



CATCHPENNY GAZETTE

Number 10 • Autumn 2005



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It's not rocket science ... it's not brain surgery ... it's ...

ROCKET SURGERY

David Burton

I'll admit it I have weird sleeping habits. As I've read happens to many people, the older I get, the less sleep I need. Four or five hours of solid sack time do it for me. Any more and I'm apt to be groggy and cranky the next day; any less and it's pretty much the same.

Since I tend to go to bed fairly early (usually before 10 p.m.), that means I'm generally up around 3 a.m. I don't have to leave for work until 6:15, so that leaves me with 3 hours of "free" time. Sometimes I'll read, sometimes work on this fanzine, and other times I'll surf the Internet.

Every once in a while, when I don't feel like doing anything else, I'll lie in bed and turn on the television. Without cable, I'm at the mercy of half a dozen local broadcast channels, and the choices are pretty limited. Infomercials, re-runs of Leno, or all-night network news. And then there are the times I catch the ultimate anti-game show, "Street Smarts," broadcast locally at 4 a.m.

While most game shows rely on the contestants having *some* knowledge of *something*, "Street Smarts" banks on people's stupidity. In a nutshell, the game features two contestants (who seem to have been given a healthy dose of uppers just before airtime) and three other people who are supposed to supply answers to questions. The contestants have to

guess whether the answers are right or wrong. Everyone involved seems to be Twenty-somethings, and the three panelists, judging from the backgrounds, seem to have been selected in malls.

It's almost frightening how *dumb* these people are, and it makes you wonder exactly how these folks managed to get through school. They have trouble answering the most basic questions about subjects like history or science or current events.

I suppose what "Street Smarts" *is* good for, though, if you have some intelligence, is making you feel superior to the contestants. But that isn't saying much...

Of course, after watching a half-an-hour of this drivel, I have to remind myself that, yes, this might be the most moronic show ever televised, but *I've* wasted a half-hour of my life actually *watching* it. □

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Artwork:

Masthead is a detail from a daguerreotype by Lorenzo Chase (ca. 1850). Cover: Photo by David Burton. Page 4: unknown artist (from the Internet). Page 6: David Mattingly (used with permission). Page 7: William Rotsler. Page 11: William Rotsler.

Uncredited art from various dingbat fonts.

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UNIQUE

Dave Locke

I penned this poem to a correspondent a few months ago.

It's not the first snow of the season, and for that matter it's falling just a bit shy of winter. But there it is, creating a curtain that partially obscures the middle distance and deletes the far background altogether, and its claim to fame is that it is the First To Stick.

However, the local weather service advises us not to worry about it, if only because the front that's expected here tomorrow and for the rest of the week will make this one resemble one of those snow paperweights where the storm is relatively tranquil and over with quickly. You remember the snow paperweight. You or your grandmother had one when you were a child. You shook it up maybe two or three times and after that it became merely a paperweight, which you have not seen in years unless your grandmother still has hers.

In looking out the window at the billions of snowflakes, and thinking of the uncountable number which must exist around the world at any one time, let alone the number that have previously existed throughout time, I begin to question the incredible presumptions of whoever said that no two snowflakes are identical. How many samples could he have possibly checked in a normal lifetime of 74 years or so? I'll bet he broke off corners and partially melted a few just getting them under the microscope. Besides, would he think

that two quarters were not identical if one was heads and other was tails? What about four quarters, where on one he saw George Washington standing on his head, and on another the eagle was hanging upside down like a bat?

I just saw a snowflake land on the window next to me and, before it melted, it looked *very much* like a snowflake that landed on the left lens of my glasses in 1956. Could it be? And, after the both of them melted, they looked absolutely identical, though I suppose that's academic.

Wouldn't it be more sensible and less presumptive, when it comes to the question of whether any two snowflakes can be identical, to state that presently we don't think so, but that we've missed checking a few?

And what does "identical" mean? If this snowflake scientist were the type of guy who'd inspect a whole truckload of Penn tennis balls ("You see one, you've seen them all") and tell us no two were identical, then I'd have to go talk to some scientific community leaders about this snowflake

proclamation of his. I can imagine the upshot to this conversation right now: "Well yes, Dave, you're right. He *is* a quibbly little nitpick, isn't he? We'll have a new snowflake statement issued immediately. It will be something like: 'Well, they're all pretty much alike, really.'" □

SNOW

by Eldrin Fzot

Snowflakes in the air,
Snowflakes in your hair,
Snowflakes on your glasses,
Snowflakes up to there.

