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Edited and published monthly by David Burton
5227 Emma Drive, Lawrence IN 46236-2742
E-mail: pixelzine@gmail.com (new address – please note!)
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AMDG



For those who missed it last issue, here's the letter I accidentally left off the title of Ted's column. Please cut it out on the dotted line and paste it on your monitor in the appropriate spot should you re-read the issue.

“ I trod on a different butterfly during the dinosaur hunt ”

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Notes From Byzantium

ERIC MAYER

Fear of Falling

Recently Kurt Vonnegut died as a result of injuries from a fall. The same week a memorial service was held for Ahmet Ertegun, the founder of Atlantic records, who had also died after falling, in his case, appropriately enough, backstage at a Rolling Stones concert. Both men were in their eighties, an age at which a fall is serious business.

The ability to stand upright is an accomplishment we can all claim (provided we're born healthy) unlike writing bestselling books or founding record companies. To infants, falling down is just part of growing up. I watched my kids take countless pratfalls while they learned to take their first steps.

I don't remember when I first stood on my own two feet, but I do recall racing around the back yard, playing tag or cowboys and Indians. I'd crash to the ground again and again and jump up laughing.

When you're in your eighties you don't usually get up laughing. Often you don't get up. I don't need to look beyond my own family for examples of lives hastened towards their ends by falls.

When I orienteer I invariably end up on my butt, or some body part other than my feet, at least once on the course. I step in a hole, or trip over a vine or a stick buried in the leaves catches the toe of my shoe and sends me sprawling. My most spectacular wipe-out came on a rainy day when I tried to sprint across a

wooden bridge while wearing plastic-spiked shoes. I've always got up – not always laughing these days. I'm only fifty-seven. I expect I'll have no trouble getting up again this year, or for years to come, but at some point (ten years? twenty?) I won't want to be falling down.

I don't look forward to the infirmities of old age turning familiar surroundings into sinister landscapes. I don't want to fear falling. I'm not sure how you tell when that time has arrived, except the hard way. I suppose we just need to enjoy getting back to our feet while we still can.

The Case of the Missing Bees

When I was a kid I'd often step on honeybees while I was running around in my bare feet through the thick clover of the lawn. The unexpected pain always came as a shock. Like stepping on a hot cigarette butt. That was the first comparison people made, which shows how long ago it was.

When I got over the pain and the stinger had been extracted and the wound coated with merthiolate, I felt sorry for the bee because after stinging they die. And unlike wasps, hornets and yellow jackets, honeybees aren't usually aggressive. Stepping on them is about the only way you can goad the peaceful laborers into hurting you.

Even though I live in the countryside, I rarely see honeybees these days. Their numbers seem to have been dwindling for years and according to a Reuters story, Vanishing honeybees mystify scientists, even commercial beekeepers are being affected:

Go to work, come home. Go to work, come home. Go to work – and vanish without a trace.

Billions of bees have done just that, leaving the crop fields they are supposed to pollinate, and scientists are mystified about why.

The phenomenon was first noticed late last year in the United States, where honeybees are used to pollinate \$15 billion worth of fruits, nuts and other crops annually. Disappearing bees also have been reported in Europe and Brazil.

Commercial beekeepers would set their bees near a crop field as usual and come back in two or three weeks to find the hives bereft of foraging worker bees, with only the queen and the immature insects remaining. Whatever worker bees survived were often too weak to perform their tasks.

Aside from learning that bees are largely responsible for pollinating a third of our food, I was interested to read that “honeybee hives are rented out to growers to pollinate their crops, and beekeepers move around as the growing seasons change.”

In *Six For Gold* Mary and I wrote about an itinerant Egyptian beekeeper who periodically loaded his cylindrical clay hives onto barges in order to follow the blooming of the flowers up and down the Nile. Ancient Egyptians were seeking to maximize the honey from their bees rather than to pollinate, but the principal was the same as used by traveling beekeepers today.

Mankind’s artificial world changes rapidly. Smoking is no longer a habit taken for granted. Merthiolate isn’t found in every medicine cabinet any more. Clover, which for a time was considered a luxurious and desirable ground cover, is now a hated enemy of lawns, targeted for death by specially formulated herbicides.

However, we can’t yet design bees that don’t need pollen, or fruit that doesn’t require pollination, so beekeepers are still the nomads they have been for thousands of years. It can’t be good news for us that their bees are vanishing.



Brain Booster

According to an article in the *Daily Express* wiggling your eyes from left to right helps to boost your memory:

Scientists say the eye movement fires up both the left and right hemispheres of the brain at the same time. And they believe this is the key to improving our ability to

Brad Foster

remember things like whether we locked the front door or turned the oven off.

Dr Andrew Parker, who carried out the research, said that only 30 seconds of moving eyes from left to right could produce results.

I admit I was skeptical when I first read this. Exactly how rigorous was Dr Parker's statistical method? How do we know that all of the test subjects weren't standing with the stoves and front doors they couldn't remember just to their right?

Then I recalled (even without the aid of ocular gymnastics) Mary's admonition whenever I find myself confronted with a recalcitrant bottle top or screw.

"Righty tighty!"

Suddenly it made sense. Turning your eyes to the right must tighten up your memories.

I intend to add this exercise to my usual morning workout, which consists of getting out of bed and going downstairs (aerobics) and brushing my teeth (good for upper body strength).

The morning seems like the best time. My memories probably come loose with all my tossing or turning. Judging from the dreams I have, something in there is loose and rolling around. When I spring out of bed and into action a few of those memories must settle back into place but a lot of them just fall out.

Of course I must remember "Righty tighty." I wouldn't want to look the wrong direction up and end up with amnesia.

Reading Benchley

I've been reading Robert Benchley again. I might as well own up to it right off the bat because you can always tell within a few sentences anyway. The moment I read Benchley I start to write like him.

When I say I "write like" I don't mean write as well. I "write like" Benchley in the same sense that my cat might be said to

"walk like" me, if she were in the habit of walking on her hind legs, which she is not. Thank goodness. (Or never when I'm looking at any rate.) Technically my cat would be going through the same motions but the effect would be somewhat different.

Come to think of it, my cat walking would probably provide more entertainment than me walking.

Which is probably as good an argument as any against analogizing.

