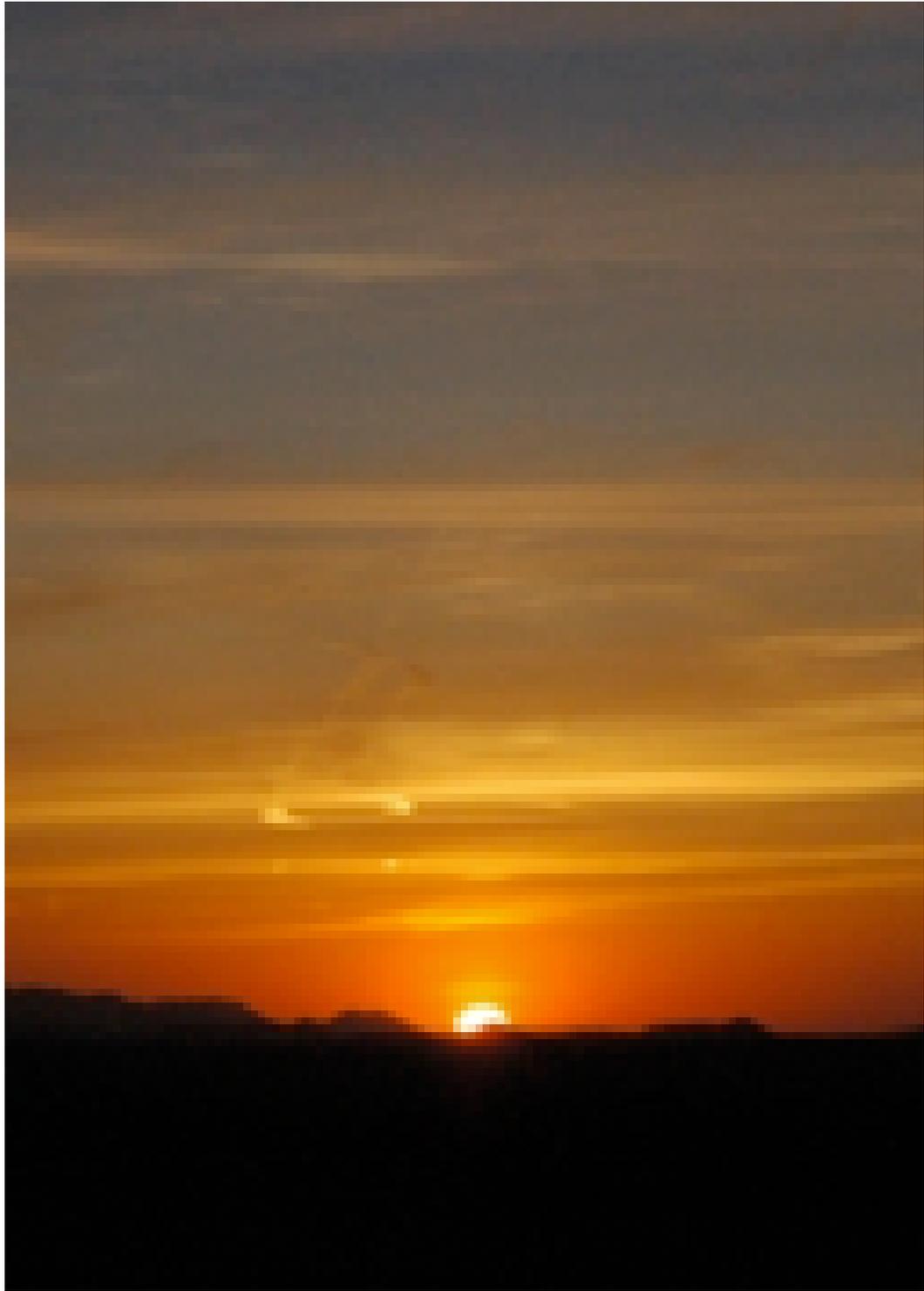


Feline Mewsings #21



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Feline ~~Mewsings~~ Mewsings

#21

August 2005

* Editorial / Introduction

We made two trips together to Arizona, and they are chronicled in this issue. Mike also made two additional trips to Oracle on his own.

Our cable company added two more stations to their high def line-up.

Mercury had two more seizures in May and July. We weren't too sure about the May incident until after the July one. This is because it happened just before Mike woke up. I found urine on the bed afterward. We weren't sure whether the two incidents were related. However in July when he had another seizure, we discovered that he'd urinated on the carpet where he'd had the seizure. Apparently the seizure causes him to lose control of his bladder. I will be taking him to the vet's shortly, and he may want to run more tests.

Shadow in the meantime has had two more post cancer checks since my last issue, and he's still doing fine.

I came down with a cold in May between our two trips. We think I caught it on one of our outings to the cinema.

The Discovery Channel continues to put out some great programming, including two science fictional shows titled *Alien Planet* and *Voyage to the Planets and Beyond*. The first depicts a hypothetical trip to an Earthlike planet in another solar system by a robotic explorer. The second hypothesizes about the direction of our manned space programme. Check out the DVDs if you missed the shows. The second show was aired in Canada under a different title.

In May we said good-bye to *Gene Roddenberry's Andromeda* and *Enterprise*. The ending of the first left me more confused than anything else. I found the ending of *Enterprise* to be quite disappointing. *House* ended while we were in Arizona, and I missed the last episode due to a problem with the VCR. During these lean times of TV, we've been doing more catching up with our stacks of purchased videos. There have been a few shows to watch, such as some new episodes of "Mystery!" and *Family Guy* and *American Dad*. More recently the Sci Fi Channel has started new episodes of their Friday night line-up, so there is more to watch. In addition PBS is showing new episodes of *History Detectives*.

Speaking of TV, it seems the government may be taking back the analogue channels at the end of 2006 if present FCC proposals become law.

I have also caught up completely with my periodical reading, so I am usually watching videos during breakfast as well as lunch. I've ordered new subscriptions to *Scientific American* and *Absolute Magnitude*, which is a quarterly sf zine. When they start coming, we'll see how much time I have left for anything more. I've also begun reading for the review site that I administer. I've finished one book so far and am in the middle of another one. Another book is on order. I try to read one e-book and one paper book simultaneously, or close to it. My current preferences for review reading are sf, Regency romances, and children's and young adult books. I'm also getting in some reading of my own books.

Summer arrived here more or less in the middle of May. However, temperatures were moderated well into July by "June gloom" or morning fog, which occurs along the coast this time of year. When temperatures rose, it was unfortunately accompanied by higher humidity, which we usually don't get until August. The monsoons have arrived early this year.

