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The 5th of May, DaveLo turned the Big Four-Zero. I had mentioned plans to Sandy and Bill Bowers about baking a cake and pulling a surprise Birthday Party on him at the CFG meeting scheduled for that date. However Crafty Dave, perhaps smelling something afoot, told Steve Leigh (at whose house the meeting would be held) that he was going to treat the meeting as his birthday party, which ruined my half-formulated plans. The weekend before the meeting, Denise, Steve's wife, called to inform me she was setting up a surprise baby shower for Sandy and Greg on that date. I had to perform a rather hefty mental switching job--discussing shower plans with DaveLo but not Sandy rather than party plans with Sandy but not DaveLo--but everything came off fine. Sandy was thrilled with all the baby stuff she got--clothing, toys, infant care books, quilts, a Baby Book, a mess of various baby care products--and I still managed to surprise DaveLo with two bottles of his favorite sherries, Dry Sack and Harvey's Bristol Cream. Steve and Denise gave him a card and Steve, who had to work that night and wasn't present, left orders that DaveLo be given a healthy slug of his birthday present, Glenlivet Scotch. It was a warm evening all around.

Since nothing else occurs to me to report here, I'll waste no more time, but go to the important part: the MAILING COMMENTS.....

[illegible]

Re yct Suzi: a perverso is someone who's hooked on collatio, right?

-- THE UNMENTIONABLE TOPIC 1 -- Omighod! You actually expect me to think while making apacomments?!? You're push-

5/14/84--10:46

Let's see if I can cope with all these questions...

(1) *What is the worst novel by your favorite sf/f writer?* This presumes I have a "favorite." I don't. The novel I recall being the most disappointed by, written by someone whose work I normally admire is GOLEM¹⁰⁰⁰ (if that's recalled correctly) by Alfred Bester. Neat beginning that degenerated into nonsense the further along it went.

(2) *What novel or story generally regarded as a classic do you find the most unreadable, and why?* TITUS GROAN (the only one of the Gormenghast Trilogy by Mervyn Peake that I've tried). Overblown, pretentious, and dull, dull, DULL.

(3) *Name an sf novel that you've enjoyed that the critics hated, or that people laugh at you for liking.* STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND (Heinlein) TITAN and WIZARD (Varley) MOTE IN GOL'S EYE (Niven & Pournelle) ANDROMEDA STRAIN (Crichton)... (And thanks for reminding me about the last one in your comments in DR) As you can tell, I seldom let what others think affect my taste...

(4) *Name the novel you would make the author re-write if you had the resources to do so, and how you would have it rewritten.* I'm passing on this one. There was a book, title forgotten, read not so long ago that I thought "Gee, if only this had been done a bit differently, it would've been a Great book!", but damned if I can recall any details about it now.

(5) *Name one major sf/f writer you're ashamed to admit you haven't read.* C.J. Cherryh. Marion Zimmer Bradley, Orson Scott Card (Okay, so they're not really "major". They're as close as I can get.)

(6) *Name the most erotic sf/f book or story you've read.* Excepting out-and-out-right porn novels (soft or hard), which I seldom really find erotic anyway, I guess it would be THE POLLINATORS OF EDEN by John Boyd (I think I've got the title/author correct). Just why I should find a story about humans beings used as an intermediary step in the fertilization of semi-sentient orchid-like plants in any way erotic, I cannot say. But there it is...

(7) *Name a story or novel that you read and did not enjoy, but that you feel you didn't do justice to. Why?* I know that this has happened to me several times while reading a book, but, for the life of me, no titles come to mind.

-- THE DILLINGER RELIC 33 -- I'm somewhat with you in regard to viewing capital punishment as a matter difficult to get involved about. I'm against killing... period. Anti-abortion, anti-death penalty, anti-war; all fall within that mindset, but the intensity with which I used to feel concerning these matters has dulled to virtual apathy. To kill a person for killing a person because killing is wrong (the implication being, of course... unless you have permission) is so... so... so silly (words fail me here) that I get disgusted with the whole human race and wish I were a member of a more sensible species like the dolphins. As far as I can see, my views have no effect on the situation anyway--humans have been killing humans for as long as there have been humans--nor have those of other, more influential people who've expressed similar thoughts better and more concisely in the past. Just thinking about it even this little while depresses me...