My cat's name is Sabrina, I should add. (Because she's giving me a look that clearly says, "If you will insist on putting me into that drivel you write, the least you can do is use my proper name, or I might just get up and walk about on my hind legs.")

But to get back to the point – in spite of Sabrina's interruptions – I admit to writing like Benchley. It's been said (which is another way of saying I'm too lazy to look it up) that James Thurber confessed that he owed everything to Benchley. Dave Barry recently told an interviewer, "Robert Benchley, I'm a huge fan of his, and he did everything I did before I did it."

I stopped reading Dave Barry years ago. I don't like Dave Barry. Even if he is honest.

Long before Dave Barry appeared on the scene I was quite happily writing away like Robert Benchley without a care in the world and no one uttered a peep. Then Dave Barry came along and started doing his Benchley imitation and suddenly people started to accuse me of copying Dave Barry.

So I stopped writing like Robert Benchley. Except when I read him. •

Eric's column is compiled from his blog at journalscape.com/ericmayer/

Much Nothings About Ado Much Nothings About Ado Much Nothings About Ado Much Nothings About Ado

Of Cabbages and Kings

I learned how to play poker in my late teens, although my father was completely unaware of this. One evening my father and his brothers, my Uncle Lee and Uncle Ty, were playing penny-ante poker in our kitchen and I cut myself into the game. My father, of course, was horrified, thinking I didn't have a clue about the game. This simply made it more to my advantage, I thought. The game was five card draw, nothing wild.

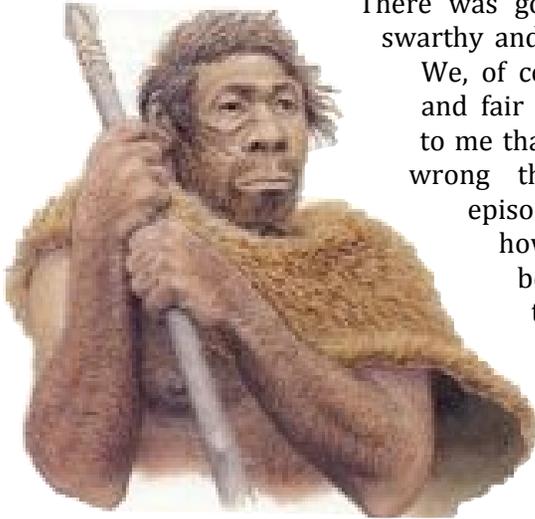
After a couple of nothing hands I drew a couple of low cards, and three kings. I tossed the two low cards and got in return the fourth king plus an ace. Now, let me preface this by saying that I have an excellent "poker face." I didn't even gulp. I just sat there praying that someone would have a good betting hand against me. My Uncle Ty did. He opened with a fairly good bet for penny-ante. Daddy and Uncle Lee promptly folded. I carefully raised Uncle Ty just enough to keep him in the game. He promptly raised me and I raised back. I could imagine him thinking "sucker." This went on for a while with each of us raising the other, while my father was getting more and more agitated. Meanwhile the pot was getting

bigger and bigger, especially for penny-ante. Finally my father said, "Let me see your hand." Of course I said, "No." The game continued on with Daddy constantly demanding to see my hand and me refusing. Finally, he just walked over and snatched the cards out of my hands, looked at them, handed them back, and said, "Go ahead." Uncle Ty immediately folded. I could have killed my father at that moment. I never really played poker after that, I figured I'd had the hand of my life and my father blew it for me.

A Question of Color

Recently I was watching one of the *Discovery* channels while they were doing a segment on Neanderthal Man and his development. As usual they had reenactments as they showed how it might have been when he and *homo sapiens* (us'ns) met and interacted.

Lee Lavell



There was good ol' Neanderthal, swarthy and dark-brown haired.

We, of course were blondish and fair skinned. It occurred to me that there is something wrong there. Most of the episode had been about how Neanderthal had been so well adapted to his cold, ice-age environment that he was unable to adapt to the warmer climate that Sapiens, out of Africa, had been bred in. Yet,

let us look at the cold-weather animals that are present today. Most of them have white fur, or grow white fur in winter. Consider, for instance the polar bear or the snowshoe rabbit. On the other hand, warm-weather animals usually have dark fur or fur that changes to white in the winter (i.e. the stoat-ermine). Now, much was said in the episode about how the Neanderthal's physical build put him at a disadvantage when the weather got warmer and I am not arguing with that proposition. What I am saying is that color may also have been a factor. If Neanderthal was very fair in skin and hair, he would have blended in quite nicely with his cold, snowy environs and would have stood out starkly in a more verdant setting, and if he hunted more by stealth (as the program predicated) this would have put him at a severe disadvantage.

So, let us revise our picture of Neanderthal and early Sapiens. Instead of the dark, swarthy Neanderthal, let's picture him as

blond and fair, while Sapiens are the dark haired and skinned ones.

But, that might bother some people, mightn't it...

Anyone Seen a Minotaur Around?

I live in a large house with many doors. There are two front doors, one side door and one back door, all going to the outside upstairs; and one back door, two garage doors and a door beside each garage door leading from the walk-out basement. I gathered this excess of doors was due to the fact that the original owners of the house built it in spurts, starting with the basement and then going upstairs from south to north, with the north part being the "newest." This has led to a rather complicated floor plan and to utter confusion on my part when Jim and I first moved in.

I was coming up the inside stairs from the basement intending to go to the kitchen from the room I now call the lobby. I turned left, which was a bad mistake. I opened a door. No kitchen. This was the storage closet. Okay, on to the next door. Hmm...the linen closet. The next door led to the office, so I tried the next one. That was the small bathroom. The door next to it was one of the outside front doors. I was beginning to get a bit panicky. I was lost in my own house! The next door led to what I now use as a craft room and the door following it was the library. *Finally* I reached the door that led to the kitchen. I was where I wanted to be at last.

Because of the complicated floor plan of the house we named our new puppy Ariadne, hoping if either of us got lost in our own house again she could lead us out of the labyrinth. •

The Wisdom Of The Jewish-Zen Buddhist Monk or Om Mani Padme Oy!

Be here now.
Be someplace else later.
Is that so complicated?

