

WAY

WHERE THERE'S NO WILL



The pieces in this fanzine are all culled from my LiveJournal, which I began keeping in the summer of 2005. I wasn't sure how much writing I would actually do there, but I've ended up writing quite a bit. I kept a paper journal for years, and I find that LiveJournal scratches a similar itch. It's a place where I can record stray impressions, meditate on important or interesting events in my daily life, and also jot down notes on and reviews of what I'm reading or (mostly, these days) viewing. It's also a way to keep my friends (and/or LJ Friends) informed about what I'm up to, although that purpose may be least apparent in the selections I've used here.

In the process of putting the zine together, I've revised many of these pieces. Some of it was a necessary translation from the conventions of LiveJournal (where, for example, other LiveJournalers are always referred to by their LJ handle), but I've also rewritten and expanded in many places in an attempt to improve things, as well as to correct any factual errors I've become aware of in the meantime. I'm uncertain whether I have successfully transposed this from an Internet entity that

frequently included links to other webpages or remarks about things I had just been reading on the web. For sure, it still reads like a diary in many ways, and I've mostly kept the pieces in chronological order as written to preserve continuity.

I'm not the first person to create a hybrid LJ-fanzine, of course. Teh tubular internets are interacting with flat fanzines in interesting and unpredictable ways. I've recently wondered on LJ whether the wider zine world is wrestling with this issue the way that fanzines are. If your distribution system is record store zine racks or coffee shops or pubs, does the lack of mailing costs mean printing cost isn't as big a deal? David Burton comments in his PDFzine *Pixel* that he doesn't see anybody outside fandom dabbling in the "paper substitute" of PDFs. I continue to feel that PDFzines are an evolutionary dead end, but who the hell really knows? Let a thousand formats bloom. Robert Lichtman's latest fanzine stats in *Trap Door 24* indicate that the field is still stumbling along at the same level it has been for the past couple of decades, and that's not counting everything posted at efanazines.com. Which leads to the philosophical question: if a PDF gets lost in the forest, does it really save a tree? Oh, and tag, you're it. Pub your ish!

Way #1 comes to you from Randy Byers. Mailing address: 1013 N 36th St, Seattle WA 98103, USA. E-mail address: fringezaam@yahoo.com. Published for Corflu Quire in February 2007. Art credits: Stu Shiffman 1, Taral Wayne 5, William Rotsler 8, Craig Smith 11, 17, 20, and 22. Thanks to Luke McGuff pour encourager l'un.

At Home with the Mennonites

— 20 Sep 2005 —

I spent last weekend at my parents' place in central Oregon with just over 30 of my relatives. Along with my parents, brother, and sister, there were aunts, uncles, cousins, cousins' children, and cousins' children's children, and various in-laws. Four generations, all on my mom's side of the family.

Both of my parents grew up in the Mennonite church, and my heritage is Mennonite for many generations back. The Mennonites were part of the Anabaptist (adult baptism) movement of the 17th century, they are ideologically related to the more conservative Amish, and they are what we nowadays call fundamentalists. I'm not sure how many of those thirty relatives are practicing Mennonites, although certainly some of them are, to varying degrees of conservatism. (I don't think any of the women were wearing coverings, which were ubiquitous in my youth). My parents left the church in the 1960s, before I was baptized, but as I've gotten older, I've realized that I have been shaped by the heritage in more ways than I can shake a stick at. All it takes is to get a pile of my cousins together to realize how much, despite all our differences, we have in common.

The activity around which this particular gathering was organized was a golf tournament. I skipped the golfing and helped my sister prepare an appetizer and burrito dinner for everyone for Saturday night. When we did this golf tournament last year, the thing that amazed me was how well the third generation — the kids of my cousins and brother and sister — got along, and how much they were just like us. My mother's side of the family has what my sister calls the Schrock mouth — a sarcastic, teasing, almost hectoring sense of humor that latches onto whatever subject is at hand — frequently something serious — and builds an ongoing in-joke about it. This time it was my cousin Dennis' scars from a recent car accident that split his face open. He told funny stories about the horrific aftermath of the accident, and we took to calling him Scarface. We are a peasant people (many were farmers and some still are, including Dennis), and the humor can be very crude —

certainly stooping to various bodily functions. I didn't hear five-week-old Brooklyn crack any off-color jokes, but just about everybody else did (and we certainly joked about her filling her diapers). I'm not sure whether it's indicative of an earthy, sane approach to difficult subjects, or a sign of a frantically smiling avoidance of the same. What's also interesting about that side of the family is how prone to depression it is — including Dennis.

Traditionally, Mennonites are of course opposed to all varieties of sinful behavior, including drinking alcohol. I think it's safe to say that most of us at this gathering, even those who go to church, are drinkers, but we are also uncertain about who might disapprove and make a scene about it. Thus the act of drinking becomes fraught. My cousin Marvin (Dennis' brother) drank heavily on the golf course and fell asleep when everyone got back to the house. My brother and I had our first couple of beers outside the house, but I later drank wine inside, once I was sufficiently inebriated not to give a shit whether I was offending anyone. Aside from my family and my uncle Truman's brother and sister-in-law, nobody else drank at the house. What was funny is that those who didn't turned out to be afraid of my frail aunt Erma, who is practically an invalid anymore and was never a very forceful personality to begin with. But she has that sharp Schrock tongue, and I guess those who live near her don't want to have to listen to it. (Most of these people live in the Willamette Valley in Oregon, many around Albany, not a few in the houses they grew up in.) Such are the disadvantages of a close family!

The traditional advantages also showed up on Sunday. My dad is replacing the deck on the house, and they are also going to have the log railing replaced with wrought iron. My brother asked if I'd help him take the old railing down, so after breakfast he and his wife and younger son and I went out and started wrenching out the long bolts and hauling the logs away. Before we knew it, Dennis and his son and two son-in-laws were out there, and that old railing had vanished before we could say, "We can handle it, thanks." All this,

mind you, after my half-deaf and careless old dad had “whispered” in earshot of one of these son-in-laws that the guy’s wife had said she’d never leave him because “he makes so much money” and that dad hoped, therefore, that he liked fat women. (At which point my brother shushed him and turned away, embarrassed.) Matt pretended not to hear, and perhaps he really had the grace to forgive an old man his graceless comments. He seems like a pretty easy-going guy — an engineer of some sort, which is how he makes “so much money.”

So we have all dispersed in our various directions, and it’s uncertain if we’ll hold this gathering again next year. All the cousins want to, but it’s wearing on my mom and dad. It helped that they didn’t have to handle food chores, but my dad in particular finds it hard to modify his routine much anymore. Having thirty people in the house for a couple of days is quite a disruption for him. But if it happens, I’ll be there, looking at the mirror in my cousins (scars and all), and watching for signs of my inner Mennonite.

THE FAMILY HUMOR

My uncle Paul has a number of serious ailments, including diabetes and generally non-existent circulation, and is not expected to live much longer (although that’s been true for a fair while now). His three sons, my cousins, are making a coffin for him, which is kind of macabre in itself, it seems to me, but according to one of my aunts, it’s beautiful. She has teased her sister, Merlyn (Paul’s wife) that people will come to the funeral viewing to see the casket, not Paul. Poor Merlyn, who is very frail herself, is getting a lot of ribbing on the subject. My cousins have carved ‘The Lord is My Shepherd’ on the front of the coffin, and the eldest told Merlyn that on the back they carved ‘I have to pee.’ According to my mother, Merlyn worries that they really did it and is not amused. The rest of us, however ...

Memories of the Gay '80s

— 02 Oct 2005 —

This morning, when I got out of bed with a full bladder and climbed the stairs to the toilet, it struck me how easy it is for my housemate, Denys, who has the bathroom right outside his bedroom door. He doesn’t have to climb the stairs just to piss! That thought reminded me of Steve H., who lived here briefly in the ‘80s and wanted to put another toilet and shower in the basement, where my room is. I hadn’t thought of Steve in a long time, and suddenly I was struck by a string of memories about a legendary time in my life.

