

Notes For Jim and the Flims
Book #32, Novel #19
by Rudy Rucker

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To Do

[Note that I have a few other To Do lists scattered among the Writing Notes. But, starting in September, 2009, I put this unified To Do list here so I'd have one that's easy to find.]

In this section, I tracked the fixes that I might eventually put in.

While thinking about the book, I'll add any new To Do items to the top of this list if I don't have the time to take care of them right away. If I think of some change and implement it right away, I don't normally list a To Do entry for it.

I put an asterisk in front of any item after I eventually take care of it (either by implementing it or by rejecting it). And then I move the asterisked item lower into the list, down to the already-asterisked items. This way I always have a clear view of the items that are my remaining To Dos.

As a result of this process, the final order of the (by now all asterisked) fixes as shown in the final version of these notes is roughly in the reverse of the order in which I implemented them.

- There is some electric eel activity in Jim's brain, and this relates to the lightning stroke that amped up the STM. In some sense Jim caused the lightning stroke. Hint at this early on, and hark back to it. Jim should mention it to Ginnie.
- * How did Val survive the long ride through the living water to the core?
- * Mention early on that it's impossible to teleport all the way to the center of Flimsy as the jivas and the goddess of Flimsy don't really want flims to teleport there.
- * By the end of the book, Jim has actually been evicted by the Simlys and all his possessions are in storage.
- * Don't talk about both jiva eggs and jiva larvae, just use eggs.
- * The border snail has tendrils that seine the layer of living water.
- * Durkle (or Jim) should make use of the little offer-plant sword at some point.
- * After Jim burns away his body at the Graf's and thinks he's gotten rid of the egg case, why does he bother going back to Earth instead of fetching Val at the core right away? Because he's bound by his promise to the goddess of Flimsy.
- * Weena left one jiva behind on Earth, and the goddess knows this, which is another reason why Jim has to clean things up before removing the tunnel.
- * Jim does not develop a projecting ruff from the egg case while in his kessence and zickzack bodies. The jiva eggs are able to shrink the case down to imperceptibility. Jim only *hopes* that burning his kessence body will clear the egg case away.
- * How did the Graf get a body on Earth when his soul came over? He came in his own kessence. Make clear that you can bring your kessence or zickzack body over from Flimsy if you come through a tunnel.
- * When Weena and Charles went to Flimsy the first time, there wasn't a tunnel, so how and where did they emerge? In the Dark Gulf, like ordinary ghosts.

- * Weena worries about the “Duke’s guards.” I should mention them again when we get to the castle.
- * What happened to Header’s sprinkle/soul after the Graf ate his brain?
- * How does Val find Jim so quickly?
- * Monin and Weena should mention that they’ve only been on their farm at it’s current location for about a year.
- * The Dark Gulf has tendrils and estuaries that make up the sheet of water between topside Flimsy and the Flimsy underground.
- * Charles’s evolution method for Atum’s Lotus reminds Jim of the method he used to find the Whipped Vic. Weena says that she made it up.
- * The swaying-color and electron-visualization routine that Jim experiences in the Weena chapter becomes part of the spell that he uses to leave his body.
- * Jim’s realization that he opened the tunnel to Flimsy and caused Val’s death should come quite early in the book. He should have a running guilt trip about causing the death of his wife.
- * Jim should have a conversation with Nurse Mary in the hospital. Mary knows something about the death of Jim’s wife, but for now it’s unclear. Mary can be a little surprised when Weena shows up saying she’s Jim’s new wife. Change Mary’s name to Alice.
- * Make Ira gay, and in love with Skeeves—this spices things up and explains why Ira helps Skeeves.
- * Atum’s Lotus should be made of sounds as well as images. And Jim can use those sounds in the Pied Piper chapter.
- * Don’t kill Charles, let him escape to the center.
- * Let Ginnie kill Weena after Jim leaves the castle.
- * Jim buries Val’s ashes on a bluff overlooking Four Mile Beach.
- * Skeeves and his wastrel SF contact burnt Amenhotep’s mummy in a fireplace, so the sarcophagus is nice and empty.
- * Get rid of the references to Jim taking pictures with his cell phone.
- * There have been numerous border snails poking through between the worlds. The snails are secretive, and hide themselves on both sides as they don’t want to be (internally) trampled by a steady stream of through-traffic. Flimsy herself likes the snails hidden, as she doesn’t want the jivas and yuels to push out to the real worlds and parasitize them. Even though the Earthmost Jiva has an idea of where Snaily is, she herself can’t get her tendrils through the baffles of Snaily’s maze.
- * Charles and Weena’s insight was that if they have an Earthling nick an electron, they can get a border snail to set up in a specific spot that they can find—and they can get the snail to be grateful to them.
- * The way people unlock the snail tunnel door is that the snail decides to let certain people do it, and it senses them.
- * Talk to Chang at the Whipped Vic Party.
- * The axe that Skeeves threatens Jim with in high-school has its handle painted green, and that’s the same axe that Header has later on.
- Monin’s farm is hidden just like the Whipped Vic.

- * Skeeves is wanted for questioning about the death of Julian Hearst.
- * Skeeves has a van even in high-school, and Jim remembers it. The Whipped Vic crew are driving Skeeves's van.
- * Bring back Chang in the "Surf Zombies" chapter.
- * Change "Charles Hinton" to "Charles Howard."
- * Change "Quest Rose" to "Atum's Lotus."
- * Don't call the lower region "purgatory." Call it "the underworld."
- * Make Val's ghost be peach-colored and yellow-pink instead of green. More like the color of a woman.
- * Mention that Skeeves and Header went after the Graf because they wanted some of his power.
- * Drop the word "yuellie" (for a ghost in a yuel-built body), it's confusing vis-a-vis "yuel."
- * The yorbafumps are specialized group-yuels shaped like elephants, like a military platoon. Drop the word "yorbafump." And have it be one of these yuel-elephants that kidnaps Ginnie, rather than a dinosaur-thing.
- * Don't bring in stentors. Flimsy herself keeps order.
- * Drop the Solsols. Just the Bulbers is enough.
- * Change "Shadow Captain" to "Tinker." No, make it "Doorman."
- * Jim knew Chang in high school.
- * Change Hinton's mention of "fractals" to "DNA". The Quest Rose is an artificial life project, not a fractal.
- * Change "Lucy" to "Val."
- * Jim is about 30, not 60.
- * Jim and Lucy had no children.
- * Jim is an independent biotech engineer.
- * Instead of thinking about a five-dimensional hyperhypercube to find the path to the Whipped Vic, Jim thinks about something relating to DNA synthesis.
- * Weena mentions an amusement park in Flimsy called Fungar Gardens, with an UpsyDownsy ride. I need for Jim to go there at some point.
- * Remove the scene with the yuel spores on Earth in the early chapters. That way it's more dramatic when they run this routine later on.
- * The Shadow Captain isn't necessarily a pro-jiva figure. Jim is somehow fated for this heroic role, which is why the jivas wanted to control him.
- * Call the yuels early in the book Rickben Junior and Rickben.
- Have Durkle do yuel teep with Jim a few times.
- Early on, Weena speaks of organizing her thoughts by color. Maybe hark back to this at least once. Or drop it.
- * Change Jim's digital camera to a cell phone camera, and don't emphasize his photos. Maybe the photos can provide a plot hook later on, otherwise I can remove them.
- * Have all the jivas be female. It never sounds right when I call a jiva a "he." They all lay eggs, they're into communication, they're female. Conversely, have all the yuels be male.

- * Make the Duke and Duchess talk like Chicago hoodlums or Asians or *Fargo* people or something. They shouldn't sound like Hinton and Weena.
- * Have a scene where the angered or greedy Earthmost Jiva begins lashing down from the sky with her tendrils.
- * Drop the thing where Jim puts a yuel inside a flat torus. This gimmick has no relation to the rest of the book. In the castle, Jim will turn Weena into a sprinkle, rather than walling her in flat torus.
- * Charles Hinton's body is stored in the basement of the Whipped Vic as well.

Publication Rate

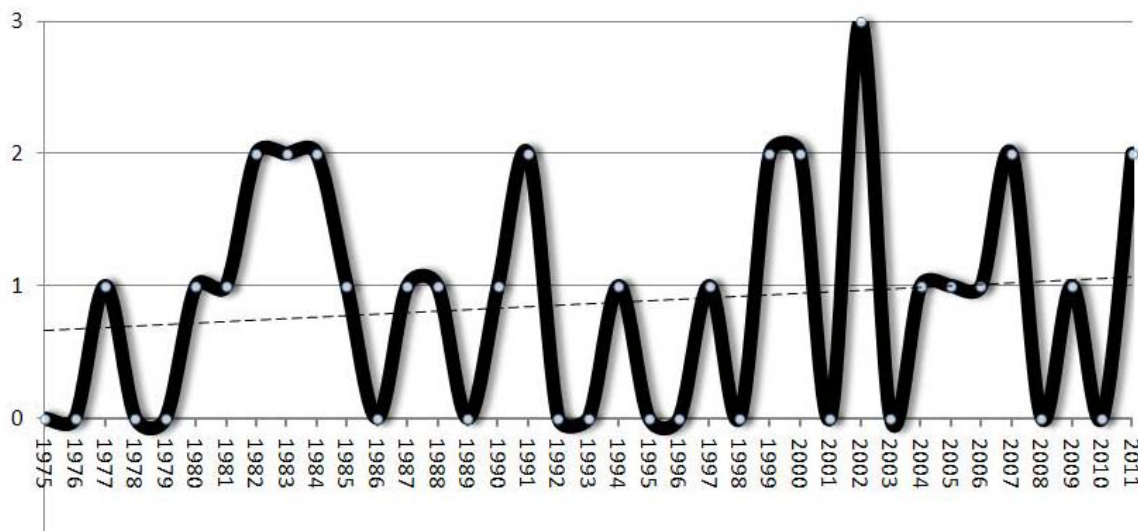


Figure 1: Books Per Year

I adapted this figure from my *Notes for Hylozoic*, upgrading it to assume that my memoir *Nested Scrolls* will be published in 2011, and that *Jim and the Flims* will come out in 2011 as well.

The dark heavy line is just a smoothed off line through the data points.

The “linear trend line” (the nearly level dashed line across the lower part of the graph) is slightly slanting up, which is good.

Interesting chart—at least to me. I see a big burst in the early years; that’s when I was freelancing in downtown Lynchburg; I had two books a year for three years in a row. Things slid back when I started teaching at SJSU in 1986, and I was in a trough in the mid-nineties. I was drinking and smoking pot pretty heavily, and spending a lot of my energy on programming. Intermission.

After my recovery in 1996, I got a second wind, which shows up in the publications starting 1999. I was still programming a lot (writing the *Pop* game framework in fact), but, as I was sober, my writing amped up anyhow. And retiring from teaching in 2004 helped me keep up the pace.

In the period 1999-2009, I published thirteen books in ten years, comparable to my run of six books in the four years 1982-1986. Maybe I'm not done yet.

Word Count

Here's the recent counts.

The Hacker And The Ants 92,000, *Freeware* 97,000, *Saucer Wisdom* 85,000, *Realware* 105,000, *Bruegel* 138,000, *Spaceland* 91,000, *Frek and the Elixir* 163,000, *The Lifebox, the Seashell and the Soul* 158,000, *Mathematicians in Love* 110,000, *Mad Professor* 87,000, *Postsingular* 89,100, *Hylozoic* 91,000, *Nested Scrolls* 95,000.

In the table below, a few of the rows happen to represent two or more chapters instead of one—because I ended up subdividing some chapters after I was underway.

Also note that I didn't get around to writing what are now Chapters 1-3 until Oct-Nov, 2009, after I beefed up the story arc of the novel. The table starts with Chapter 4 because really that's the chapter I wrote first.

(By the way, one reason why I list the sections in the order in which I wrote them is because I have some hidden spreadsheet-type formulae embedded in the table to compute the words per day and to estimate how many days remain until completion—and these formulae-fields are sensitive to what row of the table they're located in.)

Date of (initial) chunk finish.	Chaps in chunk	Word count at chunk finish.	Days into book	Eventual chap word count. Avg length: 3178	Chunk words / day	Book words / day	Estimated days till 90,000 words
Feb 3, 2009	4: The Portal	5300	42	2944	126	126	672
(Started Dec 23, 2008)	5: Brain Event			2003			
Mar 5, 2009	6: Weena Wesson			3488			
	7: Yuel	12924	72	2844	254	180	428
	8: The Boardwalk			2373			
Mar 17, 2009	9: The Whipped Vic Crew	16192	84	3049	272	193	382
	10: Surf Party			2920			
April 7, 2009	11: The Jivas	20240	105	3252	193	193	361
April 17, 2009	12: The Tunnel	22006	115	4706	177	191	356
	13: Meet the Flims			3984			
April 27, 2009	14: The Garden	26002	125	3009	400	208	260
May 5, 2009	15: Cruiser Couch	29500	133	3545	437	222	273
May 18, 2009	16: Under the Pit	34885	146	3143	414	239	231
June 2, 2009	17: Deeper	37920	161	3518	202	236	221
	18: The Dark Gulf			3317			
Aug 20, 2009	19: Offer Cap	43126	241	3573	65	179	262
Sept 25, 2009	20: The Castle	50245	277	3061	198	181	220
Oct 5, 2009	21: Weena's Tale	53332	297	2550	154	180	204
	22: Atum's Lotus			3506			
Oct 13, 2009	23: Lights Out	57211	305	2946	485	188	174
Oct 24, 2009	24: Yuelsville	60484	316	3904	298	191	155
Oct 29, 2009	1: Four Mile Beach	63873	321	1842	678	199	131
	2: A Sharper Tip			2864			
Nov 3, 2009	3: Val	66326	326	3285	491	203	117
Jan 19, 2010	25: Down to Earth	78178	403	3121	154	194	61
Jan 31, 2010	26: Missing Me	82571	415	3555	366	199	37
Feb 15, 2010	27: Pied Piper	86309	430	3111	249	201	18
Feb 18, 2010	28: The Goddess	89366	433	3570	1019	206	03
Feb 20, 2010	29: On the Bluff	89636	435	453	135	206	02

Table 1: Word Count

March 5, 2009. Chapter One was up over 7,000 words so I decided to split it in two. I want to have all short chapters that are in the 5,000 range or below. I have a feeling that this is a more commercial format. And maybe it makes the writing easier, too, if I don't have to stretch quite so far in each chapter. So as not to have to redo the Word Count table too much, I now have the rows stand for "chunks" instead of "chapters."

April 8, 2009. Today I was thinking I might split more of the chapters into smaller pieces. Suppose that I try to have every chapter be in the range, say, of 1,500 to 3,000 words. Why? It's a stylistic move. I'm hypothesizing that people have short attention spans nowadays, they've become more distractible, and it's easier for them to read a book that chopped up into rather small nuggets. William Gibson's books are often made of many very short chapters, and I kind of enjoy that about them. You take a hit, savor it, and maybe go do something else for awhile. So if I average 2,300 words per chapter—which is where I am right now—I end up with 32 chapters. Fine.

April 15, 2009. I totally can't visualize 32 chapters, that's madness, I can't outline that far. What if I do 27 chapters instead, that's right at the limits of conceivability. Then they'd have to average 2,900 words each for 80,000 words. Or do 3,000 words and end up with 81,000, which is nice, as then you have 3⁴ K words, arrived at by 3³ chapters of 3 K words each. Maybe I can do that. But I need to the earlier chapters a little to get them up to 3 K. Oh, I know, I'll cut up some of the earlier chapters and rearrange them, so that now

(*snip, snip*), as of today, I have seven chapters instead of the nine I thought I had, and now each is about 3,000 words.

April 20, 2009. Reworking the outline again. Now I'm thinking I'll do 24 chapters of about 3,300 words each. Yes, I know this number-diddling is a way of working on the book without actually, like, *writing* anything. That's okay. At least I'm thinking about writing, and about the plot. "Rome weren't burnt in a day," quoth the Pharaoh gang leader in *American Graffiti*.

June 3, 2009. In terms of story, I find it easier to plot for 22 chapters than for 24. If I can get the average chapter length up to 3,650 words per chapter, then 22 chapters could make 80K words. Where did I get that 80K target anyway? It's in fact less than the lengths of my last four novels, which were, roughly (in K), 91, 163, 89, 91, and 95. Why do I keep wanting to chintz on the length? I mean, what's the big rush to be done? After all, I just have to start over when I'm done—or quit writing entirely. Well, maybe I'm looking to write a short novel for stylistic reasons—maybe I want to write something that's clear and compact. And I do have a (possibly mistaken) sense that shorter novels are more marketable these days—they save costs for the publisher, and they save time for the readers.

August 21, 2009. Hartwell said he'd prefer a length of 90,000 to a length of 80,000. If I keep averaging 3,600 words per chapter, I'll need more than 22 chapters, that is, I'll need probably 25 or even 26 chaps. I don't have enough outline for that yet—I've only outlined 22 chaps—but I suppose I'll think of something.

September 21, 2009. I split some more chapters in two today, sometimes skimming a little off the preceding or following chapters, trying to make all the chapters around 3,000 words long. I need to change references in these notes to chapters via number, to references via title, as the numbers keep changing on me. So now my chapters average 3,300 in length. So I need—*fuck!*—27 of them to hit 90,000. And I've only got 24 outlined now. I'm always imagining that if I start splitting chapters I'll be closer to getting done, but I always forget that splitting the chapters just means I need sodding more of them. At least I now have some more ideas for things to do in the second half—and with 47,000 words today, I *am* at least into the second half.

November 3, 2009. I added two extra chapters at the start of the book. I'm still maintaining a 3,300 word per chapter average, so it looks like I still need 27 chapters to hit 90K words. The good news is that I've finished chapters 1-20, so I only need seven more. As of today, I've got 66,326 words, so I'm 0.73 done with the book, that is, I'm nearly three-fourths of the way. And I'm getting some good ideas for the ending.

December 17, 2009. I put in some extra plot elements, and now I'm up to an average of 3,500 words per chapter over twenty chapters, and a total of 70,000 words. So I need 20,000 more words, and at 3,500 words per chapter, that means five or six more chapters should do it.

December 30, 2009. Okay, I split another chapter and added a bit more text here and there. I have 21 chapters done now, with an average of 3,450 words per chapter and a total of 73,000 words. I need 17,000 more words, and I can do that with 5 more chapters, which would be chapters 22 – 26, as currently outlined.

January 16, 2010. I revised the whole book, and rearranged the chapter breaks again. The material now comprises 24 chapters with an average length of 3,100 words per chapter. I have 74,265 words, so I need a shade under 16,000 more words to break 90K. That still looks like five more chapters, which would now be numbered 25 - 29.

March 1, 2011. Final count is 90,543.

Title

December 16, 2008

Jim Oster, the hero's name.

I could go with his cow-liver goddess girlfriend, and call it *Weena and Me*.

The Elves, for the alien beings Jim sees. I like this somewhat, but the word "elves" carries so many expectations with it. I'd rather use a made-up word, and be able to craft the image as I see fit.

Someone's Watching. Jim's Friends. Can't You See Them?

I say make up some funny name for the aliens. Like Phil Dick's story, "The War Against the Fnools." Gnooms, turkles, veals, jumbies, relps, snakers, wrigglers, kobolds, slimps, huldass, nards, bolgies, banyans, flims.

The flims. That's not bad. Flimsy, films, filmy, Flim-flam. Flicker, flip, flitter, flighty, *flink* (German for swift). I think I'll use "flim" in the lower-case form, like "human" or "dog," rather than the upper-case form like "Peng" or "Hrull." It's more Dickian that way, more casual, more real.

Make the title be singular, *Jim and The Flim*, which is easier to say? So then there's one main flim that Jim Oster hangs out with?

The main flim's name is Nard? Or, no, the flim is Jim's sort-of wife, Weena Wesson.

I think actually I'll have many flims involved with Jim, in fact I'll have one inside him as well as inside Weena, so I'll make the title plural. *Jim and the Flims*.

Now, *that's* a good title! It's got a nice meter, and it rhymes, and the rhyme helps you not to misread "flim" as "film." Echo of *Jules and Jim*, also an echo of Huck and Jim.

A Transreal Novel?

I might cast my stroke into a novelistic format—like I've done in the past with my transreal SF novels—e.g. *White Light*, *The Secret of Life*, or *Saucer Wisdom*.

I worked out a correspondence between my life and my novels in some detail in an interview for *Hayakawa SF Magazine* around 1998 (see my [online interviews](#).) In that early interview, I left out the *Ware* novels and some of the others, but while I was working on my memoir in the summer of 2008, it occurred to me that I could force all of my novels into this table, as shown below.

Novel Title	Novel #	“My” Character’s Name	His Age	Period of My Life
Frek and the Elixir	15	“Frek Huggins”	13 - 14	1959 – 1960
The Hollow Earth	8	“Mason Reynolds”	14 - 16	1960 – 1962
The Secret of Life	6	“Conrad Bunger”	17 - 21	1963 – 1967
Spacetime Donuts	1	“Vernor Maxwell”	21 - 26	1967 – 1972
Postsingular	17	“Jayjay Jiminez”	24 - 26	1970 – 1972
Hylozoic	18	“Jayjay Jiminez”	26 - 28	1972 – 1974
Mathematicians in Love	16	“Bela Kis”	25 - 27	1971 – 1973
White Light	2	“Felix Rayman”	26 - 32	1972 – 1978
Software	3	“Sta-Hi Mooney”	30 - 31	1976 – 1977
Realware	12	“Phil Gottner”	30 - 32	1976 – 1978
The Sex Sphere	4	“Alwin Bitter”	32 - 34	1978 – 1980
Spaceland	14	“Joe Kube”	35 - 37	1981 – 1983
Master of Space and Time	5	“Joe Fletcher”	34 - 38	1980 – 1984
Wetware	7	“Stahn Mooney”	38 - 40	1984 – 1986
Freeware	10	“Tre Dietz”	34 - 40	1980 – 1982
The Hacker and the Ants	9	“Jerzy Rugby”	40 - 46	1986 – 1992
As Above, So Below	13	“Pieter Bruegel”	16 - 44	1992 – 1997
Saucer Wisdom	11	“Rudy Rucker”	46 - 51	1992 – 1997

Table 2: My Novels As Memoirs

Actually now, in December, 2008, some details of the table seem debatable, but oh well.

In any case two salient things I notice is that I don’t seem to have transrealized my life from ages 1-12 and ages 52-62. So maybe I should use that stuff for my novel in progress, *Jim and the Flims*. I could even use both periods, in that the main line of the story can be about an aging man, and he’s having flashbacks or reminiscences about his childhood. I could flip back and forth in time, in alternating chapters.

Themes

A New Harmony

With Obama and the Democrats coming into power, I feel like a new age is dawning. I could symbolize this by having a new harmony with a race of aliens.

An Alien Wife

My main character’s lasting relationship with a woman who is possessed by an alien mind. I was going to make her an intelligent, human-sized cow liver that he meets in a UFO, but I think that’s over the top. I’ll just have the alien mind in the woman.

An Artist's Life

How it feels from the inside to spend your life carrying out fictional fabulation and scientific theorizing. Or painting. Or being an intellectual. I could have my character be inhabited by an alien, and this could be an objective correlative for being an artist.

Life After Death

The realization that the world continues after you die. The meaninglessness / meaningfulness of life. In this context, the aliens might be ghosts. We could have a reveal, a slow dawning of this fact, and the realization that the coming New Harmony is literally the End of the World.

Science Ideas

I'll start with a more or less random list of some themes that I currently find appealing, and which I *might* use. And then I'll begin adding science ideas that are more specific to *Jim and the Flims*.

Magic Doors

I've always liked the idea of magic doors to other worlds, also known as Einstein-Rosen bridges. I wrote about them in *The Sex Sphere*, for instance, and I thought about them again this summer in Dick Termes's studio.

As it happens, Dick just sent me an email encouraging me to think of his spherical paintings in this way.

"To be living in a world where these spheres float in. Spheres like my work where you can see from outside what is really an inside view. With some effort you can enter these spheres and get on the inside which takes you to those real worlds. Some are real worlds some could be subconscious worlds etc. So, you could go from one world to the next by finding these spheres to enter. You would be able to look at the outside of the inside scene before entering..."

I like that idea, I like to think of a character with spheres/doors swarming around him or her like fireflies. Like old memories.

Dreams, Memories, Ghosts

We've seen plenty of virtual reality tales in which people mistake an illusion for a reality. But I think there's still some interesting things to be done with ordinary dreams. Waking up inside them? Finding out that they're really happening in a higher dimension?

In the mental front, we might also consider viewing memories as in some sense real. Maybe memory is a form of time-travel, and you really can flip back into the past or, more oddly, bring people from your past into your present.

I've always thought there should be more SF that speculates about what happens to people after they die. This can shade into fantasy, of course, but giving it an SF slant would be interesting. Certainly it's nice to speculate that there's some kind of underworld...rather than nothing. Suppose it's made of dark matter.

Why?

Why are we here? What's it all for? What's the meaning of life? Why does anything exist at all? Why is there something instead of nothing? Surely SF can come up with an answer.

New Senses

How about some new senses—other than, say, telepathy or radio-wave-sensitivity? Things we might notice more acutely: viscosity, temperature, pressure, electrical charge, neutrinos, Higgs bosons, sterile neutrinos, quarks. Seeing “ghosts,” that is, the *flims*.

Natural Books

A fan, Andy Valencia, wrote me in response to my blog post, “[Nested Scrolls, Alpha Start](#),” suggesting that Jim Oster be somehow broadcasting his story to other worlds, perhaps by collapsing the info into diamond-weave nanobooks that he launches into space via a rail-gun. Andy also proposed that Jim might find some extraterrestrials’ nanoautobiographies on Earth.

I like the feel of these idea, but in order to give my book a fresh feel, I do want to avoid familiar notions of possible technology—sometimes we forget how unfamiliar the future is likely to be. I see the autobios as being more like biotech growths than like tiny abacus-precise tapestries of atoms. I think of seeds or animalcules that grow into scroll-patterned cultures, akin to lichens on rocks. Or of hive-mind algal blooms. Or of quantum-computing air currents.

We can readily suppose that alien autobios are all around us in these kinds of forms, and always have been. But—until Jim Oster’s breakthroughs—we haven’t been able to read these **natural books**. Note that natural books aren’t a new concept. For instance, my friend Brian Wallace has, I believe, an ancestor who was a fringe scientist who said he could read the markings of shale as clearly as the pages of a newspaper.

For that matter, the *Book of Mormon* is described as originating in some marks on plates that the prophet Joseph Smith deciphered by using a “seer stone” or a pair of “stones of sight” known as [Urim and Thummim](#). What if Jim Oster were to found a new religion based on a natural book that he finds in the form of the shadows of a eucalyptus tree’s leaves, or in the rustling whispers of a palm tree’s fronds?

There’s a bit of the hylozoism notion in the concept of natural books—as we’re talking about ubiquitous, logically deep information. I find it pleasant to suppose that the air is teeming with the biographies of extraterrestrials. Note that these aliens aren’t necessarily from other planets, they might be from the subdimensions or parallel branes. To me it’s always seemed like overkill to drag in aliens from millions of light-years away. Why shouldn’t they be as near as my heartbeat?

Where Are the Flims From?

I’m not interested in having the flims come from distant stars or planets, that whole concept feels hackneyed and boring. I want them to come from right here, like nature spirits.

Maybe the flims live in a time dimension perpendicular to ours, but they share our same space. And we only glimpse them in brief flashes when their world lines cross our spacetime manifold. No, This won’t really work, for our spacetime manifolds would only cross at one spacelike cross section, and you wouldn’t have ongoing repeated encounters.

A standard way of explaining otherworldly beings is to suppose that they live on a universe parallel to ours, and they are able to reach over into our world or even hop back and forth. Like from the astral plane. But I want a sense of the flims being *essentially* embedded in our world—like elves or ghosts. So I want a more intimate connection than a some parallel world, something more integrate than alternate sheet of spacetime that's stuck to ours like a protective plastic sheet stuck to the viewscreen of a new digital camera. If there's any fixed, uniform distance between the two hyperplanes of reality, the worlds are separate, even if the distance is a mere Planck length.

So I'll suppose that, yes, flims live in a parallel spacetime, but that their astral plane and our mundane plane are in fact precisely the same in many spacetime regions. I think of an astral veneer that's irregularly delaminating from a mundane tabletop. At certain places and times, the world of the flims is identical with our quotidian reality, in other spots their reality sheet bulges up. I suppose that the bulge pattern is, like any other naturally occurring shape, a chaotic fractal.

If we go with the delaminated sheets model, we can have the traditional fantasy notion of there being certain times and lands where "the elves are real." Locales where Flimland and our mundane world are one and the same. And the action of my book has to do with a Return Of The Magic. We're about to pass through an era when the flims are fully visible to us all the time, and the astral and the mundane worlds are one.

Do the flims welcome the impending unification? I think not, nor more so than will the conservative elements of our own society. Let's suppose that the elvish flims are green and Earth-nurturing. They won't relish being merged into a world full of real estate developers, gross polluters, and shopping malls. Perhaps Weena's mission is to try and reform humanity a little before the worlds merge. Perhaps Jim's mission is to teach the flims to love us.

A UFO and a Cow Liver?

I'd sort of like to have Weena arriving in a UFO. How can I justify this without going over to the space-travel scenario? Perhaps the flims have a magic travel pod or bowl that resembles a flying saucer. And they can use it to pop over from the other world to ours.

Suppose that they don't physically travel inside the UFO, but it's more that they're projecting an exploration module, along the lines of a Mars rover. They can see through the UFO and, to a limited extent, do things with it. They'll have their own name for the UFOs.

Why would I have Weena living in a tweaked cow liver? Well, mainly I'm goofing off the traditional notion of UFO cattle mutilations. But I want a science reason to explain it. Suppose that the flims can't physically come here unless they're in one of those spacetime regions where our mundane world and the Flimland happen to overlap. When the worlds are separate, a flim can nevertheless project their personality information into a piece of mundane host matter. And for some mumble-mumble science reason, a cow liver is very suitable. If carried out fully and for a long period of time, the flim's astral projection kills the flim's original body. Weena makes this sacrifice as she has an important mission in the mundane world.

Sometimes flims reach over here just to fuck with us, whether for something as small as making a shoelace snap or as large as making an airplane crash. When this happens you might see a brief flicker of a UFO, acting as an eye and manipulator.

Sheckley Walks Around Corners to An Alternate World

I like the notion of a “universe next door” scenario. The universe next door isn’t reached via an SF-style higher-dimensional hop to a separate brane, but rather by walking around the streets of one’s home town in an odd way, turning unexpected corners, cutting down heretofore unexplored alleys, and slowly the buildings take on an odd cast, and you see some unusual animals—not exactly dogs—around the corners.

I get this mode of transfer from a Robert Sheckley story—“The Altar,” 1953, which appears in his epochal collection, *Untouched By Human Hands*, of 1954. In “The Altar,” the protagonist, Mr. Slater, is led into an alternate world by a stranger named Elor. They walk around and around the streets of Mr. Slater’s little suburban town, and somehow he ends up as the sacrificial offering at temple in the alternate world. Here’s how Sheckley writes the transition:

They walked down Oak Street, toward the center of town. Then, just as they reached the first stores, Elor turned. He led Mr. Slater two blocks over and a block down, and then retraced a block. After that he headed back toward the railroad station.

It was getting quite dark.

“Isn’t there a simpler way?” Mr. Slater asked.

“Oh, no,” Elor said. “This is the most direct. If you knew the roundabout way I came the first time---”

They walked on, backtracking blocks, circling, recrossing streets they had already passed, going back and forth over the town Mr. Slater knew so well.

But as it grew darker, and as they approached familiar streets from unfamiliar directions, Mr. Slater became just a trifle confused. He knew where he was, of course, but the constant circling had thrown him off...

Mr. Slater tried to place what street they were on without looking at the sign post, and then they made another unexpected turn. He had just made up his mind that they were backtracking on Walnut Lane, when he found that he couldn’t remember the next cross street. AS they passed the corner he looked at the sign.

It read: Left Orifice.

Mr. Slater couldn’t remember any street in North Ambrose called Left Orifice.

How Many Paths?

My cottage on the alley behind Madrone Street lay some six blocks from Mahalo Gelato on Pacific Avenue—basically, I had to go three blocks south and three blocks west.

I’d thought about this to the point of taking pencil and paper to the project—writing W for west S for south, planning my route as efficiently as possible was a matter of stringing together a pattern of three W’s and three S’s. I had a mental system for remembering the patterns, and, despite my seizures, this was still in place.

If I started out to the west, there were ten ways to cover the route: WWWSSS, WWSWSS, WWSSWS, WWSSSW, WSWWSS, WSWWSW, WSWSSW, WSSWWS, WSSWSW, WSSSWW. And I had ten more routes, if I started to the south: SSSWWW, SSWSWW, SSWWSW, SSWWWS, SWSSWW, SWSWSW, SWSWWS, SWWSSW, SWWSWS, SWWWSS.

My mathematician computer-hacker friend Bill Gosper directed me to a paper that discusses that if you have an M by N grid, the number of non-reversing paths from one corner to the other is the number of ways of choosing M objects from a collection of size M+N—which takes the form of an expression involving factorials.

The Population of Flimsy

According to one [recent guess](#), there are maybe between ten sextillion and a septillion (10^{22} to 10^{24}) stars in our universe. How many stars have intelligent life forms inside them or orbiting them? Maybe all of them, maybe a tenth, maybe one in ten thousand. So the number of intelligent races could range from a quintillion to a septillion.

I'd kind of prefer not to use the word sextillion, as the "sex" syllable throws people's minds into a tailspin. Maybe a quintillion is enough? Oh, why not go with septillion, especially taking into account that most planetary systems probably have (in my opinion) more than one intelligent race, if you count the salamander beings in the stars and in the cores of planets.

Possibly, so as to have even *more* ghosts, I could have not just the ghosts of humans and aliens, but also the ghosts of Earthly animals and even the ghosts of objects. In a way I'd like that—but then I'd have to explicitly introduce the notion that everything on Earth has a soul and ghost, and I don't want to take that route here, as it would be too much a repeat of *Hylozoic*.

Breaking the Bank of Computation

[[I blogged this entry](#) on September 21, 2009]

I have this idea that there are some mathematicians in my fictional afterworld Flimsy who are bent on doing some extremely demanding mathematical computations. The chief among these guys is the ghost of Charles Howard Hinton, a quirky character whom I've written about before, an early advocate of higher dimensional geometry.

My idea is that Hinton, who now lives in the Earth-based region of the afterworld, is computing such outré mathematical objects that he's had to borrow energy from the neighboring realms of the afterworld, that is from the ghosts of Solsol and the ghosts of Bulber. And now the Solsol and Bulber ghosts are tired of waiting for their payback, and they plan to do a repo on Hinton. They're going to siphon every living soul off Earth so as to pay off Hinton's energy debt.

This is, in part, my satirical take on what the quantitative analysts of Wall Street did to the economy in 2008. But overcomputing is also something that interests me on its own.

Over the years, I've noticed that certain kinds of computations are inexhaustibly greedy, and that by dialing up certain of their parameters to values that seem not all that big, you can get a computation whose demands would overwhelm the physical world.

So what kind of computation is C. H. Hinton doing?

Let's back up a step to see how gnarly his computation needs to be. What is the computational capacity of ordinary physical space? According to quantum mechanics, the

smallest meaningful length is the Planck length, which, in meters, is 1 divided by 10-to-the-35th power. And the shortest meaningful time is the Planck time, which is how long it takes a light ray to travel a distance of one Planck length. Measured in seconds, the Planck time clocks in at 1 divided by 10-to-the-43rd power.

So if we assume that we might master an eldritch quantum computational technique that lets us carry out one computational operation per Planck length per Planck time, we'd be able to blaze along at 10-to-the-78th power operations per second per cubic meter.

It might actually be that our physical space is in fact doing this everywhere and everywhen...effortlessly. Just keeping itself going.

Planet Earth has a volume in cubic meters of about 10-to-the-21st power, so if we throw all of the planet at a problem, we can compute some 10-to-the-99th-power operations per second.

We might just call it ten to the hundredth power, which happens to be the mathematicians' old friend, the number googol. Googol ops per second!

The diameter of our observable universe is currently estimated to be about 10-to-the-27th-power meters, so the whole universe has a volume on the order of 10-to-the-81st-power meters. And if you set all of that space to computing, you'll rack up some 10-to-the-151st-power operations per second. Less than a googol squared.

Using the whole universe as a computer doesn't give you a very dramatic gain over just using Earth—the reason for this is that, relatively speaking, the jump from Planck length to Earth is in fact bigger than the jump from Earth to Universe.

Now let's think of computations so greedy that they can swamp this level of computational capacity.

(1) Use a parallel computation which is spread out across a very large number of voxels, that is, small volume cells of idealized mathematical space. You can really increase the number of voxels by requiring that you can zoom down very deep into your views of the object.

(2) Have the basic step of your computation per voxel be somewhat demanding. Have it use a higher-order formula, and have it require the formula to be iterated a large number of times.

(3) Run a very large number of these computations at once because, we'll suppose, you're searching through a space of all possible formulae—hoping to find the best one.

(4) And, just to keep the demand flowing, suppose that you want to update the output reasonably fast, say at a hundred times per second, so as to create a nice smooth animation.

I've been thinking about three-dimensional fractals lately, so let's suppose that's the kind of computation we'll use. I'll want to look at a 3D fractal that's twisting and changing in real time as some parameter is varied.

The familiar Mandelbrot set is based on a quadratic equation in a two-dimensional space. For our illustrations, suppose we're interested in three-dimensional analogs of the Mandelbrot set. And, to make it funky, suppose that instead of just looking at quadratic equations, we'll be looking at higher-degree equations as well, where the "degree" of an equation is the highest power used. A quadratic equation has degree 2, a cubic equation has degree 3 and so on.

If we pass to higher degrees, it'll be convenient to write the degree in the form $(N/2)$ for convenience. We'll be using complex numbers as parameters, so that means that one of

these equations has N parameters. And evaluating a polynomial of this form takes on the order of N -squared steps.

In order to really get greedy with the computations, once we specify the degree of the polynomial we're using, we'll want to be looking at all possible variations on the polynomial of this degree. It's like we'd be searching for the gnarliest or the most beautiful fifth-degree three-dimensional analog of the Mandelbrot Set. And we'll suppose that the search can be automated by doing a brute-force search and ranking the results according to some mathematical measure such as entropy.

So now let's see how high the computational demand might run.

First of all, how many voxels per fractal? That is, how fine a mathematical grid do we want to look at? Well, let's have a nice big cubical display, ten meters on a side, with a resolution down to the smallest visible level, say to a tenth of a millimeter. And let's also require that I can zoom down into the fractal by a factor of a ten million (which is a series of seven ten-fold zoom steps). So that comes to a resolution of a trillion voxels per edge, and I cube that for 10-to-the-36th-power voxels in all.

And I'll iterate my fractal formulae a thousand times per voxel, so that makes 10-to-the-39th-power steps.

Suppose I'm looking at all the possible fractals specified by let us say, a degree five polynomial that uses complex-number parameters. So, if we don't to the trouble of eliminating terms from the polynomial and we don't take into account the constant term, that makes a total of ten real-number parameters, and evaluating the polynomial might take on the order of ten-squared steps. So now we're looking at 10-to-the-41st-power steps to generate one of our degree-six fractals.

And, as I said, we'll look at a wide range of the possible fractals of this kind—again assuming that we have some background algorithm to select the most aesthetically pleasing one.

For our search through the range of all the possible fractals of this kind, suppose that we let each of our ten real-number parameters vary between -5.0 and +5.0, stepping them along rather coarsely by increments of a thousandth. So each parameter is stepped through 10,000 values. And there are ten parameters, so I get 10,000 to the 10th-power combinations of values, that is, a number of combinations that's 10-to-the-40th-power.

Multiplying this number of fractals times the number computational steps per fractal, we get 10-to-the-79th-power computational steps in the case where we use a degree five equation. So it takes ten seconds for a cubic meter of space computing flat out to show the "best" of the degree five fractals.

And now, as I mentioned, we'll require that the display be updated in real time while some additional parameter is being smoothly varied. I want, as I said, a hundred updates per second. But each update takes ten seconds. Fine, I'll throw a thousand cubic meters of space at my problem. That's just a cube that's ten meters on a side, so my display field is just large enough to compute my image in real time.

But now Hinton wants to crank up the degree! He's not happy with degree five.

Suppose we specify some arbitrary degree that I'll write in the form $(N/2)$. This is an order $N/2$ polynomial with complex numbers as parameters and, therefore N real-number parameters to worry about. Evaluating the polynomial takes on the order of N -squared steps, and doing this a thousand times for our preferred voxel sizes makes for (10-to-the-36th times N -squared) steps.

And we step our parameters along at that same small increment we talked about above, the number of possible fractals of this kind are (10-to-the-4N-power).

So, all in all, if we go to a degree of the form $(N/2)$, it takes (10-to-the-36th times N-squared times 10-to-the-4N-power) steps to generate all variations of the 3D fractals of this degree.

So if Hinton wants to look at fractals of degree 25, that means an N value of 50 parameters. So then our number of computations needed to show the best of these fractals is 10-to-the-36th-power times 50-squared times 10-to-the-200th-power. That means our product is going to be a number between 10-to-the-237th-power and 10-to-the-238th-power. Well over a googol-squared.

ZZZT! System overload.

For, remember, Earth can only compute about a googol operations per second, and the whole visible universe can only handle 10-to-the-151st-power!

Time to have a talk with those Solsols and Bulbers about borrowing, googol-squared computations per second...

I considered going to higher dimensions than three, and I probably will. But initially I thought that (a) I'm already using higher dimensions in another context in my novel, (b) jacking it up a few dimensions doesn't make the really crushing increase in computation that we need, (c) fractals are also a kind of odd dimension anyway.

Note that it's the search aspect that makes the things need so much crunch. Search is always the ballbuster in programming.

The reason I bring in the topic of time and animation, is that I want the computational demands of these displays to be ongoing. It's like you want to be computing a fresh variation on the 3D Mandelbrot set a hundred times a second. And each successive frame is hard to compute as each time you have to search through the branching tree of all the possible next frames.

Real-time in this context means computing something as fast as you want to display it...with pre-rendering ruled out. The game here is to make the requirements so insanely high that you get something that's physically impossible...so you have to borrow stuff from the Solsols and the Bulbers.

Hinton learned about fractals in 1986. He got interested in running a higher-order Mandelbrot set algorithm, akin to Hubbard and Douady's cubic connectedness map, looking at various 3D cross-sections of the shape.

In an $N+2$ degree polynomial, we can eliminate the second-highest-order term, and the constant term is varied through a range of possible values like a scanner probe, used for drawing 2D Mandelbrot-style sets. So really we only have N parameters that we can tweak. Each parameter is a complex number, so we have $2N$ variables. So we can think of there as being a $2N$ -dimensional space whose points are higher-order 2D Mandelbrot-style set. It's more visual, to think of it as a $(2N-1)$ -dimensional space whose points are higher order 3D Mandelbrot-style sets (each of which is a stack of 2D Mandelbrot-style sets).

Hinton likes the number 27, as he once designed some Rubik's-cube-like objects for modeling the fourth dimension. If $2N-1=27$, then N is 14, and $N+2$ is 16.

So, okay, Hinton is looking at polynomials of degree 16. And these lead to a 27-dimensional space of 3D Mandelbrot-style sets. And what Hinton is doing is tracking an

ongoing trajectory through the 27-dimensional space, and watching how the 3D objects change. There's well over a googol of them.

The Monomyth

Campbell's Monomyth

Here are some notes on the different stages of the "Monomyth" as outlined in Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Bollingen Foundation, 1949.) I'll also add notes on how I might use these elements in an SF novel.

I first wrote up a version of this information when I was working on *Frek and the Elixir*, and it's in the *Notes* for that book.

It's been pointed out to me that the monomyth is male-centered—traditionally, it's about a hero, and not about a heroine. I gave some thought to how the monomyth could work for a heroine, and I've noted the relevant changes in square brackets.

In this version of the Monomyth material, I also make some notes about how to apply all this to *Jim and the Flims*.

Overall Arc

(I: Departure) Hero or heroine goes to a special place,
(II: Initiation) is transformed and gets something magical, and
(III: Return) brings it back.

I: Departure

1. THE CALL TO ADVENTURE

Herald, sign. Goal is a higher world or a special spot in the universe

2. REFUSAL OF THE CALL.

Let the hero's companion or brother be the one to refuse.

3. THE HELPER.

The little dwarf or magic animal of fairy tales. Gives the hero a magic tool like a cloak or an amulet.

4. CROSSING THE THRESHOLD.

A spooky enemy. A peyote freak-out. A woman whose knees bend the wrong way.

5. THE BELLY OF THE WHALE.

Meet a woman in the whale who is the whale's soul. In SF, if you, for instance, convert yourself into radiation to travel, the "belly" is the state of being in the chiming nospacetime. If you go through the tunnel-portal, then the tunnel could be the belly of the whale.

II: Initiation

6. THE ROAD OF TRIALS.

A series of trials, in which you are aided by tips from your helper or helpers. (I remember an SF story where a guy had to face his own fears become physical. A hydra-headed monster.) Think more in terms of a series of trials. The traditional fairy-tale number of trials is of course three.

7. THE GODDESS [THE BRIDEGROOM]

The Goddess: The nurturing mother, viewed at a higher plane than sexuality. I have the mental image of a mother I saw with her baby alone on the beach at Lover's Cove in Pacific Grove near Monterey. "Just Mommy and Me." Possibly goddess appears as an ugly woman whom you kiss to deliver and make beautiful, like in *The Magic Flute*. The two mother aspects are united, the nurturer and the sex partner. The Wife.

[For a heroine, this is the caring, but distant, father brought close. The ideal suitor.]

8. THE TEMPTRESS[THE TYRANT]

Coupled with or based on or evoking a disgust with the flesh. The punishing, ignoring, sexually active mother. The wife when you're tired of her and she's tired of you? The Millstone, the Termagant, the Virago, the Quagmire. Demanding, hysterical bitch. Being around the Temptress and her bad scenes makes a fella want to transcend already, and be pure info.

[For a heroine, this is the Rapist or Pimp or Tyrant, the one who exploits sex against its natural purpose of love and procreation.]

9. ATONEMENT WITH THE FATHER. [ATONEMENT WITH THE MOTHER.]

The parent may appear as a beggar. Or as an ogre as in *Jack and the Beanstalk*. True success is peace with father [mother], not his [her] murder. You get power.

10. APOTHEOSIS.

Eternity=time. Love and forgiveness, peace to all. God is present in everything. Bodhisattva=Mother + Father; Androgyny.

The Buddhist "Om mane padme hum" means "The lotus holds a jewel," which is analogous "God made the World" or "The Word was made Flesh." Someone might argue that God, the Word, or the living Lotus are of a higher order than, respectively, the World, or Flesh, or a Jewel.

I'm not crazy about the "jewel/lotus" metaphor as, as it seems like a materialistic grasping merchant-like attitude, really, to think of a mere dead mineral jewel as more valuable than a living lotus.)

What's up with the Mother + Father thing? Campbell says we have the good mother, and the father seems evil because he invades, the father is one's first enemy, the paradigm of all enemies to come. But in a happy family, the father has good content too, he's the nurturing motherly father. In enlightenment, we expand the nurturing father notion and drive out the enemy father idea. So that we want to nurture our enemies. See Father as a fellow human. This becomes possible after the Meeting with the Goddess (a girl other than Mom) and the Atonement with the Father (Dad is your friend). You're ready to be a nurturing father.

A second thing Campbell stresses is getting rid of desire, in apotheosis there's nothing beyond the now moment

Form is emptiness, emptiness is form. This is the secret of kenner. Matter is a mode of nothingness. Saying it's curved space doesn't go far enough, you have to see that the constituent curved space is itself nothing but thought. Thoughts thinking themselves. Eternity in the now moment.

11. THE BOON. [THE MIRACULOUS BIRTH.]

A trophy, a magic wand, magic spell, a souvenir. The theft of fire from the gods. Hero pushes further than the power granted by the Father in #9, and now there's trouble.

III: Return

12A. REFUSAL OF THE RETURN.

Refusal: Hero might meet a guy who's stuck up in "heaven," like a lotus-eater.

12B. THE FLIGHT.

Flight: Possibly done with the help of the gods, but more commonly with the gods chasing you, as in Jack from the Beanstalk.

13A. RESCUE FROM WITHOUT.

The world comes to get you, to bring you back. Maybe your lover in the real world helps you return.

13B. CROSSING THE RETURN THRESHOLD.

At first it's hard to be back. Rip van Winkle, when a 100 years have passed. A Square speaking of Flatland as "that dull, level wilderness."

14. MASTER OF TWO WORLDS.

The Higher Kingdom where the hero went is a hidden aspect of our world. Hero has ongoing lasting access to the Higher Kingdom. She / He sees the two as one. The hero presents an elixir which heals and restores the world.

15. FREEDOM TO LIVE.

Perhaps the hero becomes an anonymous wanderer. His or her work continues. Life goes on. A glimmering of a whole new cycle to begin further on.

The Monomyth in my Recent Novels

<i>Monomyth</i>	<i>Frek and the Elixir</i>	<i>Mathematicians in Love</i>	<i>Postsingular</i>	<i>Hylozoic</i>	<i>Jim and the Flims</i>
I: Call.	Bumby under his bed.			Jayjay dreams of pitchfork.	
Refusal of Call.	Cops kill Bumby.			He tries to escape.	
Helper.	Gibby the Grullo.			The pitchfork.	
Threshold.	Stun City.			The Peng appear.	
Inside Whale	Ride in Bumby.			Riding in the Hrull.	
II: Road of Trials.	Crash near Unipusk.			Thuy and Jayjay jump.	
Goddess.	Renata.			Thuy is goddess.	
Temptress.	Yessica Sunshine.			Glee gets Chu hooked.	
Atonement with Father.	Frek befriends Dad at Bar.			Jayjay with Bosch	
Heaven.	Inside a star at Orpoly.			Flying over the Planck Sea	
Boon.	Frek finds DNA for Earth			Learn how to vaar	
III: Refusal of Return	Dad stays to save...			Scared of maelstrom.	
Flight.	Frek, who flees.			Into maelstrom	
Rescue.	Renata helps Frek home.			Jayjay helps Chu home.	
Return Threshold.	Revolution against Gov.			Peng are still around.	
Two Worlds.	One more threat.			Jayjay goes transfinite.	
Free to Live	Frek frees all via toons.			Kill Pekklet.	
#POVs/ P.O.V.	1 POV/ 3rd	1 POV / 1st	7 POVs / 3rd	3 POVs / 3rd	1 POV / 1st
<i>Monomyth</i>	<i>Frek and the Elixir</i>	<i>Mathematicians in Love</i>	<i>Postsingular</i>	<i>Hylozoic</i>	<i>Jim and the Flims</i>

Proposal

Proposal Version 1

[On June 10, 2009, I sent David Hartwell at Tor Books the following proposal, along with (a) a copy of the outline as it stood at that time, plus (b) the first 40,000 words of the book (up through the start of “The Ambush” chapter), plus (c), just for fun, images of my three paintings thus far for the book: “The Flims,” “The Clone Garden,” and “The Abduction.”]

This is a novel about a science-fictional afterworld, revolving around the main character’s successful quests to find love—and to stave off end of the Earth.

I plan for a word count of 85,000 to 90,000 words. I have about 40,000 words done on the first draft, which I’ll send along with this proposal. I anticipate finishing the novel by March, 2010, or a little sooner.

The main character, Jim, is a sixty-year old man who becomes rejuvenated, and appears about thirty years old for most of the book. He discovers a portal to the afterworld—which is called Flimsy. Flimsy is populated by beings collectively known as flims. Some of the flims are human ghosts, others are humans native to Flimsy, still others fall into two categories of alien-seeming beings: the evil jivas and the good yuels.

The jivas try to enlist Jim to help them destroy Earth, instead he throws in his lot with the yuels and fights to save Earth. Along the way, he has some wistful encounters the ghost of his wife, and he looks for a new woman with whom to spend his remaining years on Earth.

There isn’t a great deal of technology in the book—other than biotech, the main SF gimmicks that I’ll be using relate to spacewarps, such a substance called zickzack, which is a kind of substitute for matter, and is made of folded-up bits of space. The flims have the skill of making zickzack, which might be thought of as hyperdimensional origami.

Despite the themes of death and destruction, the book is light-hearted and fast-paced, with lively characters and striking scenes.

Proposal Version 4

[I sent Dave two further variations on that first proposal, and then, after Tor rejected the book on October 20, 2009, I changed the book quite a bit and created a fourth version of the proposal, which I sent to the U. S. branch of Orbit Books in February, 2010, along with the first four chapters. Rather than burdening my proposal with a full outline, I cooked the essence of the book down to a page or two, like in a book review.]

Jim and the Flims is a novel set in a fantastic afterworld, revolving around the main character’s successful quest to resurrect his wife—and to stave off the end of the Earth. You might say that *Jim and the Flims* is an alternative-culture Orpheus and Eurydice with a happy ending.

Despite the themes of death and destruction, the book is light-hearted, with quirky, amusing characters.

Some of the novel is set amid the surf-punk culture of Santa Cruz, California, and the rest is set in an afterworld called Flimsy. Flimsy is somewhat like a fantasy kingdom, with

rolling fields and a castle in the shape of a giant geranium. The inhabitants of Flimsy are called flims—these include some menacing aliens as well as human ghosts.

In the book's opening scenes, our twenty-seven-year-old slacker hero, Jim Oster, loses his wife, Val. Unwittingly, Jim has made a hole in the barrier that separates Earth from the afterworld. An evil being sends through an egg that parasitizes Val—and this kills her.

A devious woman ghost named Weena converts the hole into a two-way tunnel between Earth and Flimsy. Weena seduces and recruits the grieving Jim, taking him to the afterworld. Jim hopes to find Val there. Weena's plan is that Jim is to ferry alien eggs back to Earth. Once Jim realizes that these are the same kinds of eggs that killed his wife, he rebels.

With the help of some surf-punk friends, Jim successfully blocks the alien invasion. And then he finds his way to the very core of Flimsy. The ghost of his beloved wife is there, and Jim finds a way to bring her home and to give her a new body.

I plan for a word count of 90,000 words and I expect to finish the novel by April, 2010, or a little sooner. I've now finished writing 26 of my projected 29 chapters. I'll send the first four chapters along with this proposal as a sample.

Outline

[In general, before I write a chapter, the outline of it is only a rough indicator of what I really write. This time around, I've been updating the outline sections after I've actually written the chapters, trying to keep them roughly in synch with what's actually in the book. So what you see here makes me look more prescient and organized than I really am. Note, however, that I moved my chapter breaks a number of times, so it may be that some of these outline chapter summaries aren't quite accurate about the locations of the breaks.]

1. Four Mile Beach

Jim is a twenty-eight year old man with a Bachelor's degree in bioengineering.

He surfed in high-school with his friend Chang. They had a running fight with a spaced-out surfer acquaintance called Skeeves. Skeeves had a stolen gold Egyptian sarcophagus in the back of the van that he lives in. It was said that Skeeves murdered a guy in San Francisco when he stole this item, and that Skeeves was having sex with a mummy in the gold casket.

2. A Sharper Tip

Jim finishes high-school and college and begins work at a genomics start-up company, and loses his job for joking about the dangers of genomics. After being fired, he makes a scene at a company picnic, and is blackballed from getting any more genetic engineering jobs.

He works as a mailman for a couple of years while doing a small amount of independent science research. He gets into playing with a scanning-tunneling electron microscope that he builds for a couple of thousand dollars. Skeeves intervenes, out of the blue, and gets Jim a special scanning tip for his device, a tip stolen from a physics lab by another surfer, named Ira. The tip is made of an exotic form of matter called metallic hydrogen.

3. Val

Jim meets a kindergarten teacher named Val, they fall in love, and get married.

They're happy, they're talking about having a baby. They live in a small, rented cottage in Santa Cruz, California.

For fun, and as a kind of romantic gesture, Jim gets some of Val's DNA from the skin-flakes in her hairbrush and shows it to her on rainy February night, using his scanning-tunneling microscope with the special tip.

They go to bed and make love, hoping for a baby. Lightning strikes a power pole across the street just as they reach their climax. In the aftermath of the lighting crash, Jim and Val see a glowing dot that rushes into their room and disappears under their sheets.

Val thinks it crawled inside her, but Jim reassures her, saying they just saw an afterimage from the flash. His scanning-tunneling microscope was still on, and it sparked into the sample from the current overload. Jim sets the sample aside as a memento.

They think Val is pregnant, but she is feeling sick and having bad dreams. After six months she wants to go to the doctor. The doctor thinks it's cancer and operates. Val dies in surgery. The tumor of very odd, and out of biohazard considerations, the doctors incinerate Val's body with the tumor on the spot.

Jim's old acquaintance Skeeves shows up at the funeral reception and acts weird. He steals the charred sample from Jim's desk.

Jim is depressed. That winter he hears about a strange double murder on Lover's Bluff, a parking spot in Santa Cruz.

In the springtime, he begins to get over his grief.

4: The Portal

Jim is living alone in the same small rented cottage in Santa Cruz, California. His only companion is his dog Droog.

It's a sunny July afternoon. Jim decides to walk downtown to get a cup of ice-cream. On the way he plays a game of trying to find a route that he's never traveled before. He has a vision of a weirdly knotted biological molecule and finds a novel path.

Jim and his dog end up cutting down a narrow pathway between two houses. One is a decaying Victorian house that we'll call the Whipped Vic for short.

In the Whipped Vic's back yard, Jim finds a mysterious portal in the form of a disk-shaped basement door that has a hand-print shape exactly fitting his own hand. He opens the portal and the door falls on him. He hears a woman's footsteps, and then scrambles out. He glimpses a gold casket in the basement before the door closes. He sees a surfer guy on the porch frowning at him. His name is Header. A blue slug drops down from Header, and the slug grows and takes on the shape of a sea lion. The three surf punks in the house yell at Jim, the sea lion humps off towards the sea, and Jim hurries away.

5: Brain Event

At the ice cream parlor Jim meets a new clerk, Weena Wesson, a flirtatious flaky-seeming woman who appears to be about his age or maybe a little younger. But Weena has an old-fashioned style of speech, as if she's from a hundred years ago.

Without him asking her to, Weena puts sprinkles on his ice-cream—he doesn't like sprinkles, but he eats them anyway.

He goes back home to read on his couch. And then he's struck by a pair of seizures. He awakes in the hospital. They're not sure what happened to him. Jim befriends a nurse at the hospital, nurse Alice. Alice actually attended Jim's wife during her death as well, but she doesn't tell him very much.

After three days they release Jim.

Right before Jim checks out, Weena Wesson turns up, claiming that she's Jim's wife. He goes along with this, as he's glad for the company.

6: Weena Wesson

Weena and Jim ride back to his house in a cab, and it turns out Weena's stuff is already on Jim's porch, and she plans to move in.

Jim asks Weena what's really going on, but she's evasive. She drops some hints that she might have come through the tunnel in the basement of the Whipped Vic from a parallel world—the world is called Flimsy, and the beings from Flimsy are flims. Jim doesn't take this seriously. He and Weena make love and she settles in.

After a week, Jim comes upon Weena making love to his landlord Dick Simly—who lives with his own wife Deena in a big house right next door. The landlord's wife Deena is aware of the tryst between Weena and her husband. The next morning she threatens Jim with eviction. That evening Jim gets drunk with Weena, and she tells him that they're going to have to go to Flimsy the next morning. Weena tells Jim she was planting jiva eggs in the landlord's flesh. A jiva is a kind of symbiotic being from Flimsy, and Weena has one living inside her. This creeps Jim out and reminds him of Val's death.

Weena tells Jim that the blue seal that he saw near the Whipped Vic house was a rival Flimsy creature called a yuel. Weena says jivas are good and yuels are bad. She says she's come to Earth to hunt down a bad guy from Flimsy called the Graf who was an ally of the yuels.

7: Yuel

The yuel shows up with a bunch of seals and wordlessly chases Jim and Weena out of the house the next morning. Weena eats some more of her sprinkles, they're kind of a Flimsy drug. Jim tries to lead Weena to the Whipped Vic with the tunnel in the basement but he can't find it. The yuel follows them at a distance—now he's taken on the shape of a blue baboon.

Jim and Weena go to the beach and ask Jim's surfer friend Chang to help them find the people who live in the Whipped Vic now so that they can follow them home. Jim used to buy pot from Chang, they knew each other in high-school. Chang agrees to introduce them to the Whipped Vic crew at a coffee shop in the early evening. The yuel has gone back into the ocean with the seals.

8: The Boardwalk

To pass the afternoon, Jim and Weena spend some time at the Boardwalk amusement park. Weena shows Jim how she can use her resident jiva's space warping skills to make a lawn chair from nothing. This is a technique widely used in Flimsy, the objects made of folded-up space are called zickzack. Weena mentions a Flimsy amusement park called Funger Gardens.

On the roller coaster, Weena gets sick to her stomach and pukes out her jiva, named Awnee, who is shaped like a glowing flying turnip with a branching tail. Without Awnee

inside her, Weena suddenly looks extremely old, like a hundred and fifty. Awnee drifts away, perhaps to check on the growing larvae that she implanted in Jim's landlord, Dick Simly.

9: The Whipped Vic Crew

Jim and Weena meet the Whipped Vic residents: Header, Ira, and the ethereal Ginnie. Jim has an immediate crush on Ginnie, even though he's much too old for her. Header is a big, obnoxious bully and Ira is an unschooled wannabe physicist—it turns out he's the guy who supplied the metallic hydrogen tip that Jim used in his scanning-tunneling microscope.

Ginnie talks about a voice in her head that herded her to the Whipped Vic several weeks ago. She opened the portal in the basement and an aristocratic-looking guy came out. He was called the Graf. The Graf stole a car and took her to park on a cliff, perhaps to make love to her. But Ginnie can't remember what happened next the night. The next day she hooked up with Header.

The Graf was found dead, axe-murdered and burned up, in that same stolen car the next day. The ashes of his body seem to be made of some weird stuff. And there was a dead woman in the car as well. Ginnie doesn't want to think about it. Weena forms a theory that the Graf has somehow moved his mind into the body of the muscle-bound loudmouth Header.

Jim and Weena get the Whipped Vic Crew to take them to their house for a party. On the way, Header picks up some pizzas, a keg of beer, and some drugs. The Whipped Vic crew are diving Skeeves's old van with the Egyptian writing on it.

The yuel turns up again, and follows them to the Whipped Vic and watches from a tree, still looking like a blue baboon.

All the while, Weena and Header are subtly sparring, as each of them knows who the other really is—that is, Header knows that Weena is an agent from Flimsy, and Weena thinks that Header's mind has been taken over by the Graf from Flimsy.

10: Surf Party

At the party, Jim runs into his old acquaintance Skeeves. Skeeves is a friend of Header's. Skeeves tells Jim that the house is the shell of a border snail who lives in the basement. Skeeves also tells Jim that Jim was the one who made the hole for the snail to get through.

Weena gets Header stoned with her stash of sprinkles. Jim notices that the house has a series of tinier and tinier rooms. Skeeves lives down in those odd, tiny hidden rooms.

Jim gets drunk and as dawn approaches, Weena gets into an argument with Header. She tells Jim that she's going to kill Header.

11: The Jivas

Weena sends a signal to make four new jivas hatch out from the body of Jim's landlord, Dick Simly. So now, Weena's jiva, Awnee, and the four newborn jivas show up. They look like flying, luminous turnips—typically they're the size of a person, but they can shrink to a small size. It's not clear if hosting the jivas actually harmed Dick Simly or not—Jim imagines that it did, but Weena denies this.

The jivas kill the yuel who was watching them from a tree. At the last moment before death the yuel starts making a sound called the "yuel lullaby" that repels the jivas, but Weena stuns it and then the jivas finish it off.

The jivas shrink to the size of fingertips. Weena swallows her old jiva Awnee, and convinces Jim to swallow a jiva called Mijjy. This feels good to Jim, having the jiva inside gives him a certain amount of telepathy, and some mild telekinetic abilities as well. And he's more muscular now. He might have a shot at wooing Ginnie.

Weena goes upstairs with an axe and splits open Header's skull—as she believes Header has been taken over by her enemy the Graf. Header falls out the window, and some blue stuff crawls out of his skull—it's a yuel who's been riding in Header's skull. This yuel is tougher than the other one was, it starts singing the yuel lullaby before they close in, and the jivas can't kill it. The yuel's name is Rickben.

Jim takes control and uses the jiva inside him to kill the yuel, Rickben. He's strong enough to hold off the sickening feel of the yuel lullaby. A little piece of the yuel lands on Ginnie's foot, and Ginnie kind of casually eats it, wanting the kessence energy.

Ginnie and Ira swallow jivas too.

Ira gets angry because Jim is getting closer to Ginnie. He tells Jim the secret: Ira and Ginnie are dead, that is, these are ghosts that Jim's been hanging with. Ginnie recovers her memory that she was indeed axe-murdered in that car on Lover's Bluff with the Graf. She says that although Header was at the scene of the crime, the person who axed her wasn't actually Header, but was his vile companion Skeeves.

Before this, there have been numerous hints that Ginnie is a ghost, but Jim isn't always very observant. Jim now worries that he, too, is dead, but they say, no, you're alive.

Jim opens the tunnel door and is momentarily trapped under the door again.

12: The Tunnel

Ginnie and Ira help Jim out from under the door. The head of a giant snail protrudes from the basement. The tunnel is actually the snail's gut, they have to crawl through it.

Now Weena tells Jim that he has to leave behind his flesh body to travel to Flimsy. It's like astral travel. His kessence soul and his jiva will go, but his meat gets stored in the basement of the Whipped Vic, inside an ancient gold Egyptian sarcophagus. Weena says her own meat body will be stored there as well. She says it was in fact waiting there when she came through. She says she and her boyfriend Charles stored their bodies in the sarcophagus of Amenhotep in the early 1900s. And her body's been in a trance ever since.

Jim leaves his body, aided by a chant Weena teaches him. Weena and Jim are spirits now. Weena uses her jiva tendrils to stretch the gut so it's comfortably wide—they can walk through it. The snail—called a border snail—has a head in each world, and she feeds on some darting bright animalcules that live at the interface between the worlds.

Ira decides to stay behind. Jim's dog Droog stays in the basement, protectively lying on Jim's sarcophagus. Jim has some hope of finding his dead wife, Val, in the other world.

At the midpoint of the tunnel Ginnie and Jim pass through a thick wall of "living water" filled with tiny swarming colored shapes like flying sprinkles. These little things will indeed turn out to be the same as the sprinkles that Weena fed Jim. They're seeds or codes for ghosts who've withered down to a minimal size.

Jim and Ginnie make it through the wall of living water intact. And they emerge in a rural landscape with a plowed field and a house made of five domes.

13: Meet the Flims

The snail's door is in one of the domes, and a farming family lives in the others. It turns out the wall of living water extends through the domes and arches all the way up to become part of the sky.

A man is tending a field by the domes. Growing in it are human-shaped bodies of varying size, all of them made of kessence. Their legs are rooted in the ground, and they have no intelligence, like blank-slate clones. Some of them are quite swollen.

The man speaks English, but mostly they converse via telepathy. He welcomes the newcomers and they have a meal. His name is Monin, he lives with his father, his wife Yerba, his son Durkle, and a baby. The kessence clones in the field look like copies of Monin, by the way.

We learn that Monin and Yerba are in fact ghosts who've acquired bodies in Flimsy—thanks to the jivas who live within them. Their children are natives of Flimsy, although they are spirits rather than physical bodies. Monin managed to get hold of some kessence bodies to implant the kids into, he got the kessence bodies from yuels, and therefore the kids are called yuellies.

