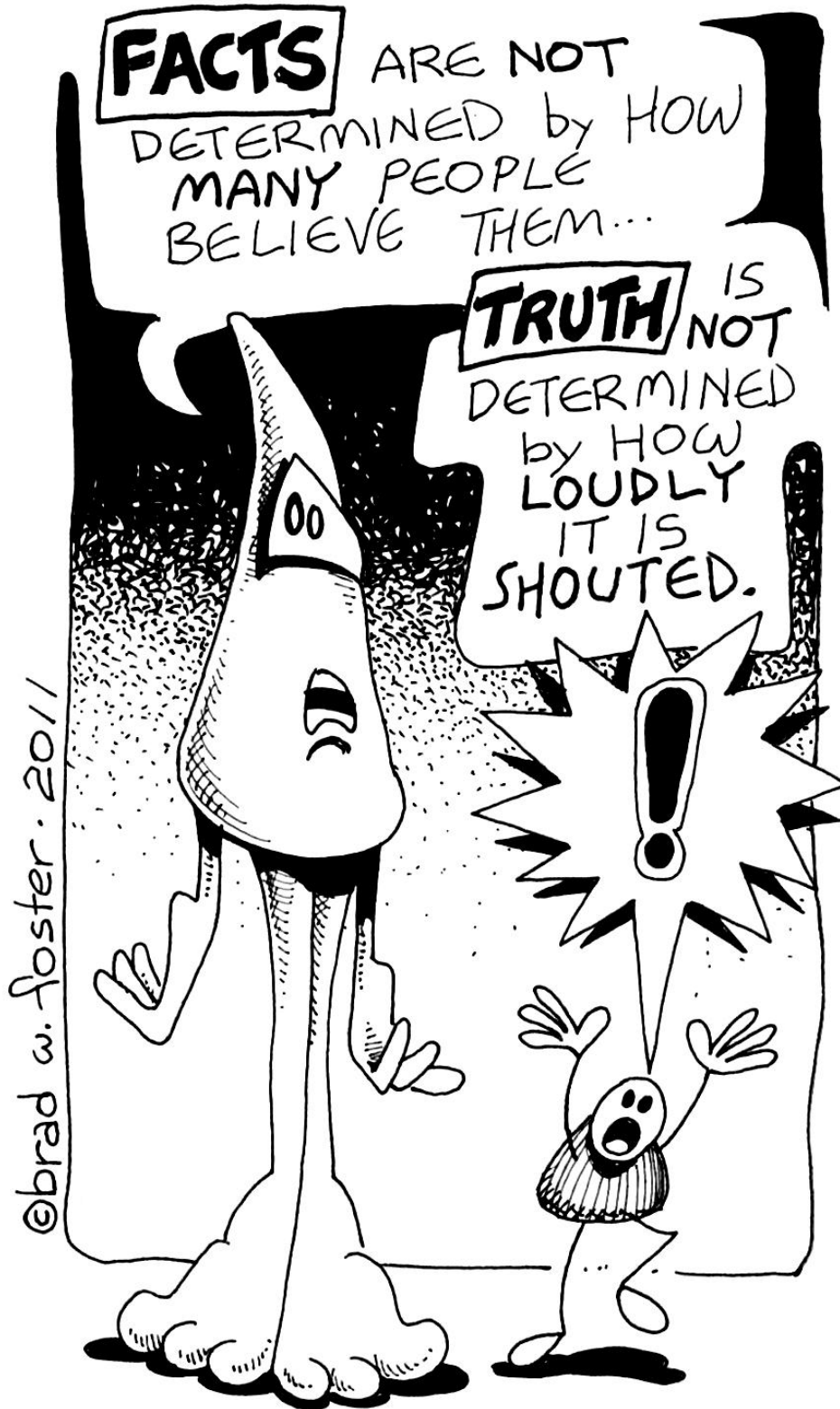


(OR: THE AGING OLD FHART NOSTALGIC TIME WASTER GAZETTE)



NEARLY DEAD AND BACK AGAIN

OR

THE VOID BREATHER'S TALE

I should have twigged back in January when the nurse in the recovery room said I wasn't absorbing oxygen properly. Since then I felt breathless on occasion. Gradually the breathlessness increased. At first I attributed it to being overweight and out of shape. I zoomed up to 210 pounds since retiring. Decided to put things right. Deliberately lost 10 pounds over the month of July. Yet I felt no better. This I attributed to my hard work fixing up our apartment and sorting stuff into keepers and discards while my wife Alyx was off in Holland visiting our son and his family. As soon as she was home I figured I could slow down and, in theory, improve.

