# TRAP DOOR


**Issue No. 24, January 2007.** Edited and published by Robert Lichtman, 11037 Broadway Terrace, Oakland, CA 94611-1948, USA. Please send trade fanzines and letters of comment to this address (or ***locs2trapdoor@yahoo.com***). Founding member and Past President$_{1991}$: fwa. This fanzine is available by Editorial Whim for The Usual (letters, contributions both written and artistic, and accepted trades), or $5.00 per issue *(reviewers please note!)*. An "X" on your mailing label means this may be your last issue. 

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## DOORWAY

Where have I been all these (two) years, you might ask as you start reading this, the first *Trap Door* since the end of 2004. I wouldn't be a seasoned fanzine editor if I didn't have my reasons…I mean, excuses… for the long interval (I can't say "delay," since that implies a schedule) between issues.

Here we go, then. First, just when I was beginning to recover from the last issue and looking for contributors to fill this one, it was time to take the great step into retirement. I'd had the same civil service job for over eighteen years and was ready, if not exactly thrilled, to tolerate a few more. But thanks to a favorable tweak in the pension scheme, I was ready to bail in August 2005. I couldn't get off the ship fast enough!

This meant that I could *finally* move in with Carol. We'd been together since the late '80s and married since 2000 but—because commuting daily from Oakland to Santa Rosa (63 miles each way) was too horrible a prospect—other than weekends and occasional extended vacations we'd never actually lived together. I'd begun moving my books a couple months before I stopped working, but it took the entire month of August to move out my enormous fanzine collection and the rest of what wasn't being given away, recycled, or tossed into the commodious trash bin of the apartment complex where I'd lived for nearly twenty years in Glen Ellen.

So, as you can see, it wasn't a good time to publish a fanzine.

More time passed while I reconfigured the placement of the file cabinets, unloaded about eighty cartons of fanzines into them, shelved all the books, decided where to put my shoes, discussed whether to buy an itty bitty book light or an eye shade for late-night reading compatibility, whether my

little Navajo rugs made the hall to my basement office look like a fire sale, and got set up to share a wireless DSL connection with Carol.

*Trap Door*? No way!

Once the DSL was activated, all the fanzines that had come out since I retired could now be downloaded and printed on my new color laser printer. And then the 2005 holiday season was coming up, with its social, family and other time-gobbling diversions. Before I knew it an entire year had passed.

As the teeshirt reads, "Good grief, Jophan, I forgot to pub my ish!" I shrugged an existential shrug. It seemed the fannish thing to do.

As far as the second year goes—well, retirement giveth and retirement taketh away. Days whiz by with not only fun things to do as a couple but also the possibility of committing fanac as close to full-time as I wish. Of course—as had been pointed out to me by fans who'd crossed over before me—there seems to be more, not less, on one's plate once that plate is entirely on your own table. I didn't *really* believe it then—but now I do, I definitely do.

Another reason for the delay has to do with the accursed Lists. Again, as I wrote in the last issue, for better or worse a lot of fan activity has moved on-line. The positive aspects of this are that the pace of communication is greatly accelerated and many long-gafiated fans who've stumbled across fandom on the Web have joined and become active on them. The negative aspect is that participation on these lists can easily become obsessive—the desire to join in the conversation and keep up with its many threads is both a pleasure and (especially on an active list) a vast consumer of time. As many of you know, I was not immune to this siren call.

*Trap Door*? Oh yes, must get to it one of these days.

In the interstices of all those changes and activities, I did send out the usual feelers to would-be contributors—and eventually enough good stuff came my way. (But as an aside, this brings up something that's been bugging me ever since I began offering an e-mail address for LoCs. It's far too easy to toss off a perfunctory response to a fanzine, shoot it into the ether, and move on to the next thing. I know we all have busy lives (yes, see above), but this doesn't lead to a very juicy letter column and it shortchanges the contributors and the editor of much-needed egoboo, which after all is the primary currency of our activities here beyond the human connections.)

But enough about me. Here's the issue at last. Hope you like it.

In the last issue I wrote about the shift from paper fanzines to electronic ones, waffling at great length about how I might handle it if I went down that path myself. During the many hours I spent refiling my fanzine collection (and of course pausing many times along the way to scan and occasionally reread bits of old favorites), I rethought the whole thing. I realized that I love the look and varied feel (mimeo, ditto, bond, Twiltone, good layout, bad layout, good art, bad art, etc.) of all the fanzines that have ever been published and brought us to this moment. I came away with the strong feeling that paper fanzines are an endangered species that should be cherished and protected even though the cost of reproduction and (especially) postage continues to escalate.

But in order to continue publishing *Trap Door* in paper form without dealing a severe blow to my newly reduced cash flow, it was necessary to generate additional funds. I held a successful auction of duplicate fanzines early last year that raised enough money to cover expenses not only for this issue but at least part of the next. (There will be more of those auctions as needed. If you're not already on my list for them and would like to be, please drop me an e-mail at *fmz4sale@yahoo.com*.)

On the other side of the coin of my decision to keep *Trap Door* on paper, Jim Caughran's letter in this issue takes me to task for *not* posting my fanzine at Bill Burns's eFanzines Web site. He points out the possibility that "by denying this readership that costs you nothing, you will have cost fandom the next Willis." I briefly considered changing my mind back again, but realized that I have two recent issues posted there and not a soul has come through with a surprise letter of comment (or five bucks for a paper copy for posterity). There's always a chance, though, and meeting Jim's concerns halfway I've decided that in the future I'll be posting the *previous* issue there for a future Willis to stumble across.

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Harry Warner Jr.'s fanzine collection has finally found a new home. After years in limbo following his death in 2003, it was bought and resold intact to someone in Texas (whether a person or an institution is not yet known). East Coast wheeler-dealer Jerry Weist handled both parts of the transaction. I learned of it in an e-mail exchange we had back in November when I noticed he was selling some of Harry's pristine collection of science-fiction pulps on eBay.

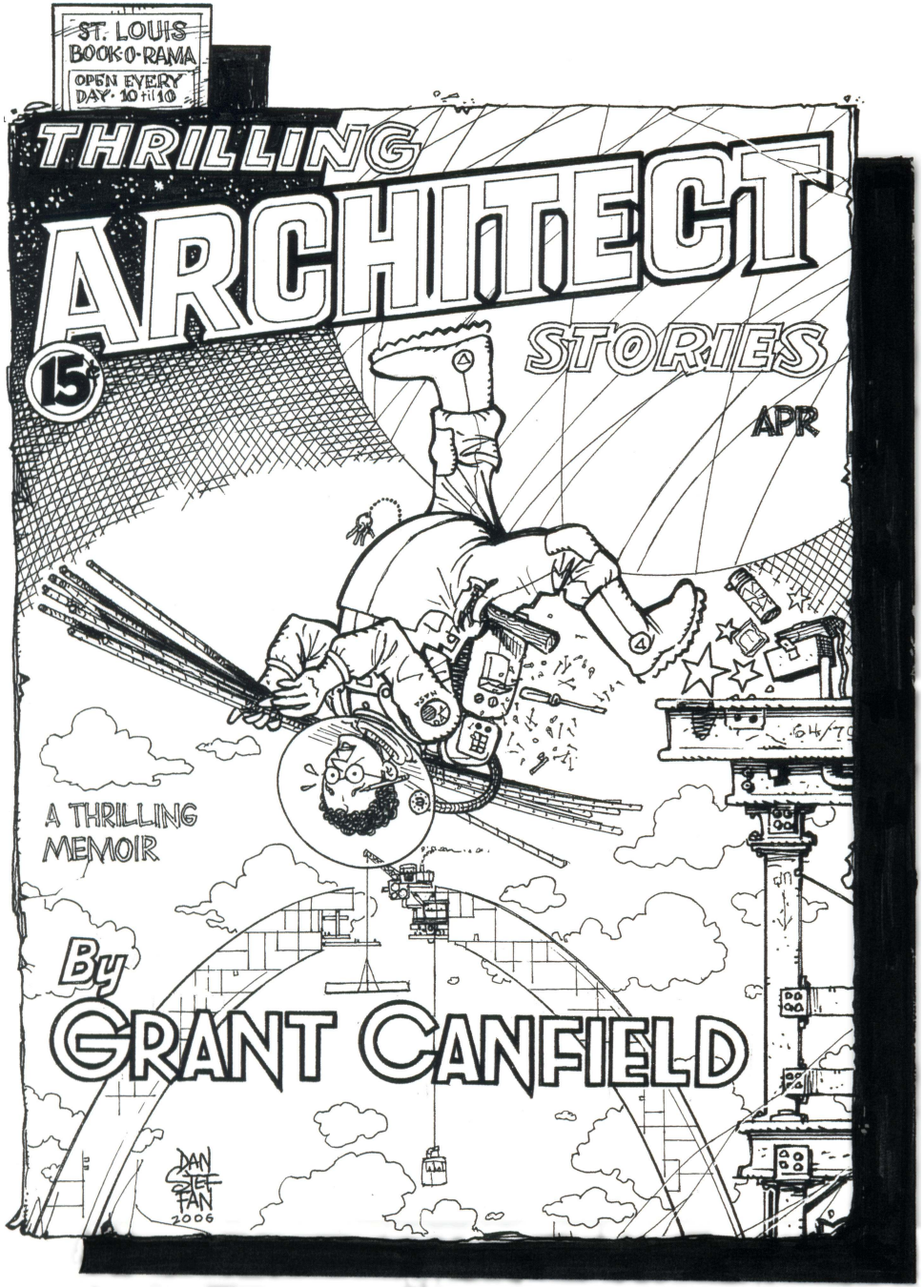
It wasn't supposed to turn out this way. Back in the mid-'90s Harry wrote to me for advice because the East Coast library with which he'd made arrangements to take his fanzine collection upon his death had backed out. I suggested that it join Terry Carr's and Rick Sneary's in the Eaton SF library at the University of California at Riverside. Harry agreed that this was a fine idea and that he'd change his will.

But after he read that Bruce Pelz's 200,000 or so fanzines had gone to the Eaton, he wrote in one of his apazines that it might be best if he changed his plans again since he felt they'd have no use for his collection in addition to Bruce's. I assured him that he was wrong, again he accepted my advice, and again said he would change his will. But after his death in 2003, some lawyers going through his papers found his correspondence with me and with the Eaton concerning his fanzines. He hadn't changed his will after all, and before long his fanzine collection was removed from the attic at 423 Summit Avenue and placed in storage. After reading an erroneous estimate on-line that Bruce's collection was worth at least $750,000, the church to which he bequeathed most of his estate believed they'd stumbled into something really valuable and began to (slowly) explore possibilities of greater financial gain. So Harry's fanzine collection remained in storage until Jerry Weist made his move.

According to Jerry, the mystery purchaser has promised to keep the entire collection intact. This is a considerable relief for me and others who were concerned that it would eventually be broken up, its most saleable parts marketed on eBay or at a prestigious New York auction house (as happened with the cream of Sam Moskowitz's collection), and the rest dumped in a recycling bin. What's unique about Harry's collection is that it goes back to the mid-1930s and comprises only items sent directly to one specific fan who was continuously active through eight decades. It's a case of the whole having a meaning that's greater than the sum of its parts. And within that whole there are undoubtedly fanzines that continue to exist only in Harry's collection—that he had the one remaining copy. (That's not so far-fetched because I know that I have the only copy of a number of fanzines. I think it's likely that anyone with a very large collection will have some unique items in it.)

The bottom line for me is that despite the disappointment of the collection not being housed under the most ideal conditions, they have found an apparently caring home somewhere—and that's good.

—Robert Lichtman




**Part I – Mel Buck and the Gateway Arch**

In 1965, convinced that practical experience in the construction trades would benefit me in my chosen career as an architect, I landed a summer job as a construction laborer.

The St. Louis riverfront was bustling that year with several major construction projects underway, foremost among them Eero Saarinen's Gateway Arch. I signed on at the Laborer's Union, got my card, and was assigned to the Busch Stadium project, designed by renowned architect Edward Durrell Stone—to one of the parking garages being built at the same time as the stadium, actually. Busch Stadium, home of the St. Louis Cardinals, was soon to be the sharpest, newest major league ballpark in the country. By the turn of the century it was one of the oldest, and its days were numbered; demolition of the stadium commenced in 2005.

My crew foreman was a twenty-year old kid named Joe Berra. He was related to Hall of Fame Yankee catcher Yogi Berra, as were a large number of the rank and file of the St. Louis chapter of the Laborer's Union. Yogi and my foreman Joe both came from the section of St. Louis everybody called Dago Hill, where you couldn't throw a rock without hitting a Berra, a Garagiola, a Rigazzi, a Santoro or somebody else ending in a vowel. The older guys on the crew explained to me, somewhat enviously, that family influence probably explained why a guy as young as Joe was already foreman of a labor crew. There were only two other people on the crew close to his age—me and another college kid named Dave, both nineteen—so Berra liked to hang out with us at lunch.

Lunch was usually the White Castle routine. The three of us would pile into Berra's pickup truck, race to the nearby White Castle, pick up a sack of burgers (12¢ each), fries and shakes, drive back to the jobsite—the sack would be almost dripping with grease by then—and wolf them down quickly before returning to work. White Castle burgers were noticeably smaller than your usual fast food hamburger, square-shaped with a small hole in the middle of the patty to make it cook faster, and impressively greasy. Carol Carr once described them aptly, recalling, "They were smaller than your ordinary hamburger and, no matter where you ordered them, cooked on a griddle that held the grease of their ancient ancestors. They were bad in all ways possible, and yet highly addictive. They were served with a huge glob of overcooked, partially charred, similarly tasting onions. It was hard to eat just one." Dave and I usually ate three or four each, plus greasy fries and a drink, a lunch that cost just slightly over a buck. Berra was a big guy, and usually ordered at least half a dozen burgers and a couple of milkshakes.

We were young, we were strong, we were idiots. Today my stomach roils at the thought of ingesting those little lumps of grease.

I almost died that summer, but not from eating White Castle cuisine.

Common laborers are a distinct class of construction worker, with a separate union, but they are not craftsmen; that is, they aren't considered to have a skill or trade like carpenters, pipefitters, electricians, ironworkers, etc. Laborers handle brute, dumb tasks like hauling stuff, cleaning up the jobsite, dumping trash, wire-brushing rebar, cleaning and oiling formwork, or any other crappy job that the elite trades might consider beneath them or out of their jurisdiction.

The parking garage, a nine-story concrete building, was nearing structural completion. All the parking floors had been poured and had cured and hardened. The spiral ramps at the corners of the building were still under construction, including the columns and spandrel beams that supported them. The columns and beams were an open framework forming two adjoining sides of a box (the two outer edges of the building corner), with the other two sides of the box being the edges of the parking floors, and inside that box rose the spiral ramps to connect to the floors. The open framework of columns and spandrels formed the outer edge of the building, but it was separated from the ramps themselves—that is, there was a void space between the beams and the curved outer edge of the spiral ramp.

On the ramp where my crew was working, the concrete workers, using formwork built of steel and wood by the carpenters, had poured columns and spandrels up to the

eighth floor, and the spiral ramp up to about the fourth floor. A catwalk supported by scaffolding next to the spandrel beams provided the working platform for the ironworkers setting the rebar, the carpenters erecting the formwork, and the concrete workers pouring and vibrating the concrete. When the concrete had set, carpenters would walk out on the catwalk, break the form ties, strip the formwork from the beams, lean the heavy forms up against the beams, and then go back to their shack for a smoke. Then the laborers would go out on the catwalk and haul the heavy forms back into the parking bays, where we would clean, oil and stack them in preparation for re-use on the next level's pour. We'd been doing this for several weeks as the building rose floor by floor.

Berra thought it amusing to assign the two smallest, youngest guys on the crew—Dave and me—to hauling the heavy forms back off the catwalk. Each form weighed about fifty or sixty pounds, so this wasn't a particularly easy thing to do on a narrow catwalk. I was in the lead, Dave following; we were carrying a form in our left hands and holding onto the catwalk handrail with our right hands. I was only a few feet from stepping off the catwalk and down onto the solid concrete parking floor when the handrail—just a 2x4 held in place with a C-clamp—gave way, and I started to fall.

I can still remember the sensation of being at what seemed to be a 45˚ angle in the air off the edge of the catwalk. I dropped the form, but had nothing to grab onto as the handrail was gone, the 2x4 on its way to tumbling eight stories to the ground through the void space between the catwalk and the spiral ramp. And that's where I'd have been headed, too, eight stories straight down—or maybe I'd just have bounced off something hard on the way down and gotten impaled on the open rebar of the ramp construction just four stories below—if luck hadn't been with me.

A quick-thinking carpenter foreman named Mel Buck happened to be standing at the edge of the concrete floor near the end of the catwalk. He wrapped one arm around a support jack and leaned out and *scooped* me out of the air with his other arm, depositing me safely on the firm concrete. "Better watch out there, partner," he said, "that first step's a doozy."

I immediately went to the port-a-john we had on that floor, for two reasons. First, I was understandably a bit shaken up and needed to sit down for a minute, perhaps loosen a sphincter or two. Second, among the usual crude anatomical depictions and other hardhat graffiti on the walls of that crapper I had recently seen a poem, apparently written by one of the carpenters, that I wanted to scratch out with a marker, and did:

Old Mel Buck
Ain't worth fuck.
Old Mel Buck
He just sucks.

Ever since that day, I haven't been real comfortable with heights. I realized that working indoors designing buildings would be a lot safer and less strenuous than working outdoors building them.

I have one other strong memory from working construction that summer. Eero Saarinen's spectacular Gateway Arch was under construction, easily visible from our parking garage jobsite. Day by day, we watched the progress as its two stubby legs, clad in shiny stainless steel, reached higher and higher into the sky, arcing inwards towards each other. When the legs got to a height exceeding the reach of conventional crane rigs to hoist materials up to the working level, a new crane rig was erected, bridging from one leg to the other with steel trusses, and dropping its hook down in the middle. As the Arch continued to rise, piece by piece, section by section, the bridge crane structure traveled upwards with it, continuously being modified, pieces of it being lowered back down to earth as the span decreased. Gradually the ends of the two legs arched closer and closer together as the Arch grew taller.

Near the end of the summer came the dramatic day when the keystone section was hoisted into place, 630 feet above the base, culminating one of the most monumental and spectacular achievements in the history of construction engineering.

Maintaining the proper distance between the ends of the two legs was critical at this point. The ends of the legs had to be positioned precisely to allow the keystone to slip neatly into the gap, meeting on both sides with a degree of precision never before attempted. Since the rigging, lift and anchorage of the keystone took most of a workday, the sun was a factor. During a large part of the day, the south leg was in direct sunshine while the north leg was in shadow. To mitigate differential thermal expansion, water was continuously sprayed on the sunshine leg to cool it down. The crane rig itself acted as a spreader, to keep the legs pushed sufficiently apart so the keystone would fit between, then the tension from the spreader could be released and the keystone welded into place, the legs anchoring it from both sides.

When the actual lift of the keystone occurred, all construction activity on the riverfront came to a complete standstill for nearly an hour as hundreds of workers on a dozen different jobsites watched this once-in-a-lifetime event. I leaned on the rail of the parking garage and marveled at the sight. When the keystone fit into place, a cheer of approval roared up from all over the riverfront.

It took a few more months to anchor the keystone, bring the spreader crane rig back down to earth, and complete the site and interior work. Construction on the Gateway Arch was completed in October 1965. It was officially opened in 1966, though it wasn't really opened to the public until 1967, when the second of the trams that travel up the inside of the legs was completed. Since then, I have ridden those trams up into the Arch several times as a tourist; I've looked out across the City of St. Louis and the Mississippi River from the viewing lobby in the keystone segment of the Arch; I've watched riverfront Fourth of July fireworks displays from the base of the Arch; in my hippie days, I may have dropped acid and grooved in the shadow of the Arch (or perhaps that was in Pepperland); and I've admired the grace and beauty of the Arch countless times as I crossed the bridges from Illinois into St. Louis and back; but I'll never forget the thrill I felt that day when I watched the keystone being hoisted into place.

**Part II – Fat George and the Fireplace Races**

In my first foray into the world of professional architecture, I worked the next two summers for an architect who designed custom houses, mostly in brick, using a large repertoire of cliché colonial motifs— corbels, quoins, shutters, mansards, dormers, cupolas, colonnades, porte-cocheres and suchlike. George could also design in "contemporary" style, as he called it, but he was far more comfortable in colonial. At any rate, he made a nice living designing house after house for a slew of residential developers, builders and private owners around suburban St. Louis.

He was also a middle-aged, overweight, sarcastic, bigoted, mean, irascible redneck bully who browbeat his slow and inexperienced low-paid draftsmen into quickly becoming fast and efficient low-paid draftsmen. (Today we use the gender-neutral term "drafters," but in 1966 it was still strictly a male domain, and we were draftsmen.) The draftsmen took what revenge they dared by consistently referring to him as "Fat George"—strictly behind his back, of course, for sake of self-preservation. Luckily, George was also a little hard of hearing.

For most of the year, George only had one or two draftsmen working for him, but during the summer the ranks would swell to three or even four, the maximum staff he could fit in his studio. Summer was always the busiest season for the spec housing industry, so he would staff up then, relying on the architecture school at Washington University to provide him with fodder for his production mill. There were usually three or four draftsmen working for George each summer, most

of us partway through architecture school, some more senior and experienced than others, all of us learning about working drawings from him and from each other. My classmate John Lee, a local boy from University City and already an accomplished draftsman, had already worked for George one summer before recruiting me, and I joined George's staff for the summer of 1966, after my third year at WU.

The office where we worked had been converted from a single-story suburban house. On one side of the entry was a reception area, restroom, conference room, and kitchenette; this was the public zone where George met with his clients. George's private office, with a big leather couch where he sometimes took a short nap, was on that side of the house, too. On the other side of the entry was the studio, or drafting room, where we all worked. There were four drafting stations in addition to George's, and several banks of flat files for drawing storage. A rotary diazo copier was at the front end of the room, under some windows next to a short hallway leading to the conference room. A back door opened out to a breezeway between the house and a small garage where George parked his classic Jaguar Mark 120 roadster. A stairway next to the back door led down to a partial basement where old files were archived. A tiny toilet room for the employees was also down there, as well as two refrigerators stocked with a variety of bottled soda pops, and a small storeroom for cases of bottled soda. Free soda was one of the few perks that George offered his employees. You might not get paid much, but you could have all the free Royal Crown Cola and Orange Crush you could drink.

