

# Variations on a Theme #19

from Rich Lynch • for SFPA 232 • written in February 2003

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## February

February isn't my favorite month – usually the weather is crappy all month, not really winter and too soon for spring, and its length of only four weeks makes the monthly bills come a few days sooner the next month. This year the month started out spectacularly bad (and I don't really believe the space junk impact theory), and may well end much the same way, depending on what world events transpire (we'll know by the time you're reading this). It's mid-month as I'm composing this paragraph, and we're in the middle of the Storm of the Century here (so far, at least). Nine inches of snow on the ground from last night, and maybe another ten inches still to come – the weather forecasters say that it might make the top-five of all time in the D.C. area, in terms of snowfall. I'm glad it's a holiday weekend, because it'd doubtful the streets will be clear enough for what would have been rush hour traffic tomorrow, otherwise.

## March

I need to get an early start on this SFPazine because next month is the annual Lynch Family Reunion, down in Tampa, Florida. I'll be driving down again, as usual, and this time Nicki will probably be coming along too, as her job disappeared in a layoff just before Christmas and the job market is soft enough here that she's not expecting much to happen before spring. As for the Reunion, there will be much food and baseball. We have tickets to two spring training games – the Phillies and Pirates in Clearwater, and the Yankees and (somebody) in Tampa. We found out last year that it was a lot more fun to do family meals ourselves at the suites-type of motel where we'll be staying instead of heading off to restaurants. Everybody has ideas of what to bring, and what kind of food to have. I've offered to make bread (which I do every weekend here – home made bread is vastly better than anything store-bought). It'll be fun.

## Mailing Comments – SFPA 231

### Ned Brooks

On city driving: “Anyone driving at 55 on the Atlanta expressways probably wouldn't survive to be arrested for blocking traffic.” The same here. Survival speed on the Washington Beltway and on I-270 is probably about 65mph, even though the speed limit is only 55. It's not unusual to be driving at 60-65 on those roads and have a State Trooper go past you at about 70. Driving the Beltway ought to qualify you for NASCAR, with the number of drivers speeding by and weaving through traffic. It's not a place for the timid!

### Guy Lillian / rear-ender '02

After what happened to you and your car, perhaps you might consider changing this title next year!

## Guy Lillian / *Spiritus*

On the overall health of the apa: "I agree [with Jeff] that SFPA is robust and happy. ... The way we are now is the stable apa we always knew we would eventually be." I think we're hanging in there, but 'robust and happy' seems way too much rose-colored-glasses to me. Every time we lose a member, there's no stable replacement. Several mailings ago, I remember somebody referring to Trinlay Khadro as (and I paraphrase from memory) "the best new member we've had in years." She lasted less than a year, if I remember correctly. The copy count required by the OE has been on a decreasing trend for years. This is 'robust'? The existence of Internet 'weblogs' have certainly been competition to papernet apas, and maybe that's where the next generation of apahacks has gone. Blogs are a lot more informal than an apazine, and you get much more feedback from two months of blogging than you do with an apazine.

On California and ConJosé: "I'm heartsick that we couldn't go." You've got a much bigger adventure later on this year, though, which ought to more than make up for it. Congratulations on the DUFF victory, and we all expect that, based on your earlier writings, you will write the best DUFF trip report ever. Make it so!

Once more on Hugo balloting: "The Australian ballot does produce the occasional injustice, such as when a candidate is so clearly preferred over his competition, yet loses because he doesn't have enough second and third place votes. ... 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> place votes count more than 1<sup>st</sup>s." Geez, where to start? First of all, a candidate cannot really be defined as "being so clearly preferred over his competition" if he/she gets less than 50% of the first place votes – clearly, most of the voters preferred somebody else, right? A better way to look at it is, do the voters prefer a particular candidate over another particular candidate – in that case, you have to look at the relative rankings of those candidates on each ballot. In the case you cite, about Frank Wu, it turned out that more voters ranked Teddy Harvia higher than Frank Wu, regardless on whether it was a 1<sup>st</sup> vs. 2<sup>nd</sup>, a 2<sup>nd</sup> vs. 3<sup>rd</sup>, or whatever. So Harvia won. It's the sorting out of these relative rankings is how the Australian ballot works. Look at it another way – suppose that there are four candidates running for the Louisiana Senate seat – a Republican and three Democrats. The Republican gets 35%, and the Democrats get 30%, 25%, and 10%, respectively. Would you say that the Republican is "clearly preferred by the voters and should be awarded the seat"? It looks to me like about 2/3 of the voters wanted somebody else, and a subsequent run-off would prove it. The Louisiana Senate election is therefore a two-step oversimplified version of the Australian ballot.

