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In the Beginning

The Fantasy Amateur: Once again, I'm three months late with these mailing comments. This tardiness will continue for at least another quarter because as March approaches its midpoint, there is still no sign of the February bundle. ' ' Loud huzzahs for Redd's decision to stop honoring the "franking" privilege. ' ' There has been FAPA precedent for including a Swedish language fanzine in a mailing. A long while ago, Russell Chauvenet distributed in FAPA two small fanzines that weren't in English. One was in French, the other in German. If an amendment is to be worked up to prevent this in the future, the wording should be chosen with the utmost care. Otherwise, some stickler could protest the inclusion of art pages, for instance, for their failure to be written in English. ' ' There are two people on the waiting list I've never heard of, a situation I can't remember in the past. I'm slipping or something. Stunned Mullets: It wasn't just science fiction writers who were thinking about television before it was invented in a commercially viable form. Just recently, I ran across a reference to television in a Sinclair Lewis story published in 1930. A character mentions in passing that he's thinking about getting into television so he'll be in on the ground floor when it goes into general use. ' ' Norman Gunston isn't as unknown in the United States as John Bangsund might suspect. A feature article about his person and methods appeared in TV Guide, the other year. I find it pretty hard to believe that Norman would seem strange if his programs were telecast in the United States. Every talk show host I've encountered has seemed like a parody or a joke, even the ones who showed the possession of talent in previous phases of their careers like Carson. ' ' I still can't understand disappointment when a Hugo nominee fails to win the trophy. The nomination itself impresses me as such an honor that the final decision isn't all that important. ' ' I don't know quite how John will take this fact, but: among the fanzines which I recently took to the attic, after deciding that it was too late to write locs on them by now, were several issues of Australian Science Fiction Review. ' ' I've never heard the theory that Schiller's ode was originally to freedom rather than joy. It strikes me as very dubious. Only two years later, Schiller wrote Don Carlos, which has more implications about tyranny and freedom than would have emerged if Schiller had substituted freiheit for freude. There couldn't have been too strong repression of freedom sentiments in that part of Europe in the last years of the 18th century; the wildly popular genre of the "rescue" opera was just getting started, soon to culminate in Fidelio. Philistine Quarterly: Grain isn't any more expensive to grow than tobacco, but whiskey costs considerably more than cigarettes. Legalized marijuana would undoubtedly follow suit in its price structure. Lagniappe: The first time I encountered the sexist attitude to "history" was as long ago as the 1930's. There was a Dr. David Keller story in one of the prozines which included a speculation that the word had

been coined as a merger of "his story". FAPA Book: Memory behaves in strange ways. I can recall nothing about my year as secretary-treasurer except the fact that one member's check bounced and, for some reason, the physical appearance of the FAPA records. They were in a looseleaf binder, inscribed on mimeographed forms which someone had prepared for efficient and neat chronicling of who had published which and owed what. I wish I could retain useful things out of the past as clearly in memory. The material in this issue is particularly interesting to me because it starts in the time which my new fan history manuscript concerns. I felt a sort of suspense as I read through these pages, wondering if I would encounter some statement or bit of data which I should have included and hadn't. But Bob Pavlat's summary of these mailings from the early 1950's meshes quite nicely with my own impressions. I am also somewhat more inclined to go along with Bob's division of FAPA history into distinct periods than I am to believe in the existence of numbered fandoms. Oops, here's another name I don't recognize: this Cantin who became a member in 1955. So I'm not just slipping; I'm tumbling down the banks and spray from the waters of Lethe is already ruining a random memory here and there.

Notes from Aranam: There must be a combination of reasons why so many things bought today fail to hold up well. Some factors other than those Roy Tackett mentions might include manufacturers' desire to boost sales by making sure their products will need replacement soon and the near-disappearance of the factory owned by one man or a small group of partners. Almost everything is built nowadays in bigger factories operated by corporations. Management might not feel as strong an urge to satisfy the buying public when the increased profits which might result from such a policy won't go to the owner-managers but to a small army of unknown stockholders. ' ' This is getting monotonous. Now I can't remember having met Roy Tackett. Apparently I did, since I'm excluded from his list of guaranteed candidates for non-existence. On the other hand, I've met at least half of those whom Roy isn't sure about.

Minimum Opus: It's no longer as easy to obtain large quantities of fanzines as Wilt Stevens seems to think. Bargains turn up occasionally when someone experiences all-out disgust with fandom suddenly and wants freedom from everything connected with it. But I fear that such happy events will soon be as rare as the discovery of an attic full of forgotten comic books from the earliest era. Dealers are starting to peddle fanzines to some extent and even some fans who decide to unload are asking vast prices for the most demanded stuff. Already the price of certain things, like Bradbury's old fanzine, early Howard-centered publications, and Willis' best-known titles, are going out of sight. I saw an advertisement not long ago that asked prices of \$1 and up for each item in a long list of fanzines that had no interest other than age: publications from the 1930's and 1940's with no distinction in title or contributors. ' ' I would resign from FAPA if I thought someone would take my place and rejuvenate the organization. But the odds seem against that. New members who become really active, retain membership over a long period, and turn out high quality material come along at the rate of maybe two or three per decade. It sounds egotistical as all get-out to put it this way, but I've been producing about ten per cent of the FAPA mailings in recent years and finishing high in the egoboo poll, so if the function of FAPA includes providing enjoyment to others, I'd better stay in.

" I can't get all het up about the awfulness of SF Expo 76. It is nothing but the logical extension of the path the worldcon is taking. It won't be as distant from the past few worldcons as the past few worldcons have been from the first few worldcons. It has simply speeded up the journey that the worldcons are taking away from a fan gathering to a totally commercialized carnival for the money-hungry of every variety. Philosophical Gases: That's why I prefer fanzines to worldcons. This is a cryptic remark unless you have such a good memory that you guess what inspires it: George Turner's complaint that fan writing has too much ego-tripping. I find ego-tripping quite interesting, much more so than politicking for future worldcon sites or blowing a week's salary on an art show entry. Well, maybe they're highly specialized forms of egotripping but the kind that turns up in fanzines seems much better. I love the novels of Dickens for the characters who turn up in them, and I think fanzines are the best place to find such characters in today's real world, for the very reason that George complains about, the way these real people impose their personalities on what they write and publish. I grant that some of them would be unbearable as constant companions in one's home. It's easy to keep them under control when they're attached to printed pages by whatever chemical law holds ink to paper. The Best Lines Are Forever on the Floor: If FAPazine titles continue to be so long, I'm going to revert to my old policy of not underlining them in these comments.

" I share Bill Rotsler's reaction to Sharman DiVono's lament over Hollywood's golden era. I love the movies from those days. Nevertheless, this is television's golden era for movie-type productions and a generation or two in the future, people will be collecting and studying and enthusing over tv films of the 1970's just as they now do over the movies of the 1930's. For that matter, Hollywood itself isn't dead. Walter Matthau will become a cult hero around the turn of the century, just as W. C. Fields is today. He's too popular for intelligent people to appreciate his very great genius today. " I believe that there is a Vivaldi factory somewhere in Europe which produces all these concertos. If so, there will undoubtedly be newly discovered additional concertos for two trumpets before long. I will grant that Vivaldi existed and even may have written some music. But where would they have kept those mountains of scores if he'd really written all the works that have been credited to him, if they'd existed down through the centuries? They would have filled half the monasteries in Italy. How could they have kept any girls at that institution where Vivaldi taught, if the poor kids had been faced with the obligation to learn twice a week a new concerto for bass piccolo and ocarina? Maybe someday Mussolini will be identified as the individual who not only caused the Italian trains to run on time but also arranged for the resumption of composing by Vivaldi, in order to provide employment to Italy's serious composers. It's significant that nobody in Italy between Mascagni and Dallapiccola composed any serious music. Obviously, during those years they were all busy writing Vivaldi concertos. " The references to Ravel's Bolero in this issue inspire me to ask the question which some very experienced music listeners seem unable to answer. How many times is the tune performed in that composition? Some people seem unable to count its appearances even if they listen to a performance solely for that purpose. Synapse: The V X M settings on the Contaflex probably govern flash synchronization. Normally, X is the symbol for

