

## Oasis 14 Con Report

### by Joy V. Smith



This year we left earlier for Oasis so I wouldn't miss any programming. We parked in the parking garage, bypassing valet parking and saving \$4.00. We checked in and dumped our bags, except for the totes. The big one's contents completely covered one of the freebie tables; this is where most of my old fanzines, etc. go. The small tote was for the charity auction--some fiction zines and books, including autographed ones. I dropped that off in the Art Show room after finding out where to put them. We were pre-registered, and there was hardly any line so that was quick.

We explored and then browsed the Art Show--lots of great art, including "The Chalice" by Jean Pierre Targete, "Catalyst" by Mike Conrad, and "Ambush" by Ed Cox (the cover for a Pinnacle RPG). Lots more, of course. There were also engraved, colored goblets by James Krog; wire sculptures, including a dragon; jewelry; decorated items; and Lucky Bamboo (something to do with *feng shui*) in decorated pots. Too bad the pot sculptures proved toxic to the plants; three were on display to show her intent.

At 4 p.m. I went to the painting demo by Targete. The painting was speeded-up, of course. Three boards displayed his sketches, thumbnails, and the underdrawing, along with the finished painting. One of the displayed works was "The Chalice."

The subject of his demonstration was a planet/moon with landscape below it. He started with a large circle on one side, using a permanent marker and made a sketch. He usually works in oils. The underdrawing can be very detailed and is done with marker or charcoal. He skipped that for the demo. He sprays the underdrawing with acrylic to seal it so the oils don't soak through. He also uses

acrylic--burnt sienna in this case--to get rid of the white background. (He thins with water.) He uses assorted brush sizes (for different purposes and because he doesn't like to clean them as he works).

He worked from his sketch, which he put aside, to create the painting. Painting is done in layers. He used a palette board, medium to make the oil flow better, etc. It was fascinating watching patterns, shapes, the volcano and lava appear. Light is very important, but color is the last

thing he thinks about. The drawing comes first; it must be rendered well. And then he ran out of time. I really enjoyed watching him create and tell us how he does it.

After that we went to the Cthulhu Chili Challenge in the Con Suite. I voted for "Dante's Death." "Fowl Wind" (chicken) was good too. "Witches' Brew" was alcoholic, I think. There was an "I Hate Chili" dish -- mushroom soup with Irish whiskey. After that I lost track, and no way was I going to taste them all again to vote for the Hottest.

At 7:30 was the opening ceremonies; brief and fun, even more so than last year because the opening speech was sung by Tom Smith, the Filk GoH; he introduced the chairs--Terry Dahl and her husband, Jim Rogers; Author GoH Jack McDevitt; and Targete--Artist GoH. The Andre Norton scholarship winner, Kellen Stelle, was also introduced. All their speeches were short.

At 8 p.m. we went to the Tom Smith filk concert. He does a lot of parodies, puns, and different voices. He started with Leon Redbone doing Gilbert & Sullivan, a Callisto (from Xena) song sung to "Aye, Calypso" (John Denver), a twisted Winnie the Pooh/Lovecraft cross, Smurf songs sung to surfing tunes ("Smurfing USA," "Smurfer Girl," etc.), "I Want to Grow Up to Be Peter Lorre" (perfect imitation of Lorre's voice), "500 Hats" (which includes a lot of Dr. Seuss titles), *Dune* in two minutes ("Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue"), a Star Wars/12 Days of Christmas cross, Babylon 5 (five season run in 2 1/2 minutes), Bobby Goldsborough's "Honey, I Miss You" (Honey glazed ham), and a tribute to old SF --"Come With Me Baby On A Rocket Ride."

There was more filking scheduled, but I went to the Alien Artifact panel. That was

my favorite panel last year. It is so much fun! The panelists were Barbara Delaplace (moderator), Jack Haldeman, Mike Conrad, Jeff Mitchell (scientist), and Ed Cox. Their personas are xenoarcheologists who have to identify alien artifacts. This is such a great panel; these people are fast on their feet and intelligent.

Saturday morning I bought the Oasis 14 t-shirt (Targete artwork on black--very nice) and an Oasis 11 coloring book with pictures by various artists. More people arrived and registered. The con committee was busy everywhere; there was always someone around to answer my questions. Attendance was even better this year, I heard. They did more promotion online, I believe.

