



TIME HAS SHED ITS PROPELLERS and mounted jets to its wings as it measures its journey in change. No day repeats itself other than being the next day.

This is too much for some and they jump and scatter. Bewildered by their own inevitable role in the scheme of things, they jump the boat or just grab a bottle of wine and hide below deck until the voyage is over. For some (and oh, how we dislike them), every day is an adventure as they smile their way through the days of change, until a new app buggers up their cell phone because its operating system added an apostrophe on line 233,343,434 of its code.

That's all it takes. An apostrophe. (But we get to gloat at those smiley people.) (Not that we'd do that.) (I certainly wouldn't.) That's how vulnerable we've become after a million years of evolution. The smallest whisper creates the largest echo.

This presents some really nasty sink holes in science fiction and cyberpunk writing. You can find yourself writing about the world you envision in the not-to-distant future and it's a few days behind you by the time you've finished your story. Well, I guess people can congratulate you on your hindsight.

I started writing *Team Player* way back in the mid-1990s. At the time, I wrote about a program that was secretly inserted into computers and had the ability track the user's computer activities. I talked about this with co-workers (all of them technological visionaries, of course) and we all arrived at the same conclusion: Software like that would definitely be illegal and anyone using it would go to jail. Get this...

"The word 'spyware' was used for the first time publicly in October 1995. It popped up on Usenet (a distributed Internet discussion system in which users post e-mail like messages) in an article aimed at Microsoft's business model. In the years that followed though, spyware often referred to 'snoop equipment' such as tiny, hidden cameras. It re-appeared in a news release for a personal firewall product in early 2000, marking the beginning of the modern usage of the word.

In 1999, Steve Gibson of Gibson Research detected advertising software on his computer and suspected it was actually stealing his confidential information. The so-called adware had been covertly installed and was difficult to remove..."

The History of Spyware

<https://www.adaware.com/faq/spyware-history>

To us at that time, spyware would have been the same as opening someone's snail mail, putting invisible ink messages in and re-sealing the envelope so that the recipient would never know the secret message was there...but spyware is even worse: it spies on the recipient and provides the sender with personal information and it may even allow someone else to control your computer.

And get this...it's illegal...sort of.

“Does this mean that spyware is illegal? Not necessarily. Though law enforcement has often pursued the creators of malware like viruses, spyware developers have been largely un-prosecuted under criminal law, though they occasionally do face lawsuits. Many spyware companies even operate as legitimate businesses.”

Spyware and the law

<https://www.spamlaws.com/spyware-laws.html>

What gets them off the hook is the user agreement...you know, that 50 million word agreement in 1pt font that takes hours to read and it's written in legalese so that, even after you read it, you have no idea that these a-holes are installing something on your computer that's going to make your life transparent to the wrong people and may even make your computer act in ways what will drive you nuts.

Back in the day, we were unanimous in our conclusion that people who would do this shit would be hunted down and locked away from the rest of the world forever. Since then, the world has gone crazy and spyware is so pervasive on so many free apps and programs that it's likely on more than 90% of the world's computers in one form or another. I think I read that somewhere on the internet so it must be true.

At the time I was researching and writing the book, these people would have been in jail, tied to the floor. Now they own mansions and yachts and governments hire them to do their dirty work.

Change is rarely limited by our expectations.

And hey, get this...neutrinos have mass. Not much, but they have mass. Not so when I was writing *Team Player*. The science at that time said, “Nope. No mass here folks. Just a bunch of massless neutrinos. Just let them pass through you.”

Of course, Science waited until *Team Player* was published with the chapter “Rogue Neutrinos of the Milky Way” before discovering that they have mass. It's not much,

about half a million times less than an electron...but it's there for all to almost see... mass. And then...

I'm pretty sure Burj Khalifa in Dubai is still the tallest building in the world (for now) and we all know that the Leaning Tower of Pisa was kicked over by a pissed-off ghost. This is all described in detail in *Team Player* so I won't get into it here. Instead...

After they read, *Boston Jonson in Murder by Burger*, people laughed at me and pointed until I cried like a bawling teary-eyed baby in desperate need of an eye-diaper.

