand.

In December of 1914, Keystone Pictures released what may be the biggest hit for the Normand-Chaplin team with the film *Tillie's Punctured Romance*. The film resulted in Normand losing Chaplin as a costar when he demanded a huge increase in his pay based on its popularity. Sennett let him go and he signed with Essanay for a much larger price. As a result, Sennett re-paired Normand with Roscoe Arbuckle for a series of films about Fatty and Mabel.

In the new series of films, Arbuckle and Normand were on a more equal footing than previously and the series enjoyed success. However, in 1915, Normand suffered a head injury. According to Sennett, Normand was injured by a thrown shoe. Normand herself claims that Arbuckle injured her by sitting on her head. Keystone actresses Adela Rogers St. Johns and Minta Durfee (Arbuckle's wife) both

claim the injury occurred after Normand walked in on Sennett having a tryst with Mae Busch. Durfee says the Mae threw a lamp than hit Normand, while St. Johns claims that a distraught Normand broke off her engagement to Sennett and tried to commit suicide.



1915 was a bad year for Normand. Although she seemed to recover from the head injury, later in the year while filming in an airplane with Chester Conklin, Conklin accidentally released the throttle, causing the plane to crash in a fireball. Both he and Normand was laid up for several days, but neither seriously injured.

Normand left Keystone and formed the short-lived Mabel Normand Feature Film Company. One of its first projects was *Mickey*, which was the first feature length comedy to allot top billing to a single actor, in this case Normand. For unclear reasons, however, *Mickey* was shelved until December 1917, when it was accidentally sent out in a mislabeled film can. The film turned out to be a sensation and copies were rushed out as quickly as the film could be duplicated. However, Normand and her company didn't reap the benefits. In fact, by the time *Mickey* was released, she was under contract to Samuel Goldwyn.

More importantly, her busy pace was wearing Normand down, as was the fact that she was having problems weaning herself from the painkillers she began taking as a result of the 1915 concussion and plane crash. Furthermore, while she has previously been known for her diligence on and off the set, her behavior was becoming more erratic and she began attending parties into the early hours and showing up late for work. Her attitude began showing up in her films and her public was turned off.

On February 1, 1922, Normand visited with a good friend, William Desmond Taylor, with whom she may have been having an affair. She left his house and blew him a kiss from her car. The next day, Normand received a visit from the police. Taylor had been found lying in his house, shot from behind with a .38 caliber gun, a photo of Normand nearby.

Although the police never tied Normand to the murder, or even accused her, she was pilloried in the press and by the public. Her popularity suffered and as the press piled on innuendo about a possible sexual relationship between Normand and Taylor, her films were banned in some cities. Normand fled to Europe to escape the press and Mack

Sennett held back the release of her film *Suzanna* until the bad publicity died down. When *Suzanna* was released in 1923, it was popular and seemed to presage a renewal for Normand, but it wasn't to last.

On January 1, 1924, Normand visited Edna Purviance and her current paramour, Courtland S. Dines. Dines had some words with Normand's driver. Normand's driver was an ex-convict and he shot Dines with a gun that belonged to Normand. Associated with another murder, there were further calls for her films being banned, but Normand went on a public relations tour. Even when her films weren't banned, her reputation was damaging the bottom line and was expensive for the studios to overcome.

Later in 1924, Normand's name was again tabloid fodder when Georgia Church named her in divorce proceedings against her husband. Apparently, Norman Church and Mabel Normand had been in a hospital at the same time and Church had told his wife that they had an affair. After Normand's name was dragged through the newspaper columns, Church recanted, explaining he had made up the accusation. The accusations and scandal had taken their toll, and Normand's career was essentially over, although she tried to make a comeback in 1926 and 1927.

In 1926, Lew Cody, who costarred with Normand in *Mickey* surprised her by proposing and the two were quickly married. Their marriage was stormy, but it lasted until Normand's death in 1930. Normand spent much of 1927 suffering from recurrent pneumonia, and in 1928, she was diagnosed with tuberculosis. In 1929, she was put into a tuberculosis sanitarium in Monrovia, California, where she died of the disease on February 23, 1930. Between 1910 and 1927, Normand appeared in 226 films.

Roscoe Arbuckle

Roscoe Conkling Arbuckle was born in Kansas on March 24, 1887, the youngest of nine children, and promptly named after Republican political boss Roscoe Conkling, a strange choice considering that his father, William Goodrich Arbuckle, was a staunch Democrat. Apparently, William was convinced that Roscoe was illegitimate and hated him, naming him after a man he also hated to confirm that feeling. Throughout his youth, William beat Roscoe.

The family moved to Santa Ana when Roscoe was a year old. His mother died when he was 12 and his father abandoned him shortly after. Arbuckle survived by taking odd jobs in restaurants and hotels in San Jose, eventually being discovered when he was singing in a restaurant kitchen. The Vaudevillian who found him persuaded him to perform at a local amateur night, where he was heard by David Grauman, who recruited him to perform in Vaudeville as a singer and dancer for his brother Sid Grauman, who would go on to build Grauman's Chinese Theatre and Grauman's Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood.



When opera singer Enrico Caruso heard Arbuckle sing, he told the comedian to “give up this nonsense you do for a living, with training you could become the second greatest singer in the world.”

By 1904, he was touring the American West as part of the Pantages Theatre circuit, including a stint in San Francisco which coincided with the Earthquake of 1906. He toured in Vaudeville for several years before making his first film, *Ben’s Kid*, for the Selig Polyscope Company in 1909. While continuing to tour, often in the company of actress Minta Durfee, Arbuckle made several films for Selig until 1913, when he left the company, which had gotten its start in Chicago in 1896 and late became the first permanent film studio in Los Angeles.

At Keystone, Mack Sennett not only hired Arbuckle to replace outgoing comedic star Fred Mace, with whom Arbuckle appeared in his first film at Selig, but he also hired Durfee and Sennett’s nephew, Al St. John. At the time, Keystone was making madcap comedies that didn’t focus too heavily on plot, instead taking the general running-around and pratfalls from Vaudeville and recreating them on the much larger stage that film allowed, adding props, including cars, planes, and crowds.

Sennett was adding numerous comedians to his company, including Mabel Normand, who made numerous films with Arbuckle, including the popular “Fatty and Mabel” series, and Charles Chaplin, who made seven films with Arbuckle in 1914. During that time, Chaplin borrowed a pair of Arbuckle’s oversized pants and adopted them in the creation of a character of his own, the Little Tramp.

Most of the great silent film comedians had their own trademarks, whether it was Ben Turpin’s crossed eyes, Chaplin’s can and moustache, or Buster Keaton’s pork pie hat. In Arbuckle’s case, he wisely played off his youthful looks and adopted a pair of pants that was too short for him. The look exaggerated his youthful looks by giving the appearance of a boy who had just gone through a growth spurt.

Arbuckle also tried to keep his weight above three hundred pounds throughout his career. Despite this, he was quite agile and had a grace about him while performing pratfalls and other physical stunts. When paired with other, smaller, actors, like Buster Keaton, Arbuckle used his size and strength to good effect to effortlessly throw his partners around. On the other hand, he never played being fat for a laugh. Chairs wouldn’t break under him and he wouldn’t find himself in unnaturally tight spaces.

At Keystone, Arbuckle began to work as a director as well as an actor. The first comedian to also direct, Arbuckle created the path that other comedians, such as Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Harold Lloyd, would

eventually follow. As a director, however, Arbuckle still found himself limited by Sennett’s influence, and eventually moved his productions off the main Keystone lot to shoot in New Jersey.

Normand left Keystone after discovering that Sennett was having an affair, and by late 1916, Keystone looked like it was in trouble. Arbuckle decided it was time to leave Keystone for the newly formed Comique, which Arbuckle insisted was pronounced Comeekay.

In late 1916, Joseph Schenck approached Arbuckle and offered him \$1,000 a day salary, 25% of the profits, and creative control of his films. Arbuckle figuratively jumped at the chance, although he was grounded literally by a carbuncle that almost caused the doctors to amputate a leg, and an addiction to morphine. By 1917, however, he was ready to start work again.

Comique’s first film was *The Butcher Boy*, which starred Arbuckle, St. John, and Josephine Stevens as the love interest. As filming was beginning, Lou Anger brought a young Vaudevillian he had bumped into on the street into the studio. Buster Keaton agreed to appear in the day’s shooting, but, wasn’t particularly interested in leaving Vaudeville for film. Nevertheless, after taking home one of Arbuckle’s cameras, disassembling it and reassembling it, Keaton returned the next day taking a \$40 weekly salary from Arbuckle, which meant giving up the \$250 he was making weekly on Broadway, and proceeded to make numerous films with Arbuckle’s group before branching off on its own.

Between 1917 and 1920, Arbuckle and Keaton released sixteen films, at least a dozen of which are extant and available. For many of the films, they aren’t partners in the way later comedic duos are. Frequently, rather than interacting together or responding to each other, the two men perform their own gags, almost as if in competition with each other to see who can do the most outrageous stunts or falls. In addition to pratfalls, one area of comedy in which both Arbuckle and Keaton excelled was the use of props. Perhaps moreso than the other actors of the period, the Arbuckle had a way of turning everyday gadgets into pieces of comic art.



Mabel Normand and Roscoe Arbuckle in *Mabel and Fatty’s Married Life* (1915)

Arbuckle was also much more likely than Keaton, Lloyd, Chaplin, or Turpin to show up in films in drag, possibly because of the concept that a large man dressed as a woman was more humorous than a smaller man dressed in drag. Not only did Arbuckle appear in his shorts like this, but in many of his films, such as *Miss Fatty’s Seaside Lovers* (1915) or *Rebecca’s Wedding Day* (1914), saw him spend the entire film in drag playing a female, rather than a male character who dresses in disguise.

Arbuckle didn’t last with

Comique for very long. By December 1919, Paramount was making overtures to him, with Adolph Zukor a million dollars a year and feature length films. Arbuckle took the offer, despite the fact that it meant ceding creative control. After one period when Zukor had Arbuckle working on three films simultaneously, Arbuckle turned down an invitation to celebrate Labor Day with Keaton and instead decided to take a vacation to San Francisco.

On September 5, 1921, Fred Fischbach, who was sharing the suite with Arbuckle, hosted a party in his room, suite 1220 of the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco. Despite Prohibition being in full swing, the party included alcohol, which would eventually net Arbuckle and Fischbach a \$500 fine. That, however, would be the least of Arbuckle's legal problems resulting from the infamous party.

At one point, Arbuckle went into his adjoining room to change clothes and saw a young actress, named Virginia Rappé, with whom he had been on a few dates, passed out



Virginia Rappé



Maude Delmont

on the floor of the bathroom. He helped her to the bed and got her a glass of water. After changing clothes in the bathroom, he found her lying on the floor again. He went into the suite and brought others back to help Rappé, at which point she started to scream that she was in pain. With the help of the hotel management, Arbuckle carried Rappé to a room down the hall, where a friend of hers, who had been drinking heavily at the party, Maude Delmont, joined her. Once a doctor arrived, Arbuckle left the hotel.

On September 9, Rappé died of peritonitis. Delmont claimed that Rappé died from injuries she sustained when Arbuckle raped Rappé, although Delmont changed her story often and on at least one

instance claimed that Arbuckle had sexually assaulted Rappé with a Coke bottle. On September 11, 1921, Arbuckle was arrested and charged with murder.

As soon as Arbuckle's arrest was announced, theatres began banning Arbuckle's work, much as they would do a year later for Arbuckle's frequent co-star, Mabel Normand. Mayor J. Hampton Moore banned the showing of Arbuckle's films in Philadelphia on September 11 on the grounds that they would offend public morals due to the charges pending against Arbuckle. Similar actions were taken in Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Washington, and other cities.

There was immediate public outcry, with the Heart papers, especially, playing up the most lurid accusations against Arbuckle. However, the legal evidence was otherwise. Judge Sylvain Lazarus ordered that the charges be decreased from murder to manslaughter. While public opinion was against Arbuckle, his wife, Minta Durfee, from whom he had separated IN 1917, came out to support him. Other actors and producers who supported him were asked by his attorneys to stay away, fearing a wave of Anti-Hollywood sentiment in San Francisco.

The trial began on November 14, prosecuted by Matthew Brady. Early in the trial, the fact that Brady had threatened one of his witnesses in order to get her testimony damaged his case. Furthermore, Delmont, who raised the initial outcry, did not appear on the stand for either prosecution or defense. On November 28, Arbuckle took the stand and told his story, which was more consistent than Delmont's. Brady was unable to poke holes in Arbuckle's testimony. Furthermore, medical testimony from both sides agreed that Rappé punctured bladder was not caused by an external agent. On December 4, after 22 ballots, the jury was declared hung, 10-2 in favor of Arbuckle's acquittal.

Brady decided to bring the case back for a second trial. Arbuckle's defense team decided not to allow Arbuckle to take the stand, in theory to show their contempt for the prosecution. They also refused the chance to make closing arguments. Once again, Arbuckle found himself with a hung jury, although this time, taking his refusal to testify as a sign of guilt, they voted 10-2 to convict.

Brady once again brought the case to trial, Arbuckle took the stand, the prosecution's star witness, Zey Prevon, who had been threatened into testifying before the first trial, fled the country before she could be brought to the stand, and on April 22, 1922 Arbuckle was acquitted. The jury released a statement in support of their belief in his innocence:

Acquittal is not enough for Roscoe Arbuckle. We feel that a great injustice has been done him. We feel also that it was only our plain duty to give him this exoneration, under the evidence, for there was not the slightest proof adduced to connect him in any way with the commission of a crime.

He was manly throughout the case, and told a straightforward story on the witness stand, which we all believed.

The happening at the hotel was an unfortunate affair for which Arbuckle, so the evidence shows, was in no way responsible.

We wish him success and hope that the American people will take the judgement [sic] of fourteen men and women who have sat listening for thirty-one days to the evidence, that Roscoe Arbuckle is entirely innocent and free of all blame.

However, four days before the jury made their statement, Will Hays, in consultation with Nicholas Schenck, Adolph Zukor, and Jessy Lasky, announced that they would no longer be showing any Arbuckle films. The blacklisting, the first in Hollywood's history, would officially be lifted in December 1922, but Arbuckle

wouldn't work openly in films for a decade. Will Hays, who had previously served as the chairman of the Republican National Committee (1918-21), and served in Warren G. Harding's cabinet as Postmaster General from 1921-1922, had only recently become the President of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America. In 1930, he ushered through the Production Code (usually called the Hays Code) which introduced strong censorship into films.

Unable to get work in Hollywood, and beset with heavy debt, Arbuckle's friends, led by Buster Keaton, helped him pay off his legal bills. Arbuckle also went on a trip to the Orient, paid for by friends and upon his return James Cruze gave him a cameo in a satire, playing himself in Hollywood. Keaton tried to get Arbuckle to direct *Sherlock, Jr.*, but the stress proved to great for Arbuckle, who backed out. Nevertheless, Keaton apparently used Arbuckle in several of his films, although uncredited and frequently with his features obscured.

Beginning in 1925, Arbuckle was allowed to direct films, although in a nod to the public outrage against him even three years after his acquittal, he had to use a pseudonym, adopting the name William Goodrich, after his abusive father. Arbuckle and Durfee also got an amicable divorce, which allowed Arbuckle to marry Doris Deane. His marriage to Deane, however was hampered by Arbuckle's alcoholism and broke up in 1928.

One of Arbuckle's major attackers during the trials of 1922 was William Randolph Hearst, whose Hearst Newspapers worked to keep the scandal alive and in the public eye. Hearst once bragged to Buster Keaton, that he had made more money of the Arbuckle Scandal than he had off the sinking of the *Lusitania*. However, Hearst apparently didn't have a personal animosity towards Arbuckle. In 1925, Arbuckle and Deane vacationed at Hearst's home, San Simeon, where according to Arbuckle, Hearst told him, "I never knew anything more about your case, Roscoe, than I read in the newspapers." Arbuckle's most successful film during his blacklisted years was *The Red Mill* (1927), which starred Heart's mistress Marion Davies, and Arbuckle was apparently asked to direct by Hearst, himself.

In 1928, still directing under the Goodrich name, Arbuckle opened Roscoe Arbuckle's Plantation Club, a nightclub which featured many of the comedians Arbuckle had known for years, including Keaton and Chaplin. However, the club was not able to survive the Great Depression and closed shortly after the stock market crashed.

When he had been blacklisted for a decade, *Motion Picture* magazine ran an advertisement entitled "Doesn't Fatty Arbuckle Deserve a Break?," signed by dozens of film stars. The result was that Arbuckle was offered a six film contract by Jack Warner in 1932. Arbuckle married a third time, to Addie McPhail as his career was about to relaunch. None of these films, Arbuckle's only talkies, although he directed some talkies under the Goodrich name, have been released to DVD/video.

By June 28, 1933, Arbuckle had finished the last of his films for Warner. They had done well enough that Warner Brothers signed him to a long term contract. The next day, after a night of celebrating the contract and his first wedding

anniversary with Addie McPhail, she found Arbuckle had died in his sleep.

Of the six comedians I'm discussing, Turpin, Normand, Arbuckle, Lloyd, Keaton, and Chaplin, Roscoe Arbuckle is the only one who worked with all five of the others during the course of his career, ranging from his two films with Turpin to the forty he made with Normand. With regard to Chaplin, Arbuckle commented that he wished he could have made more, and longer, films with him.

Between 1909 and 1933, Arbuckle appeared in 163 films, with 153 before his blackbaling in 1922. Unfortunately, spending ten years out of the public favor and dying at the very beginning of his comeback meant that Arbuckle didn't have the fan base or the resources to maintain his films. Both Chaplin and Lloyd managed to gain the rights and preserve their legacy. Although Arbuckle's friend Keaton did not, collector Raymond Rohauer did preserve the Keaton canon, including the shorts Keaton made with Arbuckle, although Rohauer gave Keaton top billing, turning Arbuckle into a supporting actor. For this reason, many of Arbuckle's films have been lost or severely damaged in ways that the other actors' have not been.

Arbuckle and Keaton

Arbuckle and Keaton worked off each other off screen as well as on screen. Shortly after Arbuckle went to work for Adolph Zukor, he threw a dinner party for the studio chief. Keaton performed the role of butler, relying on the notion that servants were never noticed. Keaton performed his duties as butler as ineptly as possible, eventually having Arbuckle jump up and chasing him around the house.

When Arbuckle was blacklisted, Buster Keaton Productions offered him a deal, and 35% of the proceeds of all films they made were paid to Arbuckle. When William S. Hart attacked Arbuckle in the press, Keaton responded by making the film *The Frozen North*, in which he lampooned Hart mercilessly, and Hart refused to talk to Keaton for more than a year.

In the very last movie Buster Keaton made, *The Scribe* (1966), the very last gag her performed was a recreation of a gag Arbuckle had performed in *The Bell Boy*, a film the two of them made in 1918 for Comique. Keaton once wrote, "The longer I worked with Roscoe the more I liked him. I respected without reservation his work both as an actor and a comedy director. He took falls no other man of his weight ever attempted, had a wonderful mind for action gags, which he could devise on the spot."

Harold Lloyd

Harold Lloyd was born in Kansas on April 20, 1893 in Burchard, Nebraska to J. Darcie "Foxy" Lloyd and Elizabeth Fraser Lloyd. Years later, in his film 1932 *Movie Crazy*, his character, Harold Hall, would leave Nebraska to become a big movie star in Hollywood. Hall had a much less



successful go of it than Lloyd.

His mother had been interested in a career as a singer and she supported Lloyd's own interest in that general direction. Lloyd first was grabbed by the acting bug in 1903, when he was cast in a local performance of "Hamlet." He continued to appear on stage as his family moved around Nebraska and Colorado as Foxy, tried to find steady work. After Foxy and Elizabeth got divorced in 1910, Lloyd and his elder brother, Gaylord, shuttled back and forth between their parents for several years. After Foxy was hit by a beer truck in 1913 and was awarded a \$3,000 judgment. Foxy and Harold flipped a coin to decide if they should move east or west, with the result that they moved to San Diego, where Foxy attempted to open a pool hall (and failed). Harold continued to take on roles on the stage with no desire to try out for the films which were being created just up the coast. However, film was more lucrative than stage work, and, given Foxy's failure as an entrepreneur, Harold eventually began to appear in films, usually as a background actor.

Lloyd had one feature, whether a shortcoming or an opportunity depends on the viewer, that Chaplin, Keaton, Arbuckle, and Turpin all lacked. All the other film comedians had come up through Vaudeville and had polished their acts and routines in front of live audiences. Their issue was translating their routines to the new medium. Lloyd, however, did not have that background upon which to draw. He had a few brief stints in the legitimate theatre and had trained with stage actor John Lane Connor when he first arrived in San Diego, but his acting was created and honed on the screen.

During this time, Lloyd became friends with another background actor, Hal Roach. When Roach came into an inheritance, he decided to open his own studio, first known as Phun Philms and later Rolin. Roach hired Lloyd who created a character, Will E. Work. It became clear that the character did not work, so Lloyd created a Chaplin knock-off, Lonesome Luke. The character of Lonesome Luke appeared in nearly sixty films and was successful enough that it allowed Roach to get a distribution deal with Pathé.

As Lonesome Luke, Lloyd was cast in tragic-comic roles as someone who was down and out. Roach felt that Lloyd could be a bigger actor playing a different type of character, although he was concerned that without some sort of disguise (as Luke, Lloyd wore a fake moustache), Lloyd was too good looking to be a comedian. They came up with a character known as "Glasses," although also referred to on occasion as Harold.

"Glasses" was an optimist. Whatever life threw at him, he also felt that success was right around the corner, and, in so viewing the world, he made it happen. Unlike Charles Chaplin's "Little Tramp," Lloyd's "Glasses" was flexible enough to be placed into a variety of social situations. This also meant that he was an easier character for the middle class to identify with. Similarly, the various situations gave Lloyd and Roach more latitude in finding situations to place "Glasses" in, from the heroic character in *Rainbow Island* to

his adventures as a newlywed in *I Do*. Unlike Chaplin's tramp or Arbuckle's "Fatty," Lloyd's "Glasses" was a regular person without any signs of grotesquerie or quirkiness.

His early films with this character were successful, and audiences could actually picture "Glasses" getting the girl. From 1914 through 1919, Lloyd's leading lady was Bebe Daniels, with whom Lloyd had a romantic relationship off screen, despite her age (she was born in 1901). When she left to pursue more dramatic roles, Roach pointed out another actress to Lloyd, Mildred Davis, who took over the Daniels roles in 1919 beginning with the film *From Hand to Mouth*. At this time, Lloyd was one of the most popular comedians.

On August 23, 1919, while filming *Haunted Honeymoon*, tragedy struck Lloyd. He was posing for publicity stills holding a prop bomb. He had just used the prop to light a cigarette when it exploded. Lloyd was temporarily blinded and lost the thumb and index finger on his right hand. The injuries and convalescence took Lloyd out of the limelight for five months as he regained his sight and had a prosthetic hand made for him. Although Lloyd

would refer to the accident in general terms, he never discussed the actual injuries.

Once Lloyd returned to making films, Mildred continued to work with him through 1923, when she appeared with him in *Safety Last*, perhaps his most well-known film. By the time it was shot, however, she had already informed Lloyd and Roach of her intention to retire. In response, Lloyd proposed marriage to her and the two were wed on February 10, 1923 and remained married until her death on August 18, 1969.

In the years immediately after the accident, Lloyd also carved out another niche for himself, one which doesn't exist in the modern world of film comedies, especially with the increased use of special effects. Harold Lloyd became the king of the thrill comedies.

In thrill comedies, Lloyd would set himself up for a variety of dangerous situations, which he then worked his way through. The most famous, of course, is his building climb in *Safety Last*, although Lloyd used the building climb in several of his films. He got the idea from watching Bill Strother, a Los Angeles daredevil who would climb buildings. Strother appeared in the film as Lloyd's best friend, and the idea, in the film, was that Lloyd's character would climb to the first or second floor and then Strother's character would take his place and perform the remainder of the climb. However, in both the film, and reality, Lloyd performed the majority of the climb, including the various stunts that saw him dangling from the hands of the clock, fighting off pigeons, and having things dropped on him. For the most part, Lloyd was climbing as high as it appeared he was, although some trick photography extended the height of the building. Even then, Lloyd was performing at a height several storeys above ground level without a net.



Lloyd with Babe Ruth

Part of the entertainment from this comes from knowing that the actor is actually performing in the dangerous areas and was placing his well-being in jeopardy.

Lloyd and Roach parted ways in the mid-twenties, with Lloyd creating his own production company. Lloyd also slowed down his work, making fewer films, but still managing to be the highest grossing of the silent comedians in the late twenties. He also used the opportunity to experiment with the film-making process, becoming the first filmmaker to preview his films for test audiences and then re-edit them to make them more appealing.

During this period, he made some of his most successful and lasting films, including *Speedy* (1928), in which he appeared as the savior of the old-style horse-drawn trolley, and *The Freshman* (1925), a college comedy which ends with Lloyd's character scoring the winning touchdown, and also setting up Lloyd's final film, which would be released 22 years later.

Unlike Chaplin, who refused to create talkies until 1940 when he made *The Great Dictator*, Lloyd was an early adopter of the new technology, releasing his first talkie, *Welcome Danger* on 12 October 1929. Twelve days later, the stock market crashed, taking with it much of the attraction of Harold Lloyd.

In the 1920s, Lloyd was a bigger box office draw than Chaplin, with his feature films making more than Chaplin's. One reason for this was that Lloyd's films has an optimism about them, while Chaplin's more satirical films had a much more cynical edge. This also explains why Chaplin's star continues brighter than Lloyd's. Following the stock market crash of 1929, the public had a much more cynical outlook on life. Lloyd's optimism was viewed as more naïve and belonging to a bygone era.

Although *Welcome Danger* was Lloyd's highest grossing film, the economic times and change in attitude spelled an end to Lloyd's career. Throughout the 1930s, he only made five films, all of them talkies, but his years as the most popular film comedian were in the past.

While most of Lloyd's silent films were original, two of his talkies from the 1930s were based on previously published material.

The first was *The Cat's-Paw*, in 1934 and based on a novel published the previous year by Clarence Budington Kelland. The character Lloyd plays is similar in many ways to his typical character. Ezekiel Cobb is a naïve young man who wants to rise up in the world. Caught up in the corrupt politics of Stockport, he uses his innate optimism and sense of right, along, in this case, with the help of the local Chinese community

The Milky Way made in 1936, based on a 1934 play of the same name. Playing a milk-man turned boxer, the film would be made into a more successful version in 1946 as *The Kid From Brooklyn*, starring Danny Kaye in the Lloyd

role of Burleigh Sullivan. In a vaguely interesting coincidence, Lionel Stander appeared in both films portraying "Spider" Schultz. When Samuel Goldwyn purchased the rights to the remake, he ordered all prints of Lloyd's version destroyed. Lloyd, however, had managed to secure prints of nearly all of his films and retained his copy, so despite Goldwyn's efforts, the 1936 film still exists.

Following the release of *Professor Beware* in 1938, Lloyd essentially retired from film-making to focus his attention on a variety of hobbies. Among these were breeding Great Danes, collecting cars, and music. Perhaps his most enduring hobby was photography, where Lloyd played with making stereoscopic images. His granddaughter, Suzanne Lloyd Hayes, has released two volumes of Lloyd's pictures: *3-D Hollywood: Photography by Harold Lloyd* (1992) and *Harold Lloyd's Hollywood Nudes in 3-D!* (2004). These two books are comprised of just some of the quarter million stereoscopic images Lloyd took.

The fact that Lloyd kept prints of nearly all of his films once he became popular enough has meant that unlike many of the silent film stars, most of his body of work survives in clean versions. Lloyd also had control over their distribution and, throughout the years he would arrange screenings of his movies, ensuring that they would remain in the public's awareness. Most of his pre-1920s films, however, are considered lost, having been destroyed in nitrate explosion in Lloyd's film vault, including most of the Lonesome Luke films..

Lloyd was coaxed out of retirement in the mid-1940s by Preston Sturgis. Sturgis had written, directed, and produced several successful films and had won an Oscar for his 1940 screenplay *The Greta McGinty*. He came up for an idea that would start with the final football game from Lloyd's *The Freshman* and pick up with the character two decades later, after

life had a chance to wear him down. Lloyd agreed, although after filming began, the two men discovered that they had very different ideas of film-making, from the script, to the characters, to the gags. When *The Sin of Harold Diddlebock* was released, it wasn't a success and Sturgis's partner, Howard Hughes, pulled it from distribution with the intention of recutting the film, something that rankled Lloyd who had managed to acquire rights to practically all of his earlier films. In 1950, Hughes re-released the film as *Mad Wednesday*, which achieved the same level of success as its earlier incarnation.

Lloyd was now retired from acting, focusing his attention on his hobbies and on the re-editing and splicing of his old films into compilations which he could control.

Harold Lloyd even has a tenuous tie to the world of science fiction. According to Joe Shuster, Harold Lloyd's everyman character served as one of the inspirations for Clark Kent, even down to the idea that he was unrecognizable when wearing his glasses. Ironic, then that



Lloyd in *Safety Last*, because this picture is required by law in any article on Lloyd.

Superman and Clark Kent first appeared in the year Lloyd retired from acting.

Over the course of his 34 year career, Lloyd appeared in 206 films (205 in the first 25 years). He managed to keep control over most of those films, which allowed him to live out a comfortable life with his wife, to whom he was married for forty-six years, until her death. Diagnosed with cancer in the 1960s, Lloyd died on 8 March 1971.

Buster Keaton

Born Joseph Frank Keaton, VI. on October 4, 1895 in Piqua, Kansas to a family of Vaudevillians, Keaton was brought into the family act very early.

According to Buster Keaton, he received his nickname when he was six months old and fell down a flight of stairs and came up grinning. Family friend and partner, Harry Houdini saw it and commented to Keaton's father, Joe, "That's quite a buster you've got there." And the name stuck. However, While the incident may have happened, it probably didn't happen in April 1895 and Harry Houdini likely wasn't involved. When Joe Keaton first told the story in 1903, he stated it happened when Buster was 18 months old, in 1896. Joe didn't mention who gave Buster his nickname until a year later, when he attributed it to "legitimate comedian George Pardey", a minor Midwestern actor. Buster changed his age and by 1921 was claiming the name came from Harry Houdini. Neither Keaton, who died in 1926, or Joe appear to have publicly disputed Buster's version of the story.

The Keatons often ran afoul of child labor laws, but they were aware of which towns on the circuit enforced them and which didn't. When the laws weren't enforced, Buster was incorporated into the act as early as three years old. In the early days, part of his role was to stand behind his father, dressed like him, and mimic his actions. According to reviews of the act published in 1902, Keaton was brought on stage because having him in the act was easier than interrupting the act for his mother to take care of him.

