

Feline Mewsings #29



Feline Mewsings is a personalzine / newsletter published more or less quarterly by R-Laurraine Tutihasi, 29217 Stonecrest Road, Rolling Hills Estates, CA 90275-4936, 310-265-0766, Laurraine@mac.com, <http://www.weasner.com/>. It is distributed through FAPA and sent to other friends and family. It is available for the usual (a response of any kind, including letters, e-mail, and phone calls of comment; trade; contributions of illos, fiction, or articles; or even money: \$1.50 per issue or \$5 per year). [] if this box is checked, I need to hear from you if you wish to stay on my mailing list. A slightly modified version will be placed on the web shortly after paper publication; please let me know if you prefer just to read the web version. I can also e-mail this in Word or rtf format. Kattesminde Press #358. ©2007 R-Laurraine Tutihasi. Permission is granted to reprint or forward any part or all of this newsletter created by the editor provided that it carries the following statement: "Copyright 2007 by R-Laurraine Tutihasi. Originally published in Feline Mewsings #29, <http://members.aol.com/felinemewsings/index.html>." All other material is copyrighted by their respective creators, and they should be contacted for any reprint permission.

Cover is a montage of photos taken by Mike Weasner in Oracle, AZ.

Feline Mewsings

#29

August 2007

* Editorial / Introduction

Retirement has come sooner than we had planned. Mike's company announced in late May its intentions of terminating his position at the end of June. Mike spent several weeks looking into alternative employment. There were also many in the company who wanted him to stay on, but he at last decided that his best course was to retire now. He has filed his retirement papers, and they should go into effect at the beginning of August. This means I don't have the luxury of six months to prepare for moving. We're in high gear on doing that. We've hired a handyman to do a bunch of minor fixes around the house. We also interviewed several moving companies and made our selection. There was a wide range of estimates, but that wasn't the primary reason for our choice. We checked the reputation of all the companies we talked to and chose the one who seemed to have the best record.

As soon as Mike made his retirement decision, I resigned my reviews coordinating position with simegen.com. Fortunately the person taking over had just quit her day job and had a lot of time for the task of taking over. Once she's learned all the ropes, she can probably go back to a day job, should she so choose.

We've spoken to our financial advisor and are in the process of consolidating our retirement savings. This takes a little time, as we have to wait until some of the moneys mature.

We also made a trip into Tucson to check out rental prices, storage prices, and talk to a builder. Things proceeded better than expected, as we were able to join a local credit union even though we don't yet have an address there. We found out that storage costs are very high but that rental costs are quite low, at least in comparison to LA. Instead of renting from a storage facility, we are thinking about renting a larger house, so we can store on the premises.

We've been very busy recently getting our house ready to show and packing up most of our books and audio/visual material. We're using the garage and what used to be the guest room for storage. We have scheduled a moving sale for mid-August.

* * *

* Mike

Mike's car was returned to us about a week after I sent out my previous issue. The fix was arrived at by following the mechanic's hunch. He replaced the remaining fuel injectors, and the noise went away. The average mileage is back up to over 46 mpg. The work was done under warranty, as Mike had reported the problem a year ago.

* * *

* Local Activities

Theatre

Rounding Third: This play by Richard Dresser was the last for the 2006-7 season of the Colony, to which we subscribe. On the surface this play is about a little league coach (Don, played by Jerry Kernion)

and his new assistant (Michael, played by Kevin Symons, whom we have seen many times at the Colony and elsewhere). Dig deeper and it's about interpersonal relationships and personal development. With only two people in the cast, it gets pretty intense at times. Although I enjoyed the play and it was very well performed, I did leave the theatre wondering whether I missed anything because it was about two men. I asked Mike about it, but he didn't have any insights to shed. On the other hand, he doesn't tend to analyze social situations very much.

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Capitol Steps: We've been going to see them annually, and this year's selection of sketches was quite excellent. This is the first time, though, when I've seen the cast lose it and get the giggles twice and had to interrupt their performance in order to regain their composure. In case you're not familiar with the group, they do political satire. They poke fun at any and everyone in politics. Major targets of their satire this time included our vice president, our president, our speaker of the house, and Al Gore. CDs of their work since they started are available at <http://www.capsteps.com/>.

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Cinema

Ratatouille: This was our Fourth of July treat to ourselves, since we were too busy preparing to move to attend any conventions. It's an animated feature put out by the partnership of Disney and Pixar. The main character is a French rat who decides he wants to be a chef. Two humans provide a romantic focus. I thoroughly enjoyed the humorous and touching story.

###

Others

Universal Studios: This is one place I wanted to revisit before we moved to Arizona, so we went for my birthday this year. Mike had the day off as part of the company's new 9/80 plan. Everyone works nine hours a day and gets the tenth day off, every other Friday. The other Friday is an eight-hour day. Quite a bit of the park had changed since the last time I'd been there more than ten years ago. I think Mike had been there just about ten years ago. We first went on the studio tour, which is a forty-five minute tour around the back lot, which shows us a lot of the areas used for filming various TV shows and movies. Among the sets we saw this time were those used for the Tom Cruise version of *War of the Worlds*, the recent remake of *King Kong*, and the Jim Carrey Grinch film. We were also treated to a simulated earthquake and shark attack. Then we saw the Waterworld show, which, I guess was based on the movie of that name that neither of us has seen. The show was apparently a synopsis of the movie with lots of action, stunts, and explosions. Then we went on the Back to the Future ride, which is basically a motion-based flight simulator. Next we saw the animal show, which featured various animal actors doing their tricks. On the lower level of the park, we went on the Jurassic Park ride, which is a water ride that ends in a big splash. Then we saw the special effects show, which, long ago, used to be part of a ninety-minute studio tour. I did not care for the Mummy Ride, which featured an indoor roller coaster that goes backwards during the second half. No more backward roller coasters for me. Back on the main level, we visited the House of Horrors, which is basically a haunted house attraction where live actors periodically leap out at the guests. I probably would have enjoyed that a lot more had it not been for a shrieking preteen who was ahead of us. We ended the day at the Shrek 4D show. There were a few other attractions that we did not get to, but we did everything I was interested in. We spent the entire day there and had a great time.

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Amy's Motley Media Musings

Reviews by Amy Harlib



***Perdido Street Station* by China Mieville (Del Rey, NY, July 2003, \$7.99, mass market paperback, ISBN#: 0-345-45940-7), <http://www.randomhouse.com/delrey/>**

China Mieville, author of one previously published dark fantasy novel, *King Rat*, a very distinguished debut with a contemporary London setting as the backdrop of a clever reworking of the Pied Piper legend, ventured into far more phantasmagorical realms with his sophomore effort, a science fantasy epic so astonishingly good I can't praise it too highly!

Perdido Street Station, set in an urban-gothic fantasy metropolis of New Crobuzon, sprawls and seethes with weird technology and thaumaturgy and teams with diverse inhabitants of all sorts of human and sentient non-human persuasions. Magical and 'steam punk' technology co-exist, there being Babbage computing engines, coal-powered robot 'constructs,' and an underclass of biologically 'Remade' victims of harsh judgements who may be part-machine, part-animal, or wholly horrific.

A visiting Garuda, a winged being now stripped of his aerial appendages as punishment for a crime he committed amongst his own kind (about which he stays taciturnly reticent), approaches the plump, eccentric amateur scientist, Dan der Grimnebulin, hoping to buy back the power of flight. The resulting research project produces an unforeseen concatenation of monstrous consequences, in which a deadly horror is unleashed—an entity so powerful that even the demons of Hell fear to fight it (declining when New Crobuzon's corrupt government begs help from the ambassador of the Netherworld).

