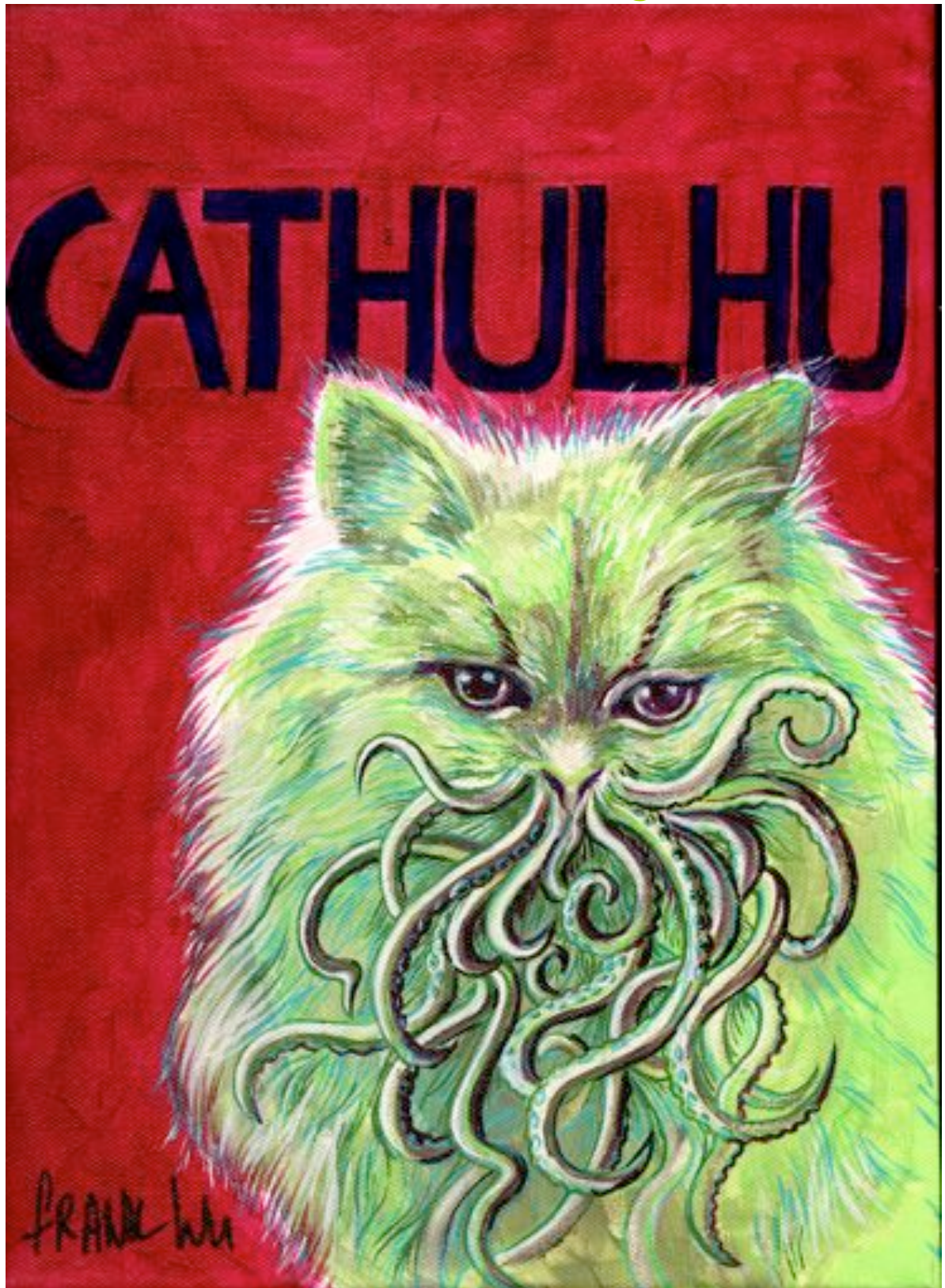


Feline Mewsings #32



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Cover art by Frank Wu. Photos by Mike Weasner.

Feline ~~Mewsings~~ Mewsings

#32

May 2008

* Editorial / Introduction

I've left myself no time to put much here. Three deadlines converged on me this month, and we've been very busy starting the building process for our new house.

Anyway we found a buyer in early March for our LA house. Escrow took a month, and everything was settled by the beginning of April. There was a lot of paperwork to file. And we also started the process of finding a contractor.

We decided finally to go with a building consultant and act as our own contractor. This way we have more control over the subcontractors. The consultant has been a contractor in the past, and he specializes in "green" construction. We're going to make our new house as energy-efficient as we can afford to make it. The construction methods for doing this are usually more expensive than the current standard methods, because they are new and not that many people are using them. We've hired the contractor to do the maximum he offers, and he will basically be holding our hands during the building process.

So far we've also taken out insurance crafted for people building their own homes and are in the process of selecting an architect. We've also made contact with the phone company there, and they gave us twelve hundred feet of cable to connect from the phone box at the "kerb" to our house. There is no actual kerb, as the road is unimproved. The fact that it's graded somewhat is all the improvement the road has as of now. We're currently not using the phone company but are getting our phone service through the cable company. However, at least as of now, there is no cable service in the area of Oracle where our land is located.

I hope to have better control of my time next quarter to give you more details. For those of you with easy access to the web who are interested in keeping closer track, go to <http://web.mac.com/mweasner/Road2Oracle/Blog/Blog.html>, where Mike has set up a blog.