As for shipping criminals off to the stars, I can somewhat agree, although the thought of freeing brutish persons to prey on others, even/they, too, are brutish is mildly upsetting to what I consider my more ethical self. Leaving killers, especially, loose to perhaps kill more people is little different than doing the deeds ourselves. I suppose I'd be more for some sort of solitary confinement for those who have shown that they're no fit company for civilized people. Perhaps on a small asteroid?. I've said before that I consider the frontiers of space as a good magnet to draw away the more aggressive, individualistic adventurers among us. Give 'em something they can really sink their teeth into! See if they can bend a planet or asteroid or moon to their wills--we could all benefit.

Being an Old Fogie regarding music, particularly rock music, I am surprised to find myself liking several of the ~~punk~~ new wave groups. The Eurhythmics (sp?), Culture Club, and a few other new-to-me groups actually play listenable music. So long as I don't have to look at them, I don't care what way they dress or decorate themselves. I never asked anyone's permission before donning my uniform of slacks and loose tops, why should I expect anyone to ask mine?

As for Rock Criticism, DaveLo and I find it extremely useful. When a local newspaper ran a column covering the latest Moody Blues album and called it lousy because it "broke no new ground" but was simply more of the same old *ho-hum* stuff, we dashed right out to buy it. They were correct; it was, indeed, the same old stuff... Now that's what I consider a reliable reviewer, he steered us just fine.

I keep waiting for the day when you place an X in the box at the end of the copies of DR you send for inclusion with FLAP. Helps to keep a note of suspense in my life...

JUDY STEVENS -- THE FRONTIER ALIEN # 23 -- Cute li'l unicorn you drew at the head of this zine. Kinda wish the one you sent as a cheer-up gift was as whimsical. (Really, I'm not complaining!)

Re yct Eric: \$70 isn't expensive for technical manuals, as you say. Nor for Art Books. I get an attack of the faunches when I see them in stores (one reason I'm not keen on bookstore shopping), but even at Publishers' Clearing House prices I can't afford them. *Sigh*

Re yct me: No, I never recovered that wallet stolen from me while at University Hospital. (I was surprised to get a follow-up call from the campus cops about it a couple of months ago. It had been hoped that perhaps it might have been found and mailed to me.) However, while clearing out some shelves around here, I discovered that I'd pulled out my kids' grade-school mug shots, so only lost their most recent pictures. *Relief* (I've other snap-shots to cover that period.)

The Organ Donation part of my drivers license is filled in; I've always done so since such were initiated. However, I read recently that those kind of "endowments" are seldom noted in time to be of any use (i.e., at time of death). The newspaper article said that *if the subject comes up at all*, it's the next of kin who are asked about it and oftentimes the stated wishes of the deceased are ignored. The system for obtaining useable organs for donation desperately needs revision--if it can be called a "system" at all...

I've seen Big Red around; if not in Cincinnati, across the river in Kentucky. "Red Pop", a catch-all term for a sort of strawberry flavor, is more prevalent, however. It's sold under various brands.

Re Creative backrub ct Suzi: I have no objection when DaveLo eats onions or garlic; they're two of my favorite foods and I'd most likely have been eating them as well. (We go through about 3 lbs. of onions every two weeks, and 4 ounces of garlic powder every five months--with fresh garlic used in that period as well. Don't know how I'd manage to cook most meals without them!)

meet in Minneapolis in June?!? Nay, nay! In Cincinnati, the last/weekend. Well, okay, midwestcon is actually in Springdale, but who's fussy? Think MIDWESTCON, Haj, make it a stopoff on your way to or from your family visit.

DEAN GRENNELL -- PENNYANTEDILUVIANFLEM.INGDYNASTYNIENCYCLOPED!AMB!CUSP!DOR -- Phooie. A mistake.

You really put my typing ability to the test, Dino.

Since "energising accumulators" is most likely to leave your U.S. readers in the dark (*coff*), I think I preferred the mashed-together "energising batteries", as being comprehensible on both sides of the Big Pond...

Congrats in getting Little Known Game Animals put to bed--or whatever the term is. Hope to see it on our local bookstores' shelves soon! Does this mean we may hope for more expansive contributions from you in future mailings? (Hint-hint)

ERIC LINDSAY -- MISSED MAILINGS -- Terry Frost is helping you enter your sf collection into your computer? How do you manage to obtain such worthy slaves? You never seemed particularly silver-tongued to me. What's your secret?

