

## Issue 2, Winter 2003



*"Ontology on the go!"*

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## Editorial

Ah, Brumaire already. How time flies when you're over forty.

Yes, over forty, but enjoying it very much. I was chatting with my esthetician between skin toning masks about the astonishing number of spas, salons, and massage boutiques there were in the greater Los Angeles area. We (or maybe only I and she just agreed with me) came to the conclusion that it can only be due to the astonishing number of single, childless (or childfree, if you prefer) women over forty with disposable income. (That's not counting the married women spending their husbands' money in the quest for marital insurance and the rare metrosexual.) You know us: due to the demographics of our age group, we're the ones who always look great and never have a care in the world except wondering how, if not why, we're supposed to be trying to catch the nonexistent man worthy of us (which is why we have to always look great). And while we're wondering about this, we're spending our honest money on important things like keeping in shape, traveling in style, and collecting Jonah Hex 1-92, Hex 1-18, many "Weird Western Tales", and all of "Riders of the Worm and Such" and "Two Gun Mojo" (these last two were the easy part). Not to mention spending quality time with comic book dealers, a species mother should have warned us about, if only she'd known. However, I must mention that I bought 84 of the 92 Jonah Hex and 17 of Hex from another vibrant middle-aged woman of taste and distinction, so this could be a trend, not a theme. Comic book dealers take note: buy some good coffee and keep a decent, fresh box of chocolates in the shop at all times. You never know when a glamorous woman of a certain age and her paid-off platinum credit cards might come through your door.

So, on to LHLS Issue 2! We have a really big show for you in this issue and if you're old enough to remember where that came from, well, you should get a massage.

I'd like to thank Mr. Tom Loper for his advice on the arrangement of the poetry in Issues 1-3. This thank you should have been in Issue 1, so it is tardy, but sincere.

Ginger Mayerson  
Winter 2003



**Kelly S. Taylor**

## **Coming of the Quake Clans: Return of the Scop?**

(Delivered at Southern States Communication Association Convention, San Antonio, TX 1998.)

*Attend!  
we have heard of the thriving of the throne of Denmark,  
how the folk-kings flourished in former days,  
how those royal athelings earned that glory.  
Was it not Scyld Shefing that shook the halls,  
took mead-benches, taught encroaching  
foes to fear him - who, found in childhood,  
lacked clothing? Yet he lived and prospered,  
grew in strength and stature under the heavens  
until the clans settled in the sea-coasts neighbouring  
over the whale-road all must obey him and give tribute. That was a king!*

The proceeding was an excerpt from *Beowulf*, a 5th century epic poem and some of the only direct evidence we have of the work of the scop. The Anglo-Saxon scop was a professional or semi-professional tribal poet who celebrated cultural values by singing epics on occasions of great ceremony and festivity. This performance was an important part of a larger performance context which included feasting, mead drinking, gift giving, harp playing, and displaying of trophies.

Because the scop was the product of a pre-literate society, our records of his origins are imprecise. The earliest records of the scop date from the fourth century. These references occur in early English poems which, although probably written in their extant forms after the invasion of those islands, date back in substance to the age when the Angles still dwelt in a continental home around the base of the Jutish peninsula.

Because scops sometimes travelled from place to place, they are often grouped with a larger class of itinerant entertainers ranging from the jugglers and bear-keepers to acting troupes and musicians who traversed Europe in search of patronage and wealth. This assumption is misleading because the scop was not simply a solo entertainer. His was not a performance to produce pleasure, but rather to produce power. His performance was a direct appeal to the forces of power unmediated by a belief in a God. The scop's audiences were not passive entertainment seekers but rather aggressive participants in the merry-making who were allowed, through the culturally accepted convention of boasting, their own turn to perform. One by one, many of them would stand in front of their lord and peers, and proclaim their self-worth in a stylized solo declamation, which all recognized as a beot or gilph (boast). The surface theatricality of these ceremonial speeches of self-praise belies their utter seriousness. Boasts launched men upon and held them to courses of action which had life and death consequences.

Not much is known about the performance style of the scop. From the evidence of the descriptions in the epic poem *Beowulf*, we can conclude that the scop's performance was highly

theatrical and vigorous. In the following quote the monster Grendal is goaded into murderous fury by the performances in the meadhall:

*Then that powerful demon, he who dwelt in darkness, impatiently endured a time of torment, hearing daily loud joy in the hall, the harp's music, the bard's clear song.*

Most scopos performed before groups. Many performed in the great halls of chieftains and kings. Some noblemen may have employed their own house scopos. Other scopos may have travelled from court to court. Some chieftains and kings are reported to have cultivated the performance skills of the scop to enhance their public personas.

The scop performed heroic lays and heroic epics. These narratives moved swiftly to their conclusions, and centered on the deeds of a few men who acted out their fates with their own sense of justice, regardless of the consequences to themselves and others.

The scop fulfilled the role of tribal historian. He defined the values of society by valorizing praiseworthy deeds and vilifying unacceptable actions. Generous gift-giving and heroic leadership on the part of a king, courage and heroic fortitude on the part of a warrior are examples of conduct highly affirmed by the scop.

The scop was no common performer. He was a man of repute, the equal of thanes. In this time when property was equated with power, the scop could inherit land, hold the land himself, or pass it down to his children.

The text of *Beowulf* describes the scop portrayed in that poem as being gilphladen, or "boast laden". The heroic epics told by the scopos were in fact cultural boasts fulfilling for the community the same functions that boasting fulfilled for the individual warrior. *Chambers* and other scholars use the term gleoman or "gleeman" synonymously with the title scop. This may or may not be accurate, but the job of the scop did in a way concern encouraging happiness. The boast in this context was not the hollow promise that our pejorative perspective causes the word to connote, but a proclamation of all the positive and admirable qualities the individual thought himself to possess and the most optimistic possible forecast of his future. The scopos maintained this glee, this irrepressible joy and optimism, in the face of even the sternest adversity. Songs of praise spring from their lips even as they ride to bury their beloved leader, Beowulf, in the following excerpt:

*At times the king's thane, a man mindful of many stories, acquainted with ancient traditions, wove together fitting words to tell a new tale in a true meter; that man skillfully gave voice to Beowulf's venture, presenting it appropriately, varying his words: he revealed all.*

The community was provided with a sense of mission every time a spokesman stood forth and praised the deeds of exemplary heroes and traced the origins of the tribe. Throughout old English heroic poetry, boasting is associated consistently with the best and most noble parts of life. Some critics have interpreted the boasts by Beowulf as evidence of his excessive pride, but

his boasts actually serve to illustrate cultural not individual pride.

Boasts were taken seriously. Boasts were understood to be serious utterances with personal, social, legal, and political consequences. Recent analyses of Anglo-Saxon boasting emphasize its function as pledge. The assembly that would applaud the boast performance is the same group whose members would degrade and ostracize if the boaster did not honor his words with matching deeds.

The performance of the scop and the boasting of warriors are both linked with the mead-hall. To appreciate the significance of the mead-hall, we must push from our minds the Mediterranean view built into Judeo-Christian beliefs that drinking establishments are places of leisure and sloth. Within the mead-halls of Teutonic civilizations, contracts covering every type of life situation from wars to marriages to property disputes were negotiated and settled. In drink, the Saxon was at peace and vulnerable, therefore at his most civilized. [In other words, a sojourn in the mead hall was the original power lunch.] The performance of the scop did not take place in a setting of leisurely people trying to escape the business of life, but among people transacting the business of life. These boasts were not the courtly gestures they latter degenerated into at the Burgundian Feast of the Pheasant and other such events. Like other things that took place in the mead-hall, the boast was a contract — seriously made; to be seriously kept. The scop was a powerful and important man because he boasted not for himself, but for the entire tribe.

Despite the cultural importance of the scop, this style of performance disappeared as a genre during the Middle Ages. Scholars cannot agree on the reasons for the extinction of the scop. Were these poet/performers merely the victims of changing times and tastes? Did the expansion of the Catholic Church into Europe adversely affect their popularity?

The Teutonic fighting spirit nurtured by the boasts of the scops was based on a self-perception that was domineering and supremely self-confident. The Germanic tribesman was encouraged to look at himself as the equal or better of anyone he met so that he would have to courage to stand in battle. The ideal Christian, in contrast, was submissive and humble; always cognizant of a power greater than himself no matter his earthly rank. Christianity was a philosophy designed to aid in living justly and morally among other civilized people. New Testament thought as found in the letters of the Apostle (and urbanite) Paul stands in contrast to many of the beliefs of the warlike Israelis of the old Testament — and to the warlike Germanic tribes and their scops. Boasting promoted a self-perception that was more incompatible and threatening to Christianity than a belief in a pagan deity. At least if the European natives worshipped some earth spirit, they acknowledged a power greater than themselves. Men like Beowulf were taught by their culture through their scops to believe themselves to be the sum of all things.

