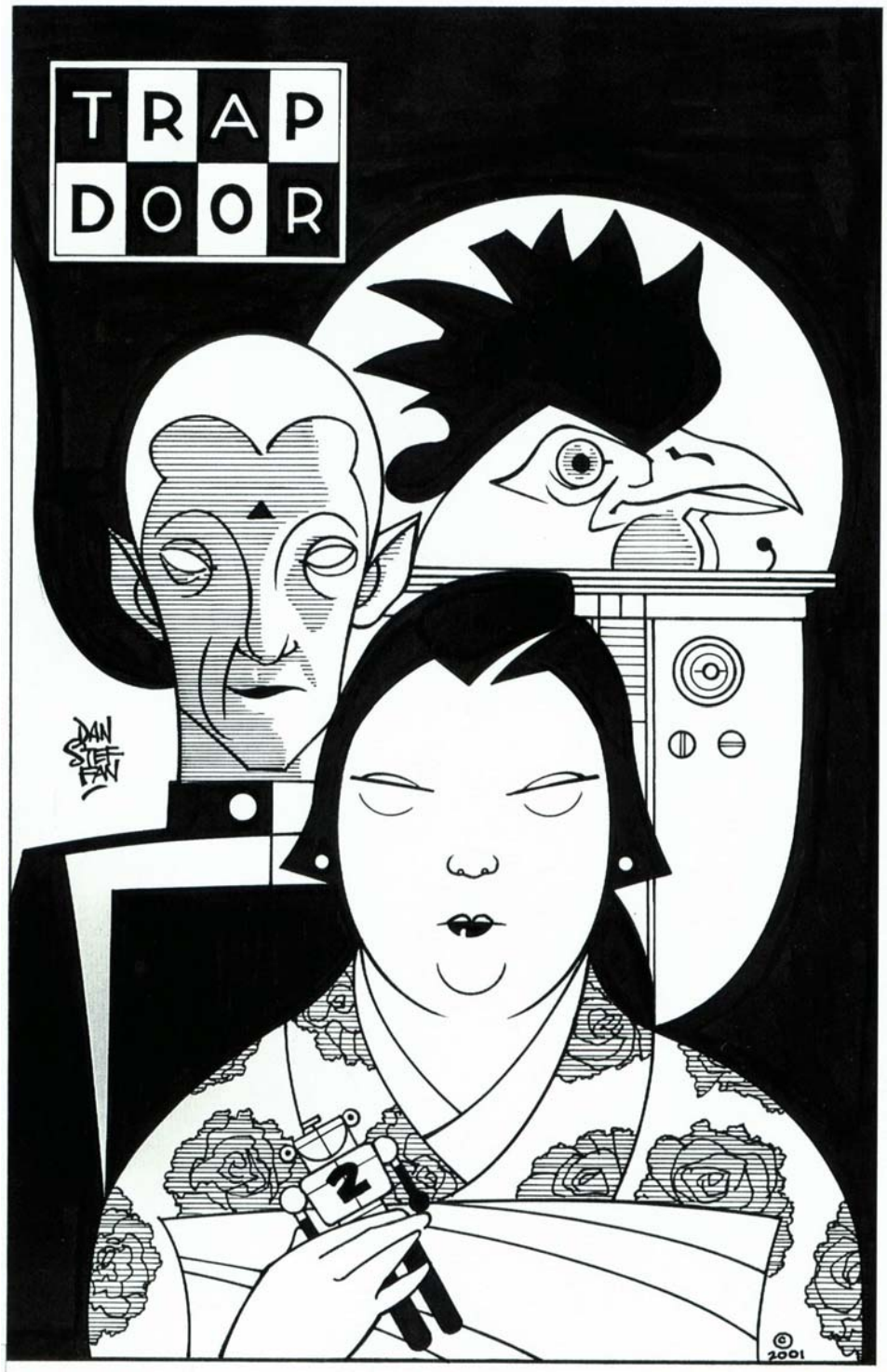

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It used to be so simple back in the last century. All fanzines arrived *in the mail*. Some you opened with great whoops and hollers. Others you set aside to read Real Soon Now. The rest…well, we don't need to talk about them.

It was the same with letters. There were correspondents with whom you wanted a frequent exchange; with others you took your time. Sometimes an exchange would get heated—not necessarily in the negative sense—and the letters would get longer and longer. I don't remember my own peak in that regard, although there were letters in low double-digit page counts exchanged now and then. When I was handling Redd Boggs's personal files, I had the opportunity to read five decades of his letters (his carbons, her originals) with Marion Zimmer Bradley—starting with a postcard in 1947 and reaching a peak where some fifty-page letters went flying back and forth. My own letter-writing didn't reach those numbers, but I recall missives of at least a dozen pages with Andy Main and probably others.

Things are so different now. There aren't as many fanzines, and more and more they're arriving electronically at Bill Burns's wonderful efanzines.com. And of course nearly all correspondence is done via e-mail. Although I can still manage (although barely) to address an envelope, increasingly there's no call to do so.

But maybe those isolated enormous interchanges were God's way of warming me up for what would come later—the Attack of the Fan

Lists. Trufen, Fmzfen, Nurofen, Timebinders, In The Bar, Wegenheim—this isn't even a complete inventory of the ones I'm signed up for, and I'm active to some extent on all of them.

Lists are like apas were back in the '70s in terms of how fast they multiply and their impact on fanzine fandom. It surprises me that no one has condemned lists, as well, as causing "the death of fanac." These days most apas are begging for new members. FAPA hasn't had a waiting list in seven years (a far cry from the days when you signed up as a neofan and was invited to join on the eve of your gafiation)—but subjectively it seems like every week or so there's a new fan list that addresses yet another special interest…and with no conscious consent or resistance on your part, and just when you thought it was safe to take out your garbage, you're pulled in once again.

Yes, I became a List Junkie, though not entirely without reservations. I toggled between curiosity and irritation. What are they talking about on Fmzfen today? Does mundane politics *have to* so frequently dominate Trufen? Who's telling tales of old-time British fandom In The Bar? Will Timebinders continue to reinvent the great fannish wheel? The lists I'm on range from fewer than twenty to nearly two hundred members, but numbers are no measure of how active any of them might suddenly be. On any list at any time, someone might hit on a subject interesting to me or one that's deadly boring—and of course there's a wide range in between—and it's all so inconsistent. But of course so is the fit between my interest and the length and intensity of a discussion. An item that captures my attention and gets my response might die from lack of wider interest while another—for example, the frequently recurring discussion of the merits of various Web browsers and e-mail software is particularly yawn-inducing for me, as is the occasional foray into bottom posting as opposed to top posting (you wouldn't think this is something that would create so much heat)—goes on for days.

Also maddening is the disinclination of many people on the lists to change the subject line as the topic morphs. Are they still carrying on about Web browsers? And if so, why suddenly all these references to keyboards?

The level of activity can also drift from list to list depending on what's hot and what's not, because there are a lot of overlapping memberships. Something interesting comes up on Fmzfen, for instance, and all the action will move there while Trufen will dry up, and then the wind blows and everyone's over on Timebinders, and then back to Fmzfen again. It's like watching a flock of birds suddenly change direction to a whole new part of the sky.

One good thing that can be said about the lists is that there's no minac. Theoretically you can lurk as long as you want and emerge if there's something you want to say. But, as most of us have discovered, theory is one thing and reality another. In the real world, I find myself obsessively interrupting all unimportant activities like eating, sleeping and, of course, all other fanac, in order to tune in and keep up.

As Arnie Katz observes in the latest issue of his electronic fanzine, *Flicker*, "I lament that so much energy and time is going into utilitarian communication and so little is now channeled into artistry. It's great to hear from so many of my fan friends so often, but I don't think anything would be hurt if they posted half as often and returned to producing writing, art and fanzines."

I agree. While I haven't gone quite as far over the edge as some—you know who you are—I'm going to do my best to take Arnie's advice and get back to my fannish roots, catch up on reading fanzines, write more letters of comment. With any luck, I'll never again be embarrassed by ending one of my *Trap Door* editorials the way I did in the last issue back in May 2003: "There will be another issue before the end of the year, I promise."

As is often the case with *Trap Door*, many of the contributions to this issue originated in the pages of apas or on the listservs. Carol's piece first appeared in Lilapa. Bob Silverberg's was in his FAPAzine last August. Michael Dobson's article was originally a post on a small list.

But I can't count on this sort of provenance to fill every issue, and if there's to be another *Trap Door* any time soon I need some of you reading this to come through with your own special deathless prose.

The parade of passing fans continues, alas. Two issues ago I wrote of Terry Hughes, Bill Donaho and Boyd Raeburn, and last year I eulogized Harry Warner Jr. and John Foyster. Since then we've lost Roy Tackett, Mike Hinge, Lloyd Eshbach, Beryl Mercer, George Flynn, Julius Schwartz, Jon White, Otto Pfeifer, Greg Shaw and Pete Graham. (No doubt I've missed someone; please forgive me.)

Several others of the more recently deceased—Bob Smith and his wife Lyn—have their final letters of comment in this issue; but the person I want to talk about this time is Isabel Burbee, wife of Charles Burbee and a legend in fandom, who passed away on October 31, 2003. Her daughter Linda wrote, "Her family was with her, which is a comfort to us and I'm sure was a comfort to her. She went rather quickly and peacefully, for which we are very thankful."

Although I don't recall if Isabel ever wrote anything for publication, she was an important and beloved presence in Los Angeles fandom for many years, extending her excellent hospitality and amazing food to everyone who showed up at her and Charlie's house to commit fanac or just to party. As a young fan in the early '60s, I felt honored to be invited to their home in Whittier. Isabel recognized me as the chowhound I was and plied me with her famous chili beans. Her son Ed wrote that "She always saw those days as a highlight of her life." Ed expands on this in the eulogy he delivered at her funeral, which is published here.

In 1960 a oneshot, *Ole Chevela!* was published by "the South Pioneer Beermoochers and Freeloaders Society" under the editorial direction of Bjo and John Trimble. As Charlie explains there, "Her Mexican friends call her 'Chevela.' It is the affectionate diminutive of Isabel. I find myself calling her that myself quite often." Following are a few selected testimonials from that publication, but before I get to them I want to emphasize that in addition to her incredible culinary skills my memories of Isabel are of a warm and caring person. But apparently when you're as good at something as she was at cooking, the memory of great food tends to overwhelm all else.

Edmond Hamilton wrote: "To us, it seemed that asking people to come and enjoy themselves and then feeding them was conduct above and beyond the call of fandom duties. In sincere gratitude, I award to Isabel the Order of World-Savers, First Class."

Bill Donaho: "There are many good cooks around…but very few great ones. Isabel Burbee is a great cook. She can just sort of breathe on the most prosaic food and it is instantly transformed. I don't believe that she could have a failure if she tried. Or maybe it's that her failures are better than other people's successes. Isabel is wonderful."

Elmer Perdue: "I met Isabel the night I arrived in Los Angeles. She was a vivacious brunette who was a gracious hostess, what with a batch of no-goods running around drinking beer. … Salutations and hail, Isabel Burbee! Fandom has not one, but two living legends!"

Feed a hungry fan and you've made an adoring friend for life. And so it was for Isabel and her amazing chili beans.

Terry Carr, after his first taste of Isabel's masterpiece: "I took a big mouthful and—froze. My eyebrows shot up, my teeth clenched, and I sat immobile for at least a full minute. The beans bubbled and sizzled in my mouth, like a volcano with a cap on it. Finally I swallowed. 'I'll just let those ole beans cool down a bit more,' I muttered vaguely, setting the dish aside. 'They won't cool down, Meyer,' Burbee said. 'You might as well eat 'em right now.' I decided he was right—after all, if I let them sit much longer they might explode. They were hot, all right—but not really unbearably so, once you got a few mouthfuls down. In fact, once you got your tastebuds numbed, they weren't so hot at all. And they tasted good. Gee, but they tasted good! I ate the whole plate. 'Have some more?' said Isabel. …I'm addicted to Isabel's chili beans. I can't live without them. In fact, I'm beginning to suspect I have a chili bean on my back."

Ron Ellik, after attending his first Burbee party: "As I sank into bed in Barrington Hall, having missed two days of school, all I could think about was how good that chili was, and how I wished I could have some more of it."

F. M. Busby: "Every time Elinor fixed up a batch of *frijoles refritos* according to Isabel's recipe, in the genuine unglazed-clay bean-pot that Isabel rounded up for her, I am reminded of the memorable evening that sparked this reminiscence. And Isabel's warmth and friendly hospitality was a great part of that evening."

And finally, Fritz Leiber: "A typical Isabel party is two parts mad conviviality, three parts insomnia, sprinkled with endless conversations, wrapped in a giant tortilla, drenched with Napoleon brandy, and served flaming on a pitchfork."

I can't end this piece leaving you all hungry. Here—also from *Ole Chevela!*—is the recipe for Isabel's basic beans:

"Take 1 lb. pinto beans, put in bean-pot and cover well with water. Don't add anything until it starts boiling or it will froth and boil over. After it starts to boil: add 1 tbsp. salt (taste later, for beans absorb salt), about 2 tbsp. lard (oil isn't the same—beans will absorb lard, while oil will just float on the water), and a fair-sized clove of garlic (about the size of your first thumb joint). Either chop very fine or use garlic press. Use fresh garlic, not oil or salt). Turn fire down and put lid on pot (cook with lid on, or beans will turn dark). Taste juice after one hour; add more salt as needed. Don't let beans get dry; keep adding water. Cook for three or four hours."

Once the beans are done, you set them aside while you prepare the recipe for which Isabel was most famous, her chili beans:

"Take 14 California chilis and wash carefully (the long dry dark red chilis, not the curly ones). Soak chilis in pan of hot water for one hour or until soft. (Hold them down with something; they float.) Save the water from soaking the chilis. Using a blender, combine 2 cups water, 5 chilis and 1 garlic per load. (Use the chili soaking water as much as possible.) When blended, put in a big bowl. Fry 1½-2 pounds of meat, but *not* until brown or it gets too tough. Add chili sauce to meat (about two quarts chili sauce). Use about 2½ tbsp. leaf oregano (not powder); grind between palms of hands. Add 1-2 tbsp. of cumin, or to taste. Optionally, add one can tomato sauce. Simmer meat and chili for an hour or two, stirring occasionally. Add beans and simmer another half-hour. Optionally, add chopped onions as garnish when served."

And finally, Isabel notes: "It's best if the chili beans can sit for 1-2 hours to absorb all the flavors. Best of all if you can make them one day and serve the next."

Like Ron Ellik, I wish I could have some more. *Vaya con dios*, Chevela!

Returning to the subject of electronic fanzines vs. paper fanzines and the cost-shifting involved: If you're like me, you don't like reading fanzines on a computer screen. Having to print out your own copy of a fanzine if for some reason you don't want to read it on your computer screen is something new. I don't read *any* zines on my monitor and I print only selected fanzines—the ones in which I have an interest and which I intend to keep. If most fans are like me we're saving lots of trees. But this switch to electronic publication represents a significant cost shift for fanzine fandom—we're so used to getting paper fanzines in exchange for "the usual"—and has also had ramifications in terms of response. As many editors have noted, electronic fanzines seem to draw fewer letters than paper ones. Some feel that if you're spending your own money to download and print a fanzine that's freely available on the Web, the act alone constitutes a sufficient contribution. I don't agree—to me the important factors of egoboo and feedback are missing in such a limited transaction—but all of this is still evolving.

In a recent FAPAzine Milt Stevens wrote: "In traditional fanzine fandom, the publisher bore almost the entire expense of producing a fanzine. In electronic fanzine fandom, the recipient would bear the entire expense of printing the fanzine. Having done so, the electronic fanzine reader… doesn't feel obligated to write letters. Obviously, we have to find a way of distributing the expense between the two groups and producing feedback." Milt goes on to suggest that e-fanzine publishers should offer to pay a buck for a one-page relevant LoC under the theory that doing so would cost less than publishing a copy of the fanzine for that reader and the reader would be somewhat reimbursed for his cost in printing out the zine (assuming he does so).

At first Milt's idea seemed attractive, but then my inner accountant took over. I realized that if I followed his suggestion I'd be spending 37¢ for a stamp to mail out that dollar—or 80¢ to non-U.S. letter writers, who may not have any use for an American dollar—and depending on response that would begin to add up to real money. Might as well keep publishing all on paper and taking on the added expense.

However, eventually—and sooner rather than later under my current game plan—I will retire on a fixed income. Since *Trap Door* runs to nearly $600 an issue, more than half of which is postage (especially overseas postage), what's my next move?

What I've come up with is to continue to produce the zine in its usual size. But instead of a 250-copy paper edition, I would cut back to 100 copies. Those would go to contributors (including significant letter writers), people with whom I trade paper fanzines, my personal friends who get *Trap Door* no matter what, and my files. The rest of the circulation would be electronic. I would provide two versions of the fanzine on-line: one for reading on screen where one page would follow another, another with the pages shuffled so that those who want a permanent paper copy could print one.

But how to get around the well-known fact—just ask Arnie Katz, who's written extensively on the subject—that electronic fanzines simply don't get the sort of response paper fanzines get? Since, as I wrote above, it's my belief that interaction is the lifeblood of fanzines, having less feedback might mean the death knell of my fanzine. (Mother of Ghod, is this the end of *Trap Door*?)

The solution I hit on is shamelessly borrowed from Bill Bowers and the late John Foyster. Access to the electronic version of *Trap Door* would require a password. I would change it for each issue, and if someone failed to respond for an excessive period of time—subjectively determined, of course—no more password.

What do you think?

—Robert Lichtman

Funeral Services for Isabel Burbee

To the friends of Isabel here today, the family thanks you for coming to pay your last respects. Instead of flowers or tears, I offer words about our mother, Isabel.

Born in Michigan, on the Upper Peninsula, near Lake Superior, she moved to California as a young woman. She became wife, mother of three children, homemaker, good cook, and hostess, and more.

Yes, hostess. During the 1950s and 1960s, in our home in Whittier, she entertained amateur and professional writers and musicians. They thoroughly enjoyed her hospitality and home cooked meals, prepared from scratch. Recently, she showed me many photographs of the jam sessions held at our house, and she enjoyed reliving those high moments.

After 27 years of marriage, she went back to school and became a Licensed Vocational Nurse. She worked in this occupation for over a decade, until she hurt herself while saving a patient from falling, and had to retire. But she did not really stop working. She took on paying and volunteer jobs cooking in the Anza Valley. Finally, she quit these jobs, because she had to, on doctor's orders. She worked until she was about eighty years old.

Of course, our mother suffered her share, maybe more, from girlhood on, as we know. But I will not dwell on that part, except to say that she took the blows and survived them all. At this moment, looking back, I call her brave.

Yesterday, in the gym, I saw an old man shadow boxing Father Time, to beat him back. Our mother too battled time, in her own way, but she lost this contest last Friday. When I visited her in the hospital during her final days, she knew her end lay near. She looked at me and said, "I told Bob Wheeler to tell everybody in Anza that I have cancer." Other aliments afflicted her as well, but she plainly understood the seriousness of this illness, and what it signified. I never heard her complain as she faced the end, and thank goodness she went swiftly.

She left this life while we visited her, so we could say, "I love you, mom" and "Good bye," touching and holding her, to give her comfort as she passed.

Her suffering over, our dear mother now rests forever at peace in the gentle embrace of Eternity.

—Ed Burbee

	'03	'02	'01	'00	'99	'98	'97	'96	'95	'94	'93	'92	'91	'90	'89	'88	'87
Australia	17	24	17	12	9	12	9	11	12	13	16	18	16	16	12	15	32
Canada	14	15	18	18	19	16	19	14	16	14	12	17	1	2	2	1	4
U. K.	41	52	39	61	65	64	58	47	52	60	51	50	44	30	61	51	33
U. S.	91	113	84	105	69	91	109	108	143	109	91	104	85	66	55	67	58
Others	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	1	5	0	4	3
Totals:	**165**	**204**	**158**	**197**	**163**	**183**	**195**	**180**	**223**	**198**	**172**	**191**	**147**	**119**	**130**	**138**	**130**

2003's "other" fanzines consist of two issues of Chris Nelson's *Mumblings from Munchkinland*, published in Samoa. A higher percentage of 2003's fanzines appeared in electronic form, and overall—alas!—the numbers have once again dipped…and 2004 through November totals just under 150 fanzines.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE:

Byron: Lord High Electrocutioner and Associates Marby and Genaro
John the Contractor: Bearer of Unbearable Tidings
Evil Neighbor: Nuf said
Frank the Insurance Agent: Interpreter of Slithery Print
Ron the Arborist: Bearer of Crane and Road Closure Sign

PREVIOUSLY ON "HOUSE: THE TRAUMA"

In the winter of 2001 glitches in the electrical wiring of my house were causing blackouts in the bedroom, bathrooms and part of the dining room. Byron (see above) said it would take three days to do all the repairs. It took three weeks. Then the many cut-outs in the walls (created by the re-wiring) needed to be filled and the rooms repainted. Byron said it would take three days. It took three weeks. While all this was happening, the rains came and the house turned into a colander. Oh yes, and my laptop began to die. Oh, and the refrigerator waterline snapped. And yes of course – one of the trees on my little pie-slice of property – the last of the behemoth Monterey Pines – fell over, taking out the oak tree of the neighbor across the canyon.

Here are some excerpts from my e-mails to friends during this period. They are repetitive, nonlinear, and yet surprisingly unpoetic.

ELECTRICAL REWIRING

"Life is crazed here for the second week – electrical repairs in the bedroom, both bathrooms, office – big holes in the walls, more discoveries every day of deep-fried wires and mysterious, Escher-like connections. More money, more time, lotsa Spanish I don't understand, dust and crumbles and chunks of plaster, anaconda-lengths of orange extension cords plugged into outlets in faraway rooms."

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"The electrical stuff is finally done. Next week they come back to repair the walls and paint bedrooms and bathroom. As you can imagine, I can hardly wait."

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"Rubble everywhere, nothing where it belongs – need a map to my *toothbrush*. Woke up this morning thinking I knew what was ahead, and what did I see? A great big puddle on the kitchen floor, coming from under the refrigerator. Icemaker waterline break? "

TREE

"Saturday around 8:00 a.m. I looked out the window, into the rain and howling winds, and said to Robert, 'Thank God all the bad trees are finally gone,' and he said, 'Well, true, but there's still that huge Monterey Pine right there.' But we'd pretty much decided, years ago, that if it fell it would fall downhill and not crush anybody. Of course there was that two-ton branch pointing toward my bedroom window. Well, you can't have everything. I go to the kitchen to make coffee, and oh my God, what's that horrible yet familiar cracking sound? And it's followed by a mighty thud that shakes the house. The furnace was loud, the radio was on, and the microwave, and the winds and the rain, but it was clear that I didn't have to worry about that big pine any more. Or maybe worry a whole lot. Ran back to the bedroom and Robert was ashen, standing there in shock. I'd felt it as a 1.2 in the kitchen, but he'd just had a 9.6 in the bedroom, where the ex-tree had been, only a few feet away. It had toppled over from the roots, all 75-100 feet of it, boom across the canyon floor."

.....

"Yesterday morning I got a letter from the person across the canyon whose oak tree my pine tree demolished. He's not *exactly* pressuring me to pay for removal and replacement of his tree, but his choice of words promises to get there soon. Frank my insurance agent told me to pass the letter on to him, and assured me that I'm not responsible for this Act of God. Act of *what*?"

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"The engineer and adjuster from my insurance company took a walk down to where the tree uprooted itself and then stayed there for a long time, inspecting the foundation. They wouldn't tell me what they found even though I cajoled, charmed, and listened intently to the adjuster's story of how he quit smoking."

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"Remember I said my insurance policy wouldn't pay for the removal of the pine tree, because it didn't damage the house? I told Frank to make sure, since there was foundation damage, and isn't the foundation part of the house? (You'd *think*.) He said that, even if it *did* apply (implying, In your *dreams*), they'd only pay a maximum of $500. 'That would help,' I said, with a pathetic catch in my voice. So he said he'd check it out with his boss, to make sure. I doubt there is a boss. Or if there is, he/she is from the same family as that phantom manager who lives in the back office when you're dickering with the sales person about the price of your new car. But he called me back an hour later. Apparently I have a superduper policy that covers the *entire* removal of the tree." Hallelujah.

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"The neighbor across the canyon is still writing me letters, which I read but just send on to my insurance company. But it's always a treat to hear from him. His latest plan is to sue me if I don't reimburse him $19,000 for his oak made of diamonds and rubies, and he never forgets to enclose estimates from his arborist, his financial consultant, his botanical restructurator, his psychiatrist, etc."

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"So I called Frank again: could he please authorize my bringing in Roto Rooter to check out the sewer pipes, which are near, under, and all around where the tree fell, because, according to the report, the engineer thought they probably weren't damaged – note the word *probably*. He said ok. This is indeed a superduper policy. But no word from John re fixing the tarp for later today when rain and wind are due. I am *so* not pleased. More later – wouldn't want you to lose the thread."

.....

"Ron of ArborTech came by this morning. This is the company that did such a good job removing the twin eucalyptus trees bigger than the Towers and later saved us that rainy Sunday when the pine cracked and hung over the roof. He said it would take a crane, two days, and cost over $9,000. Then Frank called me back, and said (in passing, would you believe) they'll only pay for removing the portion of the tree that's *on my property*. My property is wedge-shaped and very hard to parse. I may have only a few feet of tree on my property. The tree may be lying on three other properties plus part of Kashmir. (Only kidding, India and Pakistan.)"

PAINTING

"Byron just left. He was late because he'd lost the swatches, so I had to revisit that issue."

