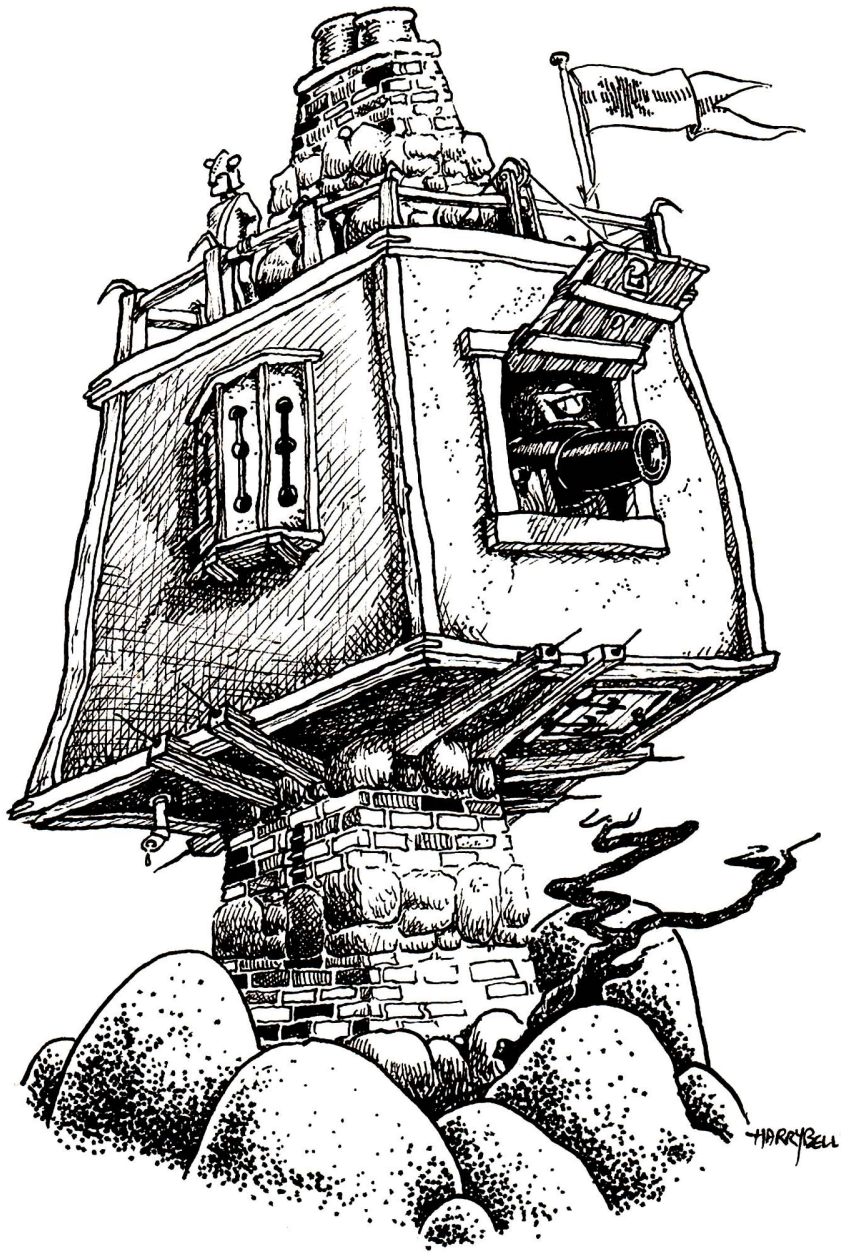

TRAPDOOR

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DOORWAY

As long-time readers of this fanzine know, I've memorialized the passing of all too many of our number. In most cases these were fans who were around when I discovered fandom in 1958 and who had been always there. Until they weren't. For about the last twenty years I've done this eulogizing so often that some have characterized *Trap Door* as an "obitzine."

Here I go once again, but this time I'm writing of a more personal loss—my oldest friend, and a friend who became a fan because of me. I'm speaking of Calvin Demmon, who, after an intense year and a half with leukemia, passed away on October 10, 2007. He was surrounded by his wife of 41 years, India, and three of their four children.

Calvin was born August 6, 1942, in Inglewood, California. He was just three weeks older than me. I met him in junior high when we were twelve, but we didn't get to know each other well until we had a geometry class together in high school. One day he noticed me reading something obviously extracurricular in my three-ring binder and asked what it was. A fanzine, I said.

"What's a fanzine?"

I explained. His face brightened.

"Sounds interesting! May I borrow some?"

But of course.

Within months Calvin was reading, writing for, and publishing fanzines himself, revealing the sharp wit and good-natured humor that forever endeared him to me. Within a year he was celebrated as one of fandom's premier humorists, inventing a form of whimsical short story he called "Biffables" (he referred to himself back then as "Calvin W. 'Biff' Demmon") and publishing many of them in his fanzine **Skoan** (for "some kind of a nut").

Soon Calvin followed my lead by joining some apas. His longest membership was in FAPA, where he stayed for six years. During the long wait to be admitted, he produced a fanzine called *W'Basket* for the Shadow FAPA, a group that had sprung up among the many waitlisters, and for a time

he even served as its official editor. While in FAPA he published *New Cat Sand*, which, like his earlier fanzines, mainly comprised his own short stories and personal essays. He placed twice in the top ten on the annual egoboo polls.

In addition to his solo productions, Calvin is fondly remembered as co-editor of several highly regarded weekly fanzines. In 1963 he and Andrew Main produced thirteen issues of a fanzine called *The Celebrated Flying Frog of Contra Costa County*. And in 1971-1972 he and John D. Berry published twenty issues of *Hot Shit*. Both these fanzines had extremely limited circulation but have become legendary beyond their actual numbers. Articles by both his co-editors about their experiences with Calvin follow, along with excerpts of Calvin's contributions.

During the '60s and '70s, as our lives diverged, it was difficult maintaining contact. We stayed in sporadic touch by mail and an occasional visit. I was fortunate enough to be there on Valentine's Day in 1967 when Calvin married Wilma (later India) Alexander in a huge old Victorian house in San Francisco that belonged to her family. Fellow fan Dick Ellington officiated as a minister in the Church of the Brotherhood of The Way. I'll always remember the joy on their faces as they made their way through the massive shower of rice that accompanied them to their getaway car.

My next clear memory is receiving an envelope from Calvin in 1968 that contained a single Twiltone sheet:

> Calvin and Wilma Demmon proudly announce the birth of the first of a series of children: Peter Morgan Demmon. Born September 2, 1968 at 4:07 a.m. in Los Angeles, weighing 6 lbs. 8 oz. and being over 20" long. Mother and child are doing fine. Mr. Demmon is a nervous wreck.

True to their word, Calvin and India went on to have another son, Casson, a daughter, Veronica, and to adopt another daughter, Laura.

Because our contact was so widely spaced, I was unable to keep up with the family's many moves and Calvin's job changes. A lengthy memorial piece in the Monterey *Herald* filled me in:

> Before working for newspapers, Demmon attended five different colleges and worked a variety of jobs, including as a flower truck driver, a radio parts salesman, a typist-clerk and a social worker office manager. He also worked as a night shift guard at the Los Angeles County Juvenile Hall and wrote science fiction on the side… His short story, "The Importance of Being Important," was selected for inclusion in the 1984 book *100 Great Fantasy Short Short Stories*, edited by Isaac Asimov. He took a job as manager of a credit counseling firm on Market Street in San Francisco, then as zone administrative supervisor for Bell and Howell Co. in Burlingame.

And somehow he found the time to sell seven short science-fiction stories—three to Avram Davidson at *F&SF* and four to Ted White at *Amazing* and *Fantastic*. Also, as "Carl Damon" he sold two mainstream short stories to *Sir!*

The career Calvin settled into for the next thirty-odd years began in 1973 when he and his family moved to Edmonton, Canada, where he became circulation manager for the *Edmonton Report* (later known as the *Western Report*). Before long he transferred to the newsroom, working as a reporter, assistant city editor and finally city editor.

The family returned to Southern California in 1977, where Calvin worked for newspapers another four years before being offered a position at the Monterey *Herald*, first as a copy editor and then as a columnist and reporter. He covered government activities in the area as a reporter and also wrote a column. Quoting the *Herald* again:

> He was best known among his news sources and his fellow employees for his gentle wit and compassionate heart, traits abundantly on display in his weekly "Serra's Children" column… Many of the subjects of the column came to count themselves as friends after he interviewed them. He received many awards and commendations from the city councils he covered, including Monterey and Seaside. He also won competitions for his work, including an award from the California Newspaper Publishers Associations Annual Better Newspapers Competition for his "Serra's Children" column.

Calvin's career at the *Herald* ended in 2001 when he took early retirement after the paper changed hands in an unfriendly takeover. After that he worked as a substitute teacher for Hartnell College and Salinas Adult School, something he greatly enjoyed. Deeply religious, he was an active member of Sacred Heart Church in Salinas, where he taught the faith to new converts through the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults. He was also involved with Cursillo, a group dedicated to building the Catholic tradition. For a while he teamed up with his former employer in Canada to help compile a history of Christianity, an extensive description of the church during its first 1,000 years.

Some of Calvin's writing is still available on the Web. You can read his observations about teaching at…

http://www.demmon.blogspot.com/

…where there's also a letter from his partner in the history of Christianity project about its demise. A very nice photo of him is still on-line at…

http://geocities.com/calvindemmon/

…along with a link to his SF bibliography.

In 1992 Carol and I attended a joyous celebration of Calvin and India's 25th wedding anniversary at their home near Monterey. In 2001 and 2005 they came to Berkeley to join in a 40th anniversary high school mini-reunion with me, Carol, Jerry Knight (another classmate/friend of ours I managed to seduce into fandom) and his wife Barbara Adair. We spent some wonderful hours together on these occasions, eating, drinking, catching up and just basking in each other's company. It was a treat to see them and we all agreed to keep in closer touch.

Carol and I were trying to arrange another visit when a chilling e-mail arrived in late May 2006. We were glad we were sitting down.

> I guess I always feel compelled to write to you when my wellness is wobbly because you're my oldest living friend—oldest as in longest time. The docs are trying to figure out why all my blood cell counts have gone way down; the current theory, as yet unverified, is something called myelodysplastic syndrome. (It's said to be "a heterogeneous group of closely related clonal hematopoietic disorders." I wish they wouldn't say things like that, though I do like the idea of a "poietic disorder" —iamsic pentameter, maybe.). This still hasn't been officially defined as a Big Medical Deal yet, and I may turn out to be perfectly OK, except old.
>
> Quintessential Calvin, that!

Six months later we learned from India that Calvin's "disorder" had advanced to full leukemia and he'd been at Stanford Hospital since late October. He would be there for over four months, his condition seesawing up and down, sometimes dramatically and heartbreakingly. Our asking "May we visit him?" led to weekly 100-mile round trips and, ironically, more frequent contact with Calvin and India than we'd ever had.

Thanks to India's unflagging insistence that the doctors not give up on him, Calvin rallied and finally got to go home in February 2007. Once he was there, we called him often had some long and enjoyable times on the phone together. The Calvin we knew best for his quick mind and quirky wit was back, and we relished every minute of those calls. But we never did get to visit him at home, because before long he was in and out of the hospital again to deal with recurrent and devastating infections that his immune system, weakened by chemo, couldn't handle. And on October 11th his daughter Veronica told us he had passed away the day before.

Carol and I went to his funeral at the Sacred Heart Church in Salinas on October 19th. Other than his family, the only other people we knew there, and were grateful to see, were Jerry and Barbara, who felt his loss every bit as deeply as we did.

We were friends for life, and we miss him immensely.

—Robert Lichtman

À la Recherche de Grenouilles Perdues

Reminiscences of the *Flying Frog* and Calvin Demmon

Andrew Main
(*aka* "andy main bem")

Although my name has been linked forever in fannish annals with that of our late and dear friend Calvin W. "Biff" Demmon, I have to admit that I don't remember much about him. I didn't know him very well or for very long, and it's been so many years, so many adventures… I really don't remember much about *anything* that happened in those far-oof days. But Robert has asked me, so I'll give it a try.

Calvin and I are linked, of course, because of our brief collaborative production of a weekly fanzine in the spring and summer of 1963 titled *The Celebrated Flying Frog of Contra Costa County*, a.k.a. "Flying Frog."

I believe I first met Calvin in the summer of 1961, when I moved to Berkeley after graduating high school; a year older than I, Calvin had been at UC Berkeley for a year, sharing a dorm room with fellow Bob Lichtman schoolmate Jerry Knight. Calvin had published several issues of a fanzine called **SKOAN** ("Some Kind Of A Nut"), which had begun to establish his reputation as a talented and humorous writer. I proceeded on to New York that fall, returning the next summer to Berkeley, where I spent the 1962 fall semester at UC, amidst a whirlwind of events which eventually resulted in my being at rather loose ends in the spring of 1963. And so our story commences.

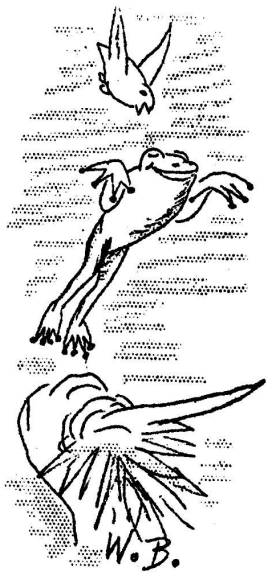
Those well-read in American literature will of course recognize the overall inspiration for our title, while the geographical reference was where I was living at the time, hosted by the very kind and generous Ray and his lovely wife Kirsten Nelson, in the Ivory Tower, Ray's study—a room which rose by itself out of the center of their house (it had windows with great views on two or three sides, as I recall), on Ramona Avenue in the charming, rustic village of El Cerrito, north of Berkeley in Contra Costa County.

How the *Frog* came about I don't quite remember. Perhaps Calvin was visiting me one day in the Ivory Tower, and somehow the idea of putting out a weekly fanzine came up. Or maybe it happened at one of the fannish parties for which Berkeley was justly famous. I had the necessary mimeograph (a Rex Rotary M2, for the connoisseurs in the audience) and practical skills, and Calvin had the auctorial talent, so…well, fellow fans know how it is. From rereading the issues for the first time in decades, it appears that an appallingly (to me now) regular consumption of highly cultured liquid carbohydrates also had something to do with it.

But whence "Flying Frog"? Well, apparently somehow I had come across the work of Wilhelm Busch, whom Wikipedia calls "a German painter and poet who is known for his satirical picture stories." Specifically, an illustrated poem of his, titled "*Der fliegende Frosch*"—which, as the classical scholars among us will already have deduced, was about a flying frog. Or at least a frog who, having managed with little difficulty to climb up into a tree, then got the idea he could fly. Like a bird, as shown in the illustration I painstakingly stenciled for our premier issue.

It seemed like a fun name for a fanzine, and so it was. (See the original poem at http://snipurl.com/fliegendefrosch.)

The plan, which we stuck with amazingly well, was to get together once a week and produce two pages each, print about sixty copies, and mail them to all our fan (and some other) friends. The first issue appeared 5 May 1963, and it appears (if the dates can be believed) that we actually kept up the weekly schedule through the end of June, then skipped a week while we attended Westercon XVI in Burlingame (remembered, I'm sure, by many of us as a high point of our sophomore years—if we really remember little else about it, due to the highly liquid nature of the proceedings), then picked up again on 14 July and continued for three more issues, through 28 July.



At that point, we realized we were feeling a mite frazzled with it all (as one of us put it, it was getting to be something of a Frog on our Backs), and besides, the jokes were growing a little stale (if they were at all fresh to begin with), and *besides*, it seems Calvin, having completed a two-year college degree, had decided to quit our little backwater burg and See the World, beginning with New York City.

So we decided to make the 13th our Gala Final Issue, a huge production of eight full pages in color (with letterpressed title page courtesy of Don Fitch); not surprisingly, it took us two weeks of intense labor to produce this prodigy, which finally appeared on 11 August. And We Folded Our Tents.

Oh, and I was also preparing to relocate to the fabled wonderland of Mt. Carroll, Illinois, there to resume my briefly interrupted educational career at a small, unusual liberal arts institution called Shimer College.

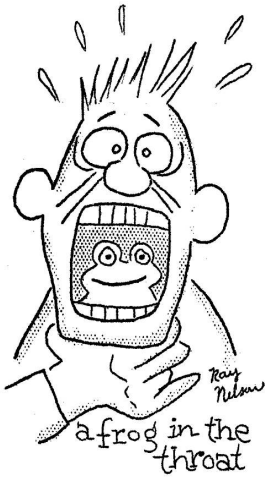
(The previous year I had met a Shimer alumni couple in Berkeley, through whom I then met a young woman named Ardis Waters in Chicago while I was attending the 1962 Worldcon. Ardis relocated to Berkeley, followed by her two sweet sisters, Carla and Danni—who later became an SF writer of some note under the name Melissa Michaels—and a bunch of other Shimer folks, who seemed to fit right into Berkeley fandom and strongly influenced its culture for the next few decades. Several of these folks were prominent in the *Frog* family, including especially our Staff Mail Boy, Tom Hall, who kindly sneaked our issues into the mail at the San Francisco corporate office where he worked; wish I knew where he is now. And I was inspired by all this to try out Shimer myself; I lasted a year there, then became an official College Dropout.)

As for *der fliegende Frosch*, the frog who thought he could fly…well, it turned out he was mistaken, as shown in Herr Busch's final drawing, which adorned the *Frog*'s final issue.

Reading the first issue now, I note that it was produced entirely (both Calvin's and my pages) on my Facit portable typewriter, with its stylish typeface, which I'd had specially made at the factory in Sweden while I was living in New York City a couple years earlier, so that I could easily type in Scandina-

vian languages with it (as Calvin notes, it had an umlaut where the semicolon should be). From this it is apparent that issue was entirely produced at the Ivory Tower, one sunny Sunday afternoon. I also get the feeling (and the vague recollection), from reading Calvin's pages, that the publication was mostly my idea, and he mostly went along to get me to stop nagging him about how we ought to publish a fanzine.

For later issues, partly in response to complaints from readers who said they couldn't tell us apart (which I find hard to believe; as I said, Calvin had the Talent, I was mostly Trying Rather Hard—or just plain Trying, I suppose), Calvin's pages were done in a standard pica type; I don't recall if he cut the stencils at his home or at the Ivory Tower.



Rereading these *Frog*s for the first time in some forty years, the first word that came to mind was "sophomoric"; in truth they're a mite embarrassing in spots. However, given our ages at the time—Calvin was 20, I 19—I suppose Much Can Be Forgiven. Certainly Calvin's writing talent, though hardly in Full Flower, was at least in embryonic evidence. And it seems we—and our various friends who comprised the *Frog* Family—had a good time doing it. I'm afraid there isn't much in them, though, that would survive for long if taken Out of Context.

The small print run allowed scope for novelties like hand-coloring the frog on the first issue with a green marker (and printing the frog in green on the final issue); using Ray Nelson's great rubber stamp collection for ornamentation; pasting in copies of the Finnish Moomintroll comic strip, a great interest of mine at the time; and use of various little stickers I picked up at my job in the mailroom of a San Francisco corporate office. Among numerous running "jokes" was repeated references to the "keen red floor" of the Ivory Tower, where Calvin was wont to stretch out and rest between bouts at the typewriter; one issue featured a souvenir thereof, a three-inch-square red paper sticker.

And there was a fair amount of rather clever fanart, much of it exploring the "flying frog" motif, from such luminaries as Ray Nelson, Steve Stiles, Arthur Thomson, Colin Cameron, Larry Ivie, even Johnny Burbee.

Another ongoing theme was 'Pataphysics, to which I was introduced by Ray Nelson, who was a devotee of this (according to Wikipedia, which explains it better than I could) "philosophy dedicated to studying what lies beyond the realm of metaphysics. It is a parody of the theory and methods of modern science and is often expressed in nonsensical language." In its own way, the *Frog* was, I suppose, a pretty good example of 'Pataphysics, and indeed was acknowledged as such by the College de 'Pataphysique in Paris itself—to which, at Ray's urging, I sent a set of issues.

It's been a long time now since my life path veered away from fandom, but I've always remembered my time there with great fondness. In a world so much given, it seems, to infinite varieties of horror, fandom was—and remains, I'd guess—a refreshing oasis, a bunch of warm-hearted, generous people who do things together and for each other for the simple fun of it. The amount of sheer creative energy that went into some of the fanzines I remember, truly labors of love by any definition, was simply astonishing. So I guess fandom itself provides a good example of 'Pataphysics in action, though so far as I know the *Frog* was the only fan artifact ever to make this connection directly.

So, come the fall of 1963, Calvin was in New York (anyway, from the final *Frog*s, that was where he was headed), and I was in Mt. Carroll. And life went on. I *do* remember *some* of the Sixties, anyway, even though I was there.

As far as I can recall, the last time I saw Calvin was *ca.* 1967, in Los Angeles, just before I left for Canada. He had recently met and married Wilma, now India, and they seemed very happy together, a classic Leo and Libra (as I remember) combination.

Dear Calvin, it was a privilege and a pleasure to know you. Even were it my place to do so (which it surely is not), I'm sure God needs no encouragement to bless you, wherever you are now; and I'm also certain your journey will continue to be fruitful for yourself, and a blessing to those around you. *Ave et vale!*

—Andrew Main

Calvin in *The Flying Frog*

Hello. My name is Calvin W. "Demmon." I live in Berkeley. Maybe I will stay here forever, having already been here nearly a year, because there is a nearby San Francisco Bay. (#1)

My next victim is standing across the room, unaware, happily slipsheeting a Fanzine. I have to kill him because his typewriter has umlauts where the semicolon should be. I am going to stuff his nose full of Grave Accents and pour molten Æ's in his eyes. (#1)

This morning at about eleven o'clock I heard the telephone ringing in my spacious flat on Bancroft Way. I was totally asleep at the time, but I managed to stagger into the Living Room (carefully avoiding my Great Horned Toad, who lives in a box and is named "Calvin"); it was Andy Main, who said "Hey! Why don't we publish a weekly fanzine?" I could not accept the responsibility of this, because I had just been dreaming that we wouldn't let me across the Mexican Border because I didn't have a Berkeley High School library ard. The other night I dreamt that I took my foot off and put it in a paper sack for a Lark. (A foot makes a terrible Lark, by the way.) Well, somebody can analyze those dreams at once and respond to the below address. We will be out of town next weekend; we are going to drive to Canada and sell our ears. (#3)

Last night, at the home of Jerry and Miri Knight, a GGFS Meeting took over. We played Old Movie Titles Charades (the side of which we were the captain winning this hard game, of course) until we stopped. Two cases of Cheap Beer were consumed by those attending this ceremony, and we were even honored by a visit from the John and Bjo Trimbles, of Los Angeles. We also received a telephone call from Santa Barbara (and Bob Lichtman and Bob West), and we have the Scoop of the Week to report here: Mr. Lichtman is once more leaving Southern California and moving to Berkeley, this time to study and learn things at the U of C here. Mr. Lichtman will be up here in August (in his words), "after I kill Redd Boggs." (#5)

Well, we actually rode on a Flying Frog the other day, and I'll bet you are just sitting on your hands in excitement about it. See, we had these Visitors from our old Home Town, these two Girls, or even *Girls*, who came to visit us in our wicked Berkeley environment. We took them all over the place: Sausalito, San Francisco, Richmond, and the Three Bridges. In San Francisco we went on the Bay Cruise, and were splashed by a wave which caused us to break our sunglasses by trying to wipe them dry. In Sausalito I said, "There is a bar from which once I was kicked out for being so Young," and they just got Real Impressed.

The next day we went to Tilden Park and drove around and finally visited the Merry-Go-Round and it was there that I rode on a Flying Frog. My two Visitors rode on chickens and horses.

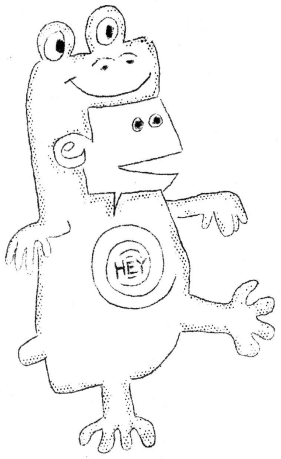
Anyway, I feel like a Real Berkeley Fan now. (#5)

The other evening our telephone rang.

"Hello," we said into the receiver. "Hello," said a voice. "Is this Calvin?" Yes, we said. "I have just received your latest fanzine, in which you say I should call you up from New York," said the voice, "and I thought I'd better do it while it was still on my desk." Pause. "My name is Pete Graham."

