

Notes for Million Mile Road Trip

Rudy Rucker

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Previous book was *Journals 1990-2014*.

Million Mile Road Trip is book #39 and novel #22.

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WORKING MATERIALS

TO DO

I put an asterisk by a To Do item after I've done it. They're listed more or less in reverse order of fix time, like blog posts. That is, the upper ones in the list are the more recent fixes.

- When does the wand larva leave Scud's body? Wand's last appearance is six pages from the end. Can leave this up in the air.
- Match lighting description of New Eden later on to first description, pale and cool. Or make both warm.
- Scud should notice that the Iravs' minds are like Meatball's mind.
- Yampa being a photographer...there's no real pay-off for it. Suppose Scud gets hold of Yampa's photos as blowback when he's zapping the Irav-head who swallowed Yampa.
- What about Zoe's craft of jewelry? I could mention Zoe doing some bead work on the trip. Maybe in Epilog or Vol. 2, if there is either one of those, she makes unny-tunnel gem brooches and gets saucerbabies to appear when she and Villy are busking.
- Maybe a throwaway line or two about the mismatch of timeflow in the two worlds. How a week in ballyworld can match an instant in mappyworld.
- Mention again later in book that Maisie gave Zoe her saucer pearl. And clarify how Yampa knew to wait where the tunnel would come through, which is near the Night Market.
- What about the nutshell of jewels/Aristo eggs that Scud found in Lady Fillipa's tunnel. Need a line about them later.
- * Duckworth needs to play some small part in the beatdown battle—perhaps he can help maneuver the lily cord's ends as Villy weaves the knots.
- * What happens to the guitars later on? Zoe's becomes a horn. Villy uses his for finding Zoe in unspace.
- * Make Sunny Weaver more rounded and sympathetic. Or make her worse. Make her *something*.
- * Eekra tells Scud it's important that they met, but then he never sees her again. So don't have Eekra say this.
- * If they lock the whale by the night market, how do they close the left front window?
- * Should mention Yampa's Zoe-outfit on the trip, or get rid of it..
- * What about Scud's camera? I stopped talking about it near the end of Chap 13. Just drop it.
- * Why didn't Maisie tell Zoe sooner that their Dad lives in New Eden?
- * Match Yulia's and Goob-goob's voices. Professorial, with the moooo for Yulia.
- * Maisie carries a purse at all times with her tunneling saucer pearl in it. And Maisie tunnels over to mappyworld at the same time as Zoe. And when Maisie dreams of seeing Maisie, it's actually teep.
- * Redo the hop from Los Perros to Van Cott so it matches the correct image of the

- inside of an ER bridge. Ditto for Zoe's quick hop from the night market.
- * The opening scene is the day before graduation instead of the second-to-last day of class. It's graduation rehearsal day, which is why the kids are at the school.
 - * Zoe considers trying a jump home with Scud's big saucer pearl which they got from Surf World. But peering into the tunnel she sees another underwater world.
 - * Give the caraway seeds to Goob-goob, and she says now she has enough to finally accomplish something. Soon after, Yulia the 4D flat cow appears.
 - * Change Nunu's scary father Thundermug to the likable good-guy Pa Saucer.
 - * Have Maisie gathering "lily cord" rope in Surf World.
 - * What happened to Zoe's saucer pearl? She lost it during the attack of the Iravs.
 - * Put saucer pearl gates on the wormholes used by Zoe, Pinchley, and Yampa.
 - * Show a few sphere gates inside Saucer Hall as well.
 - * Zoe can *only* tunnel to Los Perros from Van Cott. Otherwise it's too far.
 - * Zoe uses the saucer pearl gate in the car as well as in her bedroom.
 - * Zoe's saucer pearl was given to her by Maisie.
 - * Maisie finds the saucer pearl gates in the scrubby woods between the high-school and the freeway. Like mushrooms.
 - * Saucer pearls are unny tunnel mouths with a coating.
 - * Dad has permanently moved to New Eden as of the start of the book.
 - * Establish that the Freeth are shapeshifters, and that they reproduce by fission.
 - * What is the meaning and function of Yampa's "photos" and "videos"? Decorations for Lady Filippa's house.
 - * How can Nunu "really" be helping the kids while helping Meatball multiply the Iravs? She didn't know, she thought slicing them would kill them.
 - * They can faintly hear bagpipe music in the jet stream.
 - * Szep City fills its entire basin, a city that's ten thousand miles across.
 - * Szep City is decaying, stripped, on the skids. Lots of saucers preying on them.
 - * Someone has to go into the Pit and get a close look at Groon.
 - * Why is the saucers' range of influence limited to the basins adjoining New Eden? Groon's jet-stream-borne voice only carries a few tens of thousands of miles.
 - * Mention that Villy plays in an informal surf music trio.
 - * Make Saucer Hall saucers as protean as those in Flat Cow chap.
 - * Mention that saucers fly via pearls, and that the flying Freeth have saucer pearls inside them.
 - * Mention that the Iravs can't fly because they don't have a saucer pearl.
 - * Ditch that complicated thing about gravity getting stronger with height in mappyworld. Find a simpler reason why the car doesn't fly.
 - * Madclaw can fly with the saucer pearl in his pouch. Show this happening.
 - * Clarify the extent to which the Szep know or don't know that the Freeth are working for the
 - * When did the surf boards get lost? Boldog blew them up after Surf World.
 - * What happened to those teep slugs that they had? Stopped using them after crab agony.
 - * What happened to the Szep car that the Iravs stole? Crows from the forest pecked it.

- * Change “Aunt” Boldog saucer back to “Uncle,” better fit for aggro warrior who is killed.
- * Five Iravs is too many. Have fewer of them.
- * Zoe plans some strategy with Goob-goob when they meet.
- * Give the saucers a smell of dead fish and Pine-Sol. Mouth wash and halitosis.
- * Will Scud’s fossils ever come into play?
- * Forget about having different gravity in each basin—it’s distracting, and not worth mentioning.
- * Maisie mentions that a saucer can still zap you if you’re on a ridge next to a saucer-accessible basin.
- * Drop the saucers’ tractor beams, and have just zap rays for the saucers.
- * Thuddland/Surf World/Antland pass = Galactic Pass. Surf World/Crabland/Bubbleworld pass = Flatsie Pass.
- * Everyone in Van Cott wears a skirt...but the Borderslammers wear jeans.
- * Via their interactions in the mappyworld, the kids learn to behave in new ways.
- * Yampa shoots a time track video on the big wave.
- * Mention Maisie weekending in mappyworld New Eden.
- * Meatball is a traitor. Working for the saucers.
- * Build up the saucer’s death scene in the Surf World chapter.
- * Scud can’t teep Meatball’s or Irav’s thoughts.
- * How come I can kill a saucer by shooting it or popping it, but I can cut an Irav into pieces and it survives? The Irav can’t be a Szep or a saucer. We’ll learn that it’s a Freeth.
- * Scud has a camera early on. Shoots in Night Market and Saucer Hall but Nunu kills the battery. He talks about photos with Yampa.
- * Have low gravity in Thuddland but don’t bother in Surf World.
- * Destroy Zoe’s rattle, let her keep her horn.
- * Keep track of Yampa wearing Zoe’s clothes.
- * What is Yampa into? Give her an interest. She’s a hologram photographer.
- * Different glowon daylight colors in the basins. Brown in Antland, golden in Surf World.
- * Keep track of the surfboards on the whale.
- * Mappyworld is made of dark matter.
- * Return to Flatsies’ flat green flying bats for fighting saucers. Or make them slugs, and make the teep eyes be slugs too. Teep slugs.
- * Scud’s starstone jumps onto one of the sentinel stones and merges into it.
- * Zoe, Villy, Scud, and Maisie start as outsiders and losers, “I’m different. Nobody gets me. I’ll never find love.” Mucho wheenk.
- * I need more of a description of what Zoe and Villy look like and, even more, mentions of how they look to each other. There should be longing/lechery in the kids’ thoughts of each other.
- * Let Z & V kiss in the first chapter, but then have Zoe backing away. A bouncing kind of thing, like close, far, closer, far, close. A scary dance for these young kids.
- * A mappy basin is synched with a civilization. The minds, the oversoul, the

- collective unconscious. Feedback loop.
- * Pinchley and Yampa should be more urgent about getting back to Szep City. Ticking clock of saucers invading Earth. But to some extent their baseline is still a kicked back surfer mode
 - * The ridges between mappyworld basins contains lightyears of bunched-up empty space.
 - * Yampa and Pinchley specifically came to Earth to get Zoe. Egged on by her secret sister Maisie.
 - * I need a gnarly backstory for Zoe's parents. And therefore Zoe's Mom is uptight, and therefore Zoe is reluctant to get into a relationship with a boy.
 - * Eekra and Melon are in an antisaucer underground.
 - * They befriend a farm boy called Melon in the night market.
 - * New Eden is the next basin over from the Earth basin.
 - * The Earth-based New Eden club is saucer nuts in a Los Perros community-center meeting room.
 - * Drop paranormally gifted human "stars," and drop prospectors seeking them.
 - * Get from mappyworld to ballyworld by making a hole in the ground & use special ladder.
 - * Drop the *Cosmic Beatdown* videogame.
 - * Zoe's father Kirk married Sunny Weaver.
 - * Maisie is Zoe's half-sister, a year younger.
 - * Maisie teaches Zoe her Szep-summoning riff.
 - * Maisie tells the Szep to look for Zoe.
 - * Zoe and Villy are eighteen, and Scud is sixteen.
 - * Write ballyworld and mappyworld as single words instead of breaking them into two words.
 - * The dancing girl Eekra who talks to Scud is a mappyworld human, and she's only about his age. She's wants to tell him something. We'll return to her later.
 - * Scud is a very immature fifteen-year-old. Tenth grade.
 - * Consciousness is smeel. It's the same as dark energy.
 - * Big flying creatures in Thuddland are prototype giant saucers.
 - * Saucers and Freeth are relatives, they're made of saucer gel, a type of smeel.
 - * Change Walter to Maisie. She's (secretly) Zoe's half-sister via her father.
 - * New Eden is a slum on the outskirts of Szep City.
 - * Consciousness is real, a substance called smeel.
 - * Mappyworld is a crazy quilt of squares and hexagons. An anamorphic map.
 - * "Goob-goob" is a joke concept, not serious.
 - * Drop the Yount Protocol.
 - * Vampire saucers drink smeel, not blood.
 - * Speak of the "mappyworld" instead of the "flat world" or the "unfurled world."
 - * Mention the Yount protocol in early chaps, and Villy's father's opposition.
 - * Mention Earthly saucer cult in early chapters.
 - * Say what happened to that dart-gun of Irav's that Villy took.
 - * Keep mentioning the Iravs as they start trip. Pursuing/avoiding them.

- * Mention Tawna's threatening brother Walter early on.
- * Pace it so there's a full night when they arrive at Van Cott and drive off.
- * It doesn't get *completely* dark at night, there's still a slight glow.

Optional To Do

These are items I might postpone till the book is nearly done, or not do at all.

- Revisit question of why they mostly drive instead of flying in mappyworld.
- What is life like for the humans in Van Cott?
- Revisit issue of whether (and why or why not) the basins repeat.

PITCH

Million Mile Road Trip.

Three teens on a million mile road trip across a landscape of alien civilizations. Goal? Stop the flying saucers from invading Earth. And learn about life and love.

Projected length 95,000 words. Delivery date June, 2016. Current length 60,000 words.

The novel features Zoe and Villy, aged 18, plus Villy's 16-year-old brother Scud. Flying saucers and colorful aliens enter the tale. And, yes, it's literally about a car trip that's a million miles long—the trip is set in a parallel universe, which contains a single, endless plain divided by ridges into basin-like worlds.

Like many of my novels, *Million Mile Road Trip* is a phantasmagoric roller-coaster ride, replete with surreal incidents, sympathetic characters, mind-bending speculations, offbeat humor, and rich emotions.

I'd like to see *Million Mile Road Trip* marketed as YA. It would be rewarding to reach a new audience, and I'm keeping YA in mind as I write the book. This mode isn't new for me—my novels *Frek and the Elixir* (2004) and *The Hollow Earth* (1990) might be regarded as YA as well.

OUTLINE

I started this outline on April, 22, 2015, with eleven chapters done. I continually revise the outline as I go along—putting in more accurate summaries of which the completed chapters contain, and tweaking my descriptions of the projected chapters to fit my evolving concepts about the plot.

My original idea was to have a forty-five chapter outline, with real short chapters like in Bill Gibson's admirable *The Peripheral*, but I drifted away from that towards my more typical chapter lengths, like short-story length, although still on the short side, and not the full novelette-length long-breath jazz-chorus chapters that I sometimes use.

I tend to revise the outline after finishing each successive chapter. Working on the outline helps me see where the holes are in my projected story arc—the arc that continues from where I currently am to where I want to end up.

1. First Kiss. Zoe and Villy are driving home from school together. It's the week before graduation, but neither of them has managed to get into college. They decide to run off on a road trip together. Zoe mentions her odd half-sister Maisie, and her father who's a saucer nut.

2. Magic Ladder. Zoe plays her trumpet in a special way, using a riff that Maisie taught her, and a ladder pokes down into her room. The aliens Yampa and Pinchley come through. They

say they want to take her on a trip. Pinchley heads for Villy's house

3. Villy's Family. Villy talks to his father about doing a road trip with Zoe. Villy's mother is dead. Pop says the trip is okay. Pinchley shows up in Villy's garage. The alien's species is known as Szep, and he comes from Szep City. Villy's younger brother Scud insists he come on the trip too.

4. Zoe's Mom. Zoe tells her Mom she's leaving. Mom talks about Zoe's father. After Mom leaves. Yampa finds some saucers sneaking through the hole that she came through. One of the little saucers gets away. They like to extract psychic energy from humans—it's a physically real, but as-yet-unknown-to-us substance called smeel.

5. Augmented Whale. Pinchley soups up Villy's old station wagon, using various living tools shaped, variously, like a pancake, a water balloon, and a marker pen with legs. The nickname for the car is the purple whale. When they're done with it, it looks like a monster truck with a dark-energy engine, enormous graphene tires, and invisible quantum shock absorbers. It can drive over anything. Pinchley says they'll fetch a powerful wand to help stop an upcoming saucer invasion.

6. Rattle Hop. Villy, Pinchley and Scud pick up Zoe and Yampa. Villy brings two surfboards. Zoe uses her music to hop the car across to the aliens' universe with its vast plain of many civilizations. Before leaving, the kids fetch two things that the aliens treasure: a can of cocoa and a jar of caraway seeds. The cocoa acts as an intoxicant for the aliens, and the caraway seeds act as a longevity drug. Just before they do the hop, they are on the point of a head-on collision with another car.

7. Cruising Van Cott. They drive down a busy street in the town of Van Cott on the vast level alien world, seeing a variety of weird aliens. Van Cott is a trading town.

8. Night Market. They park under a tree by a night market. A sleazy character called Irav threatens them. Zoe befriends Meatball, a floating blob. They buy some stuff and meet a youth called Melon. Villy hassles Meatball and she zaps him into unconsciousness.

9. Saucer Hall. Scud takes off through the market. He acquires telepathy via a teep slug. He meets a girl called Eekra, who wants to fight the saucers. He sneaks into Saucer Hall and befriends a small saucer called Nunu. It's dangerous, as the saucers in the hall are parasites, they extract smeel from humans, smeel being a physical essence of consciousness. Nunu promises she won't do that to Scud.

10. Three Zoes. Zoe does a brief hop back to Earth, returning to the scene where their car was about to ram into another car. There are three versions of Zoe at this scene: her original pre-hop self, her present self, and a dimly glimpsed future Zoe coming back—apparently not with Villy. And then she hops back to the huge plain-like alien world with her friends.

11. Leaving Town. They have a fight with the menacing Irav in the parking lot; they cut him into four pieces—but the pieces regenerate to create four Iravs. The Iravs steal the valuable jar of caraway seeds, and drive off in a stolen car. Pinchley and Yampa enlarge the kids' purple whale and they set out with Meatball and the saucer Nunu in the car as well. They hope to catch up with the Iravs. They drive up through something like Canada to a region resembling Alaska. Villy and Zoe are cozy.

12. Bad Dream. Zoe has a nightmare about her half-sister Maisie. It's as if Maisie is watching her progress. They make their way to the Borderslam Inn, just across a sound from a mountain with a pass to the next basin over.

13. Borderslam Inn. During the drive, Scud was making out for hours with Nunu the saucer in the back of the car, although they didn't actually have sex. In the inn, Zoe gets advice

about the trip. Villy gets a so-called starstone from a guy at the Inn, it's transparent with sparkles in it. They get started on the drive up the mountain. Scud notices that Nunu has laid eggs on the ceiling of the car. She says the eggs are their children. Kissing is enough to fertilize a female saucer.

14. Nunu's Father. Villy drives too fast and flips the car near top of the mountain, before the pass. Two very large saucers approach them—Zoe's father and uncle, very menacing. They leave with Nunu and the eggs, escorting her to New Eden, a basin next to the Van Cott basin. New Eden is the home of the saucers, and some Earthling saucer cultists have moved there as well.

15. Maisie. Pinchley fixes the car. Zoe peeks over the ridge at the jungle in the next bowl. It's full of dinosaurs. And, looking in another direction, she can see the New Eden basin as well. The pass feels creepy, like vast space. The space and stars that would normally separate the planetary civilizations are compressed into the strange sentinel stones at the top of the pass, with tiny twinkling stars inside the stars. Scud's starstone is a piece of one of these sentinels. One stone shows Zoe an image of her half-sister Maisie. Maisie has an odd rim of skin around her waist, like a horizontal skirt. Maisie urges them to get the wand, says the saucers are dangerous, and hints about her parentage. She has the same father as Zoe, but not the same mother.

16. Thuddland. Scud gets to drive. They go into a basin which is like Jurassic World, but with somewhat alien animals. The Iravs are in there ahead of them. Meatball saves them from a giraffe-like dino. A giant saucer from New Eden is eating some of the animals. They find a mushroom with a patch that mockingly lists their names as losers in a battle against the flying saucers. The Iravs made the sign to goad them. The kids take off after the Iravs, and a giant Thudd is in turn chasing the kids—as far as the pass to the next basin. Hot pursuit. The sentinel stones throw up a forcefield to stop the Thudd at the pass.

V 17. Surf World. Villy and Zoe sleep in a lean-to at the pass, next to a rock with nebulae and star clusters inside. They cuddle, but they don't have sex. From this pass they can proceed to Antland or Surf World. The Iravs are in Antland, so they pick Surf World. The surf has smeel in it, and this means the waves are conscious and alive. Zoe takes over the driving. She uses their station-wagon to ride the huge surf—Pinchley fashions a rudder, he makes the tires even larger, and he puts paddles on them, like on the stern wheel of a steamboat. They ride on a wave shaped like a ziggurat. There's a giant saucer lurking in the sea. It attacks them, and Zoe manages to kill it. The saucer has a saucer pearl inside—a narwhal swallows that. They ride a corkscrew wave. Villy and Yampa get on the two surfboards, and Zoe tows them onto a mile-high wall-wave. A teep slug hops onto Villy.

Z 18. Beach Party. Zoe rides the corkscrew wave towards shore, hoping to reconnect with Villy. They see many narwhals. Meatball hints that she's working for the saucers. They're swamped by a wave and grabbed by a giant squid. A surfing Flatsie leads them to shore. A beach party banquet with the Flatsies around a bonfire, roasting giant crabs. Villy and Yampa show up. A narwhal trades a saucer pearl in return for a live, giant crab to eat. As he kills the crab, the kids realize the crabs are intelligent. Highly disturbing. Villy and Zoe bed down in a Flatsie hut, hoping to become lovers. But they quarrel about the trip. Zoe wants to go home. Villy wants to keep going. Zoe can't sleep. She gets up in the night and decides they should leave before the saucers come. She encounters Maisie. Maisie says that, yes, a saucer is about to attack, and that Zoe should go to Szep City for the wand. Maisie tells Zoe that they have the same father, but Maisie's mother was a flying saucer, and that's why she has a rim around her waist, and that's why she can fly. Zoe accepts Maisie as a half-sister.

S 19. Running the Ridge. Zoe drives the car up to the ridge just as the attacking saucer arrives. She has Scud, Pinchley, and Yampa in the car. The saucer shoots at them on the ridge, and he blows away the front end of the car. But then the narwhals kill the saucer. Villy and Zoe make up. They're going to Szep City. They pass a basin called Bubble Canyon, inhabited by talking bubbles. Scud trades his starstone to the Bubblers for a bubblegun. The Bubblers "open" the starstone and eat the thousand suns within. Pinchley fixes the car with a fractal ant. Zoe asks Scud if she can try hopping through an unny tunnel inside Scud's big saucer pearl. The tunnel goes to a ballyworld version of Surf World, no good. They roll on between Bubble Canyon and Crab Crater, they see what seems to be Villy's and Scud's Mom hitchhiking.

V 20. Not Mom. . The "Mom" is of course Meatball in disguise. The boys are nearly taken in, Scud in particular. But then Meatball attacks. Villy kills her with the bubblegun. Heartbreaking. She leaves ashes and a saucer pearl. Zoe grabs the pearl. Meatball and the Iravs are all in the employ of the evil saucers. They have a talk with a hostile crab. Villy naps as they drive on a ridge between the Teetertotter Forest and Birdland basins. They stop and talk to Farktooth the tree and Lady Pickpeck the bird. They learn the Iravs are waiting a hundred miles ahead. Villy learns to fly by using the saucer pearl. They sleep in a nest upon Farktooth as wild boars roam the forest. Villy and Zoe make love at last.

Z 21. In Harmony. The four Iravs ambush them at the edge of the next basin, which is called Harmony. Yampa is killed, the Iravs eat every scrap of her body. Zoe is severely wounded by a sting from a poison snail. The Iravs destroy her horn. Scud and Villy kill three of the Iravs with the bubblegun, and when it runs out of power, Villy gets zap power from the saucer pearl, and he zaps the last Irav into dust. To rest and recuperate, they go down into Harmony basin where everything is music. Zoe heals. She dreams of Goob-goob and of Maisie. Maisie tells her to use "stratocasting" to drive fast. The Harmony creatures are like singing Jello cubes. One of them makes Zoe and Villy a pair of guitars. Scud drives, and uses his saucer pearl to levitate them at the same time.

V 22. Stratocast. Zoe, Villy, Scud, and Pinchley in the car. Zoe shows Villy how to play not only surf guitar, but now in a more emotional style, more bluesy, more spacy. Zoe and Villy stratocast with their guitars, and they speed through a hundred and eighty basins, it's like an epic jam, an all-day boogie with a cosmic light show. They're going a hundred thousand miles per hour and they're levitating so they don't bump into things, and if a collision looms, Scud zaps the obstacle. Each basin lasts about three minutes. They make it to Szep City in a little over ten hours. A hypnotic stream of images, with about thirty of the basins described. As they draw closer to Szep City, they notice the persistent "ultrastorm" cloud above it, also known as Sky Castle. The last basin before Szep City is called Groon's Pit.

S 23. Wand. Szep City is like an old-school "futuristic" New York with skyways, and with an endless drizzle from the Sky Castle ultrastorm overhead. The Rubtans are darker red, the Trubans creamy yellow. Rubtans richer, Trubans poorer. They land in a busy square, provoking a pitched battle between Trubans and Rubtans wanting to claim whatever they've brought. A guy is wailing in a tower. The Aristo Lady Filippa's agent Flipsydaisy helps them make their way out of the battle, abandoning the car. Their car is destroyed, burnt. Pinchley and Yampa were Lady Filippa's employees, Pinchley a chauffeur and Yampa her stylist. Flipsydaisy leads them to an odd little square full of floating junk. A snake of light with a crystal at one end worms over to Scud and embeds itself in his left arm. That's the magic wand they were expecting to get, it's a larva of a so-called Aristo. Flipsydaisy has one too. An enemy approaches, wailing, it's gray, like a ten-foot-tall dog. Tollah from the tower. There's a hatch in the ground beneath the floating

debris, Scud opens the hatch and the others go down. Scud atomizes Tollah with a zap flash from his wand. But the dust is forming back together. Scud hurries down to meet Lady Filippa, she's in something like a rathskeller. She's casting a kind of spell on the other kids, but, thanks to his wand Scud can see through it. She's an Aristo pupa covered with eyes in a basement. But, at Flipsydaisy's request, Scud switches to seeing the Lady as she wants, and she looks like a lady in a British club.

Z 24. Lady Filippa. Flipsydaisy and Lady Filippa deliberately let the demonic Tollah into Lady Filippa's den. He's an agent of the evil saucer-master bagpipe-thing Groon. They let him in to test/train the kids. In the fight, Scud uses his wand, and Zoe and Villy use their guitars. The kids immobilize Tollah like a fly in spider silk. And Lady Filippa Tollah eats him with those caraway seeds on him. Pinchley stays with Flipsydaisy and the kids move on.

V. 25. Zeppelin. The kids walk through a tunnel to the base of a sky-high abandoned smokestack. Some rat people bring them a picnic. They sleep on the sand. The next morning an adult Aristo named Stolo carries them up into the stratosphere. A jet stream just under the big cloud. Some saucers approach them and are destroyed by thunderbolts from Stolo.

Z 26. Flat Cow. They ride Stolo into Sky Castle, a cloud that's a thousand miles high. They see 3D moiré objects. Goob-goob has the look of a Mayan god. A creature called a flat cow appears and herds the kids *through* Goob-goob and they slide down into that same jet stream again. The jet stream will pass over the Pit and fill with saucers from Groon, so they hide inside the flat cow. They get pulled down into the Pit and they pass through Groon, seeing how his inner processes work. Halfway to New Eden, a saucer attacks the flat cow, but Scud kills the saucer with his wand.

S 27. New Eden. The kids arrive in Berk in New Eden, they see Nunu, and Nunu's eggs have hatched, they're like tiny humans with saucer rims around their waists. They can fly. Saucerbabies. They have red hair. Pa Saucer had enough saucer pearls for them. The saucerbabies fly to Scud and call him Daddy. / Present are: Nunu, her father Pa Saucer, Maisie, Nunu's new boyfriend Krampus, and Zoe's Dad, and Dad's saucer girlfriend Pru. Excitement about the coming revolution against Groon and a normalization of human-saucer relations. The flat cow Yulia explains that she is a saucer, in fact she's the general of the semi-clandestine Saucer Liberation Army, and that Goob-goob has made her 4D for the forthcoming cosmic beatdown against Groon. Yulia has four-dimensional freedom, due to Goob-goob having given her a full kilogram of caraway seeds accumulated over the years. / Right about then the jet stream stops and saucers scatter across the sky. Groon is coming in ten hours. The flat cow plans to fly into unspace to tie off the tunnel once Groon is lured inside. She needs a helper, and it's gonna be Villy. Maisie presents Yulia with the lily cords she brought back from Surf World, super strong. The flat cow turns herself sideways in the fourth dimension, she's a cross-section that dwindle and is gone, invisible in unspace. / The plan is for Scud and Zoe to go back to Los Perros and do whatever they can to stall Groon when Groon is finally in the tunnel. This will make more time for Villy and the flat cow to tie off the tunnel's ends. / Zoe's father presents fine saucer pearls to Zoe, and Scud. He says they're realizing what he's always hoped for all these years, to free all the saucers.

Z 28. Going Home. Maisie gives them a ride over the ridge to the Van Cott basin in her dune buggy. On the way they see Groon fly overhead and flop down near the site of Saucer Hall. He wallows hugely, with a cloud of saucers around him. They drive there. The slave saucers are helping Groon to create a big unny tunnel gate sphere. They make their inner saucer pearl into an unny tunnel, and slide through, and it kill them. Zoe and Scud use Zoe's pearl to tunnel back to

Los Perros. Scud gives Maisie a big kiss goodbye. Zoe and Scud land running so Mom's car doesn't hit them. Zoe is cornered by Mom, who drives her to the high-school for the talent show, there's still time. Washing up in the ladies room, Zoe encounters Maisie, who's decided to hop over for the concert too. Maisie says that Groon's growing tunnel has its gate in the gym. But for now they'll play their show.

V/Z 29. Cosmic Beatdown, Part 1. Villy and Zoe sleep. Then Villy, inside Yulia the 4D flat cow, is watching the unspace tunnel from the "outside," Zoe goes to graduation with Maisie, meets up with Scud. has issue with Sunny Weaver, who warns her not to interfere as today is the advent of the saucers. Scud is nearby. Villy sees tunnel bobbling around like a sack with a litter of cats inside, something's already going on, but Yulia tells him to wait, it's not Groon yet./ Just as Zoe's getting her diploma, two giant saucers come through, bursting out of the gym. Crowd scatters screaming. Scud kills one big saucer with his wand. Sunny Weaver tries to strangle him. Zoe zaps Sunny unconscious and saves Scud. The saucer's about to eat them, Scud disintegrates the saucer just before it eats them. Some zombie cops threaten Zoe and Scud. The fly into the tunnel.

V/Z 30. Cosmic Beatdown, Part II.. Villy puts lassos around the ends of the tunnel with Maisie's 4D rope. Villy and Zoe begin fighting Groon. Scud uses wand, Zoe uses horn. Zoe and Scud see that the mouths of the tunnel are dwindling. Scud barely makes it out, Zoe is trapped inside Groon's body. Villy sees the tight strings pinch the thin necks in half and they heal over. No holes in our spaces, and Groon is in a pocket universe which is shrinking. Villy hops back to Los Perros. No Zoe. He rushes back into the shrinking Groon ball. Zoe in dire straits. She plays her music. Villy finds her, swoops her out to the lawn where the high school building used to be. Zoe and Villy embrace. With Groon's song gone, the saucer zombies wake up. Happy ending.

SIZE, MODE, FORMAT

Tracking POVs and Pages per Chapter

I'm using a close-in 3rd person POV that rotates from chapter to chapter. I only use one POV per chapter. My sense is that, although it might be fun to write in a "head-hopping" style, it's not so pleasant to read. If I want to delve into a second character's thoughts in a given chapter, I'll just have them talk out loud about their thoughts and feelings.

I'm tracking each chapter's point of view (POV) and page length (Pgs), the pages as counted in my manuscript format.

Initially I'd thought the chapters might be all about the same length, but it turns out that some are twice as long as others. I think that'll be okay, for a varying texture.

<i>Chap</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>POV</i>	Z	Z	V	Z	S	Z	V	Z	S	Z	V	Z	S	V	Z
<i>Pgs</i>	7	7	6	4	7	7	8	9	8	3	13	7	9	9	5
<i>Chap</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>POV</i>	S	V	Z	S	V	Z	V	S	Z	V	Z	S	Z	VZ	VZ
<i>Pgs</i>	14	16	19	9	11	12	8	11	8	9	11	11	8	10	9

Table 1: Chapter Points of View and Chapter Lengths

Here's how many chapters each character controls the POV, not that the numbers have to exactly match.

Up through Chap Twenty: Zoe 9, Villy 6, Scud 5

Projected: Zoe 14, Villy 9, Scud 8.

Zoe is getting the lion's share, which is what I wanted. She's kind of the star.

Progress Log, with Completion Projections

Rather than tracking the words per chapter, I'll use a coarser measure, and just watch how many manuscript pages a chapter takes up in the format that I happen to be using. These manuscript pages average about 422 words each.

They're like short-short stories. I'm liking that.

I'll be needing something like forty-five chapters.

Feb 11, 2015. I have seven chapters at 14,000 words, very close to 2K words per chapter. To hit, say, 85K, I'll need six times this much. So I'm a sixth done. And I started a little over a month ago. So I could be done in, say, six months, but I probably won't be writing flat-out all that time, like I've kind of been doing for the last few weeks. So let's say the book might take me nine or ten more months. Which brings in the completion date at something like next November, though probably I'll finish by October.

April 24, 2015. I have eleven chapters at 23,100 words, about 2,050 words per chapter. At this rate if I wanted 90K words, I'd want 45 chapters. I'm about a fourth done, and it's taken me three and a half months, so the book might take ten more months. Which pushes the completion date to out to February, 2016.

June 5, 2015. Didn't do much in May. I'm at 26,578 words, 63 pages, and almost 12 chapters. That puts me at 34% of 85K. My chapters are getting longer, more like 2,200 each. I've been inserting stuff into the earlier chapters here and there. So now it looks like 41 chapters would get me out to 90K words, more than I need. Call it 40 chaps.

July 1, 2015. I've got 31,245 words which is 37% of my 85K words target. 14 chapters, 79 pages. 395 words per page. Still doing about 2,200 words per chapter...that is, five pages per chap in the current format, keeping in mind that the last page isn't usually full. Total pages needed for 85K words would be...215 pages. I might be okay with 40 chapters, as the chapters tend to plump up a bit.

July 15, 2015. 37,300 words, 16 chapters. Target words in K / Current words in K = Target chap count / Current chap count. So Target chap count = (Target words * Current chap count) / Current words. And that's $(85 * 16) / 37.5 = 36$. So, wow, I only have to write 20 more chapters, which is just as many as the number of chapter ideas I have. But some of them will probably fission. So I've made up so much plot it might not all fit in. So maybe I can think in terms of a second volume as well.

September 5, 2015. I've got 48K words in 16 chapters. I've been revising, with the result that most of the chapters gained a little weight. So I'm thinking 32 chapters are going to do. And I'm half done right now. I started on January 7, 2015, so I'm eight months into the book. With—if things go along at about the same overall pace—eight months to go. Which makes for an end date of early May, 2016.

October 5, 2015. I've got 58K words in 18 chapters, written over 8 months, for an average of 7.25K words per month. I have a little more to write on chapter 18, which will bring it up to about 60K words for the first 18 chapters. So call it 3,300 words per chapter at this point. (The chapters are longer than they used to be, especially the recent ones, and even the earlier chapters are bulking up as I add in more characterization and more prefiguring. But some of the coming chapters might be shorter again.) I have the outline at 29 chapters, so that makes about

95K words, which leaves 37K words to go, which could take 5 months at my current rate of 7.25K words per month, meaning I could finish by the end of February. Certainly by April, I think. To be safe, call it early June.

December 16, 2015. 69K words in 20 chapters, written over 10 months. Looking towards 30 chapters and 103K words. I'm two-thirds done. I started at the beginning of January, 2015. So I'll need another 5 or 6 months. So I might finish in May or June, 2016.

March 8, 2016. 81k in 23 chapters, written over 13 months. Shooting for 29 chapters and 96K words. So I'm 85% done. I've been writing slower this spring, I had a health prob. On the average, it takes about 0.56 months per chapter. I need 6 more chapters unless I can cut it to 5 chaps. Six more chaps takes me out 3.36 months more. End of June, 2016. Call it July, 2016. Slippage. Whatever. I want to be done—because at some level I worry I'll never finish, like suddenly I'll snap and be unable to write. In another way, I don't want to be done, as I enjoy the writing and the characters. But mostly I want to be done.

March 16, 2016. 84K in 24 chapters. Now projecting 30 chaps. I'm writing fast right now, almost a chapter a week, although I'm going to slow down in early April. I might do six more chapters in twelve weeks and finish in June.

March 28, 2016. 88K in 25 chapters. My outline is projecting 31 chaps. Average 3,500 words per chapter. So I'm talking about 21K more words. 109K total. Finish by June or July

May 8, 2016. 98K in 26 chapters. Averaging 3,700 words per chapter by now. The book's growing sideways (fatter chapters) as well as lengthwise (more chapters). Forget about the old outline with 31 chaps; five more chapters from here would be too much. Like starting in on a Volume II almost. I plan three more chapters: one regular, and one double length, and one very short epilog chapter. Could run to 110K words. For the last couple of weeks, I've been reworking the outline, fixing "To Do" problems, and skimming through the whole book integrating some of my new ideas for the ending—which is why it looks like it took me five or six weeks to write Chapter 26. As I say, a lot of this time has been spent on filling in the missing back story, as well as on thinking ahead. Anyway, now I have a pretty clear outline for the ending, and everything seems logical, and the surprises are prefigured so I'm ready to rock and roll. I expect to finish by end of June or early July.

Manuscript Text Format

My formatting? Well, I changed this around April, 2015.

I now have a slightly idiosyncratic formatting because, for editing purposes, I need to squeeze a lot of words onto the screen of my new ThinkPad X250 laptop—and my screen has the unfortunate but currently fashionable 16 x 9 or "HD video" or "dumb-ass mailbox-slot" format.

So I'm picking a Word format with longer lines, and I set the Zoom setting to "Text Width." To get the longer lines, I'm using Word's "Medium" margins.

To get enough lines onscreen, I use "one and a half" line spacing between lines—2 would mean double space, but then I'd see too little. I tried "Multiple" 1.4 lines but then I didn't have room to write corrections in my printouts.

And, goes without saying, my font size is the usual 12 pts—again for print-out readability.

POV AND TENSE

POVs used in recent years:

Jim and Flims was straight first person, no-brainer, like falling off a log.

Turing and Burroughs was close 3rd person on Turing for most of the chapters, but I cut it with some first-person Burroughs pastiche chapters.

Big Aha was another no-brainer like *Jim*, straight first person. I wanted to make it easy for myself.

I had initially thought in terms of using a third person POV that's closely focused in on one single character, like I did in *Frek*. I'm following one character and seeing his or her thoughts. That's called "third person limited point of view," or "close" third-person or "deep" third-person. It's like following a movie actor with a camera.

Here's a link to a little essay by Michael Neff that talks about the [levels of 3POV](#). And this [page](#) by Sally Apokedak is good too, distinguishing far and close modes of the 3POV

In his article, Michael Neff makes the point that using the first-person point of view can be tiresome, in that it filters everything through one person's attitudes—and this is indeed an irritating feature some YA books I've glanced at. The gushing, the slobbering, the emoting, the repetitious *wheenk*. Sucking all the air out of the room. Not that it *has* to be that way—it depends on how interesting, rounded, and non-generic the author has made the viewpoint character.

In his little article, Michael Neff plumps for the close 3POV. He points out that you can go in close enough to a character it gives you the benefits of 1POV.

I could go with first-person POV, although then I have to pick my favorite character. Or I could take turns.

With a single narrator 1POV, you sometimes have a frame-tale explanation of how and why and when the narrator is telling us about his or her adventures. Maybe they're reminiscing about this afterwards, documenting the events for the record, narrating them to a rapt audience, like that. You don't *have* to do the frame-tale, and it can be of corny, but sometimes it adds something, like in *The Hollow Earth*.

Often when people do 1POV they feel that should impose the narrator's linguistic limitations on the text, like in *Huck Finn*, but you don't absolutely have to do this.

I could have several characters telling the story from their points of view, or even taking turns and interrupting each other, as if doing a joint interview. *This* could be fun. (*Cat calls, loud farting sounds, sarcastic laughter.*)

More reasonably, I could rotate from one to the other over the chapters, what I might call rotating 1POV. I'm not crazy about this mode, to me it feels forced and teenage.

Best might be if I rotate a close third-person point of view. If I rotate, I watch one character in some chapters, and in another chapter have the camera on another. I did that in *Realware*, cycling from one character to another from chapter to by chapter. I like doing that. And I did it in *Hylozoic*, too, and in *Postsingular*.

Thinking back, I had three characters in *Hylozoic*: Thuy, Jayjay and Chu. Nine chapters, and each got three chapters, and the order was like this: JTC TJC TJC. *Postsingular* was more complicated, I had really long chapters that broke into sections, and I rotated the 3POV focus from section to section within the chapters, using seven different points of view in all.

In other words I've done rotating 3POV lots of times. Weird that I'd kind of forgotten about it over the six years since I finished *Hylozoic* in the fall of 2008. The opposite of cryptomnesia, just plain old amnesia.

Another option is what's sometimes disparagingly called head hopping. You can also

think of it as an omniscient close 3POV. In one single section of *Hylozoic*, I went kaleidoscopic on the reader's ass, hopping one head to the next without even signalling the changes with section breaks. Pynchon and Phil Dick often do head-hopping. In the past I've worried this might put off a reader, but I might loosen up and try it this time.

I've always used the past tense. I wanted to go present tense in the Bruegel novel, *As Above, So Below*, but then Susan Protter and David Hartwell wouldn't let me. Could I use the present tense now? There's a lot of that in *Gravity's Rainbow* which, as of December, 2014, I'm rereading yet another time. You get a cinematic you-are-there thing. It would be fun for me to do something that's stylistically different.

Maybe I'll try doing *present tense* R3POV. So it's like you're watching a movie, cutting from camera to camera in real time. Telling the story of a movie. You are there.

And, yes, in the end, I went for a full Pynchon mode, as I describe in the Writing Notes section further down, in the entry for [January 5, 2015](#).

And I tracked the R3POV switches in the [Tracking POVs...](#) subsection right after the outline.

CHARACTERS

Zoe Snapp

Zoe lives with her mother, Tina Wacker. I was using the name Alma Anders for Zoe Snapp until January 1, 2014. The old name, Alma Anders, felt flat. And I have a nagging feeling that I've called one of my characters Alma before. And then I was thinking of Silvia Snapp. My wife Sylvia seemed not to object to me using the name Silvia. But in my head the character and my wife overlapped too much. So I looked at a list of popular girl names in the US and I hit on Zoe. For a last name I began using Snapp because I think it's funny, and because it alliterates with Silvia. But I'm keeping it with Zoe. Zoe Snapp. I considered Zorn as a last name for tighter alliteration. Zorn means anger in German, but I don't think of Zoe as angry. I noticed a woman named Snapp in some other novel recently, by the way.

Zoe Snapp has long brown hair that hangs into her face. She's having some trouble with the girl cliques at her school. She's timid. She's comfortable with boys. She's eighteen. Her father Seymour Snapp isn't around, I guess it's simpler if he's dead. Maybe he died in an interesting way. If his name is really Seymour, then Zoe is half Jewish, which would be fine, not that I see there being any religious element to her upbringing.

Zoe is okay at school, but only a fair student. She likes art, music and making jewelry. She plays the trumpet in the high-school jazz band.

Tina Wacker

Tina Wacker is Zoe's mother. She's 45. At one point I had her being an astrophysicist who's detected a distant Wacker wall. But I simplified things and Tina is a realtor and a college admissions consultant—the second job is *perfect*, given that Zoe got rejected by the UCs and that she won't bother to apply to a community college JCs.

I was calling her Leah until January 1, 2014, but then I decided that name's too hard to say. And then I was calling her Kathy Wacker but that's too strong an echo of the off-beat writer Tina Acker, whom I met a couple of times around San Francisco. And then I went for Mary, though maybe that's a little flat. Tina, I like that, it carries a little whiff of flakiness.

Villy Antwerpen

I was going to call him Willy, but I think Villy is funnier. Antwerpen is the Flemish/Dutch name for the Belgian town Antwerp. Villy Antwerpen. Villy lives in Zoe's neighborhood, he's a senior as well, a few months younger than Zoe.

He has an old beater Chevy station wagon that he likes to work on. Villy isn't much of a scholar, he's flunking his math class. He likes science okay, but just in an SF kind of way—he learns science from movies and videos—and extrapolates it from there. Not a reader. He's a skater and he surfs a little too.

Maybe he has a dog that comes along on the road trip. Give the dog a cool name. Oscar? Canny? Clod? Noble? No dog.

Scud

Scud is Villy's younger brother.

Yampa

The female alien. Maybe She's collecting fertilized eggs from animals on Earth. A wetware collector or, more accurately, a scout or a prospector, looking for useful genomes.

Or, no, I think Yampa and (later) Pinchley, are looking for a spot on our plane where they can move down (up?) a level. Like in a Super Mario game where there's ladders between levels.

Pinchley

The male alien. He's looking for cool materials. He's an insane hoarder. I was going to call him Flook, but that's kind of forgettable. Pinchley is memorable and kind of funny. I also considered Pinchbutt, although then I'd have to clarify why he's called that. So Pinchley. Maybe he himself has a pinched, Scrooge-like quality—but, nah, I want him to be, of course, like Neal Cassady.

When he shows up, he's in pursuit of Yampa, and at first this seems like an ominous war-like thing, but really it's just sexual chasing, with Yampa, like, the dairymaid skipping *tra-la-la* away from the young herdsman.

THE NOVEL'S TIME LINE

To make life easier for me and for the readers, I'll assume that the day-lengths and times of day in mappyworld are in synch with those of ballyworld. Admittedly there's no *obvious* reason why all of mappyworld would be in synch with our one planet in particular, but, hey, we're *important*.

- *Thursday, June 2, 2016.* The day before graduation. The talent show is this evening. Before the show, Villy, Zoe, and Scud hop to Van Cott in mappyworld.
- *Day 1.* Night falls in mappy world. They visit the Night Market and Saucer Hall. Villy drives all night. The others sleep as he drives.
- *Day 2.* They drive over the Van Cott/New Eden/Thuddland pass called the Borderslam Pass, proceeding over the pass and into Thuddland. They drive all day, night, arriving at the Thuddland/Antland/Surf World pass around midnight or even a little later. They spend the night.
- *Day 3.* Zoe drives the car across Surf World to the Flatsies' beach party. The meet the Flatsies. Zoe beds down with Villy. No sex. Zoe sees Maisie.

- *Dar* 4. In the pre-dawn hours, they drive up to the Surf-World/Crabland/Bubbleworld pass, and then along the ridge between Crabland and Bubbleworld. They turn a corner at a pass to Treeland, have a fight with Meatball and they kill her. The proceed onward on the ridge between Treeland and Bubbleworld, driving very fast. At dusk they reach a Birdland and sleep there in a bird's nest.
- *Day* 5. In the morning they follow the ridge between Tree World and Birdland and when they reach the Harmony pass, the Iravs ambush them. They limp down into Harmony basin. Zoe sleeps through the night, healing.
- *Day* 6. They stratocast all the way to Szep City. They see Groon the bagpipe. They meet Lady Filippa. Scud gets a wand. They spend the night at the base of an old smokestack.
- *Day* 7. They meet Goob-goob, then ride the flat cow in Groon's jet stream, a million miles back to New Eden, where it's late afternoon. That evening they ride over the ridge to Van Cott. Zoe Villy goes into 4D unspace, and Maisie, Zoe & Scud drive over the ridge to Van Cott. They see Groon flying overhead in the night. They and tunnel to Los Perros. Maisie and Zoe do the Jazz Prowlers show. Zoe sleeps at her Mom's, Scud sleeps at his Dad's. Maisie goes back to mappyworld.
- *Friday, June 3, 2016.* Graduation day at Los Perros High. The cosmic beatdown: high-school swallowed by an unny tunnel gate, Groon's in there, Villy kills him, Villy and Zoe together again.

VOICES

Late in May, 2015, I realized I need to get a characteristic and consistently-used voice for each of my characters—especially for the aliens. So I went through the book, searching for the aliens' names, and rephrasing their dialog to fit a prescribed style. I hadn't worked very hard on uniformizing their voices before. Maybe later I'll do this for the humans, but I think I already did that before.

- **Zoe.** Loquacious goth California girl who sounds like she ate a dictionary. Flights of fancy. Emotional. Says depressing things as a kind of joke.
- **Villy.** Similar to Zoe, but less fanciful. More surfer style. Not so well spoken.
- **Scud.** Also Californian, but nerdy. Like a little professor. "Spit-talking" as Georgia used to say about nerds.
- **Meatball.** British, skewing towards lower class. But don't go as far as "Cor, blimey"—no, no, no, don't do that.
- **Yampa.** Odd, surreal, like a Wackle in *Spaceland*. Often has rhyming words and alliteration in phrases. Really polish her utterances, so they're like haiku or odd jewels.
- **Pinchley.** In the first draft, I described his voice like this: "His spoken voice is raspy—a brash, proletarian, ditch-digger voice—the voice of a short-legged alien who's ready for donnybrook, wedding, or wake." Makes him sound Irish. I want something easier. 30's gangster style? Chicano vato? Not a professor. Not an autistic programmer. Kind of a tough guy. How about Southern, without going full hillbilly. Kind of comical. A little like Major Marvey in *Gravity's Rainbow*, but stopping short of dialog-emulating misspellings. Or, maybe better, like the cartoon character

Foghorn Leghorn. “That’s a joke, son.”

- **Nunu.** I go somewhat Asian with her. Like my SJSU CS students. But don’t call her Asian. It’s more like her talk is conceptually Asian in the written language sense, that is, she talks in glyptic or ideogram-like blocks.
- **Filkar.** Rodomontade. Old-fashioned bombastic English. Like Colonial or Victorian. Swilly.

LANGUAGE

I want a word for an app or tool that later enlarges atomic nuclei to the size of planets. Freelunch. Free3. Friggle. Flipsy. Flook. Femton.

Femton means “fifteen” in Swedish. The femtometer level is, uh yeah, 10^{-15} , the size scale of an atomic nucleus.

Femtogrow.

Sizer would be a nice simple name. Wacker sizer.

EARLY PLANS

WHICH NOVEL?

Over the period from May, 2014, to December, 2014, I ran through a variety of ideas for possible novels. For all that time I wasn’t sure what book I was in fact going to write.

Frek II: Loyal Ida

A sequel to *Frek and the Elixir*, a *Frek II*, perhaps titled *Loyal Ida*. Ultimately I decided once again to postpone this, and I moved my notes for it into a separate document called Frek Sequel Notes.doc.

The upside of writing a novel that’s not a sequel to *Frek* is that I don’t have to carpenter in all that old stuff from *Frek* that I have trouble remembering. The downside of not writing a sequel is that I have to dream up another whole new universe—but, hey, I’ve got lots of time and lots of ideas.

If I ever write *Ida*, we should reissue *Frek* as a YA or young reader book, and say *Ida* is in that category too. Tor Books missed a trick not marketing *Frek* as a young person’s book in the first place, what with its twelve-year-old hero.

Literary Novel

The perennial dream of something that’s more mainstream, or slipstream, or commercially transreal than usual. Something that might make for a strong finish to my writing career.

YA: People From the Fourth Dimension

In May, 2014, I drafted a proposal for a fairly generic YA novel called *People From the Fourth Dimension*. But then I realized I was putting the cart before the horse, thinking about marketing strategies before the novel. And I didn’t really have much of an idea for the novel itself.

Million Mile Road Trip

I set the YA-tailored approach aside, and decided to plan for an SF novel like I would

ordinarily write, but with a young main character. And then maybe in the end it might be a YA novel after all.

I changed the title for this book several times. First it was called *Galactic Road Trip*, and it was similar to *Frek*. Then I decided to have it be about people driving on an endless plain instead of flying through space, and I called it *Flat Earth*. And then I said there were a number of these flat worlds, and I called them Wacker worlds, so the book became *Wacker World*. And then I decided that title was trying too hard, and I switched to the darker-sounding, *The Road Goes On Forever*. Later I changed this name to the peppier *Million Mile Road Trip*.

I still couldn't get it going, and in December, 2014, I decided that I might best think of the tale as a long story, or as a novelette—and not as a novel. Less daunting. And I wanted to start writing *something*.

I knew that, whether or not it could become a novel, my germ for *Million Mile Road Trip* had some ideas and settings that I was excited about exploring. That's the big thing, being excited. That's what it takes to get me to write something. Imagining a place where I want to go.

And finally, early in January, 2015, I got something going.

TITLES

Galactic Road Trip.

Endless Road Trip.

The Road Goes On Forever. I got that title from a cowboy ballad by of that title by Robert Earl Keen—I heard that song on the radio last week, on the “Lubbock or Leave It” show on WKFJC. “The Road Goes On Forever, And The Party Never Ends.” There’s an old Allman Bros. compilation album called *The Road Goes On Forever* as well, I think it has live takes.

Flat Earth.

Certainly I love *that* title. It’s similar to *The Hollow Earth*—but maybe that’s okay. And I love the notion of me being a member of the Flat Earth Society. A problem here is that some readers will think that “Flat” relates to *Flatland*, which seems like a red herring.

If I wanted to avoid the word “flat,” how shall I describe our transmogrified world, if not as a flat Earth? A great plain. A greater plain. A steppe. A savannah. A pampas. A super Earth. An augmented Earth. Extended, unbounded, unfurled.

Or I could accept that *Flatland* will play a role in my novel. Like in the final chapters there’s a danger of expanded Earth becoming two-dimensional.

Wacker World. This title seems very strong. Fanciful. “Wack” means wild or crazy, and if you’re wacker, you’re more than that. Alliteration is good, it’s fun to say “Wacker World.” And it has a meaning, as the unfurled or “mappy” Earth will be an example of a Wacker world in terms of the lingo used in my novel.

Circling all the way back, early in December, 2014, I decided that *The Road Goes On Forever* would be the most compelling. And then, later in December, 2014, I decided to go for *Million Mile Road Trip*. Look ahead at the writing project, a “million miles” feels like a more feasible slog than “forever!”

I kept waffling between “Roadtrip” and “Road Trip” in the title. I went for the latter. Searched Google, and found 24 million “roadtrip” instances vs. 79 million for “road trip.” Looks

nicer, and more common.

CRYPTOMNESIA LOG

One of the problems in finding ideas for novels is that I keep *thinking* I'm having new ideas, but, more often than I'd like, I'm experiencing [cryptomnesia](#)—which is when you subconsciously remember an old idea, and you think it's a new one. Not that I shouldn't sometimes go ahead and reuse a trope that works well. But I'd like to be consciously aware of when I'm doing this, lest I come across as a forgetful old fool.

Cryptomnesia, dude. I'm an aged dragon slithering on his worn and meager hoard of precious objects. Relishing the touch of old gold against my scales.

In this section—when I remember to!—I'll note instances of cryptomnesia as they arise. That is, I'll note those old ideas that I reused (or considered reusing) in *Million Mile road trip*.

A day after I started thinking about *Million Mile Road Trip*, I remembered that *Frek and the Elixir* ran with some of the same ideas—that is, an unexpected starship, and a fatherless boy living with his mother, and the boy leaving on a journey with his dog. In the *Frek* novel, the live, flying Orpolese creature/UFO named Professor Bumby has that leave-from-your-driveway-spacehip quality I mentioned. Frek's other companions were the grullo Gibby and his dog Wow.

In *The Hollow Earth*, my young hero brought along his dog on a trip to another world. I literally had a spaceship car in my first Fletcher and Harry story, “Inertia.”

I had a road trip with a Neal-Cassady-like driver in *Turing and Burroughs*. and later in that book, I had Neal himself with Allen Ginsberg in a rented Cadillac visiting Burroughs.

At the climax of *White Light*, I have a man and woman driving across an infinite plain in the afterworld, and the two of them have a budding romance.

Jim and the Flims includes a kind of road trip across a vast afterworld, with a budding romance between the man and woman traveling together. They're riding on a couch as I recall—rather than in a car.

I might have monster thunderstorms sweeping across the endless landscape of the mappy Earth, and that's echoes the “renormalization storms” that roil the Planck Brane in *Frek*.

My story “The Indian Rope Trick Explained” includes a snake charmer with a horn, akin to Zoe levitating a crystal with her trumpet.

God or a godlike being as a character: *The Big Aha* and *Realware*.

The God of my characters' universe as a run-down bum-like human author/voyeur resembling me: *Master of Space and Time* (in a chapter called “Rudy Rucker Is Watching You.”)

A surfer character: The Zep and Del stories, *Jim and the Flims*, *Freeware*, *Mathematicians in Love*.

(Unused) Broadcasting a person's soul/software into the sky: Mel Nast's Personetics cult in *Software*. And my story, “Soft Death.”

Rubberly, living flying saucers: my story “Easy As Pie.”

The saucer thumping onto the car and sticking to it: the giant flying cone shell grabbing onto the guy's car in *Mathematicians in Love*.

Alien cafes: *White Light*.

A Thudd goes “Gah-rooont!”: the Godzilla dino in *Master of Space and Time*.

Blobby Freeth creatures: The gubs of *The Big Aha*.

Sex with a flying saucer ~ sex with a moldie bopper in *Freeware*.

Planetary expanse of things living in the air: This is exactly like the zero-gee jungle in *The Hollow Earth*.

Two worlds books. I had several worlds in *Mathematicians in Love*, first of all a higher-level world La Hampa, with a jellyfish god writing drafts of our world, and we visited I think three parallel sheets. Usually I just have one other world. The higher world in *The Big Aha* was called Fairyland, and it even had gnomes. In *Hylozoic* we had an alternate world called Hibbrane, where Bosch lived. Our world was the Lobrane.

White Light was an afterworld novel and the other world was Cimön. *Jim and the Flims* involved an afterworld called Flimsy.

The basic substance of consciousness as “smeel.” I used that word in *Spaceland* as the substance of the Wackle creatures. And I used it in my story “The Men in the Back Room at the Country Club” as the animating essence of the weird old men. The word dates back to the late 1960s, when I told Sylvia that after I had my spleen removed at age 13, the empty space in my abdominal cavity filled with smeel. A word I made up, a cross between smell and spleen. I used a variant of it in a poem/rap about an imaginary sexy woman that I wrote in college, “Deep crack rub. Do that smee goo?”

THE MONOMYTH

<i>Monomyth Stage / (Woman Ver.)</i>	White Light	Hollow Earth	Hylozoic	Jim and the Flims	Frek and the Elixir	Million Mile Road Trip
I: Call	Pamphlet map of Cimön	Trip to Town	Jayjay dreams of pitchfork.	The Whipped Vic	Bumby under his bed.	
Refusal of Call			He tries to escape.	Stroke	Cops kill Bumby.	
Helper	Franx	Arf, Eddie	The pitchfork.	Ginnie	Gibby the Grulloo.	
Threshold	Graveyard	Ice Cap	The Peng appear.	J gets a jiva	Stun City.	
Inside the Whale	FTL Trip	Batteau	Riding in the Hrull.	Crawl thru snail	Ride in Bumby.	
II: Road of Trials	Climb, God Squad	Ballula, Fall	Thuy and Jayjay jump.	Trip to Duke's	Crash near Unipusk.	
Goddess / Bridegroom	Kathy	Seela	Thuy is goddess.	Jim's Wife	Renata.	
Temptress/ Abuser	Cantor's Wife Ellie	Virginia Clemm	Glee gets Chu hooked.	Weena	Yessica Sunshine.	
Atonement with Father / Mother	Cantor	King of the Umpteen Seas?	Jayjay with Bosch	Charles Howard	Frek befriends Dad at Bar.	
Heaven	White Light	Tekelili	Flying over the Planck Sea	Atum's Lotus	Inside a star at Orpoly.	
Boon	Bloogs		Learn how to vaar	Shooting yuelballs	Frek finds DNA for Earth	
III: Refusal of Return	Franx	Otha	Scared of maelstrom.	Worried about eggs	Dad stays to save...	
Flight	Drive thru desert	Saucer	Into maelstrom.	Go to Yuelsville	Frek, who flees.	
Rescue	April on Halloween	Ship	Jayjay helps Chu home.	Finds snail to return	Renata helps Frek home.	

The Return Threshold	Comin' Down	Black/ White	Peng are still around.	Fight with Skeeves	Revolution against Gov.	
Two Worlds	Possession by Kathy	2 Eddies	Jayjay goes transfinite.	Evict jivas and yuels from Cruz	One more threat.	
Free to Live	Go to Los Alamos!	Go to California!	Kill Pekklet.	Rebuilds wife Val	Frek frees all via toons.	
#POVs/ P.O.V.	1 POV / 1st pers.	1 POV/ 1st pers.	3 POVs / 3rd pers.	1 POV / 1st pers.	1 POV/ 3rd pers.	
Monomyth Stage / (Woman Ver.)	White Light	Hollow Earth	Hylozoic	Jim and the Flims	Frek and the Elixir	Million Mile Road Trip

Table 3: Monomyth in Some of My Novels

The table shows an overview of how the monomyth might be found in a number of my novels. To be honest, I didn't consciously use the monomyth for any of those books except *Frek*, and what I've tabulated here is very much an after-the-fact and possibly inaccurate or even Procrustean tailoring of my novels' plots to match one particular preconception.

Conceivably I could write a new novel by outlining a monomyth-modeled plot as I did for *Frek and the Elixir*. I remember that, in the first flush of my satisfaction with the finished *Frek*, I mentioned to my editor Dave Hartwell that I wanted to use the monomyth again but I was worried about repeating myself—and Dave was like “It’s the *monomyth*, Rudy. That means you use it over and over. Even if you don’t know that you’re doing it.”

But since *Frek*, I still haven’t deliberately built up any of my novels from the monomyth outline. One reason for this might simply be that, if I do all the stages of the monomyth, then I’m likely end up with a book that’s 50% longer than usual, as was the case with *Frek*. And it takes longer. But, still I might give this a thought. In a way, it would be nice to spend two or three years instead of just one year in writing my next book. I’ve been writing so fast that the pipeline is somewhat backed up.

If I were to get all schematic again, I might consider rearranging the monomyth in some way. Could be interesting to write the stages on some scraps of paper and slide them around to look for alternate sequences. In doing that, I’d need to keep in mind that the standard monomyth flows out of a flow-chart loop, which I’ve reprinted in earlier sets of book-writing notes. If I change the steps, I’d need to change the flow chart as well.

EARLY PLOT IDEAS

I started this section on April 1, 2015. Many of the thoughts in this sections are old ones that were superseded. The real record of my plot ideas is in the Writing Notes.

Teams

I might divide the cast into two teams—see my [July 7, 2015, entry](#) for more on this.

Good	Bad
Vampire Saucers	Telepathy Saucers
Pinchley & Yampa	Irav, Trubans, Rubtans

Maisie	Dr. Sunny Weaver. The “saucerbuster” psychologist whom Mom hires for Zoe.
Villy’s father	Zoe’s mother

Table 2: The Two Teams

Motives

- I could just have Nunu be slyly out to abduct a human, but that’s cheap and obvious, and if that was all she’s after, she would have done it right away in Saucer Hall. She does want Scud—or some human ally—using the ally as an agent or a fellow warrior to overthrow the current state of affairs among the saucers. We’ll suppose that Nunu wants to eliminate the vampire saucers. And that she needs for her ally to possess the power to hop.
- Nunu—does she have telepathy?—knows that Scud doesn’t have hopping power, but she is hoping she can get in with Zoe. Zoe and Meatball don’t much like Nunu, so Nunu begins pushing Scud to learn hopping from Zoe. Zoe won’t teach Scud, but eventually she teaches Villy. And in a weak moment, Villy is seduced or won over by Nunu and she takes off with him. Perhaps Villy sees this as a necessary move.
- The Szep want the humans in Szep City for entertainment. Cornball but useable routine: the captive Szep princess Filippa needs something like the gay prattle of the humans to bring her out of her slough of despond. It’s important for Szep morale that Filippa be happy. Filippa is the niece of Yampa and Pinchley, who are of royal Szep blood. Filippa has been imprisoned by the cruel, evil, banal, bore-you-to-death ruling cabal in Szep City. They’re called the Trubans.
- I think of the cabal as somehow the personification of the endless Middle East crisis. The never-ending crap I’ve seen for the last sixty years in the papers and on the TV news. A group who want their entire civilization’s culture to revolve around their never-fading snits, resentments, obsessions, and neuroses.
- For the Middle-East analogy to work, we need several squabbling parties. Like Israelis, Arabs, Shiites, Sunnis—they can be in some Lilliput/Blefescu argument about the nature of some god they once saw. What did I call him before? Goob-goob. He lives under the mappy world. If you go down through a hole you can find him.
- The Trubans are led by a guy I might call Tollah. (Like “Turbans” and “The Ayatollah.”) Irav is Tollah’s agent. There can be a rival sect called the Rubtans, led by Tallah. I was thinking that Pinchley and Yampa are against both sect, but it could be a pettifogging Lilliput / Blefescu war, and they’re simply for the Rubtans. Funnier that way, I think. Leave it to our main characters to be the jump-to-the-next-level ones.
- Our three humans get to Szep City. Tollah and the Trubans expects them to take the role of court jesters, entertainers, and mascots—to make the Lady Filippa happy once more, and thereby to re legitimize Tollah’s rule. But the Tollah doesn’t trust Yampa and Pinchley, which is why he wants Irav to be controlling the humans even though it’s Y & P who found them. But Y & P thwart Irav, and at least one of them makes it to Szep City. And in a spontaneous uprising, catalyzed by our humans, they bring

down the Tollah and the Trubans and the liberate Filippa.

- Meatball knows what the Szep are up to, and she wants to or co-opt it, or get in on it, or make a documentary of it, or build on it, or what? The Freeth want the humans for their ability to fabulate/dream/spin tale. Meatball's home basin is a billion miles away, and she wants the road trip to lead there. This is kicker near the end. The road trip isn't going to stop at a million miles. It'll run to a billion.
- The trip might ultimately go beyond the Freeth Farm—it could become potentially endless. Or literally and actually endless, via, say a Zeno speed-up like in *White Light*. Zoe and Villy might morph into cosmic archetypes, into figures of myth and legend. The Freeth, by the way, are the oldest known civilization in the mappy world.
- The ongoing enemies along the trip are: Irav and Tollah's other agents, the saucers, possibly the ants, and some kind of anti-Freeth warriors that are like black holes.

Skills

I want to see a bit of heroism for each character. Each of them has a unique, particular quality that saves the day in one of the basins.

- Villy does something with his surfboards, they cross a basin that's all waves.
- Zoe goes out of her comfort zone and becomes empathetic. She saves them by befriending the unhappy female ruler of a basin. The Queen of the Ants.
- Meatball gets them through an assault by the saucers. Or she communicates her shapeshifting blobbiness to the purple whale and its crew—so they can worm through a basin made up of tiny crooked tunnels. Like the R. Crumb cartoon of the guy working his way through the ever-tinier sewage pipes below a toilet. This is a Pynchon trip fro G & R as well.
- Yampa and Pinchley run the revolution in Szep City. Pinchley is the mad bomber, he blows a hole clear through to the underside of the mappy world and lets Goob-goob seep in. Yampa is the social networker.
- Someone else from Earth is in the mappy world. Several of them. Holed up in, like, a hippie commune. And we have a hassle with them.

Problems

- Villy is abducted by Nunu and becomes a flying saucer. He sacrifices himself and goes in place of his younger brother Scud.
- Perhaps Zoe somehow loses, or has to nobly sacrifice, her trumpet and rattle—and maybe she loses her memory of the magic travel sounds. Perhaps she has to offer her knowledge as some kind of ransom to free the people of Szep City. Let's say she's able to hop home, but then she's stuck there, and she can't easily get back to the mappy world.
- Some kind of pervert has been stalking Zoe in Los Perros. Maybe a bullying jock. He's friends with Tawna Garvey, that girl who's Zoe's enemy. I should set that up in the early chapters and bring it back later on.
- Looking towards the final acts, it would be useful if Villy's father is in trouble, too. A bankruptcy perhaps.

SCIENCE IDEAS

Once I actually got the novel going, I incorporated most of my new sconce and plot ideas into my day-to-day Writing Notes. But while I was waiting to start, I put a number of ideas into this “Preliminary Science Ideas” section.

Sizes and Speeds

The Sun is one AU (astronomical unit) from Earth. An AU is 93 million miles from Earth, or 150 million km. Sun’s intensity is the order of $1/AU^2$.

Earth is 25,000 miles in circumference, or 40,000 km. Call this EC. Note that $AU = \sim 4,000$ EC. A long way.

Earth’s diameter is about 10,000 km. So AU is about 10,000 times the Earth’s “size.”

The speed of light is 671 million miles per hour or just about an even billion kilometers per hour.

A light year is about 10^{16} meters or 10^{13} km or 10 trillion km or six trillion miles. Alpha Centauri is about four light years away. And there’s about ten stars in all within ten light years. We’re about sixteen thousand light years from the center of the Milky Way galaxy. Who knew it was that big! I’d been planning to drive there.

And it’s 200 thousand light years to the Greater and Lesser Magellanic Clouds. Like ten galaxy-widths worth. And about a million light years to one of the nearest spiral galaxies, good old NGC 6822. The furthest visible reaches of the universe seem to be about seventeen billion light years away. An octillion meters. But it might extend to at least 50 billion light years. And nobody knows if there’s more beyond that.

Even though we had a Big Bang, it’s now believed that it may have been, so far as I understand this, an infinitely extended Bang, and our space is infinite, flat and expanding.

A parsec, by the way, is 3.25 light years, but parsecs are kind of 1950s.

Pluto’s about three billion miles from the Sun. How big does the Sun look from various distances? I found a page with [images](#) of the Sun’s apparent size from the various planets. If we were as far as Jupiter, that would be enough so that you could get see kind of a grid of suns and be mixed up about which Sun was our original one.

A storm wouldn’t throw you up that high, but if you were flying back from the other Wacker world, you could easily end up in the wrong basin of our Wacker world.

I’ll suppose that each atom of the Earth blossoms into a planet-sized square (for simplicity) on the surface of the Wacker world. How much area do we end up covering? Well, we’ve got 10^{50} of those atoms, so it’s a grid of 10^{25} by 10^{25} squares, each of them an EC length per side, that is, 40,000 km per side. So the edge size of the whole grid is 4×10^{29} km. We can view this as $400 * 10^{27}$, or four hundred octillion kilometers. Or we just round it up a bit to 10^{30} , or a nonillion kilometers.

Recall that a light year is 10^{13} km or 10 trillion km or six trillion miles.

A nonillion km is 10^{17} light years. That’s a hundred quadrillion light years. And if I cut that to 40% of that, getting 400 octillion km, we’re talking forty quadrillion light years. Either one is more than a million times as wide as the diameter of all of visible space, as the furthest visible reaches of the universe are merely seventeen billion light years away. On October 2, 2014, I summarized this insight as a tweet:

Eureka! Inflate each of Earth's atoms to size of planet, flatten 'em, tile a big "floor." Million x as wide as known space. WACKER WORLD!

Table 4: Small Scale Prefixes

Table drawn from *Saucer Wisdom*.

If an atom is like a solar system, should we say the nucleus is like the sun and the electrons like the planets? Well, an atom is 100,000 or 10^5 times as large as a nucleus, and in our solar system an AU, the distance to the sun, is 10,000 times as large as Earth's, so it's not a bad analogy. The whole solar system is on the order of 60 AU in diameters, so it's be a 600,000 to 1 ratio. So, yeah, the ratios are roughly the same.

An atomic nucleus ranges from one to fifteen femtometers.

Ultramatter

If I want some really strong matter for a backing-sheet, I might put together a solid layer of nucleons. How much denser than matter is that? Well, we're compacting the atoms by a scale of 10^5 , so that's a volume reduction of 10^{15} , or a quadrillion.

SF writers call this stuff [neutronium](#), although physicists say that the situation is more complex than that—and they also say that anything like neutronium would be subject to decaying quite rapidly, and would need to be under huge pressure. Well, we'll just have to put in some rubber physics to hold it together. Call the stuff “dark neutronium.” Or ultramatter. You've telescoped the endless regress of matter, dark matter, dark-dark matter, dark-dark-dark matter.

Sylvia says I should call it “triple-x matter.” Invented by Prof. Sylvia Goodcheese.

Wacker Worlds

There do exist cosmological structures called “[great walls](#),” but they aren’t what I’m thinking about. The standard great walls of cosmology are just pancake-like regions which

contain a high concentration of galaxies. A bit like the surfaces of bubbles in a foam where all the galaxies lie on bubble surfaces.

I want a wall that's a far-away plane that the astronomers suddenly notice—it's an endless plane, an unrolled planet like flat Earth. Note that I don't mean a mathematical plane, at least not initially. I'm thinking the Wacker walls are a couple of hundred miles thick or even a couple of thousand. Insulation against raw space's chill vacuum. Atmosphere on the top, and just bare rock on the underside.

Re. the atmosphere, we'll suppose that our entire Wacker wall is coated with Earth-like air. One could in principle have pools of different kinds of air, held weakly in place by sluggish vortices, although being slowly mixed by diffusion. But it's simpler and more fun to just put air everywhere. That is, after all, kind of the point of a Wacker wall. You can travel as far as you want without a fucking space suit.

I'll call it a Wacker wall, assuming an astronomer called Ed Wacker discovers the first one. And the biome upon a Wacker wall is a Wacker world.

I think there's many Wacker walls in space, so why haven't we noticed any of them yet? The Wacker walls are not primordial structures. The planetary unfurling process only started a hundred million years ago. And it started somewhere far away from us. And it's just now impinging on our zone. Either a planet relatively near us unfurled, or the light from a distant one is just now reaching us, or the endless plane of a newish Wacker world happens to be relatively near us.

How rapidly, by the way, is a Wacker wall propagated through space when a planet unfurls? I want to say infinitely fast. Like the unfurling process involves a total renormalization of the universal wave function and we switch instantly to the new solution.

Now let's suppose the nearby Wacker wall is about two light years away. Splitting the distance between us and Alpha Centauri. In principle you could go there in a conventional spaceship, but that's slow and boring, so I'm going to insist on an FTL drive.

What do the Wacker walls look like? Higher albedo than empty space. But with no stars visible beyond them. Would it be visible to the naked eye as an effect where a section of the night sky has an odd background? With a brighter central zone with brightness tailing off towards the edges (as the edges are increasingly far from us). A smudged bright spot in the night sky and the spot is growing. The rate of growth depends on how far away the Wacker wall is. The rate is higher the closer the wall is.

What is the orientation of a Wacker wall relative to the planet that unfurls? The wall's normal is the same as the normal of the point on the planet where the unfurling begins. This means that the unfurled wall fills a plane tangent to the globe at the point where the unfurler stood.

Some aliens might wall-walk, by traveling along their flat planet until they're quite close to some other planet, then doing a short space-hop over to the other planet, then unfurling that planet, skimming along its flat expansion to a spot near a third planet, unfurling that, and so on.

Or there could also be gleaming lines where Wacker walls cross. Call them Wong lines, as they're first spotted by astronomer Roberto Wong. Wong lines can move across a Wacker wall with arbitrarily rapid speed—they're virtual objects, like shadows, and aren't limited to moving slower than light.

And if two Wacker walls do cross, a person can travel from plane to plane without actually going through empty space.

How a Planet Unfurls, First Try

Zoe's mother, who is a quantum physicist, explains the transition in terms of "removing boundary conditions from the universal wave function." Not the wave function of the cosmos as a whole, but just the wave function of our individual planet's surface, which presently is constrained to be the surface of a sphere, and which has what you might call periodic boundary conditions. With no boundary conditions, our planetary surface renormalizes itself to be a great plain, apparently infinite in extent. Flat Earth.

But—how does the process fill in the details of the newly extended Wacker world?

There's all the region far beyond Earth that you have to extend into. And even within Earth's bounds itself, you need to tween in some stuff.

Remember that the process must *seriously* stretch and/or tear Earth's surface to map it onto a plane.(I did find a funny 1890s flat Earth [map](#) on Wikipedia, where the northern hemisphere bulges up, and the southern bulges down. But I think I'll go for truly flat.)

We might suppose the unfurling process centers specifically on the location where the magic rattle is shaken. The eventual plane is the osculating plane of the location where the unfurler was. So your immediate neighborhood looks quite similar. But there's more change further away. Interesting if you start hitting some tweened neighborhoods fairly soon.

I'm thinking of there being radial missing sections, with me at the center. That is, puncture at the antipode, and make a star kind of pattern with me at the center. And the missing slices are filled in by "tweening," just as the rest of the plane is going to be filled in.

Mathematically speaking, how does the tweening and extending work? I want to suppose that the original regions are not being appreciably changed. And the tweening or extension starts out being fairly similar, but then becomes more and more different.

I'm also imagining higher-order oscillations so that, e.g., there will be cities and oceans and continents. And mountain ranges. The extrapolation might draw on spacetime info about Earth and be working out alternate histories.

What about the extrapolated or tweened-in people and aliens? They're every bit as rich, in personality, culture and behavior. They're not derivative weak copies, not an "iron age" compared to our own "golden age," not plastic copies of the real art. We need to think in terms of an instantaneous all-at-once creation of a Wacker world. Remember my rap in *The Fourth Dimension*, about God making all of spacetime in the eternal Now moment. Creating *spacetime*, not just space. A bearded old man throwing a bucket of paint onto a barn door.

Also think of it as restoring an art work, adding in missing parts.

Re. growing a large intricate pattern from a small seed, I need only think of (a) cellular automata, (b) high-dimensional Mandelbrot sets, (c) chaotic dynamical systems, (d) logical systems.

Another way to think about it is as follows. Our universe is a quantum computation . Our home planet and its civilization and the concomitant quantum wave function of this ensemble are an ongoing subcomputation of the cosmic computation. If we could alter the whole computation so that our subcomputation extends across the surface of an unlimited Wacker wall. When unfurling is invoked, the target planet's entire spacetime computation is rapidly revised so as to cover the new Wacker world. And thus we can regenerate our existing world, with an altered its history, plus an infinite number of new "basins" of civilization. If spacetime is infinite, it's no sweat to pick up an infinite amount of slack.

Long story short, when the Earth unfurls, it's being recomputed in a new format.

We can think in terms of analog computations. Like a soap film adjusting to a flexing of its wire boundaries. Or a water surface altering when you, say, remove a boundary wall—or do a cannonball into it.

I may want to insist that, when we rearrange the surface of the Earth, we will also be rearranging the Earthlings' memories of the past. "*'Twas ever thus.*" That is, people will suppose that Earth has always been an endless plain. So there's no great wonderment after the change. But, on the whole, this option is boring. Much better if everyone's surprised.

In any case, at the very least, our hero Zoe, the person who wielded the Ghana rattle—she'll remember the original world whether or not the others do. She's special. And, due to her entanglement with Villy and Tina, they're special, too. They'll both remember—provided that Zoe noddges them.

[I returned to these unfurling issues later on, see my [August 5, 2015](#), entry.]

Wars Between Wacker Worlds

Might we suppose that each Wacker world is filled up with more or less the same roster of beings? Like, each of them is a universal library of life?

I think it's better if the Wacker worlds have different over-all flavors. So we can set up some rivalry. We have humanoids, and antmen, and elephant men, and sea pigs, sure. But another Wacker world might be made up of...talking waterfalls and singing flames and phlegmatic stones.

A bigger difference: atmosphere! We're supposing that our whole infinite Wacker world is blanketed with the same kind of Earth-like atmosphere. We do this so that we know that we can, in principle, drive as far as we like.

But some Wacker worlds might have, say, a methane atmosphere. As it happens, the one that's near to us does have an Earth-like atmosphere. And that in fact makes them more desirous of invading us.

Would there be any reason for conflict between Wacker worlds? A given Wacker world has essentially infinite area, so there's not much point fighting to control "more" territory, is there?

Well, some races might want to colonize other Wacker worlds for "religious" or "proselytizing" sorts of reason. Like they're saying: "It makes me mad to see that whole big Wacker world over there is full of chattering monkey beings and other slimy DNA wrappers. They should be talking clouds / sentient farts / crystal dancers instead!"

But historically a "religious" reason for colonization is really a conscious or unconscious cover-up for some greedy territorial imperative.

For a war, we'd need to come up with some limited resource that the Wacker worlds are competing for.

Suppose that first fourteen billion years of our cosmos were for evolving really good seed planets. And then the seeds grow into infinite Wacker walls. And now some of the Wacker worlds get preferential treatment.

Maybe one world gets a full elevation to filling all of 3D space? Or maybe the worlds are trying not to be crushed down into truly 2D Flatlands?

Ringworld, "Missile Gap," Long Earth.

Larry Niven's *Ringworld* depicts an incredibly large place that you can drive around on. But it has edges.

And in Charles Stross's story "Missile Gap," a copy of Earth has been peeled like a grape, with the surface/skin pasted onto a disk that's millions and millions of miles across, with a zillion oceans and other continents, many of them inhabited by alien species. Nice story, with a lot to think about. But there's continents with oceans in between them, so you can't just *drive*—instead Stross uses a cool Soviet-era-dream nuclear powered giant airplane.

Even though the diameter of the Stross disk is probably bigger than you can go in a lifetime the disk *is* finite. Is the finite vs. infinite option absolutely an issue here? For me it is.

If it was finite, we could do a number where we reach the "edge" of the world and it's like the edge in *Prince Caspian*, with the frozen wave. Or the classic cartoon thing of ships sailing off the edge. Stale. I want my infinity. Or, if our universe isn't infinite, I at least want to be as far across as possible, say twenty billion light years and still growing.

Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* is flat, but it's not all that big. For that matter, the afterworld in my *Jim and the Flims* is a very large disk (inside a sphere). And of course the afterworld in my *White Light* is an infinite mountain that segues into an infinite plain.

On September 30, 2014, my friend Nick Herbert pointed out to me that Terry Pratchett and Stephen Baxter published a novel called *The Long Earth* in 2012. And that in some ways this novel uses the same central idea as *Million Mile Road Trip*—the notion of ready access to an endless inhabitable surface.

Pratchett and Baxter don't have an endless flat plain of a world, instead they have a seemingly endless row of alternate Earths, "step" to a nearby Earth, and on and on to further ones.

A seeming plus in the *Long Earth* setup is that, if there are aliens out there, all of the aliens have been active and doing things all along. (I say "seeming," because there aren't any interesting cultures on the other planets in the Long Earth.)

In my own *Million Mile Road Trip*, I'll have many sophisticated alien cultures out there, and I'll need to do some handwaving to explain how the alien cultures found across our Wacker world in fact have histories to them—dating back before our unfurled to reveal these cultures.

In *Long Earth*, thousands or millions of humans take off on quests to the other Earths, especially poor people. I hadn't initially thought of that. I should have *lots* of people will be going on ultralong road trips in *Million Mile Road Trip*. Like people taking road trips.

The *Long Earth* travel tool is called a stepper, and it's powered by a potato. One of the heroes is an AI who used to be a Tibetan motorcycle repairman. So perfect, so inherently funny—a potato and a Tibetan motorcycle repairman. Pratchett is a comic genius.

I was scared to even read this book, but of course I had to. Fortunately—thanks be to god—it's not all that good. It's dull and it drags in the middle, and most of the Earths being visited are unpopulated, or the repetitive, and there's a heavy dose of pioneers heading *yawn* west. And—so far as I've read thus far—they haven't yet seen an Earth with tech or cities. And they've looked at almost a million of them.

Wacker World Thickness. Flatland?

One issue that I need to at least think about (if not write much about) is the force of gravity. When I was writing *Jim and the Flims*, I thought about the big flat world issue, and I harked back to when I was writing *Spaceland* and did some Mathematica calculations and I

determined that if you have an 3D slab of matter 2,500 miles thick, then the gravity on the surface will be about the same as the gravity on Earth—I mention this in the “[Notes for Spaceland](#)“ document online. (I write about a “cylindrical slab” in that online note, but that’s a slip, I meant a planar slab.)

Going from a round planet to an infinite flat and thick planet means big increases in the amount of matter in play—in fact it means you’re adding an infinite amounts of matter. But maybe that’s okay. We can mine all the matter we need out of the vacuum foam. Maybe it’s Wacker matter anyway, not regular matter. Wacker matter is like dark matter.

Thick or thin, you will be using infinite amount of extra matter in any case, so pick the one that’s more fun. It’s more fun, I think if the flat Earth is quite thin. In this case, we’d need to use “flat gravity” or “Wacker gravity” to get the same effect as 2,500 miles of crust with normal gravity.

The Wacker world could be only a few inches thick, although not of a gossamer soap-bubble thickness. If you dig a hole in the “ground” you see through to an alternate night sky. If this is the case, does our air rush through? Let’s say no, and let’s also assume that the thin Wacker world crust acts as a perfectly good insulator against the deep coldness of interstellar space.

What about atmosphere? We can just assume we have a sixty mile Earth-like atmosphere for the whole Wacker world. If the air went up higher than sixty miles, there’d be too much air pressure on us, assuming flat gravity acts pretty much like gravity at moderate distances.

An infinite slab would wreak havoc on the suns and stars that it passes near. Well, let it be so? Or adjust flat gravity so it drops off to nothing after about a thousand miles. A nonlinear gravity. Flat gravity is local. So the Wacker walls don’t trash the architecture of the existing heavenly bodies. We assume the Wacker walls’ suns are made of Wacker matter.

There might even be, I hate to say this, a flipside flat Earth, a whole endless kingdom on the other side. But, no, that would be too much. The other side is blank and shiny.

Another option: Suppose there is no “other side” of the plane. It’s solid matter from there on down. Would that produce infinite gravity in a normal world? Well, yes, it would. But I can jigger the laws of nature so it doesn’t. Like, most of what’s down there is ghost matter.

Still another option, the best yet: The Klein bottle move. You tunnel down into the plane world’s soil and you come out...back on the side you started on. The matter has accumulated along the plane like sand in the fold of a sheet of paper.

The Suns

Sun is one AU (astronomical unit) from Earth. An AU is 93 million miles, or 50 million km. Earth is 25,000 miles in circumference. 40,000 km. Call this figure EC. Note that the AU is about 4,000 EC. A long way.

If you drive a full AU from our start, like a hundred million miles, the Sun’s light will be half as strong. This is because light varies as the inverse square of distance and the distance to the sun from this new point is now square-root-of-two times AU—because the sunrays’ path length is now the diagonal of a square that’s AU on a side.

So if we want uniform illumination, we ought to put another sun every so often above the flat Earth. Like streetlights. A Wacker wall might capture stars and have them act as local suns. But stars are few and far between, like four light years to the next one. So more efficiently and less disruptively, we’ll posit that when a planet unfurls, it generates copies of its sun. We might say that the new Wacker-matter Suns (and new continents) are, like, harmonics of the original

Sun and the old continents.

How far away should our neighboring suns be, and how bright should all the suns be, assuming we want the maximum illuminations to be about the same as now, and we don't want the minimum illuminations to dip too low?

I want them to go about as far up into the air as the Earth's circumference, or a little less far. Think of the Sun's zenith as being at the apex of an equilateral triangle that's 25,000 miles on a side. Has to reach that apex that far in 6 hours, so it moves at an average a little under 4,000 miles per hour, call it 10,000 miles per hour zooming through the flat Earth and through the sunwell, and then it slows down at the top, then comes back down. We'll have one sun every 25,000 miles or so, and they're arranged in a hexagonal grid. The suns have to be rigorously in sync in their motions or they'll start missing their sunwell holes.

