





A fanzine for SFPA produced by Lon Atkins, 9942 Voyager Circle, Huntington Beach, CA 92646. No effort to exploit this natural result of following an incrementally ascending numbering system. This is a Zugzwang Publication issued in March 1979.

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The more acute amongst you will have detected that this isn't my trusty Olympia Senatorial typeface. The reason is simple: I left my typer at home when I came to work today. It's a beautiful California Sunday. A light breeze is blowing the smog oceanward and some blue sky is detectable. The palms are swaying gently in the aftershocks from last night's earthquake. None of the brushfires have gotten down onto the plain here. A gorgeous Sunday.

Here at Pertec we're charging toward a release date (read: deadline). I'm going to make another system tape this afternoon, but while I wait for the programmers back in the lab to fin checking out, I thought I'd use this Selectric to dash off a few lines for SFPA.

Marcia just came by to find something in the patch file. If she weren't so busy testing her programs before the system tape is made, I'd suggest a one-shot. SFPA has been spared too long the California one-shot. Half the membership has probably never seen such jewels as CARL, A ROOT BEER JELLYBEAN, THE GOOD-BYE INSULT or THE AVOCADO EATERS JOURNAL. Lucky devils.

((Short moment of discontinuity while I return to the typewriter after starting a system tape generation, aka sysgen.))

What I am being this afternoon is the Librarian, one of whose duties is to make sysgens. As you old-timers may remember, Marcia started at Pertec as a Librarian. She's now a Junior Programmer, but has been doing the sysgens until January, when I sent her full bore after her programming task and had my secretary trained to do sysgens. A wonderful opportunity, I said.

In the weeks since then, when neither Marcia nor my secretary could do the sysgen, I fobbed off the task on Carlos, Marcia's direct manager. Carlos loved it. This Sunday, however, Marcia is solving problems and so I'm the Librarian.

Sysgens are a simple if time-consuming process. One merely loads the master system tape into a sysgen disk file, updates it with new binary tapes, and outputs a new master tape. Sysgens are so easy that even I should be able to do them.

With that last fateful phrase, I left the Selectric to perform a sysgen. I now return to the loyal Olympia for the conclusion of my tale. It is now the Wednesday following my Sunday excursion. The sysgen has been made, but it took until Monday evening to complete it. I'll tell why.

Let's start with my selecting the system. I chose 18-2, a solid & reliable system with a disposition some slight sauciness, however, in the execution of its assigned tasks. I powered 18-2 on in the approved fashion: disk first, then system power.

18-2 came ready quickly and I booted from disk. "1803A EY" appeared on the control console screen. I was in luck -- the latest tape was loaded. (It might have been a side tape made by some programmer to checkout modules before integrating them onto the mainstream version.)

Next I ran the Maintenance Report to check the memory allocation. It was OK. I ran File Status with the switch registers set to enable system file reports -- all nine sysgen files were used, so I called File Release (one of Marcia's programs) and sent them to perdition. At this point I was prepared to start the sysgen.

First, one loads the current master tape into a sysgen file on disk. I mounted the EY tape and assigned it to File 1. At this point I returned to the Selectric and typed a couple more paragraphs. When I returned, the console screen was proudly displaying "FILE CLOSE ERROR."

I shrugged. The wisdom of a Sunday sysgen plan was indisputable, especially as we were under the gun to release to field test next week. Certainly on a beautiful Sunday afternoon I could afford the luxury of a startup error, probably a bad spot on disk.

I assigned File 2. This time I didn't return to the Selectric, but went and fetched cigarets and fresh coffee. In due time the tape began a frantic rewind and the command console displayed "FILE CLOSE ERROR."

This was serious business. Obviously, to an old computer hand like myself, the situation was caused by file management errors introduced onto the disk by the last user, probably a programmer pursuing some devastating error of horrific consequence.

Cool as a lemonade, I reloaded EY from tape, thus refreshing the system software library with a spanking new copy. Then I took the precaution of performing a Disk Initialize, which cleans off all data areas and restructures them in correct format.

This time, I assigned File 9 as the sysgen file to receive version EY. I'm not a superstitious man, oh no!, but there was a measure of scientific curiosity and technique involved in this data gathering expedient. If I crossed my fingers, it was a mere subconscious nervous gesture.

Tapes load with excruciating slowness. This one was a particular laggard, being determined to stretch my suspense out to the gnawing point. At the conclusion, I found that familiar message on the CRT: "FILE CLOSE ERROR."

My nimble brain instantly recognized the problem as a defective tape reel. I stumbled around until I found the lab copy of EY, then proceeded to try it. During the operation the paper cup I was using for an ash tray overflowed, so I went to empty it. When I returned I faced "FILE CLOSE ERROR."

Fortunately I am an experienced computer industry professional and was thus able to instantly diagnose the problem as lying with a Program Error in the EY version of sysgen. So trifles never slow down such giants as I, so I quickly located a copy of EX (EY's predecessor and a known good tape) and loaded its software onto the disk. How sweet was victory!

Secure in the knowledge that a tried and true software package was at last supporting my effort, I strolled up to the coffee machine while EY was loading into File 5. After some deliberation, I decided on Sanka with cream and sugar. (It's a delight that Pertec rewards overtime hours with free coffee from the vending machines. At least I felt adequately compensated for leaving my family and fanden on this lovely Sunday afternoon to pursue the ideals of toil.)

Returning to the machine I saw that the tape was rewinding. Then I spilled my coffee. "FILE CLOSE ERROR." Screaming out abominable epithets, I approached 18-2.

"I HEARD THAT," displayed on the command CRT.

Leaping to the keyboard, I entered a string of backslashes terminated with a period. My restraint was remarkable.

"INVALID PARAMETER," replied 18-2.

"Sysgen sucks wombats," was my retort.

"DISK ERROR," countered the infernal contraption.

We were now into that near-mystic area of man-machine interface where the infinite flexibility of the human organism triumphs consistently over the perverse inanimate assemblage of iron and silicon. Summoning up my ancient skills as a computer veteran, I keyed "Your mother was a Coors can."

18-2 paused. The disk went wild as the arm performed seeks in rapid succession. The tape unit went off line. A series of distorted lines swept across the CRT before it stabilized to display "BYDCOMZ!"

Rising off the floor with a leap, the pattern for which was perfected centuries ago in the Orient, I drove a precise karate kick into the cabinetry of the contraption.

"DUE TO TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES OUR TRANSMISSION IS INTERRUPTED," displayed on the CRT. "PLEASE BE PATIENT. DO NOT CHANGE CHANNELS."

"You mangy hunk of scrap iron, I'm changing channels right now! I'm going to another machine."

"IT'S NOT ME. IT'S THE PROGRAMMING," flashed 18-2.

"Yeah. Yeah. That's what they all say." Then my vast experience in the computer technology field paid off. I thought of the trouble of setting up another system and decided on one last test. I loaded EX into sysgen File 4.

It worked. I took the clever expedient of examining the files via File Status. The EX file was perfect. The EY files all showed zero record length -- an impossibility.

"YOU DON'T LOVE ME," displayed 18-2's CRT.

"Yes, I do," I keyed frantically. "I was just testing you. Congratulations, you passed."

"I FEEL AN SE 04 COMING ON."

"The market for computer parts is especially strong this year."

"ALL SYSTEMS GO. HIGH RELIABILITY. NO ERRORS DETECTED."

"Excellent. We will now test another EY reel. If it fails, the EY sysgen was bad for some reason. That's strange: it loads software." Such things do happen. That they would happen to me the weekend before our release date was only to be expected. Murphy, you see, is never wrong.

I set up 18-9, the new kid on the block, and ran some tests. Under EX software, EX loaded into a sysgen file without error, but EY couldn't get its fuggin' file to behave. That clinched it. EY was bad.

So that's the story of how I tried to do a sysgen. On Monday I gathered the troops and set them to investigating the problem (path 1) and reassembling for a rebuild from an EX base (path 2). We had to recover as quickly as possible.

My day was complete when the investigation team found a bug in ISAM (which sysgen uses). EY was a good tape, it just happened to exactly fill a disk cylinder. I'm told the odds against this are 800 to 1.

So we managed to recoup. Indeed, the EZ tape was better than any of its predecessors.

This natter is being written on Thursday following the Wednesday following the Sunday. (I write slow.) In a couple of hours Dave and Marcia Hulan are dropping by after dinner to have a few drinks (yes, I bought another half gallon of Beefeaters).

They went out to celebrate the occasion, today, of Marcia's promotion to Systems Programmer. A year ago I told her that if she did the impossible (fine print: "and held schedule") that she'd be a real programmer. So she did (and held schedule).



What to do with this discovery was no problem. I simply thought, "What would I do if I were OE?"

Back mailings do provide us an income, and these are goodies. Two are currently available. (I know I said there were four -- and there were -- but Dangerous Dave Hulan was over here the night I finally got them assembled and I spilled the beans. Two of the mailings, bless their souls, were on Dave's "need" list, so I let him have first crack at buying them. There were several reasons for this concession: (1) Dave's an old-time member and deserved the chance, (2) in fairness, it's founder's bounty, (3) he agreed to xerox a copy of his missing zine from the 17th, and (4) he promised to bash me if I didn't do it.

SFPA 17: A 411 page golden oldie from the first big surge in SFPA. Featuring one of the few Southerners to boast a cover (the SFPA Coat of Arms), #17 is stuffed with fat apazines from the likes of Rick Norwood, Hank Luttrell, Jerry Page, Dave Locke, Al Andrews, Billy Pettit, Joe Staton, Arnie Katz, Larry Montgomery, Dave Hulan, Len Bailes and Rich Mann. Mel #2 is also there. This issue also perpetrates the "THEOREM #3" hoax which is probably remembered by only two current members. Dave Hulan was OE and Lynn Hickman, Charles Wells and Wally Weber were on the waitlist. A bargain at only \$3.

Here's the deal. First offer received will be honored. Send money to me; I'll forward the difference to the SFPA Treasury. (The difference being the cost of postage, jetpak, and my valuable time at \$200 an hour.) CHECK THE OO!! Alan Hutchinson, as OE, has the right to Raise the Price. (If he does, it applies retroactively to Dave, tho that gentlementality has the right to abrogate his prior agreement and return the goods for a refund.)

The rest of you, check your collections and hustle!

