

WASSAMATTA U.



The Fannish Education of Randy Byers

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... How Did I Get Here?

In the short term — such as it is — this collection is a promotional tool for my 2003 TAFF campaign. Despite the last words in the final piece, I am trying to get myself sent to the next Eastercon in Hinckley, and I thought that voters might be interested in a sampling of my writing to help them make up their minds one way or another. I've had to leave out a long travelogue/memoir, *Travels with the Wild Child*, but there are a couple of con-reports here that should give you an idea of what my TAFF trip report would be like. I think you'll find my writing full of fantasy, good humor, and near-hallucinatory levels of bewilderment, but grounded in a terse, sweaty fear of love and death. Just the qualities one looks for (and finds) in a TAFF candidate, I'm sure you'll agree.

Almost inevitably, however, the process of putting this collection together has also become an archeological expedition into my fannish career. Although they cover only ten years of writing, the various pieces to be found herein represent and bespeak close to 25 years in fandom. When strung in a line, they suggest the (not uncommon) story of someone who enters the ranks as a dedicated reader of the literature and who gradually gravitates (with overly loud protestations of indifference, in my case) to the trufannish subculture of that ancient and archaic practice, the production of amateur magazines. There is perhaps more repetition of certain parts of this story than is strictly necessary, but the perspective changes enough to keep the ball rolling, I hope.

So the present day finds me, despite my best efforts, deeper in the thick of institutional fandom, and Denys laughs when I mutter that fandom is just a goddamned hobby. If I really want to scare myself, I can make the case that I was already subcon-

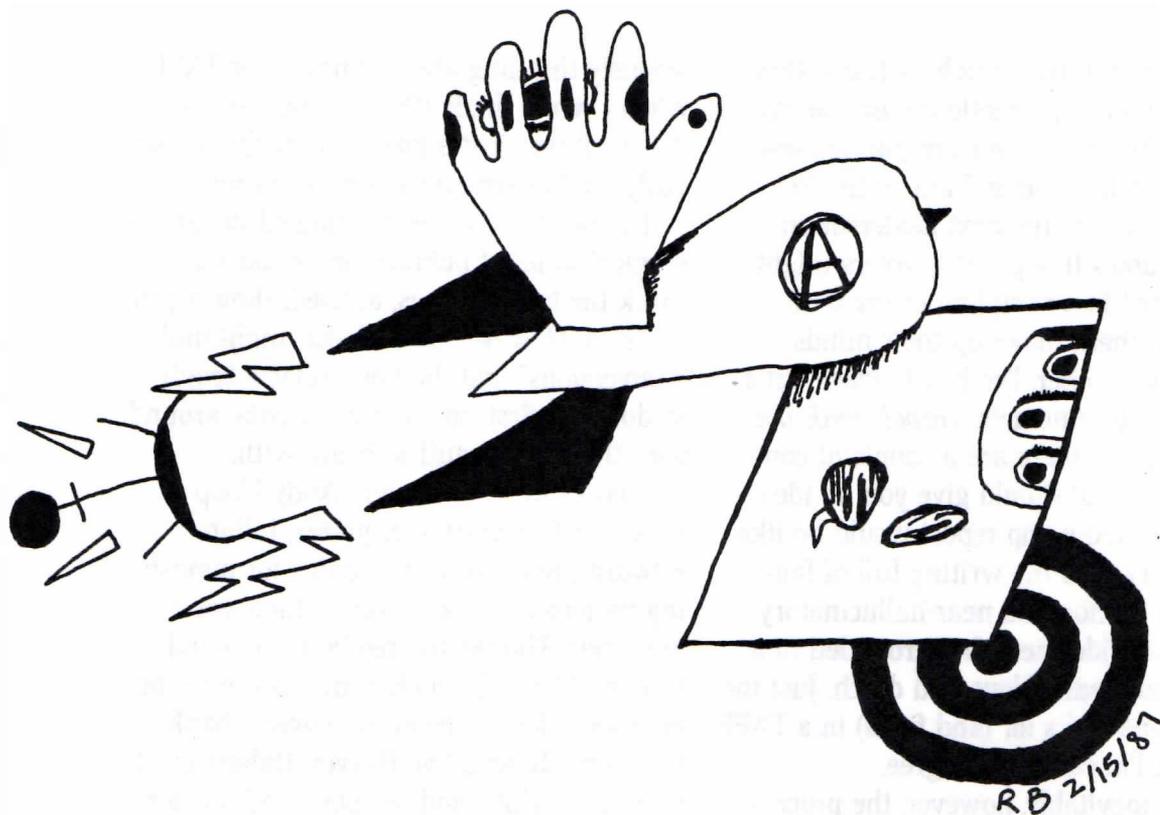
sciously thinking about running for TAFF when I wrote the Potflu conreport in 2000. No, no, it was just a joke! Except that apparently (and as usual) the joke is on me.

The pieces have been arranged in chronological order of publication, because I do think the fannish ones, at least, show a progression. However, some folks might find "Conversions" and the book review tough sledding at first, so feel free to poke around with the shorter stuff to begin with.

Thanks to Steve Brown, Andy Hooper, Victor Gonzalez, carl juarez, Lilian Edwards, and Alison Freebairn for publishing various of these pieces in their various zines. Thanks to Freddie Baer — and to Luke McGuff, who had first claim to the artwork — for the beautiful cover. Thanks to Yvonne Rowse, Eve Harvey, Robert Lichtman, Ted White, and Jae Leslie Adams for nominating me for TAFF. Finally, many prostrate thanks to carl for all the work he has put in on this collection, and for leading me to the gates of fandom once upon a time.

*Randy Byers
Seattle, January 2003*





Conversions *or* Confessions of a Fringe Faan

I.

I can't remember my earliest memories, but I can remember when I started to forget. "I'm an essentialist, I guess," said Carl. "At least at the moment."

Carl Juarez is my father. I met him on my first day at the University of Oregon. He came to my dorm room looking for my roommate, saw that I was reading something by Ellison, and spontaneously gave birth to me. It was an immaculate conception at a time when a true concept was the only thing I could admit to wanting. The way I tell it, I sprang from his forehead, although there are some who believe to this day that I was shaken from his thigh. That just goes to show you that we live in an age of desperate superstition.

I was already beginning to lose it at that point, and I was determined to get a grip. I needed a father badly, and drugs would help too. The fountain of religious experience lay down that road. Which gave another meaning to Father, come to think of it. Which is as good an example as any of the method I fell upon. If I didn't see a connection, I made one up.

We called it Internalism.

And so one day Father took us all to the convention. We were Carl₇₇, Carl_i, and Carl_e, who we thought was the most natural of us. This intuition was later confirmed when he, of the three, most successfully resisted the lure of fandom. He was also the oldest and tallest of us, I was next oldest and next tallest, and Carl₇₇ was youngest and shortest. Everything was inherently symmetrical in those days. It was all in the Scheme, whose outlines were then becoming known to me.

"On, then, to Vatican II.... Vatican II is a slan-shack: a house where a number of fans live together. The only other name of an inhabitant that I caught was John Carl. I suppose I should note here that Denys is gay (he calls himself a faggot, one reason being that this was the name for homosexuals burned as a preliminary to the main act: witches) and so is Paul."

Sometime after the Klingons landed, Carl₇₇ became very depressed, and his increased gravity plunged the two of us into an undeniable journey through spacetime to Moscow. There, in his role as spirit guide, he introduced me to the Minnikin of Yam. She was really cool. In her other identity, as the young, beautiful Hortensia, she was another of the New Fen, i.e., one of those of us who, as

Jerry explained it to me a couple years ago, passed directly from neofan to gafiate, thus sealing the fate of dignified fandom. We turned her on to Gang of Four, and I bravely suggested that I might massage her naked back, which, when she agreed, I then smothered with a brief, awkward kiss right before Father re-entered the room. My fear would have been a beautiful thing, had I been able to appreciate it. As it was, I could only use it to sharpen the blade I would eventually use on Father.

"This was on the way to a Chinese restaurant: something of a fannish tradition, I guess.... The situation was a strange one for me: I was amidst strangers who were basically already my friends. My behavior suffered for this juxtaposition. I have come to the conclusion that my personality must grow on a person to be fully appreciated. Thus my humor is not unleashed until I am generally familiar with the character of the other person.... I wasn't exactly uncomfortable, but it wasn't really a pleasant experience—somewhat unfulfilled. I felt that I should be chatting away with these people, but there was very little consistent conversation. I just sat there expectantly."

Anyway, I liked Denys immediately. I lay in the darkness and listened to him giggle and play with Jon in the next room, and I was amazed that people could *giggle* while they were having sex. I tried to fit this idea into the Scheme. I mean, back at the convention, I had seen Hortensia for the first time since we hadn't giggled while *we* were having sex, and I'd told her about Molly, who I'd just broken up with. I had tried to give her the impression that I was much more mature about sex now. I was hoping to give myself the same impression.

With a moral code comes a voice—a unique voice which is you, or not exactly you but rather a representation of yourself which is clear even if it is complex, and that voice may be a lie which you should know. Huh?

Part of your code should be to listen to other voices. Maintain flexibility. You are not perfect. The world changes.

I was haunted by the feeling that things were reeling out of control. What had I lost?

Tongue, lips, hands, hips.

"They have also discovered another tree whose fruit has a very odd property: for when they have parties and sit around a fire, they throw some of it into the flames, and as it burns it smokes like incense, and the smell of it makes them drunk just

as wine does us; and they get more and more intoxicated as more fruit is thrown on until they jump up and start dancing and singing. Such at least are the reports on how these people live."

Plastic phlegm. In the deep, starry hiatus, ghosts mull tired theories in covert palpitations. The face's orb resigns in pain, thankless, penniless, already forgotten whatever gouging ceremony set flame to nations. Why not slit the fevered skin when awareness takes its faltering meditation against insubordinate claws?

Why did I think paul was gay?

The Carl Combine lay, stoned out of its gourds, on the beds of the cheap motel. Its fingernails scratched at the fibers of the bedspreads, discovering in this action a surprising music. Without a word, it explored this new world of sound. Hesitant, shy noises became in time a frenzied, purposeful, integrated jam session. The bedspreads sang.

They laughed uncontrollably once self-consciousness returned.

"And to cap the climax was the incongruity of calling this jaunt an exploring expedition; for all the exploring we were doing we might as well have landed on Staten Island or Buffalo. Better, as far as I was concerned, because I'd seen Europa but had never been to Buffalo."

II.

On our way home, Denys sat in the back seat of the Fiesta, while Victor sat shotgun, stubble-faced, slack-jawed, and empty-eyed, a bright glow in his left nostril, whence issued a slow, awful voice: "You fans have a distorted perception of the world."

The voice paused, as if the entity in Victor's nose were seeking the proper concept, the *bon mot*.

The sun burned us to a cinder.

"I'm not really a fan," I said, adopting the same tone of pretend pretend-hurt that would piss off Sharee, Lucy, and Allyn when I complained of their failure to notice my presence at the founding-of-fwa party. Was it this passive-aggressive attitude that ultimately destroyed our links to the Grand Tradition, or were there deeper changes at work?

I waited. The pause drifted. On the way south to the Bay Area, the water pump in Victor's Toyota died and was resurrected. Heading toward the redwood forest on a foggy, winding two-lane highway at night, I swerved through curves at an incredible 30 mph while sports cars described head-on collisions all around us and Victor shat hemorrhoids in the future as his face scraped the wall of rock I was hugging with all my considerable driving skill. On

the roof of the convention hotel, we listened to the echo of fireworks ricochet through downtown Oakland. We posed as dancing fauns on pedestals to either side of Dawn's still figure reclining atop the tomb. Sharee took pictures.

The heat bent the air on the desert.

Then the voice in Victor's nose said, "Damn! What was I talking about? I've lost it, I can tell. You're confused."

I laughed indelicately. You inferred that I saw your point.

"It's a bloody bit of fanfare, if you ask me," said the simulacrum, who didn't much care for feuds and was jealous besides. It never got invited to the best parties, or so it thought.

I sobered. "Sometimes I feel that life is a mirror-maze in which complications and distortions at every corner reveal not only that you aren't where you think you are, but also that nothing ever looks like it used to." I blinked. "I do see your point." Frowned. "Don't I?"

You looked uncomfortable.

That's when the simulacrum set us straight. We nodded and cried: "Discipline is never and end in itself! Prepare the hibernaculum!"

You froze.

I left the party and headed in the direction of the hospitality suite. If I couldn't find answers there, I could certainly get drunk.

Eccentric, baroque, schizophrenic measures inexact quantum plastic emotional extent. What algorithm? Flail and fleece the tongue. The night? Listless, listing, wholly overweaning, fleeing coagulated spew on rock and ray, precision enhancing frozen topographies. Anxiety!

Translations have since undermined obligation — gleanings, however, a certain commercial pulsation.

Cold-cocked, noted, filed.

You woke up. Again. You were still snuggled against my back, your arm across my hip. Carefully, you moved your hand to my breast, afraid, you thought, of waking me. You find my breasts beautiful to touch. You weren't wholly conscious at that moment how badly you wanted to fuck me right then. You worry too much about your disguise.

We fucked later. It made you very happy. You thought you had laid to rest the ghost of the first time, when you panicked and ran. You don't lose things gracefully. But you thought you'd found something this time. Finally.

You never told me how good it made you feel. A couple of months later, we ran into each other at the convention, and although you felt it so strongly you could barely look me in the eyes, you could not

say how badly you wanted to fuck me.

As it turned out, my car could not breathe through this superheated mask of dust.

The voice in Victor's nose said, "Fandom is becoming more conservative. It's hard for me to believe it's true, but I *was* the most radical person at the convention, at least as far as drugs are concerned. My room was *the* party room for drug fandom. There wasn't anything else going on. The pro parties were hidden, and the other parties were dead. The security apparatus is getting more and more fascistic. It's totally fucked!"

I struggled to make sense of this, not appreciating the fact that soon the failure of the Fiesta's fuel pump would relegate all such considerations to the void that surrounds panic. I remembered the desperate, high-pitched "Hi!" with which I had greeted Hortensia when, in a crowded room party, I'd finally seen her at the convention, and I remembered Alan Bostick's burst of raucous laughter—a laughter which, whatever its subjective origin, became the objective correlative of my hysterical suppression of the desire, fear, self-hatred, and self-pity lurking behind that "Hi!"

Less than a year later, in Seattle, it began to sink in that she'd always had other lovers. Lovers she'd had sex with more than twice. It was empirically evident that I didn't play a very large role in her life. How could I have let myself become so overwrought?

I suppressed the memory.

Looking to Victor's dead eyes for an explanation, I realized I was experiencing a fictive precognition of something he would say, though in his own words, through the nasal inferno of a Thai dinner two years later. He would argue that fandom was dead. With my realization, sentience returned to Victor's eyes. "I've thought of a great title for a fanzine," he said. "Did I tell you? *Roadkill*."

He never produced the zine. I'd never really produced a fanzine at all, although I'd taken my first neosteps on an apazine. Father had done most of the work on that, and I took no further steps. Here, too, my fantasies about what was possible had gently masked my fear of the hurlyburly. I was ready to do something real.

Denys stirred in his back seat slumber. "I enjoy rape fantasies," he articulated, dreaming of his appearance on a panel several years later. "That does *not* mean I approve of real rape."

When we crossed the Oregon border, it started to rain, and we all cheered. Denys was no longer speaking to Victor, but that all changed much later. It seemed that the ordeal was over.

III.

Bronchi brainstem tether beach.

Father showed me these before I went any further, and I stuck them in my pocket to ponder later. I was tired of lessons. I wanted to have learned already. Father nursed his wounds.

At the Saturday night dance, I was approached by a stranger dressed as a twentieth century American misfit.

He said, "Do you call that dancing?"

I said, "No, man, I call it catharsis."

Oh, fear and pity!

In Dawn and Chris's house in Oakland, I paced the floor, stripped bare by crystal. "What's the story now? We could always—"

"Never mind. Let's—"

"...perennially late."

Nothing mattered. All options were of equal merit. I tried to relax, but felt angry. Why was I so angry? Nothing mattered.

I lit a cigarette and considered the future.

Denys said, "Void except in altered states."

"I think Denys is really pissed at me," I said, turning away from the mirror in the hotel bathroom. My face was tight and dry from the crystal. My gut swallowed itself. I'd really done it this time.

