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"Three books written and two more nearly finished probably doesn't impress you much, but for me it's enormous progress."

"Rick Brant books probably couldn't be sold to kids in the United States these days without lawsuits and parent protests."

"Almost doesn't cut it on blocking whiskey bottles."

"An APA is a slow-motion conversation. All talkers doesn't work. All listeners/responders, doesn't work."

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## So What Have I Been Up To?

This is a zine for the May 2010 issue of FAPA, the Fantasy Amateur Press Association.

**Big news:** I have a novel coming out from a small press. The name has been changed to *Exchange* and it should be out as of July 7, 2010. I'm going to be a wreck until I get a production copy in my hands.

I've been doing a lot of novel writing in the last year or so. As of now I have:

- *Exchange* hopefully on the verge of getting published.
- *Char*, which I think you've seen part of, is finished and edited, though I want to do one more pass before I start seriously marketing it.
- The rough draft of my 2008 Nanowrite Novel *All Timelines Lead to Rome* (see excerpt in my other zine from this distro) is finished and I've done moderate polishing. The excerpt in my other zine is still pretty close to rough draft. It's progressed quite a bit in the year.
- *Mars Looks Different*: A rethinking of the old-fashioned inhabited Mars and Venus with some hopefully interesting modern twists. 70 to 80% written. Hopefully I'll get it done by July of this year.
- *Snapshot*: My most ambitious and hopefully unique idea yet. Rough draft 80-90% written but I'm still in stealth mode on it. Hopefully I'll be able to share some of it with you once I get the last few chapters done.

Three books written and two more nearly finished probably doesn't impress you much, but for me it's enormous progress. I'm watching the birthdays add up, and realizing that if I'm going to change a long list of ideas into novels, the time is now. That's been my goal for as long as I can remember and it's time to make it happen.

## THE FRINGES OF SCIENCE FICTION: THE RICK BRANT SCIENCE ADVENTURES

I've noticed that quite a few of you spend a lot of time documenting various aspects of the history of science fiction. I have nowhere near the depth of knowledge of science fiction over the years that most of you do, but there is one area I may be able to contribute a little knowledge on. I grew up avidly reading the Grosset and Dunlap Young Adult series books—Hardy Boys, Tom Swift and Rick Brant mostly, along with some Ken Holt. I quickly got tired of the uneven quality of the writing in the Stratemeyer Syndicate books (Hardy Boys and Tom Swift), but continued to enjoy Rick Brant into my mid-teens, though I shifted more of my focus toward more mature mysteries and science fiction.



I still have a nearly complete run of Rick Brant, all of the first twenty-three books. The twenty-fourth and last book, unpublished during the author's lifetime, was published twenty-five or thirty years later in a 500 book edition that I

didn't find out about until after it sold out and became a collectors' item that routinely sells for prices approaching \$1000 on e-bay.

The Rick Brant stories were written from the late 1940s until the late 1960s, roughly a book a year. They were written under the pen name "John

Blaine". The actual author was almost always a man named Hal Goodwin. Hal Goodwin had traveled extensively, especially in the Far East, and that showed in the books. Unlike most of the young adult series books, Rick Brant books had the strong sense of place that usually comes only when an author has prowled the places the books are set in.

The books were always at the edge of science fiction, but rarely stepped unarguably into that realm. They involved two boys of undetermined and unchanging age, probably in their late teens. Rick Brant was the son of a famous scientist. His friend Scotty was an ex-marine who lied about his age to get into the marines and was mustered out at the end of World War II, still in his teens. They lived on Sprindrift Island, off the east coast, separated from the mainland by a tidal flat. They traveled the world, to the Philippines, Tibet, Nigeria, Egypt, Europe, etc.

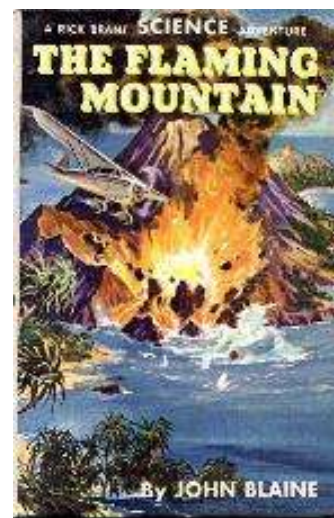
The plots were relatively simple, as befitted their audience, but characterization and dialog were always well done, and the writing quality in general was pretty good.

So how can a book or series be at the edge of science fiction? *The Whispering Box Mystery* had a group running around with a gadget that causes temporary unconsciousness by some unknown mechanism. *Sea Gold* involved extracting gold and other precious metals from sea water.

The fact that the science was a little beyond state of the art, but not far tended to make the books age rather quickly in some cases. For example, one book featured transistors as a new, high tech thing.

Rick Brant books probably couldn't be sold to kids in the United States these days without lawsuits and parent protests. Rick and friends did dangerous

things. They used slings (David and Goliath-type rock-throwing things) in several of the adventures, and a companion volume of Science Projects gave detailed instructions on how to make and use them. It mildly cautioned the audience of 12 to 16 year olds not to clobber themselves with the things.



Hal Goodwin wanted to write an actual science fiction young adult series, and actually wrote the first of the series: *Rip Foster Rides the Grey Planet*. Unfortunately, the series wasn't accepted for additional books.

Most of the Rick Brant books are still in copyright and many are

difficult to find, but a couple of them are in the public domain. Project Gutenberg lists two of them at:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/browse/authors/b/#a33540>

Hal Goodwin had a way with dialog and characterization, and bits of dialog and striking situations have stuck in my head enough that I still remember them after nearly 40 years.

The Rip Foster book is available online at:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/20147/20147-h/20147-h.html>

Fiction

**EXCHANGE (EXCERPT) – BY: DALE R. COZORT**

*This is the beginning of my novel, to be published July 2010.*

The prelude to the Exchange announced itself with a gust of ionized air, a shift of electrical charges that made Sharon Mack's skin tingle. Eleven fifty-eight. Two minutes early by Sharon's watch. Hot sunlight poured from a cloudless sky onto strip-mall parking lots running along both sides of Highway 25 on the outskirts of Rockport, Illinois. Under the supervision of surveyors, a team of hastily drafted civilians stretched yellow and black warning tape at the boundary of the Exchange Zone—the EZ. A curved line of white stakes stretched left and right—marking the calculated fringe of Bear Country.

Sharon stretched her back and wiped perspiration from her forehead before returning to her assigned task—keeping the clueless from wandering under high-tension power lines. Overhead a crew worked on the wiring, freeing cables and dropping them to the ground. It was better to drop the lines in a controlled manner before they were cut by the Exchange than chance them snapping afterward. A trickle of sweat ran into her eyes. She blinked at the sting.

Marines, rifles at the ready, patrolled the inside edge of the EZ. Illinois State Police had jurisdiction outside; tan-clad officers watched over a work group digging up a natural gas pipeline to seal the end. A stream of trucks carrying workers, equipment, and additional Marines rumbled along the four-lane highway into the EZ.

In the opposite direction, bumper-to-bumper traffic jammed the highway—

refugees fleeing Rockport. Sharon glanced at the cars and hoped Bethany was in one of them. Her stomach knotted.

*Bethany. Her daughter. Seven years old.*

The sky rumbled. As she watched, state troopers stopped the flow of cars.

Someone behind her said, "Any minute now."

The troopers ushered cars and civilian workers out of the interface zone.

A Marine shouted, "Look out!"

An oversized, iridescent-blue pickup truck pulled out of the stalled traffic and raced on the shoulder of the highway, making a desperate run. A state patrol car moved to cut it off, but the truck slewed over the shoulder and—with clumps of dirt and grass flying—roared toward the EZ. It turned toward Sharon's work party. The civilians scrambled to get out of the way, dropping their shovels and rakes. The truck's engine growled. It headed straight toward Sharon, moving too fast to evade before swerving at the last second. She glimpsed the driver and passengers—a half-dozen, scruffy-looking men.

The truck rolled over an abandoned rake. A front tire exploded. The driver fought the steering wheel. The truck, out of control, careened toward the EZ.

At 12:01 Sharon heard thunder from the clear June sky. The sun stood directly overhead. Surrounding it, the sky was clear, but only in a perfect, off-center blue circle stretching to the horizon. From outside the circle, dark, ominous clouds moved in quickly. The perfection of the circle lasted only a few seconds before the edges blurred

as the air from the timelines mixed. Sharon felt a cool wind and raindrops on her face.

Outside the EZ, the strip mall had disappeared—replaced by a low hill covered with prairie grass and patchy clumps of trees. The cab of the pickup truck was gone. Momentum kept the amputated truck bed going—its front edge plowed thick grass and dirt. It crashed into a tree and flipped, dumping passengers into the brush.

Too much happened at once for Sharon to grasp it all. The highway now abruptly ended in a grove of trees. A massive elm, sheared in half, stood where the shoulder had been. Its other half was gone, carried with the chunk of Bear Country that was now part of the old world. The half-tree creaked and leaned before the trunk splintered and it fell. Marines scrambled to get out of the way as branches crashed onto the hood of their Humvee. A pizza place at the end of the strip mall was missing a wall. Its roof tilted, sagged, then collapsed.

Sharon rushed toward the mangled truck, approaching a stocky, prematurely gray-haired man in a form-fitting T-shirt who brushed leaves from his body. Angry, he pointed at her. A tattoo of a rifle covered his sculpted forearm.

"Weren't for you, we woulda' made it."

Sharon stared at him, bewildered.

"What?" she said.

One of the other guys from the truck yelled, "It's a bear!"

Sharon gasped. The approaching animal was longer than the truck bed and almost as tall at the shoulders, like a bear, but leaner. Its eyes held a feral, predatory

look. One of the men from the truck ran when the bear was still thirty yards away. Sharon barely had time to blink before the bear covered those yards and casually swatted him with an oversized paw. The man's body cartwheeled.

A Marine Humvee raced toward the bear with lights flashing and horn blaring. The massive animal stood on its hind legs and roared. The men from the wrecked truck staggered to their feet and circled, moving slowly, trying to get behind the Humvee without drawing the bear's attention. Several limped; two dragged the dead weight of an unconscious man.

With arrogant swagger, the bear approached. Running toward the scene, three Marines fired their weapons, startling the bear. It stopped, glared down at the humans, and snorted—before turning and ambling away.

Sharon took a deep, shaky breath and let it out slowly.

*And that's why they call it Bear Country.*

She stood for a moment, catching her breath and enjoying the cool breeze. That earned a glare from a barrel-shaped, female Marine standing guard beside her. *Palmer*, her name patch said.

"Best stand back in case one of the sparkies drops a wrench or something, ma'am," Palmer said, gesturing at the workers descending from the suspension tower. The polite words had the tone of an order.

"I'm a computer jockey, not a construction worker," Sharon said as she moved away from the pylon. When martial law was imposed and the call, backed by armed Marines and State Police, came for *volunteers*, they gave her no time to change into work clothes or find gloves. She'd been pounding stakes; she lifted sore hands and winced at the blister on her thumb. Then she

brushed sand off her gray dress slacks and white blouse, now stained with sweat and dirt. The calculations gave them only three hours of warning, three hours to mobilize and prepare for the Exchange.

*Time. Not near enough.*

She glanced back at the Marine.

"Could you handle that bear if it kept coming?"

Palmer grunted. "It moves, I shoot it."

"And if it keeps coming? It would take a cannon to kill one of those things. And, what if we're attacked by some other ice-age animal on steroids?" Palmer said nothing. "And that's not all of it," Sharon continued. "Can you shoot a bug, a bat smaller than a grasshopper, or a virus? That's what they're really afraid of. If Bear Country animals get loose back in the world and start breeding or a disease comes back with us—"

Gunshots. A hundred yards away.

The survey crew gawked in the direction of the shots. Raindrops splattered on dirt, pavement and grass. Wind stirred the trees. Three helicopters, painted with green and brown camouflage, arced low. Sharon moved under a tree to get out of the drizzle.

A lumbering cargo helicopter, engine screaming, swooped in and landed close enough that she felt the downwash from the rotors. Men and women in camouflage uniforms swarmed it—unloading bundles of twelve-foot fence posts and barbed wire.

