

Feline Mewsings #33



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Feline ~~M~~ewsings

#33

August 2008

* Editorial / Introduction

We've made quite a bit of progress on our building plans and may soon be able to file for a building permit. A lot of pieces have to come together. The architect draws up a plan consisting of several pages. One of course is the overall floor plan. But there are others for the electrical and other aspects of building. We're also getting the land ready for building. The four corners of the house have been staked, and we've done some studying of the grading to be done. Our land is on a slight slope. Between the highest corner and the lowest one of the house, there's about an eight-foot difference. The more or less final plan is on p. 4; we've only made a few minor alterations since it was drawn. North is at the bottom.

The weather started warming up in mid-May, and I started watering the three citrus trees in the back yard weekly. I've been able to pick quite a few grapefruit to squeeze for juice. The monsoon season started in mid-June and will continue through September. June and July typically have the most rainfall. June was relatively dry, but there's been a lot of rain in July. I'm finishing this up early because of our worldcon trip. The worldcon is the second weekend of August this year. On our way to Denver, we'll be taking it easy and making three stops for sightseeing and visiting.

* * *

* Local Activities

Movies

Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian: I frankly don't remember the book at all, so I can't comment on the movie's fidelity to the written word. I did see someone's comment that it wasn't. On the other hand, most people seem to think that the movie preserved the feel and intent of the book. Having seen the first movie, I also cannot really comment on its quality as a standalone movie. There is a lot of action but little blood, so those of us who don't care for a lot of blood can be happy. The ending is also happy and satisfying. I enjoyed the movie quite a bit. Those readers who enjoyed the first movie would probably enjoy this one as well.

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Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull: I think we all thought this series was all done, but here we go again. I understand there are two more to come. The first of the current triplet introduces us to a much older Indiana Jones played by a much older Harrison Ford. Just when Professor Jones thought he was on the road to retirement, stuff happens. To keep the plot from getting too old, a new younger character is introduced. The adventure takes place in South America this time. There are plenty of references to the previous three movies and to the Young Indiana Jones movies that were made for TV. I found the movie exciting, and Indiana Jones followers should enjoy it.

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Get Smart: I remembered the series as being pretty corny, but I really enjoyed the movie. It was hilarious. Among other things it contains a lot of broad political humour. The setting of part of the film in LA was nice for me since I spent so much of my life there.





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.I. Artificial Intelligence* (Warner Brothers, 2001). Written and directed by Steven Spielberg. Based on the screenplay by Ian Watson and the short story "Super-Toys Last All Summer Long" by Brian Aldiss. Music by John Williams. Running time: 140 minutes. Rated PG-13. <http://aimovie.warnerbros.com/> .**

A.I., famed director Steven Spielberg's eagerly-anticipated completion of his even more renowned friend Stanley Kubrick's last project uses the imagery and tropes of sf to make a moving and powerful latter-day retelling of the story of *Pinocchio*, examining what it means to be really human.

The movie opens with some necessary exposition (by Ben Kingsley) establishing a post-greenhouse-effect world of drowned coasts and widespread famine in some areas while others remain prosperous (like New Jersey, locale of the movie), thanks to strict family planning. Technology has advanced to the point where outwardly lifelike robots called mechas can be ubiquitously found performing various services among their human counterparts. A scientist, Allen Hobby (William Hurt), desires to build a better humanoid construct to represent a qualitative advance beyond those that were made previously. He produces David (Haley Joel Osment), programmed with the ability to love and to develop an "inner life of metaphor and dreams".

A.I.'s tripartite structure's first third introduces David into the affluent suburban household of Henry and Monica Swinton (Sam Robards and Frances O'Connor), whose only son Martin (Jake Thomas), awaits a cure for a deadly disease in a frozen and comatose state in a hospital. Initially Monica feels repelled by her surrogate child with his ingratiating smile suggesting the uncanny creepiness of a living doll. Thus the film reminds us of the fear that humans' replicas of themselves will come to life and supersede us, casting *A.I.*'s spell of wonder at David's astonishing, realistic, wide-eyed appeal with a tinge of dread. This sense of unease increases when Monica activates David's imprinting function that will make him love her unconditionally and forever in a steadfast adoration both heart-rending and chilling and demanding of reciprocation.

When the defrosted Martin suddenly returns to his now shockingly expanded family, the ensuing sibling rivalry and emotional malfunctions include his introducing David to the Carlo Collodi story of *Pinocchio* about a wooden puppet who turns into a real boy. This tale becomes an obsession for David and a rich fountain of images and allusions for *A.I.* That David (programmed to be perfect) proves preferable to his quasi-brother illuminates the movie's challenging themes concerning the true meaning of humanity: if we like David better and subsequently side with his mechanical compatriots against their human oppressors, does this affirm our humanity or irrevocably alienate us from it?