electronic flash synch and M for the standard-type flash bulbs. I don't know what the V would mean. '' The broadcaster's line Juf-fus remembers might be from the 1931 Cardinals-A's world series, because Pepper Martin did play center field in it. But I was unable to find out who made the final out in that last game. The local library doesn't have the world series record book that gives play by play accounts and when I checked local newspaper files, I found that the game in question was played on a Saturday after the afternoon paper went to press and they didn't save a copy of the world series edition which they produced in those years for baseball fans. '' Try Publishers Central Bureau for collections of comic strip reprints at decent prices. I recently acquired volumes of Bringing Up Father and Toonerville Folks. '' I normally receive at least two Christmas letters from fans, not counting the Mercers' tiny Christmas fanzine. '' Why does a prostate operation unfit an attorney for a supreme court appointment? From Sunday to Saturday: The fans who were not permitted to step outdoors during the Hawaii stop on the Aussiecon flight remind me of the memorable climax in one of the Andy Lane novels which I loved so in boyhood. In one of them, involving an exploratory trip over the South Pole, Andy had captured the chronic villain, Brewster, locked him into the windowless hold, and prevented him from seeing the spot which the villain had hoped to reach first under his own power. This always struck me, during each of my 718 or so readings of the book, as a horror quite as terrible as many that I later found in Weird Tales. '' Celsius temperatures are being given on Hagerstown radio stations nowadays, right after fahrenheit readings. This has betrayed one flaw in the metric system. You can't tell if the temperature is rising or falling slowly as easily with celsius readings because it takes twice as much change in the temperature to alter the reading. The Startrek Computer Game: I wonder if this has been cleared with the Star Trek producers. They are quite touchy when anyone tries to make money from their program concept without license. Poisoned Pawn: Russell Chauvenet is the most ardent chess enthusiast in FAPA known to me. But I think most fans play chess occasionally. I learned the rudiments long ago but never got really interested. But that's the fault of my general attitude to contests rather than chess itself. I just don't want to give up time playing games and I'd rather watch sports which require muscle and coordination if I'm going to be a spectator. '' This updating on one of the most fascinating of all modern fans interested me very much. But I did feel a bit disturbed when Dave directed to me his pleas for forgiveness for publishing first draft material. I don't think I've ever chided anyone for such behavior. I dassn't, since I write everything in Horizons direct on stencil without previous draft or even in most cases any notes, aside from an occasional word jotted on the margin of FAPA publications. The fan history books are the only fanac that I've revised before publication in recent memory. Kittle Fitchering Hubble de Shuff: I enjoyed these reviews but I doubt if they'll win much reaction in mailing comment sections. Book reviews somehow don't excite most FAPA members. Don Miller's emphasis on them in this issue demonstrates, though, the biggest trouble afflicting groups like FAPA these days. There's too great diversity of interest among its members, since they come almost randomly from all sectors of fandom. FAPA thrived when fandom was smaller and almost all fans had a large quantity of common inter-

ests. The Rambling Fap: Why worry about a goh speech eight months before it's needed? When I filled that role at the Noreascon, I hadn't decided what I would talk about six hours before I was on. I'd written first drafts of two entirely different talks before leaving home, took them along, and it wasn't until the afternoon of the Hugo banquet that I finally decided which one to use and did some revising on the manuscript. ' ' I feel vindicated that a FAPA member is actually considering solar energy for a new home. It hasn't been too many years since I predicted in Horizons a coming trend toward solar energy and was cried down by several other members who explained how solar power was adequate only for such small tasks as moving the needle on my selenium light meter. Maybe I should press my luck and predict now that another ten years will create another energy trend, this one to tapping wind power, for both small and large power jobs. Ultimate South: I liked this conreport for the way Michael O'Brien put himself into it. Most of the accounts of Aussiecon were objective when the con itself was in the spotlight, although introspection had plenty of play in sections of reports which concerned the trips to and from Australia and sightseeing on that continent. Huitloxopetl: Nobody is downgrading the Hugo fan awards in which "probably 100 fan votes" decided the issue, if there were actually fan Hugos awarded on the basis of so few votes. The Fanzine Activity Achievement Awards are not meant to be competition with Hugo contests or duplication of efforts. Instead they're meant to determine what fanzine fandom likes best. So many people now vote on the Hugos that only the biggest circulation fanzines and their contributors stand much chance to win, unless bloc voting is staged. ' ' I haven't seen A Boy and His Dog. But all I've read about it has convinced me that a better alternate title might be Two Sons of Bitches. ' ' I hope Cabaret didn't disappoint Meade as much as it did me. Maybe I would have enjoyed it if I hadn't known where the plot and characters came from. But I love Sally Bowles too much as a character in a book to be able to accept that brittle and nervous paint-covered individual whom Liza Minelli played in the musical version on film. Diaspar: It might be hard to find a composer willing to set this Brian Aldiss libretto. It would put the opera into direct comparison with a major league predecessor, Benjamin Britten's Noye's Fludde, which also involves the voyage of the ark and also uses children for most of the human characters and all the animals. Besides, the Aldiss work is awfully short for even a brief opera. It might work better as a cantata-type composition which won't leave anyone grumbling over all the work involved in set construction and costumes and such for only a half-hour of music or less. ' ' Bob Shaw might have cited the telephone as another example of things that don't change much. The dialing method of getting your number is the only real change since the late 19th century, and even that has been in use in some cities for four or five decades. There hasn't been any improvement in the quality of the low fidelity voice coming out of the receiver or the nerve-rasping quality of the bell. You'd think that the telephone people would by now have provided at least a better contrast between the busy signal and the ringing sound, and would have built amplification into every phone instead of forcing subscribers to add it as optional equipment. I can understand the reasoning behind removing letters from exchange symbols to widen the availabilities but I don't see why letters have been banished from some dials when many people still use them as an aid to memory.

Hagerstown Journal

December 19--The first thing that happened on my 53rd birthday consisted of waking around 4 a.m. with realization that my Sleepmate was in trouble. The Sleepmate is a little gray box which emits a muffled rushing sound, much like the interstation noise on an FM receiver. I've used it for a couple of years, since marathon parties in the neighborhood, inexplicable noises in the walls, and assorted other noises had begun to cost me too much sleep. Now after all these months of masking those sounds sufficiently to encourage restful sleep, the machine was uttering a rather high-pitched intermittent sound. I switched it off, decided not to get out at such an impossible hour the spare Sleepmate I'd acquired for just such an emergency, and was preparing to resume sleep when I realized that the noise was still cutting on and off. This seemed unorthodox. But, assuming that the mechanical problem somehow extended to the switch, I writhed free from the covers and pulled the plug. This had no effect on the noise, which was then in its on phase. By now I was awake enough to realize it might be a danger signal from the furnace. I staggered out of my heatless bedroom, into the temperate regions of the house. The temperature seemed normal, the noise didn't seem to be coming from the cellar, and I couldn't be sure which direction it was coming from. I opened my front door. The blast of cold pre-dawn atmosphere restored such rationality as I possess, enabling me to realize that the noise was coming from outdoors, not inside the house, and that it was an auto horn. I still couldn't be sure of its direction. Cursing both the reduction in frequency response in my left ear which probably helped to create this uncertainty and the owner of the car who hadn't attended to a defective horn mechanism, I went back to my bedroom. Then my guilt complex struck. Maybe it was the horn of my own car suffering from some malady which had struck in the wee hours. It didn't sound loud enough to come from a car parked in front of my house. On the other hand, I had never heard my own car's horn blowing while I was inside the house and didn't know how many decibels it produced. Long acquaintance with that guilt complex made me understand that there would be no more sleep until I proved my car innocent or guilty. I dressed, observing a youth race madly southward past my home. Once on the sidewalk, I could detect easily that the horn was blowing from somewhere to the south, apparently a half-block or more away. A neighbor lady was also outdoors at this inconceivable hour. We conferred on the situation, agreeing that we'd never known before a defective auto horn to observe this pattern of perhaps two minutes' steady blast followed by one minute of silence, repeated over and over. I speculated that it might result from the mechanism on one of those auto theft alarms which touches off the horn if someone attempts to snatch the vehicle. Wearing a pair of decomposed bedroom slippers and suspecting that mischief might have been nearby, I decided against exploring the block for the offending vehicle. But that wretched guilt complex kept me outdoors a little longer. It forced me to get into my car and lean on the horn, just to remove any lingering doubt that a trick in neighborhood acoustics might have caused my own defective hooter to seem to come from far away. The horn duet which resulted was more than even that healthy guilt complex could face. It slunk back into my subconscious. I bade

the neighbor a good morning, locked up my house tightly, resumed my pajamaed status, and thought that the circumstances might justify a nerve pill. I hadn't taken one for two or three months, the pills normally wear off after four hours, just in time for me to waken at my usual hour, and the continuing horn blasts made it probable that I wouldn't get the rest of my night's sleep in any other manner. Just as I was reaching for the bottle, I remembered that this was the day when I must rise before 7 a.m. because the City of Hagerstown had written me a letter, announcing that smoke might come out of my commode or from similarly improbable sources on December 19. Bright and early, the city was to start on this day to inject smoke into its sewer lines, in order to betray any defects in home plumbing facilities, and a serious flaw in a house would produce enough smoke in it to force evacuation. I would never get to work at a suitable hour if I didn't breakfast, wash, shave and engage in the other morning rituals before the condition of my plumbing was proved one way or another. The nerve tablet would undoubtedly make me too drowsy to rise in time. I burrowed back between the badly refrigerated sheets, turned my blameless Sleepmate on again, and realized that my own personal new year had gotten off to an ominous start.