Regarding illumination, we know that Earth's biomes are very highly sensitive to the average brightness of the sunlight in those zones. Let's think about that fact a bit. Why is the sun less bright in the temperate zone than in the tropical zone? The sun isn't as "high in the sky." And this makes the light dimmer because the sunlight has to go through a thicker layer of atmosphere. We feel this effect in the relative heat of sun at noon versus the heat in the early morning or the late afternoon. The angle of the sun's rays varies during a day, with the seasons, and according to the latitude.

The brightness of a sun depends on four factors: the *slant* of the sun's rays, the *attenuation* of the light by the atmosphere, the *distance* of the sun, and its *brightness*.

Slant. Suppose the sun's angle from the vertical is a . If you fool with a couple of similar triangles drawn on this [Wikipedia page](#), you see that the reduction of brightness on the Earth's surface is by a multiplication factor from 1 down to 0. If your angle a from the vertical is 60 degrees from the vertical, its light is half as strong. The multiplication factor is, I guess, $\cos(a)$. This is the strongest effect.

Attenuation. If you going through more atmosphere (because of the sun angle), that soaks up some more light. Normally you lose about 20% of the sun's light to the atmosphere, coming straight down. If you come in at a 60 degree angle from the vertical, you'd pass through twice as much atmosphere, so lose 40%. For arbitrary a , it's some trig formula.

Distance. Light varies with the inverse square of the distance. More on this below.

Brightness. We'll tweak this however we want.

Let's say the light goes down to 40% as much if you're an AU away from our overhead sun on the flat Earth.

So we ought to have the suns being about 2 AU apart. Put them at the centers of the hexagons in a grid like bathroom tile.

So now the climate bands will be really large stripes, like bulls-eye patterns on targets, with an equatorial zone underneath each of the suns, that is, in the center of each hexagon, arctic bands out around the edges of the hexagons.

And now I naturally think of Bénard convection cells—will come back to that for giant weather systems.

So we paste kind of a peeled-surface image of our Earth into each hexagons, mooshign it around so the equatorial parts are near the middle and then the temperate parts and then the arctic parts. And the flattened mooshed Earth images will be will be varying in the successive hexagons, perhaps in direct proportion to the distance, or possibly according to some systematic

oscillations of first, second, and higher orders, or maybe they're just wildly wack..

The suns are positioned above the centers of the hexagons.

What about night and day? It might be too cheap and dull to have the suns' brightness oscillate while they hang in one place.

In *Jim and the Flims*, I had a jiva functioning as a sun, and it rose in the daytime and went down into a cave at night. We could do that too. The suns bob up and down through the plane of the flat Earth, like through sunwells, and that's what's producing night and day. Perhaps the oscillations are all in synch, or maybe not.

Of course If the suns are passing up and down through sunwells in the flat Earth's surface, they'd have to be a lot smaller than our original Sun—for the Sun is, after all, so much larger in diameter than the Earth. Of course if we have an infinite flat Earth plane we could afford to offer up a substantial sacrifice zone around a sunwell. If the sun was, however, a fully AU away from Earth, it would have to move really fast to oscillate in a day.

And if the suns pass through sunwells, if they keep their brightness, they'd burn the shit out of the surrounding landscape as they moved through the sunwell. Inverse square law of brightness, means that when the sun is thousand times closer, like a hundred miles up, it's a million times brighter. That's not gonna work.

Maybe we'd need to assume they get dimmer when they're closer to the surface of the flat Earth. And they can be bright again on the other side.

I wonder if the suns could just oscillate their brightness while staying in place. But that makes a problem with any reasonable notion of gravity.

So, okay, I want the suns to oscillate up and down through holes in the flat plane. We call the holes sunwells. I don't want the holes and the suns to be all that wide—maybe two hundred miles across. And the wells don't have to be all that deep, like maybe a hundred miles. And the suns go through the wells to the other side of the flat Earth.

I want the suns' brightness to damp down as they approach the flat Earth so as not to crisp us. Perhaps the suns are more like fluorescent lights, not all that hot. This said, we do rely on the Sun's heat as well as on its light. So let's keep them hot. But oscillate the brightness.

Remember that brightness is $1/R^2$ where R is distance. Suppose we set the standard sun height to FAU (Flat Earth Astronomical Unit), and call this 1.0. The sun has a standard brightness B. Then to keep illumination constant we set, where X is a variable brightness factor that's a function of R. $X / R^2 = B$.

	9	6	5	3	2	1
	81	3	25	09	04	01

To make all this work, I'll turn to "flat gravity" as a bogosity-generating, save-my-ass tool—and maybe dark matter and dark energy as well. The transition to flat physics happens during the jingling fuzz moment of the unfurling, so we can be sketchy on how it works.

Let's suppose that the flat Earth isn't made of ordinary matter anymore, it's made of Wacker matter with flat gravity. Kind of like dark matter.

The flat gravity can save us from all the suns tearing apart our solar system. Flat gravity

doesn't affect normal matter.

Ultra Weather and Getting Lost

Insanely large storms on a Wacker world.

Zoe and Villy get blown way off course, lifted into the air and swept hundreds of thousands of miles along the world's surface, across numerous basins. During this time their borrowed alien ship is acting like an aeronautical balloon.

I'd imagined them being tossed thousands of miles into the air. But our atmosphere only goes up at most sixty miles. Well, the atmosphere *could* pile up to a several hundred miles, like the storm surge at an ocean's edge—keep in mind that air is a fluid like water.

It would be nice if, at some point, looking down, they see a grid of Wacker suns, with no way to guess which one they started beneath. Even if our suns are only 25,000 miles above our Wacker world, you're only gonna see the grid if your well out in space, as far out as, say Jupiter, perhaps doing a conventional spaceship back to our Wacker world from the other Wacker world.

The Teep Hopper and Reverse Causation

The teep hopper allows a type of FTL travel. It's not much bigger than a car. It works like a star gate, it lets you do an instantaneous hop.

The catch is that there has to be something like a teep hopper waiting at your target destination. You get telepathically entangled with the pilot of the other teep hopper, and the two of you swap positions.

[The swapping feature is an add-on to the traditional SF notion of “teleportation booths.” Recall that in *The Fly*, the scientist uses a teleportation booth and there's a fly inside the booth with him, and their bodies get shuffled together.]

Anyway, when Kunk does a teep-hop to the nearby Wacker world, an alien on that planet will do an FTL jump back to his launch site—arriving at the same moment when he leaves.

Kunk knows this, but he recklessly figures we'll just roll with the side effects and see what happens.

The Ghanaian Rattle

In terms of a concrete image of the Wacker sizer, I initially liked the idea of a magic rattle given to Zoe and Villy by an alien's orange arm. But if my Wacker sizer can do the unfurling by itself—once Villy tweaks it—then we wouldn't have any need for the magic rattle.

So instead we'll use the rattle as a signaling tool. When Zoe shakes it, then Pinchley and Yampa know where she is and they can home in on her.

The Atomic Planets of a Wacker World

Let's work backward. In *Million Mile Road Trip*, I want to have each atom of Earth's interior be blossoming up into a planet-sized area of the flat, endless Wacker world.

How big a region would 10^{50} copies of Earth cover? I worked out the details in my [sizes](#) section above. And, as I mention in that section, I happily posted my conclusion as a tweet: “Eureka! Inflate each of Earth's atoms to size of planet, flatten 'em, tile a big floor. Million x as wide as known space. WACKER WORLD!”

So, very cool, I've got a full house on my Wacker world.

How can I think of atoms as being “in fact” inhabited planets?

Well, I might also think of an atom as a tiny solar system. As I mentioned in that same [sizes](#) section, as far as scale goes, atom : nucleus :: solar-system :: sun. So we could say the sun the nucleus and the planets are electrons.

It's of course harder to think of an electron as a planet. In fact standard modern physics says an electron is a point! Yes, there is a classical computation that sets the [classical electron size](#) at three femtometers, but electrons just seem to skimpy.

So, given that this is total wackball bullshit, I think I'll just treat the nucleus as the planet. And the electrons can somehow stand for a sun. "Electricity," right?

How can an atom be not only a part of the Earth-dirt I'm walking on, but also an inflated, flattened, distant, planet-sized patch of Wacker world?

I could go all twinkling Zen sage on the reader's ass, and have one of my characters say, "It does both." Or I could advocate an M. C. Escher type view in which the parts can be seen at the same scale as the whole, like in the picture where the inside of an art gallery is also the street where the gallery stands.

But why do that. Throw the reader a bone.

I'll say the flattened, inflated atoms used for Wacker world are drawn from our Earth's *interior*, that is, from dirt that's more than a foot beneath the surface. So Wacker world is only about a foot thick. I like that.

. The foot of depth is always behind the surface, so don't worry about rugged or bumpy zones. Like you do a "blur" process to grow out for a foot in every direction of non-surface zone from any surface point. Like when you spray the underside of a car with weatherproofing foam.

Later someone digs a foot-deep hole and we see—stars? No, no, what we've got under the foot of dirt is a really strong panel of adamantine [ultramatter](#), nothing but nucleons in there, plus some odd links of dark and dark-dark matter.

How Does the Wacker Sizer Enlarge Things?

I have two threads of thought here. The first is the space-time-scale continuum. The second is click-stops.

So, first of all, there is a scale axis, and the sizer moves an object (and its components) along this axis.

And, second of all, we can't move an object to an arbitrary scale location and expect it to stay there. Unless there is a natural click-stop at that scale location, the object will slide back along the scale axis to its original size. "Road" Possible Scenes

Scary Driving

The terrifying moment when a giant truck almost rear-ended us in the thick mist of rain south of Seattle, all of us going 75 mph on Interstate 5 and I'm foolishly cutting across two lanes of traffic to slot into a narrow exit because I'm dying to get out of the driver's seat and take a piss.

Spiritualism and Hyperspace Beings

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon speaks of there being four people involved in a séance. The *seeker* consults with a *medium* who goes into a trance and contacts a *control* or spirit guide who then gets in contact with another *spirit* and channels the spirit's utterances to the medium, who speaks them aloud to the seeker.

It's a nice design because it's symmetric. The control is like the medium of the spirit world.

control : spirit :: medium : seeker

You might think of the control/medium as a single entity seen as the two ends of a wormhole being that connects two parallel worlds.

Not all séances are set up this way, but it would be a good design for a medium, as then a large part of the session could be the same each time—in particular the part involving the emulation of the control's voice.

Now if we think of Yampa as being like a spirit, then there could be a control who gets her in touch with Zoe. But the analogy isn't perfect, as we don't have any medium relative to Zoe.

Aliens

NAMES

Two great Larry Niven names for aliens: Ptavv. Puppeteer. (Actually the Ptavv are humans, and that's an alien-language name for us.)

Hopper, Humper, Honker, Homper.

Hungarian-inspired names: Szep. Szampo. Szem. Szelem. Csont. These mean, respectively, beautiful, [nothing], eye, spirit/soul/wit, bone.

I'll go with Szep and Csont for now. The Szep are good aliens, the Csont are bad ones.

I'll have some giant ants too. The ants have been aliens all along, even on Earth, they tunneled through.

I want some interesting body plans for the Szelem and the Csont.

SZEP BODIES

Three legs and three arms. The arms are somewhat tentacle-like, that is, they wad together in a single bunch coming from a Szep's chest. One arm has a bone, the other two are boneless. The arms have multipurpose finger bunches at their tips.

Heads like ours, but with a knob on the back for telepathy.

Three little legs. For running, a Szep drops on all fours in a diamond-like pattern, with one leg in back, two legs on the sides, and the longer arm-bundle in front.

Their eyes are high on their forehead so they can see when the Szep is on all fours.

POSSIBLE SCENES

The Raven's Heart

In the summer of 2011, I was riding a horse in the woods in Wyoming, and I saw a large raven in a tree. I remembered a particular fairy-tale scene I loved when I was growing up. Here's my summary of how I remember it.

A boy is the helper of a wizard. They're travelling across the countryside, and the wizard manages to shoot a particular raven with his bow. The wizard tells the boy to build a fire and roast the raven's heart for him, giving the boy particular instructions that he mustn't taste the tiniest fragment of the heart until the wizard has had the first bite. The wizard lies down for a nap and the boy gets to work.

The raven's heart sizzles over the flame, and piece of hot fat lands on the boy's finger, burning it. The boy puts the finger to his mouth, licking it to soothe the pain. And in that instant he receives the magic power that lay in the raven's heart: he can understand the speech of birds and animals. Awakening, the wizard takes one look at the boy and knows that the boy has stolen the power that was to be the wizard's. The boy takes off on his own, aided by advice and guidance from the birds and animals he passes.

Somehow this episode has always held a special meaning for me. When my son Rudy was young, I'd discuss this story with him, and when we'd bring a roast holiday turkey to the table. We'd compete to tear off and devour a scrap of the golden skin and say to the other, "Now I understand the speech of birds and animals."

And so we rode up through the aspens, up through the late-summer-yellow fields, up to the bare windy peak of Bacon's Ridge. Perhaps I could write a fantasy tale?

Working title: *The Raven's Heart*. And it starts with that scene of the raven's heart. And a boy learns to understand the speech of objects.

My character gains (or thinks he gains) a magical ability to hear not only the voices of birds and animals, but also the voices of plants, stones, and of man-made objects. The raven-catcher is, at least initially, ambiguous. He presents himself as a wanderer.

After the raven experience and his conviction that objects are talking to him, my character begins to paint in a manner that interests people, even though his style remains a bit awkward (for instance, he can't do perspective very well).

As a twist, we have a second and maybe a third encounter with the wanderer whose raven-heart gave my character his power.

In the second encounter, the young man finds his way into a hobo jungle where he meets fantastic creatures like the Grulloos of *Frek and the Elixir*. In principle the Grulloos *could* in fact be limbless beggars. But it would be more fun if they were in fact healthy and nimble. Bio-tweaked. Our hero revisits the Grulloos from time to time at crisis points in his adult life.

In our character's third and final encounter with the wanderer, the man is being executed for genomics crimes. The execution is live on the web. As the man dies, he seems to look into our character's eyes and to say, "I live in you."

Possibly the wanderer is a timefreak, perhaps even an older version of the boy.

UNUSED OUTLINE FOR ENDING

S 27. New Eden. Saucers a-plenty, also some skeevy Earthlings in a Drop City kind of village. Zoe does a quick test, and finds herself unable to hop back to Earth, she's lost that power along with her horn, and her guitar's not good for hopping either. Maybe Scud could hop, thanks to his wand, but he doesn't want to. Nunu is there with Scud's eggs. The eggs hatch. They're like tiny humans with saucer rims around their waists. They can fly. Scudlings. Saucerbabies. They have red hair. The saucerbabies fly to Scud and call him Daddy. The saucerbabies are being threatened by Nunu's Aunt Boldog for being half-breeds, but now Maisie appears. She advocates for the saucerbabies, and for Villy and Zoe and Scud. Scud is in a loose, in-law sense, a member of the saucer clan.

V 28. Hole. Villy tries to get Scud to use his internal wand to slaughter some saucers right away, just for practice. Scud goes ahead and kills Aunt Boldog, who's always hassling him

anyway. Nunu and her father Pa Saucer are upset. Villy takes the blame, and Pa Saucer hurls Villy into unspace. Maisie helps Zoe and Scud flee to Van Cott—Scud driving crazily in the purple whale. Maisie says she'll stay in mappyworld and look for Villy. Scud and Zoe connect with Eekra and Melon in Van Cott. Near Van Cott the saucers are digging a vast hole, Pa Saucer is there, using the guitars, and it's going really well. The hole goes clear through the material of the mappyworld, and through unspace, and it leads to Los Perros on Earth. Scud and Zoe fly through it with the aid of Scud's wand.

Z 29. Home Sweet Home. It's still high-school graduation week in Los Perros. Zoe's only a few months older. And she's stuck here, and she's lost her power to hop back to the alien world. How boring. And no Villy. Scud keeps talking about Maisie and about his saucerbabies, which is boring and a little icky. Zoe meets up with her Dad Kirk and his creepy girlfriend Sunny Weaver, who is an agent of the saucers. A second saucer agent is in Los Perros too, pretending to be human—he has the form of a therapist/counselor called Norm Straight, and he threatens Zoe. Zoe gets a trumpet, and gets her groove back and plays a tune to bring back Villy from unspace—and Villy and Maisie show up.

S 30. Cosmic Beatdown. Working together, the kids and the Scudlings and Nunu make short work of the saucer agent called Norm Straight. And now they war on the saucers. In a preliminary skirmish scene we have a 1950s-movie-style saucer attack, a floppy leviathan of a saucer dragging its rim along Main Street of Los Perros with screaming crowds running. And then Scud gets to work with the Lady Filippa's wand, Villy handles the saucer pearl, and we get a huge double-page-spread-type battle against the saucers. The kids win.

Z 31. Legend. Zoe, Villy and Scud work out something like a long-term peace treaty with the saucers. Scud and Maisie hop back to live in Van Cott and New Eden—they'll be, like, ambassadors. They're just pals for now, but you can tell there will be a romance, and Nunu isn't jealous, she has a new saucer boyfriend Krampus. Zoe and Villy are happy together in Los Perros, but with no firm idea of how long the relationship will last. They're looking for ways to have careers without going to college. Final kicker: While he was in unspace, Villy learned that their adventures were fulfilling a mappyworld legend that kids from Earth helped create the universe. A curious causal loop. Zoe and Villy do an image search and they find pictures that resemble them—in Egyptian hieroglyphs, in Greek statues, and in Picasso paintings. Somehow their trip has had effects that ramify backwards in time. They're archetypes. In any case, Villy and Zoe are grounded in the daily reality of Earth, getting on with their lives, with the future yet to come. What next? They'll take an actual, regular, road trip around the US, doing some informal music gigs along the way.

UNUSED PASSAGES

Extra Teep Heads for Szep

Yampa has a second head on top of her head, or call it a half-head. Like a big blister with a cartoon face. Two slitty dots and a smiley-line mouth. "I SEE YOU SEE ME," says the top head, even though the line mouth isn't moving. The whispery voice is in Zoe's head. Like something she's imagining. "TELEPATHY," says the top head.

"We Szep are all like this," says Yampa out loud with her lower mouth. "YOU REALLY ARE SCARED NOW. SORRY. We speak and we teep." Her spoken and telepathic voices take turns.

Villy turns his attention to the dome on the top of Pinchley's head, and oh wow, that thin

mouth up there is smirking at him. “SEE ME SEE YOU,” it says, but without opening its lips. “TELEPATHY IS TEEP.” And now Villy gets the picture.

“I can hear that,” exclaims Scud. “Mind zaps from your squashed half-head on top.”

Goob-goob in Unspace

“I see something!” calls Scud. Zoe doesn’t want to know what it is, she wants to focus on the pointy road and the lights ahead but, like it or not, she’s seeing what Scud sees. And Villy’s seeing it too. It’s like a woman’s face, not located in any one particular direction. The face is in front of Zoe’s eyes whichever way she looks. Like a pattern on her cornea. She wants to say that the face resembles like a leering nutcase, or a drooling braindead stoner, but there’s more to this eerie woman than that. The face holds wisdom and nobility, peace and calm, power and glory. The face is watching them with compassion.

“A tale told by an idiot,” murmurs Villy. “Our creator.”

The Freeth Mission

As I understand it, they have an issue with preventing recurrence. Repetition? The Freeth do what they can to ensure that no two basins can ever be the same.

Teep Eyes

“Look at that food stand,” says Scud before Villy can start talking about his discovery. “Those little gingerbread men are selling skewers with big round things on them. But—”

“Those are Flatsies,” interrupts Yampa. “At home they slide on the ground. Countrified. Dull as cubes, and—

“I wasn’t done talking!” yells Scud. “I was trying to tell my brother that those are giant *eyeballs* on those candy-apple sticks. Who would ever eat something as rank as that?”

“Those things, they’re not food at all,” says Pinchley. “They for telepathy. What you calling sticks are woven bundles of veins and nerves. You buy a teep eye and it takes root on your bod. They swim in the ocean of the Flatsies’ basin, and they’ll grow on anyone that wants them. Me, I’d rather not have teep. Don’t want to know what everyone’s thinking.”

“*Candy apples*,” says Villy, mocking Scud. “You think this is the midway at the Santa Clara county fair?” He’s slows his car to a crawl, wanting to see what happens next here.

Yount Protocol

According to Pop, the Yount protocol is converting every bit of computer data into the personal property of the high pigs, that is, the CEOs, presidents, premiers, and generals of the world. Villy himself doesn’t care about the Yount protocol—not that he bothers to understand it. Just a fresh layer of bullshit atop all the other bullshit that old people love.

Is It A Videogame?

Zoe is the first to speak up. “Like—*huh?* A tweaked, sinister credit screen for Villy’s videogame on a luminous toadstool in a jungle in an alternate parallel world?”

“It’s like this world is talking about itself,” says Scud. “And that means we’re in a virtual reality inside a game. Like in one of those movies where—”

“Screw that stale, pseudo-mysterioso, you’re-inside-a-game bullshit,” yells Zoe. “Look!” She tears off a chunk of the back toadstool, where it’s not withered from jellyfish snot. She crumbles the chunk open, and within a hollow in the toadstool flesh are three tiny striped bugs,

sitting around a berry that they're have for dinner. The bugs stare up at them, twitching their damp feelers. "This is not some lame-butt cheap-ass videogame," says Zoe. "Not some feeble code written by Villy's dad and Walter Garvey. Not a Lego-block world inside a dipshit digital computer."

"You go, Zoe," says Villy, enjoying the flow of words.

Zoe gestures at the space around them, taking in the fat-trunked trees, the jewel-like flowers, the timid flying snakes only now starting to emerge, a nearby sky-vines, and the skeenky jellyfish, slowing drifting away. "This is my real life," she cries. "I'm on a million mile road trip in a wonderful alien world. So don't frikkin try to bring me down!"

Scud focuses on his teep, testing out the feel of what Zoe says. Yes, yes, this is a real world, incalculably rich and strange, filled with minds large and small, creatures scattered like grains of sand. "Maybe Zoe's right," he says. "But, still—"

"You said bullshit?" Yampa asks Zoe. As if that mattered. "Not bullshit?"

"Bullshit is flatter," says Zoe, winging it. "Not as smelly."

"Listen at the farmgirl," says Villy.

"So, okay, let's suppose this is real, but why were those game credits running on the mushroom?" asks Scud. "How could that happen if we're not inside a videogame?"

"Easy," says Pinchley. "Goob-goob's screwing with us."

"What if the cosmos is Goob-goob's videogame?" puts in Villy. "A quantum computation running on an unknowable subreality."

"It's the frikkin' cosmos," says Pinchley. "And you might as well stop there. Why make it a turtle resting on elephants standing on elephants all the way down?"

Trubans and Rubtans

"I'll clarify," says Meatball in a low, confidential tone. "Your Szep friends hope you'll help defeat the Rubtan plan to let the New Eden saucers make a huge hole in the ground beside Szep City. A hole that's likely to serve as a gateway for invading Earth. Pinchley and Yampa are in the pay of the Trubans, who want to oust the saucers from New Eden and the whole Szep basin. That Szep we had the street-fight with—the seamy Irav fellow? He's from the Rubtans."

Pinchley turns to Villy, screwing up his face a parody of deep thought. "Now tell me this—is mappyworld's half of Goob-goob the half with the big G or the half with the little g?" He lays a finger against his nose. "Rubtans say big G. Trubans say small. The yang and the ying."

Pinchley-Yampa Jive

Pinchley turns to Villy, screwing up his face a parody of deep thought. "Now tell me this is a glowon made of smeel? He lays a finger against his nose. "Rubtans say yes. But the old-school high Trubans say no."

"Trubans and Rubtans—swish guillotine!" cries Yampa, making a slicing gesture across her throat. "Oopsy no. Yampa. Pinchley on vacation. Million mile road trip! With ballyworld humanoids. Kith and kin!"

"What's a glowon?" asks Zoe, many steps behind in this conversation.

"Suffer the little green cabbages to come unto me," says Pinchley, patting her head. "A glowon is the dark-matter dark-energy cousin of a photon. Go thou in peace."

Stars

“Van Cott is like a seaport,” says Pinchley. “A seaport if there weren’t but three or four ships a year. Prospectors and traders in Van Cott, waiting on ballyworld superstars like little Zoe Snap. It can take time to get lucky. But your Earth keeps turning out the stars. You known for that.”

“It’s good being a star,” says Zoe quietly. She looks on edge, but happy. Villy takes her hand. “I opened a path between the worlds twice,” muses Zoe. “With my trumpet and with my rattle.”

Scud Had Sex With Nunu

“Sure,” says Scud, feeling manly. He’s on an adventure in the far North. And last night, unbelievably, he finally lost his virginity. With soft Nunu on his lap. Turns out she has a tiny hole on her underside. Just right for you know what. He doesn’t like the way Zoe was laughing at him just now. Nosy little goth. Scud’s still wearing his new teep eye on his wrist, and a quick check on Zoe revealed that, yes indeed, she’d guessed.

In the bathroom, Scud feels compelled to examine himself—he’s slightly worried that Nunu might have done something weird to him. Like tacked on a sly leech, or inscribed some insane saucerian tattoo. But, no, he looks the same as ever. Even though he’s no longer a virgin. If boning a flying saucer actually *counts* in terms of not being a virgin. Not exactly something he’d brag about to his friends.

When Scud comes out of the bathroom, there’s Zoe and Villy. They’re giving him odd looks—like he’s a disgusting pervert with a horrible disease. Zoe’s vibes in particular are uptight. She edges past Scud and goes straight for the bathroom. Villy corners Scud by the bar.

“You and the flying saucer?” says Villy. “It’s true?”

“I, uh, I mean, who says? Zoe? She’s completely—”

“*Nunu* says,” hisses Villy. “Do you have any idea what you’re in for? Nunu’s says you’re married now, if you can wrap your tiny mind around that.”

Villy Loses It

“Car’s ready!” hollers Pinchley. All the wheels have these paddle wheel fins now. “Don’t look so scared, you two. It’s not nearly so bad out there as you think. The waves is friendly, once they get to know you. They just acting rough cause they shy.”

“Heard that line before,” Villy says to Zoe. He feels really strange, but he can’t stop talking. “This bully in my tenth grade class, he was always picking on me, but he’d kissed up to this one teacher, and the teacher told me to be nice to the kid because supposedly he’s shy. And that same day on the way out of school, the bully kid trips me on the stairs, and I fall and hit my head really hard, and he laughs, and he calls me a mamma’s boy, like, using a baby voice to say that. And this is only a few months after my mother died. And the bully knows that.” Villy pauses for breath and starts up again, even though he has no ideas what’s coming next. “I got even. I snuck over to the kid’s house that night at in three in the morning. And I slit the throat of his pet dog. I used a box cutter, and I saved the blood in a thermos bottle, and at school the next day I handed the kid the bottle at lunch, and when he opened it, I hit the bottle really hard from underneath so it splashed all over his face. He knew what the blood was, and his face crumpled, and I pushed him down on the cafeteria floor, and I kicked him in the stomach really hard. And when his friend the teacher came after me, I said I’d done it because I’m shy.” The violent words are oozing out of Villy’s mouth, and he doesn’t even know where they’re coming from.

Zoe is backing away from him. “Jesus, Villy! What’s wrong with you!”

Condoms

“Do you have protection?” Zoe feels she should ask.

“Yes,” says Villy, producing a condom from the pocket of his jeans beside the bed. “I brought a box of them in the car. A gross.”

“Cocky, huh?”

“I try to be.”

Basin-Variable Gravity

“I feel lighter,” says Villy. “Like I weigh less? Anyone else picking up on that?”

“I’m getting that too,” says Scud. “And the car’s bouncing really high on the bumps.”

“It’s true,” says Pinchley. “A mappyworld basin’s gravity matches its ballyworld planet’s gravity. The light matches the light. The size matches the size. No exceptions.”

“It’s Goob-goob who makes them match?” says Scud, hoping to get a straight answer.

“Mappyworld and ballyworld are two faces on one head,” says Yampa. “Nobody makes nothing do anything.”

“Heavy,” says Zoe, drawing out the second syllable so it’s like, “Hea-veeeee.” Kind of putting Yampa down. Villy laughs. All three of the kids are tired of never knowing what the hell is going on. But what can you do. It’s an adventure.

Scud drives for several hours, doing his best to maintain a good pace. It’s a kick, driving in low gravity. The car bounds along like a rabbit.

Height-Variable Gravity

Mappyworld’s dark-matter gravity gets stronger the higher you go. Here by the ground I weigh something like a hundred pounds. If I go thirty feet up, and I weigh a ton. And higher than that—out of the question.

Scud’s Theory of How to Fly with Saucer Pearl

“I understand the *theory* of how to fly,” says strict Scud. “And later I’ll put theory into action. The idea is that you get the pearl to do a four-dimensional rotation around the osculating plane of the 3D space curve you want to fly along. And the rotation makes a local perturbation in the gravitational field.. And the perturbation transforms your local metric tensor. And you ride the tensor. Or maybe it rides you.”

Zoe’s “Holophonor”

In Harmony, Zoe makes a new instrument to replace her lost trumpet. It might be like a clarinet that becomes something like a *Futurama*-style Holophonor, which I don’t think I should specifically mention. So I’d like a name for that instrument.

Adolphe Sax developed the saxhorn, the saxtuba, and the saxophone around 1850. Another odd instrument is the euphonium, which is a like a small tuba. Called a eup for short, and it’s played by euphonists. I like saxhorn or euphonium as names, but the instruments have no jazz tradition. Don’t be too *recherché*. Better just go with an alto saxophone. Like Charlie Parker. A sax like Lisa in *The Simpsons*. But that would be stale fan-fic. Just have her make herself a new and better trumpet.

Jump Cut

“Cone-shell poison,” says Zoe. “What a burn. Jump cut. First you’re here, then you’re there. I guess when you die, it’s just a cut. With no jump. Lights off. What’s the white stuff I was lying on?”

Goob-goob as a Homeless Woman

A cloud of pale threads that map out a face, like a hard-weathered woman from the streets of Santa Cruz, a homeless madwoman perhaps—but with an odd aura of wisdom and power. She makes a gesture with one hand, as if guiding them on their passage from one world to the next.

“A tale told by an idiot,” murmurs Villy, his face serious, his mouth straight, his tangled blonde hair framing his features. He grips the steering-wheel as hard as he can.

And then the road snaps back to normal. The ghostly face is gone. They’re cruising into a town. Zoe sets the rattle down.

Rudeness in Goob-goob Scene

“Yes, fine,” says Zoe evenly. “*And we get to go home.*” Saying this, she feels a visceral longing for her simple old life. She wouldn’t have expected that. This trip has been strange and wonderful beyond imagining, but—Zoe’s due for some chillax. And Villy’s almost out of rubbers.

Scud is laughing. He likes it when his big brother is rude to grown-ups. Scud draws himself up gives Goob-goob the finger. Villy does it as well. The two of them, giving the finger to god. A little juvenile for Zoe’s taste.

“Don’t be angry with the boys,” she tells Goob-goob. Just in case the supernal alien even knows the gesture is supposed to be rude. Like—is it rude for an ant to bend one particular leg? No point in ruining whatever kind of alliance they have with Goob-goob. “They’re immature show-offs, trying to be cool, afraid of deeper—”

“I don’t mind,” says Goob-goob. “I accept them. No aspect of this, my world, is odious to me.”

“Odious,” cackles Scud, the excitable clod who always goes too far. “Does that mean *fart*?”

“What an idiot,” mutters Zoe.

“Walk through the door,” booms Goob-goob, taking no heed of Scud’s low gibe.

Saucer Sex = Bestiality

With his new determination to go for Maisie, Scud finds it kind of a turn-off to see Kirk casually caressing Priss’s hide while he talks. How could Scud ever have dreamed of taking that route? It’d be like having sex with an animal. Not that the saucers were as low down as, say, chickens or dogs—but, no. Just no.

(Re. “Priss,” I was initially calling Dad’s saucer girlfriend Priss, like the Priscilla A. who stole my father from my mother, but then I decided the name Pru is groovier, I got that name from Rabbit Angstrom’s daughter-in-law in one of Updike’s novels, I think it was *Rabbit is Rich*. Also I changed Zoe’s father’s name from Kirk, as in Captain Kirk, to Kirkland which, again, seems even groovier—“groovy” in the sarcastic “uncool” sense of the word.)

Scud's Camera

As he shoots his selfie, he recalls Nunu was playing with his camera last night. He showed her his pictures, and she was giggling and pushing buttons with tiny, creepy little fingers that she grew out of the edge of her rim. She didn't seem to know much about machines. And then she started kissing him really hard, and he never actually saw the pictures she said she'd taken. What if she reformatted his memory chip by accident? Or on purpose. A counter-intel move against the horndog secret agent spying on the saucers! But, no no no, dude, Nunu wouldn't do that. She has the hots for Scud, right? And, yes, the camera's image bank is still fine.

Onanistic Origin of the Saucer Pearls

The one interesting part is when Kirkland talks about how he seeded the mud behind the high school with saucer pearl spore culture that he obtained from—this part is wild. Supposedly Pru the saucer appears to Kirkland for the first time one night, and he's, how to say this, intimate with her, and Pru's alien anatomy produces a reverse flow, that is, she pumps an ounce of spore culture from her body and into his generative organs. And later that night Kirkland feels compelled to spread the culture by, how to say this, spilling his seed upon the ground. He spills it in the muddy patch behind the high school. Unsavory old man. In thrall to Pru the saucer.

Ghana Rattle Hop

The big gourd is right by Zoe's feet. She snatches it up and vibrates it with that special stutter-start flutter she learned from her sister Maisie. She doesn't have time to wonder if the rattle will work as well as her horn, nor has she time to wonder if her saucer pearl can possibly become an unny tunnel that the whole car can drive through. ...Zoe's carrying all of them, immersing them in the lumpy, bumpy sizzle of her Ghana rattle's sound, deeper into the unny tunnel beyond the ball. The irregular buzz is shunting them into a tunnel perpendicular to the workadaddy world. Like they're veering off into the fourth dimension.

Overdone Foreshadowing from Maisie (with Osama as Extra)

“Kill Meatball?” says Zoe, not really processing everything Maisie just said. “Meatball can be so jolly. When she’s in the right mood.”

“That’s what they said about Osama bin Laden,” says Maisie. “Before he smashed the twin towers on 9/11.”

“Meatball bears no resemblance whatsoever to Osama bin Laden,” snaps Zoe. “I don’t think you know much about Earth.”

“I grew up there is all. With trips to the Berky settlement in New Eden on the weekends. I keep a car over here.”

“Every weekend?” says Zoe, confused. “That’s why you were never around? What does a car have to do with hit? Don’t you just hop through an unny tunnel?”

“Sure I use an unny tunnel.” She heft’s her clutch-bag purse. “I have a fat saucer pearl in here that I use for tunneling.”

“Where did you get the pearl?”

“If you know how to look, you can find saucer pearls in that marshy spot next to the freeway behind the high school. They grow there on their own. Thanks to our Dad.”

“Really?”

“Saucer pearls grow there like puffball mushrooms,” says Maisie. “Dad started a big

colony of them in that sewage-tainted little creek in the ditch by the road. Years ago. Thanks to Meemaw. And that's one reason we see so many saucers in Los Perros. They come here to gather saucer pearls. Like gourmets collecting truffles. They implant a pearl into each of their babies. I have a pearl inside my body—which is why I can fly, and I have another pearl in my purse, and I use that one for tunneling between ballyworld and mappyworld.”

“Stop telling me new things, Maisie. My head's about to explode” Zoe is silent for a minute, listening to the surf. “I can't believe our father planted saucer pearls behind the high school. You and him are really in with the saucers.”

“In with some of them. The ones who aren't leeches. Like I say, I visit with them every weekend. I take an unny tunnel to Van Cott, and then I drive my dune buggy over the ridge to Berkys in New Eden.”

“Dune buggy?”

“Full of questions, aren't we? I have a dune buggy over there, yeah. And if I don't feel like driving over the ridge, I might hitch a ride with a friendly non-leech-type saucer. Sunny Weaver knows I go to Berkys all the time. And, yes, she goes there sometimes too. To visit Dad. Not that he's really interested in her anymore. He's all about Meemaw.”

Foreshadowing Aristos

As a final, puzzling, denouement, yet another alien creature enters the scene. It's like a giant flying blimp or cuttlefish. It plummets down from the clouds, seizes the corpse of Boldog in its tentacles, and disappears into the sky. Like some slimy, gnarly eagle bearing off a sheep. Hard to see any details in the gloom.

“That was a full-grown Aristos,” says Pinchley, offering no more explanation than that. “And now I'm fixing the car.” He hoists himself up off the ledge. “Want to help me, Scud and Villy?”

“You're not going to tell us more about that flying thing with tentacles?” says Scud. “Does your Lady Filippa look like that? A flesh-eating cuttlefish that's fifty yards long?”

“Don't want to spread no alarm. Aristos are on our team, you bet. And no, Lady Filippa don't look like that full-grown one who's eatin Boldog. Nuff said, and I mean it.

The Complicated Unny Tunnel Explanation

[I had this in Chapter 28: New Eden, but I decided it's too complicated, and it kind of brought the book's flow to a halt, so I really cut it down. I don't think I ever actually drew most of these pictures.]

Scud is glad to have Zoe here. “For my pictures, I'll draw two parallel universes that are 2D planes in 3D space,” he says. “But really it's supposed to be one dimension higher. Two parallel universes that are 3D spaces in 4D hyperspace.”

“Hyperspace,” echoes Villy in the dumbest hick accent imaginable. “Haahpurspayce.”

Scud starts drawing on Maisie's flap. “So we've got two universes that are like 2D planes. And in one universe we've got a really and truly flat cow, like a cut-out piece of paper. Also a flat bagpipe with a flat horn. And in the other universe we've got, well, let's put a flat person with a flat eye. These creatures can't normally travel from one universe into the other. They're *inside* their home surfaces—you shouldn't think of them as sliding around on top of the surfaces. They're like inkblots in paper. And they just see what's in their home world.”

“And now you want to show how they *do* sometimes go from one universe to the other,” says Maisie.

“Exactly, says Scud. “We travel from world to world by using unny tunnels. And I happen to know a lot about unny tunnels from reading popular science books about the fourth dimension.”

“Doesn’t everyone?” goes Villy.

“And unny tunnel is what we call a wormhole or an Einstein-Rosen bridge,” says Scud, drawing his second picture. “The idea is that you bulge down the space of one world, and bulge up the space of the other, and they meet and join together like soap films, and there’s a, like, throat connecting the two worlds. Unny tunnel.”

“The flat bagpipe and the flat cow fall through the hole in the middle of the hole?” says Villy.

“Precisely *not*,” says Scud. “Remember that these guys slide around *inside* the surfaces. Moving ink blots! What they’ll do is creep down the side of that wormhole I’ve drawn.”

“Which side?” asks Zoe. “The inside or the outside.”

“Wrong question!” cries Scud. “I’m telling you, they’re not really on one side or the other side of the surfaces. They’re like tattoos. They go all the way through. But! Our flat cow, she’s different. She has real thickness. She can peel free of the surface and fly around.”

“And if you’re flying around in hyperspace outside the tunnel, what do you see?” asks Zoe.

“You’ll see a sphere that keeps bulging and warping and changing size while you move. Like this.” Scud runs his finger along Maisie’s rim, enjoying himself.

“And what do they regular people an unny tunnel look like?” asks Villy.

“To us, the gate to the tunnel looks like a sphere with another world inside it,” says Scud.

“And what about when we’re *inside* the tunnel?” asks Villy. “Sliding down along the wall. What do we see then?”

“It’s effed up,” says Scud. “In one direction you see the back of your own head. And maybe you see a ball that has your old world inside it. And in the opposite direction you might see a ball holding the world you’re going to. We saw stuff like that when we hopped over here from Los Perros. But I don’t want to draw it. Too hard. Let’s show something easier.” His finger moves caressingly on Maisie’s rim.

“Here’s a bagpipe going through the unny tunnel,” continues Scud. “That’s supposed to be Groon, right?”

“Kill Groon,” goes Maisie.

“I want to see the attack of the flat cow,” says Zoe.

“Yulia’s out there in hyperspace. Let’s suppose she has an agile person squeezed inside her flesh like a maggot. A heroic helper to pull the strings tight around the unny tunnel at either end.” Scud looks at Villy.

“Thus trapping the evil bagpipe in Nowheresville,” goes Zoe.

“Yay!” says Maisie, prettily clapping her hands. “I like the drawings, Scud. I’ll keep them active for awhile.”

“Thanks.” Scud finds it very pleasant to have a girl being nice to him. Even if she is half saucer. He turns to Villy. “You get it? To wrap strings around an unny tunnel, you have to—“

“Fly around in the fourth dimension,” intones Yulia. “No problem, I’m a hyperspace coooow. Well fed with the caraway seeds you gave my owner Goob-goooob.”

Yulia’s voice, now that Scud finally hears it—well, it’s sort of like Goob-goob’s—if Goob-goob were to imitate a cartoon talking cow by using long drawn-out vowels at the ends of some sentences.

“Yulia’s, like, an extension of Goob-goob,” says Maisie. “There’s more to this flat cow than meets the eye. The big deal about Yulia is that she can move in the fourth dimension. And her unseen hypersurfaces are covered with an impermeable glaze of smeel. *And* she’s good for hyperspace vision. She’s a 4D flat cow!”

“The hell you say,” goes Villy.

“You and I,” Yulia tells Villy. “We’ll inflict a cosmic beatdown on Groooon.”

“The commando raid!” says Villy. “See? I didn’t know the details, but I knew it was coming. I’ll be gonna be inside this hyperdimensional rump steak, tying off the tunnel ends. I’m just hoping my innards don’t fall out.”

“I’ll keep you whoooole,” says Yulia. “Get inside me and let’s goooo.” She waggles her long cow-tail in an intricate pattern. The tip of the tail repeatedly gets shorter and longer. Dipping in and out of four-dimensional space. Little Duckworth buzzes around after the tail’s seeming tip, trying to keep up.

“Let’s wait just a little,” says Villy. “Groon’s not even here yet. Fresh saucers are still pouring in.”

But right about then the rainbow-like jet stream shudders and—stops. Stray saucers scatter every which way. Groon’s stopped pumping them in and out of New Eden. There’s a sudden, deep silence in the air, and Scud realizes that the subtle thread of Groon’s music is gone. It had been floating in on the jet stream.

“I bet Groon is coming in person now,” says Zoe. “Flying a million miles from the Pit. How long will that take?”

“Not as long as you think,” says Maisie. “Maybe three hours. He moves even faster than you guys did with your stratocasting. But making the giant unny tunnel will take longer.”

“Villy, we should goooo,” repeats Yulia. “We’ll hover in unspace beside the big hooooole.”

“If the hole’s even done,” says Villy, very reluctant.

“Noooow,” says the flat cow.

Scud feels like Yulia is being very pushy about this. The optimistic explanation is that she wants to be sure they win the cosmic beatdown against Groon. A more paranoid explanation would be that she plans to digest Villy and they’ll never see him again.

“Do you think it’ll be all right?” Scud asks Villy, suddenly worried about his brother. “I mean—me drawing pictures is one thing, but you’re putting your body on the line.”

Villy looks at Scud for a minute. “I’m glad you care,” he says, fingering his guitar strings. “And I’m sorry I keep teasing you. Maybe I’m just jealous of how smart you are at math.”

“Me, I’m jealous of how brave and coordinated and cool you are,” Scud tells Villy.

“We’re a team,” says Villy.

“The bagpipe is toast,” says Scud.

Villy tells the flat cow to hold on for a minute, and he takes Zoe by the hand. They two of them walk off a little ways from the others and stand together, hugging and kissing and whispering promises. Watching them, Scud wonders how is is to be that way with a girl. Will he ever get there?

And then the farewell is over, and Villy unzips the side of the Yulia the four-dimensional flat cow. Duckworth perches on Villy’s shoulder. He settles himself and the saucerboy inside Yulia, and pushes his face against the eyegoggles in her skin. Zoe watches in silence, her eyes brimming with tears.

Working the drama of the moment, Yulia rotates herself sideways in the fourth dimension—with the effect that Villy, Maisie, and Scud are seeing a—glazed cross-section of Julia. It's like a slice of flat-cow salami with Villy filling, that is, they see a rind of hide, a layer of beef, a little air-gap, and then an inner rind of Villy-skin containing fat, some meat, and a cross-section of Villy's intestines. The front and the back of the slice gleam with Yulia's 4D glaze of smeel.

"Ugh," goes Zoe, and plays a dissident chord on her guitar. "Wrong."

"It's perfect," says Scud. "Science on parade! Dig that slice Villy inside her. Right through his guts, it looks like. But don't worry, Yulia has her 4D smeel glaze that's holding her and Villy's innards in place. And I bet she'll give Villy a glaze of his own if he goes out on his own. It's wonderful."

"It's horrible," says Zoe, her voice breaking. "It makes no sense."

"Look here," goes Maisie, flipping out her skirt. "I'll show you a picture. Scud-style."

"Love it," goes Scud. Zoe looks away and shakes her head.

As Yulia moves away from them in the fourth dimension, the visible effect is that her cross-section scans down through her body and through Villy's body, wobbling and diminishing, reaching a zone where they see the two round slices of Villy's shins, then coming to a zone with no more Villy but still a little bit of cow, and then a zone with nothing but the wobbly circular cross-sections of the cow's long tail, which seems to go on and on and on. And the tail twitches out of sight. Yulia and Villy are off in unspace.

WRITING JOURNAL

April 4, 2014. Talking YA With Silbersack.

I recently formed the notion that I should try and write a YA, teen, young adult, children's, or middle reader novel. I was inspired by Cory Doctorow's success with *Little Brother* and *Pirate Cinema*. I read *Pirate Cinema* and I liked it a lot. And I mentioned the YA idea to my agent John Silbersack during a lunch we had in New York, and he liked the concept and encouraged it. Like, maybe if switched my target market, I'd no longer be so marked by the lackluster sales figures of my adult SF novels.

John also said that the children's and YA book editors are prickly about adult writers thinking they can just parachute in and do a book in their market. You have to be serious about it, or they reject you. You can't be pretending. They'd want to see more than a proposal, they'd want to see a finished book, or at least a goodly chunk.

John had his own notions of what might be a nice kids' book. He'd like to see a book where a young person is doing things on their own. Like someone surviving on a desert island via their rudimentary camping skills.

May 15, 2014. A YA Book Proposal (Unused).

This was a first draft of a YA book proposal which I soon abandoned. My working title was "The People From The Fourth Dimension."

Introduction

I'd like to write a young adult SF novel. My main role model is Cory Doctorow's *Pirate Cinema*, with touches of Heinlein's *Tunnel In The Sky* and Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time* [Later clarification: the "Wrinkle" reference is bogus, as I hadn't read that book when I

wrote this proposal---I just dropped in “Wrinkle” because I knew it mentioned the fourth dimension.]

I’d include some of Cory’s computer freedom themes, but I’d also bring in the more explicitly SF notion of the fourth dimension. For the 4D material, I’d draw on the ideas that I worked out for my Tor novel *Spaceland*, although I’d simplify the 4D stuff quite a bit. For a payoff, I’d use 4D to establish a stargate link to distant planet in our normal space, with the distant planet’s culture serving as a kind of mirror of our own odd social norms. At the end, the stargate would close, my three main characters would be a bit more mature, and our society would be slightly better off.

I see this as being a relatively short novel, in the 60,000 to 80,000 word range. I could deliver it by spring, 2016, or possibly by fall, 2015.

The Setup

Zane and his friends Harold and Roopa are riding the subway home from school in New York City. Zane is our first-person narrator—he wants to be a musician or an artist. Harold loves biology, especially insects and cuttlefish. He maintains a dozen aquariums and terrariums in his parents’ apartment. Roopa rules the social media and dreams of assembling her friends’ tweets and posts together into a play. Zane has a crush on Roopa.

So Zane, Harold, and Roopa are in a packed subway car. Afternoon rush. A gray-haired guy half-way down the car is ranting an endless spiel about gods and ghosts from another world. He has an intense Scandinavian accent, and the kids are laughing at him a little bit, not that they’re really listening. Suddenly the subway train screeches to a halt and the lights go out. The yelling man gets louder—and then falls silent. The lights come back on. The man is gone. Looking out the car’s window, Zane sees a strange blob up ahead—some people under a sheet? The curious, wobbly form disappears into the shadows and side-passages of the subway tunnel.

Federal agents call in Zane and his two friends. Zane’s worried he’s in trouble for computer piracy—he’s a heavy downloader of files. But, no, the agents are interested in the guy who disappeared from the train. They have surveillance video of the subway car, and they’re working their way through all the faces. Turns out the man who disappeared was a respected physics researcher, who’d once worked for military research, but who’d then gone crazy. Gunnar Volumn was his name.

Back out in the street, Roopa tells Zane she’s held back. “That crazy guy who disappeared, Gunnar Volumn—I just realized that I’ve seen him at our house. My mother knew him from yoga class.”

Zane, Harold and Roopa find some lab notes that Gunnar Volumn had entrusted to Roopa’s mother, not that the mother had ever looked at them. Volumn was doing research about the possibility of leaving our space to enter the four-dimensional hyperspace that surrounds us. He was beginning to suspect that creatures live out there. The concept flipped him out. And now Gunnar Volumn has evidently been abducted. A man who knew too much.

The Rest of The Story

The three friends work with the material in Volumn’s notebook and find a way to access hyperspace. There’s some crazy, menacing beings living in hyperspace itself—they manifest themselves as wobbly blobs. But they don’t seem especially interested in us.

Studying Volumn’s notes more closely, Harold deciphers a hint about how to build a stargate that tunnels *through* the fourth dimension. He uses some Petri-dish-grown cuttlefish skin to build a gate. The three friends travel through, and it’s creepy, like traversing a glass tunnels through a giant aquarium tank, with the bizarre 4D beings cavorting all around.

The tunnel leads to a world that's sort of like Earth, and sort of not. It's called Doople. The inhabitants are sort of like people, and sort of not. Old Gunnar Vollum is there. A couple of subplots kick in. Harold and Roopa fall in love with the same Doople "boy." A Doople ruler attempts to seduce Roopa, and she turns his actions into a theatrical spectacle. Harold befriends some Doople pets who may be, as it turns out, the true rulers of this world. Zane gets involved with the Doople music and art scene.

Meanwhile our three characters are hopping back and forth between Doople and New York, and there's problems in New York as well. Naturally the kids are having some problems with keeping up on their school projects. And two separate sets of agents are trying to get hold of the stargate.

But far more cataclysmic problems loom. Not only do the US agents want to do something wildly reckless with the stargate—one of the Doople factions wants to invade Earth. To further complicate the situation, creepy-crawly hyperspace creatures keep making appearances in our world.

Despite a series of back and forth setbacks, our three heroes save the day. It still looks like they have to finish high school—but they'll definitely be going for full-on media careers.

May 17, 2014. Talk to Hartwell. YA Panel at Nebs.

I wrote up a draft proposal for a YA novel called *The People From The Fourth Dimension* and sent it to Silbersack and Dave Hartwell.

And then I had a brief talk with David Hartwell about YA plans over a lunch at the Nebula Awards weekend, which was held in San Jose this year. David hadn't read my proposal. He was friendly and encouraging, but not entirely forthcoming. He said that he himself would not want to edit a YA book. But he said that Cory Doctorow's editor Patrick *had* edited Cory's YA books. He said he might later suggest a Tor YA editor to me. He did mention a YA author at Penguin whom he thought might be receptive, if Tor doesn't work out. Edith Sharon November.

I should have asked Hartwell about a Frek II book, but I didn't. I was too busy pretending that I wanted to write a YA.

While I was at the Nebs, I went to a panel on YA writing, and I enjoyed it a lot. It included the writers Cynthia Felice, Erin Hoffman, Bennett Madison, and Ysabeau Wilce. I liked how casual they were about the children's and YA genres, saying these were mainly marketing niches, and that older books such as *Huck Finn* or *Catcher in the Rye* or *To Kill a Mockingbird* might well have been put into those categories. They also said you should use whatever language you like, and not be hung up on using a limited-vocabulary word-list. And that a certain amount of sex is now okay, at least in the YA books.

I got the encouraging feeling that children's and young readers' and YA writers are regular writers, not arrested-development simpletons or prim goody-goody librarians with strict buns.

May 28, 2014. Talk to Silbersack About YA.

I discussed that *People From 4D* draft proposal with my agent John Silbersack today. He thought it was too generic. He said I should look at Daniel Pinkwater's children's books.

He suggested that I should think more along the plot-line of *A Wrinkle in Time*. In *Wrinkle*, the main character feels she's an outsider, and not as smart or talented as the members of dauntingly successful family. But the mysterious visitors seek her out. There's something *special* about her, some as-yet-unrecognized spark. Her mission is to *save her father*. A very

personal and meaningful mission for a kid. And she succeeds, and thereby gains status in her family.

More points specifically about my proposal.

*The disappearance of the man on the subway should somehow be directed at my main character Zane. It happened because of him. He wasn't just a random bystander.

*The door to the other dimension should be opened by Zane's internal special skill, whatever it is. And not by reading a formula in some papers he finds. Zane isn't just a kid who's amassed a bunch of MP3 files.

Silbersack thought the Tor YA editor to approach might be Susan Chang.

He stressed again that a switch from adult to young reader books would not be easy. The children's book editors will not be familiar with my work, and a mere proposal won't get a deal. I'd need to write about half the book before hoping to approach them. Need to prove to them that I'm serious about this, and that I can do it.

May 29, 2014. Hero for Children & YA. Frek?

I read over half of *A Wrinkle in Time* last night. I don't think I'd ever read the whole thing before. It's a sweet and admirable book, but I don't think I can see writing a book that's like this.

The kids in *Wrinkle* and in the *Narnia* books —they're so young and sweet and innocent, even the ones that are meant to be mildly villainous. Reading *Wrinkle*, I feel ashamed. Like I'm a dirty old bum in a playground.

Even Cory's *Pirate Cinema* character is noble and idealistic, even when he's ragging on himself. This book too makes me feel, to some extent, like a filthy old man. Like the way I felt when the librarian at our Los Gatos Library asked me what I was doing there in the Teen Books section—I'd gone in there to look at the books. But naturally I was viewed as a potential sexual predator. "Can I help you, sir?"

I used to be a sweet child, but once I was thirteen, that was pretty much over. Or I began hiding it. What happened to darling young Ru? Well, I became obsessed with alcohol and drugs.

And ever since, I've been dragging along my mental history of being an alcohol-and-pot addict. It's not like being a heroin addict or anything, but still. The addiction thing has been essential to my personality ever since my early teens, and even now, after eighteen years of sobriety, I'm a *recovering* addict. Even now, "being into getting high" is one of my measures for who and what is interesting.

God knows I'd like to get away from writing about addiction and addicts. Even *The Big Aha* was about that, only without drugs, and at least one critic twigged to that fact. The addiction theme has been done to death. And it repels great swathes of the reading audience. So let's suppose my hero isn't an addict, I can do that, I think.

Looking at it in a wider sense, the change that I underwent in my teens was that I started wanting to be a "bad boy" and to be cool. A beatnik. I wanted to show up the people whom I imagined were disdaining and oppressing me. People like my parents, my big brother, the mean kids at school, and my stupid teachers. I felt they looked down on me for being younger, for being clumsy and inexperienced, for being smart, and for being different.

This kind of hero sounds like a mid-teen, but he could be a twelve year old, and I can write a character like that. But, Rudy, you *don't* have to make him into a budding addict.

I did write a book with a non-addict kid before, of course. *Frek and the Elixir*. Frek is a twelve-year-old with some of that childhood sweetness. He does have a *father* with drug/alcohol problems, but that's on the side, and the father dies, nobly, to some extent redeeming himself. And his Grullo friend Gibby is given to getting "drunk" on mook, but that's presented in a comic way, like they way you'd have drunk pirates in a seafaring yarn. Frek stays clean.

June 1, 2014. Go for Frek II.

I couldn't actually finish reading *Wrinkle in Time*, it got too dull and repetitive for me when the kids are off on another world facing an evil being called IT. Also she didn't get the tesseract thing right. She doesn't really understand the fourth dimension. And her space-shortcut trick is the same one as in Heinlein's *Starman Jones*.

And my "People from the Fourth Dimension" proposal doesn't really interest me. The explicitly YA routine feels false to me, like I'd be faking it. A bum in a playground. And the "snatched from today's headlines" angle is boring. But maybe I'll use that disappearing man routine for a longish short story anyway, as I do like that as an opener.

Regarding Silbersack's advice about having the kid have a special power, and be saving a family member—well, *doh*, I suddenly realize that I already did that in *Frek*. I really do know how to do that kind of book, a book with a young teen hero, I just have to remember how I was back then. I can put my head into that.

Originally I meant for *Frek and the Elixir* to be marketed as a book for younger readers, I saw it as a *Harry Potter* type book. But Tor took it mainstream. I have in fact given *Frek* to, like, thirteen-year-olds, and they really liked it.

So, *doh*, I don't need to read about YA or listen to a panel about YA. I don't know why I've been feeling so lost and confused. I guess that being out of the commercial publishing game is making me lose my self-confidence.

Frek, yes, I can do more Frek. I've been returning to the idea of a *Frek* sequel since 2006. I'll try and get a proposal together and maybe write a first chapter.

The easiest for me is if Tor buys *Frek II*, and does a bit of a fresh publicity for *Frek I* as well. Problem here is that Hartwell is on record as saying "No" to *Frek II*. And it's been eight years since *Frek I*, and maybe that makes a sequel that much less viable. But maybe we could win Dave over, or get him to hand me off to a different Tor editor. I can't just sidestep Tor as *Frek I* is still in print from Tor. I'll have to give it a shot.

If Tor won't buy *Frek II*, I'll beg them to revert *Frek I*, and then try and sell the two books elsewhere. (At this point, any talk of a *Frek III* is pointless. First I'd have to write and publish the *Frek II*.)

In reality, it doesn't really seem all that likely that another big publisher would pick up *Frek II* if Tor won't. But maybe Silbersack could find something—if he doesn't dismiss the idea out of hand. If the only option was a small press, then my inclination would be to run a Kickstarter and self-publish the two *Freks* with Transreal Books. I could probably raise \$10K for a *Frek II*.

Of course when I self-publish, I'm writing for a just a few hundred people, or a thousand at most—and no kids are ever going to find out about the book, but at least it would be out.

Facts: My advance for *Frek and the Elixir* in 2004 was \$15K. Those were the days. *Frek* has sold about 6,000 copies in all U.S. editions. *Frek* seems not to exist in any foreign editions. According to a Bookscan page on the Amazon Author Central site, *Frek* has only sold eleven

bound copies in the last two years, that is, May, 2012 – May, 2014.

Frek did get very good reviews—I've placed a stash of [blubs](#) for it in these Notes. *Frek* was number one in the Barnes & Noble [top ten](#) SF books for 2004. It was in the Locus 2004 [recommended](#) reading list. I seem to remember that it was listed as one of the top young readers' books, but I can't find a link for that online.

Frek II is a project I feel actively enthusiastic about. It would be fun to work on that for a couple of years.

I'd have to do some work to make *Frek II* work as a standalone book, but I'm sure I could work that out. I did that okay with the *Ware* series.

June 7, 2014. Cephalopods.

Yesterday Sylvia and I went to see the “Tentacles” show at the Monterey aquarium. Nice to see my old pals. They had a good animated graphic that kept morphing between octopus, squid, cuttlefish, and nautilus, making it clear. We saw a tank of big-fin reef squid that looked a lot like a cuttlefish. And some nice “stumpy cuttlefish,” very rough-skinned—for camouflage, I guess.

I'm still thinking in terms of having a longish sea-going section in *Frek II*. Riding on a vaalship. Maybe Frek ends up in the undersea kingdom of the cephalopods, although I'm not quite sure this can equal with the drama of having been on other planets and on other planes of reality. Maybe we'd want to have a stargate down there. And perhaps there's some connection between Earth's cuttlefish and Professor Bumby who was, I believe, Orpolese.

Frek is fourteen. He's an outcast. But let's assume Renate and maybe Ida are with him. As I recall, at the end of *Frek I*, Earth still doesn't have starships? They do have a space colony, though.

June 10, 2014. Can I Do *Frek II*?

I have a feeling I'd be self-publishing *Frek II*. This entails a low amount of publicity, low expected sales, and doubtful odds of entering the children's lit canon. But I *can* do it. Almost certainly I could pick up over \$10K on a Kickstarter.

So why am I still bent on finding a publisher? Well, I do miss getting those half dozen or more reviews. And it would be nice to have *Frek II* in bookstores, and to be advertised in *Locus*. And it would help with getting the *Frek* books into the children's library canon, like I said. Very low chance of that happening with a self-pub book. But of course there's *zero* chance unless I *do* somehow write & publish *Frek II*.

I talked about *Frek II* with John Silbersack, he was pretty dubious. He made the point that *Frek II* would not be a “fresh start” in the children's books field, as it carries with it the sales numbers of *Frek I*. As for my idea of resuscitating *Frek I* this way, he said my latest plan is really the *opposite* of what we were talking about doing with a children's book that's a new start. But he understands that I have to write what I want to write. He asked to see a copy of *Frek I*, and I'm mailing him one so he'll have a clear idea of what I'm talking about.

I'm also sending him a printed, bound copy of the 450,000-word Draft 3.5 of my *Journals*. I was almost embarrassed to tell him about this project. “Usually...a book like this appears when the author is dead,” John observed. “But certainly it's good to have it be part of the public record.”

So, yeah, I'll do *Frek II*, and I'll just accept up front that I may indeed self-pub it.

Kickstart it for pb, hb, ebook, and CC editions. I've put in a lot of time and energy learning how to navigate this complex new channel, so why not enjoy my skill. What I have to do now is reread *Frek I* again and get my head back into that world again.

June 11, 2014. Kickstarter Work. Flurb Revival.

Right now I'm doing the grunt work of finishing off the publication of *Transreal Trilogy* and *All the Visions*. That's an unwieldy thing to contemplate.

(1) Processing the survey responses from my Kickstarter backers to make the Acknowledgement page. (2) Making the InDesign PDF files and covers for print, sending them to CreateSpace and Lightning. (3) Saving off the EPUBs and MOBIs, and sending those to Kindle, B&N, and my Transreal Books site. (4) Putting the ebooks on a password-protected download page for my Kickstarter backers. Ordering the pb and hb copies for the Kickstarter backers. Processing the survey responses to print out a list of the addresses. Packing and mailing the books. (5) Making websites for the books. (6) Possibly doing separate releases for ebooks of the three individual novels in *Transreal Trilogy*—but for now that's overkill, and I shouldn't think about it too much.

I probably won't finish all this before we leave on vacation for the first three weeks of July.

I just heard that the annual San Francisco LitQuake writing festival is sponsoring my proposed one hour "Flurb Reading" on October 18. I need to line up five writers. And maybe I'll put out a new #14 of *Flurb* for that event as well. Who should I ask to read? Well, let's start with a list of who I might invite to be in #14.

Me, Richard Kadrey, that girl who wrote a math story for Pravic, Tim Pratt, Michael Blumlein, Leslie What, Adam Callaway, James Worrall, Madeline Ashby, Eileen Gunn, Marc Laidlaw, Paul Di Filippo, William Gibson, Cory Doctorow, Bruce Sterling.

July 5, 2014. Alien YA? Subway Thing? Story?

I'm paralyzed. Can't get going on any novel at all. Circling around among the unsatisfactory options.

The other day I had some vague idea of a YA book about an alien among us, and it seemed kind of good. But setting up the whole thing seems hard. And maintaining the readers' interest.

I still go back to that boy in the subway idea, I like that as an opener. But teens...they sort of bore me. Setting it in NYC is maybe too hard.

I could do a transreal thing and write about myself in the 9th and 10th grades. Or even go back to grade school. I haven't really delved into that, other than in *Secret of Life*, which has my senior year of high-school.

My life during that year in Germany could be good material. Possibly an alien boy is sent to Earth as a foreign student.

July 17, 2014. Roadside Picnic by Strugatsky Bros.

I just read *Roadside Picnic*, the late 1970s Russian SF novel by Boris and Arkady Strugatsky—I've heard about it for years, but just the other day, while on a road trip to Vancouver, picked up a new edition at Powell's Books in Portland.

A really admirable book, starting with the great premise that some aliens stopped on

Earth, as if for a roadside picnic, and left all sorts of debris in a “Zone” they polluted. And the stuff is, for us, incredibly useful and terminally incomprehensible. The Strugatsky boys (and their English translator) made up lots of cute names for the debris. Happy ghosts, empties, golden sphere, grinder, bug traps.

Good inner monologues by the main character Red, a desperate, downtrodden, hard-working, severely alcoholic “stalker” who goes into the Zone to recover artifacts. His love for his wife Guta. Sideshow: corpses come back to life. Red and Guta’s daughter seems to be mutating into an alien.

The book breaks into four or five sections, and the narrative jerks forward by a year or two between the sections. The ending is tragic and uplifting. A very good book.

In my current lost-in-the-woods state regarding my next novel, I naturally start thinking that I might learn some lessons from *Roadside Picnic*.

The miracles in *Roadside Picnic* are intriguing and staggering, but they’re kind of peripheral. The emphasis is always on *character*—on Red’s struggles and, to a lesser extent, the worries of a functionary called Richard.

Not sure I could write that much *wheenk* though—all those repeating inner monologues. Yet the wheenk is really the core of the book. I *do* know how to wheenk, there’s a fair amount of it in *Big Aha*. But I typically have a higher action/wheenk ratio than in *Roadside Picnic*. But perhaps readers like a lower ratio than the one I’m typically using.

The very fact that the miraculous alien tech isn’t spelled out makes it that much more alluring. The Strugatsky boys leave you the room in which to dream. More like fantasy than SF. I generally prefer to spell out more details of the tech, to elaborate on it, to rationalize it, to propose an underlying theory for the phenomena. It’s a different style. I wouldn’t want to have Strugatsky-style tech in a whole novel, but it would be fun to have it in a story. The tech in Borges’s *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbum Tertius* was similarly sketchy and suggestive.

July 19, 2014. Evelyn Waugh. Still Want Frek II.

I’m reading a travel book, Evelyn Waugh, *A Bachelor Abroad: A Mediterranean Journal*. Written in 1929, after Waugh’s nonfiction book *Rossetti: His Life and Works*, and his novels *Decline and Fall* and *Vile Bodies*. Great fun. Love his style, his dry wit, his snobbery.

This is a classic found-in-a-summer-cabin book, a nice clean hardback first edition, inscribed by Margaret MacLean, December 25, 1933, Margaret being the aunt of my brother Embry’s new wife Joanie MacLean, whose cabin the four of us are staying in, the cabin on the shore of the remote Lac Desert, in the Quebecois woods, north of Ottawa. (S and I on a side trip from our road trip, flying from Vancouver to Ottawa and back.)

So now, turning aside from the Strugatskys, I begin imagining an SF book in the mode of a chatty, catty, hypereducated traveler’s notes. He could be our guide in an endless Flat Earth story. Maybe a novelette would be enough.

Yesterday big brother Embry and I went out fishing with Don, an Algonquin guide, and I twice nearly caught a pike, a two-foot long fish, very fierce. On the first go, he tore loose from my hook as I tried to drag him into the boat. On the second go, I got him halfway into a net, and he flipped loose. A Magic Fish. Today my brother went out alone and caught a pike, not the same one, and we’re eating this new pike for supper. Clearly good material for an incident in a novel.

I do still keep thinking of *Frek II*. There's still nothing else that grabs me as much. I miss that world. And either Hartwell takes it, or I somehow get the reversion on *Frek I*. If I came to him with a clear proposal, maybe I could get it going. He himself told me that the feasibility of various book projects changes from year to year with a given publisher.

I: Frek and the Elixir.

II: Loyal Ida.

If I ever do a volume III, it could star Frek's older big sister, Geneva. *Geneva's Galaxy*. Maybe, maybe not. "Geneva" doesn't seem like an engaging name for a heroine. But it could work if Geneva were an older woman. In any case, it's way too early to worry about III—when I don't have II at all in place.

July 20, 2014. Loyal Ida.

I'm liking the concept of the new Frek book being called *Loyal Ida*. It occurs to me that, taking a pinch of inspiration from the chronological jumps between the sections of *Roadside Picnic*, my *Loyal Ida* could start about seven years after the end of *Frek and the Elixir*.

In the first volume, Frek was, I believe, 12 and Ida was 10. It was 3003. If the new volume is seven years later, Frek is 19, Ida is 17, and it's 3010.

Perfect YA positioning for Ida's age, I'd have to say. Not that I plan to get into the default style tropes of YA. I want to write my story as true and clear as I can.

The seven-year gap means that I can set *Loyal Ida* in something of a new world—things will have changed that much since *Frek*. And I can skip (or summarize in flashbacks) the lumpy transition period. A key desideratum is that the readers shouldn't have to start with working to get up to speed. The book Should feel like a standalone and not a sequel.

I'd like for *Loyal Ida* to start *in medias res* in a new locale. In that Mistport I've been talking about, where they have the vaalships. Frek and Renate are married, and they get kidnapped in the first chapter. Possibly they leave a toddler behind.

There's a Grullo colony in Mistport, and a girl grullo becomes Ida's helper. Gibby's daughter LuHu. We'll have regular trade with funny Unipuskers. The Orpolese are seemingly gone, although eventually we'll find some of them inside our sun. We'll assume the branecast disappeared during the transition, that shit was too confusing. I'd like try to keep *Loyal Ida* on Earth, with some elements of intergalactic and transdimensional intrigue. But maybe eventually Ida goes inside our Sun, and funnels into that alternate universe, the Planck brane, and encounters the Magic Pig.

We need an arc. Ida is seventeen. So we might suppose that she's maturing and that she's finding romance, identity, career, etc. Overcoming some personal issue. Overall, I would do well to do as in *Frek I*, and to base *Loyal Ida* on the monomyth, that is, on a woman's version thereof, as I've discussed before.

Re. the Woman's Monomyth, in order to set up for the eventual Atonement With The Mother stage, we need for Ida to be at odds with Lora Huggins near the start. We'll need for her to meet a "Bridegroom" and an "Abuser."

July 21, 2014. The Magic Pike. Long Journey.

So now Sylvia and I are flying from Ottawa back to Vancouver, with a thousand mile drive back to San Jose facing us after that, and we're a little tired of travel—the effort and the steady expense. I have this idea we should spend two nights in Vancouver and look around the

city a little more, and possibly see Bill Gibson, but now this maybe seems like too much trouble. Hard to judge just now, we've had a long day. Four hour drive from Lac Desert to Ottawa, three somewhat tedious hours in the Canada Historical Museum, two hours at the airport, and now these six hours in the jet.

Lac Desert was lovely. I almost caught a pike. The epic had four acts:

(1) I hook him, about two feet long, get him close to the boat, he's fighting and thrashing and twists free of the hook. Should have used a net, but we didn't have one.

(2) Boat back to Embry and Joanie's cottage, have lunch, rest, and return to this same beautiful little inlet off the intricate fractal river/lake waterways with a net. Our Algonquin guide Don hooks a pike, maybe the very same one. I get the net, Don reels him in—after letting him run out the line three or four times, tiring him—I get the net half around the pike, the lure snags on the net, the pike twists free.

(3) The next morning Embry and the guide go out without me and return with... "A perch," Sylvia tells me. "I think it was a big perch." But, no, it's a *pike*! Don cooks him for our dinner, breading him and frying him in chunks in bacon grease, the fish is really kind of overcooked in my opinion, but it's good to eat him.

(4) That evening I motor back to the special inlet with Embry and Don, and I use the same lure that Don used, but the original Magic Pike isn't there.

The lake water wasn't all that cold at Joanie's, and the water had that limp, kind of jelly-like smoothness of fresh water. Very nice. Pretty reflections. Saw a lot of totem poles in an Ottawa museum. Eager to do a painting with a lake background and some totem figures in front. A Canadian artist called Emily Carr did some paintings along these lines, with very lovely melting backgrounds and finely shaded and modeled dreamy totem heads.

On the plane I'm reading another Cory Doctorow YA novels, this one is called *For the Win*, I'd forgotten about this one, it came between *Little Brother* and *Pirate Cinema*. It turns out I have a free CC version of it on my Kindle and I'm kind of desperado for reading matter on this plane ride. *For the Win* is a page-turner, with interesting ideas about the virtual currency of game worlds, and with a strong streak of political activism. But a little didactic for my taste. It's very much in the same mold as *Pirate Cinema*. I realize I would not be able to write a book like this either, no more than I could write a *Wrinkle in Time*. I'm into a more quirky and intimate and antisocial mode.

After reading for a long time, I watched the documentary movie *Finding Vivian Maier*, about an eccentric, unknown woman photographer in 1950s NYC. very interesting, and funny in parts, despite terrible plane-earphone sound and cruddy resolution on the back-of-seat screen. I'm now very interested in seeing some good renditions of these photos.

July 25, 2014. Travel Notes. Kickstarter Work.

It's the morning of the last day of our seventeen-day trip today, one last drive ahead of us. We just passed a night at a Motel 6 in Weed, California. I've been awake since 5 am, and Sylvia's still sleeping..

Day before yesterday we drove in hideous traffic on I-5 and strong rain, it felt like playing Russian roulette. At one point I cut belatedly across three lanes of traffic to get to an exit and found myself with an unrelenting red semi tractor-trailer truck not more than a yard behind our bumper. A brush with doom. My fault. Gives me the creeps to think about it. I made it into

the exit ramp, but felt creepy all day thinking about that narrow escape. As if there had been a branch in time, and we're living on in this branch, but in the other branch we're dead.

Another long day on the road yesterday, full of incident. Nice driving across a high desert landscape near the Cascades, with snow-capped peaks of Mt. Jefferson and the Sisters, the Allman Bros playing from S's iPhone. That lovely swooping guitar solo at the end of "Ramblin' Man." We heard that same song while driving in the relatively empty northeastern part of Yellowstone some years ago.

Bend was a let-down, so overbuilt and touristy. I bought a pair of Birkenstocks there, haven't worn those since the 80s, when we first moved to California. Staring at the new pair, I had a heavy flashback overlay memories of the older pairs—I went through maybe 3 pairs back then.

We stopped in Klamath Falls, Oregon, as well, one of those lifeless, emptied-out country towns. Some nice facades on one the old buildings, one, the Wilson Building, with pine cones and cow skulls. I always tell Sylvia I want to resettle into these towns, and she shudders, and I think of Wm. Burroughs's phrase about his travels through SA in *Yage Letters*, "nightmare fear of stasis."

Not long after, we passed through Dorris, California, a town where my high-school friend Mike Dorris may have had some relatives (he was part Modoc Indian). He killed himself, long ago, maybe in 1994, twenty years gone. I once sent him a photo of me standing in front of the Dorris town sign...on our last trip through these parts. Poor Dorris.

And then we got into a lovely drive across high desert fruited plains towards Mt. Shasta in the golden late afternoon light, staring at that mountain for 60 miles driving towards it, feeling like Neal Cassady and Luanne Henderson, what a thing to see a mountain from 60 miles away. I'm so happy/lucky to still be around, running one more trip with Sylvia.

Turning my thoughts back to life as usual, here's a To Do list. I'll add check marks as the things get done over the coming weeks and months.

- ✓ Register *Trilogy* and *Visions* with Lightning as hardbacks and paperbacks.
- ✓ Order some large mailing envelopes.
- ✓ Make the address labels for the Kickstarter rewards.
- ✓ Make the bookplates for the KS books.
- ✓ Do the Jan-June, 2014, royalties for Transreal Books.
- Issue Mathematicians in Love and Jim and the Flims in pb/ebook/CC editions.
- Do individual pb/ebook editions of the three *Trilogy* novels.

I was talking to a guy in Bend, a bookstore owner who'd recently dipped into self-publishing. The guy is writing a novel about killer pigs, the title is great: *Tuskers*. He's a maniac, he's gonna write the whole novel in a week.

Taking to this guy, it hit me once again that most of what I've learned about self-publishing isn't very well documented. I'm like a frontiersman, and I have info to share. I could write a bunch of blog posts about it, or a little book, but I may be doing that stuff is bad enough, without having to write about it as well. My publishing that *How To Make An Ebook* booklet was kind of a fluke, more like a test-run. But I do have a long *Notes for Transreal Books* document I'm always revising—I'm writing down the various tricks and gotchas before I forget them all—and if I really had nothing better to do, I could turn those *Notes* into a self-pub book.

But I hope and pray, dear Muse, that I do have better things to do.

July 28-Aug 6, 2014. Rewrite My Story “Petroglyph Man.”

July 28, 2014.

I'm dissatisfied about my 5,000 word short story “Petroglyph Man,” it's been turned down by F&SF, Strange Horizons, and Clarkesworld. I'm thinking I'll do a revision and maybe change it a bit. I'll run it in *Flurb* #14 if all else fails, and if I'm not ashamed of it. But I do have my doubts about it now.

Gordon of F&SF made the point that the first part of the story has nothing startling in it, just a married couple, and it might be good to frontload something thrilling or startling. He also remarked that the eventual pattern of the fantasy in my story is a fairly familiar one, and I'm mulling over some way to make it gnarlier. If it had an SF element, I could send it to Asimov's.

How to cobble in some frontloaded gnarly SF? I have an image of a cloud of petroglyph men, like gnats. Fat atoms. Or ant-sized ones, seething. Ideograms. Glyphs, labels. I always think of Phil's *Time Out Of Joint*, where, instead of a soft-drink machine, Rable Gumm finds a piece of paper with the label, “soft-drink machine.” The petroglyph men could be labels like that.

Why is Julio seeing things that way? At present he's just a dull loser who does tech-support. What if he's been doing some meditation technique? Or using some “mind gym” or “[brain fitness](#)” software that he does tech support for. SharpBrains, Brain Age, Brain Twister, Vibrant Brains, Brain Trainer, Think-O-Meter, Brain Workshop. Maybe it's called, uh, *Duh-No-More*. Or, wait, I don't want this to be a heavily comic story, really. Maybe JOOST, Hofstadter's “Jump Out Of The System?” No, there was a peer-to-peer video-sharing service with the name JOOST. Level Up. Subtext? Not that's a blog publishing software company. Borges's phrase Algebra and Fire? Well, a poet and a photographer have used that for their sites. The Rudic Protocol (i.e., the teachings of Rudy)—nah.

I've got it! The Benthic Revelation. Or, no, Benthos Brain.

“The benthic zone is the ecological region at the lowest level of a body of water such as an ocean or a lake, including the sediment surface and some sub-surface layers. Organisms living in this zone are called benthos, e.g. the benthic invertebrate community, including crustaceans and polychaetes.” ---[Wikipedia](#).

Scientist Steve Swearingen, the author of *The Benthic Revelation*, resembled a benthic crustacean.

The software was created by a quantum physicist, let's say. Lets you see the bare underlying math of the world.

But Julio is in some way using the software wrong. He's not the brightest flashlight in the hardware store, not the sharpest ice-pick in the bar, not the deepest puddle on the driveway.

August 4, 2014

So I started a rewrite, with Julio being a tech support contractor for the Benthos Brain self-improvement software. I had the idea that using the ware lets you see the deep structure of reality. And Julio is having trippy ideas.

But this isn't tight enough. And really it's still just a drug story or a crazy-person story.

Suppose instead that Benthos is an app for your smart phone. And it goes on the web and finds things that *look like* what you're seeing on the display screen, and maybe Benthos morphs your photos partway into images of the social-mind archetypes underlying your photo subjects. You don't really have to take photos, you can use it as an AR (augmented reality) app.

Julio should actively do something to make the petroglyph man real.

And there should be some problem that he fixes.

August 6, 2014.

So I finished the rewrite, making the thing into an SF story instead of fantasy, and I and submitted it to Asimov's. (And four or five months later they bought it.)

August 16, 2014. Galactic Road Trip / Norwegian Star Ship.

Here's an idea that might be a seed for the novel I want to write. The idea starts with a journal note about a scene I saw in Balestrand, Norway, in 2010.

The high-school brass band played a few numbers, including the Norwegian national anthem and *Happy Birthday*—the musician kids all pale-skinned blondes and redheads. An official made a short speech, a woman in a Norwegian folk dress broke a bottle of champagne against the hull, and we joined a stream of locals filing up the gangplank to look around the huge *Stril Challenger*. And then the ship took off for a little cruise across the fjord and back, although Sylvia and I had gotten off by then—I was unsure about how long the cruise might be. Later, after the passengers came back, we watched as the ship cavorted around the fjord, with smaller launches buzzing around it—I think of the word, *lighter*, used to mean a smaller boat that you use to unload a barge. I like that ships use smaller boats as extensions of themselves. Imagine still smaller shuttle pods emerging from the lighters. A fractal regress of ships.

When I saw this event, I had a vision of a great mothership with smaller ships circling it—the lighters. And one of the lighters darts down to a boy's house. The lighter appears in the room of my novel's young heroine, Zoe, to take her on a trip. As the lighter carries her off, Zoe cries out for some precious thing that he forgot—a toy robot or her dog.

I wouldn't mind writing about another talking dog like Wow from *Frek*. Call this one Clod. And Clod brings along some special, numinous object. Perhaps it's an odd leathery thing that Zoe and Clod found on the beach, and Clod likes to chew it. Eventually this object will be important, but as yet I don't know what it is.

If they end up inside a starship it gets boring—that usual passenger-ship analogue with cabins, and so on. The critic Jo Walton wrote that it's interesting to have starships be like cars instead. They leave from your driveway and go where you want to go. Robert Sheckley's spaceships were like.

So rather than rejoining the starship, assume either that the lighter doesn't rejoin the starship—or don't have there be a big mothership at all. The lighter could be a small scout ship. I think it's more interesting if there is a big ship, but the small one is acting as a rogue or renegade.

I see the lighter or scout-ship that picks up my character Zoe as being the size of a car, and it has a driver, and the driver might be like Neal Cassady, and my novel could be kind of a YA version of *On the Road*, only the Kerouac character is played by a twelve-year-old boy. I might call my new story or novel *Galactic Road Trip* or *The Flat Earth*, or *Million Mile Road Trip*.

Maybe the captain of the big ship disapproves of the small ship's pilot picking up the boy. That sets up a plot element—the fascist mothership is pursuing the boy and his older pal. The older guy is a father/brother figure, a trickster, a holy fool.

August 17-18, 2014. Flat Earth Novel!

Sunday morning, before church, and then sitting quietly in church, I had the idea of merging together three old story ideas—“Starship Launch,” “Galactic Kicks,” and “Endless Road Trip.” I was suddenly seeing these ideas fused into a novel. I started working up a rough outline for [book](#), and I’m repeatedly revising the outline now. Today I think I’ll call the novel *Flat Earth*. Starting with the idea of a boy named Villy who goes for an endless road trip with an alien guy in a car.

Monday I was working on the outline for a couple of hours sitting in the Los Gatos Coffee Roasting with my laptop. It felt so good to be (kind of) writing again. It’s been almost a year time since I was working on *The Big Aha*—I finished the final draft on September 2, 2013. I really miss writing novels. Working on stories is good, but they get done so fast.

There’s a plot problem—what kind of story can you have if you’re driving a flying car across an endless great plain? The default is to go for picaresque, to be inventing lots of new things, but that’s kind of dull—a string of unrelated stories. A slide-show of your family vacation.

I need an arc—like in *Frek*, where he’s getting the “elixir” to restore life on Earth. If it’s just a story or a novella, it might be enough if he just escapes the chasing mothership (if there *is* a mothership) and beats out some other cars, like it’s a race. The race being another default plot for a road story. A picaresque race.

There might be a couple or three other skimmer cars on the flat Earth, some are enemies, some are allies. Car chase is an option. Or simply trying to overtake each other—all of them hitting the same stations of the picaresque flow and thus providing a thread of story. A visits Quiz, then B visits Quiz and there’s an epiphany. B goes on to Zaaz, and then A hits Zaaz, making another narrative zap, etc. Wonder upon wonder, flash upon flash, like a race or like a football game. Ebb and flow, with the level of play continually rising.

Images of the alien guy in the car who picks up Villy. He might be like...me, Neal Cassady, Greg Gibson, Niles Schoening, Dennis Poague, Jon Pearce, Nick Herbert, Vernon Head, and/or my AA friend Scott. He’s a father/elder-brother figure, a trickster, a holy fool.

At some point, they think they’ve come back to the town they started from. San Jose. Is it the same one or is it different? Was this all a dream?

No it wasn’t a dream. And I don’t want to merely notice a slight evidence of a magical journey and wonder, that’s a standard trope, too twee—the rosebud under the pillow, like that.

August 19, 2014. The Alien-Summoning Rattle.

We need some gimcrack that can summon alien from another world, like from the flat world. Maybe I call this other world the Gone Wall. (Eventually, starting in August, 2015, I began calling it the mappy world.)

Initially I visualized a whirring gizmo with higher-dimensional parts that wobble in and out of visibility. I should do that, yes, but it’s better to have the rattle made of *natural* materials, as opposed to being made of machined metal. It’s made of something like alien plants or like scraps of hide from alien animals. But it’s still five-dimensional.

I’m modeling this doohickey on a cool rattle from Ghana that I bought yesterday from my friend Scott who’s caretaking the remaining stock of the defunct curio shop Gina’s on Main

Street of Los Gatos. Scott let me come into the abandoned store and buy anything I wanted for whatever prices I wanted to pay. I bought three rattles made from sticks and gourds, also a couple of beaded children's purses. And a couple of days later I went back and got a giant gourd wrapped in a fishnet with cowrie shells at the knots, also a heavy ram's-head mask carved from wood.