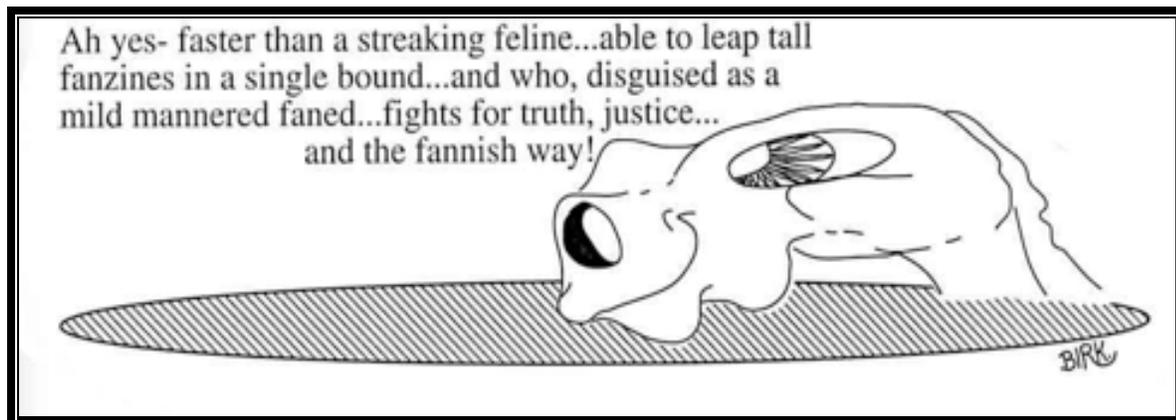
My second infected tooth was finally extracted in July. The endodontist confirmed that there was a crack in the first right upper bicuspid. Now I have to get a five-tooth bridge, because the empty spot is right next to a three-tooth bridge. Since our dental plan is so chintzy, I will have to put off the implant to replace the extracted lower left molar.

In June we experienced our first earthquake in a long time. The epicentre was east of LA.

We had more excitement locally. In mid-July I was driving home from my dentist when I noticed a large plume of yellowish smoke rising in the sky more or less above where I was driving to. Fortunately after I made the last turn before our house, I could see that the smoke was farther away. Relieved I thought no more about it until I turned on the radio, which I frequently do when I'm the only person home, and heard them talking about a brush fire in Rancho Palos Verdes. This is the town next to ours. In fact we live only houses away from the city line. After talking to a neighbour, I turned on the TV and watched for the next ninety or so minutes, during which there was continuous coverage uninterrupted by commercials. The fire started in a canyon, of which we have many on the peninsula. It quickly worked up to the ridges where homes are located. Fortunately the fire department responded quickly, and no homes were damaged. It looked like touch and go for a while, though. The fire came right up to some homes and charred a few fences. Mike had been planning to attend some kind of dinner related to work, but he came home instead after I called him. When he got home, there was still smoke visible. He took pictures of it and of one of the helicopters that were dropping water on the fire. It took less than twenty-four hours to get the fire totally under control. Two hundred twenty acres were burned. The worst part of it for me was the smoke, which brought on my asthma. The bad thing about smoke is that it gets into the furniture and even the walls. The effects won't dissipate for months. This has been a bad year my asthma. Less than a week later, we had another brush fire nearby. Fortunately this one was so small that it was out in about an hour.

Mike experienced a ten percent drop-off in his gas mileage (Prius hybrid car) between our two trips to Arizona. He had his car serviced between the two trips, and he thought it might be related to that. He took his car in to the dealer three times to see if they could do something. On his last visit, though they couldn't find anything, they mentioned that his new tyres, which he got about the same time as he'd had the car serviced, were the wrong type. The tyre place was very nice about it. He only had to pay the difference in price. After he got the right type of tyres, his mileage seems to be restored. Who knew the tyres would make such a difference?

* * *



* Mike

Mike made a trip to Oracle for the Fourth of July weekend. He managed to see the impact of the probe into the comet Tempel 1. He stayed out there for two days this time and came home with a sunburn and yellow jacket sting. He took pictures of a few deep sky objects. These photographs are long exposures, so they take a while to set up. You can see his photos at http://www.weasner.com/oracle_observatory/oracle070205.html. I can't really do justice to the photos here.

* * *

* Local Activities

Movies

Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy: I went to this not really expecting to like it. The previews that I'd seen on TV didn't seem to recommend it. But I was pleasantly surprised. Yes, the movie was so short that a lot was cut; and there were some things in the movie that weren't in the original. But I felt that the same humour was there. The only thing that bothered me was that Marvin's role was so limited; he's my favourite character.

#

Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith: I wasn't worried that I might not like this, as so much of the advertising seemed to be hype. However, as with HHGG, I was surprised to find myself really enjoying it. In many ways the movie reminded the viewer of the original *Star Wars* movie. Even though I knew the basic story already, I found the movie exciting to watch and emotionally involving. And I think it will enhance my enjoyment of the first two episodes. When we get the DVD after it comes out, as we inevitably will, I think we should sit down and watch the whole series in story order, maybe not in one sitting but over the course of a weekend.

#

Batman Begins: I hadn't heard about this movie before I saw a preview following an episode of *Smallville*. It looked good, though; so I decided I'd like to see it. We had the opportunity to see it as part of our anniversary celebration. The movie gives the origins of Batman. The beginning was reminiscent of the movie version of *The Shadow*. It had an all-star cast, including Christian Bale, Michael Caine, Gary Oldman, and Liam Neeson. I thought Michael Caine was perfect in the part of Alfred. The Gotham City of the movie was like a really dark version of New York City or Chicago. I never followed the comics very closely, so I don't know whether the movie came close to whatever is currently depicted in the books, but I really enjoyed the film. I will probably end up buying the DVD when it comes out. Mike liked it almost as well. He's even less familiar with the comics.

#

War of the Worlds: I'd heard good reviews of this one, so I did have rather high expectations. For the most part, those expectations were met. I found this movie much more faithful to the original novel than the fifties movie. The only material things changed were the location and time. Also the people involved were necessarily different to fit the times. I also found the movie quite exciting, as I would expect a story like this to be. I also liked the score quite a bit. Mike has bought the CD of the soundtrack. Spielberg deserves to be applauded for his efforts.

#

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory: We had a minor adventure seeing this one. The first theatre we tried screwed up. The first five or so minutes of the movie showed us only the bottom half of the picture. At the kinds of prices they charge these days, I wasn't going to stand for this. We left and got our money back.

