



**Issue No. 21, March 2002.** Edited and published by Robert Lichtman, P. O. Box 30, Glen Ellen, CA 95442 USA. Please send all trade fanzines and letters of comment to this address (or to [locs2trapdoor@yahoo.com](mailto:locs2trapdoor@yahoo.com)). Founding member and Past President<sub>1991</sub>: fwa. Also a supporter of afaf. This fanzine is available by Editorial Whim in response to The Usual (letters, contributions both written and artistic, and accepted trades), or \$5.00 per issue (*reviewers please note!*). If there's an "X" on your mailing label, respond or "bye!" All contents copyright ©2002 by *Trap Door* with all rights reverting to individual contributors upon publication.

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Yes, it *has* been a long time since an issue of *Trap Door* landed in your mailbox. It wasn't my intention to skip an entire calendar year for the first time since launching this fanzine in 1983—far from it—and 2001 having the significance it does in our little subculture, it's doubly lamentable not to have done an issue with that date. Well, here's my list of excuses.

In late February 2001 I stepped in some

slippery mud, rammed my right foot hard into a high curb, and broke my ankle in three places. A week later I had surgery in which a bunch of hardware was installed, and after that I was off work for nearly three months. I stayed with Carol in Oakland for the duration. She took great care of me, but the lay-off wasn't conducive to working on a fanzine because all the stuff I needed was in Glen Ellen.

Reason No. 2: Getting used to a new computer and, especially, to the changes it wrought in my life. Finally, I was able to gain access to the Internet and the Web at home, which left me less time for my traditional paper-based fanac, as those of you who long preceded me into cyberspace already know and the rest of you (hi, Harry! hi, Fred!) can probably easily imagine. While it's much quicker to fire off an e-mail of comment than it is to do it the traditional way, access to the e-mail lists—Trufen, Memory Hole, etc.—and all the wonders of the Web is quite diverting and has to be blamed, at least in part, for my procrastination. But as is always the case, the main excuse is No. 3: the time and delay built into

gathering the components that make up any given issue.

While I was recuperating, other things happened that drew my attention away from fanac. Those of you with long memories may recall that in the last issue I told of attending my mother's funeral in Los Angeles with Carol and various other family members. One of these was my brother, of whom I wrote: "John had just completed six months of chemotherapy—he's in complete remission for now," and "At the end of July Carol and I are going to San Diego to celebrate his 55<sup>th</sup> birthday." We did go and it was a great party, but it turned out to be his last birthday.

Not long after my surgery, John took a sudden turn for the worse, and just two weeks later his son called to tell me that John had passed away.

Only two days before that I'd spoken with him on the telephone at some length. I'd done most of the talking because he had so little lung capacity that he could barely get out a short sentence. We looked back to the good times we'd had recently—from that 55<sup>th</sup> birthday last July to his January visit when he came up here alone and spent some great time with Carol and me (we had a thing going on about each of our favorite crab cakes, so we'd taken him out to a Caribbean restaurant in Oakland to try *our* favorite crab cakes; and we spent a lot of time just enjoying each other). I was glad I had this final opportunity to let him know I loved him.

John's wish was to be cremated and have his ashes spread at sea; he had a boat and loved the ocean. His wife Karin told us she planned to keep his ashes for a year (for a "proper mourning period") before doing so. Hearing this was good news, since with my broken ankle and crutches I was in no condition to travel.

Younger brothers aren't supposed to die first, and from the outset of his illness John tried to try to keep it from happening. He hung in there for three years, but the odds were definitely stacked against him. It's a new and not altogether welcome feeling, suddenly being the last of my generation in the family. With my brother gone, there's no one around with whom I can talk about Old Family Stuff in a first-hand way.

But mostly, I just plain miss him.

Meanwhile, here in fandom things weren't going much better. Sid Birchby, Ken Cheslin, Bill Donaho, Pat Ellington, Terry Hughes and Boyd

Raeburn have all passed away since the last issue. True, they are far from a complete list of people who've left us, but they were the ones who meant the most to me. Every time someone who's been reading *Trap Door* from its humble beginnings in 1983 has to be cut from the mailing list due to their final gaffiation, I feel a great sadness; but it's soon followed by a vow to continue producing issues that they would have enjoyed.

Ken's and Sid's final letters of comment to me appear in this issue's letter column, and I have equally clear memories of the others. One thing about staying with Carol while my ankle mended was that I got to see more of Pat in her final weeks than I would have otherwise. I knew Pat for forty years and considered her a good friend, and I'm glad I had the opportunity.

In his final weeks of life, Terry Hughes remembered *Trap Door* in his will, and thus it can be said that he is not only one with the angels up there in fannish heaven, but his generous gift is angeling this issue of *Trap Door* and part of the next one.

And Bill Donaho's and Boyd Raeburn's fanzine collections ended up in my care. And hereby hangs a couple of tales.

It's old news by now that Donaho passed away the day before Thanksgiving 2000 at a veterans' retirement home. I first learned about it from a message Lenny Bailes posted on Memory Hole. He said that Dave Rike had informed him. So I phoned Dave. He had no additional information, and said he'd heard about it from Miriam Lloyd. So I called Miriam. Miriam gave me the name of Bill's executor, a woman named Keonaona who was some sort of honcho in a Hawaiian Huna church that Bill had been involved in. This was a surprise to me, since to the best of my perhaps feeble recollection Bill had never written of his religious affiliation in either *Habakkuk's* final series or in *Lilapa*. Miriam said he'd already been into it when he moved to her basement apartment in 1990. I asked after Bill's books, his music collection and especially his fanzines, and she said she had no idea what their status might be—that they weren't stored at her house and she was afraid they might have been disposed of when Bill moved to the retirement home.

Hoping this hadn't happened, I called Keonaona, introducing myself as someone who'd known Bill for nearly forty years and who shared with him the hobby of amateur journalism. I

explained that he had once had a collection of amateur publications, and that if it still existed I would like to take charge of it to safeguard it for future generations. She was an accepting, cheery sort—actually knew of *Habakkuk* and had seen copies of it. She said that all Bill's stuff was in a storage locker in downtown Oakland, but had no idea whether his fanzine collection was there—but if it was, I could have it.

So one Saturday afternoon a couple of weeks later, we spent four nonstop hours extracting Bill's belongings, piece by piece, which were tightly stacked ceiling to floor in that room. She appreciated the help—neither of us could have handled the task alone—and I came away with lots of fanzines, some of which filled significant holes in my collection as well as others'. (Fans who can produce detailed want lists are welcome to check in and see if I can help you.)

With Boyd it was different. We'd been friends for many years, even though we didn't see each other in person very often. His *À Bas* was one of the first fanzines I'd ever received, and he knew well that it had been a major influence on me (along with Gregg Calkins' *Oopsla!* and Dean Grennell's *Grue*). When I came back into fandom in the early '80s, he sent me copies of the last two issues (amazing that he still had leftover copies a quarter-century after publication!), and just a few years ago he surprised me with a spare copy he found of an issue of Cliff Gould's worthy but mostly forgotten late '50s fanzine, *Oblique*. I was also his Help Line for the care and feeding of his aging Selectric typewriter. But I was really floored when, a few weeks after his death last August, I received a letter from a trust company in Toronto informing me that in his will Boyd had included the following: "To deliver to my friend, Robert Lichtman, if he survives me, all my 'amateur magazines' and all my 'fanzines' for his own use absolutely."

From Geoff Kidder, son of Ron Kidder—one of the "Derelict Insurgents" with whom Boyd ran in the late '50s (think "jazz and sports cars")—I learned that the collection was large and would require organizing and packing before it could be delivered. So it was only in early February this year that I had a phone call from a gentleman at the trust company saying they were almost ready to be sent. He said there were between eight to fifteen bankers' boxes. As of this writing they still haven't shown up, and in a way I hope they don't

arrive before I get this issue out because, as I mentioned earlier, I'm vulnerable to distraction.

It seems to me that one way I deal with death is to involve myself in helping sort out a person's material possessions. Besides Donaho's stuff recently, I also did this in 1996 when Redd Boggs passed away and his apartment had to be cleared out quickly. (I had considerable help from Jeanne Bowman, Don Herron and Dave Rike.) Redd, Bill and Boyd had been part of my world since my neofan days in the late '50s and I valued them as fans and major fanzine publishers. I hope my interest in obtaining, preserving and recycling their fanzine collections doesn't make me seem like some sort of callous opportunist. I would hope that someone would take the same care with my own collection down the line.

Having seen all these fanzine collections come my way, beginning with Burbee's back in 1993, it's interesting to me what each collection says about the person, and the person as fan. Charlie's collection was, as you might expect, heavy on fannish fanzines, especially those published in Southern California by the various members of the Insurgent Element (Laney, Perdue, Rotsler and other lesser-known lights). And of course it contained a complete set of the *Shaggys* he edited and most of his other publications. A lot of Redd's collection went to Dave Rike—he'd been dispersing it piecemeal for several years—but what came my way was a mix of both fannish and sercon fanzines. How Redd-like, to have both strains well-represented. Of course there was all but one issue of his own excellent *Skyhook* (anyone got a spare copy of the first issue?) and the bulk of his other publications going back into the '40s. Donaho's fanzine collection reminded me a lot of Dick Ellington's, the bulk of which I auctioned off about ten years ago to benefit Pat: mostly fannish, but with publications from their old New York anarchist friends represented (Dave Mason's *Coup*, for one). The nature of Boyd's fanzine collection is still to unfold.

And what about me? What does my fanzine collection reflect? Well, for one thing it demonstrates a certain eclecticism. Like Burbee, my main interest lies on the fannish side of the equation, but I don't eschew more serious, science-fictionally oriented fanzines if they're done well and hold my interest. (Hi, Bruce Gillespie and John Bangsund!) Although large and well-organized, my collection is small in comparison to

the huge holdings of Bruce Pelz or even the Memory Hole “Permacollection” in the hands of Greg Pickersgill. I can make a direct comparison to the latter, since I recently printed out both our catalogues. Mine runs 122 double-columned pages in the same size type as this fanzine, while Greg’s if printed in the same format would exceed 200 pages. I have to say that I enjoy having my collection fully accessible and delight in doing research to answer questions that arise on the various e-mail lists and in other fanzines from time to time. This is a form of time-binding and furthering of fannish history that appeals to me.

This issue marks the premiere of the new format. Instead of mucking around with multi-layered paste-ups, I did everything electronically: the artwork scanned and inserted rather than pasted down, the double-page spreads accomplished by the ability to “print booklet style” instead of laboriously cutting up individual pages and taping them to a dummy.

As has often been the case throughout *Trap Door*’s life, some of the contents of this issue first saw print elsewhere. Chris Priest’s article appeared originally in an apazine, *Boring Old Fart* No. 2, that he published in April 2000 for a European-based apa called Dapper. Only a couple of people on my mailing list will have seen it before. I want to thank Dave Langford for steering Chris in my direction. “The Katz Kontroversy” by Gordon Eklund was almost the entire

content of his FAPAazine, *Sweet Jane* No. 32, in the May 2001 FAPA mailing. He added a new section for its republication here. Lucy Huntzinger assembled her column from selections on her Web diary, Aries Moon. Calvin Demmon’s article first appeared in the January 9, 2001 edition of the *Monterey Herald*, a newspaper where he worked for many years and from which he is now happily retired. Finally, Ted White’s and rich brown’s pieces were originally posts on one of the fannish e-mail lists and have been rewritten for their appearance here.

I’ve long felt that some gems of fan writing deserve rescuing from the obscurity of the apas in which they appear, and now I’ve added the vast world of e-mail to my mining activities. *Trap Door*—is it the *Readers’ Digest* of the fan world? I hope not.

To make up for the huge delay between this issue and the last one, *Trap Door* No. 22 will appear later this year. It will feature a long faan/science fiction story by Gordon Eklund, “Sense of Wonder,” and items held over from this issue by Charles Burbee (another in the series of his work that didn’t get collected in either of the two *Incomplete* volumes), John Hertz, and another installment of George Metzger’s column. Accordingly, the so-called usual one-year window of LoC-writing opportunity will not be available. I look forward to your responses to this issue....

—Robert Lichtman

|           | '01 | '00 | '99 | '98 | '97 | '96 | '95 | '94 | '93 | '92 | '91 | '90 | '89 | '88 | '87 |
|-----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Australia | 17  | 12  | 9   | 12  | 9   | 11  | 12  | 13  | 16  | 18  | 16  | 16  | 12  | 15  | 32  |
| Canada    | 18  | 18  | 19  | 16  | 19  | 14  | 16  | 14  | 12  | 17  | 1   | 2   | 2   | 1   | 4   |
| U. K.     | 39  | 61  | 65  | 64  | 58  | 47  | 52  | 60  | 51  | 50  | 44  | 30  | 61  | 51  | 33  |
| U. S.     | 84  | 105 | 69  | 91  | 109 | 108 | 143 | 109 | 91  | 104 | 85  | 66  | 55  | 67  | 58  |
| Others    | 0   | 1   | 1   | 0   | 0   | 0   | 0   | 2   | 2   | 2   | 1   | 5   | 0   | 4   | 3   |
| Totals:   | 158 | 197 | 163 | 183 | 195 | 180 | 223 | 198 | 172 | 191 | 147 | 119 | 130 | 138 | 130 |

The “other” fanzine for 2000 was from Sweden. Looking forward, fanzine receipts for the first two months of 2002 have run over 50% ahead of the previous two years and bode well for a bumper crop.



Few people alive today can remember what it was like in those days when writers and fans used only typewriters. I was there, though, back before the dawn of time.

I worked on typewriters for years and was fascinated by the things. I loved the feel of the keyboard, the busy, rattling noise when you typed, the purposeful crash and clatter of the carriage

when you pushed it back to start a new line. I liked the oily, metallic smell of the mechanism, the bulky shape, the solid weight. If I saw a typewriter at rest, so to speak, I'd stare at it in fascination, imagining all the hidden words locked up inside it, waiting to be released by the keys. Even today, when typewriters have become obsolete, the sound of someone typing, heard from another room, or wafting out of an open window, is still to me a romantic one.

My first grown-up decision, when I was about twelve, was also one of the best and most significant of my life: it was to learn how to type. My parents had an old Olivetti portable they never used, so I pulled it down from the top of their wardrobe and practiced on that. By sheer force of occupancy that typewriter soon became 'mine' and when I first became involved with fandom and began to write stories I hoped to get published, that was the typewriter I used. My parents, bowing to the inevitable, gave me a new Hermes portable for my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday and I wrote on it for years. I would write sitting on the edge of my bed, balancing the thing on my knees. For a long time I couldn't imagine it would be possible to work any other way. The whole idea of writing and being a writer was intrinsically bound up with the clatter and rattle, the sheer physical labor, of being on a typewriter.

I loved my Hermes, but by the end of the 1960s it had been borrowed by Graham Hall, taken to America and crushed in Pan Am's baggage-handling shed. Other typewriters came and went, gradually becoming larger and more sophisticated as the years went by. Writing on my lap of course became impossible once I graduated to office machines. The last typewriter I owned was an Adler electric, a beautifully made German machine which worked reliably for years.

However, changes were afoot. Word processors were starting to become available and you couldn't help hearing about the advantages that purportedly accrued if you wrote with them. Although at this time, the early 1980s, the kit was by modern standards almost unbelievably expensive—prices in excess of £10,000 (about \$16,000) were not at all unusual for what would now seem to be slow processors and cumbersome systems, with minimal memory, no hard disk and monochrome display—a few of the wealthier writers began to move over to the new technology. We lesser mortals remained skeptical,

tending to disbelieve the propaganda that was heard with increasing frequency in bars at cons, or enthusiastically written up in writers' magazines. The trouble was that most of the early converts to word processors were hacks or technophiles, so when they said their new computers helped them write faster, write more, even write better, we others rather doubted they were in a position to know.

For a while, you could reassure yourself that computers were not at all suitable for serious or artistic writers. Or poor ones.

Then came 1984, a year that brought seismic changes to my life, both professionally and personally. Amongst other things, one of my novels, *The Glamour*, made me a lot of money, by what felt like a fluke. Although I had not become wealthy, I did for the first time in my life have cash to spare.

But there is something austere and unforgiving in me and although I know it sounds like a perversely accurate reaction to the very fact that a book of mine had done well made me wonder what could be wrong with it! Once this thought had taken hold I could not rid myself of it. Within a few weeks I was feeling discouraged, washed up. I had been a free-lance writer for sixteen years without a break and I felt the pressure of staleness on me. But I knew no other way of making a living and was committed to continuing to write until I dropped. I clearly needed a change.

Meanwhile, more cash rolled in. One of the ironies of money is that when you don't need it you get more of it. The rich get richer; it's a scientific fact. In October of that year I unexpectedly received a tax rebate of just under three thousand pounds. The British tax system works in arrears. The year before I finished *The Glamour* had been one of my typically hard up periods and I'd made a huge tax loss. Although by this time I was temporarily rolling in the stuff, the rules said that I had to be paid a rebate. There suddenly it was, in my hand.

I realized I was running out of excuses about buying a computer. But I am cautious by nature and I still had reservations. I went first to a bookshop and bought a book on the subject.

The only relevant title I could find that day was one by Ray Hammond called *The Writer and the Word Processor*. I read it quickly and with interest, but it wasn't a particularly good book and I felt it promised me wonders without telling me

what they were. There were the now-familiar claims about writing more, writing more quickly, writing better and so on. I seriously doubted much of this. However, one of the authors Ray Hammond interviewed in the course of his book said something that touched a response in me. Acquiring a computer, she said, had given her an unexpected stimulus at a time when she was feeling jaded with her writing: she had had to relearn how to write, modifying old habits to the new technology. At any other time I would have found this off-putting, but that day it spoke acutely to me. That was how I felt: I needed a new challenge, no matter how artificial.

It was enough for me. A few days later the tax rebate money had gone and I had a brand-new computer on my desk. It was a make that has long since disappeared: an Apricot PC, with two 720K disk drives (no hard drive) and a mere 256K of memory. Although it ran a form of MS-DOS, it was not compatible with anything except other Apricots. A word-processing program called SUPERWRITER was bundled with the machine, as was a large pile of manuals purporting to explain how to use everything. I opened the first of these.

What followed is familiar to many intelligent but computer-illiterate people. Such people delude themselves into believing that common sense and a willingness to read instruction manuals is all that's needed to open the door to comprehension. Nothing could be less true. I was staggered by the feelings of stupidity and paralysis that swept over me.

I was soon in touch with Dave Langford, who was in the process of buying the same machine. For a while we bellowed deafly at each other down the phone, but quickly realized an exchange of letters would be better. Over the next few months a stream of correspondence accordingly flowed between us, in which I tried to articulate my feelings of frustration with the computer and Dave, patiently and often amusingly, tried to explain to me how to use the thing properly. It was an almost ideal situation, at least for me. Although Dave understood the technical stuff he didn't, so to speak, adopt it as a religion. His explanations were not only comprehensible and workable, they were almost always expressed in witty language and he would often suggest funny or intriguing ways of trying things out.

Even so, the process of learning was, to the

surprise of us both, two-way. Dave, who had worked with computers for several years, assumed that most people would quickly get the hang of them. I think he found it interesting to discover the quality, the *type*, of ignorance I displayed: I was clearly capable of writing a novel, of repairing my car, of being taller than Harlan Ellison, but when I saw the error message 'Abort Retry or Ignore?' I didn't instantly realize that the computer was expecting me to reply by typing one of the letters 'A', 'R' or 'I.'

Meanwhile, my eyes were slowly being opened to the possibilities of what a computer could be made to do. I already knew that a lot of writers learnt enough of the basics to be able to get a manuscript written and printed, but rarely explored beyond that.

Dave made me feel that this was akin to learning to drive a car, but only well enough to go down to the local shops, staying in first gear and following a long diversionary route which avoided traffic lights or intersections.

While all this was going on my private life was in a state of flux. In the summer of 1985 I began house-hunting and in August I moved into a small cottage in Wiltshire that had been slowly falling to pieces for a century. It needed repairs to all the floors, the staircase, the garden walls, the cellar, the chimney stack ... At last I had found something which would eat up my money! What had seemed for several months to be an almost infinite amount of spare cash suddenly revealed its true nature: it wasn't all that much after all and a huge proportion of it was going to go on income tax.

In this context a growing interest in computers was not only trivial, it was also slightly embarrassing. I knew I should be thinking about writing another novel, partly because I wanted to and partly because I needed to. It was the only way I knew how to earn a living. Meanwhile, though, the letters between Dave and me continued to flow, full of fascinating information about batch files, boot-up tracks and font editors.

One emerging theme in Dave's letters was that he was thinking of producing a disk of utilities to help other users. He was dreaming up new utilities, programs and routines that would make SUPERWRITER much easier to use and which would generally put the Apricot on a par with other computers. Much of this was based on what

he had, so to speak, learned from me.

I didn't see the point at first. What *I* had needed when I bought the computer was friendly advice, not another damned disk to stick in the thing. Dave seemed to know what he was doing, though, so I didn't discourage him. While I was buying the house he placed an advert in one of the computer magazines and soon afterwards reported that he had sold several copies of the disk. Inquiries about it were still pouring in.

By this time I had a copy of the disk myself and under Dave's patient encouragement had learned how to use it. The printed instructions he sent me seemed a bit cryptic, though, and to my mind depended rather heavily on pre-existing knowledge of computers. This had always been a central concern of mine: when you feel stupid about computers you feel *really* stupid and (at least at the outset) think you need someone to say something like, "Pick up the disk and put it in the drive on the left-hand side of the computer; type the word START and press the Enter key once."

In fact, with the benefit of hindsight I realize that Dave's instructions were admirably concise and reliable, but at the time I had so often put myself into the rôle of a computer idiot that I overreacted in the other direction. After some discussion, remarkably good-natured under the circumstances, I rewrote the instructions in a more simple-minded explanatory way. Once Dave had gone over them again he printed the revised version and sent that out instead.

At this stage the software enterprise was Dave's alone and I was merely his assistant. My main function was as resident "computer wally": Dave apparently reasoned to himself that if I could make his programs work then anyone could. I also helped out with writing some of the brochures and instruction manuals and to show willing I began printing most of the literature on my desktop Canon photocopier. Dave chipped me in for a quarter of the profits.

The profits were real. They were small in absolute terms but for both of us they seemed like welcome surplus income, spare cash. We both had established careers as writers and although money is an endless problem for writers you can, usually, get by. In my own case I was still in theory rolling in the stuff. Although buying the house and running up other expenses had eaten a huge amount out of my savings, I still had a surplus and everything to do with money continued to have a

faint air of unreality. I realized that unless I followed up *The Glamour* with a new novel fairly soon this state of affairs would not last—there was a divorce settlement looming and I had to pay the tax bill soon—but nothing insulates you from reality more warmly than a big bank balance. In this context, a few hundred pounds from selling software seemed like pocket money and whether or not that sort of money would continue to pour in was irrelevant.

It didn't sink in straightaway. I had thought at first it was just a hobby, a mild distraction, but I had entered the software business.

A business it certainly was and it was undoubtedly expanding. Inquiries continued to pour in and most of them converted into sales. Dave sold his fiftieth disk within the first month, coincidentally at the same time as I was settling into my new house. A second advertisement produced more inquiries, more sales. What felt like easy pocket money was starting to arrive in impressive amounts.