As you can imagine, we were gassed out of our mind by this, and we were at a sudden Loss for Words which did not go unnoticed by Mr. Graham. "I think," he said, "that since you told me to call you up, you have a responsibility to say something entertaining." Gasp laugh, we said. "Well," he said, "if you don't have anything else to say, then Goodbye." And he wasn't kidding, and he really hung up.

We immediately called up Mr. Main and reported this to him, and we both laughed ourselves Silly and were Pleased As Punch. Mr. Graham has earned himself a place on our Permanent Mailing List, if he even *wants* it, after finding out how boring it is to talk to us on the Telephone, or "in person." (#6)



On Friday evening all of Berkeley (including Calvin Demmon, who went with the Knights) attended a Party at the Orinda home of Poul and Karen Anderson. Alva Rogers was floating in the middle of the air with joy about his recent Book Sale which will make him famous and popular. Mrs. Rogers' wife, Sid, said that we "have an old chin and young eyes," and she said a whole lot of funnier things which we didn't write down because she told us to "stop taking notes like a cub reporter." Ed Clinton took one look at us and asked Jerry Knight, "Do you think a human being can be a non-sequitur?" Jerry and I both laughed and punched Mr. Clinton in the arm, and Jerry loaned me his IBM notebook so I could copy down that witty saying. Mr Clinton spelled "sequitur" for us without being asked. We inquired if Mr. Clinton had anything else funny to say for us to write down.

"Yes," said Mr. Clinton. (#8)

Mr. & Mrs. Ray Nelson, who live in this place with Andy Main, are sitting on the floor over there right now. We have just asked Mr. Nelson to tell us something funny for our Frog, and he has reminded us of a great Westercon happening to which we were witness:

We were standing with Kirsten in the banquet room, talking to Elmer "God" Perdue. Mr. Perdue bought Mrs. Nelson a drink, and then handed her a ten-dollar bill and turned around to talk to somebody else.

Mrs. Nelson looked long at the ten-dollar bill, unbelieving. She was just about to run away to Mexico and take dope when Mr. Perdue reappeared, grinning drunkenly, and removed the bill from her hands.

"The Lord giveth," said Mr. Perdue, "and the Lord taketh away." (#10)

Putting out The Frog every week makes us feel Expansive and Swell; despite what we might say now and then in our clever way, we enjoy getting your Letters, and they are always so nice and friendly that we often feel that there is some hope for Love in the World. We are glad that you like us; we like you a lot too. "Hate," though, is part of The Frog's flavor, and won't be completely abolished. Write again, everybody, and next week we will send you some cookies and a whistle. (#11)

My first semester in College went by so quickly—a matter of some four or five months, I later discovered—that I hardly realized it until I was called up before the Dean in January and told that I'd flunked out. I couldn't believe it. I had graduated from high school with Top Honors, and even earned a couple of scholarships to College.

"I can't believe this," I told the Dean. "I have graduated from high school with Top Honors, and even earned a couple of scholarships to College." I removed my freshman beanie and stuffed it in the Dean's ear nervously.

"Nevertheless, my son," said the Dean, nodding in agreement, "you have flunked Chemistry and French and English, and you have received a 'D' in ROTC. We are afraid we cannot allow you to continue here at this Place of Learning."

I helped him to his feet again, and countered with: "I will try my very best, Sir, and will earn Straight A's next semester. I realize that you cannot be lenient with just every Tom, Dick, and Harry who comes in here with a big smile and a sorority girl on his arm, but ..."

"Let me see that sorority girl on your arm," the Dean interrupted, an almost inhuman glint in his eye.

I plucked Carol off my arm and placed her in the Dean's hand. "Maybe something can be arranged," he said. I could just barely hear him over the loud whistling noise coming from his shoe. "Maybe…"

"Not on your life," I replied in haste. "Do you think I would sell out my True Love for the price of a Cheap Ticket to Education?"

"No, of course not," said the Dean. "What I'm interested is in how you shrunk her down to this small size. With this formula, we could become rich! We could dominate the world!"

"Yes," I said. "I see it now! An enemy comes along, say with some purpose in mind, and we shrink him down to about one-and-one-half feet, like Carol here, and then we could just put him under the chair or out of the way like that."

"Exactly!" cried the Dean, wiping his eyes in relief. "Well, do we have an agreement?"

"Unfortunately for both of us," I said, "Carol was born like this. She is just a natural dwarf, not made that way by any scientific means of which I have knowledge."

The Dean's face contorted in pain as Carol kicked him in the thumb. Within the hour, his pain had turned to rage, and he tossed us both out of the office.

"Well," I told Carol, as we sat outside on the sidewalk, "that's how it was in my first semester of College."

But she had fallen in love with a sparrow and moved to Falls Church. (#13)

It is a hard thing to do, to end a fanzine after thirteen issues. There is always the danger that you will wind up with a big anticlimax, instead of a punchline, and that it will stick in everybody's mind and turn sour and nobody will like you any more. "There is always that danger," we have just shouted at Mr. Main, but he has taken to his bed once more, as he has often done during these many weeks of Frog publishing, and we are left alone here to be funny.

It seems like such a long time ago that we sat around on Ray Nelson's body and talked about publishing a fanzine called "The Flying Frog." "We will revive the spirit of Berkeley fandom," said Mr. Main, "and everybody will write us letters and we will have a lot of fun at this game." Everybody did write us letters, too, and we must admit that it has been a kick for us to get a telephone call every other night from our co-editor, who would always say, "Well, let's look at the mailbag, Mr. Demmon," and then laugh cordially as we hung up on him. Oh, there have been a lot of little traditions which have evolved during the last thirteen weeks, and they are all so cute like that that we will save them for some other time, when we will write them up in a big article and send them off to Bob Lichtman.

"Well," we have just said to Ray Nelson and Kirsten Nelson and Andy Main and Jerry & Miri Knight and Cynthia Goldstone (Lou has just stepped out for a drink) and the Ellingtons and Lowell & Carla Moore and Norman Clarke, as we are all sitting around watching the death of this fanzine, "Well, this is the last page of The Flying Frog."

"Now do you believe in God?" asked Mr. Nelson. (#13)

—Calvin Demmon, 1963

North Beach Nights

Co-editing a Weekly Fanzine With Calvin Demmon

John D. Berry

In the fall of 1971, I was fresh out of college, back in the United States after six months studying at Stanford's overseas campus in France, and about to move into my first apartment in San Francisco, ready for the adventure of post-student life. One of the first things I did, after securing that apartment, was to suggest to Calvin Demmon that we publish a weekly fanzine. To my surprise, he said yes.

"Starting a new fanzine," I wrote in the first issue of *Hot Shit*, "seems a reasonable way to celebrate my new status in life, as an ex-student (why, hell, I'm a Bachelor of the Arts, which could be translated as living in sin with the Muse), an unemployed would-be writer, and a new resident of the City of San Francisco."

Now here, you see, I'm already running up against the problem of writing reminiscences: they're all lies, and half-remembered lies at that. For the very next sentences contradict my recollection that it was my idea to do *Hot Shit*.

"It seems," I went on, "that upon moving to San Francisco, one is seized with the urge to publish a weekly fanzine. When Calvin and Wilma moved here, over a year ago, Calvin called me up and said, 'Let's publish a weekly fanzine!' But I was busy, and when I got unbusy he got busy, so we didn't." The following paragraphs go on to recount my return from France in time for the first Boston worldcon, my return to the Bay Area, and the small-scale adventures of finding an apartment in San Francisco. "Half the time I'm not even here. I go down to Stanford a lot, where I hang around the Stanford Community Coffeehouse. I'm a big fan of coffeehouses, and of this one in particular. With very little effort at all, I can feel just like a student; why, I even get nervous at the onset of exam week. Yet there's that delicious feeling of being unaffected by the hustle and bustle all around me. (Hustle and bustle? You've got to be kidding. All right, ennui and apathy.) When I'm not in Palo Alto, I often go to Berkeley, where once again I am mistaken for a student. But now I am in San Francisco, where Calvin and I have just finished this fanzine."

Already you can see the essential characteristics of John Berry circa 1971: a fluent writer but with a weakness for cute asides; an ex-student with really very little idea of what to do next; and a would-be artistic intellectual. Not that different from a lot of other footloose 21-year-olds, then or now, except for having the creative outlet of fandom.

Calvin knew exactly where I was coming from, I'm sure; he'd been a similarly aimless young creative person eight years earlier, when he and Andy Main had co-edited the weekly *Flying Frog*, right there in the Bay Area. Now, though still not yet 30, Calvin was married with two young sons and was trying to make ends meet on a pair of low-paying jobs while laboring away at a novel on the side. "I'm not as Young and Cute as I used to be," he wrote in that first *Hot Shit*, "but I want to write in the same old way. The last time I was into publishing a weekly fanzine each week meant New Adventures and New Friends. Now, well—the big news in my life today, for example, is that the company is undergoing its annual audit by the State.

"Yet there is much that can be said for growing conservative and hard. I can ride the bus every day without freaking out. I shave every day and only notice it every other day. I yell at the kids, watch TV, have a few beers, pay the bills, and go to sleep. It is a small, tidy life, and almost completely misleading.

"For example, the only reason I can ride the bus without freaking out is that I spend the entire time in the prone position, speaking to God, pulling my vibes together. And when I yell at the kids, they yell back. Also I don't pay bills. It is very hard to get at the truth about one's own life."

That's Calvin's oblique, deadpan voice, as he too established his persona for the fanzine and tried to make sense, and a few funny bits, out of his everyday life. Neither of us had much daily interaction with each other apart from *Hot Shit*, but the weekly ritual that quickly established itself was a high point for both of us. For me, it turned out to be the most stable thing in my drifting post-student life, and also the most creative thing that I produced that year. Calvin was a great person to spend time with; it was simply a lot of fun sitting around at my place or sometimes his, typing out our impromptu words (we never rehearsed or wrote our bits ahead of time), drinking very cheap wine (one time when I brought along a jug of Tavola Red, he said, "Oh, good; I can't usually afford that"), and laughing.

The other ritual was taking the pages we'd written (always four pages, two by Calvin, two by me) over to Grant and Cathy Canfield's apartment, then sitting around talking and laughing some more and maybe smoking a little dope. Cathy was our secret, never-named Staff Printing Person: she got the fanzine printed by running it off surreptitiously on the office xerox where she worked. (Yes, we were that broke. *Hot Shit* was one of the very first fanzines produced on a xerox machine, long before people started arguing about whether xerography was a sufficiently "fannish" method of reproduction. The only way we could do it was by getting free printing, though we somehow managed to scrape together enough pennies to buy stamps for our 60-member mailing list.) Those evenings with Calvin—and then with him and Grant and Cathy—were probably among the most amusing and friendly regular gatherings I've ever participated in. They made me feel that I was really doing something, and that I had a true community in San Francisco.

The city itself was a frequent subject of our writing. In the third issue, Calvin offered our readers something they wouldn't find anywhere else: "We are now offering our special San Francisco Cockroaches to the public for the first time. Each roach comes in a special gift box with a card saying 'souvenir of San Francisco.' Many of the roaches are in excellent condition, although some have been slightly squashed in processing. This has been an especially good year for our special roaches, so our stocks are large enough to ensure that none will be disappointed. (We are reminded of Carol Carr, whose earliest memory is of her mother trying to kill a large raisin.) They make excellent business or personal gifts. Live delivery can be arranged at a slightly higher cost—be sure to specify 'regular' or 'extra-large.' The live roaches can be encouraged to multiply in your own kitchen or bathroom and require little or no attention. No messy cat-boxes, no expensive 'obedience-training' courses. Just a few table scraps, and soon you will have them eating out of your hands."

In *Hot Shit* #7, I recounted life in the city: "The other night the Hayes bus drove over the sidewalk to get to the bus stop, thus scattering pedestrians right and left. People getting on said, 'Far out! Do it again! I've never seen a bus on the sidewalk before.' The driver just said, 'That's San Francisco.'"

I remember walking around North Beach one day with Grant, also a fairly recent arrival in San Francisco, and turning to each other and saying: "Hey! We *live* here!"

Our small but select mailing list sent us letters, and we turned anything that amused us into a catchphrase or a running gag. Terry Hughes wrote us funny letters that we printed under the rubric "Terry Hughes Sez." Ray Nelson sent funny bits to Calvin. Jay Kinney, who had not yet moved to San Francisco, sent us cartoons from Brooklyn. Avram Davidson wrote us, as did Greg Benford. Alice Sanvito

responded in the *Hot Shit* spirit: "You guys can keep your roaches. We got plenty. First you send people all this shit, then you try to sell cockroaches. Pathetic. Crazy people." I even got letters from a couple of my college friends who had never had the slightest contact with fandom before. Many artist/cartoonists sent us versions of the fanzine's name for use as a header on the first page. Grant often handed us cartoons when we came over with freshly typed pages. Steve Stiles sent us the wonderful four-panel "Max, the Dancing Clam" ("And if he's really good they're gonna throw him back into the ocean!").

We kept this up for six months, though that span included a gap or two when I was off traveling across the country or we simply got too busy. We finally called a halt to *Hot Shit* with its twentieth issue, a special extra-long issue that included several riders (one-sheet fanzines from other people, such as the first issue of Ray Nelson's *Garden Library*). Shortly after our final publishing party, I moved out of my apartment and headed back to the East Coast for the summer, still in search of my future life. Although I came back in September and spent a couple of months in northern California, including seeing Calvin and his family, I ended up moving east and didn't live in San Francisco again until nearly thirty years later.

This week's egoboo: to Calvin Demmon.

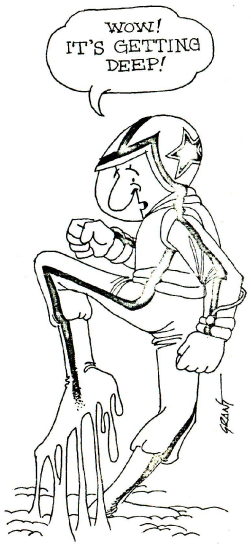
— John D. Berry

Calvin in *Hot Shit*

Several weeks ago Wilma, Peter, Casson and I went to visit Philip K. Dick. Phil had never met Wilma or our sons, and I hadn't seen Phil for a number of years. It was a strange afternoon. "We have lost the ability to distinguish between truth and reality," Phil said, almost as soon as we got there, and he soon had me believing it. Finally, after some heavy melodrama happened at the front door, and Phil began to mutter about getting a shotgun and some shells, we left. On the way out, Phil autographed a copy of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* for Wilma. "To the people," it said, "we are trying so hard to protect." (#1)

My 3-year-old son Peter and I watched part of an Oakland Raiders football game on tv yesterday. I have never understood the game myself but Peter likes it and he described the plays carefully to me. "See, Calvin—there's a man running! Oh, oh, he fell down!" When he gets a little older I'm going to have him explain Science Fiction. (#2)

I've finally discovered, after eight months, how to talk to my boss. He has always been unimpressed by my education, by my publishing credits, by my manner of dress (I wear Hart Schaffner & Marx suit to work but I got it from the Salvation Army for $3.00). His is a lusty, vital world. It came to me almost as an inspiration from above. We were looking out the window, watching the construction of a new building on the other side of Market Street. A pile driver was being erected, and a giant screw was drilling holes in the ground in which pilings would be inserted. "That's sure a big drill," I said to my boss. He said, "It's not as big as the ones they use up the street." I said, "You'd think it was pretty big if they stuck it up your ass." And he fell into uncontrollable laughter and has treated me with new respect ever since. I think I am getting the hang of Business. (#2)



Almost from the moment I began my career as a fan I was subjected to the charge, "You're not as funny in person as you are in print." In order to deal effectively with this insult I have removed all traces of humor from my writing and now trade only in sober fact. Now the other day I was reading a "translation" by a Mr. J. B. Phillips (C. of E.) of St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthian Church, and found that this St. suffered exactly the same fate 1,900 years ago. "…I know the critics say, 'His letters are impressive and moving, but his actual presence is feeble and his speaking beneath contempt.' Let them realize that we can be just as 'impressive and moving' in person as they say we are in our letters."

Thus Religion anticipates Fandom. Also noted that he liked the editorial "we" as much as we do. (#4)

Pile Driver News: My office at work faces out on Market Street. About a month ago a wrecking crew tore down the old Southern Pacific Building. Then a pile driver was carted in in pieces and assembled on the vacant lot. Soon it was hammering away all day driving us all crazy. Then one morning I heard a funny sound from across the street and looked up just in time to see the pile driver come apart and fall in an inevitable arc down across the street and punch through the roof of a Muni bus. It turned out later that nobody was hurt. But my boss said, "I'll bet it takes them a week to clean the shit off the driver's seat." (#6)

Marlowe: Grant Canfield, whose contributions to *Hot Shit* have been substantial from the very beginning, has loaned me his paperback set of Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe stories. I had read one once before, but then got hooked on Travis McGee and filed Chandler away in my head for a rainy day. It rained hard last week. I'm through with *The Big Sleep*, and I'll have finished *Goodbye, My Lovely* and *The Lady in the Lake* before you read this. Chandler is some kind of writer. Philip Marlowe makes Travis McGee look like a neurotic pervert. Maybe because I've been away from L.A. for over a year I get excited about the locale of the Marlowe series. It's set in the L.A. that I knew as a kid—red interurban cars, clear skies, orange groves, traffic lights with gongs, seedy front-page crimes. (I remember the headline in the late forties on the *Los Angeles Mirror* outside Schaefer's Grocery on West Boulevard, about Robert Mitchum's pot bust.) The neighborhoods have changed, and you can't hang your hat on a telephone any more, but it's still all there forever in my head. And in *The Big Sleep*.

Yes indeed you can't go home again. My childhood Los Angeles is as dead as Raymond Chandler. But when Philip Marlowe drives past Exposition Park, I remember playing there, later walking through the park with a girl, later yet taking a nap under the trees, between classes at the University. It's the kind of relationship I can never have with San Francisco. I was not here when trolley cars ran up Geary Street; I don't remember what used to be where the Jack Tar Hotel is now. In the Chronicle some weeks ago there

was an article about an old lady who remembers when the streets were opened so that cables could be laid for the cable cars. If we survive the earthquake, my sons may remember coming to see me at work and looking down into the big ditch where they're putting the BART subway.

I like my kids. I think I'll start to work on the juvenile detective novel I just got an idea for. Watch for it: *The Big Nap*. (To be followed by *The Tricycle in the Lake* and *Farewell, My Cookie*.) Okey? (#8)

Phone Calls: Jim Benford called up the other night, in response to *Hot Shit*. I think this is the first time I've ever talked to him on the phone. "Do you realize," he said, "that you are going to get a 15-page letter from Greg about Philip Marlowe?" He mentioned he'd heard there's a new Travis McGee novel; I pulled it off my up-to-date well-stocked shelf and read the title to him ("A Tan & Deadly Silence") and it took five minutes to convince him I wasn't kidding. That's the trouble with fans; they'll never admit when they're Scooped. He wanted to know if I was still on the wagon. (I'm hanging on my one leg, but the other one is drunk.) We had a nice chat. He gave me a message for John Berry. "Tell John to buy a car," he said. Five minutes later I called up Mr. Berry. "Guess what," he said. "I'm buying a car" Fandom has no secrets. (#9)

Smart Kid Stuff: Casson, my 1½ year old, said his first sentence this morning. We got some fresh tasty organic dates from the Food Conspiracy, and Casson learned how to say "date" in a hurry. This morning I gave him a date (as a bribe) and he ate it and looked me in the eye and said "More date." It's not a very long sentence— not a sentence at all if you want to get technical—but it's got a subject and a modifier and I think it's great.

Next I'm going to try to convince him to stop calling me "mommy." (#10)

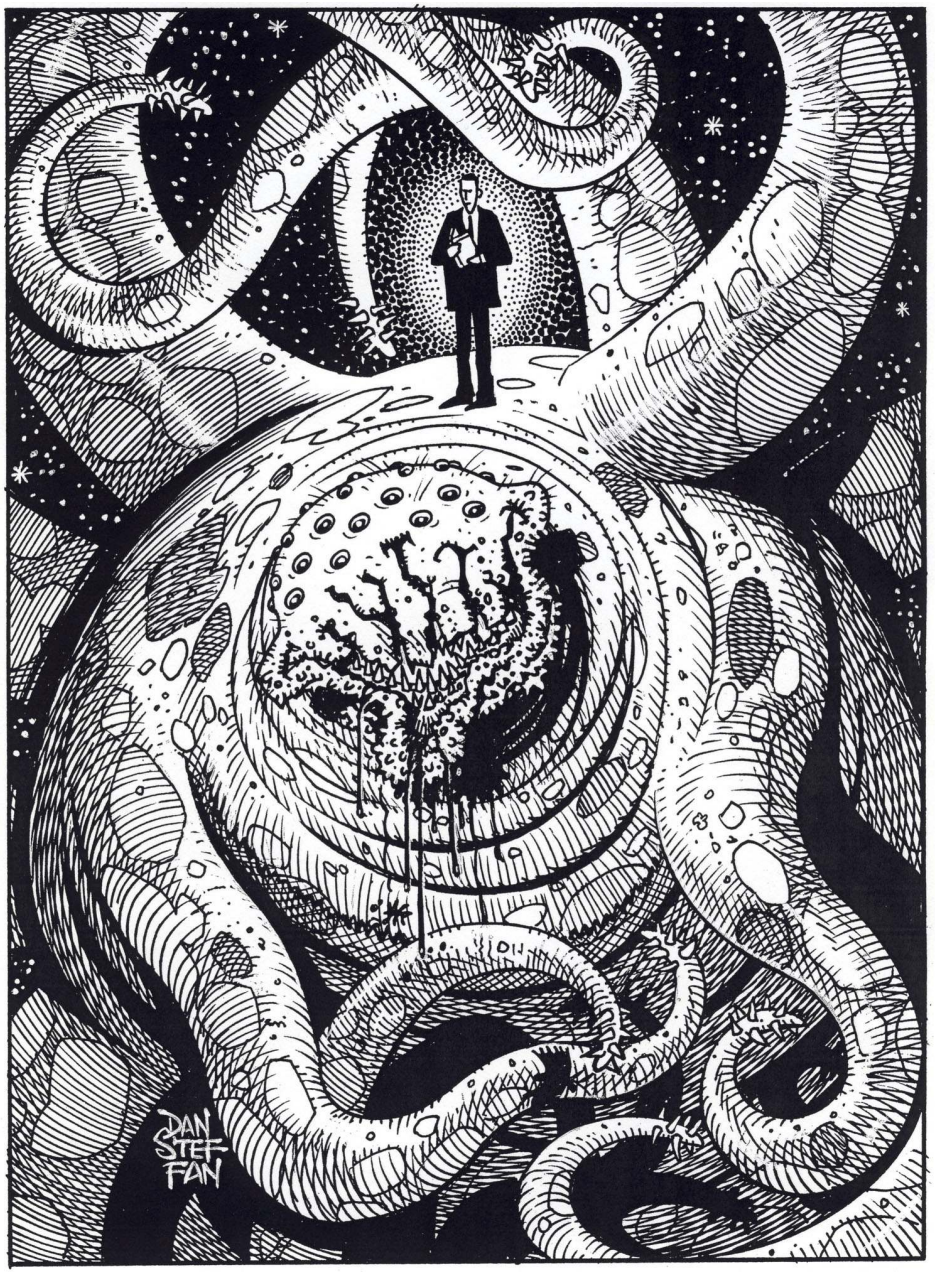
Job News: My boss is a bigot. He makes Archie Bunker look like Eleanor Roosevelt. (They looked a lot alike already.) His bigotry comes to him naturally (as it does to everyone); some of his favorite ethnic jokes, which he tells over and over again, were told to him when he was a child by his father. The first day I started to work for him he began a diatribe against black people. I knew it was now or never, so I cut him off and told him about Wilma and the kids. He looked like he had just eaten *shit*—but he has yet to tell another Black Joke in my presence, and I've worked with him for more than a year. That is to say, he's not just a simple bigot. Neither am I. He's a likeable man, and is often unexpectedly nice—as when he gave me a hundred bucks as a Christmas bonus.