* * *

* Local Activities

Movies

Sweeney Todd: the Demon Barber of Fleet Street: I wanted to see this, because I like Johnny Depp's acting. I wasn't exactly sure what to expect, having seen mixed reviews. I saw the Angela Lansbury version decades ago on cable and didn't really remember much of the story. I enjoyed the movie despite the gory bits, of which there were many (I had to close my eyes several times). Mike described it as operatic, and of course that's a good description. Of all the musicals, those of Sondheim seem most like operas. In the end it's sort of a morality play. The only people who win are the pure and innocent. If you like Sondheim, you'll probably like this movie if the gore doesn't put you off too much. The whole thing is done in a very atmospheric way—very dark so that sometimes it almost seems we're watching a black and white film.

###

Other

Tucson Zoological Society: The Reid Park Zoo is operated by the City of Tucson, similarly to the zoo in LA. When I knew we would be moving, I let my membership in the LA zoo lapse. We recently joined the Tucson zoo. The first thing we did there was to go on a behind-the-scenes tour. It was very interesting and consisted of three parts. First we were treated to a close-up of a tiger. When visitors see zoo animals, there are always two kinds of barriers between them and the animals. On this tour there was only the cage between the tiger and us. It's amazing how like a domestic cat it is in behaviour. The second part was a look at the food preparation area. There is a huge cookbook used by the staff to prepare each day's food for all the animals. All animals also get the occasional treat. Some of them are like our popsicles. This photo shows one of the tour leaders holding up a treat for a carnivore that uses a frozen rat inside a coconut that has been frozen. The last part of the tour was a look inside the veterinary treatment centre. Here the smaller animals are treated when injured or sick. The large ones have to be treated in the field.



#

Honeybee Park: We actually live within two miles of a small park suitable for hiking. There is a picnic area and limited access for the handicapped. We went there on a gorgeous day. Here are two views:



The first shows an overview and a view from the park. The second is a steep part we didn't go into, because it was under repair. There is a river running through the park, so I imagine there has been some flood damage.

#

Colossal Cave Mountain Park: We had previously been to Kartcher Caverns but hadn't explored this one. We went there with friends. It's located about fourteen miles southeast of Tucson in Vail. Besides the cave, the park has a museum, some historic buildings, and picnic areas. We took advantage of one of the last to have a picnic lunch. I brought sandwiches made with gluten-free bread I bought at the supermarket, and it was very tasty. The same company also makes a very tasty pizza crust.

As caves go this one is not very large. It is different from many I've seen in two ways. It played a large role in history. Among other things the cave was used as a hideout by outlaws and others, and bat guano was harvested here at one point. The formation of the cave is also different from other caves I've visited. Instead of being formed by carbonic acid, it was formed by sulphuric acid. This means the cave was formed very quickly. Today the cave is dead, in that no formation is going on now. Because of its historical use, there is much damage evident. Many of the stalactites have had their ends broken off or shot off. There are still some pretty interesting sights, though, as can be seen in this photo.



#

Tohono Chul Park: I found out about this desert botanical garden on a local news programme. It's located relatively close by, so it seemed like a good candidate for a day's outing. For readers familiar with botanical gardens in the Los Angeles area, it's sort of like Huntington Gardens in the way it's laid out but is smaller, more on the scale of the South Coast Botanical Gardens. The entire place is devoted to desert flora; and the place also sports much wildlife, especially birds.

We reached the park just in time for a guided wild flower walk. During this walk, we were treated to the sight of a rattlesnake crossing our path. This is the first time we'd seen a rattlesnake outside of a zoo setting. After the guided tour, we walked around a trail showcasing the cacti of the Sonora Desert. Then we had lunch at their restaurant, which is accessible without buying admission to the park. Then we walked the uncultivated trail that they have. Afterwards we stopped by their gift shop, which is also accessible without buying admission to the park.



#

Kitt Peak: Mike's alma mater, Indiana University, hosted its fourth outing for alumni supporters. Even though we'd been there three times before, each time is a bit different; and each time affords us the opportunity to look at different objects through their 3.5 metre telescope. Our evening began with a look at Mars. It was so bright through this large scope that Mike put his sunglasses on to look at it. Then we were treated to views of three different planetary nebulae: NGC 2438, NGC 3242, and NGC 4361; each looks very different from the others. We also looked at M82, the Cigar Galaxy; NGC 4298, which is a pair of galaxies, one edge on; M87, a giant elliptical galaxy (the lucky viewers saw the jet coming out from it, probably the ones with better eyesight); and globular cluster M3. The evening was capped off with a spectacular view of Saturn with several of its moons visible.

* * *



Amy's Motley Media Musings

Reviews by Amy Harlib



Message from Amy: For the foreseeable future, “Amy’s Motley Media Musings” will resurrect all the reviews in my files in alphabetical order, for they are not readily found anywhere else anymore. I hope these will contain some interesting perspectives to amuse and enlighten on various genre and popular culture offerings in the past several years—opinions from a curious, feminist, inquiring, and, I’d like to think, culturally educated mind. I hope *Feline Mewsings* readers find what I have to say worthwhile. Thank you very much for your attention.

***A Dance For Emilia* by Peter S. Beagle (Roc/Penguin, NY, Oct. 2000, \$14.95, small format hardcover, ISBN#: 0-451-45800-1). [Http://www.peterbeagle.com/books/emilia/](http://www.peterbeagle.com/books/emilia/)**

American fantasy writer Peter S. Beagle has only published six books in the last thirty some odd years, yet each was a gem. Two, *The Last Unicorn* and *A Fine and Private Place*, are considered bonafide classics of fantastic fiction. His most recent (after *Tamsin*, 1999) returns to the “gentle” ghost story form of *A Fine and Private Place* and is a sweet and poignant examination of dreams and the afterlife set in contemporary Manhattan.

