





*Oscar nominations and Mardi Gras ...* sounds like a pretty good day to begin **Spiritus Mundi**. Okay. There. I just gave this zine its GHLIII Press Pub number. It's begun.

Outside, a beautiful Fat Tuesday awaits. But while Rosy gets her stuff together for our jaunt to the French Quarter, a few immediate reflections on the Academy Award short list, announced minutes ago.

It's wonderful that **Lord of the Rings** won the most nominations, 13. I don't expect it to take out **A Beautiful Mind** (which has 8), but it's a better movie and my favorite. The major disappointment of this year is in the Best Picture category – **Black Hawk Down**, a *superb* movie, won a nod for Best Director but none for the big Oscar. The other nominees are **Gosford Park**, which is terrific, **In the Bedroom**, the sleeper “small movie” surprise, and **Moulin Rouge**, which I haven't seen but which Rosy says I'll love.

The winners are predictable in both Actor and Actress categories – Russell Crowe didn't merit the Oscar he got last year for flashing his buns in **Gladiator**, but was very fine in **A Beautiful Mind**, and he's odds-on. I enjoyed Denzel Washington's bad-guy turn in **Training Day**, and he's won a critic's award, but the movie was slight and I don't expect it to pay off for either him or Ethan Hawke, who has a supporting actor nomination. **In the Bedroom**'s Tom Wilkinson was subtle and powerful, and carried the movie, but my beloved Sissy Spacek has been claiming the awards. Her Oscar will serve as a tribute to the entire film, which I think will otherwise be blanked. I haven't seen any of the other four ladies, but **Monster's Ball** and Halle Berry are on deck for this weekend. Nor have I seen **Ali** yet, but it tanked commercially and however you define it, it would take two Will Smiths to make one Muhammad Ali. What I've seen of Sean Penn's **I am Sam** performance looks repulsive. No Billy Bob Thornton or Kevin Spacey this year: surprising. And it's too bad Guy Pearce's genius in **Memento** didn't cut it – that was my choice for 2001's performance of the year.

The supporting categories look cool – Jim Broadbent has been winning prelim honors for **Iris**, and I'd call him the front runner. I'm torn for my choice: I love Ian McKellan and his Gandalf was glorious, but Ben Kingsley was a flat hoot as the anti-Gandhi in **Sexy Beast**. I'd love to see Helen Mirren get her Oscar for **Gosford Park**, over Maggie Smith in the same flick, Kate Winslet in **Iris**, Marisa Tomei for **In the Bedroom**, and Jennifer Connelly in **Beautiful Mind**, but ... no, Connelly has this one bagged.

By the time you read this, we will know.

And it's Mardi Gras, too! Whoa! Let you know *how that* goes, later!

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# SPIRITUS MUNDI 188

A SFPazine for SFPA #225 by

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All right, it's later, and we can look back on Mardi Gras and wonder that it was ever here at all.

The week before Mardi Gras, maniacs were abroad in our neighborhood. They camped out on Orleans Avenue, a block from this house, *days* prior to the Endymion parade. Families marked their spaces on the "neutral ground" with yellow police tape and mounted round-the-clock vigils to protect their turf. Insane – but on parade day, the Saturday before Mardi Gras itself, the street was awash in humanity.

Through teenaged crowds we walked up to see the parade before it actually started. The floats were enormous if not particularly gorgeous in design: like so much else, Endymion looks better in the dark. I did approve of the celebrity guests, whom we watched clamber onto their floats: **Kyle Turley** and **Jason Alexander**. Turley is the New Orleans Saint lineman who received the accolades of every true XY chromosome on the planet when he tore the helmet off the defensive player who was trying to hurt his quarterback, and threw it at the opposing coach. Sure, it cost him thousands in fines, and the Saints the game, but no less a football legend than **Terry Bradshaw** was moved to exclaim, "I want Kyle Turley on my team!" Me too. "You the man, Turley!" I shouted, and got an upraised finger – *index*, I emphasize – in reply.

Turley was a *monster* – at least six foot six. Jason Alexander was of more human dimension. My sister-in-law is a greater **Seinfeld** fan than I am, but it still tickled me, the next day, to be asked by a waitress if Alexander and I were one and the same dude. Hey, I'm not that short. Nor that fat, right, Rosy? Rosy?

I wish we'd hung around the King's float – turned out last year's monarch, chosen by lot last year, was Joe Marino, a lawyer pal of mine from Jefferson Parish, and who knows – maybe this year's monarch would have been known to me, too. Didn't see him, but we did pick up the zippered bead bag from which my cover is taken.

Endymion's floats were only adequate in decoration, but the next day we saw some truly beautiful Bacchus floats passing by on the street – that parade is almost always the most elaborate in Mardi Gras. But despite the presence of Nicolas Cage as this year's monarch, we weren't particularly interested. Whose helmet did *he* tear off?

I worked on Monday, then prepared for the following day. Disposable cameras ... snacks (Rosy allowed me *one* Snickers) ... bottled water. We called social lioness Annie Winston to find a French Quarter party where we could rest our feet during the day. The Amoses are missed in this town. She gave us two addresses and approximate party times, *and* Annie's cell phone number, fat lot of good it did us.

We rose with the dawn. After noting the Oscar nominations and writing the first page of this **Spiritus Mundi**, I found my enthusiasm sparking. I hurried my beloved out the door and into my Tracker (always a good idea to drive your smallest, easiest-to-park car to Mardi Gras). Under cool, cloudless skies we toodled down Esplanade to the edge of the French Quarter, and miracle compounded, found easy parking on Kerlerec, a short block behind the Quarter. *Tres* unusual, a sign that something out of the ordinary was going on. By ten a.m. on a normal Fat Tuesday, you can't get within a mile of the Vieux Carre.

Entering the Quarter on foot made it clear. This was a small Gras – not very many people. The early date had kept the college brats away, leaving relatively few people on the street, most of them geezers like me. Annoyed as I get at the noisy, pushy collegiates of the day – why aren't they quiet and well-behaved like *we* were at their age? – I missed them. I wanted to gaze upon drunken, exhibitionistic coeds baring taut, pert boobies in exchange for balcony beads! These geriatric revelers would simply not cut the mustard. Rosy admonished me that it was far too early to be disappointed.

One thing I noticed early were the costumes: Elvis, dozens of Elvises. Talk about dull. It wasn't promising to be a great Gras. But Rosy was right: time healed all. As we walked, and walked, and walked, the streets filled, the people loosened, the costumes grew more creative and ... outre. The trend in toplessness this year was *paint* – succulent nude torsos emblazoned with scenery, some patriotic in tone.

John told the story of the silly coed who went topless for beads and found herself immortalized in a **Girls Gone Wild** video; she sued for a share of the profits and was told to pound sand. Perhaps concern over such commercial inequity provoked the best line of Mardi Gras, from a bead-berserk babe below a balcony: "You can come down here and *feel*'em but I'm not takin' it off on the street!"

The new accouterment to Carnival this year was the distinctive Tropical Isle Hand grenade plastic cup, thousands of which joined the other trash accumulated in the gutters. Also at sole level, ROADKILL – Rosy's term for beads and doubloons she found on the ground. Picking them up may have been somewhat unsanitary, but it freed her from actually *earning* the things. My favorite catch this year was a rubber-tipped spear; I used it to signal Rosy when we passed through crowds and pick up beads with bending over – never a safe thing to do in the Quarter, especially on Fat Tuesday.