The vindictiveness of Martin towards David precipitates a crisis that forces Monica (in a harrowing scene) to abandon the robot child along with his cybernetic teddy bear, Teddy (voiced by Jack Angel), in a dark forest. Fulfilling his creator's desires, David, with exemplary childlike reasoning, conflates his own story with *Pinocchio*'s and convinces himself that if he could find the Blue Fairy, she would transform him into a real boy so that Mommy Monica would love him. In this second part of *A.I.*, the questing David soon finds an unlikely partner, a sex-slave mecha called Gigolo Joe, played with deliciously, slickly campy

charm by Jude Law. Now exiled from the Swintons' bourgeois sanctuary of a house, David quickly discovers the dystopian nature of this disconcertingly familiar future. He and Joe become captives of bounty hunters who herd them into cages at Lord Johnson-Johnson's (Brendan Gleeson) Flesh Fair, a twisted carnival-like combination of revival meeting and demolition derby, where people express their hatred of mechas by destroying them with explosives or acid. This sequence further provokes questions on the nature of humanity and the moral scandal of dehumanization.

After a narrow escape, Joe takes David to his haunt, the decadent Rouge City (a cross between Vegas and the old Times Square). There with the help of a Robin Williams-voiced hologram called Dr. Know and a verse of William Butler Yeats's poetry, the protagonists acquire the knowledge to journey to the end of the Earth in order to find the Blue Fairy in a place called Manhattan.

In the largely submerged city, against their wills, David and Joe are poignantly parted, leaving David alone to discover the appalling escalation of human plans to exploit mechas. This third part of *A.I.* pushes the plot of the movie into strange and bizarre territory (including an ironic resolution of the Blue Fairy quest), ultimately leaving the human world entirely to all practical purposes. What seems like a contrived *deus ex machina* ending actually proves to be a provocative creative risk that Spielberg takes to examine the cathartic comforts of infantile wish-fulfilment. Can the dream of restoring that first perfect love whose loss we experience as the fall from grace, ever be attained? *A.I.* ends by forcing the audience to confront the underlying moral of all our fairy tales: in order to be real, one must be able to love, to dream, and to be mortal.

Spielberg's *A.I.* masterfully uses a fairy-tale and pop culture to create movie magic in a dazzling blockbuster film that offers thoughtful entertainment with depth that may not be perceived by the average viewer. Superb production design (especially the subtle use of blue tones in the art director's palette, cinematography, costumes, make-up, astonishing SPFX (that bring broken-down mechas to sputtering life), and wonderful performances on the part of Haley Joel Osment and Jude Law make *A.I.* well worth seeing. Spielberg, in this homage to Kubrick, effectively blends that director's chilly, analytical style with his own warmer, emotionally charged sensibility. Perfectly complemented by John Williams's brilliant, restrained, modernist score, *A.I.*, with its slowly, carefully unfolding story, its layered subtexts, eerie atmosphere, and haunting scenarios alternating with moments of brash energy, proves to be a gripping, mesmerizing film with nothing artificial about its intelligence.

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***All Tomorrow's Parties* by William Gibson (Berkley Publishing Group; reissue edition, Feb. 2003, \$7.99, mass market paperback, ISBN#: 0-425-19044-7).
<http://penguinputnam.com/static/packages/us/about/adult/berkley.htm>
<http://www.williamgibsonbooks.com/index.asp>**

All Tomorrow's Parties concludes the popular trilogy that includes *Virtual Light* (1993) and *Idoru* (1996), set towards the close of the 21st Century. As much character-driven as plot-driven, the story focuses on the approach of what the author calls a "nodal point", a moment in history when certain patterns, trends, and data associations converge in a critical moment that can irrevocably change life on Earth.

A young man named Colin Laney, down-and-out (except for his computer interface) in Tokyo, both blessed and cursed with the ability to read these nodal connections, possesses this talent brought about by childhood exposure to an experimental drug. Laney perceives a nodal point coming, potentially equally calamitous as the previous one in 1911.

Unfortunately so does megalomaniacal industrialist Cody Harwood, who has also dosed himself with Laney's drug, effectively creating the node. As part of his plan to ensure influence over it, Harwood plans to build a network of nanotech replicators, presently forbidden by most governments, in every one of his franchised, ubiquitous, worldwide Lucky Dragon convenience stores.

