

THE MARTIAN SPACE PARTY DIARY

A Chronicle of The Firesign Theatre

January - June 1972

Written and © 1996 by David Ossman

(This article courtesy of Steve Gillmor, from his former sdigital.com site.)

PROLOGUE

We had reached a creative peak in the spring of 1971 with the creation of our fourth album, ***I Think We're All Bozos on This Bus***. Soon after it was released that fall, we put together a double-album of short cuts from the "Dear Friends" radio broadcasts, a series which had frequently revv'd up our creative energies in the months before Bozos was produced.

We had been improvising together for years over the air, and it was now time for TFT to release a "comedy record" - one that maybe more FM stations would play. ***Dear Friends*** also turned out to be a multi-dimensional demonstration of TFT at work, and of our individual voices and styles.

In November 1971 we began a new series of live broadcasts on Thursday nights. again on KPFK, the L. A. Pacifica station where we four had met five years before on "Radio Free Oz."

Rolling Stone had profiled us in their September 30th issue. We were getting good airplay, the reviews of ***Bozos*** coming out everywhere were fantastic. CBS was advertising all four albums at once, available on LP, cassette and 8-track tape "For Berserkers, Zips & Bozos only!" TFT was finally making it.

After a short holiday hiatus we picked up the KPFK show again in January 1972 and also continued our regular L.A. meetings, usually at Phil Austin's great hillside house overlooking historic Mixville. I came down the coast from Santa Barbara for three or four days a week and usually stayed at the succulent-draped El Patio Motel in North Hollywood.

I kept a regular diary at that time which, along with other sources, makes up the following calendar of events: the story of THE MARTIAN SPACE PARTY, the last completed work, and the only film record of the Firesign's "Golden Age."

Sun 2 Jan

1972 DO's I Ching throw for "the new year of work" is The Well, changing to Obstruction. "The town can be changed, but the well cannot be changed. It neither increases or decreases."

Mon 3 Jan

TFT meets at PA's and decides to work on "Anything You Want To," a long-contemplated Shakespeare parody, for the next album release (following ***Bozos*** and ***Dear Friends***). DO sees ***A Clockwork Orange***. "Images still in my head."

Tues 4 Jan

TFT meets at PA's with Alan Rinzier of Straight Arrow Press and sells the idea of the ***Big Book Of Plays***. DO sees ***Modern Times***.

Wed 12 - Thurs 13 Jan

TFT meets in LA for radio show. (the sixth in the live broadcast series, but not used for syndication). Mariner 9 photos "Hint That Mars May Be 'Living.'" Grand Canyons and other vistas of Mars soon follow.

Tues 18 Jan

TFT has bit mtg about new CBS record contract. DO meets with Steve Gillmor.

Thurs 20 Jan

TFT on radio with "very good show." (The first half-hour was released as the 4th in the syndicated series. "City 0' Pigs," and the second part became show #5. "The Filipino Cheese-Ball War.")

Wed 26 Jan

DO sees ***Carnal Knowlege***. "So-so.

Thurs 27 Jan

TFT on radio. "A great time." (We called it "Pastor Flash's Pirate Ministry of the Air," but didn't use the material in syndication. DO's super-S movie "Dear Friends" records TFT at work and play in January.

Tues Feb 1

DO writes a found soundpoem, "Time Capsules" for TFT's next show. Hears "Bangladesh" album. DF album "not yet out."

Wed Feb 2

TFT meets with Steve Gillmor, who pitches himself to co- produce a flim with TFT, financed with 5K front

money from CBS.
DO watches opening ceremonies of Winter Olympics.

Thurs Feb 4

TFT's radio show "low key." (Called "The Harry Cox Show," this one was not edited for syndication, but yielded, as did others, material finally used in TFT's 1977 album, ***Just Folks.***)

Sun Feb 6

TFT profiled in Sunday ***New York Times***, headlined "Why Do Kids Love These Four Zany Guys?"

Wed Feb 9

TFT writes "The Prologue Scene, beginning AYWT." (Actually the ship-board scene, performed at the MSP.) DF has been released.