Now Grimnebulin and his rag-tag group of cronies must do what they can to deal with the flying terror, these protagonists including Isaac's khepri lover (a sculptress from a hybrid human-bodied/scarab beetle-headed insectoid race), Yagharak the garuda, a gutsy lady reporter for a viciously suppressed subversive newspaper, the clandestine group-mind of New Crobuzon's constructs, a secret traitor, a gangster-for-hire, and the Weaver (a truly unique giant intelligent spider with uncanny dimension-spanning powers).

Mieville's consummate writing skill makes all this fit together in a feat of imaginative creativity, devising a truly original setting of Heironymous Boschean decadent complexity and atmosphere written with stylish expertise equal to any of the masterful works of Jack Vance or Gene Wolfe or Mervyn Peake.

Behold thoroughly dimensional characters, quirky and flawed and utterly believable, whether human or non-human or mixed, amidst a background of dazzling intricacy, rich in gothic atmosphere, bizarre cultural diversity, and 'local colour'. Enjoy a wildly exciting and thrilling plot that relentlessly grips the reader and never lets go until the unexpected ending. (But be warned of the presence of totally appropriate contextual darkness here, some non-gratuitous gross-outs, and plenty of true-to-life cursing).

One of the best books I have ever read, *Perdido Street Station* being so splendid, so vivid, so clever (for example, in Mieville's use of terms such as garuda and khepri from our own global mythic heritage to evoke imagery) one hates for it to end. At seven hundred plus pages, it leaves one craving for more, awestruck by its refreshing and ingenious approach to fantastic fiction. This extraordinary tour de force of the imagination deserves the highest awards and encomiums! His talent should be nurtured in order to continue to enrich us all!

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***The Scar* by China Mieville (Pan Macmillan, London, Apr. 2002, 17.99UK, hardcover, ISBN#: 0-33378-174-0); (Del Rey, NY, July 2002, \$18.95, trade paperback. ISBN#: 0-345-44438-8), <http://www.panmacmillan.com/Features/China/index.htm>**

Here's another review to add to the chorus of kudos about the latest work of British writer China Mieville, whose second work of fantastic fiction, *Perdido Street Station*, or what he prefers to call "weird fiction", won the prestigious Arthur C. Clarke and British Fantasy Awards in 2001, plus a Hugo nomination, among others. Thus he quickly entered the top ranks of the speculative literature genre community. This type of acclaim for a sophomore effort, a tough act to follow, offered a challenge well met by Mieville's third novel, *The Scar*, a companion volume making only oblique references to, but independent from, its predecessor. Equally wonderful, if not even better than, *Perdido Street Station*, *The Scar*, though set on the same invented otherworld of Bas-Lag, takes place in entirely different environs than the preceding book's multifarious metropolis of New Crobuzon; and it explores far more territory and contains many darker and more disturbingly suspenseful overtones, being no less enthralling for all that.

The Scar opens with the linguist/translator protagonist, Bellis Coldwine, whose diary-like observations in the form of undelivered letters get liberally sprinkled throughout the text, fleeing recent, life-threatening upheavals in New Crobuzon to seek sanctuary and anonymity in the Nova Esperium colony across the ocean. Bellis's sea-going voyage gets aborted by pirates who capture her and her shipmates, dragooning them into becoming more or less willing inhabitants of the Armada, the raiders' vast home-

base, a floating city pulled by numerous tugs and constructed from the hulls of seemingly countless generations of commandeered vessels. Like most places in this world, the Armada's population consists of a reasonably live-and-let-live, polyglot, multi-racial and multi-species melange of sentient humanoid beings. This specific locale is distinguished by its significant number of liberated Remades, those unfortunates who ran afoul of the law and, in punishment, have had their bodies unpleasantly surgically and/or cybernetically altered.

Ruling this outlaw commune-of-sorts, we find the Lovers, an oddly seductive, sadomasochistic couple with audaciously esoteric plans involving the eponymous Scar, a far-distant place rumoured to be an inter-dimensional, reality-mutating rift where the forces of probability may be manipulated. To help them as chief aid in achieving their grandiose goal, the Lovers employ the formidable warrior, Uther DouL, armoured with artefacts from the fabled, vanished, nonhuman Ghosthead Empire. On board opposition to the Lovers' scheme comes from the Brucolac, leader of a coterie of vampires and the wild-card, mysterious master of espionage, Silas Fennec, spying for New Crobuzon. Powering the Armada flotilla's progress, a plundered New Crobuzon drilling rig extracts from the seabed, its oil-like rockmilk fuel, a source of prodigious thaumaturgic energy in this continuum where scientific sorcery mingles with "steam punk" technology in a manner Mieville makes surprisingly plausible.

The embittered, lonely, ambivalent Bellis, reluctantly employed as librarian for the Armada, finds her skills needed by the Lovers in order to interpret the language written in a book containing instructions about how to harness the uncanny avanc, an immense leviathan-like creature with the strength to tow the seagoing city to its remote destination at a pace and efficiency far exceeding the mundane tugs. Subsequently, the coerced Bellis encounters many far more willing and eager residents of her new home—a colourful, eccentric crew including two other major characters (besides the personages already mentioned previously), Tanner Sack, a freed Remade prisoner glad to join the pirates, and Tanner Sack's friend, the youthful, clownish, yet innocent, cabin boy, Shekel, in love with Angevine, a Remade woman living long term with the Armadans.

These voyagers experience many wondrous set-pieces, most notably involving Salkrikator, the submerged city of the crustacean-like Scabmettlers, sapient beings oftentimes allying with the Armada; the island of the insectoid Annophelii mosquito people, a folk suffering a lethal form of gender division with docile, cerebral, vegetarian men and voracious, blood-sucking, predatory, fearsome women, exemplars of the dangers of extreme sexual enmity; the workings of Thaumaturgic science itself, a fascinating blend of mysticism with the mechanistic; the cruelty surrounding the exploitation of the avanc reflecting the harshness of the Lovers' attitudes; the sentient, animate, plant-like Cactacae, elite Armadan guards; Silas Fennec's secret, illegally acquired, empowering devices, operating in a fashion worthy of Clark Ashton Smith or H. P. Lovecraft; and the enigmatic, shadowy, ocean-dwelling sapient creatures utterly without mercy, who stealthily stalk the Armada to play their hand at a crucial climactic moment.

The Scar, with its meandering, episodic voyage at the centre of the plot, reflects reality in a way very few works of the fantastic do. Embodying Mieville's intent to revitalize the fantasy/SF genres, the story dynamically ranges from panoramic spectacles to intimate, dimensionally developed character interactions, whether human or nonhuman, all beings having a mix of likable and unappealing traits. Brimming with nautical adventure, *The Scar's* main plot, combined with sub-plots concerning hidden agendas, all leading up to an awesome sea battle and its telling aftermath, thoroughly engulfs the reader with unpredictable turns, stunning imagery and ideas, and mordant irony. The protagonist, Bellis Coldwine, prickly and often disagreeable, nevertheless engages; because she is so believable, as are so many of her compatriots with their many-layered personalities. Also adding stimulating depth to this epic yarn are subtexts riffs off the meaning of the title, with constant references to wounds and healing and what the experience of same means in life; for no one metaphorically goes through this book unscathed; yet as in everyday life, each individual emerges changed in different, unexpected ways.

Awash in complex, exotic, vivid settings and personalities inevitably worthy of comparison with classic genre works by Mervyn Peake and Jack Vance and giants of literature like Dickens and Melville, *The Scar*, with its thrilling blend of horrific darkness, ingenious invention, clever concepts, and thoughtful, deeper meaning, deserves to win an array of awards; for it ranks among the best genre novels of the year and maybe for all time. Set sail with the Armada and get swept away on a memorable reading voyage sure to make innovative waves in the sea of fantasy, science fiction, and those avant-gardes tales that are just plain weird and wondrous.

