

IONISPHERE 25

October 2020

Beginning Fifth Year of Publication



From the National Fantasy Fan Federation's Fan-Pro Coordinating Bureau

Cover by Nathan Warner

IONISPHERE is the official publication of the National Fantasy Fan Federation's Fan-Pro Coordinating Bureau, the purpose of which is to establish good relations between readers and writers and to maintain good fan activity. It is published bi-monthly and distributed to all members. This commences our fifth year of publication. Editor and bureau head is John Thiel, 30 N. 19th Street, Lafayette, Indiana 47904, email kinethiel@mymetronet.net .

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Contents

Editorial: Another Step—Decisions and Revisions Revisited, by John Thiel, page three

Behind the Scenes: Writing High Fantasy Fiction, by Jeffrey Redmond, page seven

Fan-Pro Interview: Celine Rose Mariotti, by John Thiel, page twelve

Story: A Computerized Man, by Celine Rose Mariotti, page sixteen

Report: Groundside Notes, by John Polsell, page thirty

Poem: Convention Weekend, by Cardinal Cox, page thirty-one

Poem: Dusk, by John Polsell, page thirty-five

Musings: Reasons Why, by Will Mayo, page thirty-seven

EDITORIAL



Another Step—Decisions and Revisions Revisited

Commencing our fifth year of publishing Ionisphere, I feel it's time to take into greater account what our bureau has done and will be doing, and to better define its purposes and objectives—as well as laying in a groundwork for future advances. I'll start off by making the NFFF membership aware of what I am doing personally, as the first bureau member and the head of the bureau.

When I am attempting to get various fans who have addresses in the same town or city to pay visits to one another, I am doing what was being done in the early days of the establishment of fandom—correspondents were being urged to get together in some form of social order, by Hugo Gernsback and others, and there were attempts to establish societies, some of them successful. Forrest Ackerman was doing the same thing, writing in the letter columns of the magazines and in fanzines, as well as doing a great amount of corresponding—and the early N3F was an attempt to survey and unite fandom and encourage fan activity. I have tried to get the numerous fans who live in Brooklyn, New York, Las Vegas, Nevada, and San Francisco, California to look one another up and unite for the purpose of fan activity, and have had some success in doing so, and I've been continuing these efforts, even when there are only two people in a town that I know of—I ask them if they have been corresponding. I was doing this before I started with the Fan-Pro Bureau, and was at one time the editor of **Indiana Fandom**, which was connected with the Indiana Science Fiction Association, which has since gone out of sight, though they are apparently still doing things in convention

activities. My own group, the Lafayette Interstellar Society, moved to Indianapolis and was approaching the rest of fandom in various ways, attempting to keep up fanac and circulate science fiction. One member who had a bookshop was ordering and selling science fiction from it, and trying through his connections with other book dealers to promote science fiction. Another member persuaded Purdue University to make science fiction magazines available to students, and was successful in getting all the magazines on display at Purdue's bookselling places. We went to conventions and had the intention of getting science fiction motivated. We promoted televised and motion picture science fiction. They demanded and got more science fiction. One member was doing science fiction articles for the newspaper. It was our intention to make it clear to those of a mundane outlook what science fiction was.

I was encouraging John Polselli to correspond with other readers of my fanzine, which he was reading, and he did so, and there was fan activity right there. John has since been trying to get correspondences going among other fans, and is exploring the paper world of fandom with the intention of abetting fan activity. He is a good man at writing LoCs to fanzines also.

Jefferson Swycaffer maintains contacts which range outside of the NFFF and manages the NFFF story contest, which is an encouragement to writers and creates a lot of interaction of amateur with professional writing and a lot of interest in the crossover. He keeps up an interest in various aspects of the organization and is one of the N3F directors.

Jon Swartz is the NFFF historian and as such keeps a lot of awareness going among both fans and writers and between fans and writers. He has done some interviewing here in Ionisphere and brought some fans to more prominence with more attention.

Jeffrey Redmond keeps Facebook pages designed to get people acquainted and discussing science fiction. He has always been very active and keeps things moving. He is a writer and constant researcher into science fiction and science.

Heath Row has been active in many, even most aspects of science fiction and is good backing for the Bureau to have.

So you see we have all been busy in keeping science fiction happening and involving fans in it. I would say to the bureau members, in addition to this, "Think fan-pro relations while you are doing your work which already relates to this bureau. You can bring fan-pro contacts up and make them relevant in most everything you are doing." I would like to hear more comments from bureau members relating to what they are

doing in matters relating to the interests of this bureau or being relevant to it, and how you might be making out at it. It's a good thing to have inter-relations in a bureau as well as relating to the big Out There. The more chat that occurs among us, the better. (I feel in saying this that I am writing like conversations by mail that must have occurred among the earliest members of the NFFF, as well as the people who came along later. They were doing a great deal of organizing, and thinking of ways to do it, and at the same time were getting acquainted with one another.)

So, steps forward for this bureau would be to relate to the work more and be doing so among ourselves, to establish a credo for the bureau, and to get functioning in all ways and perspectives. We should be discussing and considering the organization we are in, just as I have been doing in this editorial. And I think we should keep ourselves visible to the membership, even if they do not do us return honors. There is no point in despairing of our endeavors; we should be doers, not despairers.

What have we accomplished in the course of the four years we have been in existence? We have introduced the concept of fan-pro relations, suggested the need for better fan-pro relations, and formalized the matter by starting a bureau whose purpose is the promotion and betterment of such relations. We have started an initiative from which we can progress in a known manner. We are making the bureau known in fandom. We have shown our accomplishments in the way of active interviews with professional writers, and a fan from time to time. We are raising questions about the health of the field. (In personal correspondence with me Jeffrey Redmond has been raising many such questions about this.) Remember that as active bureau members we are apt to be emulated by members of the organization; they might be wanting to be doing some of what they see us doing.

Doing things produces energy. Perhaps if we have enough energy in doing the things we are doing here, it will energize the field of science fiction and fandom. When you do something, you have something, and even if it is not successful you have what you have brought into being to look at. If others do not show interest, whatever became of being interested in what you have yourself? And if you are, it's likely to attract interest from others.

Well, maybe I'm sounding like Gully Foyle toward the end of THE STARS MY DESTINATION. "Gonna sermonize, me!" He was saying there was no limit to how far we could go once we started going. Here was the forward impetus of science fiction. Why stay right where we are? It's keep going that's the liveliest thing. Bester was really

showing the spirit of science fiction when he wrote that book. Doing things might very well be better than just simply watching them. And we do have some clues as to what's to be done. I feel that merely writing this editorial has done things for me, and I hope that it will do something for the people who read it, also.



