

IS IT THE END?

ORBS AND ORBITS

Reflecting on another eventful race round the sun. With no apologies to MC Escher

NO, IT'S THE BEGINNING!

"The difference between stupidity and genius is that genius has its limits." ~ **Albert Einstein**

IS IT THE END? – NO, IT'S THE BEGINNING

This year ended in a flurry of activity (without snow and sub-zero temps, thank you). I had an absolutely super time in the short *Film Noir* as an eccentric coroner working with a topnotch cast of respected friends, including **Ron House**, a terrific hard-boiled lead in **Travis Myers** and a smart crew, helmed by our generous director, **Gary Ravenscroft**, from Melbourne, Australia, no less!

And **Melinda** and I can't say enough about our participation in the **Writers Guild's** special evening of Fantasy Comedy Pilots directed by the multit talented **Peter Bonerz** and featuring the iconic **Ed Asner** and jolly **Jason Alexander** in works by **David Misch**, **Doug Molitor**, **Jeff Reno**, **Ron Osborn**, and **John Cleese**.

More fun is upcoming. Stay tuned.

"It's amazing how much mature wisdom resembles being too tired." ~ **Robert Heinlein**

AN IMMORAL MORAL

The madam opened the brothel door and saw a dignified, well-dressed, good-looking man in his early fifties. "May I help you sir?" she asked. The man replied, "I want to see Valerie."

"Sir, Valerie is one of our most expensive ladies," said the madam. "Perhaps you would prefer to see someone else." He replied, "No, I must see Valerie." Just then, Valerie appeared and announced to the man that she charged \$5000 per visit.

Without hesitation, the man pulled out \$5000 and gave it to Valerie, and they went upstairs. After an



PARTING SCREEN SHOTS
At the Writers Guild's Evening of Fantasy Pilots, left and far right, with Ed Asner and Jason Alexander. Center, as the eccentric coroner in the short, 'Film Noir.'

hour, the man calmly left. The next night, the man appeared again, once more demanding to see Valerie.

Valerie explained that no one had ever come back two nights in a row as she was too expensive. "There are no discounts. The price is still \$5000." Again, the man pulled out the money, gave it to Valerie, and they went upstairs.

The following night the man was there yet again. Everyone was astounded that he had come for a third consecutive night, but he paid her and they went upstairs. After their session, Valerie said to the man, "No one has ever been with me three nights in a row. Where are you from?"

"Idaho," he replied.

"Really," she said, "I have family in Idaho."

"I know," the man said. "Your sister died, and I am her attorney. She asked me to give you your \$15,000 inheritance..."

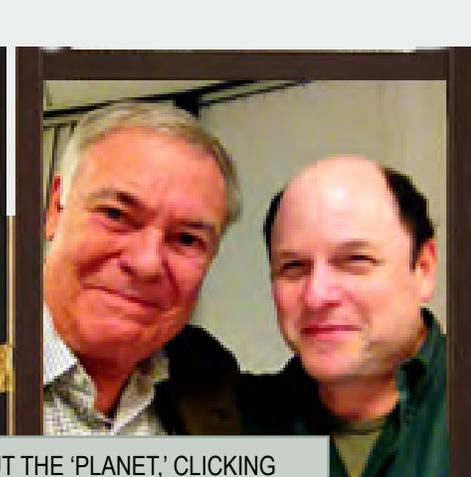
The moral of the story is that three things in life are certain: Death – Taxes – and being screwed by a lawyer!

"I'm afraid, based on my experience, that fascism will come to America in the name of National Security."
~ **Jim Garrison**, 1968

'YOUR BRAIN IS NOT THE BOSS'

So said yours truly, as **General Goatheart** in the **Firesign Theatre's** *Everything You Know is Wrong*. And it still is true.

New psychiatric studies by **Kaitlin Toner** and **Mark Leary** further support my long-promoted premise that extremists on both the left and the right suffer from "belief superiority" leading to the ideological deadlock



THROUGHOUT THE 'PLANET,' CLICKING **BOLD, DARK RED TYPE** OPENS A RELATED INTERNET LINK.