Figure 1: The Ghana world-unfurling rattle.

The alien-summoning Ghana rattle has disks of gourd skin, like washers, and they're mounted on a stick with regular bumps in it. The washers are slightly concave, and they're in pairs, with the hollow sides facing each other, and with symbols branded onto the convex sides. When I tilt the rattle, they march down along the axis, orderly but jostling, tripping over the gentle bumps on the axis rod, moving in a rolling, plausible gait. Like the legs of a centipede.



Figure 2: The scrotum rattle.

My other favorite rattle that I got is like a giant scrotum, wonderfully wrinkly and gnarled, with a dick-like stalk protruding and drooping towards the base of the sac. A little wood plug closes off an irregular hole in the side scrotum, a hole, through which the rattle-seeds were inserted. The surface is hard and shiny, with patches of gourd-pith that haven't been fully scraped off. Maybe *this* rattle does something else.

August 22, 2014. Happy to Start a Novel.

I'm having fun with this new project. Joyous. Working out things like the illumination and the weather. Trig sketches and web searches.

There's a Rancid song, "Radio," from *Let's Go*, with the line: "When I got the music, I got a place to go." Or, as NOFX says it in their reggae cover of the same song, "When I got the music in me, I got a place I can go."

I pray to the Muse that I can really get it rolling. I think it's gonna happen. *Flat Earth!*

August 23-25, 2014. Foundations of Flat Earth.

When I woke up Saturday morning, August 23, I started having doubts about *Flat Earth*, and when I read over my outline, I felt even more dubious. It's gonna be hard. But the thought of giving up is even worse.

Flat Earth is the only option I've got right now. I'd rather not go back to *Frek II*—yes I want to do that book eventually, but right now I'm longing to do something fresh. This new idea interests me. And a fresh book is more likely to sell to Tor. I would be nice to sell this book to a publisher, rather than doing my books on my own. And if I could sell *Flat Earth* and it did okay, it'd be a lot easier to sell *Frek II*.

So I'll work through the fog and confusion and see if I can nail down a reasonably coherent scientific underpinning and an engaging plot outline for *Flat Earth*. The problems seem almost insuperable, but I've done this before. Working out the details for an SF novel takes a really sustained and intense focus. That's why so few people do it.

So I'm staying on this for several days, separating out the various problems and repeatedly revising my solutions. Some of my new material is below, and some of it is folded into the *Outline* and *Ideas* sections above.

Do I Need an FTL Ship?

Is there a real need to have the FTL ship going to the nearby Wacker wall at the start of the book? It could just be that an alien in a skimmer car shows up out of the blue from the wall and picks up Zoe without anyone traveling to the wall at all. But "an alien out of the blue" is exactly the start of *Frek*, and I'd like *Flat Earth* to be slightly different.

An *upside* of having an FTL the nearby Wacker wall is that this sets up a link that brings Zoe's location to the aliens' attention. And then the aliens can show up there at Moffat Field, and Zoe can do something to get their special attention. Just as in *Frek*, I would need a reason for the alien to pick Zoe, so it's a big help to have the FTL bring an alien right to Zoe. If, instead, Kunk uses a conventional rocket drive to visit the nearby Wacker all, then it takes about a year to go there, so it's kind of pointless in terms of the story. The alien could just come over without Kunk visiting at all. But if we have the FTL, the alien ship can weirdly and miraculously show up at the moment when Kunk leaves.

A *downside* of having FTL is that, if you're not careful, you then have a gizmo for effortlessly hopping between endlessly many locales. And if everything is possible, then nothing matters. But what I want is more of a slow, continuous road-trip type progression across the surface of the flat Earth. Like the lines traced by the early navigators on our round Earth.

To limit the FTL hopping, I'll be thinking of the FTL travel as involving a matter swap across a pair of stargates. You need a sending and a receiving station. So right before Kunk leaves, it's like he's scanning for a wireless signal. Scanning for an FTL signal from the nearby Wacker wall. And, to explain how the alien comes I'll make the FTL transmission always be a swap.

There *will* be some other FTL stations on the endless flat Earth and, for that matter, on the neighboring Wacker wall. So the alien's car could hope around here, and Kunk could hop back. So there might be a few more hops in the book.

But to start with, we'll assume the alien can't find any other gates, and his search for one is part of the quest that he and Zoe and Villy go on.

How Do You Unfurl the Earth?

I'd like that Ghana rattle to play a role. If I don't use it for summoning aliens or for an FTL jump, then it can be for unfurling Earth into a Wacker world. The alien comes through when Kunk leaves. The alien swaps places with Kunk. The rattle has nothing to do with the hop, it's just something that the alien brings. And then Villy uses it to unfurl the Earth.

Why doesn't the alien use the rattle? Perhaps the rattle only works if a *local* shakes it. Like only the registered owner of a given home can order more cable TV channels. The alien was going to find some properly important Earthling to shake the rattle, but he doesn't get a chance to. One scenario might be that Clod grabs the alien's rattle. The alien has his arm hanging out of the car with a rattle, and Clod jumps up and snatches it. Like the way Rudy's dog Slug used to do—that dog was so frantic for fetching sticks.

And then Villy shakes it just a little, but it makes him feel queasy, so he puts it on his dresser, and he has weird dreams, and in the morning he grabs the rattle and shakes it really hard, and the Earth unfurls and then the alien shows up in his car.

How Does Unfurling Feel?

It ought to be very dramatic when Earth unfurls. The unfurling is going to be cataclysmic—heavy tremors and shaking, as if Mother Earth is tearing herself apart. And then Earth vibrates into shaky light and the scene becomes magical. Voices chiming in the light. And then our world reassembles itself and it's an infinite plain instead of a sphere.

The experience is kind of ecstatic, like a white-light acid trip, but I *don't* want to say anything that's druggy. Mystic revelation. Speeded-up dream. PG rated.

It could be that be the alien who brought the rattle is an aficionado of the unfurling experience. An addict, if you will. He likes to go to other planets and bring the rattle so he can experience that fabulous rush yet again.

Zoe and Villy

The main characters are Zoe and Villy. Co-starts. I'll switch between their POVs over the book, but I'll start with Zoe. Makes it a little easier for me. Women hardly ever read my books anyway, so I'm not going to try and have a woman as a standalone main character.

Suppose Villy goes on the trip with Zoe right from the start. Not brother and sister, we want a romance option. Villy's the girl next door, or from down the street. More of a pal than being a girlfriend, at least for now, but that'll change. (Like Frek and Renate.)

Maybe Villy is more into science than Zoe. Villy is, I don't know, good with her hands. A tinkerer. Or maybe I don't need to try too hard to reverse the default cultural expectations. We'll see what works.

September 4, 2014. "Endless Road Trip."

I've been away from the journals section of these notes for over a week. But in the background I was repeatedly rereading and revising them. For the last four or five of days, I've felt weak and dizzy from a virus. I did a first [blog post](#) about what I'm variously calling *Wacker World* or *The Road Goes on Forever*. Rudy Jr. was visiting with his family for Labor Day weekend. And I was working on a painting that I'm calling *Endless Road Trip*.

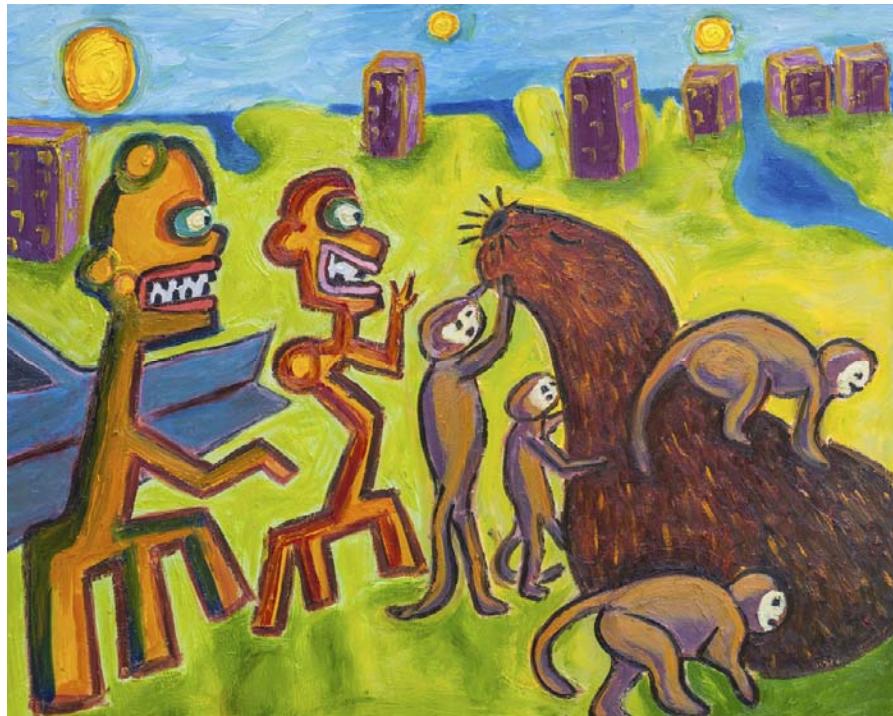


Figure 3: Endless Road Trip. 30"x24." Oil on canvas, Sept, 2014.

By way of jogging my imagination regarding the chapters to come, I did this painting of a couple of aliens on a very long road trip, and they're looking at some creatures. Not that my novels always stick to the things I paint for them in advance. The painting is a way of stirring the pot, rather than being a way of making a precise outline.

These aliens, they're riding in a purple hover car that can hit speeds of up to, say, a million miles per hour, which is no sweat, given that limitative speed of light is well over six hundred million miles per hour. The aliens have my book's young heroes Villy and Zoe along, but I didn't paint those two. You might say this image is from the humans' viewpoint.

This first place where they're stopping—way west of California—was going to be called the Land of the Ants, but then I got into a capybara-and-squirrel monkey thing, so that's what's in the painting.

I like the looks of the alien on the left. Pinchley. He's like a cartoon-character tough guy with a whiskery jaw. The round thing on top of his head might be a derby. That's Yampa on the right, she's Pinchley's wife. She's looking at the squirrel monkeys and the capybara and saying, in a screechy discordant voice, "Aww, aren't they *cute!*" Maybe her voice is so horrible that it dissolves one of the animals, or turns it inside out.



Figure 4: Capybara and squirrel monkeys.

Why capybara and squirrel monkeys? Well, a couple of weeks ago I happened to retweet the photo shown above, and for unknown reasons this became my most widely circulated tweet ever, with maybe a hundred thousand views. Part of the appeal must be that the size scale is so odd—you think of primates as being fairly tall, but you think of furry, lumpy animals as being small. Turns out capybaras are the largest rodents in the world, running up to four feet high. And squirrel monkeys are tiny. The capybaras live in the mouths of Brazilian rivers. The Brazilians eat them, and they refer to them as “fish,” which makes it okay to eat capybaras on Friday. There’s something Boschian about the photo, those odd little “men” are like clerics attending to the massive furry creature. And the capybara looks *so* relaxed, so at ease.

Sept 27, 2014. Bruce Sterling Story. Revising Journals.

For a lot of September I was working on an SF story “Totem Poles” with Bruce Sterling, and I didn’t like what he’d been doing with the story. Around September 5, 2104, I got all worked up, and sent him an angry email that I regretted, and then (in my own eyes) redeeming myself by doing an insane full-day push to finally get Version 7 of the story into coherent and marketable shape, doing ten rewrites in one single work-day running from 9 am to 11 pm, and ending up with what I’d call a masterpiece.

And then I was hoping/praying that Bruce doesn’t start arguing about what I’ve done, or doesn’t decide to trash and gut it just to bug me. But I’m not in a position to prod him because I lost face by losing my temper in that one angry email, I just have to wait. Once I lose my temper, the other guy has the upper hand. Bruce and I have been around this circuit multiple times, I think “Totem Poles” might be our eighth collaboration.

But Bruce *did* keep on ruining the story, and by September 19, 2014, we’d reached Bruce’s Version 10, in which he stripped out various key segues from my excellent Version 9, which I truly thought to be publishable. Working with Bruce is so very tiresome. The last few times I’ve sent him a version, he simply cuts it by five hundred words, adding at most a few

phrases, and replaces great swatches of my witty and touching dialog with stilted gobbledegook.

I got Bruce to admit that maybe, just maybe, he'd gone a tad overboard in his latest defacement of my work. He suggested we set the story aside for a couple of months. And I don't have much enthusiasm for working on yet another restoration. So the story is supposedly out of the picture until mid to late November, at which time, sigh, I'll write Version 11. That'll be my sixth version.

Probably I'll write the new version in a week or two, though. I want to get this little project done.

Bruce is like the co-director Lars von Trier in the film *Five Obstructions*. In this documentary movie—which I just saw on CD—von Trier badgers Jørgen Leth, an older director friend of his, into remaking a certain classic, short film of his five times—under weirdly onerous and arbitrary constraints. Supposedly von Trier is doing this for Leth's own good. To “teach” Leth something. Yeah, right. To teach Leth what a turd von Trier is.

For most of September, 2014, I've also been revising my (currently) 450K-word-long *Journals 1990-2015*, updating my proof-printed version 3 for a version 4. At this point I only have 300 more pages to go. Proofreading, doing stylistic revisions, and cutting some spots where it seems to lag. I'd like to get it down to 420K words so I can fit it into a CreateSpace volume, which is cheaper to proof and to print than Lightning.

I still have maybe month's worth of revision to go for this Version 4 pass.

Sept 28 - Oct 1, 2014. Dread and Confusion. Sales and Income.

I'm feeling some concern that I still haven't started writing *Million Mile Road Trip*—or any other novel. I tell myself this isn't bothering me as much as usual.

But it is. I'd be happier if I was writing right now.

I don't want my writing career to be over. But, wait, Rudy, even if, god forbid, you can't get *Million Mile Road Trip* to work, that doesn't mean you're done with writing. At worst, I might be slowing down. Maybe only finishing a novel every three or four years—instead of every two years. Or maybe only writing stories.

In my growing frenzy, I need to remember that I always feel this way by the time I start a novel. I need to reach such a level of dread and anxiety that it becomes easier to start writing the novel than it is to keep stalling.

My latest stalling technique is to tell myself that this novel has to be different.

The other day, I saw a nice review of my 2013 novel, *The Big Aha*. The review was by Norman Spinrad, in *Asimov's SF Magazine*. Norman enjoyed my book, but there was something about the tenor of his praise that made me realize I'm repeating myself. Norman was like, “This is another of Rucker's crazy, far-out, trippy, more-scientific-than-it-seems novel. A jolly freakfest with more political content than Rucker even realizes.” Not in those exact words.

The book that Norman describes is indeed the book I set out to write. And I realize I did something similar in *Jim and the Flims*, in *Turing & Burroughs*, and in *Hylozoic*. And, hell, in all my other books.

Is that so bad? And why would I have to change now?

Do keep in mind that I still have some loyal readers. And I like to think that, in the long run, some of my books will be highly esteemed.

But today I'm grappling with the paper tiger of whether it's a mistake to keep writing the same kind of book over and over.

How well are my recent books doing in the market? Here are some sales numbers I have, combining print and ebooks sales, as well as any "reward" copies given out via Kickstarter.

Title	Sales
<i>Hylozoic</i> (Tor)	2,100
<i>Jim and the Flims</i> (<i>Night Shade</i>)	700
<i>Turing & Burroughs</i> (Transreal Books)	654
<i>The Big Aha</i> (Transreal Books)	610

Table 5: My Recent Sales

About the numbers. The *Hylozoic* cumulative sales numbers were 2,007 in 2011, so I've bumped them up very slightly since then. The income I report for *Hylozoic* was the advance, as was the money noted for *Jim and the Flims*. I don't think I ever got any sales numbers for *Jim and the Flims*—*Night Shade* went out of business soon after this novel came out—but I'm guessing it's sold under 1000 copies, and *Jim* only exists in hardback. For the *Big Aha* sales and income, I'm including the Kickstarter reward copies and the Kickstarter donations, which seems legit. It's all about how many copies went out and how much money I got.

Now that I've figured out the Kickstarter + Transreal Books angle, the income is as good as with a trad pub. I'm fairly sure I could enjoy the same modest level of success with *Million Mile Road Trip*.

But with a trad publisher like Tor, the sales could be higher. So I have this yen to sell the new novel to a trad pub like I used to do. But I'm no longer sure if Tor would buy one of my regular novels from me at all. Maybe I'm making myself unhappy over something unattainable. It's a little like someone who gets the training to do a certain kind of job—and then says they don't want to do that job as the pay is too low.

In other words, it's self-defeating to let the market factors get too deeply into my head. Maybe I should just write what I want, and if I stick to my new Kickstarter + Transreal Books paradigm, I can do alright with it.

Fallback plan: say that I just want to get *Million Mile Road Trip* off my back so that I could move on to *Frek II*. Well, then I could rush *Million Mile Road Trip*, making it a mere novella (20K to 40K)—though how the fuck do you publish a *novella*? Or even just bust it down to longish short story or, god help us, a "novelette" (10K to 20K).

I can do that, sure, but it'd be nice to get some rhythm going and push *Million Mile Road Trip* a little further and see what happens. Before looking to do *Frek II*.

The odds are that *Frek II* ends up being another Rucker freak-fest extravaganza as well, and quite likely I'll have to self-publish that one too. So no rush. Although certainly it wouldn't hurt to ask Hartwell if Tor might by now be open to a *Frek II* after all.

Long story short, I'm anxious about writing *Million Mile Road Trip*, and the only way out of my anxiety is to start.

I've been thinking I *might* make the new book be less of a throw-in-the-kitchen-sink extravaganza than usual. And I *might* write a book that's somewhat different from the ones I've been writing. If, in fact, I was willing and able to write such a book. But maybe that's all a

distraction and a delusion. Maybe I should write my usual kind of book *only more so!*

Another factor in play is that, as I've mentioned several times, I have this notion that if I skew my book towards YA I might have a better shot at a trad pub, and a chance of that fabled wider market. I'm not against trying for YA, as long it doesn't mean I'm downgrading what I do.

Putting all these notions into the mix, I'd get these potential guidelines:

- Take the YA challenge seriously, give it a fair shot. Note that YA means short book—like 60K to 70K words. Like that. With lots of short chapters, like 20 or 30 of them. Could be fun.
- YA also means I can make the book somewhat cartoony and parodistic. Like an episode of *Futurama*. Use familiar tropes. Let the readers relax and wallow.
- Use as many science gimmicks as you like, as long as they're simple. At most one really hard one.

I'm approaching a point of diminishing returns with all this agonizing. I need to screw up my courage and start writing the novel—and get a feel for how it wants to come out.

Another thought. I was in effect adding too many constraints to the problem of designing the scenario for my novel. On the one hand, I wanted my novel's world to have a certain very strange form—that is, an endless plain with zillions of civilizations. On the other hand, I was saying that I shouldn't use my customary arsenal of weird science ideas.

And today I realized that I really have to discard that second constraint.

Telling me to write SF without weird science is like telling Keith Richards to play rock without a guitar.

Sept 29 - Oct 4, 2014. Revising Draft Outline.

I'm in the process of making potentially disastrous revisions to my outline for *Million Mile Road Trip*. To be on the safe side, I'm saving the older outline as well. In this entry, I'm tracking my evolving thoughts on plot and setup issues in the new outline.

No teleportation.

If you're teleporting across the surface of Wacker world, then you're hopping, and the different spots might as well be in parallel worlds. And I explicitly don't want parallel worlds. So, to avoid any suggestion of hopping between reality sheets, it's far better if the aliens and my characters are driving around in million-miles-per-hour cars, or in airplanes, or are being swept along by vast storms.

The reason I mention teleportation is that I'd initially thought of using teleportation for the skewed science experiment that ends up unfurling our world.

But instead of that, I'll use the Wacker sizer app, which resizes objects.

The Wacker sizer.

The produce unfurling effect that I need, the Wacker sizer inflates the alien-inhabited atoms at the femto levels, growing them to planetary size.

The Wacker sizer app uses Bluetooth or radio waves to screw with reality.

What causes the disaster?

Villy gets his own copy of the Wacker sizer app and turns it up too high.

The Aliens Appear

Villy starts screwing with the Wacker sizer app on his phone.

Villy and Zoe see a skinny orange arm with two elbows sticking out of ground. The low end of the arm tapers to a microscopic point in the dirt. The upper end of the arm bears a hand clutching a magic rattle—which Villy gets hold of. The alien is down in the atomic level and she just happened to show her arm.

As sound accompaniment, Zoe made an especially sour note on her saxophone, mixed with a crooked honk on Villy's trumpet, and a wet slide on Skeezip's trombone.

The next day the rattle will serve as a beacon to lead the aliens to Zoe.

They drive to her really fast.

What was it like for the aliens before the unfurling?

They were living on a planet that we would think of as an atomic nucleus. They didn't have a bright sun, they had a glow in the sky from the electrons.

They were made of dark matter, which our science doesn't know about. You have dark matter scraps stuck to each atom. When you enlarge an atom to be a planet-sized patch on the Wacker world wall, the dark matter scraps are the objects on the new planets. And the atoms in those new objects are dark-dark matter specks that were within the dark matter scraps.

What happened to Tina Wacker?

In classic YA fashion, Zoe will be looking to rescue her mother Tina Wacker. Tina's disappearance might have something to do with a plot or intrigue between Gaspar and his wife Lutece.

Or Tina falls into that orange hole in the ground where the orange alien arm appeared. Maybe Gaspar pushes her in.

Tina is stored as a dark-matter scrap on an atom. She's like a tiny song that you hear in your head in the background. Zoe can hear the song ever so faintly.

Only one Wacker world.

I'd talked of having two, three, or more unfurled Wacker worlds. Don't do that. It's just our Earth that unfurls. Key on the magic moment of—*zing*—our world unfurls. This has never happened before, we are the first Wacker world.

I'd wanted to have a distant Wacker world so I could have someone looking at that one through a telescope so as to better understand *our* Wacker world. But I can throw Villy and Zoe up in some ultra weather so they can see our Wacker world.

Big Wacker world.

How do I make Wacker world stretch all the way across the space of your universe? I inflate each atom in Earth to the size of a planet, see "[The Atomic Planets of a Wacker World](#)."

I want a really good variation of worlds. I don't want to focus exclusively on past versions of Earth. I *would* like a world like ancient Egypt, but with real gods and aliens. And a planet of the ants, planet of the flying jellyfish, far future humanoids. Among other things. I don't think I want to see an ever-so-slight variations of our Earth, although maybe we could do that old routine: "Am I really back home or not?"

More than picaresque.

I'd like to focus on just a few spots, four at most, and there should be some plot links among the spots. But also I want some fast-forward streaming sequences to savor the grandeur of the vast Wacker world.

December 19, 2014. Discarded Outlines: Mashup of Versions 1 & 2.

I've shuffled two abandoned outlines for *Million Mile Road Trip* here: Version 1 is from September, 2014, and Version 2 from October, 2014.

I've decided I'm not using either outline—they're too complicated, and the whole notion of being able plan a novel in advance is really kind of specious. But these attempts at an outline did produce some ideas I will eventually use. I don't know if, as I move forward with the book, I ever will end up making a "final" outline.

I may just work things out in my writing notes as I go along—writing just-in-time outlines of chapters shortly before I write those chaps, and noting longer range plans as they come to mind.

But here, for the record, is a mash-up of the original two outlines that I tried.

UNUSED CHAPTER 1 OUTLINE, VERSION 1

An astronomer named Ed Wacker notices something odd in the sky. He sees a huge flat structure, very far away. Light is bouncing off the great plane, and number of stars seem to be in some sense stuck to it, twinkling in waves. They call the thing a Wacker wall.

And then suddenly a Wacker wall comes into view much closer. Only about two light years away. And they've determined via spectroscopy that the wall has an atmosphere essentially identical to Earth's. If you could get there, you could breathe!

NASA and Earth's other space agencies start crash programs to send a manned conventional rocket there. A software billionaire named Gaspar Kunk claims he has a faster-than-light travel machine called a teep hopper, but people don't take him seriously. They treat his teep hopper like a joke and—we'll learn, it is in fact a scam.

UNUSED CHAPTER 1 OUTLINE, VERSION 2

Our heroine is a sixteen-year-old, tenth-grade girl named Zoe Snapp. She lives with her mother Tina Wacker. Her father Ken is still in town, he promotes trade fairs. Tina is a physicist working for the entrepreneur Gaspar Kunk. Tina is working on a potential technique for resizing ordinary objects, like turning a gallon of gas into two gallons, a loaf of bread into two, and so on. They dream of packaging it as a smartphone app called the Wacker sizer—although the app might be too socially disruptive to release to the public. Kunk would like a government contract. But nobody takes his plan seriously.

Our book opens in May. Tina Wacker and Gaspar Kunk plan to do a demo of their sizer app at Moffat Field near San Jose, California. It doesn't really work yet, but they need a new round of funding. Kunk's company is called Femton.

Zoe rides over to the demo with her friend Villy, and with Villy's dog Clod. Zoe and Villy aren't exactly boyfriend and girlfriend at this point, but they like hanging out. Their friend Skeezix Phong comes along too. Zoe, Villy, and Skeezix Phong play in their high-school band. Zoe plays sax, Villy a trumpet, Skeezix the trombone.

Gaspar Kunk and Zoe's mother Tina Wacker are at Moffat Field, along with a bodyguard, and a joking hipster reporter. Only about ten people in all, it's very much in the pre-

release stage, but Gaspar does want a little publicity for Femton Inc. Tina and Gaspar explain to the little group that the Wacker sizer enlarges ordinary objects.

The kids play some music. They honk a few numbers, including *This Land is Your Land* and *Happy Birthday*. Kunk's wife Lutece is there, she's in jogging shoes and a silk dress. She's also the head of the HR at Kunk's company Femton.

UNUSED CHAPTER 2 OUTLINE, VERSION 1

Our book opens in May, when Tina Wacker and Gaspar Kunk do a demo of a pair of teep hoppers at the deserted Moffat Field near San Jose, California. Zoe rides over to the demo with his friend Villy, and with Villy's dog Clod. Zoe and Villy aren't exactly boyfriend and girlfriend at this point, but they like hanging out. Their friend Skeezip Phong comes along too.

Gaspar Kunk and Zoe's mother Tina are at Moffat Field, along with some of Gaspar's workers, and a bodyguard, and a joking reporter. Only about thirty people in all, it's not a public event. Tina and Gaspar explain to the little group that the teep hopper only works if its teep scanner can find a swap partner at the target location. Kunk has brought two of his hoppers so he can demo how well they work. And ultimately he wants someone, probably Tina, to hop to the Wacker wall—which is faintly visible as a bright patch in the sky.

Zoe, Villy, and Skeezip Phong their high-school band. Zoe plays sax, Villy drum, Skeezip the trombone. They play a few numbers, including *This Land is Your Land* and *Happy Birthday*. Kunk's wife Lutece is there, she's in jogging shoes and a silk dress. She's also the head of the HR at Kunk's company. She tosses a glass of white wine across the hoppers' hoods.

The hoppers are odd-looking, like electric cars. Five feet across in back, about ten feet long, tapered towards the front. With three motorized wheels. Shiny anodized metal, with portholes and solid doors. You can sleep in them, they have waster and air recyclers, and there's some food. They're a little like camping trailers. One is red, one is green. The windows are tinted dark.

Kunk gets in one and Tina gets in the other. By way of warm-up, the two teep hoppers putt to opposite sides of the Moffat landing field—and supposedly swap places, dematerializing and rematerializing. Zoe is worried about her mother, watching this makes her feel sick. When they switch, the hoppers have ghost images buzzing around them—what Kunk calls “before-images” as well as after-images.

Villy notices that they images are holograms. And the cars aren't swapping position—they're just changing color. It's a hoax. He starts yelling about this, so annoying.

UNUSED CHAPTER 2 OUTLINE, VERSION 2

The demo is unimpressive. The sizer can in fact make things get a little bigger. But then right away, as soon as you turn off the sizer, the objects snap back.

Villy is interested and he manages to hack into the Femton secure network and load a copy of the Wacker sizer onto his smart phone. He turns the settings up to the maximum.

Tina Wacker realizes this and runs over to stop Villy.

Chaos and confusion. Zoe is yelling very loud, like she does when she's upset or excited. Villy won't stop screwing with the settings on his Sizer app.

A crack opens in the ground and Tina Wacker tumbles in, seeming to shrink as she falls.

A solid-looking spindly arm pops out of the crack, holding an articulated object like a rattle. The orange arm has two elbows. Villy's stupid dog Clod grabs the rattle and wrests it away, running across the field, chewing the rattle and holding up his head kind of triumphantly.

Zoe gets it away from the dog.

Kunk's security guard is pointing a gun at orange alien arm. It disappears. Tina Wacker is still gone.

UNUSED CHAPTER 3 OUTLINE, VERSION 1

Tina says, "Okay, yes, that was just a show, a demo, but these really might work." Tina perks up, cocks her head and stares into the sky. She's picking up a sign, she says. Kunk announces that Tina ready to attempt a hop to the Wacker wall. Zoe yells, "No."

Tina speeds across the field. A ghost ship forms and solidifies—and Tina's teep hopper disappears. An alien ship has arrived, swapping places with Tina's.

The alien ship is like a very funky hovering car, they can't see the driver inside very clearly. A sense of an orange-skinned, stick-thin woman. Zoe is yelling very loud, like she does when she's upset or excited. The car cruises close to Zoe and a spindly arm sticks out, offering her an articulated object like a rattle. The arm is indeed orange, and it has two elbows. Villy's stupid dog Clod is crazy about sticks, he grabs the rattle and wrests it away. He's chewing it and holding up his head kind of triumphantly. Villy gets it away from the dog.

Kunk's security guard is pointing a gun at the alien ship. It darts away, incredibly fast, zigzags around some old hangers, does a loop in the sky and seems to dive into the Bay. Kunk is still in his teep hopper, studying the controls, trying to analyze what Tina just did. And all at once Kunk's ship disappears and is replaced by a second alien ship similar to the first. This one, speeds off before you can really see it at all. It heads for the same spot in the bay where the first one went. Spouting and bubbling in the water. Like whales.

Now Lutece is losing her shit. Chaos and confusion. Villy slips off, hides the rattle in his car, and leaves. Cops show up to grill everyone. They're dubious, as everyone thinks Kunk is a con-man. Zoe doesn't get home until late. She's worried about her mother. Zoe talks to her father, but he's no help. She's alone in her mother's house. It's terribly empty. She finds that rattle on the kitchen table. Villy must have come by and dropped it off.

UNUSED CHAPTER 3 OUTLINE, VERSION 2

Kunk and his guards confiscate Villy's phone. He doesn't want to call the cops, but Zoe does. She doesn't get home until late. She's terribly worried about Tina. Zoe talks to her father Ken on the phone, but he's no help, he's busy running the giant COMDEX computer show in Las Vegas.

Zoe returns alone to her mother's house. It's empty. They let her keep the rattle. She shakes that rattle very hard. Kind of angrily.

Zoe has uneasy dreams. Faces talking to her.

In the morning Villy comes over. He still has his phone. He gave Kunk a double. He turns on the Wacker Sizer app and dials it up to the max.

There's a rumble, and a moment of buzzing dizziness. Zoe wonders if it's an earthquake. She turns on the TV. Earthquake. No. The satellite map is...odd. Earth has turned...flat?

Kunk coming after them.

UNUSED CHAPTER 4 OUTLINE, VERSION 1&2

An alien car appears right outside Zoe's house, in her driveway, beeping and whirring. It doesn't have wheels, it's floating like a hovercraft. The driver is sort of a woman, but she's orange, multijointed, and angular. The woman whose arm Zoe saw last night. The woman she

dreamed of. Her name is Yampa. She's fairly nice. Her voice is harsh. She wants Zoe to get in the car with her. Zoe is curious, but she's scared to do it alone. Zoe gets Villy and Clod to come along. Here comes Kunk and his slimy wife. They take off.

Yampa wants to drive back to her house.

"But we have to pass this new place—what to call it? Ant City. It's all—to the west of here."

"If you want to go west, go up as far as Anchorage and head east across the ocean on the land bridge," says Villy, string at his phone. "I was looking at the latest map. That's the shortest way to the next basin. We'll have to dress warm, it gets cold in between suns."

"How do you know all that?" asks Zoe. "In between suns?"

"There's endlessly many of them."

They drive a few hours at about a thousand miles per hour, gliding over the traffic. As the suns set, the driver becomes iconic, Pynchonian, enigmatic. In the dusk her face takes on a strange cast.

A car speeds towards them. It's another alien car. They do a bit of a chase and then the other alien hooks up with them. His name is Pinchley. He's dark purple, and he's made of tentacles. Initially it seems like Yampa is good and Pinchley is bad, but eventually the kids come to understand that both of the aliens are mixtures of good and bad.

They merge their cars together and the road trip continues. Pinchley, by the way, has a different sort of rattle, but he won't say what it's for.

UNUSED LATER CHAPTER OUTLINES, VERSION 1&2

They drive past some oddball cities. The aliens don't know much more than we do. They want to stay big even if the other atoms collapse back down. For now, however, they want to drive far.

They begin driving extremely fast, like a hundred thousand miles per hour, and they reach Antland. They have some trouble with the ants. They move on. By now Zoe wants them to turn back, but they won't. Villy's okay with going further. It's the platonic long road trip. Just keep going and they'll come to—something new! Over and over.

The aliens ditch them. A really big storm hits—ultra weather. The kids are on foot. They're swept up into the air, and they go hundreds of thousands of miles. After the storm they're not sure where they are. They're in a weird basin, some *Gulliver's Travels* kind of thing, like with people living in clouds.

They hitch a ride back to the Earth basin. With a toothless farmer.

Back in Los Perros, Zoe's worried it's not really the same Los Perros he started from, but she finds something that correctly convinces her it is.

Tina is still gone. The people in Los Perros had thought Tina, Zoe and Villy are dead, but that's just because they all disappeared. The kids go and visit their own graves.

And there are Pinchley and Yampa.

Kunk and his wife are up to something.

Zoe and Villy try to bring Zoe's mother back.

There's some problem, and Pinchley and Yampa are as surprised about it as we are. They know of a way to block it. But they don't want to help unless *they*, of all the atoms, don't have to shrink. So we agree to let their planet replace the moon.

December 20, 2014. Reset. Settle for a Novelette?

So I've cleared a bunch of things off my queue, and now I want to get back to implementing all those ideas about *Million Mile Road Trip*. Get this one done.

My feeling at present is that the *Road* story isn't strong enough to stretch out to novel length. I mean, I could stretch it out by having it span years and years, with Zoe and Villy aging. An epic. But I don't think the book has enough commercial potential to be worth so great an investment of my fading energies.

Even so, I want to explore the ideas and the scenes and, for god's sake, I don't have any other longish writing project on the table. So I'm gonna do this one, and be looking to bail at about 20K or 30K words.

I love writing, but with a story the fun's over too soon. It's like, whenever I'm writing, I'm setting up a date with the Muse. Wanting to have sex with her, basically. The thing, is, getting that initial date is about the same amount of trouble whether I'm looking for a one-nighter or for a years-long affair. So when I finish writing a short-short, I have this letdown like I've done hours of cajoling, and spent hundreds of dollars on a big evening out—and I've ended up getting a handjob on the staircase. Instead of a month in the Muse's deluxe apartment (a novelette), or, better, a year-long South Seas cruise with her (a novel).

December 22-28, 2014. "Million Mile Road Trip." Opener.

I've been feeling around for a way to make "Road" short. Dropping the complications. The core arc: the Earth unfurls to be an endless plain, two kids set off an endless road trip with a pair of aliens, the kids come back via a huge storm. Possibly at that time Earth rolls back up. But they're itching to unfurl it and get going again.

Today I'm thinking I'll write it as Zoe's first person narrative. Past tense. With an (implicit) subtitle: "The Narrative of Zoe Snapp." Like my book, *The Hollow Earth: The Narrative of Mason Algiers Reynolds*, or like Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. A narrative is an easy, no-brainer style.

You, of course, imagine that Earth has forever been a ball, a sphere, a globe. Villy Antwerpen and I are the only two who remember the decades of the great unfurling. And now I don't know where Villy is.

At the time when Earth unrolled into an endless plane, Villy and I were classmates at Los Perros High School in California. And then Villy and I went on the road. A twenty-year trip. Our ride was a highly modified 1956 Buick, the property of a pair of aliens named Yampa and Pinchley. We drove at about thousand miles an hour, ten hours a day.

And when the end came, we were fifty million miles from home. Something like a giant wind storm blew me back. And I floated down where I began—the front yard of this house where my Mom used to live.

The day I got back to Los Perros, Earth's endless plain curled back up—and all you people forgot about it. Fools that you are. You're in a lot of danger, you know.. You need to listen to what I say.

So here we go with my *wah-wah-wah* flashback.

The language is a bit too formal and nineteenth century in this initial take, I'll want to make it more contemporary and colloquial—without descending into a trashy full-bore YA

Valspeak sound in Zoe's voice. I mean, don't make it corny, don't try too hard.

I kind of like the idea of laying out an outline of the story in the first few paragraphs. Hooking the readers right away. But I'd need to tweak this so that I don't telegraph too much of the story. And my narrator Zoe can be a bit unreliable—so there can be some key twists that she's not admitting to in her brief summary. Also I think she ought to be planning to unfurl the Earth again, and that moment might be the tale's ending.

It goes almost without saying that, at a transreal level, the story stands for a young woman going out into the world and then having to return to the boring life of her home town. Coming back home after graduating from college, for instance.

I had been calling this project *The Road Goes On Forever*, but think I'll change the title to *Million Mile Road Trip*. A million is a nice round number.

Jan 2, 2015. Unused First Person Opening.

I rewrote my first-person opener about six times. Here's the final, but ultimately unused, version.

I know a lot of people still think that Earth is a ball, a sphere, a globe. I'm one of the few who knows about the great unfurling—and who knows how to drive out onto the cosmic plain. Villy Antwerpen knows about it too—but ever since Dzurt I can't find him.

This started four years ago. Villy and I were high-school seniors in Los Perros, California. More or less by accident, I invited this alien woman Yampa into our world—it was like summoning a spirit. As soon Yampa got here, she handed me a magic rattle. I shook it—and the Earth unrolled into the endless cosmic plain I'm talking about.

And then Yampa, Villy and I started out on a road trip. Yampa showed us how to get out of Los Perros. We were driving Villy's bloated old 1980s station wagon, the one he calls his purple whale. Yampa had tricked out the purple whale with a dark-energy engine, diamond-rubber tires, and quantum shocks. A Kustom Kar for true. The upgraded whale can cruise at over five hundred miles an hour—whether there's a road or not.

Road tripping in the whale felt like being an old-time explorer. Just like it was before the world got all mapped out. Sometimes we drove around the clock, but when we hit an inhabited zone, we'd settle down for a few days or even a couple of weeks—as long as the locals weren't likely kill us.

Driving on the cosmic plain, you never know what you'll find next. The plain is divided into basins, with ice and mountains between the basins. Each zone is about the size of our old Earth's surface, and each is completely different. And I don't mean "different" like, "people with bad haircuts wearing groove-dog Trekkie pajamas." I mean "different" like, "people whose bodies are hinged yellow broomsticks."

We had a lot of adventures. And by the end of four years on the road, we were precisely a million miles from home—we knew that because Yampa had upgraded the odometer on Villy's purple whale before we left. The million-mile point was a village called Dzurt. It looked a little like in Central Asia maybe, but it had hundreds of extra suns, little ones like low-flying blimps. And the locals—

they were like hinged broomsticks wearing too much lipstick, and when they talked they sounded like squeaky doors. Like Yampa, actually. Yampa felt right at home in Dzurt.

And then something complicated happened. Yampa disappeared, I lost track of Villy, and I ended up back at my Mom's house here in Los Perros. And Mom is dead.

And nobody understands where I've been for the last four years. I mean—they still think that Earth is a ball! Goobs that they are. It's like they're blind. And when I tell them the truth, they say I need help. Ha.

Getting onto the cosmic plain again is what I *need*. And I'll do it too.

But before I go, I'll tell my story from the start. Just so people will know.

January 1, 2015. Getting Excited. Pointed Ladders.

[Some of the thoughts in this entry appeared in my blog post "[Aliens Coming Down a Pointed Ladder](#)," on December 30, 2014.]

The other day, I guess it was on December 29, 2014, I took a hike up a trail on a sloping ridge above the Lexington Reservoir. I came to an overlook where I once sat with dog Arf, and he'd acted like a noble stag, standing on a boulder, overlooking the valley, profiling himself for my admiration.

This time I was sitting on a patch of grass, feeling relaxed. I've pretty much taken care of the latest round of Transreal Books republishing projects. I published *Transreal Trilogy*, and I republished *Jim and the Flims* and *Mathematicians in Love* a in ebook and paperback, and I even did a single-shot ebook edition of *The Secret of Life*. And I'm done with inputting all of my two proofers' latest corrections to *Journals 1990-2014*. So at this point there's really nothing to prevent me from diving into "Million Mile Road Trip."

My recent ideas about simplifying the outline have made it easier to begin. Also I seem to be homing in on a good voice for the narrator—a voice I can comfortably inhabit. Today I'm calling my heroine/narrator Silvia Snapp—my old name for her, Alma Anders, didn't have enough punch. And my wife Sylvia seems not to object to me using her name.

And then (on January 3, 2014) I changed the name to Zoe Snapp. It was just too confusing for me to see Silvia in the text.

I've been casting about for a simple way that the alien woman Yampa might appear in Zoe's room. And then I thought of a ladder that Sylvia and I saw on an abandoned farm near Lexington Reservoir a couple of weeks ago. It was one of those ladders where the side pieces (called stringers or rails) are angled so they get closer to each other near the top. It's like the forced perspective of a stage set—the top of the ladder looks further away than it actually is. I think maybe I've seen ladders like this in paintings by Georgia O'Keefe and by Joan Brown.

Anyway, I'll use a math move on a ladder that looks like that. The ladder is in fact infinitely long—or its end is in another dimension. A figure coming down the ladder is very tiny at the top, and the rungs up there are very close together. And the figure grows as she climbs down.

Conversely, there could be a ladder like this that has its pointed end poking *down into* the ground. So someone might climb *up* it to emerge from the lower world.

And we can climb these ladders in either direction of course—either emerging into our level, or disappearing into an alternate level. One idea might be that Yampa emerges from her

world into our world and then, once they're at some special spot a million miles away, Yampa and Pinchley use a magic ladder to go into a level that's another step away from their home level. Maybe they take Villy along.

I'll suppose that the initial ladder that appears in Zoe's room is in some sense brought into existence by Zoe achieving a very intense focus upon a spot up near her room's ceiling.

Pop a ladder appears, with its point at that spot. Here's a possible start sequence.

(1) Zoe stares at the spot.

(2) The ladder appears, and Yampa climbs down it.

(3) Yampa hands Zoe the magic rattle. Or maybe a seed for a plant that grows the rattle overnight or in a few minutes. Zoe shakes the rattle.

(4) Earth unfurls into an endless plane.

(5) Yampa and Zoe help Villy soup up his car.

(6) They leave on a giant road trip. Something's chasing them; it's Pinchley.

(7) Yampa and Pinchley have make-up sex.

Out on my walk I started feeling so happy to have a story to work on. Life beings again. Takes on meaning. The Muse is with me. And now, once again, I can be mentally conscripting things that I see into my story. Things like the ladder. Or like the incredibly weathered, degenerate, and somewhat evil-looking lead singer for a New Year's Eve band that Sylvia and I saw in the Cats roadhouse last night. I can see this cat hitting on my character Zoe along the way. (Not on my wife Sylvia.)

January 2, 2015. Break the Narrative Box. Drop 1st Person.

I've been having flashes of focus on the story for *Million Mile Road Trip*, and then a day later I can't remember the ideas, or they seem vague or weak. Like recalling dreams.

A paranoid idea: As they travel from basin to basin, Zoe gets the sense that Yampa and Pinchley already know some of the locales. They've been here before. Everyone knows something about this trip that Zoe and Villy don't know.

Cyberpunk idea: Sitting with Sylvia in the Cats roadhouse on New Year's Eve, listening to a cover band with a weathered seedy singer doing a Led Zep song, and there's two or three TV screens showing balletic moments of the day's football games, and two women are dancing to the music, one is stiff and odd, the other is a sturdy hot California girl in a shiny blouse, her breast making shiny mounds in the fabric, she rocks her shoulders from side to side. Now replace the people by ants or dwarves and we're in Basin 7.

Two issues lying ahead. (1) How does Zoe open the hole for the pointed ladder, and does her mother play a role in this? (2) What are Yampa and Pinchley doing here?

I've rewritten my first-person opener about six times, and I'll save the final revision in the [Unused Scenes](#) in section of these notes—because I'm not gonna use this approach at all.

The trouble with that style of opener is that it telegraphs the story and it boxes me into the ending that Zoe describes. There's no time "after" that described in the opener. She's stuck back in Los Perros which might or might not be what I want to do..

But, like I say, I've decided I to set aside the first-person opener. It worked in *The Hollow Earth*, but here it feels too YA. Instead I want to use an omniscient close 3rd person viewpoint. I might not even rotate from chapter to chapter, I might head-hop within scenes. I'm rereading *Gravity's Rainbow* these days, and I'm getting a yen for a more adult style than a YA-

type first person narrative. I want to be free to drift.

So today I wrote an opener more along those lines, flipping between focusing on Zoe and Villy, and it feels pretty good. It'll be a slower build-up this way, which means the story might get longer, but, hey, if it ends up being a novella or novel that's fine.

January 5, 2015. Go Full Pynchon. The Novel Begins.

As I've mentioned, I've been trying to get a handle on the nuts and bolts of Pynchon's narrative technique in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Somehow I find this very difficult. I get so mesmerized when I'm reading the book that it's hard to slow down and look behind the curtains. Putting it another way, peering at Pynchon's style is like trying to stare at the sun.

I recently found a very useful description of the style at the start of a longish 1996 work by [Michael Davitt Bell \(1962-1997\)](#): "Some Things That 'Happen' (More or Less) in *Gravity's Rainbow*." Here's a lightly edited excerpt of the opening paragraphs of [Bell's paper](#):

The book is narrated, throughout, in the present tense. Flashbacks (or events remembered by various characters) usually begin in the past tense, but they tend to shift rapidly into the present tense. The narrator is also capable, upon occasion, of flashes *forward*. Point of view shifts frequently and is sometimes indeterminate (or omniscient). And much of what 'happens' (it's hard to say how much) is fantasy (it's often hard to say whose).

Working by the light of poor dead Bell's pellucid guide, I switched my opener to the present tense yesterday, and put in a few spinning-wheels-of-the-mind asides, and I feel the story opening up. I think of compressed *puer* tea that comes in a block, and you flake out the stuff to brew it. Or a dense bud of pot.

I'm finding it hard to work on my story for more than an hour or so a day. I'm always finding distractions. Waiting till my head is in the right place. Waiting for the level of dread-that-I'll-never-write-again to build up to a sufficient level. Building up a big enough head of steam to turn the rusty wheels of this oold locomotive.

I put in two good hours of writing at the Los Gatos Coffee Roasting cafe this afternoon. I've finished the first main scene. The two characters Zoe and Villy have their first kiss. So YA! I could in fact treat this scene as the whole first chapter, even though it's only 1,400 words long. I noticed that in Wm. Gibson's recent novel *Peripheral*, he had *really* short chaps—110 of them!—and it's kind of semi-YA. A lot of YA books have short chaps. Makes them seem easy to read, I guess. Bam, bam, bam. Short attention spans these days (including mine).

So, yeah, I could say Chapter 1 is done, but, naw, I think I'll add a little more. If I were to average between 1,500 or 2,000 words per chapter and I wanted, say, 80K or 90K words, I'd need 40 or 50 chapters. Gee, that's a lot of chapters—but its less than 110! Give each chapter the shape of a short-short story. One or two scenes per chapter.

Oh lord, here I go again with the word count routines. Getting ahead of myself.

January 6, 2015. Plan For Chapter 2.

So I have the first chapter, and now I need to decide what happens in the next one. First scene: I want to get Zoe into her room and have the pointed ladder appear. Second scene: she meets Yampa.

We'll have Zoe's mom Tina in the start of the chapter. Tina can be coaching a boy about college admissions—irony here, given that Zoe isn't getting into any college. Mom doesn't want Zoe around during the counseling session, it could queer her deal.

Zoe goes into her room, spaces out, and *bam*, she sees the ladder. I want to keep it really, really simple. Zoe is going to stare at a spot and the pointed ladder is going to appear.

Tell me more about the "staring." Is Zoe in some special state, perhaps as a result of seeing her Mom? And why does Yampa happen to be waiting on the "other side"?

Suppose that Yampa has 4D teep and she can feel around in our plane of our existence and find receptive minds. It could be that Yampa has forged a lasting link with Zoe and is in some sense another aspect of Zoe, although Zoe would only realize this much later on.

Like...Zoe is a medium and Yampa is a spirit guide—a "medium" for the beings on the other side. I wrote up a full SF concept for this as [Spiritualism and Hyperspace Beings](#) in these notes.

Okay, okay, but why does Yampa connect to Zoe in particular? We want to have something special about Zoe. In a YA novel, the main character has some special characteristic that the outer world has failed to recognize, or which the o. w. even views as a fault—but it just this particular quirk which allows our protagonist to access her wondrous adventure. Viewing this another way, the heroine has had access to some kind of magic door all along, and it was this as-yet-unrealized access which was making the heroine so flaky—but now at last it all makes sense.

So what's special about Zoe? She's sarcastic, unsure of herself, emotional. She makes jewelry, and she plays the trumpet. Maybe in her room she's playing her trumpet with a practice mute and looking at her jewelry. A synergy there. She focuses on a largish half-silvered crystal sphere. She's playing to it like she's a snake charmer, bending over it, immersed in her music.

The crystal rises into the air, floats nearly to the ceiling, with Zoe leaning back, supporting the crystal upon the thin tune from her trumpet. And now the pointed ladder comes out. With a clatter, Zoe drops the trumpet. Mom calls, "Are you okay?"

"Fine," says Zoe, not wanting the magic to end.

Someone is climbing down the ladder.

And that's the first scene.

January 8, 2015. The Unfurling and the Two Worlds.

Let's suppose that Yampa and Pinchley are teenagers like Zoe and Villy. The aliens can be, like, "wild and reckless yet tormented and ultimately tender" teens that the more innocent and naive Zoe and Villy fall in with.

Maybe I do a chapter or scene with Pinchley appearing to Villy at his house. And there's some tension between Pinchley and Yampa. Or maybe we don't meet Pinchley till after the unfurling?

The big upcoming scene is when our Earth seems to unfurl into an endless peak-studded prairie occasional oceans in it. This happens when Zoe shakes a rattle that Yampa brought along. Villy and Zoe are together when this happens—it can be when they're in Villy's car, rolling out of Los Perros. Or maybe just when they're driving downtown or—this might be the best—on the way to school.

I will require that Zoe and Villy retain a memory of the transition to the unfurled world—whether or not the other people on Earth are aware that something changed. Indeed it may be that everyone else in the unfurled Los Perros will feel that the world has *always* been unfurled

this way.

At this point I finally need to decide about the unfurling and how this event relates the histories and the memories of everyone else. I think I'll end up using a parallel world. Here's how I arrived at that, by a process of considering three options.

TWO PARALLEL WORLDS

The simplest solution—and I do feel it's the one that I'll have to use—is to have Zoe (and Villy) hop over to a parallel universe where Earth has always been unfurled and everyone's used to it.

By the way, I will *not* want to say there's endlessly many parallel worlds—for then nothing that happens in the plot matters, as there's always another world where it doesn't happen. I'll only need two worlds: our regular one, and the unfurled world. Zoe and Villy hope to the unfurled world

Initially Zoe might understand this is what's happened at all. She'll think the physical structure and the history of the universe have changed around her. And she retains her memories of her earlier lives as it once was. And it'll seem strange that people seems to have different memories of the past earlier life. If Zoe speaks to them about the old version of the world, they reacts as if Zoe is delusional.

Indeed, for several chapters, Zoe and Villy will not initially realize they're in a parallel world. They'll think they're in the third scenario: *Our World Unfurls And People Imagine It's Always Been That Way*. They just think that everything around them has changed, and other people are blind idiots. And then later we can have a reveal.

OUR WORLD UNFURLS AND PEOPLE ARE SURPRISED.

But why can't I instead suppose the unfurling happens as a historical event in the timestream of our actual world? This is what I initially wanted. It would be a good scene. Everyone on Earth would be really excited about the unfurling. We could witness a few days of reactions to the event. People migrating outward in cars and in airplanes. This would be exciting. Zoe and Villy would be thundering out across the endless plain with hordes of other explorers. Like the Sooners at the Oklahoma border.

But I don't think I can make this work. There's a deal-breaking problem with the unfurling as a historical event. To wit, the unfurling brings into view a zillion other civilizations on the plain. These weren't there a minute ago, but now they are emerging *ex nihilo*, from nothing. And these civilizations have histories—memories, old buildings, cultural traditions, ancient works of art. Their residents will not feel as if the unfurling just now happened.

And yet, according to this scenario, the other civilizations histories were somehow "computed" or brought into light at the moment of the unfurling. That's a big computation. Possibly these sociological and evolutionary "computations" were taking place along an alternate or subdimensional timeline and the results are only visible now? Or maybe until now the other worlds were hiding down inside of atoms? Or maybe the other civilizations were always present, but in an impalpable form we can't see? As if our universal wave function were an overlay of several realities. This sounds a lot like the unfurled worlds were there all along...in a parallel world.

OUR WORLD UNFURLS AND PEOPLE IMAGINE IT'S ALWAYS BEEN THAT WAY.

If the other civilizations have seemingly accurate memories of a history of living on an endless plain, then maybe the people on our Earth will, at the moment of the unfurling, acquire similar sets of historical beliefs. Our whole recorded and remembered history will be instantly doctored so that Earthlings feel that they too are a civilization in an endless prairie.

So in this case we don't get that widespread sense of surprise after all. From one page to the next, Zoe and Villy are living in a world where it's always been possible to drive a million miles from home—or more. But this is exciting too. We see Zoe and Villy reacting to their weirdly altered world, and learning all the weird new ways and new trad routes, with nobody but Z & W realizing how strange this unfurled world is.

Okay, fine. We're supposing that the unfurling not only changes the spatial arrangement of our world, but it changes the whole history of the world as well. Changes all of spacetime. Isn't that the same as saying that Zoe and Villy hop to a parallel universe? I have to say yes. And that brings us back to the first scenario, *Two Parallel Worlds*.

How do I avoid a problem with Zoe encountering her double over there in the unfurled world? The simplest answer is that there aren't any people quite like Zoe and Villy in the unfurled world, and that's why Yampa recruited them.

Or the Zoe and Villy in the unfurled world are dead. Zoe and Villy over there were supposed to be the drivers, and they died, so Yampa came to get round-world Zoe and Villy. This would be a good set-up: we could say the unfurled-world Zoe and Villy were *murdered*. And then we have the fear, and the pursuit by the murderer, and the resolution of the problem.

A much weaker and less satisfying out would be to say that Zoe inhabits the mind of her double; she steps into the shoes of her counterpart. It's only her software that hops over—her mind and her memories. She feels like she's one of two personalities in the same body. The unfurled-world-Zoe's memories are faint and almost subconscious. Although at some point they can erupt.

But it's much cleaner if Zoe physically climbs a pointed ladder or drives over a pointed bridge to get to the other world. Have one and only one type of interface between the world, the same interface being used by Yampa and by Zoe.

Now if Zoe and Villy are in the unfurled world for most of the book, then we might expect that, near the end of the book, they come back to our regular world. And this is a bit like the despised "Jimmy Olsen Kills Superman" plot. Or, to put this less contemptuously, like a *Little Nemo* comic. That is, at the end our two heroes are, like, "Oh, that was all a dream."

The danger of the waking-from-a-dream conclusion is that, if it's crudely done, it makes the readers feel they've been had. It's like the author is saying, "This whole frikkin' book was a dream, see, and nothing frikkin' mattered all along, and you were a sucker if you cared."

Okay, so I need to say that it wasn't *just* a dream. Along these lines, I should say that if they'd died over on the unfurled side, the psychic jolt would have been so great that they would have died on our side. Like the way that a sufficiently horrifying *bang utot* dream can kill you.

How long relative to Earth are Z & V in the other world? One option is to say they were just gone for an instant. Like in a fairy tale. And then when Zoe snaps back, she's at that same spot where she left from in Los Perros. Except she's four years older. And she sees her Mom.

"Zoe, you look different." "I—I was gone." "You were right in your room, darling." "Call it a mental excursion. I'm sorry I was nasty to you all those times." "Are you going to

college after all?" "Well, no. I think Villy and I are going to take a road trip. Just the two of us this time." "You took a road trip before?" "A million miles, Mom. And then I came back." "Villy came back too?" "No, he's still out there." A last glimpse of Yampa and Pinchley out there too, but they climb up their pointed ladder and leave.

Another option, probably a better one, is that Zoe and Villy have been missing for four years. And now they're back, and Mom is dead.

How about Yampa and Pinchley? Y & P come over here physically. Where did they come from? Two main options. Their physical bodies came over here from the unfurled universe via a wormhole, or their physical bodies came here from a distant planet in our regular universe via teleportation.

For the moment, I think it's the simplest if Y & P came through a straight wormhole from the Los Perros of the unfurled world. Then we can have a scenario with unfurled Los Perros with a number of aliens in it, like maybe they're gathering for some kind of road race. Like in the Klondike getting ready for the Iditarod dogsled race. And Y & P wanted some high-spirited round-worlders for their crew, so they fetched Z & V.

How about the car? I think it would be nice if Zoe and Villy started out in Villy's purple whale. And they shake the rattle, and they see a bridge or an overpass that's pointed, and they drive out on it and then they're in the unfurled world. The overpass leading into downtown Los Perros.

And weird aliens are on the street. And they find Yampa and Pinchley.

And Yampa helps them fix their car. She already had a car, but someone stole it, the same person who killed the unfurled world versions of Villy and Zoe.

Pinchley and Yampa are running from someone. They have sex, it's gnarly.

January 11, 2015. Ready for Chapter 3.

I've finished Chapter 2. I did the ladder and then I did a short second scene where Yampa introduces herself to Zoe. "I want you to help us." Pinchley arrives right on Yampa's heels. And then Mom is rattling the door and Pinchley jumps out the window and Yampa hides under the bed, and that's the end of the chapter.

Chapter 3 will start with a scene with Villy. We show his family, he has a work-at-home father and a younger brother. Villy's in the garage, thinking about getting the whale ready for a road trip. Pinchley shows up, he's walked from Zoe's house to Villy's house. Villy's younger brother Scud sees Pinchley too. The three of them work on Villy's car for a couple of hours. Then Villy and Pinchley go to pick up Yampa and Zoe.

Chapter 4. Zoe has been talking to Yampa and now the car shows up. Honking. Zoe running out. The four of them drive downtown and Zoe shakes Yampa's magic rattle on the overpass over Rt. 17. Perhaps at this moment there's something menacing. The four of them and the whale emerge into mappy Los Perros.

The next scenes should be in mappy Los Perros before they set off on their road trip in the mappy world. We have a mystery and a threat. Stretch this over two chapters, I think.

The *mystery* is that Yampa and Pinchley's intended car disappeared along with the mappy Zoe and Villy. It may be that the mappy Zoe and Villy are dead. But later, when the story is ready for a bump, I can do a meeting-our-doubles scene.

The *threat* is that the forces who stole the car will come after Y, P, Z & V. And of course they will. I'm thinking UFOs. This sparks a precipitous departure from mappy Los Perros.

January 15, 2015. From Chapter 3 to Chapter 4.

So I'm up to 5,000 words, and Chapter 3 is almost done. Villy's already said goodbye to his Pop. Pinchley is in the garage with Villy and his annoying 13-year-old brother Scud. Getting ready to upgrade the whale. (It almost seems like Scud is mentally ill, or handicapped, or retarded, or majorly autistic. But he's just being a 13-year-old. One of the plot threads could be that Scud gets a little better.)

Break to Chapter 4.

Scene 1: Zoe talking to her Mom, kind of saying goodbye. Mom leaves the house. Zoe and Yampa are getting ready to leave. They notice an enemy alien outside.

Scene 2: Pinchley souping up the purple whale. The dark energy engine, the quantum shock absorbers, and the graphene rubber tires. How? He has super biotech and he sprays weird viruses and germs on the motor that reconfigure it, ditto for the shocks and the tires.

Scud wants to come on the trip, and Villy doesn't want him to—but Villy also feels sorry for Scud. In terms of a YA book, I think it's wise to let Scud come along. Like the group of kids going to Narnia. Even though I dislike Scud. But that animus is inspiring, and I can, in the writing, work through my dislike of Scud. In other words I'm stuck with the little fucker. Do I just have Villy say welcome aboard? After Scud desperately bares his soul? Like "Pop isn't able to take care of me and you know it." I guess yeah Villy has to give in. We can work this for some emotion. (The alternative is to do a stowaway routine, but that's a shopworn move, and I'm not sure I could make it fresh, and it would involve Villy having to be harsh about abandoning (he thinks) Scud.)

Scene 3: Zoe goes out and gets in the whale with Yampa. Zoe is bummed to see Scud.

Break to Chapter 5. In which we drive onto the bridge, and we see the enemy alien again, and we ramp up a pointy road-ladder to the mappy Los Perros.

January 16, 2015. Thoughts Inspired by *Ringworld*.

A couple of people—son Rudy and Paul Di Filippo—have told me I should reread Larry Niven's 1970 *Ringworld* if I'm writing about a million mile road trip. It's been about forty years since I read it.

So, okay, I found an ebook of *Ringworld* on the web. I had to get a pirate-torrent EPUB file and use Calibre to turn that into a Kindle file. Oddly, there *are* no legit commercial ebook editions of *Ringworld*. I'd never done the torrent thing before, and it was mildly interesting to figure it out, and I hope I didn't somehow ruin my computer in the process, although so far my virus scans are clear, although the torrent-downloading tool itself, µTorrent, did install some adware that I had to root out—I slipped up and failed to decline one of the three "partner offers" during installation. Anyway. I might get the sequel *Ringworld Engineers* too.

I've now read nearly the first half of *Ringworld*. In some respects it's kind of generic—I'm thinking of the characters and their personalities and the dialog and the sociopolitical baggage—but in many important ways it's great. For sure it's compulsively readable, and it's easy to see why it would win awards.

The *Ringworld* structure is a band that's a million miles wide, and the band bends into a big ring with the radius about the same as Earth's distance from the Sun. A wonderful idea. So it's in fact big enough to contain a million-mile road trip quite easily.

The thing that I love the most in *Ringworld* are the aliens called Puppeteers. Such a nice word. And there's a great running joke about how cowardly they are. They're fleeing from a wave of radiation that's due to hit our neck of the woods in 20,000 years. Their leader is called the Hindmost (because a leader stays as far back as possible from the fray.)

The Puppeteer body design is a stroke of genius. They have two "heads" that are really more like hands (puppets), and each hand has an eye and a mouth with loose, prehensile lips. The brain is safe in the body of the puppeteer. They have three legs, and they can kick a pursuer to death with the hind hoof.

In *Ringworld* we have two main kinds of aliens. Each of them has very clear and stereotyped personality traits, and Niven can continually turn to those stereotypes for bits of dialog and stage business. The party has a Puppeteer and a Kzin, the Kzin being something like a giant tiger who likes to fight. There's some offstage alien races as well, and their names are repeatedly invoked, but we don't know much about them (although they do appear in Niven's other, related novels and stories of "Known Space," his first novel along these lines being *World of Ptavvs*. Such a great title, that one—and the world of Ptavvs is in fact...Earth!)

One of the unseen races is called the Slavers, which I find to be a cool name because it's so clear and so sinister. Our *Ringworld* party's rocket uses something called a "Slaver stasis field," which is a great name for a device, and the ship is inside a Puppeteer "General Products hull #2," which is a great name as well. Solid, simple names.

Niven doesn't use all that many SF gimmicks, just a few, but he names them well and he mentions them over and over, and the reader starts to feel comfortable and knowledgeable.

Reading *Ringworld* makes me anxious about what I'm doing with my novel. But of course I don't want to try and write *Ringworld*, this isn't something I'm inclined (or equipped) to do. I want my characters to be hipper, more complex, with emotional lives akin to those of actual people I've known. I want to use richer language. And I'm doing this without space travel. And I'm setting out to write something like a YA novel.

This said, there are certainly some lessons to be learned.

An immediate concern is that—as they're presently described—my aliens Yampa and Pinchley aren't as much fun as Puppeteers. (a) I'd like them to have some odd over-riding motivation like the Puppeteers' cowardice. (b) I want them to have interesting non-humanoid bodies. At present they're one-armed and three-legged, and their single hands are a Swiss knife congeries of tool-like fingers. But this is simply a default paste-up kin of alien body, inspired by some figures I drew more or less at random in my painting *Endless Road Trip* a few months back. (c) I need a good name for my alien race.

And, further on, I'll need two or three other alien races to depict in detail. We might have a situation where there's a Balkanized pattern of settlements. We'd have some established main races on the mappy world, and they occupy neighboring territories. And maybe a new, menacing, invasive, imperialistic race that they're trying to repel. Ants?

The invaders are in fact so ruthless that they would like to come down a Z-ladder and invade our round Earth as well. So our heroes are in fact saving our own world via their efforts over in the mappy world. Story arc! *Ta da*.

January 17, 2015. Another Day in the Art Mines. Three Legs?

Hoping to get some words today.

Suddenly I'm having constraints in what I have to write in this new novel—for the first few chapters It always feels like I'm slashing away at a blank canvas with a fat, wet brush—streaks, squiggles, blots, whatever I feel like. And then the need for an overall patterns kicks in. The constraints. I've heard painters put it this way: The whole time I'm doing a painting, I keep ruining it and then having to fix it, and then ruining it again. The part where you're ruining it is the art part...and the fixing it is the craft. On the best days, you're doing both at once.[Quotable quote. Posted this on Facebook.]

I guess I'll do some scenes from Scud's point of view. I (and the readers) need to start liking him and empathizing with him, if he's gonna be in the novel. (Integrating Scud is one of those constraints I'm talking about.)

I wrote a scene where the aliens appear, but I'm not quite happy with how I'm depicting them. It may not be wise to insist on sticking to those visualizations of them that I put into my painting *Endless Road Trip*. But, for the record, here's my attempt to write them with three legs.

"I'm Yampa," says the alien woman. Her body is a zigzag column with a kink at the waist and a ball joint in the chest where her arm comes out. Her voice is low and clear. She extends her single arm as if to shake hands. It's not exactly like she has a regular hand. It looks like a mitten with one thumb. Or no, wait, the mitten is a squeezed-together wad of a hundred or more fingers, all different kinds of them in there, like the tools of a soft Swiss knife. And, looking closer, it seems as if the arm itself might be capable of splitting into separate pieces. Like three arms in one.

Her face is in shades of orange and yellow, and her eyes are pale lavender, quite high on her forehead. Her lower jaw jiggles loosely. Her lips are red, and she has a bun on the back of her head. Her legs—well, there's three of them. Like she's a wobbly sawhorse. And only one arm, and a shoulder for it. Yampa's feet tap a delicate tattoo. ...

A second figure has started down the pointed ladder. A yellow-orange man with green stubble on his chin. He's shaped more or less like Yampa, but with a bigger jaw. He wears an orange bowler hat on his head, or no, it's not a hat, it grows out of him like a tumor. He gets halfway down the ladder and then he hops free, tumbles downward, doing a midair flip along the way. And now his hoof-like feet hit the floor with a triple thump. He's an inch taller than Yampa. He wears a tool belt around his narrow waist. ...

Pinchley somersaults out of her open, unscreened bedroom window, and drops onto all fours—that is, onto his three legs and his one arm. One leg is in back, one on each side, and the arm is in front, a little longer than the legs. Like a crooked, tilted dog, golden in the summer-evening light. Pinchley trots off, still wearing his tool belt. ...

A huge, crooked, yellow dog is standing there but—is that really a dog? His legs are in a diamond pattern: one in front, one in back, one on each side. He has a weird lump on the top of his head, and his mouth is lower down than a dog's. His front leg is longer than the others. And he's wearing a tool belt.

The thing rocks backwards onto his three shorter legs and stands erect, as tall as a man. His fourth leg is actually an arm with a hand. The lump on the visitor's

head looks a little like a derby hat, and his eyes and mouth are like a person's. A toothy mouth with red lips. The eyes are of high-up on his yellow-orange face. He's got a five o'clock shadow on his chin, and the shadow is dark green.

January 18, 2015. Aliens With Duplex Heads.

I decided to give my aliens two legs and arms, but with many fingers. And two heads. Instead of a Puppeteer pair of heads, I'll do more like a totem pole, with a small squashed head like a hat on top of the main head. A teep head. The main head talks, the little half-head does telepathy. It interrupts and comments on what the main head says, and I write all this commentary in italics, interleaving it into the main speech.

I had this idea in church this morning. Sitting there with no screen gives me time to think in peace, with the familiar half-heard liturgy in the background. I talked about the idea a bit during the coffee hour with an eccentric young guy called John.

January 25-28, 2015. Plans: Characters, Aliens, Topography.

I got a lot of writing done last week, and I have over 9,000 words. I've broken it into five chapters. Right now I'd like to figure out what's coming up as my characters start on their journey in the purple whale. I'm in what you might call a black spot, a point of not knowing what to do next. Groping in the dark, looking for a plot through-line before I launch the journey to Szep City.

I have seven characters thus far: the aliens Yampa and Pinchley, and the humans Zoe Snapp (18), her Mom, Villy Antwerpen (17), his Pop, and Villy's younger brother Scud (13). I didn't really want Scud in the book, but he's pushed his way in, and he adds some relationship dynamics. Good to have a 13-year-old in a YA book. Also the pair Villy and Scud are transrealy akin to my big brother Embry and me. So I'm, *ugh*, Scud. As well as Villy and Zoe.

"How many critters?" Sylvia asks me in a mock-strict tone. I try and equivocate, but, okay, yes, I've already introduced five kinds of critters. She teases me about how I overload my books with critters. How did I get five already? I don't like mechanical tools, I like tools to be living things, so Pinchley has three car-upgrading "tools" that are critters: a living pancake, a wobbly water-balloon with eyes, and a bird/shrimp that's a living marker pen. And there's two species of pesky alien critters that Zoe finds in her pocket: ants and rubbery little flying saucers like jujubes or limpets or leeches. Two is more interesting than one.

THE SZEP ALIENS

I now have a stable idea of what the main aliens look like, the Szep. They're skinny yellow humanoids with branching fingers and an extra telepathic dome-head atop their regular heads. They talk more or less like us. For this novel I'm dropping my usual trick of having the aliens speak ungrammatically. I mean, they're very smart, they have telepathy, why shouldn't they speak perfect English if I want them to. But I do need for their prose somehow to look different. My kicker for this is that they speak in two voices: vocal and TELEPATHIC. I write the telepathic words in a word-processor "style" which at present is coded to use small caps, although, since it's a style, I can globally alter the appearance later with a few keystrokes by tweaking my definition of the style. I'd been planning to settle for italics, but both Rudy Jr. and Sylvia made the point that I might as well do something more interesting—especially since I might well end up self-publishing this book.

OTHER ALIENS

I don't want the book to be like *Ringworld*, where a majority of the races are basically humanoid. I want more of a patchwork quilt of races. And I don't want to require that you travel lightyears and lightyears to get to a wholly different ecology. Even in a "small" million miles we'll encounter dozens of races.

After all, look how different things are on isolated islands of Earth, like on Australia or Madagascar. There is some drift from spot to spot, of course, what with flying creatures, airborne spores and the like. But we could get wholly fresh things evolving anyway.

THE COSMIC ARCHITECTURE

The cosmic architecture is that we have two parallel universes: our own, and the so-called unfurled world with an endless plain or great plain—a road trip across an endless landscape was my whole original motivation for this book.

Instead of talking about our round world and their unfurled world, we'll call their world the flat world or sometimes the plane. "Plane" like in math, just as we call our planet a "sphere," and our universe (maybe) a "hypersphere." The other world isn't a *Flatland* plane, but it would be reasonable for the inhabitants to call it a plane anyway. But mostly I'll say flat.

Unspace separates the worlds, but the aliens are suddenly able to tunnel through. There is a copy of *Los Perros* on the other side.

Yampa and Pinchley say that they come from a place called Szep City which is a million-mile drive from the flat world version of *Los Perros*. They drove to the flat world *Los Perros* and became involved with the doubles of Zoe, Villy and Scud. Someone stole the two Szeps' car over there, and the three kids disappeared, so the Szeps tunneled through to our Earth to recruit our Zoe, Villy, and Scud and to make use of Villy's car, the purple whale—which Pinchley has now upgraded.

In the upcoming chapter, the aliens will hop back to the flat world with the augmented purple whale and the three kids. The passage through unspace might be troublesome. Something lives there. The Guardian of Unspace, the Warder, the Gate Keeper, the slobbering Crypt Keeper. It could even be God. I might depict him as an undesirable man, like a pervert or a bum.

In this vein, I had a nightmare this week where the computer scientist Stephen Wolfram, of all people, was playing a Mephisto role. He was forcing me down some escalators to an underworld—his kingdom. I kept being polite and trying to flatter him to get out of the bad place. But I was stuck down there, and I was thrown into acid-trip-like hallucinations of rushing shapes. I managed to come out of it, and I escaped up the stairs, but then God/Wolfram was cajoling me for a drop of my sperm. He'd had a sex change to become a woman, and he wanted to bear my child. He thought I was one of the few met on an intelligence comparable to his, and that we should join our genes. *Ugh.*

I could see this routine this for unspace yeah, but maybe it should be Zoe getting somehow molested, threatened by God, or it could be Scud who God's picking on. Was the Virgin Mary's impregnation a form of molestation?

WHY DID THE TWO SZEP TRAVEL FROM SZEP CITY TO LOS PERROS?

I'll suppose that Earth is of key importance and—why not go for it—the three kids' home village of *Los Perros* is the most important city on Earth and—lets *really* go for it—these three kid-heroes are the most important people in the world. The fate of the cosmos is in their hands.

Readers like to feel important, they like a story where there's something crucial about a

home town like theirs, and where the main character is of key importance. In YA books in particular, the readers like to suppose that the hero (who stands for the reader) has some heretofore unrecognized vast capabilities. You, just as you are, are meant to be the star of some instance of the Monomyth. Okay, fine.

Why haven't aliens tunneled through to abduct Los Perros youth before? Maybe they just now learned how to tunnel. Maybe because of something Scud did.

What would the roaming races of the flat world be seeking in their version of Los Perros? I'm seeing something tall, a marker, is it a crystal obelisk? Maybe the obelisk should be like a barbershop pole, as you sometimes see in cartoons of the north pole? Or maybe it's a bronze surfboard, that would be funny. Like the statue of the surfer on West Cliff Drive in Santa Cruz, in way, but this is a very tall surfboard, and it honors a special deep water twenty-yard-long rogue-wave surfboard that was invented by a Los Perros garage-workshop guy, akin to the Tesla cars guy. The guy put up the monument to himself. But I don't see Los Perros as a beach town.

So maybe this tall thing is some kind of antenna. A guy who claims he's broadcasting souls to heaven? He broadcasts DNA code and an encrypted data base of the person. I wrote about this routine [before](#), but I can use it again. The thing he's broadcasting with is a really big crystal, it's sixty feet high. The guy is a complete wack-job New Age bullshitter, but the Xtl Lxr, as he calls his big crystal (pronounced "Crystal Elixir," is working, but in a way the guy doesn't understand, producing subaether vibrations. Vreen rays. Yeah. The Xtl Lxr is calling to the aliens on the other sheet and it's thinning the distance between the worlds.

So it's the Xtl Lxr that's the obelisk monument I visualized. We're thinking of Los Perros as a Joycean *omphalos*, a world-navel.

The Szep are the only ones who've figured out that, thanks to the Xtl Lxr, Los Perros is a spot where the flat world and the round world are close to each other. The spot where the two sheets of reality touch. A connection point. The Szep are a very wise and ancient race, they're like the Arab mathematicians who kept Euclid alive during the Dark Ages.

The parasitic ants and saucers tag after the Szep like flies or hyenas. They eternally seek a cut of whatever the Szep find. Not that the hive-mind ants or the merged, ethereal saucers can clearly grasp what it is that the Szep have sought and now found—that is, the ants and saucers really don't have "ideas" or "understand things" in the human-intelligence senses of the words.

WHAT DRAWS THE SZEP TO OUR THREE HEROES IN PARTICULAR?

What is it that our three kids can do? Love, laugh, cry, create, intuit. But I need some activities that are more specific and quirky than generalized positive qualities. Objective correlatives, with the funk of the real. Dance, surf, play music, do math, make bead jewelry. Whatever I fix on will subsume or instantiate more high-end human traits. But for the story I do need activities

Here's a table listing the strengths and weaknesses of Zoe, Villy, and Scud. I also have a column with ideas for things that specifically attract the Szep to them.

Character	Strengths	Szep Focus	Weaknesses
Zoe	Creativity. Trumpet, making jewelry. Sees patterns.	Timbre of her trumpet. Her tune.	Listless, puts things off. Vain.
Villy	Empathy. Fixing his car.	Swoop of his	Bad at math

lly	Surfing.	mind. One surf ride.	and logic.
ud Sc	Puzzles and math. Photography. Looking at nature. Making collections: stamps, coins, rocks, shells.	Classifying. His beetles.	Low empathy.

Table 6: Plusses and Minuses of the Kids. Ver 1.

When they leave with the aliens, Villy brings his surfboard, Zoe brings her trumpet and her rattle, and Scud brings his beetle collection.

VILLY SURFS BIG WAVES

I know I've had surfer characters [before](#), but I'm going to assume that Villy's a great surfer. Looking ahead, I can see a thousand-mile ocean and some mountainous waves like in that movie *Interstellar*—that was my fave scene in the movie, and yes, I'd be recycling from the movie and from my Zep and Del stories with Marc Laidlaw, but you know the YA readers are gonna love the giant wave. It's like if you're writing a Western you have a gunfight. I see Villy as being like Zep in those Zep and Del tales.

By the way, for the *Interstellar*-style scene, we can posit an effect of the flat world's odd gravity on the waves, claiming that it changes their cross-sectional shape in some interesting way. I wouldn't want the waves to be lower and flatter—no man, I want them to be thinner, higher, more pellucid, more like curved blades. *Yeek!*

FLAT WORLD AND ROUND WORLD

I was talking about Los Perros being a spot where our ball world touching the flat world. I think of the south pole of a sphere that's undergoing stereographic projection onto the plane—the projection point, which is the north pole N, goes to infinity, and the rest of the sphere is stretched across the plane, and one single point is left in place: the south pole. See Hilbert and Cohn-Vossen's representation of this map in their classic and exceedingly wonderful book, *Geometry and the Imagination*, as shown below. (Note that "stereographic" here is used in an old-school formal mathematical sense that has no connection with the notion of stereo vision, or stereo sound.)

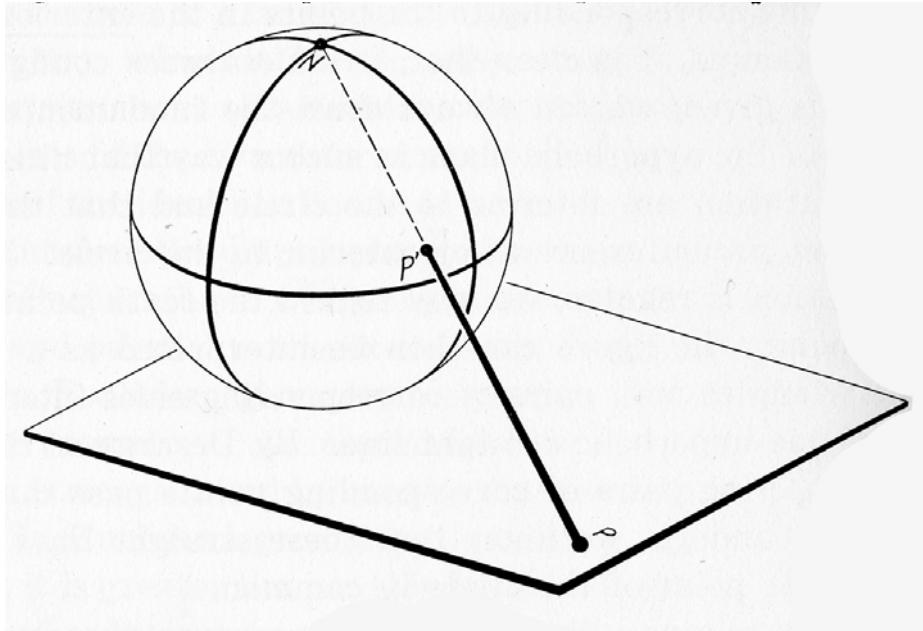


Figure 5: Stereographic Projection of a Sphere onto a Plane

And now I go all hyperspace on your ass. I may not reveal this secret wisdom in the mundane text of the novel—I may reserve it solely for the golden pages of these *Notes*. Suppose I kick things up a dimension and imagine a stereographic projection of a hyperspherical 3D space onto a flat 3D space. The projection point is clear over at the other side of our universe—it's like a north pole, and we're like a south pole. The projection point is like God's Eye, and we're mundane folk. The Eye casts a shortcut beam through the underside of curved space, zaps each point P' of our 3D space to an image point P where the beam intersects the 3D flat space of the flat world. Or, inversely, the Eye peers over to the flat world, follows the beam back from a point P , back towards the Eye and thus finds the corresponding pre-image P' in our hyperspherical world.

As this is a novel, we might suppose that there is really a being with that God's Eye. For a big scene near the end. And this God/Projection Eye lives in unspace.

So now my image is that our universe is like a ball on a plane. The ball is us, the plane is the other world. It so happens that in our world, the planets are spheres, and in the other world the planets are endless plains or maybe one single endless plain.

Round Space & Round Planets :: Flat Space & Planar Planets. It's an "as above so below" correspondence. I don't (as yet!) see any causal connection between the shape of universe and the roundness vs. the planarity of the human landscape. But maybe I can think of something. The scientist Ernst Mach said inertia results from the distant stars. If the stars of all space were in a single plane, there could be some gravitational lensing effect to cause a cloud of dust to preferentially take on a disk shape rather than a spherical form. Not just the stars in the flat plane, but the *dark matter*, yeah baby. The streams of Higgs bosons. The Higgs are more massive than the Higgs.

THE DISTANCE FROM SZEP CITY TO LOS PERROS

If it's only a million miles to Szep City, and that's not really very far. Earth is ninety-

three million miles from the Sun, so our orbit is about 300 million miles long, so a million miles as tiny little three hundredth of the way around the orbit, like one single angle degree. See the figure below.

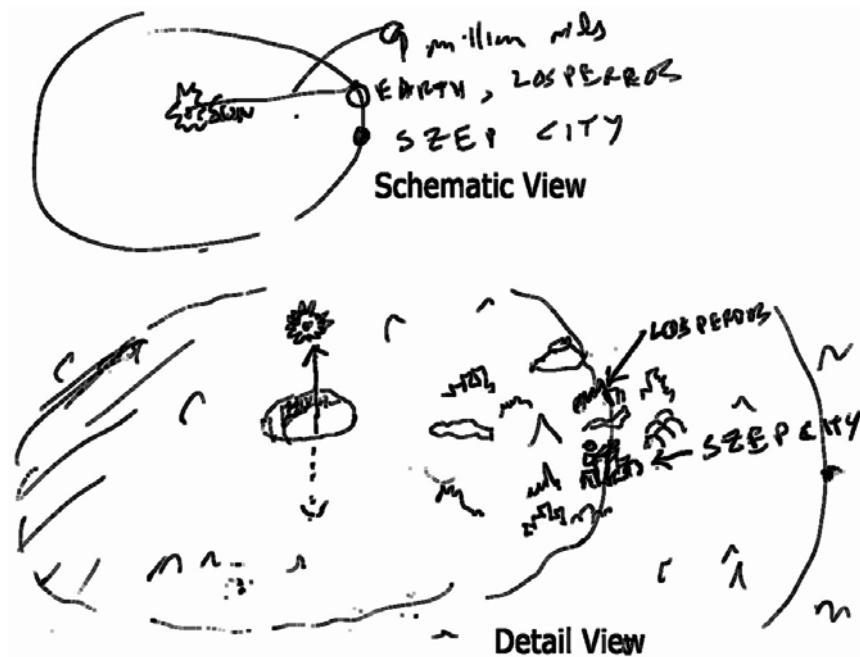


Figure 6: World Disk Around Sun

Well, maybe we can go further in a sequel.

Maybe the stars all have disks of matter around them—disk planets—and the suns oscillate up and down. This is pretty simple. A little stale, though, a little too *Ringworld*.

Or I have an endless plain with suns oscillating up and down through it. In this case it would be fun not to have the suns so far apart. Maybe one every ten AU (AU = astronomical unit = distance from Earth to Sun). This gets awfully complicated.

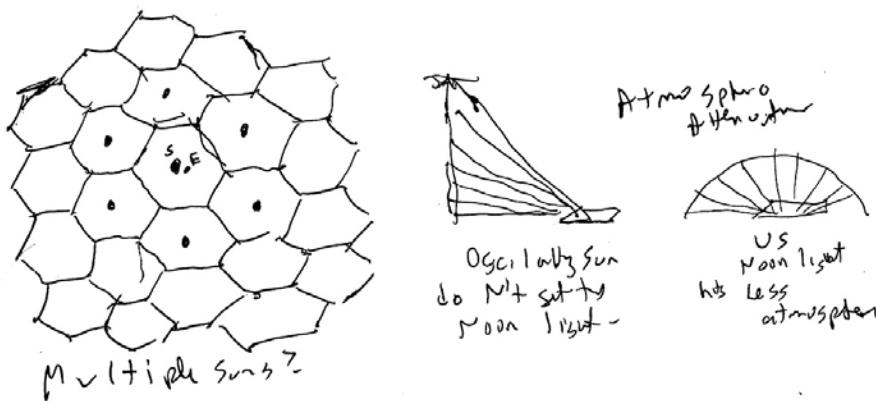


Figure 7: Lighting from Multiple Oscillating Suns

THE PLANE AND A SHEET SUN

Since the other world is in another universe or brane, I can make it as simple as I want. Let's have an endless plane of matter. The flat world, yes.