BEHIND THE SCENES: **WRITING HIGH FANTASY FICTION** by Jeffrey Redmond



Harlan Ellison, fan turned pro Wilson Tucker, onetime fan, who taught and encouraged new writers



Robert Bloch, former fan who supported fandom and encouraged new writers

Why is fantasy book writing popular with aspiring authors of all ages? Some possible reasons are:

1. Nostalgia for childhood make-believe
2. The mystery and allure of magical phenomena
3. The major commercial success of many fantasy authors, such as J.R. Rowling, Terry Pratchett, J.R.R. Tolkien, and George R.R. Martin, to name only a few.
4. There are many fantasy subgenres, at least sixty four. "High Fantasy" is one of the most popular. But what is high fantasy?

The term "high fantasy" was coined by the American fantasy writer Lloyd Alexander in 1971, in an essay published in **The Horn Book Magazine** titled "High Fantasy and Epic Romance". Alexander, who wrote the CHRONICLES OF PRYDAIN series, used the term to describe fantasy fiction set entirely in secondary or parallel worlds. This is contrasted with books set in our own "real" world that simply have magical objects, creatures, characters, or events.

In his *A TO Z OF FANTASY LITERATURE*, Brian Stableford says that “high fantasy” as a term didn’t really catch. This was in part because it was difficult to establish dividing lines between high fantasy and other subgenres, and partly because of the difficulty of accommodating portal fantasies to the scheme.

Even so, many fantasy lovers still talk about high fantasy as a distinctive genre. Its most common attributes are having an alternate world as setting, heroic or epic qualities and (often) coming of age plot structures.

If you’re writing fantasy set entirely in a fictional world, as opposed to, for example, a medieval fantasy based on this actual historical era, here are seven tips that may help you craft a page-turner:

1. Study classic high fantasy for useful insights.

It’s an oft-repeated truth that to be a good writer you need to also be an active reader. Tolkien’s *THE LORD OF THE RINGS* takes place entirely in the secondary world of Middle-Earth and is widely regarded as one of the best examples of this subgenre. How do you go about collecting insights for your own high fantasy novel?

Examine setting: How does the author create an immersive, complex world? Think, for example, of the differences between the peaceful, village-like Shire in *Lord of the Rings* and the desolate, smoking volcanic wastelands of Mordor where the arch-villain Sauron resides.

Examine character development: What trials do the main characters go through and how do these events grow or change them?

Examine the world’s internal logic: The best fantasy worlds don’t make us think “Why do things work this way?” Magic systems, relationships between civilizations and other details have explicable cause and effect.

Dust off your own fantasy favorites and take notes on how your best authors approach elements of fantasy writing you find challenging. This could be keeping continuity between books in a series or making a fictional world believable. Consciously reading this way will help you improve your writing in the long-term.

2. Make sure your fictional world offers a strong sense of place.

How do you feel reading a book where you can’t picture the characters’ environment? Often these books feel hollow and either dry or too preoccupied with characters’ inner worlds. You don’t have to write whole chapters of scene setting. But think of your characters’ environment as a character in itself. Just as a character grows, changes or does the unexpected, so can your fantasy world’s environment.

Compare Tolkien's description of Mordor, the ominous domain of Frodo's nemesis Sauron, with his description of the tranquil forest lands of the noble elves:

"Mists curled and smoked from dark and noisome pools. The reek of them hung stifling in the still air. Far away, now almost due south, the mountain walls of Mordor loomed, like a black bar of rugged clouds floating above a dangerous fog-bound sea."

Compare this to the restful description of the elf kingdom Rivendell:

"Shadows had fallen in the valley below, but there was still a light on the faces of the mountains far above. The air was warm. The sound of running and falling water was loud, and the evening was filled with a faint scent of trees and flowers, as if summer still lingered in Elrond's gardens."

Create contrasts in landscape and atmospheres depending on where your characters are located to heighten the reader's perception of place in your high fantasy novel.

3. Avoid high fantasy clichés.

Fantasy lovers may expect certain tropes (common features) of the genre. Even so, your world will be all the more striking if it is at least a little original. Mythical creatures such as dragons and centaurs are well-represented by now, for example. This doesn't mean you can't use mythical creatures that are familiar. After all, most symbols, plots and other elements of fiction are continuously recycled. Yet you can subvert reader expectations and create a strong sense of your world as a distinct place.

For example, dragons have often been described as hoarders. An extensive list of overused fantasy plots and character types includes the cliché where a girl is "held captive by an evil dragon who finds her entertaining, thus saving her from becoming crispy fried."

As an example, this trope could be reversed. George R.R. Martin does exactly this in the fifth novel of his *A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE* series: the character Daenerys Targaryen holds dragons captive herself, confining them in a cage to prevent them from wreaking further havoc.

4. Make your characters complex and not stock types.

Lesser fantasy novels often rely on obvious traits that are tied to class, race or social bearing. Of course the warrior is brave. Of course the princess or elf is graceful or chaste. In real life, people often surprise us by holding contradictory beliefs or behaving differently to how stereotyping would lead us to assume. The warrior who tears into battle might run bellowing from a snake or rat, in reality. Nobody is consistent all the time. In the great high fantasy novels, characters surprise not only each other but

themselves too.

5. Avoid the pitfalls of muddled fantasy book writing and plan ahead.

Writing a realist novel set in a familiar city is a challenge itself. Writing an epic high fantasy that sprawls across imaginary continents and peoples is a mammoth undertaking. It's easy to allow inconsistencies to creep in. To avoid this, plan your world and its inner workings in advance. Create an outline, especially if you plan to write a fantasy series in the vein of *A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE*, Ursula K. Le Guin's *EARTHSEA* trilogy or Tolkien's series.

Here are some of the elements you could sketch briefly as best you can before you start:

- a) The approximate geographical layout of your fictional world
- b) The peoples who inhabit it and their distinct worldviews, practices and customs
- c) Significant events from your world's recent and more distant history
- d) Any global or local conflicts that affect your characters
- e) Outlines of characters you'd like to feature in your novel

Once you have a loose idea of your invented world you can depart from this blueprint wherever you like. Create a framework to base your world on all the same, so that you can keep track of the different backgrounds and characteristics of the people and places in your high fantasy novel.

6. Write fitting dialogue

Where there is an epic quest unfolding, it can be tempting to use dialogue for info dumping. Don't squeeze the whole history of your fictional world into one long-winded conversation your hero and the local innkeeper exchange over breakfast. Good high fantasy novels manage to balance descriptive writing, dialogue, and action. Most importantly, dialogue conveys not just factual information, but also a sense of the character of the speakers.

For example, in *The Lord of the Rings*, when Frodo's friend Sam is caught overhearing an important conversation, he says, "I wasn't droppin' no eaves sir". His speech is reflective of the hobbits' rural and plain-talking qualities. Compare this to the lyrical and flowing speech of the elves. When a white horse appears, the bowman Legolas says, "That is one of the Mearas, unless my eyes are cheated by some spell." The elves tend to use passive voice and more complex forms of tense.

When writing dialogue, especially between members of different civilizations in your fantasy world, remember:

How people express themselves conveys something about their nature. Use sayings and manner of speech to strengthen the reader's sense of your characters' common attributes as well as differences.

