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“Welcoming Committee” by Steve Stiles

Contents—*eI*58—October 2011

Cover: “Welcoming Committee,” by Steve Stiles

...Return to sender, address unknown...47 [*eI* letter column], by Earl Kemp

Charles Stross’ *Accelerando*, by Mark Biswas

One of These Days, You’re Gonna Rise up Singing, by Chris Garcia

Midnight Special, by Victor Banis

Watching Pulp Fiction, by Earl Kemp

Dirty Larry, by Larry Revene

Back cover: “Very Wide Colossus on the Bridge,” by Ditmar [Martin James Ditmar
Jenssen]

You stand outside a society and a culture and realize that it is an invention and that you can improve it. Well, I like the American culture, such as it is, but let’s get rid of the fucking guns
—Kurt Vonnegut

THIS ISSUE OF *eI* is for Steve Stiles, in appreciation of all the great artwork he has created for *eI* over the last decade.

#

As always, everything in this issue of *eI* beneath my byline is part of my in-progress rough-draft memoirs. As such, I would appreciate any corrections, revisions, extensions, anecdotes, photographs, jpegs, or what have you sent to me at earl@earlkemp.com and thank you in advance for all your help.

Bill Burns is *jefe* around here. If it wasn’t for him, nothing would get done. He inspires activity. He deserves some really great rewards. It is a privilege and a pleasure to have him working with me to make *eI* whatever it is.

Other than Bill Burns, Dave Locke, and Robert Lichtman, these are the people who made this issue of *eI* possible: Victor Banis, Mark Biswas, Christopher Garcia, and Larry Revene.

ARTWORK: This issue of *eI* features original artwork by Steve Stiles and Ditmar, and recycled artwork by William Rotsler.

This is a huge country. There are primitive tribes here and there who have customs and moral standards of their own. It's the way I feel about religious fundamentalists. They really ought to have a reservation. They have a right to their culture and I can see where the First Amendment would be very painful for them. The First Amendment is a tragic amendment because everyone is going to have his or her feelings hurt and your government is not here to protect you from having your feelings hurt.

—Kurt Vonnegut, *Playboy*, May 1992

...Return to sender, address unknown.... 47

The Official *eI* Letters to the Editor Column

By Earl Kemp with recycled artwork by William Rotsler

We get letters. Some parts of some of them are printable. Your letter of comment is most wanted via email to earl@earlkemp.com or by snail mail to P.O. Box 369, PMB 205, Tecate, CA 91980 and thank you.

Also, please note, I observe DNQs and make arbitrary and capricious deletions from these letters in order to remain on topic.

This is the official Letter Column of *eI*, and following are a few quotes from a few of those letters concerning the last issue of *eI*. All this in an effort to get you to write letters of comment to *eI* so you can look for them when they appear here.

#

Thursday June 16, 2011:

Lloyd Penney: Got the HTML version of *eI56* right now...it'll do for the moment, and it allows me to get a headstart in getting an loc to you.

In Toronto, there are problems scheduling conventions and special events so they don't conflict with each other. In the Bay area, I can imagine that's even more of a problem, to keep Corflu and the Eaton Conference from coinciding. That's why *SF/SF* is so important there, to keep a schedule. Hey, Chris, Nalo is sweet, isn't she?

I wish there were memorable anthologies out today. There's the Dozois series, I believe, and David Hartwell has a series, but I got most of the Carr, Gold, Conklin, and Wollheim anthologies I have from library sales. I wanted them because the stories contained the greatest short stories the field every produced in the '50s, '60s, and '70s. They were important to me, and I still own them. I have a few gaps in the collection, and if I have the chance to fill them, I will be pleased.

I am hoping that someone will be selling John Teehan's Merry Blacksmith Press edition of *Who Killed Science Fiction?* at the Worldcon. Earl, I still think this kind of study, this look down deep into the heart of SF, is needed today. Could a modern *WKSF?* Sell today? I still think so, and I think it important. If it's not at Worldcon, John, I'll get in touch....

I wish there was enough interest in a place like Toronto to match a paperback show like LAPB. There's barely enough interest for used book stores. I did find a new used book store the other day, and picked up a couple

of goodies, but still, the number of such stores today is less than half what it was in the '90s, as far as I can tell. An all-star group of sellers, and I imagine an all-star group of collectors roaming the aisles, and perusing the good stuff. If there isn't such a show here, I wish I could visit you all in LA.

Thursday August 4, 2011:

Robert Lichtman: I'm **very** glad to see *eI57* finally coming to fruition! I just finished paging through to have a look at all of Dan's art, and part of the way along I noticed that my cursor turned to a hand when it passed over the art. I clicked, and was rewarded with a larger image of the piece. I went back and started over. What a joy! But I don't see any mention in your editorial, Earl, about this. Are you going to leave it as a pleasant "easter egg" for the readers to discover, or.....? When the PDF is available I'm going to have to reread this!

[See what you're missing by reading only the PDFs, Robert! Almost every image in every issue has a larger click-through version. And this should also work in the PDF edition, opening the big image in your web browser. -BB]

#

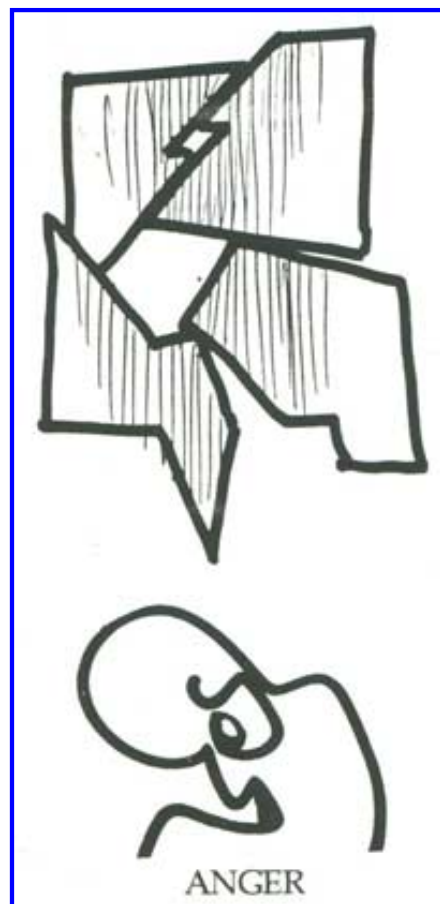
Sandra Bond: Bill Burns' announcement that *eI57* had been uploaded to efanazines.com is dated 0037hrs on my computer; and since, as Ted at least has noted previously, my ISP's server's datestamp is an hour ahead of itself during British Summer Time, that means that the announcement hit my inbox round about 11.37pm last night.

I was online, as I generally am late at night. -"Aha,"- I thought to myself, -"Ted's Letters From Prison Issue at last!"- and I clicked straight through to efanazines, and started reading.

Next thing, it's 0050 and I've read the darn fanzine stem to stern non-stop. Like most fanzine fans I'm a quick reader, and in addition I've read about half of the contents before, but even so that's an unusually voracious response from me. Kind of like opening a packet of potato crisps of a new and untried flavour, and finding that you like them so much that you can't stop munching away until the whole packet's gone west. (Perhaps you, Earl, and you, Ted, both being lean and hungry types in physical terms, aren't familiar with this situation. In which case, take it from me that I intend it both to signify a major compliment, and to hint that such an occurrence is not one that happens every day.)

I predict, though I'd love to be proved wrong, that there won't be a huge response to the issue. We all know by now that electronic fanzines don't draw as many locs as paper ones, and in addition we have the double whammy that the current issue has no letter column of its own, and that it carries the most regrettable news that Earl's planning to kill it off very shortly.

So it seems the least I can do to buck this possibly imaginary trend by striking while the iron is hot and letting you know of my appreciation for what you've published, Earl, and for what you've written, Ted. I find it all but incredible that someone could maintain enough mental composure (not to mention being able to work around the prevailing physical conditions) to write two lines put together in such circumstances, never mind twenty-one considered, evenly written, thoughtful pieces of reportage. (I could complain about the continuing absence of #20 when 'reasons of space' are one thing an electronic fanzine doesn't need to worry about; but this only shows just how much I'd have liked to have been able to read even more of Ted's prose.)



The whole opus surely deserves a wider circulation than even *eI* can give it.

[Sandra, it is my understanding that, as soon as the smoke clears, there will be an ebook edition of the issue. –EK]

I know myself only in the most glancing of ways (since my experience as a lawyer is purely in civil litigation and I made sure to avoid criminal law like the plague) just how shockingly bad the gaol system is in this country, and in the modern day; I have never read or heard anything from any source credible to me which doesn't suggest that the current US system is infinitely worse both than how it was in the days of Ted's incarceration, and how it is over here. (One hears tales of Sheriff Joe Arpaio, and I don't blame Earl one bit for not wanting to share the state of Arizona with him any more.)

There are of course blogs by ex-prisoners, and even serving prisoners, some of which I read, but though some of them are as informative as Ted's letters, and some of them are as gripping, I can't think of a single one that combines the two qualities like Ted. I shan't go as far as to wish Ted a further sentence inside just so he can write some more, but I'm sure the US needs a book by some modern-day equivalent of Ted to catch the public eye and bring its focus upon the whole ghastly, outworn, tottering, corrupt system. (This is, of course, a pure fantasy — the whole of US society is predicated in too integral a fashion upon the penal system for it to be overhauled in any but the most superficial of ways — but it's a pleasant fantasy, at least.)

So there you go. I scarcely write letters of comment any more, and it rather amazes me that I've written this one, to be frank. You may wish to keep it in your porch refrigerator, otherwise the egoboo may start to go mouldy before you can digest it all....

Speaking of egoboo, Dan Steffan deserves plenty, of course. There's nobody like Dan for illustrating a Ted White article, just as there's nobody like Ted for finding the right words to go around a Dan Steffan illo. Dan's subheadings on this occasion are all of them wonderful little works of art, all the more so for being confined to such relatively small dimensions. I'm not quite so convinced by the cover — where are those reflections in Ted's glasses coming from, if the barred door is behind him? — but I only say this because I thought the subheadings were Dan's finest hour in this issue, rather than because I thought the cover sub-par.

Presentation wise, it's only just discernible by the closest of examinations that some of the text has been OCR'd from its original format; a couple of 1s appear in lieu of the letter l, and the phrase "nolle prosequi" gets garbled twice that I spotted, but this is mere nitpickery.

To close with, something of an off-topic observation. Thanks to Robert Lichtman (may his tie-dye T-shirts never lose their lustre), this morning the postman handed me a cardboard box full of 5,271,009 polystyrene packing flakes, at the heart of which was a plastic bag, and inside of *that* lay concealed about three-quarters of a run of *FANAC* (mainly if not all copies that had once been mailed to Buz and Elinor Busby in Seattle, or Bill Donaho in New York). This item caught my eye in December 1958's #30:

"LARS BOURNE, reading in the last issue of *FANAC* how I grotched at Ted White's continual printing of pointless conversations, sends along the following news item:

Baltimore, Maryland (up) — Ted E. White, publisher, author, and musician of sorts, was murdered last night by his fiancée, Miss Sylvia Dees. Upon being questioned as to why she had committed the crime, she replied, "I just couldn't stand all those meaningless, boring conversations he kept having with all his awful friends."

"Lars adds that the news item isn't true. We thought not."

I count myself fortunate that thanks to the internet I am able to be one of Ted White's awful friends, and to

have meaningless and boring conversations with him and with his other awful friends such as Earl Kemp from across the Atlantic.

Long may you both reign.

#

Andrew Porter: The photo Ted White didn't have as mentioned in the new *eI*.

Well, of course I have a bunch of photos from back then, but good ole TW, I bet he thought he'd be damned if he'd mention me.

So it goes.

Ted and his daughter at the 87 worldcon, photo by me:

#

Chris Garcia: NO.

Evelyn was concerned that someone had died when I let out that single word while I was reading the most recent issue of *eI*. You know the moment that inspired that utterance, don't you? Your announcement of retirement. I am saddened by this, not only because you then followed it up with what might be the best single issue of *eI* you've put out yet and if there is justice one that'll win you another Hugo and FAAn Award and Ditmar, Nova, Pulitzer, Pritzger, and whatever the hell other award there is out there because it was just too perfect. My favorite zine the world is going to be coming to an end (and I will be writing something for you that I will likely roll through tomorrow in a fit of "JESUS CHRIST, I HAVE TO SEND SOMETHING!") and not just because it's the zine that, in all reality, is most responsible for me getting into writing letters of comment. Not even because the one significant piece my father ever wrote appeared the virtual pages of *eI*.

No, the real reason is because *eI* means something to me.

That will not seem that significant, it won't carry the weight of anything objective or easily defined, but it's damn true. There is not a lot in this world that really means anything to me. No, I'm not a nihilist prick who goes on and on about the meaninglessness of the world around him, but really, I see that things happen and they're good or they're bad but they don't usually mean much. To me, *eI* has always meant something. Whether it was looking at the worlds of publishing and fandom and music and whathaveyou, it was always something significant about almost every word. I never took *eI* lightly. It was always something heavy, or important, or real.

Yeah, that's the thing. *eI* has always felt real to me.