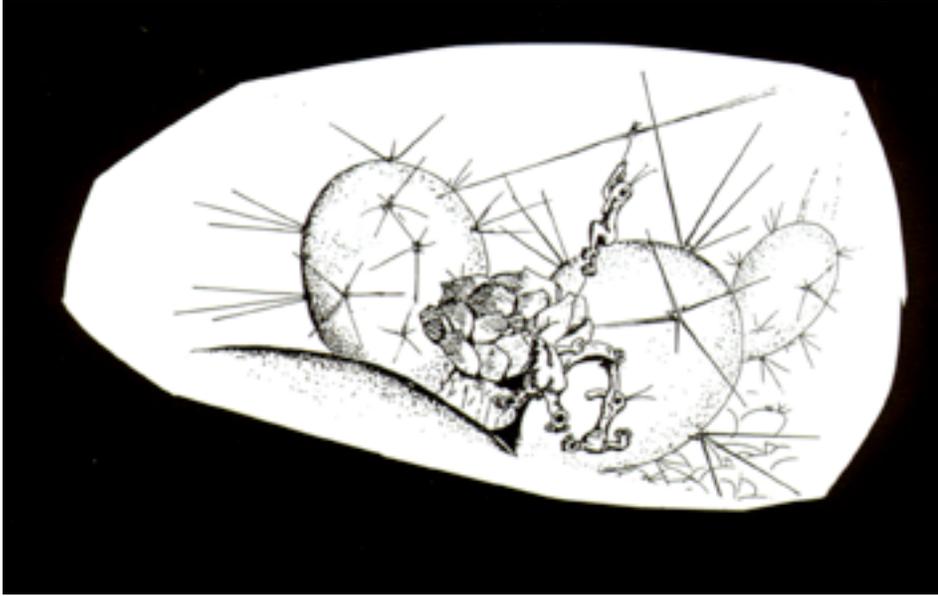
I liked this movie a lot better than *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. The Willie Wonka in that movie didn't come across to me as the least bit sympathetic; I thought he was really mean-spirited. But Johnny Depp in the part worked for me. My favourite scene was the nut room with all the squirrels, but I enjoyed most of the rest. I didn't care for the other children, but you weren't supposed to like them. Mike reacted to the movie the way I remember reacting to *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. He thought Johnny Depp as Willy Wonka looked like a Michael Jackson clone.

###

Theatre

Sherlock's Last Case: This play by Charles Marowitz was the first selection for the Colony Theatre's 2005-06 season. As usual it was performed excellently. Neither Mike nor I are hardcore Sherlock Holmes fans, but we think we're pretty familiar with the canon. There were certain things about the play that didn't strike us quite right. Some of the characters didn't seem to be behaving in the way we would expect, so the play was not totally satisfactory.

* * *



* Books Etc.

Hugo Awards: I managed to read all the novel and short fiction nominees before voting. I wasn't as impressed by most of the nominees but managed to find a few to place before "No Award". The novel nominees were more disappointing this year than in years past that I can remember. Although I usually favour science fiction above fantasy, I wasn't terribly impressed by any of the sf nominees and ended up voting for *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* in first place. It was a kind of fantasy that I like, and it's extremely well written.

In the novella category, I voted for "Sergeant Chip" in first place. I found it a touching story. I placed "The Faery Handbag" in first place in the novelette category; this was the most disappointing category for me. The short story category had the best nominees. I voted "Shed Skin" in first place, but "Travels with My Cats" was a close second.

The dramatic presentation categories did not have any really great nominees. In the long form, I voted *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* in first place. In the short form category, I gave first place to the *Stargate: SG-1* two-part episode "Heroes".

###

Guest Reviews by Rochelle Campbell: *In Search of a Brilliant White Cloud*, Pentland Press (NC), February 2005, Hardcover, 364p., \$24.95.

Remember those first penmanship lessons you took as a child? The heavy, sometimes broken or dotted lines, you traced over to create your very own letters? We were novices just taking our first steps towards entering the reading and writing world.

That must be the way it was for author Simon Van Der Heym. He's got this great idea. Have a child in his formative years go through one of the world's most traumatic experiences and have this time affect the child's life forever. It just didn't happen quite that way in *In Search of a Brilliant White Cloud*, Van Der Heym's first book.

This author chose an emotional hot spot in world history – Hitler's genocide of thousands of Jewish people – and somehow, Van Der Heym never fully capitalized upon the angst, passion, determination, or the hardships experienced at that time.

It felt as if Van Der Heym was still too close to the subject and therefore was unable to distance himself enough to allow his objective storyteller to come forth. We feel indirectly Van Der Heym's pain and angst oozing out between the words on the page. In the real world, Van Der Heym is an escapee from Hitler's Gestapo; and so is Eric, *White Cloud's* main character. But the words tell us what transpired; very rarely does Van Der Heym show us what young Eric saw and experienced.

Several times the author led me by the nose, happily I might add, to what I assumed would be a tension-raising scene only for Van Der Heym to tell me in a few cursory sentences what I wanted to see, hear, smell, and taste. I was greatly disappointed.

However, there are hidden power and undiscovered jewels deep within this story. To me, this is a thinly veiled account of the author's self-realizations and wisdom through his various life experiences. For that, it is a wonderful document. This would have come off better as a series of personal essays; because Van Der Heym is poignant, stirring, and, at times, extremely existential.

Even though I struggled to get through the author's awkward craftsmanship and his too-close stance subject matter, I did completely read *In Search of a Brilliant White Cloud*; because there's a message Simon Van Der Heym is trying to convey to the world at large; he sees the need for peace, serenity, unity, and compassion.

I believe that although Van Der Heym's fictional character, Eric, does not seem to learn much from his turbulent formative years, the author did and still does. I believe that Van Der Heym's exodus from impending death to freedom was the catharsis that allowed him to start becoming.

This initial work is just that, Van Der Heym's first step, just like when we were young and taking our first steps in learning how to write our ABCs. This author is learning how to write about who and what he is. I judge this story as a 3-star (out of 5), but I rate the author as a 10.

I take my hat off to this man who has literally moved mountains within himself to bring *In Search of a Brilliant White Cloud* into reality. I look forward to seeing more of his work as he develops his writing talents.

#

Ivona Knight, Vampyress by Shannon Leigh, Chippewa Publishing LLC (<http://www.chippewapublishing.com>), April 2005, PDF or HTML download, \$3.

Ivona Valeriu Knight is a regal vixen while at the same time the vehicle of unspeakable evil; she's a vampire. The story begins and ends in a tavern far away from civilization with patrons trapped indoors by a ferocious storm. It's a story-within-a-story, and the reader is expertly guided from a present day tale to one that took place in the early 1400s – quite a feat for a 71-page story!

