

Feline Mewsings #15



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Feline ~~M~~ewsings

#15

February 2004

* Editorial / Introduction

About the time I was putting the previous issue to bed, fires were raging in Southern California. No one was sure exactly how things would turn out. However, the weather cooled down, even bringing the region substantial amounts of rain and snow; and the fires were controlled much sooner than anyone had expected. I haven't heard of any fans being adversely affected by the fires, although some of them did have to evacuate their homes for a period of time.

On the other hand, the strikes against the major grocery stores and the MTA continued. We have three major chains of supermarkets in Southern California – Ralphs, Vons, and Albertson's. Ralphs stores are owned by Krogers. Vons is owned by Safeway. Albertson's is headquartered in Idaho. For reasons that are unclear, most of the employees at these stores are part-time. I've heard it said that this is a ploy by the employers to keep them from having to extend usual employee benefits. But no one seems to know the whole story. In any case, their current contract gives these employees full medical coverage, including their families. The stores want the employees to chip in to pay the premium for the coverage. In addition, they want to hire new employees at lower wages.

The MTA strike was a bit different, though part of it again centred on health care coverage. My understanding is that MTA employees are very well paid and are eligible for early retirement with pension payments that equal their salaries. Their medical benefits are provided by their union. The union wanted the city to pay for more of this medical insurance. The only workers actually on strike were the mechanics. The others were on sympathy strike. But this meant little or no bus and subway service, hurting mostly ridership that supposedly has no health care insurance. I don't use mass transit at all, so it didn't affect me directly. The indirect effect was that the roads were filled with more cars than usual. The MTA strike was resolved after a few weeks.

There was also a blue flu epidemic at the sheriff's office, but I haven't heard anything about that lately; so that may have been resolved. I don't have any facts about it.

I have been experiencing a few benefits of posting this zine on the Internet. A few fans have found my zine by searching for various topics that have been discussed within these pages. The other week, one person was searching under his wife's name. You may recall that we visited my first work supervisor in Hawaii when we went there for Westercon. He found the zine in which I reported on the visit and found my phone number. He called to let me know that she had passed away. It was sad news, but we had a very interesting conversation.

In November we attended Forry Ackerman's birthday party and Loscon.

We felt the earthquake that happened near San Simeon. It was fairly weak by the time the effects reached us, but the dining room chandelier swayed noticeably.

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* Loscon

Friday, 28 November, we left for Loscon about 09h30.

We reached the Burbank Hilton in under an hour. We were able to check into a room right away.

After we stashed our luggage in the room. I registered in the Green Room, while Mike went to the regular registration area.

We met at my first panel, which was about "Publication Alternatives -- E-Books, Print on Demand, etc. with Wil Wheaton and Vera Nazarian. Possibly because of Wil Wheaton's presence on the panel, we had a sizeable audience. Vera Nazarian has been published by small presses and also works for a small press.



At 13h00 I attended an interview of Guest of Honour Fred Saberhagen. Before the official interview, which was conducted by Rick Foss, Fred revealed that baseball player Brett Saberhagen is a cousin, though the two have never met; I'd always wondered about it. Fred's mother used to exchange Xmas cards with Brett's mother.

Wil Wheaton did a reading at 14h30. It was held in the large ballroom. Unfortunately, there was only a small audience. I later found out that this had upset Wil quite a bit. However, he did a great job of hiding his feelings. The readings were really great. Afterwards, he introduced the members of his family who were in the audience.

He also participated in "The Future of Open Source Programming – Getting Started with Linux" at 16h00. This was held in a packed small room. Wil was upset about this. The room did get rather warm and stuffy. Conventions are always challenged with the task of trying to predict the attendance for each panel and scheduling the venues appropriately. The other panellists were Ed Hooper, Joe Zeff, Jim Dennis, and one other. Wil tried to moderate the panel, but I think he lacks experience. There was a lot of somewhat unmoderated audience participation. From Wil's opening remarks, I got the idea that perhaps this panel may have been his idea. Jim Dennis was also trying to moderate somewhat. While I wouldn't say that chaos reigned, the panel could have used a bit more direction.

When the panel was over, I went up to the hotel room to fetch Mike for dinner. Other than attending my panel in the morning and doing a bit of shopping in the dealers' room, he stayed in the room. He had brought books to read and stuff to do on the computer.

When we got in line for dinner at the hotel restaurant, Karen Anderson invited us to join her group, which was just ahead of us. Neil Schulman and his mother formed the fourth and fifth members. Apparently, we arrived at the restaurant just as things were becoming busy. We had to wait a very long time for our food. Fortunately, we were in enjoyable company. I discovered that Karen also suffers from fibromyalgia.

We had a short respite before the evening programming. At 21h00, Warren James conducted his interviews for his web show, *Hour 25*. He interviewed Michael Mason, the con chairman, and the guests of honour and other special guests – Teddy Harvia, Fred Saberhagen, Armin Shimerman, and Wil Wheaton. Armin Shimerman said he was rehearsing for *Hamlet* at a local LA theatre. He was to play the part of Claudius. The play was to open in January.

Afterward, I went to a few parties.

I had room service breakfast Saturday morning. Then I went down at 10h00 to look at the art show and pick up a couple of books from A & M Book Cellars in the dealers' room.

At 11h30 I attended the panel "The Obligatory Buffy Panel" to see David Bratman, who was one of the panellists. The other panellists were Armin Shimerman, Lee Whiteside, and a woman who joined them

from the audience. The convention misspelled Shimerman's name with three m's on the name placard. Although I've only watched one episode of Buffy and didn't care for the show at all, I enjoyed the panel.

After that I attended a demo of computer-generated art conducted by Dawn L. Mullan at 13h00. Earlier, I had spoken to the colour-pencil artist, whose name I think is Mark Ferraro, in the dealers' room. He had recommended using Adobe Photoshop. Mullan was also using Photoshop. Mike has the program on his computer, so I must make an effort to learn how to use it.

The next panel I attended, at 14h30, was about "Breaking into Print". The panellists were Armin Shimerman, Todd McCaffrey, Keith Hartman, Tim Powers, and Wil Wheaton. It was interesting that although both Wheaton and Shimerman are published, they did not get into writing in the usual way. Shimerman is now writing his first unsolicited book. Wheaton has only published non-fiction. They ended up asking questions of the other panellists. Although I had gone to the panel expecting to hear how each of the authors had started out, the panel turned out to be more of a "how to" discussion aimed at aspiring writers. Still, it was interesting and I learned a thing or two that may come in handy one of these days.