Steve was a friend of Denys’ whom I met via the gay potlucks that Denys hosted at our house a few times in the ‘80s. Steve was a sweet, friendly party boy, pale-skinned and blond, raised Seventh Day Adventist in one of the Dakotas, and with a hard thing for black men. One memory I have is visiting him at his apartment on Capitol Hill. A black friend of his got us very stoned and put on Prince’s *Dirty Mind* and shook his ass like he just

didn’t care. I wanted to not care like that — to leap up and shake my ass to that fine, funky beat — “in my daddy’s car, it’s you I really wanna drive” — but I was worried that they’d think it meant I was *available* and I was also worried that I would just look like an idiot. Steve and his friend did some dirty dancing in the cramped aisles of his apartment, while I sat in a chair and looked like an idiot anyway. Later I bought a copy of the album and shook my ass to it in the privacy of my own home. (Yes, I did like Billy Idol’s “Dancing with Myself,” why do you ask?)

I can’t remember the exact sequence of Steve’s moving in with us. When I first moved to Seattle, Paul I. still lived in the house, and I can’t even remember how long it was before he moved out. It’s likely that Steve moved in as a replacement for Paul, although once Steve moved out again, Denys and I decided we could handle the \$320 rent between the two of us and didn’t need a third

housemate anymore. Anyway, Steve didn't live here long, and all I really remember is that he was a great cook. We would get baked on cheap pot and watch nature documentaries on PBS while he fussed and crowed in the kitchen over the preparation of a tasty meal. I'd wash the dishes afterwards. I remember that we got called by a survey company that wanted to know what TV show we were watching right then. "Animal movies!" I cried. I could practically hear the person on the other end of the line rolling her eyes, but Steve and I thought this was howlingly funny.

Well, I guess the other thing I remember about his stay here is that he'd bring home guys he met in the clubs. One time I got up early one morning and went out to walk to the coffee shop and saw a young black man sitting in a car out front, trying to get warm. "You can sit in the living room, if you want," I told him. "Naw," he said, "I'm alright." I didn't understand how it worked. Why wasn't the guy staying in the bedroom with Steve? Steve may have even have asked me to invite the guy back in, because I'm not sure I would have done that on my own initiative. I envied Steve his ability to get laid, but the social awkwardness around it seemed unbearable. Seemed to work just fine for Steve, however.

After he moved out of our house, he moved to a condo downtown for awhile and then he moved to New Orleans. I talked to him once on the phone after that, and he complained that after a shower, you were sweaty again before you could towel yourself dry. I think he stayed in touch with Denys for a couple of years, but eventually they fell out of contact too. I asked Denys years later if he heard anything about Steve anymore, and he said the last he'd heard, Steve had contracted AIDS. Denys assumed he was dead by now. It was a cold shock to come out of nowhere. Poor, sweet Steve!

Well, maybe not so sweet as all that. According to Carl, Steve moved to New Orleans because he

thought he had contracted AIDS and wanted to party like it was 1999. It turned out he didn't have AIDS at that point, but then he actually caught it from a trick (as they were so delicately called) that he picked up at a club. Not exactly a poster boy for responsible behavior. Carl also said that it's possible Steve is still alive, because he got AIDS just as the first effective treatments (presumably AZT) were becoming available.

All of which seems like news from an ancient era now. My first few years in Seattle were probably the most difficult period in my life, as I formed a new social network pretty much from scratch (although with science fiction fandom as a built-in base) and also dug through my self-hatred and inexperience in a desperate attempt to develop an adult independence. However, it was also a period of rich discovery, not least on the sexuality front, where despite my own frustration and reticence, my constrained view was exploded by the many gay men I met and befriended. I had gay friends before I moved to Seattle, but Seattle was the first place where I really saw gay culture at work in a relatively friendly environment — albeit also an environment ravaged by AIDS. (RIP Craig, who cut and dyed checkerboards in my hair, and RIP Sam, Bruce's kind, quiet boyfriend.) My gay friends, along with (and inside of) fandom, helped me along in my voyage of self-discovery — and discovery of the weirder, wider world. Well, at the very least they helped me learn how to shake my ass.

Steve was part and party to that. Hadn't thought of him in years, and the details have gotten scarily blurry. But here's to you and your bad self, Steve. Thanks for the Prince and the dope and the good food. Thanks for being a goofy sweetheart from the great white hinterlands who followed an unknown path to the gay nightclubs in Seattle and the Big Easy. Here's looking at you, kid, even if only in the cracked & foggy mirror of memory.

Thanks for listing Daniel's e-mail address. I'm sending him a picture of my cock immediately.



A Movie Recommendation for Joseph Nicholas

— 25 Oct 2005 —

Recently in a discussion of the best SF movies, Joseph Nicholas threw down the gauntlet: “*Gattaca*, on the other hand, is a genuine original. So original that no one else seems (yet) to have done anything like it!”

This gives me yet another opportunity in my ongoing crusade to recommend *Code 46* far and wide, to and fro, helter skelter, and hither and yon, till the genetically modified cows come home. It's my favorite SF movie of the past five years, vying for that honor with Mamoru Oshii's Dickian virtual reality mindfuck, *Avalon*. *Code 46* is an independent film directed by Michael Winterbottom and starring

Samantha Morton and Tim Robbins. It played the festival circuit in 2003, and then it got a token release to theaters last year. It actually played for two weeks in Seattle, at two different tiny theaters, so I got to see it twice on the (relatively) big screen. I've watched the DVD once since then.

Like *Gattaca*, it's about genetics and about winners and losers (or insiders and outsiders) in a dystopic brave new world. However, my complaint about *Gattaca* was that it had the subtlety of a sledgehammer, and *Code 46* actually manages to re-complicate its premise in much more interesting ways. Partly this is because it doesn't over-explain

its world-building. There are little bits — like the car wash that all vehicles pass through when coming into Shanghai, or the way the characters hold a coat over their heads as they run through the sunshine — that we are left to interpret on our own. The movie trusts our common heritage of dystopias and news headlines to help us understand.

The central dilemma of the story is based on a famous Greek tragedy. Again, it isn't discussed by the characters themselves, so the audience must wrestle with the implications themselves. The basic scenario is that an insurance investigator from Seattle arrives in Shanghai to investigate the forgery of "papelles" — an official document, something like a passport, that allows people access to specific privileges. He has a fling with a young woman he meets, and then things get complicated.

Aside from the fact that it's a beautifully produced movie with great performances and clever dialogue (and funny throw-away bits like Mick Jones in a cameo singing a karaoke version of "Should I Stay Or Should I Go" in a Shanghai nightclub), the thing I like the most about it is that it respects my intelligence. It's very fannish that way, and that's rare in SF film. The one false move comes at the very end, when a Cold Play song is wheeled out — to sell soundtracks, I guess. Other than that, it takes up *Gattaca's* challenge of creating intelligent, thoughtful, small-scale SF (with not even a single small explosion!), and it does it even better.

One other note: as appropriate to a movie about genetics, it involves some relatively in-your-face (but not graphic) scenes of sex, including some strangely discomfiting nudity. Now if that doesn't sell you on it ...

Whatever your opinion of Ms. Riefenstahl you have to admit that she lived a very full life.

Yapese Magic

— 04 Nov 2005 —

Last weekend, I drove our Yapese friends, Theo and Antonia, down to my brother's place in Corvallis, Oregon. It was a lot of fun. It's about a five hour drive from Seattle — around four from Federal Way, where Theo and Antonia live — and Theo and I "talked stories" the whole way down, while Antonia sat in the back and chewed betel nut and mostly kept her own counsel.

On Saturday, we all went out to Newport on the coast and went to the aquarium, the Rogue Brewpub, and the beach. On the drive over the coast range that morning, it was raining and misty in the forests of Douglas fir and mossy oak, and I kept thinking of the rain forest on Yap. The aquarium, with its fake tidal pools, kept reminding me of the abundant reef on Yap. It struck me that all my life I've lived around oceans and forests, trees and waves, fish and ferns, whether temperate or tropical. On Sunday, Lonnie, Theo, and I took a

hike through McDonald Forest, which is an "experimental forest" that belongs to Oregon State University. Theo wanted to know the names of all the trees and plants. It's very strange to see him in the role of student, after listening to him reel off story after story about all the forest and sea life on Yap.

On the drive back to Washington later on Sunday, Theo and I talked about plate tectonics and oceanography and climatology. He's never gone to college, but he has read whatever he could get his hands on out on Yap. We talked about the possibility of life on Europa, and we both got pretty excited about the prospects. Then we got to talking about the Yapese who have served in the war in Iraq, and somehow this turned into a conversation about Yapese magic.