"Cloned burgers?" they said. "You can't clone a burger, you twit. You need to un-write this terrible book and all the lies between its mind-polluting covers." But...at this time, the world could only clone entire sheep and who really needs a cloned sheep? A cloned burger would be much more welcome and much handier. But much harder to believe, apparently.

So I ate my pride with a cleaver and a spoon and vowed never to write about food again. My friends were obviously right...I was just as crazy as I looked and I had no moral standing to write about food let alone cloned food. I call this my living-in-a-cave-away-from-it-all period, even though I didn't live in a cave. Until...

**SCIENTISTS USE 3D PRINTING TO CREATE SYNTHETIC BEEF
FROM \$30,000 COW CELLS**

<https://tinyurl.com/v9shwu8c>

It rings in at \$200 a pound and has all the usual muscle, fat and blood vessels. But it's a steak, not an indiscriminate chunk of cow yelling, "Hey! Look at me! I'm the beef!"

This is a steak. An actual steak devoid of cows and meadows and the chewing of cud by a contented animal unaware of the horrors waiting at the slaughterhouse.

So why not print patty, cheese, tomato, pickle and bun together to make a burger? Can you imagine going into a burger joint, asking for a burger with just the toppings you

want and the person on the other side of the counter wearing the mouse ear hat says, "Coming right up with a 1, 2 and a..."

And it rolls right off the printer, into a mini oven and comes out looking like the perfect burger which, of course, it is. I mean, why would you clone an imperfect burger?

The only difference is...it's all one piece. You can't take it apart and change the condiments. When you bite into it, you can taste all the components at the same time. Sort of like with a real burger. Which it actually is. 😊

Not sure how that's going to work with the printer being used as a petri dish. I'd write a story about that but I'm not sure if I can write that fast before it's guess-work history.

And then there's that stuff I wrote about 2000 years in the future. Three of my friends were hospitalized for OL (over laughing) when I told them that one day we would all be born with an internet connection genetically inherited in our brains.

It would start small...some couple allowing software to be implanted in a fetus to help it develop properly. That's already being done. But take that a bit further and enhance the software so that it begins to teach the fetus in such a way that the baby is born with skills and knowledge that others take months or years to develop after birth.

We live in a competitive world. Parents will be lining up for enhanced Gerber babies...not only beautiful, but they'll come out toilet trained and they'll do their own math homework.

Now, think about it: After a few centuries, a couple of millennia, those genetically implanted connections integrate biologically with human DNA and everyone is born connected to the internet. Hey, they're cloning steaks with printers.

I might have missed the mark with the online city states in *The War Bug*...cyber cities that allow their citizens to strap up in the real world and live their lives online using whatever identity they want and even having online families. Who would ever do that?

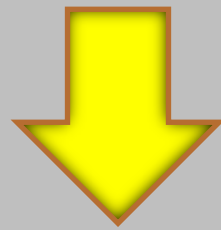
Sometimes I wonder if historical writers have similar problems, like new findings pointing to Napoleon actually retiring to a condo in the Bahamas or Bill Shakespeare actually being a very talented alien. How does that change the narrative?

I guess that's something we have to live with these days: change is outpacing us and that's the warning science fiction and cyberpunk have for us.

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www.biffmitchell.com

GOT SOME MORE STUFF DOWN HERE...