Sometimes it crunches,
Sometimes it bunches,
Eskimos know
More about snow.

Roll it in a ball
Go and build a wall.
Shovel 'til the sidewalk's bare.
Eat it if you dare.

Grease your skids and go, go, go.
Slide down a hill on a powder of snow.
Break your leg while learning to ski.
Sign your name while taking a wee.

Originally published in 1996



NOTES FROM BYZANTIUM

Writing's Work

"Amateurs hope; professionals work."

That's the catch phrase being used by Kenyon Martin, forward for the New Jersey Nets basketball team.

My morning sports scan seldom turns up anything pertinent to writing but here's an exception. There's a lot of truth to that quote. Lately work's been on my mind. I've been working. Not at fiction. Rather, trying to turn over the legal writing I do for a living fast enough so that during the summer there'll be a few weeks left to help compose the next mystery novel. It's the new pattern to my life. For years I punched the corporate clock. Unfortunately that particular timepiece has a nasty counter punch. Now I work frantically on legal articles, on contract, in order to free myself to work frantically on novels.

I'm fortunate to be able to do so. With its amazing marketing, Poisoned Pen Press sells a lot more books than any independent has a right to sell. Every sale gives me a little extra time to write fiction.

Too many aspiring writers are not willing to put in the hours, to alter their routines, to make the sacrifices, necessary to get published. They think all it takes is inspiration and when that fails they decide it's nothing but luck. Or if they just find the right agent, or maybe a movie producer or get Oprah to touch them, maybe then they'll have their bestseller. As for the idea that maybe you write one book, then another and another and repeat the process several more times...well, that's like their regular job, only harder. No kidding.

Sometimes I think many perpetual amateurs see writing as a way out of work. Money for nothing. Freedom from...whatever. That means selling books.

Amateurs want to write so they can sell books.

More than a few professionals want to sell books so they can keep writing.

Looks Like A Purple People Eater

Me and purple go back a long way. The mysteries my wife and I write are set during the Byzantine era when purple was reserved for the Emperor. Long before I wrote mysteries I published sf fanzines in purple ditto, not to mention even purpler hecto. I probably still have a few fading ink stains under my fingernails from the latter endeavor. In between the fanzines and the novels there was a lot of overly purple prose.

In the very beginning, though, was the "Purple People Eater."

That Sheb Wooley number was my first Favorite Song. A lively beat, funny lyrics, a science fiction theme and the silly voice of the alien himself. What more could a kid want?

In the summers, until I was in fourth grade, my parents ran a lakeside picnic spot. It was summer when the Purple People Eater landed. My parents had their orders. I wasn't to miss a single radio play. If the tune came over the car radio while my dad drove around the park doing his morning clean up, or on the radio in the cottage as my mom cooked breakfast, or crackled out of a transistor radio during a break down on the beach, I had to be called so I could frantically race the opening notes in time to hear the first chorus. The alien invasion cost me more than a little skin off my knees.

Eventually I owned a plastic Purple People Eater, which, like most of the artist's conceptions that appeared in Look Magazine (if I recall) was colored purple, even though the lyrics make it clear that it was the people he ate who were purple.

I suppose he might've been purple, too, due to his diet.

For years I kept my 45 rpm single, even after it had broken half way through and become unplayable. There were decades when I didn't hear



the song, during those dark ages, before the Internet and CDs gave new life to every scrap of popular culture that had seemed as dead as the dust of dried up sea monkeys.

After that summer of glory there were disappointments. I was crushed when the Purple People Eater outfit my dad made for me, with the enormous *papier-mache* head, did not win the prize at the annual Halloween parade. (A big pair of dice won. Can you believe it? Philistines!) Also, I don't recall any good cover versions. Surely some punk band missed out on a hit. I should have liked to hear Johnny Thunders' version. Now it is too late.

Old Cars

Sartre said that hell is other people. He was wrong. Hell is an old car.

This has been a time of car troubles. Resolved now, I hope. For the time being.