Drink tea and nourish life;
with the first sip, joy;
with the second sip, satisfaction;
with the third sip, peace;
with the fourth, a Danish.

Wherever you go, there you are.
Your luggage is another story.

Accept misfortune as a blessing.
Do not wish for perfect health,
or a life without problems.
What would you talk about?

There is no escaping karma.
In a previous life,
you never called,
you never wrote,
you never visited.
And whose fault was that?

Zen is not easy.
It takes effort
to attain nothingness.
And then what do you have?
Bupkis.

Breathe in.
Breathe out.
Breathe in.
Breathe out.
Forget this
and attaining Enlightenment
will be the least of your problems.

Let your mind be as a floating cloud.
Let your stillness be as a wooded glen.
And sit up straight.
You'll never meet the Buddha
with such rounded shoulders.



Deep inside you are ten thousand
flowers.
Each flower blossoms ten thousand
times.
Each blossom has ten thousand petals.
You might want to see a specialist.

Be aware of your body.
Be aware of your perceptions.
Keep in mind that not every physical
sensation is a symptom of a terminal
illness.

The Torah says,
Love your neighbor as yourself.
The Buddha says,
There is no self.
So, maybe we're off the hook.
Oy!

From the Internet.
Sent by Br. Jerome Leo Hughes, OSB

Whither Fandom?

TED WHITE

Steve Stiles regarded me owlshly. “How’s it going?” he asked me.

I considered his question. It had deep implications, I realized. The ramifications of my answer were impossible to speculate upon. “What do you mean by ‘it’?” I queried in return.

“Huh?” Steve said. “I just asked you how’s it going. That’s what we call a rhetorical question, Ted.”

“Yes, I know,” I said. “I know that. But suppose you’d asked me a similar question, like ‘How’s it hanging?’ I think we all know what ‘it’ is in that instance. But in ‘how’s it going?’ the ‘it’ is more ambiguous.”

A frown crossed Steve’s face. “What’s new in fandom, Ted?” he asked, reverting to an old catchphrase of a similar rhetorical nature.

“That’s easier to answer,” I expostulated. “I’ve just been reading the new *Banana Wings*. They put that fanzine out on a rigid quarterly schedule, you know – and paper only.”

Steve nodded.

“The current issue,” I said, “appears to be dominated by two themes – Corflu, and what defines fanwriting. Although

to be fair about it, the fanwriting theme is a carryover from earlier issues.”

“I’m sorry we’ve missed the last several Corflus,” Steve said, shaking his head. “Everyone has been talking about them. Mark and Clare have been to more of them recently than we have.” Steve was not using a “royal we.” He was referring to his wife, Elaine, and himself.

“Personally, I’m pleased that Corflu is becoming an annual tradition for UK fans,” I said. “But what caught my attention was the discussion of fanwriting. The consensus seems to be that Context is All.” I emphasized the caps.

“Context is All?” Steve echoed back at me.

“If it appears in a fanzine, it’s fanwriting,” I explained. “The real problem seems to be defining fanwriting when it *doesn’t* appear in a fanzine. Like when it’s in a blog, say. I gather this is at least in part a spin-off of that guy Scalzi’s fanwriter Hugo nomination.”

“Sort of like calling any would-be pro artist who has stuff in a convention art show a ‘fan artist’ and nominating him for a Hugo,” Steve said. That topic was a sore point with Steve.

"Yeah," I said. "Much the same. I haven't read anything by Scalzi, but I gather he's also a published pro."

"Well, Ted," Steve said sagaciously, "you were a published pro when you won your fanwriter Hugo."

"That's true," I riposted. "But I maintained two simultaneous writing careers, pro and fan. The whole while I was cranking out at least two books a year I was also writing for a lot of fanzines. I get the impression Scalzi's blog is mostly about his pro writing and career. But don't get me wrong - I haven't actually read it. I'm just going on second and third-hand impressions here."

"So what're you saying, Ted? That he should've published his blog in a fanzine, and that would make it all right?" Steve squinted at me.

"There should be limits," I returned. "A line must be drawn. I mean, otherwise you could put a shopping list in a fanzine and call it 'fanwriting'."

"But that's the whole point of fanzines," Steve remonstrated. "You can put anything you want in them. Amateur expression, and all that." He waved his hands in the air.

"So I could put a mystery story in a fanzine and that would make it 'fanwriting'?" I asked.

"Sure," Steve exclaimed.

"Why not?"

"Then I will," I said.



I was awakened by the sounds of large bullets tearing through the two walls of my corner bedroom.

At first it made no sense to me. I had no idea what was happening. I'd been asleep less than three hours. The room was still dark. Then a bullet hit the window next to my bed, and shards of glass hit my bed, neatly slicing the bedcover. With that I was galvanized to roll out of my bed and hit the floor.

I heard shouting out in the street. Angry yelling, punctuated with deeply booming gunshots. The mirror over my dresser shattered, more glass flying. I crawled, naked, across the floor for the bathroom, an interior room where I might be safer. From the street I heard more than one engine revving, then the squeal of peeling rubber. Several cars - how many?

The car sounds receded, followed by dead silence. I ventured back into my bedroom to snatch some clothes from the easy chair where I'd tossed my clean laundry. Bits of glass and plaster fell from them as I took them back into the bathroom,



where I closed the door and turned on the light.

I looked at myself. I was streaked with blood, sweat and grit. I shook out the clothes, hung them on the bathroom door hook, and took a hasty shower. A post-shower examination showed several minor cuts. Two were on my right arm, another was on my right thigh. No imbedded glass. I applied some antiseptic salve and band-aids from the medicine cabinet, and quickly dressed. I had to go back into my bedroom for my shoes. The left shoe had a chunk of plaster in it. I shook them both, then put them on.

I felt much better once I was dressed. I turned off the bathroom light and moved through the dark bungalow through the kitchen to the back door. I slipped out of the back door into the almost non-existent back yard, and circled the house warily.

It's a "two-bedroom" house, although I used the tiny second bedroom mostly for storage. The single-storey house had minimal insulation under cheap vinyl siding. The bullets had made large holes in the dirty white siding, easily visible in the street light. I counted eight holes in both the front and side walls, the holes in the side wall elongated, almost tears in the vinyl. I stared at the holes. An assault rifle? Or maybe a .50 caliber? The holes made a pattern of sorts, following a horizontal line about five feet above ground level, and about a foot above the straggly bushes that had been planted next to the house – thorny bushes which I mostly ignored. The landlord came twice a year to trim them.