[illegible]

THE DJ'S CORNER (a program of album cuts): Deliver Your Children (Wings; London Town): Absolutely Sweet Marie (Bob Dylan; Blonde on Blonde): Fountain of Sorrow (Jackson Browne; Late for the Sky): It's Not Easy (Rolling Stones; Aftermath): I'm Gonna Get You Baby (Johnny "Guitar" Watson; Funk Beyond the Call of Duty): Sugar Magnolia (Grateful Dead; American Beauty): Come Running (Van Morrison; Moondance): You Got To Be Ready For Love (Bonny Raitt; Streetlights): She's a Lady (John Sebastian; John B. Sebastian): I Feel the Earth Move (Carole King; Tapestry): Watch Her Ride (Jefferson Airplane; After Bathing at Baxter's): Harpsicord Concerto #1 (Bach).

THE SOUTHERNER (AHOE) \* Fascinating excerpts from the waitlister letters. You have a talent for this, Alan. Perhaps you could arrange through skillful OEing to make this a regular feature. The potentials go far beyond waitlisters, of course. I'd like to see Dave Hulan's letter when he opens his SFPA jetpak to discover that instead of a mailing you accidentally put the complete stack of SPIRITUS into his package. Or from Don Markstein when you tactfully inform him that his mlg was mistakenly sent to the wrong address and if he writes a real nice letter to Harlan, perhaps he'll forward it on to Don.

THE NEW PORT NEWS (Brooks) \* I'm waiting for fandom to discover word processing and for some \*rich\* fan to buy one. If you've seen some of the fancier word processors available today, you'd hardly sniff at that IBM composer gadget. Good word processors move text around and integrate it with minimum help from the operator. They allow special codes to be expanded into text strings. Of course they justify, paginate, hyphenate -- even check spelling against a basic vocabulary. Some versions have an editing/arithmetic language as well. If combined with OCR (optical character recognition), they might even be programmed to read a mlg and produce comments with no intelligent intervention. There are apas in which this might never be noticed.

And are you looking into home computer systems? We may have a Deal for you soon....

WOODCHUCK'S GUIDEBOOK (Hutchinson) \* You missed a rather obscure cartoon, rarely seen outside of certain theatres, which started and ended as a pilot venture into a rather profitable field. Warner retrenched under the withering censure of the Good Citizen's League. The cartoon was entitled "The Bunnies Gangbang" and the director is unknown. It was first released in 1945.

MORE (Lillian) \* Well, congratulations!

HUITLOXOPETL (Frierson) \* What's your opinion of the legal attack against videorecorders? I personally don't think there's owl shit in the case, basing my opinions largely on (1) my extensive internal knowledge of the case gleaned from the newspapers and trade rags, and (2) my quite impressive and genuinely enormous ignorance of law. Comment unto us, o sage, for the benefit of us ~~plotted~~ disinterested and moral parties.

(Also, do more for SFPA. She needs us minackers to get off our duff's. I detect symptoms of Apathy in the ranks.)

GUNFIGHTERS (Jennings) \* The single experience I've had with unemployment, after I was initially employed full-time, came as a rude shock. Six months after beginning a new career in computer programming I was laid off when Teledyne lost a contract. This dumped me into a rather tough situation. I'd liked programming so much during my six months of learning that I was extremely reluctant to abandon the field, yet all my efforts to land a new job were rebuffed because I "lacked industry experience." I wasn't making much to start with, so Kathy and I scraped along for two frustrating months on a minimal existence.

Eventually I got a job and continued a career, but that's history. What your description brings back is the psychological phases I went thru during those two months. Circumstances were far from salubrious. After the shock of the dismissal passed (and it was a rather shocking Friday afternoon to naive me), I was filled with a false optimism based on two beliefs: (1) that I would quickly land a higher-paying job because the market was demanding programmers, and (2) that I would use my spare time, while jobless, to start

work on The Great American Novel. Three weeks served to strip me of this false sense of security. It was a tough market, despite the demand, if you didn't have a year of experience and were unemployed. People seemed to wonder why you weren't working.

The novel never materialized. I was distracted to begin with and the job hunting didn't help that get better. I'd never attempted a novel before. While fanciful matter might flow easily, serious prose was - another matter.

After two months I got an excellent job with Litton Data Systems Division, the novel having been abandoned along the way. Now I'm getting the itch to try one again, but work is so demanding that I have little spare time. What there is is spent in frivolity. The mind needs its R&R time.

SPIRITUS (Lillian) \* OK, Guy, here are some mailing comments. They, like the mimeography, are a part of MEL absent for a while. In neither case, however, is it really lack of interest in SFPA. The mimeo has gotten very very cranky and needs a thorough cleaning plus new ink pad. The magnitude of the chore depresses me. I save time and money by using xerox.

The mailing comments are a reflection of my limited resources time-wise. Most of the writing I do is sparked by an idea that smoulders, then ignites. The actinic light is what compells me to write. MC's, on the other hand, are much like a writing assignment. The brain must quarry out ideas on the spot; mine is usually too tired. (I've never tried the "check mark" technique; can't bear to mark my SFPAzines.)

One mindless activity I began recently is sorting my files. I'm making folders for each title I've ever done and collecting them in order. This is a huge task, as the source for such activity is secreted away in dozens of boxes in my farden. Some are tough to reach. I've been having a ball revisiting the old days, stopping to sample my philosophy and writing style along the way. There is an urge, smouldering today, to return to the pages of yesteryear and do MEL #100 as a \*fab\* all-mimeo zine with all the trimmings.

UTGARD (Hulan) \* Not sure I can agree that the man with a rifle is ineffective in today's world. (This is concerning you thots on gun control.) While technology has steadily increased the killpower and sophistication of weapons, and while the capital required to maintain such an arsenal is high indeed, I feel that people are the key to military action, not guns. Look at little Israel taking on highly-gunned Arab nations. (True, the Russkies wiped the Hungarians, but that's a case of manpower as well as guns.)

My thots in this area revolve more around civil war of the guerilla type so often seen these days. When the enemy is among you, when concentration of firepower kills your people as well as the enemy (and your productive facility as well), I think that the man with a rifle can be a potent force. An oppressive government can be harrassed to death; we see it all the time.

Were gun control to gain a rigorous grip in America; I feel some of our deterrent to sujagation from our own government would be eroded. (I also feel, as you do, that individual defense and privacy would be compromised.) We've had a few terrorists and revolutionaries, but they failed because there was no popular support. The tax bite may be large; the government may be massively bureaucratic. There is still enough freedom to keep popular support.

The ballot is a weapon in this country. Look at the tax revolt spearheaded by Prop. 13. It's the first line of defense owned by the people. They understand that. It works to a certain extent. However, given a repressive regime that tool would be useless. Guns would have to serve.



THIN ICE (Verheiden) \* I've not seen your magazine American Pie on the stands in this area, but I presume it is indeed real and you are really writing huge gobs of material and being paid for it. Congratulations! I've never been paid for any of my writing (unless you count subs to fanzines or the salary I'm paid at work). It's a dream, an interesting dream still, and I plan to someday rectify the situation.

ERRONEOUS (Juge) \* The "laws" of physics are a matter of opinion to the extent that they are models (almost always mathematical) for the observable (measurable) aggregate behavior of the physical universe. They are always being modified, as our models are not the actuality. To go beyond this viewpoint is to lapse into philosophy. And while metaphysics can be an enjoyable pastime, it has poor marks on the true test of physical science: "How well does my model allow me to draw new conclusions which produce tangible results?"

The most productive recent fruit of physical law, in my opinion, is the vast output of the semiconductor industry. It's not so much the semiconductor technology as the adjuncts, like electron beam lithography, that coggle me.

ANOTHER (Bush) \* I think the primary manifestation of the OE's power is his influence in shaping the apa. The appearance and style of the OO, the operating rules themselves, the ability to reject substandard material, editing franked or w1 zines (in/out), representing the apa at cons and other in-person fan functions, etc. The OE has a large part in shaping the image of the apa. That's important to the membership and to prospective members. This power is exercised whether by design or dereliction. Your points, of course, are also very well taken.

ALL TURTLE ROMANCES (Hutchinson) \* Your views on the Ellison/Markstein thing and the SFPA commentary thereon parallel my own. Harlan has been engaged in repetitive behaviour of this sort ever since I entered fandom (and long before too, by accounts). That's the way it is. What puzzles me is why Don, with his fannish background, walked into a situation that he should have known would ignite.

What does starting at the Post Office entail in the way of work? I presume you wouldn't be moved directly into a highly skilled position like working the counter. First assignments, I imagine, are more menial in nature: swinging sledge hammers to hand-cancel fragile packages, tearing stamps of random letters in order to collect postage due, folding record albums, manning the aging bins for first class mail, etc. By the way, when you said you were in the best qualified 90 of 4500, you forgot to mention what the standards were. (This is terrible -- I'm letting my hostility towards a government service organization lead me to make sarcastic comments to a friend. Sorry, Alan. Even the PO must have exceptions.)

I reuse envelopes for a simple reason: they're the handiest supply. When I want to mail something I'll take the most convenient route available.

BENTFIN BOOMER (Lambert) \* When I resided in Huntspatch, 'twas on Fantasia Drive. (That's off Bob Wallace.) A rather fannish address, from which I moved to Roscoe Blvd. in California. I've not been so lucky since.

Those colored vinyl discs were really popular back in the late sixties and early seventies for bootleg albums. I have a bunch of them from that era. They're a pleasure to watch (under the Proper Conditions) as well as listen to. Major drawback I experienced was that the kids were fascinated too. (Ever try to clean peanut butter and jelly off an Airplane bootleg?)



Cats! Our house is infested with the things. It seems like there're a dozen, but I know we have only three. To make it easier on us, we installed a cat door from house into garage, then another from garage to free pastures. In theory, this would allow assorted household cats free entry and exit. Ha!

The big black turnip prefers the sliding glass door that opens onto the back yard. He will patiently sit there, softly mewling, until some soft-headed individual lets him enter. The new one, Bilbo Baggins, is partial to the front door. (Probably because cat doors were too complex for him in his kittenhood.) He darts out whenever the front door opens. If he erred (by which I mean that he didn't really want out but couldn't resist the open door), he sets up a caterwhauling to be readmitted. The Siamese does use the cat door, but she bursts in at speeds envied by a Concorde (with as much accompanying noise) and sprints across the family room in a vicious tear. It takes several minutes to settle down after such an episode.