I ran into an attorney I knew who'd recently been arrested for marijuana possession. "I didn't know it was in that jacket!" he claimed. Gee – hadn't heard *that* in an hour or so! When footsore, we went by both party locales mentioned by Annie, but the Winstons were at neither. As for her cell phone, either she'd left phone home or was ignoring its ring.

If there was a distinction to this Mardi Gras, it had to belong to the Jesus freaks on Jackson Square. Normally I feel some sympathy for the Christian crowd; I envy the sincerity of their belief and prefer Christian theology to every other variety I've heard of. This year, however, they commandeered the entire spread of the Square in front of the cathedral and its two flanking museums. Acceptable and even admirable were the tables of old clothes and free munchies they set out. Feed the naked, clothe the hungry, whatever. But this expression of charity was accompanied by endless bellowing through a bullhorn, alternating bad singing with worse sermonizing; the Tarot readers and face painters who make a living on Mardi Gras day at that location were crowded out. Hey, dipweeds: *Jesus liked to dance*.

Of course, you could escape the annoying Xtians by leaving the Square. This we did in the company of John Guidry, who came along as we sat there. He too had been trying to get hold of the Winstons, and failing precipitously. We had no party to take him to, aside from the biggest party in the world, but we made do. Up Bourbon. I nearly tripped over a drunk. Across Canal – awash in trash and Rosy's roadkill. Much more underfoot than in the Quarter. Down Royal. John taped all.

Eventually, four hours left to Carnival, these old bones grew weary, and mine weren't the only ones. Guidry offered to drive us to our car, and short though the walk would have been, we took him up on the offer. He'd paid thirty dollars to park in a lot by the river. Bargain. I got a better deal on Kerlerec – my inevitable parking ticket was only twenty.

Back home, Rosy watched the Meeting of the Krewes, the ritualistic conclusion to Carnival at the swank balls of Rex and Comus. She was curious about the ladies' gowns – a friend of Annie's, I've found, writes the descriptions of the clothes read on the air, sassiety page nonsense which is an art form in itself. I pigged out on Advil. My feet weren't hurting too badly, but my calves were braying like ... well, *calves*. (Also, after watching the same event last year, I found I couldn't get Carnival's obnoxious anthem, "If Ever I Cease to Love", out of my head.) True to my impression, it turned out to be a small Mardi Gras, a disappointment for local innkeepers. Not much disappointment here, though – it would have been nice to have had a party to stop off at, or visitors in town, but Fat Tuesday was as it was.

Guidry had a wise comment. All Mardis Gras being the same, and Mardis Gras are different. True enough – the flow of crazy people is unabating, but never are they the *same* crazy people. Each of them, at one time or another, is having his or her first Carnival ... experiencing civic lunacy of a level they have never known before. Some will marvel, some will freak, some will lap it up ... but it's different for everybody.

See what *you* think. **March 4, 2003.** Be here or be someplace else.



In home news ... As I reported at the end of last mailing's **Spiritus Mundi**, my onetime neighbor and boarder Cindy has moved into another abode. I wish I could report that she is riotously happy there, in her rooms rented from the Egyptian lady, but that is not the case. We're not particularly happy with her landlady, either: she soaked us for \$200 to paint Cindy's room and an extra \$75 per month to cover her utilities. We were so desperate to get our home to ourselves that we agreed to it. She's also been a royal pistol over Cindy's stuff. She surveyed the lot before the move, but once it was done complained about the multitudinous boxes of dishes and bags of teddy bears – and I'll bet you can just guess where much of that stuff is stored now.

But she got a taste of the cost of pushing Cindy too hard when old Boo's blood sugar went wacky and she ended up hospitalized for four days. She's now, and for the moment, all is stable, and we are kept aggravated interpreting between the two new roomies, and Cindy is still looking for a place of her own, *but* as Rosy says, we are still far better off being Cindy's "non-custodial parents."



Because we are now Cindy-free, we are emptying our storage unit, a carload at a time. Rosy's CRV takes about eighteen boxes at a trip, and we've been at it for several weekends, at least one load a day. I hate it, but it makes my sugar plum happy to have all of her stuff at our Allard Boulevard apartment.

I have a few tons of errant crap in the storage locker, too – for instance, a *lot* of old SFPA mailings. As you may have read in **Challenger**, Bruce Pelz clued me onto the library at the University of California's Riverside campus, which has an extensive fanzine collection; they've agreed to take the mailings off my hands. Project for the rest of March: re-box tons of SFPA, haul it to the Greyhound, send it west.

Now, I'm sensitive to the issue of privacy in this matter. SFPazines are personal publications, and some of us get tremors when outsiders, like librarians, get their mitts on stuff that we've written for our limited and restricted social group. I can't blame them. When Joe Moudry constructed a similar collection in Tuscaloosa some years ago, he arranged for a privacy stipulation, preventing the zines from being read by any perverted undergraduate with a yen for old mimeotone. I'm going to insist on the same.

This way, our mailings will be preserved, which is important to me. The alternatives – keeping the mailings or trashing the lot – are impossible, on the one hand, and unacceptable, on the other. The mailings are my property, so I've taken the best path I can think of.

Oh – I'm not disposing of every mailing. I'm keeping my copy of #1, #39 (my first) and #100 – which I may well write about in the next **Challenger**. That collation – about *21 years ago*, as you read this – was, after all, one of the great fannish moments of my life. It deserves a tribute.

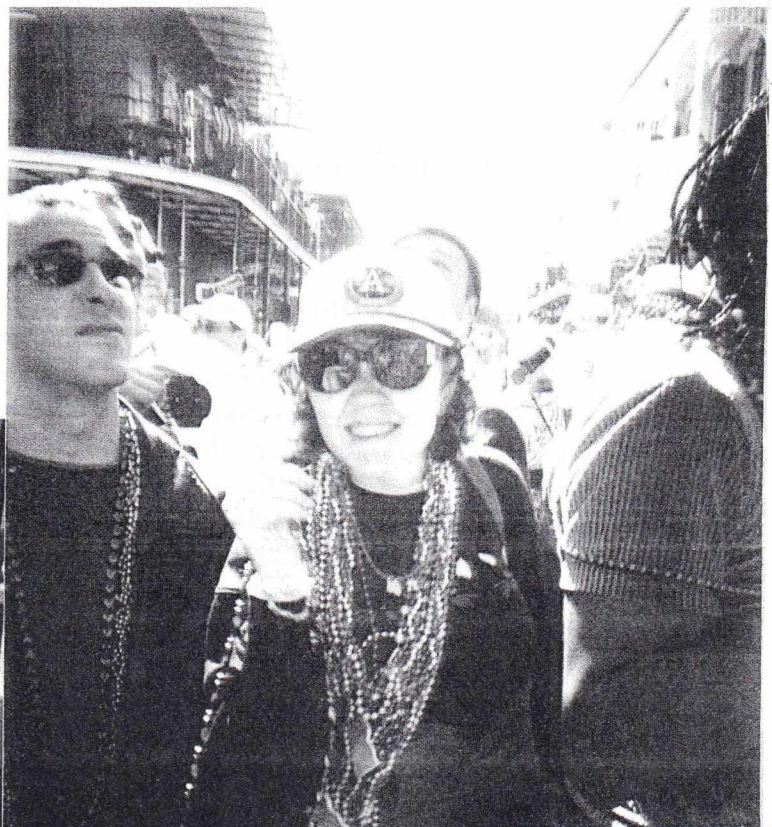


Of course we couldn't escape the Winter Olympics – not that we'd want to; safe in the relative warmth before my TV set, I loved the beauty of the snowy Utah mountains and the contagious joy of the athletes. Particularly the surprising ones who came from nowhere and did the impossible – like that Czech stunt jumper who won his gold medal with a trick no one had ever done before, or that Aussie speed skater who copped his medal by being the last guy standing after a massive collision took out all the other contestants.

