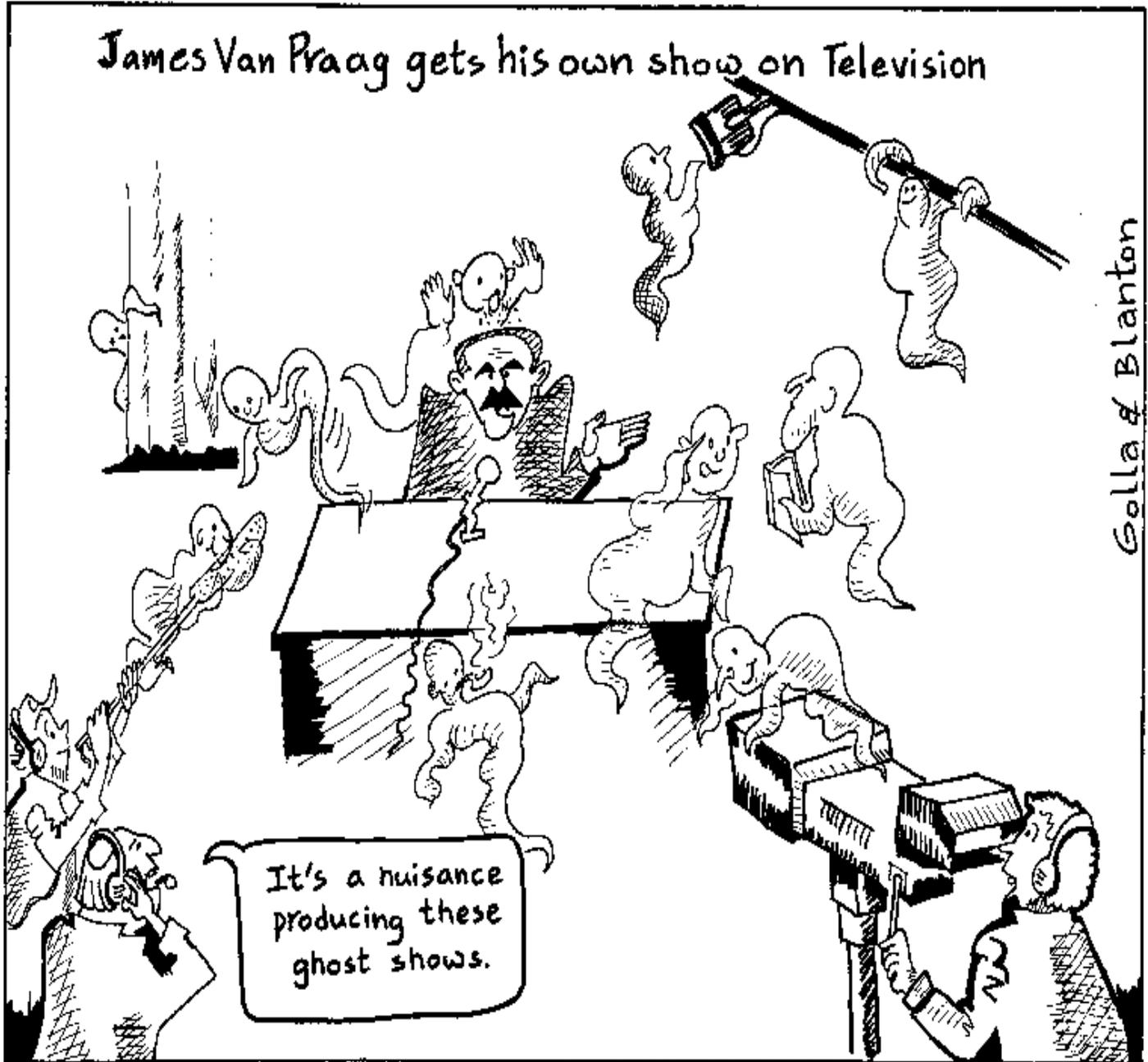


In A Prior Lifetime



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In A Prior Lifetime #6

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This fanzine is also available for viewing
at www.efanzines.com

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As is always the case, you may
acquire this zine the old fashioned
way –via U.S. snail mail – for
expressing interest, or sending a
small bag (8 oz.) of sunflower seeds.
Fat free, of course.

*contents: bemused natterings...2; they're crazy down here...3; dust from the attic
redux...6; fiction: Mephisto dropped in one day...10; from the hinterlands... 16 ;
some closing thoughts...20.*

Bemused Natterings

There are times when I really have to wonder about the reasons why people do certain things. Case in point: the next segment in this zine is sort of about how football crazy Texans are. Now, don't get me wrong; I have always been a sports fan. In fact, my favorite sports are hockey, baseball, and soccer, and I do enjoy watching football, especially at the collegiate level. I have never been much of a basketball fan; however, college basketball can be very exciting to watch. And even though I do enjoy bowling, golfing, and fishing, watching these sports on television is akin to watching paint dry. My father used to watch golf on TV, and mom used to give him a lot of grief about it, especially since he usually fell asleep in his chair while engaged in this activity. Dad and I used to watch ABC's Professional Bowler's Tour every Saturday afternoon at 1:30 PM, and it was fun. Mom couldn't understand why we enjoyed watching other people bowl on television since we used to go bowling ourselves every weekend. But, you have to keep in mind the mentality of the American arm-chair athlete: if someone else can do your sport better than you, then watch them because you **become them**, participating vicariously through the wonders of modern technology.

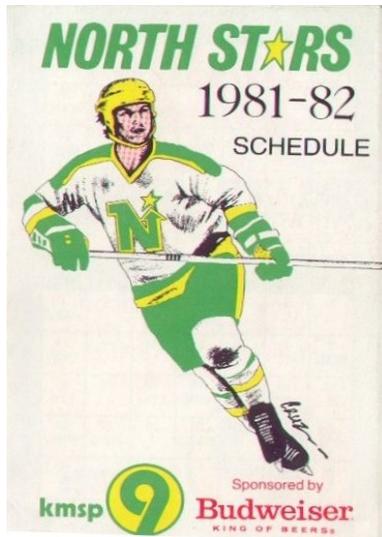
And it is this vicarious nature of humans which may explain why...

They're crazy down here

I really mean this.

Over the course of the four and a half years I have been living in College Station, Texas, the above statement has been spilling from my mouth at an ever-increasing rate. Let me give a few examples of what I'm talking about.