The shots had been fired at the corner of the house which held my bedroom. Nowhere else. But they'd been fired on a level which could be presumed to be over my bed. So, what?

A warning? Or were they hoping they'd hit me? How the hell did they know where my bedroom was?



"Well," Steve said, contemplatively, "where did that come from? That's not a whole story, is it?"

"No," I said. "It's just an opening, what we call the 'opening hook.'"

"Where's it go from there?" Steve asked.

"I have no real idea," I admitted. "I wrote it during a short stretch at work when I had no work, was bored, and just started writing. That's what came out."

"Are you going to do anything with it? Are you going to finish it?"

"I showed it to my writers group and got several good suggestions. I think I know what the second scene will be. It has to do with the absence of any cops on the scene after all that noisy shooting. But I have no idea what the overall story is, and at this point I don't know whether I'll actually finish it."

"But by putting it in your *Pixel* column, you're putting it in a fanzine," Steve expectorated. "And by putting it in a fanzine, you've made it 'fanwriting.'"

"QED," I said. "Exactly. Think it'll win me a Hugo nomination?"

Steve gave me a long contemplative look. "A nomination, Ted? Just a nomination? You've *got* a Hugo," he said, sadly. "I'm still looking for mine." •

FOUND IN COLLECTION

**Christopher
Garcia**

Do you have someone who is so deeply tangled with your life that you have no place to hide? Kurt Vonnegut would have said these kinds of people would be members of your Karass; an artificial family-type of group that exists for no good reason. I've got folks who I intersect with in a number of different places, many of them fannish and many of them in the computer field, but one name has been tangled up with mine lately in very many strange ways. I'm talking about Dave Langford.

Last issue, I told you about my friend at work who came across *The End of Harry Potter* and took that as a chance to mock me. Langford's book (which is one of the B+N Recommended books at the stores near my house) has popped up several more times. The first time was from my Uncle Wayne. Wayne runs the Hemet Public Library system and buys books. He noticed that the name of the guy who wrote the Harry Potter book looked familiar and after searching his old emails, noticed that it was on the list of nominees that I'd sent him. He called me at work and asked if I would recommend the book. I said yes, and he ordered it. He then

wrote back saying it was one of the most popular new books that the library had purchased and that he had to order more to fill demand. He also asked me to recommend other things by Dave Langford that he could add to the library. I sent him everything I could find, without so much as a grumble.

The following day my Mom, also a librarian, asked if I'd read the book. I told her the story and she said that she had read it and thought it was also very good. She said that it was the kind of thing that I should be writing. I pointed out that I'm not that smart. She silently agreed by quickly changing the topic.

The big one happened at work a couple of Tuesdays ago. That's the day we go through the week's donations and decide if things are worth keeping. Even when folks send us a list of things they're sending, usually they pack in a few extra pieces just to keep us guessing. Typically, these are things we don't want and have to either return or get rid of. We end up going through everything at least once if not twice. This week there was a lot of text and a few artifacts. There were several that were British computers from

the 1980s and 90s. These had been given to us from a guy who had lived in the UK and shipped the entire contents of his house in several large D-boxes to the US and was only starting to go through the contents again, sending stuff to museums and whatnot. There were several Amstrad computers, a company that grew exponentially every year of the early 1980s and produced a great deal of Europe's top-selling computers. There were a couple of Beebs, the BBC Microcomputer that was supposed to teach every kid BASIC. There was a weird hackjob of a Sinclair ZX-80 that looked as if mad cows had gotten hold of the thing and twisted it into their own bovine image. There were Acorns and Archimedes and the hideously ugly Phoebe. There were some handhelds that were just nutty too in the mix.

And then there was the Apricot.

Apricot computers were all the rage for a very brief period. The company started in the 1960s as Applied Computer Techniques. They made calculators and later minicomputers that were really just rebadged Victor 9000s. The Apricot in the mix was the Apricot Portable, a brilliant piece of machinery. In those days a number of computers were entering the world with infrared keyboards. These would allow the keyboard to be moved



a significant distance from the computer. The IBM PC-jr used one, but its range was limited because the signal had to actually enter a small hole in the front of the machine. The Apricot was a little better, and it could use simple voice commands. That was a nice touch. The machine was an easy carry and would have been a big winner in the US if two things hadn't happened. The first was the near total command of the IBM PC over the world of personal computing. The second was the Apple Macintosh being released the same year and grabbing up a lot of the people who wanted something different. This doomed Apricot and they never penetrated the US market.

The donation was huge and there was a box full of documentation. There were manuals and there were diagrams of programmes this guy had written. There were magazines and books and a set of articles that had obviously been torn out of the magazines they came from and put into a manila folder. The folder was labeled Apricot, so I opened it up. There were about 20 or so articles about the Apricot staring up at me. I was going to read them until I saw the name on the by-line.

Dave Langford.

The man had infiltrated the Computer History Museum, the last place I felt I could hide from his giant, moon-sized shadow. I couldn't bring myself to go through the articles, so I handed them to Dag, our curator.

"You might wanna take a look at these, old boy." I said, handing them to him. I then went upstairs to discover that Dave had sent an e-mail with an article for *The Drink Tank*. Dag came up about ten minutes later.

"You know, I started reading these and they're really good. We should put them in the important reference file for timeline research." Dag said.

I nearly 'ploded. •

Being Frank

Banana Wings 30 (Claire Brialey & Mark Plummer)

A4 booklet, paper, 36 pages, quarterly, "the usual."
fishlifter@googlemail.com

The most common harbinger of a new fanzine these days may well be a subject line starting '[efanzines]'. But arriving home after a niggly day at work to find a classic white envelope with Fishlifter Press as the return address still gives you a lift that the electronic equivalent still can't quite match. If, as Arnie Katz supposes, our choice in the future will be between electronic fanzines and no fanzines, then that's fair enough and not exactly a tricky decision. But in the meantime, a paper fanzine of the quality of *Banana Wings* still has just something a bit more special about it than another PDF download.