We realized that people were expecting us to look and behave more like a firm. There were internal pressures for this too. Although we both intended to go on writing as our main activity and we had no plans to set up business premises or to hire staff, or anything like that, we nevertheless had to have printed letterheads, a bank account, some kind of agreement between ourselves, and so on. As a first step Dave and I agreed to form a business partnership, trading under the name 'Ansible Information.' I had no say in the choice of name (nor reluctance to adopt it). Dave's compelling argument was that he already had a bank account for his *Ansible* subscription money and expenses. The software money could be processed painlessly through that.

With increasing business came increasing work. Dave's tasks were becoming onerous. As well as doing all the programming work he was formatting the disks, copying the software to them, making out invoices, then wrapping up the packages and mailing them. I fell into the habit of driving over to his house in Reading once a week and helping out. I usually printed and collated the manuals at home, then bound them up at Dave's house in the dodgy spine-glueing machine we had bought at a discount.

It wasn't long before Dave discovered there were many downsides to selling software. People

are never satisfied with what you send them. They ask indignantly: "Why doesn't your program do *this*?", and "Why can't I make it do *that*?", and "When I got your disk and read your instructions it did *the other* to my computer and now it won't work at all." Dave, conscientious as ever, would spend his days patiently coping (only a few of the letters we received were courteous or amusing or even grammatical), endlessly revising his software, endlessly improving it, endlessly seeking to make it foolproof, writing special little utilities to deal with special little problems. Hours of your life can slip by while trying to debug a program, or modifying it to do one particular thing for one insistent and ultimately ungrateful customer.

Dave's poor hearing created another problem we should have anticipated: people kept tracing his phone number and ringing up and asking for information about the disks. Worse, many of them wanted long (and to Dave, inaudible) chats about the thrilling things you could do with SUPERWRITER. As soon as we realized this was an annoyance that wasn't going to go away, I volunteered to use my own phone number as the business number and relieve Dave of that particular problem.

Dave's problem then became mine. As word gradually spread, so the pressure on the telephone steadily increased. At first it wasn't too bad—at least I could hear what people were saying—but by the middle of 1986 the incoming calls had assumed the proportions of a major inconvenience. My telephone rang more or less all day, an endless distraction from other work.

The content of the conversations was repetitive and therefore boring and vexatious. Many of the calls were simple requests for information: I would note down a name and address and later send a brochure. But others were the fascinating chats Dave Langford was now being spared, about how the caller had just discovered he could print words in italics (and couldn't understand why I didn't want to hear about it for the next two hours). Worse still, many of the calls contained technical questions about software or hardware, most of which I was frankly unable to answer. Feeling like an idiot, I was always saying: "Er ... let me ask my business partner and I'll call you back." This would then entail a shouted phone call to Dave, or in later times an exchange of e-mail or fax messages,

before I could return the original call ... only to find the caller was in a meeting, on another line, sheltering behind an answering machine, no longer interested, unable to remember the query, and so on.

As time went by I gradually picked up enough working knowledge to at least sound like I knew what I was talking about when a technical matter came up, but I never really got the hang of all that. It was always changing, for one thing. One ploy that regularly annoyed me was when some intending customer, browsing through a computer magazine, would notice a new development or a bit of fresh jargon and give Ansible Information a ring to see what we knew about it, and therefore, presumably, establish how good we were. Thus it was, for just one instance, that I first heard about a planned Microsoft program called Windows.

Another huge intrusion came in the form of the persistent telephone calls from computer magazines pleading with us to place advertisements. This was a previously unsuspected activity about which I had to learn fast.

I soon realized how it worked. Each magazine had a staff of telephone canvassers (presumably on commission), whose job was to scan the advertising columns of their rivals. When they spotted someone not yet on their own books they would phone up and try to solicit some adverts. During the mid-1980s there were between twenty and thirty monthly computer magazines being published in Britain and every one of them would ring me up once or twice a month and badger me to place an advertisement with them. In theory you could simply say 'no' and hang up, but in practice they were trained telephone cold-callers and knew how to keep you talking. Also, of course, there was the inescapable fact that if Dave and I wanted to go on selling software we had to advertise it somewhere and so we were not entirely free to slam the door on them. Almost without exception the canvassers were obnoxious yuppies and a call from them invariably left me irritated and depressed.

In any event my telephone line was tied up all day and soon my own friends, and more alarmingly my literary agent and publishers, began to complain that my phone was always engaged. Eventually I had to have a second line installed. The new number became the personal line for Leigh and myself but the sheer volume of

incoming calls on the old number did not slacken.

Then there were the brochures. Inquiries had to be answered with detailed information about what we were selling and so Dave and I wrote and printed various versions of the brochures. I photocopied these on my tiny Canon machine in Wiltshire and always tried to keep a good number of them in stock, but the demand was so great that almost every day I had to stand over the copier for an hour or more. With enough copies printed, collated and stapled I then had to attend to the intellectually unrewarding task of putting them in envelopes, addressing and stamping them. On a typical day I would spend up to two hours attending to this, but at busy times most of a day could slip by in a mindless haze of toner fumes and stamp-licking.

Once a week Ansible Information would come together in reality as well as theory when I drove to Reading for the weekly mailing sessions.

There were convivial moments—Dave and I would take an hour for lunch in the local pub and for a while we would chat about normal matters like books, friends, cons, and all that—but most of the day consisted of fairly hard work. Dave would be in one room, making up the disks, printing the invoices, keeping the address list up to date, while I would be in the other, binding our manuals, putting the packages together, keeping up with paperwork. We usually finished in time to catch the last mail collection and would trudge down the road with armfuls of stuff for sending. An average week would see about twenty or thirty packages mailed to customers; once or twice we dispatched huge consignments, feeling smug about all the money we were paying in.

There was a considerable amount of money passing through our hands when Ansible Information was at its peak. The average order was for software priced in excess of £75 and sometimes much more than that. Multiply that by the usual number of packages each week and you will get some idea of how much turnover we were generating. Unfortunately, it tended to pass through our hands, rather than stay in them.

We had many expenses to meet, of which the largest was the hated advertising. Once we had reached a certain level of activity we were on a money treadmill: we had to keep paying huge sums out to keep getting huge sums in, and we needed the huge sums coming in to meet the huge sums going out. Of course there was a margin and

we happily pocketed our shares of it, but the profits always lay frustratingly in that no-man's-land of being not enough to make us rich but yet too much to let us feel we could pack in the whole business.

Ansible's software was always changing. There was never a typical period.

The first disk (called with immense originality the 'ANSIBLE SUPERWRITER DISK'; I thought of the name, not Dave) was the early success; it didn't take too long to think up enough stuff to put out a sequel, then eventually a combined package of the two. Dave also developed a tiny but lucrative program that 'patched' a bizarre display convention in SUPERWRITER: ordinary text was displayed dazzlingly in bright or bold letters on the computer monitor; boldfaced text was displayed in dim or normal letters. Dave simply reversed this, making SUPERWRITER easier on the eye and logical into the bargain. We sold hundreds of these programs. A third package was a specialist program for writers: it enabled you to compile a book index from SUPERWRITER documents.

So far so good, but the Apricot computer was discontinued by the manufacturers a few months after we started. There was an upsurge in sales for us (because for a time there were thousands of obsolete Apricots being sold for a song) but after that our Apricot business gradually ran down. However, Dave soon came up with an ingenious postponement of the inevitable: a utility that would allow people to run their crummy ancient Apricot software (including the now old-fashioned SUPERWRITER) on the IBM compatibles they were buying to replace the Apricot. Dave called the program APE and in no time it was selling quickly. When we realized how much money APE was saving our customers we increased the price, then several times more. It kept us going for three or four more years, then it too began to decline. Meanwhile, Amstrad had brought out their PCW range of word processors and after a certain amount of grumbling (the PCW is a breathtakingly lousy machine for which to write software, not least because it used the archaic CP/M operating system), Dave adapted a couple of our old Apricot packages—the indexing program and a word-counter for Locoscript—and we started selling those. To our amazement the indexing program sold hundreds of copies in this

version, but because of the generally low retail price of all Amstrad software we were never able to make much profit from it.

The business itself also kept changing. We began as a one-man band with an assistant, then soon after converted into an informal business partnership. For a while we operated as a limited company.

We generally worked in a state of harmony and concurrence, so the informal nature of our arrangement suited us both. However, we learnt the hard way that in business an informal partnership is none too safe a proposition. We were soon dicing with disaster.

It was our own fault. We never quite threw off the notion that we weren't entirely serious about what we were doing. From the point of view of the rest of the world this meant we seemed to have several bad habits, of which being disrespectful to important software companies was about the worst. For instance, while Apricots were still being manufactured we became resellers for the early DOS-based versions of WordPerfect. At this time, WP was being imported into Britain by an obscure company which I'll call Watchdog Software. When WP hit the big time, Watchdog grew into an immense player on the software scene. We liked WP and cheerfully recommended it to our customers, mainly because it was vastly superior to SUPERWRITER. It wasn't long before we were reselling it in substantial quantities on behalf of Watchdog. Unfortunately, they had a crass and cynical attitude and we didn't like their operation. Their version of WP hadn't been configured for the Apricot at all well and it had several bugs and omissions. The technical support people at Watchdog were hopeless on everything we raised with them. (One of them actually said to me on one occasion: "Er ... let me ask my business partner and I'll call you back." His business partner was of course the head office of WordPerfect Corporation in the USA and he never did call back.) Ansible soon marketed a disk of Langford patches and utilities to go with the program (it included a macro editor that was mysteriously unavailable in the main program and a utility for converting old SUPERWRITER documents into a format WordPerfect could read) and we profitably sold that alongside copies of the main program.

It all stopped when the watchdogs up at Watchdog got wind of what we were doing. With

what we considered to be a complete lack of sense they threatened to sue us for bringing their product into disrepute and for passing off our product as theirs. The fact that we had been successfully promoting their program for months, and that many of our customers simply wouldn't have bought it without Dave's ingenious extras, cut no ice with them. Long letters arrived from lawyers specializing in corporate libel. As partners we would both be liable, without limit, for the cost of damages. In other words, there was a real danger that those humorless oafs at Watchdog would bankrupt us both. We wriggled out of the problem by nimble thinking and a bit of unanswerable cheek, but for safety's sake we decided after that to convert ourselves into a limited company.

Ansible Information hastily bought an off-the-peg company called Jetbuff Ltd and a mere instant later we changed the company's name to the much more aesthetic Ansible Information Ltd. Somewhat late in life, Dave and I had become company directors.

The company ran for a few years, but we discovered that the single biggest disadvantage to being incorporated was that by law we had to employ an accountant. After the cost of advertising, the accountant's annual fee became our largest expense. As soon as we could we dissolved the company and reverted to the informal partnership we both much preferred. After that we dealt with the risk of lawsuits by being studiously polite about companies who were getting rich importing software they didn't completely understand.

So how did all this affect my writing career?

It's instructive to look back through my work diary for the relevant years, where the facts speak for themselves.

1984 was the year it all began. I finished and sold *The Glamour* in the first part of the year but as well as writing fiction I had an active career as a freelance writer. For instance, I was producing a regular column for the book-trade magazine *The Bookseller*. I was also writing articles and reviews for several newspapers and magazines. For a while I worked as a script-editor on an abysmally awful American TV series. In the second half of that year these extra activities began to go into decline. As 1984 ended I wrote a novella called *The Ament* on my new Apricot, struggling all the

way with the odd feeling of working on a computer. That was the last fiction I was to write until 1989.

In 1985, I managed a few short reviews and articles, and a TV script (never broadcast).

In 1986, at Ansible Information's height, I wrote two short book reviews (both of computer books!) and novelizations of two films.

In 1987, two book reviews and a single article.

In 1988, two articles.

These were the years I lost. More were to come, though not with quite such stark proof of stagnation.

However, to be fair, and to be accurate, it was not all Ansible Information's fault. Getting divorced, moving house and starting a new life are each on their own huge distractions. I had all three going on. I was also in a state of paralysis over my work. The crisis of confidence that *The Glamour* had started turned out to be a real one. On top of everything, this was the period when I was confronting the long personal dilemma about whether or not I wanted to write science fiction any more. If not, then what instead? I was tired of SF and could see that the genre was degenerating into send-up novels, TV tie-ins and fantasy series, but I also found most of the 'mainstream' just as unexciting. I was unsure which way to go, what to write next. Everything I had ever argued about science fiction, and the traps it presented to writers, seemed to be coming true, with myself, ironically, as a principal victim. There is nothing like this kind of uncertainty to freeze me creatively.

But the sheer time-wasting impact of Ansible Information cannot be pretended away.

Months went by when I did not write a single word, other than computer-related material or an occasional letter. The flow of commissions for reviews and journalism dried up entirely. Commissions don't come out of the air: you have to be around and your writing has to be on people's minds. Also, your phone line shouldn't be engaged all day. Instead of carrying on with the career I had had in 1984, generally visible in London to editors and publishers, I was in an obscure village in Wiltshire, speaking on the phone to complete strangers and explaining why Dave Langford's utility for formatting documents in two columns was going to change their lives.

Part of the problem for me was that I did enjoy and benefit from some of the Ansible Information

work. It had its rewards, not the least of which was working with Dave Langford, whose wit can enliven the dullest activity. We both compensated for the essential tedium of what we were doing with a number of resorts: a private language of communication between ourselves, full of puns, silly abbreviations and nicknames; we inserted small jokes into our software manuals; we published a newsletter for our customers, the apparent point of which was to keep them informed about the cutting-edge of computer science, but which in reality was to flog them remaindered copies of our old books; we used our trade connections to buy software and hardware at rock-bottom prices; and much else. Behind it all was a feeling that we weren't really a part of the computer industry but were skimming around the edge, lobbing in dispatches from our version of the real world. A single example will show what I mean.

During most of this period Dave was reviewing SF and fantasy books for a games magazine called *White Dwarf*. It was a time when book publishers were putting out dozens of books with epic-sounding titles. *The Flood of Runes*, *Horsetrolls of the Shipbringer: Volume Two* and *Grottos and Skyskulls* were the sort of titles then current.

Dave, with a fine satirical eye, noticed that all such titles were simply ringing the changes on a small vocabulary of presumed fantasy-type words. Accordingly, he wrote a computer program that took this vocabulary, shuffled it about and produced an endless list of new fantasy titles, every bit as derivative as the real ones: *The Grottoquest of the Shoredragon*, *Holy Knight*, *A Shadow of Angels* and *The Chaos-Sea Follower* were typical. One afternoon in Reading, during a break in the chores, Dave showed me the program. He had called it DRIVEL.

We played with it for a bit, giggling at some of the combinations that appeared, marveling at how genuine many of them seemed. It was like tapping into a cybernetic version of the brain of Stephen R. Donaldson, Raymond E. Feist or David Gemmell. Dave showed me how to modify it, extending or restricting the basic vocabulary. It wasn't long before we realized we could turn the program to numerous other stultifying genres.

A few weeks later DRIVEL was ready to be marketed, under a less candid but much more respectable name, as an all-purpose random text generator. The basic program was bulked out with

a simple text editor, a handful of sample lexicons (fake recipes, duff horoscopes, lousy haiku, etc., as well as the original driving fantasy titles), a couple of utilities for checking the syntax of the lexicons and a manual explaining with a straight face how to compose and generate your own random text. Over the years that followed we sold several hundred copies of the package, had it favorably reviewed in computer magazines and received many admiring letters from customers. To Dave and myself, however, it will be forever DRIVEL.

So the weeks and months dragged by, but I was becoming restless. I felt I had walked away from the problems of my writing and replaced them with something that used up my days, was at best only mildly diverting and at worst exhausting and which wasn't even making me much money. This last factor was bulking large: the divorce settlement was expensive and the Inland Revenue had snatched the rest. My reserves were running out fast and my traditional source of income—a novel every three or four years, helped out by shorter commissions of reviews and stories—had vanished. Somewhere along the way what I had thought of as pocket money had become my principal source of income.

Meanwhile, the telephone was ringing and a man with a funny treble voice like John Major's wanted to know if we could come round to his house in Leighton Buzzard and repair the computer he had just bought from Dixons... oh, by the way, did our Apricot emulator run on his Nintendo?

Fighting all this, I began to plan my next novel. It took ages to get to grips with it, because thinking up a novel is the hardest part and the daytime distractions were continuing, but in the end I got it going. I gave it what priority I could: all Ansible Information activities were banned from spilling over into the evenings and weekends and I used that time to try to think and act the way I had done before that soon-to-be-obsolete computer had landed on my desk.

I finished *The Quiet Woman* at the beginning of May 1989, some two years after facing up to the realities of my new situation. I have always been a slow writer but Ansible Information almost certainly created an extra delay. With *The Glamour* finished at the beginning of 1984, I should on past form have had the next novel ready

by 1987 or at the very latest 1988.

Leigh and I had married in the autumn of 1988 and by the time I delivered *The Quiet Woman* she was pregnant with twins. The children were born in October. Parenthood introduced an entirely new dimension and a whole new range of distractions. Life is always changing.

As was Ansible Information. It was slowly but inevitably running out of steam.

It became increasingly difficult to advertise with any hope of covering the cost. Our most lucrative product was a niche program: a software emulation of an obsolete computer, to be run on a modern computer so that you could use outdated programs designed for the obsolete computer. How do you pitch *that* into a market where everyone else was selling desktop publishing, website designers, modems, sound cards, Windows? Even our PCW software became uneconomic to advertise, as Amstrad lost interest in the machines and one by one their users switched over to IBM compatibility. This time there was no hope of an emulation program to hold back the night.

Leigh and I moved to Hastings in May 1991, needing a larger house for our noticeably larger family. Ansible Information suffered a short hiatus as the telephone contact number temporarily vanished from sight. While we were moving, Dave Langford dealt with the packages alone, but soon after we had settled into the new house I drove over to Reading for one of our days.

Business was noticeably depressed and apart from the usual pleasure of having a couple of drinks with Dave it no longer felt as if the journey was essential. (It was also a much longer drive, taking about five hours in all.) For a while it seemed we had reached the end, but the new telephone number gradually became known and it wasn't long before business resumed.

However, our Ansible days in Reading were a vanishing institution. I went over a few more times but it was obvious to both Dave and myself that it was wasted effort. My last Ansible day was in the summer of that year, the day the journalist John McCarthy was released by Hezbollah. I haven't been back since.

By this time, Dave and I had more reliable ways of keeping in contact: for a while we used fax machines, then shifted over to e-mail. By getting rid of the accountant and by not advertising we got our costs under control.

Ansible Information survived on word-of-mouth and temporarily became profitable once again. But the good old, bad old days were gone forever.

For a couple of years, incoming telephone calls were at something like the former intensity, but I noticed a shift in content. Many of the callers were old customers, getting back in touch. They usually wanted a chat, an enjoyable reflection on how things had changed from the days when we were all picking away at our Apricot PCs. (Yes, but that conversation palls even more quickly than its precursor had, back in 1986!) They would then ask questions that once would have floored me, but with Langfordian help I could cope little better: would our software run under Windows?, would it run on an Apple Mac?, was it compatible with x,y,z?, would it run under VGA or SVGA display? and so on. Every now and then they would show enough interest to buy something. I had learned not only how to answer such questions and keep the calls brief, but more importantly from my point of view how to let the effect of the calls slide off me afterwards so that my days weren't entirely governed by the telephone.

This was still going on when I began writing *The Prestige*, but by the time I'd finished that book in 1995 Ansible Information was as far as I was concerned more or less defunct. More than six years had elapsed this time, since I had sent in *The Quiet Woman*. Six years, not five ... how much of this delay was Ansible's fault?

Not a great deal, in fact, because now there were other reasons. It is no coincidence that the six years that lie between the two novels are the first six years of my children's lives. Another excuse, perhaps, although one a few more people are likely to understand. When I finally began writing *The Prestige* it was with more feelings of insecurity than I have ever known and for ages it was the single hardest thing I have written. Telephone calls from computer users might have interrupted the flow but they had no effect on my self-belief or otherwise as a writer. It was something I had to confront directly, without excuses. I eventually worked through the problems and at the end I took my reward. The last three months of working on *The Prestige* were like magic: I worked long hours and at last felt

confident about the book for every moment I was on it.

Shortly after that book was published in the USA, a brief 'thread' of inquiry about my work appeared in one of the SF Usenet groups. Somebody asked what had happened to me, where had I been all those years? No one seemed to know at first, until someone speculated that I had suffered some kind of mental breakdown after the psychic horrors of writing the last two novels of mine to be published in the US, *The Affirmation* and *The Glamour*.

The truth is a little more complicated than that, not nearly as easily described and much more mundane. But it was also more survivable, was not without fun and something I can put behind myself for good.

Do I regret what happened? Um ... not really, not on balance. It's close, though.

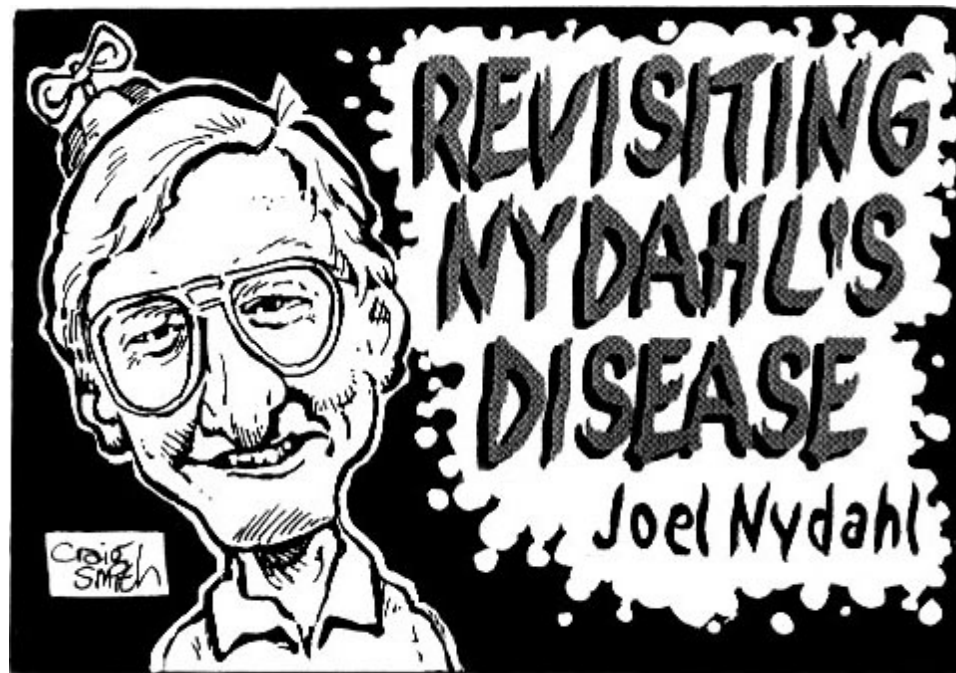
Would I let it happen again? No, never.

Ansible Information still exists, run by Dave Langford alone. The fact that he can cope indicates how low the level of business has become. I am no longer even his assistant, although a few stray telephone calls do still find their way to our number.