The story is narrated by Jake Holtz, a “working stiff” actor (nobody famous), who is confronted by the profound when the spirit of his best friend, who died suddenly and unexpectedly of heart failure—failed dancer turned art critic Sam Kagan—possesses the body of his female Abyssinian cat, Millamont, two years after Sam’s death. When the cat suddenly starts performing leaps, twirls, and acrobatic antics once impossible for his less supple human body and starts “speaking” in a sort of telepathic voice, Jake and Sam’s most recent lover, Emilia Rossi (a local NJ newspaper reporter), with whom Jake has formed a platonic friendship, are convinced that the power of their combined grief and love has proved strong enough to bring Sam back to them in Millamont’s body. Yet despite the human presence in the cat body, Sam/Millamont retains very amusing feline behaviours!

Jake’s narrative voice smoothly transitions from past to present as flashbacks recall Jake’s friendship with Sam, the two of them sharing a passion for the performing arts and an understanding of the struggle to make dreams come true. With concision and lyrical grace, Jake’s prose conveys a welter of convincing details about the minutiae of adult life and feelings as the two friends pursued demanding careers on opposite coasts—Sam writing for arts magazines and Jake taking acting jobs wherever he could, mostly in California, sometimes in NY or elsewhere—yet their relationship stayed closer than ever. When Sam’s unexpected death leaves Jake and Emilia devastated, their shared mourning and love for Sam forges the bond of a new friendship; and since Emilia inherited Millamont, Sam’s cat, the miracle of Sam returning to “haunt” the feline’s body somehow seems inevitable. But some miracles do not last forever, or do they?

A Dance for Emilia, really a novella in a small format hardcover, manages to pack into 87 pages a full length novel’s worth of character-driven, vividly detailed story rich in heartfelt musings on love, longing, and the power of bonds between people, all painlessly conveyed through Jake’s sobering reflections and witty dialogue. The book’s combination of intense emotions, colourful descriptions of people and places, permeated throughout with an oddly poignant yet beautiful mood, makes the inclusion of the eerie and the uncanny convincing, especially at the tale’s bittersweet yet satisfying conclusion. This charmingly unconventional example of the ghost story subgenre of fantasy is perfect as a gift to oneself and especially to a special friend; for Beagle offers not only an entertaining, brief, supernaturally-tinged yarn, but also something more: “Not facts, but the accuracy under and around and beyond facts. Not a recital of events—not even honesty—but truth”. *A Dance For Emilia* is a book for everyone!

#

***A Knight's Tale* (Columbia Pictures 2001), written and directed by Brian Helgeland, music by Carter Burwell. Running time: 132 minutes. Rated PG-13. [Http://www.sonypictures.com/movies/aknightstale/home.html](http://www.sonypictures.com/movies/aknightstale/home.html)**

A Knight's Tale appears to be very deliberately intended to get youngsters and teenagers interested in medieval history by incorporating rock and roll music into its score, by getting endorsements from *Rolling Stone Magazine*, by casting attractive young performers in the lead roles, and by some judicious use of anachronistic behaviour. Will these strategies work? This critic hopes so, for this movie offers great fun and visual dazzle by being a sort of *Chariots of Fire* set in 14th century England and France.

The story follows a young peasant who dreams of defying the taboo prohibiting anyone not of the nobility from competing in the knightly jousting tournaments and achieves this goal through a combination of luck, determination, and the help of friends who care for, believe in, and wish to share with him the wealth of the winnings. Heath Ledger plays William Thatcher, a Cheapside son of a common labourer whose forged noble identity as Sir Ulrich von Lichtenstein enables him to participate in jousting, which this film depicts as the equivalent of contemporary X-treme sports complete with a circuit of various competitions (held in several French locations) as one advances towards the "World Championships" in London.

The protagonist enjoys the assistance of sympathetic, appealing, youthful, and funny characters: plump Roland (Mark Addy) and flaming-haired, tall and thin Wat (Alan Tudyk) as his squires and acquiring for his herald, an unknown, glib and witty writer named Geoffrey Chaucer (Paul Bettany), yes, *that* Chaucer! Before long, a delightful "proto-feminist" tough gal blacksmith and armourer Kate (Laura Fraser), whose existence the script rationalizes credibly, joins the crew. As this earnest fivesome work their way from one competition to the next with "Sir Ulrich" rapidly advancing as he defeats one competitor after another, the hero soon must face a ruthless antagonist, the villainous Count Adhemar (Rufus Sewell), who craves the championship and the gorgeous and feisty highborn Jocelyn (Shannyn Sossamon) as much as "Sir Ulrich" does and will stop at nothing to get what he wants.

Despite the predictability of the ultimate outcome of the story, the plot still manages to offer some interesting and surprising twists along the way with plenty of humour (some of it witty dialog, some of it anachronistic, playing to an outrageous degree, on the idea of jousting as having the medieval equivalent of modern competitive sports culture and all that implies). *A knight's Tale* also offers the expected plethora of exciting, colourful, and spectacular jousting scenes, staged and photographed to up the ante each time so that the audience remains enthralled throughout, right up until the satisfying ending.

Will *A Knight's Tale* entice young people into reading Chaucer and boning up on medieval history (perhaps by reading such popular accounts as Barbara Tuchman's *A Distant Mirror*)? One hopes so; but even if such a salutary effect fails to occur, the movie provides plenty of entertainment with its fine performers, dazzling sets, costumes and armour, spectacular CGI aerial shots of recreated 14th century Paris and London, lively jousts, and humorous bits (much of it satisfyingly character-driven).

More problematic aspects: the sometimes too contemporary patterns of speech in the dialog and the score by Carter Burwell, whose lovely music, evocative of the period, gets all too frequently interrupted by the rock and roll songs ("We Will Rock You", "We Are the Champions", "The Boys are Back in Town", etc.). These melodic intrusions, despite the sports- or mood-appropriateness of their lyrics, felt jarring to this critic's sensibilities but might not bother younger viewers at all. Any members of The Society for Creative Anachronism or attendees of medieval/Renaissance festivals will be sure to be most appreciative of *A Knight's Tale*; yet this film will certainly provide a colourful, adventurous (spiced with romantic elements) couple of hours' fun for all comers.