The front cover is a Harry Turner piece of artwork, surrounded by the now-traditional eponymous winged bananas. The editorial apologizes for this being pretty much the only bit of art (wingdings don't really count, no?) in this issue. I must admit that, without this apologia, I'm not sure that I would have noticed.

Mark provides the editorial this time, with a discussion of the twentieth anniversary of Science Fiction Eye (with a sideways glance at the fortieth anniversary of *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*). Before moving on to the question of whether there are too many awards for SF&F writing these days – Mark manages to tot up a total of twenty-nine awards that a novel could be eligible for, although as he points out, you'd have to "be a black Australian/Canadian now resident in the Pacific Northwest whose first published work is a juvenile libertarian romantic alternative history novel with an Inkingnesque vampire who explores issues of gender and race in a positive way to homosexuals in a novel that contains SF, fantasy and horror elements and which appears simultaneously in Australia, the UK and the US (as a paperback original)" to qualify for them all. Actually, if anyone was careful enough to be able to tick all of those boxes, I'd almost be prepared to let them blag all twenty-nine awards just on principle.

Chris Garcia leads off with the first article, entitled "Annoying Peter Weston," about how to run for TAFF in the 21st Century. (ObDisclaimer: Yes, I do get name-checked. Yes, it was thus the first article I read in full in this issue. Yes, I am that shallow.) To be fair, I don't think that there's actually a real contradiction between their two viewpoints. Peter Weston's concern (and bear in mind I'm getting this at least third-hand here) is that "importing" voters who aren't part of TAFF's core electorate is, whilst within the rules, not exactly in the spirit of TAFF. Whereas Chris's TAFF run in the abortive 2006 race was more about making himself known to the potential but core TAFF electorate of fanzine fan-

dom and con-going fandom.

Claire writes a piece called “Misfanthropy,” in which she makes the shocking accusation that fans can sometimes be mean or bad-spirited – a fair point, but a characteristic that they surely share with the other 6 billion members of *homo sapiens*? (Apologies to any fans who are not members of *h.sapiens* that I have accidentally slighted – I can only think of Fluff the Plush Cthulu at the moment, but I am sure there are others.) Tanya Brown provides an A to Z list focused on the different categories of books on her shelves – “G for Gifts” and “S for Signed Copies” being typical categories.

Mark writes about the mailing habits of John Hertz. Stay with me here, it’s actually quite an interesting and well-written piece. In effect, it’s a review of John Hertz’s *Vanamonde*, which, as a one-page contribution to the weekly APA-L run by the Los Angeles Science Fiction Society, is typically interesting but almost impossible to review. Those of us not in APA-L tend to get *Vanamonde* in various-sized batches, and Mark notes that he seems to have shifted from a universe in which *Vanamondes* arrive in batches of 5 to one where they arrive in batches of 10. As far as I can tell, I am living in (using Mark’s terminology) the *Vanamonde*₇ universe, but that’s probably because I trod on a different butterfly during the dinosaur hunt to Mark.

Tony Keen completes his two-part article about Screen Portrayals of the Roman Empire, in which he manages to pull together consistent themes from the various types of Roman epic, from the Cinescope epics like *Spartacus*, *Quo Vadis* and *Ben Hur* to less likely genre pieces such as *Life of Brian* and *Up Pompeii*. I must admit I like his description of Richard Burton’s performance in *Cleopatra* as “a famous drunk played by a famous drunk.” The article stands on its own merits in any case as far as I am concerned, but for those who need a stfnal link, he mentions the Roman influences on *Star Wars* (via the *Foundation* novels).

Claire works through her collection of old convention badges, and gets semi-reminiscent along the way. This is followed by a convention report about this year’s Corflu by Mark, most of which actually covers the post-convention wait at the airport for the flight back home. There’s then an installment of Juliette Woods’ trip report from her GUFF trip to the British Worldcon in 2005. She notes “I’m still unsure as to whether [Clapham Junction] is anyone’s local station or whether it exists purely as a place of transit.” Well, I did once go to Clapham Junction to actually go to Clapham (on a business trip), but since the firm went bust before they ever got around to paying us, I’m not sure this really counts.

The lettercolumn is split into several parts this time. The main letter column contains the responses to the last issue. But there are also several late responses to earlier issues, which get packed off into their own “Retro Wings” sidebars throughout the issue - a neat way of filling in those awkward gaps at the end of full-length articles that insist on finishing half-way down a column.

“The rambling bit at the end” (self-titled) this time is by Claire, mainly about conventions, including the now-selected Eastercon for 2009, LXCon. The back page itself is a standard fannish joke re-worked, the spoof tick-box check-list (“You are receiving this fanzine because...”). Actually, even many real tick-box check lists are, at least in part, self-spoofs – a bit like a Roger Moore-era James Bond film. But this being Banana Wings, the spoof tick-box check-list has an original (to me, at any rate) twist at the end. •

PIXELATED

Lettercolumn

Chris Garcia

garcia at computerhistory dot org

A wonderful line from Eric Mayer. He says he can't be Kate Moss but he might be able to be Joyce Carol Oates. I studied under Joyce while I was in college. Nice lady. She had strange ideas (or as we said in Boston at the time "idears") about how to compose words into a sensible story. I've always believed that one should write like they talk, but she said exactly the opposite. I guess that explains a lot.

I shudder at the mention of Vegemite. I hate the stuff. I bought a thing of it a few years ago, back when Koala Blue and Jocko for Energizer (Oi!) was all the rage, and I took one spoonful and it devastated me. Marmite is even worse. These things were forged in the bowels of hell as tools to destroy me. These things happen.

The All Depending on Your Point of View thing reminds me of the gag that Steven Colbert used Wikipedia for. He told folks to vandalize the site by saying that there had been an explosion in the number of elephants. He then went on the show a few nights later and said that the number of elephants had tripled because of The Colbert Report. It was all a part of Wikiality! It was awesome.

