

Feline Mewsings #24



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Feline ~~M~~ewsings

#24

May 2006

* Editorial / Introduction

Just after I finished the previous issue, the DVR cable box died, taking with it several programmes I'd recorded but had not yet watched. The cable guy brought over a replacement the same day, and the new unit has worked okay so far.

The figure skating season has ended now, but I was quite busy for a while, watching Olympics coverage and then the World Figure Skating Championships as well as a few other skating shows. On other TV fronts, Cox added another high def station called Universal HD. It carries movies, old series, and some sports. I was able to catch episodes of two recent series that I'd missed – *Century City*, a futuristic legal show, and *Medical Investigation*, which was about investigators working out of the NIH. I don't know if the NIH actually has people like that, but the show was interesting even though it only lasted one season. *Century City* didn't last that long, and only about four of its dozen or so episodes were originally shown.

The Sci Fi channel has finished their season for their Friday night line-up. They are showing *Doctor Who* now. I hope you're all watching, because several of the episodes are on the Hugo ballot. Another notable show on the channel was *The Dark King: the Dragon King*. This is a show that tells the same story as Wagner told in his Ring Cycle.

In early February we had a brief visit from Jean Weber, who flew in for a conference at the airport and then went on to Washington state.

We've had rain off and on for this whole three-month period. Most of the time, it's been pretty chilly. It doesn't look like this weird weather is ending quite yet.

We have a new dentist. Our old dentist decided to retire and was able to sell her practice to our new one. Our new dentist is from Iran by way of Sweden. Her family does not like the religious government in Iran. She has a young son. Her husband is a pilot for American Airlines. Unfortunately the reason I met her the first time was because of another infected tooth that had to be extracted. Now I have no molars on the bottom. I will soon be calling the oral surgeon about a possible implant.

After months of trying to get a working charger for my hedge pruner, the company that sold me the replacement charger also replaced my battery. I guess they replaced it, because it was impossible to tell whether the battery might have been damaged by a bad charger. So I finally was able to prune the back hedge. It took quite a while because it was so overgrown, but it's all done now.

In early March there was a planned electric outage, so that the power company could make repairs. It was all supposed to get done by dinnertime. However, we didn't get our power back until we were in bed.

Our electric toothbrush, a Sonicare, which was given us by my parents shortly after we bought our house, is starting to die. This happened following the planned outage. I don't know if the two things are connected. My parents already replaced theirs, which was slightly older than ours. They said my sister's was also dying. Anyway they bought us a replacement as an early birthday present for me.

At the end of March, my father suffered from a stroke. When it happened, my parents didn't realize that's what happened, so half a day went by before he was taken to hospital at the instigation of a friend, who helped carry my father to the car. The first sign that something was wrong was when my father woke up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom and couldn't stand up. It wasn't until later that it became obvious that his left side was affected. A cat scan showed damage to the thalamus, which is the

brain's switching centre for messages from one part of the body to another. He spent a little time in a nursing home. Then he was sent to rehab. However, because he was making such slow progress, he was sent back to the nursing home. He wants to go home but can't until he can manage better.

* * *

* Mike

Mike went to Oracle at the end of January and the beginning of March. Another scheduled trip was cancelled due to weather.

It seems as though every time he upgrades his video editing software, it takes up more space on his hard drive. When the warranty expired on his computer, he had a larger drive put in. The old drive was placed in a housing that allows it to be used as a Firewire drive. All the work was done locally, which saved a lot of money in shipping costs.

* * *

* Local Activities

Movies

The Pink Panther: Steve Martin has made a new Pink Panther movie in the style of the originals. The plot of this one has the chief inspector of Paris assigning the Pink Panther crime to Inspector Clousseau. The crime was murder and the disappearance of the Pink Panther diamond. The idea is to distract everyone from the real investigation by having Clousseau in the public eye. When the chief inspector is ready to make an arrest, he fires Clousseau. Steve Martin plays Clousseau. Kevin Kline plays the chief inspector. Singer Beyoncé Knowles plays the murdered man's girlfriend. Clive Owen makes an uncredited appearance as agent 006.

Mike and I both enjoyed it. There are many laugh-out-loud scenes, though some are a bit over the top. Though it's a comedy, there is a real mystery that comes to a satisfactory conclusion. Mike liked the original Pink Panther movie, but I didn't; we recently watched the old one again, and I found it quite boring in parts. I just didn't find it really funny. We both liked the new one.

###

Theatre

The Glass Menagerie: This classic Tennessee Williams play was produced by The Colony. As usual it was excellently performed and very enjoyable. For anyone not familiar with the story, the main action takes place in St. Louis between the two world wars. The main character's mother had grown up as a southern belle but had married badly. Her husband had abandoned her years before. Tom and Laura are the children, both in their twenties. Tom has a barely adequate job in a warehouse; his income is basically the family's sole support. Laura is a cripplingly shy girl who fails when her mother enrolls her in a typing class. Her shyness leads her to become sick during one of her early classes, and she abandons her efforts. The mother panics over the fact that her daughter will not be able to support herself. Her prospects for marriage are dim because of her social clumsiness. They are totally dependent on Tom.