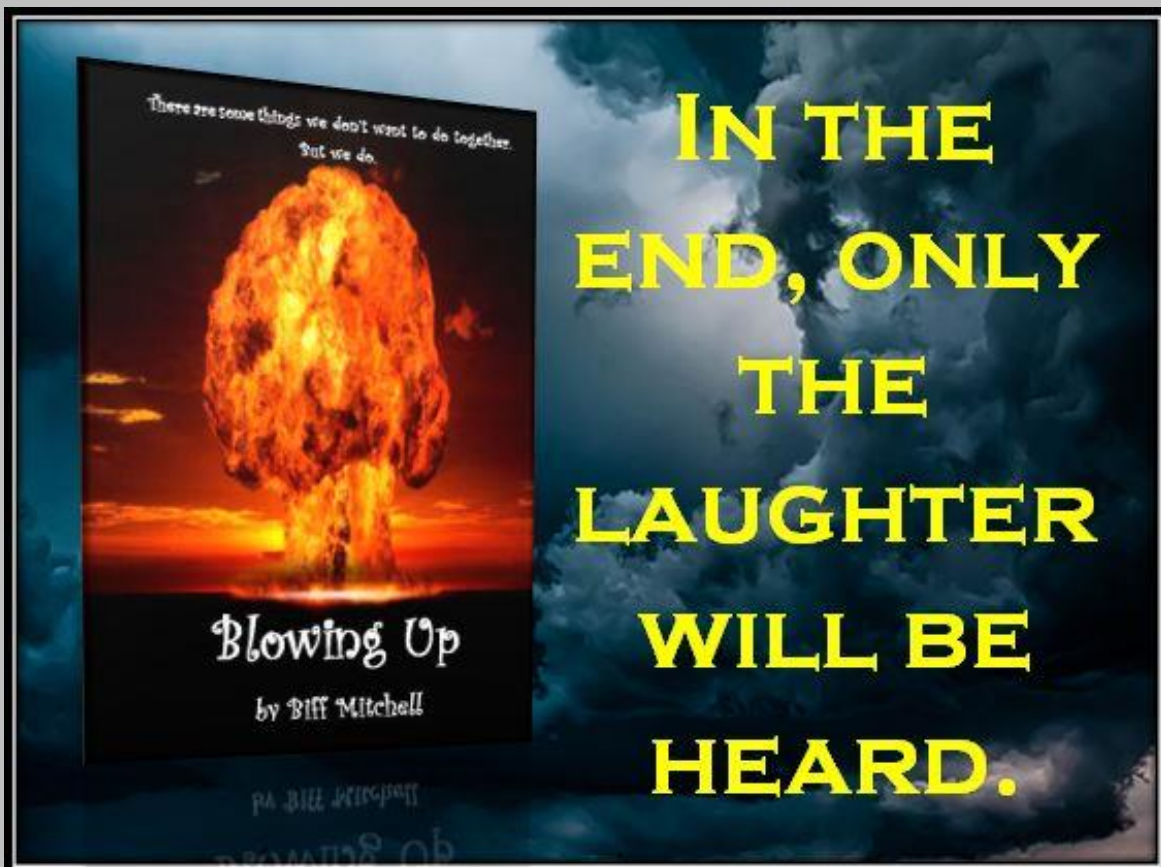


BLOWING UP

COMING THIS FALL FROM DOUBLE DRAGON
(AN IMPRINT OF FICTION4ALL)!

STORIES TO GUIDE YOU SAFELY INTO THE END
OF DAYS.

<https://www.facebook.com/Blowing-Up-103572168743719/>



EXCERPTS FROM BLOWING UP

FROM STILL LIFE WITH SAX AND MUSE

It was a quiet afternoon at Molly's Cafe. Outside, gray rain sliced through the air like tiny hatchets. Behind us, a lone sax player ground out something bluesy with all the gravel and grit of a break-hardened heart. Across from me, Jo's eyes, as usual, were green, a green that could feed forests.

She wore a black turtleneck with matching black tights divided by a red swatch of tartan skirt. I tried to keep my eyes on her eyes, but the green threatened to swallow my soul and toss me around in the tides of her green forever. I focused my eyes on a couple of dust motes arguing about semantics and existentialism somewhere in that distance between her green eyes and her long legs, those legs that flowed up into an unimaginable playground, into ... I refocused my eyes on the dust motes.

"Do you like my sweater?" she said.

"Huh?" I said.

"Do you like my sweater? You haven't taken your eyes off it. Are you thinking dirty thoughts again, you pathetic literary pig?"

Damn dust motes, arguing right in front of her breasts.

(End of excerpt.)

FROM BLOWING UP

Ghosts of the Machine

"Yep, she's a beautiful sight indeed," said Murphy as he gazed lovingly at the machine with all its pulleys and conveyor belts and consoles. He turned to Johnson, grabbed his hand and started shaking it enthusiastically.

Johnson smiled wide enough to rip his face off if he sneezed. He stared teary-eyed at the machine. "It certainly is, sir, it certainly is."