At 16h00 I went to hear Bill Wu do a reading. As he only had a short story to read, this was over early. The audience had plenty of time to ask him questions.

We were meeting David Bratman and Berni Phillips for dinner at 17h30, so I had time to spare. I went back to the room for a brief rest before we returned to the hotel lobby to meet them. We apparently beat the dinner rush that night, as we did not have any problems with ordering.

In the evening, Mike and I attended the masquerade, which was entertainingly emceed by Tadao Tomomatsu. The masquerade was quite decent. During the break while we were waiting for the judges to make their decisions, they showed an amusing home-movie made by the Loscon committee. After the masquerade, there was a demonstration of a small rocket engine.

We then went to the Regency dancing and did one dance. Unfortunately, it turned out to be a bad choice of dance in my exhausted condition. The turns involved in the dance made me dizzy. Still, I did a bit of partying afterwards.

I had another room service breakfast Sunday morning. I was on one of the first panels of the day – "Pulp to CDRW: Discussing the Fate of Paper Fanzines in a Digital World". The other panellists were Teddy Harvia, Mike Glycer, Marty Cantor, and Dennis Mallonee. I made the mistake of asking Marty if he were moderating. I think it went to his head. He seemed to take over. He also let his own slant completely eclipse the other possibilities in which fandom might be headed. I think he ended up doing half the talking.

After the panel, Mike and I returned to our room to finish packing and check out. Unfortunately, I seem to have left a necklace behind in the room. I didn't expect to get it back, but I called the hotel on the off chance that some people are honest. To be certain, the item is so small that it might just have been sucked into a vacuum cleaner. Oh, well, it wasn't an expensive item.

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* Local Activities

Live Theatre

Gunmetal Blues: This is a musical mystery written by Scott Wentworth. The music and lyrics are by Craig Bohmler and Marion Adler. The time is contemporary and takes place at a bar near an airport. There were three actors, one of whom played different characters. One of the actors was also a musician and played the piano on stage. One of the musicians also made a brief appearance on stage. The inspiration was the work of Raymond Chandler. The acting was excellent. Since the story is told largely in song, sometimes it's not that easy to follow. On the other hand, the plot is not too complicated. The only thing that bothered us and some other audience members, whom I overheard during intermission, was the smoking on stage. The smoke drifted over the audience and distressed a few of us. It detracted from an otherwise enjoyable performance. Except for one short scene, I saw no justification for actually lighting the cigarettes. I spoke to the producing director of the Colony afterward, and she said she had tried to dissuade the cast from doing so. We hope she tries harder in future. After all, wouldn't pretending to smoke be part of acting?

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Hamlet: The Uprising Theatre Company brought us this production performed at the Court Theatre in West

Hollywood. Some roles had alternate cast members, so I made sure I got tickets for a performance that Armin Shimerman (Claudius) was in. We also got to see Ethan Phillips as Polonius. The star of the show was Jonathan Wade Drahos, who is new to LA. He came to use from New York City, where he has performed on Broadway and other theatres in the City and in nearby areas. He is a handsome, tall, thin fellow.

The play started somewhat tentatively but definitely came to life after Hamlet entered the scene. I think the level of his performance probably inspired the other cast members. I found the cast to be generally excellent with the only exceptions being some of the really minor parts. It was performed on a minimal stage with pieces that mostly suggested furniture and other objects. All the major scenes were very well done. It was performed in quasi late nineteenth century costume probably collected from second hand shops.

It was unfortunate that the equity waiver theatre was only about half full. As it was the beginning of its run, I hope the theatre was fuller later on. It's a real shoestring operation. The actors worked the lobby, collecting tickets and selling refreshments. The objects d'art created for the play were available for sale.

I think this is the first time I have seen this play live. I really enjoyed it and was able to tell that to a lot of the actors afterwards, as they mingled in the lobby with the audience.

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Films

The Lord of the Rings: the Return of the King: We viewed the extended version DVD of *The Two Towers* a couple of days before we went to see this. We did not go on opening day. This movie is much longer than the first two at about three and a half hours. It makes me wonder if there are any scenes left over to make an extended version DVD of this one.

It starts with a nice flashback about Smeagol. Then the scenes go back and forth between the ones involving Frodo and the other people. I think there are about three groups we are following in turn. This usually means that about every other scene involves a battle. I've heard or read some reviewers who thought the Frodo scenes were too quiet and not exciting enough, but I didn't feel so. There was a lot of tension in the Frodo scenes even though I knew the ending.

The ending of the movie is very satisfactory, wrapping up all the loose ends. I really, really liked it even though I cried a lot or maybe because. The movie preserved the spirit of the original book very well.

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Other

University Park: We went on an architectural walk of this area around USC with a group called the Neighborhood Place Project. We started at the ONE Institute and Archives, which houses the oldest on-going collection of gay and lesbian literature and other material, such as videos and artwork, in the Western Hemisphere. The building is interesting architecturally, because it was originally a fraternity house. It is square in design with a central hall that used to have a fireplace in the middle. The rooms all overlook this central area, which was a gathering place for the members. Although it's been remodelled, the main plan remains the same. After about an hour there, we walked around the neighbourhood for nearly three hours. We looked at most of the places only from the outside. The one other building we went inside of was St. Vincent de Paul Roman Catholic Church, which was built in 1923 with donations from Doheny. It's a very ornate structure. Other buildings we saw from the outside included the Doheny Mansion, the Stimson House, St. John's Episcopal Church, the Automobile Club of Southern California, and the Second Church of Christ Scientist. After the walk, some of us went to a nearby Mexican restaurant for dinner.



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Stars on Ice: We saw this at Arrowhead Pond in Anaheim. This year's theme is "Time". There were four pairs couples: Salé and Pelletier, Berezhnaya and Sikharulidze, Meno and Sand, and Ina and Zimmerman. The regular singles skaters were Yuka Sato, Todd Eldridge, and Alexei Yagudin. In addition, we also saw Scott Hamilton and Oksana Baiul. Scott was a real charmer, as usual, of course. However, I have my doubts about whether Oksana will ever skate as well as she did for her gold-medal winning performance at the Olympics. The show as a whole was entertaining but not spectacular. Half the seats in the arena were empty. A few years ago, the performance was sold out. The popularity of figure skating seems to have peaked.