Recently, I was talking with a guy at work and he mentioned that now that I've gone and gotten nominated for Fan Writer that I can go Pro. I've got no plans to ever do that. When I was a younger man, in my 20s, I wanted to be a real pro writer. I kept getting the same rejection: this just isn't a voice we'd ever publish. Gardner Dozois once returned a manuscript with a Post-It saying This Writing Shows No Promise. I completely understand why he said that. I write like I write, but more important than how I, or anyone, writes is the fact that they DO write. The writing is the thing. I've never found anything that wasn't worth reading, or of the stuff that's been sent to me, anything that's not worth publishing. Of course, I have no standards for my own writing other than it gets written. That's just me. I'll never be a pro because I write like I talk and I don't want to write any other way. That and I don't know anything about spelling or grammar.

One of those Chris Garcias is me and one is my cousin's gradu-

Illustrations by Manfred Klein

ation photo. See if you can figure out which one, I think you'll be pleasantly surprised.

I share a lot of the same opinions with Good Ol' Pete about Pro-lapse. I think it's a good readin' zine and I'm glad that Pete's goin' at it full bore. I'm hoping that reading it will give a guy a solid understanding of British Fan History, perhaps helping a potential TAFF candidate get into the race!

Joseph T Major

jtmajor at iglou dot com

[Eric Mayer] can't get [his] weight **UP TO** 130 pounds!? Gaah. I haven't been 130 pounds since my age was in single digits. Which has led to other problems. And it's worse now because I am on steroids for the Crohn's Disease, which has left me looking puffy. (I read Megan "Robin Hobb" Lindholm's new novel where the protagonist unintentionally triggers a curse and part of it is that he starts blimping up, and felt an untoward sympathy for the guy.)

At least you can step on the invaders of your house. We have possums. Did you know, by the way, that that fannish favorite Pogo Possum was not the original hero of his strip? Originally, the strip was about a little boy named Bumbazine. One day Bumbazine just disappeared. In the swamp. Where even a possum can bury a body so far out and so deep that it'll never be found...



A man who was doing a family book on my mother's grandmother's family came to Frankfort during my last year in High School. He took a picture of my mother, my younger brother, and me. I did not look very prepossessing. I've mentioned the weight, and posing in shorts only

made it more absurd. Except for my hair, which poofed out in a dutch-boy bowl. Now that was silly.

A few years ago, my aunt (now gone), sent me a childhood picture of herself and her younger brother, my father. They both have hair in a very familiar form... So it's genes that are at fault. Or so I think as I look at my still-abundant but now gray hair.

They say that you should write on the back of a picture who is in it and when it was taken, so as to avoid such contretemps as you describe. Of course, I've heard the story of someone who did exactly that, and wrote: "The whole lot of us, a week ago Tuesday."

"Much Nothings About Ado": Be glad you still have the eye. Of course, I've never had good vision at all.

"Found In Collection": I got nominated for a Hugo, too.

You know, that picture laydown would not be admissible in court.

"Pixelated": Lloyd Penney: Remember the story in *Analog* about the completely computerized and interlinked shopping/health-care system? The guy went to the grocery and discovered that he wasn't permitted to buy anything, because eating it would shorten his life. The system offered advice on how to live without eating.

And it's been noted that children today who have been raised in sanitized germ-free environments are more susceptible to illnesses and allergies. They have never developed any resistance.

Eric Mayer

maywrite2 at epix dot net

I'm sorry but this issue is really pretty much lost on me. The cover's nice, the design excellent and Brad's illo is terrific, but as for the topics discussed...

Take Lee Lavell's medical trauma...please! I don't like medical treatments. My goal is to drop dead while still perfectly healthy. If

a doctor says to me that they will puncture my eyeball, drain the fluid, and pump in gas and I will be awake the whole time my reply would be – only if you keep giving me smelling salts. I'm glad her ordeal is over and hope she gets the optimum results.

Then there's Chris writing about the Hugos. Not being a convention sort of person, I've never voted for the Hugo, but I have voted for Chris for the FAAn awards and I'm thrilled to see that I'm not the only one who finds his writing highly enjoyable. When it comes to awards, most of the honor is just in getting nominated, in my opinion. You can't really "lose" after you've made the final list and I can't imagine anyone could feeling seriously disappointed at not taking home the actual award. Not that I have any experience being nominated for Hugos. However, Mary and I did have our Byzantine mysteries nominated for "Best Historical" two years running by Left Coast Crime. I was amazed and gratified that someone appreciated our efforts. There was no question of us winning, considering the other nominees, but that didn't diminish the honor a bit.

It looks like Peter Sullivan contributed a meaty review of Pete Weston's *Prolapse* but I've decided to limit myself to e-fanac so the zine isn't of interest to me. It's fine that Peter deigns to put it online for folks like me long after his print readers have got a copy but if an editor considers me a second rate reader why should I bother with his zine? There's no dearth of excellent reading material out there.

You see, Dave, this is getting to be a dead loss. Nice illo by Brad Foster, though. Did, I already mentioned that?

I'm almost afraid to mention Ted's column. I'm not sure if I ought to be flattered or horrified to figure so prominently therein. I guess I haven't had so much attention since...well...never mind...

Actually I don't see where we differ all that much. I could've been a little more careful in that dialog in how I used the terms "faanish writing" and "fanwriting." What I was trying to express

was that the sort of fanwriting that depends on being "faanish" to work for a fan audience, isn't very good for practicing writing for a different audience, but the kind of fanwriting that doesn't lean so heavily on faanishness can be quite useful. Rather as Ted describes, I would often concentrate on those aspects of my fan articles (dialog etc) that seemed to have wider applicability.

However, though I've always taken pride in my writing and sought to improve, I was in Fandom simply for the fun of it. In fact, as I mentioned, I never paid serious attention to writing fiction until I was in my forties. Occasionally I would get the urge write and submit a story. I doubt if I wrote more than ten over the course of two decades and you can't get anywhere like that. Imagine if you get a page and a half letter about a submission from Ben Bova and never submit again? That's how "serious" I was about selling fiction.

I certainly agree with Ted that writers like Burbee and Willis are as good or better than most professionals, although they also both wrote professionally. Walt Willis, in particular, I hold in the same regard as other favorite essayists like E.B. White and James Thurber. I should mention there's a wonderful 600 page collection of Walt's work but I'm trying not to be inflammatory.