I have lived all my life with old cars. Vehicles haunted by the specter of the irremediable defect. Who can say which rattle, which faint grinding, clank, or odd squeal, will prove to be the tolling of the bell? Every visit to the repair shop promises to end with the mechanic emerging from his operating room grim faced. And every turn of the key in the ignition can lead to the repair shop as easily as to the desired destination.

When I commuted to college I drove my parents' powder blue Plymouth. At least it was powder blue between the leprous fiberglass patches holding the body together. The broken heater and bald tires and defective brakes made the fifteen mile drive an adventure in the winter. I still recall peering through a three inch square aperture in the ice layered on the inside of the windshield as the car skated into a snow slicked intersection, the steering wheel clenched between hands I could see but not feel, trying to push the brake pedal through the floor with a cold-numbered foot which might as well have vanished.

The Plymouth smoked. Like a Titan rising from the launch pad. Thick blue billows swirled in its wake, blinding whoever might have been following me, not that I would have been able to make them out in the rear view mirror though the obscuring fog. I had to fill up with oil more frequently than gas.

The Plymouth met its end at the garage, sitting at the roadside, awaiting another fiberglass treatment. Someone swerved off the highway and totaled it. Old cars don't even have

good luck.

Montaigne said that to philosophize is to learn how to die. Today, he would surely take that lesson from owning an old car. ▣

Trees v. Power Lines

A few days ago, when I drove by the sprawling trailer park I pass on the way to town, I noticed that all the trees lining the road there had been cut down. They'd been big, mature maples. For a week in the autumn they used to form a spectacular wall of foliage. Now there were only raw stumps and a few scattered, severed limbs. For the first time I could see the sagging power line, strung parallel to the road, that I guessed was the reason for the trees' demise.

Trees and power lines don't get along. Our electricity was off for ten hours Thanksgiving day after high winds knocked trees onto nearby lines.

Usually it's the trees that suffer. Driving in the countryside you can see where pruning crews have done their work -- weirdly disfigured trees with crowns sliced off, limbs truncated, central branches cut away to allow free passage for wires. It can't say the pruning isn't necessary. I had to remove branches from a sapling by the house a few months ago.

My grandfather always thought the crews were too diligent. He was fiercely protective of the huge maples in his front yard. They were forked at the bottom, the sort of trees some might say should never have been allowed to grow. Their diverging trunks, hollow with age and disease, were held together in places by steel rods.

When the Borough crews arrived to do their work my grandfather would stand out in the yard and give them hell. He contested every branch. The trees were allowed to retain their dignity.

That was over four decades ago. I doubt that today you'd find many people who'd side with a tree against a power line, or think they had the right to, or that the powers-that-be would respect such an individual. ▣

*Eric
Mayer*

FOUND IN COLLECTION

Christopher J. Garcia

I love a good mystery. I've often sat up late into the night because an episode of *Murder, She Wrote* is on and I have to see how they manage to pin this one on William Atherton or Gavin McLeod. So on my travels through our collection, I come across certain things that make me waste valuable time searching for answers when I could be writing fanzines or sending LoCs. A pile of magazines presented such a mystery.

Digging around, I came upon a vein of magazines in the archives. They were mostly copies of *Omni* and *Byte*, but there were a few that I pulled aside for further reading one of which was a copy of *Amazing Stories* from February 1992. It was there with a number of other SF mags (like the old *Galileo* and a few large format *Analogs*) and I had to pick it up. There was one thing: it was missing its cover.

