

A Propos de Rien

For the November 2006 mailing of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association by Jim Caughran, 43 Dingwall Ave, Toronto Ontario M4J 1C4, Canada; email caughranJim@gmail.com. Dingbats are Monotype Sorts, chosen randomly.

She had a pretty gift for quotation, which is a serviceable substitute for wit.

-- W. Somerset Maugham

Hip—hooray

I missed the last mailing for getting my hip replaced. The operation and recovery are easier than I expected; there was very little pain and I started moving around quickly. I'm still doing the exercises, and some of the muscles are still weak, but instead of getting a little worse each day, my hip is getting a little better each day. Amazing the difference that makes in my outlook.

For the operation, I remembered the anaesthetist poking my spine, then woke up in the recovery room with tubes in (IV, catheter, oxygen). I was partially paralyzed from the spinal. The recovery from that was interesting in itself. There is a sensation of having moved that comes back to the brain after the motion, but the movements returned before the sensations. I could move, but didn't feel that I had moved.

I had nurses, blood sample technicians and a physiotherapist visiting at home after the operation. The taxpayers of Ontario and Canada are paying for everything except a pair of crutches I haven't used. Nice to know my taxes pay for something besides military contractors.

I Learn to Drive

My Prius has been fun; it's nice to drive an advanced car. The Prius is a gasoline-electric hybrid that gets excellent fuel economy. However, fuel economy soon becomes an end in itself. The low-consumption champion of the local Prius group held a clinic recently. He drives a controlled route to work, secondary rural roads without much traffic, and manages phenomenal economy. His usual tankfull shows 2.9 litres/100 km, about 81.1 mpg US.

It turned out that I was the only one who showed up for the clinic, so we did some one-on-one driving. We started out in Jack's car and he drove part of his route (King City to Kleinburg and back, 34 km).

Jack is talkative, and gave a running commentary on keeping speed up, coasting, accelerating when you have to, and so forth. He knows his route extremely well, knows when he must use the gasoline engine, when to coast and when to use the electric motor. There was little traffic, but Jack kept an eye out for cars who might want to pass, putting on the flashers when someone was behind.

The basic economy technique is "pulse and glide". Get moving to a maximum 65 km/h, coast back down to 40 km/h, and repeat. Coasting, the Prius turns off the gasoline engine, and may recharge its battery. In a standard car, one could accelerate to speed, put the transmission into neutral and turn off the engine, with less efficiency and safety.

With hills, it's more interesting; Jack would sometimes use engine or motor when I expected him to glide, in order to have enough speed to clear the crest of the hill 500 metres away. Use the uphills to charge the battery with the engine, maybe charge on a downhill with regeneration. And coast whenever possible. Jack's forte seems to be to use the terrain to best advantage.

criteria for books seem not to include judgments on writing.

NICE DISTINCTIONS—

Hlavaty

“A pacifist committing acts of war will fight particularly dirty.” Is a pacifist committing acts of war still a pacifist? + “It would be really nice to have a functioning opposition party.” For sure; with the Repubs far off right and the Demos saying “Me too, but maybe not as far” it’s no wonder so many Americans don’t vote; there’s nothing to represent an ordinary person. * Hitchens: “We don’t have bodies; we are bodies.” “Speak for yourself, Hitch. I *have* a body...” Your brain is meat; does your brain possess your body? Are you positing a soul? Or what are you referring to?

KING BISCUIT TIME—

Lichtman

Black on brown, and small type. We’re getting older, Meyer. ↘ If highway 5 runs from east of Oakland, the small town on the road to highway 99 that depended on its speed trap for revenue must have gone bankrupt by now. It contributed heavily to Ellik’s driving license suspension. ∞ Having used WP 5.1 after Word, WordPerfect was merely okay. Too bad WP made such a blunder in converting to Windows; they went from number one to out of sight.

SNICKERSNEE—Silverberg

A dentist in North York has an Ontario vanity plate AGBERG. Will you sue? → Iraq weapons: Hussein invited the US to come in and inspect, though he did so without notifying the press. Publicity might have shown the emptiness of the US allegations. → “The Golden age of science fiction is 13” was later than 1956, probably 1959. I remember Terry chortling over it (it was Pete Graham’s response to a Fanac poll), and I arrived in Berkeley in 1958. Terry lived with Miriam, which began in 1959.

FOR FAPA—Walker

At Corflu Blackjack, Janet set us up for a timeshare pitch in order to get half-price tickets to a Cirque du Soleil performance.

The sales pitch was not a pleasant way to spend 3 hours when I could have been talking to fans. But I forgive her. Next time, however, I’ll pay the full price.