The central action of the play revolves around a dinner to which a colleague of Tom's is invited. The dinner guest is the mother's one hope for Laura. Unfortunately he is already engaged to be married.

The play explores relationships, responsibility, and the ability to cope with reality. The main characters are all crippled in their own way.

###

Other

California Citrus State Historic Park: We joined the Neighborhood Place Project for a tour of this place, which is located in Riverside. I became acquainted with the place after Huell Howser, a local phenom on PBS, did a show about it. As you may know, citrus fruit have played a large role in the California economy. This park showcases the history of citrus fruit from its origins to its arrival in California, the development of different varieties, and its role in state history. There is a museum with historical exhibits, picnic areas, walkways among citrus trees, and a large grove of various citrus trees. Across from the entrance is a stand where fruit in season is sold.



Our tour began with an overview of the place given by our group leader. Then we went inside the museum, where park employees gave us a narrated tour of the exhibits. This was followed by a tasting session of the fruit in season at the time. There were about ten different samples, including a couple of different varieties of navel orange, two different types of mandarin orange, one variety of lemon, and several others. Then we took a short narrated hike around part of the citrus grove. On our walk, we also saw a number of red-tailed hawks. We learned about the grafting of citrus trees. For instance, the navel is a variety that does not produce seeds; so the only way to propagate it is through

grafting.

Among the facts we learned was that navel requires higher temperatures than the Valencia orange, which means, for instance, that if I want to grow an orange tree at home, it will have to be a Valencia. Possibly in Oracle I might be able to grow a navel orange; I'll have to find out. The height of the citrus season is apparently in April. That's when the citrus sampling is scheduled. I thought the ten we had were plenty. I can't imagine tasting more. Among the goodies we took with us is a list of the many varieties grown at the park.

* * *



* Reviews

King Arthur

I recently saw this purportedly realistic version of the Arthur story on cable. The makers of the movie took many of the recently uncovered facts about early Britain and some of the conjectures and crafted their version of the story. As someone who has been interested in the Arthurian legends for a long time, I found the movie interesting but not artistically great. The biggest problem for me was that without a focus on any single character or small group of characters, there was really no one for me to identify with. It was more like watching a documentary than a tale of fiction.

Here's a much more detailed review written by Amy Harlib when she saw the movie in the theatre.

I really loved the concept of this film directed by Antoine Fuqua (*Training Day*) and scripted by David Franzoni (of *Gladiator* fame) under the aegis of blockbuster producer Jerry Bruckheimer. The all-too-frequent Hollywood formulaic popularizing somewhat diminishes this otherwise excellent historical drama based on (admittedly vague) archaeological evidence concerning the real nature of King Arthur during his actual time period when the Roman Empire abandoned its occupation of Britain in the fifth century AD. The stuff of legends associated with this heroic figure were all additions that were added over centuries of oral myth-making and layered with further interpretations by medieval scribes recording this material and adapting it into the forms now familiar.

This new cinematic *King Arthur* simultaneously dramatizes de-mythicized history while still using the nomenclature of folklore, setting up pre-programmed, cultural zeitgeist expectations that fail to be met. The resulting effect feels forced and awkward.

The film's story gets propelled by a too medieval-looking and behaving Christian bishop, Germanius (Ivano Marescotti), sent from Rome and delivering the unfortunate news of Rome's withdrawal from Britain to General Artorius AKA Arthur (Clive Owen). An esteemed warrior capable of thwarting attacks

by the indigenous pagan Woads (Celtic people) led by an elder named Merlin (Stephen Dillane), Arthur also earned his reputation by successfully repelling the sporadic raids by sea-going Saxons.

Arthur's companions-in-arms, actually Eastern European "Sarmatians" admired for their superior horsemanship who had been captured by Romans fifteen years prior to the film's main events and coerced into fifteen years of elite cavalry mercenary service on the British fringes of the Empire, yearn for their impending freedom, soon to be granted by the official documents in the Bishop's keeping. However, this longed-for release won't go into effect until the Sarmatian knights perform a crucial final task, rescuing a wealthy, high-status Roman family from their isolated country estate situated in the direct path of the largest, fiercest Saxon invasion so far.

While performing this mission, Arthur and his men all establish themselves as robust, appealing, vivid personalities, who include second in command Lancelot (Ioan Gruffud), Tristan (Mads Mikkelsen), Gawain (Joel Edgerton), Galahad (Hugh Dancy), and Bors (Ray Winstone). At cruel Christianized Marcus Homerus's (Ken Stott) estate, the heroes find an absurdly inquisition-like set-up where perverse monks torment in a dungeon prisoners taken mostly from among the oppressed serfs.

After the master and the torturers get what they deserve, Arthur finds amongst the liberated captives Guinevere (Keira Knightly), a Woad woman. The expedition fends off, along their way home, pursuing Saxons in a very exciting fight sequence on a frozen lake, a homage to the famous scene in *Alexander Nevsky* that does that one better by using clever underwater shots for some unique perspectives on the action. Here Guinevere reveals herself to be a brave amazon-type and expert archer.