All good things must end, and I am aware that there'll be a point when I can't do *The Drink Tank* anymore either (quite likely ten minutes after it acquires any sort of respectability) but it is a sadness that I've only got a couple of *eIs* left. I better make the most of them.

Okay, that's enough of that. I owe you 1 article, 1 real LoC, and the drink of your choice the next time we run into each other. Hell, I'll even let you order top shelf.

#



Dave Locke: From the item written by Ted White way back in September of 1986:

“Locke didn’t have the guts to send me *Time and Again #1* when that came out, but had nerved himself to send me #2. After skimming through it, I did something I’d never done with any fanzine before: I tore it up - and sent the pieces back to him by return mail. I wonder in what way he’ll construe that...”

This piece is far too old to get excited about the distortion, but, for the record:

My WordWeb dictionary notes: “Syllogism: Deductive reasoning in which a conclusion is derived from two premises”. This won’t have been the first or last time that Ted has taken just a single false premise to generate a false syllogism. In this instance the formula was [he didn’t get *TAA #1* + no other premise = Locke didn’t have the guts to send it and had to nerve himself to send issue #2].

I sent Ted *TAA #1* and got no response. #2 got the response he describes here. My own response was to store the envelope and its contents for quite a while, thinking if I ever got to a convention with a TAFF auction that it might actually raise a few bucks as an amusing gimmick offering... Jackie’s health problems at that time led to me attending only one partial day of a non-Cincinnati area convention beyond that point, and when Bill Bowers and I briefly attended Rivercon in Louisville in 1996, all the TAFF files including this item had been, without ceremony, junked a bit earlier.



Now we’re in 2011 and hopefully both much wiser people. Just a bit earlier this year there occurred a similar single-premise false syllogism which I wrote off to Ted’s health problems and his impending surgery, but after an emotional residual dump on this mid-80s kerfuffle he saw that one for himself and apologized and I wasn’t motivated to be a prick about it. So we got past that, too.

An interesting issue, Earl. What? Yes, I know you’ve pestered me for more than the two Locke items you’ve published in *eI*. It keeps reminding me how greedy we fan-pubbers have to be as we ply, wheedle, and cajole in the neverending search for more material. I’m actually determined to get one more item to you. Then I remember this Vonnegut quote from *Timequake* and get dubious about the possibility: “I was

gazing at a list of all I’d published, and wondering, “How the hell did I do that?” I was feeling as I feel now, like whalers Herman Melville described, who didn’t talk anymore. They had said absolutely everything they could ever say.”

But if I can figure out at least one article item more....

#

Steve Johnson: Over these past years I have downloaded and read each and every issue of *eI*. Thank you for the enormous effort, and for the entrancing, enticing, and so readable results. What a great fanzine! What a source of insight into sf fandom, sf writing, pornography writing and publishing, and all the connections there between. I cannot think of any way to thank you beyond these words unless you post a link to a PayPal account.

My own obscure, active period in fandom was in the mid-sixties and early seventies. I drifted off, though kept my collections of books and fmz. In the early '90s, the textual internet brought renewed exposure to fandom, though little interaction. Later, the dam burst, and fandom was only a search away. eFanzines.com represents the high point of that accessibility of fanzines and your fanzine ranks right at the absolute top of eFanzines.

com.

I am pleased to note that the Internet Archive will preserve *eI* along with other zines distributed through eFanzines.com.

Until I read your zine, I did not previously know that Ted White was busted for dope or much about you except for your connection with Advent Books (with which my shelves are lined). Somewhere I probably still have a sixties vintage letter and drawing from the fan who made the outrageous accusations against you. At the time, I had no idea of that situation.

eI is an enormous accomplishment. For all I will miss issues 61+, it does not bother me that you will move on to other things—you deserve a rest after these extensive labors.

Thank you.



Friday August 5, 2011:

Greg Benford: But you can't quit! *eI* is such a great zine—I read it immediately.

Ted's usual high standard, and great Dan Steffan illo—all combine in an indictment of our stupid drug laws. What we learn the lesson of Prohibition?

Saturday August 6, 2011:

Dave Haren: I was saddened by the news that you are going to wrap up your excellent work of art.

I have enjoyed the recent issues. The material is not really available in such an easy to digest format and the history of the early days of publishing is priceless.

Thanks for sharing all of this material.

#

Robert Silverberg: *eI* is/was one of the great fanzines — a splendid way to wrap up your fannish career. I'll miss it very much.

Tuesday August 9, 2011:

John Purcell: Well, Earl, as they say, all good things must come to an end, and you at least have the decency to do so on your own terms. Not only that, but the issue in which you announce the eventual conclusion of *eI* is a damned good one. To be honest, I haven't finished reading all of Ted's "Letters from Jail," but I am about halfway through and it's fascinating reading. Kudos to you for making this possible, and a hearty thank you goes to Ted White for letting you do so.

You know, ten years of a bimonthly fanzine is a remarkable achievement, whether print or online. Even though I've downgraded *Askance* to a quarterly schedule now that it's in its fourth year, sometimes I get a bit tired of doing it. Then I start working on it, or I get locs, artwork, zines in the mailbox (the paper kind, you understand), and my energy level shifts into overdrive so that working on an issue becomes fun again. Because of this, I can tell you've had a lot of fun publishing this zine over this past decade, and I want you to

know that I've enjoyed it, even though I really haven't sent many locs your way. Trust me: I always read *eI* and have never found it wanting in the entertainment or enlightening areas. Thank you so much for producing this zine. It has been an education into who and what you are (I shall refrain from making a snooty aside comment here because I'm such a nice guy), and you have definitely succeeded in producing a record of your life in these pages/pixels. It has been a great run, and you should be proud of what you have produced.

That's enough groveling. I look forward to your ante-penultimate issue in a couple months, and maybe see you in Vegas at the next Corflu. With luck (and money in the bank) I will hopefully be there.

Thursday August 11, 2011:

Lloyd Penney: Yvonne and I are getting ready to go to the Worldcon in Reno in less than a week, so you can imagine we're fairly busy. Panels, parties, the usual stuff. So, I didn't realize until a few days ago that I'd fallen behind a little, and I have two issues of *eI* to comment on, so I'll do that here. First comes 56...

Also found out that the run of this fine fanzine will end with issue 60, and I will regret that. With 60 issues of the zine, do you plan to boil it all down, and write a biography?

That Foster cover...something about it says to me that this is indeed Ego, with geostationary satellites and monoliths dancing orbits around his head. Well done.

I have seen a few recommendations of *eI* on *Facebook* in my own newsfeed. I hope you've had more readers of late; maybe you will get more with the announcement of the end of the run.

My letter...many of us here and from the US attended what we termed the Final Mikecon, the regular annual birthday celebration and BBQ staged by Mike Glicksohn and Mike Harper. Lots of old friends and familiar faces, but it just wasn't the same... We needed that Glicksohn fellow there to make it complete, and we knew... For every smile and laugh, there was a sombre moment and a few tears. Whether we will ever meet like this again, I do not know. I hope Susan will let us know what her plans are.

If we have moved over the decades from eroticism to pornography today, what will porn look like in the future? There's a lot out there that will turn your crank, but with the rise of kiddie porn, snuff porn, so much more I'd rather not think of, what will future porn be like? A patch of naked curves just won't do it; I don't want to know what will.

Think there might be a copy or two of *WKSF*? available for sale at the Worldcon? I have it printed out from the .pdf, but I wouldn't mind a more durable version.

Good to see the LA Paperback Show is still going double-time. I imagine there were some sales, but more likely the whole thing is more of a family reunion. May it continue on for a good long time. Events like this, I do worry about, mostly because we can only last so long. And then comes 57...

I will make just one comment, seeing how much of what Ted went through in jail is so foreign to me. We've seen here some of the lowest characters in society, and so many of them land in jail. When we read what you and Ted went through in your own incarcerations, I can't think of anything worse that could happen to you. (Well, I can, actually...) We love our freedom too much to go through this, I would think. Is this sufficient warning to anyone else who might be risking a jail term? I suppose it's something to write about in a later day, but it's an experience I'd rather not have.

I am done, and I look forward to the next issue. You said that *eI59* will be the last chance to comment on an issue? Wrong. I will happily comment on issue 60. So there's no 61 to have it printed in? So what? Every good zine deserves some comment, and when 60 arrives, you will get a loc. But, there's 58 and 59 to deal with, and let's not rush things. See you with the next one.

Tuesday August 23, 2011:

Lawrence Block: You hadn't sent the link to *eI57*, and thanks for it. I paused just now to start reading Ted White's letters. I knew Ted a little bit back when Henry Morrison represented us both, and I believe he came to the house in Jersey in '67 or '68. No contact since then, and omigod that's more than 40 years.

Thursday September 1, 2011:

Guy Lillian (*The Zine Dump*): *eI57* This issue of Earl's e-zine consists almost entirely of Ted White's letters from prison, where he landed in 1986 after a short career retailing marijuana "to his friends." His account, excellent illustrated by Dan Steffan, is detailed and fascinating, even to one who's known hundreds of pumpkins (so named because of the usual color of prison jumpsuits I've seen) and visited dozens of jails. It's always illuminating to watch someone learn to survive in a place where the rules are not the rules he knows. As for White's crime and punishment, if all he did was peddle cannabis, nothing nastier, and if he was true first offender, then I'm astonished he drew any jail time at all (he got a ten-year sentence, nine suspended), and if indeed the arresting cop lied on the stand, then he shouldn't have been convicted of anything. Drug users impress me as fools, but corrupt authority impresses me as plain evil. Impressing me as great has been Earl Kemp; it crushes my spirit to hear his intent to retire from fanpubbing after two more issues. No! *No!*

Sunday September 11, 2011:

Bill Burns (*InTheBar*): [Ted's "Letters from Jail"] reads very well all in sequence, but at the time the story was a bit of a cliffhanger, as the letters trickled in via various fanzine editors one by one.

I received only a few of them back then, so I was very pleased to be able to put them all together in this special issue of *eI* and finally read the whole set. Ted, Dan, and Earl did a great job of assembling everything for publication.

Monday September 12, 2011:

Pat Charnock (*InTheBar*): It's very readable, and so well presented, with great layout, and lovely illos.

The big trouble with print, of course, is that it is an elitist art form. Most people can't read very well.

—Kurt Vonnegut, preface to "Between Time and Timbuktu"

Charles Stross' *Accelerando*: The Problem of Scientific Illiteracy and how "The Rapture for Nerds" Can Save Us

By Mark Biswas

On July 17, 2009, CNN.com's leading story "celebrated" the 40th anniversary of the Apollo moon landing with a piece entitled "Could moon landings have been faked? Some still think so." The fact that the headline was phrased as an open-ended question already indicated the tone of the article: it was not especially interrogatory. They did not interview any scientists or mention the conclusive evidence about the matter.

Such an article is bad enough in itself—not only by denying facts is it hostile to science, but also because it is insulting to the thousands of dedicated people who worked hard to make the Apollo program a reality. It is made worse by the fact that on that morning NASA had released stunning images from the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter of the lunar landing sites. In these images we were able to see for the first time lunar modules, scientific instruments, and even footprints of the astronauts themselves on the surface of the Moon. These images were not featured on CNN.com at any time during the day, and were only mentioned in passing at the very end of the piece.

CNN's article is only one example, unfortunately, of the much larger issue about science illiteracy. In one sense, it brings into question concerns about critical thinking skills. In a piece about pseudoscience and postmodernism, Alan Sokal worries that "credulity in minor matters prepares the mind for credulity in matters of greater import—and, conversely, that the kind of critical thinking useful for distinguishing science from pseudoscience might also be of some use in distinguishing truths in affairs of state from lies" (341). In a world of accelerating change, these critical thinking skills will become even more important. Moon hoaxers' credulity will not serve them well in a time when potentially society-altering technology will have to be carefully evaluated and debated by scientists and the public alike. Chris Mooney's article, "The Science of Why we Don't Believe Science," explores how emotion and one's own invested values—not rationalism—take precedence when judging whether or not to believe a scientific fact. This is why moon hoaxers will always be undeterred, as they can easily explain away any new evidence—even the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter's images[i].



Mark Biswas

Another facet of science illiteracy concerns communication, which Mooney and Sheril Kirshenbaum address in *Unscientific America: How Science Illiteracy Threatens Our Future*. While acknowledging disturbing statistics, (80% of Americans do not have the scientific knowledge necessary to understand the Science section of the *New York Times*, they cite) they choose to broaden illiteracy to include communication issues. Science is not inspiring the public, and the amount of quality science journalism is on the decline:

career prospects for science reporters, the journalistic breed that cut its teeth covering the space race, have probably never been worse. As of 2005, only about 7 percent of the 2,126 members of the National Association of Science Writers had full-time positions at media outlets that reach broad publics—newspapers, popular magazines, radio, and television. The rest were freelancers, more specialized journalists, or public affairs officers for universities and other institutions. (69)

Journalists and scientists alike must take more proactive roles in informing the public about science, and changing their attitudes about it. Although both aspects are important and should be addressed, I will

primarily focus on Mooney and Kirshenbaum's concerns as they appear in the singularity/posthuman work, Charles Stross' *Accelerando*. In the CNN article I have just criticized, Roger Launius, a senior curator at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, is quoted: "Going to the moon is hard to understand. And it's easier for some people to accept the answer that, 'Well, maybe we didn't go to the moon.' A lot of it is naiveté." This statement will serve as a springboard to the discussion of *Accelerando*. SF (especially posthuman and singularity SF) is about change. As Isaac Asimov writes, "it is change, continuing change, inevitable change that is the dominant factor in society today. No sensible decision can be made any longer without taking into account not only the world as it is, but the world as it will be.... This, it turn, means that [we] must take on a science fictional way of thinking" (Asimov 19-20). Singularity SF concerns itself with rapidly accelerating change in particular, so it could be said that it is the "ultimate" expression of SF in Asimov's terms. In Stross' novel, I will examine those who both oppose the accelerating change, and those who advocate it. Are their positions based on legitimate concerns? Or, like the moon landings, do they stem from their preexisting values and beliefs? If it is the latter, what can SF teach us about the issue of scientific illiteracy? In addressing these questions, I hope to demonstrate that in the world of *Accelerando*, critical thinking skills are needed more than ever to understand and function in the rapidly changing world.