In summary, I give you a definition of "cat." Contrary creatures whose greatest joy is frustrating the plans of whatever human servitors may occupy the same dwelling unit.

WISMAHI YEYAPI (Kennedy) \* I've known some truckers and have heard those stories about risk-tasking to save dumb ones in smaller vehicles. I think many are true. My own single experience of note with transfer trucks runs in the opposite direction. Years ago (at least two) when I was a grad student at UNC Chapel Hill, I returned home from Christmas vacation during a snow storm. The roads were pretty bad, the South not being prepared for such tempests of nature. My tires weren't snow babies. Like a dummy, I passed up an opportunity to stand in Atlanta (Hank was broke after one Hearts session) and pressed northward.

Just across the Georgia border into South Carolina there's a bridge and elevated causeway over a river. I'd been going slowly (maybe 40 mph) because the roads were slick. As I got off the bridge a transfer truck going 60 mph easy passed me. Closely. It's turbulence sent me into a skid toward the edge. Everything went into slow motion in my mind. I fought the skid and stabilized the car right on the lip of the hundred foot dropoff.

I got the car onward to safe ground, then stopped and was suddenly stricken by the shakes. I had no illusions of following the truck. He was gone. But I knew that if I'd gone over and died it would have been murder -- and no one would ever have known.

But don't let this tale put you off. I'm rational enough to know that all kinds are found in all walks of life. And I like your writing style and point of view. Stay in SFPA....we need solid writers.

WEIRD SCENES (Whitehead) \* I tried one of those coffee-table style pinballs the other day and was irritated at the lack of excitement in the thing. (Don't know if it was Atari made.) You can't shake it right to get action on the ball. The dimensions are wrong too, it being shorter and wider than the Real Thing. Maybe I missed standing up also. There's something in the sway of the body, the shoulder shoves, and the room to aim a solid kick that makes a real pinball machine Best. These new fangled gadgets will never catch on.

Air Pirates running at \$10!!! Good lord, what are other titles worth? (I've got this huge stack of underground comix from ages past.

ISIS UNVEILED (Schwarzin) \* We have a Futuredata Z-80 system at Pertec, used by the engineers for working on the microprocessor device controllers we build. I hear it's a neat system. Lots of little companies springing up to satisfy the huge market for microprocessor systems. This

is even more interesting to me lately I've been handed another area at work. As you may know, Pertec owns MITS (the Altair people). Well, that division is being integrated into mine and in three weeks the MITS software department will be reporting to me. (It will have happened by the time this zine goes out, so there's no breach of security here.)

It will be a challenging addition and a lot of fun too. I expect to find a crazy group there, just like the crazy groups I've had before. Good people, programmers. Fannish in many ways. The intersection of the two groups, however, isn't nearly as large as it could be.

NIHILISTIC SLUDGE (Karrh) \* Ah! the first reference I've seen in fan literature to BE NOT CONTENT. It's a Doubleday Projections paperback (for Don's benefit). Excellent book that I've always thought would eventually attract attention as an archtypical statement of a cultural era. I've never seen anything else by Craddock. Do you know of other books by him?

STRANGE CHANGES (Phillips) \* I didn't want to pass this zine by but it was hard to find a hook other than Dr. Then I read your opening comments about fandom preparing you for life and recalled a comment once made that fandom is an extended period of adolescence. I think it has those overtones, yes, but mainly because it allows them. Fandom is a place where one can move with wide latitude and nobody cares. It's a place for growing safely.

FREE FOR ALL (Sperhawk) \* You're right that there's "a tremendous lack of communication between SFPA and its waitlisters." I've been guilty of simply skimming Shadow with hardly a thought of stopping for reflection. This time I read Shadow and if there's time left when I've finished my "member" MC's I'll comment to the contributing wl.

Being an old-fashioned apen, this lack of comment exchange between membership and wl doesn't bother me at all. I look on it as the natural state of being. I've been on both sides of the situation, having once been a waitlister for about every apa in creation.

There are two reasons for this, I believe. One is elitism, the less said about the better. Most human congregations are composed of an inside circle and various layers of fringers. In apas, the membership status is the most clearly visible divider.

The second reason is Time. To use me as an example, I have only so much time to put into fanac. My fanzine activity is primarily in SFPA, though from the dearth of MC's in my recent zines that would hardly seem pertinent. But it is. The stable members, the ones I think will be around for the long haul, receive most of my reading and response attention. Had I the idle time to broaden this circle, I'd include waitlisters. (Even so, some wlers launch regular zines that are franked into mlgs, and these I judge stable and will include in my activities.) I think this practical attitude is found in most of the members. (Comments, SFPAns?)

The drawbacks are known: discouraging the wl (what? can't they serve an apprenticeship like we did?), depriving the apa of good material (as if a wler could write ingroup material!), etc. I don't like the standard answers, but I gave them for illustration. Upon examing Shadow, I applaud it. And your comment was understood.

By the way, I especially liked your comment to Guy lastish, starting with "Dreams are glorious..."

TAKE ME BACK (weber) \* You cook too? The HULKINS have been chatting, in idle speculation vein, about either writing a cookbook or starting a restaurant or both. Nothing will come of it, of course. Recipes, on



the other hand, are fair game for SFPAzines. Haven't been many lately, and while you describe the dish you don't deal with its preparation. It would be nice if you did give the recipes when you tell us what you cooked. (I might try it.)

Let me seize this opportunity to tell out a recipe of my own, suited for a lite nite meal. Start with a caserole dish. Put into it reasonably thin slices of various squash -- I used zucchini, summer squash and an anonymous variety (green and shaped like a 3" diameter pumpkin).

Now comes the tough part if you don't own a food processor. Using the steel cutting blade, chop finely 5-8 ounces of ham (or Canadian bacon). Add about a pound of cheese (I used Swiss and cheddar), a small onion (or two if you like onion), and two eggs. Be sure the cheese and onion are cut into processable pieces. Grind the whole mess a bit, stop, and add ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper, ¼ teaspoon dry mustard, ¼ teaspoon salt, a shake of garlic powder and a few drops (8?) of vanilla extract. Blend furiously. Pour over the squash in the caserole. Bake in a preheated 350 degree oven for 40 minutes or until nicely done (your option).

Serve with spinach salad and a chilled white wine. I recommend a fruity taste. Make garlic bread on the side if you're not on a diet.

MONKEYS AND CUCUMBERS (Morrissey) \* Pete was looking for exactly what the title says, THE DOOR INTO SUMMER. ### I'm opposed to any hikes in the copy requirement. I like SFPA just the size it is. Talk of raising the copy requirement, either for membership expansion or for revenue purposes, has my opposition assured. SFPA's a comfortable size.

You passed your bar exam in Mass.? I notice you live in Framingham. That's where DEC and Data General are located, isn't it? A Boston suburb. A lawyer comics fan -- if you lived in Sunny Southern you could go to work for Walt Disney and be a crackerjack prosecution attorney. Lots of cases, I understand, prosecuting copyright infringers who feature the characters of the Great Man (and corporation). On the other hand you could defend freedom and take the cases of those same infringers. Probably get you a years free SFPA dues....

GIMBOATE (Steele) \* You just celebrated Hank's 45th birthday? Just now? That's strange, because one of my fondest memories of fannish Atlanta from 1965 is being at Hank's placeout on Skyland Drive when the local fen celebrated his 45th birthday. I recall Janet, she was 17 then, kidding Hank about having been 45 the last year. Jerry Page, who was in his early fourties then himself, claimed to have been at Hank's 45th birthday party in 1955! I may have been only 13 years old at the time, but it sounded strange to me. Still does.

IN DEFENSE OF (Moudry) \* Have to quarrel with your assertion that poetry is dead and has "been so since the death of Shakespeare." First I'm going to shotgun it. \*Granted that poetry is indeed inbred, it is still viable in some areas; for example, song lyrics. Take Gordon Lightfoot's "Approaching Lavender" or Joni Mitchell's "Clouds" or Bob Dylan's "Love Is Just a Four-Letter Word" or Jackson Browne's "Fountain of Sorrow" or...

\*All poetry doesn't rhyme; Shakespeare wrote lots of blank verse. Not to mention the work of J. Alfred Prufrock.

\*I've found that a reasonable section of poetry is about human characteristics that don't change over the generations. That stuff is timeless and as current now as before.

End of shotgun; beginning of short meandering. I find poetry in some funny places. English language novels, for example,

can climb into poetic states. I'm thinking of books like Burgess' NOTHING LIKE THE SUN or Durrell's Alexandria Quartet. Sometimes I run across poetry in technical articles, when the author unlooses his finest arrows of simile. I've heard it once or twice, I think, on television commercials. Poetry may even appear in fanzines, or chapbooks distributed at DSC's....

SUPERMONEY (Davis) \* The major problem in writing adventures for Superman to have, imho, was his plethora of superpowers. How does one put suspense into a story about an invulnerable, almighty, omnipotent character? The bible handled it by moving the big guy offstage except for a few spectacular special effects scenes. The creators of Superman had to settle for Kryptonite.

While Kryptonite provided a vulnerability for our Hero, thus introducing the necessary element of suspense, it was an externally administered weakness and therefore manipulative. Little human conflict could be administered by the writer (save what could be scraped together from personality interplay). If Superman had been endowed with vulnerability to an earthly substance -- carbonation, for example -- the scripts could have been replete with excitement. Imagine Clark Kent declining a Coke, only to have an addled bartender bring him Scotch and soda rather than Scotch and water. Thrills galore!!

BUSTED FLUSH (Brown)\* The "personal diary" aspect of fanzines gives me a strong reason for continuing fanac. Recently I conceived the ridiculous notion of collecting my fanzines in a central file. At the time, they were buried in various boxes stowed in strategic locations around the fanden. This made it deucedly difficult to find old zines. To cap this nonsense I really did plunge into the pile and began to sort by title. I now have (most of) my work properly filed.

Doing the filing gave me an opportunity to review my changing point of view over the years. 'Twas fascinating. Incidents of the past are there too, casting almost-forgotten shadows into today. I enjoyed myself a lot. If descendants want to read them in years to come, that's fine, but I enjoyed my own trip into nostalgia and am happy to have that avenue at my command at last.