A number of years ago, before returning to Yap for the first time in 1998, I wrote a story about

a guy who comes to believe that as a boy he learned how to be a sorcerer on an island named Little Dog Talk. I even had the story critiqued at a Taste of Clarion workshop in Potlatch, with some particularly sharp comments — oh, ouch! — by Ursula Le Guin. I never got around to revising the story, but I did have ideas about what changes to make. One change was to add a female character who had asked the protagonist for a love charm. So it was fascinating to me to learn from Theo and Antonia (who chimed in on this conversation) that the other Micronesians — from Belau, Chuuk, Pohnpei, even Guam — often ask the Yapese for love charms.

According to Theo, the Yapese were notorious sorcerers in the past, and all the other Micronesians feared their magic. This accords with what I've read, although Theo always makes it sound pretty dramatic. But he says that people still think the Yapese have strong magic, even though the actual practice has pretty much died out. He told a funny story about the time when he and Antonia were living on Guam twenty years ago, and their Yapese roommate was stringing along a Chuukese girl who wanted a love charm. It all ended in tears, because she stole a TV to pay for the magic, and then the cops showed up. Theo said that he himself was asked many times for love charms, but he's a good Catholic and always said he didn't have any magic.

There is still one guy on Yap who practices rain magic, but Theo says he's a drunk and nobody thinks his magic works anymore. He said his mother had a brother who was raised by somebody who performed rain magic, and that when this uncle got really drunk, he'd start reciting the chants he'd heard as a little boy, much to Theo's mother's distress. Theo said the chant was a litany of the

whole lineage of previous sorcerers who had taught the next in line how to make the magic — “So-and-so gave the power to such-and-such who gave the power to so-and-such” and on and on until the power to stop the rain was handed to the person doing the chant. All the while, the sorcerer, dressed in ceremonial garb (“almost like a dancer,” said Theo) would be burning some herbs in a small fire.

Theo said that he'd seen this magic apparently work in his youth, and for all he knew there was something in the smoke from the fire that caused a chemical or ionic reaction in the clouds to keep them from releasing the rain. Well, maybe, maybe not. But it was fascinating to get this glimpse into the practice of magic, because I'm very curious about Yapese magic and haven't found out much about it. Traditional Yapese culture was amazingly, even baroquely, complex compared to the other Micronesian islands — just ask any anthropologist who has studied it. Theo has a theory about that, too, which is that people may have been living there longer than on other islands, since Yap is part of a continental plate, rather than a volcanic atoll, and thus may have been sticking out of the water longer. He thinks the Yapese had more time to develop their way of life.

Maybe, maybe not. But it was fun talking stories with Theo again, and as usual, he weaved a spell on me. It revived once again my dreams of the revised “Little Dog Talk,” with a journey into deeper and deeper secrets that eventually discovers the sunken island of Sipin where the traditional sorcerers fled (pulling the island down after them) at the coming of the Europeans. (Hm, it's starting to sound like *At the Mountains of Madness!*) But I'm better at dreaming this stuff than writing it, alas.

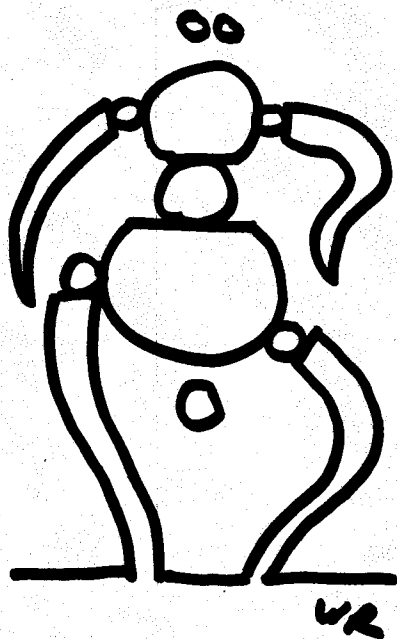
The malign door of the solstice still swings upon its hinges but she has been
too much loved ever to feel scared.

Movie Review: The Silent Star (Der Schweigende Stern, 1960)

— 15 Feb 2006 —

This 1960 film adaptation of Stanislaw Lem's 1951 novel, *The Astronauts*, was a co-production of East Germany and Poland. A re-edited, re-dubbed version was released in North America in 1962 as *First Spaceship on Venus*. I've seen that version too, but need to watch it again now that I've seen the original, which on one viewing I liked considerably better.

The story: An artifact found in the desert turns out to be a recorded message from the planet Venus that was left by an exploratory spaceship that crashed on Earth in 1908, causing the Tunguska explosion. A multinational team is assembled to go to Venus to look for the civilization that sent it. Strangely, Venus does not reply to the radio messages sent ahead. When the team reaches Venus, they find out why.



This is very much a Cold War production, full of anti-American propaganda and messages of socialist solidarity. From what I can tell, it was filmed in the old Ufa studios in East Berlin, under the new studio name of Defa. It appears that some of the technical prowess of Ufa was maintained, and the film is shot in Agfacolor, which was Ufa's response to Technicolor in the 1940s. So the

production design and look of the film are very good, while the story and acting are less so.

The structure is a somewhat Vernian spaceship procedural, by way of Fritz Lang's *Woman in the Moon* and other films such as *Destination Moon*. There's a lot of build up to the lift off, and the space voyage is filled with standard, almost archaic, tropes like weightlessness jokes and the threat of meteor showers. There's a half-hearted attempt to create romantic tension between the Japanese doctor, Sumiko (whose mother died in Hiroshima from the vile American atom bomb) and the German pilot, Brinkmann, who was there when her husband — his good friend — died installing a solar reflector on the moon. A Chinese linguist and his Indian counterpart work on deciphering the Venusian recording device, while the African communications officer tries to break through the interference coming from Venus. The Russian captain looks noble with tall hair, while the American professor feels guilty about Hiroshima. The Polish engineer makes cute, super-intelligent robots.

Most of this is only mildly diverting, although interesting as a historical artifact and as a counter-example to all the US Cold War propaganda I've seen. Where it becomes well worth the nickel on an artistic level is when they get to Venus, which is a beautiful, eerie production design. They land next to a glass forest under skies filled with glowing, flowing patches of gas. It looks like something out of Hieronymus Bosch, and the electronic music is suitably strange and almost scary (shades of the *Forbidden Planet* soundtrack from four years before). They encounter various abandoned Venusian installations, and it begins to feel a bit like *Rendezvous with Rama* — or perhaps Mario Bava's *Terrore nello spazio/Planet of the Vampires* with that sense of a lurking menace. Like Bava, it is very '60s throughout in its use of loud primary colors.

Stuff happens. A message is hammered home. A few people die, but the rest return with speeches about the importance of science and international cooperation. All of the people gathered at the

spaceport to greet them — red and yellow, black and white — hold hands in socialist solidarity. This is all quite interesting, in its earnest, didactic way, but what really impresses is the encounter with the

alien landscape of Venus. It is really cool-looking and surreal, in a distinctly European way. It is well worth a gander, and the movie is available on a Region 1 DVD from First Run.

MUDSLIDES AND AVALANCHES

This morning, KPLU informed me that two of the mountain passes, including Interstate 90, are closed due to avalanches. The commuter train from Everett and the Amtrak train to Vancouver, BC are closed due to mudslides. It seems like the whole city should just slide off into the Sound on a giant sled of mud. We could be the new Atlantis, making superscientific airplanes and software and coffee in our little hideaway beneath the waves.

Watch for clues that he is taking over: when the word 'teh' appears in *Ansible* you will know that
He Has Assumed Control

Speculative Reading

— 27 Apr 2006 —

There was a huge thread at Patrick and Teresa Nielsen-Hayden's blog, Making Light, about the uses and abuses of fanfic. It made me think again about an idea I kicked around back when I read the rec.arts.sf.written newsgroup. What struck me at the time was the sheer number of humungous threads that took a book or story and started speculating about the implications of the world-building, whether it was the artificial wombs of Bujold's Barrayar books or the personality-conditioning tapes in Cherryh's *Cyteen* or the military service requirement of Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*. As an English major, I had been taught that the job of literary criticism was explication of the text, but here were readers who left the text behind and tried to work out how the ideas expressed in the text could be elaborated further or in different directions and what other social implications they had that the author hadn't addressed. I came to think of this as speculative reading.

