



CLAIMS DEPARTMENT ISSUE 8
THE RHYTHM OF SKA
FROM CHRISTOPHER J GARCIA FOR
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CLAIMS DEPARTMENT

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SECOND FOR FAPA

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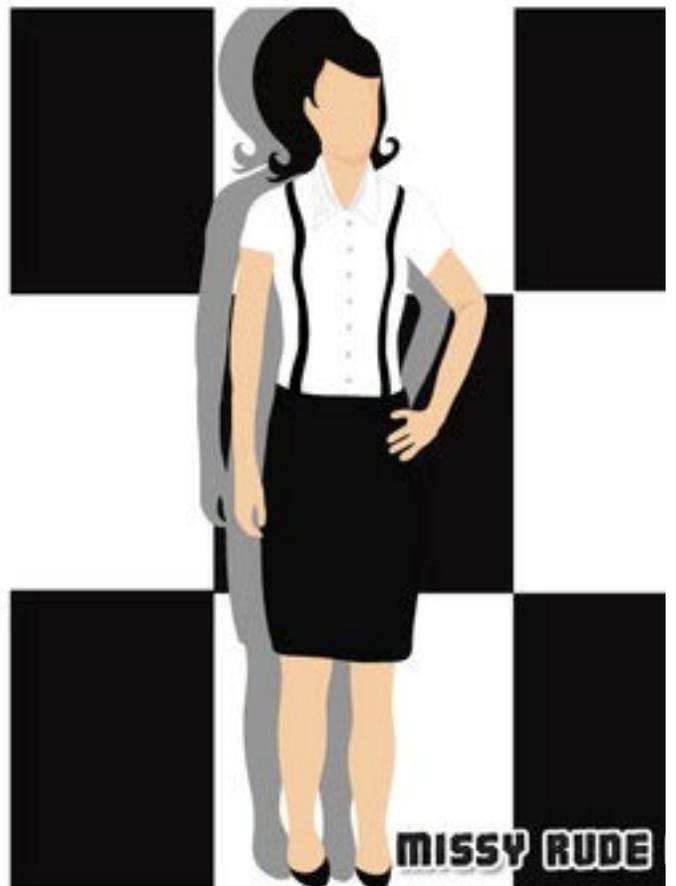
LayOut Help by M
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A Cover by Tiffany
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This one is ALL about
the ska, Rude Boys,
Rude Girls, Skinheads
Skankers, Bands,
Brass and Freaks Like
Me around the world

Welcome back. After my first FAPA Claims Department, I went and wrote one that'll live on in infamy...or at least on eFanzines.com. If you get a chance, take a look at it. It's all about Vegas. This issue is a lot different than some, but still keeps to the music, movies, book and place theme. This time, it's about my trip for Thanksgiving 2004.

My uncle Wayne had just taken the position of Director of the Hemet Public Library System, and so he bought a house about twenty minutes away in the city of Perris in Riverside County. It's not a half-bad place if you like being in the middle of nowhere with a Wal-Mart and every other big draw store around. There's even a motion picture theatre near-by! I wasn't too



impressed, but I had little choice.

The trip down would be another of my famous drives. I love driving up and down Highway Five No less than 4 Issues of Claims Department have featured a trip up (Issue Number 1) or Down (Issues 3, 4, and 7) that long road that runs through the heart of California and beyond. I know the road well and I really love it. The driving actually gives me time to think (the novel that I wrote for National Novel Writing Month was much thought-out in a car on I-5) and listen to some quality tunes.

This trip, there was no question as to what I would be listening to, but it took a lot of work to put it together.

I've been a ska fan since my Dad brought home Ska albums in the very early 1980s. This was fol-



lowed by my discovery of Madness when I started watching MTV. They would play One Step Beyond and Our House, as well as House of Fun and various other tunes. It was not unusual for me to get up and start dancing. I loved it, but honestly,

when Madness sorta faded away (about 1986) and groups like the Specials and English Beat weren't around, I didn't really come to it again.

Not that there wasn't great ska around. In the mid-1980s, the original Jamaican Ska records were getting re-released for the first time. Bob Marley and His Wailin' Wailers put out Simmer Down and One Cup of Coffee, both of which were big time ska tunes. Jimmy Cliff, Toots and the Maytals, and even Desmond Dekker were all Lloyd Brevvet, Roland Alphonso and Don Drummond. They were big names, but by the late 1960s, they broke up because Drummond went to jail for murder.