Monin wants to have the kids decide for themselves whether they should ever get jivas. Durkle doesn't ever want to get one. Durkle moves in an odd, fluid way, as he is a so-called yuellie who has a yuel-built kessence body. He has no zickzack skeleton—unlike those ghosts who have jivas inside them. Durkle doesn't have such strong telepathy, or teep, as the ghosts with jivas in them.

Flimsy is a flat disk inside a spherical shell of living water. This zone is called Earthmost Flimsy, meaning that it's close to earth. The local sun is a giant jiva that bobs up and down—she's called the Earthmost Jiva, and the locals worship her—or else. The central part of Flimsy is an immense sea called Helaven. The locals think that a God lives there.

The flim family are uneasy when they learn Ginnie is a ghost, as newly arrived ghosts from Earth are supposed to do some time in a living water zone that they call the underworld—and only if they build up enough strength are they allowed to take on a jiva symbiote and have a more-or-less solid body in Flimsy.

Weena says she wants to hop to the castle of the so-called Duke of Human Flimsy right now. Jim and Ginnie don't want to rush, Ginnie is tired, they want to get to know Flimsy, they want to walk. Weena says okay.

14: The Garden

They go outside and Weena teleports herself, by way of a jiva link to the distant target. Durkle mentions that yuels can teleport too. The farmwife says, okay, they can spend the night.

The night sky is full of colors. Monin explains that the sky is living water, filled with seething schools of sprinkles—the very tiniest kinds of ghosts. Larger ghosts live in the living water underground as well, struggling to work their way into the more comfortable life of Flimsy.

Jim shares a bed with Ginnie that night, and would like to try having sex, but Ginnie demurs. Both their bodies are somewhat non-erotic—they're made of a wrapping of kessence around a skeleton of jiva zickzack.

In the morning the newest seeds that Monin put into the garden have grown a bit. Durkle calls them Dad-fruits. The most swollen of the bodies, the older ones, now burst, hatching out new jivas, breaking the bodies to bits. Jim wonders if that was a jiva inside Val.

The boy Durkle is going to be Jim and Ginnie's guide. He's inexperienced, but it's going to be pretty easy to find the castle. In the daytime, the glowing Earthmost Jiva (who acts as the sun in this region of Flimsy) hovers near the castle like a blimp.

15: Cruiser Couch

Jim, Ginnie, and Durkle set off for the castle of the Duke of Human Flimsy. Jim makes a cruiser couch which slides across the landscape like a car seat with no car.

They eat pigpops as a snack---these are meatballs that grow in the ground, with pig snouts on top, and a ruffle of ears all around and no eyes, and root that's a curly pig tail. They eat some waffle cactuses too.

Durkle remarks that if a ghost in Flimsy suffers a severe injury, then he or she then goes up into the glowing night sky, and is often swept towards the center of Flimsy.

Durkle guides them to a deep sandy cone called the monster pit—it's at least a mile across. Durkle wants to ride a board down the sandy slope. Two other kids are there, Durkle's cousin Flam and a woman friend. Ginnie makes the zickzack boards for sliding. Durkle challenges Flam to a chicken run race, that is, a race in which you ride straight down into the pit for as long as you can. It's considered dangerous to go all the way to the bottom.

16: Under the Pit

Ginnie and the other woman stays up top, but Jim joins in the race, feeling he should keep an eye on Durkle. Jim's jiva, Mijjy, doesn't object. In fact she rather nastily says that it's sort of a rush for a jiva to be in someone when they die. Also Mijjy is curious about the bottom of the monster pit.

The older boy, Flam, is winning the race. He's far ahead, and near the bottom, he uses his jiva to jump back to the top.

While Durkle and Jim approach the bottom, they see a skull in the sand. There's a hole at the bottom, and it's full of living water, like in the sky and in that arching wall between the worlds. Jim wants to Durkle to teleport to the top with him, but Durkle stalls, and then Jim rams into Durkle and they tumble into the pool...and they're in a world of ghosts resembling a ramshackle shopping mall.

The flims call this place the underworld. The shops are oddly organized like Platonic forms: a Ball shop with all possible balls, a Sandwich shop with all possible sandwiches, and so on. The jivas are the shopkeepers, they like gathering information.

17: Deeper

Jim and Durkle meet the Earthmost Jiva, whose burrow ends up in this zone of living water. This great jiva eats ghosts, that is, she siphons off a special substance called kessence. Kessence is a kind of dark energy. Apparently living beings contain kessence blueprints of themselves that can later serve as ghosts. And the ghosts themselves need to keep a robust supply of kessence, or they dwindle down to sprinkles or disappear entirely.

The Earthmost Jiva tells Jim he needs to hurry to see the Duke of Human Flimsy in his castle. Supposedly Jim is to be a kind of deputy ruler on Earth, a so-called Shadow Captain. The Earthmost Jiva hints, in passing, that Jim is going to aid in some kind of invasion of Earth, but there's no chance to follow up on this.

Feeling pity upon the ghosts being sucked dry by the Earthmost Jiva, Jim saves one particular ghost, who's dressed in a peach-colored robe with a hood covering her face.

Jim and Durkle find staircase to the next lower level of the mall, and then the pinkish ghost shows them a staircase to the third and lowest level, where they wander among dreams. Jim finds a door to a party, but before going in, he starts a conversation with the peach-colored ghost, who turns out to be Val.

18: The Dark Gulf

Val is mad at Jim for causing her death with the popped electron. But they are feeling some attraction for each other. Jim gets Val to come into the party.

The party host, Bart, tells Jim that Flimsy is a single organism. The jivas are like neurons, the yuels perhaps like blood corpuscles. One might say that Flimsy grows our universe like a plant grows leaves, and that our souls are like the sugars yielded by photosynthesis.

Val learns that Jim is hosting a jiva, and goes to the other side of the room in a huff.

There are illicit yuels attending the party, and the Earthmost Jiva raids the place with an intruding root-tentacle. The yuels start singing the yuel lullaby to defend themselves, and the sound is driving Jim out of his gourd, due to the effect it has on the jiva inside him.

The big jiva breaks through the transparent frozen-living-water floor of the ghost party's room, and they drop down into a vast sea of living water that lies below the underworld. The locals call it the Dark Gulf living water is breathable. A powerful current flows through the Dark Gulf, rushing out from the center, up around the edges of the Flimsy disk, and into the sky. Jim and Durkle ride the current. Jim glimpses the peach-colored Val ahead of them, but he can't catch up.

On the way, they pass a great leviathan of the deep, a being the size of a moon—it's a giant jiva, one of many who lurk down there, manipulating the lesser jivas like puppet-masters, and also acting as components of the great Flimsy brain. Creepy.

Having lost sight of Val, they speed past the cliff-like edges of the Flimsy disk and up into the layer of living water that encases they sky. They manage to jump down from the sky above the monster pit, but the peach-colored ghost is swept towards the center of Flimsy.

It's night now. Mijjy makes hang gliders for them. The Earthmost Jiva scolds them on their way down—she says Jim needs to go talk to the Duke of Human Flimsy soon or else. Jim and Durkle glide down to the monster pit.

19: Offer Cap

Ginnie is alone by the monster pit. The other kids—Flam and his girlfriend—took the cruiser couch.

Jim, Ginnie and Durkle could just teleport to the castle of the Duke of Human Flimsy now—but they're tired. Mijjy makes them some sleeping mats and they lie down.

Jim again tries to make love with Ginnie. Ginnie is willing this time, and it works. It's weird, like bacterial conjugation. Jim's penis has anenome tendrils at the tip, Ginnie's privates bulge out a little bunch of tendrils—and they link up. They have good sex and strong orgasms. Ginnie goes to sleep.

Jim misses his wife Val. He figures she was swept to the center of Flimsy and that he'll eventually need to go there Flimsy to look for her.

In the morning a so-called offer cap has crept up beside them, emerging from a nearby swamp. By the way, there's a settlement of yuels called Yuelsville in the swamp.

The offer plant is mobile, umbrella-shaped, displaying kessence models of objects you might want. The plants are lethal. Durkle manages to get a sword from it, nearly dies, Ginnie saves them. Jim, Ginnie and Durkle teleport to a field near the castle.

The castle looks like a giant geranium plant. Ginnie sees a bunch of yuels teleporting in. Sixty of them wad themselves together and became a blue cartoon elephant, who seizes Ginnie in his jaw. Before anyone can do anything, the group-yuel elephant runs off with Ginnie, and the whole lot of them teleport off to Yuelsville.

Later we'll learn that the Duke and Duchess arranged for the yuels to kidnap Ginnie, and to send them a handmaid with a yuel-built kessence body.

20: The Castle

Weena appears right about now, looking for Jim in case he was lost. Jim correctly has a feeling that Weena had deliberately set up the yuel ambush to get rid of Ginnie, and he's angry with Weena. She pooh-poohs him. "Come on," says Weena. "The castle's right up there."

Weena peremptorily orders Durkle back to his farm. The boy says he'll first hop to the monster pit as he says he wants to see his cousin again, although Jim worries he'll mess with the offer cap again.

The castle resembles a giant geranium plant, with lots of holes in it, and people flying in and out, borne through the air by helpful tendrils from the geranium. A big gall bulges on the stem of the geranium near the bottom.

Weena introduces Jim to the Duke and the Duchess in a reception hall located inside an upper leaf. The Duke is pleasant, round, small. The Duchess is elegant. They talk in a somewhat vulgar way, like gangsters or crooked businessmen.

Supposedly Jim is to be an emissary to our world, the Shadow Captain, basically to carry ten thousand jiva eggs to hatch on Earth and leech the planet's kessence. Jim doesn't want to, but the Duchess tells Jim's jiva to watch him and make sure he does it. The eggs aren't ready quite yet.

The Duke needs to send the jivas to Earth as he has huge debts, and he's counting on the jivas to funnel a steady stream of "taxed" kessence to Earth. He owes a large amount of kessence to a neighboring race called the Bulbers. The Bulbers are ghosts from a race of aeroforms who live on Jupiter, and their afterworld is right next to Earth's afterworld in Flimsy.

The Duke has spent all this kessence in order to support a project of the so-called Wizard, who is, we now learn, Weena's boyfriend Charles. He's the ghost of an early genetic experimenter who apparently died in the early 1900s.

His current project is the so-called Atum's Lotus, which is an exceedingly intense kind of artificial-life computation that's eating up vast amounts of kessence.

21: Weena's Tale

Weena take Jim to an orgy room with ghosts having sex, conjugating. They go to Weena's room and do it themselves.

After conjugating, Weena and Jim talk. Weena claims it's not necessarily dangerous to carry the jiva eggs, but she admits that Earth may be a mess afterwards.

Weena made her way to Flimsy with Charles. They were lovers and he taught her biology. They faked their deaths, went into trances, and left their body.

Weena also tells Jim that she reached out from Flimsy and telepathically manipulated Jim in order to get him to find the Whipped Vic and open the door. She manipulated Skeeves as well.

22: Atum's Lotus

They go down to a gall-like bulge in the geranium's stalk. Charles's glorious project, the Atum's Lotus is in there, an amazing, ever changing three-dimensional shape.

Charles lives within a nook of the Atum's Lotus. They have a talk. The Atum's Lotus is an ongoing search for the most beautiful artificial flower.

Weena leaves to do some errands, Jim stays with Charles for the night.

It turns out Charles can block the jivas from overhearing his conversation with Jim. He knows a hidden channel for teep, using aetheral resonance. The yuels use this method for telepathy and for their teleportation. Jim says that although the Atum's Lotus is gorgeous, really nature is just as good. To his surprise, Charles agrees, or is brought round to this viewpoint.

Charles is sick of the Atum's Lotus, he longs to move on, and to explore the Helaven Sea. Weena's been kind of hanging him up. Charles also says he'll help Jim escape, and gives Jim some vague notion of a gun for shooting jivas.

Jim falls asleep. He has looping dreams, he re-dreams his conversation with Charles over and over. He awakes to Charles's warning nudge.

The Earthmost Jiva herself has thrust a tendril into Charles's chamber, she's draining Charles's substance away, and, while she's at it, gobbling up as much of the Atum's Lotus as she can, leaving great gashes in it.

Charles tells Jim to use the Atum's Lotus tools to get to the core of Flimsy to find his wife. The Earthmost Jiva devours Charles, but leaves a sprinkle that Atum's Lotus propels towards the center of Flimsy. Perhaps Charles will be annihilated and reborn.

The Duchess shows up and yells at the Earthmost Jiva to back off or she'll call in the spirit of Flimsy herself.

23: Lights Out

The geranium tendrils sweep Jim and the Duchess up to the Ducal apartment which is in the highest leaf.

Jim and the Duchess find the Duke, Weena, and a newly arrived serving girl, a ghost woman going under the name of Janie. Janie has a flexible, yuel-made body. Duchess Qwin has Janie as her pet, kind of a sex-slave.

Weena is upset about Charles's death. She's sobbing, and angry at Jim. "Where is he?" "He flew away," answers Jim. "You're an idiot," says Weena.

The Duke and Duchess seem fed up with Weena. She got a good commission on the loan from the Bulbers, and she's agitating for a commission on the impending flow of Earth's kessence as well.

They tell Weena she should escort Jim all the way to the tunnel at Durple's to make sure he doesn't try anything. And they say they don't trust Weena either all that much, so they're sending this new woman Janie along as well.

Then Boss Blinks Bulber shows up for a meeting. The Duchess has Jim and Janie attend the meeting so they can see how serious the situation is. The Bulbers are, as mentioned before, the ghosts of aeroforms from the atmosphere of Jupiter.

The meeting is in the Situation Room off the Ducal apartment. There's a big model of Flimsy. Flimsy is a really large disk, and all the afterlife regions are along the edge, like the slots on a roulette wheel. There's a septillion slots, so you need to zoom in to see them...the castle changes the display as you wish.

It's up to the Duke to settle up with the Bulbers, or they'll wipe out his kingdom, that is, they'll invade and eat all the human ghosts.

Why don't tribes invade each other all the time? Well, Flimsy has a global mind, and sometimes she intervenes.

The Bulber leaves, and now the Earthmost Jiva sticks in a tendril and puts the jiva eggs into Jim's neck. The eggs sink in and disappear, they're sleeping, dormant, and they're not messing with Jim's mind as yet.

The Duchess sends Jim, Weena, and Janie on their way, telling them to hop to the field outside and take off from there.

At this moment, Jim figures out that Janie is really Ginnie—but he can't say anything or even think about it much, as his jiva Mijjy is watching him. Ginnie doesn't look like her old self, and the people at court can't teep into her mind, so haven't realized who she actually is.

In the field outside the castle, Janie/Ginnie quickly uses the yuel lullaby to drive off Weena's and Jim's jiva. And she and Jim eat Weena's kessence as well. The Duchess in fact ordered this hit, she in fact hired "Janie" as an assassin. But the yuels double-crossed her by sending Jim's pal Ginnie as the agent.

Jim's jiva is gone and he fattens up his kessence body by eating Weena's remains. The eggs continue to slumber. Weena who's been reduced to a sprinkle, is buzzing around angrily shrieking. Ginnie kills Weena's sprinkle. She's like, "Take that, bitch!"

Jim gets Ginnie to teach him the yuel lullaby, feeding it to him via subliminal teep, which feels similar to how to talked to Charles. The Easternmost Jiva is coming after them now, lashing with the fiery tentacle of her tail.

Jim forms a yuelball of glittering kessence, puts the yuel lullaby into it, widens his throat, swallows the yuelball and, like a living bazooka, he hocks the yuelball into the fattest part of the Easternmost Jiva.

The jiva explodes in a wonderful pyrotechnic display. And everything turns to night, for the big jiva was their local sun.

"You're a hero, Jim," says Ginnie.

24: Yuelsville

A new "sun" is rising, it's a new jiva, taking on the role of Easternmost jiva. It's in fact the clerk from the sandwich shop down in the underworld. Jim doesn't have the energy to kill this jiva, too.

Jim and Ginnie take off. They mean to visit Yuelsville where it's safer from the jivas. And they hope to ditch Jim's egg case there. Ginnie does yuel-style teleportation by merging into the One Mind of Flimsy. Jim is too tired to learn the trick, Ginnie carries him.

Yuelsville is on an island in the swamp, but they miss the target a bit and land in the wet, jungly marsh. There's a lot of human ghosts in the swamp. They see some defender yuels who are composite beings like elephants with trumpet-like trunks, they keep away the jivas. A phalanx of these elephants guards Yuelsville from the jivas.

They slosh their way to Yuelsville. They glimpse the amusement park, Fungger Gardens, which lies on the Yuelsville island. They run across a kind of fortune-teller being

who darts out of a tent, she's made of four spheres. She says she's the goddess of Flimsy. She says she can help Jim find his wife Val. But she says that first Jim has to go back to Earth and close the door that he opened. He has to herd the border snail fully back into Flimsy. She says that no matter what Jim does, the jivas and yuels will invade Earth now that they know about the tunnel, so he'll have to get rid of them too, lest the planet be lost.

Some regular jiva-wearing ghosts are in Funger Gardens, and they avoid the place. More yuel-elephants protect the Yuelsville enclave just beyond. Rickben the yuel welcomes them. The yuels resurrected him using the info that was in Ginnie from the scrap of Rickben which she ate back by the Whipped Vic in Santa Cruz.

The yuels' houses are like sandcastles being assembled by flying sprinkles, who do this work for a year in order to earn a yuel-built kessence body. No ghosts live in Yuelsville, just yuels.

Jim sees some yuel spores and he realizes that it was a yuel spore that infected Val. For the moment he keeps this to himself.

Rickben takes them to the Graf's house. The Graf came back here after being killed on Lover's Bluff. The Graf is preoccupied with, as a hobby, growing musical stalagmites, turning them into an orchestra. It turns out he indeed carried the yuel Rickben to Earth in his body that time.

The Graf says Rickben had been planning to seed Earth with yuel spores, but he never managed to. A yuel has to be in just the right mood to pop a pod of spores—it's kind of like an orgasm, but not exactly. It takes months to grow a fresh pod of spores, and a newly hatched yuel can't do it until he matures.

The Graf argues that yuels are good and jivas are bad. He says the yuels can be our allies in saving Earth from the jivas' Apocalypse.

Jim hates the yuels and jivas by now. But for sure he wants to get rid of his eggs before he goes back to Earth and tries to close the tunnel. The Graf throws Jim into a fire and burns up his whole body.

Jim is a sprinkle for a minute, buzzing around. He lands on a new kessence body that the Graf has laid out.

25: Down to Earth

It seems like Jim's eggs are gone. Ginnie and Jim say goodbye to the Graf, who acts casual about Jim's refusal to take one of them back to Earth with him. Jim says that if there's only one jiva on Earth he can handle it alone. The Graf gives Jim a special flute for calling in Rickben, in case there's trouble.

Jim worries the new Earthmost Jiva might come for him, but she doesn't seem to notice them. Or maybe she does see him, and he hasn't actually gotten rid of the eggs. He can't be sure.

Jim and Ginnie teleport to Monin's farm. Ginnie leads them in through the maze. They see a scary little beetle in the grass.

It's night. Jim can't open Snaily's door. Jim tries to teep towards Earth, but he can't see much. He can't contact Ira. But Ginnie can do it all. She opens Snaily's door and teeps ahead to Earth and contacts Ira to open the Earth end of the tunnel door for Jim.

Jim begs Ginnie to come and she agrees.

Durkle notices them, they have a brief chat. Jim gets a tube of ultragrow fertilizer from Durkle. A monstrous beetle charges at them, a foot wide. Durkle slashes at it with his

sword and misses, it snips off Durkle's hand. It drives Ginnie and Jim into the snail's mouth, and it follows them through.

Jim and Ginnie emerge in the back yard of the Whipped Vic. Ira and Droog are there. The beetle rushes past them into the shadows by the sarcophagus in the basement.

Jim wants to find his real body—he wants to be sure it's okay, even if he really doesn't need to get into it right now.

Skeeves is in the basement.

There's a rising altercation with Ginnie yelling at Skeeves for having killed her, but Ginnie can't really hurt Skeeves as she's just a ghost. But then the beetle eats Skeeves and his sprinkle, and goes into hiding in the embossed designs of the sarcophagus.

Jim looks in the casket: it's empty!

26: Missing Me

Ira is grief-stricken. He says that Charles and Weena's bodies in the casket turned to stinky mush, and that Skeeves dumped all the bodies out on the street, including Jim's.

"The cops picked up your body with an ambulance," says Ira.

The three of them go and find Jim's own body in the hospital, in a coma. Jim is able to drive Skeeves's van. On the way they notice that extra jiva Sukie hanging over a car lot like a balloon.

In the hospital, Jim's body looks very unhealthy. Charles's and Weena's bodies are long gone, cremated. Jim has a talk with Nurse Alice, who is able to see the three partners' ghostly forms. She can see them because she's been taking an anti-anti-schizophrenia drug.

Alice tells Jim that the doctors planning to operate on his flesh body, to do brain surgery. She also mentions in passing that there was definitely a partly grown jiva inside Val's body.

Jim decides to stay in his kessence form for now, as he's still planning to go back to Flimsy. He decides to store his body in Amenhotep's sarcophagus again. Having seen Skeeves's fate, Jim would *rather* not mix up with Amenhotep, but he feels he has no choice. He figures his body will only survive in the casket. There's a vibe on that thing.

Nurse Alice lets them take the body. Jim, Ira and Ginnie dig a pit for the golden sarcophagus on the bluff at Four Mile Beach next to Val's ashes. Jim digs some of Durkle's ultragrow fertilizer in with Val's ashes. He stashes his meat body in the sarcophagus, and right away the body looks healthy again.

They put a shallow layer of sand over the sarcophagus and go hunting for the jiva that Weena left behind—Sukie. They find Sukie, who makes a rising slide-whistle sound at Jim. Jim kills her with a yuelball.

All right!

And now Jim's thinking he'll go try and herd the border snail back through. But suddenly he feels weird. The sound that Sukie made called forth the eggs. The eggs were riding on Jim's sprinkle in subatomic form! The eggs seethe out of his neck like popcorn bursting from a pan. The ten thousand eggs drift across Cruz.

27: Pied Piper

The eggs settle into people and animals all over Cruz. One gets into Droog. The eggs go in through peoples' or animals' mouths and the jivas incubate in their stomachs. The jiva growth is very fast this time, a matter of minutes. People and animals are bulging up and jivas are wriggling out of their mouths. They do this non-destructively, squeezing

themselves thin. The newborn jivas dig some tendrils into Earth and draw kessence from it. Nature is looking wan in spots, the grass is wilting and the trees are drooping.

Jim, Ginnie, Ira and Droog go the Whipped Vic. Each jiva has a long throbbing tube that's feeding kessence into the haze around the Whipped Vic. Ten thousand jiva tubes go through the snail tunnel and over to Flimsy.

Jim uses the magic flute to contact the Graf. Jim and Ira are playing along, jamming electronica to go with the flute. They're all amped up on all of Sukie's kessence that they ate. They can generate loud sounds from their own bodies. The Graf lines up Rickben and a second yuel called Gaylord. The Graf brings the yuels through the tunnel, waves "Hi," but goes right back. Rickben and Gaylord have a kind of sex session out in the public area outside the Whipped Vic, and they do an exploding-tail-spore-pod number.

Twenty thousand yuels emerge, they nourish themselves simply by eating dirt, pretty much picking clean the neighborhood. Jim, Ginnie, and Ira teach the yuels how to shoot yuelballs. The yuels go all over town and use the yuel lullabies to herd the jivas together near the Whipped Vic.

On Flimsy the yuels wouldn't be able to overpower the jivas, as there the jivas have the giant jivas living in the Dark Gulf to draw upon. But here on Earth, twenty thousand yuels are more than a match for ten thousand jivas. The yuels massacre all the jivas with yuelballs.

But now we're stuck with the yuels. The yuels have a weakness for music. Jim, Ira, and Ginnie enchant the yuels with a new tune based on Jim's marching-band trill from "Winter Wonderland." They herd/lead the yuels into the tunnel, as if they were three Pied Pipers.

Ginnie and Ira go ahead of Jim, moving to Flimsy as a pair of pals.

After all the yuels have gone through the snail, Jim seines a huge load of sprinkles from the living water wall, and gets the snail to crawl down inside her own throat to eat them. Yes, this is paradoxical. The snail is sticking her head down inside her own throat—but this is possible as, being made of kessence, she's very flexible. When the snail's head reaches the wall of living water within her, Jim closes the flaw that allowed for the tunnel.

He does this by realizing that his own mind made the original lightning bolt possible. Some genetic material from the electric eels of Chapter Two had gotten into Jim's brain. And now Jim recovers this memory, and plays the lightning bolt backwards. Electricity surges from the Whipped Vic location into the sky, and Jim hears a thunder-clap in reverse. And now the snail disappears into that particular electron in the charred old sample sled on the basement floor, taking Jim to Flimsy.

28: The Goddess

In Flimsy, Jim wants to get to the center of Flimsy. They talk things over with Monin and Yerba. Ginnie and Ira say good-bye to Jim and teleport to Yuelsville. Jim briefly hooks up with Durlke now.

Jim and Durlke teleport to the castle. Jim wants to go there to use Atum's Lotus to catapult him to the center of Flimsy. You can't teleport all the way to the center on your own.

Boss Blinks Bulber and some of his thuggish friends are on a rampage near the castle. They'd been pigging down the kessence from the (now vanished) jiva tubes, and they're threatening to eat the geranium-castle too.

Not that Jim feels a great deal of loyalty to the castle, but the Bulbers annoy him. Durkle holds them off with his little sword and now Jim accesses the still-potent and functional remains of the Atum's Lotus. He teleports Boss Blinks Bulber to the core of Flimsy, and other Bulbers leave for good.

The Earthmost Jiva is watching Jim, but she doesn't attack him. The jivas are a little scared of Jim for now, but he doesn't want to stick around too long. The Duke and Duchess want to thank Jim, but instead he sends Durkle in with the Duchess to meet the court, and the boy is happy. Jim and Durkle say good-bye.

Jim rides a pulse of Atum's Lotus song towards the core, and he manages to get off the wave of sound before it breaks against what appears to be a central column of light. He really knows the song well now.

Jim is on a vast calm pool of the Dark Gulf, it's a nice turquoise color. The ocean here is filled with water lilies. There's one jiva tendril. A rain of living water is drizzling from the dome of the living-water sky. The sprinkle-laden rain forms a fog of light, and the light has the form of a titanic woman—and this is the goddess of Flimsy.

Some of the sprinkles are spiraling into the goddess's glowing navel. These sprinkles get their memories erased and are sent out to the septillion worlds to serve as sparks for the souls of new beings. It's a type of reincarnation. But many of the sprinkles just drizzle down into the Dark Gulf below. These ones get another pass around the cycle through the Dark Gulf, with another chance of getting themselves kessence bodies and living on the land mass of Flimsy.

The goddess of Flimsy speaks in Jim's head. She reunites him with the ghost of his dead wife Val. Val is perched on a jiva lily pad nearby.

Jim tells Val he loves her and begs her to accompany him back. She agrees.

The goddess of Flimsy asks one more favor. Jim is to cut off the tip of the jiva tendril here—this Core Jiva is full of sprinkles that all the jivas have eaten. He and Val do it. And now the goddess sends them back to Earth via the portal in her navel. She puts a special spin on Jim and Val, so that their personalities aren't wiped out by the trip.

29: On the Bluff

Jim and Val reappear as spirits on the bluff overlooking Four Mile Beach. Val's body has grown up from the sand. As she eases into it, Jim uncovers the sarcophagus and gets into his own meat body.

But before Jim and Val can embrace, Amenhotep's beetle-spirit pops out of that design in the side of the sarcophagus. The powerful, sinister and somewhat mindless ghost wants to fight them and perhaps to eat them.

Jim uses his already fading memory of the Atum's Lotus chant to imprison the ghost within the sarcophagus. Using the chant and some remnant of his supernatural powers, Jim compresses the sarcophagus to a golden glowing ball, and he sends the ball and spirit off to the core of Flimsy. The goddess will deal with him.

"So I'm back," said Val, pulling her feet loose from the soil.

I hugged her. She looked out to sea, taking it all in, then stared into my eyes. I felt the same wonderful deep union with her as before.

"It's good here," said Val.

"I got evicted from the Simlys," I said. "And all our stuff is gone."

"I don't care about *stuff*. This is a good chance to move. While I was over in Flimsy I kept thinking that we should have tried living in San Francisco."

“Anywhere you like,” I said. “As long as we’re together.”

Independent Story Ideas

I always like to keep a list of ideas for short stories that I might write as a break from the current novel. Some of these ideas are rolled over from early Notes documents. I’ll put asterisks by the ones that I ended up using.

*** “*Happy Hour*” a.k.a. “*Bad Ideas*”**

The current trend is to view any bit of matter as carrying out a so-called quantum computation. These computations can be as rich and complex as anything in our brains or in our PCs. One angle, which I explored a bit in *Postsingular* and *Hylozoic*, is that ordinary objects could “wake up.” Another angle worth pursuing is that something like a computer virus might infect matter, perhaps changing the laws of physics to make our world more congenial to some other kinds of beings.

A woman experiences the Singularity over the course of an afternoon, sitting on her couch watching news TV and drinking vodka from a plastic half-gallon bottle. The Web wakes up. She learns that dark matter is consciousness. She calls it kvaar. Religion gets real; God is a pattern in the dark matter. Or I do it by having a kind of computer virus that infects the quantum computations of ordinary matter.

[This mutated into “Bad Ideas.”]

“*My Multiverse*”

Ever since I read *Anathem*, I’ve been wanting to write a multiverse story that’s logically coherent.

Suppose there really is only one truly existing path through the branching thicket of possible worlds. The others are only juiceless abstractions. Fine.

My gimmick is that I’ll suppose that our branch is not quite a pure jagged line. It *does* very commonly grow a stub out a few seconds (or longer?) past a given branch point. I think of a tree that’s been pruned down to a single path: bole to limb to branch to twig to leaf, with knots and stubs all along it. And sometimes the tip forks for a bit, but then one of forks dies and dries up and stops growing, and the “real” branch of history continues.

The stubs are in fact more than common, they’re all but ubiquitous.

When someone could die, but they don’t, it means that their mind has explored both the branches, and has managed to noodle the universal history into a branch where they survive. So in some sense, whenever a person dies, it’s because they failed to realize the possible world in which they survive.

And the action for the story is that some guy figures out how to always be in the right branch, and he becomes immortal, although exceedingly old. It’s kind of a “The Golden Man” story, really. I’ll have to reread that and see what kind of ontological commitments Phil Dick made about the alternate worlds.

I could even give it a title that echoes Dick’s, say, “The White-Haired Man.”

This all has personal significance for me, as I read on the web that, like, 50% of people who have a cerebral hemorrhage die. So there’s a stub where I died this July.

Somehow I can mix this with an “Incident at Owl Creek Bridge” thing. A guy actually gets to do something important to him in the stub. I mean maybe I’m living in the

stub now, and the real branch is the one where I died. I'm just in the stub long enough to write my memoir. And then *auuuugh*, the noose snaps my neck?

But all of this feels shop-worn. How to make it into a fresh and true metaphor for contemporary times?

“The Micrometamorphosis”

Sam Gregory (Gregor Samsa), a microbiologist, finds a way to insert a code for his accumulated knowledge into a paramecium. He's doing it as a “backup” for his mind. He wants immortality. But then the paramecium-writing virus that he made turns retro and turns his body cells into paramecia.

After a night of uneasy sleep he awakes as one single very large paramecium. There could be a problem with the membrane being strong enough for a paramecium that size, so let's suppose he makes it extra thick. He has dreams of problem-solving, these were about designing an 80 kg paramecium.

Let's suppose that he can fly for awhile, as that's fun to think about.

And then someone pops him, his wife. She screams and runs into the bathroom, he's trying to talk to her, she gets around him, hitting him with a mop over and over, squashing him, pushing him down the drain.

The denouement: he becomes puddle of microorganisms on his sheet, six billion strong. Now he's really immortal.

“Flying”

A fabulist story about flying. I wake up in my dreams and I can fly. Nobody every notices. My wife can't fly.

“Packrat”

A guy who saves stuff in his apartment, like the comics collector Paul Mavrides knew. He's found a way to make the space multidimensional so as to save more.

Suppose that in the warehouse, a pair of branes are at a slight angle to each other, like a pair of intersecting planes. A brane seam. It would be interesting to move over the *seam* where the branes cross. They will cross in a plane. You would, I suppose, go to one or the other brane with equal likelihood. Or maybe you could push it. Use this as a travel gate.

“Starship Launch”

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.

A great mothership ship 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 our young hero,

Gunnar, to take him on a trip. As the lighter carries him off, Gunnar cries out for some precious object that he forgot—and a lower-level lighter the size of a basketball goes back to his room to scoop up the pet soft plastic robot that Gunnar calls a “shoon.”

“The Old Ones of the Fjord”

When Sylvia and I got off the ferry to Fjaerland, it felt like an episode of the *Twilight Zone*. The other passengers on our boat all got into a tour bus that had ridden in the ferry. They drove off, leaving us alone, in this utterly silent and deserted Sunday morning Norwegian village, the fjord beside us and snow-capped mountains all around. Anything I say feels superficial, overly dramatic, here in the core of this uncanny beauty. I feel like a fly on a freshly frosted cake.

Sylvia had been talking about finding a book to read so, lo and behold, there’s an unmanned shelf of books by the road, with a sign reading “Honest Books, 10 Kr. each.” We’re both wearing shades, very Californian. I light a cigarette, I’m a noisy wise-guy, the tour bus grinds by, I wave, nobody seems to see me. True to *Twilight Zone* style, I imagine myself as a city clicker in a black suit, and my consort as a sexy blonde on spike heels, our voices overly loud amid the silent mountains.

The woman finds a book with curious blotches and symbols. It’s called *God Bøk*, which is Norwegian for *Good Book*.

“Is this math?” she asks, flipping through the pages. Her consort is a mathematician, she’s a linguist.

In the front yard of the hotel is a vertical stone plinth, like a mini-version of that 2001 slab, covered not with writing, but with (seemingly) lichen-like spots. Suppose that the spots are glyphs in the Unknown Tongue used by the Great Old Ones who live beneath the placid surface of the fjord.

Suppose that the bursting of the cow-poo reservoir was orchestrated by the Great Old Ones? Later, a moonlit clearing with the proposed human sacrifice of a beautiful Norwegian girl, a sacrifice blocked by the woman heroine, with her man’s aid—they have power because they’ve deciphered the blotch-runes on the stele by using the *God Bøk*.

Unused Passages

Jim Led by a Tweety Bird

Today, feeling energetic, I decided to accept some external randomizing input for my route. A little yellow bird was flicking its wings, darting from tree to tree, sometimes perching on a street sign or an electric wire. I’d let the bird be my guide.

Like a mail-delivery bot with a program flaw, I trundled to and fro, backtracking blocks, recrossing streets I’d already passed, approaching familiar streets from unfamiliar directions—always following the tweety bird. Was it a chickadee? A nuthatch? I’d never seen a bird like this before. Its shape was unusually smooth and stylized, almost like a cartoon of a bird.

As it happened, the bird’s guidance was leading me along a wonderfully unexpected route. The accumulating turns were wrapping the world in a welcome glow of strangeness. And then, only a few blocks from my home of twenty years, I arrived at a street I could hardly recognize at all. As if done with its mission, the little yellow bird flew up into the sky and disappeared.

I heard voices yelling from the rear of the whipped Vic, ranting excitedly about a—jiva? Something small and bright flitted across the patch of sky visible from the walkway. Another bird?

“It wasn’t really me who found the way to the green Vic that day, “ I confessed to Weena. “I was following a little yellow bird that I thought I saw. . I was just playing around.”

“I know that,” said Weena, soothingly. “The bird was a virtual image that my friend Ayaka was projecting into your mind. She reached out to guide you.”

“So why doesn’t your friend Ayaka reach out again?”

“I’m afraid she’s in—captivity,” said Weena.

Jim’s Daughter Jolie

...This was what Lucy wanted, but our only child, Jolie, had been furious at me for “letting Mom die.”

Reckless in our grief, Jolie and I had a terrible quarrel at the funeral, and now I didn’t even know how to find her. She’d moved somewhere in Seattle, and changed her cell phone and her email address. I kept expecting fresh contact information, but it never came. Lucy and Jolie had left me behind.

Hyperhypercube

To help my process, I was mapping the route in terms of a path along the edges of a four-dimensional hypercube—I’d learned about these cool shapes in college, and I still liked to think about them. I could see the hypercube as a pair of cubes, one inside the other, or as a stack of boxes a little like a crucifix, or as a wireframe pattern that was continually turning inside out. But, damn it, there weren’t enough edges. So—for the first time ever—I tried thinking about a five-dimensional hyperhypercube.

Description of the Bas Relief on the Magic Door

Perhaps my over-excited mind was fooling me, but I seemed to see tulip bulbs, winged bats, flying jellyfish, tentacles that branched like trees, lightning bolts flying from a human head, a pair of lutes, and a castle with slender towers.

Death

I’d always thought I was okay with dying. For sure I didn’t want to live forever. But I’d never expected the end to come so abruptly. And so soon. Death was realer than I’d ever quite understood.

Fatland Joke

“Weena Wesson,” said the woman, miming a curtsy. “I can hardly believe I made it to Fatland.”

“Fatland? That’s not what you want to call an ice cream store. You’ll scare off the persons of weight.”

“Oh, sorry, that’s not what I mean. Where I come from, Fatland is what we call your whole world. But let’s not get into that yet.” She wrinkled her nose in a smile—or maybe she was sniffing at me across the counter.

Variations on the Yuel's Arrival

And now, just before the door again hid the taffy-like mass that filled the cellar, something come wriggling out from the goo, something like a blue slug.

The demonic blue baboon-thing crept into the open and snuffled the air, perhaps tracking whoever had run across the yard while I'd been under the door. And then he creature turned and gazed at me, his large, golden eyes seeing right into my mind. The unearthly being rummaged through my thoughts and then—his shape began to shimmer.

A moment later, the blue monkey had taken on the look of a sea lion.

The blue mass broke up into little pieces, each about the size of my thumb. The blue bits crawled frantically over each other, linking into each other and forming the shape of—a sea lion bull. Droog was barking as hard as he could.

As the door tightly resealed against the foundation wall, the blue seal-thing humped up the little slope from the basement. His surface was nubbly, as if he were made of building blocks.

“Speaking of yuels, Monin, you really screwed up,” said Weena. “You let that yuel track me through the tunnel. He attacked us over there.”

“I didn’t see him coming,” said Monin, shaking his head. His accent seemed maybe Dutch. “The yuel was like a swarm of bees,” he continued. “They buzzed into the border-snail’s mouth before she could get it closed. Of course I was worried. But I know you, Weena. I figured you’d find a way to handle the yuel.”

Weena is Spacy

I didn’t feel like getting into a prolonged, flaky, space-cadet-type discussion.

Weena is a step beyond spacy. In certain moods, Jim would become convinced that Weena had the ability to read his mind—and that he, in turn could see into hers. When he’d start thinking this, Weena would give him a knowing look and say something like, “*Yeah*, baby.” Or she’d make that mooing sound.

Alien Memory of Marrying Weena

For a moment, I seemed to remember marrying her and how alluring she’d been in her webbed green veils—I even seemed to remember our breakup, sparked by a spat over an unidentified spate of eggs. But then I snapped back to being sure that I’d never seen her before, save at Mahalo Gelato.

Glimpse of an Overlaid World

I seemed to see the tint of the glass change in slow waves, the faint pastel hues amping up and down, as if I were diddling the world’s color balance sliders ... and now I noticed that when the color shift reached the blue end of the spectrum, the plain white walls of my room would take on a faint pattern, as if painted in arabesque designs. And I seemed to see a ghostly candlestick on my dresser.

Gorbling

“Shelves,” mused Weena. She was wearing a black denim miniskirt with platform flip-flops and a long-sleeved red cotton jersey. “I organize things by colors. Like ice-cream flavors. In my head, I have all the cornflower blue things on one shelf, all the turmeric yellows on another, all the thistle greens on another, and so on. I know thousands of different color names. I gorbled an online color dictionary from the National Bureau of Standards this afternoon.”

“Gorbled?”

“It’s as if you could search the Web in your head. When I gorble, I teep into your society’s group mind and—” She broke off. “Oh, wait, you fatsies don’t even believe in other kinds of minds, do you? You think you’re the only the only game there is.”

“I’m a fatsy from Fatland?” I asked, trying out the words. “And you know how to gorble because you’re a flim from Flimsy?”

Yanna and Wally

“It was Yanna, not me! She sent a flim off my fingertips and into the coconut ice-cream. A flim is like a spirit, but from another world. You’ll understand before long. Your so-called hemorrhage was from the new flim settling in. His name is Wally. He’s Yanna’s husband over in Flimland. That’s why it’s so perfect that—”

Widespread Liminal Awareness of the Other World

Lots of your people have inklings about Flimsy, you know. Psychics, schizos, meditators, stoners...

Weena’s Son

Slouched on a rusty lawn chair after the hard lemonade, Jim fell into a trance while studying the clouds. When he came back to focusing on his immediate surroundings, he realizes that he heard the low tapping of fingers on a keyboard. He tried to maintain a calm appearance, but inwardly he panicked, imagining that he might be inside a computer program or a video game.

But, whew, it’s just his and Weena’s son sitting in a chair behind his head, checking her email on her laptop. He twisted his neck so he could look at her, to talk this over. And then he remembered that he didn’t have a son, and that he’d only known Weena a few months. There was nobody in the chair. Or, no, wait, Weena did have a son on her own, she’d been talking about a visit from him, yes.

“Hi,” said the young man, who had the same hard, wiggly profile as Weena. “I’m Clark.”

Weena is a Groover

“I’m an elf,” said Weena in a lilting tone. “A sprite from a merrier land. *Ting!* I’ve bewitched you!”

“A Santa Cruz space cadet, eh?” said Chang, looking annoyed.

Denny’s Story

[Suppose that Weena has a “daughter” called Laura, who’s married to a guy called Denny. This is Denny talking.]

It's not really fair to say that Weena and Laura are cow livers—they're cow livers inhabited by other-worldly beings called flims. The flims can tweak a cow liver into a copy of a full-sized human body, with a shapely skeleton, man-attracting bulges, yellow-pink skin, and luxuriant blonde hair.

I met Laura when I was abducted by a flying saucer at age thirteen. And I've been with the flim in the liver ever since.

Laura followed me home from the saucer, and for a few months she hid under my bed. She'd whisper to me through the mattress. At night, after Mom was out of the way, Laura would creep out. She made herself hotter every day, guiding her tweaks to match the models in this primo porno magazine that I had. She looked she was in her twenties.

Eventually Mom caught me in the act—frantically humping my alien-possessed cow liver. Mom assumed the worst, and she was ready to call the cops on Laura. So Laura moved out of my house. She'd sleep as a hanging blob in the high branches of a big old oak tree in a gully nearby.

I'd meet Laura in the gully for sex and conversation nearly every day, and when Laura wanted to see more of me, I suggested that she make herself look a bit younger, and enroll as a student in Los Perros High with me. Soon she was head of the Cheer Squad, and one of the most popular girls in the school.

We talked about college, but I was like, why bother. My feeling was that Laura ought to be able to help us make a living. So we made an online sex video, and to build up interest, I let out the rumor that Laura was in fact a saucer alien. That was a mistake.

Reading Kerouac

Finally I started rereading Jack Kerouac, who made me want to get drunk or go camping—not that I was in any shape for those. I liked his phrases, and I liked that I only had to remember one paragraph at a time. It was just the same few things happening over and over. God, nature, booze, talk, travel.

Tibetan Demon Yuel

Some kind of animal was in the yard to my left—a muscular four-legged beast with its fur an odd shade of Krishna blue. The monster was roughly the shape of a wide Shetland pony, but it had snaggly teeth like a dog's. A very odd creature, with a round bump on the top of its head and a kind of knob near the end of its tail. The beast flared its big nostrils, glaring at me.

Frankenstein Yuel

The dark Frankenstein lurched to within twenty feet of us and stood there glaring, with his arms stretched out like a zombie. He had a tapering, slimy penis.

"Seal-fucker," said Weena dismissively.

Header with a Skull Scar

"And, speaking of spooky coincidences, Header has a big scar on his head. But I like that. I always had a thing for Frankenstein. Very butch. "

"It's from a surfing accident, Ginnie," said Header in an aggrieved tone. "Can't you be a little sensitive? I have feelings, too."

Hyperflip Passage from Ginnie's Tale

"The Graf was all over my mind, tweaking me. Everything started looking inside out. I mean, I'd see a building and think it was hollow, with the nearest corner far away. And looking at my hand was like looking inside a glove. When I'd think I was turning left, I'd be turning right. Everything backwards. I had no idea where I was."

Early Version of the Graf/Header/Ginnie Scenes

[Originally I had having the Graf call himself Arthur over here.]

"Fools," said Header, grimly grasping the neck of the bottle. "I'm here to help save your world, and you—"

"Header likes to imagine he's a visiting alien," interrupted Ginnie. "But if you want to talk about knowing stuff, *I'm* the one who found the Whipped Vic. Credit where credit is due. It happened this March. A big rainstorm, with the air like water. I'd just hitchhiked into town, massively ripped on shrooms. I splashed down all these alleys—it was like a nightmare—and this gnarly horndog kept wanting to give me a ride. He was fat and pale with a pointy pimp mustache. He said his name was Arthur and that we were meant to be a pair. Ugh. I'd think I'd lost Arthur, but he kept creeping up on me again, tailing me in his car, finally he pulled me in—I can't think about that part. But then *boom*, a flash of lightning, and I'm walking up the sidewalk to this big old haunted house. I've been there ever since."

"This Header person is essentially the same as the fat, pale man who was chasing you that first night in Santa Cruz," Weena burst out. "You called him Arthur? He's from Flimsy. He brought you to this portal. And then he moved his consciousness to Header's body. Arthur, Header, Graf Thura—all the same. He's a murderer and a traitor to Flimsy."

"Header is *Arthur*?" said Ginnie, trying to process this. "You're saying I've been sleeping with the fat, pale creep who was murdered with—"

I shook my head no. This was a question I'd been wondering about myself.

"I—I bet it was Header," said Ginnie. "That would explain a lot. The Graf dragged me into a car and started raping me. And Header killed both of us with an axe. I've been blanking it out, but now it's coming back. It was like the Graf was expecting Header to kill him. It was part of his plan to transfer the yuel. But I think he was surprised when Header killed me first."

"Did you actually see Header's face?" I asked.

"No. But it must have been him. That's how the guy was. You saw him peeping at Lover's Bluff, right? And going on about morality. Maybe the yuel ate Header's brain, but it kept some of his personality. He still had that damned axe in his closet!"

"And what happened after the murders?" I quickly asked Ginnie, using teep instead of spoken words.

"And then the yuel started crawling out of the Graf's head and I—I drifted away. And ever since then, I've been hiding from the truth."

Giving Droog a Jiva

"I'll demo my sprinkles on this stupid dog, if you're so suspicious of me, said Weena. "Come here, Droog."

I could have stopped her, but I figured Droog was pretty tough. It would be cool to have a superdog.

Droog snouted some sprinkles from Weena's fingers, licked his chops to savor the taste. And then he gobbled down the little pink jiva that had been hovering by his mouth. As the jiva settled in, he lowered his head and shook himself, from ears to body to tail. And then he sat back on his rump and regarded me with something like a smile. His coat shone, his eyes glowed. I could feel his friendly mind, comfortable as an old shoe.

"I'm Jim and this is Ginnie," I told Durkle. "Ginnie's a ghost, but, yeah, I'm still alive, in a way. And that beast under the table is my dog Droog. He's alive, too."

"What's a dog, Dad?" asked Durkle, looking anxious.

"The boy doesn't have a jiva," Monin told me. "So he can't read minds. You have to explain everything to him."

"The dog is licking his butt!" exclaimed Durkle, leaning down to stare under the table.

"Dogs often do that," I said.

My dog Droog walked over and nuzzled Swoozie's thighs. For half an instant she seemed to consider zapping the dog with her jiva tendrils, but then she decided he wasn't a threat. Tentatively she patted his head, and when he gave her a toothy smile, she squatted down to rub his fur. Droog liked getting people to pat him.

"Well, that's true," I allowed. "Remember? Durkle here made a bet. Mr. Pit Master. Never mind. I can always make another cruiser. But what about my dog?"

"He went with Flam, too. He stayed on the couch."

"No hint of loyalty?" I exclaimed, a little amused despite myself. "That Droog!" Somehow I felt sure I'd find him.

Skeeves Hostile

"Did you bring a woman for us?" said Skeeves. "A little yuppie wife?" His eyes were red and dangerous.

I tried to change the subject. "You're a surfer, too?"

"*You're a surfer, too?*" echoed Skeeves, raising his voice. He poked me in the chest with his bony finger. "I asked you a question, geek. I want an answer. I want you wife's name!"

"Go to hell," I said, and pushed past him.

"Hey, Header!" yelled Skeeves. "We oughtta teach this nerd some manners! With an axe!"

Header, who was busy across the room snorting powder off the back of his hand, just waved for Skeeves to join him.

Skeeves Remark About Header

"A guy possessed by a demon is okay, if the guy's on your side."

Flat Torus

Springing into action, I held out my hands and willed my jiva to send tendrils from my fingertips. There was a certain kind of shape I remembered from my studies of topology. You take a cube, and you glue each of its squares to the opposite face. And then the cube becomes a closed-off cell, a region of space utterly separate from your own.

My tendrils sputtered and glowed a faint red as the jiva did my bidding. The doomed yuel sent a second pseudopod my way, but I dodged him. And then, aha, I'd sealed up the bulk of his body inside a cube of space with no exit—the right face was glued to left, the bottom to the top, and the front to the back. With my final gluing, the cube disappeared, along with the yuel, except for that left-over noodle on Ginnie's foot.

Just then I noticed there was a hole in the space of the backyard, a zone of utter nothingness where the boxed yuel had been. Was the hole growing? Quickly I used my nimble jiva tendrils to repair the hole, wrapping it in a cocoon, shrinking it to a point, and sealing the point with a puff of virtual glue. It wouldn't have done to let the hole spread...conceivably a thing like that could shred the whole universe with a Big Rip.

"Was that higher dimensions?" Ira asked me. "What you did to the yuel?"

"They call it a flat torus," I said. "Like a computer screen where the edges wrap, like the old Asteroids game, that's a two-dimensional flat torus. What I put that yuel into was a *three-dimensional* flat torus."

"Can you make that thing disappear like you did to the yuel?" Weena demanded, pointing at Header's corpse. With her jiva back, she was her old bossy self. "I didn't quite follow your moves."

I shook my head no. Walling the yuel into a flat torus had taken a lot out of me.

A Different Ending for the "Surf Party" Chapter

"Oh, yes," said Weena, her voice breaking. "We have to leave here as soon as possible. It's very dangerous with a goblin on the loose. He's not really gone, he's circling around, getting the lay of the land. He'll attack in a minute. Horrible, horrible, horrible. I never realized the Graf was a vehicle for the Horde. Let's go to Flimsy and regroup."

She rushed down through the house and joined us in the yard, distractedly wiping blood off her hands and arms with one of Header's t-shirts.

"I'm coming with you guys," said Ira. "How about you, Ginnie?"

"Well...maybe," said Ginnie weakly. "We've kind of trashed things here. And the cops are going to find that—" She gestured at the maimed corpse.

"Oh, drag those remains onto the steps," said Weena. "This house is hard to find, see, so that'll protect us. Anything we leave in the yard will show up in the plain old empty lot, though. And we don't to stir up trouble here for when we come back. Go on and move that thing, you three. Hurry!"

Ginnie shook her head and backed away, but Ira took hold of one of the corpse's legs and tugged. I just watched, wondering if I should take a picture. Trembling with urgency, Weena joined Ira and schlepped the corpse halfway up the steps of the deck, tying it in place with the belt of the bathrobe.

"That's good enough," chattered Weena. "What are you goggling at, Jim? Open the goddamn fucking magic door!" She broke off and forced a smile. "And, yes, it's fine with

me if you two others come. Bring the dog, too. The more the merrier. Oh, and each of you should swallow a jiva. There's just enough to go around."

Indeed, there was a jiva hovering beside each of us four, that is, by me, Ira, Ginnie and Droog.

"You newbies need some of this first," said Weena, hurriedly digging out her little stash of sprinkles and offering it around. "Just a tiny taste. It's like wonderful candy. It gets you ready. Go ahead."

"Careful with that stuff," I cautioned. "I took some and it put me in the hospital."

"Oh, that's because you're a creaky old man," snapped Weena. "It's nothing for a young person or a dog—there you go, Droog." He'd reached up his snout to take some sprinkles from Weena's fingers. He licked his chops to savor the taste. And then he shook his ears and regarded us with something like a smile. "Come on now, Ginnie and Ira," continued Weena, her eyes roaming around the yard.

"Okay, I'll try some," said Ira, taking a pinch of sprinkles.

"Sure," said Ginnie, dipping into Weena's stash as well. After the long night of partying, the two kids didn't have particularly good judgment. "Something to sand down the ragged edges. All this blood. And, oh, poor Header..."

"What about Dick Simly?" I had to ask Weena right then. "Didn't your jivas kill him? The cops are going to blame that on us for sure."

"Oh, who cares about every stupid detail!" she yelled, suddenly losing her temper. "We have to go before the goblin comes!"

"I care," I said, liking Weena less all the time. "I might not be going to Flimsy after all."

"Jivas aren't like parasitic wasps," said Weena, bringing her voice under control. "Their larvae don't *eat* their hosts. They just amplify some of your—call it orgone energy. And hosting an adult jiva is an even bigger win-win. I'm betting that Dick Simly feels randy. Not that he's much of a lover." She threw her blood-smeared arms around my waist and kissed me. "The best thing about all this is that I've met you, dear Jim."

Even in my impaired state, this creeped me out. I pushed Weena away. But then I walked over and put my hand on the cellar door anyway. Maybe at some level, I felt like I had nothing to lose.

As before, the door reacted to my touch. This time I'd meant to side-step it when it fell outwards, but I stumbled and, once again, I ended up under the round panel. Ira helped me scramble free.

Rickben Junior Pops Some Spores

Near death now, the yuel puffed up the bulb on the remaining stub of his tail. "Protect fatten teem," he said.

"On guard!" Weena yelled. "He seeks to seed this world!"

The yuel's tail burst like a puffball fungus. Glowing blue pinpoints floated upwards on the night breeze.

The flying jivas were like jellyfish, with endlessly branching antennae. They went to work, combing the air with ever more feelers. Their appendages filled all the space around us, I could feel electric tingles as they brushed across my skin. In a few seconds, none of the blue dots remained.

"I only hope we nabbed them all," said Weena. "The yuel spores were my biggest worry. That and the yuel lullaby."

“The creepy song he used?” The tune was still echoing in my head, like a particularly viral advertising jingle.

Jim Gropes for More Objections to the Trip

“What if my dog decides to eat my face?” I said.

“Don’t be being silly, Jim,” answered Weena. “There’s plenty of garbage for the dog to eat first.”

Flimsese

“What’s he saying, Dad?” asked Durkle, looking anxious.

“The boy doesn’t have a jiva,” Monin told me. “He keeps saying he doesn’t want to get one. He can’t interpret your language. I bet you two can speak Flimsese if you let your jivas help you.”

“*Grotont Ginne yam Jim*,” said Ginnie slowly, listening into herself as she spoke.

“*Ungar vuur Droog kamachantek flaet*.” She smiled and laughed.

“*Vuur vrillt su tabor!*” exclaimed Durkle, leaning down to stare under the table. In my head, his sentence became, “The dog is licking his butt!”

“*Ockters tuun vuurs dot*,” I said, enjoying the strange motions of my tongue. “Dogs often do that.”

Tide Pool Analogy

“Our two worlds were separate basins,” said Weena. “Like pools by your Pacific ocean, Jim. And a rising tide is merging them into one. The little crabs can swim back and forth. With the diatoms sparkling in between.”

“What water?” said Yerba. “There’s no water in the tunnel. And what’s a tide?”

“You’d understand if you’d ever been to Fatland,” said Weena, putting on airs. “Jim here was the one who opened the door for me, by the way. He’s going to be our Shadow Captain over there.”

Everything is Living Water

“Flimsy is living water,” put in Weena. “And so is Fatland. Living water, Flimsy, Fatland—three different ways of looking at the same thing.”

“Oh sure,” said Monin. “If they’re the same, why do we need the border snail’s tunnel?”

“Because we’re not fully enlightened yet,” said Weena.

Flimsy as a Disk

For one thing, Flimsy wasn’t a round planet—it was a large disk, puddled with oceans, embossed with mountain ranges, and with a titanic wall bounding the disk’s edge—some thought the wall arched all the way overhead, enclosing Flimsy in a dome.

“What happens if you burrow through the wall?” Ginny asked.

“Maybe something eats you,” said Monin with a shrug. “Maybe Flimsy loses its air. It would be a stupid thing to do. More meat?”

Fate of Ghosts

“Stray ghosts are swept to the center by the living water,” added Monin. “It may be that they’re destroyed as they pass through the central light.”

Infinite Flimsy

“Our suns are huge jivas,” said Weena. “Living beings. The endless plain of Flimsy is dotted with infinitely many of them, hundreds of miles apart.”

“Endless?” I said. “Infinitely many? I thought Flimsy was a disk?”

“Like a pizza?” chimed in Ginnie.

“There’s a lot of extra room near the center,” said Weena. “It’s as if the pizza dough is stretched there.”

“We call the center Helaven,” said Yerba piously. “A sacred place, bounded by an endless glassy sea.”

“We’re not sure if anyone can ever make it all the way to Helaven,” added Monin.

“I say no,” said Weena firmly. “It’s like the way you wouldn’t be able to get to the middle of a room if every time you took a step towards the center, you got half as tall, so that there’d be infinitely—”

Weena Reveal

[I had too much info-dump in the first conversation in Monin’s kitchen.]

“Weena’s important,” said Yerba. “She came to Flimsy without dying. Like you, Jim. When was it you came, Weena?”

“1940,” she said shortly. “Thanks to math, I cheated death. But let’s not get into all that.”

“I fed the information about the tunnel to the Graf to see if he’d make a break for Earth,” said Weena. “He’s been opposing the King’s latest plans, and we wanted to see how far he’d go. I told Yerba to go ahead and let him go through, and a little later I followed him.”

Jim As Father

I had a brief mental flashback to my early days of fatherhood, nearly sixty years ago, back when my wife Lucy and I would be wakened by one-and-a-half-year-old Jolie climbing wet-diapered onto our pillows. Our child-raising days had seemed to take so long—and now they were fading memories. Lucy—was there any chance I’d find her over here? The thought flooded me with a mixture of longing and, for some reason, apprehension.

Inside the Living Water

[I tried a number of approaches to describing what Jim sees when he falls into the pastel waters of the little pond at the bottom of the monster pit.]

The pool of ghost light was like the opposite of a horn of plenty. A horn of nothing.

And then Durkle and I were—in a Flimsy shopping mall? Store fronts were on either side, their signs in an ideographic alien script. The racks before the stores were filled with gnarly, organic objects—things like roots and crystals. Humanoid figures streamed past, their preoccupied eyes not noticing us. Perhaps they were thinking about personal problems, or obsessing over something they hoped to find.

I moved my arms, feeling them to be oddly light. I could feel that Mijjy was still embedded in me. Although the jiva was presently preoccupied with running his tendrils across this world, he was still willing to help me talk.

“Have you been here before?” I asked Durkle in Flimsese.

“I’ve never heard of a place like this in Flimsy,” said Durkle. “All these stores on one place. And the people are like zombies.”

This world felt oddly flat, like a picture in a color comic. Yet the patterns around us bore the usual perspective cues for depth—vanishing points, slanting walls, objects rendered in various sizes as cues to their imagined depth within the frame.

Indeed, if I focused on the notion that this world was flat, then Durkle at my side took on the appearance of a varicolored worm at my side, writhing and making noise. He was still talking.

I looked at Durkle again, and I found myself able to execute some change in perception which turned this into more dimensional-looking world, like a comic strip with no end and no beginning. A cosmic Sunday funnies page. Each moment of our perception was a rectangular frame with a composition of pastel colors.

I had a momentary shift of perspective under which Durkle took on the appearance of a varicolored worm at my side, writhing and making noise. With some effort, I flipped back to seeing him in the round. But now I couldn’t escape my sense that this world was somehow flat.

“I wonder if this is a painting,” I said. The patterns around us bore the usual perspective cues for depth—vanishing points, slanting walls, objects rendered in various sizes to represent their supposed distances away from us.

Plugging into Mijjy’s perceptions, I saw this as flat and unbounded world, like a comic strip with no end and no beginning. A cosmic Sunday funnies page. Each moment of our perception was a rectangular frame with a composition of pastel colors.

Under Flimsy

I noticed that some sand was drifting onto the ceiling from above—the sprinkles devoured each grain as well as doing their best to eat each other. Each of them was bent upon building up enough energy to unfold and become a full-sized ghost scuffling through this purgatorial mall.

Easternmost Jiva’s High-flown Talk

[Originally I was having the Easternmost Jiva use a traditional movie-villain style of speech, and then I decided it would be more fun and alien-seeming if jivas spoke by stringing together nouns.]

“Her Serenity greets Jim Oster.” The voice was huge and husky, like an echo in a cathedral. “She inquires why you are here.”

“Hello,” I said, groping for words. “Why I’m here? I fell through the monster pit. This kid Durkle and me. It’s an honor to meet you, Easternmost Jiva. You’re very large.”

“Her Serenity grows apace,” rasped the voice, filling the mile-wide chamber. “Her Serenity plans the final days of planet Earth. She understands that you are to be my Shadow Captain.” So vain and prideful was the Easternmost Jiva that she spoke of herself in the third person.

One of her tendrils lazily unfurled, unrolling towards me like the supple tentacle of a giant squid. Frozen in awe, Mijjy made no move to defend me. The glowing root wound around my waist, drawing me closer to the luminous beet, lifting me off the floor, hefting me.

“Don’t—don’t eat me,” I stammered.

“Her Serenity supposes you to be tasty,” said the hoarse voice. X-ray colors boiled in my brain. “A live Earthling is a rare treat. And with a healthy jiva inside. Your jiva’s name is—Mijjy?”

“Indeed, Your Serenity,” teeped Mijjy. “I am eager to serve.”

“Her Serenity is vexed with Mijjy,” boomed the Easternmost Jiva. “Mijjy should have transported Jim Oster posthaste to meet the Duke. The Duke is to give Jim Oster his instructions, as Her Serenity hath decreed. But She finds you rabble spying on Her as She feeds.” Peevishly she wagged me from side to side.

“We can hop to the castle on the instant, Your Serenity,” said Mijjy unctuously. “Provided that Your Serenity can point me the right way. I can’t through the layer of living water.”

“Hold on!” I objected. “I want to go back to the monster pit first. I left my friend Ginnie there.”

“The solid ghost girl, yes,” said the Easternmost Jiva, sweetening her tone operatically. “You lust for her.”

“I suppose you could say so,” I replied. “Not that anything’s likely to come of that. Mainly I want to be sure she’s okay.”

In silence the immense glowing figure ate a few more ghosts. And then with a negligent gesture she tossed me back to where Durkle stood.

“Her Serenity tires of your paltry affairs,” boomed the Easternmost Jiva. “Get you to the castle by tomorrow—or die.”

Failed Sex With Ginnie

Ginnie’s limbs were chill as marble, and when she fondled me, it felt like a doctor’s exam. We already knew that kissing was fruitless—the inside of her mouth was dry and hygienic. And things were no better between her legs. Sex with her was hopeless.

“You may be old, but I’m *dead*,” said Ginnie, sadly joking. “Not hot or wet or slippery. Not any more.”

“It doesn’t matter,” I said softly. “Sex isn’t everything. I’m glad to have you as a friend.”

“*Friend*,” said Ginnie. “That’s always the worst, isn’t it?” She attempted a laugh. “Not that I was expecting this big, like, relationship with you, Jim. I mean, you’re old enough to be grandfather. I guess I was slightly flattered to have you hot for me, desperado that I am. But—” She shook her head and sighed. “Yes, yes, we’ll be friends. And you can help me on my path to oblivion. I just thought being dead would be more fun. Like—if this is all it is, why was a such a Goth for all those years?”

“This is fun, in a way, isn’t it?” I said.

Ginnie started crying then, and I held her against me. After awhile she dropped off to sleep.

Jim Lusts For Nurse Mary

Fickle as I am, I started thinking about that blonde nurse Mary I’d liked in the hospital, big Mary with the full skirts. Maybe I could stop by the hospital and ask her out.

Take for dinner and to a show at the Catalyst club. With a woman like Mary in tow, I could still go out and do cool things. After the show, I'd bring Mary by my house for a joint and—

Jim Sees Lucy's Ghost by the Monster Pit

"Lucy!"

"Jim," said my dead wife, studying me with tenderness and longing.. "I don't understand why you're here when you're still alive."

"The King and the jivas are recruiting me. They're want to—" I felt a tightening in my throat. Mijjy clamping down. But I didn't want to talk about jivas anyway. I wanted to talk about me and Lucy. "It's really you? This is like a dream. Oh, Lucy. I've missed you so ." I reached out towards her. Just then, of course, Ginnie had to move in her sleep, feeling around for me and mumbling my name.

"She's just a friend," I said quickly. "A ghost. I did have a woman friend in Santa Cruz called Weena—she's over here too, now, in the King's palace. But—"

"It doesn't matter, Jim." Lucy looked slightly amused at my discomfiture. "I want you to be happy. I want you to have someone warm in your burrow with you."

I laughed. We'd often spoken of our bed as burrow. I got off the bed and strolled back and forth along the monster pit's rim with Lucy. Her hand was solid—and as chilly as Ginnie's.

"You have a zickzack body now?" I asked.

"Those yuels at Bart's gave me one," said Lucy. "Right before the Supreme Jiva's raid. But tell me about Jolie. How's she doing?"

I sighed. I hadn't spoken to our daughter since Lucy's funeral. "She's mad at me," I said. "Your death really freaked her out. I've lost touch with her."

"But you have to find her, Jim. You're her father. It's up to you to help." Wife words. It was good to be hearing them again. Lucy's voice was much the same as before—soft and with a slight fuzz to it.

We talked some more, remembering old times, embracing, weeping a little. And then I was too tired to go on.

"We'll meet again," said Lucy. "Again and again."

Jim and Durkle Bust Bart's Floor

"Let's smash through the floor now," urged Durkle. "This is our chance."

"Departure happiness," agreed my jiva, Mijjy. She wanted to get out of this situation as badly as I did. The overlapping sound of two distinct yuel lullabies was driving her to distraction. I think the only thing that stopped her from leaving my body was a fear that the Earthmost Jiva might swallow her up on the spot.

Durkle and I tipped over the kettle of kessence, spilling a big puddle onto the floor. The boy and I began jumping up and down on the damp patch. And a minute later, the floor gave way like gelatin beneath a spoon. We slithered through a couple of meters of rubberized living water, and then were in the fluid itself, ripped along by the fierce flow. Durkle and I clasped hands, lest we be swept apart.

Clown Hallucination

I saw an aging clown being shot from a cannon. He looked like me. The clown landed on a mound of womanly breasts and ass-cheeks. Morning-glory vines grew from the clown's trembling fingers and covered both him and the mound. Crooked musical notes

gushed from the jiggling flower-trumpets. A flock of pterodactyls spiraled round the flowery heap, pecking the notes from the air. The pterodactyl's wings grew corners, and the creatures mutated into heavy leather-bound books that dropped to the floor, pages askew. A misty monk—who resembled the old clown—piled the books into a bonfire. A chunk of flame tore loose and became a jagged sketch of a man, running around and goosing the actual ghosts that were on the scene...

