



PIXEL THIRTEEN



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Distributed in a PDF version only.
Available for downloading at efanazines.com thanks to Bill Burns.
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Editorial deadline for *Pixel Fourteen*: May 26, 2007.

“Straight down does not give one a great view of ahead.”

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Notes From Byzantium

ERIC MAYER

Dreams Die Thin

As we age, life's possibilities slip away from us.

When I turned twenty I realized I would never become a teenage science fiction pro like Isaac Asimov. When I took up running at forty and labored to finish a mile in under eight minutes I guessed I had long since missed my chance to be the second coming of Roger Bannister.

Today I learned I can never be Kate Moss. At least not to the extent that she's done runway modeling.

True, I am the wrong sex, and not very pretty, but then again, we can dream. Not that I ever dreamed of being a runway model. To tell the truth I never gave it a thought until today. But you know how it is, as soon as we are denied a thing...

Just now I read in an article in *Slate* that the Council of Fashion Designers of America is issuing guidelines meant to discourage clothes hangers from being clothes hangers. The guidelines will not be as Draconian as those announced by fashion show organizers in Milan and Madrid which banned models who have a body mass index less than 18, for health reasons. As *Slate* explained:

Many people are predisposed to be thin, but if a model has a BMI of below 18 – the threshold used in Madrid – she is almost certainly practicing unhealthy habits, such as restricting food intake or over exercising. Someone who's 5-foot-11, like most

female models, would have to weigh less than 130 pounds to fall short of the threshold. To get to that point, even a natural waif would likely have to skip meals, exercise too much, or use diet aids.

I hate to disagree with the experts but I've met the height and weight requirements (if nothing else) to be a perfect (and now banned) runway model since I was sixteen without ever limiting my food intake, over exercising, using diet aids, or any other unhealthy practices. For most of my life I've tried to gain weight and never once managed to reach 130 pounds.

Ah well, if I can't be Kate Moss maybe I can still be Joyce Carol Oates.

Another Close Call

One of them got in the other night.

I smelled it before I saw it. An odor almost like newly cut grass. Almost. I started to shake. Newly cut grass doesn't smell quite the same and it doesn't come buzzing at your face like a cross

Illustrated by Brad Foster



DO YOU **REALLY** WANT TO
KNOW WHAT'S MAKING
THAT SOUND IN YOUR ATTIC?

between a bumblebee and a cockroach.

Sure, I'd lived through the others. But this one might be even bigger. It might be even more intent on my destruction. It might be behind me!

"What's the matter," Mary said. "What are you dancing around for?"

"Oh no. Oh my God," I explained.

"What's the cat looking at?" Mary wondered. "Ah. I see it."

The horror skittered across the floorboards on spidery legs, preparing to heave its monstrous carapace into the air. Mary's foot came down.

I sat and tried to get my breath back. "Thank heavens I smelled it in time," I told her. "That was close. Where do they come from in the middle of the winter?"

A sudden thought started my heart racing again. "You don't think the attic is full of them, do you?"

Mary just gave me a funny look. She refused to answer. Which could only mean...

I went to Google as fast as my trembling hands would allow. It didn't take long to identify the invader as a Western Conifer Seed Bug.

Apparently they've been spreading east. The first one wasn't sighted in Pennsylvania until 1992. They knew I'd be arriving shortly.

The devilish things feed on pine seeds. Needless to say our house is surrounded by pines. The insects like to spend the winter inside where it's warm.

However, according to the experts, the bugs are harmless to humans and the environment. They don't sting. So even if the attic is full of them I have nothing to fear, except for having my reeling brain overwhelmed by the maddening, impossible Lovecraftian wrongness of the alien spawn.

Just kidding.

See. What's really scary is the unknown. I actually feel much better now. Yes I do. Yes I do.

Vegemite and Me

According to a news story I read recently, U.S. customs agents are searching people from Australia and New Zealand for Vegemite. They don't consider the salty yeast extract a terrorist threat, although some who have tasted it might differ.

The problem, I learned, is that The U.S. Food and Drug Administration prohibits imports of Vegemite because it contains folate, a B vitamin approved as an additive only for a few foods. Ironically, one such food (to use the term loosely) is cereal, most of which is so unhealthy, even without folate, that merely looking at a box can take several months off one's life. (There are those who maintain that the Roman Empire succumbed to the Dark

Ages thanks to the lead in their plumbing. If Julius Caesar and his buddies had eaten Cap'n Crunch for breakfast we would never even have made it to the Dark Ages.)

Customs agents had previously allowed travelers to bring the stray jar of Vegemite into the country for personal use but have recently decided, it seems, that our collective health needs to more closely guarded, which makes perfect



sense. After all, over 40 million of us do not have the health insurance to allow us to seek out the emergency care we might need after ingesting Vegemite.

I was lucky enough to survive consuming two jars of Vegemite, but this was years ago, and I was much younger and more robust. Also they were very small jars, which suggests that hungry and determined travelers might rather easily smuggle Vegemite across the border if they aren't particular about where their snacks have been.

The jars in question turned up on the shelves of the Village Green Bookstore in Rochester, New York, in their imported food section. I can't recall exactly why I bought it. Something to do with the lead singer in the Australian band Men Without Hats sounding like the Kinks' Ray Davies. Is it any wonder the publishing industry can't figure out why people buy what they do in bookstores?

Spread on a thin, bland water cracker, the stuff resembled congealed motor oil. Ah, but the taste...Definitely salty...but more than that...sharp, exotic...just barely on the right side of being utterly unpalatable, like root beer Fizzies. Sometimes the taste buds get a thrill out of walking a tightrope.

And then, after two jars (admittedly several years worth) it was gone. Never again to be seen in any store I visited. Now, finally, I know why. I wonder when the official ban went into effect? Had I risked my health with bootlegged Vegemite?

I tried Marmite, but it wasn't the same. Whatever was in Vegemite that made it taste edible to me (folate?) Marmite lacked.

Since I won't be going to Australia anytime this century I suppose I will never taste Vegemite again. I am reminded of a children's book I once read about a snapping turtle named Big John Turkle. Big John was a melancholy sort and no wonder. One fine afternoon he dined on a shrimp salad sandwich which had fallen off a rowboat. He lived in hope that someday he would come

across another such feast. I think that's one of the saddest things I've ever read.

An Old Photograph

I looked through a family photo album with my mom. She talked about the people in the photographs and what they had been doing fifty and sixty years ago when their pictures were taken, even though she wouldn't have remembered me taking the album down off the shelf ten minutes earlier.

I turned a page and she said to me, "Now who's that?"

The "who" was me. Little more than a year old, being held by my grandfather. It wasn't that my mom didn't remember. Not yet. I've been asked that question when we come to that snapshot every time we've looked through family photos, for half a century.

The first time I must have been stumped. When I was starting grade school it struck me as funny and incredible that I – who could read and write the alphabet – had once been a tiny helpless baby.

As a teenager, to whom stupid old pictures were unendurably boring, I was just embarrassed.

When I became a young man, and went through albums on visits back home, I reflected on how long it felt since I'd been a child and since my grandfather had been gone. I was aware of having a past, already long and rich, but I was only just at the beginning of everything. The future seemed infinite.

After my own children were born, the photo of myself and my grandfather reminded me of my kids and their grandfather, my dad. The small creature in the crook of my grandfather's arm bore no resemblance to me any longer. I had become more like the invisible photographer, who must certainly have been my dad, although I hadn't thought about it before.

Today, I can't help remembering dad who's gone too.

There will be a day I turn the pages of the album by myself and

when I come to that picture I'll remember how my mom used to ask me, "Now who's that?"

Martian Summer

When I was growing up June signalled my entry into a new world. It was after school ended for the summer that my parents opened the picnic grove at the lake. For them, our move to the cottage, it meant long hours sitting by the road collecting admission fees and rising with the sun to clean the grounds and haul the previous day's trash to the dump.