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Carnegie Institution of Washington: We visited the Pasadena headquarters of this research institute, which only last year started to open its doors to the public, usually for an annual open house. We saw the place with the Neighborhood Place Project. The main building was designed by Myron Hunt and built in 1910 after Andrew Carnegie came out west. The institution supports astronomical research, which was our interest in the place. We had a tour conducted by astronomer Alan Dressler. He gave us a little talk accompanied by slides that covered the history of the place and some of the latest astronomical work, mostly conducted in Chile. Most astronomical research is conducted using custom-made equipment, so the institute has its own workshop, where much of that equipment is built. Another astronomer, Eric Persson, was working there that day and talked to us briefly about the equipment he was building. Behind

the building up on Mt. Wilson, you can see the solar telescope that was built by George Ellery Hale when he was at the institute.

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* Mailing Comments on

FAPA #265: Note to non-FAPA members: FAPA is an APA of people in science fiction and fantasy fandom. It has a large membership, currently about fifty. There are openings right now. If you are interested in joining, let me know and I can send you the relevant information.

Fantasy Amateur: I was perfectly happy to have Ken Forman continue as OE, but I welcome Milt Stevens to the job. The homemade collator Ken described certainly seemed key.

Good to see more new members.

The proposed change in credentials to allow the use of experience on the Internet for joining FAPA looks good to me.

Keith Walker (It's Bad News Week): I'm sorry to hear about your diabetes. It seems to happen to people who are overweight and have a sweet tooth. A friend of ours was diagnosed with it several years ago after he had a near heart attack. The heart condition was taken care of by bypass surgery. For that and the diabetes, he changed his diet to eliminate most sugar and took up regular exercise at a gym. He lost quite a bit of weight and looks much better. Unfortunately, his heart almost stopped recently while he was driving on the freeway. He passed out momentarily and ran his car into the barrier at the side of the road. On the other hand, he walked out of his car with only injuries. He broke eight ribs. The heart condition was taken care of, and he is recovering now.

From your discussions about your weight, I gather you are a large person and not just sideways. My understanding is that the ideal weight tables have recently been redone. Your doctor may not have the latest ones. They put my ideal weight at over a hundred pounds; and my target is ninety, based on my weight history. I managed to lose about twenty or thirty pounds in the past two or three years, but I don't seem to be able to get below ninety-six. It's probably good enough. I'm only a bit worried, because I seem to be shrinking.

I discovered the merits of low-carbohydrate diets long before Dr. Atkins published his book. I found a book while I was in college that described the "Air Force diet", which was a low carbohydrate diet. I'm using that again, though I seem to have lost the book. There have been many improvements in the foods available that make this diet much easier than it was back then. I have found low carbohydrate versions of Belgian chocolate, biscotti, ice cream, breakfast cereal, and other foods. I'm also using Splenda (maltodextrin and sucralose) as the sweetener of choice. Marty Cantor first brought it to my attention. I've used it to make cocoa, and it tastes the same to me as sugar. The amounts used are the same, which make it easy to use.



Mike has also been successful in losing weight just by cutting out sugar. Unlike me, he has a sweet tooth.

Dale Speirs (Sansevieria): I haven't noticed anyone in our area without training calling himself an arbourist, though there are so-called tree services. It doesn't take a lot of education to learn the proper way of pruning trees, so I really don't understand why I see so many badly pruned trees.

Marty Cantor (The Fish Wrap Papers): What kind of central nervous disorder do you have? Elsewhere you mention shaking in your hands. Is it something like Parkinson's?

I think a permanent wave may be permanent. It may be that it seems temporary, because hair keeps growing. The new growth does not have the wave.

Ben Indick (Ben's Beat 74): We spent quite a bit of time looking at Mars this past summer. Mike got some nice photos, which you can see at our web site.

Thanks for the compliment on the cover. It was actually done many years ago. I hope to find more time for art, but this does not look easy.

On one stairway walk in LA, which took place before 1994, from when I have them on the computer, we saw a house built in the Gaudi style. If I have a chance to dig up the slide, I'll scan it in sometime so you can see. Keep reminding me.

I was given Librium in England when I was there for Junior Year Abroad. I got really homesick and couldn't stop crying. I went to the infirmary, and they gave me Librium. It didn't do a thing for me. I have used Valium as a muscle relaxant. The dosage I was using did not put me to sleep.

Milt Stevens (Alphabet Soup #40): Thanks for the compliment on the cover. One of these days I hope to put some pictures of my artwork on my web site. Yes, it is a kangaroo rat.

Tim Marion (Terminal Eyes 10): I hope we haven't failed already at space exploration or colonization. Westward expansion also didn't proceed without setbacks. I believe the Chinese have stated that they intend to get men to the Moon. The closer they get to their goal, the greater the influence that will have on our (US) programme. Perhaps that was what Bush had in mind during his recent declaration about the future of our space programme. I'm not a gung-ho supporter of national space programmes. I'd rather see private ventures succeed. However, I feel that a national space programme may be what we need to re-stimulate young people to get into the sciences and engineering; it's a national embarrassment that a large percentage of the scientific and engineering community in this country were born elsewhere. Now the only motivation that our young people apparently seem to have is money.

"Mystery!" is still part of the PBS line-up, but they seem to alternate new shows with "Masterpiece Theatre". In between, they show a lot of repeats.

I was apparently part of a very small minority watching the new *Family Affair*. I had three reasons for watching: Tim Curry, Gary Cole (who had starred in *Crusade*), and high definition. It was, I think, the first show I saw in high def when I was still ooh-ing and aah-ing over it. I don't know if I would have been as motivated to watch without all three reasons.

I doubt that any role Tim Curry could do would eclipse that of Frank N. Furter. That role is so different and unique.

I only had one reason for watching *Sliders* - John Rhys-Davies. The series was very much like a series that George R. R. Martin pitched a number of years ago, but I don't think he got any credit for *Sliders*. The idea never attracted me. I thought John Rhys-Davies's talents were wasted in the series.

The cat songs audiotape I mentioned buying at con was a tape of songs about cats. I do have tapes I made, from CDs I gave to my sister, of cats singing; someone recorded cats and then remixed the sounds as songs.