Thurs Feb 10

TFT writes "another 2 pages of AYWT." (The beginning of the Father's Ghost scene on Castle Pflæg's Battlements, also performed at MSP.) Radio show "better than the week before. Heavy on the Olympics, which we've been watching every night." (This show, the 10th in the series. became show #6 of the syndicated version - "The Underground Olympics.")

Tues Feb 15

TFT meets, writes "one line in AYWT." (More, actually - the end of the Battlements scene.)

Wed Feb 16

TFT meets. Interview with Ed Ward.

Thurs Feb 17

DO finishes "Year of the Rat." "Inspires PA to get out his guitar, teach PB to play the harp & generally to build a musical show." Show "a great success." Called "The Year of the Rat," this program introduced several characters later written into the MSP. ***Daily Variety*** announces TFT will be "launching a series of one-minute late-night tv spots, pitching Firesign Theatre's elpees," and notes that the last time CBS had bought tv time was for Donovan In 1968.

Sun Feb 20

DO watches "the Nix land in China" and edits five of the "Let's Eat!" radio shows for syndication.

Mon Feb 21

DO contemplates week to follow: "Last radio show coming up. TV ads in a week from today. More work on Anything, plans for 3/30 show. Mtg with Rolling Stone, too!" The Free University of the University of Maryland announces a course in "Advanced Firesign Theatre Interpretation."

Tues Feb 22

TFT meets. "Lots of the Phils playing music." SG in for mtg on the TV spots. DO recalls a dream: "Clifford Irving telling me it was all his wife's idea." Volkswagen Beetle becomes the most produced automobile in history, overtaking the Model T Ford.

Wed Feb 23

TFT meets with John Goodchild of Straight Arrow. "Book now off and becoming a reality." TV ads put off until a week from Monday. Nixon tours China. Great Wall. Forbidden City. Thursday 2 March TFT's twelfth and last show in the KPFK "Let's Eat" series. (Called "The Hilarlo Spacepipe Show," this one found Chicanos in Space, the President at the Wall of Mars, Yuri Yankoff singing 'San Clamaron,' and Charles, Walter and Eric trying to anchor the pieces together. THE MARTIAN SPACE PARTY was improv'd into life live, right there on the Last Radio Show in the last live series TFT would ever have. For some reason this show wasn't one of the 1972 syndicated series.) Huge article by Mark Leviton on TFT for the UCLA Daily Drum features our quote: "Our work isn't a metaphor for society, It's a metaphor for the universe."

Sat 4 March

DO edits 3 more "Let's Eat" shows for the syndicated series, which was later issued on ten half-hour reel-to-reel tapes. Retired Deputy Director of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs John Finlater joins NORML and reports that marijuana is less harmful to health than smoking cigarettes or drinking alcohol and eventually will be legalized. Around the same time, Dr. Bertram S. Brown, director of the National Institutes of Mental Health tells a news conference that marijuana should be decriminalized. Shortly after, a bill to make the possession of 5 oz or less of pot a misdemeanor is introduced in the California legislature by Assemblyman Alan Sieroty.

Mon 6 March

TFT tapes "only one" of the TV commercials for CBS. "Reports through the week excellent." Conferences with RS on CBS contract, meeting at PA's. DO sees college chum Richard Chamberlain in **Richard**

II. Ringo says the Beatles Fan Club will close at the end of the month. "We don't want to keep the Beatles myth going, since we are no longer together," he said in London.

Tues 7 March

TFT continues mtg, works on new radio show for 3/30.

Wed 8 March

TFT continues work on the show, now known as THE MARTIAN SPACE PARTY, and on "the new album," and also designs Papoon Campaign. The Nat'l Surrealist Party is born. DO sees **Wizard of Oz** and **42nd Street** on TV.



Thurs 9 March

TFT signs new 5-year contract with CBS. End of "expeptional week."

Sat 11 March

DO editing last two radio tapes. Goes to party for poet Ed Dorn.