In order to function in this world, one must think like a scientist, a skill that is not commonplace today and will only steadily increase in importance in the coming decades. Chris Mooney and Sheril Kirshenbaum warn that "incomprehensibly big changes are coming, and we need a strong rapprochement between science and our technology *before* the next high-profile crack-up occurs" (129). One does not need to be futurist Ray Kurzweil—a hardcore Singularitarian who believes a technological singularity will arrive around 2045—to understand the importance of this issue. Even if *Accelerando* never becomes our future, our present is awash with problems that require science-based solutions and a society that can understand that science. Even if the "rapture for nerds" lets Ray Kurzweil down in 2045, it may just be okay, because it could end up saving us anyway, in a different way. Its ideas of accelerating change are present in Stross' novel, where he pushes the necessity of scientific understanding to the extreme and thereby showing just how important scientific literacy is in the present, and will be in the future. While the hard SF genre in general grapples with this concept, I'm choosing *Accelerando* for this discussion because of it focuses on the *process* of change, and not merely the end result. This focus is apt for scientific illiteracy discussion because unlike many characters in hard SF, *Accelerando's* question what the world is and is becoming, and what it should become. As a hard SF novel, *Accelerando* is closer to Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars*, than, say, Arthur Clarke's *Rendezvous with Rama*. All of these works demonstrate the necessity of scientific understanding—Robinson's to live on Mars, and Clarke's to understand a mysterious cylindrical spaceship. However, *Accelerando* and *Red Mars* specifically address whether or not accelerated technological change *should happen*. For *Red Mars*, debate ensues about the moral implications for terraforming Mars. In *Accelerando*, paradigm shifts of all kinds—economic, technological—societal—are constantly occurring, each one inciting debate. Ideological concerns are present in these novels that aren't present in novels like *Rama*. It is in these ideological discussions that characters bring to the forefront questions concerning scientific illiteracy.

In connecting *Accelerando* with these issues of scientific illiteracy, I will focus on three main characters: Pamela, Manfred Macx, and Sirhan al-Kurasani. In these characters we can see differing attitudes regarding accelerated change. Pamela is what futurists might describe as a fundamentalist luddite. She sees accelerating change as being in strict opposition to her own values, which she feels are rapidly eroding away. This anxiety makes her cling to old paradigms, even if her society has already discarded them. Manfred is a full-blown Singularitarian, much like Kurzweil, in his unending optimism for accelerated change. As a venture altruist, he utilizes his technological prowess to manipulate corporations, satisfying his desire of making information free and other people instant billionaires. As a historian, Sirhan's position on technology is more nuanced. Neither a luddite nor a blind believer, he recognizes the profound impact technology has had on his life, both good and bad. (And what he perceives as good/bad does not remain static throughout the course of the novel.) He is also radical in ways that surprise even Manfred.

What do these characters have to do with scientific illiteracy? Pamela may be considered to be analogous to an apathetic public, unwilling to acknowledge science's transformative powers in the world. Her identity is so invested in conservative values that she emotionally declares *Accelerando's* change as dangerous and socially

destructive, regardless of the facts in front of her. The key idea here is that she ignores these facts, which is what makes her akin to a scientifically illiterate public. It is not that she is being irrational by merely opposing inherently progressive technological progress, as there may be good reasons for doing so; rather, she is relying on her ideology rather than rational argumentation to make her claims. Manfred is the nerd scientist who cannot relate to this public, epitomized by his divorce with Pamela. His optimism also blinds him to larger concerns, such as the Vile Offspring (godlike superintelligences that threaten to overwhelm the solar system) and his own AI-controlled cat, Aikeko. Sirhan, on the other hand, is an ideal technologist. Aware of the societal impacts of accelerating change (in part because he was used and abused by technology in his youth) as well as its benefits, he can be seen as the bridge of communication which Mooney and Kirshenbaum desire. The gap, they argue, should be closed by scientists themselves, because they “and the people who care about their work, knows best what is being missed, why it matters, and indeed, how the science-society gap places our entire future at risk” (132). Sirhan’s nuanced views of accelerated change allow him to similarly bridge the science-society gap.

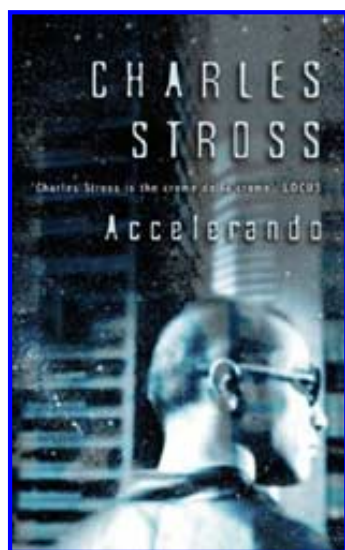
The conflict between Pamela and Manfred occupies much of the first half of the novel. Stross paints Manfred as a clichéd, hyperbolic cyberpunk hero, adapting and evolving to the waves of accelerated change with ease, a master at manipulating the virtual and the real, or any technology that may come his way or that he predicts is on the horizon, one foot stuck in the present and one in the future. As a proponent of accelerated change, he is “accelerated” himself, always on the move, even during his morning routine: “He speed reads a new pop-philosophy tome while he brushes his teeth, then blogs his web throughput to a public annotation server; he’s still too enervated to finish his pre-breakfast routine by posting a morning rant on his storyboard site....He needs stimulus, excitement, the burn of the new” (11). He is often distracted about thoughts concerning the future at comically inappropriate times: “He’s still explaining to her how he’s laying the foundations for the transhuman explosion due early in the next decade when she picks him up in both arms, carries him to her bedroom, and commits outrageous acts of tender intimacy with him. But that’s okay. He’s still human, this decade” (72). He frequently launches into drunken tirades about his vision of the future: “Dismantle the moon! Dismantle Mars! Build masses of free-flying nanocomputing processor nodes exchanging data via laser link, each layer running off the waste heat of the next one in Matrioshka brains, Russian doll Dyson Spheres the size of solar systems. Teach dumb matter to do the Turing Boogie” (18-19). This passage is interesting for a few reasons. Unknown to the reader at this time, Manfred is remarkably prescient: although Dyson Spheres do not envelop the entire solar system by the end of the novel, matter including the moon and Mars does get converted into Turing machines (He completely misses the mark as to *who* builds them, but we’ll come to that later.) The *context* of the speech—he is in a bar, quite drunk—causes the reader to dismiss him offhand. His ravings seem absurd. If he had made the same prediction at a formal nanotech conference that would not have been the case, and the reader would be more inclined to pay attention to the content of his predictions. It is in this way that the passage *performs* what Mooney argues in “The Science of Why We Don’t Believe Science”:

The theory of motivated reasoning builds on a [key insight of modern neuroscience](#): Reasoning is actually suffused with emotion (or what researchers often call “affect”). Not only are the two inseparable, but our positive or negative feelings about people, things, and ideas arise much more rapidly than our conscious thoughts, in a matter of milliseconds—fast enough to detect with an EEG device, but long before we’re aware of it.

The negative feelings the reader may have about Manfred mask any thoughts he may have of whether his predictions will actually come true.

These negative feelings probably aren’t intended by Stross, as Manfred is clearly a sort of populist hero. Manfred also shares many of the concerns as Stross regarding the freedom of information, as Stross has also expressed frustration over the difficulty of releasing his books under a Creative Commons License (Stross “Publishing Experiments”). But despite this, it is still possible to see Manfred at this point of the novel as a Kurzweilian futurist. Following his rant, Manfred’s skeptical companion, Bob, asks, “Sounds kind of long term to me. Just how far do you think?” To which he replies, “Very long-term—at least twenty, thirty years” (19). The juxtaposition of this indicator with Manfred’s drunken rant suggests that we should take

futurists' predictions with a grain of salt—they may be correct in some things, but in others they could be entirely off-base. And they might just be a little bit nutty, like a crazed prophet. In the Ray Kurzweil documentary *Transcendent Man*, *Wired* editor-in-chief Chris Anderson describes Kurzweil as a prophet figure: “His belief in this is complete—he seems to have no doubts about it. And in that sense I think he is kind of a prophetic type figure.” The documentary paints Kurzweil similarly to Pamela in that he also allows his own emotions to influence his predictions. Kurzweil lost his father at a young age, and now he collects as much information he can about his father—documents, letters, and photographs—in the hopes that an advanced AI will be able to assimilate it all to create a virtual approximation of him. Kurzweil would be 97 in 2045—just in time to make it to the immortality that he believes the Singularity will provide. As Mooney says, “We have other important goals besides accuracy—including identity affirmation and protecting one’s sense of self—and often those make us highly resistant to changing our beliefs when the facts say we should.” It is hard to believe that Kurzweil’s own identity affirmation, hopes, and emotions did not influence his calculations when determining the 2045 date.



Manfred’s exaggerated portrayal is in sharp contrast to Pamela’s introductory description, which is much more conservative: “She’s immaculately turned out in a formal gray business suit: brown hair tightly drawn back, blue eyes quizzical. And as beautiful as ever: tall, ash blonde, with features that speak of an unexplored modeling career. The chaperone badge clipped to her lapel - a due diligence guarantee of businesslike conduct - is switched off” (16). Her traditional business attire symbolizes her conservative nature, as does her potential rejection of “an unexplored modeling career,” choosing instead the safe, traditional, “socially responsible” profession. Stross calls her a “born-again postconservative, a member of the first generation to grow up after the end of the American century. [She is] driven by a need to fix the decaying federal system...” (42). Pamela’s desire to fix twentieth-century problems in a twenty-first century world results in her either rejecting the notion that things have changed (“self-denial”) or condemning the change that she cannot ignore. Whereas Manfred is all about exploring and innovating, Pamela prefers to stick to her conservative values.

During Neil Easterbrook’s presentation “Singularities” at the 2011 Eaton Conference, he identified a “transition anxiety” in *Accelerando* due to the characters’ inability to cope with change. Pamela feels that society is rejecting her values. She cannot control this, but she retaliates by controlling what she can. She starts with Manfred: physically restraining him by the end of the first chapter, he is rendered helpless. She wields complete power over him sexually; it is a complete reversal of what he is used to, i.e. freely doing whatever he pleases without paying for anything. Instead of being liberated and liberating everything by releasing his wares to the world for free, his body is being used to control him. This emphasizes the ideological gap that exists between them. They cannot communicate effectively, and Pamela “pauses for a moment’s thought: There’s a huge ideological chasm to bridge, after all” (21). And the end result of this scene, for Pamela, is a child, Amber. But despite the fact that they get married as a result, she tries to use both the marriage and Amber as a means to restrict him. Stross describes her motivation thusly: “Pam is chasing him partially for ideological reasons - she still hasn’t given up on the idea of government as the dominant superorganism of the age...Driven by the need to fix the decaying federal system before it collapses under a mound of Medicare bills...she’s willing to use self-denial ... and any other tool that boosts the bottom line.” (26). She doesn’t approve of the fact that Manfred doesn’t need money, and sees his activities as a threat to her beloved federal system. Accelerating change has displaced the power of the government in favor of Manfred’s manipulated economics, but she is still in denial about this fact. However, it is ambiguous as to whether Pamela is truly against Manfred’s leech-like behavior due to moral reasons, or if she is simply frustrated over her lack of understanding (and thus control) over this new future. Pamela doesn’t understand the new world economy that is no longer based on nation states and taxes, which is why she lashes out; perhaps her morality is merely a façade.