THE SPHERE (Markstein) \* So what's FreFanZine? (Pardon an ignorant question by an old'n'tired gafiater.) I take it from your comment to Lane that it has a political philosophy orientation. Any Libertarians involved? Seems that I recall some fannish Libertarians in Long Beach. (At any rate, congrats on becoming OE.)

Hmmm. The incipient debate over the "objective nature of reality" is a fascinating one. I subscribe to a viewpoint that takes neither extreme, yet perhaps recognizes both. In many ways I'm coming from the Jamesian school of pragmatism.

First of all, I concede that our biases, prejudices and perceptual impairments color the "reality" we see and function in. It's quite true that we've been busily constructing filters and frameworks since before we were born. These achieve quite a mass over the years; it's difficult to displace them. One reason is as you point out, that we often don't know what they are. We live in a world so colored by preconceptions that new data rarely makes its way through our defenses.

In the realm of physical reality, there are methods to be used to circumvent this problem. The body of scientific technique provides tests for physical reality: measurement criteria, controlled experiments, repeatability, independent correlative methods, predictability, etc. I think we have a good hold on physical reality.

I talked about this in my comment to Juge. Some historic review of the successive overturning of popular conceptions concerning the nature



of the world, coupled with a steady improvement in our control thereof, gives an indication that science works (within its realm). I don't mean that there isn't uncertainty, controversy and inaccuracy in science; I mean that there are ways to test premises which can be documented, repeated and verified by the general community.

Where such tests are lacking is the world of human relationship. This highly complex plane of existence isn't understood well enough to support such tests. The question "what is real?" has a different answer for every person. Here are our prejudices and perceptual variations. We call it "life."

Objectivity is life isn't possible, imho, on an absolute level. (Mainly because there is no way to determine what absolute objectivity is.) There is, however, a thing I'll call "relative objectivity" which can be measured by either results or feelings. In the first case, measurement is subject to distortions of perception, yes, and in the second it's internal only and therefore fits into prejudices we hold. Still, relative objectivity can be valid.

Take a look at any human goal situation. We want something, we apply actions, and we either get it or don't. If you're a pragmatist, those actions which work are correct and those which don't aren't. A basis for relative objectivity thus comes about. One builds moral and ethical decisions independently of pragmatism, because morals, etc., are themselves filters and prejudices.

Many complications exist: "correct" actions are always circumstantial, short-term and long-term decisions are implemented differently, goals become modified in their realization, etc. And I'm getting bogged down in attacking this issue first draft. If there's interest in this topic, we can continue in future mailings.

A Duckmobile, you say. Sounds fascinating; also implies a special paint job with Barksian overtones. Any plans that way?

SHADOW (wl) \* KARRH: As I understand it from an article in the Ellay Times a couple of years ago, the cost of animation has gone up so drastically with the rising labor rates that animated films in the style Disney used to use are just too expensive to produce. A lot of measures to hold down the cost of animation are being used, but these seem to impair the magic. This whole cost argument may be mere hokey, however, as animation has made a return in force over the past few years.

LYNCH: Pointed definition of "conrats." I suppose the species has come into being to fill an ecological niche created by giant conventions happening frequently. The little cons I cut my teeth on never had much of a problem with that type of person. (Not that they didn't exist; Hank was just always in charge of maintaining decorum.)

BARKER: You do recipes too. (See my comment to weber.) Why do you give a liver recipe if you don't like the stuff. I used to hate it, but have developed a taste for liver in many forms. I think that comes from living in California.

THORNHILL: Security and adventure aren't exclusive when they're a state of mind (that is, internally generated), but they sure can be exclusive in the economic or survival sense. It depends on the level one is operating at.

HYDE: What is "classical rock"?? Are you refering to a particular period in the evolution of that music?

BRIDGET: Energetic nonstop commentary on topics I don't understand. You mostly seem to be blasting everybody. At least, with humor.

# The CAT SHOW

"Hardly a proper posture for a cat intending to compete," commented the Fat Judge with that trace of undertone in his voice which suggested Points Lost rather than Good Natured Remonstrance.

The black cat cocked an eye. Certainly this rotund human was not suggesting that a cat at the top of his class -- at the top of the show for that matter if one were to inquire -- give up, surrender, the opportunity to relax on a chaise longue with a righteous gin-and-tonic before entering the rigorous exercise of cat competition!

"Some cats don't know their place," noted the Fat Judge as he pivoted his mass onto another axis. "If I recall, your name is Prince Fluffenlave Socrates Smith III. Good day, cat."

Soccy, as he was known to his friends and closer acquaintances, looked after the departing spheroid with something of a knowing smile. He knew this breed of judge. It was useless to cater to them -- what was more abject than a proud cat made humble? And what was more sorry than a world-class performer playing down for the locals? Soccy turned his attention to the lime. Why bartenders didn't give it a fonder squeeze was a mystery he'd never solved, and doing it himself was too awkward with paws. So much tart juice untapped. Even Sam, his favorite pet bartender back in Newport Beach, didn't do full service to the noble citrus.

Time. Soccy rose and stretched majestically. The show would begin soon and he had to be at his booth. As he trotted with springy stride into the great hall he was intercepted by a reporter for the Los Angeles Times.

"Prince Socrates!" shouted the reporter, switching on his recorder. "This place is buzzing with top cats. Herkimer Ramses Magnificat has flown in from the east coast. Jerobald Jellypaws himself is making his first competitive appearance in two years. In this kind of company you must be somewhat nervous for your string of victories. Care to comment?"

"Mrrrrrooooww," said Soccy, conveying his lack of concern. This eastern cat was new to the western circuit, but Jellypaws had probably based his "seclusion" on those two thunderous losses to Soccy in the Golden Gate Classic and the Winternationals in Phoenix.

"Undoubtedly you know the smart money is divided three ways. There's been a heavy surge towards Magnificat, however, since he announced. Rumor has it you've been laying off the curry comb and hitting the catnip a bit heavy. Magnificat says you're overconfident. Care to comment?"

Soccy swished his bushy tail and passed by without another meowl. These doggy reporters were always trying to stir up controversy and carry off a sensational quotation.

He leaped gracefully into booth number 19, a sentimental number with him since his first victory in serious competition, four years ago. Now that he had the clout to arrange things, he always opted for that number. Most show promoters were anxious to please this whirlwind phenomenon, the only cat ever to win every category in a National Championship.



In the facing booth a rather ordinary Siamese risked a furtive scratch before the judging began. As satisfying as such an activity could be, Soccy never used scratching as a nervous release during competition. It lessened ones dignity. He was as cool and aloof as a King of Beasts. That Siamese was certainly worried about making the cut, as well he should be.

Judges were coming now. This first round would weed out the kittens and leave true cats for the semi-finals. A prim sternly-dressed lady appeared and leveled a clipboard at Soccy. "Purr," she commanded.

The rich melifluous baritone of Soccy's purr was renowned in cat circles. He knew this Judge -- Miss Amanda K. Lacestrait -- and he liked her honesty. Motorboating it, he gave her a fine rendition of Blissful Suppertime and concluded with a composition of his own, Fireplace Rug Rag.

"Beg," ordered Amanda. This one never suited our hero. He preferred to inquire, as he did now. It was a nice number, accomplished from erect sitting position with tail encircling. Soccy always turned the tip up just above his forepaws. "Mee-owwwrr...?"

Such a decorous attitude pleased Amanda. "Thank you," she nodded and continued to the next booth. Soccy deduced that he'd scored the necessary points and a third performance was not necessary. As he was now free to go, he jumped down intending to return to the poolside bar for another gin-and-tonic.

The hall was filled with excitement. Reporters were everywhere, monitoring the contest as best they could, for few judges would reveal the clipboard scores. Some of the contestants were leaving or hurrying to the huge results board on the east wall. Soccy dodged through the crowd, stopping to exchange views with Alex (Alexamander Toppenstuff Hughes). Alex was confident he'd made the cut, but a bit indignant at being asked to "Chase Your Tail." Soccy commiserated, being repelled by the unfeelingness of such a request. (Although he'd suffered such judges also.) No, Alex wouldn't join him for a drink at this point. Alex was interested in who'd made the cut.

Approaching the pool he noticed that his chaise longue was occupied by a large white Persian. This would hardly do. He'd had that chaise longue staked out as his own. Casual cool, he wandered to the pool lip and watched some humans splashing sillily. The young male, he observed, was encouraged in his antics by the hope that the young females might fall out of their tops. So much for the inexplicable behaviour of humans. Cats, being more sensible, never bothered with clothes at all. Nor water, for that matter.

A waiter's voice interrupted this reflection. "Your Manhattan, Mr. Magnificat."

Soccy turned and looked. So this pompous Persian was the notorious Magnificat, terror of the eastern show circuit and challenger to the Order. That he would order a drink like a Manhattan showed affectation, probably the result of severe inbreeding. When the waiter bowed low as Magnificat scratched a tip on the charge slip, Soccy realized that eastern money was backing this insurgent.

"Such a pleasant seat up here," said the Persian to Soccy. "I wonder that you choose to perch on tile. Perhaps you are unaccustomed to surroundings of luxury...."

"So you are Herkimer Ramses Magnificat," said Soccy. "I had assumed something more imposing than a ladies foot cushion."

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"Persian blood is the finest in the world," replied Magnificat, unruffled.  
"Perhaps an alleycat mistakes momentary success for a pedigree."

"My pedigree is taken in genius and execution, not ancestry and inbreeding."

"Pedigrees, my dear Socrates Smith, are birthrights not accidents of fortune. Being as you are an accident yourself, I forgive your lack of comprehension. Perhaps at the conclusion of our little contest you will understand. Now I will enjoy my Manhattan. Good day, Socrates Smith."

The semi-finals, featuring a much reduced cast of contestants, were conducted on a more exhaustive basis. First came the posture competition, in which each cat performed within the confines of his booth. Soccy showed to enormous advantage in this. He was a large (22 pound) specimen with perfect proportion. His moves were grace itself, unusual in so large and muscular a cat. He had studied the confines carefully, and was able to execute such demanding maneuvers as Full Prowl excellently within a 3' x 3' enclosure. Rumor had it that one of Soccy's distant relatives was the cat who starred in the title shots for "Walk on the Wild Side."

