

TRAPDOOR



Steve
Stiles

1/2/00



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It's been quite a year, for me and for fandom. The list of deaths since the last issue is, regrettably, a long one—but of all those who've left us I miss Walt, Chuch and James the most. No doubt some of you expected reminiscences by me and others, but I decided that—as I did when Burbee, Boggs, BoSh and Ethel Lindsay all died within the same year—I'd publish an issue of *Trap Door* that they all would have enjoyed.

As for me, the week after I consigned last issue to the mercies of the postal service I was an unwilling participant in a head-on collision (officially called "glancing") on my way to work. The woman who hit me was driving too fast for a drizzly morning on a

narrow, unforgiving, two-lane highway. The car ahead of her was signaling for a left turn; she tried to pass it on the right shoulder, overcorrected, skidded, and plowed into me. We were both going 50-55 miles an hour. It happened so quickly that I never saw her coming, but even if I had there would have been no escape on that particular section of highway: a deep ditch began just off the edge of pavement. That's where I ended up, fortunately not hitting a large oak tree on the lip of the other side, but taking out a group of mailboxes as my car's undercarriage scraped to a halt. I must have lost consciousness for a few minutes, because the next thing I became aware of was the sound of sirens and that I was being extricated from my car by members of the Santa Rosa Fire Department using those famous "Jaws of Life."

According to the newspapers, I was taken by helicopter to a hospital emergency room. I wish I'd been there to appreciate it. I spent two and a half days in intensive care. I remember very little about it except that I was hooked up to a lot of noisy contraptions that seemed to know unerringly when I'd fallen asleep and would begin beeping loudly—and that everything hurt. Carol was there by my side constantly during those early days, comforting me, interpreting what was being said about my condition, feeding me ice chips. I learned that I'd suffered three pelvic fractures, five cracked ribs,

and a variety of cuts and colorful bruises. Also, I noticed at times when the pain medications eased off that my neck hurt; but with all my more serious injuries taking center stage it seemed the least of my worries. I chalked it up to whiplash, and assumed it would go away. I was a wreck (and the Toyota station wagon I'd had just over a year was totaled), but at least I was alive. When I was considered stabilized, I was taken by ambulance to a smaller hospital, one dictated by the requirements of my HMO. It was quieter and relatively more peaceful.

I spent twelve days in the hospital. While I was still there, Carol arranged for air conditioning to be installed in my apartment. Without it I wouldn't have been able to tolerate the hot Sonoma County summer where the indoors temperature can easily exceed 90 degrees. It was frightening to contemplate being home, mostly on my own, but as those of you who've ever been hospitalized know, it was better than the bedlam of even the smaller hospital.

Over the next month I was housebound, using a walker to negotiate inside and crutches outside. When I needed exercise, I hobbled laps around the parking area. As I eased off daily medication, pain in my neck became more noticeable, but I still wasn't paying all that much attention to it—there was so much else going on. For the first few weeks, my days were punctuated by visits from nurses, physical therapists and home health aides. Carol spent long weekends with me, cooking for us both and enough extra so that I could eat for the rest of the week. She did laundry, cleaned house, took out the garbage, got me out of some foul moods, helped my backyard tomatoes grow, brought me occasional dinners from the Ranch House (our favorite local Mexican restaurant), missed countless days of work, and helped me in even more ways than I can say. Marta Randall—who lives in nearby Petaluma but works in Oakland—gave Carol many rides so she could be with me, which took her miles out of her way. My ex-wife Lani, a couple of my children, and various friends also came around frequently to help out. I'm extremely grateful for everyone's generosity.

My ability to concentrate was seriously impaired for the first few weeks after the accident, and even after I got out of the hospital it was several more weeks before I could properly read a fanzine or even a postcard without my attention wandering. I've been told this is fairly normal post-trauma stuff. When I first came home, I was faced with enough accumulated mail to fill a large bin. I couldn't deal with it all, and many items went unopened at first.

One curious but happy exception to my concentration problems was e-mail. Lani's housemate Linda lent

me a laptop computer and I was able to keep up electronically with quite a few people—especially Ted White, who'd broken his hip in a serious fall a few weeks after my accident and was also laid up (we compared notes on our respective incapacities). I feel that this additional human contact helped me stay sane. It certainly helped me relearn how to focus my attention.

In mid-July my pelvis and ribs were declared healed in classic textbook fashion and I was told to begin walking, with a caution that I might want to continue using crutches at first. But by then I was thoroughly sick of both crutches and walker, so after a couple of days I quit using them. The orthopedic surgeon referred me to physical therapists in Santa Rosa. It was time to begin driving again.

The night before I went to rent a car, I worried that I might be too frightened by the memory of the accident to face being in traffic. But as it turned out, as soon as I was back in the driver's seat, I found to my relief that it was a piece of cake. I sat for a long moment to familiarize myself with the controls, took a deep breath, turned the key, and... off I went. At first I did feel a sense of menace from the traffic around me, but block by block it receded. I went to Sonoma, where I got a long overdue haircut and treated myself to my first restaurant meal since May. Two days later I drove to Oakland to spend my first weekend in six weeks with Carol at her place. Life was back—for both of us.

At this point, what was most important was to exercise my leg muscles in order to get them back in full operating condition. I made occasions to walk every day and also did exercises recommended by the physical therapists. I began driving myself out of my immediate neighborhood—downtown Glen Ellen, the plaza in the heart of Sonoma, even downtown Santa Rosa—in order to walk around. Before long I also found myself car-shopping, which gave me the opportunity to stroll through vast lots full of used cars. My dream was to find a replacement Corolla station wagon like my dear departed car, but none were available. I ended up with a well-equipped 1998 Toyota Corolla sedan—a nice car, my first with air bags. I wasn't sure about it at first, but gradually I grew accustomed to its spiffiness, even began to love it.

I went back to work on August 9th; by then I was walking pretty well and it seemed to me that going back to the office would help complete my return to normal life. Although sometimes my legs would ache if I walked too much or too fast, the main thing that continued to plague me was my neck, which was rapidly taking center stage. In late August my orthopedic surgeon took x-rays which showed there was still some-

thing out of whack with it and prescribed an MRI and a visit with a neurosurgeon. It couldn't happen soon enough for me, since the pain kept me from turning my head, particularly to the right, and this made things as disparate as driving, preparing meals, folding laundry, and cuddling difficult and frustrating.

Meanwhile, I'd continued going to physical therapy twice a week, but eventually noticed it was no longer helping me and stopped. I finally got an MRI a month later. It's an interesting experience—for those of you who've never had one, you are rolled on your back into a narrow tube and instructed to keep still for about twenty minutes while a series of images are taken. I'd known in advance about the tube, but what I didn't know is that MRIs are *noisy*, like a high-pitched jackhammer. Earplugs are provided, but they only partially mask the racket.

Reading the report on the MRI, I was surprised to learn that I had degenerative disk disease and some other irregularities in my neck—disk bulging and some “spurring.” My doctor said this was no big deal: we all start deteriorating beginning in our mid-20s. He thought that the accident simply stirred up what was already there—something I would probably have experienced at some point down the line anyway.

Another month passed before I learned from the neurosurgeon that no surgery was necessary (big relief) and that as time passed my neck would return more or less to normal. Well, despite doing exercises and trying to avoid or at least minimize situations that aggravated it, my neck kept bothering me until after the Seattle Corflu, when I finally—out of desperation—took the advice of Donna Nassar (Paul Williams' ex-wife) and Lani, and made an appointment with an osteopath.

Right from the beginning I loved Joel: he was short, sixty, ebulliently Jewish, and a miracle worker. When he called me for my first appointment, I got up and began walking rapidly towards his treatment room. He stopped me in my tracks with: “Slow down! Slow down! What do you think this is, an HMO?” That first session was the longest. He had me lay down on a massage table and manipulated my head and neck in mysterious osteopathic ways (more delicate and subtle than the techniques of the physical therapists) for about an hour while we talked about ourselves, getting to know each other. And here's the miracle: after that first treatment my neck pain was considerably relieved, and after five sessions he pronounced me cured. Since then my neck has gotten even better on its own.

And that's the story of my recovery. But it seems that the physical healing was only the prelude to a long and arduous hassle with the insurance companies—my own and the other party's.

You'd think that years of paying premiums would count for something, but early on my own insurance company tried to lowball me in paying for my trashed car, and it was only after going through several layers of their bureaucracy that I received anything approaching reasonable. The insurance company of the woman who hit me sent a letter early on asking for details of my lost wages, the implication being they would pay them. I wrote back with a detailed calculation. They were quick to respond but reversed themselves by saying they were unable (*i.e.*, unwilling) to make what they called “forwarding payments” and offered instead a lump sum settlement of \$30,000, their insured's policy limits. Because this seemed inadequate considering what I'd gone through, I duked it out with their adjuster for many rounds—during which I consulted several knowledgeable attorneys to get a sense of what steps I should take next—but in the end I did settle for that amount, since there were simply no other financial alternatives.

In the end, my own insurance company surprised me. I'd filed a claim for various out-of-pocket expenses, including items my doctor considered medical necessities. They paid part of it, but there were other items, adding up to about \$600, on which the adjuster stalled me for months. Just before I left for Corflu in Seattle, he turned me down. I immediately got back up on the bureaucratic ladder and was told that things would be resolved within a week. And that was the second miracle: on my return from Corflu, there was a large check for the unused portion of my “medpay” coverage, *far* in excess of what I'd been asking them for. Go figure—all I can say is that insurance companies work in often annoying ways, but getting that final check was a happy conclusion to the story of my accident.

Anyway, that's why this issue is late.

Death has touched my own family, too, since last issue. My brother John called Christmas morning to tell me that our mother had passed away. She was 88 years old and, as I've written in the past, has been in the grip of Alzheimer's since the late '80s and in a nursing home since 1995. Pneumonia was the cause of death, and it was mercifully quick—she'd first showed symptoms two days previously.

The funeral took place in early January at Hollywood Memorial Cemetery in Los Angeles. Carol and I drove down, as did my oldest son Ben and his daughter Arianna, my youngest son Gabe, Lani and Lani's mother, both of whom had visited my mother several times in the past few years. John and his girlfriend Karin came up from San Diego, as did his son Michael and his daughter Nancy and her three children. Like my father's interment in 1995, the service was a simple one; the same

pastor delivered the eulogy. John and Karin had brought along our parents' wedding portrait, taken in 1937, which we placed on top of her casket. In that picture, my father was the same age as Gabe is now and my mother is radiant. Those of you who are Web-connected can see it at <http://www.forevernetwork.com>. Type in "Lichtman" under the search function at the top of the screen.

This was the largest family reunion in years. Michael and Ben hadn't been at my father's funeral, so were seeing each other for the first time in maybe twenty years. Arianna, who's since turned four, and Nancy's youngest daughter, who's five, were a delight to watch as they checked each other out and then became best friends for the day. They provided a wonderful and welcome contrast—in more ways than one—to the solemn occasion. John had just completed six months of chemotherapy for lung cancer—he's in complete remission for now—and with his hair gone and his general pallor he bore an eerie resemblance to our father in his final years. We talked about missing our mother and about about how weird it felt to be, suddenly, the elders of the family.

Although John and I haven't exactly been burning up the airwaves and the Internet, we've been in much more frequent contact since the funeral than we ever have before, which feels very good to us both. At the end of July Carol and I are going to San Diego to celebrate his 55th birthday. We're all looking forward to it.

Carol and I love Yosemite Valley, and since we hadn't been there since the fall of 1998, it was definitely time to pay another visit. Early this year, we also decided to do something we'd been talking about for years: get married. What better place to do it than at Yosemite. And thanks to the wonders of the Web, we found a minister in nearby Mariposa who would come up to the park to perform the ceremony.

So there we were, on a beautiful spring afternoon with the dogwoods in full bloom, standing under a large oak tree on the banks of the swiftly flowing Merced River—Half Dome and Lower Yosemite Falls in our view—and exchanged our rings and our vows to go steady forevermore.

We had dinner at the Ahwahnee Hotel both nights we were in Yosemite, each time at their "honeymoon table," next to a twenty-foot tall window that looked out across a meadow to the sheer rock cliff of Upper Yosemite Falls. The meal was pretty incredible, too, ending with an apple cranberry creme brulee to die for (Carol thought that the crust of a creme brulee shouldn't be thick enough to ice skate on, but loved the rest of it).

The rest of our stay was marvelous and leisurely. The temperature was in the mid to high seventies, perfect for

walking. The following morning we took a pre-breakfast hike to Lower Yosemite Falls. The water was rushing faster and harder than we'd ever seen before, and from the far end of the bridge across its outfall there was a huge rainbow that arced from the base of the Falls itself to the edge of the path we'd walked on to approach the bridge. It was breathtaking. Only two things made it possible to pull ourselves away: the soaking we were getting from the spray and our appetite for breakfast.

The rest of that day and the morning of the next we wandered around the valley, mostly on foot, sometimes in the car (special wedding dispensation from the God of the Environment), breathing the air and taking in the beautiful scenery. It was hard to come back to the Bay Area, but we compensated the very next day by seeing lots of movies.

And then back to work for me and back to the hard life of retirement for Carol. It was good. It was very very good.

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

The number of American fanzines sure took a nosedive in '99! (1999's Other is a fanzine from China, all in Chinese except for a cover note! They got my address from Don Franson's *Trash Barrel*.)

Fanzines Received – 1987-1999

This is the final issue of *Trap Door*... in this format. No, I'm not going over to Web publication—I'm still a firm devotee of paper fanzines—but next issue will have a new appearance. One reason for the change is that, after years of procrastination and not without some anxiety, I'm finally going to replace my 1987 model computer (which has never given me a lick of trouble). Extreme technophiles reading this might be surprised to learn that *Trap Door* has been done all these years using WordPerfect 5.0 and manual paste-up.

Also—and I know I've said this before—I intend to publish more frequently, although I'm not going to commit myself to any specific schedule. At times, I've had long delays between issues due to lack of material, but because I've got articles already on hand from Ron Bennett, Chris Priest and Steve Stiles (and new installments forthcoming of Jim Harmon's and George Metzger's columns) the next issue definitely won't be another year in the making.

So, please don't delay *your* letter of comment.

[—RL, July 2000]



I'LL SEE YOU IN THE FIRELIGHT

By Jeff Schalles

I lived in New York City for nearly eight years. That was eleven years ago. I'm still pondering what I found there. In the meantime, here's a piece of it.

Like this: 1984, going south on 8th Avenue to band practice in the studio building across from the Port Authority bus station. Walking the fourteen blocks from work instead of taking the A train, wondering if I should spend my last dollar on pizza. Nice warm summer evening, good walking, lost in thought. A dollar bill flutters in front of my nose and I grab it on the fly, step back and look up at the Milford Plaza hoping for more. No, but a slice will do. Thanks.

I visited New York a bunch of times in the 1970s, stayed with fans. Learned about subways, panhandlers and pizza. Went with Susan Palermo, Lou Stathis, Dan Steffan, Barry Smotroff, Moshe Feder and others to CBGBs, Max's Kansas City, the Peppermint Lounge; saw the Talking Heads, Patti Smith, the Ramones, Television. The first bona fide Chinese meal I ever had in my life was on the upper west side of Manhattan. Jon Singer was there.

Then in late 1981 I kinda got involved with Bridget Dziedzic at Steve and Elaine Stiles' wedding reception.

Bridget had a big apartment on 104th Street between Columbus and Manhattan Avenues. I moved from Maryland to her place in December, taking what I could fit in my VW. A bunch of my books and albums got stored in a basement in Silver Spring; the rest was still in my parents' garage attic in Pittsburgh. Bridget and I had fun, we went out a lot, I plastered and painted her apartment, she taught me survival skills. Some nights we just sat around her kitchen table drinking quarts of beer and talking until late, but she'd also told me I'd have to find a place of my own by spring, that once it got warm I wouldn't be safe in her block. The Hispanic guys seemed to have some respect for women, but there'd be none for a dumb white punk like me.

Ronald Reagan had just rified me and I managed to transfer the unemployment checks to New York. Explored a lot of neighborhoods that winter, chased apartments in Washington Heights, Williamsburg, Brooklyn Heights, Park Slope, Greenpoint, even over the river in Hoboken. I was fascinated, driving over astonishing bridges and down into legendary tunnels, a bunch of it stuff I'd never known existed. Motoring down endless avenues through Brooklyn and Queens,

just looking around everywhere in total awe at everything. There's a lot of everything there. One day I called Susan Palermo and we went out to some bars and stuff and she told me about her neighborhood, Astoria. Undiscovered, kinda safe, mostly Greek and Italian. Cheap rents, probably not much longer. But the apartments weren't advertised; they went by word of mouth. Susan said just to go out and knock on doors.

So I did. I found a guy who owned a couple buildings and had an empty studio in Long Island City, practically Astoria. He took my deposit and first month's rent, shook my hand, said "thank god you're not one of *those* people." Never asked for references, didn't seem bothered when I told him I was a photographer. I suddenly had a lease on a \$300 apartment in a rent-stabilized building two blocks from the Steinway loop of the Queens subway. I moved out of Bridget's and started hauling stuff up from Maryland, taking the passenger seat out of my VW and filling it to the brim. My big stereo speakers and a lot more books remained in Silver Spring.

Time to find a job. No more cab driving. Not here. My resume said I was a photographer. Most recently I'd been assistant office manager—and staff photographer—for two and a half years at a planning agency in DC, done microfilming and records management, learned a little typesetting on a Varityper. Now, in New York, I went through the paper and applied for jobs at interesting places I'd actually heard of: photo librarian at the Black Star agency, promotion assistant at Little, Brown and Co. I didn't get any of those, but the interviews were good experiences. I also reluctantly turned down a couple of entry-level typesetting jobs that didn't pay enough. Then Susan asked me if I wanted to work as a typist in her office, working for the infamous film syndicator, Sandy Frank. Sandy's the guy who brought you *Gamara*, *Godzilla*, *Battle of the Planets*, *Face the Music*, *You Asked For It*. I took the job.

Meanwhile, as always, doing whatever I can in the never-ending battle to save the world (because I really like it here) I'd been contributing sperm to a fertility clinic in DC for several years and they had in turn referred me to a clinic in New York. The new place immediately put me on their stud list. There's hundreds, maybe thousands, of office buildings in Manhattan. That morning in March I came up out of the subway to start my job with Sandy Frank and found myself entering the same building as the sperm bank. It's twenty years later now and I expect some of my kids will try to find me one of these days. Some morning I'll look up from reading the paper on the porch and there will be me at the door. Hope I'm not expected to put me through college. There must be dozens out there.

Maybe one will become a dot.com zillionaire and feel strangely compelled to track me down and give me a million bucks. Anyway, every few days while working for the weirdest guy in television syndication I'd get to jump on the elevator for a coffee break, go downstairs and collect my, er, \$30 honorarium. We all do our part. I typed a lot for Sandy, typed television sales pitches for hours on end, got really fast on the keyboard, stayed there a year. Later I worked all kinds of jobs in New York, in ad agencies, a photo retouching studio, did typesetting in all sorts of odd places, drove a lighting truck for a gaffer, supervised data entry at the Harris Poll for over two years, read slush pile, sold a bunch of photos and articles, did some interior painting, built lofts and installed computer cabling. I keep busy. But nothing was as interesting as working for Sandy Frank.

Susan was letting me tag along with her, showing me bars, rock clubs, taking me to her band practices with The Skells. I spent a lot of time in CBGBs (where Susan had once been a barmaid) and got introduced to one of the door guys which meant, even years later, getting in free if B.G. was on the door. Then she hired this guitar player, Joshua, to be Sandy Frank's messenger. Josh, a hilarious, bright, talented kid ten years younger than me, needed a drummer. We went into cheap hourly practice studios, drunk beer and jammed, night after night. Sometimes a bass player would wander in. It was tremendously energizing. Josh had all these wonderful songs with names like Rabbit Boy, Speed Racer, Betty Aberlin (a resident of Mr. Rogers' neighborhood) and the totally awesome Blacktop and Blood. The drum kits in these places were falling apart, the amps full of buzz and hum, but I got it together again after not playing much for six years. Josh's friend Winston finished college in Indiana that June and moved back to New York and joined us. Josh and I were together in a loose series of bands: Killer Bunnies, Intensive Care, War Pigs.

I like being in bands; it's part of my identity. You get to drop lines like, "my guitar player and I took acid and drove to Pennsylvania last night . . ." hang around music stores, eat out late at lunch stands in the warehouse district, run around with weird people and stuff. We placed a lot of ads in the Village Voice looking for bass players and singers. Typical 4 a.m. message on my machine: "hey, uh . . . man . . . like . . . uh . . . I seen yer ad . . . in the Voice . . . yeah, the Voice, right . . . and I'm, like . . . a bass player . . . yeah right, a bass player . . . and we should, uh . . . get together, man . . . call me." Click.

That's how I met Valerie—she answered one of our ads, joined Intensive Care that night and moved in with me three weeks later. Stayed nearly three years. She liked my car. I picked her up in my '70 Chevelle (two-

door, black, loud stereo) from her place on Avenue B in the East Village for her second band practice and she decided that I was an interesting, intellectual thug. Val was tall and blonde, a muscular bicyclist, convinced she was overweight (no, just bulimic I eventually found out – took eighteen months to get that far, and I was the first person she'd ever told). She also had a genuine, serious, outrageous singing voice. Her coach, a former head of voice at Julliard, tried her damndest to keep Val working – Val cleaned her apartment and put up posters for her in return for lessons. Val, like Josh, was ten years younger than me. Val was also an actress, studied that too, and had run away from an intolerable home situation in Queens at fourteen. The rest I won't tell you. Mostly she waitressed, but for over a year she was the phone girl in a midtown domination studio. Talk about fun, how about getting \$200 a day just to hang around a nice apartment wearing sexy underwear? She went from that to singing telegrams and stripping at bachelor parties and someone sold a wild photo of her stripping to *Spy* magazine. I've never seen the issue; Lou told me about it. But I was there the night the guy took the picture – she paid me to drive her to gigs – I didn't like it much. One January we drove down to Asbury Park, New Jersey, for the weekend. There was only one hotel open, the rooms were cheap. That night we were down the street drinking in a biker bar and the bass player in the band looked familiar. He reminded me of a guy I played with in college, a guy from Cleveland. The band looked real tired that night. Four scruffy overweight guys, they slowly packed their battered road cases and huffed and puffed out the side door. They were down the bar drinking later and I wanted to go talk to them, but didn't. When we left I saw their old van on the side street. It had Ohio plates. Haven't talked with Val in years, hope she's okay.

One summer night, Intensive Care at The Dive. We're sitting on the hood of my Chevy in front of the club. There's two bands ahead of us—we're headlining. A skanky tall kid, long dirty blond hair, mouth hanging open, drooling, sets a child's lunch box down on the sidewalk, against the wall, by the door of an apartment building and goes in. I've simultaneously noticed a dark blue two-door Cadillac nosing into the curb behind us and gotten The Look from the driver. Winston doesn't catch The Look, instead he picks up the lunch box, opens it exclaiming, "Hey, it's full of bags of dope! Let's smoke some!" "No!" me and Josh both yell. I glance at the Caddy. The driver is glaring at Winston. He's a big guy with a mustache and lots of tattoos and he looks unhappy. I tell Winston to check out the car. He puts the lunch box back. Seconds later the kid trots out and grabs the stash saying, "Anyone want to buy some pot?" before

scampering off, the Caddy motoring slowly behind him.

War Pigs played The Dive too, later. War Pigs was our heavy metal band. We practiced in the basement of an old bakery on Avenue A on the lower east side. Two bands had just broken up, Panty Raid and Intensive Care. Josh had played with Panty Raid too; I photographed them once at CBGB. Gary played bass. He was also a transvestite and a heroin addict. Neither Josh nor Gary wanted to do the other's original songs, so we settled on being a Black Sabbath cover band – something we'd all always wanted to do anyway. To get gigs in Manhattan we dressed as Hasidic rabbis and halfway through songs we'd kick into double-time and do a klezmer thing. We rocked a bunch of clubs before things went to shit one night.

