



SPIRITUS MUNDI 187

A SFPAzine for SFPA #224 by

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2002 began at midnight, of course. Rose-Marie and I blearily watched the ornate and complicated crystal ball descend over Times Square. It may have been our exhaustion – our vacation trip had ended less than three hours before – but it seemed impossible that we had stood at the corner of 44th Street and Broadway and looked up at the old New York Times Building two days before. Surely that was another lifetime, another world ... another year. *Zzzzzzzz.*

The New Year began in earnest about three hours later. In my dreams. Someone was shouting incoherently. I spoke to the whoever-it-was but they made no sense, and it was frustrating. So frustrating that I fled the land of Nod for the darkened universe of the living – and the incoherent shouts coming from the next room. Cindy was having a hypoglycemic attack.

My neighbor, who is now my boarder, has strange problems with her blood sugar. It goes too high, she has a diabetic attack. That's bad. She sinks into torpor, and eventually, coma, and eventually, if unchecked, a bo-di-o-do. Her sugar falls too low, and she acts drunk, goofy, "coo-coo." Sometimes this makes her the funniest natural comedienne on Earth. Sometimes she's transformed into a character out of **The Exorcist**. However dramatic her yowls and contortions, they are much less serious than the sluggish silence of a diabetic strike, so I wasn't particularly terrified when I found her staring wildly and sightlessly into space, mewling nonsense and twisting her fingers in the air. I got her some O.J. and hit the dial: 9-1-1. Still amazing that *this* use of those numbers was something of a relief.

The paramedics knew the drill, of course; while I retired to this computer to polish **Rear-Ender '01**, they found a vein – in her neck, ouch – and fed her some glucose. Soon she was back to normal and on her feet. On the P.M.s' advice I opened a can of sweet potatoes for her and while I retired to reassure Rose-Marie and return to slumber, she stuffed her chops. This morning she was her sweet pain-in-the-posterior self, asking question after question about our Christmas journey, bugging me to drive her to the pizza shop, et cetera et cetera. So the first crisis of the palindromic new year – 2 0 0 2, last one of those for 110 years – passed. But it made clear the necessity of

MY NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS 2002

(1) *Get Cindy her own apartment ... clean, safe, close, and quick.* I love old Boo like the little sister I never got to torture as a child. When she moved into our spare room I was rescuing her from possible homelessness, and after 12 years of her good neighborliness, I owed that to her. But the apartment waitlist she was on was supposed to move her within three months. It's been *seven*. My beloved Rose-Marie has all her stuff here and is poised to turn this toilet into a human home ... but we've got to get Cindy out of the way.

Boo is scared but doing her part. She's found a couple of places she likes, but how she can afford anyplace in today's market on her SSI is anybody's guess. After being dillied and dallied all over town by various federal grant grafters purporting to help the poor, we have an appointment with a social worker, from whom we hope to glean the skinny on what programs exist to help such as Cindy. Time is of the essence. We have only half a year left on our lease, and we might want to stay. We certainly want the option. April 1st – that's our deadline. What happens then if nothing has happened since? We haven't decided.

(2) *Apply for reciprocity.* Our trip through the north was enjoyable, first to last, even when we found ourselves snowbound in Buffalo. Dazed by the glories of New York, we even daydreamed about an apartment in Manhattan, fat effing chance. But Tennessee ... we both decided, that even in the winter, even with nothing green but the spindle-shaped firs standing sentinel by the sides of the road, that state is *beautiful*, and temperate, and prospering, and closer to everything, and it has fireflies in the summer, *and* a Louisiana lawyer can join the Tennessee Bar by submitting an application, taking a relatively simple ethics exam, and shelling out a thousand bucks.

I've had the application in my desk for a year. I don't know why it's still unfinished. I have decent references, am not too scared of the ethics test, and can scrape up the grand. So what's holding me up?

In a way that's easy to answer. New Orleans is not my birthplace but it is my home. I love this squalid old burg. It has a unique *texture*, a feeling to the very air, that grabbed me from the get-go 30+ years ago. When I came here from California, I found it friendly. It was accepting. It brought me comrades, and made a place for me. That would be hard to leave. Of course, it is indeed squalid and decaying, and Rose-Marie, who had never been on a job hunt longer than a week in her life, has been here six months with only a small bite on her impressive resume. (She's teaching a class in investigative reporting twice a week, starting soon.) And this apartment is far too expensive for my little job to handle alone.

Although, here's another answer to my question: I like my job. I like being a public defender, even in an outlying country parish like St. John the Baptist. In most ways it's an improvement over the drug court job I had before – a better and more stable boss, medical and dental benefits, that boon to all tax loafers, withholding, and no intrusive and venomous political interference. Of all my complaints, all are minor but one: *money*. For a lawyer with 12 years experience, I make squat. Rose-Marie deserves better. So: my resolution is to expand my options. To Tennessee and beyond.

(3) *Work on my writing.* I long ago convinced myself that I have no talent in writing, and I have a Masters degree to prove it. Rose-Marie bursts with the ambition I've convinced myself I am not worthy to have. My brother advised me years ago that the only way to get along with one's wife is to capitulate at once. Therefore I once again turn my thoughts to putting words onto a page for some other reason than to complete a pleading or pad an apa pagecount.

The problem with writing, for me, is finding something worth writing about. I'm not talking about story, here; I'm talking about what I want to say. Hmm ... I'm having trouble expressing my point, a symptom of how long it's been since I've tried to put such thoughts to language. Let me try again.

A real writer, like any other real artist, has his own voice, his own beliefs, his own values, and his own message. They flow from his experience, his beliefs, from what he has learned about life and what he feels compelled to convey. Like I say, this consideration has little to do with *plot*. It has to do with *point*. Plot, characters, tone, style, all serve, in the long run, the point of a work.

Until *very* recently, when imagined writing the Great 21st Century American Novel, what came forth was suffused with anger, misogyny, bitterness, bile. When a real writer writes, what comes out is what he believes. When I thought about what I would write, what came out was relentlessly ugly. Who the hell needs that?