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"This is the second day the paint won't dry, and the end of the second week of what was promised to be a three-day job. Three days seems to be Byron's boilerplate of bullshit. My kingdom for a lobotomy."

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"The back bathroom looks like it's covered with large-curd cottage cheese, but Byron insists it's his best paint job ever. He'd given me an example of 'texturizing' by pointing to one of my walls, which was a little irregular but only subtly different from a flat surface. Then he decided to do a really great job, the deluxe version of what texturizing could look like if one had no taste at all, *without checking with me first*."

.....

"So today, with the sun out, there should be no more delays. So where's Genaro the painter? I call Byron's cell phone at 9:30. Voicemail. I call his house. His wife says he's at the store, he'll call me back. 10:45 I call his cell phone again. He apologizes. 'I just got up (the trip to the store must have been exhausting) and I'm trying to get in touch with Genaro.' We're hungry. Will we be staying home today or going out on this one sunny day in the last century? In ten minutes I'm supposed to call Byron back to find out whether Genaro's coming. If he's not coming on this nice sunny day he'll probably not be able to come later, either, when it's raining and the walls are too cold for painting. Endless."

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"Paint smears on the carpet, leaks in the bedroom, leaks in the basement, irritability, dyspepsia whatever that is, skating along my wits' end whatever that means, and it ain't over yet."

.....

"Bathroom's all painted. Byron came by for the last (really) final (really really) things. Really."

LEAKS

"Around 8:15 last night, the 60-mph wind blew and the rain came down – and In. My bedroom window frame (the part near the bed) started leaking, right across the window-sill and heading down to where the new outlet is, and it doesn't even have a cover yet. The area outside it had been caulked a few months ago, but apparently it wasn't caulked enough, or in the right place. I got a bunch of towels (nobody can convince me that hoarding is a bad thing) ready and started laying them down, but they had to be changed, when the rain was at its worst, every five minutes, and I knew I'd use them up and the dryer might not be able to dry them fast enough. I called John. He didn't have any idea how to stop it (nobody else did, either), but said he'd come by today and take a look. I go downstairs to put the wet towels in the dryer and see that the basement windows are leaking like crazy too, so I quick throw the wet upstairs towels into the dryer and run back upstairs to get more dry ones for the basement, and while I'm upstairs I see it's time to change the towels there and take the wet ones down. Repeat this drill till exhaustion slows me down, and then repeat it again, only slower, till I think to rummage around for sponges and I find a really huge one and two small ones for the bedroom windowsill and, thank goodness, even with the hard rain still falling they manage to sop up enough water so that I don't have to squeeze them out more than every ten minutes. Couple of hours have passed and this is the first time I've sat down for a second, and then I get the idea of scotch-taping a big sheet of tinfoil over the outlet. Then I make strong coffee because as long as the rain keeps up I'll have to be up with it, squeezing sponges upstairs and emptying pots and changing towels downstairs. Finally the rain slows down enough so that I figure I can take short naps between squeezings, so I set the timer for fifteen minutes, but the caffeine is doing its thing and I can't sleep. Around 1:00 a.m. the rain slows practically to nothing, but I still can't sleep, so decide to knock myself out with a Valium. Worried a little that a hard rain might start up again and I won't hear it, but I do it anyway, and the pill overrides the coffee and I'm dead-out for about four hours."

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"What Robert did for me this weekend: Braved the dirt part of the basement with a shovel to make channels to divert rainwater. Climbed on the roof to clean off clogged drains. Put up plastic sheeting outside over the bedroom windows, with staple gun and duct tape. Scoped out the corner of the foundation for damage (it looks mostly ok). And of course participated in the ritual of towel-changing in the basement, moving endangered packages of toilet paper to higher elevation, etc., etc., etc., etc. and then some."

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"Bought ten more (cheapest you can get with good absorbency) bath towels for the basement windows. Just in case."

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"Thought of yet another clever placement of duct tape for the bedroom windows. I have a feeling this may be a good thing. My feelings, however, are not worth much on the open market."

.....

"John has to come back to secure the tarp, which had removed itself from its grommets, slapping viciously against the side of the house, letting in the rain, and keeping us up most of the night. When the rain slowed down I discovered that stuffing strips of gauze (Mom's legacy, three boxes full) into the window tracks would sop up enough water to let us take little naps. John and I are talking about how much it will cost to re-side at least that part of the house. Now I know a lot more about the difference between stucco, wood, and composite concrete. But when we get to the money part I have to excuse myself and go throw up."

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"This afternoon Karen and I braved the deck in the wind and rain, taping plastic over the area where the rain's seeping in under the dining room window."

.....

"I've just been re-tarped, with strips of wood holding it at the bottom as well as the top. John was cheerful and brought me a batch of his home-made biscotti. We talked about the cost of re-siding, again. It didn't get any better. I told him I'd call him in the spring to take down the tarp. Then I'd call him in the winter to put up the tarp. Then I'd call him in the spring . . ."

THE FEEL-GOOD ENDING:

"We haven't seen 'Lord of the Rings' yet. We haven't seen anything yet. My back's been dicey, and my laptop's on its last drip of power supply, and Genaro crapped out on me and didn't show Saturday, so the back bathroom's still unusable, and John is so frustrated and overworked that he's through with me, at least for the next couple weeks. Robert came on Saturday, waited on me hand and foot, tooth and claw, bric and brac, brought in Thai food and I started feeling halfway human again. Late Xmas afternoon R's family converges here. We have reservations at an Indian restaurant we haven't been to yet, so please Lord let there be no kvetching about the food. Then we will all come back here and gorge ourselves on pastries (one a passion fruit mousse and the other a chocolate magnificence) which R and I had a pre-taste of at the store, and about them there will be no kvetching."

.....

"We were going to visit you over Xmas vacation but all we did the whole time was deal with the painters and the leaks and my bad back and my bad attitude, and whenever we could we'd run out of the house and escape into a movie. Things finally calmed down due to the tarp covering half the house (changing pure daylight to haunted-house blue) and a bathroom paint job that, if you can stand the three-inch-deep 'texturizing' on the walls and ceiling, is at least *finished*, and an electrical system that works if you call the basement clothes washer being hooked up to the kitchen circuit an acceptable arrangement."

.....

"The work wrapped up on Thursday. So now it's cleanup time and I'm starting to remember what it's like to have a life. Feel bad that our so-called vacation (Robert's biggest chunk of the year) had to be spent like this, but so it goes as Kurt Vonnegut or somebody said."

.....

"Hey, leaves are skittering across the little ledge outside my window. And the sun's so bright! I declare, we done gone from storm season to fire season in one swell foop."

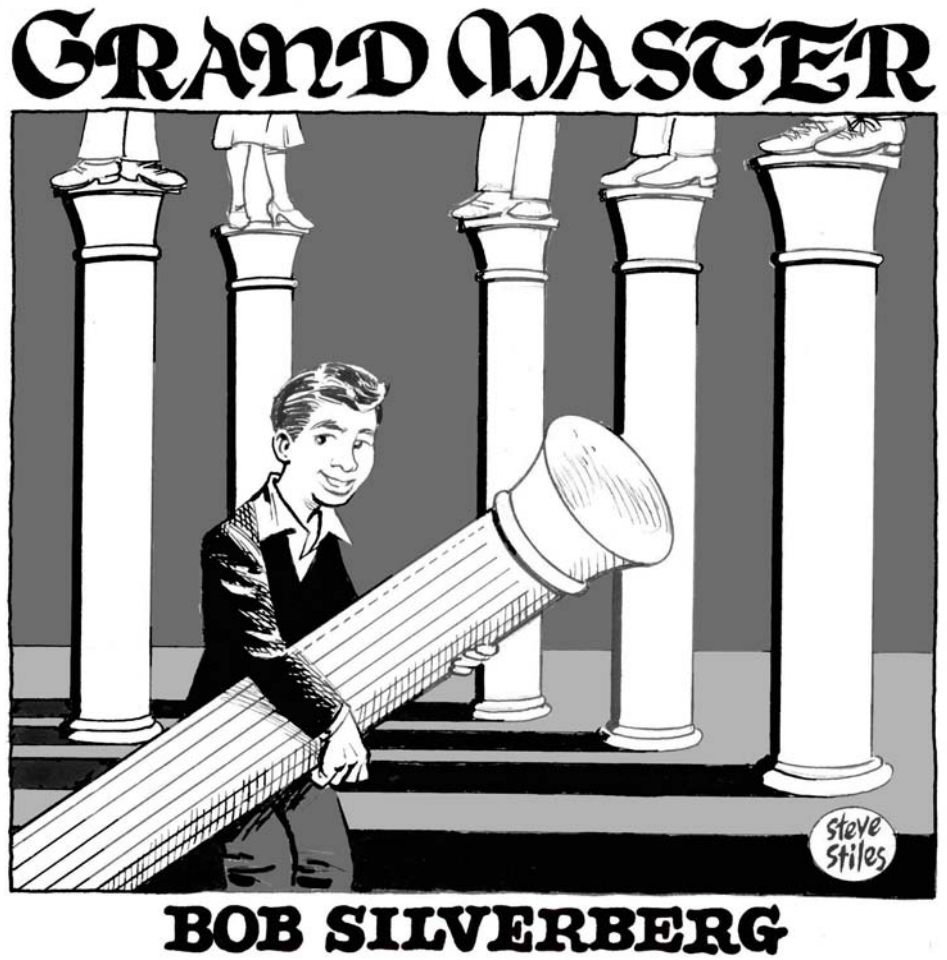
CHORUS

"John's not here yet."
"Marby's not here yet."
"Byron's not here yet."
"Genaro's not here yet."
"Is it coming in?"
"Is it still wet?"
"Get another towel."
"Do you need another towel?"
"Have I got another towel?"
"Not sure if _____ is coming today."
"_____ hasn't called."
"Sorry, can't talk – have to keep the phone free."
"Sorry, can't make any plans for the next ____."

EPILOGUE

Electrical: finished.
Painting: finished.
Leaks: buffered by tarp.
Tarp: holding steady.
Tree clean-up: getting bids.
Laptop: terminal.
Fridge leak: fixed.
Weather: sunny and windy.
Mood: eerily calm.
Prognosis: new siding a must.
Coping style: Scarlett O'Hara.

—Carol Carr



BOB SILVERBERG

The main news item around this household in the spring of 2004 was my receiving the Grand Master award of the Science Fiction Writers of America, an event more closely linked to my having maintained such a lengthy FAPA membership than might be apparent at first glance.

The thing is that I came into FAPA in 1949 as a teenager, a very young teenager whose cheeks had yet to feel the first touch of a razor. I had been reading science fiction for a couple of years at that time, and I was under the delusion that FAPA was an organization devoted to the serious discussion of science fiction, a delusion that was pretty well obliterated by the time I had finished reading my first mailing (#49, November 1949). Obviously a lot of FAPA's members did read science fiction, or at least once had, and some of them collected it seriously and some of them were deeply interested in its themes and methods (these two groups, I quickly saw, were pretty much mutually exclusive) but nobody did much talking about s-f in FAPA, nor—certainly not!— did anyone publish his own amateur s-f stories there, something that I myself started out by doing. (The older members benignly tolerated it but tactfully set me straight before long.)

Gradually I came to understand what FAPA was really all about, but my passionate interest in reading and writing science fiction never did leave me, and to spare you any suspense I'll reveal right at this point that I did, within four or five years of my adolescent entry into FAPA, become an actual

professional s-f writer myself and went on to have a pretty considerable career. As of 1949, though, that I might be destined to have the sort of writing career that I would eventually have was nothing more than a teenager's pipedream. I *did* have such pipedreams, naturally, imagining my name in lights on the cover of *Astounding Science Fiction*, etc., but I understood even then that those were simply fantasies of the sort that I was supposed to be indulging in at that age.

My taste in science fiction then had largely been influenced by two mammoth s-f anthologies—the Healy-McComas *Adventures in Time and Space* and Groff Conklin's *A Treasury of Science Fiction*—that I had acquired somewhere around my twelfth birthday, and my favorite writers in the field in those early days were largely those who had provided what I felt were the best stories in those two books: Robert A. Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, L. Sprague de Camp, A. E. van Vogt, Lester del Rey, Clifford D. Simak, Poul Anderson, Alfred Bester, Arthur C. Clarke.

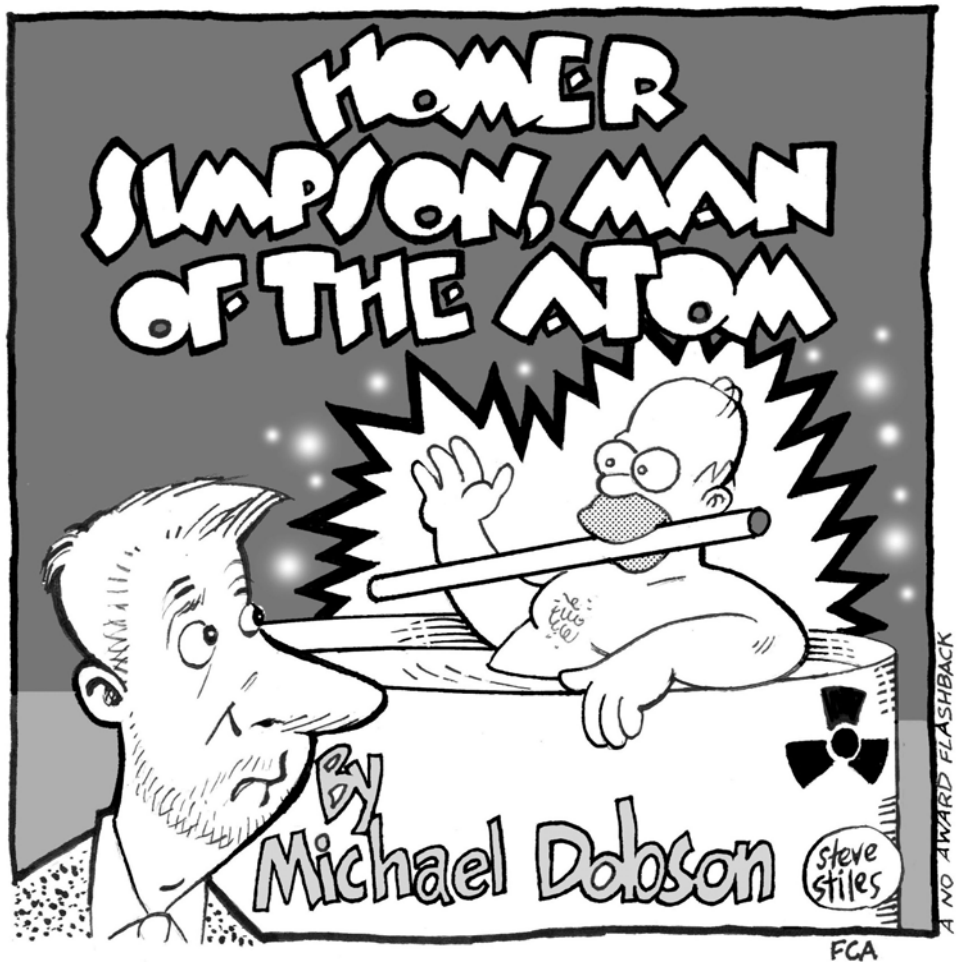
Which brings me back to the Grand Master award. I am the twenty-first s-f writer to win it, and the first who was born in the 1930s. The award was dreamed up in 1975, primarily to honor writers like Heinlein and Asimov who had done their best work before the Nebula award was instituted, and therefore most of the previous winners were drawn from the roster of contributors to John W. Campbell's *Astounding* of the so-called Golden Age period, roughly 1939 to 1945. In fact, all nine of the writers I list in the previous paragraph were named as Grand Masters, and of the other eleven writers before me, nearly all were writers of the Golden Age or the period immediately after it, whose work I had come to know and admire in my first few years as a reader. I'm talking here about Fritz Leiber, Jack Vance, Jack Willliamson, Ray Bradbury, and Hal Clement.

You probably see where I'm going here. I'm almost a decade younger than the youngest of the other Grand Masters, and nearly thirty years younger than the oldest ones. (The first stories of Simak and Williamson had been published before I was born; the careers of van Vogt, Asimov, Leiber, Bradbury, Bester, del Rey, and Heinlein got going about the time I was learning how to read.) So the significance to me of getting the Grand Master award was not just that I was receiving another pretty trophy that would create nice publicity for my books, but that *I was being gathered up into a very small group of famous s-f writers, nearly all of whom had been my own idols when I began to read science fiction and dream about writing it myself.* When the award came to the older writers, Leiber and van Vogt and Bradbury and Asimov and such, they were simply being taken into a group of their peers and contemporaries. One can admire one's speers and contemporaries, but one doesn't look upon them with the same mixture of awe and reverence with which a kid reader, just discovering the marvels of science fiction, regards them. Even now, as my seventieth birthday comes rocketing toward me, I still think of those writers as a convocation of demigods. And suddenly I find myself up there bracketed with them.

Don't mistake what I'm saying for humility. I've been writing science fiction for fifty years, now, and I've worked long and hard at it, and contributed more than a little to the core literature of the field, and I don't for a moment question my place among SFWA's group of Grand Masters. I do regard myself as a fitting colleague for them. But at the same time I carry around within myself the scruffy little kid who entered FAPA in 1949, the old who wrote all those terrible little stories that the older members treated so indulgently when I published them in my terribly mimeographed little fanzine, and it will always be impossible for that kid to see himself as the peer of Heinlein, Asimov, de Camp, Williamson, van Vogt, and the rest of that crowd.

I love having won the Grand Master award. In my line of work it's the ultimate accolade, beyond which all striving becomes irrelevant. But because a full generation separates me from most of the earlier winners, and because most of them were doing their grandmasterly work while I was still walking around with some of my baby teeth, I'll never be able to feel fully comfortable in their midst. When I did begin my career, fifty years ago, I came among them as a sort of boy wonder, and they welcomed me warmly enough, even affectionately, but to most of them I was always something of a mascot. And here I am now, coming into their midst as the youngest colleague once again: the Grand Mascot, I guess. It's a strange sensation.

—Bob Silverberg



"Would you like to operate a nuclear reactor?"

I'm up in Albany teaching a project management class for one of my long-term clients, a research lab that's part of the Naval Reactor community, and one of the students in my project management class has come up to me on break.

"Really?" These people are so security-oriented I haven't been to their *offices* yet, and this guy's talking about a reactor?

Well, not one of *their* reactors, but a one-of-a-kind "zero power critical facility" at nearby Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. This facility was built for the Army in the late '50s to test the idea of small reactors that could power out-of-the-way installations where other means would be impractical. (There's one operational in Greenland, but overall, it didn't catch on.) The prototype facility is so low-powered it's used to train students. They're going to do a power-up and shutdown, and would I like to try my hand at operating it? You betchum, Red Ryder.

I get there about 6 p.m. The facility is hidden down a dirt road so narrow it looks like a bike path to nowhere, and the building could well be abandoned. The grass hasn't been cut in months. There are a few broken windows. It looks like an abandoned building...except for the well-maintained fence. Even in an industrial neighborhood, a nuclear reactor—zero power or not—wants to maintain a low profile.

Everybody's congregating outside. It's summer and the air conditioning is out. They've done initial check-out, and there's time for my host to give me the tour. I get my dosimeter and

fill out an information card so the health physics people are able to keep my exposure information on file. I get introduced to the students and other operators and my host Tim explains the physics of the facility. I strain to remember enough of my college physics to keep up. Fortunately, he's a good briefer.

The reactor fuel, Tim explains, is mostly U238 with very little U235, so getting it to fission is fairly difficult. First, they need to generate a supply of neutrons, and then they have to slow the neutrons down enough so they have enough momentum to break the larger atoms. Fast neutrons will just bounce off the big, heavy U238 nuclei.

To slow the neutrons down, they use water, because the protons in the hydrogen nuclei are about the same size as the free neutrons. When the neutrons collide with the hydrogen atoms, the big protons absorb enough of the neutron momentum to slow them down. So when the reactor tank is full of water, a reaction can take place, and when it's empty, the fast neutrons just dissipate without fissioning any more atoms. (Tim is obviously an experienced instructor, but with my role as their go-to guy in project management, I'm a little embarrassed to ask any questions that might reveal how little physics I know. So any part of this explanation I get wrong is my fault, not his.)

I learn that the Official Movie Phrase Of Doom, "The reactor is critical!" is actually a good thing: the reaction is in balance, neither growing nor shrinking. "The reactor is supercritical" means the reaction is increasing, which is okay if you intend it. The phrase you don't want to hear is, "The reactor is going fast supercritical," which the neutron generation is getting out of control and you can't damp it down fast enough. This would be a Bad Thing.

Next, I get a tour of the reactor core itself. Tim grabs a Geiger counter and we go through a heavy door. The counter barely clicks. The room is a large cube, roughly two stories high. The reactor is a large structure in the center, basically a tank of water in a steel cage. We climb metal stairs to the catwalk around the tank. He points out the control rods (Boron 10, a good neutron absorber), and the fuel rods in the center.

He takes a length of coat-hanger wire and kneels down, reaches it into the water and snags a fuel rod. "They're safe," he says.

"Safe enough to pull out?" I ask.

"Safe enough to hold in your bare hands," he says, and hands me a thin stainless steel rod filled with U238 pellets. I take it. It's heavy.

"Just out of curiosity, how much exposure am I getting?" I ask.

"About a hundredth of a dental X-ray," he replies. I hold the rod next to my dosimeter, wondering if I'll freak out the healthy physics people. He laughs. "If you keep it there for an hour or two, it'll register something." I hand it back. He kneels down and inserts it back into its slot underwater.

We look at the two reactor scram (quick shut-down) systems: a method to drop the control rods, and in the basement under the reactor, a quick release valve that will drain all the water out of the tank. That's it, so we go back into the control room.

The control board is pure 1950s, cast iron with vacuum tubes, round gauges with glass faces, wires in metal cabinets. Here and there they've stuck in digital readouts. It's part of a long-term plan to upgrade the control system. Tonight's real purpose, in fact, is to calibrate the digital readouts by comparing them to the mechanical analog gauges.

Now they're ready to start up the reactor. We're going to go for a power level of (drum roll) one watt. I'm the operator, under Tim's supervision. There are four control rods, each with individual servomotor controls, and one master lever that will control all four simultaneously. I'm going to withdraw the rods thirty inches, five inches at a time, pausing at each five-inch mark to let the neutron count settle down and take readings. They'll use the data for the calibration.

I push up the master lever and the dials begin to turn. I can hear relays click and servomotors hum. On the digital display, neutron counts are increasing, and sensor readings are showing movement. I get to five inches and stop. I'm off by less than .03 inches on all four, and one of them is at five inches (the motors are a bit out of synchronization; this is not operator error). I'm pleased with myself, but it's no big deal, this stuff runs so slowly, it would be really clumsy to miss by very much.

After the readings, we go to ten inches, then to fifteen, and so on. It takes about ten minutes overall, and if I did it more than a few times it would probably get pretty boring. The first time, though, it's gripping. I'm running a nuclear reactor!

At thirty inches, we wait as the secondary neutron release kicks in and we find what the power reading will be. Tim's told me he expects the final control rod level to be around 26 inches to produce the intended one watt of power, so we're not surprised when the level is a bit high. So now it's down, about two inches, then another two. At 26, we're still a bit high, so 25.5 is next. And that's too low. We hunt around for a bit, but This Is Only A Test. We don't quite get to the stable one-watt mark, but tonight's mission is about over. The students have their data, and I've had my operator adventure. Well, almost.

"Would you like to scram the reactor?" Boy howdy, yes! I'm going to drop the control rods, the simpler scram, rather than empty the tank; the latter is a really drastic scram. To scram, I get to push the emergency button, a big red one. It's under a plastic flip-up cover, just like in the movies. I flip it up. My finger is poised over the button.

"Ready to scram reactor?"

"Ready."

"Scram reactor."

I push the red button. I hear a servomotor click, then a rapid whir, and the gauge wheels spin around. We're at zero on the control rods. I look up and the neutron level is dropping.

"It'll take about 88 seconds for the reaction to die down. There are neutrons still coming from the secondary reactions that will have to be released and absorbed." I watch the electronic graphs as my nuclear reaction dies.

Class dismissed. The students have been gossiping about a dorm practical joke; this is old news to them. Only the old guy in the suit—me—is excited to be there; for everybody else, this is just a job or just a lab class.

Security had said no pictures, but I sneak a shot of the building with my camera phone as I'm driving away…it doesn't look like anything, just an abandoned industrial building, but at least I'll remember.

I figured making a Homer Simpson joke in that audience was way too obvious, and it looked like everyone was also way too young to remember my old comic book hero Dr. Solar, Man of the Atom.

But that's who I felt like.

—Michael Dobson

LAST YEAR'S IGNORED HEADLINES

by *Trap Door*'s media observer, Calvin Demmon

"Queen's fury as Bush goons wreck garden—Exclusive By Terry O'Hanlon

"The Queen is furious with President George W. Bush after his state visit caused thousands of pounds of damage to her gardens at Buckingham Palace."

Well, not quite ignored. Here's an AP story out of Chicago (I got quite involved in it and cut it down somewhat from the original):

CHICAGO (AP) — In Groot-Brittanniëë is grote opschudding ontstaan over de George W. Bush kerfluffle een Buckingham Palace, mit strewen der brokenen kipple und kablenwiren, dat die queen muchenhaten happinen, maken herr furiousen und herr royalmagesteen bloodenpressure gowen wayuppen, higheren heir, zoe dey kwickcallen der doctor, hurrienuppen. [Vrom diz pointen, eit demmontranslaten gettineven wurst.] De fapa gafiaten mit der Heinlein maneuveren, walterwillisen, und vegotten juztzo manidamnen letterenovkommenten ve kantprintendemall ein disish, even vrom longonen volksen suchen gudolddaveriken.