I wouldn't want to comment on Silly Putty either--the words would simply sink away. (Nyah, nyah; you can't sling that typer this far!!)

Re: the on-going comments about cardboard coffins--according to a series of articles that have been running in the local papers about burial costs (due to some recent ^{regulations} guiding the industry being enacted at the Federal level), I found out that corrugated cardboard coffins do exist, and are an alternative to burning up perfectly good wooden ones when a body is being cremated. Such coffins cost between \$50 and \$100 in this area.

JONI STOPA -- ANOTHER MIDWESTERN B.P. -- Your season at Wilmot sounded like a real mixed bag; you either were so busy you couldn't do a thing except work, or you had virtually no customers at all. Considering the dismal success of the previous three years, how was the '83-'84 season in retrospect?

Seems like every single person I know had at least one spell of week-long illness this past winter. I much prefer the single or two-day sort myself--not nearly so monotonous! Glad you got over yours without too much difficulty.

Take my word for it, Joni. You did not strand us in Colorado, I don't care how convoluted you argue otherwise. I've never been in that state (oops; barring one stop-over during a plane-flight from L.A. to points East), or at least never have vacationed or driven through it. When you left your story I was right here in Silverton, where I still am. Now, have you got that straight?

Are you implying that Sleeping Ute Mountain should be more properly called Sleeping Big Foot Mt.? My fear of heights/^{does} not lead to fantasies such as yours about platforms tearing themselves from their anchorages and causing the deaths of people other than (though including) myself. No, I would more likely be convinced that my feet would get tangled up in each other and I'd go sailing over the edge, to/^{be} dashed on the rocks below in a spectacular but solitary death. (Actually, if a place has firm footing and (thankfully!) sturdy handrails, I generally feel safe--as long as I don't dwell on how high up I really am for too long a period (say 30 seconds...)).

Wish you'd suggest that Jon bring along that fish-fossil pendant along with him to Midwestcon this year--I'd like to see it too!

Interesting trip report, but, as usual, not much to comment about. Unfortunately one can't say how much one enjoys reading about someone else's adventures without repeating the same phrases over and over again. However, I do hope you find it in your heart to do some ^{INTERESTING} COMMENTS next issue. Y'know; life-blood of the apa and all that?

DAVE LOCKE -- SLOW DJINN -- Needless to say, this tennis season with Steve will most likely be the poorest one yet in number of games played. Not only has the weather not cooperated at all, but Steve broke his hand the Wednesday before last (the 19th of May for those who don't wish to go through the necessary calculations), and will be Disabled for at least two more weeks. Sorry about that, chum. I know how badly you'll miss your sport...

Since you asked Arthur seriously why "less Handguns" is unacceptable while "fewer handguns" is okay, I wish I could give you a learned reply. Only I can't. It is permissible to say "less" in some situations where "fewer" is equally acceptable, but times when one or the other is definitely better, as well as times when only ignorant uneducated slob would use one in place of the other. One would sound like a dolt, for instance, if it was said that "there is fewer liquor here than I would like"--"less" is obviously the Word of Choice. However, despite my inability to set down the whys and wherefores, "fewer handguns" really and truly sounds better to my (ignorant and uneducated) ear than "less", but damifino why...

I do not "need" nagging around deadline time. The fact that you do nag me and the fact that I have not missed a deadline bear even less correlation than some of the anti-smoking statistics you blanch at. Generally I've already decided when I'm going to start stenciling, and your nagging begins the day before my own internal deadline--sometimes a few days earlier. Occasionally lots of days earlier...

When I read over what I'd typed about the operation and its aftermath, I was surprised at how much I'd left out. Like the sweating. Ghod, I had to have my bed changed three times a day when it was at its worst! Ah well, it's all

behind me now...

Re the 'punctuation, in or out of quotation marks' discussion: in one of your Kelly ~~XXX~~ Person magazines (which continue to arrive here, for some odd reason) they ran a quiz on basic business typing, which included a query about this very topic. The response (ignore the question itself--isn't germane) was that periods and commas go inside the quotation marks, exclamation points and question marks belong outside. Makes no never-mind to me. I intend to continue putting only the quoted material within the quote marks, and any additional bits--including punctuation marks integral to the sentence within which the quotation is set--outside those twin ticks. Otherwise I'm doctoring the quoted material--and isn't that what brackets are for?