But I was transported to a magical place, as far from classrooms as John Carter's Barsoom. For a few months I lived a life of adventure. My daily plans revolved around frogs and crayfish, rather than reading and arithmetic.

We had no running water, let alone hot water. There was an outhouse not far from the cottage and a big tin laundry tub did for a bath. We had no television. Back then there was nothing on but reruns in the summer anyway. The grove was next to a drive-in and at dusk, just before my bedtime, I'd cross the field to the chain link fence from where I could see the cartoons, huge, garish figures, moving in silence, except for a few stray crackles from the speakers hanging in car windows, barely audible above the sounds of crickets and peepers.

The place is owned by the state now. It's a parking lot for a boat launch. I was fortunate to have had the chance to rough it during those few summers we spent there. ●

Eric's column is excerpted from his blog at journalscape.com/ericmayer

Much Nothings About Ado

LEE LAVELL

A Hole in One

Last winter I decided it was perhaps time to see if I needed cataract surgery as my vision seemed to be getting cloudier and cloudier, so I made an appointment with an ophthalmologist. While I was waiting for that appointment which was several weeks away, I noticed that my vision was definitely getting worse. Then, one day I was rubbing my left eye and I saw that with my right eye only there seemed to be a, well, the best I can describe it, warp. Whatever I looked at straight-on just disappeared and the peripheral stuff sort of filled it in. "That's weird," I thought. "Good thing I will be seeing that ophthalmologist soon." All sorts of dire things began floating through my mind. Retinitis pigmentosa? Glaucoma? Macular degeneration? I had no idea what the symptoms of those eye diseases were.

So the day came for the eye appointment. I explained the problem to the doctor. He did all the eye drops, lights, tests, etc.

"Hmm," he said.

"Oh oh," I thought. "Hmms are never good."

"Well," he continued, "You have a perfectly healthy left eye except for the cataract, which is normal for a person your age, but..."

Buts are far worse than hmms.

"But," he went on, "besides the normal cataract in your right eye you have a macular hole."

"A *hole!*" I squeaked. "I have a *hole* in my eye. What is a macular hole?"

"You're lucky," he said. (Funny. I did not feel lucky. Having a hole in one's eye did not seem at all lucky.) "A few years ago there was nothing that could be done about a macular hole. However now there is an operation and we have a specialist right here." So he made me an appointment to have the specialist examine my eye.

So, a couple of weeks later there I was at this new doctor, who was listed as a specialist in vitreoretinal disease and surgery. Again I endured the drops, lights, assorted proddings and even a photograph (or x-ray).

"Hmm," he said. (There was that "hmm" again.) "You have a macular hole."

"So I've been told," I replied. "What exactly is a macular hole?"

The macula, I was informed, is the center of the retina. It is where the rods and cones are the most dense and it is also the thinnest portion of the retina. Occasionally that portion of the retina will tear because it is so thin. They don't know why. It could be genetic, or eye trauma, or something they don't know about, but it happens. The doctor pulled out a sheet of paper on which was a smooth line with a slight indentation in the center.

"This," he said, "Is a normal macula."

Then he pulled out another sheet on which there was another smooth line but instead of the slight indentation there was a chasm.

“This,” said the doctor “is a picture of *your* macula.”

My general reaction was, “Weargggh!”

“If you decide to have the surgery, this is what we do,” the doctor explained. “We remove vitreous fluid from your eye with a needle and replace it with a gas bubble which will press the hole together again. You will be conscious for most of the procedure but you won’t feel anything. After the surgery you will need to keep your head down for a week. Then we have to wait for the gas bubble to dissipate and be replaced by new vitreous fluid. This could take several months. Your vision will never be perfect again (well, it never was in the first place) but if the operation works, which it does eighty-five percent of the time, it will be better than it is now. You can have cataract surgery for that eye at the same time.”

I agreed to the surgery and two weeks later I met with the corneal and external disease surgeon who would do the cataract surgery. After the obligatory “Hmm...you have a macular hole,” he agreed that I did need the surgery. He informed me that his part would be done first and would take less than a half hour and the macular hole surgery would immediately follow and would take less than an hour.

I needed to get an electrocardiogram as a precaution. He and the macular

surgeon would have to set up a time when they could coordinate the procedures. A few days later I had the appointment. I was told that there was a special chair that I could rent that would aid me in keeping my head down so I ordered it.

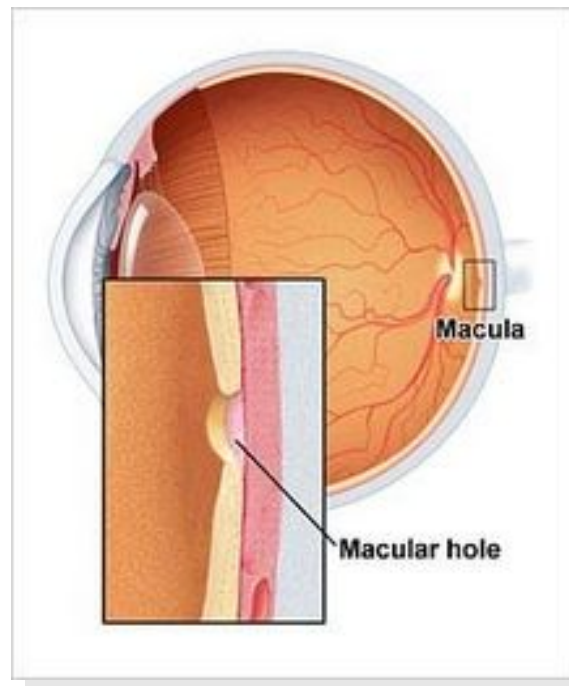
Came the week of the surgery. I was very nervous. Then, a couple of days before the time, the worst snowstorm of the season hit Indianapolis. I was snowed in. I called the doctor. “Help!” I said. “I’m snowed in.”

“That’s all right,” they said. “So are we.”

The surgery was rescheduled in two weeks. Finally the day came. I had to be there at six a.m. for prep with the operation starting at eight. After the usual drops, a thing was put into one of my veins for the sedation/anesthesia and I was wheeled in and something was secured over my face so I could see nothing although I could hear everything, including all sorts of nasty whirring sounds. I was anesthetized for a whole five minutes during the procedure. Finally it was over with.

“This will sting a little,” someone said.

“Yee-ow!” They ripped the covering off my face, removing a few eyebrows in the process, I think. This was the most painful part of the whole thing. After about a half hour in recovery I was sent home with loads of drops which had to be applied two, three, and four times a day, a brilliant green “bracelet” that warned everyone that I had a gas bubble in my



eye and dire things could happen, and instructions that I couldn't lift anything over ten pounds. ("But my cats weigh twelve pounds," I protested pitifully.) I had to go back the next day to be checked.

Then came my week of "head down." I prefer to think of it as "hell week." It is incredible how boring things can be just staring at one's feet. If I had known this was coming I would have chosen more interesting floor coverings. Let us now consider the chair that was supposed to be so helpful. I can only presume that the Marquis de Sade had some influence in its design. I am told it resembles some kind of massage chair. One straddles the seat, placing ones knees on rests on either side. There is an armrest and a headrest that places ones face downward. There is no way I could get my head in an even remotely comfortable position. The padding was not designed for a person who wears glasses, no



matter how desperately I adjusted it. For the most part I just gave up on it and sat with my face down. I had a hand held TV on which I could watch some of my local stations to pass the time, and audio books certainly helped. My cat, Carrie, who does not like to cuddle, suddenly decided she would like to sit on my

shoulder or hip. I crashed into things because I couldn't look where I was going when I was walking. (Straight down does not give one a great view of ahead.)