Buster made his official debut on the stage on October 17, 1900 at Dockstadter's Theatre in Wilmington, Delaware. He was so popular that the Keatons were given a bonus for having Buster appear in evening shows as well as matinees. In addition to mimicry, one of Buster's specialties was the pratfall and he and his father worked out an ever-changing act that took full advantage of Buster's physical abilities and his father's love of roughhouse play. The act also frequently brought the family into conflict with the Gerry Society, which existed to see that child labor laws were enforced, and the actress Sarah Bernhardt once asked, "How can you do this to this poor boy?" after seeing the way he was tossed around in the act. Other times, Joe and Myra were arrested for mistreating their son and on one instance, Buster was examined by doctors in the New York City Hall to ensure he didn't have any broken bones.



Although this claim by Keaton could be dismissed as bragging and building mystique, it has been confirmed by fellow Vaudevillian Will Rawls.

In an interview when he was nineteen, Keaton explained that early on he learned how to "land limp" so he doesn't injure himself. In the same interview, he claimed that his father gets the worst of the treatment. However, by that time, in 1914, Joe Keaton had begun to turn to the bottle, partly because he realized that his success was based more on his son's ability than his own. In January 1917, Buster and his mother quit the act and left Joe stranded alone in California while they made their way east. Upon arriving in New York, Buster was cast in a Broadway play, Schubert's Passing Show.

On the eve of appearing in the play, Keaton had a chance encounter on Broadway with Lou Anger. Anger brought Keaton to the Comique studio and introduced him to Roscoe Arbuckle, who cast him in a bit-role in the film "The Butcher Boy." Although Keaton initially turned down Arbuckle's offer of a job, he took home a camera, disassembled it and reassembled it, and the next day broke his contract with Schubert and signed a much less lucrative contract with Arbuckle and producer Joseph Schenk.

Keaton formed an integral part of Arbuckle's troupe, which included Arbuckle's nephew, Al St. John. Keaton quickly took on the role of assistant director and writer, making nearly as much as he would have if he had kept his job on Broadway. His work also had a strong impact on the screen, with Arbuckle's films losing some of their intense slapstick nature and becoming increasingly sophisticated in the humor they used.

Later in his life, Keaton would acquire the nickname "Old Stoneface" because he refused to allow his character crack a smile. Some viewers believe he was either incapable of smiling or that he was not allowed to smile on film per his contract. Neither is the case. Keaton, who can be seen smiling, and even laughing, in some of his work with Arbuckle, such as *Coney Island*, early came to the conclusion that if the audience needed to be coaxed into seeing something was funny by on-screen reaction, it meant the joke had failed.

Keaton's rising star was temporarily sidetracked during World War I when he was called up and served as both a cryptographer and an entertainer. His stint lasted about two years and when he returned, he found himself in California making films and becoming better known. Although not as well known or as successful at the time as Charles Chaplin or Harold Lloyd, Keaton was making two films a year and had control over his work. While his films may not have been as successful as Chaplin's, Keaton had a better grasp of the technical aspects of film making, which shows in nearly all the films he made in the 1920s.

One area in which Keaton excelled was the use of the camera in creating humor. He understood that the camera could feel the viewer into either seeing things that weren't there or things that were expected. This can be seen as early as *The Bell Boys* in which Keaton can be seen carefully polishing the glass in a phone booth, only to have it revealed that there is no glass to polish. In a later film, he created the split shot by showing numerous people getting out of a car. Covering half the film, he shot the sequence of

people emerging from the car, then went back and shot the other half of the car so you couldn't see the people simply climbing through. Keaton also made sure to prop the car up so it wouldn't give away the trick with unintentional rocking.

Perhaps Keaton's most famous experiment in early film was *Sherlock, Jr.* (1924). This film features a film projectionist who falls asleep and begins to interact with the films he is showing, similar in many ways to Woody Allen's much later film *The Purple Rose of Cairo*.

Keaton's comedy wasn't just based on the tricks he could do with a camera. He employed slapstick and pratfalls, both essential for comedy in a silent period, but also brought the tricks he learned in Vaudeville to the screen. Finally, perhaps more than any of his contemporaries, Keaton was an excellent prop comic, using just about anything he could find in an offhand, almost elfin manner.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Keaton wasn't content to simply make comedy films. In response to D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, Keaton made his own Civil War epic, *The General*. Based on a true story, Keaton essentially made a serious Civil War film to run as the second story behind the more humorous tale of a Confederate engineer. However, for all the humor of the main story, Keaton also interacts

Off screen, Keaton's life wasn't light or cheerful, in part because of his choice of wife. During his days with Arbuckle and Comique, Keaton married Natalie Talmadge, Arbuckle's secretary and Schenk's sister-in-law. Natalie's sisters were silent film actresses Norma and Constance Talmadge. Although Keaton and Natalie appeared happy when they married in 1921, by the time their first son was born in 1922, things had begun to sour. They had apparently agreed to name their son Joseph Frank Keaton VII, and that is the way his name appears on his birth certificate, but when he was christened, Natalie had his named James Keaton. When their second son, Robert, was born in 1924, Natalie informed Keaton that they would never have sex again.

Keaton took to having affairs with other woman and Natalie hired detectives to follow him. In a couple of cases, when Keaton tried to break off his affairs, he wound up as fodder for the Hollywood Press. Adding to his estrangement from Natalie was her need to live a lavish lifestyle. Although she didn't work in films, she felt the need to live up to the image Constance and Norma projected and spent Keaton's money lavishly, including building an enormous

house (where she took up an entire wing) and purchasing expensive clothes (which she only wore once). Partly due to his marital problems, but perhaps more due to professional issues, Keaton also turned to alcohol. In 1932, Keaton and Talmadge would divorce. She officially changed their sons' last name to Talmadge and refused to allow them to see Keaton until 1939, when James was eighteen.

Following the release of *The General*, in 1927, United Artists insisted on reining in Keaton's work, which was costing too much money and not showing a consistent return on their investment. Unable to deal with their demands, Keaton left United Artists and signed a contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, which he quickly learned that he would have no independence at all. Furthermore, his switch came at a time when sound was beginning to play a big role in films.

At MGM, Keaton's role were assigned to him by the



Keaton laughing at Arbuckle in *Coney Island*, a rare chance to see "The Great Stone Face" smiling.

heavy-handed studio system, and he was not only required to learn and stick to dialogue, but for the first time in his life was made to use stunt doubles. MGM attempted to create a comedy pairing of Keaton and Jimmy Durante, but after four films, they realized it wasn't working (although they would appear in a few more films together over the years). Keaton only remained at MGM for a couple of years before the studio released him from his contract. He found work in Europe and then returned to the United States where he

was hired by MGM to work as a gag writer. Perhaps the most famous film he worked on was the Marx Brothers film *Go West* (itself a title of an earlier film in which Keaton starred, but not a remake). Keaton had only negative things to say about working with the Marxes and Groucho indicated that nothing Keaton wrote for them wound up in the final film.

Buster married again in 1933, to a nurse named Mae Scriven. The two met while Buster was doing a short stint in a mental institution and Scriven later claimed that she didn't know Keaton's name until after they were married and Keaton claimed he was drunk and didn't remember the entire incident. They were divorced in 1936, causing Keaton to take another major financial hit. Following their divorce, Keaton began to date Eleanor Norris, who had a calming effect on his and helped wean him from alcohol. They married in 1940 and remained together until his death 26 years later.

Throughout the 1940s, Keaton began to rebuild his career, playing numerous small roles in a variety of films,

although there was nothing major. Mostly, he worked for MGM as a gag-writer, earning less than a tenth of the salary he made as his height. According to Keaton, a lot of the time, he basically showed up for work and sat around all day. He also spent time on the stage in the 1940s, touring in plays in the US and Europe. It was during this time as a gag writer that he met a young chorus girl who had aspirations to become a comic, although she didn't have a comic's timing or imagination. Keaton taught her how to pace a joke and use physical comedy to her advantage and she eventually made a name for herself as a comedian, Lucille Ball. To see the difference Keaton (and training) made to Ball, just watch her in 1938's Marx Brothers' film *Room Service* and compare her to the work she did after she met Keaton.

The beginning of the 1950s would see a slight resurgence as Keaton got his own short-lived comedy series in which Keaton would re-create many of his famous silent film gags on live television. Although Keaton's show didn't last long, it did lead to a wide variety of roles on television, from making commercials to a serious role in an adaptation of Nikolai Gogol's "The Overcoat" to an excellent episode of *The Twilight Zone* which casts him as a time traveler with the older sequences done as silent films.

The 1960s also saw Keaton return to films. In many cases, Keaton simply had a cameo appearance. They range from a brief shot in *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*, a film which like the earlier *Around the World in Eighty Days*, in which Keaton also appeared, almost seemed created to give cameos to as many former stars as possible, to slightly meatier roles, as in Keaton's last appearance, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. However, the sixties also saw the release of *The Railrodder*, a 24-minute long Canadian silent film which features Keaton on a trip across Canada on a small single-man rail maintenance vehicle. At the same time, a behind-the-scenes film called *Buster Keaton Rides Again* was made, which lasts nearly twice as long as the film it documents.

While Harold Lloyd and Charles Chaplin both managed to retain control over the majority of their films, that was not the case for Buster Keaton and many of his earlier films were thought to be lost. It was through the efforts of Raymond Rohauer, who formed a partnership with Keaton in 1954, that many of Keaton's films were eventually found and archived. Rohauer was also responsible for launching a series of Keaton film festivals that helped spark the Keaton resurgence of the 1960s.

Keaton died on February 1, 1966, having made more than 150 appearances in films or television shows.

Charles Chaplin

Without doubt, the best known of the silent film comedians was Charles Chaplin, Jr., who was born on April 16, 1889 in London to a music hall singer and his wife, Hannah, a former stage actress. When he was



young, Chaplin's parents divorced, leaving Hannah to raise Charles and his older half-brother Sidney on her own. By 1896, however, Hannah succumbed to mental illness and was placed in an asylum for two months, leaving her two young sons to be placed in a workhouse for the first time. They eventually went back to living with their mother until Sydney left home to become a seaman, although he would eventually go on to work in the entertainment field.

When Hannah was again sent to an institution, Charles lived with his alcoholic father and his mistress. After Charles, Sr. died in 1901, Charles found himself as part of a boys dancing troupe, the Eight Lancashire Boys, who toured the company performing tap dancing in music halls. From here, Chaplin joined with music hall impresario Fred Karno. Karno ran a large organization which provided entertainers to music halls and from 1910 to 1912, he sent Chaplin to tour in America, along with other members of the troupe. During this tour, Chaplin's roommate and understudy was a comedian named Arthur Jefferson, who would later adopt the name Stan Laurel. At the end of the tour, Jefferson and the rest of the troupe returned to England, but Chaplin chose to remain in America.

Mack Sennett saw Chaplin perform and offered him a job at Keystone to replace departing star Ford Sterling. Chaplin's start, however, was inauspicious and Sennett decided to fire him after his first film, *Making a Living*, in which he played a con-man. Mabel Normand, however, saw something in Chaplin and convinced Sennett to give him another chance in her film *Mabel's Strange Predicament*. Sennett told Chaplin to get into comedy make-up and Chaplin went off to figure out what he meant.

Beginning with a cane he owned, Chaplin added a derby borrowed from Roscoe Arbuckle, a tight cutaway tailcoat he got from Chester Conklin, a fake moustache, and a pair of Sterling's size fourteen shoes, which Chaplin had to wear on the wrong feet in order to keep them on. Finally, he put on a pair of Arbuckle's large pants, thereby creating the image of his most enduring character, the Little Tramp. Although created for *Mabel's Strange Predicament*, the Tramp first appeared on the screen in the film *Kid Auto Races at Venice*, which was made after the Mabel film but released earlier.

With the new character, Sennett was quickly convinced of Chaplin's abilities. Not only did he feature Chaplin in numerous films, but also allowed Chaplin to begin directing movies, including more than 30 shorts in 1914 and 1915.

In his early work for Sennett, Chaplin's character was not particularly sympathetic. He used his physicality to attack other characters, and in his most famous film from the period, *Tillie's Punctured Romance*, he plays a



womanizer who plays with the title character's affections in an attempt to get his hands on her money and later her inheritance. Part of this was Sennett's idea of comedy, which trended

towards slapstick and pratfalls. Even in these films, however, Chaplin was able to demonstrate that he was capable of subtler humor, not as reliant as Sennett's other stars on exaggerated gestures and expressions.

Chaplin would maintain the character of the Tramp throughout all of his silent films, playing one version or another of him, until he made his first talkie, *The Great Dictator* (1940), although even then, elements of the Tramp can be seen underlying Chaplin's Jewish barber. The character was far from static, although there were certain aspects which didn't change. The Tramp always had his pride. He tried to maintain his appearance as much as possible and, once Chaplin left Sennett's Keystone Studios, the Tramp treated his fellow man with the humanity and kindness he wished to be shown in return. Furthermore, although the Tramp always chased the girl, in general, at the end of the movie, he wound up going off alone, the girl settling for the handsome, wealthy, member of society.

In 1915, Chaplin left Keystone to sign a contract at Essanay, based in Chicago, but also with studios in Niles, California. Chaplin made fourteen shorts with Essanay, including a few with Ben Turpin. Chaplin also began to assemble his own troupe while at Essanay, which included Edna Purviance. Purviance would stay with Chaplin, romantically linked to him from 1915 through 1917, and continued to appear in his films even after they broke up. Chaplin also kept Purviance on his payroll until her death in 1958, although her last film work was in 1927.

Essanay's films tended to be about twice as long as their Keystone counterparts and had more in the way of plot and less in the way of out-right slapstick. Working on films at both of Essanay's studios, Chaplin didn't remain with the company long. In 1916, he was offered \$670,000 to jump to Mutual to produce and star in several two-reel comedies. Mutual offered Chaplin more independence than he had at either Keystone or Essanay and he jumped at the chance. Retaining Purviance as his leading lady, he added Scotsman Eric Campbell, who stood 6'5" and dwarfed the 5'5" Chaplin. Unfortunately, their collaboration didn't even last as long as Chaplin's time at Mutual, for in 1917, after making eleven films with Chaplin, and around the time Chaplin was about to move from Mutual to First National (with Purviance and Campbell), Campbell was killed in a car accident.

At First National, Chaplin had received even more independence than he had at Mutual, essentially being allowed to do whatever he wanted and to have First National provide funding and distribution. First National, however, did not get quite what they expected. While Chaplin's contract called for him to create shorts, it was during this time that he created his first feature length films, including *The Kid*, which featured Jackie (Uncle Fester) Coogan.

As with Keaton, Chaplin also had a knack for taking mundane props and turning them into magical routines. Perhaps the most famous instance comes from his film *The Gold Rush* (1925), in which he turns a pair of potatoes into dancing feet, a gag re-enacted by Robert Downey, Jr. in the film *Chaplin* (1992) and Johnny Depp in *Benny and Joon* (1993). Earlier, in *Dough and Dynamite* (1914), Chaplin

takes strands of dough and flips them around his wrist to create doughnuts.

While Chaplin was creating his films for First National, he was also working to create something greater. Living in Hollywood, he had become close friends with William S. Hart, Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford. In the late teens, the four of them decided to form their own studio, to not only ensure their freedom to make the films they wanted to in the way they wanted to, but also to guarantee that they would retain the rights to their films. In 1919, Hart bowed out and was replaced by D.W. Griffith. Along with attorney William Gibbs McAdoo, they formed the company, causing Metro Pictures President Ricard Rowland to observe "The inmates have taken over the asylum."

United Artists was never as successful as the original plans envisioned it. With the production costs and lengths of films increasing, it soon became apparent that none of the four principles would be able to create the stipulated five films a year. In 1924, Griffith dropped out of the partnership and Chaplin, Fairbanks, and Pickford agreed to distribute films made by other studios, bringing Joseph Schenck in as president of the company. Schenck left in 1933 to form Twentieth Century Pictures with Darryl F. Zanuck, although the new company provided four films a year to United Artists for distribution.

In 1951, Pickford and Chaplin agreed to turn United Artists, then on its last legs, to Arthur Krim and Robert Benjamin who proposed that if they could turn a profit within five years, they would then have the option to buy the company. Krim and Benjamin envisioned UA as a financier and distributor, not needing the overhead of film production. In 1955, UA won its first Best Picture Oscar, for *Marty*.

During the United Artist years, Chaplin focused on feature length films. These included some of his most famous films, *The Gold Rush*, *The Circus*, *City Lights*, and *Modern Times*. By now, his character of the Tramp had been completely formulated and he appeared in all of these films, much more sympathetically than his initial characterization.

Around the time United Artists was being formed, Chaplin also entered into the first of several marriages, and began seeing his private life bandied about in the news papers. In 1918, he married child actress Mildred Harris, at the time just shy of her seventeen birthday while Chaplin was twenty-nine. The marriage occurred because Harris claimed she was pregnant, although it either turned out to be a false alarm or she was lying. Nevertheless, she and Chaplin had a son in July 1919. Norman Spencer Chaplin was tiny and malformed and died when he was three days old. The marriage broke up in 1921, providing more grist for the tabloid mill as Harris claimed Chaplin was sexually abusive and a sadist while Chaplin alleged Harris was having an affair with Ukrainian actress Alla Nazimova. Following the divorce, Harris was signed to a deal with MGM and billed as Mildred Harris-Chaplin, a move that angered Chaplin and led to a fistfight between him and Louis B. Mayer.

Following his divorce from Harris, Chaplin romanced Polish actress Pola Negri, although their stormy relationship also provided material for Hollywood's gossip-mongers and

many believed the Negri-Chaplin relationship was more to boost Negri career than based on any actual warmth between the two. It was also during this time that Chaplin found himself in the middle of a scandal reminiscent of the ones that sidetracked Normand's career and killed Arbuckle's. On November 19, 1924, William Randolph Hearst hosted a birthday cruise on his ship the *Oneida* for producer Thomas Harper Ince. During the cruise, Ince died, officially from an heart attack, although rumors quickly cropped up that he was shot by Hearst either in a fit of jealousy or accidentally while Hearst was arguing with Chaplin over Marion Davies, Hearst's mistress. Despite the presence on the ship of gossip columnist Louella Parsons, the rumors didn't take hold, possibly because Hearst, the man who had targeted Arbuckle in the papers three years earlier, had the power to kill any stories that didn't treat Ince's death as natural.

When working on *The Kid* for First National in 1921, Chaplin cast a young actress, thirteen-year old Lita Grey. Following his breakup with Negri, Chaplin began an affair with Grey in 1924 when she was sixteen, resulting in a pregnancy. Facing imprisonment, Chaplin and Grey secretly married in Mexico and remained married until 1927. During those three years, they had two sons, Charles Chaplin, Jr. (1925) and Sydney Earle Chaplin (1926). When Grey divorced Chaplin, she claimed that it was due to his

years into the 1930s. While having an affair with Hale, Chaplin would also have affairs with actress Louise Brooks and his secretary, May Reeves.

From 1932 through 1942, Chaplin had an affair with Paulette Goddard, who would star with him in *Modern Times* and *The Great Dictator*. Goddard was considered for the role of Scarlett O'Hara in 1939's adaptation of *Gone with the Wind*, but was rejected when she and Chaplin refused to clarify their marital status. When Chaplin appeared with Goddard at the debut of *The Great Dictator*, he introduced her as his wife, claiming the two of them had been married in 1936 in Canton, China. However, to his family and close friends, Chaplin maintained that he and Goddard were common law spouses. The two were divorced shortly after *The Great Dictator* was released. Goddard went on to marry Burgess Meredith (from 1944-1950) and then author Erich Maria Remarque from 1958 until his death in 1970.

Following Chaplin's divorce from Goddard, he entered into what may have been his most ill-advised affair in a lifetime that had numerous ill-advised romantic episodes. He had a brief relationship with Joan Barry, a 22-year-old actress. In his autobiography, Chaplin described Barry as "a big handsome woman of twenty-two, well built, with upper regional domes immensely expansive which...evoked my libidinous curiosity." Unlike Harris or Grey, when Barry



numerous affairs during their marriage. Grey would later write a book, *My Life With Chaplin* (1966) detailing their time together, although in a later book *The Wife of the Life of the Party* (1995) she said the earlier book was exaggeration and fabrication and she tried to set the record straight. In their divorce, Grey was awarded \$600,000 and a trust of \$100,000 for each child, the largest divorce settlement to that time. In the biography *Tramp: The Life of Charlie Chaplin*, Joyce Milton claims that Chaplin's relationship and marriage to Lita Grey formed the basis for Vladimir Nabokov's 1955 novel *Lolita*.

Originally, Chaplin had cast Grey in *The Gold Rush*, after previously using her in *The Kid* and *The Idle Class*. With her pregnancy, however, Chaplin found that he had to recast the role and he settled on nineteen year old Georgia Hale. Despite his recent marriage to Grey, and her pregnancy, Chaplin and Hale began an affair during the filming of *The Gold Rush* which would continue for several

claimed to be pregnant, Chaplin ended the affair, saying that she was harassing him and showing signs of mental illness similar to those once suffered by his mother. After the birth of the child in 1943, Barry filed a paternity suit against Chaplin. Chaplin volunteered to take a paternity test, and the results proved that he could not have been the child's father. Nevertheless, Barry's attorney managed to convince the courts that Chaplin should have to pay child support since the test results were inadmissible under California law. That ruling caused the California legislature to pass a law permitting the use of paternity tests as evidence. In 1944, Federal prosecutors brought charges against Chaplin claiming that his relationship with Barry violated the Mann Act, which could probably have also been done following his relationships with Grey and Harris. Chaplin was acquitted of the Mann Act charges. In 1956, Barry was institutionalized after found walking barefoot carrying a pair

of baby sandals and a child's ring, and murmuring: "This is magic."

Chaplin's final marriage was also his longest, although as with so many of his relationships, it began in scandal. While facing the legal problems associated with Joan Barry, Chaplin met eighteen-year-old Oona O'Neill, the daughter of Eugene O'Neill. Unable to break up their relationship, Eugene O'Neill refused to give his consent to their marriage, which merely delayed it until after Oona turned 18. Once they were married in June 1943, Eugene refused to speak to Oona or Chaplin, and turned away from any sort of reconciliation.

Unlike most of the other silent film comedians, Lloyd, Keaton, and Arbuckle until he was blackballed, Chaplin was not content to simply make comedy films. In an early interview with writer Gouverneur Morris, Chaplin indicated that he wanted to marry comedy to drama in his works, an idea at which Morris scoffed, stating that "It won't work. The form must be pure, either slapstick or drama; you cannot mix them, otherwise one element of your story will fail." However, Chaplin quickly proved Morris wrong, although there was a large contingent that claimed that Chaplin's work was best when it was straight comedy, an attack which Woody Allen would defend himself against decades later in his film *Stardust Memories* (1980).

As soon as United Artists offered him the opportunity, he filled his films with sentimentality and attacked social issues. While some of the scenes Chaplin performed with Coogan in *The Kid* (1921) can be seen as mawkish, the film works overall and you can see the Tramp cares strongly for the Kid. In *Modern Times* (1936), Chaplin takes on the industrial revolution that still sees its workers as replaceable cogs, graphically demonstrated in the famous scene in which Chaplin bends and twists his way through enormous gears as he tightens bolts on their side. In Chaplin's first talking picture, *The Great Dictator*, Chaplin played the dual roles of a Jewish barber and Adenoid Hynkel, the leader of the Third-Reichsque country Tomania, taking on Adolph Hitler two years before the United States entered World War II, and doing so with no illusions about who and what Hitler was.

Chaplin's politics, both in these films and in reality, was enough reason for J. Edgar Hoover to order that FBI keep a file on him during the 1940s and 50s. Hoover also attempted to rescind Chaplin's US Residency. This treatment came to a head in 1952, when Chaplin and Oona traveled to London for the premiere of his film *Limelight*. Hoover worked with the Department of Immigration and Naturalization to revoke Chaplin's re-entry permit. Since Chaplin had never become an American citizen, the move effectively exiled him from the United States. Oona returned to the US to close out their house and retrieve their belongings and money. She and Chaplin then settled in Vervey, Switzerland, where they lived out the rest of their lives.

After *The Great Dictator*, Chaplin only made four more films, two of them, *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947), about a Bluebeard-type murderer (which included a cameo by Fritz Leiber, Sr. as the priest who takes his final confession), and *Limelight* (1952), about two aging Vaudevillians which costarred Buster Keaton, before his exile. The other two, *A King in New York* (1957) and *A Countess from Hong Kong*

(1967) were made after his exile. While Chaplin starred in *A King in New York*, he only had a small role in *A Countess of Hong Kong*, which he also wrote and directed.

Chaplin had received his first honorary Oscar in 1929 for versatility and genius in acting, writing, directing and producing *The Circus*. Originally nominated for best actor, when the Academy decided to present him with an honorary Oscar, they also removed him from the competitive category. In 1972, the Academy announced that Chaplin would be honored with a second honorary Oscar for the incalculable effect he has had in making motion pictures the art form of this century. Chaplin returned from exile, triumphantly, to receive the award and acquaint himself with several survivors from his earlier career, including Goddard, Coogan, and others. Chaplin accepted the honor and was presented with a bowler and whangee cane by Jack Lemmon after receiving one of the longest standing ovations in Oscar history. The next year, Chaplin received the Oscar for Best Original Dramatic Score for *Limelight*, the film whose premiere in London led to Chaplin's self-imposed exile. Although released in Europe in 1952, it was not released in the US until 1972, thereby delaying its Oscar eligibility.

Chaplin died on December 25, 1977 at the age of 88. He had appeared in 87 films between 1914 and 1967, only five of them talkies, all of which were made after 1940. His Tramp character is still one of the most recognized icons of comedy throughout the world. On March 1, 1978 Chaplin's corpse was stolen from Corsier-Sur-Vevey Cemetery by a band that hoped to extort money from Chaplin's family. The group was arrested and after two weeks, the corpse was recovered and reinterred beneath a large concrete slab to prevent a future theft.

Joint Appearances

The world of silent films was somewhat incestuous, with actors often appearing together. Below is a complete list of films which featured at least one, and sometimes as many as three, of the actors discussed above.

Arbuckle & Chaplin

- *His Favorite Pastime* (1914)
- *His New Profession* (1914)
- *The Knockout* (1914)
- *The Rounders* (1914)
- *Tango Tangles* (1914)

Arbuckle & Keaton

- *Back Stage* (1919)
- *The Bell Boy* (1918)
- *The Butcher Boy* (1917)
- *Coney Island* (1917)
- *The Cook* (1918)
- *A Country Hero* (1917)
- *The Garage* (1920)
- *Go West* (1925)
- *Good Night, Nurse!* (1918)
- *The Hayseed* (1919)
- *His Wedding Night* (1917)

- *Moonshine* (1918)
- *Oh Doctor!* (1917)
- *Out West* (1918)
- *A Reckless Romeo* (1917)
- *The Rough House* (1917)
- *The Round-Up* (1920)

Arbuckle & Lloyd

- *Miss Fatty's Seaside Lovers* (1915)
- *Twixt Love and Fire* (1914)

Arbuckle & Normand

- *A Voice from the Deep* (1912)
- *Fatty at San Diego* (1913)
- *Fatty's Flirtation* (1913)
- *For the Love of Mabel* (1913)
- *Love and Courage* (1913)
- *Mabel's Dramatic Career* (1913)
- *Mabel's New Hero* (1913)
- *Passions, He Had Three* (1913)
- *Professor Bean's Removal* (1913)
- *That Ragtime Band* (1913)
- *The Bangville Police* (1913)
- *The Faithful Taxicab* (1913)
- *The Foreman of the Jury* (1913)
- *The Gypsy Queen* (1913)
- *The Speed Kings* (1913)
- *The Telltale Light* (1913)
- *The Waiters' Picnic* (1913)
- *When Dreams Come True* (1913)
- *In the Clutches of the Gang* (1914)
- *Lovers' Post Office* (1914)
- *The Sea Nymphs* (1914)
- *The Sky Pirate* (1914)
- *Those Country Kids* (1914)
- *Where Hazel Met the Villain* (1914)
- *Fatty and Mabel at the San Diego Exposition* (1915)
- *Fatty and Mabel's Simple Life* (1915)
- *Mabel and Fatty's Married Life* (1915)
- *Mabel and Fatty's Wash Day* (1915)
- *Mabel, Fatty and the Law (Fatty's Spooning Days)* (1915)
- *Mabel's Wilful Way* (1915)
- *Rum and Wall Paper* (1915)
- *That Little Band of Gold* (1915)
- *The Little Teacher* (1915)
- *Wished on Mabel* (1915)
- *Bright Lights* (1916)
- *Fatty and Mabel Adrift* (1916)

Chaplin & Keaton

- *Limelight* (1952)

Chaplin & Normand

- *His Trysting Place* (1914)
- *Mabel at the Wheel* (1914)
- *Mabel's Busy Day* (1914)
- *Mabel's Married Life* (1914)

- *Mabel's Strange Predicament* (1914)
- *The Fatal Mallet* (1914)
- *Tillie's Punctured Romance* (1914)

Chaplin & Turpin

- *Burlesque on Carmen* (1916)
- *The Champion* (1915)
- *The Chaplin Revue of 1916* (1916)
- *Chase Me Charlie* (1918)
- *His New Job* (1915)
- *Mixed Up* (1915)
- *A Night Out* (1915)

Lloyd & Normand

- *A Little Hero* (1913)
- *Back to the Woods* (1918)

Normand & Turpin

- *Molly O'* (1921)

Arbuckle, Chaplin & Normand

- *A Film Johnnie* (1914)
- *The Masquerader* (1914)

Arbuckle, Chaplin & Turpin

- *Charlie's Life* (1916)

Arbuckle, Lloyd & Turpin

- *Hogan's Romance Upset* (1915)

Arbuckle, Normand & Turpin

- *He Did and He Didn't* (1916)

Lloyd, Normand & Turpin

- *Their Social Splash* (1915)

Five Others

Mack Swain (1876-1935) made 143 films between 1913's *A Muddy Romance* (with Mabel Normand) and his theoretical retirement in 1932. In the 1910s, he formed half of a popular comedy duo, played Ambrose opposite Chester Conklin's Walrus, but in the last years of the decade, Swain's career began to sink. Chaplin stepped in and cast Swain in several pieces, including what is probably his best known role, as Big Jim McKay, Charles Chaplin's partner in *The Gold Rush*. His 1935 death in Tacoma, Washington precluded any chance of a second comeback.

Another large actor Chaplin paired with was **Eric Campbell** (1879-1917), who only made 11 films, all with Chaplin. Campbell was a 6'5" tall Scotsman who first acted with Chaplin in England, and eventually made several films with Chaplin. He was killed in a drunk driving accident on December 20, 1917. The accident was so bad, it took more than five hours to extricate him from the wreckage. He was cremated and his ashes sent to a cemetery, which stored them for six months while waiting for payment. The returned the urn to the funeral home, where it remained in a closet from 1918 until 1938, when the mortuary closed. They sent the urn back to the cemetery, where it was stored

in a closet until 1952, when an office worker arranged to have the urn buried, but failed to note where it was buried.