Also, during this time period, the organization of the cultural communities of Europe changed. As literacy and Mediterranean culture invaded the tribal North, communities transformed from warring co-operatives of hunters to peaceful amalgamations of agrarians. Tribal structures were replaced with more hierarchical organizations capable of controlling greater numbers of people over distances. This spawned changes in the relationship between ruler and subjects. Middle management came into being. It became possible and preferable to solve conflicts through

mediation rather than through confrontation because of the greater numbers of people involved and the potential damage to agrarian interests.

The glorified self-perception encouraged by the boasting scop is ultimately not compatible with civilization based on mediation and negotiation. In the words of Northrop Frye:

Warriors begin battles with boasts that may be words of power for them: boasting is most objectionable to the gods for a corresponding reason: the possibility of man's acquiring through his words the power that he clearly wants.

What Frye says is true of deities, I would also say was true for monarchs. When government was carried out on a larger scale, access to power had to be limited and restricted. Common men had to be discouraged from believing that they too had the noble spirit it took to rule. For this reason, the boasting mouth of the scop had to be shut. By doting instead on its new favorite, the Church, who taught submission and piety, the State killed the scop not with a single decisive blow, but through gradual starvation.

Now let us move briskly forward in time to the summer of 1996. In June, the small and aptly named id Software Company released its newest game, *Quake*. *Quake* sent tremors [pardon the expression] through the gaming community for several reasons. First -- the use of graphics technology was unusual. Instead of watching the game scroll by from a removed "third person" position, use of texture mapped three-D models allowed the player to view the game from the point of view of the game character that he or she controls. *Quake* thus began a long line of what have come to be known as "first person shooters". Secondly -- the game was marketed in an unusual way. Gamers could download free "beta" versions of the software over the Internet. Additionally, id's "open architecture" policy allowed players to access and modify the games' codes. Techno-savvy gamers could customize the appearance of characters, tinker with gameplay functions, or create new *Quake* scenarios to play. The game was also one of the most notable early successes in implementation of "multiplayer options" -- that is to say, coding that made it possible for gamers to play groups of other *Quake* enthusiasts via the Internet.

The final innovation, and the one I am most intrigued by, is a result of the creation of a viable multiplayer environment for the game. id software supported and encouraged the formation of "Quake Clans" -- groups of gamers who banded together in cyberspace to form co-operative *Quake* playing teams. According to id software's official Clan page, a group wishing to become a Clan had to have the following: 1) Five members minimum 2) a Clan website 3) a team name and 4) logo and 5) a contact e-mail address. The contact then had only to e-mail the required information along with a short statement that s/he had read the clan rules and requirements to the Webmaster at id. By early 1997, the list of clans had become so extensive, id discontinued its official Clan list. Yahoo currently lists four hundred and thirty-six clan pages. A click of the mouse will take you to the abodes of groups such as Armageddon Clan, Clan Rotting Jesus, Carnage Cult, Clan 666, or the Quake Qlux Qlan. Or you may prefer to visit Clan Kavorkian, Clan Boot to the Head, Jerry Springer Guests Anonymous Clan, Clan Mallrats or the Partridge Family Quake Clan. There are even all-female clans such as Clan PMS (the Psycho Men Slayers), the Lady Marines, Hell's Belles, or my personal favorite, the CrackWhores.

A typical clan page contains information on contacting and challenging the clan to a match, displays of the clan logo and the clan's official "skin," links to other *Quake* and gaming related sites, profiles of each member, and records of matches against other teams. It is these last two items that are of the most interest to me. Although the narratives recorded on Quake Clan pages are not quite anyone's idea of poetry, they do share many characteristics with the boasts of the Saxon scop. Here's how Clan Burnt Orange introduce themselves on their website:

*Welcome to our site. Clan Burnt Orphan is a new, but experienced Quake 2 DeathMatch clan ready to rise to the top. We pride ourselves on being a highly skilled collection of honorable DeathMatchers. We don't try to impress opposing clans with fancy skins and pretty-boy custom models -- just frag count. If you think you are capable of defeating CBO, challenge us. We'd love it.*

Listen to the webmaster of Clan Southpark describe an encounter with a rival clan:

*We are the Champions! Our first match against Clan [KbK] was a success. We whooped their asses! Its was a 5 on 5 consisting of Mr. Hankey, Mr. Sinister, Starcream, Bishop, and Agent Paco. We played the best three of three and won back to back. Then clan [KbK] wanted a rematch, and the good sports we are, we gave them another shot, and when they switched to unlimited ammo on the server, we still kicked their ass all over the place. Mr. Hankey, and Bishop were excellent on offence and Mr. Sinister, Starscream, and Agent Paco were dominating on defence. Way to go, guys!*

In both of these texts a highly aggressive posture is created by the writers through the use of charged language to describe gaming experiences — "whooped ass" for "won" and "frag count" for "game points". Actions disapproved of by each clan, (such as utilizing fancy skins, or changing the server settings for unlimited ammunition) are implicitly vilified. The clan itself is valorized in the words of their boasts. The webmaster for Clan Burnt Orange calls his clan "Honorable Deathmatchers." Clan Southpark's scribe congratulates individual members for their contributions.

The choice of a name is in and of itself an important choice for the clan in forming their collective public persona. The Brady Bunch Clan explains their choice of name:

*The Brady Bunch Clan stated as a humorous punchline to some off-the-wall joke. Then the question was asked, "Well, what if we \*did\* create this clan? With a name like 'The Brady Bunch Quake Clan' we figured, who would take us seriously? It would have to contain some pretty dangerous people. So, after much thought, the call went out to the best Quake players we knew. The response was positive on all accounts. Most everyone in the Brady Bunch is in another clan somewhere in the country. The ones that aren't are hounded by other clans to join them, every time they play. We pulled together, bound by a common purpose - The overwhelming desire to DESTROY ANY clan that opposed us. It really is that simple.*

Clan CrackWhore responded to an e-mail from a female player who stated she would not join that clan because the name was too suggestive as follows:

*It takes special dedication to be a crackwhore. That said, part of the on-line multi-player gaming experience is the use of wild and extreme personas. Who would you rather deathmatch against, sweet Barbie from clan doll or street fightin' Mona from the CrackWhores. The name IS intended to shock and stimulate. My suggestion? Don't bother explaining it to your friends.*

As was true of the Saxon scops, the boasts of Quake Clans are subject to challenge. Boasts are promises of performance. A clan who exaggerates their prowess may find themselves taken to task on another clan's page. Campus Quake Clan has a page dedicated to publicly chastising individuals they consider poor players or "llamas".

"Hurray," the llama page begins, "Cryptic has almost been chosen to this month's (year?) biggest llama, his hobbies are nuke boink and teardrop, he likes to kill OS'es and is generally lame. Hello DCS ppl, the fact that you play CTF makes you llama enough already, but not showing up on a LAN party just because they play QW-CTF makes you dalai\_llama. Peekaboo!!! it's the llama of the month... Melkor is by far the filthiest dumb ugly knowitall sore loser in the dutch quake scene." The text closes by encouraging all readers to join the official jihad against Melkor.

Although most clans take a highly aggressive posture, it is not unusual for clan pages to be quite frank about their shortcomings as in this excerpt from Clan Smurf's page:

*You've just found the most average Quake Clan ever created. Do we kick ass every time we play? No. Do we have fun? Yes. Do we live to play Quake? No. Do we have suggestions for other clans? Say to yourself, it's just a game."*

Clan PMS straight-forwardly reports its humble beginnings as an organization:

*In July, 1996, Three girls from British Columbia, Canada got together, made a website and got their asses fragged... A LOT! Within a month we had three more girls join and we played our first clan match against Clan Trilogly. We kicked their butts!*

Clan Deviate modestly begins its battle record page with this statement:

*These are clans that we've played against. Some of them we've won, other's we've lost. We play for fun so we don't have a brag board set up to mock the people we've beaten.*

Member profiles also contain boasts. The following are quotes from member profile pages:

*MadMaxine -- I am a girl and I am better than you.*

*Icey -- Likes it when the victim's head is separated from the body so she always fires rockets like a lunatic.*



More exaggerated boasting tend to take place graphically on clan pages. The "skin" a clan chooses is a graphic boast -- somewhat analogous to the armour of a warrior. The "skin" of a *Quake* player does not deflect attack the way armor would, but it does serve to visually bond players to their teammates and can be used as a device to intimidate or distract opponents. Typical "skins" are hyper-muscled masculine figures. There are also female "skins" as well as images from popular culture. I have also seen skins based on Spiderman, Elvis, Santa, Hitler — and perhaps most frighteningly of all — Tonya Harding.