Since then I've had some follow-ups with both doctors. I am told that the "implant" is in place and the macular hole is closed. Now it is a question of waiting until the gas bubble goes away, which could take a couple of months at least, before I will know exactly what kind of vision I will have in that eye. •

It All Depends On Your Point Of View Dept.

After having dug to a depth of 10 meters last year, Scottish scientists found traces of copper wire dating back 100 years and came to the conclusion that their ancestors already had a telephone network more than 100 years ago.

Not to be outdone, in the weeks that followed, British scientists dug to a depth of 20 meters, and shortly after, headlines in the UK newspapers read:

"British archaeologists have found traces of 200 year old copper wire and have concluded that their ancestors already had an advanced high-tech communications network a hundred years earlier than the Scots."

One week later *The Klub*, a Sunburg, MN newspaper reported the following:

"After digging as deep as 30 meters in corn fields on a local farm, Ole Johnson and Sven Larsen, self-taught archaeologists, reported that they found absolutely nothing. Sven and Ole have therefore concluded that 300 years ago Norwegians were already using wireless."

Wither Fandom?

TED WHITE

This time around, I want to use this column to respond to an item in the last issue of this fine fanzine. I'm referring to Dave Locke's interview of *Pixel* columnist Eric Mayer. I hope this won't be seen as too incestuous, but Eric said some things I feel a strong need to respond to and the subject falls well within the purview of this column.

But first, a disclaimer. No, the parent company of Pixel Productions (Uninc.) does *not* hold the first mortgage on my house, nor I am in the secret employ of a fannish cartel. But it is true that Eric and I have had our differences in the past (a couple decades ago, actually), and that it was his dislike for what he perceived to be the fannish community I inhabited which led him to christen it "Café Fandom" – a name I rather liked. In any event, I have no desire to rake over old coals, and I hope that in any ensuing discussion we can both remain civil in our discourse. What I am responding to here are words and ideas – not the person or personality of their author.

I didn't originally intend to respond at all, but on one of those private, secret email lists I belong to, someone else flung these words at me, all but daring me to respond to them: "Writing faanish articles isn't good practice for writing anything other than faanish articles. In fact, if you have in the back of your mind any ambition to write professionally, fanwriting is almost certainly a

bad idea." He flung those words at me because he knew they challenged some of my most basic precepts.

But let's not take that statement out of context. Here's what Eric said, last issue:

"As for developing my wordwhipping skills...well, if I hadn't stumbled across fandom I doubt I would have continued to develop my skills at all. I wasn't enthused about writing for local magazines and newspapers and I wasn't skilled enough to sell to larger markets. The Internet, which gives everyone an excuse to write and some kind of audience, wasn't around. If not for fandom I would have had no incentive to keep writing. Earning a couple of college degrees, marrying, starting work, and having kids would've given me every incentive not to write. If you don't write, you can't develop your skills.

However, while fandom kept me whipping the words, to some extent it encouraged me to whip them the wrong way. Writing faanish articles isn't good practice for writing anything other than faanish articles. In fact, if you have in the back of your mind any ambition to write professionally, fanwriting is almost certainly a bad idea.

"The problem is, fandom will reward writing that in almost any other context would be considered poor, simply

Fandom did more than teach me how to write and edit, of course. Fandom also gave me the contacts – what is called “networking” now – in prodom.

because it is faanish or because of the personalities involved. Fanwriters face the danger that rather than learning, they simply repeat the same mistakes that have garnered them praise before. Of course if your sole aim is to write for fanzines then there is no reason not to keep doing whatever works for your chosen audience. Fanwriting has some peculiarities. When you write a fan article you know pretty much who you're writing for. You share a faanish background with them. You're acquainted with the same people and the same in-jokes and use the same jargon. Plus, fans take a familial interest in each other. Fanwriting is a bit like writing a letter to your mom. The best fanwriting exploits our familiarity with each other and our shared faanish culture. On the other hand, when you write a book or a story or a magazine article, beyond maybe knowing you're writing for readers who like a particular genre, you're writing for total strangers. They don't know you, or care about you, or necessarily share your background. It's entirely up to the writer to engage the readers' interests and find some common ground. I was fortunate in that there were quite a few fans around ... who were willing to accept essentially mundane essays about my family, my childhood and so forth as being close enough for fanac. Those essays gave me the chance to hone some useful skills. If I had been confined to writing strictly faanish material –

which I also did and enjoyed doing – I might've learned nothing but bad habits.”

There's a lot of truth in what Eric said. To the extent that there has always been poor or bad fanwriting, what he says applies to it. There are fans in fandom who, like our mothers, believed in “encouraging” other fans even when the results were discouraging. There are fans who believe that any criticism of any fanwriting is Wrong, because, after all, fans do it as a *hobby*, and shouldn't be held to any standards of excellence. These fans will indeed praise shoddy writing and give it positive feedback when negative feedback would be more appropriate.

What strikes me as decidedly odd about this is that when Eric and I were having our disagreement, back in the '80s, it was over exactly this point – and Eric was *defending* the Pollyanna approach he now condemns.

But I don't want to revive that argument. I want to present another point of view.

When I discovered fandom I was 13. I thought of myself as an artist, not as a writer. I was still largely unformed in my writing talents and skills, and I got Cs in my English classes. What writing I did held no clue to my future career as a professional writer or editor. If you had a time machine and you used it to go back to 1951 to tell me that one day I'd have over a dozen SF novels published and I'd be a prozine editor, I would have regarded you with incredulity and then burst out laughing at the ridiculousness

of such an idea. Those were goals I dreamed of, but saw little chance of achieving.

But I did achieve them, and I owe that achievement primarily to fandom.

Fandom did more than teach me how to write and edit, of course. Fandom also gave me the contacts – what is called “networking” now – in prodom. I met the people who would be instrumental in my career – Don Wollheim, Avram Davidson, Larry Shaw, Henry Moskowitz/Morrison – through fandom, while I was still a young fan, still in high school. They all knew me initially as an active fan, not as an aspiring pro.

As a very young fan I sent ultra-short and rather bad SF stories to the fanzines which published such stories. Strangely enough, my peer in those fanzines was a young Terry Carr, who was blurbed in one such fanzine as “The next Bradbury!” But, funny thing: I didn’t *believe* the too-kind feedback I got on those stories. I knew they weren’t good. I read real SF every day and I could see the difference.

(The only positive feedback I got that meant anything to me was a letter from Marion Zimmer Bradley. She didn’t lavish praise on my stories, but she did say she thought I had some good ideas and that some day she’d like to collaborate with me on a story. I reminded her of that ten years later, and we collaborated on “Phoenix,” my first sale to *Amazing* (in 1962), which became the first chapter of my *Phoenix Prime*. That same month I also collaborated on a story, “I, Executioner,” with Terry Carr, which

sold to *If* and became the first chapter of my *Android Avenger*.)

After I gave up on those early stories I concentrated on learning to be a fanwriter, a writer for fanzines. I started at the bottom, writing barely functional prose, cudgeling my brains for ideas, subjects to write about. Just like any other neofan of the day, really.

I was growing up, going through my teens. I was unexceptional as a fan in that era. Most fans then were in high school or college – or drafted into the Army.

As a fan I was well aware of the contrasts between the best and worst fanzines, the best and worst fanwriting. Sometimes they were thrown in my face. Redd Boggs informed me that my cruddy little fanzine, *Zip*, was not good enough for him to send me his *Skyhook* in trade. When I borrowed copies of *Skyhook* to read, the contrast was obvious. The fanzine was impeccably mimeographed and featured writers like James Blish (a columnist as “William Atheling”) and Walt Willis. And Willis himself, far kinder to neofans than Boggs, traded me *Hyphen* for my fanzine and sent me one of the last copies of *The Enchanted Duplicator*.

Here was fanwriting! This “word-whipping” was *good*. It was as good as professional writing, if in a parallel venue. The fans who wrote for *Skyhook*, *Grue*, *Oops!*, *Hyphen* and the other best fanzines of the day were not inferior to the writers who appeared in contemporaneous issues of *The New Yorker*.