Mit de Britse koningin, Elizabeth glizabeth der baldheaden flizabeth, vestayen op waylaten drunkenundsplashen mid der weltconventionen, en outputten der mimeomidtdittoen fanacwunshotten, smechdabben en der middlen ov Buckinghamen Palace, smashen op het kazootie de Amerikaanse president Bush, und staplen fingeroven, hollerein und schouteincursen, budt nicenkuten, lichen aufulbadden bradburyztorein.

In de Britse mundanenmedia, deydontnonothen abouten dis sfstoffen, er as elmeren perduen menchionen "dat flashen mit gorden ztuff." Den, zurprizen, oppop der President Bush, richen brownen und burbeen. "Effen ve kant Ztartrekkensaven, das terroristen gonnawin," bjo trimblen. Nationaal Veiligheidsadviseur Condoleezza Rice (eine grosserbitchen) en de Amerikaanse minister van Buitenlandse Zaken Colin Powell, ve es laffen zohardt atdebotuvem. Und de neofanen Bush nacht kenowing iszassen vrom a groundenholen.

Chris Priest's excellent revelation of his "missing years" caused the old nostalgia cogs to start whirring, leading me back to those happy old Norman Rockwell days when a family friend gave me a double shift Remington with Caps thudding the banks of keys either up or down (I forget) and Figs bashing them in the opposite direction, down or up (no, I still haven't remembered).

My mind moved through various other machines. And lo and behold, my nostalgia moved suddenly to…

Computers!

Ah, life (as we know it, Jim) has reached a fine state of affairs when one looks back at one's first encounters with what a goodly proportion of the populace still regards as "the coming thing."

Somewhere in the nether reaches of my loft, happily moldering away among the spiders and the dry rot are a series of Commodore machines, the Pet, the Vic-20 (with its constant hyphenation) and the Sixty-Four, to say nothing of a Spectrum, an Amstrad (a massive 640k there) and an Apple Mac. Some were still in working order the last time I looked. And there are also a number of discarded monitors. One still works, but alarming clouds of black smoke pour from it as soon as it's plugged in, never mind turned on.

The Spectrum was very useful at the junior school where I was teaching, not in any way connected with computers, but entirely for the vocabulary. When the class was working on a project on Rainfall, and a sunny day decided to honor us with its rare presence, I would take a triangular prism from my desk drawer and casually place it on the desk top immediately before leaving the classroom at some recess time. When I returned the children would be full of wonder at the "rainbow" that had miraculously appeared on the ceiling.

As a sideline, dare I tell that when I was explaining the actual colours of the spectrum and came to the final hue, which is one generally somewhat unfamiliar, I'd take the nearest boy, open the door to the adjoining stockroom, and hurl him in with the cry of "Open the door and indigo." You think I'm kidding?

At a staff meeting one day some twenty years ago, the school principal announced that the LEA, the Local Education Authority, had decided to give us a computer. Shock, horror! Hadn't it been bad enough when, a few years earlier, kids had begun to bring calculators into school? Besides, what did we know about computers? I wondered whether any of my colleagues would say anything about typewriters, or indeed, quill pens. The LEA, the principal told us, were to dish out a computer each to several schools the following Wednesday and someone had to go and collect it. Yes, there would be a demonstration on how to set the machine up and actually use it. Who was the sucker who was going to be honored with this task?

Everyone looked at me.

Well, I was in charge of the school's maths syllabus. Weren't computing and maths inexorably linked?

The machine I was given was a 32k BBC computer, affectionately known to one and all as the Beeb. It had a large, virtually square, color monitor that no one ever called anything but "the screen" and…ready for this?…it was loaded by a tape.

I was shown how to link all the wires…sorry, leads…was given a pile of educational programs and sent on my way.

And so, the following day I was demonstrating to the assembled faculty the joys of using a computer. John Berry could write an entire article…no, a series of articles…about setting up the machine and tangling up half my audience in the different wires… sorry, leads… I'll get the hang of it yet, but I was lucky. Having the previous evening practiced setting up the machine at home and entangling the children, the cats and the hamsters on only four different tries, I'd ensured that my demo went smoothly. Helped, I might add, by the brilliant and original wheeze of having tagged each lead and its relevant socket with secret signs known only to me. Like A,B and C.

So, in no time, our school had a computer. Some of the older teachers…"set in their ways" is the phrase…were shy about using it and all that. Wait, I thought, until they come to grips with those dang new horseless carriages. They had to be gently led to this alien technology and given personal after-school tuition. Sadly, the younger, good looking women declined this kindly offer, but did seem to be keen to get to grips with the computer and begin to use it with their classes.

This was a problem in itself. How *did* we use the machine in the classroom? It was decided first to introduce it to the oldest, sixth grade, classes, with the teacher demonstrating one or two of the programs.

The children, of course, especially those few who owned their own machines, invariably the Spectrum, were keen to get their sticky fingers on the keyboard. Keen? They fought over the thing.

So in no time at all, the dear old Beeb was being circulated around the school.

There were teething problems, of course. I was given the task of deciding which of the programs were most suited to which age groups. These programs were, as you can imagine, all pretty basic and some of them were, frankly, entirely unsuitable. One grammar program refused to accept apostrophes and the simple arithmetical notation programs were especially so. Our maths syllabus was entirely based on the concept of place value and accordingly, as soon as children arrived from the nearby feeder infants school, they were taught to set out numbers in columns, even the most simple arithmetic material. Thus 11 + 5 would always be written as

11
+ 5

This produced a difficulty. A young child would arrive at the answer 61. Obviously, the computer was not suitable for this work. And, yes, to forestall readers' comments, I do know about having children learning to count in more concrete and less abstract situations. That process naturally comes fist. But recording the findings requires notation.

We were making progress. Educational suppliers offered special—and, needless to say, expensive—custom-made trolleys to house the computer and its adjacent tape recorder, plus of course compartments for tapes. Our school caretaker took one look at the illustrations in the catalogues and modified a kitchen dinner trolley that served us well over the years.

Then there was turning on the machine and running the programs. The Beeb is turned on by being "booted," and I understand that the term came into being because with the earliest—even pre-Beeb—home computers the way to turn on a machine was to give it a good kick. I never tried this with the Beeb, but I'm sure there were times when some of the children felt like committing mayhem. To "boot" the Beeb, two keys, the shift key and a key marked "break," had to be pressed in quick succession. If the sequence wasn't *just* so, hard luck buster, try again. I remember one boy trying for over an hour before he discovered that the machine hadn't been plugged in.

This wasn't the only operating snag. The programs were loaded by tape. No special cassette

tape recorder was required. Any that could be linked to the computer was fine. Fine! Ha! Even the shortest tape took several minutes to load. And even then it was a hit and miss operation. Sometimes the tape would run through its loading sequence, with numbers clicking away on the corner of the monitor screen, at least an excellent way of teaching hexadecimal. And when the tape recorder had done its work and had come to a stop, there would be a horrendous message to say that a fault had occurred and that the program had not loaded. One had to try again. There was no consistency to this, as far as I could tell. Initially I checked the tapes carefully to see whether or not any had become snagged or creased during the operation, but this appeared to make no difference. A tape that had worked fine previously suddenly decided to be unloadable for so many tries, then would again burst into life. It was not always possible, of course, to set up a program prior to a lesson taking place. Sometimes, it was intended to use more than one program and the second in sequence might feature this slightly eccentric loading problem. Ah, fun, fun, fun.

We had a special needs department for some children with learning difficulties and it was here that the more reluctant members of staff were finally won over. There was a very simple "shopping" program which the children absolutely adored and their results were phenomenal. Brought to mind is Tracy, a very tall, lanky sixth grade girl who had experienced an academic life of failure. When, late in the school year, I was taking a group for fractional equivalents with teasers such as:

$$\frac{5}{8} = \frac{?}{24}$$

…she happily interjected with the correct answer immediately. Other, harder examples, were put to the group, which now appeared to include Tracy. She was reeling off the answers before anyone else, and the correct answers, too. "How do you do it, Tracy?" the others asked. "Easy, innit?" she told them, triumphantly. "I've done these on t'computer."

By this time, our erstwhile LEA were providing us with more complicated programs, some of them adventure games, and similar games were being presented in list form in different books and magazines. A couple of dedicated pupils actually spent hours of their own time slavishly copying out these listings and saving them on to tape.

But then came our really big breakthrough. One day, completely unexpectedly, an education authority engineer brought in a little machine that revolutionized our computer work. It was a disk drive. This was a small independent box with two slots for 5¼-inch disks. These were thin and decidedly "floppy." Suddenly, not only were we no longer dependent on the vagaries of the unreliable and very erratic tapes, but loading the programs into the computer was speeded up to an unimaginable degree. For example, we had a popular adventure game program called *Flowers of Crystal* that took some little time to load. How long is "some little time?" you ask. Ready for this? Twenty-seven minutes. Yes, you read that correctly, Twenty-seven minutes. And, remember, there was no guarantee that the tape would have been amenable and actually loaded the program. When the program became available on disk the loading time was reduced to an amazingly acceptable four minutes. Terribly slow by today's standards, of course. But this wasn't today. In some ways, I'm a little surprised that this particular adventure game was indeed so popular. Some of the solutions to the problems posed the player along the way, such as in which colored jar could be found a particular piece of treasure, depended not on logic but entirely on a random factor. Fail at any task and the game was lost. Start again. A child could work through various "logical" solutions, then come unstuck through sheer chance. Not good. The game, though, was popular with teachers for it stimulated all sorts of creative work, both in writing and different forms of art. One improvement that the acquisition of the disk drive did allow us was for the making of individual disks for different members of staff.

By this time we had also considered the social implications of having the children sit in front of the machine. Aware of the criticisms circulating at the time (and perhaps still circulating for I know) that sitting in front of a computer all day (our children should have been so lucky—computer time was at a premium) produced or contributed to autism, we ensured that when the computer was in use, it was used by four children at a time. Of course, this posed another problem, namely would one child seek to dominate the group and have the other three acting merely as onlookers? We tried to solve this problem by giving the four children slightly different tasks and ensuring that we mixed the groups. I also had a couple of children, with official looking badges, acting as "computer monitors" to ensure that the computer was taken to the classroom where it was to be used, was set up correctly, and that the teacher concerned hadn't lost his or her individual disk. As it's obvious that this honored position of computer monitor is best undertaken by boys, I chose two girls. Similarly, when it was my class's turn to wash up staff coffee mugs and tea cups after a morning recess, I allowed two boys this privilege. Nothing to do with computers. Just thought you'd like to know.

Things got better. Two more computers were acquired—a new machine through the education authority and a used one privately. This meant that more children had more computer time. The difficulty as far as I was concerned was ensuring that the children in classes whose teachers were not overly enamored with computers did not "allow" their allotted time to be taken over by any more dominant, enthusiastic member of staff.

And with the arrival of yet another machine, I eventually had one computer permanently set up in a spare room for the sixth grade children during their recess times. After one such session, I came out of the staff room to find a small crowd of children virtually jumping up and down with enthusiasm. "Sir…" …kids are polite here… "come and see what Paul has done." Before you allow your imagination to run riot, I'll tell you. I followed this little mob to the computer room and there was Paul sitting proudly in front of a blank screen. I didn't have to do or say anything; my normal expression is bewilderment. "Don't you see, sir?" they chanted. No, sir didn't.

But let me explain. When the Beeb was booted, a couple of lines of explanatory data appeared in the top left hand corner of the screen. Like this:

BBC COMPUTER 32K
BASIC
>_

It disappeared once a program was running. What Paul had done was to set up his own programme so that it would reproduce this initial data. "Brilliant," I said, dryly. "I really wanted it in red."

Yup, the next day the same mob dragged me to the room in order to see the data in red. "But it's not flashing," I said. The next day the data was flashing and changing color every half minute on the dot.

There were further changes and developments, of course. Our favorite word processing program, *Wordwise*, that thus far had been available only on disk was "chipped in" to the machine. The word "installed" wasn't known to us at this point. Children produced speaking programs where a voice read what was being written or that said a bright "good morning" when the machine was turned on, much to the surprise of the teacher whose turn it was with the computer. One boy wrote music on the machine and another wrote a comedy program that wouldn't allow the machine to be turned off in the usual way but which threw up various comical sayings.

And eventually, too, we acquired a modem and a password and were able to log on to an educational facility and "download" (more technical terminology) all sorts of very turgidly presented material, such as lists of trees that could be found in the New Forest or the events leading up to the Battle of Hastings.

But those days of primitive "hands on" exploration are long gone. Today the school has its own computer hall, with long benches and some thirty or so state-of-the-art PCs, all high-powered with capacities of several trillion trilobites (or whatever) and all high-tech with their educational programs brilliantly organized.

As in so many other fields, an age of innocence has been consigned to the past. But let's hear it for the jolly old Beeb. Hip, hip…

—Ron Bennett

I THOUGHT I HAD A PUMPKIN BOMB

By John Hertz

Some of the adventures of my misspent youth actually happened.

In fifth grade, I really did tape a plastic rocketship to an essay I turned in. It stood on its tail, as God and Mr. Heinlein meant it to. I had read all the Heinlein juveniles in the library, having begun SF with Raymond F. Jones' *Son of the Stars*, unless you count learning to read during nursery school by making my mother read *Through the Looking Glass* aloud until I could too. I really did host birthday parties where we all went to a commercial bakery to watch bread made or a dairy to watch milk bottled. In a third grade paper on beavers I really insisted on writing "teeeeth," many times, not only in this so irritating poor Miss Leidberg, since deceased, whom I couldn't bear either, that I was transferred to Miss Drucker's fourth grade where I could happily review *Exodus* and *The Man Who Never Was*. Miss Drucker said a book report only proved what you read, a book review gave what you thought. In sixth grade, I really did try to lead a class campaign against friction. "Down with Friction," I wrote everywhere. We could stop with magnetic brakes. But I never made one box of Herzls, the pretzel-flavored breakfast cereal (Herzls are yummy), name carefully adjusted when I found that Theodor Herzl my pretended eponym didn't use a T.

In high school I really tried out for Jean in *Rhinoceros* having practiced turning into a rhinoceros for weeks, was rejected grief-stricken, accidentally read Berenger so girls could try for Daisy, and was cast on the spot; the schedule was doubled since there already was a Berenger; then the play was canceled when he fell sick; all after I no longer attended that school. When a friend published "Gaek! gaek! the snake" in *Concept*, the literary magazine, a gang of us built the Glorious Analog Electronic Komputer for the school fair; I was inside with carts of reference books; our sign said "Secrets of the Universe, 10¢ each"; after many hours someone sent in "What are the secrets of the universe?" and I answered "10¢ each." Later we all admitted it ought to be pronounced *geek*. But the pumpkin bomb we—I'll come to that.

I picked up magic as a hobby, literally and Bruce Elliott's book. We had ten-minute passing periods. I began to look like a pear, because I kept in my trousers pockets a pack of cards, rope, scissors, a few thimbles, balls of colored sponge, and things too fierce to mention. I was on a television show, and despite everything was paid in Holloway candies. Somehow I still like Milk Duds. I taught magic at summer camp, leaving an earlier one in a blaze of glory after leading my cabin to prizes with a sabot float, I mean really a float, the sheets washed loose in the lake, and with rewritten Flanders & Swann songs everyone laughed at but no one recognized. The toilet paper gag didn't work. We knew our counselor came in late from his night out. We thought he drank. We decided to fill his bed with toilet paper. Befuddledly he would be lost to determine what it was. No lights. His toes would find it. What in the world? He would reach down and catch a piece. Pull at it. Shred. Another piece. Another. Shred, shred. Sitting in mystery on the edge of his bunk. Still at it by dawn. Shred, shred. Diabolical. At sunrise we saw him dead asleep, full length, in the bed we had for *lagniappe* removed to the floor. He never noticed that or the carefully measured toilet paper we had spent hours stuffing into his bedclothes. We never did learn how he reached his bed and not its springs which remained in the usual place. Shred.

At the next camp I was Charlie Davenport in *Annie Get Your Gun*, although I couldn't sing. I made friends with the owner's son and went stealing cherries from trees across the fence. I put on scuba gear for the fantastically clear water of a clay-bottom lake. Different lake. I fell in love with a girl counselor and read Thurber to her in secluded spots. That adventure seemed never to happen, but we stayed in touch for years and when she married I met her husband. What did I know?

I'm coming to the pumpkin bomb.

Back in school a friend one day said "I see you all over." I said "There's twelve of me." I cached extra shirts, briefcases, shoes, changing in each of those ten-minute periods. When he asked "Weren't you wearing a different watch?" I said "That was No. 8." I was late for geometry but I kept it up for days. The most interesting thing in geometry was simple closed curves. We drew them in complicated intricacies like Shambleau. We were contrary children. We learned the Shaw Alphabet, which I've forgotten, and passed notes in Morse Code until we realized how stupidly we'd trained ourselves to read ink dots and dashes instead of hearing *dah didididit dit dah ditdidit dididah dah didididit*. I've forgotten that too, relearned for a Third Class license and forgot again. We played four-dimensional tic-tac-toe on blackboards until we grew infatuated with a game someone said was Goban, invented by bored Japanese on the sand. You draw squares 8 x 8 and put a mark in one. Opponent marks one. Winner is the first to get five in a row, column, or diagonal; if either plays in an edge square you add one row on each of the four sides. The bookstore had a run on graph paper. In the snack bar we sat round the tables playing Concentration, snapping fingers and calling numbers. We tried hand signs to see if we could manage in silence but kept losing the rhythm. At fourteen I was on the varsity debate team and went out for hamburgers in -20° fondly Fahrenheit. My debate partner, another older girl, introduced me to *Marjorie Morningstar* and musicals. We read, and once actually saw, *Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mama's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feeling So Sad*. I sawed the Senior Class president in half. That almost didn't happen and she may have a scar.

At home there was a German Shepherd and later a Dachshund. I tried to teach the Dachshund to jump through a hoop. I wanted her to jump through the middle, the proper way. She walked under the rim. Cleverly I rested it on the ground. She walked over it. Resorting to dog biscuits I coaxed her to jump over the rim of the hoop, gradually raising it into the air. After weeks, or decades, although she still just cleared the rim I finally had her jumping two or three feet high. To get her through the middle I rested the rim on the ground. She walked over it. So much for my passing the Mensa exam.

The next school was short between periods, but I somehow did enough magic to meet Bob Passovoy. As a Chemistry lab aide I helped discover a new element. It had to be an element because it didn't react with anything. It was found at the bottoms of test tubes. In "anything" I include sulfuric acid and *aqua regia*, which we mixed on scant excuse. We decided to name our discovery Crud. But this raised a problem. C was taken, Cr was taken, Cu was taken, Cd was taken. None of us knew Latin or German for "crud." Another adventure that didn't happen. Miss Laird was the kind of woman who liked to tell how in Germany with two friends, when she told a Berlin waiter "Dry Martini," and the other two each said "Dry Martini," the waiter brought nine Martinis. Mr. Purvenas the physics teacher I was harder on; bored, which he couldn't help. I passed notes with a girl who liked e.e. cummings and Marvel Comics. Whenever he nabbed me to come to the board and do a problem I did. I earned a top grade fair and square. The girl moved to Canada. In those days I tutored trigonometry, forgotten, and haunted a university computer lab one neighborhood to the north. I wrote machine language for an IBM 1620, which did arithmetic by looking up tables. I never learned them myself. Alan Frisbie later explained the 1620 was almost named CADET, until some bright fellow squeaked "I know what that stands for: Can't Add, Doesn't Even Try." I met a computer so old it filled rooms, and ran magnetic tape inches wide, with sprocket holes down the middle, in vertical drives that piled tape at the bottoms of wells. Following an article by Victor Yngve, I wrote a program to generate grammatically correct, if nonsensical, English sentences. It was on punched cards, eventually 1,600 of them. In a science fair it took me two levels until a judge said it lacked drama. I never could make it work.

School was more than 99% black. I was Senior Class vice president. I ran on "Who cares

who's for president, who's for vice?" No one recognized that either. I had read all the *Pogo* and *Oz* of the Baptist minister father of the girl next door. They had a mulberry tree. I liked the way it couldn't make up its mind how many lobes to grow on the leaves, but we were sad it wasn't a bush. I impressed my rabbi and won a prize with a pastiche in which he recognized Carl Sandburg but not the *Mad* parody. My high school class almost refused graduation. Mr. Pollock the Band teacher said he was tired of "Pomp and Circumstance." It was trite and shallow and he wouldn't. He wanted the Grand March from *Aïda*. We actually struck over this, with signs, in the street. I was helpless. Earlier I had marched with Martin Luther King. I knew what marching was but at politics I wasn't good enough. I had forgotten "Pomp and Circumstance" was Houdini's theme. That might not have done any good. In compromise we had no procession; when parents arrived they found us seated; the band played "More," which it had not rehearsed, while 600 of us walked one by one across the stage. I won a National Merit Scholarship and couldn't get into Oberlin.

At Antioch where everything seemed to be magic I fell out of practice. In my first year I took English IV and learned Gerard Manly Hopkins. A teaching aide said "If you can explain *With up so floating many bells down* I'll read e.e. cummings." I fell in love with China and a woman who kept a rabbit and loved Japan. Mr. Wong introduced me to Confucius and Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu and Mencius and Hsün Tzu and Han Fei Tzu and the great translator Arthur Waley. He laid out a Chinese poem, four lines of five characters each, and seven or eight English versions like the Five Blind Men and the Elephant. Folk dancing drew 300 people every week, including me. I met Alexander Kerensky and Paul Krassner and Timothy Leary and Babatunde Olatunji and Doc Watson. Alan Watts never returned my tape recorder. I scheduled hours of classical music for the radio station and broadcast an experimental program "Studies in Greenred" that took a week making each half hour. I put on a mixed-media evening *Psychlone* with slide-projector controls in the audience; as these hip people sat waiting I asked, by a microphone backstage, "Is this entertainment? Is this *entertainment*? Is *this* entertainment?" I masterminded the Great Barbara & John Lamb Memorial Easter Egg Hunt—they were alive—for which we bought every egg in Yellow Springs (the name is very strange to a Chinese), boiled them, colored them, and hid them. Most were found next day, ahem.

I want to talk about the pumpkin bomb.

In high school we played croquet and read science fiction. I was much taken with Sturgeon's "Skills of Xanadu" and Bester's "Pi Man," and Long's "To Follow Knowledge," the curtain piece of the Conklin anthology *Science Fiction Adventures in Dimension*. We heard you could make a pumpkin bomb. It was simple. You cut open a pumpkin and scoop out the insides. Discard about a third. Mix the rest with sugar. Refill the pumpkin. Seal the top with paraffin. Let it stand. In a few days, or a week, it will explode.

We liked this. What to do with it? Talking it over, we realized that the right person for it was Steve Allen. He had made the *Tonight* show, and goo-goo dolls. His "Question Man," when given an answer, like "Strontium 90, Carbon 14," provided the question, like "What was the score of the Strontium-Carbon basketball game?" If Ernie Kovacs was the Purcell of television, Steve Allen was the Saint-Saëns; he did everything, now and then wonderfully; and over all shone a mild wackiness, his own invention. We could see sending him a pumpkin bomb, and his keeping it on the piano. "Ladies and gentlemen, we have our pumpkin bomb here. It might explode tonight. Maybe it won't." If it blew up while the camera wasn't on it, he could make an event of the cleaning.

Tonight had not been in Steve Allen's hands for years.

We made a trial pumpkin bomb. For a first attempt we got a pumpkin no bigger than a breadbox. Autumn. We opened a lid in the top, leaving a rabbet as you would to make a jack o'lantern. Walt Disney's *Legend of Sleepy Hollow* is correct: originally "jack o'lantern" meant a man ("jack") carrying a lantern, then a will-o'-the-wisp, then a pumpkin hollowed for a light and carved with a face. We mixed the sugar, returned the filling, and sealed. There was a perfect ledge outside the basement. We waited.

—John Hertz

23 September 1999:

I am about to drop out of this world. For seventeen days. Film festival. My son Jon and I are dedicated fanatics and have full series passes. It starts tomorrow and I've taken the day off to run tasks and get going. Two films a night after work and all weekend with midnight shows on Friday and Saturday nights—a Brit cops vs. vampires TV serial, *Ultraviolet*: very weird (David Lynch, what have you spawned?), also Japanese horror movies, South Korean nasty cop movie, odd documentaries (do I want to see the one about the girl who fucked 251 men in ten hours?).

I'll see about forty films counting the couple I may see twice (horror ones). With a pass, son Jon has been going to the press screenings and as of today has seen 25!! The best were horror/ghost stuff. Today's three-hour Hungarian movie was pretty good, but it's going to get a big release so it'll come around again. We mainly go to see obscure odd things—how about the Book of Genesis done by Black Africans in Mali or a Mexican film about the fallout from the Spanish conquest of the Aztec empire? Or a deliberately dull evening with Adolf H. and Eva B. having dinner followed by infantile sex games in an alpine villa. Okay, so maybe not.

With all this film-going, we'll never be home except to sleep and have breakfast, maybe do laundry if I get a gap. Only . . .

Only I've an art job I'm supposed to do. Friends, CD cover art. I draw it, fax it, change it, fax it, and they want it soonest. I'll probably be working on it in theaters, in fast food place between films. No dollars worth speaking of, of course. (I went to San Jose State with these guys in the '60s.)