Week of 13 March

"Three days of working on The Martian Space Party & associated projects. Last week in L.A. was one of the best times in our history." Gov. Ronald Reagan says he has no plans to return to acting and turns down role as Douglas MacArthur. Mrs. Reagan said she is oposed to legalizing marijuana. DO sees **What's Up, Doc?**

NYC's Mayor John Lindsay said he would work for homosexual rights if elected President. John Lennon says, "New York City is the center of the Earth," and plans to apply for permanent residence. Ringo is reported to be directing a film with Marc Bolan of T-Rex.

Wed 22 March

TFT "outlines remainder of the show." Burt Reynolds poses for a nude centerfold in **Cosmopolitan**. A sidewalk star for Chaplin is OKed by the L. A. City Council 11 to 3. The National Commission of Marijuana

and Drug Abuse recommends that private possession of marijuana for personal use no longer be a criminal offence.

Thurs 23 March

"Just about 2/3rds of the show finished."

Fri 24 March

TFT "works writing until 7 or so" DO meets with SG on the script.

Sat 25 March

TFT's commercial, featuring giant records and a car-dealer spiel was shown, probably for the only time, on L.A.'s Channel 5.

Mon 27 March

DO throws the I Ching about "The Martian Space Party" Duration changing to The Ting. "Restlessness as an enduring condition brings misfortune." TFT meets at KPFK (the MSP performance is a benefit for the station) and has evening music rehearsal. Cyrus Faryar, producer of ***How Can You Be***, is music director and "the wives" are back-up singers. The broadcast has inspired a half-a-dozen songs for us to boogie down with. At the time, CBS was advertising TFT as "The only rock group in the world that doesn't need music."

Tues 28 March

DO buys performance shirt with extra rhinestones at Turk's Western Wear. TFT spends the day in rehearsal.

Wed 29 March

TET rehearses "all afternoon and late into the night." The KPFK hall decorated as a Convention Hall by the volunteer Grassroots, led by Edgar Bullington. ***Rolling Stone's*** review of Dear Friends comes out: "This album is us!" The ***Christian Science Monitor*** says of ***Bozos***. "This is the Firesign Theatre's ***Finnegan's Wake!***"

Thurs 30 March

TFT has afternoon run-thru. THE MSP broadcast went on the radio live, and simultaneously on 16-track tape and 35-mm film, at 8:30 pm. "The Martian Space Party appeared to go off splendidly, with only minor things evident during the show. The audience - and there were lots of friends and people we hadn't been in contact with for a long time -- appeared to love the entire experience."

Wed 5 April

TFT to studio to hear playback of MSP, recorded by CBS engineers out in a mobile bus. Continues discussion of next album.

Thurs 6 April

TFT meets at PA's to work on album - "sketching out Ideas."
DO goes to Troubador to see Harry Shearer in The Credibility Gap.

Fri 7 April

TFT sees MSP film at screening room. There are more-or-less three camera angles covering the whole show.

Mon April 10

TFT works on film all day. "1st section pretty well done." Plan to finish editing Friday and shoot inserts the following Monday. DO watches Chaplin on the very end of the Academy Awards. "So sentimental - made me cry." DO reads entire galleys of ***The Big Book of Plays*** - just excellent."

Tues April 11

"Good long day in the studio - ended up at 10 with first two sections cut - viewed them - going to be a fine, funny film."

Wed April 12

"Very slow day but enough got done. DO "totally distracted by The War on TV- shit!"

Thurs April 13

"Now we have a complete cut of the Convention."

Fri April 14

"Worked all day but slowly." Sen. Harold Hughes (D-Iowa) says he has smoked marijuana. "During World War II in Africa I smoked marijuana and it had absolutely no effect on me." He favors an amnesty for pot smokers in prison.

Sun April 16

Set up miniatures on PA's porch for insert shots of Glutamoto attacking the Miniature Cardboard Village of Fudd until 3 PM, then shot until after dark.



Mon-Tues April 17-18

TFT continues in editing room. "Endless dark hours."

Wed Apr 19

TFT at the familiar CBS studios 9 am to 9 pm "firing up the track."