We provided most of our own basic drafting tools. A common draftsman's kit included a parallel bar (except for George, a dinosaur who eschewed modern technology and still used a T-square), a set of triangles (45˚, 30˚/60˚ and two sizes of adjustable), an assortment of scales, an electric eraser (another technological innovation that George, who still used Pink Pearls, considered effete), an erasing shield, a horsehair brush, a set of compasses, an inking set (rapidograph pens were just starting to replace ruling pens; guess which George preferred), lead holders (pencil-shaped grippers for inserting leads of varying hardness), lead pointers (sharpeners), and little pads of sandpaper (for specific precise shaping of a lead point). George provided the work station—an adjustable tilting drafting board with an adjustable swing-arm fluorescent lamp, a swivel stool, and layoff tables to the side and rear. He also provided general drafting supplies, such as leads for our lead holders, eraser inserts for our electric erasers, drafting powder, drafting tape, rolls of sketch paper (sometimes called flimsy, butter paper or bumwad), and of course, the large sheets of paper that the architectural drawings were drawn on.

Each drawing was produced by actual human hands. We drew with pencil on paper, and occasionally even with ink on linen, a rare and difficult task reserved only for the most special circumstances as it required an uncommonly steady hand and nerves of steel. Mostly we drew construction drawings for contractors and developers. We drew site plans, foundation plans, floor plans, reflected ceiling plans, framing plans, roof plans, partial plans, and enlarged plans; cross sections, longitudinal sections, wall sections, fireplace sections, stair sections, and detail sections; exterior elevations and interior elevations; room finish schedules, door schedules, and window schedules; roof details, entry details, stair details, fireplace details, kitchen details, bathroom details, site details, cabinet details, door details, window details, and miscellaneous details. Draftsmen were hired for their ability to produce clean, legible working drawings, and I think we all took the craft seriously.

In that shop I learned, among other things, to draw fast and accurately, letter very well, vary my line weights, and give a nice snap to the line. "Always draw to scale" was probably the most important lesson I learned, thanks to Fat George relentlessly pounding it home by throwing Pink Pearl erasers at me and berating my idiocy every time he found something drawn even slightly out of scale on one of my drawings. I was once subjected to a vitriolic tirade and public humiliation (well, a rude scolding in front of the other two drafters) for drawing a gutter that extended a bit too far from its fascia. During the excoriation, as George's face reddened alarmingly, I found myself wondering how soon the throbbing vein in his temple would pop—but I never drew an over-extended gutter again. His teaching methods were unique but effective.

Anyway, we were good and we were fast. Each of us could churn out a set of plans for an average 3,000-4,000 square foot custom colonial house with connecting garage in one to two weeks, and maybe even throw in a gazebo in the back yard. All of the draftsmen were fast; we even staged drafting races.

Virtually every house we drew included at least one custom-designed fireplace (one of George's specialties), and each fireplace required a section drawing and accompanying details, including many common features—mantle, surround, hearth, firebox, damper, flue, chimney, ash drop, etc. But each fireplace was also unique, since these were all custom houses. Many clients brought in photos or magazine clippings to show George exactly what they wanted for their kitchen, staircase, family room, or (to get back to the point) fireplace, and then George would give a draftsman the photos and his design sketches and say something like, "This will be the Adams' fireplace, but with this mantle, this surround, and a raised tile hearth. Don't fuck it up."

Whatever the specific detailing associated with a specific custom design, drawing a good, sharp, well notated fireplace section with related details would take about three to five hours. We were each assigned to do the drawings for a different house, so occasionally we'd set aside a Thursday morning, say, for a Fireplace Race, with odds and handicaps based on complexity of the designs and the participants' previous form over the course. The two or three losers would buy the winner lunch and a beer. Sometimes we'd run shorter drafting races—bathroom interior elevations, stair sections, railing details, whatever—but the Fireplace Races were the ones I remember most. George encouraged any activity like this that made us faster and more productive drafting units, freeing up time for him to nap on his couch or tool around suburban St. Louis in his Jag.

I've seen a lot of drafters in my day, good and bad, but I remember all of George's draftsmen, myself immodestly included, as being extraordinarily proficient at the craft for our youth, and I don't think it was coincidence. I long ago realized that I owe a lot to that fat, sour bastard, and to the other guys like me that he hired.

**Part III – Bobs, Blueprints, Bluelines and Berkeley**

In the fullness of time, I completed my schooling and moved to San Francisco to pursue a career in architecture. I started out in 1970 as a draftsman/drafter—eventually the politically correct term came into common use—and gradually rose up through the ranks as a senior drafter, job captain, architectural designer, and architect, duly licensed by the State of California since 1979.

Since then I've managed many successful projects and designed complex facilities costing millions, employing to the best of my ability all the skills and talents an architect traditionally brings to the table. I've met and worked with hundreds of talented professional designers, engineers, scientists, technicians, facilities managers, project managers, maintenance personnel, and specialists of all stripes. Most of my projects have been in science, technology, and industrial market sectors—R&D laboratories, biotech facilities, biopharmaceutical manufacturing, that area of country. After I recently moved to a new firm and had related some of my professional experiences and responsibilities to far-flung friends—in painstaking detail and scintillating prose, mind you—Dan Steffan asked, "Yes, but what do you *do*?" So I explained the role of

the architect:

"I draw, sketch, talk, write, deal, plan, phone, meet, scope, lunch, sell, check, schmooze, fret, manage, schedule, listen, design, assign, align, propose, prepare, present, publish, instruct, submit, diagram, interview, strategize, criticize, organize, illustrate, estimate, calculate, communicate, collaborate, evaluate, participate, negotiate and play Spider Solitaire."

The first word in that list has always been, and always will be, *draw*. I would never have become an architect if I didn't just plain like to draw. Well, maybe the fact that my dad was an engineer and construction manager for Illinois Power Company—he built power plants—had something to do with it, too.

Most of my father's friends were contractors or engineers that he worked with, and many of them seemed to be named Bob. Since Dad's name was Bob, too, I once theorized that approximately one-third of all engineers were named Bob and approximately one-third of all Bobs were engineers. Anyway, I've been around engineers and construction people (and Bobs) all my life. When I was a kid, Dad often took me out to the jobsite, where I was as fascinated by the racks of hundreds and hundreds of blueprints as by the bustling construction activity that was going on *based* on those blueprints. I was intrigued by the realization that *some*body had to figure out every single piece of that power plant, or any other building, designing it in three dimensions and then codifying that information—*drawing* it—in two dimensions, precisely and clearly enough that a bunch of other people could then figure out how much it would cost to build it, and how to build it... and then build it. The process of design-drawings-bidding-construction was clear, obvious, self-evident, and inherently interesting to me from an early age—after all, it was the subject of dinner table conversation almost every day of my early life—so perhaps my attraction to architecture was inevitable.

In the 1950s, when Dad was showing me around his jobsites, all construction drawings were actual blueprints, something you can't even get anymore because the technology is so archaic. A blueprint was truly blue, with white lines on a dark blue background, made by exposing the emulsion on a special sheet of paper to an ammonia vapor that turned it solid blue, except for white where the lines on the original drawing were. In the field, notes and marks were made on the blueprint using a yellow crayon.

By the 1960s, when I was working for Fat George, blueprints had evolved into what we called blueline prints, or just bluelines, produced by running the original drawing together with a sheet of specially coated paper through a rotary diazo machine, which first exposed the emulsion on the print paper to fluorescent light except where the lines on the drawing blocked the light, and then passed the print paper through an ammonia-vapor chamber causing the lines to appear as blue on a splotchy gray-white background. You could also get brownlines or blacklines—I'll leave it as a class exercise to figure out the difference between these and bluelines—and they were all an improvement over the old blueprints because they were cheaper and easier to produce, and because the guys in the field could mark on them with a regular pencil or pen rather than a special yellow crayon. Blueprints disappeared entirely.

Today, the diazo process is also an obsolete print technology. Construction drawings now used in the field by contractors and design professionals all feature crisp black lines on clean white backgrounds, produced by photocopying, or printed from electronic plot files or scans of the original drawings.

Not only are the prints different, but production of the original drawings themselves has changed radically from my days as a drafter. In the course of my career, I've seen the evolution of working drawings from hand-drawn pencil on paper, to plastic leads on mylar, to pin-bar registered Mini-Max layered drafting systems, to today's electronic cyberworld of computer-aided drafting and design (CADD or CAD), zip files, net postings, CD-ROMs, AutoCAD, Adobe PDFs, Microstation, LiveLink, and other arcane production and information-sharing platforms. In today's architectural world, I couldn't even get a job as an entry-level drafter, because I am CAD-illiterate. Fortunately, I've risen to a position where I can hire CAD technicians to draw for me. Speaking as one who got into this business because I like to draw, this strikes me as bitter irony.

There are still some special moments, however...

I don't draw the final working drawings anymore, but of course I still draw. It's just a different kind of drawing, and it happens at different stages of the project. For instance, I draw and sketch copiously during the conceptual design process, when we're figuring out what a building is going to be and do and look like, how it fits together, how it will be built. For me, this is the architecture bit that's the most fun.

About sixteen months ago, after I had been with my new firm for only a few months, I found myself in that conceptual design stage, just two weeks into a new project, a fifty million dollar pharmaceutical manufacturing facility now in construction in Berkeley. Largely on the basis of my own personal track record with this client, my firm had been hired to undertake this difficult contract after two previous design firms, both highly regarded, had been fired. Landing this project was an important coup for my firm, and especially for me.

The first two weeks of a project like this are mine. Other people become involved as the project progresses, of course, but I own those first two weeks. The tools I use during this period are rolls of sketch paper and a fistful of Pentel pens. (And, when necessary, a laptop and a cell phone.) My methodology is one of drawing fast and talking design issues through logically and rationally with all the people who have partial "ownership" of the building. I start with bubble diagrams to simulate critical adjacencies, check flow patterns with colored arrows, test alternate gowning scenarios, try out various spatial arrangements, flip layouts from right to left or upside down, ask lots of questions, explore random ideas or brainstorms (those of the other participants as well as my own), all the while drawing quick, loose sketches at a conference table and talking it through with up to a dozen people participating to various degrees. I actually work the design with them in real time, striving for general consensus so that everyone buys into the logic of major decisions when they are reached. Then I go away, clean up the day's sketches and explore whatever ideas may have come up, and get back together with them for another working session a day or two later, gradually evolving the layout into a plan that everyone is happy with. Eventually these hand-drawn plan sketches coalesce into a three-dimensional building design.

I really don't know any other way to design. I'm a dinosaur. I've always been able to develop good plan layouts quickly this way, and my clients generally seem to enjoy the process. I know I do.

So anyway, after I'd been doing this for about two weeks, I found myself in a two-hour meeting with about a dozen or more people from the client team, presenting the current status of the design. It was a good working session, and we had resolved several critical design issues. My floor plans were starting to work quite well, I had a good rapport with the client team, and there was a sense of confidence in the room that the project was headed in the right direction with the right design team in place. After I had worked through another minor issue with them, resolving yet another aspect of the design, there was a short pause—then one person started clapping, and another, and the whole room broke out in applause!

This had never happened to me before in my career. Oh, I've received polite applause for stand-up presentations in front of audiences, and clients have often expressed their appreciation for services rendered in other ways, but I had never been applauded for a working design session. I had the grace to blush as I pointed to the guy who started it and said, "I'll get you for this."

The applause was a genuine and spontaneous expression of appreciation for the work I was doing for them. "You have to understand," one guy explained, "none of the other architects we worked with ever paid real attention to us. It seemed like they didn't even listen. We'd tell them what we wanted, then they'd go away for a week and come back with some new drawings which would be all wrong in so many ways, and then we'd go through the whole thing again. It was very slow and very frustrating."

Another person on the team added, "It's so refreshing to work with you. We know you're actually listening to us because you design with us while we're all thinking about it together."

One of the team leaders took my hand in hers, looked me directly in the eye, and said, "You're just great." Jeez.

I always try to do a good job, but I have to admit it helps to follow in the footsteps of other professionals who screwed the pooch. The client's personnel praised me repeatedly to my bosses, and my stock rose in my new firm accordingly. At every design meeting I attended after that, people told me how happy they were with the progress of the design, how fine a job we were doing, how pleased they were. And truth be told, I was ultimately pretty proud and pleased myself with how the building turned out. Well, sure. With a client so effusive and generous in their appreciation, it would have been churlish of me indeed not to give it my very best.

Applause, yet! I can understand why people go into show business.

It's hard to tell this story without sounding boastful, and maybe I am bragging a wee bit, but this episode marked a major turning point in my career. Just a couple of years ago, due to circumstances too tedious to relate in detail, my career was spiraling rapidly down the drain. My former firm—I owned about 15% of the shares—had fallen on hard times, finally closing their doors for good in 2004 after three bad years. I personally lost a lot of money in stock turned worthless, bank loans to be repaid, three years of radically diminished income, and similar horror stories. Even worse, I was afraid that my architectural skills were atrophying from lack of exercise; I was worried that I would lose my chops.

Then fortune smiled in the form of a new job. Within a couple of months of signing on, after I had handled several small projects successfully for my new bosses, I started receiving phone calls and emails from some of my former clients who had learned about my new gig. Old contacts resurrected, dormant relationships rekindled, and before I could catch my breath I had landed several new clients and projects, including that important biopharm facility described above. My new firm had long been interested in penetrating the biotech market sector, but had had limited success until I came aboard.

There is nothing—*nothing*—that someone at my level of experience can do that will impress his new employers more than bringing in new clients and big projects. My star was on the rise, the element of *fun* had returned to my job, I had a steady income again, and I was back to doing meaningful work. There were buildings to be built, architecture to be architected, and a career that had been in the dumps just a few months before had suddenly been jump-started again—and with applause. So please forgive me if I crow a bit, but like Paul Newman said at the end of *The Color of Money*, "Hey, I'm back."

Yippy-kai-ay, and adios for now.

—Grant Canfield


Microsoft *Word* won't make you the next Shakespeare, using *Photoshop* doesn't mean you're another Stieglitz, and storing a thousand fonts on your hard drive won't turn you into John D. Berry. In general, tools favor the already competent, making what they do better, easier, and faster.

But what about those of us who aren't competent? In an egalitarian world, why should mere mediocrity result in being deprived of equal access to the joys of creative accomplishment? That doesn't seem quite fair. In the bright utopian future, dare we hope that the gifts of technology free us from the handicap—or should it be "challenge"—of lack of talent?

The answer, fortunately, is "Yes." Paint-by-numbers points the way.

During the '50s paint-by-numbers craze, one aficionado of the form wrote *American Artist*. "I know I'm not much of an artist and never will be. I've tried in vain repeatedly to draw or paint something recognizable… Why oh why didn't you or someone else tell me before this how much fun it is to use these wonderful 'paint by number' sets?… am on my fifth set and just can't leave them alone."

Paint-by-numbers allowed people with no discernable talent to produce an actual, recognizable image on canvas, from a pastoral landscape to DaVinci's "Last Supper." Not everyone saw that as benign. As another contributor to *American Artist* wrote, "I don't know what America is coming to when thousands of people, many of them adults, are willing to be regimented into brushing paint on a jig-saw miscellany of dictated shapes and all by rote. Can't you rescue some of these souls—or should I say 'morons'?"

Who wants to be—or needs to be—rescued? It takes some skill, after all, to stay within the thick blame lines. And the result, if not quite art, is an amazing simulation.

The French paint-by-numbers ads of the period focused on the *valeur éducative* of the hobby, but that was only an excuse. American advertising's slogan, "Every Man a Rembrandt," spoke to the real human need. And fortunately for us, technology is here to help.

There are sims and playsets that let you run railroads, build civilizations, and make your imaginary neighbors do naughty things, but we know those are just games. With paint-by-numbers tools, you get a product that bears a resemblance to real art.

Apple's *Garage Band*, for example, allows you to fulfill Harry Chapin's dream of backing his "Six String Orchestra" with a bass, lead guitar, drums and strings. Just drag and drop the appropriate loops into an

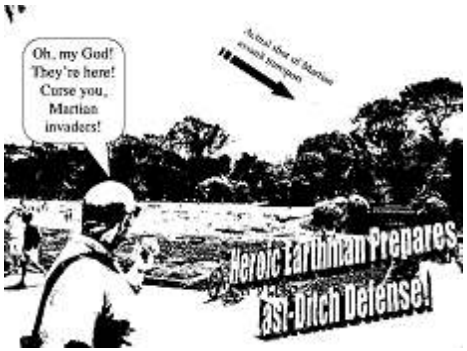
arrangement that is, if not quite music, an amazing simulation.

You don't even need your own guitar; a composition built exclusively out of loops sounds surprisingly good. I filled three CDs with the things before the fun began to get old. Don't worry, though. I won't offer to play them for you any more than I'd show off my paint-by-numbers *Last Supper*.

*PowerPoint* has become the bane of executive life, with


and cheesy animation pasted haphazardly against garish backgrounds, but it does have a certain paint-by-numbers charm when diverted to less formal purposes. Captioning photographs has become a widespread hobby; any number of Web sites and Yahoo groups are filled with captioned photos, mostly pornographic, or—*ahem*—so I'm told.

Faux art is fun.




*Logo Creator*, for example, gives you the power to "Create incredible logo designs that look like a *Photoshop* guru spent hours laboring over!" Well, not exactly. For all the manufacturer's claim that the product will allow you (yes, *you*!) to set up your own logo design business and make $$$, it's more suitable for a club or fanzine article (*q.v.*) logo. I had to build a fake company to use in a training simulation. Fake companies never have corporate identities—it costs too much. My fake company not only had a corporate logo, but I did a separate one for each "product" the company was developing.

Enter *HI! Toys*: the Highly Inappropriate Toy Company ("Corrupting American Youth Since 1971"). Your mission, o seminar attendee, is to figure out which toys to produce, taking into account all sorts of business considerations, with your imaginary job on the line.

It's almost embarrassing how little I did to the canned *Logo Creator* images. There's a logo featuring a drawing of a monkey with the word "Yes" on his t-shirt. "Just say Yes," I thought, and suddenly he's *Bad Monkey*™,


a *Curious George* for the post-modern era. Disney-style lettering and a smiling little cartoon girl made me think of *Cindy Commando*™ ("Armed and Adorable"), the only doll endorsed by the NRA. I know that


*Moose*™ is really a cow, but somehow a cow didn't strike me as funny. My favorite was inspired by a little graphic of a man who might be shouting for joy, but I went in a different direction: the *Edvard Munch*™ line of "dolls you'll SCREAM for."

*Dramatica Pro*, "your Creative Writing Partner," promises to "handhold you from initial idea all the way through to completed narrative treatment, inspiring you and supporting you along the way. It's like having a successful author as your writing partner, sitting by your side and mentoring you!" *Dramatica Pro* is endorsed by, among others, an old TSR colleague, Tracy Hickman. - Tracy raves, "*Dramatica* is my indispensable tool both in bringing form to my new novels and in the repair and tune-up of stories that I am revisiting. It has added a new, grander dimension to my craft."



Soon, I look forward to avoiding the painful drudgery of plot, characterization and description, and turn instead to my trusty copy of *Rite-A-Book*™. With a few selections from the menu, swapping out some text elements here and there, plugging in the optional Expansion Set…let's see… hmm…style, Tom Clancy, setting naval, technology, historical…

**[PRESS ENTER]** Ishmael's trained Navy eye scanned the sleek lines of the new Pequod. It was the first of the new Melville-class cruisers, with the new ultra-secret Topgallantsail Mk. V. propulsion system. He couldnt wait to climb the mizzen-mast and get a close personal look. In the meantime, he could stare lustfully at the gleaming new state-of-the-art harpoon launchers. Webleys, they were. You just couldn't imitate that unique design. He itched to get his hands on one. But he'd have to wait.

Above him, high on the captain's deck, that lonely perch where the most important commands, he could see a uniformed figure silhouetted against the sun: It was he. Ahab. Smilin' Jack Ahab. The best commander in the merchant marine. He'd lost a leg in combat and it had toughened that gruff exterior even more. But he knew his business.

Yes, he knew his business: whales.

The big ones. Not the humpbacks, not even the blues.

The White One.

The Great White One. **[PAUSE. PRESS ENTER TO RESUME]**

One hundred fifty thousand words by lunchtime, electronically transmitted to the publisher, and #4 with a bullet on the *New York Times* best-seller list in time for the six o'clock news.

Oh brave new world that has such software in it!

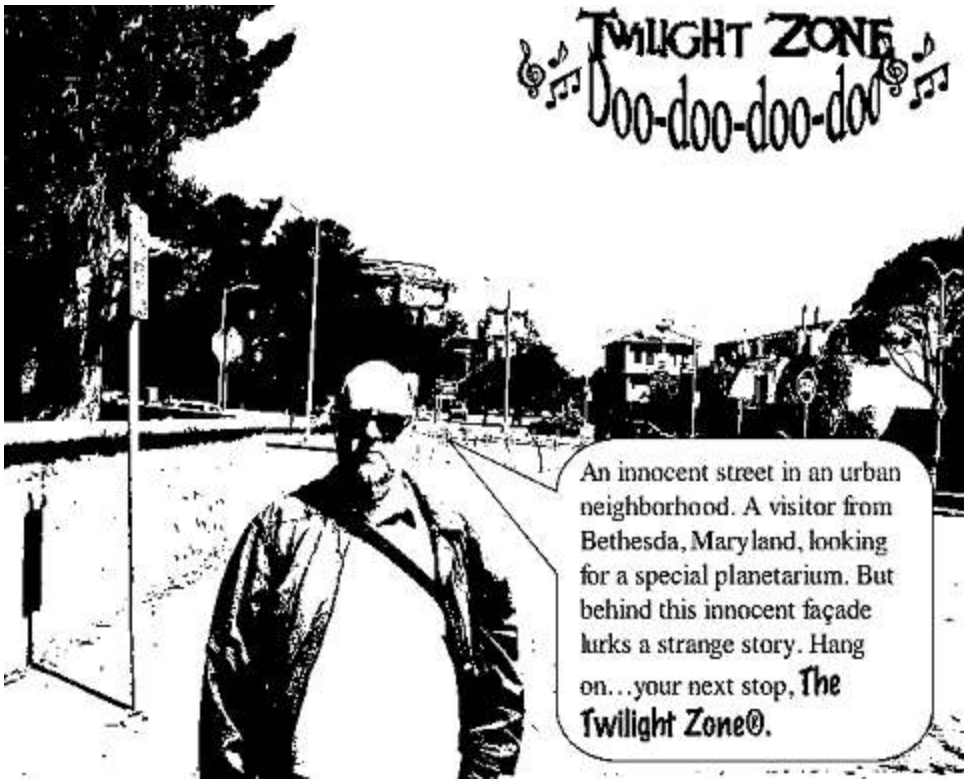
My digital SLR takes care of niggling details like focus, white balance, and shutter speed, and there's no economic reason not to fill up the memory chip I snap merrily away at my son's soccer games, and out of the 140 or so photos that fit on a 1GB chip, one or two of them look really good—well, after 'shopping and cropping, that is. I put out a souvenir book for the coach and parents (Apple *iPhoto*'s "make book" function) each season. The same software lets me do lots of other products, and even brand them with the *Logo Creator*-designed team logo. Calendars, mouse pads, coffee cups, t-shirts—yes, even a paint-by-numbers canvas—all as close as an Internet connection and a credit card.