So far as what degree of criticism we ought to direct at each other as fans...I suppose Ted and I will never agree about that. People participate in Fandom for different reasons. If someone is publishing and writing just to socialize and chat, with no interest in honing their writing or producing a polished zine, I don't see that there's anything to be gained by castigating them for not taking the approach I might prefer for myself. I enjoy orienteering.



Some of the people I'm out in the woods with are trying to race and win. I'm with those who just want to enjoy the scenery and not get lost. We all seek different things out of our hobbies.

Lee Lavell

leelavell at comcast dot net

"Notes from Byzantium": I love Eric Mayer's writing. It's the kind I would love to do. Concerning weight, when I was a child I was very tall and very very skinny. My mother kept pushing high calorie things for me to eat and constantly urging me to clean my plate but to no avail. I remained skinny. Then in my early twenties my metabolism suddenly completely changed. I gained fifteen pounds in three weeks. Since then I have been fighting the opposite weight problem. Those old childhood urgings from my mother sunk in too well. I can't seem to get rid of that early childhood training.

"Whither Fandom" (or "Wither Fandom" as you headed it. Was this some sort of Freudian slip reflecting the aging faces of many fanzine fans?): As for the content of the column, I can both agree and disagree with it. People write because they want to write. Fandom just gives the writer a place to see his efforts in print, if that's what he wants. Writers write because they have something to say. Some want to say it to others and some prefer talking to themselves. Some want to go on to professional writing. They take criticism seriously and try to learn from it. Others just write for fun and don't give a rat's ass what other people think. Fine. They're doing their thing and sometimes it's a whole lot better than the writing of those who go on to be professionals. Of course, some of it is execrable, but a good editor can help with that. Whatever, fan writing just a form of egoboo.

"Found in Collection": Congrats to Chris on his nomination. As for results there's no accounting for taste. (Take that any way you will.)

"Being Frank": Glad to see this back. Sullivan's in-depth reviews are getting better and better!

Cover: Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful.

"Much Nothings": Just as a follow-up I would like to thank Doctors Minturn (macular surgery), Johnson (cataract surgery) and Brumbaugh (who first diagnosed the hole) as well as Marcus Loidolt, Margaret Webb and David Burton, who did many things to help me get through the whole thing.

"Pixelated": To John Purcell: I actually predated "The Club House," learning about fandom through the lettercolumns in *Startling Stories* and *Thrilling Wonder Stories* in the Forties. When our first local club was formed in the early Fifties we availed ourselves of the "Free Fan Personals" in *Other Worlds* to attract new members.

John Purcell

j_purcell54@yahoo.com

Once again, a lovely cover photo. How did you know that I'm a sucker for shots of Planet Urth and its double planet companion, Luna, from space? Very cool photo. Some times I enjoy perusing NASA's website and enjoy the pretty pictures.

Eric Mayer's musings about being a runaway - how about runaway? - model are quite the attention-grabber. While he may meet the current guidelines for being a glamour model, it's good that he has the wherewithal to not dwell on such a career move. This talk of modeling in a science fiction fanzine reminds me of Tom Reamy's exquisite offset-printed fanzine of the mid-70s, *Nickelodeon*, which didn't run for many issues, but did feature brief pictorials of nude male and female fans. He was very democratic about it, too, having one of each gender per issue. Besides being a fine writer, Tom was also a very good photographer, and he blended his interests in his zine. Sadly, Tom Reamy died too young. I always enjoyed his zines and his

company at cons.

Reading about Lee Lavell's surgery to repair that macular hole was enough to make me cringe in sympathetic pain. Fandom certainly seems to have been assailed with a wealth of eye surgeries in recent months, but this is probably predictable given the fact that fandom is aging. It is sad but true that eye-sight is one of the first casualties of aging. (My wife claims it's the male sex drive, but I repeatedly assure her that it's not.) With any kind of luck, my eye-sight will hold up for many a year. Here's hoping that Lee's recovery is going well, and that she will soon have good news about her vision.

I loved that Norwegian joke on page 9. Up in Minnesota, there are a ton of these and I don't remember this particular one. Thank you for sharing.

So Ted White's column is now withering? Or is fandom withering? These are the questions I drew from the heading. Blithering, definitely. Fandom has always done. As for the content of Ted's column, I find myself siding more with Ted than with Eric Mayer about the merits of fan writing, but I can certainly understand Eric's point of view. There is indeed a lot of sloppy writing in fandom; always has been. But then again, those fan writers who care about what they produce tend to rise to the challenge, with the result being some wonderful material. For what it's worth, I try to challenge myself in order to improve my fan writing, and I hope it shows. It is so easy to fall into that mindset of "Well, it's only for a fanzine" and thus slack off on the effort. Fortunately, some fan writers plod onward, trying to do better than before.

Like Ted, I do not see fan writing as a means to achieving professional sales. Every once in a while I get on a serious writing tear and try to write some stories (science fiction, mystery, fantasy, horror/supernatural, or contemporary "literary" fiction) and poetry. Each time I believe I get a little bit better. Fanzine

writing really is no stepping stone to professional writing. That all depends on the mind-set of the writer; if one takes his or her craft seriously enough and makes a concerted, focused effort, diligence and passion will be rewarded. There may not be gigantic fiduciary rewards, but not many people can lay claim to being published writers. It is all about personal motivation and satisfaction.



How I envy Ted working alongside Terry Carr, Greg Benford, and Ron Ellik. I remember reading some old issues of *Void* and *Innuendo* (probably from Denny Lien's collection), and I suppose they and other zines moved me to create my own zines based on what I read. But it's hard to recreate solo what Ted and his companions created in such a fertile and fevered environment. My early zines failed miserably. But once again, through persistence and the desire to improve, my zines got better. Still are, in fact. In a week or so, the second issue of *Askance* will be done, and I already have some material lined up from James Bacon for the third issue. Plus my interview with James Halperin will be in my third issue. He is the fellow who bought Harry Warner, Jr.'s fanzine collection, and I'm getting together with him up in Dallas at the end of May.

Got a bit off track there, but the desire to write well is all up to the individual. It is a lot like solo sports like golf or bowling: you can't blame anyone else if your ball goes deep into the rough or down the gutter. Concentrate, practice, refine, and practice some more; that's how athletes improve, and it works for writing, too.