Meeting for breakfast at a con would be nice. As long as most of the food you are shovelling in gets into your mouth and not on the table, I don't think there would be a problem.

Double-glazing is the use of two layers of glass in a window. It's usually used to keep the heat or cold out. However, it would probably help to keep out sounds as well. The two panes of glass usually have air in between. While this would work somewhat to keep sounds out, it would work even better if you had a vacuum between the panes. I've heard of triple-glazing as well, I believe.

I've read the Bible about three times, but I certainly don't remember all of it. I don't remember if I read the same version three times. I rather think I must have read three different versions, probably Standard Revised, New English, and Good News, though I think the last is just the New Testament. I have purchased the Old Testament translation done by a Jewish group, but I haven't read that one.

The *Star Trek* episode "Arena" was actually credited to Fredric Brown, if I recall correctly.

As long as we are talking about TV here, this seems to be the right place to mention that our cable company has added INHD and INHD2 to their high definition line-up. These are two high definition stations that showcase high def shows. They run no commercials in the usual sense, though they do show previews for theatrical movies. Among the shows they are currently running is the latest incarnation of *Twilight Zone*. I've been watching these as time permits just to see them in high def. Cox also just added Fox to their high def line-up, but I haven't had a chance to watch it yet. Of the shows I watch regularly, there are only four that are shown in high def - *Smallville*, *Whoopi*, *Jeremiah*, and *Dead Like Me*. The latter two are in hiatus right now. We can occasionally get Fox's on-air broadcast in high def, so I have sometimes been able to watch *The Simpsons* that way. The station that carries *Gene Roddenberry's Andromeda* is in high def, but I don't think the show is actually high def. Some PBS stuff is in high def. There were two "Mystery!" episodes based on the works of Tony Hillerman a couple of months ago. It's always a chore to find out about these, since they are not listed in their printed guide. I have to go online and look.

Roger Wells (Voice of the Habu): I'm wondering whether it might be easier to conduct three conversations simultaneously in three different languages than in the same language. Not that I think I could do either.

Boy, if I got fifty to one hundred spams daily, I think I would just give up on e-mail. AOL was the worst offender, but I've shut off that conduit. Even there, though, I don't think I got that much. Both Entourage and the Mac OS X Mail program seem to be quite good at filtering junk. Mail correctly labels junk mail about ninety percent of the time. I check the junk folder just to make sure something legitimate didn't get mislabelled as junk, but I've only found that to be the case a couple of times. Entourage isn't as good at labelling junk mail. Still, among three e-mail addresses, I average only five to ten spam e-mails per day. My third e-mail address goes through a server that has some spam filtering. I also moderate two lists, but the junk mail that gets trapped daily is under ten. Mac.com may also have some spam filtering on its server. I don't know what cox.net does.

I've been to a few parties where watching TV or a video was part of the activity, and I've heard of parties where people get together to watch some special show. Otherwise, I don't see the point of going to a party just to watch TV. Some people leave their TV on all the time, but then it just becomes background noise. I suppose getting together with friends to see a movie might be an equivalent activity, but usually you stay together afterward to discuss the movie over a meal.

Tom Feller (The Road Warrior): Mike says the top speed of a 747 is probably around 450 knots.

Fred Lerner (Lofgeornost #73): A lot of the new radio drama shows are available on cassette or CD. I have several of the plays that were recorded in LA, and I recently bought a set of shows hosted by Harlan Ellison.

Mike McInerney (Number One #5): I'm just reading your *Quokka Quest #1* now. I'm a bit behind in my reading of computer-stored stuff. But I'm even further behind in my reading of printed stuff.

Moi (Feline Mewsings #14): I didn't get the back slope of the garden terraced this year. The gardener I was using injured his shoulder. Then the rainy season started. However, I have the name of a landscaper who can do it for me. I will contact him when the rainy season is over. If he can get the work done this spring, the area may be ready to plant this summer (for the loquat) and next winter.

Group Organizer has new problems now. After Mike upgraded my operating system after the holidays, I was unable to sync it with my Palm. The software company's support people tried to help me but without success. I can still sync the other stuff on my Palm, so I am entering the calendar stuff twice whenever I manage to remember. I check each against the other at least once a week.

The vet thinks we have finally managed to determine the correct dosage for Shadow's thyroid medication. We will know for certain when I take Shadow back for a checkup. In the meantime, it is time for Fluffy's annual checkup. I had mine the last week in January and passed with flying colours. The chronic fatigue syndrome doesn't show up on a normal physical.

Our video editing is coming along well. We are working on our third DVD from our Alaska trip. Unfortunately none of the aurora borealis footage came out. We do, however, have one still picture of it that came out; that's the one I published in my last issue. Each of the first two DVD is about ninety minutes; the third one is shorter. After that there are about three hours of video from Loscon to edit.

We found out what the weird show we saw part of on A&E in Alaska was. It is an Australian science fiction film titled *Alien Visitor*. It was released in 1995. While it's sf in form, I would say it's more of an environmental propaganda film.

In mid-December the reviews coordinator for simegen.com resigned. I became the new reviews coordinator. Since I have been posting reviews for almost a year, I was fairly familiar with the procedures and the intention of the reviews area. The whole area was being revamped to be more automated, and this process was speeded up by the change in personnel. It's not quite finished yet, but it's live. The newsletter was taken over by a new editor in November. I still post the newsletters to the Internet, though. I know enough rudimentary HTML now to do this economically. The new reviews responsibilities took a few weeks to master, and I fell behind with the author interviews. However, the reviews functions have become much more routine now, so I hope I can get back to the interviews soon.

Janice Morningstar (Grin and (Teddy) Bear It): One nice thing about Seattle is that there is an express lane on the freeway for people who are just driving through the city. I have used it on at least two occasions. The express lane has no exits through the downtown area of Seattle, and the traffic thereon moves quite quickly. LA could really use something like that. We can take the HOV lanes to drive to downtown LA, but there is no HOV lane through the centre of the city.

There is a bridge in the Seattle area that used to get really bad. I've heard that they have added or are adding lanes to relieve some of the congestion. This bridge takes you from Tacoma to the Port Townsend area, but the bridge was too narrow.

As far as the bridges in the Bay Area, I heard so much about the traffic that I avoided them, unless I was travelling against the traffic, as much as possible. Consequently I never had any bad experiences with those.