DIALING TO THE RIGHT
KTLK becomes 'The Patriot'

that paralyzes our political process.

Only moderates support a middle-of-the-road approach to resolving difficult social issues. So – promote and vote for moderates.

“Why compromise?” the article in *The Week* concludes, “or even bother to talk to the idiots on the other side?” Unfortunately, the media is increasingly controlled by the rightwing wingnuts. In fact, we just lost our sole Progressive station to **Limbaugh** and **Hannity**. **KTLK Radio** will soon be “**The Patriot**.” Sure. Thanks, **Clear Channel**...

“The middle of the road is where the white line is - and that’s the worst place to drive.” ~ Robert Frost

DON'T ASK

An elderly man was stopped by the police early in the morning and was asked where he was going at that time of night. The man replied, “I’m on my way to a lecture about alcohol abuse, the effects it has on the human body, and the dangers of smoking and staying out late.”

“Really?” the officer asked skeptically, “And just who is giving a lecture like that at this time of night?”

“That would be my wife,” the man replied.

“Life begins when a person first realizes how soon it will end.” ~ Marceline Cox

THE PUZZLE SOLVED

Our friend, the puzzling **Merl Reagle**, wrote that December 21, 2013, was the 100th anniversary of the invention of the crossword puzzle.

He tells us that it was **Arthur Wynne** who invented the crossword in a diamond shaped puzzle for the New York

World (**SEE IT ON WIKIPEDIA**) and it was “an immediate success with readers, although everyone on the staff thought it was a waste of time.” His bosses, **Joseph Pulitzer**’s sons, even called it “a passing trifle.”

Ten years later,” Merl continues, “when two Columbia grads wanted to start a publishing company, they decided to get their feet wet by publishing the first crossword book. So it was a double first – the first book of crosswords and the first book ever published by two guys named **Simon and Schuster**.” And **Richard Simon**’s daughter **Carly** “can recite the history of the crossword puzzle, chapter and verse.” She never set it to music, though, I guess.

And incidentally, I first met the young folk-singing Carly during a season of summer stock in Wind Gap, Pennsylvania, where I appeared in *Kiss Me Kate* with her operatic sister, **Joanna**, who was also **Walter Cronkite**’s partner until his death.

“And whatever happened to Arthur Wynne? “He just plugged along in various newspaper jobs and never earned a penny from the crossword.” But, amazingly, Merl found his only surviving daughter, **Kay**, living in Clearwater, Florida. His latest book, **100th ANNIVERSARY CROSSWORD BOOK**, has illustrations by **Jim Borgman**, who draws the comic strip “Zits.”

*“You can’t try to do things; you MUST do things.”
~ Ray Bradbury*

BACK IN THE USSR

Я люблю их! My Russian fans, that is. See if you don’t agree:

“Good afternoon. My name is Lyudmila. I am from Russia. I collect autographs of people who make the world around beautiful. You do too. This world is special. Without your contribution, it not been so complete.

“I work with children and they often tell of something unusual and interesting. I love my job. I learn of interesting and creative people, always interesting, regardless of age. We receive the opportunity to share the joy with others, to wonder, to learn something new, feel like a kid... I congratulate you with New Year and wish you happiness, health, creative successes! Thank you for being there!”

I am always there for all my fans, and I love sending them autographed postcards in their native tongues, although I don’t think they always “get” it.

“Whatever” was voted the most annoying word for five years in a row, and Firesign Theatre predicted it in “Fighting Clowns” 30 years ago. ~ Phil’s Phunny Phacts

MARCHING TO SHIBBOLETH

Out of print for more than 30 years, the Firesign Theatre's two classic script collections, *The Firesign Theatre's Big Book of Plays* and *The Firesign Theatre's Big Mystery Joke Book* are back in print in a single volume



with never-before-published bonus material and a new introduction by eminent rock critic **Greil Marcus**, in *Marching to Shibboleth*, exclusively from **FIRESIGNTHEATRE.COM**

This Big Big Book features *Don't Crush That Dwarf, Hand Me The Pliers*, called "the greatest comedy album ever made" by *Rolling Stone*, described by the *NY Times* as "a multifaceted work of almost Joycean complexity," and placed

in the Library of Congress' Archive of Historic Recordings. Start the New Year right and get your copy now! Price postage-paid is only \$35.