I did a lot of photography in New York, too. I shot a lot of film, a whole lot of black and white. Up on the roof of an art studio where I set type was a wooden water tower. Every now and then at night, the film processor would go off-line because the water was off. We'd go on the roof, climb the metal ladder up the side of the tank, and jiggle a chain. Two blocks north with nothing much taller between us was the Empire State Building. Lean back and look up from the tank's rusty ladder, ten floors above the street, peer through scudding clouds to this floodlit monstrosity. Hang on, man. I went up other nights and took pictures. I also shot the Flatiron Building from an office across the street. Getting to look out the window while typing late at night and see the Flatiron Building is a fine fringe benefit. I photographed dismembered sports cars full of concrete and rubble, rockers and drunks in bars, skylines and vacant lots and doorways and the Staten Island Ferry. I found transcendence in old subway cars laying on their backs at the edge of Flushing Meadow, a forest of saplings below a grate on a Park Avenue sidewalk, lines of dented trash cans. I bicycled all over Manhattan and Queens and always took a camera. I even tried doing people on the street, but never could convince myself to feel good about it. It felt like theft.

My block was smack in the middle of Archie Bunker's neighborhood and I made it a habit of going walking and shooting, especially on sunny holiday mornings. By the third day of a long weekend, the air becomes still and clean in the city and the light is very good. The streets are full of well-kept older houses, and the New York skyline can be in the background if you want. Or not. At the end of 31st Avenue, from the head of my street, you'd look down early in the morning and there'd be the Chrysler Building, perfectly framed, glowing with radiant fires. I'd carry two camera bodies, Kodachrome 25 in one, Ilford Pan F in the other, switching my best two lenses back and forth. It was a

wonderful neighborhood, tidy, endlessly interesting, and you never had to move your car.

Most cities like New York have street cleanings posted pretty much everywhere so that you generally have to move your car once or twice a week or get a ticket. One of the first things I noticed about my block in Long Island City was that there weren't any street cleaning signs. None. Driving around looking for parking spaces late at night, I found there was a rectangular corridor, four of the long blocks long and five short blocks wide, where there were no street cleaning signs. It precisely followed an odd appendage to the Woodside congressional district. One day a neighbor said to me, as we sat on the hood of my car (you do that a lot), "You're very lucky to be living on this block. *He* lives here. No one makes trouble." A musician I knew in my building turned out to be *his* limo driver. Half the neighborhood seemed to be related to *him*. Funny, though, I never asked who *he* was; I just nodded solemnly and went along with the setup. It seemed to be working in my favor so far.

In New York you come across weird characters, everywhere, all the time. They all have a story. Only one story ever gets a buck out of me, the one that begins "I'm a Viet Nam vet, man ..." But there was this one old black guy I met on 14th Street one spring. Gray haired and toothless, wonderfully cheerful, he had a bedroll slung on a rope over his shoulder. He leaned on a battered wooden cane, and he asked me if I knew where that bridge was that went to New Jersey. Heard there was work over there. He'd been living on the lower east side since Korea, hadn't been east of Bowery. He asked me for ten cents, I gave him a few bucks and told him to take a right on Broadway. How far, he asked? Oh, about 165 blocks. He thought he might get that far by summer — he couldn't move very fast.

He was a holy man. I think of him from time to time.

Coming down a subway staircase one afternoon, midtown IRT, came to a turn and here was this very thin, very short Hispanic guy, barefoot, wearing just pants and an unbuttoned shirt, fumbling with a small silver automatic. He ejects the clip as I dash by, almost drops it, shakily shoves it back in. I didn't look back. One time having dinner and reading the paper in the Modern Age Diner on Steinway Street, I got to listen to the teens in the booth behind me brag about all the cars they'd broken into. Another time I watched two punks dividing up a wallet on the N train, ignoring me as they pocketed credit cards and threw photos and bits of paper on the floor. Hanging out one evening with Josh and Winston, sitting on my hood on the upper west side, a guy comes running out of the Gap store on the corner, running faster than I've ever seen anyone run in my life. He

dashes past us into traffic, gets hit by a car, keeps going, runs right over another car's hood. Two other guys are right behind yelling "Stop him!" going almost as fast. They all disappear down Broadway.

One Saturday afternoon in Queens, corner of Broadway and Steinway, sidewalk crowded elbow to elbow with shoppers. A big guy in a cut-off sweatshirt and sneakers with a cop radio in one hand, pumped, sweating, police badge hanging from his neck, charges out of the crowd and right at me. His eyes were boring into mine, his free hand was reaching for my shoulder when another guy just like him comes from the side, says "no, not him" and they wheel and disappear into the crowd. Two, maybe three seconds has gone by. No one around me blinks but I'm zapped with adrenaline for hours. One morning coming up the back stairs from an IND platform in midtown, I find a small suitcase broken open, underwear, schoolbooks and toothpaste strewn about. Another morning walking to work, a step van with bad springs comes bouncing up Broadway. The back door is open, rolls of carpet stick out. On the next big bounce a small brown skinned man flies out the back, lands on his head, bounces a couple feet in the air and then lies perfectly still. The truck stops and two more little brown guys run back, pick him up, head swinging loosely, stick him back in the truck, and off it goes. Late one night while staying at Bridget's, walking up 104th to the deli for beer, a four-door Dodge Dart runs a full red light and t-bones a late-model Cadillac going south on Columbus. I was twenty or thirty feet away; the Cadillac rose slowly into the air sideways and was coming right at me. Then it hit a light pole and stopped, bounced on its big springs a few times and was still. The Dodge stopped in its tracks, hood open, radiator spewing, seemed like the tires all went flat, then all four doors opened simultaneously and beer cans flew in all directions followed by six guys also going in different directions. Really fast.

But back to this music thing. New York is where you go to do music. Where you go to do all art, for that matter. Which had a lot to do with why I was there. Josh and Winston and I made some good tapes at a studio up in Westchester. I helped wire the place before it opened; we got a bunch of free studio time in return. The engineer was this guy Gary who Bridget found on the subway one day. Gary was Phil Foglio's pal in high school. Coincidence? Like the night driving a taxi in Pittsburgh when three different passengers got in at different times carrying vacuum cleaners? I think not. Anyway, Gary recorded us on a 32-track; we went back several times. All very interesting, very intense stuff. We recorded in a bunch of other studios over those years too. Josh and Winston were song writers. Still are — I

still talk to them. I think we all gained a lot from the relationship. It's hard to find a drummer in New York, especially one with a car, a job, a telephone, no hard drug addictions, who actually shows up, sometimes even on time. I got to play a lot. And thanks to Susan introducing me to Josh, I was saved from ever having to answer drummer ads in the Voice.

So what's the point. What's this all about? I have a lot of energy, lead a busy life, try a lot of things, get very good at some. Other times I catch myself spewing negative energy, when some uncleared engram of intolerable pain brings forth a counterproductive outburst of incensed fury. No, no, instead I want to be like Daniel Boone (as portrayed by Fess Parker), just stand around saying yep, nope, and mebbe a lot, keep quiet and look very wise. It's a goal. I've never been good at casual conversation anyway, not when the subject involves names of stuff, books, authors, movies, bands, albums, songs. Names of things elude me when I reach for them; names of people I've known for years recede from view as I greet them at a party or on the street. If this counts as a disorder, I've always had it. This has a lot to do with the art forms I've built my life

around. Photography and writing preserve the most intense moments of time for me, places of utmost fascination, images and constructs that need no names. Every roll of film I shoot has a story or three within. I have all my negatives; they're carefully stored in dated folders. Music brings me back to the present, grounds me in the universal rhythm. I've played the drums for nearly forty years, I still play regularly, I just quit my most recent band, Borderlands, a couple of weeks ago. Something else will come along when it needs to.

So what was my big moment in New York? There were so many intense ones, so many infinitely complex interactions and cosmic gratifications amid the shifting dangers and uncontrollable lusts. But one day I came up from the subway in midtown and saw a photo I'd taken of a guy on MTV being used on his poster, and his poster was stuck up everywhere on abandoned storefronts, boarded-up windows and construction walls. Posters don't last long in the city; in a day or two another poster gets pasted over. No one but me and the agency people I'd done the shoot for knew it was mine. But that was okay.

— Jeff Schalles

Beside the Ardis Waters

with thanks to Ardis Waters (herself) and Melissa Michaels (her sister)

The prince, he went a courting
The Elf-King's three fair daughters
He found them spinning ardent threads
Beside the Ardis Waters.

"Oh I would wist, you comely three
And I would ken your mysterie
And I would know before I go
The reason why you sit so nigh
To spin, by Ardis Waters."

The first Elf-daughter made reply,
"My dowerie I make, make I
Samite and silk as white as milk
To clothe my milk-white limbs," said she.
"If me ye wed," the Elf-maid said,
"Full ready shall ye find me."

The second sister, she did smile,
"My mate I'll get by strength, not guile,
To snare my swain and draw him in.
If this ye thread, then me ye take.
Full ready shall ye find me."

The third fair daughter drew her breath
And softly there her words said saith,
"A draco dwelleth by the fall
And who is ta'en in his den
Never cometh out again.
If prince or knight, yeoman or thrall,
Shall slay this worm and injured be,
My thread for bandages I wind,
With balsam all his wounds I'll bind,
And ready he shall find me."

There is a land of Faerie
Where lovely Ardis Waters be
And ever on that mystic shore
Two maidens spin forevermore
Forevermore by Ardis Waters
Sit the Elf-King's two lorn daughters.

— Avram Davidson

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I'm a massage therapist. I began to study therapeutic massage in 1991 and soon developed a particular interest in the clinical aspects of massage therapy. This was because I had been plagued with chronic back pain and headaches when I was younger. Although no longer afflicted with these maladies, I feel a kinship with those who suffer from chronic pain and the focus of much of my study has been in the area of pain relief. I also have an interest in working with athletes.

In 1994 I began to study clinical massage with a Russian massage therapist who immigrated to the U.S., Zhenya Kurashova Wine. Not having the resources to develop expensive medical technology, the Russians had put a lot of research into developing low-tech therapies such as massage. Russian massage is used in hospitals and clinics for a variety of conditions. The Russians also credit their sports massage for the fact that their Olympic athletes win gold medals at ages when ours are retiring. When I began my study of Russian massage, I fell in love with it immediately. It felt good to the client, it was not overly stressful on the therapist, and it was effective. What more could I ask for? When Zhenya announced that she would take a group to visit Russia, I was ready to go.

So it was that in July 1997 I had the opportunity to visit Russia for the purpose of seeing how massage is used in a clinic setting there. We spent a week in Moscow and three days in St. Petersburg. During our week in Moscow, we visited the clinic every day. We had tours of the clinic and lectures from prominent

physicians. We watched the therapists work on their patients and worked with them on their patients.

We did a lot of fun things in Russia besides visiting the clinic: we went to the Old Moscow Circus, lord knows how many museums, churches, and monasteries, and the ballet. Three of us even went to a Russian disco in St. Petersburg. My favorite experience, though, was when we went to the bania, the Russian baths.

Until recently, many Russians did not have bathing facilities in their homes and so there were and are still neighborhood bath houses. The Russian bania is like the Swedish sauna but with their own particular variations. The one we visited was a fairly old neighborhood facility.

There were eighteen in our group, mostly women (only three men). Since the facilities were segregated by sex, the men had their own unique adventure. Zhenya got an attendant at the bania to look after them since they didn't know exactly what to do and spoke maybe three words of Russian. (Thank you, goodbye, and "toilet" spoken with a rising inflection to indicate it was a question.) The man took them into what I call "the wet room," a large room with a lot of wide stone benches and several showers and faucets for hot and cold water around the perimeter. He had them shower while he prepared the bania and when it was heated just right he made all the Russian men wait so his three American charges could go in first. After they entered the bania, all the other men came in behind them. This put them in the highest, therefore the hottest, place in

the bania with a crowd of Russian men between them and the exit. Russians like their bania *hot* and they were wondering if they'd survive, but they did.

Meanwhile, we went to the women's side. The group of us stood just inside the doorway of the large entrance room. A young woman in a cotton dress sat casually at an old desk. She and Zhenya conversed at length in Russian while we all stood and waited to see what would happen next.

There was a little divider behind the desk and out from behind it stepped an older, large, fat, naked Russian woman with a stocking cap and a pushbroom. Needless to say, this was an unusual sight for most of us. We didn't want to stare, of course, and yet it was odd and unexpected. The naked Russian woman stared at us for a minute, no doubt wondering who the hell we were, and then walked off.

After Zhenya finished her negotiations with the desk lady, we were ushered to little booths around the perimeter of the entrance where we removed our clothing and were issued a motley assortment of stocking caps and rubber thongs to wear. We shuffled off to the wet room. We got some washtubs, got soap and water and washed down the benches we planned to use, and staked out our benches. Zhenya had bought two bunches of leafy branches. One was a bunch of birch twigs with the leaves still on but dried. The other was fresh linden branches. Zhenya filled a washtub with hot water and let the fresh linden branches soak in it.

We showered and Zhenya prepared the bania. There is a particular way of preparing the Russian bania. Between uses the bania is aired out; we saw women standing in the doorway of it swinging towels in big circles to circulate the air. When the "old" steam and heat is sufficiently aired out, the door is closed and the fire chamber below is stoked. The fire is gotten very hot and at the appropriate time just the right amount of water is tossed onto hot rocks. The bania is filled with a sudden burst of steam. The steam is allowed to "settle" for a few minutes and then it is time to enter the bania.

As I said, the Russians like their bania very hot and I could only stay at the highest level for a few minutes before moving to a lower level which was not as hot. You try to stay in for awhile. You want your pores to open up and to sweat so that you are cleaned from the inside out. When you have had enough, you go out and step under a cold shower, which at that point feels like the most wonderful thing in the world. We would also fill the washtubs and douse each other with great gushes of cold water. It felt great. Even my partner at that time, who hates the cold, loved it. Then you sit and rest on the bench for a few minutes, settle down

from the rush, and go back to the bania for another round.

Zhenya showed us how to pelt ourselves with the dried birch twigs. Previously I had thought that the point of this apparent self-flagellation was that the mild stinging of the skin stimulated circulation. However, the experience was very different from what I expected. It is hard to explain, but the leaves do something with the heat so that you feel as if you are being pelted with little bits of heat. It's an unusual and unique experience.

About three rounds in the bania is enough. Then you sit around and chill out. Zhenya took me to one of the benches and told me to lay down. She was going to scrub me down and then she wanted me to scrub her down the same way. She took the bunch of fresh linden branches, which had been soaking and softening in the hot water all this time, dipped them in warm water and used them to trickle water all down the back of my body. Then she took the leaves, got them all soapy, and began to scrub/massage my back with them. I can't tell you how good this felt. The leaves are just slightly abrasive and the soap lather added a soft, foamy texture. When she was done, she dipped the bunch of leaves in the water again, draping the wet leaves over my back, letting the water rinse me like some gentle waterfall.

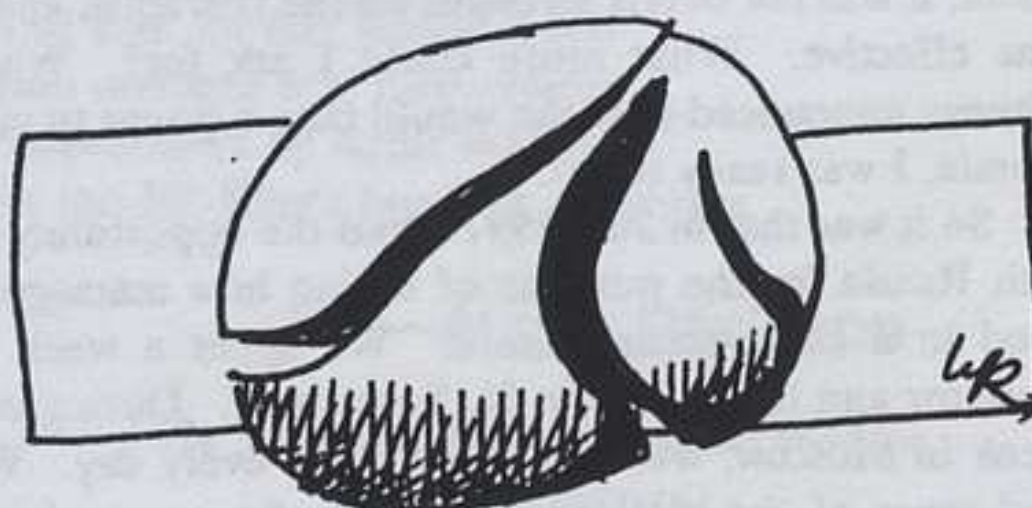
I want to tell you: this was hands down one of the most sensual experiences of my entire life.

From start to finish, we were there about two hours. When we left we felt clean and relaxed to the bone – and hungry! The next day I still felt the effects.

We should have such a thing here. And oh, by the way – the naked Russian woman with the pushbroom? She cleaned the wet room, sweeping away the soapy water and the linden leaves that fell on the floor. Guess she didn't have to bother with laundering her work clothes.

– Alice Sanvito

P.S.: You can see some photos of the trip on my website: home.postnet.com/~massageworks – sorry, no photos of the bania or naked Russian women.



ADVENTURES IN H'WOOD By Greg Benford



So there I was in fabled Hollywood, having lunch at the Fox Studios. The food was good and I was with a movie producer who was interested in a story idea I had pitched. We had gone over the whole plot structure, the breakdown into three acts (a Hollywood commandment), character and logic and setting and the works.

Everything seemed set. Everybody agreed. They thought that female lead character seemed particularly right, a match of motivation and plot.

Then the producer, a woman in her thirties, leaned across the lunch table and said, "She's just right, now. Only ... how about, halfway through, she turns out to be a robot?"

I looked around the room, at the murals depicting famous scenes from old movies, at stars dining on their slimming salads in all their Armani finery, at the sweeping view of little purple dots that danced before my eyes. "Robot?"

"Just to keep 'em guessing," the producer added helpfully. "I want to really suck the juice out of this moment."

"But that makes no sense in this movie."

"It's science fiction, though —"

"So it doesn't have to make sense," I finished for her.

So there I was a few weeks later, talking to a story editor for a development company interested in making a TV miniseries from a novel of mine, *The Martian Race*. The whole point of the approach was to portray Mars the way it would really be, hard and gritty and unforgiving. The story editor liked this a "whole lot" and thought it was a "breakthrough concept" and all, but he had his own creative input, too.

"I want a magic moment right here, at the end of the first hour," he said. "Really suck that ol' juice out!" (One of the signatures of H'wood is the incessant use of cliché phrases, the rule of advanced, glance-over-the-shoulder hipitude.)

"Magic?" I asked guardedly.

"Something to bring out the wonder of Mars, yeah."

"Like ..."

"See, when the astronaut is inside this cave —"

"Thermal vent. From an old volcano —"

"Okay, okay, vent it is. In this vent, he's trapped, right?"

"Well, not actually —"

"So he's banged up and he thinks he's going to die and he thinks, what the hell."

"What the hell."

"Right, you get it. He says what the hell, he might as well take his helmet off."

"Helmet. Off."

"Right, you got it. Big moment. Cracks the seal. He smiles and takes a big breath, and says, 'Oxygen! There's oxygen here. Let's take off these helmets!' Whaddaya think?"

"I liked the robot better."

Pitching a movie or TV project is humbling. Everybody in the room is passing judgment, lounging back on sofas in their H'wood casuals. H'wood became my cut-down term for a culture that has trimmed away the legendary aspects of the old Hollywood. For example, when I heard that not one but two big studios were making features about astronauts stopping an aster-

oid/comet from hitting Earth, I thought it a simple matter to point out that Bill Rotsler and I had written the original such novel in 1979, *Shiva Descending*, which was still in print. But neither studio wanted to buy rights; instead, the writers simply lifted whole scenes from the novel. In Hollywood, books became movies; in H'wood, reputations are made from the illusion that the entire project springs fullblown from the brow of a ferret-eyed Prometheus. Rotsler died while we were deciding what to do. At least he never saw the dreadful films that results.

After a dozen or so of these, I began to notice that nearly all of these Exec. Prods. and Production Managers and Personal Assistants were under thirty, and most came from backgrounds in Film Studies or Journalism. Some hid behind dark glasses, style victims of hipitude.

I had sold the production team of producer Jon Debont on my novel, *Cosm*, by bringing along pictures of particle accelerators. High tech, the bigger the better, helps visual people see the movie. They even liked the idea of shooting the film at UC Irvine, where I work and where the novel is set, since working in the L.A. area keeps costs down; actors and crew get themselves to the site every day. Except for the stars, of course.

For *Cosm* Debont lined up preliminary agreements to star from Dustin Hoffman and Angela Bassett; *Time* magazine carried this news. I liked Hoffman as an actor, and he would play the Einstein-like figure of Max from the novel. The core of the novel was the vexed black woman lead, though, and I wondered if Bassett could do that. Of course, I had no say in any of this, being a mere writer, though I had volunteered those two names in the pitch session.

But then Debont's big project, a film combining SF and westerns (yes...) titled *Ghost Riders in the Sky* got axed by Fox because it ran a preliminary \$115,000,000 shooting budget, and so got cancelled mere weeks before the cameras rolled on special effects. Debont had to earn his keep by shooting a horror film based on *The Haunting of Hill House*, a remake. It did not fare well in critical opinion, though it did make some money. This set him down a notch in the Fame Ladder of H'wood, so even though he had made *Twister* and *Speed* he could not get the \$90 million needed to go with *Cosm*. And anyway, the first script, written for a cheapo \$150,000, was clearly inadequate. I offered to do one that actually used dialogue from the novel, instead of lame technospeak, as the H'wood writer had done, but no, that was impossible—novelists seldom get a shot at the mystical craft of screenwriting. "I'm afraid that puppy's dead, for now," my manager said.

So *Cosm* is stalled, awaiting a million or two to finance another screenplay. So is a TV closed-end series

I proposed, which took characters clear to the end of the universe and then saved them—too big a budget, some said at several networks. They had a point; showing all of space and time does run up those costs.

We got a good agreement with Mandalay Productions to do *The Martian Race* as a miniseries, after only one pitch to the CEO. We had tried it on several other companies with various aborted starts, but this looked real. I pitched it with Michael Cassutt, an old TV hand who knows sf and has written a fair amount for magazines and even novels. We based our outline on a story I had written with the biologist Elisabeth Malartre, who was to be the technical advisor.

Then Mandalay started stalling, over and over, going through three drafts of the contracts—wasting nine months while Cassutt and I polished our outlines for the script. They were afraid of the coming big Mars movies, though we could shoot the TV series and have it out before anything reached the theatres. But then somebody came out of left field beat us, as well—a small production company that had tried to buy the right the year before. There it was in the TV schedule: *Escape From Mars* on UPN. It was the original Malartre-Benford story, wrenched around and with eye-widening technical errors. (They used centrifugal gravity on the way to Mars, as any expedition must, but had the weights on the outside, so the ship was the axis, and would feel no centrifugal effect. It sure looked pretty, though...) Dreadful acting, lousy science—including the obligatory meteorite storm, with pellets smacking into the Martian soil every few meters. Sucking the juice from bad astronomy....

So we sued. They acted outraged. Lawyers traded phone calls and documents for nine months. Got nowhere. So we told our lawyer to file—and within an hour the *Escape From Mars* money office gave in. We got \$50,000, just about double the sum I would've been willing to sell the TV rights to the novella for.

At least it was over... or so I thought.

So there I was, having dinner with James Cameron to discuss his TV series, and the parallels between it and my novel, *The Martian Race*.

Cameron is unlike H'wood types—his lead face conveys that he is earnest and practical and focused. He showed me and Bob Zubrin (the Mars advocate) his study, where for many months he edited *Titanic* when the world outside was baying for him to release the film. He had plenty of *Titanic* books around, and told us about how accurate he had tried to make the film. There was even a passenger who stood on the tail as it submerged and survived, swept upward to the surface

by the churn, then finding in the seconds of consciousness remaining a floating table to crawl up onto. His sprawling villa in Malibu is chock full of books, mostly SF, and he took us to his favorite Italian restaurant in his Humvee, splashing through streams down an oak-studded canyon; not the usual H'wood type, no.