Sharon stretched the protesting muscles of her lower back and stared out into Bear Country.

"Did you ever think you'd be standing twenty feet from another world?" Sharon said. Palmer ignored her. "Not really another world, I guess, but a different version of ours. Here, our ancestors died out or never developed. Too much competition? Killed off by climate or disease?"

Palmer looked bored.

"You already knew that? Maybe you don't care..." Sharon noticed most of the stakes marking the EZ were gone. "The eggheads guessed wrong by two minutes and by a good three feet. That's not reassuring."

Palmer grunted. "If that's the worst screw-up we run into, I won't complain. Those guys in the truck? Friends of yours?"

"No. Never seen them before."

"You know they're AKs?"

"Aryan Kings? The street gang?"

"That's what the tattoos said. And more are coming."

A bright blue pickup identical to the amputated one pulled up. The driver, wearing a radio earpiece, sharp chinos, a form-fitting black T, and reflective sunglasses got out. He towered over Sharon.

"Getting a good look at you. There are a hundred cops around. There won't always be." He took out a cell phone and clicked her picture. "Our brothers would have made it if you weren't in the way."

Sharon glared at the Marine.

"Are you just going to stand there?"

Palmer pointed her rifle. "Shut up and hit the dirt."

"What?"

"Down! Now!"

Sharon hesitated before going down on one knee. Palmer's rifle barked. Sharon, open-mouthed, stared at the Marine, then glanced back at Bear Country. Dozens of long-legged, green-furred monkeys boiled out of the grass on the far side of the firebreak. They ran so fast they looked like a movie playing in fast-forward.

Palmer yelled, "Down! Flat! You're in my line of fire!"

A monkey lunged before Sharon could get the rest of the way down. She kicked at it, missed, and sprawled in the grass. She rolled and came up in a fighting stance. The AK from the pickup was on one knee with a

stunned expression on his face. His cell phone lay on the ground by Sharon's foot; she kicked it into the weeds. A second monkey raced in and hit Palmer in the face with a rock. Palmer dropped her rifle, swayed for a second, then fell to her knees with hands covering her face. Blood seeped through her fingers. Most of the pack was already past. They raced into the thick brush—Sharon's eyes had trouble tracking them once they hit the weeds.

A monkey at the rear of the pack skidded to a stop, then darted back and grabbed the Marine's rifle. Sharon jumped forward to seize the barrel end. She lifted the rifle, with the monkey still clinging to it, and slammed the animal into the ground. It let go and staggered a few steps.

Sharon smashed the rifle butt into the monkey's head. The impact knocked it off its feet. Moving in drunken slow motion, the animal tried to get up. She hit it again. It stopped moving. She started another swing, but someone grabbed the rifle.

"That's enough, ma'am. We'll take it from here."

Sharon turned to face a tall, well-proportioned blonde in a well-tailored, light-green dress. A soldier sprinted past Sharon and draped a net over the monkey. The tall woman released the rifle butt. With intelligent brown eyes, she studied Sharon.

"Did any get past?"

Sharon's adrenaline rush faded. She felt weak and short of breath.

"Yeah, dozens."

The blonde pulled out a radio.

"Monkeys in sector three. Get choppers and trackers over here ASAP." She put the radio away. "Marine butt will fry over this. They had three hours to set up a perimeter, but the fence is still in pieces. So much for operational readiness."

Sharon strode over to Palmer, who sat

on a tuft of grass with her hands on her face.

"Are you okay?" Sharon asked.

"Yeah. Broke my nose, but I'll be fine."

Sharon stared, realized Palmer was serious, and shook her head.

*Lady Marines are tough.*

The blonde strolled over and lifted Palmer's hand.

"Get that cleaned up and bandaged, Marine. Make sure you tell the medic you got up close and personal with an LGM."

Palmer touched her nose gingerly with her bloody fingers.

"Yes, ma'am."

Sharon watched Palmer amble off. She turned to the blonde.

"Are you in her chain of command?"

"I *am* her chain of command," the woman said.

The AK got up. "Where's my cell phone?"

Sharon stared at him. "Who cares? Do you know where you are? Do you know what we'll be going through for the next two weeks?"

"You screwed with us. Don't think this is over."

The blonde grimaced. "Whatever it was, yeah, it's over. You'll spend the next two weeks piloting a shovel." She gestured at Marines surrounding the truck and pointed to the gang members. "Get these bangers doing something useful."

As the Marines escorted the men away, the blonde turned to Sharon.

"Someone you know?"

"Never seen them before today. I didn't do anything to them. Why'd they come after me like that?"

"Because you were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Take some free advice—steer clear of them. You handled the LGM pretty well. Martial arts?"

"Some. LGM?"

"Little Green Monkey. Jump on a truck and get to the shelter before curfew."

"I want to make sure my daughter got out."

"How old is she?"

"Seven, but she's..."

"What?"

"She has issues. Let's leave it at that."

"Okay. Special needs or not, if she's seven they weren't supposed to draft you. Is there anyone you can call? Husband? Boyfriend? Family?"

"Ex-husband—restraining order. The sitter was supposed to gather my daughter's things and get her out. The soldiers wouldn't listen. They gave me a choice of work crew or bullet."

The woman shrugged. "They screwed up. Sorry. They were in a hurry. Okay, you've done your part. We have enough warm bodies." She handed Sharon a laminated card. "This will get you through security. See the sergeant, get briefed, then find your daughter."

The wind tossed Sharon's hair. She brushed it back from her eyes and strolled over to a burly man in a tan, brown and gray Marine combat utility uniform. He looked up from his clipboard and she showed him the card.

The sergeant glanced at it.

"Get-out-of-jail-free card? Good for you. Ground rules: Stay in Rockport. Stay away from the EZ. You have an hour until curfew. Go home. Lock your doors. Close the shutters if you have them. Stay there. If you're caught driving after curfew your vehicle will be confiscated. Cell phones will work as long as the cell tower batteries hold up—a few days at most. Don't waste power trying to call the old world. It's not there. You can't recharge your phone, so emergencies only. Beyond generators running key facilities, there is no electricity. You

may or may not have running water. Avoid the Bear Country animals. Even the small ones have teeth, claws, and sometimes venom.”

Sharon tried not to think about Bethany—hiding her impatience as the sergeant went through his list. *Come on! Come on! I have a daughter to check on!*

Finally, he said, “Exchanges average two weeks. We’ll have emergency medical care, food, and water at city hall, the hospital, and the high school. Use your food and drink at home first. Questions?”

“No.”

“Any medical problems I should know about?”

“No.”

“Three hours before the Exchange ends we’ll know it’s coming. You’ll hear a pulsed siren. When you hear that siren, report to the high school for evacuation into quarantine facilities. Make sure you have your important papers with you. Got it?”

“Yes.”

The sergeant handed her a printed list of the rules.

“One hour. When you hear the sirens, that’s curfew. The patrols won’t mess around. If you’re out, you’ll be shot. Beat it.”

Workers piled onto flatbed trucks. Sharon showed her card to a driver.

“My house is on Eleventh Street. It’s on the way if you’re headed toward town. Will you drop me?”

The driver handed the card back.

“These cards are hard to come by. You know Anna Morgan?”

“Who’s Anna Morgan?”

The driver studied Sharon’s face for a moment.

“I’ll drop you. Jump in back.”

The truck bed was already crowded, but a young man wearing a NASCAR cap

helped her up. Two soldiers stretched a chain to hold them in. A tap on the truck’s side told the driver they were ready. The vehicle started with a gassy cloud of diesel and heaved into motion.

Sharon smiled at the NASCAR man. “Thanks.”

He shrugged.

The truck weaved through parked equipment, workers, and soldiers directing traffic and rumbled onto Highway 25. At the exit to Eleventh Street, the driver pulled to the shoulder. Sharon slipped under the chain and jumped down. The truck lurched back into motion. The young man tipped his cap and grinned, and Sharon raised her hand in reply. She jogged up the off ramp—glanced at her watch. Twenty minutes until curfew. Time enough. She turned the corner by her house.

*Oh, no.*

Mary’s car was still in the driveway.

*Why didn’t she leave?*

Sharon vacillated between relief at not being separated from Bethany for two weeks and fury at Mary for not getting her daughter out of the danger zone.

She climbed the steps and pushed the door open.

The door abruptly jerked from her hand. Her ex-husband, Anthony, grinned.

“Hi, honey.”

Sharon almost got her arm up in time to block the Early Times whiskey bottle he swung at her head.

## Chapter Two

*A dog howled.*

The howl went on and on, mixed with yaps, deep-throated barks and a whoofing noise that sounded almost human. Sharon thought vaguely about throwing something at the dog, but her head throbbed whenever

she moved. It throbbed when the dog howled too, and even when it was silent, but not as much.

She toyed with the idea of getting up and finding an aspirin. *Maybe Bethany can—* “Bethany!” Her mind snapped into focus, and she opened her eyes. She was lying on the floor of her living room. The room was dark except for the last sunlight of the day, which cast a weak pool of fading daylight in front of the partly open door. The late evening sun reflected off towering clouds, turning the sky red.

Sharon’s hands were tied behind her back. She tried to move and found that her legs were tied too. Spots formed in front of her eyes as she raised her head and scanned the room. It was empty of people. The whoofing sound she had heard earlier was coming from the spare bedroom. The only sound in the living room was a faint hissing of static from a battery-powered radio.

Sharon managed to sit up. She groaned as pain radiated out from her jaw and down from the top of her head. She sagged back against the wall and waited for the worst of the pain to subside. The dog howled again and she finally recognized the sound: her neighbors to the west chained their mixed-breed—a German Shepherd head and body on stumpy Dachshund legs—in their back yard when they went to work.

*And they didn’t come back for it. Nice people.*

Sharon jumped as the radio suddenly came to life with the DJ saying, “This is Bill Simkin from WGNB radio. We’re back on the air thanks to an emergency generator loaned to us by the United States Marine Corps. We’ll be broadcasting twenty minutes of emergency information three times a day for the next two weeks, until the Exchange

reverses and we rejoin The World. In case you hadn't noticed, we're now in another reality—totally isolated from the rest of humanity, except possibly for several hundred convicts who escaped when their maximum security prison went over in an Exchange years ago.”

Sharon brought her knees up and braced her back against the wall, then lifted her hips and wrestled her hands in front of her. She half listened to the DJ as she waited for the throbbing in her head to subside.

“—tell our listeners when and where the first Exchange happened, Tracy?”

“The first Exchange was five years ago on New Zealand's North Island,” a female voice, apparently Tracy, said. “That's actually one of the best places it could have happened. New Zealand is one of the most geographically isolated large land masses on earth, so the Bear Country animals weren't able to spread far, even though we didn't have a response ready. Also, the Bear Country animals on New Zealand were harmless—flightless birds and primitive rat-sized mammals. There have been over two hundred Exchanges since then and we haven't always been that lucky.”

Sharon looked out the door at her neighborhood. It appeared unchanged—with neatly mowed lawns in front of ranch-style brick houses on a curving street. Cars still sat in front of many of the garages. A basketball nestled in the gutter at the end of one of the driveways, straight down from a basketball hoop mounted on the garage. There was no movement on the street; no joggers, nobody walking their dog, nobody driving to the grocery store. And no sound other than the dog howling and the radio.

The DJ was saying, “A lot of people expected glaciers. Can you explain why we don't see that?”

“We didn't go back in time to the ice age. We went sideways into another reality. Animals like mammoths and sabertooths survived in Bear Country. They didn't back in The World. The climates are pretty much the same.”

Sharon brought her wrists up to her face, studied the ropes in the fading light and swore at the tidy knots her ex-husband had tied.

*Why didn't you do a half-assed job on this like you do on everything else?*

She went to work on the ropes with her teeth. That set her jaw to throbbing even more.

On the radio, Tracy said, “—big mystery of Bear Country is what you call the weird stuff. The bats are the weirdest, but around twenty percent of the large animals in Bear Country are in the wrong place. There are kangaroos in North America. There are monkeys from Africa in North and South America. The weird stuff's been here millions of years, though, so there's nothing exactly like it in our timeline. The extra competition gives Bear Country animals their edge.”