Once known as one of the big four silent comedians, as a young boy, **Harry Langdon** (1884-1944) fled his family in Omaha, Nebraska to join Dr. Belcher's Kickapoo Indian Medicine Show. Although he returned home after six months, he had been bitten by the bug and kept leaving home for short runs in Vaudeville. When Langdon decided to enter film, he approached Hal Roach, who refused to meet his price, so instead he signed with Sol Lesser, with whom he made three films which weren't released for several years before being "traded" to Keystone and Mack Sennett. By the time he began to make a name for himself, Langdon was following the other major comedians, to become the second generation of silent comedians. Langdon found himself working with director Frank Capra and writer Ripley. When Capra began running over budget, as producer, Langdon had to make up the difference and eventually fired Capra, taking over the directorial duties himself. Langdon's work was not what the public wanted to see and his contract was not renewed. Langdon managed to get work with Hal Roach as the talkies began, speaking in a falsetto voice that dated back to a childhood injury. Many now consider that any greatness Langdon really demonstrated in his films was more a product of his directors than his innate talent.

Prior to the Fatty and Mabel films, **Chester Conklin** (1886-1971) was frequently paired with Mabel Normand. Conklin also made a series of films with Mack Swain, in which Mack played a character known as Ambrose, and Conklin, sporting an enormous moustache, played Walrus. By 1920, however, Conklin felt that Mack Sennett was not respecting his talents enough and left Keystone for Fox and Paramount, where he made a series of silent films with W.C. Fields before making the semi-successful transition to the talkies, usually in smaller roles and often uncredited. An early friend of Chaplin's, he appeared in both *Modern Times* (1936) and *The Great Dictator* (1940) in minor roles, although Chaplin kept him on retainer. By the 1960s, however, his career had bottomed out and Conklin found himself working as a department store Santa in December to make ends meet.

Arbuckle's cousin **Al St. John** (1893-1962), who appeared in nearly 350 films, from 1912's *Through Dumb Luck* through the "Lash" series, in which he co-starred as

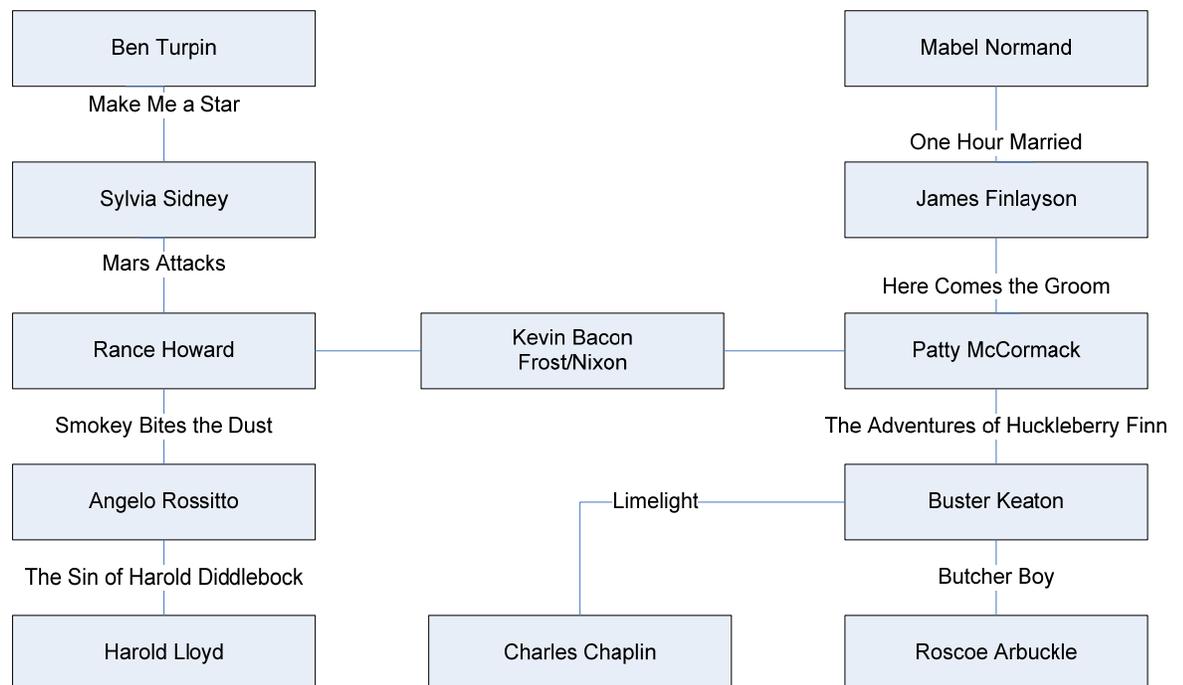
Deputy Fuzzy W. Jones with Marshal Lash Larue, which

ended in 1952. St. John appeared in films with all six of the comedians I'm focusing on. Swain's career also saw him teamed with Buster Crabbe for a series of *Billy the Kid* films.

Finally, I have to include a note about **Harpo Marx** (1888-1964). Born Adolph Marx, he would change his name to Arthur, although most people, including his family, knew him by his nickname. Getting his start with the family in Vaudeville, the Marx Brothers eventually went on to make films, all of them talkies, which was the only type of film that would work for Groucho and Chico's style of comedy. Unlike the other actors discussed here, Harpo's silence was in response to the words spoken by others, whether the overly talkative Chico, the wise-cracking Groucho, or the suspicions of a universe of other characters. Harpo did not make his screen debut until 1921, when he appeared briefly in the film *Too Many Kisses*, two years before "The Jazz Singer" changed movies forever. It was the only silent film Harpo made, despite never speaking on camera.

Bacon Numbers

Just over halfway through writing this article, I found myself wondering about Bacon Numbers for each of the comedians I'm discussing. A Bacon number, of course, is how many steps are required to get from a film an actor appears in to a film Kevin Bacon is in using people who acted together in films. It turns out that five of them have Bacon numbers of 3 and the remaining one has a Bacon number of just 2. All of them go through the 2008 film *Frost/Nixon*, in which Kevin Bacon plays Jack Brennan, although even without *Frost/Nixon*, it is possible to make the link (yes, I know, Bacon is in rashers, sausage is in links). Not all of the actors get into *Frost/Nixon* the same way.



The Virus-Scarred Man

Gregory Benford

The only story I've written that was truly prophetic came straight from my experience.

From 1967 to 1971 I lived a life divided between two difficult masters, fiction and physics. The Lawrence Radiation Laboratory at Livermore was a prime fusion research center. Edward Teller hired me as a postdoc and there I entered into its projects exploring, trying several fields—rarefied, mathematical solid-state physics; plasma stability theory; intense, relativistic plasma beams—in the hope that something would announce that here was my life's work.

Nothing did. I carried through a lot of calculations but found my interest in fusion flagging, as I came to doubt that any of the approved methods—machines with names like Astron, Magnetic Mirror, and Tokomak—would truly produce a practical reactor generating electrical power. (And 40 years later, this has proved true, with many billions spent and the program in retreat.)

In 1971 my daughter Alyson was born, my father suffered a near-fatal heart attack, and my disagreements with the leadership of the plasma physics theory group came to a head—all in the same month, January. I entertained the idea of turning to full-time writing. But that seemed a weak use of a doctorate, and anyway, I really wanted more freedom in my research, not a flight from it. So I went looking. Within half a year I was an assistant professor at the newest UC campus in Irvine and we moved to Laguna Beach.

But a story I wrote while at Livermore may be my most enduring work.

Written in 1969, "The Scarred Man" used what I was doing at the time. In a way, it was one of the darker episodes in my life.

I was trying to learn to write in those days. I programmed computers often (in Fortran, a language which survives as a dinosaur from that era) in pursuit of early simulations of plasma phenomena. Though to this day I primarily use analytical mathematics, I found computers useful. I also used the Laboratory's crude communications system that ran over the big, central computers we all worshipped then. I used ARPANet (Advanced Research Projects Administration) to send brief messages to colleagues in other labs. ARPANet linked the University of California campuses and the national laboratories such as Livermore and Los Alamos. One could either write a message by punching holes in cards, or by typing on a terminal connected to someone elsewhere on the lab. There was a pernicious problem when programs got sent around for use: "bad code" that arose when researchers included (maybe accidentally) pieces of programming that threw things awry.

One day I was struck by the thought that one might do so intentionally, making a program that deliberately made copies of itself elsewhere. The biological analogy was obvious; evolution would favor such code, especially if it

was designed to use clever methods of hiding itself and using others' energy (computing time) to further its own genetic ends.

So I wrote some simple code and sent it along in my next transmission on ARPANet. Just a few lines in Fortran told the computer to attach these lines to programs being transmitted to a certain terminal. Soon enough—just a few hours—the code popped up in other programs, and started propagating. By the next day it was in a lot of otherwise unrelated code, and I called a halt to matters by sending a message alerting people to the offending lines.

I wrote a memo and made a point with the mavens of the Main Computer: this could be done with considerably more malevolent motivations. Viruses would move. In messages to Los Alamos I did the same trick, and as the system expanded... There was no umpire to stop such shenanigans. Their reply: "Why would anyone do it, though?"

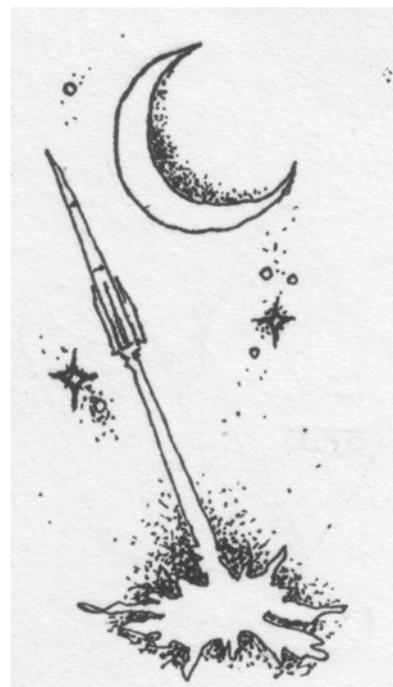
I recalled the Dylan song: *The pump don't work, 'cause the vandals took the handles...*

The ARPANet expanded to become the Net, then the World Wide Web. We tend to forget it was started as a method to link laboratories, and to ensure that communications did not break down in the event of war, so this globally uniting technology was all funded by the Department of Defense.

I thought it inevitable that such ideas work themselves out in the larger world. I wrote "The Scarred Man" to trace this out, choosing to think commercially: could someone make a buck out of this? Soon enough in writing the story I had devised a "virus" that could be cured with a program called

VACCINE. I was much impressed with the style of W. Somerset Maugham in those days, a writer now dropped from sight. I used his characteristic mannerism to frame the story, a narrator from outside listening to a tale of woe, with a twist at the end. I thought it was a solid job. Looking back now, it looks stilted.

"The Scarred Man" appeared in the May, 1970 issue of *Venture* and mercifully dropped from sight. (It's in my collection, *Worlds Vast, Worlds*



Various.) But then better writers like John Brunner and David Gerrold picked up on the basic idea and used it in novels a few years later. The notion spread. I have heard that some early copycat viruses began appearing in the ARPANet around 1974, though not virulent forms. By the late 1970s professor Ken Adelman at the University of Southern California had the same idea and claimed it for his own, warning that viruses could be very damaging. Shortly after, they became so.

I had no desire to encourage the kind of behavior I depicted in the story. The tale abounds in wrong guesses about its future, which is pretty much now—oil scarcity, shady corporations, tough economy. We aren't that desperate for oil, don't drill for it and run embargoes using submarines, for example—but the rather stiff frame of the action does still contain the kernel idea.

I avoided "credit" for this idea for a long time, but gradually realized that it was inevitable, in fact fairly obvious. It is some solace, I suppose, that last year's #2 seller software in virus protection was a neat little program named *Vaccine*.

The basic idea came into different currency at the hands of the renowned British biologist Richard Dawkins, who invented the term "memes" to describe cultural notions that catch on and propagate through human cultural mechanisms. Ranging from pop songs you can't get out of your head all the way up to the Catholic Church, memes express how cultural evolution can occur so quickly, as old memes give way to voracious new ones. This use of biological analogy now proceeds apace. We should expect more such imports into the general culture as we proceed into this, the Biological Century.

I suppose there was some money to be made from this virus idea, if remorselessly pursued, even back in the early 1970s. I thought about these, though my heart was not in it. (Perhaps I can claim, like Arthur C. Clarke, that I, too, lost a

billion dollars in my spare time.) Computer viruses are a form of antisocial behavior, and I did not want to encourage it in the slightest.

Now computer viruses are a major calamity. There are myriad variations: Trojan horses, chameleons (acts like familiar program, then turns nasty), software bombs (self-detonating agents, destroying without cloning themselves), logic bombs (go off given specific cues), time bombs (keyed by clock time), replicators ("rabbits" which clone until they fill all memory), worms (travel through network computer systems, laying eggs). Some companies in the anti-viral business claim over 100 million dollars lost each year in the USA due to viruses.

Nowadays there are sleeper mines, nasty scrub-everything viruses of robust ability, and what I term "datavores" that eat files with relish. What of the evolution of higher orders of self-transmitting information? Just as viruses are the lowest order of self-propagating entity in biology, using the apparatus of more complex entities, we may see in computers the evolution of software bacteria into higher forms. This is most unsettling. It may be inevitable, absent safeguards.

Not a legacy I wanted to claim. Yet it is an interesting case in the history of the constant interaction between science, technology, and science fiction. Inevitably somebody was going to invent computer viruses; the idea requires only a simple biological analogy. Once it escaped into the general culture, there was no way back. The manufacturers of spray-paint cans probably feel the same way...

Many writers reread their work; I don't.

Most of my fictions are to me forms of concealed autobiography, for I still can recall the heat of their creation. Beyond that, I hope they provide some amusement to inspecting, critical minds, well armed against viruses and memes alike.

Hugo and Pitfalls

As you may be aware, at Anticipation, I accepted the Hugo Award for WALL-E on behalf of Disney-Pixar. I don't have a tie to the film or the crew, but I had been in touch with them earlier in the year to arrange shipping of their Nebula to them and they asked me to handle Hugo duties, sending a brief speech.

Following the ceremony, as I lugged the Hugo Award around the convention, I hit upon the idea of offering to let people hold the Hugo for a \$5 donation to the fan funds. I managed to raised \$217 in this manner and passed the funds along to Chris Garcia to disburse to the other fan funds. (Someone offered \$2 just to touch it while I held it. Michael Swanwick donated but refrained from holding it, explaining he'd hold one of his own when he got home).

At 2am, as I walked down the street in front of the train station, dressed in a tuxedo and carrying the Hugo, a *gendarme* pulled up alongside me and ordered me to put down the knife. I placed the Hugo on the ground and took a step away from it, explaining what it was to the police officer, who took a look at it (I didn't charge him) and let me finish my walk to my hotel.

Welcome Home

Janis Ian

Words & music by Janis Ian; a derivative work.

(c) Mine Music Ltd./EMI Music Publishing Japan Ltd.(50%)/Rude

Girl Pub. Inc. (50%)

Sung to the tune of "At Seventeen"

I learned the truth at seventeen
That Asimov and Bradbury
and Clarke were alphabetically
my very perfect ABC's
While Algernon ran every maze
and slow glass hurt my heart for days
I sat and played a sweet guitar
and Martians *grokked* me from afar

Odd John was my only friend
among the clocks and Ticktockmen
while Anne McCaffrey's dragons roared
above the skies of Majipoor
Bukharan winds blew cold and sharp
and whispered to my secret heart
"You are no more alone
"Welcome home"

Tribbles came, and triffids went
Time got wrinkled, then got spent
Kirinyaga's spirits soared
and Turtledove re-write a war
While Scanners searched, and loved in vain
Hal Nine Thousand went insane
and Brother Francis had an ass
whose wit and wile were unsurpassed

Every story I would read
became my private history
as Zenna's People learned to fly
and Rachel loved until we cried
I spent a night at Whileaway
then Houston called me just to say
"You are no more alone
"so welcome home"

Who dreams a positronic man
Who speaks of mist, and grass, and sand
Of stranger station's silent tombs
Of speech that sounds in silent rooms
Who waters deserts with their tears
Who sees the stars each thousand years
Who dreams the dreams for kids like me
whose only home is fantasy?

Let's drink a toast to ugly chickens
Marley's ghost, and Ender Wiggins
Every mother's son of you
and all your darling daughters, too
And when the aliens finally come
we'll say to each and every one
"You are no more alone
"so welcome home
"Welcome home"



Taff Notes: Prelude

Steve Green

I blame Martin Tudor. We were at his home in Willenhall, north of Birmingham, helping my younger god-daughter celebrate Halloween with the offspring of various other local fans, when the suggestion arose again that I should stand for the TransAtlantic Fan Fund. Only seven months earlier, I'd told Chris Garcia point blank that there was no chance I'd ever put myself forward, but that was a different life, before I lost Ann, and Martin was convinced campaigning—and maybe even winning the race—would give me a renewed direction. That he was also about to become single may have fuelled his own enthusiasm for the project; whatever the case, he beat me down.

Ironically, our initial hurdle was actually finding someone to stand against me, since TAFF's rules explicitly prohibit a one-horse race (in contrast, I believe the Canadian Unity Fan Fund has never been contested). Perhaps because the target Worldcon was Canadian (indeed, this would be the first time TAFF was aiming north of the border), there didn't seem to be the usual groundswell of interest on the eastern side of the Pond.

(Chris had suffered similar problems when he first attempted to stand, back in 2007, and that race had no sooner launched than it was called off due to the cancellation of the planned Eastercon. By the time another event had taken its place, all bets were off and both administrators found themselves locked in post for an extra year.)

Eventually, John Coxon offered to step forward and adopt much the same stance as Mike Simpson had taken during Martin's second and successful stab at the honour, quietly backing his opponent's campaign. The fact that I'd be following in my *Critical Wave* co-editor's footsteps with an equally contrived ballot didn't altogether sit well with us, but the alternative was to postpone my own run and leave poor old Bridget Bradshaw holding the reins for an unprecedented fourth year. In the final event, John was forced to drop off the ballot when he discovered the trip would coincide with a friend's wedding, but Tom Womack unexpectedly announced his willingness to ensure the race would go ahead. You could probably have heard the sighs of relief on the Eastern Seaboard.

Thankfully, neither of us encountered any difficulties with recruiting a full set of nominations. Tom got the backing of Geri Sullivan and Vicki Rosenzweig (USA), Clare Boothby, Liz Batty and Alison Scott (UK), whilst I notched up support from Lloyd & Yvonne Penney (Canada), Randy Byers (USA), Peter Weston, Mark Plummer and Martin (UK).

The new line-up was formally unveiled at Novacon 38, with a voting deadline set just after the Bradford Eastercon.

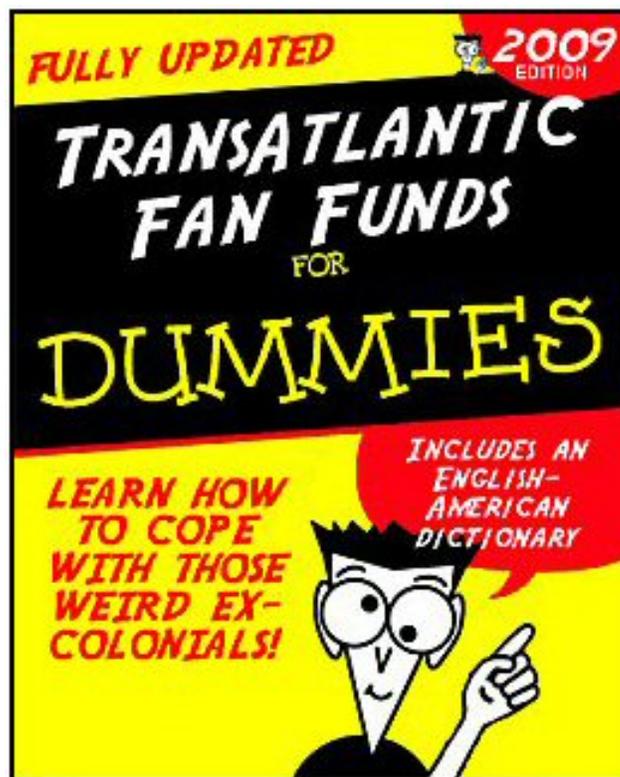


Better still, Tom and I were both attending the latter gathering, so Peter Sullivan was able to organise an informal video uplink and interview us both for the Ustream network, scoring another first for TAFF (and possibly fan funds in general).

We also took part in a panel discussion together, where I have to confess to being slightly the worse for over-refreshment (I was finding at the time I could make it through the first day of a convention, but the second often proved more of a struggle, as I hit a kind of emotional tipping-point; this would be something I'd have to watch out for if I made it to Canada). Tom came off pretty well, which fell in line with his hope that standing for TAFF would boost his profile outside his usual online prowling grounds.

Less than a week later, Bridget announced the results: a total of 175 votes cast, with a really healthy turnout on both sides of the Pond and an absolute majority for yours truly. Now all I had to do was organise my itinerary around the Worldcon, book my flights and.. ah, renew my passport, which had expired in 1993.

From that factoid, it won't surprise anyone to learn that I was by no stretch of the imagination (even a scientific imagination) any kind of globetrotter. Indeed, the only previous time I'd boarded a plane was for a brief stay in



Paris with Ann back in 1986. We'd attended the 1990 worldcon in Holland, but that was back in the days of Critical Wave, so I'd taken Martin's and my stock of back issues over in the boot of my Ford Escort. This was an entirely different league of travel.

After a couple of hiccoughs with my passport photographs, the first set of which were rejected because my head appeared too large (no sniggering at the back, please), I booked the initial flights to Montreal (via Newark, although that allowed me to depart from an airport seven miles down the road rather than the far more distant Heathrow or Gatwick). The local sf group was kindly organising accommodation for the five nights prior to Anticipation, meaning I could chillax before plunging fully into the traditional worldcon maelstrom (likely to be even more hectic than usual, given my TAFF status), and the convention itself had offered to cover my stay at the designated "party hotel", the Delta. I also added flights from Seattle to San Francisco and on to Las Vegas, since all three of those locations had been pretty much nailed in place the moment I'd decided to stand.

A few sections of the journey remained tantalisingly unglued, however. My initial plan to travel to Vancouver by rail collapsed after I discovered that not only would this mode of transport cost considerably more than all the flights combined, but there was little or no active fanbase interested in extending a welcome. Thankfully, I was offered not only a place to stay in Toronto, but a chauffeured drive there straight from my hotel, courtesy of Yvonne Penney.

The final—and in some ways most problematical - chunk of the jigsaw proved to be the gap between Las Vegas and New York (I'd already booked the return flight

from Newark, figuring that would keep the Immigration & Naturalization Service off my back, which proved to be very nearly correct). An offer to stay in Denver was first extended, then retracted, once my would-be host discovered enthusiasm for my visit approached Vancouver-like proportions. Enter stage right Mr Steven Silver, publisher of this very organ, who stepped in with a very welcome invitation to spend a few days at his home in Chicago.

And with that, as they say, all was set. "Their" optimism was, of course, severely misplaced.



[This is the opening extract from Steve's TAFF notes, which will eventually be rewritten into a full report and released on CD. Full details will be posted at taff.org.uk, the fund's official website, which currently contains the ballot for the westbound race to the next year's UK Eastercon between Anne Murphy & Brian Gray (standing jointly) and Frank Wu.]



2010 TAFF Ballot North America to Europe

What is TAFF? The Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund was created in 1953 for the purpose of providing funds to bring well-known and popular fans familiar to those on both sides of the ocean across the Atlantic. Since that time, TAFF has regularly brought North American fans to European conventions and European fans to North American conventions. It exists solely through the support of fandom. Interested fans all over the world vote on the candidates, each vote being accompanied by a donation of not less than US\$3 or UK£2. These votes, and the continued generosity of fandom, are what make TAFF possible.

Who may vote? Voting in the 2010 race is open to anyone active in fandom prior to April 2008, and who donates at least US\$3.00 or UK£2.00 to TAFF. Larger contributions will be gratefully accepted. Voting is by secret ballot: only one vote per person, and you must sign your ballot. You may change your vote any time prior to the deadline.

Deadline: Votes in this race must reach the administrators by **midnight PST, 22 December 2009. This is 8am GMT, 23 December 2009.**

Voting details: TAFF uses a preferential ballot system which guarantees automatic runoffs until a majority is obtained. You rank the candidates in the exact order of your preference for them. If the leading first-place candidate does not get a majority, the first-place votes for the lowest-ranking candidate are dropped, and the second-place votes on those ballots are counted as first-place votes. This process repeats itself until one candidate has a majority. Your votes for second and third place are important, but you may give your candidate only one ranking on your ballot. In order to win, a candidate must receive at least 20% of the first-ballot first-place votes on either side of the Atlantic. Any candidate failing to receive this minimum percentage on either side will be dropped, and the second-place votes on their ballots counted as first-place votes in the next ballot count. Candidates and their supporters will thus need to canvass fans on both sides of the Pond. You may send your ballot to either administrator, but it will be tabulated with the other votes from the side of the ocean where you reside. Votes from fans not resident in either Europe or North America will not count towards either 20% minimum, but are important to the outcome of the race.

Hold Over Funds: This choice, like “No Award” in Hugo balloting, gives you the chance to vote for no TAFF trip this year, should you feel none of the candidates deserve your support. Hold Over Funds may be voted for in any position, and is exempt from the 20% requirement; thus, if it receives a majority of the votes on the final ballot, no trip will be held this year regardless of how many votes that option received on the first ballot.

No Preference: For voters who prefer not to choose between candidates, but don't want the trip held over.

Donations: TAFF gratefully accepts your freely given money and material for auction; such generosity has sustained the Fund for over 50 years. TAFF is fandom's oldest travel fund, and one of its worthiest causes -- give early and often! Please contact your nearest administrator for details.

Candidates: Each candidate has posted a bond, promising - barring “acts of God” - to travel, if elected, to the 2010 Eastercon (Odyssey, April 2nd - 5th 2010). They have also provided signed nominations and a platform (published overleaf). Please read both sides of this ballot before voting. Send entire sheet as your vote.

Name & address: _____

Telephone number or e-mail address: _____

(We need your full contact details. TAFF may need to contact you regarding your ballot or to send out newsletters. We do not publish this data or pass it to any other organisation.)

Signature: _____

A Culture of Maps, Trains, and Sex: A Review of Catherynne M. Valente's Palimpsest Tour

Michael D. Thomas

Trains rumble through the speakers. Portable stage lighting illuminates the back of the meeting space. Women bound in corsets emerge with mysterious men from the dark corners. They read from *Palimpsest*. Eerie, dreamlike fragments of text hover in the air over the silent crowd dressed in their Steampunk finery, melding with the taboo eroticism of the lyrical imagery.

All of the readers fascinate, but none more so than the novel's author, Catherynne M. Valente. Her lush voice booms through the storefront metaphysical center as she stands in her customized *Palimpsest* corset (covered in



ancient maps). Her perfect enunciation rolls and caresses her text. Each passage pulls the audience deeper into her evocative, sensual world.

Then the music starts. Filk artist S.J. Tucker takes the stage with her top hat and big, predatory vocals, flanked by fellow artists Betsy Tinney and Michelle "Vixy" Dockrey. They rip into the music of

Palimpsest, mirroring and reinterpreting Valente's prose.

This is not a typical book tour. Of course, *Palimpsest* is not a typical fantasy novel. It is a gorgeous masterpiece of complex concepts verging on a prose poem about a city called *Palimpsest* that can only be accessed through sexual intercourse. Once you visit this city of clockwork vermin and animal/human hybrids, you are forever marked with a tattoo that bears a piece of the city's map. The novel follows four people (a locksmith, a beekeeper, a bookbinder, and train obsessive) who yearn to stay in this amazing and fascinating city.

In 2009, author Catherynne M. Valente embarked on a unique tour to promote the release of her sixth novel. Valente is still relatively new to SF writing world, but has already earned numerous awards and critical acclaim. She blends sensual prose, myths, and wild imagination to create fresh, amazing stories. Her duology, *The Orphan's Tales*, earned her a World Fantasy nomination, a Mythopoeic award, and a Tiptree award. To promote *Palimpsest*, Valente took it upon herself to create something special. She joined forces with acclaimed filk artist S.J. Tucker and crisscrossed the country with an ever-changing multi-media book tour that combined music, readings, and spectacle.

Publisher-sponsored book signings are often dull, predictable events. Like many weapons in the author's

promotional arsenal, these events have questionable sales benefits. Exceptions exist, but they're rare. As a fan, I've been to numerous book events through the years. For the most part, they always follow the same predictable pattern.

In order to demonstrate how wonderful the *Palimpsest* tour is, here's a primer on how almost every publisher-sponsored book event occurs:

1-You show up to the bookstore. For a bigger author, they might force you to buy a book there for the signing. You travel to the section of the store where they've arranged some uncomfortable folding chairs in lecture style.

2-Author X shows up at sits down in front of the dozens of people. He or she says some things about the new book and reads either a chapter from it or a recent short story for 15-30 minutes. Unless the author has fantastic reading skills, you find your mind drifting after 10 minutes to thoughts of what's on the shelves of the bookstore, trying to figure out the percentage of fans there wearing glasses, and whether or not you need to run outside to re-fill the parking meter.

3-Author X opens things up for a Q&A. There are only 20 questions that might be asked. The biggest entertainment value for me comes from the author's grimace when somebody asks him or her about where they get their ideas.

4-The visibly indifferent bookstore staff creates an orderly queue for the signing. This is where you get to enjoy the different kinds of fans. There's the collector who brought a pile of first editions, the skeezy person who will want the book inscribed to "Congratulations highest eBay bidder!", the person who has been practicing some witty banter for the last two weeks in the hope that they will become BFFs with the author after the 2 minutes of contact, and the shy superfan who might pass out as soon as they get within five feet of the genius.

5-The signing finishes and the author is surrounded by the witty-banter fans. The shy superfans also stay, but they hover at the fringes. The author chats for a few more minutes before making his or her escape.

That's it. The variations come with the size of the crowd and the wittiness of the author. A gregarious author can turn these predictable events into something engaging. Since most authors are introverts who spend the majority of their lives purposely sheltered from humanity, you can guess how often that happens.

That's not how the *Palimpsest* tour operated. Valente and Tucker traveled the country like an indie rock band. They booked events in bookstores, new age centers, conventions, and any other place that would take them. They crashed at the homes and apartments of friends and fans. Locals pitched in to help at every stop, sometimes adding to the spectacle with fan art, jewelry, a bondage and rope suspension artist, or burlesque dancers. No two shows were the same. The centerpiece of the tour was a train trip on the *City of New Orleans* with fans and friends between

Chicago and the Crescent City that ended in a semi-formal, masked gala.

These weren't readings/signings; these were *Events*.