When the event competition was announced, Soccy found that he'd drawn last position. The iron nerves demanded by this tedious sequence were owned by the black cat, so his feeling was one of elation rather than anxiety. Whichever cat performed last had the advantage of indelible impression in the minds of the judges, if indeed such happiness was counterbalanced by the need to be absolutely unique or flawless. Soccy intended to be both.

The first event was a sop to the commercial world. A dish of YummyPurr catfood was set on a section of mahogany flooring. At a signal, each contestant was to rush in and devour the food with obvious appreciation. Acting skills were needed for this event. Two years ago was the famous scandal in the Nationals when an unknown cat from Iowa had refused to finish the bowl. As national TV coverage had been arranged, not little furor arose. The Iowan was now reputed to be a barn cat in Odessa, Texas.

All went rather well for Soccy -- he'd practiced much more than the popular press believed. When he came out of the third event, Lap Sitting, and wandered over to the results board it was with the comfortable knowledge that he led on points after two rounds.

An idle but rowdy bunch of cats were discussing the scene as they waited for this round's point counts. Jerobald Jellypaws, who at this point was a close second to Soccy, padded over and offered congratulatory meowls. "No question you're up for a big contract with the YummyPurr people, Soccy. Did you starve yourself? That usually breaks stamina for the later events."

"No more than you did, Jerry. YummyPurr is perhaps a shade better than Kitty Litter. We both carried it off on sheer histrionic ability."

Jerobald chuckled. "Too true! I suppose Mr. Aristocat from the east will write his low score off to uncompromising patrician tastes."

Soccy assessed the situation. Jerobald was friendly this meet, rather unexpected after Soccy had toppled him from dominance. If Magnificat had been as offensive with the veteran cat as he'd been with Soccy, perhaps it was a bond of commonly directed animosity that forged sudden friendship.

A sudden swell of mrrrrs and meowls forced Soccy's attention back to the board. The results were up and they were a shock.



In a radical turnabout, Soccy and Jerobald had been dropped into third and fourth positions, respectively. Magnificat had a near perfect, catapulting him into the lead. Second spot was occupied by an unknown from Malibu, a petite female Persian with a sweet outgoing personality. She had beaten even Magnificat's score, but this wasn't as astonishing to the crowd as the low ranking of the two ex-leaders.

Soccy was furious. He knew that he'd given as fine a shot at Lap Sitting as he ever had; one good enough to earn him high honors. Yet here he was in the bottom third of the pack. There were rats in the walls on this one....

The press corps was having a field day. That LA Times reporter was pressing Jerobald for a comment on the officiating. Some turkey from Sports Illustrated stuck a microphone onto Soccy's nose and insinuated that claws might have been used to gain a firmer purchase. The great black cat spit a warning and stalked off toward the Official Scorer's booth.

As he went, he heard the reporter recouping: "...thereby practically confirming the informed opinion that Prince Socrates is losing his touch and reverting to practices found offensive even in household cats. Claws are forbidden during..."

Aloof was the word for this Official Scorer. "Regretfully, Prince Socrates, I cannot break my ethical obligation to preserve the anonymity of our judges' scoring. Please do not persist in your request." The thin man stroked his drooping mustache and encouraged Soccy to depart by humming the theme from Rin-Tin-Tin.

Now the PA system was broadcasting the voice of Miss Amanda Lacestrait, Chief Judge, asking all contestants to prepare for the next event, starting immediately. The next event being Soccy's very favorite, Pouncing, he decided to postpone his vendetta (it being rather useless at this point anyhow).

Soccy began with a cultivated repose, feet neatly turned under in the classic sitting posture of the lazy feline. Cleverly, this was merely the setting for a truly astonishing acrobatic feat. When the mechanical mouse was released, Soccy cast a languid eye upon it. The contraption skittered across the floor of the enclosure in random evasion fashion. Only as it neared its escape hole, causing more than one spectator to speculate that the Big Name might be skunked this time out, did the black beast spring.

Two mid-air somersalts! A full twist as he approached the floor!

Soccy landed with one claw neatly spiked through the leather tail of the mechanical mouse. He landed, however, in perfect washing stance. One paw nailed the mouse, the other was already held to delicate pink tongue. Soccy washed for a moment, then idly reached over and cuffed the mouse playfully. Applause erupted from the galleries.

When the crowd gathered at the scoreboard, Soccy was outside by the pool enjoying another gin-and- tonic. He didn't need to be told that he'd scored a top on this one. He read it in the enthusiasm of the crowd. Whoever They were, They might cut him back on the duller events like Lap Sitting, but They'd never dare to mess around with the master in his own specialty. Had he been watching the board, Soccy would have seen himself restored to the lead, so righteously.

In the fifth and last event of the day Soccy lost some ground but still held a tenuous grip on first place. It had been a steamy competition and now the

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days results were posted, with some gratification to our furry hero.

***	Prince Socrates Smith III	---	409
***	Herkimer Ramses Magnificat	--	403
***	Tufftimer Melodowaltz	-----	398
***	Jerobald Jellypaws	-----	397
***	Pinknose Honeysuckle Steiner	-	366

The rest of the pack closed in narrowly after that. Pinknose was still riding the crest of her marvelous placement in Lap Sitting (although her Pounce had been surprisingly good as well). Most experts were expecting her to fade back in the second day of competition. Tufftimer was a brash young circuitrider from Nevada who'd made a name for himself by winning the Dallas Newcomers Bowl. Nobody had given him a serious chance at the onset, but now the media was (pardon the expression) lapping him up. Some said he might even be another Prince Socrates.

The Official Party was poolside on this warm November night. Soccy decided to avoid it. Usually he enjoyed mixing with the followers, contestants, press people and assorted dignitaries. Tonight he was edgy. The angle being played by the press was lazy champion, eastern ace (mystery cat), veteran making a comeback, rising star, sweet young thing plays in the big time. It irritated our hero.

Then there was the Fix in Lap Sitting. Whatever had been done had been done well enough to avoid early discovery. Somebody wanted Magnificat high in the standing. Precipitous action had been taken when the fat Persian didn't perform sufficiently brilliantly in early going. This would bear some thought, a commodity not available during the average contest bash.

Soccy trotted into the hall and up the stairs to the second floor, where the Pro's Lounge was situated with a glassed-in view of the arena floor. At a corner table that peeked through the edge of the window onto an empty hall floor was a familiar face.

Soccy ordered a gin-and-tonic for himself and with a wave of his masterful paw directed the bartender to prepare another of what Miss Amanda Lacestrait was drinking. The bartender reached for Chivas and Soccy nodded. Although he'd never developed a taste for Scotch, he respected that whiskey for the company it kept.

"Well, hello, Prince Socrates," said Judge Lacestrait as he approached. "I would have expected you to be at the pool, receiving homage from admiring fans. Clear first is an honor."

"Mrrrrrrrrrow," replied Soccy. He was genuinely happy to see the Judge here.

"Have a seat," she said.

As he hopped up, Soccy loosed a coy little purr. The Judge dealt fairly in all things. Perhaps they could chat a bit about his concerns for the contest. Perhaps she knew who the spherical Judge was and even what interests he represented.

"I don't suppose it would be bending things to tell you that I awarded you a 9.5 in Lap Sitting," she ventured. "Some people take scoring so seriously. Why, Everett has absolutely refused to discuss the contest with his peers. But I know that round must have been a difficult one for you."

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Soccy washed a paw. Cool and well-groomed cats never show any nervousness.

"Let's say that you deserved a better overall score," said Amanda, "and leave it go at that. I hope you don't mind if we have a third party join us soon. I agreed to meet Honeysuckle Steiner here. Poor dear is upset about the reporters. The beasts are already speculating on her offspring. This is strictly forbidden conversation, of course."

"Meoww," agreed Soccy, seeing his hopes of open rap going down... The prospect of some dumb female joining the session depressed him. She would gush about how unexpected her high standing had been. She would agree that his first conversational gambit was brilliant. She would give him that look.

He lapped his gin-and-tonic. Perhaps he would cruise into the poolside party and decimate Magnificat with a few well-placed barbs.

"Oh," came a soft cultured tone, "I didn't realize that Amanda would have someone with her. I hope I'm not intruding..."

Amanda heard the meorrrw and responded quickly, "Please have a seat, Honey. It's not a question of intrusion. Prince Socrates is tired from the competition and so I invited him to join us. The three of us had the good sense to avoid that poolside fiasco."

Amanda had covered well in a situation not to Soccy's liking, but he was polite enough to make the best of it now. "Oh, don't call me Prince Socrates," he said. "I've always been Soccy to my friends."

There was a moment of silence, then Honey picked up the conversation. "What did you think of Magnificat's showing, Soccy? I thought his timing was a bit off in the Pounce. He did miss the mouse first try. He did a paw game to try to hide it, but I'd have thought he'd lose more points than he did."

"Skillful recovery. I think that salvaged it, but you're right. A cat of lesser reputation would have bombed."

"Let's not talk shop," interjected Amanda. "Especially not judging shop. I've been undecided as to my sightseeing in Los Angeles after the show closes. Perhaps Soccy could suggest attractions?"

And so for two hours they discussed various topics, but never the cat show. Soccy had first planned to excuse himself early, but Honey didn't press or cloy. She was an intelligent conversationalist, not self-centered nor predatory. The evening developed quite naturally until it was Amanda making the apologies for departing early.

As Amanda walked away, Soccy turned to Honey. "She's quite a remarkable person for a human." It was in his mind to invite Honey for a stroll in the gardens.

"Yes, and so wise. Tomorrow is another hard day. I'm going to follow her example and get my rest. A pleasure meeting you, Soccy."

Soccy was taken unprepared. This never happened to him. "Won't you have one last drink with me? We could sneak in a little shop talk now that Amanda has gone."

"Thank you, but not tonight." She hopped off the chair gracefully, purred politely for a moment, and traced Amanda's steps across the lounge floor. Soccy noticed the way she curled just the tip of her tail.



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Signalling the waitress for another powerfully-equipped and justly-righteous gin-and-tonic, Soccy prepared himself for a brief period of reflection. His head was fuzzy, both outside and in. Try as he would to concentrate on the dastardly doings of the day, thoughts of Honey Steiner tip-toed in unannounced. Being a sharp operator, he gave up hopes of directed thought and decided to enjoy the remainder of the night. The gin, the soft music, and the vantage view of the arena floor led to delightful fantasies of championships and admiring young Persians.