The freebies tables were full of media, club, and con things, including posters, pins, flyers, book marks, etc. I got lots of nifty things, some of which I'll pass on to friends and kids I know. I also came across a table with some great rocket ship models on it and talked to Steve Parady. The Scarlet Class Viper (one of the models) was designed by Parady for Richard Hatch (*Battlestar Galactica*). He also told me about the Rag Tag Fleet, a Florida-based sci-fi fan club that helps to support the revival of *Battlestar Galactica*. They enjoy other TV shows as well and publish a newsletter bimonthly as well as a fan magazine every three months.

At 1 p.m. was a Writers Workshop with Rick Wilber and Randy Miller. People paid to have their mss critiqued at this workshop, but Wilber let me and others come in and listen while he spoke generally. (Randy Miller couldn't make it, but he had read the mss, I believe...) Wilber is a journalism professor, not a creative writing teacher, but he writes short stories. In second grade he discovered SF and loved it. He read Lucky Starr and on through Heinlein, et al. He was way ahead of his peers in reading, but he was also a jock in high school, and he became a sports writer. (He has an impressive sports background.)

He learned to write fiction by doing, not by taking a course. He sold some short stories to *Analog* and wondered why some stories sold and some didn't. He learned about dramatic tension (don't give away too much; keep readers wondering) and voice (he also writes textbooks, where voice is completely different) and theme (read Joseph Conrad, especially *Lord Jim*) and POV (diction is important--part of voice)

Media journalists use black and white, not

shades of gray. It makes people more interested, especially on talk shows. Contrast gives power to stories. Set up conflicts at start of story.

Wilber's theory on the decline of short stories in magazines: Stories changed in 1952 because of TV. Short stories were written for the masses, and TV is easy short stories. By 1960, short stories in general interest magazines had practically disappeared. They were replaced by literary fiction and writing courses--the ART of short stories. SF was the last bastion of popular fiction; now it's becoming literary.

SF magazine subscriptions are down, including *Analog*. Fantasy magazines seem healthier. Mystery magazines are doing better than SF too. Now, instead of buying Asimov's, etc., people are watching the SciFi channel. The novel form is healthy though; short stories aren't.

Later was the charity auction. It started at 3 p.m. and went on for hours... They sold computers, software, fairy wings, SF magazine collections, jewelry, figures, models, lots of books (in bags and separately and often autographed), and illustrated screenplay in book form, original art, beautiful knife, ornamental dagger, the art by committee pieces, Bradford plates by Targete, ...

After that I staggered off to supper. We checked out the con suite. "Pretty much picked over" said the guy in the great space shirt. I asked him about it, and he said it was made for him. They bought the material.

I took a break in my room until the costume contest at 8 p.m.. Mike Conrad, artist and really funny guy, was the emcee. Before the contest began, the Art Show winners were announced:

SF category: 1: Crescent Wing by Ed Cox; 2: The Lab by Ed Cox; 3: Alien Attack! by Mike Conrad

Fantasy category: 1: Circle at Center by Jean Pierre Targete; 2: The Catalyst by Mike Conrad; 3: World Fall by Jean Pierre Targete.

Best in Show: Polar Princess by Stan Morrison

The judges for the costume contest were: Irene Harrison, Steve Parady, Stanley Morrison, and John Stevens. The winners were:

Cutest: Esmeralda

Best Wings: Horny Little Fairy

Best Visual Effects: Contents of the Genie's Bottle

Best Heart: Blood Red Queen of Hearts

Children's Award: Jack and The Hunter (?) both little kids, as I recall

1: The Millenium Bug (certificate and \$25.00 in dealers bucks)

2: The Black Queen (certificate and \$15.00 in dealers bucks)

3: Darth Kapazi (sp) (certificate and \$10.00 in dealers bucks)

And they each got a certificate for a free Oasis 14 tee shirt.

After the costume contest I discovered that The Millenium Bug used balloons in her body to keep it up and her lower arms were attached to her wrists--very well done. (The hall was soon full of balloons.) I also talked to The Black Queen, Tammy Martin, and learned that she had designed three of the costumes: her own, the genie's (Sherrell Carpenter), and The Red Queen's (Bonnie Beall).

At 9 p.m. we went to the Barbara Delaplace Mystery Hour. (I was getting tired, but Mike Conrad had been so funny during his earlier appearances that I decided to go.) The panelists were McDevitt, Wilber, Conrad, Owl Goingback, and Ron Walotsky. Each panelist made three dramatic statements. (I thought one was true and two were lies, but it turned out that only one was a lie.) As McDevitt said, "It's easy to tell exciting lies; it's making the truth exciting that's hard." The audience got to ask the panelists questions to try to find out which were the lies. All the statements were plausible, and the panelists had perfect answers. Mike Conrad did get a ticket on the *authobahn*, -- for speeding in a construction zone.