Without the help of a publisher's P.R. department, Valente and Tucker used the Internet to promote and organize the tour, often asking the fans directly for help with bookings and lodgings. The communities of their blogs, Facebook, and Twitter streams came together to make the impossible occur. After each signing, fans returned to the Internet to post videos, pictures, and reviews that fed the excitement for the next stop.

I caught the tour on March 18, 2009, during its midpoint at the Life Force Arts Center on the North Side of Chicago, a storefront "space for spiritually-based visual, literary and performing art" located on the same street as a Kabbalah and a Scientology center. The young fans packed the center, dressed in a hodge podge of Victoriana and International



Male outfits, proudly showing off pagan body art and tattoos. They exuded the kind of excitement that usually precedes a rock show. It was impossible to not get caught up in the moment.

I enjoyed the event. S.J. Tucker's music wasn't my cup of tea, but I admired how she captured the novel in song (she kept writing new songs as the tour progressed). Catherynne

Valente was positively mesmerizing. She was raised with a theatrical background, and it showed. She read with confidence and poise, properly altering her delivery with every character and line. I now understand why so many authors signed up for her readings' workshop at WisCon a couple of years ago. By the end of the performance, I wanted to join her fictions in *Palimpsest*.

The audience's energy carried right to the end. People hung around after the event, getting things signed and meeting like-minded individuals. Valente easily transitioned from being the rock star up on the stage to the gracious hostess in the middle. She mingled and made sure that everybody there felt appreciated.

Catherynne M. Valente cultivated a culture, combining her talent as a writer with a truly special fan experience. Everybody who left that performance felt like they were part of something bigger. Valente created a loyalty in her fanbase on a par with the big-name authors like Terry Pratchett or Neil Gaiman. The fans at these events will follow her career for the rest of their lives.

This proved extremely important to Valente a few months later. The recession of 2009 hit her household when

her fiancé was laid off from his job. After they ran through their savings, Valente came up with an idea to keep them fed. She decided to write a children's novel that was referenced in *Palimpsest* called *The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making*. She set it up as a serialized novel on her website (www.catherynnevalente.com) with an option to leave donations. Her fandom and friends came out in force. Links to it turned up on major Internet websites like Boing Boing and the blogs of SF celebrities like Neil Gaiman and John Scalzi. Within a couple of days, she had made enough money to weather her financial storm. It's hard not to believe that much of this goodwill flowed back to her because of her amazing *Palimpsest* tour.

Does Valente's *Palimpsest* tour mark the end of traditional book tour? Does the revolution begin here? Probably not. Though Valente—according to her blog—broke even on the tour, she still devoted a great deal of time and energy to it that few midlist authors could conceivably manage. Direct contemporaries such as Tim Pratt and Elizabeth Bear have expressed little or no interest in doing that kind of self-produced, multi-media book tour. Valente also possesses a unique set of talents that made this tour possible. Few authors have both the literary and theatrical talents to pull this off.

And yet, I think this does mark a shift in how authors will handle self-promotion. Valente took major risks, and so far it seems to have paid off. I have no idea if she sold more books from it yet, but she certainly created a culture of true fans who have already saved her in a time of financial trouble. Other SF authors will likely find promotional models other than the traditional book tours and convention appearances. One thing that is certain is that publishing conglomerates are not about to greatly increase the promotional funding to their midlist authors. The authors like Catherynne Valente who take risks will likely be the ones that cultivate the loyal fandom necessary to succeed for years to come.



Cheng Ho Discovers America!

Taral Wayne

A little while ago I wrote a short piece on a coin from Kabul in Afghanistan, a crossroad of the Silk Road. One of the odder details that emerged from my researching this coin's background was that the Chinese had written about the kings of Kabul that struck it. What they said was of little importance. What intrigued me was that the reach of the Chinese spread so far west.

Central Asia is certainly a curious place, and overlooked by most people. To the casual reader the vast tracts of sand and rock between the Byzantine and Tang and Sung dynasties was a no-man's land of nomadic tribes and weary camel trains. But in fact it was a quilt of small kingdoms and city-states—Kashan, Samarkand, Tashkent, Lhasa—and those nomads periodically created vast federations that overran the surrounding civilizations. Much about the numerous peoples who inhabited the heart of Asia is still unknown and what is known is nevertheless the subject of contentious debate.

But central Asia seems to have been more a mystery to Europe than to the Far East. In the 7th century, enormous armies clashed in Asian deserts. The rising Islamic empire had met the distant Chinese civilization, and fought over the fate of passes in mountain ranges that no-one in Dark Ages Europe knew the name of...much less where they were, or how they mattered to the balance of power.

One reader of my original article commented that the reach of the Chinese exceeded even to the Pamirs and Hindu Kush. He reminded me of the voyages of the eunuch admiral, Cheng Ho. (Alternately, Zheng He)

During the reign of the kings of Kabul, Sung China dwarfed any empire in the West or the Hind. Whereas the Byzantines built a wall around Constantinople, the Sung stood guard on a wall around China. A vast network of cargo laden canals crisscrossed the Middle Kingdom. Gunpowder had been invented and already primitive canon and rockets had appeared.

Some centuries later, starting in 1405, the Ming emperor Zhu Di mounted several gigantic maritime expeditions to explore the China Seas and Indian Ocean. His "admiral" was half Arab, and a eunuch, but nevertheless given the use of hundreds of ships larger than anything in medieval Europe, and command over tens of thousands of men to crew them. Not to mention that untold wealth in silk, gold,

spices, and tea were put at his disposal to sweeten diplomacy and spark trade.

The several voyages of Cheng Ho's monster fleet visited the Philippines, touched port in Indochina, probably came within sight of the north Australian shore, penetrated the Sumatra Straits, and entered the Bay of Bengal. On successive voyages the fleet sailed up the Persian Gulf, rounded Arabia, and stopped off at the port of Jidda in the Red Sea. From the vicinity of Mecca, Ho sailed south along the African shore, touching at Mogadishu and Mombasa, and may have reached as far as Madagascar. Cheng Ho was the greatest executive-explorer in history before Prince Henry the Navigator of Portugal.

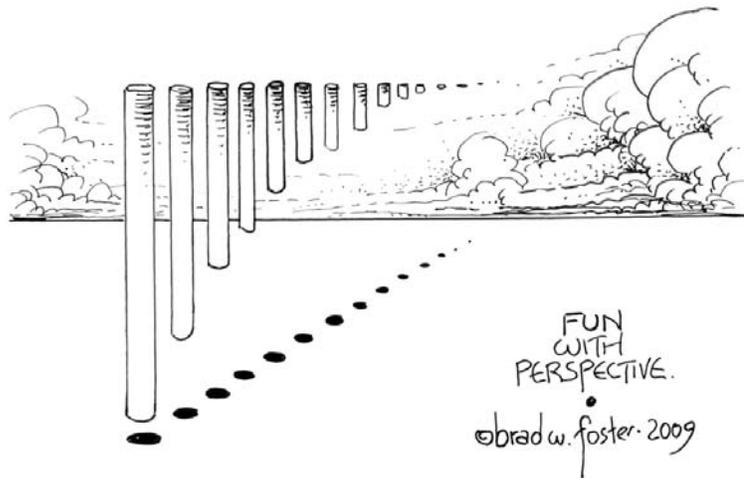
Columbus had not even been born yet.

And then it came to an abrupt end in 1433.

The maps were burned, the journals kept were discarded, the immense ocean-going ships were broken up where they lay in their yards. Everything possible was done to ensure that the very memory of the expeditions of Cheng Ho were officially forgotten. Of course, no such effort is ever entirely successful, and the record wasn't entirely expunged. A great deal about the voyages can still be reconstructed, and we know much about the maritime technology that made them

possible. But how could such a thing happen?

It would be as though we in the 20th. century had gone to the moon, not once, but several times, and then turned our back on the adventure so thoroughly that it would take a major initiative to re-acquire a capability we had lost a couple of generations ago.



ahem

Characteristic Chinese isolation and self-absorption were to blame, my correspondent implied, in particular an emperor jealous of his servant's success.

The situation was a bit more complicated than just a jealous emperor. For one thing, the emperor Zhu Di died. His heir was a more modest ruler, not given to megalomaniac projects to aggrandize his own divinity, as Zhu Di had been. He was concerned for the poor of his realm, and the burden of taxes they paid. Within his court policies changed, and the balance of power shifted.

In effect, Cheng Ho's expeditions lost out in a palace intrigue between the "Mandarin" party and the "Palace Eunuch" party. One group criticized the expeditions as a waste of money—who cared what barbarian nations there were on the far side of the world. They wanted the money spent on "useful" projects to benefit the kingdom, in this case, the considerable expense of construction of new and longer canals. Profits before curiosity would be one way of putting it.

It's actually possible to project the Chinese politics of the 15th. century into our own day. In the 20th century we've seen one party deplore the waste of money on space exploration, money that might have been used to build schools and hospitals, or reclaim the environment. But like most parallels, they won't hold up long. In our case, the "profit" motive is seen on the side of exploration, or curiosity, while its the do-gooders who are on the "useful" side.

There are numerous amusing parallels, in fact.

In making a list of characteristics of the "Eunuch" party we see the Republicans:

- an entrepreneurial class
- business opportunists
- new money (not part of the old establishment)
- imperialist ambitions
- open (free) trade with barbarians
- "trickle-down" economics, privatized interests
- crony style corruption

Likewise a list of characteristics of the "Mandarin" or "Confucian" party who serve well as the Ming version of the Democrats:

- privileged upper class
- status quo
- old money (entrenched interests)
- domestic reform
- regulated economy
- noblesse oblige
- old-boy style corruption

In any case, rather like America at various times, China turned its back on the world after 1433, deeming it populated by various towel-heads, gooks, and mud-people of no interest. I wonder if I don't prefer that China to the one that thinks the time has come for it to resume its proper place as leader of the world. Implicit in their boasts and ambition is that the rest of us will have to step back and acknowledge the supremacy of their supposed 5,000 year old culture.

By the way. That's simply propaganda that Westerners seem gullible enough never to question. Who's culture isn't 5,000 years old in one sense or another?

In 3000 BC, the Chinese were a pre-literate, pre-bronze age people wearing skins, just like pretty much everyone else's ancestors in the third millennium BC. The earliest, Shung, dynasty would not appear in China for another 1500 years. It's doubtful that the formative Chinese language could even be recognized in Beijing today. If anything, the Sumerian and Egyptian civilizations of 3000 BC were far ahead of the barbarians living on the plains of the upper Yellow River at the time.

There are two books on the subject of Cheng Ho's voyages. I recommend *When China Ruled the Seas* by Louise Levathes. (Simon & Schuster, 1994) The work is rock solid and well documented—it's accepted by scholars everywhere.

The other book is *1421, the Year China Discovered the World* and after a good start turns into a crank work. By the end, the author, Gavin Menzies, has the Chinese discovering practically every corner of the world...but manage to overlook Europe entirely.

Naturally not Europe. If the Chinese had sailed up the Thames or Seine in the early 15th. century, there would be copious written accounts in European literature. You can imagine Columbus would have had little trouble finding funds to follow in Chinese tracks. And Shakespeare a couple of generations later might have written at least one play on the subject. Of course, if Chinese discoveries are carefully limited to California, Australia, Antarctica, Newfoundland, South Africa, the Congo, and Peru, the problem doesn't arise. What records would be left by the pre-literate inhabitants of the New World, black Africa, and Oceania? How convenient that the Chinese discovered only places they are known from written accounts to have visited, or places where there can be none.

Other than that suspect circumstance, the author builds supposition upon supposition that begs skepticism. Menzies argues rather in this fashion:

A current only 100 miles off the usual trade routes would naturally sweep a fleet all the way across the Indian Ocean. If it went around the Horn of Africa just right, the fleet would enter the trade wind belt and have an almost automatic passage of the Atlantic. If they sighted land first at Manhattan, they could have sailed up the Hudson River and discovered the Iroquois. From there a trip up the Great Lakes would bring you to a series of portages into the prairies, where guides could take Chinese explorers to the Rockies easily. From there to founding San Francisco is a small step...etc.

It's rather like building a tree house out on the slenderest twig of the furthest branch of a tree. Each step makes it more and more likely the entire structure of speculation will collapse of its own weight.

Naturally, with its more ambitious, if unsubstantiated scope, *1421* seems to have caught the public imagination. But if you prefer Gibbon to Sprague de Camp, don't waste your time on this book. It's not even a ripping good yarn. There isn't a single snake goddess.

Still, it's fascinating to speculate. What if Cheng Ho's expeditions had continued? Might there have been a mighty Ming trade empire in the Indian Ocean when Europeans arrived there in the mid-15th. century, leaving them virtually excluded? Could Elizabeth's privateers waylaid Chinese merchant ships on their way to Nanking or Shanghai after leaving Lisbon and Cadiz?

Or might Columbus have been met by Chinese speaking ambassadors of Ming colonies in the New World? He could hardly have claimed America for the king of Spain.

What would we call Columbus Day do you suppose?

Welcome to Universe-R

Howard Andrew Jones

When it comes to the parallel universes we visit in speculative fiction, some of my personal favorites are the ones where Rome never fell, the one where Spock has a goatee, and Universe R. I don't know if anyone's written about Parallel Universe R, or named it before, but I imagine a lot of you have thought about it. It's that other place where great artistic works were never lost. It's the land where overlooked, forgotten, or underappreciated poets, playwrights, authors, and artists were encouraged and celebrated and lived on to craft more work. I don't mean the Egoverse where you're the top of the charts or have written a chain of bestsellers—this universe is for the artists you wish had gotten a better deal. Universe R can't be completely logical, of course. For instance, if the Library of Alexandria had survived, then we'd probably be further along with a lot of developments and some of the later artists might not ever have been born. When I think about Universe R I don't worry about it making that kind of sense.

I dropped by my counterpart's home in Universe R to look around his shelves: The work of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides came to us complete in Universe R, rather than just a few plays from each, and the works of Menander and Sappho reached us whole, rather than as just a few tantalizing fragments. Jumping ahead a bit, Chaucer finished *The Canterbury Tales*, though he had to live to 90 to pull it off, and it takes up a huge chunk of a shelf. There's no confusion over Shakespeare folios and I see one fine copy of his *Cardenio* and other tantalizing things lost to history. On the music rack, Bach's work was better preserved so that some of his music wasn't lost because it was sold as fish wrappers. Mozart lived to a ripe old age, cranking out more and more astonishing and varied works.

On my fiction shelf in Parallel Universe R, I can find all the great historical swashbuckling novels Harold Lamb wrote when he almost gave up fiction in the 1930s, just as his prose was at its peak. Near it is a complete run of all of Robert

E. Howard's fiction. He went back to writing fantasy a few times after the 1930s, but he turned also to westerns and teamed up with Hollywood producers to create some western film masterpieces. His DVDs are over there on the other shelf, next to the run of the original *Star Trek*. Here in Universe R the dogs of *Star Trek's* second season never got made and the show didn't get thrown to the wolves in the third season—thanks to the diligent work of the story editors and producers, the final three years of the show built upon the promise of early episodes. When a sequel series finally came out, Captain Sulu was also a resounding success. (Sure, I dare to discuss Bach and Sophocles and Robert E. Howard and *Star Trek* and Shakespeare in the same essay.) In Universe R The Beatles realized that they were greater together than the sum of their individual parts, and regrouped every few years to make amazing music, even while experimenting with their side projects.

This is an easy game to play, probably because any of us who love music, art, or literature have favorite creators we wish the world had heard a little more from. And let it be said that Universe R doesn't have to hold the works solely of these familiar sorts of creators; when I posted on this subject a year or more ago, it proved to be one of the most popular topics the *Black Gate* blog had generated, and was even taken up by other bloggers. One poster remarked that they'd wished Evariste Galois had gotten so wrapped up in his mathematical calculations that he forgot to head off for a duel and get himself killed. Never having excelled much at math, I hadn't heard of Galois, but I promptly looked him up.

And that may be one of the most interesting things about playing the Universe R game. Probably a lot of us have played Universe R scenarios out in our own head, but when we share across genres and disciplines and explain the reasons and stories behind our choices, we start broadening our own perspectives. We find others with similar passions, and we learn about sad and interesting, even fascinating works and their creators that we're inspired to seek more information about.

So what works are on your shelf in Universe R?



The Bonds of Discipline

Fred Lerner

In his editorial in the November 2009 issue of *Analog*, Stan Schmidt has some harsh words for the “mundane science fiction” movement.

Geoff Ryman seems to be the movement’s spokesman. The original “jokey Mundane Manifesto” that proclaimed its identity and goals may have disappeared, but the Guest of Honor speech that Ryman gave at Boréal (Montréal’s francophone SF convention) in April 2007 gives a pretty good idea of what the movement stands for.

“We believe that for most of us, the future is here on earth.” And for the rest of us, the future isn’t that much further away. The inexorable limit posed by the speed of light will confine human exploration to a radius of 25 or 30 light years from our planet. Even if we find potentially habitable planets orbiting nearby stars, the cost of terraforming them would be prohibitive. And we can forget about meeting alien races. If any exist, they will be bound by the laws of physics just as we are.

Ryman goes on to exclude several other favorite science fictional devices from the realm of possibility. Time travel, telepathy, immortality, parallel universes—none of these fits into his vision of a viable science fiction literature. “We felt as if SF had accumulated so many improbable ideas and relied on them so regularly, that it had disconnected from reality. The futures it was portraying were so unlikely as to be irrelevant, if not actually harmful.”

Dismissing so much of science fiction as “essentially adolescent,” Ryman hopes that “there is room in the SF dream for growing up, accepting the mundane.” And that’s what he intends to do in his fiction.

Forty years before, another writer denounced the undisciplined imagination of science fiction writers. “This infinite freedom is a false freedom. If we flee infinitely far into space or time, we shall find ourselves in a region where everything is possible, where the imagination will no longer even need to make an effort of coordination. The result will

be an impoverished duplication of everyday reality.”

Writing in the *Partisan Review*, French writer Michel Butor called for greater precision and more concern for scientific accuracy in science fiction. He urged upon SF writers a collaborative approach to portraying the future, urging them “to take as the setting of their stories a single city, named and situated with some precision in space and in future time,” in which “each author [would] take into account the descriptions given by the others in order to introduce his own new ideas.” This consensus future could not be ignored by readers, and “ultimately they would find themselves obliged to build it.”

If someone wished to argue that neither a French intellectual nor a leftist literary magazine was equipped to understand modern science fiction, “Science Fiction: The Crisis of Its Growth” would be an ideal exhibit for the prosecution. The year after Butor’s essay appeared, James Blish published “On Science Fiction Criticism” in the *Riverside Quarterly*. He noted “two serious deficiencies” in Butor’s argument. “It gives a completely misleading impression of the present state of the genre, and it proposes a future course for it which would destroy everyone’s interest in either writing or reading it.”

If Michel Butor had anything further to say about science fiction, it passed unnoticed. But we can’t say that he lost the argument. After all, James Blish went on to spend a good part of his time writing *Star Trek* novels.

Michel Butor was not the only critic who sought to constrain the genre. Twelve years earlier, Arthur Koestler had proclaimed that science fiction would never make the leap from entertainment to art because its imagination was not tightly disciplined. (Whatever gave Koestler the idea that a disciplined imagination would be an asset to an SF writer?) And many another outsider judged the value of science fiction by the extent to which the writers with whom he was familiar chose to explore those topics of particular interest to him.

Not that any of this matters. Nobody becomes a science fiction writer in order to write up somebody else’s vision of the future. “I dream of a future here on Earth,” said Ryman, “a future that I hope continues to get better in some ways.” If he chooses to ignore Goethe’s advice—“Dream no small dreams, for they have no power to move the hearts of men”—that is his prerogative, and we should not condemn him for it. We can learn from small dreams as well as from large ones.

But it will not be small dreams that inspire us to transcend the constraints imposed upon us by our limited understanding of the universe and the laws that govern its operation. We have no way of knowing whether the “improbable ideas” employed by so many science fiction writers will forever remain in the realm of the impossible. But we can still derive inspiration and enjoyment from them, and from the stories that our favorite writers can make from them.



NASA, My Dream Job

Ralph Roberts

If you have one dream job in your life—even if only for an all-too-brief time—you have lived well.

I have lived well. My dream job was with NASA during the latter part of the Apollo moon program. These were heady times for those of us who believed, who still believe, in space. Not in running big trucks around low earth orbit but in SPACE exploration.

Training for this job began for me, I think, about 1955 or '56—before NASA was NASA. The training manuals were in the form of books with rockets on their spines, the Winston SF series. Then came everything Heinlein had written to date, Asimov—both fiction and nonfiction—and a doctorate from Doc Smith, Kimball Kinnison, and Dick Seaton. I was ready for an invitation from Mentor of Arisia—I BELIEVED in humanity's destiny in space!

Not that practical matters were ignored. Through high school and college, I pursued a career in electronics engineering. What little money I had and did not spend on science fiction went to buying tubes and transformers and the other components for electronic experimentation of all types, especially amateur radio. I got my ham call letters in 1963, WA4NUO, and still hold them.

A lot happened in all those years, Sputnik, the U.S. satellites—our first tiptoes into space were happening! But...alas...also there was trouble on Earth, in a place called Vietnam and to there my Uncle Sam sent me.



July 20th, 1969, found me ducking enemy fire in the Vietnamese jungle up near the Cambodian border. You say 'jungle' you think of leaves dripping moisture, banks of fog seen moving menacingly down the long rows of trees all around you. Not so during half the year in Vietnam, the dry season. There were trees but the ground was red clay dust that got into everything.

Like the cheap little transistor radio I had then and still have in 2009 with the red, red dust of the Song Be river corridor still in it. On that radio, I listened intently as Neil Armstrong said, "Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed."

As he took that "one small step" my heart soared and for a moment I could forget standing there in sweat-stained jungle fatigues, steel pot on my head, trusty M-16 loaded and ready for the business of combat survival. I swore, I firmly swore, I would come out of that hellish place and back to the real world and that I WOULD get into the space program.

The army gave me an honorable discharge, a few medals, and a lighter with the First Cav logo on it in January, 1970 (never figured out the last as I did not smoke, but still got the lighter). I flew home ready to go to space!

Only...How to do it? In the meantime, I took an engineering job with a company which at least made aerospace parts—servo controls and small motors for military and civilian aircraft. It lasted a year but I hated it. Tons of paperwork, not enough engineering, and headquarters in New Jersey always took credit for successes but made sure us local engineer dudes got full blame for THEIR mistakes. It was more like the army than the army. I quit, looked up the nearest NASA facility, and pretty much drove straight there.

The Rosman STADAN (Satellite Tracking and Data Acquisition Network) sat high up in North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains, miles from the nearest town. Driving through the gate and seeing those two huge 85' parabolic antennas and all the other neat stuff flowering like Doc Smith's garden in Spring, I knew I was home.

With some trepidation, I found the office and asked if I could please apply, more than half expecting to be sent packing back down the long, curvy mountain road. Instead, an engineer-type, complete with pocket protector (I had one of those, too, we were brothers in the craft!) gave me a short interview, glanced at my resume (pretty good stuff there both techie and military hero like), reached back to a bookcase and slapped several blue notebooks with the NASA label down on his desk. "You can start now, read these."

Wow! I thought as I settled into an empty office to absorb these sacred NASA words, am I good or what?

Quite soon I realized—being so isolated—the station was always desperate for people and those of us with my type qualifications would have had to fight our way out of

there. But what did I care, I was in the space program and instantly making twice what I had been making the day before doing servo engineering.

And it was not all isolation. My first assignment was to Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland for various classes and qualifications. All of which I passed, then it was back up the mountain for Rosman STADAN or the Tracking Station as we called it.

I should explain at this time that I did not work for NASA, I worked with NASA. Of the 200 or so employees at the station, only one or two (the Director being one) actually were NASA, the rest of us worked for RCA Service Company out of Little River, New Jersey (I cringed when I first heard that, but this New Jersey company was a lot better than the first one). We had the contract to run the station. Most of NASA's facilities worldwide, including Cape Canaveral, ran that way.

Our job was to collect data from the many satellites that came overhead 15 minutes or so at a time. We had those two 85' dishes, a huge room full of Ampex multi-track recorders large as refrigerators, and a computer made by General Mills (the same folks who made Wheaties, "the Breakfast of Champions") which did orbital predictions so that we knew where to point the antennas and track the satellites as they passed over us. The computer was programmed with punch paper tape, this being 1972. And we also had a microwave link all the way across North Carolina and Virginia to Goddard in Maryland. AND we had secret tunnels beneath the buildings 'cause it got mighty cold up there in them hills.

Was I in Space Program Heaven? You better believe it! On top of all the fascinating tracking we were doing, we were also backup communications for all the Apollo missions. This meant we got to hear EVERYTHING, even the astronauts talking to their wives.

I just about lived in the station, because you could! We worked the rotating shift from Hell—seven days on 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., off two days, on 4 p.m. to midnight, off two days, midnight to 8 a.m., four days off, those still sane (or at least not too crazy) start it all over again. PLUS, them being always so short handed, you could have ALL the overtime you wanted! Most of the time I was there, I worked 12-hour shifts, go home eight hours, back for a 12-hour shift. The money was fantastic, not that I cared—I was there for the space program!

AND I volunteered for things (something I knew better than to do from my military service). They had this 30" reflecting telescope in a neat little dome way, way up the mountain above the station—an OPTICAL telescope. I volunteered to man it, not knowing (and definitely not being told) that this would usually be at 3 a.m. in the morning when it was -8 degrees. That was nothing to me, I ate it up!

We had the satellite, part of the GEOS series, that actually had a strobe light on board and this strobe could be turned on by our command transmitters. When it came over in its orbit, we would expose glass photo plates using the telescope running on a sidereal motor so that it was exactly tracking GEOS. This, once the plates were developed, gave us dots for the strobe and all the stars as streaks since their sidereal rate was not being tracked.

Was I in Space Program Heaven? Oh yeah, baby, oh yeah!

It was a great job and I would still be there but RCA Service Company lost the contract and the company that got it did not want to pay those big bucks we were getting. RCA Service Company offered me jobs at NASA tracking stations in Lima, Peru or Madagascar. Having spent a lot of time in service overseas, I did not want to go back, so I moved on to selling wholesale electronics. Not as much fun, but lots more time to read science fiction.

But the Tracking Station story does not end in 1974 for me. It pretty well did end soon after that for NASA, when they replaced the 200 or so folks at the Rosman, and other stations also, with one satellite that acquired the data and spouted it back down to Earth. The station was turned over to Department of Defense and went very secret for the next 20 years or so. But, in the last few years, DoD decided they no longer needed it and it became the property of a nonprofit, the Pisgah Astronomical Research Institute, PARI.

In May, 2009, PARI had an Old Timers Day and invited anyone who had ever worked there to come back for the day. My wife, Pat, and I went and had a fantastic time. I saw and talked with old friends not seen for 35 years or more.

The highlight for me was when the young lady tasked with catering to us old VIPS asked me what I wanted to do first. "I want to see the tunnels," I said.

"Tunnels? How did you know about that?" she asked surprised.

"Used to jog through them at 3 a.m. in the morning to stay awake between satellite passes," I told her, "a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away."

I don't think she understood, although she humored me with a walk through the tunnels. But I did.

Space Program Heaven. I never left.



A Day In East London

James Bacon

I am staying with friends on Beacon Bay, a suburb of East London, a small enough city with about 700,000 people in the metropolitan area, south of the wild coast, and on the Indian Ocean in South Africa. Its is terribly beautiful, we are house guests in a magnificent house, our friends showing us fantastic hospitality. The view from here is clear, and I look down onto the bending mouth of the Quinera River, as it seems to turn around the headland and crash into tumultuous waves of the sea as it rounds a lagoon.



It is lush green land, with a very light blue sky, and a deepening blue sea. The houses nearby are stand-alone affairs in their own ground, my wife opted to spend today tanning herself next to the pool, but I was given the keys of a bakkie, a truck in American terms, but a small one, this was an Opel Corsa, the smallest European GM vehicle one can buy, also known as a Vauxhaul Nova/Corsa in the UK, Chevy C2 in Mexico, Buick Sail in China and a Holden Barina in Australia. In Ireland we too have Opel, the German brand, and I am used to this particular model B, although I must admit the body on the back of this pick up, is odd, but its locally built in Port Elizabeth. I am armed with an excellent map, and a list of places I hope to visit. It is my intention to go to Calgary and see a horse drawn carriage museum, and then back into East London for bookshops.

I settle in to this fine vehicle and I am shown its security features by its generous owner, Bertie, who is unleashing me upon his city. There are many security features and I feel the freedom of being in control of a car and ones own destiny and I head off.

I turn for the City, changing my plan, as I go, thinking the city visit will be short. First to the one bookshop I have been advised about from my hosts and also a private bookseller, whom they sold books to, so I have the book

places sorted so I think if my visit to the station will be as curtailed as is reckoned with, it will be a quick visit then to Calgary.

The drive is quick. This is a small city, roads are not too busy but well sign-posted and spacious. I get to Longfellow Street quite quickly, and along a street of houses, there are some businesses and one is a bookshop, a sandwich board and flag identifying its presence.

I am buzzed through the protective gate and into a small, but well-stocked, second hand bookshop. The lady who runs the shop is also a graphic designer, and she has an office in the window, it's a sweet operation. I do not find any books, despite browsing, but am taken by a cat that is rolled into an odd position on a book display and the tiny West Yorkshire puppy which is small, but not timid.

I ask, just in case, if there are other book shops, and I hit the literary fountain of local geography. I produce my map, and many bookshops are entered. As I stand there, my plan changes again, I will continue on in town.

Next I turn down fleet street and head for the CBD—central business district, and turn up Station Road for the station. East London has an unusual station set up, they have local services operated by Metro Rail, and also mainline services to Johannesburg by Shosholoz Meyl . I go into the big white station, across from a Blue South African Revenue building. The station has Cape Government Railways on it and is a classic colonial building, large for such a small town, but now mostly offices and rationalised. I ask the security lady if I may photograph some, and am refused, so I ask again, and am refused, then I explain I am from Ireland, this and my cheerful stubbornness gets a result, and she takes me to the railway office, where the manager Welcome, and his secretary, tell me about their service. The office is huge, maps adorn walls, and it is airy and nice. I enjoy chatting. It is explained that I may not photo, but can wander about. Such is the rules.

I am on Platform one, so I do as asked, and just look about, the track is the standard Cape Gauge of 3ft 6ins, which is narrow gauge, in the industry, but they run regular sized trains on it, but cannot exceed about 90kmph or 54mph. As I mentioned this is an odd station, I leave, and re-enter the same platform, that is now the Metro Rail station, this station is modern and very European looking, so from this part of Platform 1, I take some photos.

There is a yard next to the station, and a large American styled hooded Co-Co diesel, grunts into life, so I turn to look at it, its a class 33, built by General Electric, the export GE-U20C from '64, but sold to South Africa from '69, with 2,000 horse power, some 125 were sold to this country with 24,000 miles of train track.