And those fanwriters set the standards I strove to meet.

Terry Carr was no small help. One year older than me, and a

Here was fanwriting! This “word-whipping” was good. It was as good as professional writing, if in a parallel venue.

Our collaboration went beyond co-editing. We also co-wrote. When one of us was stenciling something the other had written, we'd do some rewriting as we cut the stencils.

fan for two years longer (he became a fan at 12), he lived on the opposite coast, but we became friends and friendly rivals as fans. When, at my urging, he moved to New York City in 1961, we began an intense personal relationship. We saw each other daily.

I had opened a mimeo shop in the Village earlier that year, and it had morphed into "Towner Hall," the principal fannish hangout in New York City, and the place where many fanzines were published. Terry fit right in. I gave him a key so he could get in early in the morning and have the place to himself while he wrote would-be professional stories. In the afternoons and evenings we'd be putting out *Void* and *Lighthouse*.

We were both heavily influenced as fanwriters by Charles Burbee and Francis Towner Laney, fandom's original insurgents. Terry had put out *The Incomplete Burbee* a couple of years earlier. Typing up the stencils for that, he'd absorbed a lot of Burbee's style. I, on the other hand, had written for *Void* "A Day With Calvin Thos. Beck," which Harry Warner had favorably compared with Laney's work. We kidded each other about being the new-generation Burbee and Laney.

In 1958 Terry and Ron Ellik had started up *Fanac*, initially a weekly newszine, then a biweekly after Ron dropped out, due to college pressures. *Fanac* remains the best-written fannish newszine of all time, a model for every fannish newszine that followed, none of which equaled it. Terry was also putting out an

increasingly good genzine, *Innuendo*.

Once in New York, Terry merged *Innuendo* with *Void*, becoming its fourth co-editor (the other three: founder Greg Benford, Pete Graham, and myself). By then I'd succeeded my early *Zip* with *Stellar* (a fanzine devoted to fiction *about* fans or fandom, which Redd Boggs loved), replaced *Stellar* with *Gambit*, and joined *Void* when Greg's twin brother Jim dropped out in 1959.

So we were at a good place in our respective careers as fans to collaborate on fanzines. But our collaboration went beyond co-editing. We also co-wrote. When one of us was stenciling something the other had written, we'd do some rewriting as we cut the stencils. Always, when the other was present (usually at another typewriter or working on the mimeoscope, stenciling art), and unfailingly reading the changes aloud, amid chortles of glee at our cleverness. Thus, portions of Terry's *Void* editorials might be written by me, and portions of both Pete's and my editorials by Terry. And we often made up each other's editorial responses to letters. (All of Pete's best responses were by Terry.)

There was some competitiveness involved – especially from my point of view. I wanted to attain and maintain what I saw as Terry's higher level. I wanted to be as good as he was. And he, no doubt, wanted to keep an edge of superiority over me. We both benefited. We both got better.

So what exactly were we writing? Fanwriting, of course. But many kinds of fanwriting, from serious articles to brief toss-offs in response to letters. Funny stuff and serious stuff. At one point the three of us (Terry, Pete and I) created an entire hoax issue of Ted Pauls' *Kipple*, a major fanzine of the day. We wrote the entire issue. It fooled a lot of fans, although we buried the actual credits in its letter column.

Much of what we wrote was anecdotal. Fannish humor, stories about funny things fans said and did – very much in the Burbee-Laney tradition. These are pieces told as narrative, with dialogue and punch-lines. I credit them with teaching me how to write fiction of any kind.

The nuts and bolts of professional fiction writing are to be found in things like learning to put each speaker in a separate paragraph, learning how to punctuate a sentence which includes but is not solely dialogue, or how often to include “he/she said”s in dialogue-rich text. Then there’s setting up a situation and resolving it, creating scenes. Beyond that, pacing, believable characterization and story lines, and the organic development of a plot out of the intersection of characters and situation.

All of these things I learned to do through fanwriting: convention reports, fannish anecdotes, anything in which I might tell a story about people – fans – and reproduce their conversation to humorous or serious effect.

As for professional non-fiction, well, that too I learned in fanzines. I wrote articles, book reviews, fanzine reviews, even (jazz) record reviews for fanzines before I ever sold an article or review professionally.

My first professional sale was to *Playboy*. It was an anecdote Algis Budrys had told me and subsequently given me permission to write and try to sell. Then-editor Ray Russell bought it for “Playboy After Hours,” and the check opened my first checking account. (Ten years later, as the new editor of *Amazing*, I bought a story from Ray. Full circle.) Unfortunately, *Playboy* never used my piece. But their check was good.

My second sale was to *Fantastic Universe*, a prozine edited by Hans Steffan Santesson, someone else whom I’d met as a fan. He asked me to do a con report on the 1959 Phillycon. I did, and he both paid for it and published it.

But most of my sales then were to jazz magazines. I was a columnist for Tom Wilson’s *Jazz Guide* and a contributing editor to *Metronome*, for which I wrote a column, club date reviews, book reviews and record reviews. I recycled some reviews I’d first published in fanzines, and what I was writing was a direct continuation of the kind of thing I had written for fanzines – a seamless transition for me. It was only a small step beyond that when I wrote record liner notes.

I was pretty heavily immersed in the New York jazz scene at

Fandom is not and never has been a stepping-stone to prodom, and there is no reason why most fans should regard their fanwriting as preparation for a professional writing career.

the time. I met and got to know many of my heroes, key among them Charles Mingus, whose music consistently blew me away. (My articles about his 1962 Town Hall Concert, and the resulting album, are extensively quoted in the notes for the Blue Note CD reissue of that concert.)

But by 1962 I could see that writing about jazz would not support me adequately. There was too little work available, and too many of us (we all knew each other well) competing for it. I'd been doing journalistic pieces for *Rogue* magazine when Frank Robinson was its editor, but he was replaced by an alcoholic expulper named Bruce Elliott, and I lost that venue. It was time to make a career-shift.

I decided to write SF professionally. I started selling short stories in August, 1962, and books (the first one with Terry Carr) in 1963. In the course of the 1960s I had over a dozen SF novels published, juvenile and adult, hardcover and paperback, as well as one non-SF novel, the Captain America book, *The Great Gold Steal*.

I learned a lot "on the job," as I wrote those books. That was inevitable, because, as Eric notes, ultimately *practice* is what develops us as writers.

Eric is exactly right when he says "If you don't write, you can't develop your skills." In the end that is far more important than where your writing appears – fanzines or professionally. Writing is a skill which develops through exercise, like an athletic skill.

But the ability to learn and improve is dependent on one's motivation. Some people don't want to "improve" their writing. They do not strive to meet higher standards of any kind. For them correct spelling and adequate grammar is enough (if not more than enough). For them, "fanwriting" is the equivalent to a letter to one's family. Such people resist and slough off any and all criticism, even the most gentle. To criticize them is to attack them, they think. They see what they write as an intrinsic extension of themselves, not something separate, an artifact to be criticized,

changed, or improved. These people will never be professional writers (unless by a fluke of some sort), and as such they serve neither as role models nor as bad examples. They are simply irrelevant to this discussion.

Likewise, fandom is not and never has been a stepping-stone to prodom, and there is no reason why most fans should regard their fanwriting as preparation for a professional writing career.

But at the same time, fanwriting can be the way to learn to be a *writer*. What one does with that skill, once learned, is an individual choice. For me it has been a lifetime career.

And for me it has always been important to read those writers – fan or pro – who were *better* than I. I actually find it hard to read professional writers who are not as good as I am. I squirm with shared embarrassment over their mistakes, because I recognize them as mistakes I've made and learned from, but they have nothing to teach me now.