PAULINE PALMER -- MOCK FENNEL SOUP -- I've never had beer--the alcoholic kind--served in frozen mugs, but A&W Root Beer Stands, back when I was a youngie, served their brew in frosted, frozen mugs. The local package store (well, that's inaccurate; they don't sell liquor, only beer, wine, and liqueurs under 40% alcohol content) keeps its beer in a freezer, one of those old-style ones used for ice-houses. Claim they sell the "Coldest Beer in Town", which point I don't dispute. As an aside, such beer and wine stores in Cincinnati are called Pony Kegs--even listed that way in the yellow pages. Seems that at one time all they sold was beer in half-kegs, suitable for strapping to a pony to take home. Local customs is weird...

I'm with you on the acceptability of caffeine/sugar-free cola drinks. I've never sought a "kick" from such drinks anyway (only from what I put into them of an evening) and drink them for the taste, not any nebulous effects. Same with coffee. (Though in that case, I do notice when caffeine is absent in my morning coffee. I'm wonder why I'm still groggy after my second or third cup. Once the wake-up brew is consumed, though, the decaffienated kind is just fine with me, as long as it's made from ground coffee.)

Friend Martha Beck is undergoing the desensitization procedure for her allergies and is just getting to the point where her doctor is upping the potency of the shots. She's a bit tired of the routine right now, but has heard so many good things about the results, she's sticking with it. Her asthma attacks were simply coming too frequently and close together for her to let matters ride. Glad to hear that your shots work so well for you, I'll try to remember to pass on news of another successful case to her.

I've always liked my middle name (Elaine), while I acutely dislike my full first name (Jackie is just fine, but Jacqueline seems tedious and affected). The only time my full name was used was in grammar school (the nuns insisted) and when I was being called forward to answer for some misdeed. I have no pleasant connotations attached to it whatsoever, so I've relied strictly on "Jackie" as a legal signature, W2 forms, driver's licenses, etc. since I was thirty or so. I don't ever want to see "Jacqueline" (*Yuck* It's haunting me!) ever again.

00K-00K on the "Dillinger's sergeants and generals" quip.

Sneezing as an equivalent to orgasm? Well...well...hmmm. Where did I put that pepper shaker? Got to put that to the test!

Getting to skate meets is not all that different from making arrangements to attend conventions. (Aha! Knew there'd be a tie-in somewhere!) How long did Tilda retain her interest? Mine ran from age sixteen through my 18th year--not quite a three-year span.

Our cats were always well-behaved when littering--it was our dogs who were, well, bitches about the whole thing. Maybe it was because I put the box-for-babies in good, sensible-to-cats, places. Away from kids, away from dogs, in dark corners that were quiet but easily accessible. I don't know why, but it worked.

The sort of ICU you describe Jack as being in is the kind I thought all ICUs were like until I had my surgery. I believe the Cardiac ICU is more like the standard ones at University Hospital, but I can't swear to it (and no, I'm not inclined to put that impression to the test...).

Mom's voice is nearly back to normal, though she still has no saliva to speak of. Things are going well so far (she did have to go in to have her throat dilated

because scar tissue was interfering with her swallowing even liquids a few weeks ago), and the doctor expects no lasting aftereffects. I hope he's right...

To call the fanzine room at Confusion a "mess" would be charitable. The person running it was doing so under duress (mainly so he could hold after-hours poker sessions in the room), did no pre-con organizing work on it, and simply didn't give a darn about it.

Cincinnati's PBS station is celebrating its 30th Anniversary this year (it was the first in the nation) and has come up with the notion of having reduced air-time devoted to ~~begging~~ contribution requesting. After the Spring Pledge Break--cut back some 25 hours from previous years, they simply announce how much they need to keep in operation (the Pledge Week fell some 200,000 dollars short) once a week or so, and are hoping that less irritation to viewers will result in enough funding. As noted though, it hasn't worked well so far... I see no objection to them featuring up-coming programs, and the sponsors' corporate insignia doesn't equal in any way a commercial's content nor use of time, and I especially appreciate uninterrupted programs--except when it's a long one and I need a fresh drink or a pee break.