As for the lighting, forget all the oscillating suns. Use Occam's razor and have a glowing sheet of light that oscillates through the matter, back and forth, one full cycle per day.

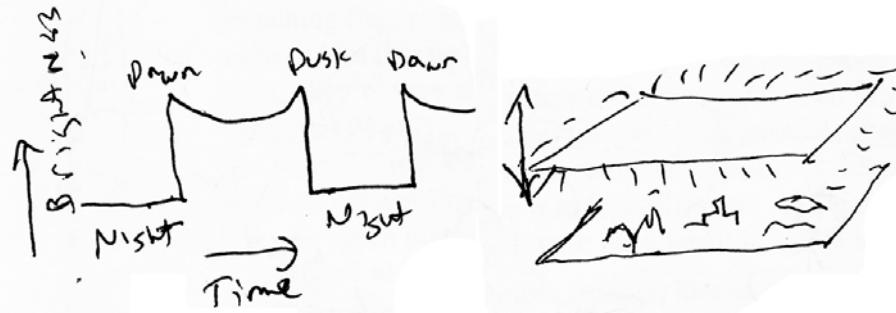


Figure 8: Oscillating Sun Sheet and Its Day/Night Cycle

This might be fun, and it's the most magical. You get a heavy zap when the sheet of light passes through you. Like you're a person being disassembled and built up by a scanning 3D printer. When the sun sheet comes up, it's full-on high-noon daylight. It might not even go up all that high, but high enough so we can have clouds and weather.

But, wait, I can make it even simpler. I'll just say the space of the flat universe is suffused with light like the inside of a neon tube. And the light amps up and down on a sinewave cycle. That's the nicest as it's more like our lighting. How might I pretend to explain that? A cloud of *glowons* oscillates through the plane. You can kind of feel them around dawn and dusk. Kind of a pre-thunderstorm tingly energy.

AIR GRAVITY: WHY THEY DON'T FLY

I want to justify my restriction that it's impossible for the Szep to fly, say, a scout ship in the flat world? In *Ringworld*—if they fly high, they get zapped by an automatic defense blaster robots. There could be an effect like that in the flat universe. Some kind of dark energy charge.

Better idea: Gravity works differently in the flat world. It's essentially impossible to fly, as gravity doesn't fall off in an inverse square way, in fact gets stronger as you go up. The higher up you go, the "heavier" you feel.

This is—*harrumph*—because the air is filled with particles that exercise a high gravitational attraction, but without being correspondingly massive and hard to move. I'm decoupling the notions of "inertia" and "gravitational charge." If I use this rubber-science maneuver, then I can just about get away with saying that the added weight is proportional to your height above the ground directly below you, as opposed to being proportional to your distance above the median altitude of the plane. So you're not heavier on a plateau or on a hill or on a mountain; you're only heavier when you go up into the air.

I won't go into tech details, I'll just call it air gravity.

You don't notice that extra air gravity weight unless you're about ten or twenty feet up. So the aliens *could* build high-speed rocket-powered hovercraft cars that hover two or three feet above the surface, but these cars don't do that well. We'll encounter some of them, and those

cars are gonna eat it.

But, wait, aren't those rubbery little saucers able to fly? Okay, maybe *they* have antigravity, but nobody else does. Maybe the rubbery little saucers are made of glowons.

Oops, I just thought of a problem. How do the *birds* fly in the flat world? Either they can't fly high or we give birds some antigravity power, akin to the saucers' power.

WHAT'S UNDER THE FLAT WORLD?

I haven't mentioned it yet, but it might be that there's a world on the underside of the plane. But I have enough balls in the air for my current book without talking about the underside. Or I might want to have my evil aliens living down there. Like maybe that's where the ants and/or the saucers come from.

But, really, given that I've set up the endless plane world, it seems wasteful and distracting to go haring off to a flipside world. Better to have the ants and saucers on the plane.

Even better, let's say the plane is a solid block that goes down forever, a half-space! I kind of like that. Life is on the interface.

Or no, let's do a loop thing where if you dig down you end up back on the plane's top surface. I was going to put in a Figure 9 figure above with a drawing of how this would work in *Flatland*—but I never did the drawing. Oh well. The universe with a lower edge that loops around. It doesn't necessarily mirror-reverse you, although I could add that as an extra touch.

January 29, 2015. The Departure Chapter.

I'm thinking I should drop the idea my characters having doubles in the other world. That's just a way of avoiding the question: Why do the Szep want the kids? I mean, if I use doubles, then I'm saying the Szep want the kids so as to replace the doubles, but then I'd still need to say why they wanted the doubles, and I still don't know.

Maybe the aliens are, like, capturing or collecting the kids as examples of a native species from the bally world Earth and bringing them back to a species zoo in Szep City. This was a move that Vonnegut used in *Sirens of Titan*. But the aliens will be ostensibly be taking the kids for some other reason. They'll pretend that the kids have important skills, but in fact they don't think much of the kids' powers. But then—I'll do a reverse—and the kids' powers *will* in fact be important, and will save the day, each kid saving their lives one time.

Zoe really didn't want Scud to come along on the trip, and I wanted to have a scene of her yelling at him. At first I overdid it, like this:

"But—this was supposed to be like—like a honeymoon," blurts Zoe, suddenly close to tears. "I mean, no, not like getting married, but I thought it would be just the two of us, having fun together, and talking, and being relaxed, and—"

"*Penis!*" yells Scud. "*Vulva!*"

Zoe draws out a small pistol, and shoots the boy in the center of his forehead. One clean shot and it's sayonara. Chittering like chimpanzees, the aliens tear Scud limb from limb, devouring every scrap of his body—and his clothes as well.

"You were saying?" goes Villy.

But then I made Scud a little more sympathetic, even though I couldn't resist writing another unused anti-Scud scene where Yampa wants to get rid of him too.

“SHOULD WE FEED SCUD TO THE SAUCER THAT’S FOLLOWING US?” teeps Yampa.
“Like throwing an invalid to the wolves behind a Siberian sled.” She’s cocks her chin, proud of her recondite cultural reference.

February 4-5, 2015. In the Flat World Now.

Feb 4, 2015.

So now I’m starting Chapter 7, at 11,638 words. The augmented purple whale has just made the hop, with the three kids and the two aliens inside. What do they see?

I’m thinking of a livelier Friday night Santa Cruz Ave. in Los Gatos, although Pacific Ave. in Santa Cruz might be a better image, or Valencia St. in SF. I started a painting yesterday, trying to get an image, and I finger-painted some multicolored snaky “foliage” in the top half, and I was imagining heads on long necks poking down, or even some Picasso-style head-blobs floating around.

Or a fairly standard SF spaceport street, with several races rubbing shoulders and, what the hell, a spaceport bar.

Once again—why is there all this activity in the flat world Los Perros? What if, in the flat world, it’s widely known that (a) There is another world, that is, our bally world, and (b) The round world may be particularly easy to reach from the flat world Los Perros. And there have been numerous expeditions. So many of those reports of aliens and UFOs on our Earth have in fact been true.

Does that mean I have to have **ugh** those generic little blank-faced Grey aliens? Not immediately, although later on *maybe* they can put in an appearance. I could have them be the “same” as those leech saucers, that is, during its lifecycle one of these beings is at one stage a flying saucer, and is a Grey at another stage. Like a jellyfish’s lifecycle—it’s a sessile thing at one stage and a drifting disk at another. If the Greys are true vampires, then being preyed upon by one of them might turn you into one of them. Not sure I’ll do this, though. I have a sense that introducing Greys sucks all the fun and excitement out of a novel, or makes it into low parody or even into fan fiction. Although John Shirley kind of pulled it off in *Silicon Embrace*.

“It’s not a nice thing to tell someone you want to shoot them in the head,” Scud complains to Zoe. “I still feel bad.”

Feb 5, 2015.

I started my painting yesterday, it’s cool. “Blobbers Beneath Tree.” A couple of Picasso-style heads, the general pattern cribbed from a Jasper Johns Picasso-homage painting: “Untitled,” 1990.

What if the city where they find themselves, Diskerville, isn’t at all a mirror of Los Perros? Well, I’d miss having it be Los Perros, I think that would be very cool.

But okay, what if there’s a city that’s a central gathering spot for bally world prospectors, like maybe San Francisco, only we call it Diskerville. When you hop from Diskerville you might end up anywhere in that general area of Earth. The unspace connection doesn’t necessarily have to respect the constraints of ordinary space and time—keep in mind that I’m even thinking of having the kids return at very nearly the same moment when they left. Like, maybe they’ll have seemingly jumped over that SUV.

The reason I’m raising the big city prospect is that I think it would be interesting if Pinchley and Yampa get involved with some other prospectors in Diskerville. We need to have

some kind of rivalry and pursuit.

Don't like the name Diskerville. I'll use Larry Niven's middle name as a *Ringworld* homage. *Van Cott*.

Maybe there are particular substances from our bally world Earth that are known to be powerful elixirs. A longevity agent on the flat world. Cinnamon? (I'm thinking of Niven's *Ringworld* boosterspice.) And that's why Yampa and Pinchley were giving off that odor, they're, like, hinting around or in fact blatantly showing what it is that they want. One little jar of cinnamon might be enough to bring immortality for hundreds or maybe couple of thousand of the Szep. It doesn't have to be enough for all of them—if it's for a *limited* number of the Szep it's better, as a commercial high-end sub-rosa product. Odd, however that the Szep's biotech wouldn't be able to synthesize cinnamon.

Oh, better idea, use lawn seed. Grass seed. That's a more complicated chemical, the DNA, and it has that life-force thing. We can suppose there's some quantum mechanical aspect to it, some wiggly-ass subaethereal vibration.

And the cinnamon can be something that gets them high, or it tastes indescribably toothsome to them.

February 7, 2015. "Tree of Life" Painting.

I did a painting of some weird disembodied heads bobbing around like balloons beneath the intertwined branches of this flat world avenue's low, strange trees. I ended up calling the painting *Tree of Life*. I wanted a simple title. Before the painting, I did two quite different sketches.

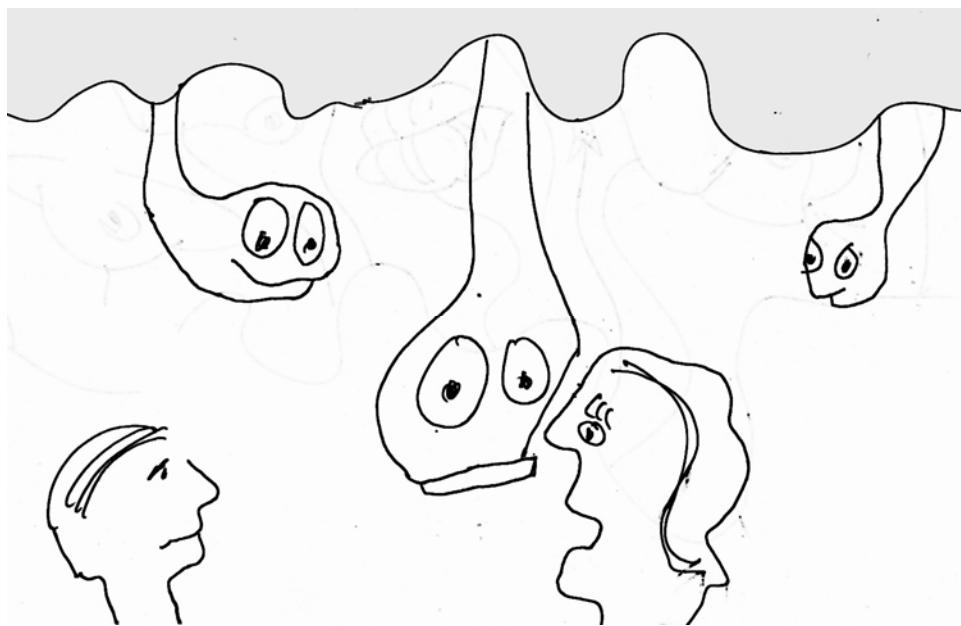


Figure 10: "Tree of Life," Sketch 1.

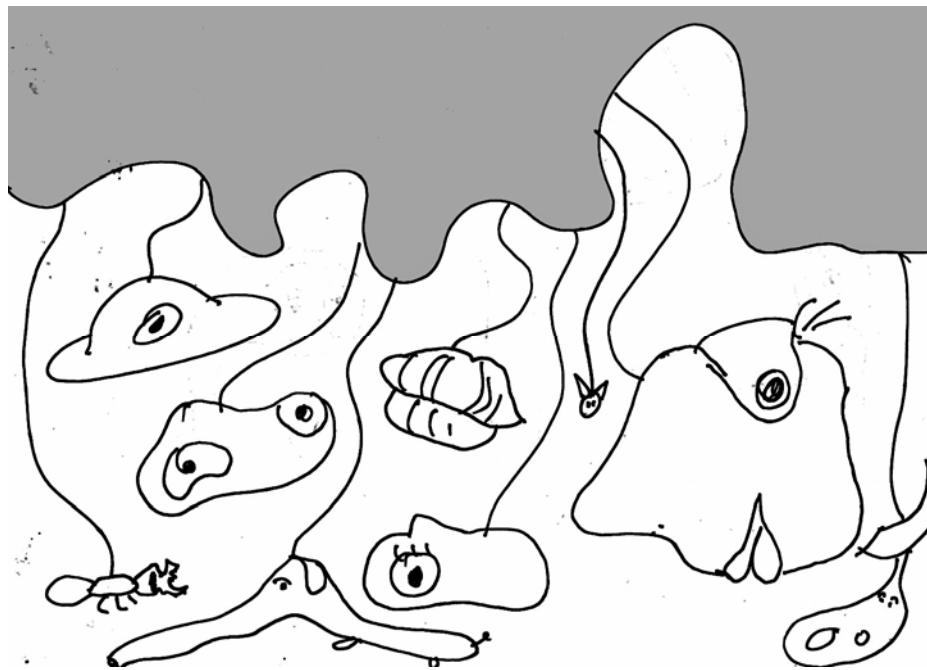


Figure 11: "Tree of Life," Sketch 2.



Figure 12: "Tree of Life," Oil on canvas. 40" by 30". February, 2015.

I started out by putting a lot of paint and gel medium in the top half of the canvas and I began finger painting with it. I decided this would be the foliage of a tree, and that I'd put two

cool aliens under it—I needed mental images of aliens for the novel. I used variations on a Picasso-style face that Jasper Johns included in his 1990 painting called, unhelpfully, *Untitled*. And then I put a third little alien in the tree with an umbilical cord. I think of this painting as showing parents awaiting the birth of their baby. So that's a tree of life.

I got a model of how our bally world matches up with the flat world. The flat world is divided into hexagonal basins separated by mountain ranges. And each hexagon has a “map” copy of an inhabited Earth-like planet. So in the flat world you don’t waste all that room on empty space and on dead rock worlds. Maybe there are gas giant basins somewhere further away, but around here, it’s all places where humans can breathe.

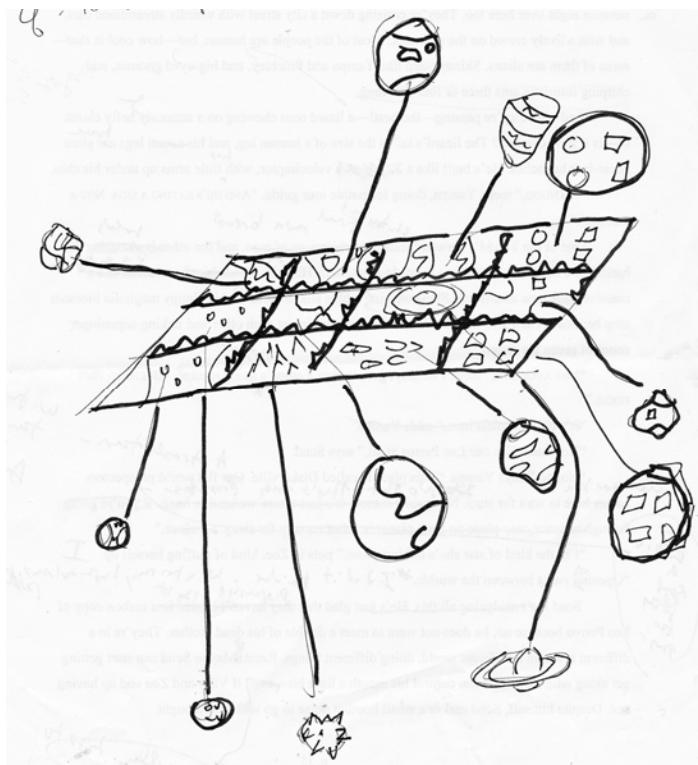


Figure 13: Bally World Planets Map Onto Flat World Basins

February 11-12, 2015. Finished Chapter 7. Split the Party?

February 11, 2015.

So I finished Chapter 7 today. I called the chapter Van Cott, after Larry Niven’s middle name. Van Cott is the name of the city they arrive at in the flat world. It gives me a good feeling to be putting Larry’s middle name in there. Solidarity. I’m one of the boys. An SF writer, yeah.

I met Larry at the very first US SF con I went to, Boskone in 1980, I think, or maybe it was 1981. I was on a panel about math and SF with Larry. I talked about *White Light*, which I’d just sold to Ace Books. In the green room before the panel, Larry was, like, “Do you know what you’re talking about with infinity, Rudy? I’m a man who knows about this stuff. I have a BA in math and I took some grad courses.” “I have a Ph.D. in set theory.” “Oh. Okay.” Laughs. He’s always been friendly to me.

I've been putting more and more wheenk and eyeball kicks into this chapter over the last couple of days. Making it fun, and emotional. Making things up as I go along. It feels a little like when I was writing *White Light* and *Software*. Piling on the wonders, and never mind any idea of an outline. Go, man, go.

At this point I have seven chapters for 14,000 words, very close to 2K words per chapter. They're like short-short stories. I'm liking that. To hit, say, 85K, I'll need six times this much. That is, 42 chapters, making 84K words. So I'm a sixth done. And I started a little over a month ago. So I could be done in, say, six months, but I probably won't be writing flat-out all that time, like I've kind of been doing for the last few weeks. So let's say the book might take me nine or ten more months. Which sets the completion date in something like next November or maybe October.

Will I Kickstart and self-pub his one? Probably I'll give commercial pubs a shot first. I don't know that anyone ever Kickstarts a commercially published book. And, yes, I'm getting ahead of myself here.

Re. commercial publication, I might not want to send out the book till it's done. I don't want advice at this point. Don't want to get derailed. Want to wail with it and see what happens. Like *White Light* and *Software*.

February 12, 2015.

I can't face doing yet another revision on Chapter 7 just now—I've been over it about seven times. Well, I might give the last page another look later today. But really I need to get going on Chapter 8: The Night Market. This is the one that'll be set inside that painting I just made, *The Tree of Life*, with the people who are floating yellow glob-heads, floating under the snake trees. They're like the gubs from *The Big Aha* a little bit, but I don't think I'd can use that name for them here, wonderful though it is. Pig, wub, vig, gub. I think I'll call them Freeths.

For the action of Chapter 8, I see them wanting to leave Van Cott and set out on the car trip, but they get into some complication at the night market. They'll learn of a problem with their intended route, and hear about some enemies who may be chasing them, and maybe one of the Freeths joins the party, and maybe for some reason the party splits in two. And the parties don't travel in caravan; they don't take the same route.

Why a Freeth? Think of a crew aboard a whaler or a spaceship, they're always adding people. The Freeth's name might be Dingo. She can guide them through the basins—along a new route. And, as I say, the route which Yampa and Pinchley originally planned is now interdicted. Dingo? Should sound more different from Yampa. Blubba. Blob. Blobby. Bumpee. Bleethe. Sairy. Meatball! I'm imagining that I'm writing for a young woman reader who's similar to Zoe. I think this reader would enjoy a woman character with a ruff'n'tuff name like Meatball. It goes against the prissy-femininity grain. Rollicking, transgressive.

After the night market scene, I might ditch Scud, and then Villy and Zoe have to (eventually) find him. Or, Scud can (eventually) reappear to save their bacon. A combination of these two.

If I get rid of Scud for awhile, then I can focus on the relationship between Villy and Zoe, which is what I originally meant to do. Maybe I can send one of the Szep off with Scud—let's say I send Yampa to kind of mother the boy. Pinchley is fun, he's a gearhead, and I want him with Villy, he can be Villy's pal. So then Meatball has to be Zoe's pal, which is why Meatball

better be in some sense a woman.

So, okay, fission the exploration party into two parties, and I'll follow both of them. And I can have my chapters switch back and forth between them—not necessarily in strict alternation, but more like in bursts, with occasional alternations.

- Villy, Zoe, Pinchley, and Meatball.
- Scud, Yampa—and they pick up another alien character. A female ant named Chrrr.

Scud is one of my stronger characters. The most weakly sketched character right now is Villy. I have Scud doing his semi-autistic thing, and Zoe being the bitter goth, but Villy isn't clear-cut. The characters of Pinchley and Yampa aren't as clearly etched as they could be, but I have kind of sense for them. Yampa's a little brighter, Pinchley's a little more sardonic and funny.

February 20-24, 2015. Eyeball Kicks for Chapter 8. Next?

I've been going over and over Chapter 8, at the night market, adding more and more eyeball kicks and story logic. Even now it's still not as thick as it should be, I want more still more sights, sounds, and a smells. Boschian, Bruegelian. Chapter 8 ends with Villy rampantly dead, zapped by the Meatball the Freeth. Menacing Ira the Szep is running over. The terrified Scud has run off into the market. Zoe has hopped back to our bally world (but she won't stay there long).

And now I see two scenes. These can be in separate chapters if the first scene runs long.

First Scene: Scud ends up behind the booths, away from the calla lights, with a few humans and aliens are meandering around in the gloom, chatting, doing deals, or connecting for sex. This world has a medieval feel. Scud wouldn't mind staying here for awhile, if he could, but, oh god, did that Freeth really kill his big brother? Scud was a rat to run off. But rats are the animals who survive. Squirming into dark holes and burrows.

Finding a pool of deep shadow, Scud leans against the trunk of a tree and pees. He hopes that food—and the preliminary digestive potion—are going to poison him.

Yampa finds him. Yampa and Scud connect, and they head off on the trip.

Second Scene: Zoe is standing on Los Perros Boulevard—she's flipped back to exact same moment when she left—except she isn't inside the purple whale. It's over her head, or no, it's ghostly and insubstantial. And, o god, she can see her earlier self inside the whale, frantically shaking that calabash rattle. The whale is sliding past her and past the careening white SUV whose, ahem, headlights are drilling into Zoe's eyes, very real, very much on the same level of reality as her just now, the SUV's tires squealing, it's dumb ass horn blaring, a gross splotch of blood on its grill, and Zoe's Mom's face is behind the windshield, staring aghast at her only child, her problem daughter, Zoe Snapp in the street holding her trumpet, frozen in the light, Zoe about to get run down.

She blasts on the horn again and—*whirl, whirl, whirl*—she's back in the flat world, back to the spot where she left from, back in the night market standing over dead Villy with that goddamn killer Freeth balloon lecturing them from overhead.

"Say you're sorry!" Meatball repeats, like Zoe was never gone at all.

"I'm sorry you're here you stupid gas bag," yells Zoe. "Bring Villy back."

"Back from where?" says Villy, creakily sitting up. "Whoah, Nellie. What hit me?"

“That frikking balloon. She zapped you.”

“You were squeezing me,” says Meatball, drifting down towards their level, but with a cautious air, as if she’s ready instantly to fly back up.

Pinchley arrives. He holds off Ira, there’s a fight, and Meatball zaps Ira flat. “You see?” says Meatball once again. But this time her conclusion is different. “You need me on your team.”

Pinchley hustles Zoe and Villy to the purple whale, and Meatball comes along. Yampa and Scud are already gone. The purple whale crew speeds out of town.

Looking ahead, I think eventually Scud might be converted into a saucer. Maye the saucers roost on the underside of the flat world. Maybe Scud does see a double of his mother, too, and it’s dreadful. Do the Stephen King thing—figure out what’s the worst thing that could happen, the thing that your readers dread to see—and go there.

February 24-25, 2015. Saucer Hall. Three Zoes.

Let’s say that Scud goes into a building that looks like the Supreme Court building in DC, and it’s the Saucer Hall. With saucerian glyphs on the outside.



Figure 14: Saucer Hall, February, 2015.

I started this more or less at random, playing with the paint, using acrylic for a change. I was out in my back yard, painting with my twin granddaughters, each of us with their own canvas. That triangular pediment showed up kind of by chance in this daub, And then the triangle made me think of the Supreme Court building, which suggested a “Saucer Hall” where UFOs gather. We ran out of yellow acrylic paint, so the painting was a little greener and bluer than I wanted, even after I worked on it the next day.

So the day after the next day, (that is, on Feb 25, 2015,) I did another session on the painting. Turns out its okay to glaze on oil paint layers on top of an acrylic painting, once the acrylic is good and dry, and with the proviso that the acrylic isn’t super glossy. So I didn’t have to go out for a tube of yellow acrylic paint. I layered on some glazes and now the final version

looks good. Before I added the final oil-paint glaze layers, the painting had that dreaded "art school hallway" look, with all the color areas flat and monochromatic and raw. Nice and rich now.

And, *score!*, in the final touchup, I had the idea of putting a sun/star/wormhole/eye in the middle of the triangle. The saucers have a hypertunnel inside of Saucer Hall, you understand. I can run with *that*, baby.

And here's a spacetime sketch I made the other day.



Figure 15: Three Zoes

An ironclad rule of the hops between the two worlds is that you always return to the spacetime location where you came from. When Zoe briefly hops back to Los Perros from the night market, she returns to the spacetime location marked H where she left from. And she'll see herself in the car leaving on the first hop, and she'll see her future self coming back after the million mile road trip but still fated to return to H. But the older, wiser Zoe will know about the onrushing SUV, and she'll be already racing off to race off to the side. What she'll do is to set out running really fast, and to the hop while moving.

I'll weave back the fact that when they do the initial hop, Zoe notices two copies of herself, the deer-in-the-headlights night-market-hop Zoe, and the racing-to-the-side post-road trip Zoe. And someone is with that future Zoe, but she can't quite make it out.

Something disturbing I'll set up: I'll suppose that future returning Zoe has Scud with her, but *not* Villy. Zoe won't initially realize that she saw this—it's something she'll half see, and then flash on this fact when they actually start up the drive from Van Cott, and she'll brood over this from then on.

Feb 28, 2015. Trip to Wyoming.

Sylvia and I were in Pinedale for four nights, visiting our daughter Isabel. I went cross-

country skiing on virgin snow on a high mountain ridge—something I love to do. Such a feel of being on another planet

We saw a traveling variety show of three performers at the high-school auditorium, I can see a scene like that in my novel—my characters doing some kind of show somewhere. Also an echo of Huck Finn there, maybe, when he's with those snake-oil-salesman-type guys.

I've been reading Kim Stanley Robinson's *2312* all the while. Alternating between feeling despair and hope about my own novel. He has lot of so-called terraria and aquaria, which are little worlds made from hollowed-out asteroids, in some ways like the basin worlds my characters will drive through. I like his focus on the different kinds of biomes, like alpine, rain forest, taiga, arctic, forest. He excels at nature writing—staggering scenes on Mercury, Saturn, and Earth. And he gets into deep stuff about social history, quite serious and enlightening...or if I do that, it's more in a satirical Sheckley-style way.

Stan intercalates some modernist lit chapters that might be frags from his notes. Possibly I could do one basin that's a tangle of minds, and get some odd writing there.

When the Flatsie comes out in the field to make Scud an offer, he ought to be sliding real fast on the ground like a flatworm.

March 1-10, 2015. On the Nod

March 1, 2015. On my last afternoon in Pinedale, I popped out the left (2011) artificial hip by twisting, squatting, and turning my knee in, all at the same time. I was trying to fasten the button my ski gaiter—pitifully excited about taking another ski with dear daughter Iz. Slow crunch and slide and it's out. It's the third time a pop has happened on my left hip, but that hasn't happened once on my right (2012) artificial hip, which has the better "double rotation" design.

We rushed to the tiny Pinedale clinic, and a pleasant, bucolic jackass sedated me and then (without having consulted an X-ray machine) said he'd maneuvered my hip back into place. But he hadn't.

March 2, 2015. With my loose hip bone jostling, I underwent a grinding level-eight-out-of-ten pain haze on the very long and much delayed air trip back to Los Gatos. I was taking one of my prescribed hydrocodone pills every two or three hours, which leveled it out for me. Flatness of affect.

March 3, 1015. I rushed to my real hip doctor, Dr. Ed Littlejohn, and he X-rays me and we see the hideous sight of my femur's artificial end-bulb *next to* the socket, even more out of position than I'd feared. Not in the socket at all.

Littlejohn is incredulous at what the Pinedale clinic's done. He's talking about surgery. I'd kind of hoped he could just pop the hip back the right way, but Ed said the muscles were settled into a bad config by now and he'd have to cut me open in any case. So it's better to do a full re-install. An "amendment" as they call it. Went to the hospital and registered, which took a really long time, with lots of redundant filling out of very nearly identical forms.

I was still riding the hydrocodone, and the process didn't bother me. Not exactly a *high*—I'm not euphoric. More like calm acceptance. At ease in the moment. Able to stare at a boring, talking face without caring what it's saying. But, it's not like a good old pot high—it's not *satisfying*. It's more like being tired.

I wonder if I can use this mental quality for the state of mind of one of my aliens. And I did see one hallucination, a guy at a table near us during our endless level-8-pain hydrocodone

airplane trip, the guy was wearing a dark beige parka, and for a moment the wrinkled hood shape looked like a creased face containing a single large eye.

March 4, 2015. I went under the knife for three hours, with spinal tap anaesthetic for my lower body, and they dosed me with Michael Jackson propofol for my head. Eventually I awoke in fits and starts in a large room with at least a dozen patients coming to. The surgery recovery room. No family members allowed in here, just nurses and aides, some of the patients unintelligible. Like frozen starship troopers being resuscitated.

Conversations around me, and, still not fully with it, I imagine the conversations are important and that they include remarks directed towards me, or statements about me, or instructions I'm supposed to follow, or opportunities I need to pick up on. I try to say something aloud in response, but I'm not sure I really do. I have the feeling that the conversations relate to surfing. But I keep nodding off, sinking back into deep inattention.

This is another good SFnal state of consciousness that I could use this scene for a state of mind for Villy or Skug or Zoe.

March 5, 2015. I'm kind of on the nod writing this. I'm out of the hospital and back at my house, writing on my laptop. I've had some oxycontin and Percocet today—the hospital nurses helpfully dialing down my hip pain for me. For a sober, AA-attending guy like me, a situation like this is equivocal. Ambiguous. I mean—the doctor scraped my bone away from the old socket like a diver using his knife to free an anchor fluke from fans of overgrown coral. And sliced and sewed my flesh. So I really am, objectively speaking, experiencing high levels of pain. And the doctor and the nurses are unquestioningly urging me to take pain pills. But, baseline stoner that I am, I feel like I'm *getting away with something*. Savoring the buzz, the disassociation.

These two annoying, self-righteous, physical-therapy-counselor women kept coming by the room before I left today. Dr. Ed had said it was cool if I checked out of the hospital after one night, but the PTCs wanted more of a chance to lecture me about how I'll need to exercise and be careful during my recuperation. One of them was threatening to block my release.

Here, again, it was great to be fully loaded on opioids so I that could vacantly and insolently stare at talking faces that annoyed me.

March 6, 2015. When I got out of the hospital yesterday, I filled two prescriptions for opioids: 4-hour oxycodone and 12-hour oxycontin. I took one of each and I felt really bombed—I didn't like it. Slept all night, and today I've dropped back down to a generic version of plain old over-the-counter pain-killer: Aleve. You're only supposed to take three or four Aleve a day, but maybe five or six is okay.

This was a bad strategy, as the pain got so high that I was very uncomfortable and ill-humored. At bed-time I took one of each of the two oxys and after a half hour the pain went down enough so that I could sleep. I woke several times during the night, and got up and read more of Stan Robinson's 2312. With the pain meds in action, I found I could walk with just a cane instead of crutches.

March 7, 2015. I decided I've been overthinking the pain meds. Today I went ahead and took a 12-hour oxycontin when I got up. I feel slightly zonked, but it's not much worse than having a cold. And I'm not so obsessed by the pain.

I had all these flip-flopping issues the last time I was supposed to do pain meds. I'm incapable of thinking rationally about drugs. It's simpler just to follow the doctor's prescription.

March 10, 2015. So I stayed on the nod for a few more days, napping, dazed, bored. And finally today the pain was at a level I could stand without the oxy.

March 11, 2015. Reset.

I got a very small amount of rewriting done over the last few days, and now it's about time to roll my Sisyphus boulder-novel a little further up the narrative hill.

Scud gets a teep eye from Filkar the Flatsie, uses it make himself invisible to the saucers, goes inside Saucer Hall and sees the great triangular Eye, with saucers streaming through like migrating flocks of birds at sunset.

He's enthralled, and loses his focus, and becomes visible to the saucers, a gyre of them dives at him, but one saucer saves him anyhow, a friendly girlish one named Lorna, she takes him out to the parking lot. And he connects with Yampa—who, let's recall, had gone off with Pinchley to sell the powder.

And then I do the chapter of Zoe's hop to Los Perros and back. I sketched some of that on [February 24, 2015](#). And at the ending she gets Villy and Meatball. I sketched some of the return on [February 20, 2015](#).

And then we get the two cars heading out of town. Or maybe they put the old car inside of Villy's car in shrunken form like a lifeboat. Might be nice, at least for awhile, to have them all in one boat. I'm seeing the two Szep, the two lovers, Scud, and Meatball the Freeth. I don't think they plan to bring Lorna the friendly saucer or Filkar the Flatsie, but those two may yet show up again.

March 28-31, 2015. Big Revision.

I finally got my writing mojo back, returned from the underworld one more time, and I'm busy with *Million Mile Road Trip* again, piling on the eyeball kicks, the unlikely incidents, and the rude dialog. Having fun with it.

I used a scene from my 69th birthday. Sylvia and I had a nice day in SF—a picnic with Rudy Jr. and family, dinner with the Shirleys, and then S & I hit this ancient North Beach bar called the Saloon. They have live blues there all the time and real x-section of people...not techs and yups all that much. Brown people in the mix.

Loved this one Hawaiian couple sitting at the car near us. At some point, with no change of expression, the woman gets up and starts dancing—or, rather, making ritualized dance gestures with her arms, forearms up, forearms down. Love the dance gesture.

The band (Johnny Nitro and the Doorslammers) played one long, mostly instrumental, song with the chorus, "I'll take you there," and indeed the music did take Sylvia and me "there" to a land of peace and zonkfulness and clear white light. I used that song in my "Saucer Hall" chapter. I love it when the real world snaps right on top of whatever I'm writing. The muse in action.

Anyway, I'm about to get my characters gathered together to start that much-touted million-mile drive, and I'm a little unsure about how to work it. So it's a good time to look over the 20K words on the novel that I have so far. I started rereading material yesterday. And I'm finding some changes to make.

- Drop my thing of putting secondary dome heads on the tops of the Szeps' skulls, also my thing of making them telepathic. If Scud is getting telepathy via a "teep eye" add-on, it would sap the interest of this if the Szep already had teep. And the dome head made the Szep too ugly and grotesque.
- Don't have Scud bring a box of beetles, as we are going to have beetle cars in the bally world, so we can't use beetles twice. Also change those "humming beetles" to

- birds or bats. Have him bring fossils.
- Don't have drifting POV. While writing the first draft, I was reveling in the freedom of doing this, but, on rereading, the head-hopping thing comes across as sloppy and confusing. Stick to one close-up POV per chapter, and the others can just *talk* about their feelings. By the way, whose story it is: Villy, Zoe, or Scud? I'll go for all three. At present, Villy isn't very well articulated as a character. I need to enhance him.
- Should use (or at least mention later) some of the items that I set up. Otherwise don't bother setting them up. Some examples. Zoe: beads and wires for jewelry. Scud: box of fossils. Yampa: wearing Zoe's blouse and skirt and necklace.

I ended up doing a quick POV revision on Chapter 1 to make it all Zoe, and I did deep word-by-word revisions on Chaps 5 – 10. I got it down to one POV per chapter. Zoe is hogging the stage at this point, that is, she's had more chapters. I need to give Villy and Scud sometime in the limelight. Will do a long Villy chapter soon.

And eventually I'll want to go back and do word-by-word revisions on Chaps 1-4 as well. But maybe not right now. Maybe I can get the forward edge of the novel to start growing again.

April 1, 2015. Parking Lot Rumble.

I think I'll make my "Three Zoes" Chapter 10 pretty short. And I'll switch to a Villy POV for Chapter 11: "Parking Lot Rumble." Here's the scenario.

Yampa and Pinchley still aren't done with their cocoa party. Villy and Zoe go back to the cars with Meatball. They start arguing with Irav, the Szep claim jumper. Turns out Meatball can't in fact kill Irav on her own, even though she bragged that she could, and even though she tries. Scud and Nunu show up. Irav threatens Scud. Nunu zaps Irav, but she can't kill him either. Her zap is more like a green tractor ray.

Villy suggests that Nunu and Meatball hold a line of dark energy between them—like an electric cheese-cutter wire, or like a virtual garrote. Meatballs lighting feeding into Nunu's tractor bean. They drag the line through Irav—and cut Irav in half.

But Irav doesn't actually die. We need him as an enemy who will be pursuing and badgering our party en route to Szep City. So I'll suppose that Irav's two halves seal over, and his torso clings to the top of his legs, and the legs trot over to Pinchley and Yampa's car. Meatball and Nunu are chasing these animated remains of Irav, and they even manage to cut him into quarters, but it's no use. The four-part Szep scrambles into Yampa and Pinchley's car and drives off while shrieking imprecations. Steals the damn car.

And then Pinchley and Yampa show up. They're not that upset about losing their car. They're high. But the purple whale is kind of crowded. Well, let's say Pinchley grows it with a space pinch. Puts negatively curved space inside it.

Villy gets behind the wheel and drives.

April 8-23, 2015. What's in the Middle?

I noticed just now that I started these *Notes for Million Mile Road Trip* a bit over a year ago, on April 4, 2015. This one is slow off the launching pad. For a long time I didn't actually know what the novel would be—and I didn't write the first page until January 5, 2015. And now the novel is at 23K words, and these notes are at 45K words.

So I've just about finished Chapter 11, "Leaving Town." I'm at 23,100 words. They're

just getting on the road, setting out on the million mile road trip to Szep City. Villy, Zoe, Yampa, Pinchley, Meatball, and Nunu inside the capacious space-dilated interior of the purple whale. They'll head north to Alaska, and across the Aleutian islands to a pass in a great wall of mountains. That might take another chapter. And that'll be the end of Part I of the novel.

Probably I'll have three long parts in all, with maybe a short fourth part when they get back to Los Perros. What happens in part II?

Well, to start with, they go through a pass, and then down into the next basin over. Naturally there will be some problem with the pass. Eventually the four Iravs will stage an ambush—he's the enemy Szep who they cut into four living pieces, but I think it's more suspenseful if he's not waiting at the very first pass, but at the second or third or fourth. It'll be someone else bugging them at the first and second passes. Living stones. Ants. Birds. Saucers.

Beyond that, I'm not sure what's in the second basin, and this reflects my larger problem: what happens during Part II, that is, on the trip to Szep City? And what happens after that? The obvious move is to have a picaresque narrative for Part II, with little tales about five or six of the basins. These have to be snappy and interesting. And I really would like some glimmerings of a bigger picture. I need the motives of the main characters. And some highlight feats for the good characters. And some twists to look forward to. I'll assemble a list of those things in a separate section called Scene Fodder.

Idea for a Basin: Birdland. I haven't mentioned birds yet, so it would be a nice surprise. Big birds, like in Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*.

I'm hepped on birds because S & I staying in a B & B cottage near Occidental, CA—and this afternoon we happened to be sitting on the patio behind a bakery in the hamlet/rest-stop-strip-mall of Duncan Mills on the Russian River, eating a scone, and some lovely birds that I called grackles were there prospecting for crumbs. The bakery had a fountain/birdbath on the patio. The grackles were shiny with glints of green and purple. They had pale yellow irises around dark pupils. Hopping around. Competing for the crumbs I was throwing them. Walking along a 2x4 railing with exaggerated back and forth head motions. Leaning down to make repeated, compulsive "sharpening my beak" gestures against the edge of the railing. The railing's edge was worn down from this.

Today is the first time in awhile that I've really made an effort to think about the overall story arc. I've been satisfied with just getting one scene after another to work.

I still have a sense that the novel is missing that one special ingredient that each of my novels normally has. An ingredient that I'm obsessed/fascinated with—a situation or a gimmick that I long to delve into and to portray. Or maybe I've just *forgotten* about the special ingredient, *duh*. It's only the frikkin' title of the book!

Million Mile Road Trip, yes. That's the thing I was longing to write about. A road trip that goes on and on—and doesn't need to ever stop. So "Million Mile Road Trip" as a title is kind of a trick. Because really and truly it's going to be an endless road trip.

This sounds nice, but somehow I'm not getting the juice and joy out of the million mile road trip that I'd anticipated. Or, rather, I haven't really started the trip properly yet, and I haven't gotten into the joyous, theological roll, beat and cosmic, as in, of course, our holy writ, *On the Road*.

Press on, Ru. You'll get there.

Possible climax in Freeth Farm. These kids have dreamed up the whole cosmos as a

legend.

I'm having some good ideas. Maybe I should stay in this arty cabin with no Internet access for a week! This morning I checked my email at the coffee shop in Occidental. Woo hoo! Twenty spam mails to delete, a couple of requests for help of one kind or another, and, yes, a painting sale.

April 9, 2015. Still Planning.

Sylvia and I overate at dinner last night, at an old place called the Union Hotel in Occidental. Est. 1879, they claim. It was the dessert that put us over the edge, a shared tiramisu served in a giant glass bowl on a pedestal, mostly whipped cream. The size of a birdbath. I slept badly, and was awake for about three hours in the night. Some of that time I was thinking about the novel.

It might be interesting if the Szep in Szep City are really big, like glaciers. You can chip off a Szep of any size. At some point the Irav foursome will ambush our crew and, say, destroy Pinchley with a flame thrower. But Pinchley will have anticipated this possibility, and will have given a tip of one of his fingers to Villy, and Villy might grow Pinchley back from this. Would be a shame to lose Pinchley's wondrous tool kit.

I really see Scud having sex with Nunu. She's on his lap and he's bucking his pelvis. A tiny pinhole has opened up in Nunu's underside, just big enough so Scud can fit his dick into it. Villy decides to have a go at Nunu too—and that's when she kidnaps him. Could I do these scenes in a YA book? A guy being swallowed, cock first, by a flexible flying saucer that he's fucking? Don't really see a way to make that PG tasteful. Maybe I could just settle for deep tongue kissing, and Villy gets swallowed that way. There can be hints of Scud having fucked Nunu as well, but we don't have to show that. Like the way that, in Freeware, I hinted that Randy Karl Tucker was fucking his pet moldie chicken, Willa Jean—but I never directly said so.

Even if Scud fucks Nunu, Villy himself isn't anywhere near hard-up enough to go that far.

April 20-22, 2015. "Dangerous Passage". Outline.

For the last ten days my attention has been on releasing my *Journals 1990-2014*. And, god help me, Bruce Sterling inveigled me into starting to write yet another story with him. "One last job, Louie. One last score." If it works out, it'd be nice to have an unpublished story for the Bruce & Rudy anthology I want to publish via Transreal Books late in 2015. *Transreal Cyberpunk* is our working title. Putatively with nine stories.

By way of keeping the *Million Mile Road Trip* flame alive, I did a really great painting. It took me about thirty hours. I'm calling it *Dangerous Passage*, although it could also be called *Mountain Pass*, *The Emigrants*, *The Immigrants*, *Villy and Zoe*, or *The Land of the Living Stones*.



Figure 16: Dangerous Passage, oil, 40" x 30", April, 2015.

This is my previsualization of the scene where they cross the pass into the next basin over. I left the car out of the picture. Maybe they shrank the car and Pinchley has it in his pocket. Actually I left out Pinchley and Yampa too.

I did include in the flying mascots: the UFO named Nunu, and the blobby Meatball. Villy and Zoe are front, being lovey-dovey, with Villy just a bit uneasy. And Scud is in back, painted cadmium-red for kicks. He's on the alert, noticing that the stones in this mountain pass are...alive. The composition and vibe of this painting were inspired by Peter Bruegel's *Conversion of St. Paul*.

I'm steadily working on a full, fifty-chapter [Outline](#). Looking at all the gaps in the outline. I'm seeing that I need more plot and subplot.

In order to fill in the outline, I'm repeatedly revising my section: [April 8, 215 What's in the Middle?](#) Working on the three bullet lists in there where I talked about motivations, and skills, and problems.

April 23-25, 2015. In LA for a Cyberpunk Con. Sterling.

There's an one-day academic conference on cyberpunk at the University of Southern California tomorrow. I'm staying two nights at the Standard Hotel in downtown LA, a bare-bones hip 70s-decor spot. I spent a couple of hours talking to Bruce Sterling on Thursday afternoon, great to be with him.

The day of the con felt very long, in a good way.

LA is such a big city. Cool how many people there are, it's like an anthill, so much vaster than SF. I can see doing an LA basin. A basin that's one enormous city. Well—Szep City might

be one big city. But I'd like a big human city too. But later, I think. We just had the urban thing of the Night Market.

Friday night I went up to the bar on the 12th floor rooftop of the Standard Hotel, where we were staying. A fully integrated crowd, not something I often see in SF. I was lolling back on a couch staring up at the tall buildings around us, each of them with a cryptic three or four letter sign on it, like buildings in a cartoon. The hypnotic beat of the electronic dance music. Slight worry that I was going to get beaten up.

Saturday morning before I left, Bruce Sterling came up to my hotel room and we worked on our new story for awhile. Bruce had my version up on his laptop and he was typing. Changing pretty much everything I had in there. I debated the changes with him one by one, and we reached some good new ideas. Kind of a magical forty-five minutes there, so rare, to be working on an SF story in the presence of my co-author. I thought of songwriters working with a piano and a sheet of paper. Kind of a classic interlude—like a work of performance art.

May 7, 2015. Off Track Again.

So I'm totally off track on *Million Mile Road Trip* again. I had that trip to LA, I'm working on that short story "The Kraken and the Sage" with Bruce, and I did a big push to mail out the paperbacks of my *Journals* to my Kickstarter backers. Gave a talk on the *Journals* in Cruz too. That went well.

Right now, Sylvia and I are off in Madison, Wisconsin, for four days to visit daughter Georgia and family. Grandchildren Althea and Desmond. And, as long as I'm so totally off the track, I thought I'd try doing a revision of my story "Knobby Giraffe" that I wrote in early December, 2014. I tried it on Claire Evans at *Terraform* back then, and she turned it down, making some good comments. I just met Claire in person at the USC cyberpunk thing, by the way. Claire's more of an SF nerd than I'd realized, which is a good thing. One of us.

Looking at "Knobby Giraffe" again, I can see that the first draft was kind of misshapen. At that time I was constrained by the fact that I wanted to sell it to *Terraform*, and they have a suggested 2,000 word length limit. I might still be able to make it work at 2K words, but it'll be easier not to have that external constraint.

Another problem was that I had way too big an infodump at the start; better to bring that stuff out in conversation among the characters.

May 25, 2015. Huh? Novel???

I did some work on my story with Bruce, "The Kraken and the Sage," but now he's blocked, or busy with other things, and I can't obsess on waiting for him. I went and finished "Knobby Giraffe," and sent it to Sheila Williams at *Asimov's*. It came in at 3,500 words. I think it's great now.

Then I wrote a new story for Claire Evans at *Terraform*. It's called "Be A Sea Cucumber"—kind of a humorous story about the near future. A writer gets a so-called Me2 app that emulates him, and gives his talks, and even writes a book under his name—and naturally the writer hates the app. 2,100 words.

I also did some more work on publishing and promoting the *Journals*. And I put together an art show: eighteen paintings hanging at the Borderlands cafe/bookstore on Valencia Street in SF.

Meanwhile I've fucking forgotten all the details of *Million Mile Road Trip* once again. I don't want to go and reread it again—I just did that. No, I don't want to get into an endless loop

of preparing to write more, and then getting distracted, and then preparing...

I want to write something new on it. Cranking up my courage. But before I start up again, I *do* need to decide what's coming next. And, looking a bit further ahead, I *would* like to reduce my worries about having enough plot for the book. So what I ought to do now is look at that sketchy plot outline I have.

And already today I reread some of my recent writing notes, where I was talking about plans for the rest of the book. A jumble of incidentals in those plans. I'd like something more clear cut.

June 1, 2015. Fixing Dialog.

Today, by the way, is my nineteenth anniversary of getting sober. My AA 19th birthday. And I still have occasional dreams about drinking and getting high—had a dream like that last week. Always glad when I wake up and realize I'm still in the groove after all. Amazing I've made it this long. It's never completely easy. I have a new sponsee now, and talking with a sponsee is always good for me in terms of remembering the steps and how they work.

Searching through *Million Mile Road Trip* this week for each mention of my alien characters' names to make sure each of them always sounds the same. Decided to give my man Pinchley a Southern accent. Like that's the organ stop that he finds interesting to use for his English.

I always like to give my aliens accents so they don't all sound the same. His "wife" Yampa has the cryptic, word-salad-esque, haiku-style, alliterative accent organ stop that I also like to use for my aliens sometimes—like for the Wackles in *Spaceland*. And Meatball is a scrappy lowclass Brit. Just so everyone sounds different.

I had a good idea for a plot-thickener a few days ago. There's a bunch of Earthlings on the flat world already. They're in, like, a Drop City settlement in an otherwise fairly empty basin. Sleazebags, zealots, something *off* about them.

And a stalker-type guy Walter Garvey from Zoe's high-school turns up in the flat world and starts chasing Zoe. He sat near her in band practice and he somehow learned her musical riff for hopping. Chasing her to the ends o' the Earth and beyond!

And when Zoe gets back to Earth without Villy, the Walter will be there dogging her. Wanting to set up a steady flow of trippers from bally world to flat world. In obeisance to the human leader of Drop City. The leader might be a PKDickian delicate tormented man, a wild talent, with SKingish uncontrollable of psychic power. Maybe a woman. Or of course the leader could be a beefy Kahuna jock guy, but that would be too obv.

Capitalize Flat World and Bally World? I don't think so.

I seem to recall that I had some hand-waving reason why they don't fly much in the flat world, I should mention that. See my "[Air Gravity](#)" note.

I don't think I'm going to use the "map ball," maybe I'll drop it. Boring to look at a map when you can look out the window. Or Meatball could display a map on her surface if they really wanted to see one.

Zoe should have a dream/vision/nightmare of the face of Walter. He's stalking her across the dimensions, he's gonna find a way to come over here, he's in touch with some Satanist or saucer-cult people in the Santa Cruz mountains. Biker heroin addicts.

June 17, 2015. Sparkstone Pass and Worm World.

I had a burst of activity two weeks ago, and I wrote every day for a week, it was wonderful. I got about two chapters done. And then I went off on a tangent or two.

One thing was making a bunch of prints for my art show at Borderlands. Incredibly difficult to get my Canon Pro9500 Mark II printer to come through with good colors. And then I mounted the prints on rectangles of mat board. Nice looking. I made about thirty of them and sold about seven. And then I made a [video](#) of the show, combining filmed video, a quality audio track, and still photos of the paintings.

And then I got into this big push (still not over) to get a professional looking podcast site. Right now it's on Feedburner, but I have problems with that channel—it doesn't connect well to iTunes, which is what a lot of people use for following podcasts.

I long to get back into that pleasant zone of living inside my novel.

The saucers will confront them on the way up, as if Scud is abducting a fair maiden from their tribe—said fair maiden being the sly, passionate, Nunu. They actually force Scud to undergo something like a wedding ceremony.

We'll have the living stones at the top. They'll be sparkstones, and the one that Scud got from Bart is a baby sparkstone.

On the other side it's—what? A worm world? (Tip of the hat to Sheckley's story, "Worm World.") Like a giant plate of spaghetti? Solid writhing worms? How would you drive through ten thousand miles of that? And worms are boring. Maybe you get inside a worm and ride it like the Eurostar train that goes through the chunnel from Europe to England. That's dull. Abstract. You're sitting in the dark.

Maybe it's a dino world. Thudd Land. We just saw *Jurassic World*, and I'm into that. It's easy. And the saucers can save them when they're halfway across.

June 23, 2015. Time Echo Three-Year-Old Urgent Midget Eloquence.

So I worked on my Rudy Rucker Podcasts station for another week, and went live with it today. About seventy-five posts going back to 2005, adding up to fifty or sixty hours of me talking. You could spend a forty-hour work-week listening to me. With overtime! I did listen to episode #67 today, me talking about Greg Gibson, Transrealism, Beat Lit, and the Turing novel, in Gloucester, Aug 19, 2012. Kind of great.

I dropped the Feedburner approach and rolled my own podcast, using the WordPress plug-in Blubrry. And tweaked some of the WordPress theme code, like the archive.php file. Bloodlust hacking frenzy. Googling for advice, but, when it gets really specific and weird, you don't always find anyone who is talking to your precise situation. The process morphed into a nightmare of addiction, me compulsively standing in front of my computer from dawn till ten at night a couple of days. But now it's kind of over. Maybe. For a little while.

Last night I dreamed about almost setting up a deal to buy four ounces of pot. Talking to the dealers, debating the price, them giving me a free sample pack to slip into my jeans pocket. I didn't get around to smoking it. And then I was lost in a museum.

I sold that story, "Be a Sea Cucumber," to *Terraform*. About \$700 for 2,500 words. I did a round of changes, and then they wanted more changes, and I stood my ground, and the editor I talk to, Claire Evans, said that was fine. There's some other "hidden partner" co-editor who plays the hard cop, I don't even know his name, but he muddies the waters, and I reflexively fear and hate him.

And we had the granddaughters here for two nights, the twins, Jasper and Zimry, and

then on the third day my grandson Calder showed up as well, with Rudy Jr. and Penny, and we had a big cookout in our back yard.

The girls found about a hundred varicolored gumballs in the town park, along with two transparent miniature plastic baseball bats that the gumballs had been inside of. The bats' handles pulled off, they were like tapered plastic jars. The size of billy-clubs. And the girls gathered the balls and put them into the clubs and marched back and forth on our porch pretending they were police. And then I hid the clubs, as I worried the girls would spill the dirty gumballs all over the house or the yard.

And then when Calder was here, he heard me telling Rudy where I'd hidden the clubs—in a high cabinet over the fridge—and Calder exclaims, "You have the gumballs up there!" He hadn't seen them, and I didn't say the word gumballs to Rudy, but Calder had heard me kind of arguing with the twins about the now-hidden gumballs earlier in the day, and he put the info together.

"Don't tell the sisters," I say to Calder. "I tell," he says, and toddles off. He's three feet tall.

And then the girls dump the gumballs out on the road in front of our house to see them roll down the slope, and Rudy is in the thick of it, and I take photos, and they put the balls back into the hollow bats—supposedly they're leaving them here, as Rudy says *he* doesn't want the bats of gumballs in his life either.

Right before they leave, Calder comes up to me. "Come, I show you the bat. In the little house." He means one of the bats is in our four-foot-tall trash shed by the road. I'm tired, I don't want to walk over there, Calder insists. "The urgent dwarf," I say, laughing, following him.

There it is, the one bat that's full of gumballs, all colors, leaning in our shed, on the floor by the trashcan. It looks magical, totemic, out of place, glinting in the yellow light from our kitchen door that's near the other side of the trash shed. The shed has two pairs of doors, one set is on the road side, the other set is on the house/kitchen/backyard side.

Calder walks through the "little house," passing from the street, though the shed, to the decking by the kitchen, hardly slowing down. He fits. He's three feet tall. The urgent dwarf.

And I get this mythic, magic feeling of childhood. Everything in rich color, in depth. Profound, incomprehensible, magical.

An hour earlier, I'd been playing alone with Calder while the others all played a card game called Stock Out. I was, like, babysitting Calder, him uninterested in the game, him down in the kids' bedroom grubbing with our stash of random old toys. He's so at ease, so cuddly, sturdy, in the moment. And I'm lying on the floor with him, playing along, and looking at him, and I get the dizzy time-tunnel feeling that I'm peering back to 1949, looking at three-year-old Rudy. Me. I can project my mind and perceptions so easily into little Calder, flesh of my flesh of my flesh. A smart little boy who doesn't yet know he's smart. Unworried. Playing. Back into the land of magic. The peaceable kingdom. An urgent dwarf.

So this is a scenario—or a constellation of perceptions and emotions—that I want to use in the next basin.

I had dwarves in *The Big Aha*, so maybe these will be something different, not exactly dwarves or gnomes. Pygmies. And do I put in the dinos as well? A jungle with maybe a settlement of humans in it? No, let's postpone the dinos.

The most interesting would be if the little children were indeed Villy, Zoe, and Scud at age three. They're "time echoes," maybe. I like that concept, a "time echo" plays back, or solidifies, or reifies—a scrap of your past. Better than just saying "mirages." Who puts them

there? The worms? Why would worms do that? Forget the fucking worms.

Okay, no worms, but what else would be in this world? Oh, right, the living sparkstones.

Take a break for a minute. Something else I'm thinking about is the surround sound in that new Brian Wilson movie, it has some corny title, *Love and Mercy* maybe...the scenes I really dug were Brian trying to come up with a song, and he's waking up from a dream, or sitting at the piano, or spacing out staring at the sky, and there's sound all around him, a sonic texture, with minor roughnesses on it, and that's a really great objective correlative for a genius composer trying to invent a song.

I'm in this very state right now, trying to come up with a vision to carry me through the next few chaps of *Road Trip*. I'm "almosting it," as one of the characters thinks in *Ulysses*.

Image: Zoe is in a space, and she hears the surround sound, and she sees her three-year-old self, an urgent dwarf, leading her through a very small door, and on the other side, it's warm, a summer night, with her grandparents.

But then—*thud! Gah-roont!* A dinosaur the size of a train! Or no, it's a giant worm...

Okay now. That's all fine, but I need my next scene. My next page. What's on it?

We're going up the slope to Sparkstone Pass. Two saucers are hovering, they force the car to stop, or, better, they spook Villy and he kind of gets the car into an impossible position. And now and Nunu and Scud have it out with her father and uncle. So embarrassing and terrible. But Scud does something that wins over Father Saucer and Uncle Saucer. He imitates some bird calls? Naw. What it is—Nunu tells the father and the uncle about the eggs. We've already done a reveal on the saucer eggs on the car ceiling. I got nothing else to do, so why hoard that bit for "later." Like, use the one bit that I've got ready, and then something else will come. Don't just be vamping with nothing going on. Give away what I have and, yea verily, the Muse Of Gnarl shall reward me seven times over.

Earlier I do a scene where Scud notices the eggs, and he whispers furiously about them to Nunu, and then a little later, *wham*, the father and uncle are there, and Scud discusses the eggs with them in a low tone, not wanting to be overheard by Villy and especially not by mocking Zoe. He whispers to the father, "I promise to take care of the babies."

"What are you muttering to yourself?" Villy asks Scud.

"I was muttering, '*What the hell am I doing.*'" Scud looks wretched.

"Behold the fruits of unprotected sex," says Zoe

"Like this is funny?" Scud yells.

They're stuck, right, and now the two saucers lift them up to the pass. And maybe they pass a message from Walter to Zoe, or maybe they don't, but in any case they fly off.

And then they have a scene with the talking stones. I can't quite get what this scene is about, even though I did a painting of it. The stones have, I don't know, created an Edenic valley world? What do stones want? To cluster together and giggle? To lie around. To bake in warmth. To have water run across them. To have dirt on them, and to have living plants dig their roots into their fissures. Do stones like people? Maybe they like being polished into gems, and they like for people to do that. Or they like getting stacked up—this reprises a rap that I had in *Hylozoic*.

The three-year-old has a crystal bat filled with gemstones. He can talk to the stones, but the grown-ups can't. These are people here, but a kind that the Earth basin looks down on. They're like Mexicans, maybe. Brown-skinned. That's kind of heavy-handed and obv. Purple or green skin is equally obv, in fact corny and stale. Could I go for the jugular and have them be

black? Sure, I should, I'm always avoiding writing black characters because I'm afraid I can't do it in a PC way, but it's maybe worse to never even try.

Call them what? Khumbu, kind of African. Nops, to get the N letter in. Bops, echoing the boppers of the *Wares*. Eloquancers, for a phantasmagoric kind of name with a positive spin. Thinking about that grandiose, flashy, high-flown speech style that a black writer might sometimes use. Wearing the language like a paisley zoot suit.

June 29, 2015. Nunu is Bad.

I was thinking about the book during the long stretches of time while I was watching the Grateful Dead performing with their electronic lightshow and searchlights for 70,000 of us at Levi's stadium in San Ho last night. I was alone for most of the concert, with nothing but my thought loops.

I decided I need to get Nunu off the scene—there's too many in the traveling party now. So I'll have her be bad, and she almost vampires Scud, and then she leaves with her father, her uncle, and her clutch of eggs.

And then my core party does the Sparkstone world.

July 2-4. 2015. The Next Basin is What? Plot Ideas.

Given that I'm a third of the way through the book, I might well think of it as a three-part novel, and say that I'm done with Part I. I'm at the very threshold of the "real" million mile drive. And then I suppose Part II can be the drive, and Part III can be the aftermath.

Kind of crushing to think of so much more to do. Like I always say, it's like I'm rowing a boat across the Atlantic—and I'm in the zone where I can neither see the shore I started from, nor the shore I'm heading for. Building the Golden Gate Bridge out of toothpicks. In the fog.

I did some work on the evanescent and constantly in flux "[Ideas for Chapters](#)" subsection in my Outlines section, and some of that is blended into this entry.

I've been stalled on the brink of Sparkstone Pass. (Actually I'll call it Borderslam Pass.) Meanwhile I'm vamping and doing scenes. I'd like to put some true "heart's desire" of mine in the next basin, something as good as Scud fucking Nunu the flying saucer. And I liked the "spaceport bar" mixture of aliens at the night market in Van Cott.

Over the years, I've described a number of strange worlds in my stories and novels, but there's no reason I can't do a "once more with feeling" routine, in case there's one I want to go back to. Things that appeal to me: A jellyfish kingdom of bloogs. A huge nest of ans. Living mathematical objects like cubes, curves, infinite sets. The Flatsies. A dinosaur jungle.

A hall of mirrors...mirrors that produce 3D reflections. The mirrors could be good. They seem unexpected. Well, maybe. But if you look down from the pass at this basin, what do you see? It ought to take your breath away. I'm still not there. I mean—a ten thousand mile hall of mirrors? I don't think I can make that work. It's dull.

Okay, suddenly I have a vision. A basin that's full of things flying. The gravity—anything is possible here—is weaker in this basin. The air is a bit thicker. Air and water are both fluids, one must recall. We have a planetary expanse of things living in the air. I had floating zero-gee lakes in *Mathematicians in Love*, and a big low-gee jungles at the edge and in the center in *The Hollow Earth*. Certainly Niven does this in *The Integral Trees*, and he has plenty of floating cities in *Ring World*. A Jurassic Park type vision. Pterodactyls, flying jellyfish, floating villages, balls of water. I love floating lakes.

Backing up for a moment, let's say that I do mirrors and talking rocks on the *ridges* between all the basins. Living rock is the underlying substrate of the flat world. In a certain sense, the living stone is Goob-goob, the Godhead and Creator of the flat world.

This fits with the fact that I plan to put living stones in the boulder field at Sparkstone Pass. The living stones are objective correlative for our tablets, laptops, and smartphones. These "Goob-goob sentinels" can produce matter-wave hologram "reflections" of whoever approaches them.

Okay, what if I do that. Questions:

- *What do the Goob-goob sentinels want? Why do they make the reflections?*
The stones use a dark energy charge for hosting emulations of conscious minds. Dark energy "*is*" consciousness, you see. Being parts of God, the sentinels don't really "need" anything. But they like to control the flow of beings on the flat world. Like Maxwell's Demons. Goob-goob's higher, ultimate goal for the paired universes is a question I can revisit.
- *What is the crisis that my crew gets into? How do they escape?*
They get into an infinite regress between a pair of mirrors. The Goob-goob sentinels do this as a way of fully draining the dark energy from a person. Filtering out the individuality, and thus killing them.
- *What is the revelation that my characters gain?*
Yampa learns how to model a friend's mind and thus immortalize him/her.

Let's say that the Szep did not take this route coming to the Earth basin. So things are more of surprise to them. And suppose that it is in fact quite difficult to cross from basin to basin due to the Goob-goob stones in every pass. The sparkstones are amulets, scraps of Goog-goob stones.

What should I call the pass? I was calling it Sparkstone Pass, but now I'm seeing sparkstones as fairly ubiquitous. Boar Back, Highspine, Coldwind, Arctic, Borderslam. Borderslam matches the inn name, and it relates to the notion of the pass being hard to get through.

What I'm thinking is that the four Iravs should attack in this upcoming basin. It's that "don't hoard up action ideas" principle I've been espousing of late. I know that the Iravs are going to attack and, I think, kill Pinchley (temporarily), so might as well do that now? I think we need to do this in the context of a *car chase*. Through the Land of the Zero-Gee Dinosaurs!

Yampa gets an angle on how to resurrect Pinchley. But she's missing some ingredient. I want to say that she'll eventually use the caraway seeds, but she won't think of that for awhile. She has some expectation of getting something in Szep City that'll do the job. Or maybe for now it's a forlorn hope. All she has left of Pinchley is his right index finger.

By the way, as Pinchley is dying he says to Yampa something along the lines of the "Remember me, Lord," that the Good Thief said to Jesus on the Cross. As I've always liked to say, in this context "Remember me" means "Make an eidetic mental model of my full hardware, wetware, and software so that I can be recreated at will." Maybe Yampa hangs onto one of Pinchley's fingers as well, for a wetware seed, and later in Szep City she uses up all the caraway seeds by making an agar gel for growing a clone of Pinchley, and she programs him with a Lordly mindzap.

And after Pinchley dies, they take off on a good run of basins, with three in particular described, let's say Ants, Surf, and Saucers.

I still need to work out the Walter thing. Let's say he's the son of Villy's dad with a saucer, so he's Scud and Villy's half-brother. I'm initially presenting him as evil, but it'll turn out that he's good. Scud's a saucerfucker just like his dad. "Saucerfucker," yeah. What a great word! On second thought, "saucerthumper" would be better. Less in-yo-face, and funnier.

I need Meatball for the final chapter or two, but I'm not seeing much of a role for her before that. Maybe I should get her off camera for awhile. Or maybe she emulates a saucer so as to infiltrate them and try to get Villy back—assuming that we say Villy get abducted.

July 5, 2015. What About Scud's Teep Eye?

I'm giving the truck huge giant wheels so they can bounce along in the low-gee jungle.

A side-issue: What about Scud's teep eye (which I started calling a teep slug in September, 2015)? I used it in Chapter Nine, but since then I haven't mentioned it. Maybe I can get by without it. Would be simpler. Maybe it's better if Scud doesn't have a teep eye on an ongoing basis. Because if he has teep, it undermines and warps all of the usual kinds of things involved in normal social interactions, like noticing people's expressions and so on.

But I'd have to: (a) Remove it from Chapter Nine—I don't remember exactly how important it was in there. Or (b) Have Scud lose the teep eye during the fight with Irav. Or (c) Give Scud an ongoing use of the teep eye. We'd have to mention it in Chapter 13: Borderslam Inn, which was from his POV.

So I'll take (a) or (b)—I'll have to recheck Chapter Nine to see if I could just drop the eye. Maybe (b) is better.

Now, speaking of telepathy, did I say that any of the other characters has teep? Can't remember. The Szep? The saucers? No, I think Scud and the Flatsies are the only ones.

July 6, 2015. Depressed.

Today, for the first time in quite a while, when I woke up, I lay in bed repeating to myself, "*I want to die.*"

Two reasons for my depression.

(1) I lost my glasses over a week ago, nine days ago to be precise, and I still haven't managed to get them replaced. A series of bad decisions and crummy opticians and random fuckups, and it may still be days till I finally do get some glasses. Meanwhile I'm walking around with a completely out-of-date ten-year-old prescription and it's so very unpleasant. Headachey, disorienting, and I can't read books or newspapers. And driving is iffy—I still have some prescription shades for daywear, but they're not good at night, and then I have to use the so-old-they-give-me-double-vision pair.

(2) My left leg continues to ache from the screwed up "revision" of my hip implant that I regrettably had on March 4. Not clear if the pain will ever stop. No end in sight. It may be that a surgeon will need to slice me open again and put in a third version of the fake hip. Dull, throbbing pain all day long every day, waxing and waning. Stabbing pain with each step, quite intense—especially on my first step when I stand up.

Constant, obsessive worry about these two problems. I wake up and feel happy and calm

for a minute, and then the two problems sink their teeth into me and worry me all day long.

My usual *joie de vivre* is fading. I'm unhappy and dour and in a bad mood. I snap at Sylvia and I feel bad about it.

I do still have a pair of computer glasses, and I'm happy when I lie on my back on the couch with my legs up on cushions and my laptop on my legs. I work on *Million Mile Road Trip* and these *Notes*. The novel entails its own set of worries of course—but these are matters of craft, potentially solvable, something I'm used to doing. When I'm writing, I forget myself, and that's wonderful. Like getting high. "The narcotic moment of creative bliss."

Today we're going to SF for the day and we'll see Rudy's kids. That'll be good. Get me out of myself. It's sunny. I had a lot of good promo in recent weeks. I'm sober. When I do my leg exercises every morning I feel slightly better. One way or another I will have glasses within a week.

Cheer up, Mr. Frowny Face!

I got a pair of glasses the next day, July 7, 2015, albeit with the wrong prescription, but the despised opticians have ordered a correct pair of lenses, and for now I have some reasonably good glasses once again. I celebrated by ordering a second pair, with different frame and from different opticians. Don't ever want to be without glasses for ten days again. I'd hoped to get some Oliver Peoples vintage horn rim Sir O'Malley frames, but that proved impossible—at a crucial moment my credit card wouldn't work, and then the bad optician said they'd order them, but they didn't, or maybe the frames were out of stock, so whatever, I got Persol and Starck Eyes frames. Cue "Does Anyone Care," by The Cranberries.

July 7, 2015. Chasing Irav. Plot Ideas.

I think I need for them to be actively chasing Irav, that is, chasing the four Iravs. So let's suppose that Irav stole more than Pinchley and Yampa's car. He stole the precious stash of caraway seeds. Fine.

But you have to ask why they wouldn't just send Zoe to fetch more caraway seeds from Earth. Why set off on an uncertain chase?

Okay, let's say that P&Y propose that Zoe jump back, but she doesn't want to. Something she saw on that second hop is deterring her from doing that. She saw her third self, and no fourth, so she knows she can only hop once more. And maybe she had another vision of Goob-goob on the way back from Hop #2.

Let's say that they catch up with the Iravs somewhere in the jungle basin, and they get the caraway seeds back. Do they successfully terminate the Iravs? Maybe it's useful for my story to keep them around. Like the Beagle Boys. So we might have some ongoing back and forth along the way. The Iravs might even become a bit clownish. More and more of them, in a clown car.

Re. the horrible daily pain in my hip/thigh, I might as well make creative use of this. Transrealize my pain. Let's say that one of the crew, perhaps Villy, sustains a really bad injury from the Iravs. A fevered period of recuperation, and he has to live with the pain thereafter. Classic trope: the wound that won't heal. Appears in Wagner's *Parsifal*.

In the Los Gatos Coffee Roaster. Looking at a young woman wearing a sleeveless T-shirt that's been repeatedly slit horizontally all the way down her back. Rows of sagging cloth with

slits between, like the steps on a ladder, showing her pitiful pale thin back and her halter top. She and her friends are all unbeautiful. Second-stringers in their high-school scene. “Do you have any idea how bad that shirt looks?” And yet she’s just a fellow suffering human. How can I be so unkind. Half-blind old man with a sore leg. Weeping in a sudden flood of empathy. Not.

I’m very full of food right now. I celebrated my glasses-acquisition by eating three tacos at Andale. Wonderful tidbits. Corn tortillas, carnitas (pork) filling, yummy peanut-based salsa. Feet up on a chair, and my leg won’t hurt until I stand and *eeeerrk* take that stiff first step.

Astonishing pain at times. No let-up. I’ve started riding my bike again. While I’m actually riding, it feels good to be bending and exercising my leg, but after the ride, the upper inside of my left thigh hurts more than ever. The temptation to *teach my leg a lesson*.

I have a lot potential balls in the air for the plot and I need to get them into some semblance of order. Like I always say—your plot arc doesn’t have to make all that much sense, but there does have to be a single coherent flow, a “cover story,” a trellis. Just pick fucking anything and stick with that. And if, later on, you don’t like the arc, you can bend it into a different shape, but at least by then you’ve got lots of things fastened to it, and they’ll generally move along. I’ll amass some elements in a bulleted list here, and then I’ll integrate these into my ever-changing “[Ideas for Chapters](#)” section.

- Walter is the son of a saucer and he will come to the flat world in pursuit of Zoe. Walter is Villy and Scud’s half-brother and Nunu’s half brother. We think he’s bad, but ultimately he’s good. He’s this trope: the despised pariah who helps you.
- The bad saucers are in Saucer Hall in Van Cott. The bad saucers are allied with the Iravs and with the two battling sects in Szep City and with the military-industrial complex on Earth. They’re vampires. The good saucers are in New Eden, along with emigrant Earthling saucer devotees. The good saucers are allied with the common people everywhere.
- Yampa is killed and Zoe is wounded in an attack by the Iravs. Walter unwittingly sets them up for this.
- Zoe stratocasts them to Szep City.
- The fight in Szep City culminates in a trip through the Goob-goob hole.
- Villy gets lost or separated. He falls through the Goob-goob hole. Zoe and Scud come back to Earth, fleeing something, or wanting to finish the war. Villy shows up on Earth with Walter and one of the saucer Scudlings.
- The big-picture war is mandarins/capitalists/generals/politicians vs. the common people. This war fills all of the flat world, and it fills our own Earth. For the purpose of a triumphalist SF novel for immature minds, we want an absolute good/bad pair and a clear victory. I’m working on a dyadic [table of the two teams](#).

Re. the two teams, I might ultimately give a nod to the fact that any such struggle is an illusion.

It’s an internal struggle of Goob-goob’s really, the yin vs. yang, particle vs. wave, Many vs. One. Goob vs. goob, if you get right down to it.

Thinking about the two sides of a cosmic transdimensional war, I might say that the bad side is for central control, and the good side is for power to the people. I can think of this as a

type of One/Many conflict, with the "One" being the state and the "Many" being the people. On the other hand, you could say that the people's natural inborn consciousness of the World is in fact the "One," whereas the government's cheese-paring legalisms are a mazy "Many". Which is the right way to look at it? Both. Neither.

Speaking of the ubiquity and ineluctability of the dyadic battle, I recall that Plato says something like, "The One and the Many run about together in every word uttered." Looking for this quote on Google, I find that I'm remembering it from my own book, *Infinity and the Mind*. Here's the original source of the quote, it's Socrates talking, in Plato's [*Philebus*](#).

We say that the one and many become identified by thought, and that now, as in time past, they run about together, in and out of every word which is uttered, and that this union of them will never cease, and is not now beginning, but is, as I believe, an everlasting quality of thought itself, which never grows old. Any young man, when he first tastes these subtleties, is delighted, and fancies that he has found a treasure of wisdom; in the first enthusiasm of his joy he leaves no stone, or rather no thought unturned, now rolling up the many into the one, and kneading them together, now unfolding and dividing them; he puzzles himself first and above all, and then he proceeds to puzzle his neighbors, whether they are older or younger, or of his own age—that makes no difference; neither father nor mother does he spare; no human being who has ears is safe from him, hardly even his dog, and a barbarian would have no chance of escaping him, if an interpreter could only be found.

Surprisingly funny. I always forget that Plato is funny. Smart people are funny. Dumb people tend to be humorless and dull.

July 8, 2015. The Yount Protocol.

I've mentioned that, to really pull the plot together, I want to have several parallel fights going on. The big-picture war is mandarins/capitalists/generals/politicians vs. the common people. This war fills all of the flat world, and it fills our own Earth. Three instances: (1) the good vs. vampire saucers, (2) the common folk of the bally world against self-styled leaders (in particular, the Szep against the Truban-Rubtan caliphates), and (3) a new extreme power-grab by the pigs on Earth. Not only do the struggles mirror each other, they have a common underlying cosmic cause.

So now I want to come up with the thing on Earth. It's some power grab by the media/internet/politicians. Akin to what's happening in David Eggers novel, *The Circle*, but harsher. Just to have a name for it, I'm provisionally calling it the Yount Act, although, wait, that's not a multinational name. The Yount Protocol.

It's a new encoding that attaches itself to every packet sent over the internet. It's promoted under the rubric of antiterrorism, antiporn, antidrug, public safety, copyright protection, anti-bullying, prevention of voter fraud, improved business climate, etc. The downside is complete loss of privacy, with realtime automated ongoing investigation and evaluation of people.

One of the kids' parents will run afoul of this, I guess it'll be Villy's father. He wants to oppose the Yount Protocol and bring it down. Scud or Villy can help him do this. Possibly a video of Villy's father having sex with a UFO will be placed online to discredit him.

The Yount Protocol has been created and is being promoted by the vampire saucers of the flat world. Villy's father had sex with Layla, a non-vampire saucer.

July 9, 2015. Snapshot of "Ideas for Chapters".

Just for the record, here's today's state of the "[*Ideas for Chapters*](#)" section. I revised it about seven times this week and I think I have *almost* enough to get going on the story again. In any case, I won't revise this "snapshot" outline, I'll be revising that active *Ideas* section up at the top of the document.

- **Captured by Ants.** A basin of ants. Mounds of them. They and the Iravs are captured by ants and carried to the queen's nest. Zoe charms the ant queen with music. Scud uses his teep slug to read the pheromones and feeler-gestures of the ant queen. The ant queen acts things out like in a game of charades—where you can fart as well as wave your arms. Weirdly the queen is wearing the logo of the freedom-killing Yount protocol group on Earth, the logo embossed on her shell. There are some breeder ants with the queen, and they want to plant ant larvae in the bellies of Scud and his fellows, and in the bellies of the Iravs. Everyone's tangled up in ant-silk.
- **Escaping the Ants.** Nunu's father and uncle fly in and carry the Iravs away, in effect ransoming them with a bomb-drop of honey. Nunu's father tells Scud that Nunu refuses to be a vampire anymore, and she is therefore dead to the family. But the father still cares about her. She's staying in New Eden, and her babies are coming soon. He would appreciate if Scud would help Nunu. The ants, Iravs and the vampire saucers are all on one side. Our gang escapes the ants.
- **Surf.** They push on to the next basin; it's full of surf with Flatsies on it. Big haze of teep. The Flatsies are surfers. Villy surfs the giant waves, using the station-wagon as their board—Pinchley has fastened a skeg to the underside. They land on the beach on the other side.
- **Cosmic Beatdown.** The Flatsies tell them about the Cosmic Beatdown. The big-picture war is mandarins/capitalists/generals/politicians vs. the common people. This war fills all of the flat world, and it fills our own Earth. Two instances: (1) the common folk of the bally world against self-styled leaders (in particular, the Szep against the Truban-Rubtan caliphates), and (2) the new extreme power-grab by the pigs on Earth, that is, the Yount protocol. The struggles mirror each other, they have a common underlying cosmic cause.
- **Walter.** Walter appears, he's done a hop, homing in on Zoe and Villy. Walter is a saucerboy like Scud's children. Walter's not actually evil after all. He's a pariah who helps you. He says the good saucers vs. vampire saucers is another aspect of the Cosmic Beatdown.
- **Irav Ambush.** The Flatsies tell them of a shortcut path to New Eden, staying up on a ridge track that runs around the edges of five basins. This is an interesting drive, but at the ridge over New Eden, the four Irav's ambush them. Yampa is killed, completely annihilated. The Iravs eat every scrap of her body, so that there's nothing left to use a seed for regrowing her. And Zoe is severely wounded. Meatball rises to the occasion and incinerates one of the Irav. They want to blame Walter for the ambush, but it's not in fact his fault. Walter accompanies them down the hill to New Eden.

- **New Eden.** Have some skeevy Earthlings in a Drop City kind of village. It's frequented by good saucers. Nunu is there with Scud's eggs. She's renounced vampirism, her fangs are gone. Possibly a race of small dark-skinned people called Eloquents. I can do that "urgent gnome" thing.
- **Scudlings.** The eggs hatch. Zoe heals. Scud and Villy's father's had sex with a saucer like Scud did, but with a good saucer, and he's in fact the father of Walter. A so-called saucerthumper.
- **Stratocasting.** Zoe gets hold of an electric guitar in New Eden, and she learns how to play a "stratocasting" style that lifts them up in their car and carries them across dozens and scores of basins, like a Frank Zappa solo in an arena. Zoe, Villy, Scud, Pinchley, and Meatball. And maybe a couple of the Scudlings. They're still driving, in a sense, but they're going a hundred thousand miles per hour and they're in a quantum state where they can pass through things, and the make it to Szep City in ten hours. Do some insane scroll-type rant through eighty basins.
- **Irav Beatdown.** In Szep City they realize that the Irav were tailgating in their wake. Immediately the Scudlings get the jar of caraway seeds from the Iravs. During the ten hour stratocast session, Zoe has taught Villy how to hop. He uses this power as a tool against the Irav. He sends the Iravs to Earth and leaves them there.
- **Princess Filippa.** They meet Princess Filippa in Szep City. She's gnarly, like a sack of meat covered with eyes and sores. She has empathy, though, she's good, she's the soul of the Szep people. Her sores are objective correlatives for the diseases in the body politic. She's the enemy of the Trubans and Rubtans.
- **Intrigue.** Interdimensional cosmic beatdown action.
- **Goob-goob Hole.** Near Szep City is a basin that's a single vast Goob-goob hole. It goes clear through the material of the flat world. Villy and Zoe accompany the Rubtan and Truban leaders there to confront Goob-goob and ask whose religion is right. Goob-goob's answers are, naturally, mocking and ambiguous. Walter appears, dogging Zoe once again, and for some reason he wrestles Villy into the Goob-goob hole, jumping in after him. The two tumbling boys dwindling into N-space.
- **Going Home.** Zoe's had it. She hops back to Earth, bringing Scud with her, meaning to close out the cosmic beatdown. It's still high-school graduation night in Los Perros, but Zoe's a few months older. And she's stuck here, and she's lost her power to hop. How boring. And no Villy.
- **Exile on Main Street.** And Scud's in love with her. Zoe's mom forces her into counseling with Dr. Sunny Weaver, who is an agent of the bad saucers. There are two competing saucer cults on Earth. Zoe is accused of helping them. The Irav are in Los Perros.
- **Together Again.** Villy shows up on Earth with Walter and one of the saucer Scudlings. Walter knew Villy had to do this, which is why he pushed him into the Goob-goob hole. They do something with Villy's dad to bring down the High Pigs and cripple the Yount protocol.
- **Justice.** A final, final beatdown on the Iravs in Los Perros. Scud decides to stay in Los Perros, nursing the revolution. Walter flits back to New Eden. He wants to marry Nunu.
- **Free Szep City.** Villy takes Zoe back to Szep City. Pinchley is a bachelor, peculiar.

- He's brought down the caliphates. Villy's whale is still there, and Meatball.
- **Next Stop Freeth Farm.** Road tripping in the whale. Villy and Zoe are driving further, at double stratocast speed, with Meatball and Pinchley, the full billion miles to Freeth Farm, with no absolute plan of stopping after that. They're fulfilling a Freeth legend that the kids from the bally world helped create the universe. In loopy time.
- **Epilog.** All memories of Villy and Zoe are gone from Earth. Except for Scud's memories. He sees a picture of Villy and Zoe in Egyptian hieroglyphs, in Greek statues, and in Picasso paintings. They're archetypes now.

July 11-12, 2015. Prefiguring. The Jungle Chapter.

Day before yesterday, before beginning to pound on the jungle chapter, I inserted into the novel's text some "prefiguring" passages about the Yount protocol, the Earth-based saucer cults, Villy's Pop's opposition to the protocol, and Pop's involvement with the saucer-fan New Eden group. I'm thinking that the father is the link between bally world and flat world for the unified cosmic beatdown. Mr. Antwerpen. What's his first name? Villy calls him Pop. Something Dutch. Hans, Peter, Jerome, let's go with Peter.

By way of prefiguring, I dialed back my idea about Nunu being an active vampire, she's renounced that, and New Eden is for non-vampire UFOs, and her Dad is kind of bitter about her going there, like a stockbroker seeing his daughter join a hippie commune. And I put in reactions from Zoe and Villy about the mappy world basin "New Eden" having the same name as that group on Earth.

So okay, moving toward the jungle now. I've got Zoe at the edge of Borderslam Pass, looking down into the Thudd Jungle basin, and there's sentient Goob-goob sentinel stones all around her, and Pinchley, Scud, Yampa, Villy, and Meatball are about to get the whale rolling again, with bigger tires than before.