Well, I do, if I'm going to do the thing that I have wanted to do since the age of 6, and set to paper one of my dreams, do the thing no less a spirit than Lillian Hellman said I could do, if I have to face the nastiness in my spirit to do it, well, then I face it. Not out, but through. Maybe there's something better on the other side. After all, if 2001 should have proved anything personally to me, it's that *anything is possible*.

After all, two mere years ago, could I have believed that 2002 would begin with me married, let alone to the elegant and beautiful and hitherto seemingly unattainable Rose-Marie?

(4) *Lose weight and exercise.* I'm sure this entry tops many lists, but it had better come high on mine. When we were in Cedarhurst, our hostess (see below) took me aside and asked me why I was breathing so hard. I wasn't aware that I was doing so, but it's easy enough to answer her: I'm far too fat. 234 pounds. That's held pretty steady since Rose came into my life, but it was an increase since my last physical. And my cholesterol is elevated, not enough for medication – yet – but high enough that I need to be aware of it.

I'm also aware of the fact that except for my Uncle Frank and Great-uncle Elmer, every single older male relative of mine has departed this vale of tears because of a heart problem. I'm 52 and would dearly like to pull another 30-40 years out of this gig before I join my honorable ancestors. So: watch the grub. Two Cokes, no more, a day. Nothing but fruit or popcorn after dinner. Rose-Marie is dedicated to this task ... and I've got to help her help me stay alive.

(5) *Read more – listen to people – act on my principles – put my trust in my fellow man, and always cut the cards.* You know ... the usual.

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My cover would have been the perfect heading for my report on our '01 Christmas trip, had we visited DC Comics and seen Julie Schwartz while we were in New York. Unfortunately, we didn't have the time. But we did visit Ground Zero, and we did sail by the Lady, and we did get this Christmas card from the magnificent Jules, and so. It's copyright DC, of course, and to believe my aching eyesight, the artist is Terry Dodson.

Later in the trip, driving down U.S. 29 in Virginia, surely one of America's most historical highways, we took a pee break at a tourist information station, and picked up the woodcut used as a last page illo. It too is copyrighted, and so shame on me for stealing it, but the artist is Karen Plunker Versluys, and it's nice. The peaceful hills of the upper south were part of this vacation too.

I plan on writing up our northern jaunt in a separate fanzine, one of those Routes of which I have become so fond. Here and now let me hail **Fran Breitstone** of Cedarhurst, Lawn Guyland, as our dedicatee for this issue. By her generosity and tolerance, she made the whole trip possible, and I'll never forget it. Let's have some mailing comments.

MAILING CAUSTICS SFPA

224

The Southerner 224 / Egoboo Poll Results / OE
An old worry strikes me as I fondle and stroke this SFPA mailing. I ran my Challengers here because I was proud of them and wanted SFPA to see them, but fear that their sheer bulk overwhelms the more personal work that we put into straightforward apazines. Surely, I think, my fellow members resent that ... and then I turn to the poll results, and lo, wow, Challenger 13, or rather the slab I ran in SFPA, was named Zine of the Year for 2001. This is the third year in a row that an issue of my genzine has been so honored, and I loop and soar and spiral in thanks. To tell the truth, Chall's win tickles me a giggle more than my presidency – but only a giggle, I'm really pleased and grateful for that distinction, too. Thanks, y'all. // No delay in finding the Best Bit in this mailing: it goes to the anonymous genius who was asked to guess the film whence came the line "How much sex, fun, and friendship can one man take?", and guessed Nixon.

The New Port News #200 / Ned I don't think any SFPAzine except for the OO has ever reached its 200th issue before. I know your issue numbers are a bit askew, thanks to that one mailing where all you did was a postmailed oneshot (**Bring Back the Sun** in 1971 – do I have a long memory or what?), but nevertheless, congratulations! // Rosy recently found out that this house has aluminum wiring, which would be illegal in new construction. How much danger am I in turning on my computer? // The rebel flag has different associations for different people. I, for instance, associate it with Lo Armistead assaulting the Angle at Gettysburg, the character of Robert E. Lee, and Southern defiance following Sherman's obscene March to the Sea. Others might well feel differently. There is much more room for disagreement than there is about the swastika, for instance, which used to have a neutral symbolism as a good luck charm, but which is now universally decried. // This is a

familiar argument about the powers of the OE. I'll qualify what I said last time on the subject. An OE should have the authority to reject *franked* material in which has no SFPAn had creative input. Fannish stuff, like con fliers and the like, are more acceptable than non-fannish stuff – the old "Los Angeles Phone Book" argument. As for zines on which the member *did* do creative work, I would allow anything in. Though I once bounced a couple of Bill Bridget's paranoid one-sheets for illegibility, I wouldn't do that now. (Everything else about the way I handled Bridget, I'd do the same.) // That isn't quite accurate about Illinois' Death Row. "[F]ully half of the population of their death row were found to have been wrongfully convicted." I checked with Clive Stafford-Smith of the Louisiana Death Penalty Resources team. He said that an appellate judge had written in a dissent that half of the Illinois death penalty trials suffered from a *procedural* problem he considered serious enough for new trials. The argument didn't convince any other judges and hasn't the effect of law, and being procedural, has nothing to do with the guilt of the inmates. // Fred Gwynne is, I believe, no longer with us, but boy, was he great in **My Cousin Vinny**. // Pamela Anderson and balloons have *something* in common, Ned. Believe it. // Re annoying advertisements like billboards: their purpose isn't to convince you to buy the product, or even like the product ... but to *remember* the product. Tension apprehension and dissension have begun **RIFF** // The way W has sold the endless war against terrorism indeed is reminiscent of the unending conflict of **1984**, and with, I do believe, the same motive: to keep himself wrapped in the flag and blunt criticism of his repulsive domestic policies. Let's hope we're smart enough as a people to do both: fight terrorists and maintain our wits.