ALPHABET SOUP—Stevens

I agree with your comments on web sites; I get my outward publication needs met by producing a Fapazine. I do prepare the web page for my Quaker Meeting, however. * The problem that came up repeatedly in Superman comics was making him vincible. How can you create suspense with a character who can do anything? If Kryptonite didn’t exist, it would have been necessary to invent it. * Movies, Scrabble, reading, online fanac, many other things interfere with producing fanzines. ↵ I never understood why people wear undershirts when just about everywhere is too warm. Down with underwear. □ Liked your Leigh Brackett quote on Bradbury (“his prose needs to have the purple beaten out of it”). I showed it to Janet, who laughed, and to my teenagers, who looked puzzled. ♣ Dan Curran reported on trying dog food—the cheap brands (1960) have too much charcoal to be human-edible.

This’n says mailing 272, August 2005. I guess I’ll comment anyway. → Liked your tweed jackets as an alternative to war. I’ll mention it to the peace groups. ☞ The Little man who wasn’t there—was he a member of the Elves, Gnomes and Little Men’s Chowder and Science Fiction Society? Was he not there because he missed the meeting? → “I have faith that those physics fellows know what they’re talking about.” Unlike postmodernists, who were proved not to know what they’re talking about by Alan Sokal. * Maybe your valedictorian who paid no attention in class was on his second time through life. I’m sure that if I had to go to high school again, I’d sleep through all the classes. ↵ Michigan professor Paul Halmos gave us, graduate students, a quick lesson on the use of “doctor” in academia. If you hear “doctor” often, you’re probably surrounded by mediocrity. Where everyone has a doctorate, there’s no need to call attention to it.

BEN’S BEAT—Indick

Your theatre reviews seem more favourable; there are fewer absquatulations. ∞ Your

pride in Michael's plays is great; glad things are working for him.

SYNAPSE—Speer

Twin Earth: probably the easiest rejections for the concept is that no other planet has a twin, and there is no need for it. I suspect that a twin world antipodal to Earth would be blocked by the sun, even with a moderate amount of orbital eccentricity. > The conservatives cut taxes, but primarily to the wealthy, and cut services, primarily to the middle class and poor. Making up for those services costs more than the taxes regained, except for the rich. Yet they sell it as a tax cut to the populace in general, and everyone's against taxes, right? Taxes are the price of civilisation; I'm willing to pay it. * Canadian gasoline prices are closer to international levels than those in the US, which continues to be an isolated market. ☞ My mother used a hekto (and I may have published an early zine on it). Hers had the gelatine mounted on a piece of cloth, which was stretched between supports. I remember that the page was smoothed onto the gelatine with a wand or roller of some kind. There were several gelatine sheets, so one could do multiple pages. * I had a visit from a salesman c. 1967, who presented a Grolier Society business card. I took him completely by surprise by asking if he were selling encyclopaedias. "How did you know that?" And since I didn't want an encyclopaedia, it was easy to close the visit without listening to his sales pitch.

ANNEX—Searles

You who lived through the depression had to save. We who were born to depression survivors were confused; there was still a lot of the don't waste anything mentality, while things were more prosperous and advertising made it a civic duty to consume. → Obesity is not a measure of wealth.

SWEET JANE 47—Eklund

May200? ☞ I had an accident for not being able to see around an SUV or van or some other consumer truck while making a left

turn. And, after getting the car repaired, the next time I went through that intersection there was another huge vehicle blocking my view. When I hesitated rather than turning left, the car behind me honked. ☼ Young men used to use coarse language to be macho; what do they do now? * "They can't possibly have cleaned it all up, can they?", referring to dirt in India. No.

LOFGEORNOST—Lerner

I'm currently reading *Heinlein's Children*, with breaks between books, remembering the books I nearly memorized as an adolescent. You're right; his style is on a par with fanzine writing, and he defers too much to the authority of Panshin and Knight. But I'm enjoying it. ☒ Simplified spelling: When the Initial Teaching Alphabet (ITA) was all the rage, I thought it could be the basis for a phonetic English alphabet. But it lost popularity. If nearly everyone had used it, the transition would be easy. Teachers I talked to said that ITA-taught students didn't see any point in correct spelling, however, and an article said that children would write in accents. ✕ Burnett shows again that all knowledge is contained in fanzines. * The Toronto island houses were cheaply constructed, long ago. But the island became a desirable place to live, so many are not so shabby now. On the other hand, ownership is not clear since the city officially wants no one to live there, (but politicians can't come out and say so).

'SNICE TO SNOW YOU—Morningstar

Did trufen or memoryhole/fmzfen become closed to search engines *after* Eric Lindsay was active?