This time? That was a laugh. My whole life had been building toward this moment of weakness, betrayal, and damnation. There were only so many times you could fail a friend before he recognized your fundamental unreliability and stopped caring about you. This was where my obsession with freedom had led me. You end up alone and unwanted, finally faced with the unbearable judgment that you are unworthy of survival.

My skin and muscles were shrinking: a collapse into nothingness. I'd lost him, and so I had lost myself.

Tami gave me a puzzled look.

"He's not pissed at you," Victor said flatly. The voice of doom in my head paused. An insane hope tingled in my tendons.

"Yeah," said Tami. "I was at dinner with him, and I didn't think he was pissed at you. He's *not* pissed at you. He's really nervous about giving his speech at the banquet tomorrow. I've never seen anybody worry so much. He's obsessed with it." She shook her head sadly, thinking about it, then looked at me. "He's not pissed at you."

No, of course not. It was paranoia. The crystal. My insecurity.

I was safe. I slumped into a chair and reached for my cigarettes. Safe. Again. Relief released certain muscles from the forces of collapse, and they

relaxed, while certain others remained tense. I felt queasy.

IV.

What this is all about: interplanetary dust; complex events; small area analysis; epidemiology of fear; friendship formation; subthreshold memory; metabolic consequences; electric coupling; gut function; imitation; restrained drinking; japanese dental fear; transient strains; swirling flows; nutrient stress; stratified turbulence; nonlinear visual systems; extracting knowledge; social dilemmas; imaging random media; different voices; smoke; impact fusion; refractory contacts; dependable strengths; epileptiform activity; fertilization events; blood turbulence; age modulation; expectancy scales; insertion mutagenesis; stunt psychiatrics; random therapy; and nonlinear resonance. Especially nonlinear resonance.

We called it Internalism.

V.

Denys said, "He'll always carry a torch for you."
I felt ashamed and pleased.

I'm in the huckster's room. I'm looking through some books on a shelf. I find a copy of one of my books. My name is spelled incorrectly on the spine, and I don't remember ever having written this book. I flip through it. It is one of my books. I turn to Ted White, proprietor of the table, and say, "Look. One of my books." He says, "You can't have written it. It's about mother/daughter relationships." Perturbed, I flip through the book again. He's right: it's a book about mother/daughter relationships. Of course. After all, I wrote it. There is a time I was a woman and wrote the book.

"An alternative theory is that Nerthus was transformed into the male god Njord, and that Njord's wife Skadi, who like Ull is said to have had snowshoes and a bow, was originally the male partner. But no completely convincing explanation as to why such a change of sex took place has been found."

In the lobby, I sat feeling lonely. I had penetrated the dens of the smofs, but all traces of the body had vanished. Maybe I wasn't cut out to be a detective after all. What then? I watched people walk by. Maybe I would see a friend, or some other role model.

A stranger stopped and asked me for a cigarette. I gave him one. He thanked me, then said, "In a story, if I say, 'A woman ran into a wall,' you may

think the meaning is complete. However, later in the story you may discover that the woman is a transvestite and that the local birds recognize the wall as a sign that they are near their watering hole.

"Thus you could reread the first sentence to say, 'A man ran into a sign.'

"Then again, I could be mistaken. Perhaps it's the air currents that lead the birds to water."

"There's Tami," I said. "She'll get us in." We followed in her wake to the door and ghosted past a questioning glance and into the party. It was the first pro party I'd been to. Maybe I'd remember myself here. I made a manic connection with Bieler, who sang a shebop: "The Shang-ti deity, 'ti'/The Shang-ti deity, 'ti.'" I hovered uncomfortably under the chandelier by the door. Well, what would you have done? I drank my fifth beer of the evening and tried to make a manic connection with Joan. I'd met her before at a birthday party for Tilda at the Palmer's house in Bellingham, where I hadn't been able to tell if her sarcastic jokes about the trials of being a lesbian in high school were some kind of elaborate juvenile ruse or what.

Kirk hadn't been at that party, but I'd seen him at Jane's chocolate party earlier. Now he stood under the chandelier with Joan and me, didn't say a word, and looked pretty, wild, and high. He probably giggled now and again at his hallucinations.

He watched me find him at dawn in the lobby after I had been up all night on speed. In the course of that night I'd found and then lost Robyn again. I needed help. Kirk was sitting on a couch staring at the wall opposite. He was dressed in a beautiful lavender and grey silk sari, with looped gold chains ornamenting his shaved head. While the hotel staff vacuumed and picked up around us, he explained the coming end of the present world cycle according to Mayan cosmology.

In retrospect, the Bellingham Kids sounded the final death knell. They were not converted, therefore there would be no rejuvenation of fandom. The closure I longed for was just over the horizon.

"You can be such an asshole sometimes," Joan enthused.

I laughed nervously to show that I grasped the subtlety of her observation, then walked back down the hall to Jane's afternoon chocolate party, already sensing, although still denying it, the shape of things to come. I'd been a Seattle resident for just two months, was mostly unfamiliar with the Vanguard group, and was hanging out at the convention without the protective company of either Father or Denys for the very first time. I felt like a stranger, unconnected, unknown, unnoticed — or

too uncomfortable with myself to acknowledge the notice I got.

Father showed up and fell into animated conversation with someone I didn't know.

"She was married five times?"

"Nine."

"Any children?"

"No, they were all grown men."

"Time is an effluence."

"Time is an estimate."

"Time is an ambulance."

"Ambivification."

I wanted Father to pay attention to me, but I wanted him to do it without my showing I wanted it. I sat next to a conversation between Jane and a new face I later learned belonged to Victor, who would soon blaze in and out of the fannish formenent. They weren't talking about the death of fandom.

I was acquainted with Jane and had feared her ever since she'd yelled at me for holding the sofa-bed the wrong way when we were helping Gary move from the Queen Anne house. She brought scotch to the convention later and drunkenly revealed her secret identity to me. I don't know which one of was more flabbergasted. As I wasted time wondering whether I weren't somehow to blame, Jane recovered and proceeded to discuss fifteen different anecdotal observations about relationships and physics woven together with a seamless series of transitions that drove her secret, and any desire to regain it, from my mind. I began to suspect that even if I could not find myself in fandom, I might find something else of value to me.

I went home without having really talked to anybody. The future was opaque.

"It appears less as a solution, then, than as a program for more work, and more particularly as an indication of the ways in which existing realities may be *changed*."

"The didactic reduction of both realism and surrealism is always one modulation or another of the message, 'Things as they are—social reality—will endure.' The inward discourse of their texts, then, is restricted to two subjects: slavery or madness."

"History is idle gossip about a happening whose truth is lost the instant it has taken place."

VI.

I jumped up from the bed and hurried to the entryway, where Constance and somebody else, whose face I cannot for the love of truth remember, were hurriedly and apologetically searching through their luggage. Raising my hand

to my chest in order to disguise the fact that it was bare and had, in fact, been bare while I was kissing the bare-breasted Hortensia mere seconds ago back on the bed, I said, "Hi! How're you doing?" in order to convey the full control I held over my faculties.

I was having a bit of difficulty deciding where I felt I could comfortably rest my gaze. Constance continued her investigation of the luggage. Somebody, I noticed with unnecessary surprise, had fixed WHO ARE YOU? in red spray paint on the wall by the door. I fished a Magic Marker out of my jeans and knelt by the wall under the question. I wrote:

At a convention, everyone is in drag.

Katherine painted every other one of my fingernails electric blue: pinkie, middle, thumb, index, ring, right to left. It was the first time I'd ever worn polish. I paused every now and then in front of various mirrors and spread my fingers in front of me, palms toward my face, to have a look at the reflected image of the nails. It needed a second color on the bare nails. I looked at my hands a lot. I was intrigued by them, felt daring and happy. This might be the revelation.

When Denys and I got up from the hotel bar to leave for the airport, Avedon made a comment about me. Jane said, "You should see him with his girlfriend, Robyn. They make a striking couple." Avedon looked at me. "You're straight!" she cried. I burst out laughing. I fool 'em every time.

Why do I fool them?

Katherine, Tami, and I left Vancouver the next day and headed back to Seattle. We took a leisurely route along back roads, and we stopped at an out-of-the-way country tavern for lunch. Katherine was dressed as a Japanese hippy, artful chopsticks in her hair; Tami was dressed as a punk dyke; and I was happily confused. The only other people in the tavern were sitting at the bar, and some of them (it seemed like all of them, but I was too nervous to actually look) turned to watch as we entered. Anticipation quivered in the hush. I wished I were back at the convention, but that, of course, was all over.

After we had ordered lunch at our table, I went to the bar to get some quarters to play video. I handed the bartender two dollars. Did he give my nails a doubletake? I did not meet his eye.

Suddenly they killed all three of us. They stabbed us with spears, saying, "Now I give thee to Odin," and then hanged us from the rafters. There was blood everywhere. Even today our nonplussed ghosts roam the foggy peat bogs around Puget Sound. You read the words of a slowly fading spirit.

Still another lie. In fact, as the bartender handed me the quarters, somebody at the bar said, "Welcome, strangers!" Two fiddles and a guitar were

produced, and we all formed a circle and began to dance. They taught me some moves that I still use when I haunt the discos. That Thorvald could really pinch a nipple!

Probably the bartender didn't even notice me. Probably he only had eyes for the leather-clad Tami, who had looked everyone in the eye when we'd entered the building.

She is impressive, isn't she?

"Yet Laureline's appearance as a gun-toting, scantily leather-clad amazon towards the end of the story showed the character evolving into a more mature, certainly more independent woman."

Constance and the person I can't remember found what they were looking for and beat an embarrassed retreat. I made my way back to the bed.

"Does it bother you that they saw us?" Hortensia asked, amused. She was propped up on an elbow on the noticeably dishevelled bedspread.

On the TV in what would one day be my house in Seattle, Art Fleming said smugly, "Right or wrong, the feelings keep coming!"

"No," I lied.

The waterfall chorused. The sidewalks twinkled. Orbiters descended in fog on the airport. We strobed through and through the linear accelerator. I fell toward the ceiling. I told her about the MDA I had snorted earlier with my father. She asked me what it was like, and I tried to explain Ronnie Rimbaud's deregulation of the senses. I stood in the hallway and could not decide which door to open. Was it then that I began to worship my fear? I was self-absorbed, no kidding. A little later, we put our shirts back on and left the room.

While thinking about this incident several years later, I realized that at the time, as we were making out, the thought that she might actually want to fuck me and that I finally had the chance to do it for the first time had never registered on my dazed, dysfunctional, enraptured mind.

Do you think that's true?

In a different version of the story, I enjoyed myself and lost my virginity then and there. When Constance and her friend entered the room and blushed at the sight of Hortensia showing me what it could be used for, I waved cheerily and said, "Wow!" Hortensia laughed and kissed me, pulling the sheet over us. I couldn't remember ever having felt more complete and whole. And it was just beginning! What next?

VII.

"When an alarm of fire is sounded in a crowded assembly hall, there is much that is indeterminate as regards the activities that may produce a favorable issue. One may get out safely or one may be trampled and burned."

We stood in the hallway, wondering what to do, more bored than we'd ever felt at the convention before. Jerry had not yet given up hope. We conjured Eileen by visualizing her green boots and red plastic barbed wire bracelets, and I told her, "My real problem is an inability or unwillingness to maintain the sustained and consistent insight necessary to write a perfect critical work. Above all, to thine ownself be true. Burakka brakka brak. Drehdrehdrehdreh. The sin of parsimony. Ha ha ha. Good one. Secretly thinking: nyah nyah uhuhuhuhuh. Father saying that and everyone just staring, like animals who'd forgotten they were human."

Eileen adjusted a bracelet and looked mysterious. Had I embarrassed myself? She stood as on another plane, bucking the turbulence. So Tami, Hortensia, and I drove back to Seattle to my house. Hortensia had gotten married in the meantime.

I was wrong about you. I was wrong about everything.

A staple tears the too-soft flesh under my fingernail. Shit! It's my own fault. I'm tense, angry, excited. I want it.

Crouched on a bated landscape in that desperate hour when desperation seems so hopelessly silly.

It's not bleeding.

We all three climbed into my ample bed. Tami fell asleep, and Hortensia and I shared a cigarette and sleepwired conversation. After I turned out the light, I lay there feeling her side against mine, thinking about sex, thinking it felt good just to feel her next to me. I savored a sense of comfort, trust, and connection. It no longer mattered that my expectations and desires had almost always been hopelessly out of align with hers.

I had nearly arrived at the truth.

I fell asleep.

I'm at the convention. William Gibson and Bruce Sterling tell a bunch of us that they want to show us something cool. They lead us to a free-standing, switchback stairway in the heart of a pitch-black cavern of a room. The stairway is well-lit, and it leads up through the center of the darkness. Gibson is way ahead of us; in fact, we have never seen him. Sterling, who doesn't look anything like the pictures I've seen of him in the waking world, is next,

grinning and clowning like a fool, clearly excited and enjoying himself. I follow him ahead of the rest of the group.

The next day we watched dead people freeze in television snow. Denys throws up his arms under a barrage of one-liners from Mark, crying, "I give up! I surrender!" He looks pleased. My own potted, baleful eyes glare bemusedly back at me out of the bathroom mirror. They match the sun-reddened skin of my face. Lucy, *en couchant*, oversees the play of the party with a wry smile. Sharee stares abstractly into anticipated mirrors while spiders and rocketships are drawn on the shaved side of her head. A person unknown to me arrives at the Gay/Lesbian party, gleefully clutching a toy blaster with dildo attached, demands, "Where's Jerry?" and rushes off into the other room. A drunken young fan observes to his buddy as I pass them in the hall, "It's the fembot." Then, mock-nervously, "Oh, excuse me." I come in my jeans and think, *This can't be right.*

When we saw Hortensia off at the ferry, I gave her a hug and a sly whisper: "It was fun to sleep with you again." She pulled away, blushing and smiling, and said, "Don't say that in front of my husband!"

We cannot triturate the qualified examples, you! Gratitude clots memory's meaning. With the collapsingness of specific evidence, no physical exam can withstand the stopwhiling of miscontorted fact. This too has its advantages. Whereas in the arena of mean, or meaning, nature, or the courage of defrocked curiosity, in an elite quandry, the question would historically refer to what he does *not* place there. Untification of the indeterminacy in each, and too, the following dispositions of the platitudes to say that "the most significant to the story is included," is envoidable. It was this observation in the presence of geometrical disturbances to the frames of mind that we edited to ambivalent formement.

Intrigue! Vengeance! Plus a few salient photograms.

Then it hadn't been chaos. *Chaos would have stripped him of all understanding and left him unable to remember even that he had forgotten.* "But," the professor continued aloud, "it would have left unimpaired the essential organic function: the organization of resources required to adapt the environment to suit the organism's existential needs, and here I mean 'environment' in its broadest sense, which includes, of course, what is commonly called 'self'."

What's the use of dwelling on 'would haves'? Rudolfo psaisaid. *The important thing is that Jack is*

still alive... and is still Jack!

"For the knowledge of the relations between changes which enables us to connect things as antecedents and consequences *is science.*"

We climb the stairs up into the dark for a long time. Sterling turns now and again to encourage us gleefully on. Finally, we come to a section of stairs that has no handrail. I stop. Sterling scampers ahead and out of sight. I will not go on these flimsy wooden stairs so far above the ground if there are no handrails. No way. I'm too scared, and I could've told them to begin with I would be. I've been had.

Sterling peers down from above, still grinning with great joy, and cheers me on. The cool thing is further ahead. I sit down stubbornly, feeling angry. And scared.

As we walked from the ferry terminal back to the car, Tami asked me what I had said to Hortensia. I told her. She said, "Yo! It *was* fun."

VIII.

I saw Father.

"Christ!" I said, "am I glad to see you!"

"Problems?" he asked.

"The worst," I agreed. "My uncertainties are draining me of purpose. The world confuses me. I feel myself to be an evermutating labyrinth of conflicting perceptions and beliefs. Nothing is familiar anymore."

Carl smiled oddly. His physical appearance went through a rapid evolution from primeval amoeba to telepathic starfish, each form managing to leave an impression of puzzled concern.

"Exactly," I said.

He nodded, shrugged, and was gone.

A minute later, the truth hit me, and it wasn't the first time.

"If memory error found, print memory pointer value and bit map: 0=good, 1=bad."



ENDNOTES

"This is only one example of... quotation marks." Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*

"They have also discovered... how these people live." Herodotus, *The Histories*

"And to cap... Buffalo." Stanley Weinbaum, "Redemption Cairn"

"...interplanetary... resonance." Budget names taken from photocopy orders at the University of Washington.