With music, art and literature made E-Z, a lack of talent is no handicap. Minimal skill and some idea of what you're trying to accomplish is all you need. The *valeur éducative* may be arguable, but the fun is indisputable.

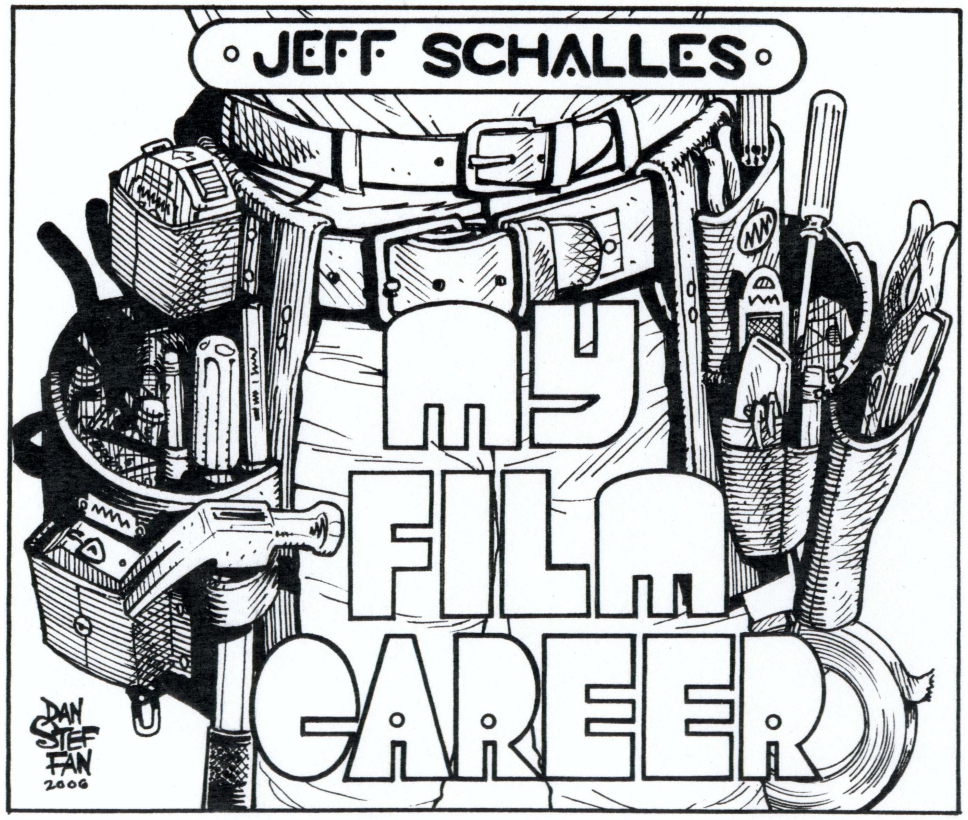
Faux creativity can be as satisfying as—or sometimes even more satisfying than—the Real Thing. There's just enough of your sweat in the final product to claim ownership, and the product itself looks or sounds pretty good.

That's a claim real creativity can't always match.

—Michael Dobson






*It's a cruel, cruel summer*
*Leaving me here on my own*
*It's a cruel, cruel summer*
*Now you're gone*

I was stowing gear in the grip truck at the end of the first day's work on Will Shetterley's local 16 mm. production of *War for the Oaks*, his wife Emma Bull's first novel. We were in St. Paul in the hollows of Hidden Falls Park. I jumped back eleven years, to 1983, outside a film studio in Queens, New York. Same smells, same gear. Same old pair of leather gloves. I'd spent the summer of 1983 working for a gaffer. By now I'd mostly forgotten the buzzwords and nicknames of the lights and rigging. It's hard physical and technical work combined with a gearhead name game. Of course, a bunch of the stuff—the lights and stands and cables and crap—have different names up here in these weird cities on the prairie in the middle of nowhere.

On the other hand, I very well remembered the bone-breaking weariness, being on the bounce from before sunup 'til long past sundown, grabbing some sleep, doing it again the next day. Working in the heat, in the sun, carrying heavy gear until by the end of the day the truck is completely empty. Everything that was in it that morning is now clamped, taped, bolted, shimmed, braced, sandbagged, and cabled together.

There was that. But this wasn't about exhaustion. It was about interesting, gratifying work. It was about properly coiling and stowing professional equipment, little of which had changed since the last time I packed a grip truck after a Seruchi blue jean commercial in a studio in Long Island City.

Except the walkie-talkies and tool belts had gotten a lot cooler. It was night, and the smells were right. The mountain lion who guides me had returned.

In 1975, after college, after bicycling across Canada, working on ranches outside Omak, Washington, and all that stuff.[1] I had an informational interview with a marketing guy in my dad's office. I was living at home, applying for creative agency jobs. I showed this marketing guy my portfolio: some fanzines and tearsheets of fanwriting and book reviews, a bunch of cartoons, a lot of 8x10 photographs. We chatted for a bit and he suggested I try production work. I wasn't sure what that was and kept looking for a creative opening.

I chased interesting creative jobs in Pittsburgh, D.C., New York, interviewed at a bunch of agencies, publishers, studios. I worked for over a year for a film syndicator, Sandy Frank. Right after that I worked a couple weeks for the ad agency Sandy used. On my last day, the wise, colorful, cigar chomping old-time New York adman simply flat out told me if I ever wanted to be happy to go out and find production work.

That spring, I answered a simple ad in the *Village Voice* classifieds: "film lighting truck driver." I'd driven big farm trucks. I made films in college. I'd shot and sold a lot of photos. I met this gaffer, Ken, at his workshop in Hell's Kitchen. He was renting a basement in a brick building in a row of ancient single story buildings under the old High Line freight tracks. The guys on the first floor were carpenters. Everyone on the block was a carpenter, an electrician, a plumber. Ken took me around the corner to a sidewalk café. We drank coffee and talked a bit, shook hands, and I was his new driver.

There was more to it than that. I'd be handling the gear on the truck and should seriously consider working to qualify as a third electrician in NABET, Ken's union. This stuff seemed to pay really well, even my non-union driver job. That afternoon I went down to Houston Street and bought a toolbelt and electrician's tools. Leather gloves. A book on stage wiring.

It was, like, mid-May. I was dating Cynthia. We'd met through personal ads in he Village Voice. I'd answered her ad first but she never called, then she answered one of mine and I called her. She owned a photo retouching studio. I worked sometimes as her messenger and production assistant, mounting photos, answering the phone. It was a strange affair, we did a lot of wild stuff in a few short months that summer. She was also Bill Kunkel's best friend in high school. He would call her at the office from time to time. That was weird. Bill and I hadn't spoken since he and the Katzes dropped out of fandom the first time, in the late '70s. Cynthia told me some interesting stories.

Ken's gaffer truck was a hulking aluminum monster. He'd had it built by Grumman, on Long Island. It was based on a UPS delivery van, but had an extra layer of compartments with outside doors along both sides. It held an enormous tightly packed set of film lighting and grip equipment. The outer compartments held racks of lights, stands, cables. Inside were shelves and racks and the flag box. He'd rent more gear for the shoots, packed in hampers rolled into the rear of the truck. It had a lift gate. There was a rack on the roof with ladders and lumber and knocked-down sawhorses and stuff. It was an unwieldy truck to drive. Usually he drove it himself.

We'd motor out of the mid-town garage at 5:30 a.m. and head for New Jersey or Brooklyn or Queens. We shot a bunch of commercials using big houses in the suburbs for sets. A lot of food commercials, a bunch of them in Spanish. Ken and his second electrician (best boy) would be laying down heavy cables through the house, clamped to the busbars in the breaker box. I'd be setting up work tables using saw horses and sheets of plywood and running temporary circuits for the stagecraft people. Mazola commercials take a lot of deep fat fryers.

I never got to work with these guys on the skin flicks they did. Ken had worked a lot with fan pornographer Mal Worob (Chairman Mal). Kenny's gear had seen a lot of hard use, stuff was worn out, big HMI lights were blowing out in the middle of scenes. We spent a couple afternoons in his basement workshop tracing shorts and rebuilding cables. I fixed the walkie-talkies.

In short, I'd finally found production work, and it felt very, very right.

Then one day, Ken died. Just… died. In his sleep, the night after we did the Seruchi commercial.

There'd been ongoing trouble with the Teamsters who drove the lighting trucks for the big film companies. Ken kept his truck in a garage full of their trucks. He hated them, they hated us. We came in late from shooting Bananarama's *Cruel Hot Summer* video and had to park behind a big generator truck. The garage attendant should have had the keys to our truck if they needed to move it. Instead, the other drivers hooked a tow chain to Ken's truck and yanked it out of the way before we arrived. They broke something, the right front sagged and handled funny that day. I got to drive to the studio in Queens. The deck grating on the Queensboro Bridge threw the truck from side to side.

Burned into my brain is Kenny, all that day, looking so very tired, so completely worn out. But I'd smile over at him from across the set and he'd smile back back at me. That's what I remember, Ken smiling back at me. I also remember the song from the Lionel Ritchie tape we were playing on the way home that night:

*You are the sun*
*You are the rain*
*That makes my life this foolish game*
*You need to know*
*I love you so*
*And I'd do it all again and again*[2]

I talked with Petunia, Ken's wife, a few times after that. Another gaffer was using the truck; he didn't need a driver. I tried to find another gaffer to work for over the next few months, then stumbled into a high-paying data entry job. That seemed to end my film career. I saw the Bananarama video on M-TV once in the late '80s and finally tracked it down recently on a DVD. That was the best shoot of all, music and dancing all day, and the girls were so nice to us. We were invited to a party after we wrapped the set but I was so tired I just went home.

I've played that video over and over. That — and the *War for the Oaks* trailer — are the only stuff I worked on that I've ever gotten a good look at. I did see the Seruchi commercial once, it flashed by and I barely realized what I was seeing before it was gone. In *Cruel Summer*, the sidewalk stuff, the gas station scenes, I was right there, but what I remember was being in the middle of a tangle of cables, lights, the sound guy with his Nagra, the camera crew, actors, production assistants. When you're seeing the bearded trucker in his cab, I'm holding a reflector bouncing sunlight on his face. On the other hand, when you see the dancing scenes at the end, up on a Manhattan rooftop at sunset, I was down on the street watching the truck.

*Hot summer streets*
*And the pavements are burning*
*I sit around*
*Trying to smile but*
*The air is so heavy and dry*
*Strange voices are saying*
*Things I can't understand*
*It's too close for comfort*
*This heat has got*
*Right out of hand*[3]

Will had announced his intention to shoot *War for the Oaks* over four weeks in May. I was doing freelance typesetting, but not very much of it. I talked to Will's cameraman, Brian, and he was happy for my help. A big bunch of Twin-Cities fans and film workers signed on for the month in a spec deal. If the movie was released and made some money, we'd get some. It seemed doable. Roger Corman does this stuff in two or three days.

We did the battle scenes first, in city parks, with all the local Renfest folks showing up with their weapons and costumes. The excitement was intense, the pitch-in and bust-yer-butt fever made even higher by the return of Spring to Minnesota. I loved standing with the second unit

cameraman on the battlefield's 50-yard line as the two fairy armies repeatedly rushed headlong at each other. Will was so excited he broke his bullhorn. We coulda been contenders.

We worked weekends and evenings. It was hard, hot, rough work, and it rained a bunch. Elves and fairies and evildoers of all descriptions were constantly underfoot. Brian brought in a real gaffer, Rami. I was Best Boy. I had the keys to the grip truck and we parked it at my house. We worked hard, really fucking hard, and shared a lot of laughs. But the end of May came along and were we weren't all that far along in the script. This was not going over very well with the cast and crew. Scenes were going into ten takes when they needed to be done in one. Will begged us to keep working into June, hey, just another week, maybe two.

People had commitments for June.One afternoon Brian called me and told me to keep the truck at my place, not to come to the shoot until I heard from him. He called around 7 p.m. I found the cast and crew out in the street, milling around in an mob. Will came out of the house and didn't seem to know what was going on. We sat down in the livingroom and had a meeting. By the end of that meeting, the shoot was over.

Rami asked me if I wanted to come along to the next project they were all working on, another local film. I really had to think. The day we shot the bar scene, the assistant director grabbed me and told me to stick close to her. "You're pure gold, man." I wanted to go with these guys, do it again for another summer. Get a new tool belt and some cool walkie-talkies.

But then I remembered how tired Kenny looked, and I quietly walked away.

—Jeff Schalles

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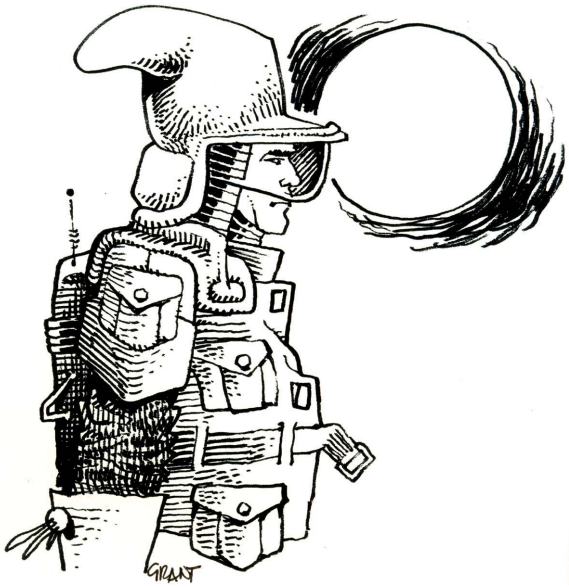
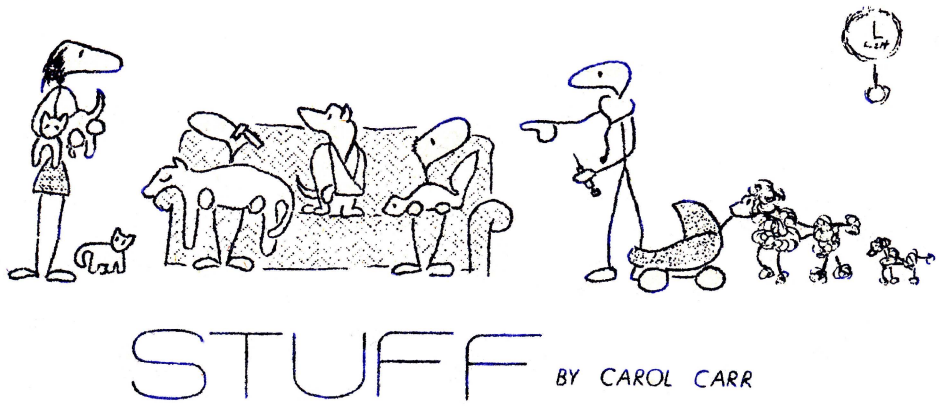
1. See "Cross-Canadian Snipe-Hunting Revealed" in John D. Berry's *Hitchhike* No. 26, May 1976

2. "You Are The Sun, You Are The Rain," © Lionel Ritchie

3. "Cruel Summer," Bananarama, Associated Music Int. / In A Bunch Ltd / Broadlay Music Publishing, 2001.



# STUFF

BY CAROL CARR

It's good to have Robert all moved in, finally, and he seems happy with his big basement office, communing (or not) with the ghost of Terry. I do occasionally let him upstairs, and that works out too. Moderation in all things, I always say. We went nowhere and did nothing much of the first year or so of his residency, which pleased us both because we're so easily amused, but some of our friends and Robert's many children (he says there are only four) would prefer hearing tales of our travels rather than tales of how the house is falling apart.

Robert hit the peak of his moving-in early September, when his eight file cabinets, desk, and maple dresser the size of an ocean liner arrived and were carried down a total of forty steps to the basement. He was back and forth from his house to mine every day for almost a month. He lost so much weight that my vocabulary was reduced to a litany of "eat eat," "drive safe," and "stop worrying, go back to sleep." I made BLTs with half a jar of mayonnaise, pushed 16% butterfat ice cream at him whenever he opened his mouth to say something. When he sat down and relaxed for the few minutes I browbeat him into, he took the time to appreciate that not only did he have his own closet now, he even had the closet floor and the shelf above the rod. You might think this was a package deal, but you'd be wrong.

Before the Oakland Hills fire in 1991 my neighborhood consisted mostly of modest two- and three-bedroom, fairly affordable wooden bungalows. After the fire the developers came through and built bigger and weirder, giving the word "inappropriate" its definitive definition. Some of the houses have lawns and some have balconies that overlook the road with its caravans of SUVs straddling the flaking yellow centerline. What is that apparition I see before me, its twin white columns from an eBay auction of the last pieces of Tara? Is that person pushing a *lawnmower*? Oh my God, it's a fake gull on top of that Cape Cod, 4,000 square foot "cottage." Since my side of the road was saved (starting two houses down from me), everything above me still looks ok. After the fire, when these stucco palaces started going up I had the idea of sticking a charred and bullet-riddled wooden sign in front of my house saying "Old Town." Then I lost interest.

One night David Letterman asked Robin Williams his opinion of Arnold Schwarzenegger and Williams said some predictably funny stuff. Then quietly, without preamble, he broke into the song from *Cabaret* by the young blond white Aryan Fascist boy soprano, and he sang it perfectly, with the same pure, zitless conviction:

"The sun on the meadow is summery warm. / The stag in the forest runs free . . ."

And then he stood up – stood up straight and tall, and his voice grew stronger, louder, more confident:

"But ga-ther togeth-er to greet the storm. / Cahh-liii-fawwwwnia belongs to me."

I shoulda taped it.

"Are you writing anything, are you writing yet? How come you're not writing?" All I need is the motivation, the discipline, the time management, someone who's brave enough to restrict my TV privileges. ("None of woman born shall touch her TV privileges.") Then maybe I would write again, yet, but there's not much of a market for a bunch of rants by an unknown high-functioning underachiever.

Terry, when he was writing, produced three pages a day. One day I realized that when I was writing I too produced three pages a day. But his three pages were all written in his head and by the time they hit the typewriter they were pure gold, not even a typo (even on stencil not a drop of corflu – it would knock me out). Whereas my three pages were the result of draft after draft ripped out of the typewriter and rewritten, paragraph by paragraph. Such different styles. And then I realized it was the same with our non-writing personalities: I thought by talking, his talking was the result of thinking. Just before my first computer arrived at my doorstep, Bob Silverberg (first kid on the block) said, "You'll love it – it's the ultimate soft sentence." So I still rip and rend as I go, but the wastebasket stays empty.

After I sold the first two sf-ish stories and saw how easy it was, I thought, youngly and naively, "Hey, I can do this, I can write full time!" and took a six-month leave of absence from my office job. But once it had become a Serious Business, I would act out my writing process by bending down, picking up my right leg with both hands, big sigh, moving it an inch forward and panting, "That's one word," picking up the left leg, moving it an inch, "That's the next word." Also, sweat, blood, and much chewing of food while pacing and smoking of cigarettes while coughing. I sold that product of my pain to *F&SF* but it was awful fluff. At the end of the six months I went back to my full-time office job, relieved and grateful for the steady paycheck and lack of anguish.

I like to sleep so much that I installed a snooze button on my smoke alarm.

I taught my mother how to curse. She was a prudish person, but she admired the way I said "fucking shit," maybe because I had good delivery, and she would occasionally check herself out with "Did I say it right?"

Years and years after Terry died the free review books were still coming in. And other forms of communication, like invitations to speak (it sometimes took a lot of willpower for me not to respond to the sender). The most macabre post-Terry event was when the deceased L. Ron Hubbard sent the deceased Terry a Merry Christmas card.

Robert had a terrible cold with cough and fever and I made him breathe steam and drink hot tea and toddies. A few days later I had the cold and he brought me take-out of all ethnicities and installed two shelves between two other shelves so I'd have more room for the DVDs and he fetched and carried and then fetched some more. I think this is what God meant by division of labor.

I'm a bad strategist and a bad chess player, but for a while I was winning a lot of games due to a sadistically fine-focused perseverance. Pete Graham, impulsive boy that he was, once threw the chessboard out the window, he was so tired of losing. Terry finally stopped playing with me, too – not because I won a lot but because he'd have to tell me when it was mate. I'd doggedly get him cornered – check check check check – until he realized I had him, and *he* had to let *me* know he was dead meat. The humiliation was just too great to be borne. Now I wouldn't remember how the knight hops ("How hop you, fair knight?"). Chess was always a tense game for me, and I'd chainsmoke all the way through. Check, check, check, hack, check, hack hack.

At Old Port Lobster Shack the lobsters get flown in every couple of days, which was enough to convince me that soon we would have to gather a couple of friends and go get messy. But this time it wasn't so easy. I'm familiar with Maine lobster in white-tablecloth restaurants where they bring it to the table partially cracked, at least enough to give you a decent clawhold. At Old Port it's more primitive. You order at the counter, then find yourself a picnic table, tear off a bunch of sheets from a roll of paper towels, scan the lazy susan with its hot sauces, malt vinegar, and yes, mateys, the all-important, nostalgia-laden tiny packets of oyster crackers. It was Robert's first time and I'd promised to teach him how to properly cannibalize the big red beast. Apparently I was a satisfactory role model, because before long he was up to his elbows in squirting juice (and even melted butter – God, he's adaptable) and his face was all smiley. He was playing in the sandbox with me, and I was so proud of him. They had a nice bathroom with enough soap & water and water pressure. We're going back soon.

It was a dark and drunky night at a convention hotel, the wee hours. We were going back to our room, and it was hard for me to walk straight enough to stay on the carpeted strip of the hall -- I kept drifting off the carpet to the left, off the carpet to the right, and I remember mumbling, real loud, "I'm a gutter ball, I'm a gutter ball."

My father died when I was three and my mother & I moved in with my grandparents. Because we didn't have the shelf space (we didn't have any shelves) for The Complete Works of Charles Dickens, originally acquired more to decorate my parents' bookshelf than to edify or entertain, the twenty volumes were given on extended loan to an aunt and uncle. When I was twelve I got turned on to Dickens and made arrangements to bring him back home with me, a bunch at a time. (Maybe by then we had a shelf but maybe not.) I did this via bus and shopping bag, in a few great shleps, several volumes at a time. I remember digging into the first book on the first trip home, and didn't get tired of him till four books later. As with Shakespeare's greatest hits, I read only the usual standards: *David Copperfield, Great Expectations, A Tale of Two Cities* and *Oliver Twist*. It was the best of times. I'm looking at their slightly frayed selves right now: "CLEARTYPE EDITION, THE WORKS OF CHARLES DICKENS, WITH ILLUSTRATIONS. BOOKS, INC., NEW YORK & BOSTON. TYPESET, NICKELTYPED, PRINTED, AND BOUND IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA BY THE COLONIA PRESS, INC., CLINTON, MASS."