After that we went to see *X-Men* in the



video room. I found it boring. (Maybe it just wasn't as much fun as the con...) There was filking in the con suite at 10 p.m.; it lasted until 2:45 a.m., I learned the next day.

Saturday night they had a casino with a cash bar to help raise money for the Andre Norton Scholarship Fund; and members of USS Guardian were on hand during the con to accept donations of canned food for The Mustard Seed, an independent local organization which helps poor and homeless people.

Sunday, 10 a.m. I enjoyed Targete's slide show, "Creature and Character Creation." Good opening slide with the title. He said that he'd always been fascinated by monsters, SF films, etc. He loved *Sinbad* and other Harryhausen movies, *Jurassic Park*, the *Alien* series, ...

There are four steps: 1: Background history/literary sources; 2: Reference; 3: Rough sketches; 4: Create orthographics.

He showed slides of habitat, texture, eyes, ... for reference. For sketches, you need anatomy, joint articulation. Orthographics: Slides of the front, back, and sides. (Trace the front view to get a back view.) Put it on a grid. Great variety of aliens and creatures. I loved the bipedal lizard with a ponytail. Gargoyles from Hell, The Magic Net (book cover), forked teeth, Gargoo (eyes express personality). Can use photos for humans. See more details the longer you look. Some sketches are smaller (2-3 inches) than the slides. Sometimes paints from his drawings. Great book covers, also CD covers (different from the book covers). Ink sketch; used markers to color it in for rendering for client. He enjoys rendering details/accessories.

Then he showed slides from a film strip which is a current project he's doing on his own. (This was an exclusive showing.) It takes a few weeks to render a small detailed drawing. (I loved the boots and the little critter in the close-up.) The villain has great weaponry!

There were a lot more things happening, including the art auction, but while in the con suite, I noticed a smoky haze out the window, and then I learned that some roads were closed, including I-4. We checked out, loaded the car, and checked the info on the boards. We had just decided what detour to take (eek!), when a guy came and told us that he'd just heard on TV that the roads were open. We left, and the smoke wasn't bad. (I was truly grateful that we didn't have to take the long way home.) There was gridlock in the eastbound lanes, but we got home with no delays. I learned that a number of people left early because of the smoke, but the art auction was well attended. And there were other panels and a Science Fictionary game; the closing ceremonies were at 4:30 p.m.

# CHEAP THRILLS AT 90 MPH

## by Ed Green

Fans, so we all believe, are sensitive types who don't go in for the kind of entertainment that satisfies Mundanes. Well, recent events have convinced me that either I'm not a Fan (if you ask the wrong people), or the 'danes are getting more like fans. Either answer is scary. You see, the problem is there's something on the television these days that I always watch, and as tough as it is to admit, I like it. A lot. It's those police chases on Los Angeles freeways.

I discovered last summer I was hooked on Southern California's newest entertainment craze. And thought I was alone in the addiction. Then local papers reported a new service was available to mainline my habit. For \$10 a month, some retired cops will page you to let you know that there's a police pursuit in progress and being televised. The width and depth of my addiction has me frightened, but there was some comfort in knowing I'm not alone. I'm not sure how I'm going to try

to fix it. Or even if I want to.

My day of discovery begins normally. I'm driving home on one of the local freeways, in the state where you're aware of the traffic around you, but you aren't paying active attention. That may sound like a dangerous way to drive, until you realize that situational oblivion is the only way you can drive for any distance on LA highways without going hysterical and locking up the brakes in the middle of the road.

Zoned out, it was easy to see the flock of local helicopters in the distance, zooming along towards the ocean, flying in a loose formation. Once it registered, I started running the infrastructure map of LA in my brain. I thought, looking at the direction and the height, they're probably the news birds and since they're moving west fast, they are probably looking at something on the freeway, and that can only mean...

Stabbing down with my forefinger, I

punch the radio pre-set button to call up an all news radio station. My heart pumped faster, my breath got shallow and quick. Could it be? Was it? Please, please, please...