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***Spirited Away / Sen To Chihiro No Kamikakushi* (Studio Ghibli / Walt Disney Pictures, 2002). Directed and written by Hayao Miyazaki. Art Direction by Youji Takeshige. Music**

by Jo Hisaishi. Running time: 125 minutes. Rated: PG. (In Japanese with English subtitles. English dubbed version available.) Available on VHS and DVD.
<http://bventertainment.go.com/movies/spiritedaway/nonflash.html>
<http://us.imdb.com/Credits?0245429>

Hayao Miyazaki, considered by cognoscenti the "God" of anime creators, acquired this exalted status during his career crafting eight features and numerous TV shows since he started in the early 1970s. His latest production, brought to the USA under the auspices of Walt Disney Studios, features far better than usual English dubbing, with top voice talent directed by John Lasseter of *Toy Story 1 & 2* fame, *Spirited Away* will only further enhance the master's reputation; for it may be the best thing Miyazaki has ever done, its quality standing out in a field where there's a markedly higher rate of intelligent storytelling, three-dimensional characters, and thought-provoking themes than in American full-length cartoons

Resonant with universal folkloric motifs, yet thoroughly steeped in Miyazaki's own beloved Japanese traditions, the dazzling, weird, one-of-a-kind *Spirited Away* begins and ends in contemporary Japan with an extraordinary otherworldly adventure in between. The story concerns a ten-year-old girl, Chihiro (Rumi Hiiragi), not a happy camper, being driven by her parents to their new suburban home far from familiar friends and places. Dad, with Mom basically in accord, decides to take a "shortcut" to their new home down an unpaved forest road. When it dead-ends in front of a narrow tunnel through a tall, featureless wall, they decide to investigate and find themselves in a wide-open landscape, near a seemingly deserted traditional village. The father, rationalizing the clearly impossible—the fields are clearly *too* wide-open to be anywhere near the town they've just left—guesses it's an abandoned theme park. Eager to explore and dragging their fearful and protesting daughter with them, the parents find an apparently unattended restaurant stocked with fragrant food, on which the adults gorge, while the anxious, abstaining Chihiro reconnoitres the vicinity. Returning to her folks, their horrified offspring finds that they have literally made pigs of themselves—a porcine transformation from which Chihiro runs in terror.

With sunset rapidly approaching and the streets gradually filling with shadowy, spooky-looking, spectral forms, Chihiro, unable to find a way out, encounters a comfortably human-looking, initially friendly, young man called Haku, who possesses a bit of magical power in this eerie place. Haku advises Chihiro about how to survive in this strange new world in order to eventually free herself and her parents. He guides her to the largest building in the realm—the bathhouse for the millions of Shinto gods that inhabit this Shamanic spirit world into which Chihiro and her family have stumbled. Following Haku's instructions enables her to find another source of succor who can give her the job she will need to stay alive and function.

This ally turns out to be the custodian of the basement furnaces that power the supernatural spa—a certain Kamajii, whose gruff demeanour and strange appearance, a gnome's gnarled features and beard, combined with six spider-like arms and quick movements, conceal a compassionate heart. He operates complex machinery and supervises the innumerable, cute little soot sprites (just like the ones in Miyazaki's earlier *My Neighbor Totoro*) that, one-by-one, carry coal to the fires. When Chihiro helps a little over-burdened sprite deliver a piece of fuel, she endears herself to Kamajii, who then tells her how to find the ultimate, decision-making authority who lives and rules at the top of the bathhouse. This powerful figure, Yubaba, a huge-headed, fearsome, bejewelled witch (and ever-watchful were-vulture) clothed in Victorian-style petticoats, uses her magic mostly to make money and to enslave her workers by stealing pieces of their names and giving them new ones in the process (robbing names means possessing some control over their souls). Yubaba gives Chihiro the new moniker of Sen (a linguistic play on words, among many in a movie rife with punning in the original Japanese) and puts her to work.

The tale then becomes one of Chihiro's maturation, of outgrowing her petulance and discovering internal wellsprings of perseverance, courage, and simple kindness in a world populated by myriads of outré, unpredictable entities neither all-good nor all-evil. Learning the ropes, Chihiro also befriends one of her co-workers—the lovely, quick-witted, grown young woman and invaluable guide, Lin. And while doing her duties, the protagonist endures many rigors and bizarre encounters while trying to find a way to restore her parents to their true forms before they get—horrors—eaten! Achieving this goal also involves solving the mystery of Haku's presence in this otherworldly place and discovering his real role. Is he Yubaba's loyal servant, having helped draw in yet another slave, Sen; or does he have his own agenda, one that might include saving Chihiro? And how does Haku connect to the oddly familiar dragon occasionally seen flying near the bathhouse?

Along the way to the surprising, poignant, believable climax and resolution to *Spirited Away*, the viewer gets treated to wonderfully creative set pieces, including (to mention just a few among so many)

the astonishing appearances and variety of the uncanny beings Chihiro works with and who enjoy the bathhouse; the Faceless One, a fascinating and important, but, potentially dangerous, entity; Yubaba's enormous baby, Bo, that must be seen to be believed; the subtly, ecologically significant Stink God and his cleansing transformation; the amazing dragon and his equally interesting true nature; the oddly amusing trio of disembodied heads who live in Yubaba's apartments; and the very animate, hopping lamppost-guide encountered at a telling moment in Chihiro's journey.

Spirited Away's mostly hand-drawn, meticulous artwork offers dazzling delights galore. Wide landscape shots feature misty watercolours, sometimes accented with subtle CGI for the shimmer of light on water or the wind rippling across field or forest. The awesome array of characters, from the central figures to cameos like the Radish God, are distinctly rendered with vivid personalities. The ultimate effect is to create a complete, compellingly real otherworld, which is then perfectly complemented by a dynamic score, delicately blending traditional and modern instruments.

The movie's story enchants and enthralls, even while providing a painless and child-friendly, yet intelligent and complex, exploration of human beings' relationships with the environment, with themselves, and with higher powers. The spunky protagonist and the colourful personages who aid or oppose her are refreshingly ambiguous, seeming to have true personal motivations, rather than assigned black/white roles. The depicted spirit world, traditionally Japanese, also displays technological influences of the Western mundane world—a fascinating concept positing that even indigenous Shinto supernatural entities can be open to borrowing and adapting anything they find useful, just like the humans whom they resemble emotionally, for good or ill, even when their physical appearances are decidedly non-human.

Adding more meat to *Spirited Away's* rich subtextual stew, in no way hindering viewer pleasure, is its presentation of the intimidating adult working world, relentlessly dehumanizing and bureaucratic and frequently cruel, arbitrary, and degrading, as viewed through the eyes of a sensible innocent who hasn't been desensitized to the point of just accepting that "that's the way things are". The "stealing your name" bit is also a great metaphor for how bureaucracy assigns labels and ignores people's real identity.

Breaking all box office records in Japan and winning prestigious awards at home and in Europe, *Spirited Away* is a masterpiece that deserves the highest accolades. Inhabiting an ideal aesthetic realm midway between the dark intensity of Miyazaki's earlier *Nausicaa* and *Princess Mononoke* and the effervescent *My Neighbor Totoro* and *Kiki's Delivery Service*, this latest film achieves a rare, exquisite balance between epic action and touching emotional moments. People of all ages owe it to themselves to experience this story, a memorable, magical, cinematic spellbinder deservedly winning the first Oscar for Best Animated Feature—a work of genius destined to be a classic—and be spirited away.

* * *

* Our Summer Vacation

By the time we went on our trip on Saturday, 26 May, Mike had already learned that his job would be terminating. We were more determined than ever to have an enjoyable trip, and I think we succeeded.

We left home on the dot at 07h00 as we'd intended. I had breakfast, which I had prepared the previous night, in the car. I didn't have any lunch to speak of, though.