First, off Texans talk funny. Now, I don't mean their drawl throws me; the linguist in me actually kind of enjoys the accent of native Texans. What I mean here is that these people say the craziest things, such as they're always "fixin' to" do something or other: "Ah'm fixin' to go to the store" or "Ah'm fixin' to get me a coke." Every other phrase spoken here possesses this flipped progressive infinitive. What? Is Texas broken? Their grammar certainly appears to be. And you should have seen the look on Dr. Kelly's face a couple years ago at TAMU when he asked if I'd like to have a Coke, and I responded with, "No thanks. I'm a Pepsi drinker." See, down here the word "coke" means the same as a Minnesotan asking for a "pop" or a New Englander asking for a "soda." Plus, if you really want to piss a native Texan off, ask them why school kids say the pledge of allegiance to Texas every morning after the national Pledge of Allegiance, and then tell them that Texas is just another gol-durned state. *Then* toss in the comment that the Dallas Stars aren't named after the Lone Star State. That will surely get them riled up.



Aside:

See, as a hockey purist, I believe there should not be professional hockey teams south of the Mason-Dixon line. I mean, it was bad enough when Norm Green moved the Minnesota North Stars – a great team – to Dallas to gain some more bucks, but for the defending Stanley Cup champion team to be the *Tampa Bay Lightning*(?!?) – I am sorry, but that's just simply wrong!!! No offense to Wayne Gretzky, but this should be an NHL by-law: no teams should be allowed in Dallas, Nashville, L.A., Atlanta, San Jose, Phoenix, Tampa Bay, or where-ever down "south." This simply makes sense to me.

But my main argument about the denizens of College Station is this: they are just totally gonzo about their damned Aggies here. Now, don't get me wrong or anything because college football in general is full of grand and wonderful traditions, but down here it is

Tradition!

And they've got some real doozies, too. The team mascot always has to be a damned collie, for example, and that's only because one such fool dog wandered into one of the dorms back in the mid-1930's because it was lost and hungry, and probably looking for work (it was the Great Depression, remember), and the corps of cadets decided to keep the dog, and named it Reveille when it started barking at 4:45 AM one day. I'm surprised they didn't shoot the dog. I would have.

There have been seven Reveilles now, and number VI (yes, they use Roman numerals here, thereby keeping up yet another tradition) wasn't too terribly bright, either. I well remember when I attended the Iowa State vs. A&M football game on October 27, 2001, which was also Reveille VI's first game out of puppy training; she was something like 10 months old, and very pretty, like this one pictured here. Well, ISU scored first in the game, early on,



and TAMU finally scored their first touchdown of the game late in the second quarter. This means that it's time for the gun crew to fire off the cannon just beyond the south end zone. Lots of colleges do this, especially the military academies, and it is very loud even when you're expecting the blast. Well, poor puppy Reveille didn't know this was coming. When the cannon boomed less than 50 feet from where she stood with her handler, the dog freaked big time. You could say the cannon scared the shit out of her – literally. Reveille broke from her handler, began barking hysterically, ran madly around the south end zone, and lost bladder and bowel control; piss and shit flew out of her back end as she ran. It took four or five uniformed cadets to corral the crazed dog, muzzle her, and physically carry her out of the stadium. Meanwhile, her handler procured a shovel and bucket and began scooping the poop out of the end zone. The person running the Jumbotron screen on the scoreboard (probably an Oklahoma graduate) found a camera angle, zoomed in on the poop-scooping guy, and put the image up on the screen for all to see. If you have never heard 84,000 people laughing, you haven't lived. Quite an experience. (FYI: Reveille VI was "retired" a year and half later after running away from her kennel, got hit by a bus, recovered, soon after bit a professor trying to pet her, then a month later jumped off the front steps of the old Academy building, wrecking a hip in the process. Not exactly the pick of the litter. The current Reveille seems to be alright, but it's still a damned collie. At least Texas has a real, big-ass longhorn on the sideline, Colorado has a buffalo, and Baylor has a brown bear. Now THOSE are mascots!)

A couple other football traditions need to be covered as well. The 12th Man tradition, where all of the students in attendance have to stand throughout the entire game, is okay, and I appreciate the sentiment: like the original 12th Man, they stand ready to play if needed. However, even though I'm a doctoral candidate at TAMU, I happen to be 51 years old and I ain't getting any younger, so hang it all – *I'm sitting down*, thank you very much.

Kyle Field is also very loud. Its capacity is 85,000, and for an outdoor stadium, the sound is fairly confined due to the structure of the stands. There are now plans to enclose the south end with more stands, connecting the east and west sides, which would boost the capacity to 110,000 making it the biggest college football stadium in America. And thus become the loudest, too.

This is another mentality about A&M that drives me nuts; everything here has to be bigger than ever before or anywhere else. This was the main cause of that tragic bonfire accident six years ago, and students still construct bonfires off campus every year the week before the annual Texas vs. A&M Thanksgiving weekend game to end the season. I won't go into this because I feel for the families who lost their kids in that stack collapse; there are liability lawsuits against the university still pending and it will probably be years before any settlements are made.

But back to the football traditions. Texas A&M University does not have cheerleaders; it has "yell leaders." These are male military cadets dressed in pristine, pressed white uniforms who lead the students in "yells", not cheers, which quite frequently end with "whoop!" Very annoying. These yells are fairly static, unchanging from year to year, which, admittedly, is also true of cheerleading squads around the nation. But these guys simply stand there, gesturing dramatically as they urge the students to yell louder. Hence their name. They don't do fancy gymnastic flips, complicated dance routines, or shake their ta-tas for the national television camera crews (which would be an interesting development, I would think). No, they just stand on the sidelines leading their dull, uninteresting yells ("Beat the hell outta ____ (fill in the blank with current opponent)" is a perennial, and don't even *think* of eliminating it!) game after game after game. And these guys campaign to be yell leaders, too. I guess it's an honor that goes on your resume after graduation. (Interviewer: "So what's your primary achievement at A&M?" Interviewee: "Making 44,000 students shout "whoop!" at the same time." Interviewer: "You're hired." Yeah, right....)

There is one football tradition that I don't mind, however, and that is kissing your sweetheart every time the Aggies score. That's a *nice* tradition to maintain. No matter what you may think, it's a harmless tradition that a lot of schools carry on, providing there's no other carrying on going on, if you know what I mean, wink-wink, nudge-nudge...

Personally, I think dogs shitting in the end zone is a tradition worth preserving.



Picking up where I left off in the fourth issue, my remembrance/tribute to Lee Pelton (1947-1993) now takes up the story toward the end of 1974. Acknowledgement of key dates and information goes to the websites of Minn-stf and Minicon history. Thank you, kind fen.