However, the first week in August witnessed an increase in breathlessness. By the weekend it dawned on me something about me was deteriorating at an exponential rate. Just standing up from a sitting position left me panting for breath. Not good. Resolved to see my doctor on Monday... damn... forgot about the holiday... Tuesday then. Alyx angry at me for not going sooner, but the truth is up to the first weekend of August I thought I had, at worst, some sort of bug or flu. I knew better Monday.

TUESDAY AUGUST 7TH 2012

Phone the doctor early and secure a 3:40 appointment. I live in Surrey but Dr. Miles, my GP since 1968, works in the Burrard Medical building opposite St. Pauls Hospital in downtown Vancouver. Bit of a long haul.

Need my cane to stomp over to the Surrey Central Skytrain station. Breathless, but make it. My breathing calms down on the 40 minute ride to the Burrard Skytrain station. Figure I won't have any problems.

From the station to my Doctor's office is maybe 8 blocks, most of it a gentle slope uphill. Become breathless almost immediately, then start panting. About halfway I begin to feel faint and unsteady on my feet. A slight twinge of panic enters my mind as it

occurs to me I might collapse on the sidewalk. Force myself to go on. The Doctor only minutes away. He'll know what to do.

Stumble into my Doctor's office struggling for breath, panting as if I'd run a four minute mile, and I had been walking slowly! Can feel my heart racing.

Dr. Miles listens to my heart, my lungs, then does an EKG test. He picks up the phone and asks to speak to the Doctor in charge of St. Paul's emergency ward and, while waiting, turns to me and says "*Get to the emergency ward, now. You need to be there.*"

As the elevator doors close I hear him call out "*Good luck!*"

Hard to define my state of mind as I cross the street to the hospital. Focus on the task at hand. Don't want to collapse till I make it inside the door.

Times have changed. The last time I was in the emergency ward it featured a huge waiting room with maybe 30 or 40 seats, plus direct access into the hospital proper. I am surprised to enter a tiny lobby with 3 or 4 seats and 3 receptionist desks behind thick glass. As I plop down in a chair I notice a sign stating the hospital does not provide pain killers except in the case of cancer or broken bones. Asking for drugs is right out. In short, they have tightened up their security against drug addicts to a remarkable degree.

Anyway, no sooner had I identified myself when a nurse pushing a wheelchair comes out via a glass security door and asks me to hop aboard. She already has a typed ID bracelet to put on my wrist, courtesy of my Doctor's phone call. I'd say I was undressing beside a cot in the emergency ward within 60 seconds of entering the building. Must be some kind of record.

I have a nice corner suite. I'm in bed number 1, with a wall to my right and only one neighbor, a woman, on the cot to my left and partially hidden by a typical hospital curtain. The curtain in front of me is open and I have a splendid view of the Nurse Charting Station and several cots across the way. At least I won't get bored. Plenty of activity.

Actually, most of the activity at the moment centres on me. Many, many questions are asked by three or more nurses. Multiple vials of blood taken. Several people take turns listening to my lungs. *“Did you hear a crackle?” “Yes, I heard a crackle.”* What the hell does that mean? Or imply? They don’t say.

I’m barely settled in when they decide to send me for chest x-rays. A male nurse comes along and pushes me along the halls to the x-ray laboratory. I make a number of humorous comments on my situation (can’t remember what I said) and the nurse smiles, then congratulates me on my cooperative attitude. Most patients do nothing but complain, apparently. But I figure, if I make everyone’s job as easy as possible it’ll be easier for them to concentrate on helping me. Besides, I’d rather be cheerful than hover on the edge of panic. In a way I am rather relieved to be where I am. No better place.