And at the end of this chapter, or pair of chapters, they'll be chasing the Iravs over the next pass, and a giant Thudd will be chasing them, but the Goob-goob stones on the far side won't let the giant Thudd through.

I need some of my new plot material in this chapter, I have to incorporate cosmic beatdown plot into every single chapter from now on, even while I'm also doing a picaresque million mile road trip thing.

So first of all, Zoe should see a Goob-goob-sentinel-generated hologram of Walter in the pass. And he should tell her—what? He's coming to help, he's on her side. And maybe Zoe sees Villy's father in the background, how very annoying, the old fool spying on her. I'm thinking Walter can be like John the Baptist, and then one of the Scud-Nunu Scudlings can be like Jesus.

Second of all, Zoe and her crew should encounter some big clue in the heart of the Thudd jungle, something to hip them to the reality of the cosmic beatdown, in fact using that very phrase, which is familiar to Villy, as he's a devotee of a videogame called *Cosmic Beatdown*.

So now I'm thinking, what the fuck, let's go all Philip K. Dick on the reader's ass.

We have a videogame console in the jungle in form of a spotted toadstool. With jellyfish goo raining down as the stinging tendrils sweep past from on high. Like acid rain. The game starts up and scrolls a series of credit screens.

Cosmic Beatdown
(Unlocked Interdimensional Edition)
Produced by
Goob-goob and the Glowons
Starring
Zoe Snapp
Also Featuring
Scud and Villy Antwerpen
With Special Thanks To
The Flying Saucers
The Yount Protocol
The High Pigs
The Citizens of Szep City
Freeth Farm
The Glowons
Peet Amsterdam
Walter Garvey

They have a moment to discuss the oddity of seeing credit screens for Villy's favorite game *Cosmic Beatdown* displayed on a luminous toadstool in this jungle.

Scud says, "It's self-referential. It means we're actually inside a game world. I saw a movie where—"

Zoe interrupts, "Screw that mysterioso you're-inside-a-game bullshit. Look at this!" She breaks up a piece of mud from the car's floor, finds a twig, breaks that in half, and inside the twig is a tiny striped bug who twitches his feelers at them. "This is not some lame-butt cheap-ass videogame, Villy and Scud. Not some sleazy code written people like your father and Walter Garvey. This is my real life and I'm having an interdimensional adventure in an incredibly strange alien world."

"She's right," says Yampa quietly. "You said bullshit, yes? Not bullshit?"

"Bullshit is flatter," says Zoe, winging it. "Not as smelly."

"Listen to the farmgirl," says Villy.

"So why were those screens on that mushroom?" Scud asks the Szep. "How could that happen if we're not inside a videogame?"

"Easy," says Pinchley. "Goob-goob's messing with us."

Their discussion of the videogame toadstool is interrupted by a glimpse of the Iravs in the stolen car. They're in fact hooting and honking, tempting Zoe's guys to pursue them.

So they do, and the Iravs lead them right in front of a giant Thudd, which begins chasing them, and we have a chase all the way out of the jungle—the Iravs followed by the whale followed by the Thudd. And at the pass, Goob-goob sentinels won't let the Thudd through—but then, in the next basin, both parties are almost immediately captured by ants. And the Iravs get airlifted out by Nunu's father, the giant flying saucer.

Eventual plot point: who created the *Cosmic Beatdown* game? Maybe later there's a scene where Scud, Zoe, and/or Villy visit the game company studio. But maybe the studio's an empty room. Villy's father Pete Antwerpen would be involved. And Zoe's eventual shrink,

Sunny Weaver, I see her as being in New Eden and being in with the game producers.

I'm liking the idea that Walter Garvey is involved with the Yount protocol, and Pete Antwerpen worked on the code for the *Cosmic Beatdown* game. Although earlier I was thinking of Walter as a kid in Villy and Zoe's class, somewhat clueless, so how would he be a big programmer? But all those things can be consistently true.

July 15-16, 2015. Book Proposal for Million Mile Road Trip. Done Chap 16.

Yesterday I focused, and I got a proposal written. Also I cleaned up the outline and the ideas for the coming chapters. I sent the proposal to my agent John Silbersack in NYC—I'll be having lunch with him there on July 27 to talk it over. My old Tor editor David Hartwell is willing to take a look too, and I'm lunching with him on July 29. Just like old times—going to New York seeking a deal. Here's the proposal.

OVERVIEW

The novel features Zoe and Villy, aged 17, plus Villy's 13-year-old brother Scud. Flying saucers and colorful aliens enter the tale as well. And, yes, it's literally about a car trip that's a million miles long—the trip is set in a parallel universe, which contains a single, endless, prairies-and-mountains world.

Million Mile Road Trip is a young adult novel in the sense that it's about young people and their specific concerns—as were my earlier novels *Frek and the Elixir* and *The Hollow Earth*. The earlier novels were marketed as adult SF, and they did fairly well. But I've always wondered if they might have hit bigger if they'd been presented as YA. I'm hoping we can try that approach this time around. And, as I write the novel, I'm keeping this target in mind.

Like many of my novels, *Million Mile Road Trip* is a phantasmagoric roller-coaster ride, replete with surreal incidents, sympathetic characters, mind-bending speculations, offbeat humor, and human emotions.

I expect to finish it in Spring, 2016, and it'll be on the order of 85 thousand words long. I've currently written about 37 thousand words of the first draft

THE STORY

It's time for Villy and Zoe to graduate from their California high school, and neither of them has managed to put together any college plans. Zoe is something of goth—smart, bitter, and a jazz trumpeter. Villy is skater with a fondness for a videogame called *Cosmic Beatdown*, a game which was co-written by his flaky father.

The kids decide to skip town and take a really long road trip. And then, just before the trip, Zoe is playing a Miles Davis solo in her room, and two skinny yellow aliens appear.

The aliens soup up Villy's old car. Villy, Zoe and the aliens set off on a road trip, burdened by Villy's kid brother Scud, who insists on coming along. It's not to be an Earth-bound trip—Zoe a newly found power to hop them to a parallel universe. It's a world that's an endless flat plain, divided by mountain ranges into zillions of basins, each basin the size of Earth's surface, and each basin containing a distinct alien civilization. Like space opera—only you're driving a car.

The trip's goal? To drive literally a million miles—traversing about a hundred of the basins. Larry Niven's *Ringworld* comes to mind, as does Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. But *Million Mile Road Trip* is looser and more roguish in tone than *Ringworld*, and by no means so

haunted as *On the Road*.

As well as the immense, picaresque road trip, *Million Mile Road Trip* involves an upcoming showdown between two opposing forces. The aliens' shorthand name for the battle is *the cosmic beatdown*—and of course it's no coincidence that this is the name of Villy's favorite videogame. But by no means does this mean that any part of the novel is “really inside a virtual reality.” The story is 100% real and funky—especially the pesky flying saucers who are shuttling between our world and the odd world of the road trip.

Rather than being like spaceships, the UFOs are like meaty animals, on the order of flying manta rays. Some of them are vampires, which adds some spice. And young Scud is even inveigled into a romance with a young female UFO named Nunu. The nature of their eventual offspring brings another element to the tale. Other elements include a new government technique for controlling the internet, and a seemingly endless war based on slight religious differences.

Further details can be found in the outline. The first sixteen chapters are done, and the chapters after that are still to come.

I included an outline, as I say, also the first 16 chapters of the novel. Looking at my ideas for the later chapters, I think there's too many ideas to fit in. I mean, here I am 40% through the book, and they're still just in the first basin after the Earth basin. We'll see how it goes.

Another thing that strikes me—going over the outline and the ideas yet again—is that I still don't exactly have the plot nailed now. This is really bothering me. I'm floundering.

Even if I don't have the big picture, at the scene to scene level, I'm feeling good about the story and I'm having fun with it. “My greatest novel,” right? The other day, in the July 11-12, 2015 [entry](#), I worked out such a detailed description of the “Credit Screen” or “Jungle” chapter that I was able to just paste that stuff into the novel and then fatten it up. I'm still involved in that process right now, as a matter of fact. Since had all those scene outlines in place, I'm writing the chapter out of order, that is, working on some of the later scenes before the middle scenes, and this is a fun way to work. Eating dessert first.

I finished “Chapter 16: Weird Screen” on July 16, 2015. I jammed in a lot of action, it's longer than most of the other chaps. According to my latest calculation, the book only needs 20 more chapters to hit 85K words. I'm starting to wonder how much I'll be able to fit in from all those [chapter ideas](#) that I wrote down

Now comes an ant chapter or two, and then I do New Eden, and then I think we put the hammer down and make it to Szep City. Maybe I simplify the Szep City scenes—I think we'll want to get back to Los Perros in time to fit in the Part III scenes that take place there. Well, no point trying to overplan. If necessary, the book can run to 90K or even 100K, whatever it takes to get a seemly whole. I just don't like to admit that right now, as a longer target length loads a kind of crushing burden on me.

As I mentioned, we're about to take a two week trip—the Outer Banks for a week with the kinds, then a week in New York. So I might not be writing a lot.

July 17, 2015. On the Plane. Dilla Beats. Deep Dream Graphics.

On a United flight, always a bad choice for my airline. They've revamped the plane seats so you can't open your laptop anymore. Not enough room. The laptop's down on my thighs, with my legs extended to lower the thighs, and the laptop's clam-shelled open about 30 degrees rather

than being 90 or 100 degrees open. Good thing I can touch type. I'm in a position kind of like someone on a reclining bicycle who's typing by squeezing buttons on his hand grips down around his waist.

On the upside, United has a new terminal in San Francisco, really a nice space with great art on the wall (in Plexiglas boxes)—an original oil by my fave artist Wayne Thiebaud. Amazing. Big painting, of a city street slanting down a hill. Good food in the lounge too, I had an enormous hot Reuben sandwich at Klein's Deli. At ten in the morning. I'm still full, and it's noon. Four more hours till Newark.

Day before yesterday I was listening to these “beats” or short sound collages by a guy called J. Dilla, an album of fifty of them, called *Donuts*. Turned onto this by Ahmid Thompson’s book *Mo’ Meta Blues*. I’d always thought hip-hop just meant an idiot yelling fuck. I was wrong. It’s a subtle art of collage, of hearing , really hearing, the sounds around you, the sounds in existing music, the sounds in electronic beat tracks, the sounds of voices. Layering them up, keeping a rhythm and a flow. And making it emotional and uplifting. Doesn’t have to include rapping at all.

And you can make a hip-hop cut without having a band, you can be, as Ahmid says, “a daredevil who never leaves home.” There’s these little jerks and glitches in Dilla’s cuts, gave me a dizzy, unreal feeling. And I was thinking there ought to be some cut-up collage reality scenes in *MMRT*.

I recently have been looking at this current fad in computer graphics, it’s called “deep dream,” and uses a neural net to “find” images inside existing photos. Like before you run the deep dream, maybe you’ve trained your neural net to find images of dogs’ heads. And then if you iteratively run your photo through the process a few times, all these dog heads pop up. Doesn’t have to be dog heads—you can pre-train the neural net to look for whatever, and you can even swap in different data sets from time to time. In the zoom I saw a guy ran the dog-finder on the image, then zoomed in a bit and found some monks or Chinese diplomats standing around, then zoomed in a little more and found faces, then zoomed in smaller and found insects. And then more faces under that. Kind of awesome.

I’m imagining a Dilla beat being played as a sound track to a deep dream zoom.

Later. Listening to my earphones in the Newark airport. Kind of nice way to relate to life in a megalopolis. This one song was perfect, Bobb B. Soxx and the Swinging Blue Jeans, “Not too Young to get Married,” with lead vocal by Darlene Love. I couldn’t get J. Dilla’s *Donuts*, no internet in the Newark airport.

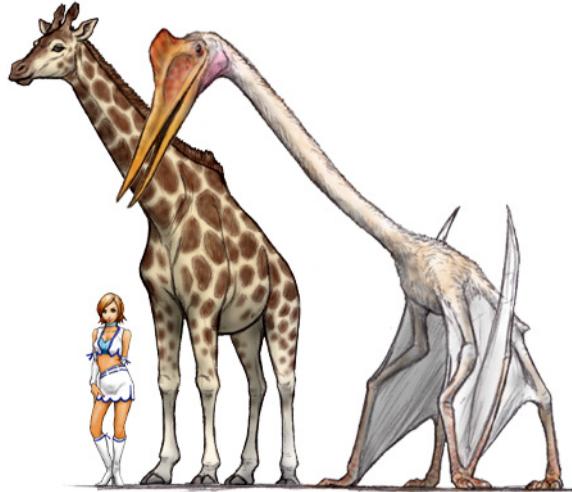


Figure 17: A Hatzegopteryx dino.

I think the Thuddland chapter is pretty good. Maybe a little heavy with the attack and chase scenes. I'm still tripping on *Jurassic World*. I'm always saying that you shouldn't base your SF novels or stories on movies you've seen, but that's what I just did in that chapter.

I kind of can't believe I went ahead and put floating jellyfish in there. That might be overdoing it—I just had them in *Big Aha*. Don't want my readers to think I'm fucking senile. On the other hand, maybe there's a joyful cry of recognition by some of them? "Oh boy, flying jellyfish again! All hail the richness of Rucker's recapitulating wit!"

If I do use the flying jellies, then maybe there should be some of them in Van Cott? I could make them kind of ubiquitous. On the other hand... I've already got the flying saucers and the flying Freeth, so maybe flying jellies gets confusing. Or yet again...If I want jellies, give them their own basin.

Jellyfish or not, I would like for my characters to be hiding under a tree from something, and for there to be acid slime that drips down and wrecks the toadstool. Well, what if they're just hiding from a flock of carnivorous dino birds, okay? The birds are feeding somewhere nearby on a big kill. (Later we realize it's something the Thudd killed.) And then my crew clears out. The toadstool doesn't absolutely have to be ruined by acid slime. It could just turn itself off.

If I kept the jellyfish, I could have one of them following the Thudd chasing the purple whale chasing the Iravs. I could take one more trick out of the *Jurassic World* playbook, and when the Thudd bounces off the forcefield wall at the pass, the jelly comes down and eats the Thudd. *Gah-rooont!*

Or instead of a jelly, it's a giant Freeth, who's kind of on the side of my crew.

July 29, 2015. Bring Back the Unfurled World Scenario? No.

My explanations of the two-worlds scenario are somewhat vague. I don't totally like having two worlds instead of one world. I liked it better last year, when I was starting the novel, and I was saying that our Earth unfurled into an endless world.

Quite a while ago, I described a scenario I still kind of like, see this entry: "[The World Unfurls and People are Surprised](#)." Earth unfurls, and everyone knows it, and they're looking at it, and people can go out and explore, but our little crew gets out ahead of the others.

The main reasons I ended up with less dramatic and less fresh scenario of two parallel worlds are that (a) it's hard to fit a populated infinite plane into our universe, and (b) I couldn't see a good way to unfurl our Earth to get an infinite plane, and (c) the bally world and the unfurled world would have different past histories.

But for purposes of discussion, let's try entertaining the unfurling process one more time. Is it really impossible to make it work?

There is a certain scenario in the inflationary view of the universe under which we end up with infinite space. I did three blog posts about at the end of May and start of June, 2015—here's the [first of these posts](#).

What if Zoe inflated space? And then she deflates it later. And then we don't have all the tunnel shit and the shit about hopping back the same point in time that you hopped from in the first place.

As I have it now, Zoe meets Pinchley and Zoe from the unfurled world before she herself goes there. And they know about her. So was the unfurled world was there all along.

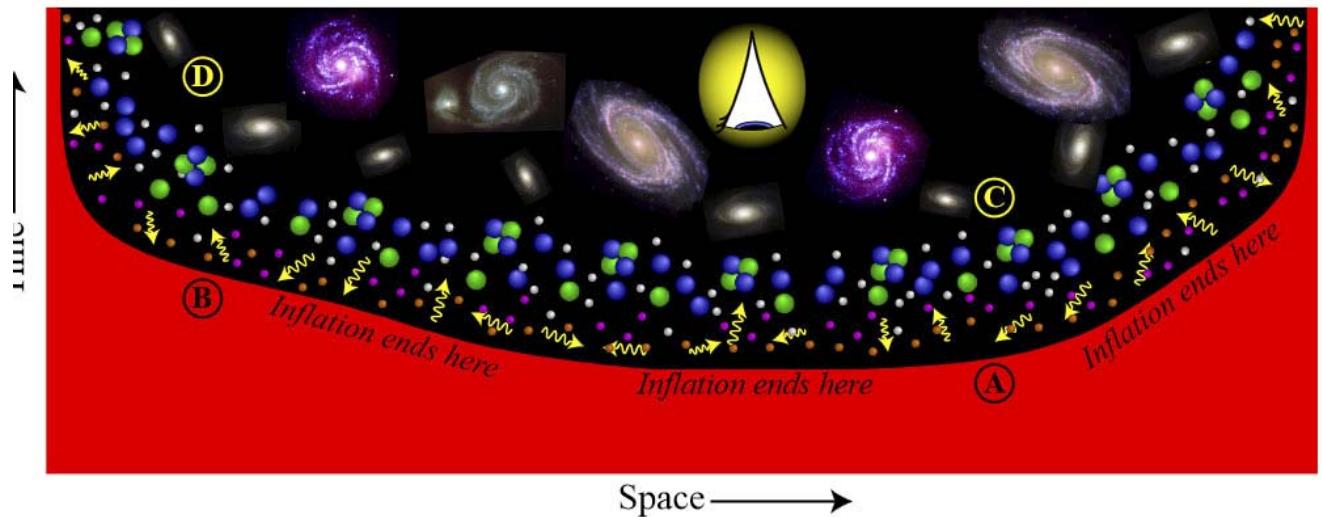


Figure 18: Eternal inflation.

A big problem I had with the unfurling scenario was this question: Where do all the other civilizations and their histories would come from? And how do they know about us?

I discovered, and blogged about, a partial fix for that in the form of the so-called [eternal inflation](#) model I learned of in a pop sci book by Max Tegmark two months ago. The unfurling event could create infinitely many worlds at once *and* create their billions of years of past histories. Siphoning the info from the quantum foam.

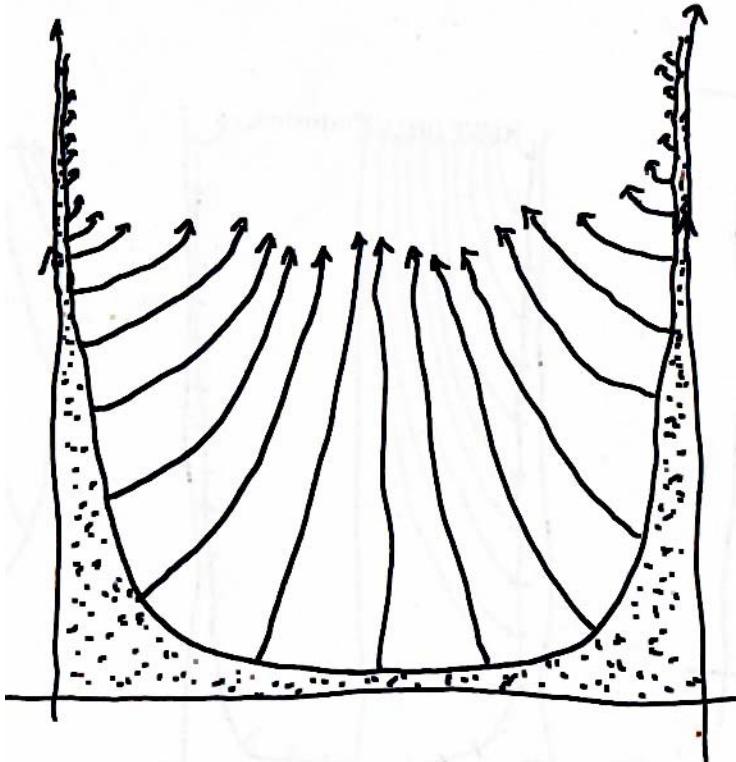


Figure 19: The Timelines in an Endless Inflation Universe

And what about the past history of the unfurled world's civilizations? That's my biggest issue with the unfurling scenario.

One possibly relevant idea is that all the points along that U-shaped curve happen at the same instant, and the shaded areas are part of a more or less instantaneous inflation event.

We might possibly think of Zoe's mind is the shaded part underneath the U. And the moment she unfurls Earth is that U-line. And all the new civilizations are born *spang* with their histories.

But I can't really make this fit all that well. I mean, before Zoe did the unfurl, the Szep were already kind of looking for her, weren't they? And I think we're supposing there will be a furling back up. And, as in the two worlds model, we have to wonder how the disparate planets of raw space get mapped into the basins of the unfurled world. Maybe when the endless unfurling plane sweeps faster-than-light through space, it gathers up the planets like a lepidopterist mounting butterflies.

If I went for the unfurling scenario, I'd have a sequence of events like this:

(1) Zoe plays the magic note. (2) There's a shudder. Earth unfurls. The Sun goes away, but it doesn't get dark. (3) The Szep drive up to Zoe's house in their beater. (4) They soup up the purple whale and drive, trailed by the empty, self-driving beater. (5) As before, they have the saucers and the near collision, but this time they rise up like a monster truck and drive over Mom's SUV, straddling it. (6) They drive to Van Cott, doing weird turns. (7) They stop at the night market's parking lot as before. When Villy gets zapped, Zoe doesn't hop back. (8) Etc.

Presumably Zoe does the unfurling before Yampa shows up. How does Yampa get there so fast? She drives up in her weird car with Pinchley. I do love that image. Kind of better than a

magic door

The Van Cott city would be a few miles away, like one of those random SF Peninsula cities I've never happened to visit. Weird exits, unused roads. I used this move in *Jim and the Flims*—where a guy takes an odd series of turns in his own town and finds a new street. I originally got this from a Robert Sheckley story, "The Altar," 1953, which appears in his epochal collection, *Untouched By Human Hands*. In "The Altar," the protagonist is led into an alternate world by a stranger—they walk around and around the streets of the guy's increasingly dark and sinister suburban town, and he ends up as the sacrificial offering at temple in an alternate world. Here's the sunnier version of this that I wrote in *Jim and the Flims*.

I half-believed the world around me to be a kind of maze. I had a persistent fantasy that, if only I traveled along the right sequence of twists and turns, I might find my way out of my dull labyrinth of woe. Deep down, I thought I might still find my dead wife.

Today, feeling energetic, I decided to try for a really odd-ball path. Like a mail-delivery bot with a program flaw, I trundled to and fro, backtracking some blocks and circling others, recrossing streets I'd already passed, and approaching familiar streets from unfamiliar directions.

I found myself crafting a wonderfully unexpected route through Santa Cruz. The accumulating turns were wrapping the world in a welcome glow of strangeness. And then—triumph! Only a few blocks from my rental home of several years, I arrived at a street I could hardly recognize. My subconscious quest had reached fruition!

At first thought, it seems there would be stars in the sky on the unfurled world, the same old stars as before. Some of them would crash into the unfurled world—that's okay, I guess. As I've mentioned before, they could oscillate through the plane of the unfurled world, although they'd burn the shit out of a few thousand miles at least. Our local Sun could be lighting up all of the unfurled world in our region. And there'd be a dull dark zone midway between here and, like, Alpha Centauri. The stars would be fixed mileposts, a hangover from the original raw world.

Fuck the Sun, the Moon, and the stars. I'll blow them into glowons. The mighty unfurling of Earth sweeps the heavens clear.

Would Zoe's mind somehow be a template for what's in the unfurled world? Suppose she likes flying saucers, and that's why they abound. Her mind plays the role of the quantum fluctuations that craft the forms within an endless eternal inflation.

The unfurled world would be an objective correlative for a psychedelic trip or a creative fugue state on Zoe's part, no? And in this case, the message on the magic mushroom in Thuddland would be something to this effect.

And Goob-goob would in fact be Zoe. Is this too far to go? I don't want the world to recognizably be her fantasy all along. I'm reminded here of Fredric Brown's 1949 novel *What Mad Universe*, where an SF editor is transferred into a universe based on the feverish fantasies of one of his magazine's rabid fans. But you don't learn the origins of this mad universe till the

end of the novel—and that's the kicker.

As I recall, I was very surprised by the final reveal in *What Mad Universe*—like, God is a slobbering SF fan. But all along the book gets to be a complete pulp SF festival, with scantily clad moon maidens and bug-eyed monsters, and I was thinking Fredric Brown was kind of an idiot. Enjoyably cheesy reading, but I'm looking down on it a bit—and then Brown hits me with the zinger, “This plot mirrors the mind of someone like you!”

Suppose that the unfurled world aliens say they've always been unfurled? So then the unfurling event does not create their world. They were there all along, and their world is separate from ours.

If I say the worlds are the same, I can't really say that Van Cott has always been on the Peninsula? And the Szep and Thudds and so on have always been there? And the Borderslam Pass has always been there, and the inn? These things were always “here,” but we couldn't see them.

So we're back to the two-world model, one reality sheet atop the other. So be it.

Yet even so, I could have a two world model but do a transition that feels like an unfurling. Like, instead of the critters coming out of a jewel hole they just drive up. And instead of going through a transdimensional tunnel, they just drove to Van Cott. And in the region of Los Perros the bally world Los Perros and the unfurled Los Perros are glued right on top of each other like sheets of tissue paper in a paper mache piñata.

So much else would have to change. The unfurled worlders wouldn't have the obsession with Earth. Etc. I don't want to take this route.

July 30, 2015. Saw Agent & Editor in New York. Items for To Do List.

So we've been in NYC for six days, staying in the luxe Library Hotel, eating really well. We saw our old friend Eddie, and I met with agent John Silbersack and my former editor Dave Hartwell of Tor.

Silbersack had read my proposal and partial first draft, and he had some very specific and useful advice. Some of the advice touched on the goal of making ROAD TRIP a YA book, some was also applicable if it's an adult novel.

Typically, David Hartwell had not gotten around to reading my proposal or draft. His usual reasons: his complex family life, his frequent con-attendance, his other manuscripts to edit. Although I like him as a person, meeting with Dave reminded me how really fed-up I was with the old hat-in-hand routine by the time Tor dropped me. But I pushed on and told him about the book, and he made a few suggestions as well.

He was repelled by the thought of Scud having sex with a saucer, although he also was laughing about it when I mentioned the tiny Scud-saucer offspring. He says it's as if my character is having sex with an animal. For that matter, Dave didn't think even Villy and Zoe should have sex with each other—he claimed this would cut the readership in half. But John Silbersack later said that Dave has a very old-fashioned attitude about sex, like out of the 1940s, and that today's YA books often have sex scenes.

Dave said maybe in September he'd have time to look at the then-current draft, and at that time he would decide if he'd want to reject it, publish it as an adult book, or pass it on to Tor's YA editor Susan Chang for consideration. He said she's hard to please, only acquires about 6

titles a year, and already has some writers she works with. I asked Dave if I could meet Susan Chang, and he said not yet. It almost seemed like he was scared of her.

I talked briefly to the Tor head Tom Doherty before lunch and he said Tor needs YA material. He told me that royalty is lower on YA books as the cover prices are lower, also that the books aren't shelved with adult SF. I hadn't really thought of these factors before

All in all not too encouraging. As I said, it reminded me of why I was so relieved to start self-pubbing! But for now I'll stay the course and see what happens. And maybe in the end my *Road Trip* is my third self-published adult SF novel. I can live with that. Could Kickstart for maybe \$9K, given that it's a novel. Yet another underground classic?

I was talking in a somewhat discouraged way to Silbersack, sighing, saying, "Well, maybe I can write it to spec." Meaning that I could water/dumb it down. But he quickly said, "That's not what we're looking for. I want you to write the best book you possibly can." And that's encouraging.

Often I resent and bristle at suggestions for improving a novel of mine, but actually that's my fear that I won't be able to do the fixes. But doing fixes doesn't really take that long. The thing is to decide where you're going *before* you do the fixes.

Here's a summary of some suggested changes, with most of these from John Silbersack. I'll integrate some of these suggestions into my [master To Do list](#).

- In the current draft, Villy and Zoe become boyfriend/girlfriend almost right away. If this is a YA book, having them hook up is one of the main events, and it should be postponed to somewhere near the end of the novel. Lots of adult romances have this same pattern...a man and woman are just friends through most of the story and only at the end do they break through their stand-offishness. Let them kiss in the first chapter, but then have Zoe backing away. A bouncing kind of thing, like close, far, closer, far, close.
- I need more of a description of what Zoe and Villy look like and, even more, mentions of how they look to each other. There should be longing/lechery in the kids' thoughts of each other. And they need to be more tormented. "I'm different. Nobody gets me. I'll never find love."
- Don't let my elaborate, chaotic, filigreed, surface decoration of nested eyeball kicks completely take over. I'm thinking of a chased golden sphere. "Chased" in the old metal-working sense. Keep zooming in on the feelings of the kids, which lie inside the orb. In other words, as always, I need more wheenk and inner monologues.
- The two kids start as outsiders, and in the process of the journey they learn how to cope with their own world. They acquire various life-skills while in the other world.
- All the alien characters (other than Nunu) whom they've met thus far seem like *adult* aliens. It might be funner and more engaging for the kids to be meeting *teenage* aliens. Why not have Pinchley, Yampa, and Meatball be teens. For that matter, have the couple running the Borderslam Inn be young. And our heroes initially try relating to the alien teens in the same self-defeating ways that they do with teens back home, but then they learn to do it differently.
- The two Szep shouldn't be quite so laid back. To fuel the urgency of the story they should be somewhat uptight about getting back to Szep City and fixing things. Even so, they can be fairly laid back. Like surfers.

- Are there any humans in Van Cott? What are their lives like?
- Why is Zoe's mother acting the way she does? So uptight and driven? What's her back story? Where's Zoe's father? Might the back story explain why Zoe is slow to enter into a relationship with Villy?
- Keep in mind that YA readers are "aspirational," that is, they prefer reading about kids a year or two older than themselves. And they do *not* want to read about younger kids. So it would be better to have Scud be older than 13. Maybe he's an immature 15.
- Perhaps instead of Scud sticking his dick into Nunu, she gets "pregnant" from Scud simply by French-kissing him for a long time and absorbing DNA from the tissues in Scud's mouth.
- I have to remember that the other basins are alien worlds. I currently have the Thud world being very much like an Earthly Jurassic Park, and I need to make it more alien—don't have exact analogues of our animals. And make clear that Thudds aren't exactly like our dinos.

July 31-August 9, 2015. What's the Story?

In trying to tell Dave Hartwell about my novel, I realized that I don't have a clear "elevator pitch" which I know by heart. I've talked about this problem in these notes before. I need to nail the pitch. Get a butt-simple action arc. Get this straight before I implement the items in that To Do list I wrote yesterday about putting in all that YA wheenk. Also I need the pitch/arc before I start a serious push for the end.

I'll group my concerns under subheader titles, and work on this entry for awhile, filling in ideas under the subheaders. [I spent ten days on this, and I still wasn't done. Just to have a sense of progress, on August 10, 2015, I started a fresh entry after this one. Slowly the new entry came together, and it's called "That's the Story!"]

CUTS

The plot is overloaded, as I threw in a bunch of threads, unsure of which ones I'd actually use. I need to prune down now. I think I can drop the *Cosmic Beatdown* videogame, the Yount protocol, and the idea of drilling down through a hole in the mappy world. Drop the idea of some humans being paranormally gifted "stars" and the idea of mappy-world prospectors looking for them.

THE MUSHROOM

Maybe keep it, maybe not. The mushroom and the *Cosmic Beatdown* game are a communication channel. I don't want to go meta and drop out of the narrative, making it seem like a videogame or a dream. If I want the images on the mushroom, maybe it can be info about the current status in Szep City. Like the picture shrooms are a mappy world communication channel. And the message can at least to some extent be precognitive and synchronistic. But, nah, not videogame credits.

SAUCERS AND SMEEL

The flying saucers, the Freeth, and the giant prehistoric flying jellyfish of Thuddland—they're around because I love them, but they need to play a plot role.

Have them all basically be so-called "smeel jellies" made of lumps of condensed or

jellied smeel—smeel being the universal substance of the mappy world, a substance which contains the essence of consciousness.

That is, the Freeth and the saucers are mutually hostile relatives, like moon jellies vs. comb jellies. All smeel jellies.

By the way, how do the smeel jellies fly? Well, smeel can do anything. Flight of fancy. Castles in the clouds. Saucer gel. The essence of consciousness.

Do I really need for some of the saucers to be literal blood-sucking vampires? That's so stale and parodic. Something *like* vampires is better. They drain people's smeel.

The saucers are parasites. Smeel vampires.

Several kinds of smeel. Consciousness is light or liquid smeel, the matter is heavy or solid smeel, and the saucers are smeel gel. An emulsion of light and heavy smeel. A colloid.

Maybe the saucers can teleport all over mappyworld. Maybe saucers can teleport from cores that they have, like the one at the center of Saucer Hall. Like ansibles. Or maybe they can teleport just on their own? I'll need this if I put New Eden all the way out at Szep City. Hop from Borderslam Ridge to Szep City. Suppose that one of the rocks there is a saucer hop node. And Zoe sees Maisie by the node

Or the saucers can drop down into a "jet stream" inside of unspace and travel any distance at all?

No, forget about saucer teleportation. Too complicated, too much of a kludge. But we *will* suppose that they're reasonably good at hopping between mappyworld and ballyworld. Provided someone invites them to ballyworld, or provided someone in ballyworld is a saucer zombie.

NO GOOB-GOOB

Any use of the phrase "Goob-goob" should be merely superstitious. Or in jest. Remember that, for the average reader, either God = bullshit, or God is too personal to be a fit topic for fiction.

I'd rather not get into anything like "God's master plan." And an all-powerful alien caretaker is really just the same thing as god. The thing is, I don't want a top-down world. I want an emergent world. Whatever function my notion of Goob-goob was going to serve must instead be accomplished by forces of nature.

This said, there is a universal mind aspect to the two-part universe of bally world and mappy world. Someone might refer to this cosmic mind as Goob-goob and then jokingly say "It has two parts. Like the two hemispheres of our brain. What are the parts? Easy. There's Goob and there's goob."

NAMES OF THE TWO WORLDS

Let's rethink the names "bally world" and "flat world"—which I was using up until August 6, 2015.

"Bally" is a of nice word, reminds me of "all balled up" for "all screwed up." And it's not in fact a word, which is good, too. And of course it evokes vast space with balls (planets and stars) floating in it. I could also call our local world the "raw world"? My idea is that our raw world is like an unedited version of the world, and the other world is the cleaned-up, highlights-only version.

What to call the higher world? Flat world is awkward as it confusingly hints of *Flatland*.

Raw world and better world. Crude world and refined world. Dull world and better world. Bally world and better world. Bally world and sampler world. “Sampler” with basins like the frilly wax-paper cups holding truffles in a Whitman’s candy sampler. But the samples are for—who? Nobody.

I’m tempted to go back to an earlier idea and call it the unfurled world. Bally world and unfurled world. I like the word unfurled, even if I don’t get into a specific unfurling scenario. But if I don’t use that scenario, using that word makes absolutely no sense.

Anthology, top hits, catalog, special selection, map.

Oh, I’ve got it. Mappy. The bally world and the mappy world. Mappy in the sense of map-like, of course, and I’m also thinking of the distorted anamorphic maps one sees where certain regions are enlarged to show their importance along some axis such as population or net-resources-consumption.

The bally world and the mappy world.

I hope I can stay with that one.

THE LINK BETWEEN BALLYWORLD AND MAPPYWORLD

What exactly is the connection between our bally world and the mappy world?

I could say it has to do with a cosmic duality, and that our world has two mutually supporting forms: bally world and the mappy world. They fuel and engender each other. Like yin and yang.

I do *not* want to say that our bally world characters have doubles in the mappy world. Don’t want the theme of the double in the plot.

Earlier I’d planned to have Earth unwrap or unfurl itself to produce the mappy world. And maybe later it would then furl itself back up. But for various reasons this doesn’t seem feasible. For my thoughts on this, see my previous entry: [July 29, 2015. Bring Back the Unfurled World Scenario? No.](#) (Actually I wrote that entry as an aside while still working on this here “What’s the Story” entry in August, but I backdated it for the sake of the logical flow of the Writing Notes.)

So the mappy world is somewhat like the traditional fairyland, which underlies the mundane world, and is accessible via spells and magic doors.

I’m very prone to multiple-world books. I had several worlds in *Mathematicians in Love*, first of all a higher-level world La Hampa, with a jellyfish god writing drafts of our world, and we visited I think three parallel sheets. Usually I just have one other world. The higher world in *The Big Aha* was called Fairyland, and it even had gnomes. In *Hylozoic* we had an alternate world called Hibrane, where Bosch lived. Our world was the Lobrane.

White Light was an afterworld novel and the other world was Cimön. *Jim and the Flims* involved an afterworld called Flimsy. I *could* say that the mappy world is the afterworld—and that my characters all got killed in that car crash they barely avoid early in the book. But I don’t want to do that. Too obvious, a car crash during graduation week.

The bally world is our 3D universe, and the mappy world is like a quilt, with each square or hexagon holding a kind of parody or imitation or essence of a civilization that lives upon one of the bally world’s planets.

Not all of the quilt patches have to be terrestrial—some of them could emulate blimp-like or weather-formation-like beings on gas giant worlds, and for that matter, we could have some

basins that are in effect like the insides of suns, provided we assume that sunspot vortices are alive and conscious, as in *Hylozoic*.

We'll focus of course on the terrestrial style worlds, although we might in passing mention the gas giant patches and the star patches.

If I want to think of the mappy world as being an anamorphic map of the bally world, I could in fact suppose that the ridges between the world contain vast, compressed volumes of empty space. And the glowons could be tiny scraps of stars.

Regarding the ridges, I don't talking about Goob-goob stones if there's no Goob-goob. But there could still be sentinel stones harboring weird perspectives relating to the anamorphic map distortion that turns a planet's surface into a bowl.

How is it that the mappy world is a loosely linked "sampler" or map of those the orbs in our bally world that contain conscious life? How does this arise? And what purpose does it serve?

If I wanted to invoke a divinity, I could say the mappy world is god's mental image of the bally world. In the same fashion as a person's mind, a god's mind might edit out the boring stuff, and cook the reality down to vignettes of the interesting bits. But remember that I don't want to invoke a top-down divinity.

One could say the mappy world is the universe's mind, although this sounds wooly and I'd rather not say it. Once again: no top down god. Just emergence.

The linking/sampling process must be emergent. In some fashion the bally and mappy world engender each other. Like the inside and the outside of a human body. Like masculine and feminine. Like the chicken and the egg. But how does the engendering happen, and why?

The mappy world is a group mind emanation from the minds of the conscious creatures in bally world. And that's why all dull stuff like empty space and stars are omitted from the mappy world. Only the interesting parts have minds living in them. (A tautology.) Okay, but again, what does this so-called "emanation" mean, and why and how does it happen?

The mappy world is like a dream arising from the conscious minds of the bally worlds? That's a step in the right direction, but I don't want wispy dreams. I want the mappy world to be rock-hard real.

Each patch of the mappy quilt is the oversoul of a particular bally world civilization. And this isn't wispy because consciousness is real, it's a physical phenomenon, it might be dark energy or dark matter or, shifting into a higher linguistic gear, quintessence or spissitude or cosmic smeel or urstoff or subaether or subdimensional energy or knotted strings or ifness or isness. "God is pure existence unmodified." The Ifth of Oofth. Why not call it saucer gel and then, wham, I've got a hook for fitting the saucers into the book! Pure genius, Rudy, pure genius. "Twas a bonnie, bosky ifth of Oofth in the old scribe's bally home."

No, wait, don't call it saucer gel, that's too restrictive. Call it *smeel*, I love that word. "You said smell?" "No, I said *smeeeeeeeel*."

I used smeel as the flesh of the Wackles in *Spaceland*, and as a kind of soul jelly in "The Men in the Back Room at the Country Club." But I'll use it again.

So dig it, a civilization's group mind—or, to be more concrete, the set of all minds in a civilization. It's a pool of smeel that rests in a particular basin of the mappy world. The Jungian collective unconscious can be reified (made concrete) as a part of the pool, which is nice. And possibly even the souls of the dead are in the pools—but, again, I'd rather steer clear of afterlife

elements. Although it could be a nice scene if Scud saw the ghost of his dead mother. A good tearjerker near the end.

Anyway, the smeel—it has patterns inside itself, and these are the beings of the mappy world. They're test models of real things, echoes of real things, and the two worlds bounce things back and forth.

Think of an jeweler's mental images of the things she makes. Or a writer's plans for his novel. Or an artist's vision of her painting. The visualization engenders a mockup, or a draft, or a sketch, and the preliminary creation sparks new ideas, which lead to new versions of the art work. A feedback loop. Fancies things flit about—and some of them take on solidity in the bally world.

It's an actual physical process, a loop, with dark energy flowing back and forth between the mappy and bally levels.

Or, again, the mappyworld is a dream being dreamed by the ballyworld. Like an afterlife. Like a fairy land version.

But this is still vague handwaving.

UNUSED NEW EDEN PLAN

I'm thinking of moving New Eden to Szep City—and have New Eden be a slum on the outskirts of Szep City. Let's suppose that some, or most, of the Szep want to oust the hippie humans and the saucers. Suppose Pinchley and Yampa were recruited to help get rid of the Edge City crowd, so in a way you might think they're mean, but they say it's good for us on ballyworld if Edge City closes down. And the Iravs want to keep Edge City going as they're being paid off by the saucers. In this scenario, New Eden would be, in effect, a weapons lab. The saucers are breeding lots of saucer babies, and they plan to deploy them around Van Cott to make a hole to Los Perros.

Suppose ballyworld Szep race has been decimated or befouled by saucers, and a minority of the remaining Szep want to save Earth—out of sympathy, as we're the closest fellow humanoids. (a) They want to show the kids what their bally Szep world has become, a good scene of de-Chirico-esque gloomy Ballardian empty ballyworld correlative of Szep City, although Szep City itself has become very elaborate (metaphor for march of digital high tech) and saucerian. (b) They want to equip the kids with some kind of antisaucer tool or technique. I'm visualizing it as a glowing ball. The Iravs want to block the transfer. The Iravs are old, the kids and Yampa and Pinchley are young.

But why wouldn't the Szep just contact kids from Van Cott? Why do they especially need ballyworld Earthlings? Well, the tool is meant to be used on ballyworld side, not the mappyworld side.

And why would there be saucers next to Earth and next to the incredibly far away Szep City?

It would be a false move to make New Eden a suburb of Szep City. I really just wanted to do that because I wanted to remove an extra stop (at New Ede) from the road trip, and have Szep City / New Eden be a single stop. Not a good idea.

Simplify. Let's say there's no saucer problem on Szep City.

August 10-17, 2015. That's the Story!

I've revised my previous (long) "What's the Story?" entry for about ten days, and

worked on my big To Do list at the start of these notes, putting some of the changes into the novel already. I still had a lot of pieces missing. So I kept going on this entry for a week, even going back and revising the previous entry a bit. As before, I'm organizing this section by listing subheader topics.

ACTION ARC

The saucers are about to do something bad to Earth, and the kids stop them.
Along the way, a problem in Szep City is solved.
And the kids mature a bit.

If Earth was enslaved by the saucers this would have an echo effect on Van Cott. A few of the Van Cott humans are aware of the upcoming saucer problems, and are in an underground state of rebellion against the saucers, like a resistance force. Like a guerilla war. Eekra the dancer is in this group as is Melon, the boy who runs the night market fruit stand.

The saucers have been parasitizing us for centuries. In earlier days they were viewed as demons or evil spirits. But all along they've been aliens from a planet that's fifteen lightyears away. But now this is becoming a bigger threat.

(1) The saucers of Saucer Hall are about to dig an enormous hole in the countryside near Van Cott. It will function as a saucer gate, like a tunnel through unspace, ringed with smeel threads from a large number of saucerbabies. I like the idea of a hole as it's so literal. A hole in the substrate of mappyworld. And then they'll be able to freely pour into our world and drain more smeel than ever from Earth, or to abduct more people than ever. And they can bring really big saucers through the gate.

(2) They are in fact evolving a supergiant saucer to get a lot of us at once, and that's part of the threat. We'll have the mandatory scene of the giant saucer flying low along Santa Cruz Avenue in Los Perros, capturing people. The kids see one of these monster saucers practicing in Thuddland. Yampa, and the kids don't realize what it is.

(3) Another reason for the escalation is that the saucers are suddenly gung-ho about importing us to New Eden and thence to Proxima Centauri. There's a fad for human slaves on Proxima.

I'm expecting the kids to bring back some magic saucer-fighting object or technique from Szep City. In terms of the Monomyth, it's the Elixir. They'll return from Szep City with the elixir, and pause to use it on the saucer headquarters in New Eden, and that's going well, but then Villy and the elixir get abducted by saucers.

Zoe makes her way over the border pass to Van Cott and manages to hop back to Los Perros with Scud in tow.

They have a tense boring week or two in Los Perros, and then Villy makes his way back.

They liberate Earth and for the envoi, Scud returns to Van Cott and takes up with the dancing girl Eekra and her friend Melon. And they plan to start a new road trip from Van Cott.

WHY THE SZEP TAKE THE KIDS TO SZEP CITY

I've been feeling like I'm losing my focus—I thought the book was supposed to be about a million mile road trip. And not so much about a saucer invasion. I'm not thinking enough about a fun road trip.

I have to think of a non-saucer-related reason for going to Szep City. Something fresh, quirky, or even just butt simple: Pinchley and Yampa take Zoe and Villy back for fun.

As it happens, the Szep are the closest race to Van Cott that's even approximately humanoid, and vice versa. In between Van Cott and Szep City, the only species are, like, Thudds, ants, anteaters. Freeth, musical Jello cues, saucers. No humanoids. So *that's* why the Szep drove to Van Cott in the first place. Like kids in their vacation between high-school and college going on a trip to England.

The only pressure on the two Szep on this trip is that they're supposed to be home in time for something mundane like going to college. And along the way the kids are mildly worried about the impending saucer invasion, but they don't realize quite how serious it's gonna be.

It's Eekra and Maisie who suggest to the Szep that they get in touch with Zoe. And at the same time, Maisie—back in Los Perros—gives Zoe a tip about how to play that certain solo that will attract Zoe.

For Yampa and Pinchley, it's just an unexpected bonus that they found kids from the ballyworld side. And they think of asking for those treats.

And it's merely *incidental* that the Szep happen to have some tool or technique that works against the saucers. And the kids bring this tool back to New Eden, which is he saucer headquarters basin, beside the Van Cott basin.

And in their battle against the saucers, our kids can made common cause with mappyworld kids a bit like them. As I say, that dancing girl Eekra is one of their contacts, and the other is the farm boy Melon.

NEW EDEN FOR REAL

Szep City has no essential connection to the saucers at all. New Eden is next to Van Cott, one basin over.

The saucers can be seen on Earth, and in the basin of Van Cott, but I'm saying their home is the basin of New Eden which lies right next to the basin of Van Cott. And this basin matches one of the closest planets to Earth. It's planet or maybe just a kind of asteroid zone near Proxima Centauri which is near its Alpha Centauri, both about 4 lightyears from Earth.

Or it could be near the star Gliese, which has four planets, and Gliese is fifteen lightyears away, that is, fifteen trillion kilometers. But Proxima Centauri is fun and easy to say.

Not hard to move the saucers and captive humans back and forth either way.

Los Perros <-- hop --> Van Cott <-- fly --> New Eden <-- hop --> Proxima Centauri.

You might think of Saucer Hall as being like Ellis Island, relative to the abducted humans being brought in.

The Borderslam Pass is a triple point. With two alternate basins visible. You can see the mappyworld Earth basin, New Eden, and Thuddland.

MAISIE AND ZOE

My stalker saucerboy character Walter is now the touching, lonely, spunky, slightly repellent saucergirl Maisie. Initially we're not sure if she's good or bad. She's Zoe's half-sister, a year younger than Zoe. 17. She's the saucerbaby daughter of a saucer that was impregnated by Zoe's father, who's named Kirk. The mother saucer, Wilhelmina, returned to New Eden.

Kirk met Wilhelmina because he was a sincere screwball saucer nut. He founded the New

Eden group, him and his mistress Sunny Weaver. Kirk meditated so hard on the while in a hot tub with Sunny that he summoned Wilhelmina. Like a magician summoning a spirit. And then he had sex with Wilhelmina, as with a *succubus*—the old medieval word for what's basically a man's wet dream of a woman: a demon-woman who comes to you in your sleep and lies under (sub + cubare) you, and gathers your sperm. Cf. the contemporary myth of saucer beings doing exactly this. Archetypal. And Sunny may have had a saucer being on top of her—an incubus.

After Wilhelmina gave birth to Maisie in New Eden, she then flew the saucergirl to Saucer Hall in Van Cott, and let her hop down to Los Perros on Earth, homing in on her father. And Sunny Weaver gladly posed as Maisie's mother. Sunny had always wanted a child by Kirk. And everyone believes Maisie is hers.

Around then Zoe's mother divorced Kirk, and Kirk settled in with Sunny, without actually marrying her. Sunny is kind of an annoying social worker, very Santa Cruz—she's like the woman with Frek's father in *Frek and the Elixir*, or like the main character's landlady in *Jim and the Flims*. Anyway, Kirk and Sunny give Maisie a home. And Zoe does know that Maisie is her half-sister, indeed she sees her in school, Maisie's only a year behind her, but they're not close, although Maisie would like to be better friends. But Zoe is kind of snobby towards her—partly because she's mad about her parents' divorce

Maisie is in touch with the saucers, she's the star of the New Eden group, she's their psychic or their medium. Thanks to her link to Wilhelmina, Maisie can hop to Saucer Hall pretty easily. She sleeps there some nights, and sometimes even catches a ride on a big saucer transport to New Eden.

But now Maisie has caught wind of what the saucers are about to do, and she's going double agent against the saucers. Also she relishes the chance to blow Zoe's mind. So she helps Pinchley and Yampa hop to Zoe. And to facilitate this, Maisie teaches Zoe a kind of trumpet call that reaches up to mappyworld.

SAUCERBABIES

The possibility of saucerbabies surprises the Szep as much as it surprises the kids.

If necessary, a saucerbaby can feed via a tube they stick into the ground, extracting raw smeel from the microorganisms in soil,

They saucerbabies are nimble at hopping between the worlds as they have smeel threads leading both ways.

At some point a bunch of them will travel en masse from Van Cott to Earth, making a ring of smeel trails which behave, in effect, like the surface of a ruled cylinder demarcating a tunnel through unspace to Los Perros.

TRAVELING BETWEEN BALLYWORLD AND MAPPYWORLD

How do they get, on the one hand from mappyworld to ballyworld and, conversely, how do they get from ballyworld to mappyworld?

The simplest is to say it's like a mental hop. Effectively like teleportation. But it has to be a little bit hard to do.

A very physical method would be that a mappyworld being can get down to ballyworld by digging a hole and jumping through unspace. And we may use this sometimes, but it's an extraordinary measure. It's very hard to dig through the dark matter mappyworld matrix. The saucers can do it, sometimes, and they're getting better at it, and they'd like to make a really big hole and send down a giant monster saucer.

Normally when you hop in either direction, you go to the closest spot on the matching planet or matching basin.

Note that even if hole-digging is one way to get from mappyworld to ballyworld, you need another method to get from ballyworld to mappyworld. Unless you have a magic ladder that leads into unspace.

Regarding the hopping technique we can suppose that for it to work you need a contact or a link or a relative at the other end. Or at least someone at the other end has to be summoning you.

We could suppose that if a saucer has sucked smeel from a human on ballyworld Earth, then that person is kind of their slave or zombie—just like the way people traditionally obey a vampire that's bitten them. In any case, these saucer-bit humans would act as mediums to draw saucers through.

In my first draft I gave Zoe a kind of paranormal power that opened up a hole in mappyworld for Zoe and Pinchley to climb down through. And then Zoe was able, by concentrating and making music, to hop the purple whale from Los Perros to Van Cott.

I'd said that occasional other humans had this power, and they were called "stars," and mappyworlders in Van Cott were in some sense prospecting for such ballyworld "stars," and there was something of an industry based on this. But I'm dropping that angle entirely.

Zoe's trip should more in the nature of a one-off event. It echoes however her father's contact with Wilhelmina, and the fact that Zoe has the saucergirl Maisie for a half-sister. Maisie put Pinchley and Yampa onto Zoe. So Zoe was in some sense calling them, and Yampa answered the call, partly as a hop, but partly by digging a hole and putting a magic ladder down through it.

FLYING ON MAPPYWORLD

Why don't they have airplanes or skimmers in mappyworld? Because the gravity isn't right...it gets stronger as you go up above the surface. Even the saucers can't fly long distances. It's very hard to stay high in the air. The best the saucers can do is fly over one range of mountains to get to their native New Eden basin. No hope whatsoever of them flying a million miles.

MATCHING UP BALLYWORLD AND MAPPYWORLD

Note that Van Cott is the one "central" spot of its basin which is the closest to ballyworld Earth. Drop everything down one dimension to visualize how we map a 3D space of spherical surfaces to a plane.

[Maybe insert "Figure : Mapping Disks to a Line."]

Think of a 2D space of disks that's mapped to a 1D line, with each disk being unrolled to put its skin on the line. The line swerves around, skimming close to each planet, and the closest skim point is the center of the flattened out skin. And then the dead spaces between the planet skins gets bunched up into a rough spot of "mountain" before the next basin skin.

As I was saying the other day, I think of mappyworld as being in some sense a dream generated by the hylozoic, pantheistic, cosmic mind of ballyworld.

Be that as it may, I need some really literal and even *dumb* connection between the ballyworld and mappyworld versions of the same planets. Something stupidly literal and obvious. An explanation with physics in it.

But what *is* a dream—from the viewpoint of an idealist who believes in quantum mechanics? As an idealist, you say the world is made up of sensations. As a quantum mechanic, you say that our world has a consciousness as an entangled system, and that it is thinking itself, but it can also be thinking of other selves. Suppose that for “complex mathematical reasons such as the Twistermann Duality Reduction,” the potentially endless number of other worlds collapses into one single alternate world, the so-called mappyworld.

So I’m saying the mappyworld basins are coherent systems created by the physical minds of the matching planets. Like thought balloons floating up from the planets. But not so gauzy as mere thoughts. And there’s not a zillion alternate thought balloon versions—that’s the main thing I need to avoid. We only want the *one* mappyworld. Quantum mechanically speaking, we say that the various alternate worlds get stuck together, they layer up, the superpose onto each other, they switch from being a broad coherent spectrum to a single decoherent alternate reality with everything fixed in place. So Gaia’s thought balloon does *not* in fact have to be gauzy at all. It’s the merged and collapsed set of all possible alternate histories.

And—idealism again—the mappyworld is not just a conceptual head-trip, no, it’s a specific concrete thing. It defies Samuel Johnson who said, of Berkeley’s idealism, “I refute it thus”—and kicked a brick.

And, natch, mappyworld is dreaming *us*. Chicken and egg.

Yeah, baby. I have to ask Nick Herbert about this.

August 18-24, 2015. I Have a Plot. And a Map.

I started by picking off some more of the To Do list items, romping through the text doing quick fixes for the To Do things and leaving the segues and consistency for later on.

And then I had some good ideas about the book and I implemented them, once again by hopping through the text with the Search function. I did this multiple times, each time searching for different key word. The search targets included: saucer, Pinchley, Maisie, sentinel stone, mappyworld and Szep City.

The new ideas:

- Maisie is a saucer girl, she’s turned double agent, she wants to help Zoe against the saucers. She taught Zoe the hop tune, and, on the mappyworld side, she told Yampa and Pinchley to be at the spot where Zoe would be pushing through unspace.
- The saucers are gearing up for a total invasion of Earth. They want to build a hole near Van Cott and send through giant saucers. The giant saucers are currently feeding in Thuddland. The Szep think that the Earthlings can win the war if they manage to steal the magic wand of the Princess in Szep City.
- Light-years of empty space are bunched up to form the ridges between the basins matching the surfaces of inhabited planets. The sentinel stones have stars and nebulae inside them.
- Scud only kissed Nunu, and he didn’t have sex with her, but this was enough to fertilize her eggs.

I put all of these things in. And I improved Pinchley’s accent. Feeling stoked. I’m getting closer and closer to a clear and simple action arc. An elevator pitch. A dustjacket plot summary.

Short version:

Three teens on a quest for an alien world’s “magic wand.” They need the wand to save

Earth from invasion by flying saucers.

Longer version:

Three teens go on a million mile road trip across an endless “mappyworld.” It’s like an endless landscape with a totally new alien civilization every ten thousand miles or so. Goals? Fetch a magic wand to prevent flying saucers from invading Earth. And learn a little about life and love.

Soon I’ll get rolling on a new chapter. I’d like to hit the surf of the Flatsie basin next.

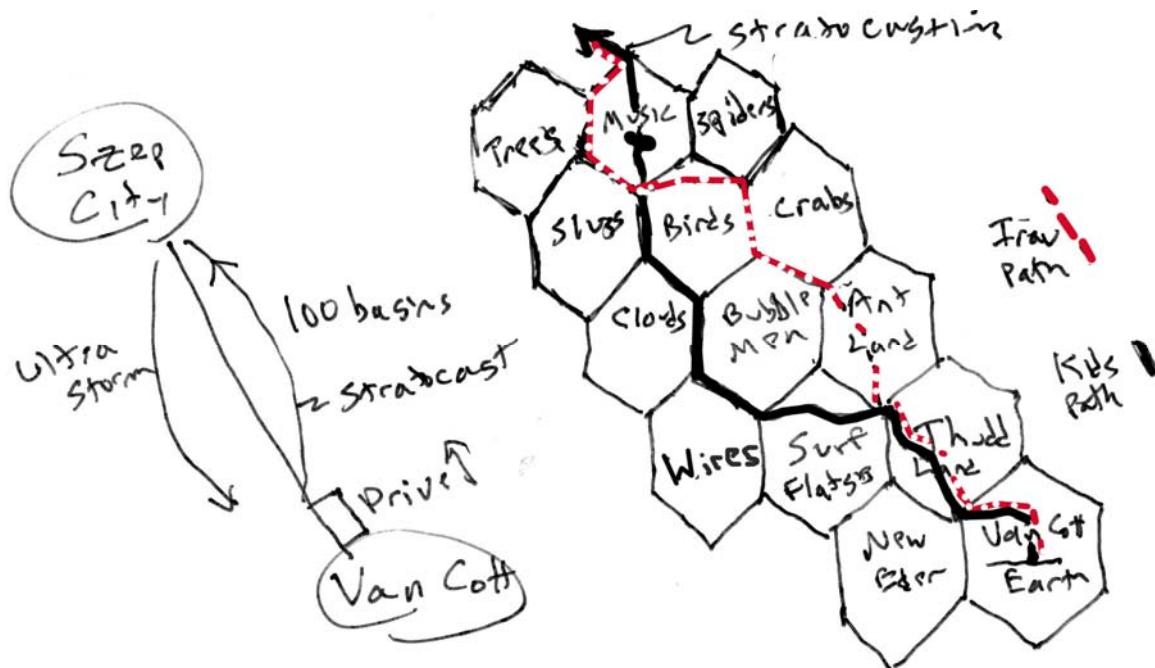


Figure 20: Mappyworld Basins Near Earth. (Needs Size Warp. See Figure 21.)

Here's a map I came up with. I'm thinking of the basins as hexagons, nestled together like the cells of a honeycomb. The saucer's home basin, New Eden, adjoins Earth's basin, Thuddland and the Flatsie Surfland. Later, on September 10, 2015, I'll take into account that the hexagons shouldn't be the same size, as the ballyworld planets have different radii and surface areas.

August 25-29, 2015. Enrich the Kids' Personalities.

I'll do a little more work on the characters before I go back to the growing tip of the story.

- Describe how the kids look.
- Establish their personalities with plusses and minuses.
- Add lust between Zoe and Villy.
- Have approach-avoidance in the Zoe/Villy affair. (They're scared.)

KIDS' APPEARANCE

Describe the kids more precisely. Their looks, and how they look to each other. Add lust

and longing. Get some blocks here, and I can paste in sections here and there.

Zoe.

Shaking her dark hair. She wears it in a bob with bangs. She has big, dark eyes, and sometimes she shoots Villy a sideways glance which pretty much slays him.. She has a nicely shaped mouth, with thin lips. She often twitches her mouth while she's talking, or even makes faces—it's like she's miming an ironic style commentary on her words. Like she's talking at two levels at once. And she knows she's doing this, and sometimes she wants to stop, but there's always that worry of sincerely saying something uncool. The irony gives her a fallback position.

Zoe's breasts are nothing much. And her butt, well, it's wider and rounder than it was when she was eleven, and boys have been known to stare after her in the hallway, which is totally a brain-dead yee-haw thing to do. But when Villy looks at Zoe in that male-gaze kind of way she's glad. She likes looking at him too. He's so graceful, so unselfconscious, so male.

The wind blows Zoe's hair off her brow. A pale, round brow, full of thoughts.

Her eyes are merry. Her ears are delicate white shells. She's not much more than five feet tall, and her arms and legs are like a tumbler's—rapid, adroit. Her fingers are stubby. Her voice is sweet and slightly draggy. A low giggle. Swings her arms when she walks. Sits cross-legged.

Sometimes she can't believe she's dating a surfer.

Zoe's Mom looks like her.

Villy.

Hair blonde and streaked from sun and surf. Smooth tan skin, somehow salty looking. Pale blue eyes, given to staring into the distance. Or then he stares straight at you. No whiskers. Straight mouth, and when he smiles, it's with the corners, and then maybe slowly spreading. Dark eyebrows.

Not heavily muscled, but strong. Flowing swimmer's muscles. Balanced, never awkward. Flat stomach. Low voice with a bit of a scratch in it. When he laughs, the laugh is a high cackle. Bops his head to music.

Old clothes, often with holes in them. Wears a tiki on a rawhide strand around his neck.

Calm. Sometimes silent, but it's not a sulky silence—he's just calm. Although sometimes Zoe wonders if there is, in fact, nothing at all going on in Villy's head. But then he'll say something interesting, and, yes, his thoughts were there all along, like an underground river.

Gets a sad, baffled look when he talks about school and careers. Cornered. So happy to be out on the road.

Holds out his arms and wriggles them, as if flying.

Scud.

Reddish blonde hair, worn short in a buzz cut. Sharp features. Mouth too big, spit on his teeth. Squints when he talks. Voice cracks, loud, cacophonous, not well-inflected, monotonous. Tall. Awkward as if his nerves haven't caught up with his body. Rangy, can run fast. Wild laugh like Villy's.

Maisie.

Pale, looks like Zoe's father, doesn't look like Zoe at all. Dishwater blonde hair in a lank ponytail. Blue eyes. Blank look. Small smile sometimes. The hidden skirt of a saucer rim around her waist.

So, okay, I made out the characterization table below, and then I went into the novel and included a lot of these description / characterization things, especially in the first four chapters. Eventually I'll comb through 6 to 16 for relationship / appearance / personality stuff, but I did hit

some of the spots in there as well.

	Plusses	Minuses	Tag Lines	Fix-it
Zoe				
	Strong self-image. Confident	Vain, snobby and cold.	“I’m a genius.” “Loser, stupid, geek.”	Finds empathy for her sister Maisie, and for the annoying Scud.
	Explorer. Takes own path.	Unwilling to jump through hoops.	“Follow my vision.” “I won’t do it. Let me live my life.”	Has to work to save Earth.
	Thinks ahead.	Dilatory, procrastinates.	“I’ll make a plan.” “Why rush? I’m not ready.”	Has to lead the group.
Villy				
	Calm.	Passive. Drifts.	“That’s cool.” “Whatever you say.”	Needs to battle deadly enemies.
	Practical. Deals with the now.	Lack of ambition, scared to try.	“I can fix this.” “I’m not playing that game. I don’t have a chance.”	Has a chance to save Earth.
	Empathy. Listens.	Poor self-esteem.	“I hear you.” “I’m dumb.”	Realizes he has the musical power to stratocast.
Scud				
	High self-esteem.	Low empathy.	“I’m a genius.” “I have no idea what you’re thinking.”	Acquires telepathy and experiences others’ feelings.
	Imaginative.	Unwilling to mature.	“What if?” “I don’t want to be old.”	Has to save his brother’s life.
	Tight focus on task at hand.	Stiff and uncompromising.	“I have it figured out.” “You don’t understand. You’re wrong.”	Thrown into chaotic rapidly-changing situations.
Maisie				
	Self-reliant.	Isolates. Can’t communicate.	“I’ll be fine.” “Leave me alone.”	Befriends Zoe and Villy at last.
	Cosmopolitan. Knows both worlds.	Resentful at being an outcast.	“I’ve seen it all.” “Everyone hates me.”	Plays a crucial role in saving Villy.

	Brave.	Suicidal.	"I'll take the chance." "I want to die."	Brings life to everyone on Earth.
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TABLE 7: CHARACTER PLUSSES AND MINUSES

Above is a table of their strong points, and of their flaws, with wheenable “tag lines,” plus summaries of turning-point-type fix-it scenes where they transform themselves and shed some particular flaw. I will come back and revise this table from time to time.

September 1-5, 2015. Planning the “Surf World” Chapter

I spent almost a week of reworking the outline of the upcoming chapters, and clearing out my To Do list, and revising the personalities / appearance / conversations / inner musings of Zoe and Villy. I’m at over 48,000 words now with sixteen chapters done, which means (I think) that I’m half done. With sixteen more chapters to go. Thirty-two chapters would be a nice, tidy length. A power of two.

So now I’m gathering my courage to jump into Chapter 17: Surf World. In this entry, I’ll record some thoughts on the upcoming chapter, plus some thoughts on what I’ve done so far.

I solved the issue on hold is the meaning of the Cosmic Beatdown “credit screen” on the mushroom in the Thuddland jungle. The Irav (now Iravs) wrote that shit there to bug the kids. The Irav/Iravs is/are a shapeshifting saucer in disguise.

They’re playing a double game of pretending to want to scare the kids off, while *really* they’re luring them onward towards Szep City. Why? They want the kids to get the Princess’s magic wand and bring it back to Van Cott. Why? They want the kids to do something dumb with the wand. Or maybe they just want to steal it.

I’d considered having “Cosmic Beatdown” be the name of a videogame that Villy plays, and is also a game which Villy’s father did some work on. I drew back from this move because I didn’t want to encourage any idea that the book’s action “really is inside a videogame.”

So for now it’s just a phrase that the saucers and the mappyworlders are using, with origins as yet unknown. But the name may yet crop up on Earth, perhaps as a *new* videogame that’s in some way inspired by saucer skulduggery.

I keep wondering if the saucers should have telepathy. Maybe I don’t need it. Keep things simple. If the saucers do have teep, I could suppose that kids don’t initially realize that the saucers can read their minds. And possibly the Szep don’t know this either. It could be a revelation that comes from the Flatsies in Surf World. But, as I say, why bother.

Those teep slugs that the Flatsies sell and wear—we’ll need to see their origin in the Surf World chapter. Do I want the Szep and all three kids to acquire teep slugs in Surf World? I think I’d rather not. Don’t upset the dynamic this far in. It’s just Scud who has a teep slug, and this makes sense for him, as it counteracts his mild autism (or just call it lack of empathy).

In the Surf World ocean, we’ll have some giant saucers, and the nudibranch-style teep slugs I’m talking about. At one point I had the slugs plus teep eyes, but it’s cumbersome to have two things. So I dropped the eyeballs. Go with the nudibranch look and wear a slug that waves a clump of antennae—a good image for a telepathy tool. In dropping the teep eyes, I lose a “candy apples” joke I had when Scud thinks that’s what the teep eyes are when he first sees one, but I

changed the joke.

Let's also say the teep slugs will attack or repel the saucers by glomming onto them. The teep slugs might be able to get really big when they're wild in the Surf World sea.

I dropped the flying leeches from Thuddland, as they'd be too similar to the teep slugs. Have flying worms in Thuddland instead.

So we've got a rogue flying saucer or two in the ocean, and one of the teep slugs chases the first saucer away, and the second saucer almost gets them, but Scud trashes that one with his own sea slug.

And the Flatsies are surfing. The waves are ungodly big—like those cool waves in that movie *Interstellar* last winter. Need something else in the ocean. Our guys are surfing in that wallowing pig of a purple whale, while Villy himself is on a board, with Zoe on a board too.

Need more. Pelicans. Lots of sea slugs, like by-the-wind sailors. Global telepathy, you can feel the waves from the inside. Perhaps the waves are conscious. Perhaps the waves are made of smeel instead of made of water. A planet of smeel, that would be cool.

If there's an ocean of smeel on Surf World, why do the saucers bother to go to Earth to get smeel? Well, the ocean is, like, raw undifferentiated smeel, and human smeel is, like, crafted netsuke smeel. Flower blossom smeel. Artisan smeel. Collector smeel. This gets back into the kind of smeel I had in "The Men in the Back Room at the Country Club."

September 8, 2015. The Motives of the Iravs.

I'm a little hung-up now, and get rolling on the Surf World chapter. I have a first scene, but what then? I need it to have some strong elements that tightly relate to my impending-saucer-invasion/fetch-the-magic-wand theme. At this point—halfway through the novel—every chapter has to have a knitting-things-together quality. Like there's a Big Bang that sends the plot elements outwards from the start, and then you want to switch to a "Big Crunch" mode, with all the fragments collapsing back together for the final white hole.

Thinking about the chapter and the chapters to come, I realize that I have to clarify the motivations of the saucers and the Iravs re. the kids' drive to Szep City.

At present it's kind of convoluted. Recently I made up a set of motivations as a way to explain why the Iravs would have written those fake credit screens on the mushroom.

(1) The Iravs are not only working for the saucers, they *are* a saucer who's changed shape.

(2) The saucers don't want to kill the kids right away.

(3) The Iravs are drawing the kids forward. In particular the Iravs are the ones who wrote the galling message on the mushroom.

(Old 4) The Iravs and/or the saucers want the kids to bring back the Princess's wand.

(5) The Iravs kill Yampa and gravely injure Zoe in an ambush three or four basins further along, and they'll ambush the kids again at Szep City.

Clause (Old 4) doesn't fit. I mean, if the Iravs left the kids alone, they'd get the wand anyway, so (Old 4) can't be correct. In the light of (5) it must be the Iravs are trying to block the trip. But then I have a problem with (2), assuming the Iravs are saucers. Why *don't* the saucers kill the kids right away?

Well, look again at what's happening. The Iravs' behavior is one of fleeing the kids, sometimes pausing for them so as to lure them on, and then, later on, violently ambushing them. Here's an out:

(New 4) The Iravs want to kill the kids, but not until they're more than two basins away from Earth's basin.

Note that Maisie could bring news of the impending invasion to Earth. But—given that she's a with a rim around her waist—she has to stay low profile. If she's found out, she'll be imprisoned, investigated, and possibly executed.

If the Earthlings do know about the saucer invasion, they can take actions to repel it. They can wait near the saucers' new portal and kill them as they come through. The saucers are, after all, meat, so we can shoot them. And, yes, they may have some kind of dark-energy protection-field, but we can find a hand-waving way to conquer that.

Getting back to (New 4), let's say that they especially want to kill Zoe, as she's the one who can hop to Earth and bring the news of the impending saucer invasion. The saucers worry that if they attack too soon, then Zoe might right away hop back to Earth before they get her. They want to lure the kids so far that Zoe can't possibly jump back...and then kill them, starting with Zoe.

How far does Zoe have to be before she can't hop back? The simplest would have been to say that as soon as she leaves Earth's basin she can't hop back. The hop is primarily an unspace hop, and it's a stretch to suppose that it can cover the light-years of space that you cross when you cross a ridge.

But there *is* a spatial element to the hop as well. I've already stipulated that if she hops from anywhere in the Earth basin, she ends up at her initial Earth hop point. So there can be a little space travel folded into a hop, along with the unspace travel. So I'm going to say that if Zoe hopped even from Thuddland then she would still make it back to Earth. Otherwise the Iravs or that giant saucer would have tried to kill the humans in Thuddland, or even back in Earth's basin. The saucers/Iravs want to herd the kids out of the Earth basin, and out of the next basin over—and *then* kill them.

So I'm saying that Zoe can jump back from the Earth basin, or from any neighboring basin, but she can't hop back from any basin that's further than there. Yes, this is a bit *ad hoc*. So I'll need to discuss this in the story and work it in smoothly. Like, I'll have Zoe consider hopping from Thuddland, and she senses that she *could*, but she doesn't do it.

And I'll mention that Nunu's father was on the point of zapping the kids on the slope before Borderslam Pass, but Zoe poised herself to hop, and the saucer sensed this, and it refrained. All this would be in Zoe's head.

And when she goes down into Surf world, she has the sense that she's *really* out of reach now. (Like when my character Mason Reynolds flew over those mountains in Antarctica on the way to the hole in *The Hollow Earth*.) So the saucers could safely kill Zoe in either the Antland or Surf World basins. Even if they don't get Zoe in a surprise attack, they would have time to hunt her down. She wouldn't be able to hop.

And in fact the Iravs were laying for the kids in Antland, waiting to butcher them one by one.

And a saucer seriously tries to kill them in Surf World. The Flatsies and their teep slugs chase the saucer off.

And later the kids flee along the spine past Wires/Bubbles, Bubbles/Clouds, Clouds/Birds, Birds/Slugs, to the corner of Music. (See my [map](#) of the basins near Earth.) And that's where the Iravs ambush them, and they go for Zoe, and wound her, but heroic Yampa sacrifices herself and Meatball pitches in as well, and they kill two of the five Iravs, and thus they temporarily drive the three remaining Iravs off.

So now I've got some plot action for the Surf World chapter! Working on the logic of your novel can be a drag. But the constraints themselves suggest new scenes.

September 9, 2015. Are the Saucers Telepathic?

Cool malignant touch of a saucerian mind in your head. Heartless, all-seeing.

I'd thought it wouldn't work to have saucer teep since the saucers seemingly didn't notice Scud in Saucer Hall. But maybe they saw him, knew what he was up to, and sent Nunu to work on him.

Side question: didn't Filkar the Flatsie assure Scud that he'd be invisible to the saucers with his teep slug? Okay, yeah, but maybe this is true. And Filkar could even mention that the saucers might have teep.

From the Saucer Hall saucers' p.o.v. the hope was the Scud and his pals might go to New Eden. Nunu was supposed to "turn" them. Make them into allies. And once it was clear that wouldn't work, they were scared to try and kill Zoe as she might escape. Zoe's got kind of a hair-trigger readiness to hop. Also Nunu wanted to get her eggs fertilized by Scud, so she didn't want to do a mass-murder during the whale's drive north.

By the same token, the Irav could have known they were going to cut him in half, and he let it happen, even doing a behind-the-scenes teep-mediated choreography with Nunu. Nunu's goal at this point was to get fertilized, and then to have Irav lead the kids two basins over and kill them.

So today I went and implanted all the saucer teep suggestions, making changes in the text.

September 10, 2015. The Basins Have Different Sizes. Colors of Daylight.

Here's a new version of the [map](#) I came up with at the end of August, 2015. As before, I'm thinking of the basins as hexagons, nestled together like the cells of a honeycomb. The saucer's home basin, New Eden, adjoins Earth's basin, Thuddland and the Flatsie Surfland. But now I'm going to change the sizes of the hexagons. I'll get to that in a minute.

The issue has to do with distances. I'd been thinking the distance across any of these basins is about 2,000 miles, but this is wrong by a factor of ten.

Error 1: I'd mistakenly thought the circumference C_e of Earth is about 10,000 miles. Apparently it's more like 25,000 miles. Fuck. And by the way the radius of Earth R_e is about 4,000 miles. (Confirmation: C_e is $2\pi R_e$, and ~ 6 times 4 is ~ 24 .) One reason I made this error was that I kept visualizing an image of the Western hemisphere and mentally mapping that onto a disk. But if have to include the Eastern hemisphere, the disk has to have twice as much area, or 1.4 times the radius.

Error 2: I'd mistakenly assumed that every planet would map into a hexagon the same size as Earth's basin.

Suppose I map Earth's surface to a disk, which I approximate as a hexagon with a diameter of C_e . Why the circumference? I'm thinking of Earth sitting on a table and a peel off the rind and flatten it to get a hexagon that's C_e across. The hexagon edges are $C_e/2$. Because I can think of the hexagon as six equilateral triangles. Traveling a third of perimeter (two edges) is the same distance C_e as cutting straight across the hexagon. If you travel on a chord from one vertex to the second vertex over, you'll do about 0.85 C_e , that is, $\sqrt{3}/2$ times C_e . [I figured that out from the fact that the chorded sector consists of two 30-60-90 triangles.] If C_e is 25,000, then the chord length is a crippling 21,000 miles.

Now in the case of the Earth basin, this doesn't matter. On the Earth basin I'm driving a set distance from, like Los Gatos to Alaska, which is close enough to 2,000 miles.

The problem is on the other worlds, where I plan to drove all the way across the worlds. Like, when I drove on a chord through Thuddland, I was thinking of the distance as only being about 2,000 miles...which is drivable in one day. And I'd want the chord through Surf World to be about 2,000 miles as well. So I need to make the Thuddland and Surf World hexagons about ten times smaller.

One minor factor is that a planet like Earth does not in fact flatten out to a disk...if you flatten it, you'd get something more like a star-shape with spaces between the points. Like flattening the skin of an orange. So we save a little bit of size there.

Let's figure out the diameter of a circle that has the same actual area as a planet's surface? (For our present purposes, a circle's area is pretty close to that of the inscribed or circumscribed hexagon.)

A planet of radius r_p has area $4 \pi r_p^2$. Question: What is the radius r_{flat} of a circle with this area?

$$\pi r_{flat}^2 = 4 \pi r_p^2.$$

$$So r_{flat} = 2 r_p.$$

What is r_{flat} in terms of the planet's circumference C_p ?

$$C_p = 2 \pi r_p.$$

$$r_{flat} = 2 C_p / (2 * \pi) = C_p / \pi$$

And the **diameter** of the flattened planet basin is

$$D_{flat} = 2 r_{flat} = (2/\pi) C_p \sim 0.7 C_p.$$

So the **chord length** is $\sqrt{3}/2$ times C_p , or about 0.6 C_p .

So if Earth's got that 25,000 C_e , I'm still stuck with a flattened-Earth diameter of about 17,000 miles, and a chord length of about 14,000 miles, which is way too big. I want 2,000 mile chords across many of the basins.

Before pursing that, let's note that, in terms of chord length distance, there's room for about sixty basins in the million miles between here and Szep City. And chord length is a better measure than is diameter if we're dipping in and out. Or if you want the diameter distance, it's forty basins. Call it fifty.

If I want to squeeze down the sizes of planets' basins, what if I throw out all the boring parts of their surfaces? Like on Earth, why not pitch, like, 90% of the ocean surface. Only 30% of Earth's surface is land. So if I just have the land masses with thin little oceans in the mappyworld Earth-basin disk, it's maybe 5,000 miles across. And if I throw out the steppes, and most of Australia, and most of the Midwest...throw out about half the land...and you get down to around 2,000 miles chord length.

Is that wrong, throwing out all that stuff? Including the oceans? Well, sure, but it's just like I'm trimming fat and bone to make a nice schnitzel cutlet. Goob-goob as a Wienerschnitzel chef.

The gain with trimming away part of the planetary surfaces is that I get that standard basin size. Cookie-cutter size. Like "best of" compilations. *The Portable Shakespeare*.

But let's look at other options.

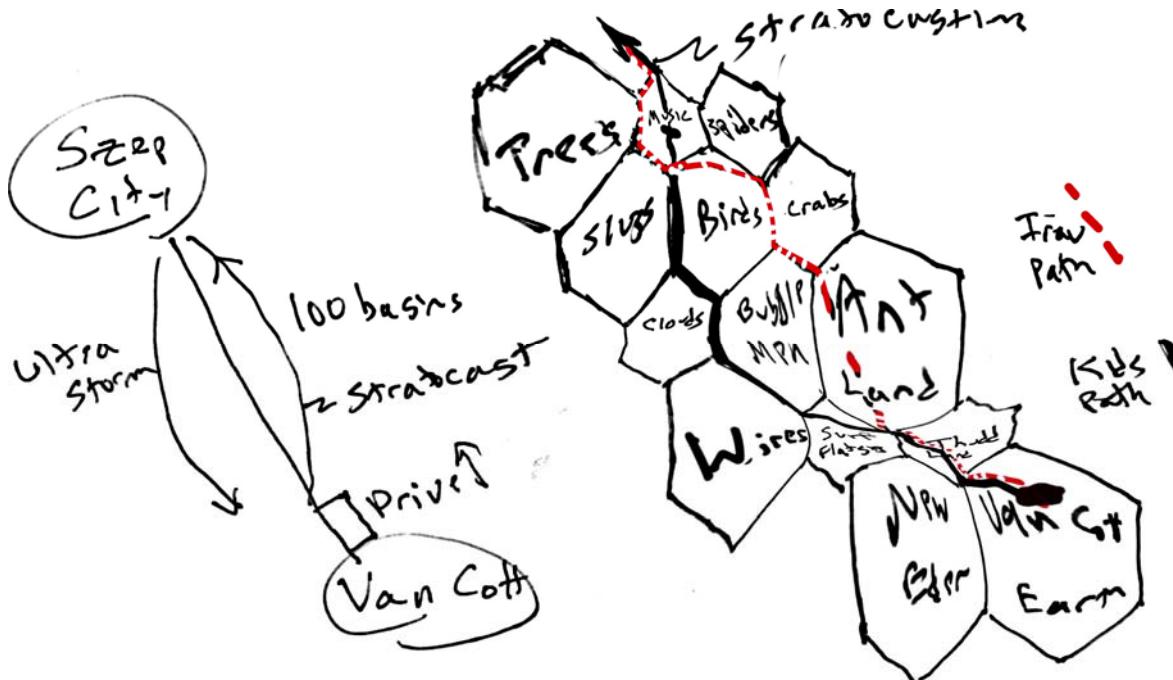


Figure 21: Mappyworld Basins Near Earth's Basin, with Size Warp.

Completely different idea. As I said, it's okay if Earth's basin is big, because all we want to do is drive from California to Alaska, so it doesn't matter if the basin is 17,000 miles across. . We can make the chords shorter on some of those other basins if we assume the corresponding ballyworld planets are smaller than Earth.

In tweaking the map above, I used the Liquefy filter with the Bloat and Pucker tools in Photoshop. Keeping in mind that the flattened Earth basin is, like, 17,000 miles across, I put a fat dot for Van Cott pretty far north. So the distance to the edge is supposed to be 2,000. And I puckered Thuddland and Surf World so they have visually comparable chord lengths. I could hand-draw a map like this for the book, and put in the labels *after* the Pucker and Bloat process. And I could still have a few basins where the trip across them was, like, 8,000 miles and it took days to drive that chord.

The point is that I can get my desired chord lengths if I stop insisting that the basins are *regular* hexagons of the same size. I just randomly fixated on that because I can easily visualize a hexagonal tiling of the plane like a bathroom floor or a honeycomb. But that assumption locked me into these very serious distance problems. But why should it be a tidy tiling? I could have irregular hexagons, or hexagons of various sizes as in the new map above. Or odd shapes. Like a bad-ass tiling of the hyperbolic plane with, say, hexagons and squares.

For that matter, the basins don't really need to be polygons. They could be free-form shapes, and I could have passes any old where, just like in the real mountains. And you dip down into a basin for awhile and then exit at the next pass. Not every pass is a triple point. Some are doubles, some quadruples. But for now I'll find it easier to think in terms of warped hexagons.

Or, yet again, I could just not talk about distances very much.

Note that the gravity on the ballyworld planets would be higher in the large hexagons and lower in the little ones. When worlds are smaller, their gravity gets much less, and in a rapid

way. Gravity is proportional to a planet's mass, which is proportional to the planet's volume, which is proportional to the frikkin *cube* of its radius. Cut a planet's radius in half, and its gravity goes down by a factor of eight ($= 2^3$). Instead of weighing 180 pounds, I weigh 22 pounds. And if I want to shrink by a factor of 8, I'm looking at, like, one five-hundredth the gravity, and I weigh, like, a third of a pound.

I kind of like the idea of variable gravity and of the hexagon sizes changing, but realistically, I don't see shrinking them to more than like 80% the size of Earth, which already busts you down to half the gravity. And an 80% shrink, in and of itself, only takes the chord down to about 11,000 miles.

In the map above, I effectively shrank Thuddland to 1/3 of Earth's dimensions, so its gravity would be 1/27 as much, which would be way too small. In the book I'll mention that it's less, but I won't say it's *that* much less. Don't give out detailed numbers.

And, as I say, if I were to squash and warp the hexagons a bit more creatively (and don't insist on all the edges being the same length on any given hexagon), then I imagine I could make the paths through Thuddland and Surf World be only about 2,000 miles from entrance pass to exit pass without making the planets all that small.

Thinking about this some more, I'll go easy on the different gravity. I don't want to lose my story in tech details. But a little variation would be fun.

One last option. We already did space dilation, in the sense of warping the space inside the purple whale to make it larger. Using the Bloat tool on physical space, as it were. Creating more space within a given fixed perimeter. We could equally use a Pucker tool, if you will. Have there be less space within a given fixed perimeter.

So, if I wanted, I could say that all the basins still look like hexagons, with congruent perimeters, but that the acreage with the hexagons varies from one to the next. So for a very large planet, traveling two sides on the ridge would be shorter than taking the chord. And for a small planet, the chord would be shorter. So you'd have kind of curved-space geodesic thing, in terms of finding the shortest route.

I'm not sure if the Szep would know about this. Maybe Meatball could work out the theory a little better.