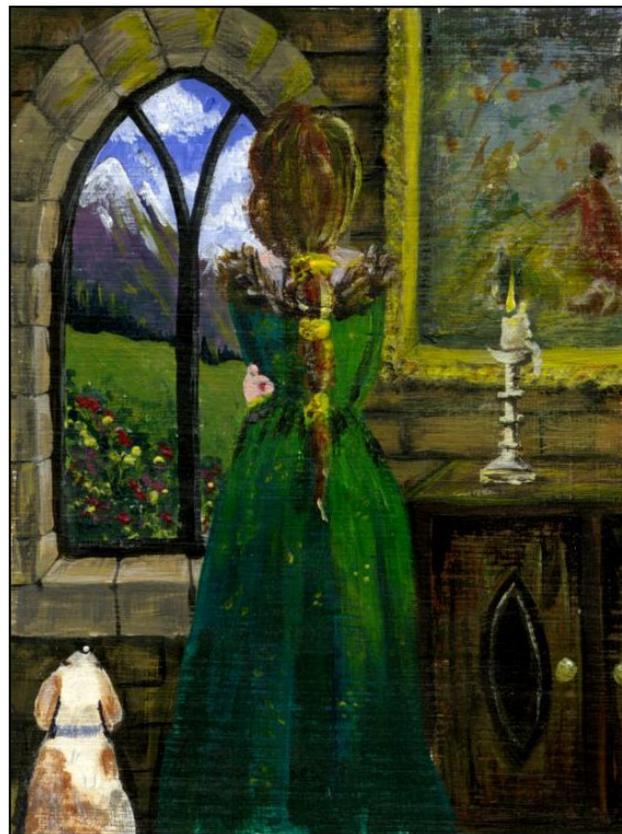
It stands, north of the station, up a gradient at the junction to Arcadia park industrial area a hundred yards away, I stare contentedly as it comes down the line into the station a powerful noise and sufficient clag, and behind the

platform it goes to the wide yard that houses a shed, sidings also has a line down to the docks. Shunting occurs, and a train of metro rail carriages is brought back out and up past the junction and away, suddenly it stops, it is setting back, I see the guard hanging out the rear carriage, and he is obviously guiding the driver, perhaps a bell system is in operation, for the train belts back into the station. I wave at the driver's there are men at the ends of the loco as well as three men in the cab, one waves, I must look very odd, no longer my natural pale blue I am starting to go from pasty white to slightly pink, in my Irish rugby jersey, and I am no doubt an eyesore. I am also at the end of the platform, sitting in a concrete and brick bench, it is the ultimate in robust vandal free station furniture and comfortable. As the driver waves, I thumb up, and he does too. I enjoy the shunting, it seems they must reposition the train so up and down it goes, in a complex but well known movement involving a dozen men. I had hoped to see the Shosholozza Meyl train arrive under electric traction, this station like so many in South Africa, with Overhead lines, of 30KV DC, but it will be an hour late. I note that the metro rail carriages, old as they are, must have no interlock as they can, and do, move with doors wide open. Having satisfied my curiosity about how they do my job here is done, I head off.

Next on my map is a bookshop on Chamberlain a bit of a drive away, but not too far away at all, called Oxford books. This is on a busy commercial street, and again I am buzzed through an iron gateway. This shop is an L shape a substantial shop, and all second hand. They have a number of Romance sections, for Mills and Boon as well as other romance, and sections that are non-returnable, a credit system is obviously in operation. The colours of Mills and Boons spines warn me away from a fate worse than death of a literary nature like the flared neck of a cobra, but they have a decent SF section and I browse.

Here I find many war novels. I like certain war novels, those gripping darkly fascinating second world war war literature of the sixties, seventies, and eighties. Sven Hassel, Willi Heinrich, Leo Kessler, Douglas Reeman and also real history, from Paul Brickhill, Guy Sajer, or Peter Reid. So I find some interesting titles. One I look at has an illustration of some *Wehrmacht* troops and a train, entitled *Convoy of Steel*, by Wolf Kruge. Its about an armoured train, so I buy it, I also find an interesting *War of the Worlds*, adorned with a Getty image of an explosion on a planet. It states it is now major motion picture, and is annotated. I have this book, but the current issue of *Vector*, the SF Journal of the BSFA is styled as War in SF and there is an article about *War of the Worlds*, so I decide I can read this quickly, and buy it.

I read many a war book when I was a youth, I loved them, I think I may have been started by either dad lending me *Colditz*, or as an extension of reading war comics, *Battle* especially, but also *Warlord* and *Victor*, classics or the genre and media, weekly adventures of bravery and poor German. I was especially taken by stories such as Charlie's war, now being reprinted in full, and Johnny Red. Interestingly these heroes were mature reflections upon the true horror or war, often fighting the system as much as the enemy. Despite being quintessentially British, and to be honest, better than many American war comics, such as



Blackhawk, *Sgt. Rock*, *Haunted Tank*, *Enemy Ace*, all of which I have more recently bought and read, in archived or cheap phone book editions, the British comics have an edge to them, rather like a sharpened saw blade bayonet, nasty, pointed and a little bit uneasy, especially wielded by a German stormtrooper, with a face shield hanging on his coal scuttle helmet screaming, 'DIE ENGLANDER!' as he leaps in your face.

A short drive and I am in Devereux, and pulling up outside what ostensibly looks like house, a bungalow, of worldwide generic design, only the signage and closer inspection show it for what it is, this is Charlene's books, and I enter, and indeed two rooms of this house, which is now all business, are bookshops. It's well laid out, and I browse. The SF section is not bad, but I am not enticed, they have *Matter* and *Black Man*, and other recent enough titles. In the thriller section I spot a book, and yank it out, *Fox at the Front*, the second alternate history by Douglas Niles and Michael Dobson, the first, *Fox on the Rhine*, told how the plot to kill Hitler succeeded. The Battle of the Bulge is a very different fight, the latter half of 1944 is great speculation. In *Fox on the Front*, 'Former opponents George S Patton and Erwin Rommel must join forces to neutralize the remnants of SS forces, bent on carrying out the Reich's Final Solution in Eastern Europe. They are unaware of an intended Soviet land grab' ...so it says on the back. It's a 2003 book, published by TOR under their Forge banner and I bought the first one in FP and this one is a cheap find.

It is the back room, where books are older and cheaper that I hit a vein of interesting work. Their military section is a good one, and although I don't pick up a pristine *Animal Farm* at four Rand, I do find David Dowding's *The Moscow Option*, an alternate second world war where Hitler is in a

coma following an accident in 1941 and under Goering, Moscow is captured. I stow that to one side, as I continue along this rich seam.

Richard Cox's *Sea Lion* jumps out at me, this the operational title for the 1940 invasion of Southern England by German forces. Cox produces a docu-drama novel, one which is based on the war gaming at the Royal Military academy Sandhurst in 1974, umpired by both British and German officers, including Adolf Galland, all arranged by the *Daily Telegraph Magazine*, it also includes some 50 pages of factual essays, about *Sea Lion*. I am sure I have it, but it is a great read, and I will no doubt devour it on one of the flights yet to come. Fiction and non-fiction intermix easily, Pan books of bravery by the men who were there swim with dreadful fantasy. I see Charles Whiting, scholar, academic and historian, his works are easy on the eye, he can convey complex military actions in accessible terms. I see his work *Werewolf*, a book about the German resistance, that attacked allied forces after they had invaded Germany: hardened believers in the Reich, who could not accept defeat and fought on as saboteurs, blind to their nation's fate, doomed by the false belief so deeply ingrained.

More books shout out at me. First it is *Honeycomb*, by Raymond Carras and William Drummond, which on the cover sports a U-Boat in the Thames, and on the rear speaks of 'deep under London a trainload of bullion...Skorzeny has masterminded operation honeycomb...mercenary strike force to hijack...' its more than enough, and although it crosses that odd line that I mentally have about fiction books which should be true, it also touches on areas I like enough for me to elasticate my logic functions. It turns out to be a winner, set in South Africa, Ireland, and London, with commando *extraordinaire* Otto Skorzeny plotting from Ireland with IRA mercenaries at a coastal estate that also has a hidden U-boat pen in a nearby cave. Its a *tour de force* of Speculative Fiction.

Finally, I find a Leo Kessler book, one of his Submarine series, about kaptainleutenant Jungblut. The cover sports a U-Boat with a V-1 launcher on its prow, and a V-1 launching. On the rear, it says 'Project N.Y...', I am sure you get the picture, its entitled, *Fire in the West*.

Interesting is the amount of deceit that one finds in this book. First off its tagged on the rear as fiction, but then there is an author's note and he writes that 'Now nearly half a century later, ex Captain Christian Jungblut has broken his long self imposed silence to reveal the bizarre story of how...he attacked the great American city and came within a fraction of changing the history of World War Two.' It is signed off, Leo Kessler, Wittlich/West Germany, Spring 1986

At this stage in his career Kessler has some 41 war novels in four different series published, including his famous SS Assault Regiment Wotan series. He also makes mention of a factual piece of information which may not be widely known to his readers, but which coincidentally makes mention in February 2009 *New Yorker*. In the *New Yorker*, John McPhee writes about fact-checkers in an article entitled "Checkpoints" and makes mention of the efforts to check a fact about a Japanese incendiary balloon, known as *fusen bakudan*, which were thirty three feet in diameter, and of which nine thousand were launched in a year, but he talks

about the efforts to reconcile a story of one going off at Hanford Engineering Works, where the start-up of the first large scale plutonium plant occurred. The checker for the *New Yorker*, through great efforts, confirmed an incendiary did in fact hit a 'high tension line carrying power to the reactor'.

Kessler also mentions these balloon attacks, specifically about starting fires in the redwood forests of Oregon, confirming one of the secrets of the Second World War, that mainland USA had been attacked and that it hid these facts as much as possible.

The implication being that why not hide a V-1 attack. I have seen plans in books of a V-2 launcher that was to be towed behind a U-Boat and would partially flood to a vertical position and be the first ballistic missile launched from a sub, but it never came to pass, only plans, and thinking about how easy things can go wrong, ones that would have been dangerous, rocket fuel is not easy to deal with.

The Americans did mount V-1's on submarines, after the war, and they even fired a V-2 off the flight deck of the *Midway*, but the Germans, well these were plans. Attacking America was always on Hitler's list, and there was an Amerika Bomber project at one stage, one of the prototypes, the Messerschmidt 264, does indeed look quite the intercontinental bomber, but it was the Junkers 390 that won the competition, but only two were built and the project never came to fruition. I still have yet to find any reference to the often rumoured myth that one such plane was in sight of New York, despite having about half a dozen books solely on secret weapons of the Luftwaffe.

An errant torpedo did hit a loading pier in the Battle of St Laurence, at Bell Island in November 1942. During the raid the first torpedo hit the Scotia Loading Pier, first it missed a moored ship, later the same U-boat went on and than sank two ore carriers. (Neary, *Enemy on our Doorstep*)

The biggest deceit though is that the author himself was an English man, the same Charles Whiting who had written some 350 books in total, novels and many on factual subjects, and who was considered a learned expert in many battles and methods of the Germans at war. He had served in the Second World War, and stayed in Germany and became a brilliant historian.

War books are war books, but it must be obvious to many readers of broad genres, that some of these titles easily fall into the verges of what we know as the alternate history genre, and of course when it suits publishers and book shops, will be titled, Literature, as obviously they are definitely unter-literature until put in the regular fiction, or classics section.

But as for *Attack in the West* by Kessler, I get the sense he is having fun, it is a work of fiction, but he seeds a mist of war, that makes things borderline believable. U-202 had an interesting career according to Uboat.net

On June 12, 1942, U-Boat U-202 landed Dasch's team with explosives and plans at East Hampton, Long Island, New York. Their mission was to destroy power plants at Niagara Falls and three Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA) factories in Illinois, Tennessee, and New York.

Yet, the boat was lost well before the incidents of Kessler's book. The idea that this fiction book may really

have happened, only truly dissolves upon very close inspection, a mark of good fiction.

The empathy one feels for the well crafted and honourable character of Jungblut, who not only has the enemy to fight, but a second darker enemy, is juxtaposed against that internal enemy, who is a Nazi loyal to another purpose, portrayed as being immoral, cowardly, bombastic and a mortal enemy of Jungblut. Therefore we have the good German and the bad Nazi, we don't ask for anything more complicated, that both characters be in one, that would be to much,

Yet, the good German is necessary in these novels, that in a way, don't glorify war, or somehow create false honour about Nazism, but show another angle, and removes the paint that all are covered in to show the real spots and fangs of these leopards as individuals. Some amazing books, by German soldiers and flyers are great companions on my shelves with those written by Allied warriors. Balance is important. War is hell, 'it murders young men'

I continue on my drive and I go to Vincent Park shopping centre, time is slipping by, and I drop the idea of going online at the Mug and Bean cafe. Instead I briefly spend some time in the Exclusive Books shop, that is at the centre. I note that in the SF section there is a good stack of Robert Rankin's, his book, *Necrophenia* just out, and I browse around. As I look at the sales table, I note a book that Mark Plummer recently mentioned to me.

It's called *700 Penguins* and is essentially that, a book with 700 book covers from penguin in it. I cannot afford it, even at its sale price, but I calmly go through each page, and take some notes as I go. I find a number that really pique my interest. First one is by Denys Rietz, a classic looking Penguin with vertical white centre band and blue at the side, of the fifties, with a long explanation of what is in store for the reader. Entitled *Commando*, it is about his fight against the British in the Boer War as a guerilla soldier. Then I find a *Nineteen Eighty Four* cover, that has eluded me, but which I just knew existed from 1983, and I take note of it and its designer, and promise myself to adjust an article on this subject at the nearest opportunity. I also note that there are two more *1984* covers in the *700*. Another blue biography penguin, but this time in the classic horizontal panels, by Sean O'Faolain about De Valera hits me, a book, in this version I have never seen. I turn onward and find a Penguin African Library cover for *The Rise of the South African Reich*. A stylised brown cover, why is African stuff brown I wonder, with a swastika in the design.

I ponder what this means, whether it is about the apartheid government of the sixties, thankfully gone, some earlier incarnation, or the time of the Second World War. The wrong turn that South Africa took in itself must be comparable to fascism in Nazi Germany. South Africa really should have gotten rid of the British rules on segregation and never turned them into laws, but when the rest of the world, well mostly, or at least western bits were seeing the light of the ills of racism and segregation that the powers that be here, in South Africa made an evil and stupid choice.

Now that's a turning point in history, I wonder how South Africa could have harnessed the real wealth of its

nation, if at this stage it took a similar turn like America, and started to move towards integration and equality.

Today it is not perfect here in South Africa, but nor is it perfect anywhere and although some people murmur about how things are not going so well, others see that there needs to be ups and downs to weather such a change, and that the country is rich in many things.

Unfortunately, today in Africa slavery exists and as for a whole race of people being made to feel second place, well one only has to look at the caste system in India to see that a type of unfair and illogical methodologies that occur. In Ireland, Dunne's Stores women went on strike in the eighties about selling South African oranges, and although one never wishes ill on a person, one does hope that Ben Dunne, realises, that what goes around comes around.

I wonder also if it foresaw the Modern South Africa I am visiting and love, where the drive is for improving everyone's lot, creating employment and of course and quite rightly positive discrimination.¹ Many see one goal, a greater fairer and better South Africa for all, my hosts are examples of this drive in many people here, they have worked hard in this country, while also having worked for the right reasons, and one is a current policy maker in government, the other, now retired, a trusted senior civil servant of the new government, who was instrumental in the changes.

These are not just words, Bertie took me to a township, he had to pay a man for some work, and we went into an area that was poverty stricken, some houses are breeze blocks, or conformed design, tin-corrugated roofs, others are built from what looked like junk, others are quite reasonable, additions and extensions. We met the man, his wives, and other men at the local shebeen, a word even I know, or as Bertie put it, an informal pub, and it was brimful, yet this man, who had owned a farm, and employed men, and was generous and fair, although strict, was greeted like some family member. The Queen of the house, especially pleased to see him. Now, if I say to someone I am off to such a place, surely you expect, I am dead, robbed, raped, murdered. The whole shebang. Not here, not with this man, not in this town, we are safe, he is respected and appreciated and it is genuine. These people are poor in one sense, but they have worked damn hard and are relatively doing well, he is not poor, but has worked damnably hard to be so, they are Black, he is white, but this is the South Africa that he has always wanted, where good work gets money, and like anywhere a decent wages are a welcome sight. You know, in London I have shared many a drink with a manager, enjoyed their company and relaxed, why is that not so everywhere. It's good to see up close, a relationship, friendship and respect, that I wonder if this book knows of people like Bertie, or changers like De Clerk, or even men like Alan Paton, who Penguin also published.

It's a book I would like to read, just to see what it says, I hope it's thoughtful. I note it down, and later find out more,

¹ I could talk about positive discrimination and Black Empowerment Employment policy, but it's a whole other article, like any government discrimination, some lose, but it's necessary, but needs to be balanced.

it's definitely well known around here, I soon find some blurb "This book is an analysis of the drift towards Fascism of the white government of the South African Republic. It documents the close affinities of thought and action between such men as Malan, Strijdom, Verwoerd, and Vorster and the German Nazi leaders, and traces the contact maintained by the Nationalist Party with Nazis from the 1940s to the 1960s."

In a letter to *Commentary* magazine about an article of theirs in June 1978, Bunting's book is knocked hard: *Brian Bunting wrote an entire book on this theme, The Rise of the South African Reich, in which he tried to convince his readers of innumerable parallels between Hitler's Mein Kampf and the platform of Dr. Daniel F. Malan's "Purified" National party...It is not a convincing book unless one does not know South African history. In that case, the "evidence" in the hands of a good and clever writer like Bunting is "overwhelming."* (Joseph Andriola *Commentary*)

The ANC have it online, in full, which is itself a retort, so I don't have to buy it, although I shall seek it out on my return to the UK, but I will and read it and see what I think for myself.

I take my notes, and quickly make my way. I note school is out and many boys and girls are now in the shopping centre in a variety of striking school uniforms. One chap, who towers above me, with huge wide shoulders and barrel chest filling his blazer, looks like a behemoth as he walks with what I assume is his very stylish mother. His blazer is adorned in badges, as are many of the kids in uniform. This is very unlike an afternoon in the Whitgift Centre in Croydon, it would be, less orderly perhaps is the word I seek, and more hoody tops and messing about. Here the kids are socialising and I note, in the American-styled diner, indulging in cool drinks.

From here, I go to Vincent Street. First I fail to find a butcher's that is famed in the whole city for its meat, and then I call into a charity shop and make some more finds. Here I find a book by David Irving, Holocaust denier and general stain on humanity. The book I find is entitled *The German Secret Weapons campaign that so nearly succeeded* but of course didn't. Irving is a man both my father and I can agree on, as being a right arsehole. The historian gone wrong, he has admitted to being of a fascist persuasion, has spoken at many neo-Nazi gatherings, and has some deranged appreciation of Adolf Hitler. He gives a level of integrity and justification to those who don't want to understand and just want to hate. I don't think Austria imprisoning him helped much, but again, Penguin comes to mind, they were sued by Irving, as was author Deborah Lipstadt, for libel, according to *The Guardian*, who he is also suing, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*. Irving sought to challenge Lipstadt's description of him as a man prepared to bend historical evidence "until it conforms with his ideological leanings and political agenda."

I often wonder about racists. They must have a really repressed appreciation of beauty, not to find attractive girls attractive, just because they are a different skin colour. I am continually stunned here in South Africa, by the beautiful

women of all colours, there are many cultures and races living here, and many varieties and mixes of race and within them all, absolutely gorgeous women exist. How could any of these self confessed 'red blooded males,' who like girls, hate them? It makes no sense at all.

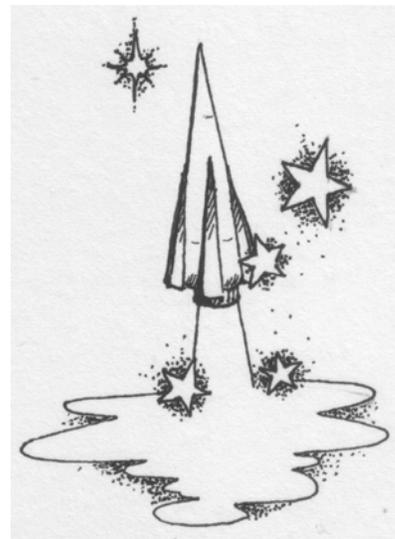
I have a good look at this book, I pass it by, such is the power of the purchaser, and I find a book by George Blagowidow, which sounds like a hobby rather than name, *The Last Train from Berlin*. It has trains in it, so I buy it.

SF is thin on the ground here, and although one or two good titles do catch my eye, they are ones I have.

Finally, I call on Rob Grice, private bookseller. I drive the short distance from city to suburbia, and pull up on an avenue of nice houses, he has been expecting me, and he is really tremendously friendly and nice. An engineer, he had also served some 22 years in the reserves. He is a book, medal, and stuff seller. He is so amiable and pleasant, a man who loves history. We get on well and he shows me his private collection of medals, adorning his office wall, all include photos of the recipient, and a piece of information or correspondence that gives them an extra touch, all well framed. His own family, have served and he has a super framed display of his forefathers and their medals. His son, like me is living in London, but has followed the family trade, and is a Major in the Signals.

We chat, he offers me coffee. He does two book stalls at the weekend, in two different venues, and is always busy, so he heads to the garage to find what SF he has, while I browse the military, fiction, and local history sections, neatly laid out in his basement. The SF is unfortunately not to my taste, but as I browse further, I spot a book, a blue Penguin, traditional horizontal paneled spine, I take it out, the cover, battered is in one piece, although detached from the book, it is a first penguin edition of *Commando*, published in 1948 for two shillings, and part of a new series of books, reprinted in agreement with 5 major publishers. I take it out, and content with such a quick find, I soon see time is sliding by and my day must come to an end. Rob though, doesn't even charge me, he gives me some pointers for further Reitz titles, should I enjoy this one, and bids me a good day and a great visit. Despite its relaxed state, the book is easily repairable, but I am well taken by this kindness.

I thank Rob, and head into the balmy sunny evening, a successful book day coming to an end, and as I drive off to meet my friend, with the trusty map, I am quite taken with this town and wonder where my divergences would have happened.



Down and Out on the Way to Sai Gon or Breaking Bad

Larry Sanderson

December 01, 2008, O'Dark Hundred

Tropical beaches, palm trees, soft sand, warmth, and visit from friends and family ahead of an early ride to the airport from friends. Multiple bags, carrying third-world made clothes back to the third world, raisins for my partner's mother, toothpaste, patent medicine, all packed in suitcases that had been packed and sorted countless times, and weighed and reweighed on the bathroom scale.

Friends, Laura Jean and David gave us a ride to the airport. There was snow on the ground, and it was cold, but we were bound for Viet Nam. From Minneapolis to Chicago, Chicago to Hong Kong, Hong Kong to Sai Gon—a long chain of flights, across the dateline, and far from the snow and the cold. We left the jackets at home. We filled the car with suitcases, two each, and two carry-ons, plus laptop and camera bag.



We dressed comfortably for the long flights. This time, my partner, Thong, was in jeans, sandals, and a warm shirt. I wore long pants, a warm shirt and regular shoes. Each carry-on carried the shorts and tropical shirts. I've been in Sai Gon before, and I knew I'd be sorry if I didn't change before getting out of the airport. My sandals were in the carry-on, along with the laptop charger.

The carry-ons contained anything we'd need on the long flight. I also carried a laptop bag and a camera bag. We had tickets, passports, suitcases when we arrived at the airport in the dark of December. We waited in line and finally got up to the United ticket agent to check the bags. One of the bags was a bit over, between half a pound and a pound. On a good day, no problem for an agent. It wasn't going to be a good day.

"I'm going to have to charge you." the agent said. My partner tried to move things around, and put some things back into bag the agent had weighed. The ticket agent wasn't happy, but we finally got the carefully pre-weighed bags past the scales.

When we got to the plane, all the overhead bins were full, they said. You'll have to gate check the carry-ons. We're going to Sai Gon, we said. But someone said, check out the plane. We went up to the door with the carry-ons. The stewardess at the door said, "You'll have to check the carry-ons." So we went back to the joint of the ramp, and dug out the few essentials, and then gate checked the carry-ons. We went to our seats and waited; it was going to be an adventure, after all. And, it would be, but the pattern was already set.

Finally, on the plane to Chicago, carry-ons checked. Long trip ahead. Excited. Off to O'Hare, 75 minute starting flight to a day and more of plane rides.

Chicago to Hong Kong?

We got into O'Hare in good time, and we found the gate for the Hong Kong flight, filled with a 747-sized mass of people, with distant speakers, and a low hint of chaos. Of course, it simply could have been a lack of sleep. We waited, milling in the crowd. Mumbly speakers. No one can hear what's being said. Fitful surges, false hopes, finally first class and business board. Finally at the end, we board. We're sitting in the back of the plane where the seats are two across and there's a little extra room against the curve of the plane.

Freshly refurbished aircraft, the stewardesses are muttering as we trek down the long aisle, with just the laptop and camera bag. Carry-ons checked. Sitting and waiting. I post to LiveJournal. "The adventure begins..." The plane lurches, moves—pushed back from the gate. The engines begin starting. One engine starts, the lights flickering. Second engine starts, the lights flicker. Third engine starts, the lights go out in our section. The music I've been listening to stops. Most of the lights come back on in our section—most, not all. We sit. We wait. "There's mumble mumble with the engine. Parts are on the way."

"The crew's illegal." The speakers say. But no sheriffs come to haul them away, instead we creep back to the gate and deplane, in a line that stretches across the terminal, and snakes back again.

About ten of us are near the end of the line. It's not going any where. Thong talks to a young woman with a new baby. She's traveling with a Canadian passport, but she only speaks Vietnamese, or we only hear her speak Vietnamese. She too is better dressed for Sai Gon than Chicago in December.

Agent vs Agent

This is the line that does not move, I think. An agent comes by and peels twenty of us off the back of the line, and takes us to the adjacent gate, where she gets into a fight with a United man over trying to issue us hotel vouchers, while he's trying to get a flight to London. Then she takes us to another terminal where there's no United man to fight with and we get vouchers. Hotel vouchers. Meal vouchers.

And too brief instructions about how to get to the hotel. And instructions—please be back tomorrow at 5:00 am to do this all over again.

We begin to regret having checked the carry-ons. The laptop charger, the phone charger (I think). They're all locked up in the plane sitting outside in the snow. For some reason, I'm convinced that my phone charger is in the carry-on. It's not, but I buy a phone charger at the airport before I get to the hotel and discover that I'm carrying it with the laptop. The laptop's charger, of course, is in the carry-on, which is supposed to be with us. You know, the one with the clean underwear, socks and a change of tropical clothes? While I'm getting the phone charger, Thong, the woman with the baby, and another Viet Kieu sit on the floor in the middle of the terminal. The traffic flows around them.

To the O'Hare Crown Plaza

We have several long conversations, and begin the trek for the bus to get to the hotel. We are in the same hotel, and we set out to find it. Chicago in December is not Sai Gon in December. One has snow; the other has cute snow globe sculpture in the center of a city that snow will never see. The Vietnamese-Canadian girl with the baby has an airline blanket for the baby. We traipse through the snow in search of a bus terminal.

We're soon outside in the snow, without coats. Thong with sandals. It's an adventure all right. We find the bus terminal, and hide inside, trying to dash out at the last minute when the right hotel's bus arrives. Finally, it does and we get on. Easy, after all, we don't have any luggage.

We check in to the hotel and yield up a voucher or two. The front desk clerk has packets with soap, toothpaste, toothbrush, and a razor for us. We go to our separate rooms. Thong and I go down to the hotel's restaurant to eat. The woman with the baby doesn't want to eat. She calls her husband in the Twin Cities. We eat in a desultory restaurant, with mediocre service, mediocre food that costs more than the United vouchers, of course. It's O'Hare airport hotel food. Then back to the room for the 3:30 am wake up. Back at the room, I post pictures of the hotel courtyard to LiveJournal, and charge my phone. I call United and try to shortcut the task of getting the tickets rewritten in the morning. I start to feel a real connection to the voices of United on the phone. I'm going to get several more chances to feel this connection.

It's OK—it's still an adventure, until the phone rings at 3:30 am.

We shower, put on the same clothes, and leave the hotel before the "Free Continental Breakfast" starts serving. It's like a reunion, but the Asian woman's husband is there. He's driven up from the Twin Cities to see her off again. We run from the hotel door to the bus, and back to the terminal to O'Hare in the very early morning. We take the bus back to the airport. We traipse through the snow. At the airport by 4:30 or so, we get in the international line and wait, and wait, and wait. When we get to the front of the line, there's a problem because I called and tried to fix the tickets over the phone. They'd made a mess of it. They rewrite the tickets, and we head for the gate and breakfast. We even get to use the United voucher!



Festive Scene from the Hotel Room in Chicago



Going to the terminal at O'Hare after the night at the hotel.



O'Hare at O'Dark hundred.

After a short eternity and some mumbo-jumbo, we have tickets, or scribbling on tickets, and we can again go to the gate. We blow the last United vouchers on coffee and scones.



Pre-boarding milling about



The Vietnamese-Canadian woman with the baby that we helped to the hotel. She was traveling on a Canadian passport, but her husband was in Minneapolis. He was in Chicago the next morning.



The rush for the gate.

If the previous day's gate gave off an odor of chaos, the second day it was much stronger. You still couldn't hear the speakers, but the organization was weaker. Everybody that has not bailed shuffles onto the plane again. This time will be the time that works! We also received the first letter of apology from United Airlines. I now have a collection!



It's like being in a poker game with Data. No matter what you do, you're back in the same seat and everybody looks very familiar.

I post to LiveJournal. We push back from the gate. The engines start, all of them this time. The lights and sound system remain active. They de-ice the wings. We taxi off to the runway. We take off. We're in the air!

The TVs start showing network shows, not, sadly, a useful show like *ER*, but a show like *Desperate Housewives*. Too soon, like a badly written soap, that movie cliché arrives via a voice from the cockpit: "Is there a doctor onboard?" It's always exciting in a movie or a TV show, but it's not nearly as exciting on a plane that's been trying to get out of Chicago for two days.

Time passes slowly on a plane. There's some food, but it isn't good. Heading north on a great circle route over the wilds of Canada for Hong Kong. The network programming ends, and *Mamma Mia!*—it's a good thing that I've seen the musical, and read the review—came and went, but the credits were just scrolling by for the first time, when the captain announced we were diverting to Anchorage. On the good side, I could add another state to my list. On the down side, Sarah Palin and Anchorage in December.

Anchorage Airport—Notice the lack of palm trees.



The Chinese-American who was going to a friend's wedding in Viet Nam. He'd go to the Vietnamese restaurant with us.



We taxied into a white landscape with mountains. Various cargo planes sat on the runway. An ambulance came, and the sick person was taken off the plan. We sat. Time passes more slowly on a plane on the ground.