In my grandmother's house where I grew up and my mother stayed the same, we had no books at all, because we had no decorative aspirations. I lived in and for my neighborhood library. And the occasional piles of movie magazines and true confession magazines that a neighbor would stack outside her apartment door for whoever would want them. I always always always wanted them. And then there were the stacks of comic books I inherited from my great-aunt's grandkids. We visited only rarely, so the pile had a long time to grow very tall, and my heart would start beating fast and I couldn't wait to get home and fall belly down on the bed in a sea of them.

Oral history: For me Luden's honey were #1, Smith Brothers cherry #2. Maybe I should have saved this for the dramatic section of my autobiography. Terry, by the way, was a Hall's Mentholyptus guy. Robert likes Tic-Tacs, maybe an occasional Mento. Jack was partial to rye bread, and maybe still is.

Like a lot of people like me (nerdy), I spent much of my childhood reading. If there had been such a thing as television then, I'm sure to have been as addicted to it as I am now. I would have grown up not giving a damn that some pundit pronounced himself a "pundint." I wouldn't climb the walls at the sound of "it isn't that big of a

deal." It might have been a good thing, actually.

When Robert & I were thinking of living in a duplex, we'd have wonderful dreams of rooms both separate (office/dens) and in common (the bedroom with wall-length TV, the copy machine room, the latest Euro-style washer & dryer that takes two teaspoons of water to wash a hundred towels), and a whole-floor library (my needs have grown just in the course of putting together this column) .

I'd love to have a real library in my house, a room just for the books, and a big old polished pine table with the Oxford English Dictionary on a stand. I know someone who has one of those, plus lots of walls for hanging lots of art. (But come to think of it, their walls are made of brick, so forget it, because I require white walls – what's a fantasy for if it isn't revoltingly specific?) Another piece of my craving is a cushy-cushioned window-box alcove surrounded by built-in bookshelves. To me the antithesis of such bookish contentment is those sliding-bookcases-on-tracks. They're undeniably efficient, but cold and uninviting. I wouldn't want my books to live in a place like that, and I wouldn't want to spend much time there, either – the most you can say is, "Wow! Look how well it works!"

When I was first learning how to drive I had trouble even with angle parking and it was Pat Ellington who told me "Look at where you want to be, not at where you are." I knew she was right – after all I'd bowled when I was younger – but then I thought, "What would Ram Dass say?"

With exceptions, like Bill Maher's alleged bad timing after 9/11, comedians can get away with speaking the truth because by definition they're not supposed to be taken seriously (even though, obviously, they're often the only ones who should be taken seriously). Like artists – with exceptions when they "go over the line" with turd-painting and displays of unorthodox sexuality the likes of which are not to be seen except in zoos and on our kids' computer screens – comics are *expected* to be outrageous. Also, they're allowed to live because they're our official ambassadors of Democracy. We can point to them and say, "Look – big free speech! Aren't we great, folks?"

Lovely trip to San Diego. Listened to the *Triplets of Belleville* tape in the car, over and over, found a Persian restaurant where the only customers were Middle Eastern cabdrivers and us. The first day at the zoo was hot hot hot and the animals were too dozy to come out & play, so my camera rested up for the next day when the bonobos were frisky and the elephants posed for us. The mommy & baby pandas, on the other hand, deigned to display themselves only when they were sure we hadn't arrived yet or had just left. Uncanny. Of course there's something sad about a zoo no matter how conscientiously thought-out the habitat ("Oh, how clever, that chew-tire placed near the milk pump"). The third night we were there, my foot was hurting, so Robert went out and came back to our room with some amazing Thai food that agreed perfectly with the soft ice cream we'd been scarfing every day. Then onward to Yosemite and lunch at the Ahwahnee and a walk to the spot between the Merced River and Yosemite Falls where we'd made it official a few years before. I sez to him I sez as we're walking there, "We can renew our vowels." And he sez, "and our promise to remain consonant." A nice moment.

I got stung on the tongue a few summers ago. Bit into a hot dog at a picnic and felt a stab of agony you wouldn't believe. An entomologist from UC was part of the crowd that had gathered around this crazy person screaming and hopping, and she picked up the thing I'd managed, with excruciating pain, to find, pluck out and throw away in disgusted panic, and she said, with the quiet confidence befitting her academic standing, "Oh yes, it's a yellow-

*(turn the page for more)*


# HE WAS AN OLD FAN...AND TIRED

## GREGG CALKINS

So went a catch phrase of those halcyon days, the likes of which shall never come again. Nor will the likes of Bob Tucker, who achieved legendary status almost from his inception. He was a fannish giant when I met him at the 1952 Chicon, but then he was already Old by that time, if not yet Tired… that's how 38 seemed to my 17, at least.

One of the things society's younger misfits of those days—society being much more structured than it is today—found enchanting about fandom was the lack of emphasis placed upon age. The fact that a young, shy, pimply-faced teenager could be accepted by fannish "peers" several times his or her age was tremendously attractive as well as excitingly enabling by those who found trouble fitting in even among their own age group. Even then, though, there were Elder Gods.

Science fiction was the common bond, but fandom was the sea of freedom in which we swam. Tucker, although legendary, showed no sign that he believed his age and accomplishments had led him to believe in any sense of superiority, and we loved him for that. From what I've read about him since I drifted out of being actively involved in fandom, he never lost that attitude, although history will record that he achieved far more than most of us.

One of the other semi-issues of my early fannish days was a semi-facetious argument about whether you were a trufan (FIAWOL), a fake-fan (FIJAGH), or—heaven forbid—a huckster. I worked for the Forest Service in those days, in the summers, as a firefighter. Between fires, which was most of the time, we worked on routine campground projects, one of which was routing wooden signs for trails and campgrounds, which turned out to be one of my major non-fire occupations. (The sign hanging out in front of our house today, saying simply "Calkins" in all caps, was made by me for my parents about 55 years ago. It followed with my father when he came to Costa Rica to spend his final years here with us.)

I knew I would be meeting Tucker at the Chicon (along with Rich Elsberry, Shelby Vick, Lee Jacobs, Walt Willis, Lee Hoffman, Harlan Ellison, and a host of fannish giants too numerous to mention since, after all, this is about Bob and I mention them only because he was among

their midst) so I agonized over an appropriate way to pay him tribute. This was before the days of the Tucker Hotel project, so I could not bring him a brick. But what *could* I do that would be different and amusing?

Aha, I would rout a sign for him. But, saying what? Of course…I would make him a "little gem-dandy huckster badge" which he could hang around his neck while he was engaged in nefarious mercenary pursuits, clearly identifying him as such. Thus the Forest Service unknowingly provided a rectangular hunk of pine, preserved in linseed oil and umber (my folks' sign successfully endured over five decades out in the weather, including several of them in the Mojave Desert's unforgiving climate), gilded with silver paint on the badge, plus three feet of chain and the eyebolts necessary for hanging it around his neck, plus my time. Your tax dollars at work, paying recognition to Bob Tucker.

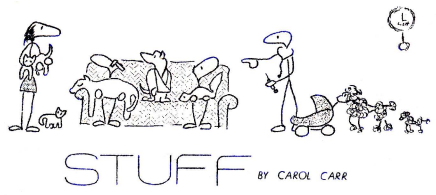
Although it was tremendously gratifying for socially-challenged teens like myself to be accepted as equals by the likes of Bob, the truth is that deep down we knew that we were not. I spent a lot of time worrying about how he would take the joke, what he would think, and I'm not quite sure that I know even to this day. He accepted it with characteristic good humor, even if I thought I detected some puzzlement, and the expression on his face says it all.

Ah, Bob, I miss you. To paraphrase Donne, even if a clod be washed away by the sea, fandom is the less, as well as if a promontory were.

How much the worse, then, that we have lost a promontory.

But not to memory. Hoy Ping Pong lives on, the zombie only dozes so long as we, who remain, remember. Forgetting Tucker is not something we will do. An old fan he might have been but he never tired. We can only hope to succeed by following his example.

—Gregg Calkins

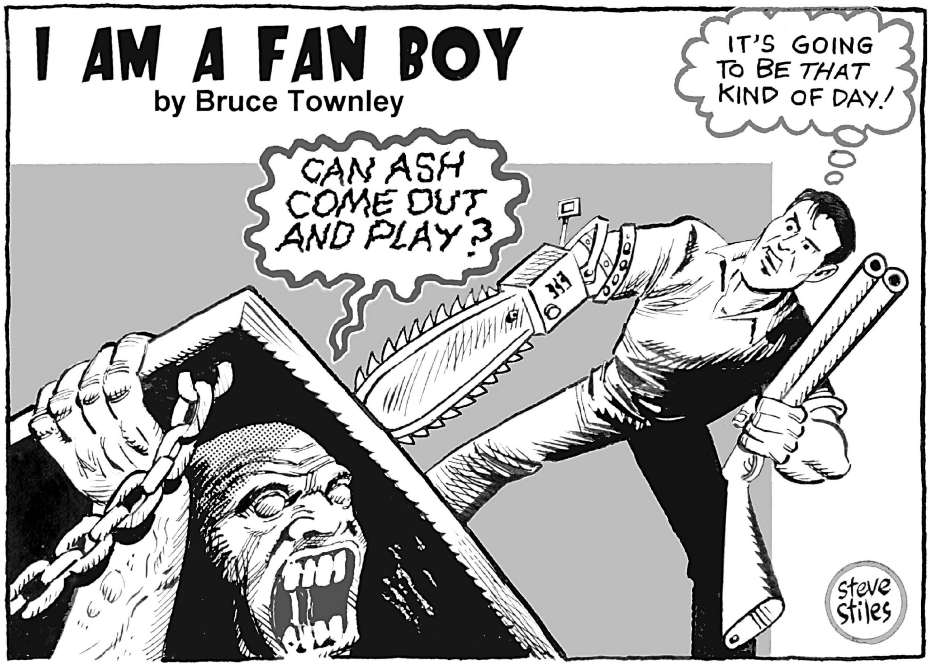



jacket, definitely a yellowjacket." We drove straightaway to a drugstore, where we got some Benadryl and figured if it was only my tongue that swelled I'd be ok. So we carried on with our plan to see a movie and the adolescent behind the counter gave me a paper cup full of ice. About three hours later I noticed it was just a *little* less painful, and by the Christmas holidays I'd stopped screaming and hopping completely. One of *the* worst experiences of my life. Motto: look before you chomp something that was sitting on a grill in the great outdoors. Later I read somewhere that yellowjackets like meat. More specifically, tongue I guess.

Most of the time I think we're always preaching to the choir, lifting each other's spirits and reinforcing our beliefs while Yeats's "center" is trying desperately to hold. But there are times I think maybe I'll be part of a sea change that touches the (blech) hearts & minds of the few who are the fringes of rationality and still have enough mind to change.

My first crush was Morton Fink. He was James Dean before there was a James Dean. Very smart, mumbled and read comic books or sketched God knows what behind his open geography book, straddled minimalism and rudeness. I loved him from afar (three seats back, on the diagonal), stared at him sneaky-wise. Wrote a poem to him: "Thou art creative I do think / And though I know your art my stink, / 'Tis in my heart you've cut a chink, / Fink FinkFink Fink." I swear to God.

—Carol Carr




Finally. There he was. I could see him through the frosted glass set into the lobby's doors. He was the big man, with the even bigger chin, sitting at a folding table, surrounded by his own books. Affectionate fans and a few flunkies were also clustered about. My objective was in sight. I hefted my own copies of the big guy's books, knowing that soon, oh so soon, he would scrawl in them with a black Sharpie marker a cheery, personalized greeting. It shouldn't be so hard for him. We, after all, shared the same first name.

I'd just seen a flick that Bruce Campbell was the writer/co-producer/director/star of, *The Man With the Screaming Brain*. Bruce describes it this way: "If I were pitching it in Hollywood, I'd say it's *The Out-of-Towners* with a brain transplant." It's an apt thumbnail sketch even though it kind of leaves out the break-dancing robot, one of the movie's love interests.

Now the clock was creeping towards 11 p.m. and I'd been standing in line to see the big guy for almost two hours, all told. It was a nice night and things seemed to be progressing, however slowly. Even so, just what the heck was I doing there?

Now I know why.

I am a fan boy.

When I got an e-mail from the Balboa Theater about this special showing, I knew I had to go. I'd already missed Campbell when he was in town for *Bubba Ho-Tep*. The Balboa is out in San Francisco's Richmond District, way west, near the Pacific Ocean, the first part of town to be blanketed when the fog rolls in at night. Campbell was flogging his new novel, *Make Love the Bruce Campbell Way*, the main character of which is named "Bruce Campbell." I got it on my lunch hour to complement my copy of Campbell's hilarious autobiography, *If Chins Could Kill: Confessions of a B Movie Actor*.

*Brain* is an unabashedly low budget sci-fi, horror, action, comedy flick shot in Sofia, Bulgaria. Campbell's most cherished memory of the place, according to his comical warm-up before the show, was of

the roving packs of ravenous wild dogs. A lot of footage in *Brain* involves Campbell chasing a murderous Gypsy woman with a crazy commitment compulsion through the crumbling infrastructure of the post-Communist city. Part of this was on a bright-pink, toy-like moped that explodes impressively an instant after it topples over. There's the business with brain-transplants involving the aforementioned robot, Campbell's character and an ex-KGB agent turned taxi driver. Stacy Keach is the mad scientist and Ted Raimi gags it up as his assistant/body snatcher/comic relief.

It's a work that is gleefully unencumbered by plot or pretension and yet has respectable narrative drive. It's also a lot of fun. Think it's supposed to show up on the Sci-Fi Channel sometime later this year.

I first encountered Mr. Campbell on an episode of *the Incredibly Strange Film Show* broadcast on the A&E cable channel. This program covered the work of all the usual pyschotronic suspects, including the angora adoring Edward D. Wood, Jr., Tsui Hark, John Waters, and the corpse-grinding Ted V. Mikels, as well as masked Mexican wrestlers like El Santo and Blue Demon. One episode featured an interview with a rather googly-eyed fellow with mussed up hair talking about how he'd convinced a handful of dentists to underwrite his flick about the accidental unleashing of ghoulish hellspawn at a remote country cabin. If I saw this guy on a cross-town bus I'd be a mite reluctant to take the empty seat next to him. This was, of course, director Sam Raimi, who now owns and operates the money-spinning Spiderman franchise. The movie the dentists invested in was the innovative horror flick, *Evil Dead*.

Later in the same program they showed a guy equipped with the most amazing wide-angle chin. Campbell (for it was him) explained that the main (or possibly only) reason he was stuck in front of the camera by Raimi was that he was better looking than the others and having him around might increase the production staff's chances with the ladies. This is how acting careers are launched, apparently.

The clips from *Evil Dead* shown on the A&E program caught my eye. They really grab you. On another episode of *The Incredibly Strange Film Show*, this time devoted to Ed Wood, Jr., one of those interviewed pointed out that one of the marks of unique film makers is that if you see only a single frame from one of their films you'll know *immediately* it's by them. Their fingerprints are on every shot. Show them a still with Tor Johnson and Vampira roving around a slapdash graveyard and fans know it's Wood who did it.

*Evil Dead* had the stamp of an auteur from the get-go. Sam Raimi is rather more technically accomplished than Mr. Wood ever was, but he has also relied on a handful of friends to make his films. Campbell and Raimi first hooked up with each other in high school. Raimi was even then making films shot on Super 8 stock. They were Three Stooges homages/pastiches, mainly. There's one from this period with the alluring title *Bogus Monkey Pignut Swindle* that Campbell mentions all too briefly in *Chins*. Pignut?

Making these short films also gave Raimi a jump-start on getting into the movie biz. A do-it-yourself work ethic prevailed during the making of the first two *Evil Dead* movies. Need specialized equipment to get your own unique look? Build your own "Shaky-Cam" from two by fours and duct tape for those eerie, ground-hugging shots that embodied the approaching, resurrected evil, accidentally let loose. You don't *have* to go to Hollywood; just make your flick somewhere else, if need be.

Campbell in *Chins* displays little patience with the airs actors can adopt. Doubt that method acting would have been much help for the *Evil Dead* flicks. So Campbell played his character, Ash, directly, as a regular guy (maybe even sub-regular) who finds himself dumped into horrific circumstances. His fans get to vicariously experience Ash's thrills and chills. Campbell himself comes across as a working stiff who has gotten himself into an interesting career by doing something he gets a kick out of. Campbell as the chain-saw slinging Ash really carries the movies, too. Good physical presence combined with a natural comic talent.

Was tickled by the unexpected infusion of slapstick comedy into *Evil Dead*, which enhanced what otherwise would have been just another teens menaced by zombies out in the woods gorefest. *Evil Dead II: Dead by Dawn* is a partial remake of *ED* with more money. Saw a double feature of *ED II* and *Army of Darkness* (the third and, most likely, final of the *Dead* flicks, as Campbell seems doomed to endlessly repeat to his devoted fans, the Deadites). In *Army* Ash gets deposited in a storybook (in the sense that *Crypt of Terror* is a "storybook") medieval England by a timewarp that he bone-headedly opened at the end of *ED II.* I caught this showing at the Strand on Market Street. This run-down theater was just the spot for viewing such gruesome yet goofy goings-on. *Army* ups the antic quotient. Certain passages have the feel of a live-action Warner Brothers cartoon. With soul-eating ghouls to boot.

With these films the horror is a part of the stew, an ingredient adding its own heart-racing zing. Just like the Three Stooges-like clowning.

Thing about zombie flicks is, I guess, that given the shambling pace of the menace, the film maker has some time for, of all things, character development. The desperate, disparate people that hole up in that farm house in Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* are all individuals, some of who the viewer cares about (and hopes they're the ones that survive). Same deal with Shaun and his mates in *Shaun of the Dead*. As I said, fans continue to bug Campbell about the next *Evil Dead* flick. They must like spending time with Ash. Hail to the king, baby, indeed.

For an actor, Campbell strikes me as an articulate, up-front kind of guy. In fact with Campbell's work I do something I don't usually do with actors. I'll watch something simply because he's in it. You should try it, too. There's a reward. He has improved my enjoyment of every cheesy movie I've ever seen him in. He's a guy from Michigan, not some Hollywood hack, doing his level best at his chosen line of work. You can take his word for it when he says: "I urge fans to do what they damn well please, but they can know that my goal is never to write beneath them, and that entertaining them is my number onepriority."

Plus, I like seeing a regular guy named Bruce get ahead.

So back to the Balboa and *The Man with the Screaming Brain*. Spent some time lined up outside the theater hoping to get my books signed and see Bruce (gotta love that first name) before the 7 p.m. show. When the line had only moved about twenty feet forward and I was still way around the corner from the theater, I finally caved in and went in to get my seat at about 6:45. Was dismayed to find that I had to surrender my hand-numbered, customized *Screaming Brain* ticket (with an inset graphic of a brain shooting out lightning bolts) to the guy outside the screening room. Had come by the theater a week or so earlier to get the ticket because I knew the show would sell out. Had gotten kind of attached to it in the meantime.

Went in and found that open seats were rapidly dwindling. First two places I tried had shaven-skulled Deadites sitting at the aisle-end of a row, claiming that the next fifteen or twenty seats were all theirs, being saved for their "friends." Huh! Got a great spot anyway just close enough to the screen, next to an emergency exit for which they'd cleared an open space so there was plenty of leg room.

Given Bruce's fan base, the theater's management apparently thought it was a good idea to play *really loud* heavy metal "songs" while we were waiting for the show. Eventually the manager came out and rather unnecessarily introduced

Campbell. Bruce clearly enjoyed himself interacting with the full house packed with Goth/Punk/ Heavy Metal types. He was in his element.

After the show Campbell came out again to answer questions from the audience, again displaying his characteristic wit and verve. He was flummoxed for only a moment when another fan boy asked why they'd used a Resusci-Annie CPR training manikin to make the break-dancing robot. Bruce had never heard of this thing. When the other fan boy gave him a halting explanation of what he was talking about, Campbell immediately demanded a show of hands to see who else in the audience knew what the guy was talking about. I sheepishly put my own fan boy paw up. I'd last seen this spooky, not-quite-human replica when they'd converted one into a ventriloquist's dummy for a skit on the *Mystery Science Theater 3000* show. Bruce curled his lip in humorous disgust at this display of rampant fan-boy-ism. The crowd ate it up.

Soon, almost too soon, the Q&A was over. I scooted out the side door to snag a good spot in the line for Campbell's autographs. A little while after I got there, I was asked by others lining up where they should stand. "Do we go by the numbers on the red tickets?" Since I was older than most of them I was approached as an authority figure, a role I'm clearly unsuited for. I just kind of shrugged and said I didn't know what they were talking about.

At length an official-type woman arrived and sorted out two lines, one ordered by those red ticket numbers and the other, later to go in line, for rabble like me who'd never seen a red ticket in their entire life. People settled in to wait once things had been arranged.

The skinny punky looking kid in front of me wouldn't stop twitching. Just another thing to grind my teeth over while I worried if they'd shoo me away because I'd bought my books elsewhere.

Finally got in the front door and up to the folding table itself. Fan Boy heaven.

Bruce was spending some quality time with fans signing their books, posters or DVDs or whatever. *His* people, as it were. He engaged all of them in some friendly conversation. He also posed for photos. This meant the line moved kind of slow but Campbell appeared committed to sharing himself with one and all. Everybody exited with a pleased smirk on their mugs.

His assistant stuck post-it notes in my books next to the spot where Bruce was supposed to sign. She wrote my first name on them which I guess Campbell should already be pretty familiar with. Then I stepped up and sat down next to Bruce.

I never know what to do in these encounters, these book signings. Sometimes, it seems, the author isn't really sure either. Usually I just mumble how much I like their stuff and leave it at that while the writer just kind of gives me a blank look. Sheesh. I guess it's a little like going to see the department store Santa Claus when I was younger.

Campbell tried a couple of conversational gambits to establish contact. He ended up asking me where I was from originally and I said "New Jersey". He told me that he'd just learned a number of "fun facts" (his actual phrase) while getting ready for a presentation at Rutgers University, in Camden. Among other things, New Jersey is the most densely populated state, the most heavily industrialized (and, none too surprisingly, one of the most polluted) and has the highest number of car thefts per capita. Told him that made me glad I'd moved away. It sounds weird but he really seemed to make an effort to set me at my ease and be responsive. I then thanked him for all the fine entertainment he'd provided over the years and he said that he hoped that there would continue to be many more. We shook hands on that. It was worth the wait and all the frustrations of the day just fell away.

Went out into the foggy night beaming a satisfied fan boy's grin.

—Bruce Townley


Climbing behind the wheel of my car had become a bore. After living our entire lives on the East Coast, my wife and I had begun to take the passing landscape for granted. Instead of the awed pleasure once gained from admiring a collapsed barn's weathered timbers and precarious geometry, the sight became nothing more than a mileage marker for our travels. "Only another hour," Lynn would remark as a familiar farm house would appear off to our right. The often-observed statue of an Amish couple waving at traffic from the parking lot of a roadside motel had turned into just another quaint artifact that had once again avoided the wrecking ball of progress. "Nearly there now," she'd say.