The Jivas Are Babylonians

“The jivas are human ghosts,” Bart told us. “Old ghosts from maybe three or four thousand years ago. I think maybe they were Babylonians. They kind of colonized the place, and they took advantage of the yuels to a certain extent. The yuels taught the jivas about zickzack, for instance. But the jivas grew those tails and figured out teleportation by themselves.”

“I didn’t know all this,” said Durkle.

“The jivas don’t want you to know shit,” said Bart. “And the yuels don’t bother to tell you. They don’t take humans that seriously. My point is that you don’t have to worry about these four yuels being here. They’re mellow. The only problem would be if the Earthmost Jiva were to notice them and decide to raid—” Bart broke off, suddenly fearful. “Oh hell, I just noticed, Jim has a jiva inside him.”

“My jiva can keep quiet,” I said, hoping this was true. “Right, Mijjy?”

“Destruction devil yuel,” said Mijjy.

This didn’t bode well. I sincerely hoped that the Earthmost Jiva was sound asleep—and that Mijjy wouldn’t take it upon himself to rouse her.

Zeppelin Floor

Peering though the floor, I could see, far below us, a plain with mountains—a landscape shrouded in night. It was as if I were looking through the tempered glass floor of an old-time zeppelin’s lounge

“You think that might be Earth?” I asked Durkle.

“Would be nice,” said the boy. “But—”

Where’s the Green Ghost?

Perhaps she’d swept past the escape slit I’d made, and onward towards Flimsy’s center and the inconceivable Helaven. I hoped she’d like it there.

Song Fan

It was a mobile plant, fan-shaped, like a peacock’s tail, playing shimmering exquisite music like a Theremin or a musical saw. The sounds were sampled from its previous victims.

Blue Dinosaur Group-Jiva

“Kidnap,” teeped the yuel-mound conversationally. It was growing taller and narrower, molding itself into a new form. “Disguise, infiltrate.”

A head the size of car differentiated itself along the top of the blue mound. Little clawed arms appeared on the great shape’s sides, a pair of powerful legs unfolded below, and a huge blue banana of a tail poked out the back.

“They’ve merged into a superyuel,” exclaimed Durkle. “I’ve heard of that.”

The eyes migrated to the head and pooled into two great orbs. A crack formed along the sides of the head and opened into a toothy mouth. The mouth opened and—

“Time to hop!” yelled Ginnie.

But our jivas weren’t responding. It wasn’t as if the yuels had disabled them, it was more as if they simply didn’t want to help. Like some surrealistic street-singer, the dinosaur crossed his little hands over his chest and leaned towards us, crooning, “Eat eat eat.”

I stretched my arms forward, meaning to send out jiva tendrils—but nothing happened. Ginnie was just as helpless. Our jivas were on strike.

“Run!” I yelled, but even as we three took to our heels, the blue dinosaur leaned forward as if taking a bow—and adroitly caught Ginnie in his jaws, cradling her rather than crushing her.

The superyuel pivoted with the dainty grace of an opera singer. A moment later he was running across the meadow.

As the blue dinosaur ran, pieces of him broke off into individual yuels that in turn disappeared—teleporting away. At the very end, Ginnie was perched atop a single yuel as if riding bareback, and the two of them disappeared together.

Yuel Dino Sings Lullaby

Time to hop!” yelled Ginnie.

But it was already too late. For the blue dinosaur had begun crooning a powerful yuel lullaby, a tune so intensely icky that my jiva was no longer listening to me. Like some surrealistic street-singer, the dinosaur crossed his little hands over his chest and leaned towards us, projecting his song with all the energy he had.

I felt a nasty wriggling in my throat, and now Mijjy was hanging in the air before me. Once again I was wobbly and old. Shit. How quickly I’d gotten used to having tight skin and smooth joints.

I glanced over at Ginnie—and her jiva had deserted her as well. Ginnie was a waifish figure of mere kessence, translucent in the otherworldly light. The superyuel let out one more crooning yodel, and the jivas fled off towards the castle.

The blue dinosaur leaned forward as if taking a bow—and then adroitly caught Ginnie in his jaws, cradling her rather than crushing her.

“Come come,” urged Weena. “And do swallow your jiva again. I like my lovers to be handsome.”

My little beet, Mijjy, floated over to me and nudged my lips. I opened my mouth and let her settle back in. For now, the loss of autonomy seemed like a small price to pay for the powers that the jiva could give me. And it wasn’t as if this was the right time to make a fuss.

Ginnie’s former jiva was hovering questioningly by Durkle, but he shook his head. “Not for me,” he said through clenched teeth. “Never.”

Bare Jivas

The “humans” in the castle are almost all mere shells around jivas. And some jivas didn’t bother wearing human skins. It’s creepy with these tentacled, squiddy, Cthulhu-like, jellyfish-snowmen bopping around the rooms.

Egg Ruff

I was wearing a rank, rubbery ruff of eggs—a congelation of roe like you'd find in the belly of a fish or on the tail of a lobster, only formed into a spiky punk-rock shape.

Stentors

"A stentor is like...a policeman?"

"More like a giant horn," said Weena. "A Gabriel's trumpet that's a thousand feet tall. The stentors keep Flimsy's metabolism in balance—they play a role like our blood's phagocytes. I understand it can highly unpleasant to meet a full-grown stentor. I've seen some of the younger ones in the swamp."

Solsols

And now, as I watched, a pair of very strange creatures appeared and began spewing more kessence onto the mound. These guys weren't like any of the flims I'd seen thus far. One of them resembled a writhing bed-spring, glowing with light. Sparks scattered as he fire-hosed kessence from his lower end. The other creature was a purple teardrop-shaped blimp, not overly large, and with eyespots all over him, red dots in yellow irises. Ammonia-smelling clouds of steam drifted our way as he pooted kessence from his pointed rear end.

"Those are the ones you're borrowing from?" I asked Weena.

"Sir Snakle Solsol and Boss Blinks Bulber," said Weena. "Our contract is with Boss Blinks—he's the stinky blimp. But he sold part of the loan to Sir Snakle, so the Solsols are involved as well. And now Blinks wants to foreclose."

"The Solsols and Bulbers are ghosts of aliens?"

"Sir Snakle lived as a vortex tube inside our Sun," said Weena. "And Boss Blinks was an aeroform on Jupiter."

Jivas Nibble Souls

"I wish you had taken the time to observe the post-jiva health of your randy landlord. Third point. Admittedly, the jiva incubation eats a small fragment of a human host's soul. But—and here is my fourth and final point—if the host goes on to live richly and in depth, their soul plumps back up."

[Outline] Threat in the Helaven Sea

Black-gloved cartoon hands on long, skinny, infinitely-jointed arms reach out from the infinitely distant core and grab at Jim. He sees scabs and tattoos on the arms, which have endless zigzag Zeno sequences of elbows folding up like lazy-tongs.

Quest Rose (Atum's Lotus) as Fractal

"Charles has broadened his interests," said Weena. "Ever since our 1986 excursion to Earth. I assume you know of fractals—such as the Mandelbrot set? During our visit, marihuana-inhaling youths were prone to displaying multi-hued Mandelbrot whirlpools on their collarless shirts. For the last few decades, the Wizards' Quest Rose has been displaying three-dimensional forms along these lines. But just last month, to really widen the range of possibilities, Charles started allowing for generative formulae of a very high polynomial degrees."

"High-falutin talk," said the Duke. "Meaning the man's gone ape. Look at this here, Jim. A bud from the Quest Rose."

He gave a little tap to the brooch that the Duchess wore upon the lapel of her coat. At the moment, it resembled a gem-encrusted orchid—but the brooch’s form was continually changing. The orchid lips opened and folded back, the pistils pushed out and grew tiny reflective spheres, and now these spheres blossomed into starbursts of spikes.

“Very striking,” I said. “Phenomenal.”

“A real-time fractal display,” said Weena. “It’s a satellite fragment of the Quest Rose, currently based on a polynomial of the twenty-seventh degree. Charles trained the bud to accompany the Duchess wherever she goes.”

“How are you making these shapes?” I asked, leaning against the railing beside him. Weena stood to one side, watching us. The cavern around us was opening up, with a washboard of ripples forming on the balcony beneath our feet.

“It’s a higher form of higher mathematics,” said Hinton. “But I’m sure you don’t want a lecture. Suffice it to say that, some years ago, I inveigled the Duke into letting his geranium inaugurate my own theater of the surd. I’ve gawked and gaped for—I suppose it’s been it’s been thirty years. It’s easy to lose control of time in Flimsy. Like Odysseus among the Lotus Eaters.”

“Tell me more math,” I urged. “I studied bioinformatics in college. And I’ve heard of fractals.”

“Good man,” said Hinton. “Very well then. The basic idea is that there’s an underlying polynomial—for quite some time, I was absorbed in z -to-the-fifth-power-plus- k -times- z -cubed-plus- j -times- z -plus- c . I called this fellow the squiffer. When iterated in the field of complex numbers, a polynomial like the squiffer has the ability to generate a higher-dimensional form. In the case of the squiffer, the form is a six-dimensional fractal, if you count both the real and the imaginary values of the three parameters j , k , and c . It’s hard to see the higher dimensions, even if you’re out of your body, let alone out of your mind. So the Quest Rose shows us three-dimensional cross-sections of these forms. Floopy goopy.” Hinton hunched forward and wriggled his fingers in my face.

“But why did your Quest Rose suddenly start using so much kessence?”

“I grew disgusted with my placid joy,” said Hinton. “So I dropped the squiffer formula and hopped to studying a particular polynomial of degree sixteen, I call this one the nutcrusher. The nutcrusher creates a twenty-seven-dimensional fractal. It’s not that any one three-dimensional Quest Rose view of the nutcrusher’s abode is so costly to create. It’s the search for the *next* view of the nutcrusher that’s the ballbuster. Do you perceive a theme? Searches are exponential. Like branching trees. Searching for the tastiest morsel of a twenty-seven-dimensional object burns through the kessence like a blast furnace.”

[Outline] Chopping Off The Egg Case

The yuels get the egg case off of Jim by cutting his body into three parts: his head, the shoulders and neck with the egg case, and the lower part of his body. The idea is to destroy the egg-case-bearing part and glue the head onto the head onto the torso. It’s all kessence, after all, and pretty flexible.

But everything goes wrong. The severed egg case and shoulders act like a worm and hump off. And a yorbafump swallows Jim’s head. But eventually they get the head back. Jim has the carry the head around for a little while. It’s thirsty and he keeps having to give it mugs of water or beer that it chugs, and the liquid pours to the ground from its severed throat,

like a memorably scabrous image of Hell that I saw on a Robert Williams cover of, I think, *Cocaine Comix*. Later Jim is able to reattach his head to his torso.

Ira on Carrying the Sarcophagus

“The ship of the sun is drawn by the grateful dead,” said Ira.

Ira’s Suggestion About Simly

“Is Dick Simly dead?” I asked Ira.

“Who?”

“He’s the guy whose body Sukie and those other jivas had hatched from?”

“I’m a little out of the loop these days,” said Ira. “What with being a ghost living in a higher-dimensional snail-shell. Maybe you should drive into his car lot and ask if you can suck his dick.”

Ginnie Knew

It occurred to me that perhaps Ginnie, after her close telepathic contacts with me, had realized all along that eel-gene contamination had enabled me to call down the lightning. Ate the eel, indeed!

Research Notes

Riverworld

Here’s part of an explanation of Philip Jose Farmer’s [Riverworld](#) that I found on Wikipedia.

“In the Riverworld universe sapience is not a naturally occurring phenomenon but is the result of a type of artificially created soul, known as a *wathan*. Wathans are created by a generator, a technology developed and seeded among various worlds by an unknown ancient alien race. Wathan generators create wathans which attach themselves to sufficiently advanced chordates. Wathans are indestructible but become detached from the body upon physical death and wander the universe aimlessly and apparently mindlessly...

“The first race to create wathans were only extraordinarily adept tool users up to that point, but lacked individual sapience. Once the first wathans were created, however, their civilization was transformed. Self-awareness increased their capabilities by an order of magnitude, and as the creators of wathan technology, they understood the process so well that they were able to “catch” wathans released by their own deaths, resurrecting themselves endlessly — or so they thought.

“But then they began to have difficulties in reattaching certain wathans to physical bodies, eventually finding it impossible. As this occurred only to the wisest and most ethically advanced wathans, they came to the conclusion that they were “passing on”, a process

comparable to the Indian religious concept of becoming liberated from the cycle of death and rebirth.

“Facing the eventual disappearance of their race, they began wandering the universe, placing wathan generators on worlds with life that could host wathans, thereby creating other sentient species. Once they create a species they think they can trust, they task them with creating yet more sapient species after the whole of their own species has “passed on”. This cycle occurred several times until relatively recent times, and the creation of humanity.”

So why are the humans being reincarnated on Riverworld? Well, the problem is that not all human-coupled wathans keep getting better—some get worse and worse. Riverworld is a special terraformed planet, and the humans are there to be winnowed, the idea being to weed out the evil human souls for once and for all.

“Monadology” and “Lazy Man’s Guide to Enlightenment”

July 14, 2009.

In trying to craft the metaphysics of *Jim and the Flim*, I drew some inspiration from Leibniz’s *The Monadology*, and from the classic work by Thaddeus Golas, *The Lazy Man’s Guide To Enlightenment*—a book which is so small I can hardly ever find it around the house when I want it.

Both Leibniz and Golas propose that there’s only one kind of thing in the world. This entry presents some info about their works.

I’ll start with an edited-down copy of a particular [entry in my writing notes for Mathematicians in Love](#), originally titled, “October 1, 2004. Howard Stern, Monadology, Benford.”

Lying here in bed at 7 AM, I just read the entire text of Gottfried Wilhem Leibniz’s *The Monadology*, along with the annotations of philosopher Eric Steinhardt.

The idea of the monadology seems to be that each entity in the world has a kind of soul called a monad. And each monad consists of a view of the world. There is, sez Leibniz, no objective world per se, just all those monads, each of which contains a subjective world, and the subjective worlds (thanks to God) match. The monads don’t communicate with each other; in Leibniz’s famous phrase, “monads have no windows.” Bi-fucking-zarre. They just *happen* to match. Each monad holds a whole model of the universe, although with one region enlarged and with lots of detail; this zoomed-in zone is the “body” associated with the monad.

I hear a door slamming in the hotel hall, a shower running downstairs. Other monads doing their thing. I can, with a slight effort, switch my point of view to theirs. The unlit white lampshade in the corner of my room is a monad, the gray-teal patch of San Francisco Bay I see out the window is a monad that experiences the world as rocks beneath its watery flow. The photons flying to my eyes from the computer screen are

monads. My hungry empty stomach is a monad. Each monad is the whole universe as seen from one particular point of view.

A wildly extravagant and non-minimal worldview. I don't yet get why Leibniz is advocating it. First of all, he's dodecaduplicating the universe a zillion-fold. And then he has to assume that all the copies are in synch. Why not just have one universe and no synching to worry about?

But, for the fun of it, I'll try and think of everything as monads today. Soon I'll go put some granola-monad into my stomach-monad.

I got into monadology, by the way, because I have a feeling that it could be a useful screwball theory to use for my new novel *Mathematicians in Love*. In there, I have this idea of a so-called Knobby Giraffe seed of the universe that's available at every spot in spacetime. So maybe the Knobby Giraffes are monads.

Now, later in the day, I'm wondering if monadology could be related to "duality," in the sense that the word is used in projective geometry. Normally a geometry has points as fundamental elements, defines a line as a pair of points, and notes that a line includes infinitely many points. In the *dual* view, lines are fundamental, a point is a pair of lines, and we note that a point lies on infinitely many lines.

Now for the monadic duality: Normally a cosmology has spacetime events as fundamental elements, with minds arising from certain sets of events that constellate to produce a mind. In a monadology, minds are fundamental elements, with events arising as matching data found in minds.

Today (July 14, 2009), I did for once find my 1974 mass-level copy of *The Lazy Man's Guide to Enlightenment* by [Thaddeus Golas](#) in my bookcase, and I also located a seemingly authorized version of the book [online](#) in space-level format. The relevant passage is right at the start of Chapter One of this little masterpiece. Here's a heavily edited-down excerpt.

We are equal beings and the universe is our relations with each other. The universe is made of one kind of entity: each one is alive, each determines the course of his own existence.

The universe is made of one kind of whatever-it-is, which cannot be defined. For our purpose, it isn't necessary to try to define it. All we need to do is assume that there is only *one kind* of whatever-it-is, and see if it leads to a reasonable explanation for the world as we know it.

The basic function of each being is expanding and contracting. Expanded beings are permeative; contracted beings are dense and impermeative. Therefore each of us, alone or in combination, may appear as space, energy, or mass, depending on the ratio of expansion to contraction chosen, and what kind of vibrations each of us expresses by alternating expansion and contraction. Each being controls his own vibrations.

A completely expanded being is space. Since expansion is permeative, we can be in the “same space” with one or more other expanded beings. In fact, it is possible for all the entities in the universe to be one space.

When we are completely expanded, we have a feeling of total awareness, of being one with all life. At that level we have no resistance to any vibrations or interactions of other beings. It is timeless bliss, with unlimited choice of consciousness, perception, and feeling. The One Mind is all of us or any of us at the highest level of expansion.

When a being is totally contracted, he or she is a mass particle, completely imploded. To the degree that a being is contracted, that individual is unable to be in the same space with others, so contraction is felt as fear, pain, unconsciousness, ignorance, hatred, evil, and a whole host of strange feelings.

When a being is alternating expansion and contraction, the being is energy. My guess is that at the middle point, fifty percent expansion and fifty percent contraction, a being would be logical, non-subjective, egoless, and predictable. Energy is not a quantity of anything “objective.” Energy, like space and matter, is what a lot of live beings are doing.

Energy beings usually react to their neighbors in a way that is often predictable and apparently automatic, like falling dominoes. While relating to space beings, energy beings will appear to be high, vibrating rapidly, with a sense of increasing subjective freedom. Oriented to mass beings, they will be low energy, vibrating more slowly with a growing feeling of subjective compulsion and disorder.

The universe is an infinite harmony of vibrating beings in an elaborate range of expansion-contraction ratios, frequency modulations, and so forth. **There is nobody here but us chickens.** The entire universe is made of beings just like ourselves. Every particle in every atom is a live being. Every molecule or cell is a tribe of beings. Energy is a large number of us vibrating together. Space is an infinite number of our brothers and sisters in perfect bliss.

The same rules apply to all of us. The rules come from the truth that we are all equal, we all have the same range of possible behavior and experience. We are free to do anything we want to do, within the necessary laws of our relations as equal beings. And love must be the first law. Love is the *action* of being in the same space with other beings, which means that love is real, as real as we are. Love is not a limited idea, it is something we do, ultimately with our whole selves.

Expansion in love is an action that is available to every being in the universe all the time. A willing awareness will take us to heaven, a loving attitude will make us free. Whatever you are doing, love yourself for doing it. Whatever you are thinking, love yourself for thinking it. Love is the only dimension that needs to be changed. If you are not sure how it feels to be loving, love yourself for not being sure of how it feels. There is

nothing on earth more important than the love which conscious beings feel towards each other, whether or not it is ever expressed.

Writing Journal

December 16-20, 2008. Warm-up Raps About Jim and Weena.

[This long entry combines a number of passages from writing notes I made this summer while gearing up to start on my memoir, *Nested Scrolls*. Those original entries ate from July 12, 2008, to September 15, 2008, and are found in the document `Notes for Nested Scrolls.doc`. As I didn't use any of this SF material in the memoir, I'm now repurposing it for *Jim and Flim*. I removed the dates from the individual scraps, and I repeatedly edited them so as to give this long initial entry some flow.]

I was feeling a little off kilter earlier this month, and today I'm starting to feel like myself again. Off and on I have this sense of rebooting—like looking at the brake light on my car, I'm like, "Ah, yes, the brake light. An electrical filament illuminating a hard plastic lens."

All the little niggling objects are still here, all wanting their attention share. The radio remote control, the knitting basket, the glasses cases, my three pairs of glasses, my hair, my clothes, the pillow, the lamps, the food in the fridge. It's like the world is this array of male and female snaps, and I'm a plastic sheet of female and male snaps that need to be matched up with the reality array. The lights flow through me, and my piezoplastic body wriggles.

Working on these notes in the Los Gatos Coffee Roasting cafe. The guy at the next table has an ascetically shaved head, and he's eating an abstemious salad of greens and goat cheese. Thoroughly, carefully, he chews a single wafer-thin slice of tomato. What a loser.

It's foggy every day in San Francisco this July, my wife reports, studying the paper.

A young woman at another table shakes her head, smiling. No health problems for her. I used to feel that way: potentially immortal. But these days I'm starting to feel like a doddering old man, just a heartbeat away from being cut down in my prime.

It's so terrible when people have words appliquéd onto the butts of their sweat pants. Like the back of a van. Like the woman I'm looking at right now in the coffee shop. Pale blue sweat pants with "**H O L L I S T E R**," the name of a small town south of here. But of course, to her, the pants aren't terrible, they're cool fashion. All a matter of convention.

Today in the coffee shop, I saw the same woman I saw yesterday with "**H O L L I S T E R**," on her sweatpants, only today, it being Sunday, she was dressed a bit more formally. Her husband is seven feet tall, they have a cute two-week-old baby.

I had another SF vision today, of what you might call *Oinkness*. An alternate world or mindscape that's made of pig. It's not like encountering a single pig, it's pure pigness. Pink skin, ears, perhaps an eye here and there, the stench, the squeal, layer upon layer of skin and meat, an endlessly cloned pig surface, folding back on itself.

How about a trip to Oinkness? Maybe combine it with that German fallout and Texas hole story.

I'd like to give my main character a hospital death experience that deflates the mysterious horror of death. He realizes that, if he'd died, the only thing different is that I wouldn't have woken up. My point is that, in many cases, you're not inevitably gonna see the White Light and the Pearly Gates and the Dead Relatives. What you see has, I'm guessing, a lot to do with the biochemical states you're going through. Some paths go straight into the dark. Death, where is thy sting?

My character—what's his name?—is convalescing, and working on a memoir, and he goes for his first bicycle ride, around a loop here, with a friend along to keep an eye on him and chat. He walks his bike on the steep parts. He feels a little dizzy—but his main impression is: what a beautiful world it is.

He says that he's still plugging back in—meaning that he's still repairing my interface to the giant reality computation. "I see now that so much of what I thought of as happening inside my head was always going on outside."

He feels tired a lot of the time. The naps hit him like sandbags—*boom*, he's out. At times it's even like there's bags of sand *sewn into* his body cavities, weighing him down.

Better: a UFO novel, kind of in the Young Adult mode, although not actually a YA book. I have this eidetic vision of a scene with a bad kid, call him Denny Allaway, frantically humping a chunk of cow liver in the UFO, he's imagining that it's Weena Wesson, the Hollywood love goddess.

Or maybe the kid doing the humping is the young Jim Oster, and he's remembering this. Or he's remembering Allaway doing it, and being disgusted by it, and only later, in the present time, is Weena Wesson revealed to be a piece of cow liver with woo-woo flim matter holograms.

I get the name "Weena" from H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine*, the woman of the future. I match it with "Wesson" for doubling, like Marilyn Monroe, Diana Dors, or Brigitte Bardot—and of course Wesson is a kind of commercial vegetable oil, perhaps not all that healthy.

Cute Sue Pohler is laughing at Denny. Our hero, Jim Oster, helps Denny out of the saucer, shielding him from Sue's ridicule. It's like an after-school special.

They learn that the President of the U. S. has sold us out. So they set out to kill him—but are spared the karmic onus of the assassination when Jim reforms the Prez by talking sense to him? Naw, that would be too much of an after-school-special touch, pretending that you could teach a powerful politician anything by talking to him. Maybe Jim sets up the Prez for a visitation by some "good" aliens? Oh, fuck talking about Presidents, who wants to read about politicians.

I've never written as much about flying as I'd like to. Like Disch's *On Wings of Song*, only more upbeat. Naw. Yet another idea: a kid goes to visit his dead father in Heaven (but I kind of did this in *Realware* already).

I remember a radio play—I think it was by Norman Corwin, "The Odyssey of Runyon Jones"—about a kid who goes to look for his dead dog in "curgatory," first broadcast in 1941, I might have heard it as a re-broadcast around 1954. It's available as part of an out-of-print CD set called *Thirteen By Corwin*, I'd dig hearing that.

Story: The hero comes back from Germany, and his father is dead. The fallout. The giant worms. The oinkness. He goes to bed with a cow liver shaped like Weena Wesson. And suddenly he's President of the Senior Class! He marries Sue Pohler and she gives birth to an alien.

Two young teenage girls are cheerfully jabbering together on the deck behind me. Like birds. Nice to hear the rhythms, though I'm not exactly listening to what they say.

Back into the head of my convalescing narrator, Jim Oster:

The world runs itself without me. The world kept on happening while I was gone. I'm still in the process of getting hooked back in. It used to baffle me that the world would go on after I die. I understand this better now. It's like I'm just one particular monitor displaying the reality crunch. But, yes, my circuits do add some small smidgen of extra oomph, but not enough that the world will seem all that different without me. It's nice that my wife and children are concerned about me. They really would miss me, just as I miss my parents. Be that as it may, I'm inevitably on my way out.

This morning, waking up, I feel good. The world outside looks so green and lively. I keep coming back to my character's thought: "It's not me who makes the world, the world makes itself, and all I'm doing is plugging into it, picking up on the ambient gnarl."

I recall a feeling I sometimes have when I'm flustered—less so now than when I was younger—of being in a tunnel, caught up in my worries, deaf and blind to the outer world. It's all a matter of the attention that you're able to pay.

My geezer character again:

If, indeed, the richest and most interesting part of my life is what's coming in from the outside, then my death really won't be such a loss. The rich and interesting stuff will continue, and what does it matter if the information is being displayed on devices other than the meat body that wears my name? This is in some sense obvious, but somehow it's not a fact that I really internalized until this month. In the past it had struck me as somehow paradoxical that the world will continue after I die. But now it just seems obvious. Kind of a relief.

I'm wondering how I might write a story or novel that dramatizes a guy's insight that the world will go on much the same after he dies. The trick would be to make this insight seem surprising rather than crashingly obvious.

So maybe write a scene from the p.o.v. of a person who's going to die, say, Denny Allaway, a saucer abductee. And he's worried about death, and he's viewing it in the hysterical-grim-finale kind of way that mortality is commonly presented in Romantic mass media adventures. And he goes down into oblivion.

And then in a later chapter, Denny's boyhood friend Jim Oster is thinking about Denny, and he observes that it doesn't really matter that Denny is dead, any more than it matters when a pinecone falls off a tree. Jim wonders if he should do something to memorialize Denny, but he's too busy humping that 120 pound chunk of cow liver made up to look like Weena Wesson.

The cow liver is sitting next to Jim Oster, sharing a bottle of hard lemonade. “*Muuur*,” says the liver.

“I love you, Weena.”

Thinking about my geezer narrator character again. Maybe he quotes the Skip James blues line: “The doctor came in mumblin’ very low. / He said, ‘You may get some better, but you’ll never be well no mo’.”

I hope I can use the part about the cow liver and Weena Wesson.

The overgrown cow liver is hiding under Denny Allaway’s bed. She whispers to him through the mattress. And at night, after Mom is out of the way, Weena creeps out. She looks like a movie star. The flim mind within the cow liver has tweaked its shape via interactive biotech.

Talk about irrelevant info, I found a YouTube video, “[Weena + Me=Love](#)” of two young Japanese women goofing around. I think it was filmed on the street by a stranger with a cell phone. “Oh, mama!” says one of the women at the end, and you get the feeling that’s about as much English as she knows.

Imagine opening the novel opening with a Weena thing.

The good news is that, in my prime, people saw me making love to the legendary Weena Wesson—the bad news is that Weena is in fact a cunningly tweaked cow liver. Weena is a flim.

I like that. Or maybe he’s uncertain about whether Weena is an alien.

Twenty years ago, I had a few days of publicity for appearing in an online sex video. My partner, Weena Wesson, was rumored to be a saucer alien. Our video link was everywhere: “New UFO You!” But then the public’s fickle attention moved on.

I do feel it’s possible that Weena is non-human—this is something I periodically think about, as I still live with her. In certain moods, I can visualize her body as a tissue-culture grown from tweaked cow liver cells, and her mind as a holographically implanted alien engram.

Not that just anyone would notice this, whether by talking to her or by having sex with her—which is, I might add, not especially difficult to do.

Our Surf City neighbors regard Weena and me as unsavory or even beneath contempt. But I’m dreaming of restoring us to the level of fame that we deserve.

What’s going to make the difference is the “scroll nesting” technique that Weena recently taught me.

I'm not sure that "engram" is a good word to use—although it has a vanilla science meaning as a memory trace, it also has a more specifically doctrinal meaning as a term in Scientology. Maybe use "enneagram," instead. Or "soulware."

What is Weena Wesson like? I see her as a Native American, or perhaps a subcontinental Indian. Or Japanese? Or just a pale, dark-haired Californian. Or even a generic heavy-featured Hollywood blonde.

Anagrams of her name: Awnnee Snowes. Anne Swesewo. Anne Wowsesse. I like Weena Wesson so much more, but maybe at some point Weena uses an anagram.

Imagine a SFictional equivalent of anagrams, in the sense of rearranging the elements ("letters") of the world to make alter reality.

Jim Oster wants to write his autobio, well not *write* exactly, he wants to make a lifebox version of his autobio, using a kind of Belousov-Zhabotinsky simulation that creates the data base as a pattern of nested scrolls, based on what he says or types.

The scroll nester isn't a computer-science kind of thing. I was thinking something like a cell phone earpiece that you talk to a lot. Or maybe more organic than that. A crystal ball? A tiny aquarium kind of thing with slime mold in it.

Jim himself isn't a techie. For much of his career he worked as an assistant for a guy installing wooden screen doors.

What's gonna happen with the scroll nester is that he stares into the display and gets hypnotized and flashes back into the past.

I'd like for part of the novel to be Jim Oster's memories of his boyhood, thus allowing me to transrealize some of the remaining unused segments of my autobiography. But for the novel to work as a story, I need some hooks between the old days and the present year (around 2010) in which Jim Oster is narrating.

In any case, *Jim and the Flims*—or maybe it's called *Jim and Weena*—still needs a plot. We'd want to have some impending crisis that might end our world—and the aliens are enlisting Jim Oster to help save our shared reality. Save it from who? From some benighted humans—I might bring back my favorite villains, the Heritagists. One can readily suppose that Heritagists have a hysterical, superstitious, witch-burning fear of the aliens. And they're working on a Reality Cleansing Treatment to erase all the ambient alien autobiographies and alien minds.

Opening scene: Jim Oster in the hospital, recuperating from what they're telling him is a mild stroke, caused by a cerebral hemorrhage. His long-term woman friend Weena Wesson visits him—these two are both somewhat out of it, along the lines of the characters in Phil Dick's *A Scanner Darkly* or William J. Craddock's *Be Not Content*. This said, I think it clarifies and simplifies my story if I assume that Jim and Weena are both sober, perhaps even in recovery—this way, it's more believable that their perceptions of the world's workings are in fact true.

After visiting hours end, and Weena leaves, Jim is thinking over some of the things she said, and he becomes convinced that his so-called stroke or hemorrhage was in fact a Heritagist attempt to wipe the very scroll-nesting powers of alien empathy that Weena has been teaching him. Weena is an alien called a flim. Jim is pretty much the only person on Earth who knows about the flims. Denny Allaway knew, but he's dead.

He escapes from the hospital in his gown and catches a ride with a not-so-coincidentally passing van of seeming hippie musicians who are hip to the flims—and maybe a few of them actually *are* flims. The odd musicians fan Jim's mental scrolls back into life, and he becomes more and more certain that, yes, the consensus world-view is a lie. The evidence is right there in his memories—and in the tales that the other van members tell, Decameron style, as they motor down the coast to a disorganized hippie/punk festival to be held on the beach near Andrew Molera State Park.

The van band comes on at sunrise, and when they start playing, more flims and their subdimensional UFOs appear.

Right after his attack, Jim Oster is thinking about sex a lot. Like—sex is one of the very first facts about the world that comes back to him. Zero and one, as it were. He feels a little surprised about reproduction—he can hardly believe the details. His woman friend, Weena Wesson, says he's like an id with no ego or superego.

In the first mornings, he sits on the hospital patio with his IV-drip and looks at the clouds in the sky. They drift along, changing shapes, with the golden sunlight on them. The leaves of a potted palm tree rock chaotically in the gentle airs, the fronds are clearly outlined against the marbled blue and white heavens.

Most of the other convalescents fail to notice their natural surroundings, but, be that as it may, the information *is* coming in from outside Jim. He's not creating it. And now Jim is struck by the realization that the world will go on without him after he dies.

Or...? He thinks of the participant/observer maxim in quantum mechanics: "No phenomenon is real until it's observed." He begins to wonder—or even to hope—that some aspect of reality depends on being seen by Jim Oster. He is, after all, a bit of a writer, and he sometimes imagines that his journals works are altering reality.

Looking up at the clouds from the couch in his back yard, he sees a high-flying bird—a crane or a gull. Mentally reaching out to contact the fowl he feels he can see through her mind, feeling the rhythm of her wingbeats, enjoying the vast expanse of her view, with the coastline and the Pacific ocean visible. Jim imagines that bird sends him a telepathic message: "Thank you." She's grateful to Jim for making her real by seeing her.

But—naaw—if Jim was dead, the birds would still be flying, the Earth would be turning, and the sun would be rising in the sky just the same. He's of no more lasting significance than a dead leaf scuttering across the patio. He finds this fact to be somehow horrible.

Jim doesn't feel like his old self. He feels like his mind is a giant warehouse where an earthquake knocked everything off the racks, and he has to reshelve things one by one. "Oh, yes, that's a

steam shovel, that's a potty, that's a quartz crystal, that's my first day of nursery school." Repeatedly he remembers marrying Anne Wowsesse, and how cute she was in her white hat and veil. Repeatedly he remembers that he never married Anne Wowsesse at all.

The days and weeks fly by. He doesn't understand how he used to pass his time. He's continually ransacking his bookshelves, looking for some old volume to reread. He spends much of his time waiting to go back to sleep. Each day he looks forward to bed time at nine p.m. sharp. And he naps every day. He wants to act normal; when he greets people, he forms his mouth into a smile, as deliberately and artificially as if he were making an "okay" hand-sign. He feels he's living a lie.

When Jim stares at a neutral-colored object such as the 1940s frosted-glass light fixture on the ceiling in his rented house, he seems to see the tint of the object change in slow waves. Faint pastel hues amp up and down, as if some unseen force were diddling the world's color balance sliders.

Smells seem much more intense, the smells of drains, of garbage, and of fruit. The meaty, oily smell of the skin fragments in his electric razor is almost unbearable. He's tempted to stop shaving.

Is the change because he quit smoking after his attack? Or has something been reconfigured in his brain? Maybe there's a piece of him gone missing. His once-powerful spiritual impulses are weak, and, in a possibly related change, he's no longer goaded by the impulse to get high.

Slouched on a the lawn chair in his back yard one afternoon, Jim falls into a trance while studying the clouds. When he comes back to focusing on his immediate surroundings, he realizes that he hears the low tapping of fingers on a keyboard. He tries to maintain a calm appearance, but inwardly he panics, thinking that he's inside a computer program or a video game.

But, whew, it's just his daughter sitting in a chair behind his head, checking her email on her laptop. He twists his neck so he can look at her, to talk this over. And then he remembers that he doesn't have a daughter. There's nobody in the chair. Or, no, wait, he does have a daughter, and she's visiting him, yeah. She is sitting there after all. Or, no, that's Weena's daughter. Another flim, come to think of it. And her name is—what?

Is Jim Oster losing it?

Weena Wesson may or may not be an alien mind inside a 120 lb. culture of cow liver cells.

We have Jim Oster recovering from his stroke and reminiscing about his early childhood, and somehow the childhood memories dovetail with his present and with some aliens. The flims.

Maybe something horrible happened in Jim Oster's childhood, some real horror-novel or dysfunctional-family-memoir type thing. Like he finds a dismembered corpse in the freezer—and it's his mother! Maybe something not quite that intense. Maybe it's just the milkman. Or the Girl Scout leader.

Or, I've got it, he finds all the cats and dogs dead in the now-eerily-silent neighborhood, each butchered pet with its little brain removed. Off in the corner of the basement, a sliver of light leaks from beneath a door. Within is Father, gloating over the wired-together animal brains, who are computing the odds of college basketball games.

December 27, 2008. Starting the Novel.

On December 23, 2008, during the big family Christmas reunion at our house, I had a few spare minutes and managed to write a kind of start for my novel, *Jim and the Flims*. I pasted in the bits that I liked from all the warm-up raps, put it into the past tense and changed the parts that were first person to third person. Today I started smoothing the material and revising it, lying on my bed in the afternoon with my laptop. I can feel a little pulse in the novel, it's coming to life.

I might make it fairly Dickian. I'd like the reader to believe, initially, that Jim Oster is mistaken in his belief that Weena is an alien flim inside a cow liver. But we soon learn that he's not nuts—for if he were, we wouldn't have much of an SF novel, would we?

If I wanted to be really Dickian, I would whip it back and forth several times, like real, unreal, real, unreal... Possibly reality itself is changing so that sometimes Jim is a crank, and sometimes he's a prophet. Our reality could be a kind of game that two or more god-like beings are playing against each other, but, naw, that's a stale Manichean concept.

I'm thinking it might be fun to work without an outline this time around. To free up the book, and return to my earlier, more improvisational methods. A way to make it new for me, and get off the assembly line.

January 4-7, 2009. Groping for a Plot.

Jan 4, 2008. The free-form approach I talked about in the previous entry isn't likely to work. Writing without an outline makes the work harder. And, without an outline, I tend to skip through the material too fast. The few hundred words that I've written on the novel are spread over forty years of Jim Oster's life. I need to focus and think of a time sequence and not try and do everything at once.

So now I'll work on the [Outline](#) after all.

I was initially drawn to the idea of starting with a sentence mentioning Jim sitting with a cow liver, but now I think this could be a mistake. I had, like:

“Jim Oster and the cow liver sat side by side, sharing a bottle of hard lemonade.”

It's funny, but it makes the book seem so parodistic, that it puts me down in a hole I have to climb out of if I want to make the story seem gripping and serious.

And even if I wanted to use the cow liver, mentioning it in the first sentence telegraphs a plot point that I could have saved for a surprise a little later on.

I'm thinking, don't use the cow liver. Just have Weena herself possessed by an alien mind.

I still need a plot. The guy has a stroke, an alien moves in with him to pretend she's his wife, and he learns that she's an alien. But then what?

They're trying to educate humanity to be greener or more peaceful? I'd want to see something more interesting. They're working towards a flowering of the arts, a coming of an Earthly utopia. Of course the fundies and conservatives will be fighting them, my usual enemies. Suppose that the story is taking place at what is in some sense the Millennium, the Apocalypse, the end of the world as we once knew it.

At some point, in my usual fashion, I'll have Jim make a trip to the aliens' land—and I'll have to think about what he sees and does over there.

Jan 5, 2008. I [blogged](#) about my initial plans for *Jim and the Flims*, and I think that may have been an unnecessary distraction for me. Sometimes in the past, I've blogged about works in progress, and I've gotten some useful suggestions. But this time, the comments were mainly from UFO enthusiasts nudging me towards their established scenarios, which isn't where I want to go at all. Sometimes I tend to overblog, as I always need some text to post.

Thinking about the UFOlogical suggestions from the fans—whether I'm trying to integrate them or I'm reacting against them—puts me into the wrong frame of mind, puts me into somebody else's game. Really, I don't think *at all* about the corpus of received ideas of UFOs, which are, to my mind, hackneyed, media-driven, and dominated by disgusting subtexts. I already talked about that lowbrow UFO stuff in *Saucer Wisdom*, anyway.

What I'm looking for in *Jim and the Flims* is more of a breakthrough book. An exploration of new possibilities. A fresh myth. I want to write like they were doing when they wrote about aliens in the 1940s and 1950s, before the numbing, moronic fog of consensus, mass-media ufology settled in.

I recall a book I read as a young teenager, it was about a boy who has an alien living inside him. The creature was something like a glob of jelly that slipped into the boy's flesh while he was swimming in a pond. At first the alien "talks" to his host by spelling out shadowy words against the sky—manipulating his retina. And the alien becomes, I think, a voice in the boy's head, and he gets the boy carry out some task. I think maybe the alien is trying to get his/her ship going again, and the boy helps with that by stealing uranium or something like that.

Maybe Weena isn't a cow liver, maybe Weena is a Santa Cruz woman with a flim inside. A barmaid or a waitress. This brings the story line close to an account of mentally ill people suffering from delusions.

And in Chapter Two, a flim gets inside Jim. Maybe this flim was Weena's husband over in Flimland. Or it was her son—no, that leads to an incest subtext, and I don't want to go there.

What if a psychologist or a cop or minister or elected official begins counseling the two to forget their thoughts of alien possession? Note that certain mentally ill people think that their caretakers are demonic, so we're a little unsure. But we'll assume in this case that the alien possession is true.

Perhaps the "healer," call him Ira Schenk, is possessed too. There might be two factions or races of aliens wanting to connect to Earth, and Schenk would be run by a bad

one. Weena realizes this right away, though it takes Jim a little while to catch on, as maybe his flim isn't as sophisticated as Weena's.

Today I'm leaning towards making it a first person account. So long as it's third person, we're looking down on Jim. Belittling him. If it's his own story it's more dramatic. And the ambiguity of what's really going on becomes richer.

It might be that Jim is possessed by a flim who's a rival of Weena's. Maybe zillions of flims are moving in. *The Flim Wars*. Kind of like the alien gamers running people in *Frek and the Elixir*, come to think of it.

Jan 6, 2008. Yesterday I rewrote the book's beginning in the first person, which does seem to work better. Jim's p.o.v. And now I'm thinking I might slow it down some more.

At present I'm starting with them drinking, and Weena says she wants to tell Jim the truth, and then I jump into a flashback covering the time from the stroke up till the present. It's kind of dramatic that way, as you're hanging on wanting to hear what the "truth" is.

I could push the drinking scene towards the end and just start with Jim's brain hemorrhage, which has a certain drama of its own. And just have linear time. But also keep in mind that, in order to hook the reader, it's best to start the first page with something attractive rather than something repulsive. So, yeah, I think starting with drinking and a mystery is best.

I'm also beginning to individualize Weena and Jim, making them interesting quirky people, which is important.

Most of all, I need a plot. A Maguffin, an elixir, a prize, a magic door. Competing factions. A goal, a mission. Something to fight over and struggle towards.

I think of Aphid Jerry and his fear of "carrier people" in *A Scanner Darkly*. The carrier people are loaded with aphid pupae that hatch out and fly around the room, making glowing haloes around the lights. Maybe Jim and Weena begin seeing carrier people.

Go psychological. Weena isn't sure all the time that she has a flim inside her. It kind of comes and goes, and Jim likewise. They're not sure if it's true or if they're nuts.

Did Weena infect Jim with the pistachio ice cream cone? Come to think of it, pistachio is too east coast of a flavor. Coconut-pineapple would be better. They call the flavor Hawaiian Harmony.

Jan 7, 2008. I wonder about pursuing an eschatological route. That is, maybe Jim is dead and hasn't quite noticed. Maybe the flims are ghosts, and Flimland is the afterlife.

I wrote about the afterlife in *White Light*, and that was pretty cool. Maybe I could revisit that theme.

I think of Nick Herbert's remark, "Maybe dark matter is consciousness." Maybe dark matter is Flimland, filled with the souls of the dead and the unborn. Souls of atoms and rocks as well as souls of dogs and women.

As always, the essential desideratum is that my story has to be something that I'm genuinely excited about. Two geezers who aren't sure if they're crazy. They're seeing ghosts or maybe aliens. They're in love. That's kind of exciting. Underworld demons. The hidden reality. Paranoia and schizophrenia—or the unveiling of the hidden reality?

By the way, how come Jim happens to be single when Weena meets him? He could be a widower. Does he have children? Maybe yes, but they live far away, and didn't hear about his stroke?

But I still don't see a plot.

January 21, 2009. A Fantasy Book?

I was on vacation for a week in NYC, and then a week in the vicinity of my birth town of Louisville, KY. I visited my brother, Embry, and his wife on their farm in Skylight, KY, which lies in a rural area outside Louisville and beyond, successively, St. Matthews, Harrods Creek, Prospect, and Goshen.

I was working on *Jim and the Flims* before I left—I got it up to 2,189 words. And I was stuck, unsure of where to go next. And now I've been gone so long that the whole idea of what I thought I was writing has pretty much left my head. Which is good, as now I can get a fresh start.

My basic notion today is to go for something more like a fantasy than like science fiction. In the last two novels, *Postsingular* and *Hylozoic*, I pushed the science perhaps further than ever before. And now, for this book, I'd like to try something different—both to make the task feel fresh and exciting, and perhaps also to attract a broader readership. So—something a bit like a fantasy, although more like *The Twilight Zone* or like Borges than like Tolkein.

(1) I'm thinking of a "universe next door" scenario, only the universe next door isn't reached via higher dimensional hop to a separate brane, but rather by walking around the streets of one's home town in an odd way, turning unexpected corners, cutting down heretofore unexplored alleys, and slowly the buildings take on an odd cast, and you see some unusual animals—not exactly dogs—around the corners.

By the way, I get this mode of transfer from a Robert Sheckley story, "Sacrifice," in which the protagonist is urged through such a transformation by a stranger, and he ends up as the sacrificial offering at temple in the alternate world. Sheckley is a spring of inspiration that never runs dry.

If the beings from this world are called flims, then maybe the world is called Flimsy.

(2) In Louisville, or rather Skylight, I was walking in the utterly empty woods near dusk, in the vicinity of Meade's Landing on the overgrown banks of the Ohio River, my only companion being Embry's dog Ziggy. I was looking down the faint trail ahead of me to where the trail curves around the slope of the hill leading back up to the high ground where Embry's farm lies. And I had a sudden brief image of seeing a terrible black beast the size of a horse standing in the trail, but broader and more low-slung, a sleek ruthless animal, a diabolical beast so dangerous that, if you see him, you can be virtually sure that in a few seconds you will die. But for the purposes of a story, my character will escape, perhaps by racing through a quick maze of trees and rocks that leads him out of Flimsy and back to Santa Cruz.

(3) Watching Obama's Inauguration on a giant TV at the Kentucky Center theater, I saw some sober officials carrying an enormous bible down a flight of stairs—the very bible used by Abraham Lincoln. I had an image of the book as a fleshy mass, slowly coming to wakefulness, twitching and meaty, a kind of minor god that normally slumbers in the hidden Chamber of Wonders. A rheumy eye opening up in the cover.

Watching the Inauguration, I also thought of monarchies, of pomp and circumstance. Suppose that my feeble, retired character Jim becomes somehow part of an intrigue among

the highest echelons of Flimsy. He is the confidant of the exiled king—and perhaps Weena is a queen.

(4) Weena is a flim who came bodily to our world—I'll drop the idea that she's a human who's possessed by a flim as if possessed by a spirit. And I'll drop the idea that Jim becomes possessed by a flim.

What Weena does to Jim at the ice-cream parlor is to feed him some bits of Flimsy food, and as he absorbs this matter into his body, he becomes able to make those special odd turns that will lead him around secret corners, through arcane twists and turns, that lead from here to the universe next door—and back again. We might suppose that Weena likes his looks, and she puts sprinkles on his ice-cream, glistening things, colorful, twinkling. He complains, a little, as he hadn't ordered sprinkles—but he eats them anyway.

(5) I'm reading book of my brother's, *Wanderings of an Elephant Hunter*, written by the Englishman W. D. M Bell around 1910, and republished in 1989 by the Safari Press. The book has marvelous accounts of safaris through unknown lands, and of encounters with tribes who've never seen Europeans before. The safari personnel includes a chronicler, a native who composes an epic poem about the journey. Every evening, around the campfire, he recites the poem thus far—and adds a new verse. The excitement of geographical exploration and the hunt.

January 26, 2009. Reset.

I was thinking it would be nice to have the action unfold at a rather slow and microrealistic pace. So that's what I've been working on for last couple of days. Rewriting the opening scenes, slowing them down, rounding out the characters.

I'm finding the voice of the narrator, I think. Jim Oster.

Yesterday I went to church, and during the service my mind wandered, as it usually does, and I was thinking about different angles for *Jim and the Flims*.

It crossed my mind that I might have Jim actually die during his brain hemorrhage, and that he doesn't realize that he's dead until further on in the book. In this case, Weena might be a ghost. But there's too many problems with this approach, which is also a little shopworn.

I was also thinking about there being a variety of ways to travel between Fatland (our world) and Flimsy (Weena's world). Maybe Jim himself, aided by his dog Arf, is the one who hits on the Sheckley Spinor path between worlds, as in his story, "[The Altar](#)." See the [Plate Trick](#) entry on Wikipedia, and the one on [Orientation Entanglement](#).

Suppose Weena came over here by some different way. What are some fantasy and SF ways of switching worlds? Note that many of these don't presuppose any particular configuration of the two worlds.

- Pushing through a rubbery mirror as in *Through the Looking Glass*.
- Drawing a door on a wall and then opening it. This is pretty common, I think it's in, for instance, the movie *Pan's Labyrinth*.
- Walking through a magic door that's hidden in a kind of closet, like in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Or through a tunnel in a dungeon. I used this in *Mathematicians in Love*.

- Meditating on a certain pattern, like in my novel *Postsingular*. This is similar to chanting a spell, in that it involves getting a certain pattern going in your mind.
- I see a visual of someone literally turning inside out via a 4D rotation. The two worlds are related like the outside leather and the inside silk of a glove. You turn inside out—ugh—and then you snap over to the other side.
- Eating something—like a magic potion, a drug, or matter from the other world.
- Clasping a magic amulet, possibly made from alternate world stuff.

Anyway, Weena was perhaps exiled to our world, or, better, escaped to our world. She needs for Jim to help fix her world—initially he maybe doesn't want to help, but he learns that if Flimsy goes down the tubes, then so does Fatland. It might also be that Jim can find a version of his dead wife Lucy in Flimsy.

They know they have to go back when they see one of those nasty hunting brutes, a yuel, like the thing I imagined seeing in the woods near Meade's Landing in Skylight, Kentucky.

January 27-29. Two Overlaid Worlds.

So, okay, the two races are the flims and the fatsies. And the worlds are Flimsy and Fatland. How do they fit together topologically?

I think we'll suppose that they share the same time axis. How about the space?

An obvious idea is to use parallel branes like in *Postsingular*. But, just to change things a bit, I might suppose that the two branes are like the two sides of a sheet of paper, or the two sides of a wooden board.

An related alternative would be some notion of inside-out. If we simply wrap the sheet of paper into a sphere, we get a balloon with a picture on the outside and a picture on the inside. But maybe somehow there is a "balloon" for each atom. You go from one world to the other by turning each of your atoms inside out.

For a moment let's think about the sheet with two sides—or, more accurately, a hypersheet bounded by a pair of three-dimensional hyperplanes: Flimsy and Fatland. How do you get from one to the other?

I suppose you tunnel through. If we do this abruptly, then it's a matter of making a right-angle turn into the fourth dimension, drilling through the bulk, and then making another right turn to get back into the other universe. But I'd like to see a more gradual transition, something more along the lines of Sheckley's "The Altar."

I suppose there could be a sloping tunnel that leads through the bulk, and when you ease into it, you can see the source universe in certain directions and the target universe in the other directions. The tunnel might be quite short—more like a doorway or a portal—so that you don't have a lengthy zone of darkness in between the worlds.

In order to require the back-and-forth thither-and-yon bumbling of the "Altar" approach, we might suppose that our space is rucked up and folded over, so that the tunnel's mouth can only be reached by going along a certain path. I think of a process like scraping away paint—you go back and forth past a certain alleyway, and each time you pass, the alley looks a little different, and finally it leads to Flimsy.

We might suppose that Weena came through this tunnel, but that she can't find her way back from our side. Jim, with Arf's help, finds the way for her.

All this said, I feel impatient and bored with the two brane model. I've used it before. I'd like something spookier, something more fantasy-like. So now I'm leaning towards the notion that the other world in some sense overlays our existing world. The two worlds aren't separate hyperplanes or different locations, they're in the same place. The Land O' Faerie is one and the same as our mundane world, if only we have the eyes to see it.

In fantasy novels this kind of thing is simply left unexplained. "The horns of Elfland, faintly blowing..." But, as is my habit, I grope for a scientific model. Suppose that the two overlaid worlds are in some sense at an angle to each other—that is, Flimsy (or the Land O' Faerie) is made of matter particles whose quantum spins are rotated by, let us say, 13.711 degrees. And normally these rotated particles don't interact with ours. They might, come to think of it, be *dark matter*! In effect, we blinkered mundanes see through polarized sunglasses—which filter out the views of the wondrous.

We might also suppose that some cosmic clock is turning, bringing Faerie into full overlap with Main Street. The dark matter spires are gonna be shimmering into view. And already, as harbingers, certain nimble humans and flims can twist and untwist themselves to dart from world to world. Sometimes a half-transformed Flimsy creature will bump against you in the dark—I think of some pony-sized dogs that I call yuels. You don't see anything, but you feel the brush of a yuel's hot flank, and you smell his rancid, meaty breath.

And in the night, the barking of the seals shades into the unearthly baying of the yuels. Rapid footsteps sound on Jim's porch...

February 3-4, 2009. *Jivas and Yuels*

Incredibly—to me—I've finished the first chapter. All these disparate pieces that I wrote about my brain hemorrhage in July, 2008, and then repurposed into material about Weena and Jim in December, 2008—they're finally fitting together. Egad.

It's 5,300 words, which is fine. I think I'll go with that as the average chapter length—with *Hylozoic*, I was writing 10,000 and 12,000 word chapters, and in the end my editor, David Hartwell, got me to break them up and I ended up with 5,000 word chapters anyway. I think maybe that's a good attention-span unit.

I did a painting this week to get some visual notions of how the flims might look.



Figure 2: The Flims (A Jiva and a Yuel)

To start with, I painted a landscape in the shape of some shadows that were falling on my canvas. The straight lines are shadows of some telephone wires. They're symbolic of this being a portal zone.

And then I painted the creature in the lower right---this is a menacing beast that I call a "yuel." When I was in Louisville in January, I imagined seeing something like this in the woods, although in my vision, the yuel was darker and more like a horse. But I decided to go for a Tibetan demon look. [Only on February 16, 2009, did I realize that he looks like a *baboon*---which is perfect.]

The other two beings are modeled on what the cartoonist Jim Woodring calls "jivas," they appear, for instance, in his book *The Portable Frank*. They're a bit like free-floating souls---and, it now occurs to me, a bit like animated paint brushes. Note that in Hinduism and Jainism, [a jiva is indeed something like a soul](#). See Jim Woodring's painting, "Jivas" below.



Figure 3: Jiva Painting by Woodring, Copyright (C) Jim Woodring, 2009.

I'm thinking that maybe there's two races or factions in Flimsy. I could have the flim people *be* jivas and the yuels—but I think it will work better to have the jivas and yuels be *helpers* of the humanoid flims. The yuels and jivas can be creatures along the lines of hunting dogs or falcons or unruly pets or intelligent robots. If the main flims are humanoid, so we can relate to them—and have sex with them.

Another Woodring picture, from the story “Frank and the Truth About Plenitude,” that appears in Jim’s wondrous and profound anthology [*The Portable Frank*](#).

(Note that it’s truly just a coincidence that my character Jim Oster shares Woodring’s first name. I was thinking about Jim Oster months before I got into the Woodring jivas.)

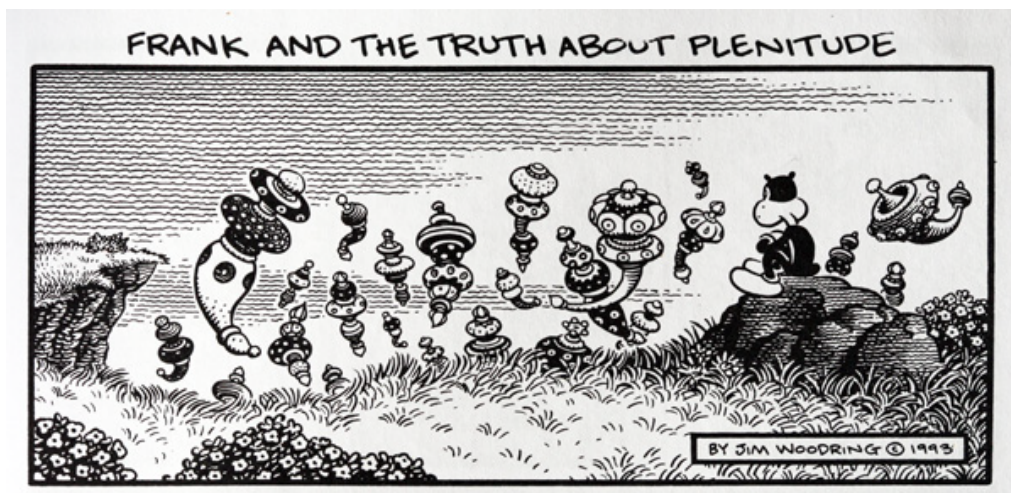


Figure 4: Jiva Drawing by Woodring, Copyright (C) Jim Woodring, 2003.

I had been thinking it would be cool to have Weena be a jiva. But even if she's humanoid, I'll suppose that she had the ability to plant jiva larvae in the flesh of Dick Simly. I like the image of the Simlys' house bursting open and forty or fifty jivas flying out, just like in the Woodring painting. I can spring this right before they leave for Flimsy.

Thinking more about Woodring's jiva forms I realize that I've seen similar shapes in Ernst Haeckel's *Art Forms in Nature*, or, *Kunstformen der Natur*. I own the book, but I also found some of his images, like the one below online, like at the [Wikimedia Commons](#)! This is kosher because copyright only lasts seventy years after the author dies. Here's Haeckel's Plate 17, of siphonophores, edited by me to show three of the jiva-like forms.



Figure 5: Haeckel's Siphonophores

Note that a siphonophore is an animal which resembles a jellyfish—such as a Portuguese man o' war—but which is in fact a colony of individual siphonophore zooids. The jiva-like guys in the Haeckel picture are individual zooids, I gather from [this discussion](#). Those horns at the bottom are feeding tubes.

The light dawns. I can have two humanoid factions of “flims” in Flimsy, the good and the bad, naturally. And I think I'll have the jivas and the yuels be *agents* working for the humanoid flims. The jivas and the yuels (that's a preliminary visualization of a yuel on the right) can be creatures along the lines of hunting dogs or falcons or unruly pets or intelligent robots. If the main flims are humanoid, then we can relate to them—and have sex with them.

I hope Woodring doesn't mind if I talk about “jivas” in my novel. I'll have to check with him.

By the way, I'd been thinking of the yuels as blue Tibetan-demon-dogs the size of ponies, as in my painting. But it would be freakier, I think, to have them look like big seals. Maybe blue or deep purple. Voracious, omnivorous seals in any case. It's kind of uncanny and creepy the way seals “walk,” humping along with their feet together. Seals would be “reasonable,” as the book is set in Santa Cruz.

I blogged most of these ideas in two posts: the first on Jan 31 - Feb 3, 2009, as [“Painting Thirteen Worlds and The Flims”](#), and the second on February 4, 2009, as [“Jivas and Yuels.”](#) And then I emailed Jim Woodring and asked if he minded if I used his jivas in my novel. He wrote nice note back:

Hello Rudy-

Sure, I know who you are, and I’m only too glad to give you my blessing for your project. As you point out on your “blog” radial creatures designed to hover are not my invention; neither is the name “jiva”, which is Sanskrit for “conditioned soul”, i.e. humans and all other creatures. So lay on, lad, and thanks for the compliments.

Respectfully yours, Jim

Feb 7-8, 2009. The Whipped Vic.

Why is Weena working that job in the ice-cream parlor anyway? I think she knows she is going back to Flimsy soon. Maybe she’s dosing dozens of customers with her sprinkles? When Jim learns this, he’ll be jealous.

Before Jim went through those series of turns in Chapter One, the Whipped Vic didn’t exist, or wasn’t accessible. It scooted over into a formerly vacant lot.

And now there is a tunnel between the worlds through the basement of the Whipped Vic, as the surf punk house becomes known around town. A number of people go there as the weeks pass, but nobody knows how to find it exactly. It’s like you end up there on some wild surfari party nights. When Jim needs to get back there, he and Weena will be canvassing surfers.

Once the Whipped Vic arrives, its three residents are seen out at the breaks now and then. I see them as a smart skinny guy (like Del in my stories with Laidlaw), an older stronger guy (like my friend V), and a girl who’s smarter than either one, but is distractible, like Thuy Nguyen. Call them Ira, Header, and Ginnie.

When you depart the Whipped Vic, it’s like going through a funnel tunnel that that you can’t easily backtrack. The only way to get in there from the outside is to circle through the unique combination-like sequence of turns that Jim happened upon in Chapter One. Ira, Header and Ginnie know the way, as they’re professional border-workers.

We can suppose that the yuel came out from under the Whipped Vic, and that, after encountering Jim, the yuel makes his way down the harbor where he reproduces. Maybe he’s even written up in the Santa Cruz Sentinel.

We might also suppose that Weena came through the Whipped Vic. She’d have to come through before Jim gets to the back yard, as Jim shouldn’t see her before he gets to Mahalo Gelato. Possibly Jim hears Weena yelling at Ira, Header and Ginnie before he gets to the back yard, and by then Weena is gone.

I’ve been writing in these ideas for changes. I looked at a map of Santa Cruz.

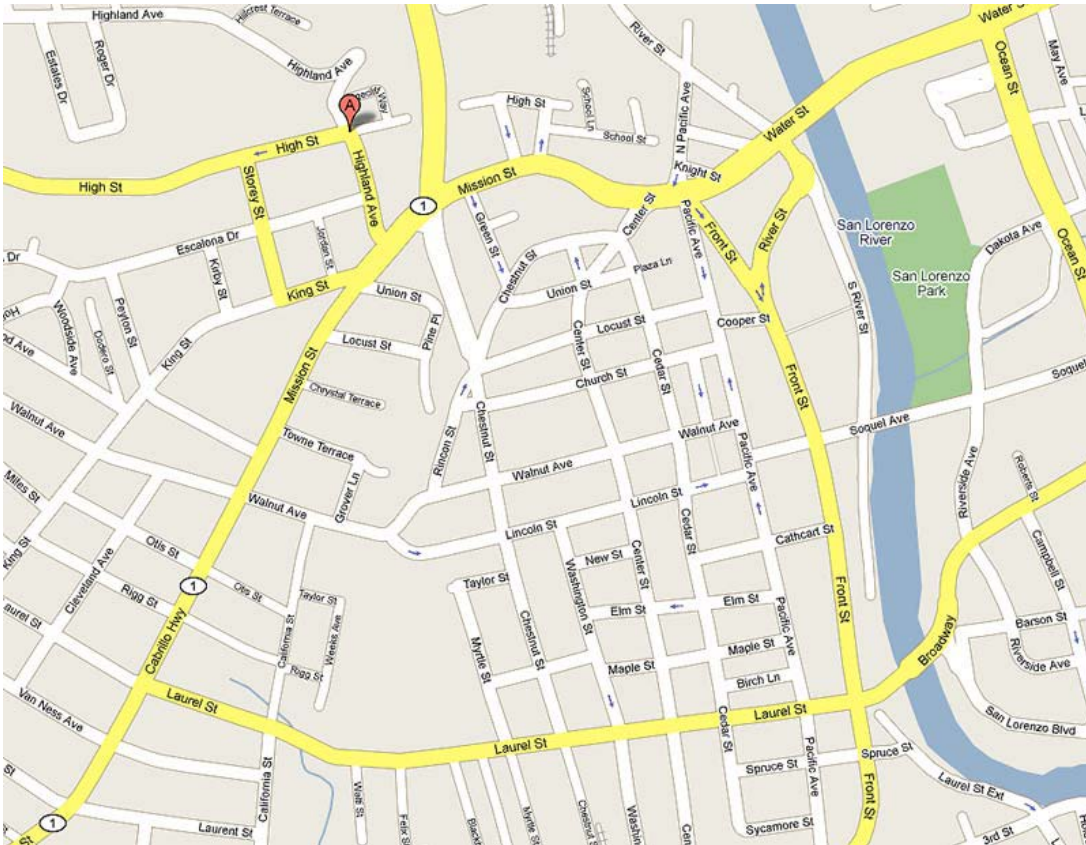


Figure 6: Map of Santa Cruz

I see Jim as living, like, between Rincon Street and Chestnut Street, or maybe down between Myrtle Street and Chestnut Street. In the general area where my friend Jon Pearce lives. And the Mahalo Gelato place is on Pacific Avenue between Church Street and Walnut Avenue—right where there used to be an ice-cream shop in 2007.

Feb 9-10, 2009. Finding Flimsy, and What's There?

I'm still wondering what happens in Chapter Two.

First of all, how do Jim and Weena get back to the Whipped Vic so they can go to Flimsy? It's too easy, I think, if Jim just goes into a trance and recalls how he got there the first time.

In pondering this, I realize that I still need to decide (and write in) how and why Jim did in fact find the Whipped Vic in the first place—I think it wastes a plot opportunity to simply have it be happenstance.

I'll say that some higher being in Flimsy *led* him there the first time—but now for some reason this being can't act again. When the being helped Jim, she sent him signs via Arf, who was trotting after a colorful bird flitting from tree to tree, a bird that was really an apparition of a jiva under the being's control. And we can might suppose that Weena was in on this, a confederate of the being, and that the yuel simply pushed in and followed her path, wanting to mess things up.

Now—this higher being in Flimsy is, let us say, a disenfranchised Queen or Princess whom Weena wants to help return to power. Is “Princess” too pedestrian a word? Or is it fun and comfortable to use it? What might the flims call a high noblewoman instead? Vedette, star, diva, goddess...how about using the Japanese word for Empress? And then I might suppose that Flimsy is like Kyoto, which would be a win, as then I can use my transreal memories of Kyoto, which I haven’t used in a novel before. So, okay, a “kougou” is the *wife* of an Emperor, but a “jotei” is an Empress herself. So I call her a Jotei.



Figure 7: Ayaka the “Empress”

The lovely Japanese-Italian actress Rosa Kato (See this YouTube clip of her in a bunch of [Japanese commercials](#)) played a girl named Ayaka in the 2007 Japanese TV series *Jotei*, based on a manga comic of the same name, which is about how a school girl Ayaka who, aided by a handsome underworld boyfriend, becomes the “empress” of the Osaka demimonde of bar hostesses. (Hostesses, the Japanese never tire of asserting, aren’t actually prostitutes.) Initially I was seeing *my* Jotei as being from a truly royal family of Flimsy jivas and she’s blocked from her throne by an evil anti-intellectual yuel. But, yeah, maybe it should somehow be like an Osaka nightclub scene...with the bad guys being Japanese gangsters in the pay of psychic polluters who, like send out telepathic spam. That could be cool.

Anyway, we’ll suppose that Jotei Ayaka helped Jim get to the whipped Vic the first time around, but now the yuels are harassing her, and she can’t project an image of her jiva over to Fatland to help guide Jim, so Jim and Weena have to get back to Flimsy on their own.