But Cameron, like many in H'wood, subscribes to the neo-auteur theory of film: all must spring from his brow. So he swerved around the huge similarities between his ideas and my novel (already in print), though he couldn't resist talking about scenes that we had in common. "When she makes the run from the collapsed greenhouse, across open ground, without a helmet—wow!"

"Ummm... You've got a scene like that?" I asked.

"Well, no." Sudden caution. "But maybe something similar. I need to suck the juice from a moment that's, uh, kinda like that."

There I learned that the usual practice of making people *see scenes* when pitching a project had a real point: making a film is really making scenes, sometimes months or even years apart, that get squeezed against each other in the final film. Each must frame against the other, and the transitions in mood must be accomplished in a collaboration between the moment of shooting and the moment of truth in the cutting room. Novelists don't come under such pressures, especially not with Exec. Prods. fidgeting daily about the mounting costs.

"I think of myself as a writer, really," he said, well into our second bottle of Borolo, a great Tuscan red.

"So do I," I said blearily.

"Huh? You are."

"Actually, I have a day job, professor of physics."

"My God, you mean the physics in those novels—" and here he quickly named four, to my amazement—"is true?"

"All physics is metaphor," I said mysteriously.

Will Cameron's series use much of *The Martian Race*? We'll have to wait and see, though as they say in H'wood, his people are talking to my people (actually, I only have one—a manager, not an agent). "I think that puppy's dead," my manager says, "but I'll try."

What have I learned? Never expect much, because this is a collaborative biz. Even though the whole thing gets started by a writer having an idea (or, in many cases, purloining one), writers are not seen as primary.

I remember that in the comic strip *Peanuts*, Snoopy wore a T-shirt saying WHAT I REALLY WANT TO DO IS DIRECT, and the main reason is that's where all the power lies (other than with the money boys, but

that's another story). As John Gregory Dunne said, "Wanting to be a screenwriter is like wanting to be a co-pilot."

In the '90s, the biz evolved until style has become content and any schmuck with a viewfinder is an *auteur*. A few directors have final cut, and so some artistic autonomy, but less than one would think, so they counter by getting into the early creative track, actually writing the script (or maybe just an outline; good dialogue is hard). No writer has ever had final draft, unless he was the director, as well—a more prevalent pattern, as the quest for power broadens. The director of *Boogie Nights* wrote the script for his next, *Magnolia*, with disastrous results. Cameron both writes and directs.

Making good, big movies depends often on one strong, creative person big enough to defy the grinding machinery. That may be a star, a director or even a producer, but it's damn sure never a writer.

Then there are the "new" creative forces, especially the special effects wizards. When I saw *Mission to Mars*, an excruciating experience, I could tell where the director had thought that the Big Effect Scene was going to save the otherwise clunky script—which reportedly cost two million. It was like a film made by children with money, who could vaguely recall being, like, *really turned on* by Kubrick's *2001*. Special effects are often used to cover script problems, by distracting the audience with spectacle. Yeats called this "asking the will to do the work of the imagination." But then, he never got a script into production, right?

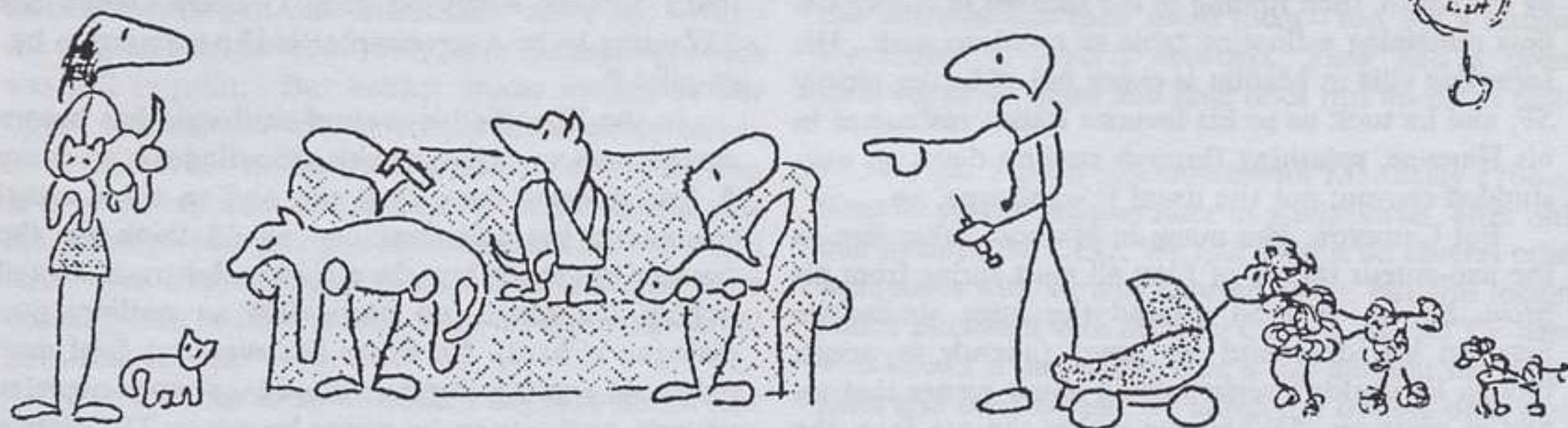
You can teach technique, but you can't teach talent.

Too many producers and story editors think the larger public cares only for sensation, spectacle, fiery explosions and creepy monsters galore. Plot logic gets trampled along with physical reality. Not that this wasn't often true in old Hollywood. The studio system just plain didn't get the technical accuracy and hard-edged grandeur of *2001*. Their idea of a near-imitation was *Silent Running*, a maudlin, sentimental, forgettable epic which hinged upon nobody's realizing that a spaceborne greenhouse would get less sunlight if it cruised out to Saturn.

Perhaps, as technical methods get cheaper, and entertainment more flexible, we can get SF stories that pay attention to the world of science. At least a few of us will buy those. And just maybe they could catch on.

On the other hand, maybe I should've just nodded my head, saying, "Sure, make her a robot. When can you cut a check?" And with a deadpan look, "I'd like to suck the juice out of this puppy."

—Greg Benford



STUFF

BY CAROL CARR

Grania Davis and Jack Dann are editing *Everybody Has Somebody In Heaven: Essential Tales of the Jewish Spirit*, a collection of Avram Davidson's "Jewish writings" to be published soon by Pitspony Press. Here is my introduction (one of many) for the book:

In 1964, only a few years after I met Avram, I asked him for a favor. He was not grumpy yet, in those days, which was a good thing, for like all my people I am thin-skinned and will carry a grudge to the grave, on my back. I asked Avram if he would mind translating a letter I'd received. It had been sent to me in the hope that I could read Yiddish. As if. I sent him a copy of the letter and waited, and pretty soon I received his reply:

"I gamely put aside my two longoverdue [sic] novuels [sic]," he wrote [notice the deft synthesis of guilt-tripping and innovative spelling]... "and produced the following:

Dear Carol great peace. I have your letter received. And it has me very happied to hear from you. Thee terribly helping with all possibles. But illegible how thus you be now in Amerika. Israel."

It goes on. So does Avram, and he apologizes for not finishing the translation and not doing a better job of it, and ends with: "Please excuse me a million times; go into a kosher butcher's and buy a lb of meat and ask him to translate for you. Are there no ivory towers anymore?" And then he adds, inexplicably: "I'm not even cooking this week, peanut butter and eggs." Looking at his letters, almost thirty years later, I see uncanny similarities between Avram's prose and Phil Dick's—their off-the-wall humor, temperament, and eccentric brilliance. Yes. What can I possibly say about Avram that he didn't say better himself, if only he could read his handwriting. Now and then I'd have the honor of proofreading Avram's

stories, for publication in one of Terry Carr's anthologies (Avram bought Terry's first story for *F&SF*; later, Terry bought Avram's). It was a terrifying experience. With most authors, proofreading was a piece of cake—you leave something alone or you change it. Before starting a story of Avram's I'd call my therapist back from vacation, take a long hot bath, and sign up for a linguistics course. I'd read one word at a time and then take a nap in order to be refreshed for the next word. You just couldn't be too careful. What looked like a common typo could be, and most likely was, the long-dead future perfect tense of the irregular verb "to fall to one's knees in a cold sweat." And it should not—*must* not—be disturbed.

Avram and I had little relationship to speak of outside of occasional letters, social-type visits, and random meetings at conventions. But we had great flavor together. He often started his letters to me: "Dear Teeny-tiny, eentsy-weentsy, itsy-bitsy, Carolkin," (whomp! that should do wonders for his bearded, dignified image). Since I was none of those things, I adored it. And here is a typical closing:

I cannot write more right now, as my every move is being watched by secret agents from Birobidjan, who are also spreading rumors that I am paranoid. When merely being noid is bad enough. Love, from bubby, only be well.

See what I mean about Phil Dick?

Once Avram visited us with a very young Ethan. They sat very close to each other on the couch and spoke in an unknown language that was probably a subdialect used by fathers and sons in Ancient Sumeria. I had no idea what they were saying, but I could tell it was rich, complex, and lit with love.

Years passed. We were in California, he was everywhere. In 1980 he wrote:

Last week I bought some office supplies and slightly overpaid. Today I returned and a person handed me an envelope saying the change was inside. I didn't examine the envelope till I got home, and found that on the envelope, in a corner, as an aide-memoire evidently, someone had penciled, "Little old man with cane." I tottered off to bed at once.

In 1983 my mother died. Avram:

For your pain and sorrow, I am painfully sorry. There is, however, I have noticed, usually, a certain measure of relief. And for whatever relief you feel, feel therein neither pain nor sorrow. Flow with it. Resume the voyage, float, float; and whenever crocodiles appear, whack them on the snout with the paddle.

A Jew, a poet, a Zen grief counselor.

In 1989 Avram wrote ("Dear eentsy-weentsy," etc., still) to ask me if I could find, among Terry's papers, a certain manuscript he'd lost track of. "Now, Carol, it is highly desired that I should have this in order to have something else to neglect."

And he ended one of his last letters to me with this fillip of brazen insouciance: "Well, time to cover the parrot." Indeed. Sleep good, Avram, and don't forget to whack those crocodiles.

My retirement party was at the house of the woman who runs the department, on a beautiful day, in her back yard. A lot of people, a lot of what Terry and I used to call *warmth*, a lot of presents. One of the (minor, but touching) going-away gifts was a fleece sweatshirt with **Cal** embossed on it. I said, "Oh, this is wonderful—because I won't be able to afford to heat my house this winter." They laughed as if they believed me. There was also a stack of gift certificates at a major real-life bookstore in Berkeley, a bunch of movie passes at a real-life theater in Oakland, the complete set of "I, Claudius" tapes, and an overnight stay for two at one of those country inns where, under your pillow, you find two pieces of chocolate that have been brought to room temperature with fresh lava rocks. Robert sat nearby, hand outstretched for the wrapping paper as I ripped and rent. After 23 years: laughter, tears, food, wine, affection, great, thoughtful loot—a terrific send-off.

Don't even *start* to talk to me about voicemail. You know how, after pressing all those buttons you finally get through not to the person you need but to the private *voicemail* of the person you need, and all you can do is

leave a message, after twenty minutes of wading through commercials to buy their other products or use this one in ways that cost them less or pay them more, or listen to answers to questions you never had and never will, like the locations of all their other stores or, if it's your HMO, if you get sick in Tuscaloosa, instructions on how to fill out the form *there* as opposed to *here*. One day I wanted to ask my HMO a simple, procedural question that an operator with two minutes' training could have answered in thirty seconds, but had to slog through the above, and never did get my question answered. That same week I got a big glossy brochure from them, full-color, gorgeous graphics, on how to reduce stress.

My latest reversion to Nostalgia la-la land is bubble-gum flavored toothpaste. Discovered it in the bathroom of Robert's son's house—probably belonging to Ari, the incredible fantastic four-year old granddaughter of same. If I regress any further I'll be writing this with alphabet blocks.

I love those drug commercials on TV. Shot after shot of happy happy people in happy happy surroundings: couples of a certain age with glowing white hair, playfully embracing their dogs, embracing their neighbors' dogs, embracing each other, rolling around in ageless ecstasy on their manicured front lawns...

VOICEOVER: "Live life to its fullest again! Prevaricon™ can take away that moldy feeling, inject new blood into collapsed veins, improve your sex life, let you scale Machu Pichu while dehydrated, reinvigorate your writing!"

Then, in hushed, rushed, under-the-table tones: "Prevaricon™ should not be used by diabetics, people with wide lower lips, the homeless, those with a low T-count, bags under their eyes, kidney disease, liver disease, high levels of yogurt, anxiety, tremors, glaucoma, allergies to wheat germ, liberals or bass players. Prevaricon can interact with drugs like coffee, tea or milk, aspirin, Aspergum and Ex-Lax. It should not be poured through cheesecloth. If you are pregnant, postmenopausal, premenopausal, sleepy in the middle of the day, or have ever used air conditioning, please see your doctor before starting Prevaricon™. Some cautions apply if you are male or female."

And in even lower tones: "Tell your doctor if you experience the following symptoms: poor financial planning, gangrene, lesbianism, extreme boredom. Prevaricon™ should not be used with plastic utensils or under artificial light."

Short pause, then back to normal volume and liveliness: "Prevaricon™! It's for you!"

—Carol Carr



25 March 1999:

Holy shit, Bob! This is terrible! I'm writing you a letter. I *should* be doing my taxes, but I don't want any more bad news. I just came from a Board of Directors meeting and as chair (or first Lord of the Evil Empire, depending on which faction you're in) it falls to me to go to the head of one of the subcommittees and tell her to cool the nasty, catty infighting in her group and put a cap on spending. But she's not home. Whew! See, if I don't schmooze her just so, if we get into an argument—there goes Saturday's date. If she doesn't come home soon, I'll have to do it tomorrow night—so that leaves *you*!

I guess I better thank you for all the fanzines. They look so clean, so neat. Real pro stuff. And all these *names*! Christ, I'd've thought they'd all have grown up or grown away by now. But they are all still here, doing it. I thought I had escaped. No, I still have my fanzine collection in boxes inside my son's bed. And there is an appeal to SF fandom: it is literate. I have spent more time in comics fandom in past decades, which can be more low than high, and then there's the *otakus*, the Japanese manga and animation fans. The zines there are pretty shallow, the general run of writing... heartbreaking.

I think the entire field is full of kids who've grown up watching too much TV, who read comics in class instead of their text books. Science?—the character in the anime who takes deep breath just prior to leaping out into the vacuum of space. Don't kids get to throw the frog into the bell jar and pump the air out to see what happens anymore? Sad state of education. They don't know the difference between "to" and "too" or "then" and "than." My kid, however, thinks otherwise:

"Then, than, whichever, it doesn't matter." "But they mean different things," I yell. "Not anymore." I can't tell if he's saying this just to send the old man up the wall for the fun of it (think of the bell jar) or if this means this is the future of the English language is. He reads James Ellroy.

Do you know what a noise band is? One practices in our living room. I am not home then. So, obviously I am an old fart, a dinosaur, and in reading through *Trap Door* I shall be rolling around in the dust of ages, the dung of a bygone world. I'll blame it on Ted White. Move over, Bob, and make some room for us all to wallow.

See? See? A whole fucking page down the drain and all I've done is rant, rave and whine. See? It's begun already. No control, just no constructive control.

Yes, I remember you. I saw the name on the envelope and nearly fell out of the elevator. I don't recall a distinct image... tall, skinny, glasses maybe, but that's too generic—almost everyone was tall and skinny then. If I saw you, a light might go on in my head. Me, I look much the same, not so gawky perhaps, but like us all I'm older and grayer. I went back to long hair some years ago. The price of a haircut kept going up and the amount of hair I was bringing in to be cut was less and less.

Okay, down to biz. I was a regular at Gaskin's "Monday Night Class" from when it was at the Straight Theater in the Haight on through its run at the "Family Dog." Gaskin I'd previously known of as a teacher at the university in San Francisco. An ex-Marine who taught literature, he sat cross-legged on his desk and expounded on science fiction and Ken Kesey. A former fan friend,

Robin Wood, who wanted to be a writer, took his class. Gaskin was hot on Kesey who then pulled the rug out from under him—"You can't trust words; they lie"—and gave him acid. After acid Gaskin taught a course called "Applied Field Theory" which was double talk for "astrology." His "lecturing" was very peculiar to the times in acid/rock soaked San Francisco: hippie jargon and semi-metaphysical philosophy and maybe a bit of Southern Baptist for salt. How do you explain it? It took getting used to, but once into it I found it quite relevant to what my head was going through. I even went to the Sunday mornings in the park stuff. But I did not join the caravan tour. A lot of followers patterned themselves like him as to the two- or three-couples family unit in a decorated school bus: the same clothes, the same way of speaking. I didn't work like that.

{About a former girlfriend of his I knew on The Farm:}
I took Cynthia — Cindy then — to the meetings and the Sundays. She took in more of it than I expected. Yep, I lived with her in around '70 or so. A friend of mine was sleeping on my floor, tossed out by his wife. One evening he brings back Cindy, who worked in the bar he managed. She was about 24 or less, and cute, nice kid, and since she didn't seem as interested in my friend as in my comic books I made a blatant offer to her to stay and she took it.

She moved in a short while later. She was a good person, nice young body, healthy as hell. Alas, she came at a time when I was considering changing the course of my life. Four years at the same job and all I did was spend money on a cool apartment that I was rapidly filling up with neat stuff purchased at flea markets. What I wanted to do was draw. I was doing underground comics then and getting into it. I wanted to do only that. I bought a Chevy panel truck, a one-ton, long-bodied, which I proceeded to fix up to live out of. Bed, storage space, etc.—that was step one. Some of my college friends had gone up to Canada, partly to avoid the draft, partly looking to "get back to the land" and looking to invest drug-dealing money. I was curious to go too, just to check it out. I got rid of the job, I got rid of the apartment, and what stuff I didn't give away I put in storage.

Cindy was much more difficult. She was devoted to me. I was not in love with her. Initially I was into it for the sex and to continue on would be dishonest. She was pretty upset by it and I don't think she ever completely forgave me. She went to The Farm with a friend of mine, Jon Snell, who'd gone on the caravan tour in his VW bus. He was a point man, ranging ahead, setting up things in advance. It was quite a circus. Cindy/Cynthia wrote me for some time, even after her first kid. Then zilch.

So I drove off to Canada. I spent a long summer there, staying at a friend's newly purchase piece of land,

36 acres for twelve or fourteen thousand bucks. It had a house—old and leaky—and cold running water. The girl, Christine, had lived in the country as a girl; Bob had not, as a boy or anything. I pitched right in. We built a house for the ducks out of mill ends: pieces of tongue and groove not more than eighteen inches long. In the evening we drew comics and smoked dope. I quite liked it there. The area was very rural, settled by Russians. Everyone had a sauna. You built them according to how many people you thought you'd have over at any one time.

Towards the end of the summer, I completed one book and began another, not a fantasy or SF, but an autobiographic book starting with a strip about my summer's end in Canada. With winter coming on, I left and was in Boise, Idaho, when snow caught up to me. I looked up some people I knew who'd lived across the street from me in San Jose. The lady wrote me often, said drop in, and was she surprised when I did. I drew a strip about a house-building site, right down to accurate details on roof joist structure—a crew of us trying to get the roof on before snowfall. One of the guys in the place I was staying went out the morning of the first day of elk season and shot a female. Grain-fed. It took five or six guys to lift the elk up and into the back of my truck. It was snowing; we were in a gully. I put it in compound low and walked the truck up and out. We had elk heart stuffed with wild rice that night.

I continued on, slowly making my way down into California. The further south I got, the crazier the pace of life got. Below Santa Rosa it bordered on insanity. But this was old territory. I shared an apartment with an old work mate and drew drew drew. I acquired a new girlfriend, a real smasher as to looks. At parties guys would conspire to lock me in the bathroom so they could get at her. I was so immersed in lust that it took me a while to notice the lack of conversation on her part. She was a veteran rock groupie and star fucker and rarely had to rely on anything other than her body to get anything. She didn't even read. Not even comic books. But that was okay.

Now what I am about to write may strike you as odd, but none of my girlfriends had any relationship to SF. No fannish connection. I hung out in the Berkeley scene and knew femmefans, but live with one? Marry one? It was bad enough that I was weird, but two of us? No way. Of course this did not save me from taking up with women who were down in flames disasters, but at least we never had to argue over dividing the library! No, I drew mostly from the social scene around college and the selection had to do with sex and good conversation. Once I got them in, then I proceeded to educate them. In no time at all I had them reading *Little Lulu* at the dinner table or out the

door. Only one girlfriend was a comics reader. Love comics. Her girlhood collection. Her bible. When she realized that our relationship bore no resemblance to the printed picture, she threw *me* out the door.

Back in the early '60s I went to work for the U.S. Forestry Service, stationed up in the Plumas National. I was in disease control so I was able to keep my beard. Fire crew were not allowed facial hair. The logic behind this became apparent when we were sent off to fight a fire. The fire crew in our immediate area were *not* sent. They had to stay in case of a local fire. Our crew and our big ex-Army truck with its 500-gallon tank of water and poison went instead. It was a big fire—I don't now recall the size, but fighting it were fire fighters from other districts, the National guard, prisoners, and Navajo smoker jumpers, plus water bombers.

I found myself on the line, a fire break being bulldozed up a slope. I was quite literally one of a line of men, one foot in the fire, one out, shoveling like mad. I faced a whole forest, as deep as I could see nothing but pine trees ablaze from bottom to top. The heat was intense. Only my face was uncovered and I imagined I could feel the moisture being sucked out of me. My beard felt dry and brittle. I believed it could spontaneously combust. I took out a bandanna, soaked it with water from my canteen, and tied it over my lower face. It seemed futile, as did tossing dirt a couple of feet into this furnace.

Eventually they brought our truck into play. It did not take long to piss 500 gallons onto the fire, then back to the river, pump up another load, go piss, go back. We slept in paper sleeping bags at night, the sky all aglow, powdered milk and powdered eggs for breakfast. Contained, the fire eventually burned itself out. We then were detailed for mop-up. We prowled the perimeter looking for "hot spots," places where the fire continued underground. True! Roots burn, slowly perhaps but persistently, so that a week or more later a fire pops up and you're off again. Where the ground was unreasonably hot we dug. Once the air hit the slow fire, it burst anew until we hosed it good.

We had been two weeks in the same clothes when our truck developed a "problem." It didn't run right. You wouldn't run so good, either, if a very big man hit you with a very big wrench. Tsk. Had to go back to the shop.

I never had to go to another big one. There weren't any. They weren't regular. By human standards. We thereafter occasionally went after lightning strikes, usually a lone tree on a hill surrounded by dense underbrush. We would start out in the morning hacking and chopping our way in hoping to get to the burning tree and its scattered parts before the heat of

the growing day evaporated last night's rain, before the underbrush caught and began to burn.

Ten years later I was in Canada, living in the Slocan, a valley that hadn't been logged in decades, lots of new growth. If a brush fire got out of control here, the winds that raked down/up the valley could whip up a fire that could ... well, you get the idea. So when someone drove by my cabin one afternoon and said there was a fire at Crazy Charlie's, I dropped everything, threw an axe and shovel in the Chevy, and raced away down the access road. Crazy was opposite to me, on the eastern slope of the valley, back up in brush. I drove fast. But when I arrived the fire was out and a bunch of neighbors, some unknown to me after two summers and a winter, some familiar, all smiles, sitting around Crazy's yard, watching newcomers come flying in. Hey, look who's here! Some would turn around and go back to some task of their own. Some of us sat around smoking dope, getting to know one another. Nice to know who you can count on. So, where do you live? Oh yeah, do you know so 'n so lives, etc.

A traveling story or two:

On a trip down into California with my Canadian wife, we found ourselves in Northern California as dusk came on. Tired from driving all day, we began looking for a motel before dinner. By some chance we spotted one waaaay off the highway. It was one of those old motels, bypassed by the straightening out of the major highway. It was difficult to get to, but rewarding. It was right out of the past: the style was of a period that could have accommodated Bonnie and Clyde, Bogart and Lupino. Wow. And the office! It hadn't changed since 1950: overstuffed chairs, deco lamps. Sandra and I were into such stuff then by way of the specialized second-hand furniture biz, so we were in heaven.