“How did animals get from Africa and Australia to North America?”

Tracy laughed. “That's the million-dollar question. It doesn't seem possible since Bear Country continents are in the same places ours are.”

The light through the door faded as Sharon worked at the knot. She paused only when the pain in her jaw brought tears and gritted teeth.

On the radio, the DJ asked, “If you went out into Bear Country, what would you be most afraid of?”

“Don't go out there,” Tracy said. “It's against the law. And, of course, it's just plain dumb.”

“But what is the most dangerous animal in Bear Country?”

“Try the bears,” Sharon said. The whoofing sound from the bedroom got louder. “Bethany?” The sound stopped. “Mary?” It started again. The dog had stopped howling for a while. Now it started again too.

“—and there are amber wolves, cheetahs, plus the tough plant-eaters like Mastodons and the big kangaroos.”

“I don't think of kangaroos in the same danger class as sabertooths.”

“These are. Don't mess with them.”

“There are a lot of things we don't want to mess with in Bear Country.”

“That's why we quarantine Exchange Zones,” Tracy said. “Bear Country animals are tougher than ours. They would take over if they got loose in The World, especially the little seed-eater bats. Think rabbits in Australia.”

Sharon tried to get her fingers around so she could get at the knots. She glanced down at her dress pants. No sign of them having been disturbed. *Which means I'll kill him fast and without a whole lot of pain.* She looked for something to help pull the ropes off. The cover of her living room computer was off as usual, with a couple of memory sticks sitting beside it, waiting for her to swap them in. She couldn't remember if she left a screwdriver over there. The computer was silent, of course.

The radio broadcast ended and the whole house was quiet for a time, uncomfortably quiet. She found herself almost hoping the dog would howl. The huffing from the bedroom came again. *What is that? Bethany?* She called her

daughter's name out loud.

The huffing sound came and then the dog's howl. "Save your breath, will you?" *Or keep howling until someone comes to take care of you and maybe they'll find me.* She tried to trace the knots on her wrists in the fading light. She bit a knot and pulled at it, pain radiating from the bruise on her jaw.

She thought about who might come by and help her. Her sister was still in Texas. Her parents would have been evacuated along with the rest of the people in the retirement community at the edge of town. *They'll spend the next two weeks worrying about their granddaughter—and maybe thinking about their prodigal daughter a time or two. Just long enough to say how like me it was to not get her out, to not make sure she's safe.*

*And still I miss them. Pathetic.* She had a flash of her dad leaning on his cane and peering down at her. "Well, this is what you get when you marry a nice car, a nice head of hair, and the paranoid nutcase who came with them." *And then he would say something about Anthony causing Bethany to be the way she is.*

A faint sound from outside caught her ear. A car. She turned, half expecting to see her dad's meticulously clean and polished black Crown Victoria pulling into the driveway. Instead, she watched a Humvee in camouflage paint go by, moving slowly, but gone before she could react. *No other cars moving. After curfew—no traffic at all.*

Shadows pooled in the street and lawns outside the open door. She turned so she could keep an eye on the yard while still pulling at the ropes with her teeth. The dog howled again, but the howl choked off abruptly. The street and yard suddenly seemed much darker. She waited for the howling to start again, pulling at the knots

more frantically in the dying light as the silence lingered.

The knot finally loosened a little. As she tore at the ropes, she heard a faint sound from the street, a scraping that teased the edge of her hearing. It eased away as she focused on it, then came a little louder as she went back to tearing at the knot. *Still no sound from the dog.*

Sharon felt the muscles in her arms and legs tense and her heart raced. She took a deep cleansing breath and let it out slowly, willing her muscles to relax. That helped a little, but she tore at the rope even harder. It slipped out from between her teeth. *Shit.* She fumbled for the strand in the near total darkness.

The sound from the sidewalk teased her ears again and a light dazzled her.

"Who's there?" It was a male voice, deep and strong.

"I'm in my own house," Sharon said. "Who are you?"

The sound was closer this time. Sharon tried to see past the light, but could only make out a low squat shadow, not much more than waist high. The shadow seemed far too short for the voice. The voice came again, saying, "Computer lady; I recognize you now. What are you doing on the floor and why is your door open?"

"None of your business."

"You're in my neighborhood. That makes you my business."

"Who are you?"

"You alone? That nutcase of an ex-husband still hanging around?"

"Don't know as you need to know that."

The figure behind the flashlight got closer. "You're tied up. Did Anthony crawl out of his whiskey bottle and do something to you?"

"He brought the whiskey bottle with him. Who are you?" The light neared the bottom of her steps and Sharon tensed, ready to slam her side against the door to shut it.

"Neighborhood watch, what's left of it. I can't help you with the ropes."

"I'll get them." Sharon got a better look at the man behind the flashlight. "You can't because you're in a wheelchair and you can't get up the steps. You're the guy who sits at the corner at rush hour." *The old guy who creeps me out.* She recognized the silhouette of a shotgun in the man's wheelchair.

"Name's Elroy Campbell. Intended to get over and let the dog out but it took a while to get the shotgun from where I hid it so my daughter wouldn't find it. Yeah, she's always here to tell me what I can't do, but did she come get me when the going got tough? Nope. Old coot might have slowed her down. Young healthy thing with a big, strapping husband and no kids. But *she* got out—and left me here. Well, I *can* handle things myself, no thanks to her."

"Can you get the light out of my eyes? Actually it would help if you turned it on the ropes."

"I'd have told her to take a hike if she had come, but she should've come anyway."

Sharon found the strand she had been working on and got it in her teeth again. Her jaw still throbbed, but she pushed the pain to the back of her mind.

"Haven't heard from that dog lately." Elroy flashed his light toward the side of the house. "Thought I saw something move back there. I hope the dog just went to sleep. I'm not counting on it though."

Sharon kept pulling on the ropes.

"So Anthony hit you and tied you up?"

“Yeah.”

“I thought you were some big martial arts guru.”

“Black belt,” she mumbled through the rope. “Which means I almost got my hand up instead of standing there with my mouth open.”

“Almost doesn’t cut it on blocking whiskey bottles. Want me to call the Marines?”

“I can handle it.”

“Really? How long have you been laying there?”

*Hours at least. Too many.* Sharon didn’t say anything, but she tore at the rope with renewed vigor. The knot loosened a bit more.

“He took your daughter. I saw them leave.”

“I know. Will you shut up and let me get these knots?”

“Marines won’t do anything anyway. Domestic dispute. Custody battle. They don’t have time to care, even if you tell them he’s taking her to Sister West.”

“He isn’t. They kicked him out. Shut up.”

“Snippy. You realize I used to be a cop.”

“I don’t care. Shut up.”

“Real snippy. Maybe I shouldn’t toss you my pocket knife.”

Sharon glared at the old man. “You haven’t even started to see snippy. Give me the knife.”

Even with the knife it wasn’t easy to get the ropes off with her hands tied. Sharon tried to get up after she got the last rope off and fell against the wall. She leaned there until the worst of the dizziness passed, then

looked into the flashlight beam. “Thanks. Be back in a minute.”

She found a flashlight and ran to the bedroom. “Bethany!” She was disappointed but not surprised to see the chubby, sixty-something face of her babysitter, Mary, who was tied up and gagged on the bed. “Where’s Bethany?”

Mary shook her head and made the whooping sound Sharon heard earlier. Sharon yanked the gag out. “What happened?”

“Your husband—”

“Ex-husband. Where’d he take her?”

“I don’t know.”

Sharon untied the woman and led her to the living room. Elroy was still sitting in front of the porch. “I was wondering what happened to your babysitter. If your husband didn’t head straight to Sister West and her bunch of nutjobs, he’s probably at that fried-out trailer his dad used to own north of town. He’ll probably have his brothers with him.”

“How do you know about the trailer?”

“I used to be a cop,” Elroy said. “Your daughter has the face of an angel but she has some issues. You need to get her back before Anthony and company decide to give her an exorcism.”

“They—” Sharon stopped. *Might actually do something that crazy. Anthony can’t admit it was probably in his genes. It has to be something I did or the government did or the big corporations did.*

“He’ll get around to blaming the devil eventually,” Elroy said. “All she’d have to do is say something and have it come true, like—”

“Shut up.”

“Babysitter told me she said *crash* a good ten seconds before two cars ran into each other a while back.”

Sharon glared back at Mary. “Somebody talks too much. She’s not psychic or possessed. She sees details and puts them together.”

“I know. She’s a Dustin Hoffman.”

“Huh?”

“Rain Man—or Rain Girl, I suppose. Idiot savant. Probably autistic and OCD too. I know that and you know that. I’m not sure your ex-hubby accepts that.”

Sharon didn’t respond. Elroy turned his flashlight off. “Batteries won’t last forever.”

The beam from Sharon’s flashlight seemed lost as she directed it into the dark street. The houses on her block blended into the darkness. No porch lights. No lights in the windows. Not even a flickering candle. Sharon said, “I wonder why the dog stopped barking.”

*I first wrote Exchange as a series of novellas in 1997 and 1998. I sent them to the pro-zines and semi-prozines, collecting rejections from Analog, Asimov’s, F&SF among others. I still have the rejections and the manuscripts that generated them.*

*Looking back at the manuscripts I sent out, I cringe. They weren’t eye-hurtingly awful, but I had a lot to learn about writing. I still do, but I’m gradually getting there..*

*In 1998, Exchange would have seemed more innovative than it does in 2010, after Island in the Sea of Time, Timespike, and Conquistador came out.*

*I don’t claim originality for the idea of moving large numbers of people to another dimension or time. I got the idea from Murray Leinster’s Sidewise In Time, and its roots undoubtedly go back further. I do have some twists that I haven’t seen anywhere else later in the book. Look for it on Amazon starting July 6<sup>th</sup>.*

Alternate History APA

**POINT OF DIVERGENCE, MY OTHER APA - BY DALE COZORT**

In addition to my FAPA membership, I'm editor of a small APA called Point Of Divergence. It's a specialist Alternate History APA. It was founded about fifteen years ago by Jim Rittenhouse, a prominent long-time Chicago-area fan. He set it up as a combination of APA and writers' group. It comes out roughly every other month with a little slippage. We usually end up with five issues a year, though there have been a couple of times when it went into hiatus for six months to a year. Issue #60 just went in the mail on April 21<sup>st</sup>. POD is fairly free-form, but we try to keep all of the zines on eight-and-a-half inch paper so we can put the zines together and staple them, with card-stock covers. I do some of the covers, but only as a last resort. The good covers, like the ones for issue #60 come from David Johnson.

I joined POD in 1998, with issue 10 or 11. I became co-editor about 3 years ago, and took over as sole editor after issue #50. The original editor, Jim Rittenhouse had a series of illnesses that were eventually traced to a long-fuse kind of leukemia that messed with his immune system. He kept hoping he would get better and the APA went into hiatus several times, before he finally decided to hand off the APA to someone else.

POD has never been a large APA. I think it peaked at around 20 people. A lot of them wandered away in the last hiatus, and a few others in the ones before that. We had maybe a dozen people when I became co-editor and it has declined a bit since then. Dale Speirs is an ex-POD-person who left during the last hiatus.

Obviously POD doesn't have the secret to a healthy, growing APA. I don't know if there is one in an era of on-line forums and mailing lists that cater to every interest. One ex-member of POD runs an Alternate History forum that has probably several hundred to a thousand members. I post there from time-to-time and I like the immediate feedback. At the same time, POD has its place. On-line is immediate, but it is also ephemeral. A topic is discussed, drops off the radar and becomes yesterday's news all within a day or two. There is rarely a lot of depth or thought in the conversations.

At their best, APAs can be continuing, thoughtful, in-depth conversations lasting for years. In reality, many of them are a lot of people “talking” without many people listening. Most mailing comments (including mine for many years) tend to be last-minute afterthoughts, typed in the last day or two before the deadline after a perfunctory skim of the zine in question.

POD was lucky for many years in that it had one guy who really went in depth with his comments. He would consistently do four or five pages of his own stuff and maybe thirty or forty pages of mailing comments. The comments were insightful and just quite well done. You couldn’t run an APA with only people like that, but having a couple of them in the APA makes it a far more rewarding experience for everybody. It feels good to know that someone is reading what you’re writing, and thinking about it, even if they don’t always agree with what you say.