The good writers are those whose works I read with admiration, looking to pick up some new approaches or ideas. How did he (or she) *do* that? I ask myself. And then I figure it out. I've learned something.

I used to do that when I read Charles Burbee or Francis Laney (and I should recommend in passing *Ah! Sweet Laney!*, a collection edited by Robert Lichtman and beautifully published by Pat Virzi for the last Corflu, copies still available from Pat for \$15).

Then I did it while reading Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. I reread all my Chandler books while writing *Android Avenger* (Ed Gorman says to good effect). These days it's Elmore Leonard whom I admire.

The point is to set and maintain high standards for oneself as a writer. Not absolute standards, but a bar one can raise as one gains in ability. Fandom has always offered examples of writers (and fanzines) who set and met high standards.

Strive to join them. Both you and fandom will be better for it. •

Found In Collection

CHRISTOPHER GARCIA

So, you'd have to be far, far away to not know that I got nominated for a Hugo. I've been blathering about it for weeks. It's one of those things that I never thought would happen, I really didn't. I have to say that it's a funny thing since it isn't the type of thing that I do *The Drink Tank* or any of my fan writing for, but it's a nice thing to have happen. Go figure.

I've mentioned to my folks at work that I got nominated and most, though not nearly all, of them knew what the Hugos were. We're chock full of SF readers and a couple of fans, though none into the whole fanzine thing. Over the last few weeks, there's been a nutty sort of dance that many folks at the museum have been doing.

Case in point: lunch. Friday.

Alana and I are eating Chinese food and playing The Great Dalmutti. I've got a killer hand, and thought I'm last in the order, I've got good enough cards to win in most circumstances. I play them and I'm taking the lead. I play 2 twos, normally the lowest pair in the game.

Alana played two 1s by using a Joker, meaning that she went out before me, I had held on to a high card knowing that I would be able to play it once the pair of twos won the trick.

Alana: "Well Chris, I just wanted to let you know what it's going to feel like when you lose in September."

It suddenly got very cold in that room.

Now, we're trashtalkers in the extreme and I've often hit Alana with some brutal zingers. She once played a set of cards that I could play on and I responded "What a lovely gift! That's the first time you've ever given anyone something that didn't require them to take Penicillin."

Yeah, we're a little rough on each other.

The next few days I took some serious ribbing from all sorts of people about the Hugo nomination thing. Everyone knows that I do my zines at work, and my boss even said that I should put the museum's logo on them to indicate that they were made here. I said I'd get right on that...as soon as the museum paid me an ad rate. We all had a good laugh.

One girl, we call her Gilroy, came up to me the other day. She was smiling and I've always enjoyed having her around. I was sitting at my desk when she came over with a book. Now, it's not rare for Gilroy, our Collections Registration Intern, to bring a book up to me to look over to answer some question or other about the history of the book, but this was a new book.

"Hey Chris, have you seen this?" she said, offering it forward.

She handed me a brand new copy of Dave Langford's *The End of Harry Potter*, a book that sets out to answer all the questions about how the Potter series will conclude, which means that it'll

be obsolete by August.

"No, not until now," I answered, taking the book and flipping through a few pages.

"Is that the same guy running for the Hugo against you?" she said. I hadn't thought of the Hugos as a race, but the idea was oddly appropriate.

"Yes, he's nominated too," I said, flipping to a section about the Weasley Twins. "Have you read it?"

"Yeah, last night," she said, and smiled that smile that means she's about to drop something on me.

"And...?"

"You're screwed," she said, the smile becoming slightly more satisfied.

So yes, the word on my nomination has sunk into the consciousness of the museum. The Chief Fundraiser found me the other day. He was looking grumpy.

"What's up, Gary?" I asked.

"Numbers don't look good."

"Really?"

"Yeah. By the way, congratulations on the nomination."

"Thanks much."

"It's good to know that my department won't be the biggest loser in the museum."

Yep, we're those kind of people.

All the good-natured jocularity aside, everyone's been wonderful. They even got me a card. I was kinda shocked. Now, I have to admit that I deserve the jibes considering the hell I put folks through while we're playing cards. I'm known for a brutal, yet still comical and friendly, streak because of the verbal Hell I can unleash. It happens. But then again, I've never managed to get in a line as snuff-worthy as Billiam did the other day. He's an emo guy who has had a few difficulties over the last year. He's a big guy, slightly larger than me. Once, while moping because I'd severely beaten him at cards, he said he was just going to have to jump out the window.

"You won't do that. There no way you could jump that high."

Yep, we're those kind of people.

While playing the other day, with Billiam being the big winner, he snapped on me.

"You know Chris, you should probably give a concession speech for every game you lose. You gotta get your practice in before Japan!"

And I think I laughed harder than anyone else. •

One of the Chris Garcias in this line-up could win the Hugo as Best Fanwriter and as editor of the Best Fanzine. Your guess?



Being Frank

PETER SULLIVAN

Prolapse 6

(Peter Weston)

I dunno, you wait 23 years for an issue of *Prolapse*, and then four come along all at once... Peter Weston's zine is now definitely into the groove of regular publication, and has developed an interesting niche as a British fanhistory fanzine, not a genre of which I'm aware of any previous examples.

Peter is obviously not entirely comfortable with running *Prolapse* as just an e-fanzine, and has come up with a similar compromise to that adopted by Robert Lichtman for *Trap Door* – the paper version goes out first, with the electronic version being posted to www.efanzines.com later, in this case after a month. Given that a significant part of Peter's target audience are old-timer fans for whom even photocopy is a tad suspect as a print medium, never mind PDF, this is fair enough. And it hopefully means that even those who didn't receive a paper copy can read the zine pretty soon after this review appears.

Peter's editorial this time has three main strands. The first is the fundamental issue of what we mean by fanhistory anyway. Just like any history, you have to recognize that there are many "histories," depending upon what evidence is used. Not even a bare listing of 'facts' can be an entirely objective history – who decides what is a historical fact and what is irrelevant happen-

stance? This reminds me of reading G.M. Carr's classic historiography text, "What Is History?" many years ago as a teenager, which first introduced me to these kind of ideas.

Notwithstanding this, Peter sticks up for Rob Hansen's *Then* – described as a 'history-in-progress of British science fiction fandom,' and available on the web at fanac.org/Fan_Histories/Then/. He makes the point that, although it inevitably represents fan history as viewed by Rob and his primary sources (most notably Vinç Clarke), it's still valid as "a" fanhistory – if people perceive it as "the" fanhistory by virtue of it being the only one, that's hardly Rob's fault!

The second strand of Peter's editorial is a discussion with Mark Plummer about the Fan Guests of Honour at the various Eastercons over the years. Given that even the exact chronology of Eastercons themselves has been confused ("Was it three times in Kettering or two in the mid 1960s?"), it's perhaps unsurprising that there are gaps and inconsistencies in the records.

Finally, as Peter says, "Let's have another go at the BSFA." The troubled history of the British Science Fiction Association has been a recurring theme in previous issues. This time, Peter talks about the revival of the BSFA in 1975 after a near-collapse the previous year.

After the editorial, the first article proper is about the bidding

process that led to the 1975 Eastercon, as a brief lead in to a longer piece by British fan historian Rob Hansen, whose first convention it was. This is accompanied by two pages of photos demonstrating (as if we didn't know it already) that the 1970s were truly the decade that fashion forgot. Rob's piece is followed up by a reprint of Peter Nicholls' contemporaneous con report, giving rather a different view of the convention to Rob's retrospective goshwowboyohboy neofan perspective.

Peter was at this year's Corflu in Austin, Texas – as was Michael Moorcock, now a resident of Texas, who was enticed along by the prospect of meeting various British fannish faces from the 1960s and 1970s. As a result, Peter has managed to wheedle a long letter out of Michael, which he turns into a six-page article. My favourite snippet is his account of a trip to Liverpool in the early 1960s, during which he passed up the chance to see the Beatles at the Cavern. Actually, Earl Kemp also managed to get a piece out of Michael Moorcock for the latest *eI* – if John Scalzi can get nominated for the 2006 Best Fan Writer Hugo, maybe Michael Moorcock could be in line for a 2007 Best Fan Writer nomination?