On movies: "Mike Resnick waxed nearly apoplectic over the stupidity of *Signs*." He's not alone. At ConJosé there was a panel on SF in the media and one of the panelists (I can't remember which one) remarked that in *Signs* we were asked to believe that a group of aliens who had navigated their way many lightyears to Earth were not able to figure out how to break into a root cellar. And that was one of the nicer things they had to say about the movie!

On what happened to Alice Sheldon/James Tiptree, Jr.: "When it came time to write a truly angry story ... she opted for a pen name. ... And when her husband died, she chose to join him. Go figure." You've distorted what actually happened to her. She was a former U.S. Government employee (State Department, I think) and apparently was strong willed. Her husband, whom she'd been married for many years, was slowly dying of what most likely was Alzheimer's Disease, and it eventually came to the point where she didn't want to see more of it, or want him

to lose whatever remained of his quality of life. He didn't just die – she shot him, and then herself. Murder suicide. She was elderly herself, but still a productive writer at the time. You have to wonder what novels and stories she might have written if she'd decided on a different course.

### **David Schlosser**

On mail sanitizing: “I seriously doubt that anyone is autoclaving mail to sterilize it. That pressure and steam just ain't good for paper.” True. They may be dry-heating the mail, though. Whatever they're doing makes the envelopes very brittle, not to mention sometimes discoloring the contents.

### **Richard Dengrove**

On natural disasters: “The theory I heard about Tungusta is that it was hit by a small comet. ... And the water evaporated leaving no remains.” There would still be a rather impressive impact crater under that scenario. A small comet is probably the most likely cause, but the explosion had to have been an air burst – no ‘hit’ of any kind happened, except by a huge shock wave that flattened trees in a radial pattern for miles and miles.

On *The Ifs of History*: “If the Confederate Army had marched on Washington after Bull Run...” If they had, the war would have ended soon afterward, because Washington was a heavily fortified and garrisoned military camp during the Civil War. A frontal assault of that nature would have been catastrophic to the Army of Northern Virginia. Lee was smarter than that, as would be almost any military commander under those circumstances.

On sanitization of work mail: “If you are afraid the post-9-1-1 post office will destroy perishable items like CDs sent to your workplace, then the thing to do is have them sent to your home.” The times that CDs have arrived, I hadn't known they were coming. At any rate, they seemed just fine after whatever sanitization process was used, so apparently it's not too destructive. We're also discouraged from broadcasting out our home addresses for business mail (partly for our own protection, since only the mail sent to government addresses is being sanitized).

### **Sheila Strickland**

On sightseeing during a convention trip: “I could take a few extra days, but I always think I can't afford it.” I've been that way, too, and it's taken me many years to at least somewhat escape that mindset. You could also look at it as some vacation days in an interesting city, where the travel costs have already been paid for. And as for costs, it's now much easier to find good and also affordable places to stay; the **hotels.com** web site, in particular, is a proven money saver. And when would you be back there again?

### **Tom Feller**

On plot points: “I have intentionally NOT reread the Harry Potter or *Lord of the Rings* books so that I would not be anticipating plot points.” I've yet to read any of the Harry Potter books, so I'm blissfully ignorant of any plot points or places where the plot of the movie diverges from the book. But now that I've seen the movies, there's much less of an incentive to read the books.

### **Gary Brown**

On reasons for falling behind: “It just dawned on me why [Jeff is] so far behind in doing mailing comments – [he] type[s] the line(s) from the hook [he’s] commenting on first. That must take a lot of time, especially since [he has] to quote it accurately.” Gosh, that has to be it.

### **Janice Gelb**

On time patrol novels: “I only recently started reading Anderson’s Time Patrol stories and am sorry I didn’t start them sooner. This full-length novel of an anarchic organization trying to pervert the time stream was entertaining and thought provoking.” You might also try, then, a one-off novel by Keith Laumer titled *Dinosaur Beach*, which is somewhat the same concept and an easy, entertaining read. I’ve never read any of the Time Patrol novels, so I’ll have to look for them.