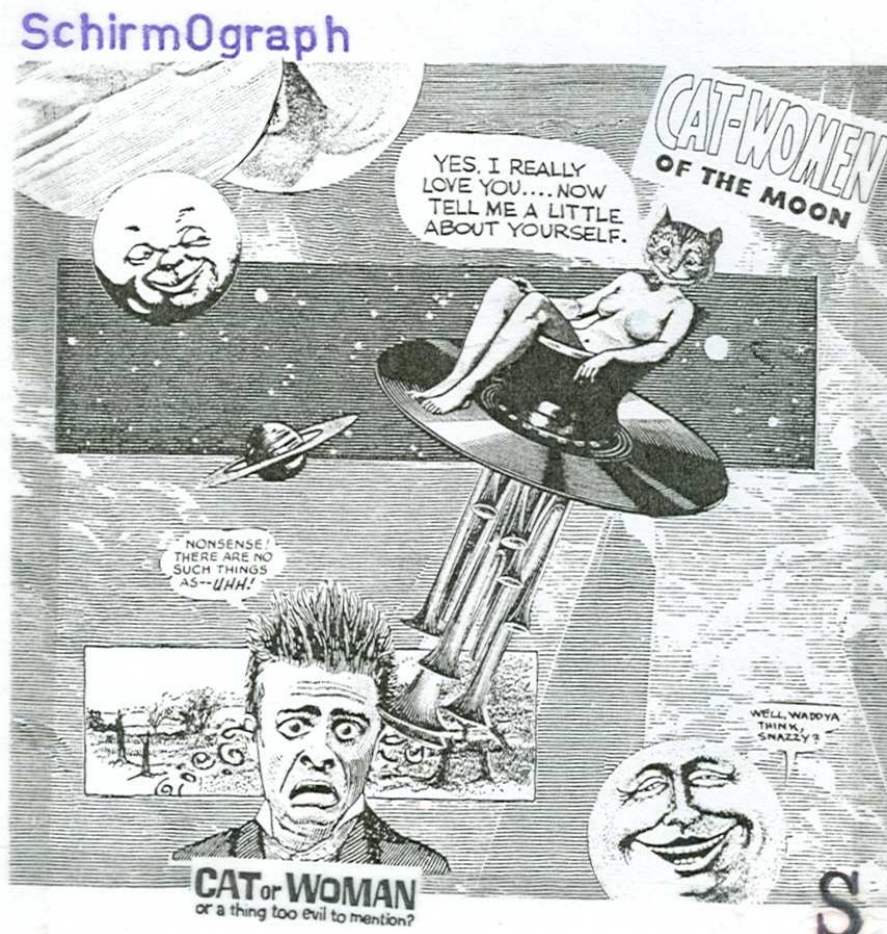
"Repeating this breaking news story, Los Angeles Police and the California Highway Patrol are in pursuit of a stolen car. The chase is proceeding westbound on the Long Beach Freeway. We go now to our helicopter on the scene..."

YES! Five miles of highway driving, a quick slide down the off ramp, three left turns and two traffic lights and I'm home. In less than 10 minutes, the television is on, the popcorn is being nuked and the remote's in my sweaty hand. And there it is, the chase!

There's a rhythm, a pace to these things. The first half-hour it's just the bones of the crime. In this case, the "suspect" was driving some Ford POS. It was a stolen car, from the northern most part of the LA area heading towards my hometown, Long Beach. The fellow was seen trying to break into a home, and ended up stealing the car and scooting. Yeah, that's the first report, but veterans of this sort of thing know that there's going to be a twist, or a spin coming. But that's later on in the cycle.

Right now, it's a medium view of the car, zipping along streets and freeways, with three or four police cars behind it. The cops stay a respectable distance back. Close enough for the suspect to see the flashing red and blue lights, but far enough away to keep the following traffic bottled up, and to avoid him stopping and reversing into them. Up above all the vehicles, at least two, possibly four police helicopters are bird-dogging the suspect. They fly at breath taking heights, barely skimming above the power lines, telephone poles and bridges along the road. Above the flying cops are the news copters. And they are transmitting live shots. Due to FAA regulations, and a finely-tuned sense of self preservation, they have to maintain a certain height, and for those close up shots, the ones that we can see the rust spots on the cars, they are using cameras with some 'muther heavy lenses. Back at the studio they've added in the lower right hand corner of the screen the station ID and the words "Breaking News." Recently, they've actually added a graphic that shows the amount of time the pursuit has been going on!

In somber, serious voices the news anchors drone on about the chase. This gives us all proof we need that they couldn't cover a



lemonade stand opening without a script. Boring, stupid and vapid. Telling us what the car is doing? While we're watching it? Just shut up, link a direct feed from the police frequency, and let us listen to that!