And to request a review copy, please **EMAIL** Taylor Jessen (ironybread@earthlink.net) Publicity shots are **HERE**.

"The smaller the gap between rich and poor,
the more moderate our politicians;
the greater the gap, the greater the disagreement
between liberal and conservatives,
[meaning] the less Congress is able to get done.
The less Congress gets done,
the greater the gap between rich and poor."
~ **Jill Lepore** in 'The New Yorker'

FRANCIS THE TALKING POPE

Pope Francis is the first leader of the Catholic Church from South America, and in "The Joy of the Gospel" he denounces "trickle-down" economics as an ideology that "expresses a crude and naive trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power, [which] has never been confirmed by the facts [and has led to] a globalization of indifference."

Yet his criticism of "the individualism of our postmodern and globalized era" might unsettle both sides of the political spectrum, as Francis also decries the "vacuum left by secularist rationalism."

And he's not the first Pope to denounce unjust economic

theories. **Pope John Paul II** often spoke of "imperialistic monopoly" and "luxurious egoism." **Pope Benedict XVI** acknowledged "corruption and illegality" in "the conduct of the economic and political class in rich countries" and encouraged "the redistribution of wealth."

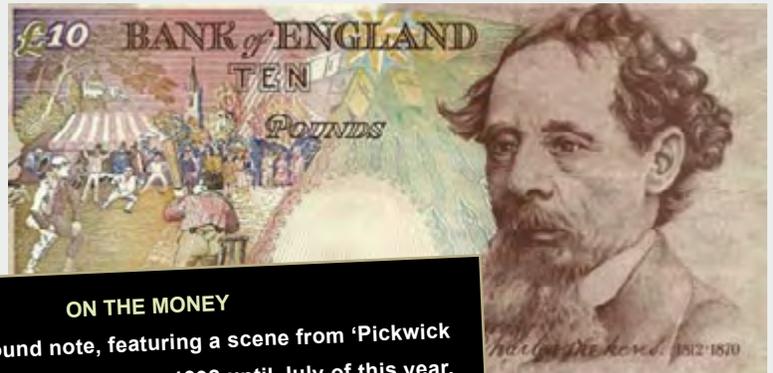
"In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits," Francis concludes, "whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenseless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule." God knows it's true...

Our Puritan ancestors in Massachusetts banned Christmas as a pagan, unchristian celebration from 1659 to 1661. ~ **Phil's Phunny Phacts**

WHAT THE DICKENS

Charles John Huffam Dickens was born on February 7, 1812 in Portsmouth, England and, at the age of 12, was pulled from school to work in a boot-blackening factory after his father was sent to debtors prison. Charles could not understand how he could be "cast away" by adults who were supposed to take care of him, and this would become a recurring theme in his writings.

Dickens had about four years of schooling in total. A little over one year from ages 9-11 and just under three from age 13 to 15. He was pulled from school twice to work and was otherwise self-educated.



ON THE MONEY
Dickens' 10-pound note, featuring a scene from 'Pickwick Papers,' was legal tender from 1992 until July of this year.

Dickens had a love of theater his whole life, and may have become a professional actor had he not fallen ill the morning of an audition at Covent Garden Theatre. His writing took off shortly thereafter, but he continued to direct, act in, and produce amateur theater throughout his life.

Dickens became publisher of a magazine called *Bentley's Miscellany* in which he published his first novel, *Oliver Twist*. His personal favorite, however, was

■ **CONTINUED**



HOLDING UP TIME
Ira Meyer eyes ice for a frozen moment. Photo by Dirk Weisenstein

David Copperfield, and his father, **John Dickens**, was the inspiration for **Mr. Micawber**.

Dickens did two tours of America, performing readings of his work; and the second earned him \$95,000, about \$1.5 million in today's dollars.

His final novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, was left unfinished, when he died after suffering a stroke in 1870. During his lifetime he wrote a total of five Christmas books: *A Christmas Carol* (1843), *The Chimes* (1844), *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845), *The Battle of Life* (1846), and *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* (1848).