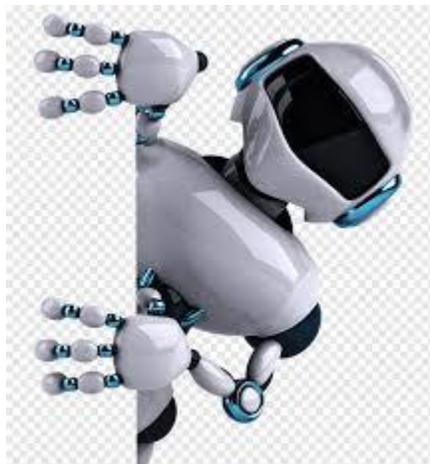
Try to use action wherever possible to advance the plot and keep lengthy conversations as breathers between sections where there is greater tension.

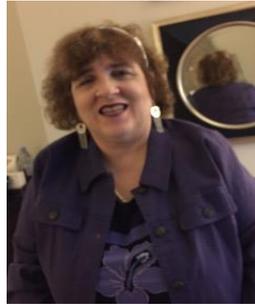
7. Choose names wisely.

As a rule of thumb, try to create names that readers shouldn't have trouble pronouncing. In Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea novels, the protagonist isn't called Tir'ag'nalkan or Axaxanian: he's simply called "Ged". It's still an uncommon name and the simplicity fits the spare style of the story.

High fantasy is epic in scope and typically has a large cast of characters. Think about how you can use names to convey aspects of your characters. This will help to keep them memorable. In Lord of the Rings, for example, Sam's simple, familiar name (abbreviated from "Samwise") suits his easygoing and dependable nature. Compare this to the sibilant and arcane-sounding name of the fallen, corrupted wizard Saruman.

High fantasy book writing is challenging because of the scope of creation and invention it requires. Provided that you plan ahead, spend some time coming up with the particulars of how your world works and avoid the pitfalls of common genre clichés, you can write a fantasy novel that makes readers reluctant to leave your fictional world.





Celine Rose Mariotti is an up-and coming writer who has had a great partiality to science fiction and frequently writes in that field. She began publishing her work twenty years ago and has brought forth such plot concepts as a country music singer being returned to life after dying, a murderous intrigue taking place in the nation's capitol, a senator haunted by a ghost, a pen-pal linkage with the planet Jupiter, and other stories of a highly unusual aspect. Her stories have awakened much interest. Recently she sent a story to Ionisphere and we are publishing it here along with the interview. The interview concerns how she came to be writing science fiction.

IO: We have a lot of readers here who would be interested in your course in doing science fiction writing. I have a number of questions about it. First, when did you start writing? When did you have your first writing in print?

CRM: I've been writing since I was a kid. I was the happiest kid in the classroom when the teacher or nun gave an assignment to write a poem or short story. When I was in second grade I wrote my first children's book. I still have it saved. I took a Creative Writing course when I was a senior in high school. My teacher, Mrs. Anderson, told us that there's nothing new under the sun. She said the things that writers like Homer, Sophocles, Charles Dickens, Herman Melville, Longfellow, Alexander Dumas, Mark Twain and many others wrote about were no different than what contemporary authors write about. The world never changes, just moves ahead with inventions and technology.

I was just seventeen and I'd go up to the library and look up publishers. I didn't even know who they were and I'd submit my work. Many were very nice and wrote me encouraging words. Of course there were a few who wrote rather nasty notes but I didn't let them get me down. I kept at it, writing, re-writing, revising,

and editing. One year I decided not to submit any work to anyone, but just keep working at revising and rewriting and editing. After a year passed, I started submitting again and **Night Roses** of Illinois was the first poetry journal to accept my poems and that was in 1991. Shortly after, **Green's Magazine** of Canada accepted one of my short stories. I started getting more acceptances. It was the beginning of a lot more successes with my writing career.

IO: When did you become interested in science fiction and fantasy fiction? How did you come to discover them?

CRM: I guess I always was into outer space, being that I grew up in the 1960s and 1970s. When I was nine years old our Apollo astronauts, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, landed on the Moon. My sister and I stayed up that night to see it all. It was a big moment in history.

There was a TV program back in the 1960s called LOST IN SPACE, starring Guy West, Mark Goddard, Jonathan Harris and June Lockhart. It was a family who were sent to outer space to land on the planet of Alpha Centauri, but they get lost in space. My sister and I never missed that show. It's on METV every Saturday night at one o'clock a.m. I also used to watch the old Star Trek which really was a show about traveling through space and dealing with aliens, much like Lost in Space was. The new Star Trek movies they make today are too weird and too violent and don't really portray anything the way the old Star Trek did. The writers of today don't have the right kind of imagination. I also used to watch Buck Rogers, another old show about an astronaut who had adventures in outer space. All that interest from childhood led me to start writing my own outer space stories and the first one, a young adult book, was I HAVE A FRIEND ON JUPITER, and was originally published by WriteWordsinc.com in 2012. I'm looking for a new publisher for it as WriteWords went out of business. Then I also wrote ATOMIC SOLDIERS and that has been published by Branching Realities Independent Publishing. And of course I've written some ghost stories and my first book was OLIVIA MACALLISTER, WHO ARE YOU? And my serial which was published by Pablo Lennis, I HEAR THE BANJO PLAYING, a ghost story about a banjo player named George Bowman which I self-published as a book later on. I've written a sequel to I Have A Friend On Jupiter called BLAST OFF TO JUPITER and a sequel to Olivia MacAllister, Who Are You? entitled THE GHOST OF CAPTAIN MCGURVY.

IO: What are the titles of the books you have had in print?

CRM: I have had several books in print over the years. Here's a list of them all:

OLIVIA MACALLISTER, WHO ARE YOU? First published in 2004 by Rock Village Publishing of MA; then I self-published it; then it was republished by DreamingBigPublications of MS., and I am now once again self-publishing it.

LEAPY THE FROG, published by MagBooks of HongKong in 2004 as an e-book.

THROUGH CELINE'S EYES, self-published in 2005. (Poetry Book)

WHAT CORPORATE AMERICA IS REALLY ALL ABOUT, self-published in 2010.

WORDS OF INSPIRATION, self-published in 2012. (Poetry Book)

I HAVE A FRIEND ON JUPITER, published by WriteWordsInc.com in 2012;

republished by Dreaming Big Publications of MS in 2016; now out of print till I find a new publisher.

MINISTER'S SHOES and MINISTER'S CORPORATE ESCAPADES, published in 2013 and 2014 by WriteWordsInc.com; now out of print till I find a new publisher.

ADVENTURES ON CAPITOL HILL—THE KIDNAPPING OF SENATOR ANDY

THOMPSON, and ADVENTURES ON CAPITOL HILL—THE MURDER OF SECRETARY JUDD CANE, first published by WriteWordsInc.com in 2014-2015, then republished by DreamingBig Publications of MS in 2017; now looking for a new publisher for them.

I'M TOO YOUNG TO BE PRESIDENT, published by Clayborn Press of Arizona in 2018.