The figure skating competition had an actual point this year, too. The pairs controversy worked out well, with a shame victory for the exuberant (and sharp) Canadians over clumsy Russians and corrupt officials, but the ice dancers were so nervous that the victory went to the only couple that didn't sprawl all over the ice. Probably the Games' best high came in ladies figure skating, watching little Sarah Hughes – 16? I have *arguments* older than she is – go out, live it up on the ice, and beat the blue bejasus out of the uptight medal freaks. (Michelle Kwan was so cautious in her long program that I'm surprised she moved



# SOME REVELERS GRAS 2002



Above right, Rosy pushes through

Above, a painted hussy

Right, Jason Alexander  
at Endymion



at all.) Lesson in life from the young: forget about glory and honors and just let the good times roll.



Rosy and I drew free tickets to **Monster's Ball**, thanks to John Guidry, and after the showing got to meet the film's child star and congratulate him on a fine performance. The acting is indeed the best thing about the movie. Otherwise it's a clumsy, patronizing fold. I might have bought it better had it not been insultingly clichéd about Southerner attitudes on race relations and family life; even rank redneck racists don't act as dumb as the characters here. It also didn't help that the film was shot in Louisiana – I live down the street from one place Halle Berry works, and work a few blocks from another, and neither can contain the action portrayed therein – but set in Georgia, despite the Louisiana shoulder patches on the uniforms. I must point out that a black attorney friend of mine loved the flick, but still, phooey.

*Zut alors!* If I've ever seen a film with more charm than **Amelie**, it's slipped my memory. (See **Iris**.) This quintessentially Parisian comedy centers around the efforts of a perky young waitress to interfere with the lives of everyone around her. In the process she liberates a streetful of sorry souls and finds quirky romance for herself. The young "gamine" (whatever that is; sounds like a horse), reminiscent of Audrey Hepburn, although there was only one Audrey Hepburn, has eyes the size of country provinces and a sweet wit that could convert the Taliban. This movie left me completely helpless in its generous power, and happy to be that way.

**We Were Soldiers** is the best movie about Vietnam I've seen since **Platoon**, and in many respects it outstrips Oliver Stone's masterpiece in its humane appreciation of the men who fought there. Blessedly free of politics, it centers its attention on the question of honor – reliance and trust among men. Daringly, it makes it clear that this and other military virtues – competence, discipline and courage – were by no means restricted to the American side. Both this movie and **Black Hawk Down** are simply superb, admirable portraits of men *in extremis*. Great war films are being made these days. Wonder what films about the Taliban conflict will say ...

**Iris** is a short, powerful film about the waning days of Iris Murdoch, the brilliant Brit novelist, as her considerable light was extinguished by the blanket of Alzheimer's. Judy Dench and Kate Winslet portray Murdoch at opposite ends of her public life, and both are excellent – Dench's performance is astonishing, a most intelligent woman playing another in the sad process of losing that intelligence. (Rosy looked up Murdoch on the internet after the film; Dench even looks like her.) Jim Broadbent has the best notices, however, with a passionate portrayal of Iris' loyal husband, but even he is given a run for top honors by the young actor who plays the same character at a youthful age. So seamlessly do the two performances mesh that many have suspected they were done by the same actor. You're reading one such.

We also saw **The Affair of the Necklace** and **Collateral Damage**, but both sucked. Mindful of the bad pun, one could say the same for **Queen of the Damned**, which I endured solely out of love for my Anne Rice fanatic of a wife. The only emotion other than boredom the film engendered was aching pity for poor little Aaliyah; so cute, so talented, such a waste, and such a crummy movie to remember her by.

CBS' 9/11 documentary was a stunning experience. It brought the war home more vividly than even a visit to Ground Zero did for me. The sense of foreboding in that firehouse as the day grew closer, so chillingly evoked through the sight of an innocuous calendar, the 11<sup>th</sup> innocently centered in the screen ... the horrifying noise of a jet engine gunning overhead, far too close ... the astonishing stab of the jets into the stolid buildings ... the firemen milling in the south tower lobby ... the sound on the roof: the flat distinctive *whump* – everyone stops cold in their tracks, everyone knows what it is ... the cool of the chief, finding an exit, and going back to get his men ... the terrible final roar as the universe gives way ... the ghastly acknowledgment of the French film maker that his brother is probably gone forever ... the relief at Ladder One as, one by one, *everyone* comes home ... dear Jesus, what a thing to happen. And once again, I am astonished and proud at how well, how competently, with what dedication and professional courage those

guys responded – at their best when things were at their worst.

I hope our G.I.s *gouge* al-Qaeda out of those damned mountains.



*Two trials in two weeks!* All of a sudden in February and early March, my little public defender job in St. John Parish was hoppin'.

The first case was the ugliest, by far – a 20-year-old girl jumping slashed and bruised, and naked from a moving auto on the Interstate. The driver was her attacker – who had been her friend and *faux* uncle since she was about 4. His defense? He was blasted – on gin, crack cocaine, and LSD. Yes, it was our old friend, a Not Guilty and Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity plea, based on Voluntary Intoxication – and I can not only see those eyeballs rolling, I can *hear* them. A decent person, I imagine you feel, could accept finding a pathetic failure like Andrea Yates insane – but a boozed-up stoner? So what?

You can see what I was up against. Fortunately I was not alone. I had an excellent investigator who constructed an elaborate time-line for the night of horror, showing how much gin, crack and acid our idiot had imbibed. I had a truly terrific expert, head of drug treatment for the entire state of Louisiana, who could testify as to the effects such a cocktail would have on a person. (In a word, psychosis.) The jury we picked was salt-'n'-pepper and even had a black grandmother on it.

The trial was long and exhausting, but except for my usual clumsiness – I'm as smooth as a washboard studded with nails – I believe I did all right. I speared the prosecution's expert good. He hadn't examined the defendant at all before climbing into the witness chair to declaim upon his sanity, and I remembered my **Anatomy of a Murder**. Would any reputable psychiatrist issue a diagnosis or commit a man without even so much as talking to him?

But the poor victim was excellent on the stand – her hurt at the terrible betrayal she'd endured was all but palpable – and my client, who *had* to testify, was calm but weak. Normally, of course, I'd *clout* any client of mine who got anywhere near the witness chair ... but the judge refused to allow our investigator to testify about what two prisoners (who had taken the 5<sup>th</sup>) had told him about smoking crack with our guy – so there was no other way to get those facts into the record. Could be that was reversible error on Her Honor's part, we'll see how the appeal goes.

Because of course our client was convicted. Kept 'em out three hours, though – a definite moral victory. My closing argument even drew praise from the cute secretary in the D.A.'s office, **Jessica-not-Jennifer** – to whom this issue is *dedicated* in gratitude.

The next week, a crack sale, *on video*, with not only one narc giving testimony, but *three*. How much chance would you give a schmuck charged with that? None at all. That's what I thought.

*I won.* At least, I won one of those moral victories public defenders like to crow about. In our business you take such victories as you can. A defendant gets a great deal that saves him some time in the pen – that's a victory. A defendant gets convicted, but of a lesser charge – that's a victory. A defendant gets found not guilty – that's a miracle.

No miracle here, just what we call "a lesser included verdict." This dude was convicted of *attempted* distribution of cocaine. The actual buy had taken place in the distance, out of the direct view of the camera and two of the narcotics cops. When he testified – at his own insistence – my client stunned everyone in the courtroom, me included, by admitting that it was him on the tape. The D.A. was visibly flustered. He'd based his whole case on the guy *denying* his presence at the scene.