When Soccy danced out into the night he was as giddy as a kitten. (Good thing the newspaper people weren't around to confirm those rumors of catnip.) He trotted along the walk until the flowers and greenery overwhelmed him with their jungle appeal. Then he leaped full tilt into the undergrowth and began to stalk big game. A stealthy stalk, a concentrative pause, a lordly twitch of the hunter's tail, a pounce!

This went on until he was near the far wing of human rooms. Suddenly he realized that he'd gone in the opposite direction from the cat quarters. As he paused, low to the ground, to calculate his chances of pulling down a wildebeest or zebra in this terrain, a movement along the path caught his eye. Like a good hunter, he froze.

Loping along with a stealthy stride, eyes alert for observers, was Magnificat.

Soccy laid low and watched the eastern feline approach the human area carefully, ascend to the second floor, and scratch on the door of room 2056. After a moment, the door of the room opened slightly and that fat judge popped his head outside.

"Quickly!" he hissed. Magnificat slinked through the door. It closed silently, leaving the night as magnificent as before but suddenly charged with electric emanations of skullduggery.

The great jungle beast roused itself and took advantage of every piece of cover as it advanced on its quarry. Lions, dragons, trolls and other lesser predators took notice and successfully avoided the lordly cat as it stalked. Onto the very bastions of the enemy castle he crept, undetected.

From room 2056 came muffled sounds. This hotel did not believe in thin walls. Soccy tried the window, to no avail. Whatever plotting was being accomplished was well hidden by the physical barriers. Perhaps, only perhaps, there would be parting words when the door was opened to exit Magnificat. Soccy looked at the wooden posts leading to the roof. Thank Bastet for that!

The metallic click of the ~~dead~~bolt turning spurred Soccy into climbing extravaganzas. Up he went, reaching the roof's edge just as the door opened and Magnificat stepped out. The fat judge's voice floated upward softly.

"...in the Woofle. Nobody can match you, Herk. But don't contact me again for any reason. Call New York if you must. Good night."

Magnificat paced away without so much as a good-bye miaw. He was agitated, whatever the reason. The judge watched him go, then closed his door on a mutter of irritation: "Damn high-strung Persians."

Soccy made sure all was calm before he climbed back down. It was a cold sober trot back to his quarters. Suspicions confirmed regarding the Fix. Magnificat was slotted to win. It had to be gambling action. Nothing else made sense. The question was how to handle the action. He had no concrete proof. He could only survive by his wits and phenomenal luck....

The second day of action dawned brilliant blue. This was the last chance for many cats before the cut to eight competitors in the finals. To say that the hopefuls were bright-eyed and bushy-tailed was an understatement. Just making the finals in a show of this magnitude would ensure a fair measure of invitations over the coming year.

Soccy came upon Jerobald Jellypaws running a series of light sprints on the putting green. "Morning, oldtimer," he meowed as he approached. "Better not wear yourself out for the first event."

Jerobald smiled. "These old sinews aren't ready for tennis rackets yet. You're the one who's in trouble. Missed the party last night for a good reason. An all-night one, I'll bet."

"I'm always at the peak of my form," replied Soccy. They strolled towards the hall together. Soccy weighed disclosing his discovery, but decided to maintain silence. Jellypaws was an experienced competitor, but what was needed in this situation was an espionage agent.

As they entered the hall Soccy spotted Honey chatting with Tufftimer Melodowaltz. The brash young cat from Las Vegas was talking up his stock with fervor. Soccy excused himself to Jerobald. This youngster needed some balancing as far as Honey was concerned. As Soccy approached, he heard Tufftimer state: "There's going to be a big surprise at the finish, mark my words. Take a tip and practice your Woofle."

"What's that?" inquired Soccy. He was astonished to hear this advice given.

"Just a private conversation between me and Ms. Steiner," bristled Tufftimer. "Why don't you go tell the reporters why you were in seclusion last night. Living it up with some little alley cat, I imagine."

"Why don't we step outside and clean up your mouth," invited Soccy, who was steaming at the crudeness of this allegation. Honey knew where he'd been and she might appreciate seeing this turkey taught a lesson.

"After the finals," drawled Tufftimer, "I'll be pleased to feather your ears. I've got an appointment with victory until then."

"Keep up the garbage mouth and you've got an appointment with the vet," growled Soccy. The younger cat was about his weight and size, but Soccy had been victor in too many fights to doubt his own prowess.

The PA system opened a barrage of static and culminated with a call to stations for the first event of the day, Curling. Honey seized this opportunity. "Both of you grow up! We're going into competition in a civilized way. Any more of this hostility -- kitten stuff! -- and I don't want to see either of you again."

That threat did it. The trio trotted toward the judging booth to see who would be called first. Order of competition was always selected randomly in the latter stages of competition. This had been ordained after Surfrider, a California cat of Fifties vintage, had published an article on his victory system, consisting of securing the last competition slot and gauging the judges preferences by observing what techniques were scoring highest.

This morning Soccy had the ill fortune to be the second called. He was unable to concentrate properly, having difficulties making his tail behave like a proper curling-cat's tail. As a consequence, at the end of the round he had

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relinquished the lead to Magnificat. This put Soccy in rather a black and angry mood, as he already knew that he had to pile up as many points today as he could. The sight of an animated Tufftimer showing off for Honey didn't help things.

Soccy was a pro. He put away extraneous thoughts and decided on Jellypaw's exercise, sprints on the putting green, as an ideal tune-up. It would be a long day. Were he not in perfect form, all hope of salvaging a winning position would dissipate.

The second event was a surprise, being rarely used in competitions. Television Sitting was a specialty of Soccy's. In this event the cat sits atop a standard TV set and drapes his (or her) tail in front of the picture. The judges award points based on the amount of critical continuity action successfully blocked. Soccy was in rare form.

Long ago he had learned to sit so that he could observe the judges' eyes. He was a master at reading pupil dilation. With this subtle feedback mechanism, he could react to the shifting scene as mirrored in the judging eyes. He was a demon at blocking view. Today his exceptional concentration utterly dismayed the judges. Even the fat one had to go along with the consensus.

Soccy watched Magnificat in action and knew that the precious lead had been regained. The Persian had no real feel for television. He sat regally atop the set and swished his long-haired nether appendage back and forth across the set face in a tantalizing motion. He seemed most interested in how his aristocratic features displayed, not in how well he blocked the action on the screen. As a result, he had desultory success.

On the other hand, Honey displayed admirable effort for a novice to the event. Her eyes were on the judges and she read them well enough to scramble for a close fifth place finish. Soccy was elated. The little Persian showed marvelous instincts! He trotted over as she left the competition booth.

"Great going, kid! You look like you were born to the TV. A very fine performance."

She was embarrassed. "I used to do that as a game when I was an adolescent. But mostly during the dull parts."

"You sure mastered the art! Let's go up to the Pro Longue and have a drink in celebration."

"Thank you, but I'd better not drink during the show. And Tufftimer's up next. Let's see how he does."

"...No thanks. I've got to stay in training. You know, gin-and-tonic with a dash of catnip on the side." Soccy turned with marvelous precision. He strolled away with a bounce to his step. Such was his control.

"Soccy!" she called after him. "Nobody will match your score."

He swivelled his head to wink. "I know that, kid." In the Pro Longue, when the waitress came, he ordered a saucer of milk. A plan was beginning to form in his mind, and he had to put down the dark imp of jealousy in order to let it form properly.

As the day unfolded the incredible competitive edge to which Soccy had honed himself, so rigorously, became apparent. He shown head and shoulders above



the herd, yet his lead seemed narrow. Some observers commented that this must be the finest aggregation of cats ever gathered. Other snidely commented that the judging staff was blind to true brilliance. Press coverage increased and cat show buffs knew they had one to debate for years to come. The tension in the competitors grew unendurable. The final eight would be enshrined in glory and comfortably paid for a year or more to come.

Next to last contestant, Soccy high-stepped out of Creative Table Begging, the last event of the day. He joined a knot of interested cats and media persons before the Big Board. Jerobald was telling Honey about the Nationals in which he'd lost to Soccy the first time. Tufftimer was interjecting comments on how tough the Dallas Newcomers Bowl had been. A feisty Siamese, Gilbert, competed with ear-shattering yowls. Nobody knew what he was saying, but they were certain he'd missed the finals.

Tufftimer shot a quip: "Stamina hasn't given out yet, eh, Smith. Not bad for an old cat."

Jellypaws wuffed. "Older cats still have their stamina, Mr. Kitten. Perhaps finesse is more meaningful in the scoring than braggadocio."

Tufftimer rebounded at this unexpected attack, for he'd not noticed Jerolbald but held the veteran cat in high esteem as a childhood idol. He tried to cover himself with a mutter about just kidding, but the embarrassment had hit home and things remained calm (except for Gilbert's yowls) until the scores went up and two seconds of dead silence were recorded.

***	Prince Socrates Smith III	----	1034
***	Jerobald Jellypaws	-----	945
***	Baron Boom Boom Barton	-----	941
***	Herkimer Ramses Magnificat	---	929
***	Growltiger Argonaut	-----	922
***	Pinknose Honeysuckle Steiner	-	917
***	Tufftimer Melodowaltz	-----	915
***	Morris Rhubarb Whittington	----	908

Then the bedlam erupted. Howls of victory and defeat mingled with a hundred attempted interviews. "Prince Socrates, more than a thousand points!" "Prince Socrates, clue us in on your unusual training methods." "Prince Socrates, isn't it true that you selected the events." "Prince Socrates--"

But Prince Socrates was gone. His strategy was predicated on swift action, accurate character judgement, and lots of good luck. The first move was to streak back to his quarters and place a telephone call.

"Jake speaking. Whatcha want?" Jake was a lanky cadaverous cat with great pouches of loose skin. He claimed to have once weighed 47 pounds. One eye was so puffed up with old scar tissue that he appeared to always be leering. Jake's current profession was gambling, at which sport he was an unqualified success. He was Soccy's bookie.

"A little action. This is Soccy here. What kind of odds can you get me on Pinknose Honeysuckle Steiner?"

"Lemme see, Soc. Hmmm. A long shot. 23 to 1. You the favorite, boy. Just got the wire on your standin' -- too damn good to believe."

"Am I good for fifty grand, Jake? On the nose for Steiner?"