On fannish terms citations: “Evidently someone has found the Chauvenet cite for the term ‘fanzine’ ... [at] [http://66.108.177.107/SF/sf\\_citations.shtml](http://66.108.177.107/SF/sf_citations.shtml) ” That site has changed to here: [http://www.jessesword.com/SF/sf\\_fan.shtml](http://www.jessesword.com/SF/sf_fan.shtml) and is also incorrect in its attribution – the originator is Louis Russell Chauvenet, not Cy Chauvenet. (I’ve sent them an email.)

On surface rail rides: “Even on the slow-moving light rail, I doubt it would really take an hour to get from the airport Hyatt to the convention center.” You’re right, of course; I should have written ‘nearly an hour’. The two people I talked to who were staying out there said it was something like 45 minutes, but that probably included waiting for a train to come. I rode the thing coming back from the airport, and I remember it was maybe 10 minutes before a train stopped at the tram station where the airport bus dropped me off. Bad luck?

On *Winter Wanderings*: I hope you were able to escape Boston before the big storm hit. Not quite two feet of snow landed here in Gaithersburg, then a night of sleet which compacted it a bit. The whole area was paralyzed (that was two days ago, and it’s still not back to normal) to the point where the Governor declared a state of emergency. We’re not likely to ever attend another Boskone – a February convention road trip is just too risky from a weather outlook.

### **Toni Weisskopf Reinhardt**

On Hank’s “Guns in the Cockpit” essay: “Let us suppose that an attempted hijacking occurs. A hijacker has cut the throat of one stewardess and is threatening the other. The pilot ... opens the door, shoots, misses the hijacker and kills a first class passenger.” Yipes! With friends like that, who needs enemies? No, what actually happens is that another passenger takes his laptop and clocks the hijacker from behind, after which the hijacker is swarmed on by other passengers. Things have changed, let’s not forget. Putting guns in the pilots hands might not have even prevented anything on September 11<sup>th</sup> (the pilots were overtaken by surprise – they already had fire axes in the cockpit and apparently couldn’t get near them), and now is probably unnecessary as long as airport screeners are able to detect firearms in carry-on bags.

On election gamesmanship: “The Democrats [in Georgia] gerrymandered the districts, and then found that they had cut their own throats.” Gerrymandering is not, of course, a stunt limited to just the Democratic party. I’d actually like to see electoral votes in Presidential elections awarded individually by Congressional district rather than statewide winner-take-all, but if that were to occur, gerrymandering would become far, far worse than it is even now. But there’s a

way to even counteract that – a Constitutional amendment that would require that of any and all proposed redistricting plans, the one that gets chosen must be the one whose cumulative total distance of district boundaries is the smallest. That would rule out strange-shaped districts that have miles and miles of boundaries in favor of more regularly-shaped districts. It would be a contest of sorts to find the one most favorable plan for the state that had the smallest total of district boundaries, in miles.

On strange voting requirements: “I would make reading aloud the preamble to the Constitution a requirement for voting each and every time.” This would seem like cruel and unusual punishment for the poor poll workers, making them hear it over and over again, thousands of times during the day and evening. Do we have to do it from memory, or can we carry a cheat sheet? (And can we substitute the first verse of “Louie, Louie” instead?) So what’s your reasoning on why this would be a good thing? Voting is already limited to citizens.

### **Gary Robe**

On the cost of sporting events: [to Janice] “Even at the [rather high] prices you paid for [World Series] tickets they were cheap compared to Super Bowl tickets.” True – I heard that seats for that were going for upwards of a thousand dollars each. Even the cost of regular season games has gotten exorbitant – I stopped going to Washington Capitals games when the ticket cost reached about \$45 per seat. Baseball is not quite so bad, but it’s it’s still about \$20 a ticket for a reserved seat. Spring training games are now about \$10 per seat, which isn’t too bad, but still a lot more than they were just a few years ago.