March 6--The newspaper obituary column told me that Charles McKee was dead. I hadn't seen him for a while but hadn't known he was in danger. The death notice described him accurately enough as the head of a local wholesale hardware firm and an Episcopalian, listed the half-dozen immediate survivors, and promised facts later about funeral plans. That was all. It doesn't seem fair. Charlie was that rare bird, a man who alternated the roles of Dodsworth and aesthete harmoniously all during his adult life. He had been in the hardware business ever since he finished school, first working in the downtown retail store which his father owned, eventually converting the firm to a bigger wholesale firm in another part of town. He was prosperous as a result of good management of the firm, he observed most of the rites of the business leader in a medium-sized community, and he looked like the kind of man whose portrait couldn't possibly be taken at any studio other than Bachrach's. But during many hours in every week, Charlie turned off this phase of himself and indulged in his great love, music. I first met him soon after I received an oboe as a Christmas gift. Charlie played first oboe and English horn in the Hagerstown Symphony Orchestra and offered free lessons in return for my promise that I would swell the microscopic ranks of that group's oboe section as soon as I was good enough not to sound too conspicuous in ensemble. I have no idea what originally impelled Charlie to mess around with oboes, but he had gone all-out. He drove to Philadelphia regularly to take lessons from Marcel Tabuteau, the legendary first oboe of the Philadelphia Orchestra during the Stokowski era, whose magical tone and musicianship were so obvious even amid the surface noise and fidelity limitations of 78 rpm recordings. This impressed me but another phase of Charlie's oboing terrified me. After one lesson, he broke the news to me: only the most naive, ignorant oboe player, someone like me for instance, tried to use reeds purchased at a music store. I must follow his example and make high quality reeds with my own hands. This was alarming, because even that long ago I was well aware of my limitations with anything involving tools or construction. But I felt near panic

the first night he took me to his workshop. It occupied most of the second floor over the hardware store, and it was jammed with quantities of tools and materials which seemed more likely to produce single-engine aircraft rather than those minute oboe reeds. I won the right to use his equipment and materials in return for agreeing to assume a small role in a delicate smuggling operation. The local organ factory used a certain type of extremely expensive, rare wood which Charlie liked to utilize in his reed assembly line and employees were forbidden to salvage even small scraps of this substance. All this was less than forty years ago, so I'd better not risk premature disclosure of full details, but I helped Charlie get his wood without causing any organ factory employee to get fired. Eventually, I was able to make reeds that had at least a 50-50 chance of not suddenly detonating into explosive fragments at unpredictable moments while in use, but Charlie continued to supply me with second-grade examples from his own manufacture for safety's sake. He was less successful in his efforts to teach me the musical secrets of oboe playing, as distinguished from the mere technical problems involved in performances on that instrument. "Make the music go somewhere," he would say. "Nobody else in Hagerstown does." Then he would play beautifully a few bars and I would realize that this was how the fine musicians did it, but I just wasn't ready, mentally or emotionally, to turn my own performances into live, purposeful playing, rather than the mechanical obedience to the dictates of tempo and dynamic markings. The symphony orchestra eventually crashed and burned, partly because World War Two depleted its manpower, but I think Charlie was mildly to blame. He was in the midst of dissension over the conductor, its only paid member, and programming. Charlie didn't like the basic symphonic fare and traditional renditions that were in use; I doubt if anything except Scherchen and something like Gurrelieder at every concert would have satisfied him. Some years later, although I'd retired as an oboist, I resumed sporadic contact with Charlie because he'd found a new way to indulge his love of good music. He had organized a baroque orchestra at the Episcopal church. He directed it, he went to Europe to rummage through collections of old musical manuscripts which he photographed with his Minox to make sure his group would play works that nobody had heard for the past two hundred years, and somehow he even got rather big names in the professional field like organist Ernest White to participate in some of his church programs. I helped with publicity for this group, which sounded to me quite as good as any of the small orchestras which were then recording this sort of music for national release. Charlie seemed totally happy, even though his labors were wasted, in a sense. Hardly anyone in the church could understand why its orchestra didn't play marches and Suppé overtures like the other church orchestras in Hagerstown, Charlie made no effort to publicize his programs outside this city, and I doubt if he ever let anyone else hear the tapes which he made of all the big projects. I never did know what caused him to drop this interest, but I suspect that a change in rector may have had something to do with it. In recent years, he wasn't active himself as a musician, as far as I know, but he was still happy because his son had begun to achieve moderate success as a baritone. Richard McKee probably won't become an absolute celebrity as a singer. I don't think he has quite the basic voice for all-out stardom. But he uses very intelligently the powers at his command

and it's easy to imagine him becoming one of the many Americans who are singing the big parts at European opera houses just below the first magnitude. Or he might achieve the same miracle as a Hughes Cuénod and become a great with less than the finest physical equipment. He was singing at a concert of the Potomac Symphony Orchestra the last time I saw Charlie. The Potomac is vaguely descended from the old Hagerstown Symphony, but it's different in the wider area from which it draws musicians, in the fact that some of its instrumentalists are paid, and in lower performance standards. The family tie can be discerned in the fact that there have been fusses over the conductor and repertoire. Charlie was sitting at a table during intermission when I last saw him, looking at nothing in particular but giving every appearance of a fat cat which had just discovered an inexhaustible source of rich cream. I didn't disturb him, not wanting to interrupt what I suspect was a moment of complete triumph over his certainty that he'd finally created a musical achievement that would get beyond the bounds of Hagerstown.

January 21--I'm a coward who has never dared do anything illegal enough to get imprisoned and eventually eligible for parole. Up to now, I've not been reprieved from imminent dissolution by a physician's discovery that he'd mistaken something mild for something drastic. But I think I know how people in such situations feel. I got called into the personnel office at the newspaper factory for the review of fringe benefits which employees undergo once in a while. I averred that I still felt no desire to change the beneficiary of my company-sponsored life insurance, I was patient at the naïveté of the question when asked if I had changed my address, and I received a little slip showing the monthly sum that would come to me if I somehow survived to retirement age on the job. There was one pleasant surprise in the form of the disclosure that the lessening of this sum for those who take early retirement isn't as drastic as it used to be. Then I wasn't sure if I was happy or sorry when I learned that more than 25 days' sick leave can now be accumulated. I've hoarded up that quantity and it's nice to know that I can accumulate more but I'd been determined to take a few days' sick leave this year to prevent them from going to waste and now I would be wasting them if I took sick leave without imperative cause. The session seemed to be over when the big surprise came, something like the codas in many of Beethoven's symphonic movements. Retirement is now possible at age 60, I was told. Until now, 62 had been the minimum age. Wham, pow, and similar words flashed across an internal screen in my imagination, just as they once did on the Batman television episodes. I felt a strong urge to faint, just as I'd done during the efforts to identify the trouble with my throat. Then I felt as if all the laws of the universe had been revised. Instead of 107 months between now and retirement, there were only 83 months left, as surely as if I had taken a successful trip in a time machine. There would be only seven Easter Weeks in which I must grumble about getting no holiday time off instead of nine more. Even wilder, only six more New Year's Eves are left to be spoiled by the thought that a new year on the job lurks ahead. I got out of there as fast as my antiquity permits. Naturally, my lifelong practice in the knack of worrying rescued me from too great euphoria. If I retire at 60 instead of 62, I'll have less than the sum in investments to provide supple-