In recent years our infrequent travels had become trips of necessity. A visit to Lynn's mother in Lynchburg no longer held the thrill of rolling hills and Southern horse farms. A drive to Richmond for a tattoo convention was now a race to get there before the hotel bar became overcrowded. The excitement and adventure of a road trip had become nothing more than hours of tedium and repetition, followed by the impending specter of the return trip's sameness in reverse.

It wasn't always that way. I used to love the idea of being On The Road. In the thirty years I lived in Northern Virginia, I had many outstanding vehicular adventures—often riding shotgun beside Ted White, one of the great automobile travelers of my acquaintance. Together we drove up and down the Atlantic Coast on our way to one convention or another; every stretch of highway became a new gateway to adventure and enlightenment. Trips to

exotic places like Cincinnati and Phoenix offered us the opportunity to follow in the tire tracks of our traveling heroes, like the Merry Pranksters and Dr. Thompson, while still being able to bask in the glorious auras of Bob Tucker, Terry Carr and even (*gasp*) Harlan Ellison.

Eventually time and money put an end to most of my long-distance adventures. Getting in the car came to mean hours of traffic jams. The only sights to be seen were the fleeting glimpses of SUVs being driven by housewives and businessmen who thought being behind the wheel of their giant vehicles gave them the ability to multitask their way to their destinations. Like hyperactive Hindu deities, they talked on their phones, ate their lunches, read their newspapers, applied their makeup, text messaged their secretaries, watched the latest DVDs, shaved their faces, and picked their noses with godlike serenity. Unfortunately, they drove like assholes. And before long, sitting behind the wheel of my little Toyota Tercel became a dreaded chore.

Occasionally, I will admit, there were times when hitting the road was still fun. A few years ago, Lynn and I decided to go to the Corflu being held in Madison, Wisconsin, and we decided to drive. Friends and coworkers expressed skepticism about our plan, but in the end it was worth every minute on the highway. Unlike the day-to-day stop and start of local driving, a trip like that was a chance to actually *enjoy* being behind the wheel of a car, a chance to put your vehicle and your mind In The Zone and travel until the sun goes down. It was a chance to find a spot on the road, a spot on your speedometer, a spot on the horizon, and let the world fly by your window without worrying about deadlines or domestic responsibilities.

That was the last road trip we made for a long time. Those deadlines and domestic responsibilities we'd so happily left behind us had done everything in their power to make sure that we didn't abandon them again for a long, long time. Finally, we'd had enough and packed up all our belongings and snuck away in the dead of night, leaving Virginia—and that nasty Texan across the river —behind us forever. We brought our book collection, our two cats, and a whole lot of fanzines to the beautiful Pacific Northwest—coming as far west as we could come without falling into the Pacific Ocean. We came to Portland, Oregon, to be exact.

Once we moved to Portland, in the spring of 2005, everything changed and we decided to take advantage of our new location and, once again, get back on the road. Neither of us had spent much time on the left side of the country and there was so much to see, so many new places to go. Our first trip was up to Seattle. While only three hours away, it was an exciting hint of what we had in store for us. That trip whetted our appetites like starving children at a candy store window. The mountains, the rivers, the forests, the skies, the cooling towers—each like some kind of new confection that we'd only glimpsed in the pages of a catalog. "Please, sir," we asked the candy man. "We'd like two Mount Rainiers and a whole box of Mount St. Helens, please."

"Yes, and make 'em to go."

We began planning trips all over, to the Oregon coast, the Columbia River Gorge, Crater Lake, and then, of course, California. Looking at the map I could feel the nervous energy welling up inside of me. I wanted to drive the legendary coast line. I wanted to see Big Sur and the giant redwoods. I wanted to see the mountains and the desert. It had been thirty years since I'd driven across the Golden Gate Bridge or seen Coit Tower. I wanted to stand with my feet in Shirley Temple's footprints at the Chinese Theatre and ignore pushy Scientologists as I wandered the Walk of Fame. I wanted to stand at dusk in the Mission District on a July evening and talk about how fucking cold it was. But mostly I wanted to see friends, some of whom I hadn't seen in many years. I wanted to sit on their sofas and drink their beer and smoke their dope and play with their children. I wanted to fart in their hot tubs and look through their medicine cabinets. I wanted to see who had lost their hair and who had lost their minds.

Our first opportunity finally came in December 2005 when it was decided that we would join a small group of our friends (also from Virginia) for a New Year's Eve celebration. Our ultimate destination was the home of our old friends Margo and Marek Minecki in Long Beach. Margo and Marek had migrated to Southern California, after living for more than a decade in Northern Virginia. In 1984, Marek had hired me to be his Assistant Art Director on a new Washington, DC weekly and Margo was working in an office with Lynn. Eventually we introduced them to each other and the rest is, as they say, history. (They're still together after twenty-two years and have two wonderful daughters.) Lynn had visited them a few years earlier and Margo and their girls had stayed us in Arlington in 2004, but Marek was never able to get away. Our arrival in Long Beach for New Year's would mark the first time I'd seen Marek since they'd packed up their car and moved away twelve years ago.

The first thing I did was to arrange to get a rental car for the trip. I'd never really considered using my Tercel for the drive from Portland down to the Land of Arnold. I knew better than that. The Tercel was in dire need of serious mechanical attention and it would never have made it in one piece. Instead, I had reserved a gigantic Monte Carlo for our drive south and then made arrangements to drop off the Toyota at my mechanic for a week in auto rehab. I figured a little TLC— along with a new catalytic converter—would be just what it needed and would guarantee a clean piss test when the car went through the tough Oregon emissions inspection that was awaiting my return.

I was determined to ride in luxury. The rental car had everything: satellite radio, a CD player, cruise control, and even heated seats. Comparing this car to my functional little runabout would be like comparing fine French champagne with urine from a sickly camel. Sure, you can drink it if you have to, but one is a lot harder to swallow than the other. After five minutes behind the wheel of the Monte Carlo, I could barely remember what my Toyota looked like.

On the Thursday morning after Christmas, we loaded up Ol' Monte and headed south on Route 5 towards our first stopover in Walnut Creek, at the home of Ellen and Joe Donohue—another transplanted couple from Virginia, and Margo and Marek's best friends. From there we'd head out the next morning for the Los Angeles basin. Mapquest had hinted that the trip would take about ten and a half hours, though others had suggested it would be closer to eleven hours. Monte got us door to door in just nine and a half hours.

We were unbelievably lucky. We had dry pavement and sunshine for almost the whole trip, with only a hint of sprinkles in the last hour or so. The scenery in Oregon was quite gorgeous and struck me as being almost prehistoric. We drove through many twisty mountain passes decorated with odd rock formations, towering pine trees, and the occasional waterfall. Each was a little more beautiful than the one before it. Lynn was busily snapping photos through the windshield in an attempt to capture it all on film before it sped by. We passed by exits for little pioneer towns with charmingly descriptive names like Rogue River, Canyonville, Cave Junction, and Red Bluff, though the towns themselves were rarely visible from the road.

Sometimes it was hard for me to take it all in. The tighter the mountain turns became, the more I had to concentrate on the road ahead of me. At times I was so focused on the job of driving I didn't even notice the scenery. At one point, after we'd crossed into California, I was navigating a

particularly serpentine bit of highway when Lynn turned to me and said, "If you can, you really should look to your left for a second." I hesitated to take my eyes off the road even briefly, but took a beat and quickly turned my head to the left and then, just as quickly, turned it back to the road..

What had greeted my momentary glimpse was a scenic view of Shasta Lake—a high altitude spot of prehistoric water and red clay and monster pines that was unlike anything I've ever seen. It was so perfect and so primal and so unspoiled and, in a moment, it was gone—lost behind the smaller, less impressive trees that lined the highway. It had disappeared from my view and vanished back into the lens of some unknown *National Geographic* photographer's camera.

But it still lingers like a perfect mental postcard. It was so bright in the mountain sunlight. The water was mirror still and the trees seemed impossibly large. The scale of everything we saw on this part of our trip was so unlike the scenery I was used to on the East Coast. Everything had been super-sized. Everything was grander. These were landscapes painted by Thomas Moran and photographed by Ansel Adams, not the gentle Midwestern visions of Grant Wood or Andrew Wyeth.

Our perfect day's drive ended a little before 7:00 p.m., as we pulled up in front of Ellen and Joe's house in Walnut Creek, with its manicured lawn and holiday lights strung along the roof. By 8:00 p.m., we were enjoying homemade lasagna and passing out delinquent Christmas presents. A couple of hours and a couple of bottles of wine later I took a Xanax and called it a night—we had at least another six hours of travel ahead of us the next day and I had promised to share the driving. The weatherman had promised rain.

We were out of the house and on the road by about 9:00 the next morning. We took Joe's Infiniti for the trip to Long Beach, leaving Ol' Monte parked in their driveway. Once again we got lucky with the weather. Despite dire predictions and actual reports of flooding all around us, our drive towards Los Angeles was mostly a dry one. Route 5 South dissected the San Joaquin Valley and cut through the knobby landscape like it was drawn with a ruler—razor-straight from horizon to horizon. The road was bordered on both sides of the pavement by endless rolling hills that drew grassy silhouettes of cartoonish figures against the horizon. Despite that, the landscape was strangely barren and uninhabited—other than the occasional cow grazing alone on an impossibly sloping hillside.

After a while the terrain flattened out and the pastures were replaced by mile after mile of industrial farmland. Giant concrete irrigation gutters ran parallel to the highway, filled to the brim with runoff from the recent rains. The current was strong and seemed to be trying to keep pace with the passing traffic. Citrus groves and nut orchards spotted the land like a bad hair transplant. Row after row of pampered and pruned trees seemed to be waiting for something to happen—anticipating the beginning of a new cycle of growth. Large signs promised that the rows of barren trees would one day yield boxes full of tasty oranges, lemons, and grapefruits that could be used to keep the world's pirates scurvy-free for yet another year.

I drove the middle two and a half hours of the trip, giving Joe a break before letting him take us through L.A.'s legendary freeways. I drove us through a section of road in the Tehachapi Mountains known as the Grapevine, where the highway got a lot curvier and the bluffs and ridges become more prominent. By the time we hit the outskirts of the Los Angeles Freeway, the landscape had changed again into barren slopes and hillsides. The land of endless straight roads and irrigation canals was gone and in their place was a knot of highway that seems to circle around L.A. without ever quite reaching its destination. I was not the least bit disappointed to give the driver's seat back to Joe for the final leg of our trip to Long Beach.

The last hour and a half of our drive involved a lot of stopping and starting, and swerving and stopping, and then swerving some more—with just a hint of lane changing thrown in for variety. We finally pulled up to the Mineckis' house a little before 4:00 on Friday afternoon. We were glad to be standing in one spot. Lynn and I had spent almost seventeen hours on the road to Long Beach and we were determined to stay put until Monday. As we unloaded our bags from the trunk it started to rain. And it didn't stop for the rest of our visit.

Inside their house we found Margo, her two daughters Tasia and Rachel, their two cats, and Puck, one of their two dogs. Their other dog, Eddie, was nowhere to be found. He had disappeared a day or two earlier and was feared to be gone for good. Not long after our arrival, Marek got home from work and we began to celebrate our reunion in earnest—which is pretty much all we did for the next three days and nights. Periodic trips to the hot tub and frequent games of pool took place on the covered patio, where the tin roof protected us from the rain. Inside it was food, drink, and loud music. Another couple, Gloria and Larry Condelli from suburban Maryland—in town to visit his ailing mother —joined us for our middle-aged festivities. They brought their daughter Carmen along with them to keep Margo and Marek's daughter Rachel occupied while the old folks made fools of themselves.

It was a very natural reunion. We are a group of people who, despite our varied professions and backgrounds, have been effortlessly comfortable with each other for more than twenty years. Once we were together again we immediately fell into our mutual group mind and found ourselves discussing everything from politics to music and back to politics again. The recent death of Marek's mother in Poland, a few days before our arrival, made families a topic of much discussion as well. We all had our war stories to tell and everybody seemed glad that the passing years had *finally* given us a bunch of new tales to tell.

Oh, and on Saturday afternoon Eddie came home, too—which just added to our many reasons to celebrate. Things were sipped, smoked, and swallowed. Later, it was agreed that we hadn't been setting a very good example for the youngsters, but by then it was too late to change our behavior. To be honest, I think the kids were quite amused by our silliness. Or, at the very least, they were used to it.

By Sunday, things had slowed down to a crawl. The Condellis caught a plane back to the DC area in the morning and later that night Marek caught a flight to Poland for his mother's funeral. His absence put a bit of a damper on our final evening in Long Beach, but we mustered on anyway. We knew he would have wanted it that way. More wine was consumed and endless piles of dishes were washed until I suspected that our hosts had been hoarding them in anticipation of our visit.

The next morning we hit the road again. The intervening weekend had been riddled with news stories about the continuous rain that had accompanied us to Southern California. There had been flooding in Napa and we saw scenes of folks being rescued from their swamped trailers near San Jose. Trees were down, power was out, and the aqueducts were running at capacity. Surely this shitty weather would be over soon. As we pulled away from the curb to start our drive home the skies opened up and it poured.

The freeways were empty—thanks to the rain and the holiday—and, despite the deluge, we actually made better time getting out of the Los Angeles area than we had on our arrival. The hillsides along the freeways were covered in a crazy quilt of drop cloths and tarps, each hoping to protect a small patch of fragile soil beneath the precariously balanced homes that stuck out of the canyon cliffs. I imagined the

houses being inhabited by aging rock stars and out of work actors who were clinging to the remnants of their lives the way their houses clung to the vertical landscape.

Once we got north of the Grapevine, the weather started to clear up. As the sun came out, we switched drivers for a couple of hours, giving Joe a much needed break. At one point, after we'd gotten back into the land of corporate farms, we came across a huge commercial cattle operation called the Harris Ranch. It must have been round-up time because there were literally thousands of head of cattle in the fields and corrals surrounding the ranch's enormous staging area. The cows were jammed together in the pasture like they were attending some kind of all-bovine rock festival. Had I not been driving at the time, I felt sure that I would have been able to catch a glimpse of the stage and the mosh pit. (Have you ever considered what a cow would look like as it crowd surfed—udder first, naturally—towards an inevitable stage dive?) I suggested that perhaps the headliner was somebody like the MOOdy Blues, but got no response from my passengers.

Interestingly, a short distance up the road from the ranch was the biggest Safeway warehouse complex in the West, covering acres of land with white industrial buildings. According to Joe, it supplies the entire California chain of stores and beyond. From a distance it looked more like a Hollywood studio than a slaughterhouse.

We stopped for gas and switched drivers again just in time for the rain's reappearance. I was secretly glad that Joe had ended up with the wet weather driving. I was feeling the effects of three nights on a futon bed and my back was not too happy about it, so I just sat back and offered moral support and occasionally shouted things like, "Oh, look, a horsey," and "Gee, should people be living that close to a power plant?" Every once in a while Lynn would hand me a sandwich just to shut me up.

For the rest of the trip the rain was constant and exhausting. Grey sheets of water sprayed us from passing trucks as they jockeyed for position in the traffic flow. Despite the many signs suggesting that slow traffic keep right, few seemed to think they were being slow—even with fifteen cars behind them in the left lane—and the remaining miles back to Walnut Creek were tedious and muted, like the sky outside our car.

We arrived back at Casa Donohue about 5:00 p.m. on Monday. Unloading the car took quite a bit longer than it had on previous occasions. Our luggage seemed so much heavier than it had that morning, and I pondered the possibility that one of Margo's dogs might have fallen asleep in my dufflebag and become an unwitting canine stowaway. But no puppies were found and the bulky baggage remains an unsolved mystery to this day. I'm certain that our total exhaustion had nothing to do with it.…

We rounded out the evening with leftover lasagna and a bout of domestic zombie-ism, watching a new episode of *Medium* before collapsing into bed for a bit of the ol' Dead To The World. It felt good—like unconsciousness should.

The next morning, we ended up leaving for home a little later than planned. My hope to be on the road by the crack of stupid had slipped to about 9:30, due to my unflagging desire to stand in the shower just a few goddamned minutes longer and my pathological need for hot coffee. But finally, we headed north. I was happy to see that the previous evening's optimistic forecast was trying to come true. The rain had let up some time before we'd left the house and I had high hopes for a repeat performance of the previous week's nine and a half hour drive.

Silly old me.

The first hour or two of our trip home was pretty uneventful. The rain held off for a while and when it did start it was light and intermittent. We stopped after a couple hours for gas and a visit to the local Subway sandwich shop, but I noticed that the rain was coming down harder when we got back on the highway. The weather report that morning had said that the worst of the storms were over and what remained was headed south, towards Los Angeles—unfortunately, somebody forgot to tell the sky. It grew progressively darker as we went north and the rain came down with unflagging determination.

I tried not to let it get me down. The drive down to California had been so pleasant that I had hoped for more of the same on our trip home, but I decided not to let a little water slow me down. I just leaned back in Ol' Monte's big driver's seat, hit the lumbar heater, and asked Lynn to pass me another cup of coffee. As we entered the Shasta National Forest we primed ourselves for another glimpse of the spectacular Lake Shasta. Lynn had hoped to get a few more windshield photos and we both attentively watched the windows for signs of the Big View.

Finally the lake became visible through the trees to our right. It was majestic; especially now that it was covered in a fresh blanket of snow. "Isn't that beautiful?" Lynn sighed. "Isn't that *snow*?" I answered.

The lake passed quickly from view—or else we had suddenly lost interest in it – and the landscape all around us began to turn white. The rain had changed to slush on my windshield and my wiper blades had begun accumulating an icy crust. As we reached the higher elevations of Mount Shasta, there was already a couple of inches of snow on the ground and the road itself was doing its best to catch up. By the time we hit 4,500 feet the traffic had slowed to about 45 mph and consolidated down to one lane, with a couple of big semi-trucks leading the pack.

Having grown up and learned to drive in snow country, I wasn't intimidated by the frigid conditions around us, but I was more than a little concerned about some of the other cars behind us. The snow seemed to be coming down harder than ever at this point, but it was rather difficult to judge exactly what was going on once we were swallowed up by the bank of low clouds that clung to the mountain pass like whipped cream on a Tijuana Brass album cover. Every once in a while, some he-man in an SUV would tear past us in the unplowed left lane; leaving behind an arc of slush and snow in his wake. Lynn marveled how even in a blinding snowstorm some guys have just *got* to wave their tiny penises at the rest of us.

After about twenty minutes of driving blind, I noticed that we'd begun our descent out of the Shastas and that the surrounding hillsides were slowly showing signs of greenery. The temperature outside rose into the low 40s and the slush on my windshield turned back into rain. My blood pressure began to return to "normal" after a while and I found that I didn't really mind the dreary skies and the drizzle nearly as much as I had before we'd found ourselves trapped in a goddamned Weather Channel commercial. What a relief it was all over.

Before long we reached the vicinity of Yreka, CA—the last town before the Oregon border—where we encountered a large message sign in the median strip that seemed to be flashing some kind of warning. "HHHHH ###444NS IN OREGON," it said. "I think they're trying to tell us something," I told Lynn. "Maybe they're just thanking us for visiting Sunny California?" she suggested. Somehow, I had my doubts.

Soon our questions were answered. As we approached the Oregon border another sign—this one much more legible than its predecessor—announced to all drivers heading north that "CHAINS ARE REQUIRED IN OREGON," and up ahead I spied a long line of cars and trucks being directed to the side of the road. Nothing was moving forward. Intermingled with the stopped vehicles along the road, a number of pick-up trucks displayed signs that offered to "Put On Your Chains for Only 20 Bucks" and it appeared that a lot of

people were taking them up on it. I considered my options—none and none— and immediately pulled over to the shoulder of the road to investigate.

"What happens if you don't have chains?" I asked a nearby driver. "Go back to Yreka, I guess," he shrugged. "Maybe you can buy a set of chains back there." I didn't relish having to backtrack on a possibly futile quest for tire chains and gave the other driver my most pitiful look. "The car rental agent told me I'd be fine as long as I had snow tires," I told him. He just smiled and said, "He lied."


Next I approached one of several yellow-slickered workmen who had just finished putting a set of chains on a nearby car. "What do I do if I don't have any chains?" I asked him. "The car rental guy said all I needed was snow tires," I blurted. "Yeah, they always say that," he replied with a small smile. His ruddy complexion was showing signs of prolonged exposure to the weather and despite the pouring rain and the general chaos, he seemed quite calm. I guessed that he'd done this before.

"Well," he said, "we aren't supposed to sell chains out here. We're just supposed to take 'em out of your trunk and put 'em on and that's it. But since you don't have any chains for your car, I guess I might be able to help you out." I was delighted at the prospect. "What I can do," he told me, "is *give* you a set of chains for your car, but then I'll have to charge you $75 to put them on."

My feet were already wet and my patience was wearing thin. I still had at least five hours of driving ahead of me, and I sure as hell didn't want to return to Yreka, so I smiled at my yellow-suited hero and told him to go ahead. A few minutes later, he returned from his truck with a brand new set of tire chains and started to install them.

"If those cops over there ask you any questions," he said, motioning to a couple of nearby CHPs officers, "tell them that you had your own chains, but that they wouldn't fit your rental car, so you swapped them out for a bigger pair." I agreed immediately, but noticed as I said the words that the officers had already pulled away from our part of the road and were headed towards a string of parked trucks. In surprisingly short order, our $75 chains had been installed and I eased Ol' Monte back out onto the snow-dusted highway.

"I can't believe we had to pay $75 just to get back into Oregon," Lynn sputtered. "I'll bet it's some kind of conspiracy." "It could have been worse," I told her. "We could have been forced to go back twenty miles in search of snow chains and ended up having to spend the night in some wilderness motel." But she wasn't impressed by my logic. "Okay," I said, exasperated, "Next time we could try making the trip in a covered wagon pulled by a couple of oxen and they'll find our bones in some ravine come springtime." That shut her up. If there's anything my wife hates it's having her bones found in a ravine.

Driving on chains is a slow process. Rarely did our single-file line of trucks and cars make it much above 35 mph. The more snow that fell on the road, the less noise the chains made as we rattled our way up the highway. At the zenith of our climb over the Siskiyou Mountains there was at least six inches of fresh snow on the ground. The southern sides of the thick forest of trees were frosted with blown snow, looking like the work of a one-armed Jack Frost—the north sides still stubbornly green. It was really quite beautiful, but it was also quite tiring and stressful to navigate.

"How will you know when to stop and take the chains off?" Lynn asked as we drove. I told her that our chain installer had told me to just keep an eye out for the other drivers. "They'll be all over the side of the road as soon as it's safe," he laughed. "You can't miss 'em." At this point we'd already started our descent out of the mountains and the weather conditions began to change almost immediately, and before long the snow reverted to rain and I found myself joining the line of vehicles that had begun to crowd the shoulder of the road.