Tyndallite Vol. 3, Number 98 / NORM! I like your idea of "running" Hugo nominations, which I take to mean a worldcon receiving nominations

all year, and not just for a short time in the winter and spring. (The ConJose ballot is out now.) That's the way nominations for the Nebula accrue. Former SFPA Brother Joe Moudry, outraged over the celestial cost of joining worldcons, suggested an inexpensive "voting membership" to promote participation in the awards. The thought is trufannish but seems ripe with risk: it'd be very easy to pack the competition with cheap ballots. // Brian Aldiss' Hugo-winning "Hothouse" series was about an Earth and Moon connected by vines; maybe that's what your talking about with Tom. // Perhaps Jules Verne researched the physics of **From the Earth to the Moon** better than H.G. Wells booked it before writing **First Men in the Moon**, but the Wells novel is satisfying in a way Verne's ponderous story could never be – it's better written, and much more *fun*, probably because of its wild sci-fi elements: Cavorite, the Selenites, and so on. "I was mad to let him know – " // But speaking of Wells, with all those complications, no wonder Griffin, the Invisible Man, went crazy. Get the shovel.

Twygdrasil #72 / Rich D. Popeye? What brought this on? Ancient movie by most standards. Weber liked it – probably because he so resembles Pluto. Whatever happened to Paul Smith? Never saw him after David Lynch's terrible **Dune**. Nor much of Shelley Duval, although I understand she got into children's TV. // A site where Truman capote and William Rehnquist are depicted as lovers? No thanks! However, if you can dish up some dirt about Antonin Scalia ... // Local SF writer and pedophile Roger Lovin, now gone on to that great home for child molesters in the sky, proposed that Charles Dodgson was Jack the Ripper. Maybe he identified with him. // Speaking of Jon Benet, you ask "would a struggle between a six-year-old and an adult yield blood?" If it's the adult's blood, I dearly hope so. I hope that particular monster bled to death in a ditch. // Someone once told me that Tarzan is the one character who has been interpreted by every major comic book company. Charlton's last Tarzan comic was withheld from distribution; it must be the rarest book ever. Comics nuts? // Could humans understand truly alien thought processes? That was the theme of a superb story by Terry Carr called "The Dance of

the Changer and the Three", which should have won the Hugo in 1969. // **Level 7** was a very popular nuclear war novel on the early sixties, written in the form of the diary of a military officer drafted to live permanently in an underground missile facility. After the inevitable, radiation seeps down, down, down ... until only the narrator is left, scribbling incoherencies until // Bin Laden did indeed miscalculate – badly. He declared irrevocable total war. He made it politically imperative that we kill him. His path could lead but to his own grave, and surely he must have known that. Was he so certain that we would alienate the whole of Islam? // **Vamps** was a comic book; it had two series, but then ran out of juice. // Ever see that 1960 **Desilu Playhouse** featuring Lee Marvin as the first man in space? Stranded in orbit, he was mouthing homilies to world peace as the show ended, as the rescue ship was launched. // I can't imagine AA forbidding a member to join an apolitical group like LASFAPA. The guy you mention is contributing again (he was the apa's founder) so if there was a ban, he paid no attention to it. // I've been buying books over the web lately, from amazon.com. It's expensive because of the shipping charges, but I never would have found **Fog Heart** without it. // When I was a kid I mourned missing **Reptilicus**, but now that I've seen it, phooey on it. Poor copy of **Giant Behemoth** which was itself a poor ripoff of **Beast from 20,000 Fathoms**. Last time I saw **Behemoth** I couldn't get over the texture of the critter's skin. It looked like it was made out of upholstery. // Rosy and I like **Nero Wolfe** – excellent period costumes, good scripts and good acting. The guy playing Wolfe, however, is far too young and thin. // Hans von Hammer was a World War I ace, at least in the Kanigher/Kubert DC universe whence he sprang. He may have met Hermann Goering at some point, he he was *no* Nazi. // The fact that the 9-1-1 hijackers used their own names tells me that their masters had no more immediate mischief planned. I hope I'm right that this horror was their ultimate act, and that's why they didn't mind leaving such an obvious trail. As for taking the event personally ... go take a look at lower Manhattan sometime, or just read Copeland's **Portraits of Grief** frank. It is personal. *Never send to know for whom the bell tolls ...*

Variations on a Theme #9 / Rich L. Your solution to the brouhaha over Boutillier's article is the correct one. Articles on fan history which concentrate on insulting or embarrassing anecdotes about fan personalities should be approached with extreme caution. What one reader would think cute, the story's subject might find seriously objectionable – and fandom ain't presidential politics; we aren't in this hobby to make our fellow fans look ridiculous. Well, I have to handle many of the same people soon in an article we plan for **Challenger**; let's see how well I handle it. // I look forward to the next **Mimosa!** Even if you did miss 2001 with the article about Sir Arthur ... I'm hoping that Bruce Pelz' piece about Heinlein will be positive in tone; Earl Kemp's "Heinlein Happens" in **No Award** left an ugly smell behind it. I bet we're both glad we passed on publishing it. // Further note on a future **Chall** website: efanzines.com has unlimited space and is willing to share it. // *whew* regarding your sister, who was spared from the Pentagon suicide bombers because her section of the building was under renovation. That was definitely the day to be late for work.

Peter, Pan & Merry #40 / Dave Lost SFPA mailings happen; I had to remail two mfgs as OE to Steven Carlberg, and half the extras of SFPA 100 sat abandoned in a corner of the Knoxville post office until I sent Vern Clark down there to kick bureaucratic butt. // Regarding **Harry Potter**'s Hugo win, I do wonder if Rowling got the trophy and what, if anything, she thought of it. The objections to its victory seemed to spring from the fact that it isn't from the SF community, is aimed at a younger audience than most contemporary science fiction (though **Starship Troopers** was first considered a "young adult" novel), and is fantasy. Will it open the door for more commercial SF, like Michael Crichton? Stay tuned. // Reconstruction didn't end until 1976, when Jimmy Carter destroyed the cliche of the Southern redneck forever. // An attempted suicide in Louisiana would probably face civil commitment. // Another Hebrew term, "smicha." Sounds like a Brooklyn insult, but here you say it means "to ordain." I'm learning a lot in this apa ... for instance, later you describe "a veritable spate of B'nai Mitvot." Damn, that sounds serious. // A name for the current war? I suggest

"The Taliban Conflict". Unless it goes on and on and on, country to country, which is about what we've been promised. Not that most folks mind. The real disaster last year – prior to 9-1-1 – was Americans' acceptance of political chicanery as a way to select its government. It was shrugged over, winked at. Maybe our people *do* want a dictatorship, and are tired of the ambivalence and difficulty of a government ruled by law instead of the whim of some Smilin' Jack. America wants to forget about 9-1-1 and not let it affect our day-to-day lives. But it should affect us. We should care more, help more, share more ... bury the myth of cold yuppie-dom, given the lie by the suffering of the victims at Ground Zero. But Americans don't want to admit they've changed. It's as if becoming a truly kinder, more generous nation would be insuring victory for the terrorists, instead of their complete defeat.