Various things happened. The stewardess chased us away from the back rest rooms. The back door opened. The stewardess chased us away from the back rest rooms. A catering truck appeared. The back door was opened. The stewardess kept chasing people away from the open door. Various things happened. The door remained open. The catering truck pulled away. The door remained open. Rumors about flying off to Frisco, rumors about polar bears attacking through the open rear door, rumors about us freezing to death while the back door of the plane was open, rumors about the crew again becoming illegal.

Finally it was announced that we'd again be deplaning and spending the night in glorious Anchorage. The back door was closed, and we straggled once again out of the plane to practice our queuing skills.

We'd learned the drill already in Chicago, where United actually has people, that they can't handle a bounced 747 very gracefully. How well would Anchorage do? United doesn't have any gates, no agents. We pulled up to a gate, not at the shiny new airport, but at the old airport. (Ted Stevens?), and lined up in a line that stretched from one end of the building to the other, and then doubled back. It was just like Chicago, only the building was older, slower, and there was no agent to peel us off the back of the line. There was, however, a boy with a ukulele. He played and sang. It was one of the things that kept us sane, along with watching the faces of the locals when they came in the terminal door and saw the long, long, snaking line.



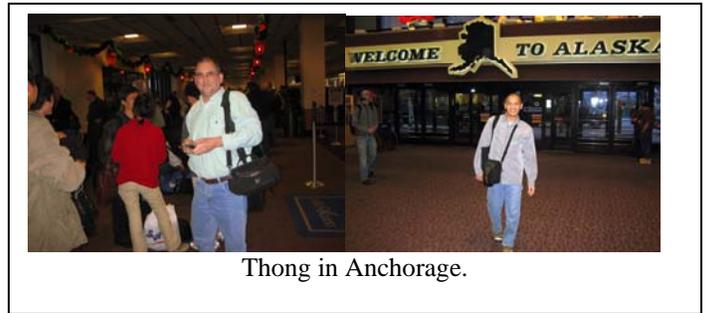
Line at the Ted Stevens Airport



The guy with the ukulele who sang for the line.



The tall man behind Thong was rebooking a flight back to Chicago. He'd been going to a business meeting in Singapore, but was not going to make it. United wasn't helpful, and he ended up booking an Alaska Air flight. He'd complain to a Chicago paper and eventually get United to pay for the flight. The two Chinese guys to the right of Thong went to the supper club with us. They ended up at the Seafood Buffet place, and went to K-Mart to pick up some clothing.



Thong in Anchorage.

And yet, all of the faces were oddly familiar. That sense of déjà vu all over again. Same people, same line, different building. People with cell phones spent their time arguing with the airline. We waited in line, I filmed some, and took pictures of the mountains, and generally everybody was in a good mood. Everybody took pictures of themselves under the "Welcome to Alaska" sign, or with the stuffed Kodiak bear. The line, however, made the line in Chicago seem like the express lane. It's still an adventure. We received vouchers—hand written scribbles on pieces of paper, a hotel room, and no luggage. When I said we were two, the agent crossed out the one he'd written on the paper and wrote two on it.

One of the reasons it probably took so long, was that we were filling up a lot of hotels in Anchorage. We waited again for a bus to take us away, and one came, and we ran from inside the airport to the bus, and off to the wonderful Puffin Inn. Or Penguin Inn, or some other kind of arctic bird inn. It was on the way to the Inn that we'd see the nice, shiny new terminal building, a quarter mile down the road.

To Your Scattered Hotels Go

When we got off the bus, we were at our hotel. It had a bear skin over the fireplace, a salmon, and pictures of bears. It had an open floor plan for most of the rooms. We could wander through the main part of the motel, up to the second

floor, and then dash across an open passageway to the next building, and along the open hall to find the room. If we'd dressed in jackets and boots, that would not be bad. Of course, we left the jackets in Minnesota. The rooms reminded me of *Leave it to Beaver* without heat. The heating, such as it was, was turned down. One light bulb blew up when I tried to screw it in.



Motel Lobby



Leave it to Beaver hotel room

One thing our hotel was not, was big enough to have a restaurant. We tried some restaurants. Nobody wanted to take the vouchers. We tried the Perkins wannabe across the street from the motel, climbing over the snow, and skating across the icy street. But we asked about the vouchers. Big mistake. No go on the vouchers. A bunch of us got into a taxi and went a few blocks to a "noted Anchorage restaurant" that looked like a 1950s supper club—a not very successful 1950s supper club. Half of the group coming in the second taxi didn't make it, or didn't make it before we'd decided we didn't like it, and so we bailed. There were rumors of a great seafood buffet just over the horizon that several of the Chinese went out and found. They also hit a K-Mart for socks and clean underwear. Thong and I took a taxi back to the hotel. We'd wear the same clothes yet another day. Some, we later found, bargained with their vouchers.

Finally, six or seven of us got another taxi and went off for a Vietnamese restaurant. We didn't ask if they'd take the voucher—the food was good, but the place desperately needed another door to keep out the cold. Then back to the hotel, and the dash from the taxi to the front door, then the dash from the front desk to the room in the wonderfully cool Anchorage air. Unlike the thin dusting of snow at Chicago, in Anchorage, the banks of snow were two feet tall. When we got back, we were invited to some fellow traveler's

room down the street and a block or two. Same hotel, just down the street and more like a furnished apartment. We walked, but did not stay long. The next morning, we did use the free breakfast at the hotel. They even had a waffle iron! Unlike the rooms, it got hot.



The food court in the old Anchorage airport terminal where we sat and sat and sat.

The next day at the same old Anchorage airport terminal, just like a group of kindergarteners, we line up as we have in Chicago (twice) to have the nice volunteers check us back into the flight, crossing our names off on a paper list, and we receive letter two of apology from United Airlines. The line slowly snaked its way past security, and into the secure area of the old terminal. They even opened the O! My Ghod! It's Alaska tourist trap shop for us and the food stand. Surprise! The Airport does not take United food vouchers. We spent hours waiting. I'd probably memorized half the prices in the gift shop.

At some point, I tried my phone connection with United Airlines, where they assured me that United had no planes in Alaska. It was a thought that I very much wanted to share. I assume they had trouble provisioning the plane? United clearly wasn't well thought of, and maybe they had to courier in a cash payment or something.

Short of a Full Load

We get on the plane, and it is déjà vu all over again again. The same faces, the same crew, but at least they have their luggage. We all know each other now. We talk about the hotels we were at, where we ate, what we did. The crew moves through the plane to perform a head count for Hong Kong immigration, or else to make sure there's no one trying to sneak themselves into China. We wait.

Our section of the plane is getting a lot of attention. A continuous series of stewardesses, stewards, and back up staff count our section. We are one man short of a full load. Finally, they ask the woman sitting across from us where the man is that was sitting beside her.

"In the hospital," she answered.



The Canadian Viet Kieu who told the airline crew that the missing person was the one taken off the plane and taken to the hospital.

Another crisis averted, we strap in, taxi to the runway, and take off one more time for Hong Kong.

The video programming starts at the same place for the third time. *Desperate Housewives*—not even a new episode. There seriously needs to be a law passed about the number of times being forced to view *Mamma Mia!* constitutes cruel and unusual punishment.

The third time would be the trick. The liquor flowed freely, as we flew west across the Pacific. The Philippine boat crew who mostly drank in back of us eventually got cut off, but otherwise, it was a pretty merry crew.

Toothbrush Inspection

Shortly after take-off, an announcement that somebody had lost their glasses comes on. They patted down the aisle across from us. We'd noticed the guy talking about his missing glasses and looking for them, but he was on the other side of the plane from us. The lights came on. A reward was offered. Conspiracy theories were advanced. He'd left them in the toilet on our side of the plane—I found them, but did not take the reward.

Hong Kong, or Still in Dante's Hell

When we finally landed on Hong Kong, three days late, the air crew was effusive in their thanks for the flight. We started to feel special. Then when we got off the plane, the Hong Kong United crew started in on us.

First, they separated us by destination. The Hong Kong people were lucky—they didn't need another United plane to get away.

About one-third of the plane bound for Viet Nam were not so lucky. We had three-day old tickets. We got herded into the transition spaces between borders, where the wolves of the United crew could pick off the weaker members one by one with offers of hotel rooms in Hong Kong—hotel rooms that you would have to pay for if you didn't make it out on the overbooked flight to Sai Gon. The United computers had apparently just dropped us. There was only one flight for Sai Gon. It was full!

There was a great deal of milling about as they tried to strike deals with different travelers apart from the group. They wouldn't announce the deal (other than free hotel

rooms) to everyone. The approach appeared to be that if they kept us long enough, we'd all take their deal.

I discovered my inner Ugly American. I took out my camcorder and started filming the Hong Kong agents. They did not like the filming. One female Chinese agent started yelling at me, and told me to stop filming. I didn't. For whatever reason, they suddenly decided to let us out into the airport. Thong and I, oddly enough, got sorted out into a group of ten or so and hurried through immigration. Then we went to the Sai Gon flight to wait. We'd gotten familiar with this act called wait.

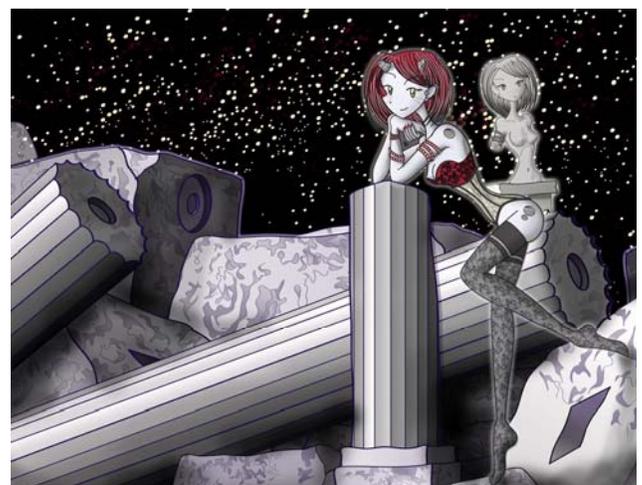
It was almost like civilization. There were phones and restaurants. There were people. Of course, we were still in three day-old clothes, but we could call Sai Gon. My Sprint phone is US based, so I used a credit card to call Sai Gon. I also let another Canadian use it to call his relatives there. His relatives lived down close to Thong's, but on the coast. It's not an easy trip from the coast to the Sai Gon airport, or from the airport to the coast, for that matter.

Ho Chi Minh City Bound, December 5, 2008

Finally, we boarded the flight to Sai Gon. Thong and I got bumped to Business Class. First time in the top of a 747. Fantasy flight, but in my fantasy flight, why am I in three day old clothes? Fine wine, fine food, private computer screen, on the second shortest leg of the trip, three day old clothes, still no luggage. The last flight was uneventful and comfortable.

In Viet Nam finally, we found the luggage that we'd checked in Minneapolis four days before. We hit the duty free at the airport. Thong's younger brothers and sister were waving at us from outside the airport. Then off to the house for a shower through the warm Sai Gon night.

The only excitement on the return trip was that one of my return tickets had been used on the way out. It required a considerable period of time in the early morning for the Sai Gon United agent to rewrite it.



They Disappeared

compiled by Steven H Silver

I've contacted several authors and asked them a simple question. Which story have you published which seems to have disappeared without a trace? I was thinking of stories which received no critical attention, were never nominated for awards, never had a request for a reprint. Stories that despite their lack of reception the author still felt were deserving of attention. Generally, the response I got was a glassy look followed by a question: "Does it have to be only one?"

Well, except for the British authors I spoke to. At least three of them thought for a few moments and replied that they didn't have any stories that fit that description (oh, to be a British author!).

What follows are the responses to that question from several authors, each talking about a story that has special meaning to them. Stories they would like to call your attention to.

"Hourglass," Baen's Universe, 2/08

Alma Alexander

When I first met Aris the Gleeman, he turned up in a story which was inspired by a folk fable from the Old Country. It went something along the lines of an intrepid hero battling his way to a certain magic spot in order to build a fire there and spend the night. In the morning, he was to hunt down and kill the creature whose tracks he found in the cold ashes of his fire when he woke - and the place where he killed that creature would mark the spot where a great treasure was buried.

But what happens when the only tracks you find are your own...?

When I wrote the story which was born out of this fable, it didn't start out as being about that hero... but about Aris, the travelling bard who also serves as a carrier of news from village to village as he travels the roads of his world. Aris turns up at an inn and everyone assumes he's there to see the Hero, the secretive and solitary man who lives at the fringes of the village. That, of course, is the true Hero of the original fable - but when Aris, who cannot resist the lure of the story, goes to see the man he finds out that the "Treasure" discovered according to the legend's instructions had a high price indeed, perhaps too high...

...and thus did Aris walk into my life. He intrigued me, as a character, if for no other reason than that it was established early that he had the same relationship with magic as most cat haters have with cats—the cat knows that it is not wanted, but in the manner of cats everywhere this merely means that the cat hater hasn't had a chance to get to know it properly yet, and the cat sticks to his side like a burr and won't be shaken off. In like wise Aris doesn't like magic, doesn't trust it, but it keeps following him around anyway rubbing its head on his knee and purring and whispering, "just TRY if you don't know that you hate it until you try it..." This was a concept that interested me, so I wrote more Aris stories.

It was the second of these, "Hourglass," that explored the idea a little more deeply...and was picked up by *Baen's Universe*.

I love that story. I love Aris and his world. But that is so far the only story of that particular series that I've been able to place

anywhere - and I haven't heard it mentioned in any forum or discussion space or nomination arena since it appeared. It just vanished.

I still have hopes, however, of letting Aris out of the shadows and into the real world. He's a grand character, and he deserves it...

The Silence of the Avatar

"In Her Image," *Analog*, 10/02

Michael A. Burstein

Around the year 2001 or so, I first came across the word "synthespian." A hot topic around Hollywood at the time, a synthespian is a computer-generated actor. In essence, any animated character could be considered a synthespian, but often the term is reserved for characters that are meant to appear real and to interact with human actors on the screen.

Filmmakers have used computer-generated actors to some extent, but with mixed results. The movie *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* (2001) was one attempt to create an animated film that had realistic human characters. Many critics felt that it failed in its attempt, as did *The Polar Express* (2004) a few years later. On the other hand, Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003) did succeed, probably because the character wasn't meant to be human.

At the moment, motion capture and an actor are still needed to bring the character to life. In general, actors are threatened by the whole synthespian concept, because if actors can be replaced so easily, they might find themselves out of work. One movie, *Simone* (2002), approached the controversy from the perspective of a producer dealing with a diva actress; he fires her and replaces her with a secret synthespian.

I was intrigued by how this concept would work within the complications of copyright and trademark law. For a brief time, Hollywood was bringing actors "back to life" by splicing their images into commercials. Usually this involved some delicate negotiations with the actor's estate, as the actor's image was not free for the taking.

I thought of the story of how Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster had sold all the rights to Superman for a pittance in the 1930s. Today creators are more savvy and generally hold onto more of the rights of their own creations, but a large enough paycheck dangled in front of anyone might make them willing to take what could turn out to be a bad deal in the end. And so I wrote the story of a young woman who sells the rights to her image to a Hollywood studio outright, and then years later, as an old woman, wants those rights back. I named the woman Jacqueline LaRue, which in retrospect was probably a little too on the nose.

"In Her Image" was published in *Analog* in October 2002, with a very nice piece of interior art that showed an older woman staring balefully into a mirror at a younger version of herself, representing her avatar.

Probably a writer shouldn't praise his own work too much at the risk of appearing immodest, but I thought the story was moving and powerful. It touched on one of my common themes, of how the future might remember the

past. I wrote it in present tense, a departure for me, so it would carry more of a sense of immediacy. And I deliberately crafted a downbeat ending, another departure for me but one that *Analog* was willing to embrace.

And then the story disappeared without a trace.

I'm still puzzled as to why. At the time, a lot of my stories were garnering attention, and the premise of "In Her Image" was one that very few other writers were exploring. Perhaps the story was too depressing, or maybe readers just weren't interested in the idea.

No matter. I'm pleased to have this chance to bring attention to the story yet again.

My "Pretty Cool" Auteur Theory
"Auteur Theory," *F&SF*, 7/98
Richard Chwedyk

I could write a treatise on "Auteur Theory." It was one hell of a roller coaster to write it—a roller coaster without seat belts.

I worked intensely on "Auteur Theory," ran through countless drafts and had it down to about 17,000 words when I started to think of sending it out. A "critique group" workshop was starting in the area and I wanted to join. "Auteur Theory" seemed the likely story to send them—well, the *only* story I had in a state anywhere near complete.

In Chicago, stilettos, truncheons, and clubs are common tools in the critical arsenal. The critique group granted no clemencies to "Auteur Theory." The first response began: "This is art about art, and I hate art about art. But in light of that I have to say—"

And so it went.

Much of the criticism seemed relevant. Much of it didn't. It didn't matter. "Auteur Theory" was dealt with "The Chicago Way" and quickly dispatched.

I picked up my bloody pile of story and headed for home in a bad thunderstorm, imagining that if I were to crash on the expressway some would deem it a suicide, or at best a mercy killing.

An emergency worker would salvage a few burned, soaked pages from the wreckage, shake his head and say, "No wonder. The poor guy knew he had no future as a writer."

When I submitted the manuscript to the workshop I also mailed a copy to *F&SF*. It was insurance. If the story didn't do well at the workshop, an acceptance from Kristine Rusch would be a reprieve. If she *did* reject it—the final nail in the coffin.

After the pummeling "Auteur Theory" received at the workshop, I felt embarrassed for having wasted Kris' time. When the envelope came back from her, I didn't open it for two days. Inside, though, I found a letter from Kris stating that if I cut the story by four or five thousand words I should send it to her again.

I made the cuts but added some wordage too, obsessed with a new sub-theme I thought helped pull everything together.

Kris bought the story, but it was at the same time she decided to move on and turn over editorship to Gordon Van Gelder. Gordon held the story for what seemed a long, *long* time. I thought: Hah! He must have come upon my story

and said, "What was Kris *thinking*?" I figured it wouldn't be long before I received a kill fee and an apology letter.

But Gordon is a man of surprises. When he wrote to me to announce the upcoming publication of "Auteur Theory," he mentioned that the story had spawned an idea for him to produce a movie-themed issue of *F&SF*, with contributions by some of the best names in the field. "Auteur Theory" wasn't the centerpiece, but it was the germ from which the entire issue grew. And that, as the kids still say, was "pretty cool."

"Out of China," *Revisions* edited by Julie E. Czerneda & Isaac Szpindel, DAW Books, 2004.

Julie E. Czerneda

The amount of work and thought that goes into a story shouldn't show. No one would, or likely could, read it, if it did. But sometimes I think about this story, "Out of China," and wish I could tell readers how it took as much or more research than a novel, how I found myself following trails through history, how many times I stymied even Google Scholar with the arcane details that became essential, and how very many tangents turned out to be invaluable. (Or not.) For the curious, my two favourites were the colour of pants worn by 13th century Chinese scholars while gardening, and the use of nets to snare songbirds in fall (which continues to this day, FYI.) My respect for those who write alternate history for a living knows no bounds after my own beginner's attempt. I'm not doing it again, believe me.

The result, in my opinion, was worth it. The story still resonates with me, five years later, especially the big ideas. It's about the consequences of knowledge—who has it and when. It's about a global political shape dictated not by people alone, but by including an understanding of where things live and why. Playing through that experiment led me to a conclusion I didn't expect. A profound change in the present, with an echo of real history as spice.

Because this was to be alternate science history, some of the playing field was familiar to me as a biologist. Frustratingly so, the more plausible I made my fictional scenario. There was a chance, had the actual science been done in this order, that many more would have survived the Black Death and other vector-borne diseases. There was a chance biology might have leapt to its feet as a science with a sense of the link between all living things, not be sidetracked for centuries by societal insistence on humanity as distinct and different.

I'm the first to admit knowing what goes into this story colours my perception of it. As a writer who enjoys the process and its challenges, I hope to get better at it, so I tend to focus on what I'm writing next or now, not what's done and published. "Out of China" is unusual in that it continues to surface in my head and I'd like to see reach a wider audience. Maybe I wouldn't tell them about all the hard work.

But I would invite them to think about the ideas.

"People Like Us," *IASFM*, 9/89

Nancy Kress

Some stories are treasured by their authors but largely ignored by everybody else. This may be because they are unoriginal, badly written, obscurely published, too subtle, or any number of other factors. The problem is that the writer may guess which applies to a given story, but he or she never really knows for sure.

In 1989 I wrote and published a story called “People Like Us” (*Asimov’s SF Magazine*, September). A quiet story, it runs less than seven magazine pages. The tale concerns a subject that is not supposed to exist in America: class differences. Aliens have come to Earth to trade. They are bipedal but don’t look much like us (fur, large balancing tail). But they are terrific mimics. The two-scene story takes place at a dinner party at the home of a rich, upper-class couple and is told from the viewpoint of his wife, Sarah. The guests are one alien plus a self-made, working-class entrepreneur and his wife; Sarah’s husband is trying to put together a business deal involving fuel futures. Throughout the dinner Sarah discovers that the alien likes art (Sarah is on the museum board), plays good tennis, and has a wry sense of humor. Sarah and the other wife, on the other hand, clash over everything: dress, vacation spots, dogs, drinks, diction, proper behavior for children. At the end of the story, Sarah apologizes to her husband for inviting the alien back while not trying harder to be gracious to her other guests: “Really, with some people, the gap was just too wide.”

I have read this story aloud at a few cons. Inevitably, people look interested while I’m reading and frown when I’m done. I think the story says something provocative about what binds people together, as opposed to what we think does. But “People Like Us” has been reprinted only once, in one of the omnibus anthologies *Asimov’s* puts out of all their stories. So maybe I’m the only one that finds it so interesting. Maybe it’s badly written. Maybe it lacks action.

Or maybe the divisions created by class differences make democratic SF uncomfortable.

“America, Such As She Is,” *Alembical*, edited by Lawrence Schoen and Arthur Dorrance, Paper Golem Press, 2008

Jay Lake

Perhaps my favorite of my own stories is the novella, “America, Such As She Is.” It appeared in *Alembical*, edited by Dr. Lawrence Schoen and Arthur “Buck” Dorrance, November, 2008 from Paper Golem Press. I worked harder on that story, both in draft and in revision, than any other short piece I’ve written to date. It was ambitious and strange, and I loved it from conception to this day.

Unfortunately, that piece simply disappeared without notice. I’m not sure it was ever reviewed, and got no attention at all from the *Year’s Best* and award lists. I’m not entirely sure why. “America, Such As She Is” is a difficult story in many ways—never likely to be a fan favorite precisely because of the aspects of the story I devoted the most attention to.

One narrative line of piece is set in Oregon in 1947, several years after Germany and Japan cooperated in the defeat of the United States by destroying Baltimore, MD

and Portland, OR in a pair of nuclear strikes designed to instill terror and demonstrate the Axis’ ability to prosecute the war to the complete, utter destruction of their enemies. The other narrative line is set in a tiny port town in Portuguese Timor, under occupation by a third-line Japanese garrison nearly at the point of rebellion.

Likewise the characters, most of whom are nameless. The Oregon protagonist’s story is told in second person, and even many of the minor characters are unnamed, as the soldier, a survivor of a Nazi work camp involved in the German nuclear effort, searches for Leslie Grove, the last unsundered American general. The Timor story switches points of view between an equally nameless whore and a hapless Japanese Lieutenant. These are challenging, even alienating choices that I made to best express a challenging and alienating topic.

I love this story. I love the plot, the action, the mood, the strange POV, the interstitial worldbuilding. I just wish more people had found their way to it to love it as well.

Bigfoot Lives!

“Primates,” *Asimov’s*, 9/06

David D. Levine

I think the published story of mine that’s failed to live up to its potential by the largest margin is “Primates,” published in *Asimov’s* in September 2006.

I wrote the first draft of this story at the Clarion West writers’ workshop in 2000. Clarion West is an intense six-week “boot camp for writers” and when I wrote this story I was feeling pretty beaten up and suffering from lack of sleep. The day after I finished it, I wrote in my journal that it “feels to me like a finely-made machine that doesn’t do anything.” When it was critiqued, it was more successful than I’d thought, but still fell flat; people liked the setting and descriptions, but found the characters stereotypical and the dialog stilted.

Our instructor that week was Candace Jane Dorsey, and in our conference after the critique she helped me disassemble my head and begin to put it back together again. That experience was invaluable, but its emotional intensity made me skittish about the story, and it sat untouched on my hard drive for five years.

In 2005 I finally hauled out the story and revised it extensively, lopping off the first and last scenes and making the character Dan less of a scary *Deliverance*-style hick stereotype. I also renamed the main character after Seattle writer Edd Vick, whose wife Amy Thomson bought naming rights in a charity auction. I had the revised story critiqued again, at Wiscon and with my local critique group the Lucky Lab Rats, and revised it one more time before finally submitting it.

The first place I sent it was *F&SF*, and Gordon van Gelder replied with a detailed two-page letter. I rewrote it as requested, including changing the ending so that Bigfoot is revealed as a tool-user, but Gordon still didn’t like it. But Sheila Williams at *Asimov’s* did, and I thank Gordon for the suggestions that made it a much stronger story.

“Primates” was my second sale to *Asimov’s*, the first being the Hugo-winning “Tk’Tk’Tk.” The September 2006 issue of *Asimov’s* had my name on the cover and was

handed out as a freebie in the SFWA Suite at the Worldcon. But then the reactions came in from the reviewers...or didn't.

In *Locus*, Nick Gevers found my story "unconvincing," and Rich Horton didn't mention it at all. One online reviewer found it "dark, repulsive, and just not enjoyable to read." *Tangent Online* liked it, and it got an honorable mention in Gardner Dozois's *Year's Best SF*, but apart from that it received almost no critical attention. After the Hugo win it was a big letdown.

But I still believe in this story. It's built on ideas that are important to me, and I think I did a good job conveying the sense of wonder that science can impart. Perhaps some day it will be recognized as one of my more significant stories. It's certainly one of the ones I've worked hardest on!

"Welcome to Valhalla," *Asimov's*, 12/08 (with Kathryn Lance)

Jack McDevitt

Back in the fifties, when I was in college, I was traveling the New Jersey Turnpike, alone in the car. The radio was on, doing excerpts from various classical composers. I don't think I was paying much attention. But gradually the passing landscape began to accelerate and I became aware that the car had filled with the music of "The Ride of the Valkyries."

My heart picked up as Odin's beautiful attendants charged through the sky. The Jersey fields and connecting roads moved by at a quickening pace. Suddenly I realized I was tearing along at about ninety. My car, an old '47 Dodge, was on the verge of exploding.

I'd always loved Wagner, "Tannhauser" and "Lohengrin" and "The Flying Dutchman." Of all the classical composers, he seemed to me by far the most talented. The music started and the sheer power and majesty of it simply carried me away. Did it every time.

I'm not sure when I found out about the inspiration, if that's the correct term, with which his music filled the Nazis. Hitler reportedly loved it and insisted that his senior staff attend the operas with him, so they could understand what it meant to be a member of the Reich. It was the ultimate artistic conception of German nationalism. For millions of victims, it was the last thing they heard before being shoved into the ovens. It left me wondering what Wagner would have thought had he known the uses to which his music would be put. Had he been aware that his work and his name would be forever associated with a Holocaust of satanic proportions.

An argument can be made that Wagner was anti-Semitic. Some of his writings suggest he embraced segments of the Aryan supremacy notions that drove Nazi ideology. But that's a long way from suggesting he would not have been horrified by the death camps.

It was a story I wanted to write twenty-five years before I actually began my career. But even with all that time to think about it, I wasn't sure how to proceed. How could I set it up? Who would carry the message to the composer and show him what was coming? What messenger could be appropriate to challenge him to consider his own role?

It had to be a time traveler. But, however I tried to put the thing together, an encounter between Wagner and a 20th century time traveler lacked the driving passion the story demanded.

Finally, fifty years after the fateful trip down the Jersey Turnpike, I met Kathryn Lance, a free-lance writer with a special interest in Wagner. I described the idea to her. She liked it and offered to write a first draft. I was skeptical it could be done effectively, but I said sure, give it your best shot.

The first thing she did was replace my time traveler. The replacement was so obvious, and worked so well, I couldn't believe I hadn't thought of it myself: It's Brunhilde who brings the warning. Who shows the composer what is coming. Wagner cannot believe that the German people, the most civilized nation in the world, could perpetrate such a horrific crime. "Are you saying that if I decline to write my masterpieces, these things will not happen?"

No, she tells him. They are coming. But you can prevent the savages from dragging you into it.

Kathryn's take on it blew me away. Nebula/Hugo material here, I thought. In reality, the story seemed to slip through without much notice. The lack of reaction surprised me, because "Welcome to Valhalla" is considerably stronger than some of my stories that have made a final ballot somewhere. In any case, had the story carried only Kathryn's name, and not mine as well, I'd have voted for it in a heartbeat.

"The Light That Blinds, the Claws That Catch," *IASFM*, 7/92

Mike Resnick

I've written a number of alternate history stories about Theodore Roosevelt. Some were Hugo nominees; one was a Nebula nominee; one was read professionally by William Windom; one was optioned by Hollywood; all but one have been resold many times.

So naturally the one with no awards, no award nominations, no movie options, and no resales is the one that I think is the best of them, and perhaps the best un-nominated story I've written to date.

Theodore Roosevelt married his childhood sweetheart, and was totally devoted to her. She was weak and sickly, and she died in childbirth in the same house and on the same day that his mother died. Roosevelt was devastated, never allowed her name to be mentioned in his presence again, and went out West to forget it all, leaving behind his budding political career (he was the youngest-ever minority leader of the New York State Assembly), his writing, everything.

Well, of course he came back to live what I think is the most accomplished life in American in history—Police Commissioner of New York City, Governor of New York, bestselling author, naturalist and ornithologist of worldwide renown, Undersecretary of the Navy, organizer and leader of the Rough Riders, President of the United States, trust buster, Nobel Prize winner, head of the first African safari, Brazilian explorer, and the list goes on and on.

But he did that with a robust, healthy, self-sufficient wife whom he could and did leave alone (or with his

children) for months at a time. I thought it might be interesting to see what turns his life might have taken if Alice, his first wife, had lived—a woman whose frailty required all the time and concentration that Roosevelt devoted to his other pursuits.

So I wrote “The Light That Blinds, The Claws That Catch”, and sold it to Gardner Dozois at *Asimov’s*. I thought—and still think—that it was a beautiful and sensitive story, the best of my many Roosevelt stories...and it sank like a stone. If it ever got a review—good, bad or otherwise—I am not aware of it. It is the only Roosevelt story that was never resold (well, until I collected them all in 2008 in *The Other Teddy Roosevelts* and I don’t think that counts.) It was never podcast.

In brief, it remains to this day my very best totally unknown story.