The defendant could still get time, of course, but only half as much as before. Hey, take your wins where you can!

Also your *mailing commentary*, beginning with the turn of this page ----->



# MAILING CAUSTICS 225

**The Southerner 224 / OE** So this the *second* edition of this mailing's Official Organ – done after the reception of Toni's stringsaver. The first printing will now assume the mantle of Rare Collectible *a la* the last Charlton **Tarzan I** mentioned last issue. Speaking of stringsavers, LASFAPA recently had a scare when Alan Prince Winston's string of over 300 mailings – all but the first mailing – seemed to fall victim to a postal mishap: his roommate was delayed in traffic and didn't get reach FedEx in time to get their zines in on time. Fortunately, the apa's Little Tin God, Marty Cantor, had an emergency stringsaver on hand, and used it, but now Dave Schlosser – who has LASFAPA's second longest string, one less than APW's – can commiserate with me. I have SFPA's third-longest string, and the two guys above me have both had theirs saved with post-mailings. We the true champs, Dave! // I admit to terminal confusion at the new dues system, but I trust this administration enough to submit to taxation without questionization, or whatever. Just tell me when to write the check.

**The New Port News #201 / Ned** Nice scientific bent to this issue – which is to say, your mc's occasionally baffled me, a disgrace to admit for the son of an engineer. First fascinating bit involves fluidics, whatever that is – from your description it would seem slower and more cumbersome than the electronics in use now, but what do I know? // Saw a very cool antique typewriter in the paper t'other: a spherical machine which positioned the keys above the paper. Know it? // Note for some unknowable future use: armadillos are the only (other) animal which catches leprosy. Which explains all those scenes in Biblical movie epics showing armadillos being driven out of Jerusalem with stones. What am I talking about? // The problem with an absolute reading of the 1st Amendment is that so much speech is genuinely harmful and needs to be regulated – "shouting fire in a crowded theatre," as the cliché goes, and kiddy porn. Libel, too, can

do real harm to an innocent person: society has to control it, and does so by declaring that untrue, harmful speech is not protected under the 1st. But of course that doesn't apply to legitimate satire ... and so I truly see no way out of your "morass of interpretation," other than by slugging it out case by case, civil right by civil right. // Speaking of e-mail spams and scams: I'm so proud: I finally got a Nigerian come-on! From the attorney general of the country, no less (it says right here!). It couldn't fool me! I sent them only *half* of what they asked for! // One architectural result of 9-1-1 will probably follow directly upon the engineering studies of the WTC you mention: no more skyscrapers. They're just too vulnerable and difficult to evacuate, viz not only this terrible incident but **Towering Inferno**. So where do we put the people?

**Variations on a Theme #10 / Rich L.** Regarding anthrax-sanitized mail: I've heard of backfires in those cleansing machines which destroyed the mail they were supposed to clean up. Imagine an entire SFPA mailing immolated like that ... whatever would we do? // It took me a second to realize what you were saying with those "prolific Christmas music composers," "Anon" and "Trad." I keyed on the mention of Gustav Holst. When I was newly-ensconced in my dorm room at Berkeley, I once went to sleep listening to "The Planets" on the radio; on my next trip across the Bay to SanFran I bought a copy, passing up a prettier album cover for a version directed by Leopold ("Leopold!" "Leopold!") Stokowski. Played it till the wax fermented, and can still whistle "Mars" and "Jupiter" – marvelous piece, that – and thought "Neptune" the most incredible music I'd ever heard. Accessible stuff, which is to say, probably a little simple, but beautiful. // Oh, the *Seiun* Awards last far longer than five minutes. Five hours is what it feels like, agony for those of us waiting to lose our Hugos so we can relax. I can imagine the Tokyo worldcon pending for – what? 2007? A hundred thousand attendees, Hugos awarded to sixty Japanese guys and Dave Langford. // I'd like to see another good meteor

shower, but I really ache for another comet, or even a good eclipse. Have only seen one really choice example of each. // It's going to take a long time before sane assessments of the Clinton era come forward, but I love your sentence, "[W]henever I hear the name 'Trent Lott', I check to make sure I know where my wallet is." That's what I *avoid* doing when I hear the name "Rudolph Giuliani"! // Something you have in common with Don Markstein: you're both beer snobs. He once featured a bottle of his favorite, Anchor Steam, on the cover to a **Sphere**. // Have I mentioned that I once planned a faanfic in which the lady's fanzine was to be named **Scherherezade**? // **Lord of the Rings** won the British Academy Award. Man, if only it could duplicate that triumph at the Oscars!

**Twydrasil #72 / Rich D.** To start at the last page: that **Wall Street Journal** op-ed piece is right-on, and frightening. Its thesis is that it is good that Al Gore was cheated out of the '00 election, because America's radical right would have given him holy Hell for taking exactly the same time to take exactly the same actions as Cheney has in the Taliban war, and the debate would have been crippling and acrimonious. The Nazis need to be appeased; that's a familiar argument. The Democrats, the article suggests, have been a responsible, loyal opposition – not that Trent Lott, proclaiming any question of Cheney's mandates to be unpatriotic, would say so. This country is in more trouble than it knows, and it's not because of Al-Qaeda. // Speaking of unsavory websites, a local fringe recently sent me one called "What's Wrong with this Picture?" The picture, when called up, showed a normal room. You lean forward, studying details, when **FLASH**, "**BLEAH!**" a hideously gawping face fills the screen! Somewhere, someone is howling that they've scared you out of your skin. That I was scanning my e-mail in the middle of the night, when my nerves were fried anyway, made it much worse. // **Li'l Abner** was at its best a magical experience, a right-wing **Pogo**, brilliantly creative and hysterically funny. It's a shame Al Capp went bonkers at the end of his life, because he was the real thing. When you come across the strip when Daisy Mae finally catches Abner on Sadie

Hawkins Day, send it along to me, 'kay? // Your mention of the Magen David star reminds me of the wine by that name, which I haven't heard of recently. It was my first snort. I found a bottle of it in my grandfather's larder when I was about 5 years old, had seen the charming commercials (do you remember the jingle?), figured it must be like grape juice, so tipped it up and spewed it all over the kitchen floor. I don't think I've ever been back for seconds. // know how wingers feel about Clinton, sort of, since I find it tough to give W any credit for his handling of the 9-1-1 crisis. He'll always be the alcoholic puppet who stole the 2000 election to me. *But* – I've publically allowed that his initial response to 9-1-1 was absolutely right-on, at least insofar as rallying the nation was concerned. I also feel the war in Afghanistan was justified and fairly well fought. But domestically – well, you've heard my rants. Consider them re-spoken. // The demon GuyLilyan resembles me in every way, except when you say that "For him to do your bidding you need to provide him with a can of beer." Never touch the stuff. // Flying saucers – remember Frank Edwards? He knew a good scam when it bit him. His **Stranger than Science** books were a joy of junior high school. // Matt Helm never had any appeal for me. I never got more than a page or two into the first book, and the movies were repulsive James Bond caricatures. It hurts to see Sharon Tate, too – like watching that putrid SF comedy with Dorothy Stratton, another beautiful being wasted by criminal madness. // "The fight against Al-Qaeda has to be an international effort. The U.S. cannot go it alone." Most succinct, very true, and just what Gore has been saying. // Oh, there's *lots* of sadomasochism in early **Wonder Woman** strips. The powerful lady in **Kingdom Come** would tear off the head of anyone trying some of the stunts Charles Moulton forced on her then.