Going back to Figure 21, I could snap the hexagons back to being a regular grid, but bulge up the "larger" areas. Can't readily visualize shrinking an area via a space curvature. I could simply have a minimum hex size, and each basin is bulged to some extent, some more than others.

A totally different type of embellishment is that I plan to adjust the hue or intensity of the glowon light in each basin to mimic the illumination of the ballyworld planet by its own sun. This would be fun too, a nice effect. Like Thuddland has green, misty light. Surf World brilliant golden light. New Eden cold flickering office-corridor light. Antland a dim brownish light.

"How can light be brown? That doesn't make sense!"

(Okay, there is no monochromatic light that's brown, but certain mixtures of varying frequencies give the effect of brown.)

September 11, 2015. Sloshing Smeely Waves?

Completely different problem: what makes the giant waves on Surf World? Also, I'm saying the waves move out from the shore. Why?

I included a version of this entry in a September 13, 2015 blog post called “[Saucerpeople and Smeely Waves](#).¹”

I was initially inspired by big wave on “Miller’s world” in the movie *Interstellar*—forgetting my *obiter dictum* that you shouldn’t model your novel on things you saw at the movies. But that wave was very impressive. It made a big impression on me. Terrified me, sitting in the movie theater.

I looked [online](#) and found the movie’s consulting physicist Kip Thorne’s ideas about the wave. His explanation is *way* more complicated than I expected. His line is that Miller’s world is “tidally locked” to a supermassive black hole that it’s orbiting—locked means that it rotates in sync with the orbit so that the same side is always facing the central black hole. (Our moon is tidally locked to Earth, and thus we always see the same face of the moon.)

Now using “tidal” in a different sense, note that the tides on a planet are in fact bulges that are taffy-pulled up by the gravity of the sun (or black hole) that they orbit. And there’s one tidal bulge on each side of the planet. And (handwaving a bit) given that the black hole’s gravity is so extreme, the tidal bulges might be a mile high and only a hundred meters thick. But if the planet is tidally locked (tidal in the other sense now), then that tidal bulge won’t be moving relative to the planet’s surface. It’s static.

So now we add the assumption the planet is *nearly* locked into position, but it *does* wobble a bit back and forth, like maybe an hour per wobble. And as it wobbles, the giant wave-wall sweeps back and forth like a windshield wiper. The ocean sloshes, you might say. And this would explain how one of those waves might rush in either direction...including away from the shore.

But...I don’t want to get into explanations like this. They bore me. I always hated doing Physics homework in college and, truth be told, I wasn’t good at it. Stale slide-rule 1960s stuff. The province of droning science stars. I don’t want *my* rubber science to be off-the-shelf physics-homework science. I want insane bullshit that nobody’s ever heard of. Also it’s my sense that biotech, hylozoism, and the philosophy of computation are more interesting these days than old school general relativity.

So, okay, in my novel, *Millions Mile Road Trip*, I have this stuff that I call *smeel*. It’s like an aethereal fluid that “is” consciousness. The numeniferous aether, if you will. As it happens, flying saucers like to vampirically leech smeel from us.

And today I realized that I can pep up the waves in my planet-sized Surf World sea by saying that the sea happens to be ten percent smeel. Not just water. And because of all this smeel, the waves are conscious and alive.

The smeel makes the waves playful. They race each other across the ocean. They pile way up on the far side, and then they race back. They take on shapes like staircases. It’s a totally surreal Mandelbrotian landscape. My character Villy gets lost and his girlfriend Zoe finds him.

In using smeel to animate the waves, I’m reprising an idea that Marc Laidlaw and I used in our surfing SF story, “[Water Girl](#)” —which appeared in *Asimov’s* in August, 2014. Why should I copy Hollywood and Kip Thorne? Better to copy a story by Rucker and Laidlaw!

In “Water Girl,” it’s a substance called quantum aether that gives the waves consciousness. And the waves are alive, running their mental processes off quantum computations. The mad scientist in our story wrote a paper called “The Quantum-Aethereal

Animation of Physical Fluids.” Here’s two extracts that I might take some samples from:

Stink Bay was teeming with small, erratic waves, three to five-footers. Del thought of the arena pool at Mar-Park in Surf City, where dolphins and orca whales did stunts for sardine handouts. Stink Bay was astir with frolicking shapes, powerful energetic forms that cut through the water like—well, like other water. Waves peaked from the flat surface, curled and gathered a bit of foam at their crests while cupping blue-green darkness at their long tubular hearts. The waves travelled without breaking, moving straight toward the shore then peeling away at clever angles, gouging divots out of the mud and sand. Small forms glided alongside the larger ones, and the “calves” word clicked for Del. The little waves reminded him of whale calves at play near a mother whale.

...Lokelani was flailing at the ocean with the beater wand, but to no good effect. The water around her was pocked with holes, as if invisible rocks were hailing down. Lokelani would have liked to backpaddle away from the formless form at the center of the dissolved circle, but she kept failing to gain purchase. Hollow vacuoles seemed to be forming in the water around her hands, leaving her clawing at foam.

The anomalous hump in the water began gliding towards the Pipeline, a shape like you’d see if something were swimming below the surface. The calf waves were herding Lokelani, Zep and Del in the thing’s wake, pushing them out towards the unquiet open sea.

September 14, 2015. Saucerpeople. Maisie Amid the Waves.

I did a painting of the saucerpeople.



Figure 22: Saucerpeople. Oil on canvas, Sept, 2015, 24" x 18".

Recall that the saucers in my novel are living organisms, meaty flying things. And *eeeek* it is in principle for a female saucer to fertilize her seeds with human DNA. They can get the DNA just by kissing a boy—I'm holding back from full-on sex between men and saucers.

So a saucer can get pregnant from a man or boy, lay some fertilized eggs, hatch them...and you get saucerpeople, as shown above! They have saucer-like rims around their waists, and they can fly.

I'm looking forward to writing some scenes with these guys. My plan had been to postpone them till later in the book but—why hoard the treats? Maybe I can work a saucerperson into the chapter I'm working on right now, "Surf World."

How about Villy gets lost and Maisie finds him and guides him back to the others. Nice scene. It's dark, and Maisie is like an angelic firefly skimming over the waves. Or play it creepier than that. Like the ghost of a drowned child.

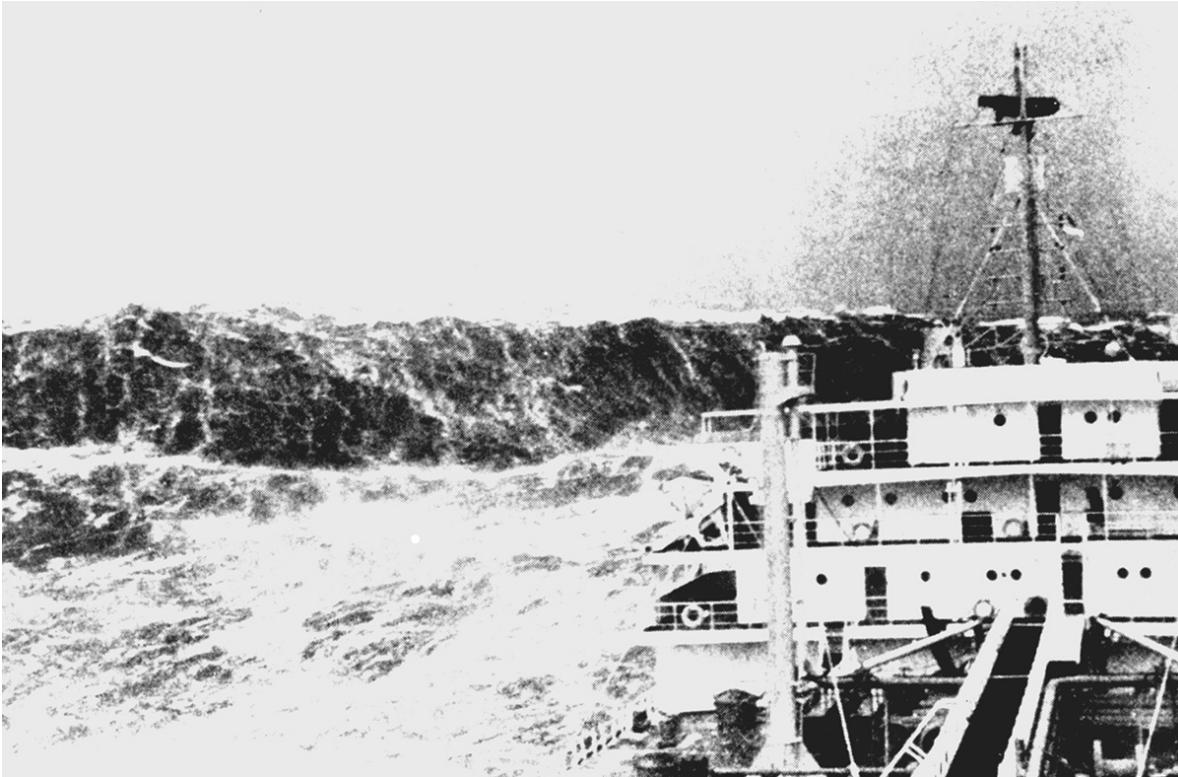


Figure 23: Scary Wave from “Rogue Waves” Entry in Wikipedia.

“Why don’t you and Pinchley have teep slugs?” Villy asks Yampa.

“Pinchley, he doesn’t like being bothered with everyone’s thoughts. Too selfish.”

“And you?”

“A woman needs her secrets,” says the Szep with a toss of her head. Very hard to visualize Yampa involved in sly passionate love affairs.

September 22-24, 2015. Plan “Beach Party” and “Running the Ridge” Chapters

So I finished the “Surf World” chapter this morning. I posted part of it as a [story online](#) on my blog. “Surf World” and “Thuddland” are the longest chapters thus far. A lot happens in each. Frantic action. And I’m seeing a lot of action in the upcoming “Air Raid.”

By the way, for writing “Surf World,” I drew heavily on my experiences in writing four surfin’ SF stories about Zep & Del with Marc Laidlaw. Especially [“Water Girl.”](#) Marc and I talked about our stories so much, it feels like there’s more than four of them.

I sent him a draft of the “Surf World” chapter, and he liked it a lot, and he made some suggestions:

I read the Surf World chapter and had a lot of fun. I obviously don’t know much about the characters, especially the exotic ones, but I still laughed at the argument with Meatball, and quite a few other things. The relationship between your hero and his girlfriend seems very sweet. It has all the hallmarks of Rucker, hilarious, affectionate, and insane visions of things most writers wouldn’t be able to dream, let alone capture on paper. It’ll be fun to see what you do with the sense

of scale...it's a good hook, right off the bat. There's an Adam Roberts book called *Twenty Trillion Leagues Under the Sea*, which does a similar thing--blows your mind before you've even started reading.

I have to say, I hope your characters get separated and have to spend a while trying to find each other. In other words, just wondering how you add peril and suspense on what seems to be a linear road trip. Everything in this chapter seems kind of safe, as if they're going to be fine and the peril isn't really perilous, right up until the end of the chapter...and then I feel like I want a sense that the stakes are real. I think you're naturally good at this...the moments of danger in your stories are usually unexpected and pretty dark. Maybe you want to keep things lighter for a YA story...but the most memorable stories for kids or whoever usually have some kind of real threat in them. I saw the big saucer come up, and thought it was going to be a menace, but they blew it away so easily and then congratulated themselves on that. I don't think everything should be easy. Take these totally out of context thoughts with an entire salt quarry!

So I did make the saucer be a little more menacing—and I could have had Scud fall out of the car, and into the “mine shaft” hole at the top of the ziggurat, but I didn’t want to take the time for that. Villy is splitting off at the end of the chapter, which is a little scary, and that’s separation enough for now (closer to the end of the novel, of course, Villy gets abducted by the saucers). Maybe I’ll put in a few more lines about how terrifying it is to be all alone with Yampa in the seething alien ocean.

Going back to the saucer in the ocean that they kill in the “Surf World” chapter for a moment. I probably should have there be blood, and it ought to take a few minutes to die—I mean, after all, in the first draft I said it was the size of Rhode Island—which might have been overdoing it a bit.

“BEACH PARTY” CHAPTER

The upcoming chapter, “Beach Party,” will be Zoe’s point of view. (I was thinking of it as “Air Raid,” with a saucer air raid as the main event, but the raid won’t come till the next chapter.)

It starts with Zoe riding the corkscrew through the first wall. It’s calm in between the walls, with echoing sound, and with pelicans diving and eating teep slugs. And she sees some narwhals in there. She looks back, and maybe she glimpses Villy in the tube, and they punch through the next wave. And then another. Just three walls in all.



Figure 24: Narwhals, photograph by Paul Nicklin.

The corkscrew is dying down. Most of the waves are going the wrong way. Zoe uses the paddlewheels, but it's tough dodging the outbound combers. She rides some pup-tents. Scud is kind of coming on to her. They see some narwhales, and it's not clear if they're friendly. As they near the shore, it's getting darker and the surf is ever more labyrinthine. Meatball is silent and preoccupied. Raskolnikov-like she keeps making self-incriminating remarks about the Freeth owing a debt to the saucers.

And then, thank god, they see some tiny, exultant figures on a comber. Flatsies. It's like approaching Polynesia. The Flatsies join them, and help them thread past the waves and paddlewheel themselves to shore.

The Flatsie village has huts, palapas, cabanas. Fires. Some narwhals have crawled up on the beach. They're allies of the Flatsies, and they're mammals, so why not. They talk funny, with whistling toothless lisping voices. The group is roasting a really large land crab from the next basin over—the crabs are intelligent, but what the hey, the Flatsies and narwhals eat them anyway, as the crabs shouldn't really be coming over into Surf World.

The Flatsies are concerned about the saucers as well. They draw a map for Zoe. The sequence goes, like, Earth, New Eden/Thuddland, then Surf World. They explain that the saucers can only visit their six neighbors. People can't hop from Surf World, and saucers can't go any further.

The Flatsies have heard the Szep's claim that the Princess of Szep City has a magic wand that can help repel the saucers. The Flatsies kill their saucers with the aid of the narwhals. What they do is load up a ziggurat with narwhals, and the ziggurat, if urged, will do kind of a volcanic eruption and spit a narwhal up into the sky and it can pierce a saucer.

Zoe grows frantic about Villy and Yampa being lost. Meatball disappears, she says she's looking for Villy and Yampa. Later Villy and Yampa show up. Villy very tired. They didn't see Meatball.

Villy recounts his experience to the company around the fire. They saw Goob-goob in the tube. "And then it's turning dark. Maisie appears, ghostly, luminous, flying over the troubled sea. She leads me and Yampa to shore. We rode some puffballs."

Villy and Zoe go into a palapa on their own. She's hot for him. He's gorgeous, charismatic. They almost become lovers. But then they have a quarrel about the trip. Zoe wants to go back home now, and Villy wants to keep going. She lies next to him, fretting as he sleeps. She gets up and walks around, and draws herself a map.

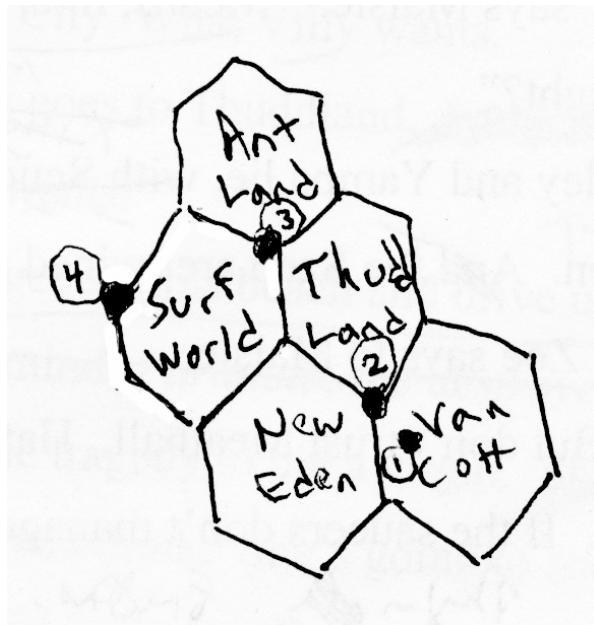


Figure 25: Zoe's Little Map

Zoe's map clarifies the status of the basins: the one's touching New Eden are saucer zones, and the one's touching Van Cott are zones where Zoe can hop home. Surf World is a bad zone, as the saucers can come here, but Zoe can't hop. The numbers indicate the sequence of spots visited, but they're not exactly a day count, as they reach the (2) and (3) dots on the same (very long) day. See my Timeline section for the day count?

She goes to get her car and she finds Maisie there, glowing. Maisie warns her that Meatball is calling in the saucers to attack. She says Zoe and her partners should leave right away. She advises against heading back directly. She is for getting the Szep tool.

October 12, 2015. Another Version of the Book Proposal

I sent a new proposal to my agent John Silbersack and to Dave Hartwell. As well as what I reprint below, I also included the full [outline](#), plus a copy of the novel draft up through the end of the "Beach Party" Chapter, plus my little [table](#) about character growth.

The hope is that Dave either makes an offer or passes it to Tor's Susan Chang for YA. I'm not optimistic, however, that Dave *will* read it and respond anytime soon—he's slower all the time, with health problems, cons, and family duties. So I'll talk to Silbersack about other options.

Decidedly mixed feelings about petitioning editors again! It's emotionally draining, and I

know I could do a successful Kickstarter for this book. But certainly it's less proofing and design work for me if a publisher puts it out (assuming they actually proof it this time.) And of course their books have higher profile and visibility than my self-pub jobbies. But Tor would have to offer at least as much as I'd get from a Kickstarter. *Rant, wheenk, rave*. Getting ahead of myself here.

Anyway, here's the proposal.

OVERVIEW

Three teens on a million mile road trip across a landscape of alien civilizations. Goal? Stop the flying saucers from invading Earth. And learn about life and love.

Projected length 95,000 words. Delivery date June, 2016. Current length 60,000 words.

The novel features Zoe and Villy, aged 18, plus Villy's 16-year-old brother Scud. Flying saucers and colorful aliens enter the tale. And, yes, it's literally about a car trip that's a million miles long—the trip is set in a parallel universe, which contains a single, endless plain divided by ridges into basin-like worlds.

Like many of my novels, *Million Mile Road Trip* is a phantasmagoric roller-coaster ride, replete with surreal incidents, sympathetic characters, mind-bending speculations, offbeat humor, and rich emotions.

I'd like to see *Million Mile Road Trip* marketed as YA. It would be rewarding to reach a new audience, and I'm keeping YA in mind as I write the book. This mode isn't new for me—my novels *Frek and the Elixir* (2004) and *The Hollow Earth* (1990) might be regarded as YA as well.

THE STORY

It's time for Villy and Zoe to graduate from their California high school, and neither of them has managed to put together any college plans. Zoe is confident but ineffective. She's sure of herself, yet timid. Villy is a good listener, but he thinks he's dumb. He wants adventure, but he has trouble getting anywhere. Villy's younger brother Scud is a know-it-all who knows nothing about other people. He wants to mature, but he can't see how to do it.

Villy and Zoe decide to skip town and take a really long road trip. And Scud tags along. Just before the trip, two skinny yellow aliens appear in Zoe's room: Pinchley and Yampa. They're friendly, teen-aged, irresponsible, but with a mission. They want the kids to travel on a million mile road trip across an immense, flat landscape with thousands of planet-surface-sized patches. And each patch holds a different civilization.

The goal of the road trip is to fetch a powerful wand that can help protect Earth from a massive invasion by flying saucers. The flying saucers are meaty animals, on the order of flying manta rays. They prey on humans by extracting a psychic substance that's akin to consciousness.

The two aliens soup up Villy's old car, using a colorful collection of "tool critters" they've brought along. Zoe uses a new-found mental power to hop them and the car to the vast parallel world. And they're off. In a way, it's like a space opera—but our characters are driving a car.

Adventures, setbacks, and wonders ensue—including stones with galaxies inside them, intelligent ocean waves, blimp-sized cuttlefish, and the emergence of Zoe's half-sister Maisie as a character. Maisie has the same father as Zoe, but Maisie's mother is a flying saucer.

In the end, with Maisie's help, the saucers are defeated. And the kids have the rest of their lives ahead of them.

October 13, 2015. Saucer Pearls, Smeel, Freeth.

What is a saucer pearl?

A saucer's body has a valuable central core. Like ambergris in a whale, or a pearl in an oyster, or something like the brains of the so-called whitemeats or bandersnatch creatures in Larry Niven's *World of Ptavvs*. Go with the pearl. I see it as fairly simple, like a hen's egg, but with a nice luster, valuable-looking, dense, numinous. Call it a saucer pearl. I need to decide what a saucer pearl is good for. Simplest idea is that it grants you two saucerian powers: (1) levitation, and (2) zap rays.

Note that the Freeth can levitate and they also can send zap rays. The Freeth ray is like a lightning bolt, possibly stationary for a length of time like a van de Graff spark. The saucer zap is similar, but green and wiggly. And drop the tractor beams. Maybe when Nunu and Meatball weave together their zap rays it should be like a braid..

What do the saucers do with the smeel they steal?

The accumulate it in that saucer pearl inside their bodies. Layer upon layer. Like nacre. The saucer pearl is what gives a saucer the powers of flight and zap. In other words, the saucers steal our souls so they can fly. Feed on our dreams. And they turn this gift into a weapon as well. Very one-percenter of them. And nicely metaphorical.

Why are the Freeth working for the saucers?

Let's assume that each Freeth wants a saucer pearl. They don't grow their own pearls, they get them from the saucers. They're symbiotes. Or perhaps they're distant cousins. Poor relations with intellectual pretenses. A Freeth can live without a saucer pearl, but then it slumps on the ground like a giant pumpkin and it can't zap anyone. The Irav is like this, and the surviving scrap of Meatball (if there is one) will be a lowly, crawling slug. Every Freeth wants a saucer pearl.

How is it that the Freeth are in contact with the saucers and their pearls, given that Freeth Farm is a billion miles from New Eden? Maybe Meatball and her family came to Van Cott to scrounge for saucer pearls, and the saucers promised them a pay-off, provided that the Freeth conspire against the humans.

Meatball herself has a saucer pearl in her body, that's why she can fly and zap. Irav is a Freeth, but he doesn't have a pearl, he hopes to earn one by helping to kill Zoe. The Iravs can't yet fly or zap, because, as I'm saying, no got pearls.

And when the kids vaporize Meatball, they get her pearl. And by now they have Madclaw-the-Flatsie's pearl as well. They don't initially know how to use saucer pearls for flight and zap. Villy figures out the flight method while they're in the whale dropping from the sky like a cast-iron safe after riding the ultrastorm as far as New Eden. Later, when Villy and Zoe split up, each of them keeps a pearl.

What is the Princess's magic wand going to do to the saucers?

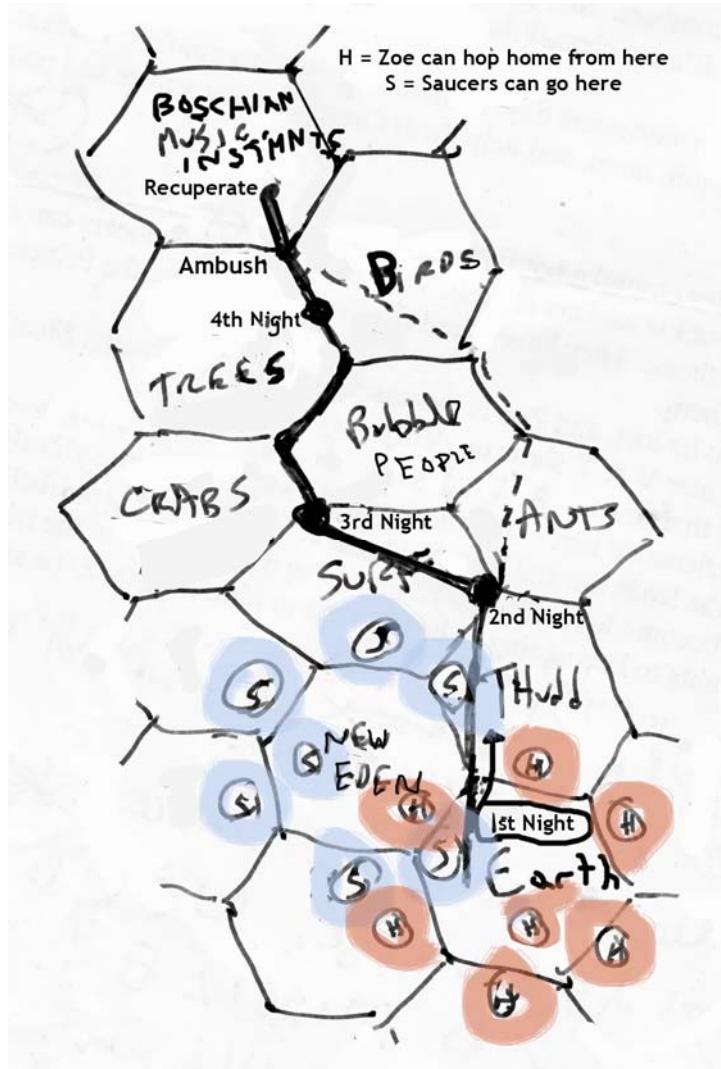
Let's suppose that it can reach into the saucers and shatter their saucer pearls, thus making the saucers as powerless as over-sized banana slugs. For the shattering process, I'm remembering my orthopedic surgeon telling me that they use ultrasound to pulverize the bone that's grown in around a hipbone-to-pelvis screw that they want to remove for revising a hip implant..

October 14-15, 2015. Plan for "Running the Ridge."

Scud's point of view. Zoe wakes the kids and the Szep. They're sleepy, half-drunk, very grudging. The five of them leave before dawn.

They come up to the pass, and they see a saucer zapping the Flatsie village. It's rising up to aim a ray at them next. A ziggurat fires a volley of narwhals that take out the saucer. The narwhals deploy flying-fish wings and glide down. The saucer bursts on the beach and the surviving Flatsies fight over taking position of the big saucer pearl at the saucer's core.

The kids decide to run along the ridge away from Surf World, as the saucers can still zap them on any part of the ridge that lies on the edge of Surf World. So they're taking the ridge between Crab City and Bubbleland. Villy's kind of willing to go hop home, just to placate Zoe, but by now Maisie and the events have convinced Zoe they really should make the run for Szep City. Here's a new map



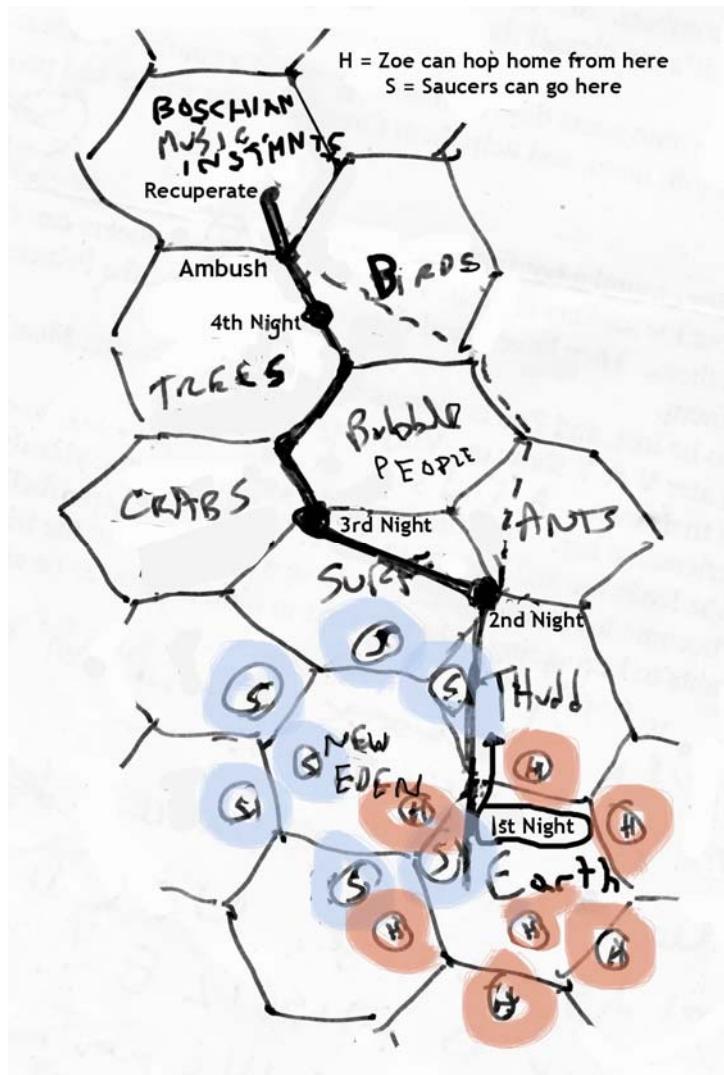


Figure 26: Third Map of Local Basins

Meatball is trailing them, as if she's unsure if they still trust her. It's pretty obvious to everyone that she was spotting them for the Iravs and for the saucers. They need to kill her, and I'm okay with that, as Meatball is not in fact working out as an interesting character, and five riders in the car is enough. It's increasingly clear that Meatball is gearing up to kill the kids herself if need be.

By the way, it's hard to kill a Freeth as they're colony organisms—like a hive or a sponge or a jellyfish or a grex—muscle cells that are neurons. So no mechanical thing can hurt them. Iravs will turn out to be Freeth as a well—Meatball was only *pretending* that she didn't know Irav. They're a team, deputized to set up the kids for a saucer execution hit as soon as they're out of range where Zoe can jump home.



Figure 27: "Vlad and Monika." Oil on canvas, 30" by 24," October, 2015.

This picture is meant to be an image of the spacy and intimidating Bubbleworld basin. At first I was going to call the painting "Bubbleman," and have the viewer imagine that the two eyes belonged to a single alien creature, but then I decided there were in fact two of them. And I decided to call them Vlad and Monika, and let them speak in Polish accents—to match the accent of the Bubbleman we met in the Borderslam chapter. Technically speaking, this was one of the more difficult paintings I've done. It was tricky to give the bubbles the effect of being colored, translucent spheres.

They have a talk with the Bubblers about how to take care of Meatball. Pinchley figures out a way to make the whale into an execution chamber to shock Meatball to death. And they put Madclaw's saucer pearl in there as bait. Tender-hearted Zoe is arguing that it's not fair to just flat out kill Meatball with no provocation,

But then they don't see Meatball anymore. And then just a little way past Flatsie pass, Meatball poses as a human being in the road—she poses as the deceased mother of Villy and Scud. The boys are nearly taken in. They stop and pick her up. In tears. But then Villy gets suspicious and says some weird shit to "Mom." It's Meatball the Freeth disguised as Mom. One of those horror movie tropes.

Mom/Meatball raises up a zap stinger, and everyone dives out of the car and it turns into a horrible shock chamber like an electric chair and Meatball is screaming that it's not her fault, her people are in hock to the saucers for getting saucer pearls. And then she's ashes, leaving behind her own pearl. A really horrible scene.

Very sad, very hard. Soften it. A living scrap of Meatball remains, a crooked piece of meat inch-worming her way along the ridge, heading back for the Freeth tree by the parking lot of the night market in Van Cott. Better than inch-worm, there's enough of her to make, like, a

Pomeranian or chihuahua dog, she grows four little legs and goes running along the ridge yelping *ki-yi-yi*. Pauses at a safe distance to bare her teeth at them.

“Don’t go away mad,” says Pinchley. “Just go away.”

This leaves open the option for the “Billion Mile Road Trip” sequel where they go to Freeth Farm with Meatball. Even better, we can suppose that Meatball fattens back up and in fact comes over to the humans’ side and helps them win the big battle at the end.

They chill out by having have a talk with the crabs about how to take care of Meatball. The crabs are highly sensitive, sophisto, and genius-like—so as to really rub salt in Zoe’s psychic wounds over having helped devour two of them crabs at the beach party.

They drive on, passing a basin of Talking Trees and a Bird Land basin. These two races share their basins. The kids spend a night in a nest in a talking tree.

In the morning, the five Iravs ambush them. Yampa is killed, the Iravs eat every scrap of her body. Zoe is severely wounded. I can use some material from my March, 2015, note about waking up after the anesthesia for my (bungled) hip replacement—and from my repeat of this ordeal that’s scheduled for October 26, 2015. Villy acts courageously, and he kills three of the Iravs. But the other two Iravs get away.

October 18-20, 2015. In Guanajuato, Mexico.

[This is a travel journal note more than a writing journal entry. I [blogged](#) a version of this post with many photos.]

I’m in Guanajuato to be on an “SF and the Future” panel with the novelist and graphic artist Bef from Mexico City, he’s a fan of mine—going back to his reading *Software* when he was fifteen—and I once published one of his stories in *Flurb*. I’ve been trying to get together with him, first last night and now this morning. All night I dreamed about setting up the meeting...I can’t just phone him because I don’t know his number here, or the international prefixes, and I’m paranoid about international phoning charges on my cell. Email kind of works, but it’s spotty.

I think I’ll see Bef and his friend Gabriela Fries in about half an hour, Gaby for short. She’s on the organizing committee of this giant month-long arts festival they’re having here, Cervantino, and the Bef connection is why I’m invited.

Guanajuato is an old town in a little valley, it grew up in the 1500s. I’m in the central historical part of the town, all stone buildings and cobblestone streets, some of the buildings very grand—baroque or neoclassical, as if in Italy or Spain. At one point Guanajuato was one of the richest towns in the world, due to its silver mines. The hills on either side are covered with blocky little houses, a little like in San Francisco, but the house colors are way more saturated and less pastel. Mexican colors. Vibrant.

I can’t speak Spanish at all, which feels awkward when people talk to me. It’s an interesting change from California—down here it’s the Mexicans who run the show. Crowded streets, most of the people reasonably well off. A few beggars. Some incredible Mexican hipsters.

As soon as I got here last night, I ordered what were in effect two dinners at a large mariachi-infested cafe on a plaza. Seemed kind of expensive, but I’m confused about pesos, with all those zeroes. (After a day of mulling it over, I figured out it was only about \$18 US.) It was unwise to overeat so immediately. This one table, with a man and a woman, they had eight or even ten musicians around the table, playing as loud as they possibly could, for over an hour.

The man at the table was singing along some of the time, a lean guy with a mustache and a cowboy hat. His woman looked absolutely thrilled. I took a picture and she seemed glad. A big night.

Took a walk this morning, enjoying the cool fresh air—we're at something like 7,000 feet. the sunlight, and all those wonderful colors on the walls. The streets wind around, all cobblestone, and there's stone alleys between them. I followed one old woman for a block to make my way through a confusing zone. An archetypal behavioral pattern: following in a local's steps. Mexico as another world. I can see a scene with my characters following an alien in *Mile Road Trip*—maybe a bubble or a bird or an ant.

I really aced my panel session—I “killed,” as the stand-up comedians say. About three hundred people there. I spoke slowly, acting relaxed, explaining cyber+punk, trans+real, science+fiction. The listeners could get simultaneous translation headsets. “The scientists say it’s not science, and the literary critics say it’s not fiction.” *Wheenk, wheenk, wheenk*.

For the rest of the day, many people who knew who I was, and they came up to me on the street. I was talking to a young man named Franco, from Mexico City, and I mentioned how it was nice to see Mexicans in their own habitat instead of in the US where many of them are in a bad position. I wasn't sure if I should say this, but Franco totally knew what I meant. He was happy to talk about Mexicans. He said when he visited the US he felt sorry for the Mexicans there, he thought they looked lonely and hangdog. He thought it was strange, or maybe funny, that there's so many millions of Mexicans in the US.

I ended up at a hotel called El Meson de los Poetas. Great view of the town, with all the houses on the slopes and, as I say, the *vibrance* and *saturation* dialed way up. I'm always processing my photos in Lightroom, and using two sliders with those names. More vibrance makes *pale* colors as intense as the bright colors, and more saturation makes *all* the colors more intense. In Mexico, it's like there aren't any pale colors at all, and all the colors are, like, *whoah!*

I'm starting to see in terms of sliders, because I post process my images a lot days. For me, the images I take out of my camera are my negatives, and I use Lightroom like a darkroom for making a final “print” image of those originals that I decide to keep. I crop a lot because I have a wide angle lens. And I tweak with the exposure, highlights, shadow, clarity, contrast, distortion, vibrance and saturation, horizontal and vertical transform, etc.

I was supposed to wait for Bef and Gaby to have lunch, but I got hungry and went to a cafe in a plaza. I ate two bowls of soup and a milkshake in only ten minutes at a sidewalk cafe. I could hardly believe how fast it went. “Has my watch stopped?”

Then I spent some time at a different cafe with Bef and Gaby. Gaby is a mathematician and a science promoter. She's writing a thesis essay on my novel *Software*, and I talked about the book, with her typing some notes into her laptop. We'd meant to record it, but neither of us remembered to bring a recorder, so we were down to analog realtime life, off the grid in Mexico.

Bef and Gaby were being so nice and sympathetic that at one point I almost burst into tears. They were saying stuff like: Had I realized what a completely revolutionary novel *Software* was? Does it bother me that I've gotten relatively little recognition for my work? Would I say that now, after 35 years, the public is finally beginning to understand? It's been a long road, and I've stuck to it, always doing it my own way, happy with the work. It's balm when, now and then, someone understands what I've been up to all along.

High on the friendly acclaim, I bought some cigarettes and, back in my room, I stood on my Mexican balcony with my shirt off in the sun, feeling like a Beat ex-pat. Instead of getting

stoned, I took a selfie.

Bef himself has published about ten novels, some of them crime novels, and a couple of SF. He says he did two narco crime novels, but now he's moving on to new crimes, like art forgery. He also does graphic novels, one of them, *Uncle Bill*, is about Burroughs shooting his wife in Mexico City all those years ago. A theme also treated in my novel *Turing & Burroughs*. Bef has a Tumblr called [Beforama](#)—these days he's mostly posting cartoons of Frankenstein.

Bef and Gaby said they have a friend who lives in Tijuana, somehow involved with the underworld, and this guy took them to "the most sordid bar in Tijuana." They sold pot and coke and acid over the counter there, the place had never ever been cleaned, but, says Bef in his mild, calm voice: "It wasn't at all threatening. It felt very safe. Everyone was friendly."

We talked about Mexico City, where Beg and Gaby live. The population is 24 million. They call the city just "Mexico," just as a New York City dweller speaks of "New York." Regarding this Mexico, Bef says it has one of the largest ex-pat American populations in the world, yet...the Mexicans never see them. The ex-pats live in enclaves, go to American restaurants, send their children to American schools. Like hidden aliens. But maybe that's not so different from other ex-pat communities worldwide.

I shouldn't have had those cigarettes yesterday, my chest hurts today. I sent a lot of recklessly cheerful emails last night, almost as if I was drunk. Social networking gets so important when you're alone.

My bad hip hurts a lot. Next Monday I'm getting it replaced for the third frikkin' time—don't even ask—and I'm uptight about this. It's affecting my mental stability. I've been having nightmares almost every night. Last week I dreamed about a nurse who wasn't really a nurse, she was the angel of Death. Vintage horror move. The moment of realizing that this "nurse" isn't caring for you, she's imprisoning you, and she's terribly strong, and she seems to have more than two arms. The starchy plastic cloth clamped across my nose and mouth. And why oh why does the doctor have no face? Two nights ago I dreamed about trying to calm a guy who was screaming he couldn't stand disorder. Last night I dreamed that I was unloved and alone, a wistful outsider. My first thought this morning was, "I wish I was dead." But then I looked out from my balcony and again everything was good.

I'm very happy to be in Guanajuato, and I wish I could stay longer. Like..*forever?* Learn Spanish. Some of the people are very attractive, others grotesque, others archetypal in Bruegelian ways. I can only guess at their inner lives, these denizens of an unknown world.

Huge numbers of police in town, riding around six or seven in a car, looking a little like street gangs. All different kinds of cop uniforms, some of them carry automatic rifles or machine guns.

Yesterday I spent some time with another conference participant, a somewhat eccentric map-maker named Peter Eberhard latched onto me two separate times, and a welcome diversion both times, Peter behaving like a tour guide. Very knowledgeable, he lived in Mexico for many years. He says he's drawn the best map every of the US, and it won a prize. He was looking to find a local educational poobah whom he could tell about his map. It was fun to be with him. He pushed our way into this huge folkloric dance show, with thousands of people watching. I was glad to be on the scene, although I tend not to like that kind of spectacle. "Awkward mating rituals," as Eberhard put it. He says the folkloric dances are particularly well-loved in Mexico, a cultural touchstone.

I wonder if Bef likes the dances. He's a city guy. He says he doesn't like Gabriel Garcia

Marquez's books or magic realism. Why not? He finds found these books corny—perhaps in same way that I find some of Ray Bradbury's work corny. Nostalgic evocations of rural life. Who cares about made-up caricature people who never could have existed in the heartfelt teary-eyed way being described.

Today Bef insists on going to see the Mexican mummy museum, and I think it'll be freaky and depressing, also it's a half hour's walk from here, and in an unkown part of town. My son Rudy Jr. was urging me to see it too. He was on a tour around Mexico a few years ago with the Cyclocide Bike Rodeo group—putting on shows with a gang of SF hipsters—and he passed through Guanajuato. So I guess, yeah, I'll see the Mexican mummies.

I didn't eat all that much yesterday, and I've been avoiding fresh vegetables and unpeeled fruit, and drinking only bottled water, and I still don't have the "squirts," which I dread getting again in Mexico, like I did back in Puerto Vallarta when we went there nearly thirty years ago, or in Spain when I was there fifty years ago, or in Manhattan about twenty years ago. You don't want to repeat those kinds of experiences that you remember with horror for decades.

On a more upbeat food note, I've had some really excellent tacos at this dive called Trompo. So good that I moan and grunt while I eat them—hey, I'm eating alone. The corn tortillas are fresh-made, and they fry them in fragrant meat grease, and the meat is chopped small and singed black. The taco is tiny, two little corn tortillas on top of each other, with the meat on that, and you have bowls of cilantro and pickled chopped onion and a great green salsa to add on. I can eat one of those Trompo tacos in about two bites. I had five of them in a row yesterday. The pork taco al pastor is far and away the best. I see lots of people eating tacos at stands on the street, as well, crowds of them, and Rudy had urged me to try those, but I've held back from that. Don't want to go all *muy squirtado*.

I hiked up to the ridge above my hotel, a serious climb, like a thousand feet, up stone staircase alleys, the air thin, my heart clenching in my chest. At the top I could see into the next valley, with similar kinds of houses, but not so many. The houses on the hill are ancient, many have been here for five hundred years. Like an anthill or a stone hive. Like the Alfama district of Lisbon, Escherian with twists and turns. Barking dogs and crowing roosters. Some of the dogs barking in a blood-chilling kind of way—in an oh-I-think-I'll-go-into-a-different-alley kind of way.

Beneath the surface of Guanajuato is a maze of tunnels, with tunnel intersections, and ramps popping up here and there. Retrofitted from drainage tunnels built by those excavation-happy miners. Means there's less surface traffic in the lovely town. You can *walk* in the tunnels too, if you want to, but I didn't want to.

After my hike, Bef showed up and we talked for awhile, sitting in armchairs by the balcony window in my room. I noted down a few of the things he told me. He mentioned the word *chiflado*, meaning "crazy." It comes from the verb *chifar*, meaning "whistle." The chiflado has been touched by the whistling breath of the beyond. He also mentioned that his brother had been in a reggae/ska band called Mamá Pulpa, meaning Mother Octopus. Here's a [video](#) of their tune, "Que Mal Gusto." He also told me one of the biggest bands in Mexico at one time was called Café Tacvba. Here's a [video](#) of their tune, "Quiero Ver." And he was involved with a zine called *Sub* (as in subliterature, as in Sf or crime novels.) And he was in a story anthology called *Mexico City Noir*.

And then we did go to the Mummy museum—my legs were rubbery by now, so we took a Mexican bus part of the way, exciting for me, and not something I could have managed on my

own. I told Bef I was happy to be seeing the sights with him, as being his partner made me cool, and less of a tourist. He said I didn't look like a tourist anyway because my eyes are intelligent as opposed to dull and blank. Of course I *do* carry a camera. Bef pointed out a nice little cyberpunk tableau—a man repairing computers with a screwdriver and pliers in a store that was, literally, a hole in the wall.

I took really a lot of photos in Guanajuato, about 200, continually carrying my kick-ass street-photographer wide-angle 22 mm lens Fujifilm model X100T. You have to switch the battery at least once a day. Working the camera so intensely, I'm getting smoother at using its dauntingly large array of settings. Something I'm trying to learn is how to grab shots of things happening, that is, when I see something staring, I want to quickly aim at it and press the shutter button and get a fast click and have the photo be in focus. There can be this deal-killing lag of a half a second while the camera focuses. Something I haven't tried recently is to manually set the focus to a reasonable range, and not have it getting measured, and that speeds up the response. Or go even more manual and set some reasonable shutter speed as well, like 1/125. And let the camera decide on the aperture. Or even pre-set the aperture too, which speeds up the camera's response even more. If you're running the images through Lightroom or Photoshop, you can usually fix a frame that's too dark (underexposed). The thing you can fix is if it's out of focus or if there's motion blur.

It sometimes annoys people if you grab a shot of them. I kind of like being sneaky, although now and then I'll go brazen like patron saint street photographer Gary Winograd, and get right in people's faces, and then smile and nod at them as if what you just did is okay. If you ask a subject's permission before the shot—that's more the "polite" thing to do, but then you may not get a good shot, as they'll be tense, or posing in a blank way. What *will* work is if you go further than just asking permission, that is, if you take the time to chat with them and get to know them a bit, and have them be as curious about you as you are about them—my sense is that Diane Arbus took this route. But I hardly ever do that. I'm not someone who's great at talking to strangers. If someone ends up looking wearily pissed off in a photo then I do feel slightly bad. But it might also be a good photo.

Anyway, the mummies were even more disgusting and horrible than I'd expected, but at least the "museum" wasn't all plastic and *educational*...it was scuzzy and funky and Mexican and like carnival side-show. By the way, these bodies weren't deliberately mummified in the Egyptian sense—there's something about the dry, hot air around Guanajuato that just preserves some bodies, makes them look like hideous sagging beef jerky. These mummies were, as I understand it, bodies that were excavated and evicted from this one particular graveyard next to the mummy museum. The families of these bodies were unable or unwilling to pay the graveyard an additional fee for "perpetual burial." So the mofos running the graveyard dug up the "deadbeat" bodies and put them on display!

The impresarios seem to have a certain sense of macabre humor. The mummies are dressed or posed in odd ways. The very worst are the mummies of babies—I refused to even look at them. Bef didn't mind the babies. He likes the museum in the way that a kid might like creepshow horror comics. The last time Bef went there was when he was eight, a big family road trip up from Mexico City to see the Mexican mummies!

Bef recounted a story (possibly an urban legend) that at one point, like in the 1950s, the Mexican mummies of Guanajuato were lent or rented to an American sideshow for a year, and when they came back, *one mummy was missing*. A great set-up for an SF/fantasy/horror tale. "The Missing Mummy." Maybe Bef and I can co-author such a story or graphic novel of these

days. Do it in a bilingual edition, Spanish and English. Sell it to Berlitz and Rosetta Stone for their language courses...

On the way to the mummy museum, Bef went into a Mexican wireless service store, I think it was Telcel, but let's just call it MexTel. He wanted to renew his phone plan, and it took a long time (and he was unsuccessful), but I didn't mind waiting.

I was glad to sit down, and I filled up a whole page of notes for ideas about this "Ultrastorm" chapter I want to write for my *Million Mile Road Trip*. And I'll talk about these ideas in the next entry of these "Writing Notes," incorporating some further revelations I was granted while visiting the Diego Rivera Museum in Guanajuato.

October 21, 2015. My MexTel Vision of the Godz.

Looking ahead, I know that I need a big wow for the ultrastorm chapter, I really want to kick it up a level there and, while I'm at it, provide some kind of cosmogony, that is, some kind of explanation or story or creation myth of how ballyworld and mappyworld arose. And a cosmology of how they fit together.

My frame for presenting the cosmogony and the cosmology is that the ultrastorm will lift my crew up to a place where some gods live, and the gods will explain or demonstrate the creation myth plus the workings of the world.

How do my guys get so high? First of all, the ultrastorm is very windy. Second of all, mappyworld gravity is fucked up. I'm thinking that the gravity on mappyworld is as follows. From ground level up to some set ceiling height (maybe a hundred or a thousand feet), the gravitational attraction gets steadily stronger, so that it's impossible for normal beings to fly that high. The saucers can get around this because they have those antigravity saucer pearls.

When you go above the ceiling, the gravitational force vector flips, and you're borne up high, high, high into the sky. Here again, having a saucer pearl can exempt you from this. The result is that when the ultrastorm lifts our crew into the sky they're zoomed up to, like, a thousand miles high. Either they don't have their saucer pearl with them, or they haven't yet learned out to "activate" it.

And I want them to meet some cool, supernatural-like, aliens up there. What are they like? As always, I think of the giant from "Jack and the Beanstalk," but that's stale. Can't do an eye in the pyramid, I think that was in "Jack and the Aktuals." So then I turn to angels, nah. Let's have gods. Call them godz to defuse the religion meme. Don't want bearded Moses-type godz, or Greek godz, or Tibetan gods. I don't want Jesus or the Buddha. So?

Today I toured Diego Rivera's childhood home right next to my hotel in Guanajuato. They've made it into a museum with a few of his works, including some watercolors he made, intended for use as illustrations in an edition of the Mayan codex, never published, to have been edited by one John Weatherwax—wonder if William Burroughs knew this guy, WSB was always talking about the Mayans.

Wonderful, wonderful images by Diego, like alien cartoons. Mayan godz, yes! So gnarly. It'll be great describing them. I shot photos surreptitiously at the Diego Rivera museum in Guanajuato. Some glare on the glass covering the first picture, but the other two came out good. They actually sell large prints on canvas of these paintings at the museum, but about \$80 each. I was tempted to get one or two, but don't really have room for them. I plan to paint a copy of the one with Hunhunahpu and the bush.



Figure 28: Mayan Godz Making the Universe, by Diego Rivera

Here's the gods making the whole universe.



Figure 29: Mayan Godz Making People, by Diego Rivera

Here's the godz making people out of clay. It's important how many godz them are

involved. A team effort.

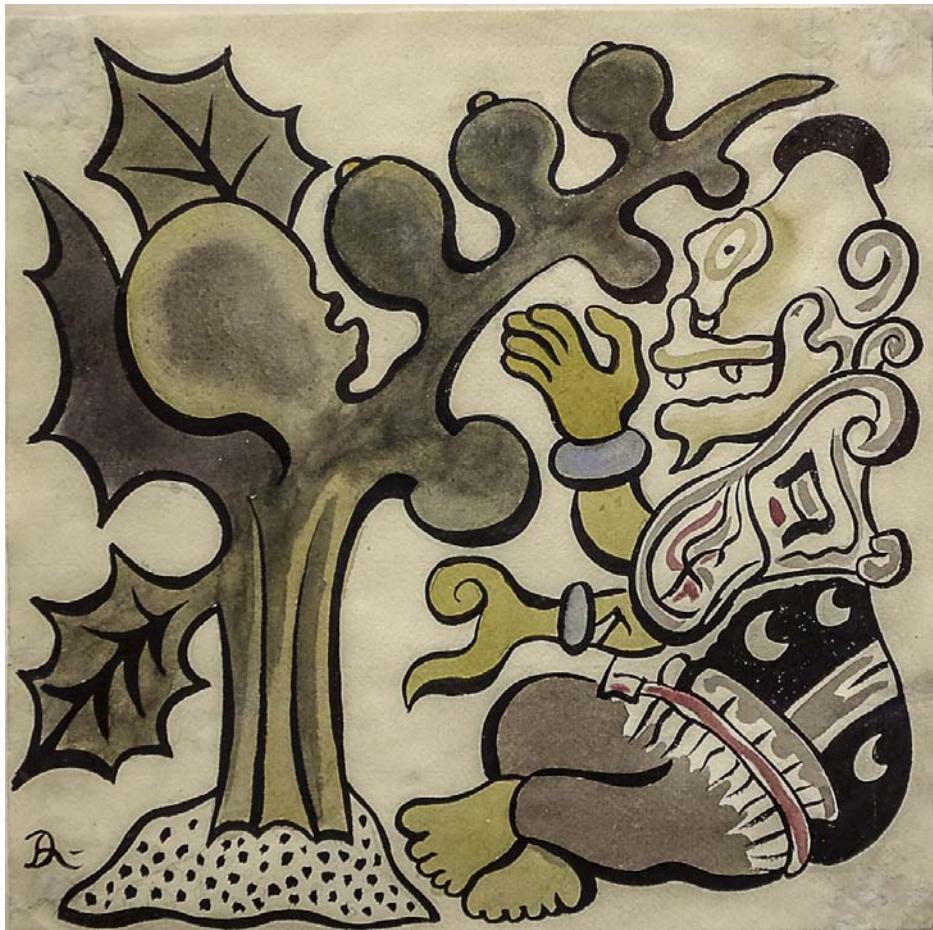


Figure 30: Hunhunahpu Fructifying a Bush, by Diego Rivera

Here's [Hunhunahpu](#) making humanoid shapes on this calabash(?) plant, including perhaps a copy of his head. Later a woman lies under it and the head drips spit on her crotch and she gets pregnant.

Okay, so what do these godz do? Let's suppose that they created our spacetime like painting a mural. They may have made the whole mural at one go—remember my old analogy of God being a bearded old man throwing a bucket of paint onto a barn wall, and that pattern is our entire space and time. Created all at once. It's always a good idea to suppose that, if the godz experience a passage of time at all, it's a *paratime* which is quite different from our time.

The deal with ballyworld and mappyworld is that these are two distinct *views* of a single underlying reality. Maybe "view" isn't quite the right word. "Instance" might be better. Instances of a shared archetype. Possibly at some point in our past, like around the time of the Big Bang (if there is a Big Bang), mappyworld and ballyworld were fully in synch. But they have to evolve differently, because of what's possible in the one but not in the other.

For instance, in mappyworld its easy for aliens to move from basin to basin—in bally world this is quite hard...at least it's hard for humans at this point in time. Possibly at some future time most races will have direct matter transmission, that is, teleportation, and there will be a closer match between mappyworld and ballyworld.

A number of godz cooperated (or competed) on creating our cosmos (which includes both ballyworld and mappyworld). Think of a Hollywood movie, or big=budge videogame. Hundreds of people are involved, contributing to it. Graphic art, CG, makeup, costumes, sound, cinematography, casting, actors, and numerous directors. Not just one director. In my model I don't want to have one single boss, no top director, no head producer. Like some Hollywood movies will have a “second unit” filming stuff.

Polytheism, many godz. The star god, the planet god, the life god, etc. One of the godz works on the inhabited planets, and a different one works on the stars. Mappyworld is the preferred view (channel, instance, mode, strand, layer) of the planets god. Ballyworld is the view for the star guy.

The events in each layer leak over into the other layers. The leakage isn't rapid, nor is it total. There are lags, and it's not required that things ever fully match.

Also, further complication, there's feedback: layer A seeps over to layer B, which backscatters alterations to layer A. Blowback.

So now I have to ask why would the godz care about anything we do? Why involve themselves in the *Earth vs. The Flying Saucers* epic? Why not just let the cosmos run? The use of paratime vs. time complicates things. It's not like, relative to the godz, anything is “just about” to happen. Our spacetime all happens at once, relative to the godz. But in paratime, they might be going over our spacetime with a fine tooth comb, and tweaking it, with the tweaks instantly propagating out across spacetime.

Like the move I used in *Mathematicians in Love*, where “God” does a new full manuscript draft of our spacetime after every “week” that passes in paratime.

The godz interest in our cosmos could be aesthetic. Or maybe there's something they *glean* from the cosmos. Maybe it's more like a farm than it is like a painting. Maybe they glean smeel. Maybe, in the end, smeel is the cosmic, transuniversal currency, and even the godz want it.

And maybe they don't like the way the saucers are moving smeel from one layer to another. The agitated movement, the striving, the coarse and vulgar grasping—it throws things “out of balance,” as we mystagogues like to say.

So the godz think the saucers are a structural problem in the cosmos. Like a virus, or like rot. And they're on the side of the kids.

October 22, 2015. MexTel Vision Continued: Reality as a Mural

Another aspect to the MexTel revelation is that I want to think of our cosmos as being like a mural painted on top of something else—like in the mural shown below. This is an idea I had a week or two ago when I was in Half Moon Bay with Isabel, and then I added on a MexTel bit, which is why I'm putting this entry here.

I was working on this entry on the plane from Guanajuato back to San Jose. The guy sitting next to me was a surfer in flip-flops, so I showed him the Mavericks mural photo, but for awhile he had *no* idea of what I was talking about. Didn't get that it was a photo of a mural. He

thought I'd collaged the lightbulb and window frame onto a real-life photo. Which is what some might think about the MexTel version. But, no, the lightbulb and the window were there *before* the "reality" image.



Figure 31: Magritte-like Mavericks Mural

As I mentioned, Isabel spotted this life-size Mavericks wave mural in Half Moon Bay. Dig how the surfer has a 3D lightbulb in his path. Very Magritte, especially with the window on the wall. SFictional flash: mappyworld (or maybe even our own world) is a hypermural "painted" on the 3D hypersurface of...some 4D alien structure. Like you notice—huh?—a 4D dvoornik's 3D cross-section hanging in the air in middle of the room, the dvoornik being part of the underling hyperobject that our world is "painted" onto. And the window is a hole into unspace.

The dvoornik might be something really quite ordinary, but it's wildly out of place. Like the lightbulb on the wave. Or like Phil Dick's slip of paper saying "lemonade stand" where a lemonade stand should be. Or like that mushroom in Thuddland with the credits written on it. Go with the credits list, as it's already in place.

Only why have it be on a mushroom. It's wholly other, like that lightbulb on the Mavericks mural's underlying wall. It doesn't have to fit in with Thuddland. It should be, like, a neon sign. A Vegas-style sign. With, like, a wax seal and a trademark on the side of the sign, and maybe a fancy silk ribbon with Vs cut into the ribbon ends. But this does *not* mean that our world is a virtual reality. It's a real reality that happens to have a credit sign for the godz on it. Maybe the sign is somehow four-dimensional; it changes shape like a Necker cube in that creepy Lovecraftian fashion.

Signatures of the Godz??? Could be, seekers, could be!

In Guanajuato, I went to a great museum of paintings and statues of the character Don Quixote. So I was thinking that I should once again try and read that book. But now I looked at a couple of translations, and the novel really does suck. I think maybe it's supposed to be funny, but it's not. The character Don Quixote is an idiot. Witless. Tedium.

But one could say there's a sense in which Don Quixote stands for writers. His lance is like a pen. He's surrounded by books at home—which is like having a manuscript you're working on. He goes out on missions and gets everything wrong because he's overlaying his transreal novelistic notions upon the world.

October 28 - November 2, 2015. Hip Operation Again.

October 28, 2015.

So that new hip I got in March didn't take, that is, its cup never bonded with my pelvis bone. So day before yesterday, on Monday, October 26, I had my third artificial left hip implanted.

There was the usual jump-cut in consciousness. I'm lying on the operating table with an IV in my arm, and then I'm waking up in bed in the recovery room. I couldn't move my feet at first, as they'd given me a spinal block injection to paralyze the lower half of my body. I could hardly talk.

"Is the operation over?"

"Yes."

And then I'm looking around the room, lying there for maybe 45 minutes, a large room with other patients, nothing very interesting to see, nothing alive except for the humans, just steel and white, cloth and plastic. Now and then a nurse. And then they wheeled me to my room, and Sylvia came in.

The doctor, Matt Miller, said Sylvia should bring me home after one night in the hospital. On the first afternoon of being home, I was sitting in my desk chair, and I leaned back and rested my feet on the couch in my office room—and the hip's ball popped out of its socket, although I kept telling myself that it hadn't. Didn't want that to be true. Meanwhile Sylvia noticed that my sweatpants were soaked in blood from my incision—this wasn't related to the dislocation, but it was bad news just the same. I didn't have the heart to tell Sylvia that I'd probably dislocated the hip.

Increasingly anxious, we managed to phone my doctor twice. I told him about the blood and about the hip popping out. He said the bleeding was common, and first he didn't believe that I'd dislocated my hip, and I wanted to believe him. But, yes, the hip was blown. So I called back and told him that, yes, my left foot was at a funny angle, that is, it was way over to the left, and that the leg seemed shorter than before, and that I got immense level-ten jolts of pain and horror if I tried to stand on it.

So the doctor is like, "Is anyone there with you?"

"My wife."

"Get her to pull steadily on your foot, and then she should rotate the left foot so it's pointing up like the other foot."

The doctor stayed on the phone, now in speakerphone mode, and advised while Sylvia tried. At first she couldn't get the trick to work—she wasn't pulling hard enough—but then she bore down. There was a popping feeling in my hip, and Sylvia turned my foot back toward the center, and femur knob popped into place in my cup socket, and it was all good. I congratulated

Sylvia and the doctor. Sylvia was fairly freaked out, and the doctor didn't sound all that happy about the situation either.

About a half hour later the hip popped out again—I was leaning over the low bathroom sink with my left leg angled out behind me, in what I assumed was a straight and safe position. Without us phoning the doctor about this one, Sylvia popped it back in as we'd done before.

I'm really anxious about my motions today. The doctor said I had very low muscle tone in the muscles around the hip socket—normally it's the tension from those muscles that holds the hip bone in place. But at this point my muscles are like over-stretched rubber bands. I guess that's because he had to push the muscles way over to one side in order to get at the hip area, and maybe the new socket position isn't so far out of the way as the old position, and that makes for slack in the muscles.

As for pain, I'm taking three kinds of pills: Celebrex, Lyrica, and Percocet (acetaminophen and oxycodone). The surgeon says I should try to stay ahead of the pain—that is, just follow the dosage instructions and don't overthink and stall and wait till the pain's come back. The pills make me a little slow on the uptake, and a little clumsy in my typing, especially on the virtual smartphone keypad. But the meds do put me in a generally good mood, a much better mood than if I quixotically try to white-knuckle the pain drug-free.

In some ways it's pleasant to be on a steady diet of oxy opiates. Makes everything look lucid, gelatinous, and a little yellow. Puts me in a good mood. And nothing hurts. Somehow I didn't pick up on this pleasure when I was taking oxy for the hip's redo in March, 2015. An interesting side-effect of the opiates is that, if I stare at some detail—like at a wire, or a tree, or the hinge on a door, or a star in the sky—then the object seems to writhe, and to be crawling downward in my visual field, but without actually getting anywhere. I'm happy to see something weird like that, but I'd rather have my usual energy and focus.

For me, any painkillers (other than over the counter stuff like aspirin or Aleve) have this effect of bone-deep fatigue that I used to get from the hayfever med chlortrimeton as well—it's like my core is missing and I'm a floppy rag doll. I hate that feeling. Maybe I can get off the oxy and Lyrica soon.

I think it'll be a week or two till I'll be able to work on the novel again. I feel kind of limp and listless from the operation and the meds.

November 2, 2015.

I've been off the meds for three or four days now. Feeling more like my old self, wanting to do something creative.

I've been fretting about this brace the surgeon wants me to wear—it's not a brace that supports or guides my leg, it's more of a constraint that would prevent my femur from moving wildly out of place and perhaps dislocating. Very heavy and uncomfortable. Super thick white plastic and steel rods. I've been going around without it, but Sylvia and my friends keep saying I should listen to the doctor and wear it. So now I'm wearing it sometimes.

I resent my surgeon for telling me to wear the brace for six weeks. Also he wants me to tether my legs, hip and ankle, to a wedge of foam between my legs at night—so that I can't possibly cross my legs in my sleep and thereby pop the hip out. He wants me to wear the heavy Star-Wars-Trooper-type brace at night as well.

Also he wants me to get physical therapy from a home nursing group that even now, a week later, still hasn't managed to show up at my house and start me on exercises. For my other

hip operations, we started with the exercises in the hospital the day after the operation. I feel that, left to myself, I can get myself fully rehabbed in a week or two.

I'm still weak and I tire easily. I slept ten and a half hours last night. I still haven't been able to get going on my novel again. I've been working on a painting instead, a version of the Diego Rivera watercolor I mentioned before, [Hunhunahpu Fructifying a Bush](#). The painting's going well, and I hope to get back to it this afternoon.

November 5-6, 2015. Outline For "Running the Ridge". Plus Hunhunahpu.

Nov 5. So I'm nearly ready to start on the novel again. I did some revisions yesterday, and expanded my outline for the upcoming "Running the Ridge" chapter this morning, and I'll start actually writing later today or, if I can find enough distractions, tomorrow. I always have a little of that "fear of the blank canvas" when I've been out away from a writing project for a couple of weeks. And, hmm, speaking of canvas, I do have the attractive alternate option of working on my "Diego's Hunhunahpu" painting a little more today. I did a [blog post](#) about my painting day before yesterday. The Rucktronics production facility is clanking back into life.



Figure 32: "Diego's Hunhunahpu." Acrylic on canvas. 36" by 36".

Nov 6. Okay, finished the painting on November 5, and revised the outline on November 6, and actually wrote the first 500 words of the chapter on November 6. The outline is akin to the

brace I'm now wearing on my leg—sometimes it's easier to walk if I take it off. "As skittish as a hog on ice," as we say in Kentucky.

Out on my trotters once more!

Scud's point of view. Scraps of party memories. They were doing a parade around the fire with the narwhals. Zoe wakes the kids and the Szep. They're sleepy, half-drunk, very grudging. They get Villy, sullen, barely speaking to Zoe. The five of them drive up the cliff before dawn.

A triple point pass again. It's very early dawn, too dark to see the other basins other than as faint glows. Crab Crater and the Bubbler Badlands. Like cities seen from a plane. Cries from down in the village. A dark shape against the glowing sea. Big flash of light—it's an insanely large saucer zapping the Flatsie village, machine-gun style. As if in reaction, the ocean blooms with intense light. A few hundred feet above the kids, Meatball is waggling and blinking, very clearly acting as a beacon.

The saucer rises up to level a ray at them, blows off the front of their car. They jump out, scrambling for shelter, Scud slips over the edge of a cliff, finds a ledge, gets the others to join him.

Meatball is still hovering over them, but the ledge gives them a certain amount of safety, and now they see a huge two-peaked ziggurat-style wave fire a volley of narwhals at the saucer. The narwhals deploy flying-fish wings and wriggle into the monster. The saucer bursts on the beach, a big saucer pearl rolls loose, someone grabs it.

Meatball is drifting down towards them. A sparkling cannonball shoots up towards her and she disappears.

Two voices. "Is she dead?" "Maybe hiding. Crunched down to dark spore mode."

It's two Bubblers named Vlad and Monika. Polish accents. They offer to help with the car and with the Meatball problem. The light is coming up. The Bubble Badlands are a maze of spires and arroyos. Some of the Bubblers are like snowmen or Michelin men, others have their bubbles spaced out a bit, like the panels of a Chinese dragon-kite. Vlad and Monika waft the kids and the broken car to a nearby mesa. Baby Bubblers watch. A Bubbler village, everything bobbing and colorful, like a town made of balloons.

Once again Pinchley, Villy, and Monika fix the car, with Scud in on it too.

Conversation. Zoe: "We have to run along the ridge away from Surf World. Villy: "If you really want to go home we can." Zoe: "No, I'm a convert. Maisie and the saucer and Meatball have more than convinced me that we should make the run for Szep City."

Meatball appears in the distance, and Vlad fires off another twinkly smart cannonball, driving the Freeth further away. Zoe says they need to kill Meatball. Yampa says that's mean. Pinchley and Vlad say it's hard to kill a Freeth as they're colony organisms—like a hive or a sponge or a jellyfish or a grex—muscle cells that are neurons. So no mechanical thing can hurt them.

Scud observes that the Iravs were Freeth as a well—Meatball was only *pretending* that she didn't know that. The whole group is a team, deputized to help kill the kids as soon as they're out of range where Zoe can jump home.

The spacy and intimidating Bubble Badlands. Steep, steep, steep. Monika tells Pinchley a way to make the whale into an execution chamber to shock Meatball to death. Zoe has the idea of putting Madclaw's saucer pearl in there as bait.

"You have a pearl? That means you can fly."

This requires a certain 4D head trick that only Scud can manage. It's not forward flight he gets, just weightlessness. The new Bubbler engine has a limited rocket capability, so they zoom over to the ridge. The rocket power only lasts a limited time, it runs on smeel.

Yampa keeps saying it's not fair to just flat out kill Meatball with no provocation, but this is moot, and now they're driving along the ridge and they don't see Meatball anymore. And then Scud and Villy see what seems to be their mother standing in the pathway, hitchhiking. Their dead Mom. But I'll split that off into another chapter.

November 12-13, 2015. Need a Gun for Shooting at Meatball.

I'm stuck in the "Running the Ridge" chapter.

Problem: if Meatball wants to kill them, why doesn't she just zap them all and be done with it. Why do the charade as Scud's mother? Perhaps her zap doesn't travel very far. Perhaps it's not strong enough to kill them all at once.

My story would make more sense if the kids and the Szep had a weapon themselves. I think I need to rectify that. So Meatball can't safely approach them, they can scare her off by shooting, so she has to insinuate herself into their group. And she has to get in close because her zap isn't long range.

Let's say the Bubblers give Scud a bubblegun. What would they give the Bubblers in return? It should be something that Scud brought. His fossils? Or maybe that starstone that he had? Would be nice if he traded a fossil for the starstone, and then later traded the starstone for the bubblegun.

I don't fully like the idea of Pinchley fixing the car as it's a (boring?) repeat of the scene at Borderslam Pass to have Pinchley fixing the whale with the tool critters that he also used in Villy's garage. So maybe fix the car a different way this time. Say the Bubblers tell them to use the whale's "memory" to have it regrow itself? Or, no, I want to get a bubblegun from the Bubblers, so I don't ask them to fix the car as well.

So okay Pinchley does the fix, he knows the memory trick himself. It's a holographic gestalt quantum state memory thing. Every component of the car system was entangled with the rest of the car, and remembers the rest of the car. Like a man regrowing an amputated leg. It's like my running joke to have Pinchley doing ever-wilder fixes on the car. The tool for doing this might be fractal ants.

Or maybe there's something vibrational or holographic about them? Fractal ants are easier. Like a Mandelbrot set beetle. The Crooked Beetle from my Pythagoras story with Paul Di Filippo.

I keep feeling like the scene with the Bubblers is boring. Like it needs something more than corny Polish accents. What might make the Bubblers intrinsically interesting?

November 17, 2015. Planning "Not Mom" Chapter.

Okay, I finished the "Running the Ridge" chapter with a big scene of Monika ripping open Scud's starstones and unleashing a thousand little suns that the Bubblers eat, and then the Bubblers have a mass mating frenzy. I thought it would be funny to Monika call the spread of suns a smorgasbord, and then I started thinking they were like Swedes or Norwegians, rather than like Poles. I changed Vlad's name to Ingmar and, earlier, Elmber's name to Gunnar. I could even change the "Running the Ridge" chapter name to "Smorgasbord," but that would be overdoing the joke.

(Maybe build up the smorgasbord scene a bit and have Scud eat one of the little suns?)

That would be cool, but too distracting just now, but maybe later they might do that. Like bring a starstone on the trip into the clouds and eat some suns up there with the Mayan gods. I remember a Sheckley story where an alien space giant eats planets and describes eating Earth as being like maybe eating a cantaloupe with ice patches on it that he shakes off. And it's warm in the middle.)

Still summarizing the "Running the Ridge" chapter as it currently is: Scud got a bubblegun in return for the starstone. And Pinchley fixed the car with a fractal ant. And then they're driving on the ridge between Bubbler Badlands and Crab Crater, and Meatball's nowhere in sight, but they see what seems to be Scud and Villy's mother hitchhiking on the ridge. And then I break for a new chapter which, for the moment, I'm calling "Not Mom."

My feeling is that I've been having all long chapters lately, so I'm going to dial down for a shorter chapter now, breaking "Running the Ridge" after 8 pages instead of stretching it to 13 or 15. An awful lot happened in "Running the Ridge" anyway. "Running the Ridge" was Scud's POV, and I think I'll go to Villy's POV for "Not Mom." I'll put the ambush in this chapter too, a shock at the end.

So now I'll write a little outline of the new chapter, "Not Mom."

Scud is fully drawn into the illusion of the hitchhiker being his mother, but Villy is suspicious, and Zoe totally thinks it's a scam. They stop and pick "Mom" up. Yes, it's Meatball the Freeth disguised as Mom. They kind of realize this right away, most of them besides Scud. It's a scary horror movie trope.

Zoe says some weird shit to "Mom," by way of getting her to drop the act. And Villy does this too, and Scud thinks Villy's being mean, but then Mom/Meatball goes to zap Zoe. Like she reaches out her hand, pretending to be nice, but Villy can see the gathering dark energy on her knuckles and he yells for Scud to shoot her, and Scud can't make himself do it and Villy grabs the gun and presses it to the back of Mom's head. Right before Villy shoots Meatball, she's begging him, screaming that it's not her fault, her Freeth people are in hock to the saucers for getting saucer pearls. Zoe gets Villy to kill Meatball/Mom anyway (daughter-in-law/mother-in-law resonance).

Kind of a heavy scene. Sad, very hard to take. The book's light and humorous a lot of the time, so I need to build up to this moment in the chapter, or it's too dissonant. Be dark in this chapter from the start, if possible.

The car fills with smoke and exploding bubblegun balls, and they're out on the ridge and then all that's left of Meatball/Mom is ashes and a saucer pearl. Getting this pearl should be a big deal, so I won't have Zoe lift that Flatsie's saucer pearl on the beach at the end of the "Beach Party" chapter like I was going to do before

Not quite sure about the rest of the chapter.

Maybe they chill out by having have a talk with a crab who crawls up from Crab Crater to talk. His name is Clacker. The crabs are highly sensitive, sophisto, and genius-like—which makes Scud and especially Zoe feel guilty about having eaten two of them at the beach party. Also, however, the crabs are fairly boring. Overthinking everything. But let's say that the crab tells them how to use a saucer pearl to fly. Only Scud understands, partly because Madclaw teeped him hints the night before.

They drive on, passing through another three-way intersection and entering a ridge that's between a basin of Talking Trees and a Birdland basin. These two races share their basins, flitting back and forth across the ridge, like neighbor folk on a country lane. I was thinking I'd

like to see the kids spend a night in a nest in a talking tree, but I think I'll try and do this chapter all in one day. I do have some doubts about discussing the Trees and Birdland basins as well, maybe too picaresque and it gets dull. I'll have to come up with some little twist so they're doing something for the plot. Also, to keep it moving, I'll skip past a lot of the drive by letting Villy take a nap. He's still tired from surfing, and from fighting with Zoe, and getting up so early, and from the emotionally draining showdown with Meatball/Mom. I could give him a heavy precog dream, possibly involving Maisie.

And then, at dusk, just when they're at the Trees/Birds/Harmony intersection, and they're thinking about spending the night in a nest in a tree, the Iravs attack. I was thinking it might be too much to have the ambush in this chapter, as we already have the death struggle with Meatball/Mom at the start, but I think I'll go for it and overload this chapter with fights. (And maybe name the chapter "Violence." Or "Not Mom" can stand, as that phrase has (obliquely) the connotation of violence anyway.) I'd rather do the ambush soon so I can get past that and keep moving the plot forward, I don't want to be working on this book for the rest of my life.

End the ambush scene with it looking like Zoe might be dead. *Heavy* chapter.

"She can sense her body's very real possibilities for injury and death."

And next chapter is her POV, she's recuperating down in Harmony Valley with the Bosch-like talking musical instruments.

November 25, 2015. Kickstarter for Transreal Cyberpunk with Sterling

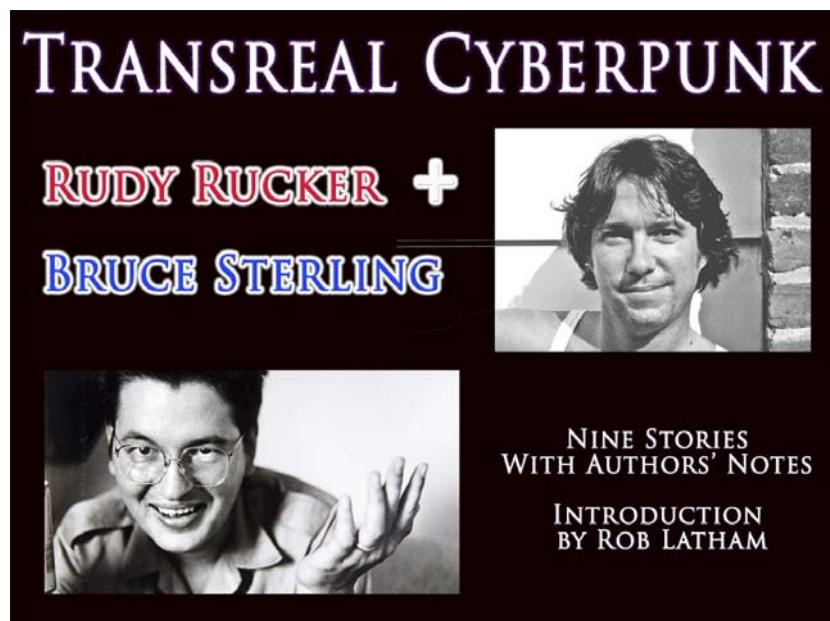


Figure 33: My Poster for *Transreal Cyberpunk*.

Today I launched a Kickstarter for my book of nine stories with Bruce Sterling. *Transreal Cyberpunk*. People have already pledged over \$4K. In one day! Very cheering. I set the campaign to run for four weeks, probably longer than necessary. The pro forma goal is only \$5K, but generally people are willing to keep giving after the goal is hit. Maybe I can promise we do some free podcast story readings as a "Stretch" goal to milk it higher.

Bruce was doubtful the campaign would work at all, and I pretty much had to beg him to let me do it. When will the man realize I'm always right?

Added November 30. We're up to \$5,300. The growth curve is flattening out. Possibly we can milk it up to \$7K. I've asked BoingBoing for a plug. In a week or so we'll post Bruce's video for the book. In two weeks I'll propose a "stretch goal" of a third party audio book via Amazon's ACX, and/or a series of podcast of Bruce and I (separately) reading a few of our stories.

November 26, 2015. Yet Another Trip to the Hospital?

Today's Thanksgiving! So many warm family memories, plus, of course, painful memories of drunkenness. Although those first shots of Wild Turkey in the kitchen with my father and my big brother were always a blast.

We'll be up in SF with Rudy and family and many of their friends today.

So...I'm getting yet another operation on my hip on Monday, that is, on November 30, 2015. The joint's popped out nine times since the fix on October 26, 2015. We were hoping my muscles would get strong enough to hold the thing in, but that doesn't seem to be happening. And the doctor claims it never will; he says my muscles have permanently lost their tone as a result of previous dislocations and operations. I'm not 100% sure he's right about this. Fear, uncertainty, doubt.

His solution is to put a thicker liner in the socket to stretch the muscles further or, more likely, to put in a so-called "constrained liner." A "salvage" technique for unstable hips.

How I wish I'd stuck with the old hip last March. How I wish I'd told this new doctor to use a double-rotation hip instead of the rinky-dink traditional cup and ball he went for—I didn't think to discuss this before the operation. I assumed it went without saying that he'd be using the stable double-rotation socket. But the rinky-dink cup is bonding well with my pelvis bone. The feeling is that it'd be foolish to tear that out and grind a fourth socket-bed into my pelvis.

In any case, with nine dislocations, it seems I need another operation. By now I'm very uneasy about moving my left leg around at all. So Monday it's another descent into the underworld, with two or three weeks of low energy and reduced mental function after that. Thinking about this makes me wish I was dead. Anxious and depressed.

Upside: looking back, I see that earlier this month, I did that great *Hunhunahpu* painting in the first week of rehab. Maybe I'll do another painting during my rehab this time around. I could paint the Iravs ambushing my *Million Mile Road Trip* party, although that would be a scene involving five humans and three Iravs. A bit too *Raft of the Medusa* for me to manage, I think. Or *Laocoön And His Sons* (being attacked by sea serpents). I'd have to cut down on the cast. Zoom in on three of them—Villy, Zoë and an Irav. And of course go cartoony on the figures.

Added Nov 29. I'm plagued by doubts. Obsessively Googling, I find that constrained liners don't have a great record of success—they can dislocate anyway, and they can lever the cup itself loose from the pelvis. As I mentioned before, they're termed a "salvage" technique, which is a bummer. They limit your range of motion—but I'm not sure by how much, and the surgeon didn't fully clarify this. Damning aside in one of the reports papers I looked up: constrained liners are often used for old people with dementia—and thus unable to exercise reasonable constraint on their motions. Should I really rush into this operation? Should I hold out

for a double-rotation hip?

And then I whipsaw back to thinking I should just get this fix done. I'm not a doctor, and my Google search results are somewhat random. Maybe my surgeon isn't omniscient, but surely he understands the situation better than I do. He's a pro. And he's physically looked inside my body at the hip.

As things are right now, I don't dare sleep on my stomach and pull up my leg, nor lie on my back and flop out my left knee to one side, nor fully stretch my left leg while lying on my back, nor lie on my stomach and raise my upper body onto my elbows, nor toss my left foot up onto a footstool. All of these moves have caused my hip to pop out over the last month.

By being careful, I haven't popped it out for six days now. Maybe my intense daily physical-therapy exercises have already strengthened my muscles enough to hold the hip in place? Should I try one of those problematic positions and see if the hip will still pop out? But I can't quite bring myself to do this. It's so very unpleasant when it pops out—and last time it happened, it was worse than ever, and it took Sylvia ten minutes of pulling on my foot to maneuver the ball back into the socket. If it pops out further than that for a full dislocation, I'm looking at level-ten pain and a trip to the emergency room.

Maybe the constrained liner isn't an ideal solution—but maybe there isn't an ideal solution. At least it'll be some kind of a fix. And if it only lasts for five years, that's better than nothing. Hell, my right hip replacement has lasted for three years, and that feels like a lot. I'll just go in there tomorrow and get it over with.

November 30, 2015. Working on "Not Mom."

Thoughts on my novel. I'm about half done with the "Not Mom" chapter. I've been working on it the last few days. I'll have a hiatus after the hip operation today, and I'll get back to the chapter in a week or two.

Yesterday Sylvia and I drove down to good old Four Mile Beach in Santa Cruz, and walked down to the southern end where the "tower" is, it's always deserted. Chaotic waves and churn, the water and foam riding the chaotic attractors. I always come here to pray to the muse. Our friends Michael Beeson and Jon Pearce were along, also Michael's wife Hennie. I found a stick and did my thing of writing my motto/spell/prayer in the sand: EADEM MUTATA RESURGO. Praying that I myself will rise again from my operation, the same yet changed. And praying that my writing ability and my novel's plot will do the same. That the book will come to life. The same as the others, yet changed. Help me, Muse.

So far on this new chapter I have a big opener with the mother-thing/Meatball fight. Kind of dragging in the middle. They're driving past talking crabs, trees, birds, and I sort of want to do scenes with those guys, but I feel pressed to get to the ambush. Maybe I should just write the ambush and then fill in the middle part later.

It would work better if the middle part introduced a tree and a bird who get involved in helping them during the ambush. The bluejay is called Lady Pickpeck, I think. I believe female bluejays are nearly as colorful as the males. Tolkein's race of talking trees were Ents, and the main one was Treebeard. We could call our tree Arb and don't worry about a name for his race. Trees have ADD-type speech patterns—that is, they branch off and never finish a thought or a sentence.. Birds are of course chirpy, a series of one word sentences, preferably monosyllabic words. Riffing off "Caw. Caw. Caw."

Maybe I should put in a proper scene with Arb and Lady Pickpeck, and postpone the

ambush till the next chapter.

So I've done a little with the bird and the tree, but I dissatisfied with the chapter. So far it's just dippy conversations with twee aliens who talk funny.

As I keep reminding myself: *Each chapter has to push the overall plot forward.*

Otherwise I'm vamping, noodling, and drifting into dull picaresque.

I need some sense of wonder. Hard to get there because I'm distracted by the Sword of Damocles (my upcoming operation). Maybe go ahead and show how the saucer pearl helps them fly and don't be holding back on that. And then they'll be set to use the pearl for the stratocasting push at a hundred thousand miles per hour after the Harmony chapter where Zoe recuperates.

I should back up and have a scene at the Beach Party with Madclaw flying with his saucer pearl. And maybe back up even further and have a narwhal flying with the saucer pearl that he swallows when they kill that big saucer that was waiting to ambush them.

Go ahead and have it be clear all along that a saucer pearl means flight.

The plot advance for this chapter should be that they learn to fly—it's Scud who learns to do this. Don't be postponing that, or saving it for later. Do it now. And I think have Villy learn to zap—that power is also courtesy of the saucer pearl. The gun isn't enough to finish off the Iravs, they need the zap as well. The zapping and flying can be part of the ambush scene.

It might be nice to just kill all of the Iravs and be done with them. Kind of boring and predictable to have them keep coming back.

Note that the flying is more a matter of levitation than really rapid forward propulsion—the propulsion will be via Zoe's stratocasting technique.

December 5, 2015. After the Operation.

I survived the operation. He put in the constrained liner, and now my hip's not popping out at all—the, like, crab claw of the liner holds onto the ball on my femur. The doctor allows that he should have done this in the first place, but "It's very hard to predict how an implant is going to work, especially when you're doing a revision on a hip." I don't have anything against him, he's a smart guy and in the end he did a good job.

The evening of the day the operation, I was in an ecstatic state of joy—to have the ordeal over! I guess I was high on all the meds too. I was actually sitting up writing down ideas for the novel.