Some weeks ago I wrote here that I'd discovered how to deal with him. I made a joke about somebody driving the pile driver across the street up his ass, and it made him laugh. Since then I've polished my technique, and I've got him rolling with laughter in the palm of my hand. I know his secret. He likes Bad Word Humor—and Bad Words can be the easy, slangy names for ethnic groups, or they can be pee-pee-ca-ca words. Two examples: Yesterday he gave me a felt pen, saying he had bought it to mark his tennis hat, but had found it wasn't waterproof. "How'd you find that out?" I asked him. "Did you piss on it?" He was still muttering "piss on it" happily to himself ten minutes later. Last week he handed me a note with some stuff written at the bottom in his own private shorthand, which nobody can read but him. I pointed to the middle of the note, picked a squiggle at random, and said, "Hey, you spelled motherfucker wrong." He laughed so hard, and was so happy, that he let me go home early.

Though I am desperately looking for another job, and I'll take nearly anything that comes along; though his politics (he's somewhat to the right of the decimal place) and his biases make me uncomfortable, still, I like my boss. I'll miss him. It's going to be tough working with anybody else. I'll have to bite my tongue.

I hope I have to bite it soon. (#17)

—Calvin Demmon, 1971/1972



There's A Long, Long Trail A-Windin'

by Dick Lupoff

Where to start this thing? Maybe with, *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep.* Great prose. I wish I could write like that. But my story doesn't start quite that long ago.

Try 1946.

I was eleven years old, and for reasons too complex and unpleasant to go into here, I was forced to attend services every Sunday at the First Baptist Church of a small town in New Jersey. Not fun for a little Jewish kid, and of course the forced conversion didn't take. I wish I'd had the gumption to protest this experience actively and loudly, but I didn't. Instead, I found a way to protest inwardly. I made up my own words to the hymns the congregation was called upon to sing. When everyone around me was belting out *The Old Rugged Cross* or *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*, I was singing my own subversive version. I also used to sneak extraneous reading matter into church with me and hide it in my hymnal.

Then, when the preacher was giving us all howdy-do about toasting forever in Hades if we didn't give up our sinful ways, I was merrily cruising interstellar space with Kimball Kinnison of the Galactic Patrol or tramping the fog-shrouded moors of Devonshite with Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson.

One weekday after school I came across a paperback anthology called *The Avon Ghost Reader*. It featured a wonderful cover filled with gothic imagery. I can picture it to this day. A spooky old house, a scattering of tilted tombstones, a skeletal tree, and a monstrous, green, clawlike hand clutching—I was convinced—*at me*.

Oh, I loved that little book. There were stories by John Collier, A. Merritt, William Seabrook, H. F. Heard, Bram Stoker, M. R. James, Mindret Lord, Henry S. Whitehead, August Derleth, H. P. Lovecraft, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Stephen Vincent Benet. I read every word of every story in that book, and enjoyed every one. But of them all, it was Lovecraft's story the knocked me out. I sat in the pew the next Sunday morning reading "The Dunwich Horror" and shuddering with delicious chills. I'd never heard of Howard Lovecraft and I didn't know anything about the practices of the publishing world. I didn't know originals from reprints, I didn't know that Lovecraft had been dead for nearly a decade, and I determined to keep an eye out for his byline every chance I got.

Over the next ten or twenty or thirty years my literary taste evolved and matured. At least I hope it did. I read a good deal more both by and about Lovecraft and came to recognize the Olde Gent's shortcomings, both literary and personal, as well as his virtues. Then I made the fateful shift in status from fan to pro. Some of my work was cast in the Lovecraft mode, and I always felt a certain kinship for him stemming from those childhood days when I found solace in my precious smuggled paperback anthology.

By the mid-1970s I was a pretty well established writer but still an enthusiastic reader. I had discovered Dashiell Hammett, in many ways the literary antithesis of Lovecraft. Hammett was terse, Lovecraft was verbose. Hammett was objective, Lovecraft was introspective. But the quality of both their bodies of work appealed to me. When I read Joe Gores' novel *Hammett* I was struck by Joe's idea of lifting a literary figure out of his study and plunging him into a narrative all his own.

A few months later—it was December, 1975—Pat and I were doing our Christmas shopping in the old Capwell's department store in Oakland. I was wandering through the men's department when I stopped dead in my tracks. Two streams of thought came together in my mind. Lovecraft and Hammett. Joe Gores' book and—and—I could do something like *Hammett*, only my focus would be the Sage of Providence.

A few weeks later Pat and I ventured out for dinner with Joe and his wife, Dori. We were in a Mexican joint in San Rafael. After a couple of margaritas—well, to be honest, a couple more than a couple—I got up the courage to tell Joe what I had in mind. The basic plot-driver for my novel was already clear in my mind, and I described it to Joe. If he felt that I was poaching on his territory I was prepared to drop the notion right then and there. Instead, Joe gave me his blessing. He even invited me to his house and presented me with a rare copy of his own first book, *Marine Salvage: The Unforgiving Business of No Cure, No Pay*. "You'll find this useful," he said, and he was right.

Early in 1976 I wrote to my agent, Henry Morrison. Henry was also Joe's agent, which eased matters a lot. I described the book I hoped to write and asked if he thought he could sell it for me. By return mail he informed me that G. P. Putnam was prepared to offer me a contract.

For the next few months I worked on other projects, doing odd bits of research and note-making on the Lovecraft novel in every spare moment. In July, 1976, Pat and I flew to the East Coast, rented a car, and spent several weeks touring Lovecraft Country in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. We wandered the streets of Marblehead and Salem, then returned to Providence. We visited Lovecraft's onetime home on Federal Hill, obtained access to the Lovecraft collection at Brown University, and read through back files of the Providence *Journal* and *Bulletin*.

By this time I knew that my book would take place almost entirely in the year 1927, so I concentrated on that year's newspapers. We had to return to California long before I had finished reading up on 1927. When we got back to Berkeley I made a contact at the University of California library and picked up where I'd left off, reading the rest of the year's dailies. I switched from the Providence papers to *The New York Times* because that was the most readily available file.

I also conducted a series of interviews, some in New York and some in California, with people who had known H. P. Lovecraft. These included Julius Schwartz (his onetime agent), Donald Wollheim (editor and publisher), Kenneth Sterling (revision client), Charles Hornig (editor and friend), and most importantly Frank Belknap Long (HPL's protégé and lifelong chum) I taped two very lengthy interviews with Long.

Another surprise came that summer when I dropped in on Charles Brown, the publisher of *Locus*, at his home in Oakland. Charles's father Larry was visiting at the time, and as we chatted I realized that he had lived in

H.P. LOVECRAFT'S "THE TOMB"

Brooklyn, in the same neighborhood and at the same time that Lovecraft and his wife, Sonia, had lived there. Larry Brown had been a teen-aged violinist. He played in basement nightclubs in the late 1920s while working days in a radio factory, and provided fascinating information about both scenes.

Back in Berkeley I spent every working day at the UC library. Early each morning I would load a roll of microfilm into a reader and start making notes. Late each afternoon I would stagger down the white marble steps, blinking back tears in the bright sunlight, and make my way home. Over dinner I would tell my family about the latest events in the world of 1927. It was a fascinating world peopled by fabulous characters: Jimmy Durante, Babe Ruth, Texas Guinan, Edith Wilson (Woodrow's widow), Leon Trotsky, Chiang Kai-shek, Bela Lugosi, Humphrey Bogart. I obtained a "planning" calendar, an oversized grid with a square for every day of the year, and plotted the events of 1927 by date and day of the week.

By September I was ready to start writing. The book was to be the longest I had ever written, somewhat over 160,000 words. If that number is less than illuminating, consider that the typical genre novel—mystery, science fiction, western—runs between 50,000 and 60,000 words. An average mainstream novel is somewhat longer—between 75,000 and 100,000 words. Pounded out on my faithful IBM Selectric typewriter, my manuscript filled 556 pages.

As my prose model I took *USA*, a huge, brilliant, rambling trilogy by John Dos Passos first published in the 1930s. Dos Passos used real or manufactured news stories, clips from newsreels, stream of consciousness monologues, all sorts of prose forms to create a huge mosaic of America in an earlier era, and I tried to do the same, building my framework around Howard Lovecraft.

In December 1976, I delivered my manuscript to Putnam's.

I was pumped. I'd been writing professionally since I was in my teens and publishing books for more than a decade. I felt that this book, *Marblehead: A Novel of H. P. Lovecraft*, was by far the best and the most important book I had ever written. My editor, Clyde Taylor, had come in to replace Peter Israel when Israel took a year's sabbatical leave. Taylor, in turn, handed the manuscript to a less senior editor who had worked with me on several science fiction novels.

What a shock when the junior editor—not Clyde Taylor—phoned me early in 1977 with the news that my manuscript had been rejected. It was much too long, he told me. It would have to be cut by fifty per cent at the very least. And it would have to be totally reorganized. The rambling, leisurely, mosaic-like structure I had borrowed from Dos Passos must be replaced by a tightly-plotted story line.

Like a good little author I returned to my desk and started on a new version of the book. This was long before the era of desktop computers. I literally cut and pasted pieces of manuscript to create the "new" book. It was an acutely painful experience. Think of amputating your own toes with a pair of rusty chicken shears and no anesthetic. But I soldiered on.

While I was working on the shortened book, Charles Brown phoned. He told me that he was leaving town, headed to Florida to visit his father. Larry was terminally ill, Charles told me. They had spoken and Larry had asked about Charles's friend who was writing that book. I told Charles that the book was finished but had been rejected and I was struggling with a revised version. I did have a spare carbon copy of the original manuscript, however, and loaned it to Charles, who wanted to show it to his father.

Some weeks later I saw Charles again. He told me that his father had died, but he'd seen the manuscript before his death, read bits of it, and was pleased.

By this time I realized that the cut-and-paste version of my book was not working. I really didn't know what to do. But later that summer Clyde Taylor arrived in San Francisco to attend a convention. We arranged to meet at his hotel and wound up sitting beside the swimming pool. After hours of hard work, I came away with a clear concept for a third version of the book. I spent much of that autumn writing the book over from scratch. By the time I'd finished it, hardly more than fifteen pages of the original 556-page manuscript survived.

My heart and soul had gone into the first version of the book. The new version was little more than a dried husk of the living, vital organism I had originally created, but it was a readable, publishable genre novel. Or so I thought when I mailed it to Putnam's.

Early in 1978 I received a phone call from my agent. Peter Israel had returned from his sabbatical and taken his old job back from Clyde Taylor. Israel had read my new manu-

script. His reaction: The book was perfectly fine as it now stood, but he had something completely different in mind. He would like me to write the book over still again, turning it into a violent, fast-paced, action thriller.

He had sent my agent a photocopy of the manuscript of another novel he was planning to publish, and he would like me to use it as a model in my next rewrite. I told my agent that I was reluctant to do this but Henry persuaded me to read the "model" manuscript. I read a hundred pages. It was a piece of garbage. It was a clumsily-written, unconvincing thriller about Einstein meeting Lenin on a Swiss ski slope in 1915 and inventing the atomic bomb. I hated the book.

I phoned Henry and told him how I felt. The Putnam's deal fell apart, and I wrote off the experience as a disaster.

Several years later Jim Turner, then editor at Arkham House, was visiting my home. The subject of my disastrous novel, by now called *Lovecraft's Book,* came up and Jim asked to see the manuscript. I gave him the manuscript and after a few weeks he wrote to me, saying that he liked the book and would like to buy it for Arkham House.

Jim Turner did ask for a few more revisions, most notably the addition of a major new scene, but all in all I found him totally helpful and our relationship was completely positive. By now it was 1985, almost a decade after I'd written *Marblehead.* As *Lovecraft's Book* it was published successfully in the US, England, and Spain. There's an edition in the works right now in Portugal. I was broken-hearted a few years later to learn of Jim Turner's death at an early age. As for *Marblehead,* I put it out of my mind. Case closed!

That's what I thought.

Another decade and a half went by. I was visiting Charles Brown again. The subject of *Marblehead* and *Lovecraft's Book* came up and I mentioned that every copy of my original long manuscript was extinct.

That's what I thought.

"No it isn't," Charles told me, "I have the carbon that you loaned me to show my dad. It's in my basement."

And it was!

Around this time I'd placed a couple of books with Cosmos Books, an imprint of Wildside Press. In 2001 my editor at Cosmos, Sean Wallace, asked if *Lovecraft's Book* was still in print, and if not, was it available for reprinting? I told him the story of *Marblehead* and he just about leaped off his chair.

I'd had several photocopies made of the copy Charles had preserved. It was nearly complete—555 of the 556 pages were present. Somehow page 553 had disappeared in the intervening years. I sent a copy to Sean Wallace. His enthusiasm grew even greater. He set me up with an editor, an academic working in South Africa. I sent him a copy of the manuscript and he started work.

Filled with enthusiasm, I went around telling people that *Marblehead* was going to be published at long last. An item about it even turned up in *Publishers Weekly*.

I don't know what went wrong with my editor, but after exchanging a few e-mails with him, I heard nothing more. The project seemed to have died again.

Another five years went by. I encountered a fellow named Fender Tucker, proprietor of a truly amazing miniature publishing company called Ramble House. I read some of Fender's books, thought they were wonderful, did a little work for Ramble House, and mentioned *Marblehead*. Again, the reaction was enthusiastic. I'd been there and done that before, too many times.

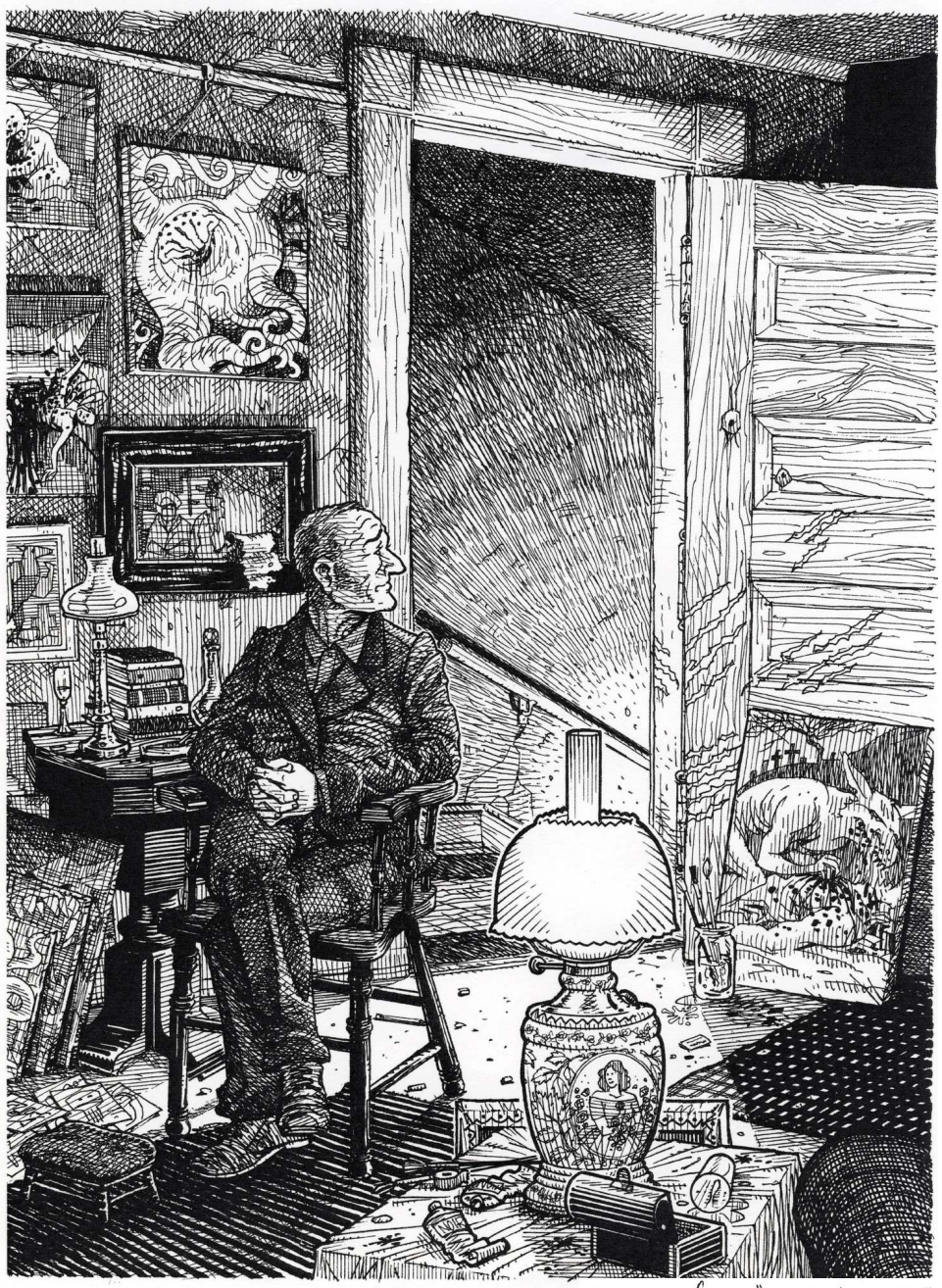
But this time I had found a publisher who was for real. I sent Fender a photocopy of the manuscript, he loved it, and we set to work. All that was missing was page 553, but of course I could reconstruct one page out of that massive novel if I had to.

And then one day I happened to be browsing on the internet and came across a book dealer's website where a copy of my 1976 *Marblehead* manuscript was offered for sale.

What in the world?!

I wrote to the dealer, demanded to know what the hell was going on, and warning him that if he sold a copy of my unpublished novel there were legal troubles in his future. To his credit, he promptly backed off—but, he explained, he didn't own the manuscript in question, he had it on consignment.

It didn't take much detective work to figure out who had provided the manuscript. It was the junior editor who had worked for Clyde Taylor back in the 1970s. Taylor was long since deceased, but I confronted the onetime junior editor—by now, not junior at



all!—and he fessed up.

When Putnam's did some clearing of old files "way back when," he explained, they didn't bother to return old manuscripts to their authors. They simply tossed carton after carton of manuscripts into the garbage! "Junior" had gone dumpster diving and rescued uncounted manuscripts, including *Marblehead,* and had stored them in his home for the next thirty years.

After we had exchanged a series of less than loving messages, "Junior" did the honorable thing. He photocopied page 553 and express-mailed it to me. Shortly followed a photocopy of the complete 1976 manuscript. By now, I don't know how many photocopies are floating around. I don't know what became of the true original. Come to think of it, that's probably the copy I cut up and pasted back together all those years ago.

As for Ramble House, Fender Tucker proved to be a perceptive and supportive editor. Artist Gavin O'Keefe created a cover painting featuring H. P. Lovecraft and a brilliant mapback painting for the book, and it was published in December 2006 in simultaneous hardcover and paperback editions. Reader response has been enthusiastic.

I've had plenty of time to think about why Clyde Taylor turned down the original manuscript and just what he was looking for. I think he wanted a genre novel, and I wrote a mainstream novel.

Genre novels have certain common characteristics. They tend to be short. They're tightly organized. They're plot-driven and fast-paced, and their characters are vivid but relatively simple, painted in bright, primary colors. There's the square-jawed hero, often with a helpful and sympathetic pal, there's the lovely heroine, there's the sneering villain. The costumes are different but their true natures haven't changed from the days of Victorian melodrama.

Mainstream novels are often longer and more loosely organized. They're driven by characters and ideas. Their pacing is more leisurely, and the characters are portrayed in their full human complexity. "My" H. P. Lovecraft was a man of conscience and good will, striving to reconcile his narrow-minded preconceptions with the realities of the world around him. "My" Sonia Lovecraft was a warm-hearted woman who cared deeply for her husband at the same time that she was exasperated by his rigidity and bigoted theories.

Of course the distinctions that I make between genre and mainstream fiction are generalities and there are plenty of exceptions to each of my statements, but I believe that the archetypes hold true. And *Marblehead,* without question, is a mainstream, not a genre, novel. And to my pleasure, when Gavin O'Keefe read the novel before getting to work on the cover art, he told me, *This is the book that should have been published all those years ago.*

You can get information about *Marblehead: A Novel of H. P. Lovecraft* and order it (or any other Ramble House book) via the website: www.ramblehouse.com .

Thirty years from my introduction to H. P. Lovecraft in that little church in New Jersey to the time I spent reading Joe Gores' novel *Hammett.* Thirty more from that shopping expedition in Oakland to the publication of *Marblehead* by Ramble House. Sixty years. Sixty godalmighty years.

I do want to clear up one more point about *Marblehead* and *Lovecraft's Book.* When I first described *Marblehead* to Fender Tucker he asked if this was an expanded and elaborated version of *Lovecraft's Book.*

No, I explained, the reality is just the opposite. *Marblehead* is the novel I *wanted* to write so very long ago. It's the novel I *intended* to write, and it's the novel I *did* write. As for *Lovecraft's Book*—well, I certainly don't intend to disown it. It's an okay genre exercise. But my heart and soul were poured into *Marblehead,* and now the book exists at last.

—Dick Lupoff

If Dick's article interests you
in reading *Marblehead*,
it can be ordered at…
http://www.ramblehouse.com/marblehead.htm

[Editor's note: Greg's article was written before Sid's death.]

In January 2007 Sid Coleman's wife, Diana, sent a letter to their friends about his decline. It was troubling; Sid was one of those I most admired in fandom—indeed, in life. But now his particular sort of Parkinson's had advanced until he could not live at home any more.

Diana had placed him in a living facility, where she visited him daily. He went long times now without speaking, she said, but at times a glint of the old Sidney would flicker. His roommate, a cook, remarked that Sid seemed to be a nice man. "Appearances are deceiving," Sid said, with a sly smile.

The Fan

Her letter set me to remembering. Sid was so much—physicist, raconteur, world traveler—and he gave much to science fiction. His teenage toils for Advent Publishers supported a scrupulous, ambitious role for fans in holding the field to its standards. In 1960 he said in Earl Kemp's *Who Killed SF?*, "I am not in science fiction for money; I am in it for joy. Formally, I am a publisher (actually, 14% of a publisher). This is useful: it gets me on the mailing list of *PITFCS*; it is a handy topic of conversation at parties; it is a means whereby I meet some interesting people; it is a better hobby than stamp-collecting any day. From an economic standpoint, it plays a lesser role in my life than returning Coke bottles for refunds."

Earl Kemp, Ed Wood, Sid and some others created a fannish publishing house, Advent Publishers, in 1956. He was a teenager when he helped publish Advent's first book, Damon Knight's *In Search of*

Wonder. Week after week the fans gathered at Earl Kemp's apartment in Chicago, catching typos in the photo offset text. Ed Wood, a very large fan with a very large voice, and Sid, maintained an unrelenting dialog about the purpose of science fiction fandom—Ed loudly proclaiming that fandom should "spread the science fiction faith," while Sid insisted on a smaller purpose, like fun.

Earl Kemp recalled that Sid was at his very best when criticizing someone for what he thought was a shortcoming. Sid's inimitable trick was to do it with charm and wit that left the target injured but somehow happy about the whole thing and anxious to tell others about it.

Fandom was for him a larger family, an audience for a swift, subtle sense of humor. At a Halloween party in Chicago, he appeared costumed as "Judas Iscariot as Sidney Coleman with thirty pieces of silver," carrying three dollars in dimes. In a letter of comment he remarked, "The interstate highway now passes through Indiana and Illinois, traversing some of the flattest territory in the nation. It has been said of this geography, 'You could see a hundred miles in every direction, if only there was something worth looking at.'"

From a fanzine piece: "Did I ever tell you about my great-grandfather, Stephen Rich, the stingiest man in Slonim? When the local stonecutter went out of business, he had him make up a tombstone for him, cheap, with everything on it but the date of great-grandfather's death. He kept it in his front yard and tethered his goat to it. At least that's what my mother has always told me, but she's quite capable of having stolen the whole incident from an Erskine Caldwell novel."

Jim Caughran recalled, "He could make a story of what he'd done today into a hilarious adventure. He could seize the moment, improvising." A faculty couple at Caltech owned a gentle German shepherd. While he was a grad student Sid would occasionally do dog-sitting duties. The doorbell to the apartment rang. Sidney opened the door with the dog close behind. "Ha! A stranger!" Sidney said, "Kill, Fang!"

And he had an incredible repertory of Jewish jokes. Terry Carr once asked him, "How many jokes can you tell that start, 'One day in the garment district...'?" He was speechless, then said he couldn't put a number to them."

Martha Beck was at a science fiction function and got into a conversation with a man who was a physicist. She casually mentioned Sid, and the man said in awed tones, "You know *Sidney Coleman*!?"

After all, Sid attended high school and university simultaneously, getting his bachelor's degree shortly after he graduated from high school, a feat I've never known to be equaled. Since his father died when he was young, he and his brother helped his mother through trying economic times, living in poor areas. He attended the Illinois Institute of Technology, mostly because it was an easy commute, and even though he had been accepted by the University of Chicago he didn't like it much, and quickly went to Caltech to get his doctorate with Murray Gell-Mann in 1962, age 25. He attended LASFS meetings and swiftly became a major theoretical physicist. Many fans never quite knew his prominence.