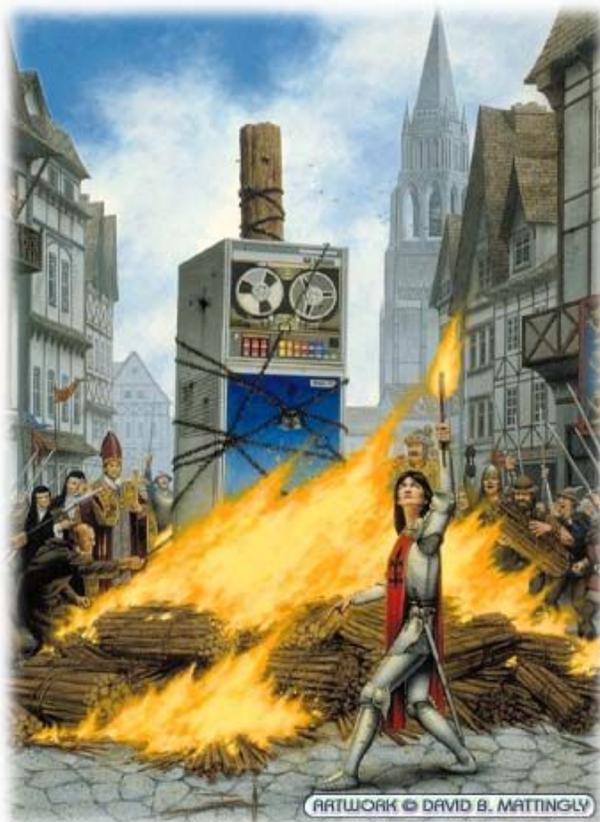
I had read this one, I think, as a high schooler. I used to pick up an issue every time I made it to the one major bookstore in Downtown San Jose, but I have always been a light reader when it comes to magazines, so I didn't remember any details from this one. I started reading early in the afternoon and fin-

ished the whole thing right before it was time to head home.

The issue itself had a number of interesting articles. One was from Robert Silverberg about the October 1991 fires that swept the Berkeley Hills. I can remember looking off in the distance from the top of my house and seeing the smoke from the fires. I was a good forty miles away, but it was there, and even afforded us very pretty sunsets. SilverBob tells the tale of various folks in SFdom whose houses were and weren't in danger. I know that Diana Paxson's house was threatened, but it made it through. He also recounted the fire that happened at his place in New York, which most folks credit as being what drove him out to California.

The stories were OK, with a Brian Stableford short and an excerpt from Kathe Koja's novel *Bad Brains* being the best of them. There was a seriously good article

on plate tectonics that also got my attention and was the only thing other than the Silverberg article that I reread. The troubling thing was that there was almost no visible reason for this magazine to be in the collection. I mean, there



wasn't a major CyberPunk story, nor anything that would make me think that we'd gone out and bought it (and since the magazine had a price sticker on the back from the bookstore right around the corner from the museum's old Boston site, I knew that they had bought it). This mystery drove me to action.

I started my search on the net. Oh glorious sister Internet, show me the way. It did no such thing. I looked into all the authors, and while some of them, Sheila Finch especially, had written computer-themed work, none of them were to the level where a 1992 Computer Historian would buy a magazine just for the fact they had an article in it. I looked through the illustrations and found nothing that would make me think that it was that. They even had a piece of the cover on the Table of Contents and it seemed to be nothing of a computer-related sort. I figured someone must have bought it for personal reading, the cover got torn off and the thing just ended up in the collection.

I began to doubt this was the case. The cover had been done by David Mattingly, an artist who was quite well known and had a background in film matte work, which is as close to actual wizardry as humans can get. I found his website (davidmattingly.com) and discovered that he had a number of great images, but one struck me. The piece was called *St. Joan and The Computer*.

It showed a picture of Joan of Arc lighting a pyre with an old IBM-type stand-up tape drive tied to it. There were several people standing around, including a man in bishop's clothing. I thought this picture looked familiar, but I wasn't sure. I looked at other Mattingly pieces, but none of them had the same call.

The Computer Museum in Boston became absorbed by the Boston Museum of Science in 1999. It wasn't until 2002 or so that the boxes of papers and a few remaining artifacts made their way over to us in California as the final part of the official change. It was another year or two before we really started going through them, putting things in their proper filing cabinets. As I was at work on this one afternoon, I found a file marked 'Attitudes.' I had no idea what that was about so I set it aside and after I had filed everything else I sat down and gave it a read. It basically was a small exhibit about the attitudes that Pop Culture presented when it came to computers. There were stills from a Porky Pig cartoon, lots of images from paranoid 1950s and 60s fiction and a few illustrations. One of which was a full color cover of *Amazing Stories*, February 1992 showing Mattingly's piece *St. Joan and*

The Computer. Paper-clipped to the cover was a series of points that the curators had made back in 1992. First, the machine being burned wasn't a computer, but a tape drive. The attitude was that the moving parts had to be the ones doing the thinking, so the tape drives were what people always showed. The second thing was this showed a distinct 'science vs. religion' theme, which has always been around. The final note, obviously posted by our former head curator was 'What the hell was Joan of Arc doing burning anything? She was a witch!'