Now, four days into recovery, I'm managing my pain meds conservatively. This time around I'm pig-headedly not taking the Percocet/Oxycontin at all. I do have a strong pain pill called Tramadol that I use twice a day. I have a friend in AA who "went out" on Tramadol, which is also marketed as Ultram, so I'm sort of happy to use it, although uneasy as well. It gives me a bit of a lift as opposed to making my tired, so it's not really a good idea before bed. But it doesn't give me the "wiggle in my eyes" like Oxy or the gut-deep exhaustion, and a *lot* more people have gone out on Oxy than Tramadol.

Other than that one, I'm using Lyrica, Celebrex, and plain Tylenol. The pain is always building back up, so I'm watching the clock all day for when I can take my next dose of something—most of the pills are limited to one pill two times today, although Tylenol you can take four times a day. Every day I'm trying to wean the pills down, but if I get too puritanical, then I'm in so much pain that I can't think, and I'm in a bad mood, so it's self-defeating.

Walking helps a little. I'll be out of the woods pretty soon.

My wound is seeping or weeping a lot of lymph that's pink with blood. Certainly several fluid ounces per day. A lot more than last time around. Sylvia is layering on mounds of gauze and tape to try and prevent breakthrough bleeding through my pants. I like when she changes my bandages—she gives me affectionate pats on the thigh and ass. On the living-room couch, I sit on a waterproof pad. I've been on the couch a lot. I streamed all 10 episodes that Phil Dick series, *The Man in the High Castle*—actually I streamed the first seven episodes on my phone in the hospital, which is kind of amazing...I hadn't even tried watching TV/Movies on the phone. And I'm still working my way through every episode of *Futurama* ever made.

The day after the operation, my surgeon showed me two startling videos that he made on his iPhone. The first video was peering in through a several-inches-deep gap in my pink flesh, showing the gleaming metal socket and head of the hip before he added the constrained liner. And he pulled down on my leg a little, and the head popped right out—showing that I did need the liner. And the second video showed my leg being moved around after the operation, testing it out, the moving fairly wildly, over to the left and to the right, up and down, the leg projecting from draped sheets covering the rest of me.

December 6, 2015. More on “Not Mom.”

So I managed to get my creaky, rusty, blood-scabbed mental gears turning again, and started back in on the novel yesterday, folding in some verbiage that came to me during that ecstatic initial “Night of Power” in the hospital when I was feeling no pain and so thrilled to my final leg fix was done.

I really wanted to call the verbose, rambling redwood tree Fucktooth. I kind of hated Treebeard in *Lord of the Rings*. Pompous droning. Tenured faculty. Vestry man. But “Fucktooth” won’t do. I’ll call him Farktooth and make him maybe a bit more likable.

By the way, in college we had these three linguistically related insult-names: fucktooth, suckjaw, and shithook. I think one of the boys had a column in the college paper called “Hook and Jaw.”

Scud can’t fly, but Villy can. He’s good at spatial relations. He feels them internally, rather than logically. When he flies it’ll be like the scene from my dream in the 1980s about flying in the Pantheon with Rudy Jr. I remember rushes of autumn leaves. Looping. Joyful with the flight. The 3D paths through the branches..

They spend the night in a nest in Farktooth, and they hear foraging wild pigs. And Villy and Zoe finally have sex together, very romantic and erotic.

December 12-17, 2015. Fight Scene in the “Harmony” Chapter.

Groundwork.

I said the Irav was a Freeth, but I’m supposing he did *not* in fact possess a saucer pearl—he was working for the saucers in the hopes of earning one. I should weave this fact into an earlier spot in the book. Along these lines, how did Meatball get her pearl from the saucers? Let’s say she’s had it since birth. The saucers employ her family in the tree are watching over that night market parking-lot action. This needs to be mentioned earlier.

What kinds of weapons are the Iravs using? They have a cone-shell gun that shoots poison darts—back in the night market parking lot, Villy got the gun away from them, but then the sliced off Irav’s hand ran up Villy’s leg and got it back. What are the detailed effects of being shot by it? Paralysis, and you need artificial respiration to keep breathing.

Let's say the Iravs got a bubblegun from the Bubblers too. To get his bubblegun Scud traded the Bubblers a starstone so they could eat some thousands of suns. Let's say the Iravs traded away the stolen car that used to belong to Pinchley and Yampa. And now they're on foot. But they can move fast—even if a Freeth doesn't have a saucer pearl for flying, it can bounce.

Go back and make it clear that a bubblegun only shoots five times. And our team wasted two shots as soon as they got it. So then, it's like a three wishes thing. And one shot went for killing Meatball. So they go into the fight with two shots only.

For the fight to work, five Iravs are too cumbersome. Let's suppose the legs stayed stuck together, so there's just four of them. The legs, the torso with a head and an arm, the torso with just an arm, and the hand. Four Iravs. Go through the book searching for "Irav" and fix that everywhere.

Let's have names for the four Iravs. The head-Irav, the arm-Irav, the legs-Irav, and the hand-Irav. (The head-Irav does have an arm, but the arm has no hand.)

Before the Fight.

Zoe's point of view. Waking with lubricious dreamy memories of making love. She gets Villy to do it another time. "To make it real," she says.

The others are bustling around. Lady Pickpeck brings them some large black berries (like in Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*) and then a scrap of raw wild pig which Scud manages to roast by producing a relatively weak zap from his fingertips after fondling the saucer pearl. Very good, is the Teetertotter pig meat, like the finest Serrano ham.

They discuss their intended sally against the Iravs. As yet, Scud can't get a really powerful killer zap going from the saucer pearl, and the others can't get any at all. Saucer pearls tend to adopt one or two "masters" and they only work for them. In any case, Scud's got the bubblegun, which is extremely powerful, almost like a short-range nuclear weapon. They want to be sure to kill all four Irav. To close the book on that particular menace.

Villy drives, and does some little hops, flying the car. Villy can lift the car with his mind, but they can't propel it car forward through the air. For lifting it, he's levitating, shielding the car from gravity. And when he flies forward, it's like he's swimming. But that doesn't transfer over to the car. At most he can physically "drag" the heavy car forward a little tiny bit. You might protest that saucers can fly forward—but the saucer is an integral organism, it's not a dead vehicle with someone inside it.

Scud is trying to build up his saucer pearl zap mojo. Lady Pickpeck flies along with them as she's hoping to get the caraway seeds that our gang promised to give to her and to Farktooth. She keeps looking ahead, and sees no sign of the Iravs. They've heard they're on foot. Somehow the birds and trees have lost track of them. They could be anywhere. Or maybe they've gone way up ahead.

The Fight.

Okay, now I need to choreograph the skirmish.

Our guys come to a three-way intersection with the Harmony basin up ahead, and no sign of the Iravs. They stop and get out of the car to look at the new basin, it's glowing and it has colored Jello cubes and whipped cream, and grapes, and walnuts, and orange slices, like an enormous salad bowl. Beautiful calm music drifting up from there.

Right then the Iravs rush out at them—they were hiding just over the lip of the basin, out of the sight of the birds and the trees.

The head-Irav has grown a clump of fingers to replace his lost hand. He has stork-like legs that bend backwards.

The hand-Irav has grown all over, so he's like a giant's hand. He has eyes on his knuckle, and there's a mouth between thumb and forefinger, so when he eats he looks like that "Cousin Millie" hand puppet that I make for the children by drawing an eye on my knuckle and putting lipstick around the gap between thumb and forefinger.

The arm-Irav has contracted his torso into a ball with two little feet, so he's a walking glob with a single arm sticking out. There's eyes on the torso, and a slit mouth.

The legs-Irav has a little doll's head on top, with a hand sticking out to the side from each hip.

The head-Irav has the Iravs' bubblegun, and he's running towards Zoe with his arm stretched out pointing the gun. Holding it with his banana-bunch of flexible fingers. Running on the stork legs. Villy flies out his window and zooms at the Irav low and fast and knocks the stork leg out from under him. The bubblegun goes off in a random blast, makes a dent in the ground.

The legs-Irav gets a scissors-lock on Villy, and the head-Irav is about to take another shot at Zoe. But Yampa and Scud are out of the car now, too. Yampa dives at the head-Irav and he shoots her, turning her head into ash.

Real fast Scud uses his bubblegun's #4 blast to blow away the head-Irav also destroying the Irav's bubblegun, which probably still had some blasts in it. In the ringing silence, the hand-Irav starts eating Yampa's body, like a shrew in fast-forward motion, eating it all, so disgusting, he swells up like a tick.

Meanwhile the arm-Irav scoots over to the car to go after Zoe. He's got the cone-shell gun. He shoots Zoe with the cone shell gun, and she falls down paralyzed, but with her eyes open, and she can still see. Pinchley knocks the cone shell gun out of the arm-Irav's hand. The arm-Irav grabs Zoe's horn and hops out of the car. Pinchley is giving Zoe artificial respiration.

Villy gets free of the legs-Irav and takes the bubblegun from Scud and blows away the arm-Irav and the legs. Irav, destroying Zoe's horn as well. Pinchley is keeping Zoe breathing, and feeling with his other hand for a healer critter in his tool belt.

The swollen hand-Irav heads for the car, he wants to finish off Zoe. Villy wants to shoot him with the bubblegun, but of course it's no longer working. Empty click-click. Scud dives on the hand and holds it down. The hand-Irav is trying to bite Scud, and suddenly gets is saucer-pearl zap-power going and he paralyzes the hand-Irav with a jolt.

The hand-Irav isn't dead yet, though, he wakes back up and starts begging and confessing. Yes, he was working for the saucers. Irav was in fact a poor relative of Meatball's who didn't get a saucer pearl and birth. So he'd done this mission to earn one. He says he's got the caraway seeds in his body, and he'll give them back, so they should let him go. He pops out the jar of seeds.

Villy grabs the seeds. "Finish him off," yells Pinchley, who's still in the car tending to Zoe. "That skorker ate my wife."

Scud emits a much stronger zap tan before. And now the had-Irav is ash.

Villy goes to Zoe, doing he artificial respiration mouth to mouth.. Zoe is growing colder and everything's getting dark. "Safe now," she murmurs. "But I'm dying." She blacks out.

December 26-31, 2015. Infected Hip Joint.

I found out last Friday, Dec 18, that my new hip joint is infected. The surgeon phoned, wanting to slice me open that very day for a so-called "wash out." But Sylvia and I were already on the road, on our way to San Francisco to go to Rudy Jr.'s company party and to the Nutcracker with his family (\$700 worth of tickets) and to spend two nights in a hotel, the first

really fun weekend for us since my operation on November 31, vastly anticipated. I told the surgeon I simply could not turn around and drive back to Los Gatos for an operation. Could not go back into the underworld. He said he understood my refusal, and that there was only a 50% chance the washout would work, given that I'd already been infected for nearly a week, but hadn't realized it.

Infection happens in 1 or 2 percent of hip operations. I'm thinking it wasn't ideally sanitary in the operating room of that "mellow small hospital" (as I was gaily calling it). I'll ask for a different hospital next time.

For the next two or three weeks I'm taking oral antibiotics. The surgeon prescribed two different ones, and it's not clear to me if I'm supposed to take both of them or just the second one, but for now I'm taking both. The surgeon is out of town, hard to reach. The pharmacist said sure, it's okay, take both, they hit different germs. I see an infection specialist later this week. Meanwhile the skin around my scar is still pink, swollen, and hot. The infection is settling in.

So—I've had two hip operations in the last six weeks, and now there's one or two more operations coming up. It's hard to express the levels of despair, fear, uncertainty and regret that I'm experiencing. I look back at the branchings of the choice tree that led here, and think, "If only, if only."

If only I hadn't twisted the wrong way in March, 2015, and popped my hip out. If only I'd gone to the hospital in Jackson and had them pop the hip back in, and that would have been the end of it. If only I hadn't chosen to replace the whole hip implant. If only that implant had bonded—and did I make this less likely by doing yoga?. If only I'd known the next surgeon would put in an unusable third hip implant. If only the hospital had given me the sterilizing wash before the ensuing correction surgery. If only I'd called the surgeon after the first week of my scar not healing and we'd done the wash-out right then. If only the surgeon hadn't later been so slow in finally concluding that I *did* need the wash-out. If only I'd abandoned my joyous San Francisco weekend to get the wash-out.

Turns out that by declining the wash-out, I gave the germs a better chance to settle down into impregnable long-term colonies on the surfaces of the metal and plastic pieces in my hip. There's a tiny chance the oral antibiotics alone can stabilize or "suppress" the infection long-term. But in all likelihood, they'll want to cut me open again, and disinfect everything. It would have to be a much more deep-going procedure than the wash-out would have been. If only.

The "gold standard" treatment is a two-step process where they remove every bit of the metal from my left hip, file away all the infected bone and replace that by antibiotic-laced bone cement, put in a bunch of antibiotic plastic spacers, sew me up, put me on intravenous antibiotics for six weeks, then open me up and put the hardware back in. And that works 90% of the time. There's also a one-step process where they skip the six week interregnum, and put in the new stuff right away. That seems to work about 80% of the time.

Given my record so far on this losing run, it seems there's a very real chance I'll be in the failing fraction either way. And then what? Repeat the cycle over and over?

I'm making myself even more depressed by writing this. I need to stop for today and get back into the novel. Inflict all this on my character Zoe instead of on me.

Another issue. For the last couple of weeks I've had constant pain in the infected hip. Juggling my pain meds all day. Mostly I get by with Tylenol and Celebrex. I stopped using Lyrica as it made me befuddled. Another med, Tramadol (or Ultram), is the best for knocking

out the pain. It's an opioid with an antidepressant effect, and I worry about getting addicted to it. I had a friend in AA who was hooked on it. So then I wonder if I'm having Tramadol withdrawal when I go without one for a day or half a day and I start feeling more-than-normally depressed. Of course the "depression" may also be from the increased pain. And probably I'm exaggerating this issue. These are only 50 mg pills I'm taking. But I'd feel safer if I could stop taking Tramadol entirely.

I was taking one every four hours when the pain was the worst, but for the last few days I held out and only took one in the evening and maybe one at noon, whenever the pain and sadness got too strong to bear. It takes almost an hour for the pill to kick in, it peaks after two or three hours, wears off in five or six. I had a mental image of the Tramadol effect—I'd imagine a pale gray cloud with little yellow isosceles triangles, like arrows, swirling and flocking like birds. Loving those arrows. And then there's a comedown and I need a nap. Or another pill.

Minor drug treat: last week when I heard about the infection, I bought a pack of cigarettes and ever since I've been having one or two a day.

On Dec 27, I finally got through a whole day without a Tramadol, and then the next day too, and the next. The dreaded withdrawal was nothing much. I feel brighter now, more present. On the other hand, if the pain and the depression amp back up during the coming treatments, it could be stupid and self-defeating to avoid taking a pleasant med.

Either way, the depression retreats when I throw myself into my work—or into talk with a friend or a family member. In parallel with all this, we had a big Christmas celebration at our house, and it was very joyful. I felt profoundly grateful for my family.

Another distraction has been the successful Kickstarter campaign and the upcoming Transreal Books publication of my story anthology with Bruce Sterling, *Transreal Cyberpunk*.

And, off and on, when possible, I've been working on the "Harmony" chapter of *Million Mile Road Trip*. In progress now: the scenes where my character Zoe gets paralyzed by a cone shell toxin and nearly dies, and then slowly recovers. Bringing it all back home.

December 31, 2015.

Yesterday I went to see an infection specialist doctor up near Palo Alto. She told me I have two organisms multiplying in my hip socket. One of them, staph, is known for being virulent, and the other, whose name I forget, is known for being hard to eradicate, as it mutates very rapidly. She says the wash-out wouldn't have worked, and would just have meant an extra operation. That was, in a way, a bit of good news, that is, one less thing to regret.

The bad news is that I'm looking at an operation to remove all the metal from my left hip and femur, meanwhile replacing the socket and ball with some antibiotic-impregnated "bone glue" epoxy so I can walk, and then I spend six weeks giving myself intravenous antibiotics three times a day via something like a biological "USB port" put into my left arm with a tube running up vein to my heart, and then I then stop the drugs for three weeks, and then if the infection doesn't boil back up, I can go on with the epoxy joint or, I think more likely is have yet another operation to replace the epoxy temp joint with more or less the same joint that I've got in there right now and then I'll recover for three or four weeks from that.. That adds up to something like four months, starting a week or two from now. So the process could take till mid-May.

I was very depressed about this, in tears. But now I'm getting used to it. Had good talks with my two doctor friends Michael Blumlein and Joel R.

December 28, 2015, Finishing the Harmony Chapter

Prolegomena

We need for Zoe to have a big vision in this chapter, or a series of visions. For the sake of the plot, to give the reader the sense that they're "learning answers" and "getting somewhere." So it's not merely picaresque.

So—I was going to use a jump-cut segue from Zoe passing out from the conotoxin to her waking up in the Harmony slime—the jump cut being my personal psychic impression of going under anesthesia or, even more, of having a brain hemorrhage or a grand mal seizure. Yet, the last time I had a hip operation, on November 30, I did emerge with a faint memory of staring up at the operating room lights and perhaps telling the medics that I was having hallucinations, but that I was okay. And they were sort of interested in what I said, or at least in my stupor I imagined they were. The lower half of my body was in a fully anaesthetized state, but the rest of me was doped on the sedative Versed, which makes you forget what happened while you're on it, but which maybe allows (let's suppose) some in-the-moment consciousness that leaves, however, few memory traces.

My point is to use this type of more complicated experience for Zoe's segue. Instead of just a jump cut. Scraps of having spoken with Goob-goob. The memories come back slowly, and only in scraps and patches.

And let's say Zoe doesn't get fully well right away. She collapses multiple times. Hears the voice of Goob-goob a second and a third time. Hears Maisie too. Milk it. Like a "Jesus in the desert talking to Satan and God" kind of scenario.

Zoe's Vision.

A vision of Goob-goob. Could Goob-goob be the overmind of the smeel found all over the place...on Earth, in the saucers, in the waves of Surf World, in the slime of Harmony? Zoe gets in touch with it and realizes the cosmic importance of her and Villy's quest.

Coming To

"We put the eel on you, gave Lady Pickpeck a couple of caraway seeds—not that she did fuck-all for us during the fight. I gave her two seeds, said goodbye, and drove down here into Harmony. Wild place."

Jello cubes = Harmons. Whipped cream = smeel. Grapes = tubers (to eat). Orange slices = Harmon homes. Mint leaves = ET-like five-legged crawlers like the one I got for Xmas from Jasper and Zimry. They're called Zongers, and they play the Harmons.

Zoe's broken her rattle and lost her horn. And even if she had them, they're too far from Earth's basin to hop. And even if they weren't too far—maybe she's lost her ability to hop. Hard to be sure. That cone-shell poison did a nasty number on her.

For now all they can do is to press on to Szep City. Villy tends Zoe. Their love grows.

Drag out Zoe's recovery woes, thereby helping me deal with my own health probs. Zoe gets addicted to the white smeel slime of the Harmons. She gets up and walks around, then feels weak, and falls back into a drift of the slime. In and out of consciousness. The cone-shell toxin damaged her more than she initially realized.

More fragmentary visions. Maisie appears. Tells Zoe she'll get better if she gets back into music.

Stratocasting

Zoe gets the Harmons to fashion a pair instruments. A really nice trumpet to replace the one she lost, possibly with some extra tweak. Plus an electric guitar for Villy. Villy had known how to play only surf guitar, but she shools him in a more emotional style, more bluesy, more

spacey.

More news from Maisie. She comes to Zoe and tells her about stratocasting.

Villy and Zoe learn how to collaborate on a stratocasting style of trumpet and electric guitar duet that can ultra-accelerate their car. The car will go at a hundred thousand miles per hour. Villy can hold the car in a levitated state while they stratocast, so they don't run into things. And Scud can zap any shit that comes after them along the way, like maybe a flying dragon at one point, and maybe an enormous piece of apple pie, or a mountain with a mouth.

December 30, 2015-January 8, 2016. Zoe in "Harmony"

If I want to draw out Zoe's recovery, the nature of the "cone-shell gun" poison should be more elaborate. And maybe I shouldn't actually call it a cone-shell gun. I already did a lot with cone shells and conotoxins in *Mathematicians in Love*.

I still like the idea of a mollusc shooting a harpoon, but make it an alien mappyworld creature. Name? A --- shell, or --- snail, where the --- is grrv, gdrv, yorgo, whaler. *Whaler* snail is kind of good. Or it could be harpooner snail.

I'll give Zoe a vision of Maisie. They talk about how far Zoe still has to go. 950,000 miles left.

If I squeeze down the planet-to-basin map, a basin might be 10,000 miles across (Earth's true circumference is 25,000 miles). So I need to pass through about a hundred basins to go a million miles. And, as of Harmony, I've gone about five basins worth. Earth, Thuddland, Surf World, Teetertotter Forest, Harmony. 50,000 miles in five days, so they ought to be going 10,000 miles per day. Putting the same thing a different way, if they drive along two edges of, say, the Bubble Canyon basin, or along two edges of Teetertotter Forest, that's 10,000 miles, and if I want to say it's only a ten hour drive, they have to be going a thousand miles per hour. Okay, okay, that's what I'll say.

Now—about this word "stratocasting" that I want to use for travelling fast via the power of music. There's a problem in that Stratocaster is a trademarked name for a Fender guitar model. And Stratocast by itself is a trademarked name for a cloud-based video-surveillance system. Can I make up a word that doesn't have so many associations?

I'm thinking of that high, intense sound of a Zappa solo, where he's pushing the chords and notes out to the edge of the universe. Actually, Zappa played not a Stratocaster, but a Gibson SG (for Solid Guitar, a variant on their Les Paul model). Jimi Hendrix played a Stratocaster. Duane Allman played a Gibson Les Paul. Keith Richards often plays a Fender Telecaster, and sometimes a Gibson Les Paul or Gibson ES, and once in a while a Fender Stratocaster. Slash plays a Les Paul.

Be that as it may, in my head, I've always called that certain kind of guitar sound "stratocasting." Like you're up above the stratosphere beaming a signal. "He played that guitar like he was ringin' a bell."

Maybe keep "strato" for high, and use something besides "cast." Sratospeeding, stratocruising, stratosailing, stratoscratching, stratostomping, stratosending. Well, I still like stratocasting better than those words. But it's too product-placement if I give Villy a Stratocaster guitar. It's a special Harmon-made guitar.

So just use the frikkin word stratocasting, and I can defuse the brand issue by having Villy mention that Fender does make a Stratocaster, fine.

On January 2, 2016, I saw Rancid at the Warfield theater in SF with Rudy Jr. Great performance. I love Tim and Lars playing together. I also got a DVD disk of Zappa playing at the Roxy with his band around 1995.

I already have a target *sound* of the stratocasting in my head, and it's hard fitting a horn into that, and I can't easily change the sound. For guitar and trumpet, I think of Miles Davis, *Bitches Brew*, and that's not a great record, too much echo chamber and too much dead air. I want insane lead + rhythm guitars in a wall of sound. Keith and Ronnie playing "Jumpin Jack Flash." Led Zep. Keith and Chuck Berry playing "Carol." Frank playing "Pygmy Twylyte." Jimi on "All Along the Watchtower."

So do I switch Zoe to a guitar? Was she playing a guitar all along? I mean, could I go back and drop the horn? The horn was cute, though. Could her new Harmony horn make a sound like a guitar? Better to just give her a guitar. I know this is selling the trumpet short. And I could have Zoe say this herself, and that guitar is a lesser instrument, for people with small intellects, but she really needs to go to guitar for the stratocasting effect that's in my head. Zoe in combination Villy.

They join Scud and Pinchley in the car. In what way does Pinchley manifest his nervous breakdown? What's an interesting mode of grief? Smashing things is boring. Sobbing and yelling ditto. What if he starts referring to himself in the third person. Dissociation. "Pinchley feels that..." Even better: He's emulating Yampa. He talks like her. He's absorbed her mind.

Pinchley will drive the car, as the others aren't quick enough.

January 9, 2016. Sent Proposal to John Joseph Adams

This fall, the friendly forty-year-old editor John Joseph Adams bought a story of mine ("The Knobby Giraffe") for a webzine called *Lightspeed*. Then I saw in *Locus* that he's now editing his own line of F&SF books at Houghton-Mifflin, so I sent him a proposal, an outline, and the first 21 chapters of *Million Mile Road Trip*.

The last time I talked to Dave Hartwell at Tor, he said he wasn't going to read my draft after all, that is, he wouldn't read it until the whole book was done. Even though he'd said earlier that he *would* read it now. So I'd really like to try someone else. Too boring to keep going back hat in hand to slow Hartwell at Tor.

My version of a proposal for Adams was shorter than the one I wrote back on [October 12, 2015](#). This time I just put in the "Overview" section shown below, followed by my outline of the past and projected chapters as of Jan 9, 2016.

OVERVIEW

The novel features Zoe and Villy, aged 17, plus Villy's 13-year-old brother Scud. Flying saucers and colorful aliens enter the tale as well. And, yes, it's literally about a car trip that's a million miles long—the trip is set in a parallel universe, which contains a single, endless, prairies-and-mountains world. The goal? Save our world from the soul-devouring saucers of the other world.

Further details can be found in the outline. The first twenty-one chapters are done, and the chapters after that are still to come.

Million Mile Road Trip is potentially a YA novel...and I'm keeping that market in mind. On the other hand it could also work as a mainstream SF novel.

Like many of my novels, *Million Mile Road Trip* is a phantasmagoric roller-coaster ride,

replete with surreal incidents, sympathetic characters, mind-bending speculations, offbeat humor, and human emotions.

I expect to finish it by June, 2016, and it'll be on the order of 105 thousand words long. I've currently written 75 thousand words. With this proposal, I'll send along a DOC of the current manuscript.

January 9-14, 2016. "Happy Blur."

Pinchley drives, he's in front with Scud, who's levitating the car and is ready to zap as well. Villy and Zoe are in back, jamming. Zoe sees the music lines like long wiggly curves coming out of the horn, twining with Villy's rhythm line. Like a graphics of a wild blaster gun's rays.

Let's redo the basin-size discussion. Earth's circumference is 25,000 miles, but suppose I say my basins are 6,000 miles across. Best-of versions of the planets. They're hexagons, with 3,000 mile radius. A cute thing about a hexagon is that its edge equals its radius, so driving two edges is the same as driving across the diameter, 6,000 miles. And if you shortcut through a basin from one corner to the second corner over (driving the "width" of the basin), that's square-root-of-three (about .87) times as far as the two edges, which comes to about 5,200 miles.

So "crossing" a basin might range from only a mile if you just cut across a tip of it, to 3,000 if you do one edge of it, to 5,200 if you cross its width, to 6,000 if you do its diameter. If you alternate diameters and single edges it would average 4,500 per basin. I'd have to do the math of it, but we might suppose that a random line across a hexagonal grid might average 5,000 miles per hexagon.

Now look at the [map](#) of their route thus far.

Driving from Van Cott to Borderslam pass was a radius, 3,000 miles.

Cutting across Thuddland was 5,200 miles.

Cutting across Surf World was 5,200 miles.

Doing two edges of Bubble Canyon was 6,000 miles. [Did shared edges of Crab City & of Teetertotter Forest at same time.]

Doing one more edge of Teetertotter Forest was 3,000 miles. [Edge shared with Birdland.]

So when they're in Harmony, they've logged only about 20,000 miles and about five basins, depending how you count the basins with shared edges.

Which leaves 980,000 miles to go. And if we averaged 5,000 miles per basin, it would be 196 basins, or if we do 5,200 mile basin-widths 188 basins. Or if we average 4,500 miles, it's 217. Let's just say "about 200."

It would be boring to describe 200 basins, I think—although maybe I could squeeze in some extras as rapid fire lists. I do need at least 30, I think. I'll list some ideas here.

1. Two troops of cuttlefish at war, reddish and greenish, one group flies, the others swim in the sea. They tangle their tentacles and bite. But then you realize they're mating.
2. Paramecia eating each other, growing, then splitting into little ones again, over and over, a growth loop. Algae in a pond.
3. Ants with four segments carving out canyons and making lacy mounds. They flicker in and out of visibility, crawling through unspace and the subdimensions.

4. Beetles releasing explosive clouds of gas. Excavating galleries in the ground. Emerging with great lumps of gold. Building a golden Ba'al beetle idol.
5. Starfish tessellating the surface, with flaws moving through the grid. When two fault lines cross, a patch of starfish peels up and curls into a dodecahedral ball that rolls across the surface.
6. Machines assembling and disassembling themselves, little ones like parasites making themselves from pieces of the larger ones, the large once gobbling the little ones.
7. Elephants carrying each other and trumpeting. Trying to make acrobatic mounds to reach to heaven. Calling out the thousand heavenly names of Goob-goob.
8. Phallic snakes, tight rings, and eggs. Snakes twining together and choking each other. The rings rubbing along the snakes until the tail explodes in a shower of eggs.
9. Tunneling evil rabbits hunted by foxes. The rabbits build pits of sharpened sticks to kill the foxes. The foxes dig up the rabbits. And carrot fields are all around. The carrots are alive, with faces, allies of the foxes. The rabbits are surprisingly vicious.
10. Milk-sputuring udders flopping around. Cowloons. Pink babies crawling after them through tall green grass. A peaceful scene.
11. Hippos in rivers, carving out new channels. A planet of braided rivers. Light gleaming in fancy networks. The waters flow into the center and pour down the edge-cliffs in waterfalls. Hippos bounce roaring down the cataracts. Their stubby peg-like teeth.
12. Towering flowers, talking and biting each other, populated by fat bees. The flowers have snobby British accents. The bees buzz around the purple whale, buffeting it.
13. Vines with floating cucumbers with little sailors inside the cucumbers like in blimps. The cucumbers gather, stretch out a sheet, and the sailors gather on it for a group dance.
14. Recirculating flows of lava and hungry volcanoes. Balls of fire flatten into shapes like molten flying saucers.
15. A sea of whirlpools budding off each other, and singing in unknown tongues. Strange multidimensional vortex-thread knots. Above the sea, the vortices are visible in the foggy air. Colored clouds above them all, splitting and merging, glowing. Swallowing each others' rain.
16. A sky full of barking dogs, with plains of identical doghouses below. Cats darting from house to house. "Why must I be like that? Why must I chase the cat? Nothing but the dog in me." George Clinton's "Atomic Dog."
17. A network of lightning bolts, connecting mountains whose peaks are sparking nodes. Like in a plasma sphere. Little silver surfers ride the sparks, gathering globes of ball lightning.
18. Ogres and gnomes. The tiny gnomes juggle the huge ogres in the air. Great steaming cauldrons of porridge. The gnomes like raisings in the mush.
19. Balls with one eye on each ball, the balls rush around a great plain like stampeding buffalo, or like pachinko balls. A dancing ballet fairy revels in being seen by the eyes..

20. Crystals snapping loose and tumbling, sprouting out fresh crystals. Very rapid.
Like a kaleidoscope, or like a zoom into a fractal. Music from the crystals.
Continually approaching some vast realization.
21. Pigs that attach their snouts to each other and spin in circles. The spinning pairs rise up like helicopters and break into showers of bacon, the strips drifting down like greasy autumn leaves.
22. Cities marching across plains with frantic monkeys in the cities. Collisions. The blood of the monkeys oils the mechanisms of the cities. The cities crumble and are rebuilt.
23. Spiderwebs and flies. The flies buzz with pleasure as they're eating. They infect the spiders, the spiders grow wings and turn into flies.
24. Mermen and sirens on a glassy black sea. Krakens in the sea, like the prows of Viking ships. The sirens feed mermen to the krakens and sing their eldritch songs.
25. Flying jellyfish stinging and eating little shrimp-people. Some shrimp take over a jellyfish, piloting it against its fellows.
26. Flying cities inhabited by leaping fleas. The fleas have human faces. The cities rise up around the purple whale, Scud needs to zap their way through.
27. A planet-sized corpse with little people feasting on it like fiddler crabs on a dead dolphin.
28. Fish walking on pairs of legs, and chickens on ladders wearing mortarboards. A great university. The pupils are dough-boys.
29. Flowing streams of light in a 3D jungle-gym maze. The patterns trace out a slowly mounting logic that hypnotizes Zoe. 4D inversions. Trying to tell them something, but it's unknowable.
30. Sponges with snails living in them. The snails present floral bouquets to each other. Pairs of snails share a shell.
31. Crawling brains playing with cards with glyphs on them. The glyphs are programs that the brains absorb, and they dance in festive patterns, like June Taylor dancers seen from above. In the center of the brains' circle a book takes shape.
32. Squealing bagpipe sacks covered with eyes. They clack their chanter tubes together in duels. But their real enemies are pairs of scissors seeking to cut holes in them.
33. A vast array of turning cogs, like the inside of a planet-sized wristwatch. Honey is all over the works, and ants are in the honey. The clockwork itself is producing the honey.
34. Cellular automata patterns being run by patches of lichen. Little girls in school skirts hopscotch across the patches singing chants. As they hop they mature and age and send babies down the hills at the basin's edge.
35. A scary mystery basin. Velvety black. Seen/unseen/unseeable forms within. N-dimensional figures from unspace. To see them is to go mad.

How to present this farrago? Is a list of paragraphs too dull, too listy? What if I jam them together into one huge paragraph / perhaps broken up by slashes? Maybe it's better just to make it easy on the reader, and do paragraph breaks. The material is strange enough, I think, without making it typographically odd. I could, however, make each descriptor paragraph into a single sentence. Like long lines in a epic, incantatory Ginsberg poem. Like "Howl" or "Kaddish," in

other words.

And interspersed among these picaresque single-sentence descriptor paragraphs, I'll have some reaction shots of Zoe, Villy, Scud, and Pinchley in the car.

Write it from Villy's point of view, I guess, in the present tense.

January 22, 2016. Dissociated Delirium in Hospital. Finish "Stratocast."

So I was in Stanford Hospital for hip surgery from Jan 19-22, 2016. Infection in my hip joint and they took out all the hardware. A traumatic two operation under deep full anesthesia, and then taking Percocet painkillers with 5 mg of oxycodone each, taking them two or four at a time. I was there three nights, and each night my room seemed like a completely different space. The second day I noticed the effects of the oxy opiates on my dreams. Watching the dreams like movies, semi-aware. Rooting through mounds of rusty metal scrap.. Faces. Never getting into proper dreams, but enjoyable, in the sense that being high is enjoyable, but exhausting and not restful, and in the morning I didn't want to go back there.

The third night the pain ramped up again, so I asked for a few more oxys, fell deeply asleep at 6:30 pm, and woke, soaked in sweat, in a state of delirium at half-past midnight. My bed seemed like the edge of an alleyway, and I was like a wet rag of clothing lying there, a wadded nightgown or a bra or some scraps of paper. A nothing. Pathetic. Lost. Undone. I was awake, but unable to remember who I was, or where, or what my significance was, or what ordeal I was undergoing, or what I was supposed to do. A wet crooked rag in an alleyway. Overhead was the "trapeze" lifter-bar of my hospital bed. It meant something, some task, but I didn't know what. Sounds from beyond a curved wall which was the curtain across my door. I hoped someone would come in. They didn't. Eventually I found the ringer-button to call a nurse. I told her I couldn't remember who I was, and that the pain pills had gotten to me. She was sympathetic.

On the table by my bed, I found the paper scrap with my marked up draft of the Stratocast chapter for *Million Mile Road Trip*. I told the nurse the scrap was from a science fiction novel I'm working on, and that I was a writer, and that I'd try to recover myself by thinking about it. She approved. I had all the time in the world here, anonymous in the middle of a hospital night. After a few minutes I got the courage to call for a nurse again—a different one came, both of them were Indian, this one got me my laptop from my knapsack cross the room, and I got to work, writing on till 3 am. Had to call the nurse yet one more time for my reading glasses. They didn't question what I was doing.

I was happy to be writing in such an extreme situation, and I think the material came out pretty well. I decided to run the last twenty or thirty basins as a single block. A surreal mural.

Back at home, I revised the "Stratocast" chapter about five times and on Jan 27, 2016, I [blogged](#) it. I showed the online version to Marc Laidlaw, and on January 30, 2016, he came back with the following comments, which I may or may not eventually take into account.

"Stratocast" is wonderful but I wish there were a lot more of it...it feels out of scale with the sense I get of the rest of the book. Weren't they supposed to be covering a ton of different worlds in one go? You had circulated a list of ideas earlier, and I thought each one of those was going to be a glimpse of a discrete basin. This feels like just a handful. I was picturing something like a phantasmagorical Henry Miller Ovarian Trolley rush of imagery, like one

tumbling sentence, overwhelming. I definitely see why that wouldn't work for this visionary sequence, but I still think you could up the visionary ante a lot. What's here is great, but if I think back to the chapter I read previously ['Surf World'], it doesn't seem that different...they were flying over/through a bunch of surreal details in that one at high speed as well. I thought this was going to go way over the top. But maybe at that point you risk losing your young reader, or your editor. I do like the way you keep it tied in with the characters and the music. Despite my feedback, I would be cautious about too much revising, because it is clearly also a product of that nightmarish night, and those kinds of connections can be delicate."

So maybe I'll take some of Laidlaw's thoughts into account, maybe not, we'll see. Thing is, Marc may have been miffed at me when he wrote the comments—because I'd recently given him some harsh criticisms regarding his own story in progress. Anyway, for now, I'm done with the "Stratocast."

January 30-Feb 1, 2016. In Search of Szep City. On the Nod.

I'm living in a hospital bed in our living room, on the same level as our main entrance and the kitchen and my desk. It's lonely, not being in the big bed downstairs with Sylvia. But I'm sleeping well. Filling three plastic liter-sized "urinal" bottles a night without getting out of bed. Two oxy pills every four hours in the daytime to keep the pain bearable. I'd thought I might be able to avoid opiates this time, but I can't. The pain is too strong. The oxy gives me spasms of deep and abrupt fatigue followed by a nap. Other med: I take three intravenous bags of meropenam antibiotic a day via a so-called PICC line that runs through an artery in my upper arm to my beating heart. Wiping out the infection that had settled into my last hip replacement. Four more weeks of this are scheduled, and then more tests, a new hip, and a new recovery. Crazy, crazy, crazy.

While I was revising my "Stratocast" chapter over the past week, I moved the order of the visions around a little, thickened some of the flashes, and forced in some plot-related things, including several mentions of flying saucers. Later, once I have the whole story clear, I can lard in some more prefigurings—I think Bruce Sterling used to refer to this practice of mine as "interpolating nodal loops."

Anyway—I need to make plans for the Szep City chapter. I can hardly believe I've reached this point, I'm into the final 25% of the novel. "Chapter 23: Lady Filippa." I think I'll do Scud's POV. Zoe and Villy are off to the side, totally bonded after the big stratocast.

I need to sharpen my mental images of the Trubans and the Rubtans. They're more or less humanoid, each of them standing on two short legs, and with a slender body that rises up from a bar at the waist. The arms emerge from lumpy joints. They have squawky voices. Their hands are like mittens with thumbs made of bunches of smaller fingers. Their faces are shades of orange and yellow with patches of green. Large mauve eyes, orange lips. Their jaws jiggle loosely. The men have stubble.

Rubtans wear fezzes, Trubans have no hats.

They're different races. Doing a sectarian Shiite/Sunni conflict would bore me. The Middle east bores me. Could Szep City be like San Francisco? San Jose? Brussels? New York?

And now, typing these notes half an hour after my 6:00 pm dose of 10 mg oxycodone

pain-killer, I begin drifting in and out of sleep, lying on my living-room hospital bed, bed adjusted with my legs up and the laptop on my lap. I keep typing even as I nod off, hoping for a lucky hit.

How many fruit-people do Jasper and Zimry have? Waiting for a prescription. Nodding in and out of sleep. A place of dreams. Steady aching in Scud's left butt cheek. Creatures with their arms raised in worship. Bone-deep exhaustion.

Szep City appears exactly like high-school in Los Perros. A Dickian move. Everyone is pretending to be someone else, but it's an open costuming show, not a sly pretence, like a masquerade. Like Carnival. They're masquerading Earth.

Give Calder's chew toy back to him, give the toy back to the baby. Lawns like hilly ice rinks.

Incredibly learned figures with mounds of books. Tiny books in heaps, like pills. The giant calculation of the paired universes of mappyworld and ballyworld. The whole history of the linked cosmos hinges upon a single event. Something about the car crash right before they hopped away from Lost Perros.

Scud feels himself to be a dainty hippo dancing. He's trying to stay awake, and to alert to his surroundings, but he can't stop the psychic flow that started up during the stratocast. Szep City is like a switchyard, a junction, a railyard of reality threads plugging in. Rickety, dangerous shacks by the railroad tracks with bums and whores. Who can make it over the low muddy ridge that rings this basin. I see pairs of legs like cricket wickets. My old tale/dream/vision of the magic crow in the woods below Bacon Ridge in Wyoming. Scud learns the language of birds and animals.

My tale's characters are cameo images in play-pieces on a table by a swimming pool at a Jewish country club in Tenafly, New Jersey. Women playing mahjong. Holly Hobbie hats hiding the players' faces. Dreaming while awake. The dreams aren't dreamt to enforce your will, you dream them to stay alive. Exhaustion. Layers of reality. What is Szep city? Who lives there? What is it for?

I pull myself together, I awaken from my reveries, I go into the kitchen for a light dinner with my wife and my daughter.

February 3, 2016. Szep City Is Like Manhattan. Lady Filippa.

Forget about the Middle East, I've decided to make Szep City be like Manhattan, one of the few big cities I know well. A tight, busy futuristic, alien Manhattan. With a touch of Brussels. Settle in there for a full two chapters, leaving at the end of the second. Have some new secondary characters.

Get some NYC narrative snap and drive. Well, maybe not *that* snappy. Goofy beat. Like a slacker detective novel. Subways, night clubs, coffee shops, big stores, maybe even a museum.

The buildings are in shades of green. Skyways among buildings. Possibly the waters have risen up into the streets and into the lower floors of the buildings, *a là* the drowned New York in the movies *AI* and *Tomorrowland*, and in the novel Stan Robinson tells me he's writing. *Nah*. I want to hang onto the true Manhattan map in my mind.

My Middle-East related Tourette-phrase-for-the-day. "How's your bagh, dad?" Maybe I can work this in. It's said by a hipster grub-pale Truban Szep, like R.U. Sirius..

All along in the drafts till today, I was talking about getting a magic wand from the Princess in Szep City. But I think I'd rather not call her Princess, as that overlays a medieval vibe, or an upper-crust *Paris Match* magazine vibe. I don't really like royalty. I want this woman

Szep figure to be hip and powerful, a woman about town, a culture hero. Lady Gaga, Baby Jane Holtzer, Yoko Ono...what's the word for a person like that? The Doyenne might work, but that's a little too establishment. Or Lady Mary, I like that name from the TV series *Downton Abbey*. Saying it ironically with a fake Irish accent. I have a friend called Mary, born and raised in SF, very thin old lady my age, tart sense of humor. "Lady" sets off any first name, but can, I think, be used with irony so as not to invoke the dreary harnesses and trappings of heraldry and leeching aristocracy. Like Warhol's actors were all Superstar.

So, okay, change the Princess to Lady. Lady something. Could I use Lady What? Or Lady Who? I like that, but, dammit, then there's a conflict with that stupid-ass Brit SF show *Dr. Who* which I've never ever seen. For slobbering fen only. Dylan's Lady Jane. Gibson's Lady 3Jane from *Neuromancer*. Lady Lux.

Or, *duh*, use the Princess name that I was going to use. Lady *Filippa*. Nice sound. A little like "Filipina," which slot transreally into my present life, as the nurse who comes to visit me at home twice a week these days is a Filipina, from Manila. She's cheerful, earthy, plump, with a raucous voice. She's a Rubtan, but she's down with the Trubans.

February 4-5, 2016. Scenes for "Szep City" Chap. Take One.

Scud and Pinchley in the front seat as they pull out of the dark, scary zone. The city below them is made of porcelain or epoxy, baked into retro-future shapes. Like the credits sequence of the *Futurama* cartoons. Towers with fins like rayguns. Egg-shaped buildings with domes on domes. Archimedean solids. Tessellations. Roadways from building to building and individual transport tubes made of thick, heavy glass. Airborne roadways with Earth-style cars.

A symphony of smells rises from Szep City: cheese rinds, tobacco smoke, gasoline, roast meat, magnolia blossoms, coffee grounds, whiffs of urine, and various unclassifiable smells, from the indescribably loathsome to the unspeakably toothsome. Scud loses his focus, and lets the car drop rather heavily from its levitated state.

They're in a square with Szep citizens, it's a marketplace with pancake trees, and traffic around the edges, and multistory buildings, a little like Union Square in New York City, not that Scud's ever been there, other than in VR games. A multiethnic crowd of Szep mingles here, all of them with warm-colored skins, but some shade more towards creamy-lemon, and others more towards brick-red. -colored, the colors not strictly on a one-dimensional spectrum, there's a blue/purple/mauve axis as well. Like skin colors in New York, and, like in New York, the lips and eyes varying. Fuller lips and larger eyes for the dark reddish Szep. The darker ones are called Rubtans, and the lighter ones are Trubans, and the bluish ones are Plunks.

Generally the dark Rubtans are higher-class, higher-status, wealthier. The Trubans are paler, more intellectual, not treated as well. Pinchley and Yampa are Trubans.

A weird Truban is near our crew. A ululating wail issues from an onion-topped tower like a minaret. The pompous Rubtans drop to the ground and pray, but the low-down Trubans don't. An explosion, one of the raised roadways crumbles to the ground. The weird Truban grabs our gang and leads them off through a passageway.

Panic, a chase or a flight, leading them to Princess Filippa in Szep City. Pinchley and Yampa were devoted to the Princess. She's gnarly, like a sack of meat covered with eyes and sores. She has empathy. She's good, she's the soul of the Szep people. Her sores are objective correlatives for the diseases in the body politic. She says she's willing to give the kids her wand.

One of the squares is a flea market that's a zero-gravity zone with everything floating around, at a waist-high level bumping you, like the flea market in Brussels called Jeu de Balle or

fancier one in Petit Sablon. The goods nudging you like dishes in a dirty sink. And Lady Filippa's wand is in that mix.

February 6-8, 2016. I Need Keys.

I need to come up with a "key" to my *Million Mile Road Trip* tale. The alpha and the omega. Note that a novel's key does not in fact have to be all that logical, but the readers do want a key nonetheless. You can wallpaper over the key's crudeness by being vague or mysterioso about it—think of the explanations in fantasy fiction or in "The X Files." And if you look closely, the keys in hard SF are vague as well. What we're after is the sense-of-wonder feeling of there *being* an explanation, rather than looking for something super logical. It's about throwing the readers a frikkin bone. Authorial art and craft lies in the mesmeric scrimshaw designs on the bone.

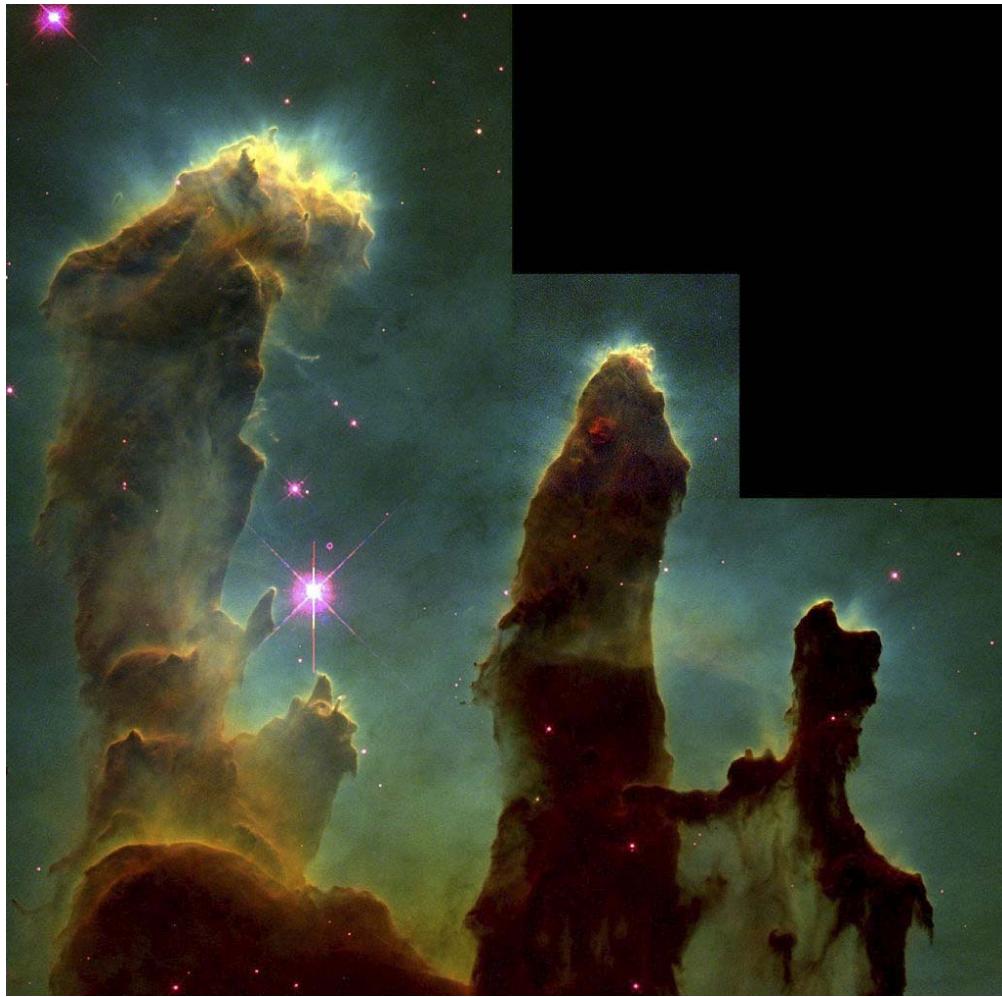


Figure 34: "Pillars of Creation," or the Star Foundry

One key: I feel like Szep City is a portal or gateway to a kind of heaven, with gods and angels living in it. Szep City is analogous to Zermatt at the base of the Matterhorn. The ever-churning pile of clouds is called Sky Castle. A scale-free regime of classical turbulence. With veils and sheets of glowing smeel. It resembles the classic 1995 Hubble Telescope "Pillars of

Creation” photo.

And I have a bunch more keys in the post after next, for [Feb 14-18, 2016](#). But first let’s break for despair...

February 14, 2016. Despair.

Yes, it’s Valentine’s Day, and I have Sylvia, but other than that...despair.

The pain in my left hip is unrelenting. I’m not quite sure what causes it. The healing of my femur, which the surgeon sawed a slit into so he could pull out the spike? Or the grinding of my bones against the cement that’s replaced my hip. Or the healing muscles.

Yesterday, by gritting my teeth, I managed to stop taking oxycontin for about ten hours, and I felt mentally more like myself, but by then the pain levels get so high that moving my leg nearly makes me sob. Pain levels are at eight or even nine out of ten. The pain has been at me all day and all night for four weeks now, with six more weeks to go until they remove the grinding wad of “cement spacer” from my empty hip socket and put in a real fake hip. Maybe the pain will stop earlier than that, I’m not sure.

At this point, the only way to control the pain is to take a 5mg oxycodone pill every two or three hours all day, and take four of them during the night. Tylenol and Aleve don’t make a dent in it.

I often snap at Sylvia and she’s at times tired of me, poor thing. I’m a burden. The long dreary days. Giving myself hour-long intravenous infusions at 6 am, 1 pm, and 9 pm every day. Chemotherapy, really. No energy. Schlep myself around on crutches, unable to put any weight on my left leg. Exhausted from the effort and from the antibiotics and from the pain meds, I nap two or three or even four times a day.

I’ve been revising my notes for the next chapter of *Million Mile Road Trip* for almost a month. But I never get around to doing any writing on the book. My days are empty, but somehow I never have time to write. The oxycodone? But, hey, Ru, Bill Burroughs wrote a lot of *Naked Lunch* on the nod or in the penumbrae thereof. You should be able to write *anyway*. So why not add unproductivity-guilt to your burdens?

Different topic.

I went over my Transreal Books sales records for 2015. The money is okay, but the actual *sales* figures are disheartening. I’m only getting decent money because of Kickstarter. The ebooks aren’t doing so bad, but the print numbers—like, 160 print copies of *Turing & Burroughs*—possibly the best book I ever wrote. A fucking joke, and 250 print for *Big Aha* isn’t any better, and, my god, 99 print copies of my *Journals*? Which I’d thought of as on a par with the journals of Kafka, Camus, or Warhol? And there were no reviews of the *Journals* at all, so far as I remember. Not even in *Locus*. Reduced to that writerly pipe-dream, “I’ll be famous when I’m dead.” Fat chance.

I’d hoped to sell the new novel to Dave Hartwell at Tor Books or to John Joseph Adams at Houghton Mifflin. But Hartwell unexpectedly died a week or two ago. Still can’t believe he’s gone. Good old Dave.

And today Adams wrote me a rejection. “Thanks again very much for letting me have a look at *Million Mile Road Trip*. I’m sorry to say I’m going to pass. It’s nicely written, and I enjoyed reading it, but overall the book didn’t quite win me over, I’m afraid.”

I keep meaning to email Patrick Nielsen Hayden at Tor and ask him if he’s interested in

looking at *Million Mile Road Trip*. I asked my agent John Silbersack if he thought this was a good idea—he was non-committal, basically he seemed to think there was no rush. It could be that some other figure at Tor will emerge as their “literary SF” editor. Silbersack said I should also consider trying a small press like Small Beer or Angry Robot or Tachyon or Saga. Get a little more attention. But I feel uneasy about this path. No money, likely rejections, no control over book design, long wait. I’m an old man sitting hat in hand in a cheap little outfit’s lobby. “Oh god, Rucker? Is he still around?” But maybe Silbersack could find a good one.

February 14-18, 2016. Painting. Key Ideas for Coming Chapters.

PAINTING OF SKY CASTLE

Somehow I got it together to do a little watercolor painting of a heavenly world with Goob-goob next to a hellish pit with an evil saucer god called Groon. Groon looks like a pouch on the left here, and Goob-goob like an African mask in the sky. I used some watercolors in tubes that Sylvia gave me, sitting on our side porch with the watercolor paper taped to a drawing board on an easel. Great leg pain, but I forgot the pain while painting. And most of the ideas in this section come out of that painting.



Figure 35: “Sky Castle” Watercolor on paper, February, 2016.

ANGELS, FLAME PEOPLE, AND SZEPS

Goob-goob lives in Sky Castle, and maybe some Mayan-style gods as well. Plus some underlings whom I might refer to as angels—but with two caveats. First of all, I’d want to free “angel” from its religious baggage. Have some dialog to disallow and inoculate against any conventional religious interpretation.

And, secondly, Goob-goob is at a higher level than the “angels.” To keep things simple I might call her an archangel or, as I prefer, I might call her a god—but in the non-religious SF sense of a god as a supernal, immensely powerful being.

Is there some word I could use *other* than angel? Like, *saucer* is livelier and snappier

than *demon* or devil, and I like the word saucer, so it's nice to use it for the bad angels. Plus the saucer word adds vividness and associations. It would be too confusing, I think, to also use saucers for the good angels—like to have black saucers and white saucers.

I'm groping for an SF vernacular word for a being like an angel. There is an SF trope of high order aliens who are like disembodied minds, possibly higher dimensional. Space spirits. Non-saucer UFOs—like the shapes flying along that nighttime road in *Close Encounters*. ETs. Great Old Ones. Energy beings. Hyperghosts. Groping, groping...

Oh, *duh!* In my novel *Secret of Life*, I had some good aliens called—flame-people, a flame-person in the singular. A flame-person is a birefringent parallelopiped crystal with a projecting stick of light. Shaped like viruses, in a way, with the info-laden “head” and the active “tail.”

Flame-people are almost like autonomous flying *Star Wars* light sabers, not that I'd embrace so vulgar and *declassé* an association.

THE SAUCERS AREN'T ANGELS

And what about the saucers? I don't think I want to push the Christian mythos and say the saucers are beings who were *expelled* from Sky Castle. I don't want a saucer to literally be a “fallen flame person.” I already have my routine about the saucers having a saucer pearl inside them, and that's working well. And they're meaty and they do their gross laying-eggs thing.

The bad-ass boss of the saucers can be akin to Lucifer of the Bible, and akin to Sauron the titular *Lord of the Rings*. This saucer god's name? I like naming monsters after my old friend Gregory Gibson—if he is a friend, given how much we've quarreled over the years. So maybe call the saucer god Samsa, as in Gregor Samsa. Nah. I had a Garmor in *Frek*. Gurgur. Gargon. Groon. I like that. A bestial grunt or groan. Groon.

Just as Goob-goob is different from the flame-people, Groon is different from the saucers. Groon and Goob-goob are higher-order Platonic-archetype beings. They're linked, like brother and sister.

Goob-goob: female, bright, yang, mental.

Groon: male, dark, yin, fleshy.

I should say something about how Goob-goob creates the flame-people, and about how Groon creates the saucer pearls. Like salt crystals from a salt shaker.

The saucers have a main outpost, a swampy hell-world that we pass on the road trip stratocast, with the saucers of molten lava. It's right next to the Szep City basin and to Sky Castle. A dale by a hill, a canyon by a mountain. Groon's palace. I'll need to pump up that apparition in “Stratocast.” It'll close out the chapter, give it a shape.

Groon is made of molten spacetime? Don't overdo it, Ru.. His basin has a deep pit, which is in some sense the obverse of Sky Castle. Literally so? Like a cast and a sculpture. The full figure/ground yin/yang thing.

SAUCER PLAN

Earth and Van Cott's neighboring basin New Eden is a lesser saucer outpost, like a colony. Think of the British Empire. Groon is planning to visit New Eden to help the local saucers close the deal is consuming all the smeel of Planet Earth. He may in fact want to make Earth into a new palace. Like his “summer palace.”

When you completely leech off all smeel energy from a region it becomes a pit. Saucerian goal: Leech below the subatomic level, leech down into the quantum foam, leech all

the way into the subdimensions. Take it all. (And replace the universal mind with a subsubsubprime mortgage.) Your ass is grass.

Lady P (and her resident flame-person) catch wind of this plan from a shady Szep named Flipsydaisy, I'm visualizing him as being a double agent or a kind of a tranny. Flipsydaisy is in with the saucers. Works both sides of the street.

Lady Filippa sent two lowly Trubans—Pinchley and Yampa—to save the humans. If she sent high-caste Rubtan “wizards” with flame-people inside them—well, then Groon’s saucers would have noticed the trip and would have killed them right away. As things are, the low-caste Yampa and Pinchley contacted Zoe and Villy all unnoticed, and by doing so, they gained a modicum of favor from Goob-goob that’s protected them on their long path back to Szep City. A tendril of energy from Goob-goob. Goob-goob is pretending she doesn’t care that much about this maneuver, but she does care—the more casual she plays it, the better her chances of drawing Groon in.

Lady Filippa and Goob-goob are playing a long game. They want to lure Groon to the unspace tunnel to Earth and trap and exterminate the monster there. Pinch off the tunnel at either end—and it’ll dwindle down to a sizzling point, *pop*, that’s it for Groon.

(Of course it won’t completely eradicate Groon and the saucers after all. Yang never erases yin. Always that remaining dark dot, right? It leaves room for a sequel, not that I can imagine ever having the oomph to write one.)

I'll have to reconcile or balance out: (1) The thing about Groon supposedly letting Pinchley and Yampa pass (2) The limitations on which worlds the saucers can attack in.

WHAT THE KIDS DO

I need some angle for Zoe, Villy, and Scud in Szep City. They do something crucial; it’s clever and heroic. Maybe we have a specific puzzle to solve, something like the riddle of the Sphinx. The Riddle of the Ant. Something about a fixed point in a regress of models inside models. And maybe other, linked, parts of the puzzle are connected to the Pit and to New Eden. Or the puzzle like a chastity belt to keep Goob-goob from having sex with Groon? The puzzle involves Flipsydaisy the freaky Szep. They don’t so much “solve” the lock as they do “hack” it. And set Goob-goob loose against Groon.

Reset. The puzzle is the issue of how the kids can get free passage back to Earth with the talking flame-person that I was calling Lady Filippa’s magic wand. In thinking of the talking prize, I think of the hilarious talking Ganzer egg in Sheckley’s divine *Mind Swap*.

RUBTANS, TRUBANS, AND ARISTOCRACY IN SZEP CITY

I’m seeing the dark-skinned Rubtans as ruling class. If you sheathe a flame-person in your body, you gain power. You’re called a wizard. The flame person is like a magic wand inside you. It roasts you a gold reddish brown like you’re a pig on a spit. Many of the older Szep aristocrats do harbor flame people, or have harbored them at one time. The Trubans are in awe of Goob-goob and the flame-people, and the Rubtans are more casual—but they work their connection to have power over the Trubans. The Rubtans employ Trubans as servants. The Trubans are like groupies a little bit, and the wizards are rock stars, and the regular Rubtans are like high-society jet-setters who are in the social group of the bands.

Pinchley’s connection with Lady Filippa is that his family worked in service at the Lady’s palace, maintaining her machinery. A chauffeur. Yampa was a stylist, or maybe I want to say like a seamstress, except she made her outfits from images. Photo clouds. Wearing a web

page.

THE SMEEL TRADE

Sky Castle is a cloud of smeel, like a living fog, like an orchid plant, an exhalation of the living land. Strands run up from many basins to the castle.

The saucers are more crass and obvious in their mining of smeel.

LADY FILIPPA'S WAND

As I already said, our Lady's wand is Goob-goob flame-person that lives in her body.

A flame-person can become symbiotic with a human—or with any material object at all, even a country ham—by inserting his/her stick of light into the object and leaving the crystal on the surface outside. Like you might have your resident flame-person's crystal on the back of your neck.

Those two magical guitars that Zoe and Villy played—let's say those were flame-people. And we get a reveal of that as they hop up to Sky Castle with some of the Rubtan wizard-aristocrats.

March 1-2, 2016. Into Chapter 23: The Wand.

So about a week ago, I finally got some writing going again, just writing on the start of this next chapter day after day, write until I'd nod out, then print it out, and mark it up, slowly, in between naps, then retype it, on the side porch in the morning sun, when I feel the liveliest. Like a beetle with half his legs and brain gone—still trying to build a nest.

Three days ago I managed to drop the oxycodone—it wasn't working very well against the pain anymore, and to my pleased surprise I realized I'd reached a point where good old Aleve could do the job. I mentioned this to the doctor and learned that's a foible of addictive pain-killers, you have to take them in larger and larger doses to get relief. Somehow I hadn't realized the equation was that harsh. I can see needing more to get *high*...but needing more to get the effect that the frikkin drug is *for*? So I'm more clear-headed now, and feeling more like myself. But aren't you always (tautologically) feeling like yourself? Well, you know what I mean. I feel like the standard Rudy self. And if I can get off the antibiotic infusions, as may soon be in the cards, I'll feel even better.

But enough about *me*. Let's talk about the chapter.

As I mentioned, I want to play this trick on Scud. They've been saying they would get a "wand" from Lady Filippa. But the wand turns out to be a living creature, to some extent parasitic or symbiotic, and it looks like a glowing snake with a crystal at one end. And it'll dart out and embed itself in Scud's spine or maybe in his arm so that he can in fact slide it out like a wand. What do I call it?

I'd mentioned flame-person and angel-arrow, but I don't quite like those names. I could go alien and just call it, like, a *krruz*. But I think there's a good English or para-English phrase lurking out there.

Or, wait, why not just call it a wand anyway! Duh.

March 8, 2016. Hip Better. Next Chap: Lady Filippa

I've actually been writing again for the last couple of weeks, despite all the obstacles—the pain, the fear, the meds, the despair. Making myself laugh with my writing, it feels good.

Playing tricks on Scud and the kids. Good action. As of today, I've just about finished the Lady Filippa chapter, although maybe today I revise the last pages of this chap yet again. Doing a lot of cycles of (short addition + print out and mark up + type in followed by short addition), more cycles than usual as many days I'm not able to work for very long.

Re. the hip thing, today I got the first good news I've had in months: the latest blood tests indicate that the infection is finally clearing up. They don't exactly measure the infection level with these tests, they measure something more like biological stress. Just last week, the blood stress levels were so high that the doctors were saying I might need another two months of antibiotic infusions, possibly with worse to come. But today the levels are good. Possibly they were so high because I've been in so much pain. This one number had been hovering around 4 or 10 or 5 and now all at once it's down to 0.5 where it should be.

A few minutes before I got the good news on the phone, I was standing in the kitchen and sending up a really sincere prayer for God to help me. And reflecting the prayer down into my body to make it better at healing itself. And then I got the call. Call it a miracle, why not.

Walking around handicapped on crutches, I've been impressed by how many strangers have been kind to me. Helping me in various ways. It's also changed the way I think about handicapped people. Maybe I mentioned this before. There's an unkind default tendency to view handicapped people as "lesser" or as not fully human. But, here on the inside, I can see that I'm as fully human as ever. Handicapped, but still me. And I'm grateful to the people who treat me that way. And I'm in no position to resent those who circle around me or ignore me or look away—as I've done all of those things in the past. And certainly I have no grudge against those who look at me in honest curiosity, speculating what might be wrong. Nor against those who put on a sympathetic but carefully blank face. Dealing with the Other. I've had nice talks with a couple of other handicapped people. One guy I've known for a long time, but now we're closer. Another guy, maybe a vet, discussing crutches with me in the taco place.

I have really nice crutches, Sidestix, from Canada. About \$400. Forearm crutches rather than armpit crutches. Like polio crutches or Stephen Hawkings crutches. I love them. I only wish I'd bought the higher-end model with the shock absorbers (about \$600), and I worry I might have given them too short a forearm measurement. I feel like a spider or like a crustacean when I'm moving well on them. My arms are sore all the time from the extra work, I guess they'll be stronger for awhile. I live in terror of a crutch slipping out sideways from under me. Skittish as a hog on ice when on damp tile. The crutches are extremely prone to falling to the ground when I prop them. When possible I simply lay them on the ground in the first place. Get it over with.

So here's an outline of what I'm writing next chapter.

Flipsydaisy and Lady Filippa deliberately let the demonic Tollah into Lady Filippa's den. He's an agent of the evil saucer-god Groon. They let him in to test/train the kids. In the fight, Scud uses his wand, and Zoe and Villy use their guitars. Finally the kids immobilize Tollah like a fly in spider silk, Zoe wraps him in chords. And Lady Filippa Tollah eats him with those caraway seeds on him. Pinchley stays with Flipsydaisy.

March 18-23, 2016. Lady Filippa Pupa Painting. Turning 70. Sky Castle Plan.

I had a lot of fun with the Lady Filippa chapter, it went pretty fast, took about a week. These days I love tormenting my character Scud. I'm ramping up for the Sky Castle chapter, but first I've been polishing the Lady Filippa chapter, and uniformizing some things in the earlier chapters.

I also did a painting of the Lady Filippa chapter. I did two versions of it, actually, first a watercolor, and then an acrylic. The title “Defending the Royal Larva” sounds good to me (because it’s silly and funny), but it’s inaccurate in two senses: (a) they’re not defending the Lady Filippa pupa, they’re defending themselves, and (b) Lady Filippa, although of the so-called Aristo race, and of high status in Szep City, isn’t really what you’d call royal.



Figure 36: “Defending the Royal Pupa” Watercolor on paper, March, 2016

The guy with the Flying Vee guitar looks like Keith Richards, I think. And the boy with the wand is kind of Henry Potter style. The woman is good, I was lucky, I just sketched her right.



Figure 37: “Defending the Royal Pupa” Acrylic on canvas, March 22, 2016

I had a lot of trouble with the woman in the big acrylic version, I didn't initially get a good angle of her head like I did in the watercolor, and I had to revise her two times. I did the final revision on March 22, 2016, which is, *oh my god*, my 70th birthday. Inconceivable. In my head I'm always 28.

I posted on Facebook about it being my seventieth birthday, and got a couple of hundred very nice and kind comments.

I've been fleshing out and revising this outline for the Sky Castle chapter for a week or two..

The kids walk through a tunnel to a sky-high empty smokestack. Not much action in the tunnel. They're exhausted and hungry at the smokestack, it's a huge circular area, two hundred yards across. Scud can't get Skzx the wand to levitate them, maybe Skzx just doesn't want to, it's hard to tell Skzx wants food and sleep like the others.

They don't want to eat possibly fake food that the wand makes. Zoe calls some rats with her music, like the Pied Piper of Hamelin. Little rats in pointed hats and little coats. They bring little loaves of bread, and cheeses, and nuts, and berries, and water wrapped in leaves, and they have a meal. They sleep on the ground near where the smokestack wall slants over, Villy and Zoe in each others' arms, warming each other, and Scud is warmed by his wand. Villy and Zoe make love.

In the morning the wand calls down an adult Aristo, he lowers itself down to them, like a zeppelin with tentacles. I'm tempted to call him “Stool” like the cuttlefish creature that my guy rides to N-D-land in *Spaceland*, but I shouldn't. Instead I'll riff off that and call him Stolo. They

sit on top of Stolo, and ride up the stack into the stratosphere, higher and higher, riding the winds deep into Sky Castle, an ultrastorm cloud that's a thousand miles high.

[Turns out I need a chapter break here already as so much happens on the way through the stack and to Sky Castle.]

Glimpses of two other godlike creatures up there, maybe a giant pencil, and a face with a thousand arms—gods of other universes.

Groon, who looks like an African mask and like a Lovecraftian tumbling hypercube, can be seen in the Pit via telescopic vision, Stolo holds up a magic lens. Groon threatens them from far below, and some saucers even come after them, but Stolo dispatches them with ease. Stolo tells them that Groon and Goob-goob are brother and sister, but they had a fight a hundred million years ago.

Goob-goob has the look of a Mayan god like [Hunhunahpu](#) [weave back in the text to make Goob-goob look this way earlier on]. Zoe plans something with Goob-goob for a little while. Something about Maisie. Villy and Scud don't get to hear what.

To get to the ultra jet stream, the kids walk *through* Goob-goob. For some reason, out of the blue, I started thinking about the story of Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego. And it's a great fit—so much more interesting to walk through God than to stand there talking to her like she's a face on a wall-monitor. She's like a *door*. So, yeah, they're like Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego in the fiery furnace, and as in the Bible story in the Book of Daniel, a fourth figure appears in there with them, A mysterious form who may play some role later on. You can see him—or her?—out of the corner of your eye, but you can't quite see her directly. The so-called "[third man factor](#)" experienced by polar explorers and by marooned sailors—although here this is actually a *fourth* man, not a third. I can also think of this person as a quantum mix of the three kids. A mixed state. S/he has a name, but they can't remember it. Call him/her ?*?*?.

They make it through Goob-goob and reach the ultra jet stream. So Goob-goob funnels the kids towards Van Cott and Earth via an ultra jet stream, which is, again, like an atmospheric tentacle. Zoe is annoyed to realize that Scud has diverted their path so that they land on New Eden, the home of the saucers.

March 28 - April 2, 2016. Painting of Villy & Stolo.

So I finished Chapter 25, which was supposed to get into Sky Castle, but I had fun with a rat picnic and a frantic ride through the smokestack and across an ultra jet stream. I did a drawing and then a painting of this scene. Villy has fallen off the Aristo zeppelin named Stolo! Plus saucers are attacking and the zeppelin is shooting them and Goob-goob is in the Sky Castle cloud overhead.

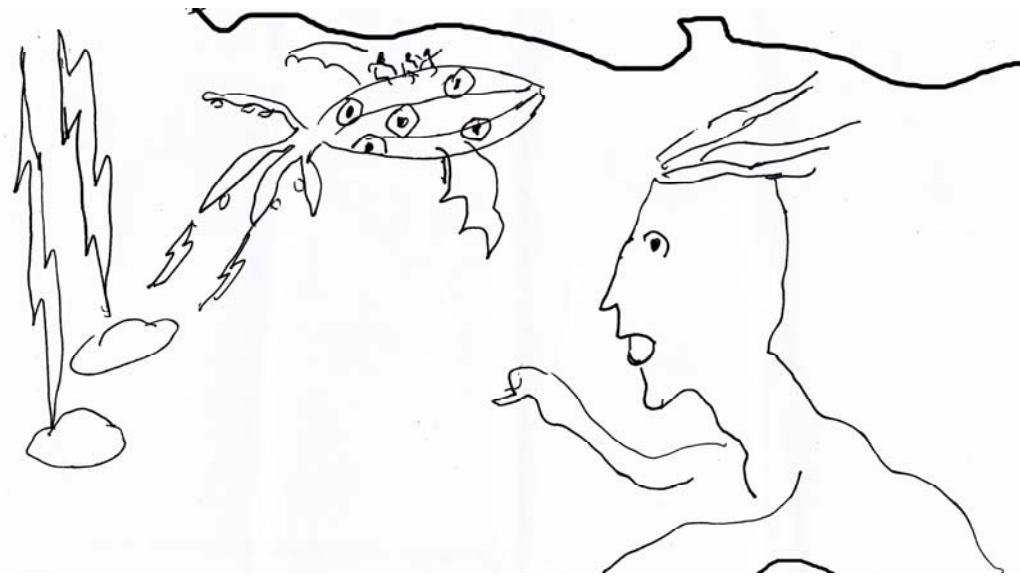


Figure 38. Villy Fell Off the Zeppelin. Sketch. March, 2016.

And then I made it into a painting. It's not exactly as close to the book as before, and I changed the title.



Figure 39. Air Skirmish. Acrylic on Canvas. 30" x 24", April 4, 2016

I had trouble transferring the lively drawing to the canvas. I actually printed out a big copy of Villy and cut him out and drew around him on the canvas, but probably freehand would have done this as well. I ordered some "transfer paper," like carbon paper for painting, comes in black and in white, will be here in a couple of weeks. Robert Williams likes that approach.

And then it took awhile to finish the painting as I couldn't work outside in the back yard (my studio) most of the day because the new neighbor who's been building himself a palatial

house for three years was making so much noise with a crew trimming the beautiful oak trees in the gully behind my house and chipping the limbs, the motherfucking asshole.

On April 1, they stopped the sawing, so I did another couple of days on the painting. As I worked on it, the zeppelin mutated into a cuttlefish with eyes. I dropped the riders as now they were the wrong scale. I had trouble situating the saucers in 3D space. And then I added a piece of ground to emphasize that they are in the air and not in, as it might otherwise seem, in the water. All in all I spent about twelve hours on the painting. As opposed to the two or three minutes it took to draw the sketch!

March 29-April 4, 2016. Clarifying Groon, the Saucers, and Goob-goob.

Okay, my guys are just inching into the bottom of the Sky Castle cloud so I'm about to do a Goob-goob scene followed by a trip in what I've been calling "an ultra jet stream" to New Eden.

Before I do this, I have to settle some issues involving Groon, the saucers, and Goob-goob. I've been through many flip-flops and changes of heart here. Looking for the simplest effective solution. I started with the following tangled block of questions.

"I said something earlier about the saucers being limited to stay within the basins that touch New Eden. I also talked about the saucers using the white light in Saucer Hall as a teleportation gate. Might they be able to teleport to the Pit? Should we be seeing saucers over Szep City? And the Szep City hall with the ululating Tollah should be a "Saucer Temple" similar to the Saucer Hall of Van Cott? For that matter I could have a Saucer Cave in Thuddland, and a Saucer Shack in Surf World?"

What's the story? Let's break the issues into pieces.

DESIDERATA (REQUIREMENTS)

- Groon is constantly creating more saucers, although the saucers can reproduce on their own.
- Groon doesn't necessarily look like a saucer, his appearance is as yet unclear.
- Groon wants to open a big tunnel from Van Cott to Earth so that he can spawn a copy of himself through the tunnel
- Groon lives in the Pit, but he has a connection with New Eden.
- The saucers from New Eden have trouble travelling very far from New Eden, in particular, they were unable to pursue the kids from Surf World and up onto the ridge.
- Saucers can already, to some extent, travel from the mappyworld to our ballyworld Earth.

GROON

I have been mentioning Groon as a god of the saucers, but need that be true? I mean, Goob-goob is the god of the whole mappyworld, and Groon just leads a couple of saucer planets. He seems much lower in power. I do need some kind of "boss" saucer enemy in the final scenes. And it makes sense to call him Groon. But maybe it's overdoing it to call him a god. A demon? A demiurge—nah, nobody knows that word. A racial archetype? A saucer hive mind? Like he's an archipelago being and the saucers are parts of him? I think I had a creature like that in *The Big Aha*. (Note I don't want to get into having a hive mind for humanity.)

In any case, Groon won't be a god like Goob-goob, but, given that he's a "boss," he's something special. Possibly a higher-dimensional being. Groon is a type of parasite that travels

from world to world, that is from universe to universe, or, better, individual Groons spawn new Groons into new universes. Our book's Groon's goal is to spawn a copy over to ballyworld Earth. He's in mappyworld now, and he wants to tunnel to ballyworld. The saucers can already get over to our world on a small scale, as occasional visitors, but the big Groon needs a fatter pipe to spawn off a child who will really set up shop in our world. The big dig tunnel through unspace.

If Groon is a boss parasite, then I think we shouldn't bother trying to say that he's Goob-goob's brother—drop that move, it's a needless complication. Let him be wholly external. He's like a plague that spreads from universe to universe. Like a disease, or like an unwanted alien species.

Where does Groon live? Let's put im the "Pit" basin next to the Szep City basin—like I was already doing. He's not livin gin the Saucer Temple building, nor in Sky Castle. If he spawns a scion to Earth, then Groon II makes our planet his capital, and make Earth be like the Pit. Catastrophe!

What does Groon look like? I was thinking of a spider, made white light. Not white light, exactly. How about dark light.

Or maybe he's a blob? Dull. How about a bagpipe! I love evil bagpipes, I had one in *Frek*.

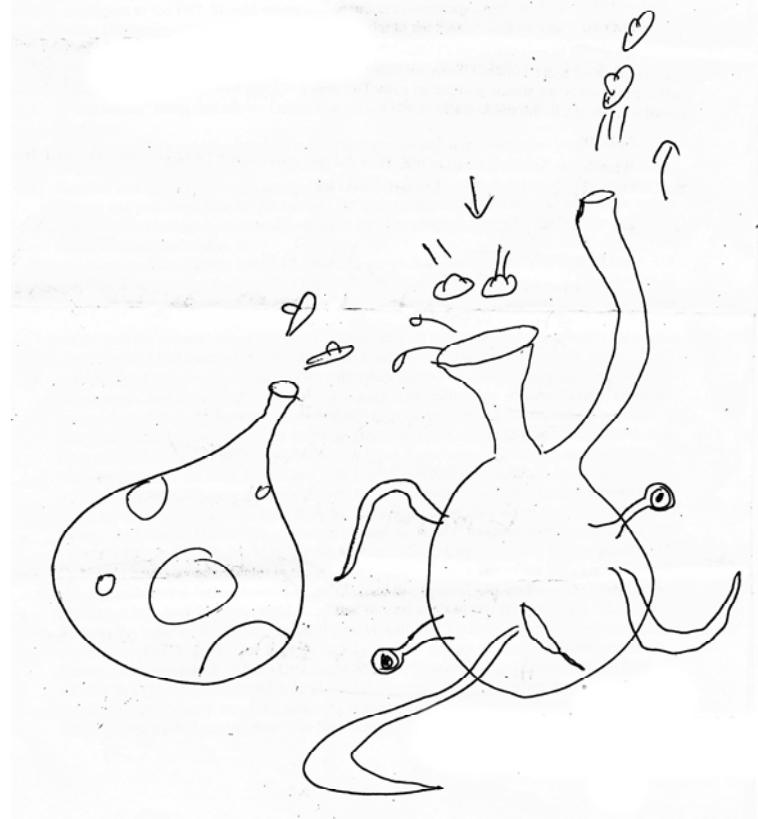


Figure 40. Bagpipe Groon.

Like a tunicate in the sea. One tube sucks in dark energy laden saucers, the other tube spawns them. The saucers are like subsidiary scavengers for Groon, not that all of them return. I

drew the one on the left first, then drew the one on the right, with the two siphons.

He's planning to give birth to a new Groon and send the new Groon through the tunnel. Asexual reproduction, I think. He can travel in the jet stream too. Groon II might hide out in the Saucer Hall of Van Cott. Maybe he's not even that big, or maybe he can at least make his size be small. I can imagine a confrontation between him and one of the kids. And then he grows. *Roar!*

What's hard for Groon is to drill through unspace to reach ballyworld and Earth.

Groon is like a fountain, continually spawning off saucers. Some stay in the Pit, but many of them get into the jet stream and travel to Earth.

Why does there happen to be a jet stream from the Pit to New Eden? Well, Groon happened to emerge in the Pit. He can't prey on Szep City because of the Aristos. He sensed the fatness of Van Cott / Earth as a target. Smelled it out. Picked up on the teep cheeps. And he picked the Pit for being close to a jet stream leading to New Eden, adjacent to his target world, Van Cott.

SAUCER NODES

I wanted to have the saucers based only in certain nodes, mainly New Eden and the pig. I thought of some possible explanations for this

- A "resonance" thing that allows Groon to send out teleportation gates only to certain locations.
- Or Groon is like a spider with eight legs. The legs are, say, a million miles long. A leg connects the Pit to New Eden.
- Simplest and best: there's a jet stream that runs from the Pit to New Eden. Groon hatches saucers and puts them into the jet stream. He wants them to gather in New Eden, and be active in Van Cott. Because he eventually wants to build an unspace tunnel to Earth so he can spawn a new Groon there. Fun consequence: the kids ride the jet stream to get back to New Eden / Van Cott. They disguise themselves as saucers for the trip. Wrapped in meat. The disguise keeps them warm as well.

Another saucer tries to mate with one of them. Ew!

SAUCER CONFINEMENT

I want to limit the saucers' range because I wanted the kids to be safe from the saucers for awhile after Surf World. I had claimed they couldn't leave Surf World, but gave no reason. Again I thought of several explanations.

- A somewhat kludgy explanation might be that they are fed by dark energy rays from the Groon node. And the basin walls block the energy. The energy can make it through *one* wall, but not through two. If we take this route, I have the Groon node in New Eden, and the saucers can get to the neighboring Van Cott, Thuddland, Surf World, and three other as-yet-unknown neighbors of New Eden. Reiterating, the Groon transport gates are in the Pit and New Eden. No teleportation gates in Saucer Hall or in Saucer Temple. The saucers have to *fly* to the neighboring basins, not teleport. So, fine, then I just need to change that white light thing in Saucer Hall to be, like, a hologram display of Groon. And Saucer Hall is like an "Amerikahaus" or "USO" hangout spot for saucers in Van Cott, and Saucer Temple is a hang-out for saucers in Szep City.
- Or I *could* have secondary teleportation gates in the neighbor basins. Like a star of six little legs. Kind of fun. Six toes on the tip of each leg. And then we would claim that

saucers can't in fact fly very high. They can't get over the basin walls. We might say the basin walls are 5,000 feet high, not unheard of at all—Carson Pass is 8,500 feet. And the saucer can only rise up to, say, 3,000 feet. And, by the way, the smokestack in Szep City might be 3,000 feet—roughly the height of the Burj Khalifa in Dubai. And we could drop the cloud down to 3,500 feet, lower than the basin wall. So we'll claim the only way for a saucer to change basins is to tunnel via a literal stone tunnel, or via a teleportation gate. The New Eden to Pit teleport hop is like a flight from Frankfurt to New York City, and from there you can go to Paris, Rio, Anchorage, whatever. And the little star links are like feeder airlines. Like from flying to Frankfurt to Budapest.

- These two explanations are way too complex. Instead say that the saucers simply don't spread that widely because there aren't that many of them. And—kicker—Goob-goob and roving Aristos sometimes blasts them out of the sky if they get too pushy. Or the Aristos eat them. In particular, we can have a bolt from the blue kill the saucers who are hounding the kids as they leave Surf World to run the ridge.

TOLLAH

What kind of creature is/was Tollah? An ectoplasmic emanation from Groon? A pet of Groon? Does Groon have more Tollahs? Sure, we might as well see some of them on a rampage in Los Perros. In that case, maybe we should glimpse an extra Tollah-dog in Szep City during the riot, or with the crowd who attacks in the smokestack. I might suppose that a Tollah dog is actually a kind of saucer, that is, it's made of the same kind of flesh. And then the Tollahs are made by Groon. And the Aristos would like eating both saucers and Tollahs.

ARISTOS

What do the Aristos want from life. How did they arrive here? Did they come in concert with the Groon? Possibly they're a symbiotic pair of species, and maybe the Tollah dogs. The Aristos eat Tollahs and saucers. The Tollahs eat humans and Szep. The saucers can also eat humans and Szep, but they also can feed by draining dark energy from humans and Szep. Groon feeds on dark energy that the Tollahs and saucers bring back to him..

JET STREAMS

“Jet stream” is a good enough name for them, don't want to add more nonce words than necessary. And “ultra jet stream” is kludgy. Are they simply air currents? What causes them? I don't think Goob-goob makes them as I'd once thought. Because if she made them, then there wouldn't be a stream that conveniently connects Groon's Pit to the New Eden where he wants to do his Big Dig.

GOOB-GOOB

I mean...what is Goob-goob? Not quite as powerful as god.

I don't see Goob-goob as the creator of our world.

She could be emergent, in the sense that Gaia emerges from Nature.

Or we might go classical and think of her as a demiurge, “an artisan-like figure responsible for the fashioning and maintenance of the physical universe. ... both the demiurge itself plus the material from which the demiurge fashions the universe are considered either uncreated and eternal, or the product of some other being, depending on the system.” Not getting

into the deep philosophy here, we might think of Goob-goob like a man who'd in charge of keeping a factory running...he keeps an eye on the machines. A plant manager. Simpler word: a demigod.