Two chest x-rays taken and back to my cubicle I go. They scatter leads all over my chest and legs and attach wires to connect them with a monitor behind me which reveals my heart rate and my level of oxygen absorption, among other things. What they do not tell me (till several days later) was that I entered the hospital with an A Fib rate of 150 beats per minute and a set of lungs that was down to 25% capacity and dropping (my lowest point several hours later was 21%).

An IV is inserted into my right hand, another in my left. Each IV has two bags attached. Something to get my heart rate lowered, or so they say. And they hook me up to oxygen via one of those nose prong thingies. I am very grateful, till I realize the oxygen doesn’t seem to be doing any good. I mention this and they increase the pressure. Breathing a bit easier.

Naturally, now that I’m festooned with tubing and wiring, I need to go to the bathroom, but they won’t let me walk the 20 feet to the ward’s bathroom. Instead they hand me an angular plastic bottle they refer to as a urinal. I place said device between my legs (under the blanket) and discover to my relief (pun intended) I was able to empty my bladder despite the presence of several nurses hovering around me. Voiding my bowel, on the other hand, is something my personal sense of

dignity requires privacy to accomplish. A bit silly under the circumstances, perhaps, but the nurses were good enough to help me on to a portable commode and then retire, closing the curtain behind them. I wasn’t exactly comfortable, knowing there was a stranger lying on a cot only inches from where I was sitting but it’s at times like these one pretends a thin hanging curtain is as solid and impenetrable as a brick wall. Maintaining (if only as an illusion) one’s self-respect and dignity holds one back from the slippery slope of feeling helpless and giving into despair.

I take the opportunity to use my cell phone to let my wife Alyx where I am. She’s shocked. And instantly worried. I promise to keep in touch as matters progress. Unfortunately, having picked up a bout of pneumonia while in Europe, she won’t be allowed to visit me. This will make it difficult for both of us.

A nurse tells me they suspect I have one or more blood clots in my lungs. To my great surprise (I know how long the waiting periods can be) I am whisked off to get a Cat Scan.

I thought all Cat Scans involved being inserted into the machine lying in a tube. This particular gizmo just rears over my chest, leaving the rest of the body free. As the powerful magnets (and god knows what else) begins to whirl around me with a muted banshee-like howling it was all I can do to keep from chuckling. I feel like I was on the set of some Mad Scientist movie, like Frankenstein’s laboratory and such. I tell the attendants this.

“What? You think we’re mad scientists?”

I guess they were too wrapped up in their work to see the humour. Oh well.

Back in emergency the two nurses hooking me back up to assorted monitors complain about a device a few feet down the hall that clicks loudly whenever someone passes by. They find it distracting and annoying.

I hear two loud clicks. The nurses glance down the hall. *“There’s no one there,”* one gasps.

“Don’t worry,” I say, “it’s just one of the ghosts that followed me into the hospital.”

One of the nurses turns on me. *“Don’t say that!”*

Ah, I forgot. Many people believe in ghosts. So I apologize. She remains wary.

People keep listening to my lungs. And stealing my blood. I swear they remove 5 or 6 vials every hour on the hour. Lots of lab tests apparently.

Plus they take two more x-rays with a portable machine. The operator comments *“Don’t worry. The radiation is just blasting past you into the parking lot.”* Ah, hum?

They’re not satisfied with my breathing. They keep increasing the flow of oxygen. Finally they decide to take out the two prong thingie and stick a mask over my nose and mouth. I feel water running down my mouth. Apparently the oxygen is humidified, and rather cool, which I find refreshing.

“We’re going to give you the walrus.”

They insert two blue plastic ‘tusks’ into the mask that project maybe six inches out of my face. I look a sight I’m sure. But these gizmos help humidify the air which, though wet, is invigorating. I feel I can almost breathe again.

Meanwhile I watch the activity in the emergency ward with great interest. First of all there’s the ‘drama queen’. A young twit who wants his clothes back so he can leave. They tell him he can’t leave till the doctor says he can. He shuts his curtain. They open the curtain, saying they have to keep him under observation. He pulls the curtain shut again. This goes on for about half an hour. Then he starts hurling hospital equipment to the floor. The nurses converge on him and force him to stop. He threatens to leave, starts walking out of his cubicle. A nurse phones security.