We made two rest stops, and I did a lot of napping.

Our route took us through a corner of Arizona. There was some spectacular scenery. It was sunny most of the time.

We arrived, as I'd expected, about 17h00 in Fillmore, UT. It's just a small town. The waitress in the hotel restaurant was particularly friendly. I had a chef's salad. The hotel we stayed at was the Best Western Paradise Resort.

Although the hotel supposedly offered wireless Internet, we couldn't get a fix on it.

By 07h45 on Sunday, 27 May, we were ready to go. Mike got gas, and I got water. Then we were on the road. I stayed awake most of the time.

About noon we stopped at Little America, WY, for lunch. I had a chef's salad.

During the drive to Cheyenne, we saw a large number of pronghorn antelope.

We reached Cheyenne, WY, a little after 17h00. We stayed at the Hampton Inn of Cheyenne. There's an Outback across a parking lot from there, and we had dinner there. I had a pork chop.

We had Internet connectivity, so I caught up with my e-mail, which I hadn't done since Thursday due to being too busy getting ready for the trip.

On Monday, 28 May, I got up with the help of an alarm clock. Then I went down for a free breakfast. I got some extra food for the trip to avoid having to stop for lunch.

Right after we checked out, we stopped for gas and water.

We made four rest stops during our long drive. The drive through Nebraska and Iowa was characterized by deer carcasses at frequent intervals, though I did see one live deer near the road.

It started to rain near Lincoln, NE, and continued off and on for much of the remainder of the drive.

In West Des Moines, we stayed at the Fairfield Inn and Suites. We had dinner at the Cheesecake Factory in a shopping mall nearby. Afterward Mike wanted to go to the nearby Barnes & Noble to check for a Star Trek book. He was successful in his search.

On Tuesday, 29 May, I got up again very early. At breakfast I again got some extra food for the long drive.

When we arrived in Seymour, IN, Mike drove around his old neighbourhood for a while. We also visited the cemetery where his parents are buried.

For dinner we walked to the nearby Cracker Barrel, where I also got some bottled water.

Later I caught up with stuff on my computer.

The next morning Mike went out to find his ex-mother-in-law. He had noticed the previous day that her house was up for sale. He found out she is now living in an assisted living facility right next to our hotel, the Hampton Inn.

For lunch we met some of his high school classmates at a sandwich shop.

In the afternoon we both went to visit his ex-mother-in-law, Mary Etta Elkins.

For dinner we tried going to a restaurant nearby. However, we left after discovering that it's a cafeteria. Instead we drove to a place slightly farther away called Max & Erma's. It seems to be part of a chain, but it was very nice. I ordered the halibut, which was exceptional.

After we got back to the hotel, we did laundry.

We both slept like logs that night.

We checked out about 10h30 and drove to Louisville. Traffic was on the light side, so it only took a little over an hour to get to the restaurant where we had agreed to meet Joe Major. We arrived way early and waited. He showed up at the appointed time. We got seated, ordered, and began to eat. By the time his wife, Lisa, got off from working at the library and arrived, we were mostly finished eating. We continued talking, though, until Joe had to return to work. Unfortunately I forgot to have Mike take a photo. The salad I had there was one of the two best I had during the entire trip.

We resumed our drive to Dayton for a reunion of Mike's A-7D fighter squadron at Myrtle Beach, SC, in the 1970s; but the navigation system recognized neither the name of the hotel (Hope Hotel) or the address. We drove to the Air Force Museum, figuring it would be near the hotel. This turned out to be not so true. We phoned the hotel from the museum parking lot, as the museum had already closed for the day. With instructions from the hotel, we were able to reach it. Many of the reunion people had already arrived, and Mike had a lot of hellos with old mates.

On our way to dinner in the hotel, we found that many had gathered in a small room stocked with refreshments. Mike greeted a lot of people there before we continued to dinner at Packy's. We had quite a nice dinner there, and I took leftovers back to our room for the next day's breakfast.

Friday, 1 June, when my alarm went off, I was coming awake anyway. My breakfast was leftovers from yesterday's dinner. I had time to take care of some on-line banking before we went down to meet a group going over to the museum.



A bunch of us went onto the base to see planes in the Presidential and R & D hangars. The Presidential hangar had old planes that had been used as Air Force One. Because it's on the base, one must be accompanied by an active or retired Air Force person. We accompanied a retiree to get on the base. Each day a group can sign up for a tour if people don't have easy access to their own Air Force personnel.

After we got back from that, we had an early lunch in the hotel.

After that we decided that day was the best day to go to

the Air Force Museum. We spend a couple of hours tramping through there taking lots of pictures. Towards the end of our rushed tour, Mike got a call from a guy he was supposed to meet with to plan things for the next day. We spent most of an hour going over details.

After we got back to the hotel, we took some candid photos. Then it was time for a group dinner, which turned out not to have a lot to offer me. I had two kinds of salad and meat. The coffee lady never got to our table, and we left.

Saturday, 2 June, we went down for brunch, since it looked as though we might not have time for lunch. In this we turned out to be wrong. On the other hand, there had apparently been flour in the barbecue sauce last night, so I had gastrointestinal problems for the next twenty-four or so hours.

We photographed the morning events, which were a video debriefing of a Vietnam rescue mission, a remembrance of a pilot lost there, and miscellaneous announcements. Because of the amount of video footage we already had, Mike decided against doing individual interviews. Instead we returned to our room to rest for a couple of hours.

I ended up taking a nap. It seems the accidentally ingested gluten had a much worse effect on me than expected. In fact it developed into pretty bad nausea and lack of appetite.

We changed and headed over to the Air Force Museum early, so Mike could coordinate things for photography of the evening's formal events. We also did a bit of shopping, picking up some postcards and a book. At 17h00 was the memorial service and dedication of a plaque with special mention of fallen comrades (in Vietnam). Then we adjourned for cocktails and eventually dinner. Because I wasn't feeling well, I just had some fruit and something to drink. There were some ceremonies before and after dinner that we photographed. We had one glitch in the taping, which Mike should be able to patch up for the final DVD that Mike is creating for all the attendees. There was a photo session after dinner.



I was coming awake when my alarm went off Sunday, 3 June. Breakfast went rather slowly, so we weren't exactly early leaving the hotel. It took about three hours to drive to Bloomington.

After checking into our room at the on-campus Biddle Hotel, we got lunch. Then we went for a walk around the Indiana University campus, Mike's alma mater. It was hot and humid and quite enervating.

After we finished our walk, Mike bought some souvenirs at the campus bookstore, which is in the same building as the hotel.

Back in our room, I wrote some postcards and caught up with my recordkeeping.

Then we both took long naps. After we got up, we walked down the main street and found a place to have dinner. We went all out, figuring we'd walk off the extra calories.

When the alarm went off Monday, 4 June, I was already half awake, due to Mike's alarm (he has to take his thyroid medication at the same time every day). We got checked out when we planned and headed over to the restaurant where we were to have breakfast with Jeff Stuckey, who does fund raising for the astronomy department. We got off to a late start to Crawfordsville. Mike called from the car to let the Pattons know that we'd be late. Mr. Patton was Mike's band director in high school and an influential teacher. They very kindly fed us lunch, though I did have to make a couple of substitutions. Their daughter, though, was familiar with caeliac disease.

We had some rain on the drive from Crawfordsville to Hannibal. Our navigation system didn't recognize the name of our hotel (Quality Inn and Suites), because it is fairly new. Our system is four years old. We had to call the hotel once we got into town to get directions. There's a restaurant located right next door, so we had dinner there.

Tuesday, 5 June, the free hotel breakfast included two different kinds of scrambled eggs, sausage, and bacon, as well as the usual.