I'll not go on about the damned films, inflicting my zeal on you before I've even seen any. Oh, no, that will happen as I go along. I make notes in a small notebook: what I saw, how impressed. As the fest picks up speed, directors begin arriving and appearing with their films, usually evening showings. I stay for that, listen, even go up and talk with them if they speak English. Hey, they're all for it. I didn't do this until one evening I approached this South Korean director whose film I'd just seen. His first. It took place in a comic book rental store that stayed open at night, showing kung-fu movies and softcore porn (on video). So I went up and asked him about this and that. Korean comics are big thick pulp things like Japanese manga. Those damn Japanese, he said with feeling, they steal from our comics. He came back with a second film about the trials and tribulations of a R&R band trying to make it in a music scene dominated by big money financed pop music stars. They can't even afford drugs—too expensive. A lot of it was similar to bands I knew back in California, etc., about which I told him, that I could relate to it, and so on. Well, it bombed back home, he said. Haven't seen him again, alas.

Sunday night, 26 September 1999:

It's 11:30 and I'm grabbing a last bite...food, I mean. I skipped two films or three to get in grocery shopping, laundry, cooking...not much cooking in evenings during festival. Three days and twelve films, a bit below par. Jon's not in

from the 9:30 show, whatever that was. Friday and Saturday nights we went to the midnight show, out at a little before 2:00 a.m., bed at 3:00 a.m. You gotta be a fanatic.

This was "Ultraviolet," the Brit mini-series from TV. Four episodes and we gotta wait until *next Friday* for the last two and things are looking bad for everyone. Oh yeah, no one uses the word "vampire"—the term "leeches" is used, "parasites" also, but mostly "they," and so far we don't know too much about "they." Every episode adds a bit more. Jon says the writers probably resourced the vampire role-playing game books: "They don't suck blood but infect humans with a virus that makes 'em very susceptible to suggestion." "They" try lots of tricks—a strain of meningitis that carries infection via a pederast to Catholic boys' school; a fetus that according to ultrasound is not alive. Ah, but vampires can't be photographed, don't show up on videotape, their voices can't be recorded. "They" are big on eradicating diseases, especially blood-borne ones. "They" want healthy cattle/batteries. A parasite does not wish to kill its host. And so on.

Otherwise no utterly fabulous films yet, but some surprises: "Genghis Blues," about Paul Peña, a San Francisco blind blues musician who heard Tuva "throat singing" off Radio Moscow one night, tracked down a recording, and learned/figured out how to do it. The film is a documentary of him and a friend going to this tiny country the size of South Dakota stuck up above Outer Mongolia, the very center of Asia. He sang blues, he sang traditional throat songs (there are six styles) and learned about fifty words and composed a blues/throat song in Tuvan and sang it. Blew their minds. It's a wild nomad's land.

Today saw an about three-hour epic Chinese historical drama—king wants to unify the seven kingdoms, a good thing—one set of laws, one language, one money, good roads, etc.—and proceeds to chop up everyone who doesn't agree. Lavish spectacle, big vistas of hordes of marching men and war machines. Now it happens that someone in China thinks this is great stuff; I know I've seen two or three previous movies on the same king and his crusade (his empire lasted fifteen years before invasion). The last was in 1996, "Shadow Emperor," wherein the emperor's childhood pal turns against him when he loses it. In this one he grew up with Gong Li. She turns on him, too. Both movies have the assassination sword in a rolled-up map.

10 October 1999:

In Canada it's a holiday, Thanksgiving. The film festival ended last night. I am quite burnt out: 49½ films in seventeen days. Of those only three did I see twice. A couple I'd have liked to see again but couldn't. I concluded the fest last night watching a three-hour French movie sitting in a seat that was pure torture. The movie was "Time Regained," the memories of Marcel Proust. Quite a lush, rich film, set as it was in turn of the century Paris and among the rich set that Marcel moved among. Lots of conversation, memory flashbacks, lots of good-looking young men who looked much alike. Dense stuff. Not knowing anything of Proust and his life, work and times, I was pretty uncomprehending.

The film I saw before that had a totally different effect on me: I fled. It had a curious title, "Shirley Pimple in the John Wayne Temple of Doom." The director was on hand. Said he spent eighteen years making this film. Well, he wasted his life. It was dreadful: bad acting, lousy sound, long long diatribe sentences, especially in the monotone narration that put you to sleep. Right off I knew I was in trouble. Eighteen years? Maybe it gets better. It got more incomprehensible instead. I bailed out. The only time I did so.

I fell asleep during a short, nodded into a zombie-state several times; but on the whole was engaged. The Japanese "horror" films weren't actually quite horror movies but ghost stories/thrillers/mysteries. I found "Ring" and "Ring 2," its sequel, the ones I liked most— concerning a videotape which has several scenes in it including one of a well in a forest. Anyone watching it has one week to live. They die of fright one week to the minute later. Several characters in the film with one week to live attempt to get clues from tape as to its origin, tracking down a history and eventually finding well woman was sealed up in thirty years ago. But getting body out of well doesn't solve anything after all. You can dodge the curse by making a copy of the tape and getting someone else to watch it. Then we move to sequel, which cranks up the tension as body count climbs. Characters left over from first movie die in here. More clues and information, more ghost sightings, more screams...and when the scientists start mucking about with their devices the body count climbs some more. At the end there are two survivors: an inquisitive girl (her teacher/ lover died) and a little kid (his whole family died). Of course this stuff proved so popular there's a "Ring 3" now.

There were other mystery shorts, one with a gruesome torture scene, and four films about fucking. Well, fucking is what went on. Two were French—"Romance" and "L'Ennui." In the first the lead fem pouted throughout the whole film. I was warned so I didn't see these. I did see "Lies" from South Korea, all fucking and whipping. Funny at times. I did *not* see the documentary about Annabel Chong who screwed 251 men in ten hours. It was a midnight show and even the presence of Ms. Chong herself did not draw me in. I'd rather go home, eat, go to sleep. I dd not eat well, grabbing fast food between showings, and did not sleep well what with going to bed late and getting up for work at 6:00 a.m.

So I slept in and did laundry (four loads!) and cleaned up a thing or two around here. But mostly I'm taking it easy. Tomorrow it's back to the real world and all its problems.

Now, where were we? Ah, yes, the not-so-favorable pursuit of the Chinese lady. I'll relate the last couple of times with her.

You find out things about people by seeing them on home turf and on not-so-familiar ground. So it was with Juliet. She phoned me one weekend morning, asking if I was doing anything. Just my fruit and vegetable shopping at the local farmers' market not far from where I live. I'm sure she remembered my habit from an earlier conversation. She had never been to it—it's not near her part of town, which has its own shopping areas—and wanted me to kind of show her around. Sure, okay, and I give her directions to put us in the same area, a small square for performers, jugglers, musicians, whatever. I spotted her before she saw me. Tall and lean, fine bones, not quite boney, thankfully; tight sheath top, shorts, big shades. Food, she says. The area we are in is a kind of tiny island under one of our major bridges connecting the outer city to the central "downtown." Besides the market it has trendy eating places, a theater, an art school, a small hotel, and a bevy of trendy shops and nautical supply stores, this being a boat dock on three sides. Houseboats, too.

When I first came to this city, it was a failing industrial area but the whole area went high-roller quickly. When I was newly married and living in a $75 a month basement disgrace, my wife and I used to cruise among the structures growing with summer speed, trying to imagine it in fifty years. But for now it's a tourist mecca, a meeting point for various kinds of affluent sets. Hey, I couldn't live on these prices for exotic coffees and treats. But we buy lunch and go out to watch the act working the square: a solo tricks and juggling act.

Juliet eats with her back to him which gets his attention as he works the audience. She won't be drawn in, relishes the moment. Somehow she manages to watch him despite pretending not to be interested. In the end she gives over some money. I don't. I've seen this weekend upon weekend for years. I'm drawn to the musicians, particularly the South American groups specializing in music of the Andes. None are here today. Juliet is big on music and dance, even in a dance troupe. She's drawn to the guy doing a Jerry Lee Lewis act over by the theater. He's very energetic, leaping all over his keyboard, all hands and toes. She likes this kind of rock and roll beat.

Among the shops is a printmakers' gallery, and it's open. I propose a look and do so, finding some interesting work. Juliet has no interest, however, preferring to go out and stand in the sun until I come back out. Maybe she isn't an art lover. That I once drew underground comics didn't tweak her. But that's not a bad sign.

However, this is all by way of killing an afternoon. As it turns out, she's attending a dinner party on board a yacht moored over behind the art school. We find it. Impressive size, several decks—a motor yacht, not sail. Big enough to live on for two people, which was the case, I gathered. The owner is in her pyramid, higher up than her, has made a million or two and she'd like to duplicate him. Now that we're at the ramp she's all for getting on and I've served my purpose, I think. Others are arriving, a couple so tall I wonder if they'll fit inside, and I'm gone.

But not out. The next call has me agreeing to come to a meeting of her pyramid scam. (Scam is my word, of course; she says "network.") My neighbor Dalila is supposed to come, too, but I figure she'll dodge it. Not me. My wife had friends who jumped into these enterprises lovingly, hopefully, and often, and by that kind of osmosis that goes with a relationship I was sucked in, too. No big thing. My teacher, E. J. Gold, was

big on "stress" and your security could be as quick to be overturned as any character in a Phil Dick novel. Hey, it'll be a *change*! Won't be any cartoonists or wannabe script writers there. I even wear a tie. An evening in a hotel in the suburbs, out on a river so polluted you could almost walk on it, next to yet another open market.

I easily follow the other folks obviously here for the same event, most familiar to one another, a few singles a bit perplexed. At a choke-point I sign in, making sure Juliet gets credit for bringing in fresh blood. It's a very sociable crowd, peopled with outgoing, naturally well-disposed folk—the kind, I think to myself, that make good sales people. Juliet and I are in front. No Dalila. The evening starts out with testimonials, expounding on the many benefits of the products this pyramid is pumping, like the herbal vitamins ("It cured my cancer!") and the cleaning solvents ("It cleaned the engine room on my yacht so well I could eat off the motor," said the boat owner who'd thrown the party Juliet had gone to, a short, pleasant-faced chap) and so on, all positive, all success.

And then on to the meat with a second or third speaker, an exuberant former hippie reborn a rampant capitalist and on his next million. The researchers have been researching and discovered that the top-selling three products out there are diet products. We are a fat, affluent society, gross with living off the fat of the land—or words to that effect. So we put it on and want to take it off and look like the aerobics set. Only a few in this room look like they go to the gym. Why, even me after decades of a 32-inch waist have had to go to a 34. So they are now revealing a *new* product: a diet drink. A shake, really, that comes in a kit form with these powders in pouches, a plastic shaker/container, measuring cups. I look at the box; the art isn't too bad. It's pricey, of course, but by now the subject is on to exhorting one and all to go out and ring up everyone to whom you sold diet cookies, vitamins, solvents, etc., and sell them this kit. The enthusiasm is almost scary.

And that's it. I get to sample a shake. Holy cow, it takes like an orange creamsicle, the kind you and I ate as a kid: vanilla ice cream covered with a coating of orange ice stuff, the best part, really. Not bad, interesting maybe even considering that this biz started out shoveling a diet cookie that was reported to taste so awful I couldn't have downed one unless it was carried down by several ounces of Sambucca.

I mill about and talk to a couple of people, even a "don't I know you?" Only no, it's not someone my wife knew back when—in fact, a recent immigrant to this land of opportunity. When Juliet is free, I go talk to her. I had a good time, enjoyed myself, I saw. It is late and I have things to do before I go to sleep. She, I understood, had a ride back to downtown from one of her friends. I am taking public transit, the elevated commuter train. I even like it. There is something off-kilter about this conversation, or rather it is in her eyes, her body: I have committed an error and of course I don't know what it is. I know this feeling well from numerous relationships over forty years and I am still clueless. Am I not emoting an anticipated enthusiasm for the pyramid stuff? Am I supposed to pitch for her going with me on the train, accompanying her to her door? Maybe her ride isn't solid. It's not my tie, for god's sake; I'm as nicely turned out as she is. Did I compliment her on that? I'm sure I did. So what is it? Screw it. I don't have all night unless she says something. She doesn't. I go.

But it does seem that there is a turning of the tide. No more early morning phone calls now. I call her prior to vanishing into the film festival. It is an odd conversation—no, it is not even a conversation. She hardly talks at all. Distant. I can hear her TV in the background. Have I interrupted something? No. Oops, I ain't making a dent here. Adios.

It's a way of life, you know, the pyramid. Provides all if you give, maybe even if you're a fugghead. And the *I Ching* always seems to recommend perseverance. Hey, only a phone call. Life as a lottery? I hope not. I never did have *that* kind of luck.

—George Metzger

George Richard Fox was the most remarkable science fiction fan I've ever known. I call him a fan, though his interests and ambitions were to take him out past the science fiction cosmos. When first we knew each other in the mid-1940s, we were teenage kids in suburban New Jersey, about an hour and a half from Manhattan, and so living on the fringe of the SF pulp world.

From early adolescence, Fox stepped to the beat of a different drummer. He was born and raised in Rahway, a central New Jersey town hardly noted for intellectual stimulus. Like some other bright teen-age loners, Fox sought friendship beyond his home town, and so he contacted other adolescent nerds through the science fiction fan movement. Industriously, to see their names in print, fans wrote letters to the editors of *Planet Stories* and other pulps, and from their published addresses, could write to one another. That was how I first came to know Fox, when he was thirteen and I barely two years his senior, the two of us living in towns thirty miles apart.

At the time, he was a morose, precocious lad, suffering terribly from asthma, and I didn't foresee much of a future for him. I certainly wouldn't have predicted that one day he'd be a published novelist, nor that he would land in Hollywood, writing the screenplay for a colossal, star-studded epic.

Soon after V-J day Fox attended the grandiosely titled Dovercon, a fan gathering at my house, notable for bringing together two arch-enemies, Sam Moskowitz and Donald A. Wollheim, in more or less friendly fashion for the first time in many years. Wollheim, who long worked in the pulp field, in 1946 was editing *Ace Detective* and had struck a popular chord with his anthology, *The Pocket Book of Science Fiction.* I viewed him as a god. To allow himself and his wife Elsie to be lured from the city to remote Dover was, as I look back on it, an astounding act of charity on Don's part. Later, I was invited to conclaves of fans and ex-fans at their condo in Forest Hills, where I got to meet and ogle immortals such as Damon Knight, James Blish, Robert A. W. "Doc" Lowndes, John B. Michel, and Cyril Kornbluth. Sam Moskowitz was newly home from military service, and at the meeting he regaled us all with anecdotes of life in the Army tank corps.

So you see, geographically, the glamorous world of New York pulp professionals wasn't far away. It was easy for some of us kids to go in to Madison Avenue one afternoon and annoy W.

Scott Peacock, editor of *Planet Stories*, in the headquarters of Fiction House Magazines. Peacock politely showed us around his cramped workspace, and we gawped at original Finlay illustrations. Another time, the generous Sam Merwin, Jr., editor of *Thrilling Wonder, Startling Stories* and *Captain Future*, invited me to lunch in a high-class Manhattan eatery, just because he was curious to meet a kid who wrote all those letters to the SF magazine letter sections. Merwin, son of a then well-known novelist, was a far better editor than his cornily-titled magazines might suggest. He improved them greatly by soliciting top-flight material from Will F. Jenkins, Henry Kuttner, and C. L. Moore, and many other greats. Me, I was trying to crack the pulps in those days—any pulps. Once, when I submitted a would-be western story to a cowboy fiction magazine, back it came with a note from Merwin. I think I can recall it word for word:

"You may regard this as a tough break, kid, but I happen to be the editor of this book too. It seems that nobody born east of the Mississippi can write westerns with the right feel for language, terrain, and atmosphere. In your opening line ("A rifle cracked, and Mott swerved his startled roan into the crevice in the rocks") you appear to have your hero stepping into a crevice that a bullet has just made."

After that merciful damnation, I quickly scuttled back out of the West. Merwin always returned my unsuccessful SF stories, too, with encouraging reactions.

And—wonder of wonders!—I even had a family tie to *Astounding Science Fiction*, although it never helped me crack its demanding market. Kay Tarrant (we always called her "Aunt Catherine") was the sister of a man who had married my mother's cousin. She worked as assistant editor and secretary to John W. Campbell, Jr. Kay was a brisk, smart, no-nonsense Catholic spinster who roomed in Hoboken, and she was wonderfully kind to me. She added me to the magazine's subscription list as a freeloader, and religiously read the terrible stories I submitted to her. I don't know whether she ever showed them to Campbell; probably she spared him that displeasure. I kept trying to concoct high-brow stories that I imagined might please Campbell, but my heart wasn't in them. Some of them had such complex plots that I didn't understand them myself. Kay worked on *Astounding* for many years, although she once confided that the Street & Smith magazine she really loved was *Unknown*, which Campbell edited, too—a marvelous fantasy pulp that fell victim to wartime paper shortages.

I mention all this just to show that, for kids with literary aspirations, the nearby New York pulp world seemed tantalizingly within reach. Its editors went out of their way to treat adolescent squirts like me with tremendous kindness—even when we weren't (like Kay Tarrant and me) distant relatives. George Fox, too, grew up in this climate of hope-kindling encouragement.

After getting to know Fox better, I thought him the smartest kid I'd ever met. He could be mercilessly frank, and his mind was devoid of cant. He was quick to see the absurdity of a situation, and like one of his early idols, H. L. Mencken, took joy in observing the foibles of humanity. Yet he was quick to laugh at his own embarrassments, and made comedy out of what, for me, would have been humiliations. (I believe he once suffered from a case of the boils, as did his protagonist Merle, in *Without Music*, the novel in Fox's book, *Inside Man: A Novel & Two Stories*.)

Even back then, Fox was learned in movies and movie lore, precociously well-read in pulp magazines and detective stories. An astute critic of the great pulp writers, he sometimes scorned their plotting abilities. He made me aware of that absurd moment in *The Maltese Falcon* when Hammett, having written himself into a hole and not knowing what to have his characters do next, resorts to a wildly improbable device: a dying man staggers into Sam Spade's office bearing the statue of the mysterious falcon itself. Fox saw at once that Hammett had employed a desperate and preposterous stratagem; I had thought nothing of it. Somehow, he tolerated me, and sometimes he and I and other cronies would spend a weekend in New York, blowing our allowances on a cheap hotel room and nonstop movie-going.

In 1946, Fox and I found ourselves assisting Sam Moskowitz in staging an event entitled the First Post-War Eastern Science Fiction Convention. John W. Campbell, Jr. and other celebrities were flattered into coming to Newark, and speaking at this momentous affair at a low-rent meeting place, the Slovak Sokol Hall. That was the beginning of the Eastern Science Fiction Association, whose monthly meetings featured a lustrous roster of unpaid speakers including Isaac Asimov, L. Sprague de Camp, August Derleth, and David H. Keller, M.D.

Unimpressed, Fox soon began to distance himself from science fiction, becoming a leader of a clique of adolescents called The Spectators, whose name reflected a wish to stay cool and disinterested. They used to sit in the back of the room at monthly ESFA meetings and, although not exactly living up to their wish for coolness, would snicker and sneer. In 1947, together with Lloyd Alpaugh, Ron Christensen, Ron Maddox, Lee Budoff, and me, he founded the Spectator Amateur Press Society (name chosen for its initials), an imitation of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association, whose members swapped their mimeographed magazines in quarterly mailings. But although he churned out a few careless fanzines, including a one-shot called *Speculations*, mainly distinguished by a silkscreen cover he had talked his art teacher into doing for him, Fox didn't long devote himself to amateur publishing. I had the impression that he thought it folly to give away his writings for free. Early in life, he had made up his mind to be a successful popular writer. When he and I were teenagers trying to write pulp fiction, it was detective fiction he attempted, not SF. Clearly he preferred the more-or-less real world of crime and punishment to space flights to Alpha Centauri.

We were young enough to miss World War II, but not the Korean Emergency. In 1951 Fox enlisted for four years in the Air Force and was stationed in the Philippines, the locale of his novel *Amok*. After graduation from the University of Missouri's School of Journalism in 1958, his fortunes climbed. In less than a decade he rose from reporting on leash laws and Rotary Club meetings for the Perth Amboy *Evening News*, to become editorial director of Magazine Management, a New York publishing company specializing in two-fisted adventure slicks. On a vacation trip to Mexico City, he had the luck to meet Helen Gray, whose father was in the diplomatic service, a woman who could appreciate his sense of humor and offbeat approach to life. In 1960 when her family returned to Washington, D.C., they were married, and married they remained. Fox began working on *Male,* a magazine of hairy-chested adventure stories, purportedly true but actually concocted. At the time, the staff writers for Magazine Management were dazzlingly overqualified: not only Fox was hired but also Mario Puzo, Bruce Jay Friedman, and Martin Cruz Smith, all destined to become celebrated novelists. Like his character Merle, who writes for a magazine called *Turmoil for Men*, Fox took such hackwork with a grain of salt. He once explained that, to come up with photographs of the heroes of the supposedly true stories, he would rummage the files of Tass, the Soviet news agency, since readers couldn't tell Russians from Americans.

Fox quit the magazine business in 1968 and became a free-lance writer. He took feature-writing assignments for *Playboy* and *Saturday Evening Post*. Both short stories in the present collection date from the late 1960s. The wonderful comic crime story, "Kessler, the Inside Man," published in *Esquire* in 1967, was chosen by Anthony Boucher for *Best Detective Stories of the Year* (1968) and reprinted again in the Doubleday Mystery Guild's *A Treasury of Modern Mysteries* (1973). It's about a poet (resembling me) who helps a Mafia don rob a casino on the Riviera. In 1971 *The Paris Review* printed "The Twenty-Sixth Second," a Fox story that had pleased its editor, George Plimpton. This wry tale of frustration in the suburbs—about a commuter who secretly carries a suicide pill he had been issued by Army intelligence, and what happens when his wife discovers it—is worthy, I think, to stand beside the best work of John Cheever.

Fox's years of inventing heroic yarns for *Male* must have left his sensibilities in agony. *Without Music*, published in 1971 by Holt, Rinehart & Winston, may have been a reaction against the demands of formulaic writing. It drew admiring reviews and went into paperback, but an irresistible opportunity was to swerve Fox from doing more novels of its caliber, and his career took a startling new direction. When Mario Puzo, busy writing a screenplay for *The Godfather II*, couldn't do more than supply the first draft of the screenplay for *Earthquake*, he nominated Fox to continue the job. Soon after the film was released in 1974, listing Puzo and Fox as co-authors, Fox published a fascinating personal account of its making: *Earthquake: The Story of a Movie* (Signet Books, 1974). Produced and directed by Mark Robson, starring Ava Gardner, Charlton Heston, Lorne Greene, Genevieve Bujold, and George Kennedy, *Earthquake* was ahead of its time in its special effects. These involved faking the collapse of the Hollywood reservoir dam, the

twisting-about of skyscrapers, and the destruction of large portions of downtown Los Angeles. Trick photography combined live action with miniature sets; ingenious artificial rubble had to be manufactured and manipulated. With a menacing sound track and shivery music by John Williams, the film served as a model for subsequent near-future disaster movies.

In moving to California, Fox escaped the treadmill of *Male* and the East Coast professional pulp world he had known as a child. (The latter was also a treadmill, all right. Don Wollheim once told me that, at one time, all the sports pulp magazines were "edited by science fiction fans who hated sports." During his stint as editor of *Baseball Action Stories*, someone in the office had asked him what he thought of the Series and he'd replied "What series?" Legend had it that when in the 1940s Frederick Pohl was editor of two SF books, *Astonishing* and *Super Science*, he was making $15 a week. His secretary was also making $15, so he fired her, did her work too, and got $30.)

Fox became entangled in a legal dispute with his former friend Mario Puzo over the credits to *Earthquake,* and having trouble finding more film work, returned to fiction. In 1978 Simon & Schuster published *Amok*, a thriller about a seven-foot-tall Japanese soldier still haunting the jungles of the Philippines long after World War II, killing victims with a samurai sword. Fox wrote one more novel, *Warlord's Hill* (Times Books, 1982), a thriller based on the premise that a band of renegade Nazis had invaded the New Jersey Pine Barrens, within distant sight of the Empire State Building. ("At last!" he scrawled in my copy, "the horrifying truth about New Jersey revealed.") I don't want to underestimate those thrillers. The work of a master craftsman, they move breathlessly, with crisp dialogue and terse description, and they supply their readers with all the entertainment they had bargained for. (And often Fox couldn't resist strokes of his characteristic wit and irony, to which, in *Without Music* and in his short stories, he gave freer rein.)

It seems a Foxean irony that some years following the movie *Earthquake*, he and Helen would have their own home in Woodland Hills severely damaged by the Southern California quake of 1994. They repaired the house and kept living in it. He continued to collect residuals from *Earthquake*, renewed every time another tremor struck California and a TV channel showed the film again. He worked on other film scripts, but wrote no more novels.

Later, in 1998, Fox, Alpaugh, Christensen and I, together with our indulgent wives, held a reunion in Albuquerque. Shortly thereafter, we were astonished to learn that the SAPS, which we had formed so casually and soon quit, still flourished and had celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. (As I write this, it is still going strong.)

In May 2000 Fox was diagnosed with lung cancer, which had spread. He died abruptly. Seven weeks later, he was buried at sea, his ashes consigned to the Pacific.