Graphics and narrative on clan pages combine to bolster the clan's self image as praiseworthy individuals who join together to form a cohesive and admirable group. Even if the membership aren't particularly good *Quake* players, the clan emphasizes shared characteristics such as a sense of humor or style, shared gender or national origin, that make them a worthwhile organization. The clan page reifies their shared values and creates a conglomerate "face" that they can share with unknown legions of others via the world wide web.

Unlike the craft of the scops, clan websites are a very new phenomenon. The modes and conventions of presentation are still in the process of negotiation and definition. Slang terms rise and fall in popularity. The standard of sophistication for website technology is constantly being revised. Oral presentations of narratives are possible, but are currently too cumbersome to be a practical option for most web authors. Within the next five years, oral histories might be as common on gamers' webpages as animated graphics are now. What seems crude and clumsy in the clan pages today may mature into a more fully developed and recognizable form of artistic expression in decades to come.

Perhaps a more significant difference between the narratives of the scops and clans is the nature of the power each lays claim to. The boasts of the scop sprang from real life and death conflicts. The clans inhabit a virtual world. The consequences of their "battles" to the lives of the gamer/combatants are relatively trivial. Players frequently assume gaming aliases. This makes it possible for a gamer to abandon the history attached to their actions under a certain pseudonym like a snake shedding an old skin. The power of the clan page to promote or decry actions and values extends only as far as the page is accessed and read. Even at that, the behaviors they wish to influence are only within the confines of what is in all honesty just a stupid kid's game. However, we must not allow ourselves to dismiss the patterns of thought reinforced in play. The Duke of Wellington is supposed to have said that the battle of "Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton". Do Quake Clan pages contain the blueprints for communal behavior on the part of the next generation?

Listen closely to the way the webmaster of Clan Cheese describes his group:

*Cheese is not a true clan, but a loose organization of Quake players. We have many members who did not want to join a clan or were already in one join the Cheese due to our unique and liberal policies. Overall, our clan is organized anarchy. And with this anarchy comes great expectations from each of its members to maintain order. I am impotent to enforce these unofficial policies so I hope that every Cheese will do his duty.*

Are we becoming bands of loosely bonded individuals that come together briefly for limited purposes only to reconfigure at a later date? At some time in the future will we think of America less in terms of "one nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all" and more in the immortal words of Clan Nine from Outer Space, "a group of friends who work together and like to play together — That's 'together' in the sense of 'at the same time'... not necessarily implying any tendency towards co-operation or an aversion to fragging each other into tiny gory bits."

*Dr. Kelly S. Taylor is a professor at North Texas State.*



**William Benson**

**Nightfall at the Corner of Hoover and Adams**

Somewhere  
in the neighborhood  
a familiar scene breaks

loose.

The streets bleed electric red  
and the pitched scream of sirens  
on Hoover street

ricochets

from window pane

to brick wall

and out again.

But all I can do to ease this pain  
is squelch an urge to stick my fingers  
in my ears.



**Lynn Loper**

## **Rain and Roses**

In most parts of the country summer starts on Memorial Day. Here in Wilmington it really starts with the Flower Market. It's a big charity affair; they have crafts and rides, food and games, and tents full of plants and flowers for sale. You wander around, eat food that's bad for you, see old friends, fill box after box of plants, and bask in the sun.

This year, we got up on May 9th, a cold gray Friday, and pulled on sweatshirts. We took my mom with us; we filled our boxes, ate our bad food (French fries and funnel cake for breakfast!), and as we left it started to rain.

It's been raining ever since. It's June 4th, and there's been one - one - 24-hour period without measurable rain since May 9th. The perennials I picked up at the Donor Plant booth sat on the back porch for three weeks, until I gave up and waded into the ankle-deep mud in my perennial bed and put them in.

They look as good as anything else around here does. I have a couple of small gardens and one big one. The small ones are two 10x10 foot raised beds, one for a cutting garden and one for vegetables. They were both planted on May 5th, the last sunny warm day.

I grow my own seedlings. In January, I go over the catalogs and web sites until I have a list of way too many things, and I try to pare it down. But I'm a sucker for zinnias and rare tomatoes. I have six kinds of zinnias in that 10x10 bed, along with everything else, and fourteen kinds of tomatoes in the other bed. (You could call it intensive gardening, or you could call it nuts.)

I've lost a lot of zinnias to cutworms this spring. I'll cut little manila-folder collars for fourteen tomatoes but not for two hundred and fifty zinnias. This year, I'll have gaps. If the sun would come out, the cutworms would turn into miller moths and fly away on moth business. But the sun doesn't come out, it rains, and the cutworms are hungry and probably bored. They're stuck. Me too.

The tomatoes look fine; they're growing, but they aren't as big as they should be. I can't remember the last time I didn't have buds on the tomatoes by now. It's too cold for tomatoes.

Then there's the big garden: my roses. I have sixty-two roses now: beds on either side of the front door, roses in the perennial bed, roses stuck here and there, and the big bed in the back garden. (Don't think it's a mansion; it's a plain old suburban house on a third of an acre. There's a guy on a much smaller lot in another suburb that has over four hundred roses. I've never been there; it would give me ideas.)

Spring is always a problem. The beds are muddy, either from melting snow or rain. It's worst just when you should be cutting the roses back, at the end of February. This year it got done in early April. It doesn't matter; it was freezing cold until the middle of the month, and the poor things were dormant well after they should have been budding.

The leaves came out slowly, and the buds, and then the rain started. The buds got bigger. The rain has to stop sometime, I said; then look at all these buds. Look at how big they are!

But the rain hasn't stopped. It rains every day. Some days it rains hard. We had a drought last summer, a true historic drought, and now we're inches over our yearly total. And it still rains. It's dark, and it's cold, and it rains.

Most of my roses are either English roses or old roses, and many of them bloom only once a year. Imagine that hybrid tea under your mom's kitchen window; now imagine if it was covered all at once with all the flowers it usually bears all summer. In his wonderful book "Second Nature", Michael Pollan says there's something more than a little sexual about an old rose; it climaxes, gives all it has to give in one unrestrained burst, while hybrid teas never quite... finish.

Roses can't wait forever. Mine have started to bloom. The blooms on old roses are glorious things, hundreds of petals so delicate they seem transparent, coming out in quarters or balls, flat or cupped faces, throwing scents of tea or myrrh or green apples all the way out to the street. But they're delicate. They don't have the thick, fleshy petals a modern tea has. They collect the water and hang over, with water spots marring the fragile petals.

I could do worse things than race out when the rain lets up a little, to clip off a blossom from the bottom of a bush or a bud that looks like it might come out. I miss my dozens and dozens of blossoms. I'll take what I can have. But I don't think I'll ever enjoy watching the Weather Channel again.

*Lynn Loper gardens, lives and works in Delaware.*



**Geoff Fernald**

## **Unessential Ingredients**

At fifty-nine we are sorting items in our rental home;  
Accumulated wealth of lives passed,  
Looking for what is essential, were we  
To find ourselves on the move over the next  
Ten years. We, my wife and I,  
Pare the furniture down  
More easily than expected.  
Paring down more a decision of how much  
we can afford ten years from now than what must not be lost.  
We hesitate over the 1812 grandfather clock, but give away the 1800's  
forty-five dollar tavern table of more than 30 years, keep one of the  
rockers, and the nineteenth century chest and pine foremans standup desk.

It's really the books that go down hardest. Our favorites.  
Those now hard to find, the Steinbecks and Greenes.  
And art books especially suited to us. The poetry collection and  
a few others and old, mostly inherited. It is these that, like the cost of medical insurance  
for preservation of our bodies, must be kept in a storage locker against damage;  
even during non use.  
We consider renting a U-store in the desert for one hundred dollars a year, where  
land goes for pennies. Then there are the paintings and their need for  
refrigeration. I, like Jesus' rich man, am having a time with my possessions.  
No longer possessing them but possessed.

Difficult to find those non-essentials.  
Weeding from something to nothing  
Making the coming decade of vagabondery  
A simpler life.