### **Jeff Copeland**

On visiting Washington, D.C.: “We ... got to see the Lincoln Memorial first.” That’s about the halfway point of my gonzo full-court-press walking tour of Washington I do for visitors here. We start at Union Station, go to the Capitol, then west on Constitution to the Natural History Museum, then north to the Old Post Office Building (the view from the tower is the best in Washington), then to Ford’s Theater (if there’s interest), then past the White House and further along Constitution to the Vietnam War Memorial, then to the Einstein Statue (a great photo op, getting your photo taken while sitting on Einstein’s lap), and \*then\* to the Lincoln Memorial. After that, it’s to the Korean War Memorial, then to the Roosevelt Memorial (which seems more like an upgraded part of West Potomac Park rather than a memorial) then to the Jefferson Memorial, then to the Washington Memorial, then east on Independence past the Holocaust Museum to the Smithsonian Castle, and finally to the Air and Space Museum. All this takes 6-8 hours, at least, and it’s easily five miles by foot. You had intended to stroll through the Capitol “except that you can’t do that anymore.” Yeah, and you can’t even walk on the terrace outside the Capitol either – that’s one of the most impressive photo op places in the city, looking up toward the dome. Now it’s off limits. (When you were at the Air and Space Museum, you were about three blocks from where I work.)

On fanzine web sites: “The other common error – which I think the Lynches commit with the *Mimosa* web site – is to try to duplicate the printed page on the web.” You’re right we’re trying to do that; we’ve always maintained that the web version is not a separate entity – it’s the same fanzine, and therefore should look the same, at least as much as possible. We have only one-time

usage rights for the articles and artwork that we use in each issue, too, so it's important that the web version not be significantly different than the printed version.

On the Dramatic Presentation Hugo Award: "There's now a short-form Best Dramatic Presentation category – I still think of it as the *Buffy* category." I guess one test on if it's working correctly is how many non-*Buffy* TV episodes get nominated. I plan to nominate an episode of *The Dead Zone* ("Siege") and *Stargate SG-1* ("The Other Guys"). *The Dead Zone*, in particular, is a dandy series that's turning into 'don't miss' for me.

## More February

One advantage of being told not to go to work (the Federal Government was shut down today) is that I was able to get all the mailing comments done – with the trip to Florida in March, I was afraid I'd get caught in a time squeeze. Now if I can just get to the post office to mail this...

This time of year isn't a great one for going to evening events down in Washington, but there have been some interesting ones. Back in January, Nicki came with me to a buffet at Hungary's embassy on a night so brutal, with the cold and the wind, that I'm grateful she brought a scarf and earwarmers with her for me. The event featured a short talk by the Science and Technology counselor about some of the notable scientists and inventors who were from Hungary, followed by a very fine meal that featured real Hungarian goulash and their national chocolate dessert that was to die for (I had three helpings!).

Not really enough room left this time for a Classical Music section, but I can say a few words about a famous Broadway musical that made it to network television this past weekend. It's one of my favorites, too – *The Music Man* – though this new version was not exactly warmly received by the reviewers (the *Washington Post*, in a review titled "Ferris Buehler's Off Day," thought Matthew Broderick's Prof. Henry Hill was a pale shadow of Robert Preston's version of the character). I liked it, though – it has some of the best music of any Broadway play, and it's stays good no matter who is singing it. To bring this back to the subject of classical music, the composer of all those wonderful tunes in *The Music Man* was himself a music man – Meredith Willson was an accomplished flutist who played in Sousa's band and then in the New York Philharmonic. Willson didn't remain a professional musician for very long; it soon became obvious he had a real talent for orchestration and composing. His most famous compositions, of course, were from Broadway – *The Music Man* and his other musical, *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* – but besides these, he also composed classical music; his two symphonies, descriptively titled "A Symphony of San Francisco" and "The Missions of California," are now available on an inexpensive disk (Naxos 8.559006). These two works are a bit moody and aren't overpoweringly melodic, but (lest that sounded overly negative) are pleasant and not at all difficult to listen to. You'll never hear them, though, unless you buy that CD, as no other recordings exist – they've, in effect, been upstaged.

And now, it's time to get *off* the stage. No more room! Final total for the big storm of ought-three was about 20 inches of snow here in Gaithersburg. More than half a week later, the streets are not yet completely cleared; that little oversight caused some mammoth gridlock last night, which made my commute home a three hour ordeal (almost two hours of which were the last 15 miles from the Metrorail stop to home).

Next time, some baseball talk, so I'll see you then!