Manfred is a master at manipulating economic models for his own gain. This is significant for a few reasons. For Stross, economic models are poorly portrayed in SF, and so this allows him to rectify the genre’s

mistakes:

Science fiction has traditionally been economically naive, with a strong libertarian streak which I think is like a crude Leninism. That's attractive because it could be used to explain everything, and if only we lived by its tenets, everything would be perfect. Except that we have to assume perfectly uniform and spherical humans of a fixed density for it to work. Humans are complex and if you show them a system, a subset of them will try to game the system for their own benefits. (Hecht)

Manfred, of course, games the system in order to attain wealth for the purposes of accelerating technological change. But beyond this, it allows Stross to emphasize the degree to which change is accelerating. Compared to science and technology, law and economics change at a much slower rate. Consider digital copyright issues. When Napster first came on the scene in 1999, music lovers enjoyed a few years of easily accessible (but illegal) music as the lawyers began to scratch their heads, wondering what to do. When the torrent site *The Pirate Bay* went to court in 2009, it was found guilty of copyright infringement. The case has been appealed, but even if the ruling is maintained it will make little difference. Most of its servers have moved to the Netherlands, where Swedish courts have no jurisdiction (Ionescu). Laws are still largely bound by nation-states, but with technologies like the Internet, borders become increasingly meaningless. The law has yet to adapt to this. Beyond copyright, lawyers will have to address a myriad of issues that their law is not prepared for, among them privacy issues surrounding the use of the Internet and virtual reality^[ii], ethical concerns with bio and nanotechnology, and so on. Technology doesn't care if the law is "ready"; it simply marches on while legislators scramble to catch up.

If the law is slow, then it follows that the conservative Pamela would side with slow-adopting lawyers. Resistant to change, she allies herself with those whose values are similarly old-fashioned, if not irrelevant. After Manfred is visited by the Copyright Control office, he calls attention to the fact that they are living in the past:

Russian gangsters from New York bought the recording cartels a few years ago, you know? After the rights stitch-up fell apart, and the artists all went on-line while they focused on copy prevention technologies, the Mafiya were the only people who would buy the old business model. These guys add a whole new meaning to copy protection: This was just a polite cease and desist notice by their standards. They run the record shops, and they try to block any music distribution channel they don't own. Not very successfully, though - most gangsters are living in the past, more conservative than any normal businessman can afford to be. (51-52)

Both business models, and the legislation that makes them function, quickly become outmoded by *Accelerando's* accelerating change.

The portrayal of lawyers is actually comically evil—apparently Russian gangsters (the Mafiya bought the recording “cartels”—and the reader cheers on Manfred as he resists them. Pamela's lawyer, Glaschweitz, is portrayed as a clichéd villain complete with “goons.” The fact that Pamela relies so heavily on lawyers to pursue her crusade against Manfred is particularly revealing, as it shows that Pamela has no intention of accepting the possibility that Manfred's point of view may be correct. Mooney writes that people will often think like lawyers, rationalizing rather than reasoning:

To use an analogy offered by University of Virginia psychologist [Jonathan Haidt](#): We may think we're being scientists, but [we're actually being lawyers](#). Our “reasoning” is a means to a predetermined end—winning our “case”—and is shot through with biases. They include ‘confirmation bias,’ in which we give greater heed to evidence and arguments that bolster our beliefs, and ‘disconfirmation bias,’ in which we expend disproportionate energy trying to debunk or refute views and arguments that we find uncongenial. (Mother Jones).

Pamela reflects both biases constantly, reading each situation in the exact way that affirms her own values.

When her grandson, Sirhan, explains to her how he lived multiple childhoods at once, she finds the notion distasteful, and it is further proof that societal norms are being shattered: “When I was a little girl that was all there was; none of these questions of self-selected Identity. There was no escape, merely escapism. Didn’t you have a problem knowing who you are?” (277).

Pamela certainly spends “disproportionate energy” trying to prove her point that living forever “is immoral. Think of all the resources you’re taking up that younger people need! Even uploads face a finite data storage limit after a time! It’s a monstrously egotistical statement, to say that you intend to live forever. And if there’s one thing I believe in, it’s public service. Duty: the obligation to make way for the new. [iii] Duty and control” (279). Her argument here is a completely reasonable position to take, in that it is a matter of opinion, not empirical study, and that she is perfectly within her rights to decide to die. Her decision to reject immortality and embrace death requires considerable commitment on her part, considering the social and technological change that has arisen against it. Sirhan views this decision as an act of revenge—it is her way of “getting even” with a husband and a society that she believes has shunned the values that she holds dear. And if we can say anything positive about Pamela, it is that she is extremely loyal to her values.

But to pigeonhole Pamela as a slow-moving dinosaur is disingenuous. Unlike most lawyers, she can adapt in precisely the same way that Manfred has: “lawsuits are hitting his corporate grid at a rate of one every sixteen seconds - up from none in the preceding six months...If it keeps up for a week, it’ll saturate every court in the United States. Someone has found a means to do for lawsuits what he’s doing for companies - and they’ve chosen him as their target” (34). This “someone” is of course Pamela. She is willing to combat fire with fire if the situation demands it. For Manfred, however, Pamela’s interference is only a minor setback. By means of a few clever business maneuvers, he deeds Pamela intellectual property assets of twentieth-century music worth over a billion dollars as a way to avoid her lawyer’s fees. But Pamela can’t access this potential money because, Manfred explains, “She still believes in classical economics, the allocation of resources under conditions of scarcity. Information doesn’t work that way...people will be able to hear the music—instead of a Soviet central planning system, I’ve turned the network into a firewall to protect freed intellectual property” (67). Pamela may be able to adapt to change to some extent, but only as far as it will serve her own beliefs. Manfred is concerned with the future, which is why he is able to beat her in this case. By protecting freed intellectual property, not only is he outmaneuvering Pamela, but he is also laying the groundwork for protecting AI rights as well—another example of Manfred as a “futurist” forward-thinker.

It is important to note that for Pamela and Manfred, communication is a lost cause. No effort is made to listen and respond intelligently to the other’s points—rather, they are essentially yelling at each other with hands over their ears and tongues sticking out like children. When Manfred reveals his plan to outwit her, she curses at him. Rather than trying to explain his position, he “forces a smile, bemused by his inability to respond to her the way she wants” (71). It isn’t until the following scene that he explains his actions to his second wife, Annette. Unfortunately there is too great an “ideological gap” between Manfred and Pamela for him to convince her that the world she thinks she lives in no longer exists. Their poor communications skills can be seen as analogous to the issues Mooney and Kirshenbaum address in *Unscientific America*. Manfred epitomizes the scientific community and the media’s inadequacy in communicating scientific concerns. In the media, science coverage is on the decline. The authors cite deregulation and decades of media mergers as responsible for the homogenization of content, of which science coverage is the first to go:

Producing [science coverage] requires seasoned journalists with high levels of training, who expect to receive salaries commensurate with their experience and expertise. These journalists are expensive, and media owners seem to keep making the judgment that they’re not worth it, that science journalism doesn’t draw enough eyeballs or, ultimately, advertisers. (78)

As a result, the job market for science reporters is grim. The deregulation and merging of companies has created an environment where what is desirable is to please investors—and that means making every newsroom make the most profitable product. In this atmosphere, science news never makes the cut. The authors call for need to invest more into science media so that more science is picked up on American’s radars. Federal funding for the teaching of science communication, as well as creating more not-for-profit

sources of science journalism may also be part of a solution (78).

As both Manfred and Pamela are to blame for their inability to reconcile their differences, the media is not the sole problem. Mooney and Kirshenbaum point out that scientists have a responsibility to communicate with the outside world; they cannot remain locked away inside laboratories. In *Accelerando*, Manfred isn't particularly interested in educating others about how to maneuver Economics 2.0 so much as he is interested in figuring out ways to bend the system himself (although he does educate and help his daughter escape Pamela's control via loopholes that involve selling her as a "slave" to a shell company) We need to train scientists with the necessary communications skills to engage the public: "Do they learn to tell stories about what they do through narrative, and thereby appeal to the interests of audiences much broader than a group of lab mates?...Do they understand the different needs of politicians, journalists, and entertainers, for scientific information, and are they prepared to convey their knowledge in the appropriate form?" (125). More scientists must be willing to have an active public role as part of the job. Carl Sagan, and now Neal deGrasse Tyson, Brian Greene, and Michio Kaku all have undertaken to engage the public through TV programs, popular science books, and the requisite Steven Colbert appearance. While physics is adequately represented (why are physicists so good at this?) most fields are not. Who is the "Carl Sagan" of environmental science or biochemistry?

Pamela and Manfred end up separating due to "irreconcilable ideological differences," but such a separation in such a society is not desirable for the 21st century. Pamela is definitely not stupid nor ignorant about the rapidly-accelerating technology, yet her ideology seems to guide her actions, preventing her from any systematic analysis of the technology that she sees as problematic. How do we get the Pamelas of the world to think with informed facts rather than allow their ideology to predetermine what facts they should believe? Mooney and Kirshenbaum's goal in redefining what "scientific illiteracy" encompasses this important aspect: "Luckily, there is another side to the scientific literacy tradition, one that goes beyond the standard emphasis on factual or theoretical scientific knowledge to stress...citizen's awareness of the importance of science to politics, policy, and our collective future" (18). In *Accelerando*, Pamela is smart and capable, even to the point of using the very technology that frightens her to serve her own ideological ends. But despite this, her conservative outlook forbids her to see to what extent science and technology is changing the world.



The juxtaposition of Manfred and Pamela serves as the main source of interpersonal conflict in the novel, as we've seen. Perhaps Stross is suggesting that between these two diametrically opposed viewpoints—Pamela's misunderstanding due to her morality, and Manfred's blind optimism—there is room for a more moderate position, which we may find in Sirhan, Manfred's grandson. He is interested in accelerating change. But as a historian, he is more interested in understanding the past in order to better understand the *present*, rather in extrapolating trends in order to predict the future. He is focused on practical human concerns, rather than the pursuit of knowledge, like Manfred. He is not a Kurzweilian in his optimism, but neither is he a conservative like Pamela (although Manfred thinks otherwise). His thoughts concerning technology are nuanced and complex. Consider his childhood. In his earlier conversation with Pamela, we learn that he does not admire his mother for lazily pressing the reset switch, so to speak, in the hopes that sooner or later a "good" version of him will pop out of simulation. However, he acknowledges that "The more people you are, the more you know who you are...You learn what it's like to be other people" (277). But later in the following century, we are told that "This experience scarred him as badly as any nineteenth-century boarding school experience..." (226). Over time though, his opinion of that particular technological experience changes. Sirhan is adaptive, allowing facts and experiences, rather than blind ideology, to inform his beliefs. This trait is what sets him apart from Pamela.

Sirhan's damaging and bizarre childhood may lead one to predict that his own approach to parenting will be

conservative in comparison; however, the opposite is the case. His son, Manni, is actually a reincarnation of Manfred. This leaves even the progressive Adult-Manfred uncomfortable: “just why they want to raise an ancestor instead of creating a new child of their own is one of those cultural quirks that is so alien he can barely comprehend it” (275). Manni’s own childhood is even more technologically altered than Sirhan’s: “Manni has grown up with neural interfaces to City’s mind-space an order of magnitude more complex than those of Sirhan’s used, and parts of him...are fully adult” (392). This suggests that Sirhan has decided that traditional childhood is, in fact, painfully limiting.

Manfred’s pro-singularity ideology doesn’t dictate his actions entirely; like Sirhan, he too changes his views. When the Vile Offspring threaten to consume the solar system, two factions of posthumans form: *accelerationistas* and the time-binders. The time-binders want to move further out of the solar system, delaying the incoming Vile Offspring in hope that during that time a final solution will present itself. *The accelerationistas* believe that retreating to a distant brown dwarf is the best solution. The Manfred of the twenty-first century would certainly be an *accelerationista*, excited about the possibilities of a new technological singularity. But his opinion has changed: “Sooner or later, we’ll have the same problem all over again, runaway intelligence argumentation, self-expression, engineered intelligences, whatever...We carry the seeds of a singularity with us whenever we go, and if we try to excise those seeds, we cease to be human...” (356). If Manfred had stuck to his ideology, he would have committed disconfirmation bias by ignoring the Vile Offspring, explaining them away or dismissing them outright. But he has learned that singularities, as much as he loves them, will always lead to a nonhuman, and possibly threatening, intelligence.

Manfred and Pamela clearly demonstrate motivated reasoning, as we’ve seen: Manfred wants to reach a technological singularity so much that he is blinded by any potential threats. Pamela desires to uphold her conservative values, causing her to treat anything that may be a threat to those values with suspicion. Their ideologies often prohibit them from considering other points of view. But is motivated reasoning entirely undesirable? And is it always illogical? Mooney writes, “it doesn’t make sense to discard an entire belief system, built up over a lifetime, because of some new snippet of information...In certain conservative communities, explains Yale’s Kahan, “People who say, ‘I think there’s something to climate change,’ that’s going to mark them out as a certain kind of person, and their life is going to go less well.” (Mother Jones) In certain social situations, it may be beneficial to hold a particular position regardless of the facts. Also, belief systems should be challenged and questioned by new pieces of information, but not overturned until a *variety* of facts or experiences makes those beliefs no longer tenable. Otherwise, one’s beliefs would be constantly changing. If Pamela and Manfred did not have their respective ideologies, they would not be goal-oriented, driven characters. Their ideologies give them purpose. Moreover, it is difficult to say that they are being irrational when they allow their ideologies to govern their thoughts. For example, it may well have been illogical for Pamela to give up her position when Manfred outmaneuvers her and her lawyers early in the novel. Manfred may well have been right about how dramatically economics changed, but Pamela doesn’t let this victory get to her, and for good reason—she turns out to be right, too. The end result of accelerated change is the Vile Offspring, and although Pamela does not predict the Vile Offspring per se, as she is more concerned with the sociological implications rather than a potential threat to humanity, her conservative viewpoint turns out to be correct, albeit for the wrong reasons.