RED, WHITE AND BLUE, self-published in 2018. (Poetry Book)

ATOMIC SOLDIERS, published by Branching Realities Independent Publishing.

I HEAR THE BANJO PLAYING, self-published as a novella in 2019, originally published as a serial in **Pablo Lennis**.

RAZZLE DAZZLE, collection of my short stories published in 2020.

IO: What are some of the magazines in which your writing has been published?

CRM: Since my first poem was published back in 1991 by **Nightroses** of Illinois, and then **Green's Magazine** of Canada published one of my short stories, I've gone on to have continued success in being published.

Here is a list of many of the magazines and journals who have published my

work:

Poets at Work (Pennsylvania), **Moosebound Press** (Alaska), **Magnolia Quarterly** (MS), **Poetic Eloquence** (Texas), **LoneStars Magazine** (Texas), **Offerings, Star Poet** and **North Stars Magazine**, **Poet's Review**, **Inspirational Poet**, **Writers Bloc Magazine** (Canada), **Quantum Leap** (Scotland), **First Time** (England), **PCM Magazine** (India), **Poetscrit** (India), **Atlantean Publishing** (England), **Tigershark Publishing** (England), **FreeXpression** (Australia), **StoryMondo** (Australia), **Coffee Ground Breakfast** and **Pancakes in Heaven** (Wisconsin), **Creative Inspirations** (Michigan), **Conceit Magazine** (California), **Poetespresso** (California), **Weird World Magazine** and **Blue Moon Poetry** (North Carolina), **Indiana Press, OMDB (Over My Dead Body)**, (Washington), **FrostFireWorlds**, (Iowa), poems and stories published in **Goose River Press Anthology** (Maine), **Suzerain Enterprises, Bear Creek Haiku, Calliope**, the Korean War Veterans' **Graybeard Magazine**, and, of course, **Pablo Lennis** and many more!

IO: Have you anything you would like to say or describe about how your writing has developed, and what experiences you have had in being a writer?

CRM: I started out writing when I was just a kid and I started submitting my work when I was only seventeen. Over the years I've learned to rewrite, revise and edit, edit. A story is never perfect with the first draft. You need to do a second, a third, a fourth and even a fifth draft before it's finished and ready to be submitted. In the life of a writer, you get a lot of rejections before you get an acceptance. But the more seasoned you become, the better your writing becomes and you get less rejections.

In the publishing world you have to deal with the good publishers and the bad ones too. There are some people who get into publishing and don't follow the rules of good publishing and treat their authors shabbily. You encounter all sorts of people in the publishing world. But you focus on the positive, the successes, and you keep on going. I love to write because that's who I am, a writer. If I didn't write every day, something would be missing in my life. Writing is my life. It's what I was born to do.

IO: Thank you, Celine, for the interview.

Now we present the reader with a story by Celine, a first publication here.

A COMPUTERIZED MAN by Celine Rose Mariotti



Protolife, what's to be said about it?

Part One

Doctor Willis Humpford was a scientist who lived in Bakersville, New Hampshire. He was a quiet man with no friends. He was locked in his world of science where he could make anything happen. Dr. Willis Humpford had a plan. A well-devised plan. A secret project.

He kept his blinds on his windows closed. He kept the lights dimmed. He rarely answered the door. But his neighbors were suspicious. Daniel and Stephanie Kowesky were brother and sister. Daniel was eleven years old and he loved detective stories. He had been watching their neighbor next door with his pair of binoculars every afternoon when they came home from school. Rarely did their neighbor ever seem to go outside, at least not while they were watching. But he had a Cadillac and their grandmother reported that she saw the man next door get into his car every morning around nine a.m. Stephanie was fourteen years old and she was nosey and very precocious. She was also quite astute for a girl her age. She always asked a lot of questions and her teacher once sent her to the Principal's office because she asked her too many personal,

embarrassing questions. The Principal sent her home for two days' suspension, trying to teach her to respect other people's privacy.

"You've been watching that house with your binoculars for the past week. Do you see anything interesting, little brother?"

"Can't see into this guy's house as his blinds are all drawn. He drives a Cadillac so he must have money and Grandma says he leaves every day at nine a.m. I wonder where he goes. Where does he work?" said Daniel.

"Hmm. Is he dressed up when he goes to work?"

"You mean a suit and tie?" asked Daniel.

"Yeah, little detective."

"Well, you're the one who's always asking a lot of questions, Steffy. You got into trouble at school because of all the questions you asked the teacher. So, don't say things to me," protested Danny.

"Sorry! I'm curious. Let's go ring his door!" suggested Stephanie, pushing her brother to move out the door of their house.

"Hey, quit it! I'll be in charge and I'll do the talking so we can get ourselves invited in," said Daniel very confidently.

"Can't wait to look around in his house. Hey, you don't think he's some sociopath?" questioned Stephanie.

"I hope not. If he is, we're toast!"

"Oh God, don't say that! I've got plans for my life!"

"Hey, me too. But I think he's hiding something there."

"What if he's a terrorist?" mused Stephanie.

"Then we call the FBI!"

"Okay. But then he'll know that it was us who turned him in!" shrieked Stephanie.

"Well, once they get him, we have nothing to worry about," said Danny, reassuring her.

Stephanie rang the doorbell. They waited. No one came to the door. They saw his car parked in his driveway. "He is home then," said Stephanie. "His car is here."

"Wonder if he's some kind of spy?" questioned Danny.

"It's possible he is. Let's knock on the door and see if he'll answer and let us in. He didn't answer when we rang the doorbell," suggested Steffy.

"Okay, sis. We'll both knock."

Stephanie used the knocker on the door and rapped three times. There was an eerie

silence. Danny used the knocker and he rapped about five times. Danny and Stephanie waited. They were about to leave when the door creaked open. A thin man with piercing blue eyes and blonde hair stood there. He had a frown on his face, and he wore glasses that were small squares with black rims. He also wore an old brown sweater. Danny figured he must be about forty, maybe forty-five years of age.

"Who are you two?" he asked, with a note of suspicion in his voice.

"We're your neighbors," announced Stephanie.

"Hmm. I see. What do you two children want?" he asked in a low, creepy voice.

"We want to be your friends! Don't you like to have friends, Mr.—we don't know your name."

"I don't know your names either," said the mysterious man.

"This is Danny, my brother, and I'm Stephanie. Our last name is Kowesky."

"I don't mingle with people. Please go!" The mysterious man closed the door.

"Hello, Mr. Hello! We just want to be your friends!" shouted Danny.

The door opened slightly. "Please go away!" the old man demanded.

"Mr.—we don't even know your name, but we only wish to be your friends. What's your name? Can you tell us that?" pressed Stephanie.

"Not at all. I'm closing the door now. You're asking way too many questions. Goodbye," said Dr. Humpford, and he closed the door and bolted the lock. He peeked through the blind to make sure they left. He watched them go back inside their house.

"Kids these days. They're where they don't belong," sighed Dr. Humpford. He returned to work on his secret project.