“And you and your crew made this all possible, Johnson,” said Murphy. “We’ll never forget this, you know.”

“I know, sir,” said Johnson.

“Oh,” said Murphy, “looks like Sinclair is going to say something.” He looked in the direction of a man in a very expensive three-piece gray suit. He clapped his hands three times.

“Everyone!” said Sinclair. “Everyone! May I have your attention.”

A hush fell over the room as seven men in very expensive three piece gray suits and five men in shitty mismatched suits trained their eyes on Sinclair. “We all know that progress is inevitable, that what is to come, will in fact come. We can’t fight it. We can’t stop it. We can only accept that things will change.” He looked around the room into the eyes of each of the twelve men surrounding him. “And change they will. And I like to think...for the better. Things change for the better. And that’s what’s happened here. Things have changed for the better. We...all of us...” He raised his arms in a sweeping motion to include everyone in the room. As he raised his arms and did the sweeping thing, not a wrinkle appeared in the arms of his expensive gray suit jacket. “...have embraced the future. And now the future is here.” He pointed both creaseless arms toward the machine. “The future is here.”

A loud cheer resounded in the room. It bounced off the walls and ceiling and swarmed lovingly over the machine. It was followed by a cascade or energetic applause as everyone in the room turned to face the marvelous machine that had been in the works for almost a year. And here it was...the future.

Moody smiled profusely as he stood by himself, happy with the news he’d received that day. All five of the production people had been given their walking papers. They were no longer needed. The machine would everything they did faster, more efficiently and, most important, cheaper. Much cheaper. In fact, cheap enough that all eight managers had, that day, received huge bonuses and raises in pay. Moody clapped his hands together hard enough to almost hurt them. Fucking idiots, he thought as he clapped and glanced quickly at Jones and Wallis.

Jones put his hand on Wallis’ shoulder as he stared at the machine. Their suits, of course, were mismatched. Wallis turned his head to look at Jones, who turned his head to look at Wallis. “We did it,” said Wallis.

“We sure did,” said Jones. “And in under a year.”

“Against all odds,” said Wallis.

Jones squeezed Wallis' shoulders. "So...what next for you? Any prospects?"

"Nothing yet," said Wallis. "Didn't realize the job market would be this tight. How about you?"

Jones shrugged his shoulders. "Haven't really had time to get my resume together...with all the overtime and weekends here to get this working on schedule."

"Yeah," said Wallis. "Same here. But we did it, Jones, we did it."

Manfort shook Smith's hand firmly, maybe a little too firmly, as was his habit. "You people did a wonderful job, Smith. Wonderful job."

"Thank you, sir," said Smith, beaming. He loved getting praise from Manfort and the other managers in their expensive three-piece gray suits. It made him think that maybe someday he would be wearing one of those suits and filling someone's day with joy...just by shaking their hand. "It was a big job, but what can you say with a team like ours. It was all teamwork, sir, all teamwork."

"That's the spirit, Smith," said Manfort. "It's always the team. Always the team." He turned his gaze full on to Smith. "So, how long have you been with the company, Smith?"

Smith sensed an opening. He smiled wider. "Eighteen years, sir. Eighteen years last week. And every one of them a wonderful experience, sir."

"Well, Smith," said Manfort, "you've been a valued employee, and making this machine a reality must serve as a sort of culmination of accomplishments for you, Smith."

"It certainly does, sir," said Smith. "It certainly does."

"Granted it means that you and your team will no longer be needed here, but I'm guessing that you're all looking forward to new challenges," said Manfort as he smiled and nodded his head as though agreeing with himself. "And a much deserved break from eighteen years of the same-old same-old, right, Smith?"

"Right, sir," said Smith a little too loud. "Looking forward to new challenges."

Fucking idiot, thought Manfort as he turned and walked away from Smith, leaving the ill-suited man wondering what had just happened.

"Look at them," said Kingsley to Bingham, both wearing expensive three-piece gray suits. "They're fucking happy. We just got them to build a machine to put them all out of work so that we could make more money and the fucking idiots did it...and now they're celebrating."

"Did you get your bonus?" said Bingham.

"I did, yes," said Kingsley.