By the end of 1974, the giddiness of finding fandom and the Minnesota Science Fiction Society, Inc. had worn off, but the fun was in full swing. The conventions that Lee Pelton, Steve Glennon and I were attending had begun extending past Minicon; all of us were becoming avid comic book collectors – naturally Lee had a head start on Steve and I, but that was okay – and Lee had clued us on to North Country Comics Con II in Minneapolis in the fall of '74. It was fun, mostly for filling holes in our collections, but we all knew in our hearts that it by no means could take the place of Minicon. We were

supremely hooked by the beast, no question about it. There was so much fun to be had, and this was definitely a turning point in our fannish careers.

As a matter of fact, the three of us were now receiving *Rune*, the official clubzine of Minn-stf, because in those days, attending membership to a Minicon included automatic addition to *Rune*'s mailing list. If I remember correctly, Chuck Holst was the editor when I first began getting the zine, and then Fred Haskell took over in the fall of 1974, publishing ten splendid issues until the end of 1976. It was under Fred's excellent leadership that *Rune* became the massively popular clubzine it is now famous for, perhaps to the point of being considered the epitome of the modern-era clubzine. It was while he was editor that Lee and I began writing book reviews for *Rune*, which was quite nifty for both of us; Lee also wrote some movie and music reviews, which was a precursor of things to come.

Throughout 1975, Lee, Steve, and I began attending more conventions. With Minneapolis being in the relative hinterlands of the Upper Midwest, this limited us, but we were able to get to such fine conventions as Byobcon in Kansas City, Windycon in Chicago, and Wiscon in Madison. It needs to be mentioned here that Minicon was held twice in 1974, which nobody seemed to mind except by those running the con, and Minicon's population growth was underway. Our first meeting with Bob Tucker was during this time – he was Fan Guest of Honor at Minicon 8 in April – besides numerous other long-time fans like Rusty Hevelin, Bill Fesselmeyer, Jon and Joni Stopa, Phyllis and Alex Eisenstein, Ross Pavlac, Robert Asprin, Joan Hanke Woods, Tom Reamy, Jeanne Gomoll, and so many others I've forgotten. It was a heady time for us, fueling the fires that would erupt in the Minicon film committees of the late 70's.

Besides the cons, we were attending Minn-stf functions, which were numerous, to say the least. The typical club meeting agenda went something like this: gather at 1:30 PM at so-and-so's house; socialize until business meeting begins at approximately 4:00 PM; business meeting over at 4:30 PM (if that long); back to socializing; dinner break, 6:00 to 8:00 PM; reconvene for more socializing; music begins roughly around 10:00 PM; music and party end some time before dawn the next day. Lee loved the socializing. Never a drinker of alcoholic beverages and the consummate kibitzer, he could expound upon fantasy and science fiction books, rock and roll, blues music, old films, television shows, and what-have-you at great length. His knowledge of things scientific and such was vast, and he was willing to use it, especially when supporting his opinions on a topic. The man was in his element, and he loved it.

The music part of these meetings really got Lee going. When you consider that Minn-stf at that time was blessed with wonderful musicians and entertainers like Fred Haskell, Jim Young, David Emerson, Nate Bucklin, Reed Waller, Kara Dalkey, and Mike Wood, it was no wonder that these music sessions would go all night long. They would all sit in a circle in the host's living room, or a room large enough to accom-



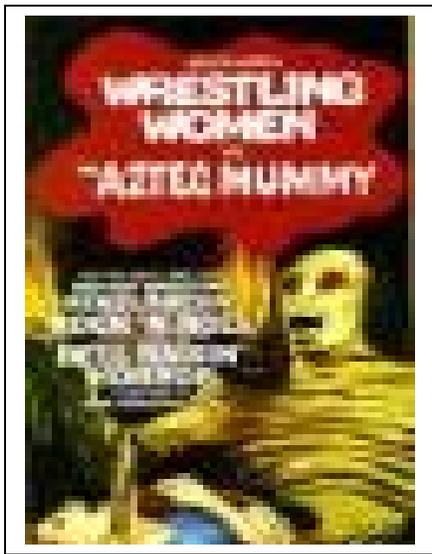
moderate most everyone at the party, and go around playing old and new songs. If you knew the song, you would play or sing along. If not, sit and enjoy. It was magical, really, and I doubt if anyone could ever recreate the mood. Lee was in the thick of it all, too, requesting songs that he would sing with gusto. He had a great rock and roll voice, too, I have to say. Through Lee's urging, I began to bring my guitar to these meetings and started playing my songs since I didn't know many popular songs. Besides, I was playing in Johnson, Fish & Company, a folk-rock trio that was trying to get gigs at the campus area coffeehouses. On top of that, I was afraid that my musicianship wasn't simply good enough to be playing in Minn-stf's group of accomplished musicians. It astonished me at how readily they accepted me; Nate Bucklin, in fact, encouraged me to learn more material and play bass. Lee joined up with Nate, Reed, and Kara in Runestone, and the group began playing gigs around the Twin Cities. Not many, but they were well received in the coffeehouses down around the University of Minnesota. By the end of 1978, Lee was beginning to think of forming an updated version of Runestone that included me on bass (because Kara had left the group for personal reasons), Nate on lead guitar, Reed on rhythm guitar, himself on lead vocal, and try to maintain a steady drummer. He knew of a couple from previous bands he had sung in, those groups going by the monickers of Afterbirth and Muff. (I will not say more on these bands, obviously enough.)

It was at one of these mid-seventies Minn-stf parties that Lee met Carol Sather, a new fan from the southwestern Minneapolis suburbs (Shakopee, I think). The two of them hit it off immediately, and it wasn't long before they were cohabitating an apartment in downtown Minneapolis. Carol would soon change her last name back to her maiden name of Kennedy (once her divorce was finalized), and it was apparent to everyone in Minn-stf that Lee and Carol were a great pair together. Their tastes in music, cons, and fanac were very similar; all the while Lee's fanac was growing by leaps and bounds – exactly the way he naturally did things – and when Fred Haskell's two year reign as editor of *Rune* came to an end, Lee and Carol announced that they were seeking to take over the clubzine's reigns. Looking back from the advantage of time and distance, they were the logical choice: Lee and Carol's fannish exuberance, energy, and visibility at cons were the embodiment of that "Crazy Minneapolis Fandom" persona becoming famous around fandom at large. Thus their reign at the helm of *Rune* ran from 1977 to 1979, and saw a huge upswing in the mailing list that paralleled the growth of Minicon. Lee recruited me as mailing agent, and that was a job considering that the typical print-run and mailing of *Rune* then was around 1000 copies, a huge circulation by any fanzine's standards then or now.