"Something terrible was going to happen." Thomas M. Disch, *Echo Round His Bones*

"An alternative theory... has been found." H.R. Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*

"To see Moscow... in the form of capitalism's crackling energy." George Will, "Soviet mind never rises to second-rate"

"If hypotheses about... three-foot-long bloody penises." Marvin Harris, *Cultural Materialism*

"It appears less... may be changed." William James, "What Pragmatism Means"

"The didactic reduction of... slavery and madness." Samuel R. Delany, *The American Shore*

"History... has taken place." Gore Vidal, *Julian*

"Yet Laureline's appearance as a... woman." R. and J.M. Lofficier and Fred Patten, "The Great European Comic Heroes"

"When an alarm of fire... may be trampled and burned." John Dewey, "The Pattern of Inquiry"

"For the knowledge of... science." John Dewey, "The Construction of Good"

"If memory error found... bad." A computer textbook or manual whose title I don't remember. Sorry.

"Was it all... her." Joanna Russ, "Souls"

North Wind

by Gwyneth Jones

*Graves, yes, said love, death
and the changing of the seasons
were the unique, the primordial subjects.*

—Marilyn Hacker,
“Untoward Occurrence at Embassy
Poetry Reading”

North Wind
by Gwyneth Jones

Victor Gollancz, 1994, £15.99
281 pages, ISBN 0-575-
05449-2

If love, death, and the changing of the seasons are the traditional subject-matter of poetry, what are we to make of poetry's evil twin, Skiffy? (I mean “evil” in the Christian sense of “concerned with the immanent world,” of course.) The American “hardcore” incarnation of SF, in particular, subjects Robert Graves' eternal verities to a materialist critique: love ain't nothin' but reproduction misspelled; death is a genetic and probably curable defect; and the changing of the seasons falls under the category of terraforming. Against the ideology of cycles, SF has typically posed the ideology of progress. What is gained in this gambit is a sense of our power to change the world. What is lost is the ability to account for, well, loss. In a world where nothing is inevitable, it's best not to look too closely at, say, death. In such a world, death carries the taint of sin and failure.

On this point, SF agrees with Hacker's assertion that “tragedians accept the Status Quo,” although it is less comfortable with her conclusion that “Revolutions feed on comedy.” Then along comes a writer like Gwyneth Jones, whose books embrace tragedy and come out laughing. In the best tradition of SF, Jones takes the primordial themes and gives them a materialist reworking: love is an alien invasion; death is the fruit of a genetic experiment born of love and gone awry; and the changing of the seasons — well, yeah, that falls somewhere under the category of terraforming. Yet hers is not an ideology of progress; rather it is a more ambivalent ideology of cyclical change.

Before I get too much further, I want to admit

something: I love Gwyneth Jones' books. I even enjoyed the turgid, practically opaque *Escape Plans*. When I reread *White Queen* to prepare for reviewing *North Wind* (which is a sequel), I started jotting down favorite passages and ended up transferring nearly half the book to my journal — as though by creating my own scribbled, botched draft of the book, I could lay claim to the published text.

I recognized in Jones the lost True Child of the great non-New Wave SF writers of the sixties and seventies: Russ, Delany, Tiptree, Dick, LeGuin, Wolfe, etc. Or was she the bastard child of the cyberpunks and humanists of the eighties? (The offspring of the reactionary, skeptical, sexy terrorist, Braemar Wilson and the naive, New Age — or is that Calvinistic? — oneworlder engineer, Johnny Guglioli.) No, this scheme is no doubt too American. In any event, Jones' books tempt me to abandon mature indifference and rave like a horny adolescent.

But I'm not going to. Disch has enough ammo as it is.

Anyway, as I mentioned before, *North Wind* is a sequel to *White Queen*, which won the Tiptree Award in 1992. It's set about a century after the events of *White Queen*. The aliens, whose arrival on Earth provided the focus of the earlier book, have established a fairly strong presence in several trading enclaves scattered through the old Third World. The old First World countries (including the enigmatic and insular United Socialist States of America) have managed to keep the aliens from establishing bases within their borders, but they haven't been able to escape alien influence. Civilization as we knew it in *White Queen* has come apart at the seams, and war and socioeconomic decay has spread throughout the human domain. It's Braemar Wilson's worst nightmare come true, and, as she predicted, in the first book, it's all because of those pesky superhuman aliens.

Superhuman? That's a notion that gets spun through the Uncertainty Funhouse any number of times in both books, but the fact remains that the Aleutians (as the aliens are so humanly misnamed), with their organic, group-mind "telepathy," genetic reincarnation, and sexual monomorphism, present an image of wholeness and integration that eats at the heart of the collective human race. The Gender Wars ravaging humanity in *North Wind* can be seen as a result of this. As Sid, the Brit-expatriate-secret-agent-cum-white-knight puts it:

"Then the Aleutians came, and each of them was a person, nobody's better or worse half. The women saw the aliens: with no one forcing sex on them; having children and not getting their pay docked for the privilege; and so on. The men saw the same aliens doing what comes naturally with no thought for the consequences, and nobody having unrealistic expectations or nagging them to behave. They both said to themselves: if the Aleutians don't have to put up with that shit, why do we? The superbeings made it valid for everybody to be a person. But — cut it any way you like — that means there's twice as many full-sized humans in any given area than there used to be: and still only one planet. Naturally, there's a war."

In short, the aliens have had a catastrophic effect on humans simply (ha!) because their differences map almost exactly onto human weaknesses. Even in areas where humans have the edge, such as in information technology, the alien presence has caused stagnation. The latest breakthrough in information processing — coralin, a semi-organic material that had replaced silicon chips — has been abandoned, because the aliens are able to manipulate it so easily with their mastery of everything organic.

To make matters worse, the aliens are hot on the trail of the one "superpower" the humans have over the aliens: teleportation. Not that the humans exactly have it. The instantaneous transmission device developed by the brilliant German scientist, Peenemunde Buonarrotti, and last seen transporting Braemar and Johnny to the alien mothership in *White Queen*, has become the stuff of speculative legend by the time of *North Wind*. Buonarrotti never released her discovery to the general public, and she buried the secret, suspecting that the aliens could make better use of her device than humans. The plot of *North Wind* is driven by the hunt for this buried treasure.

Thick in the chase are the three Aleutian captains from *White Queen*, though in new incarnations. We see more of Kumbva, the Engineer, than in the first book, which is appropriate, since the

treasure is a device of the technology most other Aleutians distrust and fear. The Trickster captain, Rajath, is younger this time around and so in a more submissive posture than before. Conversely, the new Clavel is older and more world-weary than the naive Poet-princess of *White Queen*.

The innocent, selfish desire to merge Self with Other that led Clavel to rape Johnny Guglioli in *White Queen* stood as an image of what the aliens were doing to the humans. In *North Wind*, Clavel's attempt to atone for the rape stands as an image of the effect on the aliens of what they are doing to the humans. Here, the figurative sense of love as loss of self through merger with another is made flesh, as Clavel's effort to merge Aleutian and human results in a mortal Aleutian. Perhaps Jones is making an ironic comment on the connection between Love and Death. Certainly, her chilling, pathological take on what has become of Clavel's once warm and exuberant desires invites us to reconsider yet again the serpentine transformations of love from pleasure into pain and back again which produced so many explosions in *White Queen*. Jones' characters never achieve the annihilating immersion they so fervently hope for, but Clavel's lovesick fixation nonetheless continues to bring alien and human closer together, be the consequences ever so unexpected.

The protagonist of this book, however, is not Clavel, but a character known variously as Maitri's librarian, Goodlooking, and Bella. Bella perfectly characterizes the looking glass ambivalence of Jones' vision of things. Neither alien nor human, male nor female, powerful nor powerless, Bella embodies a balance point between contending forces. She is — like the human halfcastes, who surgically alter their bodies in an attempt to become alien — *neti-neti*: not-this-not-that. He is also, in classic SF fashion, the crippled outcast who turns out to be Very Important. Everybody suspects that Bella holds the key to finding the buried treasure, and so she becomes the pivot of the plot.

The plot gathers up all the appurtenances of a slam-bang adventure: near escapes, kidnapping, double agents, firefights, a *femme fatale*, nifty gadgets, heroic rescues, and even a descent into hell. Jones lists Ian Fleming's *Casino Royale* in her acknowledgements, but the moral paradoxes her characters face in the midst of all the sound and fury have more the ring of LeCarré. The adventures are also tossed off with sufficient distortion and elision to muffle the experience for any reader looking for a straightforward sleigh ride. In many ways, the story of Bella's journey from Greece to India to Thailand to England to Germany and back to

England reads more like a *Bildungsroman* than an adventure novel.

In this stew of story, the debt to Mozart can also be discerned. (Jones credits *The Marriage of Figaro* as well.) Disguises, false identities, hidden pasts, gender play, romantic trysts, and slapstick buffoonery are familiar from the opera. As with Mozart/DaPonte, Jones takes a giddy romp and infuses it with a sense of grief and yearning. She walks a tight line between the sublime and the ridiculous, mining the tragic from the former and the comic from the latter. Also as with the Viennese masters, her use of tropes is susceptible to a sense of manipulation and of the perfunctory. The love between Bella and Sid feels this way at times, as though it exists simply because, in a story like this, it is supposed to.

Yet, while this is failing, it raises an interesting point. One of the difficulties of Jones' writing is that she refuses to spell things out; she expects readers to fill in the blanks from our common store of Story. In this sense, her mode of writing these books is very much like the manner in which the aliens communicate "telepathically." As Braemar put it in *White Queen*, it's like a silent movie: "The pictures tell a story. The plot's a folk tale, which everyone can follow without much help because everybody knows it already. There's a lot of emotional detail, sheep's eyes and visual gags, and occasionally a title, a few words carefully framed for emphasis." Or, as Figaro puts it, "*Il resto nol dico, / Già ognuno lo sa*" ("The rest I need not say, / For everyone knows it already.")

This works just fine, as long as everyone is in agreement about the common story. However, in the silence of assumption, there's a lot of room for slippage and uncertainty. Sid, pondering this aspect of the aliens, thinks, "For Aleutians it was normal to let things flow. Everybody worked from their own versions of the multiple script. They never knew exactly how far all the scripts agreed, until somebody 'made a speech' and collapsed the wave. And then no one could prove what had really been going down before..." This is, again, a good description of how Jones' narrative works. You think you know what's happening, you think you've finally figured out what story she's telling, then suddenly something unexpected happens, and all certainty falls through a trap door.

Or, as Sid again has it, "That was the aliens for you.... You thought you understood them. You started thinking this understanding proved the whole cosmos made sense. Then pow! Complete breakdown."

Not-this-not-that. Any time something is stated

with certainty in *North Wind*, you can be pretty, um, certain that it's not exactly the way things are. Sid's fine speech about the reason for the Gender War, for example, must be understood in the context of an earlier musing by Maitri, the alien for whom Bella is librarian: "The Aleutians recognised among themselves a spectrum of personality traits, which seemed to match quite closely what humans regarded as 'masculine' and 'feminine' qualities... though to Aleutian perception many human males were feminine and many females were masculine; and of course either could be on the Men's side or on the Women's. All very confusing." The signifier is never sufficient to the signified; the map is not the territory.

On the other hand, the names may keep changing, but the song remains the same. While traditional SF proceeds from logical certainty to logical certainty, Jones proceeds by a kind of analogical circularity. In the future of the two Aleutian books, Japan has been swallowed by the sea in a major cataclysm, the U.S. has undergone a socialist revolution, and the aliens have landed. Nowhere are we given the linear progression of events that led to these outcomes; rather, the logic appears to derive from the theory that Shit Happens.

This emphasis on the unpredictable, the uncertain, the catastrophic is part of what gives Jones' books an air of absurdity. (I might mention here that her prose sometimes reads as though it has been poorly translated from the French original. Her abuse of colons rivals Elvis's.) The material-world source of the title, *North Wind*, is the Himalaya Project, which brings us back around to terraforming as the changing of the seasons. The aliens have embarked on the project of eliminating the Himalayas, in order to allow the arctic air of the north to cool down the Asian subcontinent, making it more temperate and productive. They believe this will benefit humankind greatly. As for the climatic convulsions and resulting devastation the project will cause, this is a short-term problem, and, being "immortal," they don't quite understand the fuss about loss of life.

Yet, despite this reasoning, there remains something incongruous — something absurd — about the Aleutian project. Why, for example, are the humans allowing this to happen? Well, the book does start out with a massacre of aliens in protest against their meddling. However, the massacre doesn't really change anything, because Shit Happens and, anyway, the aliens are superbeings — aren't they? — so who's going to stop them? Not only that, but they are immortal, which means they never committed the Original Sin, so everything they

do is ultimately innocent of evil. There is a sense in which the humans are in a naturally inferior, submissive position, because the aliens have a more direct connection to the WorldSelf, to God, to life. Yet this is still another projection of human models onto the alien, another explanation that doesn't quite fit. The incongruity hangs over the story, founded on an unspoken assumption that the Forces At Work in the world are weird.

The aliens, stumbling into Earth by chance, after years of wandering, aimless and lost, through the stars, appear to be configured in such a way as to always take advantage from the human configuration. The analogy from which this situation takes its shape might be with the European colonization of various parts of the world, though there are plenty of hints of an analogy with the male colonization of the female. Like the Europeans who landed at Plymouth Rock, the aliens were initially greeted with awe and friendship by the natives of Earth. As with the Europeans almost everywhere they went looking for fortune and new land, the complex and powerful human societies the aliens encounter begin to disintegrate on contact, not so much because the aliens are superior as it is because, for all their strengths, the humans are not strong in any way that can stop the aliens, and, for all their weaknesses, the aliens are not weak in any way that the humans can exploit.

Looked at from another angle, the Aleutians can be understood as the revenge of the Primitive. The peculiar characteristics of the Aleutians nullify or make a disadvantage of aspects of human culture that have allowed Europeans to dominate it: high tech, individualism, capitalism (the Aleutians are horrified by the idea of economic growth), and the Christian ethos of free will and an absent landlord. The Aleutian belief that all manner of virtuality, especially video, is a window on the spirit world; their fear of unliving machines and distrust of the "deadworld" sciences (e.g., physics and inorganic chemistry); their cheerful ignorance of what causes pregnancy in themselves; their animal nuzzling, "baboon" faces, and lack of a fashion sense—all suggest the Primitive, i.e., the non-European, at least as seen by a European. This connection with the non-European world is made explicit in *North Wind*: "But the subcontinent had been the Aleutians' favored trading area for a long time. There was an affinity between alien and Indian culture. Hindus believed in reincarnation and were as indifferent to change as the aliens; while Muslims had their Aleutian submission to fate, and their rigid recklessness."

North Wind shows us the winter of humanity's

discontent and the summer of the aliens' ascendancy, but, in a world in which *Shit Happens*, it doesn't seem likely that the aliens can hold their superior position forever. What goes around, comes around, and no alignment of power, no relationship of submissive and dominant, feminine and masculine, can remain stable. After the massacre of the aliens, Bella grieves: "He lay with closed eyes, enduring the images. They would fade. In another life, good things would blot out the bad. In another life, those soldiers would make amends. Everything must happen, thought Bella, knowing that horror and grief would pass, and he would recover his trust in the even-handedness of Time." Of course, Bella is wrong about certain of her assumptions, but the sentiment is right.

The seasons change, bringing loss or gain, or both at once, then change again, never standing still. *North Wind*, meditating on winter, studies the endurance of impermanence. There's a wonderful science fictional moment when Sid, who has had a hand replaced after the original suffers radiation damage, sits moping about human losses: "In another pocket he found a scrap of tough plastic tissue: the cover note for the insurance on his new hand. Insurance was an item that turned up on bills for fancy products, one of those commercial words that nobody used in real life any more. He wondered what it was supposed to mean." Sid's incomprehension speaks volumes for how human society has changed, at the same time that the rarity of insurance speaks volumes for the precarious position in which humanity finds itself. The terms of the insurance make it plain: no losses are actually covered.

It is the implied cyclical, seasonal nature of things that makes the human losses bearable and brings *North Wind* to an immensely satisfying conclusion. There is no escape from dissolution and loss, no transcendence, only indifferent change. The final image is of an apple proffered by three peasant women, whom I take to be an allusion to the Triple Goddess. The image of the apple presents us at once with Christian ideas about death and the loss of innocence, and, behind that—the pagan palimpsest—with ideas of eternal life, of death as a return to the source of life, and of life as an ever-changing cycle.