Back at the Roman settlement near an incredibly impressive recreated Hadrian's Wall, the protagonists have their climactic showdown with the Saxons - typical Hollywood barbarian caricatures led by the memorably nasty, ultra-gruff Cedric (Stellan Skarsgard) and his equally sinister son Cynric (Til Schweiger). Before the big battle, Arthur enjoys an all-too-brief romantic interlude with Guinevere. The final frenzy offers thrilling sequences of rather bloody ancient warfare in which the Saxons use crossbows a thousand years too early, although the Romans' trebuchets did exist in that time period.

The best things about this *King Arthur* film include the fine performances of the leads, especially the portrayal of Arthur and his altruistic, tolerant Christianity in which he never proselytized but let his ideals speak for themselves, practicing the "Golden Rule" as much as he practically could, given the violence of his milieu. The dazzling visuals featured fascinatingly detailed costumes and blue woad body paint, sets and locations (actually Ireland standing in for England), and weapons and Roman armour used in terrific fight scenes all gorgeously photographed by Slavomir Idzik. Hans Zimmer's lush, symphonic, and choral score added beautiful atmospheric accompaniment to the proceedings.

This splendid-looking picture had many satisfying moments of drama, humour, and warrior-action; but it never quite worked as the already mentioned anachronisms negatively detracted from the production's positive aspects. Die-hard period epic fans like me will definitely want to see this film for its merits even while nitpicking its faults. There is a very good time to be had here if you don't fuss too much about this version of *King Arthur*, which probably will not be one that will pass into legend.

* * *

* My Health

Blame Tim Marion for this section. I needed to set him straight about the state of my health. Rather than just write an answer to his questions, I thought I would put an article here. For one thing, I have quite a bit to say on this topic. Some of you were around in 1999 when I first was diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, and neurocardiogenic syncope. Even if you were, though, you may not have the big picture; as I dribbled out facts slowly over time. So I am going to go over how these illnesses affect me. This isn't a general discussion of the diseases. In fact, the first two are syndromes, not diseases. A syndrome is a constellation of symptoms shared by many people where no cause is known or proven. It may turn out that we, in fact, suffer from many different diseases. There just isn't a lot known right now. Since none of these conditions is fatal in itself, there isn't a lot of urgency to study them.

Chronic fatigue syndrome. This is a condition in which regular exercise, instead of leading to more overall energy, just leads to the person being tired all the time. I really didn't believe it myself until my rheumatologist encouraged me to get twenty minutes of cardiovascular exercise every day. We both believed I would feel better. We're talking twenty minutes total per day but not necessarily all at one time. Well, after I did this for about six weeks, I could barely stay awake during the day. So I stopped

exercising, not entirely, but not that much. I still manage to get some exercise a few days a week, usually less than fifteen minutes. I can do lower level exercise, such as slow walking, for longer periods of time, but not every day. This means, for instance, that I can function pretty well at a convention for a weekend. But then I pretty much have to take things easy for the next two or more weeks. I also tire fairly easily when I'm driving, so I don't drive anywhere that's more than an hour away. I tried doing jury duty a couple of years ago. Fortunately I only had to serve one day. The following day, I didn't manage to get up until after noon. This means I could serve on juries if they allowed rest days between the days of service, but juries don't work that way.

Fibromyalgia. This is a condition defined by pain mostly. However, other symptoms, such as sleep problems, usually accompany it. The diagnosis is by a number of pressure points on the body. If there is pain in more than a minimum number, then the patient is diagnosed with fibro. My case is relatively minimal. I have aches and pains, but I can manage them with natural dietary supplements and OTC analgesics. I have learned to manage my sleep pretty well. I stress out easily but have learned to use herbal remedies and not to rely on prescription muscle relaxants, which usually have undesirable side effects. Stress and fatigue frequently lead to gastrointestinal problems; my lactose intolerance becomes exacerbated, for one. I have learned that the judicious use of ginger and peppermint keep me from being dependent on drugs such as Pepcid, which I use only when absolutely necessary.

Neurocardiogenic syncope. This is a condition that causes my blood pressure to experience a sudden drop when in an upright or sitting position. This can lead to light-headedness or even loss of consciousness. I have a suspicion that my car accident in 1996 may have been caused by this. There is no way to know for sure. But I no longer feel safe driving on freeways without a backup driver. When I'm driving alone, I stick with surface streets. No one knows what causes this. I suspect stress or fatigue may be factors.

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* Mailing Comments on FAPA #274:

Dale Speirs (Opuntia 59.3): The popularity of a president who isn't going to be running again can influence the voting in the off-year election as well as the election of the next president. If the current president isn't popular, people are more likely to vote for someone in a different party.

While I agree that most people when they hear "New York" think of the city, when Bob Silverberg kept comparing New York to California, I think it sounds as though he were comparing two states. However, I don't think he is really acquainted with New York except for the city. It's a bit misleading to compare a city against a state.

