

**ERBMANIA!
EDGARDEMAIN**

Edgar Rice Burroughs and the Wobblies

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A commentary regarding the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) in the Works of Edgar Rice Burroughs

It was just a single mention in a single paragraph of Edgar Rice Burroughs' *The Girl from Hollywood*. The conversation on Rancho del Ganado concerned the possibility that a movie company might come there to film on location:

"You can't tell anything about them," volunteered Guy. "I understand they pick up all sorts of riffraff for extra people— I.W.W.'s and all sorts of people like that. I'd be afraid." (GH-Chapter 4)

I.W.W. was an abbreviation which did not need to be spelled out for most readers in the early 1920s, but which might not be familiar to every reader nowadays. I.W.W. stands for the Industrial Workers of the World, a union of working men that was both famous and infamous in Burroughs' time; an effort aimed at merging all the unions of the

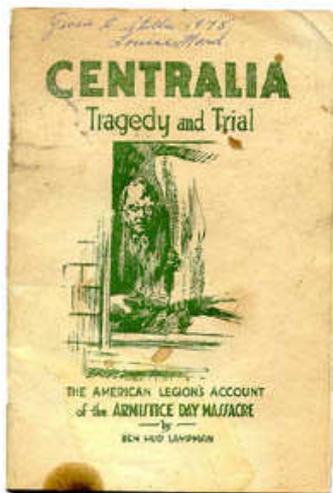
world into one big, powerful force. The I.W.W. still exists today.

The concept behind the I.W.W. was revolutionary and its members then were, in many respects, revolutionaries themselves—militant, unyielding and determined. Single-minded and—their opponents claimed—lazy good-for-nothings.

Where went the Wobblies (as union members were known) trouble followed. There was mob violence, unfair justice, and even murder. And both the Wobbly members and the authorities who resisted them in those times, must share the blame for the tragedies that dogged the movement.

As I read through *The Girl from Hollywood*, the I.W.W. abbreviation immediately struck a familiar chord with me, for one of the most notorious incidents involving the Wobblies occurred in my home town of Centralia, Wash., less than three blocks from where I now reside.

Very likely, Burroughs had heard of what happened in Centralia, Washington on Nov. 11, 1919, Armistice Day, when an event made headlines around the United States—and even continues to make headlines today in the form of reflective articles that appear in Centralia newspapers, and other



newspapers and Veterans Day telecasts from time to time.

But Burroughs did not need the Centralia incident—if, indeed, he was aware of it—to develop his distrust for the Wobblies, for he was already in a position to be well aware of their activities from the time the organization was born in Chicago.

Burroughs and his wife, Emma, were living in Utah in 1904, after a brief sojourn in Idaho. Burroughs served as a railroad policeman, but the job was not one he wished to make his career, and Chicago—where family and friends were—was beckoning. So they held an auction to dispose of their worldly goods and used the money for train fare back to Illinois.

The following summer in Chicago marked the formal beginning of the I.W.W., a movement which had been developing informally over labor disputes of the previous years.¹

On June 27, 1905, the "Continental Congress of the Working Class" was called to order, and several unions and factions came together under the banner of the Industrial Workers of the World.

Burroughs was to work at several jobs in Chicago before eventually launching a successful writing career, and he surely was aware of the growing Wobbly movement as its activities in its headquarters city were no doubt often in the headlines.

Meanwhile, in 1912, the same year that Burroughs' first Martian story and first Tarzan story both appeared in pulp magazines, Wobbly activity began to escalate in San Diego, Calif., a town of 50,000 at

¹ Burroughs portrayed I.W.W. members as union thugs in *The Efficiency Expert* (Serialized All-Story 1921, story written 1919)

the time. The Wobbly history, "*We Shall Be All*", by Melvyn Dubofsky, reports that the town had "a small and contented working class and no important or large industries threatened by labor difficulties" and "never did the number of Wobblies in San Diego exceed a few hundred. Yet those few, as a contemporary journalist commented, 'goaded the authorities and the populace into a hysterical frenzy, into an epidemic of unreasoning fear and brutal rage, into a condition of lawlessness so pronounced that travelers feared to visit the city.'"

