

# A Propos de Rien

For the November 2004 mailing of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association by Jim Caughran, 43 Dingwall Ave, Toronto Ontario M4J 1C4, Canada; caughran@rogers.com. Dingbats are [Tracks](#); the font file apparently does not contain info about the font.

In America, anybody can be president. That's one of the risks you take.

Adlai Stevenson (1900-1965)

## England

Janet and I planned a trip to England in September to see Janet's 96-year old aunt before the inevitable. The inevitable happened before we left, and we arrived for the funeral. Since we were mostly visiting Janet's family, I restrained myself from seeing fans. Had we been there for first Thursday, however ...

The aunt lived near **Canterbury**. I had never really considered how much history England (and Europe) have, and what effect this may have on viewpoints. I guess in some sense, civilization in Europe is received from the past, while in North America, it was imposed on the frontier.

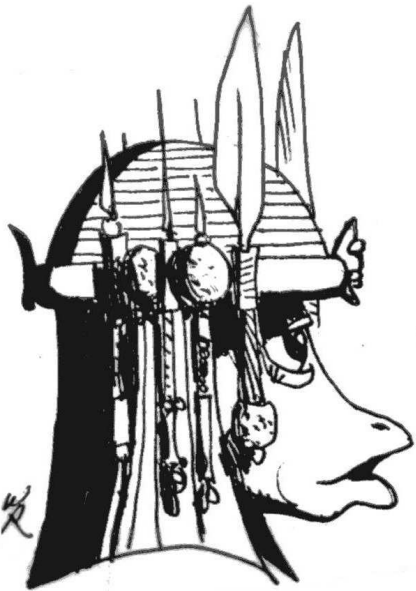
Canterbury was Roman, Saxon, Norman, medieval and modern. We went to the Roman

museum there-- well worth a visit. Many Roman ruins have been discovered or first excavated only within the last 10 or 20 years.

It seemed to me that the Romans just bought off the wealthy in Canterbury, probably pointing out the benefits of peacefully assuming Roman citizenship, and the costs of not doing so. For the commoners, of course, life wasn't particularly different from pre-Roman through medieval times.

We took a short cruise by oar on the river, then a walking tour through the old city. Janet thought we

should see the cathedral; I objected that it would only bring out my anti-religious prejudices. It did, and I was ranting about the uselessness of it all when we left. Later, in York, Janet suggested I view the cathedral there anthropologically, which helped a lot.



**Moment of panic:** When we arrived in London after Canterbury, we took the underground from Victoria Station to go to the hotel. I got onto the car, the doors closed, and I looked around for Janet. She wasn't there! I didn't know which hotel we were in, nor which stop to get off at. Lost in the big city!

I got off at the next stop, Sloan Square, and looked for Janet on the next 4 or 5 trains. Not there. Meanwhile, Janet didn't want to get onto a train, fearing she would miss me when I took a train back to Victoria Station.

I went to the exit and said some panicked words to the attendant there. He took me to the stationmaster, who calmed me down, offered coffee, and called the adjacent stations to announce a request for Janet Carrington.

Janet finally took a train, expecting I would turn up at the stop for our hotel. At the second stop, while she was looking around the platform, a woman asked if she were Janet Carrington, and told her about the announcement.

I kept a bit closer to her after that.

We spent a few days in London. Saw the **Lion King** on stage, which was mostly notable for the fantastic costumes and the sets. (The Sloan Square stationmaster said his wife worked on the costumes.)

Our bus tour was spoiled by a demonstration at Parliament in favour of fox hunting that stopped traffic everywhere. We went to the Courtauld museum and the Tate Modern.

In 1952, I spent a month in Washington DC, and visited the Smithsonian museum almost every day, mostly the science and technology exhibits. I had something of the same feeling visiting the **British Museum**: so much to see and learn about. I wished I were 11 again and could spend a month there. Seeing the Rosetta Stone is one of the Big Thrills of the museum.