#



***A Tree of Palme / Palumu no Ki/* (GENCO Toho Co., Ltd., 2002). Directed by Takashi Nakamura. Written by Takashi Nakamura. Art Direction by Mutsuo Koseki. Character design by Toshiyuki Inoue. Cinematography by Takashi Azuhata. Music by Takashi Harada. Running time: 136 minutes. Not rated. (In Japanese with English subtitles). (Available on DVD)**

<http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0311618/combined>

A memorable, stand-out among the screenings at the 2003 BAAF (Big Apple Anime Festival), director Takashi Nakamura's most recent feature offered a dazzling, allegorical, science fantasy tale rich in entertainment value and meaning. Having considerable experience doing animation work for, most notably, Hayao Miyazaki and having worked on *Akira*, *Neo-Tokyo*, and *The Blade of Kamui*, and, in addition, having helmed *Catnapped* (among others), Nakamura's latest effort noticeably shows the artistic influence of the towering talent of Miyazaki, yet retains a distinctness of its own.

A Tree of Palme takes place on a distant otherworld populated by humans living side by side with numerous other sentient humanoid species using technology ranging from early industrial to very advanced, with the highest tech belonging to a mostly antagonistic subterranean civilization. All must cope with an exceedingly intricate and diverse indigenous ecology comprising many seemingly intelligent, exotic-looking organisms.

The titular character, Palme, turns out to be an AI robot created by a botanist employing a unique blend of circuitry and a special kind of local wood with rare energy-conducting capacity. Palme's appearance, resembling that of a young boy, suited his intended function, to assist his builder's dying wife, Xian. After Xian departs this mortal coil, Palme loses energy, becoming barely operable, until the arrival of the fugitive warrior woman, Koram (Yurika Hino), on a mission bearing a package containing a crystal filled with an oil legendary for its soul-restoring properties. Entrusting Palme with the parcel that must be kept from those wishing to use its contents for malign schemes, Koram eludes her pursuers and gives Palme a galvanizing purpose for his existence; for he becomes determined to take up Koram's quest to deliver the uncanny substance to its source, the centre of the planet, threatened by the same destructive foe mentioned above.

Palme, swiftly benefiting from the life-bestowing powers of the object in his care and thoroughly awakened, makes his way towards an urban centre where he can find help to achieve his goal. In the bustling, confusing, cosmopolitan city, Palme falls in with a band of several orphaned youngsters of diverse genetic backgrounds whom he helps to escape from cruel slavery. These grateful children, used to a bleak existence of scavenging and pilfering to survive, join Palme on his journey, a change in their lives that also offers them hope for a better future. During subsequent travels, the youngest urchin, called Pu (Mika Kanai), becomes closest to Palme, while the leader Shatta's (Daisuke Sakaguchi) attitude toward the protagonist progresses from suspicious rivalry to warm companionship. At this point in the story, Palme also forms a bond with Popo (Megumi Toyoguchi), a young girl resembling Xian, running away from her bitter, widowed mother's abuse.

Along the way to the exciting, transcendent climax, Palme and his friends must evade pursuit by Popo's mother-from-hell and by the advanced underground culture's faction that, as described earlier, desires the item in Palme's care for their own selfish, exploitative purposes. The quest soon takes on a layered significance; while the plucky band encounters the various environs and the myriad inhabitants thereof flourishing on their world, many of the most bizarre-looking creatures frequently proving far more benign than the antagonistic humanoids that most resemble Palme. Amidst these adventures, Palme notices the crystal he carries exerting a transforming effect that will have profound consequences on his spiritual growth and his final fate, it likewise affecting his friends.

The theme of Palme's desire to become more human, while initially bringing Pinocchio to mind, soon develops divergent, more imaginative and emotionally poignant ramifications, especially in their ultimate effect on Popo in addition to their effect on the protagonist. The characters, all quite colourful and vivid, mature and grow throughout the absorbing story that unfolds against a stunning backdrop of gorgeous alien landscapes. Whether the vicissitudes of their voyage take the heroic youngsters into the air, on the ground, into forests and along rivers, the sense of wonder and interest in the outcome rarely flags except in one or two spots in the over two hour long narrative.

With spectacular visuals and subtexts involving personal maturation, the meaning of humanity, and the benefits of learning to live in harmony with a complex environment, these never interfering with the entertainment value of *A Tree of Palme*, this charming science fantasy cinematic saga owes much to the influence of Hayao Miyazaki. Enhanced by a haunting, atmospheric score, this film, so rich in content,

with its own style despite its homages, blossoms in the minds and hearts of its viewers and deserves to flourish in the anime field and to propagate in the wider world.

* * *

* Odds and Ends

Business Week for 21 January 2008 ran a review of *The Big Switch: Rewiring the World, from Edison to Google*. The book is about the growth of automation in the world, but the author goes one step further. He warns that the growing Internet may become a mega-network that will dominate our lives. He predicts world domination by a handful of entrepreneurs and the loss of employment for legions of information professionals. Further he predicts that companies and governments will harvest data to control the rest of us. He even says humans may eventually become mere neurons in an intellectual machine. He leaves out any of the benefits of automation, such as the way scientists use computers to sort through data, enabling them to make advances.

#

World Science (emailnews@world-science.net) for 4 Feb 2008 had this: "Everyone with blue eyes can trace their lineage to one person who lived around the late Stone Age (http://www.world-science.net/othernews/080131_blueeyes)."

#

There is an interesting ad in the 19 January issue of *Science News*. The ad is for a company called The Great Courses, the Teaching Company. They sell lectures on DVD, CD, or tape. This one is headlined "Fairy Tales and Science Fiction: What Do They Reveal about Us?" The lecturer is a Professor Eric S. Rabkin. There are twenty-four chapters, starting with "The Brothers Grimm & Fairy Tale Psychology" and ending with "Cyberpunk, Postmodernism, and Beyond".