As I mentioned in the [previous post](#), I could have Jim and Weena run all over town and look for some trace of the three surf punks from the whipped Vic.

Here I need to ponder what kind of beings *are* Ira, Header and Ginnie? Are they (a) regular humans, (b) flims, (c) some kind of interworld beings like security guards in airports or like aphids living on the “flower” of the whipped Vic, or (d) are they organelles or parts of the Whipped Vic “house” itself—as if they were pistils on a flower.

I’ll go with (a). It could be that lots of people know about Flimsy—the psychics and schizos and stoners and meditators. The three surf punks are locals who’ve found out how to squat in the twilight zone or interbrane or *tunnelspace* as we might best call it. In this case, it

would indeed make sense to ask other surfers around Santa Cruz about these three. Suppose that Jim asks (as I was thinking the other day) one of Jolie's high-school surfing pals.

So now I need to invent *that* character. He teaches introductory surf classes to goobs at Cowell Beach by the pier. He's cynical, and a randy con man, but also kind of an enlightened surf sage who truly doesn't care about anything. He's ethnically Asian, but very much a Santa Cruz California boy. (I considered naming him Yang because the word means "bright," but then I thought of that unattractive Yahoo, Jerry Yang.) The guy who first owned my blue Haut surfboard that I bought second-hand was named *Chang*, so I like that name. Perhaps our Chang has bleached the tips of his hair to be blonde.

Chang escorts Jim and Weena to a wild party at the Whipped Vic that evening. During the day they have to dodge the yuels, and we get to see Dick Simly burst open to birth out two dozen jivas that fend off the yuels. But in the process, Jim is seen and is accused of murdering Dick Simly. Anyway, they make it to the whipped, Vic, and they have an encounter with Ira, Header, and Ginnie before going on through to Flimsy.

The passage through the tunnel might be interesting, akin to finding your way through a multi-sheet [Riemann surface](#). Or for that matter, this kind of path is what it takes just to reach the Whipped Vic at all.

Possibly the Whipped Vic can protrude into either Flimsy or into Fatland. Like a nipple that you push out to one side or the other of a rubber sheet.

My next problem is that I haven't decided what it's going to be like in Flimsy. What are some options? Before listing options, note three desiderata to keep in mind.

Playable. The world should be able to support a story. In particular Jim should be able to move around it as a human character, and he should be able to interact with the flims in fairly comprehensible ways.

Meaningful. The world should transreally represent something that's important to me, and should carry some satiric or philosophical subtext.

Wonderful. The world should be beautiful to think about, and somehow be essentially different from any environment in our present or past world.

Now let's consider some options regarding the nature of Flimsy.

The Afterworld. Whatever I decide on for Flimsy initially, we might eventually reveal this world to it overlap with the afterworld—and then have a big scene where Jim meets his dead wife. The "surprise, this is heaven" move is however a bit of a genre cliché, and corny, and plot-wise it's a kind of retrograde step to meet his dead wife, and, come to think of it, I used the afterlife in *White Light*. So I think I'd rather not do this here.

Cartoon world, with cartoon conventions. Fine, but if I do this, I immediately face the same what-is-the-nature-of-Flimsy question all over again, for I have to ask what kind of underlying world this is a cartoon of. Of course when I mention cartoons here, I think of *Frank*, and of the jivas that Jim Woodring draws—and maybe the yuels would look like spiders—but to make this playable at novel length, I think I'd need for the flims to take on a more humanoid form most of the time. I think that, rather than having a cartoon world, I might better have a somewhat realistic humanoid world, but with cartoon physics.

Fantasy kingdom. The default for "fantasy" these days is a medieval land with nobles, knights and dragons. But it's hard for me to get very excited about such a world, as it's so burdened with received ideas, so fannish, so non-transreal. To make a fantasy land

that's meaningful and vibrant for me, I might rather suppose that it's a rural world like the paintings of Bosch and Bruegel. But I have in fact written about this B & B rural world in *As Above So Below* and in *Hylozoic*. So, wait, how about a fantasy world that's...Elfland! I'll break out a new section for that.

Elfland. I think this might I what I really want to write about. A land where magic is real, and it's not the Middle Ages. So elves, goblins, elementals, and so on are in fact real, but they live in the world of Flimsy that's slightly askew from ours. Note that I wouldn't want to be overly tendentious about matches between Flimsy and the folk mythology of our fairy tales, as this leads to mere name-checking. What might it be like in my Flimsy Elfland? I could have a kind of episodic picaresque, like a trip through America, and we encounter a variety of scenes, each with its own odd natives. We might start in a rural Elfland akin to the Grulloo Woods of *Frek and the Elixir*—recall that the Grulloos were like goblins, and their bio-tweaked tools were effectively like magic. Transreally, this is my country childhood near Louisville, Kentucky. And then we segue to a small town, like all the little villages I lived in over the years: Highland Park, Geneseo, Lynchburg, Los Gatos. It's like our contemporary world, only with things like magic that works, things like flying carpets, genies in bottles, spells, demons. And then, near the end, we get to the capital of Flimsy to deal with the issue of installing Ayaka as the Jotei, or Empress. And maybe this city is like Kyoto. And we might also visit the power center of the yuels, which is a brutal immense Mannhattanesque city. Maybe for the finale, Flimsy segues into a dreamscape or into a surrealist scenario, like the Magritte world they visit at the end of *Frek and the Elixir*.

It would be good to have some specific and radical difference to the laws of nature or the nature of society in this other world.

In our world, it's easy to change something physically or to build a machine. But it's hard or impossible to affect something with your mind. What if it were the other way around in Flimsy. They can teleport stuff, but they can't put together a wagon or a flight of stairs. They're unable to build a window that lets in light and keeps out the wind and rain, they count on teeking away the droplets one by one—or maybe they train the house wall to do the teeking, maybe the house teeks something like a force field barrier within the window frame. Would they even need a house? It doesn't protect you from teleporting thieves or ruffians. Any protection is, once again, going to be teek-based.

We might set this up by having Weena be very awkward with physical things. She's not used to using her muscles to do stuff. Everyone's telepathic powers are weaker over here in Fatland. If this is the case, then maybe she can't search the Web in her head over here, by the way. Or maybe she needs to eat some sprinkles to get that going. The sprinkles are like instant telepathy enhancers.

Backing up, if the sprinkles are teep enhancers, shouldn't they have an immediate effect on Jim? Maybe he's teeping the passers-by on Pacific Avenue as he eats the ice-cream, not realizing consciously that this is what he's doing, he's just feeling like he has a lot of empathy and insight. And he's very light on his feet on the way home because he's actually teeking himself along a bit. And he can kind of see the folded Riemann surface sheets that cover up the Whipped Vic with the illusion of an empty lot. And he's kind of able to read without looking at his book's pages at home, he has remote vision. But all the new

experience is making him tired. And it seems easier to just read the book with his eyes closed.

Why does he then have the seizures? Maybe he gets out of control in his dreams somehow. Or maybe the yuel is remotely zapping him. The evil face of the upstart pretender to the Emperor's throne.

February 12, 2009 Interrelating the Yuels, Jivas, and Flims.

We start with some things that I want to keep:

- Weena is a flim from Flimsy and she resembles a human woman.
- Weena has some friends, and they want to put a certain woman on the throne. They have a legend of finding help from the "Shadow Captain."
- Weena has some enemies in Flimsy, and the enemy faction has a yuel who's trailing her, the yuel follows her to Santa Cruz.
- In Flimsy there are jivas that resemble Woodring's siphonophore zooids. The jivas are variable in size, able to fly.
- Weena is able to implant jiva eggs in a human body, and the jivas can hatch out over here.

I need to work out the roles of the yuels, jivas and flims in a way that preserves these things, and which keeps the story playable and (relatively) believable.

In the last few days, I'd been entertaining a scenario under which every flim has a soul which is a jiva, and these jiva-souls can generate a body of any shape. But this leads to shape-shifting, and I think that kills the story. If anyone can look like anything, there aren't enough constraints.

So I think I'll roll back to the idea that I mentioned in my [Feb 3-4, 2009 entry](#): The jivas are *helpers* of the humanoid flims. The jivas are beings along the lines of hunting dogs or falcons or unruly pets or intelligent robots. Every flim has access to the jivas, and then there might be good jivas and bad jivas, and jiva battles, and so on.

Okay, but what about the yuels? I'd been thinking of a yuel as a shapeshifting flim, but I want them to be an inferior being, more like a hunting dog that belongs to bad-guy flims. I did like the visual effect of having the yuel resemble a seal, at least for awhile. But if he looks like a seal, what's the explanation?

- (1) It's just a coincidence that the yuels look like seals, or
- (2) Knowing Jim's fear of seals, Weena's enemies in Flimsy pre-designed this yuel to look like one, or
- (3) The yuel is able to shapeshift his form, and he chose to look like a seal, or,
- (4) The yuel is projecting a psychic image that makes Jim *think* he looks like a seal, (and for that matter, the seals think he's a seal too).

I don't like the first three options. As I said before, I'd like to avoid shapeshifting, as that makes the world less "playable" as a plot game. But (4) could work.

Without his disguise, the yuel looks like the [Tibetan demon](#) that I painted. He reveals his true appearance when he breaks into Jim's house. But I can still have a crowd of seals, because the disguised yuel took up with the seals under the pier (the yuel has telepathy with

the seals as well as with people so he can bamboozle them too), and he leads some of them to Jim's house.

Or, you know, I could just drop the seal thing, and have the yuel look like the demon the whole time...but if I do that, then Jim is going to be yet more flummoxed by his initial encounter at the whipped Vic...unless we suppose that the yuel runs off *really* fast, so that Jim hardly sees him.

Suppose he does see the Tibetan demon for a second, but then the yuel disguises himself as a seal. The yuel doesn't want to attack. He wants to spy and blend in.

I have to deal with the problem of why the yuel isn't attacking Jim all the time. Why doesn't the yuel kill Jim in the back yard of the whipped Vic as soon as he appears? Why doesn't the yuel kill Jim at his house during the week that Jim is living with Weena? Why doesn't the yuel kill Jim when the yuel shows up on the morning of Jim's trip to Flimsy? And this problem is especially acute when the yuel is a savage Tibetan devil-dog sent by Weena's enemies.

I think we need to suppose that the yuel's mission is *not* to kill Jim right away. The yuel wants to spy on what Weena does. And the yuel wants to learn the route that leads from Santa Cruz to the whipped Vic (and thus to Flimsy). This is powerful knowledge. The yuel wants to spy on Weena and Jim, and track them till they teach him the path back to the whipped Vic, and only *then* does he perhaps want to kill Jim so he can't come to Flimsy.

On [Feb 9-10, 2009](#), I suggested that some flim had telepathically shown Jim the path to the whipped Vic. But now I think that's a bad idea. (a) If someone in Flimsy knows how to do this, then the yuel doesn't need to spy on Jim and Weena to find the path. (b) It's awkward to say that a flim can telepathically contact a fatsy; it would be better to keep the worlds more cleanly separated.

I'll just suppose that Jim stumbles onto the path. A long-shot. I already set up the story that he has a weird hobby of path exploring, so this is somewhat justified.

If Jim just suddenly happens on the whipped Vic with its open basement tunnel, how would Weena and the yuel have been so ready to dart through?

Now, the yuel is shadowing Weena, so he just naturally followed her, but, why is Weena so ready to dart?

I might suppose that Jim does something to open the tunnel. Maybe he doesn't see the punks right away, and he snoops down to the basement, and pulls open the door, and *wham* the tunnel's open. That's more dramatic than having the tunnel just be open all along. It's a power chord. It's traditional for fantasy. And it explains why Weena didn't come through before.

Jim opens the tunnel and soon thereafter Weena comes rushing through—we might suppose that she's been keeping watch for a path to Fatsy, maybe she had jivas watching for a hole.

Why doesn't Weena talk to Jim right away? Maybe she's hoping to shake the yuel? Maybe she wants to meet him as a person at first? But won't he recognize her in the ice cream store? Maybe the door of the tunnel knocks Jim down.

And then the yuel comes through, at first like a demon, and then seeing Jim, it contacts his mind and becomes a seal. And begins barking. And then the punks appear up on the deck. And the yuel is scared and runs away.

The punks are just people who happen to squat in the whipped Vic—they found the way there because they’re such stoners. They’re unable to open the tunnel.

If Weena isn’t really a jiva herself, how is it that she hatches jiva larvae into Dick Simly’s body? I love this effect too much to give it up—so how do I justify it? Well, maybe she has a jiva-planting tool that she just *calls* an ovipositor, but she doesn’t actually have a jiva-egg-ovipositor sticking out of her navel like I was gonna say.

A thought about the jivas. Maybe they can stick together like the zooids of a siphonophore, and you see this hovering glowing shape a dozen meters across, like the face of a sunflower (which is a composite of small flowers). Maybe over in Flimsy there’s a really large composite jiva thing, and it’s a kind of god.

Whew. This is as hard as setting up a logical axiom system. That’s more than enough ideas for now. I’ll go and knead them into the story, and then we’ll see what comes next.

February 18-19, 2009. Plan “The Whipped Vic Crew”

I did those revisions, and now I’m into the second chunk now, with working title, “The Whipped Vic Crew”.

The action so far: The yuel awakens Jim and Weena, they run away, Jim can’t find the Whipped Vic, and Jim and Weena meet with Chang at the beach and ask him to help them find the surf rats who live in the Whipped Vic. They agree to meet with Chang and the crew at dusk

So what’s next?

(1) Jim and Weena kill the afternoon somehow. Maybe they go on the Boardwalk rides. This is interesting for Weena, as they don’t really have any machines in Flimsy. Maybe her jiva flies out on the roller coaster. Weena talks to it, and it drifts across town like a balloon.

We can get in a little conversation in about the physical and sociological nature of Flimsy, and maybe a little about the political situation—the thing about the Empress. For this to work, I need to narrow in on a design for Flimsy. Suppose it’s like the world of *Frek and the Elixir* combined with the alternate world of *Postsingular*. That is, I’ll say that we have fully mature biotech, under which every device that people use is from a plant or animal, or is even a living creature itself. And I’ll say that people have telepathy. But maybe I’ll hold off on telekinesis, which is somehow disruptive and violent. An Eden-like world in which all our furnishings are organic or even alive. And you can talk wordlessly to each other, and to the objects themselves. I’m thinking in particular of Stun City with, as I say, teep. And what are the jivas? Spirits?

(2) They meet up with Chang at the Perg coffee house around dusk. Jim has brought tequila. Conversation with Header, Ira, and Ginnie. Ira is going to be Jim’s friend, they share an interest in—mazes. Ira has audited a few knot theory classes at UC Santa Cruz. But he has no money to go there, and isn’t organized enough to fill out the necessary forms in any case, also he prefers to go surfing whenever he likes. Header is obnoxious and hostile, a resentful alcoholic. Ginnie is to some extent under Header’s thumb, because she has a crush on him, but she’s a good person. She says she drifted into Cruz from out of town. She says she’s a sound sculptor.

(3) They ride to the Whipped Vic in the crew's station wagon, drinking tequila and smoking pot. They pick up some pizza. A moment of friendliness on the street with the light from the pizza kitchen. The warm pizza light. They drive, going around and around corners in the gathering dusk. Ira knows the way. The crew notices the yuel loping after them, and they think they've lost the yuel, but when they get to the house, Jim will learn that the yuel was riding on the roof of the car.

(4) In the house Ginnie cranks up her noise machine, aleatory real-time sound from a system that she cobbled together—maybe I recycle some of Laidlaw's "Chaos Surfari" routine about having sound taps in an aquarium. The yuel runs off into the far corners of the back yard. They're eating pizza, and some more people show up, scary weird people, like a party in San Francisco where you wonder if everyone's human. Jim and Weena go down to the backyard. The round door glows invitingly. But the yuel is lurking in a eucalyptus tree, up high, hugging a thick branch. Jim is scared to open the door with the yuel around.

(5) They party some more, and Weena reassures him that soon the jivas will come. And then in a pause of the party noise, they hear incalculably intense screams of horror from a block or two away. From Dick and Deena Simly's house. Sirens. Lights appear in the sky, things like flying jellyfish, about twenty of them. Weena's jiva stretches out its tendril and whistles, high and wee. The jivas approach. The yuel tries to flee, but in seconds they're on him, stinging him to death.

(6) Jim goes down and gets the tunnel open. Ira and Ginnie appear at his elbow. There is more to the Whipped Vic crew than initially suspected. They are perhaps symbiotes of the house, and the house is part of a living organism? No. They're members of a secret mystery cult? Maybe. Suppose that Ginnie and Ira have known about Flimsy's existence. Jim and Weena and Arf rush through, and Ira and maybe Ginnie come along. Ira is going to be Jim's sidekick and comic relief, maybe a holy-fool figure. Maybe Ginnie is the artist-scientist?

Re. the door to the tunnel, I see the door as a pearlescent object with a spiral pattern—it's an operculum, one of those self-grown shell doors that some snails have. And there's a kind of snail or gastropod in the basement and you reach the other world by writhing through its gut. In fact maybe the whole house is by way of being a shell that was grown by the interbrane snail. I want to say it's like a banana slug, since this is Cruz, but I also want it to have an operculum and a Whipped-Vic-shell.



Figure 8: Welcome to Mars.

And then we get to Flimsy. What does it look like? I might as well use my painting, “Welcome to Mars”

February 25, 2009. *Zickzack, or, Hyperdimensional Origami*

I would like to have some very different kind of technology in Flimsy, or something that’s not even like technology at all. Various kinds of—empowerment. In other words, the flims are empowered by something other than the kinds of machines that we have, or they’re using machines in a different kind of way.

Making this fresh is a demanding problem, as I’ve written about alternately-empowered worlds before, and I don’t want to repeat myself. Here’s a series of empowerments that I’ve used: junkpile, biotech, direct matter control, matter holograms, and psi powers.

A constraint is that I want to keep the jivas on the scene, things like flying jellyfish, possibly alien beings, possible spirits, whatever works. And I’d like to keep the vibe of the flims being like sprites, elves and goblins, even if they have to be, like, DMT elves living in an intense urban fantasy.

I’ll run through some options, ending with a new one that I like.

- *Junkpile*. A old-school SF future scenario posits a kind of ultimate New Jersey, crowded with tech junk, but without any truly paradigm-shattering changes. I think of *Max Headroom*, cyberpunk, *Bladerunner*, like that. I kind of had this approach in my first novel *Spacetime Donuts*, and in *Software*.

- *Biotech*. On the Earth of 3003 in *Frek and the Elixir*, people use biotech instead of machines. They have, like, house trees and knife plants and transporter beetles—every little object you’d want is grown by some kind of plant and any task can be done by a specialized animal. And I briefly mentioned this scenario in *Saucer Wisdom* as well. I first read about the notion in some forgotten SF novel or story when I was in high school—I specifically remember reading about a seed for a house, and plant that grew knives.
- *Nanomachines*. We can imagine docile nanomachines that build whatever we want, like the “utility fog” sometimes discussed, or like smart sand. I did something in *Frek* a little like this, with tiny living polyps building a house like a reef—but here we’re talking about molecular-sized machines. I did have nanomachines in *Postsingular*—first the nants, and then the orchids—although in those books the nanomachines weren’t actually building stuff. And I don’t really want to have these nant-like things in Flimsy because then right away we have to worry about them coming over and eating our world, which is a problem I already used for a plot in *Postsingular*.
- *Transmutation*. This variation of direct matter control appears in *Realware*, , and was sketched in *Saucer Wisdom* as well. Here people have devices called allas which can create any object they want by transmuting input atoms into the desired output atoms (using quark-flipping), and by then arranging the atoms into the target object. It’s like programming matter.
- *Vaaring*. In *Frek*, they travel to a planet called Unipusk, where some of the locals are “kenny-crafters” who can “vaar.” Vaaring is like transmutation, but more far-fetched. Vaar is used in two related senses. The first type of vaaring is the process of turning invisible dark matter (kenner) into a visible substance. The second type of vaaring is the process of forming the kenner-derived matter into some specific shape or device—these objects are called kennies. Functionally, vaaring is pretty much like using a magic wand, as is transmutation.
- *Matter holograms*. In *Hylozoic*, the Peng alter the quantum computations of matter so that the atoms send out matter waves that interact to form objects called *tulpas*. To some extent you could do without tech if you could make tulpas at will—it’s a bit like transmutation or vaaring, although the resulting tulpas don’t have the stability of a kenny or an alla-made object.
- *Psi powers*. The humans in *Hylozoic* use teleportation to get around, telepathy to communicate, and they assemble some things by teleporting objects. They can also teep into objects (which have rudimentary minds) and encourage the objects to behave in certain ways. This cuts down on their need for tech devices.
- *Hyperdimensional Origami*. Suppose that the jivas use a type of dimensional mastery to make things for the flims. In a buzzword sense, I explain the gimmick as hyperdimensional origami. Regions of space fold and alter to become tunnels, houses, whatever. It’s not psi, it’s not nanotech, it’s not matter holograms, it’s not vaaring or transmutation—but it’s almost as good as having any of those. I still need to work out a few details though...

I need a shorter name than “hyperdimensional origami.” Flip, twist, twizzle, tweak, zikzak, zickzack. I like zickzack. I see it as a verb, adjective, or different kinds of noun.

“The jiva zickzacked the space beside my feet, creating a shimmery flight of stairs.” “I entered zickzack door.” “What’s this? It’s a zickzack.” “The jivas have the power of zickzack.” I might still find a better word.

The jivas do the zickzacking. This in the SF tradition of giving people access to some incomprehensible alien devices owned by alien allies—or alien masters. And normal human tech has withered away in Flimsy, or maybe it never even emerged, if we suppose that the jivas have been around for a really long time.

I like the jivas, so I don’t really see them as overbearing masters. On the other hand, it gives you a plot if you have cruel alien masters aliens firmly in place at the tale’s start, and the story is about the humans accomplishing a revolution. Suppose that the yuels are the alien masters. The yuels have controlled the flims and the jivas since time immemorial and now we’ll bring them down.

February 28 - March 1, 2009. Zickzack Tech

Wall: Take a slab of space like a sheet of plywood and fold it so the back touches the front. And then anyone who runs through the slab bounces right back into themselves—so they stop. It’s a zickzack wall. It keeps out the rain and the bugs. Call it a helloby, short for “hello goodbye.” No, call it a zwall.

Furniture: You can use those zwall things in any shape, of course, so you can use them like lumber or like cushions. But how to make a zwall be soft? You could make a pillow-case-shaped zwall with air inside it, and it would be somewhat elastic, provided that you put wrinkles into the pillow-case zwalls. Or fill it with a bunch of smaller zwall pillows to get a foamy effect.

Light bulb: A sunball is a ball with its outside connected to the inside of a ball that’s high up in space where it’s always sunny. You can make the light as intense as you like by making the input ball increasingly large relative to the input ball.

Weapon: An eatball is a similar to a sunball, but you throw the input ball at someone and it eats through them, spewing a fountain of guts from the output ball.

Fast Travel: Standard magic doors or space portals or hyperjumps. Step in here, come out there. Call it a spacebridge.

Slow Travel: I’d like something like a bicycle that moves me along at a nice brisk pace without the dislocation of a spacebridge. I’m thinking of...call them slideplates or, better, skids. I put skids on my shoe soles or on some little skis under a seat of a device called a skidder. The top of the skid is mapped to the bottom of the skid, which is consistently a certain distance ahead of the top. The greater the distance, the faster you move. How do you turn a skid on or off? Maybe you have a lever to warp the skid’s shape, making it more like a rectangle (motionless) or more like a parallelogram (moving).

Cloth: I could make a kind of quilt from two thin zwalls and fill it with fiber. But that’s crude. I’d like to see spinning and weaving, too. I suppose you could spin with a tapering tube that has an intrinsic rotation built into it. And for weaving you might have a woven region of space tubes, exactly congruent to the threads of the desired cloth, and your threads are pulled through this matrix by little skidders.

Cell: I think of a flat torus, that is, a cube which has each of its faces glued to the opposite face. How does a cell like this interact with the surrounding space? In a way, it seems to be essentially cut off, like a torus floating beside a plane. So it disappears? But a spacebridge can get you into it. Or what if I wrap the cell up in normal space. It’s like the hollow liner of a Thermos bottle. You could use this as insulation.

Recordings: How do I have a voice that repeats something over and over, as in an ad or a warning device? I could do this with a time loop, but I'd rather keep this simple, and not get into the quicksand of temporal manipulation. But I don't quite see any space pattern doing this. I could do it with a telepathy pattern, I guess—what I called a teep tag in *Postsingular* and *Hylozoic*. I am assuming teep, so I'd just need to assume that objects are in some sense teachable. And I guess I'd like that fine.

Computers: I could do like in *Hylozoic* and fall back upon the native intelligence of objects or, putting it differently, upon the intrinsic quantum computations of matter.

March 6, 2009 Sample From "Chaos Surfari"

Here's some passages from Marc Laidlaw and Rudy Rucker, "Chaos Surfari," written in 1988, first published in *Interzone*, March/April 1989, and reprinted in my *Gnar!* anthology of 2000. Marc wrote most of this part.

Kid Beast flung the door open and stepped back. The room gave off a foul tidal stink, as of a dozen starfish left in a hot car trunk through the length of an August day. Half a dozen aquariums bubbled along the walls and corners of the room, and another half dozen sat dark and stagnant, with occasional sulfur farts bubbling up through the murky scum. There was a drum-kit and some amps.

"Come on in," said the Kid, picking up a carton of Friskees cat-food and pouring the contents into a black aquarium. The surface seethed with the frenzied feeding of opalescent beaks.

He wore hightop sneakers, jeans, and an old mod black suit-jacket with no shirt. His straight black hair fell into his eyes. He wore faint black lipstick; or maybe he'd been sucking on a stamp pad. He had a leather thong around his neck with a little brass crucifix.

His front teeth were broken, blackened, in need of caps. Zep was suddenly certain he had seen this kid many times ... on the streets, or hanging out in front of the 7-11 at two in the morning, talking to the strangers who came and went, hitting on them for cigarettes and beer money. He repressed the dishonest urge to give the Kid a comradely clap on the back and reassure him that everything was going to be all right. Kid Beast was like a five-car pileup waiting for car number six.

Kid Beast started bopping around his living room, affixing little suction cups to the sides of his aquariums and hooking lengths of speaker wire to the suckers as he spoke. The wires all ran to a primitive mixing board, held together mainly by duct tape and rubber bands. Strange low noises began to ooze out of his speakers.

"Check it out. I think would be a great main sound for a new

band.”

Kid Beast fiddled with the dials on his deck, and the room reverberated with aquatic belchings and bubblings. He was mixing up the aquarium sounds, wrenching them into obscene configurations that sounded like some mad punker vomiting into the gulfs of outer space.

The Kid looked proud, upping the volume on his aquatic inferno. “Like, it’s so much uglier than anything any other group has got.”

March 18-20, 2009. Relating Flims, Jivas, Yuels, Goblins and the Graf

I’m about 16,000 words into it, just finishing off “The Jivas” and starting “The Tunnel.” They have a climactic fight scene at the Whipped Vic, and may now go through the border snail to Flimsy.

Unless I decide that they back off and stay in Santa Cruz, but, nah, that’d just be chickening out. But I can have more talk before they go, it doesn’t have to be a mad rush.

I put in a bit about Jim carrying a digital camera and taking pictures. Actually I did it to justify his knowing the concept of “clipping” in a computer graphical sense, so as to apply this word to his mental state when very high. But then I was thinking that, since I myself carry around a camera a lot, it might be interesting for me to have a chance to write about taking pictures. And I had the sense that it could be a useful plot hook later on if Jim has a lot of digital photos of these weird things he sees.

I was even thinking that, over in Flimsy, his conceptions about photography might enable him to come up to a solution to some problem they have there. I was thinking in terms of his using photography as a metaphor of a psychic version of the Windows Restore function or the Mac Time Machine facility, that is, the ability to restore your system (computer here, brain over there) to a prior state, after it becomes encrusted with junk (bad upgrades and drivers here, bad teep thoughts over there).

If I do keep the photo thing, then I need to have a scene or two every now and then of him scrolling back over the pictures and studying them. For instance, he takes a photo of the round door early on, so he ought to be studying it later. Boring.

Rather than carrying the camera to Flimsy, maybe Jim leaves it behind, and the evidence within it is what gets someone to be there to open the tunnel when he comes back.

**

If the Whipped Vic house is the shell of the border snail, I should put in a routine about smaller and smaller rooms (like the chambers in a nautilus shell). And, if the shell is in some sense double (two snail heads, one facing each of the worlds), I might have something about thin walls. I need a bit more description of the party in any case, so that can fit in with this.

I’d been thinking of having the tunnel be though the border snail, and have the tunnel be really narrow, like a maw, but crawling in there is too repellant. I think I’ll have the tunnel be big and cozy, with quilting on the walls. A spacewarp makes it roomier. Maybe Weena’s jiva opens it up. In particular, I see there being a zickzack way to make the tunnel seem bigger. Negatively curved space! You stretch the space.

Jim needs to start being proactive, otherwise he's not heroic. I always need to remind myself to do this—it's such a classic writing error to have your main character be passive and acted-upon. I know that this is a common mistake that beginning writers make, and yet I still make it.

So, alright. Suppose that Jim wolfs down his jiva Mijjy on his own, and then he's really powerful and he does a **shazam** energy blast from his hands to kill off the creature that runs out of Graf Thura's split head. Or something like that. He deals with the goblin.

Come to think of it, it's better if Jim puts the goblin into a zickzack room than that he zaps it. It's better to take advantage of the powers you've already got, rather than to keep tacking on new ones.

Regarding the 3D flat torus room—call it a z-cell—such a room becomes invisible and wholly disconnected from our space. It leaves a hole in space that you presumably glue over. So the Graf Thura goblin is, like, gone for good? Maybe that's okay. There's more goblins out there. Possibly he might come back later on, too.

Is the z-cell the same as a zwall? No. In a zwall we usually only glue two surfaces, and in a z-cell, we glue six. But that's not such a big difference. The bigger difference is in how do the gluing.

Consider a block. If I'm making a z-cell, I glue the outside of the back surface to the outside of the front surface, so that if I someone tries to come out the front of this block, they go into the back and vice versa. They're trapped.

In a zwall, on the other hand, the is where you take a slab of space and fold it in a higher dimension so that the outside of the back surface is glued to the *inside* of the front surface so that, when you pass out the back, you come out the front. So anyone who tries to run through the slab bumps into themselves.

A zwall is like an inside out z-cell—in the sense that, to make a zwall, you essentially throw out the interior of the block, and then wrap the outer surfaces to be glued to the opposing faces' inner surfaces. In a z-cell, on the other hand, you essentially discard the region outside the block, and wrap the outer surfaces to be glued to the opposing faces' outer surfaces.

I tried to draw the zwall and z-cell below, but I'm not entirely sure that my drawing of the zwall is coherent. I wanted to show the idea that when you enter the zwall, you bend around so you come out the same face. But in this picture...what does the back of the zwall look like? It's better I think just to assume that the back surface of the front face is glued to front surface, and you do the same on the back face.

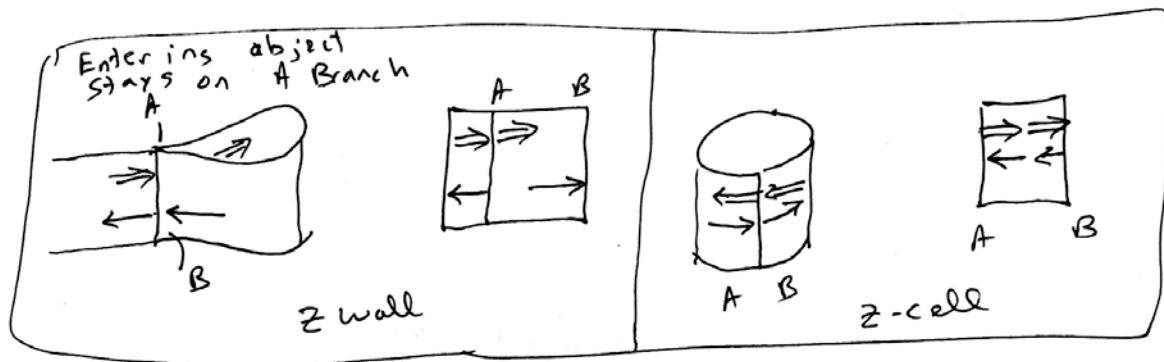


Figure 9: Zwall and Z-cell.

Maybe, in his proactive vein, Jim helps convince Ira and Ginnie to eat their jivas too. Ginnie is especially on the Flimsy wavelength, remember it was her who could find the way for the surfers, also it was her that Graf Thura was after.

The thing that comes out of the Graf's head—should it really be a goblin? I mean, I've got the jivas and the yuels already, so maybe it's overdoing it to have a third kind of odd alien being from Flimsy. What if the thing that comes out of the Graf's head is just a smaller person, a space-warped person? I don't want it to be a yuel, as I think of the yuels as fairly mindless. And I don't want it to be a jiva, as I think of the jivas as being good—unless I want to have both good and bad jivas.

Well, I guess it could be a goblin after all. And then we'd have the lineup over in Flimsy be humans + jivas versus goblins + yuels. Jivas can live in humans, but the yuels stay outside.

Was the yuel Rickben perhaps the Graf's pet? Yes, he got left behind, and he came over with Weena. But if he was the Graf's pet, why would he be hanging with the seals? Maybe he, as a seal, would meet the Graf at the break. So mention that Header's been playing with a seal. Also, if Rickben in the Graf's familiar, then Header should become upset when Weena's jivas kill the yuel.

We might use the word "rind" to refer to the hollow body that the Graf-goblin was driving around.

Perhaps having the jiva inside Jim can make him younger, like via a zickzack face lift, like what they call a "ribbon lift" with a length of the tail pulling taut or, maybe better, by a spatial shrinking of, e.g., one's wattles. Zickzack tendrils could merge into his muscles and tendons making them tauter, zickzack lining could fix his hip joints, the overall effect of having the jiva linked to his nervous system would sharpen his mind.

So I'm not talking about hypnotizing people into *thinking* Jim is younger, but rather about a real Fountain of Youth thing working for him here.

Come to think of it, maybe *that's* my dream of the better world—a world where I'm young again. And maybe later in the book, when he comes back home, *sob*, the rejuvenation wears off, and Jim is old again.

If Jim is rejuvenated, it becomes possible to pair him up with Ginnie, thus adding interest to our romance plot—given that Jim's affair with Weena soon reaches a dead end, as Weena's somewhat villainous nature is revealed.

We might see J. and G. as a pair of saviors for Flimsy, a natural match.

Of course there's something icky about an old man getting a young girlfriend—although certainly it helps if Jim is rejuvenated. Since Jim has a daughter of his own, there is, however a faint tang of symbolic incest around his match with Ginnie. I have to confront this—you can't just wallpaper a thing like that. Suppose that Ginnie and Jim have a brief discussion relating to this point, maybe Ginnie confronts Jim, asking did he have sexual feelings towards his daughter, and Jim believably denies this, putting himself in the clear. To this end, we'd also want to build up a little record of Jim as a solid, healthy father to Jolie.

I see Jim as returning to Fatsy alone, and Ginnie stays on in Flimsy as a queen. And we might suppose that Ira, who's come along to Flimsy, and has been stuck in the role of Gina's pal, finally breaks out of that, and then Ira stays on in Flimsy with Ginnie as her consort.

March 23, 2009. More Issues About the Tunnels and the Yuel

I need to clarify still more things about Rickben the yuel vis-a-vis Weena and Jim.

We'll suppose that Rickben is the Graf's pet or guardian. The Graf fled over to Fatsy to escape a death sentence, and he didn't have time to bring Rickben with him initially, although he would have liked to. Rickben has tagged along after Weena, hoping to help the Graf.

Weena is a special agent, travelling over to Fatsy to eliminate the Graf. Weena knows that Rickben is the Graf's partner, but she doesn't know what the Graf looks like over here. So to start with, Weena doesn't know that the Graf is inside Header.

Conversely, the Graf knows right away who Weena is because Rickben and the Graf can teep each other, also the Graf and Rickben they meet at the surf break every day (with Rickben imitating a seal).

Now, why don't Rickben and the Graf kill Weena before she figures out what's up? Maybe the Graf is hoping to make a deal with her so he can go home. And then while they're talking, Weena gets him so high on sprinkles that he can't go after her.

The Graf's interest in Jim is that he wants Jim to open the tunnel again.

So the Graf wants both Weena and Jim to come to his house—so he can talk to Weena, and so he can get Jim to open the door.

I had been assuming that the Graf had already been driving the "Arthur" body-rind over in Flimsy, and that the Header appearance is a psychic projection, an illusion. But I think I'd like to back off from this. If all the flims can look like something they aren't, then dealing with them is going to be tedious.

A better option is that the Graf-goblin can hollow out a living human's head and move inside it. So his different "looks" over here are not teep disguises, they're actual bodies he wore. Note, in this case, that someone should find the body of Arthur soon after Ginnie comes—Arthur with his head split open. How does the goblin get into a body like Header's? Maybe through the mouth—but then we're mirroring the jiva entrance, which isn't good. By slicing open the skull and suturing it with zickzack, but nevertheless leaving a scar. And of course the goblin eats the old brain. I think that's more dramatic.

Back to the notion of spoofing one's image, can we eliminate it entirely? At this point I have the yuel looking like a seal. But perhaps the ability to change appearance is something that *only* the yuels have. A yuel might even look like a person from time to time—although, being a yuel, it wouldn't be capable of conversation.

The jivas have one kind of magic—the ability to manipulate space like dough, thus making zickzack with their tail, an ability that, come to think of it, entails the ability shrinking by putting negatively curved space around themselves.

What if I let the yuels be shapeshifters? I'd been avoiding actual shapeshifting because I didn't want all the flims to be doing that. But if I'm going to give the yuels one kind of magic, why *not* give them shapeshifting, instead of the less-interesting ability to project altered images of themselves into others' minds. And I can explain it by saying that

yuels are colony organisms. Like jellyfish or, more to the point, like slime molds or ant colonies. This is a biotech thing that I can make a case for.

Suppose the Graf came through only a day before Ginnie, and that he's driving a stolen car.

The Graf has tried to get Ginnie to open the door, but it won't open for her.

Who opened the Fatsy tunnel door when the Graf came over here? Who opens the door over in Flimsy? How do these events synch up?

Suppose we think of the "tunnel" as spacetime links between door-opening events in the two timelines. The notion of synch is somewhat meaningless when discussing parallel times. You just pick two events and link them. Okay, fine. So we need people to man a number of opening events, as described in this table.

Occasion	Fatsy Door Opener	Flimsy Door Opener
Graf comes to Flimsy	Arthur	Rini
Weena comes to Flimsy	Jim	Rini
Weena, Jim, Ginnie, Ira go to Fatsy	Jim	Rini
Jim Comes Home	Jolie	Jim

I don't know who Rini is, exactly, it's an unusual name I happened to see the other day, the name a waitress wrote on our dinner check. I see Rini as kind of a priestess, keeper of the gate over in Fatsy. And I think she gets killed after the third contact, and then it's up to Jim to open the door to get home. And who opens it for Jim on his trip home? Maybe some friend of the dead Arthur's, some old woman, and Jim ends up with her? Or maybe it's even Jim's wife, come back to life? Or—yes— it's Jim's daughter, Jolie, which would be emotionally satisfying, as the book starts out with Jim missing Jolie.

Why does the border snail only open its operculum for certain people? Simplest answer: the border snail is as a god, weaving the patterns of the worlds.

March 25, 2009 The Rhetorics of Fantasy

After a lifetime of being an SF writer and reader—and somewhat skittish about fantasy, I'm slowly coming to accept that my new novel, *Jim and the Flims*, is closer than ever to fantasy. It's like I'm tired of making up scientific explanations of things. I just want to go straight for the surrealism without having to incant the by-now-rather-stale rhetoric of quantum-this and dark-matter-that.

So now I'm getting interested in theories about what fantasy literature is and can become.

I just read a really interesting essay by my friend Farah Mendelsohn about this [online](#), it's the introduction to her critical volume *The Rhetorics of Fantasy*, which I then proceeded to order a copy of from Amazon. So without having read the book yet, I'll irresponsibly start outgassing about Farah's ideas based on what I gleaned from the intro. She distinguishes several modes of fantasy:

Portal-quest. There's a magic door to another world. The main characters go through, learn about the other world, get to know it well enough to achieve something, and then come back. Things from the other world don't come through the portal to our world.

Immersive and Intrusive. In the immersive mode, the book simply starts out and is set in some fantastic other world. In the intrusive mode, creatures from another world appear in ours. The mood for intrusive fantasy is one of shock and amazement, what Farah Mendelsohn calls an "awestruck or skeptical tone." She points out that it's an effort to keep up this tone of surprise, and to this end, the oddness of the intruders often escalates over the book.

Liminal. Like the intrusive fantasy, the liminal fantasy is set in our world, but there the fantastic elements are fleeting, barely glimpsed. Maybe you see an elf in your back yard, rather than a giant were-pig rampaging down Wall Street. Or a little birdie talks to you. Mendelsohn suggests that in the liminal fantasy tales, the characters don't get all worked up about the odd things, they take them as a normal part of life. This would set liminal fantasy apart from to intrusive fantasy.

It always surprises me to find such simple archetypal forms underlying such seemingly open-ended forms as fiction in general and fantasy and science fiction in particular. We stick to a few patterns that work—patterns perhaps suggested by basic aspects of our innate psychology.

I found I was almost viscerally compelled to put a **portal** into *Jim and the Flims*. I was floundering, and the notion of the portal was like a life-preserver to grab.

With a portal, you're setting several things in play. One is that you have an alternate world. A second is that there will be limited access to the portal, that is, only a few characters can go through it. A third is that finding the homeward portal from the other world may take some effort. A fourth is that the portal can lead aliens to our world as well as leading us to theirs.

In *Postsingular* and *Hylozoic*, I had an alternate world, but here the "portal" wasn't a specific location, but rather a certain meditative technique—akin to a magic spell. And in *Mathematicians in Love*, I had a certain device that would turn some region of space into a portal. You might think of it as a mechanized spell-caster.

Of course SF is rife with portals—that's often what faster-than-light travel devices look like: magic doors. But even a ship that you get inside and then get out of is a kind of portal, particularly if the ship makes a long trip very rapidly. The animated UFO that Frek rides in *Frek and the Elixir* serves as a portal.

The same portal issues arise with these variations: limited access to the portal, the difficulty of getting back home, and the two-way connection that the portal involves.

(This said, there is some extra symbolic element in the notion of a ship that you get inside of, as then we're metaphorically adumbrating the notion of birth. Joseph Campbell refers to this stage of the classic quest tale as "In the Belly of the Whale.")

A far-future SF novel has the quality of an **immersive** fantasy novel—you're in some place where everything is different, and you're seeing through the eyes of a native, and slowly you get your bearings. The SF equivalent of **intrusive** fantasy is to introduce have the strange things intrude via a new invention. Or they might arrive as alien invaders.

Jim and the Flims takes the form of an intrusive fantasy. That is, we start out in our familiar world, and the fantastic elements trickle in. Yes, there is a portal, but we first become aware of the portal because of some fantastic beings who've used the portal to intrude into our world.

Rather than continuing to escalate the oddity of the intruders, I plan to go the whole hog and have my characters go through the portal to the alternate world themselves. They get used to it pretty quickly, so we get more into the immersive than the intrusive mode, and they don't have to act awestruck all the time.

Regarding **liminal** fantasy, I've often thought about a notion that there are other beings around us all the time, things we glimpse from the corners of our eyes. I guess this is a liminal fantasy concept. I like the notion that the world is full of living beings or spirits of place, akin to gnomes, elves and fairies. The story I wrote with Paul DiFilippo, "Elves of the Subdimensions," is a liminal fantasy.

When starting *Jim and the Flims* I was thinking along these lines, imagining an alternate world the overlays and is wholly contiguous with ours. But now it seems less likely I'll use that mode—probably it's enough to be using the portal-quest and intrusive fantasy modes.

At least now, thanks to Farah, I have a clearer notion of what it is that I'm up to!

March 30-31, 2009 Voor, Not Goblin

I reread and edited the chapters up through "The Whipped Vic Crew" over the last week, fixing all the things I'd mentioned, and a few more things as well. I put in this thing where having a jiva in your body vitalizes you and makes you closer to being a powerful person in their twenties—this way Jim can have a love affair with Ginnie. Weena, being a professional killer and a hundred years old (which is visible when she temporarily loses her jiva), isn't such a good love-match anymore.

On Monday, March 23, 2009, I read the current version of Chapter One to a large and enthusiastic audience in San Francisco for an EFF benefit. I [blogged](#) a podcast of the reading. Reading the thing in public gave me a boost towards feeling the book is real, and that it's going to work.

I'm not quite sure about having a little green goblin in Header's skull in the Surf Party scene where Weena axes him. I want to have a creature living in his head and controlling him, but a green goblin seems too much of a default choice, that is, too much like a golden age Kelly Freas image of a Martian.

First of all, don't call it a goblin, call it a voor.

Second of all, I think I do want the little green man with a gnome look.. A gnome resembles a bald old person, and old age is one of the subtextual themes of this novel. I have a vision of my voors in armies and in underground cities like in, yes, *Lord of the Rings*. Just to make it a little different, suppose I give each voor an extra pair of arms to suggest a six-legged ant-like quality.

Alternative looks could have been something spiky—like that Mandelbrot-set creature I imagined in *The Hacker and the Ants*, the Beetlejuice Monkey, with a purplish glow, and clicking mandibles. Or something rapid, supple, and squid-like in the Cthulhu style. But a humanoid look for the villains provokes a higher emotional response in the reader.

Third of all, give the voors a power or quality along the lines of the implicit biotech in my existing menagerie of space-bending jivas and colony-organism shapeshifting yuels. Suppose that the voor is like the Plastic Man cartoon character, who can change his body shape. Unlike the yuels, who are colony organisms, the voors can't *completely* change their shape and color, it's more that they can change the sizes of their parts. They do this via a jiva-like technique of space manipulation. Note that, by the way, jivas can change their own size via space manipulation, so the skills of the voors and the jivas are similar. Perhaps voors are dark-side jivas—comparable to how devils are sometimes regarded as fallen angels.

I'm thinking of the 1940s comic [Plastic Man](#) by Jack Cole, by the way. Art Spiegelman co-edited a book about this strip. And the character is mentioned (as Plasticman) in Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*:

"Four-color Plasticman goes oozing out of a keyhole, around a corner and up through piping that leads to a sink in the mad Nazi scientist's lab, out of whose faucet Plas' head now, blank carapaced eyes and unplastic jaw, is just emerging. 'Yeah. Who're you, Ace?'" (p.206) And later in the book, in the gloomy twilight of the tale, "Plasticman will lose his way among the Imipolex [plastic]chains, and topologists all over the Zone will run out and stop payments on his honorarium checks" (p.752)

Big win: If the voor can change his shape, then Header doesn't need a too-obvious scar on his skull. The voor could have entered via Header's nose. So now I need to go take out the references to the scar. Instead we might mention that Header has frequent nose bleeds.

We might also mention that Arthur's body has no brain at all. He's not exploded or anything, but his skull is empty.

Back to the notion of a yuel as a colony organism. Suppose that the component organisms are fairly large—the size, let us say, of cockroaches or, better comparison, thumbs. And they stay blue. So the yuel has a granular appearance. A lumpy blue seal. The other seals accept him because they're stupid and they only see in black and white anyway. But a yuel could never get away with imitating a person.

Suppose that the yuel's tail-bulb swells and bursts when the jivas kill him. The burst is a release of spores, like a puffball fungus does. The yuel thus enters into the intrusive fantasy mode. Our protector jivas' fractally branching and barely visible root hairs dart around and snag all the spores—or maybe not quite all of them. We can suppose that later, in the last act, Jim has a final confrontation with a yuel.

So now, on the morning of March 31, 2009, I folded all these changes in.

April 12, 2009. A Flimsy Flip.

Easter Sunday! We're in San Francisco.

Pocket notes from yesterday: (1) Old Chinese people doing Tai Chi in Yerba Buena park across from the Museum of Modern Art. They're getting ahead of me health-wise. The gestures are beautiful. They wear cheap dull clothes and play shrill Tai Chi music on a boom box. They jabber incomprehensibly. They never smile at me, or even recognize my presence. (2) A bird. Its eye is a pale blue-gray-aqua disk with a black dot in the center. Black beak, slightly iridescent feathers.

I pick up Wm. Burroughs, *The Soft Machine*, at City Lights Books, with a nice pink cover, and reread some of it. Long time no see. Its chapters seem fairly independent of each other. Some aren't too badly cut-up. One chapter I read, like dada pulp SF, "The Mayan Caper," gives me some ideas for how things might be in Flimsy. First a few quotes.

Setting up for time travel to Mayan times. "Then he injected a blue fluid of heavy cold silence as word dust fell from demagnetized patterns—from a remote Polar distance I could see the doctor..."

After the transition. "Suddenly he sat up talking in Mayan—The word curled out his mouth and hung visible in the air like vine tendrils—I felt a strange vertigo which I recognized as the motion sickness of time travel..." [Note that Burroughs uses that same phrase in *Yage Letters*, to describe the effects of the drug: motion sickness of time travel.]

"I lay down in the hammock and immediately felt the stabbing probes of telepathic interrogation."

At the frequent celebrations, "...the priests appeared in elaborate costumes, often disguised as centipedes or lobsters..."

"I made recordings of the festivals and the continuous music like a shrill insect frequency that followed the workers all day in the fields."

That last quote dovetails with a talk I had with an old friend, Jack Vad, who is a sound tech for the SF Symphony Orchestra. He said, "Being a sound tech can be like being a dental hygienist or like being a sculptor." Sometimes he's just tweaking and cleaning, sometimes he's molding sounds. He has really good software, it got a lot better in the last two years. He used the word "detune" to mean change the pitch. For fixing a sour note, you used to have to detune all the instruments, and had trade-offs where fixing one was messing up the others. But now the soundware lets you isolate a particular line of music, an individual instrument, and detune that alone.

Controlling reality via cut-up sound and video...

For a minute, in a too-strict analogy to *The Soft Machine*, I thought that maybe Flimsy has priests running things on the behest of some aristocrats. Following Burroughs, I might call their religion "Trak." The aristos and Trak priests keep people in line with telepathy and with fear-mongering about the vooor—in analogy to how our Republican elite and their fundamentalist Xian priests go in for fear-mongering about Islamic terrorists and about bohemia.

But, wait, it's simpler to have the *jivas* running things. The *jivas* are the controllers in Flimsy. And a coterie of Trak priests and aristos are in with the *jivas*, but maybe only for now, the *jivas* can't be depended on to always go along, they may turn against their quislings.

So the nice-seeming *jivas* are bad. Conversely, the scapegoat vooor and yuels are in fact rather neutral about us, and even at times goodhearted. And at some point our hero Jim finds this out.

I think of this move as a *flip*. I did a flip in *Spaceland*, with the Kluppers and Dronners. At some point Jim will be captured by the voors and yuels, and then he'll learn the truth—this moment is the *reveal*. Joe Cube got his reveal in *Spaceland* when he finally talked to a Dronner.

I see the bad jivas as objective correlative for a pocket computer, like an iPod or Blackberry—theyglom onto you and give you power and link you in, but they control you.

The yuels just can't talk. Droog befriends the yuel. A yuel is an objective correlative for an emergent hive behavior. And a voor is—what—a Plasticman anarchist self-transforming punk rocker? I don't really know what a voor is...

I wonder if I should *fuse* the voors and the yuels. It would be simpler to just have one alternative to the jivas. No voors at all, just yuels. So its a war of jivas vs. yuels.

And then it has to be a yuel inside of Header's skull instead of a voor. In this case, I need an explanation for why Jim has to immure this skull-yuel within a flat torus, as opposed to having the jivas sting it to death. Possibly the yuel was empowered by the sprinkles that Header snorted? But the original yuel would have gotten some of those on his way through. Possibly this particular yuel is smarter, more accomplished?

Or maybe we should suppose that the jivas can't easily kill the yuels—otherwise Weena would have used Awnee to kill Rickben right away. Or maybe it's that, when a jiva stings a yuel to death, the yuel always sends out a spore cloud, and you don't want to try that unless you've got at least five jivas, who can work together to zap all the spores.

Further details for *Jim and the Flims*:

After the flip, we'll see that Weena totally tricked and enslaved the "Four Figments" (that is, Jim, Ira, Ginnie, and Droog) by having them swallow jivas.

And the jivas really *did* rip Dick Simly to shreds, Weena was lying when she said they caused Dick no harm. Maybe the jivas planted a bunch more larvae in other people before going back to Flimsy with Weena and the others, and we'll find out about this later.

What do Weena and Trak want to accomplish in our world of Fatland? Suppose they want the jivas to take over. Weena is bad, she's like a black-ops agent for the aristos and priests and jivas.

The sower is a gatekeeper of the border snail on the Flimsy side.

Suppose that the Graf was a bad aristo, but that the voor inside him was good, trying to undermine Trak. Suppose that the Graf is so noble that he willingly sacrificed himself, letting the yuel eat his brain.

The sower let the Graf through, because he didn't realize there was a yuel inside the Graf. The yuel used the Graf as a disguise, in other words, because he wanted to get over to Fatland to preempt colonization by the jivas. It's not so much that the yuels want to protect us, as it is that they want to inhabit our world in a symbiotic fashion with us—as opposed to the jivas who want to enslave us.

After the Graf made it through, Weena learned that the Graf had contacts with the yuels, but not that he had a yuel inside him. She decided to go after him, and the sower opened the gate for her.

The tracker yuel, Rickben, simply rushed through in Weena's wake, before the sower could stop him, he came through as a bunch of little things, like a swarm of bees that congealed.

April 14-15, 2009. Outline, Hartwell.

I finally wrote up some of the [outline](#) today. Assuming I average 2,300 words per chapter, and that I want 85,000 total, I need 32 chapters, and so far I have entries for 19 of them.

Empowered by my outlining, I called my editor Dave Hartwell on the phone. I told him a little about the story of *Jim and the Flims*. His first question: “This old man who’s the hero, when he goes over to the other world, can he be younger?” I told him I’d thought of this, and I was indeed making the guy become thirty. “Twenty-eight would be better,” said Dave, and then quoted me some fact about the average age of SF readers being under thirty. So, fine.

Dave liked the notion that I might be getting closer to the fantasy genre in this outing. He says he can’t really make an offer on the book until we see how *Hylozoic* launches. So I might as well work on it for another couple of months before sending it in. Lately he has this disturbing habit of intimating that he’s not sure if my sales numbers are strong enough for Tor to keep publishing me. At some point that happens to a lot of us. And then the weary round of small press publishing begins...

I did some work on my latest painting today, *The Baby Farm*, which is supposed to show what things look like over in Flimsy in “Meet the Flims.” I’ll paste in a picture of it later, when it’s done.

Thinking more about Hartwell’s remark that the book is more commercial if the hero should be young, I see a change I could make. Initially I was thinking that Jim is only rejuvenated for as long as he has a jiva living inside him, and that when the jiva leaves, he snaps back to his original saggy age.

And I do have in mind that Jim evicts the jiva from his body midway through the book. But then he’d be old, and he wouldn’t be likely to get it on with Weena anymore. So now I’m thinking that when you take on a jiva, it makes some permanent changes in your body, lacing up the slack with zickzack space ties. This said, you may not be quite as plump and vigorous without your jiva. But once you’ve had one, you’ll keep looking pretty young.

On the rejuvenation front, I need to be consistent in how I describe Weena. I’d initially depicted her as being about fifty, but if she has a jiva in her, she’s probably look more like thirty. And I’d had a thing about Weena looking really old after she spits up Awnee—but if the jiva changes are permanent, then I should remove that. That’s okay. I can still talk about Weena’s aged eyes.

Making the change on Jim, I feel a little disenchanted, as if I’m being cowed by the fear of becoming unpublishable. I really wanted to write about an old man, after all. I think that at least near the end of the book I’ll have Jim be old again.

Outlining, I’m having trouble seeing enough action for the last third of the book. Something will come to me, I’m sure, but I’m anxious. Really to get a novel, it’s not enough to have just one story, you kind of need a second and maybe a third story overlaying the first. I need another story besides the jiva/yuel thing.

I’m shooting for 27 chapters of 3,000 words at present.

April 16-17, 2009. *The Afterworld. Doing it My Way.*

All in all, I feel kind of discouraged about *Jim and the Flims* today. Hartwell’s admonitions about low sales and my possible expulsion from the Tor line-up are a bring-down. Of course I exaggerate what Dave said, and I focus on the negative, because I happen currently to be in a depressed psychological state due to having a flu virus for going on three weeks—it wears me down when I’m sick for too long, and I get a little down. Or maybe I’m depressed because I’m so worried about the book. Hartwell is, after all, my friend and my

champion. But there's a chill wind blowing from the business front, and he can't help but mention it.

I feel cornered, backed up to a cliff's edge, and that I should try harder to be commercial. Hand in hand with that comes a feeling of rebelliousness. Give them the finger and jump. And maybe, in the long run, that is in fact the most commercial move. (And keep in mind that "they" only exist in my head, that is, "they" are a certain set of voices in my ongoing tortured-artist-type internal dialogue.)

I do worry that I'm just repeating stuff that I've done before in *Spaceland* or *Frek*, etc. I feel like I don't have a single brand-new idea or vision that I'm burning to express. I feel like it's hack work, paint-by-numbers.

And this makes me wonder if maybe I'm done with writing SF novels, sigh. Maybe I really have expressed all the visions that I wanted to, explored all the worlds I can dream of. Certainly there *are* other worlds and visions—but maybe not for me. So what can I do with the rest of my life? Paint larger pictures? Learn to play the guitar? Get back on drugs?

Thinking about Jim going inside a huge glowing jiva, I was noticing how I'm always circling back to the blinding light vision of transcendence. The Big Pig, the inside of a star, etc. I'm like a medieval painter who keeps painting the Last Judgment. I saw the White Light on my big acid trip on Memorial Day, 1970, Highland Park, NJ, and I never got over it. But, sheesh, isn't there something else I can depict?

I'd thought of making it interesting in Flimsy with the zickzack, but that's really just recycled *kenner* from *Frek* or *vaar* from *Realware*.

So I have to ask myself once gain, what is my true and deep concern (if any) in writing *Jim and the Flims*? The original nugget was the cerebral hemorrhage I had in July, 2008. But I moved past that pretty quickly. Death and the afterlife (if any) are current hot issues for me that I haven't brought into the book yet.

So let's try on the notion that should be discussing death and heaven and hell in *Jim and the Flims*. That's something I could get mildly excited about. I did have some stuff about these eschatological themes in *White Light*, which was largely set in some kind of afterworld. And there was some after-death stuff in *Realware* as well, when the character is in a hypersphere with his "dead" father. And there's a hint of the afterworld in Thuy's account of her trip past infinity at the end of *Hylozoic*. So I've mined this vein a bit, but certainly there's more ore in the seam.

How might I make Flimsy be the afterworld?

(1) One possible move is the traditional one of giving the character a health crisis, then segueing into increasingly bizarre adventures, and then he realizes that he's actually dead. "And then Jimmy Olsen realized he'd been dead during the preceding N chapters, and that all those mad adventures had been afterlife experiences." [When I say "Jimmy Olsen" I'm riffing off those old Superman comics where cub reporter Jimmy Olsen kills Superman, and in the last panel of the comic, Jimmy Olsen falls out of bed, and says, "Oh, it was only a dream."]

A downside with this move is that the longer you postpone the reveal (that is, the larger N is), the more annoying it is for the audience. Like they've been reading along, and taking the story seriously for chapter after chapter, and suddenly you're telling them it was all some bullshit hallucination.

Really you don't want to postpone the "I'm dead" reveal for long, because once you know the guy is dead, then the adventures take on some interest as you are consciously reading about the afterlife.

This said, if the main character is dead, this does takes some zest out of the story, as who cares, after all, about what happens to a dead guy? And he can't really die, now, so what does he have to worry about?

Another downside is that if Jim's a ghost, he can't have meaningful interactions with the Santa Cruz locals, other than with the ghosts, that is.

(2) A second way to write about the afterlife is to use Dante's move in the *Divine Comedy*. Dante himself isn't dead, he's on a tour of these other worlds. It's like an exploration of alternate universes. Note that Niven and Pournelle already wrote an SF pastiche of Dante, so I wouldn't want to copy any particulars, just the general notion of a living guy exploring the afterworld—which is in fact the move that I used in *White Light*.

Kicking up the spook factor, maybe one or two of those three surfers that Jim meets before he leaves are in fact dead, they're ghosts or zombies? And maybe half the people at the surf party are dead, too. Surf zombies. That would be cool. I still want the drama of killing the obnoxious boss surfer Header with an axe, so maybe Header is alive—but I guess he could be a zombie, and then he gets back up to his feet even with his brain gone and his head axed, all Vault of Horror style. Gnarly, dude. If Header's a zombie, then I can keep using him as a character even after he's been killed...

Is Jim's mysterious woman friend Weena something like an angel or a devil? Well, she's from this other world, which might be the afterworld, so maybe she's a ghost. Or maybe that world had native-born people as well as ghosts that have emigrated there from here.

I might suppose that when Jim opens that portal at the dead surfers' house, and Weena comes through, she initially assumes Jim's dead. Weena's sprinkles are meant to make it easier for the dead to come across to Flimsy. But Weena notices that the manager in the ice cream shop can see Jim, and that Jim really does eat the ice-cream, so she knows he isn't a ghost, and maybe then he's more valuable to her, although she has a little regret as she knows the sprinkles will give any living person a brain hemorrhage. Or maybe the sprinkles don't cause the brain event—that was something Jim was fated for (which is another reason Weena thought he was dead, she was just a little early), and the sprinkles are a coincidence, or maybe the sprinkles even helped Jim survive.

Jim falls in love with Ginnie even though she's a ghost. And once they're in Flimsy, Ginnie is substantial and he can fuck her.

I don't quite see how to fit in the yuels and jivas here, and the whole thing about the Graf.

Later in the day.

Two practical changes to make: I'll have Jim leave Ira back in Fatland, so we don't have so many characters on the outing. And Jim can enlist the sower's son as a guide, call him Durkle or Turkle, the kid won't have a jiva yet, he can be the Helper in the monomythic sense.

Regarding this morning's blues and general ennui about the book, I think I need to stay in a frame of mind of *doing it my way*, rather than *trying to make it commercial*. As has been rather amply demonstrated by now, it's highly unlikely that any novel I ever write will

be a big commercial success. The skittish fen are suspicious of me, and forever more will be. So why should I start groveling and bowdlerizing and self-censoring and hobbling myself—especially if so doing vitiates my joy in writing?

Make it punk and crazy and surreal, Ru. Do an execution-style murder of Deena Simly, with dum-dum bullets to the head, the heart, and the stomach? Have the boys squabbling over Header's left-over heroin? Have Jim get butt-fucked by his dog?

In a less operatic key, I do think it's a mistake and an overly commercial move to have the jiva rejuvenation be permanent like I was saying yesterday. I should stick to my guns: you're only young as long as the jiva is in you, and when Jim loses his jiva he's going to be old again. He's not going to be magic-wanded into permanent youth. I'm an old man, and I want my character, at least in this one book, to be a frikkin' old man, at least some of the time.

In other words I have to roll back the changes to the novel that I made yesterday to implement the permanent rejuvenation spiel. And, yes, Weena *will* look a hundred years old when she temporarily loses her jiva, Awnee. It's a bit of a hassle to put this back, as I have to do it by hand, from memory, as I don't think I have an electronic record of the pre-change phrasings—but it's not *that* big of a hassle.

So, fine, maybe I flip my wig and go totally surreal with Flimsy. Random crazy stuff, like in the *Alice* books. I have an idea for a garden of growing clones for sacrificing to the jivas, and that's a nice fresh image. As a working method, I could go for shock-effect after shock-effect, picaresque style, enjoy it locally, and that's all it is.

But, face it, flipping isn't enuf. I need a story-thread to keep myself wanting to sit down and write every day. When a book is going well for me, working on it is as interesting to me as reading someone else's novel---I'm eager to find out what happens next.

Another issue is that I need some consistent overarching relationship between our world and the alternate world "Flimsy" that Jim visits. And this is where Flimsy as afterworld seems useful, although I am a little concerned about how many changes I might need to make.

But I do think it *would* in fact be quite cool for Jim to find out after awhile that this girl Ginnee that he's so hot for...to find out that she's a ghost.

There can be some prefigurings. Ginnee is shadowy in the van, hard to see. Other people don't seem to notice her at the restaurant. Maybe Ira is a ghost, too, but I think we suppose that Header was alive—until Weena killed him. Maybe we see his ghost then.

And maybe, what the hell, further into the book, Jim does meet up with his dead wife Lucy over in Flimsy. Kind of an Orpheus and Eurydice number, I think I've never used that pattern before, hooray. And, lord, I'd be hooking into a silo fulla corn with the dead wife routine, wheenk to spare, very commercial. Especially when Jim can't bring her back from Flimsy to his homeland. ☺

April 17, 2009.

So I rewrote this entry a few times, and [made a blog post](#) of it, and got a little bit of encouragement from my fans, and now I'm going through the manuscript and putting in changes so that, yes, Ginnee and Ira are in fact ghosts, and Jim didn't notice that until Ira tells him right before he and Ginnee follow Weena through to Flimsy. The changes aren't all that

hard to do after all. Just a few little tweaks, really. And now I've got a nice setup to work with.

I'm finally stoked.

April 20, 2009. Painting The Jiva Garden.



Figure 10: The Clone Garden, or, Meet the Flims

For the last month or so of working on *Jim and the Flims*, I've been nibbling away at a painting of how it's gonna look when Jim and his new ghost girlfriend Ginnie make it over to the other side, that is, the land of Flimsy, which is both a parallel world with its own natives, as well as being a place where the spirits of some people from our world go after death.

As I've mentioned before, these days, when I'm stuck for story images, I like to paint instead of just thinking. I've always done little drawings of my scenes before writing them, but now I enjoy the more heavy-duty process of breaking out my kit of acrylic paints. The painting takes longer, and I get more deeply into it than into a drawing.

My original inspiration for the motif (fancy art term for the subject matter of a picture) here was the better-known version of van Gogh's, *The Sower*—a man sowing seeds into a field. His name is Monin. And I've got two people greeting him, they just came out of that interdimensional tunnel visible in the door of house-like (or Atomium-like) structure made of lavender spheres. These are Jim and Ginnie, not that I necessarily think they look exactly like this in my novel.

The kicker in the picture is that the sower is casting baby-seeds into the field, and we see human heads—and the head of one green alien growing up. I probably won't have the green alien in this scene in the novel—my book paintings are more like dreams or premonitions about my stories than being totally accurate illustrations. (The helpful, prancing dog of the right brain retrieves the ball. *Arf!*)

In the morning the seeds in the garden will have grown—they'll be human-like bodies, with their legs rooted in the ground, and with no intelligence, like blank-slate clones. All of them look like copies of Monin, the sower. Some jivas come and sting the bodies, implanting larvae. The jiva larvae eat up the bodies and burst forth as new jivas.

That's the practical reason why I need this garden, see. I want the jivas to be savage parasitic flesh-eaters—like wasps who lay their eggs in the flesh of paralyzed hosts (I love the use of the word “host” in this context). But I don't want the jivas' flesh-eating to be a problem for the locals in Flimsy, so we have these “jiva gardens” full of clones for the jivas to grow inside of.

April 21, 2009. The Zone Between The Worlds

Just for the hell of it, I'd like to have our Fatland Earth be a sphere, and the land in Flimsy to be an infinite plane. In this case we can't have the Flimsy planet moving around a sun, so we suppose the Flimsy sun bobs up and down through a hole in Flimsy, like a bucket moving up and down from a well.