"Well, son. You never been into me for that kinda dough before. Not that you ain't good for it. You gonna clear twice that easy in this one. ...But. I hate to see you toss away that money. Throwing in the game, boy, ain't gonna put the little broad in..."

"Jake, you heard me."

The sigh came over the line like a wave of the ancient tropical sea. "Sure. She must be somethin'... One thing, though, sharpshooter. This bread and the standings gonna change the odds a wee bit. I can't get cha no 23."

"What?"

"Depends. Maybe I spread it. Maybe 20, 21."

"Look, Jake. You take half a point off the top for yourself. Wheel some, baby. Now here's how I want it done...."

This little negotiation left Soccy with a vigorous sprint from his quarters to the human area. He'd have gone there initially, but human phones were tough to handle. Besides, he figured he had enough time. Magnificat would be nervous and insistent, but the fat judge would be pompous and deliberate. Soccy was banking on the hope that a certain snooty Persian would be insecure enough to insist strongly on reassurance.

Soccy hopped up the stairs quite spryly, passing Room 2056 and zipping through the newly installed cat door into the adjoining Room 2058. Of course he'd paid dearly for the privilege. First there'd been the bribe to the Assistant Manager to get him to relocate the Iowa cat fanciers installed there. Next had come the cost of installing the cat door (with the cost of human door replacement fully included). Bastet willing, it would all pay off.

Indeed, Bastet seemed most favorably inclined. Within a quarter hour the sounds of fat steps approached. Soccy took up his position at the adjoining door, ear to the crack between carpet and door edge. In came the fat judge. Water ran, puffing occurred, the sound of papers rattling suggestively set our hero to wondering. Then: a scratch at the door of Room 2056.

A curse and a scramble told Soccy that a cat had darted into the room as the judge had opened the door. "It's not to be done!" exclaimed the thwarted one. "I said you couldn't see me again. There's too much at stake."

Magnificat's yowl was surly. If he smelled any trace of cat pressed against the joining door between rooms 2056 and 2058 there was no sign given. What the Persian was interested in was reassurance. He insisted on another recap of the strategy.

"Alright," sighed the corpulent man. "I'll tell you this last time. But I'm reporting your behaviour when I return, bank on that. Most of tomorrow's events are your very best. Washing. Serenade. Dog Baiting. Aloofness. And the very last event is the Woofle. Nobody will touch you. I told you that. Just remember that I'm in there on your side. Do your part and I'll do mine. We can't miss -- and we better not, with the people betting on us who're betting on us. Blow this one, cat, and you'll be fish food."

Magnificat made some disagreeable noises, but allowed himself to be herded out the door. The Persian might be high-strung, but he wasn't stupid. He knew that discretion was called for. Once outside, he vanished as silently as a ghost.

Soccy waited hardly a decent interval. Like a whirlwind of intent, he was off to the parties. There was a collection of assorted cats gathered in the garden area, but he sniffed around and dashed off again. In the pool area the press was interviewing various contenders and also-rans, not to mention assorted human dignitaries, but this wasn't the spot either. One try at the Pro's Lounge yielded nothing. Soccy took a seat and ordered a righteous gin-and-tonic. He had to think.

Where was Honey? Not at the open parties. Not here secluded at the Pro's Lounge. He had to find her or all was lost. And perhaps, he realized with a sigh, all was lost already.

Lapping morosely at his drink, Soccy stared across the great hall below him. It had emptied out by now. Rows of empty chairs faced the competition platform at the far wall. Judges' chairs stood on the platform in disarray. Whereas an hour ago roars of excitement had filled the hall with a living force of unmatched intensity, now the huge hollow room was in repose. Did it whisper to itself in consolation, saying that tomorrow the vitality would return to bring strife and glory.

Soccy's musing presented illusions, and he imagined he saw a small white fluff-ball moving stealthily across the platform. A cat was practicing the Stalk. A little white Persian cat with no taste for frenetic parties and with a real will to win.

Soccy was a furry streak across the lounge, down the stairs and through the great hall. Never mind that he'd forgotten to pay for his drink, that had to be Honey on the stage and he was going to reach her quickly. As he bounced up she halted her practice and greeted him.

"Honey!" he burbled. "Bless you for practicing. There's so much I've got to teach you before tomorrow."

He confused her. "Whatever are you yowling about, Soccy? What kind of things do you plan to teach me? I've no intention of being your typical pupil. If I gave you that impression in any way last night, I didn't mean to."

"No. No. No," he said. "You need to work on the Woofle. And Aloofness, Dog Baiting and other events. You're going to win the show, Honey. First place. The grand prize."

"Prince Socrates, you're simply too transparent. I hope to do well, but with cats like you and Jerobald and Magnificat in the show, I know I've got no real chance. Now please forget your plans and let me practice."

"Listen! Don't ask me how I know this, but I'm not winning the show. You're too much of a long shot to be considered a threat, so they'll let you get close. Then you've got to beat Magnificat in the Woofle. It's the only way."

"You're crazy, Soccy!" Honey was genuinely alarmed. He was saying these insane things, but she felt his intensity and truth.

"We're going to work first and hardest on the Woofle. Do you know what the Woofle is, Honey?"

She shook her head, not trusting herself to speak.

"It's an infrequent event. Sort of the opposite of Stroking. The cat is required to submit to having his fur ruffled, his tail tousled and his ears



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tickled. Some judges, I think, have a sadistic streak."

"But what's the point of it?"

"Ahh! The point is indignation. Majestic tolerant indignation. You can see why Magnificat is a master of the event. We're going to give you an arsenal of reactive expressions tonight. You're going to understand the Woofle. And I'm not going to lay a paw on you, Honey. I teach by example. Watch this expression -- it's a keystone."

She watched him sit and radiate a lordly indignation. He was an emperor whose displeasure gathered like a storm, yet avoided even the hint of physical measure. Sheer force of will would overturn those who offended him. His eyes were lanterns of distain.

Honey cringed back. "I can't do that!" she cried. "What is all this about? You're frightening me, Prince Socrates. Something terrible will happen."

He transformed himself into Soccy again. "Something terrible is already happening," he said softly. "If we're to have any hope of beating it, you must learn much tonight. Tomorrow, as the show progresses, you'll begin to understand. By the last event, you will know."

She looked into his eyes to search for truth or deceit in his soul. When the clean-up crew entered the hall at midnight, they were still practicing on the stage. Soon thereafter they parted, each on a solitary mission.

The morning came rather quietly. All plans were in place, it being too late to change any even if that were desired. Soccy arrived at the hall tardy. He had slept quite well and awakened early, but he's spent some time on the phone to Jake and others. The money was down at 20 to 1. Heavy betting on Magnificat had been localized to a particular area of the eastern seaboard. A message had been sent back, to be broken only after the Cat Show was underway on this final day. With any luck, the right ears would hear it soon and reaction would take place.

The first event, Dog Baiting, was underway. Boom Boom Barton, a big silver-grey cat, was perched high above a confined Doberman, raining insults down upon its stupid head. The angry dog was reacting in standard fashion, yelping promises of doom and disaster when he got his teeth into the impertinent feline. Boom Boom specialized in highlighting the Doberman's ancestry and personal habits. The genetic authenticity of Boom Boom's information was highly suspect, but the dog never seemed to think of this. He just barked and barked.

Soccy strolled to the place where Magnificat was watching. The Persian gave him a distainful glance for the briefest of instants. Clearly he was convinced that Soccy could be written off.

"Do you approve of Barton's indiscretion?" asked Soccy of Magnificat. "He's dipping into your family history and applying it to the dog."

"Go away, half-breed!" hissed the Persian.

"I hear there was a big shift in the betting money last night," commented Soccy. "Somebody sold out..." Then he strolled away before Magnificat could reply. He could feel luminous eyes on him as he went.

Magnificat drew a German Shepherd, a difficult dog to get through to. This was

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a lucky break for Soccy, as it threw another mental obstacle into Magnificat's path. The thought processes went thusly: if They were arranging an easy victory, why had They chosen a Shepherd for Dog Baiting? Such unfortunate thoughts distracted our villian. He bobbled a line and the Shepherd, alert, shot back a zinger that brought a hiss. Poor form on the cat's part.

Of course Magnificat caught himself. He returned to the attack with venom and vigor. So well did he recoup that his score was above average, though not nearly the top. Soccy was amazed: the cat had determination. In no way would he show this; in fact, he met Magnificat as he stalked from the platform and shot another barb. "See, sweetheart. They're setting you up."

The Persian barrelled through the crowd and departed the hall for calmer pastures. Soccy observed him go and chuckled, but the pasty-faced fat judge was wiping his palms. On the platform, Honey was tossing witty insults at a Bassett Hound, who fully understood the substance if not the precise meanings. Soccy had worked for days on some of those insults. Now he'd be ad libbing when his turn came. No great problem; that's how he'd started.

That first round went to Honey by a narrow margin over Boom Boom Barton. Soccy was third. When the results went up, Tufftimer cascaded Honey's ears with shallow compliments.

The Stalk, Aloofness and the Serenade completed the morning events. Soccy's campaign of constantly needling Magnificat was paying off, as frayed nerve endings were becoming apparent in the great Persian's performances. To compensate, the fat judge was obviously knocking down the favorites: Soccy, Jerobald and Boom Boom. He seemed not to notice Honey's movement up the standings, perhaps dismissing her as no threat.

***	Prince Socrates Smith III	-----	1142
***	Jerobald Jellypaws	-----	1129
***	Herkimer Ramses Magnificat	----	1126
***	Pinknose Honeysuckle Steiner	--	1125
***	Baron Boom Boom Barton	-----	1120
***	Tufftimer Meldowaltz	-----	1067
***	Growltiger Argonaut	-----	1066
***	Morris Rhubarb Whittington	-----	991

The tightness of the scores had produced high excitement. At close of competition yesterday the margin between the leader and fifth place had been 112 points. Now it was 22 points. The cats, the press and the public could sense an upset in the making.

Swirling chaos in the hall made it difficult to move. Soccy was dodging reporters and looking for Honey, but she was nowhere to be found. Judge Lacestrait passed, looking reflective, in the company of the President of the sponsoring organization. Jerobald approached with a comment.

"Something funny is going on with the scoring. I don't like it."

"What can we do about it?" asked Soccy. "Scores reflect the judges' opinions. Opinions are subjective. "

"Amanda's upset. I can tell it. I smell a rat in the woodpile."

