

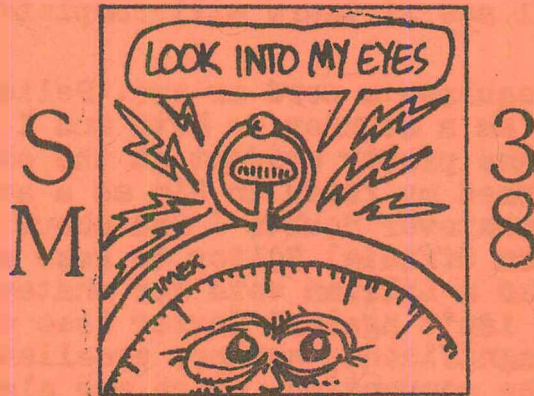
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SPIRITUS MUNDI 38

GRAS
'77!



Frosich



Come on, take a look. Come on, I'm not that ugly.

That's right. Gaze deeply into the muddy brown semi-luminescence. Wait ... maybe this would work better if I took off the glasses ...

Hmm ... now I can't see you. Oh well. I have a question to ask. Does it show? The anticipation, I mean. I've been looking forward to this issue of my bimonthly commentzine much more than usual. In fact, I have been twitching with the need to get started on Spiritus Mundi 38. Which is, incidentally,

GHL III Press #300

The second issue of any year is always special. The cloister of winter, even in such relatively warm climes as 631 Dauphine Street, New Orleans LA 70112, is beginning to break. Yet I still have enough of the caged antelope in me to seek release through fanac ... specifically, on stencil. The Oscar nominations appear -- in fact, did so just today. SFPA begins to rebuild its energies after the orgasmic splurge of an egopoll mailing.

And since I've moved to New Orleans, and begun spending my Februaries here, there's another advantage. My cover, about which details in a line or three, broadcasts this attraction in living color, through an illustration by Dany Frolich used by the artist's kindpermission. Mardi Gras.

(The coloring on SFPA copies of Dany's cover, by the way, is my fault. You can find unmolested copies of the Frolich geniuswork on the bacover ... The character of Bacchus is copyright by the krewe, crew.)

All of these matters find commentary within -- and they're not all. A Scanner Darkly found its way -- at long long last -- to my hands. Joe Haldeman's Mindbridge lies open within easy reach. A local theatre has begun a splendid series of classic & near-classic movies ... on the order of 12 every week. And of course there are new movies opening all the time. All this requires my attention herein, too.

And I'm not forgetting the basic purpose of Spiritus Mundi 38 ... it is a SFPAzine.

So ... there will be commentary on mailing 75 of our august organization some pages on. We will see if there will complete commentary now ... or what. As of now ...

Stven and Don's Con requires a word or two. Believe it or not, I enjoyed myself. That may come as a stunner -- Beth and I aren't living together anymore, and that became pretty evident at the con -- but it is true. Stven Carlberg reaffirmed my faith in him as a solid and good fellow. Alan Hutchinson took whatever doubts I had about his personal qualifications for any post from Official Editor to Pope and tore them into itsy bitsy pieces. Alan has a Lillian vote for whatever he wants to run for ... as long as it isn't against Carter (see opposite -----). Inzer was his usual magnificent, humane, excellent self. Marcus Weilage practically carried the convention, which was almost completely without program, around in his Vetamax suitcase. He deserves much more applause and gratitude than he received in person.

I mean, I've never seen a better film program, and it was all his doing. I saw Fantasia again. I saw the incredibly funny "What's Opera, Doc?" for the first time (did you know that it won an Oscar?). Lots of other Warner Brothers gems. The insanity and brilliance of Steve Martin's nightclub lunacy. It was great. Why, he even showed (as a sop to yours truly, who kept whining for it) King Kong.

That was a tremendous day. I saw King Kong and Citizen Kane, the former through Marcus, the latter through the splendid Prytania Theatre uptown, which is showing classics of cinema at the rate of a new bill every two days. What a privilege ... the best entertainment film ever made, a masterpiece of excitement and spectacle and inspiration. And Kane, the best serious film ever splashed on a screen. The beast destroyed by beauty, and the man destroyed by his inability to love. Feasts for the eye and heart and brain, movies that move you to "wow!" It was, cinematically, the best weekend I've ever spent.

It was good to see you there, if you were there. It was good to talk to Freff, and to Stven's shy friend Janine from Houston. Freff was extremely nifty and good to listen to on anything from clowning (he has attended the Ringling Bros. Clown College) to murder (he has come much too close for comfort). (To being murdered, that is.)

I enjoyed myself. Despite all.

All. Well. Yes. Beth has moved out. Right now she's over at Linda Karth's and Annie Hebert's and she may move in with them. Check Phlogiston 2 for details, if details she wishes to provide. It is hers to say. Myself, well ... the Gras report which follows in a few sheets was written, except for the last two pages, before the schism. It says a lot about what has been lost.

Or what has changed, rather. Maybe more on that later, if I have the courage.

What else is new, I hear you cry. (You are there, aren't you?) Not much. I'm looking for another place to live and I'm considering spending \$70 on a 1963 Rambler with a cracked windshield and brakes that wouldn't stop a sleepy flea. (Fun to drive the thing. Like flying. Or rioting. The thrill is all in the risk.) I bought a dozen Frazetta posters for something like \$1.50@ at the con and await walls to plaster them on. I visit the bohunk metropolises of Vacherie and Hahnville, Louisiana, once a week each to offer the benefits of unemployment insurance to the residents of these and other rural communities. It's a change, yawn.

Speaking of my job, a new clerk came into the office between last issue and this ... a lass named Tacy who hails from Oklahoma via St. Croix. She's blondish and wears glasses and looks and sounds like Stven Carlberg's sister. I kid you not ... I halfway expect her to come up some day and start telling me to stop picking on Markstein.

SO FAR SO GREAT

I can hardly believe it, but I'm going to say it: hooray for the President of the United States!

I am very pleased with Jimmy Carter's performance so far. He has moved into the office with surety and style. Even Bill Buckley was forced to allow that the republic might survive 4 years with the Georgian at the hel. True, he hasn't been stuck with a world crisis yet ... but he's handled the devastation domestic trauma of the winter of '77 with a deft touch. His presence is calming, strong, disciplined, active. I missed his fireside chat, but his news conference was gutsy and extremely impressive.



I especially applaud his statement from that event wherein he said that sure, the United States could deal with the Soviet Union on arms negotiations and SALT and so forth, and still voice our moral outrage at the treatment of dissidents and Jews in that terrible place. Kissinger, as you know, shied away from any stance on such matters, believing that we should not antagonize the Russians anywhere for the sake of detente. I like Carter's compassionate toughness a teensy bit better, I think.

And he did just what he said on his very first day in office. He pardoned some draft resisters. It wasn't as much as I wouldd have liked him to do ... but the dserters will find their way home opened in a like fashion soon. Carter's action makes it only a matter of time.

I like his humor. When he stood in front of HEW workers and encouraged them to pay more attention to their families and "if you're living in sin, get married" (the laughter went on for a solid minute; imagine a purposeful gag by the President of the United States earning that much honest laughter), I found myself feeling ... proud.

Yeah. Proud. Jimmy's got a long way to go. But he's well on his way.

A BOOK

From my journal, 27 January 1977. Thursday: "Whenever I read a new Philip K. Dick novel I feel simultaneously extremely depressed and incredibly elated. The man touches the stuff of human life. He understands drudgery, and what it defines through its negation. And what it means. Love and hope and forgiveness and sacrifice -- an echo of Faulkner. Dick is no pessimist. He is a believer. He believes in art and joy and human worth. I bought A Scanner Darkly tonight. It showed, suddenly, on the Doubleday (bookstore) shelves. It's a dense and meaningful book ... It's about dope and paranoia and loneliness. It speaks of denials. By dealing with denials it also deals with affirmations; in Phil's world, in the real world, you must acknowledge that there are both if there is one."