The cabin was plain and simple, the better to show off the natural wood floors and walls, the old style magazine picture from *Saturday Evening Post* in a cheap wood frame. And the bed in the bedroom at the back! Old metal frame bed with squeaky springs that rattled something wonderful when you screw emphatically. Once in bed we were giggling like teenagers. And then, on cue, right outside the bedroom window, the first northbound train of the night rumbled past.

Another: A few years back, my son and I took a holiday and traveled to Massachusetts and Rhode Island. This was Jon's choice. A teenager, he was into H. P. Lovecraft and wanted to visit that territory. He was, with his teen pals, into roleplaying games, long sessions held on weekends in our apartment. He wanted background!

Contrary to previous years, he now was into photo-

graphy and buildings and scenery. Color, details. We shot roll upon roll. After Lovecraft's grave with its marks of sacrifice and burnt offerings, we became obsessed with graveyards. Most were very full of monuments and mausoleums in full 19th century sentiment, temples to the memory of the dead. Awesome, man. Jon's mother and I had settled on cremation. She got a party and her ashes scattered upon the ocean's face to be carried to far off places. Who can afford ostentation on this scale today, I thought, clicking away. And then, in a west Massachusetts graveyard, I found *the* family plot. A sarcophagus and headstones all of black stone. And the family name was Bates. No Norman Bates, alas, but the chill I got. Great stuff. Ah, the rewards of being weird.

I loved/love Frank R. Paul. In my teens it was easy and relatively inexpensive to accumulate old Gernsback pulps, and so I did. I even loved the smell, the brittle powder flaking off in my hands. Paul had sense of wonder and "spaceships with rivets" stuck with me. I always longed to do stories using them but I seldom did. *Air Wonder Stories'* airships and flying cities were better for fantasy. A few of us U.S. comic book guys and the Europeans were quite fond of them. And a couple years back I discovered a Japanese artist who was likewise nutz about them. This is Hayao Miyazaki, best known over here for an animated movie and long serialized comic book, *Nausicaa*. It has big, impossible heavy, ponderous flying machines.

His love of flying machines has shown up in most all his film works, but I don't know if he ever saw Paul or any pulps. He *did* see the old Superman cartoons and has said those had an impact on him. He is also fond of elaborate chase scenes. His 1986 animated feature, *Laputa*, is an alternate 19th century Europe with massive open pit industrializationscarringtheland, hugemany-propellored flying machines, a steam train chase, air pirates, a robot gone amok, a rescue-the-princess-from-the-burningcastle that's hard to beat, and of course a flying city tended by robots with no humans to muck it up. Of course, I love it. Hugo G. would have loved it.

Disney has bought his works so they are coming. Miyazaki did not own the rights to any of his stuff. The word out of Japanese animation circles is that he was so pissed about Disney getting his stuff that the newest film, *Princess Mononoke*, has some extra violence in it, added by him. People getting arms and heads chopped off. Nothing too far out by Japanese standards, but by Disney? To be safe Disney is releasing them under the Buena Vista suboutlet title. *Kiki's Delivery Service* is the only one out so far. It has a dirigible. It crashes but that's about the only dismemberment in the movie. He

also prefers young girl leading characters.

I don't know how well known Miyazaki is outside of a circle of anime nuts. There are people in the North American animation studio scene to whom "Japanese animation" means gawdawful crap and I find I have to tread warily lest I receive a storm of abuse. I am sure I could have come up with an appropriate fannish reference once upon a time, my out-of-knee-pants neofan days. Now, no, a blank. Good, I haven't fallen too far. In fact, I am dangerously close to preaching the wonders of *Giant Robo* or *Evangelion* and we can't have that. For one thing, my hand might cramp up, or your brain might cramp up, like watching too much TV.

On another trip up, I had problems at the border. The person interviewing me took exception to me. He knew all about us longhairs. We came to Canada, joined a commune and went on welfare, useless parasites. I protested to no avail. They set conditions on my coming in: I was allowed a short time period, and they confiscated most of my cash. To get it back I had to leave before a certain date and turn in certain papers as I left via a border station, which papers upon processing would release the money they kept to my bank account in San Jose. It is curious, but for this routine I might have actually gone back at the end of summer. As it was, I returned to Bob and Christine's and fell in with the work there as though I had only been gone a short time.

When my allotted visiting period was up, I loaded my truck with my stuff, borrowed a pile of cash from friends, and drove south, heading for the least distant border crossing. On exiting Canada I turned in my paper and drove south. But not far. I turned left and drove to the next border crossing. This time I tried a different approach: I lied, falling back on a good, sincere story. I was a freelance writer writing material for travel/tourist zines and I was planning on researching ghost towns and their history. I had names of places, like Sandon, and asked questions about where to go to get touristy kinds of pointers, etc., I had money, etc., etc. Welcome to Canada, enjoy your stay. No restrictions, no constrictions.

I drove back to Bob and Christine's, unloaded the truck, returned the money, and as it was only afternoon, fell to doing whatever was the biz of the day. I was liking it ever better than the previous summer. My friends went off to another valley on some trip of their own and I was left alone on the farm. Well, not alone—there was the horse, dogs, ducks, chickens, garden snakes and the occasional cherry tree-robbing bear. I gardened, fed, and drew drew drew. It was very quiet, sometimes only the wind in the trees, an occasional car on the dirt road, a visitor or two. When my friends came back they said, did you miss us? And I said no, go away again.

As harvest time came and went and it grew colder and colder, I kept putting off going. I had nothing to go back to—friends in Idaho and Puyallup had moved on and California was too crazy. At the last moment some friends, again former San Josers, came and told me they were moving into their finished house. Did I want to move into the cabin they'd been renting? I jumped at it. It was a four-room cabin with electricity, a well for water and a two-hole outhouse with a view that I shared with the couple in the two-room house on the same piece of land: \$25 a month.

The main room had a broken window. Too cold. I sealed it off. The bedroom had a wood burning heater, the kitchen a wood burning cook stove and a radio someone had left behind. I had to hurry to get my firewood in and to build my furniture: a bed, a table, two benches and for a refrigerator there was a tiny room off the kitchen with most of its window gone...my refrigerator. I also stocked it with cord wood: pine along this wall, cottonwood (a poor wood) here, and birch (best) here. My truck was from California and was not suited to winter in Canada: no heater. Whatta you need a heater for in California? Mostly I drove around with the window down just like in summer. I put two huge birch tree stumps over the rear axle for weight/traction. There were a few hills I couldn't make but travel on the hard-packed snow roads was fine.

So I drew. I did this comic. I drew late hours at night when the radio picked up stations from all over, even San Francisco. I heard about Pigpen's death from a collapsed stomach this way. I worked for long periods of time. My hours got odd. Going to bed at sun-up was okay, but 11 a.m.? So I'd quit and go to town, visit folks, pick up mail—and start all over.

I have been reading *Trap Door*, almost at the end of the last letters section. All this brings back nostalgic memories. It was the writing in *Innuendo* and *Habakkuk* that made me, early on, appreciate *writing*, the art of *story-telling*. It's not that I hadn't read *writing* before; I had. I recall reading turn of the century novels with long sentences—"Take him bag and baggage to the castle and I shall hasten thither on my unicycle" sticks in my mind. Thank God for Hemingway. In attempting to emulate them, I consciously did not get off-track like I've likely done all through here—stream-of-consciousness-Kerouac—but kept it all down to short little stories, self-contained. I was very good very often but the knack and the "style" carried over into my term papers and assignments in college. Invariably they were done the night before due, an outline, some quotes, a catchy opening, score points, a snappy ending, all bashed out on a portable typer. I was to become quite quick at it in my two fingers and

thumbs way. Now whatever became of it? It was an Underwood or a Smith & Wesson, whatever. I loaned it to Suzie, the girl next door. I never got it back.

I phoned her. In Santa Cruz. Not in. Oh, well.

I was always late with most projects. In my oil painting class on critique day, the teacher would wax wrath on wet paintings. I would prop mine in front of the open oven door for baking and go to bed.

Phone rings. It is not Suzie and the typer thirty years later. It is Devin. For my son Jon. Dev is a computer whiz whose college course assigned his team an animation exercise—doing two and a half minutes of 3D animation in three weeks. Jon scored music for it. Mostly it's a chase through sewers. Jon did it on his computer, continually altering it every night as they would phone in the new timing. The music helped tie the various pieces together, I was told.

In a way Devin and Jon got me going down the road that led to my snooping around fandom again. Last summer they wanted to go to Bremen, West Germany. I don't remember the air fare but the hotel was \$150 a night. "\$150," I screamed. "Why, when I was you age I went to an SF con in L.A. and I probably didn't spend \$150 on the whole trip!" Of course that was South Gate in '58 when a hotel room in the slums was \$5 and we had ten or fifteen people in one room. Ted White, John Trimble, Ron Ellik, and so on. I recall that I went with a young femfan, Sylvia Dees. She was nineteen, very good-looking, had a high IQ, and like most of us she was a taste neurotic. Very electrical, the effect. She came to be married to Ted White—that and being on the east coast terminated my infatuation for her.

But I did hear of her over the years: in the latter '60s while I was living in San Jose drawing underground comics and she was in L.A. remarried and making films; in the early '70s when I discarded my San Jose life for rural British Columbia and she dropped her L.A. life and took to following a guru. Always an interesting lady, I thought. I hadn't thought of her in years until 1998. I wondered what she's doing now? Why, I'll call her up and ask her. Ho-ho, silly boy—she had vanished. I sought out old-time SF fans. Nobody knew. I got dated information or misinformation: "She was shackled up with Bruce Pelz" was one piece that fairly clogged my brain. When I found Pelz I learned otherwise. I found out a few other bits such as the reason Rotsler wasn't answering his phone was that he had passed on. But Bruce balanced that out handsomely. Turned out he owed me money from some artwork for a project a decade ago. I hadn't a clue, but he paid me. Kudos! Bill Donaho was for getting me

onto the Timebinders chat site. Ted White mentioned my name there and that got me *Trap Door*. It got me other stuff. Hell, I even spent a day at the local Vancouver con. I correspond with Ron Bennett. I never did find Sylvia Dees. Last I could learn was that she was (a) a computer programmer, (b) living in a small mountain community west of Denver, and *that* was in the early '90s. But hey, now I have you guys. Not as good-looking, but available, available.

Back to Jon and his proposed trip to Germany. Of course this is 1998 and they are going for the "Conference on Artificial Intelligence," not some mere SF con. A colleague of Douglas Hofstadter's was to speak. A proper parent, I went through the roof: "Do you think money grows on trees?" (I got that from my mother-in-law who used it on my wife and I followed suit.) In actuality I liked the idea, especially if they would then buy a Europass and bum around Europe, stay at youth hostels, meet French girls ... neither kid has *really* traveled. I've taken Jon to London and San Diego, San Francisco and Boston, but it was only the trip to Lovecraft country where he woke up and looked around, even if it was to soak up details for role-playing games.

I regret not being able to afford travel the succeeding years. Now a "holiday" is living in the film festival for two and a half weeks and seeing fifty to ninety films. But anyway, they were not opting for two weeks in Europe, only the weekend. For two weeks I'd have come up with the bucks. But it fell through and now his passport has lapsed. If he renews it, it will be just before a trip, at the last moment. How'd he get like that anyway?

There's always something. The Raël people were here last Saturday, downtown, hyping their pitch. Part of a display had to do with the model of a kind of bio-dome, only not a dome, but a central circular building with an enclosed passageway running axis-like out in two directions to other circular buildings, which were domes. The whole pattern was like a crop circle pattern. In fact, the chap behind the table said yes, this planned residence/center was based on crop circle patterns, which in their turn are messages from the aliens in the flying saucers. Oh shit, I guess you guys aren't those people couple of years back who tried that sealed bio-dome experiment? Oh, no, not at all. Well, you learn by mistakes—what's your plan with this structure?

But I couldn't make headway. I don't think it was secrecy; I think the buildings are not a real plan, just a hook, though of course he may just not know anything. He's there to sell books, actually. Raël appears to be (don't laugh now) a guy abducted by aliens. They picked him to be their prophet, see; they look just like us and they seeded this planet. Us. So, you see, all earthly

religions are bunk, designed to twist you up with guilt and sin, etc. They have a better plan, of course. Buy this book. Oh, and this is the last chance we're gonna get, or so they make it sound. If we don't heed the prophet and straighten up, our saucer cousins are going to terminate the biological experiment.

I guess the crop circles were an intelligence test and we're blowing it. I'm not sure I'm interpreting this right. I did not buy their books. Apparently they've been around since the '70s but never caught on. They said they'd be back. I wonder if I can steal any ideas from them for a comic book?

23 July 1999:

It's okay that you haven't written some lengthy letter back as reflex to what I wrote. I've gone through a lot of big letters lately and of those I required some definite return there's been a wide silence. I might think it's a conspiracy if I weren't too lazy to push on them. Well, not quite lazy, otherwise occupied. Things like live women. Distraction.

Particularly the recently met one. Recently enough that I have only partial data to go on. My intuition, however, says "Watch it." This one is not quite in the flaky/odd category for once. Still, despite my objective analysis of my intuitive take, I'm interested. Maybe it's the long legs. At 5'7", tall for a Chinese. High cheek bones. Coming out of a divorce, she is set on independence, fun and money. Alas, part of working on this last objective has her involved in a pyramid scam and I have a moderate horror of them.

I suspect she cultivated me more in hopes of another sucker to be enlisted into the grand plan. I must disappoint her. I am no salesman with the drive to inflict this snake-oil on my friends. It is slight schizoid to be backpedaling in one direction while trying to move forward in another. There is a tentative plan for her, her friend (my neighbor) and I to end up at a Caribbean music/food festival in North Vancouver tomorrow afternoon. Only these ladies are not sure of when or how. A bit exasperating but synchronicity is at work again. An interview (of me as ol' underground cartoonist) on a university radio show got on to the subject of the *I Ching*, the Book of Changes. I hadn't thought about it in a long while.

I first encountered the oracle in 1963 in Nevada. I was hanging around the peyote church scene and a number of people there used it regularly. I picked it up and sorta played with it. Now, older and wiser, I would advise caution. Once I asked the book if it was full of shit. It came right back: only a fool would question the accumulated wisdom of centuries of wise men, etc., etc.

Well, it certainly put me in my place. I was impressed. And then a few months later, while in Army boot camp, I

found *Man in the High Castle* in paperback and read it. I became an avid Phil Dick fan on the spot with this, the first thing I read of his. My wife picked up the use of it from me, but I haven't used it in years and years.

Until last night. Why not? It's Chinese, she's Chinese. I asked in regard to her. I got the 39th hexagram: the mountain. Obstacle. To go northeast is to run into the unmovable mountain. Retreat southwest, it advises. To get to the music fest I must go northeast, while an alternate possibility lies in the southwest. If I must persevere, I must get help from friends. Oh oh! One of her friend's friends is a woman I've been going out with, too. Latina. Temper. Watch out.

Now, of course there are layers of meaning here. Basically, the books come across to me as an ancient text that serves to remind me that in an ancient Chinese court there are rigid rules of proper behavior and thought, and here's a reminder that there's a formula for how to get through this. But it is far removed from life today. However, the universe is in a constant state of flux and chance is as good as anything else. Here it pointedly reminds me that I have insights I'd rather ignore so I can feel good. But, hey, what the hell?

So what am I going to do? Why, go ahead, of course. I've said I would, and barring a better opportunity I'm going just to see what happens. These are not the only folks I know who are going to be there. "He who dares wins" or is it "He who leaps first gets sorry look afterwards"?

And so on Saturday morning this lady calls early, 9 a.m., when I am losing my argument with myself—do I get out of bed and Do Things or do I just go back to sleep? Phone rings. I get up. What's the plan? She's not moving until girlfriend shows up, who's on a vague timetable. I try to install in her simple transit instructions: bus, seabus, follow the stream of people towards sounds of music. Simple. So why do I have doubts? They worry about weather. The pattern has been a gloomy morning followed by a nice afternoon. Have faith, I say.

Later, in the small park, I look up at the wide northern sky behind the pavilioned bandstage: behind the apartment building skyline, a range of mountains stabs up into the sky, mountains whose climb begins at our feet in this shoreside park. Clumps of dense clouds smother the peaks, stretch out over our heads, heading south.

After assorted errands I have crossed over the waters to follow my way by the sounds of a Jamaican band to this small park surrounded by apartment buildings. Not too many people yet. The grass is damp but there is no smell of rain. The weather has scared off some of the scheduled bands but other musicians fill in, with enthusiasm. People continued to arrive. Not enthusiastic people, though; clumps watched other clumps of us dance about. Umm,

I think, this is *not* Golden Gate Park in the latter '60s when we had one big orgasmic organism of drug and idealism stoked hippies dancing like demented chickens on a hot griddle. No, this is not that, for try as the folks on stage might to get people moving this is not a participating crowd. Even the parting of the clouds, the bright sun striking down—on cue from the DJ-ish MC—doesn't work. It became a nice afternoon and a promising evening. But my ladies have not shown up. It is not so large a crowd we'd not spot one another. Stood up.

I move on. An old friend of mine works nearby in West Vancouver. I catch her coming off work at six. No plans. We fall into routine: dinner and a movie. At dinner she talked about spirits. They follow her about, a bother. She does not see them, but she feels them, hears them. They come at night, and only when she is alone, only when on her back; so she sleeps on her side with the lights on. The main spirits she is familiar with are not bound to one location, but come to her wherever she is. She told of a roommate who was afraid of her closet, that there was something in it. My friend said she knew it was waiting for her. Sure enough, at night it comes through the door and attacks her, a nasty, unpleasant man. She bit him, his little finger. She could feel the finger in her mouth. As soon as she bit him, he quickly backed off. Now he leaves her alone. Far out stuff, huh? A bit scary, too.

The movie selection in West Vancouver isn't great. We cast down the Muppets in favor of a light comedy with Julia Roberts and Hugh Grant. Roberts is a bit difficult for me to take. I enjoyed the movie and its cast of odd characters and tolerated her. My friend likes the lady and, of course, Hugh Grant. I like him, too. Coming out of the movie, I chanced to look in a mirror. My face is bright red. A sunny afternoon, after all—a glowing afternoon culminating with an easy, familiar old friend.

A few days later, Saturday, I got hold of the Chinese lady and got her story. Her girlfriend dropped out at the last minute but undaunted she made her way over. She made a point of emphasizing her independent nature. I sounded pretty irrelevant to it all. Of course, by the time *she* got there it had only an hour's worth of music left and I am in West Vancouver going to dinner with an old pal.

Oh, well, the oracle warned me it'd be like climbing a mountain. What oracle? She'd never heard of the *I Ching*. I gave a brief explanation. Now she thinks I'm weird. If she's normal, this is not going to help out one bit. Persevere, however, the book says, so I go on about upcoming music events. Free stuff, easy access. It's summer, lots going on. Okay, Saturday night there's a Brazilian band playing down by the beach on a stage faked up like a river showboat. I give directions. Oh, yes, fireworks over the water afterwards, first of several

nights of such. On Sunday a Japanese festival with music and martial arts, etc., and on Wednesday night taiko drumming back at the showboat by the beach. I leave it at that and phone my other friend, Peruvian lady. She doesn't know about Saturday; she works as a tour guide. But Sunday is free. We'll go to this festival. She hasn't had a day off in a good while.

This showboat stage has been down by this part of the beach forever and is used for all kinds of events. Picture a bay, west being the mouth of it with the beach I'm talking of on the bottom, the south side the general area I live in. This summer it has three or four musical events a week. There's an amphitheater-like seating area on a slight hill facing it. The audience looks out onto the bay, the city's downtown skyline, and behind that our mountains. The water is flecked with sail boats. I have been out in the suburbs running down unfindables all day. The band is doing a sound check. There are steel drums, conga drums, a regular band drum set-up, an electric bass and keyboards, also some funny-looking Brazilian instruments, one string only. Sounds good.

And it is good. Here the audience — lots of local families with kids — is packed into one area with room to dance down in front, sides and back. Very energetic, with dancers in costume working like hell. Still, this is a largely white audience and they may dig it all, but doing responses and doing waves is too much. Looking to be entertained, like it's TV or something. As the music jumps on the sun goes down, the sky goes purple while the sun slants directly across the bay making bright mirrors of the sails on the water. The clouds go ruddy red for a bit and then it's night. By the second half we've got little kids up on the stage trying to follow the dancers and a big crowd around the stage swaying with the beat. It's working better now. And then it's over.

I am not staying for fireworks. I've seen years of them. I bail out. More people are filing into the area. I head up the hill against the tide coming down. I need a bus home. I have to pee. Back at the beach, the lines are a mile long at the rest rooms. If I gotta wait I'll do it on a bus. I make it home in good time and in the door about the time that the fireworks commence. People are out on the roof watching. I make a quick dinner, watch some video, go to bed.

Sunday: I don't get hold of my friend until mid-day. A tour guide job appears to have elastic hours and she worked until midnight. Just up. All for going out. Only first she has to go to church. Okay, phone me afterwards, I say. Quick sprint on grocery shopping for the week to come. Then I sit and read through whatever novel I am currently reading. Around four I begin to suspect something's amiss. Finally she answers the phone.

Didn't go out at all, but went back to sleep! Up now. Just gotta run out and mail a letter.

This goes on until 9:30 when on my way out to purchase something I run into her and two girlfriends I have not met before returning from dinner. The friends have a video to watch. Sigh, sure, okay, watch a video, eat a rich cake someone has whipped up. Food. Well, I am mollified some, and more by making rude comments about the film. It's not very good or memorable. One of the ladies has the plot figured out in a flash — woman after large amounts of money causing demise of husbands and lovers along the way. She finds the film rather cynical. We don't like any of the characters in the film. We root for their demise. The most innocent person is the lawyer and he's wisely cynical of the actions of everyone else in the film. Oh well, I best not complain. I've rented worse videos on a whim. I seldom dare inflict them on anyone but myself, though. Even stuff I like is a trial for some people.

Out of Sunday evening, though, is hatched a plan. Not by me — I try to keep it simple. The plan involves the lot of us going to the next Saturday's music on the beach (taiko drumming) followed by fireworks. Indeed it is to be a picnic on the grass. Such elaborateness is surely doomed.