The next piece follows on from a discussion in the previous issue about the circumstances surrounding the setting up of the Doc Weir Award in the early 1960s. Peter presents extracts from “a thick file of correspondence accumulated” by the BSFA over the years. The general impression is of an award that was created almost by accident, mainly because no-one could think of anything else to do with the money, and which has managed to survive to the present day despite a very checkered history along the way.

The final article is part of a series of “Collectors Anonymous,” by Greg Pickersgill. Here is someone who seems to have moved seamlessly from angry young man to (in the aftermath of his Fan Guest of Honour role at the 2005 Glasgow Worldcon) lovable

grumpy old man. But then I guess that it is one of the fundamental rules of British society (and not just fandom) that every “foul mouthed offensive bastard” ends up as a “new model mellow grandpa.” I note that one of the most popular programmes on TV these days is “Grumpy Old Men.” Anyway, none of this has much to do with Greg's piece, which talks about his completist tendencies regarding his SF Book Club collection

The *Prolapse* lettercol has exploded over the last few issues, taking up 12 pages this time. And with a full-page WAHF listing that implies that Peter could easily have managed a further 12 pages if he had wanted. This is one of the few disadvantages of the paper format, in that an e-fanzine could have just expanded the lettercol to fit the material available, without bothering about such bothersome practicalities as printing costs and the Post Office's 100 gramme weight band. Of course, the other way of looking at it is to say that the need to edit down to space means that the overall standard of material is higher – which certainly seems to have worked, to pick a random example, for *Ansible* over the years, ever since Dave Langford revived it on the basis of “as much news as fits on one sheet of A4 double sided.” As it is, the lettercolumn has a good mix of old-time fans brought in from fringe fandom back to the mainstream via *Prolapse*, as well as more modern fan voices like Mark Plummer and Claire Brialey – as Mark notes, in a comment picked out for a masthead interlineo, “If you keep this up for long enough you'll be able to become nostalgic about something I can remember.” •

Prolapse 6 (Peter Weston)

regular, PDF or paper, A4, 36 pages.

<http://efanzines.com/Prolapse/index.htm>

Pixelated

READERS

Mark Plummer

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Ted's column in *Pixel* #12 comes as something of a relief, as I always assumed I was alone in initially taking a resolutely low-tech approach to e-lists. In fact I still have some of my old e-list print outs, and I specifically remember that when we moved here I unpacked a vast wodge of fan-fold paper full of doubtless important-at-the-time debate about some minor league TAFF scandal from a decade or so back. I should take a lesson from Ted and dump it, if nothing else because it's probably all archived somewhere anyway. From that, and as I think I've mentioned to you before, I graduated to a system – I use the term of loosely – of floppy disks passed back and forth between myself and Claire which continued even after I'd been given email access at work because, unlike Ted, I was always wary of subjecting my account to the kind of traffic that I knew lists such as Memory Hole could generate.

I got better and graduated to my own home computer eventually although at the moment I read – and only on a generous interpretation participate in – just the one list, Wegenheim, plus a couple of other small low-traffic private list. Sometimes I wonder whether I'm actually missing out by not doing more (I'm not In The Bar, for instance) because – as Ted says – there certainly have been periods where the e-lists seem to be the happening fannish

places, but somehow I've never been entirely comfortable with the form. I don't know whether my initial fragmentary approach to e-lists – and before it, my erratic reading of Usenet groups like rec.arts.sf.fandom on the office library PC – rather coloured my approach but, to be honest, I've never entirely grasped the dynamic and I tend to attribute this to having what I think of as a periodicals mindset. To me, I prefer to look at a fixed point – a fanzine, say, such as *Pixel* – to which I can respond. I'm aware that maybe (probably) other people are responding to it too, but I don't actually have to pay any attention to them at this stage because I'm looking at a static object. An e-list discussion is constantly developing, evolving, expanding and I find it difficult to jump in unless I just so happen to be there as a thread begins. The answer may be that you have to respond to each separate element in a self-contained way, although set against that I know that I find it personally slightly annoying when as so often happens somebody wakes up to to comment on a few-days-old post in way that shows no awareness of what may have subsequently been said.

I also think I need too much thinking time, frankly, and maybe this is another area where Ted's straight-to-stencil background stands him in good stead. My preferred mode is still to write something, and the sit and stew on it for a while, thinking whether

I can improve the phraseology, whether I'm actually saying what I think I'm saying, whether the person to whom I'm commenting is saying what I think s/he's saying. Essentially, I am too slow moving for fast-paced modern fandom.

I saw the "In The Bar Live" at Corflu and I'd have to say that it could have been better. The problem though I think was less that the readings were "stripped of their context" – although I'm guessing here as I haven't seen them in context – but more that most of the readers weren't very good performers and didn't seem to have rehearsed or practiced. Now Graham Charnock was good, as Ted says, and I'm sure it's not coincidental that he's the one who has a solid background in performance as a musician and singer. I wouldn't rate the programme item as a complete waste of time, but I'm inclined to mark it down as another example of how when you want to come across as being really spontaneous it really helps if you've prepared your spontaneity in advance.

Minor point: but I don't think Ted's right when he says *Wegenheim* is named after a German helmet. I've never entirely understood where the name comes from, but I think it's an allusion to an old ratfan creation called Brian Wegenheim.

As always, I'm impressed by the visual aspect of *Pixel*. In particular, I like that page 3 Brad Foster cartoon. Very apt: the sponsored links in my Gmail account often seem to be encouraging me to buy air-conditioning systems... •

Joseph T. Major

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"Dialogue with Two Fans": Try cleaning out an outhouse. It will give you a new respect for Roman technology (they invented the continuous-flow toilet).

Repeating myself, the new fans aren't pubbing their ishes because that requires too great a commitment to solidity. Far better

to vlog or whatever the latest cool new technology is. And they are so connected all the knowledge has run out their ears. (Example: someone who actually condescended to post on the James Randi Educational Foundation board, talking about these wonderful Moon Hoax videos he saw. When asked for proof, he gave more assertions, and ended up saying that nowadays we have YouTube and can't be fooled. Yes.)

"Whither Fandom?": And, from the description of Gary Farber, bowling alone on his blog, that sounds about right; the future of lists, having burned everyone out, dying of the light.

"Much Nothings About Ado": I never could bring myself to watch *Ally McBeal*. Somehow, seeing a show about a woman who could put on a fluffy white fake-fur coat and go to a costume party as a pipe cleaner, and having her obsess about bearing a child nonetheless, never quite appealed to me.

"Pixelated": Eric Mayer: The Internet may have provided us all with an extra-brain, but it has also eliminated the ability to have a cortical-thalamic pause. Which explains the various acerbities recounted by Ted White back in his column.

John Purcell: There was a case a year or so ago of a man who had a spectacular crash in his van. He was steering the van with his elbows...because he had a cell phone to each ear. I am still waiting for the real-life ultimate in going fractal which will go something like: "I was driving along the expressway at seventy and I saw a woman in the next car checking her lipstick in her rear-view mirror. That so astonished me that I choked on my doughnut and had to grab for my cup of coffee, but it still spilled on the laptop and the guy on the other cellphone asked what was wrong."

Lee Lavell: who speaks of children singing how "They are trampling out the village where the grapes of wrath are stored." They call those "mondegreens," and several of the more striking are preserved on kissthisguy.com. •

Eric Mayer

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Well, for some reason *Pixel* seems short this time. Maybe it's because I passed queasily over that long, long dialog. When Dave suggested it I agreed because I'm used to doing online interviews to promote the mystery books. I find such "mystery author" interviews to be kind of silly – I mean, who cares? – but it's an accepted thing to do and there are plenty of mystery related web sites that want interviews. But seeing something similar in a fanzine...I dunno. Seems kind of vainglorious.