Laney's and Harwood's struggle to influence the outcome of the nodal points draws in a number of characters, many of them "old friends" from the previous two books in the trilogy; and they all head for predicted "ground zero", the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, now too earthquake-damaged to

support motor vehicle traffic. The famous span, currently transformed into a huge, self-governed, build-it-yourself shanty-town populated by hip outsiders, provides the locale for a gathering of Laney's old pal, former rent-a-cop Berry Rydell, to whom Laney has given money and a package that conceals a projector containing the virtual personality, or idoru, Rei Toei; and joining them, an erstwhile bike messenger named Chevette; the weird, watch-loving, intuitive, net-surfer Silencio; the mysterious hacker inhabitants of the virtual Walled City; Harwood's shadowy assassin, Konrad; and motley others. Rei Toei proves pivotal in the conclusion that Gibson builds up suspensefully only to end it all with a bittersweet, supremely ironic twist.

All Tomorrow's Parties proves a delight to read, filled with Gibson's vividly conceived near-future scenarios and concepts: the neural implants, the matte-black cyber gear, the nanotech construction materials, the miscellaneous repurposed cultural detritus, not to mention the whole crew of appealingly eccentric characters. All this, set forth in the author's unique and astonishingly textured prose rich in off-the-wall ideas and extended metaphors amidst the intriguing character interactions and exciting plot developments, represents Gibson in top form - essential reading for sf aficionados.

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* Odds and Ends

The Cardiff Centre of Astrobiology reports that our sun periodically passes through an area in space where particle density is greater. This happens because the path of the sun goes up and down through the galactic plane. About every 35-40 million years, we pass through the dense plane of the galaxy. When this happens, Earth has a higher probability of being hit by comets that are jarred loose by impact from the particles in dust clouds. It is believed that the dinosaur extinction happened during one of those times. We are currently at the beginning of one of those periods when the possibility of collisions is greater.

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A short article in the *New Yorker* for 5 May talks about a set of graphic novels about 9/11 written by Ernie Colón and Sid Jacobson. It is intended to be a user-friendly version of the 9/11 Commission Report, which Colón surmised would not be read by most of its buyers. The book was published in 2006 by Hill & Wang. A sequel will be published in August.

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Business Week reviewed *The Post-American World* by Fareed Zakaria. "Once again, it seems, we're living through interesting times." The author sees American hegemony being challenged by the rising powers, including India and China. China, India, Brazil, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia are growing faster economically than the US. India native Zakaria thinks the US has grown careless, arrogant, and lazy since the fall of the Soviet Union. The US must learn to play in the new global economy or it will go the way of the British Empire.

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An article in *New Scientist* talks about five sf movies that got the science right. The five movies are 2001: a Space Odyssey, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, *Alien*, *Gattaca*, and *Solaris* (both versions).

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According to a paper submitted to *Science* by NASA's James Hansen, top American climate scientist, "...if humanity wishes to preserve a planet similar to the one on which civilization developed and to which life on Earth is adapted, CO2 must be reduced from its present 385 ppm (parts per million) to, at most, 350 ppm.

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* Mailing Comments on FAPA #283:

Fantasy Amateur, Vol. 71, No. 3: I apologize to everyone for failing to get my egoboo poll sent in. I'm afraid the home building project has put a crimp in my time, and perhaps I'm still learning how to manage my time for other projects while we are involved with building a house.

Dale Speirs (Opuntia 64.3): I really like the concept practiced in Alberta of teaching math as a unified subject. I'm sure it would have helped me learn better. Speaking of math, I was recently impressed that there actually seems to be a practical application for trigonometry, a term I had to search my mind to remember. As you know, we're in the beginning stages of building a house. The man bidding to do the solar installation on our house was talking sine and other trigonometric terms in discussing the angle of the solar panels. I'm sure knowing of this and other practical applications would be great incentive for many students.

Ben Indick (Ben's Beat 92): I think John Lithgow is a great actor, but the American audience doesn't seem to appreciate real acting ability. I first saw him live in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and was blown away by his performance. I later also saw him in the taping of the radio production of *M Butterfly*.

You indicated that *Grey Gardens* would be part of the Arizona Theatre Company's 2008-2009 season, but their web site doesn't include it in their line-up. There must have been a change since you published your zine. Perhaps it's not part of their regular season but a special event. I'll try to keep an ear open. I'm on their e-mail list, so maybe I'll find out that way.

Shelby Vick (Let It All Hang Out): Your zine this time is full of comment hooks.