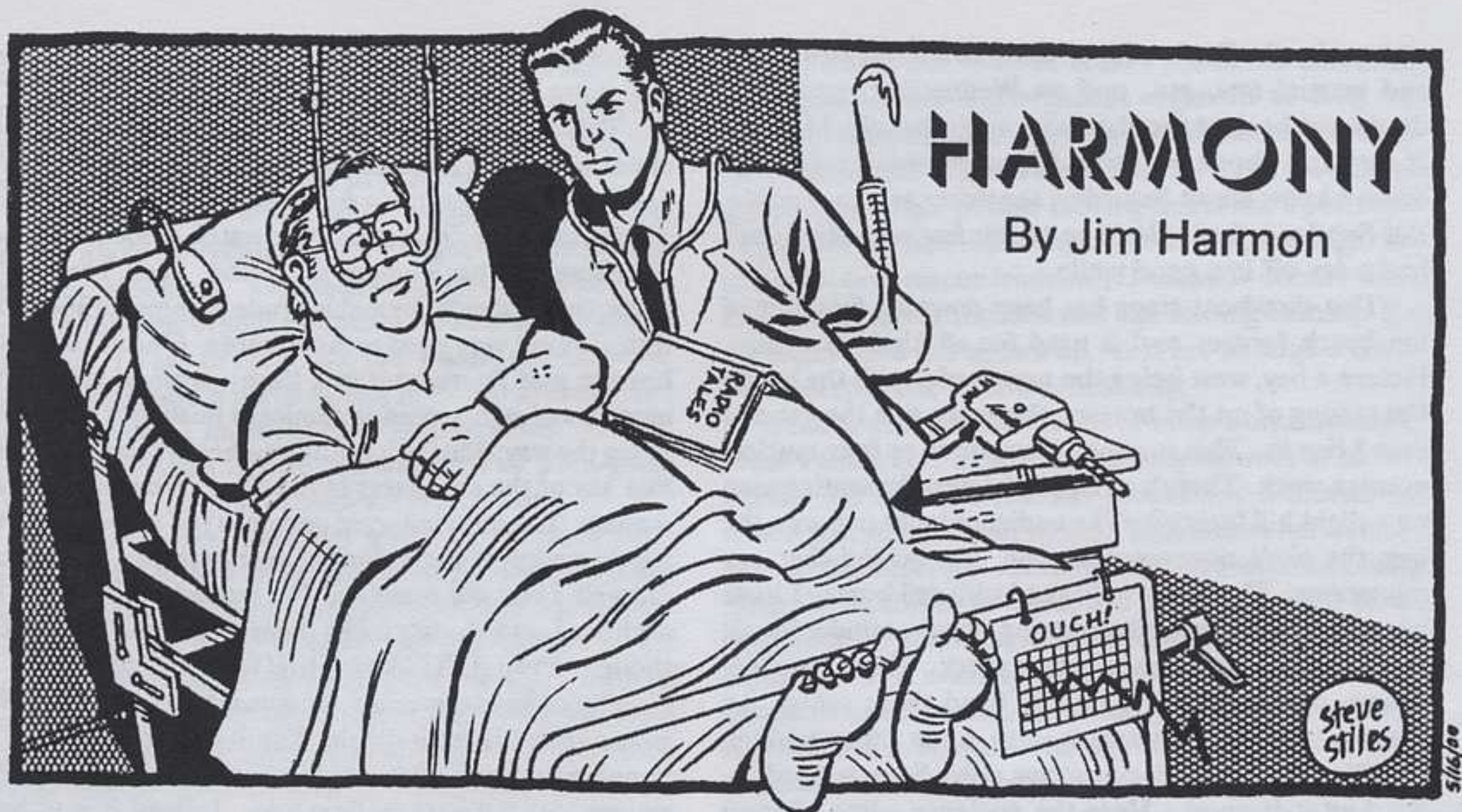
Later. Yeah, doomed indeed. I showed up, sitting in about the same place, eating pizza with a can of pop. Some of the same audience as before. Lots of kids down in front.

The drumming: three drummers, two men, one woman, Asian-Canadian, who've been at this from eight to twenty years. The guys of Japanese descent, the woman third-generation Chinese. Big drums, little drums. Origins with peasant folk, fisher folk, loggers. Very active work: the drummers use whole body — again like the Brazilian music, there's a kind of martial arts overlap. Dances, with masks — even a mask that looked like Darth Maul, which scared the shit out of some small tyke. They built up to a big finale of exhausting, frenzied drumming, using big and small drums. Pretty cool. But I can't recall all the names of the drums, not a one even, impressed though I was.

Once again I left to avoid the fireworks and the crowds and the cops who are confiscating booze. They pick out people and search them. Finders keepers. I don't feel like ranting and raving myself into foolishness any further than I have.

Following Saturday morning: Oh, no! The Chinese girl phoned this morning. I'm to come see her perform. Malaysian dance troupe. Seems harmless enough. I'm counting on food. Once more, dear friends, into...

—George Metzger



HARMONY

By Jim Harmon

The year 2000 had come. There had been no Y2K great disaster. Oh, there had been some amusing glitches — owners of cars for 2000 had been given horseless carriage licenses for 1900 vehicles. I was sitting around watching the news on TV with one eye and sorting paperback books, which ones to keep, which to go to the Salvation Army. My nose and throat felt very dry. Maybe a cup of coffee would help. Suddenly, my nose felt wet. I used a tissue. Red. Oh, no, a nosebleed. Barbara, my wife, got those frequently but I had only had a nosebleed three or four times in my life. Well, they only last a couple of minutes, I thought.

But this one lasted longer than any I had ever had. Despite my efforts to hold my nose and catch the blood on a towel, I was getting the blood everywhere — on the walls, the floor, my clothes. Later, Barbara would say the place looked like a murder scene. I woke up Barbara and she felt I could control it by holding my nose, doing the usual things. But I couldn't. I did manage to get some help from a silver nitrate stick I used for shaving cuts. It contained the flow for awhile when I probed up my nose with it.

Finally, we decided that I had to go to the hospital. St. Joseph's was nearby and covered in our new Blue Cross policy. We went to the emergency room and found it packed on a Sunday. We waited five hours for attention. At last, a young doctor saw it, and said there were a lot nosebleeds due to the dry air. My problem was aggravated by my blood pressure running too high

and by paint fumes from Barbara painting our bedroom. The answer to my problem was cauterizing the open wound in my nose.

Cauterization means "burning" but they used a chemical to achieve the burn. Unfortunately, I found much of the chemical spilled through into my mouth, burning away the taste cells. My mouth was dry and burned for weeks, and my sense of taste is still not what it once was. Moreover, after I returned home I found at about four in the morning the cauterization did not hold. The blood began to flow again.

Returning to St. Joseph's, we found the emergency room empty on Monday morning. Apparently people manage to have all their emergencies on the weekend. I got immediate attention. The nurse was quite upset that I got blood all over her station. "You are creating a biohazard!" she charged angrily. How dare people come into a sanitary hospital with the bloody injuries!

This time I got an older doctor, clearly a specialist, who proceeded to insert a tube up my nose and, from the length of it, up past my eyes into the center of my forehead. I thought my brain was somewhere up there, but apparently there aren't any brains there — at least in my case. Yes, it hurt. I tried to keep from screaming and flailing about. "Ah, a good patient. The worst is over."

"What's the worst that could happen here, doctor?" I asked.

"You could bleed to death." He patted my arm.

"But don't worry. We aren't going to let that happen."

I finally saw myself in a mirror. It looked as if I had twin green elephant trunks sticking out of my nose. "We'll keep it like that for a few days. Get this patient a room." So for the first time in my life, I was admitted to a hospital, issued a gown and a bed. The bed was too short for me and my feet kept hanging over the edge. The pain continued, but every time I asked for a pain pill I was given one. For people interested in such things, I experienced no high or any pleasure from the pills—just a lessening of the pain in my head.

I lay there feeling generally miserable. Barbara, our daughter Dawn, and family friend Helen were frequent visitors—so frequent that Helen was taken for my second daughter. I had thought of Helen as a contemporary, not young enough to be my offspring, but I guess I had been kidding myself about how old I looked. I was brought books and magazines to read, but I felt too bad to do anything but lay there and feel miserable.

After three days, the tube was deflated. On the fourth day, it was removed and there were only a few traces of blood. There was some problem about my blood pressure and some fever, but after a few more days I was released.

All the doctors and nurses had been efficient and kind. The food was the worst I have ever encountered. I couldn't taste it very well but I knew it was awful. My roommate spoke the worst French I ever heard to his wife and children. He was a Black American, and what he spoke sounded as if he was laboriously sounding it out from the printed page, although it was extemporaneous. I shouldn't criticize, since I can't speak any foreign language at all. But when you feel as lousy as I did, it doesn't take much to be an irritant.

When I finally got home, in my own bed with Barbara beside me and our kitten Charles sleeping at the foot, and with KUSC playing classical music softly in the night's darkness, I felt very grateful to be alive and to be home.

I have a new edition of my old book, *The Great Radio Heroes*, coming out from the publisher, McFarland. I expanded the book by about twenty percent and corrected some mistakes I had made. I had delivered it before the new year, and after its receipt I had heard nothing more about it.

I tried phoning the editor about when I might expect it.

"If you delivered it last year, it should appear sometime this year. We publish hundreds of books a year. We can't predict an exact time."

"Yes, you published the work of hundreds of

authors. That's how you stay in business. Don't you think we deserve a little information on what we contribute to the operation?"

I don't remember her exact words but they were similar to what I've heard from editors and publishers over a lifetime. While they could not stay in business without our efforts, there is always the implied put-down, the diminution of our lives and beings. Most writers make so little money that publishers tend to hold them in contempt. After all, they become rich off our work. Most of us just remain poor.

Writing is a wonderful life for the very successful writer, like a Stephen King. For the average scribe, there is only little pay and often even contempt for those living off their life's blood.

Still, many of us who know we will never see wealth are driven to put thoughts to paper. There is no adequate explanation. I have no answer.

In recent years, I have collected more radio items than science fiction.

In January, I found for sale on the Internet service eBay what was advertised as a "Tom Mix Radio Record"—a 16-inch transcription. I wasn't sure what I would get. Sometimes transcriptions are mislabeled, and other times they will no longer play on a 16-inch turntable, which I do own. I made my bid, \$75, which was the minimum reserve for the item. No one bid against me.

The transcription arrived, very securely packed, and I was able to transfer it to tape without difficulty. It contained two new-to-me Tom Mix episodes back to back. Since there are only twenty-some episodes known to exist, it was like finding another pair of California condors.

The first story, "Mystery of the Scarlet Scarecrow," was near enough to the end that enough clues were given for me to solve the mystery. The script by George Lowther was a fair mystery, like a good mystery novel. I plan to play the episode on my radio show on www.yesterdayusa.com and to give my solution.

After fifty years, I still find in my childhood favorite a class act, in the writing of George Lowther, in the acting of my dear friend, Curley Bradley (whom I got to know in his last years and who considered me his adopted son), Forrest Lewis and Leo Curley. Have I learned nothing in all these years? Or is it as Bill Blackbeard once observed: children know what is good. Trust the judgments you made as a child.

—Jim Harmon



THE COOL COLLECTOR



By CHARLES BURBEE

Back in the Thirties, when everything happened — didn't you know that everything happened in the Thirties? — I used to work at a number of part-time jobs. I worked in grocery stores and delivered papers and mowed lawns and stuff like that.

I wonder if fandom is ready for the incident that befell me one Saturday afternoon in the Safeway produce department when a young lady approached me with an appalling statement?

In those days there was no self-service the way there is now in supermarkets. Stuff was not prepackaged. You gave your order to the clerk and he selected the merchandise and weighed it out in paper sacks. I think the most common phrase I heard in those days was "Gimme all you can for a dime." I thought that was a little silly. If something was twenty cents a pound and they wanted a dime's worth, you had to give them a half pound. Or did they mean they wanted ten ounces instead of eight?

Oh, it sounds like I'm about to tell the story of the young lady who approached me with an astonishing, heart-stopping statement. Well, I'm not. I came here to tell the story of a collector of old phonograph records. His name was Victor Quam. The year might have been 1939. At this time I was working Saturdays

for the State Personnel Board, which is California's name for their civil service commission.

Sometimes I gave the examinations—that paid more —and sometimes I just worked as a "proctor" on them, which meant I distributed materials and watched to see that nobody cheated, and accompanied men when they went to the toilet — presumably to see that they didn't discuss the examination with anyone else, or refer to a secret store of notes. I also went out to the sidewalk with them when they wanted to smoke. Smoking was forbidden on school property and these civil service examinations were almost always given on school grounds. I always felt it was childish, making grownups go out to the sidewalk to get a drag or two on a cigarette.

Once we got the announcements made and the entry cards picked up and the pencils and examinations and other stuff distributed, there wasn't much to do besides walk around and look official, and try to stay awake. Of course, if one of the other proctors was a bouncy female we stayed awake through natural causes.

Lots of times only two or three of us would run the exams. One of the men I often worked with was Victor Quam. After the people were started on their exams, he would start working on a card file. In a small neat

printed hand he would make entries on small cards. I of course asked him what he was doing that for and it turned out he was a collector of old phonograph records. He was cross-filing his index so he could locate anything by composer, artist, orchestra, or name of piece. He was an opera buff and mostly had oldtime records of people like Schumann-Heink, Tito Schipa, Caruso and others more obscure.

We didn't have much in common there. I had mostly popular records. I was still in the Gilbert and Sullivan stage, not having grown out of it yet.

He spoke of an oldtime label called Fonotipia. I had never heard of it. It was an Italian label and had come into existence around the turn of the century. A lot of otherwise obscure but fine artists recorded for that label, he told me. It was a scarce one. He didn't even have a catalogue of their complete line. He collected all he could find. Some were black labels and some were brown labels, the black ones being the rarer.

A month or so afterward, a friend gave me a stack of old phono records. A lot of them were operatic stuff, and among them I found not one, but two, Fonotipias.

My golly, I thought. I can hardly wait to see Quam again, to tell him I now have two of those old items. Maybe they're ones he especially yearns for and I can give them to him. That should cause his collector's heart to burst with joy.

Next Saturday I worked with Quam. I told him I'd found two Fonotipias and he said "Oh?" and seemed more interested in some sparrows on the lawn outside.

I felt a surge of disappointment; he hadn't reacted at all as I thought he would. He hadn't sat up straighter, with his eyes shining, and said, "God, Burb, I've got to have those records for my collection! What do you want for them?"

Instead, he had said "Oh?" and looked at sparrows.

Ah well, I thought. You can't figure people.

I asked him if he wanted to know the titles of the records. He said "All right," rather listlessly. I forget about one of the discs but the other had *Sogno Soave e Casto* on one side and *Il Mio Tesoro* on the other, both sung by Giuseppe Anselmi, with piano accompaniment.

He seemed bored by the whole procedure, but did rouse enough to ask whether they were black or brown labels.

"Brown," I said.

"Yeah, they're the common ones," he said.

I mumbled something and went off to look busy.

The following week I played those records. I especially liked *Il Mio Tesoro*.

A month or so later I made a trade deal with him.

I had a lot of old operatic stuff I didn't care for and he had some Chopin and Gilbert and Sullivan he didn't want. So a trade was the natural result. He came over to my house and he went through my stack and I went through his stack and we had a satisfactory trade. During the trade I had to play *Il Mio Tesoro* for him, explaining how I had learned to like it.

A little later I noticed that record in his "I want" stack. "Oh," I said, "that's a mistake. I don't want to trade that one." I took it off the stack and put it away. He said nothing.

Next time he and I worked together he asked me if I particularly liked that aria. I said yes. I'd never heard of the aria in my life before, but now I liked it a lot. I'd played it several times.

He told me it was a fairly long aria and usually was on a 12-inch disc—we speak of 78's—instead of a 10-incher like I had. "Your version is cut. I'll tell you what. I've got a 12-inch record of Tito Ruffo singing it, the complete aria. You'll love Tito Ruffo. I'll trade you that for your *Fonotipia*."

I hesitated. I liked my record. I said I'd listen to Tito Ruffo, but I made no promises. I listened to Tito Ruffo. It was nice to hear a variant of what was now my favorite aria, but I declined to trade. I liked Giuseppe Anselmi better than Tito Ruffo.

Then he offered me a record of John McCormack singing it. A fine version, he said, electrically recorded. Didn't sound tinny, like the old acoustic I had. I listened to it. I didn't care for old Jawn at all.

Then he told me that at the end of my record the piano player goofs.

"Didn't you notice that?"

I said yes, I'd noticed, and at first had thought it was a deliberate discord. "It doesn't detract from my enjoyment of the song," I said.

Then he got to where he was offering me five records for one. He even got to the point of offering me money, the last resort for him.

Then he told me the story. The whole story. The story he should have told me that very first day when I told him about my two *Fonotipias*.

Il Mio Tesoro was his specialty. He collected all the versions of it he could find. He had a dozen or two versions and had never even known mine existed until I told him about it that day.

"Did your heart jump with joy when you heard about it?"

"It sure did," he said.

"Then why didn't you tell me about it at the time?" I was a bit nettled. I said, "You know you were so cool about it all that I was disappointed. Why didn't you come right out and tell me you wanted it? I'd have

given it to you with best wishes for your enjoyment.

"But you said nothing about wanting the record, so I kept it. Then I got to playing it and fell in love with it.

"And now I won't trade it or sell it. You have outsmarted yourself."

He had, too. Oh, I know it's the collector's method of self-protection — a common sense one — to act only half-interested in something, lest he get stuck for the true value.

But he didn't know me. He didn't know I wasn't a conman. I wasn't out to stick anybody.

That is the story of Quam, the Cool Collector.

It might also be the story of Burbee, the non-conman.

I still have that record today, more than thirty years later. I played it only last week. Old Guiseppe Anselmi was in fine voice.

I still like him better than Tito Ruffo.

I think it is hardly fair to mention, as I did at the beginning of this piece, that I worked in the produce department of a Safeway store and a young lady approached me with a sensational statement — and just let it go at that. And instead I just tell a rather tame story about a collector who fumbled the ball.

So I will tell the story, after having mentioned just enough of it to titillate and perhaps exasperate you.

So there I was, about eighteen years old, I think, working in the Safeway store mostly on Saturdays. We worked twelve hours and got paid 30 cents an hour. We got paid at the end of the shift, 9 p.m., in cash, \$3.50. What, you say, 12 times 30 is \$3.60, not \$3.50. You are absolutely correct, but \$3.50 is what we received for twelve hours of work at thirty cents an hour. One of the other fellows, Eddie by name, said he considered that he worked the first ten hours for thirty cents an hour and the last two at twenty-five cents an hour. That's the way Eddie consoled himself.

It was still a fairly large amount of money for the times, when one realizes that stew meat was ten cents a pound and cabbage was one cent a pound and watermelon was a half cent a pound and canned soup was seven cents a tin. A little later, when I was almost old enough — legally — to go to bars, I used to go to a place called The Old Waldorf. It was impossible for two people to spend a dollar there in one evening. I would take a young lady there and we would drink a few 26-ounce glasses of beer at five cents a glass, and eat thick ham or beef sandwiches at five cents each. How in the world could anyone spend a dollar in that place?

Today, with my capacity, I could spend a dollar there.

Well, as I said, I was one fine Saturday afternoon dumping potatoes into the potato bins. In one bin they

were ten pounds for nineteen cents and in the adjacent bin, ten pounds for twenty-five cents. I filled them both from the same sacks.

I spilled a dozen potatoes on the floor. As I was down on my knees, picking them up, I noticed a pair of legs with a skirt above them approaching me down the aisle. She got right up to me and stopped. I squeezed to one side to let her pass. But she stood right there and bellowed, "You son of a bitch!" Startled, I stood up and looked into an angry female face. She was a girl I knew.

"You son of a bitch!" she bellowed again. "You god damned son of a bitch!" I have not since heard a voice that sounded so loud.

I stood there staring at her, appalled, my body in the clutches of a sort of paralysis.

Again that mouth writhed and again those terrible words roared out: "You god damned son of a bitch!" And then, even louder, it seemed: "I let you fuck me, you son of a bitch, and now you won't marry me."

I stood there, my benumbed mind feebly sending out a prayer: "Oh, God, I wish I'd never fucked her. Oh God" — I suddenly believed in God again — "I wish I could go back somehow and undo this. Oh, God, I wish I'd never touched her." With all my heart and soul I wished this.

Mechanically, I put the potatoes into the bins. My paralysis began to wear off a little. I saw the manager, about forty feet away, his head frozen in the air over the cash register. There, in various aisles, stood customers, also frozen, staring our way with eyes like saucers.

The young lady kept bellowing. I turned back to her. She seemed to be staring at my left ear. I edged slightly to the right. Her eyes did not follow me. I edged right out of there, over toward the cash register.

As I did, I realized that God had answered my prayers. I had not screwed this young lady. I had traveled through time, by God. I was now on an alternate time track. What other fan can make that statement?

I got to the cash register and turned to look at the storm center. She stood there, still accusing the opposite wall of seduction with the promise of marriage. After a time, she went out, muttering.

She lived about a block from my house, and I passed her place each day on my way to school and work. She was often sitting on her porch steps and would call out to me to come talk to her. I was usually in a hurry, because in those days I never allowed enough travel time to go anyplace, and I never stopped. Well, one day, I stopped. She was sitting there, apparently not wearing panties, with her legs spread a little,

and this may have affected my decision to stop.

But after I talked to her a while I decided against seduction of this particular maiden. She seemed sort of dim-witted. One might say moronic. I have almost chosen girls of better than average intelligence, or maybe I just think I have. Maybe women can assume an attractive coloration of intelligence when they wish to lure a man. Maybe that's one way nature provides for the perpetuation of the species.

Anyhow, she didn't appeal to me sexually.

So I didn't screw her. On this time track.

I learned later that one of the clerks in the market across the street had done the seducing and she'd been over there hollering at him, too. The only thing I never did get straightened out was the time element. Had she come over to Safeway first, to tune up on me, and then gone to Ralph's Market to shout at the real culprit? Or, had she bellowed at him first and then come over to taper off on me?

You can well believe that I got kidded without mercy over this bit of my love life for many years afterwards in that Safeway store.

Some years later — 1940? — I met a fellow on the street. He was in Army uniform. He knew me; he greeted me by name.

He had obviously been drafted only recently; his hair was too short and he showed signs of recent sunburn.

But I couldn't place him. He looked half familiar, though.

He spoke of people I knew. I still couldn't place him. Of course, even your best friend looks freaky when he's newly inducted.

Then he said the right words.

"Hey, Burb, you still fucking halfwit girls?"

And then I knew him.

He was Eddie, the Safeway clerk.

— Charles Burbee

(Reprinted from *Esdacyos* No. 22, August 1973, edited by Ed Cox)

It's been my custom, when reprinting one of Charlie's previously uncollected articles, to send copies to Linda, Ed and John, his children, to obtain their approval and to garner any comments and/or observations they may have. Here's what they had to say about "The Cool Collector":

LINDA MARKSTROM

Reading "The Cool Collector" certainly brings back many memories of my dad. He was such a story teller with such a great memory. I was always amazed at his ability to remember events and the exact dates of the happenings. Now I wonder if he *really* remembered those dates so precisely or if he just was a very convincing story teller. It was probably a little of both.

I can remember our occasional Saturday trips to second-hand stores (today these are called antique and collectible stores). On those trips he always talked to me as if I was his equal and I heard many stories about his youth — always age-appropriate, of course. Now I wish I had listened more carefully and asked a few more questions.

I guess I wouldn't have remembered my dad's answers if I had asked the questions when I was young. It would be nice to talk to him now because there are things I wish I would have asked but never did — but I guess we all have regrets after it's too late.

ED BURBEE:

Thanks for sending me a copy of my father's article,

"The Cool Collector." I had never read it before now, although in my youth I had heard my father tell shortened versions of the article's two episodes. The article refreshed my faded memory and brought me delight.

As well, I see that these little episodes carry that whimsical note which gives them lasting charm. Your readers will surely enjoy them also for their contrast. On the one hand, my father unwittingly triumphs over the too-smart collector and in the process establishes his own generous character, while on the other hand he find himself exposed to the neighborhood as the cockhound now facing the woman he supposedly lied to for sex.

Notice, by the way, the contemporary aspect of the sexual encounter. Nowadays, people young and old voluntarily appear on national television shows to confess their sexual betrayals. These people shamelessly seek public notoriety. My father met notoriety, too, yet as he points out his innocence here made no real difference. He still lived indefinitely with the badge of bedding dimwitted females. At least posterity knows his side, and we can chuckle along with him as we learn it.

JOHN BURBEE:

"The Cool Collector" was fun to read because it sounds like my father talking. Which means I did not appreciate his writing nearly as much then as I do now. And how many times did he say, "Everything happened in the '30s?" A million times, give or take a few hundred thousand.



CHRIS PRIEST

It was an epic read: the last eight issues of *Trap Door*, covering the last eight years of fandom, taken in more or less a single shot. I decided the only way to go about it was to treat it as a long novel, moving from one issue to the next, sometimes seamlessly, reading the LoCs within a few minutes of reading the material on which they were commenting. Even so, I still found I experienced a familiar effect, known all the years I've been reading fanzines, that other people always seem to have noticed things I've missed. Particularly the artwork: when people comment on something and I look back at it, I wonder how I could have missed the same point. Well, here's to differences, but it usually leaves me with a vaguely unsatisfactory feeling about myself, that I haven't been paying close enough attention.