*Geoff Fernald's has been writing poetry for 40 years. He works as an engineer and lives in the Los Angeles area: He is published in a collection called "Seven on a Monday". Please contact the LHLS poetry editor for more information on that volume.*



**Tom Good**

## **Dispersed Flash Mobs: A History**

The Flash Mob was one of the first technology-driven fads of the early twenty-first century. Participants, organized through email or other messaging systems, congregated at a prearranged spot to carry out absurd activities. Early Flash Mobs performed actions such as standing on a ledge in Central Park making bird noises, or staring at a particular rug in a rug store. For a time, flash mobs were quite popular in larger cities. Participants reported feelings of euphoria from being involved in something so organized yet inexplicable.

The turning point came when organizers uncovered major flaws in the original Flash Mob concept, and devised their solutions. The problems arose from *colocation*. Flash Mobs required all participants to gather in a single area, and this presented several drawbacks. The first flaw was simply that of elitism and exclusivity. Would-be performance artists in small towns far from major urban centers would find it unreasonably difficult to participate in the latest Flash Mob event.

The second, serious flaw was more abstract: colocation actually contradicted a core philosophy of the Internet. After all, the Internet was designed to avoid the sort of "single point of failure" introduced when one resource becomes essential to the success of the whole. Flash Mobs were easily thwarted, either by deliberate intervention -- as when authorities decided to disrupt assemblies which might disrupt public order -- or by simple bad luck in the form of a traffic jam or other impediment to reaching the designated site.

Finally, colocation of a large group inherently represented an attention-seeking behavior. Flash Mobs carefully avoided "selling out" and forfeiting artistic legitimacy by engaging in commercial activities. Ironically, it took a long time for artists to realize that attention-seeking was the biggest sellout of all, *because attention was the new money*.

Out of these struggles the Dispersed Flash Mob was born. This new form banned colocation but preserved the unity of intent and action. Organized yet geographically distributed activities became the new ideal. Each participant would play his or her part at a *different* location. In one of the first Dispersed Flash Mobs, conspirators turned off all the lights in their dwellings at precisely 11:04pm EST.

How many people participated? We will never know, for many people unaware of the game must have performed similar actions by coincidence. The organizer claimed the involvement of "millions", but this was almost certainly exaggeration, or as some liked to call it, "plausible assertability." Nevertheless, this unverifiability became the new hook that made the game even more popular. Soon Dispersed Flash Mobs were credited for all sorts of widespread phenomena, from the election of unusual political candidates to the popularity of certain songs or beverages. Some of these claims were no doubt true, such as the Great Persimmon Tea Frenzy, but others will remain forever disputed.

The next revolution occurred when a figure identified only as "#" declared that Dispersed Flash Mobs, while a step in the right direction, still lacked artistic purity. Unity of both action and intent was not only excessive, but unity of action in fact *polluted* the unity of intent by being too identifiable, and thus too much of an attention-seeking activity. The next wave of Dispersed Flash Mobs emphasized intent alone: each participant performed a different ordinary-seeming action, in a different location, while keeping some prearranged thought in mind.

This caused a worldwide sensation. At any given moment, any person one encountered may have been acting on behalf of a Dispersed Flash Mob, but it became impossible to tell one way or the other. Only the individual knew for sure. Some people claimed to be part of the conspiracy in order to sound important; others who were deeply involved denied it just to purposely confuse the issue.

Ultimately, nearly everyone with access to wireless communication joined one of the 5 major Distributed Flash Mob groups which now dominate daily life in technological societies. The groups compete with one another to devise new, clever, and appropriate intents, while periodically denying their existence in order to avoid the shadow of attention-seeking. Incredibly, the "#" Group -- still thought to be the world's largest -- now regularly claims that Dispersed Flash Mobs of any kind have never existed, and that the whole concept is "mass hallucination" and "socialist propaganda." The precise intent of such statements remains unknown outside the group.

*Tom Good lives in Portland, Oregon, works for a software company, and his interests include T'ai Chi Chuan, gardening, and riding motorcycles.*





**Robert Tribble**

**By the Ear of the Mule**

"Before we can sow the wheat,  
We must plow the ground," Dad said  
On the way to the field, and gave me the reins  
To the two brown mules "You're now  
Big enough to handle a plow.  
Make your first row straight  
And the others will follow. Sight the far end  
Of the field, pick a bush and make  
Directly for it. Keep that gee mule's right ear  
Just right of the bush you're sighting on  
And you'll plow a field an artist might paint."

So I plowed by the rule and the fields I plowed  
Were praised though never an artist painted them  
I also learned a plowman I did not want to be  
But in the years since that youthful lesson  
I find picking a target plows my days straighter  
As I think of old Kate's ear.

*Robert Dean Tribble lives in the Los Angeles area. This poem originally appeared in Capper's Magazine.*



**Erik M. Stevens**

## **Johnny**

No one in the family knows how Johnny's burial was arranged. The fact is, we didn't know he had died until eight years after the fact. That's a long time for your father's brother to be out of touch, but we were used to that about Johnny. My dad and my uncle weren't talking to one another, and later Dad wasn't talking to anyone because of his Alzheimer's. So maybe it's not surprising that we didn't find out about Johnny's death until a year after Dad himself had died.

Now I go to visit both their gravesites and I'm struck by how the differences between them continue on in death. My father is buried in a well-maintained cemetery in north Seattle, and while it took nearly two years for us to decide on the design of the gravestone, there was never any question that there would be a marker and that it would be *nice*. Johnny is buried in a different cemetery in Seattle, in an area filled with what used to be called pauper's graves. The only marker for his cremated remains is a small aluminum one, about the size of an index card, with his first initial and last name (misspelled), the date of death, and an identification number.

How much does the ending have to do with the beginning? Johnny and my father were born in New York City, Johnny in 1922 and my father in 1927. There was an older sister as well, but she doesn't really figure in this story. It was a working class family; the steady breadwinner was my grandmother, who was a social worker. My grandfather was in the Army during World War I, but if I ever knew what work he did, I have since forgotten it.

Johnny was the black sheep of the family, and I wonder how his mother felt when he began to get into trouble with the law. I only know ephemeral pieces of the story and much of it is blurred, confusing people I never met with those whom I only met briefly. I know that after his mother died, Johnny sent a wreath every year to be placed on her grave. He also used her maiden name as his middle name, although I don't know if he ever made the change legal. Were they really close, or were these simply symbolic acts empty of deeper meaning? Even if Johnny were alive today to tell me, I wouldn't trust his answer. I never trusted what he told me.

I didn't get to know Johnny until I was sixteen years old, in 1980. My family had moved from New York to Seattle when I was only two, and there wasn't much visiting back and forth with Dad's family, particularly Johnny. He showed up in Seattle in 1980 and stayed with us for a while, sleeping on the couch in the basement. Gradually I picked up that Johnny came to Seattle because he was running from the law, something about tax evasion and property seizure. I was fascinated and yet slightly repelled by him. His talk was peppered with slurs against Blacks, Jews, Hispanics, and yet he could be charming in his slick but tough way. Most of his tales were from his younger years — he told us about working in the CCC, the Civilian Conservation Corps, during the Depression. He was sent out West to help build trails and shelters at Yellowstone. He said little about the mountains and wilderness that he was working in, focusing instead on the camps and the other men.

Like my father, Johnny was a woodworker. He was a master at refinishing antiques, and soon after coming to Seattle he was able to get work with a prestigious designer and antiques dealer. I

noticed, though, that he didn't work long for Weatherford. Again the tale was never clearly told to me (or maybe since I was a teen at the time, I wasn't too interested in hearing it), but I read between the lines and figured out that Johnny set up shop for himself because he couldn't deal with someone else telling him what to do. The irony was that even long after he was done doing work for Weatherford, Johnny liked to drop his name into the conversation, just like he would mention his supposed connections to the mob.

After Johnny had his own shop and place to live, we didn't see him as often, even though he was only a few miles away. The 80's started moving by quickly; I was busy with growing up and moving out, and my family was having to deal more and more with my father's illness. First unspoken, then discussed tentatively, and finally diagnosed late in '87: Alzheimer's. Did Johnny and my father ever talk about it? Johnny himself wasn't in the best of health. Now in his 60's, he had already lost a lung to cancer before he came to Seattle, and the few times I saw him I noticed he was becoming slower and stiffer in his movements. He made little effort to change his habits, always smoking a cigarette and eating steak and eggs when he could afford it.