**Tyndallite Vol. 3, Number 98 / NORM!** Again, thanks for the JonBenet material from the Boulder newspapers – which, just as the detective on the **Today** show had me convinced the family was innocent, seems to swing suspicion back towards mother Patty ... as the wheel keeps goin' round and round. When will that pitiful child get justice? // The 2000-year-old computer you mention reminds me to stay angry at von Daniken, whose entire theory



seemed based on the idiocy of ancient man. How, he asks (dramatically) could primitive man, a knuckle-dragging semi-simian, construct the pyramids, or raise the statues on Easter Island, or wipe his nose? Surely *aliens from another world* must have done these magical things for them, and on and on ... Pfft. The guys who built and used that proto-sextant – as well as the people who designed the pyramids, Easter Island, and so forth – were simply *bright people*, engineering whizbangs who would be building space stations if they were alive today. Aliens unnecessary, thank you very much. End rant. // I've seen Don Grant's facsimile editions of Sherlock Holmes from **The Strand**. Superb – and the illos even looked like Basil Rathbone! (Or, I should say, Rathbone looked like the drawings. So did Jeremy Brett, now that I think about it.) // Want to work up an article on Nemo and the **Nautilus** for a future issue of **Challenger**? Question: was the book SF or simply techfic *a la* Tom Clancy?

// **Forbidden Planet** is SF, and superb SF at that. Really got my juices going in 1956. **This Island Earth** is a separate movie, nowhere near as satisfying. // T'was **Nolazine** #12 where my Poul Anderson story first appeared. The 13<sup>th</sup> issue didn't come out till almost a decade later. Was there a 14<sup>th</sup>? I seem to recall one ...

**Tennessee Trash #45** / Gary R. Nice Christmas photos and cool pranks you played on the kids, especially your niece Stephanie. If that's her on the left of the photo in lower right, I diagnosis lifelong cuteness for her. And a redhead, too. Wow. // Beth's family had a traditional Christmas joke – passing along an ancient bottle of Old Spice, often hidden in other gifts – and I once heard of brothers who kept exchanging a pair of pants in ways designed to be impossible to top. The last stunt involved putting the pants in the glove compartment of an old car, then taking the car to a dump and having it compacted, *a la* **Goldfinger**. // Your sign gift to your karate school is splendid -- what great imagination and thoughtfulness. In gratitude, I trust the owners didn't come over to your house and punch holes in the walls. // **O Brother Where Art Thou** really kicked ass at the Grammys – Album of the Year,

a real distinction, and a collaboration award for "A Man of Constant Sorrows". I wonder if that soundtrack is also up for an Oscar. // Your passion for truth shines in your mc to Ned: "there's NO SUCH THING as reagent grade VM&P Naptha!" What swine said there was? Let's get him! // The Super Bowl commercials tying drugs to terrorism scared me -- on at least two levels. First, it's possibly true, but worse, it means Ashcroft's Justice Department will be seeking the same extra-constitutional mandate against dopers as they've claimed against Arabs. The Bill of Rights is for sissies: pass it on.

**Frequent Flyer** / Tom Holy creeps! That's a horrible story about Anita's car wreck – thank God she's okay, and good for her for not letting the crash change her plans. Any aftereffects? Did your insurance come through with new wheels? // Ah yes ... football. I envy you seeing live pro games. Maybe someday New Orleans will have a team. Wasn't this a splendid Super Bowl! For some time I thought it dull, but then it dawned on me: the reason the game seemed dull was because the Patriots had the mighty Rams stymied. Their victory was one of the most startling upsets in the history of football, and I'm delighted they prevailed ... in only the third Big Game to turn on a field goal. // Your nightmarish story of flying home from Atlanta only pours concrete into my horror of flying; the only thing that alleviates the terror I feel being airborne is knowing when it's almost over, and your journey simply would not end. There's a loathsome rumor that Amtrak may soon cease its New Orleans service, too, so ... alternatives are drying up! // Spotting the World Trade Center in movies (**Sleepless in Seattle**, for instance) or TV shows these days makes me flinch. The insurance shenanigans going on over 9-1-1 makes me ashamed, although I can understand the companies' motives. Though it strikes me as crass to think about money vis-a-vis the disaster, that's their job. // **Smallville** comes on opposite **24**, and so gets a pass around here, but the reviews have been excellent. Apparently Luthor is a complex antagonist, not a misunderstood hero as I feared. It sounds interesting – like **Babylon 5**, a series I'll have to catch in reruns. Speaking of **24**, someone wondered about the sequel, when we'll presumably watch Kiefer Sutherland sleep for an hour a week all

season long. // **Stalag 17** did a lot with "When Johnny Comes Marching Home". It not only signified the hope of eventual freedom for the POWs, it underscored the despicability of Peter Graves' treason, as his character joined in the song. Graves loved that part – probably the only time he got to play the bad guy. // As a veteran of childhood coonskin caps, I appreciated the listing of Fess Parker's credits. Wasn't there also a movie release of Davy Crockett at the Alamo, oft-discussed here?

**Peter, Pan & Merry #41 / Dave** Nothing personal, but I really hope there are no dumb blood tests in **Star Wars II**. Perhaps the silliest moment in **Phantom Empire** came when Liam Neeson started describing the Force in terms of Jedi blood chemistry. Talk about wrecking a mood! // Like I've said, what I missed about **Lord of the Rings** in the film version was the way in which poetry suffused Middle Earth – everyone was always breaking into verse to tell an epic story of their race. And Bombadil, and Old Man Willow, and Goldberry ... but what was there, magnificent. I even liked the expansion of Arwen's role that I so feared before I saw the film. It introduced the character, underscoring the importance she'll have to the story, one or two movies down the line. // I loved that **Simpsons** episode wherein the Springfield Republicans meet to plan Evil Deeds. "Nader, you've done enough!" // Hmm ... I think Superman didn't get the name Kal-El until the fifties. I seem to remember it. // Didn't buy Krispy Kremes when you had the chance?!! Jeff, I call for a vote under the expulsion clause! // I'm not fond of Mel Brooks; **Young Frankenstein** is unworthy of its Hugo. // So Jenny Montaire bought a Saturn. I can't even afford a Phobos! (That might be funny if Phobos was a moon of Saturn, but except for Titan I can't remember any of the moons of Saturn. What do you want from me? I'm over fifty!) // An epic phrase: pride goeth before the phallus! I should think it follows it!

**Offline Reader Vol. 1 Issue 26 / Irv** Gad, you're making me glad of this little job of mine, even though **Parade's** last issue revealed that I'm

only making as much as a Taos cop. But is a job is a job. // Ooh, glad Celko can't hear you say he's not "true Southern." Why not, pray tell? Because he has a Czech name? Your name is German, mine is French: what *is* a true Southern name?

**The Sphere vol. #195, no. 1 / Don** To answer the question of Joe Staton's SFPA memberships, herewith the results of a few minutes' research into my \*ahem\* complete set of Southerners: Staton joined in mlg 11, around 1963, with Official Editor Bill Plott (who had the original idea for SFPA). The less said about his own OEsip, the better. Lon Atkins put him "in limbo" in mlg 29. He joined the waitlist in the Gala 50th Mailing while you were OE – do you believe that was in 1972? Nearly 30 years ago? – and was brought into membership while Steve Hughes and Binker were EOs, in mlg 60. He dropped in 72, during Stven Carlberg's first tOERM. Who can name his zines? // I like Aaron McGruder's iconoclastic Boondocks, and will be reprinting the delectable "Pretzel schmetzel!" strip in **Challenger**. The man do speak an uncomfortable truth. // The original Red Tornado was before my time, of course, but I seem to recall her secret identity: Ma Hunkel. That might be right. // Yes, Gore is and always has been the true President. I applaud his return to the public dialog, and hope he speaks out against the usurper administration's atrocious domestic policy – especially their contempt for due process. We can win the war against terrorism and stay true to the American ideal.