I can't possibly comment on all eight issues, much as they provoked my interest, amusement and mental response at the time I was reading them. The best reason is, of course, that what seemed a hot topic back in, say, 1996 has been played out as far as everyone else is concerned, even though it might feel to me, now, as if it's something I want to reply to. If you want an example of this, take Greg Benford's "We Are Everywhere," back in *Trap Door* No. 12 (1993). Although Rob Hansen wrote an effectively negative LoC about this in the following issue, I still felt Rob hadn't said quite enough. I would have joined in with him. I so disagree with sentiments like the ones Greg was expressing! But here we are, it's the middle of 2000, seven years on, and I don't suppose even Greg can remember what the article was about. No one else can—can you? {Sure, that's the one about Greg's

involvement with SDI, the anti-missile defense system, via his employment under Edward Teller at the Livermore lab.} But to me it's all still fresh and pretty damned contentious. Also, in this catch-up reading you get a blurring effect: after a while the individual issues of the zine run into each other in your memory, the original articles becoming confused with the comments on them that followed.

What comes across to me in summary, after these eight concentrated years, is actually a sense of sadness. *Trap Door* felt to me like a chronicle of the passing years, recording the advance of increasing age, the encroachment of diseases, the striking of death. Almost every issue recorded the unwanted death of yet another friend, or the news of the onset of some terrible degenerative malady: aneurysm, alcoholism, cancer, Alzheimer's, and so on. I couldn't help noticing that some of your regular correspondents, who appear in the latest issues, have also passed away in the intervening months. So sadness prevails in *Trap Door*, but if you won't take it as a contradiction I think the kind of sadness you record is a positive thing. Sadness is mourning, missing, remembering. We are sad from a position of survival and hope. Also a distinct element of *schadenfreude*! Sadness is not at all the same thing as misery, or depression, or wretchedness. {Exactly, which is why I took such exception to this being referred to as an "obitzone."}

I've come to the conclusion, vast and unoriginal, that there is no consolation in death. You can find odd comfort in many terrible events, see a funny side to some otherwise appalling disease, notice a singular irony about an accident. But death leaves you without any of those.

Even the death of an enemy leaves you feeling a bit sorry. In the last three or four years, in addition to hearing about the deaths of many people I've known I have lost five close personal friends. Once the shock has worn off, and the sense of distress, you're left only with the spaces those people once occupied. Nothing and no one can replace them. You are left bereft, your life less enjoyable than before. My father, who is 92 this year and is still fully compos mentis, frequently says that the worst thing about living to a great age is that you have no friends left alive. All he has now is us, his family, and we are all independent adults.

On a more cheerful note, there was so much to enjoy in *Trap Door*. I'm grateful I've caught up at last. I find I still like trip reports best, for some reason. Maybe it's the old armchair-traveler syndrome, in which you feel like you've gone on a visit without the troubles that go with visiting. Carol Carr's articles were much appreciated here. I like Gary Deindorfer's stuff, Dave Langford's, yours...almost all of it. (32 Elphinstone Road, Hastings, E. Sussex TN34 2EQ, U.K.)

BOB LEMAN

Many thanks for *Trap Door* No. 19, a very classy production, and pretty much my idea of what a fanzine ought to be. Of course at this point I see very few of them, so I can't make comparisons with the current crop, but stacked against the good stuff down through the years *Trap Door* rates very high indeed.

Your note {enclosed with the issue, which was sent well after publication} was the first I'd heard of Walt Willis's death. He was a giant whose passing leaves a gap that can't be filled. I have no doubt that you and those other fans who have remained close to him will memorialize him properly. This is the time for comprehensive memoirs, for getting into the record all possible history of the man, his works, and his time in the fandom he in large part created. I never met him. We exchanged fanzines and corresponded from time to time, and I had one piece in *Hyphen*. That was all. But I admired him enormously—his character as much as his talent.

This issue is a real feast. I find more familiar names than I'd have expected, names that go back close to fifty years for me and are a great pleasure to encounter again. But the greatest pleasure in the issue was Dave Langford's *jeu d'esprit* growing out of the Beachcomber collection. This is very superior stuff, laughing-out-loud funny, highly inventive, and ingenious and surprising in compressing its vignettes into the "templates." The first and last of the "Charles Randolph Harris" quatrains are really most remarkably clever. And the same can be said of Dan Steffan's title illustration, a pastiche that might fool Gorey himself if it weren't for the "blog" label on

the cauldron and the nametags on the familiar Gorey characters. Outstanding.

A piece like that, simply by existing, stands forth as a challenge to the rank and file to have a whack at apéry. I don't know Chuch Harris (I regret to say) but that's the name in Dave's template, and I take it that players of the game may use it without being presumptuous—I don't suppose Dave actually knows Mrs. Ravoon. I take the liberty of ascribing to my imagined Harris a taste for practicing the culinary arts:

Most epicures hold, when they're being judicious,
That meals at Chez Charley are far from delicious.
The chef who contrives that the taste of the fare is
So strongly repellent is... Charles Randolph Harris.

And a couple of Ravoons:

The old mausoleum was fetid and cold,
And its coffins were slimy with fungi and mold.
I drew open a lid; in the fungal cocoon
Lay the doom of the city—'twas MRS. RAVOON!

The gunslinger fled down the dusty main street,
Pursued by the lawman he'd come there to meet,
And shoot it out with, on the street, at high noon
—For they'd sent the grim deputy, MRS. RAVOON.

Weak though the above efforts may be, this kind of thing is great fun to fool around with, and enormously amusing to read when it's done by someone with Langford's talent. But there's not much of it around nowadays to inspire the amateur; the tradition of light verse in this country appears to be moribund or dead. I take this to be a consequence of the abandonment of rhyme and meter and other formal conventions in poetry. The good light verse uses polished techniques, complex forms, and recondite vocabularies to convey trivial and humorous matter, so that we find impeccable rondeaus and villanelles about—for example—football crowds and the pain of hangovers. The contrast is central to the humor, and some acquaintance with prosody tends to increase the reader's enjoyment, and is of course vital to the versifier. I don't think the young are taught anything about prosody these days. I don't think that they are even exposed to much poetry, except perhaps to the likes of Maya Angelou. It is not inconceivable, I suppose, that Maya Angelou could inspire emulation by a would-be poet, but it is clear that nothing resembling humor could possibly result. We may still be breeding poets but not, I fear, humorous poets. Of course many people will have it that poetry is necessarily serious, and that humorous verse is merely that, and does not deserve the name poetry. They may be right. Verse can be written without a trace of poetical talent if one knows the rules—see some examples above.

I ought to add that Dave's footnotes are very fine and funny. "As any fule kno" strikes me as an expression that probably has currency in fandom of a kind with the neologisms and canonized typos and naturalized misspellings that have served down the years as shibboleths separating insiders from outsiders. If that's right, I'm an outsider here, and I'd be glad to learn whence it came. (2615 Broad Street, Bethel Park, PA 15102)

WM. BREIDING

Dan Steffan's cover really got to me. I feel as though I'm hardwired into that cover of *Astounding* that the Mark 7 is holding. I remember it so vividly, yet I wouldn't be born for another three years. Somewhere in the '70s I must have run across it and been much affected by it. Thanks to Dan for letting me revisit with it. (CoA: 150 Grattan #4, San Francisco, CA 94117)

BOB SMITH

There is probably a technical or artistic name for Dan Steffan's linked cover illustration, but it's most striking—and after the initial look conjures up all kinds of memories and thoughts, depending upon your age and time around science fiction, I imagine. The eternal story of Robot versus Human (Master), and on pulling down the October 1953 *Astounding* one realizes immediately that the Freas is not *quite* Freas. The robot has come a long way in our art and imagination, but... not in reality, eh? One can appreciate this great cover on many levels.

I'm not sure I have been back in fandom long enough to go through a cycle, but I know what you mean. I probably kid myself that fandom must take its place in the priority of things; but I am also wondering how I would get along without it in these twilight years of retirement. I found the sentiments expressed in the first half of your editorial very similar to mine, in this second incarnation.

One of the sinister aspects of early television that we probably didn't holler about would be the enormous number of documentaries, etc., on wildlife for our armchair viewing by the late 20th century that might substitute for the real thing at our local zoo. Lyn and I are just as guilty as the next person when asked, "When did you last visit the zoo?" We probably can't remember, and it was usually when the family was much younger. New arrivals or genetic wonders may tempt us, but something else gets in the way. Usually I am watching TV with a hefty member of the feline species on my lap and murmur something about look at your big cousin, ain't it gorgeous. However, in that inimitable Lichtman manner you brought parts of the San Diego Zoo alive for us. {If asked the same question you pose above, I'd have to confess that before San Diego my last zoo visit was probably in the mid-'80s in San Francisco when my

four sons were — at least some of them — still pretty young.}

After reading Ron Bennett's hilarious experiences in the world of comics, I am inclined to suggest the title should've been "Tijuana Brass," because those hucksters certainly had plenty of it! I wouldn't consider myself to be a comics fan, but I did fall for the plastic bag trick once. A small bookshop opened in my town, and sitting enticingly in the window in a plastic sheaf was a colorful DC *Flash Gordon* for eight dollars. I grabbed what turned out to be parts 1, 2 and 3 of a nine-part "maxi-series" and never did find the rest. I still have 'em, the artwork is great, and I read somewhere that in fact nine parts was *too* long.

Before reading the fascinating story of Lucy Huntzinger's conversion to the great god Cyber, I went to visit the local bookshop's computer shelves to discover just what the hell HTML is. In fact, the opening paragraphs of *The Idiot's Guide to HTML* were only slightly more goshwow than Lucy's prose. You may rest assured I didn't buy the book. Since returning from Gafialand I have noticed more and more this almost defiant attitude towards those unfortunates who are not intertwined in the Internet. The traditional fannish discipline of "if you don't respond, you don't get my fanzine," now becomes "if you are not on the Net, then tough cookies, kiddo — my fanzine will no longer be winging your way." This is not sour grapes, I hasten to add; there are well-meaning friends who send me goodies from the Net, and this is the true fannish spirit. Since it seems to be the current catch-cry, I assume Lucy "has a life" well away from this modern version of *The Caves of Steel*? I find her final paragraph almost frightening....

Wm. Breiding's observations of life, whether wildlife in the countryside or wildlife in a trendy cafe, are wickedly acute and deliciously readable. I am reminded (slightly) of Jack Nicholson's naughtiness in the cafe scene in *Easy Rider* and — strangely enough — of Saki's dissection of people in strange situations. Most enjoyable.

"The Creature" was an enjoyable tale, indeed, but one senses Burbee's tongue firmly in cheek. Lovecraftian — or perhaps Merritt? — and who is he having a shot at, do you think?

I remember reading Jim Harmon's column in *Peon*, in Japan in the early '50s, and it's nice to renew acquaintance with his talent. I find myself agreeing almost completely with his views of movies that should be considered, and really pleasantly surprised to see mention of Tom Mix and Gene Autry (how 'bout Buck Jones?). Interesting piece of related trivia: Fred Astaire's daughter (who now lives in Ireland) was interviewed on our

national FM station recently, and apparently her dad preferred some of the other well-known dance partners to Ginger Rogers. (Ghod, all those luvly legs!)

Some years ago I read one of Kenneth Rexroth's essays where he referred in passing to Dave Van Ronk, and I automatically looked him up. I'm ashamed to add that's as far as I went. There was no mention of the Bosses' Artists, not surprisingly, I suppose, so this side of his work is an enjoyable treat. Pete Seeger's career is well documented, of course, and he quit the Party circa 1951. Boyd made this aspect of Van Ronk enlightening reading.

Hmmm, well, abnormal psychology can also include feeble-mindedness and genius, so which one was Gary back in the 1970s? If one is going to bare one's soul of twenty-six odd years ago in a late 1990s fanzine, one must be prepared for more brickbats than bouquets. I don't think it is an "exercise in abnormal whatsit" at all: merely a normal but crazy mixed-up kid, heavily influenced by the discovery of all manner of eastern mysticism with frequent dips into a thesaurus. Allowing for time and place and age and degree of sincerity, Gary (Dawson?) could've said it in a more simplistic manner—and I can think of a few Zen masters who would have whacked him unmercilessly. And I wouldn't be getting a headache now.

Arthur Hlavaty: If you want a more blunt description of what Hubbard and Parsons got up to, read Chapter 7 of Russell Miller's book, *Bald-Faced Messiah*. {Many stories about Hubbard and Parsons are also related in *Sex and Rockets: The Occult World of Jack Parsons* by "John Carter" ("the pseudonym of an individual who wishes to remain anonymous," the rear flyleaf says) published late last year by Feral House and which I recommend to anyone interested in these subjects.} From pocket calculators and pocket computers, we can go to a device much more useful to me, as a diabetic, the latest blood sugar monitor, which shows and stores ten readings in its memory. Or, if you prefer, the tiny Dictionary and Thesaurus. Both handy electronic devices. The Internet can go jump. (37 St. James Rd., Bradbury NSW 2560, Australia)

GARY DEINDORFER

The Steffan cover is wonderfully intricate, a technical tour de force. And yet it presents a warmly emotional situation—the elderly woman's hands hold the adorable robot; clearly she cares a lot about him. And the robot in turn holds the October 1953 issue of *aSF*, an issue I once owned—I recognized that cover immediately. An ET-like robot, a loving old woman, that instant nostalgia cover of *Astounding*—it makes for a great outside for the new *Trap Door*.

In your "Doorway," you tell us all the many tactile memories you have of various fans. I envy you that; I don't have anything like that. Clearly you have a gift for

friendship that I don't have except with you, Steve Stiles and a handful of other people. You are also blessed that you have, say, Terry Carr's collection of shading plates, stylii, etc. Thus does our fragile "home," fandom, knit itself together.

I have a theory why you obviously love good food and write about it so well. It's because you are one of those lucky people who can eat as much as he wants without putting on weight. If I were to write, say, about an excursion to Canter's, it would seem swinish considering that I am about 5'9" and weigh in at 235 pounds. But you, being tall and thin, can get away with it.

Isn't Ron Bennett phenomenally prolific these days? Aside from his appearances in *Trap Door*, there are his articles in *Mimosa* and who knows what other fanzines. Learning more about fans and fandom, this is the first time I realized that Ron makes his living as a comics dealer. Clearly, it isn't exactly a picnic being a comics dealer of international proportions. As for those issues of *Classics Illustrated*, more than one fellow student I know used them to write book reports; these days, it's the video of the book, if said book happens to have been made into a movie. At any rate, Ron is a wonderful writer, as well as being seemingly immortal, since his writing powers don't seem to have been diminished at all since the late '50s when I was a timid neo reading his work and marveling at its wit and deftness of construction. And I didn't realize old comic books were "shaved" to enhance their appearance: something else I learned this issue, and it makes for a funny Craig Smith heading illo, what with the moronic-looking skinhead kid "shaving" his copy of *Action Comics*.

Lucy Huntzinger and Gary Hubbard are linked in my mind. Mainly because I think Lucy is fandom's most underrated female writer and Gary is fandom's most underrated male writer. But Lucy says she doesn't care about traditional accolades, such as LoCs to paper fanzines. She writes to be read. I wish I were on the Net sometimes, to be able to read Lucy's writings. If I get hooked up, Lucy's address will be the first one I will access. She is such a fiercely honest and feisty writer, after all. And Dan Steffan's heading illo for her article is really beautiful.

Wm. Breiding's work always grabs me, too. Wm. is becoming not merely a good writer, but a masterful one. He is an acute observer of human behavior, and his honesty slices right through the everyday bullshit of ordinary life. The Tall Skinny Blonde will find herself a place in my mind for a long time. I love what Wm.'s paramour Peggi says: "I got my own scene going on."

I believe that the kudo for best heading illo of the issue has to go to Dan Steffan for his illo to Dave Langford's piece. And Dave's article features his own parti-

cular and peculiar brand of erudite silliness to good effect. Some of these verses are funny indeed. I am amazed that Dave has troubled to go to all those sources for these, and then troubled to write verses of his own. He indeed does have a "way with words."

Richard Brandt's piece is rather slight: a vignette, a lagniappe. But what makes it fascinating to me is this: I watch local Philadelphia area news and sometimes wonder what the reporters are like on their off-time. Well, Richard's article provides a glimpse behind the scenes of news people and what they're really like, something I would have no way of knowing about merely by watching the local TV news.

Charles Burbee's piece is completely unlike anything I have read by him before. It is more avowedly "literary" than what I have found from reading his classic, immortal humor pieces. I suspect it was intended for professional publication. At any rate, this Faulknerian outing is an intriguing glimpse into another aspect of his subtle and kaleidoscopic mind. And the Stiles heading illo is an instant classic.

Fun to read an offering from the truly legendary Jim Harmon. Am I to presume that from now on Jim will have a "Harmony" in every issue of *Trap Door*? I hope so.

Always good to see something from the also legendary Boyd Raeburn. As far as I can tell, this is the first Boyd contribution to a genzine in ages. I don't like folk music, for the most part can't stand it, but from what I have heard on the radio of Dave Van Ronk I liked him more than most practitioners of the genre.

As I told you on the phone, I am not miffed by Dan Steffan's heading illo for my psychedelic article. It shows pretty much where my head was at in those days. As for the article, I suspect most of your readers will find it pretentious and bombastic—that is, if they understand it at all.

Reading "The Ether Still Vibrates" is like sitting in the living room of a gathering of a large, congenial family, not merely eyetracking a string of LoCs.

I wish Pascal Thomas and his wife the best of luck with their little girl. Heartwarming to read about that.

Gregg Calkins' Rotsler reminiscence is most amusing. Apparently Bill not only photographed these gorgeous girls, but got to go to bed with them, too, on occasion. What a charmed life Bill must've led! (*Trent Center West, 465 Greenwood Ave. #1104, Trenton, NJ 08609-2131*)

DAVE LANGFORD

Dan Steffan is a genius: his Gorey-pastiche heading is one of the most delightful illustrations ever provided to perk up the drab medium of a Langford fan article. More, more! (Oh dear, that means I'll have to write something.)

A footnote to my article. When going on about

"template verses" I never got around to linking in the celebrated Burma Shave signs, not being able to think of an SF/fan connection. But I've been reading John Sladek's stories in the wake of his death, and noticed (probably for the first time) the significance of three lines seen through a bus window in "The Interstate": "Beards grow faster / In the grave / Take it with you —" (94 *London Road, Reading, Berks. RG1 5AU, U.K.*)

RICHARD DENGROVE

I remember the cover from Dan Steffan's cover on some '50s *Astounding* — and from a later commentary, that the robot is out of date: it is heavy metal when, with scientific advances, any self-respecting robot would be light plastic. Of course, that commentary is fifteen or twenty years old itself, and plastic must have been replaced with something else by now.

While you would like to get away from the subject of death, at our age it dogs us. We can no longer, like in our youth, presume we are immortal. My friends' parents are dead or in failing health even though, mysteriously, mine in their eighties are in fine health. Also, with the aging of fandom, more and more fans are dying. People I know keep getting cancer. When others' fate is not smeared in our face, our own is. Arthritis is creeping up. I have to watch out for diabetes. In short, things are so depressing we should ignore them and get on with our lives. {Yes, but of course not to the point of ignoring our own health.}

About Ron Bennett's trip to the USA, at least he had a good time even if it turned out the *Classics Illustrated* comics he turned up his nose at are now the rage and the Batman and Superman comics he was on the lookout for are not. Having a good time is not 100% predictable. Our moods intervene. Our expectations are crushed. Our flights are late. It rains, snows and sleets. People prove unpleasant. We try to have a good time and guarantee we won't. So lady luck was with Ron in San Diego and Tijuana. However, no matter how unpredictable having a good time is, it's more predictable than the comic book market.

Between you and Lucy Huntzinger, there is middle ground: namely, we are being forced into the Internet whether we like it or not. It is becoming The Way commerce is conducted, people are hired, goods are sold, and people communicate with others. More and more it is a part of our daily lives. Still, you may be able to avoid it—for now. My father does; he has me do his searches. On the other hand, will you be able to hold out in 2020? In 2050—if we should live so long?

Not only should William Breiding have known all along he had his own scene, he should also have known that being home is not worrying about being home. Easier said than done. This wisdom comes from the king

of irrational worry. While I don't worry about being home, I worry about having made faux pas, even unapparent ones—in fact, especially unapparent ones.

Charles Burbee's tale gives subtle hints of great terror and horror. He would never make it in this world of Stephen King, i.e., the era of gross-out.

I have to ask Jim Harmon: was Buster Crabbe as Flash Gordon really that great? It was fun as a kid but, as an adult, I wasn't quite as impressed. How do you get out of a dungeon in that series? You whistle to the guard. He comes running and you bop him on the head. Works every time. Buster Crabbe's Flash Gordon does show imagination aplenty but too many incidents, like the ones with the guard, mar it.

I have a comment for Arthur Hlavaty: Colin Wilson was not the only one who reported how Jack Parsons was involved in something unsavory and how L. Ron Hubbard was sent by Naval Intelligence to investigate. Frances King told the same story. I don't blame either for not wanting to raise the animus of Scientology. However, having given Hubbard equal time, Frances went on to tell another story: how Hubbard ran away with Parsons' fiancée in the yacht he co-owned with Parsons. {A subject also covered thoroughly in the "John Carter" book I mentioned earlier in this lettercol.} (2651 Arlington Drive #302, Alexandria, VA 22306)

MILT STEVENS

To begin my comments on *Trap Door* No. 19 in a completely backwards manner, I really liked the back cover by Brad Foster. The art in *Trap Door* is always quite good, and the artists have come up with many clever variations on the trapdoor theme, but the Foster back cover happened to grab my attention particularly.

Your editorial started me thinking about how much fanac I could stand as an upper limit. Unlike you, there has never been a time during the last forty years when I thought I was entirely out of fandom, although there have been periods when I wasn't doing a darned thing. My activity has also varied between club activity, convention activity, and fanzine activity. I've never reached the point of feeling maxed out on fanzine activity by itself. (Of course, I've never tried to be an omniapan or publish hundred-page issues of genzines either.) There have been times when the club and convention activity forced the fanzine activity into abeyance for awhile. The year prior to LACon II (where I was co-chairman), I did feel I had reached my limits and was possibly operating beyond them. I did quit doing the club and convention stuff after that. My fanzine activity has been sporadic since then, but pretty regular since I semi-retired last year. I've reached a point in life when I'm unlikely to engage in huge writing or publishing projects in the heat of neoish enthusiasm.

I think that pure sloth will give me adequate protection against the dangers of over-indulgence.

Lucy Huntzinger describes a new form of fanac which seems almost devoid of the most essential element: feedback. I know that people like Emily Dickinson wrote most of her life without showing anyone any of her material. (If I wrote like Emily Dickinson, I wouldn't show anyone any of my material either.) The fact that the eyetrack detector on your Website keeps incrementing would seem rather unsatisfying in the absence of anything else. If I had a Website and it was registering a hundred sets of eyetracks per day, I would figure it was just government operatives looking for terrorists, kiddy pornographers, or tax evaders.

William Breiding describes a situation where having a trendy face might be of consequence. I've never thought about whether my face was trendy or not. People don't automatically scream at the sight of it, and it eliminates what would otherwise be an embarrassing vacancy on the front of my head. Also, I am middle-aged. Middle age has never been hip, cool, or trendy, so I don't have to worry about that crap anymore. I can dare to be stodgy and behind the times. I see nothing wrong with being behind the times, since I'm not all that fond of the current times anyway.

If treed cats get television news coverage in El Paso, things must be slower there than I imagined. Since nobody has ever reported seeing the skeleton of a cat in a tree, I don't know why anyone would worry about the situation at all. However, I do recall seeing a police report about a man who met with unfortunate results by climbing a power pole. He accidentally killed himself while attempting to commit suicide. If his luck was always that bad, I can sort of understand why he was making the attempt. The man had climbed a power pole and was threatening to jump. His family and even a priest were present and trying to talk him out of it. It appeared they were succeeding when he lost his balance and hit the 220 line. The shock might not have killed him. The fall might not have killed him. Getting impaled on that climbing rung—that definitely killed him. (6325 Keystone St., Simi Valley, CA 93063)

FRED SMITH

Many good things in this issue of *Trap Door* and it's good to find another couple of old-timers who are still alive, namely Jim Harmon and Boyd Raeburn. Boyd's *A Bas* was a favorite zine and of course Jim is famous for opening hotel room doors as well as for his column in *Peon*. Regarding movies, by an odd coincidence local TV critic Barry Normal has just published a new edition of his 100 best films to which he's added *The Unforgiven*! Tastes differ, certainly, but it's surely got to be better

than any Gene Autry or antediluvian Tom Mix film.