Thank you for clarifying exactly when an SUV might be useful to have. I've tried to tell my sister and parents that but lacked the clarity of expression. When Mike retires, I hope to get an SUV; but I hope my reasons are more valid than theirs. There are a lot of unpaved roads in Arizona, California too, in state parks and other wild areas that I'm interested in driving on. In fact, our land in Oracle is on such an unpaved road. At least that road is short enough that driving along it in an ordinary car, if done slowly, is not too bad.

I disagree in part with you about the reviews on amazon.com. If there's only one review for a book, CD, or DVD, it might not be very useful; but I find it useful when there are multiple reviews. They can help me decide when I am wavering about whether or not to get a particular title.

Your précis on the article about the presence of heavy metals in human bones through the ages was interesting but leaves more questions than answers. I know that high levels of lead and cadmium are poisonous, but I wonder about the effects of the other metals.

The article you describe about the extinction of Neanderthals is interesting. When Rob Sawyer discussed the same question at Coppercon, he posited that the longer life span of *homo sapiens* led to the development of being able to see patterns in nature and plan for the future, while Neanderthals continued to plod along hit or miss from season to season.

Ben Indick (Ben's Beat 83): I don't live in Washington State, but I have made several trips up there, always in summer. At least in summer, there seem to be plenty of sunny days. But I suppose if you live there, it's probably like my experience in upstate New York. You think it's cloudy most of the time. That's what I hated about the place (upstate New York).

The R in my name is just an R. That's why there's no period. Legally it's part of my first name: R-Laurraine; the hyphen is part of my name.

I didn't see the Moscow Cat Theatre. That review was written by Amy Harlib, who lives in New York City.

Other authors have written sequels to H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*, notably Stephen Baxter (*The Time Ships*). However, I am always interested in other sequels. I looked up your friend's Internet site and have written him an e-mail.



I much prefer the simple life of the city, where you can get your food from a supermarket like God intended. -

Dale Speirs



Robert Lichtman (King Biscuit Time No. 46): If you take into account the rather generous tax credit (not deduction) you get for buying most hybrid vehicles today, that probably makes up for any price difference.

When was the last time you were in Hollywood? Although I haven't checked this out personally, I hear there's been a great deal of renovation going on there in recent years.

One of the reasons I probably don't get very good mileage on my Geo Prizm is that most of my driving is on city streets between 35 and 45 miles per hour. And I don't drive very much. I put maybe three thousand miles per year on my car. Then there is the fact that I live more than a thousand feet up, and I have to climb up that hill every time I drive home from most anyplace. I used to get much better mileage when I was working and driving on freeways regularly. On most long trips, we take Mike's Prius.

A. Langley Searles (The Annex #21): Reading about your medical problems was more harrowing than watching any TV medical show. I am relieved that you survived your ordeal and hope you will soon be back to normal.

Eric Lindsay (For FAPA): My parents recently bought a Subaru Forester to replace their two Toyotas.

The VCR/DVD unit we have is capable of transferring from one medium to the other or would be if it were in working order.

Gordon Eklund (Sweet Jane #46): Certainly the nature of both Northern and Southern Californians have been changed by the influx of people from the East Coast. The first time I visited LA back in 1976, I found the drivers here to be really mellow. If you signalled a change of lane, a space opened up; you hardly had to check. Nowadays, they close up instead. I think there are too many New York drivers here now.

Back in the eighties, a bunch of us fans were walking around in an area of LA that was largely residential and didn't have much traffic. It took the one person among us who had lived in NYC to get us to cross the street without waiting for the lights to change. Tickets are given out here for jaywalking here as well if you happen to be seen by an alert policeman.

I vote for leaving the Alaskan wilderness alone in any case. My sister is guilty of being a solo driver of an SUV. My parents, though, go just about everywhere together. In my sister's defence, at least her SUV is a hybrid now.

Walking seems to be pretty popular here but not for getting anywhere. It's strictly an exercise thing. For a while there was a man who drove here and parked his car and then went on a jog every morning. I haven't seen him in a while, though, so he may have found a more convenient neighbourhood.

Dale Speirs (Opuntia 59.5): When I was growing up in Japan, there was a girl who was a bit older than I who had had polio. She was effectively an invalid. Her father was wealthy and travelled a lot, and she had dolls from all over the world.

My grandparents were more fortunate than yours in their chosen professions. My maternal grandfather was a doctor. When people couldn't pay for his services, he frequently got their sugar rations and such. My paternal grandfather was a wealthy merchant.

Glass soft drink bottles were recycled in New York state and Massachusetts. We got something like \$.12 a carton back when we returned them to the supermarket. When plastic bottles replaced the glass bottles, this recycling stopped.



But then, she was only a girl. - Gordon Eklund



Milt Stevens (Alphabet Soup #49): I was always told to avoid ground floor apartments, because they're more easily broken into by thieves and other people up to no good.

The *Wild, Wild West* TV series was so much better than the movie. Ross Martin, who played Robert Conrad's (James West) sidekick, was really great.