"Did you get your raise?" said Bingham.

"I did," said Kingsley. "And I might say, it was not displeasing."

"They made us richer," said Bingham. "They're working class heroes."

"But they're all out of jobs now, Bingham," said Kingsley. "They replaced themselves with a machine and now they're all out of work."

Bingham thought a moment and nodded. "They're fucking idiot heroes."

Glowing in their expensive three-piece gray suits, Stansfield and VanHart stood on either side of Davis in his blah brand suit.

"This is going to make us all rich, VanHart," said Stansfield.

"You mean, richer, Stansfield," said VanHart. "This machine is going to make us richer than we ever dreamed."

Davis smiled sheepishly. Here he was, standing between two of the managers. He'd never stood between two managers before. It was like he was part of some kind of informal management meeting...two managers discussing things with Davis in the middle.

"Too bad about the team," said Stansfield. "All that work and now..."

"Just business," said VanHart. "We have the machine. We don't need them anymore."

For just a split second, Davis let a negative thought run through the train of his glory-moment standing between two managers, as though he were part of this important discussion about the machine. That was enough to abort the thought before it had a chance to turn into anything close to an idea. Besides, he had more pressing things to dwell on...like coming up with some kind of plan to find work and pay the bills.

Fucking idiots, thought Stansfield and VanHart simultaneously.

"Everyone!" said Sinclair. "I think it's time for the moment we've all been waiting for." Everyone turned expectant eyes on him as he walked over to one of the control consoles. "I've been told that his machine is so easy to use...that even I can use it."

Subdued chuckles and laughter floated ingratiatingly toward Sinclair, who sat down at the console. "Apparently, all I have to do is press this button." He smiled and looked around at the smiles. He put his right index finger on a large blue button labelled START and pressed it.

They all felt it at the same time, expensive three piece gray suits and mismatched suits. For an instant they thought it was the machine, but when the walls flew at them

and started shredding their bodies and heat began to melt the threads of their suits, it was the IA in the machine that had the last thought: *Fucking idiots.*

(End of excerpt.)

FROM CLOUD WALKER

Joey Kovacs was tired of being dead. He wasn't sure how long he'd been dead, but he knew it was long enough and he'd had enough of it. The guy with the long hair, beard and robes had been friendly enough and had welcomed him warmly, but he'd been short on details. "Welcome," he'd said, all smiles and ethereal glow. Then, he'd just walked away and disappeared leaving Joey to check out the new surroundings.

There wasn't much to check out...clouds, sky, more clouds. He was standing on a cloud, which seemed weird at first. Clouds are vapor. When you stand on vapor, you fall. But there Joey was, standing on vapor and not falling. He thought for a while that maybe the bearded guy had fallen into a cloud somewhere. He was sure he would have heard a scream though. He couldn't see the ground or where the sky ended so he assumed it would have been a long fall. A long scream.

After he'd grown used to the idea that he wasn't going to fall, he started to walk around on the cloud. Not far at first...he wasn't sure if he should wander far because the bearded guy might come back and he wanted to be there when he did. After a while though, he started to wander farther. The cloud seemed to go on forever, like walking a treadmill at a brisk pace and watching the scenery stay the same.

At first, he thought a lot about his previous life: his friends, his wife, his kids, his co-workers. He wondered how they were doing, how they were taking his death. He tried to remember what had happened, but nothing came to mind. It was like, "Hey, look, you're alive! Hey, look, you're dead!" And here he was, dead. Walking on a cloud.

This wasn't what he'd expected.

In fact, he wasn't entirely certain about what he'd expected. Big party with all the people he'd ever known suddenly whooping it up in a cosmic festival with no end. Or maybe he'd sink into some kind of universal awareness and become one with the stars. He hadn't given it a lot of thought, but there seemed to be a lot of possibilities, all of them more interesting than this. He looked around. Clouds. Sky. More clouds.

He didn't leave footprints when he walked the cloud. Wisps of vapor floated around his feet with each step and there didn't seem to be any change in the density of the vapor.