"I'm at the top of the second rank," Carol Carr remembers him saying.

Sid the Physicist

I first met him in the 1960s, introduced by Terry Carr, who explained with a wry smile, "You're both in physics and write for *Innuendo* [Terry's fanzine], so you should probably know each other." Sid was already both a better physicist and wit, of course. He was far more subtle and powerful in his mathematics than I.

In the late 1980s he caught the attention of the entire physics world with a calculation, using a "wormhole calculus" he invented for the purpose. It carried the characteristically witty title, "Why there is nothing rather than something: a theory of the cosmological constant." [*Nucl. Phys. B* 310: 643 (1988)] In it he concluded that through complex dynamics in the first moments of the universe, it was later able to sustain life forms that could perhaps "know joy."

He showed how the cosmological constant could be forced to be zero in the early universe. This fit the prevailing prejudice among theorists that the constant, first introduced by Einstein to make the universe static, neither expanding nor contracting. When Hubble found in the late 1920s that the universe is expanding, Einstein said imposing the constant was a blunder, not because it was a bad idea, but because Einstein didn't see that the resulting equilibrium was unstable. Any minor jiggle would destroy the static state, starting motion. Even with the constant, he should have foreseen that Hubble would either see a universe growing or shrinking.

Sidney had no prejudice either way on the value of the constant, but he did see a pretty way to use quantum mechanical ideas to propose a sweet model—the sort of confection theorists hold dear. I was startled by the intricate audacity of his calculation, as were many others. At the time I had been working on some wormhole calculations myself, much more prosaically trying to find a way to see if we had any wormholes nearby and if they could be found out through their refracting ability. Some wormholes might develop one end that looked as though it had negative mass, since its other end had funneled a lot of mass out through its mouth. These would yield a unique refracting signature, two peaks, if a star passed behind it, along our line of sight. Find the two peaks (rather than one for ordinary wormhole mouths, or any ordinary mass) and—presto, a gateway to the stars, maybe. It was a clear longshot.

Sid had no illusions about his model—it was a longshot, too, that just might be right. Worth a chance. I felt the same.

Everybody liked the "wormhole calculus" because they liked the result, a zero constant. That seemed clean, neat, a theorist's delight. Sid basked in the attention, though he didn't think this was his best work. My work, done with several others, got a lot of citation and wasn't my best, either; wormholes just get good press. Sid quoted Einstein wryly that "If my theory of relativity is proven successful, Germany will claim me as a German and the Swiss will declare that I am their citizen. If it fails, Switzerland will say I'm a German and the Germans will say I am a Jew."

It turned out that the cosmological constant isn't zero at all. In fact, it represents the highest energy density in the universe, far more important in dynamics than mere matter like us. In fact, it's close to the value that will eventually give us the Big Rip that will tear everything apart at the End of Time, even atoms. When I mentioned in 1996 the recent discovery that the constant was large, not zero, Sid shrugged. "Win some, lose some in the old cosmology game."

We haven't found any refracting wormholes, either. That's just how science goes.

The Sidneyfest

When Sid's decline became evident, the Harvard physics department put on a Sidneyfest that ran over a weekend. Some reports on this event, with pictures, are at:
physics.harvard.edu/QFT/sidneyfest.htm

Then-president of Harvard Larry Summers opened the Fest before a large crowd with, "There has not been so much talent gathered around the snack table since Einstein snacked alone." Nobelist Steven Weinberg gave the next talk, discussing how to calculate Feynman diagrams for quantized general relativity. He talked about work in progress, and at the end said, "I don't know what to do now. Does anybody else?" This was the place to ask! He added, "In happier times, I would have gone straight to Sidney Coleman."

Though Weinberg is now at the University of Texas, he shared the 1979 Nobel Prize in Physics with Shelly Glashow and Abdus Salam for work done down the hall from Sid. "Sidney is a theorist's theorist," Weinberg said. "He has not been so much concerned with accounting for the latest data from experiments as with understanding deeply what our theories really mean. I can say I learned more about physics from Sidney than from anyone else. I also learned more good jokes from him than from anyone else."

The noted particle theorist Howard

Georgi said, “In his prime, which lasted for a very long time, from the mid ‘60s to the late ‘80s, Sidney was such a towering figure in theoretical physics that even his close colleagues (Nobel prize winners, etc.) were somewhat in awe of him. In fact, we had to be careful about talking to Sidney too soon about new ideas, because he was so smart and had such encyclopedic knowledge that he could kill nascent ideas before they really got started.”

Sidney was a beloved teacher of graduate students, and many of them attended the Sidneyfest. Sid referred to the community as *i fratelli fisici*, by which he meant the brotherhood of physicists. (Most physicists speak at least a bit of broken Italian, a legacy of the grand and highly influential summer schools organized by Nino Zichichi in Erice, Sicily.) In a physics career one often arrives by train or plane, anywhere in the world, on the way to a conference or academic visit. One of the fondest reflections of being a scientist is to then be greeted by a total stranger, who immediately treated one like an old friend. Erice was like that; the brotherhood of science. With good food.

The town likes the NATO-backed workshops because they bring an elevated form of tourism to the ancient town on a granite spire, perched a kilometer above a beautiful beach. One year a noted German physicist drove down in his brand new Mercedes and parked it outside the workshop buildings, which were once a convent. He emerged an hour later to find the Mercedes stolen along with his luggage and all his lecture notes. The German panicked, and Director Zichichi led him back inside to give him a glass or two of good Sicilian wine. Emerging an hour later, there sat the Mercedes. Zichichi had ties everywhere. The local Mafia had found the thieves. Then they kindly returned the car, washed, waxed and fully fueled—an impressively offhand way to show real power. Sid always loved telling this tale.

I had given a lecture series there in astrophysics, suspecting that the true appeal of Erice was the meal chits they gave out for attendees. Good in many of the best restaurants, these allowed for wine with the meal, no questions asked. This single gesture made the afternoon sessions either lively or dead, depending on the quality and quantity of the wine. But Sidney avoided the wine, focusing on clarifying his own lectures right up to the last minute. His careful, insightful summaries of the state of knowledge in field theory became famous and appeared as a book devoted solely to them.

One of the Sidneyfest attendees who got his doctorate at Harvard remarked, “How do you do physics at Harvard? You go to Witten to give you a problem to work on. You go to Coleman to tell you how to solve it. Then you go to Weinberg to write you a reference letter.” Ed Witten is the Einstein figure of string theory and much else. Weinberg won the Nobel for what we now call the Standard Model.

Though I’ve never met Weinberg, I learned a lot of physics just working through a Weinberg calculation he did as a toss-off for a classified project I worked on in the late 1960s, given the problem by Edward Teller, who had hired me in 1967. Weinberg’s footprint in the calculations was impressive. He came a decade ahead of me in the profession and I rather regretted showing that the method he studied would not work in reality. But physics isn’t just about getting everything to work; it’s about the truth. Weinberg was no sharper than Sid, but he happened upon an insight that proved out true quite swiftly. There is a lot of luck in science; many of the brilliant just don’t hit quite the right problem. Sid won prizes, several Sidneyfest attendees remarked, but not the big ones.

There were many Sid stories. One was about being at a physics meeting where Stephen Hawking spoke up from his wheelchair. This was around 1976, when Stephen could barely control his throat, and struggled to make his points in his semi-unintelligible way. His comment contained a detail, abstruse mathematical argument and went on for minutes. Sid said that he was tempted to reply, “That's easy for you to say,” but held his tongue.

Another Sid story: A mathematician and an engineer are sitting in on a string theory lecture. The engineer is struggling, while the mathematician is swimming along with no problem. Finally the engineer asks, "How do you do it? How do you visualize these 11-dimensional spaces?" The mathematician says, "It's easy: first I visualize an n-dimensional space, then I set n equal to 11."

At the fest Sidney could not deal with the crowd, so he watched the proceedings on TV in a small room off to the side. At the end he appeared before the crowd but declined to comment, saying later, “At my age you tend to emit a lot of gas, and I'd rather not.”

Wit

Rather than his physics, I remember best Sid’s brilliant wit. He once remarked about dopey plot twists, “The one good thing about stupidity is that it leads to adventure.” I’ve often thought that applies to life as a whole, too.

Bob Silverberg recalled in a fanzine, “While traveling in France in the early 1970s, Sidney unexpectedly contracted a case of what turned out to be crabs. ‘Unexpectedly’ because this is customarily a venereal disease, and he had been a model of chastity throughout his trip. The offending organisms must have been concealed in the bedding of his hotel room, he decided, and so he had suffered a case of punishment without the crime. But during the trip he had not, however, remained true to the dietary restrictions imposed by the religious doctrines of his forefathers; and, he said, after visiting a French doctor and having his ailment diagnosed for what it was, he was granted a vision of his Orthodox grandfather rising up in wrath before him and thundering, ‘Thou hast eaten crustaceans, child, and now thou shalt be devoured by crustaceans thyself!’”

Carol Carr remembers that Sid’s French was limited, and that a literal translation of what he told the doctor was, “Small animals are eating my penis.”

In the fevered height of the 1970s, when even theoretical physicists had gotten the hip message of the 1960s, Sid had a tailored purple suit. He wore it with stylish aplomb, smiling his owlish smiles below twinkling eyes, pretending to not notice the flagrant color. Once, walking across Harvard Yard, we encountered a student who had a question about a career in physics. I wondered how Sid would reply, since I usually gave a long, windy answer. Sid simply swept a hand grandly down his tailored flanks and said, “Study hard, have original ideas, and someday you, too, may wear a purple suit.”

Carol Carr also recalls: “Sid made the expression ‘enjoying oneself’ a concrete, observable act, and he would sometimes be caught shamelessly indulging in it. Once, at a party, he had just said something funny to a bunch of people. After the punch line he walked out of the room, leaving them all in mid-grin. Several minutes later I happened to notice him, alone in a corner, still chortling to himself. What he’d said to those people had a long half-life, and Sid was a bonafide, dyed-in-the-wool appreciator. If a good joke happened to be his own, he wasn’t about to apply the doctrine of false modesty and let it die before its time.”

When his physics department suddenly needed someone to fill in for an ill colleague, they asked Sid if he could teach a field theory class that the energetic colleague had scheduled for 8 a.m. Sid was a notorious night owl who often had to rouse his dinner guests to go home at a mere 3 a.m. He relished the pleasures of watching the sun come up while putting on pajamas and others stirred. Still, he considered. He felt that he did have an obligation to his department. “I’m sorry,” he finally said, “I just don’t think I could stay up that late.”

He wrote a great sendup of the space program:

“Once I gained access to Pioneer 10, it was the work of a moment to substitute for NASA’s plaque my own, which read, ‘Make ten exact copies of this plaque with your name at the bottom of the list and send them to ten intelligent races of your acquaintance. At the end of four billion years, your name will reach the top of the list and you will rule the galaxy.”

If only A. E. van Vogt had thought of this economical idea!

Of course, Sid had his oddities. He was the worst driver I ever knew, distracted by conversation with his passengers, oblivious to the screech and shouts of near-accidents. Marta Randall remarked on how when she was the lead car on the several-car trip to a restaurant, she always saw Sid in her rear view mirror in profile, easily distracted.

But then, Feynman considered dental hygiene to be a superstition, despite his rotten teeth. Einstein hated socks. We have our foibles.

Sid did indeed look a lot like Einstein, but he loved SF whereas Einstein deplored it. Lest SF distort pure science and give people the false illusion of scientific understanding, Einstein recommended complete abstinence from any type of science fiction. "I never think of the future. It comes soon enough," he said.

Now, though, Sid can't concentrate enough to read SF. For decades he took SF seriously but not solemnly, and his insights led to his role as a book reviewer for *F&SF*—the only non-literary person ever to serve. His *F&SF* book reviews skewered the second rate and revealed the excellences of the able. In a review of a novel that did not make the grade in a nonetheless ambitious area, he simply remarked, "This book fills a much needed vacancy in our field."

Sid is just the opposite. As he fades from us, his departure from our midst leaves a vacancy that echoes, unfillable.

—Greg Benford

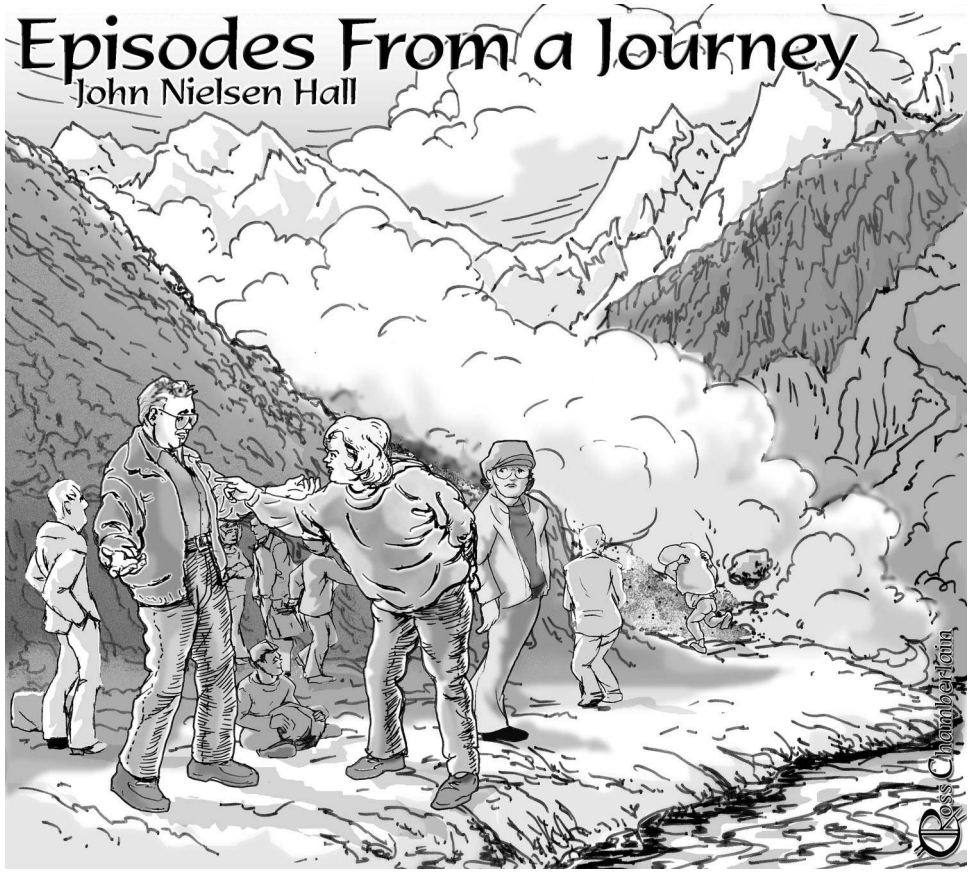
Another Calvin Demmon Memory
by Lenny Bailes

Calvin Demmon was a good friend to me one day in the summer of 1972. I was walking down Fell Street on the way to the bank with forty dollars in one pocket and a map of San Francisco in the other. Suddenly I felt a hand in my pocket. When I turned to see what was going on, a knife was thrust into my chest. The hand ripped something out of my pocket and I collapsed on the sidewalk. Some people picked me up and drove me to a nearby hospital. I was kind of groggy and when they asked me for the name of a friend, I gave them Calvin's phone number. I had been sharing an apartment with John D. Berry and taken it over when John decided to pack up and go on one of his Traveling Jiant odysseys.

Anyway, they stitched me up at the hospital. The knife missed my heart by an inch or two and the thief got the map of San Francisco for his trouble, rather than the forty dollars. Calvin dropped everything when he got my phone call, came down to the hospital and took me home. I was too weak to go back to the apartment, and Calvin and his wife put me up for several days while I regained my strength.

Afterwards, he admonished me to try not to get stabbed again, if I could help it.

—Lenny Bailes



These are episodes from a journey through (mostly) Chinese Central Asia undertaken in 1988. The journey proper started from Gilgit in Pakistan and went via the Karakoram highway to Kashgar in Xinzhiang Autonomous Region, China at the western edge of the Taklamakan Desert, then on to Urumchi, capital of Xinzhiang, in the northwest. Then we went by train through what is erroneously called the Gobi Desert (since there isn't a single Gobi desert, but rather a number of desert depressions surrounded by arid hills and plains) with various stops and excursions to Lanzhou in Gansu province. In an unplanned extension we went on by train from there to Xian in Shaanxi province, ancient Chinese capital and home to the "Terracotta Army," before setting foot on an aircraft again.

On the journey besides myself were a group of sixteen, assembled in the U.K. by a company that organized treks of this sort. Among the sixteen were my wife, Julia Stone, mother-in-law Barbara Stone and her friend and colleague Valentine Downe. The group "leader" was Christine, who was French, married to an academic living and working in Cambridge where she taught Chinese language and history. She was one of those people whose attainments rather overawed me, holding as she did three degrees, and speaking her native French and English, and Mandarin and Cantonese and Japanese and Hindi and Urdu and Farsi and Arabic—that I knew of. But she could be very fixed in her views and, I thought, a bit too uncritical of the Chinese authorities and their version of Communism.

This was after the death of Mao and the fall of the Gang of Four, but before the Tian-anmen Square massacre. It was a time of change in China, but with the old ways still much in evidence—uniformity of dress, few consumer goods and foreigners such as ourselves carefully escorted and watched by a succession of "guides."

But the first episode takes place in Pakistan:

Episode 1:

We had left Gilgit in a Karakoram Highway Tour Bus—we knew this because it was written on the side in big letters. It was also emblazoned with what I assumed was the same information in Urdu, and carried many other inscriptions and prayers in ornate script on more or less every flat surface of the "bodywork." It was, in fact, a long flatbed rigid truck roofed over in clear plastic and sheet metal. The seats were hard plastic benches. It was a very uncomfortable ride, as the bus rolled alarmingly at every bump and dip in the road, and the suspension of the thing had been beefed up rather than loosened, in order to cope with the vicissitudes of the highway's surface. The Karakoram Highway was, and very likely still is, a two-lane blacktop without the benefit of a white line. It had been built over a long period of time with help from Chinese engineers spasmodically from the early seventies, not, as is claimed still by the Chinese, to open up travel and trade between Pakistan and China, but to enable the Chinese military to carry out a rapid flanking movement in any future conflict with India. Since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the road had a strategic importance to the U.S., and it was American money that paid for the elite corps of Pakistan Army Engineers, who maintained it as far as the Chinese border. We very soon found out why that maintenance was so vital.

Geologically, the Himalayas, the Karakorams, the Hindu Kush, the Kun-Lun and Tien-Shan mountains are the youngest on the planet. Being so youthful, they move about a lot. I am not speaking here simply of seismic events, but also of the action that weather and water have on them. The rocks in many areas are unstable and unweathered—and they fall. Sometimes, small pebbles at great heights fall and hit larger pebbles, and these fall and hit loose rocks, and these fall and hit big boulders, and then you have a landslide. This does not happen just once, and then everything comes to rest, but over and over again, so that whole sides of mountains start to move and keep moving like a river of rock and stone and dust for days. Some thirty miles or so from Gilgit, our travails on the Karakoram Highway Tour Bus were to be curtailed by just such a phenomenon. Not that it was apparent. I had been clinging on to my plastic bench by the fingertips, looking backwards at Mount Rakaposhi towering over 7,500 meters and beyond it twinkling in the clear icy blue sky, what I was sure was the distant peak of K2, which, if I was right, was a massive 8,600 meters. Flying up to Gilgit we had passed underneath another huge mountain, Nanga Parbat, the only time I have ever been on an aircraft with a mountain above us. I was mesmerized by these big mountains, gasping at the plumes of snow that the roaring wind blew off their summits, like a banner, while we insignificant beings complained of heat and dust in their shadow. My attention was drawn to the traffic jam ahead. I was not much interested.

We had joined a queue of overladen trucks and over-occupied cars. There was nothing to see except the river, a tributary of the Indus, maybe a hundred feet below us at the side of the road; a shallow fast-flowing broad body of water whose waters, I was sure, would be mostly icy cold melt water, though they looked brown and dirty. The bus was now at a complete standstill with the engine off. Christine and the driver went off to investigate. We waited, I stayed locked on to the distant peaks, and we ignored a party of men in slightly different dress, with flat round caps on, all of them bearded, who had walked between the stationary trucks and now stood gazing at us much as I was gazing at the mountains.

Christine and the driver returned, and simply said the road was blocked. I don't know why, but we just assumed that whatever the blockage was, we would be waiting until it was removed. The driver began a long discussion with the party of beardies. At length, there was much slapping of outstretched hands and smiles. Plainly a deal had been struck, but I could not figure out in respect to what. One of the beardies asked the driver, who then asked Christine, where we were from. Britain, she said, we are British. The beardie smiled very broadly, revealing beautiful teeth. He laughed and spoke rapidly to the driver, the driver relaying to Christine: "He says his grandfather killed many British soldiers." This was not entirely reassuring to us. Then suddenly we took note of our backpacks and other luggage being rapidly stripped off the roof. It was an alarming moment.

But Christine now vouchsafed what was going to happen. She informed us of the landslide which, she said, was still going on. On the other side of it was a similar queue of vehicles that had been coming the other way. The plan was that, as the truck drivers were already doing, we would transport ourselves and our belongings on foot around the slide, and swap with vehicles now stuck on the other side. Our jaws dropped at this innovation, as we wondered in our Western way how and when the rightful owners of these vehicles would reclaim them. Perhaps they never would—it did not seem to bother anyone. (In fact, the bus and lorry drivers just swapped passengers and loads.) Christine said that these kind Pathan gentlemen (for that is who the beardies were) would be carrying our luggage. We wondered why, since most of it was backpacks, we couldn't carry it ourselves, particularly since the Pathan gentlemen, however kind, were surely going to be requiring a chunk of rupees at the conclusion of their labors.

But when Christine had casually mentioned how we would go around the slide on foot, we had not considered what that would involve. We had to get down to the river, and walk along its margin. This would entail descending from the road by a tiny path previously picked out by goats. Indeed, as we found very soon after we began, the path was indiscernible and so steep that we had to cling to rocks or to scraggy bits of bush where rocks were unavailable. They were the only things, we thought, preventing us from tumbling base over apex into the icy torrent below. Eventually we decided to abandon all pretense of dignity, and slide down on our behinds. Having decided on this course of action, I sat behind Julia, holding on to her T-shirt and whistled the Indiana Jones theme by way of encouragement. But this only earned me fearfully foul abuse which I was quite glad that the uprightly pious locals could not understand. The further we slid, Julia's filthy language was no more than in keeping with the state of our clothes, as dust flew up around us in great clouds. Occasionally one could discern some other member of the party clinging fearfully to a clump of grass, or a tribesman running barefoot and upright down the slope with a sixty-pound rucksack on his head, but mostly we were in a world of dust that only cleared when we arrived sore, torn and indescribably filthy at the bottom.

Valentine had taken care of Barbara's descent by turning around and descending with her face to the rocks, enabling her to use her arms and legs and getting Barbara to hang on to her arm. Valentine enjoyed a challenge, and was not particularly mindful of her dignity, so had enjoyed the experience—she was also a good deal cleaner than Julia and myself. Barbara, despite having been in the army throughout the war and inured thereby to various hardships, was still of a mind to have an inquest into whose bloody stupid idea this trip was (mine), which inquiry she renewed at various times all the way to Beijing.

Having got down, we took stock of our situation. The margin between the slope and the water was quite broad and composed of level water-smoothed stones. Valentine thought that Julia and I might benefit from a dip in the water first, but I put my hand in it and concluded I'd rather stay dirty. As I suspected, it was teeth-numbingly cold, though now that we were closer to it, we could see the water was clear and clean. Julia's jeans ,

the only pair she had brought, had torn in some embarrassing spot, and she was, to put it mildly, extremely cross about this. She had a safety pin, fortunately. We walked on, overtaken every few yards by a local with something apparently unfeasible balanced on his head. Soon we began to meet people coming the other way and looking back up to the road could see more people coming down the steep slope, including women in burkhas or tribal dress, children and men carrying suitcases tied up with string, irregularly shaped parcels wrapped in brown paper, and huge holdalls brimming with, well, stuff. They were all walking upright, I noted. What wimps we were.