I need to decide what Goob-goob looks like. In an earlier scene I had this:

[Sitting behind the desk is a sturdy figure, like a statue of stone. Flat-nosed, solemn, with staring eyes and a feathered head dress. Arms like plump tubes. Her substance glows a rich yellow, but the light doesn't dazzle Zoe, and why should it, given that Zoe's—dead?]

"I'm Goob-goob," says the protean figure. Just now she's like a Mayan icon, with extravagantly curved features that taper into scrolls.]

But I can do better. Here we go.

Zoe's always been fascinated by moiré patterns—the strange visual effects she sees when, say, two window screens or two chain-link fences overlap, slightly out of kilter. A fluid series of lobed patterns erupts, changing with Zoe's slightest motions. And there's chic fabrics with mashed-in grooves to give a watery moiré effect as well—quite a craze for these during Zoe's junior year, matter of fact.

And—here's the new part—Zoe has found that, once in a while, under certain conditions, her perceptual system can create moirés on its own. Like one time, while she was zoning out in her bedroom, her retinal cells and her brain's neurons got a smidgen out of synch with each other—or something like that—and, whoah, she sees three-dimensional moirés rippling around her. Faint pale purple or maybe even ultraviolet patterns, lively and improbable as air currents.

The underling grids that create the 3D moirés aren't just sheets, you understand, they're solids filling the whole frikkin room. The 3D moiré is generated by a pair of patterns like gelatinous, transparent, 3D blueprints for billion-room apartment buildings—two patterns like virtual-reality honeycombs, or like rubbery jungle-gyms. These two underlying cell structures are ever so slightly, and ever so deliciously, out of phase with each other—and the interfering overlap engenders glorious, tasty shapes that caper around Zoe's room like dreamtigers.

For a minute she imagines that she herself is a moiré dreamtiger. No realer, and no unrealer. A sum of aethereal grids, why not. And in her ears she hears a symphony of wavering interference beats, emerging from a stereo pair of orchestras, each of them ever so a tiny bit out of tune with the other. *Vive la différence*, baby. Long story short---Goob-goob looks like a dreamtiger.

I like this. I think I'm ready to go now. Time to start the "Goob-goob" chapter at last. Maybe I'll do a little work on it today.

April 17, 2016. The Flat Cow

I haven't written in these *Notes* for a couple of weeks, but I have been working on the novel—despite yet another unpleasant interruption. [By the way, on April 19, 2016, I used a lot of this section as a blog post that I called "["Pokes from the Muse."](#)"]

On April 5, 2016, I went in for another hip operation at Stanford Hospital. My infection was gone, so the surgeon put in another hip socket and femur ball. He gave me a double-rotation

non-dislocating hip like I'd wanted in the first place, six months ago. The long way round. This final operation involved much blood-letting, transfusions of three "units" of blood, four hours on the operating table, a fresh hairline crack in my femur, and cutting through muscles to install clamp-support rings around the damaged femur. Intense pain-killers afterwards, and as always I'm working to damp them down. Three months of rehab ahead. I'm wearing a leg brace for six weeks, even though I don't like to. My left thigh muscle is like fruit-leather, and painful to move. So stiff I can't get into the driver's seat of my car. I'm doing rehab on the thigh. Slowly starting to believe this is the the final fix. Maybe by late June or early July we can fly to Budapest.

I got back to the novel surprisingly soon after the operation. Like, I *need* to go into my fictive world to escape boredom, anxiety, and pain. To forget my ragged self.

I wanted the kids to go meet Goob-goob, and be sent back to New Eden, in the Earth area. Plan is for Goob-goob to dump them into a jet stream. Right now they're going to ride over the Pit where the stream loads up with saucers being puffed out by Groon. I need to set it up so they aren't attacked by all those saucers en route to New Eden.

I had three muse-flashes to help me out.

Flash 1. John Shirley sent me a link to a super detailed online image of Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*. And while panning and zooming around in there I found an image of Salvador Dali! Bosch and Dali the great Surrealists synchronistically, achromatically, conspiring to place this image here and now for me to find. "Street surrealist" that I am, as Bill Gibson puts it in his intro to the *Wares Trilogy*.

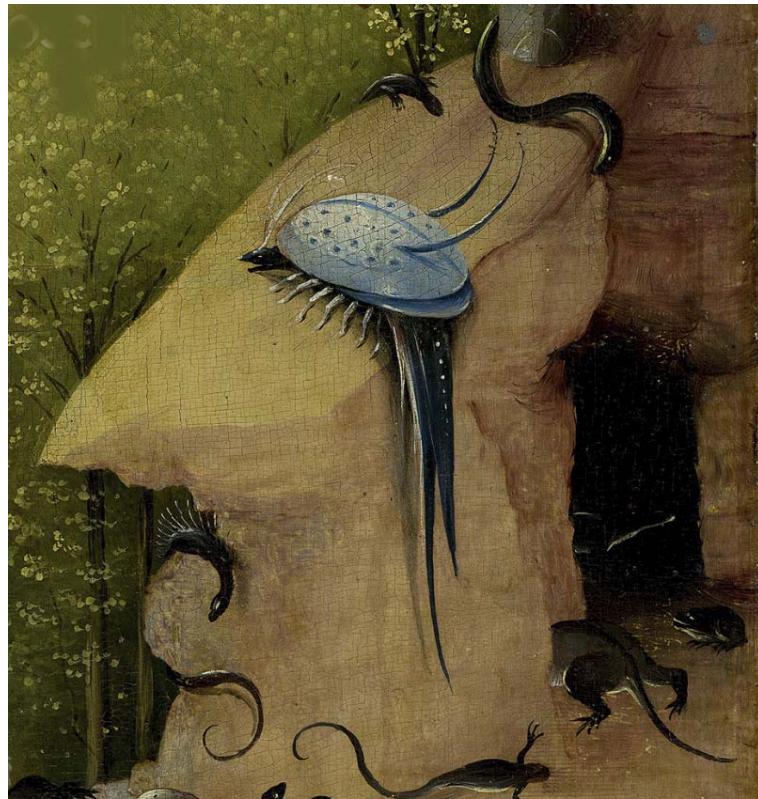


Figure 41: Salvador Dali in Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*

Flash 2. While I was gearing up for the encounter with Goob-goob, out of the blue, I started thinking about the Bible story of Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego. I already had the idea my novel's three kids should pass through Goob-goob. Much more interesting to walk through a god than to stand there talking to her like she's a face on a wall-monitor. She's like a *door*. So, yeah, going through her should be like Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego in the fiery furnace. I looked up the story in the Book of Daniel, and learned that an angelic or god-like fourth figure appears in the furnace with the kids. A mysterious form who may play some role later on.

While Googling for images, I found a Beastie Boys 1989 cut, "Shadrach," great words, very wild, and a video hand-colored by, I think, Jauch. The words not about the legend, and hard to summarize. "I once was lost but now I'm found / The music washes over and you're one with the sound / / Ride the wave of fate it don't ride me / Being very proud to be an M.C."

You can see the fourth figure (the fourth Beastie Boy?) out of the corner of your eye, but you can't quite see this being directly. I thought of the so-called "[third man factor](#)" experienced by polar explorers and by marooned sailors—although here this is actually a *fourth* man, not a third. Is this new being a quantum mix of the three kids? A quantum superposition? But I need to know what he or she looks like.

Flash 3. I had the idea of a so-called flat cow. Shaped kind of like a saucer, but smoother, more discus-like, and covered with nappy, brindle-pattern calfskin cow hair. And her side unzips like a coin purse so the kids can hide inside. Zoe names her Yulia (at first I used the comic name "Flarp," but "Yulia" is better.). She showed up unexpectedly while I was writing the

scene where my kids enter the door through Goob-goob—she rammed into Scud's back.

I still need to make up a logical explanation for the flat cow. Not worried about that. I believe in the Surreal hard SF approach: *Vision first, Logic later.*

So the flat cow is the analogue of the fourth figure in fiery furnace. And, fine, I might go so far as to say she's a quantum superposition of Zoe, Villy, and Scud.

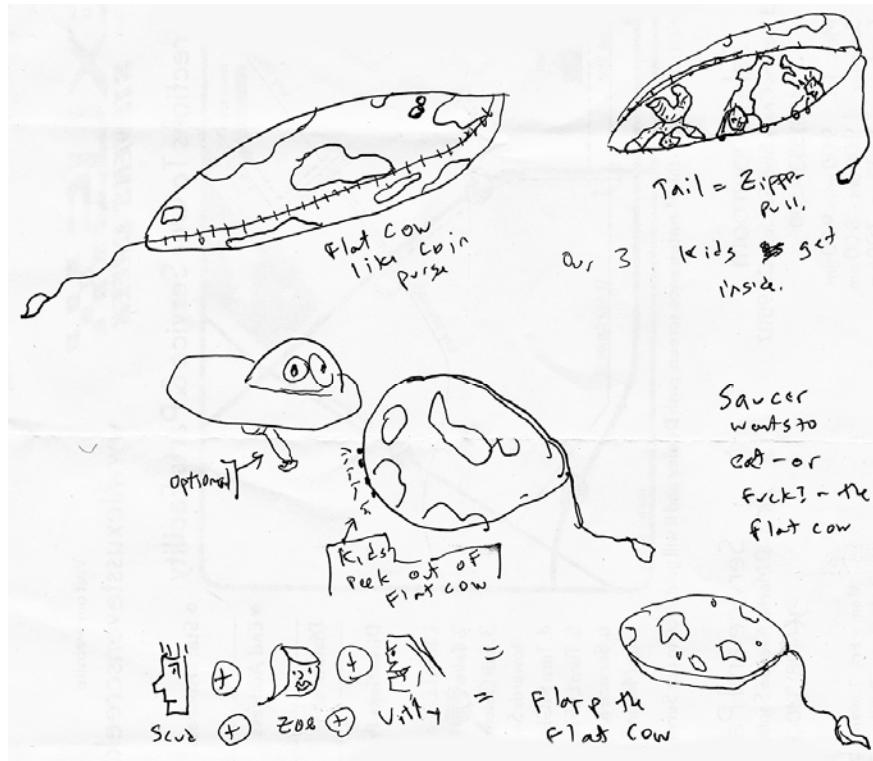


Figure 42: Sketches of the Flat Cow.

Here's an esoteric notion that I probably won't use. In the higher physics of mappyworld, a "flat cow" is a term that literally means "quantum superposition of any set of objects, producing a new superposed object." And—for reasons so erudite that I haven't invented them yet—the flat cow sum of any set of objects does happen to indeed resemble a bulging disk covered with calfskin and which moos. The number of spots on the cow indicate how many objects it's based on. Cf. a vector space generated by a basis, Riemann sum, quantum superposition, composition of functions, weighted average, tensor product—it's a routine mathematico-physical expression.

Mappyworld divorce counselor. Who gets the house, hubby or wife? Generate a flat cow based on the man, the woman, and the house. And then listen to this flat cow's moos.

Is there an easier explanation for where the flat cow came from? Might flat cows be commonly seen? Relatives of the saucers? No, I think they come from Goob-goob, akin to the Aristos. A food stock animal for the Aristos in fact. But of great teep sensitivity, sponge-like, so our flat cow does absorb or possess a caricature-level personality that's a mix of Zoe, Villy, and Scud.

I have a mental image of one of the saucers attacking or molesting the flat cow that hides the kids. Either the saucer takes a jagged shark-bite out of the flat cow or it extrudes a tube that it

tries to insert into the flat cow. Not clear to the kids if this is a penis or a feeding tube. But highly unwelcome in either case. Scud shoos it off with a dark energy zap from his wand. Kills it, in fact.

April 21-26, 2016. The End is Nigh

This is a big, multisection entry. I'll track the progress by date in this first section, and be repeatedly revising the sections below.

April 21, 2013. So I finished Chapter 26 with the ride inside the flat cow, and got them back from the million mile road trip. And now it's time for the closing chapters. I just now printed out my old outline for the ending, and I'll reread and revise that over the next couple of days. I'll make this into a multi-topic entry, with subsections on some of the issues that I need to resolve.

April 22, 2013. Right away I see that I need to make the ending faster. I had five more chapters in the old outline, but three should be enough. Think in terms of a three-act play. Plus, okay, a very short final epilog chapter as well. And don't go off on tangents or start introducing more characters. Be tying up loose strings. And if it's too much trouble to connect back to some of the old stubs, just drop them.

April 23, 2016. Light dawns. Not *all* saucers are evil vampire leeches. Just the leaders. But the common mass of saucers are fun-loving vagabonds. We must support these rebels & crush the GOP-like ruling-class parasite saucer faction! Topple the dictator-like despot Groon! I tell this to Sylvia and she says, "The bagpipe Groon is controlling the bad saucers with a bagpipe tune!"

April 24, 2016. Figuring out the details of Groon's saucer-processing, and of his two-way jet streams. Revising the text around all mentions of New Eden. Changed the human settlement's name to Berky.

April 25, 2016. Revising the text around all mentions of New Eden, also around all mentions of saucers, because now we have two kinds of saucers. The SLF or Saucer Liberation Front vs. the GOP or Groon Owned Parasites. Not that I'll really use those initials. I'm also chipping away at some of the items in the big ["To Do" section](#).

April 26, 2016. In the morning I worked on a [diagram](#) of Groon recycling slave saucers and spawning new ones. Then continued searching along, "saucer" by "saucer," doing fixes at each spot. I did this for a few hours yesterday, and all day today, dawn to dusk and I'm still not done. I did take three or four hours off to work on a *Flat Cow* painting in the afternoon.

MISCELLANY

Saucer pearls. When the kids land in Szep City they have no saucer pearls. They need two or three for the Last Battle. Perhaps they get one from the Flat Cow who is in fact a saucer? They feel it in her meat. Or, I think best, the freedom-fighting good saucers give them some in New Eden.

New Eden Space Friends. They are devoted to supporting the cause of the good saucers against the bad ones. Zoe's Dad has to do something for the plot.

Why Maisie told Yampa and Pinchley to get Zoe. Because Maisie looks up to Zoe, and because she knows Zoe can learn to play the hop tune. And because Zoe's father told her to do it.

Zoe's Mom's Car. Whoever hops back will have to fit into that scene.

Flat Cow. I'm gonna have the Flat Cow admit that she is in fact a saucer, but a good one. She is in fact the general of the Saucer Liberation Front.

Zoe's Dad and Sunny Weaver. Proud of Zoe.

HUMAN SETTLEMENT IN NEW EDEN

I have some humans living in a settlement in the saucer basin of in New Eden. I'd been calling the settlement Drop City, after R. Crumb and T. C. Boyle places, but I need a better name. And then I thought of the name Happy Valley, just wanting to make it sound stupid. But now I realize it's not a stupid place. It's a cradle of freedom. The center of the Saucer Liberation Front. The base of operations against the Parasite Saucer Faction

What if we call it New Berkeley? That makes sense, in that the real (old) Berkeley is/was a center of leftie activism. But I can't have New Eden *and* New Berkeley, can I? And I want to keep New Eden because, at least from Groon's point of view, it *is* an Eden. So riff off the Berkeley name in a different way. Berzerkeley or Berzerkistan. The first name is the one that most people use but it's a little stale by now. I personally like the second, it's mainly used in *Doonesbury* as a name of a fictional country like Kazakhstan. Saucer Berkeley. Oh, just call it Berky. I like cute, cozy names.

SAUCERS AND GROON

It turns out there are two kinds of saucers. The regular, curious, lovable cheerful saucers. And the driven zombie-like saucers harvesting smeel for Groon. There are some saucers who'd be bad anyway, and they tend to be trusties of Groon. Like prison guards, sergeants, slave masters, foremen of captive work crews. Like Republican bosses. Greed heads. Bullies like Uncle Boldog. Groon eggs them on, streamlines their theft process.

By the way, I don't think "Groon" is that great of a name. Words for bagpipe. Dudelsack. The Big Honk. Can't find a better name, though. And it's good that Groon is like "groan," which connotes bagpipe noise. And a sense of being damned in a kind of Hell.

Anyway, Groon has enslaved the saucer race to serve as his scavengers. Groon isn't a saucer himself. Not only is there a flow of saucers from the Pit to Earth, there's a reverse flow from New Eden to the Pit, with saucers bringing smeel and dark energy to the insatiable Groon. And what Groon doesn't consume or dole out to his favored enforcers, he ships back to his home world Gouda X-9.

Groon has a history of relocating to new and particularly fat smeel lodes to cut down on his jet stream work. We can suppose Szep City is run down, stripped bare by Groon's depredations.

The saucer who attacks the Flat Cow is a mean one, a guard, but most of the saucers in the jet stream are newbies. I can't decide if the Flat Cow is a saucer.

DOUBLE JET STREAMS

Groon sends the saucers out via jet stream, and draws them back by a twinned jet stream. I could simply have a pair of parallel streams—like a divided freeway. Or I might have the jet stream like a Benard convection cell, a type of toroidal motion. Suppose Groon blows from his pipe making an outbound stream, but that, at the center of his pipe, he sucks through a smaller pipe making an inbound stream. So we have concentric countercurrents. The outer shell moves towards New Eden and the inner core returns to Groon. Slightly confusing—and perhaps not physically justifiable—but more pleasing than the freeway.

We might expect von Karman vortex street dissipation, but we can imagine an unseen dark energy containing wall or mesh. We might worry about fierce shear at the interface between

the inbound inner tube and the outbound outer tube. Well, you could damp down the speed so it's only fast at the center of the inbound tube and in the mid-ring of the outbound one.

I can't visualize the proper bogus-tech gimmick to make the concentric flows work. I do know that a Benard convection cell has this type of flow, but I don't think they're ever single isolated cells that are thousands of miles long, and with no convection involved.

GROON'S BAGPIPE SONG

I'll go with Bosch and view bagpipes as essentially sinful or even evil. Good go-to candidates for SF aliens. I mean just *look* at them. Floppy sneaky things, howling and gnarly. And they somehow emerged in *every* country! Enslaving and hypnotizing all who hear their mind numbing sound. There's one really *big* bagpipe who in fact controls most of the flying saucers. At that's Groon.

Groon creates the dual jet streams with his horns. A high, thin song that enchants the saucers. Hypnotizes them. They love being in the streams, it's the supreme experience of their lives.

HOW TO MERGE SKY CASTLE WIND AND GROON JET STREAM?

How to I fit these together? The thing under the cloud could be more of a shear, a gale, rather than a jet stream per se. The Groon jet stream terminates with Groon in the Pit. Even if it looped through Sky Castle, it would be full of inbound and outbound saucers—and I'm showing it as empty. I want the thing of them being in an empty gale and seeing the crowded Groon dual jet stream coming up.

GROON'S PROCESSING

Groon has several sacs and sets of tubes, as shown below.

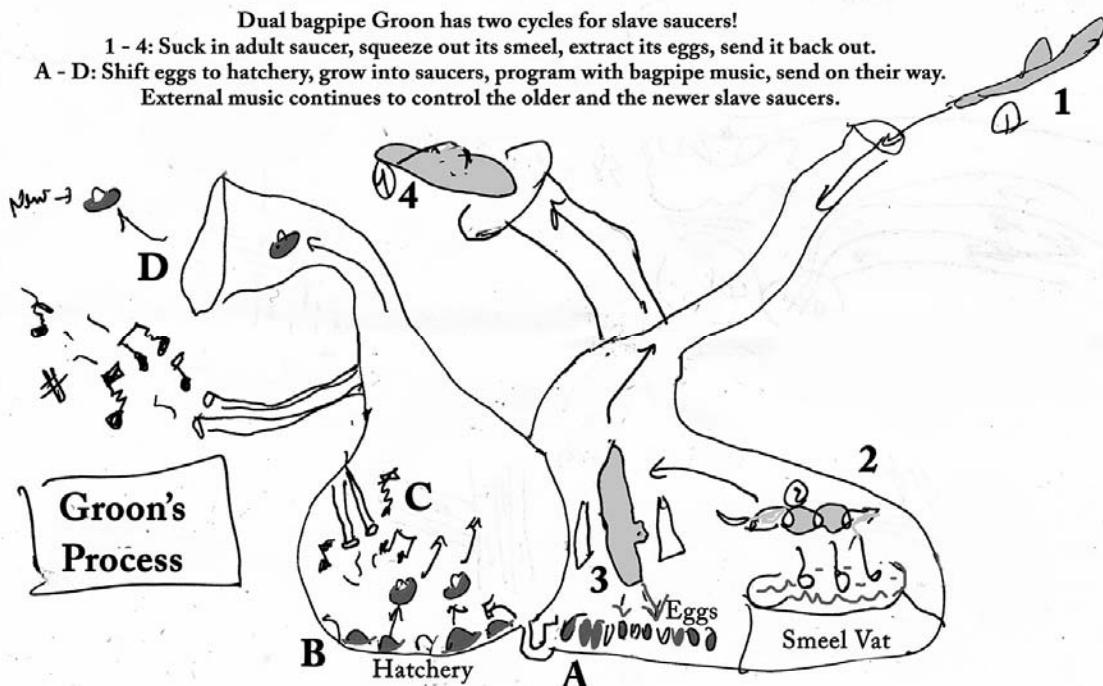


Figure 43: Groon's Two Cycles

Groon's body is a bagpipe with two sacks, the recycler and the hatchery. Although actually, there's no reason to have two separate sacks. Could be one big sack with kind of a partition in it. Like a human heart, come to think of it. But here, first time out, I drew it with two sacks.

Anyway, here are the things he does.

- 1. Sucks in slave saucers, rebel saucers, and henchmen saucers.
- 2. Squeezes the smeel from the slaves and rebels, kills the rebels, and fattens up henchmen saucers
- 3. Strips eggs and milt from the slaves and henchmen.
- 4. Sends out the processed slave and henchmen saucers.
- A & B. Cultures and hatches fertilized eggs.
- C. Indoctrinates the hatchlings via his music.
- D. Sends out the newborn saucers.
- Continually plays his music to the outer world, broadcasting via the jet streams to control his slave.
- Stores excess smeel for himself to keep the dual jet stream running
- Once in awhile relocates.

HOP POWER

Source of.

Why did Zoe ever have the power to hop from ballyworld to mappyworld and back? Maisie showed her the riff. Secretly hoping Zoe would fight the saucers. Maybe Pinchley and Yampa had weakened the unspace distance in this area. Maisie already had a little tunnel. Zoe's Dad wanted Zoe to go off with Pinchley and Yampa. The saucers have tunnels. Is the unspace

here like termite-riddled wood with lots of tunnels in it? So it's weak and it would be kind of easy to bust out a big chunk and get that Big Dig tunnel.

Limitations upon.

I'd said hopping only worked in basins neighboring Van Cott. Why not have it just work only in Van Cott? Or near the marketplace, and Saucer Hall, and wherever in Van Cott they popped out, some road in town. Then we'd need for Zoe to get from New Eden back to Van Cott before jumping home.

The reason I said it *might* work in Thuddland was so the saucers wouldn't already attack her there. But maybe the saucers in Thuddland weren't mean ones. Even though in fact Zoe can't hop from Thuddland, and, we'll say, nor can she hop from New Eden

I am revising the [outline](#) again.

April 28, 2016. Visiting Groon

I pretty well have to let the readers get a close look at Groon. I went back to the "Stratocast" chapter and had them zoom down into Groon's Pit at the end of the stratocasting car trip—Groon and the saucers are so into their reproduction cycle routine that they don't notice the purple whale. The kids get quite close, and have a good look-see. The huge sack is nearly transparent.

I *could* have worked in a visit to Groon near the start of the ride-the-flat-cow trip along the jet stream to New Eden. They're hidden in the Flat Cow and could can get away with it—provided we admit by then that the Flat Cow is indeed a saucer. But I couldn't wait that long, and it'd be boring to go right back to times in a row, so I won't do that.

But we *will* go inside Groon in one of the final chapters, like courageous Zoe, Villy, or Scud goes in there with some kind of commando bomb. Groon's like an abandoned factory by hen—he's got his jet stream turned off.

I think of Groon's zoological correlative as a tunicate or sea squirt. The most primitive animal with a spinal cord.

By the way, today I just about finished a painting called "Riding the Flat Cow." As often happens, the painting isn't a precise match for what's in the novel. In a painting you have to think about what visually works. And putting one person on top of the cow is better than trying to depict three (unseen) people inside it. Also, I found the cow looked better in the painting with eyes and ears, although, in the context of the written story, I like having her blank on the outside, somehow to me that's funnier, and makes the flat cow more obviously like a saucer. And I slipped a copy of the "Royal Pupa" into this painting as well.



Figure 44: “Riding the Flat Cow.” Acrylic, April 28, 2016. 24” x 20”.

Maybe I've already mentioned that, looking ahead, I'm seeing the flat cow as the supreme commanding general of the Saucer Liberation Front troops.

May 2-3, 2016. Toward a “Shooting Script” for the Ending

I hope to start the end chapters soon. Meanwhile I've been doing a lot of groundwork on the manuscript. Checking off things on the To Do list. Like making two kinds of saucers, describing Groon, saying the flat cow is a saucer, clarifying the jet stream connection between Groon's Pit and New Eden. I kind of feel like if I continue straightening up long enough, then I'll see a clear path to an ending. If I tidy up enough, I'll find the unknown lost thing that I'm looking for. I'll list here some things that are on my mind. Some of these reiterate things I mentioned earlier.

MULTIPLE ER TUNNELS

Los Perros is a special saucer-rich region, they have a tradition of saucer sightings. The unspace between Los Perros and Van Cott is riddled with holes, like termite-eaten wood, or like a ship-worm-attacked clamshell. The saucers make these wormholes and slither through. Zoe, Maisie, Pinchley, Yampa, and Zoe's father all have squeezed through. There's so many holes that the “wood” is spongy and it's possible to knock loose a whole big chunk of the unspace barrier

I like that image, but I'm not sure it fits. We're talking about two branes of 3D space, with a 4D bulk space or unspace in between them. The traditional way to connect them is via physical soap-bubble-style wormholes that look like ER bridges, the way I often draw them. So then it's a matter of coalescing a lot of narrow wormholes into one big one. Rather than knocking out a big chunk.

Yet another image: the closed-off US/Mexican border. With lots of secret tunnels under

it. The tunnels might merge into a superhighway.

[Could the wormholes surfaces be drilled-out surfaces of bulk space? So the bulk space or unspace would be a solid, like coal. And you drill a 4D hypertunnel by making a void inside the tunnel. And then the hypersurface of the tunnel is your wormhole. I sort of like this, but then the wormhole isn't like a sausage skin that can come loose like a pocket universe that then shrinks to nothing. So, no, don't think of the bulk as solid.]

So I'll go with the ER soap-film-like tubes. Here's a drawing of what I have in mind.

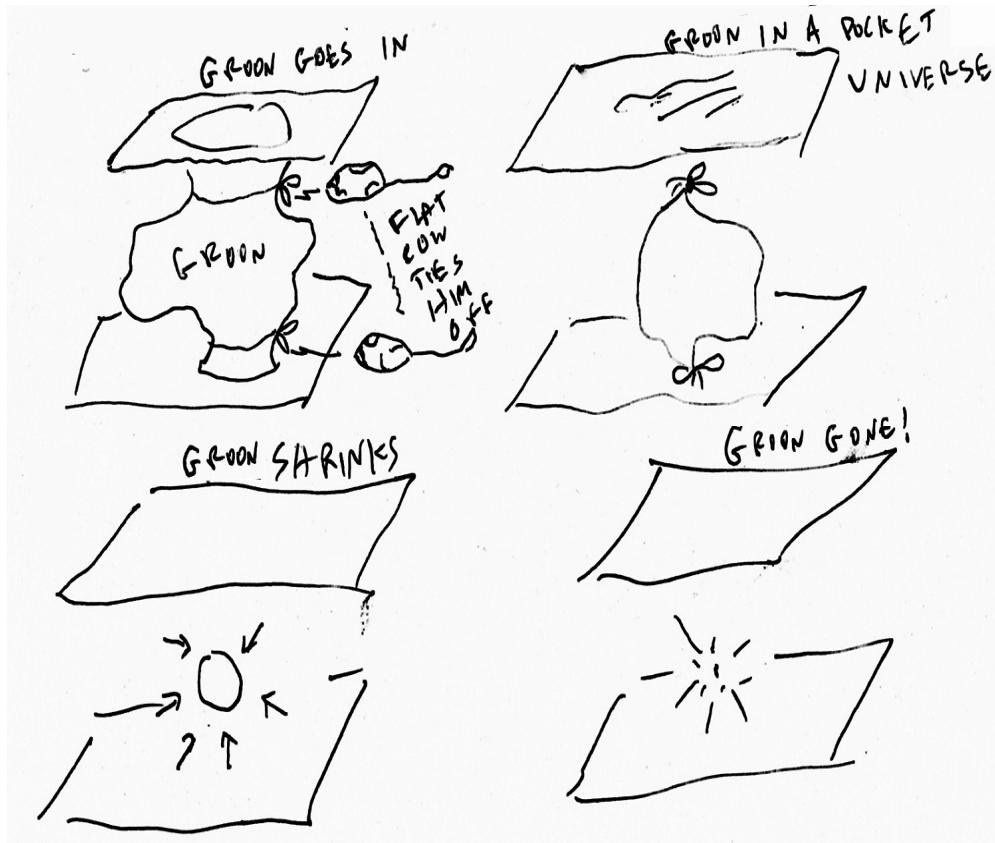


Figure 45: Merge wormholes into fat one. Enter Groon. Isolate as a pocket. Let shrink.

Something I need to remember—and that I'd been forgetting up till now—is that the mouths of the ER bridges look like odd spheres. You know, the Xmas ball with a different world shown inside the ball, like I had in *Realware*. They are *not* holes in the ground like mineshafts.

I've been talking about a Big Dig and imagining a cavernous excavation tunnel in the ground, but I need to alter that. Ditto for my "sinkhole" image of the Los Perros High School disappearing.

Nevertheless, Saucer Hall and, eventually, Los Perros High will disappear. If not into a sinkhole, then how? Into big huge ER bridge mouths. How does that work, and how does it look?

First of all, laying the groundwork, I have to go back and put Xmas-ball ER mouths at the openings of the tunnels that Zoe hopped through.

Then have a few ER gate balls floating around in Saucer Hall. And later have a bunch of

them congregating there and merging. And then a really big one is being pumped up by—who? Groon, of course? He's inflating it like a bubble with one of his chanters? Or with music and meditation? Or by drilling a bunch of thin ER bridges and letting them merge together, accumulating like bubbles in the suds of a sink of dishes, and the bubbles merge and get bigger.

Frenzied back-and-forth hopping by the slave saucers creates a honeycomb of tunnels that can merge into the big one.

LAST MINUTE FLASHES

We *have* to do a scene of Groon the bagpipe arriving. Flopping hugely down into Van Cott, *thudd*, right on top of Saucer Hall—or, better, a block or two away, and then hugely slithering to it. And then getting to work on the big ER bridge.

Villy inside the 4D Flat Cow takes off into unspace and ties off the tunnel ends. He rides in that 4D cow like A Square rode in or on A Sphere. The cow is 4D because it got so many caraway seeds from Goob-goob.

Earthside, when the big tunnel pops through, the high-school is suddenly warped into a forced perspective where it seems to recede towards the heretofore unseen city of Van Cott. Flailing Groon is visible in the background, growing.

When the bubble is cut off, it takes the high-school with it. So the high-school seems to dwindle and disappear. Space seals over and you have an empty lawn.

(Burned on the grass: CLASS OF ???? FLUNKERS. Villy's little joke, burning that in place. Actually I don't see time for that in the story flow.)

Dad's been living in Berkys since before the start of the book.

COSMIC BEATDOWN: HIGHLIGHTS FOR AN ENDING

I'm still working on my 3 + 1 chapter outline for the ending of *Million Mile Road Trip*. What I had was too slow. I'll throw out some of it and jam the rest into an I-can't-stop sequence of big scenes. Don't worry about chapter breaks or POV or wheenk or the minor characters. Make it one giant long rush. And let the POV wander as required, putting in section breaks for clarity. And if I want I can in fact have chapter breaks—but first I want the rush. I'm looking at a double-length final-episode extravaganza, an eyeball-kicks double-page-spread. Call it "Cosmic Beatdown."

I wrote all the highlights below, then repeatedly rewrote the chunks up in the main [Outline](#) section a couple of times, and repeatedly reworked the list of highlights below. Came up with a couple more "To Do" items along the way. I'll take care of those, and then it'll be time to start writing the frikkin ending!

- Nunu and the saucer-babies embracing
- The jet stream bursts and saucers are all over
- Maisie presents Villy with some special kelp rope from Surf World, strong enough to tie off an 4D ER tunnel.
- Yulia says she got 4D from caraway seeds. She and Villy disappear into unspace.
- Zoe, Scud, and Maisie drive over the ridge to Van Cott, buzzed by some large slave saucers. A few saucerbabies in the car.
- On the ridge, the kids see Groon jetting through the air all floppy and with feelers, pushed by blast from his chanter, flops down near Saucer Hall in Van Cott wallows around.

- Groon's saucers hopping back and forth over and over at Saucer Hall, making the separation porous and crowded with ER bridges..
- Zoe and Villy hop back in front of Mom's car. Cornered by Mom, trying to explain where she's been. Huge number of saucer sightings in Los Perros. The next morning Zoe has to go to the graduation. Her Dad's old girlfriend Sunny Weaver is there. Talk about Dad luring saucers.
- During graduation, as Zoe gets diploma—the *plorp* of the ER tunnel opening. Los Perros high is inside the ER gate. View of Van Cott over there with thousands of saucers and Groon.
- Big saucers come through and are dragging their edges along the ground, catching people, very 1950s, lots of screaming. Sunny Weaver helps calm them down.
- Villy and the flat cow are in raw unspace. They have the special Surf world rope from Maisie and they're tying off the two ends of the ER tunnel.
- Scud and Zoe ride their saucer pearls into the tunnel and are blocking Groon from coming through too fast. Shooting blasts at him with their pearls. Zoe is playing music that jams Groon's riffs, and Scud is casting spells with his wand.
- Groon responds with jet stream blasts from his chanter. Zoe gets inside Groon and tickles him.
- The mouths of the tunnel are closing down. Zoe and Scud barely escape.
- Villy and the flat cow have the tunnel severed from the two branes. Villy plays some music at it that sets the sausage skin to relaxing...and then it shrinks down to nothing. *Pop*. Groon is gone.
- Villy is lost. He follows Zoe's music back to Los Perros.
- The brane in Los Perros seals over. There's a blank lawn where the high school used to be. A hillock.

May 4-5, 2016. Jewels, ER Gates, and Saucer Pearls.

This morning I did another rewrite on the outline for the three closing chapters, currently: 27. *Enter Groon*. 28. *Cosmic Beatdown (double length)*. *Epilog*. And I did a little more revising of the list of highlight scenes in yesterday's post. And I added a few "[To Do](#)" items. And now in the evening I'm thinking about a sensitive issue.

If the saucers use Einstein-Rosen bridges, also called ER wormholes, to hop back and forth, then Zoe presumably hops the same way, so how do the ER gates relate to Zoe's initial gem + music hop scene? And where does this lead us? Lots of thoughts, which I list below. And a bunch more To Do items.

By the way, what should they call these tubes? "ER bridge" is kind of formal, and presupposes knowing about Einstein and Rosen, which most of them won't, especially not in mappyworld. "Wormhole" is stale. "Hypertunnel" is easy. Or "untunnel" since they talk about unspace instead of hyperspace. Even better: "Unny tunnel." I'll go with that. I think I used "unny" to mean creepy in an earlier novel. But that would be okay.

I've got so many To Dos that it'll take at least a week to do them all, and maybe two weeks. The upside of this is that afterwards the novel will be tighter and the bogosity generators will be tighter and more (para)logical. Also the plot will be better.

ER GATES AND ZOE JEWELS.

In the first hop scene, Zoe uses her horn to levitate a particular half-silvered bead with a

drilled thread-hole in it. A ladder slides out of the hole, and Yampa climbs down. And I present the music as being the magical ingredient that opened the gate.

I think it will be interesting to say there are semi-permanent ER gates in our space, and they look like shiny balls of varying sizes. The size of the ball can change: it can dwindle down to atomic size, or it can be inflated by the smeel of human attention, or they might merge with each other like soap bubbles.

We might suppose that an ER gate can be open or closed. That is, there might be an impervious membrane or force field at its surface (recall that an ER gate's surface is a circle in 2D Flatland, and is a 3D sphere in our space). So you could have a little ER gem that feels hard or perhaps rubbery. But under certain circumstances—like when you play your horn, or put some mental mojo on it—the surface could become permeable. You could stick a finger through it, or walk through it, as if it were a soap film.

What about the size issue? How can a gem be an ER gate for a full-size humanoid? Well, I can imagine squeezing the metric grid lines to make that work. Just imagine that the metric lines bunch up around the gate and are like a micro grid on the inside, so it feels big in there. But even so the outer gate might fit inside a millimeter-sized circle drawn in the macro grid that lies immediately beyond the gate. So the gate an fit inside a pearl, but you'd also see the full-size people inside the gate, dancing on that shrunken metric grid. And when they come out, they're like toothpaste, or rather, construction foam that balloons up as it comes out of the tube.

What about the drilled hole in the bead Zoe was using? I don't see a good use for that hole—it's a different direction from the 4d transport axis of the ER bridge. The drilled hole seems to be a distraction. Noise. I think I'd better drop it, and suppose that these ER beads are being displayed, like large valuable gems or high-end pearls, that is, in settings, as opposed to being drilled and mounted on strings. Even without the drilled hole, Yampa's ladder could cutely poke out of the surface of the gem.

Another point re. drilling is that you *can't* really drill through an ER bridge gate. Your drill line would go into the mouth and down the throat and off into infinity on the other world—and it wouldn't come back up. The effective diameter is infinite, since there's a whole cosmos squeezed into the middle.

I might suppose that someone—Maisie?—planted an ER gate among Zoe's jewels. I might also suppose that, down the line, Zoe is making ER gate amulets or brooches.

Note that Zoe should bring the ER gate pearl along in the car, and that's how they jump. And then maybe she loses the pearl later on. Like maybe Nunu steals it.

And maybe we should ditch the African rattle she was using. A red herring.

ER GATES AND SAUCER PEARLS

If we have ER gates as jewels we're facing some confusion with the saucer pearls. It's not good to have two very similar-looking artifacts that do totally different things. I'd like to unify.

So...how might a levitating-and-zapping saucer pearl also be an ER wormhole gate? Possibly an *enhanced* gate, but still a gate. It's a nice thing to do, as then each saucer has an ER bridge at its core. One might even say that saucers are animals who evolved to form around an ER gate, and to nurture it and magnify it so that they (the animals) can fly and can zap things and perhaps can hop between worlds.

To make the task easier let's suppose that an ordinary garden-variety ER gem does not give you levitation or zapping powers. The thing has to be enhanced by the smeel that a saucer

feeds into it. A 4D smeel vortex. The vortex can suck at the other world and by this power hold something in place. Like a suction cup, in a way. As for the zapping, well, that's a Wimshurst machine or Van de Graf generator or electric dynamo kind of thing, with the dark energy sparks emerging from the rotation of the smeel.

[Re. 4D-mediated levitation, in my short story, “The Indian Rope Trick Explained” I proposed using 4D thorns for a kind of levitation in that the thorns stuck into the 4D aether, which was to be a solid underlayment beneath our space. I may have been inspired by the writings of C. H. Hinton, who in, I believe, *A Flat World*, had something like this about prayer producing levitation because when you pray you did a “third-eye tooth” into the aether. But the thorn idea won’t really fit my needs here, as I’m specifically thinking of an ER bridge—and even if the bridge was like a thorn, it might be awkward to, say, fly along while levitating—you’d have to be dragging the thorn along through some conveniently located solid material in the other world. If you wanted to be crude, you could attach the other end of your ER bridge—the ball over in the other world—you could fasten it to a big bird, or an ornithopter, or a flying drone. But then you’d be hitting an Occam’s Razor scenario. That is, to fly across the room, I teep to the other world, and get someone there to carry the other end across the room so when I’m dragged it looks like I’m flying, but if I’m gonna do that, why not have a bird or an ornithopter in this world.]

Anyway, let’s stick to the idea of saying a saucer pearl is an unanchored wormhole ER bridge and try to get levitation out of that. As I mentioned before the excursus, we might go for a suction thing. And we’d want to suppose the tunnel has a fairly high modulus of elasticity, so that if you constrain or impel the position of one end of the ER bridge, then the other end is constrained to some extent as well. Pulled along as if by a spring. So if I have an ER bridge in my body and if I can make the ana end of be dragged upwards by some force, then I’ll be dragged upwards as well, that is, I’ll levitate. And the force can be a 4D vortex that’s “sucking at the other world.” And there’d have to be a concomitant effusion from my end of the ER gate. And this could take the form of dark energy. And rather than radiating this out in real time, I could accumulate the dark energy on the surface of the gate-ball—and later release it as a lovely big zap. So I’m saying that a dark-energy-sucking ER bridge could provide for both levitation and zap.

Thinking some more about this levitation thing, unless you’re careful, the saucer pearl will drag you against forward motion. I want it to drag against downward motion, but I also want the ability to turn off this effect so I can land. I need an ability to aim the vortex thread (upward for levitation), and the ability to dial down its intensity (for free flight).

Alternate explanation: an ER bridge has inertia and resist motion through the 4D aether. That would be no help, though, as then saucers with ER pearls would tend to stay fixed in one spot.

Finally I go back and look at my existing text, and I already has a perfectly good “bogosity generator” explanation. The saucer pearl spins and generates a kink in the gravitational field, a kind which you can ride like a spacetime surfer. Of course, how obv.

UBIQUITOUS ER GATES

Suppose there are ubiquitous nano ER bridges that are like Velcro holding together the mappyworld and the ballyworld. These account for the synch between the planets and the basins.

I would not require these bridges to be “short” in length, as I want to have some room in between the universes so that the bridges aren’t tangling with each other, and so that Groon has room to flounder around after Villy cuts loose his tunnel’s ends.\Peeling an ER Bridge

So a saucer pearl is an ER bridge gate, but with a transparent smeel shell over it that keeps you from going inside. Dark energy can pass through the shell, but not matter. To peel it, you need a certain vibration that shatters the smeel shell.

CARAWAYS MAKE YOU HYPERTHICK IN 4D

How is it that caraway seeds enabled Yulia the flat cow to have a substantial 4D thickness? Suppose that some quality of the seeds lengthened the strands of the Velcro-like nano ER gates in her body.

I keep feeling like it’s the curve of a caraway seed that’s important. And their unique flavor, according to Wikipedia, is based on the essential oils [carvone](#), [limonene](#), and [anethole](#). And, says Wikipedia, they’re “fruits” not “seeds,” but that just means that the biologically precise seed is a dot inside the curved fruit that we call a seed. And 28% of the world’s caraway seeds are grown in Finland, of all places.

I’m thinking the oils are some weird enzyme-like or catalyst-like growth hormone for ER tunnels, makes them relax and get longer. That’s why the seeds are curved. *Boing!*

May 11, 2016. Time Problem.

So I did all my To Do things, and I pasted the by now very detailed outline of the “New Eden” chapter into my novel manuscript, and I’m writing the chapter by expanding the outline. I was having trouble starting on it—with so much at stake—so it’s good to have the crutch, or trellis, or skeleton, of an outline to get me going.

But just now I was updating my story [time line](#), and I thought of a time-synch problem. I want the graduation day scene to be on Friday, June 3—the kind of date when graduation typically is. And the book has to end at the graduation, I have a big scene set for that. I had the book starting on Thursday, May 26, on the second-to-last day of class. And there’s a week of action over in ballyworld. So that’s all fine.

But earlier, I had this bright idea that every time Zoe hops back, she’ll go back to the spacetime location where she started, that is, back to the May 26 evening on rainy Los Perros Boulevard, with Mom’s SUV about to run her down. But now I see problems with this.

If Zoe hops back to May 26, she’d have to wait a week for the graduation, cooling her heels in Los Perros, and we’d lose momentum.

And the seven days in ballyworld...she’s lived through those, but are those days real if no time’s passed on Earth? Well, that’s not such a problem, it’s a typical move for fairytales. The fairytale time has no duration in Earth time. And I hate to drop the desideratum that she always hops back to the same moment—but I kind of like that bit, with the three Zoes.

(Q) So what to do about the seven-day wait?

(A) Change chapter one to Thursday, June 2, the day before graduation. So as not to lose that getting-out-of-school opening scene, I’ll say it was graduation rehearsal day, with the seniors

So, okay, I changed the first chapter to be on graduation rehearsal day. That evening they hop, and have eight days in mappyworld—and never mind about matching the time flow of the

two worlds. They return when they left, spend a night, and go to graduation day.

And, oh wow, come to think of it, now Zoe can play in the talent show. That could be fairly awesome, after all she's been through by then.

May 17-18, 2016. Plowing Through the New Eden Chapter

May 17, 2016.

My method of expanding upon a detailed outline is working for writing this chapter. It's about 2/3 done. Along the way, I had a ton of fixes to do to make all the previous stuff match. I got into the characters' voices, there's a lot of conversation, and I'm totally plowing forward with lots of jokes and heavy thoughts.

I made Zoe's Dad into a real asshole, modeled on this really low-empathy guy my age whom I know (*not me*). I kind of despise the guy in question, so it's fun to show him as an asshole, but then a shred of empathy blossoms within me, and I make a half-hearted attempt to show him, too, as a fellow human being.

One novelty is that I have Scud give a little science talk on unny tunnels (ER bridges), with seven or eight illos that I'll include in the text. Scud is drawing them with his finger on Maisie's touch-sensitive color-changing saucer rim. I still have to do the drawings. It's not really a problem to put drawings in a novel—I did it in *Saucer Wisdom* and in *Spaceland*. And I may well have some of my recent paintings in the book as a different kind of illo. Plates vs. Figures. I'll draw the figures in awhile, but right now I'm on a roll with the writing.

The book seems really good to me, and I'm still completely unsure about how I'll publish it. With my old editor David Hartwell dead, I don't have an automatic place to go to. If I end up with *ugh* a small press, I hope to insist that I get to do a limited edition hardback color-illustrated deluxe edition so I can run a Kickstarter on that edition, and get some *money*, which I would for sure not be getting from a small press. As I've said before, something in me really rebels and going to a small press when I myself already *am* a small press.

But this is all hypothetical—in reality my best shot will be to send it to my agent after it's completely done. I expect to finish it by July, and then I probably ought to still keep it back and do a read-through and edit, and then send out the resulting second draft.

Anyway, I'll get back to writing tomorrow morning, and I might be able to finish off this, the second to last "real" chapter of the book (with the short epilog chapter still to be done). My schedule tomorrow is blessedly blank and the whole day is mine. Well, we *are* going to a dinner party at 6, at a neighbor's, it's a farewell party for our beloved and eccentric 82 year old friend/neighbor Gunnar Vatvedt who is being evicted.

My leg is better all the time. Managed to go in a rowboat day before yesterday, and went to the beach today. We're planning to go to Kauai in late July, and Vienna/Budapest in late August.

May 18, 2016.

The Scud POV "New Eden" chapter has grown so long—especially with all those drawings—that I'm going to split it and have a separate "Going Home" chapter from Zoe's POV. Taking Zoe over the ridge, back through Van Cott to Los Perros, back to Mom's house, off to the graduation, and into the unny tunnel to skirmish with Groon. Really there's no special virtue in having a double-length chapter like I'd been telling myself I was going to do.

And after the Zoe setup chapter, I'll have a Villy's POV chapter for "Cosmic Beatdown." It would be good if he did something to save Zoe, kind of a traditional move, right, hero rescues his girlfriend who's twisted her ankle and fallen to the ground directly in the monster's path.

And then I flip it and have Zoe rescue Villy with her sweet song—because our boy is lost in unspace.

I wrote a funny (to me) [scene](#) about Zoe's Dad seeding the patch of saucer pearls behind the high-school by masturbating onto the ground, but then I coded it up a little so it doesn't say that in plaintext. And I did the final touches on the chapter on May 19, 2016.

May 19-20, 2016. No Ghana Rattle. Pearls & Tunnels Fixes.

As I clarify the saucer pearl / unny tunnel connection, I'm cleaning up the scenes where Zoe hops or tunnels between the world. And now I feel it's too distracting to use the trumpet the first time and then suddenly use the Ghana rattle the second time, and then use the trumpet all the other times.

The only reason I put in the Ghana rattle was because I had one just like it on my desk, obtained at a bargain price from a local world crafts store that went out of business. And I was having fun shaking the rattle and then writing about it.

But for the sake of the readers' sanity, it's better to stick to the horn. So now I removed all the Ghana rattle stuff, even though I like it, and replace it with horn.

And then, before I could do the scene of Zoe tunneling back to Los Perros from Van Cott to fight Groon, before that I had to do a second round of straightening out my descriptions of the unny tunnels and the saucer pearls all through the book. So I searched for the words "pearl" and "hop," and put in, like, eight hours worth of fixes.

The "three Zoes" scene took three revisions (thus far) to smooth it out. Very dodgy stuff. And someone could at some point raise the question of how the same saucer pearl could generate three distinct unny tunnels with three distinct gates located at approximately the same place and time. I'll think of something on that later, maybe. Or maybe leave it as a minor loose thread for geekoid fan to theorize about.

All in all, the setup now looks solid enough for me to move on towards the end.

I'm doing the Zoe at the concert scene. What could happen there? Oh, she's surprised to encounter Maisie in the bathroom, that's something. And they spot the place where the unny tunnel is going to come through. A small but growing saucer pearl beside a mound of saucer meat. Sooo gnarly.

May 21, 2016. Inner Unny Tunnel Pops Saucers. Planning "Cosmic Beatdown".

It occurred to me that if a saucer has a saucer pearl inside its body and it uses the pearl as an unny tunnel, and it then goes through the unny tunnel, then the saucer emerges inside out in the other world. This would normally be lethal. We might even suppose that the inside-out saucer would pop or fall to pieces. Scud needs to draw a picture of this.

Therefore, the saucers can't use their saucer pearls for tunneling. But Groon's slave saucers might be willing to sacrifice themselves by tunneling with their internal pearls. The saucers' legacy world be an unny tunnel which merges with the big one. And then the flesh of their dead bodies would accumulate near Los Gatos High, which would be cool.

So today I put all that in—which meant yet another search through the whole book for instance of the phrase "saucer pearl."

The school will think the meat is a junior prank, a truckload of waste from a rendering company. I should build up the scene of the saucers sacrificing themselves on the steps of Saucer

Hall.

For now Scud has the two new pearls in his knapsack and Zoe's about do to her Jazz Prowlers' performance. Question: will Maisie be there or not? Two options. (a) On the one hand, it seems like Maisie is back in mappyworld, so she won't be at the concert. (b) On the other hand, the time streams aren't fully in synch, given that Zoe's whole eight days in mappyworld happened in the one instant that she was missing from ballyworld. So then maybe a *past* Maisie can be at the concert.

But I think it's too knotty and confusing for the reader to think about either (a) or (b). And, really, I have no special reason for leaving Maisie in mappyworld during the Cosmic Beatdown. What if she tunnels back to ballyworld right before the concert too. And Zoe runs into her in the ladies room where they're washing up. Maisie hopped over because she wanted to see Scud.

And then they play together, and Maisie says she'll keep an eye on the high-school overnight and get Zoe and Scud if the tunnel opens up.

Okay, this is great, but the time match will be even smoother if Maisie jumped over to mappyworld right when Zoe did. I should go back and smooth that in. And Maisie can have been busy getting the revolution ready so people can kill off the leech-saucers after Groon's gone.

I had this one big scene I wanted to do all along, but now I'm not sure where I can fit it in. If anything, it could happen back in Van Cott. It went like this:

"A 1950s-movie-style saucer attack, with floppy saucer leviathans dragging their rims rim along the lawn and along the Main Street of Los Perros [could be Van Cott] with screaming crowds running, and the saucers harvesting people's smeel, and even eating some people's flesh."

I had a mild version of this in the Thuddland jungle, so maybe I should just make more of that scene. But, nah, it really needs to be on a town's main street. And if I try to do it in Los Perros, it deflates the Groon tunnel scene.

How about this. After things are settled in Los Perros, and if I have the *oomph* for another scene, the kids can jump back to mappyworld and help finish off the leech saucers. Or that won't fit in the "Cosmic Beatdown" chapter, it into the then-no-longer-just-an-epilog "What Next?" chapter.

The Zoe chapter is stretching out, so I'm going to move the second projected part of it into the middle of the "Cosmic Beatdown" chapter and have the chap's POV go Villy-Zoe-Villy. In other words, I do (a) Villy POV opener for "Cosmic Beatdown," then (b) Zoe at graduation going inside Groon, then (c) Villy saves her.

In other worlds, I decided to run that trad trope: "girl twists ankle and boy saves her."

May 22-25, 2016. Outlines for "Cosmic Beatdown." Cross-sections of 4D.

Here's an outline I wrote on May 22, 2016. At that time I thought I could structure the chapter in three sections, alternating V-Z-V POV.

Villy is in unspace. He's hovering, waiting to see the tunnel get fat, and waiting to see it get lumpy with Groon. He can see our world *and* mappyworld from 4D space, Yulia is holding him together. He sees inside everything. The growing unny tunnel gate is inside Saucer Hall. And then finally he sees the tunnel and he sees it swelling up.

Zoe at graduation in the morning. Her Dad's creepy ex-girlfriend Sunny Weaver talks about how they encouraged saucers, and how Dad disappeared, and how much Dad hoped for from Zoe. Sunny is on Groon's side, Zoe realizes. Sunny is pro-leech. She is a saucer zombie. There are many saucer zombies in the crowd. When Zoe walks across to get diploma during graduation, with everyone out on the lawn, a giant ER gateway opens up inside the high-school building, turning it rubble, And now Groon is visible in the tunnel. Sunny Weaver and the saucer zombies try and stop Scud and Zoe from going into the gate. Zoe and Scud ride their saucer pearls into tunnel to stall Groon from coming through. Scud uses his wand, and Zoe is playing her instrument. Groon turns on his jet-stream-level chanter blast to push them out of the way. Scud is blown out, but Zoe gets *inside* Groon and messes him up, tickles him, throws him into a fit. But then she can't get out in time. The Van Cott image disappears, that end is tied off. And now the image of Los Perros is getting smaller. Zoe should leave, Scud is yelling to her, but she's stuck somehow, down inside Groon, and Scud speeds away leaving her behind.

Villy lands triumphant in Los Perros and—there's Scud but no Zoe. She got stuck inside the tied-off tunnel with Groon. Villy goes to her rescue. He and flat cow fly out into unspace and dive into the tied-off tunnel. It's shrinking, but not super fast. It's like hell, or the inside of a burning factory. Stuff falling. A steady drone. He gets hold of Zoe and they escape at the last minute.

And then I did some revisions and finished the previous chapter, "Going Home," about Zoe going from New Eden to Van Cott to Los Perros. I end that chapter right when she's about to play her big concert with the Jazz Prowlers. Somehow I couldn't face writing that scene. Too triumphant, too been-done, and god knows I've had enough music in the book already. Also I couldn't think of good *twist* to make the Zoe-playing-in-her-band scene interesting.

And here's an outline I wrote on May 25-26, 2016. In this one, I have / marks to indicate changes of POV.

V/Z 29. Cosmic Beatdown . Villy, inside Yulia the 4D flat cow, is watching the unspace tunnel from the "outside," / Zoe goes to graduation. Maisie spends the night at her house. The zombified Sunny Weaver confronts them at the graduation and warns Zoe not to interfere with the impending advent of the saucers. Scud is nearby. He tells Sunny Weaver that she's crazy and that she sucks. / Villy sees tunnel bobbling around like a sack with a litter of cats inside, something is already going through. / Just as Zoe's getting her diploma, two giant saucers come through, bursting out of the gym. Crowd scatters, screaming. Scud kills one big saucer with his wand. Sunny Weaver jumps on his back and tries to strangle him. Zoe zaps Sunny unconscious to save Scud. The saucer's about to eat them, but it goes for Sunny first, Maisie saves Sunny. Scud zaps the saucer just before it eats them. Maisie is agitated Now Groon is visible in the gate. Maisie hops back to mappy world to come at Groon from the other way. Villy and Zoe fly into the tunnel on their saucer pearls and begin fighting Groon. Scud tries uses his wand against Groon, but it's not enough. Groon turns on his jet-stream-level chanter blast to push Scud out of the tunnel. Scud is blown out. Will Groon escape. Zoe is playing bagpipe on her horn which interests Groon. And she gets *inside* Groon and messes him up, tickles him, throws him into a fit. / Villy begins to tie off the ends of the tunnel with Maisie's 4D rope. Does one end, then working on the other. / Zoe sees the mouths of the tunnel are dwindling. Scud zaps Groon from the mouth making Groon stay in, and yells for Zoe, but she's tangled up. Zoe is trapped. / Villy sees the tight strings pinch the thin necks in half and they heal over. No holes in our spaces, and Groon is in a pocket universe which is shrinking. Villy hops back to Los Perros. No Zoe. He

rushes back into the shrinking Groon ball. / Zoe in dire straits. She plays her music. Villy finds her, swoops er out to the lawn where the high school building used to be. Zoe and Villy embrace. Happy ending.

May 26, 2016. Cross-sections from 4D Space.

I was thinking some more about (1) the cross-sections that objects in 4D space make with our 3D space. And (2) about how 3D worlds look when viewed from 4D space. Four points.

(1.1) Start with the case of the cross-sections of a purely 3D object that's in 4D space. For these guys you see microtomed vanishingly thin planar cross-sections. Like slides. I have this in my current description of the flat cow's departure and now I wonder if I need to change this, given that the flat cow is in fact 4D with a small hyperthickness.

(1.2) Okay, say the flat cow has a slight 4D thickness, about an inch. I'll imagine an xyz axis system with x going to the right, y going into the paper, and z vertical. And the fourth dimension is w. My flat cow is 7 feet wide (x axis), fifteen feet long (y axis), she bulges 3 feet high (z axis), and her hyperthickness is, say, 1 inch (w axis.) Suppose she rotates "towards" me so that the y axis goes to the w axis and the w axis goes to the -y. I leave the x and z unchanged. We can say we're rotating around the xz plane—recall that in 4D geometry you can indeed rotate around a plane.

What do I see in xyz space after I rotate my flat cow ninety degrees around the xz plane? She's still 7 feet wide on the x axis, she's now 1 inch thick on the y axis, she's still still 3 feet high on the z axis, and she's 15 feet long on the w axis. Her xyz cross-section is shaped like a short surfboard resting on one of its long edges, with the flat bottom perpendicular to the y axis. The shape of the surfboard is just what you'd see if you'd cut the flat cow in half and looked at the bared surface.

What does the rotated cow look like? Inside her, on the y=0 plane is a vertical slice of herself. Her points with y=0 have remained in the same place, as the xz-plane rotation doesn't move them. So she contains a microtome-like slice of herself. But I have an inch of hyperthickness that's been made into thickness by the xz-plane rotation. Let's say the thickness runs a half inch in front of the microtome plane and half an inch in back of it. It's like a 4D wrapping around the essentially 3D flat cow. So what I'm seeing is the hyperspace wrapping material on the front and the back of the surfboard. And now I have three options.

- (a) I could have the hyperspace material be like blank skin or, worse, like white plastic.
- (b) I could claim the hyperspace material is covered with hair like the cow.
- (c) I could say the hyperspace material is a stiff, transparent jelly, possibly made of smeel.

I think the third option is best. The big win with this option is that we can in fact continue with the traditional cross-sectional imagery described in 1.1.

And, really the hyperspace cover doesn't have to be very thick at all. It can be a thin film, like Saran wrap, or like the latex of a condom. A glaze of smeel for "The Ham what Am!"

(2) Villy has a 3D eye, so he will see those microtome-type planar cross sections of 3D space, and of Zoe in particular. These images on his 2D retina.

But let's say the flat cow has a 4D eye with a 3D retina, and she'll get a "paperweight-style" view of 3D objects. That is, she'll see both the inside and the outside. And Villy can get those views in his head via teep from the cow. I'll check back on my *Spaceland* novel for descriptions of this.

Speaking of *Spaceland*, that book includes an artist's drawings that are based on my

original drawings. The originals have, in other words, never been published. So I'll dig them out and see if I might use them for a few of the numerous figures I need for *MMRT*. For that matter, I might look for my original drawings for *The Fourth Dimension*, if they still even exist in my archives. Those drawings were of course redone by the wonderful David Povilaitis for the published edition.

May 31-June 2, 2016. Cosmic Beatdown, Part I.

Okay, I'm rocking my "Cosmic Beatdown" chapter. Wrote nearly 2.000 words today. I did the attack of the two giant saucers, and now I still have to write the fight with Groon. I have alternating Villy/Zoe POVs.

I decided to break the chapter in two, like "Cosmic Beatdown Level 1" and "Cosmic Beatdown Level 2." Funny and contemporary to speak of "levels," although I have a slight worry this might promote the fallacious sense that the book's whole action was a dream or a fantasy or a VR game. It would be good to adduce some "evidence" to quash this notion in the Epilog.

Or, really, better just to say Part I and Part II in the titles. Don't even go there about "levels."

I'm missing a trick if I don't have some of the graduation crowd be saucer controlled zombies. Sunny Weaver is one of them, but I want about a dozen, and they're giving Scud, Zoe, and Maisie some real problems as they try and kill Bombo. We could even have some zombie cops. Let's suppose that Zoe's horn can tame the zombies.

Once Bombo is dead do the zombies go slack? They're disoriented, without any control-signals from the two giant saucers? And then are the zombies just on their own when no saucers are around? Well, maybe. Just kind of blah. Like sleeper-cell agents who only kick into gear when a control agent (that is, a saucer) shows up.

But no, no, no, it works better if the zombies stay on the kids' case, running on their remembered orders from the saucers. So I'd need to have a bit of that at the end of Chapter 29, "CB, Part I." I just don't have the energy to write that today (June 2, 2016)...after spending the day revising the chapter's end.

I had toyed with the idea of adding a chapter where Zoe and Villy get arrested by zombie cops. But it's enough if that's just a one-paragraph scene at the very end of Chap 30, "CB, Part II". Zoe and Villy kiss and say, "We won." And then two zombie cops run on stage and arrest them. And then...blackout. Chapter over.

And then in "Chap 31: Epilog" we quickly clear up the arrest problem. The public goes with the "sinkhole" explanation of the high-school's collapse. The monster saucers were a mass hallucination. Zoe, Scud and Villy aren't terrorists or pranksters, but they're not heroes either.

I saw a biopic doc of Janis Joplin the other day, and in my head Sunny Weaver looks like Janis, and I keep wanting to say how dowdy and frog-faced and toad-like Sunny is, but I think I have to water that down because that kind of talk won't play with PC YA librarians at all. I can't be dissing a woman on the basis of how she looks.

June 6, 2016. Cosmic Beatdown, Part II.

A couple of weeks ago, I wrote an [outline](#) for this chapter, let me revise it a bit today. A couple of new points: I think the two ends of the tunnel have to pinch off at the same instant, otherwise it flattens out into the still-connected world. I'd like one last near-escape of Groon that's blocked by Goob-goob.

Villy: Villy begins to tie off the ends of the tunnel with Maisie's 4D rope. The flat cow cautions that the ends need to be pinched off at the same time. Goob-goob's eye is watching them on a stalk and in fact Yulia's tail tapers down to Goob-goob. But Goob-goob and the flat cow need Villy's agility. And it makes a better story if he does the save. The world is a story.

Zoe: Scud and Zoe fly into the tunnel on their saucer pearls and begin fighting Groon. Scud uses his wand against Groon, but it's not enough to kill the bagpipe. Groon turns on his jet-stream-level chanter blast to push Scud out of the tunnel. Scud is blown out. Groon readies himself to fly out that end of the tunnel, Zoe is playing bagpipe on her horn which interests Groon, she has a way of noise-cancelling his tune, playing the phase-shift opposite sounds. He sucks her in, meaning to digest her. She begins playing farty resonant blasts that make him sick. Meanwhile Scud is back in the tunnel and zapping Groon again. He's temporarily immobile. Zoe sees the mouths of the tunnel are dwindling. Scud yells for Zoe to leave, but she's stuck in some smeely glue inside Groon. She's trapped. Scud leaves. The world is closing in on Zoe. She plays a plaintive tune calling out to Villy for help. But he doesn't seem to hear her.

Villy: Villy pinches the thin necks in half and they heal over. No holes in our spaces, and Groon is in a pocket universe which is shrinking. Villy hops back to Los Perros. Scud is there, but no Zoe. He rushes back into the shrinking Groon ball. It's like hell or the inside of a burning factory. Things falling. The evil anguished drone of the bagpipe. Villy hears Zoe's song. He swoops her out. Groon wallows, twitches up into the fourth dimension, oh God, he's going to follow them. The Goob-goob controlled Yulia spits Villy and Zoe towards their plane and forces Groon back down into the collapsing ball.

Zoe. And then Villy and Zoe on the lawn in front of the half-collapsed high school building. They embrace. Sunny Weaver runs over with two zombie cops who mean to arrest them. But there's no more Groon music in the air.

"Wake up, Zoe," tells Sunny. "It's over."

The blank face lightens.

"Oh. Sorry to have bothered you."

June 9, 2016. Home Stretch.

I'm nearing the end of "Cosmic Beatdown, Part II," and the book's up to 115K words. Never thought I'd get here. Borges in one of his short-short stories has a line like, "He can hardly believe he's come to the day of his own death."

I don't think I'll finish today—we're going up to Berkeley today to see Mavis Staples and Bob Dylan play at the Greek Theater. But Friday and Saturday Sylvia will be gone, on a road trip down to a cousin's funeral in Santa Barbara. So I'll probably do a writing push then.

I'll finish the "CB, Part II," and then tack on a couple-of-pages-long "Epilog," and that'll be that for the first draft. The next step will be print the whole thing and do a full read-through-with-markup, which will take a few weeks or even a month. Followed by typing in the changes. And then I'll send it to Silbersack.

June 13, 2016 I'm Done.

I finished it off yesterday, that is, on June 12, 2016. Typed: *The End*. I think I wrapped things up tight enough that I don't need an Epilog after all, although I could always change my mind about this. As it stands, I've got 116,400 words.

And what do I do with myself now? Relax, dude, relax.

I had an outline for an Epilog as follows:

The only story that makes the national news is that somehow a high school building in California disappeared. The press is going with a “sinkhole” story for the school building’s disappearance, and the saucer sightings and deaths are “flaky Californians” having mass hysteria and trampling each other.. There might have been some high-ranking saucer stooges who in fact understand that Groon’s been killed, and they might have wanted to play the terrorism card as an excuse to go after whoever did it. But their motivation dissolves with Groon’s controlling song gone. Zoe, Villy, Maisie, Scud and Dad work out something like a long-term peace treaty with the saucers. Creative energy replaces smeel. With Groon gone, the saucers aren’t so rapacious. They’re friendly and cute. Scud hops back to live with Maisie in Van Cott and New Eden—they’ll be, like, ambassadors along with Zoe’s Dad. They’re young to be hitched, but nobody cares over there. Nunu isn’t jealous, she has that new saucer boyfriend Krampus. /Zoe and Villy are happy together in Los Perros, but with no firm idea of how long their relationship will last. They’re looking for ways to have careers without going to college. For now, they’ll take an actual, regular, road trip around the US, doing some informal music gigs along the way, organizing pop-up shows via the web. Villy’s guitar still works and so does Zoe’s horn. And they’re good at conjuring up friendly saucers out of thin air—which always fascinates a crowd. Re. the mythic angle to their adventure, maybe they see seeming images of themselves in Egyptian hieroglyphs, on Greek kraters, and in Aztec glyphs.

But I don’t feel that, as the book now stands, the Epilog is necessary. Or maybe I’m just too tired of writing to do an Epilog right now. When I’m revising for the final draft, I can weave some of the upcoming things into the conversations in the last few chapters. Or do an Epilog after all. Or I can save some of it for seed material for a possible sequel.

I’ll also want to straighten out the roles of Scud’s camera, Yampa’s image-capturing, and Zoe’s jewelry. I threw all of these in as extras early on, but I kind of dropped them. But they could play a role in the Epilog or the Vol. 2 sequel.

Wait, wait, wait—*sequel*? Haven’t I been saying that *MMRT* was going to be my last novel? Oh, yeah, maybe I said that. We’ll see! I know I’m going to be missing my psychic playground of the *MMRT* world, and missing my imaginary friends (the characters).

Maybe I’ll just go ahead and write an Epilog next week, and then I don’t have any implicit commitment to a Vol. 2.

Re. the work flow, as I said, I’ll do the revisions before I send it out. And I’m definitely going to plan for a Kickstarter for a deluxe hardback color-illustrated edition, even if someone publishes a commercial trade edition.. As a prelim for that I might design and print a paperback version of the book to send to editors.

July 27, 2016. Vacation in Kauai

So I haven’t looked at or thought about the novel for six weeks. While still in Los Gatos, I was embroiled in the technical minutiae of republishing my LIFEBOX tome—starting from a PDF that I’d run through Abbyy FineReader to get a fairly scuzzy Word DOC. Still not done with that hack.

But on July 18, Sylvia and I came to Haena on the North shore of Kauai for twelve nights. We're saying in a cottage called Hale Pau Kai (House Blossom Sea). Very peaceful here. We're doing a lot of snorkeling, swimming and porch-sitting. Yesterday we took a great hike in a park called Limahuli Gardens. Such wonderful views of the drip-castle-like Na Pali peaks.

My writer friend Marc Laidlaw lives here with his wife Geraldine now. We're talking a little about writing another of our surfpunk Zep & Del stories.

I printed out *Road Trip* thinking I might read it down here, but I'm on vacation, and I don't feel like it, and I don't exactly like the format I used for the printout (margins too small, lines too close together, so it would be hard to mark up with pen.) I figure when I get home I'll do a fresh print and dig into the read-through. We'll only have about three weeks before we light out for Hungary to visit Georgia & family. So not sure I'll get it done. We'll see.

August 8-18, 2016. Feeling Lost. But Then I'm Well!

Aug 8, 2016.

We're leaving for Hungary on Aug 29, I hope. Assuming my hip is really healed. Waiting for one more blood test result about this. Should hear tomorrow. Very anxious.

I'm in a kind of depressed, or mentally flat, state these days. It's like I have a mild form of PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder)—from having four operations in six months, and a three month stretch with no hip at all, and all the pain and the meds, and the ongoing uncertainty and fear. I feel lost and unsure of myself. And I'm still not free to just run out and do whatever I want to.

Flatness of affect, easily angered, subject to fits of weeping (well, *that's* an exaggeration), lack of interest in usually pleasurable activities. Situational depression might be another phrase for it. One day at a time. In the Now. Exercise. Ice cream.

Very noticeable ongoing pain in the muscles of my left leg. Deep ache. And I'm plagued by a not completely rational sense that at any moment my hip could pop out its socket or otherwise go terribly awry. Skittish as a hog on ice. Cautious and old. Bored. I don't even dream that I might dare go to a rock concert. Seventy.

I feel lonely. My old sponsor Vernon has drifted out of touch, I think he's moving to Sacramento. One of my sposees has put himself on Prozac, and he no longer seems like the same person, more zombie-like and less humor-aware. Another of my old friends here seems lost and unhappy. It's a hard time.

At least things are good with Sylvia—modulo the fact that we disagree about almost every little thing all day long. And I get to see my son and my 3 SF grandchildren every week or two—such a lift to my tired old soul. Great to talk to my daughters on the phone too, and, as I say, we hope to visit Georgia in Budapest in three weeks.

Aug 9, 2016. I did two long walks yesterday and today, and really I do feel like my leg is coming back. I walked about a mile each day, really pushing it, and the leg held up. Felt the better for the workout. I was playing with my Pokemon Go AR game along the way today. Tomorrow I should hear from my surgeon.

Aug 10, 2016. So today, ten days after my blood test, the surgeon's office calls and says they got the results in the mail—and I'm clear of infection according to both of the two tests they did. Whoah. Life begins again. I'm out of the haze. Back in the sun. Hardly knowing what to do, I went downtown and had a root-beer float at Dolce Spazio Gelato. It's going to take a few days to adjust. Like getting off a rocking ship onto solid land.

Aug 11, 2016. I've been telling people I'm well. It's like I've been released from prison.

That sense of coming back into daylight from the underworld—I had that feeling after the strokes. I'm getting some serenity already. Those pains in my chest that I had in Hawaii—those might have something to do with stress. Ya think? I bought some expensive walking sandals yesterday and maybe I'll buy another pair tomorrow. Lots of money in my savings account, thanks to the slow but meaningful drip-drip-drip from my various Transreal Books titles.

Aug 13, 2016. I walked about a mile a day all week, and now my left calf is killing me. Like how a charley horse would feel. Need to take it easy. Now and then I'm still sandbagged by despair over how long this is taking—accompanied by hatred for the surgeon who did this to me. Dr. Matt Miller. Would it be worthwhile to sue him? As an act of revenge? But what would the process do to my serenity and to my life?

Aug 15, 2016. My neighbor Daia, who's a physical therapist, says the calf on my bad leg hurts because of "compensation." It's much bigger and more muscular than the calf on the good leg—from holding the foot of my bad leg off the ground for all those months. I'd thought it was big because of smel, that is, from lymph draining down from the injured thigh. She said I should rub "magnesium oil" on it to reduce the scarring and internal adhesions. Will give that a try, although the web indicates it's a scam. First comes some yoga and a bike ride. The yoga is finally starting to feel like it used to. Holistic.

Aug 16, 2016. Huge bike ride today, about five miles, around the old salina ponds at the bottom of the SF Bay near the SJ airport. I feel like I shook out a lot of kinks.

Aug 18, 2016. Tried walking downtown yesterday, emulating the walk from our Vienna hotel to the museum with the Bruegels. Took only about ten minutes, but I had to stop a lot. That nagging pain in my left calf. So annoying. That only started a week ago. I'm going to bike to the supermarket today.

August 3-25, 2016, Revising the First Draft.

Aug 3, 2016. In Kauai just now I was mostly snorkeling and beaching, and when I went to do a little computer work, I got into fixing Marc Laidlaw's ebooks for him, rather than correcting my draft.

But now I have a nice three-ring binder with my printed out first draft in it, and I'm reading a few chapters at a time and typing in changes. I think maybe I was reluctant to start because I feared the book would be terrible. But it seems okay, or even good. And maybe I was reluctant to start this next stage of the process because I dread trying to sell the book...and that's still an issue, but I have to go there. I'll give that effort a few months, before dropping back to Kickstarter + Transreal Books.

Aug 5, 2016. Fixed another couple of chapters today. Read them, marked them up, typed in the changes. Making the book better for sure. If I do two chaps a day, I could be done in two or three weeks. Still need to do the illos too. Might finish before we leave for Hungary on August 29. If not, it can wait another couple of weeks. Oh, and I got better three-ring notebook for the pages today.

August 8, 2016. Finished Chapter 7 this morning, and chap 8 in the afternoon. That's about 25% of the book in five days, so I might finish the whole thing by Aug 29. At some points in the revision the book seems really good, and at other points, it feels a little dull. I'll be glad to mail it out and get that process started. If I don't get any offers or interest by the new year, I'll go ahead and self-pub it.

August 9, 2016. Finished chap 9 today, should finish chap 10 tomorrow.

August 10, 2016. Finished chap 10 and got into chap 11. I've got 81 out of 302 pages

done. 26% in seven days. Not quite sure I can finish before we leave. Well, what's the diff, really?

Aug 11. 2016. Finished chap 11 today. It was twice as long as the earlier chapters, but I don't think I want to get into breaking chapters. Revising, I've noticed that at times I didn't stick to holding onto one character's unique POV for each chapter, and I'm fixing that as I go along. But I worry now there were one or two near the start that I didn't fix because I wasn't yet poised for fixing that type of problem. Well, I might flip back and check. And in any case, I'll be reading through the book again sooner or later.

By the way, in terms of the rotating POV, it might be useful to go ahead and put the POV character's name as a subtitle for each chapter. People do that sometimes to make it easier for the reader. I think I did that in *Realware*, as a matter of fact.

So, okay, I went and did that, it looks good, makes the book easier to read, and reminds me to keep the POV straight.

Aug 12, 2016. Okay, I read and typed in fixes for chapter 12 this morning, lying on cushions in my bed for three hours. That's 96 out of 308 pages. Nearly a third done in nine days. If it takes me eighteen more days, I'd finish on Aug 30, but—we leave for Budapest on Aug 29. And I have to do the drawings, too. Maybe I can really crank this week and make a dent. Would definitely like to get it in the mail before I leave.

But, wait—don't *obsess*, Rudy! Give yourself a break. Have some fun, now that you're sort of well. Go swimming, ride your bike, paint a picture. If you mail it off in mid-September, that's fine too. And if you can hold out till the end of September you'd have time to print out galley proofs to help with the submission process.

Aug 13, 2016. Finished chap 14 today: read, marked-up, typed in. Had to delete a lot of foreshadowing stuff that I'd arbitrary shoved in here while writing the later chaps. Don't actually need to foreshadow all that much. It's more important that the early chaps are interesting on their own, and that they don't bog down with infodumps. In terms of the current page numbering, I've done 113 pages out of 307. Time to print out another chunk!

Aug 15, 2016. I'm into chapter 17 and I've done 141 out of 305 pages, which is 46% of the way. I've used 12 out of the 24 days between Aug 3 and Aug 27 (although we don't leave till Aug 29, I doubt I'll be doing revisions on Aug 28). That's 50% of the time. So I might not make it. But maybe the later chapters won't need so many corrections. Or maybe I'll finish the revisions on the plane. But I'd still need to do those drawings. As you can see, I'm not sticking to my personal admonition to slack off. Thing is, I *like* doing the corrections. It's like picking off scabs, or washing my hair, or trimming my nails, or doing yoga—it's maintenance!

Aug 17, 2016. Finished chaps 17 and 18. 168 pages out of 301. 55% done. Cut some more of those clunky, heavy-handed prefiguring passages. I've used 54% of the time before departure.

Aug 18, 2016. Read, corrected, and typed in chap 19 this morning in bed. Pages done: 178 out of 301 pages. 59% done. Time used: 15 days out of 24. 62% gone. If I can do another chap today I'll pull ahead. I'll go hang in a coffee shop now, it's only 10:29 am. OC much?

I liked chap 19. "Riding the Ridge." I didn't have a whole bunch of prefiguring crap to cut out. The book's lively and funny, and where possible, I'm improving the wording. I always think about the guys who wrote *The Simpsons* and *Futurama*—they had, like, a year-long pipeline, and they went over and over the scripts, tuning every word and every joke for maximum effect.

I also think about how much work this is, and how I really might not want to do a novel

again—as I keep saying. And then in my head I visualize an editor begging me, “Please, Rudy, *Million Mile Road Trip* is so good, so fresh, so creative, you’ve set it in such a wonderful new world, and it’s such a big seller—you have to make it a three-book series.” And then I rehearse various kinds of answers. And then, taking a step back, I think of La Fontaine’s fable, “The Milkmaid and her Pail.”

Aug 19, 2016. Did a total rewrite of the fight scene where the Iravs ambush them. Needed to go back and make a few changes to make it fit. Not much time to work today. Spent three or four hours with my friend Vernon, then went to Michael Beeson’s birthday party. 187 out of 301 pages. 62% done. Time used: 16 days out of 24. 66% gone.

Aug 20, 2016. Did a second rewrite of the fight scene. Typed in what I have. 198 out of 301. Revision 66% done. 17 out of 24 days. Time 70% gone. Off to SF for the day now!

Aug 21, 2016. 22 chapters done. 216 out of 301 pages. 72% revised. 18 out of 24 days. Time 75% gone.

Aug 22, 2016. I’d like to hit 238 pages today to match the fact that I’ve used up 79% of my time. We’ll see how it goes. Note that as I go along and crop,, the manuscript’s page count shrinks a few pages now and then. Later: I made it to 226/300 pages, which is 75%. Not bad.

Aug 23, 2016. Time: 20/24 days. 83%. Morning pages: 234/299. 78%. Evening pages 249/298. 83%. I’m fuckin caught up. I’m gonna make it.

Aug 24, 2016. Time: 21/24 days. 88%. Morning pages; 260/297. 88%. Hassle with the long explanation of the unny tunnel trap for Groon—I had about six drawings, which killed the forward momentum. I dropped a lot of text, and cut the images down to about three drawings, and I lifted those from other books of mine. Just to keep things going. So I can mail out the book soon. Too jangled to do new drawings today. I had an argument about nothing with Sylvia. Afternoon pages: 266/296. 90%. Maybe I have time to mark up another chapter now. Just three chaps to go. Evening page: 275/296. 93%. Only two more chapters: Cosmic Beatdown, Part I and Cosmic Beatdown, Part II. I’m really loving this part of the book. The scene with Zoe and Maisie in the women’s room at the high-school is so perfect. I can totally see this book as a movie. Indeed, I’m watching it in my head.

August 25, 2016. Today I bore down and finished the revisions. Reworking the last two chaps. I subtitled the sections to match the altering POV. I gave a bit part to the saucerboy Duckworth (son of Scud and Nunu). I had Villy use his guitar in antiphon with Zoe and her horn for them to find each other in unspace. Sweet ending...as often happens to me, my new novel’s ending brings tears to my eyes. It came in at 111,100 words. I cut it by about 5K words during the revisions. Trimmed out repetitious foreshadowing and recapitulation. Went ahead and got down to business a little faster in some scenes—no need to vamp once you actually know what’s supposed to happen. I mailed it off to John Silbersack and asked him to see what he thinks about where we might send it and how we might pitch it.

Finis coronat opus.

September 22, 2016. Background Info

I talked to John Silbersack day before yesterday, and he was pretty encouraging—modulo the perennial recalcitrance of the SF publishers to see things my way. He asked for some background about my writing the book, so I wrote the following bits.

RUDY DESCRIBES WRITING MILLION MILE ROAD TRIP

I imprinted on Kerouac’s *On the Road* in high-school, and since then I’ve often thought

I'd like to write an SF version of Jack's scenario. I used to envision a novel called *Galactic Kicks*, and I had a vision of a pair of odd-ball alien pilots taking the role of Neal Cassady.

In 2014, I decided to slant my road trip book so that it could sell into the general SF or perhaps into the YA market—as opposed to making it a beatnik niche tale. Another key decision was to have the journey literally be a road trip in a car—as opposed to being a spaceship journey. I came up with the title *Million Mile Road Trip*, and designed a world in which such a road trip might be possible. Two inspirations were Larry Niven's *Ringworld*, and Charles Stross's story "Missile Gap."

To give the book a compelling feel, I wrote it in the present tense. It's like an adventure being narrated in real time by the three main protagonists in turn. We have two twelfth-graders (Zoe and Villy) and a tenth-grader (Scud). An eleventh-grader (Maisie) plays a supporting role. It's the night before Zoe and Villy's graduation, and I worked to get an *American Graffiti* last-fling vibe. I had fun writing the kids' voices, especially Zoe's. There's a little bit of *Catcher in the Rye* in Zoe's voice, but she's less self-assured and, of course, more feminist. I've learned a few things from my wife and daughters!

The world the kids journey through is, in effect, a quilt of valleys, each valley several thousand miles across, with ranges of mountains between them. And each valley contains, in essence, an entirely different planetary civilization. I had fun creating a range of surreal worlds, at times in the spirit of Lewis Carroll. A standout is the surf world, which was inspired by the gigantic waves shown in the movie *Interstellar*. In order to keep my journey from being merely picaresque, I added a strong quest/chase/flight theme. The kids are hurrying to obtain a special wand to ward off—an invasion of flying saucers!

For years I've loved the flying saucer trope, and I feel it's such a strong and resonant theme that it can definitely allow more use. But I wanted to keep it from being stale. A new angle I introduced was to have the individual saucers be living beings and to broach the possibility of humans mating with them. Interspecies sex is of course dangerous territory, but I think I defused it by making the saucer sex scenes comic and non-explicit.

The real sex and love in the novel revolves around the romance between Zoe and Villy. I worked to give their affair a slow, tender, blossoming quality. And there's a chance of romance between Maisie and the one-year-younger Scud.

The book's overall pattern follows the Joseph Campbell monomyth, as did my novel *Frek and the Elixir*. In this vein, I include a semi-divine being—casually named Goob-goob—and a numinous sense that there's something legendary or pre-ordained about our characters' journey.

Regarding the overall tone, I learned about space-opera humor from Douglas Adams's *Hitchhiker's Guide*—but I didn't want to go too far in his direction and to have my story become silly. I wanted my novel to be cosmic and scary and romantic and funny—all at the same time. Over all, my key model was Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. I've admired Pynchon's work for decades, and I like to think that in *Million Mile Road Trip*, after twenty novels, I've finally figured out how to emulate the great man's cadences and tone.

BIO NOTE

Rudy Rucker is a writer and a mathematician. For twenty years he was a professor of computer science at San Jose State in Silicon Valley. He received Philip K. Dick awards for his cyberpunk novels *Software* and *Wetware*, and an Emperor Norton award for his autobiography *Nested Scrolls*. Other standouts include his mathematical SF novel *White Light*, his

contemporary *Postsingular* and the YA-oriented novels *The Hollow Earth* and *Frek and the Elixir*. His best-selling books were his nonfiction works *Infinity and the Mind* and *The Fourth Dimension*. Rucker lives with his wife in the San Francisco Bay area, and he paints scenes relating to his work, selling canvases online. On the social media front, Rucker has a popular blog, as well as seven thousand Twitter followers and two thousand Facebook friends.

December 5, 2016. Waiting.

John S. had me clarify that Scud is about 15 or 16, so it's not completely out of the question for Maisie to start dating him.

At this point I'm still waiting for some feedback from the publishers that John plans to try. Having self-published my last few books, I'd kind of forgotten how long the wait can be. Nothing to do now but tune out and let the process run its course. And I've always got the Kickstarter/Transreal Books move if all else fails. My bomb shelter...