By which overblown rhetoric I meant to say that I was stunned and amazed by A Scanner Darkly. It is a superb novel. In it, Phil deals with the drug culture that nearly killed him ... and which did, indeed, kill many of his friends. It is a tragic & terrifying novel, familiar in that it presents lost and doomed people struggling for control over their lives ... and utterly without hope of obtaining it. As in much of Phil's work, that control rests with external forces, huge and nameless and invisible, against which struggle is hopeless ... maybe. It is a book from the heart. Fred Chappell's poem "Science Fiction Water Letter to Guy Lillian" lamented an s.f. field in which "no one changes / his socks, or chips a tooth, or shaves ... It counts suffering out." I'm going to send Fred a copy of this book when I can afford it. I'm also going to send Dick a copy of Fred's poem.

These two should meet, at least artistically. And every s.f. reader should meet A Scanner Darkly. Hugo? Oh, absolutely. Nebula? I'd bet on it. How about Pulitzer? How about Nobel?

(By the way, the night that I bought Scanner I called Joe Moudry in Tuscaloosa, with whom you'll recall I had a long discussion on when the book when be appearing. Phyllis told me that Joe was asleep, so alas, I could not do what I had wanted to do: Go "NYAH NYAH I GOT IT FIRST I GOT IT FIRST!" Did manage to spring that line on Inzer a few minutes later, though.)

Scanner Darkly is one of the best two or three Phil Dick novels I've read.

OSCAR TIME

A photo of Sylvester Stallone and Talia Shire on the front page of the evening paper? I bought a copy, even though I'd read an earlier edition. That could mean only one thing, that photo ... yes, Oscar nominations! The yearly extravaganza was begun! Woo woo!

It's a pretty good crop this year; although I'd've liked to have seen Paul Newman nominated for Best Actor for BUFFALO BILL & THE INDIANS and Harvey Keitel for Supporting Actor in TAXI DRIVER, but so it goes. And here and now, my thoughts on the Oscars, so groan away and turn the pages, scarf my schween, here they are. As in days past ()s around a name indicate the probable winner of the Academy Award, _____ beneath the name indicates whom I want to win the Oscar.

Best Picture: All the President's Men, Bound for Glory, (Network, Rocky), Taxi Driver, Network and Rocky are hot hits at the moment, & if I had to give an edge it would be to Stallone's splendid film about his brave boxer. I found fault with Network ... the subplot involving William Holden and Faye Dunaway was preachy and unnecessary, detracting from the brilliance of the basic story ... but that film absolutely shone whenever Peter Finch or Robert Duvall were on screen. As for Rocky and Taxi Driver the latter is undoubtedly the finer work of cinematic art, presenting the bleakest side of human nature and American life. Rocky presented the light, Taxi Driver the darkness. They're both there. I don't know which I prefer. Thank you, Jesus, for keeping the fake King Kong off the list.

Best Actor: (Peter Finch, Network). Robert DeNiro, Taxi Driver, Giancarlo Giannini, Seven Beauties, William Holden, Network, (Sylvester Stallone, Rocky.) I'd give the edge to Stallone, but Finch's incredible

performance was not only magnificent in its own right, filling the film with authority, it was also the last screen appearance of one of the world's great actors. I give him almost an even chance. I hope like hell that he wins. DeNiro's acting won the NY Film Critics Award, and as he was inutterably brilliant, it's easy to see why. Yet Stallone is all the rage ... I give him the Oscar if Finch doesn't take it, and vice versa. Great category. Only Holden is truly out of his league this time.

Best Actress: Marie-Christine Barrault, Cousin-Cousine, (Faye Dunaway, Network), Talia Shire, Rocky, Sissy Spacek, Carrie, Liv Ullman, Face to Face. Spacek is in the news (and in the Newsweek) right now, so don't count her out. Her performance was bone-chilling and heartbreaking and I root for her at least as much as I hope for Finch. She was terrific. Dunaway will probably win the award because of the coattail effect, not to mention the previous nominations for Bonnie and Clyde and Chinatown which rightfully should have brought her Oscars. Ullman won the Film Critics award, but I think she can be discounted this time.

Supporting Actor: Ned Beatty, Network, Burgess Meredith, Rocky, Laurence Olivier, Marathon Man, (Jason Robards, All the President's Men), Burt Young, Rocky. Olivier a supporting actor?!?? The Golden Globes thought so -- he won that award in this category. He was stunning, & perhaps I should not discount him entirely. Beatty had one big scene in Network, one big speech -- and while that's nice, it's not enough. Meredith was great in Rocky, true ... but Robards stole the show in All the President's Men. His performance as Ben Bradlee won special acclaim the moment the movie opened. I think he's got it, and I know I'll be glad if he does.

Supporting Actress: Jane Alexander, All the President's Men, (Jodie Foster, Taxi Driver). Lee Grant, Voyage of the Damned, Piper Laurie, Carrie, Beatrice Straight, Network. Laurie was excellent in Carrie and is my second favorite. I haven't seen Voyage of the Damned. Straight had One Big Speech in Network, & it was a part of the movie that should have kissed the Editing Room floor. Alexander's part in President's Men was all right but certainly nothing special. Foster, Foster, Foster all the way.

If Guidry -- John type, you remember him -- manages to rouse himself from his torpidity, another Fearless Forecast may appear in this mailing. If I have a part in it I'll talk about the other categories there. In the meantime, I look over this list of nominees and note that I have seen Robards and Alexander on Broadway ... which will make four Oscar winners that I've encountered in the flesh if they win. Gee gosh whillickers!

SHORT NOTES

Mindbridge, novel, Joe Haldeman -- pretty good, but lightweight in comparison to The Forever War. Unlike the Hugo winner, Mindbridge cannot engross its readers in the personal lives of its characters. The unnecessary Brunnerian structure of the novel is the blame.

The Sentinal, movie -- blah occulter in the Rosemary's Baby line, though not its league by any means. Nice climactic scene involving real-life freaks; they portray the legions of the damned, the film's only really effective touch.

Twilight's Last Gleaming -- Another flick. Blows. Lots of Carter rhetoric clumsily drooled forth by Charles Durning and Burt Lancaster. Absolutely unconvincing, sloppy, and tedious. Blech.

You seen one Mardi Gras parade, you pretty well got it down pat.
So goes the cynical maxim.
Baloney.

Carnival in New Orleans is unique. They don't celebrate Fat Tuesday in Dubuque. Mark Verheiden didn't think February 22, 1977, a particularly important day in all likelihood. Surely there was nothing civic to make him think so. Spanier, chugging across the exquisite breadth of New York harbor between Staten Island and the towers of Manhattan, may have realized that his Ole Pal-GHIIII had Mardi Gras going on around him ... but what did Chuck see of Gras where he was?

Every moment of every day is unique. Ecclesiastes swallow your rose for now ... there is plenty that is new under the sun, and Carnival -- every Carnival, like every con -- is one proof of that.

Follows a Gras diary, composed on stencil the day after, usually, the events described. Mardi Gras, Mardi Gras ... it's over now, and it seems so strange to think that it could ever have been ...

GRAS '77!



ANTICIPATION

So close to the end of January, one notes that the chain-link fences are up around the shrubbery on the center divider of Canal Street ...

One notes the announcements for the early Balls in the paper, complete with photographs of nymphet Queen, bravely smiling Princesses, and saccharine theme ...

One leaves the dentist on the 30th of January, after having ones molars on the upper right side of his mouth ground down to make way for crowns; one's mouth tastes like Auschwitz, and one will be told later by one's girl friend that it smels that way too; one spots, in the gutter by the busstop, a circle of bright, light metal; a harbinger; a doubloon ...

On and on the signs come forth. Coming home via hitching and hoofing from the Prytania Theatre on distant Prytania Street, one notes police barricades gathered and chained to downtown lampposts ... NO PARKING signs are adorned with cradboard additions: PARADE ROUTE... the lady at the IDES, working alongside one, hands out doubloons from her own parade, Venus, to come the same day as Bacchus ...

And finally, on Friday, the eleventh of February, 1977, one is at one's desk, trying manfully to take down the story of a girl who had only that morning been fired by Radipphone for asking for a drycleaning allowance for her uniform. The hubbub makes this task difficult. It becomes impossible when, on the Gretna streets outside, vehicles of strange and wonderful design, adorned with heads of exotic and beautiful women, rumble past on Franklin Avenue. They are pulled by fast-moving tractors and the sides of the creations are empty ... but they are recognizable anyway: Mardi Gras floats, floats for the parade of the Krewe of Cleopatra, to roll later that night on the Gretna side of the Mississippi River.