I mentioned earlier what happened to my Hermes portable typewriter when Graham Hall took it to the USA. He tragically died a few years later and it fell first to Charles Platt, then to me, to sort out his belongings. Amongst them was Graham's own last typewriter, a magnificent Hermes office machine. He had bought it in the early 1970s, choosing the best-made manual then on the market, something so well engineered and substantial that he hoped it would last him more or less forever. He didn't live long enough to use it for more than a few months. I took possession of it a few years ago and I still have it. I keep it clean and oiled and from time to time I take it out to use for a while.

Computers are here forever and typewriters are forever obsolete, but that Hermes is still for me a thing of intrinsic beauty, something that smells good and clatters convincingly, a permanent reminder of what it was like when I began writing all those years ago.

—Chris Priest



### *Or, A Nostalgic Day in the Life of an Old Fan*

I was amused and bemused to discover that for over four decades I'd furnished grist for the mill of fandom gossip and speculation. I first became aware that I was the stuff of legends (even if very minor ones) when, a few years ago, my friend Linda sent me a printout of a definition she had come across on a fan site:

**'NYDAHL'S DISEASE:** Also know as 'Annisthesia.' A particular kind of gafia or fafia with overtones of 'burnout.' The specific case for which the disease is named involved a young fan named Joel Nydahl, who published a monthly fanzine called *Vega* which became something of a mini-focal point after *Quandry* folded. For the first anniversary issue, Nydahl knocked himself out producing a 100-page annish—a rare accomplishment in those days, particularly for a 16-year-old—but it apparently got little in the way of response and the young fan editor promptly gafiated, puzzled and dismayed. It would appear, however, that some assumptions were made that

were not really true. Friends of Nydahl have stated that he had been falling behind at school while publishing his fanzine and dropped out of fandom not in disgust at the poor response his final effort received but because he was entering college."

—drgafia1@aol.com (Dr. Gafia)

How complimentary to be remembered, even if only for deeds done in my errant youth. Shortly afterwards, I received e-mail messages from two fans (Robert Lichtman and Ted White) who wanted to know if I was the Joel Nydahl who, as a young teenager in the early 1950s, had published a fanzine called *Vega* and a short story in *Imagination*. What bizarre set of circumstances, I wondered, had led two individuals to query me on the same day about events that had taken place nearly half a century earlier? Ted subsequently informed me that I was "still remembered in fandom and that periodically fans ask[ed] if anyone [knew] what became of [me]." One such flurry of inquisitiveness resulted in someone discovering my website and asking once again that question. Ted (who, coincidentally, drew the

cover for the fifth issue of *Vega*) subsequently contacted me and wanted to know about my “present attitude toward fandom” and whether I would be interested in “renewing old ties.” And yet a third fan informed me that I would be eagerly welcomed back into the fold. Many, it seemed, wanted to know for certain what caused my “disappearance.”

Let’s see if I can set the record straight and address some of the rumors by presenting a little autobiographical history—as I remember it.

The first issue of *Vega* appeared in all of its naïve hectograph glory (ah! those purple, gelatinous days) in the fall of 1952. Since I was new to fandom, of necessity contributors were limited to those young souls with whom I had been corresponding. By the time the third issue came out, my father—who financed the entire operation from paper to postage—had purchased a cheap mimeograph which printed all subsequent issues. Since I possess only a limited number of these (including the famous *Vegannish*), my history of the fanzine must be vague and sometimes, I’m afraid, imprecise.

As the months wore on, I got additional subscribers, interest being fueled by a laudatory review in Mari Wolf’s fanzine column in the same issue of *Imagination* (May, 1953) which carried my short story. By the time the first four or five issues had appeared, I was receiving most of the fanzines in print and corresponding with their editors and with as many other fans as possible. Soon Dean A. Grennell (an “old guy” in his late twenties), Mari Wolf, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Harlan Ellison and Robert Silverberg (the last two only a few years older than I) were contributing on a regular basis. Then Redd Boggs, Robert Bloch and Bob Tucker joined in. What a thrill for a young editor. From having to beg for contributions, I was receiving more columns, articles, fiction, and artwork than I could print. Suddenly, to the complete bafflement of my parents, I was a minor celebrity.

In my halcyon *Vega* days, I had one very negative experience—one that bothered me terribly at the time and still bothers me even now. For whatever reason, Marion Zimmer Bradley (who was, as I recall, not yet or only recently published) took a liking to me and offered (I may have asked her) to write a regular column. This she did for a number of issues. Then she wrote another piece—the nature of which I don’t

recall—but asked that it appear above a pen name and that I not reveal who the author was. This I agreed to do—and immediately broke my promise. Marion was furious, and I didn’t blame her. I was mortified and have worn a hair shirt ever since. What a jerk I had been. As far as I know, Marion never revealed my betrayal to anyone, and for that I would thank her even now had she not passed on.

I vividly recall the experience of putting together the *Vegannish*—from rounding up a field of contributors that read like a Who’s Who of Fandom, to typing the 100 mimeograph stencils (justifying the right-hand margins, as Harlan Ellison had been doing in his *Science Fantasy Bulletin*), to printing the gold-colored pages (the idea also copied from Ellison), to coordinating three runs (each of a different color) for the cover, to assembling the monster by walking around the dining room table (often with my mother) collating pages by hand, to mailing both parts (no staple would go through fifty sheets of paper).

Not long ago, I purchased a mimeographed, three-volume version of Harry Warner’s *A Wealth of Fable*, a fascinating account of fandom in the 1950s. Until I learned of the existence of Warner’s work, I had no idea that my years in fandom had been written up. I suppose that now would be the time and this would be place to attempt to set the record straight concerning statements made about me in *A Wealth of Fable*. I say “attempt” because, frankly, although I’m sure of how and when some things happened, I’m not sure about others.

Often Warner quotes me directly. All of the quotes sound accurate, at least plausible; he must have acquired some of the letters I wrote to others. On some matters, however, I doubt that he has the story entirely straight.

There has been much speculation on the demise of *Vega* and on my subsequent disappearance from fandom. On a few of the matters, Warner is definitely wrong. He mentions financial problems as contributing to my decision not to publish a thirteenth issue; he even speculates that selling my short story to *Imagination* helped finance *Vega*. Not true. Financial problems played no part at all in ceasing publication. Nor did “lowered grades in school.” What probably happened (some incidents are vague here) were basketball and girls. It was about this time also that my family moved from

our farm, about six miles outside of Marquette, Michigan, into town; there I was no longer isolated from high school social life and I had a chance to expand my horizons beyond my small upstairs farmhouse room.

The reason I stopped publishing *Vega* and dropped out of fandom is terribly prosaic—hardly the stuff of legend. Suddenly and inexplicably I lost interest in both fandom and science fiction. “Burnout” might be an apt term to describe the final cause of my disappearance; but what caused the final cause is more problematic. I remember the excitement and energy which infused me over the twelve-month life span of *Vega*. I don’t remember any gradual diminishment of that excitement and energy; I don’t remember any warning signs. I remember only that once the *Vegannish* was in the mail, I had no interest in putting out a thirteenth issue; nor, strangely, did I have an urge to read any more science fiction. Warner is probably correct in inferring that I was exhausted.

It would be incorrect to say that I quit fandom “cold turkey” since that expression implies painful withdrawal—and I had none. I never missed what I gave up and never looked back. The theory that I dropped out because I got no response to the *Vegannish* is absurd. It seemed to a fifteen-year-old (not a sixteen-year-old, as stated in the definition of “Nydahl’s Disease”) that the whole world was in awe and praise of what he had done.

After hearing from White and Lichtman, I began to consider renewing my “membership” in fandom—if doing so implied only (as Ted White suggested) an interest in meeting old friends and rehashing old times with individuals whom I fondly remembered. I decided that I might have some interest in doing so.

It didn’t take long to decide that I would attend the Worldcon in Philadelphia, for one day only, while visiting my friend Linda, who lives just outside the city.

**9:45, Saturday morning, September 1, 2001:** I’m on one of the mid-morning trains into downtown Philadelphia. I’ve been studying the Worldcon schedule and feel that I’ve got a busy day planned as well as possible.

**10:15:** I am standing near the end of a very long line inching its way toward the registration area of the Philadelphia Convention Center. The

line is moving much too slowly; I see my plans of being on time for an 11 a.m. session honoring William Tenn (where I will connect with Bob Silverberg) almost certainly dashed. I realize that I have been very naïve. I had thought of descriptions of cons in the ’50s which a few hundred of fans attended. Here, even from my limited perspective, I can see what appear to be thousands milling about in the immense main hallway.

**10:50:** At least the line itself is interesting because eclectic: nondescript individuals like myself, who might be in line for a popular movie; people of all ages in various stages and kinds of makeup and in a variety of costumes (Darth Vader walks by); families with children of all ages (the program tells me that sessions for young people are plentiful); an author (unknown to me) discussing his latest book, which is encountering a series of problems at the publisher. Suddenly, a new line opens up for those who are able to pay cash. I may be saved.

**11:15:** When I arrive late, the session honoring Tenn is well-attended, though not full. At the front of the room sit five panelists. I recognize Silverberg; the others, by sight or name, are unknown to me. There are no formal presentations: Each member of the panel speaks extemporaneously. I am struck by the insight, intelligence, and richness of the comments. I am struck also—almost immediately—by the stupidity of that thought. Why would I expect things to be any different? I suddenly realize something I didn’t know I knew—that when I put the world of science fiction behind me at fifteen, I was incapable of seeing the literature as more than adventures set in strange times and vast space. As the panelists discuss Tenn’s work, I am convinced that I will now reread it from the new perspectives I am gaining.

At the end of the session, I make my way to the front and briefly shake hands with Silverberg. We have seen each other only once before, for ten minutes or so about twenty years ago, and have been exchanging e-mail messages for the past few months. He is busy right now, needing to attend to Tenn. We will connect later, I’m sure, at some unspecified place and time.

**12:20:** I am sitting in a large meeting room with perhaps twenty other people. The session, entitled “Worldcon Orientation,” is designed for babes in the woods, like me (“New to Worldcons

and fandom? Stop by with your questions and we'll introduce you to fandom," the program advertises).

I raise my hand with a question and am eventually called on.

"I belonged to fandom many years ago," I venture. "I'd like to connect with some of the older fans who might have been around then. Is there a list anywhere of those attending, as opposed to those who are presenting?"

"Would you mind telling us your name?" one of the panelists (I believe Leah Zeldes Smith) asks me.

"Joel Nydahl."

**"Joel Nydahl!!!!???"**

I am not prepared for the reaction that this response engenders. Three jaws drop nearly to the ground. "Do you know who this is?" the woman asks the audience. It's not exactly a rhetorical question since (not surprisingly) some don't. But many, to my amazement, do.

"*Vega*," calls out one.

"Nydahl's Disease," yells another.

I nod and smile. I make a few comments about how happy I am to be here (I am) and about how strange it feels (it does) to find out that I am "famous" in this limited way, but how gratifying it is (it is). Finally, the focus is off me and back on orientation to the Worldcon. Since I want to grab a bite to eat, I decide to leave. As I make my way to the door at the back of the room, Leah Smith yells out, "*Don't let him get away!*"

Her husband Dick catches up with me near the door. He wants my address. "You'll be getting lots of fanzines," he says, shaking my hand.

**1:00:** I am in the Exhibit Hall, a huge room filled with commercial enterprises relating, sometimes only tangentially, to science-fiction. (I can buy soft-porn drawings of various futuristic and fantastic individuals cavorting in alien settings.) Among the hundreds of tables and booths, a couple offer pulps from the early 1950s (*Amazing Stories*, *Fantastic Adventures*, *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, *Planet Stories*); this was "my" period, so the attraction is like iron filings to a magnet. I spot and immediately covet the September 1951 issue of *Amazing Stories*, one which I remember owning. (On the cover, a giant, alien-but-beautiful woman carries the unconscious body of a handsome young man, obviously rescued from the wrecked spaceship in

the background; her huge bare breasts, scarcely hidden by the body resting in her arms, vividly illustrate why my mother had doubts about the propriety of the magazines I left lying about the house when I was thirteen.) I suspect that I'll buy this treasure, but I don't want to carry it around all afternoon.

**1:45:** I am standing in front of the *Asimov's/Analog* Table behind which various authors station themselves (according to a schedule) to sign copies of their works. I am waiting for Bob Silverberg with whom I have not been able to connect. He is to appear at two o'clock. He is a very busy man. Connie Willis is signing autographs now. There is a long line, and, unless Silverberg shows up early, I don't see how I will manage to steal a few minutes without being attacked by adoring fans who have been patiently awaiting their turns.

**2:05:** Silverberg is obviously running late. I am bored, so I walk over to a table featuring T-shirts. Nothing much of interest. I look up and see Silverberg stride by quickly and make his way to the *Asimov's/Analog* Table. I'm sure he didn't see me. The line must have a hundred people in it by now. I decide not to take my place at the end (I would feel awkward, having nothing of his to have autographed) nor to walk up to Silverberg directly. That would be too pushy. Perhaps I'll run into him later, by accident.

**2:30:** I am standing in front of a table offering... something for sale; I can't remember what. The owner of the concession is staring at me; actually, he's staring at my name tag. "Silverberg told me you'd be here," he says. I smile and we make small talk; about all I can think to say is how nice it is to be remembered, even if (oddly) by total strangers. He produces a camera from somewhere under the table. "May I take your picture?" I tell him that I would be honored. (During the day, a number of fans have taken my picture. It occurs to me that my likeness may turn up in fanzines all over the country.)

**2:55:** Somehow I find the strength to resist attending "Hamster Divination," at which Esther Friesner will share her "unbelievable hamster tricks."

**3:00:** I've decided to go to a session called "Baycon '68." I arrive early and stand outside so as to intercept Ted White, who is on the panel. Ted is one of the people I've come to the con to see. Although we corresponded as teenagers,

we've never met. We are delighted to see each other and manage to talk for five minutes before he has to take his place as a panelist. He reminds me to show up at the Fan Lounge around 5:30; a lot of fans will be looking forward to meeting me there. Dinner is on the agenda afterwards.

The session is open and free-wheeling. I wasn't around fandom in 1968 and have never before been to a con, but the names being dropped by the panelists (and members of the audience) are familiar and I'm fascinated, both by the subject and by what seems to be Ted's total recall. There is nothing he doesn't remember in detail and nothing about which he doesn't hold a very strong opinion. Ted has, in fact, become what appears to be the unofficial historian-laureate of fandom. Everyone defers to him.

**4:00:** I am at a session called "The Fan Writing Hall of Fame." I've come to hear about Walt Willis and Bob Tucker and others who were famous fan writers when I was active in fandom. I'm happy to find that even I can contribute, if only rather lamely ("What is the reputation now of Dean A. Grennell?").

**5:45:** I am waiting outside the Fan Lounge for my friend Linda to arrive. A college professor, she has been teaching all day at the downtown campus of her university. More amused than impressed, she's very curious about this aspect of my past life. As we enter, I see Ted in the midst of a circle of eight or ten fans. They're discussing fan history. Linda goes off to a far corner of the room to wait and observe. I join the group. Ted introduces me, but it's obvious that everyone there knows who I am. I don't for a moment suspect that they have been "waiting for me," in the sense that if I didn't show up the event would be a failure, but clearly they're glad to see me.

The discussion about fan history continues. I join in occasionally. I am asked to tell about my early days in fandom, about publishing *Vega*, and about my disappearance from fandom. I am astonished to discover that I have forgotten even more of the details of my own life than I had believed! But Ted has not. I thought, for example, that I had never told anyone about dropping out of fandom. Not so, says Ted. It turns out that I wrote to a number of people announcing the fact. I'm happy to learn that I wasn't as big a dope as I had thought.

One member of the group works for Sotheby's and specializes in the relics of fandom.

I am amazed at this fact. I am even more amazed to discover that back issues of *Vega* bring \$35-\$40. He assures me that he will send a few back issues that I don't have. He produces a hardcover copy of Harry Warner's *A Wealth of Fable*—a version I didn't know existed—and turns to a photograph of me charming a "cobra" (a vacuum-cleaner tube with a horseshoe crab shell balanced on top) out a wastepaper basket. He assures me that he will send a copy of the book also.

I'm having a great time. Linda, unfortunately, has had a change of plans thrust upon her and we have to leave soon. I excuse myself and apologize to Ted for having to spoil our dinner plans. I hope he understands.

**6:30:** I want to buy that back issue of *Amazing Stories*, so we hurry to the Exhibition Hall. Like the bazaar in James Joyce's "Araby," it is nearly deserted; only stragglers remain, and the life has gone out of it. The booth selling the magazine has closed, but the owner (trusting soul) has left his stock open and unprotected. I find the issue I want and ask a woman closing up her own booth next door if she will make sure that the \$15 gets to the owner. She assures me that it will.

On the way home, I tell Linda all about my strange, wonderful, surreal day.

After a long career as an English teacher, I am now Chair of the English Department at Broward Community College, just outside Fort Lauderdale, Florida. I have hardly any reminders of my days as a fan—a few issues of *Vega* (the rest having disappeared over the years) and a copy of *Imagination* containing my first and only S-F publication. My interests now are jazz, food, wine, and travel.

I appreciate the opportunity to set the record straight—though now that the mystique has been stripped from my life and times, I fear that I'll be much the poorer.

—Joel Nydahl



# THE KATZ KONTROVERSY: A DOCUMENT

Gordon Eklund



*"I have every confidence that the Fantasy Amateur Press Association will still be here next year for the next election. This is very important, because that's when I plan to run for President...."* Arnie Katz in his FAPazine, Feb 2001

*"It was always the feeling among those who started the club that all four FAPA officers ought at the very least to be human beings...."* Jack Speer reminiscing on the Internet, June 2002

The revelation early in the year 2002 that the current incarnation of old-time New York fan "Arnie Katz" was in actuality a house name adopted by a loose assortment of Las Vegas fanzine fans in order to (in the words of Ken Forman) "provide a veneer of cohesiveness to our collective fanac" has sparked considerable controversy throughout the length and breadth of fandom. What follows is a series of statements of fact gathered by the author over time as the controversy has grown tentacles and spread like rancid butter on a poppy seed bagel. That which follows, one hopes, will serve if not as the final statement on this matter, then at least as a starting point for collective fannish closure.

1

"We were neofans," Forman has been quoted as saying. "And fandom seemed to us a giant and frightening morass, a Gordian knot to be unraveled, a sandwich of living writhing beetles to be nibbled and swallowed. I don't remember which of us came up with the 'Katz' idea. It may even have been in the form of a letter. I think it was Boyd Raeburn from up in Canada—we wanted him as Guest of Honor at one of our early local cons but he said he didn't have a cool costume—who wrote saying that he'd heard that Arnie Katz had settled in Las Vegas and was working as a barker at a strip club. Of course none of us had even heard of 'Katz' then, so it all sort of naturally developed from there."

2

An anonymous, heavy-set female Las Vegas fan adds the following: "We just thought it was a funny name. Like Waldo Meatpacker, something like that. 'Arnie Katz.' We just thought it was weird and wild and very very hot—you know *muy caliente*—like anonymous group sex when everybody's wearing a different fantasy costume."

3

The matter of the documented existence of a "Joyce Katz" has been raised by several stubborn doubters. Ms. "Katz" herself responds: "They paid me ten bucks to use the name. Ten bucks and all the Old Granddad I could put away and I'd have people out to some rental house and we'd hang around and I'd go to their cons. The real name's Meatpacker. Patti Jo Meatpacker. I've been married fifteen years to the same no good lazy thieving bastard whose name ain't Arnie, let me tell you. I'm a dancer in the chorus at the Crystal Lounge. But what I really want to do is act."

4

And what of the amiable, beaming figure of the "Arnie Katz" whose presence at innumerable conventions over recent years has been thoroughly testified to? Ms. Meatpacker/"Katz" elucidates: "They used different guys. It was never my no good husband but one time it was my brother-in-law Ralph. When he was out of work from the cab company. They paid your expenses plus ten dollars and they gave you the fake mustache and the glasses and a pillow if you needed it. Mostly they used homeless people. We got them in Vegas like hairs on an armpit. One time at one of the Corflu things—I think it was the one in California—the guy being Arnie got so loaded he swallows his own mustache. And nobody notices. It was as funny as a kangaroo on crutches. I still bust a gut to this day."

5

So who did the writing? Ken Forman again: "Nobody really. We just sort of recycled. Jack Speer let us borrow from his fanzine collection. I don't know if he knew what we were doing but if he did he never let on. We took a bunch of old articles and just changed the names and moved some of the words around, especially the adjectives. Nobody caught on. One time Greg Benford wrote a loc raving about some article or another in *Wild Heirs* and it was really just one of his own old editorials from *Void*. The one about cleaning out his desk. We must have used that one ten times. The thing with fans is they're bright with high IQs but very little memory, even when it's written down. I think it comes from smoking all that dope back in the sixties."

6

Ken Forman's "Final Statement on the Matter of 'Arnie Katz'" as it appears in his current FAPazine: "It was just our way of gaining entry

to fandom on a more or less equal footing. If it bothers anybody or hurts their feelings, then I apologize to everyone. Such was never our intention or our motivation."

7

And yet what of the supposed real Arnie Katz reported by several fans to be living and working in contemporary Las Vegas. Forman again: "Sure, we tried to find him. Who wouldn't? We wanted to at least let him know what we were doing and hope it was okay with him. But he wasn't in the phone book. Nobody'd ever hear of him. We even asked this private investigator my wife knew from when she was dealing cards at the Hilton and he nosed around and came back and said there wasn't any such person—not in the state of Nevada anyway. It was like, if he ever had existed, this real Arnie Katz, he'd dropped off the face of the planet. So we went on with the hoax."

8

An anonymous Vegas femmefan again: "A bunch of us developed a real crush on ol' Arnie. We wanted to sleep with him. All of us. One at a time or in a big bunch, it didn't matter. But he wasn't real. It was just a big fantasy. Like Mr. Spock. When we were little kids we all wanted to screw him, too."

9

So there it lies. Or does it? On August 13, 2002, old time fan rich brown posts the following on an obscure internet chat group: "To all whom it may or may not concern: Arnie Katz does not exist. He never existed. He wasn't real when he was in Vegas and he wasn't real when he was in Brooklyn. The guy's a figment and all of you who believed in him, all of you who ever went down that bad road, then I'm telling you you've been had, brother, and big time."

10

Within days another old-line fan and supposed friend of "Katz"'s from back in the sixties, Ted White, responds: "Rich just got his medication mixed up. It was Tuesday and he thought it was Thursday and he got the wrong bottle. Of course Arnie was real back in the sixties. Jeez, he came to Fanoclast meetings, some of them at my own home."

11

Somebody surely did, but who? Rich brown again: "Ted White is a friend of mine but he's scared shitless. He doesn't know the whole story, none of us do, but I'll tell you this much. The only

medication I ever took was out of the business end of a Cherokee peace pipe. And Ted White knows that, too.”

## 12

Another former fan from that era, a one-time close associate of both White and Brown but who prefers not to have his name used here: “I don’t know nothing about no Las Vegas Arnie, that’s way after my time, but the guy I knew in Brooklyn, he was as real as the snot in your nose. One time we were riding the subway way up in the Bronx, doing an Allen Ginsberg thing, and these four punks come up and start hassling us. One pulls a shiv and Arnie takes the blade away from him so fast your eye can’t follow. Go thou and forswear violence in all your deeds, he sez. I mean, I ain’t making this up, he really said that. Now you tell me, a guy like that: he’s a hoax?”