The discussion of fanfic on the blog made me think that it does something similar, in that fanfic is a form in which readers follow their own ideas about an established literary universe. It's another way of working out implications and further

developments of a story or text. And this has got me thinking about Ioan Couliano's theory in *The Tree of Gnosis* that human religious beliefs can be seen as a systematic working out of binary variations on other beliefs, so that if one group believes that god is a benevolent figure, another group will believe that god is a malevolent figure, and if one group believes that god is a benevolent male, another will believe that god is a benevolent female, and another will believe god is a malevolent male and another that god is a malevolent female and so on, with the orthodoxies trying to stamp out the numberless "heretical" variations. Does fanfic work this way as well, with different readers finding aspects of the story to reverse and then explore along the given axis? Certainly the smuttier fanfic seems to work through every sexual coupling possible in a given group of characters.

One thing all of this gets at is that we experience Story as malleable. A story is never finished or final, and so in movies as well we seek the directors cut, the outtakes, the variant edits. Criterion just released a DVD set with three variant cuts of Orson Welles' *Mr Arkadin*, one of which was made recently by fans scholars trying to recreate Welles' original intent. Text itself is

variable, and so we have the variant versions of Shakespeare's plays and the scholarly arguments about the best or original or most complete version. These are all different forms of speculative reading. Story is protean, changing from one form

to another in our hands as we chase after a fleeting glimpse of what really happened, what's really there, what the meaning is, heading asymptotically toward the horizon of the possible and the dream of getting it on with the dream.

DREAM GIRL

For a long while he sat there, gazing down, meeting the half-hooded eyes in silence. And presently, with the effortless detachment of one who moves in a dream, he bent down to meet her lifting arms. The sand was cool and sweet, and her mouth tasted faintly of blood.

— C.L. Moore, "Scarlet Dream"

From Troy to Toronto: Return of the Living Dead

— 09 May 2006 —

So I'm back from my trip to upstate New York and Toronto. As anticipated, I had a fricking blast at all stops and at all points in between. Funny how good, clean fun (ahem) leaves one so exhausted. Yet I have crawled to my keyboard to bring you the tale of my travels. (Well, this is after a hike to Kidd Valley for a bacon cheeseburger and then to Bottleworks for a supply of local beer. Good, clean fun, I tell you.)

My first stop was in Troy, New York, which is near the state capitol, Albany. I was visiting my friend, the incomparable Ron Drummond, who moved there from Seattle last year. The most common question I heard from locals throughout my visit was variations on, "Why the *hell* did he move from Seattle to Troy?" But Troy is an interesting post-industrial city in its own right, and the beer at Brown's Taproom, where we met Ron's friend Kevin for dinner Wednesday night, was quite good. The highlight of this part of the trip, however, came the next day when we rented a car and drove into the Berkshire Hills in western Massachusetts. We drove out on Route 2, also known as the Mohawk Trail — a winding, wooded road through the rolling hills and dells and picturesque rural towns of the Berkshires. It was a beautiful, sunny day, and the woods were doing their best to paint themselves in every possible variegation of light green.

We stopped at Williams College for a quick visit with Paul Park, who teaches there, and then we continued on to Shelburne Falls, where we met John Crowley. Shelburne Falls is the model for Blackbury Jamb in his Aegypt quartet, and he led us across the Bridge of Flowers and showed us around the town, including a stop at Nancy L. Dole's wonderful Books & Ephemera shop, where I found ancient tinted postcards of the Mohawk Trail. Once he had determined that I was not an axe murderer or otherwise unkempt, Crowley invited us back to his house, where he and Ron looked over the proofs of artwork by Peter Milton that will be used to illustrate the 25th anniversary edition of Crowley's novel, *Little, Big*, that Ron's Incunabula Press is publishing. (I had carried the proofs with me from Seattle, where I'd received them from John D. Berry over a couple of pints of Whoville Weizenbock at the Elysian Brewpub.) Crowley seemed genuinely delighted and excited by the artwork and by the prospect of this special edition of his most famous book.

After we left his house, we roared back to Troy on I-90 to meet Sarah Prince for East Indian food at the Shalimar across the street from Ron's apartment. Sarah delivered stencil artwork for me to take to Corflu. I was a mule for quite a number of items with a number of destinations on this trip! It was great to meet Sarah after all these years and to hear about life in the Adirondacks. She had a

lovely dog, too — a mix of black lab and chow, with short hair, a curly tail, and a black tongue.

Next day, after breakfast across the Hudson River with Ron, I was picked up by Geri Sullivan for a road trip to Corflu. My geography lesson continued, as we traveled due west on I-90 across the widest part of New York to get to Toronto. I guess I've always thought Toronto was due north of New York, but I guess I was, you know, fucking wrong. Montreal, in fact, is due north of New York. Geri and I had a wonderful gabfest for most of the nine hour journey. She sure does know what's going on in a lot of different fannish communities! Reader, I now have your number. Expect a blackmail note soon. We also stopped at Niagara Falls, which I hadn't seen since I was a baby. Nothing looked at all familiar, oddly enough.

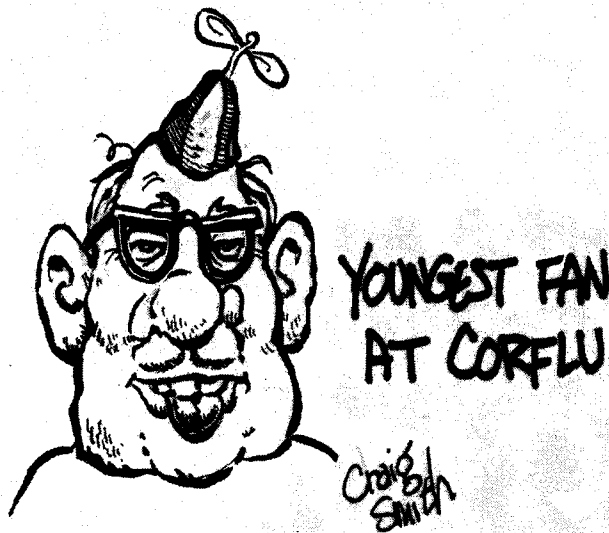
Then we hit the convention, and as usual the linear narrative went nonlinear. It was a small Corflu, with only 26 in attendance, but I've never had a bad time at a Corflu and that's still true. Actually, last year in San Francisco was almost too much of a good thing, with so many people I wanted to talk to that I ended up sitting in a corner anxiously trying to figure out where to start. With a much smaller crowd in Toronto, I was paradoxically able to spend quality time with more people. Yvonne Rowse and Ian Sorensen were the token Brits in attendance, and I ended up hanging out with them quite a bit, which I hadn't been able to do at either Corflu Titanium or at Interaction last year. Ian was in fine form and kept me in stitches whenever he was around. Yvonne keeps *him* in stitches, but that's from hitting him whenever he makes a terrible pun or rude comment, which is approximately every thirty seconds.

Friday night, I helped Colin Hinz load and transport goods from his house, and I thereby got to see the Gestetner that went *spung*. That machine certainly spilled its guts. It was impressive that Colin wasn't killed in the accident. Can't remember what that style of house is called, but I really like it: narrow, deep, and two stories on top of a finished basement. This trip to the Annex neighborhood was pretty much the most I saw of Toronto. Otherwise I joined several expeditions around the downtown hotel for food, including Ethiopian,

Chinese, Middle Eastern, Japanese (for the convention brunch) and New York deli meals. (Do they really serve something called "peameal bacon" in NYC?) I was one of the auctioneers for the TAFF auction, joining Murray Moore and Andy Porter. That was fun, and we collected over \$300 for TAFF, which was pretty damned good for such a small group. The fannish slideshow that night was great, with many gasps of astonishment at thirty year old photos of friends who were once thin and dark- (not to mention long-) haired. Many laughs were to be had as Mike Glicksohn barked "Next!" every time Taral tried to show a landscape photo from one of his roadtrips. Not infrequently, this would become, "Next! Next! Next! Next! Next! Next! Next!" Mike was in great form, and the loss of a kidney did not seem to slow down his consumption of peaty single malt one whit.