It was Carnival. Ahead lay a week and a half of parades and bands and noise and junk spinning through the air and swarming negroid kids everywhere underfoot. It seemed like three weeks, no more, since the meeting of the courts that ended Mardi Gras '76. But less than that ago one was gaining permission from Lany Frolich to use his drawings for the Bacchus extravaganzas (with the note that the character of Bacchus is copyright by the Krewe and both drawings are copyright by Blaine Kern). One was preparing.

And here it was. Gras.

MECCA/Feb. 12/Saturday

Earlier that day I noticed another sure sign of Carnival: the liquor store across the intersection from my abode had moved its counter to its doorway.

That evening, after a wet day, it calmed, and the weather was fine for parades. Beth, Indiana lady, had never seen a Gras before, and so the Mecca parade would be especially important.

As usual, the time given for the parade to start -- miles from 631 Dauphine, at Napoleon Avenue, thence to wind up St. Charles to Canal Street -- and the actual time of its initiation were two very differ-

ent things. So between the banks of barricades we walked, a familiar trek for me, and apparently agreeable enough to Beth. We walked down St. Charles to meet the parade, through the skid row district (home of the glorious Hummingbird Grill, finest restaurant in New Orleans since Buster Holmes went to pot, unfortunately not the same pot as the once wonderful red beans) past Lee Circle onto the beautiful avenue of old houses, streetcar tracks and drooping trees. We had wandered for quite a ways without seeing any sign of a parade, except for the thousands of people of all sizes and shapes and colors and ages lining the river lane of the street ...

Ah, but we were found, succor at last, because who to our wondering eyes should appear but Ilaine Vignes, her throat encircled by a glowing band of phosphorescent fluid, out with several of her charges from the St. Vincent Home. We located the young ladies, who were just your normal, average group of healthy, uncomplicated, smiling, joshing pregnant teenagers (although one was 23, she acted like a teenager) and stood with them while waiting for the parade.

(Softy old GHIIII, perhaps suffering pangs of guilt for long-past indiscretions, bought the girls ice cream. Now I ask you, is that noble or is that stupid?)

Finally it came ... bands, black high schools, shoulders-forward marching, kids running along behind the crowd on the neutral ground, keeping up with their school ... flambeau carriers, black kids with highway flares on long poles, more bands, then ornately costumed Krewe officers in cars, and then the King on his float, an impressively pretty float, surprising for such an early parade ...

"Is that it?" Beth asked. "Isn't the King's float last?"

No, no, it is only the beginning ... for down the street on his own float, waving two feeble arms in their casts, his face a solemn mask of duty. Here he was, the guest of the Krewe, the one, the only, biggest damn fool in the world, Evel Kneivel!

Incredible. Those two arms in the casts were too much. "Jump off the float," I yelled at him.

The title of the parade was "We Must Go Down to the Sea Again" and the floats featured sea motifs, of course. And to our delight they were very attractive -- the first few parades of any carnival are usually pretty shoddy affairs. But these were neat and generous and the St. Vincent girls caught a lot and Beth snared a fancy bracelet (fancy as anything thrown, that is) and I picked up a spade kid who tried to steal a doubloon from beneath one of the girls' shoes and tossed him as far as I could and caught a doubloon on the lip and wow, what a trip. The floats just kept coming, and Beth seemed to get right into the spirit. Yay.

After the parade we walked with Ilaine and the lasses, all of whom were in a somewhat obvious state of impending maternity, back to St. Vincent's. There we played ping pong and rummy while Ilaine waited for one particular chick to return to the nest ... and I had a fit when I thought I had lost the most precious thing in my life. Yes, Beth had snatched my beloved H*A*T from my pocket and hidden it just to watch me go ape. Finally I located the beloved woolen skicap, while Schwarzin giggled. "Let them scoff," I told my hat, "we're together again and that is all that counts!"

(For a more complete rundown on my adored adornment, check SM13, SFPA 51)

HESTIA/Feb. 13/Sunday

Gorgeous the morning -- what three or four minutes of it were still left after I awoke. (Without THE GHOST BUSTERS to rouse me earlier, I sleep Saturday mornings.) The sky was a heartbreaking blue -- and as I walked over to see Beth at the restaurant, I saw its azure perfection sundered suddenly by a silver glory ... the Goodyear Blimp? Well, it did look nifty drifting around the Quarter, its throaty engines growling.

I wandered towards Canal, where a parade would soon be passing. Carrollton is a rather blah krewe; I swear I've seen the same old **tatty** floats rumbling past for the past two years. At the intersection of Canal and Basin I spotted a pert redheaded teenager waving **vainly** at each passing float. The tall spades and their swarming kid brothers were too much for her. Enter the noble Lillian once more: I had two doubloons caught in the air in the teeth of Afro violence. I pressed one into her baby-like palm. "Redheads," I said, "should never do without."

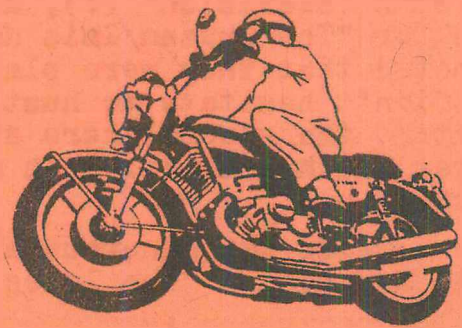
The afternoon swam lazily on. I wrestled the dirty clothes generated by two hardliving humans into laundry bag and pillowcase and lugged them past the boozy punks outside of Shakey Jake's down Dauphine to the laundromat. There my clothes and Beth's were insulted by malfunctioning machines and arc-eyed winos who staggered from machine to machine eying the sloshing garments hungrily. In the midst of the cycles I returned to 631 Dauphine, where I was greeted by a ringing phone.

"Guy," said Beth, thereon, "Come over here right away. We think the guy in table five is Dennis Hopper."

Celeb'-hound to the end, I sped right over, past a crowd of drunken street kids seeming to extort some beads from a tourist. Into the little green building on Bourbon Street -- less than half a block from the fabled corner of Toulouse and Bourbon -- I ran. A glance at the skinny little fella in the corner talking to some freaks and I could nod to Beth. It was him, all right. And it was A Sign.

Time out in this breathless narrative to make it clear just what all this meant. Sitting there was Dennis Hopper, busy character actor. John Wayne killed him in True Grit. Kirk Douglas killed him in Gunfight at the C.K. Corral. And a nameless coonass killed him in another movie he made ... Easy Rider.

Been in a cellar the last 15 years? Okay. Easy Rider was one of the most important films of the '60's. It articulated the yearnings and the concerns of disaffected youth (hoo boy!) better than any other film made. It was violent and philosophical and it sang with vision and doom. In it two Ellay hippies, played by Peter Fonda and our hero Hopper, cross America on motorcycleback to, ta-daa, Mardi Gras. Along the way they give Jack Nicholson screen immortality and my generation (or, my part of my generation) cinematic life. It's a masterpiece. It climaxes at Mardi Gras. And it was coming on the box that very night.



So encountering Hopper was, uh, how you say in America, neat, no? I sat for awhile while Beth -- who hadn't waited on his table -- and one her fellow tablehoppers worked up their courage to go ask for an autograph. When they finally went I sauntered on over too (be it not said that Lillian doesn't let his girl friends break the ice for him). And what did Guy Herbert Lillian III say to Dennis Hopper, molder of a Mārdi Gras myth?

What else? "Welcome back."

I also mentioned the TV showing of Easy Rider that evening. "Yeah," said Hopper, "this is getting intense." "They couldn't kill Billy forever," I said in leaving. Lillian gasses the stars.

(That night we watched the movie. Beth had never seen it. Came the climactic moment, Fonda's climactic thematic line, "We blew it," which has been tormenting people for ten years, ambiguous and confounding. "God damn it!" I shrieked in my journal. "I had Dennis Hopper sitting right there and I didn't even ask him what Wyatt (Fonda's character) meant.")

Beth came home and after securing the laundry, which had suffered through a washer that would not drain and a drier that would not dry, we headed up to Canal Street in the soft purple of the warm evening. Hestia was upcoming. Overhead, the Blimp circled, elaborate electronic cartoons parading across its enormous flanks. In the clarity of the sky it blazed brilliantly.

I was interested in Hestia for two reasons: first, my celebrity consciousness was sparked by its Grand Marshall, Telly Savalas. And this would be Hestia's first parade, it being the newest of the Carnival Krewes.