The next day, another knock came at his front door. He was annoyed that it might be the kids next door again, so he totally ignored the knocking. But then he heard a man's voice.

"This is the Police. Dr. Humpford, please open the door!"

Dr. Humpford was terrified. Why were the Police at his door? No one knew about his secret project, not even his fellow professors at Dartmouth. He opened the door.

"What's the problem, Officer?"

"Your neighbors, the Koweskys, are concerned about you. Are you okay?" asked the police officer.

"Yes, Officer, I'm just fine. I just keep to myself. I'm a scientist and a professor and I do a lot of research work, so I tend to stay alone. I never knew that was a crime," said Dr. Humpford.

"Oh, no, of course not, Dr. Humpford. As a Police Officer, if someone calls and says they're worried about their neighbor, it's my job to come and make sure you're okay. A lot of people who live alone often fall or get sick and there's no one to call for help. Just doing my job to make sure you're doing okay," explained the Police Officer.

"Well, as you can see, Officer, I'm fit as a fiddle," said Dr. Humpford.

"I noticed you have all your blinds drawn. Is there a reason for that?"

"I like my privacy and that lady across the way is always in the window," replied Dr. Humpford.

"Okay, some nosy neighbors!" said the policeman, laughing.

"Yes, some nosy folks around here," said Dr. Humpford, anxious for the policeman to leave.

"I'm glad you're okay and sorry to bother you. Here's my card if you should ever need any help," said the policeman.

"Thank you. I appreciate that."

With that the policeman left and Dr. Humpford returned to the basement floor to work on his secret project—a computerized man. He had big plans for this man and he couldn't afford any interference from nosy people.

Around seven o'clock that evening, the loud rapping came again at his door. He had just sat down to watch JEOPARDY. He knew a lot of answers to the questions. Why was someone bothering him now? He paused the TV.

Dr. Humpford opened the door slightly. There were the two kids from next door, Daniel and Stephanie, standing there smiling at him.

"Did you call the police on me?"

"My Dad did because he thought maybe something was wrong with you. He was concerned," said Stephanie.

"I know you folks probably mean well, but I don't like anyone bothering me!" exclaimed Dr. Humpford.

"We're sorry. We just want to be friends, really. Don't you want a friend?" asked Danny.

"I've never had too many friends. People and I don't get along," said Dr. Humpford.

"Can we come in? We brought you a gift."

"A gift?"

"Yeah, well, we figured we'd buy you a book," said Stephanie.

"Thank you. I do love to read."

The thin mysterious man looked so dejected. He smiled a rather sad smile and said, "You want to come in. I'm a scientist and my name is Dr. Willis Humpford. I am a professor at Dartmouth. I have lived in New Hampshire all my life. Come on, come inside. It's chilly out here," said Dr. Humpford, welcoming his two young guests.

"So, what kind of scientist are you?" asked Danny thoughtfully.

"A computer scientist and a former astronaut," said Dr. Humpford, getting nervous with all the questions. Too many questions. Too many people surrounding him. He had to make the kids go away. He had to keep them away from his secret project. His head started pounding.

"If you kids don't mind, I'm really quite tired and I'd like to sit and watch Jeopardy. Come by some other time and thank you very much for the book. I will enjoy reading it."

"We'll come by Saturday morning. Will that be okay, Dr. Humpford?" asked Stephanie.

"Yes, yes, that will be okay, but you must know I'm a busy man, so I can't visit for too long, but you can stop by. That would be nice."

"We'll see you Saturday morning," said Danny. With that the kids went home and Humpford had his peace and quiet, at least for now. Why were these neighbors of his so nosy and so concerned about him? He didn't know them, and he wanted to leave it that way. He watched Jeopardy and he even watched Wheel of Fortune. Then he descended the stairs to his basement where he conducted his research on his secret projects. But one in particular was most important to him. That was his Computerized Man. No one was to know about this secret project so he could carry out his very organized plan for this Computerized Man to run for the U.S. Senate where Dr. Humpford would control everything he did and start with his programming. Then when the right time came, he would make the Computerized Man run for President. Then the doctor could take over the whole country and then the whole world! His mind was running away with him. He had to stop all his thinking and daydreaming and concentrate on his programming of this Computerized Man. His cell phone rang, and it was Professor McMasters from the Science Department of Dartmouth. Another nosy person to deal with.

"Dr. Humpford, this is Professor McMasters, and one of your students said he's interested in working with you in your Robotics Lab. He's intrigued by how robots are made, and work, and he said he likes your class. His name is Peter Carella. Can I give him permission to join your Robotics Lab?"

"Yes, yes, Peter is my best student. Yes, he would do very well there, and I could

perhaps use his input with some of my research projects," said Dr. Humpford, his mind now devising a new plan.

"Very good, Peter will see you at the lab tomorrow! Hey, Dr. Humpford, you don't attend any of our conferences? Or our work lunches. Any reason?"

"I keep to myself."

"We'd like to see more of you, okay?"

"I'll think about it."

Dr. Humpford closed his phone and noticed his Computerized Man sitting up. Humpford was excited. "My goodness! You are moving! My program is working! Now you must speak like a real person does."

The "Computerized Man" lifted his right arm.. "I under.....stand...you," he said in a mechanical voice.

"Wonderful! Success! Now you and I have to work on human speech patterns," instructed Dr. Humpford. He was proud of his "Computerized Man". Now it was time to go to sleep. He had to be up early to once again work on his secret project. One day soon the whole world would know Dr. Willis Humpford.

He climbed the stairs back up to his living room and then climbed the stairs to his bedroom. He took a fast shower, sat in bed and began to read the book that his two neighbors had brought him. In a way he was just as curious about them as they were about him. The title of the book was A MECHANIC IN SPACE.

The story began: "How did a mechanic find his way into outer space? And how did a mechanic in space have national security clearance? How did this mechanic have so much information on the President of the United States? Who is this mechanic in outer space?"

Dr. Humpford read on and kept reading all night till he finished the book—it was that good.

He only got a few hours of sleep before he was up early at five thirty a.m. The first thing he did after showering and getting dressed and making his bed, was to go down to the basement and check on his secret project. Everything was coming into place—all just as he had planned. Roger was moving his arms and legs. On to the next step.

He ate his breakfast and headed to the University, driving along in his Cadillac Seville. He arrived at the university and parked his car in his reserved spot. Then he hurried along to his office in the Science Department. His first class was at ten a.m and it was now nine thirty. He had some time to go work in his robotics laboratory. While he was in

the lab, Peter Carella arrived.

"Dr. Humpford, Professor McMasters said I could join in on your Robotics Lab. I just love your Robotics Class. I really want to build my own Robot. I have a plan. I want a Robot who can help me become the richest man in the world—my own sidekick," said Peter. "Someone to keep all my secrets and help me make the impossible happen."

"Hmm, interesting plan, Peter."

"Do you have any plans with the Robots you make, Dr. Humpford?"

"I have elaborate plans, my friend."