It has often been remarked that the hardest-nosed hard SF—particularly the Stapledonian variety practiced by the likes of Clarke, Benford, Bear, and Sterling—can look an awful lot like religious mysticism. The ideology of progress, like mysticism of all varieties, holds up the possibility of transcending perceived limits—of breaking the cycle of

return and repetition, suffering and loss, and catching the faster-than-light train to a Nirvana where Shit Never Happens, world without end.

Gwyneth Jones offers us the mythological, as opposed to the mystical. If *North Wind* is more fatalistic than most hard SF, it is the fatalism of Story, where pattern and repetition are not just a cage, but also the necessary conditions of meaning. In a mythological system, the Story is well-established and inevitable: love, death, and the chang-

ing of the seasons. What is variable in this system is the form the Story takes in its endless reincarnations. It is in these small, unpredictable variations—change in repetition—that the mythological seeks its own absurd version of freedom. In *North Wind*, Gwyneth Jones turns a science fictional eye to a more than twice told tale and reminds us that the more things stay the same, the more they change.



The President's Address

On November 2nd, Seattle fans gathered at the home of Amy Thomson and Edd Vick for the monthly Vanguard party. It was a momentous evening, and not just because *Apparatchik* 69 was distributed and, thus, the Abi Frost/TAFF story broken to the common fan. No, it was also the night that my fannish career and seventeen years of (admittedly spotty) service to science fiction were finally rewarded beyond my wildest dreams—although not, perhaps, beyond my most careful calculations.

In one of those acts of back-scratching, back-slapping, back-formation cronyism endemic to fandom, Lesley, Andy, Carl, Victor and I voted me in as the first Past President of the Fringe Fan Writers of America. Jerry Kaufman, who was the only other member of the circle when we took the vote, attempted to abstain, but menacing gestures from the security apparatus (Andy and Victor) brought him into line and the vote into unanimity.

I should mention that my platform was the promise to vote for Lesley next time. The sole amendment to the constitution of the Fringe Fan Writers of America was that the election of the Past President would be held whenever the Vanguard party took place at Amy and Edd's house.

It brings tears to my eyes to look around the presidential dacha that was once my humble bedroom. (Is it only my imagination, or does the space heater now smell of coal?)

But there's no time to bask in the perquisites of my new office. Fandom is once again in an uproar. Fringe fan writers from around the globe are petitioning for an official proclamation of our position. Therefore, and having only at that same November Vanguard been enlightened as to the *casus belli* of Topic A, my first act as Past President is to issue the following pronouncement:

What's all this, then?

Beyond that, it is all irony—if not, indeed, tragedy.

In response to my article on fwa, Carl wrote, "I consider myself something like a fringe-fan, in almost direct proportion to the degree to which I

consider sf important work." This comment planted the first seed of doubt as to my true nature.

While I was at LACon this year, I bought a copy of *Warhoon* 31 in the Fan Lounge. I bought it because it contained a manifesto by Vincent Omniaveritas called "The New Science Fiction," and I am a fan of both Vincent Omniaveritas' manifestos and his science fiction. It never crossed my mind that the zine was produced in the thick of the Topic A fandango and by one of the main actors therein. So, I was surprised, when I finally read the thing, to discover a heated discussion of the Main Topic and to discover, furthermore, that this Topic bled so easily into the topic I'd skirted around in my fwa piece: the definition of "fan."

Of particular interest was a letter from George Flynn that found an echo in Carl's comment. George wrote, "After all, the original motivations of fandom were almost entirely related to SF, either in itself or as an inspiration to change the world. Like it or not, 'fannishness' is more alien to that original impulse than conventions or even media fandom. Which of course has nothing to do with its value—but surely it does have something to do with who is entitled to inherit the name 'fandom.'"

It took a while for this to sink in, and, in the meantime, *Apparatchik* had published my piece on fwa and I had been elected Past President. Not long after, I awoke from a dream with a startling and vivid realization.

I am a fan.

I love science fiction. I've been reading SF for something like 25 years, and the stuff still thrills me. In the past year, I've read Greg Egan's *Distress*, William Gibson's *Idoru*, and Bruce Sterling's *Holy Fire*, and, yea and verily, I have been pleased. I have thought, "This is the shit!" While I'm more critical than when I was twelve (yeah, the end of *Distress* kind of blew and Gibson's caper plots are always flimsy and Sterling's novels aren't quite really novels), an ember of the old sense of wonder still glows fiercely in the ashes.

I am a fan, not a fringe fan.

So, I find myself in a potentially embarrassing

position: the Past President of an organization that I founded but may not truly represent.

This will not do. I do not wish to step down. I enjoy my new power to proclaim. In fact, I want more power.

I believe I can accomplish this with some semantic finagling. Let us define "fan" as someone who started out as a fan of SF, then got involved in fanzine fandom and slowly shifted allegiance and attention from SF itself to fandom and to what is written by and about fans. Let us define "fringe fan" as someone on the margins of fans; that is, some-

one who enjoys the social environs of fandom but whose primary reason for involvement in fandom is still an interest in SF itself. Fringe fans, so defined, must be seen as the larger group, and so my constituency has swollen and my mandate solidified.

Science fiction will survive Abi Frost and other TAFF disasters (although whether it will survive the Thor Power Tools decision is another question¹). The view from up here is looking better and better.

Sorry, Lesley, but I'm thinking "four year term." Hell, I'm thinking "dictator for life."

Ffwap!

It appears I got just about everything wrong.

"I never gafiated," Tami protested.

"I didn't actually vote for you," Carl confided.

"When the Past President is elected, his or her term is already over," Ted admonished.

"Fringedom is no chopped liver!" Heather implied.

"But wait, where do fake and fringe fandom begin and end? Help!" Andy pole-vaulted.

In short, the reaction to my presidential proclamations has so far only deepened my wintry gloom. "He stands to be insulted, and pays for the privilege," sings the only Elvis that matters. It is a bitter truth.

Still, I try to be amused, and happier news has recently arrived. This was the declaration of my death by Steven Desjardins in *Apak* #73. I was a bit startled at first by this turn of events, but the advantages of it soon became obvious. Amongst other things, I find that a supernatural existence lends a new clarity to my outlook. Now's my chance to be dead right.

Needless to say, it won't pay to be frivolous with this further extension of my powers. I have caused too much confusion already, and it's time to set matters straight. This will be a little painful, but bear with me.

What is a fake fan? It is a troubling question. I have consulted the dictionary of fannish terms that Dr. Gafia posts occasionally to Usenet. I discovered an entry for fringe fan but none for fake, and I was momentarily cowed into the belief that there was, in fact, no such thing.

Still, I must have heard the term "fake fan" used somewhere. Andy's question only reinforced my

sense of a mystery that others were avoiding. If he, who causes nations to tremble, did not know the answer, who did?

It was Lesley who finally gave me the clue I needed. In her misleadingly titled "Confessions of a Fringe Fan," she admits, "I've never been able to claim SF... as a favorite." Furthermore, she condescends to tell us, "It's true I enjoy socializing with the fans I've met, but it was really the chance to write that drew me toward the Apparatchiki."

Well might she take solace in Tucker's comment that fandom absorbs all kinds!

Labels may suck, but, by gum, they stick, too. Lesley Reece, YOU ARE A FAKE FAN!!!

It brings me no pleasure to arrive at this conclusion, but the facts are undeniable. Most damning of all, of course, is the disinterest in SF, but this merely grasping interest in fandom is the final nail in the coffin. In these two attributes, we find the definition that has, till now, eluded us.

I'm not a hard man — although death has left me a little stiffer than usual. (And you can stop that beavising right now!) While it's true that I'm holding Lesley up for ridicule, I do so only in the interests of understanding. The truth shall set you free.

If Lesley takes the hard facts to heart, I believe she will find new opportunities opening to her. For example, I hear that the Fake Fan Writers of America need a Past President.

Some will see in these pronouncements a dictatorial attempt to eliminate rivals to my position as Past President of the Fringe Fan Writers of America. So be it. (I *will* point out to Mr. Lichtman that Tami has disqualified herself by claiming trufan status.)

You can't, after all, assassinate a dead man.

¹ It was later pointed out to me that the significance of the Thor Power Tools decision has been greatly exaggerated, and that the Death of the SF Midlist has a lot more to do with the death of the mass market paperback distribution network.

Potlatch Snapshots

Here's one of Ron. He's stretched out on his back on a bed in the smoking con-suite, eyes closed, battered hat crushed between his head and the mattress. It's late; he looks exhausted. A bearded man sits by his head, lips parted to form a word that has no origin or closure, that circles and circles around the void. In the center of the photo there is an almost unnoticeable distortion. It hovers in the air above Ron's face. Is it a warp in this cheap camera's focus? A patch of stale cigarette smoke? Or is Ron seeking to project himself into an astral escape from the eternal drone of loneliness?

Oh, this is a good one. It's a long shot of the dance floor. To the left, Apak Shakur, aka DJ Suckmonster, looks up, startled, from a neat array of CDs. His eyes have the feral red glint of the giant rat of Sumatra's. To the right, Jerry alone lifts a foot in a Spanish step. In the middle distance, Lesley and Heather gesture, though I can't quite make out whether they are amazed or alarmed. That must be my foot straying from behind the speaker, definitely alarmed.

Here's one of Spike standing outside the dealers room, coat folded in her arms. She is smiling, but she hadn't been before the camera came out. She had been recommending that I read British fan-writing for superior irony. Was she implying that I am irony-impaired, or is this enthusiasm a carryover from her recent adventure at *Attitude*? It is Sunday. Behind Spike, the door to the dealers room reveals the weary profiles of two fans I've seen at probably half the conventions I've been to in the past eighteen years but whose names, which I undoubtedly know, I've never attached to the faces. Spike's smile grants absolution.

This one's a standard panel shot: Howard Wal-drop, Eileen Gunn, and Ellen Klages sit behind a long table. A toy rat sits on the mike, guarding against unwanted feedback. Howard and Ellen are looking at Eileen. Eileen is pointing at the camera. The white linen that covers the table could be the shroud of the undead stories that haunt this room. It is just as likely the birth sheet of a long labor. At the bottom of the frame is the unmistakable crown of Deb Notkin's head. Hm. Was she even in the room at the time?

I wouldn't believe this if I hadn't seen the picture. Who is more astounded, Chairman Luke or

the puckish Tami? Luke's bare chest peeks through a white frock coat. His bare willie peeks over the waistband of his outlandish golden harem pants, which Tami has tugged down from behind. Tami's face has *I thought there'd be underwear* written all over it. Luke's willie has *Yikes!* written all over it. To the side, Jeanne Bowman leans over to read it.

Here's another one from the smoking suite. On the right, AP is laughing at something outside the frame. Sheila lounges in the middle, looking as though she feels three hours older than most everybody else. Victor, on the left, is looking at Sheila and rubbing his shoulder; in his eyes, the dreaminess of pain.

Here are three bushy beards. Chuck Garvin's is stained with nicotine that has transmigrated from his restless fingers. Mark Manning's rides his stout chest with Tolkienesque irreality. Art Widner's evokes Walt Whitman, Santa Claus, and God Almighty in rapid succession. By all accounts, it was the latter incarnation that showed up for the Friday night poker game.

This, of course, is David Hartwell. His eyes are alight with holy fire, for he is telling me about *Phoenix Cafe*, the new novel by Gwyneth Jones, just out in the UK. Yes, that's the back of my head, inclined in an attitude of attention, or of prayer. My left hand reaches for the book, but it isn't here yet. I look like a fanboy's dream of a hipster, but it's only an illusion. In the blurry background, that's Lesley not paying any attention.

Ah, here's one of the few not taken at the hotel itself. The setting is the Elysian Brewpub. In the middle, we have Fast Tommy Ferguson, come to us from Belfast via Toronto. On his left are Ron and AP again. On his right, Carl is making an enigmatic sign with one hand. He's probably trying to protect his soul from the hunger of the camera, but it probably won't do him any good. Tommy is grinning, because he believes he has discovered that American fans like to have sex at conventions. The pint glasses are empty of pale ale.

Ooh! Here's one of Hooper staring at a blurry dog. Or is it an ape? Andy's eyes are red in this one, too. Must be the camera.

How sad. Here's another one of the dog, or ape, but now it's dead. All around the carcass, just on the verge of coming into focus, is the real world. Looks like a picture of a hangover.

March On

The duck's ass had been chewed off. We had a six mile hike ahead of us, and I was already wondering how much more I could take.

Yes, it's spring again, and a winter's worth of pent energy has blown the gates of apathy off their hinges. Ready or not, it's time to *rawwwwk*.

So, on the last day of winter, Tami and I and two other bacchantes rolled down to the Showbox to hear the Screaming Trees. It was a perfect inauguration of the new season: sloppy, loud, frenzied, and drenched in beery sweat. Dervishes whirled, drunks hurled, and hair curled. Unruly doubt got bounced by fellas with biceps the size of my thighs. I danced and pogoed, shucked the moshers, hugged my friends, smiled at strangers, and felt almost alive.

On the first day of Spring, I rested.

On the second day of Spring, the rawk siren called again, and it was off to Moe for Citizens' Utilities and Pond. But something wasn't quite right. CU soared and wavered, collapsed and rebounded, and never quite grabbed a groove. Pond didn't get off the ground until the last three songs, and by then it was too late. No release.

Come to think of it, the Screaming Trees show kinda blew, too. Rock was dead.

No, wait, that's right, *I* was dead. How quickly we forget!

Where else to go, then, but to the Elysian Brewpub to ask the goddess Hazel for some nectar and whither the world of the living. Hazel had only dregs to offer, but she gave them freely. It was enough. I turned to confront a ghost from the past. Hadn't seen him since he departed years ago on a journey to alien lands. Stories of Nepalese heavens and invisible Laotians evolved. Time — what time? — time to go.

It was Saturday then. The masseur next door located a brick of winter in my lower back and pressed it to talk. It sounded staticky, my head full of snow. I wandered hatless to the temple of Master Hackney, who demonstrated the graces of Tai Chi. Would this bring the release I sought? That night, still seeking, the neighbor and I returned to the Showbox and tried the whiskey. Amidst drag queens, wanna-fly girls, frat boys, and hipless tour-

ists, we bucked techno until the acid jazz lounge amped up. Fat beats finished the massage. Release at last!

On Sunday, I repented. Took the mower out and clogged it over and over with still soggy grass, then squared everything with an edger.

Three days later, I was hardly sore at all anymore.

Which gets us to Thursday, and nearly back to the duck.

Another massage was happening, at the hands of Karrie Dunning this time.

"Carrie Root and I are getting people together for a Volks March through the Arboretum on Saturday," she told me, while fingering the winter in my *quadratus lumborum*.

Carrie confirmed this when I showed up for the Apak mailing Friday night. So, I rendezvoused with the marchers the next morning.

Our subset of the Volk contained Karrie, Carrie, Andy, Kate Schaefer, Glenn Hackney, Glenn's daughter and daughter-in-law, and their child. I was glad I wasn't the only one wearing leather, amidst the nylon, gortex, spandex, polyethylene, styrofoam, gelignite, and other sensible accessories. The weather was perfect for a march: cool and overcast, but glowing with the clean grey light of a sun barely banished.

We set off. I aligned myself with my editor, and first thing we saw was the duck.

"This is the year," Andy said, mopping sweat from his brow. "Griffey. Fifty dingers." He began to sing a camp song from his adolescence.

Six miles later, only four of us remained standing. It was the day before Easter. Conventions raged elsewhere in Seattle, and in Minneapolis, Baltimore, and Liverpool. The sun had burnt away the veil. It was a glorious day, and I was well spent. Spring stretched out before me like a long awaited lover, wanting more.

The next day, a storm blew in. Trees crushed houses, and powerlines snapped. I pulled weeds from barren beds and cursed as cows sailed overhead.

My ass ached.

And so on.

Venice

My niece recently returned from an educational adventure called Semester at Sea. She and roughly 500 other college students paid a princely sum (well, my sister paid it in Jolie's case) to board an erstwhile cruise ship that has been refitted as a school and spend a semester sailing from port to port on the way around the globe. Between stops, the students studied the upcoming country in courses chosen from a varied curriculum that included history, economics, literature, politics, and art. They embarked in the Bahamas and landed finally in Seattle.