FELINE MEWSINGS—Tutihasi

Ontario gives a sales tax rebate of \$2000 on a hybrid car; I don't know what other provinces do. With our current oil company Conservative government, we're not apt to get federal tax relief.

August Mailing

YHOS—Widner

I don't mind people riding public transit and talking on cell phones. I do mind those driving their private transit and trying to talk at the same time. → "Downtown" in Toronto is usually the financial district, about a mile (as you note) from Bloor St. Bloor St. used to be "uptown", but uptown has become far north, and midtown is another mile or two north of Bloor. Our ups and downs are no longer adequate. ✓ Rich brown says, "we weren't fanzine fans or convention fans or club fans, we were actifans." But there were a lot of club attenders, a few of whom got involved with fanzines, but many did not. There were many people who attended local conventions, and some of them attended clubs or saw fanzines. But many did not. Fanzine fans may have had some prestige among club fans, but that wasn't enough to motivate many club fans to pub their ish. There were all three types of fans, with overlaps. ✱ The "Science: Truth or Fiction" button was clearly a creationist device to cast doubt on evolution.

KING BISCUIT TIME— Lichtman

I never figured out how my Social Security and Canada Pension were calculated. Adding the two, who apparently cooperated, I get a little less than one or the other might pay. ✂ Got to get back to exercising... ✂ When I lost my billfold, I quickly cancelled all the cards. A week later, I received the billfold and cards (less cash) in the mail. The thief dumped it into a mailbox, and Canada Post got the address from ID within. ✱ Insurance companies were burned by the World Trade Center collapse (the costs spread all over the industry with higher re-insurance premiums), and now global warming seems to be shaking up the weather. They're avoiding risks, which is what insurance companies' stockholders would like, but not what people buy insurance for. ✱ The dealer I bought the Prius from had one in the showroom a year later; Toyota is making more of them. In cost comparisons, note that Prius brakes don't

wear out (they mostly slow down by regenerating electricity), and wear/distance on the gasoline engine may be half that of a car that's running all the time.

REVELATIONS—Parker

FrontPage doesn't restrict what you can do too much, but it writes poor html code. However, I use the 2003 version; it may have improved. Then again, it's from Microsoft. → Is this, and your professional newsletter, done on inkjet? If you print many copies, it might be worth checking out colour laser printers; they've become cheaper, and supplies are much less expensive. ⊗ I doubt that an obscure email address is any protection against spam. Spammers troll the web looking for email addresses; if you're mentioned on a web site that doesn't encode its addresses, you'll get spam.

FOR FAPA—Lindsay

Let's see. Global warming has screwed up the climate, resulting in drought in Australia. "Several major cities are now contemplating high energy consumption water desalination plants." Elsewhere you imply that that power is coal-generated, so the desalination will result in more atmospheric CO₂, and thus more global warming. Da capo. ✓ I have a Sony Palm, with keyboard that I sometimes use for notes or writing something while traveling. The Palm is 4 years old, ancient in that niche, and will probably have to be replaced soon. But it's difficult to buy a palm computer that isn't also a telephone, GPS, high-fidelity sound system and lawnmower.

ROAD WARRIOR—Feller

Air conditioning is another thing that has largely happened during my lifetime, but is now regarded as a necessity.

FELINE MEWSINGS— Tutihasi

In your locs, the ink colour makes the (()) unnecessary. Good idea; we don't use enough colour. ✱ Penney laments anti-virus bloatware. I've been noticing that Norton slows everything down, and ZoneAlarm tries to do too many things, most of them

not well. “Improvements” change the function, and don’t address the problems the software was acquired for.

ALPHABET SOUP—Stevens

The dirty side of the politics of institutions, such as your note on sorcerers’ training keeping people out of the trade, is rarely explored in science fiction. It may be what the villains do (*The Roads Must Roll*), but it’s not business as usual, as it is in the real world. ▶ During WW2, my father raised chickens in an urban environment (Tacomoma). I can barely remember them.

RIDE LIGHTNING—Sabella

You need to work out an Ace-like triple if you’re going to add mailing comments into a triad. We need another spatial dimension or two every so often. * Diefenbaker and Riel are figures from Canadian history. Given that history taught in the US is American history with a hint of European history, your ignorance can’t be held against you. ↘ “Nobody has ever explained why you don’t have more spare time after retiring than you did when you were working.” It’s one of the mysteries of life. For me, I’ve taken on additional projects, read more news and other things I could ignore, etc. And, I play more computer games and otherwise waste time. Some corollary to the Peter Principle? ♣ If Trap Door has a mailing list of 210 people, why does Fapa have trouble reaching 50? Should we conscript Trap Door’s list? > In second grade (1947), I had three or four of the childhood diseases consecutively. And children still have to go through chicken pox, colds, perhaps one of the milder measles, etc. * My father left the US geological survey to work for AID in 1957. I spent 6 months in Pakistan before going back for university. He worked in Pakistan, Iran, Panama, and Indonesia.