My political views are heavily influenced by libertarian ideas. I agree with you on abortion up to a point. I believe it's immoral and should not be state-funded. I'm also against the death penalty for the same reason. I agree with you about the legalization of drugs. I think they should be all regulated in the same manner as alcohol. As far as firearms, I believe licences should be required just like driving. I see marriage as a private institution that the government should not interfere with except insofar as to determine taxable status.

I think it's wrong to compare the retirement package for politicians with Social Security. The latter is a safety net for people who fail to save in other ways. Politicians' retirement plans are equivalent to private retirement plans offered by companies or 401K plans. It certainly is a lot better than other retirement plans, so you would have a right to complain about that, but comparing it to Social Security is the wrong way to go IMHO.

My parents never relied on Social Security, and I don't expect to either. My father told me that Social Security covered their daily living expenses, such as food, clothing, and real estate taxes. They paid for everything else with their retirement money. I hope Mike and I will be in a comparable position.

True that money alone will not attract good teachers to the profession. I've known many people who wanted to teach, but it was too difficult to cope with unruly or even dangerous students. More money would have acted as hazard pay in some of their cases.

While it's true that some of our Founding Fathers were statesmen rather than politicians, I think you're wrong to believe all of them were. I believe Washington could play politics with the best of them. Adams did not fare so well, because he was unwilling to play politics. Politics I'm sure goes way back in human history.

My religious views are more or less the same as yours. I've always been interested in comparing biblical writings to actual history. As you say the Bible was written by men, and many changes have been wrought in it since the original writing.

Grapefruit juice interferes with the body's absorption of many nutrients. If you're going to drink grapefruit juice, you should do it between the times you take medication or vitamins. Our rental house has a fruiting grapefruit tree, and I've been using the fruit to make juice. I can't eat it without making my teeth hurt, but I can drink the juice. It's quite refreshing on a hot day.

I envy the fact that you don't have arthritis. So far mine is not too bad.

His Imperial Majesty Bob Silverberg (Snickersee, Vol. Twicely, No. Nicely):

You say you've been at your address for thirty-six years, but you seem to be talking about a mailbox. Have you actually lived in the same house for that long? The longest I've lived in the same house is twelve years. I've had a couple of postal boxes and will again when we move to Oracle; they don't deliver to the house. I'm on my

sixteenth mailing address, if I've counted correctly, not counting college and university addresses.

I can't imagine you being under stress. You always seem so calm, collected, urbane, and glib whenever I've seen you.

Coffee doesn't have to be bitter. Most American's don't like it bitter. Since coffee doesn't wake me up, I only drink it because I like the taste. I've been drinking it since I was about thirteen or fourteen. I can't drink too much, or it'll put me to sleep; too much can also upset my stomach and give me heartburn. These days much of the coffee I drink is decaffeinated.

Welcome to the Apple world. Mike is a developer and has been for many years. He wasn't sure whether to continue being one, but he calculated that the membership cost was more than made up for in savings when we bought him a new computer this year; developers get discounts on equipment. He used to write Apple shareware, but he hasn't done so in several years. He also hasn't attended a Developers' Conference in quite while either. It used to be paid for by his employer when they still used Apple computers in-house.

Milt Stevens (Alphabet Soup #58): Tea can actually stain teeth worse than coffee. Most of the stains on my teeth are from green tea.

I don't put sugar or other sweetener in my coffee, but I do like cream in it if it's available. I won't use artificial creamers.

In my experience a defunct magazine can offer you alternate subscriptions or other compensation or it can just stop arriving and one day you realize you haven't received any issues in a while. It seems to be about fifty-fifty which way it'll go.

Eric Lindsay (For FAPA): We paid \$650 for our colour LaserJet printer that can automatically do duplex printing. We got it with an extra paper tray. It has four toner cartridges. The black cartridge lists for \$75, and each colour cartridge is listed for \$82.99. Although we don't usually buy direct from HP, we probably pay close to those prices. If you add up the cost of the toner cartridges, they do not add up to the price of the printer. Also as far as I can tell, the drum is not a user-replaceable item. I have no idea what the working life of one is. I usually end up replacing the colour cartridges four times a year. The black toner usually gets replaced a little more frequently.

Many Americans, including me, no longer watch TV live. Instead we record most shows to watch later. This way we don't have to sit through commercials. Mike, for some reason, prefers to watch live and channel surfs during commercials. In my case about fifty percent of the shows I watch don't have any commercials anyway, so I'm just time-shifting my viewing for convenience. Speaking of commercials not fitting into most sf shows, I was recently surprised to notice (as I zapped through it) that an AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) ad was run during an airing of *Doctor Who*; I know there are probably many baby boomers like me watching, but ...