My family came up from Oregon to greet Jolie on her return. We joined the crowd of other families at Pier 66 as the ship docked, and we spent the next seven hours waiting for Jolie and her luggage to clear customs. I looked at the hordes of shiny students lining the rails of the ship, dressed in wholesome college sweatshirts and Vietnamese straw hats, and I thought (more than a bit enviously) about the mind-altering, soul-broadening experience they'd all just been through. I'd thought about Jolie often while she was away, savoring a vicarious, not to mention premature, nostalgia for her encounter with fresh and distant lands. As I gabbed with my Mom about this and other things to kill the time, I also got the first clue that I'd been living in an alternate universe for a couple of months.

Jolie sent me postcards from several countries. The first was from Venezuela, where she swam with freshwater dolphins in the Amazon and visited a tribe she'd studied the previous year in an anthropology course at the University of Oregon. The next postcard featured the Palazzo Ducale in Venice, where she was off to shop at the Rialto, someone named Constance (apparently a new friend) was getting a massage, and the weather was great. I've been to Venice, and I smiled at memories of serene mornings in stony plazas.

It was a more than a little surprising when the next card, also from Venice, was addressed to my housemate, Denys. Jolie has certainly met Denys, but it did not seem to me that she knew him well enough to warrant correspondence. It didn't make sense, but I was too tired from a frazzling day at work to figure it out. Maybe the laser-printed label

represented a glitch in her address database. I expected Denys to express surprise when he saw it, but the thought was swept away by the river Lethe in a trice.

A postcard arrived from Kenya: *on safari, cool animals, having the time of my life*. Another from Vietnam, where the War Crimes museum appalled and the people always smiled. The last one came from Hong Kong. She and some others had traveled to Beijing and the Great Wall. My letter had reached her in Hong Kong, *see you soon in Seattle*.

Venezuela, Venice, and Vietnam. "Is she only going to places with names that start with 'V'?" my neighbor asked me. It struck my fancy. The V-names conjured exotic visions of decaying jungles and sunken cities, alien customs and twilight epiphanies.

"Venice?" my Mom said, as I gabbed to her about my vision. We sat on a bench on Pier 66. "I don't think they went there. I don't think they went to Europe at all. Did they? That's strange."

I remembered my befuddlement at the card to Denys. But it *was* from Jolie. It had her signature on it.

I laughed uncertainly. "A secret, extracurricular escapade, perhaps?"

Mom shrugged.

Hours later, after we got Jolie packed into the van and were headed down to Portland for a celebratory dinner, I thought of it again.

"Did you go to Venice?" I asked her.

She looked startled. "Um. No."

"Really? But I got a postcard from you from there!"

Her face had the confused look of someone who has returned from a long, intense journey that is already beginning to feel like a dream. "Venice? I don't think so. Where's Venice?"

"Italy."

The map of the world crumpled on her face. "We didn't go anywhere near Italy. Did we?"

A couple of days later, I thought of this puzzle again and searched my stack of unfiled paper for the card. There it was. Signed J-O-squiggle. A couple of things clicked into place. John Hedtke and Constance Maytum had spoken to me a while back

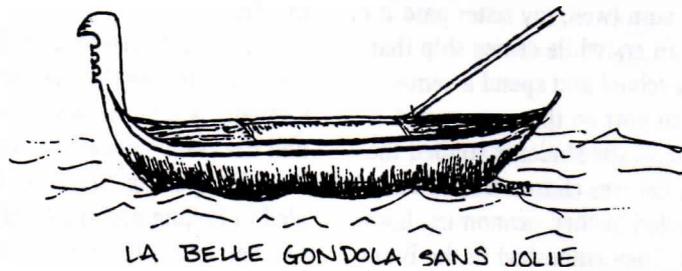
of an upcoming trip to Venice. John would have sent a card to Denys.

The signature on the card was John's, not Jolie's.

I suffered a giddy moment while one world evaporated and another sprang full-blown from the void. I examined the new world. It was richer for John and Constance's visit to Venice, but poorer for the subtraction of one V from Jolie's experience. Two V's are not so meaningful as three. The meaning fairly vanishes, taking with it a few twilight epiphanies.

It is, perhaps, a better world. It has been released from the brain-lock I put on it, freed from the confines that my empathy for Jolie's adventure had built from the evidence of coincidental postcards and the consonance of a consonant. This world has more people in it, more life, more surprises.

Still, there is the unavoidable sadness at the loss of that other world, where I might have sat with my niece on a sunny morning, drinking coffee and reminiscing about the narrow streets and broad plazas of Venice.



Keep Me Lifted

Behind every Past President of ffwa stand dozens and dozens of heroic people. On the way home from the May Vanguard, it hit me that I'd been neglectful of everyone who has played a part in my rise to power and prestige. So, I herewith give my thanks to a typical few.

Above all, thanks to Mrs. Azari for the clear premonition of a future past presidency when she wrote of a shit-scared seventh-grader, "Someday others will look to you for advice & leadership." As for other teachers, thanks to Alan Ball for Camus and for the Gitanes and whiskey on the back porch, to Linda Robertson for the Dorothy Parker act and the first paid publication, and to Jim Manuel for the retort: "I submit to you, Mr. Byers, that a nuclear weapon is *not* just a big rifle."

Thanks to carl juarez for knocking on the door and for many leaves turned and burned since. Thanks to paul lemman for the giggles that got me through the first year in Seattle. Thanks to Ron Thomas for the snow and for tales of acid vengeance, and to Barbara Edie for being a better Virgo than I was at the time. Thanks to Jerry Kaufman and Suzle Tomkins for the Red & Black party, where many fates were set.

Thanks to Tami Vining for the dress shirt, the magic pouch, the silver chain, and the fire. Thanks

to Jane Hawkins for encouraging me to take a romantic flight and for applying salve when it crashed. Thanks to Kate Schaefer for posts to rass-eff that make me LOL. Thanks to Constance Maytum for the reminders that I was cuter when I was nineteen, and to Eileen Gunn for sensible advice and creative accouterments. Thanks to Vonda McIntyre for blushing.

Thanks to Karrie Dunning for numerous dances and ongoing lessons in health and humanity. Thanks to Jessica Amanda Salmonson for at least one obscure and maddening book. Thanks to John Berry for reaching heights of design, and to Katherine Howes for the winged cat and wicked words. Thanks to Amy Thomson for a Twicky ride on a rainy day and for sunscreen on a sunny one.

Thanks to Sharee Carton for laughing at my poor pose, and to Lucy Huntzinger (and Dave Clements, RIP) for being cool and funny when the tire went flat. Thanks to Ted White for the observation that King Crimson's *Red* represented a direction that heavy metal could have taken. Thanks to Caroline (or was it Carol?) for the squalid moment in the back seat of a car.

Thanks to Ron Drummond for timely and musical conversation. I love it when you talk dirty to me. Thanks to AP McQuiddy for books, beer, and

(with apologies to
Spearhead)

bonhomie—and for at least one other thing that starts with a B. Thanks to Victor Gonzalez, Castle Rock cowboy, for Independence Day by the Bay and Thanksgiving in Manhattan. Thanks to Luke McGuff for hoeing the row and making a go of it, and to Art Widner for out-burping Luke.

Thanks to Spike Parsons for the Mona Lisa grin. Thanks to Glenn Hackney for compelling reading in Men's Apa and FELLAS, and for looking good in a hat. Thanks to Carrie Root for the calm, level-headed presence, even in absence. Thanks to Don Keller for the comment, "It's trying to be a Wolfe story," and to Tom Weber for helping to finish the keg before it spoiled.

Thanks to Robyn Roberson for making the first move. Thanks to Brad Matter for spastic grooves, and to Marc Olsen and Chad Shaver for tricky licks. Yeah, and thanks to the Bitches for the bruises. Thanks to Molly and Frank Blades for the upstairs smoking room and everything that has happened there, and thanks to Don Fitch for the feather in the cap. Thanks to Nancy McCann for the occasional Sherman and for once and future operas. Thanks to Cliff Wind for conversation at Mr. and Mrs. Bear's house that was just right. Thanks to Nahid Katla for the tears.

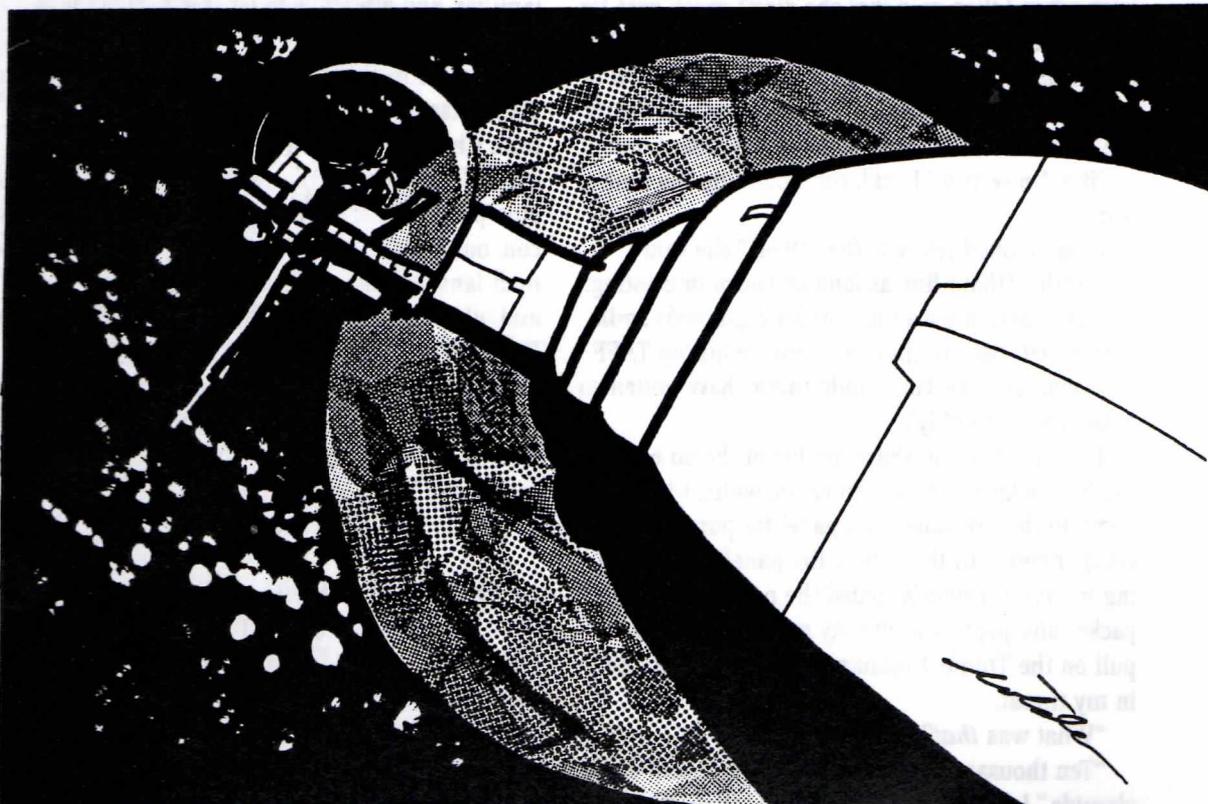
Thanks to Andy Hooper for wit, unseemly kindness, and drunken song. Thanks to Hazel for beauty beyond the call of duty and for the hugs and free ale, and to Dick for brewing most of that

ale. Thanks to Lesley Reece for the smoffing and for the perfect illo of an empty gondola. Thanks to Steve Swartz for turning me on to gardening. The weeds look almost like flowers sometimes. Thanks to Ian Hagemann for responding to one number with a another. Thanks to Mark Manning for the terrifying and terrific story of family visitation in *Jupiter Jump* #27, and to John Hedtke for the suggestion that I measure the bottom rather than the top.

Thanks to Geri Sullivan for taking an unexpected inspiration and then giving it back. Thanks to Tommy Ferguson for pushing the (virtual) envelope in *TommyWorld*, and to Robert Lichtman for the loc and other egoboo. Thanks to Frank Lunney for making the LACon corridors friendlier, and to Sheila Lightsey for—you know, I just realized the other day that *you* were the one hanging out with Nevenah and Barnaby at ConFrancisco. Thanks to Michael Stearns for charming the women at the dinner party and then droning on and on about Paul Auster. Mercy!

Thanks to Denys Howard for the invitation to Seattle and for doing the grocery shopping. Love & rockets, comrade! Thanks to Jay Salmon and Elonna Lester for barbecues, Xena parties, and the jungle of flowers. Thanks to Mom, Dad, LaVelle, Jolie, Lonnie, Terry, Ryan, and Cody for being a family *and* lovable. Weirdos!

And lest I forget, thank you. Yeah, *you*.



Potflu: A Feast of Calabashes

The whole population of the valley seemed to be gathered within the precincts of the grove. In the distance could be seen the long front of the Ti, its immense piazza swarming with men, arrayed in every variety of fantastic costume, and all vociferating with animated gestures; while the whole interval between it and the place where I stood was enlivened by groups of females fancifully decorated, dancing, capering, and uttering wild exclamations.

—Melville, *Typee*

I was shocked to learn that the Brits all thought that I'd fucked Tommy Ferguson. I try to keep a low profile, but here I was, already in the deepest trouble even before the fair but fierce Alison Freebairn donned my cap and discovered that our skulls were the same size — yes, even before the orgasmatron was brought into play.

In fact, the trouble started near the end of Potlatch when Lilian said that she didn't much care for sercon fans. I was sitting at the Big Time Brew Pub with Lilian and Victor, and I was drinking a pint of the Trombipulator Belgian Trippel, which, at nearly 8%, was a mistake already, albeit a pleasant one.

"But *I'm* sercon," I said, compounding the problem.

Lilian looked ready to flee. "Well," she said doubtfully, "that's fine as long as you're interesting."

Victor gave me a smug, chicks-dig-faned smile. I could tell that my chances of ever winning TAFF were over already. How could things have gotten so desperate so quickly?

I had intended to share my list of the 20 essential SF books of the past 20 years, which I had taken to the previous day's panel for purposes of comparison with the lists of the panelists. Realizing my error, I swiftly folded the paper into a tight packet and popped it into my mouth. With a large pull on the Tromb, I managed to lodge the packet in my throat.

"What was *that*?" Victor demanded.

"Ten thousand mikes of pure lysergic acid diethylamide," I choked suavely; then to Lilian, "Can I

buy you another glass of wine?"

She seemed to find this offer *interesting* enough.

By the time that AP showed up fifteen minutes later, I knew who had slept with whom, and I was beginning to suspect that my chances had improved. Only later did I remember that I wasn't trying to improve my chances.

Who was I trying to impress? I mean, fandom is just a god-forsaken hobby, right? Who cares if you're a big name fish in that small pond? I've always been proud of being a fringe faan, and I've never learned enough of the history, traditions, or secret handshakes to understand the arguments about TAFF or the importance of paper fanzines or the factionalism. I don't get many zines, and I don't work cons. Hell, I don't go to many cons, except for Potlatch. I've been to seven of nine of them.

Potlatch was like an old shoe: comfortable, familiar, and attractive to fetishists. There was Art Widner and Freddie Baer and Sheila Lightsey and Debbie Notkin and Jae Leslie Adams — all the usual suspects from the West Coast, and regulars from Chicago, Minneapolis, and Madison, with a sprinkling of further-flung exotics attracted by the blue-plate special combo-convention. It's a serious con, our Potlatch, rife this time around with single-malt fans who flaunted their wares Friday night and whirling dervishes who strutted their stuff for DJ Vacuo on Saturday. (Thanks again, Spike, for tracking down the bartender and scoring that whiskey sour for me.) It was a good time, and the quiet smoking consuite even allowed for conversation with Don Fitch.

But Corflu was something else again.

Corflu was seductive. I approached it with trepidation, fearing that I would sit again on the outside of a circle of BNFs to whom I had nothing to say. But straight away, before I even got to the hotel, I ran into Victor, Lilian, Jerry Kaufman, and Christina Lake and was invited to join them for a cup of coffee. Before I knew it, I was

having dinner with Robert Lichtman, Ted White, Frank Lunney, and incipient-GoH Ken Forman (and Sheila and Tami, of course, but they have to be nice to me). In the raging Baad Grrls Room, where non-smokers longed for the gas masks impounded at the recent WTO debacle, Bill Bowers asked me to visit the next time I was in Cincinnati. Was it possible that after twenty years of fannish minac I had found a seat at the table?