I see the Flimsy end of the shaft as a giant shaft-like hole in the ground, very dark inside, with sprinkles glittering down below. Maybe the flims lower buckets in to haul out sprinkles.

It would be convenient if jumping into the Flimsy sun-well takes you to our Fatland. What might our end of the well look like? Possibly it's the mouth of an extinct volcano in Iceland—maybe it's even [Snæfellsjökull](#), which Jules Verne uses in his *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. Or a cave on Mount Shasta. Or, better, it's something quite close to Jim's home—say it's a culvert where bums live in Santa Cruz.

Maybe the surf zombies are roosting there in fact. I can totally see that scene, Jim stumbling over them.

I wonder if I could keep the bouncing sun, and the well shaft, but drop the infinite plane thing? Maybe Flimsy isn't actually an infinite world, but a disk world with an edge. I've never written about one of those—there was a world like that in the Narnia books. And it seems very much in the vein of traditional fantasy.

If we see Flimsy as kind of a big disk, we might think of it as an ice-floe floating on an aether sea, but no, I think I'll just have it floating in space, or give it a sky dome, or not worry about it.

Oh, wait, Terry Pratchett has written a series of 36+ books about his Discworld, and I don't think I want to be going up against all those pre-existing associations—and setting myself up for invidious comparisons. And if I start combing through Pratchett's work, I'm going to lose my rap and get into his rap instead, which is funny and clever, but not a place where I want to be—too jokey and parodistic. I *did* check to see what Pratchett does about his geography. He has endless cascades running off the edges of the slightly concave Discworld, and his sun is maybe 80 miles in diameter, and circles around the rim of his Discworld—I'm not sure about the orbit, but I guess his sun goes under Discworld sometimes so that they can have night. Supposedly the orbit is so complicated that every

now and then one of the titanic elephants who holds Discworld on his back has to move his leg so the sun can get past, *ho-ho-ho*.

If I keep Flimsy as an endless plane, I should think of something interesting about having this kind of world—in exchange for giving up **sob** the Edge with the endless waterfalls. Maybe the endless plain of Flimsy is set up so that that you can wander and find every one of countably many versions of your Flimsy town. Maybe the infinitude makes it unlikely that you find a particular ghost from Fatland.

Or, I dunno, maybe I go for the disk anyway, maybe the notion of the infinite plane is too distracting. I do want a flat world in any case, as I want that sun tunnel.

Yet another flat world model is an infinite plane which is only of finite size, because you stretch as you go further away. Here I'm thinking of the stereographic projection of a sphere onto a plane, where the sphere's north pole becomes a single point at infinity that lies at the (finite) end of any indefinitely extended ray in the plane.

I see the sprinkles as being like diatoms that live in an aethereal fluid that fills the gap between the worlds. At Four Mile Beach the other day, I was looking at a pair of pot-shaped tide pools in a flat stone, separate little worlds, but then a wave came in and flooded the rock between them, making it possible for a critter to swim from one pothole to the other. (Or it could have been a rising tide instead of a wave.) So I'm thinking that maybe something is happening in *Jim and the Flims* which makes it suddenly easier to wallow between the two worlds. Some access of aethereal fluid.

But, wait, if I want to think of the fluid as *dividing* the worlds like an interface, then the worlds are in fact going to be closer when there's *less* of the fluid. That is, I'm not really going to use a two-tide pools model here, although, for another story, that would be a nice model. Here I'm using a two-slices-of-bread-with-pâté-in-between. And less pâté means its easier to hop over.

I'd like to have a clearer image of the border between Fatland and Flimsy.

The simplest idea is that they're two sides of a hypersheet, and the border is the bulk between the sheets. In some ways this is the same model that I used in the *Postsingular* pair of books relating our universe to the alternate world called...what *did* I call it there? Ah, yes, I called it the Hibrane, and we were the Lobrane.

The parallel branes model could fit in with one planet being a sphere and the other being an infinite plane—if we allow for metric distortions. Like the “infinite” acreage of Fatland is a stereographic projection of the finite surface of a sphere. And the seemingly odd-shaped border (that is, the region that's not outside the sphere and above the plane) could be renormalized into a nice flat layer of icing. Not that I'd have to go into detail about this.

Or, which might be easier, I just say the one world is a disk and the other is a sphere, and just suppose they adjoin in the higher dimension. After all, I didn't get into worrying about this detail when traveling between the Lobrane and the Hibrane.

In the *Postsingular* books, I had an ocean between the worlds, a Planck Sea. This introduced a distinction between the two sides of the Planck Sea, “our” side and the subdimensional “Subdee” side, and I really don't want to get so complicated this time.

I want something homogenous, and not all that thick, between the two worlds. It's a fluid filled with sprinkles—that curtain they go through, that's it. In some places the wall of fluid is thicker, and harder to cross. In others it's narrower.

What's a good name for the zone between the worlds? I was just saying "border," but I'd like something more colorful. I considered "interzone" but this word is so peculiarly and indelibly a Wm. Burroughs coinage that using it would bring in too many expectations. "Bulk" isn't bad, but nobody but physicists knows that the bulk can mean the hyperspace between the worlds. Frontier. Crossing. The living water.

Oh, yes, I like that one. The living water. The sprinkles are diatom-like critters inhabiting the living water, and the snail positions her stomach over the living water so as to capture the sprinkles for food. Thus, she'll be called a sprinkle-snail (instead of a border snail).

Dead people from my Fatsy occasionally appear on Flimsy, their bodies much like those of the natives—but it certainly isn't the case that every Earthly ghost finds his or her way across.

Duke Dim and Duchess Qwin have ruled East Flimsy for nearly a thousand years. Their minds are gone, they're empty jiva puppets. Maybe they're run by the Supreme Jiva, as a matter of fact.

April 23, 2009. Images for the Hike Across Flimsy

I want Jim, Ginnie, and Droog to walk from Monin's house to the castle, some fifty miles, led by the boy Durdle.



Figure 11: Pigpop

They eat pigpops as a snack---these are meatballs that grow in the ground, with pig snouts on top, and a ruffle of ears all around and no eyes, and root that's a curly pig tail. Maybe we have some waffle cactuses too, like prickly pears. Cold fire flickers across the rocks like lichen.

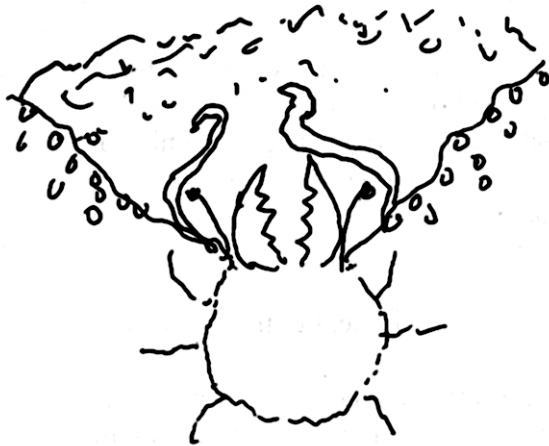


Figure 12: Ant Lion

They come across a cone of cinders. Durkle gets them to sled down it, as if they were snowboarding. Jim makes the zickzack boards for sliding. It's dangerous, but the resident jivas living in our heroes don't object. The jivas are young and irresponsible, and apparently it's sort of a rush for a jiva to be in someone when they die.

While they're bowl-surfing, they see a skull in the sand. There's a giant ant lion at the bottom, with tentacles and mandibles, they barely escape. They escape by Ginnie having her jiva make them a hamster-ball of zickzack around themselves.

They have the jivas turn gravity around, so their ball rolls out to the top of the pit. They're on the wrong side of the ant lion's pit for walking around the castle, they're near a swamp.



Figure 13: Song Fan

They could just hop to the castle now, but Durkle wants to look at a song fan—he’s heard about them, but has never seen one. Quickly they find one. It’s an animated plant, fan-shaped, like a peacock’s tail, playing shimmering exquisite music like a Theremin or a musical saw, a song that’s in part made up of sampled shrieks from the song fan’s previous victims.

The jivas can’t stand the sound, they’re worried the song fan will eat them, they jump out of our heroes and flee---the jivas are the beet-shaped things moving off to the left in my drawing. Note also in the drawing that the song fan has stealthy tendrils growing out to plug into the necks of our heroes Droog the dog, Ginnie the dead surfer, Jim, and young Durkle.

Thinking ahead, I’m also imagining an elephant with a vacuum-cleaner trunk, I think I’ll call it a “yorbafump” from *Winnie the Pooh*’s “heffalump” and from Richard Nixon’s birthplace, Yorba Linda, California.

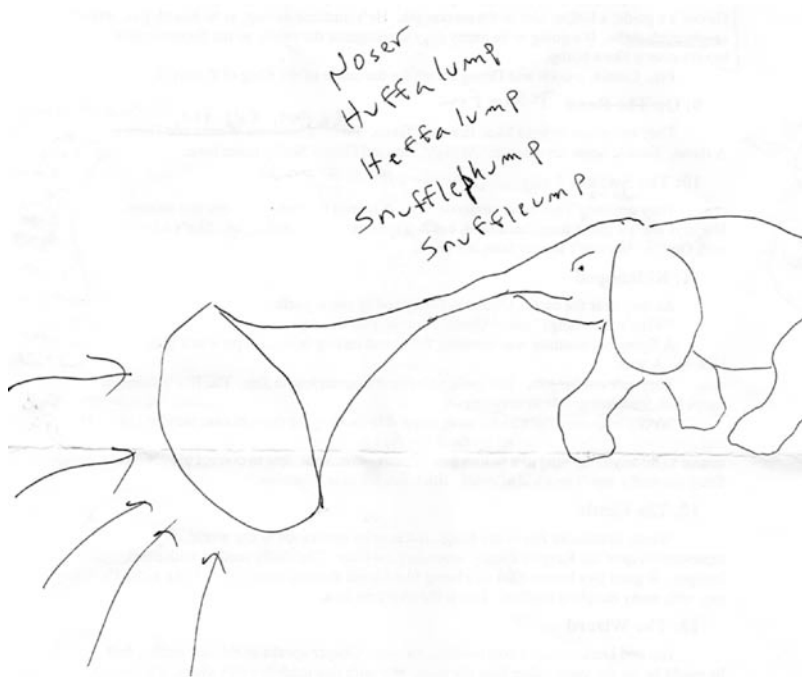


Figure 14: The Yorbafump

So, okay, I’d like for my heroes (1) to do some dangerous things, (2) to narrowly escape death, and (3) to get lost. And I have two near-term threats in mind: an ant lion and a song fan.

I have problems with my plans, given that Jim and Ginnie and Droog have jivas inside them. (Have I written about a giant ant lion before? Or just seen one in a Donald Duck comic? Or no, I think it’s that I imagined writing an ant lion scene for the story “Hormiga Canyon,” and that’s why it feels like a repeat, although Bruce and I didn’t actually use that scene.)

(Q1) Why don’t the jivas prevent them from doing dangerous things?

(Q2) If they are in danger of death, why don't their resident jivas save them with a space-jump or by an attack on the enemies?

(Q3) How can they get lost, since the jivas are always plugged into the wider mind, and since they themselves have teep via the jivas?

I think we can assume that the jivas are aware of the dangers of the ant lion and the song fan. Although they're new to Flimsy, they'd be plugged into the Flimsy jiva-web, so they ought to know.

(A1) Let's suppose the jivas don't in fact care all that much if their hosts kill themselves. They can always get new hosts. These very young jivas in Jim, Ginnie and Droog might be particularly reckless in this regard. They might in fact be interested in upgrading to local flims instead of being in a fatsy, a ghost, and dog. The jivas might not even bother to warn them about the ant lion, or only warn at the last minute, in a kind of sarcastic way.

(A2) Also suppose that the jivas can in fact enjoy it when their host dies, it's an intense experience. Their attitude could be, what the hell, let's have some fun, *yee-haw*, so what if these goobs carrying us die, what a rush, and then we'll get better hosts. And maybe they're not even willing to set up a space-jump, or to attack the foe.

(A3) We might suppose that the jivas actually leave the bodies of our heroes when the song fan threatens. The jivas actually leaving is more likely than going into suspended animation. And if the jivas are gone, then our heroes really will be lost. And, for that matter, they'd be hard for Weena to find. Does Jim get a jiva back very soon? Suppose that, yes, Weena imposes one upon him. Maybe Droog and Ginnie go off with the yuels, which suits Weena fine.

Another problem comes to mind. If Ginnie is a ghost, does she have to worry about getting killed again in Flimsy?

Perhaps we might suppose that she's been reincorporated in Flimsy, and that she has a legitimate body there, on a par with the bodies of the flims.

Alternately, she's not really worried about getting killed, and she just laughs at the ant lion—maybe he bites her in half, and her halves fuse back together. But she might be scared of the song fan, who is trying to steal their souls as well as eating their bodies.

If the jiva leaves Jim's body after the attack of the song fan, and he gets old-looking, would Ginnie still fuck him? Maybe yes, and that could be sort of a nice surprise for Jim, and indicative of a certain unconventionality on Ginnie's behalf. "Oh, so what if you're old? Hell, I'm *dead*!"

Of course I will catch some flak for having an old man do it with a young woman—it's such a typical scene for an old man writer to dream up. As if I were, oh please God no, the late Heinlein. Or *ack* the sixty-year-old Woody Allen playing a romantic lead with Mira Sorvino. Or, in a different mode, the impoverished Eddie Poe writing about finding buried treasure.

If Jim and Ginnie *are* going to do it, is it better if he's doctored to look young? Well, if I do want Jim to look young, I have to go back to my earlier plan of having the jiva rejuvenation be semi-permanent, with the jiva putting in zickzack ribbon lift bands, webs, and joint pads—and then I lose the somewhat dramatic effect of Weena being a hundred years old when they're meeting the Whipped Vic Crew. Doing this makes me feel a little

tired and bored, since I've already edited this stuff twice before, editing the rejuvenation from the original impermanent, to a trial permanent, and then back to impermanent.

Maybe a "boon" that Jim brings is that he figures out how to get jiva rejuvenation without having to become the slave of a jiva.

April 27, 2009. Back At It.

I was on a trip for the last few days, to visit daughter Georgia and her family in Madison, Wisconsin, and I'll be traveling again later this week, to the Eaton SF Conference in Riverside, CA.

Last week's crystalline images of my book have turned a little faint by now. I was going really good before I left. So now I'm getting started again on the plane back from Madison. I like writing on the plane—there's no Internet to distract me.

I rewrote the outline a little bit just now, I'm polishing "The Tunnel," and trying to get up enough momentum to start writing "Meet the Flims" and "The Garden."

Last night I dreamed I was hanging around with William Burroughs. We were inventing a science fiction story together and also to some extent living in the story. It was a great dream, very trippy in spots, and fortunately quite long, as I liked the dream so much that I was able to keep circling back to it and extending it. But I don't remember many details. Something about being in the basement of my boyhood home at 620 Lane in Louisville. I remember a large and somewhat creepy deep freezer there, and the pottery jar of fruit and brandy that my mother had put there to ripen into a sauce, only the maid drank it. The freezer and the jar were SFictional for sure. Burroughs and I in that scene, I think, letting alien parasites into our bodies, then pushing them out, using the aliens to get us high. There was some connection with yage as well.

Re. the story, I'm thinking that I'm not going to be using the dog Droog for much in the Flimsy scenes, so maybe it would be simpler not to bring him along. Maybe Droog stays with Ira in Fatland. Maybe I don't even put a jiva into Droog at all, maybe that's one complication too many—it would kind of be better if the jivas *only* wanted to be in people.

On the other hand, Droog is good for comic relief and as a foil. And maybe I can find a good use for him in the story.

April 28, 2009. The Economy of Flimsy.

Do the jivas reward farmer Monin for growing cloned bodies for them to implant with their larvae?

Maybe the jivas are slave-masters who simply force people to do their bidding. But running a society that way is (a) dull and (b) a lot of work.

So let's suppose there is some sort of medium of exchange in Flimsy, something like money, but I don't want to use our notion of money, which is akin to paying in beads.

They could be exchanging something of intrinsic value to everyone, such as, let us say, sprinkles. But if sprinkles were the core of the economy, there'd be more mining-type activity around the border snail's tunnel.

So let's use our abstract notion of money as being something whose value derives from the fact that you can exchange it for goods. But rather than using pieces of paper or metal disks or beads we'll virtualize the money. Like an all-credit economy. And the jivas are the ones who keep track of how many credit points each flim has. You get points with

the jivas for doing stuff for them, and you can get jiva points from someone else for doing them a favor, or by giving them an object they want.

Even flims who don't have jivas inside them can accumulate jiva points.

I need a better name than "jiva points." Jucks, jivoons, jivvers, joosts, jubs. I like *jubs*.

Someone says that if a ghost dies, he or she then goes up into the glowing night sky.

May 11-12, 2009. What's in the Pool?

May 11, 2009.

Okay, I have Jim and the boy Durkle falling into a pool of pastel colors at the bottom of this enormous conical hole called the monster pit.

And pretty soon, I'll have them drop down from the Flimsy sky directly over the hole, my idea being that Flimsy is like an infinite sheet of brownies whose top surface is the same as its bottom surface, so that if you go out the bottom you come back from the top. Fine.

But I want to have an interlude inside the sheet of colors that lies between the bottom and the top.

What do I call this zone? The Ghost Light. The Zone. The Interzone. The Ice. The Scribble.

I have a notion that the sheet is rather thin or, pushing this, that it's two-dimensional—I'm thinking of the remarks some physicists recently made that [our universe might be a hologram](#) emanating from a 2D sheet somewhere. This hologram generates not the universe of Flimsy, but rather an afterworld that resembles, let us say an endless mall—I happened to be in the Valley Fair Mall in Santa Clara this week, and I was thinking about how soulless and creepy malls are.

Suppose I focus on the mall setting and don't go off on a lot of talk about a 2D/3D ambiguity—I can still have it, but I don't want to get into mentioning holograms or string theory as I'd like for *Jim and the Flims* to be a little less scientifically intricate than a book like *Hylozoic*. I could just say that there are two ways of looking at the flat icing between the bottom and the top of the cake.

Or I might just say that the in-between zone is only one room thick, and leave it at that. In this latter case, Jim has the idea of climbing out through the ceiling—this could be a discovery he makes that not all the denizens of the icing think of.

Actually, no, I think it makes more sense if he falls into the zone from the ceiling and leaves by digging through the floor.

However I work this, I need for something significant to happen here. In the near term, we might suppose that this visit gets Jim's dead wife on his trail, although let's say that he doesn't realize this till a bit later. She'll follow him down into Flimsy and show up as a cowed crone in the swamp.

But I need some longer term twists from the pool as well. I think I'll have Jim meet the Supreme Jiva. I'd been expecting that to happen later on when he jumps into the Supreme Jiva's well, but it's more dramatic to have the meet happen before I (and by the readers) expect it. And, remember the book's nearly half over so I need to start deploying the big events.

Suppose that Mijjy makes Jim meet the Supreme Jiva. And they're also driven that way by some cowed figure chasing Jim (his wife).

What else? I see zombie-like mall-walkers. Stores that are like repositories of Platonic forms, that is, each store sells all variations of exactly one thing. Chair. Shoe.

I like the “scribble” name, and I’m supposing that when Jim was first imagining his room’s colors changing, he was seeing the scribble. The scribble is in the sky, and it’s at the bottom of the monster pit and, more than likely, it’s at the bottom of the Supreme Jiva’s burrow. Fine.

But, wait, I need to jibe the scribble with the sheet of living water they cross when passing through the border-snail-tunnel-between-the-worlds. Really the scribble and the living water should be the same—it’s too confusing to have two alternative subdimensional aethers. (Note that I already had the equivalent of two aethers in *Hylozoic*, differentiating between the passage from brane to brane *across* the Planck sea, and the passage *down into* the Planck sea that leads through the subdimensions and eventually to the transfinite realms of Alefville.)

So, okay, how do I make the scribble and the living water be the same?

I talk about the living water being full of sprinkles in the earlier chapters, so there’d have to be sprinkles in the scribble as well, I think. But maybe you don’t see those so much when you’re actually inside? Or maybe I do have the sprinkles moving around the mall halls, but they look different when you’re inside the living water/scribble. Maybe the sprinkles are ghosts. Maybe the people in the mall are sprinkles. They have bright clothes, but for now they look like humanoids instead of like polyhedral gems.

How is it that the living water divides Fatland from Flimsy and also just divides the bottom of Flimsy from its top? Maybe the living water is like a source code that can be interpreted in several ways. A multiple hologram that shows different images depending on how you illuminate it.

Oh, fuck that cosmic code and hologram bullshit. Keep it simple, make it experientially real. I’ll reprise the bit about Jim finding the Whipped Vic by following a certain twisty path through Santa Cruz. The zone of the living water has this curious topology such that if you take certain paths, you end up in different locations. So when you pass through the living water you can emerge into either Flimsy or Fatland.

Given the universality of the living water zone, I shouldn’t be using any particular language for signs on the stores in the mall that Jim thinks he sees while inside it—like not English and not Flimsese. The signs can be graphic, symbolic. Core forms.

May 12, 2009.

So yesterday I implemented most of the stuff I wrote here yesterday. I didn’t use the “scribble” word, and just had it be living water both in the sky and in the curtain in the tunnel. And I made the sprinkles unfold into ghosts if you get inside the living water with them for long enough.

Durkle and Jim are in a place that looks like a mall, inside the living water pool at the bottom of the pit, and Jim’s jiva Mijjy is urging them towards something. And in a little while I’ll have them drop out of the night sky over the monster pit and find Ginnie alone there. So far, so good.

But I need more stuff in the ghost mall. What do the ghosts eat? What do they do all day long? Are they shopping in the stores? Selling memories, maybe, or buying them, or , better yet, trading and swapping. Materializing objects out of their heads and acquiring

others. But what do they pay with? Well, to answer this, we need to decide who runs the stores.

Suppose it's jiva nodules running the stores, things like the Mandelbrot set buds that dangle from the mother Mandelbrot set, attached by tendrils to the Supreme Jiva, who is thus the Supreme Shopkeeper in the mall world of the Living Water afterlife. Whenever a ghost makes a trade or a purchase, they pay for the privilege by accepting an extra tendril link into themselves and thus becoming further enslaved.

This is a nice objective correlative for consumerism, by the way.

Okay, and I need a big scene in the ghost mall. Suppose that Mijjy is able to telescope the hallway so that they go rather far. They go into the burrow region that underlies the Supreme Jiva. And they find a giant armchair or throne or haystack or betasseled purple cushion for that hardworking giant sun-beet, the Supreme Jiva, to rest upon. And, yea, the Supreme Jiva doth descend into the living water, sending out space-warping ripples. And the Supreme Jiva's tendrils coil and shorten and she drags thousands of the ghost people in against her—she's feeding off the ghosts, drawing energy from them, they get thinner and fainter and a few of them disappear.

Maybe Jim sees his wife there? Maybe he saves her and she flits away? And tags after him when he digs through the floor.

Like I mentioned before, I'm almost halfway through the book now, and the meeting with the Supreme Jiva should provide a fresh impetus to the plot, like a "deep explanation for it all" or a *mission*. It should help to tie together some of the following:

- The Graf's trip to Fatland to promote the yuels.
- Weena's trip to Fatland to promote the jivas.
- Jim's projected role as Shadow Captain.
- What the jivas want from us.
- The role of the yuels.
- Jim's dead wife.
- The ghosts and the sprinkles.
- The low level of the living water between the worlds.

The simplest is to have the Supreme Jiva tell Jim something. And he believes it. But maybe then, when Jim's in the castle, the King sneaks aside and tells him something different. Let's suppose the King is a secret supporter of the yuels as well—that's a nice twist.

It occurs to me that I've been neglecting the yuels, I wonder if we might see some of them in the living water. Let's suppose they help Jim dig through the floor.

One issue that I need to at least think about (if not write much about) is the force of gravity. When I was writing *Spaceland*, I did some Mathematica calculations and I determined that if you have a 3D slab of matter 2500 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 "cylinder" in that online note, but I think that's a slip, I think I just meant a slab.)

But I only want Flimsy to be five or ten miles thick, not 2500 miles thick. One solution would be to suppose that the matter down deep in the slab is 250 or 500 times denser

than ordinary matter. Or maybe there's a gradient so that it gets, like, 1,000 times as dense near the bottom, but is fairly normal near the top. (Another solution might be to suppose that the gravitational constant is different in Flimsy, but I don't want to get into that, as then the dynamics of "normal" objects on the surface of Flimsy might be weird.) Or I might say that there's some extra force that supplements gravity, a pull towards the living water, and Jim noticed this when he passed through the curtain in the snail-tunnel, and he noticed it when he was boarding, how much stronger the force seemed to get as he went further down.

A related issue, *sigh*, is that if I'm identifying the living-water-covered bottom of Flimsy with the living-water-filled sky, then why doesn't the gravity or the special extra force pull up? Oh, this is easy—the sky's further away than the ground is when you're on the surface of Flimsy, so even if the stuff in the sky pulls at you, the closer ground stuff pulls you more. It might be, however, that you fall very, very slowly at first, when you tunnel down through the floor of the living-water-mall.

Or maybe you have to *work* to fly down from the top of the sky, like there's a tipping point at some altitude about half way up.

Another thing I need to mention is the sand-fall. I had sand sliding down into the pit, and dropping down out of the sky above the pit, so evidently the sand is falling through the living water zone, so there ought to be a spot in there where you notice this. Perhaps there's a sand hole area, a kind of vortex that they avoid, sure. The yuels herd them into that. And then Jim doesn't have to dig a hole.

But wait, if it's hard to get down from the sky like I was saying, then the sand isn't going to just drop. So maybe those slave yuels who are *throwing* the sand down. And they throw Jim and Durkle down too, doing them a favor.

Aw, this seems kind of distracting. Maybe I just forget about the sand, I mention that it's sliding down the walls of the pit, but don't have it raining from the sky. We might just suppose that the sprinkles eat the sand as it slides into the living water. And we might also suppose that, over time, the pit is getting bigger and bigger. Conceivably the pit is like a cancerous chancre, and it will eventually feed all of Flimsy into the living water.

May 13, 2009. Where Am I and What Are All These Things?

It would be nice to know what I'm talking about and where I'm going. I feel like I'm at a black point in the book—I got this far on momentum, and now I need to start aiming towards a conclusion.

I'm worried, unsure, confused.

In particular, I'd like to know the following: (1) What are sprinkles? (2) What are the ghosts made of? (3) What are the flims? (4) What are the jivas? (5) What are the yuels?

In each case, I'm looking for two kinds of answers:

(a) A SFictional story-internal explanation for what these beings are. (Keep in mind that *any* SF explanation is better than none, no matter how half-assed it is.)

(b) A rap about the symbolic meaning of these beings. (Note that there can be no *wrong* answer to the question of meaning—all I'm asking is what these creatures mean to me, and why it is that I feel compelled to write about them.)

So that gives me $5 \times 2 = 10$ things to think about. I'll rap and bullshit about some related issues and then come back to my ten answers in a separate post.

It's awkward to keep saying "the living water place" or just "the living water." I want a simple name for this zone, to make it more of a real location for the reader. Okay, given those Platonic form type stores I'm putting into the mall there, let's suppose that the living water world is indeed a variation upon [Plato's world of forms](#), which I just read up on in Wikipedia. In this online article, quoted above, I found some possible names for the place where Plato's forms live in a quotation from Plato's *Phaedo*.

But the true earth is pure (*katharan*) and situated in the pure heaven (*en katharōi ouranōi*) ... and it is the heaven which is commonly spoken by us as the ether (*aithera*) ... for if any man could arrive at the extreme limit ... he would acknowledge that this other world was the place of the true heaven (*ho alethōs ouranos*) and the true light (*to alethinon phōs*) and the true earth (*hē hōs alēthōs gē*).

The Pure Land, which I've used in another context in a short story, and which has maybe too much of a Buddhist vibe.

Ouranos, which is Greek for heaven or universe, but sounds too pompously classical for me, and too much like Uranus.

Aithera, which is Plato's Greek word for ether or heaven, but I think I might want to use the word "aether" interchangeably with dark energy, quintessence, and living water.

Alethos, for true. This might be the closest match, but I'm not wild about the sound.

Katharan, which is Plato's Greek word for pure. I like Katharan, but sounds a little too much like the woman's name Katharyn only let's warp it just a bit to get . Kathar, Cathar, Cathay, Qathay, **Qatharan**. I think with the Q is good, it gives it an exotic, fairytale, Far East sound.

What do I call the stuff that souls are made of?

Good old *aether* is a candidate, but it doesn't sound enough like physics. *Dark energy* is popular these days. Plato talked about *quintessence* (for "fifth element"), and physicists today use this word to mean a kind of dark energy. In an article about quintessence on [Wikipedia](#), I find the word *quintom*, which I like, although it's currently used to describe a class of model, often in the phrase "quintom scenario."

I found a paper called "Cosmological evolution of tachyon-quintom model of dark energy," which has these words: "The quintom scenario of dark energy is designed to understand the nature of dark energy with ω across -1 . The first model of quintom scenario of dark energy had two scalar fields, where one is quintessence and the other is phantom. The role of the rolling tachyon in string theory has been widely studied in cosmology...some sort of tachyon condensate may be described by effective field theory. In some sense, this work means that multiple kessence-like fields can implement the quintom, which extends the possibilities that the quintom is realized and is worth further study."

Apparently you can generalize quintessence to have "k-essence," which has now become "kessence."

That's a good word. We can say that souls are made of **kessence**, which is a type of dark energy that emerges under the quintom scenario. Maybe Ira gives this explanation, we might suppose that he'd wanted to be a physics major, rather than math, as I'd said earlier.

Being dead and a ghost, Ira would be interested in issues about kessence.

It would be nice if the nature of the sprinkles were to prove to be in some sense the key to the whole novel.

My constraints are that I do want to have sprinkles in the living water of the curtain, and to have Weena fishing for them. And if the curtain is a part of Qatharan, then there's got to be sprinkles at least *somewhere* in the mall beneath the monster pit. In fact, given that I'm speaking of the pit lake and the sky ocean as being pastel and sparkling, so we assume that the sprinkles are fairly ubiquitous.

Now I don't want the Qatharan mall to be a fog of sprinkles continually nipping at the characters, so I will suppose that the sprinkles hang out on the upper and lower surfaces of Qatharan, like pond scum. This way, seen from the outside, Qatharan sparkles, but its core is clear.

But, once again, what *are* the sprinkles? I think of them as small, darting animalcules, the size of regular ice-cream-shop sprinkles. But I want them to be more significant than mere plankton.

One possibility is that the sprinkles are larval forms of something, similar to the mosquito wrigglers that you see on the surfaces of puddles and ponds? But—larvae of what? Well, I don't want yet another kind of alien, so the sprinkles would have to be larvae of yuels or of jivas.

I've already set in place a jiva life-cycle whereby the jivas lay their eggs inside humans, so I guess the sprinkles would have to be yuel larvae. But, no, they shouldn't be yuel larvae, as Weena, who is pro-jiva and anti-yuel, carried some sprinkles into our Fatland, and if the sprinkles were yuel larvae, Weena would have been seeding out world with yuels, which is the opposite of what she wants to do. So nix on the larvae, at least in any obvious way.

I'm kind of thinking of Qatharan as the internet, so the sprinkles could be information packets of some kind. How about memes, that is, thought forms? Or mathematical sets? Or universes?

But those are such abstract notions. Let me reiterate that I'd like it if the lowly sprinkles turned out to be a truly key aspect of the novel's world.

Let's go back to my notion that sprinkles are ghosts, like I was saying yesterday. All the other options look either bad or Maybe, but I have to be careful. It's physically awkward to claim sprinkles can morph into humanoids—I think they shouldn't flip back and forth, but rather that a sprinkle is a seed that may or may not blossom into a ghost.

So perhaps a sprinkle contains all the information content of a person or an object. They're like DNA, and like lifeboxes. And a sprinkle *can* open up to be a ghost, and conversely a ghost can collapse into a sprinkle. But many sprinkles don't get to open up. Many ghosts disperse without managing to crystallize into a sprinkle.

Note that if sprinkles were ghosts, then the people who eat sprinkles—e.g. all of our main characters—would be in some sense cannibalistic. They'd be destroying souls for a snack. Possibly this doesn't matter all *that* much, if there are so many sprinkles out there, but still. Let's suppose that once Jim, for instance, knows the score, he doesn't eat sprinkles anymore.

But why do the sprinkles have those nice bright colors and spicy tastes? Perhaps they *like* to be eaten—eating a sprinkle somehow spreads its information. Maybe when you eat a sprinkle you in some sense are twinkling or instantiating someone's soul, and the soul is glad for this, it's a virus being loaded onto some fresh wetware.

Another problem with the sprinkle=ghost-seed scenario is that Ira and Ginnie seem to be ghosts who aren't sprinkles at all. Well, they could fold up or crystallize into sprinkles. Maybe when Jim goes back and looks for Ira, he finds a single glowing orange sprinkle lying on Ira's bed, and he has to reconstitute it. Or even better, Ginnie folds up while she's with the yuels in the swamp. That would be cool, Jim goes to find his new girlfriend, and she's a glistening two millimeter capsule of iridescent mauve.

I'm going to summarize my conclusions in a separate entry.

May 13, 2009. Answers to Basic Questions, Version 1.

So here's what I figured out earlier today. I will be posting a revised version of this later on, as my plans continue to evolve and change.

(1a) SF explanation for sprinkles.

Sprinkles are crystalline information patterns summing up the complete architecture and life experience of an object or a person. If fed enough kessence, a sprinkle can unfold into a ghost. Sprinkles are like eggs.

(1b) Deep meaning of sprinkles.

An artwork that could blossom into a simulation of you if someone appreciates it. The dream of making a software copy of yourself on the internet, or as art.

(2a) SF explanation for ghosts.

We actually have souls made of some insubstantial but physically real substance called kessence. And objects have souls like this, too. The kessence of something is its full information package, its lifebox. If provided with matter by a jiva, a kessence pattern can become real.

(2b) Deep meaning of ghosts.

Immortality via cloning, by not dying, or by having children.

(3a) SF explanation for flims.

Flimsy is on a parallel brane, separated from us by living water. The universe is an archipelago of spots with living water separating the globs.

(3b) Deep meaning of flims.

They live in a dreamy fantasy world of no machines, they're an imaginary Golden Age of humanity. But (as often happens to the innocent and good) this airy race has fallen into the grip of brutal slavemasters, to wit, the jivas. The jivas won't have so easy a time of it in taking over our human world—because we're so nasty.

(4a) SF explanation for jivas.

These are intergalactic, interbrane parasitic beings who feed upon the kessence patterns found in interesting objects.

(4b) Deep meaning of jivas.

The internet with all its tendrils. iPods, cell phones, Blackberries, cameras that beep, pocket organizers. Global corporations drawing money from everyone. They can make anything, but they want to own you.

(5a) SF explanation for yuels.

They are pure meat life, unbounded by digital DNA, completely analog beings able to reshape themselves. They're spontaneously generated in the swamps of Flimsy, and they could start growing in our city dumps.

(5b) Deep meaning of yuels.

An anarchic polyculture resistance force against the monoculture of the jivas.
Minority groups. Hippies, bums, street people.

May 14-15, 2009. Levels of Ghosts, Grateful Dead

I see three levels of ghostly existence. (Initially I had seven levels, ugh, but I've been beating it down.)

(1) **Ghosts** in the traditional sense. This is an insubstantial humanoid form on Earth or in Flimsy, made of kessence. Ghosts can dissipate, that is fully go away, or they can become sprinkles. A ghost may collapse down to a sprinkle if it's sapped of most of its kessence. Dead people on Earth start out as a ghosts, and usually they make their way to Flimsy. It's hard for a ghost to return from Flimsy, but they *can* if a living person summons him or her.

(2) **Sprinkles**. A ghost with only a small amount of energy collapses to a self-active animated kessence crystal called a **sprinkle**. But a sprinkle can upgrade itself back into a humanoid ghost if it gets enough kessence energy, or if it eats enough matter that drifts in, or if it eats enough other sprinkles. A sprinkle can die if someone eats it, or if it starves..

(3) **Solid ghosts**. These guys have jiva-made bodies. They can mingle with the living on Earth, or act like a living person in Flimsy. A ghost can be upgraded to a solid ghost if the ghost is assisted/occupied by a jiva who is creating the body. The solid ghost may go back to being an insubstantial ghost if the jiva pulls out, and may even collapse down to being a sprinkle, or even dissipate completely.

Thus, a typical sequence would be: living human, ghost on Earth, sprinkle in the living water, ghost in the living water, solid ghost on Flimsy.

Sylvia and I went to see the Grateful Dead at the Shoreline Amphitheater on May 14, 2009, it was kind of inspiring, and a nice scene, even if, for my taste, the Dead's music is sometimes a little too thin and sketchy. Like "if I *were* to play a song, it might sound like this."

They did, however, hammer home, "Don't you let that deal go down," as their closing number, getting that full-tilt blues-boogie locomotive sound going. I never quite understood the meaning of the lyrics to that song, by the way, so I looked them up and thought them over. I think the song is addressed to a gambler (and by extension, we're all gamblers in the game of life), advising that (a) you should always accept the chance to *deal*, and that (b) when you deal you should be sure to control the game and *win when you deal*. Grab your opportunities and make the most of them.

During some of the jams, my mind drifted to thinking about my novel.

They played "Purple Begonias," with the line, "The sky was yellow and the sun was blue." A nice concise bit of surrealism. Should I make Flimsy look that way? Tempting. Gives it an underworld feel.

I liked the Dead's stage—to me, it had the vibe of a huge UFO, the lights pointing at us, flashing, the flow of sounds as if from a giant music box. I need some flashing lights in my book. Maybe the Supreme Jiva has the imposing audiovisual qualities of a Grateful Dead stage show.

I imagined Jerry Garcia being in the air there, watching, especially when they were singing, "I know you rider, gonna miss me when I'm gone."

May 15, 2009. Flimsy=Afterworld.

At the Dead concert occurred to me that I might vastly expand the swath of death in *Jim and the Flims*—like what if everyone in Flimsy is in fact a solid ghost—or a real meat child of solid ghosts? Suppose that the book’s action was stirred up because Jim *almost* died in the hospital. (I’m going to hold firm against the Jimmy Olsen move of having my main character be dead without me telling that to the readers until the end of the book.)

The thing is, I’ve been shying away from writing about the afterworld, I’m only wading into it a little bit. But if I had even the seemingly solid parts of Flimsy actually be part of the afterworld, too, that might be interesting. And it would provide a reason for Flimsy’s existence—as I currently have it, Flimsy is just a more or less arbitrary alternate world that we’ve discovered, but if Flimsy is the afterworld, then it’s more like we’re finding something that we’ve been looking for all along. It would give the book a simple one-line high concept, “It’s about a guy who visits, and returns from, the Land of the Dead.” This would of course, as I think I mentioned before in these notes, bring me close to the plot of *White Light*. But that could be okay, I’d like thinking about the afterworld again, especially since I almost died this summer.

The flims might all be ghosts from Earth, but they could be from different times in history, so it would make sense for Monin to be sort of medieval. Maybe Flimsy got “tenured up” by the old-time ghosts, and newer arrivals get shunted into a half-existence as sprinkles or in the living water.

I’m not sure if I want to use that somewhat arbitrary name “Qatharan” that I was talking about using for the living water zone. I might call it the Waiting Area. Or, heh, the Skymall, which is what Airlines call the crappy catalogs they stuff into the seatback pockets. Or, wait, of course—its Hell! Or maybe just Purgatory. Hell could be inside the Supreme Jiva.

We might suppose that Weena is a solid ghost who’d come to fetch Jim, doing an errand for the King of Heaven.

If we suppose that the solid ghosts can breed and have normal children, then it could be that Monin and Yerba are solid ghosts, perhaps very old. And Durkle is their flesh son, native born in Flimsy. Maybe they’ve had lots of children over the years.

Durkle doesn’t plan to get a jiva at all. There are increasing numbers of young native born flims who are unwilling to plug into the jivas. Rebels!

Maybe the jivas claim that they’re creating the whole world of Flimsy—which seems plausible as they’re apparently creating the solid ghosts. But it’s not true. There’s some higher power.

Possibly the jivas are aliens indigenous to Flimsy, but it would be more economical to suppose that the jivas are highly successful earlier ghosts that have taken control. Think of, for instance, a certain irreligious view under which a figure like Jesus is seen as a psychic parasite, siphoning off people’s energy in the matter of a highly successful cult leader. Not that I want to disparage Jesus in particular. I’d rather disparage presidents and kings—I’m talking about the boring ego-trippers you have to read about in your grade school history books. Or we might think of the jivas as entrepreneurs or capitalists or scientists or media stars.

Note that the meaning of jivas changes if Flimsy is our afterworld, and the notion of them invading Earth wouldn’t make much sense (if it ever did). So I’d have to rethink once again where this book is going.

What about the yuels? I might suppose that they're indigenous to flimsy. But maybe it's tidier if they're a kind of ghost, too. Like gnarled old surfers. Bitter indie rebels. Ghosts like jivas, but with a different temperament. Yuels can make stuff too. Maybe Jesus was a yuel, or is one now.

Maybe the Flimsy=Afterworld line of thought is a mistake, in fact maybe it's a mistake to say the sprinkles are ghosts and end up with three levels of ghosts, and for that matter, maybe I shouldn't even have made Ginnie and Ira be ghosts. I'm starting to feel like I've gotten sidetracked from what was going to be a fairly straightforward alien invasion fantasy.

Twisting with anxiety in the Black Point...

May 16, 2009. Implementing Flimsy=Afterworld.

Today I want to think some more about how I might have Flimsy be the afterworld. I slept on the idea, and it does seem like a win, especially as it gives us a motivation for talking about the Flimsy world at all. It's not just some silly-ass alternate world, it's our heaven and hell! That is, the rolling landscapes of Flimsy are a (somewhat compromised by the jivas) heaven, and the living water Skymall waiting room is hell and/or purgatory (purgatory because you have some hope of getting out).

If I make this a gradual reveal, then I don't have to make all *that* many changes to what I've written so far.

Maybe I call our home "Earth" instead of "Fatland." "Fatland" is a little misleading and jokey—it sets up those false "Flatland" expectations.

By the way, other zones of Flimsy can be afterworlds for other planets, but we won't really get into that. The zone we're into, where the Flims live, is the afterworld for Earth.

The bad thing that the jivas are planning to do could be the Apocalypse, the end of the world, the Triumph of Death, although I wouldn't exactly call it the Last Judgment, as I don't see there being any judging going on. It's more that the jivas just want more souls to eat, perhaps because they're eager to expand their—their what? The Skymall? Or do they have some castles? I was thinking of the King of Flimsy's castle as being like a medieval D&D castle, but maybe it has a lot of jivas living in it too. They're the ladies in waiting and the knights. The "humans" in the castle are all just shells around jivas, so the castle really is for the jivas. And some don't bother wearing humanoids. I could be very creepy with these tentacled, squiddy, Cthulhu-like, jellyfish-snowmen bopping down the halls.

The King might even be a puppet of the Supreme Jiva, why not? A nodule on one of the SJ's many tails.

With Heaven all tenured-up they really don't want anymore ghosts arriving. The native-born population of Flimsy had grown to the point where there's a nice good flow. And the jivas want to just suck down every last drop of Earth's kessence—yes, it's shortsighted, but they're greedy. Like oil company execs. "Drill, baby, drill!"

So in order to save Earth, we may have to kill off all the jivas. At that point, can ghosts still score a solid ghost body in Flimsy? Well, let's suppose that you can still get a solid ghost body from a yuel, so that heaven is still heavenly.

We get rid of the multinational, colonial, Wall-Street-leveraged, exploitative, cloud-computing jiva networks, and replace them by standalone, free-ranging yuels.

So now here we go again: What is a yuel? What is a jiva?

Jivas can make ordinary matter, they don't have to just make zickzack, but zickzack is "cheaper" for them. Like plastic.

Maybe Jim's upgrade in the rejoove (rejuvenation) was meat instead of zickzack—in this case, his rejoove remains even if his jiva pulls out. But maybe I leave Weena's rejoove as temporary, as it's kind of dramatic to see it wear off. Maybe the default is a zickzack rejoove, but the wizard tempts Mijjy with a footy to give Jim a royal meat rejoove. Or the Supreme Jiva does it.

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Is living water just plain kessence?

May 17, 2009. Answers to Basic Questions, Version 2.

Here's a new version of what I wrote on May 13, 2009. Version 2 fits in with Flimsy=Afterworld.

(1a) SF explanation for sprinkles.

Sprinkles are crystalline information patterns summing up the complete architecture and life experience of an object or a person. If fed enough kessence, a sprinkle can unfold into a ghost. Sprinkles are mini-ghosts.

(1b) Deep meaning of sprinkles.

An artwork that could blossom into a simulation of you if someone appreciates it. The dream of making a software copy of yourself on the internet, or as art.

(2a) SF explanation for ghosts.

We actually have souls made of some insubstantial but physically real substance called kessence. And objects have souls like this, too. The kessence of something is its full information package, its lifebox. If provided with matter by a jiva or a yuel, a kessence ghost can become real.

(2b) Deep meaning of ghosts.

Immortality via cloning, by not dying, or by having children.

(3a) SF explanation for flims.

Flimsy is the afterworld, and the flims are ghosts (some sprinkles, some solid), and there are also some flesh flims who were native-born from solid ghosts.

(3b) Deep meaning of flims.

The heavenly Flimsy is a dreamy fantasy world of no machines, like an imaginary Golden Age of humanity. But this airy race has fallen into the grip of brutal slavemasters, to wit, the jivas. The established flims are like people with tenure. The hellish Qatharan zone is both a waiting room, a mall, and an airplane. The flims in Qatharan have to push and fight like poor people.

(4a) SF explanation for jivas.

These are human ghosts who got powerful. They feed upon the kessence of others and they're making a library of their patterns found in interesting objects.

(4b) Deep meaning of jivas.

The internet with all its tendrils. iPods, cell phones, Blackberries, cameras that beep, pocket organizers. Global corporations drawing money from everyone. They can make anything, but they want to own you.

(5a) SF explanation for yuels.

They're human ghosts like the jivas, only they organize themselves differently. They're more like vortices than like networks. They live in the swamps of Flimsy—the song fans eat jivas but not yuels. The yuels might start growing in our wetlands or in our dumps.

(5b) Deep meaning of yuels.

An anarchic polyculture resistance force against the monoculture of the jivas. Minority groups. Hippies, bums, street people, punks.

May 19 & May 24, 2009. BoingBoing Guestblog.

May 19, 2009.

Okay, now I've done most of the fixes so that Flimsy is the afterworld. I have the flims just talking English. They're calling our world "Earth" instead of "Fatland." There's references to the living water zone as "purgatory." They mention that Monin and Yerba are five-hundred-year-old ghosts who've scored solid jiva bodies.

I'm still going to have to print out the whole thing and go through it carefully to get the whole ghost thing set up carefully.

I'm distracted because I've been the guestblogger on BoingBoing for the last few days, I'm supposed to do this for two weeks. My motivation is that the exposure will help promote *Hylozoic*, which goes on sale next week.

I got off to a horrible start. My very first day on Boing, I put up a "Neck Wrinkle" post, joking about how so many young people these days shave their whole heads if they get thin hair on top, and how "If you're at all overweight, you're going to have a lipless slit-mouth wrinkle on your nape. So your back is like an eyeless alien face." I accompanied the post by two street photos of the backs of guys' heads.

I imagined I was kidding around to loosen up the audience, but people can be so touchy and humorless and PC. I got over a hundred comments on this post—most people thought it was funny, but a few of them are scolding me for mocking the fat and the bald. And the people who *do* have neck wrinkles were angry with me. I felt a little bad about this. And then I made it worse by posting a comment where I apologized, but also joked that someone should post a photo of a bald neck-wrinkle head with a pair of shades on backwards so that it looked like a face.

And then people were hassling me about how insensitive *that* was, so I took away my comment, and then some choleric witch-hunter put up further comments recounting what I'd said in my (now deleted) comment. And then, to hell with it, I deleted the whole post and comment thread.

By the end, I was in fact feeling sorry for the bald guys with neck wrinkles, and feeling guilty for joking about them. Really a horrible way to start out my run. I realized I have to be more careful when addressing a really wide audience like the BoingBoing readers—it's not like the generally more friendly and intimate audience of my own blog.

Why oh why am I doing this?

May 24, 2009

My next few posts were quite mild, about things like art and science, and they weren't getting all that many comments. But then I loosened up again, and put up an "Everything is Alive" post with a photo of a rock, and a brief argument that the rock is alive. That one garnered over a hundred comments.

Reading these comments, I started to imagine that—no matter *what* a given post of mine is like—a certain number of the comments are going to be nasty, probably because I have an unconventional mind-set. One guy pityingly and insultingly wondered if I was a heavy user of psychedelics. Several pompous, trembling-with-fury, mini-profs took me to task for “bad philosophy”—which felt like being back in academia getting critiqued by small-minded lamers.

Just to get in my critics’ face—and to capitalize on the general interest—I put up another post about this stuff called “Panpsychism and Hylozoism,” which also attracted a crop of argumentative, hostile comments that I recoiled from without reading.

I’ve done about fifteen posts now, with about ten more to go. Maybe I could stop reading the comments entirely, it’s not worth the aggravation, having all those virtual voices in my head. Many of the comments are nice, or interesting, but of course it’s always the negative ones that stick with me. Without actually reading the comments, I can in any case see how *many* each post gets, and that number is useful to know. I tell myself that it doesn’t really matter *what* they’re saying about me—just so they’re saying *something*.

Today in the afternoon, curiosity got the better of me, as it always does, and I did read a bunch of comments, for instance the ones on my “Gnarly Videos” post and my “Ants” post, and they were generally very friendly after all, so I should relax.

I’ve learned how to write my posts in advance, so I can do, like, four of them at once, and then rest for a day or two. I’m generally putting up two a day, one short one, and one longer one with more links.

The pay-off date is Tuesday, May 26, 2009, when *Hylozoic* starts shipping. I’ll be pushing the book that day. So today (Sunday) I wrote up that post while I had some time—it took about two hours.

Meanwhile I’m hardly doing jack-shit on *Jim and the Flims*, but I’ll get back to it soon.

May 27, 2009. Who is Weena?

(I revised this entry on September 20, 2009).

I think Weena should be the ghost of a human with a living body still Earth, like Jim. She’s anomalous in Flimsy for that.

I might model her on [Alicia Boole Stott](#), an intuitive geometer of the fourth dimension, known for her cardboard models of the 3D cross-sections of the 4D polytopes. See also this [more detailed essay](#) about her. She learned about 4D from no less a man than Charles Howard Hinton, who was the suitor of Alicia’s older sister Marry Ellen Boole. Hinton used to bring his set of 4D-vizualization cubes over to the Boole’s house and show them off.

Alicia’s years: 1860-1940. I might suppose that at age 80, she used a 4D twist to send her ghost over to Flimsy without having to die first. In Flimsy she acquired a jiva and she’s periodically returned to Earth. When her jiva-equipped ghost settles into her comatose body, it appears rejuvenated.

If I use Alicia as a character, but I’ll have to do some tweaks.

First of all, I don’t see the historical Alicia as having a somewhat nasty personality like Weena, but none of the readers will know this---although at some point Alicia’s descendants might object (unlikely they’d notice).

The second problem is that, I'd rather not have my character be speaking with an Irish or English accent and use antique prose, like Alicia would—so I'd have to assume that Weena has been back at least once before this, maybe in the 1980s, and that, at that time, she acquired a California manner of speech, which wouldn't be so hard, given that she has a jiva-mind-amplification. I'll kind of have to do this whether or not Weena is actually Alicia Boole or some other old-timer, to bring her linguistically up to speed, as I think it's more entertaining to have Weena talking colloquially and giving people the finger.

Thirdly, I had wanted her name to be Weena Wesson, rather than Alicia Boole Stott, but I might suppose that she calls herself Weena Boole, and that the "Weena" is a nickname she acquired due to her fondness of H. G. Wells's book, *The Time Machine*, which came out in 1985 when Alicia was 35.

A simpler approach might be to simply make up a woman who has a similar life to Alicia's. Hinton did, after all, live in the US during the latter part of his life, so he could have tutored a Weena Wesson whose 4D work didn't in fact attain the (modest) renown of Alicia's.

Hinton's years: 1853-1907. His final toast at a banquet in DC was "To female philosophers." He (seemingly) died of a heart attack or stroke on the sidewalk. Yeah, I think it works better if he and Weena went out together at that time.

Weena Wesson might have been born in 1860 like Alicia, but she "dies" when Hinton does, in 1907. If I assume my book is set in 2010, I might suppose that Weena's been back to Earth three times. I'll return to this in my "[Weena and Charles](#)" discussion on September 20, 2009.

If I have the song fans scaring the jivas away from the monster pit, then I probably need a second method getting jivas out of people. I see jiva-removal being mentioned three times: first when the jivas hop away from the monster pit—although I could drop this, maybe, second when the yuels get the jiva out of Ginnie, and third when the wizard gets the jiva out of Jim. So I need at least two different methods.

June 1-6, 2009. Ramping Up To Submit.

That *Boing* guestblog stint is behind me now, [25 posts with 750 comments](#). Whew.

So I'm back to the book. I'm approaching the halfway point, that is, I've got 38,000 words and I'm near the end of my "Dark Gulf" chapter. I have this notion that I want this novel to be 80K words. That's shorter than usual for me, by the way, but this time out I want to hit people with something easy and fast. But I think less than 80K would be short weight.

Currently my chaps are averaging 34K, and at that rate, I'd need 23 or 24 chapters—but past experience tells me that my chapters will thicken up to an average more like 36K each. So I'm planning for just 22 chapters—looking at my outline, I can't presently see enough plot for more than that.

I'm working on the outline this week, by the way. As I move on, I may well find more story threads, so it's possible that I will end up with more than 22 chapters.

We're leaving for a trip in two weeks, that is on June 16, and I'd like to wrap up something and send it off to David Hartwell to consider while I'm gone. Although if I don't send it till July, it doesn't really matter.

I made a lot of changes to my plot-plan lately—like deciding that Flimsy is the afterworld—so pretty soon I'd like to print out what I have, and then reread it so that everything is consistent and make sense. A reread would also be a good way to get amped for thickening the outline of what lies ahead.

It was two months ago, around [March 30, 2009](#), when I reread and revised the first chunk of the book. So it's almost time to hit a revision cycle again.

Durkle needs more of a personality. I think later he will accompany Jim back to Earth, so I need to build him up more. He's only 12, but I can give him some traits. Foolhardy, adventurous, kind, wise-guy, likes to eat, a virgin curious about sex, tends to zone out.

I need to keep doing stuff with zickzack and hyperdimensional origami, I've been letting that slide.

I need more longitudinal plot elements, that is, things that run from beginning to end. The book as it stands is looking more episodic and picaresque than I'd like.

How about Jim doing more with Lucy, the ghost of his wife. Suppose that Jim hooks up Lucy at the palace. She's made her way in from the swamps. Maybe she calls herself Bree (like the divinely robotic Marcia Cross in *Desperate Housewives*), so as not to be too obvious.

Weena just takes her for a naive new arrival. Maybe Lucy is working as a lady in waiting for Queen Qwin. I was going to have her be a courtesan, but I don't want to get into the husband-watching-wife-have-sex thing, I already did that in *Spaceland* and in *Hylozoic*, enough's enough.

Does Lucy have a jiva? Let's suppose not. Let's say that she surreptitiously got a yuel body in the chaotic last seconds of Bart's party, right before the Supreme Jiva blew out the floor.

It would be good to have a topical back story about what the jivas and yuels are.

I recall that earlier I was thinking of the jivas as being like rich people who get to a country first...that is, the jivas are early human ghosts who'd simply amassed so much kessence that they're fat like beetles. Why do the jivas have their powers, though—like the roots, and the ability to fold space? And why do they breed by laying larvae in human flesh?

What are the yuels? Some other type of evolved human ghost? An easy idea is that jivas are bankers, politicians and business men—and yuels are artists, writers, and scientists. Jivas are consumers, they're like animate SUVs. Yuels are self-sufficient gardeners, like bicycles.

I implemented this idea right away:

“The yuels are a line of ghosts who've been here a really long time,” said Bart. “Three or four thousand years. The jivas are an old line of ghosts too. An easy way to understand the difference between the two is that jivas are descended from priests and kings—while the yuels started out as artists and poets.”

I need to clean up the stuff at the beginning about the yuel in Header's head and in the Graf's head. If the Graf had to smuggle a yuel inside his head, then how did Rickben the yuel so easily get through Yerba's tunnel? And if Rickben could come through like that, what was the point of the Graf going to all that trouble?

How about this: the blue slug that becomes a seal *doesn't* come through the snail-mouth tunnel. The only people who come through are: (a) the Graf clone with the yuel in his head (offstage and earlier with Header opening the door) and (b) Weena (while Jim opens the door).

The blue slug that becomes a seal darts into the yard from somewhere that Jim doesn't see. In fact it's coming out of Header's nose. The yuel in Header's head splits in two. It starts out small and gobbles up a bunch of dirt and gets big.

One thing, I need to give both yuels the ability to sing the jiva-repelling song, so that complicates the death battle in the back yard after the party just a little bit.

Okay, I'm implementing all this right now.

I have three more questions. (1) Why did Header open the door for the Graf? (2) Why did Header kill Ginnie and the Graf with an axe? (3) How did he know to do those things?

It would be best if I could tie the answers to some longitudinal plot element, that is, to have the answers become clear only later in the book.

Let's say that the Graf caused Header's behavior. He has a hook-in to some kind of psychic thing, and he hypnotized Header from the beyond. Perhaps Header is into occultism, and he saw the Graf at a séance. The Graf showed Header the Whipped Vic and got him to open the door.

And then, apparently, the Graf goaded Header into hunting him down and killing him—precisely because the Graf wanted to move his yuel into Header's skull. But, no, the Graf would realize the yuel could get out of his nose. He knew he was going to take over an Earthling's body. But why?

The yuel should have some task that he's doing with the body that he gets on Earth. Spreading yuels, I suppose, like by budding off new ones and releasing them like rats.

Why doesn't the Graf do this in his old body? Well, let's suppose that the garden-grown clone bodies aren't very viable. They don't live long, they don't have proper digestive tracts.

To some extent the Graf is "good," in that he's pro-yuel, but he's *very* creepy.

Let's suppose that the Graf meant to take over Ginnie. And it was Ginnie who opened the door for him. Header just happened to butt in. He's a wild card—or possibly a jiva pawn.

Why did the Graf hook up with Ginnie? Ginnie just hitched in with some stoner kids. And the Graf was guiding her to the door, and then she let him in, and he was going to put his yuel in her, and then Header murdered them.

And let's say that Weena did a remote hypnosis on Jim. She found him because Jim was thinking about hypercubes—and Weena "is" Alicia Boole Stott. Weena/Alicia came over to Flimsy via 4D machinations and cheated death at age 80 in 1940. (She took the name

“Weena” out of homage to H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (1895), which came out when she was 35.) And Weena showed Jim the Whipped Vic and got him to open the door.

June 5-7, 2009. *Ghost Bodies.*

I’m starting to be plagued by overly many constraints and complications involving the ghosts’ bodies. I need to simplify things. Here’s a cleaned-up plan.

- Weena has a (very old) meat body that’s propped up by the jiva inside her. With the jiva inside her, she’s sexy, even hot. When the jiva temporarily leaves her, she’s quite decrepit. In principle, the jiva could have left the upgrades in place, but she temporarily removes them to be spiteful and to remind Weena how much she owes to the jivas.
- Jim is rejuvenated by having a jiva in him, she gives him zickzack ribbon lifts and joint pads. When the jiva leaves him, under duress from the Wizard, the jiva leaves the rejuvenation in place, the jiva doesn’t have time or the presence of mind to remove Jim’s upgrades.
- Ginnie is a ghost, and her entirely jiva-made body is cool and juiceless, it’s made of zickzack, and there’s no way to make love to her.
- Lucy is a ghost who gets a yuel-made body. I had briefly supposed that the yuel-made bodies might be different, but that’s too complicated. Lucy’s body is zickzack as well, cool and juiceless, just like a jiva-made body. Jim can’t have sex with either of his ghost women friends, and really that’s just as well..
- Monin and Yerba are ghosts with jiva-made bodies, but they’ve managed to mate and to have a flesh child, Durkle.

This last point merits some discussion.

First of all, how do ghosts have sex? I have an image of bacterial conjugation, where they stretch a band between their bodies and mingle their substance. The genitalia are just window dressing, mere *schmuck* (a word which in German means “jewelry,” and in Yiddish means “penis.”)

However they mate, how do two zickzack-bodied ghosts have a meat child? Certainly we can suppose that a ghost could form an artificial womb and nurture a fetus to full term. But where does the couple get a biological fertilized egg that incorporates their genetic information?

Let’s suppose that a ghost’s psychic kessence info-pattern contains an eidetic memory of the original fertilized egg that the (now dead) body grew from. Like that koan: “What was your original face before you were born?” Answer: “I remember being a fertilized egg.” (It’s more visual and sensual to talk about a memory of one’s fertilized egg than a memory of one’s DNA.)

The two ghosts can info-combine their two egg memories. And—I have to make another leap here, but what the heck—we will suppose that a sufficiently motivated jiva can in fact rearrange some atoms to create a copy of the egg. This is a lot of work for a jiva, and you’re not going to find them making physical objects very often, but, if pressed, they can indeed make a tiny fertilized egg.

The jivas that belong to, say, Monin and Yerba, are willing to make a fertilized egg for the couple because it will add to these jivas’ status to be inhabiting ghosts who have a

meat child. The flims are proud of their plan to create a true alternate to Earth, a real world with meat people.

The jivas have also, by the way, genetically engineered some of the plants and animals in Flimsy.

I still have a problem about the bodies, though. Monin is growing meat clones in his garden. So why can't he grow a clone of his own body and put his mind into that, instead of living in a zickzack body?

Regarding ghosts taking on garden-grown clone bodies, we'll suppose—like I was saying in the previous entry when discussing why the Graf clone's yuel wanted to swap into an Earthling body—that the clone bodies have low vitality, they're rudimentary hacks that you could only live in for a day or two. So even if Monin and Yerba could swap to garden-clone bodies for a short time, they couldn't do it long term.

And we'll also suppose that a ghost can't take over a body that's grown from a fertilized egg in a womb or in an artificial womb. A more or less naturally grown human has their own intrinsic kessence soul.

And I'm going to make a rule (at least for now) that a ghost can't take over a living human body again—otherwise they'd be possessing people on Earth, and I don't want to start that whole line of possibilities.

Another question about ghost bodies: can they teleport? Well, if a ghost has a zickzack body with a jiva, it can a fortiori teleport by riding the jiva.

What if a ghost has no jiva or yuel inside, but has a zickzack body...can it teleport? Or what if a ghost has not zickzack body at all? Can a yuel teleport?

I think it makes a better story if the yuels and jivas *don't* have the same powers. Jivas can teleport, and yuels can shapeshift. Yuels can't teleport. And, hell, let's say ghosts can't teleport either.

Yuels can make zickzack, a little bit. But we can suppose that these actions all burn up kessence.

June 7, 2009. To Do.

I'm going to keep a To Do list here of changes I think of making, and I'll put an asterisk by each one when I've taken care of most or all of it, leaving the bits that still need work in *italics*.

- * That sound the yuels make which the jivas can't stand—let's say it's like a lullaby. That's more unexpected than having it be a shrill grating sound. The yuel lullaby. *It's like a jingle that you can't get out of your head.*
- * I want to have some flims flying around the geranium palace like gnats. So maybe I need to prefigure some flight by flims. Maybe Weena can't fly because she's meat. But Monin and Yerba could do a flight demo. Or, no, wait, I think I'll just limit flight to the neighborhood of the Big Geranium, so I'll just take it up in the "Offers" chapter or in "The Castle."
- * Awnee could have left Weena's rejuvenation upgrades in place, but removes them to remind Weena how much she needs her jiva.

- * Have Ginnie seeing an inside-out Necker-cube style reversal when the Graf takes control of her, and effect similar to what I saw in the toy store, staring at a fan and mentally reversing the motion of the blades.

June 9, 2009. *Supernatural Beings in Flimsy*

Looking ahead at my outline for the book, I'm thinking it's too simple. If we're in the afterworld, we should have some encounters with beings other than human ghosts.

I was assuming that the jivas and yuels were ghosts too, very old and powerful human ghosts, but maybe it's more interesting if they were supernatural higher-plane beings along the lines of devils and angels?

Yet I *do* like the idea of some humans becoming as powerful and pushy and greedy as the jivas—like a dynasty of robber baron tycoons. The jivas want to shut down Earth with the Apocalypse, as they don't like the immigration rate! They just want a small and managed herd of meat humans in Flimsy to supply fresh ghosts.

How about this compromise: the *jivas* are ruthless, puffed-up humans with the minds of colonialists—and the *yuels* are a native species of Flimsy. As friendly natives, the yuels taught the jivas the technique of making zickzack. Perhaps they taught the jivas about teleportation as well—no, wait, it'll be more interesting to have the jivas be in exclusive possession of that particular skill.

Okay, I just implemented this: yuels are natives, jivas are imperialist old human souls. It's always a little surprising to me how few words I actually need to change when I make these huge (in my mind) revisions to an imaginary world I'm crafting. The main work is in changing the model in my head. What I've actually said on some world-design topic in a given novel is often quite minimal, and often a complete upheaval in my fictional cosmology only requires that I alter two or three paragraphs.

How did the jivas get those tendrils? Do those somehow relate to God? Are the jiva suns getting their light from God via a space-tunnel?

Speaking of God, where would s/he live? We have Flimsy set up as a kind of toroidal world, in that the top wraps around to the bottom. It's a one-sided pancake, maybe even a flat torus. Then God would be outside? A sea of light that the pancake floats in? That's kind of generic and boring.

What if God instead lived in a single room in the castle. Down in the dungeon. The King throws Jim in there, expecting Jim to die. God looks like a shiny cuttlefish. But then he looks like my Pop, or like me—a white-haired old man in a rocker. The jivas are pressuring God to bring on the Apocalypse, but he's not going to. He's content to let things play out, and watch the show—in any case, he already knows how things will work out. He sits there in a rocking chair, chuckling. Jim gets locked in with him. God can make the cell walls disappear and be in a paradise with a lot of other gods.

I might also suppose that God *is* in some sense the despised yuels. He could be a hylozoic-rather-than-pantheist-style god, a many rather than a one.

Yuels don't exactly teleport, by the way. Each yuel is only a temporary manifestation of the underlying God goo. They congeal. The One Yuel is omnipresent, like the aether.

Does the One Yuel extend to Earth? Probably not, otherwise the Graf wouldn't have to smuggle a yuel over. But when the yuel is on Earth, does the One Yuel spread throughout our universe? Probably not, that would be too easy. Maybe the yuel-ness has to take hold somewhat slowly.

Note that if I'm viewing yuels as vortices in the God mind, then (a) they might take on a different look, like knotted vortex tubes and (b) the role of "yuel spores" would need to be reconsidered.

I might also mention other zones in the potentially infinite plane of Flimsy?

June 11, 2009. Proposal. Painting for "Offers". Eschatology.

I recently finished a painting, for my "Offers" chapter.



Figure 15: "The Abduction," acrylic on canvas, 40" by 30," June, 2009.