A fast read that ramps up the excitement and sends chills down ones spine but fails to culminate in a truly rewarding ending, this story begs to be completed. It leaves the reader hungering for more, just as Ivona hungers for one Van Dragos, possibly the descendent of her long lost love.

For those that want a delectable vampyric appetizer served with generous doses of colourful phrases and smart dialogue, pick up this e-book for a fun fast read to while away your commute.

* * *

* Two trips to Arizona

Our first trip was primarily for an outing to Kitt Peak that was sponsored by Indiana University for significant donors.

We left home early in the morning Thursday, 28 April. We stopped for breakfast at Thousand Palms. Our meal stops were merely to get take-out food, which was eaten in the car. Our lunch stop was in Tonopah, AZ. We also stopped for gas in Gila Bend, AZ. After we reached the Tucson area, we stopped first in Oracle to visit our land. I took some video in Oracle. Mike took me for a walk around our land, and we ended up picking up burs that were very sharp indeed on our pants. This was my first visit to the land since we purchased it. We also discovered that someone or something had rammed the fence where it abuts the land of one of our neighbours. The force clearly came from the neighbour's side of the fence. We knocked on his door, but no one was home.

We reached the Marriott Courtyard motel at the airport before 18h00. After we unpacked, we had dinner there. It's a pretty nice establishment.

Friday morning we went to the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum. We got a little lost getting there, as the GPS system did not have the location quite right. The place is much bigger than I remember from my first visit in the early 1980s. Most of the cages containing animals have been replaced by larger habitat type setups. Despite spending almost four hours there, we did not see all of it. There are a lot of trails. Exhibits include a walk-in aviary. There is much wildlife even outside the actual exhibits. We also saw exhibits under construction. With the spring flowers in bloom, it was quite beautiful. We left there after getting lunch.



We got back to the hotel before 14h00. After a couple of hours, during which Mike downloaded the photos he had taken onto his Powerbook, we left for Kitt Peak. We reached the picnic area about the time requested. During the next fifteen minutes or so, the rest of the party arrived a few at a time. The weather, which had been partly cloudy, had cleared up. It looked like we would have a great night for stargazing.

After the picnic, we went to the cafeteria, where a slide show about the observatory was shown. Soon thereafter, we proceeded to the WIYN observatory. The first object we saw through the 3.5 metre telescope was Saturn.

Then we saw M66, which is a spiral galaxy. Then we looked at M3, a globular cluster. Then we looked at Jupiter's Ghost, planetary nebula NGC 3242. A look at Jupiter nearly required sunglasses. It was so large

and bright that the three moons visible also appeared as spheres. M87 came next; it is a gigantic globular cluster with a massive black hole in its centre that causes a jet, which was visible with averted vision. We also looked at a bright star – 94 beta Leo – with a diffraction



grating; we could see some of the Fraunhofer lines. The last object we looked at was the Sombrero galaxy.

By the time we drove back to the motel, it was after midnight.

On Saturday we drove back to our land in Oracle. Mike wanted to take a panorama photo at mid-day. The panorama still and a virtual reality version can be seen at http://www.weasner.com/oracle_observatory/oracle.html.

We spent the afternoon touring Biosphere 2. The place was built to be a self-contained biome to help us better understand Biosphere 1, Earth. Experiments showed that the builders did not quite succeed. Oxygen was not replenished in sufficient quantity and had to be added. Two experimental groups lived in the habitat for some time, however. The



entire complex of buildings covers 3.15 acres.

In the evening we went back to our land. Mike wanted to test the long exposure setting on his new Nikon D70 Digital SLR camera. Unfortunately there were too many clouds to use the telescope he had brought. I stayed outside until it got cold. I waited the rest of the time in the car, listening to episodes of "Sergeant Preston" on our iPod.

We tried to go to the zoo Sunday, but there was some sort of emergency going on, and they weren't letting anyone in. We later found out that a wild bobcat had invaded the zoo. The invader shut the zoo down for three hours while animal control people captured it. The bobcat killed a black swan at the zoo.



We didn't want to wait around, so we went to the Tucson Botanical Gardens, which are nearby. It's not a large place, but it is very aesthetically laid out. Plant life is interspersed with interesting sculptures, and there are many birds and butterflies. There was a bonsai group setting up, and I talked to a few of the gardeners.

When we went back to the zoo after a couple of hours, the zoo was open again. We got in free with our GLAZA (Greater Los Angeles Zoo Association) memberships. It is a relatively compact place but well laid out. It has a good mix of animals, most of which were available for view.

We left Tucson Monday morning after breakfast in the hotel.

We stopped for lunch at a Carl's Jr. in Indio and arrived home early in the evening.

#

Our second trip to Arizona took place the last full week of May. Mike had been scheduled to attend a training conference at a resort in Phoenix, and he had asked me if I wanted to go along. After looking at the resort's web site, I decided to accompany him. As long as we were going, we tacked on a few days in Tucson after the conference.

I got up fairly early the morning of Sunday, 22 May, and was ready to leave at 08h45. I slept off and on during the drive to Phoenix. We stopped at a McDonald's in Thousand Palms; so I could get some lunch, which I ate while Mike continued to drive. Mike also stopped for gas in Phoenix before we got to the Wild Horse Pass Resort and Spa in Chandler. The place is relatively new, having only just opened about two and a half years ago.

Mike was too tired to attend the reception that was being given in the afternoon. I successfully contacted Jacqueline Lichtenberg and Greg Brown and set up meetings with them.

We looked around the hotel before having dinner at the Ko'Sin restaurant. The food was pretty good, but it's pretty pricy.

Monday morning I went riding. There were only two of us on the group ride besides our guide. The ride was fine, but I must have pulled a muscle in my back when I was getting off the horse.

Greg Brown arrived at our room at 16h00 as planned. Greg and I talked until Mike got back from his conference. He still had some work stuff to do on the computer, so Greg and I continued talking. When Mike finished we went down to dinner. We were there for quite a while. A bit after 20h00, Greg said he had to leave.

Tuesday morning I walked around inside and outside the hotel taking some video.

In the afternoon I sat by the pool for a couple of hours and went in the shallow pool a couple of times. I was able to find a shady spot under an umbrella. I wasn't able to do much swimming, because my legs were so out of shape.

Mike returned to the room shortly after I had returned and showered.

On Wednesday I stayed in the room catching up with record keeping and reading.

When Mike's conference and other work ended, I called Jacqueline to tell her we were leaving for her place, which is not too far from the resort.