* * *

* Mailing Comments on FAPA #282:

John S. Davis (Ghu Fapalement #7807): All the photos in my collage cover were taken from our Oracle site. When Mike makes his more or less monthly trips out there, he takes one or more telescopes. It's amazing what CCD technology can do. CCD stands for charged coupled device, and it allows a camera to take multiple pictures that add up to make up one.

We joined the Arizona Central Credit Union. I chose that one after checking out several of them. Some of them we could not qualify for. I think that one only required you to live in Arizona, though they let us join before we moved. We're still members of Kinecta Credit Union in California, and I may retain that membership.

The only things that should need any irrigation after we build our house will be some fruit trees. Everything else should be native or close to it.

Oracle is located in Pinal County.

I'm glad you enjoyed seeing our floor plans. They are still in flux. Every time I think I've decided everything, I get new ideas.

Ben Indick (Ben's Beat 91): I started out my working career as a librarian and ended up being a computer programmer. After about ten years doing library work, I was bored with it. After about ten years doing computer programming, I was bored with that too. Then I got sick. I got well, but then Mike decided to retire.

As I believe I reported at the time, I had shingles last summer. My case was light since it was a result of the vaccine and not an actual case of chicken pox. A local friend ours recently had shingles, but she was lucky to get it on her arm where it wasn't so bad. Mike recently got the shingles vaccine.

I saw the movie version of *Joy Luck Club*. It was incredibly sad, and I'm sure I used a lot of tissues. I haven't read the book. I haven't read anything by Amy Tan. I also enjoyed on TV *Sagwa: The Chinese Siamese Cat*, which was done as an animated series; I bought two of the DVDs. I have one of her books, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, which is packed up with most of my other books; I haven't read it yet.

Mah jongg is popular in LA fandom. There are annual tournaments in honour of the person who was most responsible for its popularity in the subculture. The version we play is probably closest to the Chinese way. The

local public library here hosts mah jongg every Saturday. It turned out that they played the American/Jewish version, and I can't say I really cared for it.

Chris Garcia (Claims Department: a Chris Garcia Thing): Sorry to hear of your financial woes. I hope they have been resolved by the time you read this.
Congratulations on making the switch to the Mac.

Milt Stevens (Alphabet Soup #57): Now there are four electronic APAs that I know of. I belong to three. I am now OE of one of them, the N3F APA. We've made it bimonthly, which I guess it was before it went into suspended animation for three years. We've had two disties, and it seems to be doing fine so far.

Mike McInerney (Number One #12): I've frequently made purchases at various stores combining gift card and credit card and never had any problems. You must just have run into an inexperienced sales clerk.

I was also in college during the Viet Nam protests and hardly noticed, but then I was in England for much of that time and only read about those things in the papers and saw TV coverage. Still there was not a whole lot of that going on at my college anyway.

We are paying premiums for our retirement medical coverage through Mike's former employer. Fortunately we signed up before they jacked up the prices, but we're probably paying close to your \$9000 to Kaiser annually. Of course our plan is for two people and includes a pretty good prescription plan.

Last I heard from John Purcell, he was planning to join FAPA after he completed the work for his degree.

Peggy Rae Sapienza (Adventures on Earth No. 13): I know someone else who can't wear watches, because they stop working, but I don't know if this extends to digital watches. If the problem were only with the old-fashioned kind, I'd say it was something magnetic; but your situation stumps me. I presume that the atomic clock sets itself automatically by using the time signal put out from Fort Collins. So even if you slowed it down, it would constantly reset itself. Same with the cell phone I presume, that it resets from some signal from the provider.

Roger Wells (Voice of the Habu, Vol. 10, No. 1): The pedestrian crossing law used to be the same in California, at least Los Angeles. My sister once was ticketed for going through the pedestrian crossing area when someone was crossing at a different place on the road. As far as I know, the law has either changed or they just no longer enforce it.

Dale Speirs (Opuntia 64.1B): Thanks for the great reviews. You've gone into such detail on the stories that I no longer feel I need to read them.

Robert Michael Sabella (Visions of Paradise #122): I always buy enough on Amazon to get free shipping.

I've watched *What Dreams May Come* and agree that it's a great movie. I just found it a little too weepy for the comfort of my sinuses. I may watch it again someday though. I had actually been trying to find a different movie, one that I still have not managed to find. I remember seeing a preview for it in the theatre, probably in the mid- or late eighties. I believe it was a comedy. What I remember from the preview is that there were people on a bus going someplace. They didn't realize it, but they were all dead. I suppose the bus was going to heaven or to the other place.

Robert Michael Sabella (Visions of Paradise #124): I shouldn't think you'd have to continue working forever. If New Jersey is anything like California, there should be plenty of volunteer teaching, mentoring, or tutoring opportunities available. I would imagine that some of these would be just a fulfilling to you as the work you're doing now.

What is the elevation of your home? I think of New Jersey as being relatively flat with maybe some hills.

And I dream of headless horses and snakes eating their own tails. —Gordon Eklund

Robert Michael Sabella (Ride the Lightning, Winter 2008): I also didn't think excessively highly of *River of Gods*. While it had a lot of interesting concepts, there were too many characters, none of whom we spent enough time with to be able to identify with.

The other day we were passing a motorist talking on his cell phone. The interesting thing to me was that he was gesticulating with his free, though on the steering wheel, hand even though the person he was talking to couldn't see him.

My copy of this zine was missing page 5, which, judging by context, was the page where you started your comments to me.

The future of APAe is still murky. I'm in three electronic APAe. eAPA is probably the smallest at this point; I'm not sure why this is. It's the most open. One is more or less invitational. The other is part of the N3F, so one must join the group in order to participate in the APA. The fact that the other APAe are healthier may be a rosier indicator.