The way Lee and Carol worked together as a fanediting team was very effective. Carol brought expertise in editing and publishing to the effort, and she was also a fine, sensitive writer, a combination well-suited for fanzines. To this day I wish she'd write for or produce a personalzine; she was a member of *Lasfapa* and *Minneapa* for quite a few years, though, and well thought of in those apas. Lee, on the other hand, was *Rune's* front man. He would hound people incessantly for contributions of artwork, articles, and reviews at club meetings, cons, through his apa-contributions, and also via mail. Lee's

charismatic energy level was a draw that acted like a conditional black hole sucking you in and would only spew you out until you did something for *Rune*. Their two-years of production were not only indicative of their personalities, but of the club's personality as well. By the end of the Seventies, at least a half-dozen fans had moved to the Minneapolis-St. Paul area to become a part of Crazy Minneapolis Fandom, such as Linda Ann Moss and Barney Neufeld from Cleveland, and Matthew Tepper from Los Angeles.

Another new wrinkle in Lee's fanac developed during this time; he decided to be the film committee chairman, with Steve Glennon as his primary assistant and I would be a projectionist and gofer for the film committee. Not a problem for the Minicon Powers That Be. Thus, the die was cast for probably the most legendary film room years in Minicon history, 1977-79. Lee's manic love for ghodawful science fiction and fantasy films, to say nothing of his penchant for really oddball shorts and cartoons, surged to the fore as he and Steve, with minor input from me, deliberately selected some of the worst sf films of all time for "showing." A brief selection from these years include *Plan 9 from*



Outer Space, any of the Amazon Wrestling Women flicks (such as the one shown here), a wide selection of Hammer "horror" films, *Them*, Roger Ramjet and Underdog cartoons, Rocky and Bullwinkle episodes, *Hardware Wars* (courtesy of Seth Goldberg), *Bambi Meets Godzilla*, *Bambi's Revenge*, *Terror of Tiny Town*, plus other pixillation short films. It was a crazy selection, and So Much Fun. We tossed in some good films, too, but the emphasis was on the outré and berserk material.

Lee considered it the film committee's duty to properly illustrate to the assembled viewers how to "enjoy" these visual treats. So, the three of us would heckle the films *while we were showing them!*

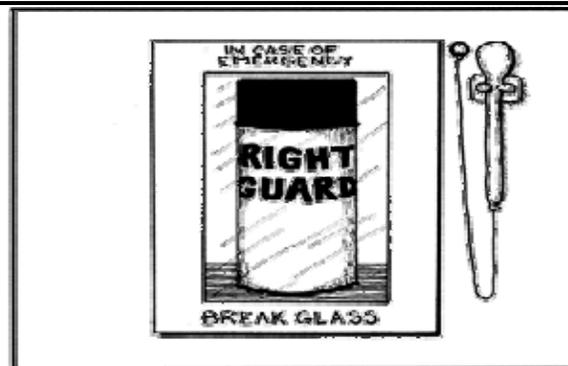
Apparently, this was unheard of, or sort of unheard of, for a convention film committee to do, but the response was phenomenal. Every night the film room would be packed not only for the films, but also for our one-liners and heckling jabs. Eventually the audience got into the act, rattling off comments and zingers, but never seeming to match our efforts. Dean Gahlon, a long-time Minn-stfer, told us one night that we were even funnier than the films! To Lee, that was the ultimate compliment. I also remember one Saturday night showing of *Plan 9* when we were in rare form, ripping it to shreds, and a fan from seven rows in front of us stood up and yelled at us to "Shut the fuck up! I'm trying to watch the film!" The poor slob was shouted down, and within twenty minutes I observed him joining in the slam-fest. Felling a bit smug, we had made another convert to the fold.

At this point a possibly apocryphal story needs to be told. Legend has it that during the mid to late Seventies, a young fan from St. Cloud State College (an hour's drive north of Mipple-Stipple) was a frequent Minicon attendee and became so enamored and impressed with our movie selections and resultant high-jinks that he concocted an idea

for a local television show based on Minicon all-night film/jeer fests. For a few years, *Mystery Science Theater 3000* was hidden way up in the nether regions of UHF on Channel 41 out of St. Cloud, Minnesota, but Joel Hodgson was on his way. Like I said, I am not sure how much of this is true or not, but it makes for a good story.

All in all, those were incredible years for Minn-stf, and especially Lee Pelton. As co-editor of *Rune* with Carol Kennedy, the zine and the club experienced unparalleled growth. Lee's fanaticism was at a frantic level, and I can honestly say that I cannot recall ever seeing him happier. After Lee and Carol stepped down from the helm, it was time for the next segment of Lee's fanatical career, which I was fortunate to be involved in: publishing his own fanzine, *Private Heat*. Next issue I will pick up the story from there.

And now, a word from our sponsor...



**A new safety item for
science fiction conventions.**

Note: this is not a slam, but a mere Internet captured image that fits here.

*I have never run fiction – not even faaanfiction - in any of my fanzines, ever, going all the way back to 1976 when I began This House, so what follows is a radical change for me. Every so often – such as whenever the mole crickets are mating on the back patio under a full orange harvest moon – I get the urge to write fiction. So saying, here's a fantasy story I wrote over the course of the past year, and it has the distinction of already being rejected by one online fiction magazine! I am so proud...*sniff**

Mephisto Dropped in One Day

“Just what *is* the point, really?”

Silence was my answer.

“I mean, I understand that there are things I need to deal with on a daily basis, but what's the point? Where's the why in my life?”

At that point there was nerve-shattering sputum clearing behind me. I hadn't expected anybody to intrude on my intimate argument, but now I couldn't argue with myself anymore. God only knows, nobody else can carry on a deep conversation like I can.

"Your 'why' is right here."

I hate it when someone answers rhetorical questions. Especially when I don't know the person. So I turned around to see who had spoken.

An odd little man squatted on the floor, legs bent inwards, making him look frog-like. The voice didn't match the package; it was way too deep and confident for a frog. It took me quite a while to ask the very simple question "Who are you?" Something like three minutes.

The answer was equally long in coming. Prefaced by what I thought was a shrug, it was an ambiguous "Well, you should know me by now."

"That doesn't answer my question."