With all the Jamaicans coming to the UK in the later 1960s and throughout the 1970s, Ska started to pop up in places like Bristol and Manchester. In the late 1970s, two bands formed that would end up changing Ska forever. One was the Coventry Automatics, who like most bands from that part of the world, changed their name a bunch becoming The Special AKA. They started recording songs, and their first album was produced by the greatest songwriter in history: Elvis Costello. (OK, I know there are going to be people reading who will have very different opinions, though typically they boil down to one of three people: Bob Dylan (People in their





40s+), Willie Nelson (Country Fans (40+), and Lennon-McCartney (as one guy). I just don't see it with any of them, as Elvis really changed rock 'n roll and basically invented what would become Alternative Music, which is now what's called pop music by the MTV and so on.) The album was great and there were other backs coming up too. The (English) Beat, The Selector, Madness and so on. All of them did great stuff just as Punk was dying out. Sadly, this only lasted a couple of years and by 1981, it was pretty well over.

In the mid-1980s, kids around the US started forming bands. It was MTV that had spread songs like A Message to You Rudie, Concrete Jungle, One Step Beyond and Mirror in the Bathroom and the growing alternative music station, like Live 105 in the Bay Area, had exposed a lot of new kids to ska during the early 1980s. Bands like Fishbone, The Toasters, The Undercover SKA and The Untouchables were all out of these kids. By the late 1980s, there were Ska bands all over the country with names like Gangster Fun, The Mighty Mighty Bosstones, Buck-o-Nine and Plate 'O Shrimp. They tore it up, on an underground kick, for about seven or eight years, until the year

1993.

In 1993, several things happened. First, a band called Skankin' Pickle was touring the US. I'd seen them several times before, and they were always great, but they were now a college favourite. The Bosstones were getting MTV play, No Doubt was starting to show up all over the place. It was the first sign that Ska was making a mainstream comeback.

By 1995, it was everywhere. There were ska bands like Reel Big Fish, Less Than Jake, The Dance Hall Crashers, Jack Kevorkian & His Suicide Machines and The Aquabats were getting mainstream play, and No Doubt released one of the biggest selling albums of the decade. A bunch of punk bands also started doin' the ska, including Sublime and Rancid (who came out of the classic Ska-Punk band Operation Ivy). It was a good time to be a ska fan.

But it wasn't to last.

By 1999, it was almost entirely done. No Doubt was shuttled to the back in favour of Gwen Steffani on her own. Reel Big Fish wasn't the big deal any more, and there wasn't a lot goin' on. The fans still stayed loyal, but only just barely.

The Music



I set out to make the perfect set of CDs with the perfect set of Ska songs. I did five CDs for the trip: one on Jamaican Ska, one on Two Tone, one on Third Wave, one on Covers and the last one being the Greatest Ska Songs Ever. As I launched out from San Jose's beautiful Downtown, I was ready to pop them in the order of age, building towards the two general compilations.

The first album was stuff that any ska fan would expect to have from the 1960s. 007 Shanty Town was the highlight, though there was Laurel Aiken, Rico Rodriguez, Prince Buster, and so many other things to listen to. I found myself skanking hard to a tune called Dr. Kildare, which I believe was just a cover of the theme song to the TV series. It was great, and it almost made my Best Comp Ever, but got beat out. By the time I made it to Casa De Fruta, I had gone through the entire first CD, and was reasonably ready to rock with the second CD.

And that was where I started my true rocking.

You see, traditional ska is based on Jazz and Soul and R+B, and in a way it showed. Two Tone was based off of Ska itself and Punk, and in many ways, was the first wave to give Ska an independent image. The Specials Too Much Too Young, a live version, was the first song and it was one of the songs that almost require you to bounce around a



car. I did so, making my erratic driving even more erratic. Luckily, at 5 in the morning on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, it's not a big problem. I followed that up with some of the other great songs of the Specials, including Concrete Jungle (a Marley Cover), Long Shot Kick de Bucket, and the Beat's Mirror in the Bathroom. It was a good CD, but the third was what I was looking forward to the most.