The San Diego city council, in an effort to curb rabble-rousing public speeches, closed the downtown area to street meetings. This was seen as an infringement of free speech and Wobblies and other groups responded by creating a broad coalition called the Free Speech League. According to "*The Wobblies, The Story of Syndicalism in the United States*", by Patrick Renshaw, when the "Free Speech League, 2,000 strong and uniting a wide variety of militants, including anarchists, syndicalists, socialists, single-taxers and some AF of L members was formed in San Diego in 1912, the San Diego Tribune urged that all demonstrators be shot down or hanged."

Resulting arrests, beatings and other violence continued through the summer of 1912 before the movement gradually died a natural death.

"The beatings began to seem hardly worth it 'when the object to be gained, free speech, of and by itself brought no improvements in working conditions and added few members to the IWW. It seemed worth even less when, as Joe Hill remarked, San Diego was 'not worth a whoop

in Hell from a rebel's point of view.'" ("We Shall Be All")

A year after that long, hot summer, on Sept. 6, 1913, Burroughs told his publishers he was moving with his family to San Diego.

During the year and a half they lived there, Burroughs enjoyed one of his most prolific writing periods, penning all or parts of stories that would eventually appear in book form under the titles of *The Return of Tarzan*, *At the Earth's Core*, *The Cave Girl*, *The Monster Men*, *The Warlord of Mars*, *The Mucker*, *The Mad King*, *The Eternal Lover*, *The Beasts of Tarzan*, *The Lad and the Lion* and *The Girl from Farris's*.

Burroughs was never too busy with his fiction, though, to ignore the world around him. We know from his biographies that he was a man keenly interested in keeping up with the daily headlines. For instance, in 1928, he covered the trial of a notorious murderer and wrote newspaper columns about it, and in World War II he served as a war correspondent. So, it is very likely that he was well aware of what had gone on in San Diego the summer before, and the local press probably occasionally had articles referring back to the period as new developments warranted.

The family left San Diego in March of 1914 and returned to Chicago, not to return to California—this time for good—until five years later.

During those next five years, Wobbly activity continued on many fronts around the nation and Burroughs—whose practice was to keep up on current events—was probably aware of a lot that was going on.

For instance, on Nov. 19, 1915, Wobbly activist Joe Hill was executed by a Utah firing squad for a murder which many believed he had been falsely convicted. His official "last words" to a fellow union activist: "Don't waste any time in mourning. Organize."

Well, the I.W.W. did mourn somewhat.

They "carried his coffin out of Utah to Chicago. Thirty thousand people attended the funeral at Graceland Cemetery, where graveside eulogies were delivered in nine European tongues." (Renshaw, p. 146)

Afterward, they more specifically followed his wishes and continued to "organize."

An event such as that surely made the news and was one of the things that would have kept Burroughs posted on Wobbly activities.

In early 1919, several months before the Centralia tragedy, the Burroughs family moved back to California, this time to what was to become the town of Tarzana near Los Angeles. They took residence on the former ranch of Los Angeles Times publisher Harrison Gray Otis, which Burroughs was to name Tarzana and was the locale on which he based the fictional Rancho del Ganado of *The Girl from Hollywood*.

Otis was a fireball opponent of the I.W.W. His newspaper is credited with being the first to use the term "the Wobblies" in print. While his newspaper was an activist and editorial force against that labor movement, he was also anti-union in extracurricular ways. He and sugar king John Spreckels, for instance, controlled a citizens committee which appointed private detectives to work with San Diego

police superintendent John Sehon to investigate union activities.

As tensions were building in San Diego toward the summer of unrest, one of the factors contributing to the tension was the 1911 bombing of Otis's *L.A. Times* building, a violent act which claimed 21 lives.

Police traced the dynamite to the McNamara brothers, members of the *Times* typographical union, not to the Wobbly leaders themselves. Yet, it was the Wobblies who were blamed. The *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 2, 1911, led the attack on "that hobo gang which calls itself the Industrial Workers of the World."

So Burroughs bought a ranch from a man who had been intensely involved in the anti-Wobbly movement and it is, again, probable that Burroughs was aware of this history.

Other incidents in California followed the San Diego affair and

"California's newspapers featured stories connecting the I.W.W. with crop destruction, sabotage, violence, and even murder. To be sure, I.W.W. agitators' hyperbolic rhetoric of class warfare did little to counteract the organization's negative public image; indeed, it worsened it." ("We Shall Be All")

Two notorious incidents involving the Wobblies had taken place in the state of Washington.