Ahead was a tall line of dust that met the water. I could only see people going into and coming out of the dust, but I was pretty sure they were running. I could not think why. As we drew closer Christine came running up from behind. "You must be careful," she said, as she ran past. "What's the problem?" I called after her—but she was too far ahead already. Then I saw a rock—quite a big rock, perhaps the size and shape of a large console TV—and it was airborne. Slowly, it tumbled over in the dust-laden air and hit the water with a mighty splash. Only now did the awful truth dawn on me—we had to cross the landslide, *which was still moving.* Christine had simply said it was still going on—the reality was a river of dust stones and rocks falling from somewhere way above the road. The road having been blasted out of the side of the mountain, the dust stones and rocks were falling onto it, then bouncing off into the river gorge we were now in. The road was blocked by a great pile of this material, which moved and added to the downward momentum as it was continuously struck from above.

"Good morning!" called a cheery Pathan, with three bags of cement on his head as he ran past going the other way and evidently was seized by a desire to practice his English as he went. "Morning." I replied as courteously as I could muster, but he was already gone. A big shard of some rock or other whizzed across the top of my scalp so close I could feel its passage through the air. I called to Julia and the others to all join hands with me and we would all run in line abreast. But Julia declined, Barbara said flatly she couldn't run that fast, and Valentine stated that she thought we would do better to run through it one at a time. Christine came running back through the dust to meet us. She had a bandana of some sort over her face, and urged us to do likewise. Though we had not expected to be needing them so soon, we had been warned back in the U.K. about sand and the necessity to keep as much as possible of it out of our lungs, so we all had big cloths and hankies stuffed into our pockets and we quickly wrapped our mouths and noses.

"I will run with Barbara," said Christine.

"No, you won't," said Barbara

"Please just do it," said Christine. She grabbed Barbara's arm and ran. We stopped looking at each other and ran after them both. We climbed onto the moving mass of pebbles and small rocks and kept going, trying not to slip. A football-sized rock came bouncing along from my right, and I skidded to a halt to let it pass in front of me, comically flailing my arms so that I would not fall backwards, then jumped forward and dived into an impenetrable cloud of dust. Unable to see a thing, I just ran another half dozen steps, and then I was in the daylight again. I took off my bandana, wiped my glasses on my trousers, and looked around. Julia was standing in the sun, dust-covered from head to foot, apart from her lower face and circles of pink skin visible around her eyes. She did not look pleased to see me. "You bastard!" she said.

Christine ran back again through the dust cloud to round up others of our party. The four of us walked on wordlessly in the sun. Above us, more great icy peaks reached into the blue of heaven. Now we had to climb back up to the road, but fortunately this was a bit easier than coming down, since a stream had carved a little gorge into which we could climb and from there we saw a small bridge carrying the road. We could scramble around the pier of the bridge back up. As I was coming up, an inverted three-piece suite with four barefoot pairs of legs protruding was coming down, at speed. "Salaam alaikum," said an armchair as it went by. I was out of breath, and just waved.

Episode 2:

We boarded the train in Urumchi. It was a big steam thing, reminiscent of U.S. Steamers, but a train buff among the party assured us its design was Russian, though probably built at the Chinese railway works at Harbin. The coaches were very spartan—there were two classes of accommodation: "Hard" and "Soft." We were in soft, which had individual compartments with bunks. We thought these bunks would or should convert to seats, but we were wrong. You sat on the edge of your bunk or stayed in it. They had pillows that were filled with dried peas. Not my idea of soft, but in hard, you had no pillow at all, just the same wooden seat you had likely sat on all day. There were little electric fans on pivots in the ceiling of the compartment—one did not work, the other worked but made an extremely unpleasant noise. Luckily the weather was not so hot as to require them much. Each compartment was provided with thermos flasks of hot water. People drink hot water in China, even when it is boiling outside. They do of course have tea, but that is usually just leaves in the hot water. I had found in Kashgar that if you asked for "Hindoostan Chai" you might get something approximating what a poor British soul might regard as tea, but never with milk.

The train moved a bit faster than Indian ones, but not by much. The smell of coal and the bionic rhythm of the rails gave us broad smiles and we all reminisced about trains that used to be. Our first intended stop was Yiwanquen, where we would leave the train and go by road to Turfan. The train stopped at heaven knows how many places between Urumchi and Yiwanquen. While there was food served on board, most people preferred to get out at each station and buy stuff from vendors on the platform. One particular delicacy of those parts was a sort of deep-fried locust, in a glazed batter, on a stick. Little kids screamed the walls down if refused these. Being vegetarian was a trial. We needed a translator, usually, to explain what food we wanted. We usually got boiled rice and not a lot else. If you wanted the loo, you walked down the corridor to a little compartment, just like trains have in the U.K.. Once inside, however, there was a tap and square hole in the floor, and that was that. I thought it must be a Hard Class loo, so I ventured further afield to see if I could find the Soft Class loo. I headed toward the restaurant car, through hard class proper. People were perfectly friendly, but exceeding curious. Westerners were a rarity and we stood out like circus clowns in our bright T-shirts and multi-pocketed trousers in various colors. We were adrift in a sea of blue Mao suits, the only exceptions being the children, who were dressed up like Christmas presents. Everybody chewed nuts and spat. The floor in Hard Class crunched under your feet as you made your way over solidified nutshells and gob. I never found the Soft Class loos, but the restaurant car was interesting. All the tea etc. was served in cool enamel mugs with lids, usually emblazoned with a big red star or a picture of Mao, though he had been dead more than ten years. Food, too, was eaten off plates that had lids. All the food was prepared in a space hardly bigger than the toilet it was directly adjacent to. It took all day to get to Yiwanquen.

From there our party boarded a small fleet of big Japanese 4x4s and headed off to the Turfan depression, so called because it is a big rift and Turfan actually lies below sea level, at about the same elevation as the Dead Sea. Surrounded as it is by the Gurbofung Gobi, the Fire Mountains, and the Taklamakan, Turfan is both remote and one of the hottest places on Earth.

So after our long day on the train, we looked forward to a meal and a good night's rest before the rigors of the onward journey. And it seemed, as we crested a big sandy hill, that we were in luck. There was a six-story tower of a hotel, in a curious pink concrete, glowing against the setting sun. We noted as we got closer that the desert was reclaiming what had plainly been laid out gardens, and a

large fountain and pool held nothing but sand and empty Coke cans. There were no porters or bellhops to help unload or carry our gear, but we cheerfully carried it in ourselves to a huge, tiled, cool, reception area. There were many signs in German, we noted, and supposed that even here some great Rhineland tour company had an outpost. Behind the polished expanse of timber that was the desk, stood two young girls, rigidly still with eyes wide. Our "guide," who had traveled in the front of the foremost 4x4 smoking roll-ups and carrying on some sort of monologue—the driver had not taken a great part in the discourse anyway—now began yelling at the girls. Christine chipped in with something additional. The girls, on hearing this, looked at Christine as if she had that moment stepped from an interstellar craft of unknown origin. Christine collected our passports and the girls bestirred themselves and handed out cards which we were presumably to fill in and thereby register, but they were entirely in Chinese. We muttered, scratched our heads, peered at the characters and dotted lines. We asked Christine. "Put down what you like, where you like," she advised. "They can't read it anyway, and nobody in these parts speaks any English. Mr. Tang here"—she indicated the "Guide"—"has recently replaced the previous official, who at least spoke German." She gave a very Gallic shrug.

We did as indicated, and presently were issued big brass keys attached to plastic discs with western numbering. We trudged off to find our rooms. We got into the lifts, which were standing with the doors open. We pressed buttons and waited…and waited… and nothing at all occurred. The doors did not shut, the girls behind the desk shuffled the cards we had all filled in, and no one came to pick up our gear. Mr. Tang looked curiously at the poor foreign devils standing in the lifts as he went by carrying his shiny briefcase on his way to the stairs.

The penny dropped, we trooped out of the lifts, hefted our packs and started up the stairs. Julia and I were on the top floor. In the corridor, all the panels in the suspended ceiling had been removed to expose the air conditioning. Plainly it was not working. A plastic hose hung down at one point, slowly dripping water onto the carpet. Judging by the soggy carpet, it had been doing that a very long time. We found our room and inserted the key in the door—there was no need, the door was not locked. Inside was an ordinary western hotel room, twin beds and a small bathroom. The loo did not flush, the tank being innocent of water. Washing one's hands afterwards was likewise not a possibility. Our dark suspicions were confirmed about the shower as well. Since we had already spent one night in an army barracks, these were trifling deprivations, but we were, admittedly, a tad downhearted. We lay on our beds, and found the covers harbored a fine layer of sand. This drew our attention to the fact that there was no glass in the window above the door. On investigation, I found that sand was blowing in through the roof somehow, and that it had presumably done in the air conditioning as a consequence.

Undeterred, we set out again for the restaurant, but we could not lock the door to our room. The key was quite useless. I suspected that the lock was full of sand. We left our belongings and hoped for the best. We had become convinced that our party, Mr. Tang and the drivers were the only guests in this enigmatic establishment. Christine stood at the door to the restaurant receiving questions and complaints and making excuses in response: the hotel had not been open long; a German company built it and ran it until they lost patience with not being paid by some distant bureaucratic hive in far off Shanghai; they had not trained the staff properly; it wasn't the staff's fault; etc. Christine's inclination always to favor the Chinese, particularly the poor peasant at the sharp end, was very much in evidence, and perhaps she was right. But then there was dinner.

As in Kashgar and Urumchi, we were seated around big round tables with revolving "Lazy Susan" middles. At length, staff brought food and placed it on the revolving section. We seized our chopsticks and prepared to dive into whatever came around. Except we didn't. It wasn't just the vegetarians either. The various bowls contained things unidentifiable and, for the most part, cold. I couldn't even see any rice. One bowl proved on examination to be a sort of couscous. Cold couscous. There was a big jug with leaves and stalks sticking out. I tried to bite into one, but it was like trying to eat the branch on a tree. Perhaps it was a table decoration—who could tell? Someone discovered dates; we ate the lot in nothing flat. Then, in triumph, big tureens were borne aloft from the kitchen. Each had the head and tail of a fish sticking out. With ceremony and smiles , they were placed on the tables. Each tureen carried an entire fish. Entire, in the sense that nothing had been removed. Guts, bones and skin were, as far as could be ascertained, still present. Each fish lay in a stock so thin that the only way that it would have been possible to determine the difference between it and hot water would have been by laboratory testing. On Christine's table someone asked what it was. Christine carried on a brief conversation with those of the waiting staff who had Mandarin. The conclusion was that it was fish soup.

Replete with dates and cold couscous, we retired to our sandy room, barricaded the door with our backpacks, and prepared to sleep the sleep of the just. I came awake to rhythmic banging and a strange light in the room. The noise was the door, trying to blow open and being resisted by the backpacks. The light was the sun, as filtered through grains of sand suspended in the air and the sliding doors onto the balcony outside. I started to cough. Julia woke and started to cough also. Like a pair of consumptives we rose and staggered about, looking at our watches. It was 8:30 a.m. Beijing time—probably only around half past four in reality. There were no time zones in China. All official time was Beijing time, around four hours ahead of where we were. We tried to close the door, too dopey to think straight; else we would have realized that the absence of any division between inside and outside above the door would mean that the wind was coming in whatever we did. Giving up, I sat on the backpacks and looked out through the window. When we arrived I had not paid much attention to the view, just sandy hills and rocks. Now I realized that I couldn't see them. Also, the sky was turning a sort of purple, like a bruise. In a blinding flash of intuition, I thought to myself, "Oh, right. This must be a sandstorm!"

With great presence of mind we retired to the bathroom, hauled the backpacks in with us and locked the door. The room door, now liberated, flew open and the wind howled in, so that even the bathroom door rattled. Julia sat on the loo, while I sat in the shower. Sand came under the bathroom door in long fingers, moving on the tiles of the floor, like tentacles of something desperate to reach us. "No breakfast this morning then," said Julia, glumly surveying the sandy tentacles. Then the light went out. In my time I have slept in baths, but I think that was the only time I have slept in a shower. When the wind noise and external banging and crashing subsided some hours later, we eased our aching bones out straight and peered around the bathroom door. The power was not back on, but daylight shone through, not least from the rooms across the way, whose doors and windows were hanging off. I could see a sand dune covering a bed in one of them. The clothes we had been wearing the night before, which we had carelessly left lying on a chair, were gone except for, most fortuitously, my Rohan trousers, which had taken up residence atop the window. We had been sleeping in our underwear and T-shirts. Julia was moved to observe that so far on this trip she had got through a pair of jeans, a wrap and a skirt, and had not seen anything meriting the description of a shop in thousands of miles. Our boots and shoes lay like little sandcastles in a corner of the room, needing only a paper flag to recall the beach at Swanage where we used to take our holidays when I was a kid. Making ourselves as presentable as we could, with Julia now in her last skirt, and with our bandanas covering our faces, we started off down the corridor like the bad guys sneaking up on the good guys, hoping to meet some of our fellow travelers. At the end, by the lifts,

was a guy called Bob cross-legged on the floor, wrapped in a couple of sheets, rather reminiscent of Lawrence of Arabia at a feast in Faisal's tent. He told us that his girlfriend was in a cupboard opposite, too afraid to come out. There was the sound of a very loud conversation drifting up the stairs. This proved to be Mr. Tang, haranguing some poor local perhaps on the unacceptable standard of the weather in these barbarian parts, or maybe on an abstruse point of party doctrine—it was difficult to tell. Maybe his briefcase had blown away. Everyone stood in at least a quarter-inch of sand, and it was still blowing in through windows and doors.

Passing Mr. Tang and the others, we trudged down the stairs, arriving back in the lobby. Here, no one had thought to lock the doors and sand was blasted over the walls and furniture. We looked in the restaurant, more in hope than expectation, and found a number of our party, including Christine, drinking tea—that is, leaves and water. We joined them, but we soon found that food was out of the question, There was probably a sand dune in the kitchen now, though that probably wouldn't have affected what came out of it too much.

Episode 3:

We arrived back at Yiwanquen three days after we had left the train there. The train from Urumchi arrived around eight in the evening—later than when we arrived, and I thought it was late then. We had the most amazing moonlit view of the desert and in the distance snow-capped mountains, puffs of smoke from the engine making them appear and disappear. It was a hot night, and the compartment we were in this time had no fans at all. We could open the window a bit, but the powers that be had decided that Soft Class should be "entertained" as the rest of the train, with non-stop tinny pop music from Hong Kong.

Mindful as I was of the consequences of being caught committing an act of criminal damage in a totalitarian state, I nevertheless felt compelled to do something about the little speaker directly above my ear on the top bunk. Had I not had a little screwdriver blade in the Swiss Army knife I was carrying, I would have gone insane. It took me an age to unscrew the grille, stopping every time someone went by in the corridor outside (no blinds on the windows—not in China), then cut through the wires to the speaker, and then screw the grille back up. But when I was done, I still couldn't sleep.

Xinzhiang had once been known, in the days of Empire, as Chinese Turkestan. Even as late as the 1890s, it was a large blank on the map and blanks on the map were a matter for grave concern in the Calcutta corridors of power. A blank on the map could harbor an entire Russian division. The struggle between Britain and Russia for control of India's northwestern approaches was the main reason for expeditions being sent there, even though both Russia and Britain had previously guaranteed to refrain from trespassing on the Chinese Empire's territory. But, in fact, China only possessed the territory by a historical default.

A hundred years before the common era, Romans believed the silk that got traded through the many markets of the near east grew on trees, somewhere in a country then called Balkh, now part of Afghanistan. In China, the first Han empire had only recent learned of countries they had never previously suspected the existence of. Furthest and largest of these was Li-Jien—Rome. Both empires were at least as inward looking as the other, but through the intermediate kingdoms and empires that lay between, an organized trading network became established. Silk and spices and pottery went west. Glass, armor and leather goods went east. In the nineteenth century, Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen named this network of routes "The Silk Road." China had conquered most of the territory west from Xian in order to expel the Huns, nomadic warriors who preyed on trading caravans and threatened the approaches to Xian. It was to keep them out that the first of a number of "Great Walls" was built. The Huns were driven further west and still later became a nuisance to Persia and Rome. Later still, China was threatened from the south, by the Tibetans who for a time forged their own empire right across the deserts and up into what we now call Siberia.

But over hundreds of years, China beat the Tibetans back and subjugated them. When Buddhism reached Tibet, around the turn of the tenth century, Tibetans had given up on war and empire. Islam came from the west and the Turkic peoples of Central Asia (hence Turkestan) threw off Chinese rule for a time and were ruled instead by Caliphs, successors to Genghis Khan (who had avoided the deserts), in Samarkand and even Baghdad. But the imperatives of trade led the Caliphs to concede territory and their peoples once again fell under Chinese dominion. Chinese rule was distant and largely benign, and nobody troubled the empire, if the empire did not trouble them.

It was still like this when the Swedish explorer Sven Hedin rode roughshod over British officialdom and into these nominally Chinese backwaters in 1890. On his second expedition in 1895, Hedin crossed the Taklamakan desert, from Kashgar to the southeast, with the vague notion of going on to Tibet in that direction. The Taklamakan desert is probably the highest above sea level of any desert in the world, and the hottest. An entire river, the Daria, rises in the Kun-Lun mountains, enters the Taklamakan and evaporates. The perpetually shifting sands have covered and uncovered many oasis towns and settlements over millennia. Their ruins lie there still covered by dunes, waiting for the wind to brush them clean again. They nearly covered up Hedin. Only he and one porter escaped alive.

A little later came Sir Aurel Stein. Though born in Hungary, he was as eccentrically British as it is possible to imagine, accompanied by his faithful bearers, not least of which was his Jack Russell terrier, Dash. No matter what happened to his dogs, whether they met some awful fate or died of old age, they were always called Dash and they went everywhere he went. He excavated in the Taklamakan. That is, he dug into the sand, which blew back again, then covered up what he had done the day before, or last week, or last month. So he would dig it out again, and he went on like this until he recovered enough finds, particularly old documents or works of art, as he felt justified the effort in the first place. He finished by taking a few glass photo plates of his diggings, and then he moved on. How he achieved this can only be marvelled at, but this was a man who, surveying a mountain at the northern edge of the Karakorams called Mustagh Ata ("Father of Ice"), decided to see if it was possible to ride up its fourteen thousand feet or so on the back of a yak. It was. Jolly good.

There were some Germans, a professor and a museum handyman who calmly strolled around the region, stripping ages-old wall murals out of caves, a Russian (the famous explorer Nikolai Prezhavelsky) who was always passing through trying to get to Lhasa, and later still an American and a Japanese. They were all brave, somewhat insane men, now characterized by the Chinese as robbers and desecrators. Not that the Chinese saw any value in any of it until after these men had been and bore off what they had previously done nothing to conserve themselves.

When the train reached Hami, a number of us got out to stretch our legs on the platform. This was the first time I had done this, since I suffered grave anxiety about the train leaving without warning—which it seemed to do, although it moved so slowly it was not difficult for people even to wait for their change and still scramble back on. I wandered about the platform, recalling the adventures of such folk as Sven Hedin and Aurel Stein in this desert oasis. I looked over a fence and saw the long thin sticks that Chinese use for grave markers—hundreds of them, all standing in rows, all with red stars on them…most bizarre. They might have been the graves of combatants in some engagement in the civil war or during the famine that was The Great Leap Forward. Perhaps more likely was that they were the graves of those who had built the railway line, probably dissident political prisoners, though I fancy they might not have got red

stars—or perhaps that was a final insult by the Party. Further speculation was halted by the great moaning whistle of the locomotive and the screaming couplings of the carriages as they took the strain. Instantly I sprinted for the nearest carriage door, clambering over Mao suits and ignoring the threats and imprecations of Julia, running as fast as her little legs would carry her as the train moved up from, say, two miles per hour to five. I did manage to grasp her arms and pull her in, but I was still being roundly abused twenty minutes later as the train hit cruising speed.

Well into the next day we got off the train again at Anxi for another excursion. A short distance out of Anxi we crossed the railway track and saw the train going the opposite way, from Lanzhou. To come up the incline it had two great oily steamers hauling it. A terrific noisy sight. But the 4x4 we were being driven in could have turned round and beaten it back to Anxi.

We rejoined the train at Yumen and then went to the end of that particular line at Lanzhou. Lanzhou was very reminiscent of Stourbridge and Lye in my youth—coal smoke hanging heavy on the air and filling the back of your throat as the day gets hotter.

That should have been the end of the road, and we celebrated with a little party at the Lanzhou zoo, drinking Coke and taking pictures of the pandas. But the plane we had hoped to get to Xian and Beijing was a day late, and triple or quadruple booked. Finding this out took the whole day at the local airport, before we went back to the station. Waiting again for a train, we were served a culinary treat: chips, fried in oil with coarse black pepper. That was the best thing we had to eat on the entire trip. When our train came it was diesel-hauled and had compartments with little chintz curtains at the windows. When it arrived through fertile fields and green hills in Xian, we disembarked to a hotel with proper flush loos and the second McDonalds in all of China right across the street. By these signs did we know we had reached "civilization."

—John Nielsen Hall

Another Calvin Demmon Memory
by Don Fitch

Calvin was perhaps *the* Best Person I've ever had the good fortune to know, and I'm sorry he's no longer making the world a better place than it otherwise would be.

That he was A Very Humorous Fellow was immediately obvious from his writing; that he was also an extreme Wise person, filled with (for lack of a better word) Loving-kindness, might have taken a bit longer to appreciate. I do hope a collection (or selection) of his writings will somehow be made available. (For years—two or three decades, now—I've been sorry, whenever thinking about him, that we were no longer in any kind of contact, and "that's the way the world goes" really wasn't much help, but…he was someone who almost always got his priorities right.)

I've often wondered how much Calvin was being Humorous and how much he was being Profound when he said "If you keep people laughing hard enough, they won't hit you."

I also have fond memories of the few months when Calvin and I were both attending LASFS meetings every Thursday and—though we engaged in only brief grease-for-the-social-gears conversation—ritually exchanged thick envelopes containing multi-page (typed on both sides, with hardly any margin, even though postage cost wasn't a factor) letters filled with the kind of stuff that was Really Important to both of us at the time.

—Don Fitch

MIKE GLICKSOHN

It seems like decades since I sat down to send a LoC to *Trap Door* but it's probably only lustrums. I certainly appreciate that you kept sending me issues out of respect for my earlier activities and chose to ignore my recent inactivity.

Some things don't change (and that's a good thing): *Trap Door* is still a well-produced, well-designed, well-illustrated fanzine filled with writing that runs the gamut from good to really good. What did surprise me, though, considering my long absence from your pages, was that of the 46 people who contributed to the issue (that includes people short-quoted in the WAHFs) I recognized 40 names. *Trap Door*, The Fanzine of Old Pharts!

I retired last June and thought I might try and resurrect my career as a letterhack and also work on sorting and shelving the twenty paper boxes of fanzines stored in my basement. Seven months later neither task has been started, let alone accomplished, but we'll see what the future brings. (This attempt to discover whether or not writing LoCs is like riding a bicycle should be considered a one-off rather than the first step to a new and glorious chapter in my fannish career.)

Grant's article was fascinating and enjoyable reading. (It seems unfair that someone who draws so well can also out-write a large percentage of fans.) Although I first started using Grant's artwork 35 years ago, I had no idea that he earned his living as an architect—although I suppose that sort of thing is not uncommon in fandom. Unless we know another fan in person, we tend to know a lot about what they do in fandom and little (if anything) of what they do in "real" life.

The really stunning (to me) thing about Grant's piece is how much he remembers about the places and people and events in his professional life. I taught for 35 years but couldn't fill more than a page about amusing or insightful things that took place over those years. (I hasten to add that this isn't because such things didn't happen but because I can't remember them. A lousy memory is one of the curses of the drinking class, I guess.)

For the same reasons, I thoroughly enjoyed Jeff Schalles' reminiscences. I had one job for 35 years, 34 of them at the same school in the same room. There was more variety in a couple of Jeff's summers than in my entire working career. And I strongly suspect that working on movie shoots is inherently more likely to lead to tellable anecdotes than teaching Calculus. (I can attest to Jeff's excellence with a camera: he took one of the two best pictures of me that have ever been taken.)

Michael Dobson's article is intriguing to a semi-Luddite. (My computer is used for e-mail—like this attempt at a LoC—as a typewriter and to play Free Cell.) Now I'm old enough to remember Paint By Numbers, although I don't remember

ever doing one, but the middle section of the piece may be just as fictitious as the final section for all I know. Is it?

Carol's 26 (yes, I'm still anal) cross-sections of her life were great fun to read (except maybe the wasp one which caused severe wincing.) A couple of reactions...