That last statement might be explained by the fact that he was a middle-aged Brit of traditional up-bringing.

Having gotten to the middle of the Mystery of the Missing Cover, I felt as if I had done good... though even *I* felt bad about wasting the better part of a week on a search that ended up solved by looking through a box that had sat next to my desk for more than a year. □



CREATIVE ATTENTION

PETER SULLIVAN

One of the consequences of doing 7 flights in a 14-day holiday is that you end up exhausting your book supply (even if you take the annotated version of *War and Peace* together with how ever many volumes it is of *A la recherche du temps perdu*). However, this is no hardship, as it allows me to peruse the airport magazine stalls for delicacies not available in England (at least, not unless you are in London or search very hard).

Such as *Wired*² magazine. I started reading the UK version of this publication when it bizarrely started appearing on Durham Railway Station's news-stall. I say bizarrely, because this bookstall is normally the epitome of populist – a wide selection of women's titles (varying from those that tell you how to enjoy³ an orgasm to those that tell you how to knit⁴ one), the obligatory top shelf "gentleman's publications" and huge piles of tabloid newspapers. The only other out-of-place title is usually the *Times Higher Education Supplement*⁵, but then this is practically compulsory in a University town. However, I was obviously one of the few purchasers of *Wired UK*, at Durham Station or elsewhere, as the UK edition ceased publication early this year. Looking at the American edition, it is obvious why; it is twice the size, with most of the extra material being adverts. And whereas the adverts in *Wired UK* were almost entirely computer-related (or at least technology-related), *Wired US* appears to have broken into a much wider demographic, featuring the sort of advertisers who in Britain would grace *GQ*⁶ or similar "lifestyle" publications.

Anyway, what I really wanted to talk about was one of the articles in the aforesaid publication. Michael H. Goldhaber, in "Attention Shoppers," puts forward the thesis

that, in the information economy, it is not information that will be the new "money" but attention. Economics only works where there is scarcity, and there is no scarcity of information on the Internet. What is scarce is attention; the numbers of hours spent online multiplied by the number of I have probably done hideous damage to his argument by such a short abstract, but if you want to, you can go and read the whole thing. It's not, as far as I can see, on *Wired's* web site, so I'll just have to give an old-fashioned reference rather than a snazzy hyperlink; *Wired* Vol 5 Issue 12 (December 1997), ISSN 1059-1028, page 182 *op.cit.*

One theme which Goldhaber doesn't really have time to explore is that, whilst the Internet is the most visible and largest example of an attention-based economy, it is by no means the first. Fanzines in general, and Diplomacy zines in particular, are probably one of the better pre-wired examples of these sorts of transactions.

When John Piggott⁷ appropriated his First Law of Fanzines from S.F. fandom – that all zines exist solely for the benefit of their editors – he was tapping into a universal truth. It's for precisely these reasons that most fanzines publish at a loss. Editors from time to time moan about the loss they are making, but in the end they go on publishing, and the few zines which have tried full-price pricing have rarely lasted long, unless they had enough of an edge to justify the extra cost. In Goldhaber's terms, the editors are trading cash for attention. However, the subscribers are also trading cash, in their case for amusement, entertainment, or whatever

Reprint of an article from Octopus's Garden, Issue 20, December 1997¹, and from Peter's e-APA zine.

it is that you call that need to pick up the unopened zine off the mat and read it on the train.

The wired world is a different sort of paradigm. I have no way of charging you for reading a web page, secure VISA⁸ channels notwithstanding, and in the attention-based economy I have no incentive to do so. The downside of this is that, in zineland, I am one of the few fighting for attention. The number of zines is finite, and unless you are a wide-ranging subber, this is probably the only zine to drop on your doormat today. It's either read this or stare out the train window⁹ at the cows zooming past at 90 mph. However, in the wired world, on-line zines have to compete for attention with the professional media¹⁰ and sites where Gates McFadden¹¹ allegedly gets her kit off. This is probably why the Diplomacy hobby on-line has not really developed a zine-orientated model. The games are adjudicated by Judges¹², and what more general material there is (such as the excellent Diplomatic Pouch¹³) tends to be more focused on the game and the hobby itself, rather than editor's flights of rhetoric about whatever takes his fancy.