Hope Leibowitz was the random guest of honor, and I took great pleasure in prodding her about her speech as often as I could. She seemed to enjoy the teasing and ended up giving a wonderfully Leibowitzian speech from scrambled notes. It was very cute and very appropriate, and a chance for her to think about and summarize her experience in fandom. You're free now, Hope, and maybe I'll follow your lead and try to get it over with as soon as possible in the future rather than bribing my way out of it!

It's probably no surprise that Murray's suggestion last week, when I announced the roadtrip with Geri, that I ask her about the status



of the issue of *Science-Fiction Five-Yearly* that is due this November has resulted in my being invited by Geri to co-edit. Ted White told me it would be a good rite of passage, and I said, "Sounds like more of a hazing to me." But I know that working with Geri is going to be a lot of fun (she's already talking about a collation party in Massachusetts), and wow, it's really something to be working on a Lee Hoffwoman zine. It's enough to make a fan doubt his worthiness! But if Geri and Ted think I can hack it, I guess I'll give it a go. Thanks, Geri!

The chance to get to know a bit more about Toronto fandom was also welcome. I finally met the very genial Lloyd Penney, with whom I got to talk quite a bit. Lloyd was quite handy around the convention as well and kept track of the winning bids and collected the money at the auction amongst other things. One person I hadn't heard of before the convention was Phil Paine, who turned out to be quite a database of Canadian history, sociology, linguistics, economics, and just about everything else. I think I learned more about Canada in three conversations with him than I had learned in my previous 45 years on this planet, and it was fascinating stuff, at least to me. The discourse on how the horrific Saskatchewan dustbowl of the '30s led to an overrepresentation of Saskatchewanians in the political elite was a sociological masterwork. Then there was Janet Wilson and her son, Paul, who knows way more about mimeos than I do even though he's half my age. He and Colin worked hard on the ~~program~~ souvenir book throughout the convention, and

Geri, Andy, Hope, and I played mimeo groupies Sunday night as we watched them wrestle with Gestetners while Geri found entertaining items to peruse on teh internets.

There weren't a lot of zines at this fanzine convention, but Ian brought copies of his *Snapshot 7* and Pete Young's *Zoo Nation 7*, Jim Caughran had an issue of *A Propos de Rien*, and I handed out a few extra copies of Lilian Edwards' final *Floss!* From last year. (Another great issue of ZN, Pete. I read most of it on the flight back, and I was especially wowed by the piece on the Toynbee Tiles. Dude, that's a brilliant editorial score!)

Okay, I'm running out of steam here, so I think I'll end with something Don Anderson told me in the consuite Friday night. I mentioned that Geri and I had taken I-90 much of the way from New York and that it led all the way to my hometown, Seattle, on the other end of the continent. Don said that it has always comforted him to think that from his house in Rochester, NY he could, if he wanted, drive a few blocks to I-90 and head west across the country, get off in Issaquah, WA and drive a few blocks to get to Wally Weber's house. I-90: Roadway to the Fans. I had a great time on the eastern ends of it, and now it's great to be back at the western end that I call home.

Thanks to Ron for all his hospitality and friendship, and thanks to Catherine, Colin, and Murray for a small but perfectly formed Corflu. See everybody next year in Austin, TX.

They'd sit there and watch him lecture with their mouths open and their eyes shining
and their souls sticking out like warts on a toad.

To Health in a Handbasket

— 01 Jun 2006 —

Turns out I don't have diabetes yet, the blood tests show, but the doctor has put me on Lipitor for excessive levels of the naughtier varieties of cholesterol. (My good cholesterol is high too, but

not high enough to compensate for the naughty. Typical worthless goody two-shoes — I'm going to kick your useless namby-pamby cholesterol ass!) Going on a prescription fills me with a nameless

sinking dread, and with this on top of the ongoing teeth-grinding that has resulted in a busted molar and sleeping with a night guard, I am feeling decidedly middle-aged and trapped in complex mortal dilemmas. Where did my grandkids get to anyway? I need someone to mow the lawn while I catch my breath and have another beer.

The doctor joked that if we just put Lipitor

and an antidepressant into the drinking water, we'd all be a lot better off. That's a funny joke, but it's also scary, because it says we are a nation of fat, depressed people. Nuke us now, Iran, before the punchline becomes a sentence.

Oops, I hear Homeland Security at the door. I'll be right back!

Good thing I already lost all faith in humanity last week.

IF A DRUNK FALLS FROM A CARRIAGE

If a drunk falls from a carriage, even if it is going very fast, he will not die. His bones and joints are the same as those of other people, but the injuries he receives are different. It's because his spirit is whole. He was not aware of getting into the carriage, nor was he aware of falling out of it. Life and death, alarm and fear do not enter his breast. Therefore, he confronts things without apprehension. If someone who has gotten his wholeness from wine is like this, how much more so would one be who gets his wholeness from heaven! The sage hides within his heavenly qualities, thus nothing can harm him....

— Chuang Tzu (trans. Victor H. Mair)

Death of a Farmer

— 27 Jun 2006 —

My mother has informed me that Uncle Paul died in his sleep yesterday afternoon. I didn't know Paul very well, perhaps partly because his three sons, my cousins, were enough older than I that we were never close and thus I never went to spend the night at their place that I can remember. He was a smiling, simple, hard-working, devout Mennonite man, although perhaps a sterner father, according to my cousins (via my mother), than was apparent from a distance. He served in a hospital as a Conscientious Objector during WWII.

Those who knew him better will probably remember him for other things, but he was also inadvertently, in the most horrible way, responsible for the limitations imposed on field-burning in Oregon. Field-burning is the practice of burning the dead stalks of grass in a field after the seed had been harvested. (My farming uncles — and now cousins — mostly grow grass seed such as fescue and golf.) As a kid I thought the fires were really cool, and I remember how little whirlwinds would throw up pillars of swirling flame — very

dangerous for spreading the fire, but just about the neatest thing in the world in the eyes of a kid. The fire kills plant disease, weeds, and pests in preparation for the next crop, but it also causes pollution that made the practice controversial with environmentalists, not to mention the people living further south in the Willamette Valley who had to breathe the smoke. Then one day my uncle was burning a field next to I-5, as he had done without problem for years, when the wind shifted suddenly and carried the thick smoke over the freeway. There was a chain accident and several people died.

It was a bad, bad time for Uncle Paul after that, as indeed for the families that lost loved ones in the accident. There were lawsuits, the father of one of the accident victims wrote an angry book, Paul suffered a heart attack and then depression, he retired from farming and fought to hold onto the land for his sons. The state banned field burning along the freeway and imposed an overall acreage limit, which was just as well, but if only they had done it earlier for environmental reasons or for the

health of those living downwind! None of my relatives have burned any of their fields since that day.

There's more one could say about Uncle Paul's ill health in later years and his relentless cheerfulness in the face of it. (And his wife's deep depressions, and those of at least two of his sons.) I didn't know him well and didn't feel a strong connection, and I feel almost guilty for memorializing him with this awful episode in his

life. Yet there's something fascinating about it, something bigger than life, something bigger than death. I'm sure Paul believed that the Lord moves in mysterious ways. The Lord's motives in that morass of pain and legal conflict are indeed inscrutable, yet Uncle Paul kept smiling and kept the faith that there was a purpose for it even if he didn't understand what it was. Perhaps it's as good as one can do in the face of mystery and the shifting of the wind.

OISEAU D'AVRIL

So the wedding of Luke and Julie McGuff on April 1st was brilliant, and the sky turned clear blue right before the outdoor ceremony. The chorus of kazoos was awesome, in a fairly bloody-minded, libertarian kind of way. The Reverend Earthquake McGoon (aka Andy Hooper) presided over compact, poetic, realistic vows. Afterwards, I had a needed talk with a longtime friend I've drifted away from. The past is still there and alive, even as we grow older and change. The Hakka duck at Doong Kong Lau after that was so-so, but the spicy eggplant was out of this frickin' world. As Lara the Dirty Librarian drove the bride and groom and myself to the restaurant, the windows steamed up, and she cried, "They're having their honeymoon in my backseat!" Then it was on to Vanguard, where I spoke of pussies and beavers with the zoological crowd and bought a purple heartwood pipe hand-crafted by a native fan.