I think I'm allergic to relaxing.

I just found the ending of the Matrix series of movies to be very disappointing.



I was allergic to hard physical labour; every time I did it[,] I broke out into a sweat. - Dale Speirs



Robert Michael Sabella (Visions of Paradise #104: The Passing Scene): The only item on your best of the years lists that I agreed with is David Bowie's *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust*.

When I was living in Pittsford, a suburb of Rochester, New York, I was driving through an adjacent suburb, Henrietta. I was stopped at an intersection waiting to turn left. When the road appeared to be clear, I started to turn. Then I saw a semi speeding towards me. I think my reflexes took over. I sped up and managed to clear the intersection before the semi got there, but for a moment I really thought that was the end.

Wow, you're the first person I'm aware of knowing who has had Lyme disease. I had no idea it was so common in your neck of the woods.

Chinese buffets seem to be pretty common here, too. Back in Pittsford there used to be a really nice Italian restaurant that had a great salad bar that included pizza. You could just eat off that. Unfortunately the place isn't there any more, and the restaurant that replaced it is not half as good.

Arby's must have come up in the world. Maybe I should stop avoiding the chain.

Throwing pills down the toilet was not a great thing to do. That's the sort of action that contributes to the environment being polluted.

Robert Michael Sabella (Visions of Paradise #104: Wondrous Stories): You seem to have missed the whole point of "Sergeant Chip". It's about man's fear of being replaced by intelligent dogs. After Chip is given the medal and especially after he demonstrates his abilities in his rescue stunt, the powers that be start to fear him. The whole rest of the story is about the way the top brass try to kill him regardless of how many humans they have to kill in the process.

Christopher J. Garcia (Claims Department Issue Eight): My family is probably smaller than yours. My father had a sister and brother, both now deceased. My mother had a sister and brother; the sister is now deceased. Half of them stayed in Japan, so getting together was out of the question for most of the family. My father's brother was in business and travelled a lot, so we saw him when he was still working. My father's sister moved here before we did. My mother's sister moved here after we did. Neither sister ever had children; so on this side of the Pacific, my sister and I are the only ones in our generation. Neither of us has children, so the family ends here on this side. The ones in Japan have children, or at least some of them did, and some of them had children; so the family continues over there. One of my cousins visited briefly many years ago.

It's Joaquin Phoenix, not River, that was in *The Village*.

Peggy Rae Sapienza (Adventures on Earth No. 10): I used to like really firm mattresses. Unfortunately, my joints have become tender, mostly due to bursitis. We now sleep on a softer mattress. When we need to get a new one, I am contemplating getting a Tempur Pedic; I checked with my rheumatologist, and he thinks it's a good idea.

If you can afford to travel to avoid allergies, that's great. However, if you reach the point where that's too hard on your body otherwise, there are good allergy medications available. You can also try allergy shots. I've had two courses of allergy injections, each of six years duration, and haven't had to use any medication on a regular basis since then.

Both *A Tale of Two Cities* and *David Copperfield* that we read in high school were abridged versions. I have since read the full version of the latter but don't recall if I've reread the first. Charles Dickens is among the authors I favour. My sister read *Great Expectations* in school and told me the story. I read it much later.

Jim Caughran (If it's Friday, this must be Rajasthan): I enjoyed your trip report. Although I was always fascinated by reading about India in the works of Rudyard Kipling and E. M. Forster, it doesn't sound civilized enough for me to want to visit any time soon.

Jim Caughran (A Propos de Rien): We in the US get tax credit for buying a hybrid vehicle. Do Canadians get something similar?

Tom Feller (The Road Warrior: Special European Trip Report): I enjoyed reading about your travels.

Fred Lerner (Lofgeornost #82): I used to fly USAir quite a bit when I lived in the northeast. They never lost my luggage, but maybe their service has deteriorated. I used some of their frequent flyer miles recently to get subscriptions to a couple of magazines. One is *Architectural Digest*. The other is *American Heritage*, of which I have received one issue so far.

I haven't read *Moby Dick* yet. I'm in the middle of reading Proust's masterpiece in French. I will probably have to reread it once I get through all the volumes. My French is quite rusty.

Maybe I'm culturally Jewish to some extent, too. I was steeped in Jewish culture from seventh through the first half of tenth grade. The school divided the students into group by ability, and I was in the high achiever group. Most of the students in my group were Jewish.

We have fresh local produce year-round. Just the mix of fruits and vegetables changes.

Dick Eney (Target: FAPA): I never heard of Louis Riel before. I never had much Canadian history.

Janice Morningstar (Seal with a Kiss): By the time you read this, you should have received my e-mail about the latest prices for the Corflu DVDs.

* * *

* Letters to the Editor

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

Sheryl Birkhead, Gaithersburg, MD

(Rec'd) 26 January 2006

Profound apologies. Just found #22 on the computer table stack and decided to send something.

As I'm sure you already know, epilepsy is not common in the cat (far more common in dogs). ...