Offline Reader Vol. 1 Issue 25 / Irv Speaking of completing new paperwork for jobs you've already applied for, Rosy had to fill out a new app for the local newspaper a mere six months after putting in her first one. **The Times-Picayune** keeps them no longer than three months. // Not having his autobiography on hand, I'm not sure Julie Schwartz claims to have edited the first fanzine, or if that's a distinction others claim for him. Whatever may have predated it, no denying that **The Time Traveller** was of seminal importance to SF and fandom.

Revenant #9 / Sheila Cool to read so many familiar place names in this issue ... or should I say, *cold*. You're lucky you went north in the summer. // The guide map Rosy bought while we were in Manhattan also depicted the Statue of Liberty with the World Trade Center in the background. Looking from that cover up to the vast empty sky at Ground Zero made the loss clear to her for the first time. // "I'm appalled at Bush's order allowing due process to be scrapped ..." Atta girl! But don't restrict your opinion to SFPA. Voice it out loud! Little I've read matches the power in your simple statement, "I hear jackboots." Sock it to them! I'll hit the newspapers if you will! // Faith and begorra, the Jackson Highland Games sound like grand Irish fun. Let us know when they come next year. // Cemeteries – you're lucky, if that's the word, to

have your ancestors in one place. Mine are scattered all over America – California, Alabama, upstate New York – there's no one place to go and sit and think on the past. // **Lord of the Rings** – lovely, wasn't it? But I can't help but think of imagine **Pfei-** ... she-who-cannot-be-mentioned-politely-to-another-lady as Galadriel. // The Harry Potter edition I'm most looking forward to is the paperback-sized **Goblet of Fire**; it'll fit right in with my collection of Hugo winners. // I don't quite understand why you had to re-type the Toronto piece; seems like a hideous load of unnecessary work. Why couldn't you simply 'rox it from the printed copy? A grand account, by the way! I look forward to our journey there in '04. The drive from my brother's place on Grand Island is pleasant – Grand Island is infinitely prettier than Buffalo – and it's always fun to drive through Canada: off just enough from normal American life to be spookily interesting. Your guide to Toronto is nifty – I may beg you to pen an updated version for **Challenger**'s pre-Torcon issue. // Ever scarf Canada's great junk food, Fiddle Faddle? Like Cracker Jacks, only sweeter. // Service centers pop up every 35-40 miles on the Ohio Turnpike and the New York State Thruway. Rosy likened them to Swiss chalets. // Plants – when I went out west in '93 for Confrancisco, I found myself braking and going for my camera whenever I spotted a new variety of cactus by the side of the road. Don't ask me why: I know bupkus about botany. // Lewiston ... haw! My folks lived on Eddy Drive there for years. // Next worldcon, let's hold a SFPArty so none of us will miss the others in the crush. Feller hosted a superb gathering of SFPAns, KAPAns and LASFAPAns at MagiCon; let's do it again! // I too was vaguely dissatisfied with MilPhil, and prefer DeepSouthCons. (DSCs only exist because SFPA founded them, y'know, so it's our home convention. I really look forward to Huntsville.) Next worldcon, we're going to *plan*, so we won't miss so damned much. // When you meet Sheryl Birkhead, you'll like her. Indeed, you two do remind me of each other. // The last CoastCon I attended featured a scrawny bozo getting all but naked at Toni's Baen Books party, and the sexual torture device set up next door. // Armadillos catch leprosy? They're popular critters in SFPA, featuring in at least two ongoing titles: Liz's, of

course, and Janice's when she was in Shadow-SFPA. // Large-print books are great. You don't have to be old to appreciate the ease and comfort of the read. Just half-blind. // Ruth Shields is a Chall pal from way back; she does fun art. // Wish I'd seen your comments before Christmas; we might've been able to connect for lunch in Canada. As you'll see when and if I finish **The Patriotic Route**, Rosy and I had a grand time north of the border. See much snow?

Comments 12 / Steve My lady and I both salute and thank you for the gorgeous photos of our wedding; even my porcine appearance can't ruin the beauty of the bride and of the occasion. (I note, though, that either I moved my *boutonniere* to the opposite lapel or you flopped the two middle photos.) Rosy has a request: could she have a copy of this zine, one not scarred by my mc'ing notes? // Speaking of gorgeous: as usual, your color work is awesome. // In a year like 2001, I imagine few people felt like celebrating, but everyone knew how badly it was needed. For me, it was doubly – triply – meaningful and sweet. For me, aught-one was personally wonderful, if geopolitically tragic. I both wanted and needed to dance. // We saw a few Leonids, standing out by Lake Pontchartrain in the relative absence of light pollution. One had a green trail, signifying what? Copper? // Haven't seen the aurora borealis since my childhood in Buffalo. Unforgettable – that same year I saw Sputnik 1 pass over. // Wow – when you disagree strongly on a political question with Toni, that must have been *some* discussion. // I'm trying a number of different tactics in regards to winning a **Challenger** Hugo. Every lettercol contributor in every genzine I see gets a complimentary copy. Every SF club – as opposed to trekkie and gamer groups – gets a complimentary copy. Every convention bid gets a complimentary copy. But these are nickle-&-dime maneuvers in a battle that requires grand strategy. *I've got to get on the Net.* My current site is not what I need. // Seeing the WTC in "person" helps make the disaster more real. At our first look at lower Manhattan in December, Rosy, who hadn't seen the Towers outside of TV, wasn't sure about where they were in Manhattan and noticed nothing. I too noticed "nothing" – the Great Big Nothing gap where two enormous silver

buildings had once stood. // About racial “profiling” – I wouldn’t blame anyone for taking long second looks at Arabs after 9-1-1, but I would blame those who caused those Arabs discomfort without any indication that they meant harm. // Insightful comment about sales alertness. As a trial lawyer, I should be able to glean a person’s thoughts from his body language, but put that down as another talents I should have developed and never did. // Clinton was lucky, all right: in his enemies. Had he faced more reasonable men, of less obvious hypocrisy and hysteria, his fate would have been much less kind. But the Republicans did not play him sensibly; they castigated him as less-holy-than-they, with hungry grins on their faces, and so it was their downfall the people found themselves desiring and enjoying. A put-upon man, no matter how personally tacky, will win sympathy.