Eventually there was a break between my father and Johnny. My father finally got tired of giving Johnny "loans" that were never repaid and told him no more. The limited contact with Johnny dwindled to nothing. Occasionally we'd hear word of Johnny's latest exploits from a cousin or a neighbor, about a new girlfriend and then later about his arrest for discharging a weapon. Johnny was in jail again, something that didn't seem to surprise my parents too much.

None of us knew when Johnny was released from prison or what happened to him next. Dad's Alzheimer's was becoming more and more pronounced, and my mother was bearing the brunt of caring for him at home. My siblings and I were all wrapped up in attending graduate school, pursuing careers, getting married and starting our own families. Occasionally Johnny would come up in the conversation, and we wondered what he was doing and even if he was still alive. None of us attempted to find out where he was.

Johnny died in August 1993. He was living in an apartment in the central district in Seattle and apparently died of heart failure. I discovered the facts about his death in the summer of 2001. My cousin had given me his social security number and one day when I was surfing the net I discovered a site where you could search the Social Security Death Index. I typed in Johnny's information and received a listing with the date of death and the zip code for his last residence. I called my mother and later one of my brothers to tell them the belated news. I experienced a subdued sense of loss; certainly I had never been close to Johnny, but I was sad to hear of his death.

Did he have friends around him, those last few years? He died alone and from the death certificate it looks like it took a day or two for anyone to discover the body. When my mother and I finally went to Mount Pleasant Cemetery to find his grave, we asked who had paid for the burial. The woman in the office shuffled through the records slowly. "The State," was her brief response.

Maybe it is my father's own death which has made me focus so much on Johnny's death and his forgotten grave. Before my father died I rarely visited cemeteries. Now they seem to be a regular

feature of my landscape. I go for a bike ride or a walk, and if my path takes me by a cemetery, even if I don't know anyone who is buried there, I stop for a while. I have traveled to several countries in the last few years, and in nearly all of them I have visited a cemetery, often with no conscious plan beforehand.

The media saturates us with images of violence and death, yet no one talks about going to visit a relative or friend's grave in the same way that we mention shopping trips or the latest movie watched. I find a walk through a graveyard to be comforting and reassuring, even if the graves are unmarked and poorly tended. So while I make my occasional visits to both Johnny's and my father's graves, I make no effort to spruce up Johnny's grave or leave a bouquet for my father. If my thoughts grow deep, I take the time to say a prayer of thanksgiving for the complexity and mystery of human relationships. Otherwise I admire the spreading branches of the nearby cedar and listen to the wind whispering through the grass.

*Erik Stevens is in the paradoxical position of working as a network administrator and computer support specialist for an ecumenical retreat center located in a remote village with no Internet access. Living in the Cascade Mountains of Washington State he also enjoys painting, writing, hiking, Scrabble playing and reading. He is a drinker of fine black teas and is fluent in Swedish and has no desire to catalog all the other facets and experiences of his life as he approaches his 40th birthday. Website: <http://red-fish.org/>*



## Geoff Fernald

### Orchard

California back road,  
A sixty-mile joiner of Freeways,  
Small roadside orchard,  
Beauty in the mind,  
Tranquil,  
Speeding past,  
Then drawn,  
Stopped.  
Disembarking from the day's journey.  
To an orderliness  
Like German black forests,  
Geometric,  
Yet....  
Branches, Chaos, Randomness,  
Leaves mostly fallen  
Into  
Ordered rows  
In between.

We find ourselves walking inside a Monet,  
A Pizzaro,  
Standing there out of our halted automobile.  
Noon sun,  
Pastel peace of mind,  
A desire to sit amidst  
Leaves, trunks, branched-arches.

Almond orchard,  
A mind's eye,  
My brother and I in a shared  
Silence.



**Donatella DelBono**

## **It's in Your Head (Part 1)**

"it's in your head"

An analysis and guide

I recently had an argument with a friend (my head) over the film *Head*. As this argument progressed to an unfulfilling climax, I soon realized that my friend understood none of the film. I was quite surprised by this since I have always thought that there really wasn't that much to grasp. After all, there is no plot, so it should be easy. However, even I, a student of media ecology and pop-culture, must admit I've had my share of flip-flop opinions on this one. So, now I have come to the conclusion that ... it's not my fault!! And I am at the brink of obsession - nay, insanity - trying to come to a satisfactory agreement between "me" and my "head". But relax, you need not put yourself through what I have tormented over for so long. I have chosen to publish my sick obsession for the world to see in the hope of some cure - to be able to go out into the sunshine and breathe the fresh smog once again, and to finally get this Monkee off my back!

I feel much better now. So here is the formula for viewing *Head*: stop listening to others' "theories" and dismiss your own pre-conceptions. Listen to the opening title song and do exactly what it says.

To begin, I never really thought this film was all that good until I wrote this piece, which is a response to my friend's argument. I now have a whole new respect for it and it'sits filmmaker; but still this film isn't that profound or intellectual for it to require any kind of in-depth theorizing or analyses. However, there does seem to be some confusion as to what is going on here, and what the hell - it's fun. So, before I get into it, let me give you a tip: Don't watch the film for at least a year. Give yourself time to wash away all your pre-conceptions and prior knowledge. Then go back and have another look. Try to simply watch what is happening on the screen, and most importantly - don't think about it!

O.K. so it's one year later. Feel any different about it? No? Well then don't waste any more time and start reading! Let's begin with the film's structure: Now, everyone claims it is circular because the end winds up at the beginning - nonsense. Film is linear - period. We are not dealing with another dimension here. Time is linear, and the medium of film is displayed in time. There is no such thing as a circular film. It just means that the film comes full circle. I know this seems like over-simplifying, but believe me, there are people out there who don't understand this concept. *Head* is simply a dream, with a very definite indication of when the dream ends. Fine, we all know it's a dream, but who's dreaming? If you watch the first few minutes, you will notice a subtle, but definite film style. It is slow, laborious, mundane, - pretty boring stuff. It seems like it goes on much longer than it actually does, and that's because it's filmed in real time - it is meant to be boring so it can contrast with the rest of the film. Everything that happens in these first few minutes is the only thing in the film that is actually taking place in the film's "real" world. This is the foundation of the film; like the bridge they are

standing on it is concrete, solid and real - yes "real" in a film sense. When Micky and the guys run onto the scene, nothing has changed.

Have you noticed the lack of comedy so far in this "Monkees" flick? That's because it isn't funny. Look at the expressions on the four guys' faces. No one is laughing. When we finally see Micky's face just before he jumps, we realize this is not a joke. He's serious! He looks over the rail into the water below; makes a decision, and acts on it - he jumps. This scene is not played for comedy. We don't believe that if Micky jumps he will be saved at the last moment, like in a T.V. sitcom. When we see Mike, Peter, and Davy at the rail, they too look just as serious; and when Micky hits the water he doesn't get up and swim away. He is clearly drowning and lifeless. Just as we see his final breaths escape, the mermaids appear; and this is the beginning of his dream and the rest of the film.

Now, I know it is very popular to think of the dream as a collective consciousness of all four characters, again - nonsense. I used to think so too, but only because I heard someone else say it first (I think it was Peter Tork actually.) It's a very seductive idea because it seems to add a layer of complexity to the film; but sorry, Pete - it just isn't there. It leaves too many unanswered questions, and the film winds up not making a whole lot of sense - hence the confusion. In fact, the film is a dare. It is challenging the audience to think of, and accept these four people as individuals; but that's almost impossible to do. We only think of them as "The Monkees". Each member makes up one quarter of a collective entity - the commodity - brought to you by Hollywood. Yet they did such a good job packaging these guys that they can't break free of it; and if one of them acts on his own as an individual by say - jumping off a bridge; then the greater whole the "Monkees" can no longer exist. That's why the other three jump later; they have no choice. If they don't jump then the group as a whole dies. Their only chance is to follow Micky into the water and hope his solution works to save them all.

Simple enough so far - nothing you probably haven't heard before. So, let's move on and see why this collective consciousness theory doesn't work. First, if it were a collective consciousness why do we only see Micky jump off the bridge? I know! But ignore the end for now; we'll get to that later. The common thought on this is that it doesn't matter who jumps off the bridge, because it will always be the same dream - the same film. True (somewhat), and again this is very tempting, because it allows all four boys to have their equal say and equal time. They must be equal! It seems like pure sacrilege to allow one monkee to stand out in any way. That's what Hollywood tells us; but they are not equal in this film anymore than they are equal in real life - that's the point. Micky just jumped off a bridge to commit suicide. He can no longer be equal - he's dead (or at least dying). There is no one else in his head. It's just his own warped dream brought on by his final moments before death - stretched or slowed down to about eighty minutes, or the length of an average film. This is the second and last play on film/time distortion. Once for reality and once to represent the dream.