The Third Wave brought with it stronger elements of Punk and Funk. I had put bands like Perfect Thyroid and The Slackers on it, who both blow me away. (My favourite lyrics from The Slackers: Every single day, she's looking to put me away, and she brings me gasoline when I ask for water). This is serious fun music. Fishbone, The Bosstones, Reel Big Fish, it's just plain fun. There's a great song called Allston, Mass all about the immense sucktitude of that city near Boston where I used to live. It's a great tune and there was another from folks who lived in the same area called Nut



Monkey, which was just a big instrumental blast of speed and fun. Let's Go Bowling, probably my all-time favourite Ska band, from the beautiful city of Fresno, CA, kicked in a great tune called Rude 69, with a rollicking horn drive

that just about blows me away.

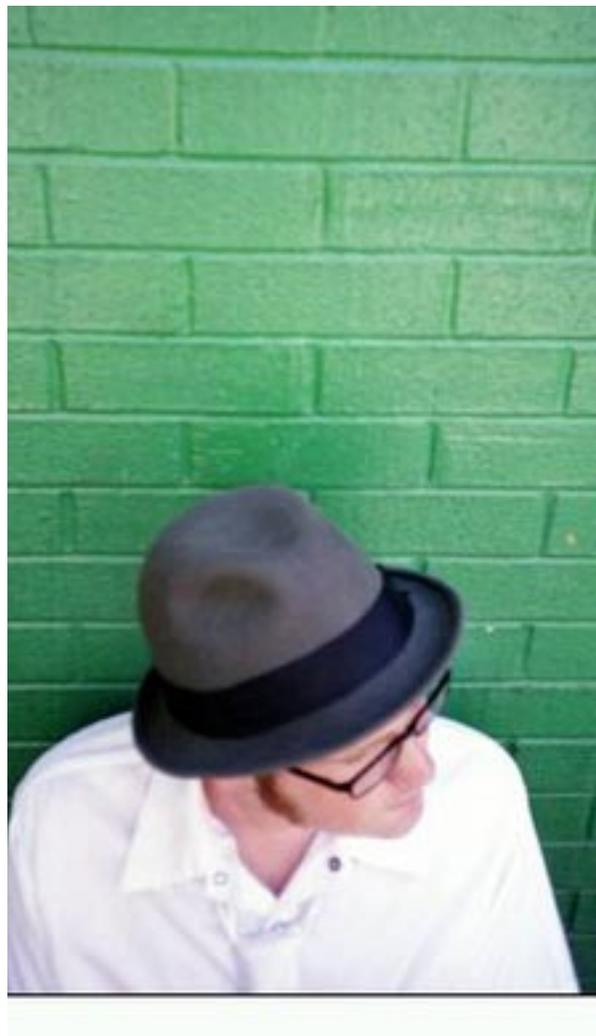
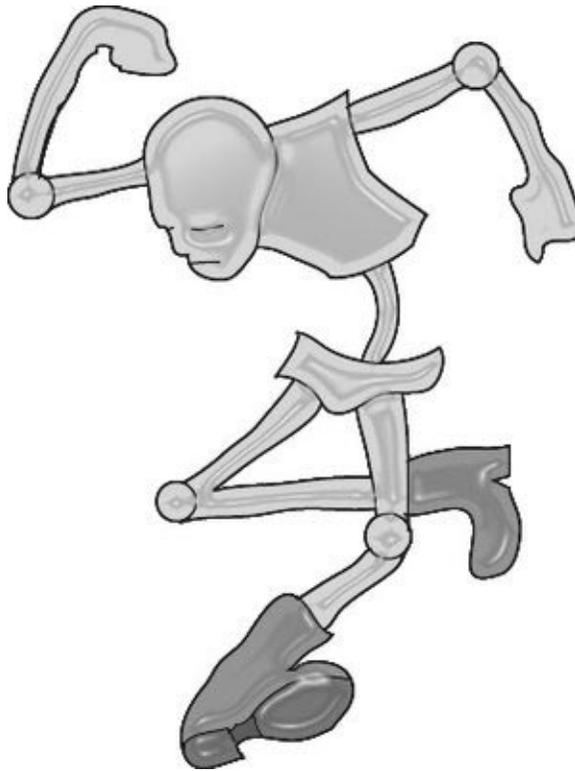
That CD was boss, and I was about to head off of I-5 onto a little road to head for Bakersfield and then points south. I stopped and hit the bathroom and discovered that I really love roadside gas stations on the big highways. They're in the middle of nowhere, with nothing to keep them going but the fast drivers who stop for gas, to pee and maybe buy a snack. So, instead of making it fast and easy for folks to get to everything, they also stock the places with CDs, DVD, cheap crafts, and all sorts of junk that only a person who was living in the area would buy.