We made our way to the Mark Twain Cave site before they opened, but we didn't have a long time to wait. We bought tickets for the cave tours right away. Since our first tour wouldn't start for almost an hour, we did our souvenir shopping then. We also had an interesting conversation with a man who used to live in LA but now lives out of an RV and travels around the country working parttime at parks. Our 10h00 tour was of the newer Cameron cave. We each had a lantern. These caverns are mostly dry. Only



the two of us were on the tour, so it was very personalized. Our tour of the main caverns took place immediately afterward. With twenty in this group, we didn't have as much chance for customized photography. However, since these caverns are lighted, I could take video pictures. The guide tied in a lot of the locations to plot points in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. He also talked about the real townspeople on whom Twain's characters had been based.

We had lunch at the Mark Twain Dinette next to the Mark Twain Museum, which we next went to. The museum consists of several buildings, including the homes of Mark Twain, Huckleberry Finn, and Becky Thatcher. We bought a few souvenirs. Afterward, we saw the statue of Tom and Huck, climbed too many stairs to see the river lighthouse, and stopped by Molly Brown's birth house. The last was not open, so we only took pictures of the outside.

We returned to the hotel and rested before going to dinner again at Fiddlesticks, the restaurant next to the hotel. After dinner we did our laundry, since we'd discovered that there was a laundry room there. I also

wrote up a bunch of postcards.

Back in the room, I caught up with my e-mail and recordkeeping.

I managed to get up before my alarm Wednesday, 6 June, for a change. We checked out after breakfast.

The GPS guidance system had us wondering for a while. The route looked rather circuitous and was more than an hour longer than I had estimated. It turned out it was trying to avoid a toll road, which we didn't mind taking.

We stopped for lunch in Independence, MO, the last time on this trip that we would have this luxury on driving days.

We reached Abilene, KS, in mid-afternoon and checked into the Holiday Inn Express. The wind was something fierce. I was witness to a branch breaking on a large tree. It was a very hot wind. At least it was much drier there than further east.

After resting up some, we went out for dinner. Afterward I discovered that I'd left my toothbrush in Hannibal. Sigh! At least the hotel was able to supply me with a replacement.

We had a rude early awakening Thursday, 7 June, when the hotel's clock radio went off at 05h30. I finally managed to get it turned off, but I didn't get a lot of sleep after that.

I had breakfast at the hotel, and then we went to the Eisenhower Center. Right after we arrived there, I noticed that I'd forgot my camera. We had to return to the motel to retrieve it.

The Eisenhower Center is located in a parklike setting where the house he grew up in is located. The visitor's centre, the museum, the library, and other things are located in separate buildings. The day was warm and breezy and quite pleasant. We were there until well after noon.

We stopped at the Kirby House Restaurant and had a lovely lunch. I was so impressed that we decided to return for dinner and made reservations. It's an old Victorian-style mansion. The service is nice, and the food is better.

Then we went on a tour of the Lebold Mansion. This was built for a banker and was one of the earliest houses in the area. The house has had many uses since, but it is mostly restored as much as possible.

It was too late to do anything else, so we returned to the motel to rest up. Then we went out for dinner at the Kirby House Restaurant.

At night I got online to take care of e-mail and recordkeeping. The Internet signal became troubling after a while, though.



I was up early Friday, 8 June, for an early start. We made a couple of stops along the way. I had lunch in the car—the leftover pork chops from a couple of nights ago. We reached Clayton, NM, by 14h15 and checked into the Best Western Kokopelli Lodge.

We decided it would be better to visit the Capulin Volcanic National Monument that day rather than the next. This was a good decision. It took an hour to get there, and there were two walking trails for a



total of 1.2 miles. It was not an easy hike, since it was uphill half the time. The view from top was really beautiful, though. There were also abundant wildflowers. We heard a lot of birds but didn't see many.

On the drive there and back, we saw many deer.

After we got back into Clayton, we stopped for gas and then went straight to the Eklund Hotel Dining Room for dinner. It was quite a nice place, and the food was good.

Back in the room, we had dependable WiFi. I did e-mail and recordkeeping. It appears my computer battery is dying.

I woke up almost an hour before my alarm Saturday, 9 June, and never really got back to sleep. After I got up, I went to get my free breakfast. Then we checked out and started driving. We had some of the best scenery of the trip. The first leg between Clayton and a town called Springer featured many deer and antelope. Shortly before we reached Gallup, there was some rain. About this this I formed some theories about why we saw so many dead deer in Nebraska and Iowa and so many living ones in New Mexico. The land in New Mexico is mostly fenced in because of cattle ranching. As a byproduct, the fences keep the deer from roaming onto the roads. The land around the freeways in Nebraska and Iowa was mostly woods or farms with very few fences.

After checking into Motel 6, we went to Meteor Crater. The visitors' centre there seems much more elaborate than I remember. There is no way to see the crater without going through the visitors' centre. However the admission was probably worth it, as it included a guided tour of part of the rim. We bought several items in the gift shop before returning to the motel.

Having seen a Denny's from the freeway, we had planned to have dinner there but learned about a nicer place from a motel employee. It's in a hotel in downtown Winslow and was definitely worth the drive. We had a very nice dinner; I had filet mignon and Mike had elk. We both had dessert, me strawberries with cream and Mike a peach sundae.

After returning to our motel, I took a short shower. A heat rash was starting to drive me nuts. I later discovered a few days after getting home, that it was not a heat rash but rather shingles. I had a fairly mild case though, as it was the result of chicken pox vaccine and not an actual case of chicken pox, which I've never had.

We discovered the motel has WiFi. Unfortunately the air coming out of the AC smelled all mildewy, so we did without. It's cool outside, so it wasn't too bad.

I got up early Sunday, 10 June. We packed and checked out to head for home.

In Needles we stopped at a Denny's for brunch.

We were home by about 15h00.

* * *

* Mailing Comments on FAPA #279:

Fantasy Amateur: My condolences to Ben on the loss of your friend Paul Walker. I never met him in person, but I believe he wrote reviews for *Luna Monthly* during the same time I did.

Dale Speirs (Opuntia 63.1A): Interesting article about 8-tracks. I never got into it myself and skipped right into cassettes.

Bob Silverberg (Snickersnee): Thanks for alerting me about wireless watering systems. I have added that to my notes on our retirement house, which we plan to build in Oracle, AZ.

Shelby Vick (ConfuSon): Very nice tribute to rich brown.

Jack Speer (Synapse): I've been in two states where it's illegal for a customer to pump his own gas.

According to the Inspector Morse series, the spelling of the word civilization was that way when the person was educated at Oxford or Cambridge.

Eric Lindsay (For FAPA): We stopped using inkjet printers after we bought our colour laser printer. It's so nice not to have to worry about clogged ink. I think the print quality is a lot better, too.

In my opinion a place with a population as low as 5 is only a village or hamlet, not a town.

Unfortunately I got shingles before I got the vaccine. On the other hand, I hadn't realized I was even a candidate for shingles. Apparently a small number of people can get shingles from the chicken pox vaccine. I just turned out to be one of the "lucky" few. However my case was quite mild in comparison to others I've heard or read about.

Mike is holding off on buying the iPhone because of our pending move. He plans to buy one in Tucson. That way he can get a local number there. We're hoping he can replace his Palm with his iPhone.

I've had a PayPal account since they offered a \$5 incentive to join and have never paid any money into it. I have other people pay me into that account and have used money earned that way to pay others. I have used it with my credit card once. My account is not tied to any bank account.

We made our wireless network secure when Mike detected someone trying to tie into it.

Thanks for the alert about Lyn McConchie's *Tiger Daze*.

Gordon Eklund (Sweet Jane 51): The comics pages in the *LA Times* have really deteriorated. I cancelled my subscription because we're moving, but I was thinking of cancelling anyway.