**Trivial Pursuits #99 / Yawning in York / Janice** Didn't you just do issue #96? I'm all confused. // A needle to the eye, broken toes ... you're in for a change of luck. Try skydiving. // Whenever I see Anne Perry's name I flash on the fact that she was one of the twisted teenaged killers in **Heavenly Creatures**. If she can be forgiven on the basis of her talent, why couldn't Leslie van Houten? // Indeed, some years wallow in great SF movies, like that year that saw **Blade Runner**, **Wrath of Khan**, **Road Warrior**, **E.T.**, and **Little Shop of Horrors** make the Hugo ballot, and **The Thing** outside of it ... and some are like 1987, which had **Robocop** and a fair fantasy called **The Princess Bride** and nothing much else. Guess which year Nolacon got stuck with. // As





## MORE *MARDI GRAS*

Above left: air-conditioned royalty

Left: John Guidry confronts satanic ducks

Above: Stars and Stripes forever!



you should see from my trip report, my brother weathered the bad storm in Buffalo well enough, but even he couldn't drive in it. We were lucky to leave when we did: by that day's afternoon, the thruway was closed. // Some of my strongest memories of early life involve the cemetery where my grandmother was buried. I've been there many times since then, but still occasionally dream of the place I imagined as a child: a miniature city. // Guy will forgive SFPAn who do nothing special for milestone issues like their 100th – but he'll mourn, oh yes, he'll mourn. // I just finished **The Two Towers** ... devastating ending! // Where did this "Geek Hierarchy" come from? It's brilliant! // It might be worth a ten-hour plane flight to visit the U.K. – Rosy very much wants us to go – but what I say now and what I say facing the gate are two very different things. Anyway, I enjoyed your SMOFcon report and York travelog, although I too am distressed that you were able to smuggle scissors past airport security with such ease. Did no one on the plane freak when they saw you wielding your crocheting needle?

**Revenant #10 / Sheila** The "lure of technology" hooked me too in January, but I didn't buy anything; Rosy found a battery-powered hand-held mini-TV, and scanning the conference championships on it got me through moving Cindy. Of course, it also almost got me killed when I found myself watching a play while driving, but what is progress without risk? // The only problem I've caught in my two viewings of **LotR** was some poor rear projection in the council scene. Everywhere else the illusory size differences among hobbits, humans, elves and dwarves was perfectly maintained. By the way, if you see **Black Hawk Down** – brilliant film, but nerve-stretching – watch for the GI who falls out of the helicopter. It's Orlando Bloom: Legolamb... I mean, Legolas. // Maybe it was different in Toronto, but it didn't get really cold in Buffalo till Christmas Eve; the days before were almost temperate. Then the lake effect hit. You experienced that joy of the season when you flew out of Buffalo. Wish you'd looked up "Lillian" in the phone book and reached us through my brother on Grand Island! Would have been funny

for folks from southeast Louisiana going all the way to the Canadian border to have lunch. // Hmm ... would werewolves have were-fleas ... deep scientific discussions we have here in SFPA. Actually, I think the answer lies in the bone-chilling last sentence of Guy Endore's wondrous **Werewolf of Paris**, a transcription of a medical report of a corpse exhumed from its grave. The pathologist reports an awful act of vandalism: someone has substituted the body of a wolf for that of the man. Decomposition is advanced, but ... "No insects." \*yih\* Still brings it on home! // Yes, SFPA is addictive; I'm glad to see you've caught the bug. During my first half-year of membership or so, I was a student at Berkeley, and waiting for my mailings was as nerve-shredding as any tear gas attack. I remember one time when the co-op dorm's mail girl – who later got her Phi Beta Kappa key – brought the unmistakable jetpak to my room, and wearing nothing but underwear I grabbed her and swung her around in joy. (Of course, I did that all the time, SFPA or not.) One time I spotted the mailman going into Cloyne Court, another co-op, dragging a mailbag behind him, with a package inside that I knew was SFPA. I followed him and grabbed it at once. Thank God I can (sort of) afford first class delivery these years! I'd still go nuts without it. // Classmates.com is fun, but most of the people listed from Ygnacio Valley High School I didn't know in 1967 and don't know now, and some I did know I wish I hadn't known. // Yes! That ridiculous Haunted House tour was at *The Myrtles*, not *The Willows*. I'd blocked the real name from my mind: the tale of the guide's repaired trousers was just too terrifying. **SHRIEK** // "UK 2205"? Now that's bid preparation! // Since I am now a reformed married man, I will not reveal my name for **The Vagina Monologues**. // Ouch! Don't mention art posters. I miss my **Guernica**. // Rosy recently taped a J.K. Rowling documentary about the models for various Harry Potter locales – like the ancient boarding school in Scotland which was a direct antecedent for Hogwarts. // More about terror of clowns ... Lon Chaney *pere* had a quotation Robert Bloch liked to use: "The clown is funny in the circus ring. But what would be your reaction if you opened a door at midnight and found the clown standing there in the moonlight?"

**Just a Page in Case / mike** We're talking about



buying a DVD, just because they offer so much more than videotapes. Letterboxing is the least of their advantages. This began in earnest at Christmastime, when I found that Rosy's favorite film, **Holy Smoke**, was unavailable on VHS. I've been wandering the DVD counters, fantasizing the library of great movies I'd build ... only to have DVDs go the way of the 8-track when something better comes along.

**Derogatory Reference 98 / Arthur** This mc will probably be mostly quotes, since you zing'em in there so spectacularly this time. For instance, "the Taliban is a barbarous, misogynistic abomination that could use a good dose of cultural imperialism." A-the-heck-men! to that! Also, "For America to be worth saving, it has to have freedom of expression." Not only have it, but *stand for it*, because this current administration believes that the Bill of Rights – which it despises anyway – has no meaning when non-citizens are concerned. I couldn't disagree more, of course; the first ten amendments draw limits on government power over individuals, no matter who the individuals are; Inge Glass still has rights against illegal search and seizure even though she's a German. I fear Mr. Ashcroft does not agree. // I tend to agree that the parents who rented a stripper to entertain a high school football team acted very inappropriately, and possibly illegally, but the kids should not have been punished, if they were. Why not send a hooker to a seventh grade basketball team? I'm sure they'd enjoy it, but if the limits don't apply to high school kids, where should they start? // Eudora, your p.c. software, sounds like a massive pain in the tush. Can you delete her prissy electronic ass from your program? Or do you get a kick out of telling her to stick it where the sun shines never, if she had such a place, which she does not? // The Trickster? Great **Flash** villain. Tightrope walker name of James Jesse (that's what I said). // You review a book by Frederick Crews of **The Pooh Perplex** fame. He was a Berkeley professor; I tried to talk him into letting me enroll in his James Joyce seminar once. "Pound that sand, son," he (effectively) said. // Another ace line: "whatever you say about your past, it got you here." // I don't know if it was "the working class" that you

had a problem with in grade school, since there are working class people of genius and many more of humor and decency. You're talking about *dumb* kids, almost always a misery to endure in youth. Vonnegut wrote once that the real trouble with dumb bastards is that they didn't believe there was such a thing as being smart. That's only true of the *mean* dumb. Other folk, less gifted than we are, deserve our love, protection, and respect – to an extent. We should respect their opinions less than they do, respect their rights *more* than they do, and respect their feelings as we would have our own superiors respect ours, because they're out there, too, of course. // James Garner – I am still too disgusted with the Supreme Court to watch him on **First Monday**. I miss **Rockford**. // A great line about the Best Novel Hugo that I don't agree with: "the gargoyles have taken over the cathedral." Who could win a Hugo "if this keeps up"? Crichton? Clancy? King? (He won one for Non-fiction, once; *should* have won for "The Mist", an exquisite horror tale with an SF base.)