One of the homeowner association rules here prohibits drying clothing outside. Probably it's considered an eyesore.

Nevada seems to be the most popular state for Americans to retire to, not just fans.

I believe Marty Cantor still smokes a pipe.

I have located a radio station to listen to here, but I haven't formed the habit of doing so. When we were in California, Mike was working and I wasn't for a number of years. Then I developed the habit of listening to the radio whenever I was home alone and frequently even when Mike was home. I still find myself listening to the LA station on the web. The local station isn't quite as good, to my taste, as the one in LA. They broadcast jazz in the evening. Though when I was young, I listened mostly to music, either classical or rock, these days I prefer talk radio of the NPR (National Public Radio) variety. My second choice is classical music. Rock is a distant third, because there aren't any stations that only play the kinds of rock I like.

Like you I expect good customer treatment from businesses. The only time I might be willing to forgive a problem is when I have had years of good service from a company before the occurrence of the problem and the problem seems to be an isolated case.

Helpful sales people have been very useful to us as we window shop for things we will need in our new house.

I would think that self-service airplane fuel would be quite common at small civilian airports. One of Mike's colleagues from his Air Force days lives only a couple of miles away and owns a two-seater. He keeps it at a nearby airport. He took us for rides four years ago when we were visiting. Although there is a building there for official types, there was no one there when we went. The building was open, as I used the rest room facilities there. I imagine that fuel is dispensed in the same way. It's probably like this at most small airports.

Robert Michael Sabella (Visions of Paradise #125): *London* by Edward Rutherfurd sounds like a book I might enjoy. I've put a reserve on it at the library; I also note that I can buy used copies from amazon.com at reasonable prices.

I wish my reading speed were like Joseph Major's, but it's more like yours. Of course, this does not take into account all the magazines I read and the reading of shorter materials that I do online. But I imagine both you and he also read magazines and stuff online.

Robert Michael Sabella (Visions of Paradise #126): You mention replacing a water conditioner. What kind of water conditioner do you have? Since you apparently have a well, do you have to soften the water? The water in Oracle appears to be only moderately hard, so we're just planning to put in a drinking water system; we had one in California, and it worked very well. It seems to me that if you put your water softener on the water before it went into the heater that your heater would last longer.

Steve Green (No Exit #7): May I request that you put your name in a prominent place on your zine?

The British *Robin Hood* series was shown in this country. It was playing, I believe, in 1956 when we moved to this country and was on the air for two or three years after that. I enjoyed it, but it seems a bit tame now. The new *Robin Hood* series on BBCAmerica now is a bit over the top but enjoyable. Something between the two would be more realistic. Disney did a different *Robin Hood* series, but I don't really recall them.

Gordon Eklund (Sweet Jane #55): Thanks for the heads up on international travel being less hassle than domestic.

I don't believe I've been awakened by a nightmare since I was a little girl, probably between four and seven years old.

I'm afraid you'll have to wait for more reports of civic activities. You'll be stuck with building activity reports for some time to come.

Norm Metcalf (The Devil's Work, Vol. 3, No. 142): When I bought my Palm a number of years ago, it came with a copy of *Tarzan of the Apes*. I enjoyed it enough that I bought seven of the sequels at a price of a couple of dollars each, all that was available on the Palm site. After the second book though, the quality seems to fall off. I wonder if the ones that are not available are even worse.

Jim Caughran (A Propos de Rien): I don't know in general what happens to retirement funds when an employee is laid off, but I can tell you what happened in my case. At Xerox, I was not fully vested when that happened. The company actually allowed me to keep my money there for an extra year, at which time I became fully vested. Then I rolled over the money to a mutual fund. When I was laid off from Hughes Aircraft, I was fully vested. However, they did not allow me to withdraw the money. Instead it's being paid to me now after I declared my retirement. They have a five-year option that will pay out the money in five years instead of a longer period of time.

My recollection is that radio astronomers knew the temperature on Venus's cloud tops was high, but we didn't know that it was high at the surface. We couldn't see the surface through the clouds or measure the temperature there. Mike recalls the same. We couldn't both be wrong, could we?

Janice Morningstar (Comment-ary, part quatre): I moderated the discussion for *Three Hearts and Three Lions* at a Westercon in Phoenix (Litchfield). Some of the discussion was about whether it was sf or fantasy.