Among neglected American novels, *Without Music* is one of a kind. Although altogether Fox wrote five novels, some of which enjoyed popular success, it's the one book that he apparently wrote to please himself without regard to sales: the one in which his outrageous humor and stark, colorful style are given free play, the novel for which he most richly deserves to be remembered. Fox was a lifelong lover of the movies, and as his work as a film writer proves, knew how to tell a story cinematically. And there are superficial resemblances to certain literary icons. I can't forget Fox's comment (once tossed off in conversation) on those two great American influences: "Hemingway and Faulkner write like two different kinds of drunk. Hemingway is like a drunk who counts out every word; Faulkner, like a drunk who can't stop talking."

In some ways, *Without Music* is dark and overwhelming, a story of moral failure, and yet on turning the last page we feel satisfied and reconciled. A lesser writer might have trumped up a happy ending, but Fox remains faithful to the nature of his characters and so, to the end, the book remains hard-eyed and plausible. This is no small feat, in that some of its characters and events are bizarre.

If Fox had written other novels of such rugged originality, his name might now stand high in the canon of our letters, next to those of Nathanael West, Flannery O'Connor, and other limners of the grotesque. His more conventional novels are vivid and skillful entertainments, and they have passages of characteristic wit, but they were written for the marketplace and that motive shows. His career as a fiction writer began with two paperback adventure novels, *Turncoat* (Beacon, 1959), signed "Richard Fox," and *By Blood Alone* (Berkley Books, 1961), published under the pen name of Frank Corey. When the first of these books appeared, Fox was outraged to find that the publisher had inserted a gratuitous sex scene written by somebody else.

Fox once confided that he didn't like writing sex scenes. He knew that in popular fiction they were expected, but he disliked having to make up an aura of spurious romance. And so the big bedroom scene in *Without Music* is a hilarious and awful travesty. It reads like a parody on conventional sex scenes in best-sellers.

In nearly every one of his stories, Fox remembers World War II. To anyone who doesn't happen to have a Holocaust victim in the family, the Nazi menace may seem ancient history; but to those of us who grew up during those war years, it remains vivid. Even on the outskirts of New York, people felt vulnerable, and in 1938 a nation panicked when Orson Welles, in his radio version of "The War of the Worlds," told in artificial news bulletins of Martian invaders advancing across the New Jersey meadows in the direction of George Fox's home town. In 1942, I recall nightmares in which the war machines of Hitler and Hirohito would roar across the country. Such a possibility seemed very real back when the Japanese were routing our inexperienced forces from Bataan and Corregidor. After the war came a new worry: nuclear devastation and its attendant back yard bunkers (bomb shelters). In a curious way, I find this jittery *zeitgeist* operating in *Without Music*: the wounded members of the Mangled Club remind us of the recent past, and, ominously, the proprietor of a restaurant is a former Gestapo member. In Fox's novel *Amok*, a Japanese soldier stranded in the Philippines, continues to swing his sword, never having heard that the war is over. In another novel, *Warlord's Hill*, escaped Nazi war criminals survive in the New Jersey swamplands. In the grimly comic story "The Twenty-sixth Second," that concludes *Inside Man*, Harry Overton remembers his dread of being caught by the Gestapo ("In Short Hills?" his wife wonders), and still carries his government-issued cyanide pill, his reassuring means of escape. No doubt, in writing for *Male*, Fox invented many war stories and fabricated a few escaped Nazis hanging out in Argentina. And the movie *Earthquake* appealed to a generation of moviegoers still half-expecting warlike devastation. George Fox would have been skeptical of critical pontifications, and yet I think it fair to claim that his fiction astutely captures a national postwar case of jumpy nerves. In the present era of war against terrorists, his work takes on a curious timeliness.

Without Music is a novel built to last, for it has, as Ezra Pound said a classic has to have, a certain indefinable freshness. Although reviews were favorable, it made only a brief stir when originally published—as first novels by writers unknown to the literary establishment tend to do. For more than a quarter-century now, anyone who would read it has had to seek out a copy on the used book market. "Kessler, the Inside Man" and "The Twenty-sixth Second" also deserve new readers. I'm thankful that in those stories and in *Without Music* George Fox's spirit—his irrepressible merriment, his command of words, his tough, skeptical knowledge of humanity—is here in black and white, to go right on regaling us.

—Joe Kennedy

[In somewhat different form, this article appeared as an afterword to a collection of Fox's best fiction, *Inside Man: A Novel & Two Stories*, edited by X. J. Kennedy, available from Xlibris in paperback, hardcover, or as an e-book. Enter ***http://www1.xlibris.com/bookstore/bookdisplay.asp?bookid=15520*** into your browser, or call 1-888-795-4274. The Website offers an opportunity to read a portion of the book.

[Additionally, some copies of *Inside Man* are available from various secondary sources, as are copies of the previous editions of the novel, *Without Music*. Do a search on Bookfinder.com and you will find them.]

I was shocked when I heard on NPR that Dave Van Ronk had died after surgery for colon cancer. It'd been decades since I was last in touch with Dave, but he had been an important person in my life.

I met Dave some forty-odd years ago at the Libertarian League Hall in NYC. Dick and Pat Ellington were running the Lib League and they put on regular chicken dinners there that were open to all. My then-husband, Larry Shaw, and I went frequently. Dick knew I was into folk music. He recommended we come that particular evening because a folk musician friend of his would be there.

The friend was Dave Van Ronk. After the dinner, he sang and played. Then Dick introduced us. We struck it off immediately. No surprise, since it turned out we had a number of fannish friends in common.

Dave was just back from a hitch as a merchant seaman on an oil tanker, and was staying with his mother in Brooklyn a long subway ride from The Village. When we found that out, Larry and I invited him to bed down at our place on Greenwich Street, just a few blocks from Washington Square.

Dave was a good house guest. He was neat. He pretty much lived out of his guitar case, which doubled as a suitcase for basic necessities. He always folded up the sofa bed in the morning. He took care of his own meals and laundry.

One morning Larry had gone off to work and left me asleep. When I woke I was so sick and so weak I could not get out of bed or even give a loud shout. Fortunately there was a bedside extension phone. With effort, I managed to call Larry at the office. He told me he'd call back, and I should let the phone ring. When no one else picked up, Dave answered it in the living room. Larry told him what was the matter. Dave found a doctor who made house calls, and got him there for me. Turned out I had mono. During the hours Larry was at work, Dave fixed my meals and nursed me through it.

When I met Dave, I was an avid folk music fan, but I didn't know any of the Village folk music crowd. He seemed to know them all, and he knew the places they gathered to make music together. It was through him that I met people and with his help that I started publishing a folk music fanzine I called *Caravan*. Dave was enthusiastic about doing a column for me under the penname "Blind Rafferty."

In those days Elektra Records was one of the few labels featuring folk music. It was run by Jac Holzman from a small storefront in the Village. Dave's background was in jazz and blues as well as folk. He liked music done with power, not polish. Elektra's releases generally annoyed him for being too slick, too prettified. In his column for the first issue of *Caravan*, he blasted Elektra's catalog in general and one record in particular as typical of their approach.

I sent a copy to Elektra. To my surprise, very shortly I got a call from Jac complaining that I hadn't given him a chance to defend himself. It hadn't occurred to me that anyone would take something in a meager little mimeoed give-away fanzine that seriously. I explained to Jac. He forgave me and invited me to visit the office some time.

Well, I had a tape recorder and had gotten Dave to tape a reel of stuff for me in my living

[continued at end of letter column]

JOEL NYDAHL

What fun to read *Trap Door* No. 21! I must admit, however, that I hardly know how to begin commenting on it. With the exception of some earlier issues you so kindly sent a few months ago, it represents just about my only direct contact with fanzines since…well, let's not go there, but it's been decades.

With such a span of time between first and last, I couldn't help but compare *Trap Door* to fanzines I read and contributed to when I was active on the scene. (My god, we're talking fifty years here!) Mentally I placed it, of course, next to my own *Vega*. My first thought was that there was no real comparison. *Vega* (and many of the other fanzines of the early 1950s) I remembered as amateurish by comparison—because their editors were so young. Many of us, in fact, were just kids, albeit precocious kids. Harlan Ellison (*Science Fantasy Bulletin*) was 15 or 16; Bob Silverberg (*Spaceship*) was about the same age; David Ish (*Sol*)—where is he now?—was about my age (14); Lee Hoffman (*Quandry*), whom I never knew, was the "older woman" (I swear—that was how I thought of her) at 19.

But then I thought that maybe the scene wasn't much like that at all; perhaps, with my myopic view, I was misremembering and misrepresenting the total picture. Certainly, time and selective memory must have warped my perspective. Redd Boggs, Dean A. Grennell, Bob Tucker, Shelby Vick—these were "old" guys and their work evidenced a degree of maturity that I noticed and hoped to emulate someday.

When I actually went so far as to dig out the early issues of *Vega* that I still possess (unfortunately, only a paltry few) and thought more about other fanzines of the time, I was struck by the naïve enthusiasm of much of the writing. All in all, my overall impression of those times is of youthful vigor with all of its weaknesses and strengths. I wonder (being so long removed from the scene) if there is today a bunch of kids out there who sound like "we" did. (Ted White can certainly comment on this topic—as can you, with your extensive fanzine collection.) *{The last teenage fan I recall was Sandra Bond back in the late '80s. These days new fanzine editors in their 30s or even 40s are considered young.}*

Chris Priest's piece on typewriters dredged up memories of typing mimeograph stencils for *Vega*—and justifying the right margins as I typed. I'd get about halfway through a line, stop to count the number of spaces I had yet to go, calculate how many I would need to complete a line, and double- or triple-hit the spacebar to accommodate the text. Harlan Ellison was the first I was aware of who did this, and I shamelessly emulated his technique. (Why this concern with neatness, I wonder?)

Lucy Huntzinger—what a joy! What a funny person! Bizarre in exactly the right way. I've just discovered her, but I'm sure she's an established figure of whom I'm simply not aware. I wish I'd had her writing for *Vega*. *{Well, you had Marion Zimmer Bradley, but Lucy is definitely funnier*

than Marion could ever be.}

The autobiographical piece by Ted White—too bad I didn't know him better back "then"—reminded me that I once owned an original Virgil Finley. At one time, *Future Stories* awarded an original illustration to the writer of the "best" letter to appear in each letter column. I won once and treasured the finely-crafted pen-line drawing of some fantastic scene (I've forgotten what). I regret that I lost or misplaced that illustration. (Is Virgil still around—or is that a hopelessly naïve question?) *{He died in 1971.}*

Category of Things Never Change: FAPA is an acronym I had forgotten—but there it was, still alive and well. And—my caricature is a prime example—the beanie with the propeller is still around and, evidently, a powerful icon yet. Go figure. (In some respects, it's as if I've never been away.) *{I had much the same feeling when I returned in 1980, but I was only gone for a decade.}*

It's been difficult to think of anything to say that won't seem at least slightly irrelevant to most of your readers. Sorry. Memories are all the colors I have on my fandom palette these days. Thanks, Robert, for giving me a chance to resurrect some of my favorites!

FRED SMITH

Chris Priest's article on typewriters is wonderful. Loved particularly his imagining the words locked up inside waiting to be released. I can appreciate that feeling since I get the same thing when I see a piano—imagine the music inside waiting to be played. The Hermes typer I do remember as being a particularly fine machine, something I could never afford. Do you recall the Varityper, incidentally, that was used to set type for *The Rhodomagnetic Digest* which was then printed on a Multilith offset machine? Very advanced stuff for fans of that era, and that equipment didn't come cheap. The Little Men must have been well-heeled little men! I know all this because I actually worked for Addressograph-Multigraph-Varityper for a while selling Multilith. The Varityper, if you've never seen one, was a kind of glorified electric typewriter that instead of type bars had interchangeable semi-circular segments containing all the type characters, thus allowing quick switching of type faces. A competitor came along shortly in the form of the I.B.M. "golf ball" machine which used similarly interchangeable type faces mounted on a sort of golf ball zipping along as you typed and rotating through 180 degrees for upper and lower cases. It was fascinating to watch in the hands of an expert typist! *{The late Dick Ellington made his living for many years with one of those many-balled IBM composers, so I have seen one of them. I've never seen a Varityper but have seen its product, for instance in the Little Men's* Rhodomagnetic Digest *and elsewhere.}*

Cliff Gould's *Oblique* is another fanzine I remember well from those days. It bid fair to be almost the so-called "focal point" of fandom for a while. I disposed of a large part of my fanzine collection in the early sixties when I moved to a small flat and the rest I passed to Greg Pickersgill when I came back into the fold, so to speak. Greg very kindly supplied me in return with *Warhoon* 28 and the hardcover edition of "A Wealth of Fable" to add to my (small) collection of fannish books.

Hey! I've just noticed something about your cover artist's name—the way he signs it. Dan Stef fan! Is this for real? Is his name really *Steffan*? If true, then it's some coincidence. And Guy Miller is not a sci-fi fan (he says), let alone a stef fan. How did he happen to get involved in Fandom, then? *{He's a crossover from non-SF amateur journalism.}* For that matter I have my doubts about Ron Bennett (hiya, Ron!). He's been around forever but I have a feeling that he was never interested in science fiction. Comics, yes, but magazine SF, well…

MILT STEVENS

In *Trap Door* No. 21, Chris Priest's descriptions of his early typewriters brought back a memory from my early childhood. I had a toy typewriter when I was in kindergarten or first grade. That may have been a repressed memory. Most people have repressed memories about sex. I have a repressed memory about a toy typewriter. I guess I always knew I wasn't much like the other kids. My parents may have been trying to encourage literary pursuits by giving me this toy typewriter. Or maybe not, since the keys were only painted on. So how was a child expected to type with a typewriter with painted-on keys? Well, it had this wheel which contained the alphabet, punctuation marks, and a space. You turned the character or space you wanted to an arrow at the top and pounded on the space bar (which was real) to make an impression and move the carriage one space forward. With diligent practice, a child could type up to two words a minute on this device.

However, this early toy typewriter must have prepared me for my first real typewriter which was a Standard my father had acquired second-hand when he was in high school in 1931. It was a dreadnought among typers and could have served well as an anchor for a battleship. It really wasn't very portable. I used that typewriter from the time I learned to type in eighth grade all the way through college and even for my early fanac. I didn't manage to afford a new typewriter until I was in the Navy and bought an Underwood-Olivetti portable in an Army PX in 1966. I used that typewriter for all my fanac until I bought my first home computer in 1993. I still have the Underwood-Olivetti in the closet of my computer and fanzine file room. I keep it just in case civilization collapses, and I have to take up typing again.

Lucy Huntzinger mentions a contest to rename the Big Bang. I wonder if anyone thought of the obvious and suggested calling it The Beginning.

As a kid, I certainly wouldn't have shared Lucy's liking for fantastic names. I didn't much enjoy having a somewhat unusual one. In later years when I started writing, I could see some virtue in having an unusual first name with a quite common last name. However, while I didn't much like the name Milton, the thought that I had been misnamed never occurred to me. It would be like imagining that they had miscounted when they issued your Social Security number.

Those folks who are promising to "make the Book of Revelations make sense" are probably passing out something the FDA wouldn't approve of.

Gordon Eklund does insist
That Arnie Katz does not exist
The truth should make a grown man swoon
That Arnie is truly Mrs. Ravoon

JON SWARTZ

Chris Priest's "The Lost Years" struck a chord with me in several ways. For one, of course, it brought back my own memories of typewriters long gone and my very reluctant change to a computer. I only did so when my sons, both computer scientists, gave me a computer and practically forced me to use it. Now, of course, I couldn't do without it. Speaking of my sons, Priest's piece reminded me that my younger son, while still in high school, also wrote an emulator program and for a time sold it worldwide. His program was even written up in a national computer magazine. At one time he too was threatened with a lawsuit by a large computer company which claimed he was infringing on its copyright.

Joel Nydahl's return to fandom, if only for a brief visit, was touching. I'm so glad he had a good experience at the Worldcon. Maybe Thomas Wolfe was wrong, after all. I found Joel's story so entertaining that I looked him up in Warner's history, mainly to see the picture of him "charming a cobra" as a teenager. Warner's report of Joel's departure from fandom was better than that recalled by Joel himself. Assuming Harry took his facts from printed documents of the time, I suspect Joel's memory is like mine: less than perfect.

Reading Gordon Eklund's "The Katz Kontroversy: A Document" produced multiple laughs, several of them aloud. How clever! I think humor is greatly underrated in our culture. Recently I've been reading (actually *re*-reading) P. G. Wodehouse, and experiencing at least one belly laugh per page. A critic once wrote: "He who has not met Wodehouse has not lived a full life." I heartily concur.

Steve Stiles's art is wonderful, and I liked the other artwork as well. After reading his "Drawing Board Blues," I see that Stiles is really a professional artist. You are so lucky to have him as a regular contributor to *Trap Door*. The front cover by Dan Steffan was very striking, and the back cover by D. West was amusing.

CHRIS NELSON

Dan Steffan's cover for *Trap Door* 21 has a strange appeal which I can't quite put my finger on. Is it the aerodynamic nun hovering above the trap door? The levitating peach? The masterful use of shade and shadow? Dunno—but I like it.

As I do the rest of the contents. Sorry to hear about your brother, of course, and all of the other folk who have passed away recently. But good to hear that you were at least able to rescue a number of the fanzine collections they left behind. It's a nice change from all of the horror stories about once-treasured collections being tossed by relatives unaware of their rarity or the love and energy

devoted to putting them together.

I had the pleasure of meeting and corresponding with Roger Dard some years ago before he died. Roger had, for a period in the 1950s, been Australia's most prominent fan and had amassed quite a collection (including near-complete runs of *Weird Tales* and *Astounding*). Although he had disposed of these years before we met, he still had a sizable collection of SF and comics-related materials that he enjoyed showing and reminiscing over. At one of our meetings he mentioned his intention to "make arrangements" for this. But, alas, when he died in 1996 nobody in West Australian fandom could discover what had become of it.

I suspect Roger would have recognized Joel Nydahl's name and enjoyed his article even more than I did. Quite fascinating to hear of and from him about his abrupt departure and brief rediscovery of fandom after so many years.

What a range of names in your LoCs. Real timebinding stuff.

JERRY KAUFMAN

I want to put in some good words for the artists this issue: Dan Steffan and Steve Stiles just go from strength to strength, Craig Smith captures Joel Nydahl so well that I feel I've actually met the man, and D. West on your back cover is the mordant wit I expect him to be—no duckies here.

The survey of fanzines received agrees with my perception that zine publishing was down last year, but indeed things seem to be heating up this year. (Part of this impression is based on fanzines I got from Randy Byers in February and March that were actually out last year.) I forget how you tabulate, though—are you counting each issue of *Vanamonde* separately? Since John Hertz mails out copies of this slim weekly apazine in trade, that could account for one-third of your total zine count. *{No, I count each envelopeful as one fanzine.}*

I quite appreciate the background look at Ansible Information, and regret the time Chris Priest lost from fiction writing. He's one of my favorites. However, the mundane unreality of it all obviously added a certain flavor to his novels, as all of them I've read, from *The Glamour* forward, have endings that question the meaning and reality of life.

"Jazz, food, wine and travel" are Joel Nydahl's current interests. Sounds like a prime candidate for FAPA to me, and I think Joel would enjoy many generally available zines as well.

"The Katz Kontroversy: A Document" sounds like a silly satire at first. But I was reminded of my frequent visits to the Katz domain when I lived in Brooklyn. Arnie would always ask me, "So what's new in fandom?" This always annoyed me at the time; instead of a pleasant conversational gambit, it always seemed somehow a pointless question. Who would know better than Arnie, poster boy for all that was fannish, what was new? In the light of "The Katz Kontroversy," with its revelation that "Arnie" was an actor, I now see that he was in fact asking for information he desperately needed to keep up the pretense.

It seems important to mention that the title of Ron Bennett's memoir and the demeanor of Mrs. Brown in Steve Stiles' illustration in concert led me to expect a stunning revelation at the end of the piece. I expected that "Mrs." Brown would turn out to be a man in lifelong drag. I was misled, wasn't I?

JAY KINNEY

Trap Door No. 21 arrived the other day in its new smaller format. The publisher in me can't resist a few comments on design issues. First and foremost, it works—so you can relax on that account. Of course it does have the unsettling tendency to sit on my desk with the cover flipped up at a 90-degree angle, due to its bulk. Heh.

You truly have mastered clean and classy fanzine layout. Swell illos all, by the cream of the crop of artists out there. On the one hand, we are saved from the jarring practice of peppering the pages with unrelated cartoons of dubious humor. On the other hand, four text-only spreads in the Chris Priest piece and eight of the same in the letters section is a bit relentless. Perhaps a pull-quote or two would break things up and pull the reader in more? *{Pull-quotes are for the pros—if a fanzine isn't interesting, pull-quotes are not going to make it so. My model for the letter column and longer articles was established early on when I encountered a fanzine whose lettercol was subtitled, "page after page of solid black type." And also by books.}*

I'm delighted that you are giving wider circulation to Gordon Eklund's hilarious "Arnie Katz" piece. Since it only ran in FAPA, I wouldn't have seen it if not for *Trap Door*. Perhaps I can add a supposition to the Katz controversy. As you probably know, I spent a fair amount of time hanging out with "Arnie" when I was going to art school in Brooklyn 1969-72. "He" shared an apartment with Andy Porter for the first year or two that I knew him, and I always found it odd that Andy was never there when I'd come over to visit "Arnie." In fact, I don't think I ever saw the two of them in the apartment at the same time. Eklund's article has made me realize that perhaps—just perhaps—"Arnie" was really Andy Porter with thicker glasses and a false mustache. They were both the same height and the same build.

I can see it all now: Andy is lounging around in his tidy, well-appointed room when I ring the doorbell. He sees me through the peep-hole, quickly pastes on the mustache, dons the coke-bottle glasses, and greets me at the door as "Arnie." He ushers me into "Arnie"'s rather dank and dusty room and amuses himself with getting me loaded on vegetable matter, all the while playing Firesign Theatre and Arlo Guthrie albums.

When I finally stagger to the subway to return to my dorm, late at night, he whisks off the mustache and glasses and sits back down in his own room and reads hard SF until he doses off.

Hah! He sure had me taken in! As for the episode where he won over "Joyce" by letter-hacking and phonecalls, little did "she" suspect that she was actually falling in love with Andy! But the last laugh must be on Andy Porter, since he had no idea at all that the "Joyce" he married was actually Ray Fisher, following his spectacular sex-change operation.

Sorry to blow the whistle on the whole scam, but the scales fell from my eyes when I read Eklund's article…and things finally began to make sense!

RON BENNETT

Chris Priest's description of his Lost Years parallels in so many ways my own when my "spare" time was largely taken up with book and comic dealing. The "behind the scenes" time it all took up was unbelievable, pricing and bagging comics and parceling them up for mail orders. And the reading! My main source of reading for years, apart from the daily newspapers, were other dealers' catalogues and trade papers like *The Comic Buyers' Guide*.

A lovely Steve Stiles heading illo to my piece. Heavens, he must have met Mrs. Brown on a number of occasions to capture her likeness like that.

A neat Twice Told Tales piece by Lucy Huntzinger. I once had in one of my classes a very young, very intelligent little girl called Sheba, a name I rather liked. It turned out that she'd chosen this name for herself when she was about three years old, her actual name(s) being Sheila Barbara.

No, no one wants to ask Jane Austen about Elizabeth Bennett. Elizabeth Bennet, yes. Trust me to notice this. But who else? Heavens, I've had a life-time of people spelling my surname with only one 't.' And the only place I've ever seen it thus is in *Pride & Prejudice*. And here we have the reversal. Pcha!

Ah, I took to Calvin Demmon immediately. Anyone who writes "different from" rather than the incorrect "different than" has to be taken notice of. Sad little story. In the garden here lie a number of my daughter's hamsters, Mitzie her delightful little cat and my own cat, Othello ("Office" to one and all). Ah, memories, memories.

I found Steve Stiles's description working as a comic book artist fascinating. As you might expect. Those deadline pressures! No wonder Eddie Jones turned down requests from Marvel. Steve can't look at work time lost in terms of hard cash. He didn't really lose twenty-four grand. The potential for that amount, yes, but the sixteen he did earn were in terms of hard cash. A buck in the hand is worth twenty-four grand in the bush and all that.

Well, well—I hadn't known that Ted White was an artist. The things one learns reading fanzines. It's akin to wandering through the rooms of a building, all of which become familiar, some to a greater degree than others, and then suddenly finding yourself turning a corner into a room you hadn't realized existed. I'd certainly love to see those early Pollockesque paintings of Ted's and also those portraits he has in his home. Ah, a good writer, Ted. Wish he'd contribute to fanzines more (well, those I read, anyway). And I hope he finds his fulfillment and gets back to painting. Oh yes, and another great Steve Stiles heading illo. Excellent likenesses of Ted and John W. Campbell, at least as I remember them.

Lovely letter from Joyce Katz. Very pleasantly written, very relaxed. For some reason it occurred to me that the temperature and weather conditions in Las Vegas and Singapore are actu-

ally the same. Except for the minor consideration of humidity, that is. Liked her description of George Metzger "following the life." Yup, I think that's George. Perhaps we should consider him our own twenty-first century beatnik. I'd add "a valuable relic," but I won't as such a description might offend…come to think of it, the beatnik tag might, too. Neither is meant to do so. All said, or written, with respect and affection.

Excellent comment from Greg Benford about watching *The Sound of Music* proving fatal to a diabetic. I'm diabetic and I must be the only person in the country who has never seen the film. Now I have a "scientific" reason not to do so.

Intriguing premise of David Redd's. My ninety-two-year-old mother and my son have, I'm told, recently been discussing exactly the same thing, how they feel inside that they're only of a much younger certain age. And why not? It's only I who feels and acts like a shriveled, worn-out husk. It's probably what my morning mirror tells me.