Interesting to see your (and Ron Bennett's) account of your visit(s) to San Diego since I went there back in '91. In our case we flew to San Francisco by Northwest Airlines, spent a few days there, then hired a car (courtesy of Alamo) and drove up to Lake Tahoe. We spent the night there, visited one of the casinos briefly, and drove the next day through the Sierras to Minden, Nevada. The main purpose of this was to visit the gliding site at the Minden airport since I'm a glider pilot. (I had previously collected a temporary U.S. pilot's license at the F.A.A. offices in S.F.) Anyway, after I'd flown one of their sailplanes to 13,000 feet over the Sierras (ahem!), we drove back down to Monterey, stopping to view the spot on Cannery Row where the bust of John Steinbeck used to be before it was stolen, then took the Pacific Coast highway over Big Sur down to San Luis Obispo. Now *that* was scary and, boy, was I glad to get down to sea level. We stopped there and in Santa Barbara before carrying on to San Diego, skipping Los Angeles. Not being zoo people, we went to the Aerospace Museum in Balboa Park instead and, after having been told by friends to "be sure to visit Tijuana," we took a bus into town (we'd given Alamo their car back) and then took the electric train that runs from the center of the city (along the street yet) down to the border and we then *walked* across into Tijuana. (Note for Ron: it's *not* a trolley that takes you to the border, it's a *train*!) And, by the way, I considered Tijuana to be a dump. It's filthy dirty—a shock after the cleanliness of California—and full of ragged beggars. A postscript to the trip was that a couple of months later I received my proper U.S. pilot's license from the F.A.A. offices located in the Federal Building in Oklahoma City. It was quite a shock when I heard about the bombing of the building later on.

I seem to have taken up most of this letter talking about my trip to your fair state. Notice, no mention of fans: I was in the midst of my long gaffiation so you can imagine how surprised I am to see so many of the old-pharts are still around, like Benford, Busby, Calkins *et al.*

Not, alas, Burbee. I enjoyed "The Creature" very much, although untypical of his style. I would agree with everyone who reckons he was one of the very best writers we had. (15 Mansionhouse Gardens, Glasgow G41 3DP, Scotland)

RON BENNETT

Found your editorial/trip report interesting, as I always do. Yes, I'm fascinated with zoos. I'm fully *au fait* and agree with all of the arguments against them, but nevertheless I like dawdling time away going round the things. And San Diego...why weren't you there during the ten days I spent at the U.S. Grant there? Rank bad

planning on your part. I particularly found your mention of this nut driving the stolen 7-Up truck as only an hour before reading it I'd been watching a TV program about instances of bad driving which included an episode of some fruitcake driving, of all things, a stolen army tank. And coincidentally, through streets in San Diego.

Loved Craig Smith's heading illo to my piece. Yes, mint indeed.

I don't like this term "paper fanzine" which I think possesses an overtone of inferiority. Ha! Only a paper fanzine, eh? I feel the term "fanzine" should refer to exactly what it's been referring to and standing proud for all these years. For the publications which people turn out for the Web, let's have a new term: "cyberzine" or "webzine" or perhaps "netzine."

Lucy Huntzinger's admission that she didn't care about letters of comment when she was editing a fanzine intrigued me. It's a new view to me. I've always been led to believe that faneds thrive on LoCs. I've always tried—yeah, many times without success—to send off what I trust is an interesting letter which might interest, entertain or amuse the fanzine's editor—and maybe even the readers—as a tangible form of thank you for the entertainment afforded me. Nothing wrong with Lucy's point of view, of course—simply, as I say, a new one to me.

If Hamburger Mary's place is as William Breiding described it, I'll definitely have to get there some day. Not, not for the burgers particularly; it's that mirror. It made Bill's countenance look like that of a cowboy? That's the type of mirror I certainly need. "Mirror, mirror, on the wall," I ask the glass on the door of the bathroom cabinet, "who is the fairest of them all?" And the answer comes right back every day, "Not you, Meyer, not you." Hell, I'll even buy a hamburger there if the mirror can work similar miracles for me.

Yes, I remember "Beachcombers" of the *Daily Express* and also the Kettering tapera, *The March of Slime*, with its blog commercials ("Clean your shoes with Blog, brush your teeth with Blog," etc.) but the possibility of a connection between the columnist and the play is news to me. Norman Shorrock was responsible for the production, of course, but the script, as far as I know, was by Stan Nuttall and John Owen. At the Liverpool Eastercon this year, I had a drink with Dave Langford and Norman. Pity I hadn't had *Trap Door* then or I could have brought up the matter. Perhaps Dave did when I wasn't there. This has got me intrigued. I must investigate further.

Interesting "Harmony" column. And when weren't Jim Harmon's columns interesting? "The greatness of the movies lies in the past," writes Jim. On the face of it I'd tend to agree, but isn't that something of a cop-out? Doesn't this eliminate the possibility of great movies

being made in the future? Sad, if so. The trouble with these 100 Best Whatever lists is that they're simply subjective or are compiled by people Who Don't Know. I haven't seen the lists Jim mentions, but similar lists I have seen all too often failed to list foreign language films. Don't films like *The Grand Illusion*, *The Blue Angel*, *The Wages of Fear*, *Rififi*, *Roshomon* or *The Seven Samurai* deserve places on those "100 Best" lists? To say nothing of South American productions. Strangely, for the most part I agree entirely with choices Jim makes over those he picks out from the list.

Wow, Boyd Raeburn! *The Boyd Raeburn*? Wow! Yes, that story about whizzing over to New York to attend the Ellington party has been a part of fannish ethos, legend and history, firmly entrenched in the fannish psyche. Certain in my fannish psyche, along with Boyd's obsession with the ol' TR3. And yes, I fully go along with his symptoms of doubt when someone totes in a guitar and wants to sing folk songs. Would that they were *all* like Dave Van Ronk.

That's ironic, the *{then}* soon to be departed Chuch Harris writing about the recently departed Vinç Clarke. I haven't been on the guided tour Chuch mentions but, yes, I've stood astride that metal bar so that I've been in two hemispheres at the same time. Mind you, people have for years been saying that I'm on a different planet. Road signs other than those which are mandatory are permitted, y'know, usually designating "a place of historical significance" or the name of the river across which you're about to drive. Millions of 'em all over the place, and personally I think the east-west hemisphere signs on the M25 a great idea. Distracting? If you've driven on the M25, you'll know that distractions are a bonus. (36 Harlow Park Crescent, Harrogate, N. Yorks. HGT2 0AW, U.K.)

SID BIRCHBY

The arrival of *Trap Door* No. 19 is as welcome as the flowers in spring. I am most taken with your tally of fanzines and I see that your list is now up to the impressive total of 2,002 for the period 1987-1998, and after various number-crunching exercises I must agree with you: "I think fanzine fandom continues to be in good shape." Having said that, the obvious retort must be: what precisely is its shape—good, bad or indifferent? For all those years, and for that matter going back to the time when that rough beast shambled to the nearest duplicator and said, "to hell with sercon," what exactly has been going on?

First off, let me declare an interest, in a parliamentary sense. I was brought up, sort of, in the great days of magazine SF, when nothing would satisfy the young nerdish lad than a regular diet of space opera. Who can

say how many of them succumbed to the siren lure, maybe even taking a course in science, which in those days was damn near like the better class of SF magazines? Rather than naming names of some very familiar persons who might declare, "I owe it all to my first fanzine!" let's take the case of Roger Penrose, a professor of mathematics at Oxford, a famous cosmologist who with Stephen Hawking invented the physics of black holes and the big bang. When a boy, he discovered the "Penrose staircase," which in due course M. C. Escher turned into a work of art.

Was the youthful Roger an SF fan, or was he maybe a sercon fan? I do not know. In any event, he might as well serve as a role model for all SF fans, whether or not fanzine fans, who have been slandered as sercon. As for myself, was I ever the famous boy-scientist who single-handedly defeated the alien hordes of the planet Mongo? Nah—in my dreams, in my dreams. Alas, those days are gone, and in the words of good old Samuel Goldwyn, we have all passed a lot of water since then. (40 Parrs Wood Ave., Didsbury, Manchester M20 5ND, U.K.)

SUE JONES

Thanks for *Trap Door* No. 19. This is the first fanzine I've ever been sent from America. {Sue wrote in June '99; this situation has since changed.} Ron Bennett's account of his visit to a comics fair combined an entertaining travelogue with lots of insider info about the comics business. I was fascinated by the idea of people trimming bits off old comics to make them look "mint." I prefer old books to be a little less than pristine. It shows that they have been read and used and enjoyed, rather than been left lying in a safe place; that they have been kept close at hand because they have proved to have value, not been kept out of reach in the expectation that they might eventually acquire it.

I appreciate Lucy Huntzinger's point that an electronic zine can sit there patiently, waiting to be found by people who might then come into fandom, while paper zines need to be aimed at their readers. (Although I don't see why printed zines can't find a few public places to sit, too.) While I appreciate her enthusiasm for the new medium, her article didn't make me wish to emulate her. "I rarely get letters or e-mails of comment," she says, which defeats the purpose of fanwriting for me. I write to correspond far more than to be read for my own merit—I want to spark responses and feedback. And if I did get response, wouldn't I find it too swift, too immediate, to encourage me to improve my writing rather than just bash out another reply as soon as possible? Would I have time to think? Worse, would I find the speed of turnaround an inducement not to do other things *besides* write? (That temptation is bad enough with paper

communication.) Until I am in a position to get Internet access myself, I can only imagine what effect it would have on my own writing. Reading "My Sensitive Cyber Face" gave my imagination plenty to work on. {And now?}}

Nice to see Dave Langford's piece on Beachcomber, Widower's adverts and similar amusements. (And a most excellent pseudo-Gorey illustration to go with it.) I'm too new and too ignorant of fannish history to recognize all the allusions, and I haven't heard of most of the people mentioned. But I am acquainted with Widower's Wonderful products as Harry Turner kindly sent me reprints of *Now and Then*, the fanzine he co-produced with Eric Needham. (Flat 5-32/33 Castle Street, Shrewsbury SY1 2BQ, U.K.)

STEVE GREEN

Ron Bennett's amusing memoir of dodgy dealing at the San Diego Comic Convention put me in mind of one bizarre sidebar to the *Spider Man* relaunch in the early 1990s. Fans eagerly bought "bagged" copies of #1 (like Laura Palmer, wrapped in plastic) in the hundreds of thousands, refusing to unseal them for fear of reducing their value. In fact, the *contrary* was true: Marvel had produced far fewer unbagged copies, making them the rarer item: merely by tearing open the wrapper, you increased the value. Me, I buy comics for enjoyment not as an investment (which is why I tend to stick with the undergrounds and self-published material, where quality is not automatically subsumed by the corporate sausage machine).

Ann is a regular visitor to, and great fan of, Lucy Huntzinger's Website, but I'll confess to preferring paper fanzines to reading on-screen. Of course, there is a simple compromise: I can just print Lucy's essays off and read them at my convenience. That way, we both get what we want.

The Burbee tale was an intriguing discovery, and I can think of no better venue for its belated publication. Ditto, Chuch Harris' touching remembrance for Vinç Clarke, itself recolored by later events (in a sense, the article stands as a tribute to them both). It is in work such as this that fanzines rise above the mere obituary: we honor these members of our fannish family not so much for what they did as for who they were and what they meant to us. (33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull B92 7LQ, U.K.)

DEREK PICKLES

I enjoyed Ron Bennett's tour report and his adventures with comics. I got U.S. comics from my father when he was with the RAF in Canada from 1943 to late 1945. The bases were awash with comics, some bought by the airmen and others given by the very generous towns-

people. He used to send me large parcels of assorted comics, Superman and Batman, Captain America and Captain Marvel—which I preferred at the time, Shazam and all that. Trouble was that because the parcels were random collections, I seldom saw more than a couple of consecutive issues at any one time, which was extremely frustrating as I either came in at the middle of a story or missed the ending.

Reference my letter: I mention the real Alamo not being as it was in the film. I have since discovered that this was also a problem for John Wayne and his filmmakers so they moved a few miles down the road and built a replica Alamo and village and shot the film there. The article said it was now a tourist attraction run by the local native Americans.

The story of the man having to choose the correct door, from two side by side in the arena wall, ended with him opening both doors and pulling them towards himself until the edges met before him as he stood with his back to the wall. From one doorway the beautiful princess stumbled out on to the sand shading her eyes as she emerged from the chamber into the sunlight, whilst the tiger emerged from the other doorway.

There are comments about *Trap Door* becoming a glorified *Despatches* magazine. Life is a continuum; as some die others are born, in fandom as in life. Death isn't fair, even with modern medicines and treatments; life isn't fair, and old age doesn't guarantee peace or maintenance of faculties. From sad experience I would give anyone just one piece of advice – "Do it now." Go places, do things, don't defer things. I did and wish I hadn't. At 35 I was at teacher training college qualifying in P.E. for under 11s. At 42 I was walking with a stick because of arthritis in my spine and hips. From there I went downhill—occasional plateaus but a general decline. Now I set off alarms at airports because of my metal hip and knee joints. (44 Rooley Lane, Bankfoot, Bradford, West Yorkshire BD5 8LX, U.K.)

LLOYD PENNEY

First of all, Happy 15th Annish on the arrival of *Trap Door* No. 19.

I have a few memories of Tijuana myself. On our way to the Los Angeles Worldcon in 1984, we spent a week in San Diego, plus half a day in Tijuana. Yvonne haggled for cheap serapes in Spanish, we bought Kahlua and assorted liqueurs, and made a lunch stop at the Hotel Caesar. I do remember that the lunch at the Hotel Caesar was just fine; it was lunch at the Denny's in San Diego that sent me to my sickbed.

"Trendy" is overrated and overappreciated. I've never been trendy, except when popular fashion changed to match my own. I've never tried to be trendy, either,

and I'm probably happier and definitely richer for it.

Dave Langford's article raised the usual grin. A verse I've already sent to Dave, with no response, and it's just as well... based on the British legend of Lillian Pinkham, snake oil salesman, yet purveyor of wonderful elixirs under the nickname of...

Lily the Pink
Raised a stink
A fit of jealousy
In a lie she's caught
For she was not
The inventor of Q.R.V.

Pascal Thomas can be glad he lives in France, and not Quebec. Both have un Office de la langue de Francais, but the one in Quebec is militantly crazy. With the backing of the provincial government, l'Office is shutting down Websites that are English only, and are trying to legislate the use by golfers of recently-minted French language terms. These are translations of golf terms such as wedge, tee, driver, putter, divot, duckhook, slice, caddy and others. You can tell the separatists are still in power there; Quebec is the only jurisdiction actively campaigning to become a banana republic.

Good to see Andi Shechter's name again. I do miss her smiling face... I last saw her at the Bouchercon in Toronto in 1992. Also, welcome to Sherry Thompson. New folks should always be welcomed... it wasn't always so. (1706-24 Eva Rd., Etobicoke, Ont. M9C 2B2, Canada)

MICHAEL WAITE

Ron Bennett's escapades at the San Diego Comic Convention were an educational experience for this non-comic book reader. The exception to that generalization was *Classics Illustrated*, which I read during my high school years. We didn't have access to *Cliff Notes* back in the '50s but we did have *Classics Illustrated*. I made it though my high school "lit" classes thanks to its editions of "Julius Caesar," "Hamlet" and "Macbeth." I hope Mrs. Hicks and Mrs. Beckwith don't read fanzines (back in the '50s we addressed teachers as Mrs. and Mr.). Ron, you should have definitely loaded up on *Classics Illustrated*—they are a hot item nowadays, some issues selling for several hundred dollars. Oh well, there is always next time. "Tijuana Taxi" is loaded with anecdotes that had me laughing out loud.

I don't share Lucy Huntzinger's "unconditional" enthusiasm for on-line fandom. I did check out Lucy's Web pages and my initial impression is positive but... Oy vey! Is that really you out there in cyberspace, or someone pretending to be you? Have you really abandoned "traditional" fandom values for that cheap electronic imitation? All those nameless Peeping Toms hitting on

you without bothering to comment. I'll say an Our Father, five Hail Marys and a Glory Be to Saint Gestetter for your safe return to "traditional" fannish values. There is no Twiltone in cyberspace; there is only the constant flicker of Cyclops. Perhaps I should say *Kaddish* now that a chapter of your life has ended. In all fairness I must thank you for taking the time to write an article for *Trap Door*. Perhaps you are not completely lost. This article may be the start of your trip back to reality. Don't get me wrong, I like fen journals in cyberspace, but only as an *addendum* to the "real" thing. Hard copies, via my mailbox, are what I'm looking for. In the meantime, I'll be looking for your byline in every "real" fanzine that comes to my domicile.

It's great to see Jim Harmon back in print. "Harmony" was my favorite column in *Riverside Quarterly*. Jim always had good things to share, and still does. Like Jim, I too have problems with the American Film Institute's "Top 100 Movies" list and all the "variations on a theme" that continue to be published. Someday, when I'm feeling ambitious, I may attempt a "Top 25 Movies" list with 75 honorable mentions.

William Breiding is an astute observer of human nature, and a hopeless romantic. For this I cannot fault him, as I too am a hopeless romantic. My favorite form of entertainment, in days of yore, was people watching at the International Air Terminal in Detroit. Because of heightened security, these days the watchers have become the watched.

At first I thought "The Creature" was an autobiographical piece but soon realized it was part of Burbee's fertile imagination. As long as there is a fandom, the name of Charles Burbee will echo from its hallowed halls. (105 W. Ainsworth, Ypsilanti, MI 48197-5336)

AMANDA BAKER

I was interested to contrast your recent introduction to on-line fanac with the opinions which Dale Speirs and Lloyd Penney have been expressing in the LoCcols of recent *Opuntias*. I'm approaching this as someone who began as an on-line fan (with *The SF-Lovers Digest* e-mailing list) in the summer of 1988, and only began to be interested in the Papernet at Novacon in 1997. It seems strange that people consider the Internet "expensive" when attending a convention can cost £400 each, and putting out an issue of a fanzine can cost £200. If you know where to look, it's possible to find computers which are a few years old and fall into and below that price bracket, which can be used for a myriad of purposes including word processing and accessing the Internet, and the telephone bills and connect charges can be kept to below £20 per month by using off-line reading techniques. I don't think the issue is the Internet vs. the

Papernet or conventions per se; rather it is our attitudes as to what is an acceptable cost, and familiarity with a certain medium, which really count. There's a lot of rubbish on the Internet, but that's inevitable given its accessibility to leisured Westerners, but there are gold mines of information particularly in technical areas which appeal to the computer literate. (Dept. of Physics & Astronomy, P. O. Box 913, Cardiff University, Wales, UK CF24 3YB)

BEN INDICK

As I read through *Trap Door*, I liked your style the best, a gentle melancholy, which of course pervades us all as we grow older, lose friends, and wonder about ourselves. I do not know your age {58 the week before this year's Worldcon} but I am only 75 and, as a friend says, people are dying to get there! Everyone seems to be 75 lately. Maybe I only know old farts. Sometimes I prefer younger people; other times I am more comfortable when I am the younger. Anyway, my fannish experience somewhat mirrors yours. I recall when I was less than 50 I got tired of it and chunked the whole thing. Like you, I didn't even save my own fanzine appearances and first zines, which I now regret. There were appearances in the early '40s, gone forever now. Eventually I returned, again with occasional doubts as when, a few years ago, as the only charter member who had never missed an EOD mailing, I quit, but eventually rejoined. I have promised myself I shall not quit in a silly pique again.

I appreciated your annoyance at getting a smoky room at the Bahia. Janet, like any ex-smoker, is tough about this. In Spain she insisted on a change and we basically exchanged rooms, not knowing it then, with another of our tourmates. Complaining of outdoor noise, they got our large, slightly smelly, quiet room with a lousy view; we got their small, clean, no longer noisy room with a great view. Best of all, my spouse was placated. I matched your kosher cholesterol intake with copious amounts of fois gras (in southwestern France) whenever I could find them. Once home again, I knew I would see no more of my favorite.

The articles (particularly Dave Langford's) and the artwork (especially the bacover) in the issue were all good. However, what lifted my eyebrows was that you appear to have had an article from Joe Kennedy! Since Joe (once JoKe) became a professor and published poet, name of Xavier J., or X. Joseph, Kennedy he had, I thought, utterly foresworn SF and fandom. I wrote him a few years ago, asking whether he was the original Joe hiding behind an X, and he responded amusingly but is surely no longer the precocious Jersey tyke who turned out such classic zines, which I had thrown away, as *Terrifying Test Tube Tales* – that, more or less, such

infantile stuff was beneath his purview. Now he seems to have thought better of it. Has he too, then, returned? Quick, get him into FAPA! {Joe's article was written on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of SAPS, and though he's on the mailing list – hi, Joe! – I haven't been able to rouse his fannish blood to a boil like I briefly managed after I contacted him in 1962 when SAPS turned 25.} (428 Sagamore Ave., Teaneck, NJ 07666-2626)

DARROLL PARDOE

Thanks for *Trap Door* No. 19. Lots of good stuff as usual, but I was particularly interested in Lucy Huntzinger's piece. I read Lucy's *Fully Caffeinated* regularly, along with a number of other e-journals, both fan and non-fan. At the moment I'm trying to work out the best way of adapting my *Pigs* to the electronic medium. I've been uploading them to my Web pages for eighteen months now, but I begin to think some change in format may be a good idea. Unlike Lucy I am not that bothered to know how many hits I get so have never installed a counter. On the other hand (and again unlike Lucy) I want to preserve an interactive content by including some of the responses I get. Also some of my recipients are valued friends who are unlikely to get connected to the net in the near future. So I can see *Pig* remaining a hybrid electronic/paper beast for the present.

Lucy, I think, has gone a lot further down the e-journal road than this. There's a huge and rapidly expanding world of on-line journals on the Net, a fascinating world which has already grown too big for any one person to comprehend in total (rather like happened to SF fandom over the last few decades) and her *Fully Caffeinated* is much more of an e-journal than it is like a traditional fanzine. Is this going to be the direction we all take in the future? I suspect it may be. (36 Hamilton Street, Hoole, Cheshire CH2 3JQ, U.K.)

JIM CAUGHRAN

Interesting notes by Lucy Huntzinger on electronic fannish Web pages—started to write “electronic fandom” there, but it doesn't fit. Her take on comments—read it but I don't care if you let me know that you read it aside from the counter—hard to believe, perhaps.

Regarding Irwin Hirsh's LoC on photographs, we had a call from Sony Canada recently, telling us that by buying school photographs we had entered a drawing for a digital camera and that we had won! Cynically, we asked how much the free camera would cost, but they just wanted to deliver it. It's great – the recording medium is floppy disks, so I can transfer to the computer easily. Disks are much cheaper than film – and I've got a lot lying around here – so it's easy to take a lot of photos, as one should to get a few good ones. I can edit them on the computer,

and then . . . then I run up against limitations. My printer isn't capable of good-quality prints, and I've yet to take a disk to the photo shop to be printed. I'll have to do so when I edit the pics of my older daughter's wedding. It has changed my outlook on photography, however.