Robert Michael Sabella (Visions of Paradise #115: Wondrous Stories): My take on *Her Majesty's Dragon* was a bit different from yours. I'd describe it as a variation on a Regency romance. I found the characters very well done. There are, according to Amazon, four books in the series so far. The book interested me enough that I plan, one of these days, to buy the sequels. The SF book club has published the first three books in one volume.

Tom Feller (The Road Warrior): I hope you survived the colonoscopy okay and that they didn't find anything out of the normal.

John S. Davis (FAPAment 407): Thanks for the peek into your creative output.

Steve Green (No Exit): We haven't had milk delivered by a milkman since 1959. I remember when I was in England 1969-70, we had milk delivered to our dorm. As I recall the milk was shared by the half dozen or so people who shared the kitchen.

* * *

* Letters to the Editor

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

Jason K. Burnett, somewhere in Minnesota

28 April 2007

Congratulations on producing another excellent issue of FM [#27]!

As luck would have it, I had just watched *Casino Royale* the night before reading your review. I don't know that I'd go so far as to say that this was the best Bond movie ever, but it's certainly the best they've done in quite some time. (I was looking at the James Bond boxed sets the other day and noticed that they had scrambled the movies so that in order to be able to get the Connery and Moore movies, you had to buy the Dalton and Brosnan movies as well. Apparently someone at the studio was listening to their inner Ferengi.)

I greatly enjoyed Amy's book and movie reviews - she's given me a lot of new things to look for. I'd much rather read a fan-written review of a movie than a professional critic's review, because fan reviews generally start from the premise of a person who enjoys the genre of book or movie they're reviewing and then go on to tell whether or not the item they're reviewing worked as an example of that genre. When dealing with a professional critic, you never know if they're approaching a book or movie as someone who likes and understands that genre, or if they even like movies at all. (The reviewer for the *Times-Picayune* in New Orleans, when I lived there, gave everything such negative reviews that I was only able to come to the conclusion that he didn't like movies at all and was only doing this to pay the bills.)

Thanks for pubbing your autobiography. I had picked up bits and pieces of this from your other writings, but it's nice to have it all in one place. You might want to think about republishing this on your website, or at least publishing a link saying, "For a more detailed autobiography, see FM#27."

The trip and con reports were, as always, entertaining and informative. I especially liked the article about Kitt Peak with accompanying photos. When the boys get a little older (a 3-year-old has *no* attention span for such things), I'd like to go to places like that.

Well, I hope this letter finds you well. I'm off to the store for sunscreen, mayonnaise, a new light bulb for the refrigerator. (Such an exciting life I lead, eh?)

#

Edmund R. Meskys, Moultonboro, NH

13 May 2007

Thanks for another interesting ish.

I found both movie reviews interesting. I do not see much about media and had not heard of *Astronaut Farmer*, but it does sound interesting. The Inuit movie also sounds interesting. My wife and I did see *Dances with Wolves* in the theatre, and she read me the subtitles, so I was able to follow it. (The movie was three hours long, but in an NPR interview the director had said it was originally four hours long and was cut for theatres. I wonder whether the full version is out on DVD or tape.) If I can interest her in this one and we can rent it, I would like to try this one too. Last time I said I would not do anime films because of my inability to do subtitles, but in this case I hope it would interest Sandy enough to do it with me. *Passion of the Christ* is available on DVD with a descriptive track for the blind, where one voice reads the subtitles and another describes the action; but I did not see it. I have no interest in gross-outs like this or his new movie about the Aztecs. I am actively Catholic, but this just does not interest me.

Again with credit I would like to circulate these reviews to my friends who have a strong interest in movies. Hmm, I should add you to that list. I find something to circulate only once every month or two. Maybe one will respond with additional comments, in which case I would pass the comments on to you.

I enjoyed the Lovecraft review, though I am not a Lovecraft fan. I have read one collection of his shorts (*The Lurking Fear*, a paperback from the 50s) and one collection of Mythos stories by others. They were OK but just not my thing. I think I would enjoy his Dunsanyian tales better and have to check if they are available recorded or as TXT files for my BookPort.

When my father died in 1968, we had tons of medications left, including a large bottle with over a thousand nitro-glycerine tabs. This had been given him by the US Public Health Service hospital where he had been treated. He was a retired merchant marine chief engineer, and the hospital had been built by the maritime unions before being taken over by the Feds. As a union member, he had been grandfathered in. Anyhow, our neighbourhood pharmacist had said that legally he would have to send it to a lab for analysis before he could use it, and it was just not worth the bother. Today, after the Tylenol poisonings I think there would be no possibility of re-using meds. When my mother died in 1995 at the age of 97, we again had meds left over. The visiting nurse said we should flush them down the toilet. I failed to interest the mother of a friend, said mother having a sister who was a medical missionary in Africa. It is sad to see such waste when there is such a need.

Several years ago I fell down a two-foot deep hole and broke my heel, and they put on a large metal frame

on the foot that cost Medicare a lot of money. They did not want it back when I was done with it; and, again, I hate to see the waste. I do not see how it could be recycled, and it is still lying at the bottom of a closet. I am making the beginnings of decluttering my house; so when we are gone, my son won't have that much to sort thru; and I am afraid I will have to send it to the town dump.

#

Andrew Porter, New York, NY

13 May 2007

Surprising that you're thinking of retiring to Tucson, an arid place that's beginning to make California look like a water-logged Paradise. There were some interesting items in the *NYTimes* on-line recently on how the mountain towns in Arizona are under extreme climate change...

#

Amy Harlib, New York, NY

14 May 2007

I got *Feline Mewsings* #28 and I haven't had time to read it yet, but I will very soon. I do like the cover artwork. Thanks very much.

#

John Purcell, College Station, TX

14 May 2007

Many thanks once again for the zine, Laurraine.

So Mike plans on retiring Real Soon Now, eh? That's a major life-change, for sure, something that is not in my foreseeable future. Maybe fifteen years from now, I will retire from teaching; but who knows? Good luck to you and Mike on the transition.

Amy Harlib's review of *The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath* made me lament for my long-lost collection of Ballantine's "Adult Fantasy Series". At one point, I believe I had every single book in that series, or damn near close to having them all. It was a great series, and the artwork on the covers was consistently wonderful. I easily remember that Gervasio Gallardo cover and can see it as clearly as if I had just pulled the book off the shelf. *Sigh* Maybe some year I will be able to rebuild that collection, but the prices will be so much higher than they were years ago. *Double-sigh* So it goes.

Say, I did hear that they were making a very off-Broadway musical version of *The Fast Runner*, complete with Busby Berkley-type production numbers yet maintaining as authentic an Inuit wardrobe and instrumentation as possible. I understand the working title of this production is called *No-No, Nanook*.

I think I am actually leaning towards joining FAPA at some point this summer. Don't hold your breath, but it might really come to pass before the 4th of July. My wife has always said I'm a bit on the crazy side...

That should be all for now. Thank you so much for the zine, and I look forward to seeing you again sometime soon. Stay happy, and stay in touch.

#

Brad Foster, Irving, TX

17 May 2007

I still get a grin every time I write out the title of your zine.

Wonderful new issue and quite a funky/weird piece of cover art from delphyne and Rich. Looks like a teaser image for a new series to show up late night on the Cartoon Network in their Adult Swim line-up.

Nice to hear you have definite plans of what to do when retirement happens. Upside of my choice of life is I've been free to work for myself for the most part. Downside is there really is no "retiring" in the future. But hey, seems half the people I know these days who are retired are still working at something else. I'll just keep on doing what I'm doing, I hope.