In the background we have a giant geranium plant that's being used as a castle by the flims. In the foreground, a Jim's girlfriend Ginnie being abducted by a mass of yuels who have taken on the shape of a dinosaur. The sun is the glowing alien being known as the Supreme Jiva, and is shaped like a beet. On the left is my old dog, Arf, posing as Jim's dog, Droog (even though in the actual book, Droog isn't there for this scene).

I phoned Dave Hartwell yesterday and he said now would be a good time to send in a [proposal](#), so I wrote one up and emailed it in with the current state of the outline and the first 40,000 words of the novel draft.

On the phone, Dave said I should shoot for 85,000 to 90,000 words rather than the 80,000 I'd been thinking of recently. Well, that shouldn't be a problem. I'll think of more events to put in as I move along.

Dave also remarked that Philip Jose Farmer's seven (or so) [Riverworld](#) books are about a science-fictional afterlife—it's a multi-million-mile long river where anyone who

dies is resurrected. Although I'd heard of these books, I'd forgotten about them, and I don't happen to have read any of them. I should have a look at the first one, *To Your Scattered Bodies Go*.

One thing I do remember about Riverworld is that Farmer uses a number of famous historical figures as characters, including Mark Twain and the explorer Richard Burton. I don't want to do that very much—although I am still thinking of having Weena be Alicia Boole. But I don't want to have a name-checking parade of famous people in the book, that's kind of facile and can become dull. The characters should hold interest on their own.

This said, I admit that I've used famous people as characters in the past, such as Eddie Poe in my "unknown history" novel *The Hollow Earth*, and cameo appearances by Albert Einstein and Georg Cantor in my afterlife novel *White Light*, not to mention Jeroen Bosch's part in *Hylozoic*.

So maybe I will use one or two more famous people in Jim and the Flims, but I'd want them to be somewhat marginal or obscure, I think. Maybe Charles Hinton! I've always wanted to write about him anyway, and he'd be a good match for Weena as Alicia Boole. As a more popular character, I might like the idea of Nikola Tesla, although I don't know too much about him. I can see him liking the jivas a lot.

By way of further research today, I read the "Eschatology" entry in the Clute and Nicholls *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (1993). They don't mention anything that really shuts down the niche for me—and they have a nice mention of my *White Light* and of that *Afterlives* anthology which I had a story in. I might take a look at Bob Shaw's *The Palace of Eternity* if I get a chance; apparently he locates the astral plane in hyperspace.

July 12, 2009. Back from Norway. Another To Do List.

I've been gone on a trip to Denmark and Norway for a month, during which time I didn't think about *Jim and the Flims* at all.

Early Sunday morning, looking out hotel window at Valencia Street, I see a guy skateboarding past, listening to his iPod, grinning as if receiving a continuing stream of revelations. This is the 21st Century.

I'm still waiting to hear something back from Dave Hartwell about my proposal for *Jim and the Flims*. Maybe I can get him on the phone this week, although it may well be that he hasn't gotten around to looking at it yet, what with it being summer.

In any case, I feel like working on the book again—I've had a month off and I have a visceral need to be writing. Yesterday, I started revising my outline for the chapters from "Offers" on, and I had few thoughts, mostly negative.

"I don't really see the point of the other world in my novel," I thought. "I'm not all that interested in the characters." In this moment of despair, it crossed my mind that I might walk away from *Jim and the Flims*, and leave it unfinished.

But I hate to waste my work, and I'm now wondering how I might change my notion of the book so that the project feels alluring to me.

So while I work on the big picture in some of the later entries, let me start a bullet to-do list of smaller fixes that I might use. As usual with my to-do-lists, I'll place asterisks by the entries one by one as I implement (or definitively reject) them. I may come back to this list numerous times later on, so the date on this entry is a little misleading.

- Set up Jim meeting a nice nurse named Alice in the hospital, with short dark hair dyed blonde, and sexy wide skirts. She makes funny faces. *Have him think about her off and on*, and then at the end of the book he ends up with her.
- Why exactly is there a tunnel from Earth to Flimsy? Is it like an umbilical cord, perhaps, and Earth is the fetus? Or Flimsy is the computer and Earth is the display.
- Note that the wall of living water around the world should rise up right behind Monin and Yerba's farm.
- I still need a twist at the end. Maybe the beings who've been imprisoned in flat tori go back in time so we get a closed causal loop.
- Jim needs a task, or a mission, I think something concrete as well as his quest for the Answer.
- Along the way, Jim should probably be recognizing a few more of the ghosts.
- I think Ginie ought to stick around and grow, it's probably a mistake to just drop her after the "Offers" chapter.
- What if Jim were 40 instead of 60? I do have this feeling that my typical readers don't want a novel about an old man. If I made him younger, I'd have to have him still working at the Post Office, I guess, but that could be okay.
- If Lucy or Jim imprisons Weena in a flat torus, why can't she use her jiva's powers to unfold the space and get back out? Suppose that Lucy or Jim uses an enhancement to flat torus creation that they learn from the wizard (who is perhaps Charles H. Hinton): propel the flat torus along a random n-space vector, with a random n-space tumbling, so that it's very hard, almost impossible, to find one's way back, although eventually, yes, Weena will re-enter our world. Or maybe the flat torus always ends up in the living water (Planck Sea) between Flimsy and our Universe.
- The shape of the purgatorial mall shouldn't be regular. Think of it rather as a honeycomb, or an agglutination of frog eggs, something that's accumulated, rather than something that was designed from a blueprint.
- * One evening recently, we were over at Michael Beeson's and he was playing old, old songs on the piano and we were singing along, especially Sylvia, who was standing in front of me. The whole notion of an existence among ghosts seemed so gray and empty when I compared it to seeing Sylvia sway to the music and then turn, singing, to grin at me, full of juice and life. Give this to Jim as a memory, have him regretting being in Flimsy.

July 13, 2009. *What Is A Soul?*

I keep wondering if it was a mistake to start talking about the afterworld. Mulling it over, I realize I don't believe in the religious notion of immortality at all. Last month I was wondering if I might use God as a character—but that could so easily turn horrible and corny. If I want something like God, s/he would have to be a Great Old One—or just another "gub" (as I may call the generic we're-all-the-same beings that populate reality).

I do still think the notion of a *science-fictional* afterworld has some promise, as it's sort of fun to think about, a ray of hope, if you will. And at this point, I don't have any better

ideas for Flimsy than having it be an SF afterworld, also I've already put in a fair amount of stuff about ghosts, so I'll hang in there and see where I can go with this.

I want to invent an ontology, a cosmogony, an eschatology, a science of heaven, a complete and original explanation for what exists and why, an explanation for how we have souls and what the afterlife is like—without falling back on the crutches of God or god-like aliens.

I want Jim to *find out all the answers*. I've always dreamed of somehow going to heaven or meeting God, and getting all the answers or, even better the single core Answer.

It shouldn't be absolutely impossible for me to actually deliver a simulacrum of the Answer to the readers, to invent something plausible for Jim to learn about how the world works. The best approach is to take this task seriously and not settle for parody or nonsense. I'll pitch some elaboration of the not-so-well-known views of the world that I already have: my Wolframite tenet that everything is a gnarly computation, and the Gödelian teaching that the passage of time is an illusion.

Having Jim learn the Answer is a challenge that interests me. This makes the book worth writing. I'd like to turn out something that resembles a crowning philosophy, a parable worthy as the source text for a new scientific religion. L. Ron Hubbard, move over!

What reasons have others had for talking about souls?

(1) **Christianity** uses souls as a way to punish or reward people later on, which is a coercive idea, and can be viewed as a carrot-and-stick that's used as a scam. In any case, given that I'm writing a commercial SF novel, I want to focus on some science-fictional explanation for the soul.

(2) In **Hinduism**, reincarnation is a way that souls recycle life-energy, with the idea that beings can become more enlightened with successive passes through life. Eventually a given soul may get everything right, break free of the cycle and return to the source. I see this process as being a little like finishing a videogame—where you get to start over each time you goof and get killed.

(3) Philip Jose Farmer's **Riverworld** uses an alien-related reincarnation idea. Some aliens have developed an ability to generate free-floating souls (called "wathans") which can be attached to certain living beings. The wathans can be caught when their host being dies, and they can be "resurrected" by attaching them to further beings. (I pasted more [info about Riverworld](#) into my Research Notes section.)

Moving on, let's consider three software-based scenarios. That is, we'll suppose that our bodies, minds, and lives are somehow encoded as patterns of information, and that this software can generate copies of us after we die. How might this work?

(4) We might think of **reanimators** who are in effect gathering the software of specimens in our world. Come to think of it, I've already written a book using this approach, none other than my second novel, *Software*—in which the reanimators are intelligent robots that the humans built.

In a variation on this theme, the reanimators are supernal aliens. But I definitely don't want to use higher beings with magical-seeming powers. Resorting to aliens only kicks the real questions upstairs.

(5) In a religious version of reanimation, which is called [soul sleep](#), God remembers you after you die, and then resurrects you in a material body at some future time. Adherents of this belief draw support from the following passage in the Gospel of Luke, where the so-called good thief speaks to Christ.

“ ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ He replied to him, ‘Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’ ”

(6) In the **digital virtual reality** approach, we suppose that we're all living in a huge simulation in a giant box of a computer, in which case we're all software patterns in the first place, and our bodies were really just some associated graphics and animation routines. This scenario has been pounded into the ground by the trilogy of *Matrix* movies.

I don't like the digital virtual reality approach as it disrespects the rich analog reality of the physical world. Another downside is that the digital virtual reality scenario usually invokes an incredibly wise, boring and pompous Chief Programmer who stands outside the simulation—and, as with alien reanimators, this shifts the interesting questions up a level.

I want my soul to be right here staring me in the face, just as I am. Like my skin. I don't want my soul to be under the control of some bearded British-accented guy in a white suit—like in *The Matrix Revolutions*.

(7) I'm going for what I'll call a **lifeworm** approach. I'll use the word “lifeworm” to refer to the quantum computation embodied by my entire life: a complete record of information about my body, mind and actions. I'll suppose that lifeworms are permanent and can't really disappear. I'm thinking of there being a two-way street between objects and their lifeworms. The object generates the lifeworm, yes, but, the lifeworm can serve as a template for a copy of the object.

The soul-as-software concept feels fresher if we think in terms of quantum computation instead of in terms of chip-based digital computation. Ordinary matter is carrying out quantum computations all the time—so we don't need to imagine that there is a different level of hardware to carry out the computations underlying our phenomenal reality. Our phenomenal reality *is* the computer. Note also that we can be quantum computations of matter without having to invoke any external programmers—the process is emergent, intrinsic, self-generating. My soul-software is just something that evolved. Finally, note that it's scientifically reasonable to suppose that the quantum-computational software inherent in a lifeworm can generate a clone of the original being.

To make this funky and science-fictional, I'll say that lifeworms aren't mere abstractions. They're physical objects made of kessence, which is a type of highly subtle aether, akin to dark energy. The lifeworms are a bit like shadows, or like the air currents in the wake of a flying bird, or like the turbulent eddies trailing behind a swimming fish, or like spacetime trails, or like the tube of skin that a snake sheds. More precisely, a lifeworm is like some rubbery shellac that adheres to a being's spacetime trail. You might think of the lifeworm as the mold you'd get if you were to pour latex into the hollowed-out negative cast of a sculpture.

When a being dies, a lifeworm made of kessence appears. The lifeworm had lined the spacetime trail of this individual. And now, as the head of the trail dissolves with the individual's death, the lifeworm can crawl out—like a snake emerging from a burrow. The burrow was the individual's life.

It's worth noting that I'm working with two notions of time here...the frozen time of spacetime and the higher time of the moving Now. But I won't get into that right now.

July 14, 2009. *Everything's Alive and Everything's The Same.*

I'm sticking to my hylozoic view, and I'll be giving souls to animals, plants, stones, scraps of paper, motes of dust, and atoms. I'd already been thinking of having a platonic form of each type of object, like for instance a Platonic Dust Mote. But it might as well be the case that all those rocks and plants in Flimsy are "ghosts" of Earth objects.

Souls are an extravagance and, in a way, a duplication of effort. Indeed, if we go hylozoic, we end up with a whole second universe of ghost things—and that's what Flimsy is.

For a time, I'd thought of supposing that one and the same entity are the object and the soul. I'd thought that perhaps a given information pattern can manifest itself either as a material object, or as a ghost. In other words, I'd hoped that a being might exist, on the one hand, as a massive object in the physical plane or, on the other hand—via a process of expansion or uplifting—as a ghost on the astral plane. So then souls wouldn't have to be copies.

But a full identity of objects and ghosts isn't going to work. For consider: when a human dies, their body is a corpse, but we want their ghost to be able to come out of the body and do things. The ghost and the body really aren't the same. A corpse doesn't turn into a fog and drift off as a ghost. And even if you have a digital virtual reality world, there's a distinction between the "soul" (the software) and the "body" (a computer graphical shape, among other things).

Pushing even further than hylozoism, I plan to use an idea from Leibniz's *Monadology* and Thaddeus Golas's *Lazy Man's Guide to Enlightenment*, and this is the idea that *there's only one kind of thing in the world*. For now I'll call these things gubs.

If everything is a gub, then although I might be human now, I can be something else tomorrow, just as in Hinduism. Reincarnated, if I'm lucky, as a pelican.

An image: a fountain, with the water going into vapor and into clouds and into rain and into rivers that fill the fountain. Today I'm a human, tomorrow I'm an atom, it's all good. The sprinkles of *Jim and the Flims* fit into this context—sprinkles are contracted souls, but they might well contract further and become elementary particles.

In my References section, I have some notes on [Leibniz and Golas](#). Golas suggests that, not only am I a gub, but I can spread out to become space. For a time I'd wondered if this meant that my body could simply become my ghost—I'm harking back to the notion of identifying the body and the soul. But, for the reasons I mentioned earlier in this entry, this won't work—when someone dies, it's not that their corpse changes from mass to space, but rather that an aethereal kessence-based form detaches itself from the flesh body.

So I guess I have to say that we'll have *two* kinds of things: gubs and their ghosts—which I'm going to call lifeworms. Fine.

July 15, 2009. *Ontology, Cosmogony, and Eschatology.*

The other day, when I wrote my first draft of the entry of July 13, 2009, I was brashly proposing that I should invent an all-new ontology, cosmogony and eschatology—that is, theories about, respectively, what exists, the origin of the universe, and the afterlife.

But now as I repeatedly rewrite these last few entries, I realize that, rather than making up a completely arbitrary theory and imposing it from above, I'd do better to craft a theory that is a pretty good fit for what I've already written.

I'll assume, in other words, that the non-logical tale-spinning part of my mind has already come up with the rudiments of a theory, and now I only need to add some logic and scientific fabulation to flesh it out.

In other worlds, I'll try the following three-step process:

- (1) Describe the afterworld that I've implemented in *Jim and the Flims* thus far.
- (2) Polish and tweak this design to get a full theory.
- (3) Revise the novel to fit the improved theory, and begin writing the continuation.

(1) *Here's my raw "ontology, cosmogony and eschatology" as of the end of the first draft of the "Dark Gulf" Chapter. I'll list some of the questions that I still had—and in the next stage I'll fill in some answers.*

When a person dies, a ghost made of kessence appears. Is the ghost inside your body all along, or does it only appear when the person dies? Why is there a ghost?

Normally a ghost goes to Flimsy, appearing in the purgatory mall. Where is Flimsy, relative to our universe? How do the ghosts get there?

Some ghosts shrink down to become sprinkles. Possibly a sprinkle can become an elementary particle. Sometimes a sprinkle can grow back into being a ghost.

A ghost can get a zickzack body from a yuel or from a jiva. These bodies are constructs made of folded-over scraps of space. Once a ghost has a body, he or she leaves purgatory and goes into Flimsy.

In rare cases, a living human can go to Flimsy. One route is to take a tunnel that is the body of a border snail (like Jim does). Another route is to execute a certain kind of higher-dimensional flip (like Weena and Hinton did).

The jivas and yuels are evolved humans. The jivas feed on the kessence of the ghosts. What do the yuels feed on?

(2) *Here's a rewrite of my design, with answers to the questions.*

There is only one kind of thing in the universe. I call these things gubs. In fact there's only *one* thing, which loops back and forth in time, and this fact can be one of the punchlines of the book.

Every gub, that is, every object and, in particular, every person, brings into existence a form that we call a lifeworm—the lifeworm embodies the informational pattern representing a gub. By existing, the gub creates the lifeworm. Conversely, the lifeworm can generate a copy of the gub.

Flimsy is in the subdimensions, in the indeterminate sea below the Planck scale. ("The kingdom of God is within you." Luke 17:21.)

A kessence lifeworm without a material body is like a loose string, and it tends to shrink to a very small size, dropping down towards Flimsy, and it gets stuck in the interface between the macroworld and the microworld—this is the purgatory mall, which is an

agglutination within the living water. The living water is absolutely continuous space, pure potential, the class of all sets, a universal wave function—all of which means I don't yet know what the living water is!

Some ghosts shrink all the way down to become sprinkles, which can become elementary particles. But sometimes a sprinkle can grow back into being a ghost.

A ghost can get a zickzack body from a yuel or from a jiva. These bodies are constructs made of folded-over scraps of space. Once a ghost has a body, he or she leaves purgatory and goes into Flimsy.

In rare cases, a living human can go to Flimsy. One route is to take a tunnel that is the body of a border snail—these scale-enabled snails are really like funnels that taper from our world down into the microworld. Another route is to execute a certain kind of higher-dimensional flip, dualizing your strings, and taking on the small size like Weena and Hinton did. Is the sand pit a border snail? How do I jibe the scale notion with the wrap through purgatory to the living water sky of Flimsy?

The jivas and yuels are evolved humans. The jivas feed on the kessence of the ghosts. What do the yuels feed on?

July 17, 2009. The Topology of the Living Water.

I'm having trouble fitting together the geography or topology of these elements: our world, the living water sheet that Jim crosses in the tunnel, Flimsy, the living water at the bottom of the monster pit, purgatory inside this living water, and the living water under purgatory—which turns out to be the same as the living water in the sky of Flimsy.

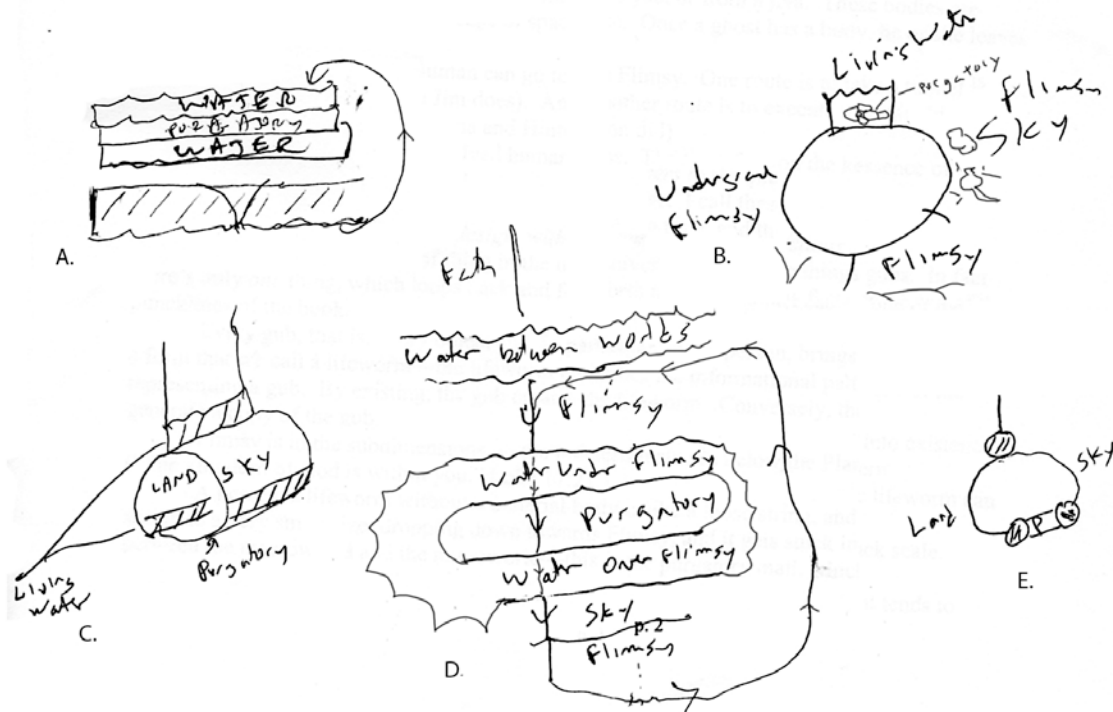


Figure 16: Five Sketches Towards a Topology of Flimsy

Sketches A and B only show Flimsy, while C, D, and E show Flimsy plus the connection to our universe.

I'll discuss the easy part first.

We'll have purgatory be a congelation within a sea of living water, as suggested in sketch in B. I also suggest this notion of immersion in sketch D, by having the purgatory be a kind of submerged island—but I do want it to look more like a mass of frog eggs than like a smooth hot-dog.

Given that purgatory is immersed, then in the “Dark Gulf” chapter, I shouldn't say that the living water that's under purgatory is congealed like Jello. I might as well just have it be liquid, but for whatever reason hanging in the sky. Alternately, I can have a Jello-like layer at the top—in any case, the two zones should match.

The wrap-around of space (or scale?) is okay if I want to take a fairly orthodox view of quantum mechanics and suppose that there really is a bottom of the size-scale. This would be as opposed to the endless stretch of subdimensional levels that I posited in *Hylozoic* and in “Jack and the Aktuals.” But if it's bounded, that's fine here, as then I can suppose that at some point Jim becomes a single “bit” which weaves the entirety of reality above and below.

Now comes the hard part.

My biggest problem at this point is that I have two distinct zones of living water:

(1) The waterfall-like **curtain** that Jim passes through in the tunnel, and which demarcates the border between our universe and Flimsy.

(2) The **sea** of living water that lies both above and below Flimsy, and within which purgatory floats.

The simplest solution is to connect the two zones of living water, but I still don't have the topology for that straight. A vexing issue is that I'm thinking of the direction from our universe into Flimsy as a scale axis, but I'm thinking of the direction through Flimsy and back from the sky as a circular space axis.

(An alternative might be to have the curtain between the worlds be made of light, or to simply have it be a swarm of sprinkles—but it's more powerful to be using the living water in both places, so I really need to think of a way to connect the two kinds of water.)

Oh, I've got it!

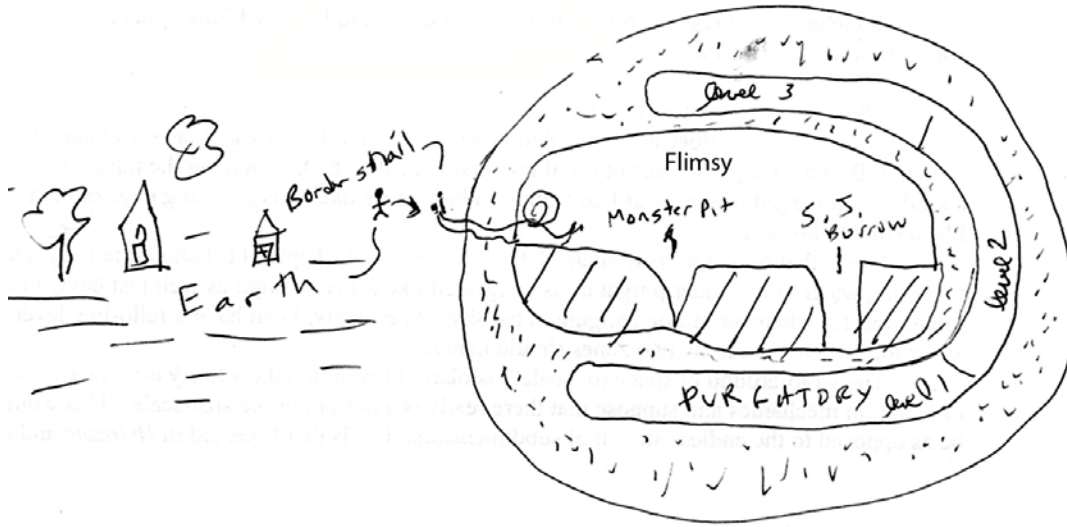


Figure 17: Flimsy in the Living Water

Flimsy and Purgatory are two lumps floating in a ball of living water. Purgatory bends around like a letter U. The three levels of purgatory lie in different regions along the U. That's Flimsy in the middle, with the ground marked by diagonal strokes—you can see the Monster Pit

I'll give up my original belief that Flimsy is an endless plane. Instead it will be something like a disc with a dome of sky. (I'd considered this on [April 21, 2009](#), but then I rejected the disk as being too familiar from Terry Pratchett, but oh well, I need this model, I think.)

If Flimsy is finitely large, then we might suppose that it's only the afterworld for Earth.

I could have Monin and Yerba's farm being right by a rubbery Jello-like wall of the living water that runs right down to the ground. And the border snail is sticking his head through this wall.

Here's a problem, though. If the snail is a tube sticking through the living water, then why does the living water cascade across the tunnel? If we suppose that living water bilocates with ordinary matter, then we need to think about that when Jim passes through it—I guess that could be okay.

July 22, 2009. Flimsy as a Monad with an Infinite Center.

I still like the idea of Flimsy being tiny, down at the lowest level of space scale. I think of it as a monad.

And it wouldn't make sense for Flimsy only to be in one particular location, so we might as well assume that it's an ubiquitous monad. That is, Flimsy is inside every particle of matter and space.

You might say that the copies are in synch, like mirror-balls. But it would be more accurate not to say that the Flimsy particles are copies of each other, but, rather, that they are different views of one and the same thing. The One that underlies everything.

Here's the win: if Flimsy is to be found within every particle of the universe, then Flimsy can serve as a stargate. I shrink down into Flimsy, and then ooze out of it onto the surface of planet Bex in the Whirlpool Nebula!

If Flimsy is going to be housing the souls of aliens from throughout our universe, then I need for the place to be very large, perhaps even infinitely big—even though it's smaller than an electron.

I can do this by using a space-warp trick: the center of the Flimsy-ball is negatively curved space that spikes out, with an unattainable center that is literally at infinity. God's Eye.

Putting it differently, you might say that you can't reach the center of Flimsy because you keep shrinking as you get closer and closer to it. I used this idea in *White Light*, describing a terrace outside the infinite Hilbert's Hotel, a terrace which has alef-null tables (that is, as many tables as there are natural numbers.)

After an indefinite interval of time I woke up with a start. I was covered with sweat, confused. The light outdoors hadn't changed. The phone was ringing and I picked it up.

It was the clerk's smooth voice. "Professor Hilbert is having tea on the terrace with some of his colleagues. Perhaps you'd care to join them. Table number 6,270,891."

I thanked him and hung up. The terrace was reached by passing through the lobby. From outside, the terrace had looked fairly standard, with about fifty tables around the circumference. But now that I was on it I could see that everything shrank as it approached the middle...so that there were actually alef-null rings of tables around the terrace's center.

Already about ten rows in, the tables looked like dollhouse furniture, and the gesticulating diners like wind-up toys. To find Hilbert I'd have to go in better than a hundred thousand rows. Fortunately there was a clear path in, so I could run.

The space distortion affected me without my feeling it. When I got to the dollhouse tables, I was doll-sized and they looked perfectly normal to me. I sped towards the center, staring at the strange creatures I passed.

... Each table had a little card with a number on it, and when I got into the six millions I slowed down a little. There were so many creatures. The endless repetition of individual lives began to depress me...the insignificance of each of us was overwhelming. My vision began to blur and all the bodies on the terrace seemed to congeal into one hideous beast. I lost my footing and slipped, knocking a waiter off his foot.

... Before long I spotted three men sitting at a table, two in suits and one in shirtsleeves. With a sudden shock I realized I was looking at Georg Cantor, David Hilbert and Albert Einstein. There was an empty place at their table. I hurried over, introduced myself and asked if I could join them.

I'm pretty sure that I originally got this idea from an Escher print. In *Smaller and Smaller I*, a wood engraving of 1956, Escher represents this type of “infinite terrace” by a tessellated square in which the inner tiles grow smaller and smaller as they near the center.

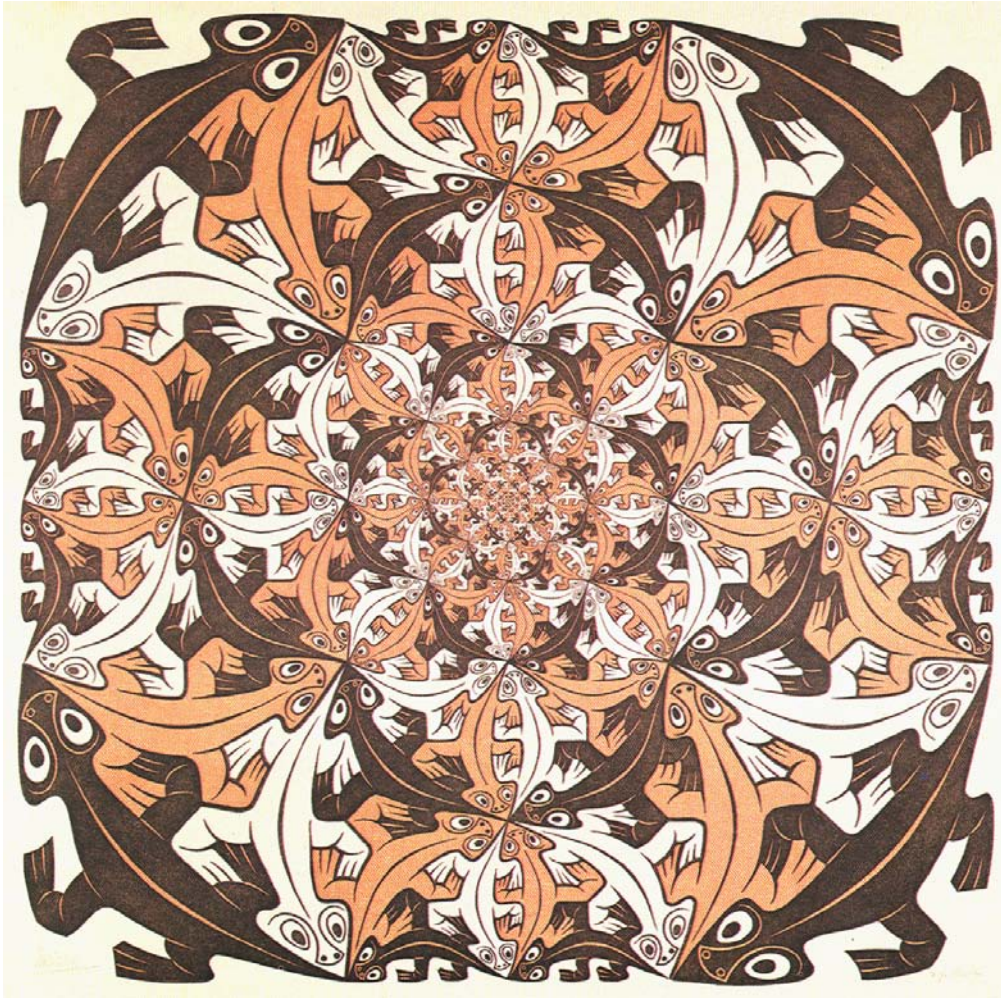


Figure 18: M. C. Escher, *Smaller and Smaller I*.

Discussing this piece in *The Magic Mirror of M. C. Escher*, his friend and editor Bruno Ernst writes: “Escher took things to fanatical lengths and, using a magnifying glass, cut out little figures of less than half a millimeter. For the center of the wood engraving *Smaller and Smaller I* he purposely used an extra block of end-grain wood so that he could work in finer detail.”

I should also mention that Escher was also interested in the “opposite” way of fitting infinity into a finite region: drawing a disk in which things shrink as they get nearer to the circumference. This appears in *Circle Limit III*, a woodcut from 1959.

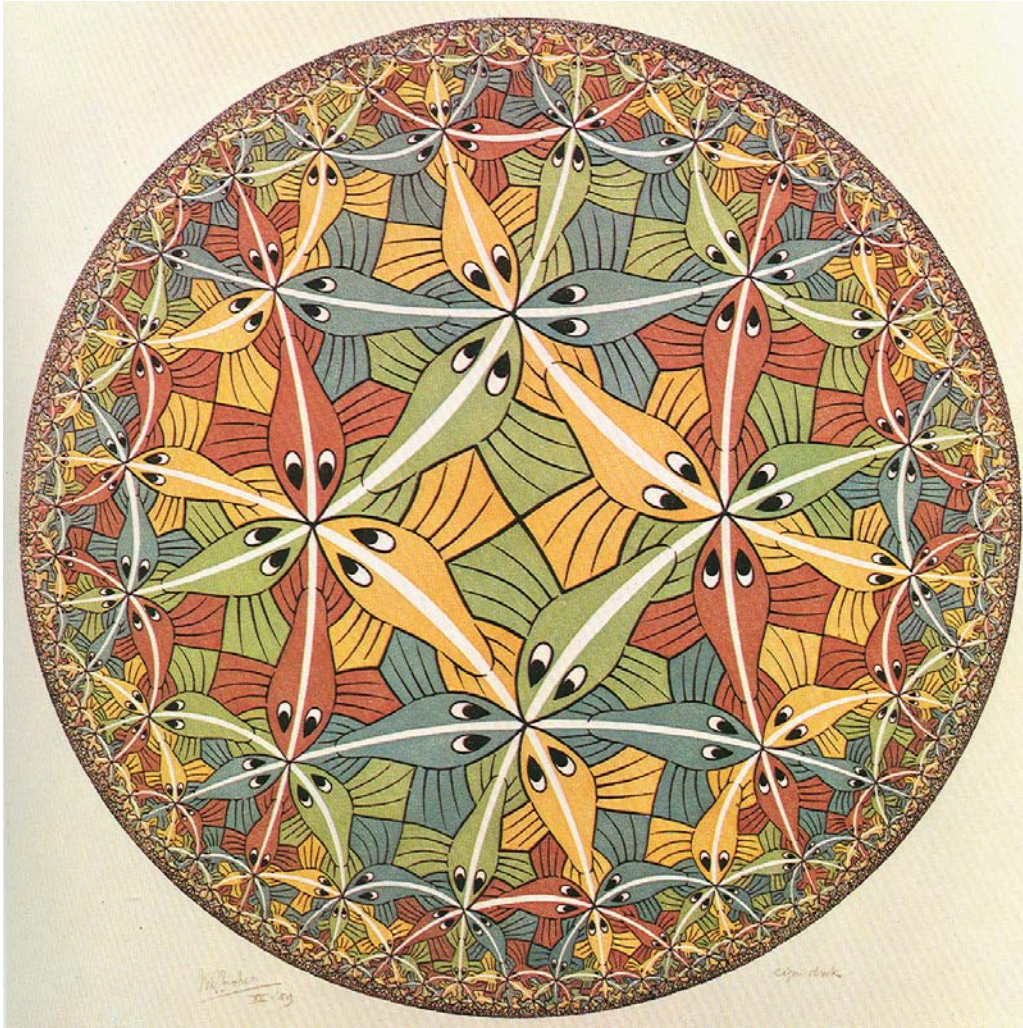


Figure 19: M. C. Escher, Circle Limit III

Escher's inspiration for this pattern seems to have been a mathematical diagram of Poincaré's model of hyperbolic geometry, such as the one below, taken from D. Hilbert and S. Cohn-Vossen, *Geometry and the Imagination*. See also <http://mathworld.wolfram.com/PoincareHyperbolicDisk.html>

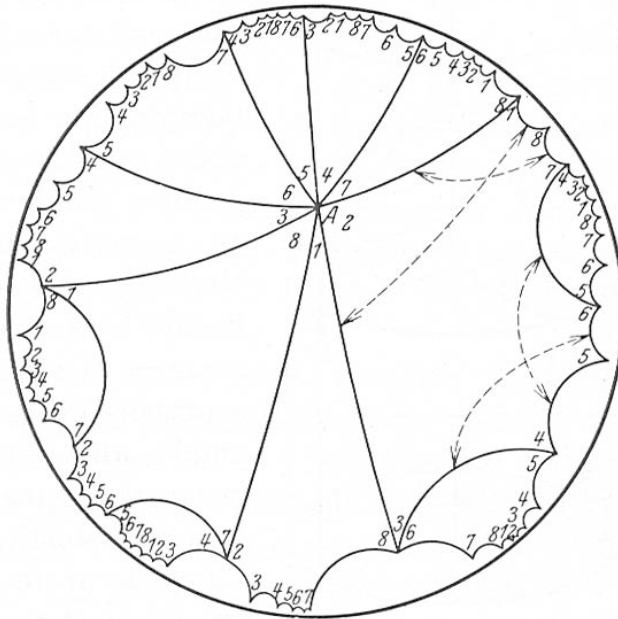


FIG. 249

Figure 20: Poincare Plane

Although in many ways more beautiful than the shrink-towards-the-center model of the Hilbert's Hotel terrace, this hyperbolic model isn't suitable for *Jim and the Flims*. Because I want my explorers to be coming into Flimsy through a bounding wall of living water.

August 4, 2009. Clarion, Canada, Ballard.

I'm nearing the tail end of a two-week trip. I taught the last week of the six-week writing workshop, Clarion West, in Seattle. And then Sylvia and I drove a rented car to the Canadian Rockies, from Jasper to Banff.

On the last day of my workshop, I led the students into a basement room that had an Aladdin-like oil lamp which I'd lit, and we chanted the following for about fifteen minutes.

Time, saucers, sex and goo
 Elves, mutants, robots too
 Muse of strangeness old and new
 My blank pages call to you.

We really got into the sing-song, doing it mantra style, Gregorian style, and, at the end, as a sweet chorus. It was one of those experiences that sticks in my mind, a milepost. I think it'll stay with some of the students, too. I wanted them to understand about the Muse. In the end that's what you have to count on. In a way, that's the most important thing I could teach them, although I told them some more mundane things too—details on my blog post, "How to Write."

Catchy slogans I only thought of afterwards:

“You’re not doing your job as a fantasy or SF writer unless your readers wonder if you’re crazy.”

“Initially, don’t worry about making sense. Get your effects and eyeball kicks from spontaneous mental images—you want a surrealist’s direct pipeline to the subconscious. Once you have a good image, you can always make up some kind of explanation for it, so the story seems smooth.”

By now, having been away from writing pretty much continuously for six weeks, I miss the Muse very much.

I look forward to doing something with that “infinity in the middle” idea that I was working with before I left. It would be interesting to have Jim go through the divine light of infinity instead of heading straight back to Earth. But it has to be different from *White Light*. It’s something like a White Hole that Jim falls through.

Yesterday Sylvia and I were boating on a little lake near Jasper, in the Canadian Rockies, a Pyramid Lake, with a big pyramid-like mountain peak right next to it, meadows and bogs and forests flowing gently up to the base of the stone, a lovely place. Our boat had a quiet electric motor, and we were gliding through some water no more than a foot or two deep, with water plants all around—it reminded me of the sea in the Narnia novel, *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, which is a place that I always wanted to go. It crossed my mind that this would be a nice setting to use for a chapter of *Jim and the Flims*, there could be a sea like that around the anomaly at the center of Flimsy.

Naturally I think of a maelstrom around a central anomaly—but, gee, I just had a maelstrom in *Hylozoic*. Focus on the curious growths that appear in the shallow water. Have a realization that you’re inside an electron? Experience the Multiverse?

I can see black-gloved cartoon hands on long, skinny, multiply-jointed arms, reaching out from the core and grabbing at people. Scabs and tattoos on the arms, with the zigzag sequence of elbows folding up like lazy-tongs.

Today we’re at a lodge on Moraine Lake, an even prettier spot, although now the weather’s cloudy with hints of rain. My hip hurts a lot, which is frustrating, as I’d love to go for an all-day hike tomorrow. Well, at least I can go canoeing.

Over the last few days I read J. G. Ballard’s autobiography, *Miracles of Life*—he wrote it in the last year or so of his life—he was dying of cancer at age 77. It reminded me of how my own brush with death galvanized me into writing a memoir, albeit at age 63. Comparing my memoir to Ballard’s (this mental exercise would be “*How To Make Yourself Miserable, Lesson #701,435*”), I worry that his life was more interesting than mine—all that stuff with Shanghai and the prison camp, and the beggar at his boyhood front steps dying under an “eiderdown” blanket of snow. Oh well, I have to work with what I have.

I was particularly interested in Ballard’s remarks about science fiction. I hardly know his SF—I’ve read bits of *The Atrocity Exhibition* and of *Crash*, but that’s about it...well, I read his autobiographical novel, *Empire of the Sun*, too.

He remarks that SF is “far closer to reality than the conventional realist novel of the day,” and that it’s “often as elliptical and ambiguous as Kafka.” He says he’s more interested in “what now?” than in “what if?”—meaning that he wanted to use SF as a lens to understand the present, “looking for the pathology that underlay the consumer society, the TV landscape

and the nuclear arms race.” He speaks of SF as having tremendous vitality, and being original, fresh, optimistic and positive. “It was a visionary engine ... a hot rod ... propelled by an exotic literary fuel as rich and dangerous as anything that drove the surrealists.” He wasn’t interested in space travel. “It seemed to me that psychological space, what I termed ‘inner space,’ was where science fiction should be heading.”

This all sets me to thinking about ways to try and write something fresh and outrageous, I have in mind that I need a story for the impending issue #8 of *Flurb*. And possibly something I come up with for that might lead the way to a new plot thread for *Jim and the Flims*.

August 5-12, 2009. No News From Tor. Short Story “Bad Ideas”.

August 5, 2009.

By the way, while I was in Seattle for Clarion, I ran into my Tor editor, David Hartwell, and he still hasn’t looked at my proposal for *Jim and the Flims*. He had four finished manuscripts arrive for final edits, and he’s been busy with that, as well as with going to cons and SF events, including teaching week five of Clarion, which was why he was in Seattle.

By way of fishing for some kind of commitment, I said, “Well, I guess I’ll just go ahead and keep working on *Jim and the Flims* anyway.” Dave: “Yeah...do that.” So I might as well take that to mean that of course he’s likely to buy the book. To really ensure this, I do need to follow up on those inklings of a stronger ending that I had in mid-July.

Last night I slept badly, with a mixed-up Ballardian SF story cooking in my head. In my half-waking state, I was dithering between calling it “Good Ideas” or “Bad Ideas.” In my hypnagogic state, I saw the story as resembling what passes through my head while cruising the web, a series of (superficially) unrelated incidents, a cut-up based on a series of SF vignettes.

But I’d rather write a “real” story, as experimental writing is usually dull. In this connection, I think of the choreographer Marc Morris irritably saying, “Why is that whenever people improvise, it always comes out the same?” Not that I totally rule out writing an experimental story some other time—but today I’m thinking of a conventionally formed (if radically themed) SF story called “Bad Ideas.” I want to have a weird, well-crafted story for *Flurb* #8, and thereby (I imagine) show my recent Clarion students that I do know what I’m doing. So okay, fine, what’s in the story?

Contradictions. Being in Canada, I get the feeling that the people here aren’t as tense as my fellow citizens of the US. The US is plagued by a lot of unacknowledged conflicts and internal contradictions—elephants-in-the-living-room relating to matters of class, income and race.

False path: Would telepathy in the US lead to riots? But, really, everyone *knows* what other people are thinking (but not saying). What if people just started saying shocking things all the time? Maybe because there’s a law mandating this. But then we get a story filled with crude insults...can this work? Done with the right touch it could be liberating or funny—I think of the woman comedian at Obama’s inauguration dinner saying that Rush Limbaugh was supposed to be one of the 9/11 terrorists, but that Rush was late for the mission because he was busy scoring drugs. Not that I feel like writing a short-half-life piece that’s overly topical. If I did it, I’d make the bones of contention be nonsensical, like an

argument about which end to open a soft-boiled egg, as in *Gulliver's Travels*—and in this case the story wouldn't exactly be realistic, it might be in an alternate or future world.

Correct path: It would be interesting if people started literally breaking up into pieces as the result of their contradictory ideas. Like your left arm secedes from your body, and then gets into internal squabbles with the fingers splitting off, and the arm dividing at the elbow. Due to some dark-matter upgrade, your arm can live on its own, it can even grow an eye, a mouth, and a simple digestive tract. This effect can make a good kicker ending.

Start. The internet is still quite new and undigested, some fresh SF ways of treating it could be good. I've discussed telepathy and a global mind in the *Postsingular* series. But for this story, let's do something more literal and less scientific. I think of ideas that crawl around like slugs. And you can stomp on them. Thus the story's title: "Bad Ideas."

To start the story out, I'll use an old story idea that I have on the shelf, the one I called "[Happy Hour](#)." But I'll leave out the vodka. The woman is a goody-goody, a down-trodden housewife. Due to something she sees on TV or on a viral video on her computer, she becomes able to externalize her ideas. She spits out her mousiness, it takes the form of a little Jane Austen figure on the floor, she stomps it like a cockroach. Her memories of her parents are mean little dolls, she chops them up with the kitchen knife and her dog eats them—wow, they're actually meat. She gets rid of more and more of her ideas, and becomes a blank, vegetating for a few days, eating food from the fridge, and then some evangelist/cop types show up and unleash some bullying little ideas of their own that turn her into a soldier for the Faith.

Better middle. Suppose that her husband is a fat guy who watches porno and sports on his computer. And he pukes out a Bosch-Hell pile of lubricious naked figures. And another mound of athletes. And then he's pretty much mindless.

PC Uplift Ending. Maybe the guy had some key to controlling the ideas, and the woman now takes over the world. "There'd be some changes made."

Weird Ending. Their body parts are seceding—a stronger ending.

Okay, that's a start—now I'll make a new document and write the story. But I'll need better characters. A story doesn't work if you use stock characters—as I kept telling the Clarion students.

August 8, 2009.

I worked up sketches for the two main characters in my story, "Bad Ideas."

Bea. A cultivated, thoughtful, and kind-seeming woman who speaks mildly—but at times turns means as a snake. She's rather self-centered, and can take a permanent and serious dislike to someone over a fairly small issue. Over the years, she's broken off with her parents, and with her brother. Really, she's somewhat timid, and reacts by lashing out.

She spent time in Spain as a young woman, fascinated by flamenco. She's an English-to-Spanish interpreter for the courts, reliable, she likes the people she helps, mostly deportation cases.

She likes reading history books, and is fond of talking at length about what she's read, but isn't interested in joining book group discussions. Her husband isn't intellectual, so she tends to talk about her books with friends and neighbors when she can corner them. She likes to watch foreign movies, and explains them to her husband, but he doesn't always

understand. She has a male admirer at work, a public defender, who is a bit more interested in intellectual topics, but she thinks of him as weak and stupid.

She gave up an illegitimate son for adoption as a baby, and feels guilty about that, not that she wants to have her son on her hands. Recently she and her son met, and they had some counseling, and get along reasonably well.

She hates organized Christianity, and goes with her husband to Hindu gurus, and extols about the wisdom of the gurus, their vibe—she and her husband have this in common. When they were younger they lived communally in a Berkeley ashram together for several years, a discipline so harsh that the men and women slept in separate dorms.

Nils. Skinny, cheerful, a mechanical engineer who builds prototypes for a company that makes machines for chip fabs. He's friendly and lively in company, but he often misses the point of what people are saying. He's Norwegian and has never fully mastered English, partly because he doesn't hear very well, due to a nearly lethal fall while rock-climbing in his twenties—the fall cracked his skull. Also, he has very little education.

Nils likes to ski, hike and bicycle or, failing that, to drive places. He doesn't like to sit still, he never reads a book. This said, he meditates, and the yoga works for him, he's inwardly calm despite his somewhat frenetic activities. He's a gardener with a complex system of hoses and timers, with raised beds and fences against the gophers and deer. He's a beekeeper.

He spends a considerable amount of time online studying cameras, bicycles and cars, particularly used items on eBay, even though he never seems to buy any of the stuff.

Today I'm on the plane, flying from Calgary to San Jose. I've been reading Pynchon's old novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*, and it feels as if the Muse is talking to me through it. It's "fortunate" that I happened to bring this particular book along for the trip's casual reading. Here's some quotes.

[Our heroine Oedipa Maas was wondering if there might be]

"...a real alternative to the exitlessness, to the absence of surprise to life, that harrows the head of everybody American you know..."

I'm feeling more confident about the story, and Pynchon's example is an invitation to kick it up a notch. It's nice to know I'm writing it for my *Flurb* webzine, so I don't need to second-guess my intended publisher's tastes.

August 12, 2009.

The Muse came to me the other day. What invited her in was that I started fleshing the outline into a story...and now I'm nearly done. Here's a bit I cut out, it's nice, but it's distracting, as I don't want the adopted son theme to take over.

"Somewhere in this orgy of self-annihilation, Bea found the presence of mind to save a special memory among the tea bags in a kitchen drawer: her golden memory of the safe delivery of her son. As it happened, the boy had sought her out last year—all grown up by now—and, although cordial, the meeting had not been warm. They were unlikely to meet again. For whatever quirks of fate and personality, the full extent of Bea's motherly joy would forever be delimited to that one afternoon on the ranch, with the sun angling its light onto the tiny, fragile, precious human whom she'd grown within her flesh. And maybe that was enough. But, by the same token, less than this was unacceptable. The birth memory was

not to be lost. And so she snuggled the tiny thought-grown baby-doll among the sachets of chamomile.”

God, it feels good to be writing again. And yet, I spend so much time every day avoiding it... I also have to fight the thought that I’m writing this story for, in some sense, nothing—that is, I quixotically plan to put it straight into *Flurb* without even trying to sell it.

August 14-15, 2009. A New Model for Flimsy’s Topology

I finished my painting of a disk with an infinite center, *Topology of the Afterworld*, like I was talking about in my entry “Flimsy as a Monad with an Infinite Center,” on July 22, 2009.



Figure 21: Topology of the Afterworld, acrylic 40” x 30”

So, okay, Flimsy is a disk, and I might as well assume it’s sitting inside a sphere of living water, a tough rubbery shell of the living water. And under Flimsy is a thin sheet of living water, and purgatory is a disk under that. And the center is infinitely far away.

I need a good name for the central spot, I don’t really want to call it White Hole, that’s too limiting. The flims call it something—but what? God would easy, but that’s a particular box I don’t want to get into unless I really mean to. Maybe they call it Hell? Gehenna? Heaven? Hellaven (a portmanteau combination of Heaven and Hell)? Let’s use hellaven for now. Or maybe spell it more simply, like Helaven, or even Heleven, so the etymology doesn’t hit you over the head. Helaven is better as it has “haven” in it, rather than “eleven.”

I had this idea—and maybe I should drop it—that Jim and Durkle would tunnel down through purgatory and drop out of a floor hatch in the lowest level of purgatory, and they’d find themselves falling from the Flimsy sky, that is, from the dome of living water above Flimsy. It’s dramatic. But how do I explain it?

Here’s three explanations—I’d really like to lay this issue to rest, as I’ve been hung up on it for way too long, and I feel like it’s blocking me from proceeding on the book. This said, it could be that there’s something about the issue that’s core to my psyche and my state of resonance with the world of *Jim and the Flims*.

(*Explanation 1: Bent Purgatory*) In my entry “The Topology of the Living Water,” on July 17, 2009, I entertained the notion of having purgatory somehow bend around past the disk of Flimsy to be on top of it as well as under it—but that’s kludgy, and asymmetrical, and it poses the problem of how the snail-tunnel goes through from Flimsy straight to Earth, intersecting the living water, yes, but presumably not intersecting purgatory.

(*Explanation 2: Hypertorus*) I could simply claim that the bottom of purgatory is “glued” to the top of the sky, in the manner of the zickzack spatial connections. This would feel more natural if I thought of the living water container as being a cylinder instead of a sphere. I could think of a torus shape, in other words, but with the cylinder not actually bent in 3D space, but simply as a cylinder who’s top and bottom are...connected. A hypertorus.

This is a little bewildering for a non-mathematician, but I kind of like it. I would want to keep in mind that I ultimately want Flimsy in its shell to be the same as an electron. So far as I know, however, electrons aren’t necessarily “spherical.” In fact, given that they have “spin” we could think of them as being cylinders, and the hyperconnection would seem okay, too. But it’s pushing things.

(*Explanation 3: Living Water Flow*) I could suppose that there is a powerful and rapid flow of the living water, and that when Jim and Durkle tunnel down out of the lowest level of purgatory, they’re rapidly swept up into the sky, and they jump down from there. This is a fairly attractive notion, as it’s pretty easy to understand. And we might suppose that the infinitely distant hole in the center of Flimsy has a recycling fountain-like quality, creating a more or less toroidal flow through the central Helaven, with living water emanating from it, streaming around Flimsy and eventually dropping back into the Helaven from the sky. Okay, fine, let’s go with that. Here’s a picture.

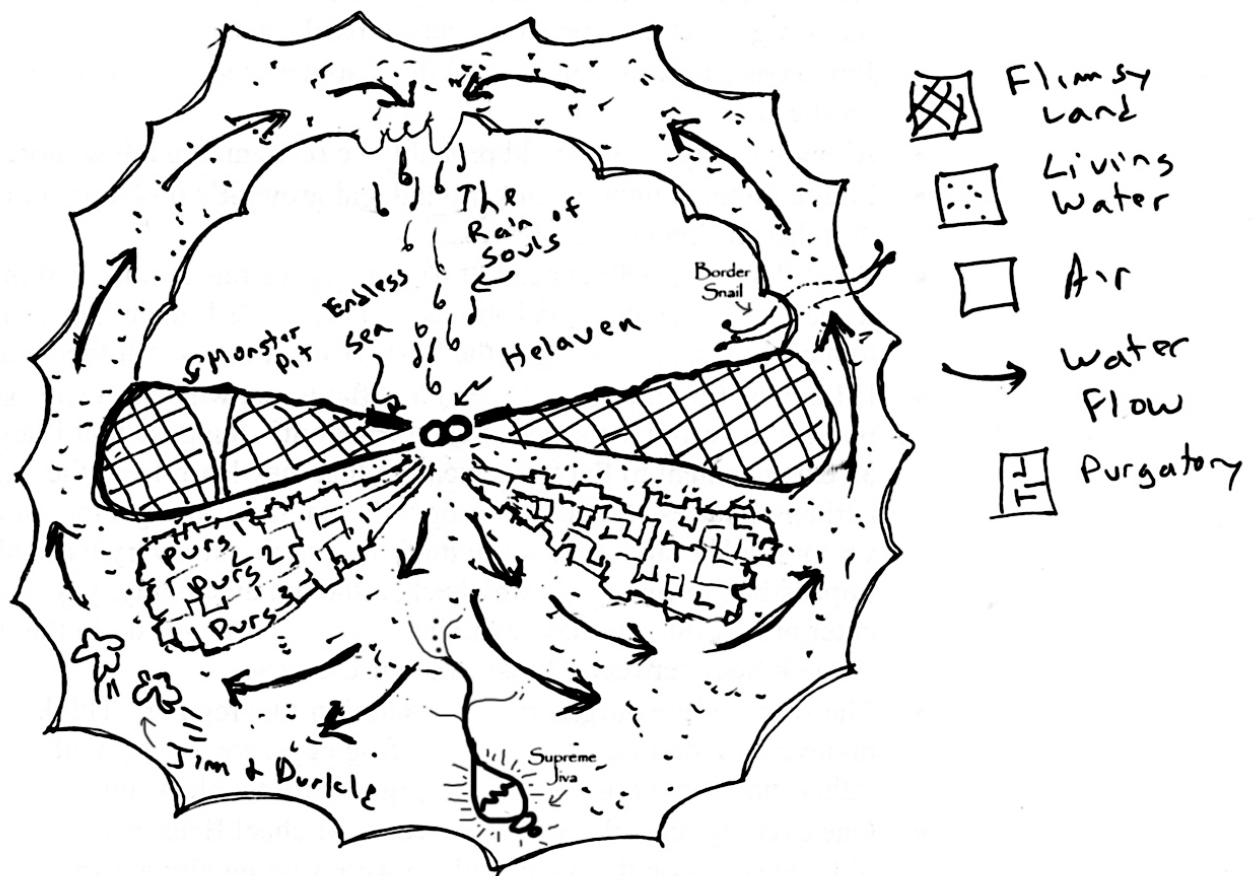


Figure 22: Flow model for Flimsy

Note the border snail on the right, sticking through to make a tunnel. Note also that I have an “Endless Sea” around the central Helaven, this can be like the shallow waters of Pyramid Lake.

A fine rain of souls is falling from the sky above Helaven. The souls are absorbed into the light, and new water and souls flow outward below.

Purgatory is a bunch of corridors and boxes, somewhat randomly accreted, like the Winchester Mystery House, like an airport terminal forever under construction, like a repeatedly renovated mall.

Jim and Durlle go through the Monster Pit, through Purgatory, and are swept with the living water in the sky, and they dive back down from there.

The tapering of the landmasses towards the center indicates that the center is, in effect, infinitely far away.

And there might as well be a great leviathan—a gnarly tentacle-laden Supreme Jiva in that great gulf of living water at the bottom, a puppet-master who in fact controls all the sun-sized jivas in Flimsy—and I may as well suppose that some mid-level jivas are controlling the jivas in Weena, Jim, and so on. (Turns out that thing I was calling the Supreme Jiva up until a few days ago was only the Easternmost Jiva.)

Groovy.

So now I'm revising the chapters from "Under the Pit" through "Dark Gulf" to include the flow model, and I'm putting in other revisions as well here and there in the earlier chapters.

Given that Flimsy is now infinite, I'm downgrading the status of the former King Korban and the former Supreme Jiva. I'll have Duke Dim and Duchess Qwin instead of King Korban and Queen Qwin. He's the Duke of East Flimsy, rather than the King of Flimsy. It's the Easternmost Jiva, not the Supreme Jiva. Fine.

I'm wondering if it isn't too much hassle to bring Jim's dog, Droog, along on the trip. I don't see Droog as serving much of a plot function. Maybe Droog could be waiting back in Santa Cruz, like Odysseus's faithful dog Argos. Seeing Odysseus across the courtyard, Argos wags his tail. Odysseus brushes away a tear, but being in disguise, doesn't go over and pet Argos. Instead he heads into the hall to kick butt. And then, "*Argos passed into the darkness of death, now that he had seen his master once more after twenty years.*"

August 19, 2009. Offer?

Day before yesterday, on August 17, 2009, with my new ideas for *Jim and the Flims* in mind, I revised the outline and sent Dave Hartwell at Tor a fresh proposal. And that afternoon I went out to a favorite spot on Four Mile Beach, north of Santa Cruz.

I did a little routine that I've often done while working on a new novel in recent years—I draw a logarithmic spiral in the sand and I letter the slogan, "EADEM MUTATA RESURGO", which is Latin for "The Same, Yet Changed, I Re-arise."

The mathematician Jakob (or James) Bernoulli (1655-1705) has this inscribed on his tombstone in Basel along with a picture of a spiral (the engraver goofed and put an evenly spaced Archimedean spiral instead of a growing and seashell-like logarithmic spiral).

I started writing this slogan on beaches while writing *Frek and the Elixir*, and in fact the slogan is mentioned in that novel. I think maybe I've done it while working on each novel since then. You can [search my blog for "resurgo"](#) to see the other spots where I've mentioned it.

Today (Aug 19, 2009), I yet again re-mailed my proposals and drafts for both *Jim and the Flims* and the *Nested Scrolls* memoir to David Hartwell. He'd complained early today that on Aug 17, I'd only sent the documents in PDF format, and that he'd prefer to read them in RTF format—which I took as a good sign, as it seemed to indicate that he did now have (a) free time to consider my proposals and (b) free scheduling slots in which to consider placing my books

And then I worked on *Jim and the Flims* most of the afternoon, writing a fun and long-planned passage about a sinister alien plant called (coincidentally, yet, I'm sure, synchronistically) an "offer cap". I prepared to [blog the passage](#), and right about then my agent phoned to say she'd spent a half hour on the phone with Dave and that he was going to try to get Tor to give me an offer for both books!

Hooray!

What a relief. It's almost like the magic worked. Magic plus umpteen hours of writing and maneuvering, that is. What a long haul it is being a writer. Beginners have no frikkin' idea.

And really, how strange and wonderful it is that I happened to do my Resurgo thing yesterday and that I happened to write about the “offer cap” today—and then the offers came in.

Life is the greatest novel of them all.

Now to see if Dave can actually get the plan approved, but I’m optimistic about this, as he’s high-ranking at Tor, and my sales have been okay for them, if not sensational. Dave just got the 2009 Hugo for best Editor (Long Form), which can’t hurt.

It’s especially cool and surprising that they’re likely to put out my memoir as well. Wow.

In the old days I’d be getting wasted right about now by way of self-annihilating “celebration”—in these new days I’ll take a bike ride. And at least smoke a cigarette.

August 20, 2009. *Yuel and Jiva Dialect*

My writing’s going pretty good again—although starting tomorrow I’ll be at the beach for four days with the kids, so won’t be doing much in the coming week.

I’m writing a scene with the yuels confronting Jim and Ginnie in the “Offers” chapter, and it occurs to me that the yuels are going to be better characters if they can talk—but that their speech should be strange.

I think of the Unipuskers in *Frek*, who only talk in imperative sentences, that was rich, a great gimmick for expressing bossiness. And the devilish-looking Wackles in *Spaceland*, they talked in a kind of Beat poetry. When thinking of alien speech, I also recall my first-generation-immigrant Vietnamese computer science students at SJSU, that’s an interesting speech model, but I’ve used that before, I think.

Here’s a simple and powerful idea: the yuels speak in strings of verbs. and the jivas speak in strings of nouns!

It expresses a nice distinction between them. The yuels are more Zen-like, in action, flowing. And the jivas are more capitalist, hoarding, acquiring.

Originally I had the jivas talking in a somewhat dull orotund society-lady Mrs. Earbore kind of way. Like a traditional SF-movie villain with a deep voice and a British accent. But, yeah, it’s more fun, mysterious, poetic, and alien if the jivas instead speak in strings of nouns.

Nouns are easier to string together. When I string together verbs, I think I’ll have to allow gerunds, that is words ending in “-ing”.

September 14-15, 2009. *Back to Work Again, Planning Chap 13*

Sept 14, 2009

I did a couple of good weeks work on *Jim and the Flims* at the end of August. I reread and revised the last few chapters, and finished my “Offers” chapter. And then something else came up, which I mentioned before—Postscript Publishing and Tor Books started talking about buying my memoir, *Nested Scrolls*—Postscript would do a limited edition, and Tor a trade edition.

So I got into rereading and revising the memoir, also adding the missing chapters that I hadn’t yet done at the end. That went pretty well, I’m happy with that book now, and I sent the Version 2 off, hopefully to help inspire Tor to actually follow through and formally offer me a two book deal for *Nested Scrolls* and for *Jim and the Flims*.

So now it’s back to *Jim and the Flims* again. It’s a drag to have actually been writing on it less than a month ago, and then to have dropped back and lost my momentum once

again. It's such an effort to get back into a noel when I've stepped away. That's why writing is generally easier for me now that I'm not working a day-job. These days I can just stay with a project day after day for weeks at a time. But this summer, I've had all sorts of distractions.

Anyway, I feel a discouraged about *Jim and the Flims* today, like my heart isn't really in it. I think it might be the worst book I've ever written. But I've thought that before, on other books. Maybe I've been right each time! Maybe my books get worse and worse and worse. Maybe I should quit writing. I could just paint all the time. Only the painting I'm working on right now, "Grandpa and the Twins," is a mess as well. Everything's hopeless, I'm senile and inept.

And, come on, what the fuck is *Jim and the Flims* about anyway? And—I hate to ask this again—*why* do I care about these characters? What a fiasco, what a loss, what a nightmare this project is.

It always cheers me up to write despairing journal notes like this. Wheenk!

To some extent the griping is the sound of a part of me that wants to convince the rest of me that I can just give up and not do the work of finishing the book.

Really there's some good scenes in *Jim and the Flims* already, and some opportunities for very cool scenes coming up. Any book can be wonderful.

I need to remember that it's just meant to be entertainment, and not worry about it so much. Don't try to hit it out of the park, Rudy. Get back to the craft of the writing and you'll cheer up.

And, oh yes, I care about Jim because he's me in a few years. And Durkle is me as a boy. Ginnie—who is Ginnie exactly? I don't quite have a fix on her. A hip young woman, kind of like Thuy Nguyen was. Not necessarily transreal, but inspired by all the wise, funny, worldly, sweet-and-sour women I've actually known.

I was calling that carnivorous mobile mushroom an "offer cap," but that name's a carry-over from when I was envisioning it as resembling a peacock's tail. I need a more appropriate name. Keep the "offer" but change fan to—what? Mushroom, wrong rhythm. Shroom, too druggy. Toadstool, too long. Cap is okay. Offer cap, sounds nice and dumb, like gimmie cap. And like inky cap mushrooms.

Sept 15, 2009

Now for "The Castle" chapter. What's it like in the castle?

I can't have them be in hallways there, or it'll feel too much like the purgatory chapter. I want things to be different in the castle. I'm thinking it resembles the interior of the Unipuskers' spaceship in *Frek*. Very plush. Or, more to the point, like that Rosenborg Castle I visited with Sylvia in Copenhagen. But this isn't quite right. I don't really want it to be Victorian or medieval. I want it to be ostentatious and wasteful in some different way.

It's mostly big rooms, only a few per giant leaf, and the rooms have lots of light and lots of windows, and there aren't tunnels through the stems, instead you fly from leaf to leaf, borne by the geranium's tendrils.

The rooms are exceedingly richly furnished because the geranium can make stuff just like the offer plant could. In fact the geranium is (as I'll discuss later) bankrupting the kingdom with the kessence budget for this castle.

Perhaps Durkle's house could make stuff too, come to think of it. But if Durkle's house can make stuff, why was he so excited about the offer cap? Maybe the offer cap is more prone to making stuff that a kid really wants. Durkle's house only obeyed his parents, Monin and Yerba, especially his mother Yerba.

I should use a different word than "vaar" for direct matter control, as I think I already had "vaar" in *Frek and the Elixir*, in *Saucer Wisdom*, and in *Realware*. "Fab." Jivas, humans, ghosts, and animals can't fab. But some plants can do it, and I think yuels can fab as well. Really those clone garden bodies are a type of fabbing, they're grown by hatcher plants, and they're made of kessence. The way fabbing works is that the plant talks to some kessence and coaxes it into a shape.

Re. fabbing—is the matter in Flimsy made of atoms? No, but I won't get into all that until September 17, 2009. For now, suffice it to say that everything in Flimsy has to be made of kessence and/or zickzack.

Up until today, I had a jiva making a real-world sandwich out of nothing in purgatory. But now I'll drop that. Because if the jivas could fab kessence or matter, they wouldn't need the humanoid clones grown by Durkle's parents. So that sandwich was zickzack.

Note that the yuels they can teleport, so they have a bit of control over space, but I'd rather not have them making zickzack. I want them to have different powers from the jivas. So we'll say they can fab things out of kessence. If a ghost gets a body from the yuels it's a kessence body.

Summing up; the jivas can make things of zickzack (folded space). The plants and yuels can fab stuff from kessence (aether). That's it.

If the geranium can fab things, then the nobles in the castle have swords—we can suppose that Durkle knew that, which is why he was excited to have his sword. In any case, later on, Durkle's sword should do something important, it's like a weapon that you find early in a videogame, and you need it later on.

The Duke and Duchess can be like...why not like my parents? Or maybe the Duke is like my old department chair at Geneseo, Bill S., and the Duchess is like my former neighbor Elena V. Or a mix of those two.

Little lizards scurry around the floors in the castle. Like geckos or iguanas. Call them gecks. They're made of kessence, made by the big geranium. They're colorful and the nobles are prone to eating them for snacks, like Gummi worms. The gecks are inhabited by unfortunate human souls—some people settle for a tiny lizard body if they can't score a human-size zickzack body.