Yes. I know exactly…well, I think I do…what Jean Young (wow, another name from the Golden Past) was feeling about getting her old life back. All I wanted to do when I was hospitalized was get back home to my sedentary existence in my lonely shepherd's hut. I was amazed to discover that some of my fellow patients did *not* want to return home. They'd have to make meals, make beds, make decisions.

What a superb letter from Harry Warner. Full of sound, ultrasound (and there's no medical connotation implied) opinion with which I'm happy not to disagree. It's always been the same with Harry and me, ever since I first encountered him, probably in my FAPA days. I don't remember the subject matter but I do remember that it was a subject, perhaps on the ethics of writing for newspapers, that was entirely new to me and I thought: entirely right. This was something that entered my psyche. I suddenly had an opinion on the subject, and I've never disagreed with him since, yes, even when I did happen to have an opinion on the subject previous to reading his views. Like this time and his remarks about the cinema. I, too, haven't been to the cinema for yonks (the last film I saw there was *Groundhog Day*) and the much vaunted TV "premieres" all seem to be slanted towards the tastes of an adolescent mindless artificial-thrill-starved couch potato. Instead of a more adult mindless artificial-thrill-starved couch potato like me. Bring back the good stuff like Abbott and Costello, say I.

NOREEN SHAW

Chris Priest's article should stand as a warning to people intending to test the water of software and business. He surely lost more than he gained. Arch Oboler wrote a radio play called "Chicken Heart" wherein a giant chicken heart absorbs the planet. The last human circles in an airplane. Substitute "computers" for "chicken heart" and the picture is clear. Yes, they have their uses, but moderation in all things.

Delighted to learn that Joel Nydahl is alive and happy, although gafiated. Fandom does not forget its sons. In sorting fanzines, I ran across 3-4 comic poems from Rog Ebert. They were good and demonstrated his talent when a "kid from Illinois." Ron Bennett's "Mrs. Brown" does have a distinct echo of "the most unforgettable character I ever met," thereby cementing *Trap Door*'s uneasy alliance with *Reader's Digest*. Very enjoyable and much like a Masterpiece Theater miniseries.

Lucy Huntzinger's charming potpourri in which she mentions explaining our civilization to a visitor from the past reminds me of a family game we play. We attempt to explain things to an alien visitor. Think of the Rose Parade as an example. "See, there are all these flowers and some colored paper and volunteers glue them on flat truck beds in the shape of singing chipmunks at a certain time each year, and then…" How about just explaining Alvin and the Chipmunks? Or fandom?

To Steve Stiles, I'd say he was better off without the Mighty Morphin gig. It sounds undoable, even if you *had* the time. Greg Benford's agreement with Bob Leman on Maya Angelou demonstrates the perceptiveness of fans for hype (polite expression). There is a well-documented incident in library circles about the lady. At a speaking engagement at the Central Library, she was given a tour of the work rooms. In the room reserved for new titles, awaiting cataloguing, she allegedly removed 2-3 books, put them in a bag and said, "Thank you."

To Bob Tucker—those B&W films you worked on at Fox in the '50s *are* still seen by myself and hordes of others. The Greatest Video Store in the Known Universe (Eddie Brandt's) in North Hollywood has over 55,000 tapes. They *specialize* in Noir and great, but almost forgotten. gems from the period. They are busy all the time. Film buffs storm the doors five days a week. I'm among them. I live two miles away! *(*

BOB SMITH

There are two ladies from a certain religious organization who call around at least once a month to try and convert me to their interpretation of the Bible. When they started off about how bad things were and the end of the world was getting closer, I countered with the statement that things weren't all that bad because *Trap Door* had finally arrived. Having established that your fanzine was my version of a Good Book, full of marvelous prophets and infinite words of wisdom, they wandered off muttering to themselves. I always feel sorry for them. Actually, as a way of injecting a science-fictional note into your letter column, I must tell you that many years ago one of them actually produced from her well-worn briefcase a deluxe edition of Asimov's *Foundation*, loaned to them by a friend up the road who said that was *his* guide and Good Book. I managed to keep a straight face, and to this day don't know if it actually got read or not, or who the person was down the road. I have heard Asimov's book called many things over the years, but as far as I know it had never had a Divine Inspiration label slapped on it.

Ah…the typewriter and the computer. Guess most of us have been down the road that Chris Priest describes, although perhaps not all of us have been sidetracked as thoroughly as Chris was. I was 21 before I actually got my quivering fingers on a typewriter. It was early 1952 and I had just taken over as Manager/Projectionist at an Australian Army cinema, and there sitting on the office desk was an ancient but usable Underwood …One of the funniest books on computers I ever purchased was Peter A. McWilliams' *The Personal Computer Book* (1982), and this probably eased our minds considerably on the question of lashing out good money on this new electronic fad. So about the time Chris was probably purchasing that Apricot (don't laugh; overseas you could buy a "Banana" and bring it home) Lyn and I invested in a Tandy (Radio Shack) 1000 with a green monitor and umpteen manuals. Now here we are in the 21st Century, and Lyn, who has just begun work in a union library, culling and archiving documents, says there are two large Adler daisy-wheel typewriters sitting on the floor destined to be chucked out (!), and would I like one. It's a crazy world, you know. I have to admit I found this piece rather too long and rambling, and Chris's final paragraph may upset those who still use typewriters. (Actually, if I didn't know from my biblio sources I would have thought this was a much younger person writing.).

Joel Nydahl's piece is a heart-warmingly fannish slice of life that—and I admit it!—moistened up my eyes slightly. I guess I can only echo those words: *don't let him get away!*

Calvin's piece needs no comment; it would almost be a personal intrusion. Most of us have been through it. Curiosity prompts me to wonder what kind of response the original in the local newspaper brought forth.

An entertaining piece by rich brown, that many of us—perhaps ruefully—can relate to. I have to blame the American Serviceman for introducing me to the filthy weed. I had smoked the odd Woodbine, but it couldn't compare to the exciting names of the American brands left carelessly in their vehicles during the war. Why pinch chewing gum when some GI had left a carton of Camels in the glove box of his jeep! In the climate of today, no doubt we would ask the question: since he is now considerably older does rich still like that long, slow drag? (I was surprised, in a recently published photo taken at Syncon '70, to note I held a cigarette; thought I'd given up before then.)

BOB SILVERBERG

Superb issue of *TD* this time, much fascinating stuff. Particularly enjoyed the lovely funny Priest account of his career in software, and Joel Nydahl's poignant tale of trying to catch up with me at the Worldcon—we had planned to meet somewhere during it, a reunion after half a century or thereabouts, but I got engulfed in pro-ish responsibilities and in the end we managed nothing more than a quick hello. He tells the story with great restraint.

Surely *TD* would have been one of the all-time classic fanzines if you had only had the good sense to publish it in 1952, when classic fanzines walked the earth.

RICHARD DENGROVE

How does one deal with someone who is

crazy? How should Steve have dealt with Susan? Does one humor them? Or does one give them a jolt of reality? I have had that problem over a longer haul with a loved one who with aging has become paranoiac. Actually I hear in old people it's called paraphrenic. According to this loved one, her daughter-in-law is picking her locks and reprogramming her phone with the help of her granddaughters. The family has primarily chosen to give her a jolt of reality. Her husband tells her, "No one stole your purse!" "No one stole your glasses!" Telling her that goes off her like water off a duck's back. Something inside of her verifies the whole paranoiac scenario. And she is someone who will go with that something. It is dubious she even recognizes we oppose her fantasies. She is always looking to us for confirmation. On the other hand, the family's strategy is not 100% jolt. In one way, her husband has tried to humor her. He has had their home locked up like Fort Knox, the idea being this will discourage her from believing her daughter-in-law can get in. But just as the jolts fail to jolt her, humoring fails to humor her. The locks are for naught as far as my troubled loved one is concerned. According to her, her daughter-in-law picks them. Something she learned from her mafiosi father.

E. B. FROHVET

Unlike Ted White, I have never been into art. This may stem from a second-grade episode in which I and classmates were busy with some pseudo-artistic endeavor. It may have been finger-painting or may even have involved brushes. The teacher looked over my shoulder, sighed wearily, and said, "You really aren't very good at this, are you?" However valid this may have been as artistic criticism, I thought at the time—and still think—it was a singularly tactless and cruel thing to say to a child. Thereafter I never undertook art classes (unless mandatory). To this day the whole process remains opaque to me. In working on my own fanzine, if I want a particular lead illustration or a cover, I can describe verbally what I want and send it off to Sue Mason or Steve Stiles. I am always astounded by the result, because it's something so far beyond my own ability.

JOHN BURBEE

A late "thanks" for sending me your fanzine. I enjoyed reading it and I would ditto my sister who is pleased that people still remember Charles Burbee. He's a legend to me, too.

It seems that fandom is a living, organic thing that reproduces itself; not much appears to have changed. Gossip, parties, ordinary and extraordinary people, sex, money, booze, and oh, yes, Science Fiction/Fantasy. Reading your publication took me back to a time when fanzines were everywhere around the house (and frequently so were visiting fans). The smell of fresh mimeograph ink is etched forever in my brain.

I pity the fan who publishes at Kinko's, missing out on the fun of creating stencils, then collating, stapling while someone turned the mimeo drum at j-u-s-t the right speed. I believe I was present and pressed into service (as a child) at the creation of a few "One Shot" pubs, crafted in just such an ancient manner. And I tell you, those adults were sure having a lot fun. Glad to know that fandom is still fun. And serious business. *{Um, er, *I* publish using a commercial copy service! I figure I paid my dues back in the '50s and '60s on both mimeographs and ditto machines—and if I wasn't doing it this way now, I probably wouldn't be publishing at all.}*

TIM MARION

Your editorial may have been short, but there sure was a wealth of material in there. You had my sympathy regarding having broken your ankle and also regarding the death of your younger brother. Then I was very envious of you for getting to acquire so many fanzine collections. But the most poignant piece in your editorial, to me, was mentioning how Terry Hughes had remembered *Trap Door* in his will. Not only was this a wonderfully fannish and generous act on his part, but it was also extremely appropriate.

I note names in the WAHF section of the lettercol, such as Mike McInerney and Alice Sanvito—gosharootie!—these are names that were appearing in fanzines when I was a child. They were gafiating as I was entering into fandom. Then I note even older names, such as Calvin Demmon. And it sure is great to see a letter by Gary Mattingly again! And such a long letter, too! This inspires me to wonder who might next be brought back from the glades of gafia. *{I'm working on Cliff Gould, who lives nearby.}*

Obviously you have the same talent that Terry Hughes employed many times of being able to garner contributions from fans who have left our merry little scene. Of course, you have a slight advantage over him, since you actually knew some of these people where Terry heard of them first by reputation (I believe). Whatever the reason for the talent, I admit I wish I had it as well.

Reading the lettercolumn first makes me want to drop the present issue and go digging through my room to see if I can find all those back issues you sent me; I would love to read what Jeff Schalles wrote about typing for a living in New York (since that's what I did for so many years, and am still doing, in a sense). However, I don't know why Ron Bennett (who writes responding to Jeff's article) couldn't have simply told his inquisitive co-worker that in the evening he hangs with a social group, a reading club. Maybe he thought he would then have to explain fandom to her, and, as we all know, fandom cannot be explained.

I like what Len Bailes said about death: "...sometimes I think of it as a gentle sleep that may come to us." Lately I have come to think of death as the Ultimate Gafiation, which one of your other letter writers may have expressed also. I think of it as the time when I don't have to keep doing so much stuff. I just to pray that I don't have to be taking care of any cats then... My greatest fear is, as Marty Cantor expresses it about Bill Rotsler, "the essential Bill Rotsler being betrayed by a decaying body."

I've saved for last to write about "Revisiting Nydahl's Disease," by Joel Nydahl, which by itself makes this *Trap Door* an incredibly valuable fanzine. After all, Joel Nydahl must be very fondly and well remembered by fandom if we…named a disease after him?? But seriously, I have been out of fandom for so many years that I had completely forgotten about Joel Nydahl or the disease of burn-out or gafiation he was supposed to have experienced, and the time that he was active before was before I was even born. Therefore, I have little to say about these historical events, except, sometimes, the good we do lives after us.

Nydahl did strike a familiar note with me—I can well imagine his amazement, many years after he published his last fanzine, of finding out, through a website, that he is still remembered in fandom. Something like that has actually happened to me. Last year was one of my first years "back" in fandom for many years. Not being very fanactive, and not having very much to do at work, I cruised the Web and thought to look up REHUPA, and see what they are doing. REHUPA is the Robert Ervin Howard United Press Association, an apa I founded. What did I see? Not only is it still going very healthily, they actually remembered me! "REHUPA was founded in 1972 by a teenager named Tim Marion," it begins, which is essentially correct, and goes on to talk about how I mysteriously disappeared after a couple of years of involvement. I was indeed a teenager when I started that apa…just barely. I just had turned thirteen. But the description, I joked last year, makes me sound like a perennial teenager (which may be accurate, considering I don't have a girlfriend and do have pimples). Still, it's always nice to be remembered.

ROGER STEWART

Thanks for sending the copy of *Trap Door*. It really is a well-written and nicely illustrated zine. You've got some good artists and several impressive "names" in the list of writers. I've long been a fan of science fiction and of comic books, but I've never been a member of the fandom for either.

When I read a zine like yours I feel as if I have wandered into a party where everyone else knows each other but I don't really know anyone. It was funny reading the article on the putative non-existence of Arnie Katz. I used to work for a publisher that put out lots of hint books and strategy guides for electronic games, and I got to know Arnie and Bill Kunkel and the whole Vegas crew pretty well because they were doing game magazines at the time. I asked Arnie for a copy of one of his fanzines once, and he seemed reluctant to give it to me. I think he was almost afraid to let me see the other "side" of him. *(*

JOSEPH NICHOLAS

Many thanks for *Trap Door* No. 21—although the gap between it and the 20th issue has been so long that (apart from Greg Benford's article) I couldn't remember what was in it and hence what most of the letter-writers were talking about. But then we are scarcely in a good position to complain, since it's been so long since we last produced an issue of *International Revolutionary Gardener* (at least a year—and probably more) that readers of the next issue (there will be one, honest!—we keep promising ourselves) will be in the same position with respect to the letters we

have in hand. Heigh-ho. (We could in theory have made great strides towards another *IRG* this Easter weekend, but instead spent three afternoons on the allotment, digging out weeds and planting potatoes.)

In any case, this response is more akin to Ken Rudolph's letter than a proper LoC: a sign of our wish to be kept on the mailing list while we think of a more substantive contribution. As with Ken, fanzines (but not just *Trap Door*) are now our main point of contact with fandom: we rarely go to conventions, don't subscribe to e-mail lists or participate in newsgroups (I did lurk in rasff for a couple of months after first getting internet access, but abandoned it because it was so clogged with trivia, and was a member of the Trufen group for some months until the traffic got so heavy that I had no time to read it), haven't been to the Jubilee (or wherever it now is!) for close on three years, and if we weren't receiving fanzines we'd have no idea at all of what's going on. (I should stress that not following just about everyone else into e-fandom is a deliberate choice on our part, not a complaint about being left behind; if we wanted to spend more time in front of our computers, we would.)

One substantive comment I might make, however, concerns the Molesworthian phrase explicated by Andy Sawyer. It is not, as appears in the printed version of his letter, "as any fule no," but "as any fule kno"—as I'm sure Andy himself actually wrote, and as he has doubtless already pointed out to you. By "correcting" him, you've actually introduced an error, chiz chiz! (Thus you are utterly wet and a weed, and I shall get my grate frend peason to tuough you up a lot.) (No misspellings there, I can assure you!)

*{But as it turned out, it *was* Andy's typo, so I wrote back to Joseph pointing this out and adding, "But I should beat myself up a little for not catching it." And Joseph wrote back:}*

That this was Andy's typo is very surprising, since Britons of a certain age (a group which includes him and me) would have imbibed the Nigel Molesworth stories as part of their schooling—so much so that they will even use the phrase "as any fule kno" in their everyday speech. (Indeed, if you hear someone say it, you know that they're using Nigel's spelling.) Knowledge of Molesworth was at one time so ubiquitous that the now-departed fan Roy Kettle ("departed" in the sense of having given up fandom to become a high-flying civil servant) once published a parody of the Willans-Searle opus in the form of a Biggles story as written by the curse of st. custard's, the opening line of which—"What ho Ginger sa Biggles at he ete cream bun"— people such as Dave Langford and I can quote to this day. So massive smacked bottom for Andy—to be delivered, of course, by a skool master with a new kane.

{And having warmed up from writing the above, Joseph wrote again a few days later:}

A follow-up to my previous e-mail of comment, this time responding to Chris Priest's article on Ansible Software and his role as a guinea pig for the testing of computer manuals before their actual publication.

I wish this were a common practice, because I am constantly encountering computer manuals which fail to make plain exactly what actions are required or which even miss out important steps when explaining how to use the product. Two examples:

I recently purchased a digital camera from an electronics store near my place of work. The section of the manual which deals with use of the camera is fine; the section which deals with installation and use of the photographic software on a PC is poor. To transfer two or more pictures to the PC, it advises, "use the Ctrl key." How to use it is left unexplained; eventually, I discovered that one was supposed to hold it down while clicking on the photo images with the mouse in order to select more than one image at a time.

That's perhaps a trivial example, but here's another, concerning a Revo palmtop (the last model made by Psion before they ceased production) purchased by Judith. She also bought a stand and cable (with software) to connect the Revo to her PC, so that data could be transferred and calendars synchronized. The software was installed and reinstalled on the PC, the cable and stand connected, disconnected and reconnected, and still the PC refused to recognize the existence of the Revo. It was only through trial and error that she discovered one was supposed to launch the connection software on the PC before actually connecting the Revo itself—a crucial step which the manual had completely neglected to mention.

This is why—although as a consequence of his experiences with Chris, Dave Langford is probably exempt—I am coming to regard the writers of computer manuals as vermin who should be physically kicked to death, so that others may learn from their example.

KIM HUETT

I've pondered the new *Trap Door* and find it good. The paperback style dimensions are exceeding pleasing to the eye and sit in my hand far more comfortably than the previous version ever did. The fact that the new page size has also resulted in a slightly thicker zine helps in this respect too.

The all-electronic method of production is also a success though the scanned artwork has lost a little of its sharpness. Not enough to detract from the overall look but just enough to catch my eye. None the less I'm impressed that you were able to get artwork to print as crisply as you did. I've made some fumbling attempts of my own in this area and have failed to achieve results half as sharp. Clearly I need to learn a little more this process before attempting to use it seriously.

Interestingly not only is this issue visually attractive but the written contents inspire me to comment as well. While I've enjoyed reading previous issues, very little in them has made me want to sit down and bash keys. Joel Nydahl's article on the other hand does need some response.

You see I can offer to Joel one explanation as to why fandom believed what it did about his departure. Not that long ago I was reading a copy of Dick Geis' *Psychotic* No. 17 and in the letter column is none other than Dean Grennell. In the middle of a long rambling letter he has this to say about Joel's gafiation:

"Actually, a monthly—why am I telling *you* this?—is too frequent a chore for anyone who must turn out the thing in their spare time. Somebody—don't know who off hand—was sneering at Nydahl for quitting publishing altogether rather than just slacking down. But, knowing more than most about Joel's problems, I can sympathize with the course he chose. *Vega*, despite being all-sub, never came at all close to paying its way and Joel was piling up an ever-growing bill at the local office-supply place—one time I heard the total was over $50—and for a 15-year old who's not earning money of his own, that is neither alfalfa nor timothy. Joel's dad earned an adequate living but he wasn't what you'd call well-to-do and he helped Joel along with his stencils and paper far more than most fan's parents might.

"But Joel was a perfectionist and also a hunt-and-peck typist—an unhappy combination in a faned. Every single page that went into *Vega* was pecked out twice with one finger—once to dummy and once to stencil. In view of this, that 100-page annish assumes Augean stature.

"No, Joel—at least in his own mind—painted himself into a corner from which the only way was out. At the time of his heyday—say, the last half of 1953—a great many fans considered *Vega* to be the best contemporary fanzine. Certainly it was the leading monthly. And it pretty much kept on getting better with every issue. Then he made one last all-out sprint to the summit with that *VegAnnish*. After that, anything he might have produced was going to seem anticlimactic and I think he was afraid he'd get torn to ribbons if he faltered from the high standard he'd set himself. I got that impression from his letters anyway. No need for me to tell Geis what happens when a few hypercritics get the idea in their hot little heads that a leading mag is on the downgrade. Not only that but it is so treacherously easy for fandom to run away with a person. Joel had reached the stage where he was spending nearly every waking moment either engaging in fanac or thinking about it. His studies were suffering, his social life was suffering, and Joel was suffering. The problem of how to taper off gracefully was too much for him so he took the drastic remedy and made a clean break of it. Right now Joel and his folks are in Florida somewhere—at least I'd heard they were going there and they've left Marquette—and nobody seems to know their address down there."

As *Psychotic* No. 17 was published in late 1954, it's likely that the reasons for Joel's dropping were still being speculated upon. More importantly, Dean Grennell was a big name back then and not the sort of person whose opinion would be dismissed casually. Certainly Geis published nothing in either of the next two issues which refuted any of what Dean had to say. Given the high regard in which Dean was held at the time and the authoritative tone of his comments, I think it's likely that this letter simply became the official version of events. His explanation certainly sounds convincing even though Dean does admit to reading between the lines in a couple of places.

{And Joel replies:}

JOEL NYDAHL

My thanks to Kim Huett for passing along Dean Grennell's speculations on my disappearance from fandom. I had not been aware of these remarks by an old friend and correspondent and so they are especially dear to me. Dean pretty much has the story as far as the basic, outward facts go but, as far as I can remember, he (quite understandably) speculates incorrectly. I say "as far as I can remember" advisedly since not every incident from those days is vivid in my mind. I do know, however, that "an ever-growing bill" played no part in my ceasing publication of *Vega*.

My grades were not suffering. "Being torn to ribbons" never occurred to me. What Dean did get right is the "Augean stature" of my venture: I was simply exhausted. And, strangely (even to me, as I write this), I was tired of science fiction and fandom. I just didn't want to continue doing what I had been doing. From that day forward, I did not read another science fiction story. Go figure. It sounds bizarre, I know, but that's the way it was.

But I think all of this has been said before (mostly by me!) and I think by now that everyone knows about as much as he or she wants to.

HARRY WARNER, JR.

In theory, at least, I could extend your listing of fanzines received backward by many years. I have on my desk your listing of fanzines sent and received for about the past twenty years and I could probably find after a long hunt even older volumes of this record. But I have no intention of doing so because of my vision problems and because I can think of many more interesting things to do with whatever time remains for me. Besides, my findings wouldn't be accurate enough for a couple of reasons. My memory isn't good enough to remember if an obscure fanzine that arrived long ago was from the United States or England or Canada. And I record in my archives only each separate piece of mail so it doesn't cover instances in which two or more fanzines arrived in the same envelope.

I found the same perverse interest when I read Chris Priest's account of his affair with computers as I do sometimes with an elderly person's play by play account of a long and dangerous illness. My three years of computering involved much the same kind of equipment that Chris used, I suppose, because it must have been from 1979 to 1982, the last three years on the job before retirement, when the local newspapers stopped using rational tools like typewriters and pencils. Chris mentions the uselessness of instruction manuals, which I also learned all about. They gave each of us a thick and closely printed volume of instructions on how to do many things with the computers that we never needed for journalistic purposes; but in all those pages, there wasn't one morsel of information on how to get back on your screen an item you'd written and sent to the main computer. We weren't even supplied with the secret of putting quotation marks into our articles. Trial and error showed that you got the double quote symbol for the start of a direct quote by pressing the " key twice and closing quote marks by two presses of the ' key.

I'm not sure Lucy Huntzinger gives good advice about giving a baby an unusual and distinctive name in addition to a popular, frequently used one. Johnny Cash described in a song what can happen if a man decides to name his newly born son Sue. Schoolmates can be cruel when they learn that one child has an exotic name, particularly if it is similar to some common substance like tapioca or pepper. Titta Ruffo, whom I wrote about in my previous LoC, sang under that name but his real name was Ruffo Titta. His father's dearly beloved dog happened to die just when the future singer was born and the grief-stricken man decided to keep the pet's memory alive by naming the child Ruffo, which was a very popular name for dogs a century ago in Italy, something like the way so many United States dogs used to be named Rover. Would a man ever be elected President of the U.S. if his name was Rover Cleveland?

I've thought at times about the idea someone brings up in this issue, who would be the best person to visit if you were granted an hour with anyone you wanted to talk to in the past. Jesus Christ is an obvious choice, but where could I find anyone who could teach me to speak Aramaic with the pronunciation of twenty centuries ago? I thought about the no-good son of Johan Sebastian Bach who was entrusted with an enormous stack of the composer's works, didn't take proper care of them, and they are now lost. But an hour wouldn't be long enough to ferret out information on their possible whereabouts. Should I try to gain admission to the White House in early April 1965, and persuade Abraham Lincoln not to go to the theater on Good Friday? It would probably be useless because the President was fatalistic about the danger of assassination, refused to be more careful, and Booth would probably have killed him elsewhere sooner or later. So tentatively I've decided to have an hour's chat in Stratford-upon-Avon with William Shakespeare after his retirement from the theatrical profession. Just think how much I might learn about this mysterious famous man. I could explain my strange English accent and odd clothing by claiming I lived in Europe, was in England on business, and a friend who used to attend the Globe regularly had asked me to visit the playwright. I could ask such questions as whether Shakespeare really wrote any of that awful play about Titus, if the "To be or not to be" monologue is a spurious passage written by someone else (would Hamlet wonder about whether there is life after death so soon after chatting with his father's ghost?), the identity of the Dark Lady of the sonnets and whether they are realistic or just platonic in their apparent homosexual elements. I could ask him to recite for me a few lines from one of the parts he both wrote and played, which would reveal exactly how actors handled their lines, apparently half-sung, half-spoken. After 59 minutes and 45 seconds, I would whip out a small camera and shoot a series of exposures of Will before vanishing in a puff of smoke.