Trivial Pursuits #96 / Janice Scary stuff this issue ... possible layoffs, needles in the eye, Microsoft, Ashcroft ... *yih* // Cool that you should see Barry Bonds’ record home run. I wonder who got the ball – before Cooperstown exercises its rights of eminent domain. I’m only sorry Mark McGwire has retired. When healthy, he had the wherewithal to pursue and exceed 73 ... // The BCS – whatever that stands for – was acclaimed by the Today show as the second-biggest sports blunder of 2001. First? You have to ask? The XFL, stripper cheerleaders and all ... // GAH YIH YIKES BARF! When you say “I’d rather stick a needle into my eye,” you’re not just quoting Terms of Endearment! Horrible story about the clogged tear duct and the Mengolean treatment for it. GAH YIH YIKES // Orycon sounds more like an excuse to watch football on a different TV set than a convention, but at least it’s in a pretty area. // I’ve never received a Nigerian scam spam. Should I feel neglected? //

Re: Hugos. It’s my stalwart belief that voters can both salute quality and “spread the wealth” to new faces – see my “apples & oranges” argument a mailing or so past. In any event, a fan writer to my eye is an amateur writer, and Langford is an award-winning professional. It’s the same as if fandom gave Kelly Freas 20 fan artist Hugos in a row. He’s better than anyone else publishing, so why not? Because it isn’t fair, it flies against the purpose of the awards, and it hurts the spirit of

the community. To improve the pacing of the award ceremony, get rid of the *Seiuns* (as I’ve said often), and rehearse the guest presenters, so we won’t have to sit through some goof forgetting to read the nominees or butchering Hlavaty’s name or whatever. // Whatever happened to the president of the Air Traffic Controllers Union, whose strike gave Reagan his first chance to look tough to the great unwashed? I wonder if he was a Republican mole, in office to do just that: make Ronnie look good ... // You should visit Ground Zero. The flower-strewn fences around the site are still bedecked with photos of the missing, pictures of handsome young folks in happy times. It’s almost unbearable. // I repeat: I want to collect tales of P.C. “zero tolerance” school boards and roast them in their newspaper letter columns. I understand public fear, but public stupidity is something for which we should all have “zero tolerance.”

Avatar Press 2.16 / Randy This is a fine zine with spiffy photos. Your excellent worldcon report, for instance, features some beauties (if no Rebecca Morris), and your first page made me drool. Part of that was for your new car. // That nuclear power plant you flew over ... my then-wife Beth and I flew over the same one, I’m sure, on our way to my brother’s wedding in 1982. Could it have been Three Mile Island? // I hope that Big-Named Fan who rebuffed you on the first day of the convention wasn’t me, not that I can sanctily claim BNFdom. If so, forgive me; I was soused. As for the Kinko’s in the main hotel, I kept going by there to check my standings in the Sci-Fi Weekly Hugo Poll, worthless though it was. // Those desserts at Le Bec Fin sound interesting, particularly these days, when I’m lucky to get a single grape after a meal. Tell us more, slowly. And the Phamous Philly Cheese-steak sandwiches ... *slobber* // Rosy loved the MilPhil masquerade, and bought a sample CD from the female *a capella* group which entertained afterward. // I went to one ASFA Charity Auction a few years ago that still haunts me. I passed up a chance to buy an original Stephen Hickman sketch of a pirate ship for \$60. It had “Challenger cover” written all over it ... and now, it’s gone. // You’re right: to be a part of *real, classic* SF fandom, you have to hit a

worldcon or two. Does this mean that the multitudes at Dragon*Con aren't real fans? Ask me when I've been to one. // Can't wait for the Huntsville DSC! // Terrific artwork, as usual. (You should have come out much higher in the artwork category of our egopoll.) I was very pleased to run the Varley/Verne piece in my latest; it's good to have you there ... and here..

Frequent Flyer / Tom Continued sympathy to Anita on the passing of her mother. As you'll see when I write my trip report from this Christmas, I'm saying goodbye to mine now, a little bit at a time. It is isn't easy, no matter how long it takes. // I hope airport experiences are back to normal because the heightened security we've been promised is settled in place, not because the airlines have decided to forget it. See my comment to Toni about the imbecile in Atlanta. Was he really only trying to make a flight? // Nawlins is a tourist town. I haven't heard how much worse off the city is because of lower tourist revenues; probably, not so bad, since no one is going to let a minor terrorist war get in the way of the Superbowl. By the way, the Big Game falls right in the middle of Carnival this year, screwing up any number of parades and balls. While we're talking about football, I'm amending my call. Rams over Steelers this year.// A bald eagle named Challenger? Can I get a photo of him? I like that name ...