He lost track of time. Nothing changed. There were no variations that would allow him to say, "OK, this ends here and that begins there...so...we have this and that." There was no this and that. Only this. Clouds and sky. This endless cloud, this endless sky. He couldn't remember sleeping since he'd died. He just kept walking. He hadn't eaten since he'd died. This made sense to him in a weird way. *You eat to stay alive. I'm dead. I don't need to eat.* The good thing about this, though, was that he never had to shit. Not that he hadn't enjoyed a good crap when he was alive, but it would have been unseemly here, with all the clear blue sky, the white fluffy clouds, the absence of toilet paper.

He tried to remember what his life had been like, who he was, what he'd done, where he'd lived, who he'd known. There were flashes, a face here, a building there, a stream of blurred actions that seemed familiar but didn't form a complete picture that he could identify with any kind of certainty. He couldn't remember the last time he'd had one of those flashes and, in all honesty, he didn't care anymore. He didn't want to think about who he'd been and what he'd done. That had nothing to do with anything anymore. If he'd been a bad person and there had been a hell, he'd be there right now. So it didn't matter if he'd been good or bad.

However, it did occur to him that he might be in hell, a hell where you didn't roast your ass off for all time, but suffered from loneliness or boredom forever. But he wasn't lonely and he wasn't exactly bored. A little variation would have been nice, but its absence didn't bother him. He just kept walking. There was no day-after-day or night-after-night. There was just an eternal sky and clouds. He could see well enough but he had no idea where the light came from. There was texture to the sky and he could discern the folds and crevices of the clouds, but there were no shades or shadows that would indicate the direction of the light that made them.

No...he wasn't in hell. He wasn't in pain. He wasn't feeling that he was being punished for anything. He was just...dead. And he was here he was...walking on a cloud surrounded by infinite blue sky.

He was tired. He'd been walking a long time. He had no idea how long, but it felt like a long time...not in the sense of one day flowing into the next, but more like a sense of

fatigue that etched itself into his awareness a little deeper with each step. It wasn't something he could measure. It was just there, somewhere in the fabric of his walking.

He supposed that was another thing he'd had wrong. Who would have thought that you could get tired when you were dead? He'd always thought of it as the ultimate state of relaxation unless, of course, you went to hell. He didn't think hell would be relaxing.

But this wasn't all *that* relaxing. He was just walking all the time. Walking on clouds. His feet weren't sore. His legs were fine. He hadn't eaten in ages but he wasn't hungry. But he was tired. He wasn't sure how he would explain the tired he felt if he had someone to explain it to. So he decided to explain it to himself.

"Well, Joey, it's like this...you're not physically tired."

"Then how do you know you're tired?"

He walked for a while, thinking about this. There were only the clouds, the sky and himself...no one else. He wasn't sure how long he walked and thought but, eventually, he said, "I'm having an internal monologue and I would really appreciate it if you wouldn't interrupt."

"Oh, I see...talking to yourself, are you?"

"That's right. I'm talking to myself and I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't interrupt."

"OK, then...I'll just...listen. That OK?"

"I suppose so. Just don't talk."

"Got it."

"OK, now where was I?"

"You're not physically tired."

"You're talking again."

"But you asked a question. I answered."

"It was rhetorical. I wasn't asking you. I was asking me. And just who the hell are you anyway?"

There was a moment's silence.

"Could you ask another question?"

"What do you mean another question? Who are you?"

More silence.

"Haven't got a clue."

Joey looked around. Nothing but clouds and sky. He looked behind. Same thing. He turned around. Just as he was about to take a step: "I wouldn't do that."

"Do what?"

"Go back."

"And why not? I don't seem to be getting anywhere going forward."

"I don't think it's allowed."

"That's crazy. I'm going back."

He lifted his foot and stomped down hard. And fell right into the cloud.

"Told you not to do that."

(End of excerpt.)

(End of publication.)

(Bye)

(oops...almost forgot...)

**CRAZY MAN AND THE DOG, SIDESTEPPER ARE BACK!
SEPTEMBER 27 AND EVERY WEDNESDAY AFTER**

**THINGS ARE GOING TO GET WEIRD. AND IT'S STILL FREE AT
[HTTPS://CRAZYSIDESTEPPER.COM](https://crazymanadventures.com)**