**Random Thoughts / Steve** I appreciate the insights of a professional businessman – and a wildly successful one – into the Enron horror. I agree, and I think most pundits do too, that for a giant corporation to contribute to political parties is not unusual or, most likely, deplorable. It's also universally accepted that people are responsible for their own investments, and if they go belly-up, that's the breaks of the market. *But*. What if those investors had been *forced* to invest their savings in their home company stock – and what if the company lied to its investors/employees about its fiscal health? You'd never have treated your people like that; why should that be acceptable for Enron? What also if these same robber barons used their political contributions to exact favors from those politicians which did not benefit the country as a whole? That too is unacceptable corporate behavior, and it isn't being unrealistic or unfair to drive a stake through it. // I fully agree about "executive privilege." When an executive cites it, check your Constitution: part of it is probably missing.

**Oblio No. 138 / Gary B.** That is an amazing color cover, very reminiscent of early Prince Valiant. What do you think? Have they found the Garden of

Eden? // As you remember, C.C. Beck was an attendee at Seulingcons back in the early seventies, and I saw him at one. Cool moustache, and glorious balsa reproductions of antique weapons. The swords and axes looked solid and heavy – but weighed ounces. I wonder why he had his falling-out with Julie Schwartz? // I'd forgotten about your affection for faux football. Hmm ... you know, Gary, there's a **Challenger** article there ... // From all I hear of the Enron scandal, I can see why Teddy Roosevelt so mistrusted Wall Street. The robber baron mentality he fought against in his presidency is alive and well, and the Republican Party he led against its excesses has completely given over to its power. // Regarding our treatment of Al-Queda prisoners at Guantanamo, this is one civil libertarian who'd insist on inspection of the facilities there by the International Red Cross and Amnesty International. America is in the right and should never have anything to hide. This has nothing to do with what the Taliban "detainees" are like. It has everything to do with what we are like. // I can't help but feel sorry for Mariah Carey – so talented and lovely, but nominated for a Golden Raspberry for **Glitter**, and victim of the worst possible publicity following her emotional collapse. I wish we'd leave the poor kid alone. // Dave Barry's 2001 Holiday Gift Guide is funny, but sort of listless – which you'd figure after a most un-funny year like aught-one. He could never top "The Entire Reproductive System of a Cow", anyway. // The attitude of that postal worker regarding Priority Mail is simply arrogant and gross. Don't just complain to her the USPO – take it to your congressman! // I suspect that the Pentagon attack on 9-1-1 drew less attention than those on the World Trade Center because it was less dramatic. There's (horrifying) video of the jets spearing into the twin towers, so we can relive those psychotic moments over and over; there's no such record of the D.C. crash. // The Box Scores are yours and you can tote 'em any way you want, but – any reason my **Challenger** pages weren't counted last time? While we're on that topic: it probably sounds greedy of me, since issues of **Chall** have won Zine of the Year for the last three years, but I think that members should have the right to vote for any zine that has gone through

the apa for that honor. Vox populi and all that, Were earlier genzines that ran here – **Clarges**, **Sons of Bacchus**, **Fladnag**, **SEC**, **Pan**, etc. – disqualified? // Re: your comment that swarthy Arabs are more likely to be searched than blondes from Denmark ... *not by me!* Blondes from Denmark would come damn close to first! (After redheads from Ireland, maybe. Hi, Rosy. What's the rolling pin for?) // I want to know the name of the school that suspended a 4th grader for wearing a Snoopy keychain ... and the address of its local newspaper. I salivate to tell those dickheads what I think of them. // Hey, why don't you feature Page 3 Girls in the **Post**? Betcha your circulation would improve, and you might sell more newspapers, too! // Andru & Esposito – from your bacover – always impressed me as static and dull comic artists. They did **Wonder Woman** for years and the entire run, I think, of **Metal Men**. I remember how surprised I was when Marvel teamed Andru up with another inker for an X-Men; that backstory must have been touchy. // See my comment to Tom for impressions of the Super Bowl -- and the next **Challenger** for the fear engendered by some of its commercials.

**Can't Believe Everything You Read On the Internet** / *Jeff* I love that Aaron McGruder cartoon about W's pretzel binge so much that I'm swiping it for the next Challenger editorial. It's amazing that no responsible party has taken W to task for risking his life by such irresponsible drinking, not to mention for trying to cover it up with such a lame yarn. Betcha there's a gentlemen's agreement not to look too hard at the incident -- an understanding that the cretin's handlers will keep a closer eye on him in the future. // It may be foolish of me, but I can't take any of the gummint's warnings of new terrorist threats too seriously. Like their wide-eyed assertions that Osama may still be alive, it seems a pretty obvious attempt to keep the public frightened, clinging to Dick Cheney's pants leg. // The term "fairly dry Puget Sound" is a non sequitur ... oh ... you're talking about the job market! // Your footnote brings forth an interesting question: what should be the nature – and the aim – of a "post-scarcity" world? First assuring that bountifulness is general – that no one suffers. Then, maintenance, of course, since "post-scarcity" is just another name for "paradise."



Then everybody grab an easel and palette and start painting. // I had some problems with the ending of the new **Ocean's 11**, but I hesitate to criticize such lightweight fluff. Caper movies succeed because, however charming and fun to watch, the crooks don't get away with it: crime does not pay. I got the strong feeling that Clooney's clowns did get away with it, and ... well, I said I felt uncomfortable griping about a purposefully witless film. // Re: **The Prisoner**, you say, "the whole plot hinges on a comma." Could be you mean the exchange, "Who is Number One?" "You are [,] Number Six." That's another ending – the last episode – that now seems cloying and pretentious, but some of the earlier episodes, especially the Hugo-nominated "Schizoid Man", remain brilliant a generation after their filming. // I hope you catch up on your mc's soon; these old ones aren't part of the current multilog and seem a little stale. // Hmm, another competition – what SFPazine has been composed the furthest away from the South? I imagine Lynch's postcard-zines qualify. // Mike McGrady ghost-wrote both of Linda Lovelace's books? Steaming hypocrisy. **Inside Linda Lovelace** was pornography boasting about Lovelace's sleazy career. **Ordeal** portrayed the gobble-artist as the victim of her manipulative manager, hating every slurp. Which perspective was true? Obviously, whichever sold best at the moment. // Eternal New Orleans fan – and thrice-published novelist – Pat Adkins was here recently, and showed us his Palm Pilot. Astounding device! // Only good thing about **Pearl Harbor**: Alec Baldwin playing Jimmy Doolittle, an American hero squared.