Home With the Armadillo #50 / Liz Your quilt covers are gorgeous, splendid abstracts with powerful subtexts. The 9-1-1 quilt depicts a gap in the skyline, which is the most noticeable thing about lower Manhattan these days: I've compared the sight to a smile, missing a tooth. Beautiful color work, too. // Regarding the mystery novel: since, typically, a crime is solved or an injustice corrected, I'd say the genre brings order to chaos, which is perhaps a substantial appeal. // Interesting that you're close with the O'Briens; Ulrika sent me the only negative LOC I've yet received about **Challenger** #15: she didn't like the incorrect umlaut or whatever I ignorantly placed on the word "Skal". // Kent State ... so long ago, it feels like yesterday. The question seems to be, did the National Guard aim at specific targets or did they just fire blindly? To my knowledge, no one ever interviewed the idiot

Guardsmen, not that they would have told the truth, but they *look* like they're aiming, and we know who they hit. Whatever, I hope their souls rot for it. // The "wallet" police shooting case came from New York, another one of the run of atrocities of Rudy Giuliani's administration now forgotten in his wave of adulation. New Yorkers have many virtues, but they're also more than happy to sacrifice an innocent every once in a while so they can feel safe. // **Guernica** took more than a month to finish, as I understand, but the painting was indeed done quickly. Picasso was offended by the bombing of the ancient Basque capital to the point of obsession. I'm looking for a good print to replace the torn one I used for that recent SM cover, but the local art emporia only feature light, faded copies. // As for the administration's ugly agenda, lots of people oppose its opportunism. We are definitely Not Alone. But ... *where is Al Gore?* // You pay Randy a great compliment when you ask to use his illo as the basis for a quilt. I hope he okays the idea. As for yipping chihuahuas, I never minded them. Yipping *Pekinese*, on the other hand (forgive me, ghost of Sinbad), deserve little more than the imprint of a heavy boot.

Handcuffs and Peanut Butter / Portraits of Grief / Bartlett's part 2 / Jeff You've heard about the Afghan kids who opened one of our food packets, found peanut butter, and not knowing what it was, played with it like clay. So "Handcuffs and Peanut Butter" could describe our Afghan policy. // **Portraits of Grief** is utterly horrible ... and yet, I read the new entries, ever week in the NYT. Good question: how would Gore have handled the 9-1-1 crisis had honesty prevailed in the last election? Wingers might imply that he would have caved in and wimped out, but I find that incredible; I think he would have pursued Osama and the Taliban in much the same way that W's masters have. I know Gore would have had no truck with Ashcroft's assault on the Bill of Rights, because such a winger maniac would not have gotten within *phoning distance* of a Gore administration. (What will Gore do now? I'm trying to find out, but no one – not even our senators – seems to know how to write him a letter.) There is no need to equivocate – the Democratic party is vastly more honest, more fair, more true to the

Constitution than the Republicans, which remain the party of Watergate, Iran-contra, and the stolen election of 2000: sleaze to the core. Your comments on these issues, by the way, belong in a newspaper – not just in an apazine. // Sean Penn is a great actor – though his **I am Sam** looks suspect, the presence of Michelle Pfeiffer **PFEIFFER** notwithstanding – but a dull director. He seems to start out shouting and never let up. Speaking of film, your thoughts on **In the Bedroom** are anxiously anticipated. Slight spoiler alert. I loved the acting – especially Tom Wilkinson, whom I didn't know beforehand – and the exquisite use of silences, but ... did the film have a resolution? Wilkinson's last dialog seems to conflict with the clear symbolism of his band-aid. Finally, I found the flick to be a mesh of **Ordinary People** with **Death Wish**, morally confusing and unsatisfying.

// As for **Lord of the Rings**, I loved it, and expect it to be an Oscar nominee and the Hugo winner. I missed the books' depth, their music, their poetry – but the adventure, the mystic beauty and horror of Middle Earth, ahh ... those came through. To my shame, I had my doubts that a rather plain woman like Cate Blanchett would make a convincing Galadriel (she was a perfect cocaine tramp in **The Shipping News**, some contrast), but she understood what was required of her, and *shone*, a Lady to whom we would all offer the Ring of Power over our lives. // Speaking as one-male-who-hates-accompanying-our-wives-on-feminine-type-errands to another, have you seen that commercial for sore throat spray where the guy tries to beg off taking his lady to **Tears of the Heart** because his throat hurts? "Chloroseptic," says the voiceover, as we watch him sit stupefied in the theatre, surrounded by bawling females, "... sometimes it works *too well*." // That's dreadful about the 12-year-old girl who committed suicide. Y'all had dinner with her family a week before – of course, if you'd noticed anything, you'd've said something. What can be said now?

// What's **The Syndic**? // The novel of **Candy** was dull porn. I've never seen the Ewa Aulin (sic) flick of which Ned is so enraptured, but I did see some *sensitive* and touching *stills* from the XXX-rated Carol Connors version in a Swedish magazine once. // It's a shame that Russell

Crowe won that ill-deserved Oscar for **Gladiator** last year, since he is much, much better in **A Beautiful Mind**. Ignore the trailer, which pitches the movie as an insipid chickflick; it's actually a pretty intelligent and harrowing portrait of a brilliant schizophrenic mind. **Shine** for mathematicians ... **Good Will Hunting** for grown-ups. // Regarding Krispy Kreme, Rosy prefers Dunkin Donuts, but she'll come around. Have you ever visited a KK outlet? They have windows onto their production line. You see the dough being cut, being shaped, being fried, and then – oh God – passing beneath a waterfall of pure, satiny sugar before making its warm, succulent way into – oh, oh, God, *GOD!* – a hot, ravenous mouth. You feel like Homer Simpson, and all you want to do is jump on that conveyer belt and lay there with your mouth open.
Yummmmmmmmm

"**Yngvi**" #74 / *Toni* Getting nervous? // The incident of the idiot who closed down the Atlanta airport made the national news. I wonder what happened to the doofus. However stupid he was, leaping over barricades, the airport authorities overreacted. The creep who tried to blow up a transatlantic flight with a shoe-bomb, on the other hand, or foot – that's a different matter, and needs careful investigation. // Been looking for an excuse to revisit Austin; the lure of Willie Siros' great genre bookstore, Adventures in Crime & Space, is irresistible. // As for Charl Proctor's column ... I'm deathly tired of movies about "cute crooks," so I hated **Bandits**. Was that my Galadriel? Never saw **Hearts in Atlantis**. Being also tried of movies about "cute psychotics," I also disliked **K-Pax**; it struck me like a half-baked remake of an infinitely superior Jeff Bridges film, **The Fisher King**. // Gwen has a point with her fear of clowns: when I was a kid I was scared of Santa Claus. Had I Toni's conservative leanings, I would ascribe this to an instinctive revulsion to over-generous liberalism, but I think it was the beard that freaked me out. // But speaking seriously for once, can you translate John Ashcroft's refusal to examine gun registrations for terrorist activity into something like English? He's anxious to violate every other Amendment to the Constitution; why is the Second so holy?