Deep tissue massage, at least for me is "fun", to tears. I have chronic knots – years and they hurt. I bought a Homedics Massage Pad (does rolling and shiatsu). I figure it costs the same as one massage and love it. I hope massage works for you. ((As physical therapy, the deep tissue massage was covered by my insurance.))

((Interestingly my shoulder problems cleared up after Shadow died. I figure I'd been stressed out by worry over him. Whether the massage helped is, therefore, moot.))

#

Leslie David, Reston, VA

14 February 2006

... As you heard, we got snow. Today it'll be in the 40s, tomorrow in the 50s; so I'm sure we'll say bye-bye to the white stuff very soon.

Usual crisis mode at work--it's nothing new, so I've just learned to accept it. At least they're paying me well to make me crazy.

I was down at Ft. Eustis in Newport News for two weeks; we had the first version of a revised course running, and I was down to monitor it. I had a good time; the woman who was my neighbour in Korea

lives in Matthews and works at Ft. Eustis; so she and I had lunch, went walking at lunch, and had dinner while I was there. I also had lunch with the garrison commander who was also in Korea the same time we were. I had run into Ronnie back in the 90s when I was out at Offutt AFB working on a contract. It's a small world; he had taken over from a guy I'd gone to high school with. I knew he (the guy I went to hs with) was stationed in Nebraska, because I'd run into him at the 20-year high school reunion.

Not much other news here; our apartment complex was sold to another management company; that's the fifth company in ten years, and there was some talk that they were going to take the place condo. I doubt it; the buildings are over thirty years old, don't have a washer and dryer in them, and can't really be modified to put one in; plus I doubt anyone is going to hand over the big bucks (300K) to have to run into the dining room and flip the breaker back because it flips off if you use a hairdryer on high and have a light on in the bedroom, or if two people try to blow dry their hair at the same time. I live in the low-rent part of Reston; and in the last ten years, my rent has gone up \$500 a month. Sure makes me wish for those Richmond days again.

I am going to start taking ballroom dance lessons again. Due to "Mad Hot Ballroom" and "Dancing with the Stars", ballroom is back "in" again. Whatever show is on ABC at 10 pm on Thursdays did a segment about ballroom dancing a couple weeks ago; and PBS is going to air American Ballroom dance championships this Thursday, 16 February, in our area. Finding a regular partner would be nice, but I don't expect it to happen; there are more women in Northern VA than men.

#

Gerry Balter, St. Paul, MN

14 February 2006

The cover is beautiful. With all the grey, cloudy days we've been having here, it was nice to see something colourful.

I also watched the Tournament of Roses parade on New Year's Day. I felt sorry for all those people who had to march through the rain. They seemed very energetic, and I admired them for that.

I am sorry to hear about Shadow.

I agree with you regarding *King Kong* being "too emotionally gut wrenching." That's why I didn't see this version. I saw the version with Fay Wray, and that was more than enough.

I'm assuming you will be at Worldcon this year. So will I. Maybe we can get together.

#

John Purcell, College Station, TX

18 February 2006

It is a cold (35 degrees) and wet Saturday morning in South Central Texas, a perfect time to catch up on a few LoCs.

Thank you very much for the latest of your *Mewsings*; it is good to see that you are doing well and being so active. Since you mention your therapy and problems with bursitis, allow me to counter with the rotator cuff syndrome that gives my left shoulder daily early-morning stiffness and pain. After a few hours it tends to work itself out to a minor pain and annoyance, but the PT exercises I do aren't as effective as they used to be. My right shoulder is fine now -- no problems at all. Unfortunately, I suspect that before the year is out, I'll be needing surgery on my left shoulder to correct it. All those years of throwing baseballs and footballs and playing hockey are probably to blame for it. Oh, well. It is not so bad that I can't play catch or ball with my son, Daniel. Speaking of the little guy, I'm coaching his little league team again this year. We were supposed to have skills assessments this morning over at the ball field complex, but that's been cancelled due to the rain and cold.

Onward to a few things in FM #23.

I have never understood the connection of Regency Dancing to sf fandom, except for it being a fun thing

to do and a chance to don some fancy dress and act like it's the mid-19th century again, or something like that. Nice photos of the dance and Forry's birthday bash. Man -- 89 years old. Forry's looking good there. Ray Bradbury's up there in age, too. Was Ray Harryhausen also present? You didn't mention him, and I think he's still knocking about in his upper 80s as well. That would have been a fantastic party to attend.

Even though you and Mike never planned to really attend Loscon, it still sounds like you two had a good time. Some year I may have to get to a real con again; the last one for me was Minicon 27 back in 1992. At present I am planning on going to Aggiecon 37 this March, since it's right here on the TAMU campus the weekend after my birthday. Dan will like it because there is always a sizeable computer gaming area and TVs hooked up to PS2s and X-Boxes. We'll bring our Yu-gi-oh! decks and challenge some college punks to duels.

Oh wow! Leslie David sent you a loc! I haven't heard from her in years! Sounds like she's doing very well, too. Would you do me a favour and let me know what her mailing address or e-mail address is? I would love to send her a copy of my latest zine, *In A Prior Lifetime*. And thank you, Laurraine, for the quick loc; much appreciated for your brief input about Lee Pelton.