**Home With the Armadillo #51 / Liz** It is very cool that your 9-1-1 quilt is receiving such widespread notice. Is it still viewable on-line? I'd like to trumpet it once more. // *Not coming to DSC????? NO NO NOOOOOOOO* This is not acceptable! You must all come to the convention. All of you. No argument, no equivocation, no B.S. phony-baloney Allie's-got-to-choose-a-college excuses. *DSC uber alles!* Quick, Mammy, mah smellin' salts! // In all seriousness – not that I'm not serious about

you guys coming to Huntsville; you *must* – it's an exciting time for Allie as she begins the process of choosing a college. Don't be too upset if she selects one a bit further from your hearth than you'd like. You and I went to superb universities close to home, but a spirit like hers might want to fly a little farther. // "What's in the 40 tubs that Rosy had to move?" Judging by the ache in my back, lead. // Yes, the expansion of Arwen's role in the **LotR** movie was harmless, nothing like the dreadful P.C. posturing I'd feared. On to **The Two Towers**! // "I like ... cheese toast with bacon." Me too, but the very idea that I'd consume such a cholesterol glut would make my wife and my doctor boil. Maybe if it were turkey bacon, which Rosy has introduced me too; turkey bacon and sausage are so superior to the beef/pork varieties that I can hardly face them these-a-days.

**Passages #12 / Janet** "Q: All your responses must be oral. What school did you go to?" "A: Oral." These great tidbits from various legal transcripts prove a point I have often made: court is the best free show in town. Everyone should pack courtrooms and shower the defense attorneys with money. A gesture I'm sure you're familiar with, as a doctor facing a bogus malpractice suit. When it's over, and you're vindicated, which of course you will be, I want to hear all about it.

**Guilty Pleasures 22 / Eve** Too bad you didn't run for Gainesville's city commission: you could have installed Klingon as the official city language. // It's an exciting time for your boys, especially Raphi, looking forward to college. I get a hoot out of how his quippy phone message nailed the recruiter from Hahvahd. But Micah may have the ivy halls beat, with overnight visits from "five luscious teenage babes" in his USY chapter. Ahh ... how do you join this USY? // I like your film reviews, as they include small films of quality. They may not become cult classics or win Oscar nominations (exception: **Sexy Beast**), but they're worth the time. (Never heard of **Focus**, but William Macy and Arthur Miller sound unbeatable in combination.) Trouble is, around New Orleans such flicks only show at the tony Canal Street Cinema, which may have received a death blow: the yuppie mall where it's located now charges for parking, effectively doubling the price of a ticket.

Oh well – we can always see **LotR** for the 90th time.

**Avatar Press 2.19 / Randy** I miss going to Chattacon, which always impressed me as youthful in the same way that Rivercon always struck me as being rather stolid. I'm far more the latter than the former, but it was nice to be reminded of how it was once upon an eon ago or so. Besides which, I like Chattanooga. // Yes, this season of **The X-Files** will close things down. When, after seeing a recent episode, I complained to Rosy that I didn't understand anything that was going on, she told me not to worry: she's been a fan since the beginning and it baffles her occasionally as well. The answer is way, way out there. // Yes, your DSC ad will appear in the next **Challenger** – hopefully, *before* the DSC! Cash is close this season. // Your progress in filling your house with furniture is enviable. We're filling our house with boxes – emptying a storage locker, y'see. That many are dilapidated, decaying boxes full of SFPA mailings puts an onus on me to get the damned things shipped to that California library ASAP. I wish Joe Moudry still worked at the University of Alabama library. Where he once began a fanzine collection: it'd be a cinch to run them up to Tuscaloosa. Riverside is another story. Another time zone, too.

**The Werewolf is Napping #1 / George** Speaking of Miracle Pets and stewardesses, who won the Westminster Dog Show? Was it that terrier from the newspaper (and I don't mean the newspaper spread on the floor)? Or someone from United Airlines? // So Mark Verheiden is involved in **Smallville**. I feel immediate guilt for not following the series. We have to get SFPA's most successful son to DSC! // Actually, your comment that the Taliban and Al Qaeda would wipe out the works of Carl Barks is very telling. They'd erase all joy from this turf. // Ah yes, Gary Tesser. 'Twas he who first implanted the idea of walking across the Brooklyn Bridge into my mind – and when we did so last December, I thought of him. He'll have to join us on that trek someday. // Speaking of implants, Pamela Anderson was last seen enduring Howard Stern's

comments on the air about her vagina. Uhh ... so to speak. // William Randolph Hearst either built or renovated a house in Berkeley for his son Randy when he started school there. Yes, that's the eventual publisher of the San Francisco *Examiner*, and father of Patty. An 18-year-old millionaire with a house all his own -- think he had problems filling it with gold-digging sorority girls? Anyway, my co-op association owned that house in the '70s; it was filled with 18-year-old non-millionaires last I saw of it. // I know you have snoring problems, George – I can hear you from New Orleans. Actually, I too have sleep problems; this mc is being composed between 4:30 and 5 on a Saturday morning. Guess it's better than wandering the neighborhood in my pelt, throwing tangelos at the windows. // The afterlife? Wish I believed in one – but I fear 2102 will probably feel just like 1902 to me. (It could be the late hour, but I hesitated to write that line, lest my writing it make it true.) // "I love clothes washing machines that vibrate and walk across the floor. If [you] can get it to go out the door and steal your car you could make a fortune with the film rights. ... Fred Drier could be in it." Another *Best Bit*, George – you must be running out of trophy space on your wall.

**Yngvi is a Wimp / Toni** How *dare* you for minac this time? It's not like you had anything else to do! // I wanna see photos of this wedding and read all about the honeymoon ... Mrs. Reinhardt!

**SM187 / Rear-Enders '01 / Me** My New Year's Resolutions are all admirable, and the first – move Cindy to her own place – is at least partially accomplished. As for losing weight, well ... maybe if I cut off my foot ... // Alas, **From Hell's** Elephant Man makeup didn't receive the Oscar nomination it deserved. Full many a flower is born to blush without an Oscar. Lots better than John Hurt's, too. // See? Called the Super Bowl months in advance. // With that triumph, that's that, he said, as he finished his mailing comments on the 5<sup>th</sup> day of March, 2002.

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I thought to end this **Spiritus Mundi** with another page of Mardi Gras photos, but they'll have to keep. I also gave thought to talking about my latest trial, but it was just another sad, silly black street dealer caught on video who had no idea he was in as much trouble as he was. Important matters, to be sure, but this morning, March 20, 2002, I awoke to news that, however expected, still made it imperative that I use this space to another purpose.

You know, I'd thought about R.A. Lafferty last night, hours before the SFWA announced his death. I'd been reading a comic novel by Mike Resnick, and the thought had crossed my mind that it had echoes of Ray's great comic masterpiece, **Space Chantey**. Mike should be pleased by that comparison, because Ray Lafferty was the funniest voice ever to come out of science fiction, a natural wit and a brilliant writer, rich with spontaneity and passion. I got a strong moral sense out of his work, too, a serious under-story where morality and ethics reigned. He was a serious man who expressed his serious views through wit, and laughter, such laughter.

I can't write fully about R.A. Lafferty and what he meant to me, as a writer and as a presence, in such a short time as I have to finish this **Spiritus**. Perhaps when I tackle the next **Challenger** I'll be able to apply the care and craft be needed to do the job right. **Spiritus**, though, is my journal, where the care is spontaneous and the craft accidental; here, just let me just mourn. Let me mourn the scruffy old bird we met at St. Louiscon in 1969, the genius who wrote **Past Master**, the sweet, self-effacing gentleman who wandered about our conventions like a lost neo, the roaring boozier who greeted each moment with a salute: "Bang! Bang!"

For somebody so funny, I don't think he had a lot of happiness in his life. What he did have he shared, exuberantly, brilliantly, and may the God in Whom he always professed belief grant him shelter, at last from the storm.