But Pamela may be right about the societal implications as well, to a degree. Stross doesn’t go into detail regarding the posthuman enclave around Saturn. It seems to be relatively utopian, (as “utopian” as being under threat from the Vile Offspring can be) with a post-scarcity economy. But the human relationships are all extremely dysfunctional. Not amoral per se, but there is definitely a case to be made that characters lack a sense of familial responsibility. Even Pamela, for all her pining that familial values are falling by the wayside, is a terrible mother herself, strictly controlling her daughter’s life in order to compensate for what she sees as a morally deteriorating world: “Children need moral absolutes, especially in a changing world, even if they don’t like it much of the time. Self-discipline and stability, you can’t function as an adult without them” (270). Unfortunately, her ideology translates to an extremely controlling situation for Amber, leading her to plead to Manfred for help: “Mom’s getting loopier every week—she’s dragging me round all these churches now, and yesterday, she threw a fit over me talking to my terminal...Every time I tunnel out, she tries to put a content-

bot on me, and it's making my head hurt..." (73).

Ironically, then, it is Manfred who might just be the most socially responsible character in the novel. He rescues Amber from Pamela's oppressive parental hands and, most importantly spearheads an effort to unite the *accelerationistas* and time-benders in order to combat the Vile Offspring. The same forward-thinking that causes him to be a crazed prophet at the onset makes him aware of the threat that they pose. Manfred is frustrated that others don't think in this way: "It's downright embarrassing to be a member of a species with such a profound lack of curiosity for its own future..." (347). He observes that an apathy for knowledge exists, even for events that, for us in the present day, would fundamentally change us forever: "Two years ago, JPL, the ESA, and the uploaded lobster colony on comet Khrunichev-7 picked up an apparently artificial signal from outside the solar system; most people don't know, and of those who do, even fewer care" (46).

An information-saturated world isn't necessarily one that recognizes the importance of science and rational thinking, which is one of Mooney and Kirshenbaum's main points. The Internet is a place where one can find information to support any argument one wishes: "Faced with...people intellectually driven and empowered as never before by the profusion of "science"—good, bad, and awful—on the Internet, one soon recognizes that the lack of scientific knowledge is probably not the main problem" (15-16). In *Accelerando*, Pamela is definitely not stupid nor ignorant about the rapidly-accelerating technology, yet her ideology seems to guide her actions, preventing her from any systematic analysis of the technology that she sees as problematic. How do we get the Pamelas of the world to base their thinking on established facts? Mooney and Kirshenbaum's goal in redefining what "scientific illiteracy" embraces this important aspect: "Luckily, there is another side to the scientific literacy tradition, one that goes beyond the standard emphasis on factual or theoretical scientific knowledge to stress...citizen's awareness of the importance of science to politics, policy, and our collective future" (18).

In the present anti/pseudoscience climate, "Pamelas" are in abundance. Perhaps the most recent example of this is the nuclear fallout map that went viral on the Internet following the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan[iv]. The map described lethal levels of nuclear radiation drifting over the Pacific and entering the western United States. Most alarmingly, this incident showed that humans are primarily emotional rather than logical beings. Rather than appeal to the experts—the Japanese Nuclear Scientists who said numerous times that there was no threat of fallout—and nuclear experts who said that the radiation levels on the map were more in line with nuclear weapons, not a nuclear meltdown—people were inclined to believe the scary image forwarded to their inbox. Both Pamela and the email-forwarding public react with their gut instinct rather than seeking out facts.

That's not to say that scientists should be listened to without question. Journalists, and the public, need to ask intelligent questions. Of course, this requires the public to have suitable background knowledge to know what to ask in the first place. If 80% of the public cannot read the Science section of the *New York Times*, then how can they intelligently respond to what scientists tell them?

In December 2010, NASA scientists announced the discovery of an extremophile bacteria that is able to use arsenic in its DNA instead of phosphorus. Unfortunately, bad media reports sensationalized the story, reporting as though the bacteria was "arsenic-based," which might give a Trek geek thoughts of finding silicon-based Horta's roaming Titan. The truth is that while the bacteria can use arsenic, they use it poorly and perform far better under phosphorus. This is once again an instance of the public reacting with emotion—instead of fear and doom, in this case it's a sense of excitement. And while public excitement in science is certainly a good, needed thing, it isn't worth obtaining at the expense of truth. The public and the media aren't solely to blame for this, however. Physicist and astronomer Phil Plait, for example, criticized NASA for "overhyping"—it said that the event would have "implications for astrobiology" days before, which accelerated media speculation even more than usual (Plait). What's probably most tragic about this is that for the general public, the sensational bit is what gets remembered. It doesn't matter that there is a healthy debate going on in the scientific community, because that debate is not being covered by the mainstream media. Why? Mooney and Kirshenbaum: "Media coverage tends to be episodic and event-driven, always in search of the dramatic and the new" (71).

Media sensationalizing can distort science and technology in ways that glorify science, but it can also condemn it. CERN's Large Hadron Collider, or LHC, a particle accelerator designed to mimic the state of the universe close to the big bang, was criticized when scientists said that there was a small possibility of the creation of a mini black hole. Never mind that it would exist for an extremely short amount of time and cause no ill effects—it was enough to cause a panic, even causing CERN to be the target of a lawsuit. This irrationality was combated in the blogosphere with rational, scientifically-bound arguments, humorous websites (<http://hasthelargehadroncolliderdestroyedtheworldyet.com/>) and a study by CERN itself, who concluded that the LHC posed no threat to earth.

In addition to Pamela and Manfred's ideologies, the nature of the novel as posthuman and singularity SF story also support the idea that rapid change will require a better understanding and appreciation of science in our lives. It is impossible to say how Stross views the posthuman as socially harmful or not (or, we might say, *illogical to conclude*, based on the evidence provided). It is a dysfunctional family, for sure, but it is only one dysfunctional family; Stross does not show us how posthumanity has affected society as a whole. Pamela's dysfunctional marriage, control issues, her inability to communicate, and poor parenting skills exist despite her ideological stance. This would suggest, then, that Stross expresses that there isn't anything inherently "sociologically damaging" about posthumanism in and of itself. In fact, he strengthens their humanity by doing so: people are still people, complete with their faults and foibles.

Aineko, the cat, complicates this argument, however. When it is revealed that it was manipulating Manfred's family the entire time, the author calls into question how the reader is supposed to judge the characters. What, if any, agency did they exhibit? Was their dysfunctional state a product of Aineko's meddling? Stross leaves this ambiguous: "Sirhan knows Aineko manipulated his eigenmother, bending her natural affection away from his real father and toward another man. In moments of black introspection, he wondered if the cat wasn't also responsible in some way for his own broken upbringing, the failure to relate to his real parents" (341). If the ultimate source of the family's dysfunction is Aineko, and not simply human faults, this paints a much darker picture of accelerating change. It would suggest that there is no room for humanity at all. Despite the threat that the Vile Offspring pose, at least they are a *recognized* threat. Aineko's origins as a pet, and his slow evolution throughout *Accelerando*, mask his true motivations as a post-singularity AI, who has proved itself to be apathetic concerning the welfare of humans.

This darker interpretation would be in line with Stross' own beliefs. Reading Stross' FAQ for the twenty-first century, it is obvious that he is no Kurzweilian. His vision for the twenty-first century is downright tame, especially for a SF writer—for him, the most defining change will be that people will continue to migrate to cities. Not exactly exciting SF material. Here, he explicitly states that if the Singularity were to arrive in the way Kurzweil envisions it, it would surely be a bad thing: "The rapture of the nerds, like space colonization, is likely to be a non-participatory event for 99.999% of humanity—unless we're very unlucky." This idea is played out in the Vile Offspring—separated from humanity by a huge gap in intelligence, their motives can be only guessed at. They are the quintessential singularity. And Manfred's family is quite unlucky, having been manipulated by Aikeko.

Kurzweil doesn't like to make the distinction between "us" and "them": "I'm using the third person they but it's actually going to be us," he tells us (*Transcendent Man*). In fact, for him, the entire point of the singularity is to augment the best of what it means to be human. This is why he dislikes the term "posthuman," arguing that it creates artificial boundaries between what is human and what is something else, he believes that biological and mechanical intelligence will merge. The result: "The singularity is the sweetest music, the deepest art, the most beautiful mathematics" (Kurzweil 367). If Kurzweil had written *Accelerando*, the posthuman enclaves would not exist—rather, their information would be contained in the smart matter enveloping the solar system.

The place where posthumanism and singularities become most relevant to science illiteracy lies in their unpredictability. Stross believes that there will be "unknown unknowns" which cannot be predicted, unlike Kurzweil. In this category, he includes biotech, nanotech, AI, and "other stuff so weird and strange I can't even guess at it." If the twenty-first century turns out to be less predictable than Kurzweil would like to

believe, and accelerated change isn't as radical as Kurzweil predicts or Stross depicts in his fiction, it isn't to say that Kirshenbaum and Mooney's desired goals will be no less relevant. (Indeed, even if it were the case that technological change and scientific discoveries were *decelerating*, a rational public that pays attention to science and communicates with scientists would still be highly desirable.) But if scientific change is more gradual but less predictable in the coming decades, then a scientifically literate society is just as important, because it would take such a society to cope with the "unknown unknowns" just as it would to deal with Kurzweil's accelerated change (which would also probably come with its share of its "unknown unknowns," no matter how adept Kurzweil believes he is at predicting trends).

In *The Singularity Is Near*, in the chapter entitled "The Impact..." Kurzweil describes how nanotechnology will eliminate aging, fundamentally alter the digestive system so it will become possible to eat whatever food you wish without health affects, how intelligence will become augmented, and our bodies' appearance will become 100% modifiable, and so on. These are all examples about how potential technology will impact our bodies, but how will they impact *society* as a whole? As a futurist, Kurzweil sees these technological innovations as an inevitability, but he fails to speculate as to *how* they will reshape human society. He only admits that the impact will be so far-reaching that "as the Singularity approaches we will have to reconsider our ideas about the nature of human life and redesign our human institutions" (299) and does admit that we will have to use technology with discretion, and that "we need to recognize what's important in our humanity" (311). But these statements are vague—how those ideas will be reconsidered and how our institutions will be redesigned, Kurzweil doesn't really choose to speculate (perhaps he's leaving that task to SF writers like Stross)—only that it will be good[v]! Kurzweil is more comfortable with numbers and graphs, and trying to predict precisely how social institutions will change is not his game[vi].

Kurzweil seems to be saying nothing more than, "by year X, we will have this technology, which will impact our lives in ways that we cannot easily predict, especially in terms of society. But it'll be good, I swear." In this respect, assuming such an optimistic stance seems a bit premature on his part. In *The Diamond Age* by Neal Stephenson, the technology Kurzweil describes has arrived, but societal issues persist. Fundamental disagreements brought about by ideological and cultural differences have conflicting ideas as to how nanotechnology should be implemented: "Now nanotechnology had made nearly anything possible, and so the cultural role in deciding what *should* be done with it had had become far more important than what could be done with it" (37). In the novel, neo-Victorians control the Feed, a nanotech "pipe" where goods are produced. In this way, they artificially restrict what can be produced. The Han phyle advocates "Seed" technology, in which anyone can control something akin to the "Feed." For the neo-Victorians, such a technology not strictly controlled would result in anarchy; for the Han, the neo-Victorian Feed is an inherently "Western" technology, which is impeding on their own culture. There is no guarantee that simply by inventing these godlike technologies will society fix itself—and it will certainly take a scientifically literate society to manage them.

Even if a tenth of Kurzweil's envisioned technology comes to pass in the twenty-first century, society will doubtless be transformed in ways that not even Kurzweil cares to speculate. To return to *Scientific Illiteracy*, we can see how imperative it is that science communication be improved; we need scientists communicating both with humanists and the public in order to figure out what exactly is "important in our humanity," how these new scientific and technological breakthroughs will or should affect society. New discoveries may challenge our most deeply-held values, to the point where we may all become Pamela-like:

In the coming years, we're likely to see many scientific discoveries that raise troubling ethical questions and spark new conflicts. Neuroscience, for instance, is providing an increasingly naturalistic picture of human consciousness, as brain imaging has led some to suggest we are nothing more than electrical impulses and proteins. This reductionist perspective will, assuredly, challenge fundamentalist religion and widely held notions about humanity—free will, the concept of the soul. (Mooney & Kirshenbaum 106)

This accelerating change is "likely to be met, however, with the increasing fundamentalist and Luddite reaction to the accelerating pace of change" (Kurzweil 338) (i.e., the "Pamelas") as well as the piercing

Manfred/Kurzweilian optimists and the Sirhan-moderates. These diverse views will only be able to be mediated that can understand and think about science in a non-emotional way (i.e. not making premature good/bad assumptions based on feelings) that values science's ability to solve the very real problems of the twenty-first century, and if scientists can communicate their scientific data to the public in Carl Sagan-style, which informs, inspires, and cautions, all at the same time.