I've seen a siamese cat that drooled. I don't think it's breed-specific, though. Most cats who do that seem to be over-weight, affection-starved neuters (not that they don't get affection, only that their requirements are exceedingly high).

Is there some significance in your use of "Opps" as an exclamation? The first time I thought it was a typo, but after so many repetitions...

Nice poem. I liked it; even read it to my daughter.

The bearded fellow on your Lower Case page looks just like Roger Reynolds, an Ohio fan who puts out a sorta fanzine, FUTURE FOCUS. He was also the person responsible for the Confusion Fanzine Room.

MARTY HELGESEN -- INCIDENT REPORT (27 FZ) -- It was nice of the Boskone committee to note Mike Wood's death in its program book.

You make the time-zone problem in announcing election results sound like it first surfaced in the 80 election, while I recall gripes about being made in previous elections. However, because computerization didn't permit "winners" to be announced quite so fast as is the case nowadays, such griping wasn't as vociferous in the past. Like yourself, I'm essentially neutral on the subject, though I wouldn't object if the networks had to wait until, say, 11 P.M. EST to make their claims. I'd like to have some idea of how the vote's been going before I retire for the night. Local stations should be able to report on totals for their own audiences, though.

While I can see the need to censor the reports sent by correspondents to their newspapers or magazine during a WAR, Grenada was not a war of any type. Even so, Reagan did not suggest censorship, he banned any sort of eyewitnessing by journalists--conservative, liberal, or neutral. I'm sorry, but I believe it's foolish to place that much trust in any government.

BRUCE ARTHURS -- LAST STAGE FOR SILVERWORLD #12 -- Congratulations on selling your story. Knew you could do it, fella!

Car horror stories. They almost make me rethink the whole idea of buying another car. (Note: almost. We're still looking.)

Your shocked-cat story belies the notion that cats cannot be trained. One training session, and look how well Sir Kay picked up the essentials! (All cat-people know the "untrainable" charge to be a base canard anyway.)

Sorry to hear about your mother-in-law's (that is the relationship, isn't it?) broken hip. That can be so damned dangerous in elderly people, women--with a tendency to osteoporosis--in particular. I most sincerely hope she heals without any complications. Even a good rehabilitation is no fun, from what I gather.

Again, congrats on the fiction sale.

SUZI STEFL -- JUXTAPROSE JOURNAL #27 -- Thanks for the recommendation on the Horse Clan books. From what I've heard of them, I kinda thought they might be the sort of prehistorical reading I enjoy, but you know how it is when it's a mainstream novelist you're dealing with--never can trust their reviewers. Fan opinions cut through to the meat of the issue; is it a story a fan would like? You made that pretty clear.

Hope you haven't experienced any after-effects from that eye accident. Davelo still suffers occasional flare-ups in the spot where he injured his cornea, and says it feels as painful as it did when the damage was first done.

I don't understand what you mean by saying that no one has taken you up on the idea of compiling a cookbook. I believe several people said it sounded like a nice idea (usually also mentioning that it was a project they wouldn't particularly want to attempt themselves) and I thought you were busy all this while scanning back issues for hidden recipes, sorting them into categories, and all-but-set to type them up. So what sort of feedback are you looking for?

Italian ice is a sort of frozen fruit juice, similar to sherbet, but without the added milk solids. Tasty, and a looked-forward-to treat when you're on a restricted diet in the hospital.

From what I gather (I've never been to one) Rubicons are very similar to Spacecons and Octocons--40-60 people who gather for a weekend party in a motel. One of these years I hope to make it to one. (They play lots of poker...)

You "get into" a book in a similar fashion, but to a much greater degree, as I do. If a book can't put me into its setting, I tend to be dissatisfied with it; the more involved I become in its "world" the better I like it (generally). I can "hear" things and feel some sorts of tactile effects (recently read BEND OF THE RIVER by V.S. Naipaul and I could hear cicadas chirring and the heat of the African sun quite clearly), but seldom "smell" odors. Once in a while it happens--piney woods odors, or floral scents are more apt to get triggered--but not very often at all.

Still like that snapshot. Elessar snapped a good'un that time (and I'm pleased we were able to wheedle his prices down!).

ROY TACKETT -- VOMBIS NUMBER 14 -- Boy, were you ever in a good mood when you started off this zine!. Nothing like a little snarling and rancor to cut the phlegm that accumulates between issues, eh? Sorta like clearing the throat.