Mysterious Destinations / *mike* Attractive zine this time! Good color work, and I love the comic book babes. Who drew that Batgirl on page 19? Kick me to death, woman! Reminding me of the awful story in which two hoods lost a fistfight because they were ogling Batgirl's legs. Batman and Robin weren't distracted, but we all know about *them*, don't we? // Nice section on your adorable kitten. *My cat hates my guts.* He usually greets me with a goose-like hiss and dashes across my feet when I rise in the night. Just this morning I was hugging my wife, looked over my shoulder and caught him glaring at me like a rejected suitor. Jeez, cat, gimme a break. // The sainted Martina may enjoy reading your praise fo Czechvar Beer; I should pass it along. //

Your freedom/security formulae zip o'erhead like a Stealth fighter, their significance not even guessable. // I tend to look at 9-1-1 as the yuppie generation's loss of innocence, and as Columbine was for an even younger part of America, and Kent State was for us. That "immunity" you mention is gone; the world will never seem as comfortable again. At least the country went to war for theuppies; middle America cheered when Nixon gunned us down. // Good ol' Tank McNamara. I wish the local paper carried him. Never have I seen the rank hypocrisy and hilarity of America's sports addiction portrayed so well. // Again, an important point about the terrorists. They attacked the loci of American economic and military power. They thought that by killing the head of the American Beast, the body would die. Boy, did they miscalculate! I can see no adverse effect to our military, and whatever economic damage occurred because of 9-1-1 has been subsumed by the recession anyway. All they did was make trouble for themselves. If they'd wanted to do real damage, they should have done as my brother feared they'd do, and gone after the power complex near Niagara. // Speaking of photos, it cost us \$52 to develop the 14 rolls we brought home from vacation. It took a few days for Sam's to get them back, but that cheap price was worth it. // Translation, Sherman would rather fight housewives than soldiers. That mfer may have won the war, but he cost the country a hundred years of bitter regional division. // Reading your excellent analysis of the Spenser/Hawk relationship, I am tempted to shout, "Come on,

Joe Mantegna!" I loved his Spenser TV movie. // I mentioned the aspect of **From Hell** that impressed me the most, but here it is again: the makeup for the Elephant Man was by far the best I've ever seen, far better than the lumpen mask hung on John Hurt in the David Lynch film. This time I really believed I was looking at a human being – hideously deformed, for all the world like one of Michelangelo's last sculptures, a human form struggling out of chaotic matter. Oscar-worthy job. // Speaking of famous houses, Rosy and I must have driven past one when we were in Buffalo: Teddy Roosevelt took his oath of office on Delaware Avenue. // Nothing bestial about your anger at the 9-1-1 killers. In the face of inhuman behavior, rage is only appropriate. Let's drag Osama to Ground Zero in chains.

Tennessee Trash #44 / *Gary R.* See, Gary? If you'd voted in the egoboo poll, you'd've received the 25-point bonus, and made the top 5. // Regarding the Robe boys' taekwondo: train them well! I plan to employ them as convention bodyguards in my dotage. // "The [Halloween] costumes in Mexico tend to be too morbid for American ... tastes." Reminding me of that disturbing Bradbury story, "The Next One in Line" (I think), about that horrible Mexican village that disinters its dead *and puts them on display* if their families can't afford a burial tax. A B-level horror film I saw once showed the exquisite Samantha Eggar touring that nightmare, and I once flipped through a grisly book of photos – reprinting the story – from the place. *yih* // Funny that blood pressure meds are available over the counter in Mexico. Maybe I could find the propanolol I'm supposed to take. The manufacturer being months in arrears in shipping that beta blocker, I've been put on metoprolol, which is apparently a totally different drug. // You well state the hypocrisy of the government's 1984-style advice: "Terrorism is always imminent; inform on anyone you think suspicious." This is small government? // If you were surprised that there are **Monty Python and the Holy Grail** action figures, imagine my astonishment at the **Reservoir Dogs** action figures I found last Christmas! Mr. Pink and Mr. Blonde ... just the guys Barbie wants to share the toybox with! // Nifty and *educational* fun eavesdropping on your conversation about music with B'r'r Lynch. I

should have learned this stuff in college – another proof that I wasted the greatest opportunity of my life to enrich my spirit. // Was I feeling “prophetic” when I wrote that the WTC bombers would be living in fear? No ... just the slightest bit bellicose. And I don’t regret it a farthing. // 280! God, you do have high cholesterol. Mine is +/- 220, and I’m on a diet/exercise regimen that I resist constantly, much to Rose-Marie’s dismay. // Speaking of the **Maine**, its mast stands at Arlington. While we’re on the topic of the turn of the last century, I’ve begun **Theodore Rex**, Edmund Morris’ second volume about the first Roosevelt. It’s wonderful, of course.

Passages #11 / Janet Cute cover drawing! Not as cute as your last one, though. I look forward to seeing your babies again. // The fundamentalists who object to Harry Potter believe that witchcraft=Satanism. Need we point out that isn’t the way the Potter universe is constructed. They celebrate *Christmas* at Hogwarts! And with nary a human sacrifice ... // Your article on postpartum depression is topical, of course, thanks to the terrible Andrea Yates story. Your explanation is both clear and fascinating. And it could be valuable. I xeroxed it for my law office, in case we get appointed to a new mother’s case.

Guilty Pleasures 19 / Eve I like that list of colleges to which Raphi is applying, especially since I never dared apply to the Ivy League myself. I had to suffer the ignominy of Berkeley. I love your boy’s comparison of Yale to Hogwarts! // Micah studying the banjo? Tell him, next stop, Earl Scruggs, and that weird Uncle Guy will be expecting “Foggy Mountain Breakdown” by the ‘03 DSC! // “Good novelists are thieves and liars!” was essentially what Lillian Hellman told my writing class, six or seven millennia ago, or as you more succinctly, it’s all grist for the mill. Alfred Bester (to drop another name) told me that a writer never wastes anything – everything he learns or sees or senses, no matter how trivial, comes in handy sooner or later. // Phooey on those Philistines who snickered at the title **Captain Sinister**. (I take it the guy is left-handed.) It’s far zestier than **Pirate’s Song**. // **Windjammer** – ah yeah, the first (and only) film I ever saw in Cinerama, the

process using three synchronized projectors. I was a slip of a lad, and remember only the first wide-angle shot and the scene where the captain of the ship lectures his young crewmen about shore leave. They didn’t say what he was talking about, but even then, I got it.