Well thank you for the zine, especially good for seeing the names of old fannish friends again. Take care of yourself, and maybe the grace of God will bring us face-to-face again somewhere.

#

John Hertz, Los Angeles, CA

27 February 2006

The Autumn Ball ended around midnight or one, as it did in '05. "Seems to run later and later" may be true but not by clock time.

I asked the soldiers who gave Kelly Freas's grave marker military honours. They'd love to play "Taps" live but don't have enough trumpeters.

At Loscon XXII, Chris Garcia kindly left *Drink Tank* and other things in the Fanzine Lounge; but I never saw him in person, which to me shows the merit of fanzines. But apparently no one on your "Fur or Ferrous" panel mentioned the "offog" (E. F. Russell, "Allamagoosa", 1959)!

#

Neil Kaden, Fairview, TX

3 March 2006

Thanx for FM23. Cris & I are getting by -- now she's also looking, as her store chain shut down all 1000 stores in February. Good news is she's making an effort to learn to use a PC and to search job boards. These 1st few weeks I'm trying to spend as much time with her as possible.

#

Sheryl Birkhead, Gaithersburg, MD

10 March 2006

Shadow – RIP.

This week I took both of my 15-year olds in for annual blood work plus. Fluff had I-131 for hyperthyroidism last June, and I neglected the three-month post treatment check. Well, she is now in renal failure. Pudge (having a very tiny mass removed and since she was "out", routine dentistry) – her blood work shows almost hyperthyroidism (3.9 – at 4 it's abnormal). So now I watch and try to get them to eat a renal diet (there are six available in the US and I have samples of five – will get the sixth) – which cats notoriously dislike. So it begins.

After finding out I did not have a membership at the WorldCon this year (hmm, I did have '05 and do have '07 – no idea how '06 fell through the cracks) – I coughed up \$50 and finally remembered to do my nominations. Once again I was reduced to only the fan categories, but I always plan (and somehow manage!) to read the fiction nominations and hopefully I'll have seen the dramatic presentations, so I'll be

able to actually vote but could not remember many standouts for nomination.

I haven't seen *King Kong*. I *have* seen enough blurbs to be sure I would have trouble (blubbing) with the ending, so I'll stay away.

Zathura is on my netflix list.

Glad to see Elst Weinstein is still alive and ticking.

After the one dead cat (Germany) positive for bird flu, the islanders were told to keep their cats inside; we shall see.

I think there were fifty in my brother's high school class and seventy in mine (about one hundred in my sister's). I don't see any of them. High school was not a favourite time.

I missed the fact that postcard rates went up when first class did, but so far none of the cards were returned. I *have* had some returned lately with an over-size note but routinely have used these sizes over the years ... ?

Deep tissue massage hurts. I bought a Homeremedies (I think that's the brand) chair pad – does Shiatsu etc – not the same as a masseuse but available twenty-four hours a day and it cost what one and a half massages would.

Ah, the cherry blossom buds are on spring schedule.

#

Tim Marion, New York, NY

22 March 2006

This is my effort to try to stay in contact. I've just finished reading *Feline Mewsings* 22. Sorry I'm so late in reading it; it's been pretty much catch-as-catch-can as far as fanzines and I am concerned. I think I managed to read only two issues of *File 770* and one issue of *Chunga* in the past 6-12 months. Typically, I carry a fanzine around with me, unread, until the paper almost decays.

Actually, I tried writing you recently to give you my Egyptian pun. Maybe you didn't get it, so I will relate it again here.

What did Julius Caesar say after an arduous, passionate, nine-day bout of lovemaking with Cleopatra whilst sailing on her barge down the Nile?

"Whew! That Ptolemy sure took a toll on me!"

Unfortunately, I sent this with the wrong subject line. Laurraine, I can't begin to express how much frustration I had sending that simple email. When I first sent it, I was mistakenly sending it back to myself! It took 2-3 tries, by which time I was so angry and frustrated I could hardly see what I was doing. So no wonder it had the wrong subject line...

Your adventures read a bit more adventuresome than I remember from this zine in FAPA. There, you frequently wrote as though you were weak or disadvantaged physically or had an exceptionally delicate palate. In these con reports, you write about taking an 16-hour driving trip, staying up all night talking and eating meatballs and moderating several panels at a con. It looks good on you. Just out of curiosity, but were you reimbursed your membership fee for moderating so many panels? If I had been there, I probably would have wanted to be on the Batman panel.

((See article at beginning of this zine explaining my health. I don't seek reimbursement for being on panels at cons. I'm just doing it for fun, after all. And I don't know where you got the idea we drove for sixteen hours to get anywhere. It takes about seven hours to drive to Phoenix and about nine to get to Tucson. That's the farthest we've driven. Mike always drives – his choice. I doze on and off.))

Fine photo for a cover, but the colophon and indicia on the other side of the page tend to bleed thru, ruining the scene a bit.