There was a good crowd lining Canal, but we found excellent places along the wire by squeezing in between a tree and the cable. Beadwork from previous parades hung in the naked branches overhead, but braver and more foolish souls than I retrieved them.

And here it came again ... first, a cop car, its blue light twirling ... and a band, the trumpets blaring and a swirling noisy figure 8 of cycles, driven by the Lions Club, followed by more cyclists bleating raucous horns. The Southern University band strutted. Highschool girls stamped past in legions, taut tamborines slapping plump pubescent thighs.

Good floats, inventive. I spotted some props I'd seen on earlier floats in earlier years, and in drydock at Blaine Kern's warehouse...but Hestia hadn't skimped, and they looked nice. The theme was "Family Fun Through Television" (!), and they featured a great "Super Friends" entry, one for "The Shazam/Isis Hour", ... Larry Epke ran up to join us, and I noted that they were playing our song. Good floats, good tosses. We didn't hesitate to hustle into the street to capture our goodies, beating the secondliners at their own game. Great parade! It was Epke's first and he dug it. Beth was "throw me somethin' mister!"ing with the best of us.

And Savalas was generous and enthusiastic and handsome and craggy and bald and cool. "Who loves ya, baby?" I shouted as he passed.

And, "CROCKERRRRR!"

We left at parade's end loaded down with plastic jewellery. What the hell would we do with all that crap? Doubloons you send to outoftan suckers

or save to pitch to black kids yourself the following year. That's what I did with most of mine. (I saved Rex, of course.) What about the jewellery? Well, the cliché is that you'll make a hanging, dangly curtain out of them ... and so Beth, her adorable throat circlet with dozens of necklaces, vowed to do.

If anyone will do it, she will ...

Suggestions called for, though. Aside from making hanging curtains, what else can people do with Mardi Gras beads?

NOTHING/Feb. 14/Monday

Monday was a day of rest. There was a parade, of course, but we blew it off.

PEGASUS/Feb. 15/Tuesday

It looked for quite a while as if Tuesday would be the second day of rest in a row. But nay, Beth was drawn out with Linda Karrh and Anne Hebert on an alleged fabric-buying expedition for costumes ... after all, the day of days was but a week away. (I'd gone along on an earlier outing to a Gentilly store filled with bolts of various cloths. The textures were unbelievable. Oh, to be James Joyce, and have words for all!) Left to my own devices, I strode out in the relatively chilly night to catch the nightly parade.

I had no idea of what it was. All I knew was that Canal Street was blocked off, again, and that the meridian down which I strolled held perhaps two other white people, both dead. I watched the parade turn the corner of Basin and Canal (right outside the Joy Theatre; you know where I mean) and realized that the float which passed was adorned with a most unique giant head. Last year's Endymion parade was a salute to American Presidents, and one float featured Richard Nixon. The onlookers reacted properly, booing and throwing doubloons and jewellery back at the unfortunate riders. Here was that very Nixon head, untimely ripp'd from the Endymion extravaganza and placed on Pegasus (for such was the parade). It had sprouted a beard and Spockish eyebrows in keeping with the Magician theme of the parade.

I caught a doubloon and should have flicked it in, but instead scampered back along Canal Street. I should explain the Pegasus route. It went downtown (headed that way) on Canal until the Joy Theatre, at which time it executed a 90 degree turn to the right and headed uptown. Somewhere in there, it did a gradual 180 until it was once more headed up towards Canal. Got it? I decided not to wait on Canal, as it was both crowded and cold, and found myself at the intersection of St. Charles (I think) and Poydras, watching the start of the parade nose towards me. The crowd was more to my liking ... mostly tourist teenagers. Awful in their own right, true, but a better lot than the Canal Streeters if I must say so.

Little lost puppy wandered by. Girl gathered him up in her arms.

The floats were nothing spectacular but still decent, and the masquers were generous with their throws. The King looked very drunk. I wanted to snare a medallion necklace for Beth ("for Beth," he says) but failed despite many pleading gestures to the float riders and screaming myself lungless. Finally a knot of the medallions, necklaces with doubloon-sized commemorations attached, flew into a guy's hand nearby. I tried another tack. "Trade you a doubloon for one of those." And it worked. Right on.

The barter system. What could be more American?

MOMUS/Feb. 17./Thursday

We found Elaine and the girls again, sitting on the St. Charles curb. The night was gloriously gorgeous and warm, and madness and mirth were in the air. Momus was coming! And on the 100th anniversary of the krewe, we were promised something that had not graced Mardi Gras in years ... satire.

And we got a terrific parade. True, the floats were relatively crude; there was none of Bacchus' ornate, mechanical marvels, or Endymion's kingly beauty. But there was madness, and lunacy, and gibes at Moon Landrieu and real estate companies selling swampland and a washing machine cranking ersatz dollars through its wringers and riders wearing firemen's suits ... an oblique comment on Momus' own bad luck. The krewe's original costumes went up in flames a few weeks back. They were generous to a fault. Doubloons flew like killer bees, beads and necklaces swirled like falling birds. One float rider threw a cup of bourbon out at a black couple, splattering the pregnant pretties and myself. I snatched necklace after necklace from the air, donated them to the slim throats of the St. Vincentites and once to a black kid behind me of about four.

Yes, I kicked up my heels! Yes, I dug it! Beth did too, wrestling doubloons from second liners and responding to the apish antagonism of the same with ballsy counterforce. Bravo! She was into it and into it right! No pompous cynicism for such as she! Let'er rip! I regaled the girls with Lillian tales, Who, What or Where Game (which none had seen), Nixon in his undies, my precious hat and its wonderfulness. They did a fine job of feigning utter disinterest. Nyahh. Fatsos.

The parade was brief -- the floats came hard one upon one another and the action was furious. What a fabulous parade! Who needed million dollar floats? We had million dollar madness!

The last float passed and was followed by streetsweepers, but though Elaine took the swell-bellied babes back to St. Vincent's, but Beth was not done! As bad as any second liner, she grabbed my hand and together we ran up the center meridian, over the streetcar tracks, after the junk-dispensing floats, screaming and waving: "Throw me something, sexy!" she shouted. "Pitch it! Put muscle on it!" I added.

Yeah, Momus was classic Gras. Bedecked with beads and doubloons clattering in our pockets, we trudged home. (Or I trudged ... Beth was as fleet as ever.)

Breaking through the lines on Canal, cutting ahead of the parade, we made our way down Bourbon. And met en route a lass I knew at Charity, UFC sophomore, there a blood drawer, fresh from a shift with the Mardi Gras Coalition, a local outfit doing volunteer work for outoftowners. She was doing medical work, natch ... and reported that one of the major problems people were having was infected earlobes from clumsy ear-piercings. The travails of Gras!

HERMES/Feb. 18./Friday

That St. Charles walk was getting to be like the most familiar path of my life. This night, however, Beth and I felt the rising wind and figured that there might be rain (There Shall Be No Rain, however, is the Law of Gras). We went down only so far as the magnificent Hummingbird

Grill, where we feasted like royalty for around a dollar apiece.

While we gorged ourselves on the unbeatable Hummingbird French Fries, the familiar beeping of the lead police car summoned us to hurry. By the time the last luscious glob o' groovy grease was scarfed down, the first of the high school bands was stamping past the skid row palace of fine food.

Hermes' theme was Peter Pan, and each of the nicely done floats depicted part of the Pyle story. It was a good parade. Unfortunately, we stood in front of a tall platform and the masquers were more fond of pitching to the fortunates therein placed than to we peons below. Nevertheless both Beth and I did quite well. Screaming and kicking up my heels with each victorious catch, I'm quite sure that I appeared to many of the local residents as a figment out of their wildest d.t.s. Again, as we cut back towards the Quarter after the last doubloon had clinked on the street, we ran into the parade on Canal Street, and had to crawl through pushing, shoving, jostling thighs and knees to get across the street and safely home.

It never did rain, but windy it was. The Goodyear blimp carried its flying light show several times overhead, and it sure was strange to watch it travel sideways through the sky.

IRIS & ENDYMION/Feb. 19/Saturday

We should not have stopped off at Papa Joe's (the restaurant, not the House of Joy massage parlor up the street). The manager grabbed Beth and said, "Please work today!!" I had to proceed alone to one of the parades I most enjoy ... Iris.