But they called to me!

I had to buy a few things that just required to end up in my car. A Charles Bronson movie (which I've never watched). A Selena CD. A Stone Cold Steve Austin mug and keychain (OK, those were cool) and a blanket with Fish on it.

It was all just so perfect.

Back on the road, this time down a smaller highway that went through orchards



and dirt-filled areas, I popped in The Best Ska Covers. Ska musicians love to do covers, have ever since the early, early days. Here's the run-down - Phoenix City by The Les Miserables Brass Band (1992 or 3) - Ring of Fire by Mr. Cranky (1992) - Sunshine of Your Love by Bim Skala Bim (1991 or so) - Sanford & Son by Perfect Thyroid (1994) - Simmer Down by The Mighty Mighty Boss-tones (1993) - Boys Don't Cry by Reel Big Fish (1999, maybe 2000) - Hungry like the Wolf by Reel Big Fish (I have no idea, pre-1999) - One Step Beyond by Madness (the only song that shows up twice on the CDs) - Tears of a Clown by The Slackers (1997) - Mary Elena by Roland Alphonso (1993) - The Batman Theme (off of the Danny Elfman composition) by Skavoovie & The Epitones (1993) - Let's Go Bowling (based on an old Bowling Alley Commercial) by Let's Go Bowling (1992) - Don't Worry by

Monkey (You know, that song about the Three Little Birds)

- The Theme from Tetris (Not Sure who did it)
- Shot in the Dark by The Tokyo Ska Orchestra (1990s)

- The New York Ska-Jazz Ensemble's brilliant cover of Harlem Nocturne



skinhead girls with the fringe around the forehead and ears. The Mod look is very popular, particularly with women who like to carry around teapots as purses. It's a nice look, even though my fam-

ily looked at me funny while we were having Thanksgiving Dinner.

Oh, yeah, that brings me to...

It's a great CD, and if you don't know much about ska, it's the way to go.

One of the big things about the ska community is the fashion, and I consciously decided that I'd be playing the Rude Boy for the weekend. I got my old skinny tie out of the closet, brought my black suit, my white shirts and my pork pie hat. That is pretty much the most accepted Rude Boy garb. Rude Boys make up a percentage of the ska fanbase, though smaller percent every year. There are a lot of Skinhead Ska fans, and plenty of punks who just like to jam to the ska every once in a while. There's a movement that I had a hand in founding called Skoth, Gothic Ska, but it's still pretty underground. For chicks, it's different. You see a lot of dresses and cat's eye glasses. Plenty of chicks in suits, and lovely, lovely

My Family

My is pretty small, at least the part that gets together for holidays. My Mom has 4 brothers and sisters, my Dad has 5, but there's only 4 of us who ever get together since the death of my grandmother in 1994. They are my Mom, my aunt Susie, my Uncle Wayne, and me. The three siblings are all single and all live in different parts of the West Coast (Mom in the Bay Area, Susie in Canyonville, Or, and Wayne in Perris, CA down in Riverside County). We went to Wayne's place because I went to LosCon once and that's the closest of the places to LA.

Wayne's house is in a development that's at the foot of a mountain. This mountain will come into play later. Perris is one of those towns, like Clovis or Los Ba-





nos, that has changed from a farming community of largely Mexican families to a place where housing developments are bring White Suburbia into the area. It's not a positive change, in my opinion, because it loses the original character of some great little towns. Los Banos in particular is one that hurts to see change so much.

Wayne's house is nice, two stories with rooms for me, Mom, Susie and Wayne's room, which is quite nice. The first thing that Mom always thinks of when she arrives at Perris is to head over to the Super-Wal-Mart or any of the other giant stores they've got just five minutes out of town. I'm not a big fan, but there wasn't much to do other than reconnect with Shadow, the dog that I lived with for almost a decade. She's older now, but no less rad.