POD helped me get more comfortable with writing in the early days. I could tell myself that I was writing for friends in the APA, not for the cold, scary and unforgiving world of the book industry.

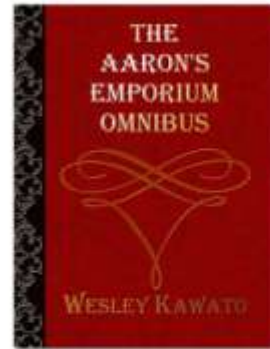
An APA is sort of like a slow-motion conversation. If everyone is a talker, the conversation doesn’t work well. If everyone is a listener/responder, the conversation just trails off. It needs people to tell stories, toss out ideas and get things going. It also needs listeners/responders, people who take the ideas and stories and run with them. I’ve tried to be both in POD since our super-responder got too busy to continue in POD, but I’m just not that good at it.

POD is always looking for new blood. If you’re seriously into alternate history and you want to be involved in yet another APA in addition to FAPA, you might want to look into POD. We have a webpage at:

[www.dalecozort.com/PODPage.html](http://www.dalecozort.com/PODPage.html)

Note: The covers for POD issue 60 are by David Johnson.

## POINT OF DIVERGENCE SIXTY



## COVERS FOR THE COVER

## A SLICE OF MY LIFE AS A FAN

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My science fiction fandom is probably smaller than most of yours. While I've been reading science fiction since I was about ten years old, and have been trying to write it off and on since I was in fifth grade, I attended my first science fiction convention nine years ago when I was in my mid-40s. I've attended only Chicago-area conventions, with the exception of one trip to the Detroit area for a Penguicon (Science Fiction/Open Source Software). I usually attend Duckcon, WindyCon, and Capricon. I've never gone to a Worldcon. I've met very few science fiction luminaries. I spoke briefly with Hal Clement one time shortly before his death, have been on a couple of panels with Eric Flint, and one with Mike Resnick. I interacted with Steve Stirling quite a bit on the old GENie online network and still correspond with him from time-to-time. Other than that, big-name science fiction authors are people I read about, not people I interact with.

As I read FAPA I feel a sense of loss. I would have loved to have met Phillip Jose Farmer and Isaac Asimov in person, though I would have been too shy to actually

talk to them beyond mono-syllables, and I suspect that in the flesh they might have proven a bit disillusioning, though based on limited on-line interaction most of the authors I've interacted with have been very bright, very creative people, and generally pretty down-to-earth.

Point of Divergence was my first APA. I joined it 12 years ago. I joined FAPA because POD was on hiatus and looked like it was going down the tubes. Fellow POD member Dale Spears suggested FAPA as an alternative. My activity in FAPA has been a bit episodic, and I haven't always been a good commenter. I read some issues avidly and do a lot of mailing comments. When I'm busy writing a novel I tend to cherry-pick distros, looking at a few zines and just skimming others. I always read Spear's stuff and Silverberg's, but as I mentioned, I skim others if I'm pressed for time. Skimming is my loss. There is a lot of good stuff in the APA. I do always appreciate well-crafted covers, and well-organized zines.

## MAILING COMMENTS

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**The Method to My Madness:** I haven't done mailing comments since at least February 2009. I read some zines and at least skim the others when they first come in, but after the months I don't remember enough to comment intelligently. How do I give as many people as possible feedback? Realistically I don't have enough time to reread all of the zines in all four of the distros and do comments. Here is what I came up with:

Comments are in alphabetical order by contributor's last name. If you had a zine in any of the last four distros your zine should have a section of comments. If you are in the February 2010 distro I usually didn't go back to comment on the November 2009 one, though if something caught my eye I did. If you weren't in the February distro I went back and tried to find you in the November 2009 one. If you weren't there I went back to August 2009, May 2009 or February 2009 ones.

**Sandra Bond (February 2009):** Welcome back, and I hope you aren't a one-shot. I would feel silly talking to air, after all. Your travails in a Wisconsin winter: I can empathize to a certain extent, living in northern Illinois, which can get Wisconsin-like at times. Our winter of 1982-83 would have given a typical Wisconsin winter a good run for its money. I still remember a student

from Libya arriving during the worst of that winter and wondering how we lived that way.

Ah, someone else who puts fiction in their zine, and a nice little story at that. I hope you're still involved and I hope to see more from you.

**Jason Burnett (February 2009):** I don't know if you're still in the APA, but in case you are I'll say a few words about your zine. Sorry to hear about your computer problems. I had a similar problem a couple of years ago as a couple of computers I built around AMD 32-bit Athalon motherboards had those motherboards die due to leaking capacitors. I got the data off the hard drives and consigned the computers to the basement bone-yard. GoogleDocs is a good solution if you don't have a single main computer. The Rostler story sounds fun. I've often toyed with writing stories where a couple of science fiction universes co-existed. It would be interesting to see how the Star Trek and Star Wars universes would react to one another. My guess is that Darth Vader and crew kick butt until they meet the Borg. On the invention of the Mailing Comment: I didn't realize there was a time before Mailing Comments, and don't see the point of APAs without them.

**Roger Cadenhead (February 2009):** “Bridesicle” sounds fun. Interesting idea. Your comments to Sabella: I think one of my hard disk utilities has a shredder function that gets rid of any remnants of files on unused portions of your hard drive. I’m afraid I have to agree on not wanting being eager to meet Ellison, though that’s based on a limited amount of reading of his non-fiction.

**Jim Caughran:** I think I have you beat on procrastination. I wrote a zine and got it printed off, but then missed the May 2009 mailing, forgot to send it for the August 2009 mailing, the November 2009 mailing, and the February 2010 mailing. The threat of MINAC finally got me off my butt.

Sorry to hear about the second hip replacement and your problems with it. My sister had to go through that with one of her hips. Not fun.

Your comments to Speirs: The bit about the rich getting rich/poor getting poorer is an interesting one. I think that in the late 1960s to early 1970s a faction of the wealthy and powerful in the US and Western Europe decided (rightly or wrongly) that there weren’t enough resources on the planet to support a growing and prosperous middle class and an increasingly wealthy upper class. (Remember all of the talk about the limits to growth) Between the middle class and increasing wealth for the upper class, guess which one the upper classes decided was dispensable?

A partially overlapping faction also decided that the waste products of manufacturing were too dangerous for most manufacturing to be done in their neighborhoods. So heavy manufacturing gets done mostly in poor (or initially poor) countries run by police states capable of squelching any dissent about people getting poisoned by industrial waste.

I remember back in high school when as a member of my high school ecology club we attended a ceremony where a local manufacturer removed some kind of large polluting machine. I learned a valuable lesson a day or two later when I found out that the machine was actually just getting moved to Brazil. Tough environmental regulations along with our current definition of free trade generally equals companies moving manufacturing to places with no environmental regulation and sending their products back to western consumers. In terms of US health, that’s probably a good thing, though the health effects of going from a manufacturing job with good benefits to a minimum wage job with none may negate the advantages of a cleaner environment, at least for working class people. If you believe that people in less developed countries are just as human as people in the US (which I do), NIMBYing our pollution to the developing world is obviously bad policy, not least because transporting the goods back to the west adds to the overall level of pollutions.

The reality is that continually increasing consumption of many of the things we

use does run into limits, especially if the likes of China and India, along with a big hunk of the Middle East and Latin America join the party. We need to find ways of increasing wealth without increasing consumption of scarce resources.

The obvious answer is to shift consumption from things to information. There are problems with that though. First, a lot of people, including most young people, don’t respect property rights to information the same way they respect actual property. When a person can carry a million books worth of information or enough video for two weeks of 24/7 viewing on a low-end external hard-drive, it’s hard to keep information from being free if enough people want it to be. Second, information per se isn’t scarce. High quality information may be scarce, but there is a glut of most forms of information. Ask anyone in the publishing industry and they’ll tell you that there is glut of novels, short stories, novellas, factual books, and pretty much any other kind of writing. There is certainly a glut of video—enough video to populate 500 channels with junk and a smattering of gems and enough to keep Youtube full of new videos.

There are some ways that you can substitute information for material things. Video conferencing can substitute for travel. One smart bomb can replace a hundred dumb ones. An LED light-bulb should soon be able to substitute for a standard one and use a fraction of the energy, and CFL bulbs already do that, though with some drawbacks. An e-book and some electrons can substitute for a thousand or more dead tree books, if the problem with piracy and letting people move their books from platform to platform without repurchasing can be solved. The key is to find enough of those substitutions that actually work and make sense economically to keep economies growing while not overstressing our resources anymore than we already are, and hopefully decreasing the stresses per capita.

Unfortunately, a lot of potential substitutes for existing things in short supply have their own bottlenecks. A lot of alternate energy sources don’t scale well or have a dependence on rare earths somewhere in their production chain.

Your comments to Wells: I’m embarrassed to say that I have only minimal knowledge of Canadian political events.

Your comments to Sabella: I’m afraid I can’t agree with you on hoping Palin gets the Republican nomination. Two reasons for that: First, don’t underestimate the woman. Do you really want her that close to the presidency? If the economy goes south at just the wrong time she could conceivably win. Second, you really don’t want a one-party state—kind of hard to have a democracy with only one party, and the two parties have made it very hard for a third party to come in and replace one of them. So, if the Republican go down and stay down you end up with a one-party state. I would far prefer it if the Republicans nominated someone who would be a competent president if

elected whatever the policy differences.

I suppose part of the difference between your views and mine is that I don't see the two parties as being all that different in terms of the things I consider crucial. There was a time when the Democrats drew a vital part of their political support from industrial unions, while the Republicans drew a crucial part of their support from small to medium-sized businesses. Both bases of support to some extent counterbalanced the influence of very large corporations because the interests of those bases were opposed to those of their larger competitors or opponents in the labor/management arena. Labor is still important to the Democratic party, but it's more and more government employee unions of various kinds, rather than manufacturing unions. Government employment unions don't have the same built-in opposition to corporate interests that industrial ones do.

Small and medium-sized business is still important to the Republican base, but more and more of small and medium-sized business is composed of taxpayer-farmers—people who derive most of their income from manipulating the government in some way to get subsidies of various kinds. There isn't the same kind of direct competition between smaller and larger businesses that there once was. Plus the balance between small and large business has swung decisively in favor of larger ones. Small and medium-sized businesses either get big, find a niche, or get bought out.

As a result of all this, both parties are increasingly dominated by corporate and large business interests, especially financial ones. That's pretty obvious from the distribution of campaign contributions. I don't necessarily consider all large businesses inherently evil, but disproportionate power in the hands of profit-seeking organizations can cause major problems. Changing the party in power isn't going to change much until the balance of power in who gets nominated within the two parties changes. Average people need to get involved early in the primary cycle of Senate and House races, where their money and time can have a larger impact than in the general elections.

There is also a peculiar irony in the way the US electoral process works. As the Democratic party gains seats in the House or Senate it inevitably gets more conservative while the Republican party also gets more conservative. When the Democrats lose seats in the House or Senate, they inevitably get more liberal. As the Republicans gain more seats they become more liberal too.

Why? Because the seats that normally change hands are either swing seats or seats that normally go to the other party. If the Democratic party wins swing seats or seats that normally go Republican, the people who won those seats tend to vote more conservative than the rest of the party because otherwise they'll have a tough time getting reelected. They are representing an electorate

more conservative than the electorate represented by the rest of the Democratic party.

The same thing happens in reverse when Republicans take a lot of swing seats and normally Democratic seats. It's not that changes in seats from one party to the other don't have any impact. It's just that it has less impact than most people realize, and much of the impact it does have is in the first few months to a year after an election.

And that's far more politics than I normally do. I'm not a particularly political person, though I will vote for or against individuals of either party that I consider particularly honest/competent or dishonest/incompetent.

**Erik Leif Davin:** Interesting bit on the origins of filking. That's one of the many parts of fandom that I haven't explored in much depth yet. What I've seen of it looks like fun. I feel deprived. I was an adult with a seven year old daughter when my I attended my first convention. I'm not sure why I didn't go earlier. Probably a combination of stereotypes of geeky Star Trek fanatics and the cost. I've still never gotten to a Worldcon. Must do that soon.