She showed us around her house. A lot needs to be done in the way of building bookshelves. We sat for a while and talked. Then we left for the cinema. Her husband wasn't interested in going with us. Jacqueline treated us to *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith*. It was a rousing good movie. I cried less than I'd expected. It was exciting and filled in all the empty spaces in the saga.

Afterwards, we went inside Jacqueline's house again and talked some more.

We checked out about 10h00 on Thursday and drove down to Tucson. The drive took about an hour and a half. We reached the Best Western Inn and Suites in Tucson about 11h45 and were able to get a room. After we checked in and took our luggage to our room, we went to the Village Inn next door for lunch.

Then we decided to do a little sightseeing. We went to Fort Lowell Park, which is just the remains of a fort. There is only part of one building remaining of the place. The museum itself is a recreation of one of the other buildings. We tried to get to another historic site, but the GPS navigation system steered us wrong. We ended up near Sentinel Peak, so we drove up that to see the city from above. Unfortunately, you can't see the downtown area from the top. We figured we really didn't have enough time to try anything else because of rush hour traffic and returned to the motel. We had dinner at the Village Inn.



Then we drove up to Oracle, though the skies didn't look promising. Other than seeing the sunset, we didn't stay because of the clouds.

The free high-speed Internet at the motel worked sort of. I could receive all my e-mail but wasn't able to send.



Mike had a conference call Friday morning for work. When that finished, we drove to Mt. Lemmon. We drove the official route from the Eastern side of the mountain. It turns out the road from Oracle is not paved, and Mike didn't want to drive that on our trip back down because of time considerations. There are several vista points on the road up the mountain with some spectacular views. We reached the summit about 13h30. The area is filled with vacation homes. There is a restaurant, where we ate, and a gift shop, where we shopped.

After we came back to the motel, Mike decided not to go to Oracle; because rain was threatening. Shortly after that, the skies opened up; and we got a deluge lasting about half an hour followed by some fierce thunder and lightning. There was some light rain a bit later, but things dried quickly after that and allowed us to walk to the Village Inn for dinner.

We left about 09h30 Saturday for home.

In late morning we stopped at Gila Bend for gas.

About 13h30, we stopped at a McDonald's in Quartzsite for lunch and reached home early in the evening.

* * *

* Mailing Comments on FAPA #271:

Ray Schaffer (Fanalysis 32): I sure hope the future isn't as bleak as you painted. I take some solace in the fact that, unlike Nazi Germany, there is still healthy criticism about our government being bandied about. Most of my pessimism, or at least feelings of less than optimism, are centred on what people are doing to our environment.

Eric Lindsay (For Fapa): A condo can be any size. The one I used to own had two bedrooms, which meant four rooms in all (kitchens and bathrooms are not counted). Mike also used to own a condo with the same number of rooms, but overall the condo was larger. In our neighbourhood some developer has built million-dollar condos that are two or three floors.

Social Security, retirement pensions, and personal savings are problematical. At least in this country, people don't seem to be learning to save for their future. Social Security is meant only as a fallback for people who don't manage to have anything else. It is currently possible to live on it as long as you don't expect any luxuries. Retirement pensions are provided by corporations, and some corporations have done a really bad job of it. A combination of the three is the best option to have. My parents lucked out in that they retired when companies were still providing medical insurance et al. They manage to pay for all their basic necessities with Social Security. The rest is available for vacation trips and other extras; they had both a company retirement pension and some private savings. Back about 1980 the US government provided tax-free retirement accounts. These are voluntary, so only the wise invested. Some time later, they made available tax-free savings accounts for employees of companies that wanted to provide them. I believe most companies match certain percentages of employee contributions to these accounts. These were all opt-in programmes, which meant you only got enrolled if you took the initiative. There is talk now of creating opt-out accounts of this type that would require action not to be a part of the programme. This makes a lot more sense to me. Both the individual retirement accounts and the company sponsored retirement accounts have caps. These caps must have been too low in the past, since now they are offering catch-up options to people over fifty. When I met Mike, he was only putting the minimum amount into his company-sponsored saving account. I maxed it out and decide where his money gets invested; he has a number of options that include several mutual funds and safer options. He used to have all his savings in company stock, a foolish option as was shown by the Enron debacle. It seems to me that better education is needed.

Eric Lindsay (Magazine Boxes Project): I admire your initiative and creativity. I buy magazine storage boxes from library supply companies, which I knew about having been a librarian. Some of the ones I buy are made of sturdy cardboard, and some are plastic. I have mostly ones with closed tops, which allow me to stack other things on top of them.

I like the photo of you with your supervisor sitting on your shoulder. I've never had a wild bird sit on me like that. That must be pretty tame.

I looked up Natural Snakes and found a photo. They seem to resemble gummy candy.

Dale Speirs (Opuntia 56.1): Your book reviews are so complete, more like book reports, that I don't feel any need to read the books you reviewed.

Ben Indick (Ben's Beat 80): Your comments about the translations of Verne's works makes me wonder about the quality of the translations I own. We have six books by him, but only one gives the translator's name; that's *20,000 Leagues under the Sea*, which was translated by Walter James Miller. I suppose this probably makes the other books rather suspect. I have read other editions borrowed from libraries but did not note the translators' names. I never realized that Verne's writing had a literary quality. I suppose now I will have to look for French editions.

We are quite well acquainted with John Hertz. I met him shortly after I took up Regency dancing in 1979. He teaches most of the local dance sessions now. We also see him at many social gatherings throughout the year. Indeed he is on our invitation list for the occasional parties we host. We exchange fanzines.

Shelby Vick (Comments Commence): It's *vive la difference*.

I never thought of myself as being more than usually socially active, but I do enjoy mingling with people.

When my husband retires, I figure we only need one car. Right now, having two cars is still very useful. While he is at work, I can drive my car to doctor's appointments, to the vet, and shopping.

Robert Lichtman (King Biscuit Time, No. 44): Paypal doesn't cost any money to me the way I use it. In fact I have made money from it, since I signed on when they were giving out \$5 for people to sign up. I have never had more than a hundred dollars in my account. It's a convenient way for some people to pay me small amounts of money, and I use the account to pay out of for small purchases. Were I to handle larger amounts, I would need to become a verified user, meaning I would have to link it to a bank account. Rather than use our joint bank account, though, I would probably open up a different account to use for that purpose.

Did we ever compare watches? From your description, it sounds like we have the same model. My husband also.

Arthur D. Hlavaty (Nice Distinctions Nine): Not really a comment, but a neighbour gave me the audio book version of Robert Langdon's *Angels and Demons*. It made me think of you since it involves the Illuminati, at least in a manner of speaking.