“Don’t you dare call security! Don’t you dare! I’m still in my cubicle!”

“Too late. It’s done.”

At which point he breaks into screaming hysterics, screaming swear words at the nurses in an increasingly high pitched voice.

The head nurse storms up and gives him a dressing down worthy of a Sergeant-Major. He’s quite subdued and passive by the time security arrives. What a twit.

Then there’s the tattooed thug, I’m assuming a hit man for the Yakuza, striding about pounding tables and stridently demanding something or another in an incoherent but very loud voice. Would be very impressive except the back of his gown was untied and I could see he was wearing a bright blue diaper. Made him seem less threatening somehow. About half a dozen security guards show up and tell him it’s time to leave. I would have thought he needed more time in a padded cell, but they escort him away. I hope they gave him his clothes back before expelling him onto the street.

And, darn it, I’m having trouble breathing again. They promise me a better mask, one with the oxygen warmed to body temperature. I let them fit it onto my face. It’s very tight, and unfortunately I associate heated air with stifling, unbreathable air. The oxygen is being delivered at the greatest volume yet, but I feel that I’m suffocating. Evidently I am somewhat claustrophobic. I tear off the mask and gulp deep breathes. They find this rather illogical, but take away the nasty mask and put the ‘Walrus’ back on. I feel better, though I’m still gasping and panting.

Fortunately I’m distracted by hunger pangs. All I’ve had to eat today was a glass of milk. I mention this to the nurses. One of them scrounges up two sandwiches, one egg and the other cheese, and a small cup of grape juice. Hits the spot, even though there’s barely any discernible taste or texture.

It is approaching Midnight and the nurses suggest I try to get to sleep. Easier said than done since I normally sleep on my stomach, but all the wires and tubes hooked up to me prevent me from doing anything other than lying on my back. Still, I’ll give it a try, but it won’t be easy. The nurses

keep checking on me every few minutes, sometimes shining a flashlight in my face.

WEDNESDAY AUGUST 8TH 2012

Morning is long in coming, if only because I get very little sleep, and I keep being interrupted by the vampires taking more blood from my veins. How many more tests do they plan on doing?

A Doctor comes by and tells me the good news. There are no blood clots in my lungs. On the other hand my lungs are full of fluid and they don't know why. He explains helpfully that this is why I'm having so much trouble breathing.

So now I know. I'm drowning on the inside. What's causing it? What are they going to do about it?

"We think maybe your heart has been in A-Fib for several weeks and this is causing a buildup of fluid in your lungs."

"Can you give me something to put my heart back in rhythm?"

"No, we can't convert you yet. Might make things worse. But don't worry, we'll come up with something."

Not feeling exactly reassured. More doctors, sometimes groups of doctors, arrive to listen to my heart and lungs. One of them turns my head to one side and stares at my neck. *"There it is,"* he says. A nurse comments *"I see it."* See what? What's wrong with my neck? But they won't tell me.

A nurse comes up smiling. *"You're in luck. We're going to give you medicine that will make you pee continuously."*

Oh, great. *"Why?"*

"The more you pee the less fluid there will be in your lungs."

I don't quite follow the logic behind this but I'm willing to try anything if it'll let me breathe normally. It's a bit like coming home from a long night of beer drinking, except there's no party, no

beer, and just a lot of peeing. Every time I deposit 200 metric something of urine in a bottle the nurses react with glee. When I pass the 1,000 mark they're positively ecstatic. If the amount of fluid leaving my body equals the amount of fluid draining from my lungs, then I do indeed feel like I'm winning a contest. But it doesn't seem to make any difference in my breathing.

Eventually my bladder settles down and I settle back to see what they'll try next. It's not long in coming. Two nurses bustle into my cubicle and start unhooking me from various contraptions.

"We're moving you to a better room."

What? In the emergency ward? A cubicle with thicker curtains mayhaps? I am quickly wheeled the length of the ward and slid into the centre of an actual room, hooked up to a fresh battery of machines, and then abandoned as the nurses leave, closing sliding glass doors behind them.