"Actually, it does, depending on how you define questions and answers." With that, the frog man tiredly smiled at me. "Either way, think of what I said: 'Your 'why' is right here.'" Again, came the wan smile.

"If you're trying be a Yoda, you're not doing it right," I informed the frog-man. "Invert sentence you should."

He cocked his head to one side and said, "Right here your why is," then gave a smug smile. "Is that better?"

"Yeah. That's how you do it. But did I ask you? Really, did I?"

The frog-man shrugged without getting out of his squat. "To speak like Yoda? Yes, you did."

I snorted. "No, that's not what I meant."

"You asked me to do that..."

"Stop interrupting me! I meant about my personal, philosophical ravings. Plumbing the deepest meanings of my existence. *That* question!"

The man gave a froggy shrug. "Okay, yeah. I got you."

Rubbing my eyes, I asked again, "Now, did I *ask you*, of all the people in this whole wide room – in which at the time I was alone, I'd like to point out – that lovely, soul-searching question 'where's the why in my life?'" I glared at him, trying to decide if I was getting myself into something I shouldn't be getting into.

In response to my re-stated question, I got another shrug. "Sort of. It *was* a nice, open-ended question, especially when the answer's so damned obvious."

"You're getting on my nerves."

"Only if you let me."

"Don't give me that psycho-babble crap! I hate that more than anything else."

"Suit yourself."

The frog-man finally got out of his crouch – revealing a height not much higher than when he was in the squat position - stretched his legs, and walked around the room, touched the door, a wall, a chair, dusted a bookshelf with an ancient fingertip, licked it off. I shuddered. "You're a disgusting little creature aren't you?" I commented.

Still another shrug. "I suppose. Not as disgusting as you picking your nose then eating the boogers. You must like the taste, considering how much you chomp them down." He gave me a rather disdainful frown, making him look on the order of 150-plus

years, give or take a decade or three. Maybe being all of four-foot nothing with a frightful shock of gray hair that must have been combed yesterday with a dirty left hand, he almost *did* look like a homeless Yoda. Right then and there I decided that I **really didn't** like him at all. And never would.

I decided that the Yoda-frog had to go. Where, I didn't care, but

He

Had

To

Go.

We stood there looking at each other for quite a while. It gave me an idea of what a 'pregnant pause' was, and convinced me that I would not enjoy the birthing process.

For quite a while we just stood there, sizing each other up – or down, as the case may be, depending on one's point of view.

"Insults aren't necessarily called for right now," I informed my antagonist.

"True. But it would be uncouth for me to resist such an opening. You did ask for it, you know."

"Maybe I did."

"So we're agreed."

"On what?"

"You're asking for it."

I blinked. "For what?" I asked, wishing I hadn't asked.

"The meaning of your life. The 'why' as you so perfectly stated it a mere pittance of time ago."

That did it. That really convinced me that I *really didn't like this...this...PERSON?*

"Just what the hell kind of a guy are you, anyway? My curiosity is definitely aroused by your appearance, even though I definitely don't like your mouth."

"Suit yourself," the little person said. "I can answer *that* question for you easily enough."

And with that being said, he promptly squatted down again as if preparing to leave something on the floor, and stared at me.

For quite a while neither one of us said anything to each other. It unnerved me, but I didn't care to pursue to the subject; like fishing for a compliment in a sea of insults, it seemed so pointless.

I tried busying myself with the daily bits and pieces of what passed for my life – picking up scraps of paper, organizing and reorganizing piles of bills on my desk, shuffling my life like a half deck of cards – which meant walking around that rock-solid figurine set slightly off-center in my living room floor. "You know, " I said, "you have a nasty habit of being unavoidably obnoxious. It's damned difficult to get around you."

A shrug was the reply.

"You ever gonna move?"

"Are you ready for your answer?"

"*That* makes no sense at all."

"Oh, come on, Nathan. You know what I mean."

That stopped me cold. I hadn't told him my name, or anything like that, but thinking about it, I guess I kind of figured that he must have known all along since this weird little guy did somehow enter *my* apartment, *my LIVING SPACE*, and was now sitting on *my* floor arguing with *me* about God knows what. "Just who in the hell *are* you, anyway?" I asked, my voice rising to a slightly effeminate pitch, which meant I was getting frustrated.

Again came that froggy shrug which looked like Yoda-wannabe was trying to rearrange his shoulder sockets. "How can I put it," he began cautiously, "that would make sense to you..."

"*Nothing* makes sense to me right now. Who you are, why you're here, how you got here, how you know who I am..."

"Oh, heck. That last one's obvious. And once you understand that then everything else pretty much falls into place." He looked at me with an expression suggesting a lifetime of amphibian wisdom. Well, water does amplify – and distort – what you're seeing.

I didn't know what to say, except the obvious response –in fact, I felt compelled to ask: "So, who are you?"

Smilingly came the reply, "I guess you could say I'm a part of you. Another level of self. You know, peel an onion and you still have onion; keep peeling away layer after layer after layer, and you will always keep finding onion until the last layer's gone, which leaves absolutely nothing in your hand. See, there is no solid core to an onion; just a compressed mass of layers. And depending on your preferences, you either enjoy an onion or you don't. Not everybody likes them, you know."

I mulled this over for quite a while. *Not everybody likes them*. Now my "guest" was delving into the kind of metaphysical argument I love to debate myself about. "Are you implying," I tentatively asked him, "that underneath it all – that is, underneath all of the layers of me – I don't like myself?"

Yoda-frog scrunched his eyebrows together in thought, wagged his head from side to side, and said, "Mmm, I wouldn't say that exactly. It's more like you won't like what you see."

"But that's your opinion."

"Yes, this is true. It is. So do you?"

I blinked. "Do I what?"

"Have an opinion about yourself?"

"Interesting question." After a moment's reflection, I ventured a carefully phrased reply. "I think everybody has an opinion about themselves. And by the very nature of people being people, no two opinions ever really agree, especially when it comes down to very personal matters."

A wan smile crossed that ancient face. "Yes, young one, you have done well."

"I've thought about this subject matter many a time before. When you're single and living alone there's no one to really argue with intelligently about things, like life, the universe, and everything, if you know what I mean."

"Of course I do," came the quick reply. "How else would I come to exist?"

"Hanh?" was my intelligent comeback.

"Think it through, young one." And it raised a lengthy, bony sort of index finger bent just a bit to the left in the middle. It looked painful, but my conversation partner

didn't seem to mind it. "In the short time that I have been here physically with you, haven't you wondered where I came from?"

"As a matter of fact, yes. A few minutes ago."