The city of Everett, on Puget Sound about 25 miles north of Seattle, was in the midst of a union-breaking effort. A call was put out by unionists for volunteers to enter Everett to establish free speech and the right to organize. Many Wobblies answered

that call and embarked for Everett aboard the *Verona*. It was met at the dock by Sheriff Donald McRae and a large body of armed vigilantes and deputies, in November 1916.²

There was an argument as to whether the men would be allowed to come ashore, and then gunfire broke out. Five Wobblies were killed and another 31 wounded. Six to 12 were shot in the water after they had gone overboard. Sixteen of the sheriff's men were wounded and two killed, including the sheriff himself.

The aftermath of what came to be known as "The Everett Massacre": 74 Wobblies faced riot and murder charges; none of the sheriff's men were charged.

A similar judicial outcome took place as a result of the Centralia incident of Nov. 11, 1919.

As in many other places, anti-Wobbly feelings ran high in the conservative town of Centralia, population 7,300 at the time.

In his book, "Wobbly War," former Longview, Wash., Daily News publisher John McClelland Jr. tells of a gray early morning in February 1915 when residents awoke to find that

"overnight a serious crisis had developed.
Forty-seven unwanted, undesirable, and

² In 1916, Everett, Washington was facing severe economic difficulties. There was ongoing confrontation between business, commercial interests, labor, and labor organizers. There had been a number of labor organized rallies and speeches in the street. These were opposed by local law enforcement, which was firmly on the side of business. IWW organizers had gone into Everett to support a five-month long strike by shingle workers. Once there, vigilantes organized by business had beaten them up with axe handles and run them out of town. The Seattle IWW decided to go to Everett in numbers to hold a rally to show their support for the striking shingle workers. — [Wikipedia](#)

possibly dangerous men had come down the mainline tracks from the north and were hanging around the streets, up to something."

These men, of course, were Wobblies.

Centralia had no soup kitchens or other facilities to feed wandering tramps, and there were town ordinances against vagrancy. Since the Wobblies outnumbered the police, many Centralia citizens joined forces with the officers and soon a group of 100 citizens was assembled to escort the Wobblies out of town.

The next morning, however, several of the Wobblies returned, demanding food. When it wasn't forthcoming, they began to help themselves at a local bakery and grocery store. The citizens reassembled and this time marched the Wobblies to the next town, Chehalis, just to the south. There, they were met by another delegation of forewarned citizens and escorted further south.

Centralia, however, was not to be rid of its Wobbly problem so easily.

The town was in the middle of timber country and loggers were primary targets of organizing Wobblies. By 1919, an I.W.W. hall stood on North Tower Avenue in Centralia and it was here that the Armistice Day tragedy began. The war was over and the town had welcomed home its heroes in uniform. A parade was planned for Armistice Day and the young men were a part of that parade. The parade went north on Tower Avenue and at a point near the Wobbly hall, reversed direction; then the veterans' contingent marked time directly in front of the I.W.W. headquarters. And at that point the debate began—and continues to this day: Did the

Wobblies in the hall open fire on the veterans deliberately and without provocation or, after marking time did the paraders intentionally turn and rush the I.W.W. hall, to be met by gunfire from those defending their property?



Whatever the cause, four young war heroes from prominent Centralia families were killed, and the townspeople were enraged.

Wobblies were chased and arrested. That night, the lights throughout the city "mysteriously" went out and a group of citizens broke into the jail and hauled out Wobbly Wesley Everest, himself a veteran.

He was whisked to the Chehalis River Bridge and summarily lynched, his body a target for gunfire as it hung above the turbulent, moving water.

For years afterward the bridge was known as "Hangman's Bridge" until a new, wider span replaced it. However, there are those who remember and, nonetheless, refer to the newer structure as "Hangman's Bridge" as well.

Several Wobblies were placed on trial afterward, convicted, and spent a number of years in prison. No one was ever tried for the lynching of Everest.

News events like those in Washington, Southern California, and Chicago, along with news from

other parts of the U.S., likely kept Edgar Rice Burroughs informed of the Wobbly situation.