Iris is a woman's krewe, and as such is much more generous with the garbage to the lusty lads than the normal Gras club. I saw the parade on St. Charles, again, and as the retrospective of Iris' 25 years passed scored time and again with shouts of "Hey, pretty lady! I'll love you for 20 years!"

I had to rip off a grocery sack to haul all my prizes home.

Gras Snapshot: a girl hanging by her knees from a brace on one of the floats. The night before, another: a middleaged Italian woman standing behind the line of screamers and beggars, watching with a sad expression the hoopla and hilarity. In the midst of it her husband caught bangles with his hat.

The afternoon was a flurry of cleaning the cubbyhole and preparing for an expected onslaught of Grasers who would accompany Beth & myself to Endymion ... one of the more fabulous and elaborate parades. Larry Epke told me when he showed that the red Iris doubloon which I had been tossed entitled me to a free meal at Popeye's Fried Chicken. How about that? It was actually worthwhile to go!

And Beth's replacement finally showed up at a few minutes till six, and she came home, her T-shirt filthy and her jeans doused with spilled beer. The streets were literally clogged -- as in sink -- with people, and more than one drunk had sloshed his nectar over the Papa Joe's counter. While she changed Larry and I chatted and Larry read recent NYAPA and SAPS mailings ... trufanishness! While Mardi Gras brayed on outside, fans read apa mailings!

Finally we went out onto the streets ... with one goal in mind. Endymion.





The curbs of Canal Street were packed four deep from Basin Street past Claiborne. It had rained just long enough to sog down the sidewalks and make the whole place ugly; we watched one or two items pass from behind the wall of people -- amazingly, the parade had actually started on time and had wended its way to the center of town in less than an hour. It still had a long way to go before it reached the business district of Canal Street so we decided to go back there, find ourselves an open spot on the barricade and wait.

We did so. The Quarter side of Canal was sparsely mobbed -- relatively -- and a gorgeous section of wire was located which we jealously guarded against the encroachment of others. (Beth had an energetic hip war with a dark-skinned lass with the lips of a gibbon and the vocabulary of a stevedore that I smoothed out by pitching enthusiastic and insane woo to the Negress, who responded with an astonished look and a final shake of her head and wave of frantic dismissal.) The crowds and my own shrieking at the preliminary motorcycle riders and whatnot that came by seemed to be too much for poor Epke, and he vanished. But at about that time others showed up ... the boomboom babes themselves, Linda Karrh and Annie Hebert, hauling along some guy from Texas they'd met at Worldcon and our own Dennis Dolbear, in from LSU law school for the weekend. Ah, this was a crew to contend with ... it lacked only Larry, who'd left, Justin and Elaine, who weren't there, Wirth who had been shielded away by the awesome traffic, and one or two others who don't bear mentioning in a family ap. a.

I suppose I should differentiate Endymion from the usual run of Carnival parades. It is a huge krewe with over 700 members, who are mostly newly rich New Orleanians of not particularly revered lineage. (Rex and Comus, on the other hand, are composed of the elite that is not necessarily rich -- although it does help, especially at the fee charged to their membership -- but are of Old, Old, Old blood.) They spend billions on their floats, and construct elaborate double-decker models complete with moving parts, movie stars, and gallons of beads and doubloons and whatnot to thrill the crowds. Oldtimers despise Endymion, feeling that it, and its great rival krewe among the nouveau riche, Bacchus, have brought show biz and Rose Bowl kitsch too much into Mardi Gras. That's their privilege. I love'em all.

And I must say that I loved Endymion. It was a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying a lot of laughs. First came tiny predecessor floats bearing but one man and one fine young lady on each, each with an incredibly beautiful and ornate head dress depicting the title of the float. (Although what possible head dress could explain "India's Victory to Jaddartha"?) They were lovely but frustrating, as the royalty on display had long since sold out their last necklace ... some of which bore the fabulous million, the Endymion Token of Youth. With luck, you will find such a token attached to this Spiritus, a ~~token~~ gathered by my own hand at this very parade.

The Grand Marshall of this year's parade was a local dago made good named Gino Vanelli, whom I had never heard of before. He stormed past with lots of thick black hair and tight pantaloons. He was followed by Laverne and Shirley. I believe Laverne was the one on my side of the street. "You're the pretty one!" I shouted to her ... the ugly one. Bands and motorcycles and cops on horseback and then the ornate riverboat float, featuring Doc Severensen, trotted past, the two decks exuberant with beads and Endymion's extravagant doubloons. The wire was abandoned and we took to the streets as more Endymion's enormous floats came intoview, reworkings & rethemings of last year'd Presidential floats, true, but clever and artistic ... Dany Frolich, you did a swell job.

Beth was really into this. Her throat became encrusted with Tokens of Youth. She freed two of the medallions from their necklaces and along with Karrh hooked them through her ears. (EEEEEEEEeeegggghhh!) She carried a wineskin Dolbear had left at my apartment the year before, filled with 1974 Mouton-Cadet. She gained a goodie from every float, and since her jeans had no pockets, packed mine full.

And I was no slouch! The floats were like Cosmopolitan mannequins, maybe so, and indeed I find my Gras memories warmest when I think of Iris or Venus or Momus with its tacky floats and super-human vibes ... but what the hell, Rose Bowlish or not, the crowd was having a great time and what's the matter with that? On and on they rolled! Up and up we jumped. Dance to the music! Perhaps the classic parades have more soul than Endymion ... but nobody let that get in the way of having a helluva time.

I lost Beth at parade's end, but found her back at 631 Dauphine with Karrh, Hebert, Texas Steve and Dolbear ... oh yes, mustn't forget Hebert's attractive and demure ex-suitmate, Bev. They were reading my journal and combing my closet for the blowjob photos and pouring vino on the GHLLLL press and making long distance phone calls to Brazil no no, I lie I lie. They were simply sitting around waiting for me to come back from my excursions up and down Canal looking for Beth. I had walked through streets awash in trash. The major item in this trash? Not beer cans, as in years past ... but plastic sacks, such as used to hold jewellery prior to pitching it. Yessir, Endymion had done its all to give NOLa a great time.

A few minutes of rest at 631...I showed the folks pictures of my family & the shots I took of (not "at") Carter and Ford during the campaign. Then out we went again into the chilly but crowded night. Annie wanted to go into a bar, any bar, and warm up. Others wanted to visit Jackson Square. Annie objected in her own free-associative fashion: "I'm not going to that windy, open place where you don't have any warm bodies to cuddle up against ... just hippies eating grapes."

I collapsed. "She's better than the muppets!" I shrieked.

It was cold, and there were no bars not choked with huamnity already. So the party broke up ... and back here, at 631, my worry about Epke -- I'm a Jewish mother down deep -- led me to perform an insane act. I dialled first his number, found him not around, then looked up and dialled 523-9216 ... Cinema 16. But I had Beth hold the phone and ask if Larry had gone there to get out of the wind and noise.

He had not ... but Beth, who did not identify herself, said that Mark-stein had a very pleasant voice.

TRAVIS : BACCHUS/Feb. 20/Sunday

Some contrasts in day nine of the saga of Gras '77. Venus came first ... a ladies krewe careening down the now-familiar-as-ones-own-doorstep St. Charles route. And ah, the bounties of the goddess of love ...

For you see, that lady in my office rode Venus this year -- uh, er, I mean, anyway -- and she told me exactly where she would be. And so as the floats began to trundle past, I waited for #15 ... and when it stopped about a block down, subject to one of the endless gremlin attacks that beset Carnival parades, I pushed to the side of the float, knocking over paraplegics and grandmothers, trampling pretty children underfoot, yelling "Sarah! Sarah! SARAH!" at the top of my lungs. (If I were Alan Hutchinson, I would add that fifty ladies named Sarah descended onto me from the crowd, while my friend from the office, Myrtle, stared in perplexity. But ...)

But there was a flash of recognition and Sarah leaned down to dump whole fistfuls of plastic goodies into my palms! Jealous secondliners leaped vainly at my prize, but fell short, as Sarah then dumped EIGHT DOUBLOONS into the mass of treasure! Cackling and whooping I ran from the crowd! A discarded paper sack blowing across the sidewalk became depository for the Sarah-given glories. Hubba hubba!

I danced back to the Quarter on aching but featherweight feet.