"Alright. Now, have you wondered how I knew your name?" I nodded in response. "Furthermore," my guest continued, "consider the moment when I arrived. What *exactly* were you questioning just before I appeared?"

I thought for a moment, then remembered, "I was debating with myself about the meaning of my life. It's a favorite topic of mine lately."

"Hmm. And why is that?"

"Why?" The question was both ludicrous and relevant, requiring serious attention. "Because lately everything that I do just seems so worthless and pointless, as if there is no reason for doing anything. You've heard of that expression paddling up a creek without a paddle? Well, I don't have a paddle. I don't have a creek, either."

"I believe the correct phrase is 'up a river without a paddle,'" Yoda-frog informed me with an annoyed smirk.

"Whatever," I said irritably.

"That's okay. I knew what you meant since the metaphor wasn't substantially changed."

"Awfully white of you," I grumbled.

My guest ignored the comment. "Why do you think everything in your life is so worthless and pointless?" he continued. "What's happened to make you feel that way?"

I sighed and chewed on that bitter topic for a moment. "Oh, I don't know. It's just that...that nothing ever really seems to go my way, you know what I mean? Uh, no matter what I try to do, things always seem to blow up in my face and I never seem to be advancing in life. Like the White Queen, all I'm doing is running as fast I can to stay *exactly* where I am. And that frustrates me."

He nodded sadly. The look on his face urged me on, which made me feel like he was morphing into the love-child of Yoda, a frog, and Dr. Phil. "And that's why I personally feel that everything in my life is so pointless. Why try to do *anything* if you're not going to get any kind of a return on it?"

After a momentary lull, my partner – which is how I had begun to think of him – said, "Well, you're still here slugging away. That's a big plus in your favor: never give up; don't say die; it ain't over until the last batter is out, or the fat lady sings. The whole list. You really should look at it that way."

The cliché festival made me laugh a bit; not that I was amused, but it was a left-handed compliment, and I appreciated its irony. Usually this was something that I would normally tell myself whenever I got down in the proverbial dumping grounds of personal groushings about my lot in life, that there are always options to everything, no dead-ends – well, maybe there are, but those are rare – and that someone else always had it worse than me. *Count your blessings, Nathan, old buddy. Count your blessings.* It was a litany I was all too familiar with.

Neither one of us said anything for a few minutes, until finally Yoda-frog said, "Onions can be very useful," with no elaboration offered on that statement.

I stared open-mouthed at him. "Where in the world did *that* come from? Talk about your out-of-left-field comments."

He “giggled,” rather, emitted a sound that resembled a giggle. Every thing he did resembled something normal, but he most certainly was not normal in any semblance of the word. “Actually,” he said, “everything I do and say has a purpose. Just like you.”

“Oh, good Lord in heaven, here we go again...”

“But, Nathan, you’ve always enjoyed a nice, healthy metaphysical discussion!”

“Yeah, yeah. I know.” I paced around my apartment while Yoda-frog settled down on the couch, patted a cushion. I watched him from across the room before I went over and sat down next to him. Maybe he wouldn’t bite after all. “Here’s the deal,” I began. “I would really like to know your reason being here. Why you suddenly popped into my world as if you transported in from another dimension or something. I mean, why here? Why now? If you know my ‘nice, healthy metaphysical discussions’ so well, why haven’t you shown up before?”

My partner sucked in and released the corners of his mouth before saying, “‘Here’ is an ambiguous concept. It implies a relationship in time or space, and each of those concept words need to first be clearly defined before they can be understood. At least it seems like you’re finally starting to set your paradigms. Take me, for instance. In all the time that we’ve been talking not once have you even attempted to touch me.”

I looked at him in disgust. “Why should I?” I asked. “Maybe I don’t want any of your ugly little body cooties. You’re no Adonis, that’s for sure.”

That got a real laugh in return. With a mock Yiddish accent, Yoda-frog said, “Ah, he can’t hold a candle to me. Now, Narcissus – there’s another story...” A faraway look, as distant as the past, briefly passed over his face, then vanished like clouds across the mountains on the moon.

“But seriously, shake my hand,” he suddenly said. “Welcome me as a real guest to your home. How else are you going to accept the reality of me?” With that, my partner reached out an ancient hand, gnarled roots at the end of a thin, bent and withered trunk. I hesitated. “Go on,” he insisted. “Take my hand. It only takes a second or two to give a proper handshake.” The look on his face was so intent yet peaceful that I felt as if I was meeting with my old college faculty advisor again. A very familiar face, indeed.

“I won’t get cooties?”

“You won’t get cooties.”

“Promise?”

“Just shake my hand, Nathan.”

So I did. I expected to feel like I was grabbing a bundle of sticks, but instead, the old, twisted fingers comfortably curled around my hand. Immediately, a sense of content resignation filled me. “How very odd,” I commented. “I get the distinct impression that I know you very well. Which is impossible, considering that you just popped into my life a short time ago.”

“I did?”

Nonplussed, I said, “Well, yeah. Remember? I was questioning my reason for existing, and all of a sudden, <poof> there you were, in all your squat grandeur.”

Yoda-frog bowed deeply. “I thank you,” he said, “and hope you haven’t been disappointed.”

He had a way of saying things that made me think in a disconcerting manner. “Why should I be disappointed in you? I’m disappointed in my life, not yours. Heck, I hardly know you.”

A wry smile and a sad wag of his head came in answer. “Ah, young one, how unable to connect the dots you seem. Think, reflect, and connect,” he intoned with a voice that connoted a wisdom far older than even he was.

I thought for a minute. “You mean to tell me,” I began carefully, “that I actually *know* you?”

“Intimately.”

“How could that be?”

Shrugging, Yoda-frog again confronted me with an apparent non-sequitor: “Do you know my name?”

Dumb, all I could manage was a weak, “No.”

“Um-hmm. You never asked, and I never volunteered that information. So why is that?”

“How should I know? You’re the mental intruder here. If you know what I mean.”

“Yeah, I do. So why is that?”

With a world-weary sigh, all I could do was pace for a while, stop in the kitchen, absently open and close the refrigerator, shake my head, then wander back to the living room and sit back down on the couch. “I am completely clueless,” I concluded. “All I know for sure is that you are here talking with me, and I have no clue what’s going on except that I think I know you from somewhere – no, actually, I’ve known you for some time. A *long* time. Everything about you goes deep into me for some reason. And I really don’t understand why.”

Silently, Yoda-frog appraised me the way a slave-trader used to hawk his wares on the docks of 18th-century Charleston harbor. After a while, he said quietly, almost in a whisper, “And another layer is peeled back.”