Humor is, as they say (whoever "they" may be...), relative. Most of what I call "broad" (Shut-up-Suzi) humor I find stupid, and therefore unfunny. Slapstick falls into that category as a rule. Mel Brooks stuff either is so funny I weep with laughter, or leaves me feeling like a block of wood. No halfway measures there, nothing that simply amuses me. Same thing with cartoons. Frequently I can see the point, and still not find the idea funny. I used to worry about that, but don't any more. Things either strike me humorously or they don't, and just because something doesn't make me crack up doesn't mean the person next to me on the bus won't giggle maniacally at it. Different strokes for different folks, and all that. The cartoon panel THE FAR SIDE is much like Brooks in its effect on me--I either laugh or I stare at it puzzledly. No halfway mark. BLOOM COUNTY tickles me most of the time, but no cartoonist can bat 1,000.

What sort of important movement afoot do you see, if not the one Horvat seemed to sense? You rouse my curiosity.

The State of Indiana passed a resolution some months ago which made English its Official Language. Indiana has no bi-lingual problem at all--if you discount the Black's street talk from the Gary, Ind. area. The Latinization you speak of is extremely evident in L.A., and everything in California that smacks of officialdom is done up both in English and Spanish. From a recent report on T.V., some oriental languages should be added to that list as well. Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese...pretty soon no one will be able to understand the guy next door, even when they come from the same basic ethnic stock. It may be Elitist and chauvinistic, but I really believe it would be best if we did establish a single Official Language; just so we could all have at least one means of communication in common with everyone else in the country...

Aren't back problems fun, though? I especially like the MD's instructions to avoid any strain. Heck, getting outta bed in the morning puts quite a load on the ole backbones. I think they just have a script that they're taught to recite, without ever actually sitting down and thinking them out. No lifting--how do you get the milk out of the fridge, then? No stretching--and leave the dishes pile up on the counter? No bending--how do you sit down without bending? Or reach the toilet paper? Or put on your shoes? Such orders have to be taken with a hefty grain of salt (how large a crystal can sodium chloride form, anyhow?)

I think the "should've/could've/would've" game is too depressing to be played. Quite naturally one tends to think the alternate paths as all being smooth and relatively effortless, when common sense tells you that they most likely would have been just as rough and rocky as the one that was actually taken. However, it's such an easy mental mode to slip into...

The only NBF rooms I've been in were being hosted (hostessed?) by Martha Peck and were, therefore, very relaxing and comfy places to be. Think the one she ran in D.C., at Discon II was the nicest--that's where our paths first crossed as I recall. If fanzine rooms were anything like that place was, I could definitely see the attraction to use them as a lounging area.

Should I assume that all the huckster tables have been sold for Bubonicon? I can't imagine how anyone could slip up that badly. Do you think there will be any customers for the hucksters? I don't.

How does Rene pronounce her name? I had always thought "ruh-NAY", but find that son-in-law Greg's sister is called REE-HEE (both syllables accented evenly), and wonder how common that pronunciation is.

I agree with you on the tenuousness of archeological theory. It's still fun to postulate, though. I really doubt if there's any way to "know" how things actually came to be the way they are, and consider the field more of a mental exercise than anything else. Amusing in its pretensions.

DAVE WIXON -- THE BIG BRONZE FAKE #21 -- Hope your pre-natal depression had a short life. Doesn't sound like fun at all...

Good point you bring up about fandom-as-family. It has to be an almost instictual thing or it doesn't work as a concept. Which, of course, lets those Cousins who don't have that sense off the hook. We all aren't born with the same talents, after all, even when we are from the same family.

Doesn't sound like a pleasant stay down in FLA, no matter how you look at it. But I can't help wonder--why on Earth didn't you work on your FLAPzine during those boring hours? You had time enough for aimless driving, and 'twould seem that writing would've been a helluva lot more constructive.

May 1st came and went, but no CoA from you. Tight housing market up there?

I'm not a Grandma yet-- a fact which is distressing to all concerned. Sandy's been in the Early Stages of labor for some two weeks now; was told if she hadn't delivered by the 22nd would be going into the hospital to be induced either the 23rd or 24th, but that was changed and now is set for next week *Sigh* Babies come when babies come, and that's the only way it works, I guess. We're all getting antsy about it all...