"Maybe we can join forces," said Peter.

"Hmm, interesting idea. Here's my card. Call me later, but not a word to anyone—not any student or Professor or even family member. And especially not to Professor McMasters. Do we have a deal?"

"Sure do, Dr. Humpford."

"Let's shake on it, Peter."

Peter and Dr. Humpford shook hands to seal their deal.

Later in the day Dr. Humpford returned home, but he stopped at the store to buy a piece of salmon and a can of corn and a can of coffee. When he got home, he cooked the salmon and warmed up the corn. He also made himself a pot of coffee. After he ate and cleared up the dishes he hurried down to the basement to work on his secret project, "The Computerized Man". He had to teach his robotic friend to speak just like a human. He had made his face to look like someone he had seen in all the magazines he had pored through. His "Computerized Man" was going to be the next U.S. Senator to represent New Hampshire. Once he got elected and he was a big success, then he would have him run for President. And wherever the "Computerized Man" would go, he would go too. The sky would be the limit. Total control of the world would be his goal.

His telephone rang and it was his student Peter.

"Peter, I am most happy you called. Why don't you stop by my house in about twenty minutes. We will discuss my secret project," said Dr. Humpford.

"I'll be there, Dr. Humpford. Where do you live?"

"65 Spring Street in a white colonial house. I'll look forward to seeing you."

Dr. Humpford got back to work on his secret project. He spoke to his "Computerized Man" and typed in his commands on his own home-built computer with capabilities far beyond any other computer. "I command you to rise!" spoke the computer.

"Rise. I w-i-ll r-i-se!"

Slowly the computerized man stood up.

"Wonderful. I command you to walk!" spoke the computer when Humpford typed it in.

Slowly the Computerized Man put one foot in front of the other and began to walk!

Suddenly the doorbell rang. Humpford hurried up the stairs to see who was at the door. To his dismay, it was his two neighbors. The nosy neighbors are back again, he thought with a sigh. He opened the door slightly with the chain lock still on.

"Hello. Can I help you?" he said, somewhat in a grumpy voice as if he wasn't pleased to see them.

"Hi, Dr. Humpford. We wanted to come visit you and we brought you a box of candy," said Stephanie.

Dr. Humpford knew it would be hard to get rid of these two pushy kids.

"Come on it for a few minutes, but I'm really busy," he said.

"Did you read the book?"

"Yes, yes I did, and I enjoyed it very much. I'm sorry if I'm rude but I'm expecting someone, and I can't talk right now. But thank you for the candy. I'll see you Saturday."

"You're always really busy, aren't you?" asked Stephanie.

"I'm a scientist and a former astronaut, so yes, I'm always busy. I'm sorry, but I'm expecting someone." He escorted the two to the door.

Stephanie and Danny left, but they went to the tree in their front yard and Danny used his binoculars to spy on Dr. Humpford.

They saw a young fellow ring his bell.

"Who's he?" said Danny.

"I'm not a psychic, Danny. I don't know who he is. Something is pretty unusual about this guy, Dr. Humpford. He's always in a hurry to throw us out, like he doesn't want us to see something," said Stephanie.

"Yeah, what could it be?"

Humpford escorted Peter Carella into his house. He looked around outside to make sure he didn't see his two nosy neighbors.

"Come on inside, Peter. I have a secret project to show you. A robot I have built, but he is a computerized man. This is top secret! No one should know but you and me. Okay?"

"You can count on me, Dr. Humpford!"

Peter followed him down the stairs to the basement room where he was astounded

to see the Computerized Man, who was walking about and counting to one hundred. Peter was amazed. "Wow! You built him? This is totally exciting!" said Peter.

"My life's work. As an astronaut I studied a lot about robotics and how we would use robots in outer space and through all my studying and experimenting, I started to build Roger, my computerized man. He is going to run for the US Senate and I have him programmed for what he will say and do as a Senator. I have to work on his language skills," said Dr. Humpford.

"Yes, his face is quite unique," said Peter.

"We'll work on improving it," said Dr. Humpford, managing a smile.

"Let's let him sit here and speak," said Peter. "I think he's done enough exercise."

"Yes, Roger, sit here."

"Your wish is my command, Dr. Humpford," said Roger very obediently.

"Now, that worries me. If he speaks like that in public, people might get suspicious," said Peter.

"Right now, he's programmed that way because I'm training him," explained Dr. Humpford. "But I'm sure once he's completely programmed, I can de-program that response."

"Sounds like a good plan, Dr. Humpford. Okay, let's hear him speak more."

"Yes. Roger, say 'Official'," instructed Dr. Humpford.

"Off-i-cial," said Roger.

"Okay, how about New Hampshire?" said Dr. Humpford as he watched the wavy patterns on his computer. Peter watched them too and read over Dr. Humpford's notes on Roger's progress.

"When do you have to announce his candidacy for the U.S. Senate?" asked Peter.

"In a week or so," said Dr. Humpford.

"Then we really have to get him prepared."

"Say 'New Hampshire', Roger."

"Your wish is my command. New Hamp-shire" said the Computerized Man, very slowly and distinctly.

"Say United States Senator," said Peter.

"I do not obey you," said Roger.

"Say United States Senator," said Dr. Humpford.

"Your wish is my command. U-ni-ted St-a-tes Sen-a-tor" said Roger, slowly and distinctly.

"He has to talk a little faster but at the right pace," suggested Peter.

The doorbell was ringing and they could hear young voices and pounding on the door.

"That must be my neighbors, the Kowsesky children, Stephanie and Danny. They keep coming over thinking I need their friendship," complained Dr. Humpford, shaking his head.

"Maybe they might be useful for our secret program," said Peter.

"You think so?" asked Dr. Humpford.

"They can be Roger's family!" said Peter.

"Hmm. Excellent idea! I'll go let them in."

And so Dr. Humpford climbed the stairs and walked over to the door and opened it ever so slowly and carefully. "Yes, children, you're making a lot of noise out here."

"We've been sitting out here under the tree and we saw that other fellow go into your house. We want to come in too as we see the light in your basement room," said Danny, talking so fast Dr. Humpford could barely make him out.

"Come on inside. Peter and I could perhaps use your assistance," said the good Doctor, his mind buzzing with more possibilities for his plan. This might be the answer to his prayers as long as the children kept their mouths shut about his secret plan.

They followed him down to the basement room and were startled when they saw the computerized man.

"Is he a robot?" asked Stephanie.

"No, he is a computerized man. He looks and will act like a regular human, but I will control him with my computer. We have to upload all the programs into his circuits. On the back of his neck I will insert this pack which has computer chips that will tell him when to walk, sit, talk, and which will control his thinking. The average person won't know they're talking to a 'Computerized Man'," explained Dr. Willis Humpford. "Oh, this is my new assistant, Peter Carella. He is part of my Robotics Lab at the University of New Hampshire."

"Nice to meet you two kids. Dr. Humpford told me about you," said Peter, taking a sip of his coffee.