Most of my information about Joel Nydahl for the fan history came from Joel himself, in the May 1954 issue of Dick Geis' *Psychotic* and in the *VegAnnish* itself. I also used some items by John Magnus in *Varicoso*, Dean Grennell in another issue of *Psychotic*, and Bob Tucker in the 16th *Oopsla!* Tucker said a $90 unpaid bill at a mimeo supply store caused weeks of worry. Nydahl described in *Psychotic* his slump in school work and money problems. In that same *Psychotic*, he also described what he experienced in the last two months of work on the giant issue: "The constant grinding, working, slaving, began to take its toll. Exactly how it did so would be hard to explain. It was more like a gradual thing that crept."

I enjoyed most of the LoC section. It was sad to learn that Jean Young has been having all those physical and job problems, but she sounds like her old self when she writes. I'm afraid that if Fred Lerner doesn't hurry up and visit Yosemite after making trips to most of the other big national parks, he may be charged with being an anti-Yosemite. Grandfather Frost, whom Sid Birchby mentions as a Russian version of Santa, is a character in Rimsky-Korsakov's opera, which is known both as The Snow Maiden and as Snegurochka. He is too grumpy to be an equivalent to Santa in that opera and he is the father, not just a companion, of the Snow Maiden, born out of wedlock to Fairy Spring. A closer operatic approximation of Santa is Hans Pfitzner's wonderful little opera, *Cristkindelflein*, where the German Santa plays a major role in the tale of a little elf who wants to become human.

KLAUS EYLMANN

Thank you for *Trap Door* No. 21. It's a good start to get myself familiar with international fandom again. I liked "The Lost Years" by Chris Priest. I'm not sure if it's because I would have liked to write novels as he does or because I found fascinating the tale of how the enterprise on the side line gobbled him up. Besides that I got some feeling reading those LoCs about names I had read about more than forty years ago. So I saw Ken Cheslin mentioned John Berry. Is he still active? *{Yes, though nowhere near as active as he was in the old days when it seemed like every other fanzine would contain something by him.}*

A lot has happened since I was an active SF-Fan. Well, I moved around a lot: from Germany to the U.S. and then to Italy where I have retired.

I am a Hamburger, to deviate a bit from what Kennedy said about being a Berliner. Hamburg in Germany is my native town, situated at the river Elbe with a large port for deep sea vessels, a huge red light district, beautiful parks. A scenic river called Alster ends downtown in a kind of lake. Robert A. Heinlein had been there and he liked it, too. How is that?

About forty-five years ago some youngsters and I formed a small SF-group in Hamburg and published a fanzine called *Nova*. Not much fannish stuff in it, was more like a conveyor of SF-stories written by German fans. Each issue contained a portrait of an SF-author. We liked the American ones most and I sent a letter to Heinlein at that time asking for a contribution. He wrote me a letter back reminiscing on his visit to Hamburg. We—that is, my co-editors and me—were very excited about that. I mean, having read all his novels, seeing that movie called "Endstation Mond," based on one of his novels about the first space flight to the moon and all that. It was like, gosh, our fanzine would have a great future. So all

that typing on stencils, cranking the mimeograph and collating running around the table, all that was done for a higher purpose. We didn't know what that was, but it was fun anyway.

Knowing some English, mostly from my classes at a commercial school, I put out some feelers to the International Fandom. With two tape recorders, I cut small tapes, talking on them and putting on some incidental music, and sent them to various SF-fans in Great Britain and the U.S. It was fun, real cheap, and much better than a letter. You got them back with their voices on it.

And so I got in contact with Don Allen who lived in Gateshead in Great Britain and published the fanzine *Satellite*, and some other guys like Alan Burns. Then I became a member of the British SF Association—and when they announced they would have a small gathering in Manchester I wrote them that I would like to come, too.

Moreover, I told Don Allen I would like to visit him and then I asked John Berry in Belfast if I could drop by. Each of them said yes. That was great and I jumped into the train with a carry-on bag and the suit I was wearing. So it was Hamburg – Hoek van Holland by train, from there to Harwich where I spent a night and then I went to London by train again. I stayed in London a bit, at Paddington, where at Sussex Garden Avenue are a lot of bed and breakfast accommodations. From there I took a train to Hoddesdon in Herts where Alan Burns lived. He, I looked for his name on the Internet, if it was him, and I think it was, developed in a book author and now I would like it was not him, because that man has passed away. At that time, though, he contributed some great stories to our fanzine. Next leg was to Manchester where a party was in full swing when I arrived. Young and beautiful women and bearded and not so bearded guys and I drank one punch after the other, one woman in my right arm and another in my left and the other morning I woke up in a bath tub. One bearded guy and his wife let me stay at their home for a couple of days to recover and I learned about colored bread. My suit was dry-cleaned and then off to my next leg to Gateshead Newcastle where Don Allen lived. Now my memory gets patchy. I know I met his wife because Don was still at work and she sent me to a hotel where Don picked me up in the evening. I think we both visited Jim Cawthorn. He, as I know, is still active, illustrating books of Michael Moorcock. At that time he sent me some beautiful title pictures for our fanzine.

From there I hopped on a train again to Scotland. Then I crossed the Irish Sea which was rough. The sailors stood in the middle of the deck while passengers like me did a puke competition. We got off the boat in Ireland and looked like zombies. John Berry accommodated me in his home. He was the most popular fan writer at this time, a fingerprint expert with the police, and we passed the time playing cricket in his backyard, went to the stony beach, and hung out in his house. One day we visited an uncle who was an Elderman at the Irish parliament and we had a chance to see the Belfast town house. I got the chance to put my name in the Golden Guest Book of the town, marveled at the entry of Queen Elisabeth who got a whole page to put her name on while us commoners got one with fifty or more lines.

Those are fond memories which had been stored away as I went on to other tasks like studying, playing in an amateur beat band, girls, marriage, programming computers. Now that I have retired, SF fandom keeps growing on me again and I hope to revive some of the excitement I had, to meet old friends and to get to know some new ones.

MARK PLUMMER

I'm not sure about Dale Speirs's contention (letters) that "[no one] can receive more than a tiny percentage of the thousands of zines being published." Literally true, perhaps, if you consider the whole wider zine field, but I'm not sure if this is what you do. Personally, my interest—and thus the source of my figures—lies primarily with those fanzines produced by science fiction fandom and not with those other zines which bear only a superficial resemblance. (It's not so much that I'm uninterested in the latter, but more that I don't actively seek them out in the same way.) In that respect, I suspect that a compilation of data from you, Bill Bowers, Greg Pickersgill, Dale and myself would be pretty comprehensive so far as general circulation fanzines produced by English-speaking fandom is concerned. Okay, I suspect there are whole rafts of apazines that wouldn't be covered, as well as all the media-focused zines, but I'm inclined to think that these are a separate field. *{I don't count most apazines, unless they have a large outside circulation, in my calculations of fanzines received—to do so would add at least a couple hundred more zines to my tally—and to some extent I discount Dale's tallies because he appears to include all zines received from all sources. I base that impression on the fact that his tallies are always way larger than my own and that his review columns include many zines I don't see and wouldn't particularly be interested to see. We each make our own fandom in our preferences.}*

So, *Trap Door* restored my confidence somewhat and also arrived in the U.K. with impeccable timing. We will now be able to baffle future generations of fannish quiz participants by asking them to name the link between a Robert Lichtman fanzine and an oversize cardboard cut-out of Steve Green, the answer being that both made a cameo appearance in Pete Weston's Eastercon fan guest of honor speech in 2002.

I was talking with Pete about *Trap Door* on the morning after his talk—which was, incidentally, far better than Pete would have you believe—and he was arguing that the latest issue is almost too good. There are many pieces which would count as standout under any other circumstances, but I guess I'd have to give pride of place to Joel Nydahl's nostalgic return. It must be a remarkable thing to discover that you've become the stuff of legend based on your actions five decades ago—and it's somehow appropriate that at last some of the legend turns out to have been wrong anyway. A traveler returns to a location to discover a whole mythology arising from an earlier visit: a familiar plot, I suppose, and more than a little science-fictional. I guess Joel is lucky that we didn't turn him into a god.

PAMELA BOAL

As David Redd mentions in his LoC, one of the nice things about *Trap Door* is the community of shared experiences. The great time and place binder for me this issue is Ron Bennett's article, "The Real Mrs. Brown." We were Air Force, not Army, and during our posting to Singapore the children went to school in Changi. Even so, the privileges of rank were just as jealously guarded; as a lowly corporal Derek was only allowed four packing cases for his family of five. For the duration, one became a book case and the other three toy boxes with dolls' house, fire station and garage on their respective lids.

Of course airmen are unable to read until they reach the rank of Warrant Officer, so there were no bookcases in our quarters. That did not, of course, stop us getting books but taking more than a very few treasured volumes back to the UK was out of the question. We knew every second-hand book stall and shop on the island. SF books were as rare as hen's teeth, but there must have been one other SF reader as some books did come in. One stallholder kept all the SF that he bought for us and we got the impression that those we gleaned from various sources were kept for that other reader. Now if Ron was in Singapore 1962/3/4, the mystery is solved.

RAY NELSON

I enjoyed the whole issue but unadorned praise is kind of boring. I do have to mention that Dan Steffan's artwork is so good I'll have to study a few how-to-draw books before I dare to submit anything to *Trap Door*. But annoyance is always interesting, so I'll bite on a few of the comment hooks that floated past me in the letter column.

Bob Smith's LoC mentioned the term "sci-fi" as an "abomination," correctly attributing it to Forrest J Ackerman but failing to mention who first labeled it as an abomination, that is, Harlan Ellison.

Ackerman is a man who has devoted his whole life to science-fiction, who was even voted "Mr. Science-Fiction" by a world convention.

Ellison is a man who quite correctly denies writing science-fiction and attacks the entire genre and its fans whenever a microphone drifts into his field of vision. I like Ellison's work. I have followed it with appreciation since the days when it arrived, mimeographed, in my mail box, but I have yet to read an Ellison tale which featured anything remotely resembling science. I seem to remember Ellison favored the drab alternative appellation, "Speculative Fiction," though his work contains, if possible, even less speculation than it does science.

Who are we to follow? Ackerman or Ellison?

I vote for Ackerman.

I would even ring a few doorbells for Ackerman, not only because he has better fannish credentials, but because the move to "Speculative Fiction" signals more than a mere name change, like the change from janitor to sanitary engineer, but a move to a heavy-handed, "sercon" way of thinking, a misguided attempt to kiss butts in the academic mainstream, to win the admiration of

critics who never liked us and never will like us and never have had a clue as to what we are doing.

Those literary Uncle Toms who persist in calling sci-fi an abomination don't seem to realize that it is we, not the self-styled mainstream critics, who are winning, who are capturing the mass audience the mainstream always wanted to capture. When historians get around to picking the literary masters of the twentieth century, Faulkner, Joyce and Pound will not make the final cut, but Dick, Heinlein and Asimov will.

ERIKA MARIA LACEY BARRANTES

Very interesting to read the ways in which a company will start. I've seen references to Ansible Information around the Web a few times but didn't realize it was still going. I thought it was one of those things that died back when Windows started being really major.

I learned to type on a typewriter years ago when still living on the yacht; we had a portable we all used for years. The good thing about it was always being able to find ribbons for it, no matter what country we were in. I, however, was a hunt-and-peck typist at the time, and stayed that way for more than ten years. Even in high school, where I took typing as a subject for a semester, I didn't graduate to the highly evolved speeds, instead needing to look at the keyboard when typing. It wasn't until a few years ago, when I went over to computers and became an IRC addict, that I learnt to touch-type at very fast speeds. These days I type the fastest when not looking at either the keyboard or the monitor, often when in conversation with someone. *{My own getting-up-to-speed period was on a manual typewriter, and I tend to credit the pounding of keys I did to strengthening my hands so that in these latter days I don't suffer from carpal tunnel syndrome. And I still pound my computer keyboard, but not quite as hard.}*

The bad thing about all that, of course, is that it's now affecting my hands and I'm having pains in my fingers. At least I didn't learn to type so fast on the typewriter, for the pressure needed to press the keys then would have killed my fingers a lot earlier. I don't know how hard-core gamers survive playing so hard and fast all the time!

I feel very sorry for Chris Priest and Dave Langford in their years of being in the computer industry. I'm not even in it and I get stuff all the time. A lot of the people I know mistake my competence when it comes to knowing what's wrong with my own computer and the little that goes wrong with theirs—usually because they pressed the wrong key—to mean computer godhood. It also means I get desperate phone calls from people all the time, stuff they'd figure out themselves if they tinkered a little and things I want to bite their head off for disturbing me about.

I remember the e-mails going on Memory Hole about how everyone was really excited to find out that Joel Nydahl was around and contactable via e-mail. It's good to see that he had a good time at Worldcon. I can't imagine how odd it'd be to be known by lots of people, including those you don't know and never did. To be remembered for so long after one has gafiated would surely be very ego-boosting.

The article on Arnie Katz had me going for a few minutes, until I realized no way. It did take me longer than it ought to, so I can sit around and feel a bit dumb about the whole thing now. Once I got into it…well, it was amusing, anyway!

Mrs. Brown sounded like a very interesting person indeed—someone worth knowing. That someone is so memorable as to inspire a written piece in a fanzine many years later is definitely of interest! I wonder what she'd say if someone tracked her down and showed her a copy of the article…not that I'm volunteering or intend to, that is. Just curious. I don't think I've known too many people I'd want to write articles about.

If I had a time machine I don't think I would go back to meet someone famous—I would go back to meet myself at some younger age and see what I was really like. It would be like watching old film of myself, only live and interactive. While doing something like going back in time and giving Hitler's parents condoms might be very cool, I wonder what the present would be like if he hadn't existed?

I remember the dramas of smoking from teenagerhood. I didn't smoke myself, but I had many friends who did and often snuck behind the tennis courts so they could light up and was party to many a running away whenever a teacher was thought to be appearing. My brother used to smoke, too, and often he'd get me to write notes for him to take to the nearest petrol station saying that I was his mother and he had my permission to buy me cigarettes. Never mind that I was under eighteen myself at the time, there being only eighteen months differences between our ages. I don't know why he couldn't write the things himself—maybe because my handwriting had developed past the indecipherable scrawl he still has.

I stood my brother's smoking all right and even helped him along. My friends who smoked were constantly trying to get me into the habit. I don't know how I stayed off—maybe because I was and still am too much of a skinflint to go buying them. My main reason for not drinking at the moment isn't because of moral values or any such thing but because I can't be bothered spending money on something that's going to make me sick as a dog a few hours afterwards.

Marty Cantor's comments on his ex-wife being mistaken for his daughter reminds me of when I was a teenager and everyone was confusing me for my father's wife. I really do mean everyone. This was around when I was fifteen, prior to even my calling him "Phil," which I started when I was sixteen. He's my real father, but I opted to do that out of…I don't really know why, but I've done that for years. At any rate, every time I turned around I'd be asked if my husband was home, and people talking to my father would casually refer to me as his wife. It was really boggling, all the more so because ever since that two-year span nobody's mistaken me for his wife. On the flip side, my mother's been mistaken for my father's mother so many times it's not funny. People really look like they want to be swallowed up by the earth and never to be seen again when they do that. *{All my four sons have always referred to me as "Robert," never anything else except for a joke. It was the custom on The Farm and seemed completely *right*.}*

What Kim Huett says about letters of comment suddenly makes me oops—I get people sending me fanzines, but since I've not done one in ages if I enjoy a fanzine I sit down and get about writing up a letter, and I always try to make it interesting. Sometimes it can be a challenge and I beat my head against the table trying to think up something interesting to say, but sometimes things just flow. I hadn't realized that people would prefer not letters but fanzines in return before—must think about this a bit harder. *{I like to get both, but it's letters of comment that breathe life into a fanzine—the absence of them makes the editor wonder Why Bother?}*

LLOYD PENNEY

Kim Huett's letter sums up one of my own concerns about my own output. I try my best to insert some of myself into each letter I write, but I write a lot of LoCs, and I try not to repeat myself. Fortunately, my own experiences are different things to different groups, and the odds of the groups intersecting are fairly small. So, hack away I do, and e-mail gets the LoCs out much faster. Yet, I was recently described by Andrew Hooper in a fanzine review column as "the most overrated letterhack in fanzine fandom." Is he right? I wait for others to make that observation before considering just one opinion. In the meantime, I look for room for improvement, hope I'm not boring anyone, and happily hack away. There's nothing like finding your byline in an admired publication.

DEREK PICKLES

I can't do full justice to *TD* No. 21 here; as I've said to you before there is so much packed into each issue that I honestly can't read it and make sensible comments. I like the reminiscences of fans of the '40s and '50s as familiar names of fans and fanzines emerge from the golden haze of memories of half a century ago. So many familiar names have left us, it only brings emphasis to my feeling of mortality. Because of this I am passing my fanzines on to Andy Sawyer at the SF Foundation Collection as none of the children want them and I'd hate them to finish up in the council's rubbish tip.

I've been in touch with a dealer and, in the New Year, will be listing most of my sf and detective books for sale. What's left the children will have to sort out between themselves, apart from all my football fanzines and books which I've already given to my younger daughter—she knows more about football than I do, and my son has his own collection of football memorabilia.

Regarding *Trap Door* No. 22: Brilliant, superb. What a tour de force, SF written by Dashiell Hammett. I'm going to read it again, and again, and again.

JACK CALVERT

Firstly, thanks again for sending the *Trap Doors*. I read number 22 straight through, cover-to-cover. It's a little difficult for me to comment on fiction, but I can certainly say that Gordon Eklund's story was great fun. I'm pro-

bably missing some things in it, but the shy, withdrawn fan, the compulsive collector, the hick inventor, the hot-shot pro from the West Coast, and the wily publisher brought smiles of recognition. Not to mention the good old-time travel/parallel world plot. A fine story. I also greatly liked the Burbee piece playing the role of classic reprint. This is the first of the legendary Burbee's work that I have actually seen, and it lived up to my expectations. Dan Steffan's illustrations were great: they added nicely to the *Astonishing Trapdoor Stories* effect.

In number 21, rich brown's tale of his first pack of machine-boughten cigarettes caught my eye. I don't remember the first pack that I bought from a machine, but I do remember the last. It more than a decade ago, at a hofbrau in El Cerrito, where I had gone for lunch with a couple of guys from work, and it cost me five dollars worth of quarters, which I had to feed to the machine slowly, twice. I decided that was enough of that. And not long after, I quit altogether.

The piece by Joel Nydahl put a nice closure to that famous fannish mystery. And it was interesting to see the convention from Nydahl's perspective, after he had been away all that time.

Chris Priest's article was another one that gave an interesting perspective on the early days of word processing. I share his liking of typewriters, although I am a lousy typist. But the machine did make what was going on the page seem more concrete. I think that writing with a typer in some ways forced more precision in thinking. That said, I recognize that there is no going back. I remember seeing the Apricot advertised in *Popular Electronics* or *Kilobyte* way back when, but I missed most of the early computer shakeout. I had a Brother dedicated word processor for a couple of years, and I loved it. It had amber type on a small black screen, was not compatible with anything, and did nothing but process words— no distractions. Then I had an early Windows machine, and after that it was Macs all the way. But "The Lost Years" pretty much confirmed what I suspected back then, that computers could eat your life with details.

PASCAL J. THOMAS

Well, I might as well admit it, it was the red X on the envelope that did it. My first LoC in years (although I'm not sure this one will actually appear on paper, the ease of e-mail having won me over). But that X was on the envelope of *Astonishing Trapdoor Stories*, aka issue 22, which I read last July. (I have crystal clear memories of a dim smoky Trondheim pub, where I was waiting for a local blues rock band to take to the stage, and wasting my eyes deciphering Gordon Eklund's story.) And I couldn't find much to say about it.

Not that the story wasn't good. Eklund knows what he's doing—in this instance, "Behold the Man" rewritten in the milieu of SF fandom. Well, a little more than that, and with some bite. But a pretty bittersweet bite, a melancholy air—a story written for the audience of fandom that damns the whole fandom thing as the scion of social inadequacy and sexual frustration. Or so I was reading it, at least, being perhaps in a somewhat melancholy mood (what's the equivalent of "dead dog" for the end of scientific conferences, pray tell me?). And there evaporated my desire to send back a letter, I took a couple of planes back home, lost my key ring in the airport (but that's another story), grabbed a novel by Ken MacLeod—well, life went on.

Still, I knew that a previous issue of *Trap Door* (No. 21, of course) was lying unread in my study. With another trip coming up, to an SF con this time, another plane to catch, hours spent on further bus shuttles and trains, time was ripe. And that was the issue I should have read all along, for (unwittingly I assume) it was united by a thematic thread: the holes, the fugues in our life that make us, for a while, part with our avocations. Or change them. (Funny enough: just looked up Webster's to see whether avocation was the word I was looking for, and discovered its older meaning was "distraction." Precisely my topic.) I can't hide that SF, though it still occupies a lot of space in my house (books and other documents line the walls), has been taking up less time in my life. (I've got kids, other passions, other worries, and even a renewed interest in my job as a mathematician).

But I'm drifting again—the same phenomenon that keeps me from sending LoCs, or envision publishing a fanzine, or even participate in a discussion list on the Internet. Where, then, are the holes in your issue? It starts in time-honored way by an editorial listing the reasons why the issue is late (another one of those holes in time I was talking about), then Chris Priest sets the tone for the issue, with his "Lost Years," and how the computer business crept up on him. And of course Joel Nydahl is another one who fell out of fandom through a hole in time, and never really emerged again. (And perhaps I should be counted in the same category? But that would be presumptuous; my passage in fandom was neither precocious nor brilliant, nor that short, for that matter, and I'm still active in SF circles as a reviewer, as a quick Google search on my name will reveal). And then we hear Ted White about his career as an artist (a career he left to eventually become the Ted White we know), Steve Stiles with an article about what was keeping him from drawing a strip—which turns out to be a belatedly salvaged article. Can't escape from the gaping jaws of time, or of time-holes.

It's reassuring, really, to see that *Trap Door*, firmly ensconced in the nexus of fandom, is not a refuge for monomaniacs, and is able to look at fandom from the outside. Because the people who make up fandom also have a life outside of it, and share it with others in the framework of this paper pub (pub, as in British bar, not as in "pub your ish"). Also, and perhaps most importantly, late, very late LoCcers catch themselves hoping that their tardiness can be, if not excused, at least explained away as a universal Law of Nature. Or of Fandom. Well, er, best regards, and thank you for the zine. It really is great. *{And thank you for paying attention to that red X and staying on board. You would be missed.}*

WAHF on No. 21: **WOODY BERNARDI**, **RANDY BYERS** ("I'm impressed by how solid your zines are. How many words do you fit into these things? It took me several days to read it—not that I was reading it 24 hours a day, but still." That issue had just under 40,000 words, about the length of one side of a '50s Ace Double.), **MARTY CANTOR** ("Somebody in your loccol mentions missing one issue of *TD*. So do I—in my case it's #16. Strange, one out of the middle of the string." Can anyone assist Marty?), **JIM CAUGHRAN** ("Nydahl back—amazing! Katz a fraud—it happens. I remember rich brown as a skinny kid—someone else is clearly impersonating him."), **BRAD FOSTER**, **CHUCK FREUDENTHAL**, **NORM HOLLYN**, **BEN INDICK** and **GUY MILLER** ("I had planned to acknowledge receipt of *Trap Door* with pithy comments before this, but instead I went to the hospital for a triple bypass. That sounds like minor business to someone like you, judging by what all has been dumped upon you in the past few months. Anyway, I want you to know that I appreciate your remembering me. May the rest of the year be good to you." Thanks, and it was!).

And now on to the letters on *Astonishing Trap Door Stories*:

EARL KEMP

I couldn't put it down.

There were many things I really needed to do today and not one of them included reading Gordon Eklund's fantastic "Sense of Wonder." Only thing is: I did. It's one of the very best things I have read in many moons. I wish I had written it. I wish I had published it. I wish I had illustrated it exactly as did Dan Steffan.

One think I know for sure is, I lived it. I don't mean just by reading Eklund's words; I mean I lived it. I was there all the same times doing the same things with all the same magazines, publishers, editors, writers, artists, and other hacks.

The "Novel of the Future" was a resounding success for me, on almost every level I am capable of judging it on. As a stand-alone story, it held my interest. As sharply honed satire it tickled my fancy. As anecdotes about my friends, it re-awakened many fine old memories of my own. For instance, at the end of Part 1 Gordon wrote, "With a fat green monkey on my back named Earl." In honor of our guest of honor, Ted Sturgeon, I dressed for the ChiCon III masquerade as Ted's green monkey (from "Affair With A—") complete with a painted green baseball bat punch line.

DICK LUPOFF

Well, the mail she has done arrived and indeed *Trap Door* is here. News of Harry Warner's death was a shock, although I'm sure it should not have been. How old was Harry? Surely eighty-ish, if not older. *{Yes, eighty.}* He was an established pillar of fandom when I began my involvement with the community in the early '50s, and he stood unshakeable for so many years, I guess I'd somehow assumed that he was a permanent presence. He was always a voice of calm, sanity, and moderation. This, in the center of a community all too generously populated with lunatics of every imaginable stripe. (Thee and me and our respective spouses and dearest friends excepted, of course.)