Critics have said the initials I.W.W. really stood for "I Won't Work." Some of those union members worked among the movie companies of Hollywood according to the passage in Burroughs' 1923 novel. Burroughs would have been in a position to know since he sometimes rented locations on his ranch to Hollywood film crews and also visited Hollywood studios when they were making movies of his most famous creation, Tarzan of the Apes.

While the I.W.W. reference in *The Girl from Hollywood* was merely a reference in passing, Burroughs dealt with what he saw as the consequences of radical social and political movements in another of his works, a story originally titled "Under the Red Flag."

Burroughs, concerned not only with the I.W.W., took an interest in the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. He linked the goals of the Bolshevik movement with the aims of the Wobblies, as did many others.

In *Edgar Rice Burroughs: The Man Who Created Tarzan*, Irwin Porges wrote:

"...Ed considered using a fictional approach to alert the public to the menace of communism. It was his first demonstration of the intense dislike and fear of communism that he would display for many years."

On Dec. 4, 1918 "...in an inquiry to the Department of Justice, Ed spoke of 'the Bolshevik movement...an organized effort to spread these doctrines throughout the world for the disruption of existing forms of government.' He maintained that if the Bolsheviks were successful, the result would be

an end to 'all commercial and social progress' with the world being precipitated into 'a period similar to that which followed the decadence of Greek and Roman civilization.' "

Burroughs told the man at the Department of Justice that he had in mind a novel showing the future conditions one or two hundred years from then, presupposing a world-wide adoption of Bolshevikism:

"It is not my expectation to write anything that will revolutionize public opinion as my stories are primarily for entertainment, but if I could obtain information on the I.W.W. movement here and also Bolshevik literature which would permit me to write more intelligently on the aims and practices of these parties, it might be that my story would be of value in setting people to thinking of the results which must follow the continued dissemination of this type of propaganda." (Porges, 312-313)

A man named Clabaugh, of the Justice Department, thought little of Burroughs' idea, writing, "Personally, I seriously question the advisability of confining an article, or series of articles, to the subject to which you refer, as it may do more harm than good...."

An irked Burroughs fired back that "...I doubt if my fiction would be taken seriously enough to do any harm and the only possible value it could have outside of entertainment might be to suggest a line of thought inimical to anarchist tendencies."

Unswayed by the attitude of the official at Justice, Burroughs spent from April 30 to May 21, 1919, writing "Under the Red Flag."

His efforts to get it published, though, were unsuccessful. He was determined that it would see print, even if he had to print it himself. But instead of that he exercised another option: He rewrote the story in January of 1922, and the oppressors became Kalkars from the moon in a story called *The Moon Men*.

The Moon Men was to become the middle story of a trilogy. Burroughs wrote *The Moon Maid* to begin the story of a future conquest of the earth by moon dwellers, and concluded the three-parter with *The Red Hawk*, in which the forces of good have arisen to take back the world.

Just exactly how much of "Under the Red Flag" was revised to make it into *The Moon Men* is not known.³ However, a reading of *The Moon Men* might lead one to believe that, other than changing the kinds of conquerors he was talking about, Burroughs may not have had to change much at all. It's still a story of people living under a totalitarian and cruel regime, where neighbors can be

³ On September 24, 1919, he [ERB] commented in exasperation to Joseph Bray, "I managed to get an expression from two well known editors and I find that it was not the fact that they didn't like the story but that they were afraid of the effect it would have on the public mind. Personally I think it is ridiculous to believe that a story showing the unpleasant consequences of Bolshevik rule would do any harm." *He added*, ". . . I intend to try and find somebody to publish it even if I have to publish it at my own expense, as I am personally sore that none of the magazines would take it for such a silly reason." — Quote from ERB correspondence as found in Irwin Porges, *Edgar Rice Burroughs, The Man Who Created Tarzan*, 1975

spies, where taxes are unfair, where religious worship is forbidden, and where people who defy the government are either killed or sentenced to hard labor.

At the time the Wobblies were building their organization, one of their goals was that a working man labor no more than eight hours a day. But the long-range target was a four-hour day, thus assuring jobs for everyone.

Burroughs refers to this four-hour day in *The Moon Men*, when he writes of conditions which made it easy for the Kalkars to conquer the earth.