We visited his resting place in Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey and dined at Rule's in London, where as a boy, it's rumored he pressed his nose against the window and vowed to eat there one day. He did.

"It's not about websites or process, it's about people."
~ Kentucky Gov. **Steve Beshear**

END TIMES

"Friends, Romans, Country Folk! With another year drawing to an end, as always, I marvel at the phenomenon known as time. For in the midst of seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, and years disappearing, there is the seemingly eternal constant of now. The breath we are taking in this moment is our anchor. Time stands still. The gift, the miracle of life is ours – to enjoy.

"My longtime teacher, **Prem Rawat**, once said something about man being the only creature in nature that creates a reality, then abides by it. I laugh (and cry) when I see the

stresses we subject ourselves to because "That's reality"; often wondering what, my friends, is so real about it? But this has always been the quest of human existence. Knowing what is real. And regardless of what speed bumps and potholes we encounter on our road, this is the journey we are born to take.

"I have done my fair share of stupid things. Oxymoronically, these may have made me marginally smarter. I am fairly sure where I have traveled, yet have no idea how far I have yet to go. Is time passing? Or does it not exist? It doesn't matter, as long as we appreciate this moment..."

"So pay attention to your breath, to your life...and, with gratitude, watch the masterpiece unfold."

– From our friend, nature photographer, *Ira Meyer*

"I've still got the same attitude I had when I started. I haven't changed anything but my underwear."
~ **Robert Mitchum**

THIS JUST IN

I have just learned that the re-mastered CD of our long-lost 1985 album ***Eat or Be Eaten***, with 28 minutes of never-released tracks and a bonus video, has now become available exclusively at **Laugh.com**.

Described as "a hilarious artifact of the Digital Bronze Age," it began as a demo for the world's first interactive computer game, morphed into a Cinemax TV special, then the first CD with sub-code graphics, and is now available to all.

■ **CONTINUED**

It tells the story of the Player (**Peter Bergman**) on his quest to solve the mystery of virgin sacrifices in the secretive, protective and demonic world of Kudzu County and includes artwork of the never-realized board game version by **Bruce Litz**. **CHECK IT**



"Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly and applying the wrong remedies."
~ **Groucho**

THANK YOU

Victor Kopcewich, Keith Hebble, Ed Landler, Betsey Brubaker-Strom, Kent McCaman, Larry Aronson, George Riddle, Spider Robinson, H. Lee Kagan, Renais Hill, Jim

Meskimen, and to all our dear friends and relatives who continue the tradition of sending out Christmas cards. In the absence of a tree this year, your cards have decked our halls and brought us much good cheer!

"Writing is not necessarily something to be ashamed of. But do it in private, and wash your hands afterwards."
~ **Lazarus Long**

SOUND FAMILIAR?

"I don't know what they have to say, it makes no difference anyway. Whatever it is, I'm against it. No matter what it is or who commenced it, I'm against it."

"Your proposition may be good, but let's have one thing understood; whatever it is, I'm against it."

"And even if you changed it or condensed it – I'm against it." – So sang **Groucho Marx** in *Horse Feathers*, 1932)



"Cats recognize their owner's voice but just can't be bothered to react to it."
~ **Phil's Phunny Phacts**

PLANETCLICK*

YANK YOU

- CATNEWS**
- LOTTO**
- SPITFIRE**
- IRONY**
- DOG/CAT**
- TOWERING**
- JUST DUCKY**
- SWINGTIME**
- ELVIS EH?**
- LITES**
- SNOW HOME**
- CHEAPO**
- DISCODOG**
- CAR\$**
- ANTS**
- WORDS**
- PACHMAN**
- MEOW**
- OH, MY PAPA**
- XMAS BALLS**

"Roses are reddish, Violets are bluish - If it weren't for Christmas, We'd all be Jewish." ~ **Benny Hill**

BEARWHIZ BEER <http://www.eagletshirts.com>

FUNNY TIMES: <http://www.funnytimes.com>

FST: <http://www.FiresignTheatre.com>

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* **Click the 'Planet Click' PHRASE to open a video link.**