There's a sign on the door. The letters on the outside are somewhat visible because of light shining through the paper. With difficulty (I'm very poor at reading letters backwards) I manage to piece together the words of the notice facing anyone approaching my room.

The sign reads *"Stop! Airborne Precaution!"*

Just as I begin to ponder the implications of these words a shrill horn sounds just outside my room. Three red lights above the door begin revolving and flashing. I see six doctors donning masks, gloves, and disposable gowns. It dawns on me the alarms are sounding to warn people that the door to my room is about to open.

Jesus H. Christ! What have I got? Fraser Valley Eubola?

The six come in and stand around the foot of my bed. One says *"We think you might be highly contagious."*

No kidding!

"It's just a precaution. We won't know till further tests. Bear with us. We have a long list of

suspects. We know it isn't blood clots. We know it isn't your heart. It might be infection."

I bite the bullet. *"What about cancer?"*

"The Cat Scan didn't detect any mass in your lungs, and you don't have the other symptoms of lung cancer, no night sweats for instance, so it's probably not cancer, though anything is possible."

Well, that's cheery. A toilet sitting in lonely splendor in the corner flushes by itself. The six turn to stare at it.

"Don't worry," I call out. *"It's just my imaginary friend."*

The six turn in unison to stare down at me, evidently trying to decide if I'm delirious or not. Hmm, sometimes my humour is a little out of place, it seems.

I'm left alone with my thoughts, wondering if I'm going to become as famous as Typhoid Mary. For the second or third time I use my cell phone to let Alyx know I'm still alive and that another suspect has been crossed off the list. She remains very worried, whereas I'm drifting along, quite deliberately, in what I call a 'positive state of denial.' Might as well.

Five nurses enter the room, masked and gloved as before, though this time thankfully without triggering the horn or the flashing red lights. *"We need to do more tests. So we're taking you to the ICU."*

"What's ICU?"

"Intensive Care Unit, but don't worry, it's just because it has the equipment needed for the tests."

"Uhh... okay."

Instead of unhooking me from the monitors and oxygen they place a bench over my bed/stretcher and pile all the equipment atop it. Then they place one of those paper anti-contagion masks over my nose and mouth, and we're off to the ICU.

Picture this. Our route takes us out of the emergency ward into the main hallway running the length of the ground floor. The corridor is flanked by a gift shop, coffee shop and a large waiting area. The joint is really jumping, there are people milling about everywhere.

I am barely visible (or so it seems to me) beneath blinking, beeping, flashing equipment and what does show is festooned with multiple wires, IV tubes and my oxygen line.

Two begowned, masked nurses are guiding my bed from behind, and a flying wedge of three begowned masked nurses are marching in front of me, sternly ordering people to *"Step aside!"* and waving their outstretched arms to encourage them to obey orders.

People step aside all right. Some of them jump aside. I can see the concern on their faces, not for me, but for themselves. What the hell kind of plague zombie is being transported through their midst? They are mightily worried, even shocked. I find this amusing.

We go into the 'new' building, an addition constructed years ago by a company I used to work for called Northern Construction. I remember that as the project neared completion we office employees were given a tour. I remember being shown the hospital morgue and being dared to try out one of the stainless steel autopsy slabs. I remember how cold it felt when I stretched out... was it thirty years ago? I remember thinking 'I'll be here again some day, but I won't care. I'll be dead.' These memories not an omen, or so I hope.

Once again into an isolation room, though this one has more equipment. They ask me to slide from my bed to the fixed bed in the centre of the room. I manage to do so. I don't see any obvious washroom. *"What if I need to go? Is there a commode?"*

"Oh, don't worry about that," says the nurse cheerfully as she tucks me in. *"Just go in the bed. We're used to it. Happens all the time. Perfectly natural."*

Say what? I feel slightly discombobulated. With relief I notice a commode in the corner. Am bound and determined to use that rather than the bed, even if the nurses object.

What I didn't understand till later was the nurse (all the nurses) assumed I was dying, and since people approaching death often lose control of their body functions and are usually quite embarrassed, she was trying to ease my feelings in advance of the anticipated 'accident.' Fortunately I am oblivious to the implications of her words and examine my surroundings with curiosity.