Of course, this time I didn't have anybody in a rain slicker to do my dirty work, so the removal detail was all up to me. Fortunately, I had (sort of) paid attention to how the chains had been installed and had relatively little trouble getting them off when the time came. All in all, we traveled less than ten miles with our new snow chains on the car, and after it was over I couldn't help but think that maybe they had all been just a little bit over cautious. I'd regularly driven through much worse storms during my years in the Snow Belt and immediately began to regret my decision. Had that patch of snow really been worth spending $75 on just to avoid a bad motel continental breakfast? And what the fuck was I going to do with chains for a rented Monte Carlo after we got home?

Despite my doubts, it was too late for a do-over. The police simply wouldn't have let us into Oregon without the chains; the question was moot. Now all I wanted to do was get back to Portland, no matter what the weather did. Fortunately, as I knelt in the rain to remove my new tire jewelry, I noticed a spot of blue sky peaking through the clouds overhead. By the time we got down off the mountain, the sun came out just long enough to set—giving us a brief glimpse of what we'd been missing all day. Well, at least finally we were back in Oregon.

The setting sun in the mountains was quite lovely, but the darkness it left behind only made the end of our trip more tiring. It rained most of the way, which meant that I really had to pay extra attention to the road and the traffic. I never got a chance to just sit back and relax and enjoy the ride. The unlit highway seemed extra dark in the pouring rain and made the serpentine path through the mountains seem a little scarier than it probably really is.

Just north of Eugene we slowed a bit for what I thought was a night construction crew, but turned out to be a huge, nasty car accident. Fortunately, the crash took place in the southbound lanes of I-5 and we'd slowed down mostly because of rubbernecking. The wreck involved at least three vehicles, but it was hard to tell the exact number because the cars were in shreds. Both lanes were completely blocked by hunks of cars and shards of metal that seemed to be made of aluminum foil instead of steel. It was quite shocking. The

police on the scene had the area lit up like a movie set, which only emphasized the seriousness of what had happened. Multiple deaths had to have occurred. Both lanes of traffic were backed up for more than five miles and it looked like they were going to be there for hours. I slowed down a little bit after that.

This trip had included a lot of firsts for us. It was our first drive from Portland to Los Angeles—including all the sights we encountered along the way. It was our first visit together to both of our friends' homes in Walnut Creek and Long Beach. And finally, it was our first trip *back* to Portland from California. Everything was new. Nothing was familiar. That was very exciting and invigorating most of the time, but by hour eleven of our drive home it had become exhausting.

I kept thinking that we had to be "just around the bend" from our exit. But because I'd never driven this route before —let alone in the dark and the rain— I had no visual cues to inform me about my progress. I couldn't "see" where I was or figure out how much longer until we'd be "there." I'd been driving up and down the East Coast for more than thirty years and I'd learned to recognize the landmarks on any given trip. I rarely used a map or even read the road signs; it had become second nature. I never realized how much I took it for granted.

Eventually I was right and our exit *was* just around the bend. Once we hit the outskirts of the city we were rewarded with streetlights and the vaguely familiar cityscape of our new hometown. The road curled around the edges of downtown Portland before it crossed the Willamette River and headed east towards our neighborhood—once you actually get to Portland our house is very accessible from the three major highways—and it seemed like only minutes before Ol' Monte was pulling up in front of 2015 NE 50th Avenue. Home At Last.

We'd been gone almost a week, but you wouldn't have known it from the reception we got upon our arrival. The cats, who had been sleeping together in Lynn's recliner, barely acknowledged our presence, even though we'd burst through the door singing a little chorus of "We're Home, Kitties." Apparently they had missed us so much that Sam actually opened one of his eyes and glanced in our direction. It was so good to be back.

The next day I picked up our Tercel at the shop and took it out for my third try at the emissions test. Larry the Mechanic had put the new catalytic converter in the car—he said the old one fell out in pieces when they were making way for the new one—and it passed the test with flying colors, and within 24 hours we were finally legal in the state of Oregon. What a relief.

It was a new year, a new town, and a new phase of our lives. In only a couple months we would celebrate our first anniversary in Portland—and our 25th wedding anniversary a few months after that—and the possibilities seem endless. After all those years in Virginia, our lives had become comfortable and complacent, but now each day in Portland is a day full of infinite possibilities. We're never quite sure what will happen next. Maybe money will fall from the sky. Maybe spaceships will land in our front yard and ask to use the toilet. Maybe John Cleese will be just around the next corner announcing, "And Now For Something Completely Different." Portland's like that. And that's why we love it here.

Every day our list of destinations grows and so do our hopes for the future. Old places and old disappointments have been replaced by new sights, new challenges, and new questions. Questions like: Who am I? Where am I going? And most important of all: Does anybody want to buy some snow chains for a 2005 Monte Carlo?

—Dan Steffan


Fandom, when I joined it, was comprised of mostly student-age fans—high school students and college students. A typical fan was aged sixteen to nineteen. When old pharts begin to get nostalgic about the "good ol' days" of fandom in their youth, this is the fandom they are describing: predominantly adolescent.

Not that all fans were teenagers. Most of the BNFs of that era—Tucker, Bloch, Willis, Burbee, Laney—were grown and married, with kids of their own. There were a scattering of older fans at almost any point in the history of fandom. But the tone was set by fans who were probably in high school.

These fans had names now long-forgotten by all but the most assiduous fanhistorians. Names like Don Wegars, Stu Nock, and Warren Freiberg—all high school kids who put out fanzines (respectively: *Fog*, *Cosmic Frontiers* and *Brevizine*) and then gafiated, usually when they headed off to either college or the army (the draft snapping up many of us at eighteen).

When Gregg Calkins, the editor of one of Sixth Fandom's best zines, *Oopsla!*, graduated high school and turned eighteen, he wrote an editorial about this milestone occasion. And I, still in the middle of high school then, thought, "Gee, what a mature guy."

So if fandom was considered as a playing field, most of the players were teenagers, with only a handful of star players and sideline coaches adults.

This inevitably set the tone for many of the games fans *did* play.

Bob Shaw wrote an article (which I first saw published in the *Rhodomagnetic Digest*) devoted to "Fanmanship," a fannish twist on the "Gamesmanship" fad of the day. Bob was a married adult, and his "Fanmanship Lectures" were pointed and funny. Fans often referred to them,

but few could or did practice them. Most fannish "games" were more juvenile and often petty.

I mention this mostly in prelude to what follows.

In 1958 I moved out of my parents' home and into the house rented by a friend of mine, Richard Wingate, in Baltimore. I was twenty. Over that summer I read a lot of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett and wondered where I was going to go in my life. I had no clue. I was completely at loose ends in terms of future plans. I wrote a lot of bad fragments of fiction, none of which offered the slightest hint that I'd someday write professionally.

And I wrote for and put out fanzines.

Later that summer Wingate was evicted from his rented house (because a girl—John Magnus's girlfriend—was living with us), and he, John Magnus, John's girlfriend and I subsequently rented an apartment together. That fall we started up a Baltimore-area fanclub of sorts with Marion Cox (by then Oaks), a former *Vega* columnist who had moved with her new husband to Baltimore. We met at the Oaks' house-trailer in a nearby trailer park. And the first new person to join our club that winter was a ratty-looking little kid named Ted Pauls.

We all thought Ted was eleven or twelve, but he was then, he later insisted, fourteen. Ted was in the N3F and putting out a fanzine for that group. He was typing stencils on a *toy* typewriter—one which required you to turn a disk to the right setting before hitting the striking key. Letters were irregularly aligned, and line-spacing was by hand and erratic. He was using the simplest hand-mimeo. But his fanzines had promise and Ted had a lot of energy.

I had at that time close to half a dozen different typewriters—I collected them—and I decided to lend Ted Pauls one of them, a Royal with a slightly different typeface, sort of halfway between serifed and sans-serifed. In return I asked him to type some stencils for me (for "Carl Brandon"'s *the BNF of Iz* and Kent Moomaw's *The Adversaries*), which he did. He had a *lot* of energy. And in short order Ted was putting out a frequent fanzine called *Disjecta Membra*. This was in early 1959.

I wish I had copies of that fanzine to hand to quote from. It would make this piece a lot easier to write. And I need to digress again.

At some point in the late 1990s or 2000, rich brown suggested to me that we collaborate on an article. The focus of the article would be the argument he and I had in the pages of *Disjecta Membra*, and how it was resolved. Rich went ahead and wrote several pages for this article, and he bundled those pages with a couple copies of *Disjecta Membra* and gave them to me. I quickly skimmed what he'd written—my ghod he went on about a lot of tangential things!— and set it aside to get back to.

Then rich had a hissy-fit. He would do this from time to time and usually I was only an observer. Like the time Bill Donaho trimmed what he considered excess verbiage from a many-page LoC of rich's to *Habakkuk* (third incarnation; '90s) and rich tore up the issue and mailed it back to Bill. That was a typical rich brown hissy-fit. Normally rich got over them within a day or two, and I thought that when, during a card game, he became upset with something I'd said (I'd accused him to lying to me, which he had), and threw his hand of cards all over the room (I was still finding them days later) and stormed out of the house, he'd get over it quickly. But he didn't. It festered with him for months, and early on he demanded the return of his part of the article and the copies of *Disjecta Membra*. Typically, he insisted that a third party accomplish this return.

Well, ultimately reason prevailed and rich and I got back together again as friends and card-players, but I've never again seen the pages he wrote for that article. And I looked for them, in his apartment and on his computer, after his death. No luck there. I don't know what he did with them. It seems unlikely that he tossed them; I found a stack of ancient manuscripts in his apartment— none of them the one I wanted, of course.

So I'm going on nearly fifty-year-old memories here, Bear with me.

Rich Brown was five years younger than I, so in 1959 I was twenty-one and he was sixteen. (By that summer he was seventeen.) Keep that in mind. Keep in mind also that rich had a tendency even in those days to fly off at the handle, to misunderstand something and respond vociferously to it, like Emily Latella. He was still a kid. I'd known rich for a couple of years by then. He'd joined the waiting list of the Cult in 1957 and had sent me copies of his early, blurrily-mimeographed fanzines. I'd met him in 1958 at Solacon, the Worldcon.

I liked rich moderately well, but I thought him a bit too likely to go off half-cocked. So, when he made an erroneous claim in a letter to Ted Pauls' *Disjecta Membra*, I responded to it. I no longer recall what this claim was, or what the basic issue of dispute was. I don't recall whether I responded to rich in a letter or a column in *Disjecta Membra*. I really don't recall *any* of the details.

All I recall is that this dispute between us in the pages of *Disjecta Membra* went on for several issues, to my increasing annoyance. I really couldn't see why rich wouldn't admit defeat and drop it, since he was clearly arguing the losing position, and even shifting ground while doing it (conceding losses only tacitly).

Finally, I'd had enough. I felt the whole issue had been beaten into the ground and should be given a proper burial. So I wrote a piece in which I told Ted Pauls's readers that the whole argument had been a hoax. I said that rich and I had flipped a coin to see who would get the losing side, and that he had, and that I felt he'd played out his role admirably in our entire hoax argument, but it was time to bring things to an end before someone concluded we'd been *serious* about our argument. Ahahahaha.

It was, I thought at the time, an elegant solution. It defused the argument and offered rich a face-saving way out, which he apparently accepted. And at the same time it underlined the fact that I'd held the winning position. Win-win. Besides which, rich was now in the Air Force and had less time to keep up his fanac.

So I wasn't quite prepared for it when rich showed up in New York City in 1961 on furlough, paid us a visit at the apartment Sylvia and I had on Christopher St., and said that he'd enjoyed his side of our hoax argument and he was glad I'd signaled its end when I did. "I was really having a hard time supporting my own position with a straight face," rich brown said with a straight face.

It dawned on me that rich had convinced himself that my hoax-resolution to the argument was true. I'm afraid my mouth dropped open while I stared at him. "Uh, rich…" I said. And I explained to him what had really happened. He turned kind of red, and his expression got sheepish.

"Oh," he said. "Well, okay, then. Good thing it's over."

And, by the mid-'90s, he thought it made a pretty good story and wanted us to write it up.

But I think—at this point in my narrative, the little grey cells now more stimulated—going on my vague memory now of what he'd written, that rich wanted to spend pages on the nature and facts of the original argument itself. And that probably had something to do with rich's contribution to Guy Terwilliger's *Twig*, a piece which was called "Terwilliger and the Fan Machine," and was closely based (too closely, in my opinion) on a prozine story called "Terwilliger and the War Machine"—the whole thing based on the coincidence of the "Terwilliger" name— and my review thereof in *Void*.

I think rich really wanted to re-argue that original argument all over again, just on the chance that, the second time around, he might win it this time.

But unless that piece of his turns up some time in the future, you'll have to be satisfied with my version, in which he was always destined to lose that argument, and ultimately did so with grace and good humor.

—Ted White

# THE RANT TO END ALL RANTS

BY JAY KINNEY

A couple of years ago, my wife and I reached an agreement whereby Dixie wouldn't read the front section of the newspaper at the breakfast table. Too many news items served to trigger rants about this country or that, our fearless leaders, the economy, the environment, you name it. It wasn't that I mind rants—far from it—but I prefer not to ingest them along with my morning bagel. So, now we save the rants for later in the day. It's the civilized thing to do.

But this essay isn't about Dixie's rants. For that, she'll have to write her own. This essay is about *my* rants, the ones that run through my head as I make my way through the day. Out of the kindness of my heart, I rarely share these rants with others, choosing instead to bottle them up inside. However, now that I am taking—not one but two—blood pressure meds, it has occurred to me that it might be therapeutic to share my rants with you. I can't afford psychotherapy at present, so I might as well get my money's worth out of being asked to write something for *Trap Door*.

Some of these pet peeves used to be aired at the monthly dinners of the Curmudgeons Club, an informal fellowship of used occult book dealers, writers, and gadflies. Alas, the King Curmudgeon, who hosted the gatherings in his kitchen, decided he'd finally had enough of cigar-smoking loudmouths arguing with each other at top volume, so he shut down the Club. I guess curmudgeons are like that.

So, consider this a rump meeting of the Curmudgeons Club. Pull up a chair, pour yourself a glass of Merlot, and get into the spirit of a good rant.

For the life of me, I cannot fathom what kind of idiots are running the U.S. Postal Service in general and my local branch post office in particular. I've had a P.O. Box at this same branch for over 25 years, so I've seen staffers come and go. At one time it was a great post office, if such a thing is possible. The clerks had been there forever and were reasonably efficient. The only time there was much of a line was for two weeks preceding Christmas.

Then some hotshot in Washington, DC had the bright idea to turn post offices into postal boutiques with half the lobby given over to retail displays of packaged stamps, shipping supplies, wrapping paper, and a whole slew of products that no one was clamoring for. I'm sure the theory was that customers could come in, shop for what they wanted, and then pay the clerk at the little counter in the display area. This would free up the other clerks to just handle the more labor-intensive tasks, such as weighing packages and checking the paperwork for registered letters.

Well, of course this theory totally fell apart in practice. Very few people seemed to want to buy the stuff in the retail displays, so most of the time the retail counter was unstaffed. Meanwhile, the main counter had been cut from three stations to two, and the new computer equipment seemed to guarantee that every transaction took twice as long as it used to when you just had a clerk and a cash drawer. So, now we have Christmas-length lines all the way to the door, every day of the year. Bravo!

And speaking of Christmas, was it just me or did everyone's first class Christmas parcels take two to three weeks to arrive? I didn't receive one small parcel, postmarked December 15, until several days into January. Meanwhile, by a stroke of luck, I'm on the mailing list of *Memos for Mailers*, a USPS publication for business mailers, where the Post Office keeps congratulating itself for meeting its efficiency goals.

And don't even get me started on the P.O.'s idiotic "security" precautions, which now enforce that you can't drop any stamp-bearing mail weighing over one pound into a corner mailbox. The logic of this totally escapes me. Is a one pound, two ounce package inherently more dangerous than a one pound package? I guess that letter-bombs are likely to weigh more than a pound, so this policy cuts down on the vast letter-bomb danger plaguing the nation's mailboxes. But, what about dioxin-sprinkled letters? Hey, if they are under a pound, into the mailbox they go. Idiots.

So now, if I'm sending out a two-pound Priority Mail parcel—sort of "guaranteed" to be delivered in two to three days, which is what you used to get from First Class Mail before they started taking two to three weeks with that—I can weigh it at home, put the right amount of stamps on it, drive or walk to my post office, and stand in line for twenty minutes in order to hand it to a clerk to accept. Oh no, you can't just walk in and drop it on the counter. That would make America insecure. You need to wait in line so that the clerk can run out a 0¢ meter strip, stick it on the parcel, and then fling it in the cart. Ah, now I feel better!

Like, what does that prove? Okay, if I mail it using a business postage meter or online-generated postage, I realize that the parcel is traceable by the serial number included on the meter strip or the i.d. number from the online transaction. But what's so secure about the clerk running a P.O. meter strip to slap on the parcel? All that does is trace the parcel back to him! And besides, if the parcel is a letter-bomb and it later explodes, what are the chances of any of these identifiers surviving the blast, anyway?

These policies must have been invented by the same genius who designed the packaging for Express Mail and Priority Mail envelopes to look nearly identical. UPS, at least, has long had red packaging for over-night letters and blue packaging for second-day letters. You could tell which was which at twenty feet. But, I guess the Post Office didn't want to copy a competitor's intelligent policies, so they came up with identical red, white, and blue packaging for both categories, requiring you to squint and scrutinize closely to tell which is which.

But enough on the Post Office. How about shoe manufacturers? Since when did

they start putting sufficient hunks of metal in sneakers to set off airport screening equipment? Are we now doomed to take off our shoes to walk through metal detectors for the rest of our lives? Can someone get a clue and find some nice hard plastic that would do the same thing that this mysterious Johnny-come-lately metal now does? And while they are at it, would they get off this jag of making shoes look like they were designed for the Michelin Man? I just want some simple, unobtrusive, comfortable sneakers—not Bozo shoes the size of a small SUV. It's embarrassing, for God's Sake, to go visit my 83-year old mother and see her clopping around in white and blue monstrosities that appear to be the result of a one-night stand between a life preserver and a birthday cake.

Designers! These fiends are forever looking for some new category of stuff to shift from humble utility to overpriced chic crapola. Take eye glasses. I'm not sure when they made the shift from being mere "things to help you see better" to full-blown ugly fashion statement, but it is totally annoying. Perhaps it was John Lennon's round wire-rims or the omnipresent aviator's specs of the '70s, but in any case it is now nearly impossible to get just your basic frames—not too big, not too small. Now, everyone is peering through these expensive little rectangles with a field of vision of about one inch. They make everyone look like a 1963 office receptionist, which is not at the top of my list of images to emulate.

But then that goes hand in hand with fashion in general, which I largely consider to be the designers' little joke at our expense. I dropped out of the whole Fashion thing in my early twenties—or so I thought—by just wearing blue work shirts and jeans for about five years. The young intellectual as proletarian look. But, of course even that was a form of Fashion or anti-Fashion, just as the whole homey hip hop look—which I consider the attire of fools, mind you— started out as a kind of anti-Fashion statement. No doubt some PhD candidate in Cultural Studies has already written a dissertation identifying the unsung hero who first thought of wearing his pants-waist down around mid-thigh and trucking around with his pontoons, I mean shoes, untied at all times. Give that man a scholarship to Clown College! But, I fear that I betray my late middle-age by no longer comprehending what is hip, or hop for that matter.

I mean, here I am, living in the North Mission in San Francisco, on a block with no less than three tattoo parlors and one piercing/branding shop, three sushi restaurants, four bars, numerous coffeehouses, and now, an onslaught of boutiques. And I truly don't get the boutique thing. (I have issues with the tattoo thing, too, but I'll get to that in a second.)

For instance, a block away there's Otsu, the Vegan Boutique. I can't even stand to go in there, so I'm just describing things from the windows, but the point of the place is that nothing in it is made from animals. No leather belts, shoes, whips, or eyepatches. No sir.

Well, fine, that's a nice moral statement, I suppose. Incidentally, no animals were harmed in typing this essay, either. I went out of my way to avoid a leather keyboard or monitor. Hey, maybe Comp USA should re-brand themselves as a Vegan Computer Store, but I'm getting away from my point.

Call me Old School, but I fail to see where a boutique is a earth-shaking radical statement. It reminds me of David Brooks' book, *Bobos in Paradise*, which I didn't read, but when did that ever stop me? Brooks charts the rise of a new class of "bourgeois bohemians," *i.e.,* latte-swigging liberals in BMWs. When I originally heard of Brooks' notion I rather resented it, even though I have a dented 1989 Toyota, not a Beamer. But as time has gone on, I've concluded that Brooks is on to something.

These hip boutiques are about as Bobo as you can get. Yes, you too can make a political (and Fashion) statement by not buying mass designer-brand clothes made in sweatshops! Instead you can maintain your righteousness by patronizing chic boutiques with one of a kind $100 t-shirts and an absence of fur and leather. Talk about having your cake and eating it, too.

Tattoos. Hooboy! Listen, I was practically there at the birth of this whole trend, in the late '70s. Not only did Dixie and I have a heavily tattooed belly-dancer perform at our wedding party in 1978, but I was on the original staff of *RE/Search* magazine, which of course went on to publicize the whole Urban Primitive movement. Yeah, yeah, we're reclaiming our bodies by wearing rings through our noses. The philosophy was a bit thin to begin with, but it had the cachet of only being advocated by a handful of punks. By now, though, every 15-year old from the 'burbs has gotten their privates pierced and their arms covered with more tats than a career sailor. Big deal.

Me, I'm still of the '60s countercultural mentality that says: "you might have to go underground at any time. Avoid all easily-identified body markings. Off the pigs!" Well, you can skip the pig part. Don't want to offend any Vegans, after all, but the rest of it still stands. I'm not giving The Man any extra help in picking me out in a crowd. Of course, at the rate things are going, I'll stick out like a sore thumb as the only guy *without* tattoos within a ten-block radius. Damn! So much for the Revolution.

And then there are the bicyclists. Was there ever a more irritating crew of self-righteous dipshits than San Francisco bicyclists? Not only do they get to ride in traffic—sometimes in the middle of the lane—but they get to ignore all traffic laws and suddenly convert themselves into pedestrians on wheels, if it suits them.

I'm of the live and let live school, I assure you. I mean no harm to the helmeted dickhead who blithely cuts in front of my car, daring me to hit him. I restrain myself and do not mow him down. But the temptation is great. I guess the ultimate message is: "We're not using fossil fuels, so we get to ignore stop signs, lights, one-way streets, and traffic in general. We're special."