mental income than I'd been counting on. There would be a two-year gap before social security payments began, unless the feds change their own pension rules or I accepted a company gimmick which pays most of the social security money expected at age 60 but compensates by taking some of the social security money from age 62 onward. There was the absolutely mad objection involving time off: if I work until I'm 62, I'll get nine months off for vacation but if I take that early retirement I'll be cheated out of two months' vacation time. Then there is the problem of stuff wearing out. Unless my present car ages faster than my last two did, it'll still have a year or two of life in it when I'm 60, and I'd been counting on it dropping dead just a few months before retirement, so I could get a replacement during my final weeks of regular pay checks. My television set is nine years old, so its picture tube will undoubtedly need replacement any month now, and I'd been plotting to trade in the set shortly before retiring, just before that second picture tube wore out, for best trade-in value. However, I haven't been able to worry about such things with my customary persistence, because there's always the strong probability that I'll get fired or quit or drop dead before either 1982 or 1984. Meanwhile, I can stick to my most recent work goal, that of hanging on for another two years until some long-term investments have matured and I can convert them to income-producing investments so abrupt departure from the job wouldn't require a lot of fast financial manipulations. If I make it until 1978, I do believe that 1982 or 1984 won't seem an eternity distant. Edgar Allan Poe once said somewhere, I think, that the human mind can't conceive of the distance represented by a mile. I've decided that it's equally impossible to comprehend that six years or eight years don't represent an infinity of time, when freedom from the daily drudge is involved.

February 7--People who travel a lot can claim all sorts of advantages from their trips. They meet many people from far away, learn something about how life is lived in other lands, gain much the same reputation that Ulysses enjoyed from the simple fact that they've gone places and done things, and are able to supply fanzine editors with material about their wanderings. As a chronic stay-at-home, I've always felt considerable inferiority in this respect, particularly when I'm among a bunch of fans from all parts of the nation and they start to talk about cities which all of them know like San Francisco. But tonight, I came into my own. For an hour, I was the globetrotter, secure in the knowledge that I could relate to what was going on in a way that perhaps no other fans and only a minute fraction of one per cent of the nation's people could do. I was watching Almost Anything Goes. It is the first game show I've ever watched, and my first exposure to it created a delightfully naughty feeling much like the day I acquired my first country music record. But then I read somewhere that this is really a United States adaptation of a much-praised British tv series. Besides, it's not a greed-directed game show, like most of the breed, because the contestants get nothing but one trophy for the winning team and the admission fees paid by spectators are given to charity. This was the night for the Pennsylvania competition. By an improbable coincidence, all three cities from which teams were drawn are well known to me: Chambersburg where I was born, Waynesboro which is only a dozen miles from Hagerstown, and Gettysburg which is within my range.

The program included little travelogs of the contestants' home towns. There I sat, instantly recognizing the oldest building in Waynesboro, the statue of the soldier in Chambersburg's center square with his blue uniform and a grim expression on his face as he stays eternally facing south as a guarantee that rebels won't return to burn down the town again. (I experienced less recognition with the scenes of Gettysburg because they emphasized the battlefield and I'm acquainted with most features of that town other than the battlefield which I've never toured. A battlefield tour has always seemed to me as pleasant as an after-hours stroll through an abattoir.) If any other fans were watching, I knew, they would be as strangers, seeing these things for the first time in their lives, and it was all old hat to me, a globetrotter for a day. The euphoria from this temporary triumph as a traveler lasted long enough to cause me to watch the rest of the program. I found myself enjoying it, even though I'm not acquainted with any of the participants from those three towns. In fact, I strongly suspect that there were some near-ringers in the cast of contestants. Some of the family names aren't normally found in those communities, and they probably belong to people who moved there to take jobs just a few years ago. While watching, I wondered if this series might gain more of an audience if people realized a feature of it that few network television features can offer. The contestants looked like real people, the kind of United States of Americans that I live around, not the standardized California faces and bodies that are ubiquitous on almost every other program. Still another fillip of pleasure came for me when one of the Chambersburg contestants passed out a moment after helping to win an event in which she was one of the dogs on an arctic team racing through artificial snow. The woman in question is a journalist for the Chambersburg Public Opinion. It made me feel as if I had company, remembering my own fainting spell in a doctor's office a few weeks earlier. I don't see the newspapers from those cities regularly, so I don't know if the Chambersburg team which won the Pennsylvania competition has achieved additional glory in the regional and national competition when taped for later telecasting. But it doesn't matter too much; I'll still have the unique experience of seeing my home town team vie for a national crown on coast to coast television. It's doubtful if Chambersburg will ever acquire a major league baseball or football franchise, and different cities are utilized each year for Almost Everything Goes. So I'd better enjoy this specialized kind of rooting opportunity now. I may not get another chance.

December 18--The mailman brought today a mysterious little package from a fan with whom I've had only minimal contact, and it bore an inscription indicating that it was a birthday gift. One of the few shreds of civilized behavior that I haven't sloughed off is the habit of waiting until my birthday itself to open gifts. So I puzzled for sixteen hours or so over what could be in that modest container with a brown paper wrapping. When it became ethical to open it after midnight, I found a cassette in the parcel, no clue as to the nature of what the cassette might contain, and so the suspense went into a hold pattern. By coincidence, I'd just decided a few days earlier to order a cassette player when Montgomery Ward offered a fairly good quality machine at a special bargain price. It hadn't arrived yet. The tape player got stuck somewhere amid the holiday mails, didn't arrive until well after the first of the year, and in the interval I almost yielded to the illegal impulse

to smuggle the cassette into the local library and listen to it there on the player which is meant for permitting patrons to hear a collection of talks on historical topics. I was afraid I didn't remember enough details from the book on sleight of hand which I read as a boy, so I didn't risk it. The gift tape was the first thing I played on the new machine when it arrived. You could have knocked me over with ectoplasm when I discovered what was on it. It was nothing less than the ghost of part of the legendary FATE tape. This was a chain tape for open reel machines which lived through many cycles about twenty years ago, with a membership confined to FAPA members. It got stuck somewhere and I had grown resigned to the probability that it had long since been erased if it hadn't been lost in the mails. My birthday gift was a dubbing of my contribution to the last cycle of the FATE tape. It is never a calm experience to hear one's own voice unexpectedly, but I held up well under that inevitable strain because of the distraction that the nostalgia element of my chattering provided. I recognized instantly the background hiss which meant it had been a product of my darkroom compartment at the office, where I did much of my taping back in those years when I was spending ten and twelve hours a day at the office six days weekly and felt justified in breaking off newspaper duties from time to time for fanac. The things I talked about on that tape segment would be mostly meaningless to the bulk of today's FAPA members. But they seemed surprisingly contemporary to me as I heard them for the first time in 1975, as if I'd been thinking about the topics which were under discussion at that time on the FATE tape, right down through the years. It could conceivably be the sole surviving example of my voice as it emanated from my first tape recorder, a Dixieland model of small price and uncertain origin which I'd purchased from Olson. The sound quality was surprisingly good on the cassette, my first intimation that my new machine provides better results than the price made me expect. (There's no apparent way to use it as a tape deck while feeding its output into a good amplifier and speaker, but otherwise it's quite versatile, even piano music is listenable on it, and its automatic level control facilities are faster-reacting to sudden changes in volume than some machines costing ten times its price, judging by the performance reports I've seen in audio magazines.) I'd better not identify publicly my benefactor, in case someone still in FAPA should have been the owner of the physical aspect of the FATE tape, the reel and tape itself. But I feel quite happy at the knowledge that such a historic tape hasn't plunged into irrevocable oblivion, after all. It strengthens my hope that everything which was still exists somehow, in this or another plane. And it makes me wish once again that someone in fandom would make a serious and long-lasting effort to establish a tape archive for fandom, where such treasures or dubbings from them could be preserved permanently for the enjoyment of future generations of fans. Now I can't wait to see what fandom bestows on me if I survive until another birthday. Last year, Sheryl Birkhead had sent something equally nice. Dare I hope for something next year like the first new issue in a long time of Hyphen from Walt Willis?