It was a complicated day, but in a good way. A milestone day, and a day of high feeling. And today, after journeying to farthest Redmond to pick up an eBay-purchased bike rack for my brother, I ate Mongolian chicken at the Fremont Sunday Market and then went to the Big Time, where I ran into Wolfgang and had the most amazing wide-ranging conversation about krill populations, UN-funded research, rogue waves, and the taste of seal. After these labors, I rested.

Wabi-Sabi

— 02 Jul 2006 —

When I was in college, my girlfriend, Molly, told me about the Japanese concept of *wabi*, as she called it. I think she learned about it in a class, but she might have learned it on her own since she had an interest in things Japanese and covered our bedroom floor in *tatami* mats and wanted to learn how to do the tea ceremony. In any event, what I brought away from our conversations about *wabi* is that it was a technique of purposefully introducing an imperfection into a work of art as a way of accentuating the beauty of the whole. I was fascinated by the thought that imperfections could be beautiful.

It turns out that my understanding of the concept was wrong — or perhaps appropriately incomplete. For one thing, the term is apparently actually *wabi-sabi*. Poking around on Google a bit yesterday, I read a few pages that indicate a much more complex philosophy than just "imperfections create beauty." The rather slight entry in Wikipedia, for example, says, "The aesthetic is sometimes described as one of beauty that is 'imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete'" and that "[i]t is a concept derived from the Buddhist assertion of the first noble truth — Dukkha, or in Japanese, 無常 (*mujyou*), impermanence." (This entry actually has a cute self-referential apologia as well: "During the

1990s the concept was borrowed by computer software developers and employed in Agile programming and Wiki wiki to describe acceptance of the state of ongoing imperfection that is the product of these methods.” Wikipedia isn’t untrustworthy; it’s imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete.)

An interesting page at hermitary.com (“resources and reflections on hermits and solitude”) goes into quite a bit more detail: “The original connotation of *wabi* is based on the aloneness or separation from society experienced by the hermit, suggesting to the popular mind a misery and sad forlornness.” Over time it became an aesthetic concept of “quiet contentment with simple things.” *Sabi* has to do with “natural processes resulting in objects that are irregular, unpretentious, and ambiguous. The objects reflect a universal flux of ‘coming from’ and ‘returning to.’ They reflect an impermanence that is nevertheless congenial and provocative, leading the viewer or listener to a reflectiveness and contemplation....”

Actually, my original understanding of what Molly told me about *wabi* probably wasn’t too far off-base. Another short little webpage I found says of *wabi*, “It also can mean an accidental or happenstance element (or perhaps even a small flaw) which gives elegance and uniqueness to the whole, such as the pattern made by a flowing glaze on a piece of ceramics.” What I hadn’t really grasped was that the flaws are accidental or natural, rather than intentional. The discussion of *wabi-sabi* reminds me of the reading in Taoism I’ve been doing lately, where “non-action,” or non-volition, is essential to connecting to the Tao. Happenstance guides us to the ever-evolving heart of the real.

Makes sense as an aesthetic concept, too, and reminds me of the sense I often have of writing as a process of accidental discovery. Much here to chew on. I’ve always been what I call a “passivist.” This is not an honored trait in our culture, but it seems that Asian philosophies see something valuable in passivity and receptivity — not to mention in solitude, contemplation, and melancholy. My kind of philosophy!

| didn't know he could lack confidence so well.

Book Review: *Edison's Conquest of Mars* by Garrett P. Serviss

— 23 Sep 2006 —

On January 9, 1898 the *Boston Post* newspaper began serializing a novel called *Fighters from Mars* — or *The Terrible War of the Worlds as it Was Waged in or Near Boston in the Year 1900*. This was an apparently pirated version of H.G. Wells’ *War of the Worlds*, which had months earlier been legitimately serialized in the US in the magazine *Cosmopolitan*. As the title of the pirate edition suggests, the action of Wells’ novel had been transposed from London to Boston (as Orson Welles later transposed it to New Jersey), but to crown the transgression, on February 6, 1898 the *Boston Post* began to serialize an unofficial and unauthorized “sequel” to this version of *War of the Worlds* called *Edison's Conquest of Mars* — “written in collaboration with Edison by Garrett P. Serviss, the well known astronomical writer.” In

this sequel, the great nations of the world (led by the US, of course) set aside their political differences, pool their resources, build a fleet of antigravity spaceships armed with disintegrator rays designed by the American inventor Thomas Edison, and, led by Edison himself, head to Mars to exact revenge for the invasion in the earlier novel.

Edison's Conquest of Mars has had a strange publication history. Its first book publication didn’t come until a limited edition of a “significantly edited” version in 1947, almost a full fifty years after the newspaper serialization. Perhaps this is also the “abridged version” that appeared in *The Treasury of Science Fiction Classics* in 1954, which seems to be the next publication (and the form in

which several SF fans I've talked to first read it as teenagers). In 1969, Forrest Ackerman published his own heavily edited "good parts" version in paperback under the title *Invasion of Mars*. I suppose it's only fitting that an unauthorized sequel to a pirated transposition of somebody else's book should have such a butchered publication history, but nonetheless we are now, courtesy of the print-on-demand publisher Apogee Books, able to read the original version of the novel as published in the *Boston Post*, accompanied by the original newspaper illustrations as well.

It turns out it's a really fun book. The *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (2nd ed.) calls this an "edisonade," which is a subgenre in which Edison or some other real or imagined inventor features as the hero. But what struck me about the novel was how modern it seemed — or at least how Campbellian. Serviss was, in fact, a well-known astronomer, and he's fascinated by science and technology. The completely fabricated spacedrive and disintegrator rays are explained in loving *faux*-scientific detail, and he also delights in giving realistic (if still speculative) descriptions of the effects of low gravity (on a visit to the moon and then to an asteroid) and of the difference in how light would look in a vacuum as opposed to in an atmosphere. The introduction to this edition by Robert Godwin says the novel's descriptions of a realistic spacesuit and of a space battle are both firsts in the history of the genre.

It's too long since I've read anything by Verne, and maybe that's where this interest in scientific exposition comes from. It's probably unfair to call it Campbellian, because by the time Campbell was writing and editing, there was less stopping to give exposition about whatever gadget had been invented in the story and more attempt to integrate the exposition into the flow of the story.¹ But it certainly isn't Wellsian, and in fact little has been retained from the Wells novel except the idea that Martians invaded Earth and laid waste to much of it. The Martians themselves are very different from

Wells' description, being essentially very tall humanoids (taller than humans because of the lower gravity on Mars). While the Earthmen consider the Martians superior in intellect and civilization, there isn't much evidence of it in the story. You might say it's more a view of Americans looking across the ocean at Europe and seeing a power that could once burn the capitol but is no longer quite so overwhelming. Certainly there's nothing of Wells' sense of "intellects vast and cool," although they do still qualify as unsympathetic.

Edison isn't the only living scientist/engineer to accompany the expedition to Mars. Lord Kelvin is also onboard, and "the celebrated English electrical expert" Professor Sylvanus P. Thompson, along with Lord Rayleigh, Professor Roentgen, and Dr. Mossian, "the man who first made artificial diamonds." In a small sub-chapter titled "As the Great Napoleon Did," Serviss tells us that, "On the model of the celebrated corps of literary and scientific men which Napoleon carried with him in his invasion of Egypt, Mr. Edison selected a company of the foremost astronomers, archaeologists, anthropologists, botanists, bacteriologists, chemists, physicists, mathematicians, mechanics, meteorologists, and experts in mining, metallurgy, and every other branch of practical science, as well as artists and photographers." And these scientists come forward to solve problems and conduct experiments along the way, leading to delightfully absurd scenes such as the one where a spacesuited Lord Kelvin leaps from the surface of an asteroid in order to test his theories about the type of orbit that will result.

But aside from this boyish popular mechanics kind of geeky playfulness, there is also a weirder strain of imagination running through the book that seems to foretell science fiction's continuing skeezy romance with UFOs, ancient astronauts, and Fortean phenomena. This is a bit of a **SPOILER SPOILER SPOILER SO YOU MAY WANT TO SKIP TO THE NEXT PARAGRAPH**, but once the Earthmen get to Mars they discover a human woman there. Using the latest linguistic theories, they determine that she is the descendant of Aryans taken from the Kashmir region thousands of years ago and enslaved on Mars.