Of course, by writing about his article, I am indulging in various sorts of attention-based transactions myself, trying to insert Goldhaber into your attention, and trying to siphon off some of that attention onto myself. In fact, once you start thinking along these lines, you can extend it to just about any situation in life. So, before I go too far, I'd better sign off and start paying attention to a nice cup of coffee... ☐

Notes:

1. www.burdonvale.co.uk/octopus/oct20.html
2. www.wired.com/wired/
3. www.cosmopolitan.co.uk/
4. www.ipcmedia.com/magazines/womansweekly/
5. www.thes.co.uk
6. www.gq-magazine.co.uk
7. <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/DiplomacyWorld/10years.htm>
8. www.paypalsucks.com/merchant-account.shtml
9. www.nationalrail.co.uk
10. www.bbc.co.uk
11. www.hard-to-find-actresses.com/gates.html
12. www.diplom.org/openings/openings.html
13. www.diplom.org/Zine

EPISTLES

LETTER COLUMN

Chris Garcia

Talking about Where's George, Las Vegas/Bay Area/Hawaii fan Kathryn Daugherty is very big into it. They even have a convention where they gather. I used to take part, but after a while, I got a little creeped out when I got the same bill three times...on two different coasts and the last time at the Winchester Mystery House as a part of a string of coincidences that were more than a little weird.

On Eric Mayer's article, yeah, the past never goes away anymore. It's part of what keeps me employed! I recently rediscovered the first San Jose act ever to chart, The Count Five. Nothing ever goes away, though that goes back decades, it's just easier now with the net. I remember the 1980s as being one big decade of neon and 1950s

nostalgia. I wrote an ultra-short fiction piece about peering back at yourself through the Internet. So many great songs are Muzaked nowadays. I heard "China Girl" by David Bowie and "Watching the Detectives" in a supermarket the other day and I felt old.

Not only are they used as Muzak, but they also pop up in TV and radio ads. I don't think anyone would have ever guessed 30+ years ago that a song Led Zeppelin would be used in a Cadillac commercial.

I love plastic bags, since they are perfect for cleaning out the mouse cage and easily tied up when done. I recently discovered my love for them, though I still often get paper for various uses, like campfire cooking.

To Robert Lichtman, I pretty vividly remember it as *Off-World*, but it might have something else. I know I've read one called *Off-World* (I believe it was a punk zine in the 1970s) and when I went to ask Dad, he said he thought I was talking about *Outworlds*. I wouldn't be shocked if I was wrong. ☐

Eric Mayer

Again an attractive issue. I've played around with PDFs and layout but have no feel for it. Nice cover photo too. I like the idea of the photo standing alone without the title over it and plenty of white space to set things off.

I've seen mentioned that dollar bill tracking hobby but never run across one of the bills. I have encountered money with nonsense scrawled on it. Four letter words, naturally, or George with eyeglasses or his teeth blacked out, and citations to the Bible. Then I've seen bills which someone apparently used for a grocery list or to do some quick calculations. I have also read some bizarre and inexplicable messages, which sad to say I can't remember, but which made me wonder at the time what the intent of the writer had been.

When I go to the grocery I always ask for paper bags, for the reason Dave mentions – the plastic bags spill everything all over the car. It is true, you can carry about ten plastic bags in each hand, so long as they aren't overly packed, in which case the bags are so flimsy you can't lift one without it breaking. When plastic bags first appeared they were strong. I used to keep the bags I got at the local drug store and used them to carry books and stuff around. They'd last for months. Now they barely make it to the car. The manufacturers have got the bags down to the point where they mostly look like something that might theoretically hold what's put in them.

One of the arguments for the plastic bags is



that they're cheaper than paper. I often wonder how much "cheaper" they really are when most places – if they give a hoot – have to double or triple bag so they don't burst.

Writing instruction, as far as I'm concerned is nonsense. The things that can be taught are so basic that anyone who can write a coherent article for a fanzine already knows them (which granted, leaves out much of the population...) and the rest is just the opinion of the individual instructor or editor. Now if you're writing for a particular editor then what you do have to pay attention to is what that editor wants. But learning what that editor wants won't necessarily help you with any other editors.