March 10--I'm not a very good citizen in most ways. For instance, several years ago I cut off the United Way without a dollar, a shocking anti-social act. When my weekly income tax payments topped \$100, and most United Way agencies were drawing grants

of one type or another from federal, state and county governments, I decided I was doing enough involuntarily and transferred the money I'd been giving voluntarily to the local ambulance service, an all-volunteer organization which has no source of income other than donations from the public. But in recent weeks I've been doing my civic duty in one way. I've been riding local buses at least one round trip each week, in the hope that my bachelor's mite may help patronage to stay at a level which will persuade the county to continue to subsidize the bus system. It has been a long time since I rode local buses regularly. I acquired my first car in 1950, I moved within four blocks of the center of town in 1957, and the old privately owned bus system declined dreadfully in quality and quantity of service as the 1960's proceeded. The management eventually went broke and after a few busless years, county authorities backed renewed service several years ago. I've found the resumption of occasional local bus-riding a strange mixture of familiarity and strangeness. The very start of this gesture toward helping my community was jolting. Someone had told me just a short time earlier that I was looking very well for a change, and when I asked the driver how much I must pay to reach my destination on the outskirts of Hagerstown, he said: "Only 20 cents if you're sixty." I find it hard to get used to the modern system which forbids the driver to make change and requires the customer to pay the exact fare, without even availability of tokens to simplify things for passengers. I didn't think this method was really justified in Hagerstown, where patronage isn't great enough to force a driver to carry a large quantity of change and there's little after-dark service where robberies of the driver are most apt to occur in big cities. But after I'd been riding the buses a few times, I experienced something which caused me to realize that passengers aren't as trustworthy as they used to be. The driver ejected five kids for refusal to obey the anti-smoking regulation and for pulling the cord when they didn't want to get off. In all the years when I rode local buses a dozen or more times weekly, I don't remember anyone getting thrown off while I was riding. Maybe it's imagination but I seem to detect a deterioration in the ability of the general public to get on and off a bus within a reasonable span of time. Not many passengers of today's vehicles are infirm, because they have three steps at the entrance steep enough to frighten away the people in terrible physical shape. But apparently healthy passengers seem to hesitate when debarking just as if they were about to sky dive and many people when boarding a bus spend a lot of time looking around the vehicle exhaustively, as if they suspected it of being a fake Hitchcockian bus like the one in Torn Curtain. I find it pleasant to experience again the impromptu conversations with total strangers that spring up on the buses nowadays, just as they did decades ago. I still believe that the decline in this nation's public transportation system is largely responsible for the increased hostility and tension amid its peoples. When you're in a private auto, it's hard to make new friends with occupants of the nearest autos on the street or highway. Women are now able to get bus driving jobs in Hagerstown, something they couldn't do under the old regime. The county lost several buses and body shops had several private autos as patients before the county found the most capable female drivers, but by now they're doing a fine job. I doubt if I increase my amount of bus patronage, because it would nibble into my time resources and because I'm already driving my

car so little that I barely keep the battery properly nourished. There's no hope of disposing of the car and switching to buses as my sole method of local transportation, because the routes don't cover the city well enough and there's little service at night, none on Sundays. But the reluctance of many people to ride the local buses at all illustrates the difference between the average person's thinking and mine. Most people feel that driving their own auto is the height of luxury. I still feel demeaned when I do that, because it would be so much nicer to have someone else do the driving. It's the same way in eating places. I shun cafeterias, which so many people prefer, because I must do the work of carrying my food to my table instead of relaxing and waiting for someone else to perform that chore. I know nothing about my ancestors much further back than my grandparents. But I wouldn't be surprised if somewhere among the remoter forebears there was at least one rich man with lots of servants. Reincarnation is the easiest way to explain my differentness.

January 31--There is a mistaken impression in fandom that I am Hagerstown's only loc writer. It's true that I am the only Hagerstonian who is to be found regularly in fanzine letter sections. (That situation could change, when the new local fan, Jerry Forrest, finds time amid his congoing to plunge into fanzine fandom.) But there's a potentially great loc writer here, wasting his time in his mundane role as superintendent of the local water department. I doubt if Bill Breichner has ever read a fanzine. But he showed what he can do with a loc when a local newspaper published an editorial about the city's fire hydrants. The editorial writer had seen hydrants in other communities which had been adorned with painted faces. He had suggested that following suit in Hagerstown might be a good idea. Breichner wrote in reply a letter to the editor almost as long as those St. Paul used to compose and considerably more lively. For instance, Breichner commented: "The possibility that a fire hydrant painted anything other than our present decor would assist 'an errant motorist to his driveway' is intriguing. Can you imagine what a problem an errant motorist, who depended on such a condition at his driveway, would have in a community with 800 fire hydrants? Since this represents a first, we can only suggest that the respondent of such an idea is subconsciously exhibiting his frustrations on not being able to locate his driveway or that perhaps his hounddog instincts are the only thing to lead him to his home. Although a fire hydrant beside his desk could even help guide an errant bitch, it would serve no other purpose since this type of journalist endeavor won't set any fires. Errant motorists have ways of locating fire hydrants and strategically they locate those on well lighted street corners, plainly visible, a long way from their home driveways, and at an expense of from \$500 to \$700." Breichner admitted that his staff had thought about adorning hydrants with the portraits of Revolutionary era celebrities, as the editorial proposed. But, he added: "Some of our thoughts on the matter were: (1) That the flat structural top of our hydrants illustrated with such an honored forefather as Ben Franklin would be degrading since it would give them the appearance of flat heads. (2) It would not be in keeping with the spirit of the bicentennial to have man's best friend, the dog, doing what they are traditionally accustomed to doing to a fire hydrant illustrated with the image of George Washington. (3) If some of our canine friends were unable to iden-

tify a hydrant dressed in the color of a Revolutionary War hero, we might well have a serious epidemic of urinary discomfort. Furthermore, if we were able to educate them to this revelation, just think of the problem midgets would have after the bicentennial.

(4) How would a fireman react to having to remove the caps of a hydrant painted with the image of Betsy Ross?" Breichner went on and on and finally concluded: "Come to think of it, you have been publishing the same old drab black on white newsprint for a lot longer period of time than we have been painting fire hydrants a drab green."

January 5--It's increasingly difficult to find a place to park within a half-block of my home after everyone gets home from work and before they leave for the second shift at the taverns. So tonight I decided to walk rather than drive downtown to attend a meeting. I noticed that several other persons who showed up for it shared my concern over the increasing amount of crime in Hagerstown. Our attempt to remember what time muggings began on Mondays was still in the back of mind as I began the seven-block walk home well before 9 p.m. I still can't get accustomed to the way things are in downtown Hagerstown after dark on the five nights of the week when stores there aren't open late. Walking through the shopping district, you see only an isolated individual or cluster here and there. These denizens stare at you as if you had crashed a good but very exclusive party. There wasn't even a customer in the pizza place, one of the few unalcoholic establishments open every night in that area. There wasn't a policeman in sight, even though one is supposed to be on duty at all times in the recently renovated Public Square, due to the vast amounts of glass and shrubbery installed there. A half-block from the square, I came to a full stop at a dangerous alley, peered into it to ascertain that the only vehicle in sight was a half-block away, started across and jumped for my life when I realized that the car had mistaken the alley for an interstate highway and was bearing down on me. Someone in the vehicle yelled something incomprehensible after me as I gradually decelerated, perhaps inviting me to do it again in the hope that I'd be winded enough to give the driver a sporting chance on the second runthrough. At the courthouse corner, even though it was a cold night, several dubious looking characters were lounging on the benches. From the corner of an eye, I saw a couple of them rise and keep pace with me on the other side of the street, as I turned into Summit Avenue. I felt tempted to stop at the newspaper office and call a cab, then remembered how I'd seen some cabbies operate their vehicles in recent days and decided I'd be in less danger if I continued walking. The next half-block is well lighted because it contains a large parking lot and a late-hour laundromat. After I'd come to the edge of darkness past those establishments, I glanced back and the pair had vanished. Nothing in particular happened until a block further along I heard the loud snap of closing teeth, instantly succeeded by loud and frustrated barking. A little boy dashed toward me from the other side of the street, crying: "Did he bite you, mister?" I shook my head negatively, and the little boy's face fell. He slunk away dejectedly. I thought maybe I'd better cross the street, too. This resulted in near annihilation when a car without lights glided soundlessly out of the further recesses of a closed service station into my path, barely a block from my home. I remembered that the 23rd Psalm had helped the day I took my first airplane ride on the way to Noreascon, and pressed it into service again. Maybe it helped, maybe I

would have negotiated that last block without disaster anyway, but when I got back in the house I understood why most Hagerstown people drive when they go somewhere after dark.