## 13

Greg Benford is not only a fan but also a professor of physics at a leading American university. When asked to comment on the controversy he responds with a formal statement issued through a spokesperson: “According to Einstein, it’s fully conceivable for an ‘Arnie Katz’ to exist here in this spot while simultaneously not existing in there, that other spot. It’s all a matter of temperaments Kelvin, of the universal continuum, of mass plus energy divided by Jennifer Lopez’s waist size. If you don’t believe me, ask Stephen Hawking.”

## 14

From the Los Angeles *Times* September 6, 2002: “Physicist and sci-fi author Gregory Benford has recently been incarcerated in a private mental institution, a spokesperson revealed. The precise nature of his affliction is not known.”

## 15

San Francisco fan Len Bailes has been named over the years “Arnie Katz”’s oldest fan acquaintance. In fact, according to one version, Bailes and “Katz” went to school together as boys. Bailes explodes this myth: “That was all a mistake, a confusion. I think I know how it got started. The guy I went to school with was named Arnie Blatz. Blatz, not Katz. He was a moron, a real ignorant ignoramus. He couldn’t have spelled cat frontwards, let alone if his name was Katz. The biggest pimples I’ve ever seen on a kid, too. I don’t know what happened to him. Somebody told me he died in Vietnam. Stepped

on a land mine. No, he was never a fan.”

## 16

Robert Lichtman of Glen Ellen, California, has accumulated a core collection of most of the major fanzines published over the last fifty years. His opinion for this article: “I’ve nothing to say. Lives have been threatened over this and to me it’s just not worth it. Fandom is supposed to be for fun, a way to relax short of spilling one’s seed on the ground. You shouldn’t have to worry about getting locked up in a loony bin for the rest of your life.”

## 17

“I remember being shown the large, bland object that purported to be ‘Arnie Katz’ long ago at Ted White’s home in Brooklyn, and was immediately suspicious of its authenticity, but when I voiced those suspicions in my mild, befuddled way I was immediately shouted down (‘He’s confused,’ they said, ‘he’s only a pro, he doesn’t understand fannish stuff any more’) and I have kept quiet ever since.”

—Bob Silverberg in *Snickersnee*, August 2001

## 18

And Harry Warner, Jr., our leading fannish historian. “Katz? Arnie Katz? There was once a Milton Katz who published a fanzine called *Barf* but I think it only lasted two issues and you couldn’t read it—it was published using purple ink on single-ply toilet paper and there was too much see-through. In my opinion, Arnie Katz does not now and never did exist. But that’s just my opinion.”

## 19

Bob Tucker, who goes back to the very beginning: “I remember Degler.”

## 20

Albert Einstein: “The universe is stranger than we imagine. Stranger than we ever can imagine.”

## 21

From a private letter of “Arnie Katz” circa 1966: “The cool thing about fandom is that you never really know anybody. It’s all a paper world. I’ve known some people three years like Harry Warner and never even met them once. And even after you do meet them, how do you know it’s the same guy?”

—Gordon Eklund



I was a member of the faculty of Warwick School in Singapore for three years. The school was under the auspices of the British Ministry of Defense's Forces Education Service. There were thousands of the British armed forces stationed in the republic. Many of the personnel were married and had brought their families with them. And, of course, their children had to be educated.

The school principal was a larger than life character. Mrs. Brown stood over six feet tall and was almost as wide. Had not Erle Stanley Gardner been writing twenty years earlier, I would have strongly suspected that she had been the model for his Bertha Cool, one of the two leading ladies in his *A. A. Fair* series.

This lady invariably wore a *very* loose-fitting cotton dress printed with some outrageous floral pattern. Those of us who were feeling particularly unkind would quip that the dresses were supplied by Rent-A-Tent or that she could be invited to confront any enemy in jungle warfare and scare them to death as she loomed out from the camouflaging undergrowth.

She wore her graying hair in a lengthy pony-tail which she swept forward over her right shoulder. For some reason she was extremely susceptible to one faculty member's constant endorsement that she looked “particularly becoming this morning, Mrs. Brown.”

She was an amazing mixture. A Cockney who spoke with an accent sufficiently outrageous to rival that of Dick Van Dyke in *Mary Poppins*, she had been in Singapore since the Second World War

and was devoted to all sorts of charity work, in particular being concerned with the Singapore Boys' Town project. She had been honored by both the British and Singapore governments, held the republic's B.B.M. decoration and also the M.B.E. (Member of the British Empire), the British equivalent.

On one occasion, a group of us teachers was discussing some edict or other which had been formulated the previous day by Premier Lee Kuan Yew and the Singapore government. “You think it's a good move?” broke in Mrs. Brown, who had just entered the room. “Yes,” we said, and gave our reasons. “Oh, good!” said Mrs. Brown, enthusiastically. “I'll tell Mr. Lee. I'm having dinner with him tonight.”

She had one extraordinary conversational habit. You know how it is when you're in conversation with someone and refer to a topic you've discussed or mentioned previously in an earlier conversation, perhaps a day or two earlier. You precede the topic with some remark to lay a foundation and recall that earlier conversation. Not so Mrs. Brown. She'd pitch right in and continue the conversation as though there had been no break and she was simply continuing whatever had been the topic of two or three seconds earlier. This could be extremely disconcerting as you struggled to recall exactly what had been said two or three *days* earlier.

And it could be worse. And often was, for many times the continued conversation had been begun days earlier *with someone else!* Faculty members would rush around asking one another whether

anyone knew anything about some future date on the school calendar, some problem concerning some particular pupil, or some conversation, the foundation of which had been laid with someone else.

She lived quite close to where I'd rented a house and I'd occasionally give her a lift home (so that I certainly had my fill of those continued conversations). I feared for the suspension of my small 1,000-cc Ford Anglia and shuddered in more ways than one when she climbed out of the car and gently closed its door with a thud which rocked the entire street.

She was exceedingly kind and did her best for both her faculty members and the children. The army authorities had supplied me with half a dozen crates to transport personal belongings out from the U.K. I'd actually used only four and had put the two empty crates, flat-pack fashion, into storage. Once in Singapore I was suddenly presented with a bill for a couple of hundred pounds for the unused crates. On the phone I explained to the major in charge that the crates would be returned to the army as soon as I was supplied with a pertinent address. The major was having none of this. "We've had to pay a shipping charge for *all* the crates," he told me. "The charge for those which weren't used is *your* responsibility."

Mrs. Brown took the phone and dismissed the major with a polite request to speak to his colonel. The major evidently did a little spluttering but eventually the colonel came on to the line. "Oh, hello, Bill," began Mrs. Brown. That was the end of the demand for payment.

I was finding some difficulty sleeping in Asian humidity countered only by a ceiling fan and requested a move to an accommodation which had air conditioning. In no time I found myself being examined by an army doctor who decided that the air conditioning was unnecessary. He turned down my request and furthermore declared that as I was unable to sleep in these normal conditions for the island my contract would have to be terminated and I would have to be sent back to the U.K. I was given three days to leave Singapore.

Mrs. Brown was on the phone as soon as I arrived back at school and reported to her. "Ridiculous," she told whoever was at the other end of the line. "This difficulty in sleeping is affecting Mr. Bennett's work. He's the best teacher in the world and I can't do without him." And that was the end of that. I got the air conditioning.

"You see," she explained to me later, "the doctor was a captain and only majors and above are allowed to have air conditioning. He wasn't going to recommend you for air conditioning when he couldn't have it himself." It seemed that there were hidden agendas even in those days.

This business of being "the best teacher in the world" shouldn't raise any eyebrows. *Every* faculty member was, at some time or other, "the best teacher in the world." I'd been forewarned of that before I ever set foot in the school. The soubriquet didn't throw me at all, even in the company of colleagues. We all knew that we'd be bestowed with this particular mantle at some time or other.

There was even the apocryphal story that some parent had phoned Mrs. Brown at some time or other to complain about some transgression of one faculty member. "Oh, I can't believe that," Mrs. Brown had informed the complainant, "your child's teacher is the best teacher in the world," then adding, "whose class did you say he was in?"

I was with her one time when we visited a street market in order to purchase some material for a school project. She examined the material and inquired as to the price. The stall holders conferred in a Chinese dialect, probably Hokkien which is most prevalent in Singapore. Mrs. Brown quickly interrupted the discussion. "No," she said, "this fat pig of an Englishwoman isn't prepared to pay that price." We got the material at a knocked-down figure lathered with all degrees of profuse apologies. How were the two stall holders to know that Mrs. Brown was married to a Chinese lawyer and spoke several different dialects?

One day John Hoyle, a colleague, and I were running a soccer coaching session with two classes of ten-year olds, which usually involved our playing alongside them. Big kids. (The teacher in the movie, *Kes*, had nothing on us.) Our young goalkeeper, a really nice kid named Richard Haley, dived across to save a shot, had his wrist trapped between ball and goal post, and found himself with a badly broken wrist. John picked up the boy while I ran to get my car from the school lot. We told another teacher who happened to be taking part in another coaching session on the school's extensive playing fields to inform the school office, and whipped off to the nearby military hospital where we turned Richard over to the medical authorities. We remained at the hospital until his parents arrived a short time later and then returned to school to complete the appropriate accident report forms.

"What exactly happened?" Mrs. Brown asked us.

"You know Mr. Hoyle," I said facetiously, "and his temper. The way he treats his class." I then explained what had actually happened.

She was having none of it. "What *really* happened?" she asked. "What did you do to the boy, Mr. Hoyle?"

"You've really landed me in the soup," John said, not very pleased.

I explained that I'd been joking. We repeated our account as to what had actually taken place.

She persisted, however, and when I'd got back to my classroom to which the children had returned, I found her in my wake.

She beckoned me outside the room. "What *really* happened?" she inquired once again. "What exactly did Mr. Hoyle *do* to that boy? He's not here now. You don't have to be afraid." What? Of the best teacher in the world? "You can tell me what *really* happened."

"Mrs. Brown," I said. "I was joking. Mr. Hoyle is as kind as anyone else on the faculty. He wouldn't *dream* of harming any child. He was absolutely marvelous looking after Richard while we drove to the hospital."

She didn't look convinced.

"You can ask the children here," I said. "They were all there. They all saw what happened."

"Yes, I shall," she said. "You stay here." She marched into the classroom and announced, "What exactly did happen to Richard? What did Mr. Hoyle do to him?"

Different children confirmed our story.

"No," she said. "I want to know what *really*

happened. You needn't be afraid of Mr. Bennett." What? Of the best teacher in the world? "Just tell me the truth."

The account was confirmed and reconfirmed. She returned to her office. But she wasn't convinced.

A couple of weeks later, a girl in John's class requested leave to go to the cloakroom. Off she went. Ten minutes later Mrs. Brown appeared.

It appeared that en route to her destination the girl had decided to jump the corner of the low wall surrounding the rather charming fish pond in the school courtyard, had tripped, and had badly gashed her knee.

Mrs. Brown was rather accusatory. "What did you do to the poor girl?" she inquired. "You know the reputation you have with these children!"

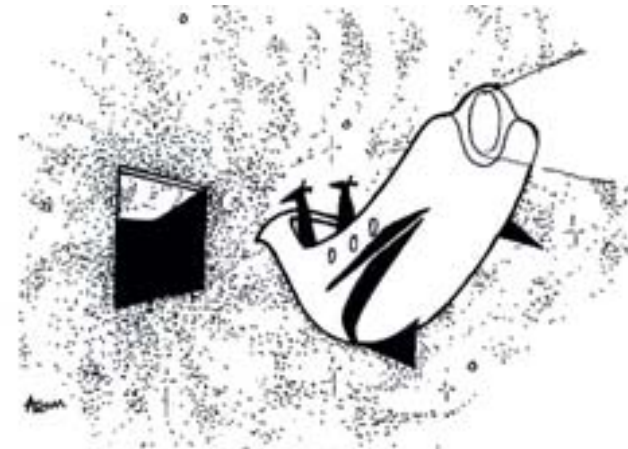
Poor John! I've often wondered whether she talked of *him* as being "the best teacher in the world," perhaps to Lee Kuan Yew. Who knows? Or whether, in his case, he'd been written off in her estimation and consigned to some deep hidden reaches of her mind, his name and memory never to be resurrected in civilized society.

Who knows, with such a woman?

She was brought to mind recently with the release of the movie, *Mrs. Brown*. Dame Judi Dench might not have won an Oscar for her portrayal of Queen Victoria, but for my money our *real* Mrs. Brown, our larger than life character in both senses of the phrase, could have had one any day of the week.

A woman like that just *couldn't* be real.

—Ron Bennett



# TWICE-TOLD TALES

BY **LUCY HUNTZINGER**



## Selections from Aries Moon

While sorting through a stack of magazines I ran across a 1994 contest to rename the Big Bang theory. 10,660 entries were submitted to *Sky & Telescope* magazine, but none of them won. As I scanned the list, I could see why. There's a few I really like, but only for the hilarity factor:

Bursting Star Sack  
Infinity Forever  
It's a Universe  
OK, Fine  
Hot Hurl  
Stupendous Space Spawning

It got me thinking about the whole scientific naming scheme thing. Take particles and quarks, for instance. They get really cool names like Charm, Beauty, and Down. Of course, sometimes they're called really boring things like  $D_s\gamma$  and so on, but there's a charming amount of whimsy that pervades scientific names.

I've been fascinated with names since I was very young. The year I went to kindergarten I decided my parents had given me the entirely wrong name. It didn't fit me at all. It was like

wearing slightly too-tight clothes. It made me feel squirmy and uncomfortable. They insisted on using it, though, and when I demanded to know my middle name their perfidy was revealed: I didn't have one. I was outraged. I determined right then that I would change my name someday. I did, too.

Finding the right name for something is important. I spent my first babysitting money on a Name Your Baby book. I still have it. I use three of them to this day, mainly for writing, for online avatars, and for amusing my pregnant friends with outrageous suggestions. I think people should give their children one bland and one fantastic name so they have a choice. Nothing is more tedious than naming your child David Michael or Anne Emily. How utterly forgettable. Much better for David to have, say, Zontar as a middle name. Anne can be paired with something unusual like Eglantine, or bypass the commonplace entirely and name her Angharad instead.

But if Zontar or Angharad doesn't suit, may I suggest Infinity Forever? Or maybe you could hold a contest. There are at least 10,600 people with a few ideas for you.

**Today's Mail** for Resident, the fellow around here who gets all the interesting stuff, included a fabulous slick brochure for *The Time of the Beast*. It looked pretty nifty, and for a few moments I thought it was an ad for a new computer game. It certainly had all the components. Ravening dragon-like beast, check. Maiden with bosom heaving in distress, check. Black moon, check. But lo and behold, it is not a computer game. It is an exciting lecture series that will "make the Book of Revelation Make Sense." It says so, right here and stuff.

Inside the brochure the illustrations are even more exciting. Jesus is riding a white horse, looking pretty white himself. There's some angels with really badly drawn wings having a big fight in the sky next to him, right where Jesus is gonna get zinged if he doesn't put up his Shield of Invincibility. There's a sort of Moon Maiden on a moon with a howling beast underneath her, presumably threatening her maidenliness. The beast looks like a cross between Gidra and Cerebus, if you can imagine. And then there's a real scary-looking businessman with the numbers 666 imprinted on his forehead. So I guess he's the actual Beast. But wait! There's also Mrs. Beast, who is wearing a rather nice pair of earrings with her turtle-neck shirt and the 666 emblazoned on her forehead. And then, just to top it all off, there's a military guy with big lasergun eyes shooting green fire all around. I hadn't realized there was so much scheduled for the Apocalypse.

Best of all, it's all brought to you (or Resident, in our case) by the Amazing Facts Committee on Arrangements. Now that's what I call a committee name.

**I just love** the *Palo Alto Daily News*. It's the free rag I pick up each morning at the train station. I can read it from cover to cover in fifteen minutes, which is how long it takes me to get to my station. I read it for the daily columnists, the comics, and the police blotter covering Atherton, Palo Alto, and Menlo Park. The actual news content is heavy on the City Council feuds and rather light on anything else. The blotter is really the best thing about it. Here is a great example.

*ATHERTON First block Melanie Lane, 5:16 p.m.: A resident called police*

*after a golden cocker spaniel ran into her house and jumped on a guest.*

What a nightmare that must have been for the Ladies Who Lunch. I can see it now. A huge, slaving beast bursts in upon the delicate, unsuspecting flower of Atherton womanhood and menaces them. Slowly he advances upon one of the terrified guests, rising up, up, up to lugubriously leave paw prints all over her Michael Kors twin set. His glowing brown eyes seem to pierce her very soul. She faints. The police rush to the rescue. Arf, says the intruder unrepentantly.

But that's not all that happened last week in swinging Atherton, California, no sir.

*ATHERTON 200 block Polhemus Ave., 3:51 p.m.: Vandals moved a large decorative rock.*

Holy cow, Martha, call the police! Someone's moved the large decorative rock and set it right on top of the zinnias! Boy, what a dashing escapade that must have been. After all, your basic large rocks are notoriously heavy and awkward. I'm guessing this one was carved in the shape of Cindy Crawford or something equally irresistible to have been of interest to the criminal minds sneaking around Atherton. I imagine they tried to lift it and gave themselves hernias on the spot.

Or maybe they were so demoralized by misjudging the rock thing that they decided to do some real crimes and let loose a cocker spaniel to terrorize the neighborhood in retaliation. I'm thinking they don't have enough to do in Atherton.

**Today's Clueless Travel Moment** is courtesy a hapless fellow who phoned my travel agency to ask if there was any difference between trains and planes.

"Yes," I said helpfully. He waited. I waited. I wasn't sure where he was going with this.

"Oh," he responded, "a lot?"

"Yes," I replied, "quite a lot." We both waited again.

"Oh," he said, and hung up.

It's a wonder they can find their own feet in the morning.

**What if you** discovered you could use a time machine and could go back in time just once, for just an hour? What would you do? Save the

world? Meet with a famous person? Wreak havoc by messing with events?

This question is the flip side of another game I like to play where you bring a person from another age forward in time and try to explain something in five minutes, like planes, or penicillin, or Pauly Shore. It's fun, and harder than it seems.

As for me, I'm in the "meet a famous person" camp. I've no interest in changing the world although I'd be glad to nip back in time and offer Hitler's parents some condoms. But the real catch with this time machine business is you'd have to convince someone you were from the future, get them to open up to you, and then dash back in only one hour's time. Seems very unlikely you'd get any sensible conversation out of anyone. Well, maybe Oscar Wilde.

Before choosing we must first acknowledge that the ideal historical person would have to speak English very well, and fairly modern English at that. I think I could muddle through as far back as the 1700's but before that the language is too different for my ears. I can barely manage Shakespeare, and must always be looking up the translations in the back of the book. Thus, I regretfully give up Athenais, Madame de Montespan, along with Hatshepsut, Caecilia Metella, and Bess of Hardwick.

If it must be modern and English, I think first of all I'd like to speak with Jane Austen in her late teens. If someone else had already bagged her, I'd have a chat with Victoria Woodhull, a most

interesting and complex woman. E. Nesbitt would be good, too, a revolutionary feminist with a penchant for making trouble and writing really good children's books. I would want to meet women who had unusual talents and the courage to pursue their visions, whether in art or reform or education. I don't much care about going back in time to meet men as men have consistently imposed their viewpoint on history and the literary canon. I can read the male perspective any old time. I'd prefer the opportunity to meet the sparkling intellects of historical women who were acknowledged, admired, even honored in their day, but brushed aside as footnotes by later generations of male academicians.

The thing about meeting Jane Austen is so many of us want to. I think there could be a good short story wherein poor Jane is besieged throughout her life by time machine wielders constantly popping in to talk to her. Even if they were limited to only one hour it would be annoying. Eventually, I suppose, she would have to devise a note to hand to each new visitor: yes, yes, you're from the future and you want to ask me about Elizabeth Bennett, but I'm working and I don't want to know about planes or penicillin or that unfortunate man. She'd carry on making parsnip wine or gooseberry jelly, and all we poor visitors could do is look on while breathing in the authentic 18th century atmosphere.

Time machines would be a terrible nuisance.

—Lucy Huntzinger





# AN OLD BOY AND HIS DOG

calvin demmon

My brother Bob and I had at least three dogs when we were kids, all of the short-haired, terrier-mix variety, energetic and yappy. As an adult, living in rented spaces, I couldn't have a dog, so I made friends with cats, and I have two cats even now.

A dozen years ago, having acquired a house in Marina, India and I agreed it was time for another dog. She'd been doing a little research and had become interested in the kuvasz, a white, long-haired Hungarian breed, said to be clever. Except for its color, the kuvasz has the general size and appearance of a golden retriever—some kuvasz owners refer to their dogs as “platinum retrievers.”

And so, when we learned of a woman in Las Vegas who had to move into an apartment and couldn't keep her kuvasz, we agreed to “rescue” it. The 1½-year-old spayed female arrived at the Monterey Peninsula Airport one afternoon in a

crate, and India, my daughter Veronica and I went over to get it. The first time I saw Kuva—her original owner had saddled her with the unimaginative name—she sized me up from inside the crate, looking quite capable and very smart. I liked her instantly.

We took her home and enrolled her in obedience classes at Hilltop Center in Monterey, where she learned to sit on command. She never quite got the hang of walking on a leash without tugging, but I hiked all over Monterey and Marina with her anyway. She would hold up her paw for a shake if you asked.

Kuva was remarkably different from all the other dogs I'd ever owned or known. They had characteristics, habits, quirks. Kuva, though, had a distinct personality—intelligent, watchful, self-sufficient. She was even tolerant—despite holding nothing but contempt for the feline race in general, she always permitted Veronica's little

gray cat, April, to attack her, nuzzle her and sleep next to her.

Kuva wasn't a dog to roll over in submission at the first hand reaching out to pat her head. She maintained her dignity without being snotty about it. She was, as another owner said about his kuvasz, affectionate but not cuddly. And when she got into trouble, she did it with style—like the time she broke out of our yard, found her way inside the house next door and surprised our neighbor, Tamara, in her bathtub.

She had friends all over the neighborhood. Sometimes, sitting inside the house, I would hear children walking by our yard saying, “Hi, Kuva.”

Three or four years ago, Kuva started getting arthritis in her hips, and it grew progressively worse. Finally, the week before this Christmas, she went down and couldn't get up any more. She rested on a waterproof pad in our family room, and although we washed and turned her in the

middle of the night, she began to develop bed sores, and her vet, Dr. Hart, told us by telephone what we knew: she was thirteen, an advanced age for a kuvasz, and it was time.

Dr. Hart agreed to come to the house. India and Veronica and I stroked Kuva and talked to her as she nodded off under Dr. Hart's gentle administration of an anesthetic overdose. He listened to her heart with his stethoscope and he finally said, “She's gone.”

Veronica and I wrapped Kuva in a blanket and buried her in the back yard, and our neighbors, Larry and Margot, brought over a potted chrysanthemum that we will plant on Kuva's grave. I made a wooden cross, although she wasn't a Christian, and put it on her grave, too.

She was the best pet I've ever had. Rest in peace, Kuva. Good dog.