I'm now in five APAe, four besides FAPA—eAPA, SNAPS, N'APA, and LASFAPA. I'm OE of N'APA. I rejoined LASFAPA, because Marty Cantor has made it so easy; he is both my mailing and printing agent; all I do is send him an electronic copy of my zine. The other three are electronic.

Thanks for the heads up about free stuff on Craigslist. The knowledge will probably come in handy one of these days.

Some people benefit more from allergy shots than others. They have always worked well for me, even for asthma. After six years of shots for rhinitis, it's never returned. The asthma did return; I had six years of shots that kept the asthma away for the most part for almost twenty years. The shots I'm getting now are mostly for asthma. There are currently much better medications for controlling allergy symptoms than when I first started allergy shots. However I prefer getting shots to taking medication every day.

I think I'd unplug myself from the Internet if I got as much spam as you say you do. In fact that's why I stopped using my AOL account for e-mail, because the spam outnumbered the legitimate messages. I haven't had the problem since. Possibly the ISPs are doing a better job of filtering spam even before they reach my inbox.

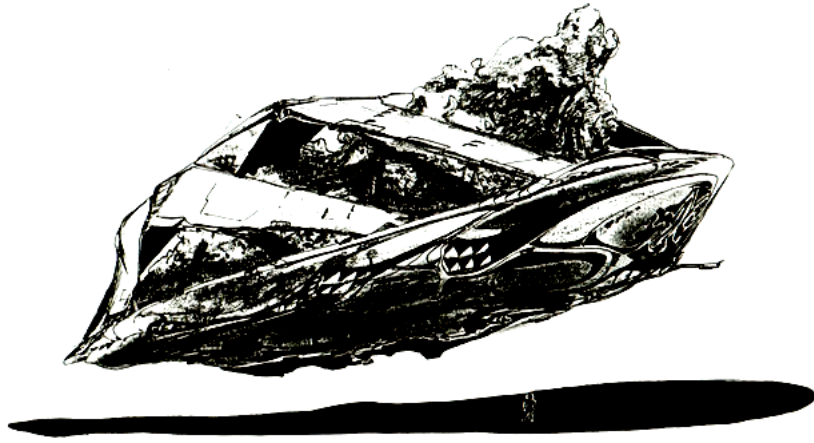
Dale Cozort (Science Fiction Adventure Magazine): I can take or leave fiction in fanzines. If it's enjoyable I'll read it. Yours tended mostly to be enjoyable.


We had problems with one of our cats chewing on cords in the computer room. We used to keep the doors closed when we weren't using the computers. He seems to have outgrown the habit fortunately.

LED lighting is now. When we went to a lighting store to discuss our lighting needs for our new house, we were shown some LED options. The argument for them is that they don't use much power and last a very long time. We

were told twenty years in the case of one of the fixtures.

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* 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.

Rita Prince Winston, Venice, CA

2 Mar 2008

...

Comments on Comments to Laurraine:

Ed Meskys: A cat who is mixed red and black without any white is called a tortoiseshell. British cat books think they are less uncommon than tortoiseshell and white, which is what Americans call calico. I hope the new cat gets over her terror and is happy living with you.

John Purcell: Why did 9-11 affect house sales in Iowa? Why didn't nervous people flee from New York and Washington to Iowa and buy your house?

Tim Marion: Yes, I have heard of Jeff Jones.

Earlier today, I once again looked up parrots. I'm not sure what was different about my query this time, but I found two sites about feral/naturalized parrots in southern California, both of which had "ID guide", photos of each species known to be established here. That was no help at identifying the local parrots. All the photos showed green birds, and from a distance we can't see if they have a red or yellow spot on top of their head or around their eyes.

In the process, I stumbled upon an entire site and many references to peach-faced lovebirds living wild in Phoenix. It seems that they have even been sighted in Tucson, so you might see them.

#

Amy Harlib, New York, NY

25 May 2008

Loved the new issue # 32, especially the Cathulhu cover! ROTFL! My compliments to the artist, Frank Wu! I also enjoyed your reports on trips to the Tucson Zoo and local parks. The mailing comments are always interesting. I loved the new *Sweeney Todd* film too despite the gore. I thought the performances, music, production design all came together brilliantly.

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Joe Major, Louisville, KY

25 May 2008

Diana Gabaldon is a "Time-Travel Romance" novelist. Her main series features an Englishwoman from the 1940s who goes back in time to the 1740s, where she gets involved in the Jacobite Rising and the like.

There are several large thick volumes of the series. It all seems rather like "The Wheel of Time". There are Gabaldon fans and an organized Gabaldon fandom; I believe there was and may still be a Gabaldon Special Interest Group in Mensa.