Dale Speirs (Thrilling Typewriter Stories, Vol. 1, No. 2): That Paine's Celery Compound sounds like something I could really use.

Thanks for running the O. Henry story. I always enjoy reading those.

Dale Speirs (Opuntia 56.3): Some people buy those bad monster films of the 1950s for their nostalgia value. Mike got the Black Lagoon and Mummy ones. I couldn't remember seeing any of them before. They were mostly pretty bad except for the first Mummy movie.

Sf cons are not the only groups that make the mistake of listing speakers without confirming them beforehand. A few months ago, Mike was contacted by Meade and told that they might want him to make an appearance at the Riverside telescope conference. Mike told them that he was planning to be in Arizona at that time but might be able to change his schedule with sufficient notice. When he received notification the day before we left for Arizona that he was on the schedule of speakers, he e-mailed back that he was sorry but he would be in Arizona. Someone who attended the conference told him that the attendees were informed that Mike would be there. I hope no one was terribly disappointed.

Keith A. Walker (Paragon 2 – the 2005 UK Eastercon): Small world. I have a pen pal in Nuneaton. We've been corresponding for about twenty years. She was in Los Angeles once, and we met. I have not yet had the opportunity to visit her.

One problem with panels that I've run across is that a moderator is often not assigned beforehand.

Robert Michael Sabella (Ride the Lightning Winter 2005): Fanzines submitted to efanzines.com can be in any downloadable format or in html for reading online. Most people use PDF format.

I grew up reading the DC comic books, though I think the earliest comics I read were things like Donald Duck and Little Lulu. I didn't read comics for years. Several years ago a Los Angeles fan started a Little Lulu fanzine that he distributes free. When I discovered this, I asked him to put me on the mailing list. I started buying some used *Little Lulu* comics, but they are very expensive. Recently a publisher has been reprinting the comics in black and white, so I'm buying those instead. When J. Michael Straczynski started putting out comics, I became a comics buyer again. In addition to his comics, I am buying the new version of *The Legion of Super-Heroes*, which was a favourite comic in my youth. In fact I have bought the archived editions of the original version.

I don't consider Wolfe's "New Sun" series and its successors or Miéville's New Crobuzon books to be fantasy but science fiction.

Did you know that we have the Republicans to thank for the two-term limit on the presidency?

Our trash collection company would not like it at all if we closed our trash bins with bungee cords. They are designed to be picked up by their truck, using a mechanical arm, and flipped open automatically.

My parents attend the opera and some ballet performances in Seattle. They live two hours drive away. To avoid having to drive home late at night, they either stay the night at a hotel in Seattle or with my sister, who lives just south of Seattle.

If you are seriously worried about brittle bones, you should discuss this with a doctor and possibly have a bone density scan. My husband had one after I asked him to get one and he discussed it with his doctor. His doctor agreed, since my husband had lost some height, one indication of weak bones. He has osteopenia, which is a precursor of osteoporosis. Any small person should get a bone density scan. Small people are prone to osteoporosis.

My book buying has been sporadic in the past. If I discovered an author I liked when I was in book-buying mode, then I tended to buy up everything I could find. This is what happened with Gerald Durrell. I discovered

him in a little shop in Stratford, Ontario, when a friend and I were killing some time before the play we had gone to attend started. I read enough standing in the shop that I bought a copy of every book that was in the shop. Afterward I started buying others as quickly as I could. I was working in a library at the time, so researching the availability of books was very easy. The pen pal I mentioned in my comment to Keith Walker helped me fill a few holes in my collection. To date I have most of his books. He wrote autobiographical stories about collecting animals for zoos, including one he started himself on the Isle of Jersey.

I was introduced to F. Paul Wilson when I was doing book reviews for a couple of review zines. He was just starting out then. He was impressed by my review; he said I was the only reviewer he was aware of that understood what he had been trying to do in that particular book. After that I read a few other books he wrote. I liked them, too; so I became a collector of his books.

As for Silverberg and Zelazny, I have not liked everything they wrote. For instance, I did not care at all for the Amber series, though it's possible I might feel differently now if I were to try them again. There are some books by Silverberg that impressed me greatly. On the other hand, there were others that I liked but not enough to collect. I liked his Lord Valentine books enough to give them to my sister as gifts; they are more her type of books than mine. The Star Trek books are my husband's domain. Though I had a few of them before we met, he continues to buy and read them. Some of them are quite good, and I suppose most of them are at least entertaining. I have read only a few of them myself. We actually have nine Zelazny books, so he missed the cut-off by only one. It's possible that we may acquire more of his books and Silverberg's in future.

Ditto 18 flyer: Don't look for us in Wisconsin. That month we will be travelling only within the state, of California, that is.

Marty Cantor (Fish Wrap Pre-intelligencer): There is apparently an Oracle Historical Society. According to their web site, Oracle was named after a gold mine. The mine was named after a ship. The owner of the mine had survived a storm in the ship and so named the mine after the ship.

There are appliances you can buy to help you apply lotions to your back. They look like backscratchers, but they have a little pad instead of the scratching fingers.

Gordon Eklund (Sweet Jane #43): You ask, "But how come in the comic when people get hurt, there's never any pain, no suffering?" It probably depends on the comic. In the ones I read, people do suffer pain and other ill effects when people get hurt.

You also said, "... who played just about everything musical you could think of through his rear end? Odd people seem to be fascinated by this." Are you yourself one of those odd people?

You implied that you think Edgar Allen Poe was a bad writer. Is this your opinion of Poe? I quite like Poe myself.

I'm glad to hear that we're not the only ones with stacks of unviewed DVDs. Mike and I both have them. However, I want to watch most of the ones in Mike's stack, which is much smaller than mine. He's not interested in most of the ones in my stack. During the June hiatus of practically everything on TV, I have made a small dent in my pile. As I keep telling Mike, we probably won't keep buying DVDs at the same rate of speed. We have probably acquired most of the historical ones that we are interested in. From this point on, we will probably mostly acquire DVDs of new movies and TV shows. It would just be too scary otherwise.

Milt Stevens (Alphabet Soup #46): I agree that saying that *Perdido Street Station* is dismal does not say anything about whether the reader liked the book or not. Whether a book is dismal or not would definitely not be a quality that would determine whether I liked a book. In the case of this particular book, I think a happy ending would have been totally out of place. I would have hated it if it had ended that way.