To my right are sliding glass doors giving a comprehensive view of the ward. Seems every patient has their own room. To my surprise I see a nurse sitting at a small desk up against the glass. She's doing paperwork, but glances at me and the equipment readouts behind me every sixty seconds or so. I am literally being monitored minute by minute, but again, I fail to comprehend the significance of this.

I note with interest that two small rooms function as airlocks. One is for people entering, the other for people exiting. Sure enough, a nurse and a doctor enter, a humongous doctor built like a professional wrestler.

"I need to take a swab" says the nurse.

"Oh, okay."

"Roll over." She pushes me on to my side. The doctor clutches me firmly and puts his weight on me. What the heck?

I catch a brief glimpse of the cue tip from hell a second before it's shoved up my ass.

"See? It doesn't hurt," says the nurse.

"Easy for you to say," comments the doctor.

I am speechless. In truth it didn't hurt, but my dignity is in tatters. Still, not as bad as a prostate examination. For them as not in the know, when the doctor uses his finger to press down on the prostate, it feels exactly like a red hot poker being forced... but I digress.

"Now it's my turn," declares the doctor.

I find my voice. *"Where?"*

"Just need a swab from inside your nose." But what he didn't tell me was he wanted one from the back of my sinus cavity. I don't like the sensation at all.

"And just one more..." he says, swiping the skin of my inner thigh. I'm beginning to feel like a human petri dish. What are they looking for, exactly?

It occurs to me they haven't given me anything to eat or drink so far this day. I inquire when I can expect food to arrive.

"Oh, we can't give you anything, not even water. We want you to be empty for the test."

More people enter my room. *"What sort of test?"*

"This," says a new arrival. He detaches an impossibly thick black snake of an endoscope from a block of equipment. The equipment pod at the end boasts lights, mirrors, suction orifices, possibly a GPS and God knows what else. The infernal machine looms larger than the space shuttle arm to my bulging eyes.

"We intend to do a Bronchoscopy. We just need to stick it down your throat, push it into your lung and swish it around a bit... you know, take pictures, take samples, flush out your lungs, that sort of thing."

I am overwhelmed by all this technical talk. *"Oh sure, I guess."*

"But first you need to sign this form. There's only a five % chance we'll puncture your lung and cause air to bleed into your chest cavity. But it's not a problem. It's easy for us to insert a tube between your ribs and bleed off the excess air. So no worries, I assure you."

With a somewhat trembling hand I sign the release form. Nervous I am. *"But what if I gag?"*

“No problem. First we numb your throat. Say Ahh.”

I do and the back of my throat is sprayed. I feel the numbness immediately. Someone lowers the back of my bed until my head feels like it is dangling from my body. The lecture continues.

“Now we’ll add a drug through your IV. You’ll be conscious, we need you to be, but you won’t care. Afterward you won’t remember a thing.”

My last thought before blacking out is ‘This stuff isn’t working...’ Next thing I know, I’m waking up with a sore throat. I’m told the Bronchoscopy went well.

“May I have some water?”

“Not yet. We may have to do some more tests.”

After that they leave me alone apart from keeping a constant watch over me and sneaking in now and then to capture more of my blood. I’m beginning to get the impression the hospital funds itself by selling blood to vampires. Certainly my energy level is low. I decide to get some sleep.

They darken the room for me, but there’s a lot of bright light spilling in from the nursing station beyond the glass doors. At least the ward is relatively quiet. Somehow I manage to fall asleep.

THURSDAY AUGUST 9TH 2012

A very quiet day. For one thing, I’m still not allowed any food or water. Well, not quite true. A cup of water resides on a small table beside my bed. Sitting in the cup is a small stick attached to a sponge the size of a sugar cube. I am allowed to swab the inside of my mouth once an hour.

I confess I cheat a little. Every time I put the sponge in my mouth I suck it dry for a brief, momentary sensation of actually drinking a tiny amount of water.

Given my extremely limited intake of water, oddly enough I don’t feel dehydrated. Must be all the fluid in the two IVs that’s keeping my body

flush. It’s just my stomach which is completely empty. And it has gone dormant. I don’t feel hungry at all. Good thing too.