—Calvin Demmon



*I didn't expect that it would take this long for this piece of mine to see print. Years ago I had originally submitted it to another fan editor who, due to the necessities of his job, had promptly folded his fanzine. After a few years I discovered that my hard copy and floppy containing the text had disappeared into the usual black hole. Requests and inquiries to the faned, who shall remain nameless, went unanswered (maybe he had a black hole of his own!). Fortunately, the article eventually did turn up, so without further ado let's all jump into the Way Back Machine and go to ...*

**June 19, 1995:** Seven AM. After my usual five hours of sleep I hauled myself out of bed and let our Labrador retriever out to drench the pitiful

remnants of surviving grass in the backyard, sat down with the morning paper and my first of many glasses of cranberry juice for the day: with a tight deadline hanging over me, my body had chosen to up that pressure by manufacturing a few kidney stones nine days earlier and I had been plagued with cramps ever since. It was a hell of an accompaniment to my daily drawing The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers.

I had never expected to be working on the Power Rangers. Like many of my freelance jobs, the assignment had dropped into my lap unexpectedly; in this case only an hour before sitting down for our family's annual Passover dinner. Inasmuch as the publisher was willing to pay major money per book for five issues, this particular Passover was pretty jubilant: man,

financially, was I ever out of Egypt!

I'm not principally interested in the superhero genre (although today's superstar writers Alan Moore and Warren Ellis have beautifully reinvented the field), nor am I that adept working in it. What initially attracted me to the comic book field is an approach to humor and adventure that's hard to find these days. Still, I like to think that I have enough on the ball to do a passable job at depicting those folks in the tights and capes as they endlessly engage in their cosmic fistfights. Up until *The Morphins* I had penciled *and* inked issues of four different comic titles, often in under three weeks time (with "Doc Savage" it really showed, unfortunately). That being the case, I wasn't worried about making a similar deadline just doing pencils. Until I got the script, that is.

For those of you not familiar with the old-style Morphins (there's a new generation, evidently) there were six of them. They had two sidekicks, a mentor, and a cute robot. There were three major villains with their numerous mutated minions and all these had intricate costumes. The scripter had broken almost each page into six panels and written a majority of the characters into each panel. And then, just to take things a step further, he frequently divided panels up by the use of a "viewing globe" that depicted a separate scene that the Morphins and their friends were watching—for example, a fireman on an extension ladder rescuing a bunch of orphans from a burning building. To top all that, one of the villains might be using a telescope to spy on our heroes in a cutaway at the top of a panel. All in one sixth of a page.

I began to see why the regular penciler had bowed out of this assignment. But, hey, I was certainly being paid well for the extra effort!

Down in my basement art studio I went over the script. By my calculations I had to draw nine panels a day to make the deadline for each issue. My next step was to go to my filing cabinet full of clippings to pull the reference material, trucks and dirt bikes, needed for that day. Next I did very rough breakdowns on typewriter paper and, because the panels were all crowded, I character counted the copy to see how much space the dialogue balloons would take up. Then I laid out the page and sharpened pencils. After about two hours of all this, I was finally drawing. Judging from past experience I would be finished with the last panel sometime after midnight. Whether or

not my kidney stones would allow me to get much sleep that night was another question: it felt like two bulldogs were gnawing away in there. I drew the evil Lord Zedd posturing from the balcony of his lunar hideout in the first panel. The second panel was more interesting: Skull and Bulk, two comic relief characters from the Morphins' high school, were being blown off their dirt bikes by Pirantishead. Five Morphins materialize in the lower right of the panel while Rita Repulsa looks on gloatingly from an upper left insert.

I liked Rita Repulsa; she was fun to draw. It's strange that the Mighty Morphin Power Rangers show had many critics. From them I had formed the impression, before ever seeing the series, that the show was a blood-drenched preteen equivalent of a Charles Bronson movie. But when I actually caught the show I discovered that the action scenes were choreographed slapstick, the monsters laughably tongue in cheek. The Morphins themselves were squeaky-clean-cut, fitting heirs to the likes of Tom Swift and the Bobbsey Twins. If I had seen the show as an eight year old, I know I would've loved it.

By my fourth panel I had decided to turn on the radio. After days of listening nonstop to albums I was satiated with music. I tuned into the local right wing radio show, an action akin to lifting up a rock to check out the wet squirming things, and found that Louis Farrakhan was being trashed rather than Bill or Hillary. A novel change.

It had started to rain, a really heavy, violent downpour. I felt uneasy; we lose electricity with monotonous regularity during storms. Then, upstairs, the dog began barking; somebody was at the door.

It was a friend of ours; I'll call her Susan. Elaine and I had known her and her husband for some years and we occasionally got together for dinner, cards, or a movie. But one look at Susan on our doorstep, drenched to the skin from the storm, told me this was no social call; her expression was intense, twisted with fear and grief, tears mingling with the rain running down her face. Putting Dickens in another room, I invited her in.

From various past hints we knew that Susan suffered from manic depression, kept under control with medication. Although inclined to be withdrawn, Susan seemed little different from an average introvert and Bill was quietly genial and rather fannish. Both had suffered numerous

financial setbacks over the years (Bill was a former physics instructor from Johns Hopkins) and their various attempts to make a living had been a long uphill struggle; it gave us something else in common. Lately Susan had been working in a Maryland funded computer agency that provided communication services for the speech and hearing impaired but, being shy and the only Euro-American in the place, was having a hard time fitting in. One individual in particular, she felt, was going out of his way to prove that racism can be a two way street and Susan was ill-equipped to deal with the cheap-shot hostility, real or imagined.

The afternoon wore on. I found myself an impotent observer of a kind of personal hell that I hope never to experience, painful just to witness. Susan was in the deepest anguish, unable to trust anyone—least of all herself. She had quit taking her medication and was now hearing voices. Weeping, her hands twisting together so tightly that her knuckles stood out in white relief, she broke down again and again. She was fully aware of what was happening to her but was just as sure that her medication was poisonous, that her husband and psychiatrist hated her, that everyone was plotting against her, and that her head was literally in danger of exploding.

I had no idea what to do. If I attempted to step out of the room and call a doctor it meant leaving her alone. If she discovered I was calling some "enemies" I was afraid it would send her into hysteria, or, worse, send her away into a severe storm. I also knew Bill was still at work and I didn't have his number. I kept talking as calmly as I could, trying to be upbeat as possible, always trying to reassure. I talked about mental strategies that had worked for me when I had been through bad times, about Judaism, zen, self-help techniques—and felt like a futile ass even as I did so. My little stresses and her state of mind weren't in the same ballpark; my solutions were like band aids to a skull fracture. Still, during the next five hours Susan began calming down by degrees.

The storm had at last passed and the sun came out. We sat on the back porch and drank tea while my cats buzzed around her legs, allowing her to pet them. Finally Elaine gotten home from work and the three of us took a long walk through our local park. I was hoping to be able to call Bill now. We suggested that she wait for him or let us drive her back to her place. Susan insisted that she

was well enough to drive and against our judgment we had no choice, short of physically restraining her, but to let her leave for the short drive back home.

I had given up all thought of drawing for the rest of the day. I had once kept on deadline when yellow jackets were swarming through the studio, but that was piffle compared to what had just gone down. I took a long hot bath and then we went off to a favorite restaurant. Later that night Bill called us to let us know that Susan had arrived safely. She was back on her medication and was scheduled for an early session with her therapist that next morning.

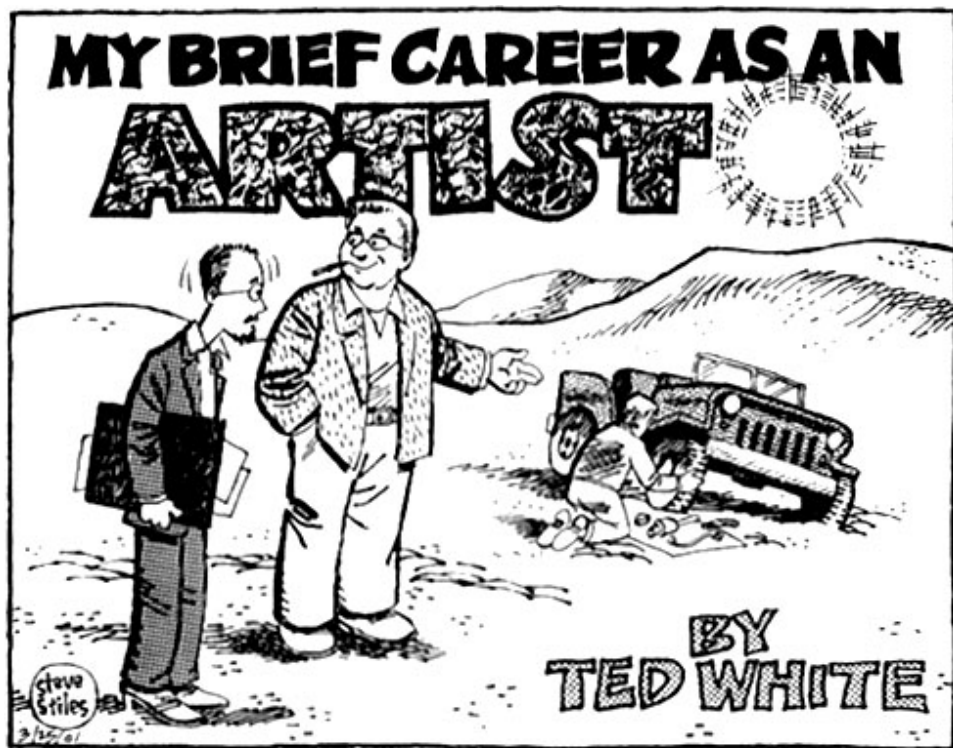
She never made it. Instead she left work and drove nonstop straight to South Carolina, where she got into a collision with her car. The authorities kept her under observation for three days. Fortunately there were no serious injuries.

All this happened years ago and Susan was able to stick it out on her job and to our knowledge has been able to function normally. The bully at work got fired. As for my saga with *The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*, I finally finished with the kidney stone pain after my first issue—just in time for one of those toothaches that goes on for ten days and the dentist can't locate the offending tooth. That was my second issue; there wouldn't be a third: another publisher, one of the Big Two, had negotiated with *The Morphins'* owner to take the title away from my little guy publisher. They then proceeded to publish a few issues and then fold the title (*Spider-Man* would be ashamed).

I'm of two minds about that whole experience. On one hand, I made sixteen thousand dollars in a little less than six weeks. And on the other hand, I lost twenty four thousand dollars worth of work. (I should take it in stride; after all, every few weeks Elaine and I lose millions of dollars playing the lottery—well, we don't win it!) It's one of those perception things: is the glass half full or half empty. In this case, I think my glass was half full.

Only nobody ever asks—full of *what*?  
—Steve Stiles





It all started with an innocent post to a fannish e-list. I said, “This afternoon I saw *Pollock* the movie and it really re-energized me to paint. I loved the painting parts of the movie and found the rest fully credible (nothing I hadn’t heard before), if not very attractive. The man was horribly repressed and viciously angry most of the time (as his art unerringly reveals), and pretty poor company drunk or sober. But he was a great artist.”

Jae Leslie Adams responded, “So Ted, I didn’t know you paint.”

Well, *I haven’t* painted in more than 40 years, but I’ve always intended to come back to it “in my retirement,” like Churchill.

I trained to be an artist from early-middle childhood.

I took still-life classes. I learned to create very credible wine bottles with pastels – reflections, refractions, and all. Like many kid artists, I drew incessantly – filling my notebooks with drawings of cars, rockets and comic book characters throughout grade school.

It was my deepest desire to be an automotive

designer/stylist. I designed cars in my head – planning their every detail and creating innovative engineering for them (one – in the late ’40s – was steam-powered). But I was dissuaded from this career-choice by the need to craft good-looking models of my designs (in order to get into the General Motors school for aspiring automotive designers) – I was a lousy model-builder (it was a separate skill and one I never mastered).

By high school in the early ’50s I wanted to be a prozine illustrator and I studied the art in the prozines of that and earlier eras. I also bought, at auction, prozine illos at the 1955 and 1956 Worldcons – getting my hands on actual examples of scratchboard, CraftTone and other types of commercial-technique art. The prices at the auctions at conventions in those days would make a modern collector green with envy. I probably paid a dollar or less each for those black and white originals – and major (cover) paintings went for \$25 and up. (Fellow named Calle did some fine scratchboard art for prozines in the early ’50s – and went on to be a Major commercial artist. I have some of his originals.)

I took a high school art class, but learned almost nothing from it and ended up teaching my teacher these commercial techniques. I taught them first to myself, by studying the originals I had and by going to a downtown DC art supplies store and exploring the tools and stocks they had. (It was in this fashion that I bought my first CraftTint/Tone sheets and the two developers needed, and bought scratchboard and several scribes.) In order to practice with these materials I copied comic-strip panels (Walt Kelly’s *Pogo* and Stan Drake’s *Juliet Jones*) for a local newspaper contest, and I rendered photos. “Rendering” a photo means to translate it into another artistic medium. That medium could be pencil, pen-and-ink, brush, etc. Learning to work by removing black, in scratchboard, was as useful as learning to use screened overlays (Zip-A-Tone) or the two-toned mechanical cross-hatching of CraftTint.

I got to be reasonably good at rendering photos, but it seemed to me then that this was too mechanical a process, as I understood it, to be “creative” in the way I thought an artist should be. I felt that I should be able to create pictures solely out of my head, and this I could not do easily.

During this time I had a Saturdays (school year) and full-time (summer) job at the local stationary store, where I’d been buying my mimeo supplies; this got me a good employee discount and I used it to buy a set of colored inks. These inks came in squat little bottles like India ink, but in a wide variety of colors. The inks were not opaque, but translucent. Using illustration board I began painting with these inks.

I improvised. I’d brush some color onto a board, and see in it a skyscape, perhaps a sunset or silhouetted mountains, and then I’d make these images more solid, adding detail as it occurred to me, until a picture emerged. I had to build up colors from light to dark in overlays. I did a lot of miniatures – little pieces measuring maybe three by five inches, or ten by five, or any other size. I’d cut the larger board into pieces and paint on each piece.

Many of the early pieces were surreal, and it was at this time that I discovered a book of George Herriman’s *Krazy Kat*. This was a newspaper comic strip set in a surreal southwestern landscape which shifted from panel to panel. It enormously appealed to me and I painted two *Krazy Kat* paintings which my mother has. I also copied a

panel from Bernie Krigstein’s EC Comics adaptation of Bradbury’s “The Flying Machine” in full color (and without word balloons). All in colored inks. But the copies and tributes were the exceptions; most of my miniature paintings were improvisations.

The early ones were semi-representational, but then I started going abstract.

To me the alpha and omega of abstraction are Mondrian and Pollock. I discovered Mondrian first and felt a natural affinity for his work; it fit with the fanzine layout and design I was then doing (my *Stellar* period) and I saw immediately how Mondrian related to design and had revolutionized magazine design in the ’20s.

I knew less about Pollock and I’m not sure whether I even knew about him at that point – but once I discovered his mature works, they spoke to me. (I got to know Pollock best after I moved to New York City and had ready – and frequent – access to the Museum of Modern Art. That museum has many of his best pieces and on one occasion mounted a retrospective of his career which convinced me that I did not care much for his early, pre-abstract, works – few of which are to be glimpsed in the movie, *Pollock*.)

I had moved to larger sizes and started using a form of “canvas paper” I’d discovered at the store where I worked. This “paper” had a textured surface like canvas and could be painted on with oils, but I used it for my larger Mondrian-like designs (created using drafting pens for the straight lines – I also took drafting and mechanical drawing in school), in part because of the way the inks glistened on it. At some point I found that I could dip my brush into the ink and then flick it at the board or canvas paper, creating a splatter effect. The more viscous inks made more interesting splatters, V-shaped. I could control these by the way I held and the force with which I flicked the brush. (It was all in the wrist.) One piece I did occurred when I noticed a blank sheet had a single splatter-drop on it – an accident. I turned it into art by adding a single line which began at the left edge of the sheet and traveled three-quarters of the way across it. Very simple and very effective.

I worked with interesting color combinations (even as Pollock eventually did), varying them from piece to piece. To me these splatters (less dense than Pollock’s – I used more white space – and I rarely *dripped* the inks the way he did paint)

often suggested three-dimensional spaces, and I sometimes ornamented them with tiny objects within them to give them scale – like a tiny rocketship wending its way through a starfield of nuclear explosions. Eventually I combined them with my Mondrian approach, creating large abstracted geometrical shapes, masking them off and filling some of them with contrasting colors and textures of splatters.

I still have these and they still look good. But the colored inks fade when exposed to direct sunlight, as occurred to a couple which my mother had framed and hung. And I felt I was reaching my limit in the medium of colored inks.

So I taught myself oils and did several paintings in oils. One which I keep on display in my dining room (on a mantel where I also have a framed Bergeron silk screen) is of a female nude in a forest, with the framed pencil study for the figure below it. I painted it at 19, and never got the female's mouth right, so she's mouthless. She looks amazingly like my first wife, Sylvia, whom I'd not yet met then.

I met Sylvia and married her a year later, a few months before I was 21. I discovered that she was a better artist than I (I still have one of her abstractions hanging in my living room), and I also discovered that she had this neurosis (one, unfortunately, of many) about "competing" with me. Consequently, I gave up painting so that she would not. Before that happened I whipped off a Picasso-like piece on our kitchen table on a tall narrow canvas I'd stretched to fit a specific-space need. (It is now displayed opposite Sylvia's piece in my living room.) It was my last work in oils.

In 1961 I did a bunch of prozine illustration samples (some of them in collaboration with Andy Reiss, whose portrait of me hangs in my dining room, and who went on to be displayed in and work at The Brooklyn Museum of Art – the

one the mayor of New York City hates) and showed them without success to John Campbell at *Analog* and Cele Goldsmith at *Amazing*. Cele never met with me, forcing me to leave my samples with her receptionist and rejecting them without comment. But Campbell at least talked to me for more than half an hour, the only time I ever spent one-on-one with the man. (Mostly I listened. He told me he valued an artist whose work I disliked because the man could "field-strip a Jeep in the desert, put it back together again and drive it away.")

But in 1970 I did have one prozine illo published: the illustration for a Greg Benford story I'd commissioned for *Amazing*. I sold it to myself. But it wasn't as good as I wanted it to be; I'd gotten rusty over the intervening years.

I settled for being an art director. I can work with artists; I can talk shop with them. My friendship with Mike Hinge and Jeff Jones didn't hurt, but the way I presented their work on the covers of *Amazing* and *Fantastic* kept them bringing me more paintings. And when I edited *Heavy Metal* I was able to work closely with the artists we used.

I've never given up on doing my own art; I've always expected to return to it some day. It's been my regret I've never had any experience with acrylics – they were coming in just as I was getting out – but I've watched people like Jack Gaughan work with them. I gather you can use them like either oils or watercolors, depending on how much you thin them, and I think I'd like to try them out – when I'm old and "retired." Toward that end, I (always a scavenger) have occasionally picked up crappy paintings that others have thrown out – with a mind to painting over them some day. A stretched canvas is just a painting I haven't painted yet. And some day....

—Ted White



Jay Kinney was actually speaking about something else. We'd been talking about beer and Jay had said that he hadn't seen any Kirin Stout among the selections in the beer vending machines near his sister's place in Japan when he was there. He added that he'd heard beer vending machines were on their way out due to concerns that underaged youths could abuse them. "Much like what happened with cigarette machines over here," he concluded.

Faster than "skate key," this had me flashing on my first-ever experience of buying, not beer, but my own cigarettes from a cigarette machine.

I wasn't above stealing. I got hooked in my early teens by "borrowing" from my mother's pack and, on weekends, from unlocked cars parked around the golf course where I made money retrieving golf balls from the Arroyo Seco, a "branch" of the LA River.

But when I "graduated" to smoking beyond the weekends, which was when I began to feel that I needed more than half a dozen smokes per week, I decided it was time to move on.

It was time, that is, to try buying them a pack at a time from cigarette machines. I picked one at a gas station about three blocks from my home

and planned my attack carefully. I knew, you see, that it was illegal to sell to cigarettes to minors—it said right there on the pack that criminal penalties were involved. Not knowing any better, I assumed it was a two-edged sword. In short, if it was illegal to sell cigarettes to minors, I assumed it was equally illegal for minors to even *attempt to buy them*. I also assumed, correspondingly, that there was more diligence than there was (*i.e.*, it would be a while before I found out I could buy them over the counter at lots of small stores simply by claiming they were for my mother or father).

So, anyway, I was gradually cutting myself free of the notion that any adult who saw an under-aged person smoking a cigarette was likely to stop whatever he was doing, grab the kid, take him kicking and screaming to local law enforcement officers who would cuff him, put him in jail and report him to his parents.

You may think I'm exaggerating. No. When I first started smoking regularly, I always made sure that I was a *minimum* of six blocks from my home, on some quiet street with no one around. If I lit up a cigarette and someone came out of their home or a car turned the corner, I hastily put it



out—sometimes comically, as the sparks cascading off my blue jeans almost certainly drew more attention to myself than just "cupping" my cigarette would have . . .

Well, as I say, I was beginning to learn to cool it, but I wasn't all the way there yet. So I picked the cigarette machine at this gas station because it was outdoors, between the "office" of the station and the men's room, and the price was still 25 cents. This was an important consideration; the price was then in the process of going up to 30 cents a pack and had done so in other cigarette machines. Not that the extra nickel would have impoverished me—it was just that, so long as it only cost a quarter, that meant I would only have to insert one coin, not two.

I cruised in on my trusty bike (speed might be needed in the "getaway") and parked it right in front of the cigarette machine, then walked into the men's room. I washed my hands, pulled a quarter out of my pocket, and walked back out. As luck would have it, one of the attendants was going back into the office to make change for a customer who had purchased gas just as I came out, so I pretended like I was checking out my back wheel. That let me check out the other attendant, who was wrapped up in pumping gas in another car. As the first attendant was about half way to the customer whose change he was returning with, I turned and put my quarter into the slot, it rattled noisily down into the cigarette machine; with my other hand, I grabbed the handle under my "brand" of cigarettes ("Compare Pall Mall to a shorter cigarette. Pall Mall is longer...") and then pulled and pushed. It went "clunk" when I pulled and then went "clunk"

again when I pushed:

**CLUNK!—CLUNK!**

surely not much louder than, oh, a Sequoia-sized battering ram demolishing a castle wall.

I knew, right then, how a would-be prison escapee must feel when he finds himself outlined in the prison spotlight just as he reaches the part of the wall he needs to climb over in total darkness. Still, I knew there was some distance between me and the nearest attendant (the one making change), so I grabbed the pack of cigarettes, which had somehow been transformed into a pack of Lucky Strikes, left the complimentary matches behind, hopped on my bike and sped away.

I was surprised to find that neither of the attendants had been "alerted" by the sounds I'd made. I mean, how could they not have heard that? They just continued doing what they had been doing, though; I looked back, over my shoulder, and neither of them were breathing down my neck. I slowed down and *didn't* turn left into the alley, which I had planned to do if I thought they were calling the police on me.

Just as well. We were only ten blocks from Pasadena City Hall and the cops could have had cruisers there, blocking both ends of the alley, before I could have fast-peddled my way out of it. I did turn in at the next block and stopped in front of the second house down. There was no one around. With slightly trembling hands, I opened the pack of Lucky's, lit up and took a long, slow drag. A reward, you know—after all that excitement, I felt I *needed* a good smoke.