The Sphere vol. #195, no. 1 / **Don** Nathan Alexander Markstein not only has a tooth but righteous cheeks! My congrats to Rachel on contributing so magnificently to the 21st Century! // Actually, thanks to New Orleans swami Ken Kafoed, I learned about the significance of September 11th to Arabs on September 11th, and I believe the tidbit was broadcast on **Today** while footage of the collapsing buildings was still on the screen. // Rich Lynch was not in SFPA while you worked at the porno theatre, so could not simply rely on **The Sphere** to learn whether the job got you arrested. Finding – a bit late – that the story was questionable, he asked a local to checked the legal record, who reported honestly on what it showed. What’s your gripe? // The **Toonopedia** is truly superb; I’m nominating it for the special Hugo being given for websites by ConJose.

Oblio No. 137 / All Things Must Pass Gary B. I love that **Strange Adventures** cover on your colophon. “Space Museum” ... “Star Hawkins” ... of course, “the Atomic Knights.” Good ol’ SA ... probably the comic closest to Julie Schwartz’s heart. How I mourned when Jack Schiff took over in the great **Batman/Superman** trade ... especially since I’d just bought a subscription. // Rough news about your cousin; I hold mine almost as close as siblings. // Interesting reading about the founder of the modern **National Enquirer**, the sleazy rag that kept Rosy alive for 20 years. We passed another anthrax site, the NBC Studios, on our Christmas break; didn’t see Katie Couric in the **Today Show** set, but I did see and envy the chair she sits in. Funny story about the driver-by holding his nose as he passed the affected building. // Oh, hell, the election. Lowest moment in the history of American democracy. Of course, there has been worse news since than the crushing of an able, decent man’s lifelong ambition, for which he worked with diligence and decency, but the loss of Al Gore to public life is a repulsive waste. // The **Little Archie** art saga is a cool story. Next time I’m in the area, all things being amenable, I’d like

to meet Bob Bolling. Hmm ... page 20 of the comic art is missing. On it, Little Archie must have done something Not Good to win the whuppin' he gets on page 21. // Joe Staton joined SFPA for the second time during my first OEship. He produced good covers, illos for the zine of the year (**The Goodbye Insult**), and zines that convinced me forever that he was no friend of mine. // An interesting take on **Superman**. Naturally, the religious analysis is a bit ridiculous, but I like the Clark/Supes dichotomy Chris Hutchins emphasizes. The best moment in **Kingdom Come**, after all, came when Supes put on his specs again, and we got Clark back. // Luthor is *not* a good guy: he's Supes' nemesis and antithesis, an egomaniac of pure genius and pure evil. I haven't seen **Smallville**, but if they portray Lex sympathetically, that has to be a mistake. (**Esquire** likes the show.) // In a way, George Harrison's death hurts in a very different way than did John Lennon's. Lennon was from this vale of tears untimely ripp'd, a tragic and ugly and wasteful death. George was brought to his end by illness, by the fact that he was, however brilliant and famous, only mortal. His death reminds us that even if we evade madness as an enemy, as he did when he escaped that loon who invaded his house and stabbed him, time is still out there, and it waits for us all. Still, he gave us beauty. He practiced till his fingers bled, and he gave us "Here Comes the Sun". Someone once said they could listen to that song for 17 hours and still not be tired of it. *It's all right.*

SM186 / Challenger 14 selections / Challenger 15 / me One of the reasons I wanted SFPA to see **Chall #14** was to read Gary Brown's terrific article about comics-buying, and Kurt Erichsen's wonderful illos. One of the reasons I wanted Gary to see #15 was so he could read the great response his reminiscence drew. // Tried something different with the photos for **Chall #15**, scanning them onto disc. The repro was maybe 85% as sharp as straightforward halftoning, but the ease of sizing the shots, flopping a couple, and laying out the pages compensated for a great deal. I wish I'd stuck with Times New Roman throughout, though; Goudy Old Style looks clean and modern, but didn't xerox well. // And so, with a last toast of Ol' Pretzel (the only 7-year-old, 150 proof

pretzels in the world, or did you *believe* that horsepoop?), on Wednesday, January 16, 2002, these mc's close.



Knock on wood till my knuckles bleed, but as I commit this **Spiritus Mundi** to the post, it seems as if one of my New Year's Resolutions is already accomplished.

Dear heaven, I am so loathe to write about it, since – God *please* no! – I might jinx it, but it looks very possible that my erstwhile neighbor, present boarder Cindy may have found a place to live.

Or rather, it found her. A fellow attorney referred me to a social worker in her New Orleans office, and after much pestering he agreed to meet with Boo and us. We thought he'd simply chat with her a couple of minutes and then give us some pointers on which social services she was eligible for and those agencies which might help find her a place. When we arrived we were confronted by a room full of do-gooders, whom the social worker identified as a newly-formed non-profit charity group, designed to help people the social services couldn't aid. That was Cindy, all right. They got on the phone, and within thirty minutes, the lady who may be everyone's salvation walked in.

Handsome, Egyptian, a divorcee with a big house in a very nice part of town, she needed someone to housesit while she worked and help her with her rent. Maternal and intelligent, she understood Boo's situation at once, and took us all by the pad. Needs a coat of paint, but very nice. It's been a few days, she's spoken often with Boo ... it looks like it's going to happen!

For no more rent than she was paying at Fontainebleau, Cindy gets a big bedroom, bathroom, and a rather narrow but still livable sitting room. *We* get our place to ourselves, to unpack in, to rearrange, to live in, our own home, our own at last.

Let it be ...

SM187