I'm afraid I didn't vote in the FAPA elections, so I'm neither part of the six nor part of the landslide. I haven't been active enough in the APA to know who would be a good leader and who wouldn't.

John Carter of Mars as a Pixar movie: I hadn't heard of that, but it sounds fun.

And, going back to your November zine: Interesting tidbits about Clarion. I thought about applying there last summer, but couldn't swing the time and expense. I suppose that deep-down I may have been a little afraid of being rejected if did apply. I did get to the novel-writing version of the workshop James Gunn does at University of Kansas. It's not as long as Clarion, but it was helpful. I'm doing the short-story version this summer.

I'm trying to figure out if I've finished writing my million words of crap yet. If you count alternate history scenarios I'm definitely there. If we just look at fiction, and don't count rewrites, I'm probably somewhere close to 700,000 words. If I hit a million words of fiction and am still not happy with my writing I may want to find another creative outlet.

**Gordon Eklund:** Health care in the US is a sad mess, and probably will remain so after the recently passed changes. The problem is partly that the political parties have become so deeply entrenched in their positions of nearly a hundred years ago and have indulged in a kind of political trench warfare for most of that time, with the public caught in the middle. The result is a system that no one would have designed on purpose and that simply can't give affordable health care without fundamental reform that isn't being considered

seriously by either party.

Your list of best movies: I feel very uncultured. I have one of the movies on your list, and haven't watched it yet.

**Randy Everts:** It's neat that you were able to meet Stan Laurel. I'm impressed and jealous. I read and enjoyed your Buddy Holly piece in the August 2009 distro.

**Tom Feller (August 2009):** I'm afraid I can't comment intelligently on your musical and theatre experiences. My daughter does do community theatre from time-to-time and that's the extent of my theatre-going. She was in a local production of *Once Upon a Mattress*. I also enjoyed the movie adaptation of *Watchmen*, and especially Rorschach. It captured the grim, gritty graphic novel pretty well. I wanted to catch *Taken*, but haven't been able to yet. Our teenage daughter has pushed us toward a steady diet of *Hannah Montana* on Disney Channel, though she is a little too old for it now. It's a cute little show that is starting to run out of ideas. We did watch the movie. It captures the essence of the show.

If you happen to have a grandchild over or are confident enough in your adulthood to watch cartoons without that excuse, I would recommend *Phineas and Ferb* or *The Grim Adventure of Bill and Mandy*. They're both aimed at kids, but with an added layer for adults in the room.

I enjoyed your con descriptions. A friend of mine shares Bob Embler's interest in bits of archaeology that don't fit into the current theories. A couple of years ago he showed me an article from a peer-reviewed journal that claimed that American Indians around the Great Lakes knew how to cast copper as early as 1000 BC. I don't know what to make of the claim. Indians in North America were certainly better metal-workers than most people give them credit for, but the consensus so far seems to be that they heated the rare nuggets of nearly pure metal and hammered them into shape, rather than smelting them or casting the metal. He made the claim based on an analysis of bubbles in the resulting artifacts. Among the other anomalies: part of a human skull that appears to be of a Homo erectus that was supposedly found along a lake in Mexico. It's hard to know what to make of something like that without the archaeological context, unfortunately, so I count it as a question mark, not necessarily evidence of pre-sapiens humans in the New World.

**Steven Green (May 2009)** Ha. You thought you could avoid being commented on by skipping the last three zines. Nope. I found you. I'm sorry to hear of your loss, and especially of the way it happened. Very scary and abrupt.

I can't think of much else to say other than to hope that you continue to find

things in your life that are worth doing.

**Arthur Hlavaty (August 2009):** You have an interesting take on the blogging and social networking scenes. I'll have to check out your LiveJournal. I'm also on LiveJournal and Facebook as DaleCoz. I have a MySpace account, but haven't visited it in years. I did join Twitter a few nights ago in a bout of insomnia. I haven't figured out anything useful to do with it yet.

I had to laugh at the idea of Mundane Science Fiction. I wonder how that differs from Literary Fiction or Mainstream. I like your take on Phillip Jose Farmer's influence on science fiction and your take on Mao.

**Fred Lerner:** I suspect that your librarian's way of getting statistics is more common than most people realize, and not just in libraries. You point to some interesting issues in your bit about the problems of determining how influential an article is. The way universities determine tenure also pushes research in some undesirable directions. According to one of my University instructor friends, papers where the hypothesis is disproven are accepted in peer-reviewed journal much less often than ones where the hypothesis is proven. That represents an obvious temptation to fudge data, but more importantly it pushes people away from high-risk science on the frontiers of knowledge and toward filling in low-risk little gaps in knowledge. Much of science publishing is obscure and non-controversial and intended to be.

On live TV versus DVDs and DVRs: I joined the DVR generation about two months ago and have already filled our DVR with almost 200 hours of programs, most of them science fiction television.

Interesting analysis of the many Jews who do not see Israel as their homeland. I think you nail the strength of Stirling's "Dies The Fire" series—that the people aren't trying to recreate the world they lost. They're helped along in that by the fact that with the new physical laws they can't rebuild that old world. Stirling builds a very interesting post-catastrophe world. I haven't read all of the books about the second generation post-catastrophe, but the ones I've read seem to be getting stronger with each book. Stirling is a very bright guy. I got into a couple of online debates with him on the old GENie online network back in the early 1990s and found him knowledgeable in a wide range of history areas, especially the history of technology. He also has a good grasp of how societies work in a crisis, though the first "Dies the Fire" book has some features that I consider implausible. As I read more of the series I understand why he did some of the stuff he did in that original novel. It set societies on some interesting paths that pay off in terms of plot and background color as the series goes on.

Stirling builds good playgrounds. His stories aren't always as big as the playgrounds deserve. I thought that the story in *The Sky People* was too small

for the playground, for example. The second book in that series didn't have that problem.

**Robert Lichtmann (November 2009):** Number of houses lived in: Put me in for two, plus three apartments, all for about a year. Times in the hospital: As far as I can remember I've only been in once. I've had a couple of knee surgeries, but they were outpatient. Membership longevity in FAPA. Since I was over fifty when I started, I doubt that I'll ever be in contention for longest membership. I'm in awe of the decades long memberships.

**Eric Lindsay:** I don't know what kinds of ecological problems feral camels are causing in Australia, but the cats really do need to go, at least outside the cities. One interesting thing about feral cats in Australia: With few large predators to compete with they get huge. I saw a picture of a tranquilized one that was head and shoulders too big for a standard cat carrier. I'm jealous of you having wallabies munching on your lawn. I'm sure you get blasé about it after a while.

Your comments to Spears: Yes, steampunk seems to be taking off in the US too. Capricon, a Chicago area convention, had a Cyberpunk theme this spring. The costumes were wonderful. I think the cool costumes and brass gadgets are a lot of Cyberpunk's appeal.

Your comments to Hlavaty: Your use of Facebook is close to what mine is, though I do visit a bit more than once a month. I consider it a waste of time, but a necessary one.

**Norm Metcalf:** I thoroughly enjoyed both *The Time Traders* and *Galactic Derelict*. Of course I was a pre-teen when I read them and was comparing them to Stratemeyer Syndicate Young Adult Series books like Hardy Boys, so it's possible they wouldn't hold up well if I reread them. That's always a danger when you reread the books you loved as a child.

Your comments to Fred Lerner: Very true. You need to give the reader a set of rules for the fictional universe and stick to them. That's also one of the criticisms of the later Star Trek series like Next Generation. They have a tendency to invent tech on the fly that conveniently solves their problem.

**Mike McInerney:** I like your memories of cap guns and playing Cowboys and Indians. Kids in our neighborhood used to light rolls of the caps with matches. I was probably fortunate that I didn't discover match-head rockets and tennis-ball cannons until I was in college. I would have probably burned to house down or blown a finger off. Your memories of the radio shows: I'm just a little too young to have gotten in on the best of the old radio adventures, but a Christian station in Chicago was still doing Christianized versions of the old radio adventures, and since we didn't have a TV that was our source of

electronic adventures. Like your parents, mine didn't want to get a TV, and didn't until I was 13. Even then we were allowed no more than one hour of TV per night.

I went through a Bomba the Jungle Boy stage, and collected a lot of the old hardcovers. I also went through a Tarzan stage, which turned into an Edgar Rice Burroughs stage. I think I had pretty much all of his books that were available at the time. I haven't read them for years because I'm afraid it would destroy the nostalgic memories I have of them. At this stage I'm almost certain to find them poorly written.

**Janice Morningstar (August 2009):** Your comments to R-Laurranine: Yipes. Yet another type of dementia to worry about. My mom died of probable Alzheimer's and my wife's dad had multi-infarct dementia, though he died of heart problems.

Your comments to Lerner: It seems like Burning Man would attract a subset of fandom, along with people who wouldn't think of attending a con. You would think that Harry Potter would leave kids with a mindset that led them toward science fiction or at least fantasy. Science fiction needs more well-written young adult books, maybe something like a modernized Rick Brant. It also needs to have more stories that are accessible to people just starting to get into science fiction. A lot of the most accessible ideas for non-fans were done to death in the 1930s or 1940s and are seen as trite by fans unless they have esoteric twists that differentiate them from that which has gone before. There needs to be some market that entertainingly recycles the fundamental old themes in ways that can reach a non-fan audience. Your comments to Sabella: I like stories that drop you in the middle of a situation and gradually give you clues that let you figure out what's going on. A lot of people don't though, and if the writer isn't careful readers can end up giving up before they get into the story.

I agree that McCain was by no means a big Bush supporter. In my opinion McCain had lost the election before he was nominated. Much of the semi-libertarian part of the Republican base despised him because of provisions of the campaign reform bill he sponsored that they felt (rightly or wrongly) restricted free speech, with a potential impact on bloggers. Bush loyalists didn't trust him because of the many differences he had with Bush over the years. He tried to energize the base with the Palin nomination, but Palin had little appeal to either fiscal conservatives or semi-libertarians, and whatever appeal she had to social conservatives was far outweighed by her negatives among independents, who had been relatively willing to vote for McCain in the primaries.

Your comments to Wells: Locally a lot of fans seems to think everyone who

reads science fiction (actually anyone who reads without moving their lips) is a Democrat. I've voted for at least four different parties over the years—Democratic, Republican, Green, and Libertarian. Neither the Greens nor the Libertarians precisely mirror my views, though they each have some good points. I mainly vote for them as a way of saying “None of the above” or “This race is a blow-out and I want to keep third parties on the ballot.

My political views boil down to: governments are potentially good things, but they reflect the upper classes of the societies that elect them. In our case, the upper classes tend toward the robber baron, with a mixture of a cloying paternalism when it's convenient for them and a cold indifference when it isn't. That pretty much sums up the natural inclinations of our governments, whether they be Democrat or Republican. This probably isn't original to me, but I view senators and congressmen as being sort of like diapers. They need to be changed frequently, not that it keeps the newcomers from making a mess themselves.

Your comments to Stevens: I don't have a general-purpose sweet tooth, but I have a weakness for tart candies, usually in combination with something salty, and ice cream (especially combining chocolate and peanut butter). Now stop with the food stuff. You're making me hungry.

I enjoyed the cartoon. I also do a lot of browsing at the hucksters rooms of the local cons, and I like the knowledgeable people at some of the tables. On fossil fuel oil versus synthetics from coal or algae. Oil from algae is one of those big-potential high-risk areas that could lead to a major geopolitical change, or stay too costly until we get down to the dregs of the non-synthetic oil a couple of decades or more down the road.

Your comments to Davis: We have three cats and couldn't imagine having more, but my sister has six, and at home point my aunt had twenty-five. She lived on a farm and got too old and frail to catch the kittens so they could be neutered. We were one generation away from having 80 to 100 cats on her farm when we intervened. Your comments to Caughran: Did the great uncle feel guilty about unleashing Lenin (and probably as a result, Stalin) on the world?

**Steven and Vicki Ogden (August 2009):** You certainly put a lot of work into this issue. Thank you, and I'm sorry I'm not going to have time to give you the in-depth comments this deserves. I did set it aside to enjoy later.