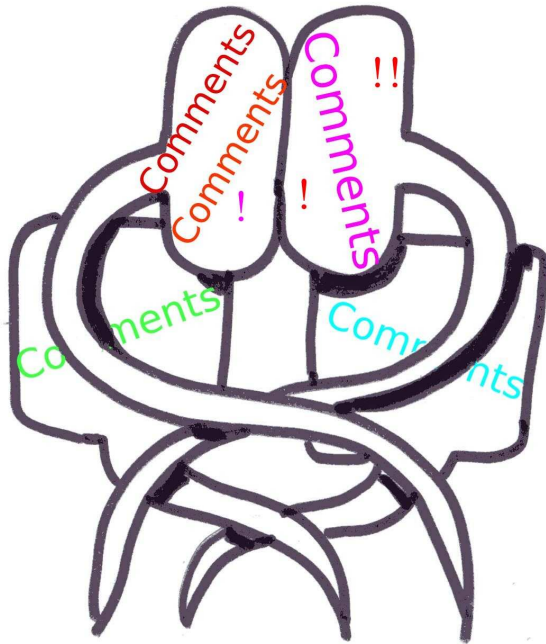


Spider in Tate Modern

**Yorkshire:** Janet has a cousin in Yorkshire who lives in a small village near York. There was a Roman military post on the site of the village, and most of the ruins have not been excavated. (Residents are forbidden to dig deeper than three feet.) The museum there has some artifacts, a section of the Roman wall, and some amazing mosaic floors.



England is **expensive!** Several times I caught myself thinking that the prices were almost reasonable, then realizing that I was seeing pounds and thinking dollars (GB£ = CA\$2.40). Gasoline was 80p per litre, certainly more by now.



## August Mailing

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### FANALYSIS—Schaffer

“Is being patriotic only looking at flattering facts about this country and ignoring the disturbing ones?” Those who insist we blindly follow Our Leader should live in a dictatorship. In a democracy, the people have the obligation to keep the leaders honest. Bush and cronies would prefer blind followers.

Patriotism is supporting your country all the time and the government when it deserves it.

Mark Twain

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### FELINE MEWSINGS—Tutihasi

I sort of envy your attention to keeping up with science fiction. I haven't since I was a teenager. While it wouldn't be too difficult to read the Hugo nominees, I haven't the discipline to do the things I have to, without adding that. But I was surprised at Torcon to discover I had seen 4 of the 5 (or 5 of the 6?) movies nominated. Science fiction that has been superseded by reality might now be considered alternate history. Many of the tales I read when young were set in the Now. England has a different set of metric conversions than Canada. Distances

and speeds are metric in Canada, “English” in England. I think weights and measures are more converted there than here, where we sell English quantities in metric units—369 grams of whatever, for example. (European Union trade means a lot more is converted there.) US businesses have converted to metric in order to export, but still retain a fiction of English units for the home market. Janet's cousin works for British Airways. He told us that altitudes are feet, speeds are knots, fuel is measured in litres, etc. A hodgepodge. When I played handball (never well), I was much more ambidextrous. I can still reach with the left hand for painting, etc. First Fandom started out as an organization to exclude younger fans. That they've changed their definition of younger does not make them more attractive.

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### SWEET JANE—Eklund

Your comment that you write mailing comments when something stirs up conversational thoughts, rather than because you are dazzled by quality agrees with my practice. Retirement somehow does not free up time, it soaks up time. At the Thursday pre-Corflu party, I really thought there ought to have been a typewriter with a stencil hanging out of it. A computer would not have been the same. There may be good reasons that Governor Arnold and President W. don't read, though each is intelligent. I believe W is dyslexic. “Fantasy” and “verse” were once synonymous: Homer, Beowulf, etc. Not sure whether your next to last page, which followed the last page contextually, was the end of your fanzine or not.

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### FORTY YEARS AGO AGAIN—Walker

At a lunch table, 30 years ago, two of us American, the boss a Brit. The other American was ranting about draft dodgers. I was trying to think of a politic way to defend them, when the boss said that he left Britain because he was about to be conscripted. It was after the Suez war, but the draft was still in effect and he would have wasted two years. A French mathematician told me ear-




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## THE THROWN ROCK THAT REFUSES TO COME DOWN

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lier about feigning depression in order to avoid the draft after the Algerian war. Conscription is nearly universal, and so is avoidance of conscription. 🐾 Ben Indick wants to write plays; you want to act. Hmmm...

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## OPUNTIA—Speirs

How does one do a loop-the-loop with an open parachute? 🐾 The Toronto Star started a fix-it department for public areas—downed trees, fouled bus shelters, broken benches and the like. Sounds like you would be the one who would answer many of those things in Calgary. 🐾 When I was young, Lincoln Nebraska didn't clear the streets in winter. They put cinders on some of the steeper hills, but apart from that, people learned to drive on snow. (Chains helped.) These days, people are unprepared, and unused to driving on slippery surfaces.

Harris closed the mental health centres in Ontario, as Klein did in Alberta, with much the same results in street people. Now a leading Conservative has big plans to get rid of street people. Conservatives create problems with bad policy, then campaign on promising to correct the problem (again by the wrong means). 🐾 I wonder about pixel boards displaying animated ads in front of traffic; it doesn't seem likely to make it easier to concentrate on the road.