((Perhaps I need to use heavier paper for the cover.))

On a personal note, Jesse has recovered completely from the broken eardrum the incompetent, foolish vet gave him (Farber). However, Casper seems to have had an aneurism and, for a while, was walking like Jesse had (since the problem occurred near his inner ear, the doctor is theorizing). Casper has regained a lot of balance, but he's still somewhat clumsy and holds his head sideways -- sigh. I'm not eager to have the doctor do a brain operation on him, however; for all I know, he could end up worse. Right now he's still eating enthusiastically, jumping up on my bed, scratching the scratching pad, etc. He's still almost completely happy. Sure hope he doesn't have another one...

#

Tim Marion, New York, NY

1 April 2006

...

Reading from the first page of *Feline Mewsings* 21, I enjoyed *Enterprise* and the way they used it to explain so many discrepancies in the Trek universe. (Such as how the Klingons originally looked like overly-hairy, sometimes Spanish, Vikings.) I don't think they understood the whole "Vulcan logic" issue, however.

...

Do you still use a VCR? I thought, like me, you use DVR now to watch programs you don't want to keep. My cable company offers a combination cable box / DVR for monthly rental. Pretty handy, except for the 35 hour limit (which I believe I've complained to you about before).

#

Rita Prince Winston, Venice, CA

2 April 2006

...

Regency balls running later and later seems historically realistic, at least for the London season. People who had dinner at eight couldn't get to the ball much before ten, and part of the ball was supper at one am. "American naval battles on the Barbary Coast" somehow came up in conversation with Tim yesterday. He told me that the US did not win by naval battles but by a squadron of ten US marines with rifles landing and defeating Libya/Tripoli's sword-armed naval forces.

Theatre – Last year *The Grand Hotel*. This year *The Grand Tour*. Next year *Grand Avenue?* *The Grand Illusion?*

"I'm not sure which of the numbers on my watch is the model number" ... 1, 2, 3, 4 ... (sorry, couldn't resist).

Update on my letter – my computer was down for two months. When it finally worked, Dell cancelled my service contract for no good reason. I don't plan to buy another Dell.

Jay Kay Klein: You can spell *miu* with the birdie for M, the reed that looks like a feather for I, and the other birdie for U; or instead of the reed, you can put the sign for MI; the sign is supposed to be a picture of a milk bucket, although I don't see it myself.

I'm forty-eight and "Rita Prince Winston" is the name on my birth certificate. My mother's mother's maiden name was Marguerite Prince, nicknamed Rita, but that grandmother was born in 1890-something and died before I was born. How nice to have an excuse to talk about myself.

...

#

Tim Marion, New York, NY

4 April 2006

My officemate Cheryl wants to know what those unusual and distinctive flowers are on the cover of *Feline Mewsings* 23. At a glance, all I could tell her was that your husband took the photo. ((They are called red hot pokers. I have small ones in our front window box. The ones in the photo are larger ones that we saw at a botanical gardens.))

...

Re *Feline Mewsings* 21, I'm sorry your dental plan is so chintzy. I'm very discouraged with my company's insurance policy at the moment. I am apparently paying \$72 a month, but when a \$270 biopsy came due (for which I never received a copy of the test results, I might add), the insurance paid only \$110 of it! That's what I've been paying for all year?

In regard to Mike's mileage --- yes, the decreased size of the tire can increase mileage. This is what ancient man discovered when they first invented the wheel. Before that, they were using logs to roll along their heaviest objects. Then they found that only a slice of the log on each side could make it move faster and better. ((It wasn't the tyre size in the case of Mike's car. It had to do with rolling resistance; his car needs low resistance tyres. Both sets of tyres were exactly the same size.))

Sorry to hear about your father. Casper is holding his head a little straighter now. I have hurt my back and it's very difficult to walk --- problematic for taking the subway at the time of morning when the rush is headed against me (I get shoved almost every day by rude people who don't understand that the hallway/sidewalk/stairs/whatever is supposed to go TWO WAYS!). I feel like I'm walking like Casper was walking there for a while... My mother, who is slowly dying of an enlarged heart, had strep throat recently; but apparently she's gotten over it. She actually sounds strong when she talks to me, for the first time in a few years.

And I'm enjoying some good anime.

* * *

*** Closing Remarks**

Next time I should have a con report and a trip report if things go as planned. Westercon will be in San Diego, and we plan to attend. We're also hoping to get up to Ashland, OR, for the Shakespeare Festival and then on to Bellingham, WA, to visit my parents.

Before I close I want to add one more thing that didn't seem to belong in any other place. *The Merchant of Venice* is not one of my favourite Shakespeare plays, but it isn't one I avoid either. I had, though, never seen it performed to my taste -- until I saw the version with Al Pacino and Jeremy Irons. That cast brought the play to life in a way I've never seen it done. If you like Shakespeare, I heartily recommend it. It was filmed in 2004. Usually when I watch this play, I become impatient during the scene when Portia's suitors are trying to pick the correct box. This didn't happen with this version. Everything flowed very naturally.