Now, Thanksgiving is a time for family, and my family can drive me insane. You see, I'm a disappointment to them in that I don't really care about buying a house, being successful and would much rather do things for the fun of it than the advantage it might give me. Still, they seem to be mildly proud of me since I'm the only kid

of my Mom, and thus, the only offspring of any of the three. To get away from them for a bit, I decided that it might be fun to climb the mountain across the street.

The Mountain

The mountain doesn't appear to have a name, so I figured I'd summit it and give it the name that I would call it (which would be Mt. St. Christopher). I started from the bottom with nothing but the clothes on my back. The weather was very nice, actually, with temps in the mid-60s and a nice bit of over-cast to keep the sun down. I wore a long-sleeved shirt and my traditional long pants. I didn't think it would be a good idea for me to go in my suit.

I made it about 2/3 of the way up when I noticed that I was thirsty. I went up a bit more, and I realised that I hadn't brought any water, I was still about 30 minutes away from the top and that I should probably turn back.

And so, I did.

Walking back down wasn't hard,

I just kept my way simple and avoided the parts where I had had to do some serious face work (as climbers call it). I came to a rock where I rested for a second. When I got up, I was scoping out a better path down, still maybe 15 feet up, and somehow I lost my footing.

And I fell.

And fell.

Falling.

Ouch.

I landed with no sort of thud, but a lot of pain. I land-



ed on a soft pile of gravel, which is only soft relative to the stuff on either side. I scraped up one shin, my left arm, and I had a gash in my right inseam. My pants were ruined, but I didn't have time to worry about that now, I had to walk back to Wayne's place.

It took me a lot longer than it did going up, but I was bleeding a fair bit, so that's understandable. I got home and my family greeted me, not noticing the abrasions.

"How was your hike?" Susie asked.

"I fell down the mountain." I said.

Mom and folks got very concerned, but I went into the bathroom, cleaned up, took a bath and that was that. I can now say, along with hitting on a Pop Star, getting into a fight with a pro athlete and writing a gag for a stand-up comedian that I have, in fact, fallen down a mountain.

The Book

In my quest to be a Steam-Punk completist, I looked to the Wikipedia. There was a work by a fellow named Michael Swanwick, an author I had met at BayCon 2004 and whose writing on a small scale I had enjoyed. I picked up the one Steam-Punk book attributed to him: Jack Faust.

Jack Faust is a retelling of the Faust myth with a Mephistopheles that gives Faust the power of creating the future. With all of this, Faust basically turns Germany into a

powerhouse and then leaves for Britain, basically causing all sorts of problems. He also tried to win the girl with the help of the bad man, all in a strange way.

There's a lot to like from Swanwick here, but at times, the shock rating gets a little high for me. I understand that Farmer and Sturgeon made it OK to talk about sex and other various nasties, but I think that a lot of what Mike put in it wasn't needed. There are pacing issues too, which show up in my need to read it in chunks no larger than 30 minutes worth at a time.

Ska
Punk &
Disorderly



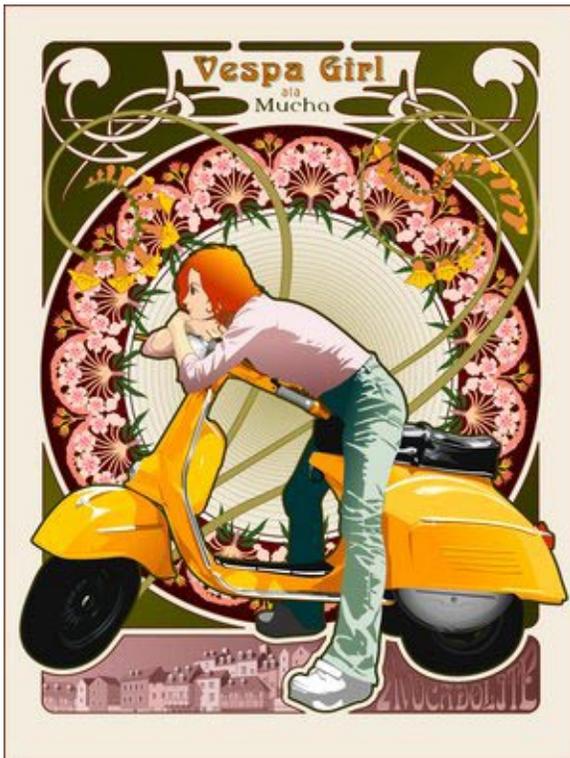
It broke it up and when things started to weigh down, I would set it aside, go and try to climb a mountain and come back to it. Ok, that only happened once, but the thought is the same.