Now that we understand there is a dream taking place (since there are mermaids swimming around and there are no mermaids in reality), who is the dreamer and what is he dreaming? I'm speaking of the big picture, not specific scenes - we'll discuss that in Part II. Let's start with the first scene after the mermaids. It fades into Micky behind an aquarium (because he is dreaming in water) kissing a girl. She kisses the other three and declares them "even" or equal. What?!!

How can that be after I just argued that they are not equal? That's precisely what Micky is thinking when he dreams it. He dared not to be equal by jumping off the bridge. Now the audience is being challenged to think of him and the others as individuals - as real people. The reason they need to get this point across is because these four actors never really had a chance to play characters on their T.V. show. Essentially, they were playing themselves, or so it seemed. That's how the show was promoted. The characters were not given names, so the line between fantasy and reality starts to blur. They weren't playing themselves of course, but because they were supposed to be a "real" band they were perceived as being "real" characters living in a sitcom and recording music. Only they weren't real, they were a complete fabrication, a result of marketing genius. Unfortunately, it is the real Micky, Mike, Davy and Peter that suffer the consequences - hence their desperation to avoid the equality that had been forced on them. The film also doesn't feel equal. The time spent on each character certainly doesn't seem that way, and though I've never actually timed it with a stop-watch; I've always felt the film seemed Micky-heavy and Mike-light. Notice that whenever the dream switches to someone else it always seems to come back to Micky. Why? Because he is the one that is dreaming, so he always makes a connection back to himself.

Now you must ignore all those heavy-handed dream sequence fade-ins and fuzzy screens; they're heavy-handed because they are a ruse, just like the "cop's dream" before Mike's sequence. All it really means is that Micky is dreaming in the language of film; after all, this is his entire life: an endless stream of film, TV, tours, and soundstages. He is making his dream like a film (or many films), and we, the audience are watching the film of his dream. The "cop's dream" is actually a hint, because we know the cop wouldn't be dreaming about Mike and his birthday party - that's absurd. What would be the point, except for the sake of absurdity? Then, after an extra heavily contrived psychedelic fade (almost cheesy), we see Mike wake up. The "psychedelic fade" and the "cops dream" are the clues. There is no reason for anything to look "contrived or heavy-handed" because the film expresses beautifully many effects that look very polished and professional, even by today's standards. Don't be fooled. It was all very intentional, just as the different film styles were used to represent different aspects of the people in the film. In this regard, the film is really much more sophisticated than it first appears. The film styles I mentioned can be seen throughout as a subtle thread that links the four main characters. I've already discussed the first in the beginning of the film. The next is during Davy's sequence with Annette Funicello. The style is that of an out-dated, corny melodrama - fake tears and all. What are they talking about in this scene? He says he wants to be more than just a two-bit violin player, so he has to go through with it. Go through with what? Get his face bashed in? Of course this is also a metaphor for Davy's disgust with being a Monkee; but the point is that Davy does indeed get his million-dollar face bashed in. The way it is filmed is simply Micky still dreaming in film language. This is how he sees Davy. This is how everyone sees Davy; but we really don't know how Davy sees himself. Would he cast himself in a cheap B-movie with Annette (an ex-teen idol)? Maybe, but that would be speculation. We know what we think because we're Davy's audience, like Micky. Davy's role as a Monkee was to be cute - lets face it, he really didn't do much else. Without that face, he's nothing. This happens again during Peter's sequence after he punches the waitress in drag. The scene officially ends when the director says cut and shows up in front of the camera. We have just been watching another film within a film; and to bring us out of it the filmmakers give us the "documentary" style. The shaky camera presumably belongs to someone shooting a behind the scenes look at Peter. The main point to



this scene is that Peter is not the dummy. So what does that have to do with the way in which it was filmed? Since we are supposedly seeing the real Peter here; you could say that the style is indeed "real". Peter comes out of character and the camera spontaneously captures it. The real Peter seems like a nice enough kind of guy who cares about how his character is going to look on camera. The filming style seems to help define the line between Peter and the character he portrays.

The final sequence gets a little murkier. This is Mike's Birthday Party scene. This sequence looks like a horror film from the early sixties, and the theme is to be "scared"- but to be scared of what? Of Mike? Or is Mike the one who is scared? If so, then of what? Whoa - lots to get into here, but difficult to do if we don't want to speculate too much. Mike is startled when he opens the closet door and a dummy that looks like Micky falls to the floor; then he quickly recovers when he realizes what just happened. But why would Micky scare Mike? And why did Micky and Peter disappear? Is it all a practical joke? Or is it some kind of revenge? At the end of the scene, Mike winds up scaring everyone with his unpredictability. Is that what this scene is trying to say? Personally, I never thought of Mike as fear inducing, but then again, I don't know him - only his alter self - and it isn't my dream anyway. So whose dream is it? We already know it can't be the cop's dream as we are led to believe, because it would render the dream irrelevant. Mike may dream of himself being frightened by something - we all have dreams like that, but would he dream of himself frightening others? Possibly, but doubtful, there must be a better explanation. We see Davy and Peter run scared through the haunted house, but why not Micky? A fake Micky falls from the closet. Why not Peter? They both just disappeared. Micky would certainly be the most likely to perform a practical joke on Mike for his birthday. Is that where he is? If we continue to think of this sequence as Micky's dream, then it becomes slightly clearer. A practical joke to Micky might seem like fun; but Mike doesn't like surprises, so he gets angry. A clash of two very different personalities; but if this is Micky's perception of Mike then it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks or does. If Mike frightens him, for whatever reasons, then he can dream about trying to frighten Mike - which is perfectly reasonable. In the end, Mike frightens him anyway when he blows up at the party givers for surprising him. The difference is that when Micky tries to scare Mike, it's just a joke; but when Mike gets angry, no one is laughing. He truly does become a pretty scary character if he can't take a little joke, especially since his friends just went through all the trouble to give him a surprise birthday party. So it seems more believable that this would not be Mike's dream, unless Mike was on some kind of guilt trip, but someone else's. Someone who has been repeatedly either scared, disappointed or hurt by Mike, and someone who clearly just doesn't understand him.

The remaining scenes in the film are essentially filler composed of metaphorical vignettes, and only work to disintegrate the structure with confusion. It's easiest to pick out the musical scenes first. There are six where we expect to find only four and that's because the songs don't really correspond to the characters themselves; but rather to a thought, idea or feeling of one or all of the four characters. Of course, the music is nice to have, I think they are some of the best scenes in the film; but they do not really contribute anything to the structure. It's as if the film is beginning to become an exercise in entropy. All the chaos of the dream fights to break down the original format that we thought was established, that's why the film becomes so confusing; and that's why it is so important to keep that original structure simple; so it will be easily carried through all these scenes of chaos.

Another important theme running through the film is how each character deals with the black box, which represents many things such as Hollywood, a cage or storage box, and the universe (or at least Micky's universe). This is the world they are desperately trying to escape, and each has a different idea for coping with the enemy. Peter and Davy keep disappearing in search of their solutions - one being philosophy and the other being sheer determination, and strength. Mike doesn't seem to have any means to deal with the problem. He simply reacts poorly when something happens. Mostly, he gets angry or upset and does nothing at all except an attempt at intimidation. Micky has no real solution either, or the ultimate one, depending on how you look at it. His way of coping is to end it all with a leap off the bridge. Neither of which is much of an effort to keep the black box at bay. They are the two extremes. While Davy tries to take everyone on with his fists in pure action-hero style, Peter tries to use his head to escape, which also doesn't work. Peter hasn't escaped, he has simply learned to live with the problem and try to change his "reality" or perception so that he will not be bothered by it.

The key here is irony. Each character acts in the way we would least expect. What is little Davy doing when he attempts to be a boxing champ or action-hero? I find it difficult to believe that David Jones is this way in real life. And what about Peter? Of course he isn't the dummy he plays on T.V.; but he probably isn't a rocket scientist either. So he is somewhere in between, like most people. We know that Mike probably wouldn't sit back and do nothing - he just doesn't seem like the passive type. We also know that Micky Dolenz never committed suicide. So these are just exaggerations, but exaggerations of what? Are we supposed to believe that in real life, these four people are the more subtle versions they portray in this film? Well, I don't know them - maybe they are; but it seems more reasonable to assume that the point is that these four people simply are not what they appear to be on T.V., even though their names haven't been changed.