I don't think your theory about why I don't multitask well holds much water. My sister is an expert at it and has been all her life. When we were in high school, she would routinely hold phone conversations while watching TV. She claimed that she could follow the shows. If I tried that, I would lose one or the other. She never married and doesn't have kids. When I try to multitask, I just make lots of errors.

I don't know that Arthur C. Clarke is really writing much fiction these days. It seems to me that what he does is hatch ideas that he passes to other authors. He gets co-author credit, but I believe most of the writing work is actually being done by the other author.

You said that the number 47 holds some significance to graduates of Pomona College. Won't you tell us what that is?

Please note that the punctuation in my name is a hyphen, not a period. Thanks.

Robert Michael Sabella (Visions of Paradise #97: The Passing Scene): I have read all of last year's Hugo nominees at least in part. The part is Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Years of Rice and Salt*. I bought a secure Acrobat version of it. Unfortunately, when my computer crashed last summer, I lost the ability to open the file. Downloading it again didn't work. I discovered that getting help from Acrobat for their free reader would cost me \$30/hour. I decided not to put any more money into the book. Possibly I may have a chance to finish reading it, but I'm not highly motivated. After reading about two hundred out of about seven hundred pages, I wasn't enjoying the book. I found it difficult to be interested in the characters, who were little more than cardboard cut-outs. The writing is not easy to read, either, being rather dense with very little dialogue. The plot was hardly existent and not exciting at all. Although it would be difficult for me to say categorically that Robert Sawyer's *Hominids* definitely deserved the Hugo above the others, I can say that his book was exciting, easy to read, and had characters who were very easy to identify with. I have read other books by him (*Terminal Experiment*, *Starplex*, and *Calculating God*), and they are all good reads if not quite as good as *Hominids*. When I finished *Hominids*, I was happy to learn that there was another book coming about the same characters; I hadn't known it was part of a series. I voted, by the way, for David Brin's *Kiln People*. It is just as exciting a book and goes into a bunch of metaphysics at the end, which I liked. On the other hand, the ending was a bit of a let-down. China Miéville's *The Scar* was excellently crafted with good plot and characterization, but I find his style a bit hard to get into. Swanwick's *Bones of the Earth* was not quite as good as the preceding three. The characterization was rather flat, so the reader's sympathy does not get engaged. In conclusion, I would say the Hugo probably went to the right book. Whether better books were published the same year is a different question, the answer to which I wouldn't know.

Why do you object to the stuff you put on spaghetti being called "sauce"? That's what everyone else calls it, and I do know some other Italian-Americans. Or is the "gravy" you make for your spaghetti different from the usual spaghetti sauce?

Maybe it's because you make no restrictions on restaurant choice that everyone picks reasonable ones. Whenever there is a restriction, the choice that is not allowed is what everyone naturally wants. Otherwise, people are probably going to pick a place they are familiar with.

I definitely think successful writing can be learned. The only part that can't be learned is the interest in writing.

Arnie Katz (Plasma, Nov. 2003): The Dorsai Irregulars use the beret as part of their uniform.

This might be in the past tense, since I don't know if the group is still in existence.



General Comment: A couple of mailings ago, Arthur Hlavaty ran a set of nine-nine statements about himself. It was one short of the one hundred that was the purported goal. This inspired me to come up with a hundred statements about myself. It lacks the humour of Arthur's list, I'm afraid. I've been told that I make a great straight man. I'm not so great with humour. Anyway, here they are.

1. I was born in Japan.
2. I was introduced to sf and f as a child in the form of the Baron von Munchausen stories.
3. When I was growing up, we had a dog.
4. I came to the US with my family, parents and sister, when I was seven.
5. I learned English after coming

6. to the US.
6. We came to this country with very little, as my father had just earned his degree and was coming to his first job.
7. We moved to Rochester, NY, where my father had attended the university as a Fulbright scholar.
8. We adopted a cat when we were in Rochester.
9. My mother started me on piano lessons; but I gave up on them when I was in eighth grade, using a sprained thumb as an excuse.
10. I was first entered into a public school but learned very little, as the classes were much too large for individual attention.
11. Then we found a private school giving scholarships to foreign students.
12. As soon as I was able to read English, I was a frequent patron at the library and soon found that the books with labels showing rocket ships or atom symbols were the best ones.
13. My first exposure to figure skating was in grade school; I returned to it twice, once in college and then much later only to have to give it up for health reasons.
14. I started learning French in third grade and continued studying it through college.
15. We moved to Massachusetts after three years in this country, and I went back to public schools.
16. When I entered junior high, it was my first exposure to Jews.
17. When we bought our first house, we adopted a cat, who unfortunately contracted leukaemia, as did his siblings.
18. After junior high, while we were in Massachusetts, most of my classmates were Jewish.
19. In eighth or ninth grade, I was exposed to adult sf in novel form by classmates.
20. We moved back to Rochester, NY, in the middle of tenth grade.
21. A cat that we brought with us ran away and became feral; we adopted two other cats in his place.
22. I tried going back to the private school, but I didn't like it there, so I continued with public school.
23. When I was a senior, the first black student enrolled in our school.
24. College was an eye-opening experience for me and a difficult cultural adjustment; I was paired up with a black student from New Orleans.
25. I think college for me was more about emotional development than education.
26. I soon became restless and this led to my spending junior year in England, where I did some more emotional developing.
27. When I returned from England, I worked a summer as a library intern.
28. I was having problems academically and decided on going to library school after college; at least this was a way to make a living.
29. In grad school, I was introduced to sf magazines.
30. It was in one of those that I read about WorldCons.
31. My first con was Torcon 2.
32. There I picked up various flyers and got hooked up to other fans.