Jymn Magon, a fellow in David's APANAGE, stopped by last night to visit while in the Midwest on business. Nice person, even if he doesn't drink (not even coffee!) or smoke. He gifted us with a copy of RETURN OF THE JEDI on record, which he produced. Since we haven't seen the movie yet, he cautioned us not to listen to it, but heck, we know the story by now...

DaveLo gifted me an early B'day present--a portable radio which will bring in VHF-TV bands. Now we don't have to keep the set in the living room blasting in order to hear it in the dining room (where we live), and, with the head phones, I can listen to programs while he's typing. Neat, and useful. (If only it picked up the UHF stations, too. *Ah well, one can't have everything...)

Speaking of Language

By William E. Lasher

TITLES RANKLE

One dubious advantage of growing up here in the colonies, instead of in England where the mother tongue got its start, is the fact that we have no titled nobility. We aren't born with hereditary titles like Duke or Earl, and we can't be awarded an honorary title such as Knight.

Americans like to think they've avoided this structure of titles and ranks, and in general we have. The fact that we know so little about titles is a good example of language being defined by its culture: if we don't have the rank, who needs to know about the title?

We find our society remarkably free of titles and rank, until we look at one of our largest public organizations, the armed forces. The services are divided into two groups, the commoners or enlisted men, and the nobility or officers. This division has historical roots which are not always clear today. For example, officers were once drawn only from the ranks of nobility, so that they were truly both officers and gentlemen.

The names we use for our military ranks are borrowed from French. Even among the enlisted men, "private," "corporal," and "sergeant" are borrowed from French. "Private" is related to "deprived of office" — not an officer. A "lieutenant" is quite literally a "place-holder" in French, one who can act for a superior, or take his place.

Our "captain" and "colonel" are originally French words, and even "major" comes from the French "sergeant major." In fact,

"admiral" is one of the few military titles not taken from French. The French in this case borrowed their "admiral" from Arabic "Emir-al," which means "the Emir" or "the commander."

English speakers have never been hesitant to borrow words if need be, but what we've avoided in this country is a kind of linguistic marking of class; we don't have a "Sir Hugh" or a "Lord Elgin." Instead of inherited titles we have earned ones like "Senator" and "Judge," or even "Major" and "General." It might be argued that we have a class structure in this country, but it takes a keen eye to find its dividing lines, if they exist at all.

The titles we most admire and aspire to are "President" or "Chairman of the Board," titles that indicate both high status and high income. We use "the King," "the Duke," and even "the Sultan of Swat" to refer to Elvis Presley, John Wayne, and Babe Ruth, but these are honorific titles reserved for special cases.

We spend most of our time, in fact, with the simpler titles like "Mr." and "Mrs." and "Ms." Even this last is changing shape only a few years after its birth. Intended for use by any woman, "Ms." has come to mean something like "any unmarried woman," returning us to just the distinction about marital status the term was invented to avoid.

Perhaps we need another set of titles for ourselves; is it possible the French would oblige us just once more?

nounce words the way they look. "Victuals" is really "vittles"; "preface" doesn't sound like "deface," but "bestial" sounds the way it is spelled, not "beast-ial."

Most of the problems with pairs like "pretty"/"kitty" stem from the English spelling system, not from the spoken language. We're using spellings that have hardly changed since Shakespeare's time, but our speech is so different that he might not understand us at all.

One way to explain these problems is to look at the history of the words. "Victuals" is the Latin spelling of a word which was borrowed from French into English; neither the French nor the English have ever pronounced it the way it's spelled.

"Beast" and "bestial" sound different for the same reason "feast" and "festive" do: for hundreds of years English has used a long vowel in the shorter word and a short vowel in the longer word.

The trick to pronouncing "pretty" is one of the most basic in language: some sounds affect the way others are pronounced. The "y" at the end of "pretty" has affected the sound spelled with "e," and we pronounce it "pritty." The "w" in "few" affected the sound before it, producing "fyoo." The same is true of "new," "grew," and "stew," but what about "sew"?

"Sew" is the only one of these words I know of that sounds different, although British "shew," pronounced "show," really fits the same class. "Sew" derives from the older form "seow," later spelled either "sew" or "sow," but meaning to stitch in any case. The modern word has the one spelling, "sew," but the other pronunciation, "sow." The spelling is, at best, deceiving.