—rich brown



**RON BENNETT**

Fine, interesting article by Jeff Schalles. Reminds me of my own days as a London typist. At one place, Marplan, a market research firm, I'd start at 10 a.m. The first thing anyone did was to read through the morning papers—the firm took everything from *The Times* to *Le Monde*—have a cup of tea and look important. Some executive would then appear and ask somebody to type some important piece of junk, often a questionnaire on stencil. Somewhere along the line it became known that I was familiar with stencils, backing sheets and plico film. Sometimes there would be no work and we would sit there all day, giving me the opportunity to phone Ted Carnell and others for news for *Skyrack*, which I'd usually manage to cut right onto stencil. And if often happened that about five or six when we were ready to quit after a hard day's grind, an exec would appear screaming that we had a presentation to get out *now* and could anyone stay back to work on the thing. Sure could. This entailed initially a meal in the exec restaurant and double time while we worked on the project. Crazy! Of course, I have to add that there *were* days when we worked solidly through the day. I remember particularly one colleague, a woman of about fifty who constantly berated me about my lack of ambition and similarly constantly questioned how I spent my evenings. Go tell her that I was having a whale of a time spending every evening with fans. I simply said that I spent all my spare time at the cinema, a reply that drove her mad. Why didn't I go to the theater? It was obvious that the theater was up-market and the cinema was far beneath anyone of any standing. I argued that with the cinema one was presented with the finished, polished article, while with

the theater there was always the possibility of people making mistakes. Ah, she said, that was the charm of the theater. Perhaps I could have told her that back in Harrogate I went to the rep every week. Wonder what became of this bright, sparkling piece of humanity. Just glad that I wasn't married to her. But hell, I met no one like the array Jeff writes about. He certainly gives a new insight to the term "Off Broadway."

Wow, traveling to Moscow and St. Petersburg to study aspects of your profession. Terrific and a good piece by Alice Sanvito. I'm wildly jealous. I'd love to visit St. Petersburg. Mind you, I'd prefer to visit my roots in Kiev and, for that matter, Lithuania.

Greg Benford's superb account of his dealings with Hollywood was fascinating. Loved the touches of jargon and the anecdotes. But, hell's teeth, we've all read those stories and seen the movies about Hollywood moguls and we know all the old jokes, the parodies and the caricatures...and they exist, they *exist* even in this day and age. I find it frightening. A London agent likes a script I sent him, but feels it's a little too long. After reading Greg's account, I felt like suggesting that he simply cut out act two. But if an experienced high-profile writer like Greg has had all this trouble, what chance does an amateur like me have? Screen writers have always been regarded as the lowest in the film hierarchy. Perhaps the paying public is to blame. Who was the actor who said, "They think we make it up as we go along?"

Nice piece by Carol on Avram Davidson. I only corresponded with him once, a letter in which I mentioned something about Hebrew script. His reply was in Hebrew script. Which I don't read. Great column. Loved the list of exclusion clauses.

Lovely rambling article you've made from George Metzger's letters. George mentions the *I Ching* telling him to go north-east instead of south-west. But, is he interpreting the different layers correctly? Maybe they mean that he should start his journey at seven and a half minutes past the hour rather than at twenty-two and a half minutes *to* the hour. Or perhaps he should play the game on which that ridiculous book, *Diceman*, was based. Write down six alternatives, and roll the dice to see which path you're going to follow. Reminds me of when I was shown around a Buddhist temple in Penang.

On an altar was a small wooden container of long, slim sticks which looked like elongated toothpicks. My guide shook the container, rolled out the sticks, and said that he was happy with the result, which he obviously was.

What's this about hearing spirits and having people living in your bedroom closet being scary? Doesn't *everyone* hear spirits and have people living in their bedroom closet? George does worry me at times.

Heavens, Jim Harmon certainly went through it with that nosebleed. I laughed out loud at the doctor telling him what was the worst scenario. I began to nod in sympathy: About four years ago one Saturday evening, the same thing happened to me. An unstoppable nosebleed with lashings of red all over the kitchen sink and a pile of towels. My son Andrew was very concerned and very helpful, and decided when I kept falling down that I was suffering from a blood loss bordering on the serious and that it was time for him to whip me off to Accident & Emergency. There, the similarities with Jim's ordeal ended. Happily, after a couple of tries—don't ask me what they did; I was in no state to notice—I was back at home. Ah, what one does to get out of washing dishes.

Super piece, as expected, by Burbee. Reminds me of when I lived in Belgium. Every couple of weeks or so, I'd drive the thirty miles north to visit a collector/dealer who lived in Brussels. We traded items; we bought from and sold to each other. I'd bring him some really nice item in which I knew, just *knew*, he'd be interested. He wouldn't bite and naturally on the following visit I'd leave that particular goody behind at home. And he'd inquire about it! The next time I'd bring it along and he wouldn't be interested but would ask about it again on the subsequent visit. I got to taking such items along and leaving them out in the car, only bringing them in when he asked about them. And on those particular occasions, he always took them. Go figure.

Excellent commentary on contemporary mores and values by Ed Burbee.

A great letter column with lots of people I've not heard of for yonks, like Bob Leman.

I must confess that I'd completely missed that neat little homage to *Astounding* on last issue's cover and it's nice to have it pointed out to me so that I can go back and take pleasure from it, too. Of course, this means (sadly) another use for letter

columns is for the Really Busy Fan who can skip reading any fanzine until the following issue and simply read the letter column in order to see where are the especial goodies he's missed. Wouldn't apply to *Trap Door*'s letter column, which is a fanzine in itself.

Like Bob Smith I have one of those dinky little pocket computers which record blood glucose levels. A fantastic little toy, though I'm still trying to play Tomb Raiders on it without a great deal of success.

Fred Smith's visit to California sounds far too exciting for him to pass it off with merely a LoC. Article material here. Get him to it. Thinks: That trolley car which took me from San Diego down to the border was a *train*? Well, I never!

Reminds me of way back in the '60s George Locke used to spend time in the States caddying for a glider pilot. "I've landed here in Ohio or Kentucky or South Dakota"...or wherever.... "Bring the truck to tow the glider back home." George was actually kind enough to come along and talk to my class about his exploits.

I agree with Sue Jones that there's something comforting about books which show signs of wear. Hopefully they've been read and not been used as missiles thrown at the neighbor's cat. A dealer tends to look at them a little differently, though; it's generally easier to sell an item in pristine condition.

Re: Steve Green's comments on the 1990 launch of the new *Spiderman* series of comic books and the fact that a great number of the first issue were issued in specially designed "collector" plastic bags (if you want a couple of dozen, let me know), whatever the actual number produced with or without bags, the bagged copies are catalogued at a higher price and sell for higher prices. The bags themselves were later discovered to have been made of a type of plastic which would accelerate the oxy-deterioration of the books! And then there were the "Blue Lizard" issues. A proportion of copies contained a page (actually four pages because of the printing technique) which had missed the yellow that would have turned the character the correct shade of green. Just like stamp collecting, these variety copies sold, and presumably still sell, for premium prices. Around £60 a throw, the last I heard. This is where collecting for investment really goes berserk. Do you unbag your *Spiderman* #1, thereby lowering its value, in the hope of perhaps

discovering a "Blue Lizard" copy? Oh, yes, that's the *Spiderman* #1 with the *black* cover. I've not heard of any "Blue Lizard" copies with the purple and green covers. Aren't you glad you began to read this. Take an aspirin and lie down.

And re: Derek Pickles' letter, also on comics: I don't think the titles he mentions—*Captain America*, *Captain Marvel*, *Superman* and *Batman* contained continuing stories in those days, but of course there would be allusions to various happenings in earlier issues which is probably what caused the frustration. There *were* comic books which *did* carry continuing stories but these were invariably those books which reprinted the Sunday supplement pages of strips like *The Phantom*, *Dick Tracy*, *Mandrake*, *Prince Valiant*, *Steve Canyon*, *Terry and the Pirates*, *Bringing Up Father*, *Blondie* and *Tarzan* in books like *Ace*, *King Comics*, *Magic*, *Popular*, *Tip-Top* and *Sparkler*. And yes, it was frustrating. I also suffered in the same way as did Derek.

The *Classics Illustrated* field is a complex one, with its own branch of specialist collectors. There are many reprints of most titles, the slightly differently presented covers making all the difference. And there are, or were, many British reprints, too. In some cases the British "reprints" were entirely or in part redrawn by British artists and in at least one case was entirely a British publication which never appeared in the U.S.? Aren't you glad you asked?

Nice to read Harry Turner's account of how the Widower adverts came into being, and that letter from Chuch Harris is absolutely terrific. Wonderful how he makes his point through the medium of humor. One is forced to wonder exactly how seriously he was taking this difference between English English and American English. I laughed out loud at his remark that death and permanent gafia is much the same thing.

## JOYCE KATZ

Reading about your horrible accident and how dreadfully hurt you were made me sad all over again. How close we came to losing you!

I'd like to lay an Obligation on you and all my other friends, to Be Careful, and Outlast Me. It is not for your own sakes I ask this, but for the Highly Important need to keep my own world intact. It already seems my world is getting small, and I wish it would never be decreased again. *{I'd*

*like to live at least as long as Bill Danner, assuming my health remains good.}*

Jeff's piece about New York City was fascinating...a beautiful pastiche of city lore. I was particularly touched by his bit about the old man who was laboring his way toward New Jersey. Jeff called him a holy man, and it may be true. Those who choose New York City's streets as a way of life must have some sort of inner light that illuminates their dark reality.

His time in New York overlapped mine, so many of the images he conjures seem familiar... in Brooklyn, it was the crazy man standing for years on the same corner, who smiled and nodded at me every time I passed for a dozen years or more, then one day woke from his lethargy and began to attack passerbys with a knife. Or the teenage beggar I gave money and encouragement every day, who joined a cult, gradually began turning tricks, took up crack, and descended into a premature old age, hair in strings, face ruined, arms covered with sores. The last time I saw her she was stealing a pair of skis from a local department store. She looked at me, and tried to hide from my familiar eyes. But at least she seemed better fed and I was glad of that, and hoped she'd get a good price for her booty. I often think of her and wonder if she has survived.

Mostly I lived in a comfortable, industrious New York, and knew comfortable, industrious New Yorkers who were good neighbors, good friends. But Jeff draws compelling word pictures, and his description of New York City is undeniably an accurate one, and a great deal more exciting than the "Hi, Neighbor!" atmosphere of Brooklyn Heights.

Delightful to read Alice Sanvito's piece, and interesting, too. The world of the Russian Bath seems very far removed from Las Vegas this afternoon, although the temperatures seem very similar. (But it's a dry heat, as they say in Nevada.) I recall Alice with much affection; a fan girl on the scene during the publishing frenzy of the Brooklyn Insurgents, in 1971-72 or thereabout. I believe she was brought into the group by old St. Louis fan Chris Couch, and she joined us around the huge table for our communal meals. We all loved her, wanted her to stay forever, but she eventually went back to St. Louis. I believe I gave her a spoon as a memento of her time with us.

Greg Benford's hilarious report on efforts to

work in the movie biz are so exactly akin to the frustration others have expressed. They are also somewhat similar to the experience of game-writing. The game-creation-biz is modeled after Hollywood. It takes a huge team of people to make an electronic game, and writers get wrenched around just the same. Perpetually low men on the totem poles, it's their destiny to be second-guessed, rewritten, sucked dry, and cast aside like a drained lemon rind.

Carol has always written beautifully, and does still. She has the art of making a column seem like a tiny visit into her life. I feel voyeuristic as I browse her thoughts, then leave happy from the experience, but feeling I have intruded into her space. She has a gift for opening a window to give us a glimpse inside, and I'm always grateful for that look.

Meeting George Metzger at Corflu 2000 was one of the highlights of the convention. I had met up with his art in the 1960s, through comic fan Bob Schoenfeld, and George even did a wonderful "St. Louis in '69" poster for us. But I never met him, and I'm sorry about that.

Reading his near-stream-of-conscious column reminds me of what a pleasant fellow he really is. His description of flitting from place to place, following the life, reminds me of the '50s and '60s; it's like a period piece, an *On The Road* pace of existence that most of us who lived back then have given up now. He removes all the rough traveling, the hunger and cold, and leaves only the pleasure of people well-remembered.

## BEN INDICK

Have you read Stephen King's article in *The New Yorker* about the accident which nearly killed him? It would seem like old home week to you, after yours. Each of you suffered terrible damages. You were more modest in FAPA and I really had not known how extensive it all was, although at least you ended up with an air conditioner for your pains. Had I e-mail back then I would have filled your days with chuckles and chortles, but confined merely to the USPO I was helpless. Still, somehow, entirely on your own, you did make it through. With a little help from some pretty fine people. Your long cure reminds me of some 35 years ago when I had a heart attack. An infarction, heartwall damage. They were more cautious in those days and I was not even allowed to dangle my legs over the bed for

21 days, then a few days of dangling, then walking, during which my legs were so weak I nearly fell, like Ray Bolger as the Scarecrow. I also had some anticipatory fears but it all worked out well, much much easier for me than for you, I must add. You were a mess! *{Not as bad as Mr. King, though.}*

I was awaiting the insurance story and am agreeably surprised it worked out satisfactorily for you, although it was a most aggravating fight. Somehow I cannot believe you got what you deserved, but if the woman was insured for such a preposterously low amount you were stuck, although, had you wanted, you could have instituted a personal lawsuit against her. I think I carry a million insurance. If I would have bopped you, you would be wealthy today. We might even have split it since you are such an amenable fella. *{Such an offer is hard to refuse, but I'll do my best. As for launching a civil suit against the aggressor, I determined that the turnip had insufficient blood.}*

## GREG BENFORD

Your car crash account reverberates with unspoken emotions, so perhaps you've processed most of the deep impact such events have. Adding on degenerative disk disease didn't help—but it's a commonplace disorder, Meyer, goes with the territory of 50+. (I learned I had it while I was training to run marathons, and exceeded my legs' and spine's carrying capacity at twenty miles.) It's helped by building the nearby support muscles so the load gets carried by them, not your squishy disks.

Great Schalles, Harmon, Metzger and Carol Carr—virtual columnists here, giving a sense of continuity. I compared Alice Sabvito's hot/cold bath with my trip while in Istanbul to the oldest extant Turkish bath. Marble halls, elaborate water rituals, a quite elegant soapy massage—alas, from a man. No light beating with leafy branches, though, which would be a big seller in California, you betchum.

Elegant rhymers Bob Leman is dead on about Maya Angelou—a sign of our times that the Clintons had her read a poem at the 1993 inaugural, which turned out to have big pieces stolen from a minor poet's work published only a year before! Yet she is an icon of the lit'ry world, never mind her lack of elementary skills. Luckily, time erodes even such phony fame.

Sid Birchby's inquiry about Stephen Hawking is perceptive: the budding physicist read nothing but SF from age ten on. When I came to know him in Cambridge from 1976 on, he reminisced about many plots but could never remember their authors (humbling, for a writer like me). Much of his thinking is very science fictional, and he knows virtually nothing of the rest of western lit.

Jim Harmon's invective against the American Film Institute's Best Movie List of the Century is of course right, as Noreen Shaw says. I was astonished to find I'd seen 96 of them! Yet many of my faves were missing. I deliberately watched *the Sound of Music* last month to tick off another of that four, but geez, if I'd been a diabetic I'd have been a goner....

Like John Burbee, I dream of dead friends, including both Burb, Rotsler, Terry Carr, Zelazny, Kingsley Amis, and Heinlein. Somehow writers turn up in my fantasy-scapes more often than others, even physicists—though I've had several repeating dreams about earnest discussions with Einstein. (All set in a gauzy afterlife, too... Nope, can't remember the content, drat.)

John Baxter is right about Rotsler the fading bard of porn. He made a scratchy living that way, once his physical health began to erode, and his *Contemporary Erotic Cinema* was the first book in the field, one much stolen from and a collector's item in its sole paperback edition. A colleague of mine in Women's Studies at UCI lifted whole ideas from it, published her book on porn, then refused to cite Bill because *it's not an academic book*. Yeah, right. Watching *Boogie Nights*, I wondered powerfully if Rotsler was the model for the Burt Reynolds character.

Great Stiles headings!—especially for my piece.

## DAVID REDD

One thing I like about *Trap Door* is the community of shared experiences and attitudes. Usually it's stfnal more or less (e.g., Carol's delightful and moving "Stuff" about Avram Davidson). This time, though, despite all the brilliance by Greg, Alice, Chris and the other letterhacks, it was still your own piece about your mother's funeral which got to me. And not just the part about missing her, more what came afterwards.

Since my own Mum's death the day after

Boxing Day Meriel and I are the “elders of the family,” as a neighbor helpfully reminded us shortly after the funeral. It’s an odd feeling, since we’re in our early fifties and don’t consider ourselves elders at all. We knew our grandparents and the last of them died after our children were born, so we’ve been used to having three or four generations around, often in the same house. Now suddenly the vertical family has shrunk to just us and our children—who are in their twenties and are fleeing the nest one by one. We still have other relatives horizontally, so to speak, nearby but not in the same town, but there’s a definite feeling of a dimension missing somewhere.

(There was a previous episode of this for me, about thirty years ago when I lost grandparents, aunts and uncles within a very few years. At that time I was acquiring Meriel’s family, which sort of compensated. This time, acquiring a son-in-law and his relatives doesn’t feel the same.)

Inevitably, neither of us feel like elders. Somewhere in my heart it’s still 1966, and all this career and mortgage and stuff is irrelevant to what my teenage self still thinks and dreams. (Note to George Metzger: this is why we’re “all still here, doing it.”) I suppose that in the real world there are people who grew up inside as well as outside? I still fear secretly that the real-world people will find me out eventually, spotting that I’m not one of them, even though I’ve been a visiting member of their club all these years.

Anyway, you’re right, being the elder of the family is weird. Like Linda Markstrom, I wish I’d listened more carefully and asked more questions. Also, as a parent I wish I’d spent more time with the children before they grew up and their childhood slipped through my fingers.

I guess me having these thoughts proves that *Trap Door* really is the fanzine of mortality.

Sorry this wasn’t the sort of chatty quotable letter you’d want for the lettercol, but it’s what came out. *{On the contrary; it’s a splendid letter. And I know what you mean about relatives not being quite the same thing. This past July my youngest son got married to his high school sweetheart, and suddenly I’ve a whole flock of in-laws, including some elderly ones, since she’s part of a \*huge\* Italian family.}*

## JEAN YOUNG

I gather from your editorial that Walt Willis,

Chuch Harris and James White have died in the past year. I wouldn’t have heard otherwise. So many are falling away, I always fear the worst. Well, I suppose it isn’t inherently The Worst, being part of the natural order of things—but it’s something I don’t want to hear, anyway. But I’d rather know the situation than wonder.

I greatly sympathize with how long it seemed to take you to recover. Even after I came home from my various surgeries, I didn’t feel like reading or doing art or anything for a long, long time—yet what I particularly wanted was my old life back. I’ve got some of it, but still cannot stand for more than a few minutes without my canes, and not for all that long with them. Walking is a lot easier than standing.

I think I enjoyed Jeff Schalles’ reminiscences of his strange times in New York, although I was constantly thinking “better him than me.” Seeing people get killed is not one of those experiences I long for, or would treasure, though I suppose it makes one wise, in a way—experienced in the cruel and crazy ways of the world.

Alice Sanvito on the Baths of Russia really was fascinating. Sort of like a sauna or sweat lodge. I don’t like hot (or cold, either, for that matter), and I hate to sweat; but the massage part sounds wonderful.

I really, really, *really* enjoyed Greg Benford’s Hollywood tales. I actually saw *Mission to Mars*, and just loved Greg’s remark that “it was like a film made by children with money.”

Carol’s voiceover for “Prevaricon” was just wonderful. I have seen many of those ads for new prescription cure-all drugs, with all their caveats, and this was just perfect.

I guess I can relate more to George Metzger’s reminiscences than to Jeff Schalles’, since his experiences are more like my own of that period—or those of people I knew. I have never heard of the Rael people; I’m not sure I’d really want to meet any. Something was forwarded to me on e-mail from Larry Stark who got it from Lee Vanderlaan (my ex-partner of Hippy days in The Valley at Quandahl) about a Day Out Of Time and a Rainbow Bridge, which was crammed with all sorts of weird pseudo-astronomy and pseudo-physics and was totally incomprehensible. I guess July 25 and 26 were the critical days, and we have supposedly now jumped 200 years into the future—or maybe it was 2,000 years.

Jim Harmon’s ordeal, though far briefer than

yours, sounds quite unpleasant. Hospitals just aren’t the funnest places in the world. I can empathize with his relief at being home again and the world more or less normal.

As for myself, I hope to continue as geology curator at Luther, although we didn’t get much funding from the interim Dean, and are going to have to make a pitch to the new Dean first thing in the fall. I had a student worker this summer (who got paid over five times what I did—and I only got paid because my colleague donated his research stipend to me. That’s what it is to be marginal at Luther College). I did the Nordic Fest Art Fair here the last weekend in July—my nineteenth year at it—and despite a lot of worry and hassle trying to get it together, it went okay—I made my entry fee and a bit more, though not enough to cover the new sides for the E-Z-Up shelter that I bought. It’s very tiring, and my original dream of doing lots of art fairs once I retire is pretty much out the window. We made some progress on my well-log based structural study, and did pathetically little (but some, some) on my colleague’s gravity survey—still unfinished, and likely to remain so as he is going to retire at the end of this school year. That also leaves my future at Luther—and in geology—very up in the air. I can only wait and see.

## FRED LERNER

Your account of your honeymoon trip to Yosemite resonated with me. Sheryl and I didn’t have our honeymoon in a national park—we traveled in time rather than space, to Colonial Williamsburg—but for our tenth anniversary we visited three of them: Grand Canyon, Bryce Canyon, and Zion. I’m the one who plans the family’s trips, so I knew (but Sheryl did not) that when we entered the North Rim’s Grand Canyon Lodge a floor-to-ceiling plate-glass window would give us a view directly into the canyon. This established the tone of our trip, a week of geologic splendor New Englanders never see at home, and hooked us on visiting the national parks.

Since then we’ve traveled to many of the western parks—Big Bend, Carlsbad Caverns, Guadalupe Mountains, Sequoia, Kings Canyon, Olympic, Badlands, Wind Cave, Petrified Forest, Mesa Verde, Arches, Canyonlands—as well as a host of national monuments and national historic sites. At one point we established a lifetime goal of visiting every site managed by the National

Park Service. This is beginning to look unrealistic. For one thing, new parks are being added faster than we can keep up. For another, some of the national parks are tucked away in the more forbidding parts of Alaska, or out in the Pacific. (The National Park of American Samoa is one that we don’t expect to be visiting anytime soon.)

There are several of the most popular national parks that we haven’t visited. Yellowstone and Grand Teton, we are told, are far too crowded in summer. They are reputed to be at their best in early autumn, which means that we shall have to wait until we are freed from the tyranny of the school calendar to visit them. And we’ve never been to Yosemite. There, too, we shall wait a few years, until the environmental improvements that I understand to be in progress reduce automobile traffic in the park and make it more pedestrian-friendly.

In the meantime we’ve discovered that Europe has got national parks, too. We visited three in Estonia this past summer, and mean to visit at least one in Iceland in April. We’re not backpackers or long-distance trekkers, so we can’t enjoy these parks to the fullest; but even duffers like us can find in them beauty and grandeur within the reach of our abilities. I just hope that President Bush and his Interior Department won’t do too much damage to our national parks and monuments.