In talking to Alyx I learn that she is preparing a ‘care package’ for me. Our fellow VCONite Rose Wilson will drop by our apt on her way home from work to pick it up for delivery next day. Great! Something to look forward to. Meanwhile Alyx has let people know of my whereabouts and perilous condition. It seems many expressions of concern and well wishes have been pouring in by email. This improves my morale considerably. Don’t feel so alone now.

What to do when you’re in intensive care? There’s a clock on the wall. I could watch time go bye. But I opt instead for the widescreen TV on the wall beside the clock. Perhaps the only perk in the ICU. I ask for and am given the remote control.

As luck would have it the Turner Movie channel is running a Kurasawa film festival. Fantastic! First I watch ‘**The Seven Samurai**’, one of my all-time favourite films. Next comes ‘**Throne of Blood**’, Kurasawa’s take on MacBeth. Then ‘**Yojimbo**’ which I have never seen before. It’s a wonderful film, full of great characters and atmosphere as a freelance Samurai plays one faction in a small town against the other. This is followed by ‘**Red Beard**’, basically an ancient hospital melodrama of tear-jerker proportions, but I admire the sets and the characterizations.

There follows a couple of interminably long Samurai movies made later in his career. They are in colour, which I don’t find as ‘authentic’ as the documentary feel of the previous B&W films. Fact is, I’m Kurasawa’d out. I drift in and out of sleep as the films grind on. Eventually I just switch the TV off. At least it helped the day go by quickly.

The night shift nurse introduces himself. Name of Peter. He’s nearly my age, and in the course of our conversation I find out he’s long been interested in writing Science Fiction. We discuss how to write Science Fiction, the rules of writing promoted by authors like Robert Heinlein and Robert J. Sawyer, unusual methods of writing (Theodore Sturgeon always wrote in the nude at the kitchen table while listening to golden oldies

rock music, and always submitted his first draft without ever correcting anything, as his wife revealed at VCON 12 in 1984. Samuel Delany, a meticulous multi-drafter, nearly fell off his chair on hearing this.). From there our discussion dissolves into the nature of individualism, personal creativity and expression, how to avoid social pressure to conform, and all kinds good stuff like that there. Then I learn he's a musician as well, one who worships Jimi Hendrix. I tell him my story of helping to boo Jimi Hendrix off the stage when he was the opening act at the Monkee's concert in Toronto's Maple Leaf Gardens back in the mid sixties. He tells me that Hendrix and Miles Davis were planning an album together just before Hendrix died. What a record that would have been!

Peter glances at his watch. *"Damn! Been talking an hour. Got to make my rounds. Oh, by the way, I hear someone else needs this room more than you do. We'll be moving you soon to the cardiac ward."*

"Cardiac ward?"

"Don't worry. It has the only room available. That's the only reason you're going there."

Don't worry. Don't worry. The mantra of the hospital. It strikes me that if someone else needs this room more than I do, it must mean I'm no longer considered critical. Come to think of it, I'm not being monitored as closely any more. Maybe I really don't have to worry after all. On the other hand, Peter was wearing a mask. Hmmm.

Round about 11:30 pm assorted nurses bustle in to help me get ready for my move. Suddenly an alarm sounds. Everybody runs out the airlock toward a room barely visible to me down the hall. A loudspeaker broadcasts the ringing of a bell four times, followed by a calm female voice saying *"Code Blue. ICU. D43."* This message is repeated three times. A nurse goes rushing by my glass doors pushing a small cart with defibrillating equipment. I'm guessing a heart attack. I think back to how many code blue messages I've heard since entering the hospital. At least three or four a day. Hmmm.

I know I must be patient. I settle back in my bed and wait. Should I watch TV or not? No, they could be back any minute now. Perhaps, if I'm really lucky, I can nap a bit.

FRIDAY AUGUST 9TH 2012

3:00 AM. They're still working on the poor unfortunate down the hall. About this time I fall asleep.

4:00 AM. Peter wakes me up. He unhooks my various wires and IVs but leaves me connected to an oxygen bottle he places in the back of a wheelchair. Then I hop in clutching my cane and bag of clothes. I am then wheeled through eerily empty corridors to the 5th floor cardiac ward.