(If there's ghosts in the lizards, I need to wonder why the ghosts in Flimsy aren't moving into all kinds of flora and fauna in Flimsy—into the animals, plants, even the breezes. We'll suppose the gecks are somehow designed to accept ghosts, whereas the other things aren't.)

I remember those repellently self-abasing hymns that are like, "Praise Him, Praise Him on his Throne," going on and on in that vein. Some of that in the castle maybe—but, no, we already did that kind of thing with the Eastern Jiva in her Nest. That shit bores me. Suppose the castle vibe is less like a stuffy court and more like a gypsy encampment. Hippies in a dome. That would be more fun. I want to enjoy the castle, I want it to be a

treat. Purgatory was to some extent a drag, and rather thinly imagined, although I did like the Platonic archetype shops.

Why don't they have a clone garden by the geranium castle? Too icky? Maybe there's something about that snail that helps feed the garden of Durple's parents.

Background music in the geranium, plant song.

September 16, 2009. The True Nature of Flimsy

Why do the jivas want or need other beings (whether flesh or ghost) as hosts? Of course the bigger jivas aren't in people. Is it a way to leech kessence?

I need to find a connecting pattern behind these aspects of jivas:

They like to run the shops in purgatory.

They like to live inside humans (and inside other intelligent beings).

They like to hatch their larvae inside living flesh.

Okay, how about this. The jivas love to organize data, they're like brain organs that way—thus the interest in accumulating every possible instance of a given concept like Ball or Sandwich. The jivas are nosy and like finding out personal information—thus the desire to live inside humans (or other intelligent beings). The jivas don't have much kessence ("soul") of their own, and they need this substance to nurture their larval growth—thus the implantation of eggs in kessence-rich human flesh or in the all-kessence dummies that Monin grows in the clone garden.

There's a big map of Flimsy in the castle. Finally we get the picture. Suppose that Flimsy is a much larger disk than I'd been thinking, and that all the afterlife regions are along the edge, like the slots on a roulette wheel. For reasons I describe in "[Population of Flimsy](#)" note, I'll suppose there's a septillion slots. I'll drop the idea of having the center of Flimsy be infinitely far away, as it's extraneous, and a repeat of things I've written before. In fact I'll go to the other extreme and suppose that the distance to the center is considerably less than you'd expect. A certain kind of negatively curved space can have this property—I'm thinking of a pizza-dough disk whose edges are massively stretched and ruffled.

There's a region for each intelligent race in our universe, which is not in fact infinite. The slots nearest to us are occupied by Solsols, who are beings from inside the sun, and by Bulbers, who are aeroforms in the atmosphere of Jupiter.

Suppose that we glimpse Solsols and Bulbers in purgatory, and a few of them are visiting the Duke's castle as well.

Rather than speaking of the Easternmost Jiva and the Duke of East Flimsy as I had been thus far, I'll call them the **Earthmost Jiva** and the **Duke of Human Flimsy**. This puts emphasis on the fact that there are lots of races in Flimsy, and that Earth isn't in any unique geographic position vis-a-vis Flimsy. (Rejected names: Duke of Terran Flimsy, Duke of Earthian Flimsy, and the confusing Human Jiva.)

For the neighbors I'll use simpler names: the Solsol Jiva and the Count of Solsol Flimsy and the Bulber Jiva and the Prince of Bulber Flimsy, both of whom rank higher than our Duke of Human Flimsy.

Given the big roulette-wheel-like disk design of Flimsy, I no longer need to suppose that the middle is infinitely large. As I mentioned above, I'll suppose that the middle is in fact closer than one might expect. But I'll still have that very large and calm Prince Caspian sea in the middle, a sea of the living water, we may as well suppose, with the inhabited afterworlds around the border like a circle of land around a landlocked lake. It's like the lagoon inside an atoll. We have a rain of souls in the middle and a spacy glowing light with voices in it at the very center—this is the localized interface of the being that is Flimsy.

I won't put a vortex or maelstrom in the center, as I just did that in *Hylozoic*. And I hid infinity in thick fog in *Hylozoic*, so I won't have fog. It'll just be very clear pellucid water, glowing water—it's like having an old-time nuclear reactor in a swimming pool full of cooling water that glows purplish blue with Čerenkov radiation (caused because the hard radiation travels through the water faster than light.)

The mind of Flimsy is distributed throughout the land—I'm thinking of the jivas as the neurons of the Flimsy brain. So it's not accurate to think of the soul of Flimsy as being located in this glowing region of the Helaven Sea. Rather we might say this is where the human interface of Flimsy resides, that is, it's like a Delphic cave where you can converse with the god.

The nearly divine being that is Flimsy as a whole can reach a glowing tendril out through the "north pole" of the Flimsy orb to touch the worlds outside. This tendril is like the streamers inside the Hollow Earth, it's an aethereal arm, soft lighting, a fickle finger of fate. We don't see this capability until the very last chapter.

Flimsy is an organism. The jivas are its neurons and higher brain nodules, and the yuels are its blood corpuscles, maybe like antibody-bearing leucocytes in particular.

There is no true Supreme Jiva. The jivas are just cells or organelles, and the mind of Flimsy emerges from their joint activities. There are some really big jivas in the living waters under purgatory, but they're just nodes themselves.

Flimsy is inside every atom of our universe, every atom is Flimsy.

It's as if Flimsy is a bulb or root or rhizome, and the universe is foliage that Flimsy grows, and the ghosts who travel from the universe to Flimsy are like sugars made by photosynthesis in a plant's leaves. Flimsy grows the universe to feed itself.

Having Flimsy allow the jivas to destroy Earth is like a plant deciding to let an unhealthy leaf wither and drop away, its stem weakened by organelles within the plant.

The Earthmost Jiva and the Duke of Human Flimsy are in hock to the Flimsy being. They over-spent on the castle and their lifestyle. The castle is continually glowing with kessence energy. Maybe that's why the Count of Solsol Flimsy and the Prince of Bulber Flimsy are over there partying.

The Earthmost Jiva and the Duke of Human Flimsy plan to liquidate Earth to pay off the debt, and then they hope to go sponge off the Solsols or the Bulbers

The Earthmost Jiva and the Duke of Human Flimsy are somewhat like the financiers who drove the U.S. into depression and wanted bailouts. Like Lehman Brothers, or Sachs-Goldman, or AIG, or WaMu. Topical satire!

I'd been seeing the closing-down of Earth as involving a huge invasion of jivas. And this could still be how it would work. We only see the aethereal arm of Flimsy coming into play in the last chapter, when Jim begs Flimsy for help.

September 17, 2009. Expunging Meat Bodies From Flimsy.

Today when I woke up, I started thinking that if there were alien races in Flimsy, then maybe the physical environment in Flimsy needs to change along the rim from slot to slot? But if the aliens and humans are all ghosts, then we shouldn't really have to worry about life support, the main thing is that the environment supports the flims, such as jivas and yuels.

It's more reasonable to suppose that we have a uniform kind of environment in Flimsy, perhaps something rather cartoony, but in any case a landscape that works for Flimsy's internal processes—keep in mind that I'm thinking of Flimsy as a living organism itself.

Another point that hit me this morning is that Flimsy is supposed to be inside every atom, then we wouldn't expect any of the stuff in Flimsy to be made of atoms, molecules or ordinary matter.

So if I have no atoms in Flimsy, and the alien beings are all ghosts of various kinds, then we can't really have Jim or Weena or Durkle being in "normal" meat bodies in Flimsy. And this brings on a host of revisions.

Before getting down to that, let's get clear on what the things in Flimsy are actually made of. They're all made of various combinations of zickzack (curved space) and kessence (an absolutely continuous fluid like aether).

Even though zickzack is made of space, I think of it as a bit kludgy, like Lego block models, or like digital computer simulations. And kessence is flowing, analog stuff, akin to aether. The solidity or size of a ghost has to do with how much kessence it packs, and whether it has a zickzack armature inside it. A normal ghost uses a minimal amount of kessence, but if we layer up enough kessence, we can get something rather juicy. And a ghost can acquire a zickzack body which is a little like a robot body. Jim is a juicy ghost.

So what are the jivas and yuels made of? I see the yuels as being pure kessence. And I might as well say the jivas are mostly zickzack. How is it that a jiva can glow like a sun if it's mostly zickzack—well, let's say they endlessly mirror a single tiny scrap of kessence. Like a Hollywood type making a big deal of their mildly quirky personality or their slightly-above-average IQ. Like Sharon Stone, say, or Diablo Cody.

What about the plants and animals in Flimsy? And the flims? They're mostly kessence, too. And when a plant fabs something, it's making it out of kessence.

Why a ghost would eat at all, even if it has a kessence/zickzack body? Well, it eats kessence.

So now, as I said, I'll stop having meat beings in Flimsy. This poses a number of problems that I need to solve.

Jim in Flimsy would have to be a pure kessence projection of himself, with a jiva assistant. His real body is in fact slumbering in the basement of that Whipped Vic house in Santa Cruz.

I think I used the slumbering body move in *White Light*—I think Alwin was seemingly passed-out at the Dew Drop Inn while his soul was in Cimön.

If Jim's dog Droog comes to Flimsy, his body waits in Cruz as well. But, naw, I'll just leave the dog home, I'm hardly using him in Flimsy anyway, this isn't really boy-and-his-dog book, after all.

And what about Weena? I had this idea of Weena and the Wizard being Alicia Boole and Howard Hinton, who have transmitted themselves into the afterworld intact when old, using some hyperdimensional spiritualism ruse.

But suppose instead that Weena (and Hinton) are effectively immortals on Earth in very old bodies that are held together because they have jivas inside them. And when Weena or Hinton hop over to Flimsy, their bodies slumber on Earth, a little like vampires or zombies or mediums. Weena gets Jim to lie down on a ledge or in a coffin in the basement, and he sits up out of his flesh and only then goes into the tunnel.

While your body slumbers, your jiva and kessence soul can go over to Flimsy. But now and then you return to your crypt and reanimate your body.

It's not exactly like being a zombie—I think of a zombie as reanimating a human body that's truly dead. A soul in a corpse. Astral traveler is a gentler word.

What about the sex issue? I'd written it so that Jim could have hot sex with Weena on Earth, and I guess that can still work, assuming her ancient body is jiva-rejuvenated. But then I supposed that Jim couldn't have satisfactory sex with Ginnee's ghost in the afterworld. Yet in the afterworld, Jim and Ginnee are now on an equal footing, they're both made of kessence with a zickzack body. And, after all, sex is largely in the head.

So maybe I was chickening out on the astral sex. Belatedly trying to have Jim be faithful to his dead wife. But it would be more interesting if Jim and Ginnee were lovers. I think readers would prefer that to the hypocritically abstemious scenario I presently have. But, to make it weird, suppose that I do a bacterial-conjugation number for their sex on Flimsy. A band connects them and kessence flows back and forth. Gnarly, dude. I like it. A full spinal orgasm (though the spine is a tube of kessence at this point).

To Do

- * Jim and Weena leave their bodies on Earth. Maybe Weena shows Jim the storage pod in the basement of the Whipped Vic, or Jim sees it on his own when he goes through the snail.
- * The clone garden scene in Flimsy has to be altered so that the clones are thick kessence, rather than being meat.
- * The idea of Durkle being an actual meat child goes away too, instead he has to be thick kessence. He's a juicy ghost, maybe with a little extra kessence gotten from a yuel. Jim is a juicy ghost too, but he also has zickzack.
- * Jim has bacteria-style sex with Ginnee in Flimsy, and he likes it.
- * Leave Droog home in Santa Cruz.
- * There isn't just one Supreme Jiva down in the Dark Gulf, there are lots of them, giant jivas.
- * Say that Weena was a woman from the DC area who was Hinton's mistress, and that she and he left their bodies in 1907. See my revised "[Who Is Weena?](#)" entry.
- * There should be some guys fertilizing the plant outside, with hods of kessence, maybe it's Bulbers and Solsols doing that.

A win with Jim leaving his body is that maybe when he gets back, he can't find it. The cops have him and Weena in the fridge at the morgue. Or, more likely, in intensive care in the hospital, in comas. That would be cool. Their jivas help them escape.

If Ginnie comes back to Earth, maybe they dig up her body and reanimate it with her ghost, and then we get to have a real zombie. Come to think of it, Header was a kind of zombie too, as he was, I think dead—his brain was gone—and he had a yuel living in his skull. A healthy zombie. But Ginnie would be a more traditional body-parts-dropping covered-with-grave-dirt zombie.

September 20-24, 2009. Weena and Charles. Mandelbulbs.

This follows up my "[Who Is Weena?](#)" entry of May 27, 2009. As I suggested there, I now plan to make up an unknown woman Weena Wesson who was a student, and mistress, of Charles Hinton when he lived in Washington DC.

The downside here is that I'm not, after all, honoring an existing woman mathematician Alicia Boole Stott. So I need to have Weena at least mention her. Perhaps she's envious of Alicia.

Hinton's years: 1853-1907. His final toast at a banquet in DC was "To female philosophers." He (seemingly) died of a heart attack or stroke on the sidewalk. But this was a plan that he and Weena had hatched, and they both went into a trance at the same time.

I can suppose that Weena Wesson might was born in 1860 (like Alicia Boole), but she "dies" when Hinton does, in 1907, and she was 47 at the time. If I assume my book is set in 2010, this was 103 years ago, and Weena's body is effectively 150 years old.

I might suppose that Weena's been back to Earth three times. I could say they came, every 31 years, which means 1938, 1969, and 2010. But I think I'll make it 1939, 1986, and 2010. In 1939 they were frightened and repelled by the Second World War, in 1986 they learned about fractals. And it was in 1986 that Charles moved his and Weena's bodies to California. They came when I did, right when the Mandelbrot set was really popular.

Weena and Charles have bankrupted the Duke of Human Flimsy by carrying out their very extensive mathematical investigations of, let us say, higher-dimensional higher-order fractals. They're looking for the ultimate Mandelbrot set, just like I've been doing of late, see my September 15, 2009 blog post, "[In Search of the Mandelbulb.](#)"

Building on that post, I worked out some numbers that make the following scenario plausible, found in the Notes under the title, "[Breaking the Bank of Computation.](#)" The link for origin for the image shown below is found in a comment I added to this post.

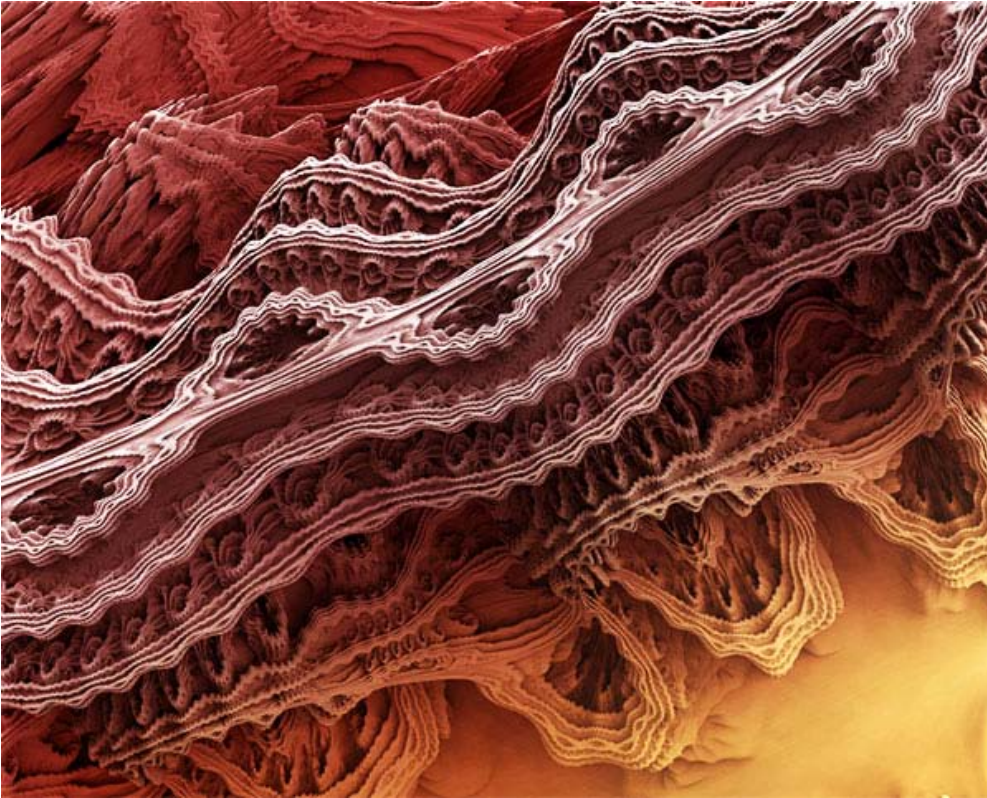


Figure 23: Daniel White's Rendering of a 3D Mandelbrot-style Set, Degree 8

Hinton learned about fractals in 1986. He got interested in running a higher-order Mandelbrot set algorithm, akin to Hubbard and Douady's cubic connectedness map, looking at various 3D cross-sections of the shape.

Hinton likes the number 27, as he once designed some Rubik's-cube-like objects for modeling the fourth dimension. Hinton is looking at polynomials of degree 16, a number he also likes because it's two to the fourth power (like in a hypercube). And these polynomials lead to a 27-dimensional space of 3D Mandelbrot-style sets.

And what Hinton is doing in the Duke's castle in Flimsy is tracking an ongoing trajectory through the 27-dimensional space, and watching how the 3D objects change. There's well over a googol of them.

A draft passage:

Standing on one of the trellised balconies, I looked across the fields of unearthly plants, and savored the sumptuous detail on every side. As the stuff were translucent I could see nice colored fingers within the slowly shifting mass. Nothing was still, everything was slowly morphing, ever progressing towards greater levels of beauty and gnarl.

I could almost feel how the computation was tearing through inconceivable amounts of kessence.

Weena led me down into a craterlike hole. On a balcony three tiers down, we found a spiraling patio with fresh doorways opening up and others closing off, everything translucent with deep shades of color within the construct. Sitting on this shelf was Hinton himself.

“Why are you doing this?”

“I’m waiting for something, I’m not sure what. The image of a lost love? A shape so arcane and eldritch as to catch the attention of the great mind of Flimsy itself?”

Quote found in [Wikipedia](#), from Alexander Pope’s poem, “Essay on Criticism.” I was thinking Hinton might recite this to Jim, but I guess that would be a little too-too. Although I really like the flow of it, the first line is enough.

“A little learning is a dang’rous thing;
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring:
There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
And drinking largely sobers us again.
Fir’d at first sight with what the Muse imparts,
In fearless youth we tempt the heights of Arts,
While from the bounded level of our mind
Short views we take, nor see the lengths behind;
But more advanc’d, behold with strange surprise
New distant scenes of endless science rise!
So pleas’d at first the towering Alps we try,
Mount o’er the vales, and seem to tread the sky,
Th’ eternal snows appear already past,
And the first clouds and mountains seem the last;
But, those attain’d, we tremble to survey
The growing labours of the lengthen’d way,
Th’ increasing prospects tire our wand’ring eyes,
Hills peep o’er hills, and Alps on Alps arise!”

It would be nice to have a name for Hinton’s fractal. Ultrafractal is nice, but that’s the name of some commercial software. And I need something more poetic.

It’s evolving, it’s a path through a twenty-seven-dimensional space of possible fractals. Quest. The Quest Rose. Porcupine, bristle-bottom, scarab, bug, beetle, orchid, blossom. I’ll use Quest Rose for now.

(But later I switched to “Atum’s Lotus,” to get a more Egyptian sound.)

September 22-24, 2009. Apocalypse How?

What exactly does the Duke want Jim to do on Earth?

Down the line, the result could be to kill everyone, and maybe even to dissolve the planet’s matter. But I think we needn’t start with such a drastic plan. Perhaps initially they only plan to leech a lot of kessence from Earth. And even that plan could be veiled in a request to help spread more jivas on Earth.

Why would Jim actually need to visit Flimsy to get this instruction? Well, maybe they plan to give him a very large number of jiva eggs to scatter around. Seven billion of them. And Weena doesn’t want to carry the egg case.

I think the story works better if Weena doesn't plan to be there for Jim's seeding of Earth. And later she shows up for an extra battle.

Big question. Why doesn't Weena just set the jiva invasion in motion on her own? Why would she need to enlist Jim? Perhaps there's a fear that once the invasion cranks up, people may not be able to leave Earth for Flimsy?

Oh, I've got it—although Weena doesn't tell Jim this—carrying the jiva eggcase is potentially lethal for the carrier. Or at least the aftermath of the release is a very dangerous time with the frenzy of the jivas.

We'll suppose this is a local project of the Duke's, rather than a global Flimsy project. If Flimsy wanted to do something to the Earth, it could do it directly, I'd imagine, given that Flimsy is in every atom.

The Duke plans for the jivas to do the leeching. I suppose the yuels could do some leeching, instead, but it's more something that the jivas seem to be set up for, what with those tentacles. And maybe the yuels wouldn't be inclined to leech.

Why are the jivas and yuels enemies? They are after all, both elements of the single organism Flimsy. But I guess there's something that they're competing over.

September 27-30, 2009. Revising Weena. On and Off a Roll.

Sept 27. I'm going really good now. This idea about the higher-degree-Mandelbrot-set-like Quest Rose was a god-send. Some guy I happened to be emailing with showed it to me, and I was like, "Yeah. That's what I needed to see." Thank you, muse.

I keep rewriting the outline and I have quite a few good ideas for the second part of the book now. And I'm up to 50,000 words, past the halfway point. I think I've made it through the black spot once again—although, yes, I know there will be more of them later on. But probably not as scary as the Big One in the middle of the book.

Right now I'm doing a major change. I'd had Weena talking in the familiar Phil-Dickian California-speak that I've learned to do so smoothly. But if she's really from 1907, it really makes more sense if she has an old-timey manner of speech. So I'm going through the book, searching for every occurrence of "Weena," and rewriting all her lines.

I have a slight worry that I'm losing some nice Val-girl zingers, like "Don't worry," but those are, after all, rather facile. I think it's going to be richer and funnier if Weena talks in an odder and more high-falutin way.

Sept 30. I finished doing all the Weena lines, it took three days, it was a lot more work than I'd expected. What made it more work especially was that I ended up noticing all kinds of loose threads and inconsistencies from the accumulation of reach-back changes I've made. But now I think it's pretty solid. And it is sort of more fun to have Weena talking in this 1900s-style way—at least I hope that's the era she sounds like. I might reread some of Hinton's "scientific romances" to check the tone.

The drudge work of doing this long revision threw me off the roll I was on last week, that lovely writing binge, tearing through the Castle chapter and into the Quest Rose chapter. It was so nice being on a roll. I had a couple of days when all I thought about from dawn to dusk was the novel, and I was belting out more than a thousand words a day, and that's including two or three polish-revisions. I'd almost say those are my favorite kinds of days,

when I'm almost in a trance, just thinking about the book all day long, problem-solving, rockin' it, hitting the curl.

Last night and today I didn't get to write on the novel, I had to write this 6,000 word introduction for a collection of essays about infinity, to be published by the Templeton Foundation, a group interested in promoting scientific discussions that relate to theology. They're paying me to write the intro.

They were going to pay me to write an article, but I wrote an SF story, "Jack and the Aktuals, or, Physical Applications of Transfinite Set Theory," and the intended publisher freaked out about have an *ugh* science-fiction story in their scholarly tome. But the Templeton guys were nice about it, they paid me for the story anyway, and they told me I could write an intro instead, and they even said it would be okay if I put in a plug for my "Jack and the Aktuals" story (now in online form at Tor.com and on my website). I liked this development fine, but then the papers that I'd be "introducing" showed up at my house, and I'd been putting off reading them for a couple of months, even though I'd said I'd do the intro by mid-September.

So yesterday morning they emailed me, like, "Where's the intro?" So finally I tore into reading the papers, starting yesterday afternoon, I think. Some of the papers were weaker than the others, but the good ones were quite strong—some good math ones, papers about physics and infinity, and a couple of strong theology papers about God and infinity—written in philosophical jargon just this side of incomprehensibility, but sort of fun to read—like listening to the twittering of alien beetles. For most people the math papers would be alien beetles, but for me that's more like hearing jazz that's switched (over the years since I left grad school) to some new kinds of beats.

Anyway, I actually read all the papers and wrote the whole 6,000 word introduction yesterday and especially today. I can't quite understand how I did that. I could never write 6,000 words of a novel in one day. Of course for my intro, I was partly able to recycle stuff that I already know, also I was able to drop in quotes from the papers in question. But I did write quite a bit of brand new stuff as well. Thing is, I was in a rush to finish because I wanted to get back to *Jim and the Flims*. But I'll still be revising the intro again for a day or two next week, as there's still two more late-arriving papers coming in...

But, wait, tomorrow I'm heading off to Madison, Wisconsin, with Sylvia for five nights, to visit daughter G and family in their new house. I may get a little writing done around the edges, I'll try and keep the embers alive, but I won't be doing any all-day rockin' on a roll. But then, ah then, Muse willing, I'll be carving up Flimsy again. But not for long enough!

I'll be back home on Oct 5th, I think, and, gosh, only about six weeks after that, we're going to Australia for some absurdly long trip, like a month, I think. And then it'll be December 15th, and we'll have the frikkin' Xmas to do. Jan and Feb will be solid peaceful writing, I hope, and in mid-March we might take off for Venice. Why all these trips? Well, people keep offering me free plane tickets and a little money to come give a talk, and it seems like a shame not to, if the locale is interesting.

I do, in principle, like to travel now and then. But I'm like an addict about the writing, too. I just want to binge and binge and binge.

October 6-9, 2009. Starting "Lights Out." Third Proposal to Tor.

Oct 6, 2009.

I managed to do some work in the evenings on my trip to Wisconsin, and I pretty much have the “Quest Rose” chapter done (later called “Atum’s Lotus”). I’m starting the next chapter (currently numbered 17), “Lights Out.”

I’m wondering if I really needed to give Hinton a yuel-made body.

If you don’t have a jiva, then I guess you need a yuel-made body, as a jiva won’t make you a body unless she can parasitize you. I sort of wanted Durkle not to have a jiva, so he had a yuellie body. And I need for Ginnie to have a yuellie body so she can kill Weena and help Jim craft the jiva gun that Hinton hinted to him about.

But why bother giving Hinton a yuellie kind of body? Does this aspect of him play a major part in the story?

Okay, I just put him in a jiva-made body and gave him a jiva.

Here’s an idea: if Janie/Ginnie and Durkle are the only two yuel-bodied people we see, then it might make sense to hook them up as lovers later on. Durkle could grow up really fast, in a *Dad’s Nuke* time-bake routine.

Oct 8, 2009.

I have Ginnie being abducted by yuels right before Jim enters the castle, and a few hours later, Duchess Qwin’s agent brings in a yuellie maid from Yuelsville who is in fact Ginnie in disguise. And then the Duchess somehow gives the yuellie maid the opportunity to kill Weena’s jiva and to run off with Jim.

This seems awfully pat. Could it be that the Duchess has set up Ginnie’s kidnapping and has knowingly brought her back as a yuellie and knowingly sicced her on Weena? What would be the Duchess’s motive?

The Duke and Duchess, with Weena’s knowledge arranged to have Ginnie kidnapped by the yuels, as she’s a complicating factor in dealing with Jim, also because Weena is jealous of her. Unknown to Weena, the Duke and Duchess are very annoyed about the bad Bulber loan and about Ginnie’s pleas for more commission, and are planning to terminate Weena, and they requested the yuels to send them a yuellie who’s willing and able to assassinate Weena by using the yuel lullaby. Weena thinks they’re just getting the yuellie for sex. This plan was in motion before Jim and Ginnie arrived. As a final twist, the yuels did their own double-cross by installing Ginnie as the yuellie.

Oct 9, 2009.

I went back and changed it so yuellies can teleport—before I had Durkle unable to teleport. But it’ll be better if Ginnie, as yuellie, can teleport. I also am giving the yuellies a kind of teep, call it yuel teep, maybe. It’s what Hinton and Jim were using.

I also went back and gave Header a fellow-killer called Skeeves—it was Skeeves who actually wielded the axe. And he’s still alive, so Ginnie wants to go back to Earth to take revenge on him.

Today I rewrote the outline yet again, and sent that to Dave Hartwell along with the first 55,000 words of my draft (up through the first scene of the “Lights Out” chapter), just in case he needs more motivation for finally making us an offer.

It’s my third proposal for *Jim and the Flims*, I sent the first in June, the second in August, this, the third, in October. I suspect this may be annoying of me, and that it makes

me seem desperate, but I don't know what else to do. I have a premonition of an axe coming down, and I'm trying to stop it. I'm anxious and I'm losing it.

The other day my agent Susan Protter said Dave Hartwell at Tor Books might have an offer by next week—we're still hoping it'll be a two-book offer that for both *Jim and the Flims* and my memoir, *Nested Scrolls*. But maybe Tor is thinking of me as a weak old person they need to get rid of. A toothless ancient Eskimo to be set adrift on an ice floe. "Here's some blubber for the ride! Have fun."

People know that it's hard to write and sell a novel, but really they have no idea.

October 11, 2009. *Surf Pilgrim.*

I picked up a cold on the trip to Madison, and it's been hard to really do any solid work. It makes me feel sorry for myself to be sick and uninspired and sitting at the computer. I've just been chipping away at some little things. Eventually I'll be well and the Muse will come help me again. I did get a nice rewrite of my plot outline done in any case, and I do have a pretty good idea of what happens in the next two chapters. Ground work.

Meanwhile, I've been painting pretty much this week, working on a large (40 by 30 inch) acrylic painting that I started at Four Mile Beach north of Santa Cruz about three weeks ago. That day I trekked down there from the parking lot with my painter friend Vernon and got the canvas covered with a light layer—when I'm *en plein air*, it's all about getting the composition blocked out, and finding some of the colors, although often, back home, I'll dial up the colors to match my memories and my aesthetics, which tend to be brighter and more saturated than reality.

It was kind of a big canvas to carry to the beach. A certain amount of blowing sand got stuck to the paint, which is nice, as it adds physical texture and a you-are-there quality. When my mother painted *en plein air*, she'd often bring back a little baggie of dirt or sand and mix it in with her paint.

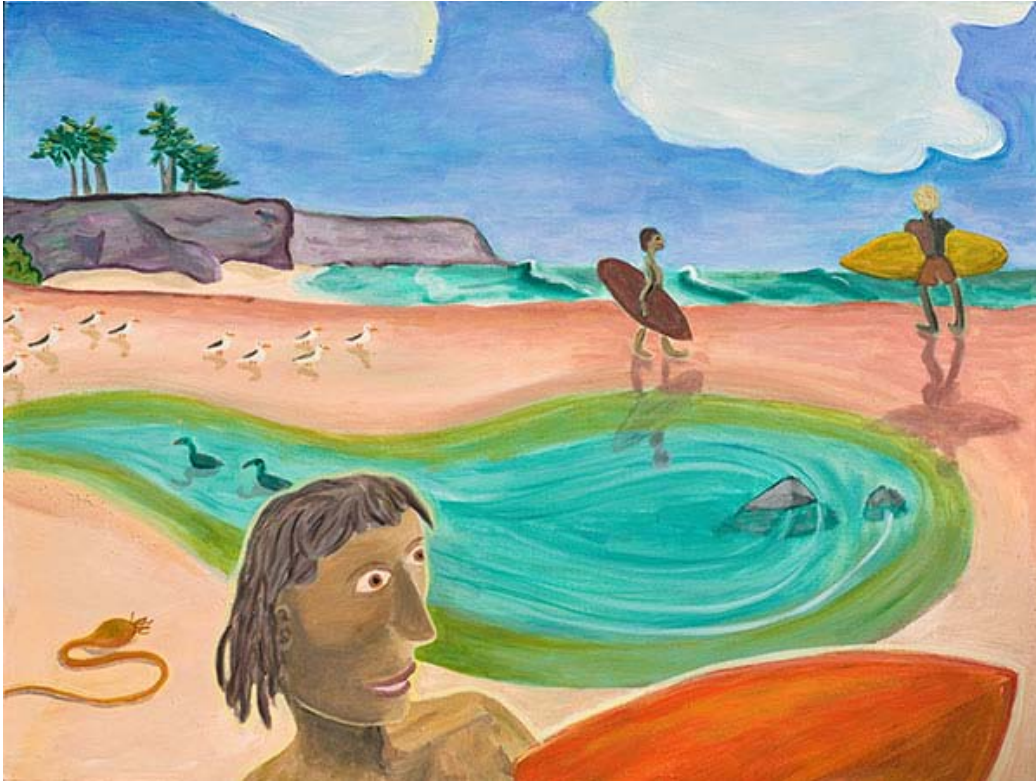


Figure 24: Surf Pilgrim

I'm calling the new picture *Surf Pilgrim*, because there's a surfer in the foreground with (really for purposes of popping him clear of the background) a faint gold halo around him. And he's got a determined look about him.

I think I saw this phrase as a graffito on the sea wall near Ocean Beach in San Francisco, maybe it was spelled "Serf Pilgrims" there. And then Marc Laidlaw and I used a variation of the phrase, "Stoke Pilgrims," as the name of a gang of surfers in our Zep and Del SF surfing story, "Probability Pipeline."

I'm not sure if *Surf Pilgrim* has anything to do with *Jim and the Flims*—but you never know. I do have some scenes with surfers in the planned "Surf Zombies" chapter that's coming up later on. And Jim might possibly encounter some beings like surfers when he sets out across the Helaven Sea. Buddha on a standing wave.

October 15, 2009. Yuelsville.

I finished my chapters "The Quest Rose" (later called "Atum's Lotus") and "Lights Out," and now I'm starting the "Yuelsville" chapter.

Revising the outline by way of preparation for the next push forward, I'm thinking I need a little more plot in the last third of the book. Maybe I should build up a black-magic cabal involving Skeeves and Weena—fix it so that's been hinted about all along, but only near the end of the book do we learn the details about the cabal.

Okay, fine, but what happens in Yuelsville, and what does the place look like?

I'm going to make Yuelsville an island in the middle of a swamp, like (as I understand it) Avery Island in Louisiana where Tabasco sauce is bottled. I could use my

memory of the swamp full of birds that Sylvia and I saw near Lafayette, Louisiana—I used that scene in my Bruegel novel, *As Above, So Below*, when Williblad Cheroo is talking about his memories of America. But certainly I could recycle and transmogrify that material. Here's an edited excerpt of Williblad's monologue—edited to make it yueller.

The living water was green with sprinkles and dotted with flimsy plants like cypress trees — bulbous at the bottom, with roots that came up high to make knees. On every branch of every tree there was a nest as big as a wagon wheel. And in the nests were flexible yuellie ghosts in incalculable profusion, some shaped like humans, but some of them shaped like birds—like roseate spoonbills, gray herons, egrets, and ibises with down-curving beaks.

The gaps in the trees happened to line up so that I could see a distant island in the swamp, the island of Yuelsville. A ray of the new jiva's light was focused on the island, it was like a peek into paradise. On the island were two yuels as large as a man and a woman, stretching out shapes like wings and flapping them, twisting their bodies and twining their long necks. In their excitement, the mating yuels stepped off the island into the shallows and there was a huge, wallowing splash — it was a jiva tendril, unbelievably fast. The jiva's tentacles caught the smaller yuel, he screamed and died, his flesh melting into kessence. The other yuel flew away. And now a pride of yorbafumps converged on the scene of the murder, digging down into the muck and unearthing a buried killer beet.

I see the yorbafumps as living in the swamp around the island—they serve as protectors. They might in fact be yuels themselves. And I think I'll move that amusement part Funger Gardens to the island with Yuelsville. The amusement park is at one end of the island, and ghosts or flims can come there from all over Human Flimsy. And the yuels live in a settlement at the other end of the island. The setup mirrors Santa Cruz, which abuts the Boardwalk amusement park on the ocean.

What kinds of dwellings do the yuels have? I need something different. What's available?

I already had Jim in a cottage in Santa Cruz, and the surf punks were in a whipped Victorian house. I put Monin in an assemblage of zickzack spheres. And the Duke was in a giant geranium plant. And purgatory resembled the ramshackle halls of a mall or of an airport. And Hinton was inside a rubbery 3D fractal, that is, the Quest Rose.

So...do I put the yuels underwater? I don't want that here, I'll save undersea for the center of Flimsy. Burrows? Too much like purgatory and the Earthmost Jiva's burrow. A coffin hotel with curved space inside the drawers? Well, then I just have big windowless rooms to describe, like in a convention center. How about some aircoral like in *Frek and the Elixir*? That's maybe a shade too close to the Quest Rose, but, at least for now, I don't have any better idea. I can stress that the aircoral is solid and unyielding, as opposed to the soft, ever-flexing Quest Rose petals.

In *Frek*, I had airpolyps that are gnat-sized flying critters who build up curvy houses called aircorals. And, like sea-going polyps, the airpolyps create reef-like structures by

depositing tiny bits of silicon and calcium. And here in Yuelsville, it could be sprinkles that build these lacy coral-like structures, making them out of kessence crystals, a bit of a sacrifice for the sprinkle, as they're chronically low on kessence. Maybe if a sprinkle works for the yuels building for a year, then it gets to become a yuellie.

Here's an edited quote from *Frek* that I might use.

The yuels' houses were made of colored and textured stuff like coral, quite hard a motionless, not at all like the soft, pulsing flesh of the Quest Rose. Whence came these concretions? I got my answer when we passed a house under construction. Around the growing walls were heaps of kessence. The air was alive with a fog of glinting, darting sprinkles. I reached out and trapped one like a gnat. It was a tiny faceted cylinder, carrying a crumb of kessence in its grip. The sprinkles were assembling the building like a reef.

No two of the windows were the same shape. Fantastically formed turrets and antlers stuck up higgledy-piggledy from the cornices and roof. The mansion's smooth, undulating walls were creamy white with a few large patches of blue.

I looked back across Yuelsville. Two of the buildings on the skyline had already changed shape. One of them had a new spire that hadn't been there before. Those builder-sprinkles were fast.

October 18-20, 2009. Rejected by Tor. Talking to Hartwell.

Sunday, October 18, 2009.

I just listened to a voice-mail from my agent Susan Protter, and the word is that Tor doesn't want to publish *Jim and the Flims*. On the positive side, they do want to publish my memoir, *Nested Scrolls: the Memoir of a Cyberpunk Philosopher*.

Although it's great that Tor is doing my memoir, I have this paranoid, bitter feeling that it's a gesture, like the gold watch they give you at a farewell dinner before they put you on the train to Siberia. Or it's the scrimshaw tooth they give you to take on the ice-floe with your final hank of blubber.

Oh, don't think that way, Rudy, that's too "How to Make Yourself Miserable." I really am happy about the memoir. I'm sure Tor isn't publishing it as a favor, that's not *at all* how a big company thinks. Maybe they figure that, given that the memoir is a different kind of book than my novels, there's a chance of it catching on.

But now, *sigh*, what to do with *Jim and the Flims*? I feel like an aging ball-player sent down from the major leagues. Relegated to the minors. To the small presses, in other words.

Right now I'm still dreaming of trying some other major houses first. I've always wanted to go back to Ace, for instance—although, come to think of it, when Susan informally asked them about improving Tor's offer for *Frek and the Elixir* in 2003, they said they probably wouldn't do that.

I'm not sure what's the problem with *Jim and the Flims*. It could be my uninspiring sales-record on the last few novels. Or it could be something specific to the theme and

execution of this particular book. I hope to talk to Dave Hartwell on the phone soon and get more info.

Monday, October 19, 2009.

I couldn't get Dave on the phone today, but Susan Protter called, and she'd talked to him some more.

Tor will buy *Nested Scrolls*, and it can come out first from PS Publishing in a limited edition like we'd been planning, with Tor reusing the design, which is good.

Susan says Tor won't buy *Jim and the Flims* due to both of the reasons I'd suspected: (a) my recent sales figures aren't as strong as they could be, and (b) Dave doesn't think this new book is one of my best ones. He could be right about the second point. I've had my doubts about *Jim and the Flims*. But I still have some hopes pulling it together and making it amazing. The plot is missing something at this point.

Susan says it would be fruitless to pitch *Jim and the Flims* to, like, Ace or Bantam, as they all look at the same sales numbers database. They're looking for rising writers who can sell fifty or a hundred thousand copies of a novel. At this point in my career, a track-record becomes a liability, I guess.

So now begins the hat-in-hand round of smaller publishers.

I'll probably start with Night Shade Books. They have good publicity and promo, a strong line of books, and I've met the owners Jeremy Lassen and Jason Williams around San Francisco a few times. I'll probably see Jeremy at the World Fantasy Con in San Jose over Halloween, come to think of it.

Alternate houses might be PS Publishing or Subterranean Press. But my impression is that these houses are more oriented towards pricier limited-edition books. I do see some authors, like Kage Baker, in both Subterranean and Night Shade editions. Tachyon's turned me down two times now (for my memoir, and for an anthology of my stories with Sterling), and I'm not eager to try them again.

I keep coming back to the thought that, *waah*, I'm outta the major leagues. Bummer.

Well, I've seen it happen to other aging SF writers or, for that matter, to bands, or to visual artists. If a group (even the *Rolling Stones*) makes eighteen albums—who's gonna buy the eighteenth one? The public loses interest. I've had a run of eighteen novels in a row from major publishers, and I can be grateful for that.

It's not that *Jim and the Flims* is necessarily worse than my other books. At the local-craft level, I feel like Jim is as buffed and polished as anything I've ever done. It's a chain of glittering haikus, man, with every paragraph a poem! Although I suppose that the global story and the set of characters could be more engaging, I think those flaws are still fixable.

I think it was important to write *Postsingular* and *Hylozoic*, but it could be those books were too far out for the SF reading public.

PRO MARKS TIME IN COW TOWN—DREAMS OF BIGTIME COMEBACK!

Maybe on the next novel I can still turn it around and get back into the majors. I do, in a way, know what kind of book I should write to score better sales, although it's not clear I'd have the will to write it. Young, visionary characters and near-future biotech.

(Lightbulb over my head! Maybe I could alter *Jim and the Flims* so that it has...young visionary characters and near-future biotech! And come back sooner than expected!)

Really reaching for solace now, I can fantasize that if I go over to the small presses, I might in some way unfetter myself. At the very least, a change of publishers would give me a slightly different stance vis-a-vis my work. Possibly, writing for a small press, I could go back to letting it rip a little stronger—like in the early *Ware* days, or like I still do in some of my *Flurb* stories.

It's true that writing for Tor has come to mean that I censor myself slightly. Once in a great while Dave Hartwell has asked me to edit scenes that he found too pungent—for instance I removed a three-way sex scene from *Mathematicians in Love* (the two male rivals in bed together with the woman), and I toned down the sex scene between Thuy and Chu in *Hylozoic*. It could be that I've internalized the censorship, and maybe this weakens my work.

Like, just the other day I was dithering between two versions of a line. Uncensored version:

"I am the Monad," she said. "The divine mind of Flimsy. I've been expecting you. Come into my tent. I'll show you my cunt."

Toned down version:

"I am the Monad," she said. "The divine mind of Flimsy. I've been expecting you. Come into my tent. I'll show you my crotch."

I think it's heavier, and funnier, with "cunt," but I'd been on the point of changing it to "crotch" because of my sense of that Tor wouldn't like the salty word. And, speaking of internal censorship, maybe I worry about the strong word shocking my children or (how odd to worry about this) my grandchildren. Maybe I want to be mature and respectable. But maybe I can still just be that wild guy who writes dirty words on the wall. More like William Burroughs, in other words.

[In the end, I didn't use either version of that sample line. Both are, really, kind of off-putting, *sigh*.]

Tuesday, October 20, 2009.

I'm looking back on *Jim and the Flims* now and wondering what I could change to make it more marketable. It would be wise to revamp it before pitching it to another house—you really only get one chance, and that multiple-versions-of-a-proposal thing I was doing lately is bullshit.

Along these lines, Hartwell told me he didn't even look at my third version of the proposal, he just kept on reading the material from the second version. And Susan had cautioned me that multiple proposals versions are annoying and amateurish.

I need to make the proposal and the partial draft really strong before sending them out again.

(1) I wonder if I made a mistake in having the main character be sixty. Dave Hartwell already mentioned this to me on [April 14, 2009](#). Vernor Vinge got away with that to some extent in *Rainbows End*—although in fact this book sold less well than his others. Vinge had his geezer character get an Alzheimer's treatment (!) and go to, like, high school. In a way I was trying a move like that by having Jim Oster get rejuvenation from the jivas or from the yuels. But, hell, I could make Jim Oster be thirty-two. You can have a brain hemorrhage at any age.

(2) At present Jim, as sixty-year-old, has an estranged thirtyish daughter who lives in Seattle. But if he's thirty-two, any child of his would be maybe ten or younger. So how

would I bring children into the story? In principle I could say that the child or children died in a car accident with the wife—but that’s too depressing and could dominate the tone of the book. Or possibly Jim’s such an inept parent that the children are living with other people—but that makes Jim a bad father and a weaker character. Or possibly the child or children *are* living with Jim—and that makes him sympathetic, and provides some transreal humor opportunities, but then I have to do some major rewriting. Or maybe he doesn’t have any children at all, after all, young people these days often wait to have kids.

(3) Maybe I play up the black magic murder cult aspect more. And the zombies. What if the cult was revealed to be the cause of Jim’s wife’s death?

(4) Maybe have the discovery of Flimsy inside every particle of matter be something that’s presented more up front and early on. Jim could be a visionary rogue bioengineer who’s cobbled together an ultra-powerful electron microscope, and he’s begun to see signs of Flimsy! That gives the book a stronger SF backing right away.

Dave Hartwell finally called and we had a nice talk. I feel better now.

He doesn’t want much in the way of changes to the memoir, he only said that I should put in more dates to make it easier to see how it dovetails with the outer world. He says it’s a good read with a nice authorial tone. He thinks it has a decent chance of selling well to people outside the circle of SF readers.

He says they could afford to buy the memoir because they can get the design for free or at least cheaply from PS Publishing, so that’s a good thing.

He said we could still think about the title, and that the input from the Sales Dept would be important on this...for a non-fiction book, people like a very clear title, for instance a memoir or biography should perhaps have the author’s name in it.

Re. *Jim and the Flims*, Dave reiterated what Susan had reported to me, that is, my recent novel sales have been low and that *Jim* seemed to have some problems. He made four suggestions that I think I’ll implement.

(i) Make the main character be 32 instead of 60.

(ii) Forget about him having kids.

(iii) Don’t introduce so many new words in the first fifty pages.

(iv) Get the central character more under control in terms of his personality, at present he’s like Rudy and like not-Rudy, but without a clear core.

He said that if I want to build up the murder-cult idea, then I should probably base it on something real, to give the story thickness—although this is in some sense risky as I might thereby bring people of that kind to my door.

He said Tor might possibly reconsider *Jim* in a couple of years, particularly if the memoir does well. He also said it was fine if I tried *Jim* on another press meanwhile, and came back with a fresh novel in a couple of years.

Or, if I want to mark time for a couple of years, I could get into writing stories.

Re. where else to send *Jim*, he felt that first of all I should think the book over and do some rewrites along the lines he suggested. And then I should at least try a couple of the other big houses, so as not to be betting against myself. So maybe we do try Ace and/or Bantam. And if that doesn’t work, then the likeliest prospects are Night Shade, Subterranean and Tachyon.

It occurs to me now that Susan was perhaps too negative about my chances for a sale to the majors. On the other hand, maybe Hartwell is just trying to lighten the blow. Well, it

certainly wouldn't hurt to ask, like, Susan Allison at Ace to have a look at *Jim and the Flims*. My editor of yore.

[A week later, on October 29, 2009, Susan returned to this issue in a conversation with me, and she said that Susan Allison had, after all, said she wasn't interested in my books as they don't sell so well. Susan P. then suggested that I could always try the Simon & Schuster SF line: Pocket Books. Or Roc, Daw, or Bantam. She said I shouldn't say that Tor had turned down *Jim and the Flims*, but rather that Tor was buying my memoir and didn't want to commit to a novel as well just yet, and that I preferred to try for another publisher rather than wait a couple of years until Tor is ready—all of which is in fact true.]

In any case, I'll work on the manuscript for a bit before sending it out again. I think I'll get a clear idea of the changes I want to make, then do a rough version of the changes just by going through the electronic manuscript, then finish the first draft, print it out, and then mark it up to pick off the additional little changes that I'll inevitably miss doing during the electronic reconceptualization run.

I'm fairly wired right now, I'll jump into a new entry, even though it's still the same day.

October 20, 2009. Reworking Jim Oster.

So now I'm going to try and take care of Hartwell's four points, as well as the extra ideas that I'd had.

From December, 2008, through October, 2009, I was thinking of Jim as a retired sixty-something mailman with a BS degree in math. His wife had died of cancer a couple of years earlier. And yesterday, David Hartwell convinced me that the book would work better if Jim were 32, as that's been the typical age of my heroes in my better-selling books. Even though Hartwell isn't going to make an offer on the book, I think he's right about this, and about the other points.

I'd already been thinking of making Jim younger, as it was starting to seem icky to have old Jim getting it on with a young surf-punk like Ginnie, especially when he has a daughter of about the same age. And if it seems icky to *me*, it would seem much ickier to my intended target audience of...*thirty-year-olds*! For sure they don't want to hear about geezers' wistful sex fantasies and their dreams of a Fountain of Youth.

So now I need to reconceptualize Jim as a young man. And I'll have to rethink the stuff about his wife's death and about whether he has children.

What's Jim like? Perhaps I make him a tweaked version of me, that's always the easiest, particularly for a novel written in the first person. What was I like at age 32? Well, that was in 1978. I'd just lost my teaching job at Geneseo. So let's say that Jim is unemployed or underemployed, and he's somewhat bitter about it.

What's his career? It would be nice to use biotech as my science Maguffin. I don't want Jim to be all that much of an academic scientist, so maybe he just has a BS in bioengineering from the school of engineering at U C Santa Cruz. He didn't get a Ph. D., instead he got a job at a biotech start-up. Along these lines, keep in mind that *none* of the serious computer programmers I ever met in industry had a Ph. D. in computer science. The scene could be somewhat similar in the bioinformatics/genomics/biotech world. In a cutting-edge field, the professors are often in something of a back-water, and they aren't necessarily up to date in a real-time way that an industrial scientist has to be.

A biotech guy I met said that there was some similarity between biotech and CS in that there's not a huge amount of conceptual content to learn, it's more about learning a nomenclature, a zillion odd names. And about learning to use the latest machinery.

Suppose that Jim got fired due to office politics and due to a down-turn in the economy. He turned bitter, he was drinking and smoking pot. He made a scene at the office, and was then informally blackballed and he can't get a biotech job at all. Disgusted by how things were going, he's worked as a mailman for a couple of years, and he does some ongoing biotech home-lab research on the side. And he's been laid off from the mailman job as well.

Suppose that he'd managed to marry Lucy. I still think of Lucy as a kindergarten teacher.

(But maybe she's a business person? Like from the company where Jim works? Maybe she has an MBA, even. Or just a Bachelor's in Business, just a low-level person. She does publicity. But she's light-hearted and fun. Like our young friend C, who works at Google.)

They're newlyweds, but she died of some weird disease. Or maybe she was murdered, but he doesn't realize it initially. It would be good for the story if Lucy's death was in some way caused by people associated with Skeeves, the guy who killed Ginnie. Let's say they were talking about having children, but had kept putting it off. And then they thought she was pregnant, but it was cancer. A yuel in her womb.

The exact nature of Jim's research is important, but I'll accumulate my thoughts on that in the Oct 22, 2009, entry, just a page or two below.

Looking towards the finale, I think it might be nice if we have a *happy-ending* version of the Orpheus and Eurydice story, that is Jim *does* manage to bring Lucy back. Maybe he uses his last bit of biotech skill to clone her, and her ghost settles in.

October 21, 2009. Using Fewer Neologisms.

So now I deal with Dave's remark that I have too many neologisms, coined words, repurposed phrases and proper nouns at the start of the book—and that he felt lost, like in some bad fantasy novel where even the most ordinary objects have made-up names. “That's not a rock, that's a gorkin.”

Dave claimed I had, like, one or two dozen funny words in the first couple of chapters. So let's look at a list of the new words by chapter. I can get a handle on this by removing my custom dictionary file from the spell checker and then spell checking to see what comes up. And then I can add the special phrases by hand, as I think of them.

On the next page, I put the list, in the order that the words occur. It doesn't look all that intense to me. But maybe I can leave out some of the special words. And not every person and place has to have a proper name.

More than this, Dave's issue was that I shouldn't frontload them. Chapters 2, 4 and 8 in particular are heavily laden. To some extent I frontloaded deliberately. I was thinking in terms of prefiguring, and that it might be smart to use some unexplained odd words early on to pique the reader's curiosity. Some authors do this. But maybe that's not a wise move. Just to keep the record of what I do here, I'll mark the moved or eliminated words by formatting them with the ~~strikeout~~ effect.

Okay (a little later) I've been eliminating unnecessary special words and names, and I moved some of them from the earlier chapters into the later chapters, as you can see in the

list. So now the book doesn't feel like a maze of verbiage when you're getting started. It's okay now.

Chapter 1	Rickben	ghost pool
Val	Duchess	Belkian
Diane, Dick Simly	spacewarp	Zim
hyperhypercube	Inngie	
Chapter 2	Chapter 7	Chapter 11
sprinkles	living water	Pippa Piggott
Flimsy	flim	
jiva		Chapter 12
yuel		Dark Gulf
Graf	Chapter 8	
teep	Monin, Yerba	Chapter 13
Thura	Durkle	
Rickben Junior	Earthmost Jiva	Chapter 14
unaugmented people	Helaven Sea	superyuel
flim	purgatory	
Chapter 3	yuellie	Chapter 15
Awnee	flim	Quest Rose
Header, Chang	Snaily	Yuelsville
Ginnie, Ira	Jivaic priests	Bulber
yuellie	jub	fabbed, fabbing
kessence	Nyoo	Solsol
	border snail	geek
	Solsol	stentor
	Bulber	
Chapter 4	Chapter 9	Chapter 16
kessence	cruiser couch	squiffer
zickzack	yorbafump	nuterusher
Funger Gardens		
Duke	Chapter 10	Chapter 17
UpsyDownsy	Yuelsville	yuelball
Yuelsville	offer caps	
Dimble	pigpops	Chapter 18
Quest Rose	waffle cactus	yorbafump
Chapter 5	monster pit	Monad
	Flam	
Chapter 6	Swoozie	
Mijjy	yuellie	

October 22, 2009. Jim's Research.

I went ahead and took out all the references to Jim being old or rejuvenated, and I changed the first page to reflect my new notions about Jim's back story. And I dropped the business with his kid. So now I'm more or less ready to get going again on the rest of the book.

Some more changes to make. I'll use "Val" instead of "Lucy." Also the book will have more unity if the Quest Rose has a biotech nature. Bringing in fractals is too outta left field. Suppose that Hinton learned of DNA in the 60s, rather than learning of fractals.

I need to figure out what kind of biotech experiment Jim is doing in his home lab. It ought to play some role in the story. Suppose, at least as a Maguffin, Jim is finding a way of

really taking control of bioprogramming. It's like learning the higher level language above the "machine language" of the raw DNA.

So what does this have to do with Flimsy, the jivas, and the yuels? Flimsy feeds upon our souls, or rather, upon the information that our minds and genomes hold. And just as we prefer to eat free-range chicken rather than factory-farm chicken, Flimsy might prefer souls from a non-biotech world. Alternately, in terms of "chickens," maybe biotech plumps us up and makes our souls more diverse. In this case Flimsy would encourage at least certain kinds of biotech. Actually, I don't see Flimsy wanting to get involved with us at this level.

Maybe the jivas or yuels can't fully invade a planet until the life upon it becomes programmable by biotech? It might be that the yuels and jivas both want to knife in and take advantage of the biotech to establish themselves very widely on Earth? Okay—but how exactly *would* the jivas, yuels, and Monad take advantage of biotech? I don't see this line of thought leading anywhere. Drop it.

So Jim's biotech research is in part an irrelevant Maguffin, it just sets him up for using an electron microscope.

Jim is, as I said, an independent researcher, and he's [built himself an scanning-tunneling electron microscope](#), or STM, for a couple of thousand dollars. Perhaps Jim has in some sense seen Flimsy already—although of course he doesn't yet realize what it is.

Here's some info about STM, gleaned from a [Wikipedia entry](#) and from [McAllister Technical Services](#) (who sells STMs).

The tip and the sample need to be in a very good vacuum. Display is black and white on a video screen. You need a sharp tip—carbon nanotubes are good. You have a coarse control for getting the tip near the sample, this can be an optical binocular microscope or a fiber-optic light pipe. You use a reactive piezoceramic control to stay at, say, a fixed distance from the surface. Vibration control is a big deal, you might use magnetic levitation or Beryllium-copper coil springs or a gas spring (compressed gas in a tube)...maybe Jim uses bicycle shocks. IBM first used the tip to manipulate xenon atoms on a nickel surface, building "corrals." You put the sample on a "sample sled." The set-up might be the size of an office cubicle, what with the vacuum pump.

And here's a link to Google images showing [STM pictures of DNA](#). You put it on a graphite sled. Some images were made in a vacuum, but apparently some were made in just regular air.

Jim's own work is bringing on our crisis vis-a-vis the jivas and yuels. Here's a good idea: What if Jim, by tinkering with his STM microscope has punched a hole in the wall of an electron, thereby making a spot where the border between the worlds has a weak spot where Monin's snail can push through!

The yuels notice the hole first, and one of them unsuccessfully creeps into Val's body. Val's tumor is a botched attempt by the yuels to get in early, Skeeves helped with this. Val's body is cremated and the yuel dies too. The reveal for this comes late in the book, when Jim is almost thinking that the yuels are his friends.

After the Val attempt, the Graf brings a yuel, and then Weena shows up, hunting the Graf. And have some more home-lab stuff while Weena is around.

And later we get the full-blown jiva invasion, and the yuel counter-invasion. And finally the mind of Flimsy gets involved.

If it's all about the hole in the wall between the worlds that Jim made, we don't really get into the pros and cons of biotech.

I need a new first chapter—back up and *show* the back story about the biotech and Val's death and Jim's independent research. Develop the romance between Jim and Val so we care if they get back together at the end.

October 23-24, 2009. I'm A Chicken With My Head Cut Off.

I feel increasingly lost vis-a-vis this book. Ever since it was turned down by Tor last week, I've been running around like a chicken with my head cut off, making random changes—practically with a chain-saw and a blow-torch. I'm freaking out. And I still feel like I don't have a core narrative for the novel.

It makes me very tense and uneasy to have my book be in such a muddle. It is, to say the least, a difficult gestation and birth.

Last night, while enjoying the musical *South Pacific* onstage at the Golden Gate Theater in San Francisco, I was imagining thickening up *Jim and the Flims* to make it a different than my usual novels.

I tend to push and rush through a book, and they can end up a little thin and frenetic. What if I go ahead and rush through to an ending, just to have a framework—and then spend a year or two rewriting the novel? That might be interesting. Maybe I could make it lush and sparkling

If I take two more years, I could always send it to Tor later on. And then I wouldn't have to start yet another novel for awhile. Or find a new publisher.

Well, first I have to figure out how to fix it, and maybe in January I'll decide whether to send it out to others. In any case, I can't (at least not yet) see walking away from the book and leaving it unfinished. There's still a lot of fixes that I haven't tried—I just don't know yet what the fixes are.

Why should I have Charles Howard Hinton as a character? His 4D expertise has nothing much to do with the plot of the book. And introducing him sets up a false expectation of there being a hyperspace twist to come. And...why just that *one* famous person?

Perhaps I just use a fictional character instead. Or some kind of early genomicist. Or use a mystic. Or an artist. Or how about a centuries-old occult murder cult. Something with an Egyptian element, perhaps. Might the King Tut tomb-discoverer Howard Carter be involved?

Jim might wonder why he's not running into famous people, by the way. "Most people aren't famous," Weena might say.

What's the Graf's background? Maybe he, Weena and the Hinton-character all knew each other? They were all in that cult. Maybe Skeeves and Header are in the cult too. And maybe that purple guy in purgatory, Bart, was in the cult too. He can mention the Graf and Weena.

Having Jim puke on the salmon at the picnic is too obvious, too Hollywood teen flick. Jim should do something freakier. Like he packs the salmon with cancer cell culture,

although knowing it won't in fact cause disease, but he just does this to freak out the Wiggler administrators.

Maybe Jim is designing weird drugs—do I want to go there? I don't think so, as then it's a whole different book.

In any case, the more I think about it, the more I feel a need for a new chapter at the start. I can ground Jim and Val, set up the rest of the story and, as a practical matter, gain a cushion of extra pages so I don't have to stretch the ending in order to fill out the novel's length.

Flimsy feels persistently thin. Maybe I could it more overgrown and jungly. I'd like to go over the book and add many more eyeball kicks.

What if ghosts in Flimsy are all kinds of things, not just humanoid figures? This leads to a hylozoic situation where everything in Flimsy is animated by the mind of some dead being. A kind of reincarnation. Not everyone gets to be a humanoid flim. Some are just soup spoons.

I really need a more clear-cut videogame-style plot. Hero executes fix A, B, and C to block menaces X, Y, and Z. You know all along what fixes the hero has to do, and you monitor his progress and the progress of the menaces.

At present, the story is rather amorphous, the menaces are slow to emerge, and the fixes are unclear. Okay, I'll try to crystallize a plan into a table—which I can now repeatedly revise

Menaces	Fixes
Amok biotech.	Smarter biotech.
Murder cult.	Violence and white magic.
Tunnel to Flimsy.	Jim closes it off with his STM.
Jivas invade.	Yuel lullaby, and some change in attitude by people, a reduced focus on networking.
Yuels invade.	Do a Pied Piper number, leading them back to Flimsy. Or maybe some higher-order biotweak on the flims.

Table 3: Menaces and Fixes

October 26-27, 2009. *It's Darkest Before Dawn.*

At some point in the novel, maybe in the first chapter, I need for Jim to say something about death. Here's a remark I emailed to Marc Laidlaw yesterday.

"I have to confess that there's also a part of me that feels a twinge of envy whenever I hear of someone dying. They get to finally quit striving and take a rest. The Big Sleep. Enough's enough. Off the hook. Free at last. Gone to a better world. Merged. I realized this was a dangerous line of thought."

We went to see the King Tut show at the De Young Museum in San Francisco this weekend. It was a good show, with some gorgeous things. I loved a "pectoral" or necklace with a winged scarab, and even better was a big gold coffin for Tut's grandmother or mother-

in-law or something. Tjuya. A boat to heaven. It would be cool to have Weena and Charles be storing their bodies in that kind of a chest instead of just in a wood coffin. Maybe Charles was an Egyptologist!

I pick up a lot of cultural associations of the 1920s and 1960s when I look at Egyptian art. Howard Carter discovered Tut's tomb in the 1920s—I just read Carter's fascinating account of it in a Dover reprint called *The Discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamen*. I think Tut sparked the 1920s fad for Deco and Egyptian stuff. I could hook that into Charles and Weena's departure.

The psychedelic rock posters and cartoons of the 1960s often used to feature flying scarabs—I think particularly of the work by Rick Griffin

It felt so weird to come out of the tomb-like show into the museum shop, three thousand years later, and a half a world away from Tut's tomb and everyone is imitating Tut, wearing plastic Tut hats, and taking pictures with their cell phones.

Certainly there should be Egyptian stuff in my fictional land of Flimsy. A flying snake. A great scarab. These might be better than elephants.

If Jim as made the tunnel to Flimsy with his STM, then how would it be that Weena and Hinton have been travelling back and forth for over a hundred years?

Well, perhaps a *spirit* can go back and forth, but until there was a tunnel, perhaps no *flims* could do the hop.

I'm wondering if the yuels would have thought ahead and put a lot of yuel spores into that yuel-built body they give to Jim. And in this case, Jim would be taking yuels back to Earth even as he takes back jivas. This is a bad idea, as it would short-circuit the need for a couple of the later chapters.

Might Jim at least worry about the possible presence of spores in his yuel-built body? How might he cleanse himself? He wouldn't ask a jiva to go over him, as then he'd have to worry about getting a jiva egg case again (remember that he (mistakenly) thinks his egg case is gone). And if he underwent some kind of annihilating radiation bath to remove the spores, this would be likely to kill the egg case.

How do people kill jivas? I'd talked about sparking jiva tendrils before. How about a different approach here, maybe Durkle knows it. You can lure out yuels (or yuel spores) with music! This would set us up for Jim's Pied Piper routine near the end of the book.

So the first chapter is taking shape, but I keep feeling like I'm repeating myself. In a way, I'm sad to go back to having a 28-year-old or 32-year-old main character. But I still have hopes of getting my rocks off via the creative process. Here's something along these lines that I emailed Greg Gibson last night.

"I'm thinking of switching to writing stories pretty soon. After I get this current novel off my back. Right now it doesn't feel like as much fun as usual. I have a sense that I'm repeating myself in ways large and small, from the story tropes right down to the phrases. And my usual publisher doesn't even want the book, so I've got that dragging on me too. I'm getting old and shopworn. But I still fantasize of blundering into the sacred grove yet again, if only for an hour or two, and that keeps me going."

November 2, 2009. *The New Arc.*

Despite all my gloom last week, I feel like I'm getting a much better story-arc going. I'm adding two extra chapters at the start. And I'm putting in those ideas I had about Jim's scanning-tunneling microscope creating the portal, and about having a yuel spore infect his wife, Val. The book thus takes on a Orpheus and Eurydice pattern, as I'd mentioned before. I'm thinking Jim will probably Val back, although possibly not.

I like this new arc, and I'm thinking of a new pitch:

"*Jim and the Flims* is a mixture of fantasy and science fiction. Through a careless biotech experiment, the main character Jim allows a creature to reach earth from the afterworld, leading to the death of his wife. He travels through a portal to the afterworld in a quest to bring her back—and becomes involved in fending off a full-scale invasion of Earth."

Yesterday we were in church, and it was All Saints Day, and they sang a somewhat creepy hymn about the saints. There's a massed glowing horde of them, and they're streaming down to Earth through the pearly gates. I was thinking it might be cool if a lot of ghosts in Flimsy do in fact end up in a luminous cloud at the center, these are the saints, and it could be interesting if they "invaded" Earth—perhaps just to drive out the yuels, or perhaps to bring on the Apocalypse. But in that case, we wouldn't get Jim settling back down with his cute little wife. Maybe I keep the massed horde—and *that's* where all the famous people are—but they don't all flock to Earth, although that is mentioned as a possibility of Jim can't fix things up.

If the cloud at the center is in some sense the heavenly part of Flimsy, then the landscape and the regions below are more of a purgatory/limbo/hell region.

I'm thinking today that it's heavy-handed to call that region below "purgatory." Let people surmise that for themselves. Anyway, it seems more like hell than purgatory. I could call it "the mall," but that's overly topical and specific.

I was at the World Fantasy Con in San Jose this weekend. I ran into the literary-SF writer Jack Womack who's now working as chief publicist at the US arm of Orbit Books, who are expanding and buying a number of titles now. Orbit US is owned by Hachette Books.

I told Jack I needed a home for *Jim and the Flims*, and he urged me to send it in. I asked Jack which editor, and he said "Dieter, Tim, or Don Juan," and disappeared. From the web, I glean that the main Orbit US email address is orbit.hbgusa.com. In a three-year-old article, I see that Tim Holman was then publishing director for Orbit US, and Devi Pillai, Alaya Johnson, and Darren Nash were editors. I see the Tim, but I don't see a "Dieter or Don Juan." I'll have to ferret out an email address for Jack Womack and ask him more.