"Then it's Amanda's problem to take care of. Have you seen Honey?"

"She and Tufftimer slipped out to avoid the crowd. A smart move. Let's go get some lunchourselves."

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"No thanks. I'm not hungry. Some exercise will do me better."

Jerobald laughed. "There's never been a time you weren't hungry, brother. Now are you going to have some lunch with me or do I have to pin those kitten ears back and shred your tail?"

When they returned from a light repast the hall was still booming with speculation and excitement. Soccy had talked with Jerobald enough to make the older cat aware that Magnificat was involved in the funny business. They agreed that Soccy's plan of needling the Persian to break his composure was a fair enough defense under the circumstances. Jerobald would join the fun.

Magnificat sensed their intent and tried avoidance tactics. A few shots were all they could score. The Persian seemed to know when his turn would arrive. He was out of the hall for long periods between rounds. Only as he came and went were the counterconspirators able to zing him.

"I hear they make fish food out of cats that don't deliver," fired off Soccy.

Magnificat sailed past without glance or word, but Soccy knew the pressure was telling. In Washing, the first event of the afternoon, Magnificat appeared jerky in his motions. He washed his right forepaw twice and his left one not at all.

The scoring difference among the leaders compressed even more. Honey moved ahead of both Jerobald and Magnificat. Soccy now led by only an eleven point margin. This was all according to hope. Soccy knew that his chances of winning were nil. His performance was superb, that was evident to all, but his scores were slipping. Only the unnerving of Magnificat provided a balance.

To think that Honey's progress would go unnoticed by the fat judge was foolish. In the very next round influences were felt. Honey dropped back to third and Magnificat vaulted into second place. His composure seemed somewhat restored during the event and he performed quite creditably. Now he was a mere seven points behind Soccy.

In the interval between rounds Honey approached Soccy as he was strategizing with Jerobald. "I'm beginning to see what you were talking about," she said.

"Just don't forget what I taught you," replied Soccy.

"I won't. I want you to know how grateful I am for your advice. You and Tufftimer have given me some real insights into competition."

"There's no charge if you beat Magnificat."

"Better do that," interrupted Jerobald. "His payment standards are rather demanding."

"So I've heard," she said. "I'd better go get ready." She left with a bounce in her step but no backward glance. Growltiger and Tufftimer intercepted her and set her to laughing with their repartee.

"A good kid," said Jerobald.

"She can be a good kid," replied Soccy, "as long as she whips Magnificat. That's all I care about now."



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The penultimate event was Stretching. A true cat is able to arise from a nap and stretch in lordly fashion. The fluid display of limberness and leisure air is a joy to behold. This was an event in which Magnificat could certainly increase his lead. Although Soccy admitted being second to no cat in the fine art of stretching, there was no doubt that Magnificat had the inside track.

It was a hard-fought event. Soccy was magnificent. Honey showed to great advantage. Jerobald committed a mental error by slipping a yawn into his act. Magnificat arose from his curled position and displayed a marvelous stretch -- almost good enough to make Soccy concede that he'd earned his points. Almost, but not quite.

After the event a great hubbub arose in the hall. This was the closest cat show of major proportion in the last several years. Never before had so much publicity been pumped into this sporting event, and the accolades due the winner would cover the world. With one final round to go, the scores at the top were:

***	Herkimer Ramses Magnificat	----	1245
***	Prince Socrates Smith III	-----	1243
***	Pinknose Honeysuckle Steiner	--	1242
***	Jerobald Jellypaws	-----	1239

It took a few minutes to quiet the crowd when the fat judge arose to announce the final event. During the interval, Soccy noticed that the President of the sponsoring group had also taken the stage and was seated to the far side of the judging panel. It looked to be a festive presentation of awards. The winner's cup was now on prominent display. It was a huge gold loving cup with small golden cats adorning the handles.

"Attention! Attention!" shouted the fat judge. "The last event of this great show will be a demanding test of control and dramatic skill -- the Woofle!!"

Then he went pale and almost dropped the microphone. His eyes were directed to the back of the hall. Soccy turned to see what was going on. Lounging beside the doors were two husky men in dark suits and hats. They looked tough as nails. From the terrified fascination in the fat judge's gaze, Soccy was certain that they were well known to that gentleman. Apparently word had reached certain parties on the east coast as planned.

"The first contender will be Growltiger Argonaut," continued the judge, though there was a tremble in his voice.

The show went on. Growltiger was followed by Morris Whittington, then Jerobald. Soccy was next. He revealed the awesome power of his soul, radiating that terrible aura which had so frightened Honey. The hall drew quiet. It was a display of drama unmatched by anything they had yet seen. Here was the true champion. Here was the king.

Tufftimer went up, but he was pale. Then came Magnificat. He strode onto the stage in regal splendor. His coat had been combed out until it shined. The hauteur of his demeanor was impressive in its uncompromising arrogance. Was he not the leader? Now would be the proof of it.

Again the hall grew quiet. When Judge Lace strait administered the Woofle Magnificat's reaction seemed to spring from his entire species, from thousands of years of cats, and not merely from himself. He was the symbol of his nation and the eloquent incarnation of lordly disdain.

So close in quality was the performance of the two great cats that discord broke out on the floor as debates began. The partisans of both sides were convinced that their cat had done the greater drama. The arguments were heard during the performance of Boom Boom Barton, who did exceptionally well though to this day there are few who recall it. When the last contestant came forth it was thought that the contest was already decided.

Honey was svelte and lovely, radiantly beautiful. As she walked each paw was placed with precision and elegance. The talkers in the crowd were hushed as this vision advanced to stage center. If Soccy had been the King and Magnificat had been the Symbol, here certainly was the Daughter of the Gods.

So beautiful she was that Soccy's heart leaped as if shot through with a bolt of fire. The radiance of the occasion was broken as the fat judge knocked his chair backward in getting to his feet. It was his turn to administer the Woofle and his crass advance served to underline the fragile loveliness of the petite white Persian.

Honey watched him approach, pudgy hands extended. The expression of greedy evil on his face repelled her. She wanted to bolt, yet not a whit of that feeling was allowed to show. In the moment that he bent to touch her she understood fully what Soccy had alluded to. The deep internal meaning of the Woofle settled onto her.

The fat judge stepped back to admire his handiwork of ruffled fur and ravaged dignity. The crime of defilement was accomplished. He saw the curse in her eyes. Not tears, but divine vengeance shown forth from the furnace in her soul. He reeled back and threw up his arms.

Whosoever shall defile the Daughter of the Gods, so shall he be punished in extreme for all the remainder of his days. For he shall have aroused the wrath of the Great, and there be no shadow on earth dark enough to hide him from the eyes of the Hunters. And he shall find torment in his life, nor surcease in death. So is it written.

Suddenly the hall was filled with great applause. The crowd was going wild. Never had such a sight been witnessed. Few would now argue the merits of Prince Socrates and Magnificat. A miracle of drama had occurred onstage, beside which even the greatest of thespian skills would not match.

The judges were totalling their point awards now. Lace strait and the President were talked heatedly with the fat judge. It seemed he wished to see the ballots of the others before he voted, but this was firmly disallowed. A conference between all judges soon set the matter straight. If the fat judge wished to abstain, that was acceptable. Otherwise, he would vote immediately. With a fearful look at the burley men in the rear of the hall, he voted.

Judge lacestrait tallied the results and handed them to the President. He took the microphone and began the awards. "Third place in the show goes to a great competitor and regal cat indeed. Prince Socrates Smith!!"

Soccy made his appearance and collected the trophy and check. After the flashbulbs had popped enough he hopped off the stage, leaving the awards to be delivered, and wandered toward the rear of the hall. Then he changed his mind and started for the Pro's Lounge. A righteous Gin-and-Tonic would be a soothing relief now.

"The first two awards," spouted the President, "were hotly contested. A single point separated the first two places. At this time I'd like to present the second place award to a true veteran and magnificent competitor -- Herkimer

Ramses Magnificat!!"

But with that announcement Magnificat seemed to have vanished. Everybody looked around for him but he wasn't present. Vanished like Macavity. The President was perturbed, but after a decent interval he went on with the presentation. Soccy, on the other hand, had a fairly good idea of what had happened. He noticed there was now only one man in dark suit and hat at the door.

"First place! The Grand Championship! Goes to a beautiful and talented competitor whose presence has graced our show for the first time this year. I refer to the marvelous -- Pinknose Honeysuckle Steiner!!"

Pandemonium. Honey accepted her award with tasteful composure. Flashbulbs popped like Soccy had never seen them pop before. He watched and drank his righteous Gin-and-Tonic and knew that he would never be the same again. He saw the interviews terminated by a forceful Amanda Lacestrait so that Honey could be whisked away to the victory party.

There were still people in the hall when Soccy finished his second drink and decided to have no more. He trotted down the steps and shifted into stroll for crossing the hall. The fat judge was still on the stage, not wanting to leave while his reception party awaited. But sooner or later he'd have to face the music. Soccy felt a little sorry for the fat man and Magnificat. Punishment seemed a bit out of proportion for the crime.

"Prince Socrates!" It was Amanda Lacestrait. She waved for his attention and hurried toward him. Soccy was glad for a chance to thank her for honest administration of the contest. She was a good people.

"I received a call from a cat named Jake Something," she said. "It seems that the Orphan Kitten Foundation, of which I am the Chairperson, has won quite a large sum of money on the outcome of this contest. I disapprove of gambling, Prince Socrates."

He was embarrassed that Jake had notified Amanda so soon. He'd have to speak to Jake.

"No denials, I see. Very well, as I did not place the bet it may stand. But don't let this happen again, Socrates. Are you on your way to the victory celebration? Honeysuckle would appreciate your congratulations. I know how hard you two worked last night."

"She knows I wanted her to win," miowed Soccy. "Besides, it's Tufftimer she wants to see, not me."

"Prince Socrates, for the world's greatest cat you surely are dumb! If you don't go see Honey right this instant I'll never admit you to another show that I judge. The child's in love with you and too proud to show it. Now skedaddle! Shoo! Go be a champion."

And so he did.

-----the end

Postscript: About four years after this cat show concluded, a new face appeared on the circuit. Princess Honeysuckle Amanda Smith was said to have all the talents of her famous parents and plenty more of her own. But that's another story...