I hadn't realized that both Shatner and Doohan were Canadian. Preferential hiring? 🐾 The Flames' loss "could cost the Liberals the election." Be honest; the Libs had no chance of taking many seats in Alberta, whether the Flames won or lost. But I think the Bloc won the election. 🐾 You might get your "marinated charbroiled chicken breast on pita" cheaper by going into a Greek restaurant and asking for souvlaki.

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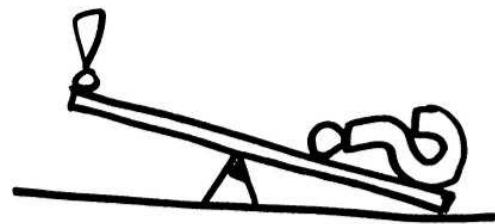
## VOICE OF THE HABU—Wells

Asimov "did not consider psychic powers to be very likely." I have had irreproducible and unconfirmable experiences with telepathy and precognition. I think they exist, but are uncontrolled. Should someone work out how to control them... 🐾 Schools will start teaching for the "no child left behind" exams. Schools need a lot more than ranting about standards (though that might help). Adequate funding would be a start. 🐾 Good luck in the job search.

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## GEGENSCHWEIN—Lindsay

**95-96:** This was overly interesting. Overly because I was reading it on the streetcar, looked up and discovered I was far past my stop. 🐾 It hasn't been so long ago since a portable computer was one that had a handle on the side. Things *have* improved. 🐾 Testing performance rather than urine is too sensible. We seize on a Problem, then Do Things About It, whether they make sense or not. 🐾 You rant both against immigration and about the effects of the baby bulge on the economy. The former can ameliorate the latter. 🐾 Fighting terror or crime is a great excuse for imposing a police state.



**101:** You say that airport security in the US may make you decide you won't travel there again. Not to defend Homeland Security, but after swearing off email because of spam and travel because of inconvenience, are you denying yourself to punish others? 🐾 Airline seats: In a Jetsgo seat that had leg room for a midget, I moved to a vacant seat on the port side. Turns out the port-side seats are 1st class, starboard for us ordinary people. Someone else who had moved there was sitting beside me. The attendant

asked him to move but not me, so I stayed. I'm sure she knew I had moved, but I guess grey hair has privilege. I read a lot of computer things out of habit. I'll have to develop not caring, as you have, about things computer. As you note, airport security would be easy to circumvent, and I'm sure Homeland Security and Al Quaida both know that. I think it is primarily to increase the fear level, so people will put up with the police state, and re-elect GWB. I have never appreciated the esthetic value of lamps, except for a homemade ceiling lamp in the shape of a dodecahedron. Damn, I think I'll find some chocolate. My digital camera is smart enough in its default mode that I've never second-guessed it except for flash.

**99:** Damn, you travel a lot. Feller says his shoes set off the airport alarms. In the US, the sensitivities are set ridiculously high, creating a lot of false alarms. Again, this supports the idea that they are creating fear rather than security.

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## LOFGEORNOST—Lerner

To me, it seems perfectly reasonable for you to go to St. Petersburg via Lappeenranta. Sounds like a great trip. The lifestyle of the czars was matched by that of North American capitalists. Visit Casa Loma in Toronto.

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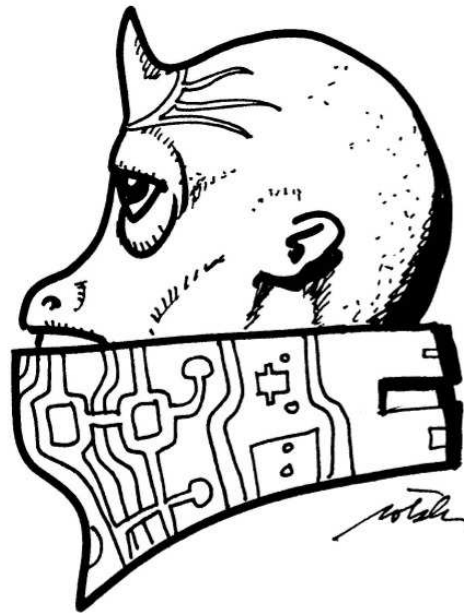
## FISH WRAP—Cantor

When I upgrade a hard drive, the new drive becomes the main drive, and the old drive the temporary and backup drive. This gives me triple redundancy in backups: back up to a different drive, copy from there to CD and to another computer over the network. It also gives me what seems to be an outrageous amount of disk space until suddenly it's filled up again. Some faneds seemed to be carefully selecting Rotsler illos from the pile you dumped at Corflu. I just grabbed a few, some of which you see here. "I do not consider fish fit for human consumption." Odd title for your zine, then. If your will's executor burns your apartment with you in it, will the *stuff* in there go with you?