Gordon Eklund (Sweet Jane #54): I will send your complimentary remarks about her review of *A Fire Upon the Deep* to Amy. I also liked the book, so I hope you do as well.

Tom Feller (Road Warrior): My condolences on the loss of your grandfather.

Janice Morningstar (Comment-ary, part trois): My problem with downloading movies is that I don't think the resolution would be good enough to play on a fifty-inch TV. I imagine downloading an HD movie would take quite a while even with a high-speed connection.

Disney still keeps a tight rein when it comes to releasing their works on video. Sometimes, though, you can find one that's currently in the vault at a smaller outset where they just haven't sold all the ones they received previously. The used market is also a place to check. Most of the Disney DVDs we've bought have been of their older works from TV, such as the Swamp Fox videos.

Daniel Craig is the Bond actor, not Roger Craig. I've seen him in a couple of other vehicles, and he seems to be an excellent actor.

Self-service gas stations are, or were, illegal in New Jersey.

My shingles resulted from a chicken pox vaccine. After checking to see whether I'd had chicken pox, I received the vaccine when it became available. No one then told me that I was in danger of getting shingles from it.

John Purcell has said, someplace, that he intends to join FAPA after he has completed his degree work. This makes a lot of sense to me.

Jack Speer (Synapse): The fiction I've seen recently in the *LA Times* was not serialized, just short stories.

Depending on the contents of letters I receive, I may print part or all. I tend to print all or most of letters I receive by e-mail, since it's pretty easy to cut and paste. Letters I receive that are typewritten can be scanned without too much trouble. Handwritten letters, though, I find difficult to transcribe; so I tend to be more selective of what I print from those.

I was laid off from Hughes Aircraft many years before retirement, but I was vested in their retirement plan. I am now receiving that money, not that there is that much of it as I was there only for seven years. The money that I'd had in the 401K plan was rolled over to a mutual fund when I severed relations with the company.

* * *

* Letters to the Editor

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

Last time I managed to leave out a couple of letters, so I present them first.

Roslyn Willis, London, ON

5 Dec 2007

By the way, I loved the cover illo by Frank Wu on your latest issue of *Feline Mewsings* (which I always enjoy)!

#

Mary Manchester, Rochester, NY

22 Dec 2007

Loved the cover of *FM* #30. So now we know why they sleep so much. Wings and worship, eh? It's been a long time since I had such a presence in *FM*. That was nice, so I guess I've mostly outgrown my cringing when I read what I've written privately out there in public. Mostly.

That kitchen-bathroom wall thing was a puzzlement. I've lived in about as many places with that layout as without, so I guess it's not an issue in NY or FL or wasn't when those houses or apartments were built. Perhaps a reader will have some insight on the matter for the next *FM*.

#

Jon Hall, Santa Monica, CA

8 Feb 2008

Sounds like your move was rather arduous, especially with burglars taking advantage of your absence. I expect Tucson will be better for your health, once you're settled in. ((As for Tucson being better for our health, I guess it's a mixed blessing. There are two ragweed seasons here—one in spring and the other in fall.))

I decided not to move up to Eureka; but selling that house is even more of a headache than buying, especially in this market. Realtors are up there with lawyers and car mechanics, ethically.

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Any Porter, New York, NY

12 Feb 2008

Just read your new issue, and glad to hear you're settled in. It's a shame about having one of your telescopes stolen. I always wanted a good telescope, but of course the fact is that there's nowhere to use them here in NYC. The clunky 60mm Tasco I bought years ago for \$20 when a local department store was going out of business, I finally gave to Joe Siclari. He's in an isolated semi-rural house in northern Westchester and has no problems with seeing more than a dozen stars at night, which is what I get here, and that only when it's exceptionally clear and dark. Damned sodium vapour streetlights! ((The Tucson area has a dark skies ordinance that keeps light pollution to a minimum. Unfortunately our land is in a different county that doesn't have such an ordinance, but at least the area isn't heavily settled.))

Do you have a current e-mail for J. K. Klein? I know some people who want to get in touch with him.

I recently read a depressing article in the *NY Times* about long-term climatic changes in the desert SW. Not an area of the world I would be moving to. ((The NYC area is predicted to go underwater, so I'm not so sure you should be talking.)) I'm in fact now retired and living on the investments I made when my mom died in 1999 and left my brother and me all her money plus her apartment (87th Street just off Fifth Avenue/Central Park), which we sold for a good sum. And, gasp, I turn 62 next month. Have already put in for early Social Security. Having survived liver bile duct cancer last year, I think it's a good idea to get some SS before Bush spends it all on nuking Iran... ((We're only a couple of years behind you, as you know since you keep the birthday lists (You don't have Mike's birthday, but we're both born the same year.) We also plan to apply for SS at 62. That's what our financial advisor thinks we should do, and I agree after having done a little research.))

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Lloyd Penney, Etobicoke, ON

16 Feb 2008

Welcome to Arizona, I suppose I should say. I hope your move was as stress-free as possible. Right now Yvonne is working just up the street from our apartment, so staying in our neighbourhood is a given. She would like to move but to somewhere within the area so she can still walk to work. I'm quite used to travelling ridiculous distances to get to work, and by transit, too. We would both prefer to live in the west end of Toronto; it seems to be the area least affected by crime. ((I only once had a job that would be considered walking distance from home, but I never walked. Maybe today with all the concern about global warming I would walk or at least take a bike.))

It is tough to fit into a new house to make it your home. My last big move was to British Columbia, and we

mostly liquidated our possessions in order to move easily. When you rent, you never feel you can make any changes to it; it's not yours to change. We're relatively pleased to be where we are, especially now that Yvonne works up the street at Diageo Canada. (I am at Panasonic Canada right now, but that assignment will end shortly. I plan to take a break from daytime assignments for a while and just work evenings at the *Globe and Mail*.)