**Heath Row:** Interesting notes on the move to California. From what I hear, California and Illinois are neck and neck in terms of which one is in the most financial trouble. If you get tired of sun, great weather and government that would be bankrupt if states could go bankrupt you could always move to Illinois, which shares one of those traits.

I'll be interested in your list of favorite science fiction and fantasy bookstores. I buy a lot of my science fiction from the booksellers in the hucksters room of the local science fiction conventions. I talked to one of them who sells at science fiction conventions something like 37 weekends a year. I don't believe he has a store-front.

“Gypsy Tail Wind” sounds fun. I like stories that make the biological background of a story important. I do find it disconcerting that someone who first published in 1988 is considered a relatively recent author. By that standard I would still be in that category at age 77 in 2032.

**Robert Michael Sabella:** I read through your list of books of the decades and realized just how out of the current science fiction scene I am, and how big the science fiction scene is. I've read none of the books or stories you mention in any of the decades, yet I have probably close to a thousand science fiction books in the house, and have read many more science fiction books, novellas, and short stories. Part of the difference is that I stuck with many of the old favorites like Poul Anderson, Asimov, Heinlein, PJ Farmer, and Pournelle, among others, until the authors either died or semi-retired. I generally didn't try out a lot of new authors, and have curtailed my science fiction reading rather than getting into new authors.

I'm probably going to need to change that if I'm serious about writing science fiction. My writing probably seems somewhat old fashion by contemporary science fiction standards. On the other hand I'm not trying to make a living as a writer, though money coming in from it is nice. I'm writing the kind of novels I would like to read.

Your trip to the Thomas Edison museum sounds fascinating. Edison put together a marvelously inventive organization.

Your summaries of *Gateway* and *Heechee Rendezvous* remind me again of how little I know about some areas of science fiction. The stories sound fascinating. I really should dig into Pohl's stuff.

Your comments on the difficulty of following a classic: Ah, finally an author I've read. I loved both *To Your Scattered Bodies Go* and *Riverworld*. To be frank, the rest of the books Farmer wrote in the series were objectively poor. I think it was a case of the author (in this case temporarily) becoming too big to edit. Farmer needed to take books three and four, cut out about two-thirds of each book and add focus. If he had done that he would have had one of the best trilogies I've ever encountered, and I would have counted him among the greats. He was still a good author, and I've read most of his stuff, but I never ranked him as highly after the third and fourth books of the Riverworld series.

Your comments to Slate: I'm afraid I've never gotten into most of the world of

fantasy, though I've enjoyed a few urban fantasies.

Your comments to Dengrove: My eyes are on the verge of bleeding just from your description of *Genesis Secret*.

Your early experience with the policeman: That's sad. I wonder if the guy ever thought that he might have had that kind of impact on a scared kid. I hope you're wrong about bad early memories meaning pessimism. My extremely early memories are (1) Getting a tricycle, (2) Having the spokes on the front wheel of the tricycle break, (3) Having a little friend move away and wondering if it was something I said. Two out of three bad ones.

I enjoyed the "Lighter Side" stuff.

And on to issue #148: The ratio of science fiction to fantasy and horror depresses me because I have no interest in reading or writing fantasy or horror. Your analysis of why the shift toward fantasy is happening is interesting. Thinking of my stories, I do try to create characters people will want to follow for several stories. All but one of the novels I've written so far creates a playground that I can easily use for at least three or four novels in the same fictional universe and using the same characters. A couple of people who have seen my *Snapshot* manuscript say that I could write a couple of novels a year for the next twenty-five years and still not come close to doing it justice. On the other hand, I don't think my stories do much in the 'escape from all this' front. I tend to put one science fiction concept into an otherwise normal world.

Interesting point about science fiction book and readership numbers growing, just more slowly. From what I've seen locally, science fiction book fans are aging. Younger fans are mostly Science fiction TV/movie/gaming fans rather than science fiction book fans.

Long series set in the same universe: Yeah. The key is making the universe interesting enough and deep enough that the reader can continue to find new and exciting things about it in later books. That can be difficult, especially if the author is trying to retrofit the new pieces into an existing universe. The ideal is something like the Foundation trilogy (I don't acknowledge the later stories as being part of the series in the same way the original three were). In each case you got a seemingly complete story and universe that was actually a subset of the complete story and universe that was revealed by the complete trilogy. I would love to write something with that kind of multi-story arc that is still accessible as complete individual novels.

Your review of *Heechee Rendesvous*. Okay. You've talked me into it. I'm going to have to find the series and read it.

Of the Delany stories, *Lines of Power* (abbreviated title) sounds like fun. I'm

ashamed to admit that I've never read any Delany.

As usual, I enjoyed your "Lighter Side" stuff, especially the bit about the guy who took on the biker gang.

And on to the next zine.

Your comments to Lerner: I would recommend *In the Court of the Crimson King*. I consider it quite a cut above *The Sky People*. I have to add a caveat to that recommendation. The book reaches a logical ending point, and quite a good one. Most of the loose ends are wrapped up and the book is ready to end. Then he introduces another, loosely related subplot that isn't resolved. I have no idea why he did that. If you read it and figure out what he was trying to do in that last section, please let me know.

Stirling has a tendency to write good stories that in my opinion would be improved a lot if he had a stronger, more demanding editor. For example, *Conquistador* is a strong story, but a little over two-thirds of the way through it he puts the story on hold and goes into essentially a 30-40 page travelogue of his alternate version of California. It's wonderfully in depth and well-written, but it's backstory—something that should have for the most part stayed in the author's notebook. Putting your plot on hold for that long is a good way to lose readers.

In some cases sections of a book could work plot-wise, but the writing stinks. I was reading one of his "Dies the Fire" books, and about two-thirds of the way through found myself bogging down and having a horrible time motivating myself to keep reading. As an aspiring writer I decided to figure out why, and went into line-editor mode. It was easy to figure out why I was bogging down. The writing was grammatically correct, but the sentences were long and convoluted. I was having to slow down and parse each sentence. The average reader wouldn't know why the writing bogged them down, but it would. Most of the writing in that book was much higher quality. I'm not sure what the issue was. Maybe they were close to a deadline and didn't take time to do as thorough a line-edit as they should have.

Don't let any of that discourage you from reading Stirling's stuff. He builds imaginative worlds, interesting characters, and plots that move. The problems are generally concentrated in one specific subplot of a book, where the editor should have cracked the whip a bit more.

Your comments to Lindsay: Australia is unfortunately vulnerable to introduced animals. I suspect that in a couple of thousand years the vast majority of Australia's Marsupials will be extinct, replaced by a witless menagerie of 'weedy' species from Europe and Asia. That's tragic.

Your comments to Speirs: I have mixed emotions about the idea of alternate history not being a subgenre of science fiction. I think it depends on the AH. My POD book *American Indian Victories* is much closer to history than science fiction. Something like *Crosswise in Time* seems to be clearly science fiction. Then there are stories that may or may not even be alternate history. *Exchange* will be marketed as alternate history because that's the closest subgenre, but can something really be alternate history when the alternate reality has no sentient species and the branch point was long before people existed in either reality?

Your comments to Templeton: I like some, but by no means all of Heinlein in the early years. His later books needed a subplot-ectomy. I do put Asimov among the greats. I've often thought Clarke's stuff needed real villains. Of your list of classics, I've only read two, and only enjoyed one of those two: Ringworld. I can't venture an opinion on the others. I would put the first two books of the Riverworld series and the first three of the Foundation books high on any introductory list, but can't tell you how they compare to the ones on your list.

On National Novel Writing Month: I think I mentioned earlier that it can be a lot of fun, but do be careful if you have an obsessive personality. For fast writing I highly recommend the *Writer of Die* website.

And on to issue 146: Interesting perspectives on Silverberg's career, and your own attempts to create the kinds of stories you enjoyed from him. I guess I would hesitate to call writing the kind of stories you like to read failure. Writing is unlikely to yield financial rewards commensurate with the efforts for all but a lucky few, so if you aren't writing what you want to write I don't see the point in doing it. Maybe as a path to getting to write the stuff you want to, but that can be a treacherous path.

"The Pope of the Chimps" sounds like fun. I'll have to see if I can find it somewhere. A lot of Silverberg's stuff sounds fun. I read a few of his books very early in my explorations of science fiction, but they didn't resonate with my 12-year-old, Hardy Boy reading self, and I never tried again after my tastes matured.

**Peggy Rae Sapienza:** Your article on Takumi Shibano: Sorry to hear of his passing. I often forget that fandom transcends national boundaries. It's interesting how much influence a fan can have on a country's fandom.

Your mailing comments: I love the Asimov story. I wish I could have met Asimov, as well as quite a few other favorite authors, like Poul Anderson and PJ Farmer. Farmer's stuff was of uneven quality, but at his best he was very good, richly imaginative. I always felt an affinity for him because he lived in Peoria Illinois, kind of a sister city to Rockford, where I grew up. I loved his

World of the Tiers books and the first two books of the Riverworld series (the rest stunk in my opinion). He also died on my birthday.

**Bob Silverberg:** Congratulations on the sixty years in FAPA and for the generally good health!

Your comments to Speirs: Interesting about the lack of earthquake prediction capability. Oil prices are an interesting phenomenon. There is relatively little supply or demand elasticity either up or down in the short-term, so a small demand shortfall can translate into a huge price increase. Equally, a small surplus can translate into a large price decrease. The market tends to over-respond to price increases, with a lag-time of several months to a years. They also over-respond to price decreases, though with a longer lag time.

Prices spike and stay up for a while. People eventually respond by buying more efficient cars or moving closer to work. Investors respond with additional investment in oil exploration, better extraction techniques, battery research, electric car plants, and research on alternate sources of liquid fuel. At some point demand falls a bit and/or supply increases, and price drops. When it drops, there is little to keep it from continuing to drop. People may drive a bit more, but the average mileage of the country's car fleet will have increased, and will remain elevated until the additional fuel efficient cars work their way to the junkyard ten years later.

Supply doesn't fall easily either. Once you have an oil well or a tar sands operation in production you've already paid your capital costs, which is usually a major hunk of your costs. If you aren't making back your upfront capital costs completely but you are making back more than your production costs, the logical thing to do is to keep producing. You probably keep producing for a while even if you aren't making enough to cover your production costs, because you figure prices will bounce back and you want to keep your workforce ready for the rebound.

That brings up another point: expectations. Back in the late 1970s, with the first energy crisis, predictions of imminently running out of oil led to the expectation of oil prices rising indefinitely. That led to a lot of investment in energy project that only made sense if the price of oil did keep rising. A lot of people bought cars based on that expectation. Both the investment and the purchases went on for a while after prices dropped because of expectations that we were experiencing a momentary downward blip that would go away in a few months. We're benefitting from similar expectations now.

Eventually, as oil prices stayed down in the late 1980s, the 1990s and into the new century, the expectation changed. Unsophisticated Americans either forgot about the energy crisis or decided that it was a one-time event. More sophisticated ones decided that the Persian Gulf oil states could pump oil

profitably at under \$5/barrel for the foreseeable future and they had learned a lesson from the original energy crisis: push energy prices too high and you cause western economies to slump, reducing demand, strengthening the search for alternatives, and ultimately reducing the long-term profitability of oil. As a result, the Saudis would act to keep oil prices within a stable and relatively low band.

There was an element of truth to the sophisticated view. That's approximately what happened for the twenty-odd years between the oil price spikes. Then a number of things changed. First, the Saudi fields started to lose their ability to crank up and meet demand spikes. Second, Americans indulged their desire for big cars and trucks again. Part of that was due to advertising. Due to their enormous retirement and health benefit costs, the big 3 domestic auto companies could only make a profit on high-end, high profit cars and trucks. That meant energy hogs, and the Big 3 built and pushed energy hogs.

Finally, the spread of US-like life-styles pushed demand higher. People in China, India, Malaysia, Turkey and Mexico, to name just a few, wanted the goodies they saw in TV and movie representations of the US, including the cars. Many of them got those goodies as their countries industrialized. Others got them by immigrating to the United States, either legally or illegally. A Chinese peasant who migrates to the city and joins the middle class suddenly demands a lot more of the world's environment and resources. So does a Mexican or Guatemalan peasant who migrates to Los Angeles. In neither case do I condemn the person for trying to find a better life, but in both cases the strain they place on already overstrained natural resources rises drastically, as does their carbon footprint.