In tones befitting Charlton Heston, they tell how horrible the driver of the escaping vehicle is, recklessly running red traffic lights and blowing through stop signs. After so many years of this kind of thing, you'd think the newsreader would understand that most of these people have already broken the law, and that's why they are running. Someone facing serious jail time for sticking up the local 7-11 isn't going to suffer the pangs of conscience and turn themselves in over a traffic infraction. Although it has been suggested that along with the slug-line "breaking news" and the timer, there should be a little cash register on the screen, which tallies up the fines due to traffic law violations. It would add such a wonderful little touch.

Maybe the anchors feel they have to show the proper emotion during these things. "Politically Correct" concern over the gross endangerment of the citizens of our fair city. They seemed shocked when they report that the suspect is doing close to 90 miles an hour on the freeway! I'm sure some of those anchors have passed me going as fast as that in the parking lot of the local Starbucks! When I'm driving home, if there's any open space at all, I have to dodge Yuppies from hell just like them who zoom at 80 mph, chatting on their cell phones and slamming on the horn when the traffic doesn't magically clear for them. That's the way driving is in LA.

Now the addiction is truly taken hold and it's humming. The viewers want to know more, to see more. On cue, the local station goes to a news van to the scene of the crime. Once there, the reporters bound out of the truck like a SWAT team, setting up the gear and swinging into action. Never mind they just parked on the neighbor's lawn, or ran over his Rottweiler. They are here to cover the story! Such as it is. The field reporters stand around with a microphone clutched in one hand and a finger planted in an ear to try to listen to the twits back at the station. The mike always has the station number and call letters pasted on it, in B\*I\*G, H\*U\*G\*E signs. It's really fun when they get some poor small little reporteroid out there, with half his head covered by the logo. I wonder if this is a twisted kind of loyalty test. Make sure your face is seen on screen, or hype the station?

Another player now enters the spotlight, the public affairs officer for the law enforcement agency that is handling the case. He's very excited about being there, you can tell that by the professional smile, the frozen look of competence, and the vein throbbing along his neck. All of the reporters begin



OK now: there is no 'Bleat-bleat' in the middle of the second movement. Who's the wise guy?

playing the "Who Can Ask The Most Asinine Question?" game. There's usually either one clear winner, or a dozen ties for first place. The police spokesman this time started out by saying that the only thing they knew for sure about the suspect was that he was "male." Then came the shouted questions. One of my favorites was the reporter who asked the officer, "Do you think the suspect was abused by an alcoholic father as a child?" The cop paused for a moment, and looked around. I believed that he was trying to figure the odds in choking the news hound unconscious before the cameras got a clear view of his face and name badge. He decided the odds weren't good, but it was a very close decision!

It's a circus, in the true Roman Empire sense of the word, and I'm part of it, eyes linked right to the tube. It's entertainment for the groundlings! I should be cleaning my apartment. I should be balancing my checkbook. Hell, I should be writing something for *File 770!* I will, in a minute. Really!

The station has gone to a commercial. Click goes the remote, running down the channels until I find another one with live coverage. Different angle, a different voice, but everything else is as it should be. Now the helicopters are pulling back, giving us shots of the traffic around him.

It's at this time something starts tugging at my hindbrain. This isn't right. There are real people down there. This whacko could T-bone a mini-van with a Soccer mom and her eight kids inside. Doesn't this mutant know that he can't get away? Even if he outraces the ground units, there's a fleet of heli-

copters in the air over him? They all have radios! There's a saying among the cops that you can outrun a Ford, but you can't outrun a Motorola! Is it in the job description of people who break the law that they have to be stupid?

Just then my conscience starts to take control; its soothing tones tell me to put the remote down. It whispers, in an almost lover's tone, the suggestion to pick up a book and read. Actually, not a bad idea. I'm right in the middle of the new Turtledove book. Where did I...

Oh no! The crook has gotten off the freeways! We're into mid-game right now, approaching end game at high speed. Forget the book, forget the phone, forget it all! Now comes the thrill. Buzzing through intersections, dodging around traffic. The police are trying to shut down the intersections, but the driver keeps turning and sliding around corners. Oops! He almost lost it, his rear end beginning a serious skid. He corrected just in time! He's gaining speed!

This chase is fast approaching the final moments. And it's gone on long enough that more information is coming out. The driver is, as suspected, a serious boozier and druggie (at least according to the cops). Most of these people are. It becomes even more clear moments later.

The picture is this: The crook has now arrived in a beach community of LA. To the driver's left is a heavy rail, then the edge of a 100-foot cliff and then the ocean. He's travelling at high speed when the car zooms off to the left, impacting the railing!