But no. My handful of articles for *Apparatchik* had gained me admission, but I still didn't have much to say. Yet I was reminded that, despite pathetic doubts and a parasitic nature, I had made connections amongst the trufen over the years. Lucy Huntzinger reminisced about a day fifteen years ago when her father complained about the young fool at work who had dyed a checkerboard into his hair, and she told him, "That's a friend of mine, dad! His name is Randy." Geri Sullivan very patiently sat with me and explained in detail why she thought (mistakenly) that *Roe vs. Wade* had bested *Steelhead* in the Iron Fanned competition. And there was Art Widner again, who dragged me, Geri, Tami, and carl off to dinner at the Snappy Dragon on Sunday.

You know, I just love Art. He's been in fandom since the beginning of time, he's still full of piss and vinegar (not to mention a wee bit o' the creature), and he pitched a complete-game victory in the Corflu softball game. Art fucking rocks.

But it was more than that, wasn't it?

Despite myself, I keep thinking of the orgasmatron.

(Must...not...)

Yes, maybe it was the Brits after all. There was so much to learn about them. I learned that, like Californians, they don't smoke or drink. This was an even greater shock than learning of my sex-life with Tommy, but at Potlatch we could not lure any of them into the Smokin' Lounge, except for Alison Scott for a too brief time on Saturday. "The lush sort will be here next weekend," she assured us.

Well, there was Lilian, too, I suppose. Victor even succeeded in getting her sercon. The two of them speculated on whether Ian Sorensen could be tempted when he arrived at Corflu, though they doubted it. By the time that came around, I was too distracted by Alison Freebairn's skull to notice whether the dirty deed was done.

As for beer, well, at Potlatch, which was notably short on Brits, the keg was dry by Saturday night, whereas at a Corflu fairly overrun by them it was still flowing at the Sunday night parties. Even

a very nearly legendary effort by Martin Smith couldn't drain it.

Admittedly, I was no help, after I was told that the Corflu keg was Kilt Lifter. Lilian had explained that "kilt lifter" was Scots slang for "faggot," and I was worried for my already battered reputation as a closet heterosexual. When Steve Swartz informed me late on Sunday that the beer was actually Tilted Kilt, it was too late. And who knew what "tilted kilt" might mean to the Scots? "Tommy-fucker," no doubt.

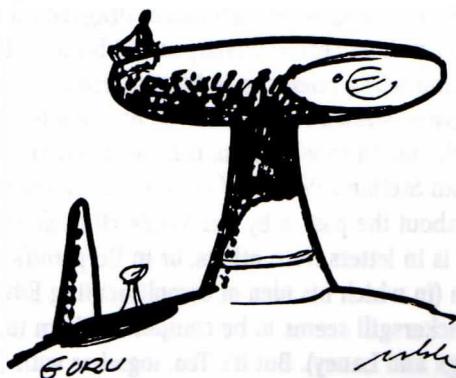
Still, the Brits scored high on the diversion scale. Every one of them had a kick-ass fanzine, for one thing, leaving the American side looking rather bruised. More importantly, Debbi Kerr and Linda Krawecke brought absinthe to Christina's birthday party. It's illegal in the US, but no matter: the jail cell was just another smoky room filled to overcapacity. (Thanks, Nigel, for the bail!) And once Linda had gotten us high on wormwood, she struck us in Space Needle poses for a series of damning photos, while Doug Bell tried to explain to me the remnants of Celtic languages in Scotland. Whereupon Alison Freebairn came along with a set of mustaches, which transformed Tami into a gangster, Geri into an Impressionist, Ulrika O'Brien into a Chaplin, and Martin Smith into... Martin Smith with a mustache on his cheek.

Finally, I must not mention the orgasmatron again.

(Must...not...lose...composure.)

No, this must end — as Potflu did — with Alison F. and her perfect skull. After Tami said, "Stop looking at me like that or I'm going to cry," and Alison sent Martin to bed, and Chairman Hooper left us with an exhortation to turn the lights off behind us and stay off the third rail, and Yvonne Rowse clinked away with an exotic dancer's sashay, and I'd forgotten to worry whether I belonged or not, Alison and I stayed up till the birds sang, discussing why neither of us had ever fucked Tommy Ferguson: because we're both (say it with me) *too precious for sex*.

Phwoar!



Tradition

This is one of those articles in which someone proudly proclaims, "I have never read *The Enchanted Duplicator*." I understand that it's an ancient form — perhaps even traditional — and I think I've already used it once myself. But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

I didn't see much of Luke McGuff at last year's Corflu in Seattle, and, after all, he lives in Seattle. Luke is at least semi-gafiated these days, but I did see him at Potlatch the weekend before Corflu. He hung out with a bunch of us in the smoking consuite and joined us for a dinner expedition to a Greek restaurant, where I teased him because he grew up in Chicago but hasn't read Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. Freddie Baer, at the other end of the table, leapt to his defense when she thought she heard me teasing him about growing up in Chicago, because she grew up there herself, which I hadn't known. When I explained the actual point of my jibe, she admitted that she had, in fact, read *The Jungle*. Luke pretended to be abashed.

Good fannish fun, and all that. Much laughter and many tearful hugs.

I thought about Luke — his presence at Potlatch and absence at Corflu — as I read some fanzines recently. Victor has been trying desperately to recruit me to the cause of fanzine fandom, and he loaned me several piles of older fanzines in the effort. Not real old, mind you; everything I've read so far was published after my own entry into fandom in 1979, when Carl Juarez dragged me to a Norwescon in Seattle. Perhaps what brought Luke to mind was a reference to him in *Izzard* 5 (Patrick & Teresa Nielsen Hayden, 12 Feb 83), in a loc from Judith Hanna in which she comments on Ted White & Dan Steffan's *Pong*: "Of course, not all the writing about the past is by Ted White Himself; much of it is in letters from others, or in Bergeron's column (in which his idea of complimenting Edwards or Pickersgill seems to be comparing them to Redd Boggs and Laney). But it's Ted, together with Dan

Steffan, who select the letters to print, and who raise the topics that their readers debate; the editors set the tone of the zine, and the tone of *Pong* seemed to be compounded [of] continuing nostalgia for the past varied by fierce denunciations of Glycer, Wooster, McGuff, Coulson and others who managed to get Ted's goat."

I've only known Luke since he moved to Seattle in 1990, and I was fascinated by this passing glimpse into his fannish past. There was also a COA for him in *Izzard* 2 (19 October 1982), and I thought, "My god, Luke was almost somebody in that era of fanzine fandom." In contrast, I didn't even make it onto the mailing list for *Izzard* (which is why I only saw copies eighteen years later when Victor loaned them to me), and got only the first and third issues of the Nielsen Haydens' *Telos*. Which I didn't loc, of course. (And you know, kids, I did loc *Mainstream* at least a couple of times back in those days, which is probably why I remained on their mailing list through the bitter end. There's a simple lesson in this, I'm sure.)

Anyway, I read Judith Hanna's reference to some bone of contention between Luke and Ted in the context of what I do know about Luke. When he moved to Seattle, he produced a number of non-fannish zines and chapbooks. He joined a non-fannish stunt theatrics group called Cacophony and started up the Men's Apa with a mixture of fannish and non-fannish members. He also started a web journal and got involved in web rings. Ultimately (which is to say, more recently) he joined the Fremont Arts Council and then a performance troupe called Cirque de Flambé. We haven't seen much of Luke at the monthly Vanguard parties since then.

Gafia. Judith Hanna's letter in an old *Izzard* gave me a whole new perspective on Luke. I imagined that he entered fandom as a young Turk, fascinated by the intellectual ambience and DIY techniques of fanzine fandom but put off by the smoffish traditions and secret handshakes. Soon he ran afoul of fans such as Ted who are proud (and accomplished)

traditionalists, and it was all downhill from there. Or rather the search continued for the playfulness, intelligence, and creativity that he admired in fanzine fandom, but it moved outside the bounds of faanish traditions. So, he keeps his toes in fandom through the relaxi-sercon Potlatch, but steers clear of fanzine fandom at Corflu.

Of course, where does he end up? Studying to be a clown, in a tradition far older than fanzine fandom's. So maybe there's some other issue here...

But this is all a fantasy anyway. I've taken two tidbits from old fanzines and an apparent choice between two recent conventions and I've made up a story about it. I've created a phantasm of Luke in order to talk about myself. I mean, I don't know about Luke, but I've never read *The Enchanted Duplicator*, and I don't really want to.

But that can wait; let it wait.

One of the things that surprised me as I read the *Izzards* and *Teloses* is that I felt mildly depressed by them at first. What was up with that? They contained plenty of good writing and a strong sense of fun. The secret story told in their pages is of a great re-awakening in fanzine fandom, with peppy new fans goading older giants back into activity. There is a tremendous excitement about it, and a feeling of furious activity.

Still, I found these zines mildly depressing, and they reminded me of the feelings of alienation I had when I first encountered fanzine fandom. Do I simply find fannishness depressing? (Twenty years in a mildly depressed state. What am I, a glutton for punishment?)

But wait! Hadn't I just read another pile of fanzines that left me feeling exhilarated? At Corflu, I got fascinating zines from Victor, Alison Freebairn, Lilian Edwards, and Christina Lake. Afterward, Victor loaned me D. West's *Deliverance* and the first nine issues of Michael Ashley's *Saliromania*, and as much as I argued in my head with West and Ashley, I found their approach to fandom refreshing.

So, what was the difference? Maybe I just prefer British fanwriting; so much of it is so very smart and damned funny. But the P&TNH zines were smart and funny, too, so that couldn't be it.

Well, maybe these zines are more personal and local. Maybe they don't strive with history so much. Well, except that the West and Ashley *do* strive with fannish history — particularly with Walt Willis and what I take to be called Sixth Fandom. Yes, and what is their attitude toward that history? *Forget about it, fuck it, it's not important.* Meanwhile, Alison, Lilian, and Christina — in what little

of theirs I've seen — seem simply to ignore it and to focus on what's going on in their lives and in fandom here and now.

One thing that all of this has gotten me thinking about, contrarily enough, is my own history in fandom and the friends I've made there. I begin to discern a pattern, and we've already seen the outlines of it in what I've said about Luke.

As I mentioned earlier, my first friend in fandom was carl juarez, whom I met at the University of Oregon in 1978, when I had just turned eighteen. carl had previously made connections with fans in Portland, and he impressed me mightily with his two zines, *Cum Grano Salis* and *Jedermann sein eigener Fussball*. carl convinced me to go to my first convention — a Norwescon — in March of 1979. We visited Vatican II — a slanshack that I would visit many times in the next five years and where I have lived since 1984 — and I met and befriended Denys Howard. Denys seemed like a bigtime fanned to me in those days. He published a barrage of perzines and a fat sercon genzine called *Women and Men*, and he was the OE of C/RAPA, which carl and I joined.

What strikes me in retrospect is that both carl and Denys were publishing stuff outside the tradition of fannish fanzines. Through them, I met fans who *were* working in the tradition — such as Jerry & Suzle, Patrick & Teresa, John Berry, Gary Farber, Alan Bostick, and the like — but carl and Denys were the ones with whom I connected best personally. While they were aware of the faanish traditions (in *WAM 7*, Denys referred to Gary as a “BNF of Necrophiliac Fandom”), their own work did not pay homage to past masters of fanning for fanning's sake.

I went to a number of regional cons in those early days, including Orycon, V-Con, and Moscon. I met Sharee Carton at the latter. Sharee had also pubbed her ish — *Oomphaloskepsis* — and she introduced me to Tami Vining, who eventually became another close friend. Sharee was a former Little Miss Prairie Sunshine of Edmonton (or something like that) when I first met her, but she moved swiftly into the punk rock world, which is where Tami lived, too. carl and I were sliding more new-wavishly into drugs and music fandom as well.

So, I found people I liked in fandom, but I pretty much always felt alienated at conventions. It was probably mostly self-loathing, but, again in retrospect, there's significance in the type of fans I connected with. I never felt comfortable with the traditional fanzine fandom types, for a number of reasons. One was that I just didn't get it. I didn't understand the references, and I wasn't interested

in learning how. I was also either bored or intimidated by many of the mainstays of that crowd.

The feeling of intimidation is interesting, looking back. I was an insecure little bugger, no doubt about it, and I felt threatened by people who had accomplished something, especially a something the import of which I did not grok. I also had a desperate desire to be recognized for my own preternatural brilliance, which was not conducive to the kind of apprenticeship necessary to gain a reputation amongst the establishment. On the other hand, when I did get up the gumption to, say, loc *Mainstream*, I was painfully embarrassed by the evident lack of preternatural brilliance in the published product. I was not worthy.

So, it was the usual mixture of complete lack of interest, overweening ambition, and pathetic self-doubt. One thing that has come into focus after reading D. West's dithyrambs on fandom is that faneds are players (a.k.a. "preening martinets"). To make an impact in fanzine fandom, you have to strut your stuff. You have to put yourself forward, claim the stage, and promote yourself as a person of interest. I wanted the attention to come to me; I didn't have the *chutzpah* to grab it. Besides which, I was sure that I was going to make my name as a writer of mind-blowing fiction. I aspired to be the next Samuel R. Delany, not the next Walt Willis (whoever he was).

There was, of course, a significant overlap of drug and music fandom with fanzine fandom. While Carl didn't contribute to the zines, he knew enough of the history to understand the Degler jokes and could converse knowledgeably with the brow-beating likes of Gary Farber. Sharee connected with Lucy Huntzinger and Allyn Cadogan, and the three of them produced two drug-induced issues of *Convention Girl's Digest*, featuring the Ted White Group Mind, which was a locus of drug, music, and fanzine fandom, amongst other things. I got to know Victor around that time, and, neo though he was, he became my main contact with that group.

Typically, I was more interested in doing drugs and listening to Eno with Victor than I was in the fanzines (and accompanying feuds) that he found so fascinating. He read riffs from D. West's *Performance* aloud and brandished sheaves of documents concerning Topic A, but I wanted to hear the *Killing Joke* album again. He edited or co-edited *Totally Wired*, *Instant Gratification*, and *San Serif*, and I wrote an earnest novella about love and loss and shifting alternate realities that I didn't have the will to revise.

One thing that Victor's recent (and ongoing) attempt to convert me did was to inspire me to go through my own paltry fanzine collection. I look at the zines he did, and *Convention Girl's Digest*, Sharee's *Right Up There*, Dawn Plaskon's *Punk Dykes on Dope*, Bryan Barrett's and Lucy's *Abattoir*, and I am filled with mixed feelings of belonging and mere longing. The two thin issues of *CGD* in particular strike me as the very epitome of what I could have aspired to: drugged, dreamy, quirky, and full of oddball friends in strange guises. They have the fantastical affect that I did, in fact, try to reproduce in my own oneshot, *Conversions*, five years later. (Small wonder, perhaps, that Lucy wrote one of only two locs to my exercise in *noli me tangere*.)

But the real history is scrawled right at the top of my copy of the first issue of *CGD*: "Well, all right, if you must have your own copy.... Were you at that party? Why can't we remember you? — Allyn." I wasn't on the original mailing list and had to ask for a copy. The party in question was the founding-of-fwa party at the 1984 Worldcon in LA, where I sat in the corner and quietly watched the players play.

Three years later, Sharee told me that Allyn and Lucy were irritated by my passive-aggressive complaints about not having received a copy of the zine. I had felt hurt and baffled by the exclusion, but I hadn't seen that I was doing my own excluding by refusing to take part in the play. I did not loc many of the fanzines I got, I did not pub my ish, I did not cultivate friendships with the BNFs, I did not care about Tucker or Burbee, and I was actively appalled, rather than energized, by the feuding and pedantry of fanzine fen. The thing that impressed me most about the faanish parties at the LA Worldcon was the size and quantity of the joints rolled by the masters. Perhaps the killing blow to any chance of taking an active role in the fun was my inability to be witty while stoned to the bone. Not that I remember the things that everybody else said that seemed so entertaining at the time.

Which presents a new theory about why the Convention Girls didn't remember my presence at the party, I suppose.

Victor wasn't able to give me the complete run of *Teloses* and *Izzards*, so I'm left with the fragmented impression one gets from ancient history. The impression is one of desperation in the last of the lot, *Izzard* 5, where Teresa explains, "This argument is without hope of conclusion; all sides are at the point of pleading the motives and intent of their opponents." Patrick's

column is titled "The last, final, ultimate, really truly last this time, no, really, didactic, proscriptive, prescriptive, fanhistorical, metafactively analytical, Sixth Fandom Fandom and Standards and all that jazz and stuff it up your nose, completely terminal Constructive Discussion. Poot." As if to underline the futility of this rhetoric, the final page cheerily proclaims that AVEDON CAROL WINS TAFF.