But I don't mean to pick on bicyclists alone. I've got a bone to pick with car drivers, too. Why is that every other driver on the road—with the possible exception of *you*, if you've read this far, for which you earn my eternal gratitude—why is that they never learned to drive? Their idea of "defensive driving" is to never use a turn signal, so as not to tip off any other drivers about their next move. The list of sins is endless. Driving at ten miles an hour while yakking on a cell phone; running red lights; shifting back from lane to lane in a daze; driving slow down the whole block in front of me, and then suddenly speeding up so that *they* can make it through the light, but leaving me stuck. I'll spare you the big-wheel truck and SUV rant. Suffice it to say that all Hummer owners should be shipped off to Iraq where their stupid big cars could be put to a practical use.

Speaking of Iraq, if there was ever a more stupid elective war in the history of this country, I don't know what it was. I could have predicted that it would end up like this, but did they ask me? No. Bush is really missing a bet by not having me vet all his foreign policy decisions. Domestic ones, too, for that matter. I mean, could I come up with a set of worse decisions than these jackasses?

I have a healthy respect for conservatives who are into conserving. Hey, conserve gas, conserve the environment, conserve me a table for two with a good view of the door. But these fools in charge have nothing conservative about them. They're a devilish blend of autocratic, libertarian, militarist, police state reflexes, whose only saving grace is that they keep blowing it.

And talk about faith-based initiatives, I consider their whole economic world view to be faith-based. The supply-side, free market true believers took the collapse of the U.S.S.R. as some sign from Heaven that the Market is the solution to everything. Total rubbish! Have they not read Rosa Luxembourg???

Ulp! Well, there goes the old blood pressure again, and I think I'll draw this to a close. A good ol' Pepcid might hit the spot about now. Have a great day! And remember, nice matters!

—Jay Kinney


**ANDY HOOPER**

I frequently use the term "elegiac" to describe your fanzine, and you certainly have more than a few reminders of human mortality scattered throughout this issue. But I also found your editorial among the most topical and immediate things that I read last year. It is ironic that a beautifully executed electronic fanzine that took the editor months to assemble is less likely to receive any comment or response than a list-serve e-mail that was composed in 45 seconds. On-line fanzines do have a marvelous quality of permanent availability that means people can send you comments many months or years after you published the material. But they don't convey the sense of obligation to respond that paper fanzines have.

Some editors have tried to address this issue by creating passwords to be used in securing the fanzine, allowing them to maintain some sense of who is reading it, but my impression is that the rate of response to this policy is quite low. So far, the most successful approach seems to be to post your fanzine at efanzines.com or some other web location, and then send out e-mail notification that includes a personal appeal for a reply. Anything you can do to re-create the sense that the fanzine is actual correspondence rather than a static post that anyone can access seems to help encourage response. I attribute Cheryl Morgan's Hugo award for Best Fanzine to the large bulletin board she has appended to the web version of her fanzine, which helped her fans to organize toward the goal of seeing her win the award.

I'm not inclined to agree that the printing of electronic zines places an unrealistic burden on the reader—to me, it seems like an opportunity to create something unique for myself. I love the fact that I can download the PDF, e-mail it to the printer who does *Chunga* for us, and ask him to create unique single copies of fanzines for my collection. So far, I've used this technique on Joyce Katz's *Smokin' Rockets* and Earl Kemp's *eI*, which has been expensive but well worth it to have reading copies of their work.

As usual, you croggle me with the line-up of contributors to *Trap Door*. Quite touched to see Lee Hoffman contribute her memories of the start of Dave Van Ronk's career. And I was simply not familiar with the professional work of George Fox, and therefore found Joe Kennedy's biography wholly new material. As a relatively new home owner, Carol Carr's schematic account of her rewiring/remodeling hell made me cringe in sympathy. And I liked many of the images and incidents in John Hertz's Pumpkin Bomb memoir, but I ultimately felt it went on a bit long for me to really enjoy his ambiguous ending.

Perhaps the best thing in the issue is Bob Silverberg's meditation on his Grand Master status. I can remember an incident of some years past, sitting with several other fans and admiring a picture of Bob as a teenager, hunched over a stencil in the production of an early FAPAzine. His smiling, handsome face was almost hypnotic to the trufen present. When Bob described himself as still a wide-eyed novice in the presence of his fellow Grand Masters, a kind of "Grand Mascot," I think he's hit on one of the reasons why participation in fandom is so enduringly entertaining. No matter how old I become, I'm a larva when compared to Father Tucker, R. Twidner or even a youthful prodigy such as yourself. Swiftly approaching thirty years in fandom, I continue to hear stories that explain relationships and incidents to me for the first time, to discover new fans and pros to read, and routinely feel condescended to by my predecessors in the field. I don't know of any other subcultures in which this sensation of perpetual neohood is so easy to achieve.

I did not send any comment on issue 22, but share the generally positive impression of Gordon's work that most of your correspondents describe. I think there is a tendency to concentrate wholly on the paradox of causality when reading time travel stories, whereas I feel it is important to suspend disbelief in both the methods and results of time travel, including its impact on causality, if you are going to enjoy the story at all. Perhaps I fall on the other side from most of your readers, in that I find those time travel yarns in which people slowly turn transparent after damaging the causality behind their own birth or existence to be far more difficult to accept. I think the personal history and internal memory of the time traveler would remain intact, even if he found a way to prevent its existence and cut himself off from ever returning to his point of origin.

The look of the fanzine is as impressive as ever. Numerous parties have said they are inclined to vote you for the new Best Fanzine Design FAAn award, and I can see their point—your ability to publish so much brilliant fan art and force so much legible text into a compact format is a model of fanzine efficiency. Thanks again for sending me a copy, and I hope we can go on trading as long as you care to publish.

**SHELBY VICK**

Issue 23, like always, was a marvel. It provided nostalgia and the occasional very interesting in-depth look at parts of fandom. One of your readers compared *TD* to *Reader's Digest*, which—strangely enuf!—was a comparison I had made myself earlier on.

Great memorial for Isabel Burbee! I wonder if many other fans have similar better-halfs supporting them, without being into fanac.

Carol Carr did an enjoyable recount of a painful experience. Unfortunately, it rang too many familiar bells with me—not from my own losses, but friends and clients. (When I worked with Met Life, I ended up in the auto/home-owner field.) Liked your "extracted from e-mail" bit. I've used it myself; it retains reality and saves time! Glad you could keep your sense of humor, Carol—even more glad that you shared it with us!

Bob Silverberg's piece was unforgettable—enjoyable and well-written. He clearly captured the little guy joining the big guys, with all the awe and goshwowgeewhizboyoboy that goes with it. And yeah, there is no doubt he deserved it!

Michael Dobson returned the feeling of excitement to something that, because of constant repetition, had become rather "ho-hum" to others. But, to me, anything dealing with nuclear reactors is always exciting. He done good!

Letters. Many of your LoCs could stand alone as another interesting article! Starting with Joel Nydahl's "return," so to speak. Fred Smith and typewriters, another favorite subject of mine. I particularly loved the IBM proportional spacing electric. Of course, it made it a bit more trouble to do the 'flush right' spacing!

Milt Stevens reminds me of my early typewriters. My very first one was given to me by an uncle. His son had taking apart an old Remington, and couldn't put it back together again. My uncle asked if I wanted to give it a try. *Yes!* It took me a weekend, but I got it put together and my school grades immediately improved, as teachers could now read what I turned in. Did lots of writing on it, too. Then my folks gave me a Remington portable for my graduation, and it cranked out hundreds of letters and LoCs. Kept both typers for many, many years. Both had their platens replaced, back when it could be done without huge expense. Even used them some at Vick Mimeograph! (Along with the IBM Proportional and a tabular typer with a platen over eighteen inches wide and one with 38-point Arial type, and… but then, that's another story.)

Hate to disagree with Bob Silverberg. Of course, I'm sure he wrote with tongue-in-cheek when he said that it was a shame you didn't pub *TD* in the '50s, "when classic fanzines walked the earth." I mean, yeah, it would have been considered a classic Way Back Then—but I consider it a classic today!

**JACK CALVERT**

As I sit here starting to LoC *Trap Door* No. 23, I seem to be unconsciously acting out a lab demonstration of your comments in the editorial about e-lists. Since I'm writing on the computer, and the computer is wired to the internet, it's easy to just dial in and take a quick look at what's happening on Trufen or Timebinders. Then, as long as I'm there, I might as well take a look at the news, and browse around a bit and try to think of what it was that I was going to look for…and there goes my time. You paint a good word picture of life on the lists. But I do think that despite the various quirks you describe, they are a good thing. I know they have enabled me to have more fannish contact than I otherwise would. It is pleasant to be able to drop in to the virtual clubhouse and see who is there.

Many people have commented on the difficulty of pulling in responses with an efanzine. I think that at least part of the reason for the lack of response is that reading something on the Web is, socially, like listening to a radio broadcast or a speaker in a large auditorium. The responsibility to respond is diffuse. (You can hear the people on public radio trying to break through this during drives.) The use of a password appears to be an excellent way to re-establish the kind of individual connection that is there when a paper zine comes in the mail.

Carol Carr must have been hit by a perfect storm of homeowner problems. I've never had anything happen as bad as the tree falling over—knock on, uh, wood—but I find that owning a house is a continuing plague of little things: peeling paint, leaking faucet, plugged pipe, rotten fence, need new roof, gate sagging, door needs varnishing, exhaust fan needs cleaning, something died under the garage, and on and on.

I can also identify with Michael Dobson's adventure with the reactor. I've never operated a reactor, even a zero-power one, but the most fun I had in my working career was operating the high power radio frequency amplifiers that drove a linear accelerator up at Lawrence Berkeley Lab. Making the linac go involved a truly stfnal conglomeration of equipment, and big sparks and bangs when things went wrong. It was more fun than downhill skiing when everything worked.

Ray Nelson makes some interesting points about "sci-fi" and "speculative fiction." Ray asks, are we to follow Ackerman or Ellison? I would certainly don one of Ray's propeller beanies and fall in behind Ackerman. But despite its origin, I can't bring myself to like the term "sci-fi." I suppose most people these days use it neutrally, just as the standard word for that rocketship-and-robot stuff. But to my ear, it sounds breezy and pseudo-hip. I tend to suspect the person using it of thinking that "Star Wars" is out there on the cutting edge. Why not just use the term "science fiction"? And we can argue about the definition, and what it includes.

**RICH COAD**

I can see the temptation for on-line distribution of fanzines but it's not something I'm in favor of. Reading on-line is tedious at best; printing the fanzine out also leaves a lot to be desired. At least on my printer I don't get any color and pages are all single-sided—if I could afford a full duplex color laser printer which handled heavier paper I might enjoy the experience but, as it is, I end up with a stack of unattractive 20 lb. white paper stapled or paper clipped together which tends to get lost amidst similarly unattractive W3C specs and such like. So I would be forced by your plan to become either a contributor or a significant letter writer. This so much goes against my essential lazy nature that I have to ask: can I send cash? *{Cash is always welcome, but you've just become a "significant letter writer" and get this issue free as a result. As for that dream duplexing color laser printer you desire, check out the H-P 2605. It lists at $499 and comes with four fully-filled toner cartridges, but I've seen it for as much as $100 less. It took me fifteen months to use up the three color cartridges my non-duplexing 2600 came with.}*

Carol's article was superb and further proof that sometimes the best fanzine articles come out of circumstances you wouldn't wish on anyone. I still recall with great fondness Grant Canfield's tale of getting a kidney stone and I believe Burbee once wrote about having his balls swell up to prodigious and painful proportions. Recently I read (on-line) Steve Stiles's account of his first orgy, which ended up with most of the participants vomiting and hospitalized from food poisoning. At least Carol's tragic circumstances were affecting the house and not her body. As I've said before, reading an article like this quickly removed my angst about being a perpetual renter and makes me feel so comforted that, in similar circumstances, I just have to call the landlord. I hope everything has finally worked out. *{As you've seen from your several visits, it has.}*

Calvin Demmon's little piece had me laughing out loud and trying to read it aloud to Stacy. She was quickly laughing out loud, too, although I'm not sure whether she was laughing with me or at me as I massacred Demmon's hysterically funny pseudo-German.

Michael Dobson has now given me two reasons to be intensely jealous of him. Not only does he have a spacesuit but he actually has had the chance to run a nuclear reactor! Now, I'm a member of the Green Party and all in favor of hybrid cars and opposed to offshore oil drilling but—and this may be due to such a large amount of SF reading at an early age—I've never been able to find it in my heart to be opposed to nuclear power. Oh, I'll admit that something like Chernobyl is pretty horrifying and building reactors right on top of earthquake faults is really stupid and proper disposition of radioactive waste is a problem; but compared with the problems caused by burning oil and coal or damming rivers, nuclear power has always seemed fairly clean and low-risk to me. I never understood the fear inspired by the movie *The China Syndrome*—after all, the reactor shut down before a meltdown occurred just like it was supposed to. It appears that some parts of the environmentalist movement are coming around to this way of thinking but I expect a lot of public education will be needed before any new nuclear power plants are built in the U.S.

**WILLIAM BREIDING**

The thing about fanzine fandom is that it's interactive, and if you find yourself hookless, or just tired of hearing your own voice droning on and on, one is left up the crick without a paddle—upon the lee shore I lay in sleepy solitude! And of course, the best fanzines are always nearly faultless and self-contained. I agree with the many loccers who weep and moan in front of such consistent and relevant faanish cool as *Trap Door*.

Somewhere I recently read (was it V. Gonzalez in his review of P. Weston's memoirs?) the words "Ah, Sweet Idiocy!" and realized I had never read FTL's classic text. Nor Degler's. *{Degler had no "classic text," just ravings about the love camp in the Ozarks, etc.}* And herein, you mention J. White's "The Exorcists of IF" and I have not read it. Did K. Cheslin reprint that? If so, I probably have it somewhere. *{No, Ken limited his extensive reprints to John Berry and ATom. Over the years "The Exorcists of IF" was published in two fanzines and a book. But the easiest place for you to read it is at www.trufen.net, where it was posted on June 14, 2004, as an entry in "Dr. Gafia's Journal."}*

I once had this fantasy of doing a series of reprints, *The Illustrated Fables Of Fandom*, but I realize I haven't even read all of the ur-texts of fandom, let alone explaining Roscoe in 3,500 words or less.

**DAVID REDD**

Many thanks for *Trap Door* once again—another lovely issue. As my last letter intimated, I was with Lyn Smith about the telling of "Sense of Wonder" in issue 22 (despite the general fun and gusto of the tale, and the wonderful Dan Steffan illos) and so I'm glad to see a variety of contributors and styles again. I find it hard to choose a favorite—both Joe Kennedy's and Ron Bennett's pieces have been reread pretty quickly, as has your editorial discussion, so I suppose they're the standouts. Nice to know from John Hertz, the Eliot Fintushel of this issue, that someone else was struck by Frank Belknap Long's "To Follow Knowledge." (Unlike John, I didn't see Heinlein juveniles much, because the series didn't cross the Atlantic until later. The solitary exception was *Starman Jones*, which circulated widely and to my joy was totally unlike British juvenile sf of the time.)

Looking at your editorial, I ask, is this the last *Trap Door*? In the nostalgic/children's story field, websites have largely taken over from the old amateur magazines and now provide instant libraries on-line. See collectingbooksandmagazines.com, gateway-monthly.com, ERBzine and the rest. I now begin to believe that the information age has arrived. The e-fanzines are the present, let alone the future, which belongs to lists and blogs and message boards. (Oh, for a crud filter or internal search engines which would let you see only the Good Stuff.)

My trouble with e-reading is the eye-strain from the screen. I had enough of that at work. And I still appreciate owning and holding a desirable physical artifact like *Trap Door*, or the paper *Ansible*. Perhaps these opinions betray

my age. Younger generations mostly prefer ephemeral thrills these days.

You say the e-zines get less response. This may be true. The terrific *Steam Engine Time* has issue 4 out on the web, and I've saved it ready to read, but I wonder, when I do get around to printing and/or reading it will I have lost the urge to dive in, enjoy and respond? Really, I can't see people printing out whole zines very much, not until someone invents my personal print-on- demand download printer. (Like your custom digiphoto printer, only printing both sides of A5 sheets *and* gluing them together....)

So, to answer your question at last: yes, I'd love to go on receiving a print *Trap Door*, but I'm not sure how best to recompense you for your time, trouble and costs. Sending $5 isn't generally possible for a Brit (cash being too liable to vanish in the mail). Could I send a fannish article? I'm not as fluently readable as the Silverbobs or Metzgers of this world. Writing is a hard slog, except for occasional moments of inspiration, so reading it is usually a hard slog too. *{Yes, write article!}*

Your costs in keeping a paper edition going will definitely get too much—especially on a pension, as I'm finding, having retired last September on what is effectively a quarter salary. (Pension funds aren't what they used to be. "Additional voluntary contributions?" Don't make me laugh. The sock under the bed would have been more use.) This must be another sign of fandom graying, all my talk of pensions and retirement and costs. The lettercol of *Thrilling Wonder* was never like this. At least you keep the ether still vibrating so I can think yes, I'm still young really, it's just the world that got older.

**PAM BOAL**

One of the letters mentioned Ken Cheslin and John Berry. As I sit here holding Ken's last calender of Olaf cartoons and last Hemlock Soames publication with so many ATom cartoons, I wonder how any one can imagine web zines ever evoking the same feelings as paper ones. It's at least five years since the last John Berry publication I can only hope he is alive and well. *{He published a GDA anthology a couple months ago.}* As it happened I was the first fan to find out that Ken had died. I phoned him to say thank you for his last publication and his wife answered the phone and told me the sad news. Not an experience I wish to repeat.

Oh my! I truly sympathize with Carol Carr. At the end of every boating season we come home to find the natural law of house maintenance in operation. It usually starts with something as minor as a leaky tap, which soon escalates into an overflowing cistern, a damp patch on a ceiling, turning into a waterfall damaging a carpet. Then just as we think we have almost sorted the problems, the boiler for the central heating and hot water systems pack up. Needless to say our favorite plumber has gone away for the foreseeable future and the man who fitted the boiler has failed to keep up his accreditation with the company and is not legally permitted to deal with the matter. Naturally, at that point the weather has turned cold and wet so we are unable to dry things out. Of course there are other minor irritations such as the TV and computer developing the colly wobbles. Nowhere near as drastic as Carol's problems but a typical annual event that makes me understand and shudder with sympathy for Carol.

**RICHARD DENGROVE**

I was going to say I have an apartment and so I wouldn't have the same problems as Carol Carr. But my sister lives in an apartment and hers flooded. She really didn't have a place to stay for several weeks. In short, things can pour in apartments as well as houses. It is just that problems with housing have not happened to me. Even when the apartment next door was on fire, my complex was one of the few with brick construction that limited any destruction to that apartment. Talk about luck.

Those pyramid schemers were crazy, but at least they left George Metzger alone. Someone selling snake oil didn't leave my sister alone. He was the son of a friend of my sister, and was trying to sell her Essential Oils which, he claimed, were a panacea. My sister's years in the cosmetics industry told her this was a scam. On the other hand, she was too polite to tell him "no" outright —her downfall. When she went to the bathroom, he decided to go through her purse and get her credit card info. Then he ordered her a $20 starter kit. She was not amused. She got the charge taken off and his company blocked. Probably she should have gotten a new card, too.

About Joel Nydahl's account now vs. his account in *Psychotic*, I have to go with his account in *Psychotic* in the '50s. This is a pity: I am sure what he is telling us is the truth as he remembers it. The problem is that our memories are porous. A memory over fifty years will have lost something. The fact is a memory over three seconds will have lost something.

Dean Grennell's account of what Joel told him is another thing entirely. Accounts change when they go from one person to another. Still, it may be more accurate than a fifty-year-old memory.

**KLAUS EYLMANN**

Carol Carr's "Christmas Vacation" brings back memories. I worked in the U.S. as a programmer contractor for about ten years. In Germany or Italy we live in brick houses, so staying in U.S. apartments was quite educating. Smoke detectors are much more diffused in the U.S. When I got my first job in Midland, Michigan, I didn't know about those and found out about them a day later, after I had complained about the high-pitched sound which emanated the whole night from the ceiling.

Then I got to know bug motels in Stamford, Connecticut, after an invasion of termites in my kitchen. And in Dallas, Texas, I got a visit from twenty or more roaches which slipped in under the door. I found this quite funny as the gap was (I think) made for landlords to enable them to shove those nasty letters into the den. I got myself one of those handy vacuum cleaners, sucked the roaches in and emptied the cleaner from the balcony. I guess the critters went around the house because the next day I saw them again.

Regarding Bob Silverberg's item, all of those writers he mentioned (including himself) were or are thinking SF. I published some stories in the German small press. But reading *Analog*, *Asimov's* and *F&SF* I always asked myself, how are they doing that?

Michael Dobson's "Homer Simpson, Man of the Atom" made me think about the abundance of resources in the U.S. Reminds me of that time when I lived in Fort Smith, Arkansas, where I saw the jets of the National Guard zipping around the airport. Here equivalent forces have at most some helicopters.

**BRAD FOSTER**

Carol's "What I Did…" was one of those "someone always has it a bit tougher than me, so stop complaining" kind of articles I need to get now and then. We've had our toughest year yet in 2004, all kinds of major time- and money-consuming work to the house, plus having to move my ailing father-in-law in for full-time care. But, it could always be worse, so I'll try not to whine too often.

In fact, I could also relate directly to Richard Dengrove's LoC on dealing with paranoia in a loved one. My father-in-law is major into late-stage dementia. Kind of a blessing to him, as he is not really aware of the bad physical conditions he now suffers from. But it also means he keeps thinking he can just jump out of bed and go outside to work on things. The fact that I had to literally lift him from the bed five minutes before to put him in his wheelchair because his legs can no longer support him is totally lost to him. Lying in bed on pain killers, there seems to be nothing wrong, and he often thinks we are lying to him about where he is, what the situation is, etc. At his worst moments, he will even be confused enough to think that he is lying in a boat. The physical evidence of the bed under him, the sheets, what he can see and feel—none of that seems to be able to get through whatever odd memory-cell in his brain is firing at that time that he is, quite literally, in a boat. Sad for sure, but also sometimes kind of fascinating to witness how the mind and body work. Or, in this case, stop to do so in a logical fashion.

In the end, we're all just meat sacks with beta-system brains, and getting along from day to day without walking into a wall is a pretty major accomplishment

**JIM CAUGHRAN**

Isabel Burbee treated me like another son, back those 45 years ago, so your and Ed Burbee's eulogies have a special meaning. And her chili recipe is a fitting memorial. Thanks.

As I said in Fmzfen or Trufen, if someone can read your fanzine and it costs you nothing, zero, zilch, to give it to him, why not? The quality of *Trap Door* is going to attract LoCs in any case. Maybe some science fiction reader will see a reference to *Trap Door* somewhere, look to see what it is, and be attracted to fandom. Maybe, by denying this readership that costs you nothing, you will have cost fandom the next Willis. *{Oh, the guilt! But before I kill myself, I should again mention that no one has responded in any way to the two back issues on efanzines.}*

I laughed at Harry Warner's "Rover Cleve-

land," then almost cried when I realized that this flashback of Harry's gentle humor likely will be the last.