Thurs April 20

"Very close to finishing" MSP movie. Screening for CBS and editing sound. Also, layout of photos for book almost completed. Lawrence Livermore scientists propose the existence of a giant planet beyond the orbit of Pluto which they call "Planet X."

Fri April 21

DO spends a short day in editing. "Film was fine and to be finished up by PB & PP. "The men are on the moon!" (Apollo 16) (In retrospect, THE MARTIAN SPACE PARTY movie seizes the strong narrative count-down of Papoon's Nomination and the President's Blast-off, while revealing just enough of the side-trips to be tantalizing. It is a fine, funny film, even 24 years later.) TFT's 1970 "Electric Western," **Zachariah** showing with **Shaft** and **Celebration at Big Sur** this weekend in a triple-bill at the Airport Drive-In in Goleta.

Mon 1 May

TFT begins working on a different concept for the next album, heavily influenced by the new material written for the MSP. "Started in writing page 1 - commercials which lead us on into the 8-track."

Tues 2 May

"Developed very quickly the basic plot outline for **Not Insane**. Worked quickly on plot development" Also, mtg with SG on film.

J. Edgar Hoover dies at 77. An 85-year-old FBI agent is, however, still on the job (as predicted by PP on **Dear Friends**).

Wed 3 May

TFT continues writing.

Thurs 4 May

Screening of MSP at CBS. "Spent afternoon continuing with NI, technical discussions, sounds, filling out the plot."

Mon 8 May

"Spent most of the day discussing movie with SQ and dealing with business...the day ended with Nixon's Mining Hifong speech - so we all were a little blue."

Tues 9 May

TFT writes 6 more pages of NI. This includes first drafts of "Torment of Young Guy in Radio Prison" and "Mark Time & Crew Return from Planet X." The stories would intersect in a virtual world of merging media, watched over by WALTER - the supreme Watch And Listen To Everything Robot. "This is WALTER..." The secretary of the 30th World Science Fiction Convention writes to inform us of Bozos' nomination for the 1971 Annual Science fiction Achievement Award (Best Dramatic Performance).

Wed 10 May - Thurs 11 May

"Not too much more work accomplished." (Rewrites of "Young Guy" and one new page of "Mark Time.") Week's headlines: RICHARD NIXON REIGNS UNCHECKED. 'EXXON' NEW NAME FOR HUMBLE. PAINTING OF NIXON IN NUDE IS WITHDRAWN FROM ART SHOW.

Sat 14 May

DO's I Ching throw for **Not Insane**, or **The Firesign Theatre vs. Dream Monsters From El Outer Space** is Duration, changing to Limitation. "Thus the superior man creates number and measure, and examines the nature of virtue and correct conduct."

Mon 15 May

TFT spends six studio hours recording and building the 8-track collage which will represent "Radio Prison," an Earth-girdling sphere of ever-expanding transmissions, from vintage radio, foreign broadcasts and tv movies, to the noise of solar wind, all created from recycled ads, readings of Filipino comic books, gospel music, coverage of the Olympics in Tierra del Fuego and other bits from the "Let's Eat" radio shows. "Came back to Motel--watched TV--the Wallace shooting announced during our lunch." "A good first day's work."

Tues 16 May

"Morning session went very well - boys playing music, so mood way up. Technical work very satisfying."

Wed 17 May

"Work progresses. By the end of the day we will have the base-tracks for the first 5 mins and music for the whole thing." "Finished the back-tracks for Not Insane. Very positive feelings all around. Good music and improvisation." Sinatra comes out of retirement to croon at a fundraiser for VP Spiro Agnew, then vows it's his last public performance.

Sun 21 May

DO's I Ching throw for "Not Insane (Continued)" is Coming To Meet, changing to Retreat. "There is a fish in the tank. No blame. Does not further guests."

Mon 22 May - Tues 23 May

"The two days In the studio have contributed 7 mins assembled. Today, we ought to get into Young Guy sequence."

"Got a mix this morning."