33. Andy Porter published my first LoC.
34. I think I started out as a very good student when I was young but got bored and ended up impatient to leave school behind.
35. I've always been a late bloomer; I'm still trying to decide what to do when I grow up.
36. All my life, I've had too many interests and not enough time to pursue all of them.
37. I've always been in love with colours; it's hard for me to resist buying a large box of crayons of many colours when I see one at a store.
38. My art teacher in junior high threatened to haunt me if I didn't go into art.
39. I've continued to dabble in art but have never made a living at it; I had the idea that making money with it would ruin it for me as a hobby.
40. Singing is another of my interests, but it's sort of fallen by the wayside.
41. I've always loved to write, starting with collecting pen pals and then progressing to keeping a diary.
42. Fandom provided me with an outlet for both my art and writing, and I have dabbled in both since discovering fandom.
43. On the other hand, fandom may have kept me from getting more involved with singing and figure skating.
44. I became involved with apas fairly early on and have been a member of at least one apa at any time since then.
45. In 1982, I was laid off from my first job.
46. As a result, I moved to the West Coast with my parents; my sister had moved here already a few years before.
47. After a long job search, I finally found a job in late 1983 and moved to Los Angeles; my roots sank in, and I felt I was finally home.
48. Many of the people who were my initial friends in LA have moved away.
49. My sister, who was living in LA, also moved away eventually.
50. I have lived in five different places in the LA area.
51. In 1986 I became a homeowner.
52. I adopted my first cat that year.
53. I was laid off for a second time in 1992.
54. As a result of the Northridge earthquake, I was able to find another job just before I was ready to throw in the towel.
55. In late 1995 I found my Prince Charming.
56. In 1996 I totalled my car in an accident caused by unknown health factors.
57. In 1997, Mike and I found a nice house in a very pleasant neighbourhood.
58. In 1999 I was forced to quit working for health reasons.
59. Fortunately I was still able to get to Australia for Worldcon and start my new hobby of videotaping.
60. About a year later, I started doing some volunteer work on the web for a web site geared toward writers and sf fans.
61. Spending more time at home meant that I became more concerned about the appearance of the garden and took some gardening classes at the local botanical gardens.
62. Over the years I've done a lot of flip-flopping politically, but I think I'm basically an environmentalist.
63. I'm gardening organically and buying organically grown fruits and vegetables as much as possible.
64. I have always liked cats and dogs to a somewhat lesser extent; we have three cats now.
65. I collect skunk things - stuffed animals, jewellery, books, figurines.
66. I've always collected things.
67. I have a stamp collection and specialize in stamps about the space programme, astronomy, nature, and anything else that strikes my fancy.
68. I've never liked to cook, though I don't mind baking so much.
69. My favourite colour used to be blue, but it's been green for many years.
70. I don't like teal and don't care for purple.
71. I have eclectic tastes in music, my favourites being Prokofiev, Mozart, Wagner, heavy metal, Hawaiian music, and Christmas music.
72. I don't care for country and don't consider rap to be music.
73. I enjoy exploring places where I live, so I join historical societies and other groups that have outings to various interesting places.
74. I enjoy getting together with like-minded people.
75. I enjoy political humour, such as the Capitol Steps and Mark Russell.
76. I like the British *Carry on ...* movies.
77. I enjoy Steve Martin.
78. I admire Harlan Ellison.
79. I enjoy almost anything by J. Michael Straczynski.
80. My spelling is excellent.

81. My sense of smell is too good for my own good.
82. I'm very prone to motion sickness.
83. I've never handled stress very well, but I find that I'm supersensitive to it now.
84. I have frequent headaches.
85. My digestive system is the first thing to act up when I'm tired or under stress.
86. I used to be cold all the time, but now I'm frequently bothered by hot flushes.
87. My eyes have always been somewhat on the dry side, but now they are too dry to allow me to wear contact lenses.
88. I'm short and haven't found a way to grow taller; worse, I seem to be shrinking.
89. Being short is a big problem when it comes to clothing; almost everything has to be shortened or custom-made.
90. I have small feet, and it's difficult to shop for shoes.
91. My favourite gem is emerald, which is my birthstone.
92. I prefer gold to silver for jewellery.
93. I don't care much for diamonds unless they're blue.
94. I don't like pink.
95. I used to be afraid of heights but got over that.
96. I don't have much of a sweet tooth, but I like chocolate.
97. I tend to prefer salty snacks to sweet ones.
98. I like meat too much to be a vegetarian.
99. I enjoy needlepoint and crossword puzzles.
100. I like lists.

* * *

*** Letters of Comment
(For the uninitiated,
these are letters
commenting on
previous issues of my
fanzine [newsletter])**



My replies to the letters will be enclosed in double parentheses. I will also routinely make editorial corrections in punctuation, spelling, and so forth.

Sheryl Birkhead, Gaithersburg, MD

24 September – 4 November 2003

Nice cover by Franz Miklis!

[Later] Chagrin – but I *do* have excuses – the hurricane, a hit and run accident ... ((Sorry to hear you have had so many problems.))

Every time I see colour printing, I think, nah – I have a laser printer; and the last time I looked, they were still about \$2200 ... ((Our colour printer is an ink jet. The good colour laser printers are still way too expensive. Our black and white printer is a laser.))

I've ordered an '04 Matrix (after the hit and run). I toyed with waiting to see the '04 Prius, but there was just not enough time to do my homework (and it would be the first year with the second-generation technology ...) ((Sometimes the timing doesn't work out. I hope your new car is working out well.))

...

Apologies for the horrendous scrawl – elbow hurts! ((Is that from the accident? Thank you for the

artwork you sent.))

#

Gerri Balter, St. Paul, MN

15 November 2003

Thank you for sending me your most recent edition of *Feline Mewsings*. I was sorry to hear that you were ill in May. I'm glad to hear that you are better now.

I have heard from friends of mine who garden that it's restful. Your banana plants are beautiful. ((I don't know if gardening is restful, but it does give me something to do that is physical rather than mental in nature on a fairly regular basis. It is rewarding to the extent that it is nice to see things growing because of something I did right.))

#

Rita Prince Winston, Venice, CA

16 November 2003

I read your zine happily but found few comment hooks. The first is that Acrobat Reader urged me to download updates, but when I clicked "OK", it just sent me to its website, with no indication of what I was supposed to download once there. ((I hate websites that do that. I rely on Mike to tell me when there are updates of software. There should be a way to find out what version of Acrobat Reader you have. The latest version is called Adobe Reader, which I had to get because some commercially sold PDF books require it.))

Ooh, color drawing of cute little rodent! Kangaroo rat, I guess, from the jumping position. Between-meals snack, say the cats.

Your parents now "believe [you] when [you] tell them the rush hour traffic in Seattle is nothing compared to LA"! Oh, doubting Thomases!

I'm glad to have been exposed to Marty Cantor's FAPazine title: "This Zine is Not Good Enough to Wrap Fish!"