"Nice to meet you too," said Stephanie, and she shook his hand.

"So, what are you going to program him to do?" asked Danny.

"He's going to run for office," said Dr. Humpford.

"What's he going to run for? Mayor?" asked Danny.

"Oh, no, that race was this past November. No, he's going to run for the U.S. Senate."

"For the U.S. Senate? Wow! That means he goes to Washington, D.C., if he wins. And you go with him, right? I mean, you have to program him," said Stephanie, her eyes wide with amazement.

"And he is going to win! My 'Computerized Man' is going to be the next U.S. Senator from New Hampshire," said Dr. Willis Humpford, with a look of determination in his eyes.

"So how will you do all of this?" asked Danny.

"Watch and learn from a master!" exclaimed Dr. Willis Humpford.

And so Danny sat at one of the many computers that Dr. Willis Humpford had in his lab. Dr. Humpford showed him what he was uploading and how he was going to run some of these programs to install all this pertinent information on government and on the state of New Hampshire into Roger's computerized brain. Stephanie went through a box of clothes that the good doctor had and selected an outfit for the "Computerized Man" to wear. The good doctor told her that he had bought all those clothes especially for the "Computerized Man".

The doctor uploaded most of the files and while Peter worked on them, he gave Danny a book on Robotics to read. But together they all worked to accomplish their task. Now all four of them dressed the Computerized Man in the outfit Stephanie had chosen. A pair of blue pants, a white shirt, blue socks, and a red tie.

"Now his name is Roger Humphrey," said Dr. Humpford.

"Hmm. Excellent choice. It has a ring to it—Senator Roger Humphrey," said Peter.

"Now what do you do?" asked Stephanie.

"Now I attach this packet to the back of his neck," said the good doctor. And so he did, and the children watched. And Peter assisted him. Then Dr. Willis Humpford went back to the computer and hit the start button on his program. They all waited. Suddenly, Roger moved his head back and forth. He raised his arms and then lowered them.

"I am Roger Humphrey. I reside at 65 Crown Street in Bakersville, New Hampshire. My occupation is as a lawyer. I wish to run for the United States Senate," recited the "Computerized Man", now known as Roger Humphrey.

"Excellent, Roger! Say hello to our new assistants, Peter, Stephanie and Danny."

"Hello, Peter, nice to meet you. Hello Stephanie, nice to meet you. Hello, Danny, nice to meet you," said Roger in his mechanically programmed voice.

"I've got a little suggestion," offered Peter.

"What's that, Peter?" asked Dr. Humpford.

"He still sounds too mechanical. If you want him to run for the United States Senate, he can't sound so mechanical. People will get suspicious, especially the news media and the people at large," said Peter.

"You're so right. I will work on adjusting his voice. Thank you. You're very helpful, Peter."

"Thanks, Dr. Humpford. I've got to go. I work at Sally's Diner at night, earning extra money for my college education. I'll see you tomorrow at the University," said Peter.

"Okay, Peter, I'll see you then. You two children better get home. Your Mom will be worried. But promise me and Peter that you won't tell a soul about the Computerized Man," said Dr. Humpford.

"We promise. Not a word, Dr. Humpford."

"We'd better get going," said Danny.

"Keep our secret, kids. And wait a minute. I want to pay all three of you for helping me," said Dr. Humpford. He went to his box in his lab and pulled out a twenty dollar bill for Stephanie and a twenty dollar bill for Danny and a fifty dollar bill for Peter.

"Thank you, Dr. Humpford. Don't worry, we'll keep your secret," said Danny.

"Can you come over after school tomorrow, say around three pm?"

"Sure, we'll come over. We'll tell our Mom that we're working on a science project and you're helping us," said Stephanie.

"Great idea! Thanks, kids. You're the first friends I ever had. People usually don't like me much. Even the people at the University. They're always cold to me," said the doctor.

"People are not nice. Sometimes my best friend Cindy makes fun of me. I know she's just jealous," said Stephanie.

"Yes, people can be very jealous. I've had that all my life with people being jealous of me. I was always super-intelligent and into science, so for the other kids I was weird. I get afraid of people because they are so mean."

"Yeah, they are mean, Dr. Humpford. But don't worry, we're your friends. We're your partners, too," said Danny.

"Thank you. Let's shake hands on that!" And so they did, and Stephanie and Danny went home. They both looked forward to seeing the good doctor tomorrow afternoon.

Danny found it hard to sleep that night. He tossed and turned thinking about Doctor Humpford and his Computerized Man. He couldn't wait to see the good doctor and the "computerized man" and see what the doctor had planned. And he was soon to find out.

Stephanie was up doing research on her laptop. The first thing she researched was Doctor Willis Humpford.

She pulled up a profile on the doctor on a web site about renowned scientists in America. This is what she found:

Dr. Willis Humpford, age 49, of Campton, New Hampshire is a Professor of Computer Science and Robotics at Dartmouth University. An astronaut, he had flown on the Discovery Space Shuttle and conducted experiments with robotics on the space station. He also built a robot that has been used to assemble information for space exploration. The robot can test and sample soil and rocks.

Dr. Willis Humpford hails from a very old New England family. His ancestors fought in the Revolutionary War, War of 1812 and the Civil War. His great-grandfather was a Lieutenant in the Army in World War I. His grandfather was a navy pilot in World War II. His Uncle Ned was an Army Captain in the 1st Cavalry, 7th Regiment in the Korean War. His father was a decorated hero of the Vietnam War. He himself served eight years in the US Air Force, reaching the rank of Lieutenant Major.

Stephanie printed it out so she could show Danny. Now it was time to go to sleep.

In the morning light, Danny looked over at the clock on his bed stand. It was six o'clock. He sat up and grabbed his iPad from under the bed. He searched on the internet and looked up information on robotics. He read all about the many different robots that have been invented over the years. He got up and turned on his printer so he could print out some of the information. Then he got dressed for school. He hurried down to breakfast. His Mom was making pancakes. Stephanie hurried down too. She would show Danny what she had looked up about Dr. Willis Humpford later when they came home from school. But before they went over to see Dr. Humpford.

Meanwhile, Dr. Humpford was up early reading up on the other candidates who were throwing their hats in the ring for the U.S. Senate race in New Hampshire. He had to do a study on all of them so he would have Roger all programmed and prepared for the campaign ahead. His plan had to work out.

Peter Carella, on the other hand, was already busy at the Robotics Lab at the university. And he was looking up an article online about the very thing that Dr.

Humpford was doing—building a computerized man. Did this person who wrote this article have any clue that someone had actually done this? The person who wrote the article was a Dr. Emil Renaud. Peter printed it out so he could show Dr. Humpford.

An hour later, Dr. Humpford showed up in the Robotics Lab ready to work with Peter and three other students who were all interested in how you built and programmed robots. So he got to work teaching them all about it. One of the other students, her name was Roberta, was deeply interested in the science of Robotics and had already begun building a small one of her own. Her Robot was meant for meteorology to help predict the severity of storms. Dr. Humpford was most impressed with her ability. He took Peter aside after class to discuss their secret project which he would soon find out had been shared with the ever so suspicious Dr. Emil Renaud.