I attended one college reunion. I think it was my twentieth. I decided it had been too soon. The older you are, the better housing we are assigned for the reunions. We were in one of the oldest dorms with scuzzy bathrooms. As for high school, as I went to three different ones, I'm not sure which reunion would be appropriate. I would probably choose the first one I attended, as I knew my classmates best there. We had been friends since at least seventh grade. I'm no longer in regular contact with any of my high school classmates in any of the schools. Recently, though, I did touch base with one classmate. Her sister was on the NPR show *Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me*. I recognized her name, which is a somewhat unusual one. I e-mailed her, and she turned out to be the person I remembered. As for fandom, I didn't find it until after I'd finished grad school.

Tom Feller (The Road Warrior): Congratulations on your new car.

Your description of the Fire of Brazil sounds very similar to a Brazilian restaurant we went to near DC.

Your first Andre Norton novel was also my first one, which was recommended by a high school friend. I didn't

care for it. I also received a review copy of another book of hers in the mid 1970s, and I didn't care for that one either. Years later I read the "Witch World" series, which I do like.

Moi (Feline Mewsings #20): It looks like we finish the year at second place where annual rainfall is concerned.

Roger Wells (Voice of the Habu, Vol. VIII, No. 2): At this point I'm effectively caught up with my periodical reading. I have a steadily shrinking pile all received within three weeks.

Does the VA cover spouses, too?

I didn't realize that there was much difference between Canadian and American English.

What is the VA's symbol for secular humanists?

By your definition, just about all of us have Asperger's.

My sister lives quite close to you in Federal Way.

... it is good that I decided to go into computer software; as a physicist[,] I would have utterly failed to be sufficiently obscure. -Roger Wells

Dick Eney (Target: FAPA): I disagree with "all prozines are digest size", unless you don't consider *Absolute Magnitude* to be a prozine.

Steve and Vicki Ogden (Edgar's Journal #3): I read the *Wizard of Earthsea* and the sequels while I was in library school. I didn't care that much for the books, but I didn't react as negatively as you seem to have. Recently I acquired and listened to the audio book version of the first book, because Harlan Ellison was the reader. That has made me interested in re-reading the books.

Janice Morningstar (April Showers Bring May ... Showers): I e-mailed you information about the Corflu Blackjack DVD set, but I will repeat the information for anyone else who might be interested. The Corflu Blackjack set has two disks; at the moment I can send it in-country for \$7.50. The Corflu Titanium set has three disks; these can be mailed to you for \$10.50. Both are \$16.50. The price may change, so you might check with me first before sending money. I can accept cheques, money orders, or payment by Paypal (directly from an account, not credit card). The price covers the cost of material and postage. These are Region 1 disks. Please enquire about prices to other countries.

Hawaii is humid, but it never gets hotter than the 80s.

Jack Speer (Synapse): Whether a TV show is "worth watching" is very subjective. I certainly find both *Stargate Atlantis* and the new version of *Battlestar Galactica* worth my time. Some of the things I like about *Stargate Atlantis* are the female team leader, the funny scientist (I believe he's supposed to be a physicist), and the military leader. There's good chemistry among the stars of the show. I like *Battlestar Galactica*, because, unlike the original, the story is serious, not tongue in cheek.

I think most people are made self-conscious by recording devices only at the beginning. It's easy to forget that they are there, especially when the devices are not visible.

Your statement that "one can't fall as far in a tub as ... in a shower" is only true if the person in the tub is not standing and the person in the shower is not sitting. Usually when I'm in a tub, I'm taking a shower. These days I spend a lot of the time in the shower in a seated position.

The Song of Roland (*La Chanson de Roland*) is similar to *El Cid*. It is about France's struggles against Moorish invasion.

Using a close quote at the end of a paragraph when the quotation continues in the next is not incorrect; it is merely unnecessary.

You said, "Oiwa, Oume, and lemon. Such juxtaposition of vowels seems unusual in Japanese". *Au contraire*. For instance, the Japanese word for "house" is "ie" (pronounced with short vowel sounds for each vowel, like in Latin).

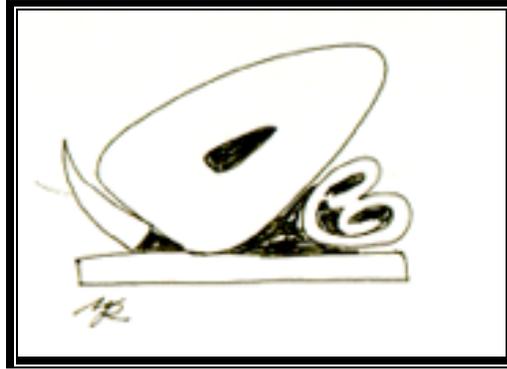
I've read *Don Quixote*, but it was in translation and in an abridged edition.

UPS - Uninterruptible Power Supply.

I never got into *Fafhrd* and the Grey Mouser, either.

"Technical pens are way cool" can't really be explained to anyone who is not an artist and hasn't used one. One can look up a story by title only, on the Internet. The person at the mike in the photo accompanying my SPERDVAC write-up is Harlan Ellison. Sf and fantasy may be where the money is, but mainstream is where the respectability is. Why would you expect most FAPA members to know what *stare decisis* means. It's a legal term, and I never came across it before. I believe Eric Mayer lives in or around Rochester, NY. At least that's where he was last time I read about him.

* * *



* Letters to the Editor

My replies to the letters will be enclosed in double parentheses. I will also routinely make editorial corrections in punctuation, spelling, and the like.

Sheryl Birkhead, Gaithersburg, MD

27 April 2005

Whew – I'd have pegged the cover on #19 to be by Alan white, not Miklis.

... then Andre Norton, now Bill Bowers – yeah RIP.

I hadn't seen anything about Ben Indick's problems; what happened? ((Ben suffered some injuries from a fall down a staircase. I believe he has mostly recovered.))

'Tis the season to mulch; today was the fourth local house fire which is directly traced to mulch! Aha, a *loophole* for not caring for the yard!

The Octavia Butler book you mention is the only one of hers I've "read" – well, listened to on tape; and I enjoyed it thoroughly!! ((I find that some books are better listened to than read.))

I make it a policy not to vote in Hugo categories in which I am ignorant. After nominations I try to read all the short listers; but unless I've read at least all but one, I refrain from voting.

How is Mercury? Epilepsy is not as common in cats as in dogs. Of course, if it is epilepsy, am hoping for idiopathic (in general), since many causes are not easy to manage; but to back into a diagnosis of idiopathic, you (of course) have to rule out all the other causes. Each vet has a different comfort threshold, but often medication is not started until the frequency is at least one to two times a month. Fingers crossed that this was a worrisome but one-time problem.