"... I sent my application to First Fandom. Younger members are associates. You have to have been active in fandom for thirty years or more." Altho' I went to the 1972 (?) Worldcon in LA, I didn't really get involved in fandom until 1974 or 1975. First I went to some of Bjo's Strek cons, then I went to the LA NASFiC when the Worldcon was in Australia, and then I joined LASFS, APA-L, and LASFAPA. And now I don't do any of that stuff... ((If you're no longer doing any fannish stuff, you probably aren't interested in joining First Fandom. However, attending a Worldcon would definitely qualify you as having been a fan back then. My first fannish activity was Torcon 2. At the time I sent in my application, it hadn't quite been thirty years, but it is now. Torcon 2 set the ball rolling for me. I made connections very quickly after that and was drawn in to fanzine and convention fandom.))

Oh, color photo of tree with big bunch of bananas, and is that weird thing hanging down from them a flower? ((Yes, that is the banana flower. It appears first, and then starts dropping petals and the bananas start to appear.))

#

Liz Lehmann, Fairport, NY

23 November 2003

Your banana tree in your *Feline Mewsings* is very impressive.

#

Lloyd Penney, Etobicoke, ON, CANADA

12 December 2003

I've got issue 13 of *Feline Mewsings* here; and now that the week is almost done, I have time to get some LoCs done. That's a wonderful jerboa on the front, by the way -- ((Thanks for the complement on my

artwork.))

You certainly enjoy local theatre -- wish I could afford it! The Toronto production of *The Producers* opened just last night, with local comedian/musician/actor Seán Cullen as Max Bialystok. It was a surprise for some of the actors in the production that Mel Brooks himself was in the audience, and he was invited on stage to take a bow with the rest of them. There was mention of the Jason Alexander/Martin Short version in Los Angeles on the morning news today. ((Except for *The Producers*, which was quite expensive, the other theatre venues we frequent are much more affordable. I'd say the average ticket price is under \$30 a ticket. I've found that there are many lower-cost theatres that put on better performances on average than some of the more expensive ones.))

I keep wishing radio could be more than just music and slick DJs, so I'm all in favour of reviving radio theatre. I wish I could participate in it, too. I told you about the spoken word horror CD I did a couple of years ago now, and I keep looking for opportunities to do more of the same. ((One radio station here that has been doing old-time radio drama for years suddenly stopped recently. Mike and I are dismayed. We are making do listening to radio drama on CDs and tapes. I also occasionally listen to an East Coast station by web. Another radio station has apparently picked up the drama hour, but we haven't found out when they're broadcasting it yet.))

Ned Brooks recently became an associate member of First Fandom, and I just have to wait a few more years before I can join myself, and I plan to. I need to ascertain whom I'd talk to, and where I'd send my money. ((The address I have for First Fandom membership is Don Dailey, Membership Chairman, PO Box 354, Georgetown, IN 47122-0354.))

No Monet to buy Degas to make the Van Gogh? Once you get Degas, you can go Chopin with your Liszt. Be Bach in a while -- ((Groan!))

Looks like Neil Kaden is in the same boat I am -- I can't find any work right now, even with a new and improved résumé, and networking, and professionals looking for me to assist my job search. What am I looking for? Anything in printing and publishing. I may be a victim of reduced literacy rates, for I keep hearing that various local newspapers and magazines are laying off staff. ((Good luck with your job search.))

Well, Torcon 3 has come and gone, and it certainly wasn't what we had hoped it would be. Politics kept Yvonne and me off the committee, so we were able to attend and reunite with lots of old friends; but yet, I wish we could have been on the committee in an effort to improve things. It wasn't the convention I'd wanted it to be. ((I'm sorry you were disappointed with Torcon 3. I think I know how you feel. After moving to the LA area about twenty years ago, I attended several Loscons. I found them disappointing and stopped going regularly. I still went occasionally if I heard about something I wanted to see, usually just for one day. This year, I was on two programme items on Friday and Sunday, so I decided to stay for the whole weekend. I really enjoyed it. It's the best Loscon I've attended. I don't know whether I've changed or Loscon has improved. Possibly it's a combination of both. I know the parties have become better. The masquerade has also improved. With a Worldcon, though, you only have one shot. My first con was Torcon 2. I couldn't tell you whether it was a good or bad con. I was such a neo that I didn't even know about the parties.))

Time to go -- Yvonne will be home shortly, and we have a little bit of shopping to do before we can start on our weekend. Take care, and have a great Christmas and New Year's.

#

Neil Kaden, Fairview, TX

29 December 2003

Thanx for the notice of FM14 being online. Great cover and lots of pictures -- obviously why it took so long to download thru my modem. ((I realize that my zines can be hefty downloads. That's why I offer alternatives for people who need it. Thanks for the compliment on the cover.))

Was surprised that your Alaskan Cruise actually had a cruise ship. A few years back my parents went on what they kept telling us was an Alaskan Cruise; but when they returned and showed us the movies, we learned it was a bus / hiking / boating tour group, where they slept each night in a (usually different) hotel room. The ship they toured on was small (perhaps 25 passengers + crew), and they went out amongst the glaciers on it a few days. ((There are many different kinds of ways you can do an Alaska cruise. If you check out the photos at our web site, you'll see that we ran into many other cruise ships on our trip. There are the smaller boats like the ones your parents took, but doing it that way actually costs more. I enjoyed the wildlife and the cruising experience.))

Glad you survived the Mac meltdown. Going for you were two key things: (1) a server you backed up to and (2) Mike.

Still looking for work, along with millions of others. My primary client ran out of cash, and my secondary business has been offline for six months -- but at least I [earned some income] as a consultant before that kicked in. Cris got a promotion at the store to Supervisor -- means a raise and up to ten more hours a week -- and either opening (starting at 8) or closing ('til 10-11pm) most days; so sleeping is starting to be a problem again as she tries to adjust to shifting hours and the stress of my situation. ((Sorry to hear about your continuing employment situation. At least the economy is slowly thawing out. May you have better luck soon. Congratulations to Cris on her promotion.))

#

John Hertz, Los Angeles, CA

30 December 2003

Thanks for FM14 with swell Rotsler.

The Santa Claus on back was once all the computer graphics there were.

#

Gerri Balter, St. Paul, MN

30 December 2003

I enjoyed reading about your trip. You had an interesting time. I have been to most of the places you write about but saw them from a different perspective. It was interesting reading about places I had visited from some one else's point of view.