"Fantasy", "Time-Travel", and "Futuristic" romances are becoming an increasing part of the business. I've read a few which aren't bad but given up on several.

Hope to see you at WorldCon.

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Rita Prince Winston, Venice, CA

26 May 2008

Colour cover! Perhaps Lovecraft would have liked Cathulhu. He liked cats. In *The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath*, he showed that the ghouls were peaceable family beings despite their food; so maybe he secretly had another viewpoint where Cthulhu was just playful.

Your LA house finally sold! Congratulations! Actually I hope that doesn't mean the market is looking up, because I'm dreaming it will go down at least another twenty percent so I'll be able to buy something. ((I think you may get your wish. This economic downturn may last even through 2009.))

A frozen rat inside a frozen coconut? I don't suppose the carnivore eats the coconut, so is batting it around while it breaks it open to get at the meat the "treat" part?

How did the sulphuric acid get into the cave?

Tohono Chul Park—I know that Tohono O'odham is a Native American tribe. Is it the same "Tohono"? According to Wikipedia, "Tohono" means "desert".

Lucky viewers who saw the jet coming out of M87 "probably were the ones with better eyesight." Or better imaginations.

Amy Harlib—"Everyone with blue eyes can trace their lineage to one person who lived around the late Stone Age". Why can't the blue eye mutation randomly occur in someone not descended from that person? ((I believe that was from a story I reported in my "Odds and Ends" section, not Amy's column. The report referred to genetic studies tracing lineage.))

Lloyd Penney's LoC mentioned blurring the distinction between a genzine and an APAzine. I've always been under the impression that the first fannish APAe were bundles of genzines, just a more efficient way than mailing each copy of each genzine separately. ((You're right about the history of APAe, but these days a lot of APAzines are written specifically for each APA.))

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What do you call the sound cats make when preparing to fight? Someone just called it "making weird noises". I call it "cussing", and my late mother called it "moaning". ((I may be unfamiliar with this noise,

but maybe a reader can chime in. My cats don't fight as far as I've noticed (Mike disagrees and says they fight in the kitty condo). Since they stay indoors, they don't fight with other cats, either. Fluffy hisses sometimes when he sees a strange cat outside. Mercury makes a funny sound like a "click click click" very fast when he sees birds outside.))

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Brad Foster, Irving, TX

Got in the 32nd *Feline Mewsings* this week and have to tell you, really love Frank's cover here! At first glance it looks like a cat having a hard time getting down some sushi, then it's a cat with a bizarre tentacle beard... but then, after my mind has tried everything it can to avoid facing the awful, frightening truth, I know I must face the fact that I am looking on the unfaceable face of ...Cathulhu!

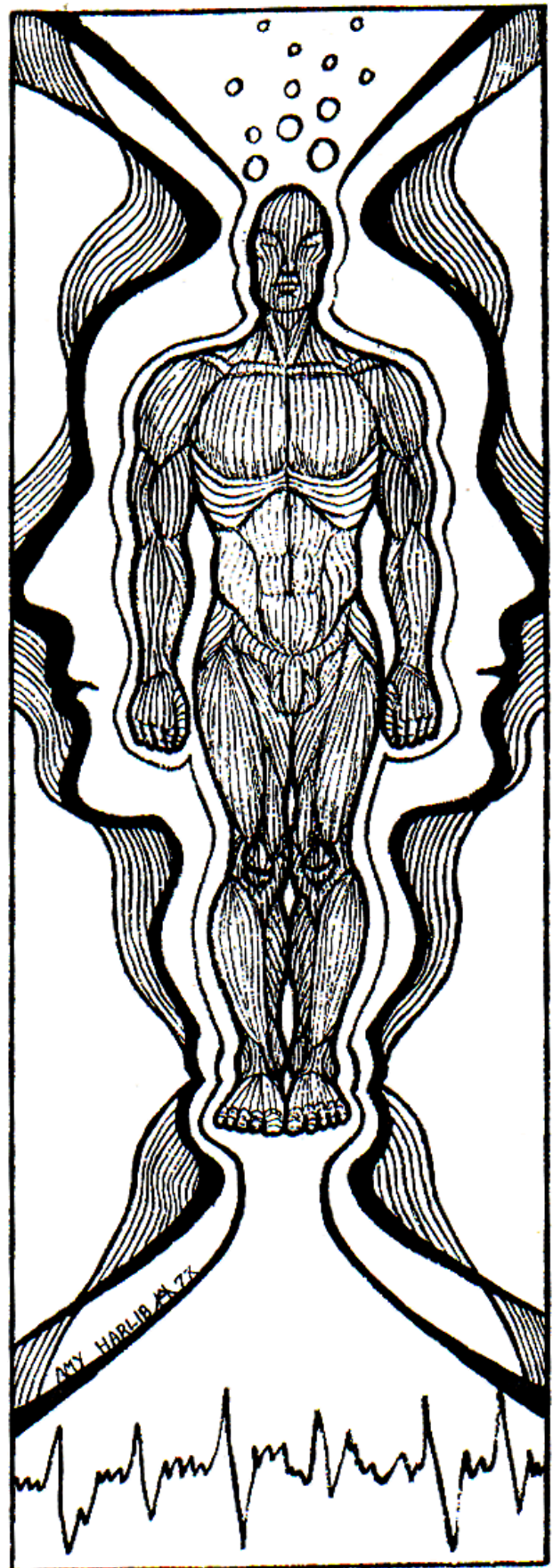
Get a giggle every time I look at it!