“Huh?” I turned to only an impression in the cushion where he had been sitting. Before my eyes, the indent undid itself, and the couch looked as normal as ever before. I think I wanted to be unnerved, but I wasn’t, which surprised me. Shaking my head in wonderment, I got up, went back to the refrigerator, grabbed a couple beers, sat back down on the couch, then downed them in pure, unadulterated silence, deep in thought, but not in despair. That feeling was gone. Perhaps this oddball encounter had been good for me after all.

“Oh, what the hell,” I finally said to no one in particular. “Here’s to self-flagellation,” I toasted, and downed the last of a beer in one hefty gulp. Then I got up to go to the bathroom, all the time absently thinking of the conversation that I had just had. It made me laugh through my nose at the thought of that strange little man, that manifestation of my imagination, and how he had affected my thought patterns through the strangest set of questions and comments I had ever encountered in my life. And somehow, it all made sense to me as I washed my face.

As I dried myself, I finally smiled at my non-reflecting mirror, and remembered a line from an old Beatles song:

I’m looking through you, and you’re nowhere.



From the Hinterlands

In which there are letters of comment culled from readers. Again, I didn't get much of a response from the fifth installment of IAPL, but there were some good ones nonetheless. So saying, in the immortal words of the late, great Jackie Gleason, "And awaaay we go!"

Peter Sullivan writes: Thanks for putting the latest issue of *In A Prior Lifetime* up on Bill Burns' efanazines.com. As well as being a lot cheaper from your point of view than the traditional paper fanzine, I guess it also offers the possibility of pulling in casual readers such as myself.

I've never been camping myself - I'm too addicted to creature comforts - but if I was going to, I guess I'd want a tent like your giant behemoth. Of course, in England, the logistics of camping are probably a bit different from in the middle of TX. Not least that almost any camping holiday is likely to be interrupted by the rain at some point. *Sounds like Texas, especially from December to March, and then again in June. Sometimes it feels like a monsoon season here.*

Rain is also the main difference with our grass. With the longer autumns, the grass seems to keep growing and growing, with the final cut coming later and later. This year, I really could have done with cutting the grass in November, but it was really too wet all month for me to even try. We've just had the first snow of winter today, so hopefully that will be it until the spring. Whilst God may well be prepared to water the grass for us, we still end up doing the cutting!

Your coding exercise on Minn-stf was interesting - although I can't know how accurate it is for this particular group, the coding types you identify seem recognisable to me in terms of wider fandom. I guess that most people will belong, to a greater or lesser degree, to more than one type. I know that Arnie Katz reckons he's identified seven types of fannish behaviour - each individual fan being a composite of all the different types to a greater or lesser degree. I guess this could, if we're not careful, turn into a "What does your fannish activity say about YOU?"-style personality test, of the sort that seems to be endlessly recycled in women's magazines both sides of the Atlantic. *Fans definitely cross over from one sub-activity into others, which typifies the eclectic nature of our interests. We all tend to be a bit of everything, I think, especially if we're a part of a decent-sized club or region with an active fan community. It is probably inevitable that eventually a fan settles on one or two main interests, such as me in fan writing and pubbing. I don't do cons anymore, and at one point I was very active in cons, apas, zines, and so on. Got burned out in the process. Right now just doing on-line fanac seems to be just right for me - and cost-effective, too.*

Popeye as philosopher? Yeah, I can grok that. The other great unrecognized philosopher of the 20th century is Winnie the Pooh. Just consider: "Isn't it funny / How a bear likes honey? / Buzz, buzz, buzz / I wonder why he does?" The ability to externalise and self-analyse one's own fundamental pleasures - whilst still enjoying them on an instinctive or visceral level - should be a model for us all. Not just a Reflective Practitioner of his trade or profession, Winnie the Pooh manages to be a Reflective Practitioner of Life itself. Or something. {peter@burdonvale.co.uk}

I so love Pooh's outlook on life. Don't you get the feeling that Pooh would have been a great faaan writer? I sure do.

Eric Mayer writes: Just downloaded and enjoyed reading *In A Prior Lifetime* 5. Issue 4 was one of the main offenders that has caused me to expend much time reading and even locking fanzines this past year. I'd been poking around e-Fanzines after getting Bill Bowers' Xenolith and I noticed your familiar name, and another fellow who said he was a returnee (Dave Burton) and, you know what they say about curiosity and cats...So I'm happy to see you haven't escaped again, any more than I have. *Escape is always an option...*

I like your lawn care doctrine. Our small lawn fades from grass to a clearing in the woods. Doesn't need much mowing. I get the mower out only 10 or 12 times a year, and just as well since the aging machine rattles alarmingly and odd bits keeping falling off. I put the bits in the shed. Just in case I might need them. Like when Hell freezes over for instance. The last mow is to grind up the autumn leaves. I'll be darned if I'm going to rake leaves into the woods. *We don't have leaves because we have only one small tree. Hah!*

As for car maintenance, I once changed a headlight. That was my shining mechanic's moment. I had a hard time opening the hood on the last car I had. I recently read that internal combustion engines are not suited to the requirements of vehicular conveyances. They have so many moving parts to make up for the deficiencies. Steam powered cars have only a few moving parts. I can believe it.

Good breakdown of various types of sf fans. One of the things that always confuses the issue of defining fans or fandom is that one can be interested in an activity (going to conventions or putting out fanzines) or a subject (Star Trek or fanzines). Fanzine fans are particularly hard to fathom in that they seem mostly interested in fanzines and those who produce them (themselves) So they produce their own media, but most do like to go to conventions. (In a way fanzine fandom is a hobby about nothing) I could see defining fans by diagrams of overlapping activities and subject matter interests. Some fans who like to run things may prefer to run clubs rather than cons for all I know. There are Trek fans who do fanzines. *Back in 1979 I wrote a column in a Trekzine coming out of Columbia Heights, Minnesota called **Universal Transmitter**, which was fun and ran for only three issues. But you're right; there is cross-over from Trekdome or whatever media group into core fandom. I read Joe Sanders' book **Science Fiction Fandom** (1994), a collection of fine essays centered on the development and nature of fandom, for my Sociology research proposal, and rich brown's chapter provides an excellent discussion/background into the so-called Barbarian Invasion of the late 1970s.*

Good piece about Popeye! I've bought that Spinach with his picture on it. Didn't work for me though. *Blog:*<http://www.journalscape.com/ericmayer>

Lloyd Penney *also wrote in:* I've downloaded In a Prior Lifetime 5, and many thanks. I have the VanGogh/Marvin illo as well...came from a Looney Tunes calendar we just can't part with. We also have a Starry Night print on the wall, and we're tempted to put Marvin in a frame beside it. Oooh, isn't that lovely? On with the loc...