It's not a question of whether or not these potentially society-altering technologies proves a threat; in fact, it is too early to say. Rather, society needs to be able to fully comprehend the science in order to make rational decisions. This does not necessarily demand that one have a staunch optimistic, pro-technological stance. Rather, a scientifically literate society must be able to both accept beneficial technology while at the same time recognizing and rejecting technology which may be harmful. A scientifically illiterate society is just as likely to be ruined by its own technology as it is to be ruined by the misinformed rejection of science and technology. Cases such as the LHC paranoia exemplify this point.

What kinds of people should participate in these debates? Manfred, although far from perfect, (perhaps Sirhan would be a better example), represents the kind of person Mooney and Kirshenbaum wish to foster: aware of all the latest technological trends—Economy 2.0, 3.0, posthuman modifications, uploaded sentient beings (such as the Lobsters)—he realizes that technology is the driving force in the decades to come. Understanding how technology works gives him an edge that allows his family to prosper. Although he is too optimistic in his trust in technology, causing him to be taken by surprise by the Vile Offspring. But this lack of foresight can be understandable because it can be seen to represent the limits of human understanding. It doesn't matter how prescient Manfred might be, it is impossible for him or any other posthuman to understand or predict the Vile Offspring's actions. They are Stross' "unknown unknowns." An ignorant Manfred cannot foresee what threat the Vile Offspring may pose, just as an ant cannot comprehend that its ant hill will soon be the location of a new condominium. As such, the threat that they pose can be seen to represent society's apathetic attitude toward science today. Carl Sagan reminds us that "[Science] urges us on a delicate balance between no-holds-barred openness to new ideas, however heretical, and the most rigorous scrutiny of everything—new ideas and established wisdom. This kind of thinking is also an essential tool for democracy in an age of change" (27). Today, society's apathetic attitude toward science leaves it similarly unprepared for a future of accelerating change, both in the amount of problems that will require science-based solutions. Like Manfred, we have the ability to address our ignorance (well, at least until the singularity!) If we do not, then we run the risk of either global problems or our own technology overrunning us. But unlike Manfred, we may not be able to afford the centuries it takes for him to change from crazed ideologue to savior of humanity. His journey may serve as a cautionary warning, and it is in this way that the singularity—a fictitious one—might save us.

[i] "The images came from NASA, so they can't be trusted and must be fake. Of course NASA wants to keep their hoax alive!"

[ii] Privacy is already a concern today with personal computers. Courts are able to seize defendant's hard drives if there is valuable information on them concerning the case. This occurred in the recent case of George Hotz, who released a security crack to allow for hacking of the Playstation 3, potentially opening the console open to piracy but also the use of third-party operating systems. Sony was able to obtain Holt's hard drives to be examined by a "third party" for evidence: (<http://www.techspot.com/news/42635-sony-wants-two-copies-of-geohots-data-in-ps3-hacking-lawsuit.html>.)

Considering that a hard drive is among the most personal items one can possess, potentially containing years of emails, photos, and documents, it is incongruous that we do not uphold them to the same amount of privacy scrutiny as we do with the telephone.

[iii] Although this is not what she means, this statement is ironic because Pamela, of course, is terrified of the "new"—it is responsible for what she sees as the decline in society.

[iv] <http://skepticalteacher.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/japanfallout.jpg>

[v] That's not to say that everything will be roses and daises, of course. For Kurzweil, problems will be solved, but others will arise. Cyberwarfare will be far more serious issue than conventional warfare: "When everything is information, the ability to control your own information and disrupt your enemy's communication, command and control will be a primary determinant of military success"

(335). Technology will still remain "a double-edged sword and as such always has the potential of going awry as it surges toward the Singularity, with profoundly disturbing consequences" (373).

[vi] Perhaps another reason is that for Kurzweil, the Singularity is a certainty, and for him it is impossible to imagine what a Singularity-level intelligence society would be like. Society will fundamentally change in other ways before this moment, of course, but for Kurzweil it's an uninteresting blip in the radar. He is more interested in the technological path from here to there. Besides, virtual realities will allow for a person to inhabit whatever society a person desires.

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If I am going to spend eternity visiting this moment and that, I'm grateful that so many of those moments are nice.

—Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse Five*

One of These Days, You're Gonna Rise up Singing

by Christopher J Garcia



Christopher J Garcia

I often think about what the documentary of my life would be like. I think it'd be fascinating, largely due to the fact that I make it sound like I've led a life of magic and mysticism. The truth is it is days and weeks of utter boredom punctuated by moments of sheer coincidence. When I started writing this one, I thought I should try to figure out what would be a chapter break, where everything would hinge and I'd make the kind of progress we expect from individuals in a documentary. As I was working out which of the heartbreaks I would write about, I put on my YouTube playlist and the first thing that came up was a video I'd shot at the Westercon just a couple of weeks ago. It was a performance by one of my favorite musicians, Unwoman, in the Fanzine Lounge. It was a great performance, but it made me think of two brief, fleeting, solitary moments of music that I didn't have to share with a bunch of other people. There are two Westercon moments that are certainly not chapter breaks, but they are my moments.

Westercon 2008 – Las Vegas

The Vegas Westercon wasn't a hit. Not at all. There were only a few hundred, maybe 400, and the hotel-casino had unusually high-priced rooms, but Linda and I had a good time with folks like Leigh Ann Hildebrand, Kevin Roche and Andy Trembley, and Jason Schachat. Bill Mills was there. I've always appreciated Bill's work, and recently found out I'm lampooned in one of his tunes and could not be more honored, and I had been a fan of one of his YouTube videos from the 1980 Westercon. It was a version of Elton John's "Rocket Man" sung with a very good backing group of six or so. It was great and I'd told Bill that I would be requiring him to play it for me at the con. He agreed.

And then the con happened.

You see, if you've ever been to a con with me, you may notice that I never stop moving. It seems like I've always got something going on, always moving between points at the con where I've got stuff going on. It's not easy, it's exhausting, but an absolute blast. It does mean that if I have plans with someone without a specified moment for it to happen, it tends to not happen. Sadly, it looked like it wasn't going to happen; I wasn't going to be able to see his set because I'd promised Linda that I'd take her to see the fireworks since it was July fourth. I had to run back to the Lounge to grab something and I saw Bill sitting with Roxanne in the Rotunda of the hotel.

"Hey Chris," Bill said, "you coming to the concert?"

"Can't. I promised Linda I'd see the fireworks with her."

"Well then, I better play it now."

And he did.

Now, here's the thing; other than me, Bill and Roxanne, there was no one around. Literally no one. In fact, I'd say that there wasn't a single person in the conference area at all. Everyone was upstairs, waiting for the fireworks to start. Bill played and sang the hell out of that song, playing like he was playing to an audience that was hundreds of times larger than the two of us. I sat there, on top of the fan table for one of the

WorldCon bids, and just smiled to myself. This was one of those moments that are just perfect. We were in a freakin' rotunda! Nothing's better than the acoustics of a rotunda, especially when there aren't a lot of yahoos to soak up the sound. It was so very cool and I gave a standing-O right there to Bill before I disappeared up the escalator and wrapped my arms around Linda and watched the 'plosions off over Las Vegas.

I didn't stop smiling all night.

Westercon 2010 – San Jose's Fairmont Hotel

I'd arranged for Erica Unwoman Mulkey to come and play in the Lounge. It was a small room, about the size of my apartment, and it ended up being a full house. The first time I'd seen her she played the piano and did several covers. Typically, she does cello rock. She plays cello beautifully, but really she's got a voice that makes you forget what instrument she's got between her knees. She has the kind of voice that is completely authentic, but feels so much more brutal when she goes all cynical. She writes powerful lyrics and comes up with beautiful music. I love hearing her and she plays well in goth club settings, steampunk events, and even at traditional cons. I love her stuff.

She ended her set with my favorite song of hers, "Haunted." I'd shot a series of videos with her at the Computer History Museum while we were upgrading the space for the new exhibit. She played three songs in front of the Babbage Engine, all of which turned out terribly, but the final song I had her play in what is now the museum store but then was a construction site. I lit it with a string of construction lights and it was an excellent video of "Haunted."



Erica Unwoman Mulkey

That evening, we hung out in the bar for a while, but I had to run around and chat with folks about the site selection results which were world-changing (in the way of SMOFs at least) and then I walked around and ran into Erica and a single guy, looking almost asleep on a chair. Erica was sitting at the grand piano that was tucked away in the corner of the Fairmont Hotel located furthest from anything anyone would walk by. It was tucked away, as all hotel pianos should be. I set myself into a chair and listened.

She was playing covers.

I plugged in my camera and captured her version of George Michaels' "Careless Whisper" and a Morrissey tune as well. It was awesome, though I ran out of video space after just two songs. She asked what I wanted her to play next and I thought about it for a moment.

"Surprise me, darling." I said.

She really did.

Perhaps the greatest graphic novel ever writer is Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta*. The thing that always gets me about Alan's work is that he populates it with more than just the story he's telling, but with popular culture that bleeds through. He goes deeper than almost any other writer in that respect. One of the things that he populated *V for Vendetta's* London with was music, one song being "This Vicious Cabaret."

Man, here's a song for ya. It was written by Alan Moore and David J. The recordings on YouTube aren't great. It seems that David J had a very different vision of it than it played in my head when I was a kid.

My friends Eric and Beth Zuckerman (the team who does "Eric in the Elevator" at various cons) just

happened to be walking by and stopped to listen. Erica asked what I wanted to hear. I said “Surprise me.”

At that point, she ceased being Erica and became Unwoman.

I know a lot of people who have pseudonyms and who have persona. Almost all of them are contrived, created for some reason of role-playing or identity hiding. One friend, an author of Steampunk Romances, has two identities so separate that she stops responding to her other name not out of playing the character, but because she gets so far into it and just forgets. Unwoman and Erica are very different people, but it’s largely because Unwoman throws herself into every note, every chord. I doubt anyone could get through to her while she was playing either her cello or the piano. How weird, master photog that he is, took photos in seven-a-second bursts and somehow each photo had her making a different expression. She dives deep and the performance of “This Vicious Cabaret” was just spectacular!



Unwoman doing her unthing.

And it belonged to the four of us.

That’s what was so amazing. Unwoman was singing like she was in front of an opera house full of people, and the only ones there were Eric, Beth, me, Unwoman, and the walls. The sound was amazing, nothing to soak up all these flying sound waves. The feeling was amazing, just like it had been in Vegas that July 4th. Unwoman had provided one of those incredible moments.

And it was almost entirely mine.

I was a victim of a series of accidents, as are we all.

—Kurt Vonnegut, *The Space Wanderer*, *Sirens of Titan*

Midnight Special*

By Victor Banis

Hot Springs, Arkansas, 1949

“He here. He at the back door,” Sukie say.

It was early. They wasn't open for business yet, most the girls just layin' around by the windows, fanning themselves, sometimes callin' out to men on the street below, but more friendly like than serious. Rufus busy cleaning the bar. Marilou be in her office, checking yesterday's money when Sukie come in without knocking, slid inside all quiet like and push the door shut behind her.

“He at the back door,” she say, looking as scared as maybe she seen a ghost. Added, like it make everything clear, “He been shot.”

Marilou stare at her like she musta made it up. Knew who she meant, 'course. They be talkin' about him jes a little bit ago, nobody hardly talkin' 'bout nobody else. Wasn't expectin' him to turn up here, though.

“They lookin' for him all over the place. How he get here an' nobody see him?” she say, and, “he gonna get us all kilt, an' he ain't careful.”

“You want me to send Rufus? Tell him to git?”

Marilou thought on that for a minute, rollin' her eyes up at the cut glass chandelier like she thought she find some message wrote up there, tellin' her what to do. After a bit, she give a great sigh and heave her big ole self out of the chair. “Ought to shoot him myself,” she say in an exasperated voice. “Mens. Always tryin' to git that ole rib back, isn' they? You hasta help me.”

Sukie shook her head, eyes wide in her coal colored face. If she had the nerve, she say no, but one dark look from Marilou an' she jes shut right up. She know better than to sass Marilou when she say like that. She follow Marilou meekly through the bar, where Rufus hardly give them a glance—women's business, was what he figured, too early to be customer trouble—and down the hall.

“Huh?” Marilou say, openin' the back door and seein' nobody there.

“In the bushes,” Sukie say, “I tole him to hide hisself, lessen somebody come along and see him.”

“Where you at?” Marilou demanded in a sibilant whisper. The Azalea bush next the door groan. She stepped off the stoop and looked into the bush. A pair of eyes, wide and bloodshot, blinked back at her.

“Mighty glad to see you, old gal,” he say, and she say, “It ain't mutual, tha's for sure. You wantin' to get me kilt, tha's what you comin' round here for?”

“Didn' have no place else to go,” he say, breathin' heavy, the words comin' out slow, like they been penned up too long. “They after me like a dog.”

“Tha's the truth,” she say. “They lookin' all over the place for you, every policemans in two counties.”

“They ain't found me yet. You gonna help me, or what?”

She took her time over that, didn't answer him direct, either, but she say to Sukie, "We best take him up the back stairs."

It was two flights up, supportin' him between them and him not able to do much more than shuffle his feet. He stank, too, of sweat and blood and dirty water from some place he been hidin'. *Prolly down by the crick*, she figure, it was a crick kind of smell. And fear, you could smell the fear on him worst of all, hung about him like a fart round a hound dog.