¹ Kim Huett has suggested that it is Gernsbackian instead, and he is probably right. I'll get back to you on this once I've read more SF of the era.

Once they have deciphered her language, she is able to tell them that indeed the Martians had invaded Earth once before and — wait for it — built the pyramids and left a statue of their emperor in the form of the Sphinx! — **END SPOILERS**

It must be said that this novel doesn't provide much in the way of literary pleasure. Serviss is nowhere near as good a writer as Wells, and his attempts to create pathos and romantic interest, or even dramatic (or merely narrative) tension, are not particularly effective. It must also be said that there is a strong element of American jingoism and racial and sexual stereotype to deal with. But from a certain vast, cool, and unsympathetic angle even these things are historically fascinating, and the view of the global politics of the era is quite revealing. Let's just say that Kaiser Wilhelm doesn't come off too well, and you can already feel WWI brewing. But the Kaiser isn't the only real head of state to appear in the story either, and the appearance of US President McKinley bears a certain *frisson* of irony in the context of American expansionism as advocated (or at least assumed) here.

I actually expected it to be far more a triumphalist exercise than it is — which isn't to say that it's lacking in triumphalism. It is a power fantasy about inventing miraculous devices and turning the tides on a superior foe. But it isn't without losses and defeats and the real threat of catastrophic failure along the way, and perhaps more importantly, it isn't without a delight in the

wonders and mysteries of the cosmos that are discovered in the process of pursuing bloody-minded vengeance. The dead cities of the moon, the asteroid made of gold (and the Martian space pirates trying to steal it!), the pleasure of weighing only five ounces and of throwing rocks into orbit, the marvelous towering trees of Mars and its vast plantations fed by a network of irrigation canals, a forty-foot humanoid woman from Ceres caught in a Martian flood — all are reason for the scientist heroes (and journalist narrator) to stop and examine and wonder and expound. In the end, much as it has always been in the American imagination of itself, vengeance is taken more in sorrow than in anger, and there is genuine, if ham-fisted, pathos when the eponymous conquest is consummated.

So I highly recommend Apogee's edition of *Edison's Conquest of Mars* (although I can't say much for the book design, and there are a number of typos as well). I don't know how many people there are out there that would read this book for pleasure, but if you're at all interested in the history and evolution of science fiction, there is certainly great pleasure to be found in it. I liked it so much, in fact, that I've also picked up Apogee's edition of Serviss' *A Columbus of Space* (1911), which is about a trip to Venus. But next up is the University of Nebraska edition of Edwin L. Arnold's *Gullivar of Mars* (1905), which looks to be another entertaining example of turn-of-the-previous-century SF.



I'LL HAVE YOU KNOW
THESE ARE MOUSE
EARS! WHAT KIND
OF PERSON WEARS
BEAR EARS TO A
CONVENTION?!

Chuang Tzu Mash-up

— 09 Nov 2006 —

Great knowledge sees all in one.
Small knowledge breaks down into the many.

Great words are inspiring;
Small words are chatter.

In sleep, men's spirits go visiting; in waking hours, their bodies hustle. With everything they meet they become entangled. Each day involves them in mental strife. They become indecisive, dissembling, secretive.

Small fears disturb them;
Great fears swallow them whole.

Arrows shot at a target: hit and miss, right and wrong.
That is what men call judgment, decision.
Their pronouncements are as final
As treaties between emperors.
O, they make their point!
Yet their arguments fall faster and feebler
Than dead leaves in autumn and winter.
Their talk flows out like piss,
Never to be recovered.
They stand at last, blocked, bound, and gagged,
Choked up like old drain pipes.
The mind fails. It shall not see light again.

Joy, anger, grief, delight, worry, regret, fickleness, inflexibility, modesty, willfulness, candor, insolence —

All are music sounding from the same empty reed,
All mushrooms rising from the same wet mould.

Day and night they alternate within us, but no one knows whence they arise. Enough! Enough! Early and late we meet the 'that' from which 'these' all grow. If there were no 'other,' there would be no 'I.' If there were no 'I,' there would be nothing to apprehend the 'other'. This is near the mark, but I do not know what causes it to be so. There must be some primal force, but we cannot discover any proof. I believe it acts, but I cannot see it. I can feel it, but it has no form.

This is a mash-up of translations of the same passage of Chuang Tzu by Thomas Merton, Victor H. Mair, Burton Watson, and Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English. To show how things vary, Watson has it, "In sleep, men's spirits go visiting; in waking hours, their bodies hustle." Mair has it, "When people sleep, their souls are confused; when they awake, their bodies feel all out of joint." Merton has it, "When the body sleeps, the soul is enfolded in One. When the body wakes, the openings begin to function." Feng and English have it, "When we are asleep, we are in touch with our souls. When we are awake, our senses open." The differences and similarities create an uneasy quadratic equation. Another possibility would have been, "When people sleep, their souls are confused; in waking hours, their bodies hustle." I like the double meaning of "their souls are confused," with the second sense being that we become confused about which soul is ours. Merton's take of all souls becoming One is similar, although more transcendent. (I don't believe in an immortal soul, by the way, but I do believe we're none exactly alike.)

GIMME A U

The game was to list ten of my favorite words beginning with U, and why:

01. **ululate** - What is best in life? To crush your enemies, see them driven before you, and to hear the ululation of the women!
02. **uniform** - Catholic schoolgirls in trouble ...
03. **uncle** - I love my niece and my knucklehead nephews.
04. **utter** - Utter nonsense so to speak.
05. **ukulele** - According to the American Heritage, in Hawaiian *uku* = flea and *lele* = jumping.
06. **upchuck** - Almost onomatopoeic.
07. **ugly** - Properly clotted and ungainly, a curse, a metaphor, a mood.
08. **umbrella** - A great prop for them that dance.
09. **ulterior** - The truest of motives.
10. **uncertainty** - Not so much a philosophy or theory as a state of being.

Twin Peaks in the East

— 05 Dec 2006 —

It took Geri Sullivan and me (myself & I) approximately three-and-a-half days to print *Science-Fiction Five-Yearly* 12, starting with several sides printed on the laserjet and the color inkjet at her house in Toad Woods (which was built in 1973, of course) on the Sunday evening and Monday morning after Thanksgiving. We were still printing (and Geri was still laying out) the final pages as the collation started in the NESFA clubhouse in Boston Wednesday night, with most of the final sides printed on the new Dell color laser printer that Geri had in the meanwhile bought from our hostess with the mostest, Deb Geisler. In between these bookends, I printed side after side on Mr. Gestetner, aka Mr. G, the NESFA mimeo copypri-nter, which is not in fact a Gestetner at all.

This was the first time that I had ever taken part in printing out a fanzine one side at a time like what they did in olden days, except in those days they used hand-typed stencils and hand-cranked mimeos rather than this fancy automated stuff. Still, it was fascinating to watch the zine take shape very, very slowly over the course of days in a process

very different from the reproduction of *Chunga*, which consists of sending a PDF to a printshop and picking up the printed, collated, and stapled result later the same day. The communion I achieved with Mr. G on Monday, Tuesday, and the first part of Wednesday was very calming and made me feel all accomplished and craftsmanlike and earthy and everything.

“It’s now literally true that this zine has my fingerprints all over it!” I crowed to Geri, as I looked at an ink-smudged page. I had already felt that my editorial fingerprints were all over the thing, but they’re harder to see unless you know they’re there.

As the collation party time of 7pm approached on Wednesday, however, the sense of peace and reproductive bliss (ahem) began to fray under the pressure of actually getting the damned thing good and damnit *done*. The NESFAns began to appear and to clamor for work to do. Two of the earliest arrivals, Tony Lewis and Ted Atwood, started to tape Pantone chips and Rotslers, respectively, to the inside of the back cover. I fed Fibertone to the

laser printer, while Geri tried to finish her editorial amidst one distraction and interruption after another. As more collators arrived, we decided to collate the completed second half of the zine first, while Geri and I finished off a few pages in the first half. Others were set to work putting labels and stamps on envelopes, although Geri was anxious that stamping an empty envelope was a recipe for mailing an empty envelope.