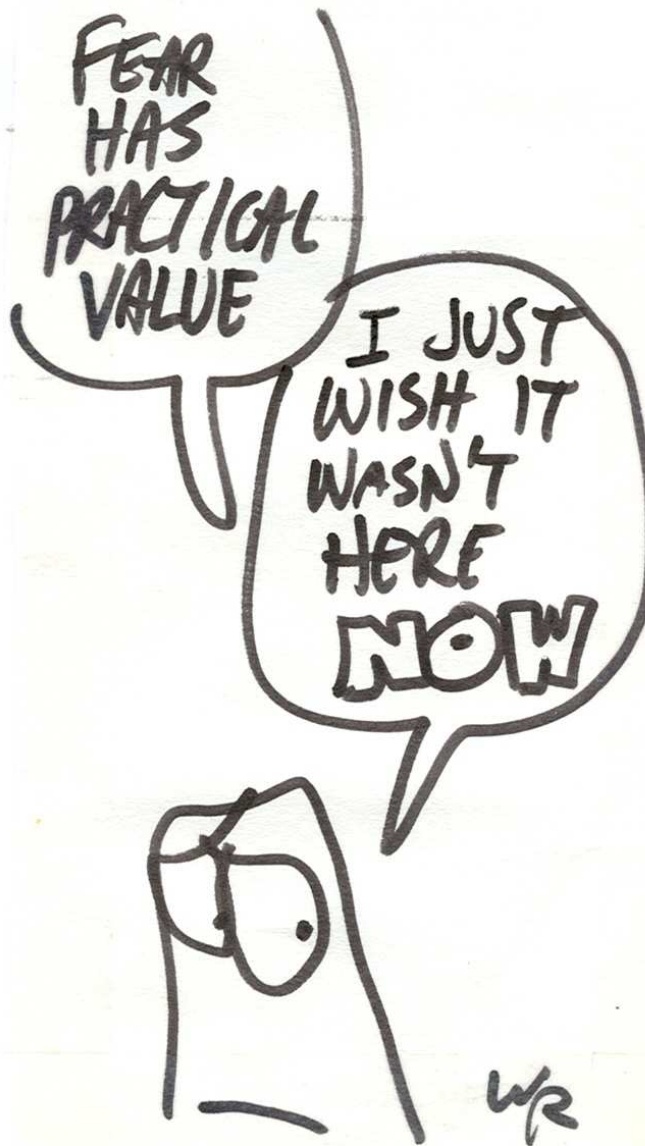
We're denied a view of the car flying out

into the blue, sewage tinged Pacific Ocean. No, those rails are designed to prevent that kind of mess. So, our criminal tears along the fencing, which bends enough to sling the car along the length of the rail and spin it onto a small dirt lot adjacent to the rail and next to the road. It's an area where young families park to watch the setting sun. Because this is a weekday afternoon, it is thankfully empty. The TV shows the crushed front end of the car, light colored smoke rising from under the crumpled hood. I can see at least one flat tire. This car isn't leaving without the Auto Club helping. And we're into the endgame!

For a few moments, until the first police car locks its brakes up behind him, we watch to see what the suspect does. Many bail out and run away on foot. While this can lead to a few more moments of freedom and comic relief photos of out of shape cops struggling to climb over a fence, it almost always ends badly. A tackle, a moment of dust and the suspect is cuffed. Now and then, he runs into a building and then the cops call in the SWAT teams. Sometimes, in the lottery of crime and punishment, the first unit behind the suspect is a K9 officer. The foot chase is shorter and the dog gets a hot lunch.

But this time around, the fellow elects to remain in his car. This is actually a variation of running into a building, because the police consider this a "barricaded suspect" and call out the SWAT team. Time for a quick trip to the bathroom and maybe another bag of popcorn. SWAT always takes 45 minutes to arrive. It doesn't matter if the suspect has crashed into SWAT's own training center, 45 minutes is in the union rules, and that's how long it will take.

Police spend the time using the PA systems in their squad cars, to try and talk the suspect into surrendering. Others set up a perimeter around the open field and beyond. Folks who haven't been watching TV are surprised to suddenly find themselves tossed out of their homes. It is done in the name of safety, since gunfights have a way not following the rules of physics we've all grown used to since *The Matrix*. These citizens end up being highly upset and excited. In many cases even more so after they find out what's going on. That's because the cops insist they leave the great view that the Fates have gifted them. They could set up deck chairs on their front lawn and watch the event like a Roman citizen of old. And, they could order out for a pizza too! That assumes most of them really believe what's going on. If their



favorite newscaster isn't bookending the details, how can it be real?