Like Chris I finally decided I wasn't a writer of sf. I read sf endlessly from 4th grade into college, then stopped because I didn't like the literary slant of the new wave stuff that was coming out. For some weird reason I kept sporadically trying to sell sf. I guess it was because I'd got the idea in my head when I was a kid and couldn't give it up. Every three or four years I'd suddenly write two or three stories – just in case I'd grown some new brain cells – and send them out to be rejected. I wasn't even reading sf any longer. I didn't even want to write sf. I just felt like I should. Finally I began selling some nonfiction and that cured me.

After Mary and I were married she convinced me to co-write a mystery story with her. I'd had this idea about an "open room" murder in Mongolia for a long time but my sf experience had soured me on any sort of fiction writing. Of course it helped that Mary assisted me with the mystery structure. She'd already sold to Ellery Queen. The story did sell to Ellery in fact and since then we've sold about 20 more to Ellery and anthologies plus our six Byzantine novels. I haven't undertaken to write any fiction on my own – except the "practice novel" I wrote, just to prove I could finish such a thing before we embarked on the mystery novels. I haven't had much time and given my past experience writing something on my own doesn't seem like a good bet. I'd rather see something co-written going into print. I can have my say, so to speak, in that context. What interests me is messing around with words and making up stories. I have no great messages the world desperately needs to hear! ☐

Lloyd Penney

If you've been on the wheresgeorge website, you probably know there's a companion site called

whereswilly.com, which traces the travels of a Canadian \$5 bill, which is the smallest paper denomination we have now. Willy, in this case, is Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the Prime Minister of Canada from 1896 to 1911. A couple of Willys have come my way, and I have got them registered at the site, but I haven't seen a bill like that in more than five years.

Eric Mayer is right, the Internet is not living up to its potential or its billing. Maybe we need a separate Net as an electronic library for the world, but the Internet we have is jam-packed with opinion, hatred, cheap sex, chatter and foolishness, and the greatest shame is the huge amount of ingenuity that brings it all to us. It is also a great archive of the past remoulded for playing today, which helps make up for it.

I will not reveal Yvonne's age, but a couple of years ago, I bought her a multi-year membership in CARP, which is the Canadian version of AARP. She qualified, and she has access to discounts on travel and insurance, and because I am married to her, I am an associate member, and I can get those discounts, too. Not bad for 46. The discounts are on things I will never buy, but it would be great if the membership card could get me dollars off my grocery bill. I'll take any discount I can get my hands on.

Chris Garcia should know that I gave SF editors a similar gift many years ago. I tried my hand at writing short fiction in the 1980s, and after about seven years of getting either rejection slips or being totally ignored, I decided there must be something else I can do with my time other than butt my head against a brick wall. By the way, I also have a copy of *Constructing Scientifiction & Fantasy* by Ashmead, Schweitzer and Scithers. It's actually a fat pamphlet, and didn't do much for me. Looked good, though.

Canada Geese are a problem in most places. They crap everywhere, they graze parks until they look freshly shaved, and they hiss at one and all. They travel most places these days because most places are banning feeding the ducks and geese, so they have to go elsewhere for their lunch. If only there was some good meat on them, they wouldn't be such a pest.

No, Eric, it's *you* that live in the alien country! We have thousands of black squirrels, some grey squirrels, some red ones, and a few chipmunks here and there. Most of all, we have raccoons. My LoC...Yvonne never did get the ISDC she was hoping to bring to Toronto. She seemed to impress those who would make the decision, but the old boys network saw her as an unknown factor, and denied it to her. Maybe a future year, but who knows? ☐



Gregory Benford

I downloaded CG & liked it.

I wanted to do some fannish reading & had my laptop & free wireless, in Bologna, Italy. It's striking that churches and basilica dominate the city, huge and full of hollow majesty—for they have tiny congregations. Living among a past that echoes of songs no longer sung gives an odd tenor to Europe these days. I'm here doing astrophysics this summer. One wonders if our monuments to vast scientific and technological faith, our observatories and accelerators, bridges and towering scrapers of the sky, will also be honored with a tip of the hat to history, tantalizing tourists, but vacant, tombstones to ideas now dead.

Eric Mayer has a wry humor I like. I've not even been in a Wal-mart, but the idea of a geezers pay less day is...odd. (Yeah, & I'm a geezer.)