I live in a two-story house built in the 1920s. There are twelve stairs and a 180-degree turn down to the basement (six, landing, turn, one, landing, turn, five) so I cannot imagine a house that has forty steps leading to the basement (unless your basement has 20-foot ceilings?) *{It's 40 steps from the road/carport down to the basement, but 18 of them are outside. There are three 90-degrees turns to negotiate, all inside.}*

I'd love to get my basement finished so I fill every wall with shelves and get all of my books out of the boxes they are now in (except for the ones on the fourteen bookcases scattered around the house.) So why don't I? Oh, there are about eighty thousand reasons.

The Bruce Townley piece is like the Michael Dobson piece. I recognize a lot of real references but I don't know how much of what I don't recognize is nevertheless real or the product of (what always used to be in the old days) the very strange mind of Mr. Townley. Whatever the breakdown is, it was fun to read.

Enter Dan Steffan, another fine artist who writes with above average ability and style. His lengthy trip report was a great deal of fun to read (except for the harrowing conditions on part of the return drive) but once again I'm left wondering how someone can remember such an incredible wealth of detail about a fairly long trip, even if was a fairly recent one. Perhaps Dan (a) has perfect recall, (b) took copious notes about the roads, the weather, the scenery and a dozen other topics or (c) made a lot of it up. Of course, Dan is the epitome of honesty which rules out (c) and (a) is very rare so that leaves (b). I'll probably never know. (When I wrote an almost 50-page fanzine about my time in Australia in 1975 as a Fan Guest of Honor of the Worldcon, I took several pages of notes for each day of the trip but I'm sure others with less-abused brains than I have can do such reports without them.)

My longest road trips were back in the days when I took my motorbike from Toronto to Florida and back a couple of times but one tends not to really notice the scenery on such a drive because if you're watching the scenery the chances are the trip (and your life) will be much shorter than expected! I do recall crossing from Florida into Georgia, though, and reading a sign which had four words, one on each line vertically, and appeared to read MOTORCYCLES USE CAUTION RIPPLES. "What the fuck are "caution ripples?" I wondered until I got to the section of highway where the blacktop had been removed, revealing the corrugated under structure. As I fought to control the bike, I swore and wondered how much a colon after the third line would have cost the State of Georgia.

I always enjoy Ted White writing about events and people in fandom before I became active, perhaps even more than when he writes about events and fans from my own time as a fan. I usually wonder if Ted's recollections of things past are accurate but unless someone contradicts his version of things I'll accept them. Fanhistory is endlessly fascinating to me, even after near-gafiation for fifteen years.

Lots of discussion in the lettercol about e-zines and paper zines but for me, Rich Coad sums it all up best. I should probably steal his first paragraph, print it on a card, and hand it to anyone who wants me to become a part of fanzine-fandom-as-she-is-today.

Anyone interested in real history written by a fan would do well to try and find a copy of *The Improbable Irish*, written by Walt Willis under the pen-name Walter Bryan. I have a 1969 Ace paperback (and I've no idea if any other editions were published) but it's a wonderful history filled with the wit and insight Walt brought to his fanwriting. *{There's also a Taplinger hardcover, and both are readily available in a book search on-line in a wide range of prices and condition.}*

So there you are. Somewhat jejune but it's been a long time off the bike! And I hope to hear from you before 2009!

A. LANGLEY SEARLES

It was good to know that Harry Warner's fanzine collection will remain intact in its new ownership. I hope it will also become more accessible to historians and other interested parties than it was when Harry owned it. I was sorry to see that Sam Moskowitz's collection was broken up after his death, and I wonder if Sam ever visualized that happening. I once asked him what he had planned its destiny to be, and he said, "I've told Chris *[his wife]* to sell it to the highest bidder." I didn't have the foresight to query as to whether he meant the highest solo bidder or the highest price to multiple bidders for separate parts of the whole. In any event, he probably simply wanted to provide as generously as he could for his wife.

The letter section was particularly interesting in this issue. In former times people used to compare ages at which they had begun reading SF; now it is when they became active in fandom—an entirely different thing and dependent on their milieu as well as other factors. For example, it would probably be easier to begin if you lived in a city than in a small town (where face to face fan contacts would be statistically fewer).

I enjoy your having carefully filed all your fanzines. How do you file your correspondence? Sam Moskowitz was meticulous in filing his stuff. Some of his methods seemed unorthodox, but whenever I asked about some fannish matter he was always able to locate what was needed to give a responsive reply. (One of his unorthodoxies was filing all postcards he received together. He felt it not only saves space but prevented them from getting lost.) *{I don't save most correspondence. Letters of comment are another matter, though—each issue's are in a separate envelope and all are stored, along with original manuscripts, artwork, paste-ups and "camera ready" originals, in a trio of boxes. Every now and then I think that if times get hard I might be able to pick up a few extra bucks auctioning off my poctsarcd LoCs from Bloch.}*

TOMMY FERGUSON

I was taken by some of your comments on the use of the Web to publish fanzines and the level of response generated from that. Although I'm very taken with the Web as a forum I'm not convinced, either, that it is the way forward for fanzine publishing. Bill Burns is doing a great job—I really believe his best efforts are merely to capture some zines that would otherwise not be saved and make them more accessible. But I don't think it is getting people more involved in fandom and fanzines. How many people, for example, actually print out the zines from the site rather than just skimming through them on-line? I know I certainly fall in the latter camp. *{Although in an ideal world paper fanzines would remain the dominant form, some people would simply not be doing fanzines at all if not for electronic distribution. Arnie Katz and Earl Kemp are two prime and prolific examples. As for printing out the zines on Bill's Website, I only do some of them. I suspect that my selectivity is typical. Readers?}*

Grant's article on his career as an architect was interesting, well written and a lot of fun, with a great ending. Who could ask for anything more? The details of someone else's job can be intrinsically boring, as my wife knows all too well. But Grant spices up his details with elements we can all relate to: on the job politics, dickhead bosses, and personal triumphs. At times the detail does come across as a list of things—but this makes the rest of it flow as well. And it does flow—very tightly written with specifics that stick out even as I type this: capping out the arches I'm sure resonates with anyone who has been on a major project.

"Every Man A Rembrandt" raised a few hackles with me: it is all about the content! Playing with the net and other PC tools is great entertainment and loads of fun. Some of the results of these are laugh-out-loud funny and very creative. But I'm reminded of my early fanzine days and, as ATom memorably advised me, "It doesn't matter what you have to say. If people can't read it, there's no point." Now that crudzines can be produced perfectly, electronically and exactly the same for each copy (using the tools that Michael mentions) it is even more about the content. So I have to disagree with his premise—technology cannot free us from the lack of talent, it just exposes that lack even more clearly. Readers of the various crudzines I've produced over the years will all too readily agree with that! As Eugene Doherty memorably ripped off from someone, "I didn't know you couldn't write well until you learned to type!"

Jeff Schalles' film school article was fun—snapshots of life—the creative drive versus the production of daily life. Reminds me of the sales guys in the bank I work with versus the support staff who make it happen. I'm sure this division of work and aspiration is to be found everywhere in life.

I really enjoyed the other articles as well—slice of life from Carol—and the letters reminded me of the last couple of issues which I've just dug out. Great zines and wonderful artwork. Which leads neatly into the Bob Tucker article. A great

fan and I love the whole idea of the Tucker Hotel: the sort of irreverent and yet reverent nonsense that makes fandom so much fun to be a part of. *Trap Door* is another part of that.

MICHAEL DOBSON

At first glance, I got the impression that *Trap Door* No. 24 had some sort of theme to it, but—well, nope. Lack of theme notwithstanding, it was, as always, a delightful issue. I'm glad to see you following in the fine faanish tradition of editorializing on "why this issue is late."

I share with Grant Canfield a discomfort with high places, so I read the description of him nearly taking an eight-story dive with a certain amount of sphincter tightening of my own. This may be a side consequence of my having limited depth perception, but my skin begins to crawl if I'm less than five feet away from an unconstrained drop. I'm not fond of flying, either, although I do way too much of it. The DC area equivalent of White Castle is Little Tavern, with the same little grease squares and onions. A girlfriend of mine many years ago worked at a Little Tavern, and I became a fairly regular devotee during her tenure.

The applause Grant received was surely well deserved, and I particularly like that he identified the reason: "We know you're actually listening to us." I've worked with project managers of all stripes over many years, and it's interesting to me how often even experienced and skilled project managers miss the fundamentals. Real listening is a skill, and one that a lot of people don't seem to have mastered.

Carol Carr once quoted Terry as saying, "Carol's natural medium is the postcard." What I admire is how she manages to compress an entire story into so few words, and wrap it up so neatly. "You might think this was a package deal, but you'd be wrong." "Check, check, check, hack, check, hack, hack." "What would Ram Dass say?" Genius.

It's always risky to meet your idols, so I'm glad Bruce Campbell lived up to Bruce Townley's expectations. (It must have been the name. Gotta love the name.) I met Dr. Seuss once, and he snarled at me when I asked if he'd autograph two books. I had to get over the mental image of that cranky old man when my son was at the age to hear "From there to here/from here to there/funny things are everywhere."

At the other extreme, I gave Stan Lee a tour of the TSR show room at the American International Toy Fair one year. His handlers, who treated him sort of like an advanced Alzheimer's patient, accompanied him. I said, "I'm a big fan; I've been with you since *FF* #4."

"Where the hell were you for the first three?" he said with a grin, put his arm around my shoulder, and let me show him around. For about ten minutes, I was his best friend in the world, even though I know he forgot who I was within minutes after leaving the showroom. I was impressed. In the unlikely event I ever become famous, I'll use Stan as my model of how to behave. Everyone should have the chance to go "out into the foggy night beaming a satisfied fan boy's grin."

I enjoyed Dan Steffan's travelogue a lot, though I wonder how many invitations he's going to get after confessing his intention to "fart in their hot tubs and look through their medicine cabinets." Fortunately, I don't have a hot tub. He's welcome to check out the medicine cabinet; it's pretty boring.

I admire Ted White's graciousness in putting an end to the argument with rich brown by claiming in print it had all been a hoax. It was indeed an elegant solution. It occurs to me, though, that there is another possible interpretation of rich's later behavior when he acted as if he believed Ted's hoax-resolution was what actually happened. When people get that defensive about an untenable position, the issue is often not about believing themselves to be correct, but rather wanting desperately to avoid the embarrassment, shame, or loss of face that comes with admitting public defeat. If he had been really that serious about his position, he would have fired back angrily when Ted labeled it a hoax. By saying, "I was really having a hard time supporting my own position with a straight face," he may have meant, "I was wrong, and thanks for not making me admit it." But, as Ted said, he ultimately did accept the situation with grace and good humor.

Jay Kinney identified some of the more absurd elements of Postal Service security. As a frequent air traveler, I deal with the TSA equivalents all the time. (I wish I had a business making 3 oz. bottles. I'd be able to retire in a year.) There is a certain rationality and logic to the seeming madness, as long as you know what risks they're really trying to avoid. It's not so much harm to *you*, but the harm to *them* if called to testify before Congress after some incident.

Take the ban on box cutters on airplanes because some of the 9/11 hijackers used them. There's no risk to flyers if hijackers have box cutters, really. "I have a box cutter! Fly this jet into the nearest tall building!"

Box cutters weren't the weapon. Expectation management was the weapon. Pre-9/11, smart money said sit down, shut up, and do what the nice hijacker says. Today, if some joker with a box cutter tries to hijack a plane, I'll have to stand in line to get my chance to kick him. That weapon could be used only once.

In a way, I pity some traditional hijacker. "I want to go to Cuba! No, really! I don't want to fly into any buildings; I want to live as much as you do!" No one will believe him. But TSA officials have safeguarded themselves against their most important risk: "We have banned the weapons used by the 9/11 hijackers. Don't blame us."

I love organizational dynamics. The way people behave as individuals is funny enough, but the way they behave as groups is even more perverse. For example, the management guru Martin Weisbord observed that the center of power in an organization resides with the department in charge of the last major *failure.* That seems completely backward, but note: if the company's hemorrhaging money, the finance department runs the show. If you lose a big lawsuit, legal is in the driver's seat. If there's a strike, labor relations is in charge.

Take FEMA pre-Katrina. FEMA combines civil defense and natural disaster response, and the people in each area naturally think of their concerns as primary. The last failed pre-Katrina crisis was, of course, 9/11, and with FEMA moved into Homeland Security, the civil defense people are in charge. As a result, the natural disaster people screaming about Katrina find it hard to get the organization to move, and when they request support ("I need you to release your trucks!"), other concerns trump them ("Give you my trucks? Don't you understand that this is the *perfect* time for Osama to strike?").

Now, of course, Katrina is the last failed FEMA crisis, so the shoe is on the other foot. That means that *now* is a much better time for Osama et al. to act. People. Can't live with them, can't shoot them.

TIM MARION

I can certainly understand your discouragement after all the work you put into *Trap Door*—it's both attractive and well-written, and mostly seems to avoid all those silly fictional combination spoofs I see in so many fanzines nowadays (where the entire wit and humor of the piece seems to consist of little more than making as many references as possible). *{"Mostly"!?}* Lack of response is almost certainly one reason why I stopped doing *Terminal Eyes*. Well, that and the expense. I too was discouraged by mere email responses such as, "Thanks for the zine." People who responded that way were quickly cut off my list as I don't consider that a legitimate response. *{It's a dangerous thing to do here, too.}*

In this issue I expected to enjoy the Grant Canfield piece the most, since I remember how helpless with laughter some of his fanwriting from the 1970s made me. Indeed, I remember writing Grant at that time and complimenting on him on something in Frank Lunney's new fanzine (*Syndrome*), and he wrote me back a card, "Have been receiving great, greasy, gooey, gobs of egoboo for my fan writing lately…strange sensation." But at the time Grant's writing had me just as entertained as his cartoons. This piece, however, was more a rambling autobiographical piece than something inspirational for belly-laughs. Nonetheless, it was great to get a slice of life from this fascinating person. Grant need not worry about "boasting"—he has every right to be proud of himself for being at the top of his chosen profession.

Another entertaining piece was Jeff Schalles', as his story had a point and a resolution, making it a brief, satisfying read. I somewhat fondly remember when Jeff lived here in New York; apparently Jeff has quite a talent for being able to bull his way into almost any job. Considering what a demanding job Jeff is writing about here, I am glad he made the decision to gafiate from gaffering (I sure hope no one else has said that!).

Nice reading Ron Bennett's letter in the letter column…until the end, where you reveal that he too has passed. Damn, Robert, I must have spaced out on that! Yet another disappointment to me, following fast on the news of Lee Hoffman's death. I really enjoyed reading Ron's letters in *Trap Door*, as well as his account of dealing comic books in England.

I wanted to mention that I appreciated Carol's

amusing, faanish, almost tipsy-humorous tidbits —they added a much-needed note of levity to *Trap Door*. Although in some ways *Trap Door* is similar to *Mota* in terms of content, one thing the latter had going for it was a wild sense of humor, almost reminiscent of the underground comix (especially with Dan Steffan doing so much of the graphics!). I suppose this could be a reflection of the times—perhaps the mid-'70s were a much more carefree time than now. At the time I was living in it, I wouldn't have thought that it was such a "carefree era." But there it is. Or was. *{Depends on your perspective—from mine on the commune in the woods of Tennessee, it wasn't very carefree, either.}*

DAVID REDD

Grant Canfield's "Thrilling Architect Stories" —wow, another Golden Age heading— Golden Age of Dan Steffan, that is. Lovingly detailed —the sight of rivets can take an old-time fan right back…

I see that Grant's mid-'60s life ran fascinatingly parallel to my own. From 1967 on I worked in the County Surveyor's drafting room (UK: drawing office) whereas at Grant's Rapidographs were replacing the old drawing pens. Here too were electric erasers, little sandpaper blocks, drafting powder ("pounce"), drafting tape ("masking tape"), and huge sheets or rolls of drawing paper—the largest usable sheet being "double elephant" size, although they were small elephants.

We worked at drawing boards with the usual parallel-motion aids, or on the big central table when long paper rolls were needed for drawing long road schemes. We calculated minor details with books of seven-figure logarithms; more complex design coordinates were calculated by the County Treasurer's computer, occupying several rooms nearby and communicating through punch-holes on little rolls of coloured paper—"baby bumf" as we called it, and relatively advanced technology. (As late as '69, studying Fortran at college I wrote every single line of code onto its own file card, and teams of secretaries then typed punch-holes into the cards…. The first digital pocket calculators didn't reach us until '72.)

That long central table was the location for a fiercely upheld tradition. Every lunchtime we removed the drawings and equipment—scales, set squares, curved plastic guides to various radii or transitions ("railway curves"), etc.—and created a clear flat area for playing table tennis ("ping-pong"). This tournament, rather than the Fireplace Races of Grant's workplace, was the main theatre for rivalries. Tidy work and professional pride were individual rather than competitive, and the only serious aggression over drawings occurred during competition to draw ever more elaborate north points on the larger drawings. (The small foolscap land plans had to suffer rubber-stamped north points, by order.)

The environment was all-male except for a few secretaries. We bought our own drafting tools, ditto our tea and coffee. My starting salary in U.S. terms would have been 75¢ per hour, and glad to get it. I also checked house-purchase land searches for impending road schemes, and plotted road accidents on strip maps—the black spots indicating deaths were a powerful argument for improvements.

Working conditions weren't too dissimilar to Grant's, although the perks were even less. The short wall with our one door (fire exits? Hah!—this was 1968!) had some file drawers and a miscellaneous work area including the tea table and sink. Here I learned to sluice ink from nibs, persuade the smaller Rotring Rapidographs not to seize up, mix water-colors, and wash out failed linen drawings into dust-rags. The latter was a mark of shame. Thus the new plastic film was real progress; errors could be scratched out at least once by razor blade—although the evidence did remain visible.

Those water-colors were used for the last vestige of Victorian engineering art—the hand-coloring of the cut-and-fill sections on our highway drawings. I also painted a pink wash across land acquisition plans, sometimes on major schemes but more usually those slivers of field corners being acquired for smoothening bends. (One of our Divisional Surveyors usually wheedled farmers into donating those little strips, but this could backfire later if we needed more land and the farmers realised that what they'd given away was worth money.)

Grant's rotary diazo print technology was ahead of ours. A dark and not very dry basement held the County Council filing records, gradually decomposing and soon to disappear in the reorganisation of 1974. Beside the file shelves lay another Victorian relic: a long metal frame bearing a single curved sheet of glass half the width of the room, with a kind of miniature aerial ropeway slung overhead. This was the arc-lamp exposure device accompanying the ammonia printer. I would lay a transparent drawing over light-sensitive coated paper, then place both around the outside of the glass, and pull a tarpaulin up tight to hold them in place. Check the lamp rods and the glass globe, replace as necessary. Next, I cranked up the overhead cables, threw the switch (fingers crossed for no electric shocks) and stood back as the lamp flared and lurched its way across the drawing. After the exposure, I extracted the print paper and fed it into the long slot of the developing machine where ammonia fumes turned its yellow lines and letters into rather variable brown print. I don't remember how we disposed of the spent ammoniacal fluid, but I'm sure we could be prosecuted for it now. Again there was only one basement door. Right beside a dodgy fuse box. I survived, though, to see a shiny new all-in-one machine arrive in an above-ground room with windows. Took all the fun out of life.

The real fun was going out on survey: open air, meeting people, creating plans out of a few marks and measurements. And how we measured things… I hammered nails into the roads as reference points, then wound up the links of my surveyor's chain into wheatsheaf formation, held the handles and flung it out so that two of us could stretch it out on the road between nails. That was technology for you. (In college, they also taught us plane-table surveying, basically sketching to scale as practiced by the troops in India; could still be useful if the Empire ever comes back.) In later years I left the Council. I passed from pencil-and-paper to AutoCAD, moved from hand-thrown steel chains to EDM computer surveying, and in fact moved altogether from design into overseeing construction on-site. But in all that Grant is dead right about one thing—I always needed to draw. Without my little site drawings done with my '60s skills, the road designs I worked to could have given us curbs with zig-zags, or junctions meeting the main road two meters in the air. I admit the site foreman could have corrected matters without me, eventually, but the resulting contractor's claim would have been horrendous.

Drawing. Strange what pleasures I could find in work, late and alone in a leaky gaslit Portakabin surrounded by mud, broken drainpipes and a waiting sub-agent. Distance lends enchantment to the view. Thanks, Grant, for reminding me of all that.

GREG BENFORD

I'd like to see Grant Canfield in person again, since this article reminds me that he's a fascinating guy. I liked the interwoven tech details of architecture, the sense of a job well done in a profession that delivers to clients who care and appreciate.

Same for Jeff Schalles—I get the feel of what this work is like. As a boy I worked on southern Alabama farms, and remember both the pleasure of physical labor and the clear idea that in the long run it might be better to work inside and sit down a bit, too. My relatives who stayed in farming got beaten down badly by age fifty, and not many lived long lives. (My grandfather died of lockjaw (!) before the tetanus shots.) So I went first into engineering and then quickly realized I liked my physics pure and undiluted. Eventually I became a mathematical physicist, then went back to doing experiments and running labs—mostly because there's nothing like hands-on work. Nature bats last.

Ted White on rich brown: Yep, a feisty guy, a true career fan, and I miss him. Jay Kinney seems similar in these delightful rants—a seldom-recognized art form. Reminds me of Lenny Bruce.

Nobody can outwrite Carol, of course. She wasn't made for the production-mode fiction writer life: those folk really do have the narrative drive that spews works out through their fingers. I was that way in the '70s and '80s and most of the '90s, but now see other things to do in life. I still write about a book a year, still…and lord help us, even write for fanzines! (Please don't tell anyone in SFWA.) Not surprised she was a crack chess player, either.

Trap Door is the best print fanzine around. Alas, its circulation is too small to reach the audience we need. But your sure editorial skills tell true—this may be your best issue yet.

JOHN PURCELL

Grant Canfield's architectural stories were fun to read. My older daughter's boyfriend is entering his senior year at UT-Arlington as an architecture major, and has spent the past two summers intern-

ing at a firm in downtown Houston. When I spent five weeks staying with him at his apartment in Houston last summer while teaching summer session classes at North Houston College, I had the chance to see some of his work. He's quite talented. His models are impressive, and I really like some of the lines he's developed.

It is a good thing Grant wasn't afraid of heights—I would have peed my pants doing some of the things he did back in his younger days. Working on the Gateway Arch would have been fascinating. I have always wondered how they put together things like that. Even more astonishing is thinking about all of those ancient massive structures like the Parthenon, the Pyramids, and especially those European cathedrals of the 12th to 16th centuries. I always wonder how in the world did those people ever figure out shit like that? Then I remember reading *Sarum* by Edward Rutherfurd and how mesmerizing the story of the building of Salisbury Cathedral was. Rutherfurd did his homework and made his narrative entertaining and educational.

"Every Man a Rembrandt!" reminded me to use some of the fonts and fun stuff available on software we have here at home on my zines. I just get too lazy to dredge out the discs, relying on Word Art and the drop-down font menu for a little variety. This was a helpful little article and maybe, just maybe, I will hunt down LogoCreator and some of the other items Michael Dobson mentions. There is a lot of fun stuff out there if one is so inclined to find and use it.

You know, the artwork throughout this issue of *Trap Door* is wonderful and makes me so damned envious that I could just puke. The articles themselves are great, but the artwork you've commissioned to accompany them is all perfect and complementary. There's a reason why Stiles and Steffan consistently place high on FAAn and Hugo Award artist ballots—they're damn good!

I have never worked on films before, but have been in bands. Jeff Schalles' article makes me want to go read *War for the Oaks* now. I remember when that book first came out, and how bemused Emma was when everyone enthused over it. She's a good person, and I haven't seen her or Will in positively ages. If I remember correctly, Steve Brust told me last year that they're living in California now; they were just GoHs up in Dallas a few weeks ago at a convention, too.

Bruce Campbell is a funny actor ("I am a Fan Boy"), and I really enjoyed him in *The Adventures of Brisco County, Jr.* many years ago. I have watched a couple of these *Evil Dead* movies on the Sci-Fi channel and found them suitably campy. If you take them with thirteen pounds of salt and accept them as fluffy entertainment, they're a lot of fun to watch. Campbell has a great sense of tongue-in-cheek humor, and that's a good trait in this business.

Last year at AggieCon 37, I think I surprised and amused Peter Mayhew by simply talking with him instead of fawning all over him asking for an autograph and so on. Mayhew's a pretty cool dude. Huge, too. But I learned years ago that most celebrities prefer to be treated like normal humans, not as some kind of pedestal-climbing deity of the month. Bruce Townley's article reminded me of this, even though Bruce admits he's a fan boy underneath it all. I probably am too, but prefer not to show it. This year Richard Hatch from Battlestars Ponderosa and Galactica will be at AggieCon, so I will continue my habit of simply saying hi and chatting up the media guest of honor. It's a dirty job, but someone has to do it.