In any case, I'm still revising the book, and I think I'll hold off on making proposals till January, 2010. I really need to put my best foot forward the next time out, I don't want to rack up a string of rejections. I might as well take my time, as there's probably no point sending out a proposal in December—nothing ever happens in December.

November 3, 2009. Distractions. More Work on the Outline.

Okay, I found Jack Womack via Facebook. Now to rework *Jim and the Flims* and get it ready for sending out again. Jack suggested sending it to the main guy at Orbit, Tim Holman.

I've written two chapters for the new start to *Jim and the Flims*, and I have the Orpheus and Eurydice story arc in mind. At this point, I need to go through the whole manuscript, chapter by chapter, propagating changes forward as I go, and making sure all the pieces fit. Right now, Jim's personality undergoes a glitch or a lurch between my (newly written) Chapter 2 and the (written nearly a year ago) Chapter 3.

But soon I'll have to set *Jim* aside until December or January. For one thing, I have to do some revisions on my memoir—more about this in my *Notes for my Memoir.doc* file.

Also coming up is a month-long trip to Australia, and I don't plan to do much work on the memoir or on the novel during that time. It may be that I don't even get into the memoir until December.

And in the very near term, I'm about to go to San Francisco for three nights to be with the family for daughter [Isabel's art show](#), which is a giant 400 foot graphic novel cartoon.

All this said, I find that I'm repeatedly rewriting the outline of the remaining chapters of *Jim*—and I'm even rewriting the outlines of some earlier chapters. To the extent that it's easily done, I'm rapidly integrating changes into the novel to match what I plan.

November 4-7, 2009. Egyptian Style!

I still need a simple, high-concept idea for what Weena and Charles were up to, who Charles was when he was alive, and how Skeeves fits into their plot. That's the big missing cluster. Note that I don't need something really complicated here, it just has to be solid and emotionally satisfying.

So, okay—let's have Weena and Charles be Egyptologists! Ancient Egyptian death stuff is cool. The art is great, you've got the mysterioso hieroglyphs, and the belief system is wack—see also the Wikipedia paragraph on the [Egyptian afterlife](#).



Figure 25: Tjuya's Coffin

I saw this great sarcophagus at the [King Tut show \(which I blogged about\)](#), Tjuya's coffin. Let's say that Weena and Charles are squeezed into a box like this together, one atop the other, in a gnarly Poe-style embrace. Weena gets back into the box, she lies down on the inert and mummy-like Charles, hugging him and caressing him.

Later Jim gets hold of this magical coffin and buries himself on the bluff next to Val's ashes in their octagonal cherrywood box.

I can visualize the last scene of the novel as looking like my painting of "The Muse." Val's buried in that particular spot, overlooking the tower at the southern end of Four Mile Beach. That's Val rising up from the ground, see. There's a nice hollow in the ground there, where I sat when I painted this picture. And Jim's body is buried in Amenhotep's casket there, too.



Figure 26: The Muse

So how do I work the Egyptology thing? What if Charles is an unknown-to-the-public version of Howard Carter, who unearthed King Tut's tomb. Charles did a secret dig in a wadi in a cliff high above the Valley of the Kings. Charles found Amenhotep I's tomb (which the public still believes to be undiscovered, see Wikipedia on [Amenhotep I](#)), and looted it before Victor Loret, the French Egyptologist, found it as the by-then-empty tomb, KV39 (or maybe Tomb ANB).

Most of the plunder of the tomb went to a French aristocrat, a man like Carter's sponsor Lord Carnarvon. But Charles and Weena stole one piece of the booty—a gold coffin, along with a Coffin Scroll or so-called [Egyptian Book of the Dead](#) within. The name

of this kind of book in Egyptian is “*rw nw prt m hrw*,” which means something like “spells of leaving in the daytime.”

“Row new port my harrow.”

Charles and Weena took their plunder to the US, where Charles became a lecturer on Egyptology. But they kept their gold sarcophagus and their Coffin Scroll. Charles and Weena deciphered the hieroglyphs, and when things got hard, and used them as a chant for leaving their bodies. Fine.

But what’s their motive in Flimsy? Why are they in with the jivas? And how does this relate to Charles’s Quest Rose? And why is Weena so eager to help set up an invasion of Earth?

What is Charles trying to create with the Quest Rose? Perhaps it’s meant to be a higher form of something that he and Weena read about in the hieroglyphs. A kind of mantra, or cartouche, or power-glyph. The thing they read does have power—it allowed them to go to the afterworld without dying. Perhaps they believe there’s a higher-order heaven beyond Flimsy, and they were trying to get there.

Rather than “Quest Rose,” I should call it something more Egyptian. The New Lotus? The Egyptians had lotuses—which are water lilies, and they is a blue species and a white species. The native blue lotus blooms in the day and in the night it closes and sinks. I found a couple of links: <http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/flowers.htm>, and <http://www.kingtutshop.com/freeinfo/Lotus-Flower.htm>. Here’s a quote from the latter.

The lotus flower is a symbol of the sun, of creation and rebirth. Because at night the flower closes and sinks underwater, at dawn it rises and opens again. According to one creation myth it was a giant lotus which first rose out of the watery chaos at the beginning of time. From this giant lotus the sun itself rose on the first day. Another version of the creation story that originated in Heliopolis. Before the universe came into being, there was an infinite ocean of inert water which constituted the primeval being named Nun. Out of Nun emerged a lotus flower, together with a single mound of dry land. The lotus blossoms opened, and out stepped the self-created sun god, Atum, as a child.

I think maybe Atum’s Lotus is a better name than the New Lotus. New Lotus is a little flat and obvious and New Age. Or Atum’s Root? But, no, I want a flower, as the thing is growing.

In some sense, Charles is looking to rediscover the original Atum’s Lotus which gave birth to the sun. He feels that he can get it to bloom again. He’s kind of hubristic, and he wants to go to a second, higher, level of heaven. I don’t think he’s seeking temporal power, or that he wants to run Earth. When Atum’s Lotus project crashes for him, Charles is content to make the most of the heaven he’s in.

Let’s say that Jim finishes the design of Atum’s Lotus when he passes by the Castle—and by doing so, Jim drives out the Bulbers.

And how does Skeeves fit in with Charles and Weena? Suppose that C & W have not in fact returned to Earth since they left in 1910. Maybe they couldn’t find a way. And their

semi-mummified bodies are in the gold sarcophagus. And the sarcophagus was bought by William Randolph Hearst, and made its way to a screwball coker descendant in San Francisco, and Skeeves acquired the sarcophagus in exchange for a kilo of coke—possibly Skeeve murdered the Hearst scion as well, and kept the coke. And then Skeeves put it in initially in the back of a hearse that he drives. Or maybe it's a van, the same van that Header drives later on.

And when Jim popped open the tunnel to Flimsy, Weena teeped through and found Skeeves because he was near her coffin. And Weena told Skeeves she'd build him a house. And she guided Monin to his present farm, located by the hole that Jim made. And the snail made a tunnel that Weena could plan to go through.

Why did Weena want to go back to Earth? She was curious to see what had happened. She was a little sick of Charles. Maybe Charles wanted Weena to fetch something to help make his Atum's Lotus project work. A special amulet from the golden coffin, something like King Tut's pectoral with the eye of Horus and the winged scarab.



Figure 27: Winged Scarab Necklace with Eye of Horus

A little more info about Egyptian notions of the afterlife, edited from the Afterlife section of the [Wikipedia article](#) on Ancient Egyptian religion.

The ancient Egyptians believed that humans possessed a *ka*, or life-force, which left the body at the point of death. Even after

death, the ka needed offerings of food, whose spiritual essence it could still consume. The ka might be thought of as simple existence or the bare notion of “I am.”

Each person also had a *ba*, the individual personality—what we might call software. Unlike the ka, the ba by default remained attached to the body after death. Egyptian funeral rituals were intended to release the ba from the body so that it could move freely. After being freed, the ba was believed to return to its mummified body each night to receive new life. Thus the state of the tomb and the mummy were important for the survival of both ka and ba.

Once the ka was free to roam, its goal was to unite with the ba to form a complete soul, called an *akh*. In order to achieve this, the ba had to pass a judgment known as the Weighing of the Heart, where the jackal-headed god Anubis weighed the heart of the deceased against a feather (which symbolized Maat, the divine principle of fairness and order). The ibis-headed Thoth took notes.

If the heart was heavy, the ba was destroyed by the crocodile-headed demon Ammut, also known as the gobbler. Otherwise the ba united with the ka to form an *akh*. And then, by the way, you’d want to make sure that the gods gave you back your heart.

Specific beliefs about the activities of the *akh* varied. The vindicated dead were said to dwell in Osiris’ kingdom, a lush and pleasant land believed to exist somewhere beyond the western horizon, and kings were said to travel with Ra the sun-god in his boat that glides across the sky every day.

There was also a notion that an *akh* could also travel in the world of the living and magically affect events.

I [blogged](#) this info on November 10, 2009, along with some other stuff.

I should make Skeeves more colorful—at present he’s just a flat, evil psycho. A 2D cartoon. I’d like him to be more of a motor-mouth, espousing a zillion crazy theories. And to give him a certain dark glamour—sometimes psychopaths have a way of drawing people in, I’ve known a few guys like that. Header is too flat and pure-evil as well.

November 8-10, 2009. The Revised Plot.

I’m still trying to crystallize and integrate the Egyptian angle. In this entry, I’ll recap, polish and extend the content of what I was saying in the entry of November 4-7, 2009. More than that, I’ll write a fairly comprehensive outline of my revised plot.

It could take a month to implement all the rewrites this will involve—that is, a month in addition to the time I’ll need to just finish the novel. Well, there’s no rush.

In any case, as I mentioned a couple of entries ago, I’m about to go to Australia for a month-long academic junket, and I have to do some revisions on my memoir. But in the meantime, I may keep thinking about the new plot outline, getting it smooth.

In a secret excavation in 1895, the tomb of Amenhotep I was found in Egypt. A French nobleman acquired the golden casket and the mummy of Amenhotep within. The California tycoon Randolph Crocker bought it around 1910 to add some tone to his garish palace on the coast. Crocker engaged Charles Howard—a disgraced expatriate British Egyptologist who'd taught for a few years at the fledgling UC Berkeley before being fired—to write a monograph on the casket and the mummy.

Charles Howard, who was also a dabbler in the occult, discovered what he considered to be a spell, embossed as a pattern of hieroglyphs on the outside of the casket. He calls the spell the Lotus chant. Supposedly it allows you to leave your body alive, and to travel to what the Egyptians called the Western Lands.

Charles was having an extramarital affair with Weena, a former student. The scandal was about to break, so Charles and Weena decided to flee to the Evening Lands for a few decades, then to return.

(Charles is about 40 and Weena about 30, so their birth years were Weena: 1880, Charles 1870. I see my novel as being set around 2010, so Weena's body's calendar age is 130, while Charles is 140. They're in suspended animation for a century, which is tidy.)

Charles and Weena embraced inside Amenhotep's roomy casket, lying down on the crumbly, greasy mummy. They chanted the spell, and made the astral journey to Flimsy.

They settled into Flimsy, but they learned that ghosts are unable to return to Earth by any path other than by passing through the center of Flimsy. They were reluctant to take this route, as it's said among the flims that the passage through the Eye of Light annihilates an individual's personality—only the raw soul-essence is recycled, this is what the Egyptians call the *ba*.

Charles had some hope of developing a spell he called Atum's Lotus, which he initially thinks might open a tunnel back to Earth. And he sells this idea to the Duke of Human Flimsy and to the Earthmost Jiva, who would like to start leeching kessence off of Earth.

Charles becomes obsessed with the abstract geometries of his potential Atum's Lotus spell, and he's endlessly tweaking it. Charles himself isn't really that interested in going back to Earth, he likes it in Flimsy, he's just kind of lost in the hacking process of Atum's Lotus.

Charles began getting teep contacts from the spirit of Amenhotep himself, who had long since moved into the glow of light near the center of Flimsy. Amenhotep has noticed the vibes of Charles's incantation, and Amenhotep hopes for a spell to open a path, not back to Earth, but rather to a higher level of heaven. He feels that, as a great Pharaoh, he was too good for this commoner-infested afterlife.

So, without telling his sponsors, Charles shifts his focus from finding a tunnel to the Earth to finding a tunnel to some higher heaven. Not that he's making much progress in any case. But he does, with Amenhotep's help, reach the insight that Flimsy is within every particle of matter, and that the center of Flimsy is transfinitely far away. And now, when Weena, pressed by the Duke for results, nags Charles about that tunnel back to Earth, Charles remarks that, if Weena really wanted to get back to Earth, she should get someone to poke a hole in an electron on Earth—and that might open up a tunnel.

Weena has been making occasional teep contacts with her and Charles's bodies, checking on them every few months.

Over the years, Amenhotep's casket with its three bodies (Amenhotep, Charles and Weena), makes its way to Julian Crocker, a screwball coker descendant of the old family in San Francisco. Skeeves acquires the sarcophagus in exchange for a kilo of coke—and then the deal goes bad, when Julian wants to hang onto the coffin. In a tussle with him, Skeeves murders Julian Hearst, and keeps the coke and takes the sarcophagus.

Skeeves puts Amenhotep's gold sarcophagus in the back of his van. He keeps his surfboard in the van, too, also a mat that he sleeps on. And now the casket is in there too. Skeeves is taken with the fact that two of the "mummies" in the casket are in suspended animation, as they're Charles and Weena. Maybe he even has sex with the comatose Weena.

Weena visits her sarcophagus—and is disgusted by the necrophiliac liberties that Skeeves is taking with her body. Weena gets into Skeeves's head and picks up the gossip, coming from Chang, that Jim Oster is doing his experiments with his scanning-tunneling microscope. It occurs to Weena that this might eventually lead to a tunnel to Flimsy, were Jim to pop an electron, so she tell Skeeves to look for a sharper tip.

Skeeves mentions this to his hanger-on Ira, who happens to steal the metallic hydrogen shard from the UCSC physics lab, which Jim then gets through Chang.

When Jim Oster opens the tunnel to Flimsy with his scanning-tunneling microscope, a yuel spore drifts through and embeds itself in Val. The tunnel closes up almost right away, but a permanent flaw or dimple remains in the wall between the worlds, a weak spot that invites further access.

Six months later, Weena re-visits her sarcophagus. Once again, she gets into Skeeves's head and this time she hears the vague gossip about some weird infestation of Val's body—Skeeves heard a little from Chang, who heard it from Jim. Weena sniffs out Jim's STM project and senses the popped electron. This isn't a wide-ranging search for her, for remember that her coffin is now in Skeeves's van, and the van is in beachfront parking lot only a half mile from Jim's cottage.

Weena tells Skeeves to steal the old charred sample on Jim's sample sled—the speck of matter which contained the tunnel, and which now contains the thin spot where the tunnel can be remade. She tells Skeeves this is a huge discovery.

Skeeves decides to keep control of the situation, so he drowns Ira while they're out surfing. But Ira won't go away. His ghost sticks around. There's some seepage of kessence from Flimsy that's making the ghosts in Santa Cruz more solid than before.

On the Flimsy side, Weena gets Monin and his family to move their farm to a location "near" the Earth tunnel. She has them use a snail to make a solid tunnel with a door locked by a spell, there's a door on either end.

On the Earth side, the snail makes a house for Skeeves. The tunnel, or Weena's spell, are warping the space around Monin's farm and around the Whipped Vic so that both are hard to find. The cops are looking for Skeeves to question him about Julian Crocker's death. Skeeves hides tiny spiral shrunk recesses of the house's interior, and he stashes Amenhotep's casket in the basement. He lets Header and the ghost of Ira live in the main part of the house, and he signs his van over to Header.

Weena is planning to go back to Earth soon, but she can't get Charles to come. And when the Duke finds out about the tunnel, he wants to terminate Charles's funding for his Atum's Lotus project. The tunnel to Earth is all that the Duke ever really wanted, after all. Charles begs to keep the project alive a little more—he says he's close to finding a tunnel to a higher heaven. Weena points out that if they tax Earth with the jivas, they can draw in

enough kessence to buy off the Bulbers anyhow. Weena will go to Earth and find a messenger to carry the egg case. Her sense is that she herself doesn't want to be on Earth when the egg case is released. And the tunnel is long enough that you can't just toss the egg case through. So the Duke grants Charles a short extension while the egg case is prepared.

Weena and the Graf are occasional lovers. Before Weena leaves for Earth herself, she blabs to the Graf. She's a chatterbox—she tells the Graf of tunnel, the hiding of Monin's farm, and the tunnel-door unlocking spell. The Graf quickly bribes Yerba to let him through, and he teep-teaches the locking spell to Ginnie on Earth so she can open the door. Thus the Graf and his yuel come through the tunnel before Weena gets around to making her trip to fetch a messenger.

Skeeves doesn't like the idea of the Graf coming through from the afterworld, so he stalks him and kills him at Lovers Bluff. And he kills Ginnie as well because she opened the door. He's getting scared of the occult, he doesn't like hearing Weena in his head. Header, Skeeves's pal, becomes possessed by the yuel that was inside the Graf. Skeeves knows this, but he decides to let that ride, as it means that Header now has more power than before. A guy possessed by a demon is okay, if the guy's on your side.

Like Ira, Ginnie has an unusually solid ghost. Thanks to the yuel, Header is able to teep into the mind of Ginnie's ghost and block her memory of being killed by Skeeves. Ginnie hooks up with Header and moves into the Whipped Vic.

Weena feeds Jim both the route to the Whipped Vic, and the door-unlocking spell so he can open the door. She comes through the tunnel and begins an affair with Jim. Charles should come through the tunnel too, but he's mad about there being such a simple path, he's focused on Atum's Lotus, and doesn't want to abandon it. As mentioned before, Charles doesn't really want to go back to Earth anymore.

Weena spreads some jivas on Earth and wipes out the yuels that the Graf smuggled across. She teaches Jim the Lotus chant, stashes his body in the basement, maybe on top of the sarcophagus, and takes him across to Flimsy. As mentioned before, she wants to bring Jim back to Flimsy so the jivas can put an egg-case on him, and invade Earth.

So Jim goes back to Flimsy with Weena. And then Jim is saddled with an eggcase to take to Earth.

[This is as far as the action of the book currently goes, which is up through my "Yuelsville" chapter.]

Jim reaches Earth with the egg case and the jivas get loose.

Weena has a falling out with the Duke, and throws in her lot with the yuels. She brings a yuel over to Earth to fight the jivas. The yuels kill all the jivas, and then Jim does a Pied Piper routine, leading the yuels through the tunnel to Flimsy. And he closes the tunnel for good.

And now Jim wants to find the ghost of his wife Val at the center of Flimsy. On the way, Jim passes by the Duke's castle, and, in a stroke of genius, he completes Charles's Atum's Lotus. Jim uses Atum's Lotus to send off the attacking Bulbers. And then Jim goes through Atum's Lotus transformation himself, but bails out from it quite near the center of Flimsy, the Eye of Light, a central singularity at a transfinite distance.

Jim meets Val, Amenhotep, and the god of Flimsy near the Eye of Light. He's taking Val back to Earth via the Eye of Light. The god of Flimsy puts a spin on them so their personalities will make it through.

The ghost of Amenhotep gloms on and follows Jim and Val. Amenhotep imagines that the tunnel leads to higher heaven, though truly it leads back to Earth which is indeed, in a certain circular sense, the heaven above heaven.

Jim gets into his sleeping body, and he grows a new body for Val from her ashes.

Amenhotep gets his mummy-body going. We have a final struggle against the powerful, sinister re-animated mummy. Jim kills the mummy and returns to a happy live with Val.

I need some kind of explanation about how the route to the Whipped Vic keeps changing every day, and about how Ginnie is able to learn it. Think, maybe, of the maze-like passages within a pyramid—maybe Weena has learned a concealment spell from Charles, who in turn got it from Amenhotep.

Or, no, I have it, the border snail herself makes the concealment maze.

November 14, 2009. “*The Mummy*” with Boris Karloff

Last night we watched the 1932 Boris Karloff film classic, *The Mummy*, I borrowed it from the library. Great, great film. And great research material for me, given my interest in spicing up the plot of *Jim and the Flims* with some Egyptian spells and a mummy.

In the first scene, it’s 1922 (echoing Carter’s opening of King Tut’s tomb in 1922), and two archaeologists are in their field quarters, studying their haul. In the corner leans an open sarcophagus with Karloff mostly wrapped in mummy-bandages, and with a wonderfully wrinkled face. He’s the mummy of Imhotep, a priest from 3,700 years ago. A handsome young Oxford-educated archaeologist is studying a little box with an inscription of the lid along the lines of, “Whoever opens this box will die from the mummy’s curse.”

So naturally he opens the box, and within is *The Scroll of Thoth*. Thoth is that Egyptian god who has a skinny bird’s head, an ibis head. The hieroglyphs are so old that they’re pre-Dynastic. But our dreamy archaeologist copies some of them out, and begins trying to read them, reciting the text in a low murmur.

In his casket, Karloff/Imhotep, twitches an eyelid, opens his eyes, moves his hand. Cut to blond archaeologist youth still studying the Scroll of Imhotep a few feet away. A crusty hand comes into the frame and rests upon the scroll. On one finger, the mummy’s hand bears a ring with a scarab in it. The mummy leaves carrying the Scroll of Thoth. The Oxford boy backs off to the side of the little room and—begins hysterically laughing.

“He laughed until he died in a strait-jacket the next year,” we learn from the romantic-lead-type archaeologist in the next scene, which is set ten years later.

Karloff reappears, he’s still the walking-mummy Imhotep, but he looks fairly cleaned-up, thanks to magic. He’s wearing a fez and presents himself as a local named Ardeth Bey. He guides the romantic-lead archaeologist to the untouched tomb of Princess Ankh-es-en-amon, a so-called “Vestal Virgin,” from the good old days.

A quick jump forward and now Ankh’s mummy and all of the statues and ornaments from her tomb are in Cairo museum, Karloff/Imhotep/Bey goes there, lights a lamp, kneels, and recites a spell from the Scroll of Thoth, which he still has.

“Ankh Salaam. Ankh Salaam. Ankh Salaam,” chants Karloff, which is kind of great, as he’s using, like, the only two vaguely Egyptian words that anyone in the U.S. audience knows.

Not far away, in downtown Cairo, a flapperesque half-Egyptian girl at a nightclub hears the psychic call. She is the reincarnation of the Princess, she carries the ancient *ba* and *ka*.

And now there's some back and forth. The romantic-lead archaeologist wears an Amulet of Isis to protect himself from the Mummy. Close-ups of Karloff's wrinkled, triangular face, eyes huge, glaring hypnotically. To cast a spell he holds out his hand with the scarab ring. To kill an distant enemy, he clenches his hand, and sends an old duffer to the carpet with a heart attack.

The Mummy wants to kill the flapper and then to use the Scroll of Thoth to revive her to be his wife. They'll hang out with a version of the sun god, Amun Ra. (Although Atum is also a sun god, as is Ra.) Karloff calls this transformation The Great Change. But a statue of the goddess Isis saves the flapper.

And in the last scene Karloff does the classic Mummy-movie thing of turning back into a skull.

I started a painting a few days later that will be, I think, a mummy. I'll call it "Amenhotep," after the planned mummy in my novel, (or possibly I'll call it "Imhotep," which is the name of the mummy in the movie.)

December 14-19, 2009. Integrating the New Plot Elements.

So now I'm back from a month-long trip to Australia, during which time I did nothing at all on *Jim and the Flims*. And now I'd like to integrate the ideas that I outlined in the Nov 8-10, 2009 entry, "Revised Plot."

I'd like to do this fairly rapidly. and then get into writing the rest of the book. And maybe then I'll do a full print-out and read-through to smooth out the new additions, and to make the story arc really come alive in my head again. And then I can finish the book.

I'll break the new material into four pieces.

(1) *Skeeves*. Jim can see Skeeves getting the sarcophagus in the first chapter, and Skeeves might tell Jim some more in the "Surf Party" chapter.

(2) *Weena*. Weena can tell most of her story right before Jim leaves his body in the Whipped Vic basement in the chapter currently called, "The Tunnel," and maybe some of it at beginning of the chapter currently called "Atum's Lotus."

(3) *Charles*. Charles can tell most of his story in the latter part of the "Atum's Lotus" chapter, when Jim and Charles are hanging out.

(4) *The ending*. The part that comes after what I've written so far. I don't have to worry about integrating that at this point—I'll be working that stuff in as I write the new chapters. All I have to do right now is to integrate (1) – (3).

There's one stylistic point to make. I think I can show some of the Skeeves stuff happening in the opening chapter, and then maybe have Skeeves tell Jim a bit more in the "Surf Party" chapter.

I have a fleeting worry that it might be boring if I have Charles and Weena *tell* their stories in interactive conversation with Jim. Might it be better to present their stories in the form of narratives, that is, to *show* the stories? One possibility here would be to let Weena and Charles deliver extended monologues. But this is a bit unnatural, and it's perhaps mildly confusing to have an "I" character other than Jim. A second option might be to have Jim step in and say something like, "Rather than recounting every step of my somewhat tortuous

conversation with Weena, I'll just summarize what she told me." And then get into a narrative that I set off with the *** breaks, or possibly even set off into a separate chapter called something like "Weena's Tale." And ditto for "Charles's Story."

But, no, I think I won't have use either of these creaky options. I think I *can* just present the extra material in the give and take of conversations. It won't be completely crystal clear at first, but I'll circle back and give the information more than once, and the reader can have the detective-novel sensation of figuring something out.

Okay, now I'll write out the three pieces, chunked into action points, and I'll fold them into the book, working them in as conversational bits, as in a detective novel.

As in my To Do lists, I'll put asterisks by the points as I work them in. Some points I can't take care of yet, and will have to handle later on, for instance when Skeeves reappears later in the book—and I'll move these leftover points to the master To Do list that I keep near the beginning of this Notes document.

(1) Skeeves Material

(1a)

*The axe that Skeeves threatens Jim with in high-school has its handle painted green.

*And that's the same axe that Header has later on.

*Over the years, Amenhotep's casket makes its way to Julian Crocker, a screwball coker descendant of the old family in San Francisco. Skeeves acquires the sarcophagus in exchange for a kilo of coke—and then the deal goes bad, when Julian wants to hang onto the coffin. In a tussle with him, Skeeves murders Julian Hearst, and keeps the coke and takes the sarcophagus.

*Skeeves puts Amenhotep's gold sarcophagus in the back of his van. He keeps his surfboard in the van, too, also a mat that he sleeps on. And now the casket is in there too.

*The casket has three bodies in it (Amenhotep, Charles and Weena). Skeeves is taken with the fact that two of the "mummies" in the casket are in suspended animation, as they're Charles and Weena. He's having sex with the comatose Weena.

(1b)

*Skeeves mentions Weena's remark about popping an electron to his hanger-on Ira, who happens to steal the metallic hydrogen shard from the UCSC physics lab, which Jim then gets through Chang.

* A few months later, Weena tells Skeeves to steal the old charred sample on Jim's sample sled—the speck of matter which contained the tunnel, and which now contains the thin spot where the tunnel can be remade.

Skeeves wants to be the boss with the secret, so he drowns Ira while they're out surfing. But Ira won't go away. His ghost sticks around. There's some seepage of kessence from Flimsy that's making the ghosts in Santa Cruz more solid than before.

(1c)

* On the Earth side, the snail makes a house for Skeeves. The border snail is warping the space around the Whipped Vic so it's hard to find. The cops are looking for Skeeves to question him about Julian Crocker's death.

*Skeeves hides tiny spiral shrunken recesses of the house's interior, and he stashes Amenhotep's casket in the basement. He lets Header and the ghost of Ira live in the main part of the house.

* Skeeves signs his van over to Header.

(1d)

* Weena doesn't like the idea of the Graf coming through from the afterworld, so she (remotely) sics Skeeves on him and Skeeves kills the Graf at Lovers Bluff. And Skeeves kills Ginnie as well because she opened the door. He's getting scared of the occult, he doesn't like hearing Weena in his head.

* Like Ira, Ginnie has an unusually solid ghost. Thanks to the yuel, Header is able to teep into the mind of Ginnie's ghost and block her memory of being killed by Skeeves. Ginnie hooks up with Header and moves into the Whipped Vic.

(2) Weena Material

(2a)

* In a secret excavation in 1895, the tomb of Amenhotep I was found in Egypt. A French nobleman acquired the golden casket and the mummy of Amenhotep within. The California tycoon Randolph Crocker bought it around 1910 to add some tone to his garish palace on the West coast.

* Randolph Crocker engaged Charles Howard—a disgraced expatriate British Egyptologist who'd taught for a few years at the fledgling UC Berkeley before being fired—to write a monograph on the casket and the mummy.

* Charles, who was also a dabbler in the occult, discovered what he considered to be a spell, embossed as a pattern of hieroglyphs on the outside of the casket. He called the spell Atum's Lotus. It allows you to leave your body alive, and to travel to the afterworld—what the Egyptians called the Western Lands.

* Charles was having an extramarital affair with Weena, a former student. The scandal was about to break, so Charles and Weena decided to flee to the Evening Lands for a few decades, then to return.

* Charles and Weena embraced inside Amenhotep's roomy casket, lying down on the crumbly, greasy mummy. They chanted the spell, and made the astral journey to Flimsy.

(2b)

* Weena nags Charles about finding a tunnel back to Earth, Charles remarks that, if Weena really wanted to get back to Earth, she should get someone to poke a hole in an electron on Earth—and that might open up a tunnel.

* Weena has been making occasional teep contacts with her and Charles's bodies, checking on them every few months.

* Weena remotely peers in at her sarcophagus—and is disgusted by the necrophiliac liberties that Skeeves is taking with her body. Weena gets into Skeeves's head and picks up the gossip, coming from Chang, that Jim Oster is doing his experiments with his scanning-tunneling microscope. It occurs to Weena that this might eventually lead to a tunnel to Flimsy, were Jim to pop an electron, so she tell Skeeves to look for a sharper tip.

(2c)

* Six months later, Weena re-visits her sarcophagus. Once again, she gets into Skeeves's head and this time she hears the vague gossip about some weird infestation of Val's body—Skeeves heard a little from Chang, who heard it from Jim. She deduces that a tunnel had opened, but that it had closed up almost right away, and that a permanent flaw or dimple remains in the wall between the worlds, a weak spot that invites further access.

* Weena sniffs out Jim's STM project and senses the popped electron. This isn't a wide-ranging search for her, for remember that her coffin is now in Skeeves's van, and the van is in beachfront parking lot only a half mile from Jim's cottage.

On the Flimsy side, Weena finds Monin and his family who have a farm at a location "near" the proposed Earth tunnel. She has them use a border snail to make a solid tunnel with a door on either end which the snail holds shut. The snail tunnels through the dimple in the electron which was nicked by Jim and which Skeeves has in the sample that he stole at Val's funeral.

* The border snail is warping the space around Monin's farm, hiding it as well.

(2d)

* Weena and the Graf are occasional lovers. Before Weena leaves for Earth herself, she blabs to the Graf. She's a chatterbox—she tells the Graf of tunnel, the hiding of Monin's farm, and the tunnel-door unlocking spell.

* The Graf quickly bribes Yerba to let him through, and she tells the snail to open the doors for the Graf and the Graf tells the snail to open for Ginnie on Earth. Thus the Graf and his yuel come through the tunnel before Weena gets around to making her trip to fetch a messenger.

(2e)

* Weena feeds Jim both the route to the Whipped Vic, and tells the snail to open the door for him. She comes through the tunnel and begins an affair with Jim.

* Weena spreads some jivas on Earth and wipes out the yuels that the Graf smuggled across. She teaches Jim the Lotus chant, stashes his body in the basement, maybe on top of the sarcophagus, and takes him across to Flimsy. As mentioned before, she wants to bring Jim back to Flimsy so the jivas can put an egg-case on him, and invade Earth.

* So Jim goes back to Flimsy with Weena.

(3) Charles Material

(3a)

* Charles and Weena settled into Flimsy, but they learned that ghosts are unable to return to Earth by any path other than by passing through the center of Flimsy. They were reluctant to take this route, as it's said among the flims that the passage through the Eye of Light annihilates an individual's personality—only the raw soul-essence is recycled, this is what the Egyptians call the *ba*.

* Charles becomes obsessed with the abstract geometries of his potential Atum's Lotus spell, and he's endlessly tweaking it. Charles is lost in the hacking process of Atum's Lotus.

* Charles has long since shifted his focus from finding a tunnel to the Earth to finding a tunnel to some higher heaven. Not that he's making much progress in any case.

* Charles does reach the insight that Flimsy is within every electron, and passes this fact to Weena. And he tells Weena to pop an electron if she wants a tunnel.

(3b)

* Weena is planning to go back to Earth soon, coaching Jim to pop an electron so she can tunnel through. Charles doesn't really want to go back to Earth anymore.

* And when the Duke finds out about the tunnel, he wants to use it to leech off Earth.

* Weena points out that if they tax Earth with the jivas, they can draw in enough kessence to buy off the Bulbers anyhow. Weena will go to Earth and find a messenger to carry the egg case.

* The tunnel is long enough that you can't just toss the egg case through. So the Duke grants Charles a short extension while the egg case is prepared.

December 20, 2009. Still Integrating.

I really don't need too much more to finish the book. Five or six more chapters. There's no need to drag out the trip from Yuelsville to Earth, as we want to get into the final action now.

I went ahead and took care of every item of the previous entry, "Integrating the New Plot Elements," and I also took care of many outstanding items on my global *To Do* list.

More things I did:

Killed off Charles at the end of the "Atum's Lotus" chapter and killed off Weena at the end of the "Lights Out" chapter. Clear the decks.

Changed it so Atum's Lotus should be made of sounds as well as images. And Jim can use those sounds in the Pied Piper chapter.

Made Ira gay and infatuated with Skeeves to make it conceivable that Ira still hangs around even after Skeeves murders him.

Clarified why Jim goes back to Earth from Yuelsville, when really he should be pressing on towards the center of Flimsy in his quest for Val. The little image of the goddess of Flimsy who talks to Jim at Fungur Gardens tells him that if (and only if) he closes the tunnel and saves Earth, then she'll let him get Val.

Mitigated the apparent inconsistency of Jim's going back to Earth to close the tunnel when he half-knows that he'll infect Earth with jivas or yuels. The goddess of Flimsy knows that with the tunnel is more or less public knowledge in Flimsy, the invasions are bound to happen, whether or not Jim plays a role, so it's just as well to let Jim go through anyway and put him in charge of cleaning things out before he closes the tunnel. "I've lost a lot of worlds this way," says the little figure. "The flims are very greedy."

By now the novel must have inconsistencies and broken segues and repetitions, so I need to print it out and go over it again. The prospect of rereading the whole thing just now bores me a little, so maybe, for now, I'll just reread, say, the first three or four chapters, and the most recent couple. Or, if it gets good to me, I'll reread the whole thing.

We're about to go to Wyoming for five days to visit our daughter Isabel for Xmas, and I may bring the printout for casual reading.

Looking ahead, I'd like to be really clear on the book's story before writing the ending, so I'm also revising the outline. This is a stage when I can think in terms of simplifying the book by getting rid of unnecessary threads. I'm over the hump and it's time to be tidying up.

Regarding the overall story, Jim needs to muse and scheme about wanting to find the ghost of Val. This needs to be a strong, persistent thread. It should be that he's trying various strategies over time, we need a clear sense that this is the Quest of the tale. Without this Quest, Jim is simply a patsy for the flims. And, given that I only added this the wife-fetching theme recently, I'll really need to weave it in.

December 28-29, 2009 Tweaking the Plot Yet Again.

Okay, we're back from a week's trip to Pinedale, Wyoming. We went there to visit Isabel for Christmas. I'm only today getting around to reading some of my printouts of the novel. I'm looking at the first chapter—a lot of it is new material that I've never revised even once, so it's quite rough.

Even though I didn't look at the manuscript while we were gone, I did think about the novel a little bit.

One thought I had was that too many of my characters are murderers, and therefore somewhat unlikeable. Here's a list of how things stand (*italicized*), with possible ameliorations.

(1) *Skeeves murders Crocker, the Graf, Ginnie, and Ira.* Maybe the Crocker death is self-defense or an accident, and the Graf and Ginnie are due to Weena's controlling him. And maybe he doesn't kill Ira, or if he does, then that's Weena's fault too.

(2) *Header is in on the murder of the Graf and Ginnie.* Well, okay, Header is a bad guy.

(3) *Weena indirectly kills Val, sets up the murder of the Graf and Ginnie, and murders Header.* We'll let these crimes stand: Weena is a villain. In fact, we can amp up the amount of responsibility that Weena bears for the deaths of the Graf and Ginnie—she doesn't want a witness in the form of Ginnie. Regarding Val, it could even be that Weena deliberately sent something through and into Val so as to torment Jim and make him more malleable—or possibly she sent some kind of feeler as a way to be sure of finding the hole.

(4) *Ginnie murders Weena and Skeeves.* If we blame Weena for everything bad, I think it's legit for Ginnie to kill her. But we can have something different happen to Skeeves, that is, Ginnie won't kill him.

I'd currently had the Earthmost Jiva eating up Charles's sprinkle—instead I think we let Charles escape to the center of Flimsy, and then Jim can have another little encounter with Charles, who is, after all, an interesting character.

I want to think a little more about Val's false pregnancy and ensuing death. I'd thought of the spore as being a yuel, but it crossed my mind that instead of a spore, the infectious agent might have been a jiva egg.

If Val's pregnancy is a jiva egg growing inside her, then I'd need to rethink the time frame until they find this out. At present I have it being at the six months point of her pregnancy. But in other spots, I describe the jivas as gestating more rapidly than that. In the Clone Garden scene, it seems like the jivas gestate overnight (although I could change this), and in the jivas-inside-Dick-Simly sequence it seems like the jivas gestate in a few days. I suppose I could find a reason to justify why the jiva grows more slowly inside Val. It's more dramatic if the process is slower within Val, as then it's more like a real pregnancy experience.

Another issue is that I have Weena's jiva, Awnee, poking a ovipositor directly into the flesh of Dick Simly to impregnate him, and I'd be looking at a floating spore-like egg as being the impregnator of Val. Looking ahead, however, I'm expecting Jim's jiva eggcase to send out something like a cloud of spores or, more accurately, like jellyfish planula larvae. So it could be that the thing that gets into Val is a jiva larva. And to prefigure this discovery,

I could have Monin's garden clones being seeded by ambient jiva larvae as well. The image, then, might be that the atmosphere of Flimsy is as rich with seeds of jivas and yuels as the Earth's atmosphere is rich with bacteria.

I might suppose that the maturation of the jivas within the kessence clones takes six months, just the same as in Val. We could suppose that you only get the really rapid jiva maturation (like in Dick Simly) when a jiva directly implants an egg, which we might better term a larva or an embryo.

I would still like Monin's kenner clones to grow rather rapidly, as it's visually dramatic to have them appear overnight. In this case, the clone garden should have (at least) two plots—some full-grown clones that are swollen with jivas ready to hatch, and some new clone "saplings" that spring up overnight.

By the way, I'm currently planning for Jim to grow Val a meat body from her ashes back on Earth in the book's last scenes, but this process doesn't have to be an exact match for the way in which the kenner clones of Monin are grown in Flimsy.

If it's really Weena's fault that Skeeves killed Ginnie, then Ginnie might have figured this out, so she might not necessarily want to haunt or to destroy Skeeves. But then why would she want to go back to Earth with Jim? Maybe Jim begs her to come as far as the tunnel because he figures Ginnie can teep Ira (or perhaps Skeeves) and get him to open the door—and Jim doesn't have teep contact with anyone on Earth. And then Ginnie gets pulled through due to unforeseen circumstances.

By the way, if Jim doesn't have a door-opener contact of his own, then how did Weena and the Duke expect Jim to get back to Earth in the first place? They planned for Weena to contact Skeeves?

When Jim temporarily returns to Earth to close the tunnel (and then gets bogged down in evicting the jivas and yuels), it seems like an unnecessary complication to have him (a) Drop his kessence body and get back into his meat body and then (b) Store his meat body and get back into a kessence body to return to Flimsy to look for Val.

What if I pushed the missing body scene back to the final chapter? Alternately, if Jim *does* mess with his meat body on the first trip back, I should motivate this by supposing that—teeping down from Flimsy—he's noticed that the body is no longer where he left it. In fact, this could be an additional motivation for his hop back to Earth.

I currently say that, *firstly*, in trying to remove Jim's jiva egg case, the yuels burn Jim's body down to a sprinkle and then give him a new yuel-built body and then, *secondly*, the eggcase pops back out of Jim's body on Earth.

So where was the egg case hiding? I can think of three options.

(It's tiny) I might suppose that the egg case became a microscopic attachment to Jim's sprinkle, perhaps by taking advantage of the odd topology of the book's world, wherein Flimsy is inside each electron of the visible universe.

(It's hyperdimensional) Or I might say that the egg case was hovering "beside" Jim in a higher dimension, like a gun that a terrorist hands around the arch of an airport metal-detector.

I'd need to explain why Jim's yuel friends wouldn't have thought of this possibility.

By the way, I haven't fully decided whether the pop-out occurs while Jim is in his kessence body or in his meat body. Perhaps the pop-out is more dramatic if, as a precautionary measure, Jim as already burnt the kessence body that he came over in.

January 1-16, 2010. Two Weeks of Kneading the Dough.

Jan 1, 2010.

So now I'm finally going over the printouts of the book's current state, correcting and revising. There really are quite a few spots I need to smooth over and rework to make the newly layered-on plot elements fit.

I'm enjoying this work a lot more than I'd expected, so I'll probably go through the whole book as it currently is. It's nice to be digging into it, getting my hands on the verbiage, crafting and polishing. I'm getting the characters' personalities straightened out.

I'm glad Jim is 27 instead of 63. It really makes the book more fun. When I started on it, over a year ago, I was still overwhelmed by my brain hemorrhage, but that doesn't need to be a very big part of the book after all. It's just something that happens in an early chapter.

It could work out to be a good book after all.

Last night we were at the San Francisco Symphony for New Years' Eve, and I had the idea that the Atum's Lotus could sound like a symphony orchestra—up till now I'd been thinking more in terms of Gregorian chants or those Tuvan throat-singing monks. There was one song I dug by Johann Straus II, "The Egyptian March."

January 5, 2010.

I [blogged this entry](#) on Jan 19, 2010.

I keep changing the chapter breaks, and it's a hassle to keep revising the Word Count table and my so-called outline. If you redo your outline after you write the book, is it still an outline? Like tunneling under a painted canvas and changing the underlying sketch...

Right now I'm revising what's currently chapter twelve: "The Tunnel." I'm finding I can cut a fair amount from what now turns out to be reiterated infodumps.

Revising a book, I'm always anxious that it will be somehow unfixable. But it's always fixable, if I keep an open mind. When revising a book, I often I think of the *I Ching* hexagram number #18.

Ku / Work on What Has Been Spoiled [Decay], which is composed of two trigrams.

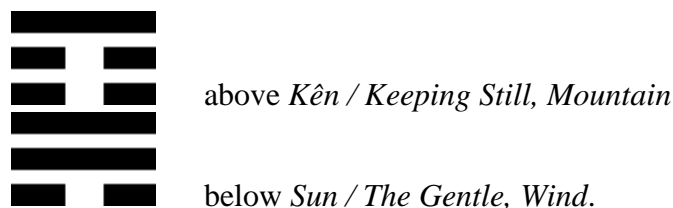


Figure 28: The I Ching Ku Sign

I'll paste in some of the analysis of this hexagram from an [online copy](#) of the classic Richard Wilhelm translation of the *I Ching*, rendered into English by Cary F. Baynes (Bollingen Series, Princeton University Press, 1950).

The Chinese character *ku* represents a bowl in whose contents worms are breeding. This means decay. It is come about because the gentle indifference in the lower trigram has come together with the rigid inertia of the upper, and the result is stagnation. Since this implies guilt, the conditions embody a demand for removal of the cause. Hence the meaning of the hexagram is not simply “what has been spoiled” but “work on what has been spoiled”.

WORK ON WHAT HAS BEEN SPOILED

Has supreme success.
It furthers one to cross the great water.
Before the starting point, three days.
After the starting point, three days.

What has been spoiled through man’s fault can be made good again through man’s work. ... Work toward improving conditions promises well, because it accords the possibilities of the time. ... We must not recoil from work and danger—symbolized by crossing of the great water—but must take hold energetically. Success depends, however, on proper deliberation. ... We must first know the cause of corruption before we can do away with them; hence it is necessary to be cautious during the time before the start. Then we must see to it that the new way is safely entered upon, so that a relapse may be avoided; therefore we must pay attention to the time after the start. ... Decisiveness and energy must take the place of inertia and indifference that have led to decay, in order that the ending may be followed by a new beginning.

January 8, 2009.

As I mentioned, I’ve been splitting up some of the chapters and moving around the chapter breaks. I have twenty-four chapters in the current uncompleted draft of the book. I’ve reread and corrected the first sixteen. I imagine that eventually I’ll be adding about five more chapters, or maybe just four if the chapters are long.

When I revise, I’m sometimes a little surprised at how very many corrections I make. Didn’t I noticed all those problems when I first wrote the material? Well, it’s a matter of laying on successive layers, like in a painting. I can’t properly do the detailed touch-up until I have the underlying composition roughed out. And I can’t prefect the composition of the early chapters until I have some idea of what’s happening in the later chapters.

In any case, it’s going well. I’m making the characters more consistent, and threading in the extra storylines that come from the [Nov 8-10,2009 Revised Plot](#) ideas.

Today I’m working on the scenes in my seventeenth chapter, “Deeper,” where Jim has his initial encounters with Val’s peach-colored ghost in the underworld of Flimsy. Jim isn’t quite sure that this is in fact Val. Although she’s helping him, she’s a bit shy or stand-

offish, and I need to think of a reason why. Perhaps she blames her death on him, so she's a bit scared of him, or angry—but she's interested enough in him to tag along and interact with him for awhile.

Maybe I can make some remark about why Jim isn't constantly seeing famous people.

"Have you ever rapped about this with science-fiction writer ghosts?" I asked Bart. "Like Robert Sheckley or Philip K. Dick? Or how about Rudy Rucker? Is he dead yet?"

"No joy for autograph-hounds in Flimsy," said Bart shaking his head. "You have to grasp how big this place is. Like—the first time I went to L.A., I was sure I'd be jamming guitar with Tawny Krush, or eating out Lureen Morales's snatch. But all I saw was crowds of goobs. It's the same here. Here comes everybody."

January 11, 2010.

I just finished revising "The Dark Gulf" and "Offer Cap," which are currently my chapter eighteen and nineteen. Five more to go before I'm all caught up.

And then, kind of unfortunately, I'll have to take a break for a week or two, as David Hartwell's about to send me some change requests for my autobiography, which has the working title *Nested Scrolls*. I'll lose momentum. But at some level, I'll still be mulling over the story to come.

I'm getting some more words into the book during the revision, so the additional material isn't really going to have to be all that extensive. I figure five more chapters, max.

The most work in the beginning was setting up the thing with Jim popping the electron and thus providing an entrance for a tunnel between Earth and Flimsy. I had to put in more Skeeves scenes, and stuff about the mummy sarcophagus as well.

In the middle part of the book, the most work has gone into beefing up Jim's quest for his wife Val. I added a scene in "The Dark Gulf" where he has a conversation with her—having her be an amorphous will-'o-the-wisp wasn't going to work. Turns out Val is mad at Jim (for causing her death and for having a jiva inside him now), and this sets up a good dynamic.

January 16, 2009.

Okay, now I'm done revising up through the end of the "Yuelsville" chapter. It's been fun, and satisfying. But now I have to jump off the cliff into the unknown again. I'll start by revising my outline for the final four or five chapters.

January 14, 2010. Happy Ending? Or Eurydice?

I [blogged this entry](#) on Jan 16, 2010.

I keep wondering if a "happily ever after" ending is best.

I gather that, in romance novels, the HEA ending (as they call it) is more or less mandatory. As the romance novel writer Janet Dean says on the writing-advice website *Seekerville: Escape from Unpubbed Island*: "What I love about romance novels is the guarantee of a happy ending. That's why I read and write them." But should I be following writing advice from such a source?

But what if Jim doesn't in fact get Val back at the end of the book?

At a deep level, *Jim and the Flims* is about a man coming to terms with his grief over his wife's death. So it might be a cop-out for Jim to get Val back. Maybe it's enough if he

travels through the whole process, and at the end he's rounded off a grief cycle. Nobody ever comes back from the dead. You can't ever go back to the happy person you used to be.

As a half-measure, I'd been entertaining the notion that Jim does in fact get Val back to Earth at the end—but then she frikkin' *divorces* him! I was thinking of that as a post-modern twist.

Maybe it's heavier if Jim somehow can't get Val to come back *at all*. It's not so much that she wants to come and that he mistakenly he looks at her—like in the “Orpheus and Eurydice” myth. I think it's rather that Val wants to go through the zero and start again. I'd need to prefigure this kind of predilection on Val's part, or show her growing into this mind-set during her stay in Flimsy.

I can kind of see Jim ending up with nurse Mary, as I'd originally planned. But that's sort of random.

It could be that grief is the transreal meaning of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth in the first place. Here's a link to Vergil's version in the [Georgics](#), and here's a link to the story in Ovid's [Metamorphoses](#).

Eurydice is bitten by a poisonous snake soon after her marriage to Orpheus. Orpheus goes down to the underworld and plays his lyre and garners some sympathy. He's like, “It was unjust, it was too soon.” Pluto, the god of the underworld, gives him Eurydice and tells him to lead her out of the underworld, but not to look back. And, when Orpheus is almost out of the cave entrance, he looks back at his beloved, perhaps worried that she wasn't following, and now she breathes the world, “Farewell,” and fades like smoke in the air.. He never sees her again, and the keepers of the underworld won't let him come back and try again.

Vergil says Orpheus was soon torn to shreds at a wild Bacchanal, and that his severed head floated down the river to the underworld, still calling out for Eurydice. Ovid says that Orpheus “was the first of the Thracian people to transfer his love to young boys, and enjoy their brief springtime, and early flowering, this side of manhood.”

In other words, our bereaved poet turns alkie or gay! Gotta love it.

All this said, I might be outsmarting myself if I don't just do the comfortable, reader-friendly thing and let Jim bring Val back. What I *can* do is make this a little hard for him. Like, Val initially doesn't want to come, and maybe he has to talk her into it. Perhaps the scary ghost of Amenhotep shows up near Flimsy's core and, like, scares Val into Jim's arms.

Yes, I think I'll have Val come back.

January 17, 2010. *How Souls Go to Flimsy*

I need to get a clear notion for a basic scenario that occurs when humans die in *Jim and the Flims*.

Q 1: Normally a person's sprinkle hops over to Flimsy and emerges in the Dark Gulf. What path does the sprinkle take, without having to use a special tunnel?

A 1: If I say that the sprinkle dwindles down to a very small size and sinks into an electron to reach Flimsy within, then this is too similar to using Jim's tunnel. So I think we need to suppose that the sprinkle does something akin to teleportation. Perhaps, once a personality becomes wholly immaterial, it emerges as a platonic form. I might push the notion that Flimsy is a land of conceptual beings.

Q 2: How is it that some free sprinkles *can* exist on Earth, cf. the ones in Weena's stash?

A 2: The normal tendency of a sprinkles is to leave Earth, but Weena's sprinkles are a bit fattened up from eating kessence, and they have enough inertia or materiality to exist on Earth for a time.

Q 3: When Ginnie and Ira died, why didn't their sprinkles fly away?

A 3: We might suppose that Ginnie settled into some spare scraps Graf's kessence. The Graf's body was not *entirely* burned. And, when Skeeves drowned Ira, he'd brought along a chunk of kessence from the border-snail's mouth for Ira to use.

Q 4: What does Weena do with her kessence body when she comes back and gets into her flesh body?

A 4: She leaves it in a mound inside the sarcophagus, and then she re-uses it when she leaves her body again. Actually she divides this hoard in two, so that when she and Jim leave their flesh bodies, they each get can make a kessence body.

Okay, fine, I integrated all four of those answers into the text. Next problem.

Why is Jim going back to Earth if there is any chance at all that the eggs are still inside him? The goddess of Flimsy tells him that he and he alone can close the tunnel. And the only way he can do it is by going through and goading or luring the border snail back through.

I need to come up with something a little dramatic in how Jim moves the snail and closes the tunnel. Let's suppose that there is some linkage to that lighting bolt that made popped the electron in the first place. Jim replays this event mentally—and realizes that his own psychic energy created the bolt. And, once he grasps this, he can somehow play the bolt backwards and thus remove the hole.

Perhaps Jim's initial plan on coming back to Earth was to hunker down in his body and get some dynamite to blow away the border snail. But that plan isn't going to work.

January 25-29, 2010. "Missing Me."

January 25, 2010.

I finished the "Down to Earth" chapter last week, and then I had to take a break to revise *Nested Scrolls : A Memoir*. David Hartwell had just sent it back with a bunch of edit requests. I did all the fixes, adding 8,000 words in the process, and sent it off to Dave and to Nick Gevers at PS Publishing today.

Today I revised the outline for the last four chapters again. I keep making the ending faster and simpler; at this point, I think the book should wind up with a frenzy of rapid-fire action.

Tomorrow I hope to get started on writing the "Missing Me" chapter.

January 26, 2010.

I [blogged](#) part of this and the Jan 29 bit, on Jan 30, 2010.

By way of getting back up to speed, I revised "Down to Earth" today. I decided to have only ten thousand jiva eggs in Jim instead of seven billion. It'll play better if he only infects the environs of Santa Cruz, rather than the whole planet. This way we can readily visualize Jim and the yuels actually cleaning up the invasion before it spreads further.

Something occurred to me last night. Although I'm supposed to be working on "Missing Me," I was thinking ahead to the chapter after that, "Pied Piper." I'm realizing that

if Jim's eggs go into ten thousand of the citizens of Santa Cruz, then that many people might well killed by the destructive practice of hosting a jiva larva. That's ten thousand out of Santa Cruz's population of fifty thousand.

"Oh well," as I said to Sylvia when I realized this last night. "Can't make an omelet without breaking eggs!"

Maybe I take some sadistic light in tormenting Santa Cruz... Another upside would be that if ten thousand people died, then I could have a scene of Jim having to confront that many sprinkles (a.k.a. dead souls), and this could be pretty dramatic. And then maybe the yuels carry all these new ghosts over to the other side and fix them up with nice yuel-built kessence bodies right away. And we get a suburb of Yuelsville called Nueva Santa Cruz.

January 29, 2010.

I'm moving along well on "Missing Me," with some good surprises, pathos, and laughs. What I did to kick-start the process was to paste in the outline paragraphs from my notes, and then I just started fleshing out that material. I've been hitting a thousand words or better per day. And I finished the first draft of the chapter today, although I'll still have to bulk out some scenes and revise all during tomorrow and maybe the next day too.

Only three more chaps to go! I'm not even gonna worry about sending the book out to editors until I finish it. Shouldn't take more than another month.

I smell blood, I'm ready to bring this wounded deer to the ground. And I mean that in a good way.

The last couple of days, I was thinking ahead to the "Pied Piper" chapter some more. Despite what I was saying on January 16, 2020, I decided not to decimate the population of Santa Cruz after all, and never mind that this Sodom-by-the-Sea so richly deserves such a fate—just kidding, ☺ ☺ ☺. Seriously, I think readers would be turned off to encounter a mass die-off in what's meant to be a fairly light-hearted novel—it would bring them down, and my goal is to show them a good time.

And thus, by the way, that jerk Dick Simly is still alive when Jim goes to the Simly the Best car lot in "Missing Me."

To set this up, I'm putting in some mumbo-jumbo about the jivas having tweaked the egg-in-human-body routine so that, although the first such egg (in Jim's wife Val) was lethal and slow-growing, the latter-day jiva saints of Cruz can carry their alien spawn to term without lethal effects and, moreover, the maturation now takes only six minutes (hours?) instead of six months.

I love how flexible things are in SF. Give people a floating log to hang onto, and they're willing to go with the flow, and right over a waterfall if that's to be part of the fun. It's like that poster of a UFO that was in agent Mulder's office in the X Files: [I WANT TO BELIEVE](#). I always loved that slogan, it really goes to the heart of ufology is all about.

February 2, 2010. Proposal.

I decided it's time to look for a publisher, even though I still have three chapters to write. But at this rate, I think I'll finish it by mid-March, so it's really about time to get a deal.

I talked it over with Susan Protter, and we're going to try Tim Holman at Orbit Books. I'm writing up a [very short proposal](#)—just a brief summary of the book. And we'll send that along with the first four chapters. Susan thinks it's better not to overwhelm them

with the whole book, but to send a chunk as a teaser, and then if they ask to see the rest of it, that draws them in a bit more.

My current plan is that if Orbit won't go for it, maybe I can get Dave Hartwell at Tor to take another look, and if that doesn't work out, I'll take it to Jeremy at Night Shade.

On Friday, February 6, 2010, Susan forwarded my proposal to Tim Holman at Orbit. Probably I won't hear back for quite some time.

February 9-15, 2010. "Pied Piper" and Heart Worries

Feb 9, 2010.

Okay, I'm working on the third-to-last chapter now. I've had some distractions over the last week. I got the proposal out to Orbit, and did some work on a photo book for Sylvia's birthday and on the third edition of my art book, *Better Worlds*.

I've also been having some angina-type pains in my heart, which have necessitated trips to the doctor and medical tests—I'm still not sure how this will play out. Possibly I'll need a stent or even a bypass, although there's always the hope that I'm only imagining the problem. On the other hand, maybe I'm about to drop dead.



Figure 29: Amenhotep's Ghost

Distracted as I've been, I've been painting to help get ideas for the book. Here's *Amenhotep's Ghost*, holding the pharaonic talismans of flail, crook and ankh.

I like his expression, it's so unhappy and lacking in empathy. A very dangerous creature to confront.

Feb 11, 2010.

I'm inching forward. I've done the jiva invasion. I still have to do: Jim calling the yuels, the yuels massacring the jivas, Jim leading the yuels into the tunnel, and Jim closing the tunnel.

I keep getting distracted, but really there's nothing I enjoy more than working on the book. I can't wait to finish it—and at the same time I know I'll be sorry when it's done.

Had another fucking heart test today. I don't get the final word from the doctor till next Friday, Feb 29. It's kind of ironic that the inspiration for *Jim and the Flims* stems from my brain hemorrhage in July, 2008, and now, as I schlep towards a possible March, 2010, finish I may be facing a serious problem with my heart. Clearly this book is not a young man's work.

Feb 12, 2010.

Okay, I did a push today and I finished a rough version of the "Pied Piper" chapter by noon. I'll smooth it out later today and over the next couple of days, probably bulking it out a bit. And then I'll tackle "The Goddess," the next to last chapter of the book.

But I'll take a break right now, which is noonish. I scored 1,100 words this morning, which is a good day's work for me. Maybe I'll do some more work on my painting-in-progress, which in fact depicts the scene where Jim gets to the center of Flimsy and meets the goddess.

Feb 15, 2010.

Three quick revisions: today, yesterday, and the day before. It's smoother, I'd like to think this chapter's done for now, and for now I'm not going to reread it. Onward. I added a little more conversation, although things do still go perhaps a little too smoothly at the end of the chapter. But at this point the author, the narrator and the readers are on the luge of dramatic exigency, racketing down the slope, longing for the climax.

February 16-19, 2010. "The Goddess"

Feb 16, 2010.

I got the first thousand words or so written on my chapter "The Goddess" today, the second-to-last chapter of the book.

The last couple of weeks, I've been working on a painting of the scene in this chapter, showing Jim and Val in the sea at Flimsy's core. I thought I finished the painting yesterday morning, but today in the afternoon, I revised it a little bit more after writing.



Figure 30: At the Core of the World

I wasn't sure what to call the painting. I considered calling it *Unknown Legend*, because it's so clearly an illustration depicting some specific chain of events—but nobody (not even me, at least not fully) knows what the events are.

That must be Val who's helping Jim cut off a piece of that big jiva's tendril. I figure Jim has Durkle's sword.

Initially I'd imagined that Jim would be fighting his way past the jiva, but maybe we've seen enough jiva-fighting by now. This picture suggests that the jiva is be dead or nearly so—given that she's upside down, and that she's passively allowing Jim and Val handle her tail.

That's the goddess of Flimsy in the background. Maybe the goddess killed the jiva and told Jim and Val to cut off a piece of it for her to eat. Or maybe they're supposed to get something special from inside the jiva. A huge gem for the goddess.

I like the huge gem, that has a good fairy-tale quality, finding a treasure inside the body of the slain monster. But I have to ask why weren't there gems inside all those jivas that Jim killed on Earth—or inside the Earthmost Jiva. Well, maybe those jivas on Earth were too young to have much inside them, although maybe Sukie did drop a little something that perhaps Dick Simly grabbed. And maybe the Earthmost Jiva dropped quite a substantial gem that the Duke and Duchess have taken possession of.

But maybe I don't want to bring the gem thing in, we'll see. I don't absolutely have to make my story match the picture that I happened to paint. But I do, at least in principle, like the notion of letting my subconscious painterly process provide some input into the plot.

Feb 17, 2010.

I'm still wondering what Jim's going to do with that piece of jiva tail he's slicing off. Here's a different slant on that gem-in-jiva idea that I wrote about yesterday.

So far I never said anything about jivas (or yuels for that matter) having sprinkle-type souls. I'll suppose that they don't. They're in some sense parts of the single vast organism that is Flimsy, so they don't have separate souls.

When I was talking to the cartoonist and artist Jim "Jiva" Woodring at the Clarion West party in Seattle this summer, I casually said something like, "It's not big deal to have a soul, anything can have a soul, it's just existence, or maybe a little bit of computational capacity." I was on my hylozoic kick. And Woodring draws himself up, acting flabbergasted. "A soul—a soul is by no means easily made."

I might mention here that (a) I derive my images of the jivas from Woodring's work and that (b) it's really only a coincidence that the main character in my novel is called Jim—the book was well underway before I met Woodring or started using jivas.

Suppose that I go with his view of things. So the sprinkles are rather rare and precious. And Flimsy really does need to send sprinkles down to the septillion world so that new beings can be born. So it make sense that she'd be recycling sprinkles.

But we might also suppose that Flimsy is, with some difficulty, producing new sprinkles as well. Perhaps they're growing in the flowers of the water lilies of the Paradise Sea. And, now, getting back to my painting, *At the Core of the World*, what if that jiva Jim is carving on is the Memsahib High Jiva, the fattest of them all, the Empress of all jivas who hooks into all the bobbling bulbs down in the Dark Gulf. And suppose also that this Nodal Jiva accumulates all the souls that her subordinates catch. And there's a big stash of sprinkles tucked into that tail, and Jim's carrying it up to the goddess of Flimsy.

Feb 18, 2010.

I had a good day. I wrote about 1,600 words and now the first draft of the "The Goddess" chapter is done. It helped to have the painting to think about. I'll revise the chapter once or twice and move into the final chapter soon.

It's hard to stay at it, but, on the other hand, I don't want to stop. At this point it's almost like an athletic thing, like finishing a hike. I'm driving myself, but in a fairly pleasant way.

I'm thinking now about my next revision—which I hope to do tomorrow or this weekend or Monday. I have to put in the sprinkles drifting out of the water-lily blossoms.

And I'm thinking it's better if the jiva tail-tip is like the cap on a plastic squeeze bottle of mustard, and that the whole jiva is full of sprinkles. So instead of the sprinkles (= souls) being in the tip of the tail they're in the main body of the jiva. And the goddess sticks that main tendril of the jiva into herself, like she's filling up a car with gas. *Vrooom!* She's loading up with new souls to spew out into the septillion worlds.

I can't quite decide whether the tendril—and then Jim and Val on their way back to Earth—go through the goddess's navel or through her vagina. Maybe I just go with the navel, which probably makes the scene easier for the average reader to think about.

Tomorrow morning I go see the cardiologist and find out if I'm about to die. I *would* like to finish *Jim and the Flims* before I'm gone. Yes, I'm self-dramatizing here, and not entirely serious. Actually, I'm thinking I'll probably get off with a stent. Unless I've totally imagined the whole thing.

Feb 19, 2010.

So I saw the doctor, and yeah, on March 3, 2010, I'm getting this procedure called percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI)—they used to call it an angiogram with stenting.

I managed a light revision of the chapter today, just about wrapping it up. Yes, I'm freaking out, but work is a welcome distraction.

February 20-22, 2010. Done.

February 20, 2010.

Okay, today I painted all morning, and this afternoon, I finished the book on my laptop the Los Gatos Coffee Roasting coffee shop, with Sylvia reading the paper next to me. I rounded out "The Goddess" chapter, and wrote a very short final chapter, "On the Bluff." I'll be fleshing these last bits out a little more, but at this point, yes, the whole book is in some kind of finished form.

February 22, 2010.

So here I am at the same table in the Coffee Roaster again. I just did a rewrite on the ending, and the book's at 89,950 words—call it 90K, as planned. Maybe I do one more polish of the last few pages tomorrow.

My To Do list is all checked off, except that I want to put in some slight prefiguring of Jim's mental powers—but that'll work better if I do it in the context of the next full pass through the text.

So now what?

I could perhaps print out the more recently written chapters. Under the current numbering system, these would run from "25: Down To Earth" through "29: On the Bluff," only a matter of some forty pages in the current format. That could take me a couple of weeks, though, and I'd really like to finally have some publisher's commitment towards the book before I work on it anymore. I'm ready for a break.

Susan Protter sent a letter of inquiry to the editor at Orbit Books last month or so, I don't think we've heard back. I'll send Susan the new manuscript soon in any case. She can ask at Orbit again. I don't think Dave Hartwell at Tor is willing to look at it again right now, as they just bought *Nested Scrolls* from me and don't want to overcommit. It's gonna take some patience.

Meanwhile I have some other things I can do on the literary front. Like put issue #9 of my webzine *Flurb* together. I'll put a chapter of Jim and the Flims in there as "[Val and Me](#)."

And I have to get stents in my heart arteries next week, which is weighing heavily on my mind. And a family reunion this weekend, Georgia and her kids are coming to visit. And maybe a trip to Munich and Venice in the second half of March, if I'm in any shape for that after getting the stents—although I'm starting to think I won't be up for the trip. And I've been setting up some promo events for the *Ware Tetralogy* in April.

But most of all, I need to *relax*! My nineteenth novel is done.

And I like how it turned out.

Thank you, muse.

September 3, 2010. Sold to Night Shade

As it turned out, Tim Holman at Orbit liked *Jim and the Flims* a lot, and said some flattering things. But he didn't want to publish it, I think maybe he used the word "peculiar." So then I turned to Jeremy Lassen at Night Shade Books as I'd been planning—I know him from around San Francisco, and we'd discussed the possibility of working together before.

And then on August 25, 2011. Jeremy made my agent a good offer for *Jim and the Flims*. What a relief!

“And, lo, the stone was rolled away from his tomb.”

I’d been starting to worry that I was washed up as a writer, and that I’d reached the point of writing unpublishable novels—I kept thinking about the toothless old Eskimo on the ice floe. But I’m not on the ice floe yet!

I’ve been writing short stories all spring and summer, and now I can go ahead and start another novel. Yeah, baby. Keep it bouncing.

March 1, 2011. Finished the Third Draft

So in early February, Nightshade came back with some editorial suggestions, and I did a few hurried tweaks for a second draft, as they wanted to rush out an advance reading copy. And then this week I had more time, and went through the book carefully, making about eight hundred corrections for the third and, I think, final version. I made it a little lighter, I think, and thickened up the ending a bit.