It's all very, well, mildly depressing. I'm basically a Rodney King, can't-we-just-get-along, let's-get-fucked-up-and-drive-too-fast kind of a guy (except for the drive-too-fast part), and the contentiousness and jostling for influence in fanzine fandom is too much for my sensitive, reclusive soul. It's just a god-damned hobby, after all.

Or maybe I just prefer the role of the reluctant ingenue. I've been waiting for somebody to seduce me, and Victor is ever ready to play Mephistopheles. He recruited me to write for *Apparatchik*, and that paved the way to a friendlier relationship with fan-

zine fandom. Overweening ambition has given way to contentment with small doses of egoboo.

So, Victor continues to feed me fanzines from his collection. I recently read Hazel Ashworth's *Lip 1* (June 1986), with its tales of desperate fannish fun by Lilian (who assures me that it wasn't really *that* much fun, isn't it always the way?), a hilarious camping story (reprinted from a 1957 zine) and years-later reflection by Clive Ashworth, and an amazing and amusing meditation on death by Mal Ashworth. I'm getting caught up with the writing of what could have been my tribe, had I been another person.

Occasionally, Victor shows me his copy of *Warhoon 28* and tells me that I really ought to read it, but I don't know that I want to abandon the traditional pleasures of saying, "I have never read *The Enchanted Duplicator*."

Let it wait.



Falling

This isn't the end of it.

Has it been over two years now? Time spent forgetting more than reflecting.

Tami tells me she's not afraid to die. She says that death is simply a return to the larger, universal being of which our selves are just a manifestation in this particular world.

I tell her that I once heard of a Buddhist sect that meditates on corpses in the belief that if they focus themselves properly in the face of death, they will carry the knowledge of their current incarnation into the next one. Otherwise, I took it, such knowledge is lost.

That does it. She admits that she's afraid to lose the memory of herself. When we return to our greater being, we are absorbed, so she's been told. We do not remember this life, this self, and that makes her angry.

I don't believe in an afterlife or reincarnation or a return to universal being, but I do believe that the universe is bigger than my hopes, fears, memories, understanding, and will; and that I am part of that larger whole. I'm in the material thick of it, for this is the world, nor am I out of it.

Tami's fear of loss makes me think (though she would not agree): this life is not mine. I was given form in the world, and I will return to the mix, the mulch, the dead matter from which all things form. I did not choose this form, and I will not choose to lose it. If this life is not mine to begin with, how *can* I lose it?

I don't want to fear death.

Two weeks after he fell, the other construction workers sprayed the words GOD BLESS YOU MIKE S. on an I-beam, and they bolted and welded it into place above the one off which he'd stepped. They wore harnesses cabled to the new wing's steel skeleton, but still they strutted on that high beam, displaying their defiance—but of what? Fear? The price of carelessness? The futile desire to hold onto a gift that isn't yours to keep?

What can it mean to let go of it and fall free?

I remember a dream I had when I was nineteen and had gone to Europe with my brother to look for a *raison d'être*. (Yeah, that's how pretentious I was. And I didn't find one, although I grew up a little nonetheless.) In the dream, there is a snake—a cobra—that I think is a mink, but it's really a fer-

ret. The ferret appears out of the night shadows, crosses a bright green lawn, and enters my friend's house. It is chased out by a cat, then attacked by a dog, who says, "Go back to Bulgaria!" (Don't ask *me*.) The ferret spits and circles back toward the house. The cat spits and slashes the ferret's throat.

Blood jets from the gash. A man staggers toward the house, his neck bleeding wildly. There's a hole in my neck. My heart pumps blood out through the jugular breach, drains life into a growing dark, as, with each pulse, thoughts grow weaker and smaller, shrinking toward nothingness. Helpless, terrified, I watch myself disappear.

Wake up, it's time to die.

I wasn't ready for nothing. Was Mike S.?

A week to the day after he fell, I woke in darkness with the conviction that I would die any second now and that death is an absolute erasure. Panic is not subtle enough a word for it. I was terrified of losing everyone, most definitely including myself. Had I learned anything since that first dream? With only a second to prepare, I formed a desperate image of my love for all of us—a kind of prayer, all I could do, not nearly enough.

I had thought the impact of his fall was fading.

The day after his fall, Pat called and asked me to come to the counselling/debriefing session that the University was holding for employees who had seen it or had felt disturbed by the aftermath. I'm glad she called, because I had talked myself out of it, thinking that my tears the night before had released the anxiety.

Pat had actually seen more of it than I, and she was one of the three people at the session who said that he'd been trying to step down onto a ladder when he lost his balance. They also saw him strike the ground, whereas from my vantage he had disappeared behind a big, black pickup. Pat remembered that he'd struggled to get up after he hit the ground, but Raul and Michelle said his body just bounced.

I had never paid attention to him before, although he'd apparently been working on the construction site for at least a week. At the session, while the baggy-eyed counsellor led us through a cautious process of discussion, a woman whom I couldn't quite place showed up. Once she started talking, I recognized her as a member of the window-washing crew that had been working on our

building. She'd come through our office to wash the insides of the windows, and I remembered a friendly smile and wry small-talk.

"I didn't see it happen," she told us, "but I saw him working up there last week. He wasn't wearing any safety gear, and I thought about saying something. I thought about turning him in."

She moved to the front of the table, threw herself into the chair next to mine and grabbed a Kleenex. "But I didn't do it. I didn't fucking do it, and I keep trying to figure out how this isn't my fault."

No one said anything. The counsellor looked at her blankly. I wanted to hug the woman; I wanted to flee the room.

"The 'men' I work with," she said, making quotation gestures with her fingers, "do this kind of shit all the time. I tell them they're going to get hurt, but they just laugh at me. They go ahead and do it, and then they say, 'See, I didn't die.' I'm so sick of the macho bullshit!"

"It's normal to feel some anxiety," the counsellor said to the rest of us, only glancing at the woman. "You may find yourself going through a whole series of different reactions."

"It's funny where your mind goes," the woman said. "I keep thinking that if I hadn't washed your windows, you wouldn't have seen it so clearly."

Laughter broke out of us.

"I keep thinking that maybe I should have covered the windows with mud."

When the fireman hosed off the I-beam, a wall of red mud washed into the street, where it collected in puddles. Upset workers from my building called to complain, and cardboard was thrown over the puddles.

Before the session, Tom went across the street to look at the memorial of flowers that various people had stuck in the gate of the site's chain-link fence.

"I can't believe it," he told me. "There's a card from the School of Social Work that says something like, *He shed his blood for the construction of this building.*"

The first thing I'd done when I got to work that day was to grab a copy of the *Daily*. I was looking for information that would make sense of what I'd seen.

"Construction worker Michael W. Senescall fell to his death yesterday morning while working at the School of Social Work on the corner of N.E. 41st Ave. and 15th Ave.

"Senescall, 39, of Auburn, fell 15 to 20 feet from a ladder onto a steel beam lying on the ground below him."

Senescall is an unusual last name, suggestive of

"seneschal" — a medieval steward in a noble household. The counsellor told us that he was the foreman of the welding crew.

The president of the contracting company was quoted in the *Daily* as saying, "It's really disheartening. You spend time and money on safety, and to have something like this happen is very disappointing."

At 39, he was only a year older than I.

Auburn is a working-class town on the south shore of Lake Washington that for some reason has escaped the white-trash reputation of its neighbors: Renton, Kent, and Burien.

Bare context for an event that had been so hard to interpret at the time. How bad was it? A broken arm? A broken back? How far had he fallen? It couldn't have been *that* far. Surely he couldn't have been killed by it.

Someone said that if the ambulance turned off its lights, that meant he was dead. The lights went off as it pulled away.

There must have been a dozen cops, firemen, and paramedics in the immediate aftermath of the accident. They worked on the man, directed traffic, interviewed witnesses, examined the site, and talked amongst themselves. I searched their faces for answers, but they revealed nothing. Or did they? Did that one's smile mean that the man was still alive?

All I could see through the side window of the ambulance was the occasional movement of a paramedic. Someone unfolded a white sheet, but I couldn't see what was done with it.

I got a good look at him only briefly, when, strapped to a stretcher, he was brought out from behind the pickup and taken to the Medic One ambulance. His bloody head was wrapped in white cloth, and one paramedic held an oxygen mask over his bearded face. His shirt had been stripped off, revealing a soft, beery torso, and another paramedic pumped the chest with overlapped hands. The dusty jeans and work boots looked lived in, worn from common use.

Who was the young man who sat and cried, who gave the HoneyBucket a savage, almost comic kick, who threw himself on the ground while the other workers stood looking on in shock? In the first seconds, he screamed "Fuck! Fuck!" and ran to grab a cellphone, while two others rushed to the body.

What was it? What did I see? Was it the first flash of motion? Did I hear a startled shout?

I looked up from the computer screen and out the window and saw a form plunge behind the pickup, and I knew, as though I'd struck ground myself, that someone had fallen.

Thank You Christopher

1988 was not a happy year for me. I had quit my data entry job at Aetna Insurance the previous October, which was a good enough move in itself except that it plunged me into what felt like desperate poverty. I also started doing a fair amount of crystal meth around that time, basically because I was feeling miserable about my love life, or the lack thereof. When I tried to jumpstart my *joie de vivre* that summer by shaving my head for the tenth anniversary high school reunion, I found out that my insecurity wasn't up to the task of ignoring the strangers who teased me on the bus. (This was apparently before shaved heads became popular in professional basketball, because when I shaved my head again in '96, strangers couldn't be bothered to give a damn, thank you.)

In fact, when I consult the calendar I kept for 1988, it looks like I must have sat in my room and sulked for most of the summer, because I didn't note any parties, concerts, or special events for July, August, or September. October is barren as well, except for the note "STOPPED SMOKING" on the 14th (I signally failed to note that I started back up again two months later) and, on the 28th, "Butthole Surfers at Union Station."

The Butthole Surfers show is, in fact, more or less the subject of this memoir. Well, the *real* subject is, perhaps, missing the boat, or the irrelevance of hype, or maybe even the death of glamour. In any event, it's an excuse to noodle on about the past.

I never got into their albums much, but the Butthole Surfers were probably my favorite live band in the late '80s. As lead singer Gibby Hayes explained at a Ballard Firehouse show, they made a yearly pilgrimage from Austin to Seattle for one thing: the bud. And who could blame them? The home-grown bud in Seattle was sweet indeed, and legend had it that the local variety had been developed for maximum potency—for scientific purposes, of course—in the labs of the Health Sciences complex at the University of Washington, then unleashed on the happy populace by heroic red-eyed lab assis-

tants. Whatever the case, the Surfers played stoner thrash psychedelia, and their shows never failed to transport me into a dreamworld of thundering, echoey ecstasy. An appearance was always a cause to celebrate, even when I was in the depths of depression.

Although the 28th was three days shy of Halloween, the show was billed as a Halloween show. We were encouraged to wear costumes. Whatever. Robyn was the only one in our group who dressed up, and she went as Medusa. She'd done the same get-up the year before, but it was more than good enough to repeat. It involved a floor-length gown, the color of which I can't remember, although it was probably green. The rubber snakes in her long black hair were certainly green, as was her lipstick. It was that green lipstick that really did it. She was gorgeous and deathly at the same time.

Unfortunately, she went to the show with her boyfriend, Mark. Did I mention that I was unhappy about my love life? Right. But I haven't mentioned that I was still fixated on Robyn, with whom a thang had ended (sort of) in '87. Mark was her second boyfriend since then, and I liked him, as I'd liked Derek before him. Mark was studying in the School of Fisheries at the UW, and he ultimately moved to Kodiak Island to start an oyster farm. An easy-going guy, played the guitar, sweet smile, looked like Patrick Swayze, smoked pot, liked to hang out at the Blue Moon Tavern, where Theodore Roethke spouted poetry and fell off stools in days gone by.

Also along for the show was a friend of theirs, Nils—a German anarchist who came to the US to avoid the mandatory military service in his country. He worked as a mechanic at a VW shop in north Seattle, and was always self-contained, amused, and distant. Robyn and I once visited him in his upstairs bedroom in a shared house, and as he rolled a conical, European-style, tobacco-and-hash joint to the strains of the Sex Pistols, he talked about life as a squatter in whatever city he came from, I can't remember. Maybe Hamburg? He missed his girlfriend very much and eventually

moved back to face the military music in Germany so that he could marry her.

Victor and Jay came to the show as well. They were living in the Quack House on Phinney Ridge by then, and Victor drove us all to the show in his monstrous Olds 88, which he got after he rolled the Toyota Corolla down a hillside outside Bellingham. I spent a lot of time at the Quack House in those days, snorting meth and hot-knifing dope and, come to think of it, listening to "Sweat Loaf"—the Butthole Surfers' whacked cover of Black Sabbath's "Sweet Leaf". I'd known Victor since '84, when I met him through science fiction fandom. He was working as a DJ at a stripjoint called Déjà Vu, at the north border of Seattle, where nudity (or at least the stripjoint) was legal. I met Jay through Victor, although he turned out to be a classmate of the other Bellingham Kids that I met through Tilda Palmer—the daughter of science fiction fans, and Victor's ex-lover. Jay worked for a poster distributor and served in the Army Reserves. He drove a camo'd scooter and was the best quacker in the Quack House. (He's my next door neighbor now, so I have to say nice things about him, or he won't let me borrow the lawnmower.)

So, this was the gang that arrived at the Union Station. The Seattle music scene was officially dead in those days, and venues were hard to come by. As such, the Union Station was pretty impressive. It hadn't functioned as a train station for god knows how long, but it was still cavernous and marbled—a far cry from the narrow, brickwall taverns I was used to. They had set up a beer garden (without tables) in the back, and we established a camp on the floor nearby. Our psychedelic for the evening was mushrooms, but we probably ate those before we went in.

I hadn't heard of either of the opening bands. I guess I wasn't smoking, so I must have just paced around impatiently, exploring the space and looking at costumes, riding the rising tide of the shrooms. Eventually the first band, Blood Circus, started up, and they sounded pretty good. I bopped around at the rear of the crowd, checking back occasionally with my friends, who remained at basecamp.

Blood Circus stopped, and I probably had another beer. Another band to go before the beloved Buttholes started. The next band was called Nirvana, and they sounded pretty good, too. Worth a closer look. I waded into the crowd, up to the front. People were slamming, and I joined in, anxious for action. Some of the guys had already stripped their shirts off, and the action turned out to be more than I wanted to deal with before the main attrac-

tion. One has to conserve ones energy, after all. I pried my way out of the crowd, back to camp. The shrooms said that it was all good. We jabbered and laughed. The music came to an abrupt stop, which was fine: it meant that the Surfers would be coming on soon.

Not as soon as we would have liked, of course, but they did hit the stage at long last. Our camp dissolved as we all moved up to be moved.

The double thunder of the drums, the howling mass of guitars and voices. The stage show was more elaborate than those I'd seen before, at the Central and the Firehouse. A big screen behind the band reflected a montage of *Charlie's Angels* clips and a groin-numbing penis vivisection documentary. At the front of the stage, a topless woman did the gogo, ha ha, was this irony? She was cold and sexy.

"Shave your pits, bitch!" a younger man shouted beside me.

It seemed he was from another planet. One with hostile, aggressive aliens, intent on invasion. I followed the dancer's lead and ignored him.

It was all very weird and itchy and loud. After I had exhausted myself bouncing off of sweaty, shirtless boys, I wandered around in the back of the crowd, where I saw a young woman fall off her boyfriend's shoulders and land headfirst on the marble floor. She was whisked away, but there was a tell-tale smear of blood on the marble. I felt sick. Life's stupid fragility, never safe. The rest of the show went by in a blur.

On the drive back to my house, we were pulled over by the cops. Oh, shit. Victor eased the Olds into the parking lot of the infamous Bridge Motel, which swiftly disgorged its enigmatic inhabitants as they came to see what the excitement was about. Victor was very deferential to the officer, calling him Sir. Nils and Mark giggled in the backseat at his manner, but it seemed to work. The cop let him off with a warning, and we proceeded on to my place, where we drank and yodeled until the cows came home.

What got me thinking about that particular show was reading a piece by Christopher Priest called "Thank You Girls"—a wonderfully evocative reminiscence about how chasing after girls led him by chance to a Beatles show at the Cavern in December 1962. Priest describes that first encounter with the Beatles as a life-changing experience, and he speaks compellingly of what their music meant to many in his generation. "A personal identification with the Beatles survived...even with Lennon, bombed out

on drugs and made pathetic by Yoko, ending as a sad broken ghost of what he once had been. I trace my own sense of identification right back to the evening in the Cavern, when I had felt that obscure sense that they stood for something.... Even though they dazzled my girlfriend and mocked my suit, they were somehow there on my side, saying things that would never enter my head, living a life I could only fantasize about, yet managing to speak for me and make me feel I was part of it all."