And some hours passed and some hours passed and Beth and I were on the phone with Karrh and Dolbear and Hebert, and sure, we said, we'd see each other tonight ... Bacchus was just like Endymion ... I mean, what did Bacchus have that no other parade had, ay?

AAAAY!

SIT ON IT! HENRY WINKLER, YOU
TOAD ... THE FONZZZZZZZZZZ!!!!

Now get me straight ... I've seen maybe three episodes of Happy Days in my life, and one of those was just before the Bacchus parade. I was not delighted with his selection when it was announced some months back. Bacchus traditionally is a truly established performer ... generations of fame behind them. Bob Hope has been Bacchus. Phil Harris has been Bacchus. Danny Kaye was, according to Guidry, whose judgment I trust on such things, the finest Bacchus of all. Other gods of wine have included Raymond Burr ("Rotten ... he just sat there in a drunken stupor"), Jim Nabors -- like Winkler, a star of the moment, tsk -- Glen Campbell. I've seen Jackie Gleason and Perry Como raise the goblet of mirth high myself. Is Henry Winkler in their league? Grumblegrumblegrumble ...

Nevertheless there is no way that I'd miss Bacchus. He is the newest and among the niftiest of Gras traditions.

And he had among the most disturbing and frightening of reigns.

The parade was still hours away when Beth and I walked up to Canal. It was hung up on Lee Circle. NBC Saturday Night was beginning a rather strained Gras show from Jackson Square ... although the Buck Henry parade report was great, and the opening bit with Ackroyd atop the Jackson monument was truly priceless. We hit the streets at its first commercial. The streets ... more crowded, noisy, impatient, ugly

multitudes ... no sooner had we reached the corner of Canal and Dauphine than we saw two black chicks flailing at each other with closed fists and found a pathetic group of people gathered ...

The blacks surrounded, gawking. On the sidewalk the fellow's wife knelt, supporting his head, while his ole buddy bent down and shouted "Sugar! Sugar!" Insulin shock.

Why do I care for Beth Schwarzin? Why is she the most special person I have evr known? Because for the next 45 minutes Beth and I fed that poor diabetic jerk sugar bummed off a hamburger truck, walked him around the streets as his wits began to return, and screamed at temporary cops trying to get them to call an ambulance, something, anything. While we tried to get the attention of first aid workers on Canal, a street washed in spilled brew and trash and heehawing drunks, the diabetic and his wife and his ole buddy blood brother vanished leaving one very concerned young lady from Bloomington, Indiana, who would be mother to the world if she could. And who drew one conceited neurotic boob out of his own dark little world into a bright place where you have compassion for clowns you never saw before lying in the streets.

We stood beneath the Adler's sign for a while on the far side of Canal. There the parade would pass just before returning to the Rivergate. And the crowd grew, and grew, but then here it came, here it came ...

First there was just the tips on the marcher's caps. Then the riders visible above their mounts. And then the king's float, Dany Frolich's brilliance painted all over it, and atop it, dancing, jumping, a bouncy, exuberant, whooping, loving-it-up Henry Winkler, no more the Fonz but someone far far more ...

"HAIL BACCHUS!! HAIL BACCHUS! HAIL BACCHUS!" I shouted over and over again. "HAIL BACCHUS! HAIL BACCHUS!"

Henry Winkler was fine Bacchus. I'll carry with me his lusty leaps, fists clenched, grin like the sun, for a long time. Hail the Fonz! Hail Winkler! Hail Yale Drama School! HAIL BACCHUS!

And then it was time for fabulous Frolich floats, the distinctive hand of Dany Frolich -- whom I knew when he had to be home at midnight, for God's sakes -- particularly the best float currently rolling, the fabulous Bacchusaurus. You see it there on my cover ... Its jaw lowers. Its serpentine neck rises and falls. I caught a Bacchus medallion thrown from it. And while we caught a lot (though nothing like the Endymion mother lode) that's one item I will particularly prize.

No, did not get one of the purple Winkler doubloons ... these are thrown only by Bacchus himself. However, a friend at work promises that I can have several ... nice to have connections ...

LDSE/Feb. 21/Monday

Thanks to good ol' Edwin Edwards, state employees did not have Monday, the day before Mardi Gras, off. I somehow staggered to work, after raising the roof with snarling and screeching. But the day passed quickly, almost as if I'd slept through it.

Back home, I reacted to a rumor I'd heard and called Jonesboro, Ark. And spent the rest of the day of rest cursing foul and vile fortune, which had kept me from running into George Inzer while he was at Gras Saturday and Sunday, often less than a block from where I boogied with

Beth He had worn out his finger dialling my number, always at times while we were out of the apartment. And, since Arkansas does not recognize Mardi Gras as a state holiday as does Louisiana ...

Shit. That put a downer on the whole rest of Carnival. At least, it put a downer on the rest of that night. During which Beth just plain could not sleep. Who could blame her? For the evening and the morning were

Fat Tuesday

The phone rings. It is Karrh. It is also 8:30. "We're leaving now," says the blonde bombshell. By "we" she means herself, Hebert, Wirth (what would Gras be without Doug?), that local fringie Couzint, and his latest, Steve from Texas, Bev the quiet Connecticutan. We lurch awake.

Beth spent Monday night cutting and arranging her costume. True to the Gras spirit, she wanted to masque, and buying some green cotton knit and borrowing some glitter from the boombooms (who had come by the p.m. before bearing supplies: food, costumes, makeup, for today) she completes her attire this Tuesday morning. I am called on to paint a star on her shoulder in glitter, and to draw an arrow down her arm ~~indicating~~ her elbow. Glitter flies everywhere. (It is yet ubiquitous in this abode.) Leaving now, huh? It is ten, and I ache to leave. My camera is loaded with Kodacolor. Today I will break my photo-fast for this Gras. Karrh's number is called, and the intimidating beep of a busy signal is heard. %\$@#!!!

So okay, I write a note, since I am not about to let Beth miss the morning parades that hit Canal Street early on Gras day -- Zulu, the madcap Amos'n'Andy black parade ... and Rex. Needless to say, as we hit the main drag (painfully empty; and no one in costume; agh, it seems a dead Gras) nothing was going on. But Zulu arrives in short order, wild and crazy, and promptly passes down the other side of Canal Street, turns toward the Auditorium, and disappears. But we see them as they pass, the King, the gorgeous black Queen in her nest of soft plumage, the Big Shot from Africa ... oh, it would turn a liberal's eyes back in their sockets to see Zulu cavort, but Mardi Gras, a holiday for the people, only rolls its eyes itself at such qualms.

(The token of a Zulu parade is a Zulu coconut, painted gold with ZULU written across it. They used to throw them out and woe be unto the skull that caught one, for these are real coconuts and no waferlike doubloon or weightless plastic bauble. Nowadays they sedately hand them over the side -- except to onlookers like the coworker of Beth's who scored nine of the things by yelling, "HEY! NIGGER, THROW ME A COCONUT!" at last year's parade.)

As Zulu goes its way, Karrh appears, dragging along an 8½ named Fred dressed in green. It's a real relief to see her and know that the day as planned is getting underway at last. She takes Beth's keys and after the Negroid krewe finishes its march past our station, we trot home to the hubbub of 631 Dauphine, locus for NOLA fanac on Mardi Gras day.

Doug is there, loquacious as ever in his Captain Future/SFPA suit, complete this time with helmet. Karrh wore her Dracula cape & knit

stockings. Steve, at his first Mardi Gras, shows fannish spirit by coming clad as a droog, complete with stuffed jockstrap. Annie wears a fantastic flag costume that, alas, I never manage to photograph in focus. Bev and Couzint's cutie Sylvia -- who, most truly, has one of the most beautiful faces I've seen in years, thanks to some subtle Japanese touches in the bone structure; I hope that the portraits I took come out -- are in monk's robes and flowing gown respectively. The mirror is crowded with girls smearing on glitter. Couzint offers me one of his homemade cookies, complete with secret ingredient I eat half of one and discover that Alice B. Toklas must have had a secret craving for cigarettes; they taste like Marlboros.

Panic! Panic! What if the quest for makeup perfection causes me to miss Rex?!? I finally whip the group out the front door and up towards Canal. There seem to be more people heading towards us than walking with us. Oh no!