OPUNTIAS—Speirs

Penney forgets that sending cheques to Ontarians didn’t work for the Harris Tories, who had a deficit but sent them anyway to celebrate lost governmental services. ⇐ The giant squid video is on the BBC, but it isn’t terribly good. Follow the links from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/4288772.stm>

* I rather suspect that travellers’ tales of frozen lakes led to the walk on water miracle. (I walk on water every winter.) Gods and their prophets were expected to perform miracles in those days, so the author of John put in a lot of miracles.

Penney says, “The only kind of headgear seen these days are baseball caps.” Add winter toques and it would be both accurate and grammatically correct. □ Are SUVs involved in most of the accidents you recount because they’re dangerous or dangerously driven, or simply because everyone in Calgary drives one? → The Stampede’s computer ought to be smart enough to recognize that \$712 is not a reasonable admission charge. * Many Toronto restaurants of other ethnicities are either Greek or Chinese by cook.

I read mysteries, but am getting a bit weary of formulae. Most recent was *Case of Lies*, Perri O’Shaughnessy; it was, among other things, a non-formula story of an obsession with prime numbers and the Riemann zeta function, as well as its formulaic lawyer.

As well as fandom, fish and philately, sailing was losing participants at the time it lost me. Are young’ns doing nothing but internet? ▶ An Italian friend said that when he speaks in Italy, people say, “You talk like my parents! Language always changes. → I like your typical Canadian sentence, eh? ↗ There were great flocks of sheep in *Brokeback*; because I doubt they could be imported, I suspect they were Albertan sheep. There was some comment that as gay cowboys, they weren’t cowboys at all but sheepherders. ★ I have the annual worldwide party on my calendar, but I usually miss 9pm. → Pedestrians see your back yard? There are people walking? ⇐ Fees haven’t stopped junk mail, nor (where they exist) junk phone calls. Spam is just more of the same.

LOFGEORNOST—Lerner

I had never thought particularly about Joan of Arc. Now I wonder how her memory has fared in England. (Compare Napoléon, who is still a hero in France, but is regarded somewhat differently in England and Russia.)

PARADISIACAL VISIONS— Sabella

I try not to read jacket blurbs. They're written by under-paid assistants who haven't time to write a good one. For a non-fiction book, they crib the introduction; for fiction, they riffle through the book, find something that might sell books, and put it onto the cover—though you might not want to know that before you start reading. * *Doonesbury*, *Zits* and *For Better or Worse* justify looking at the comics page. There are a couple I no longer read, and I scan the remainder. * While dissent is necessary in a free society and is being discouraged in the US, should teachers present partisan political views? I think they should if balanced by opposing views. * Down in flames—hmm. ➔ Speaking of pi day, since it's Halloween:

X Corporations which fire execs and give them **big** settlements make the idea that there is an owing class that takes care of its own more reasonable.

Stockholders of Hewlett-Packard scolded the board when they gave an exec big bucks, but the scolding hasn't changed practices.



SWEET JANE—Elkund

Interesting note; we're living longer, but may outlive our hobbies, like Fapa. ☆ Last time I went through airport security and was asked to take my shoes off, I told them I couldn't reach my feet (because of the hip). They let me go through shod. Got a note today that some testers got through Newark airport with all kinds of simulated weapons. The purpose is not to be secure, but to scare people into voting republican. Me, I'm scared of the republicans.

SFAM—Cozort

Welcome. You have the opportunity to get away with violating the unwritten rules for

a mailing or two. Don't keep too low a profile. * Don't apologize for your fiction; I liked it.

STUPIFYING FAPA—Eney

Internet humour has the following derivation of the finger:

Giving the Finger

Before the Battle of Agincourt in 1415, the French, anticipating victory over the English, proposed to cut off the middle finger of all captured English soldiers. Without the middle finger it would be impossible to draw the renowned English longbow and therefore be incapable of fighting in the future.

This famous weapon was made of the native English Yew tree, and the act of drawing the longbow was known as "plucking the yew" (or "pluck yew"). Much to the bewilderment of the French, the English won a major upset and began mocking the French by waving their middle fingers at the defeated French, saying, "See, we can still pluck yew!"