I'm a huge HPL fan; and like Amy, I was exposed to his works in the paperback reprints of the '70s. I have probably reread his stuff more than anything else since. (And that includes the "Gormenghast" trilogy, which I also love for the amazing images and style.) I like her explanation of the appeal of Lovecraft's writing as his "ability to combine unabashedly purple prose with wildly imaginative, gorgeous imagery..." When discussing his work with those who dislike the style, I've always joked that I learned from reading HPL to never use one adjective when three could fit in. I did a Cthulhu image years ago for a role-playing magazine but only recently tackled trying a portrait of the man himself. It is a companion piece to a Poe portrait I've done, and I've been pleased at how many people in the "real world" of the art festivals I show at recognize HPL. (You can see the Lovecraft at <http://www.jabberwockygraphix.com/lovecraft.html>, and you can see the Poe at <http://www.jabberwockygraphix.com/poe.html>.)

I appreciate the various kind comments from folks in the letters column about my cat-critter cover last issue. To Lloyd specifically, about that stretchy neck, it's not a real cat: think of it more as an alien Cheshire cat with a smug little grin more than a huge smile.

Off to my niece's graduation from medical school this weekend. (I am managing to work that into just about every letter I send out this week, proud uncle that I am!)

#

Jason Burnett, Minneapolis, MN

19 May 2007

Even with your few days of sleeplessness, it sounds like you're handling Mike's upcoming retirement fairly well. From the sounds of it, you've got a lot to do in the next year or so; but you seem to be handling it in a pretty organized way. Moving to Phoenix should be quite the adventure - from reading your theatre reviews and trip reports in FM, it sounds like you've got LA pretty much wired as far as where to go and what to do. Reaching that level of knowledge of Phoenix should keep you happily occupied for quite some time - it sounds like exactly the sort of mental challenge that scientists recommend to keep your brain young, and certainly more fun than just doing the crossword every day. I'm looking forward to reading of your adventures.

((We are moving to the Tucson area, not Phoenix.))

#

John Hertz, Los Angeles, CA

29 May 2007

Your naming animals you saw on your trip to Carrizo Plain reminds me of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* and of Patrick O'Brian's naturalist, Stephen Maturin. There is a joy in seeing creatures and in recognizing them.

#

Sheryl Birkhead, Gaithersburg, MD

23 June 2007

I found #28 sitting here on the pile of zines needing attention, so let's begin.

My brother retired early from GE, never actually expecting to do so. Apparently every five years or so the company goes on an economizing binge, and even high-level administration is considered. It is all voluntary; and what he did was to submit a proposal with what it would take as incentives to buy him out, and they agreed! He says that he is making quite a bit more now, working about half to three-quarters the hours as a consultant-and has all the retirement in addition. He has contracts in China; and they pay for his flight over, his hotel bills, and return flight; plus he gets all the frequent flyer miles (a *lot*) and frequent sleeper nights (whatever they are called at hotels). The trips only last a few weeks each, and the "miles" he gets have allowed his family to travel worldwide with airfare and hotel paid! Not a bad job if you can get it. So, early retirement does work out well for some!



I am seeing more and more (but hearing them less!) hybrids on the road. I tend to try to buy exactly the car I want and then keep it until it actually wears out. So, my Matrix is "only" three years old, but I continue to take looks at what else is out there. The next car will (as of today, that is) have two main considerations in the purchase decision-making—height (which directly correlates to hip and knee comfort; not too many vehicles out there are "just right"—higher than the "traditional" sedan but lower than an "SUV") and mileage/conservation. The local garage I use was honest when I was hunting the last time and said they did not have the experience or any specialized equipment to work on hybrids. I am guessing that may change as (I hope) hybrids become more numerous. Has the Prius's funny noise problem been resolved?

((Except for my first car, whose choice I was rather limited on due to time considerations, I always intend to drive a car until it wears out, but my aims always seem to be stymied.

((Yes, the Prius problem was satisfactorily resolved.))

It might be interesting to see that Harlan Ellison DVD. I'll try to remember that when I check Netflix every now and then. Wonder if they will have *The Fast Runner* in their stock?

I collect whatever interests me. I have only been to a few stamp shows but enjoyed myself greatly. All I did was wander around and then sort through boxes of materials I thought might be of interest (stamps, First Day Covers...), just the same way I would look through boxes of books or zines, sort of like a convention that is totally hucksters!

Amy Harlib's illo on page 8 reminded me of Franz Miklis; then I see you have one of his pieces on page 15 (ironically, I would never have guessed he was the artist!).

I wish there was a manual override for the windows in cars that have automatic ones. It took me a long time to decide to go for that. Now, while I like the automatic windows, I still have a tiny worry about not being able to crank one down if needed in the absence of the automatic function, but I am guessing this has not proven to be a founded fear; otherwise there would be a failsafe.

The new postal rates included a lot of changes; the first one I ran headlong into is the change of category for the simple larger manila envelope, now in a new class (at least new to me) called large envelope and starting at 80¢. Faneds caught on very early, folding zines to fit flatly into the smaller manila envelope. Then I found out that even the smaller manila envelope if it is padded, now has to go as a parcel (or at least something other than straight first class). The upshot is that I am visiting the post office more frequently these days until I get the categories sorted out. Unfortunately, the little brochure they have to hand out is not very good or inclusive. I am not above playing the "if Daddy says no, ask Mommy" game and so far have found that the large (close) Post Office routinely says no to most of the things I want to send in cheaper categories, and the small (further away) Post Office says yes. Guess I am a slow learner, because I continue to go to both!

If you've had a chance to see John Purcell's new fanzine *Askance*, then you have seen wonderful covers by both Brad Foster and Alan White—gorgeous. John kindly sent me a paper copy, but I managed to get a look at the colour version by using a PC at the library (my Mac will not open most of the zine files I have found; sometimes the library computers will).

((I am so backed up in my online reading that I have not looked at John's zine yet. One of these years.))

I went to a program at the newest county library—a discussion by George Guidall, a narrator of audio books. He was introduced by a representative of Books on Tape who let us know that three weeks ago George was an answer on Jeopardy! He is the most widely recorded male narrator, having recorded nine hundred books in the past eighteen years. It was a fascinating time. Obviously he has a superb speaking voice, but the great vocabulary and his story—he is classically trained as an actor and began by recording between shows. For his first book, he actually had to interview with Tony Hillerman; and the rest is history. I actually have an sf book on tape that he narrated; we shall see.

((Usually my decision to buy an audio book is dictated by the reader. My favourite readers are Harlan

Ellison, Derek Jacobi, Kristoffer Tabori, and Ian Ogilvy.))

In the past I have listened to sf on tape and not liked it. Guidall explained how he works and tried to impress on the audience that listening to a book is a different experience from reading a book and how he approaches it. He reads the book and formulates what he thinks the author is saying and aiming for; then his narration goes from there and is not totally unbiased as he tried to convey that aim. It was satisfying to know all the authors and books he talked about! One book he used as an example as a bad one, the narrative is one I just listened to the previous week; he read from it and simply smiled, recalling the passages. He read some letters he had gotten from listeners, and three were saying thanks for helping to cure their road rage! I can say that the audio books certainly make being stuck in traffic more enjoyable.

((My first experience hearing a book being read was actually on a radio show that used to be on late at night. I discovered that some books I had not enjoyed that much when I read them became more enjoyable when I was listening.))

The annual veterinary meeting will be held in DC in a few weeks. I cannot afford either the time (five days) or the money (\$375), but I will go for one day (cringe—\$200). I have only been to one other one, when it was in Baltimore, and the freebies were fantastic! There was a huge "hall of exhibitors" with free stuff and discounts on orders, so I hope to take some string bags and make a big haul (I had better, to make up for the cost). I would like to get to some of the talks, but that may not happen—similar to sf cons, they have multiple tracks; and usually all the ones I want to see are opposite each other. Yeah, a lot of similarities (except the huge freebies I expect). I am curious to see what Lloyd has to say about the Space conference.