Let's get back to the beginning and why the dream is not a collective consciousness. Towards the end of the film, after Peter has his philosophy lesson, he finds Mike and Micky standing around betting on whether or not the girl is going to jump. They both ignore Peter while passively watching the girl. Micky says she won't jump, while Mike bets him ten dollars she will. Micky does not think she will jump off the building because he just jumped off a bridge. Have you ever wondered why that V8 he's drinking is so prominently displayed? It isn't an early example of product placement. Micky is having second thoughts about his actions since he now sees that he still can't escape the black box; he already knows his solution is not working. Mike knows she will jump because he just witnessed his friend jump, and it's Micky's dream anyway - he knows he just jumped. Indeed, the girl jumps, but Mike presumably catches her - just like in a television comedy.

At this point, the film starts to slowly back up through previous scenes until they finally reach the point where they started - the bridge; but this time the scene has changed. Look at it carefully and compare it with the first version. It isn't the same scene at all. In fact, it looks like the film was reversed because the perspective is from the opposite side of the bridge - only a very observant viewer will pick this up, it's very subtle and you need to pay close attention to the comparisons of both scenes. Why the perspective trickery? Because it is indeed a different perspective. When Micky jumps off the bridge in the first scene, we are watching the "real" event take place in a movie called *Head*. In the ending scene Micky is dreaming of himself and

the others jumping - an imagined point of view, in a dream, in a movie called *Head*. And with some very clever editing of the same film footage, the end scene loses the seriousness of the first. It is more chaotic and frantic. The scene looks more like it came from the TV show - like a "typical monkee romp". When we see Micky run through the red tape on the bridge he acts as though he just won a race, not like he's being chased in fear for his life; and when he jumps off the bridge this time we don't get to see his face, so we don't know if he is serious or not. When we see the other three witnessing Micky's jump there doesn't seem to be any "real" concern. Instead, their expressions convey a comedic leap off the bridge similar to the way the girl jumps from the building earlier, almost cartoonish. When the others jump (although Davy never really jumps he just kind of falls off the bridge) they're just following their friend - since no one else's solution to escape the black box worked they are now going to try Micky's extreme solution. This time when they hit the water no one drowns. They all get up and swim away. They even seem quite pleased with themselves for finding a means of escape. However, as before it is only temporary because they end up in the tank of water - fished out of the sea to be stored away for future use. So, no one's solution worked.

Yet, this is still the dream - it hasn't ended. Even as the credits roll, Micky is still dreaming his little film. Only when the film breaks and the screen goes black, and the music finally fades does the dream end - along with Micky's life. So Mike, Peter and Davy never actually jump off the bridge the way Micky does. Micky only dreams they follow him off the bridge the way they might in the television show.

Now, I've given this careful (obsessive) thought, and at first I just couldn't let go of that collective consciousness idea because it's just a lot more fun to think of it that way. After I was convinced that it was only Micky that actually jumps and therefore the only one dreaming, I thought why couldn't he be dreaming in a collective with the other three who are still conscious? Well, aside from the obvious - they are still conscious; there would need to be some kind of metaphysical tether connecting everyone, which is just plain silly because we're supposedly dealing with reality here, and this is not science fiction. Or, maybe Micky is dreaming the whole collective himself - simply dreaming from everyone's perspective. Though this would not be a true collective consciousness, it is a possibility which I am willing to accept (with difficulty). However, I prefer to reduce it to its common denominator - its most simplistic form which is one person, having one dream, from one perspective. It keeps the structure sound, and stable enough to hold up to all the chaos that it must support. The dream itself now becomes nothing more than a stream of consciousness which just happens to be about three people and the person dreaming.

The one problem I find with this perspective is, if this is solely Micky's dream then the film starts to take on a more personal or human quality because it is less abstract. It now begs the questions: Why Micky? Why not Mike, or Peter, or Davy? And why did he really commit suicide? Well, there is no way we could really know for certain since the filmmaker chose not to deal with it, so we are left to deduce from what we do know.

Actually, in answer to the first question, I suspect it was merely for technical reasons. Since the point of the opening scene is to be "real" and serious then it would be most logical to choose the person who is the least serious, because the filmmaker has to get this point across in only a few seconds of film just before the jump off the bridge. The audience only gets one quick facial

expression to grasp this point. As soon as we see a serious Micky, we know something is wrong. If, instead, we saw a serious Mike we probably wouldn't give it a second thought because he is always serious. It would be a different film entirely because there would be no differentiation between the "real" Mike and his TV character, so we couldn't know that the opening scene is supposed to be different from the dream. Peter would be difficult if not impossible to use because he requires dialogue for his explanation about not being the dummy, which he gives us later in the film. Peter's "irony" is intellectual, not emotional like Micky's, so it can't really be shown with a quick glance of his face. Besides, it would be too sad and sentimental if Peter jumps. He evokes too much sympathy, kind of like a puppy. Davy is out of the question because he is simply too shallow and therefore would not be believable. But this is also a more intellectual concern, like Peter's, so he isn't a practical choice either.

There are probably other reasons as well. For example, since Micky was essentially the wackiest member of the group, it makes for a good excuse for the film to be a comedy. If it were Mike it might be more serious, or Peter less intellectual, or Davy shallower. Finally, if you had to choose one of the four Monkees to one day snap and commit suicide by jumping from a bridge; who would be your choice? The lunatic of course! Micky was already a bit emotionally unbalanced anyway.

However, when we turn to why he would do such a thing we tread on shaky ground, because there is really no way we can know this without some more information. If we keep with the content of the film, then Micky is trying to escape the black box. In real terms it means he was just fed up with being a monkee - which in fact he says in the film. The problem with this is that it seems like a pretty lame excuse to end it all. Which brings us to another problem - the film's subject in general doesn't seem worthy of the film's efforts. These four guys are tired of being the Monkees; tired of being rich and famous. I can appreciate the fact, even sympathize with their feelings about not having control over their music and television show - but come on - life couldn't be that bad! These were four pretty lucky guys and maybe they should have been just a bit more gracious. The film makes them look like a bunch of spoiled brats who are throwing a tantrum because they aren't getting what they want. They weren't happy with their image, and with the music that they were forced to put their names on - the poor things. But then again, maybe life really was as unbearable as they claim; after all didn't Kurt Cobain shoot himself in the head for similar reasons?

End of Part I

*Donatella DelBono is a Monkees' fan, but otherwise a mystery.*



## **Ginger Mayerson and Laurel Sutton**

### **An Interview with John Bloom**

Columnist John Bloom, somewhat better known as Joe Bob Briggs, very kindly gave editors Mayerson and Sutton the interview below in early June 2003. In addition to writing numerous columns and articles, Mr. Briggs has these books available on Amazon: *Profoundly Disturbing : Shocking Movies That Changed History!*; *Joe Bob Goes to the Drive-In*; *Joe Bob Goes Back to the Drive-In*; *Iron Joe Bob*; *The Cosmic Wisdom of Joe Bob Briggs*; *Guide to Western Civilization, or My Story*. And for all things Joe Bob Briggs and some John Bloom writings, too, try out [www.JoeBobBriggs.com](http://www.JoeBobBriggs.com).

#### **Background**

**Laurel Sutton:** Five columns a week - that's a lot of reading and writing. Do you read other columnists regularly, and if so, who? Do you read any comic strips daily?

**Joe Bob:** I'm afraid it's no on both counts. I read eight newspapers a day - eleven on Wednesday - but I skim columns. I look for topics that interest me. I'll usually read Frank Rich's column in the New York Times because it's always meticulously researched and his thinking is deep. I'll read Lewis Lapham in Harper's. Everyone else is hit and miss.

**Ginger Mayerson:** If it's not you, who's your favorite columnist and why is that?

**JB:** Lewis Lapham, because he has a refined sense of history, the ability to use American English in a powerful way, and the courage to push logic to counter-intuitive conclusions.

**LS:** What fiction are you currently reading?

**JB:** I'm not currently reading fiction. I'm reading a history of Hungary. The last fiction I read was Lafcadio Hearn's "Kwaidan."

**LS:** Do you work hard to keep Joe Bob Briggs and John Bloom separate identities? How do you decide which byline to use?

**JB:** I would prefer to just use Joe Bob, because he's better known than John Bloom, but I was an eyewitness to the 9/11 attacks, and when I called UPI and said, "Well, how do I file this story?" they said, "I don't think we can put Joe Bob's name on that." So we decided that when the subject is sufficiently serious that it would be offensive to write about it as Joe Bob, I use John Bloom. I also use John Bloom for media criticism, because if I didn't, my fellow journalists would crucify me for hiding behind the nom de plume. Things were so much easier in the 19th century.