Somewhere amidst the growing sense of chaos, a strapping young man showed up at the front door of the clubhouse and emitted newbie signals. Geri rushed over to explain that this was, indeed, the NESFA clubhouse and that we were collating a fanzine. As he looked at the well-oiled NESFA machine grinding with practiced, telepathic efficiency through the process, a look of panic and confusion inhabited his face. I turned away to feed more Fibertone into the printer, and when I looked back he had vanished in a flurry of speed lines. Seemed a bit ironic, considering the number of articles in the second half of the issue (then under collation) about recruiting new fans. But we old-timers are kinda scary looking, aren't we?

Collation of the second half was completed, and we were not yet done printing the first half.

"You're going to lose your helpers," Deb warned Geri.

I ran a last side — the inside front cover — to Mr. G, praying that he wouldn't choose this moment to jam or mangle the page. When half the copies were moistly printed, I ran them to the collating table to get that process going again. Meanwhile I sh had all of the zines stapled and all

of the approximately 240 labeled, stamped envelopes stuffed and sealed. Neat piles of finished zines teetered atop the work table. I slumped into a couch and chatted with Tony and Dale while Geri wearily packed everything up. I pointed out to Geri that she needed to finish printing the page still in progress in the laser printer, but it ended up that I'd fed the sheets in upside down, so I had to yank the tray before we misprinted all 75 sheets remaining. Geri tracked down an expert stapler and got the stapling going on the first completely collated copies. The collators discovered about forty sheets with the beautiful color header of Christina Lake's piece on one side that were blank on the other. I ran them to Mr. G to print the other side, trying to get the paperfeed realigned after several NESFAns had used it to print their apazines, which had been printed and collated already that evening in a separate room.

About then Ron Drummond called to say boo.

"So are you having fun?" he asked, after I explained the wall of noise in the background.

"Actually, it's not very fun at the moment," I said. I was feeling exhausted and stressed out. The clubhouse was buzzing with motion and talk, and it was hard to think straight. Somehow Geri sailed through all the madness with calm purpose, directing the various jobs and answering the host of questions. I managed to help with the collation of the first half of the zine, and thus got back a bit of focus. When that was done, I jogged the fully collated zines for Dale Farmer, expert stapler, who stapled almost all of the approximately 340 zines that resulted from a total attempted print-run of



350. (A pretty damned good completion-ratio, too, it seems to me.) NESFAns began to leave with cheery good-byes and tearful hugs. By 10:30, three and a half hours after the collation party began, we had all of the zines stapled and all of the approximately 240 labeled, stamped envelopes stuffed and sealed. Neat piles of finished zines teetered atop the work table. I slumped into a couch and chatted with Tony and Dale while Geri wearily packed everything up.

The bloody zine was finally, really done. It was, in fact, dead. As the material had come in over the months of editorial work, and then the revisions, and then the artwork, I had grown increasingly excited at the quality of what we were getting. In the days before printing began, it seemed to me that we were in the process of creating a truly awesome zine that was going to blow everyone who loved fanzines away. I was giddy with pleasure at the creative blast of it all, and I only got more giddy as Geri started working her design magic, capping it all with that amazing color photo montage in the header of Christina's piece. Maybe I simply got too excited, but by the end of the collation party I had lost all sense of whether what we'd actually managed to create and send out into the world was any good or not. It was just a bundle of furry paper, and I was just a bundle of fried nerves.

It was in this mental state that I proceeded to Logan International airport the next day, thanks to a ride from Deb, and proceeded via Philadelphia to Troy, NY to visit Ron. I slept for close to twelve hours that night, which was good food. A day spent bopping around Troy and Albany, visiting a bookstore, eating a Pakistani dinner (accompanied by a genuine New York roach), and catching a showing of *The Fountain* helped further restore my blasted senses, although I didn't like the movie very much, in contrast to Ron who loved it. We chewed over our differences with the help of beer at two different bars, including Brown's Taproom, a brewpub that anyone visiting Troy would do well to visit.

The next day, Saturday the 2nd, was the second peak of my trip out East. We had rented a car the day before and had debated taking a daytrip into Vermont or up the Hudson River Valley north

of Troy. In the end we decided to take a jaunt into Manhattan instead. The so-called plan was hatched at the last minute, with everything evolving on the fly. We had been up into the wee hours watching Pedro Almodóvar's perverse creampie of a screwball comedy, *Tie Me Up, Tie Me Down*, on DVD, so we slept late again. Ron made a couple of calls to friends in NYC after we got up, and we hit the road by noon. The first leg of the journey was a drive down I-87 along the Hudson River heading south, although the river was generally out of sight of the freeway. It was a gorgeous sunny day, miles away from the rumored snows of Seattle. We listened to the new Beatles mash-up album, *Love*, which set the spirits soaring with its reimagining and remixing of familiar old songs. An hour and half after we left Troy, we cut over to Poughkeepsie and caught the 2:30 Metro-North train into the city. The tracks ran right along the Hudson, and we passed through a land of many connections, including the island ruins that were the scene of the great party in Crowley's *Aegypt*. (Or was the party in *Love and Sleep*?) And then here was Yonkers, and didn't John D. Berry grow up there? Didn't realize it was so far north of the city. (Turns out it was actually nearby Bronxville where he grew up, but we were close anyway.) I looked through a photocopy of the first pages of the hand-written first draft of Crowley's *Little, Big* as we passed through the Platonic landscape informing the fantastic geography of the book, tracing Oberon's trail to the City.

We detrained in Grand Central Station — the first time I'd ever been there, as far as I can remember. It was dark by the time that we climbed out of the subway at 79th and Broadway. Twenty minutes later we were sitting in the Hi-Life Bar and Grill on Amsterdam with Chip Delany, eating nachos and raw oysters and drinking a brown ale brewed in Brooklyn. Chip was taking a short break from making corrections to the galleys of his new novel, *Dark Reflections* (if I'm not misremembering the title). Typical of Chip, the "corrections" had apparently already included 2000 additional words. It was a blast to see him on his home turf, and he enthused to us about a couple of movies he'd seen recently, *Happy Feet* and, against received critical wisdom, the recent adaptation of *All the King's Men*,

which he reckoned was the best political movie he'd seen in yonks (or perhaps in Yonkers). He also told us about the nearby Thai fusion restaurant called Rain, which he said was spendy but worth the trip to the city in itself. Both judgments were confirmed when Ron and I ate there a little later. Ron's green curry, in particular, was amazingly good, with an extraordinarily subtle but vivid heat, and the waiter was a complete gas who earned himself a very nice tip with an energetic, personable performance.

From there we headed to the Lincoln Plaza theaters via a walk through the Strawberry Fields memorial to John Lennon in Central Park and a quick stop at the liquidating Tower on Broadway. At the theater we discovered that the 9:30 showing of Almodóvar's new movie, *Volver*, was sold out, so we bought tickets for the 10:30 showing and went back to Tower. I walked around the store feeling glum at the spectacle of such large quantities of unloved, apparently unsellable commodity. Buried in the anonymous masses of plastic, I did discover a stray copy of 7 Year Bitch's *Viva Zapata* and felt somehow salvaged. Almodóvar's movie was very charming, if strangely structured, with thriller

elements that are completely subsumed within a melodrama of woman surviving, and helping each other survive, a host of trials and traumas and revelations of the sordid past. He has become a master of melding genres in unexpected and compelling ways, although I think *Live Flesh* and *Bad Education* are better at incorporating the thriller elements than this one. Or was the absurdity of the crime, or at least its complete detachment from realistic consequence, the point?

Then it was a race via subway to Grand Central Station to catch the last train to Poughkeepsie, departing at 1:50am. I dozed on the train, which was full of drunken twenty-somethings returning from a night out in the big city. We arrived in Poughkeepsie after 4am, and we drove back to Troy with the Beatles blaring on the excellent car stereo, which kept us awake. I hit the couch at Ron's place at 5:45 in the morning, and was up five hours later to head to the Albany airport.

I was fried again, and life was pretty damned good. The zine is, come to think of it, pretty damned good too, isn't it? Yeah, what the hell. It's *all good!*

The bad news: For those forecasts to come true, Iraq will have to turn into Canada next year, Afghanistan into Sweden, and Congress into an order of mendicant monks.



CORFU CHOIR?
NOPE, NOT INTERESTED.
AHM TONE DEAF
PARDNER!!!

Craig
Smith