But wait! There are none with the distinctive Rex madallion about their necks (a plastic crown). I ask a Gras-goer and receive the huzzah-worthy news that Rex has not yet turned the corner onto Canal.

There are more delays. Several people stop Wirth and ask to photograph his costume. It's the bubbletop that does it. I snap one pose with Beth myself; in the vivid sunlight they are a living fountain of color. (I also snap one of the snappers, a redhead. Forgive me, Beth! Old religions die hard!)

And then we are on Canal, walking down towards the usual Gras station for fans in this town ... the tree in front of D.H. Holmes' Department Store. This time we stand on the inner side of Canal, and indeed, the distinctive pitch begins to arise. This was no down Gras! The costumes are now out, and while Doug's is the best on the street (he is asked to pose dozens of times in our short walk) some are all right. Favorite of the morning: two giant Hershey bars, one "With Nuts" the other "Without Nuts". The Goodyear blimp boms and yaws dramatically overhead, in the skidding clouds and impetuous winds.

And then the float turns the corner across the avenue. It is distinctive. Doug says the krewe has used the same float for thirty years. The crowd does not seem to notice, but the cry still goes up as the King's float stops at the Boston Club and we can see the diminutive regality of Rex, King of Carnival, as he toasts his Queen and the city of New Orleans.

It is a great moment. Surely it is silly. But it is a great moment. Rex in real life is some 60ish millionaire businessman named Nolan. But that is only for the other days of his life. Today they do not matter. When Rex passes me I yell at him to cast his blessing on me and my people, and shout that "We love you!" The other days of his life I must say that this is hardly so. But today he is mythic, today the millionaire is the marvelous, the banal is the bacchanal, the bourgeois is the beauteous. Hail Rex! Hail King of Carnival!!

As the parade passes a team of marchers from West Point shouts "Love those tits!" at Beth. The Russians might as well land now. A motorcycle cop leading the floats pulls an Instamatic out of his saddlebag and snaps Doug's picture. Doug salutes the passing marchers by thumping the edge of his hand against his helmet. The floats come and shower the crowd with wonderful garbage -- for the life of me the theme of the parade is forgotten. Unimportant. Rex has been seen again. Carnival Day is safely blessed. We can go on about the day secure.

or meagre procession joining the gathered stream of revelers heading down Royal Street, usually the sedate and antique-lined snotty sister to bawdy Bourbon, today no less a brouhaha. I anticipate ... well, recall the last two Mardi Gras reports done for SFPA (in migs 63 and 70, SMS 25 and 32, respectively). Royal Street balconies hold many strange and wondrous things Mardi Gras day; the SHOW US YOUR TITS show is merely the one to which I have given the most notice. Does Lillian look forward to the jouncy, bouncy exhibition of multiple mammaries admired twice previously on Fat Tuesday, staged for Royal Street's benefit from that particular balcony? Yes ... I must admit that it is so. For though my situation is several quanta better than it was before, and my heart is strong through Beth's presence, the Tit Show is still a harmless, rather invigorating reminder of days past.

(Tits to the right of me, tits to the left of me, tits in front of me, volleyed and thundered ...)

But I will forbear the suspense. The balcony is reached later on that day. And is there a sadder sight than emptiness and desertion? Where once brave tank tops peeled up, a forlorn potted plant sits alone. Oh despair so tangible it flakes off your skin!

Nonetheless, onward, ever onward. A splendid Bacchus costume is snapped. Wirth is stopped often to pose; he should charge. Sustenance is obtained via a short jaunt to Bourbon Street, a visit to a Chinese quicky-eatee joint. (Silence, Celko, I know what I just said.) A stop by the celebrated corner of Toulouse and Bourbon (Easy Rider still with us) where Beth now works gives her the expected info that she is expected to help clean up on the morrow. And then we are back at 631 for a very very much needed recuperation break.

It is brief, though, brief in the extreme, because who can loaf when all that insanity booms on without? Soon we are up and onto Royal, bound for the tit show -- I think, but no, it is not there -- and Jackson Square. On the way, a Titanic Meeting.

Royal is a broiling, swirling cascade of costume and carnival. As the heads of the woowooing mob bobs a sign, borne by a malcontent in top hat and tails (later I find that it is George Schmidt, lead singer for the New Leviathan Oriental Foxtrot Orchestra). It lifts towards one of Royal's deservedly famous wrought-iron balconies, and peeking over the intricate ironwork there is a familiar face, round and mustachioed ...

"Justin!" we shout. "Justin!"

And the Grandest Turk of all grants us a cheery wave. I climb a lamp pole -- no end to my adventurousness Gras day -- to shout greetings, and see just below me a face I'd worried over in the last few days, face last seen Endymion Night: Larry Epke.

leapt to the ground and grabbed the goateed ex-Kapa-Alphan (where his zine was entitled SIC SEMPER EPKE). I motioned for Beth to come greet our lost comrade. "Where did you go?!?!? We thought you'd been kidnapped by white slavers!!"

And Markstein there, looking forty-five years old. I hug him; he glare hollowly.

He is attired in a green garbage bag with "For Prevention of Disease Only" written across it.

FOR PREVENTION OF DISEASE

Away ... towards the Square itself, a bloom of light and noise. Patters of rain -- Rex, you're fired -- sprinkle the masses. Who are gathered in a circle around fiddling bearded musicians, ignoring the shower of confetti-sized propaganda from an ardent Jesus freak who hurls handfuls of the stuff over their heads. The parklike Square itself, containing the famous statue of Old Hawkface astride his horse, is closed off and locked within its wroughtiron gates; the city expects thousands of dollars worth of damage to its parks this Gras and it does not intend to allow havoc to spread to this most sacred of NOLA places. Nevertheless it is a fact that reeks of authority and control and it is an alien intrusion into a most unauthoritarian day.

We discovered that we had lost Wirth, and later -- days later -- when he reappeared, he told his tale; kidnapped, snatched by SCAers Lynn Thomson and visitor Rebecca LeDock. One could ask for less pleasant diversion ...

Justin Winston, down from his party on Royal Street, appears on Square's edge, along with Elaine in clown makeup. They will meet us in front of the Doubleday Bookstore at six ... Justin has agreed to break a boycott of a decade and a half and watch a parade ...

The rain increases and the merrymakers return to 631 Dauphine to shed some of the masquery. My lamentations of the lack of a tit show -- I was at the wrong place at the wrong time -- leads Karrh to threaten/promise one right then and there. Alas, sanity prevails and Cinerama is restricted to the theatres ...

It approaches six. Beth and I hearken ourselves to Doubleday, followed not too closely by the rest. Justin and Elaine indeed wait there in the soggy street -- no more rain -- for the beginning of Comus, last and probably the most neglected of the Gras parades. Comus is the oldest of Gras krewes. Impossibly, it even outrates Rex as a social club. Its parade always receives colossal sets of raves from traditionalist observers of Gras, plus complaints that the riders are stingy with doubloons and other precious Mardi Gras junk. I have never seen Comus, and its mystery attracts me ...

The four of us move up St. Charles to meet the parade; the rest decide to stay on Canal. Darkness is fully down by now, but it is a darkness filled in spots with living light ...

The atmosphere is different as the flambeau carriers hove into view. Yes, there is still shouting as the first float, Comus' throne, hies down the avenue ... but it not the sort of greed that greets the throwers of trinkets and trash. It is more like the huzzahs that greet Rex. But the shouts to Comus have another flavor to them ...

Noone knows who Comus is, year to year. This year as the masked God of Sleep lifts his fabled chalice to those below his perch, he seems much younger than the previous Comus I have seen. This is the ultimate krewe, Justin says, filming matters with an antique movie camera. One must not only have family, one must have lots of money -- and I hear a terrifying figure involved with being a captain or a duke in the krewe -- five figures ...

Yes, the cheers for Comus are different. "HAIL, GOD OF SLEEP!" I shout. He throws no doubloons. He simply embodies something of the mysterious



and the well-why-not-say-it supernatural ...

Rex united a millionaire named Nolan and the royalty of NOLA society and tradition. Comus unites some anonymous man and the spirit of joy itself.

It is neat.