February 2--I never thought it would happen. But a vanity press book finally interests me. Part of the interest comes from the puzzle aspect of *The Miracle and a Boy's Heart*. But it could conceivably be the first book with some literary merit ever published by Vantage Press. It's a story about two half-grown boys during the summer of 1918, somewhere in Maryland. Part of the mystery involves the exact place where these things are supposed to happen. The descriptions given in the book of Bradockville don't fit any existing Maryland town (and I didn't forget any in my speculation because the range is limited by the fact that it's a county seat). But there's another phase of the mystery: why the book appeared from a subsidy firm when it wouldn't have taken too much advice from an editor at a normal book publisher to turn this into a first-rate book. The author uses Donald L. DuVall as penname. When I got the review copy, I checked with Vantage and got his telephone number, but didn't call him, since he lives in another part of Maryland and wouldn't be known to local newspaper readers. If the biographical facts on the jacket are true, he spent most of his life doing hack non-fiction writing like how-to books, got disgusted with this career and turned to teaching late in life. There can't be much doubt that most of the stuff in the book is semi-autobiographical. Nobody could make up so many small details about how it was to grow up in Maryland early in this century. For instance, there's the way the characters talk. There are dozens of Marylandisms that you can't learn any way except by living around here: "Making me wallow in slop like a hog," or "maybe the good Lord has knocked some sense into him," or "I got me an old rusty knife." There's no real plot to the book, other than the way the young hero gradually becomes more aware of the realities of life. Much of it consists of long narratives which he hears. Some of these have the genuine tang of old men recalling things that happened when they were young. One of them, though, is spoiled by the fact that it describes how Maryland's blacks started their new free lives on the day the Emancipation Proclamation became effective. DuVall doesn't seem to realize that this document didn't apply to Maryland, where slavery wasn't abolished until a couple of years later by a constitutional change. There are passages that seem as if they might have come from Mark Twain, particularly the half-funny, half-tragic circumstances surrounding the hero's birth. His friend's name is Hickey, so maybe DuVall was thinking about Huck. If by chance anyone in FAPA should run across the book, one episode's locale can be identified with certainty: the small town in Frederick County which the hero visits is Middletown, and everything you read about the beauties of that area is accurate even today. One climax of the book might qualify it as borderline fantasy. If I understand correctly what was going on, the boy saves his mother's life by somehow transferring his own strength temporarily into her dying body. I wrote a long review of the book for the newspapers and got a bawling out from one local book store owner because she had no idea how to go about getting copies for some people who were interested in buying it. If DuVall carries out his intention and doesn't run out of money, I must try to find Vantage's address for her, because he intends to write four more novels. He is doing it, he says, because he is an optimist and his students are pessimists, so he wants to show them "how life really was, could be,

and should be." Maybe the last couple will be science fiction, judging from that description.

January 21--Masochism isn't my normal amusement. But sometimes I just can't resist. I got to wondering how far behind I might be on the task of catching up on all the movies made before I began going to theaters. So I looked up the advertisements of the four movie houses that were operating in Hagerstown fifty years ago this month. I didn't bother to copy down all the film titles which were booked here during that January. But I took enough notes to convince me that I'll never find time or opportunity to view all the interesting-sounding ones that I've missed up to now. Well, I think I've missed them. I could conceivably have been taken to the movies once or twice shortly after my third birthday, but I wouldn't have remembered much if anything. In more recent years, I seem to have been able to see only two of the features that were shown in Hagerstown in January, 1926. The Gold Rush created almost as much of a sensation when it was first shown here as it has down through the years since its growth into the status of a classic. The best seats in the local theater during its run cost 25¢ in the daytime and 35¢ at night, about double the normal rates. Moreover, the theater manager claimed that he had paid the biggest price in the history of Hagerstown theaters to book the film. Sally of the Sawdust is the other feature shown here that month which I've seen in maturity. Don't miss it, if you don't recognize the title and happen to see it listed for revival somewhere. It's W.C. Fields in his big stage success which was later converted into a sound film, with music and some more sentimentality added, and retitled Poppy. If some unlikely turn of events should cause me suddenly to be possessed of ample leisure and access to the world's biggest collection of silent films, I'd hunt for a lot of other movies that showed here during that month, hoping that they still survive. I would want to see ~~That~~ Royle Girl for historic reasons, not because I'd expect a great movie. That was the first Paramount feature directed by D. W. Griffith, so it would be interesting even though it's generally considered a dud. A couple of features intrigue me solely because of the odd combinations in their casts: The Best Bad Man had as its leads Tom Mix and Clara Bow, while Brave Hearts (billed as "a never to be forgotten photoplay of wigwam and college life") featured Rod La Rocque, Tyrone Power, and Sally Rand. Some of these other inaccessible treasures would be wonderful to watch because of my fondness for people featured in them: We Moderns with Colleen Moore, Go West with Buster Keaton, Calgary Stampede featuring Hoot Gibson, and The Goose Woman starring Jack Pickford and Constance Bennett. Then I'd like to see some famous stars whom I've never watched in anything more extensive than film clips. Both Bobbed Hair (which claimed to have had 20 authors among its script writers) and Seven Sinners starred Marie Prevost that month and she is just a name to me. Patsy Ruth Miller, another actress I've never watched, must have been busy in late 1925, too, because two of her films played almost in succession, Rose of the World and Hogan's Alley. I know Jackie Coogan as a boy actor from only one film, so I'd like to see what he was like in The Rag Man. Cecil B. DeMille's silent features seldom come within my reach, so I'd like to watch The Road to Yesterday, one of the first of the disaster movies from all I've been able to learn about it, but one that went considerably beyond the current crop by causing the disaster victims to get such a shock that they end up in the past. Joseph Schildkraut was its big star. There's one semi-consolation

in all this. If I should some day find the opportunity to see some of those old silent features, I'll appreciate them properly as what they are, examples of the culminating years of the silent movie era. The Hagerstown audiences who saw them when they were shown here for the first time a half-century ago couldn't have appreciated them properly at that time, because they didn't know that sound would begin coming to the movies on synchronized records before the end of that year and on an on-film soundtrack before the next year had ended. The innocent folks must have taken for granted that all those silent film stars, the high quality photography, and the other good things about the silent movies would be available to them indefinitely.

January 26--The new edition of the Hagerstown street map gave me a mighty scare. I could barely read it. Fortunately, before I made an appointment with an optician, I talked to someone about it and was quickly reassured. In my terror, I hadn't noticed that the map of the city itself had been drastically reduced in size, so a lot of subdivisions and suburban areas some distance from the city itself could also be shown. I quickly felt better about the rate at which my vision is deteriorating. But there was nothing else about the new map to cheer me. It bore witness to the continuing stupidities involving this city's streets. For instance, in a town with perhaps 35,000 residents, there are two Park Roads and a Park Avenue, Park Circle, Park Driveway, Park Lane, and Park Place. A half-dozen streets contain "oak" as part of their names. Cherry Tree Lane is on the other side of town from Cherry Tree Circle and Cherry Tree Drive. Then there's the unchanged way local streets assume aliases from one block to another. If you walk north on Summit Avenue, for instance, and continue straight ahead, you find yourself eventually on Jonathan Street and Forest Drive, all within the space of a mile. All the east-west streets that go through the black section of town have two names, one for the white neighborhoods, the other for the black sections. (When someone proposed to city authorities rectification of this kind of discrimination, the suggestion was rejected on grounds of too much nuisance for lawyers, postal workers, and so on; yet the city had altered not long ago the name of one street from Featherbed Lane to Antietam Drive.) The Terrace still drops dead at one point in the northern edge of town, only to come abruptly back to life a half-mile further on. The map doesn't show it, but there are other strange things about local streets. In the western part of town, for instance, you can't be sure about the location of an address on most of the north-south streets, because the 200 block, 300 block, and so on don't line up properly on those parallel streets. I suspect that part of the trouble came when a new east-west street was inserted through that area, when only part of the intersecting streets existed, causing the streets built later to jump numbers when that late-comer started a new block. But I can't imagine why the numbers on the two sides of one block of View Street are so wildly out of synchronization; 903, for instance, might be right across the street from 964. The homes look as if they'd developed both sides of the street at about the same time. Unfortunately, razing to make room for a parking lot destroyed the best local evidence of an iconoclast at work. There used to be a little row of small houses in a half-alley, half-street in the downtown section. Someone who refused to bow to convention had placed their numbers on them in big characters, so nobody would imagine he might be trying to hide the daring thing

he had done. He had numbered those side-by-side houses on the same side of the street, one after another, 1, 2, 3, and 4, flaunting the rules of the post office department and the ingenuity of Napoleon or whoever it was invented the house numbering system. Nobody tried to change the numbers and they died with the houses.