Interesting to see that with the number of FAPAazines I get individually in the mail, the boundaries between a genzine and an APAzine is blurring. I may not be a member of the APA, but I get to see lots of what's happening there.

Last year when Yvonne and I travelled to Dallas to go to the International Space Development Conference, we saved some money and time by doing a grocery order. We had access to two bakeries and went to get some bread that Yvonne could eat, namely wheat-free, containing spelt, amaranth or other grain. Both bakeries had no idea what we were talking about. They only knew that bread came from flour. She had a limited number of foods she could eat at the conference; at least the hotel was willing to make her a special meal for the major banquet we attended.

If the US military could be persuaded to take a fraction of a percentage of their near-trillion-dollar budget and add it to the crumbs NASA gets each year, getting to Mars would be no problem. Instead the public is taught by the media that any interest in space and Mars is childish at best and ridiculous at worst, and NASA will limp along as best it can.

If I recall, there is a convention in the Tucson area called Tuscon. Not sure what kind of convention it is. Take care, and I look forward to the next issue. ((Tuscon is a small sf con. So far they have only announced the location and their author guest of honour, Diana Gabaldon. We haven't made any decisions about attending or not yet. I've met the author already at another con, but I've not read anything by her. I think she writes fantasy, which isn't exactly my cup of tea.))

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John Purcell, College Station, TX

29 Feb 2008

Nice cover artwork, Laurraine! It is good to see some of Amy Harlib's art in a fanzine again. This one is very nicely done. Now what I have to do is ask her for some art for *Askance*. Hmm... I believe I have said that before, haven't I?

Well, it certainly sounds like you and Mike have been keeping busy. Moving state to state can do that. Welcome to the club of fannish inter-state movers. Besides being extremely stressful and expensive, it takes a lot of effort and is physically and emotionally draining. I am glad that you are moved in. Now for that California house to sell, and soon would be extremely helpful. Good luck to you two.

This semester has turned out to be busier than I expected, but that's all right. At least I am getting ever closer to finishing this *fershlugginer* PhD. My goal is to have it in my grubby, middle-aged hands by December 2009, possibly sooner. We shall see what happens.

I like to blame my doctoral work as responsible for keeping me out of FAPA for now. Then again this really is a conscious decision on my part, since I should get the serious stuff taken care of first and then enjoy life again. Academia has a way of sucking the joy out of living, but it's a temporary thing. So long as I don't take it too seriously, I know I'll be fine.

Speaking of degrees, my wife is graduating from Sam Houston State University this coming May with her BA in History/Criminal Justice. She is already perusing job openings in her field—criminal archivist: way cool concept, and is getting excited. So like me, Valerie has to hunker down and take care of the essential matters first in order to enjoy the rewards. I am quite proud of her and plan to spring for a nice celebration as her graduation present. She has expressed an interest in seeing New Orleans's French Quarter, and that would be a lot of fun. We shall see how things go from here.

That picture of your new house is nice, and the view of the mountains is a huge plus. My relatives in American Fork, Utah, have a splendid view of Mount Timpanogas and the mountains edging the right

flank of the Great Salt Valley. They live just north of Provo (twelve miles, roughly), and it's a beautiful area. There are great camping areas nearby, too. One day we will have to go back out there for a visit again. Your photo really reminded me of my aunt and uncle's house. You certainly are in a nice area.

Nothing of note to say in response to your letters and mailing comments, so I shall leave off here and wish you and Mike happy settling in your new home. Take care, and don't be a stranger.

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Sheryl Birkhead, Gaithersburg, MD

24 Mar 2008

Greetings Arizonians,

Ah perhaps some of the answers to my questions about your loc in *tKK* (*The Knarley Knews*) will actually be answered within the pages of *FM*; I'll take a look.

I just watched *I Am Legend* and shipped it back to Netflix. I know I have read the original, but (just as you) could not remember it. There were, obviously, two logical outcomes, and the only question was which one. Even without going back to re-read, it feels as if the movie is fairly true to the book. I think what surprises me most is that I do not recall much murmuring about the movie other than the usual pre-release information, so I had to wonder if it was well received. I put it on my Netflix list and actually got it fairly soon after the DVD was available. Enjoyed.

Sounds as if the organic grocery store you are frequenting was a Wild Oats; I used to send one of my nieces a gift card to WO until they were bought out. I had never heard of the chain (and now never will for this area), but my sister explained—think of Trader Joe's meets California (i.e. upgrade the expected prices). Does that sound about right? ((Yes the store that we go to is a Wild Oats. It's slowly being remade into a Whole Foods Market, but the name on the front has not yet been changed.))

While I don't tend to think of this area as truly rural (it was when we moved out here many years ago, but metropolitan DC has spread), I realize how much I miss the amenities of Gaithersburg proper. It seems ridiculous that the best source of organic produce will, eventually (it is still being built), be the local Safeway. There are two nearby grocery stores (the current Safeway and a Weis), but people look at the difference in price, and neither store stocks much at all in the way of either organic or vegetarian. I am used to driving, so the fifteen-mile drive each way to a TJ or Whole Foods doesn't seem unusual, but it will feel a lot better if that new store (two miles each way) actually carries a lot of the products I use. We'll see. The house looks very nice in the picture, despite internal problems. Did you theorize on how long you may actually have to be there? I presume there are two (at least) parts to this—selling your house and getting the new one built; any time frames on the horizon? ((The supermarkets here seem to stock a good selection of organic produce, but they don't carry organic meats and fish.

((Now that we've sold the California house, and the building process has been started (if not the actual building), we estimate eight to twelve more months in the rental.))