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## BEN'S BEAT—Indick

I hope your Janet's cancer surgery went well. Molecular nanotechnology is where a computer virus could be a real threat. One of the papers was "The effect of increased longevity on population patterns". The only hope for Canada remaining solvent is continued high immigration. "Longer telomeres for women implies longer life": I understand that most of women's better longevity is explained by men's more dangerous jobs and sports. Since our sport is publishing fanzines, which is not particularly dangerous except for convention banquets and runaway mimeos, male fans should buck the trend. I liked Baruch's "Old age is always 15 years older than I



am", Twain's "Life would be infinitely happier if we could only be born at the age of 80 and gradually approach 18" and Ertz, "Millions long for immortality who do not know what to do with themselves on a rainy Sunday afternoon." "I despise [Muslims] for their murderous elements." Do you also despise Jews or Christians for the nuts in their midst? Right-click on a spell-checked wavy red line and you will have the options to ignore or add to the dictionary. Wow! I like the sculpture with picture on p.27.

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## VISIONS OF PARADISE—Sabella

**99:** You say that you read mostly historical fiction, “a preference which has accompanied my sf reading ever since”. Is it historical fiction, sf-like alternate histories, or some other genre? While professional weather prediction is not perfect, it is fairly good, and much better than it was in our youth. The space program had its uses. Certainly better than groundhogs. \* Your line spacing varies for your smilies, something you may not want. You can fix it on the “format paragraph” dialogue, or permanently in the “format style” dialogue. I’ve set the line spacing to exactly 12 point here because of the dingbats, though I will modify that to balance columns. These track dingbats are a little weird; some should be larger, some smaller. ☺ “Since it’s on the front flap, nothing is given away to say that ...” I try not to read cover blurbs until I’ve finished the book, for that reason. They often give things away you didn’t want to know. Writers say that editors are loath to allow them to write their own blurbs, but they seem to be written by assistants who skim the book too quickly, or for non-fiction books, crib the preface. 🐼 Feb 8: Why do we behave as though college games are contests between Good and Evil? 🐼 **100:** Enjoyed the *Brief History*.

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## RIDE THE LIGHTNING: SABELLA

Sports: in high school, the jocks are adulated and little positive recognition is given to brains. We called them “dumb jocks”, though athletes probably have the same range of intelligence as any other group. 🐼 If a person’s social contacts consist of 100–200 people, the several thousand Chinese in Parsippany would have the same impact as

a larger community elsewhere. There would be, of course, films and other events in a larger community that a smaller group would not have. 🐼 You referred to *Cryptonomicon* as “those books”, and I have read and enjoyed a huge book that I thought was the whole thing. A check at Amazon.ca shows that the English version is one volume and the French, three (at CA\$30+ each). 🐼 So many of the US’s problems have to do with the huge gulf between rich and poor, that even Republicans ought to see that it’s in their interest to work on that. 🐼 Ignoring health problems is a habit I got in the US, where it’s expensive to deal with them. 🐼 Shakespeare *has* been translated to modern English, of course, from *West Side Story* to the *King Lear* in Scotland Yard that I saw recently.




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## BIRD OF PREY—Stinson

I checked out the Kodak falcon site; thank you. (Season’s over, though.) It would be interesting to see a video of a falcon taking a pigeon. 🐼 Of course Word is “honest publishing”. Here it is! ☺ I suspect “Fans are slans!” was more important in the story’s fan popularity than its merits.

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## FAPALEMENT—Davis

I like your colour smudges. 🐼 I’m impressed that you sang Quixote! 🐼 I play computer games mostly when I’m feeling a little depressed. At the moment, I’m working on Jezzball, but I can’t attain but a fraction of my former high score (369,923).

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## GRANDFATHER STORIES—DeVore

Michael Jackson's autograph: Fritz Kreisler was once approached by a woman who wanted his autograph. "I've always driven one of your cars." He obliged by signing as Walter Chrysler. 📄 Your grandson has already made out fine.

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## BIG, LITTLE FISH—Bond

Enjoyed the Corflu report. The con was spoiled for me by my mother dying as it went on, but you brought back some of the enjoyable minutes. 📄 Steve and Elaine Stiles "were both ... charming people." Funny about that; most fans are.

employ very few people, and to make most of the workers "contractors" to avoid paying benefits, particularly in the US where health care is missing. Union power is much diminished except in a few industries. So maybe we need another champion for the working person. The established parties, including Canada's New Democratic Party, will not do it. 📄 I like the dreaming=brain defrag metaphor. But various experiments have shown that brains store memories which are inaccessible through the usual file access mechanism, and that there is apparently no way to delete these fragments. 🐾 What is the boundary between Palaeogene and Neogene times?