"Father said that most of the railroads were destroyed during the wars after the Kalkars overran the country and that as workmen were then permitted to labor only four hours a day, when they felt like it, and even then most of them were busy making new laws so much of the time that they had no chance to work, there was not enough labor to operate or maintain the roads that were left, but that was not the worst of it. Practically all the men who understood the technical details of operation and maintenance, or engineering and mechanics, belonged to the more intelligent class of earthmen and were, consequently, immediately thrown out of employment and later killed." (Chapter 2)

Right or wrong, the Wobblies believed in their cause and it motivated them to defy authority and to spit in the face of death. Strangely enough—though Burroughs disliked what the Wobblies stood for—his hero in *The Moon Men*, a young man named Julian 9th, is exactly that kind of person—he speaks his mind where free speech is forbidden; he

is not afraid to challenge authority when he believes it is in the wrong; he is willing to die for his convictions.

Note from the author: "ERB and the Wobblies" was complete in the above three parts, originally published in ERB-APA. The above has been slightly edited and expanded. The following is a separate article I wrote in ERBapa 38:

'THE RED FLAG': SYMBOL OF A MOVEMENT'

Why did Edgar Rice Burroughs call the original version of his story about the Moon men "Under the Red Flag"?

The colors of various historical versions of the Russian and Soviet flags have almost always emphasized red, and the Soviets were known as "reds," so that's probably a major reason. Though Russians were replaced by Kalkars in the final draft of the story, the Kalkars ruled by dividing the conquered world into districts called "teivos" —which is "Soviet" spelled backward. But Burroughs also regarded the I.W.W. as a threat that went hand in hand with the Reds.

Red was a favorite color of the Wobblies as well. Their song book had a red cover; their membership cards were red, and one of their favorite songs was called, "The Red Flag."

The song was written in 1889 by Jim Connell, who said he had been inspired by the London Dock Strike of 1889, the work of the Irish Land League, the Russian Nihilist movement, and the hanging of the Chicago anarchists following the Haymarket bombing of 1887.

"The Red Flag" became the official anthem of the British Labour Party and continued to be popular in England for many years.

The song was first published in the I.W.W. press in the *Industrial Union Bulletin* (July 25, 1908) and was included in the first edition of the I.W.W. song book. It was one of the most popular and well-known radical songs in the country.

Whether Burroughs was familiar with the song or not, I don't know, but it very likely could have been that the song had something to do with the title of his original story.

Then, too, those in *The Moon Men* secretly cherished an outlawed and tattered red, white and blue flag, and many of the sentiments expressed in the song could also have been sung by those who opposed the Kalkar oppression. The song:

THE RED FLAG
By Jim Connell

The People's flag is deepest red,
It shrouded oft our martyred dead;
And ere their limbs grew stiff and cold
Their life-blood dyed its every fold.

CHORUS:

Then raise the scarlet standard high
Beneath its folds, we'll live and die

Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer,
We'll keep the red flag flying here.

Look 'round! The Frenchmen loves its blaze,
The sturdy German chants its praise;
In Moscow's vaults, its hymns are sung,
Chicago swells its surging song.

It waved above our infant might
When all ahead seemed dark as night;
It witnessed many a deed and vow,
We will not change its color now.

It suits today the meek and base
Whose minds are fixed on pelf and place;
To cringe beneath the rich man's frown,
And haul that sacred emblem down.

With heads uncovered, swear we all,
To bear it onward till we fall;
Come dungeons dark, or gallows grim,
This song shall be our parting hymn.⁴

AFTERWORD

I have updated the above articles slightly from when they first appeared in my “Edgardemain” contribution to the *Edgar Rice Burroughs Amateur Press Association* mailing No. 38, in 1993. After that

⁴ *The Red Flag* is normally sung to the tune of the German-language carol *O Tannenbaum* (also used for the state song of Maryland) though Connell had wanted it sung to a tune he called *The White Cockade*. —Wikipedia

article came out, I sent a copy of it to John McClelland, author of *Wobbly War*, which is referenced in the article about ERB and the Wobblies. I had to explain to him a little bit about just exactly what *ERBapa* was, so he would understand the context. I had met Mr. McClelland when he came to Centralia to autograph copies of his book, and when it was my turn I told him of my former association with the local newspaper, *The Daily Chronicle*.

For years *The Daily Chronicle*, was reluctant to print historical articles about the Centralia incident— probably due to pressure from prominent local leaders who may have had at least some guilty knowledge about the mob which, in reaction to the veterans' death, lynched a Wobbly.