Despite that, *Pixel* still looks great (another striking photo on the cover) and makes for an otherwise interesting read.

Ted White's column about lists was enlightening. I was not aware of the lineage of all those lists. Fascinating. Ted's done a real historical service here.

The few times I've ventured onto lists I've beat a hasty retreat. I get nervous in crowds and lists, to me, are the electronic version of crowds. More importantly I can't keep up with the activity. I can't read and digest hundreds of posts a week, let alone keep track of all the threads. I can't compose my thoughts, let alone my writing, quickly enough to respond. By the time I figure out what I want to say, write it down and hit send, the conversation has moved on and I'm left muttering to myself. Also, unlike fanzines, which can be read and responded to at one's leisure, when time is available, lists demand immediate attention, and constant scanning, if you want to be able to (in in my case futilely attempt to) contribute to a discussion in a timely fashion.

It was often said that the best part of fanzines was the discussion, and zines tended to be taken over by loccols. Lists (and blogs and such) have reduced fanac to only the "best" part. Nothing but discussion. Just the icing. I know people occasionally post excellent articles/essays to lists but these seem to get lost. Of course, as I just mentioned my experience with lists is very limited so my

impression could be wrong.

My dad, like Lee Lavell, was a teacher and I'm here to tell you (and agree with her) that teachers don't work less hours than anyone else – the schedule is just different. Teachers at least are paid better today but don't get the respect they deserve. Few professions influence people's lives more. When my dad died a couple years ago, half the people at the funeral were former students. Most of them had devoted their lives to art (which my dad taught) in one way or another. Inspiring students is probably more important than the specific things one teaches them.

I'm glad Chris was able to finally award David Levine with his deserved victory. Chris isn't the only one without a photographic memory. While I was at my brother's recently I glanced at a few old issues of *Groggy* which he still has (and I don't) and learned all sorts of things about my own history which I had entirely forgotten. For example, I apparently – or so I claimed in the early eighties – had a portfolio of fan art in Mike Gorra's special zine devoted to the Tucker Fund. My only consolation, being reminded of that (a thing somewhat similar to the dialog in this) is that I do recall that Bob had a good sense of humor. •

Lloyd Penney

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Pixel 11:

Congratulations on *Pixel's* good showing with the FAAn Awards. It's showing that that it is not necessarily the medium that is important, but the message, Marshall McLuhan notwithstanding. However, the medium is putting out the message that e-zines are making their mark, and becoming part of the fannish landscape. I don't think they will replace paper zines, but will instead complement them.

Lee Lavell proves that living is dangerous to your health, no matter what you do or how you live. Yvonne had a recent food al-

lergy test, and found that many of her health problems can be traced to many foods she has been found to be allergic to. I wonder how many of us should have a food allergy test, and how much benefit we'd get because of it. Also, it's true that being exposed to allergens and toxins will build up our resistance, but protecting our children to the extent where we might as well cover them in bubble wrap proves to be a detriment. Our lives have been made more and more complex in good and bad ways,

I enjoy the company of both dogs and cats, but given my druthers, I'd have a cat on my lap any time. We were deciding about the offer of a cat from a good friend of ours when Yvonne had that allergy test...yep, she's allergic to the little furballs. Dogs, not at all. No justice, especially for me.

Having a Scottish mother, I had to learn many terms she uses to this day...the lift of the building, the boot of the car, the iron needs a new flex. That's elevator, trunk and electrical cord respectively. I've, of course, learned lots of Canadian-based words over the years, sitting on the chesterfield, and television and US fanzines have given me lots of American vocabulary to worry about. So, no matter where the zine comes from, I can give it some home-based response, in a dialect the faned can relate to.

I've worked enough conventions to have wondered about running or helping to run a Corflu...alas, that may never happen now, but most of the trick in running cons is remembering everything, and catering to the specific needs and traditions of the group you're attracting. It is good to see that the locations of future Corflus can still be agreed to amicably...I just wish they could be a little closer to where I am. The chances of getting to Las Vegas are remote, so getting to all the other agreed-to places will be nigh onto impossible.

I did a little research about computer museums, figuring that Chris Garcia can't possibly work for the only one. Looking up here, I found a computer museum at York University in Toronto, one in

Nova Scotia, and the Personal Computer museum in Brantford, Ontario. So, I expect, we might just ship off our Comptometer to one of these places, instead of spending big bucks to ship it to Chris.

Discussion of fandom is fine, and remembrances of how it used to be are educational. We do have to look forward, and find out what the requirements to be called a fan are these days, and in days to come. We must be online, and our interests will vary. I have always been interested in fanhistory, but as enjoyable as looking at our past is, we might learn more if we started looking at our future. I'd like to see where we're all going.

I have no idea what's happened to Joe Maraglino...a quick Google of his name shows him as active in Worldcon bidding in the early to late '90s with the Niagara Falls in '98 Worldcon bid, plus *Astromancer Quarterly*, and some dabbling in book publishing. After that, he and his wife, zine illustrator and cartoonist Linda Michaels, seem to have disappeared.

As I write, given what's in the fannish news today, Chris Garcia definitely has his fannish street cred down pat...he's gotten two Hugo nominations, one for Best Fan Writer and another for Best Fanzine for his *Drink Tank*. Congrats to all the nominees, and I honestly thought I was going to see lots of Japanese names on that ballot.

Pixel 12:

Out of the older faneds Eric Mayer lists, only Brian Earl Brown's *Sticky Quarters* ever made it to my mailbox. I am wrestling right now with the balance between fanac and making a living. Just lately, I've had a lot of job opportunities come up, so the resumes stream out, and hope springs relatively eternal, for possibly shorter definitions of the word 'eternal'. I don't read as much SF as I used to, and I rarely, if ever, go to SF movies or watch SF television... How old was I when I discovered fandom? I was 18, so I

qualify for First Fandom associate membership as of December. Thirty years in the trenches.

I hope Chris Garcia's efforts at running fanzine lounges at conventions have been more successful than Garth Spencer's. From what Garth writes, he's spent a few conventions alone in his lounge, with almost no interest in what's going on. The only time I've run a fanzine lounge was the one at the Winnipeg Worldcon in 1994, which was very successful.

Indeed, space travel no longer has that excitement it had in the 60s and 70s. Through Yvonne, I'm getting a peek inside the world of space activists, where the excitement still lingers. We all have the same question...how do we bring back the excitement, the sense of wonder, to space exploration? It peaked momentarily when Burt Rutan's SpaceShip One won the X Prize, but what's happened lately? Not even the space station is anything exciting.

Lee Lavell, you have a macular hole? Is there yet any treatment for this? Not only did I learn a lot about the body of the eye during my retinal surgery, but I used to work for a local broadcasting company for the blind and low-sighted, VoicePrint, and I learned a lot there, too. •

John Purcell

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You know, David, editorial presence or not, *Pixel* is a dangd fine fanzine. Issue to issue, it contains a nice balance of material that always makes for a pleasant read. F'rinstance, the "Dialog With Two Fans" provides a nice bit of fan historical writing in which I recognize a whole mess of names that Eric Mayer mentions. Not only do I remember *Title* (another fine fanzine), but I agree with Eric's assessment that Brian Earl Brown's *Sticky Quarters* was an under-rated fanzine of the time (mid-1970s); it – *SQ* – also provided fledgling faneds like me with addresses of fans and zines that I could trade my zines with. Personally, I don't think Brian is

given much weight for his contributions to fanzine fandom, but I could be wrong. For me, I always liked BEB-zines, and looked forward to receiving them in the mail.