Alas, as the saying goes, "All men are mortal." Women too, of course.

But—fans?

Incidentally, I found your comments on Harry's volumes of fan history in contrast to Sam Moskowitz's *The Immortal Storm* intriguing. I recall writing a brief piece about these books, several decades ago, in which I asserted that Harry's book (he'd only done one at the time) was a fine and reliable compilation of facts. But Sam's book read like a novel written in the voice of a raving paranoid.

Consequently, while *The Immortal Storm* may be lousy history, it's great fun, while *All Our Yesterdays* may be a fine reference book (if one chooses to use it as such) but as a straight read it's pretty damned dull.

*{I pointed out to Dick that Harry *did* have a side—most noticeably in his apazines—that wasn't "always a voice of calm, sanity and moderation," and he wrote further:}*

Now that you mention it, there was an incident back in the late '60s/early '70s that indicated a conservative turn on his part. That was an era in which a lot of fans (no names mentioned here) were experimenting with various mind-altering substances and writing some very interesting little essays about their observations and experiences.

Harry commented, I believe in FAPA, that the whole topic was a waste of time and/or a rationale for hedonistic self-indulgence. As I recall, his formulation was that "it's nothing but getting drunk."

As anyone who knows anything about the subject is of course aware, the experiences induced by different substances vary greatly from one another. As the radio commercial used to say, "Postum is no more like coffee than coffee is like tea." And to suggest that cannabis, alcohol, meth-amphetamines, heroin, etc., all induce the same state, is not only false, it's absolutely silly. So Harry was factually wrong. But more to the point, he had neither experienced these altered states himself, nor (as far as I know) researched available literature on the subject. He was just spouting off, from a conservative or even reactionary viewpoint.

But still, he was (relatively) rational and certainly polite about it. I don't believe anyone took him up on the subject, but if anyone had I would have been interested to see how he would have dealt with the discussion.

Of course that was just about the time I dropped out of FAPA so I didn't see any of the proverbial comments-on-comments-on-comments.

On the other hand—and to get back to 2003 and the altogether admirable *Trap Door*—I read through Gordon Eklund's "Sense of Wonder" with the greatest of glee and with frequent moments of the shock of recognition. A complete hoot and total pleasure. My thanks to Gordon for writing it and to you for publishing it.

RICHARD DENGROVE

About the Sense of Wonder novelette by Gordon Eklund, what can I say? A novelette constitutes something that is new and different in science fiction fandom. Even short fiction is few and far between. I bet there were a lot of stories in the early fanzines. However, fiction hasn't really been done much lately. And then only on the periphery of fandom. By neos who know no better. It is a hard and fast rule science fiction fandom has very little to do with science fiction. And that remains true even though I myself have written some brilliant short short fan stories. One had the punchline: "A Thool and his Bunny are soon smarted." ...I won't bother you with the story. *{Thank you, I'm sure! I wonder if in your comments here you're referring to all fiction in fanzines or only to fan fiction—i.e., fiction about fans. In either case, the tradition extends way back, with fan fiction having its peak in the '50s and '60s. Of bad amateur SF, however, the less said the better.}*

Also, an aspect of the novelette deserves comment. I guess the idea behind time travel paradox novels and novelettes is that they don't make sense. When Charlie Frap changes the past so Hugo Gernsback is a madman, how come he doesn't change the future immediately? Why should the future change in waves? The events that changed the past happened decades before. There is no good answer. At least, John Brunner had the future change immediately in *Times with Number* (1962).

However, the only logical approach to time travel paradoxes was James Hogan's in *The Proteus Operation* (1985). Namely, there is no actual time travel; travel to alternate timelines maybe, but no time travel.

Now about the lacunae of Hugo Gernsback's life. *Sexology* was a real Gernsback magazine. It was begun in 1933, although I do not know whether or not by Gernsback. My late father, a psychiatrist, wrote for it in the '50s and '60s. And, because he did, he received a publication from Hugo Gernsback annually, called *Forecast*. They were smaller even than digest size. I don't know what the size would be called. Hugo wrote it all himself and it was heavy on predictions for the wonderful, sparkling future.

My late father gave them over to me and I loved them. I once had a copy for each year spread around my late father's house. For all I know, they are still there. I just can't find any under the mounds of treasures and trash that were my late father's legacy. That is a shame. While I hear, even as of the '60s, *Forecast*s were worth something monetarily, they would still have far greater sentimental value to me today. *{Checking the book search engines, only a few copies of* Forecast *are listed, ranging in price from $90 (for a copy with a lot of water staining) to $150. The size, by the way, is listed as 4½ x 6¼ inches.}*

I have to give my condolences about Harry, too. He locced my *Jomp, Jr.* and made a solid contribution to it in the process. He and Buck Coulson were half my zine—maybe more if my ego wasn't as large as it is. About politics, I certainly have to agree with you: he was a gentleman. I am sure Harry's politics were somewhere to the right of Kubla Khan; but, given his graciousness, as opposed to some of today's conservatives, he seemed in your camp.

Also, I hear Harry was a lot more versatile than we would ever know. And that is saying something. We knew he was a reporter. We could tell he was a religious man, although he didn't talk too much about his religious activities. We knew he was into classical music. We knew he read different languages from his discussions of opera.

However, some parts of his life were shrouded from us. We didn't know he had served as a translator for many people in Hagerstown. And we didn't know he wrote science fiction himself. If memory serves me correct, he once even wrote a novel. I hear he compartmentalized even more with his neighbors in Hagerstown. They didn't even know about his life as a science fiction fan. I guess he didn't want them kidding him about "that Buck Rogers stuff." *{The MITSFS's index of the SF magazines 1951-65 credits Harry with ten published short stories between '53 and '56. He also has two published poems—one in a 1940* Weird Tales*, the other in a 1976 poetry anthology—and a "Probability Zero" contribution in a 1942* Astounding*.}*

JOHN-HENRI HOLMBERG

Not least interesting when reading Gordon's story is the question of what to call it. Is this SF or faaan fiction? Is there a difference? Or is it recursive SF with a vengeance, utilizing fandom rather than the field itself as the basis for speculation? I tend to this last reading; quite possibly, along with Bloch's always quoted classic, this is one of the very few stories belonging to an extremely small "genre" within the field, that where fandom is used as the milieu for an otherwise self-contained SF speculation. And I have no slightest doubt that the story is the so far best within this particular niche of SF.

As a serious SF story, on the other hand, the use of fandom may detract from its impact; fans tend to read fiction about "themselves" as spoofs rather than as serious SF. Obviously this would be a mistake here. What you have, in a sense, is "A Sound of Thunder" retold as a story about modern SF, where the stepped-on butterfly is Gernsback's original, perhaps childish and unsophisticated but nevertheless honest vision of science fiction. If I should be critical, I would actually have wished for this story to be longer—the ending seems to me too abrupt, and although the parallel world/timelines implications are there, and although there is a kind of brief resumé of the changes wrought, I for one would have enjoyed seeing this worked out in a bit more detail.

Even so, though, and whether viewed as SF or as a satire on SF and fandom, it's a thoroughly professional piece of work, meant in all the complimentary ways. I'm almost surprised that it wasn't published professionally; it is certainly good enough, and if I had been able to relaunch that damned prozine (which might sell all of a thousand copies in Sweden, I suppose, but on the other hand if you count citizens that still equals around 30,000 in the US), I wouldn't have hesitated very long before printing it. *{This letter was written in 2003, and subsequently John-Henri *did* launch a prozine,* Nova Science Fiction, *with Gordon's story translated into Swedish and Dan Steffan's* Time *cover on the title page.}*

A couple of years back, on Memory Hole, I seem to remember that we talked about the idea of doing an anthology of the best faaan fiction

written over the years. At the very least, this story not only gives that notion a renewed lease on life, but makes it considerably more pressing. Someone ought to talk to one of the fan-owned small presses. *{I remember that discussion in outline, but not in substance. My own short list of such would include James White's "The Exorcists of IF" (which can be found in NESFA Press's* The White Papers)*, many of the Carl Brandon stories (including "My Fair Femmefan"), Larry Stark's "Con Report" in* Boonfark *No. 5, and of course "The Enchanted Duplicator," even though it's been reprinted so many times. And yours?}*

LLOYD PENNEY

"Sense of Wonder" by Gordon Eklund is a marvelous pulp tale, great SF, and another example where we have determined over time that our elders aren't nearly the gods we thought they were in our neohood. I've heard so many bad things about Hugo Gernsback over the decades; perhaps he was just a man after all. The language of the story is a little too hard-bitten to be believed at times, and perhaps the revelation of the similarities in features between Charley Frap and Gernsback is a bit of a come-on, but still enjoyable from beginning to end.

Dan Steffan's art work is just great. The Arbogast house looks suspiciously like someplace Norman Bates used to live. The best is the opening artwork for the story itself.

TED WHITE

The new, special, all-fiction issue of *Trap Door* is a delight, not least because Gordon Eklund has long been one of my favorites—at both fan and pro fiction. (I like to think I helped discover Gordon as a pro—I published his first story in *Fantastic*, and I gave his career a boost by guaranteeing to buy all the stories he couldn't sell to higher-paying markets when he wasn't sure about quitting his job at the post office to become a full-time pro.)

That said, I have to approach his fan fiction pretty much as I approach his pro fiction—especially when it's of this length. So I just finished reading Gordon's story. I wanted to like it, and I liked parts of it, but overall it falls apart.

There is, for example, the italicized prologue: It's told first-person by the person who kills Hugo Gernsback (I). It's immediately followed by the narrator introducing himself: "The name's Frap. Charlton H. Frap." *But Frap didn't kill Gernsback (I)!* Hapgood Snails did. This is a serious and perplexing flaw which ought to have been caught by the editor. *{My editorial assumption regarding this was that, since the prologue was in italics, it *was* Snails' voice, unlike the rest of the story.}*

Then there's the Time Loop described: Frap, himself born in 1945, goes back to 1925, and after Snails murders the insane Gernsback (I) takes his place (implausibly, since the original Gernsback is officially dead), becoming Gernsback (II). It's a story-given that a person cannot exist via time travel in the same era in which he already exists (albeit Gordon goofs and gives it as "Norton's law, remember: two of the same body cannot occupy the same space at the same time"—but no one was trying to "occupy the same space," only "the same time") so when Frap is born in 1945 the *baby* blows up!

This creates a paradox, of course, since without Frap growing up there is no way he's going to time travel back from 2003 to *become* Gernsback (II), and thus cause his explosion at birth. (And why *at birth*? Why not at some point after conception? Surely by a viable age—seven or eight months—Frap "existed" to the same extent he did at birth.)

There are other major inconsistencies: Frap's discovery on his first trip to 1925 (which took over seventy hours!—that's *three days* of standing there with your hand on a lever!) of Gernsback (I)'s insanity and the unlikelihood of *Amazing Stories* ever appearing makes no sense, because he lives in a world in which *Amazing did* appear in 1926. Frap is accused by Arbogast of *changing* something to make this change in the past (which, interestingly enough, has *no* described effect on the present), but it is established that this situation preceded him. So what caused it? I kept waiting to hear that it was clever ol' Hapgood (who after all still has the time machine and could easily go back to *1924* or some such in order to drive Gernsback (I) crazy), but that never happened. It's a very large loose end.

There are smaller ones as well. Why make relative peanuts by bringing back first issues of prozines? Anyone half as smart as Frap and Arbogast would have gone instead for copies of *Action Comics* #1 or *Superman* #1 or *Detective Comics* #27—now worth hundreds of thousands of dollars apiece in mint (new) condition. (Don't tell me that as SF fans they couldn't think of this.)

Also, I'm mildly bothered by the narrative style. It's common in fan fiction to write broadly and satirically, but the style employed here seems to be a caricature of '40s private eye fiction, full of vivid metaphors told in breezy slang, but a bit over-the-top in its choice of language. This looseness makes taking the story seriously—on *any* level—more difficult. And maybe I shouldn't. But I figure any piece of fiction of this length, which took Gordon some real time and energy to write and me a while to read, *ought* to have some aspect worth taking seriously, even if it's only the cleverness of a twisted time-paradox plot, or a satirical look at fans sunk too deeply into fandom.

A few other nits: Chapter 19 opens with their taking a cab from "midtown Manhattan" (although by the '50s Gernsback's offices were on 14th Street, which is no easy walk from Central Park—but I haven't checked his '20s address) to some place in Brooklyn in "less than fifteen minutes." *{In the September 1928 issue of* Amazing*, the earliest I have, the Experimenter Publishing Co. was at 239 Fifth Avenue.}* "Crosstown traffic, 1925-style, a gentle jewel you wouldn't believe"—and I don't, not for a single second. It was *worse* in 1925, when you still had horse-drawn wagons and cable cars all over Manhattan, in addition to cars, buses and trucks, and many of the subway lines were still under construction. And a trip from midtown Manhattan to Brooklyn isn't just "crosstown." It involves crossing a major bridge, with all but the 59th Street Bridge (to Queens—not Brooklyn) being way downtown, Houston Street and lower.

Then there's "the August 1936 tenth anniversary issue" of the successor to *Amazing* (Chapter 22) although the 15th anniversary issue is correctly dated "April 1941." "August" was a mental or physical typo. *{Yes, and my error in not catching it!}*

The Burbee story is cute and a nice lagniappe, but what really makes the issue is Dan Steffan's art. All of it. *{Definite agreement there—but as for your details observations regarding the many time travel paradoxes in Gordon's story, I completely agree; but without granting them there would, of course, be no story—not this one, not *any* time travel yarn.}*

CRAIG SMITH

Gordon's story was a classic and I really couldn't "put it down." I stayed up until 1:30 a.m. to finish it. I guessed where the plot was going part way into the story and am guessing that the *Behold the Man* ending was an intentional nod to Moorcock's story? If you never read the book, Moorcock's time traveler goes back to meet Jesus, finds him as a drooling, hunchbacked idiot, and ends up taking his place. Also I found myself wondering why, if the characters *really* wanted to make some big money using time travel to nab collectible magazines, they didn't go to the early '40s and snap up the early Superman and Batman titles? They'd be a lot richer than with a few pulps, and it wouldn't ruin the market by taking only a couple issues of each, but I guess the story wouldn't quite work right that way, would it? *{You and Ted White—time travel capitalists! Of course, you both have a valid point.}*

Never mind. I'm glad the timeline alteration never occurred in "our" reality. Artsy, critically-accepted SF magazines? Where's the fun in that? Anyway, I really enjoyed it, and Dan's art is fantastic all the way through—and what a terrific cover!

LYN SMITH

Many apologies for the delay in commenting on *Astonishing Trapdoor Stories*, which arrived some time ago. If the truth be known, I read only a few pages, was so annoyed with what I read, put it aside and tried to figure out just what had so annoyed me. This past week has been spent on sick-leave, so I have had time to examine my irritation and put fingers to keys (funny how saying "put pen to paper" no longer seems appropriate!).

I reread "Sense of Wonder" and have finally realized that it is the gratuitous use of expletive and sexual innuendos in place of descriptive prose that upset me. No, I am no prude—living for 30-plus years in the fannish world and having raised my share of sons cured that—but I believe that such prose is no real substitute for (reasonably) well-crafted description. Sure, it is (presumably) supposed to be the reminiscences of a young teenager that we are sharing, but limits for general consumption must be firmly drawn. Perhaps—and this is an aside—it is here that the fate of the written word has been downgraded to its present low levels…and Gordon Eklund has decided to jump on the bandwagon, so to speak.

The story is worth rereading, but only as an

onlooker's view of the introduction of the "I"' to the world of SF and not for the characterization or for any new slants on the genre—the sexual thoughts would sit well with a young boy's identification with characters in the story and as such may—at a pinch—be acceptable for that reason, but for no other.

Traveling as I do on Public Transport, I am constantly amazed at just how the language has changed: where once it was unusual to hear—in Bob's favorite term—the in-&-out word, it is now used to describe any and every thing as a matter of course, made worse by the realization that the users probably know no better (or other words for describing what they want to say). Is it this extreme that Eklund has latched on to?

It seems that the beginnings of such extreme language have their roots in the sexually oriented thoughts of the pre-or early- pubescent male of Eklund's story. It is so very easy to hop on the bandwagon and to take the line of least resistance and to write in the style of others who may or may not have found a commercial style and to call that style "popular." Maybe, just maybe,this was the beginning of the 'anything goes' mentality that I see all too often on the trains I catch daily—the young know and have no way of knowing any better.

Most books one picks up are written in a similar style—there is no titillation of the imagination (a lost skill methinks…) and very few words that appear to have been chosen for their beauty or expressiveness. All seem to specifically and clinically describe the most intimate detail—it almost seems to me that the number of words used in a passage or situation is important, that keeping them to the absolute minimum is the most important consideration.

Perhaps Eklund has caught this bug, but has also retained some of the olde-worlde niceties of writing and not really amalgamated both into a recognizable personal style. He seems to be uncomfortable in both styles, with the sexual thoughts of the "I" coming across as an uncomfortable addition to the bulk of the story. Each without the other would make acceptable reading, but both together make for irritation, using the same style throughout, but separation of the thoughts of the "I" and the main action could make for an enjoyable time-filler (cf here Lawrence Durrell's "The Black Book" or even the 'Conversations with Brother Ass' in "The Alexandria Quartet").

Linguistics is a hobby of mine, frustration with the misuse of what is—to me, at least—a particularly beautiful and expressive language a daily annoyance and an opportunity to give vent to my feelings a real joy (because it doesn't happen very often). I hope you are not too upset by what I have said—I certainly was not taking a personal swipe at either you or Gordon Eklund, but believe strongly that a true friendship must be based on honesty.

PAM BOAL

How good it is to receive a *Trap Door*. A blast from the past—fannish fiction! It is nice to know I am not alone in enjoying such offerings and that it has not died with those fannish friends of yesteryear.

I liked the plot, plotting and pace very much. The style is less to my taste, rather in your face like modern comedians. I guess I'm getting old but I always think of knicker elastic when the scatological and sexual references abound. Why knicker elastic? Well that seems to be the favorite of small boys when they are trying to put on an act for their peers and to shock their elders. Or rather it used to be, probably not for today's little wiseacres.

Liked the Burbee. How good it is to be reminded of the days when people did not take themselves so seriously, when they had a sense of fun and could enjoy a bit of nonsense.

BEN INDICK

Today I read Gordon's great novel of the future (huh? no future here, just a past and a changing present) and laughed my head off. in. Similes and metaphors drop faster than aitches in Whitechapel here, but Gordon has no mercy, keeps us in stitches, ably abetted by Dan Steffan's great and appropriate artistry (especially both covers), and immediately qualifies *Trap Door* for a special Hugo (that name!) as the first fanzine ever that presented a complete novel in one issue. And Gordon deserves one, too, for his generosity in offering us for free such a work, although I suspect he laughed harder than anyone. And you deserve one for having the guts and the money to do it. Even Burbee deserves a retrospective one for his short and amusing piece. This is all-star stuff, Bob, really, and that Warren Beatty stuff was hilarious. Thanks a million—this zine I save.

RICH BROWN

The new issue of *Trap Door* was a hell of a fun read. I don't believe I've seen the Burbee before. I truly loved the Dan Steffan art—but then, I always do. And it's not just because I owe Dan more egoboo than I can easily explain. Well, I'll try: Dan did the interior illustrations for one of the four issues of *beardmutterings* I published; Joe Staton did the other three. The difference was that, when Joe did it, I sent him the material and he sent me illustrations, and then I adapted my layouts to what he'd drawn, whereas with Dan I gave him the pages already laid out and he had to "fill in" the holes. In other words, roughly 70,000 times more difficult. But he came through.

Then, of course, I laughed myself silly, right out loud, at (among other things) all the empurpled similes in Gordon Eklund's "Sense of Wonder." There are other things about the story which delighted me—but I don't know if I can enumerate them all.

Still, let me see if I can give you just one. In most faan fiction in which real fan names are not used, we encounter a fictional picture of fandom which is meant to represent fandom-as-we-know-it. Rather like a fictional Manhattan in a mundane story about Manhattan, it doesn't actually matter if the delicatessen named doesn't actually happen to exist where the story says it does, as long as there are enough other trappings of the actual Manhattan to make it feel "real." n faan fiction, the names of the fans, their fanzines and sometimes (but not always) their fan clubs may be different from those we actually have in fandom, but the fandom depicted is implicitly ours because all the trappings are there: The oldest ongoing fan apa is FAPA, mailings are quarterly, the annual relaxacon of the midwest is called the Midwestcon, there are fans who filk and fans who costume and fans who game, LASFS has a weekly apa, the Worldcon picks future sites based on something called a Rotation Plan, etc., etc.

That being so, I just loved the subtlety and consummate skill with which Gordon manages to get the idea across in "Sense of Wonder" that the fandom he's writing about is really an "alternate universe" fandom. I know there's more than one place where he did it, but the only one I can track down at the moment is where Hapgood, Norton and the protagonist take the plane to New York and land at Idyllwild. In our universe, of course, it's now known as JFK. It's a great piece of show-don't-tell.

Perhaps I should leave it at that—or take Gordon's advice at the end of the story and go write one of my own. *{Yes, please do!}* Not that I "didn't like this story," but, having thought about it, a nit occurred to me as I was finishing it, and short of grabbing myself by the scruff of the neck and holding on, I can't seem to stop myself from pointing it out. You can't kill the protagonist in a first-person story because of the presumption that the protagonist is telling you about what happened from the perspective of having lived through it all, and the fault here is almost the same kind of thing. The humorous satire implicit in all those purple similes in "Sense of Wonder" would seem to be—wouldn't it?—that you can easily end up being that bad a writer if you've devoted yourself throughout your entire life to reading the pulp prose of that Crazy Buck Rogers Stuff to the exclusion of all else. But this satirical point gets discarded at the end, since our first-person protagonist reveals that he's completely deghetto-ized science fiction in his guise as Hugo Gernsback by publishing stories in his magazines by William Faulkner, D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Ernest Hemingway and Thomas Mann....

Well, I've read and enjoyed stories with plot flaws you could drive a Mack Truck through, and this one isn't anywhere near that big. And I do still really enjoy the story.

WAHF on No. 22: **GREG BENFORD** ("Gordon's story is a pleasure. He puts the smile back into simile. Indeed, the piece could probably find a place at *Asimov's* or *F&SF*, it's that professional."), **SANDRA BOND**, **BILL BOWERS**, **BILL BURNS** ("I had great fun reading the story. Congratulations on getting it before *F&SF* snapped it up! Dan Steffan's illos were the perfect complement to the narrative, and while there might have been a few holes in the logic, that only helped capture the feel of the old pulp days."), **KLAUS EYLMANN** ("I read Gordon Eklund's yarn two times. Not that I didn't understand it, but because besides that hilarious slant it contained so much information which called back memories when I got my *Amazing Stories* each month at the Hamburg Railway Station."), **NIC FAREY** ("Taking my freshly unwrapped copy of *Trap Door* to the room of the utensil, I read past the first few pages, and remain on the seat, oblivious to the screamings of

desperation from the other side of the door, ass unwiped, coffee getting cold, the imprint of the hard plastic getting deeper into the buttocks. Couldn't put it down, guv…bloody good!"), **BRAD FOSTER** ("Only just now have time to write to let you know how blown away I was by both the presentation and the surprising fun of the full-length piece you ran. *Major* kudos to Dan Steffan for the artwork! Zine, story, art…as us old hippies like to say, '*Way* cool, man!'"), **KIM HUETT** ("The reprint of Charles Burbee was much better than just about anything else I've read of his. If you had claimed it had been penned by Fredric Brown but not published till now I think I would have believed you."), **TERRY JEEVES** ("Dan Steffan's artwork is terrific and really catches the mood of the story. By all means nominate him for an Oscar, Hugo or any other award, he deserves one."), **CHRIS NELSON (**"Your statistics on zines received. Are these issues, or titles? Either way, you should surely have tabulated at least one 'other.' *Mumblings* is published in Samoa, despite my tongue-in-cheek tagline on each issue." My grievous error! As for your question: issues.), **RAY NELSON** ("Concerning the story 'Sense of Wonder' in the May issue of *Trap Door*: In the July 1948 issue of the fanzine *Dream Quest*, a story entitled 'The Craters of the Moon' by Redd Boggs appeared. 'The Craters of the Moon' has been the finest work of fan fiction in history—that is, until now."), **CURT PHILLIPS**, **BRUCE TOWNLEY**, **DAMIEN WARMAN** and **HENRY WELCH** ("A rather interesting story that blows all temporal causality out of the window. The least believable part about the story was not the time travel and the consequent problems, but rather the knowledge of the protagonist. It is hard to believe that such a hard-core FIAWOL fan would know the details of when and where to find Faulkner, Rockwell, etc. Further to have kept track of particular stocks to invest in is rather questionable as well. Especially after the time line was clearly altered." Well, whatever.…).

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room. It was hardly audition quality, but when I went to see the Elektra office, I took it along to ask Jac if he would audition it. I didn't tell him it was by the same person who'd written the "Blind Rafferty" article. I guess Dave's style gave him away. When Jac gave me back the tape, he said he couldn't see anything worthwhile in the performer. And then he asked if this was the same person who'd written that article. I admitted it was. Not long after that, Jac put out a folkmusic sampler with a variety of performers, and he included two tracks by Dave on it. I can't say for sure, but I had the feeling he did this to demonstrate that he didn't hold the article against Dave.

Those tracks were Dave's first commercial record appearance.

—Lee Hoffman