March 11--I felt sort of giddy today at the office when someone told me what had happened. I looked at the editorial page, and sure enough, there was a little note explaining why my columns haven't been appearing for several weeks. There had been enough calls from people asking about their non-appearance that the switchboard girl or someone had complained about the nuisance, and an explanation had been approved. It's the first time I've had any real evidence that someone reads the stuff I write, aside from isolated complaints and even rarer compliments (which usually, upon investigation, prove to have come from people who never read the columns because they don't know what page they appear on). What I've been doing is trying to put together a July 4, 1776 edition of the Hagerstown newspapers. It has been a pleasant change from the grind of finding things to write columns about, but it has proven more difficult than I'd expected. The main problem is the scarcity of hard facts about what was going on in the Hagerstown area two centuries ago. There were no local newspapers until the 1790's to swipe stuff from. Most legal documents from 1776 are in Annapolis, too far for commuting. The histories of this area contain a fair quantity of stuff about happenings during the Revolutionary period, but those books are terribly inaccurate on matters which can be checked on, they don't give sources, and I've been unable to track down the origin of some of their narratives. Fortunately, I was spared several potential problems. The management decided not to make any effort to write in the style of journalists two centuries ago, so I'm cheerfully flinging around words which entered the English language in more modern times and even committing some deliberate anachronisms by referring to towns and institutions by the names by which they're known today. I'll stick in a small explanation somewhere about the necessity for doing this when the newspaper reporting fiction will make it impossible to include explanations of former names which are meaningless today to readers other than historians. I'm also permitted to run in this edition news which is weeks or months old, because it took that long for newspapers in 1776 to get word of happenings far away. This created one real problem: it would have taken a couple of days for anyone in Hagerstown to learn what happened in Philadelphia on July 4, 1776. But a bit of leafing through history books showed how easy it would be to write the main story about the events when Congress approved the Declaration of Independence on July 2, and include a prediction that signatures would start to be added within a couple of days. I've learned almost as much about the characters of people in 1776 as about 1776 from the library books I've gone through. There is a criminal amount of vandalism involving library books, apparently by students for the most part because of the nature of the books I used. One book had page after page neatly ripped out. One volume of an important two-volume set has vanished. It looks as if someone had smeared jelly over most pages in a particularly large, expensive book. I described some of the damage to the girl at the circulation desk, and she didn't seem interested. I hope I don't get blamed, since I've undoubtedly become already an object of suspicion among people who think I might have planted those column calls.

The Worst of Martin

1064th mailing

Martian Windbagg (Georg Authaus) - pretty clever, lithoing the zine on the back of Martian sandpaper. Never could read Martian. Tried to put it to the traditional use but found that sandpaper is sandpaper is sandpaper....

Out Damned Spot (Lemuel) - that's what I said....

Asteroid Belt - Notch 3 (Sznumx) - maybe that's poetry in the Asteroid Belt but it's more like piggen Univ to me. On the second page, for example:

Kithem waluit perith wahh
Hilder mayem wold enathh
Horif perth in tothick xem
Walla yee in perinem.

Now, most of you have been right there. We know the "Mayem wold" would never "walla yee in". The inference is ridiculous. You might as well say a "Jusha berin" would "ferig wahl". Which is quite a famous joke. In fact, I never fully appreciated the intended pun until I saw Bilton Merle at the Crater Club, Earth Moon, one night. It was a marioin-smoker, and - well, maybe this isn't the place to go into such stories. They're really "out of this world", to coin a cliché.... But you see what I mean about Sznumx's poetry. Further on there's misspellings:

Zashimun id lilka purkin
Mus ig bon a yerrli ferkin....

I'll bet he can't even pronounce it....

Bat 69 (Dingey) - I had the pleasure of meeting Schiz Dingey at the Venucon. Very nice girl. It takes a little time to get used to her two heads, four arms, four - well, everything is duplicated. Poses quite a problem. No wonder those marriages don't work out. Believe me - it just don't work. Schiz isn't at all sensitive about these things. She discusses them quite openly. It's the custom, so "when in Phoebus, do as the, etc.".... You may not know it but Schiz is one of the leaders of the polyandry movement on Venus.... But I diverge from her zine - Bat 69. It does weigh up the bundles, but printing on the label of (hic! pardon me) full Wool Imperials does make for studious reading....

Methuselah (Speer).... Known as Old Jack affectionately. They say he's been around an aeon.... No one could be that old - Vol. MMMMCCCLXXIII No. 24.... He must be passing off his own grandpa as himself....

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(from the summer, 1953, issue of Grotesque, published for FAPA "and a few other friends" by Edgar Allan Martin.)

The Book Stops Here

Of late I've been reading books which would cause raised eyebrows all over fandom, if the news got around. They are an assortment of volumes from the Best-in-Books series which Doubleday published a few years back. I'm sure that the average fan would consider them beneath his notice, bourgeois and lowbrow. But I've been in the mood for reading which doesn't force my intellect to embark on complex gyrations and doesn't shatter me emotionally. Besides, there's some good writing to be found in this series, along with the duds aimed at simple-minded readers. And a surprising proportion of fantasy fiction found its way into these books, some of which is hard to find in other editions.

Some people seem to think, incidentally, that this series is just another Readers Digest project. But it was different from the RD volumes, which consist of nothing but abridgments. The Best-in-Books volumes normally contained two or three complete books in uncut form, together with a few excerpts from other books which were plainly labeled as such and which, in most cases, didn't pretend to give the reader a quick experience of the entire book, but instead offered intact sections or chapters. I don't know how well this series sold, but volumes from it turn up quite regularly in second-hand stores and garage sales in this area, often in good condition including jackets so crisp and unsoiled that some subscribers obviously didn't read what they bought.

From the fantasy standpoint, one of the most interesting volumes is an unusually fat one that contains one well known science fiction novel, Philip Wylie's *Triumph*, and a rarely mentioned novel by Taylor Caldwell that is about half-fantasy, half-mundane, *Grandmother and the Priests*. If you haven't read the Wylie book, it's a sort of counterpart to Farnham's *Freehold*, superior in some ways but inferior in many others. The portions of the story that tell of the first days in the rich man's shelter after nuclear war are quite gripping. But the final stages, with the remnants of the USA and USSR armed forces slugging each other feebly all over again, just don't ring true. There are two other flaws which bothered me. I can't believe that a conflict which did such a thorough job of destroying things north of the Equator would leave the other half of the globe comparatively unaffected, as Wylie postulates. And I really doubt if even the richest North American could have afforded a shelter with the scope and facilities described here.

Grandmother and the Priests should be approached with caution. If you yell at your wife, pull legs off spiders, and tear up magazines when you hear someone taking religion seriously, you'd better not risk the Caldwell novel. For that matter, even a devout person might find the framework which she devised for the story impossibly clumsy. A little girl is sent on a visit to her grandmother every time her parents have a squabble, her grandmother usually has some priests as dinner guests, and the priests tell stories. These unrelated stories make up the bulk of the book. But this pretext for publishing a batch of shortish stories together is no worse than the plague device included for a similar purpose in the *Decameron*. The fantasy tales included in the novel are usually associated in one way or another with the Catholic faith, one or two of them are quite dull, but some others are quite gripping. The best of them might be combined into a good movie in the

tradition of Dead of Night.