“The Secret Sharer,” *IASFM*, 9/87

Robert Silverberg

The story of mine whose obscurity has most puzzled me is the 1987 novella “The Secret Sharer,” for which I borrowed the title and some of the narrative structure of a famous Joseph Conrad story, but which I transformed completely into a science-fiction story, and, I think, quite an original one. (Conrad’s story takes place aboard a small nineteenth-century merchant vessel in the South Seas, mine aboard a vast starship moving through interstellar space.) To me, my “Secret Sharer” is one of my most inventive works, providing a new look at the standard sort of starship (mine exists only in part in our space-time continuum) and at the theme of transporting passengers across transluminal distances in suspended animation. I embellished my story with what I thought were some pretty rich, captivating characters. And indeed it stirred a lot of notice when it was published in *Asimov’s* (one reader wrote in to ask whether the editor knew that Joseph Conrad had written a story using the same title) and was nominated for both the Hugo and Nebula awards—where it went down to double defeat, losing to stories that I was assured by friends were less deserving of the trophies. And after that the story vanished from sight. It has not been reprinted in any anthology and I never see it mentioned in critical commentary. I used it in a short-story collection of my own, even giving the entire collection the title of *Secret Sharers* to indicate my esteem for that particular work, and used it again seven years later in a collection of my novellas called *Sailing to Byzantium*. But no one else has ever reprinted it. I think of it as having been written very close to the top of my form, and rate it as one of my four or five best works at novella length. But no one else seems to agree. I wish I knew why.

“Last Favor,” *Analog*, Mid-December 1987

Harry Turtledove

Twenty-odd years ago, I wondered why Eastern European Jews have such a distinguished record in the arts and sciences. (Yes, I am one—somebody’s gotta bring the average down.) Maybe it’s coincidence. Or environment. Maybe not. Consider...

If you put animals or people in a place where cold’s the big threat, they’ll evolve to adapt. Arctic foxes have short noses and little ears. They don’t radiate much heat. Eskimos have flat faces and are stocky for the same reason. If you put animals or people where heat’s the big danger, they’ll adapt to that, too. Sudanese and Bantus run to the lean side. Fennec foxes have long, pointy noses and sail-like ears to dispose of heat.

So what if you put people—has to be people here—in a situation where stupidity will kill them? Eastern European Jews couldn’t be peasants; kings and nobles wouldn’t let them. They had to take trades like moneylending and bookkeeping and jeweler—and who’ll starve faster than a dumb moneylender?

Liking the idea, I set it in space, extended it to put a race in this situation for millennia, and wrote a novelette about it. Stan Schmidt bought “Last Favor,” which ran in the mid-December 1987 *Analog*. I waited for the politically correct to scream and me and the politically incorrect to defend me. I waited, and waited, and waited...

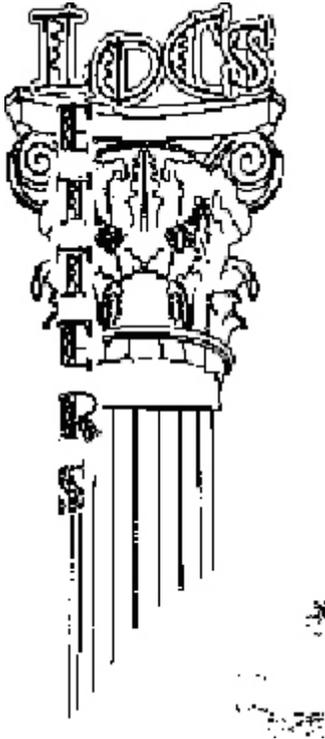
Didn’t happen. I was at a con with the artist who painted the cover illo for that *Analog*. He enjoyed the story, he said—it showed the virtues of racial tolerance. I smiled. I nodded. I sighed (where he couldn’t see me).

Some people got it. Vernor Vinge was kind enough to compliment me on the yarn at Loscon. I told him what the artist had said. He kinda shook his head, as I had before him.

Dammit, I wanted people to notice. I put “Last Favor” in my second collection, *Departures*. I’ve got a lot of mail and e-mail about that collection. As far as I can remember, nobody’s said word one about “Last Favor,” for or against.

I do wonder what went wrong. Maybe I was too subtle. People rarely accuse me of that, but maybe. Or maybe SF folk are more tolerant of weird notions than ordinary mortals. Nah, there has to be a rational explanation instead.

The most likely one, I suppose, is that the story didn’t quite do the job I wanted it to. I keep trying. “Bedfellows” and “News from the Front” were also written with intent to provoke, and seem to have managed rather better. You do learn as you get older. There has to be some point to it, after all...doesn’t there?



Letters of Comment

January 8, 2009

Dear Steven:

I know I wrote a loc to *Argentus* 07, in fact it was on my disk.

The Residence of the Wind:

"Yamamoto was exonerated because on the traditional calendar he had been born in the Year of the Snake." Traditional calendars explain a lot, don't they? I was born in the Year of the Horse, Lisa was born in the Year of the Tiger. She likes horses, I like cats. We were meant for each other, that is.

My State's Politics. Bathhouse John Coughlin being annoyed at the claim that he was born in Waukegan. Didn't like Binyamin Kubelsky all that much, did he? Well! (The man was better known as "Jack Benny".)

Actually, Mr. Kubelsky was really born in Chicago, but his mother had records faked to indicate a Waukegan birthplace since that is where she did nearly all of the carrying. Benny, of course, later married Sayde Marks, who he met through her cousin, Zeppo.

Why Sexy, Studly Vampires Suck:

Besides to live, I suppose. Madeline L'Engle was also confused by this Nosferatu-amour; being a vampire meant you were dead. But the image of the vampire has been selectively severed from its roots. To the vampire writers of today, being a vampire is the tagline from *The Lost Boys*: "Sleep all day. Party all night. Never grow old. Never die. It's

fun to be a vampire." The considerations raised by Pat Sayre McCoy and L'Engle just don't exist in that view of the universe.

After I published the article, Pat and I were discussing vampires and I pointed out that Dracula is quite a good novel (as is the John Polidori fragment "The Vampyre"). In Dracula's case, most people base their entire image of it on the films made by Hammer, rather than Bram Stoker's book. I'm also a big fan of Chelsea Quinn Yarbro's Count Germain novels, although those have almost become straight historical fiction whose protagonist just happens to be a vampire. As it turns out, the woman next to me at work is a big fan of modern urban-vampire fantasies.

Letters of comment: Chris Garcia: "Carol Doda . . . was one of the first celebrities I ever met who really felt like she had star power when she was just walking around." It was the silicone, Chris, the silicone.

Bacover: You say I got thish because "I didn't want to, but after the Ludovico technique, I felt ill if I thought I wouldn't send it to you." Just be lucky they didn't try the Fraser technique. That standing around with the powdered-sugar coated lollipop didn't do me any harm, but then I don't do sugar or lollipops; others would find it less resistable. If they threaten you with the Benefactor's Great Operation, run!

Namarie,
Joseph T Major

Steven:

Thanks for the latest *Argentus*.

I don't know that I'd classify hard SF as right-wing and space opera as left-wing. This is too broad a generalization. There are plenty of examples of both sub-genres that do not fall into either category and probably some that cross the line. The characterization might hold better on the social side, but I'm just not motivated to go through my library to note and cite examples.

Illinois has certainly had its run of corrupt politicians. I don't know that the density there is much higher than elsewhere, but as a former cheddarhead any embarrassment that sticks to flatlanders holds a certain allure. No, not really. Corruption on this scale and the cost to the public are poor ways to expend effort and money in today's tough economic times.

Until next issue...

Henry L. Welch
Editor, *The Knarley News*

knarley@welchcastle.com
<http://tkk.welchcastle.com/>

1/23/09

Dear Steven:

It's a shame that this zine is now an annual event, but I am pleased when it does arrive. I am not sure of its numbering, but if it's annual, the year should do fine. So, here are some comments on *Argentus* 2008. Or issue 8, if I can figure it out properly.

I first announced the 'zine as an annual in issue 2 (2002), so yes, the numbered issues correspond to the year in which they came out. However, in 2005, there was a special edition. This year will also see a special edition, so Argentus 9 (or Argentus 2009) will actually be the eleventh issue of the 'zine. Special editions, however, don't get a dead tree edition at all.

I wish there were smaller rocket trophies given out for Hugo nominations. I assume there are certificates, plus in many cases, the little rocket lapel pins. There'd be more expense, but there'd also be more of a memory formed for each of the nominees. For many of us, hope springs eternal for the Hugo ballot. I have lots of friends in Montreal, so who knows what might happen? Fingers crossed...

Not all cons send out certificates and Denvention did not have the traditional rocket pins for a variety of very good reasons. Denvention also only gave one pin to each nominee, even if the nominee received multiple nominations (which affected Msrs. Egan, Garcia, Scalzi, and myself. Although I know it seems trite and cliché, the nomination really is an honor. The pin is a nice remembrance, as is whatever gift is given at the Hugo Loser's Party (although I'd rather have a rocket) than the lovely parting gift (this year a thumb drive in a pen).

It would have been interesting to see both Glyers win Hugos for their efforts. To be honest, the only time I can remember seeing husband and wife win separate awards was when Yvonne and I won separate Aurora Awards in 1998. My memory is notoriously short, so I am certain someone will provide me with a reminder of previous husband-and-wife Hugos.

Congrats to Paul Kincaid for his BSFA nomination. That's an interesting topic in his book; I'd like a look inside to see what it's all about. Could this essay here have come from the book?

Nope, this essay is original to Argentus.

I have read Chris Garcia's trip report, and it is a fun read beginning to end. Because Canada is culturally caught between a rock and a hard place, namely the USA and the UK, I have seen rugby on television, some of it British, but most of it Australian. Aussie Rules Fitba is entertaining to watch, not just for the organized riot rugby is, but also for the crowd reactions. North American fans are quiet and sedate compared to those Aussie fans, who go into paroxysms of joy at every score.

I gather the Japanese Worldcon was a true culture shock for many who attended, not just North Americans who flew to Japan, but also for the Japanese who attended, and found themselves in a very North American convention. I also gather never the twain did meet, which was unfortunate; seems that two separate conventions were taking place. I have read reports that the convention lost about \$35,000 (equivalent), so my question is...would Japanese fandom consider bidding again? What are their plans?

We still mourn 4sj's passing...you are completely correct, a fannish memoir by Forry is something he should have considered. It would have been a best seller. but then, do we truly know the date of our death? If Forry had retired from the field, I'm sure he would have thought of a memoir, but he was still busy being a fan.

Are there any fans in the Chicago area who had any dealings with Barack Obama before his successful run for the presidency? His charisma can't be doubted, and is more visible given his predecessor. I am not sure anyone could live up to the billing Obama's been given; I know what he will try his best. I'm just afraid that even superhuman efforts will disappoint many, and his popular powerbase will dry up.

I'm not aware of any ties in Chicago fandom directly to Mr. Obama, aside from some fans who worked for his campaign.

I have a copy of Diana Glycer's book, a gift received from her and Mike at the last Corflu in Las Vegas. (Thanks again!) Wonderful book, and a triumph of research and the value of notekeeping. If any of us were to be researched in the future, how would it be done? We have traded paper correspondence and diaries, with at least some level of longevity for the ephemerality (not sure that's a word, but it is what I mean) and short life of the blog, the e-bulletin board, the text message and the Twitter tweet. Paper correspondence and diaries have made this book possible. Ah, well, more old grumping on my part. I have seen writers' groups work well, and others

start with the best of intentions, but... Little comes of those groups, except fond memories for some, and recriminations for others.

In February 2009, I appeared on a panel about whether paper fanzines have been replaced entirely by electronic correspondence, a relatively common panel over the last several years. My guess is that it will be held as long as we hold the "Is SF Dead?" discussion.

Alma Alexander's article reminds me of a complaint I've had for a little while now. With astronomers and others in charge making what appears to be arbitrary changes in the status of heavenly bodies...Pluto is no longer a planet, but Titan is? I haven't seen an up-to-date depiction of the solar system, with all discovered or demoted or promoted planets, or other heavenly bodies. Has there been any final decisions about what's what orbiting the sun?

The current rules are set, but may be reconsidered at the next meeting of the IAU. As it happens, I bumped into Neil de Grasse Tyson when I was in New York back in November and we had a discussion of Pluto's status. His comment was that the issue he raised, which wasn't captured by the press, was that people should consider the attributes of the bodies in the solar system rather than arbitrary names. He also pointed out that in the Hayden exhibit, neither the number eight or nine appears in relation to the number of planets. Instead, they work more on combining the terrestrial planets, the Jovian planets, and the ice balls.

I think I'm done here, Steven, I'm having some trouble focusing on the screen in front of me, which means I am tired, and it's time for a weekend, anyway. Many thanks, take care, and produce these things a little more often, willya?

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

August 29, 2009

Dear Steven,

Thanks for the issue of *Argentus* 2008. If you continue to follow your annual schedule, there should be another issue out in the not too distant future, so I better write a LoC.

I had given some thought to University SF collections before reading the article by Lynne Thomas, but her article caused me to think about the subject in greater detail. I started thinking about university collections

after I started thinking about what to do with my own collection. Sooner or later, everybody comes to the realization they are getting older. This is a trend that won't continue forever. After I considered these things, I realized there were things in my house that I was never likely to look at again. I might as well decide what to do with them while I am still capable of doing it. I certainly didn't want to do a "Harry Warner."

My basic approach to collecting is completionism. If glomming onto things is good, then glomming onto everything must be great. This may be an intellectually lazy approach to collecting, since you eliminate the need to decide what is worth it and what isn't. Or at least, you eliminate a lot of decisions. You still have to determine the borders of SF and fantasy or whatever it is that you want to collect.

Lynne Thomas seems to have a much different approach. Science fiction is undeniably produced by science fiction writers. It seems reasonable to look at one writer at a time and see what makes them tick. Figuring them out individually should be easier than figuring the entire field out.

It would seem that Lynne Thomas and I are approaching the subject from opposing views of history. She might go along with Disraeli's idea that you should study biography rather than history. History is produced by the actions of great men (persons). Much to my surprise, I seem to be approaching things from a Marxian viewpoint. History is produced by historical forces. If you want to know about SF, you have to consider the bad stuff as well as the good. Most ideas in SF come from outside SF. Once an idea enters the field it is batted around and combined with other ideas. The best consideration of an idea isn't necessarily the first one. At best, SF considers all sorts of ideas from the general culture and digests them into something that might even make some sense or reveal that some ideas don't make any sense. At least, that sounds good.

Yours truly,

Milt Stevens
6325 Keystone St.
Simi Valley, CA 93063
miltstevens@earthlink.net

Steven,

A much belated loc on the 2008 *Argentus*. Of course, it being a yearly, I am only a year behind.

It has occurred to me that I rarely comment on yearly fanzines. There are two reasons, I think. First, such a fanzine

is usually long and packed with material (and there is really a lot interesting stuff in these 41 pages) and so the task of responding with an appropriately weighty and interesting loc is daunting. Secondly, since I know the fanzine will not appear for another 12 months, there is plenty of time to respond, or—as it usually transpires—plenty of time to keep putting off responding until the fabled day when I feel up to writing that wonderful, lengthy, fascinating letter that such an issue surely merits. At some point, though, I begin to feel that it would be embarrassing to write so long after the issue has appeared, plus I have begun to forget what I thought about saying when I read the issue.

Needless to say I have resolved to reform and next year—yes indeed, next year—I will do better.

Perhaps the highlight for me was Diana Glycer's account of how the Inklings influenced each other. Both what she discovered and her literary detective work were fascinating. I wonder if such a study would have been possible had these writers been working today? Someone might keep an online journal rather than a diary and perhaps it might linger in cyberspace after the author has departed. Or perhaps not. And are private emails likely to be archived anywhere or donated to a university as letters commonly have been? As for manuscripts showing changes during the course of a project...is anyone going to preserve backups or files containing early versions? Do writers even save such things? In fact, with word processors, much of the tinkering that goes on in the course of writing is immediately obliterated as the author works over the document. Probably people have actually changed their writing methods.

Fred Lerner's article about reading great books was also of much interest since I have been trying to get back to reading more books, as opposed to browsing the internet and so forth, and have actually been making an effort to read some of the many classics with which I am unfamiliar. In most cases so far I have found the classics as great advertised and highly enjoyable. Although, as Fred mentions, there are some I can't get into. Back in the sixties when I was young and callow and visited New York City for the first time, a moonie sold me an expensive copy of the Bhagavad-Gita less than a minute after I stepped off the bus. I never could make any sense of it. But then, I had to lug it around the city all day—it must have weighed 100 pounds by that evening—so it pretty much ruined my trip and I probably held that against it, not to

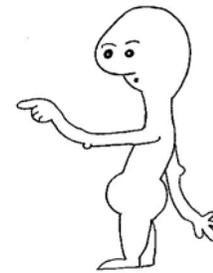
mention \$9.95 would have bought me several more UK edition Mike Moorcock novels at the sf bookstore I visited. I disagree with Fred though on Michel de Montaigne. True, I avoid his earlier lengthy essays full of classical quotations but his later, more personal ones I love.

Recently I finally, finally read Moby Dick. A wonderful book. I think I was put off reading it because I found the movie so disappointing. A buddy and I went to see when we were in grade school and what we wanted was a monster movie like Godzilla or Reptilicus and it didn't live up to expectations. When it showed up the monster was a real let down. Even worse than the Crawling Eye. I also read Crime and Punishment. I approached it gingerly but found it surprisingly easy to read. It's a crime novel with conflict in every chapter! I also surprised myself by becoming engrossed in Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse. In the past her books seemed impenetrable within a few pages but when I suddenly understood she was writing in large part about the limitations of human perceptions and time it all made sense. Ulysses, however, remains impenetrable, like Proust. But I am thinking of giving it another go sometime. and Fred has set forth a lot of other possibilities to add to my list! Now I need to live to 150 or so.

Your article on corrupt Illinois politicians was also outstanding. It's amusing to read about political crooks who are dead and longer bilking the public. And yes, the public does seem to distinguish good graft and bad graft. And probably with good reason. The local congressman when I was growing up—who won re-election every time with a dictator-like percentage of the vote—was a fellow named Dan Flood. In 1980 he was censured for bribery and subsequently left office but I don't think his constituents could drum up much anger towards him. He'd been bringing the bacon back to Wilkes-Barre for decades. In 1972, after the area was destroyed by flooding due to Hurricane Agnes he more or less rebuilt the place with federal funds. Maybe it was pork, maybe he paid himself well, but he definitely served his constituents well. Heck, he was from a coal-mining area yet he had a waxed mustache and wore white suits and sometimes capes. He looked like he was ready for a night at the opera. If the voters didn't hold that against him a little graft wasn't going to bother them.

Best,

Eric



Responses to *Argentus* Guide to the Art of the Con: Special Edition 2

May 30, 2009

Dear Steven:

Many thanks for the second *Argentus* Special edition. This loc is going to be a challenge to respond to because, like you, I've been involved in convention running for a long time, for me, over 25 years. Once we travel to other conventions to see how they run them, we find out that different methods work for different conventions, different audiences, different communities. We have the opportunity to borrow ideas from other groups to see how they work in your own community, and those borrowed ideas are seen as fresh and new. Then, there are others who see their way of doing things as The Only Way, and they are argumentative about it, and further discussions turn personal. We still don't play well with others. So, I will see what there is to say on each article, and I promise that anything I might write here will be constructive, or will illuminate my own experiences on the subject. Conrunning is not a science; as you say, it's more a philosophy.

(By the way, I wish you and Tammy Coken were still working on your Midwest convention zine. Yvonne and I retired from active committee work a couple of years ago after our 25 years, but Yvonne returned quickly to run the science and space programming track at Ad Astra, and she did it well. It got me thinking about how I miss working the convention, and the current chairman, Lee Knight, who lives just up the street from me, said that she wishes we'd return to help...so, I will return to the committee for Ad Astra 2010, and at a meeting that will be held tomorrow as I type, I will offer my services to the convention as a Director.)

I will list one failure of many con runners, especially those who are new to the sport. Should they be able to grasp what their responsibility is, especially if it is one with which they must deal with the members of the convention directly, they will perform their duties in a way that is most convenient for them, and not necessarily in a way that is most convenient for the members. One of my

successors as chairman of Ad Astra dropped the great convention hotel we had because it was too far away for him to get to. In many ways, conrunning is part of a service industry, event management, and we have to run the event so that our members are happy and get the most enjoyment out of the event for the least effort on their part. We also attend conventions, and we'd expect no less ourselves.

I have done some hotel negotiations, but not much. I do know that you have to go to a hotel at a disadvantage because even if you arrive at the hotel in suits and briefcases and your lawyer, ready to do business, the moment you mention a science fiction convention, you automatically stop being an adult in their eyes. That sci-fi garbage is just for kids after all. Further dealings with the hotel, should a contract be signed, will reflect that attitude, especially in dealing with those in charge of rooms, banquet, etc. Hotels must make money, to be sure, but we have had some hotels that were brutally honest with us, and we thanked them for it. Most hotels can make more money off a single wedding in a single room on a single day than they can in giving a science fiction convention all their function space for the entire weekend. In spite of their need to make money, some hotels are making it difficult to do business with them mostly because we aren't the kind of business

they want. I suspect we don't drink enough, or eat enough, in the hotel restaurants. One hotel the local convention wants will simply not allow hospitality suites; you must pay lots more money to purchase hotel catering. One show manager I worked with years ago has on her person every moment of every day what she called the show bible, which was a planned, minute-by-minute list of what was to happen in every room of the hotel or conference centre she had contracted, and what staff was expected to do to prepare for each event. You can't expect the hotel or other facility to know what you want in the event as well as you do, so giving them a copy of your bible of complete directions in a linear fashion make it nearly impossible for the hotel to not know what you want. Getting the staff to deliver it in the fashion you want, that's another thing, but at least you have the advantage of know that the hotel knows what you want, the hotel management will sign off on the document, and the hotel is liable if they do not deliver every specified at the specified time.

Badges...we've all heard the complaints of the badge names not being set in a readable font, or being of a type size that can be seen from a distance. I've also heard that some complain that the type size is too big, so that their names can be seen, somehow violating some privacy concerns. I can understand

that a little bit in this age of fragile privacy and identity theft. The little things mean a lot, so pinbacks or clips or string or lanyards have to be kept in mind, especially for Worldcon. Some conventions want to be as modern as possible, so they offer facilities for online payments, like Paypal. That's great, but I do remember one convention that went all-Paypal, and wouldn't accept cheques or even cash. Then they couldn't understand why some people wouldn't come. Again, convenient for you doesn't necessarily mean convenient for your members.

The badge is all Kevin Standlee says it is...identity marker, ticket into the facilities, souvenir of the event itself, sticker and pin place for the week. Similarly, it is a personalized bond and receipt of the investment you've made in your membership; if it wasn't suitably identified as yours, anyone could take it and wear it, a bearer bond, as it were. I have made badges for a couple of dozen conventions, simple pinbacks, usually business card sized 2x3.5". I have made sure the con name is easily read, and that there is plenty of space for personalized self-identification. I have asked the convention committee what colours they want, and while I have done more, I usually draw the line at a dozen. Your security team will never remember what all those colours are supposed to mean, even if you give them a chart.

Many conventions provide a programme book and pocket programme. The programme book winds up being a souvenir book, which most people won't read until they get home, if they read it at all. All important information should also go in the pocket programme, which most people will read on site. One item that I feel is very important for member convenience is a restaurant and services guide. The average person attending is from out of town, or is at least unfamiliar with what's around the hotel. Finding out where various places to eat are adds to the whole weekend experience. Also, services are important. Where are the ATMs, 24-hour variety stores and pharmacies in emergencies, the local gas stations, which ones sell diesel, where are there supermarkets and photocopy shops so I can stock and advertise my room party? This is what I mean by services. So many conventions ignore this, and one convention I spent several weekends doing such a guide for took my efforts, made 20 copies, and threw them on a cluttered freebie table. I offered my services to another convention the next year, one that at least acknowledged the value of the guide.

Opening ceremonies has less and less importance for me, especially in this age



of shorter attention spans. Most people blow them off, but I think the most important thing such a ceremony can do is inform those who care enough to go of any changes, deletions, additions, etc. to the actual programme. A few easels with that information here and there, especially by the information desk, would help, too. Introduce the senior committee, let them know about changes, tell them important rooms numbers, like where the con suite is, and let them loose. They will usually look after the rest. Closing ceremonies...most people are gone by then, or are packing their cars. If there are the results of the masquerade, or any other competitions, that information can easily be placed into any messages sent to members connected with your LiveJournal or Facebook pages, or can be a part of the first paper progress report you send out to everyone. I don't mean to demean the closing, but I think there are more effective ways of getting these results out to your members.

I have worked con suites and green rooms at many conventions. We've tried to be as green as possible, and offer trashcans and recycle bins. It does get tiresome when the hotel offers this, and at the end of the convention you see both garbage and recyclables going into the same dumpster. Dealers' rooms? I've done lots of those, too. Getting the right balance of books and jewelry, plus other collectibles, cottage industry items and garage sale stuff is nearly impossible. How much of anything is too much? It's all subjective. Having a varied room is good, but as Bill Roper says, too many dealers mean that there may not be enough disposed income to go around to make sure that their bills can be paid, and a little profit is made. We may also have to keep in mind that many people are not buying the way they used to. Perhaps the age of the collector is going away; we're told that having less stuff is a good thing. We may have less disposable income to dispose of in this recession; dealers are bound to suffer. Cons will, too; some will blow off conventions altogether, and try to get what they want off the Web. I was just at Anime North in Toronto, scooping up dealer business cards so perhaps they might consider coming to Ad Astra...we had a few unsold tables this year, and if I am going to rejoin the committee as assistant dealer chief, I guess I'd better do that kind of thing when the head of dealers isn't around.

June 1, 2009

I remember a couple of times where Hal Clement was the sole guest of honour at a convention, yet George Richards was also a guest as was Harry

Stubbs. For many years, Hal would go to convention in Ottawa, and when Ottawa stopped having conventions, he'd come to Toronto. He was a lucky charm for a number of years, and when he passed away, he was much missed. Our experience has been that local scientists and science activists are good guests...one not only works at our local science centre, but is also a steampunk enthusiast.

Good guides from Minicon and Boskone, and others...just more proof that different things work in different situations. This is an -ology, not an -onomy. Objective parties not only make good moderators, but they also make good committee members. (Why does the idiot who derails the panel always sit in the first row, and interrupt literally everyone? This guy was our cross to bear for a while, but he seems to have gotten the hint.) We are not filkers or Whofans, but we have assisted in running the local filkcon's con suite (away from the filking), and we have in the past, and will again this year, run registration for the local Whofen as they stage their own local convention. Good programming is meant to act as a conversation, a social lubricant, an information session and a way so showcase your talented guests. Can't hang about in the dealers' room all day...and children's programming is meant to show that those stupid conventions Mom and Dad go to all the time aren't as stupid as they thought. (If Mom and Dad love the same shows the kids do, either Mom and Dad are cool, or those shows aren't.)

For me, a good Green room is meant to provide a little refreshment for the panelists as they meet pre-panel, and discuss what they are going to do. However, that good Green room rarely happens. Many conventions have done away with a Green room, and other cons put so much into their Green room, some attendees are bitter over the fact that it's become a private party, with better provisions than the con suite. I would prefer a couple of tables of simple fare, a few sandwiches, fresh fruit, drinks and a few banquet tables to sit and chat at. I had hoped that there was a guide for neopros on how to deal with fans...good for Susan Schwartz. These friendly guidelines are actually good with any member of the public, especially those more fanatical ones.

Growing up??? C'mon, James, you can do better than that! I remember Max running the Chaos Pirate kids programme at L.A.con IV, and I also remember the rude things you did with inflatables, but that's another story. There were interesting things to do all day, the adults (like me) arrived every so

often to check it out and snaffle a few goodies for ourselves, and steal a few ideas for our own conventions. The kids seemed to have a good time, their parents did visit occasionally, and none wanted to leave. Again, maybe they figures that Mom and Dad's stupid conventions were cool after all.

The rest of the articles are good to read, and all come across as common sense. All of this is, again, informed opinion, based on actually doing the job, and varying opinions are always welcome. At least, most of us do. I am certain a fanzine could be created that would discuss conrunning...sure it's been done, and I think some of us need to agree to disagree, or remember that different things work at different cons. I've had discussions in the past, and now that I am officially back in the conrunning game, I think I will leave the arguments to those with hotter tempers than mine. Thanks for this large zine, and I hope this large loc suits it. Four pages! Many thanks, take care, and tomorrow, I celebrate my 50th birthday. Left the big announcement for the last. Take care, and see you in Montréal.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

Hey Steven—finally got home and had a chance to look. Very interesting how much Priscilla and I agree! Not a surprise as we work well together. Haven't read everything yet though I will. Found one typo in the Hugo article, first sentence of the Nominations sections "until" is spelled "util" Looks very good! Thanks so much for putting my burlblings in print. Will be very interested to see feedback.

Mary Kay Kare



Mock Section

This year's mock section takes the form of pitches or reviews of classic television series re-imagined as science fiction or fantasy television series. Michael Thomas offers *The Mr. Ed Diaries*, Tom Smith presents *Happy Days* in a whole new light, Chris Garcia has updated *ALF*, Joel Zakem turns his attention to *WKRP in Cincinnati*, John Helfers has created a new *A-Team*, and Sondra de Jong looks at *Father Knows Best*.

The Mr. Ed Diaries

Michael D. Thomas

Executive: Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the preview of the CW's Fall line-up. As you all know, the CW specializes in the teen girl demographic with hits such as *Gossip Girl* and *One Tree Hill*. We have also had a lot of success in reviving old series such as *90210* and the new *Melrose Place*. This season, we think we have a real winner for you. We're reviving another old franchise, but with a couple of exciting twists.

After many discussions, we realized that the teen girls are really excited about the book *Twilight*. Of course, since we're the CW, there was no conceivable way we could afford that massively popular property. Instead, we sent an intern to the Santa Monica Barnes & Noble to scour the YA section for any old *Twilight* knock-off. We found one in *The Vampire Diaries*. Unfortunately, it was so close to *Twilight* that our lawyers decided to add some uniquely CW elements. What do teen girls love more than vampire boyfriends? That's right, ponies! I know my daughter's nanny says she loves hers. Let me now present to you the promo trailer for the show that every teen girl will soon be talking about.

Announcer: Coming to the CW this fall...

The Mr. Ed Diaries

A vampire horse with dark secrets. A young college girl who happens to look like his long lost love, Catherine the Great.

1. Int. Teen Girl's Bedroom. Night.

A sad teen girl sits in the window seat of her modest 50-square-foot bedroom. She's writing in her diary.

Elana (voiceover): Dear diary, today will be different. I will not just be the girl who lost her parents due to a plane crashing into their car on the way to chemotherapy for their tragic hair cancer. Did I mention I was sad? And pretty? Sad, hot, and pretty. Today I will smile my hot smile. Maybe my knight will gallop into my life. Am I being clear enough that my smile is a fake smile to hide my hot sadness?

2. Int. Barn/Office. Night.

A palomino horse is writing in a journal on the half-door of his stall. He's wearing glasses and holding a fountain pen in his mouth.