These attitudes on the part of the newspaper began to change around the time I went to work there as a young reporter fresh out of the Marine Corps in 1968, and it became less of a chore to persuade the editor to allow articles quoting long-lived townspeople on their memories of that day.

Eventually I became editor of *The Daily Chronicle* and it seemed that every new reporter we hired had a vision of writing the "true" story of what happened on Armistice Day, 1919, in Centralia, Washington. So, when those cub reporters would ask if they could do such a story, I would simply say, "Great idea! Go to it." Those worth their salt would find someone to interview and we'd have another story. And, along the way, I wrote a few stories about that dark time myself.

So, McClelland signed my book this way:

"To John Martin, former *Chronicle*
managing editor, who remembers when

the local press felt free to publish the story told here." John McClelland, 2/12/88.

After I sent McClelland a copy of my *ERBapa* contribution, he wrote this letter in reply:

6/15/93

Dear Mr. Martin

I appreciate your letter of June 9 and the copy of your most unusual publication, *Edgardemain*. How flattered Burroughs would have been to have such a 'fan club' spring up posthumously. Many more eminent writers than he don't have this following their demise.

Burroughs' attitude towards the Wobblies and the other radicals of his time was typical of most of the American public, as I emphasized in the *Centralia* story. We should not pass judgment on history from the vantage point of what was once the future. Another writer of that period, Zane Grey, took a similar disapproving view of the IWW. One of his novels called, I believe, "*Desert of Wheat*," tells of the lynching of a Wobbly in eastern Washington that may have suggested what the mob in *Centralia* did to Wesley Everest.

Burroughs was one of those rare writers with a vivid imagination who had a gift for telling an easily read story. The creation of *Tarzan* may have been the consequence of luck, but it was also evidence that he knew what would appeal to readers. But even he could not have foreseen what that imaginative creation would lead to. Think of what he would

be doing today in the age of the word
processor!

Sincerely,
John McClelland

In Centralia today, children and newcomers first learn about the 1919 incident by seeing "the statue in the park," a tall, imposing metal statue of a World War I soldier standing guard. The official name of the statue is "The Sentinel" and stands atop a concrete base in the center of the downtown city park. On the statue's base are mounted metal likenesses of the four members of the American Legion who were killed by violence Armistice Day 1919.

Another memorial was eventually added in Centralia—one which would have been unimaginable years before. The Elks Lodge—across from the downtown city park featuring the statue—was sold to a developer who turned it into an antique mall and, a few years later, gave permission for a large mural on the building's front wall—a mural showing a triumphant Wobbly rising from his grave.

In spring and summer, when blossoms and leaves adorn the park's trees, the vegetation forms a barrier between The Sentinel and The Wobbly. But in stark November and through the winter when the leaves have fallen there are the two—unchanging in convictions. It is interesting to note that both of these iconic images can be framed into a single photograph.

In the past several years, I located some Armistice Day "artifacts" thanks to ebay. I have successfully bid on two November 1919 newspapers—*The Bellingham (Washington) Herald* and the *San Francisco Examiner*. Each carried page-one stories on

the Centralia tragedy. I also acquired an undated two-page spread in a pictorial newspaper showing photos of the city after the tragedy, including an image of the burial detail for the lynched Wobbly. I plan to make them available to some local entity which can put them on public display.

Meanwhile, Michael Duffy, a Centralia film maker, is in the process of filming a movie regarding the Armistice Day incident. Tentatively entitled, "The Forgotten," it explores the event and its aftermath through the eyes of Elmer Smith, a Centralia attorney of the era. Smith was an advisor to the Wobblies. Duffy has a website where you can find info about the film, along with a photo of The Sentinel. This, and other links, can be found on his [website](#).

By the way, if any of my Wobblies article sounds familiar, you may be remembering an article in *The Burroughs Bulletin*, New Series, No. 71, which came out in the Summer of 2007. It featured an article on pages 11-19 titled "Edgar Rice Burroughs: The Activist Author vs. The Wobblies." It was written by Alan Hanson, a retired history teacher from Spokane, Wash., who graciously gave me a co-author credit since he had my permission to use things from my original *ERBapa* article.

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Edgardemain (on the web) 2011