I tape a lot of TV stuff but usually end up a week or so behind. I believe the Star Trek legacy is about to end its current incarnation. I *hope* to remember to get the final episodes taped to see how everything gets resolved in a way that "leads" to the original *Star Trek*. ((I frequently find myself months behind in catching up with taped episodes of TV shows. Right now I am all caught up and even watching some of the stacks of DVDs I've bought. Fortunately, no TV series goes year-round.))

Thanks for #19. It seems like days are getting even *shorter* – have a stack of *things* that need doing – yeah – RSN.

((Thanks for the fillo you sent. I will use it at an appropriate time.))

#

Gerri Balter, St. Paul, MN

31 May 2005

I am sorry to hear about your and Mike's health problems. I hope things have improved by now. ((Mike is fine. I expect my dental problems will have been taken care of by the time this zine is printed up.))

I also saw the play *Proof* in St. Paul at one of our local theatres called Park Square. I also thought it was very well done.

I'm assuming you won't be going to Scotland. Are you going to Seattle? ((We have no plans at present to go to either.))

I had planned to go to Scotland, but the cost of an airline ticket (\$1,200) plus the horrendous rate of exchange caused me to change my mind. I won't be going to Seattle either; because I already bought a membership to Bouchercon, the World Mystery Convention, in Chicago.

I will be going to L. A. next year. How about you? ((Plan on seeing us there. It's only a short drive – about an hour – for us.))

#

Rita Prince Winston, Venice, CA

12 June 2005

I'm sorry to hear of your infected teeth; I hope the problem is solved. Infected teeth appear to be a main cause of death by septicaemia (blood poisoning). ((As though I didn't have enough to worry about.))

Do your cats need a pet sitter for Thursday through Monday, five days? I think for that length of time, I'd leave them with clean litter boxes and a stockpile of water and dry food and have someone stop in maybe only once (Saturday) to give them canned food and change the water and refill the dry food. For Friday through Monday, four days, I probably wouldn't have anyone stop in. ((That would work if our cats didn't need medication. Shadow gets thyroid pills and Pepcid once a day, and Fluffy gets Cosequin at least twice a day (four capsules, which I spread out over four times a day when we're home) and a pain pill twice a day. I don't expect anyone but a professional pet sitter to have to take on this kind of task.))

Re your comment on FAPA 270, I also thought Paris Hilton was the name of a hotel. What were her parents thinking? The travel adviser on *Marketplace* ((show on NPR)) says always to get paper tickets, not e-tickets, in case your airline goes bankrupt and you need to find a flight on another airline. ((Sounds like good advice if you think your airline is in danger of going out of business, which is not a very common occurrence.))

Re LoCs to you, there is a small museum of folk and craft art across the street (Wilshire Boulevard) from LACMA (Los Angeles County Museum of Art) that includes miniatures. I've never visited it. ((But I have and should have remembered. I even bought a book there that shows a few room boxes.))

Lloyd Penney wrote, "my middle name is Ludd", in a reference to Luddites; this reminded me that Lloyd, Ludd, and Lludd are all attempts to spell the same Welsh name.

#

Lloyd Penney, Etobicoke, ON, Canada

17 June 2005

Many thanks for the 20th *Feline Mewsings*, and it's mid-afternoon Friday. We're getting ready for a fannish party tonight, a barbecue at the airport where Yvonne is learning to fly on Saturday, and a family

barbecue on Sunday. There's a Toronto Gaylaxicon meeting on Saturday evening and an Ad Astra meeting during the Monday pub night. It's going to be hard work to keep up with all this fun, so I'd better do my LoCs now!

I am hoping that you might come up to Toronto for the 2006 Corflu. I haven't seen any details yet, but I am sure that Catherine and Colin are working on getting things ready. I've never been able to get to a Corflu, so I am looking forward to it. I've already seen the nickname TorFlu, but I'll leave such names to the committee. ((Corflu in Toronto is not in the cards for us as of now.))

I finally decided to jump on the bandwagon when it comes to weight loss. Yvonne lost more than a hundred pounds with Weight Watchers, and some friends have lost some substantial weight with the Atkins diet, but Atkins seems fairly strict. Weight Watchers has their own version of the Atkins diet called the core diet; and so far, I've lost ten pounds on it. Yvonne's lost a few extra pounds, but we are feeling it. We love breads and pastas, and we miss them. As soon as they come up with the no-carb, no-calorie chocolate sundae, we'll have it made... ((I'm lucky that I really don't care much for carbs, anyway. The low carb way works for me, though I have to admit it used to work much better when I was younger. I don't think there's such a thing as a no-carb, no-calorie sundae; but there are low carb low calorie ice cream desserts.))

Mailing comments to Bill Bowers...a shame he's gone. I found out this affected Mike Glicksohn a great deal. I met Bill only once at a Midwestcon. ((I only met Bill once, too, at the Corflu in LA.))

I would also like to know more about old time radio conventions. I am attempting to make a side career of being a voice actor, and I've had some success but nothing lately. I must wonder if the two might go together. There is the possibility that I might be part of a group that will perform *The War of The Worlds* at Ad Astra next year.

Rita Prince Winston says Toronto steals work from Hollywood? Live here for a while and see that Hollywood still produces the vast majority of movies and television shows. We have our stables of great actors, writers, producers, and stagehand people. There's an area east of the downtown that is nicknamed the "studio district"; we have a lot of soundstages there. The city of Toronto, the province of Ontario, and the Canadian government offer tax breaks to not only bring productions here to keep the movie/TV industry alive here but also to bring those productions to Vancouver, Montreal, and any other Canadian city that has those production facilities and people. LA is the only place that makes this stuff? No way. Interesting how if the US government hands out money to an industry, it's called supporting it; but if any other country does the same, it is somehow an illegal subsidy. If you feel we steal it, steal it back! It's a very competitive industry, so Hollywood...compete!

Check out www.sectarianwave.com, and you should be able to download an episode of the radio play I was involved with. It may be some time yet before the full set is available.

All done, and off into the ether. See you next issue!

#

John Hertz, Los Angeles, CA

24 June 2005

Maybe Ed Meskys meant the Kaye Museum, now closed, which was across from the LA County art museum and had some of the Thorne rooms.

#

IAHF: Kees van Toorn; Leslie David; Mary Manchester, who says she perked up at recognizing Lloyd Penney's name.

* * *



Squirrel eating exhibits at Arizona Sonora Desert Museum

* **Closing Remarks**

The coming three months should include two conventions, so my next issue should include reports of both. In addition, we will be going back to Borrego Springs for another astronomical star party.