Finally, there is the problem of "cave" and "have." The dictionary indicates that "have," a native word, sounded almost as it does today from its earliest recorded history. "Cave" was borrowed from French with a long vowel, spelled with an "a," in contrast to the short vowel in "have," also spelled with an "a." In short, nothing unusual has happened to either word, but our spelling system has fooled us again.

SOUND TALK

"Why," the man on the phone was asking, "do we say 'pretty' so that it rhymes with 'kitty'?" And why, asks Eleanor Robers in a recent

letter, do "few" and "sew" sound so different? What about "cave" and "have"?

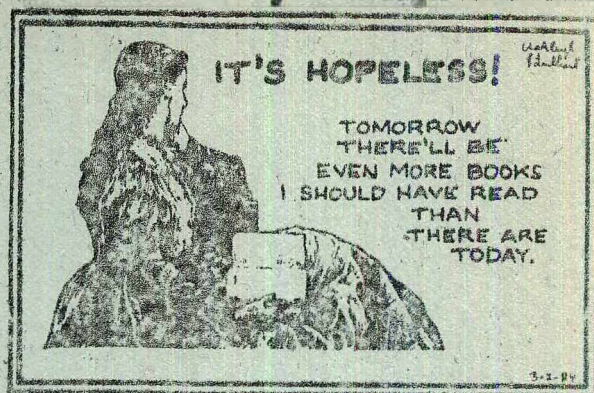
We've all suffered from the embarrassment of trying to pro-

English has just five vowel symbols to represent more than twice that many vowel sounds, so we are constantly trying to interpret those symbols in our words. Is it long, is it short, or is it something else entirely?

The simplest way to explain most of our spelling surprises is to point to the way we represent vowel sounds. In "cave," "have," and "father"—not to mention "urban"—we have a confusing array of sounds all spelled with one letter.

Perhaps we should imitate the Hebrew spelling system and simply not use vowels at all: jst spll wth chrnts.

Pot-Photos by Ashleigh Brilliant



UNLETTERED

One of our problems with understanding English is understanding all the words and phrases we've borrowed from French. Here is a language which seems to present as much trouble with unpronounced letters as, say, English.

For example, who would believe that in French only the first two letters in "cent" are pronounced? Or that "qu'est-ce que" is a two-syllable utterance?

We have only to look as far as English to find equally absurd spellings like those for "knight" and "Did you eat?"—pronounced "jeet?" In both languages spelling has not kept pace with changes in pronunciation, so the spelling systems have become arbitrary at best.

When we look at French words, however, we don't see the same system a Frenchman does.

We don't think about words as being masculine or feminine, so we have trouble with the difference between a "blond"—a man with light hair—and a "blonde"—a woman with light hair. It helps that in French there is a difference in sound as well: "blonde" is pronounced with the "d" sound, "blond" without it.

English speakers have actually gotten rather smug about this business of masculine and feminine: we can get along without that sort of thing in our language. But we have our own categories: ships, cars, airplanes, storms, and even guns are usually referred to as "she." A baby or an animal may be called "it" and a doctor, a judge, or a mayor is assumed to be a "he." It may be argued that these are inaccurate, but they are common usage.

For all our problems

with the sound and system of French, however, there are certain phrases from French that can be more misleading.

English almost always has phrases like "white coat" where French has "coat white." Strange as they may sound, we have borrowed our share of these "backwards phrases" from French, and kept the French word order. Think about "court martial"—a "war court"—or "attorney general"—a "general attorney," if you please.

In addition to legal terms like "judge advocate," we also have more common phrases like "heir apparent," "proof positive," and "poet laureate" which fit the same pattern. And in an election year who could forget the "body politic" or the "president-elect?"

My favorite example of these inverted phrases from French is the "chaise

longue," or the "chaise longue," as we like to say it. The literal translation of "chaise longue" is "chair long," a pretty fair description of the object in question. But Americans don't see it that way.

We have actually reversed the meanings of the two words. "Longue," the French word for "long," has become "lounge," our word for a kind of "chair." Then we look at "chaise," the French word for "chair," and think it must mean something like "long!"

I suppose a "long chair" is the same by any name, but pity the poor Frenchmen who is trying to learn English. If he ever finds out what we've done to his comfortable chair, he may decide to stick to French. It makes more sense, he will tell you, and besides, it sounds so nice.

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