Congrats on finding the buyer for your old house. Especially with all the news we hear this day of how tough it is to move homes, nice that you no longer have that hanging over your head. Not to mention now the money to proceed with your new home. I'm impressed by even the short description here of what you are having to set up to get that done, taking on the contracting yourself. Simply -buying- a new home already out there takes a lot of time and effort. Good luck on getting exactly what you want! ((We wouldn't be doing the contracting ourselves if we hadn't found a great consultant. None of the contractors we talked to had any real experience with building for energy efficiency.))

Great photo from the Tucson Zoological society. All I could think of was that it was a shot of the next big snack item at the Renaissance Festival: "Frozen coconut rat on a stick"!

Having been a major fan of Peter Beagle's *The Last Unicorn* and *A Fine and Private Place* for years, actually lucky enough to meet him at a small local convention this year, and work a trade deal for a few of his other books. One collection contained the "A Dance for Emilia" that Amy reviewed here, and I agree it is another wonderful bit of story telling from one of the best writers we have around.

On the other hand, in her review of *A Knight's Tale*, she notes she hopes it might get a younger population interested in reading Chaucer and medieval history. Nope, not gonna happen. They might download some of the songs, but other than that a hipped-up retelling of an old story is usually not going to go much further than that. In my



humble opinion.

In your mailing comment to Mike McInerney, you mention you and Mike together were paying an annual health insurance premium of \$9,000. I clutched at my heart when I read that! Cindy and I were doing about \$6,000 a year for pretty minimal coverage (We had to cover close to another \$5,000 in bills before it ever even kicked in.) She recently got a new job where she is covered totally as an employee through their plan, and I get added on for only about \$2,000 a year. Don't get sick, is my advice. ((We get more than minimal coverage under our medical plan, so I don't really think we can complain. It's a PPO so we get to choose our doctors and don't need to ask anyone's permission to see specialists.))

I liked Sheryl's long description of the procedure to get a cat used to a cat carrier. It all makes wonderful sense and is very logical. Unfortunately, at least in the case of all the cats I've come in contact with, even if I went through that procedure, I know the very first time one of those trips ended up at the vet, they'd never let me near them with that carrier again. I believe the cat phrase for this would be: "Meow, meow, meow; meow, meeeeoow!" ("Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me!")

I also hope she has better luck with the TV converters. I used one of my coupons to get one for the uncabled TV in our bedroom. We have a couple of the little b&w TVs you can plug into a car outlet, but evidently no converters are made for that design. I'm going to use the second coupon to go ahead and get a second standard convertor. I figure come next year when the big signal switch happens, a lot of people will get rid of their sets to upgrade; and it will be easy to pick up a lot of nice sets for cheap at thrift stores and such. At least, that is my hope. ((You may be right. Our big TV is already digital. We have a couple of small sets that we'll just ditch as far as TV watching goes; they will still be okay for watching tapes and DVDs. We have two other sets that are like your little one. They run on batteries or can plug into the wall. Those sets will be totally useless and become hazardous waste. All our sets, except the large one, are quite old, though; so they've done their time. When we move into our new house, we'll undoubtedly buy one or two new sets.))

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John Hertz, Los Angeles, CA

Actually I was most responsible for the popularity of mah jongg in fandom—indeed played the Chinese way.

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I Also Heard From: My mother, who called to let me know the cover illo for Amy's review was a mirror image. Here it is right side up, so to speak. Since Amy sent me the picture right side up, I'm not sure how it got inverted.

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*** Closing Remarks**

Next time there will be a worldcon report among other things. I hope to have seen some of you in Denver.

Laurraine