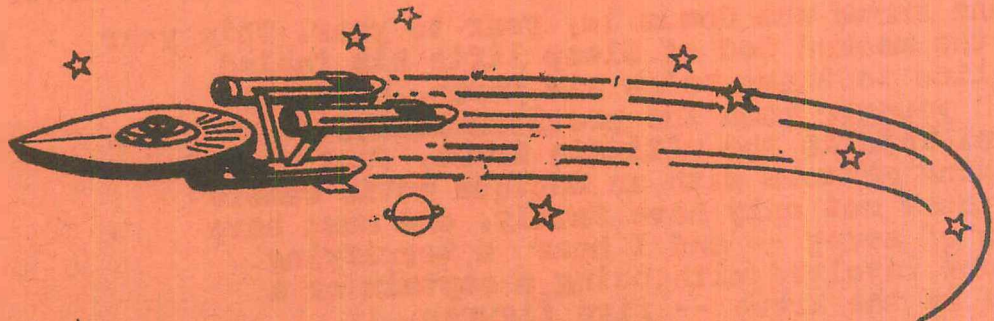
The next float was unmanned -- traditionally the Title Float bears no vulgar bead-tossers. But these follow in turn, on floats neither gaudy nor spare, and the masquers are not as stingy as some say -- Beth had ten of the fabled Comus doubloons in hand by night's end.

Oddly enough, Justin caught the most. The float riders seemed to single him out. Von Turk is a New Orleans man, true, and runs in some truly esoteric circles. It is whispered by those daring to speak of such matters that he could even belong to such exalted krewes himself, were he not as sensible and stingy with his money as Comus traditionally is with doubloons.

There they are, in silly costumes, the cream of New Orleans society, throwing worthless jewellery and plastic coins to the commoners below. And Gras climaxes in their appearance. Soon they will be off the street, into the Auditorium, and midnight will bring the Meeting of the Courts of Rex and Comus and the formal end to Gras. I will see perhaps ten seconds of this extravaganza on the box before Beth forbids further viewing. The parade fades down the street. We go to the Cafe du Monde for beignets and coffee, or milk in my case. Other eaters shout college fight songs into the night air.

And it is night. Garbage is taken down and left on the street, a convenient method of disposal. It is night. Karrh and Company, heading homewards down St. Charles that night, are targets for bottles pitched by hoods in passing cars. Nighttime. And the next day Beth spends on her hands and knees scrubbing the floor at Papa Joe's. Night. Later Walsh reveals that his uncle is in Rex. A terrifying thought occurs, a future Gras with the mad machinegunner as monarch chucking hand grenades instead of doubloons. Down in the sewer depths beneath Quarter grills, doubloons are glimpsed like planets far out in space. Gras ends. The party ends. Nighttime comes.

Night falls as Comus swirls away that Tuesday night. The day has been magical, filled with costumery and wit and gloriousness and laughter. The next day will be merely Wednesday ... Ash Wednesday.



Surprise -- there are none.

Before she left, Beth convinced me that I could take definite steps towards apa peace by a simple and still dignified step -- silence. So SFPA 75 passes by with only the barest of mentions below. There goes six solid years of commenting on everything in every mailing. Ka-sob!

Maybe someday I'll go back and catch up. In the meantime, though, this single page is it. I've agreed to let all the items of contention go by ... even though I'm positively aching to argue with Stven this time around. Oh well, I'll have to get by on Deep-Heet. (Biased&baloney! Biased&baloney! Oops -- sorry.)

A few things, though. I'm against increasing our membership to 35. SFPA is indeed undergoing a great deal of change -- Inzer articulated that well, if somewhat gloomily, at the March con -- but I think the in-group spirit so often cited as SFPA's greatest strength would suffer if we added on more roster spots. New members come and go; I think that making SFPA membership that much easier to obtain would in fact lessen the value of a membership. We had a spate of new member turnovers for quite a while and it didn't help the apa a bit. I vote ix-nay.

I also vote ... if that's the proper term ... ix-nay to the hard treatment given Bob Jennings for expressing his opinion in the Korbas matter. In fact, I think Stven took unfair advantage of his position as OE in replying to Bob's commentary in the very mailing in which that commentary appeared.

Verheiden -- saw MR. A-1 and dug it. More at DSC! A Verheiden film fest! Steele - Yes, I've met all of P.L.'s sisters, and her parents, too. Alan - Okay, I'll accept your statements on the Uncle Scrooge affair as final. Great zine as usual. Meade - Read the Niven thing through again, but the GHLIII tribute you mention eluded me. Wherizit? Spanier - Tsk!

BEST BIT: Whitehead wins it for for the "Guy and Don" limerick, off-metre though it was. Inspired!

Wirth - I recommend Ubik for the neophyte Phil Dick reader. It's funny, it's rather typical of the later stuff, it's exciting, and it's accessible. Then, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, The Man in the High Castle, Martian Time-Slip, Eye in the Sky, and Dr. Bloodmoney. These are all top-flight works. Hit Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch while you're at it, too. Then wail ... you have 30-plus books to choose from. And don't neglect Scanner. How about that? You get my longest mc this time!

Also my last. I'm sorry I didn't do my usual broad (if somewhat shallow) job ... especially with that logo up there (of which I am quite proud). Maybe someday I'll do what I did in Spiritus Mundi 11 and this mailing's Dipped and Shot for Stinkin' ... go back and hit what I missed this time. And so ...

And so I spent a million dollars on my phone bill, those'ash days after ... I called Greensboro and talked to Pam Tha-myth (now Pam Thomas, and no lisp. I called Washington and the voice that will always be there. And that leads me to the finale of this rather schizoid issue ... the

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Dedication

One of my problems is that I rather tend to overreact. But one of my qualities is that I also tend to snap to.

This issue of Spiritus covers quite a bit of ground. And although the weekend of March 12-13 was only part of that territory, it's the part I wish to focus on for my closing shot of the issue.

I took a couple of hours of annual leave on Friday the 11th and split town. I had only place that I could go, away from the personal hassles: Birmingham, Steel City, where I was forged one October evening in 1948 and whence the Lillian family has come for generations. Dad grew up there and his parents are buried there. I still have great-aunts and a truly great-uncle there. And I have friends there.

I took advantage of the invitation I've had standing since the Tuscaloosa mimeo-buying excursion of last November, and visited the Proctors ... Charlotte, Valery, and the family's fellas, Jerry, Justin, Martin and Forrest. Though their interest in the fannish world is primarily anachronist, being old friends of the great Ulric, Charlotte and Valery and Jerry went to the last DSC, and there the ladies were so taken with the Lillian charm that naturally I had to go visit them ...

I bullshit, but I knew that their invitation was sincere. This town was getting a little uncomfy for me. I needed respite, a chance to reflect and sort things out and decide on a manner of living life for the next while. I grabbed the Dawg and in a pounding rainstorm arrived in B'ham at one o'clock Saturday morning.

Charlotte and Valery and Martin met me, and I'm afraid the lads must almost totally fade out of the picture. They were nice to talk to about such varied topics as high school and Nixon's underwear (I'll always work that anecdote into any conversation) and D&D (which I understand less well than I understand Diplomacy) but let's face it, I needed shelter from a storm or two, and for me, guys just can't cut it.

So I threw myself on the mercy of the Proctor ladies, principally Charlotte ... and that heading at the top of the page gives away whatever surprise this natter had in store. Charlotte Proctor, here's a Spiritus to call your own ... as if it could match one umpteenth of your own magnificent, genrous spirit.

This lady put up with me not only crashing on her couch and eating her food, but drove me to see my great-aunt Cora, who at almost-70 has the life-energy and joy de vivre of a 17-year-old. Visiting with Aunt C was like a bath in the fountain of youth. I may be a mess but my forbears were and are terrific stuff. Charlotte took me to see Vulcan, the giant statue overlooking Beautiful Downtown Birmingham which so frightened me when I was a kid. It no longer seems so terrifying ... or so tall. When I woke up Sunday morning there was a glass of milk waiting for me ... and if I sound chauvenistically grateful for the attention ... I admit it.

Charlotte braved the perils of the Spring Valley Triangle to convey me to Meade&Penny's inaccessible abode. (Hi, Meade, hi Penny, hi Joe, hi Phyllis!) Mostly, she listened, and listening, gave hope. And strength. And courage. And compassion. There is still such a thing as compassion and selflessness in the world. Recently I had forgotten that.

She even got me through the trauma of flying home (a smooth trip). Charlotte Proctor gets this issue of Spiritus because ... well, because I'm still here to give it to her. I'd make it more if I could.

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