I wouldn't say Pixel contains no editorial presence. I do edit articles/columns when necessary, and I'm pretty adept at creating (typographic) widows and orphans...

In this dialog, Eric and Dave discuss the word-smithing art as developed by fan writing. While I agree that the language specific to fan writing can be detrimental to a developing writer's style due to fandom's extensive jargon and in-jokiness (there's a word for you), any field of professional writing will have that. The academic writing that I'm producing for publication certainly has a ton of academes, and that's just one example. Sports has a pile of jargon, as do economics, philosophy, science, and so on. The key here, I do believe, is that a writer needs to learn how to use the language specific to his or her field of interest. The main thing to remember here is that the writer is learning how to communicate in print as effectively as possible to a target audience. Clarity of expression is the goal, and high quality fan writing can be just as enjoyable as the finest educational theory hoo-hah stuff that I read every day. (There's an oddball simile for you.) Communication is what we're shooting for, and the practice that fan writing provides does help shape a writer's style and ability to express ideas with language. Practice of any kind helps, and I'm afraid that fan writing is a practice that too many folks have looked down upon, which is a shame. I'd stack anything by Willis, Shaw, Carr, Burbee, and Langford (and others, too) up against the finer literary satires in literature. There is a lot of fine, fine writing in fandom, but it is true that the enjoyment factor does increase if the reader understands the jargon and in-jokes present in the work.

Like Eric, I found fandom in the early 70s, although not in

Amazing. A friend of mine told me about this science fiction convention in Minneapolis called Minicon and said, “let’s go check it out.” So we did, and the rest is history. But I remember the “Clubhouse” feature, and found that intriguing. “Fanzines,” I would muse. “Must check these out.” Here’s something else a whole bunch of us share in the fannish cosmos. How connected we all are to each other.

After reading Eric’s comments about it, and yours, I’m not so sure that the “Clubhouse” column wasn’t where I first heard about zines as well.

Onward quickly into Ted White’s column. Recently – about a month ago – I finally joined the Fmzfen list, and find it interesting. There’s been some very fan historical discussion going on recently, plus people asking for information about this or that, which already has made this foray a good decision on my part. The whole schtick behind listing this year’s Hugo nominees in alphabetical order sans headings was quite funny, and I’m giggling as I type this, making me correct too many miss-spellings as I go. I have to admit, I do like it, and plan on hanging around Fmzfen for a while. This listserv is going to help me stay connected and sane during my final dissertation phase.

Lee Lavell’s musings about being a teacher really hit home. I am an adjunct college English teacher – being considered for a full-time position at a number of colleges now (’tis the season to be hiring for Fall ’07 openings) – and Lee is so right about watching the growth of students. I don’t see that as much in the college-aged crowd, but growth still occurs. The give-and-take of ideas in the college classroom is exciting for me, and I love it. My goal as a teacher at this level is to help develop student critical thinking skills which the American public educational system seems designed to atrophy. Once their brain-matter kicks into gear, classes get fun. Yeah, I love teaching, and a sense of humor

helps a great deal. It is still a balancing act, though, since you have to try to avoid stomping on people’s feelings and beliefs, but there’s a lot of leeway in the college classroom that you can’t have in the primary grades. It is a very enjoyable career path, and I’m glad that I finally figured out what I wanted to be when I grew up. So it took me 45 years. That’s not too many...

A fine zine, and I will close by wishing Lee Lavell well and that she recovers fully from her eye surgery. She had a macular hole repaired? Ouch! Hope all goes well, Lee. We love you around here.

Thank you, David, for the issue, and I’m glad you’re thinking of running the same title for the foreseeable future. However, your comment about renaming it *Avis* gave me a chuckle. If your zine comes in second again next year, then change *Pixel* to *Avis*. Then that would be the fannish thing to do. •

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I enjoyed Dave Locke’s interview with Eric Mayer in *Pixel* No. 12, not least because it gave me a solid overview of Eric’s fannish origins, his life and career, and what he’s up to these days. Eric says that he “discovered fandom around 1972 thanks to the ‘Clubhouse’ column in *Amazing*.” That was during the period when I’d fapiated and gone on to become a founding member of The Farm, a commune in Tennessee, and was only keeping up with the tiniest bit of fan activity. So I don’t know what Eric did by way of contributing to fanzines during the ‘70s, but I do know that he started up *Groggy* in 1978 (although the first issue was called *Charm*). Because he was an active fanzine publisher when I began publishing *Trap Door* in 1983, he was on the mailing list from the start – and he responded to that scrappy first issue with one of my favorite articles in *TD*’s early issues: “My Immense Brain,” subtitled “Tales from the 99th Percentile,” in which (among other things) he confessed that his memory for baseball statistics

tended to crowd out other things such as remembering to bring his brother home from the school playground one day. That article appeared in the second issue and was very well received. Eric returned in the fourth issue with “Face to Face,” an account of attending a Kinks concert in New York and later meeting Dave Davies of that group at another event. It was also much enjoyed by *Trap Door’s* readers.

Neither of these articles involved any special knowledge of fandom on the part of their readers, and in my view could have been sold to a paying market. And this connects to my noticing that Eric draws some sharp dichotomies between fan writing – which he correctly characterizes in saying, “When you write a fan article you know pretty much who you’re writing for” – and “writing for total strangers.” Of the latter he says, “It’s entirely up to the writer to engage the readers’ interests and find some common ground.” He goes on to say, “I was fortunate in that there were quite a few fans around (like yourself) who were willing to accept essentially mundane essays about my family, my childhood and so forth as being close enough for fanac. Those essays gave me the chance to hone some useful skills. If I had been confined to writing strictly fanish material – which I also did and enjoyed doing – I might’ve learned nothing but bad habits.” Here Eric seems to be setting up a straw man – that somehow he might have been forced to write only fanish material – and then knocking it down. It seems to me that writing is writing, when it comes right down to it, and if you’re paying attention to your craft you can hone it on “essentially mundane essays” submitted to fanzines or mailing comments to a weekly apa (as per John Hertz, who no one would accuse of being a bad writer). And even with fan writing it’s necessary to “engage the reader’s interest.”

Ted’s access and introduction to e-mail parallels my own. The only apparent difference is that Ted didn’t have a computer at home at the time, whereas I’d had a computer since 1987 – but

not one that could easily (if at all) be hooked up to the Internet. The office where I worked (also starting in 1987) had computers from the first day of my employment there, but didn’t connect to the Internet until 1998. As with Ted’s experience, this access was “ostensibly for internal communications, but it was open to any and all e-mail.” And like Ted, I more or less immediately subscribed to Timebinders. I set up the first of my Yahoo mail addresses to do so, not wanting to have fanish stuff coming in at my “real” e-mail address out of concern that it might be detected and I’d get in trouble.

From there our respective history of activity on the various lists that sprung up in the wake of Timebinders’ decline is more or less parallel. And the things cropped up rapidly. As Ted writes, “It was suddenly very much like ’70s fandom and the proliferation of apas – large and small, public and private, and some both exclusive and secret. The parallel was inescapable.” The major difference is, of course, that unlike FAPA and its historic restriction to 65 members there’s no upper limit of how many people can be on any given list. And because there’s no “minac” requirement to meet, quite a few people on each list with which I’m involved lay back and “lurk,” sometimes popping up to make a contribution but otherwise quiescent. Finally, I agree with Ted that these lists *are* as important to fandom now as apas were back in their day, and the declining membership of nearly all apas is a clear sign that fandom’s group mind feels the same way.

Joseph Major is more than a little confused when, in the letter column, he refers to Frederik Pohl’s “memoir, *The Futurians*.” As no doubt I won’t be the first to point out, it was the late Damon Knight who wrote *The Futurians* – in my view perhaps the most entertaining fanish autobiography – while Pohl’s is *The Way The Future Was*, published in 1978 (and yes, it would be great if he’d write a second volume). •