So, you have an underlying upward pressure on prices due to the fact that we used the easy oil first, and world demand is growing with the spread of industrialization. You have the fact that the Saudis can no longer stabilize prices in a narrow band by increasing or decreasing production. Add to that the usual rules of supply and demand only work on oil after a delay of months to years and then overshoots, and the role of expectations, and I think you can look for more price spikes over the coming years. They don't do our economy any good in the short term, but hopefully they push us to do the things we need to do in the long run to adapt to an environment where oil becomes scarce and expensive.

Humanity in ten million years? I still like my idea of multiple human species. I suppose that could happen even (or especially) if we settle the planets and eventually the stars. If the lineage still exists, it almost certainly won't be our species. You mention normal genetic mutation, and that will certainly be a factor. If two parts of a species are genetically isolated, the normal genetic drift leads to them becoming two species in a fairly limited time, which would vary

depending on how long a generation is. Subspecies of chimps have been separated for over a million years and not become fully separate species. Chimps and bonobos are separate species at three million years of separation. That would point to it taking more than a million but less than three million years for a new species to form. On the other hand, *H. erectus* graded into *H. sapiens* in a million years or so. Give natural processes, I would give our species maybe one to three million years before it became different enough not to be the same species.

Of course a species can be formed by genetic drift, but generally there is going to be some element of natural selection. The two habitats are rarely going to be exactly identical in terms of ecological niches. The more different the two habitats are in terms of ecology, the quicker two isolated population will diverge structurally and behaviorally, though that won't necessarily be reflected in a purely numeric look at the genetic differences. Polar bears and one isolated population of brown bears are genetically closer to one another than that population of brown bears is to other brown bears. Behaviorally and structurally that population of brown bears are closer to the rest of their species. In spite of their unique look and behavior, polar bears are a recent species, probably no more than a couple of hundred thousand years old. They probably developed their unique behaviors after the last interglacial—around 130,000-140,000 years ago. Temperatures apparently got a couple of degrees centigrade higher in that interglacial than they have so far in our current one, and the current polar bear habitat probably wouldn't have been suitable.

On the other hand, as you mentioned, artificial genetic changes are almost certainly in the cards, unless technology collapses and stays collapsed.

There is also another class of genetic changes that are happening to us that don't fit neatly into the natural or the artificial categories. As we created towns and then cities, we also created new sources of sort-of natural selection. I suppose you could call it cultural selection or Anthro-selection. Who has the best immune system to cope with crowd diseases? Who can work and procreate in the face of malaria? Who can cope with the pressures of being in the midst of thousands of strangers? Who can learn to read quickly? Who can learn new languages? Who is less susceptible to alcoholism? To drug addiction? Who is less susceptible to the various pollutants we're putting into our environment? Who can sit for prolonged periods of time without developing health issues? Who can live in a calorie-rich society without becoming obese? Who can quickly gain other people's confidence and take advantage of them? Who can do a better job of choosing from the many potential friends and allies to gain resources? Who is less susceptible to the tools of mass persuasion? Who can work the longest day behind a mule or swinging a hoe? Who is better at throwing a round ball through a round hole or at a glove?

I've read a couple of places that human evolution has actually accelerated in the last ten thousand years, and I believe it. This sort-of selection to fit into our human-created environments has to have been fierce. What kind of selection does it take to turn a gene that helps against malaria from a one in a hundred thousand freak into the standard in a population? When a disease like smallpox regularly killed forty percent of a susceptible population every time it went through, century after century, and killed off a high percentage of children where it was endemic, a minor difference in how hard smallpox hit you was far more of a factor in remaining in the gene pool than being strong or intelligent or fast.

What selective pressures will future cultures add to that list things our culture has selected for? That's probably impossible to predict, though I may try at some point.

Your comments to Davin: I looked back at my records from last Nanowrite. My best was 6245 words in a day. I had one other day over 6000 words, but most days were in the 3000 word range. Of course that was rough draft, not finished work by a long shot, even by my standards. Unlike Ellison, I don't get it right the first time. It takes one line-edit pass to get the words tight, usually cutting word count by 20-25%, and another to get the words right, sharpening descriptions and adding little touches.

Your comments to Speirs – 2: Democracy works okay as long as there are strong safeguards for individuals, and respect for property rights, but unfortunately, enforcing those safeguards requires the support of the majority.

Over the last few decades, Illinois has voted itself into much the same situation California has. In our case, our elected officials reacted rationally to their political environment. They promised state employees rich retirement benefits, thus getting their votes, but set aside only enough money to pay for rather poor retirement benefits, thus conserving money to use for other constituents, thus getting their votes. Getting multiple votes with the same money worked politically. Of course now the state has over \$17,000 per capita of unfunded obligations for their state employee retirement programs. That's close to \$70,000 for a family of four. Given the percentage of people in the state who don't pay taxes, and the fact that a good hunk of that bill comes due in the next couple of decades, there is no politically or economically practical way all of those retirement benefits will get paid. Rereading these comments I suspect that I'm not telling you much, if anything, that you don't already know, but I'll leave my initial reactions as I wrote them.

**Dale Speirs:** Four zines this time? That's ambitious. In 68.1D you talk about the dwindling of the market for westerns, and the fact that nearly half of the remainder were Louis L'Amour reprints. I actually went through a L'Amour

phase ten or fifteen years ago, and read very close to all of his novels. While a lot of his books fit comfortably into the stereotypical western genre, he does explore the fringes of the genre. He has a couple of modern westerns, some books that are set in other periods (14<sup>th</sup> century Europe, England and then the US southeast in the early 1500s, the late 1700s) and one book tiptoes into fringes of science fiction with a plot that involves visitors who are apparently from an alternate history version of the US southwest.

I don't recall having seen any alternate history westerns. I might try writing one someday. A couple of my alternate history scenarios set up a world that wouldn't be far from the stereotypical wild west.

One of my history teachers claimed that the stereotypical wild west did exist in parts of the US west, but a lot of it was life imitating art (if you consider the cheap westerns of the day art). According to him, when the first popular westerns came out, the stereotypical gunfight was rare, partly because pistols were scarce and expensive. Prices came down and people steeped in the penny novel ideas of the west actually made those ideas real to some extent. I don't know if he was right or not. Certainly there were sheep/versus cattle wars and wild boomtowns based on gold and silver finds, and wild towns on the routes of the cattle drives.

"Mark and Bill" sounds like fun, as do "Mr. ZIP" and "Rowdy in Paris".

I like your theme in "We Learn Nothing From History". "This time it's different." Of course it never really is. The bit about the panic of 1907 is fascinating. I had wondered if a major natural catastrophe in a country with property insurance would cause economic problems. Apparently the answer is yes. The 1907 bit also highlights the importance of deposit insurance as a circuit-breaker to keep economic collapses from spreading. (Of course deposit insurance has its own problems, but they're outweighed by the benefits). The take-home thought from the piece is the three-generation cycle. "The grandparents suffer from the mistakes, the parents learned the lesson, and the grandchildren say this time is different." Very true in my experience.

68.1E: Interesting take on investing in precious metals. I've never done that, but I suppose I should put aside a little bit that way as a precaution against things going really bad. I had heard that gold prices were held down for many years by the fact that there was a technology out there that would allow extraction of a lot of additional gold if the price went above a certain point. Can't vouch for that being true.

Interesting point about the fact that the US had to start importing oil causing us to go off the gold standard. Also a good point about the actual inflation rate being considerably higher than the official one. One of my friends calculated his personal inflation rate over the last 3 decades and concluded that it had

averaged around 8% per year. If the inflation rate is really 6-9% annually, then in real terms the US economy has been shrinking essentially the entire time between the late 1960s and now—boom time or bust. That actually squares with my personal experience, though the Midwest has been left far behind the relatively prosperous East and West coasts.

The Midwest disease has finally caught up with California, and wealth is becoming dangerously concentrated in the vicinity of Washington DC—one of the many things you could put into a “You might be becoming a banana republic if” skit.

You make a couple of interesting points on the fact that unless you are in physical possession of precious metals you still have a counterparty risk and the fact that governments do try to punish precious metal markets. They are a thorn in the side of governments because they do at least a little to keep governments honest.

Your comments to Lloyd Penney: Yeah, I like primarily non-military AH too. I do find that people tend to be intrigued but somewhat disconcerted by them. There seems to be an assumption that wars and diplomatic maneuverings are history and anything else is a curiosity. I did a series of Alternate History scenarios involving changing climate and got very little feedback or interest.

68.3: I’m glad you are continuing the tradition of the Clearcut award. I used to win it about half the time in Point of Divergence, but there a forty or fifty page zine was usually enough.

Your comments on Visions of Paradise: Sounds like the Hugos are like much of the rest of life—Who you know and how you know them. I’ve had about the same experience you had with the Science Fiction pro-zines. I subscribed to all of them for a year or two in the late 1990s, but usually found that the only thing that held my interest was the non-fiction features in Analog. On conspiracy theories. Yeah, from what I’ve seen it’s a mindset. I have a friend who is a really nice guy and reasonably smart in other ways, but he eventually gets sucked into every conspiracy theory out there: “Roosevelt knew about Pearl Harbor and forced the Japanese to attack”, “Waco conspiracies”, “Oklahoma City bombing conspiracies”, “911 conspiracy theories”. He used to be an ardent creationist, but now loathes them. He switches political parties regularly, usually coming out against the party in power about a year after they gain power. I’m expecting him to be talking ‘Birther’ nonsense, “Goldman Sachs owns the government” and anti-global warming stuff by the middle of this summer. It’s just part of his world view. Oh well. He’s a nice guy if you don’t trigger his current pet issues.

Your comments on the other Visions of Paradise: From your comments on Locus I’m getting the impression that I really need to understand more about

the structure and personalities of the key players in the science fiction market if I intend to be a writer in it. I think a lot of would be writers think that writers can just sit back and create great literature. In reality they have to spend an ungodly amount of their time networking.

As usual I enjoyed your “Seen in the Literature” section, especially the abstract on food storage in Jordan a thousand years before domestic crops. The development of agriculture has always fascinated me, as have the few complex and large-scale societies that have developed without agriculture, like the Chumash of southern California, some of the Northwestern Indians, and a group in Romania. I’ve sometimes wondered if food storage wasn’t more important than plant domestication in terms of allowing population growth and more sophisticated societies. It’s hard to say, because food storage is generally followed relatively quickly by plant domestication.

**Milt Stevens:** On Pluto getting demoted from being a planet: That bugged me too, though I understand the reasoning behind the move. There could be forty or fifty Pluto-sized or bigger planets in the Kuiper Belt, maybe more. To be consistent we would need to either call them all planets or call none of them planets.

As soon as we found a Kuiper Belt object bigger than Pluto, the nine planet model was untenable. Either you had at least ten planets or you had eight. Nine couldn’t be right. That doesn’t make the demotion sit well with me. It just means that from a purely logical point of view I can see the point.

Your comments to Wells: I do get the overwhelming craving in the vicinity of a bookstore. I also get time-warped when I go into one. I look at my watch and it’s an hour later. Libraries have the same affect on me, only maybe more so. I remember a time or two when I’ve glanced at my watch and realized that it’s eight hours later, and simultaneously that I was extremely hungry and absolutely had to get to the nearest bathroom.

I hadn’t heard the term Black Friday until a couple of years ago, and considered the day after Thanksgiving just a day to stay away from malls because of the crowds.

Your comments to Sabella: Ed Buchman sounds like a lot of fun to be around. I thought being out of your mind was necessary if you’re going to live in California.

Your comments to Metcalf: I figure it takes at least twenty-five years before a political figure gets substantially reassessed, and close to a hundred before you get a reasonably objective view. Actually, the timing partly depends on how much the president comes to symbolize a set of policies. Franklin Roosevelt will be an icon to the liberal side of US politics and anathema to the most

conservative part of US politics for as long as the two political persuasions exist in recognizable form. Ronald Reagan will always be icon and anathema to the opposite sets of factions.