Chris Garcia's reflections on trying to write fiction for markets reminds me of getting started after a career as a fmz fan (tho I still am one of cawse). I just tried to write the kind of stuff I'd like to read, and never read anything about writing short stories beyond the marvelous *Raymond Chandler Speaking* collection of his letters, which have much to say about writing for genre (tho Chandler hated sf of the 30s, & said so). I think fmz writing is a great way to learn, mostly through trying on various voices. I've always written fiction in a style that seemed to address the needs of the story – and thus I think don't have a distinctive voice (Unlike Chandler, actually.).

I found your editorial about people who track

dollar bills...well...it's really weird what people will do for hobbies. ▣

Robert Lichtman

That's a terrific "detail" from Lorenzo Chase's 1850 daguerreotype – do you know anything about what it is, where it was taken?

Unfortunately, not much. It's generally titled "A Young Gentleman," although I've also seen it titled "A Young Dandy." It's a "detail" only because I cropped the figure out of a nondescript background.

Eric Mayer writes, "There's one of my minicomics! Who the heck saved that?" Well, me for one. I don't have them catalogued, but in my Mayer file in addition to my complete runs of *Groggy* (first issue of which was called *Charm*) and *Deja Vu* I have a handful of Eric's minis including a number of issues of *Stick Dick*, *Mom*, *Bad Cat*, *Groggy Comics* and others. Eric also writes, "When I am an old man I will not buy groceries on Tuesdays." I don't think I'll ever take advantage of free coffee at Wal-Mart – I don't wish to ever shop there! – but I don't mind a discount on groceries. A natural food store in San Francisco offers a 10% discount to all over sixty and doesn't limit it to any one day. That discount makes their somewhat high prices almost reasonable.

I've cut my shopping at Wal-mart down to almost nothing after reading about and seeing several documentaries on their business practices.

Dave Locke's problem with plastic bags and groceries is one I had, too, with the result that most of the time I ask for paper bags (still available here). I also carry around a large empty box in the trunk of my car that keeps the grocery bags, whether paper or plastic, from shifting around as I turn corners. I could get canvas grocery bags – several of the stores I shop at offer them, and the others don't mind if you appear at their check-out stand with canvas bags from Somewhere Else – but they've never appealed to me. For one thing, eventually they need washing. Plastic and paper bags never have that problem and I can use them for carrying out the trash. ▣

Peter Sullivan

I would guess that an article on shopping bags is a good example of the "gen" that makes up a genzeen. And, of course, my role as a LoCer is then to seek to widen the debate out to the phi-

losophy of "grocery delivery paradigms" in general.

So, have you or Dave ever considered boxes? British supermarkets always used to have an area where they would dump any packaging boxes that were still in reasonable condition for people to use for packing, but this seems to have largely died off over the years. However, one supermarket, Safeways, had a variation on this theme when they introduced self-scanning. They sold cheap (probably subsidized) but sturdy green plastic boxes, designed to stack neatly in the trolleys. The idea being that you picked your items, scanned them on a little gizmo attached to the handle, and put them in the box in the trolley. Assuming you weren't selected for "random" re-scanning (seemed to be about 1 in 5, although I'm sure it wasn't as "random" as they claimed), you could just lift the boxes from the trolley into the boot of the car, and then out again at the other end. Other than accidents from over-filling, a fairly fool-proof system.

Needless to say, as a fully-fledged geek, the idea of scanning my own stuff was just too tempting, and I insisted that we sign up for the self-scanning system. Sadly, Safeways abandoned it after about 18 months. No idea whether this was because the costs of cheating were too high, or whether there just wasn't the level of take-up from the shoppers to justify continuing. And of course the Safeway chain has now been bought out by Morrisons, although the store we used to go to has actually been converted to a Sainsbury's. (I hope you're keeping tabs on all of this. There may be a little quiz later.) So our sturdy green plastic boxes are now redundant, and have developed a second career as general garage storage boxes for all those little thingamajigs that can't be thrown out. Sadly, they are useless for fanzeen (or general paper) storage, as the sides slope too much.

But nowadays, many of the groceries for this household arrive via Internet shopping. Which means that we are entirely indifferent as to the quality of the bags used. As long as they make it from the front door to the kitchen. Of course, some of them don't even manage that... ▣