You might want to ask your vet if you can change Fluffy's steroid from prednisone to prednisolone. Prednisone is metabolized to prednisolone, the active form; prednisone is generally a lot cheaper, but there is some evidence that cats handle the active form better. It's not a big difference, but every little bit helps. I am told that metronidazole is very bitter (some of the drugs I have tasted, but not that one). Just FYI, I believe you can get them as chew treats (but if they are bitter...?); also, I am not sure about the novel protein interference if there is actually any protein in the treat (I think the feline flavours are chicken, shrimp, salmon, beef, and liver). I have used famotidine (think that is the right spelling), Pepcid AC generic, as a transdermal gel; but there are no studies on its efficacy; we just went on effect, and when it worked figured at least enough was being absorbed to help the stomach.

((Fluffy has not had any problems with Prednisone. As long as I get both it and the metronidazole in deep enough into his throat, he swallows them. He was also on Pepcid AC, but he started vomiting after I gave it to him, so I stopped using it. That is apparently one of the known side effects, at least for humans.))

I see you say you are working to decrease the square footage of your dream house, but you neglected to give me a figure; it looked huge on that one diagram, but I couldn't find a scale! Yeah, it will soon be too expensive to live around here; property taxes will have tripled in the six years I have lived in this house, and now the electricity cost will almost triple in the next eighteen months. I still cannot locate reputable solar energy people locally to tell me how big an array would fit on my roof, since I do not know enough about orientation to know how usable the large roof areas are; only the one small end triangle is of the right location. I keep trying to conserve and use renewable resources but am thwarted at every turn!

((The previously printed house plans were probably in excess of six thousand square feet, much more than we could afford to build. We now have a 3500 square foot design, and we think we will be able to do that. Our current floor plan is on the next page. We will definitely be using solar energy. The one builder we've talked to seems very knowledgeable.))

Look forward to your travel notes! Thanks for FM

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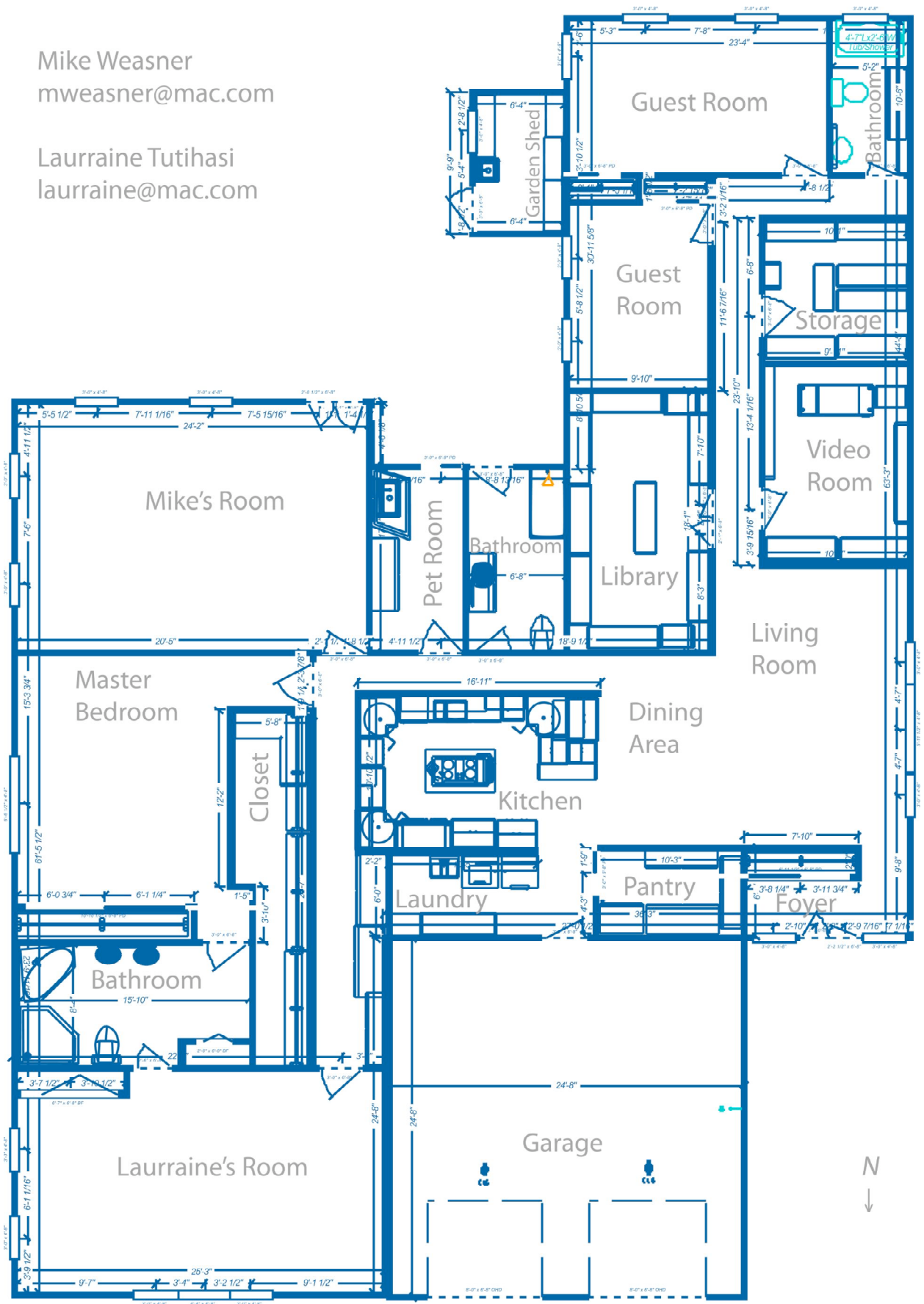
Lloyd Penney, Etobicoke, ON

1 July 2007

Happy Canada Day! It is July 1st, Canada's 140th birthday, and we've been out and about enjoying the

Mike Weasner
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sunshine and attending the Casa Loma Renaissance Faire. It was fun, but now we're back home enjoying other activities. I hope I'm not too late getting a letter to you...I have *Feline Mewsings* 28 here, and a quick letter issues forth...

Retirement? I don't think I'll ever do that. Too much I want to do and see, not enough money in the bank, etc. Lots of reasons. It's now illegal here to force anyone out of their jobs as they turn sixty-five. Of course, getting the job to stay in is the toughest part. I think the only way I'll have enough money to retire on is a sizable lottery win.

Our local pharmacy will take back old store shelf medications as well as old prescriptions for safe disposal. Too many strange chemicals get into the water supply as it is. A good drugstore participates in such a programme, and we've take advantage of the programme several times now.

Documentaries on television? That's about all I watch now! There's TLC, A&E, PBS, CBC, TVOntario...I have lots of sources for interesting television, the true reality TV.

More and more, I find fanzine fandom a community of people who, for the most part, have never met one another, Corflu and Ditto and Worldcon fanzine rooms notwithstanding. There's just too much geography in the way. Yvonne and I had a fine time in Dallas for the ISDC, and we were frugal. We have almost enough travellers' cheques left over to go to Las Vegas for Corflu Silver next April.

My loc...the show is long gone, but I have been working other shows since. Helps out with the bank account. I've just hit the slow period for trade shows, but things may pick up in late July. Yvonne is back at Castrol for another contract—same job, same pay, same rotten working conditions. If she's offered another contract, you can guess what her answer will be.

Greetings to Jason Burnett...hope life is picking up again. At least, you're making a comeback to this happy asylum.

It's the closing day or days of Westercon as I type...were you able to go? I gather Chris Garcia has been very busy in the fanzine lounge. I hope it got crowded at some point...

That's all for now. Take care, and see you next ish.

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*** Closing Remarks**

I had to finish this zine off in a rush, so it doesn't include everything I'd planned. No promises for next time, as we don't have an exact schedule for moving yet.

Laurraïne