## RICHARD DENGROVE

I love Steve Stiles’s propellor beanie blastoff, in particular because it reminds me of a LoC I saved from Ray Nelson on the zine *Habakkuk*. In it, Ray claimed to be the inventor of the propellor beanie or beaniecopter. And it was a lark. In 1947 or thereabouts, he was taking gag photos mocking the covers of the SF pulps of the time. He came up with a propellor beanie as headgear for the intrepid spaceman. After that session, George Young took the beanie. As Ray said, he let him because no one had any idea it was worth anything. George wore it to different conventions in the late ‘40s and soon other fans adopted it. George was supposed to be the model for Beanie in the two Beanie and Cecil series. Having seen Steve’s door, I hope the intrepid spaceman Ray was mocking traveled in, or even on, something more spaceworthy.

## HARRY WARNER JR.

I felt a sort of horrified fascination over the articles by George Metzger and Jeff Schalles. Horrified because I couldn't imagine surviving in the sort of lives they've led, fascinated because they seem to have enjoyed most of the things that would turn me into a whimpering catatonic. Unfortunately, neither of them told us at the end of their contributions if they are happy they chose such adventurous lives instead of having settled down to a stodgy career and family-creating. They both have had enormous talent and neither of them seems to have utilized it in the way that would bring big money and public recognition.

Jim Harmon provided me with another session of horror when he described that persistent nosebleed and its consequences. Curiously, I've never suffered a genuine nosebleed. Sometimes I'd get some pink mucus when I blew my nose during a severe cold, but that was it. I seem to have failed to land on my nose during the two falls that led to long hospital stays, because there was no damage there. Maybe God took pity on me because my nose is already so big and it would be unfair to allow it to suffer problems over such a large area.

I can't see any reason to hope the movies will improve, despite Greg Benford's efforts in that respect. The studios are no longer the way they were a half-century ago, when an executive could decide to authorize a movie or two with little hope for a big box office, just because it would bring prestige, with its loss absorbed by all the profitable films. Maybe the new outburst by authorities about violence in the media will force Hollywood to soft-pedal for a while the plague of mindless all-violence films, but I have my doubts about that happy prospect. I've not watched a movie in a theater for at least ten years and sometimes a year goes by without my watching a movie getting its first television showing. The glorification of promiscuity, fornication, firearms and gutter language sickens me.

Alice Sanvito, thank goodness, was entertaining rather than disturbing in her narrative of how one takes a superbath in Russia. And I appreciated her words about me in the letter section. We could have met at a convention if she was going to them before the mid-'70s when I quit, but I don't remember it if it happened.

However, I have been trying to verify the possibility that I went to the worldcon in St. Louis in an astral body or something. My physical self definitely remained in Hagerstown that weekend, because I was home when someone called me to tell me I'd won the fan writer Hugo. But Martha Beck insists that we had a very long conversation during that convention. Maybe I also sent the less substantial part of me to an encounter with Alice in St. Louis.

I share Bob Leman's dismay over the paucity of light verse. In addition to the causes he mentions for this sad situation, I might point out another: the near-extinction of light verse in newspapers. Columnists used to indulge in it, sometimes letters to the editor took that form, and metropolitan newspapers sometimes even bought light verse to use as fillers. Most of it was bad, but it reminded the public and the poets that the medium existed.

The letter section is valuable for the LoCs that tell us a good bit about the last years of Bill Rotsler and Nieson Himmel. I've never been a pornographer but I did spend a lot of years in journalism, and one of the few sensible things I've ever done was to get out of the latter profession before I got too old to do a proper job of it. There's nothing worse than the old reporter suffering through menial tasks because he is no longer able to handle the stress of reporting or unable to keep up with the time demands of a decision-making desk job.

## ERIKA MARIA LACEY

Jeff's experiences sound scary indeed. The most strange thing that I've ever had happen to me is when I was in Sydney. Walking around and minding my own business, I was in one of the shopping centers when a guy appeared to be following me. I'd walk along and look in shop windows sideways to see if he was still there. He was. I'd stop and pretend to *really* look at something, and he'd stop and turn my way every so often. Amateur. So I went down a flight of stairs, left the center and walked to a bus stop and sat down. He couldn't do anything now without being obvious, so he kept walking and left me alone. It wasn't the only weird thing... that visit when I first arrived a guy approached me and began to ask all sorts of personal questions, which I either evaded or lied about (family coming to see me soon, lots of family in Sydney, they all know

that I'm here, that sort of thing—all lies). The day that I was leaving he saw me again, and began to follow me up the street. I hurried along in an attempt to pretend that I'd not seen him, to no avail. Again I lied, and it worked sufficiently to get rid of him. It must be the air in Sydney. It never happens in Brisbane, not even in the suburb where I live, which has one of the worst reputations of the southeast (only Inala and Ipswich are worse).

Massages are absolute bliss—all power go to Alice. Having back problems from time to time, finding a friend or family member who is willing to be conscripted into doing massages isn't very easy, and to pay someone... well. For someone who is unemployed, the chances of that are not too high. Massages ranks right up there with having my hair brushed to make me feel lethargic and fall asleep. Perhaps training people how to do proper hair-brushing is next on the list.

Avram Davidson sounds like an eccentric guy. Very eccentric. Often those who are so are very interesting—someone should maybe do collections of letters of his someday. They look like they'd be a very interesting read. *{I agree—and believe such a project is in the works.}*

I don't have too much trouble with voicemail or being kept on hold—speakerphone. I just sit there with a book and read until someone comes to attend me; that's when I start paying attention, not before that. Of course, my family hasn't caught onto this nifty use of the speakerphone as yet. Grumbles about idiot machines on the other end of the line prevaricate. That's what e-mail is for! Asynchronous communication, but it always gets there.

## F. M. BUSBY

This issue carries so much good material that it's hard to figure where to start. Fascinating stuff. Jeff Schalles on "little incidents" of life in NYC, Alice Sanvito in Russia of all places, Greg Benford with more proof that if H'wood studio execs were only a little smarter they could qualify as radishes.

Carol is of course a category unto herself. Loved her reminiscences of Avram, and cheered a couple of well-chosen pet peeves.

Considering what Homer did for Odysseus, I wonder what he'd make of George Metzger? (No worry; Geo is doing fine, all by himself.)

I sympathize with Jim Harmon. No two ways about it, hospitals always feel like enemy territory. And I feel lucky to get out alive!

Burbie influenced the writing of an entire generation of fans, and still, nobody matches his touch with an anecdote. Here you have a pair of choice ones. I tend to doubt that his story in No. 19 was intended for pro publication (as Gary D. suggests). Because, if he had submitted it, I think it would've sold.

## GUY MILLER

I was perversely fascinated with Jeff Schalles' piece, especially since, as a young man, on one occasion I experienced a slim slice of the New York he talks about. I found it a not nice-place to visit and I certainly had no desire ever to live there. I was glad to get back to Springfield, Ohio. I hasten to add that at several other times I have had more positive visits to the Big Apple. But, in any case, the article offers interesting insights, as does "Alice in Banialand." I've read more than one account of tourists' Russian adventures, but never about the bathing ritual of its citizens. Another article providing a peak at the underneath of a world one is constantly exposed to is Greg Benford's. I'm not a sci-fi fan, but I bet he writes a good story. And I could read more of Carol Carr's delightful "Stuff"! So, I look forward to another *Trap Door*!

## BOB SMITH

Delightful cover from Steve, but I would suggest that Robert Lichtman and *Trap Door* have been in a celestial fannish orbit for quite some time. However, I keep thinking that's Forry Ackerman clinging to said door, since I can't imagine you using the abomination "sci-fi."

Strange feelings on reading Schalles and Metzger—there was a distinct urge to play some jazz or something from the periods of their lives being described, that would create a comfortable link. There were moments that touched me, apart from the obvious SF and fannish hints, and as was almost suggested it was like dipping back into Kerouac. Since I had discovered fandom and the military at approximately the same time, probably my early years were slightly more "controlled" than fannish contemporaries. (But I can still pull down off the shelves the writings of Philip K. Dick and the *I Ching*.)

Carol was absolutely delightful to chuckle over and—I have to admit—a welcome change from all the stream-of-consciousness stuff. More, please.

Jim Harmon conveys the atmosphere and fear (and organized chaos) of the hospital that most of us can relate to, and fairly obviously hanging on to one's sense of humor is essential. Lyn and I use that saying "it's good to be home" a lot. However, to be fair, it was sense-of-wonderish to visit and hold our three grandsons over the years. When it comes to the dear days of radio and its heroes, I like the comment I read somewhere that the opening lines and remembered sayings always hover in the ether like a Cheshire cat that never quite goes away. Jim is easy reading.

Burbee was most enjoyable, as always, and including comments from his children almost adds another dimension to the Burbee character. Ed Burbee says it better than most of us could, I think. Since it's now a way of life for smokers to get a drag or two on the sidewalk or wherever (well, it is in this country) Burbee's reflections on 1939 childishness make you think.

Is this the same Bob Leman whose wonderful grasp of the English language we admired back in the '50s? *{The very same, yes.}* He has improved with age. On the matter of poetry and humor, I have found that when one wanders through the poetry anthologies collected but waiting for the right moment, as it were, a surprising amount of humor is found, even amongst those poets considered serious and even dull. And since we were looking at Burbee a few pages back, without our own microcosm and via *Fancylopedia II*, there are some gems to be rediscovered. It would be nice to believe that the young will come back to that dull school subject later in life, but I fear not. Bob's Harris and Ravoons enjoyably appreciated.

Ron Bennett on the stolen tank in San Diego reminded me that here in Australia we had a similar incident some years ago, and although the army driver may have been minus a few marbles, I got the distinct impression that most viewers enjoyed the spectacle of a vehicle the fuzz (pardon my ancient usage) couldn't get near. Nobody is going to argue with a tank!

Most entertaining letter from Sid Birchby, and the case for Roger Penrose gives food for thought. Did he have some illicit pulps stashed away, or perhaps a few imaginatively-covered

*Astoundings*? Many of the newer generations of scientists could indeed have SF hidden in their past, and many of them are good at writing about their fields. In Arthur C. Clarke's 1963 novel, *GlidePath*, the leading character, an RAF boffin-type, checks out the "literature" at his new posting and amongst the technical books and sensational novels of the time are "a dozen copies of *Astounding Science Fiction* and *Wonder Stories*, etc." Makes you think.

I admire Amanda Baker's rational approach to the Internet vs. Papernet, but the issue is also about those individuals who really have little interest in taking that fatal step because their lives are reasonably full. All the electronic marvels we are used to and the computer as a tool can be happily accepted, and the individual should be allowed to make a choice. (Can you imagine a totalitarian state where, as soon as you're old enough, being hooked to the Net is compulsory.) You don't have to be on the Net to discover nuggets of technical information, and I presume from Amanda's interesting address "technical" means on her professional level.

Harry Turner's slice of OMPA history was interesting. John Baxter joined that a later on, but I don't think he stayed in any longer than I did in SAPS. There is of course another very practical reason for not over-indulging in baked beans.

John Baxter's mention of Lafcadio Hearn reminds me that the Web can cause a form of disillusion for one who has cherished a quiet enjoyment of a favorite writer for many years. John Foyster, knowing my interest in Hearn, downloaded and sent me many items of interest from The Web. The asking prices for Hearn's books and the depth of Hearn mania in what John sent was quite a shock. I run loving fingers over my meager collection of Hearn and Things Japanese, and retreat even further from the Electronic Monster.

## BOB TURNER

I was delighted with Benford's Adventures in H'wood because his opening sentence captured my attention and rekindled my memory banks. He had lunch at the Fox Studios! He doesn't know it until now but he may have eaten that lunch in the same dining room I patronized for about five months. This revelation will plunge all fandom into war.

In 1946 I went to Los Angeles for the Worldcon and afterward stayed five months because a job at the Fox Studios fell into my lap—not as a lowly writer but as a lowly set electrician. I was the new man with the lowest seniority in the electrical department and so I was assigned to the scut work—crawling between the walls of back-to-back sets and wiring the lighting fixtures on those walls, or crawling inside a locomotive boiler to wire the headlight hanging on the faceplate. Lucky me.

The movies I worked on are now 50 to 55 years old and I no longer see them on the black-and-white late shows, but none of them were sci-fi and none contained errors that might upset a physics professor. They dealt with George Montgomery as a private detective, with Maureen O'Hara as the owner of a prized race horse, and with Ronald Colman raising a family in Boston. Dull stuff with nary an astronaut strolling by without his helmet.

Thank you for a splendid issue, memories and all.

## MILT STEVENS

"I'd like to suck the juice out of this puppy" is a truly grotesque figure of speech. It seems completely appropriate to the people Greg Benford is describing in *Trap Door* No. 20. Film making is a committee effort, and a camel is a horse designed by committee. This explains how the film version of "The Cold Equations" ended up with a happy ending. I didn't actually watch the film, but I heard about it. When it aired on television I wasn't in the mood for a really down movie. My reaction to hearing about the changed ending was something in the order of "They did *what*?" My mind was boggled.

Still, they're doing better than they used to. I was growing up during the period of the Attack Of The 75-Foot Turkey movies. Mentioning that you liked science fiction caused many people to believe you were admitting to liking such films. I commented at the time that I liked science fiction and I liked movies, but the combination of the two was generally the outrage of both.

Carol Carr mentions the gifts she received on the occasion of her retirement. When I retired my co-workers gave me a new suitcase (which I needed and have used several times since) and a Star Trek TV remote. I actually needed the TV remote too, because the remote on my VCR had

died several months previously. The Star Trek remote was in the form of a phaser. Aside from turning things on and off and changing channels, it also made the sounds of phaser blasts and small explosions. I can see how it might be a very therapeutic device. When some political poltroon is proposing new taxes it could be very satisfying to give him a couple of phaser zaps and a kerblam as well. It might not lower my taxes, but it could lower my blood pressure.

Carol Carr also does a great send-up of the advertising for those TV wonder drugs that really make you wonder. *TV Guide* also has its share of medical marvel ads. In *TV Guide*, the ads are always two pages of one-point type. I have no idea of the details of these ads, because I can't read one-point type. Possibly, they are a form of communication between outer space aliens who have the requisite little teeny eyes for reading the little teeny print.

## LENNY BAILES

Greg's article on his adventures in Hollywood reminds me of how I like the physics and scientific speculation in his early stories. I haven't read *Shiva Descending*, but I remember the novella he wrote with Gordon Eklund about the talking Sun creatures. Greg says that in the '90s, Hollywood Biz has evolved until style becomes content, but I think the movie adaptation of Carl Sagan's *First Contact* belies that point. (And it has only one explosion in it.) I felt that the storyline in that movie offered character values, and, for me, it evoked a sense of what an alien contact might actually be like.

Greg is right in noting that Hollywood screenwriters tend to rewrite or alter most of the novels that find their way into movie production. They don't like downbeat endings on "family" films. As for the sloppiness he observes in some science fiction films, I tend to agree that spectacle is sometimes used as a substitute for plot development. On the other hand, B-movies like *The Thirteenth Floor* show that good narrative and production values can be combined.

I scanned Burbee's Collector story. I guess supermarket work can be rough, at times. I haven't encountered incidents like the one he mentions in my own experience.

I agree with Chris Priest's sentiment that the death of any man or woman diminishes us. However, I find that after the grief, there is some

consolation in remembering the good times one has shared with a departed friend. I struggle in my own life with the issue of death as a final experience, but sometimes I think of it as a gentle sleep that may come to us.

Carol's comments on the exaggeration found in some TV ads hit home to me. It's as if they design them for people who never leave their TV sets.

### E. B. FROHVT

I loved Greg Benford telling James Cameron, "All physics is metaphor." (Which is true in more than a metaphorical sense.) I assume Benford knows about Edgar Rice Burroughs, who seriously proposed a system under which a writer would have creative veto over the screenplay made from his book and also a say in the casting of the film! In his time, Burroughs was influential enough that he did in fact have some input (at one point getting his son-in-law cast as Tarzan). Of course nothing like that is possible now. I recall commenting somewhere that of the five films nominated for the Hugo in 2000, four were written by their directors and the other one by out-of-the-box H'wood screenwriters—none by professional SF writers. I've thought about writing an article on all the favorite SF books that would make great movies: wasted effort. Never gonna happen.

I don't know if *TD* is deliberately intended as an apazine or functions as one, but somehow it leaves me with that impression. *{No, it's more like a class reunion.}*

### STEVE GREEN

It says much for Greg Benford's inner equilibrium that he's able to write of his encounters with the marching morons of Hollywood in such a whimsical manner. It's scarcely surprising that many of the current generation of film directors began their careers in advertising: both industries operate a philosophy that other people's ideas are not intellectual assets, but natural resources to be strip-mined regardless of their provenance.

Case in point: several years back, Levi Jeans ran a campaign which ripped off the central imagery of *The Swimmer*, Frank Perry's 1968 adaptation of a John Cheever short story. When the ad reached the U.K., one journalist in the preview audience picked up on the "homage." Rather than apologize, or seek to justify their

actions, the agency representative merely demanded to know whether the movie had an unanticipated familiarity on this side of the Big Pond. (Similarly, it could be argued that *Forrest Gump* is naughty but *Zelig*, reworked with a bigger budget and without the wit.)

### FRED SMITH

Enjoyed particularly Greg Benford's "Adventures in H'Wood." Saw him recently on an astronomical video made a few years back and very distinguished he looked, too. Burbee was good, as always; in fact it's wonderful how he can make all sorts of subjects and incidents so interesting.

Jim Harmon is another who seems to be able to hold your attention even if the topic he's discussing is less than engrossing. Transcriptions of old Tom Mix radio programs, for example. Although I did hear recently a transcription of part of "The Shadow" on radio with Orson Welles doing the maniacal laugh. Incidentally, I learned only a short time ago that Street & Smith had started up their publication of the pulp magazine in response to the interest in the radio show which had actually been intended to publicize their *Detective Story* mag.

### GARY DEINDORFER

It was really great, and a blast from the past, to read George Metzger's writings. Didn't George teach Jack Kerouac everything he needed to know about confessional run-on prose? Or maybe it was the other way around. Y'know, I wouldn't be surprised if George knew Jack, if not as a friend then perhaps as an acquaintance.

I found Greg Benford's piece to be hilarious. I did know that in Hollywood writers are considered one step below janitors.

### JON D. SWARTZ

Loved my first issue of *Trap Door*, and enjoyed all of Steve Stiles' artwork, especially the cover. I hope he's a regular. *Trap Door* had all the things I like in a fanzine: interesting editorial, lively features, thought-provoking letters, and clever artwork.

"Harmony" by Jim Harmon was my favorite feature. I have been a friend of his for years (through correspondence) and still own and cherish copies of his *Radiohero*, a fanzine he published way back when. I have all his OTR

books, and he was very helpful when I was writing my OTR book. His comments about publishers were right on target. My experiences have been similar, no matter the publisher. One can change publishers, but not the attitude that exists in the industry. No wonder some authors look to the small specialty presses, especially ones run by fans.

### MARTY CANTOR

Jim Harmon writes about a family friend he considers a contemporary being taken as his second daughter. Reminds me of something which happened to me recently. Even after Robbie and I separated, we continued to go shopping together on Sunday mornings. Now, with Robbie having moved to England a few years ago, I still go to the same market on Sunday mornings. A few weeks ago a clerk who has been there for some years asked me, "Where is your daughter?" Robbie may be seventeen years younger than me; however, both of us look younger than our ages. Or, maybe, I no longer look younger than my chronological age, as my hair (and my beard) have been showing more than some grey. Still, it was a bit of a shock to hear my ex-wife called my daughter.

Fred Smith writes about how Highway One down the Big Sur coast is *scary*. I took several vacations there (once when my transportation was a motorcycle) back when I drove MGs. I did not find it scary; but then, in those days, I was a bit of a wild driver and did not mind taking chances in my driving. Of course, they only seemed like "taking chances" and "wild" in retrospect. Still, in my relatively limited experience, the Big Sur coast is one of the most beautiful places on Earth.

John Baxter writes of visiting Bill Rotsler at his Van Nuys house, commenting about his physical decline corresponding with the decline of neatness in the house, with everything in disarray. Indeed, this was the case when I last visited Bill at his house. At that point, Bill lay on his couch during my whole visit (he directed me to pick up an envelope on a desk in another room—and I managed to find it—wherein he had placed various items for me). I spent some time talking with Bill (whilst standing as there was no unoccupied flat surface in the room). Bill's decline was evident in everything except his mind. Bill was the same Bill most of us have known and loved for all these years. Which made

it all so sad, the essential Bill Rotsler being betrayed by a decaying body. Within months, he was dead. He lives in memory, and I will continue to keep the memory fresh by using my voluminous collection of Rotsler art in my fanzines.

### JIM HARMON

I appreciate the egoboo I got from such people as Noreen Shaw. I believe I did invent radio fandom but I never got any such recognition from an old time radio club. I got a smile out of Steve Stiles' illo for my article. It looks like Rex Morgan attending a character out of Gasoline Alley—Uncle Walt, maybe. Fat men are jealous of their dignity—the only fat man ever to be treated with dignity on TV was Raymond Burr. But I'm not so fat anymore. A recent radio fanzine has a photo of me in Western gear, looking pretty damn heroic. I hope Steve won't mind my preferring that—although it isn't as clever as his work.

### JERRY KNIGHT

I never thought I'd see "Beside the Ardis Waters" again! My recollection is that Avram wrote it for Andy Main when Ardis moved to the Bay Area (along with Ron Hoffman and Dick & Sharon Karpinski). Is that right? Oh, wait, her sisters came here too. And shortly after that we split for Poughkeepsie for my six months in IBM computer school. It seems like an awfully long time ago.

It was fascinating to read about James Cameron and the movie business in Greg Benford's article. I loved hearing about Avram from Carol. I'm about halfway through the George Metzger piece (George Metzger!?!), and just felt like writing you. This isn't the sort of feeling that strikes me often, so I thought I should take advantage of it.

### A. LANGLEY SEARLES

I enjoyed the latest *Trap Door* very much, particularly the clever verses confirming the ever-increasing ubiquity of the lovable Mrs. R. These are too good not to continue, so I am doing my part by making a contribution to the canon. I have carefully preserved the approved anapestic meter, but have ventured to expand my verses a bit, in keeping with the majestic character of her latest territorial incursion:

On the top of Mount Everest once  
did appear  
A stone on which someone scrawled,  
“Kilroy was here.”  
But a recent explorer found this  
was erased  
At some recent time, and is  
now replaced  
With a legend he read, by the light  
of the moon,  
As “This mountain is owned now by  
Mrs. Ravoon.”

The lady’s family name is unusual. It does not appear in any of the telephone directories for New York City, but on checking the listings for Westchester County, the suburb just north of where I live, what did I find, just after “Ravon, Zvi-Henri, 45 Ridge Road, Larchmont,” but “Ravoon, Caroline, Milton Point, Rye”! So perhaps the old girl is not just a figment of the imaginations of some inventive British fans after all.

#### WM. BREIDING

I know from viewing your own aesthetics and knowing your loccers that you are a real editor, so it was with great appreciation that I ego-scanned the locs and there were so many comments on my brief piece. Thanks for that.