I had an example of Rotsler's skill when I saw one of his models in a skin magazine in the dormitory years ago. While his photos of the model weren't great, they looked alive. The second photographer showed her standing around looking bored. (24 Prestwick Crescent, Willowdale, Ont. M2H 1M9, Canada)

TRACY BENTON

I was excited to see Lucy Huntzinger's article, "My Sensitive Cyber Face," featured in *Trap Door* because I've been a reader of hers for a year or more. I started reading her because I was interested in on-line journals in general, and I knew Lucy. Little did I know how addictive her journal would be. *Aries Moon* has all the ingredients: the essays don't ramble on for pages, so I can get a daily dose without having to block it out on my calendar; I've met many of the characters who come up; she often mentions fannish news; and her writing is terribly, terribly entertaining. Who among her readers can forget her tale of the travel customer who wanted to go to Baden — or was it Baden-Baden? Who didn't ponder the mystery of what was digging up her carefully tended garden? I follow the journal as if it were a tiny soap opera, without really feeling like a voyeur; after all, Lucy decides what she wants to post. It also doesn't hurt that she's terribly funny. I have to be careful, though: I saw Lucy recently and was constantly thrown by the feeling that I know her much better than she knows me. I had a weird sensation that I have been neglecting my part of a conversation, and it was much stronger than the similar feeling that I owe someone an LoC.

The whole on-line fandom thing has a much different flavor to me than paper fandom. While I haven't participated in on-line chats, a friend recently compared the local apa to "a really slow 30-person chat room." Lucy's journal is like a super-frequent perzine. If I feel like it, I can read *Mimosa* on-line. But none of these are quite equivalent. To me, they can't really *replace* the printed version because they offer totally different things to appreciate and enjoy. The lovely repro and vast weight of an *Idea*, for instance, couldn't be properly admired on-line; but I find it just as enjoyable to check out *Aries Moon* and scrutinize Lucy's latest color schemes and up-to-the-minute news. The one real disadvantage I find in on-line fannish writing is that it seems so ephemeral. I can pull out an *Apparatchik* and enjoy it ten years from now, barring disaster. I have no guarantee I'll be able to do that with *Aries Moon* and, indeed, Lucy might not

want that to happen anyway. It may simply disappear into the ether.

As usual I need to heap lavish praise on Dan Steffan's artwork. He remains my favorite fannish artist due to his versatility. In fact I was so thrown by his "Gorey" artwork that I turned hurried back to your credits page, convinced you'd scored some unbelievable art coup. But Dan is so versatile that I'm uneasily reminded of Peter Sellers on *The Muppet Show*: "There is no me. I had it surgically removed." Which style is actually Dan's?

I have a hard time choosing specific articles out of your fanzine to focus on. They're all so darn good. I have a particular appreciation this issue for Dave Langford's "Beachcombing" and Boyd Raeburn's on Dave Van Ronk since I've always loved amusing verse. I'm sure this is the tragic result of childhood exposure to Milne's "The King's Breakfast," but there you are. Here's my Americanized attempt:

I came off the trail with my head full of Vi
My music-hall gal with eyes blue as the sky
But tickling the ivories at Jimmy's saloon
Was the sad cowboy's nightmare of MRS. RAVOON.

I think my favorite article of this issue must be Wm. Breiding's just for its thoughtful consideration of trendiness alongside the restaurant slice of life. I recently accepted an offer for a new job. Something the interviewer said reminded me of this essay: "I like to hire troublemakers. I like to hire people who have something going on." Trendiness presumes that you *want* to fit in. So many of us don't want to bother—isn't this part of why there's so much fannish infighting? Rampant individualism? (108 Grand Canyon Dr., Madison, WI 53705-4225)

MARTY CANTOR

You write about some of the fannish things you have inherited. At my age I have been thinking about how I want my belongings to be disposed of when I die. I thought I had taken care of all my possessions until I read that you had acquired Terry Carr's collection of stylis, lettering guides and shading plates. I would like to leave mine to somebody who could put them to productive use; however, to my knowledge I am one of the few fans who still use mimeo reproduction and I use the new Gestetner technology where everything (except the copying) can be produced on a computer.

I can understand Lucy Huntzinger's devotion to electronic fandom. Still, as a paper fanzine fan of twenty-some years, I still find the arts of producing a paper zine quite satisfying even though the above-mentioned new Gestetners have taken out quite a bit of the scutwork I never liked. The ease of producing my zines on a computer is what has really brought me back into fandom

after spending most of the '90s mostly gafia. I enjoy the crafting of a zine and holding the final product of my labor of love in my hands. Especially, I like the give-and-take one finds in paper zines. I like—oh, do I like!—the LoCs I receive in response to an issue I have produced. And I like writing LoCs to zines. To me, this interaction between faneds and letterhacks is one of the supreme joys of fandom.

What is this—is *Trap Door* turning into a Dave Van Ronk zine? Two issues in a row about this interesting person. No complaints, though; as you know from my previous LoC, I like the guy (and really enjoy his music). One thing about Dave—he has the widest repertoire of any folk musician I know. Or, more accurately, I should use the word “knew” instead of “know” as I have not been in that field since I discovered fandom. Not that I do not enjoy folk music, but my interest in things fannish has sort of taken over what I jokingly call my free time. Reading about Dave makes me wish I could have kept up my contacts with other folk musicians. And I wonder if Dave has been keeping up *his* fannish contacts. (11825 Gilmore St. #105, N. Hollywood, CA 91606)

HARRY TURNER

Was intrigued by Dave Langford's Beachcombing piece, suggesting a possible link between Snibbo and Widower's Wonderful Products. I leave exploration of that potent influence to the literary detectives. All I can say on the matter is that as far as I recall the beginnings of Widower's was a relatively Beachcomber-free process, and came about in this manner

Widower's ad jingles first made their appearance in the second issue of *Now & Then: The Proceedings of the Romiley Fan Veterans & Scottish Dancing Society*, published on 16 November 1954 as a contribution to the second mailing of the newly-launched Offtrail Magazine Publishers Association (OMPA). Coeditor Eric Needham was a regular weekend visitor to the Turner home at that time, and as I had the job of advertising manager at a company in a nearby town our conversation often touched on the techniques of persuasion, which may have started Eric peppering his contributions to the zine with gratuitous ads for deserving causes—publications that met with his approval, dead philosophers who provided him with inspiration and apt quotes.

At an early editorial conference, while tucking into one of Marion's weekend family nosh-ups, Eric complained that he'd had a bad week with his window-cleaning business in Manchester city center. Rushed off his feet with work, he'd no time to shop, and all he found in his larder when he staggered home for a meal at the end of the day were a few tins of Batchelor's Baked Beans, part of a bargain offer he'd stocked up with. After

chomping them all week he'd grown heartily sick of the diet, and his frustration worked itself out in an ad jingle. We cast about for a replacement of the Batchelor's brand name (not wishing to give them a free ad), settling first on “Widower's” and finally the all-embracing alliterative enhancement of “Widower's Wonderful Products.” So the very first Widower's ad emerged as:

Socrates died by his own hand
Imagine what this means . . .
A whole life wasted—he never tasted
WIDOWER'S WONDERFUL BEANS!

(Literary sleuths will probably find a certain significance in the fact that the initial jingles he wrote were *all* concerned with food. It was a subject very much on his mind at the time.) I pass on the facts as I know them for anyone so bold as to take up the challenge of Dave's proposed thesis! (10 Carlton Ave., Romiley, Cheshire SK6 4EG, U.K.)

LEE HOFFMAN

I can't resist commenting on Boyd Raeburn's article on Dave Van Ronk and the *Songs of the Bosses' Artists*. As far as I know, everything Boyd's written here is accurate, but possibly slightly misleading. For one thing, Roy Berkeley deserves a lot of credit as an exponent of the songs in question. While I can't say for sure, I suspect Roy of having written some of the best of them. He's the one who most frequently performed them. For another thing, to the best of my knowledge we weren't calling them *Songs of the Bosses' Artists* until the songbook was conceived, which was some time after that party Boyd cites. And Dick Ellington deserves a lot of credit for publishing them in the form of *The Bosses' Songbook*. I would not hold him at fault for “wimping out” on the second edition. I can't say for sure, but I suspect some kind of pressure was brought to bear after the first edition got into circulation. From what I know of Dick, he wouldn't merely “wimp out.” Using discretion when good sense warrants it isn't quite the same thing. (*The Digital Tradition* includes what we knew as “The Ballad of Pete Seeger” under the title “People's Song Song.”)

The Bosses' Songbook was conceived while I was still living in the apartment on Greenwich Avenue, around '57 or '58 (I'm terrible about dates). Dave and Larry Block had dropped by. We were sitting around gabbing and Dave was picking a bit when the idea of a book of *Songs of the Bosses' Artists* came up. Between them Dave and Larry whipped off some verses for songs (to which I proudly contributed a couple of lines) and we did the chord patterns.

As the contributors' credits in the second edition indicate, quite a few of the songs were written by others,

and as Boyd has noted most of them were in circulation well before the idea of the songbook came along.

One song I rather liked didn't make it into the book. That was the one that went (in its entirety), "On the first day of Trotsky, I gave my love the ax." (3290 *Sunrise Trail, Port Charlotte, FL 33952-6606*)

NOREEN SHAW

Your trip to L.A. and the stolen 7-Up truck rings bells. It certainly prevented my son from getting home from work that day. It's something everyday in the Golden City. There is an entire car chase fandom that does nothing but watch chases on TV and discuss them. If you've seen a TV program called "It's Like, You Know" which sends up L.A. madness, you'll have seen chase fandom in action. They send out for Chinese so they don't have to leave the TV.

Nice to read Jim Harmon, the inventor of Old Radio Fandom. He is right. The American Film Institute list is unspeakable. The worst thing about it is the shameless marketing ploy. Madness lies in taking this stuff seriously. Harlan is at the absolute peak of his fame as a writer and a personality, but as a fan, his peak was the Horace Gold issue of *Dimensions*, which I helped him put out. I recall how terrified I was that he actually called Gold in New York from his apartment in Cleveland. "You can't do that!!" I cried. Of course he did.

Boyd Raeburn and *The Bosses Songbook*: I always thought the line in "The Ballad of Pete Seeger" about "this is not '38" referred to the Hitler-Stalin pact, but I may be wrong about the date. The Russian film "Burnt by the Sun" covers the Kulaks pretty well along with the terror. Many people I knew in New York were convinced that the KGB was following them day and night and they were very careful where they went and who they talked to.

Sherry Thompson's letter said it all. The legendary fans and fanac aren't lost as long as you and Dick Lynch and others care about the days when fans were kings. Did I mention that *Trap Door* does indeed remind me of *Lighthouse*? That ain't bad, Robert. {No, indeed—thank you!} (5223 Corteen Place, #7, Valley Village, CA 91607)

IRWIN HIRSH

Trap Door No. 19 arrived on a Monday. The previous Friday Marty Cantor's *No Award* No. 5 arrived. What this meant is that one side of the weekend I read Bill Rotsler's view of Gregg Calkins' visit to a photoshoot, and on the other side of the weekend I read Gregg's view of the same events. A most interesting activity, especially as the two views were written on either side of a couple of decades.

If Eve and John Harvey ever do ever achieve their aim of getting into the Guinness Book of Records as the world's worst LoCers, I want a special mention. I've

received a LoC from each. Eve locating an issue of *Sikander* and John locating an issue of *Larrikin* half a decade later.

Over the past few years I've had a small number of looks at Lucy Huntzinger's Website/on-line fanzine. It's a nice site. However, because she likes that it is easy for her to revise something she has already published, Lucy actually gives me a reason not to ever revisit the site. I don't want to read something one day, if the following day she's gonna change it. In the concluding paragraph Lucy says that being an electronic fan "keeps me stretching myself as a writer instead of lapsing into old habits." I would've thought that in this regard published-in-stone paper fanzines has it all over an easy-to-revise Website.

In looking at the difference Lucy notes that the electronic world has given back her identity, and from the context I assume she means fannish identity. It is interesting that Lucy compares paper and online fanac only in terms as a publisher. I tend to look at the difference in terms of both a publisher and a reader. I know that you, Robert, have spent some of your time and hard-earned cash in getting this issue of *Trap Door* to me. That means something and, with all the other editors who send me their paper fanzines, helps give me my fannish identity. You know that I, Irwin Hirsh, am reading your fanzine, and I know that you know that I'm reading your fanzine. Whenever I've checked out someone's Website I have no idea that whether they know I've done so, or even if they care that I have done so. And for me that pushes the Website away from things like *Trap Door* and closer to whatever I can pick up at the local newsstand and bookstore. (26 Jessamine Avenue, East Prahran, Vict. 3181, Australia)

ALICE SANVITO

I do hope that some people will continue to publish on paper. You know, they predicted that movies and television would put an end to books and that didn't happen. It just isn't the same. Personally, I like being able to hold something in my hand. Besides, the idea of taking a computer to bed with me doesn't sound very appealing. I think there are advantages to both. The on-line zines are accessible to a lot of people, have a lot of flexibility and, for those who have the expertise, are potentially less expensive. But they are not the same. I really liked my first impression of *Trap Door*. It looks very nice. And I did note, with some irony, that it contains a print article by a woman talking about her fondness for having an on-line zine and how she wouldn't be participating in fandom if it wasn't for that.

Reading *Trap Door*, I'm amazed at all the names I'd forgotten that are coming back to me. One was Harry Warner, Jr., who I remember used to (and still apparently does) write long, thoughtful LoCs. I'm wondering if I

ever met him. I have this mental image of him that I'm not at all sure is based on actual experience, or something concocted in my mind as I read his letters. It was delightful, though, to come across him again. I always found him endearing. I could hardly believe it when he said someone had been publishing LoCs from him that they had changed the content of. How rude!

I was sad to hear that Bill Rotsler passed away. I don't know if I ever met him, I just remember having a fondness for his illustrations. I once embroidered a character of his on a white cotton henley that I wore for years. (7700 Clayton Rd., Suite 304, St. Louis, MO 63117)

ARTHUR JEAN COX

I suppose you knew Nieson Himmel. {*Can't say I "knew" him, but I did meet him a few times in the early '60s, probably at Burbee's.*} He died on March 13, 1999, following what seems to have been a stroke while at work at the Los Angeles *Times* the previous month. He worked there for many years. Before that he had been a reporter for 22 years for the Los Angeles *Herald-Examiner*, where his specialty was crime. His name was often seen on the front page, headlining stories about Bugsy Siegel, Mickey Cohen and the Black Dahlia. But lately, at the *Times*, he had been confined to a desk, on the night shift, because of increased girth and age and poor health. He was 77 years old.

He was a well-known figure in Los Angeles fandom from about the mid-1940s. I came to know him then, but pretty much lost sight of him during the '80s and '90s – we came together in an unexpected way late in '98. He liked to drive around Los Angeles on weekends, partly for his personal enjoyment and partly for professional reasons – he might see something worth reporting and something might be gleaned from the small community newspapers he picked up. He wanted a companion for these drives, and so for a few weeks I rode around with him.

We covered vast distances, for he drove rather fast, and I saw places I had never seen before although I have lived here for half a century, such as Marina del Rey, Venice and San Pedro. But one evening we had three narrow escapes – near-collisions with other cars – and I called him the next morning to say I wouldn't ride with him anymore. "I like you and respect you, but I want to live a few more years." He took this very well, saying he wanted to get together with me, anyway, somehow; but that wasn't really practical and we didn't see each other again. It's been a long time since I've done anything I've regretted so much. He had an unprepossessing appearance, because of his size and shape and difficulty in moving about, but he was a very sweet-natured guy. {*Jean also enclosed an article from the Los Angeles Times*

about Himmel, in which it's noted that "During the late 1940s, Himmel lived in a Pasadena mansion with a number of science fiction enthusiasts" – this would be Jack Parsons' place – and "shared a bedroom for a few months" with L. Ron Hubbard, of whom he's quoted as saying, "He was a guy on the make. I couldn't stand him."} (1528 Winona Blvd. #11, Hollywood, CA 90027-5014)

CHUCH HARRIS

I have to say how much I enjoy *Trap Door*. And especially the letter column where old friends appear long after you imagine they are dead or permanently gafia (which, I suppose, is much the same thing).

But what do you mean by this nonsensical "Fan Tidbits by Dave Langford" that heads up the Proxyboo piece that I paid for? Langford doesn't come cheap, you know, and there is an added surcharge for every reference to "Chuch, Randolph, Genius, Harris, etc." I know I have complained before about "odor" when you mean "odour," "aluminum" for "aluminium" and suchlike, but this effort, "tidbits," is almost a blasphemy. There is no such word. The word is "titbits" – a 17th century word that seems to be anathema in the U.S. because of its connotations with "tit." Stateside this is a truly dreadful word. Even our most avant garde authors try to avoid using it. Robert Silverberg refers to those glorious founts of fecundity as, er, "jugs," and even our lovely lost BoSh called my favorite character, "Queen Ooh! – what-a-lovely-pair-of-knockers."

And, as I've also complained before, "ass" is nothing but a four-legged donkey. Miss Michelle Pfeiffer came over recently to play Titania (not "Tidania," you'll notice) in *Midsummer Night's Dream*. She had problems with her scanty costume so that her whole performance "became about keeping my ass covered." Perhaps, for the benefit of Brits not really conversant with the American language, our newspapers might have amended this to "My whole performance became about keeping my Bottom covered," or is that just too much to hope for?

Yes, I know that we Brits are no more than a vociferous ethnic minority of your readers and you alone have to make a decision about these differences in dialect, but you have to be consistent. You just can't have your cake and edit, can you?

SOCORRO FRANCO-BURBEE

The article by Charlie was a stranger to me. I know that he was publishing stories long before I met him. This is, obviously, one of them.

I'd like to tell you an interesting little side story that I don't think anyone has ever heard. Charlie's childhood nickname was "Tom." His mother was California Indian, but his father was French. Charlie Sr. would call his son

"petit homme" (little man). Later it simply got shortened to Tom. During his final years, sometimes I'd call him Tom—no matter how poorly he felt that day, it would bring a smile to his face. (12723 S. Gabbett Dr., La Mirada, CA 90638-2109)

JOHN BURBEE

Comment about Rotsler and Charles Burbee: I continue to occasionally think about and (naturally) miss my father, but Rotsler has begun to occur to me as well. I can easily imagine those two (wherever they may be) having one of those conversations where the hilarity is only exceeded by the esoteric obscurity of the topic. The whereabouts of the foreskin of Jesus, for example. Elmer would have to be there, too. Everyone laughing so hard the tears flow like beer.

But to continue re Rotsler: I spent two days at Avalon, Catalina Island, a few weeks ago. Bought a Hawaiian shirt. Just one. Then something happened upon returning to the mainland, and I have since acquired four more. And I want some more. Girlfriend says I have enough. We'll see, but I think of Bill when I don a shirt. And I like the way I feel when wearing the shirts. Thanks, Bill. (46748 Pala Road, Temecula, CA 92592-2917)

JOHN BAXTER

It's been good to read all the tributes to the late Bill Rotsler. I can only agree with the warm assessment of him as man, fan and artist, even though I knew him better in his other, less widely discussed incarnation, as a pornographer.

We'd corresponded over the years, and met at a Worldcon in Brighton, where some wag had the idea of seating Bill, myself and Jerry Pournelle together—three writers who had all done meteorite-striking-the-earth novels. (With only a little more effort, he could have filled the table; Harry 'Skyfall' Harrison, for instance, was only a stone's throw away.)

Other than these fleeting meetings, however, for most of the time I knew Bill personally—during 1989/90, when I lived in Los Angeles—his preoccupation, profession and avocation was porn. Most of the little money he earned came from inventing biographies of the women who serviced L.A. phone sex lines. He also designed the Heart-Ons, the awards (in the form of a wooden heart with a poker-work text) presented by the now-defunct Association of Adult Film Critics at their gaudy annual get-together at Gazzari's rock club (now also defunct) on Sunset Boulevard.

I spent hours in Bill's Valley bungalow listening to him expound his theories of porn, a subject on which he was encyclopedic. He did so surrounded by the detritus of

a career in terminal decline. Framed nude photographs on the walls and cabinets filled with indexed cartoons and designs showed how he'd run his life when he was in good health. Many of the pictures, however, were crooked, the cabinets overflowing. Drifts of X-rated movie mags sagged across the floor, piling up against cartons of video cassettes. The floor hadn't been cleaned in a decade; one walked on discarded pages, unanswered letters, tear sheets, cartoons, photographs.

Bill's physical condition mirrored the ruin of his life. He hadn't then been hit by the strokes and heart attacks that killed him, but a back injury kept him a semi-invalid. Even more debilitating, however, was his despair at failing potency. Surrounded by images of women orgiastically embracing trees or exposing themselves to the blazing desert sun, he embodied—to me anyway—Dylan Thomas's "old ramrod, dying of women."

Which was what made his interest in porn seem so innocent. When we went together to the 1990 Heart Ons—an event that deserves more attention than I can give it here—he blossomed. It was the last time I saw the Bill of earlier days.

In private, he was both funny and scholarly about porn. This set him well apart from the vast majority of people in that community, few of them noted for insight, nor the ability to laugh at the business. Bill could do both, and did, in his excellent *Contemporary Erotic Cinema*. He was particularly struck by the loyalty of porn movie viewers not to stars but to themes. Every sexual variation has its following, he explained, as do certain social or familial relationships. It wasn't true that people hired adult videos indiscriminately, only interested in wall-to-wall fornication.

"You imagine a man and a woman balling," Bill said.

"You know nothing about them except...there they are."

"Well, no, actually what they are is...they're brother and sister!"

"No, no. I made a terrible mistake. They're not. He's blind and she's being nice to him. Uh, no, that's another film. Sorry about that. They're really long-lost lovers. Oh, no, that's another movie too...."

"You can go on like that, with the same couple doing it. The context in which you put them alters your feelings. If it was brother and sister, or son and daughter, or father and mother, it's a hell of a lot different if it was a student and his teacher."

(Simon Hoggart, who was the London *Observer's* U.S. correspondent for a while, later corroborated this. He was taken aback when he saw a porn film in which a husband and wife made love. Since it was so rare in porn, it almost seemed like a perversion. Presumably, he decided, such films had their following, too. He imagined himself murmuring to the clerk in a video store, "Do you

have something, er, matrimonial?")

Bill was also capable of a genuinely aesthetic transport in watching porn. He waxed poetic on the subject of Marilyn Chambers' body language, just as he could rhapsodize about the '60s, when every bus into Los Angeles brought another hundred women who'd sheared their hair in a ritual rejection of their Mid-Western inhibitions—he coined the phrase "Midnight Haircut"—and come to California to Discover Themselves. Many discovered Bill, who wasn't ashamed to boast that he contributed to the liberation of any number of them, either with his lens or, more intimately, later; in that, Gregg Calkins' letter about encountering Bill just after a session with a model rings more true than most other things I've read which recall him as artist, bon viveur and fan. Rotsler the Pants Man deserves a tribute too.

Dan Steffan's Gorey pastiche heading to Dave Langford's piece was masterly. (And I'm with John Clute, by the way, in scorning reprints on one's shelves. First editions only—and, ideally, signed ones.) Gorey's growing popularity is a phenomenon I can only regard with awe. It's bad enough that the Prime Press or Arkham House books you've lugged around from apartment to apartment over the years turn out to be worth enough to buy your own moving van, but when even your casual accumulations become precious, there's an acute sense of embarrassment. At least you read *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* and *The Lurker on the Threshold*—well, most of them, anyway—but that collection of condom wrappers.... Who'd have thought that the University of Nova Scotia had that kind of money?

A colleague who taught film with me in a college in Virginia during the '70s once came upon a relic of his childhood: a cloth bag filled with badges and code rings collected from cereal packets and Cracker Jack boxes. As a joke, he wore some to a conference on Popular Culture studies. It didn't go down well. To his fellow academics, these things were relics, artifacts. Wearing them as decoration demeaned them. They should be in a museum, not on his lapel.

In the same way, the Goreys I've accumulated over the years at a dollar here and fifty cents there are now the sort of embarrassment that only a bank vault can decently hide. Likewise my books by Lafcadio Hearn, an enthusiasm on which Bob Smith launched me decades ago, and which has taken me not only through countless dusty shelves of Japanese voyages but as far as Matsue, the town where Hearn lived and wrote. That the books of poor stunted old one-eyed Hearn, arguably the least physically well-favored writer in history (okay, after Harlan Ellison), should be worth the tens of thousands of dollars one would need to pay today to replace one's

collection would have amused him as much as it appalls me. EBay has a lot to answer for. (18 rue de l'Odeon, 75006 Paris, France)

WE ALSO HEARD FROM:

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