NED BROOKS

Excellent memoir by Grant Canfield. I didn't know he was an architect. I remember the drafting equipment he describes—we had it where I worked for NASA. And when they microfilmed the 1952 architectural blueprints of Building 640 and the 8-foot TPT wind tunnel, someone had the sense to keep the originals. The microfilm—which was carefully pasted frame by frame into IBM cards for computerized sorting—turned out not to have enough resolution to read the text. I remember taking one of those blueprints to be copied—it was about 4x10 feet. I had had drafting in college, but was glad never to actually have to do it much! Especially in ink. I still have the instruments though.

I didn't know Gregg Calkins was still around. While inventorying my book collection I ran across a book with his bookplate that Phil Harrell had given me.

Jay Kinney's rant is good. I was very annoyed by the postal rule that parcels over one pound have to be presented to a clerk. *{And now the cut-off is thirteen ounces. Damn those terrorists who figured out a 13.1-ounce letterbomb!}* The post office branch nearest here however is not as bad as his—I don't have to stand in line to mail a package with the postage on it. I was told to just bring it up and lay it on a counter space they have for that. I have also been told that this rule applies only to packages with actual stamps as postage. If you use one of the systems that make printed postage you can mail it anywhere it will fit, whatever the weight.

HOPE LEIBOWITZ

The Grant Canfield article was amazing. Hearing his story about the people clapping was really great. I never had a moment like that in any job. It actually made me a bit envious! As to the lunches when he was an apprentice—yikes! I used to like going to White Castle once in a while when I lived in the Bronx, but every day? I think that would have palled quite quickly. I went a few years ago when I was at a con, and someone drove. It was exactly as I remembered it.

The Jeff Schalles article was interesting. I have seen that Emma Bull trailer for "War for the Oaks" at Minicon and it was very impressive. I was so hoping the movie would get made, as I've read the book too and it was also very good, even though I'm more into hard SF. I was amused by the sentence "The mountain lion who guides me had returned." I have known Jeff for a long time, and I can almost picture him saying that.

Carol's article was great. The short bits were very easy to read, especially when constantly interupted by things happening in cafes. It must have been bizarre, getting an Xmas card from the deceased L. Ron. I loved the sentence, "Where I grew up and my mother stayed the same." It stopped me and made me repeat it in my mind, and I even read it to a friend. But that half-jar of mayo line (I hope it was an exaggeration!) caused a wave of nausea. There are probably healthier ways to gain weight. And the yellow jacket incident—ow! I've never even been stung by a bee.

The Gregg Calkins article on Tucker brought a tear (several!) to my eye(s), in public. I wish I'd made it to his ninetieth birthday party.

Though I'm not at all into horror, I enjoyed the Bruce Townley story about meeting Bruce Campbell. A lot of my friends loved that Bubba Ho Tep movie, but I had no interest in seeing it, even though it was supposed to be more comedy than horror. Most writers just sign the book and don't try to make much contact. An exception is Harlan Ellison, who was the GoH at Minicon last year. He signed my book and kissed my hand. No, I didn't wash it for quite awhile afterwards.

I loved Jay Kinney's rant. I too rant all the time, and so do a lot of people. There are so many things that piss me off, and it seems to be getting worse all the time. Are people more inconsiderate than they ever have been? If I get started on this I could write for pages and pages. But all I can say is that someday I hope to sit on a package with eggs in it, when people occupy the seat next to them on the bus with their bag. I have sat on many bags to date, but no eggs yet.

ANDY SAWYER

I shuddered at Grant Canfield's account of the catwalk handrail giving way. I don't do heights myself and this passage moved from being a mildly interesting, always-fun-to-hear-about-someone's-life piece about something I don't know anything about to the "oh shit!" recollection of times in my life when similar things have happened. One was the occasion at school when after an unusually heavy fall of snow we all stole whatever flat objects we could use as sledges and headed for the nearest steep slope. I was having a wonderful time until I fell off whatever I was sledging on and found myself laying across the track staring at the guy behind heading towards me on his sheet of metal, closing my eyes to feel a stabbing blast across my leg as he whipped past, and giving me the screaming conviction that when I opened my eyes again I'd see half the leg following him. Fortunately, the sensation was simply the cold as my track-suit leg was sliced through. No flesh was touched, but an inch closer and things would have been significantly different.

And Jay Kinney's rants were fun—I hope they were therapeutic. Isn't it odd how we've moved from being romantic malcontents to grumpy old men (thinking about our pensions)? Now just don't get me upon public transport in the UK, where my local bus service decided to cut the route serving our village to just three times a day (morning and evening), with the rest of the service to Liverpool going from the town ten minutes away. All very well, but the three journeys from our village became more and more random as the drivers became confused about which journeys were extended to us, which way round they went, and which stops they picked up on. I have become a mad person who writes letters to the bus com-

pany. I am going to invest in some green ink.

Let me add my voice to the letters in praise of paper fanzines. E-lists are fun, and an essential source for storage: if I had time I would scan most of my fanzines and thereby save space. But the number of ezines I regularly read is limited. Somehow, using the screen is work. Paper zines are play, and long may they run

JOHN NIELSEN HALL

I thought Grant Canfield's tales of fear and horror in building sites and drawing offices were very good. I remember an old friend of mine telling of how he worked on a building site once and how he put a dumper down an as yet incomplete lift (elevator) shaft and the uproarious merriment of many sons of the Emerald Isle similarly employed who were oblivious to the fact that my friend felt he had escaped death by inches. This hilarity turned to grim concern at the damage to the plant and the time it would take to pull it out of the shaft. But of the human consequences they were entirely unconcerned. I think when your daily routine involves working at heights and with big pieces of machinery and so on, after a while you don't think about the risks to your person. My very first job when I left school was as a trainee electrician on a building site. I hated, loathed and detested it, and lasted about six weeks. I've stuck to indoor work ever since.

Dan Steffan's automotive expedition was also very interesting. I would have been madder than several varieties of hornet were I to find myself obliged by the cops to purchase snow chains at inflated prices. Firstly, I think people should be responsible for themselves, and have the choice to take the risk or not. Second , though this wouldn't have applied to Dan since he was driving a rented car, I drive a four-wheel drive, electronic traction controlled Subaru wagon, and there is no snow covered road encountered—in the UK at least—that me and it could not have gotten through. Third, if Dan had been on a back road going over the state line, would the cops be hanging around directing folks to the side of the road? I'd bet against it. It seems that if you drive a car, you leave that free country you thought you were a citizen of and can be pushed around by the merest whim of officialdom. Don't worry. Rich Coad thinks I'm only a watered down European version of a Libertarian. But if you want another article like Jay Kinney's, but not actually by Jay Kinney, call on me. *{Consider yourself called.}*

I enjoyed Carol Carr's ramblings best of all, though. I was curious to know if she ever did read the other books in the complete Charles Dickens. I think you are missing something if you have never read *Bleak House* or *Our Mutual Friend*. I never cared much for *Oliver Twist* or *A Tale of Two Cities,* but those big dense sagas I lapped up. Ever tried *Dombey & Son*? What a book. If only I could write something as good as that, only set in space or on another planet ,or something. I would, at last, be a Skiffy. Ah well, "we are such stuff as dreams are made of"—oh, wait a minute—that's Shakespeare. *{Carol sez: "I almost read* Bleak House *after the delicious 2005 Masterpiece Theater adaptation. The impulse, unfortunately, faded. I am not the woman I was at 12."}*

CHRIS NELSON

It's good to see another *Trap Door* after quite a while. I can't complain about the long interval —been there, done that—and can appreciate the reasons for it. We've been on the move again, too, but are now settling back into new work and life routines. I can only dream of retirement at this stage, but congratulate you on yours and hope that it does eventually allow you to find greater time for fanac.

My online activity has ebbed and flowed but our period in the Pacific was a definite low, due to comparatively frequent changes of email address and a failure to update my e-list "subscriptions" each time. I'm not entirely unhappy about this. Unlike Ben Indick I can recall spending far too much time writing extensive emails on occasion, but looking back I'm not at all sure that it was always time well spent. Generally, though, loccing is not something I've ever been terribly good at. Catching up with the local scene here in Oz upon our return I discovered that Eric Lindsay seems to have ceased pubbing *Gegenschein* and I confess to feeling guilty about my lack of LoCs to him. Among others!

The update on Harry Warner's fanzine collection was most welcome. Earlier news had been truly appalling—if that could happen to one of the best known and widely respected of fans, what hope for the rest of us? So I share your mixed response to the latest developments and look forward to further details. Organizing a collection like Harry's in some library would be my dream job.

Grant Canfield's article was fascinating. Looking to gain practical experience in a field before spending time to acquire professional qualifications seems like a sound idea, though it is clearly not without risks. Doozy first steps, indeed! His description of the completion of the Gateway Arch reminded me of scenes of the Harbour Bridge at a similar stage of construction —not something I witnessed personally, but it was such a milestone in Australian history that the newsreel footage of the time pops up every now and then, part of the vivid imagery of this Aussie icon.

My dad is a Bob and was an engineer for a while. I've read that during the Apollo program almost one in ten Americans did work related to the space effort in some way or another. At the time, my dad designed components of a chronometer intended to go into some small bit of the spacecraft. After his team had worked on it for a while, the company he worked for received a German-manufactured equivalent and they were all completely blown away. It was a fraction of the size, had meticulous workmanship, and functioned perfectly. He gave this up to become an aircraft mechanic, but soon became a teacher and spent most of his career in manual arts and computing class rooms.

I wasn't completely sure if Michael Dobson was writing tongue-in-cheek or applauding how technology can make us all feel like great graphic designers, writers, composers, etc. I enjoyed his faux toy company logos but have to sort through so much clutter on the Internet every day to feel any great joy at the way technology is liberating the creativity within everyman.

That said, I must confess I have used the movie function on my digital camera to make a few amateurish clips with my girls and it is fun for them to see the result. I don't think Spielberg will start trembling any time soon. I've always wondered just how exciting real production work would be and Jeff Schalles' piece gives a pretty vivid idea of the attractions as well as the grimy reality. You'd clearly have to love the work to persist with it. Interesting, though, how many successful film-makers have started out making low budget movies like, I guess, the War for the Oaks. Bruce Townley mentions Sam Raimi's *Evil Dead* films and others. Peter Jackson springs to mind, too, with his early schlock films in New Zealand. Not my cup of tea, really, though I've enjoyed Raimi's Spiderman movies and Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* despite a few shortcomings.

Bits of Carol's Stuff always resonate. When Hubbard was still alive he and his wife (Cindy-Lou?) sent me a Christmas card, too, though only that one year and I have no idea why. Presumably they found my address in a fanzine, but I wasn't a prolific contributor and had no profile to speak of. Maybe the Scientologists were getting desperate (this would have been before John Travolta and Tom Cruise had signed up).

Dan Steffan's travelog reminded me again of my desire to visit the Northwestern states at some time in the future—though probably in summer. Many years ago my mom, dad, brother and I drove from Perth to Darwin and back for my sister's wedding, a trip of around three days of near-constant driving each way that pretty much cured me of any previous excitement I might have felt about long distance driving. Until lately this wasn't something we had to worry about anyway, since you could circumnavigate any of the islands we lived on in less than eight hours. Now that we're in Canberra, though, we're just a few hours from the snowfields so maybe I should give Dan's chains some thought.

RICHARD DENGROVE

Great illo on the cover by Steve Stiles. But *Bothriocyrtum Californicum*? *{Also known as "trapdoor spider"}* Still, it will look good in eFanzines. Of course, there are other reasons besides that and letters of comment why you should post there. From a librarian's standpoint, doing it is good because people can refer to your zine any time and any place. Even you can refer to your zine if some question arises.

Sometimes, however, not being up-to-date is no vice. Even though Grant Canfield isn't up on all the modern drafting techniques, he is still an architect much in demand because of an old virtue: he listens. In my library, I have found that listening is a good part of reference work. Sometimes, the patron will answer their own question and not realize it. Certainly, to be sure of understanding the question, you have to listen. In other walks of life, listening can make you powerful beyond the dreams of megalomania. While Joe Stalin was one of the bloodiest dictators of the 20th century, and certainly no role model otherwise, he got where he was because he listened. That shows how powerful a tool listening can be.

Other of our abilities are more dubious. That makes Michael Dobson's "Every Man a Rembrandt" my favorite article in this issue. Like a lot of people, he feels like a Rembrandt with a paint by numbers kit. While I have not felt the same way about paint by numbers, I have felt it about other things. However, Michael knows all too well that no one is going to mistake him for Rembrandt. Also, like a lot of people, he feels like Mick Jagger when he mixes music with Apple's Garage Band. Ditto, he knows too well know no one is going to mistake him for Mick Jagger. Also, Michael knows another thing: in the tension between imagination and reality, there is humor. I am sure he feels like Benton and Barton when he uses Logo Creator. However, he makes sure all the advertisements parody real advertisements. Love the logo for Highly Inappropriate Toys, with the kid whom the toys have apparently driven bonkers.

While Michael Dobson understands the attraction of paint by numbers, Carol Carr does not understand the true essence of track shelving. It is less soul-less than she thinks. In 1982, at work, I was given a room with track shelving and told that that was going to be my library. I haven't regretted it. Kids scream with joy when I roll it back and forth. Adults are fascinated by it too but less demonstrative. Once, a person from the very pinnacle of government, the Congressional Budget Office, came into my library. He couldn't keep his eyes off my track shelving. In short, it is classier than Carol thinks.

While I and Carol have firm views on the esthetics of libraries, Dan Steffan would not be interested in it. He is a bohemian used to more excitement in his life. His trip to Los Angeles and back to Oregon sounds like it gave him a big jolt. We could say he is an old fart who likes excitement in his life. However, the fact he wants excitement in his life probably means he's not an old fart at all. *{And, I suspect, he also likes libraries.}*

By the same token, though sixty-two, I am not an old fart. My job has changed once every couple of years from 1982 on. It depends on what people ask of my library. Originally, I had to figure out how to locate government offices. Then patrons started asking me about legal citations. Next, they wanted articles on nutrition and medicine—yesterday. With a little help from the National Library of Medicine, I can get quite a number the next day. Now patrons who happen to be my bosses demand news clips. If my job stopped changing, I would be bored. You could say I am an old fart who is used to adapting to new challenges at work. On the other hand, like with Dan, could you say I'm an old fart at all?

TERRY JEEVES

I really enjoyed *Trap Door* as it is not only the size I like, but also it comes as hard copy which I can sit in an easy chair to read. None of this on-screen stuff which Rich Coad makes an excellent case against in the lettercol. The illos are great—with full marks going to Dan Steffan for that superlative heading to Grant Canfield's highly entertaining piece. I have sympathy for Grant's fear of heights—I even get giddy in a front balcony seat in a theater. I also liked Steve Stiles' cover illo.

I take issue with the condemnation of painting by numbers Michael Dobson mentions. If it gives someone pleasure, why not use it? After all, model making is on a par with paint-by-numbers when the modeler makes something from an instruction sheet instead of scratch building, I enjoyed the article, though.

Jeff Schalles' piece on the life of a "roadie" was also entertaining and show how varied life can be.

Dan Steffan's travelogue was really varied, especially so for me because I had visited areas close to the travel route in two Stateside trips—one in 1980 the other in 1982—but we never needed skid chains, although we did have the opposite experience of driving through Death Valley when the air conditioning broke down.

GREGG CALKINS

Regarding Grant Canfield and the St. Louis arch, I was amused about all the construction labor around the area that stopped to watch while the keystone was set. That had to be a very expensive period with all of that high-priced labor turned into spectators for the duration. I wonder how much extra that actually cost?

I've done quite a lot of drafting, myself, and having learned earlier than he did I struggled through plates and plates of lettering with an old nib pen you actually dipped into an inkwell. Horrible tool! For the first eleven years after I graduated, I essentially drafted maps and geologic cross-sections. I miss that, actually. By that time, of course, we had Rapidograph pens and things were much easier. And, of course, I learned to draw and letter on mimeograph stencils even before that.

I was tickled by the egoboo in Ted White's column—very nice of him, but he got a little confused about my age. I graduated from high school and turned eighteen, true enough, but I had been in college at the University of Utah and was in my second year there by the time the latter happened. I turned eighteen that November, late in the fall quarter, and left for the Marine Corps the following May, barely six months later, in the middle of the spring quarter.

I dropped out to keep from flunking out, since I had discovered sex by that time, although not the actual practice thereof. I was studying for that test harder than I was for any of my schoolwork, however, and it showed.

Alas, joining the Marine Corps put a temporary halt to both quests. By the time my Marine Corps enlistment was up three years later, the Korean War was over and the Marine Corps had a policy which allowed me to get out a couple of months early in order to re-take the spring quarter I failed to complete by enlisting. Very enlightened of them, I thought, and still think, but they were also ready to re-shrink the size of the peacetime Marine Corps again, like they always did back in those days when we thought every war would be the last one.

By the time Vietnam came along I was even older than Ted White's imagining, also married, and really had little interest in preserving democracy in Southeast Asia even though I was opposed to the world-wide spread of Communism. The whole thing just seemed too far off for me to contemplate, plus since I had already spent three years working industriously to avoid being sent to Korea the habit had become well-ingrained.

Oh, I had some desire to go to Japan, I admit, because I had heard from returning guys my own age that they had live-in housemaids with all the sex that entails, plus more than I even knew about in those sheltered times (you could have more than one housemaid at the same time, for instance), but the Marine Corps had a stuffy policy about it. I could go to Japan occasionally on R&R, sure, but my primary duty station would be in a tent in muddy Korea—if I still wanted to go. I'd heard plenty of stories about Korea, even after the shooting stopped, which made that decision a no-brainer.

Besides, staying in California meant I could continue pubbing my ish and impressing Ted White, both worthy goals. Ted White, in turn, impressed the hell out of me by actually turning pro and even becoming an editor, both of them dreams which I had abandoned as I resumed my college life in the fields of mundane.

And, in due course, encountered sex for real and sapped my fannish energies in the process, retaining only enough for participation in a quarterly apa that still came around too often, sometimes. I did very much enjoy my stint as FAPA OE, however, the last of the Good Old Days. Some time I'll have to tell you about them. *{Any time, Meyer. How about for next issue?}*

PAMELA BOAL

Issue 24 of *Trap Door* demonstrates that fans are life just writ more interestingly, perhaps with a slightly skewed viewpoint. Virtually every article has a counterpoint or echo in my own life—starting with Grant Canfield, who has every right to feel pleased that his abilities are appreciated and financially rewarded. My brother-in-law was a highly regarded structural engineer but was just thrown on the redundancy scrapheap when there was a recession and a cult of regarding youth to be of greater value than experience. I wish Grant had been the architect who lived in this house before us. Throughout the house there was evidence that he was a do-it-yourself fanatic who couldn't. The plans for an extension that came with the house deeds may have looked elegant and within the planning laws. but on examination it was obvious that they were totally impractical for anyone living in the resultant structure.

Now that two of our grandsons are in their twenties, I decided that it was time to produce something that could be passed down to the great-grandchildren. I decided on a book containing nursery rhymes collected in the oral tradition—that is, that someone in the family had to be able to quote the rhyme in full. Eventually we came up with one hundred rhymes. I also wanted to illustrate the rhymes with original modern (rather than the usual Victorian) pictures. As I have trouble grasping a pencil or brush and certainly can't control a mouse well enough to draw on computer, this was a somewhat daunting task.

Michael Dobson is right—while my Serif Draw Plus program did not turn me into a Rembrandt, it did enable me to be a reasonably competent illustrator. With clip art that could be dismantled into component parts and recombined with a selection of quick shapes, a range of colors and shading effects, the results were quite satisfying. My shaky hand was possibly an advantage when, for example, applying graining to a plank of wood, the fact that lines did not go quite where I intended resulted in a more natural look.

Carol Carr's "Stuff" is as ever a pleasure to read. My father also had the *Complete Works of Charles Dickens* along with a selection of other classics such as the Bronte novels. He went off to WW2 for six years and left instructions with my mother that the books were to be locked away until both my sister and I were old enough to appreciate and take care of them. As my sister is seven years my junior, that would encompass several years. Books were hard to come by in the war years so like Carol I haunted the library. Betimes father came back the library had enabled me to read most of the books in his collection and I lost interest in the rest. Mother died and father remarried and went to live in a granny flat attached to the house where his new wife's son lived. We were overseas during that phase of father's life so never got to meet our step-relatives until his funeral. We were asked if we would like to take away some of my father's old clothes as a memory of him. I told my step-brother that I would rather have my father's books. There was a look of surprised disdain on his face, and at that point I realized that I had not seen a single item of reading matter in the house. He informed us that he had been going to throw them out but thought they might still be in the garden shed or the attic. Eventually, when I promised to pay for the package and shipping, step-brother agreed to find and send the books to me. Eventually most of the books did arrive here. Have I reread them all? Well, no, but they do often provide a source of reference.

In a sense everyone's travel experience is unique to the individual. Husband Derek and I, along with our children, may have experienced some aspects of Dan Steffan's travels but the weird ones are as unique to Dan and Lynn as ours are to us. When we first arrived in Cyprus and traveled around the mountain roads, we were somewhat bemused and even disbelieving on seeing signs that read "Caution Road Slippery With Grape Juice." When harvest time came and grapes were transported to the winery in rickety old lorries, we rapidly became believers. Unfortunately there are no signs that warn of an even greater danger. After the grapes are pressed the skins are transported to an animal feed factory. We were traveling behind a lorry transporting skins along a road with no opportunity to overtake said lorry. In any event we were in no real hurry, having allowed plenty of time for the Mediterranean pace of life. The fumes coming from the lorry were not that unpleasant, telling us of wines to come that may be tasted at festival time. However, I was developing a headache and was about to suggest that we might ease back when I noticed Derek's head seemed to be nodding on and off (well, not exactly—just sort of drooping forward and then jerking upright) I started to ask him if he was okay when he swerved into an almost lay-by (there weren't any real ones, just slightly wider areas) and turned off the car engine. He had realized, most likely just in time, that the fumes from the lorry in front were actually making him intoxicated.

Our younger son is a first electrician, but like Jeff Schalles he has done his share of being the dogsbody there to lug heavy equipment about. Most of his work nowadays is site manager for outdoor festivals. That means planning the layout of the site and supervising the get in and out of everything from stage, to food franchise stalls, toilets and parking signs. New health and safety laws do not allow electricians to climb up ladders to fix lighting structures. Instead they have to go aloft in cherry pickers. Of course the stage is invariably at a very different height to the bed of the lorry transporting the cherry picker to the site. Interesting logistics, danger to one electrician up a ladder or several dogsboddies trying to get a cherry picker from lorry to stage. As in all business the customer is always right, so when the stately homeowner insisted his sheep need not be moved from the grounds for a combined orchestral, laser light and fireworks event, he was allowed to have his way. There was considerable consternation when the spent rocket cases began to land amongst the baa lambs.

TARAL WAYNE

"Every Man a Rembrandt": As the tools and aids available to home computers grow more sophisticated and user friendly, more and more people will be able to compose rock operas, direct animated fantasy epics, publish the Great Gay American novel, paint, or produce a science fiction film masterpiece in their spare time. One in a million may even be good. While I don't really believe the bad will drive out the good, there's every likelihood it will make distinguishing the good from the bad very hard for most people. Not that the monopoly of media by professional editors has been any guarantee of quality. Look at how many people paid good money to watch "Dukes of Hazzard" in the theater, or have made the "Left Behind" series bestsellers. But my experience of cyberspace suggests strongly that the average person cannot distinguish between shoe polish and pre-recycled, organic solids. How will they tell real creativity apart from cleverly replicated digital "creativity"? Every Rembrandt a preprogrammed template?

Back in the '70s, Victoria Vayne and I used to do the con thing, and to get to them often drove distances that would give an environmentalist a stroke. We drove from Toronto to Baltimore, New York, Washington, Cincinatti, Detroit, and Boston as a more or less routine matter. Less easily justified to the Green Generation were our car trips to Miami, Kansas City, and Denver. On the way to MidAmericon we circumnavigated Lake Superior, and drove through the Dakota Badlands before turning east to KC. The Denver trip was especially remarkable since we made via Duluth, Lethbridge Alberta, the Grand Tetons in western Wyoming, and Yellowstone Park. But, oh! they were adventures!