Wed 24 May

"Finally got into recording Young Guy." (This was TFT's sixth and last day of this final series of sessions working in the old CBS studios with engineers Bill Driml and Phil Cross. The results can be heard on the cuts "La Bomba Shelter" and "Young Guy, Motor Detective" on TFT's 1993 compilation **Shoes For Industry** on Columbia/Legacy.)

Tues 30 May

DO "Proofed book pages (again)." DO's I Ching throw for "Keeping Not Insane" is Grace, changing to After Completion. "Grace in the hills and gardens. The roll of silk is meager and small. Humiliation, but in the end good fortune." A man named Laszlo Toth smashes Michaelangelo's "Pieta" with a hammer.

Wed 31 May

TFT decides to discard portions of work already written and recorded.

Thurs 1 June

Photo session at PA's for Not Insane album cover - burlesque of a Japanese Monster movie poster, probably "Rubbergon Dumn Toyko."
FIREMAIL/THE MINDLESS FELLOWSHIP - TFT's first "official" fan club starts up in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Fri 2 June

TFT writes two pages of a new scene in which Young Guy, his girlfriend Miki and his butler Rotonoto listen to The Lizard on the pirate radio, then SG arrives ("Somebody must be downstairs, Boss!") for mtg which ends abruptly and TFT goes home.

Sat 10 June

TFT decides on no further meetings at this time. Phone calls continue throughout June.
News reports: Hoover leaves his half-million dollar estate to his friend Clyde A. Tolson. According to Gallup, President Nixon's popularity is at the highest point - 61% approval - in nearly two years, after his Summit meeting in Moscow. Roper's survey finds that 51% of American adults believed they would obey, if, as soldiers in Vietnam, they were ordered to shoot all inhabitants of a village suspected of aiding the enemy. Elvis, 37, is appearing at Madison Square Garden. The Goon Show reunites for a photo op with the Duke of Edinburgh and other Royals. Marijuana penalty reduction defeated on the California Senate floor. The Dog-Face Butterfly approved In the State Assembly as California's State Insect.

Wed 28 June

DO's I Ching throw for "tomorrow" is Opposition, changing to The Creative. "One sees the wagon dragged

back, the oxen halted, a man's hair and nose cut off. Not a good beginning, but a good end. The companion bites his way through the wrappings. If one goes to him, how could it be a mistake?"

Thurs 29 June

Screening of MSP movie on the big screen at the Director's Guild theatre in Hollywood. TFT all present, along with "Grassroots" camponers, friends and show-biz types. "The showing was enjoyed."

EPILOGUE

THE MARTIAN SPACE PARTY played all over the country in the fall of 1972 and became a Science Fiction Underground Classic. Mention was made in *The New Yorker* of the Nat'l Surrealist Party and Papoon's "Not Insane!" slogan. John Lennon was photographed wearing a "Not Insane!" button the following April.



TFT's album titled *Not Insane* was released in the late fall to confused reviews. Finished during the summer, it was finally a collage of the new studio recordings, parts of the MSP performance, and our old favorite, "The Count of Monty Cristo," recorded on tour in 1970. The contemplated story-line and newly written but un-recorded scenes were never used.

A year came and went. Proctor & Bergman teamed up for *TV Or Not TV* (in which two guys try to produce everything for a home-made cable station by themselves while media pirates surf on their sync waves). I produced *How Time Flys* with Steve Gillmor, in which Mark Time does return, in the year 2000, alone and forgotten, from Planet X, and has his hologram records of the trip stolen by an unscrupulous entertainment entrepreneur. Austin began work on *Roller Maidens From Outer Space*, a Surrealist Detective Story With Music which takes place out on the thin boundaries between electrons, where the Apocalypse is always in progress. Fit the two hours-plus of these three albums together with Not Insane and the "Let's Eat!" shows into a single time-and-space condominium and you'll have 1972's long-awaited "next Firesign album."

Easier yet, join us in person on that Historic Night, March 30th, 1972 at THE MARTIAN SPACE PARTY!

Oh yes, TFT didn't formally meet again until late August 1973, to begin work on The Giant Rat of Sumatra. The Golden Age had become the Sober Seventies.

Not Insane!

**David Ossman
Honeymoon Bay
January 1996**