This is the first I've heard of a Webelos Scout, so I Googled it up. Scouting has changed a lot since I was a Scout. I doubt Lord Baden-Powell would recognize it. I was a Scout in the 9th Orillia Scouts in Orillia, Ontario, which I reached my bronze lanyard level. There just wasn't enough time, money and assistance from leaders to get to the lofty Queen's Scout level.

To be honest, John, I don't think God created the superstore, for there's too many of us who consider it a blight upon the land. I'd consign WalMart to Purgatory for all the labour problems and crappy products they inflict upon us here, and most other large stores drive small business into the ground. Other local stores that cause rather than solve problems are The Home Depot and Staples. So, I'd rather support small business, for I will get better customer service there, and often, better prices, too.

The best thing about initially discovering SF clubs and other fans...they are different and weird and misunderstood, just like you, and it's OKAY. You might not understand them, either, but at least you now have a support group with which to be misunderstood together. It does help, and facilitates the socialization process. The six categories seem to cover fans and the level of involvement they want or need for their own level of fulfillment, from the actfans to the happy deadwood. *Yup. And like Peter Sullivan mentioned, there's a lot of interlineations between groups within the individual fan. We*

can all be one or a combination of these fan types. In fact, we probably have to be in order to be a fan. Or some kind of post-modernist take on fandom, I think.

My loc...there is nothing like a paper fanzine, and there is a short stack of them on my desk ready for response. However, I certainly understand the costs associated with paper repro and postage. Also, paper fanzines, in sufficient numbers, take up an awful lot of space. I'm sure we all know Bankers Box products well. So, .pdfed zines are the next best thing. You can collect them and keep them on the desktop in a folder, as I do, and will eventually burn them onto a CD-R. The zines I could put on a CD-R would probably take up 30 feet of shelf space or more, so space limitations are easily solved. Webzines aren't as convenient, and aren't the linear read that most readers need to facilitate completecomprehension. The technology has changed, but for the most part, the reader hasn't. *I agree with you; the format will change, but the essence won't, and thank ghu for that!*

I fully expect there will be university courses on Popeylian philosophical studies as part of a degree in pop culture humanities. We swallow our frustrations for we cannot strike out at everyone who does us wrong, no matter how much we're tempted. The worst we can do is flip the bird at the driver who cut you off to get on the off-ramp, or the last parking spot, or give a filthy look to those who might push you aside for the last subway seat. If only there was a non-violent vent to those frustrations, or maybe that's what video games are truly for. Popeye shows the best in us for summarizing our anger, and the worst in what to do about it. Our violent times show us that the frustrations are building. We need that vent and soon, or society will become anarchy. *A most true observation. I frequently feel the need to vent; that's when I pull out my guitar and play for a couple hours or so. Writing music is a good vent, as are writing and physical activity.*

So much for the soap box. Many thanks for a good little read, and take care; I'll look for the next issue RSN. *{penneys@allstream.net}*

Eric Mayer also commented on my one-shot posted on efanzines.com, I have been grading papers, and I must scream: In college I became pissed of when I was only getting a B in my writing course. I finally decided what the prof wanted was sententious nonsense copiously footnoted. So I purposely decided on a subject for which there was not a shred of actual evidence - the influence of the philosophy of Henri Bergsson on Shaw's St Joan. I had more footnotes than text. I got an A+. It made me feel a little dirty actually. *Glad to see I'm not alone here.*

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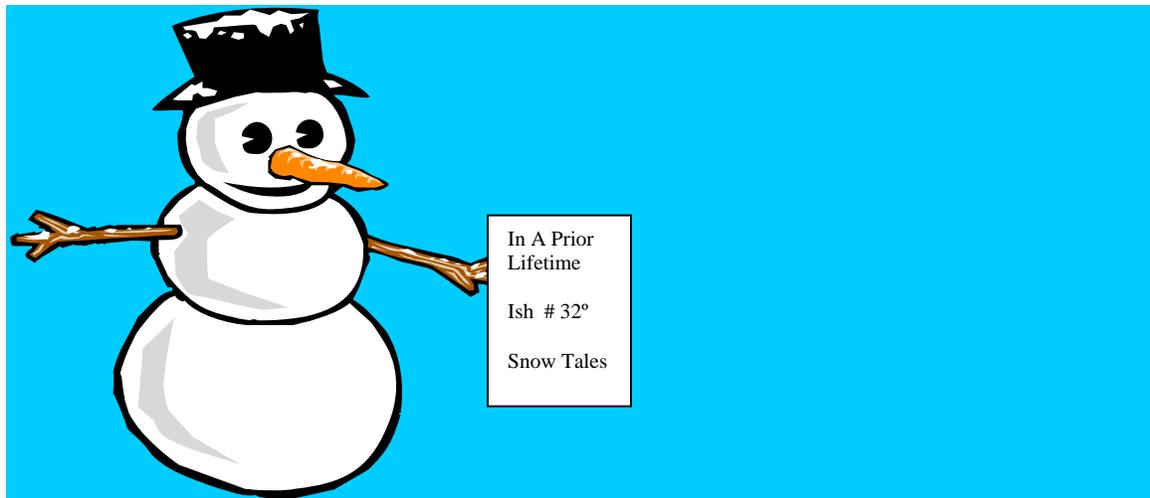
I Also heard from these lovely people: John Neilsen Hall, Arnie Katz, David Burton, Mike Glyer, Bill Burns, Arthur Hlavaty, and the ever-so-lovely R Laurraine Tutihasi. Thank you all!

Some Closing Thoughts...

David Burton, in the 13th issue of his zine *Catchpenny Gazette*, comments on the shift in fanzine content due to technology; one of the things he says is that there are no longer fanzine review columns being pubbed any longer, except for Andy Hooper's occasional contributions on the www.fanac.org website. He's right; you really don't see much of this type of thing anymore. As a matter of fact, I used to do a fanzine review column back in my first fanzine, *This House*; originally, it was a column devoted to a choice few followed by a listing of zines received, and eventually it morphed into a review column of related zines or simply the most recent ones received. My intention is to run such a fmz review column herein starting next time.

Merry Christmas, y'all,

John Purcell



frosty sez, "A cold, refreshing zine!"