Another volume in this series has two novels that are on the verge of fantasy. Marquis Childs' *The Peacemakers* is set in a near future, and deals with diplomats who are striving to ward off a crisis which could lead to nuclear war. It's also the worst novel I've read in a long while. I'm prejudiced by the fact that this series of events is described with seeming love by Childs, who apparently respects such people and believes they serve a useful function. This is equivalent to admiring a lot of children who are playing with matches on the grounds that they haven't set anything afire yet. Much better reading, although even less qualified to be judged fantasy, is Paul Gallico's *Scruffy*. It might be rated with *The Americanization of Emily* as an alternate world story inasmuch as the events described could be proved not to have occurred during World War Two. Gallico's theme is the apes of Gibraltar, the legend that their fate is linked with British command of the rock, and one historical fact, a note from Winston Churchill who took time during the war to express worry that the apes might die out. Gallico makes things worse than they really became, by postulating his title character as an overbearing but still impressive ape who threatens to destroy his peers in addition to almost driving quite a few humans mad. Most of Gallico's humans are caricatures rather than efforts at portraying real people, but I prefer him in this writing mood to the more sentimental sort of fiction he often indulged in. Besides, even if you decide you didn't enjoy the novel, you're the richer for having read it because you learn that the Gibraltar apes aren't really apes at all but magots.

The one downright ghost story I've found in this series is a complete dud. Manning Coles' *The Far Traveller* sounds like a bungled effort to catch the spirit of the Thorne Smith novels. I barely managed to finish it, even though its combination of movie people and Germany involves two of my favorite topics. Coles postulates the return of a long-dead German nobleman and his servant to the castle where a movie is being made on location, his success in winning the male lead in the film, and various shenanigans which he perpetrates on the company. It's all supposed to be hilarious, but it just doesn't make it. The fact that Coles doesn't even try to describe film production methods realistically doesn't help, either.

Among the mundane novels I've been reading in this series of books, I think I liked best a pair with New England settings. Ruth Moore's *Speak to the Winds* is a strange novel, as far as construction goes. It starts with a long preliminary section in watered down Faulkner manner, dealing with the first settlers on an island. When the story shifts to the present, or the not too distant past (it's hard to be sure) the style lightens, the sense of the epic recedes, and it turns into a very convincing, detailed description of a fuss involving many of the residents of a small community. I live considerably south and much more mainland, but I can recognize the absolute authenticity of the church social, the Christmas program at school, the aging postmistress, and many other things. To top everything off, in the final pages there's a sort of immolation scene that wrenches the story back into something imposing again, and the author doesn't even bother to relate how the feud came out. Nathaniel Benchley's *A Winter's Tale* is more all of a piece and unlike the other novel, it brings an outsider into a small New England community to provide some contrast. There's min-

imal plot, just the complexities created by an attempt to start amateur theatricals in the town, and no worldshaking threats develop for any of the characters. But Benchley has a good knack for making every character remind you of someone you've known in real life. There goes some more of my time, because I'd already promised myself that I'll soon get around to reading all the Robert Benchley writings that I've missed, and now I must do the same for the other novels of his son.

McCrory's and Newberry's outlets in this area have been selling huge quantities of used books, identified on the signs as lending library volumes but looking to me more like the leftovers from community book sales. I found a few goodies among the junk. The best treasure, ranked by the mood I'm in these days, is a copy of Noel Coward's first autobiographical book, *Present Indicative*. Some subhuman vandal removed a couple of pictures from it, but the complete text is there. The writing is wonderfully funny most of the way through and its only fault is the way it leaves me wanting so badly to be able to see plays which are no longer produced with the casts that they possessed a half-century or more ago. I wonder if I am just imagining it, or if Coward really does include in this book many veiled allusions to his homosexuality. I doubt if the general public was well aware of it, when this book appeared in the late 1930's. But when read with foreknowledge, many pages of the book seem intended to convey more information than appears on the surface, to those who knew the author personally or at a reliable secondhand. If he hadn't been trying to be truthful in this guarded manner, I think Coward would have tried to give some explanation or other for the enmity which he describes encountering in certain circles.

I admire H. G. Wells' science fiction so much that by all rights I should have read all his mundane fiction too by now. But I haven't, and just recently I finally read one of his best known novels, *Kipps*. I'm sorry now I didn't encounter it long ago, because it's the kind of book that should be re-read a half-dozen or more times at intervals of about ten years. There are some dubious details in its construction, like the occasional grinding halt in the progress of the story while the author begins to moralize in the first person, and the decided imbalance of pace which causes *Kipps'* rapidfire adventures after his fortune is embezzled to be crowded into about the final eight per cent of the novel. Maybe the influences of *David Copperfield* are a bit too potent on some of the plotting, too. While you're reading it, fortunately, such considerations are forgotten. I found one personal message in it, which has been quite useful. A jukebox in the restaurant which I often patronize for lunch has been getting on my nerves, as a symbol of the vulgarity and clamor of the 1970's. So you can imagine how consoling it was to read one paragraph in this book which advises about the antiquity of my trouble. *Kipps* in the pre-vacuum tube era is self-conscious while dining in a hotel somewhat too rich for his tastes and he tries to divert himself by putting a coin into its Harmonicon: "Considering the high social tone of the Royal Grand it was really a very loud instrument indeed. It gave vent to three deafening brays and so burst the dam of silence that had long pent it in. It seemsd to be chiefly full of the greatuncles of trumpets, megalotrombones and railway brakes. It made sounds like shunting trains. It did not so much begin as blow up your counter-scarp or rush forward to storm under cover of melodious

shrapnel. It had not so much an air as a ricochette. The music had, in short, the inimitable quality of Sousa. It swept down upon the friend of Lady Jane and carried away something socially striking into the eternal night of the unheard; the American girl to the left of it was borne shrieking into the inaudible. 'HIGH cockalorum Tootletootle tootle loo. HIGH cockalorum tootle lootle loo. BUMP, bump, bump--BUMP.' Joyous, exorbitant music it was from the gigantic nursery of the Future, bearing the hearer along upon its torrential succession of sounds, as if he was in a cask on Niagara. Whiroo! Yah and have at you! The strenuous life! Yaha! Stop! A Reprieve! A Reprieve! No! Bang! Bump!"

Surprising amounts of pleasure came from Franz Rottensteiner's The Science Fiction Book. Surprising, because I foresaw that little of the information in a basic history of the field would be new to me. But I found myself rejoicing in what I was reading for perhaps the same reasons that the religious person likes to hear the thrice-familiar history and tenets of his faith preached or recited time after time. Besides, the illustrations are wonderful, and many of them were new to me. Still, the ones that I know best are the most evocative: the prozine cover reproductions. The ones in color gave me a terrible urge to dash right up on the attic and root through boxes until I'd uncovered my old prozines, so I could behold all those other well remembered covers which aren't included in this book. And I'd like to compare the originals with the reproduction, to determine if the printers really have caught their image with the total accuracy that memory tells me they have. I have seen curiously few reviews of this book in fanzines. Maybe Franz' advocacy of Lem has given most fans the idea that this book dealt principally with Polish science fiction. But in actuality, Franz did a near-perfect job of getting almost all the important things into the limited number of pages at his command. I might have wished for more attention to the recent crop of first-rate female writers of science fiction but I can't think of many other imbalances of any significance. It's a remarkable achievement for someone who lacks the collecting and reading advantages automatically possessed by someone who has spent his life in an English-speaking land. Authors like Burroughs and projects like Star Trek don't get the strafing you might expect if you know Franz only from his appearances in English language fanzines. He's particularly strong in this book in his sections on science fiction written on the continent of Europe and in the generous quantity of illustrations drawn from non-English language sources. There's a useful worldwide chronology of science fiction and listing of Nebula and Hugo awards down through the years. Franz expressed what struck me as excessive remorse in a letter to me over a few minor inaccuracies, mostly in captions and listings, which resulted from his inability to give the entire contents of the book a final inspection before it went to press. Perhaps the best thing about the book is its price: \$14.95 is a decided bargain for a hard-cover volume with 160 large-format pages, so many of them in color and so lavishly dotted with illustrations. My only regret about such a book is the knowledge that the market would hardly support something similar dealing with the overall history of fandom.

I've also been reading a lot of fanzines which are in some cases almost as wordy as books. Which reminds me, it's time to stop cutting stencils about books or any other topic, and get back to writing locs.