What people choose to steal boggles my mind; I mentioned this in my loc to *tKK*. At least the insurance company will be coming through with some reimbursement. About the steroid, if possible go for prednisolone; prednisone is bio-converted in the liver and this seems much more problematic in felines than was first thought. We used to just go for the prednisone, which was dirt cheap, figuring it just got converted to the active form; now we are getting information that this, in cats, may not be as routine a transformation as was thought. Feline practitioners have been saying this for some years, but now the research is finally proving it out. ((I will ask the vet about this when I take Fluffy in. I also read that the treatment for human Crone's disease is being changed. My rheumatologist said that it's similar to what Fluffy has. So I will ask about that as well.))

Ah, I see I used an improper title; the unit is actually a water neutralizer (very acid water here and one hopes to avoid all those nifty pinholes in any copper pipes if possible), not a softener. Anybody have any idea if people, in general, with neutralizers continue to drink the water? I see all the chemicals that precipitate out as a water sample evaporates and the big tub that goes into the neutralizer once a year—makes me wonder what people do, and are all those salts innocuous? Just wondered and not sure how to

find out.

Cats and carriers—one way, if you have the kind you can dis-assemble (and I heartily suggest you get a "top loader"—makes life a lot easier on both you and the cat). I suggest taking it apart and actually feeding the cat in one part--using the other part as a bed if the cat is amenable. Once all this is accepted (and it takes a LONG time) you can try putting the carrier back together but no door and feeding inside that. Then add the door and re-acclimate. Finally, try closing the door and releasing the cat after a short time, making sure to make nice and have her relax before letting her take off; when there is no sign of trauma/terror, try small (VERY SHORT) dry runs in the car. Cats are just very schedule- and location-oriented; they dislike anything that changes what they know. With any luck you will eventually be able to make the trip with at least a lessening level of angst. You might also try investing in a spray bottle and/or room mister of Feliway and see if your cat is one of those that responds to catnip. Feliway is an artificial pheromone that lessens anxiety—an analogue to the chin secretions. When a cat rubs you with its chin, it is marking you with the pheromones; and this artificial version helps lessen stresses. It works to varying degrees with different cats but is worth a try.

I haven't seen much about truly self-driving cars, but I frequently see ads about the car that will parallel park itself. Most of us learn how to do that in order to pass the driving test and then spend an inordinate amount of time avoiding ever doing it again!

Doing the taxes precipitated a lot of computer problems, but tucked in amongst all that was the information that I am not eligible for this nifty tax stimulation rebate (or whatever they are calling it). My business, to put it charitably, was well below sea level last year; and the catch for the rebate is that you have to have at least \$3000 in earned income. Nope, I don't even come close. Drat, now I'll have to figure out some other way to prepare the TVs for the government-mandated changeover to digital. Oh yeah, I already got the federal "coupons"; they had to work hard to figure out an expensive way to create them. I have two of them, but I pressed the send button online before reading the last few lines, and they expire two months from receipt or thereabout. Yes, they are for \$40 off a converter...each. But, short lifespan (see previous note—two months) and are only for certain models. The blurb that came with the coupons explained only three models also passed analogue signals; so you cannot use most of the models until the conversion actually takes place. I asked the nice, but rather un-informed, clerk at Best Buy how one connected old (I mean old) sets. He launched into a discussion of the coaxial cable. I waited until he ran out of steam and mentioned there actually was a type of antenna cable before coaxial and that was what I meant. You could almost see the gears whirring and then the steam rising as he ran out of information. With an apologetic smile he merely added that he guessed I would have to get some sort of adapter and hurriedly added they did not carry such an item. Gonna be interesting, especially without that rebate to help get back to the same status as before the government mandated change. Thanks a lot. ((Radio Shack used to sell the type of converter you need, but I don't know if they still do. I used to have one, but I doubt I still do.))

This lastish you did-not "sound" too stressed. I hope that is true. Aside from the obvious worries, this breathing time gives you a while to make the transition in stages. How far is the rental from the building site for the new home? My sister's take on having their home built was that at least one person needed to plan on camping out at the lot for about six months. Her story for a density award was that they apparently have two colour co-ordinated bathrooms, one blue and one yellow. Apparently the builder simply could not get the right colours in the right rooms, even with the tile in place as a strong hint! Ah, to be charitable...maybe red/blue colour-blind—naw, that wouldn't explain yellow. ((There is such a thing as blue/yellow colour-blindness. Also some people are totally colour-blind. One of my doctors was that way, and I used to tease him mercilessly. He was probably relieved when I moved away.))

There is a potential upside to this; you just might come out with enough material to fill a dozen zines.

Keep us all informed. *Mewsing* readers want to know! Thanks for thish.

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Tim Marion, New York, NY

26 Apr 2008

It's been pretty hard for me to write for months now. I've been working very hard on a new *So It Goes*;

and, although I'm sure the work shows, it's still not finished. I still have a little collating to go, as well, of course, as well the stapling and mailing, etc.

There for a while I was seriously considering rejoining FAPA and running *So It Goes* thru FAPA but ultimately decided against it. I just can't stand the thought of having to produce a fanzine every now and then. Would rather wait until I am Truly Inspired. ((Some FAPA members only run one fanzine through annually.))

I enjoyed the pictures and description of your new house. The mountain view looks so appealing there, along with the absence of streetlights, that it almost makes me wish that it was I moving into that house. I'm sorry Mike's telescope and material was stolen from the previous house; I'm sure that must have generated a very betrayed and burned feeling.

As for your letters, I'm sorry Jay Kay Klein won't be at any conventions in the future taking pictures. Ed Meskys's letter was fascinating, writing about ancient ESFA, his deceased 14-year-old cat, and his new calico. And "hello" right back at fellow letter hack Lloyd Penney.

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I Also Heard From: Amy Harlib, Torun Almer, and Tim Merrigan

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* **Closing Remarks**

I hope to manage my time better next quarter, so I won't find myself finishing my zine at the last possible minute.

Because of our building process, our travel plans have been pared back. We still hope to get to the Worldcon.

Laurraine