I was amused by George Metzger’s mentions of Steve Gaskin. I went to most of his “classes” at the Family Dog, and remember what a big deal it was when he went on the road and then started his utopia down in Tennessee. (Remember, I was maybe 13-14 years old.) Many years later I had to agree with Danielle when she said of hippie culture, “I couldn’t be a *real* hippie. They had way too many rules; they were very strict.” That’s a pretty accurate statement, at least from my life view. The whole culture of political correctness evolved from a wing of hippiedom that I just couldn’t “grok,” although I sure did try.

#### DALE SPEIRS

Your zine statistics are most interesting. I’ve only been keeping track of mine for a couple of years. What matters is not the absolute numbers, since neither of us (or anyone) can receive more than a tiny percentage of the thousands of zines being published, but the relative change from year to year. You have the best data, and the long run from 1987 indicates that zines are not on their

deathbed just yet. Between 1998 and 1999 we both report declines in the USA and Australia, but increases in Canada. I get about one-third mail art and punk zines, but they seem to hold the same proportions as SF.

I’d like to see more people keeping count of their zines, using your categories to allow consistent comparison. There is a need for more objective analysis of zinedom, instead of “in my opinion” remarks. The first year I kept track (1998) I tried to categorize zines by theme, but this quickly failed because so many of them blur the lines between perzine/genzine/sercon/reviewzine or SF/mail art/punk/political. So now I just call them zines. Period.

#### GARY MATTINGLY

I have this problem. There are too many things in which I am interested. There are too many books, too many movies, too many TV shows, too many Web pages, too many toys, too many catalogs, too many knives, too many odd occult practices. I will admit that one might seriously question my choices at times. Who in their right mind, would watch “Sabrina, The Teenage Witch,” when they had several issues of *Trap Door* sitting unread? Okay, I would. Admittedly *Trap Door* is a lot better but it is a lot easier watching Sabrina. *Trap Door* is something you need to actually take some time with, to savor over an extended period of time, not something to guffaw over one minute and then forget the next.

Anyway, I did it. I just finished reading *Trap Door* No. 20 and I enjoyed it. Admittedly I’m at work so I can’t watch Sabrina (or Buffy or Angel or Dark Angel or Level Nine or . . .)

Enjoyable artwork throughout although I must admit to enjoying the Steve Stiles’ illo for “Alice in Banialand” the most and the one by him for “Harmony” running a close second.

Sorry to read about your accident. Admittedly I had heard about it shortly after it happened but not with the same amount of information you provided. I really hope I never have such a bad accident. I have had quite a few small accidents but I’ve never been very severely physically injured. My most interesting one was when I ran into a telephone pole. Of course, I have no recollection of running into the telephone pole, having imbibed more than I should have which caused really poor driving and some memory loss. Of course, maybe it was only sort of poor driving

since if I hadn’t hit the telephone pole I would have gone into the lake. I didn’t really realize I hit something until several miles later when I heard this horrible noise. Hm, what is that horrible noise? I got out of the van and notice that there is this large sort of rounded dent pushing in the middle of the front of the van, pushing the fan and fan housing into the radiator. Oh, the fan is hitting the fan housing and radiator. Hm. Then I realize I don’t really know where I’m at. I walk a ways, figure out the location of the trailer of the fellow employee who has graciously provided me a place to sleep until I get settled. Walk back to the van. Drive back. Go to sleep. Next day comes along and another fellow at work comments about the skid marks he has seen leading to the tilting telephone pole where the road bends around the lake. That is to say, if you continue in the direction the road was going you leave the road and find the lake. Whereas, if you make a left or a right, you will find the continuation of the road. He remarks that the dent in the front of my fan would seem to be perfectly molded to the telephone pole. Together we make this assumption as to what must have happened.

This was not necessarily the best period of my life, living by myself in Storm Lake, Iowa, employed at my first job out of college. It has, um, memorable bad moments, well, bad hours, bad days. Like, I wouldn’t recommend taking acid while you’re alone, slightly depressed and living in a one-room residential motel that has obviously seen better days. Would not recommend that; however it can leave interesting memories, sort of.

Death. I don’t think I’m too fond of it. Not a comment from personal experience. Well, since I suppose there is always this reincarnation possibility I suppose it could be a personal experience but it fits into another one of those memory loss periods. No personal memories appear to come into my brain. The bad part, of which I speak, is other people’s deaths (so far). I just don’t deal with it very well. Not too good on the commiseration part. Not too good at all.

Enjoyed reading all of your experiences. I guess it all relates to my voyeuristic tendencies. Will always remember Peter Sellers’ line, “I like to watch,” in *Being There*.

Jeff Schalles writes in a most entertaining and interesting fashion about his experiences, too. So many people seem to have so many more

interesting life experiences than I do. Admittedly there are those other 20,000 or 30,000 other people who haven’t had more interesting life experiences but I don’t read their articles, since either they haven’t written them or they’re really boring.

I have gone to various clubs in San Francisco and the Bay Area and seen bands. I suppose the most interesting ones were fifteen or twenty years ago though, like going to see punk bands at the Deaf Club and learning to sign BUD or getting my nose broken while watching the Psychedelic Furs in Berkeley. Nothing like crawling away with blood flowing on to the floor while some maniac follows you with great expectations of beating you to a pulp (hm, makes me think of *Astounding* covers). Fortunately as I advanced toward my table all my friends stood up, particularly the rather tall Lynn Kuehl, along with Rich Coad and Larry Rehse. Okay, maybe I was drinking that time, too, so I don’t really recall who all was at the table. Patty also wasn’t very pleased with this fellow’s behavior. So, fortunately, he retreated and later the bar staff escorted him from the premises. Patty probably caused a number of fellows an inability to relieve themselves of their accumulated beer content when she followed me into the men’s restroom to check on my condition and help me find some additional paper towels to soak up the blood. A definitely interesting experience but one time was more than sufficient.

Alice Sanvito’s article was also most entertaining and informative. Another person with quite interesting life experiences.

Greg Benford’s article was also interesting (must find thesaurus and another word for interesting). I frequently wonder why changes are made to books which are really quite interesting and then become much less interesting and coherent when they become movies. Of course this sort of returns me to Sabrina and an easy false reality that so much of the population, including me, falls into. Why analyze? Just sit there and have your mind numbed. Easy.

Also enjoyed Carol Carr’s “Stuff.” Always fun to read about the occasionally strange way people view life. Was Avram Davidson just attempting to be entertaining or was his reality really like that? Everyone’s reality may not be the same, I do believe, at least how their view of reality appears in their mind.

Another truly interesting life appears in

George Metzger's article. I had one girlfriend who wasn't a fan and we really didn't have that much in common. I much prefer having something to talk about, even though I don't really talk that much. Maybe I'm lazy and don't really feel like "educating" them. I have enjoyed or at least experienced a number of periods of life when I was relatively alone, even though I wasn't out in the country. There was a summer in Manhattan, Kansas, when I took one class, worked as a switchboard operator and went to cheap Sunday kids' matinees. It was a most calm period. It didn't really feel boring but I didn't really do much creatively. Well, okay, maybe I did a few fanzines/apazines but nothing huge. It still felt good though. I'm not sure I have enough energy to live as interesting a life as George seems to live now.

I also have never had a nose bleed as severe as Jim Harmon's. Again, another entertaining article. Even my broken nose, noted above, didn't bleed as long as his nose did. I did have to go to the hospital for a little inpatient nose-rearranging. I think that hurt more. Of course, most of the alcohol had left my system by that time.

Charles Burbee's article was also enjoyable and interesting (I just cannot write good LoCs. I have a horrible time saying over and over how good everything is. I guess I could limit myself to a few cursory remarks or one long ramble related to one article but I feel so obligated to comment on everything when I've enjoyed reading it. Now if the article was boring I can fairly easily skip right over it. Sometimes I am driven to say how loathsome someone's view is, at least as portrayed in the article, but more often than not, I just won't say anything.). His description of the encounter of the half-witted girl reminds me of visiting the psychiatric ward at S.F. General and having one woman saying over and over how she just wanted a kiss. I don't think she was half-witted but she did have some severe problems plus I just bet that my employer, the Social Security Administration, wouldn't have understood at all if I had tried to comply. I also have a feeling it wasn't just me. It probably was any male that walked in. I've often heard the phrase "starved for affection" but she seemed to be the most exact realization, the near epitome of that phrase, not counting puppies I've seen at the animal shelter. I hope she found what she needed.

## LLOYD PENNEY

I always like looking at your fanzines received chart. I daresay that the lion's share of Canadian fanzines come from Dale Speirs, with one or two coming from Andrew Murdoch and Murray Moore. I'd like to pub my ish again, but time and money never allow. And as you say about yourself, I am a paperzine devotee.

Jeff Schalles proves to me, with a fine article, that I could never live in New York City. I consider Toronto more than crazy enough for me. I'm sure that should the Worldcon vote in Chicago go our way, fans going to the Worldcon in Toronto in 2003 will find the city fairly tame. This really means that it's safe, and you can enjoy life in downtown with nothing to worry about. 0 The bania sounds great, good for you and quite relaxing once you get over the heat. This article also illustrates the West's repressive ideas about casual nudity. Obviously, the Russian woman in the bania wasn't repressed. Being unclothed in such a facility probably provided her not only with a more comfortable atmosphere in which to work in, but also with the healthful benefits of the bania all through her working day.

George Metzger's article is a great read, but as some people would have it, Canada is this large unlabeled land mass north of the USA. What places in Canada did you go to, George? You sure crossed that border often enough. What year did you go to VCon? You still live in Vancouver ... Yvonne and I were FanGoHs at VCon this past May.

Another great Burbee story. I think it's a nice touch to add commentary from his children. I know I'm one of many who never met him, but the more I read these articles, the more I feel I did know him. I hope Linda, Ed and John are happy that Burb is still entertaining his audience after his passing.

Chris Priest's father is 92 years old, and has lived long enough to outlive all of his friends. I think a side-benefit to all this fannish folly is that we have friends of all ages. Should I ever reach my 92nd year, I pray that I shall have friends up to twenty years younger (as I do now) to help fill my days until my passing.

## LUCY HUNTZINGER

I was a little bothered by the people who were put off by my conversion to online fandom, but I remember feeling much the same way about other

fans back in, oh, 1992. I'm certainly sympathetic to that feeling of being left out. And I can see why someone might feel dubious about my claim to not especially care about letters of comment, but truthfully, although I love feedback (I'm not claiming to write in a vacuum) I've never been deeply into apas, letter columns, news groups and so forth. I'm not a terribly social writer, I suppose. It seems to me at this point in my life I no longer derive my sense of community primarily from the written word. Now it's personal contact, a social life, that does that for me. Of course that social life was made possible through my original contact with fanzine fandom via letter columns and trades. I'm aware of the irony.

I was baffled by Irwin Hirsh deciding there was no reason to read my online diary/fanzine as I had the capability to revise what I'd written. I can't understand that being a deterrent to revisiting the site. It's not like I rewrite what I've already posted. If I've changed my mind about entry 111 I write a new entry, 112, explaining why I've changed my mind or what my new thoughts are on the topic. I do occasionally revise spelling errors and grammatical booboos, much like a second edition of a book. I wonder if this means Irwin refuses to read anything but first editions?

Tracy Benton seems to be my biggest fan. Gosh, she's enthusiastic. I enjoyed that bit.

Aside from my interest in the lettercol I particularly enjoyed reading your editorial about the accident and the aftermath. I remember visiting you last July and being so happy you were on the mend. I also liked Greg Benford's take on Hollywood screenplays and movie making. I have friends trying to break into screenwriting (don't we all?) and it sounds like such a strange game to play. The lingo is nearly as bad as business English. Sucking the juice from a moment? Get away from me.

I am crazy about Steve Stiles' illustrations. He and Dan Steffan are my absolute favorite artists in SF fandom.

Carol was terrific. No caveats. Love her writing, her sense of humor, her wit, her bite.

## EARL KEMP

As I read through the issue and finally reached the letter column, I encountered a number of references to Tijuana. And, as in all cases, the reviews were pretty mixed. There was a time, in the mid-'60s, when I thought I knew Tijuana

rather well indeed, and loved her dearly. There are a few out of this world events running through my memories that will eventually appear in my rough-draft autobiography. Don't hold your breath but do expect something you've never encountered before.

Finally I reach the letter, in the very back of the issue, from John Baxter, and appreciated it very much indeed. My period with Rotsler really ended in early 1980, and John's picked up after that. In a way I am glad that I missed that period of Rotsler. I had the unique privilege of knowing Bill and sharing in his work and his fun during the very peak of his personal perfection. I really need to remember him that way. But I want to thank John for sharing what he did; it was a masterful job of memory at work...he should be proud of himself.

## KEN RUDOLPH

I hope this reaches you in time...before the dreaded X becomes a permanent banishment from the kingdom of *Trap Door*. I haven't been in much of a letterhacking space the past few years. I'm hooked on the instant gratification of Usenet, which is sort of a 24/7 APA-L. Somehow the stately cadence of a fanzine lettercol just doesn't have the same juice.

But the articles and columns in *Trap Door*! I'd hate to miss even one issue. The other day I gathered about me my collection of *Trap Doors*—an unbroken continuum from No. 3 to No. 20. Such a wealth of good writing. As I perused issues at random, I felt like Scrooge McDuck diving through his money locker.

*Trap Door* is also my last vestige of contact with fandom, where I read about the tragic deaths of real life faanish characters which have enriched my life and keep up with the history of this amazing cult of fanzine fans. Somehow, I never manage to make it to cons (or when I do, as at the L.A. worldcon a couple of years ago, I feel like a fish out of water and flee). But, my abiding interest in fan history...abides.

So, please don't remove me from your mailing list. One day I'll overcome my reticence and writing block and actually come through with that article about Sylvia Dees, or my point of view of the barbarian invasion of L.A. fandom by the druggies in the late '60s.

In the meantime, keep sending *Trap Door*. My life is in your hands.

## KIM HUETT

I can understand Ron Bennett being at Lucy's confession about not caring about letters. I think there is more about than he realizes; it's just that people don't mention it. I know that I was surprised years ago when Jack Herman told me he much preferred to receive fanzines to LoCs. It seemed basically wrong to me back then but in the years since I've come around to his way of thinking. Now I would be more interested in reading in ten fanzines than twenty letters of comment sent to me in return for a fanzine. I think the problem is that despite some very good letter writers there is too much uninspired commentary in LoCs. It's hard to be inspired all the time and the temptation is there to write something, anything to ensure the next issue is sent to you. Of course the tendency of most LoCs to be single draft might have an even greater bearing on this. Anyway I would rather read a nicely edited letter column with all the dull bits cut out.

## LINDA MARKSTROM

I am glad that people have enjoyed our comments about our dad. I'm sure we probably have totally different opinions of him then most of his friends in the science fiction world. Of course, for a long period in our lives we looked at him from the standpoint of children. After we grew up we didn't spend that much time with him. My perspective of him is mostly from my childhood and the last 10-15 years of his life. *{It's exactly that perspective that interests me and, I think, the readers who commented on your, Ed's & John's observations.}*

A correction to Cora's story about my Dad's Father calling him Tom. It was my Dad's paternal grandmother who called him *petit homme* (little man) not his father. His paternal grandmother didn't speak English, only French. My grandparents always called my Dad "Sonny," never Tom.

## MIKE DECKINGER

I have a copy of *The Bosses' Songbook*, purchased at the Pittcon in 1960 from Sandy Cutrell. The lines that LeeH quotes sound very similar to "The Twelve Days of Marxmas": "On the first day of Marxmas, my true love gave to me / A picture of Leon Trotsky...."

All I know about the *I Ching* is what I've read

in *The Man in the High Castle* and various other scholarly journals. George Metzger very entertainingly discusses how he consulted it. More and more it sounds like the magic eight-ball, which also responded to all questions with a shake and a swirl of the ball, and then the answer would swim into view, in that transparent window, written in minuscule script.

Milt Stevens' recounting of the man who accidentally killed himself while attempting suicide brings to mind some recent "Darwin Award" winners you may have read about. The Darwin Award is an accolade earned by someone who kills himself in an exceedingly stupid way. During a Headlands logging protest one hapless demonstrator, known as "Chain," in a burst of formidable but misdirected bravado, dared a tree to fall on him. It did. But my favorite is the skydiver who chose to aggressively demonstrate against Yosemite's policy of restricting skydiving within its borders by parachuting off a mountain top. She conclusively proved the wisdom of the ban when she crashed to earth after the parachute refused to open. Divine intervention? You be the judge.

## ANDY SAWYER

I'm quite astounded at Chris Priest's LoC of the last eight issues. Eight years of fandom is like a lifetime: it kind of tempts me to pull out some of the zines that I never actually got round to responding to and writing a letter of comment out of the blue. It might be fun....

Greg Benford has it absolutely right. "It was like a film being made by children with money...." That's exactly the movie industry—hoping that twenty seconds with the Big Effect will outweigh ninety minutes of utter boredom. But then, so many times the audience laps it up or doesn't even notice that the storytelling is crap, so what can you do?

I'm sure you have been deluged with notes from British fans of a Certain Age responding to Bob Leman's request for an explanation of the provenance of the expression "as any fule no." It's from the Molesworth books of the 1950s written by Geoffrey Willans and illustrated by Ronald Searle: *Down with Skool!*, *How to be Topp*, *Whizz for Atomms* and *Back in the Jug Agane*. Molesworth's reflections on English prep school life are searing social documents of our time—hem hem—and even those of us who have

not had the experience of minor English public schools in the 1950s recognize the surreality of it all: being British just at that time when the value of being British was changing from Ruling the World to Fuck All, the class system was at least being recognized as a class system and given the choice between Latin and Dan Dare Kennedy's *Shorter Latin Primer* goes up in smoke. None of all that is actually *in* the books much (except maybe the last bit) but they \*are\* wonderfully funny send-ups of the school system of the time, alas dead and gone except for those whose "little place in the country" is actually Shropshire.

(Sorry about that, but scratch any English fan and you will find a Molesworth. As any fule no. Whether the humor translates across the Atlantic I have no idea, but Monty Python did, so who knows?)

I was rather amazed to see John Baxter's reference to the journalist Simon Hoggart (whose technique for his "Parliamentary Sketches" for *The Guardian* I have shamelessly plagiarized above), as I had just been in contact with him. In his weekly column in the paper's Saturday edition he had mentioned (not for the first time) reading W.H. Hodgson: apparently he had lost his copy of *Carnacki the Ghost-Finder* and there didn't seem to be any copies available via the Web or if they were they were incredibly expensive. I e-mailed him to suggest that he was looking in the wrong places (I'd just had a copy of a catalogue which offered a paperback reprint at £1.50), but apparently he'd had quite a few similar suggestions and at least two outright offers of the book. So, is Hoggart a fan? I think we should be told. Shame I hadn't read John's LoC before I e-mailed him, or I could have asked his opinion about porn as well....

## SID BIRCHBY

I received *Trap Door* No. 20 and read it with so much pleasure that I put it aside for another chortle and haven't replied until now. It was only recently when I held the door open in the local Tesco for a person coming out of a little room and noticed his red gown and white hair. Yes! it was Father Xmas as large as life, leaving a jolly "ho-ho-ho!" floating in the air. In actual fact, I noticed that he had lost his false beard, which was still hanging on the handle of the condom machine. I betcha he is still making a fervent wish.

As a matter of interest, this is all rubbish! I mention it as an aside. Reindeer, of course. The happy reindeer, companion to the well-known Santa who, as we have just seen, attending sundry calls of Nature, is actually one of the grumpiest animals in the world. How often do you encounter reindeer in the kiddies' pants? Let me tell you, not very often! These earthy beasts are not fit for children. They grunt like camels. They bite, smell awful and, what is more, they are prone to flatulence of the jumbo scale. It's the moss, mainly. Their staple diet is reindeer moss, which grows under the snow and they have to grub around for it, which accounts for their bad temper.

I see by the papers that the Russians have their own version of Santa, namely the raffish Grandfather Frost. Quote: "He smokes, swills vodka continuously, and is always seen on the arm of his nubile young female companion Smegurichka [Snow Maiden]."

Exactly so. Just like—no, I mustn't tell tales!

## KEN CHESLIN

Many thanks for *Trap Door* No. 20. Steve Stiles' cover is damn good.

Your chart of fanzines received is interesting. Pity we haven't got a few other folks' charts to compare it to. I guess people never think to add up or chart them, or are not really bothered to. I couldn't tell you how many I've had over the same period, though possibly I might be able to figure out how many this year. I am pretty amazed by the 69 U.K. zines you list for 1999. I'm sure I've not seen as many as that; I doubt, in fact, that I've seen that many "reviewed" or listed. I wonder if you're getting U.K. fanzines from a parallel-world U.K.?

"Adventures in H'wood" did not surprise me, though it made me wince several times. The remark "like a film made by children with money" coincidentally echoes remarks I made in another publication quite recently, though I was on about things on the TV—which I guess includes films—to the effect that some programs are so shallow—dumbed down—that they could have been made by a bunch of 12-year olds. TV is a visual medium but a lot of what I've seen, even on supposedly "serious" programs, could have been done as well on the radio. There are constantly repeating shots of the same objects/scenes/illos, as if "they" couldn't find—or be bothered to look for—more illustrative material, and there is this

damned intrusive music shoved in, quite inappropriately and too loud, and flashing lights and “wobbly” bits. “Serious” programs are no more than “shows,” and pretty unskillful and shallow, too—“special effects” but no substance.

George Metzger! I’ll be crogged! Haven’t heard of or from him for years. We did exchange a few (very few) letters years ago, but somehow we lost touch. He did wonderful illustrations on his envelopes, which I treasured for years though regrettably they seem to have vanished now. (We *have* moved house a few times.)

Is that supposed to be Jim Harmon in the Steve Stiles illo? Well, he should be all right—it looks like he’s got that handsome, young, brilliant Dr. Kildare to look after him.

As a complete non-expert on poetry, naturally I have an opinion. Folk who consider humor in poetry (or in prose) to be, axiomatically, inferior to Serious Poetry (or prose) are, in my opinion, Deficient Humans. Life, the universe and everything is too important/serious *not* to laugh at.

“Other people seem to have noticed things I’ve missed” I opine is more common than Chris

Priest seems to suppose. Even things in one’s own writing/fanzines can be overlooked, and then pointed out by a LoC writer or whoever. I say this having in mind comments made to me (by John Berry over the phone) this very morning regarding characters I’d named after guns (in one instance) and fans’ names in other stories.

#### WE ALSO HEARD FROM:

**DON ANDERSON, SHERYL BIRKHEAD, PAMBOAL, NED BROOKS, RANDY BYERS, AVEDON CAROL, GRANIA DAVIS, MOG DECARNIN** (“I particularly enjoyed Alice Sanvito’s description of what a Russian banya is like. Wish we had those here!”), **CALVIN DEMMON, BRAD FOSTER, CYNTHIA GOLDSTONE, JOHN HERTZ, TERRY JEEVES, SUE JONES, DAVE LANGFORD, GUY LILLIAN III, ANDREW MAIN, MIKE McINERNEY** (mostly on No. 19), **DEREK PICKLES, MARK PROSKEY, DAVID L. RUSSELL, FRED SMITH, BO STENFORS, DAVID THAYER and HENRY WELCH.**