You didn't say, but I assume you flew Alaska Airlines both ways. It sounds like your flight to Alaska was nicer than your trip home.

#

Ed Meskys, Center Harbor, NH

31 December 2003

Hi--just finished reading the zine. I did save it and might have my wife describe some of it, especially that gibberish of punctuation marks at the end. ((The gibberish punctuation at the end is a text graphic from back in the old days before real computer graphics.))

Bill Bowers and Fred Lerner send me their FAPazines electronically and I enjoy reading them, too. Ben Indick is an old friend going back to my days with the Tolkien Society of America, and he used to send me print copies, but I should nag him for an electronic copy.

Some neighbours just came back from an Alaska trip, and they used a digital still camera, and then put all their pix on a DVD as stills that they played for us. Of course, my wife got much more out of it. ((I take videos, and Mike takes stills. We edit the videos and put them on DVDs with the stills, which we place on the disks as slide shows. So far, we've only sent copies to family. We can make duplicates if other people express an interest in any of our videos. The DVDs begin with our Worldcon trip to Australia. We just finished a DVD of short outings we took from fall 2002 through August 2003.))

I did enjoy Torcon; but there hasn't been a Worldcon since my first in 1956, which I didn't enjoy. Many

had problems, but there was still enough good in them.

I do not know whether I sent you my e-zine *Entropy* or my Christmas letter but will append the latter. If I haven't sent *Entropy* I will send it. I only do it about twice a year and five ish thus far have been APA combined with genzine. ((I downloaded your VIEW FROM ENTROPY HALL #32 and #33 when they were announced on one of the e-lists. I download announced zines regularly. I haven't been LoCcing any of them due to my being so backed up in my reading. I have read yours, though.))

I had not gotten into *Next Generation* at first but really enjoyed the last three or four years of it. I only saw the first movie, but the others have not come out on video with description voice-overs giving the action. A friend owns the DVDs and I will eventually borrow them. Neither Sandy nor I are big movie or TV fans. Anyhow, I remember at Nolacon II there were many anti Wesley Crusher remarks. I take it he has been rehabilitated in the movies. (He was absent from the show the last few years, as I remember.) I wonder how he was received at the LASFS meeting. He must have had a positive experience if he wrote it up on his web site. ((Wesley Crusher just had a cameo in the latest Star Trek film. Wil actually filmed a real scene, but it ended up on the cutting room floor. Wil feels very much at home at the LASFS. He calls himself a nerd, and most LASFSians are also. We usually don't go to the LASFS, but we went to hear Wil. Larry and Fuzzy Niven also stayed to hear him. Wil thinks the world of Larry but says he is too intimidated to talk to him. I've been trying to persuade him to overcome this silly feeling. Wil was a guest at Loscon, and you can read my report in this issue.))

#

Stella Nemeth, Lake Forest, CA

31 December 2003

I generally dip into your fanzines, but this time I read carefully mainly because I'd love to take one of those Alaska cruises myself. The photos of Alaska are just wonderful.

When we saw you, you mentioned that it generally rains in Alaska; but it is still too bad that the weather kept you from doing some of your scheduled sightseeing. And it is too bad you got sick on the trip. But I know what you mean about being tired. Joe and I also scheduled too many things on our trip to Mexico last year. I would have been very tired at the end of the trip if we hadn't had a full day at sea with nothing whatever to do except recover from the previous three days of sightseeing.

#

Rita Winston, Venice, CA

3 January 2004

I don't understand the cover. Is it supposed to be a saltshaker, pepper mill, and their child? ((I thought they were buildings.))

Why would the watches not get their time signal during the night when in hotels? How would they know whether they're in hotel or an apartment building? ((The metal used in structures such as hotels sometimes interferes with the reception. Also there could be problems if the windows don't face Colorado, where the time signals originate.))

Colour pictures! Yum.

Funny about retrieving the luggage to get the room key. Lucky that Mike found your missing earring.

Reindeer sausage and reindeer chili -- both sausage and chili are highly spiced foods, sometimes so much so that one cannot tell by taste whether they were made of beef or tofu, so I'm wondering if them being reindeer meat made a difference to the taste.

Is the little animal standing up in Santa Barbara a prairie dog or a meerkat? ((It's a meerkat.))

Lee Gold found the text of the Hawking lecture on the Web: <http://216.239.41.104/search?q=cache:oI-WUuawXZwJ:www.damtp.cam.ac.uk/strlst/dirac/hawking/+%22stephen+hawking%22+godel&hl=en&i>

e=UTF-8 .

I hope your health gets a lot better.

#

Mary Manchester, Rochester, NY

26 January 2004

Thank you for sending *F. M.* #14. The more I read about your Alaska cruise, the more appealing it sounds. I had just a taste of Alaska back in the early '70s, and this is reminding me of all I wanted to go back to see and do.

#

Janet Weasner, Bremerton, WA

29 January 2004

Certainly enjoy your *Feline Mewsings* #14 ...

Wonder if the movie *Seabiscuit* will win the major film award this year? Never know what the Academy will do.

What was the final diagnosis concerning Shadow? You thought he probably was hyperthyroid.

Really enjoyed the picture of your banana plant.

How do you play Sherlock Holmes Musical Pursuit? I am a Sherlock Holmes fan. ((Let's see if I can recall this. The people running the game read a selection from a Holmes story. Then a pianist played a musical clue that fit in with the story. We had to guess the name of the song. I believe there was a pun involved.))

#

Tom Feller, Nashville, TN

4 February 2004

Thanks for sending the zine through FAPA.

I liked your trip report. My parents will be taking a cruise to Alaska in August. This will mark the 50th state they have visited. ((Your parents have been to all fifty states? Wow! Alaska was a new state for me, but there are several others I haven't been to yet, even if you count just travelling through by car or train.))

I saw *Seabiscuit* last summer and read the book over the Xmas holidays. The movie was quite faithful to the book; although the book had more detail, especially the efforts by jockeys to keep their weight down.

* * *

* Closing Remarks

The next issue will have a couple of con reports for two small cons – ConDor in San Diego and Corflu, which will be in Las Vegas this year. There should also be the usual theatre reports and possibly more.

This winter has been middling as far as rain goes. We had quite a bit in December. Most of January was dry. We have had some more rain recently (mid-February). The temperatures have been on the cool side most of the time.