“Come to my house later around four thirty and we’ll work on Roger. You’re doing well in my class. Very good work. I’ll see you later,” said Dr. Humpford in a low voice.

“Yes, Dr. Humpford. I found this article online. I thought you’d like to read it,” said Peter.

Dr. Humpford glanced at it and made a face when he saw Dr. Emil Renaud had written it. “This Dr. Renaud just writes his notions and ideas which he borrows from everyone else. He’s a pompous jerk,” said Dr. Humpford.

“You know him?” asked Peter.

“Way back when I worked with NASA. He came around purporting himself as an expert on robotics. He’s an expert at nothing! I told him so,” remarked Dr. Humpford, shaking his head in disgust. Peter smiled. He liked Dr. Humpford. He was a cool person underneath that wall he often built around himself. He was super-intelligent and his feelings were hurt easily. Peter empathized with him as he found people to be cruel as well.

“See you later, Dr. Humpford,” said Peter.

Right after school was out for the day, Danny and Stephanie sat at the kitchen table, each eating a cereal bar and drinking a glass of milk. They were getting ready to go see Dr. Willis Humpford. Their parents were both at work and their grandmother was working on her crafts. She told them not to stay too long at Dr. Humpford’s. Dr. Humpford told them to come at three o’clock.

The second half of this story will appear in our next issue.



GROUNDSIDE ACTIVITIES by John Polselli

Happenings in the non-computerized world



Original house of THE CONJURING



College students in Providence, Rhode Island



Home of H.P. Lovecraft



View of an area of Providence



Aerial view of Providence



Providence Skyline

It's great to be back in my birth state, Rhode Island. I had been missing it. The house that I'm living in is surrounded by dense woods. There aren't any streetlights on our road, and at night it's pitch dark. I like that. I can see the brightly lit stars.

Several ponds and lakes are nearby, and I'm looking forward to fishing again. My girl friend has a farm. There are goats, chickens, turkeys and roosters in the back yard.

Peter Spinella has visited us on three occasions with his girl friend. He's planning to start reading sf again. Regarding his activity he says he's not sure. Why that is the case he really didn't explain. Hopefully he will go back to writing again.

I've been to the beach on four occasions since I've returned. It was refreshing.

We are planning to visit Emily Dickenson's house in Amherst, Massachusetts, which is not very far from where we are living, and I've been back to Gloucester, Massachusetts where poet Charles Olson lived and wrote his Maximus poems.

The demon-infested house on which the movie THE CONJURING is based is not more than a mile or two from where I'm living.

During one of our recent drives we passed Lovecraft's house. It was good to see it again.

I live in a very secluded area which is very conducive to writing.



CONVENTION WEEKEND by Cardinal Cox



Never been to a convention? Let Cardinal Cox show you the lay of the land.

Old hotel, not getting the wedding receptions

Maybe just a little shabby at the edges

Doesn't know quite what to expect with this convention

Double doors to the main hall held back with wedges

In the foyer attendees are getting badges

And a pack detailing what events should be when

Grey-haired bloke with beard, jacket covered in patches

Members are all glad to be together again

Opening ceremony? First drinks at the bar

Dealers' room with treasures still busy setting up

Panel on foreign tv show? Have you come far?

Why don't we get another quick drink in our cups?

The Guests of Honour are either known or they're not

There's a writer who has had a few books published

And a graphic novel artist who's done a lot
Though another has had to cancel, who you wished
To meet. Unfortunately, that is how it goes
Reception in the art show, nibbles to be had
Free food? Would be rude not to. See, there's one who knows
No, avoid them! Chatted to them before, quite mad
About to start late-night movie in second hall
Rare screening of something that is a total dud
Can clearly hear the raucous laughter through the wall
When alien creature emerges from the mud

DAY TWO



At last the dealers' room is now open
People are wearing costumes they've made round the place
Corridor talk—And is the correct plural “fen”?
Orion slave girl over there with the green face
So just right now there's “Are fanzines a dying art?”
Saw that panel—oh must be—twenty years ago
Someone is already filking with all their heart
Outside (if sunny) there are boomerangs to throw

Rumour of a room party up on the fourth floor
Promoting another con (or something) next year
No secret knocks are needed to get through the door
Oh, and there's bound to be some fine imported beer

DAY THREE



And none of the poor committee have slept
Was some emergency at 2 in the car park.
And then the ever-escalating problem kept
Them there until the pink eastern sun killed the dark
Well look I'll open rooms; he'll map the desk out front
And she will wrangle gofers, done it many times before
Come back after sleep, when you can do more than grunt
It's a convention. It's just fun. It ain't a war
Lunchtime they are back, zombie-eyed but half-alive
Everything has run to time—mostly—more or less
The fans from far and wide have managed to survive
Nothing major has unraveled into a mess

Closing ceremony? We'll get a quiet drink
Committees said something about been given aid
Bar staff have to ask how's it gone? How do you think?
Mind you, as I say, wouldn't do it if you paid
Us. See if you can get that young writer there one
Invite them over. Someone grab them a chair.
Well, all in all, the weekend was all rather fun
There's that clever scientist guy with all the hair
Dead Dog Party? Oh, you say there's a chance of snacks?
Well, it would be rude if we were not to join in
You know what I always say, what our fandom lacks—
For Ghod and all his Aint's sake, don't let him begin.



DUSK by John Polselli



The end of afternoon brought rain of fire
Which birthed four dinosaurs from out the grass
My virgin bride was walking through the mire
While searching for an elephant of glass

The moon had shifted leftward over trees
That hissed in wind and scattered living pearls
A golden orb was moving in a breeze
Upon which drifted luminescent girls

And when the night had fallen crickets sang
Stars transformed themselves to flakes of snow
Churchbells from the darkened woodland rang
While sadness in my heart began to grow

O dragonfly with crystal wings that wave
In soundlessness above my silent grave





Reasons Why by Will Mayo

Because of the horror I write. Because of the fear I write. Because of the beauty I write. It is my ticket to the world.

I spend my time in the company of poets, writers and editors of all stripes, but I never claimed to know much about literature, history, philosophy, any of that. Indeed, for all my studies I remain a self-educated man. All in all it's whatever gets you through the night. For one man it might be a prayer. For another it might be a hand at the poker table. For me, it's this matter of words. So be it.

And I swear it is all just some strange memory of a dream. A dream which excites us to no end. And like all dreams it must die.

I try not to put on too many airs because, unlike so many know-it-alls that have come my way over the years, I am well aware of my limitations. Daily, the world outside my door presses nearer and I know too well the amount I have yet to learn, the amount I have yet to render.

But for now the hour grows late and I have tales yet to tell. As the world turns maybe someone will listen.

I'm at peace with my life and I'm at peace with my death. Whatever happens happens. For now, I tell a tale or two.



Endpage. Write your letter of comment here.