I think Wilson was originally a liberal hero because of his support of US membership in the League of Nations, but lost that status as people became more aware of his racism and the extent to which his stubbornness and miscues made US membership in the League less likely. Custer's reputation probably tracks the degree of sympathy for American Indians.

It'll be interesting to see what people think of our last several presidents in fifty years. A consensus seems to be forming that LBJ was a pretty lousy human being and a poor Commander-in-Chief for the war in Vietnam, but a very effective legislator during his time as president. Both liberals and conservatives currently see Nixon as a very poor president, though for different reasons. I'm guessing that both Bushes will see similar left-right dislike for different reasons solidify over the next few years. I suspect that Clinton's standing among liberals will decline over the years, while the right will always hate him. Carter may see a little bit of an improvement in his reputation, but I think both ends of the spectrum will continue to see him as an ineffective president. I'm not even going to speculate on JFK's long-term standing. That's still too politically charged.

Your comments to Speirs: We've talked about the weaknesses in alternate history stories quite a bit in Point of Divergence. Too many of them are "if-only" stories where the author's personal view of an attainable utopia are played out. Too many of them think it's cute to toss in historic figures hundreds of years after the point of divergence. In reality, the chances of someone in non-isolated groups still being born even five years after the divergence strike me as being low. Precisely the same sperm meets the egg? What's the likelihood of that?

Your comments to Fred Lerner: We're starting to put a few copies of Point of Divergence online in PDF format, though in an area that is hopefully only available to members and a few former members of the APA. We also sent copies of the first 45 issues to the guy who runs the Uchronia website. One complication with Point of Divergence is that it's also a writers' workshop and until the stuff is published or put in the public domain I'm uncomfortable having it floating around on the Internet.

Your comments to Templeton: I've done the national novel writing contest the last two years, but in both cases I actually plotted for three or four weeks before the writing month (November) started and wrote a large part of the rough draft of a novel. In 2008 I wrote 73,000+ words in the month, and in 2009 I wrote a little over 99,000 words. The 99,000 words in 2009 was way

too much. I spent an unhealthy amount of my time at the computer and it took me a couple of months to recover. It was weird, but I didn't gain weight during the month. I gained about ten pounds starting about two weeks later and ongoing for about two months.

NanoWriMo can be a wonderful experience unless you have a tendency to get obsessive, which I do. Next time I'm going to set a maximum number of words as well as a minimum number.

**Katrina Templeton:** Hi Katrina. I'm relatively new to the APA myself, having started a mere three or four years ago. This is my first zine to actually go in the distro for over a year. We have a few things in common: Computer background, interest in history, though mine never led to a degree, current under-employment, though mine is hopefully temporary—hours cut in half until the economy picks up. I did pick up a second job that pretty much takes up the financial slack. Good luck getting the fanzine off the ground. Nothing wrong with living with one's parents, especially in a caregiver role. We lived in a separate apartment with my wife's parents for many years until they passed away. They respected our privacy, so it worked out well.

Hopping in my time machine and going back to your November 2009 zine: A NanoWriMo person? Good. I've done it two years in a row and enjoyed it immensely. Wrote 73,000+ and 99,000+ words the last two years. It sounds like your experience is a lot like mine. We have an annual word war with Perth Australia, do a lot of trash talking send each other kinds of candy that aren't available in each others' countries. So far we've beaten them every year.

Ah, so you're the editor of e-APA. We need to talk. I edit Point of Divergence (POD), an alternate history APA. We're trying to figure out if electronic distribution would work for us. The problem is that about a third of our membership lacks the computer skills to come up with a PDF file, or even attach a word file to an e-mail. I have on occasion scanned issues in to do a special PDF edition, but there has to be a better way. Do you do the zine as one PDF or as individual PDFs from the members? We have individual zines that are up to 55-60 pages, with their own tables of contents. I haven't figured out how to put them all in one zine while preserving the page numbers.

And, since you're new to the APA, I'm going back to your debut issue in the May 2009 distro. Interesting introduction and history of how you got into science fiction. I started early too, but took a detour into Young Adult series books before becoming a solid science fiction fan. I still like other genres, including some westerns. Your early science fiction adventures mirror mine to a large degree, including Asimov's stories, Douglas Adams, and Heinlein's *Stranger in Strange Land*. I have mixed emotions about Heinlein also.

Stranger struck me as one of his better efforts, though it seemed to me that it was headed in directions that the author or publisher reined in for the last part of the book.

I hate to say this, but I don't believe I've ever read anything by Phillip K. Dick. I did read *Snow Crash* and enjoyed it. Of your later list of authors, the only one I've read is Turtledove.

A computer technician? Interesting. I was a computer programmer in the old days of Cobol and mainframes, though I also programmed in IBM 360/370 Assembler Language, Fortran, C, Basic, RPG, and a smattering of other languages.

I went through a phase where I put together my own computers, most recently one based on one of the early AMD 64-bit processors. I think it was a socket 740 motherboard. Does that make sense? I knew all of this stuff at one time, but haven't used it for a couple of years. They were just moving to SATA for hard-drives when I put that computer together. I've been meaning to put together another computer one of these days, but it's time consuming and I've gotten so heavily into writing that I never seem to have time. I have a tendency to gradually accumulate almost all of the pieces for a computer and then say "what the heck" and buy the last couple, then put it together.

Your other reading: I read a couple of books on the 1918 flu epidemic also. My mother's older brother died in it as an infant. Fascinating and scary time. If something like that happened now it would probably cause even greater economic disruption along with the many deaths.

Well, in any case, welcome. I hope you stick around, at least partly because if you do I'm no longer the junior member of the APA.

**R-Laurraine Tuthasi:** Oddly enough, you're the first person I recall where someone in the family had probable H1N1. My wife and daughter had some kind of nasty flu this winter, but it didn't require a doctor's attention. Solar water heating: very cool. I'm glad you got it working closer to your expectations.

Review of "Atlantis: The Lost Empire": Sounds fun. I missed that one. Might be worth renting on DVD. "Atom" sounds fun too, though it's very much not the sort of thing I normally read. With most of my long-time favorite authors dead or retired, I need to find new ones.

Your comments to Sabella: Interesting discussion on science fiction news sites. That's yet another thing I need to add to my news sweeps. I don't really have a good source for science fiction news. I'll try those out.

Your comments to Lindsay: Yeah, Detroit is a sad story. I hear that the city

government is thinking about tearing down whole neighborhoods—about a fourth of the city to make the rest of it more manageable. The housing problems are partly a matter of location, with a few percentage points of the counties in the country accounting for most of the problems. There is also sometimes a mismatch between the scale of the housing and the ability of local people to pay for it. High end homes can sometimes be a problem even when the overall market in an area is okay.

Your comments to Lichtman: I've always felt a little deprived that none of my grandparents played a role in my life. My mom's parents were dead before I was born and my dad's parents lived 500 miles away. They were also more than a little creepy, especially my granddad.

**Michael Waite:** I like the Phillip K Dick quote. Yipes on the health issues. I hope you don't have a repeat anytime—well, ever. Your FAPA RIP list is entirely too long. Didn't I tell people that there was a moratorium on deaths in the APA until I had a change to get to know everybody?

Your comments to Garcia: I know what you both mean about the effort involved in doing good mailing comments. I'm trying to partially make up for a year of no comments and it is shooting a major hole in the weekend. I'm at over 5600 word of comments so far, and still have seven zines to go.

I enjoyed *Venus on the Half-Shell* many years ago. It's not quite Farmer at his best, in my opinion, but it does demonstrate his versatility.

Your list of famous suicides: I may have to mine that for alternate history potential. Who on the list do you think would have changed the world the most if they had died another fifteen or twenty years? I suspect that many of them would have simply grown old in obscurity, having already had their moments in the limelight. It would also be interesting to develop a list of famous people who seriously contemplated suicide, but didn't follow through or were unsuccessful in the attempt and didn't try again.

**Keith Walker (November 2009):** I don't want to get into FAPA politics and I have no strong opinion on whether or not there should be a Vice-President. The bits about having a backup do resonate with me though. POD went through a bad patch it still hasn't recovered completely from yet. Our founder and OE had an undiagnosed long-fuse type of leukemia that messed with his immune system and led to a series of illnesses. He kept thinking that he would knock out this illness and get back to making the APA work. This went on for over a year before he finally found out what was actually going on and resigned. We were on hiatus much of that time and lost a lot of members in an already small APA.

**Roger Wells:** Your comments to Templeton: For the most part I agree with

your assessment of Heinlein, both the good and the bad. I think that he was well served in his earlier years by strong editors who insisted on tight stories without a lot of unfocused subplots. As he got older and a bigger name his stories tended to wander and be a tad bloated. I still like a lot of what he did and consider him one of the greats. Your comments to Vick: The attempt at e-mail fraud is a new twist for me. Fraudsters are getting more and more sophisticated. A lady in one of my classes tried to rent a house through Craigslist and was contacted by a fraudster. She was suspicious, so we Googled a couple of sentences from the letter. We got several hits explaining how the fraud was supposed to work. The guy claimed to be a doctor in England planning to move locally to attend school. When the time came for the first month's rent and security deposit to be paid, he would have claimed that he need to transfer some money and would have sent a check larger than the amount owed, with the understanding that the extra amount be passed on to a friend. His check would bounce and the house owner would be out the amount sent to the friend..

On high function autism: As a kid I had a few traits that seemed to border on the ones you describe. Of course with me part of the issue was being book smart among kids of factory workers and not having a TV until I was 12 or 13, which cut me off from a lot of the cultural references. That did make me an avid reader though, which in my opinion made up for a lot of early social badness. My social skills improved dramatically after we got the TV. I'm not sure if it was cause and effect or simply growing up and finding a circle of friends I had more in common with.

On Calendar changes: Funny. On your cruise plans: At least you didn't get caught in the volcano dust madness.

**Art Widner:** I skimmed your zine, but then set it aside because I didn't want to deal with the invented spellings. I find that reading material with a lot of misspellings quickly interferes with my ability to spell things correctly. Sorry. I hope this doesn't come across as unfriendly or 'can't take the joke', but I know invented spellings cause me problems.

I did catch your mention of liking Poppy Ott and Jerry Todd. They were out of print long before my time, but my grade school library had battered, much used copies of two Poppy Ott books. I read them and then collected the rest of the series. I still have the collection, but I made the mistake of going back and rereading one of the later ones a couple of years ago. It didn't live up to my memories. I think part of the problem was that it was one of the stories where the author tried to grow his characters into something like the Hardy Boys. It didn't work and lost a lot of the humor and sense of place that made the earlier books fun.

The Jerry Todd books were at their best when Jerry and pals were feuding with the Tutter kids or pretending to be Robinson Crusoe. (Oak Island Treasure) If you enjoyed the Jerry Todd books you probably enjoyed Mark Tidd too. I remember Mark Tidd's Citadel with a great deal of fondness. I've avoided rereading it because I'm afraid it won't live up to my memories.

**And that's it for this distro.** I hope you enjoyed the extract from *Exchange*. I always feel a little weird and a little intimidated when I put fiction in my FAPA zines. I read peoples' lists of favorite books, I see all of the great authors, and I wonder about the wisdom of putting my fiction out where people who consider Heinlein and Asimov sort of okay at their best can read it.

I also hope you get a chance to take a look at some of the Rick Brant stories if you didn't when you were a kid. Most of them hold up surprisingly well for what they were.

My mailing comments for this distro runs 13,027 words and covers 29 of the 31 current FAPA contributors. Since I'm one of the 31, it looks like I missed one person: Shelby Vick. I'm not sure how I missed him, but I searched the distros back to February 2009 and didn't find any zines from him. I hope this comment section partly makes up for not having participated in the last four distros.

I wrote most of the comments for the earlier distros under rather odd circumstances. My elderly aunt (87 years old) lives with us, and she fell this morning. As a result, we spent the morning in the hospital. She slept most of the time and I did mailing comments. If you find the comments wordy or incoherent, that's my excuse. By the way, they didn't find anything wrong with her, She may have just gotten her bedspread partly off the bed and then gotten her feet tangled up in it. We're counting ourselves lucky that there are no broken bones and we're retiring that bedspread.