PLUCK YEW! Over the years some 'folk etymologies' have grown up around this symbolic gesture. Since 'pluck yew' is rather difficult to say (like "pleasant mother pheasant plucker", which is who you had to go to for the feathers used on the arrows for the longbow), the difficult consonant cluster at the beginning has gradually changed to a labiodental fricative 'F', and thus the words often used in conjunction with the one-finger-salute are mistakenly thought to have something to do with an intimate encounter.

It is also because of the pheasant feathers on the arrows that the symbolic gesture is known as "giving the bird".

Neither Canada nor the US should favour the ballistic missile defence nonsense. It's time USers revolt against spending billions on a nearly impossible task against a hypothetical weapon from a hypothetical enemy. After the cold war, there should have been money for other things, but the US government has been spending it on bullshit projects like this. The US would be much more secure had they allocated maybe 1% of the money gone to defence contractors over the last 50 years, on providing clean water, or health care, or education to third world countries. [end of rant] ● No, Visa didn't ask invasive questions, and they sent me another card, so it wasn't phone phishing. ↗ Marking sheep to discourage woolgatherers seems to have a big disadvantage when the

owner wants to shear. ☼ I suspect that more people might have believed Bogart to have a Canadian accent than a Cockney accent.

VOICE OF THE HABU—Wells

You use gmail as the forwarded-to account; I use it to forward mail to my internet provider, figuring it will be available should I want to go to another ISP. ☼ “One convention hires professional bartenders... liability reasons.” Hotels often require that they serve the drinks; a hotel would insist on it if drinks were sold. ✂ If anyone can afford a private jet, Bill Gates can. Your next seat friend was probably someone else.

FOR FAPA—Lindsay

I’m sorry to hear of Jean’s mother’s death. → I suspect the world is going to suffer a lot from global warming. Politicians can’t think beyond the next election, and probably won’t take global action when national interests might suffer. The Stern report this week said it would be expensive; they pulled their punches to make it more believable, according to Jeremy Leggett, who wrote the Greenpeace report in 1990. With New York and London and the Netherlands under water, the insurance system collapsing, et bloody cetera, more happens than global recession. * US auto-makers are going to use hydrogen fuels cells, Real Soon—it’s been 10 years away for the last 30 years. Meanwhile, European diesels aren’t selling and Japanese hybrids are. I suspect that the diesels are smaller than the hybrids, which may be the only reason they are equally economical. A hybrid diesel would be interesting.

BEERING HOUSE—Garcia

Sorry to hear of the death of your father. ♡ Nice queens, in a good-looking zine. ➤ Good luck with taff. ❖ What’s the N3F up to these days? I was a member c. 1956 ✂ I agree that Hillary is not a winning candidate, but I think she’ll have her trouble in the primaries, and Someone Else will be the candidate. I suspect Obama is running for the vice presidential candidacy by running for president. * Thanks for the compliments. I don’t use InDesign, and in fact hadn’t heard of it. I’d download Adobe’s trial version, but I don’t like time-

limited software, and I’m okay with working in Word.

SYNAPSE—SPEER

Where is Synapse when I need it? I can’t find it, but I remember your challenging my “third-rate medical care”. I said it to provoke argument from USers, but you were the only one who bit. The World Health Organization rated the US 37th, but what do they know?¹ It’s true that excellent medical care is available in the US; the problem is that you have to be wealthy or insured to get it. The public health stats are terrible, particularly infant death rate, maternal deaths, life expectancy, obesity... And it costs more for poorer results. Here’s partial stats:

INTERNATIONAL HEALTH COMPARISONS

	Canada	France	UK	US
Health spending per capita, 2002	\$2,931	\$2,736	\$2,160	\$5,267
Private share of spending	30%	24%	17%	55%
Life expectancy	79.7	79.2	78.1	77.1
Infant mortality per 1000 births	5.2	4.5	5.0	6.8
Physicians per 1000 people	2.1	3.3	2.0	2.7
Nurses per 1000 people	9.9	7.0	9.0	8.1
Hospital beds per 1000 people	3.2	4.2	3.9	2.9

source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD Health Data 2004

⇒ Synapse will show up as soon as I print this, I suppose. Will try to comment next mailing.

#1 #9—MCINERNEY

Thanks for your eulogy to rich brown. I miss his contributions to Trufen (wordy, as you note). I actually have two images of him, one as the skinny kid I met at Solacon, and the other as the overweight fan I saw a couple of times in the last few years.

BEN’S BEAT—INDICK

You’re back to form here, seeing more plays and absquatulating (or talking about it) appropriately.

¹ Mel Lastman, Toronto’s mayor during the SARS epidemic, famously asked, “Who is WHO?” when WHO issued a travel advisory on Toronto.