It didn't take me more than a couple of days to finish it, which is a good thing since I had somewhere to be.

For all the things to be said against Perris, there's another city called Hemet, where my Uncle has his library. I knew that there was an event going on, I thought that it was a holiday parade, and on one level I was right, and I don't really care for holiday parades unless I have The Little One with me, so I didn't think of going, but my Uncle said that I'd enjoy it, so I drove on down and found my spot on the street marked for Library employees only.

I am so glad I did.

There's a tradition in ska cir-



cles of riding Vespas, those adorable little scooters that were popular in Europe for years but barely caught on in the US. I loved when my Dad would take me out on one as a kid, but that was only once or twice.

I had dressed up in my Rude gear, skinny black t-shirt, black suit, no pork pie hat, it just doesn't work with my hairstyle. While I was sitting there, enjoying the floats, a group came by, all on Vespas.

The Vespa Girls of Riverside County said the flag that was being flown from one of the bikes. They were about 20 girls, many with the dozen of mirrors that Ska fans like to see on their motor bikes. Some were rude, some were skinhead grrls, and at least one was absolutely adorable. I noticed that I was just a few hundred yards from the end of the parade, so I got up and headed over there as soon as they passed by.

Getting there, I saw that they were all wearing buttons for various bands. I found one girl who was wearing a Perfect Thyroid button and

started a conversation.

"Hey there." What better line for me to open with?

"Nice suit."

And with that, we were off, chatting for about twenty minutes before I left. She was just a nice girl and a big fan of ska and, it turned out, of my

writing. I used to drop letters to a Ska zine in the 1990s and she remembered them as being quite funny. I headed off, I'd only been broken up with Gen for a month or so and wasn't in the mood for actual flirting, so I headed home and remembered that I had two videos waiting for me to view.

The Videos

The first of the videos was a 1980s Skateboarding video called *The Search for Animal Chin*. It's a basic video of guys skateboarding, including a very young Tony 'I'm a Mainstream Celebrity!' Hawk. It's 1987's best video and I had a great time watching it and reliving the days when Rich Casem and I would skate and watch *Bones Brigade 2: Future Primitive*.

The other was the movie that had been on my mind for ages. It was a simple story by a director I hadn't really experienced much of. It was M. Night Shaymalan's *The Village*.

The Village is a pretty simple story, and my friend in the Industry had sent me his Academy Screener

copy. This is illegal, I know, but what are you gonna do? I started watching it and quickly found myself reading.

Now, this isn't as bad a thing as you think it is. You see the story is simple, and I'll avoid spoilers even though it's obvious what's going on from the beginning. There's a village, isolated in the middle of a forest. There are marauding beasts in the forest that sometimes come into the town. There's a guy, played by River Phoenix, who wants to go and get supplies, and he's the only one brave enough to go through the forest to get them. There's a blind girl, played fantastically by Opie's daughter, Bryce Howard, and she's in love with the young man, despite a semi-retarded guy, played by Adrian Brody, being in love with her.

The performances in the film are really good. I loved Bryce's gentle

turn, and Judy Greer, who is a great comedic actress on Arrested Development, was solid too. Add to that William Hurt and Sigourney Weaver and you've got a good pack of actors.

But that's not why I started reading. I started reading because the story is weakish, certainly too simple, but the score of the film is truly magnificent.

The score is highlighted by the most impressive virtuoso vi-

olin in film history. The violinist, the young Miss Hilary Hahn. James Newton Howard's score is one of simplicity at times followed by swelling emotion. It was cheated out of the Best Original Score at the Oscars this year. It was sad.

The film is worth renting, since the acting is good, but if you can buy the original score, do that and do it now!

After I was done with it, I started it again and went back to reading some magazine I had picked up.



The Way To Go Home

After that, I had earned my return to my homeland. I sadly left my last SKA CD in the house, so I had to listen to the ones I had already heard on the way home. It was fine, since they were great CDs, and I had a good, and fast drive. I believe that I made it home with a record time in the area of 5 hours, probably helped by the fact that I didn't stop until I was within sight of Santa Clara County. I had a good time, and I SKAed