In Marilou's room, the biggest bedroom in the place, which suited her position just fine, she propped him by the door, Sukie helpin' him to stand. Marilou went to a big old wardrobe against one wall and, puttin' her broad shoulder again it, rolled it out of the way. Behind it, another set of stairs, narrow and steep, went up to the attic

"I never knowed this was here," Sukie said, surprised out of being afraid.

"Wasn't supposed to know. Never tole nobody about it. Rufus, he probably 'member this attic. Or maybe not. I fix it for myself when we has that trouble couple years back, figure I might need me someplace to hide. Git him on the cot, there."

Except for the cot and a pillow on it, there wasn't much else in the room but a bucket for a toilet, flies making a racket around it, and another bucket full of dirty water. The blind was pulled down tight over the one window. Across the way, at the Gypsy Casino, the neon lights flashed on and off, on and off, green and red splashes leakin' through the window blind, Dust thick everywhere. The room like an oven. Not a breath of air stirrin'.

They wrestled him onto the bed. He give a weary smile. *Look like a death head grinnin' up at me*, was how she saw it. Behind her, Sukie slip out the door and disappear down the stairs. *Jes as well*, Marilou thought, *she be too excitable*.

"Much obliged," he say in a weary voice. "Preciate it greatly, I surely do."

"Don't be getting' too grateful, an' don't you be thinkin' you stayin' here either," Marilou say. "I leaves you rest till morning, tha's all. Be way quieter then, 'bout four, five o'clock, jes 'fore the sun come up. Can't keep you here past that. Daylight come, it too dangerous."

"I unerstan'."

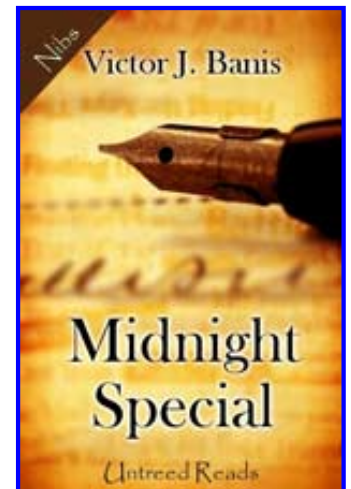
"Jes so you do. Don' mean to be hateful, but I got my own skin to think of, me an' the girls. Them girls all depends on me to look out for 'em."

"Everybody know you good to your girls. You always good to me, too, honey. I know that. I's a mean bastard sometimes, wasn' I?"

"They's worse ones, I 'spect. Men, they all mean, you ast me. Somepin about that sap you all got down there. Don't matter much. Runnin' a place like this, you see some bad ones, is all."

"You always my favorite, though, I swear it. Never mean to treat you bad. Jes the way things happen. You right, I reckon, it's the sap." He paused and say, like the idea just pop into his head, "You wanna take a ride while I be here? For ole time sake?"

She snorted. "Listen at the fool. Can't hardly crawl up the stairs, two women hepin' him, and he layin' there thinkin' 'bout poontang, if that ain't jes like a man."



“ I ain’t dead yet, girl. If we was careful, I could...”

“Sides,” her eyes narrow, “I ain’t got what you like down there nowadays. Not what I be hearin’, anyways.”

“Ah, that shit.” He coughed. “People talkin’ queer shit, tha’s all it is. You oughts to know that. Do women all the time, since I’s knee high, always like it jes fine an’ I ’spect the ladies do too, most of ’em acted plenty grateful, seem like. That other stuff, tha’s just prison business, it all you got to do when you in there. But I always thinkin’ ’bout women when I doin’ it, and tha’s no lie. I swear it, most the time, I thinkin’ ’bout you, honey, an’ you wantin’ to know the truth.”

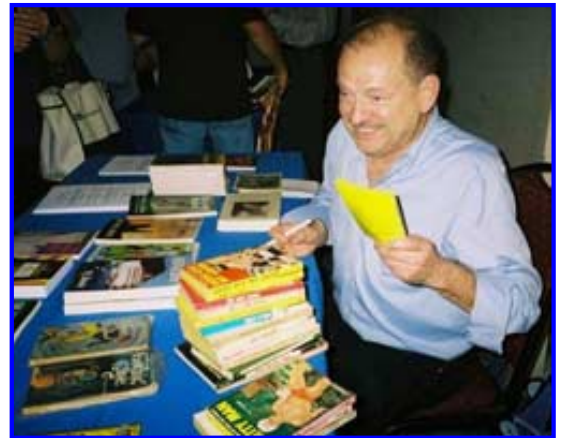
“You allus was full of it.” She look pleased anyway.

“Don’t you pay no mind to that shit, is what I’m sayin’. Jes somepin a man gets used to when he inside, is all.”

“Maybe. Tha’s what you say. What you did, last night, though, you didn’ get used to that in no prison.”

He tossed his head back and forth on the pillow, like he was trying to get something inside it to come loose. “Fuck. I oughtn’ of done it, I know that, it was like I jes go crazy all a sudden. I don’t know where it come from. Just somepin got into me, come over me out of nowhere. Like the devil done took me over.” She looked unconvinced. “Tha’s the truth, I never even thought of nothin’ like that before, I swear it. It was like somebody else doin’ it, like I wasn’ even there.”

“Uh huh. Like the devil do it. Don’t make no difference, I’m tellin’ you, they gonna burn your ass for it, make no matter where it come from, burn the devil’s ass too an’ he say anythin’. Been different if’n it a colored boy. You mighta got away with it if he colored, nobody mind much about a colored boy. But a white boy...”



Victor J. Banis

“I know, I know. An’ they finds me, they string me up for sure.”

“’Cept, they finds you here, they be stringin’ me up with you.”

“I jes didn’ have nobody else to turn to, you know what I’m sayin’?”

“You already say that. Won’t hep my neck none when they puttin’ a rope round it.”

“I’m goin, I swear it. Soon’s I can.”

She study him over good. “Don’ look to me like you goin’ anywhere, not an’ on your own. How you git here, is what I like to know?”

“I git here, is all. An’ I be goin’, too. I go right now, an’ you say I got to. Jes get me down them stairs, an’ you won’ see nothin’ but my ass on the way out the door.”

“They be shootin’ your ass, they see you, make no matter whether you is goin’ or comin’ you jes has to wait here till mornin’, is all. I have the boys bring you down later on, ’fore it git light, they carry you over by the railroad track.”

“Long as it okay with you, is all I’m sayin’.”

“An’ I ain’t sayin’ it okay, neither, I just saying tha’s how it be.”

“Tha’s okay, then, tha’s the best thing, what you say. We wait ’til morning, then I be outa here. Ole Rufus’ll hep, won’t he? He wouldn’t turn me in, would he?”

“Rufus know to keep his mouth shut, he don’t want strung up neither. You didn’t jes make trouble for yourself, fool, you make trouble for every darkie round about here. Everybody scared.”

“I understan. I ain’t wantin’ to make no trouble for nobody. They put me by the tracks, is all they got to do, I can manage the rest of the way. Once it start to get light, I jump me a freight, be long gone, won’t see me no more ’round these parts, I swear it.”

She looked at the wound in his side. It had stopped bleeding but it looked ugly, all red and puffy. *Prolly*, she thought, *it infected already. For sure he wouldn’t be jumping no trains. Mos’ likely he’d end up under one. Or he jes lay there an’ die where they leave him. Wasn’ no worse than what’d happen to him if they catch him, though.* Nothin’ she could do ’bout that, ’bout any of it. She like him well enough, always had. He be her first, and they say you allus sweet on your first. Not sweet enough she wantin’ to get herself kilt, though.

He closed his eyes, breathin’ heavy. She thought maybe he pass out, till he say, his eyes still closed, “You ever hear tell of the Midnight Special?”

“Tha’s a song, isn’ it? By that Lead Belly.”

His laugh turn into a cough that left his lips looking like he been eating berries. “Huddie Ledbetter,” he said, smilin’ around his pain. “He the king of the twelve string guitar. Shit, that boy could play a guitar an’ tha’s no lie. An’ sing, he sing like the angels, didn’ he?”

He hummed a snatch of off pitch melody, ended up with, “Haah.” She thought that was a groan, but he did it again, and say, “Used to grunt like that ’tween verses, ole Lead Belly, say it the sound the men make on the chain gang as they bringin’ the hammer down.”

“S’at so?” She figure his mind was wandering. He looked feverish, and he be feelin’ hot when they carry him up. She brought him a tin cup of rusty water from the bucket and held his head while he drunk it down. She hoped he didn’ die ’fore she got him out of the house. They burn the house down, they find out she shelterin’ him here, and her with it.

“It’s a train,” he say out of nowhere.

“What you talkin’ bout, wha’s a train?”

“The Midnight Special. It a train be taking the prisoners from New Awlins out to Angola prison in the middle of the night. At midnight. So’s nobody can see ’em, I guess.” He silent for a minute. “There’s a hell hole for you, Angola prison. I’s there. Lead Belly too, jes not the same time as me, I mean. Worst place on earth. You get solitary, they put you in a metal shed out in the sun, like to bake you to death. Going to Angola same as goin’ to hell, is what they say. Them as been there.”

“Didn’ s’pose it no country club.”

He was quiet for a spell again, and she was fixing to leave him, when he say, “They’s a thing men tell at Angola. They say you see the Midnight Special, you see its headlight shinin’ on you in your cell at night, it mean you gonna be free by the morning.”

“Huh. Well, I don’ know nothin’ ’bout that, but I am tellin’ you, for sure you gonna be free of this
whorehouse, by morning, an’ tha’s the Lord’s truth. You git youself some sleep now. I send the boys up when it
be time. Not for a spell, though, too many people ’round.” She hesitated at the door. “You be wantin’ some
food? Or a whiskey? I send Sukie up with a bottle, an’ you want one. You allus fancied your whiskey, seems
like.”

“Nah, that’s okay. ’Bout whiskeyed out. I gonna sleep, is all. Wouldn’t mind me a cigarette, though.”

She found a pack in his pocket, lit one for him, put it between his lips. He puffed greedily. She waited, and
when he began to snore, she took the cigarette out of his mouth and stepped it out on the floor, and went back
downstairs.

*Excerpted from *Midnight Special*, by Victor J. Banis, available in e-format from www.untreedreads.com or
from Amazon.

People have to talk about something just to keep their voice boxes in working order so they’ll
have good voice boxes in case there’s ever anything really meaningful to say.

—Kurt Vonnegut

Watching *Pulp Fiction*

by Earl Kemp

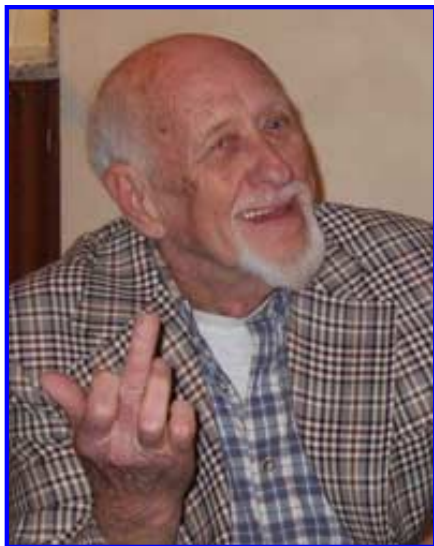
Recently, on the Fictionmags Yahoo group, Todd Mason posted the URL for a feature-length documentary on Pulp Magazines. From UFOTV, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzlbRjmWEQ8&NR=1> and because it is a long documentary, I was reluctant to get into it at all. Nevertheless the lure was so obsessive that I made the decision to at least sample it before abandoning the effort.

That was my big mistake. I was captivated, glued to my PC monitor, unable to move away from my desk. I watched the whole thing all the way through until even after the ending, the screen blank for a while as I tried to recover from the effects of all the things I had seen.

It is a great production, a huge amount of perfect visuals, cover scans, animations, interviews, snips and bits and pieces of interviews, gatherings, book sales, all the usual with much attention to detail, to color, to sound, to music, to lighting. Thoroughly professional.

As far as it goes.

Of course I object to parts of it, and especially the emphasis placed on those parts, but then that's what I'm supposed to do, and to make my objections known and supported by reasons...and then I could rant like usual.



Earl Kemp at Corflu, 2007
Photo by Bill Burns

First, the good parts. The parts that make feel so very old, and incompetent, and senile. That I am is not material to the feeling. I have never been able to see myself as I really am...or appear to be. I am, in my mind in my view, young and handsome and virile and devoutly desired. When I do, by accident, catch a fleeting glance of whoever it is I appear to be bouncing at me off a display window or an unexpected mirror I am always shocked by the gruesome visage and hurry away from it before it can actually catch up with me.

Ray Bradbury and Frederik Pohl did that to me. Again. Actually they've been doing it to me for years but I've tried my damndest to avoid them, so they couldn't remind me that I'm now 82, and rapidly catching up with them at least as far as age is concerned. I've been running into them at least once a year for the last half dozen or so and, even though I fight against it, each time I see them I remark to myself how much they have changed...aged...since the last time I saw them.

They make me feel so very old.

Bradbury figures rather prominently in this documentary, as he rightly should. Plus there are mentions of how very much Bradbury has done for the field of science fiction and for young people who aspired to doing something creative within that genre. That certainly goes for me.