Thank you for the Chris Garcia pictures on page 17. Except for that pretty lady, it's a rather scruffy bunch, especially that third

guy from the left. Looks like he needs a long trip to sober up. Eeeeww... Only a fool would share a hotel room with a guy like that...

Mark Plummer made some excellent points on writing in his loc, especially when he mentioned that he needs some “thinking time” for his writing. I do that, too. It does help to write it down, move along to other things, and come back to it later after its had a chance to percolate through the brain for awhile. It helps me to spot idiotic phrases and inconsistencies that I crashed out in a fit of creative passion. Distance and a fresh mind helps edit out the mistakes and smooths the writing. Works for me.

Joseph Major: This scenario sounds surprisingly real. What I’m waiting for that will croggle the old brain matter is when I see dogs wearing iPods with earphones out for morning jogs with their likewise attired owners. In this town (College Station), *anything* is possible!

Eric Mayer: As you know, I’m a college teacher, and right now it’s finals week, so this weekend I have a passle of grading to do. The zine thus gets back-burnered for a few days, but by mid-next-week, *Askance #2* is back in full production. Almost done, too.

A fine issue again, David. Many thanks, and let’s do this again next month, shall we?



Robert Lichtman

robertlichtman at yahoo dot com
In his column in *Pixel* No. 13 Eric Mayer writes, “I was lucky enough to survive consuming two jars of Vegemite, but this was years ago, and I was much younger and more robust. Also they were very small jars, which suggests that hungry and determined travelers might

rather easily smuggle Vegemite across the border if they aren’t particular about where their snacks have been.” I remember those tiny jars of Vegemite. They were my first physical introduction to the stuff back in the early ‘80s after reading about it in Australian fanzines. I was living with Jeanne Bowman at the time, and it was she who had the bottles.

I quite agree with Eric’s characterization of it: “...the stuff resembled congealed motor oil. Ah, but the taste...Definitely salty...but more than that...sharp, exotic...just barely on the right side of being utterly unpalatable, like root beer Fizzies. Sometimes the taste buds get a thrill out of walking a tightrope.” I can understand why those two small jars lasted Eric a couple of years. At that time Jeanne’s father was a globetrotting executive for a major corporation, and on one of his trips he brought back something that made our eyes pop out with wonder: an 18-ounce jar of Vegemite. Actually, *two* of them. I don’t quite remember the details of how it played out, but after Jeanne and I split up I ended up with one of those jars.

I kept it for many years, never getting quite below a half-inch of the top of the bottle in my increasingly widely spaced indulgences in Vegemite consumption. It slowly migrated to the back of the cupboard I kept it in, and was eventually forgotten.

Rediscovering it when I moved in the fall of 2005, the bottle was very dusty. Inside, though, the Vegemite looked (and smelled) the same as it had in the early ‘80s. In a quick executive decision – “I haven’t had any of this for at least a dozen years, probably more” – I threw it in the apartment complex dumpster.

Eric writes of the family photo albums inherited from his mother: “There will be a day I turn the pages of the album by myself and when I come to that picture I’ll remember how my mom used to ask me, ‘Now who’s that?’” I have hundreds of photos – some in albums, some in frames, others loose in envelopes – that my deceased parents either took themselves or inherited in turn

from the generation before them. For the most part I can still identify who's who, but there are a few that stymie me. I recognize some of those people as friends of my grandparents, but I can't recall their names. And there are a very few who draw a complete blank. I need to take time to mark the backs of at least some of them so my sons will have a clue.

I agree with Ted White's comments about Eric Mayer's remarks about fanwriting in the last issue, and since I made my own observations in this issue's lettercol I'm not going to take it any further. I did enjoy Ted's many anecdotal digressions here. That aside, it was interesting to come across Ted's mention that when he sent the early *Zip* out into the world Walt Willis traded *Hyphen* for it "and sen[t] me one of the last copies of *The Enchanted Duplicator*." Walt must have had a lot of "one of the last copies" around, because he did the same for me back in the late '50s or early '60s. And when I came back into fandom in 1980 after a decade-long gafiation he sent me a small pile of leftover issues of *Hyphen*, the last of which had been published in 1965.

Unlike Mark Plummer I never went through a phase of printing out great gobs of e-mails for archiving purposes, but once I got e-mail at work I had the same concerns he did "because, unlike Ted, I was always wary of subjecting my account to the kind of traffic that I knew lists such as Memory Hole could generate." Even before I got into the lists, I set up the first of my now many free Yahoo Mail accounts – one for each list in order to keep the conversations separate from one another – and began saving personal e-mail on my work computer's hard drive and then downloading it to disks that I took home and filed on a monthly basis (and then deleted from that hard drive). It wasn't until late 2000 that I finally got on-line at home. Even so, because it was dial-up there remained a huge percentage of my correspondence that I conducted at work and I kept accruing and saving to disk that portion of it rather than copying myself because it was a

quicker means of archiving than having to download it all at dial-up speeds. Even now I save all correspondence, but now it's all sent to my giant external hard drive rather than put on disks. I still retain all the disks from back when, but their contents are also on that hard drive. Ghod, I'm boring myself. (As a footnote on the subject, though, I'll add that I've never archived the lists, instead relying on the Web archives to do that for me. If Yahoo Mail ever has a serious crash or goes away, I'll be out of luck.)

Lloyd Penney writes that he was eighteen when he discovered fandom thirty years ago and is now looking ahead to this coming December when he qualifies for membership in First Fandom. I joined that group not quite two years ago and am not planning to renew when my present membership runs out. My first experience with their publication *Scientifiction* was when Jim Harmon was editing (2000-2002). It was a solid little fanzine then with interesting articles and letters, well-presented and -written. I also have quite a few of the issues that came out in the period immediately preceding Jim's editorial stint, and they're also pretty good, ranging (like Jim's) from 16 to 24 pages per issue.

Since joining First Fandom myself, the same publication has been a scrappy newsletter with minimal editing and very few pages. The largest one I've gotten was the most recent, at ten pages, but the rest have been either four or six pages – and one of the four-pagers was a double issue! The issue before the current one never reached me at all, and although I've sent an e-mail to ask for a replacement copy weeks have passed with no communication and no fanzine in the mail. It's hardly worth ten bucks a year to get at best sixteen to twenty pages of newsletters. •