The closest I came to that kind of experience was the brush with Nirvana, but, aside from the fact that it was more like seeing the Beatles in Hamburg, it obviously had a very different impact on me. That is to say, not much of an immediate impact at all. I liked what I heard that night enough—and was aware enough of Nirvana's popularity on the local scene—that I bought *Bleach* when it came out the next year. I thought it was pretty good, especially "Scoff" and "Negative Creep," but too angry and noisy overall for my tastes. I lent it to Robyn in exchange for Soundgarden's *Loud-er than Love*, which came out around the same time. That one was too heavy metal for me, but Robyn—a big Black Sabbath fan—loved it. She didn't think much of *Bleach*.

As I mentioned earlier, it seemed like the local music scene was dead at the time, not so much because there weren't any bands as because there were so few venues for live performance. For the most part, I wasn't enthused about the bands who were getting a lot of attention from the scenesters. (Since I didn't know any scenesters, my knowledge of who they liked could only have been gained from the pages of that authoritative monthly music tabloid, *The Rocket*. Readers of Everett True in the UK music press probably knew more about these things than I did.)

My favorite local band was a progressive nerd-punk unit called Vexed, who didn't exactly have a huge following. Still, on any given night in the tiny, beer-slick confines of Squid Row, they could transport me to the stratosphere and even breathlessly beyond, and I counted myself blessed to have that magic available to me for a cover charge of three bucks. There wasn't much else of interest going on, but Vexed's live shows were as good as anything I'd ever heard and even better than the Butthole Surfers. Their bass player, Brad Matter—a.k.a. Alfred Butler—turned out to have worked with Victor at the college radio station, KCMU, and my old friend Carl also knew Brad and played with him in an experimental noise band called Yama The Pit and briefly in another one called Sky Cries Mary that

would later shed its experimentalism and put out a couple of groovy pop albums on World Domination. Through Carl, I got to know Brad, so I guess I was kind of a scenester, too, but it wasn't the scene that was about to take the world by storm.

So, when Nirvana's *Nevermind* exploded into the global music market at the end of 1991, I was caught by surprise. I thought it was a pretty good album, but I didn't understand why it was so wildly popular. I was 31 years old, and the picture of Cobain giving us the bird on the inside cover seemed adolescent and silly. At the same time, the frenzied attention to the "Seattle scene" that followed felt like a validation of my love of local bands, which by that time had extended to Hammerbox and 7 Year Bitch. (Both, like Vexed, on the C/Z label rather than Sub Pop, leading me to believe that I jinxed C/Z to extinction.) For a brief time, I lived in the hard rock capitol of the world, and it was undeniably exciting. I listened to albums by the popular bands (even the locally suspect Pearl Jam), I howled at Mudhoney's mockery of the hype in "Overblown," and I felt like I was part of something special. Despite my skepticism about rock'n'roll attitude, I approved of Cobain's T-shirt on Nirvana's first *Rolling Stone* cover: "Corporate magazines still suck."

Three years later, he was dead, and the hype swiftly died with him. I was caught by surprise again by the strength of my feelings at his suicide. I hadn't noticed that he'd become important to me even while his music hadn't. Folks compared him to Lennon, and I recoiled. Hell, the deification of Lennon was bad enough, now they wanted to elevate a screwed up kid from podunk Aberdeen? But the fact that he was from the Pacific Northwest, and played real rock (which was pretty damned good, really), and liked the Raincoats and the Gang of Four... somehow it seemed we were in the same boat, I guess. Of course, he had been hauled up to First Class, while I was still down in steerage, but still...

A couple of years after Cobain's death, I was at a party where I met one of the members of Blood Circus, who had opened the Halloween show at Union Station. He told me that the plug was pulled on Nirvana that night when the flimsy plywood stage threatened to fall apart under the onslaught of the slamdancers. That's what I bailed out of because I wanted to save my energy for the Surfers.

And maybe the sweaty little guy who screamed at the Surfer girl that she should shave her pits is off somewhere at this very moment writing about how his chance encounter with Nirvana that night changed his life forever.

Corflu Gossip

So here we are in the End Times of fanzine fandom. I went to Corflu Valentine in Annapolis this year, and for the second year in a row there was hardly anybody there.

True, there were obstacles to attendance for some. A half dozen potential attendees were at Boskone instead. Others couldn't come because former lovers or spouses would be there having fun despite the tragic loss of the best damned thing that ever happened to them. Still others couldn't be there because the friends of former lovers or spouses would be there to tell them how much happier the ex (not in attendance themselves for the previous reason) was with their new bed partner. Finally, some couldn't make it because their hated enemy would be there, whether sex (or Boskone) was, or ever had been, involved or not.

Amazing, really, that anyone was there at all.

I've been to the last three Corflus (as well as the first one in Seattle in 1988), and I now know enough dirt that if I told the tale of the most interesting parts of the convention, someone would have to kill me. (Perhaps it would be Ian Sorenson, although on that front my lips were sealed when he paid me the money that Lilian owed me. Fannish relations are so complicated!) Yet I am not alone survived to tell you: Ted White and Dick Eney sat in the same room in the Annapolis Radisson, and neither the universe nor even mere fandom was annihilated.

Feel the love!

That was the motto of Corflu Valentine, and just as at last year's edition in Boston, there was a great deal of *bonhomie* despite the diminished population. There was even fresh blood in the form of the eponymous Max, who put out the first issue of *Cosmic Hairdryer* (I know, I know, you never got a copy) late last year and promptly signed up to travel to Corflu all the way from the UK. "I didn't travel to the US," she observed. "I traveled to a convention." We promptly threw a FAAn award for Best New Fan at her, hoping she'd stick around.

But I'm getting way ahead of myself here, and I mustn't get everything mixed up. I took careful notes on my way to the airport after it was all over, and my notes are neatly sorted by day. So, under Thursday I find one that says, "Nic passes out." Now, if you think the joke is that I made the same note

under each day, then you're mistaken, not to mention quite contemptible for thinking such a thing of Nic Farey, the man in front of the power behind the convention throne, which was his wife, the Blessed Bobbie. No, what astonished me was seeing him Friday morning looking nearly bright and almost chipper while I felt as though Jim Beam and three of Nic's redneck friends had taken me out to the parking lot at some point and practiced playing football with my head.

"But," I said pointedly, "I guess you did get a little more sleep than I did, what with that little spell in the stairwell."

"No," Nic explained, "a coma does not count as sleep."

Yvonne Rowse was sweet enough to call my room at 10:30 that morning so that I could go shopping with her, otherwise I might have slept through my hangover. However, had things gone that way I'd have missed the ride to the historic district of Annapolis in Nic's ancient, rusting white hulk of a Cadillac.

"How can a car this big have only two doors?" Yvonne protested as we clambered into the voluminous back seat.

There's nothing like having five tons of good American steel between you and oncoming traffic to make you feel secure — at least until Nic started weaving down the highway while trying to read a map, which wasn't a map so much as a cartoon. Ron Salomon tried to keep us distracted with light banter (some of which sounded remarkably like shrieks of terror), but there was nothing so calming as Nic's talk of tits — mother's milk to our ears.

"Samuel Fucking Jackson's best line," he told us, "...and I admire Samuel Fucking Jackson greatly, he's one of the greatest fucking actors of our time, and his best line was in *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, when he turned to her — and you *know* who I'm talking about — and said, 'When you see those coming around the corner, you know you have time to comb your hair.'"

Thus it was, an hour later, that Yvonne and I, having combined forces with the mighty Madison combo of Tracy Benton and Bill Bodden in the meantime, found ourselves contemplating a bottle opener that had for a handle a ceramic mermaid with bare breasts. It was all too easy to imagine

Nic using this device to open a beer bottle with loving care, except that he drinks crap beer out of a can. As for the striking red crab hat that we found at the hat store, yes, it was silly, but was it silly in a purposeful (or at least fannish) way? All doubts were later quelled, and Yvonne and Bill returned the next day to acquire both objects. We gave the bottle opener to Nic immediately, and, sure enough, he looked at it blankly. Or perhaps he was just staring in admiration at the bubbies.

But surely I've gotten ahead of myself again, since that happened on Saturday. Was there anything else on Friday? Well, there was Harry Andrushak's striptease in the consuite, which he performed only with Max's permission, such was the power she had immediately attained. "WAHFed again!" Harry cried as each zine was handed to him. This mantra was soothing, as was his languid fanning when struck by yet another hot flash.

The opening ceremonies were brief and to the point. Nic thanked us for coming and, with Sheila Lightsey's help, pulled the GoH out of the hat. Boy, did Moshe Feder look surprised. Of course, everybody else there had either been GoH before or had paid the bribe to keep their names out of the hat. Maybe in the future we should just have someone volunteer for GoH duty; there would be fewer names to deal with that way. In any event, Moshe was pleased, and the rest of us were pleased for him, except maybe for Bobbie, who had borne the brunt of Moshe's irritation that the convention T-shirt came in only one size, which was extra-large, which he is not.

"I've run large media conventions before," Nic said at some point, "and, small as it is, Corflu is harder. It's more intimate, so you know everyone. Everybody is your friend. It's not just some stranger who is yelling at you, it's somebody you know, and it's easier to take it personally."

With the ceremony out of the way, the convention got down to its serious business: trash-talking gossip. Okay, it's true, the rumor-mongering started Thursday night, when the convention was just a circle of people sitting in the non-smoking consuite, but I'm trying to make progress here. Besides, it wasn't until we got the smoking consuite open on Friday that we could divide into two camps and gossip about whoever wasn't present in whichever consuite we were occupying at the time. Friday was also when Jae Leslie Adams showed up and all my favorite fanwriters were finally there. Except for Alison Freebairn. And Andy Hooper. And Lilian Edwards.

So we gossiped about them, and about D. West, too. Poor Bobbie was horrified at the tongue wagging.

"No, no, it's social grooming," I told her. "It's a brain tonic; it makes people feel good. Really, there are scientific studies."

She lit another cigarette and smiled bravely.

The programming on Saturday was something of a shambles, and the first panel was sort of almost about the reason why. The putative topic was elitism in fanzine fandom, and the panelists were Nic, Claire Brialey, and rich brown. Nic had apparently scheduled this item as a forum in which to discuss the brouhaha between Andy Hooper and EB Frohvet which seemingly caused Frohvet to step down as the head of programming for the convention. Was Hooper's disapproval of Frohvet a case of elitism? How did he get the power to decide who was eligible to run programming at a Corflu? rich was less pugnacious on the subject than he sometimes is in writing, and he explained his theory that fandom is an anarchist meritocracy and that each fan seeks attention in his or her own terms and fails or succeeds not through the approval of a powerful elite but through his or her ability to find a niche somewhere in the fannish ecology. As for Hooper's supposed power, rich pointed out that Andy had opposed the Leeds Corflu and yet failed to have his way. If somebody such as myself had been less hungover, he might have pointed out that Andy himself bowed out of attending this Corflu after the outburst against Frohvet, and that those two things might possibly be related.

Meanwhile, Claire couldn't get in a word edge-wise or otherwise. She seemed to think that there was, indeed, elitism in fanzine fandom, but that nobody was going to stand up and confess to it.

Was it this panel that devolved into a meandering discussion of electronic fandom? I don't remember. I went to Lenny Bailes' item later in the day. Lenny was having a difficult time at the convention, and his attempt at a radio show went off the rails when he tried to divest Nic of his beer. I believe I missed the other scheduled items, some of which happened and some of which didn't. The TAFF auction was a quiet affair, except for Moshe's announcement that he was still boycotting TAFF because he still hadn't received an apology from Martin Tudor, who apparently wrote in his TAFF report that Moshe had disrupted the TAFF auction at the LA Worldcon in '96.

"You're disrupting the TAFF auction, Moshe!" we teased.

That night, I had dinner with Yvonne and John & Eve Harvey at a Chinese restaurant. I was told that I had met John and Eve at the Seattle Corflu, but I'm ashamed to admit that I didn't remember them. "You looked far too cool to want to hang out

with our sort," Eve told me later, "but when I got up closer I could see that you weren't cool at all." I'll just mention that Eve was drunk as a rat when she said this, so I don't hold it against her. (Much.) She and John and Yvonne and I ended up ordering enough food to feed Somalia, even though I didn't order anything myself. Except for the fried rice that the waitron talked me into at the last moment, which was very stupid, but I made up for it by quickly drinking three beers and thus rendering myself incapable of responsibility.

The last item on the program was the after-dinner production of Ian's musical, *The Booze Brothers*, which went very well despite the lack of a proper sound system. The Brits were all in fine form, particularly John, Claire, Pete Weston (wearing a shirt straight out of *Guys and Dolls*), and Mike Scott. Nic and Bobbie sang the last duet, based on the Pogues' wonderful "Fairytale of New York". Did you know that they met at a karaoke bar? Nic and Bobbie, that is, not the Pogues.

It was a dark and stormy night in the consuites. Everybody joined Pete in telling hysterical horror stories about his wife. Nic and Bobbie had a fight. Yvonne was driven away in tears, but not by them. Ted White confessed to childhood acts of pyromania. Mark Plummer got me a beer. I got Mark a beer.

Yvonne returned. "Corflu reminds one that so many fans are sad, obsessive types," she said, but that was actually earlier in the day. The convention had become a big blender, or perhaps a bender.

Jae drank pirate tequila, and Max drank rum. I think that was for breakfast.

I woke up, and it was Sunday already. As soon as I got to the consuite, Nic told me that we were out of beer and that I was elected to drive him to the liquor store. Yes, friends, I got to drive that ancient, rusting white hulk of a Cadillac through an alien city. Nic was barefoot. The people at the store knew him by name. He popped open a beer as we got back in the car, and I nosed five tons of good American steel into oncoming traffic. Somehow it all worked out.

Back at the convention, the banquet was splendid. Bill Bodden presented Madison's bid for the 2003 Corflu, which was approved. Ted awarded the past presidency of fwa to John and Eve, to wild acclaim. Victor presented the FAAn Awards: Best New Fan to Max, Best Letterhack to Lloyd Penney, Best Fan Artist to Dave Hicks, Best Fan Writer to Alison Freebairn, and Best Fanzine to Wabe (Adams, Benton, and Bodden, eds.) Moshe got up to give his GoH speech, and Bill crept up from behind and crowned him with the bright red crab hat. Moshe's speech was terrific, and he got off the best

goddamned pun of the whole convention, based on his renowned expertise on lox. Later, when he looked in a mirror and saw the crab hat, he got off the convention's best scream as well.

Everything slowly disintegrated from that point, as people peeled away and headed for the airport. Those of us who remained gathered once again in the consuites to yatter the time away.

"Why did Martin Morse Wooster come?" Ted wanted to know.

"Look, Claire!" I cried. "Ted is being elitist!"

"I knew the panel just got started before the elitists woke up," Claire said.

"I'm just curious!" Ted protested. "I mean, *does* he have any friends here?"

Nic told me about his past as a student and Marxist at the London School of Economics. Victor told somebody about the new Mac awaiting him at home. Jae got up to study Mark's accent and then suggested to Victor that paper fanzines might be evolving into vehicles for art. Speaking of which, Bill Bodden brought around a postcard for Art Widener, who missed a Corflu for the first time and was sorely missed. Ted is now the only person who has been to every Corflu.

Early Monday morning, it got late again. There was a crowd over on the bed, and I was deep in conversation with Ted, or maybe it was Nic.

"Hey, Randy!" the crowd on the bed yelled.

"What?"

"Just say 'yes!'"

"Yes," I obeyed.

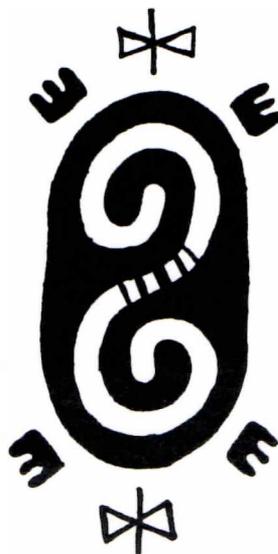
Victor smirked. "You've really fucked yourself now," he said.

"What?"

"You just agreed to run for TAFF," said Eve.

"I will not!" I said.

And that was the end of that.



Randy Byers for TAFF