**LS:** Where do you draw your inspiration for "God Stuff"? Were you raised in a religious family? What makes homegrown American religions (Mormons, 12<sup>th</sup> Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses) so singular?

**JB:** I was brought up in the Southern Baptist church, but I dropped out pretty early. I have some friends who run a "televangelist watchdog" organization. They monitor those guys and ferret out the ones who are fleecing widows. So they had collected all this videotape in a sort of "greatest hits" reel, and they showed it to me one day, and I thought, this is great. You don't have to watch the whole sermon, but you can see the funniest parts. Hence the idea for "God Stuff." What makes homegrown religions so interesting is that they are all run by CRAZY PEOPLE.

**LS:** What place does religion have in our lives? Can you be moral without belief in God?

**JB:** I'm a lifelong journalist. I think everyone is immoral. Actually that's the orthodox Christian view as well, though, isn't it? That all are sinful, all are fallen. I think that God should be part of your life but not your politics.

**LS:** Are you ever going to direct a film?

**JB:** I'm flattered that you think I would be capable of directing a film. I'm not sure I have the monomaniacal self-destructive nature to spend three solid years doing that, to the exclusion of all other things in my life. I tend to be a multi-tasker, instead of working on one big "War and Peace" project.

**LS:** What did you have for breakfast this morning?

**JB:** I had one of those high-protein milkshakes because I was going to the gym.

### **Political**

**GM:** Do you have any idea what GW Bush's appeal is?

**JB:** Well, I guess thinking, "He's got that kinky sex look behind his eyes," is out.

**LS:** Is John Ashcroft really Caligula?

**JB:** Are you confusing Caligula with Comstock? Caligula was a wild and crazy guy.

**GM:** If John Ashcroft could be Caligula for a day, what's the first thing he'd do?

**JB:** He'd say either "What are these three transvestite hookers doing in my bed?" or "Where's my sister?"

**LS:** Who will win the next presidential election? Who should win the next presidential election?

**JB:** I think it will be as close as the last one. George Bush is very politically sophisticated, and any problems he's having now — and he's having quite a few — will be addressed. He

doesn't just stand idly by and let events overwhelm him. Most of the Democrats are pansies. The only one with balls is Hillary Clinton.

**GM:** What issues do you think the Democrats should run on in 2004? If they're not the same, what issues do you think they can they win on?

**JB:** I think the Democrats should run on the issue of being more charitable among ourselves, more forgiving in general, and more willing to be a part of the international community. I don't think they can win on this. They can win on making Bush look like a lunatic on the economy, and making him look like a loose-cannon cowboy overseas. You wouldn't think it would be that hard to defeat him. After all, when he was elected in 2000, this was a country at peace with plenty of money. Now it's a country constantly going to war with no money, continuing to spend more than it has.

**GM:** I feel certain that Dennis Kucinich (<http://www.kucinich.net/>) is going to get the Beatle hair vote, but has anyone in the Dem field caught your eye and how so?

**JB:** Just Hillary. I think the fact that so many people hate her will give her lots of media opportunities, more than any other candidate. (Hell, I don't even know that she's running.) All she has to do is turn all those negatives into positives, the way she won the U.S. Senate race in New York. She actually CONVERTED people who saw how spunky she was.

**GM:** Do you think GW Bush is a shoe-in for the Republican nomination in 2004 or is someone on that side going to challenge him?

**JB:** Are you making a joke?

**LS:** What is the ultimate goal of the current administration? Should we be afraid of it?

**JB:** The number one goal is to remain the current administration. The number two goal is to defend the nation against all traitors, domestic and foreign, real and imagined.

**GM:** Does Patriot Act II make you nervous? And, if so or if not, do you have any insight into why the extreme Right is okay with it? I mean, hasn't it occurred to them that if it can be used to undermine the Left, it can be used to undermine the Right? Do they know something I don't or is one of us just naïve?

**JB:** I think every Congressman who voted for the Patriot Act should be thrown out, just on the basis of that one vote. Our own Congress, the one institution that's supposed to enforce our direct will, abandoned protections that go back 227 years, and seriously weakened bulwarks against government intrusion that have been built up over the past 70 years. You can understand if the executive branch tries to get away with it--that's what they do, that's why we wrote the Constitution to oppose anyone who would become king--but Congress? Who ARE these people?

**GM:** I read the Bloom column on the Miranda rights; do you have any idea why the Supreme Court, and other authoritarian institutions, are making it more difficult to get fair and even treatment in this society?

**JB:** Well, the way the Founding Fathers set it up, is that the Supreme Court is supposed to protect the Constitution, so the other two branches can't assume that the power derives from them instead of from the people's document. Most of the current justices say they're conservatives, which would mean they're constitutionally oriented and committed to the views of the Founding Fathers, but they were silent when the government suspended habeas corpus after 9/11. So, no, I don't have a clue.

**GM:** In your opinion, what's the most appalling thing the Bush administration has done in the past 2.5 or so years? Perhaps you have a top five most appalling Bush administration acts?

**JB:** You're really not Bush fans at all, are you? The most disturbing thing to me was the suspension of habeas corpus, the holding of people in prisons for months and months without lawyers or charges filed or seeing their families — like we're some kind of Third World country.

**LS:** Would you run for president if asked?

**JB:** If nominated, I will not run. If elected, I will not serve. If bribed in the high three figures, I'll do anything.

**GM:** And if so, who would be your running mate?

**JB:** Elvira.

## **Cultural**

**LS:** Why do women swoon over cowboys?

**JB:** Do women swoon over cowboys? I'm rummaging around here for my chaps and boots.

**GM:** Do Texas women have a special mystique and who do you consider the greatest living Texas woman and why?

**JB:** Texas women are beautiful and spunky, which can be a good or a bad combination, depending on which side of the spunk you're on. The greatest living Texas woman would have to be my mom, a former Miss Bluebonnet and lifetime teacher of rambunctious elementary school students, which in far West Texas can involve daily brawls in the schoolyard.

**GM:** Leaving aside that this interview is being conducted via email, do you like the internet or are you just tolerating it because it will not go away?

**JB:** Like most people, I have a love-hate relationship with the Internet. It makes some things easier, but it takes up entirely too much time. I had to stop sending out autographed photos because of the Internet. People used to have to spend money on a stamp and a letter and go to some trouble to request a photo. Now you just get hundreds of people who are trying to build a collection they can sell on eBay. Sometimes they don't even bother to put "Dear Joe Bob" on



their email. If you look at the recipients, you might find Paul Newman is getting the identical email.

### **Lightning round**

Levis or Wranglers?

**JB:** Do I have to choose? Is this one of those sneaky free association psychological tests? I always answer the last word I hear, so . . . Wranglers! Not really, it's Levi's.

Ford or Chevy?

**JB:** Chevy. More romantic.

Lone Star or Maker's Mark?

**JB:** Both, depending on the occasion. I'm so bad at this.

Patsy or Loretta?

**JB:** Oh, Patsy, definitely Patsy.

Elvis or Frank?

**JB:** Frank rules. There will never be another Frank.

Twenty-something or forty-something?

**JB:** I have no idea what you're talking about. Are these soybean futures?

Hunter Thompson or Tom Wolfe?

**JB:** Oooo, tough choice. I'm gonna have to go schizophrenic on you here and give you a John Bloom/Joe Bob answer. You've definitely named the masters, though. Hunter Thompson once sent me a photo of himself dynamiting various objects on his Colorado ranch. I have no idea why he sent it, but I understand the artist that made him do it.

Marx Brothers or Monty Python?

**JB:** Marx Brothers. They're nastier.

Carter or Reagan?

**JB:** Jimmy Carter's the most underrated statesman we've ever had, in spite of his Nobel Prize. (We don't really even give him credit for that.) The man goes to the Sudan and says to the rebels,

"You've got to stop fighting while we deal with some disease problems here," and they . . . DO IT. He's done more good in the world than all the other living presidents combined.

**GM:** One last question, who has more charm: Mr. Briggs or Mr. Bloom?

**JB:** I do. No, he does.

**GM and LS:** Thank you most kindly, sir.

**JB:** Thanks, hon, and thanks, darlin. (You have to figure out which expressions is used by Joe Bob and which by John.)

*Ginger Mayerson is a Los Angeles based composer and author. Laurel Sutton is a Bay Area branding and naming entrepreneur. They are both editors for the Journal of the Lincoln Heights Literary Society.*