In the 1950s, when I was first tottering on my SF legs, Bradbury was one of my greatest heroes, and rightly so; he certainly deserved that position on that pedestal. I no longer remember when or where or how, for that matter. But we did. And we became correspondents, writing to each other for years, exchanging thoughts and ideas and concepts...hopes and futuristic dreams. But, even then I already knew that there was no way I was a

writer...I was a reader...and a wannabe...and an unformed future somethingortheother. We even exchanged Christmas cards...that quaint old custom.

Pohl and I also go way back together. We even got involved, together, in some decidedly illegal paperwork manipulation to clear some cloudy publication rights...manufacturing documents from old office files that never existed. We've kept this secret, Fred and I, for almost 50 years, and I'm depending on his continuing silence to protect the innocents involved.

And, every year, as I grow younger and dumber, they are growing older and wiser, Ray and Fred....

But, what was that I said about objections to this documentary? I've got them, in spades, and they involve only one person, Lafayette Ronald Hubbard, and specifically that this documentary focuses *much too much* on him. I could even easily think that the whole documentary was somehow sponsored, paid for, and supervised by the persons and firms allegedly associated once upon a time with the writer but who have, instead, taken the image of Hubbard much beyond his own capabilities and aspirations.

The Dianetics people, the laughable "church" of Scientology, have taken their token image and recreated him after their own concepts of Second Coming. I suspect Hubbard's rotten corpse is rolling around inside his casket in protest of the things he never knew he did so well and for so long and to enrich so very many people with...misdirected and fumbled data focused only on the bottom dollar.

Shame on you, and shame on this documentary makers for falling for such garbage.

Many people did much more to further the pulp magazine era than Hubbard. Take for instance, Robert A. Heinlein. As reluctant as I am to say anything nice about the man, he certainly was a much more influential writer than Hubbard could ever have even hoped to be (witness those later-day novels allegedly written by Hubbard that were so dreadful and incompetent that they were *never* read...libraries rejecting the free copies Bridge insisted upon sending). And Heinlein was very, very flawed, particularly in areas of human relating, of love and sex...almost too kinky and tangential with some morbid incest and pedophilia continuously floating around the fringes of his later-years writings, rewritings, expansions, and "original" versions of some of his reoccurring works.

If any one writer could be singled out for such praise in this documentary, surely it would be Heinlein and *never, ever* Hubbard. Yet the documentary literally *reeks* of Hubbard...long out of the picture totally...a forgotten writer except within the minds of Bridge Publications who keep inundating the marketplace with unwanted and unused and unread ever newer editions of his long-forgotten output.

To say nothing at all about Hubbard's output that somehow mysteriously kept appearing from Bridge long after Hubbard himself was (outside the organization) a forgotten, abandoned, and discarded icon.

Fairness is what is missing from this documentary. If they are going to so praise Hubbard for his viable creations they should also condemn him for his reprehensible creations as well. Not one single mention of Dianetics, or Scientology, or "churches" appears in the documentary. Nothing about his wanted criminal status or his ten-year tenure as a much wanted fugitive from justice in a number of different countries. His convictions, his four-year unserved sentence, and the huge fines he had to pay for fraud. Etc., etc.

When I was first discovering and becoming addicted to science fiction, I read Hubbard's short stories, his novels, and liked them very much. I was particularly fond of *Unknown* during those learning years. It was only after he invented Dianetics that I no longer found his writings to be enjoyable...they certainly weren't informative. Besides, I liked fiction, not non-fiction, even fiction disguised as non-fiction pseudo fact.

The documentary, praising Hubbard, even went as far as to name Algis Budrys (we all knew him as Ajay, never as Algis; perhaps that was something related to Bridge) as one of the better Hubbard hustlers.

And...and this is extremely important...not one single word, even in passing, for Harlan Ellison. Yet, between antics and super self-hype and while endearing himself to all of SF fandom forever, Ellison has certainly done more to promote pulp fiction than Hubbard.

Where is the fairness in this documentary?

"It's hard work," he said. "It's not pleasant - just in solitude, writing. You can't have anybody around. It's a very lonesome business, and we're social animals."

—phone interview with Kurt Vonnegut, *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, 4/01

Dirty Larry

By Larry Revene



Dirty Larry cleaning up Baghdad 2009.

WWII. The US was king and all the princes and princesses of the guys and gals who had done all the heavy lifting paved the way for some real exposure to the good life. Cars got girls, girls got pregnant, and before I knew it I was where my parents were, that's not where I wanted to be at all.

The only solution was to go to New York. I packed my overnight bag and, 45 years later, I'm still in NY and living out of a suitcase. I wouldn't have it any other way. The best things in life don't fit in a valise but are stuck under your hat in the head bone. I've got skills and I've got friends...who could ask for anything more? I was sure I had a hand in developing Rock and Roll in my music career; they don't call us boomers for nothing. Film? Well I knew I could lie my way into that. That was easy. I took New York by storm ... sort'a.



Eddy Dolls DeCurtis

Music gigs in the Big Apple were plentiful if you don't mind playing with a Korean band in a Chinese restaurant or ducking flying beer bottles behind the trap set squished in some corner of a bar. Not what I had in mind but film, ah there was a new adventure, besides those people get up before 2:00 in the afternoon and nobody asked, "What time is the 4 o'clock rehearsal?" Heads win! Film it is going to be.

I've always been lucky and been in the right places when decisions were being made. Serendipity is my middle name and I was offended when I saw *Forest Gump*. They stole my story. They changed

the street corner to a park bench, but I know the *real* story; how it really happened. When I first met Bob on a street corner I thought it fortuitous that he should offer me work right off the bat. I was just in need of some moneymaking opportunities. *Porn? Hell yes, I'm interested.* I was better equipped than I thought with my speckled background in film when I saw what was required of me. "Load magazines? I can do it with my eyes

"Hey friend, want to see some pictures?" the stranger whipped open his raincoat lined with photos of naked ladies. For a 13-year-old Boy Scout heading to camp the encounter in the New Orleans bus station was nothing short of exciting, mysterious, and perplexing. It wasn't raining and where did he get all those safety pins? I should have bought one of those pictures it was the only way in those days for a kid my age of getting a good look at what was really under all those crinolines. Bobby Sox and Saddle shoes were enough to get me going back then; can you imagine tits and pubic hair? That would have to wait.

I rode the crest of the wave of sexual and social revolution that culminated around 1968. The tsunami had been building since the end of kick ass



Dominick Mantiglio's FBI mug shot.

closed.” “Run sound? You bet, big ears they call me.” “And I’m a bitchin’ editor, you know?”

When you talk about the nitty gritty—well I found out what that means. Not much nit but a whole lot of grit. Before I knew it I was watching guys do things to women that would have made the guy in New Orleans blush. I never knew dames could do that to a guy. Where does she put all that? She’s not really gonna’...she is! This all gave me time to ruminate about my sheltered life. But now, now I’m in the belly of the beast and sopping more prurient action than I ever knew existed. There must be laws? Sure, and part of the job was to keep all the exposed film next to the back exit.

“We’ve got a taffy pull—cool off the set and let’s get a beer.”

“Bob, the rooms so dark in there I can’t see if he’s got it up yet.”

“Just listen closely next to the door and you’ll know.”

Boy, those were the days when men were men and women were sure glad of it. Pump and grind—grind houses—and the daily grind. Six loops a day was what it took for a successful shoot. With that much sex for 12 hours my ol’ lady was happy to see me coming in the door. “Why don’t you wait till we get to the bedroom.”

I was sure the envy of all my friends and printed up mimeograph answers to the stock questions. “Yes, they are really into it.” “No those are not real, there’s a new thing called silicone.” “Some guys do and others can’t do.” “Yes I did just start smoking, waiting is just so awfully tedious.”

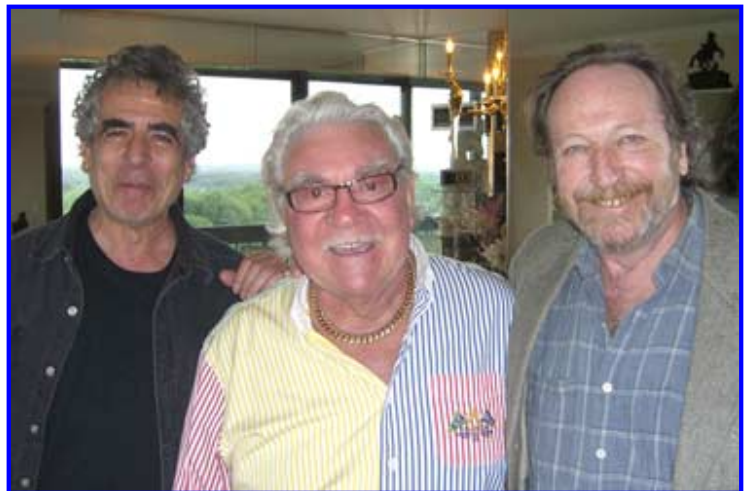
After a couple of weeks I was congratulating myself and what a pro I’d become in such a short time. Never at a loss for a good anecdote about what had happened just the other day, I felt like I was on a different footing than most people in the ways of the orgasmic organism. The life of the party “Yeah this one guy was having trouble and we took a break and he sat in a lotus position, pinched fingers chanting, “Iwon tuget er’up Iwon tuget er’up” Ha, ha, ha, what a riot. She does like to put something a little special behind her ears to make herself more attractive...like her ankles.” A ha, ha, ha.

Then the laughing stopped. Hey, this is serious stuff, watching a dog doing the real doggie position with the freckled face girl with nice tits and great legs. I wouldn’t want to kiss her after she went down on Fido though, that would be like blowing half the hounds in the ASPCA pound by proxy. What is she thinking, that Linda girl nobody has ever heard of. And Chuck her trainer takes a walk for the performance; guess he’s not the jealous type. Boy, the shock waves are still ringing in my ears 40 years later.

“The devil made me do it” Bob kept saying while stroking his breast, making mea culpas. It was weird, he’s Jewish. But I knew the devil and he was packin’. You did what Eddy Dolls said or you got your face rearranged. Eddy had all the class of a turd in a punch bowl, and you listened up when he talked with a voice so raspy he could plane a 2 x 4. He was like the pivot man for a Gambino bike formation. Square and squat with pop bottle



Eddy Mishkin testifying before the Kefauver Congressional Hearings in 1955.



The late Jamie Gillis, the ever present Marty Hodas, and Dirty Larry 2009 (photo credit Benson Hurst).

glasses that made you think you were staring into a Studebaker's headlights, with the lights out. His rug fit his crown like a dead gray cat had expired from the carbon emissions he oozed.

Mr. Bluster was Eddy and I felt like Howdy Doody around him, shaking so much I should have been playing maracas in a Mariachi band. I was just the kid, so I didn't think I was that important to him. That is until Bob skipped town and guess who got promoted.

One thing you had to respect about Eddy he got right to the point. "You're a smart kid. I don't want you making films for nobody else or I'll shave that mustache and make a parking lot out of dis here studio." See! Non-ambiguous.

Bob left NY when Paul Rothenberg, the lab man, showed up in an alley with a terminal case of flying lead poisoning. Set to cop a plea for an obscenity bust and rat out Roy DeMeo and Nino Gaggi for extortion of his 8mm loop processing enterprise, Roy created a double entendre with the silencer on his .38. Bob knew he would be next for some protection from Roy. Now where was Eddy Dolls when you needed him? He was making Eddy Mishkin's life rotten while he held court at Wholesale Books getting lots of exercise running his mouth and jumping to the wrong conclusions. The two Eddies were married, you see, in a shotgun wedding. Mishkin was smart, he gladly coughed up 2g's a month for Eddy Dolls' family maintenance when Dolls was in the can. That was before he ever knew Dolls. Marty Hodas had to have his 8-year-old kid abducted from first grade to make the point. "Hey, Marty, you know where your kid is?"

Bob did work for Marty, the "Peep King." As a matter of fact, Marty invented the machine and coined the term peep show with the glut of quarters he was hauling out of the bookstores 24/7 (that's EST). He didn't count 'em, he weighed them. I saw a fly die in one of those places.

Bob did work for a lot of peep creeps in the 1970s that's how he got into trouble. Me, on the other hand, had a steady client. I could see the scribbling on the peep booth wall that this was not a healthy career move.

Link to Mafia in L.I. Slaying

By **ROY R. SILVER**

Special to The New York Times

MINEOLA, L. I., July 30— Nassau County and New York City policemen were trying to determine today whether organized-crime figures were involved in yesterday's slaying of a Long Island man described by the police as a major national distributor of pornographic films.

But after questioning more than 50 people, Albert Owens, first deputy chief of detectives of Nassau County, said that neighbors, friends and relatives had been unable to shed any light on a motive for the slaying.

The victim, Paul E. Rothenberg, 42 years old, of Sands Point, was shot twice in the back of the head in an alley off Northern Boulevard in Flower Hill near Roslyn. His late-model Cadillac was nearby.

There's a game for every season - ice hockey, basketball, baseball, football. Life soon appears to be a game, and it isn't. In games the object is to win, but in life the object is not to win. The object of the whole world is to preserve the game board and the pieces, and there is no such game.

—Kurt Vonnegut, 3/69



“Very Wide Colossus on the Bridge,”
by Ditmar [Martin James Ditmar Jensen]