Just to make things more exciting for the men and women of law enforcement, the caravan of news vans usually arrive right about this time. It would be cynical to suggest that the media helicopters are in direct communication with the vans, and tell them when their arrival would create the most amount of chaos in an already whacked out scene. After all, cops and reporters usually have such a fine working relationship to begin with.

LAPD's Metro D-Platoon, a.k.a. SWAT, arrives on the scene. These men and women are the direct descendant's of Daryl Gate's original SWAT team. With almost 30 years of experience and training with such elite units as the FBI's HRT, US Army Delta Force, US Navy DEVOPS, and German GS-9 teams, you have to shake your head and wonder what the hell they're doing responding to a loon sitting in the middle of an open

field in a car. But, the big blue step-van that became famous in the 70's TV series has arrived, along with dozens of sedans, now the team... waits.

At least, that's what it looks like on television. Dozens of officers lifting equipment out of the trunks of unmarked police vehicles. The cops are loading the small, deadly submachine guns they carry, and tightening the Velcro straps of their bulletproof vests.

According to one of the station anchors, "It looks like the SWAT team is bringing some heavy weapons to this situation." That's damned perceptive. I'm surprised he recognizes what a gun is. He probably thought they carried cap pistols and water balloons. If the images weren't so exciting, a heavy volume from my military reference library, say *Jane's Military Small Arms*, would shatter the picture tube of my TV set.

I'm two seconds from punching the mute button on my set when the picture shifts to an overhead shot from the helicopter again. Now there's some action going on!

Three cops, MP5 sub-machine guns out, are walking slowly towards the car from behind. The one in the lead is holding some sort of large box. They stop, then the first cop moves forward, very slowly, and when he's within 30 feet of the car he throws it. The box lands in the dirt, rolls once and lays near the door of the battered Ford. You can plainly see a line, or cord of something running from the back of the box to the police, who are now moving backwards.

"They've just tossed a bomb at the suspect!" Screams one of the news anchors. It isn't often that you see one reporter roll their eyes over something stupid another one says, but we get it this time.

"Let's not be hasty. It could be tear gas. It could be a listening device. It could be anything."

In reality, it's what the SWAT team calls a "throw phone". It's a battery-powered phone with wires that connect to a similar phone used by the crisis negotiator. This is the cop who'll try to convince the suspect (who, by the way, is still sitting in his front seat) to come out peacefully.

Things don't look as if they can be resolved by talking. The on-scene reporters are now on the air with yet another media relations officer. She's having less fun than the previous media flak, since a third of the questions now involve SWAT tactics.

“Are you going to use a sharpshooter in one of your helicopters?”

“No. Department policy is not to shoot unless the suspect is a threatening someone’s life or limb. And our air units don’t have sniper teams in them.”

“Is that standard department policy, to shoot people from helicopters when they are a threat?”

“Ah... no. We don’t deploy snipers in our helicopters.”

“But, you could? Right?”

“Could what?”

“Shoot at suspects from your helicopters?”

As the officer stares with an open mouth at the reporter, we’re back to another ground shot. This time, some camera jockey has gotten a fairly decent shot of the suspect vehicle. Just when you thought that the dumbest people on scene were carrying microphones, the subject of this little drama decides to compete for the title. He’s jammed a piece of paper up against the closed window of the driver’s side door. According to the talking heads at the studio, there is something written on it. You couldn’t tell from the image they’re broadcasting. Sometime tells me this knucklehead is using a ballpoint pen and printing the letters very tall on the page, but not very thick. Maybe he just forgot his crayons at home. Maybe he’s an idiot and we’re all wasting too much time on this.

“Or, “ came that damn voice from the back of my mind “maybe you’re the idiot.”

I turned up the volume control with the remote, winning that debate in the only way I knew how.

Everyone sits now. For almost an hour. The throw phone hasn’t been picked up. The cops can’t read the note. The reporters are still looking for something profound to say. And the helicopters are thinking about looking for a nearby gas station.

I’m close to turning on the computer and finishing up a few things when a reporter starts yapping about how the police are making a move! From his tone of voice, and lack of breath, it appears that a major shoot out has just started! Dozens of fully automatic weapons spraying lead up and down the street, hundreds of innocent citizens being gunned down where they stand!

A nice rush of adrenaline, but nothing close to the truth.