Long ago I grew mortally tired of lesser car trips. You know the sort. Hop in the car around midnight and drive all through the dark hours, sticking to throughways and interstates the whole way, and pulling up to the con's suburban hotel next morning in time to catch a few hours exhausted sleep. That's not a car trip. It's a grueling endurance test you might as well have spent in a darkened room with a video game. There's nowhere to stop but identical McDonald's and Wendy's. There's nothing to see on the road but strings of red taillights and oncoming white headlights, with the occasional yellow or blue warnings floating by out of the darkness. As often as not the driver is in a hurry to cut down the length of the trip anyway. Even if a neon-lit flying saucer were to land in plain sight in a farmer's field next to the highway, you'd zip by it at 70 mph before heads could even turn.

Compare the routine con trip with a leisurely drive of thousands of miles with no clear timetable. You take scenic back routes, stopping at will in atmospheric small towns, eat when hungry wherever the vibes are attractive, stop to ogle the sunset or meandering river or purple mountains majesty if you want, and maybe discover the Buy of Your Life in a small bookstore you would otherwise never known existed. And on the way, no dishes to wash, no beds to make, no boss, no telephone, and in those days no spam. That's the life!

Give me a goodly lottery win—nothing major, perhaps three or four million—and I think one of my first purchases would be a good traveling car. Then pick a con, find the least direct way to drive to it, and start early.

JOHN BAXTER

Thanks for *Trap Door* 24. Knowing your leisurely schedule, I'm confident this LoC will not arrive too late for your deadline. The best one can hope is still to be alive when the next issue arrives. Which rather addresses the overall tone of the issue, which is Lament for Lost Time, the Dear Dead Days Beyond Recall, the Burden of the Years, etc. As Andy Hooper rightly says, "elegiac". I can't remember a fanzine quite so saturated with the sense of what should, I suppose, be called Old Fart Fandom. Or, more accurately, Last Fandom? Since one does have the sense that fanzines like *Trap Door*, on paper, and transmitted by the antiquated medium of the post, have largely had their day. To my great regret, by the way.

Even though I was instrumental in getting Bill Warren's *The Evil Dead Companion* published (by finding him an agent in the UK), Bruce Campbell (pace Bruce Townley) was an unknown name to me until Mike Moorcock gave me a bootleg DVD of *Bubba-Hotep*, in which Campbell appears as Elvis Presley—who, having fallen into a coma, wakes decades later in some redneck excuse for a hospital to find that a double has been buried in his place and that he is regarded as long dead, and on this account universally mourned. Since there was not enough meat—or at least blood—in this plot for a Campbell movie, some sort of scuttling insectile mutant monster is haunting the hospital, as is a doddering Ossie

Davis (in his last role). I have since passed the DVD on to Anne Billson, author of *Suckers, Stiff Lips* and books on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and John Carpenter's *The Thing*, who is a good deal more enthusiastic than I was.

Earlier this year, I served on the jury at the Trieste Scienceplusfiction Festival, courtesy of Harry Harrison, who was the chairman. where films like *Bubba-Hotep* were the norm.

Moorcock, who now divides his time between Austin, Texas, an apartment in Paris and a condo in Majorca, is surely a candidate for the Fandom of the Failing, physically if not financially, though less so since his foot healed up and he no longer had to travel around in a wheelchair with one leg permanently raised to the horizontal. On a couple of occasions, we rolled him up the hill to Montparnasse for lunch, and maneuvered him through the double doors of La Coupole, an evolution which recalled Chaplin's *The Rink*, where Eric Campbell, the large, irascible man with the beard, is a gout sufferer—cue of course for Charlie to run his foot into the wall, jam it in the revolving door, etc. These days Mike makes do with a cane, which, with his natty suits and wide-brimmed felt hats, makes him look like Barry Humphries' lecherous older brother.

Dan Steffan's driving. I drove some of that route a couple of years ago on a book-hunting expedition into the Pacific Northwest with the legendary book hunter Martin Stone. As a gesture of flamboyance, we'd emailed ahead to Seattle to rent a golden convertible—which, arriving at SeaTac at 1a.m. in a gelid December rainstorm, did seem, on reflection, a little rash. The woman at the car rental counter agreed. "You'll freeze!" she said, and in short order persuaded us to take a goose-shit-green Jeep 4 x 4. And thank God. As we zipped up the icy slopes of the Sierras, past that view of Lake Shasta Dan mentioned, we passed dozens of stalled cars struggling with chains, and even a few heavy trucks sidelined by the cold. From our lofty elevation, we looked down on these poor unprepared mortals. Martin, in flagrant defiance of the 'No Smoking" decal, ashed his unfiltered Gaulois, I took a slug of my Noisette Latte, conveniently situated in the extra large beverage wells by the gear shift, and turned up "All Things Considered" on the radio. Kings of the Road, man!

That excursion with Martin began as a lark, with the possibility of a little profit if, as we hoped, the shops of the north woods had not been scoured as completely as those of San Francisco and Los Angeles. But who could know how comprehensively the internet had laid waste to the second-hand book market? Of the scores of shops listed in the most recent booksellers' guide, all but a handful had closed. In some cases, even the building was gone. We found ourselves staring at building sites or parking lots. The stores that survived had often done so by relaunching themselves as boutiques. They featured wall-to-wall carpet, a coffee machine, scented candles, and piped music. A few first editions in glossy wrappers, optimistically overpriced, stood in locked glass cabinets. More like the waiting rooms at a spa or clinic than bookshops.

One of my most abiding memories is of the sprawling mall in upstate Washington. At mid-afternoon, we had the whole place almost to ourselves. To a clangorous soundtrack of Christmas music, we wandered through halls decked with boughs of plastic holly, past stores which, though ankle-deep in ersatz Christmas cheer, had barely a customer. At the deserted stand where Santa waited to be photographed with your kids, he and his midget helper took a load off their feet by sharing the white plastic throne.

Everything shouted excess, from boxes of chocolates the size of suitcases to the local branch of Victoria's Secret which, clearly overestimating the market for bustiers and suspender belts among lumberjacks and trailer trash, had leased a one-time carpet store, spacious enough to garage a semi-trailer. The enormous windows were filled with billboard-sized photo enlargements of languorous models, massive as whales, reclining in net bras roomy enough to hammock a cow. Only Edward Hopper could have done it justice.

Carol and lobsters. You would love Charente, Carol, down on the Atlantic coast, where we have our summer place. It's prime country for lobsters, which are called, because of their color, Cardinals of the Sea. There is even a restaurant of that name in Royan, where you can eat lobster on a cliff overlooking the ocean. No oyster crackers, however. Anyone who demanded anything so un-French would probably be thrown off the cliff.

MILT STEVENS

Bruce Townley's article in *Trap Door* No. 24 started me wondering about when was the last time I had stood in line for an autograph. For awhile, I couldn't remember ever having stood in line for an autograph. Then I remembered a single exception. There was a party in San Francisco for E. Hoffman Price in connection with the appearance of a collection of his short stories. I bought a copy at the party and stood in line to get it autographed. Autographs just aren't my thing. Over the years, I've known some writers quite well, some in passing, and some by sight. Having their signature in a book doesn't change any of that in the slightest. Autographs might add to the value of a book, but I've always collected for my own amusement rather than resale value.

Like Jay Kinney, we all have our rants. I don't know whether it is just me, but we seem to have more of them as we get older. However, I've found one way to cut down on the number of rants I have. Ignore the news as much as possible. Your digestion will thank you for it. During my lifetime, I have gone to extremes about the news. There were times when I was reading three or four newspapers a day. There were other times when I figured if something was bad enough I'd hear about it, and if it wasn't, I didn't have to worry about it. At the moment, I'm in the latter mode of operation.

While I don't think it is worth a rant, I have noticed the strange things that pass for post office security these days. I mail the FAPA mailings at a regional post office. *{Milt has been FAPA's official editor for over four years, gathering and sending out the quarterly mailings. Anyone reading this who's interested in participating in what's become a very retro form of fanac, please contact me for details.}* If it wasn't for the new-fangled security regulations, I'd go in the front door and dump the mailings in the hopper. As it is, I go around to the back of the building, grab one of their laundry hamper style carts, load the FAPA mailings into that, and trundle right on in to the building. In the last four years, nobody has looked at anything I was bringing into the building. In fact, no postal employee has been within twenty feet of me. If I had any desire to blow them up, I would have done it years past.

DALE SPEIRS

Jay Kinney was ranting because the USPS insists that parcels over one pound be handed over the counter, and if pre-stamped must include a zero-cent meter strip put on it by a clerk. This has nothing to do with post-9/11 security, but actually goes back a decade to the heyday of Ted Kaczynski, better known as the Unabomber. His mail bombs were over one pound, stamped, and he dropped them in street mailboxes. The idea behind forcing people to bring parcels to a counter is to ensure that they will be photographed by security cameras. The zero-cent meter strip is to prove to the postal sorting plant that the parcel was in fact handed over the counter. Metered mail from businesses does not have to comply with this for the obvious reason that the meter strip can be traced.

"What are the chances of any of these identifiers surviving the blast?" asks Kinney. You'd be surprised at how good forensic technicians are at reconstructing things. Kaczynski's use of stamps was known right down to his favored denominations, but because he mailed them from street boxes far outside his home territory the postmarks were not helpful. Thus the insistence on meter strips.

These precautions are not, as Kinney writes, "idiotic security precautions," but are the result of Kaczynski's 18-year parcel bomb campaign that killed three people and mutilated 23 more. (Most people who survive a mail bomb are right-handed, and will lose their left hand because that's the hand that was holding it when the bomb went off.) I have published a history of mail bombs in *Postal History Journal*. The earliest known was in 1829, when a Spanish general lost his left hand opening a package from a Basque terrorist.

MARK PLUMMER

I bashed out a brief acknowledgment to *Trap Door* 24 on 31 January and in reply you said, amongst other things: "And once you get a chance to read it and remove some of your surrounding distractions, I hope for a *real* LoC*…."

As I said at the time, I was using a day of industrial action to tackle a bit of my own editorial work, so I had actually done no more than open the envelope, marvel briefly at its contents, and then fire off a quick mail-of-thanks before adding *TD* to the pile of fanzines on the sofa bed next to my desk. Where it sat, temporarily overtaken by the Corflu haul, until last night.

The point of mentioning this is, of course, that I wrote my brief email of acknowledgment without having read your comments in *TD* about

people who *only* send brief emails of acknowledgment, and the fact that I'm writing in more detail now is actually because I intended to do so even before I saw your more general request that recipients do so.

In a way, I'm kinda surprised that we don't ourselves seem to receive all that many emails-of-acknowledgment, given that it's so easy to do. But then again, I so rarely send such messages myself that it shouldn't really be surprising. As you say, we all lead busy lives, and I find it a little alarming that at the age of 43 I'm so actively looking forward to retirement.

But now you're echoing the sentiment so often voiced elsewhere, that the end of paid employment somehow results in less free time. I'm clinging on to the hope that you—and indeed everybody else—is exaggerating this point, although I can imagine you sighing that yes, you thought that way too until you knew the ghastly truth. *{Yes, alas! When the entire day, more or less, can be categorized as "free time," the need to focus and prioritize becomes more of an imperative than pre-retirement.}*

I've been particularly thinking about this sort of thing as Claire and I decided to take the whole post-Corflu week off work, partly to give ourselves some time to adjust to the intercontinental time differences—with every trip I find I get less good at doing this—but also so we had some space to do nothing much, or rather to do all the things that we don't usually do through lack of time…such as reading, and writing to and about fanzines.

I had this startling revelation a few months back. Given that the earliest I get home from work is about 4:30 (I start early), and it's more likely to be 5:00 or even 6:00, and given that I don't keep late hours during the week because of the early start, I only have six-eight "useful" hours after work—which means that I spend somewhere in the order of 15% of my Monday-Friday free time watching Channel 4 News. So really it's not at all surprising that I don't get anywhere near as much done as I'd wish. You know, I'm convinced hours were longer ten years ago. *{From my lofty position of being over twenty years older than you, it's my impression—and, of course, not just mine—that while hours are the same length they've somehow speeded up in their passing.}*

Anyway, I'm rambling away from the contents of *TD* although I have to say that whilst all the articles are generally interesting I don't have a great deal to say about them. Stand-out piece for me is probably Carol's column, in which respect I'd note that while *TD* is always very good at marrying artwork to words, this is a particularly apt pairing in a way I can't immediately define. *{Perhaps it's the familiarity of LeeH's heading, which has been used here many times and which I "borrowed" from the final issue of* Innuendo*.}* Otherwise, there are all sorts of little snippets like Dan's description of having chains on the wheels of his car, one of those little Americanisms I've often heard referenced but never entirely understood. The UK has snow, yes, but it's usually pretty minimalist stuff and we deal with it by allowing our transport infrastructure to collapse entirely at the first flake which was why it was so traumatic having a major (by British standards) snow fall early on the morning we were flying out to Corflu. In fact, we had a reasonably trouble-free journey, and on the final leg—the cab ride from Austin airport to the Doubletree—heard radio reports of seven *feet* of snow in upstate New York which made the one or two inches that had pretty much shut down whole tracts of the UK seem pretty feeble.

I should also say that it's nice to see some words from Dan, a fine artist—his FAAn Award richly deserved—but a fine writer, too. The same goes for Jay Kinney (well, apart from the award bit), and I'll resist the temptation to pile in with my own pet rants about golf umbrellas and the telephone dialing code for London.

A good letter-column of course—although I worry that phrasing it that way makes it seem somehow *effortless*, which I'm sure isn't the case. I like Andy Hooper's point about the sensation of "perpetual neohood." Andy and I are of an age, I think, although I can only claim slightly more than twenty years in fandom, but I constantly feel that *everybody* has been here longer than me, and in my time I've still only assembled a fraction of the pieces that make up the fannish jigsaw. A couple of years ago Claire and I attended Peter Weston's "reunion" for attendees of the 1964 Eastercon—in case it's not obvious, we were there, I think, in the guise of delegates from the future—and I was fascinated and charmed by the way that stories were still emerging from that era, bits of "common knowledge" which were not so common that everybody there had heard them before. My favorite was a long and rambling tale from Pete Weston and Rog Peyton at the end of which it became apparent that in the frequent retelling they'd edited out one particular individual who was now in the room and only just learning the truth about what *really* happened over forty years ago.

Oh, and just a small thing about whether or not to post PDFs to efanzines as supplementary to a paper distribution. As I'm sure you know, I'm a paper-every-time kinda person, but it is incredibly useful to have the PDF sitting there as a reference copy. If I'm sitting in front of the PC and I want to look something up—as often happens—it's so much easier to simply open a window and summon up the data. I can even copy-and-paste if I want to quote from it. The alternative involves, well, a whole flight of stairs and the fanzine cupboard.

FRED SMITH

Ted White is talking my language when he reminisces about the '50s era of fandom. And Dan Steffan—well, he's right in there with his travelogue. His artwork and all your other artists are great. I mean *great*!

Jay Kinney also struck a responsive note in me, since I too am a dedicated curmudgeon. Most of what he ranted about I would agree with but could add a few of my own, particularly with regard to the state of popular music. Many people would no doubt jump on me and say it's just my advanced age, but I disagree and maintain that it's an objective fact popular music has declined steadily over the last fifty-odd years. Don't start me off!

Saddened to read Ron Bennett's letter after the news of his death and to think that I never got a chance to apologize for accusing him of not being a science fiction fan. In fact, I was only winding him up a little because of his comics dealing. Apart from that I was sorry to miss seeing him at Interaction (not surprising, considering the crowd there), a kind of rerun of missing Ethel Lindsay at the 1995 Worldcon and her death shortly thereafter.

JIM CAUGHRAN

I was a little harsh in my comment on posting *Trap Door* to eFanzines. The point was simply that the rules have changed. It no longer costs anything to circulate another copy of a fanzine, so long as it's done electronically. Your idea of posting the previous issue there is a good one. In fact, I went there to get a copy of Isabel's chili recipe.

I'm surprised you got no response to two previous postings; I got a couple of LoCs on my much less deserving FAPAzine from eFanzines. They were from fans, however, so maybe it's just that you've sent paper copies to anyone who might comment. *{There are dozens if not hundreds of fans who don't receive* Trap Door*, but perhaps they also don't check out efanzines, either, or if they do they take the free ride.}*

Dobson is amusing on creative software; I like it. I have a mental contradiction here. I think artificial intelligence will rival humans soon if civilization doesn't collapse first, and I think creativity is a human trait which machines won't be as good at but can support by doing things like spell-checking.

How far can it go? Will machines supplant architects like Canfield, building structures incredibly useful and beautiful? Will machines find new ways to kill humans in war? Will machines eventually reduce us to mindless TV watchers, while they do the important things like loccing *Trap Door* and playing Freecell? Yeah, automate fanzine production, loccing, conversation on online groups, con going and First Thursday.

But what would we do if we didn't have something to procrastinate?

Interesting, footnotes referring to other fanzines. References assume that the referenced item is available. For you with your extensive, filed and cross-referenced collection, this is easy. For me, with a limited collection packed away in boxes or lost, it's impossible. Maybe, when everything is available electronically, we'll be able to look at things from the Riverside library or another public fanzine collection.

Or more probably not, since scanning things for electronic access is too labor-intensive. *{I'm hoping that James Halperin will follow through with his idea of scanning Warner's entire collection and making it available electronically. He's got the money to actually do it, while we mere mortals can only do it piecemeal.}*

Carol is a master of the short shtick. I enjoyed the times I spent with her forty or so years ago, and would like to see her again, all these years later. Bring her to a Corflu I go to? (I probably won't be at Las Vegas next year.)

I hadn't realized how good a writer Dan

Steffan is. Most of what I see of his work are good illustrations; I don't remember seeing other prose from him. Driving through snow: We had two patches of snow on the way to Corflu. In Michigan, it was whiteout, but short-lived, and everyone slowed down and got through safely. In Missouri, it wasn't as bad, but people didn't know how to drive on snow, and there were cars all over the fences, and a jackknifed semi and…

I was more scared in the easier conditions in Missouri than in Michigan. Janet freaked out in the snow in Colorado on the way back, and we spent the night in a motel about thirty miles from my sister's, after driving through the worst of it. I haven't seen tire chains since I moved from Nebraska to California in 1958. Tire chains in Nebraska were a usual thing in winter, since the streets were neither plowed or salted—they would put cinders on the hills, if you were lucky. And people learned to drive on snow with and without chains, to adjust speed to the conditions and leave more room.

JESSICA SALMONSON

As I was reading through *Trap Door* I had that usual attack of nostalgia but tried to push it away as I'm fairly certain I'm doing stuff nowadays even more interesting than in fannish youth and am not generally nostalgically oriented.

But then it struck me that you might be interested in hearing about a postcard I've had propped up over my computer for the last couple of years. It's not quite an authentic "poctsarcd" because those were three-penny cards. This one's older. It's a penny postcard postmarked July 25, 1950, and addressed to a pal now long gone, Harold Taves. The message side is a drawing by the now equally missing William Rotsler, just two bullet-shaped guys, one telling the other "Cross-patch!" I know it's nothing of any consequence at all but there it is over the computer where I have very, very few things attached—the only other things being a picture of a fennec which greatly resembles Daigoro, my twinky little dog, and photos of my sweetie Rhonda. Just stuff that makes me feel things are okay with the world no matter how it otherwise appears.

Fans used to make me feel cranky about 90% of the time because finding corners where there were sober, nonsmoking, intelligent ones was often difficult. But if I could've imagined how memorable those days would be I might've been nicer to a higher percentage of 'em, as a kind of "thanks for the future memories." *{And thanks for this memory of postcards past. As you know, I've sent you this fanzine from the very beginning in order that you should occasionally get to wrestle with your innate fannishness. Your yanking back at this particular chain is always welcome.}*

WE ALSO HEARD FROM:

JAMES BACON, **JOHN D. BERRY** ("I like Mog Decarnin's form of sympathetic magic: 'Now that I've let all my magazine subs lapse in hopes of moving…' I picture her canceling her subscriptions and then waiting hopefully until enough juice has built up in the infundibular matrix, whereupon it suddenly propels her, willy-nilly, into a new abode."), **WILLIAM BREIDING** ("Getting Grant and Jay into the same issue was amazing enough, but to also have a major new Brute Tornley (as Bruce Townley was briefly known in the '70s) piece constitutes classic status for the issue."), **KEN FAIG** ("There is a wealth of life experience behind the contributions in this issue. I particularly enjoyed Grant Canfield's 'Thrilling Architect Stories' and Dan Steffan's 'Long Beach Bounce.' Canfield is right that the man or woman who is successful in most professions is the one who can communicate effectively with clients and potential clients. Every profession (or line of work) has a story to tell, and it is usually the storytellers who lead the profession. I always hit the road with reluctance, so I could identified with Steffan's travails."), **BRAD FOSTER** ("I think having to move and rearrange an entire household is a good reason for a little delay in pubbing your ish, though. And these days, I'm not going to complain to anyone about how long it takes them to get out a paper zine."), **MARLIN FRENZEL** ("Enjoyed especially the articles by Dan Steffan and good old Ted White. I can't wait to see what he has to say about me when I finally pass over."), **E. B. FROHVET** ("Aside from Carol's bits and pieces and a smattering of LoCs and WAHFs, the source of *TD*'s content appears to be 90+% male. Any deliberation there, or did it just happen that way? It's hard to think of an American fanzine with a large female input." This came up in discussion somewhere else recently, and it was determined that in the past more women were actively writing for fanzines than is the case now—where did they all go!?—and because of this past issues of *Trap Door* had a higher percentage.), **STEVE GREEN** ("Just thought I'd mention I was reading *TD* 24 and fully intend to get a loc over to you RSN," but didn't), **JOHN HERTZ**, **BEN INDICK** (" My own long trips are finished. My wife cannot take the lengthy air trips and even locally—from NJ to DC—is too much, because I get too pooped for 5½-hour drives. Go Dan, go, while you can. It is great and I envy you."), **JERRY KAUFMAN** ("You know, the biggest comment hook in it was your plea for meatier eLoCs. In my case this would require a meatier brain"), **JOE KENNEDY** ("Thanks for soldering on with the magazine. You and *Trap Door* seem to be the one thread connecting me to fandom anymore. I relished Gregg Calkins' tribute to Bob Tucker, a writer of fan stuff whose delectable tongue-in-cheek prose in his *Le Zombie* set a standard that us younger fry strove to live up to."), **JOSEPH MAJOR** ("I agree with you about the problem of it being so easy to reply to an online fanzine that we'll get around to it RealSoonNow. For all that the fanzines on efanzines.com are available to a whole wide world of new fans, I note that the letter columns have the same old names." That's more or less true, but the ease of on-line communication compared to paper mail has brought back some fans who'd previously disappeared—such as Eric Mayer and John Purcell.), **GUY MILLER**, **LLOYD PENNEY** ("Retirement sounds good, and better all the time; but for me, I'd need a job to retire from."), **BOB SILVERBERG** ("One thing that did strike me was a letter referring to my contribution last issue as 'unforgettable.' As it happened, the author himself had forgotten it. (But a little cogitation reminded me that it was my Grand Master piece, as later letters confirmed.)"), **JON SWARTZ**, **BRUCE TOWNLEY**, **JAMES WELCH** and **ALEXANDER YUDENITSCH**.

	'07	'06	'05	'04	'03	'02	'01	'00	'99	'98	'97	'96	'95	'94	'93	'92	'91	'90	'89	'88	'87
Australia	10	6	7	6	17	24	17	12	9	12	9	11	12	13	16	18	16	16	12	15	32
Canada	13	17	13	24	14	15	18	18	19	16	19	14	16	14	12	17	1	2	2	1	4
U. K.	36	37	39	29	41	52	39	61	65	64	58	47	52	60	51	50	44	30	61	51	33
U. S.	93	113	154	106	91	113	84	105	69	91	109	108	143	109	91	104	85	66	55	67	58
Others	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	1	5	0	4	3
Totals:	**152**	**174**	**213**	**165**	**165**	**204**	**158**	**197**	**163**	**183**	**195**	**180**	**223**	**198**	**172**	**191**	**147**	**119**	**130**	**138**	**130**

The percentage of electronic fanzines continues to increase. Of the ones I download and print, Arnie Katz and Earl Kemp are the reason. However, many more are being published that I *don't* download and print (for instance, Chris Garcia did 45 issues in 2007)—if I did, the above recent totals would be much higher. And, some of the fanzines I receive in hard copy are also being posted electronically on efanzines. In this ambiguous light, I'm discontinuing this long-standing *Trap Door* feature after this issue.