**LEIGH EDMONDS**

I read your comments about lists with some bemusement. It took me a bit of time to even figure out what all the writing is about because it is a part of the new digital age that seems to have avoided me. These days I seem to spend most of my time sitting in front of computers, but the end result is paper. People like their history to appear in the form of books even though it might be more efficient and cost effective to produce them electronically. *{Leigh is a writer on the subject of Australian infrastructure history. His book,* The Vital Link: A History of Main Roads, Western Australia 1926-1996*, is available from Amazon and is a much more accessible book than the title would imply, revealing in many places his fannish roots.}*

As so it is for me with fanzines and fanac. What fans do when they are at their best is a form of art and it works better in a permanent and tangible format. The nice thing about this issue of *Trap Door* is that it is a physical entity that you can hold in your hands and manipulate. The lovely yellow cover, the Dan Steffan on the front and the D. West on the back, the mixture of text and pictures, etc. It looks and feels good.

As for the content, you'll forgive me if I pass on Carol Carr's article. Not that we are going through the same trials, but our next door neighbors are. And since there is only a narrow driveway between our hours and theirs we have had many of the troubles but won't get any of the reward. Mainly noise. Tradesmen seem to like playing the radio very loud while they work 100 meters away, blasting the entire neighborhood with the most mediocre rock and roll from the '70s, '80s and '90s. Then there is the grinding, banging, yelling, etc., from seven in the morning.

I also thought it was rather unfair of you to print all those comments about Isabel Burbee's cooking without enclosing samples. Recipes may be all well and good, but only if you lack my ability for making a mess of perfectly simple toast and Vegemite.

It was sad to see the last letters of Bob and Lyn Smith. It was from Bob and Lyn that I got my liking for haiku and a great many other of the finer things in life. I never saw them in their new home but I could imagine what it might have been like with, as Bob mentioned in one letter, Puccini wafting around the house and out the window. Reading through the letter column I'm amazed at the number of names this old gafiate recognized, and enjoyed.

**RON BENNETT**

I'm a little amazed to find that I didn't know about all these fan lists and on-line talk opportunities. I probably don't have to tell you that I'm all in favor of informal chat, the writing one might find in correspondence, but I also like the more structured format of the fanzine article and agree wholeheartedly with Arnie Katz that much of the energy on the lists might be better directed into a little artistry. Of course, it might be argued that I'm not qualified to hold this opinion because I'm not a list writer. I think Arnie's point is well borne out by my happy memories of Harry Turner's *Zenith* covers and the sheer artistry and care that went into them. I can't help feeling that with electronic fanzines and correspondence we are being denied such delights. *{On the contrary, some electronic fanzines positively glow from the full-color artwork in them. Alan White, for instance, has provided many such examples to a number of happy faneds.}*

Well, I've read some shaggy dog stories, but John Hertz's was nothing but a cop-out. Do we get the results of the pumpkin bomb test in the next issue? Or the one following that? *{John?}*

Interesting to learn that Joe Kennedy is a distant relative of Kay Tarrant. Haven't heard of her in many a year. I think she is best known in SF lore for her very strict editing of anything she regarded as not quite upstanding. The story goes that one writer got a little double entendre past her by describing a cat as "the original ball-bearing mouse trap."

Wonderful to read once again something written by Lee Hoffman. I was about to add, "even though the theme was one of sadness," but of course this was a little valedictory celebration of how Dave Van Ronk had been such a part of her life. I hadn't met Dave, but reading of Dick and Pat Ellington and Larry Shaw certainly brought back some happy memories of my own.

Good grief! Joel Nydahl considered Bob Silverberg's *Spaceship* amateurish! The little group of which I was a part at the time regarded it as about the nearest a fanzine could be to professionalism. To us, *Spaceship* was one of an elite group of fanzines emanating from the States. *Grue*, *Peon*, *Le Zombie*, *Wastebasket*, *Quandry* and *Skyhook* come readily to mind as others.

Interesting to read that Fred Smith doesn't think that I've ever been interested in SF. Ah, what *can* one say to that? Wonder how he came to that conclusion.

I rather liked Bob Smith's account of his waving *Trap Door* in the faces of ladies who knocked on his door bearing their fruits of religious wisdom. I was reminded of Chuch Harris standing outside a convention hotel of a Sunday morning too many years ago handing out his own religious tracts to passers by: quote cards bearing eternal wisdoms such as, "If you didn't want crottled greeps, why did you order them?" I lie awake at nights wondering whether the recipients have even yet recovered.

Very interesting letter from Klaus Eylmann about his visiting fans in the U.K. An article in its own right, full of the enthusiastic vitality he was obviously feeling at the time. One small point, though—it was, of course, the late Alan Dodd who lived in Hoddesdon, not Alan Burns.

Of course I also knew every book stall on the island when I was in Singapore, some of which were really tucked away in small housing estates in remote and rural areas like Serangoon Gardens, the Jalan Kayu estate near the Seletar RAF base, and the back streets of Katong. But then, as most days we worked only mornings I had the time to look for them. Pamela Boal was there a few years before me. But I certainly knew the Changi primary school and Changi Village. In the village a well known gent called Baker ran the book shop, and on one occasion he told me in no uncertain terms he did not want me as a customer. He couldn't afford me, he said. We used to gamble for my cash and his SF books. Naturally, I did not wish to be cut off from this source so said, "Okay, I'll come and buy the books and we won't gamble." This was too terrible for him to contemplate. "No!" he shrieked. "You know me, I *like* to gamble." Status quo restored. Ah, happy days.

Wonderful to read something by Ray Nelson. I'm not sure about a Forry v. Harlan argument or comparison, but then I've met Harlan only once (at a San Diego ComicCon) and then only briefly. I've never heard him give any sort of speech, so I'm not familiar with any denegration he may have made of SF. But Ray doesn't help his cause when he makes the point that Harlan's stories contain no science. Forry's involvement with SF doesn't exactly drip with an overload of scientific concept. And who has ever cared about that?

Strange how attitude to smoking have changed. I remember Ted Tubb giving an impromptu lecture at a London party on how to pad out a story with a page-long description of someone lighting a cigarette, and in many of the fanzine pieces I wrote around the same time—1800, I think it was—I'd have someone smoking. Bob Madle mentioned that he could almost taste the cigarette, which was very nice of him. Ah! the joys of smoking a Belgian Bastos with Jan Jansen or an American Philip Morris with Bob Pavlat. I quit, both smoking and writing about the habit, when I found myself going through more than three packs a day, often lighting a cigarette from sheer habit when I already had one burning away in an ash tray. Hey ho! Now, I can't *stand* the filthy habit and won't even sit on a park bench near someone smoking.

So, wow, Robert! What a double letter column! What an issue! If one makes a list of *all* your contributors and beside their names writes the date of their most intensive involvement with SF and/or fandom, I suspect that virtually every year, certainly from 1950, would be covered. Some going. *{I do my best to make this fanzine an ongoing exercise in timebinding. And how I wish Ron was still here to read my comments and harvest the egoboo on his article in the last issue}*

**MOG DECARNIN**

Thank you for *Trap Door* No. 23. Carol's story was hilarious and of course, painful and hair-raising at the same time. I hope things have settled down by now and that there will be no more horrendous surprises.

Michael Dobson's turn at the controls of a reactor was really interesting. As was Ron Bennett's fond memory piece about the computers of antiquity. That was long before I ever set hands on one, but some of the things he described are ominously reminiscent of stuff that used to happen with the first office computers I worked on.

Come to think of it, just about everything in the issue was about the past, wasn't it? Hm, I wonder if that was on purpose or is just what tends to happen these days. *{It takes a special*

*talent to write non-fiction about the future.}*

I really appreciate getting *Trap Door* though I am always far behind on reading (which is the main reason my loccing is so deplorable). Now that I've let all my magazine subs lapse in hopes of moving, things in piles are surfacing faster.

**MILT STEVENS**

*Trap Door* No. 22 had me stymied, because (like many fans) I have difficulty commenting on fiction in fanzines. Of course, I could have started by commenting on the Dan Steffan illustrations which added an interesting touch to the fiction. They remind me of the illustrations that were appearing in *Galaxy* and *Beyond* in the early '50s. Most pulp illustrations tried to be bizarre but realistic. The illustrations in *Galaxy* and *Beyond* at that period had a surreal quality like everything was a dream of some sort. It suggested that things were happening but maybe not really happening.

Then again, I could always diddle with the time travel paradoxes. Such diddling is the last refuge of almost everybody. If Gernsback would have gone crazy and never published *Amazing* without time travel intervention, and Frap changes the past to a different one than we know, where did our timeline come from? Did the inventor N. B. Norton become unhappy in a timeline where he could never possibly sell his story and go back to an even earlier point in time and change things back to our timeline? I somehow sense a Novel of the Future which is about to leak out into a trilogy.

Suggestions for time travel capitalism are always fun, too. Pulp magazines and comics? Pshaw! How about taking a Santa bag full of simple mechanical toys and plastic gewgaws back to about 1910 and trade them in on some gold double eagles. Or how about a camping trip to California in about 1846. The area around Sutter's Mill might be a good location. Gold dust always trades, and you can still pan small amounts of it out of some of the rivers in California, so it wouldn't be all that difficult to explain in the present.

Gordon's story was a great piece. However, I think Lyn Smith's criticism in No. 23 has some validity. I love Gordon's similes, but it could have been improved by lowering the ratio of scatological ones. Charlie Frap is a fan of the most brain-rotted sort. He should think of more similes from pulpy adventures.

As you mention in your editorial in No. 23, e-lists have come to occupy a notable place in current fandom. I'm subscribed to five of them, but I'm hardly a list junkie. In fact, I read a fairly small percentage of the traffic on any of them. The only items that have drawn some comment out of me have been fannish research projects such as the Big Heart Award, the numbers of Science Fiction League Chapters, and the exact dates of some worldcons in the '50s and '60s. Otherwise, I pick up some news and observe some fans badmouthing each other and badmouthing some fans who have died or disappeared. I agree with you that mundane politics shows up entirely too often. Wherever it show up, it always seems to generate far more heat than light.

While reading Bob Silverberg's article, it occurred to me that Bob is one of the few people I know who grew up to be what he wanted to be. Most of the rest of us didn't even become anything close to what we wanted to be. This wasn't always bad. Sometimes we later realized that we wouldn't have really been happy doing what we thought we wanted to do. In many cases, we ended up in jobs that didn't even exist when we were kids. Maybe we should take a survey of all the career aspirations of all junior high school kids today and then use it as a basis for speculating on what the job market twenty years from now might be like. In most cases, whatever they want isn't what they are going to get. *{And extrapolating from what you wrote above, many of those jobs they're going to end up filling haven't even been thought of yet.}*

Ron Bennett writes about nostalgia for early personal computers. I can dig it, but it is still a strange and almost unsettling idea. That bright, wonderful new future is now covered with dust. What do you suppose that says about us?

In John Hertz's "I Thought I Had A Pumpkin Bomb," very few of the individual incidents much resemble things I did while I was growing up, but there is still an overall sense of familiarity. I think it's the feeling of having all that energy to get into all sorts of stuff. And there is just so much stuff to get into when you are a teenager. Some you shouldn't get into but you will anyway. As William Blake put it, "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.

**DICK SWAN**

Thank you for sending me the new Issue of *Trap Door*. I looked at the contents, saw George Metzger in there, and just read his piece. George used to shop at the first store I had in San Jose, opened in the summer of 1969. I was fifteen and my three partners were seventeen.

George was going to school at San Jose State. I had gotten nutty collecting ECs and had a few doubles. George was already doing *Moondog* and some other underground stuff. I remember selling him an issue of *Two-Fisted Tales* for $6 one time. We talked a bit, he turned around to leave, and he rolled it up and stuck it in his back pocket.

At the time I just about croaked, and didn't get it. But a couple of years later I took all my comics out of their plastic bags and just laid them on the shelf by my bed, thinking that I hadn't really read them since I'd bagged them. I was thinking about George when I did that.

I noticed he wrote this stuff in 1999-2000. I think he moved to Canada after he left San Jose, and someone told me he later got into animation. It was cool to read this little piece by him.

**GEORGE LOCKE**

I enjoyed your editorial, and was especially taken by your printing the recipe for chili. One of my fondest memories of my visits to SW USA in the '60s was chili, which somehow is not nearly the same in this country. Though I'm not a cook at all, I occasionally get culinary obsessions, and I'm going to have a bash at making one a la Burbee if I can find the ingredients over here. *{And did you?}*

Enjoyed Ron Bennett's reminiscences about ancient technology. Me, I'm addressing something not dissimilar but even older. I've started on my piece about publishing with a fanciful description of my old Gestetner; I'll send you a draft of that if I can get this modern technology together. *{Not a good sign that I'm still waiting! Was it grasping the technology or writing inspiration that's stymied your efforts?}*

Did you make a New Year's resolution? I did—to spend an hour each day working on the word processor on thee different projects: my bookdealer memoirs; revising and setting up in type a fantasy/detective novel I wrote twenty years ago; and a literary project in an area I have absolutely no experience (education) which suddenly descended on me just before Christmas (and for which I'll actually get paid!!!).

Meanwhile, as part of my work towards the memoirs, I've been going through a run of *Aporrheta*, which has reminded me of a lot of the things I did in those days, and in which I see your name coming up quite often. Next job is to go through *Smoke* and see what I can dig up from that.

**MIKE DECKINGER**

How would *Trap Door* readers obtain the sacred password, assuming the feasibility of your project is established? *{I would send out an e-mail to everyone, as John Foyster and Bill Bowers did.}*

I heard Paul Krassner give a lecture in New York, decades ago when he was still publishing *The Realist*. Krassner was a protégé of Lenny Bruce. He co-wrote the Bruce autobiography "How to Talk Dirty and Influence People," serialized in *Playboy* and reprinted in hardcover, and had much the same sensibilities of Bruce.

Perhaps his most outrageous stunt was when he published in *The Realist* supposed deleted excerpts from William Manchester's JFK biography. Krassner devised a loony scenario in which a grieving Jacqueline Kennedy, following the assassination, discovers Lyndon Johnson hovering over JFK's body in the funeral home, performing an unnameable necrophiliac activity. Both JFK's followers and his critics were aghast at this. Krassner later admitted it was faked and wondered why all the fuss.

Jon Swartz suggests humor is underrated today, and I agree. I still regularly reread Thorne Smith for his gleefully unsophisticated and frequent descents to almost juvenile wackiness. Smith is not Nobel caliber, but he can be a potent remedy for much of the intensity of the news generated today.

If Ron Bennett feels he would be affected by just watching *the Sound of Music*, he will cringe to learn that there are now sing-alongs for *the Sound of Music*. Selected theaters show special prints that have the lyrics for the songs appearing on screen, in time to the music. The entire audience is encouraged to sing along and to appear in special commemorative dress.

**JESSICA SALMONSON**

I have close to zero interest in efanzines and fannish elists, and I lament the passing of the great age of fannish fanzines arriving in the mail. Your editorial and the Arnie Katz quote pretty much sums up my sentiment, though unlike you two, I don't have the motivation to nevertheless keep looking through all that tepid

electronic tea-water for the occasional sip of substance. It's nice to see you gleaning the great morass of dullard postings to find the occasional item worthy of paper. It's also exciting to read through your lettercol, though I'm of an age now that it's a bit weird that I recurringly remark to myself, "Oh, look who's still alive!" including people I could've sworn I had seen obits for, but must have dreamed those.

It's a sad fate to not die young, to live so long as to discover even the dippiest dipshit events of our youth were indeed the good old days. Weird to think that today's least talented almost brain-dead elist fan-types may themselves live to see an age when their best work in elists constituted the good old days.

**FRED SMITH**

Apart from your lettercol, which is a nice meaty one, the items which appealed most to me were the articles by Joe Kennedy and Bob Silverberg—mainly for their accounts of their early fan days, which brought back memories of my own introduction to SF and fandom. As far as science fiction is concerned, though, I predate both of them, since I started to read the stuff around 1936. Didn't discover fandom until the '50s, though. Bob's *Spaceship* was one of the best even if it did contain too much "fan fiction," but I'm afraid that his professional writing was not my favorite. This is mostly my own fault, I hasten to add, since it's really only his earlier work that I've read and most critics assert that his later stuff is up there with the best.

Back in the fabulous '50s a jazz concert was staged at Massey Hall, Toronto, which included a group dubbed The Quintet of the Year (the year being 1953). The group included Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, Charles Mingus and Max Roach—the cutting edge of modern jazz. Mingus recorded the concert and I've had the LP ever since it was issued. Now, fifty years later, there is a book called *Quintet of the Year* by Geoffrey Haydon (published 2002 in the U.K.) which features potted biographies of the five musicians and a detailed account of how the concert was organized and its aftermath.

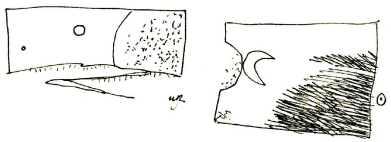
Evidently (and I never knew this until I read the book) it was set up by "an inexperienced and impecunious group of young idealists calling themselves the New Jazz Society of Toronto." Unfortunately for them the world heavyweight title fight between Rocky Marciano and Jersey Joe Walcott was rescheduled for the same night as the concert and this seriously affected their ticket sales. When Jazz Society members Alan Scharf and Boyd Raeburn (!) were asked for a cash advance by Bud Powell, they could only rustle up sixty cents between them. After the concert Raeburn had to pay Mingus "out of his personal funds" according to Haydon.

And yes, this is "our" Boyd Raeburn. I wonder if Boyd ever reported this in any of his fanzines. I never came across it in any of the issues of *À Bas* or *Le Moindre* that happened to come into my possession, but you have many more so possibly it's all stale news. If not, just thought you'd be interested. *{It was never mentioned in* À Bas*—of which I have a complete set—nor in the first dozen or so issues of* Le Moindre *I perused before my eyes glazed over. Checking on-line for the New Jazz Society I find no mention of its members' names, but given the extensive coverage given to jazz in* À Bas *it's got to be "our" Boyd Raeburn.}*

**WE ALSO HEARD FROM:**

**JOHN BERRY** ("I have now commenced my 51st year in fandom," he wrote in January 2005, and he's now done with his 52nd and working on his 53rd—well ahead of me with only pushing my 49th), **SHERYL BIRKHEAD**, **E.B. FROHVET**, **CHRIS GARCIA**, **KAREN HABER (**"I liked *Trap Door*, especially the cute picture of the young Bob by Steve Stiles—it *really* looked like him."), **JOHN HERTZ, BEN INDICK** ("Thanks for a fine big issue featuring not only a posthumous but characteristically wonderful letter from the irreplaceable Harry Warner Jr., but also a lovely article from Bob Agberg, managing successfully, even remarkably, to be proud yet modest. Your introductory 'Doorway' is beautifully put. I recall the days when lengthy letters were the mode in communication (cf. HPL's!). I did some long ones, but never the length you describe such as Redd's. E-mail positively encourages brevity." Alas, I agree.), **TERRY JEEVES**, **JOE KENNEDY** ("*Trap Door* is a remarkably solid and intelligent fanzine, and I've enjoyed the whole number. It's astounding to find Ben Indick, Ray Nelson, Lee Hoffman, and other venerable presences still going strong. Hadn't known that Lee H and my good friend and onetime literary agent Lee Shaw were once married."), **JAY KINNEY (**"It looks like you had a very tight word spacing setting in the page layout program which makes the lines a wee bit hard to read, to my eyes, at least. But maybe I'm just getting old." My fault, that, for overtweaking the word spacing and WordPerfect getting over-enthusiastic and/or wonky in complying—won't happen again!), **BOB LEMAN** ("You have done me a great kindness by keeping me on your list, and you deserve a considered and polished LoC. I'm afraid, though, that this note is all I'm up to!" I wish you were *still* on my list!), **JOSEPH MAJOR**, **GUY MILLER**, **STEVE OGDEN** ("I'm one of those old fogies that likes print fanzines, too. In fact, I seldom ever check any of the on-line sites. I've looked at Timebinders, but not in any depth. I've checked places like the *Mimosa* site that carries all the articles from past issues. I search for names every once in a while (like you and Mike Resnick and Brad Foster) and stumble on some interesting places, but just don't have the time it takes to pursue them."), **LLOYD PENNEY**, **JON SWARTZ**, **BRUCE TOWNLEY** and **HENRY WELCH**.

Now that you're done with this issue, *please* take some time to LoC! As I mentioned in my editorial, one of the thing that sometimes makes me lose hart about continuing *Trap Door* is the increasing number of minimalist, dashed-off e-mail responses. Speaking both on my own behalf and that of my contributors, we wish you'd take more time and write something meaty.



| | '06 | '05 | '04 | '03 | '02 | '01 | '00 | '99 | '98 | '97 | '96 | '95 | '94 | '93 | '92 | '91 | '90 | '89 | '88 | '87 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Australia | 6 | 7 | 6 | 17 | 24 | 17 | 12 | 9 | 12 | 9 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 16 | 18 | 16 | 16 | 12 | 15 | 32 |
| Canada | 17 | 13 | 24 | 14 | 15 | 18 | 18 | 19 | 16 | 19 | 14 | 16 | 14 | 12 | 17 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| U. K. | 37 | 39 | 29 | 41 | 52 | 39 | 61 | 65 | 64 | 58 | 47 | 52 | 60 | 51 | 50 | 44 | 30 | 61 | 51 | 33 |
| U. S. | 113 | 154 | 106 | 91 | 113 | 84 | 105 | 69 | 91 | 109 | 108 | 143 | 109 | 91 | 104 | 85 | 66 | 55 | 67 | 58 |
| Others | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 4 | 3 |
| **Totals:** | **174** | **213** | **165** | **165** | **204** | **158** | **197** | **163** | **183** | **195** | **180** | **223** | **198** | **172** | **191** | **147** | **119** | **130** | **138** | **130** |

The "other" fanzine received in 2006 was Chris Nelson's most enjoyable *Mumblings From Munchkinland*; Chris is currently living in Fiji. The percentage of fanzines received electronically, mostly through Bill Burns's estimable efanzines.com, increased from 22% (37 zines) in 2004 to 38% (83 zines) in 2005, but backed down to 32% (54 zines) in 2006. Much of the credit (or blame) for this in all the years can be attributed to Arnie Katz, although Dave Burton and Earl Kemp are also contributing factors. However, *a lot* more electronic fanzines are being published that I *don't* download and print—if I did, the totals for recent years would be much higher. And, some of the fanzines I receive in hard copy are also being posted electronically on efanzines. Despite these quibbles, overall we seem to be talking to each other in fanzine form as much as ever. And that's good.