We do see a large moving truck slowly entering into the picture. From the news helicopter’s angle, you can see a half dozen SWAT officers crouched behind it, with another hunkered down behind the steering wheel. A mobile barricade. Now this is a fun end game!

The truck stops about 50 feet from the passenger’s side of the suspect car and stops. The first cop in line slides forward and leans

over the engine hood. He’s pointing a gun of some sorts.

This has almost become a sporting event. Will the quarterback fake a handoff and throw? Will he tuck his chin against his chest and sprint? What’s the plan? What’s the play?

And in a moment, we see. A small flash of white light, and a puff of smoke. Something smacks against the passenger window of the crook’s car. You can see the thousand specks of light as the window shatters. Before any reporter can say anything, a second officer has popped up and fired another weapon off. It looks just like the first one. “Aha! 37mm grenade launchers!” In my mind I high five myself. It appears that they’re going to use tear gas to smoke him out.

They fire one in and wait. After five minutes, they fire again. Then wait. Ten minutes another shot. Twenty minutes round four slaps into the Ford. The inside of the car can’t have much breathable air left. Rounds 7 and 8 go in at the hour mark.

The reporters are having a collective heart attack. The police information officer refuses to answer questions until the SWAT guys are done, and none of the news folks have a single clue on what’s going on. My favorite exchange during this time is when the TV station has a split screen of the reporter in the field and the anchor. The anchor is one of those older types, looking properly grim. “Must be getting pretty hard in there for the suspect to breathe, after 1 hour and 15 rounds of tear gas.” This grasp of the obvious is dwarfed by his inability to count muzzle flashes. The field guy, not to be outdone by some studio flunky chimes in with “A man like him with nothing more left to lose can take a lot!”

Nothing left to lose? What? He hit the magic number of traffic violations and he’s facing the electric chair? The law has been changed, and breaking and entering gets you a date with a needle full of poison? Perhaps he’s broken the most important law, boring the TV audience! Down goes the volume.

Finally, the cops, possibly just bored themselves, make the approach. It’s a small line of five cops, spread out in a militant version of a Conga Line. Pointing submachine guns, shotguns, wearing bulletproof vests and gas masks, they walk up in the driver’s blind spot. One officer yanks open the door, and the poor suspect falls out, coughing and crying. He’s about as violent as a ground sloth and moving twice as slow. The cops cuff him, then lead him away from the car, and sit him down. One of them is fanning his face. Cops rarely feel sorry for guys like him, but you just have to know they felt sympathy for this one.

Now comes the post-game wrap-up. Al-

ways short, but always fun.

The electronic eye shifts back to the Information Officer. He outlines the basic plan the SWAT guys used, then asked for questions.

“Why didn’t you try talking him out?” Was the first one. You could see the reporter. He had the killing question. It was an Emmy for him, and trouble for the cop!

“We did. For almost two hours. He didn’t respond.”

“Why not? Was there a language problem? Couldn’t you have tried harder?”

The cop shrugs. Then he points overhead. “Hear those?” All the reporters look up at the fleet of helicopters, still circling the story.

“The suspect heard them too. That’s all he heard. He couldn’t hear anything over the noise of your helicopters. We tossed him a phone. We used loudspeakers. The SWAT cops yelled at him. If he’d had an Internet connection, we would have tried that too!”

There is, for the first time this whole day, a moment when not one reporter has a comment. It doesn’t last. There is now a riot of questions, comments and people shoving each other, trying to get another question in.

I now turn off the television. The show, as far as those of us who follow these sort of things, is over. Oh, we’ll all watch the 11:00 news, just to see different angles. But, it’s over for now. Nicely done. I’d give it three stars. Not quite the drama of a real shoot-out, but everything else was there.

Well, it’s not quite over. I have a question too. I ask myself, once again, why? Why watch?

Am I a wannabe? My days of being a cop in the US Air Force not behind me? A secret longing? Or maybe there’s the chance that this will develop into something more than just a routine chase. Something akin to Jack Ruby taking justice into his own hands with Oswald? Maybe I’m a victim of the media meme that makes films like *Faces of Death* acceptable. Or is it just raw, human drama? Men and women at their best and worst. Acting, no reacting, to life under stress of the highest level. Perhaps it’s just... wait...

You’ll have to excuse me, but my pager just went off again.

Did I mention that the service only costs \$10 a month?

*Author’s note: For those of you who may doubt the existence of such a service, please go to [www.pursuitwatch.com](http://www.pursuitwatch.com). Have fun!*