Mr. Ed (voiceover): Dear diary, I'm having trouble stopping my insatiable hunger for blood and carrots. I tried to wear a hat today to block the sunlight. Unfortunately, it was a straw hat and I ate it.



3. Int. High School Hallway. Day.

Elana and her friend Vicki are standing by some lockers (feel free to use the high school set from all of the other CW shows).

Vicki: Hey, have you seen the new guy who moved in to the old Post house? He's quite a stud.

Mr. Ed walks down the hall wearing a black leather jacket. Elana stares. Mr. Ed returns her gaze.

4. Ext. Graveyard. Day.

Elana is wandering around the misty graveyard with her diary. She trips and falls. Suddenly, Mr. Ed is by her side.

Mr. Ed: Are you all right?

Elana: Yeah, I'm fine (Elana gets up off the ground). Except for my hidden sadness. That's why I'm in this graveyard writing in my diary. Did you hear that my parents are dead? There's a lot of depth underneath this terrific hair. Hey, I'm Elana.

Mr. Ed: Hello, I'm Mr. Ed. I'm not a stalking vampire horse or anything. Speaking of which, are you bleeding?

Mr. Ed looks away as Elana rolls up her pant leg. She has a small injury.

Elana: It's not bad, just a little bit of blood. It also looks like I got some hay on it.

She looks up. Mr. Ed has disappeared.

5. Ext. Bridge. Night.

On a starry night, Mr. Ed and Elana stare into each other's eyes while talking on a covered bridge. Behind them, an amazing waterfall pours down. Feel free to add fireworks and an emo guitar ballad to really drive home the point.

Mr. Ed: I'm sorry I disappeared like that earlier. I thought I heard a bugler playing "First Call" in the distance.

Elana: Hey, that's okay. I get it. You're passionate. Not like my old jealous boyfriend who's staring at us right now in the distance. He's the one in the letter jacket holding a sharpened stake and a riding crop.

6. Ext. Woods. Night.

Vicki is wandering alone in the forest.

Vicki: Gee, I sure hope there are no vampires out here.

Vicki turns her head towards a rustling sound in the distance.

Vicki: Yikes! A vampire!

7. Int. Post living room. Night.

Mr. Ed walks into the room. A mule is standing behind a desk pecking at a typewriter.

Francis: It's happening again, Mr. Ed, You promised that you would stop killing after you sucked the Addisons dry.

Mr. Ed: It wasn't me, Francis. I'm going to my room.

8. Int. Barn/Office. Night.

Mr. Ed enters his stall. A figure emerges from the shadows.

Wilbur: Hello, Mr. Ed. Did you miss me?

Mr. Ed: Willllbbbuuuurrrr...

Wilbur: That's right. I'm back. No institution could hold me forever. Because of you, they all thought I was crazy. My wife Carol had me committed, but nobody suspected that my talking horse—who was a total jerkface for not talking to anybody else—had already turned me into an immortal vampire. Now I'm going to get your little girlfriend (maniacal laughter).

Mr. Ed: Now take it easy, Wilbur.

Wilbur stops laughing and points at Mr. Ed's face.

Wilbur: Wait a minute, there's nylon thread pulling on your mouth. Peanut butter my...

Mr. Ed: I'll stop you, Wilbur!

Both fly out of the door and scuffle.

9. Title Card

The Mr. Ed Diaries

Announcer: The Mr. Ed Diaries. Their love will be written in blood and barley.

Preview: Happy Days

Tuesday 8:00

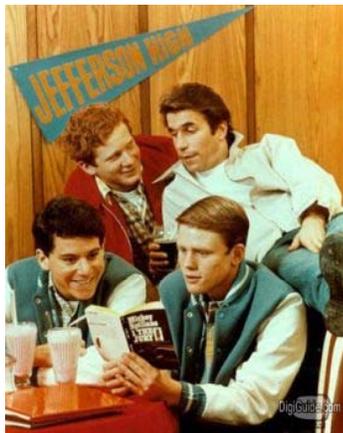
ABC

Tom Smith

The mystery deepens and the horror ratchets up big-time as the now-obviously-ironically-titled Happy Days enters its fourth season.

Fonzie (Henry Winkler), the ersatz biker/rebel/mechanic/philosopher without a past, was only a bit player in the first two seasons. But he's carefully grown power and connections, all seemingly unrelated to each other at the time, and now he's the de facto ruler of Milwaukee. His weird abilities grow stronger and scarier as well. A knock on the wall or the snap of the fingers control electrical devices, machinery, and beautiful young women, and he can end challenges to his authority with a look so contemptuous it can't even be called a glare. The police and politicians defer to him, and no one dares to anger him.

Except, of course, our slightly-overly-whitebread hero, Richie Cunningham (Ron Howard). Richie realized last year that [a] even though Fonzie is acknowledged by all to be a local high-school dropout, no one remembers him before three years ago, and [b] the Fonzie is never dirty, no matter how many cars he works on. This year, Richie confronts Fonzie more directly, with potentially explosive results. Most interesting is the premiere episode, which



features (SPOILER) an angry Richie calling Fonzie "Bucko", which brings the Fonzie up short. Is it a command word? Part of Fonzie's true name? A reference to a past identity? No one knows, least of all Richie, but it gives him a weapon against the otherwise-unassailable Fonzie.

The rest of the cast is entangled nearly as deeply. Richie's mother (Marion Ross), suspiciously reversing in age to settle at a quite lovely late 20s/early 30s, is succumbing to Fonzie's quasi-romantic blandishments, and Howard Cunningham (Tom Bosley) is helpless to do anything lest Fonzie destroy his business. Al (Al Molinaro) is in the same boat, and it's rumored that he might find out exactly what happened to Arnold (Pat Morita), who simply vanished in a flash of light at a karate tournament last season. Al is also terrified of his new stepson Chachi (Scott Baio), who is taking an unhealthy interest in Richie's all-too-malleable sister Joanie (Erin Moran), and the true connection between "cousins" Chachi and Fonzie will shock you. Ralph (Donny Most) and Potsie (Anson Williams) are back as well, contrasting their insane banter with ruthless efficiency as Fonzie's henchmen.

Look also for two new characters this season: a stranger named Mork (Robin Williams), who may or may not be from another planet entirely; and Lori Beth (Lynda Goodfriend), a cute librarian who may have some clues to the truth of Fonzie's origin.

Alf: Alien Life Form

Christopher J Garcia

Paul Fusco had something different in mind when he created ALF in the 1980s. A cuddly, hilarious creature from another planet, ALF was an icon of everything that was wrong with American television in the Reagan decade. Paul wanted to give a commentary on the ways in which an alien would look at life on Earth and how it differed from what he knew from his planet. The alien, then called Aleph, would crash onto property owned by the Tanner family outside of Los Angeles. He was sheltered by the family, which gave him a deep vision of what the world was like. Fusco intended to do issue episodes and wrote nearly 20 scripts.

And yet, no matter how hard Fusco pitched and pitched, he found nary an offer for his tightly written dramatic presentations. While many of the scripts, which have since leaked onto the internet, have been lauded as a decade ahead of television's cutting edge, they were never given more than a cursory glance. The less than stellar performance of John Carpenter's Starman did not help matters.

Fusco's show, originally called Alien Life Form, bounced around until, on the advice of many friends, Fusco turned it into a rapid pile of video tape, centering on ALF, true name Gordon Schumway, who happened to be from the planet Melmack. The crusty vision of an alien who crashed into the backyard of a family and then hid in the shadows as families went through financial problems, marital difficulties and drugs was replaced by lame sight gags and a fuzzy, loveable puppet whose most dangerous aspect was his fondness for eating cats.

In 2009, Paul Fusco signed a deal with Joss Whedon. Joss, whose own show Dollhouse was smoldering on Hulu, but fizzling on Fox, had been a huge fan of the show and immediately saw the possibilities for a revamp. Fusco presented the original scripts to Whedon, who spent several months updating them. Whedon saw the character as originally presented by Fusco as being too one-note; merely a table on which a meal of pathos was set. Instead, Whedon tried to give the Alien Life Form something new: a personality that wasn't based on Animal House.



From the first shot, an egg-shaped vehicle crashing into Willy Tanner's backyard in Wyndameer, Montana, you know there is something very different. The shot opens on little William Tanner playing with a ball in the backyard, only to be crushed by the crashing spaceship. Willy Tanner, played with remarkable restraint by Kurt Russell, runs out to find his son dead. As he tries to pull together the pieces which have been strewn across the yard, the Alien Life Form emerges.

"What are you doing?" he asks, voice provided by Billy Crudup.

Alf is no longer the walking shag carpet, but instead a somewhat furry, somewhat scaly, somewhat featured creature of almost 7 feet tall. The team from ILM which created both the CGI and puppet version of Alf did an amazing job of creating a life-like creature which doesn't feel like a guy in a suit even though that's exactly what Alf is almost a third of the time. His lean body and uneven textures work to make him seem unworldly.

From there, Alf, as everyone but Willy calls him, convinces Willy to let him stay. They report the crashed object to NASA, who declares it a piece of space junk, though a young scientist called John Ochmonek, played by Anton Yelchin, is convinced that it is an alien spacecraft and makes it his personal mission to find the truth. At first Willy hides Alf away in the garage, not even allowing the rest of his family to see him. When Brian, Willy's son played by the well-groomed Jonah Bobo, discovers Alf, he first thinks to kill it with the shovel, but then talks with him, always referring to Alf as 'it' and discovers that he can easily talk with him, something that's not possible with his own parents.

Alf remains in the garage the entire first three episodes, which is interesting as much of the time we only know of Alf's presence by a peek of him through a window as we watch the action, or in a reflection in a mirror. Alf is intensely interested in the ways in which humans act, specifically with regards to their death rituals. He watches the Tanner family sit shiva for their dead son. Willy notices Alf watching through a window and later confronts Alf for intruding on their mourning and for being the cause of all that sadness.

Alf, is unmoved.

"He is merely away in The Cold until he can be formed to return" Alf says, giving us our first glimpse of his planet.

Whedon's take on Alf is remarkable. He's neither a noble savage nor a wise shaman. It's established the Alf got himself into this mess by following a signal he thought would lead him to The Cold, where he would find his true love. A particularly passionate retelling of his trip happens when he is finally introduced to Willy's daughter Lynn, played by Kat Dennings. Dennings is really a break-through here, playing both the sexy monster out to take down as many male gazelles as her tiger stare will allow, and the damaged girl whose closest treasure, her little brother, was stolen away from her. She and Alf form a strange relationship, one which takes an incredibly odd turn as the series progresses.

Perhaps the only wrong turn that Alf makes is the inclusion of Joanna Kerns. While she plays Mrs. Tanner with a certain charm, she does seem to perform in ways that are too knowing of her own sit-com past. When she first confronts Alf, after believing that a burglar has broken in through the garage, she nearly ruins the entire episode with her comedic eyes, but pulls it back later when she guides Alf into the house and insists that they give him a proper bed.

This is actually the darkest project Whedon has ever been involved with. His take on Alf swings from somewhat joyous, as in the episode where he celebrates the supposed rebirth of true love from The Cold, to downright horrific when he must feed and stalks a cat in one of the most terrifying scenes that you'd think were funny if they hadn't been imagined as gore-shrouded, F.W. Murnau tableaux. That particular episode may be the most telling of the transformation. When Alf announces that he must eat (and will not eat again for 140 of our Earth days), we hear jokes

snapped off about what an alien would eat. When we see the jokes that come to life with his hunt, nearly 20 minutes of it, all without dialogue, we realize just how far this make-over has gone. The only bright spot in the episode is the sort of jocular comedy you might have found in the original, and the darkness is darker than anything you'll find on television.

The familial interaction is especially good between feuding siblings Brian and Lynn. There are dark secrets the two share, and the grief for their dead brother turns to anger more than once. Bobo's not quite the seasons star that Dennings is, but he holds his own in their shared scenes. Russell is the star of his scenes with Alf, but whenever another character is on screen, he fades away, but in a way that is a positive for the show and may be the best choice the actor has ever made. He allows himself to become a ornament instead of the tree, which is for the best of the show. The series of interviews with Dr. Ochmonek are tense and bleary-eyed. Yelchin is presented as a genius and believer, but he is forced to go forward scientifically instead of being able to go all out like he'd like to. It's very much like the cop whose hands are tied. He plays that role beautifully, including having a remarkably believable flip-out during his interview with Lynn Tanner. It's a frightening scene, made even more effective by just how real it seems.

The series, whose first 13-episode season has been shot, though only the first seven have been shown, is one of the most expensive on television due to the effects work required for Alf, as well as shooting on location in parts of Utah, Wyoming and Montana. The series so far has had lovely moments of low-tech joy, especially involving Alf and Lynn, and some dazzling moments of big budget expression. While its numbers have not been great, partly because of it's Friday night at 9pm timeslot, it has a loyal viewership that has already planned a convention, AlfCon, where they're planning on burning an effigy of the original 1980s Alf.

The fire, she will cleanse.

Prospectus: WKPP on Cincinnatus Station

By Joel D. Zakem

Setting: The Future.

Planet Earth has been devastated by climate change, disease and wars. The unfortunate people left on the planet's surface live in the ruins of mighty cities. The lucky ones, including the government and the entertainment industry, have escaped, either to other planets or large artificial satellites circling the devastated planet.

One such satellite is known as Cincinnatus Station, and one portion of that satellite is home to the studios of WKRP, which broadcasts and webcasts vintage rock n' roll, news, and mutant farm animal reports to the survivors left on Earth as well as to the other orbiting satellites.

Most of the action takes place in the somewhat tacky offices of WKRP. Still, because of the necessary effects, it might be best to make this as an animated show.

The Cast and Story Lines:

Arthur "Big Guy" Carlson- In this case, as in the original show, "Big Guy" has multiple meanings. In addition to being the station manager, Arthur Carlson is so fat that his office is an anti-gravity chamber where he can float in comfort (think of the residents of the Axiom in WALL-E). Though he is tutelarly in



charge of WKRP, he has the appearance of being a figurehead with very little actual control. Mostly, he floats in his office, reminiscing about fishing for mutant sea creatures in the lakes of earth. He also appears to be somewhat in thrall to the computer in his office, which he refers to as Mother Carlson and which may be the real power at the station.

In trying to maintain his authority, Arthur (along with Mother) is a source of many ideas and promotional schemes, most of which ultimately fail (like the time in tried to revive the ancient holiday of Thanksgiving and almost caused a war on earth when he used an experimental space cannon to shoot freeze-dried turkeys toward earth). Arthur, however, is sharper than he looks, though, and, like all the characters, he has own agenda.

Jennifer Marlowe- Blond, beautiful and somewhat icy, Jennifer is more than the receptionist at WKRP. Since she controls all access to the “big guy,” she is in a position of power. She also uses her charm and beauty to influence the other cast members. What they do not know, however, is that Jennifer is a sophisticated android of a type heretofore unseen.

Some of the major plot lines involve Jennifer and the question of why she is at WKRP, whether anyone else knows she is an android, and whether she is working independently or still remains in the control of her mysterious builders.

Andy Travis-Another mysterious character, Andy appears in the pilot episode claiming that he was hired by Mother Carlson to be the station’s new program director. He immediately changes the stations format from electronic muzak to classic rock, soul and jazz. Since he had been a successful executive at other media companies, no one quite knows why Andy has come to lowly WKRP. In many ways, however, he acts has the glue that holds the diverse cast together.

John Caravella IV aka Dr. Johnny Fever- A refugee from earth, Caravella claims to be descended from the legendary disc jockey whose name he has appropriated. Whether it was because his family was exposed to radiation before they escaped from Earth or whether it was from his family’s history of pharmaceutical experimentation, the new Dr. Fever has for arms, which aid him in spinning records on WKRP’s antiquated equipment. Since there are no other four-armed mutants on Cincinnatus station, Caravella’s origin provides another plot line.

Les Nessman and his clone- There are two Les Nessmans employed by WKRP. One is inside Cincinnatus station, in his office with imaginary walls, providing a skewed look at the news along with his award winning mutant farm animal reports. The other Les is located on Earth, where he finds and reports the stories that WKRP broadcasts. After he sends his copy to the satellite bound Nessman, however, his stories are generally butchered.

Therefore, there is constant bickering between the two Nessmans (in order to eliminate the need for another set, the earth-bound Les could be portrayed by a disembodied voice and/or solely communicate with the station by e-mail). Moreover, like the Betty’s on Quark, the two Nessmans argue about who is the original and who is the clone.

Herb Tarlek- The garishly dressed sales manager, Herb is madly in lust with Jennifer and therefore is always ready to do her bidding. A recurring plot thread is Herb’s cowardly reluctance to travel to other satellites (or even Earth) in order to sell more adds. In addition, he is constantly arguing with Andy about making the station more commercial, thus making his job easier. Andy would like to fire Herb, but the Big Guy and Jennifer often intercede on his behalf.

Bailey Quarters- The traffic director/substitute newscaster of WKRP appears to be shy but, like the other employees, has her own agenda, often involving Andy and/or Johnny. Bailey is constantly trying to improve the station’s position, which often puts her in conflict with Herb and the satellite-bound Nessman. The earth-bound Nessman, however, appears to be one of Bailey’s supporters (possibly because she does not butcher his news copy). Bailey also appears suspicious about Jennifer.

Venus Flytrap- No one knows the origin of the mysterious, somewhat mystical, late night disc jockey. On the other hand, Venus seems to know more about the other characters, including Jennifer and Johnny, than he lets on. While Venus and Andy are friends, they often argue about the music that Venus plays.

From the Small Screen

NBC Dusts off an Oldie but Goodie, Adding a SF Twist

Date: August 17, 2010:

John Helfers



Nothing says success in Hollywood like recycling (in fact, FOX’s Fringe is such an X-Files clone I’m surprised Chris Carter isn’t contacting his armada of extraterrestrial, chain-smoking lawyers to sue for infringement—yes, it’s going to be that kind of column this week).

But for every successful hit, whether expanded from film or recycled from television, (M*A*S*H, Battlestar Galactica, Alien Nation, Stargate), there are dozens of retreads that suck so bad they never make it past one season, if they’re lucky (The Fugitive, a revamp that was tried after the Harrison Ford Film, which, of course, was based on the original 60’s television series), Tremors: The Series, Karen Sisco (based on the character from the film Out of Sight), Blade: The Series (suffering an undeserved cancellation, in this reviewer’s opinion)—the list goes on.

And in this week’s “everything old is new again” category, NBC is jumping on the bandwagon with a reimagining of one of its most popular 1980s hits—The A-Team. After the box-office bonanza that was the A-Team movie earlier this year (early buzz is Neeson up for Best Actor Oscar—who knew?), one would expect the exact same tropes to be paraded out every week on the small screen—and thankfully in this case, one would be very, very wrong.

In a rare, inspired bit of television recasting (and what the network suits will say was a bold leap if it succeeds, and a fatal error if it fails), the new A-Team now features four extraterrestrials in the lead roles—a kind of A(lien) Team, if you will. And—although you may not believe this next sentence—the show is actually decent.

Anyone who grew up during the 80s remembers this one—George Peppard, Dirk Benedict, Dwight Schultz, and the always over-the-top Mr. T, along with a collection of various actresses as the obligatory female sidekick/eye-candy, until that character was phased out halfway through the show’s run. Every season featured

roughly three plots recycled over and over. The new A-Team displays a canny nod at its roots in the opening voiceover, which I'd swear was done by the same guy who did the original:

"Ten years ago, an extraterrestrial prison ship crashed in the New Mexico desert. Government officials immediately moved in and captured the alien races onboard. Several of these aliens promptly escaped from a maximum-security government laboratory to the Los Angeles underground. Today, still wanted by the government, they survive as soldiers of fortune. If you have a problem, if no one else can help, and if you can find them, maybe you can hire... The A-Team."

Of course, one can think of so many ways this can go wrong. One thing the original series had going for it was the by-play between the main characters. Peppard and the others knew they were hamming it up for the camera, and played their roles accordingly. Without the proper cast, this show could be doomed from the start.

Thankfully, so far the team looks like a go from the beginning. Veteran SF actor Michael Biehn (Terminator, Aliens, The Abyss) won the juicy role of the aliens' leader, a near-human extraterrestrial known only as Hannibal. The pilot revealed that he has a sort of "cybernetic brain" that contains pretty much all the knowledge of the known universe—except anything regarding the strange planet they find themselves on. So while he could set up an enfilade on the flank of a squad of space police—in zero-gravity, no less—for maximum effect, he doesn't know how to order a hot dog, for example. Biehn is the perfect choice to hold together his crew of misfits, who are forced to work with each other, since there's no one else they can turn to. The rest of the group includes:

"The Face," in what some see as a radical departure for the film actor, Jake Gyllenhaal has been cast in the role of "Face." This smooth-talker is a shapeshifting alien that can morph into just about anyone—including the opposite gender, and can also exude pheromones on command to influence his interaction with humans and others. Unfortunately, it also seems that while this "Face" is eager to learn about being human, he also displays an ominous disregard for the well-being of the people he's studying (the deli scene in the pilot is a good example) Whether this is a stunt for the series based on Gyllenhaal's work in *Brokeback Mountain* remains to be seen, but the special effects are phenomenal (there's only one aspect of the alien that remains the same throughout its changes—try to spot what it is).

Thomas Lennon (*The State*, *Reno:911!*) is the "Murdock" character—his character—called Myrdoc, naturally—is a cyborg with the ability to interface with any machine he wishes, making him the de facto pilot/mechanic of the group. Given the casting choice, it's fairly obvious that he'll serve as comic relief, especially since his alien is already addicted to television, and has the strange ability to watch dozens of channels at once, and quotes from them incessantly. How often they'll go to the "Macgyver-a-machine-out-of-spare-parts" gag remains to be seen, but with aliens in the mix, it would be pretty damn cool to see some out-of-this-world technology come out of this idea.

In a marked departure for the "B. A. Baracus" tough guy, Chiwetel Ejiofor (*Serenity*, *American Gangster*, *Children of Men*) plays an alien simply called Stel who is still a combination of the combat machine. He's sort of like the C-3PO of the group when it comes to fighting—he knows more than 1,000 forms of unarmed combat practiced throughout the galaxy, and can assimilate new ones simply by observing a fighter he's in combat with. And fortunately, there's not a gold chain to be seen. While the choreography isn't quite-Yuen Wo Ping level, it's clear they've put quite a lot into the fight sequences. In fact, the production team has put quite a lot into the entire series, from the setting of the prison ship itself (the crash landing sequence was truly nail-bitingly suspenseful) to the details for each alien and how they

have to blend into human society, attention has been paid by the folks behind this entire concept. This may mean that someone upstairs is taking this seriously—or that the crew is overspending their budget in hopes of a big hit. Only time will tell.

Of course, while the team encounters whatever problem they'll be expected to solve each week, they also have to keep their heads down, since they're not only being chased by the U.S. government, which consists of lead scientist Adriana Carroll (Evangeline Lilly) who may be more on the aliens side than first shown, but also by the U.S. Army Major Jack Balmore (Scott Baio, making a welcome return to television). But that's just the beginning—they also have to evade the intergalactic team of peace officers (trust me, they make it look much better than it reads) that lands on earth to bring back all the escapees, a trio of aliens with unique powers all their own (guest-starring three actors whom you'll be sure to recognize, but I'm not going to spoil the reveal for you here). While they were only glimpsed in the pilot, I'm sure we'll be seeing much more of them in later episodes. While the pilot itself was primarily set-up—the crash, capture, and subsequent escape and integration into the underground of Los Angeles, but with such a rich milieu to work with, future episodes should have much to work with.

Recycling television series is a time-honored tradition, but bringing back such an iconic series in such a bold new way is a risk that NBC will only know if it pays off when they get the Neilson ratings. In the meantime, this reviewer, however, will be glued to the television every Wednesday night at 8:00 p.m. every adventures of The A(lien) Team.

Father Knows Best

Sondra de Jong

Father Knows Best? Don't be so sure! It's the 25th century and the Andersons have a lot more to worry about than Bud's paper route.

Our location

BFN Township, Midwesterville District, Earth



Our characters

Jim Anderson, dad...Newly appointed President of Space Trash Acclimation and Reuse (STA'AR) who always solves the problem just in time to get home for dinner and help his kids with their homework.

Margaret Anderson, mom...Stay at home mom having a hard time balancing her family life with her past as an interplanetary government spy. No one in the family knows.

James "Bud" Anderson, Jr., Son, 17 years...Typical 50's sitcom kid caught in a Cyberpunk kind of world.

Betty "Princess" Anderson, Daughter, 14 years... Girl Genius type. Batting the boys away left and right, well, the betrothal requests of the royal spawn of the Alien nation of [bracket], anyway, who do not understand the concept of nick names. All Betty wants to do is unlock the secrets of the universe.

Kathy "Kitten" Anderson, aka STA'AR Kat, Daughter, 9 years... Not very bright, but cute as a button. After reading Andre Norton's STA'AR Kat, Kathy took her nickname of "Kitten" too seriously and mistook her dad's company, which mines for space trash, as space mines disguised as trash and now believes she is the vanguard of a feline invasion force.

The "Townns"folk...

[producer]: An over-the-line obsessive alternate reality TV producer from The Alien Nation of [bracket] with a heart of... Huh, do [bracket]'s have hearts? Stay tuned, Tuesdays at 9 PM to find out!

Big X: Gender non-specific wannabe strong arm type STA'AR Trekker with the hots for, well, everyone.

Kats: Yes, they are real and on their way with an invasion force and, no, they do not know who the heck is Kitten.

Suspected Inhabitant of Quantum Particle: If we told you, we'd have to kill you, then who would be left to watch the show?

Michael Jordan™: Basketball star from Old Earth Chicago team, The Bulls (in no way affiliated with The Bulls).

Our Story

Margaret, making dinner in the kitchen, well reprogramming the Ultimate Family Feeder 3000... again, keeps hearing the same frequency hum of a cold fusion speed craft above the house at exactly 5 minute, 3 second intervals. Could it be? No, he had been incarcerated in a quantum particle over a decade ago.

Betty read in Science about a lab that discovered a new species on Orion that can see through any object... except, as they would soon discover, rubber. When given a basketball and a genetic duplicate of Michael Jordon™ to teach them the sport as a gift, they discovered they could not see inside. Naturally, they believed that there must be a universe inside the basketball and formed a new cult that espoused doctrine based upon the theory that there are infinite universes inside of infinite basketballs. Betty was intrigued and thought that a new approach might help her unlock the secrets of the universe. She launched a basketball into orbit that circled the earth in 5 minute 3 second repeating intervals, hoping to create an event.

[producer], the producer of The Alien Nation of [bracket]'s highest rated program, Princess Watch, noticed a strange phenomenon every 5 minutes, 3 seconds over Princess's dwelling. Could it be one of The Alien Nation of [bracket] most holy objects? Indeed it was! A basketball! This must be a sign that the time was right, that Princess was finally ready to wed. Now, how could [producer] make sure that it was to [producer]? Somehow he knew it would involve the quantum particle that he had been keeping in flux for an indeterminate period of time.

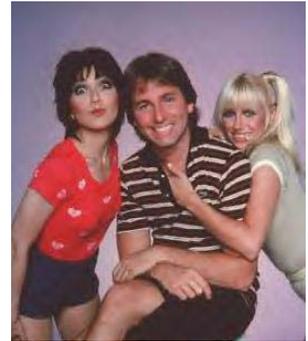
Kathy, exactly 5 minutes, 3 seconds after sending a message to STA'AR Kat home world, started hearing a frequency that could not be naturally occurring, being repeated exactly every 5 minutes, 3 seconds. If only she could decode the message, perhaps her role in the invasion would be revealed. Unfortunately, she had yet to correctly assemble the decoder ring that came in her box of Cat in the Hat™ cereal.

Jim was having a hard day at work. An elusive piece of space trash kept escaping the grasp of his best STA'AR Trekkers. This was odd because the space trash seemed to be following a regular orbit pattern of 5 minute, 3 second intervals. Big X insisted that every time he got a hold of it, it phased. Was his new promotion on the line? Even worse, would he miss Bud's big game?

Oh no! It's time for the big game and Bud can't find his lucky basketball! Will BFN High finally beat their longtime rivals or is the big game on the line?

Three's Company Robert Rede

Originally set in Santa Monica and running from 1977 to 1984, this new version of the show is set in 2476 on a space station orbiting the alien planet Rittex (a reference to original series' star John Ritter's father). While the original series saw Ritter's character pretending to be homosexual in order to rent an apartment with two women (portrayed by Joyce DeWitt and Suzanne Somers), in the new series, the rooming situation is complicated by the fact that one of the characters is an alien.



While the original was a straight farce, the new version attempts for more political and social satire. The relationships between Jonathan Lasker (Harry Lloyd), Eileen Djibo (Paula Patton), and the alien Haspik (Gary Gulman), are used to provide a variety of stand-ins for cultural relationships in our own time.

Throwing a spanner into the works is stationmaster Eric "Flash" Beck (Larry Miller) who was sent to the station as punishment for various infractions. Too well-connected to completely bust, Beck harbors resentment towards his superiors (which includes pretty much everyone) and has barely concealed xenophobia, which at times also turns up as racism, misogyny, and homophobia, apparently as the whims of the writing staff ebb and flow. Despite the lack of consistency for the character, it is a testament to Miller's comedic ability that Beck is the most interesting of the characters.

The other interesting character is Haspik's best friend, another alien named Koolong (Holland Roden). While Haspik is a shapechanger, Koolong has the shape of an attractive young human. She is set up as a foil for Flash Beck, who lusts after her, not realizing that she is in fact an alien.

Although the idea of using the set up, especially with a white, gay male, an African-American female, and a shape-changing alien, to reflect the different types of relationships in modern America, from same-sex, to inter-racial, to interfaith, is an intriguing use of the premise of the original show, it seems to be beyond the talents of the writers and producers of the show. There appears to be a strong desire on the part of the behind-the-scenes staff to fall back on the farce which was exemplified in *Three's Company*. Perhaps the area where the farce is most obvious is the Beck-Koolong plot line. There is clearly a contingent of the writers that wants to use it to say something important, but they seem to be overruled by those who just see an easy joke.

Despite a poor debut, ABC has announced plans to pick up a full 20 episode season, perhaps seeing something in the producers plans that give hope that the show will move towards more intelligent satire, although early indications are that the residents of space station Rittex will spend the year dropping-trou and mistaking identity.



Argentus
707 Sapling Lane
Deerfield, IL 60015

You really want to know why you got this?

_____ You sent me something for inclusion. And I included it.

_____ Sending this to you is easier than a phone call.

_____ You downloaded it from e-fanzines.

_____ I'm attempting to prise a LOC from you.

_____ I'm hoping it will inspire you to send something from next ish.

_____ or maybe even inspire you to pub your own ish.

_____ The hamsters living inside my brain told me to send it to you.

_____ There is a secret message for you hidden within. In code.

_____ Klaatu barada nictu!