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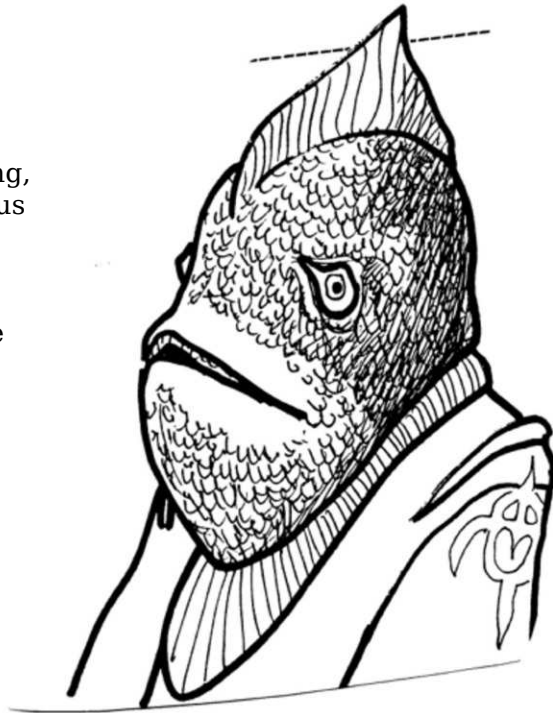
## DEVIL'S WORK—Metcalf

Trek fan fiction is probably a good thing, though it may deny us recruits for that supreme hobby, publishing fanzines. Getting kids to write is Good.

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## OPUNTIA—Speirs

The inheritance reforms were Alberta's only, and I suppose it's a guerrilla fight against what is perceived as eastern impositions on marriage. Sometimes it seems Alberta would fit nicely into a Republican US. 📄 Do aquarium or philately fans publish fanzines? 📄 8-hour working day: We are at the point where 8 hours is more than society needs, and people are losing jobs. There has been a little acceptance of part-time jobs, but only a little, and mostly where the work can be done over communication lines. There is a tendency to




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## NICE DISTINCTIONS—Hlavaty

The CBC replayed the radio coverage of the Miracle Mile in the Commonwealth Games. 50 years later, it was still exciting. These days, not only is more known about training, people spend full time at it. And we allow more people to compete. It's no wonder that sports accomplishments overwhelm those of our youth.

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## OUROBORUS—Ogdens

Good that you managed a continuation of your job, and sad that you lost a cat

in the move.

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## THE ROAD WARRIOR—Feller

Remote time-sharing systems did seem like the wave of the future for a while. No one thought computers would become cheap enough that you or I could have one on our desktop.

## SNICKERSNEE—Silverberg

When I was younger, I thought you more than six years older than I. That was a recognition of what you had accomplished. 🗨️ Quitting smoking for Galaxy: Science fiction is good for something! 🗨️ How was this reproduced? The imperfections don't seem like those a copy shop would create. 🗨️ I quickly turned to Webster's Collegiate, second edition (1957), which I keep around as the last prescriptive dictionary, to see how "fortuitous" and "multiple" differ from modern understandings of the word. "Fortuitous" means merely "by chance", rather than "lucky". (But the Encarta dictionary still has "by chance" as the first definition.) But "multiple"?

## ALPHABET SOUP—Stevens

I think the two cities requirement for credentials was added later, to require more than fanac only in clubzines. 🗨️ A princess holding hands with a frog in the queue for a marriage license isn't controversial. A prince holding hands with a frog might be.

🗨️ "Growth in Southern California is going to come to an end." Those who sell things want more and more people to sell to, so it's unlikely. I don't know what happens when there's too little room for people to reproduce. 🗨️ I like your idea of faneds paying a token amount for locs.

## TARGET: FAPA—Eney

The price of crude has gone up because Bush wanted to increase reserves. This may or may not have anything to do with Iraq. It takes a bit of courage to do that in an election year, I suppose, but he has not been particularly blamed for it. Too difficult to explain in a sound byte, maybe. 🗨️ "US government did very little genocide on the Indigenous Nations." The Cherokee march and Custer's campaigns were two too many.

"North Vietnamese ... interfering with the establishment of democracy in South Vietnam"—Calling the South Vietnamese government democratic is a confirmation that the word means "on our side" and not much more.