Nice! Still a room to myself, but with a full bathroom complete with bathtub! Even more important, there's a phone! I no longer have to worry about my cell phone batteries running out. I can contact Alyx any time. Content, I fall into a deep sleep.

I am awakened by the nurse opening the curtains covering the windows of my room. "Not much of a view," she says.

I disagree. I'm looking down into a large quadrangle amid the hospital complex, much of the space taken up by a low building whose roof is covered with shiny metal pipes, circular intakes and exhaust vents. Possibly something to do with the ventilation system. It looks very industrial. I like industrial. On my right is the back of the old hospital, a sea of red brick with white window frames. What look like giant, ten feet long inflated condoms of clear plastic are projecting from the top windows. I have no idea what they are or what they're for. They sway nicely in the breeze though. The rest of the quadrangle is formed by additions to the hospital of varying vintage. Above these buildings various skyscrapers are visible, as well as birds and aircraft. Lots to contemplate. I think it a very nice view. A useful view.

Breakfast! It's only toast and porridge with orange juice and milk, but it is as welcome as a medieval feast and improves my state of mind considerably.

A mini-horde of purposeful doctors strides in. "Great news," says one. "We found out what's wrong with you. Found protein markers in your lungs. You've got Hypersensitive Pneumonitis."

I assume the word is spelled 'Numinitus' and comment "What? I'm allergic to ancient Roman Gods?"

There's a slight pause. "Ahhh.....Nooo. You have an extreme allergy to birds. Potentially fatal. Been exposed to any birds lately?"

"Vincent, Cupid and Kitsung. A flightless crow and two doves. We've had them for years."

"Indoors?"

"Yes."

"It's also called 'Pigeon Breeders Lung.' Prolonged exposure can trigger an instant allergy. You'll have to get rid of them. We won't let you go home till they're gone. Meanwhile we'll start you on the appropriate anti-biotics and get you back to absorbing oxygen in no time."

After they leave I phone Alyx to give her the good news/bad news. "They say the birds must go and the apartment cleaned to remove every trace of bird dander."

"What about moving them to the aviary in the back yard?"

"We don't have an aviary."

"I'll build one. I'll design it then go to Home Depot for the materials."

"Will it be ready by Monday? I might be getting out then."

"I'll make it ready."

I start to worry as soon as I hang up. Already Alyx sounds frantic. A race against time. And she's still got pneumonia! Going to be hard on her.

The day nurse comes in to see how I'm doing. I tell her the good news. She ponders. "My husband breeds canaries in his den. I tell him they

stink but he denies it. Sudden fatal allergy to bird dust eh? Hmm..." She leaves.

Another nurse comes in and attaches a third IV to my arm. Don't know why. She leaves.

Another nurse comes in and steals more of my blood. She leaves.

Another nurse comes in to tell me "You didn't hear it from me but the word around the ward is you have a new form of Avian Flu." She leaves. I'd be upset, but I already know what is wrong, and it ain't Avian Flu. Does give you an idea how rumours can spread though, especially when it concerns a 'mystery patient' that (up till now) baffled the doctors.

Another nurse comes in. "Time for your blood thinner shot. Give it to you in the stomach."

My blood turns cold. "Like a Rabies shot?" I ask fearfully.

She laughs. "No, don't be silly. Just in the fold of the skin. Won't hurt at all."

"I know," I say, attempting to appear courageous. "It's just a little prick."

At the exact moment I say "It's just a little prick" the nurse shifts my gown and inadvertently exposes my own personal little prick. I am at a loss for words. Somehow she manages to keep a straight face, stabs me, then leaves.

Another nurse comes in. "The doctors have decided you're probably not contagious. They're waiting for the results of the third TB test. If it's negative like the first two, we'll take the contagion sign off the door." She leaves.

Another nurse comes in. "Time to remove all the wires. Your blood pressure and respiration are doing great! We'll just check your pulse once in a while. Keep you on oxygen for now, though." She leaves.

Another nurse comes in and hands me four pages of information about Hypersensitive Pneumonitis. She leaves.

At this point I think I can be forgiven for imagining a long lineup of nurses just outside my door each awaiting their turn.

Another nurse comes in – No, wait! It’s Dave Wilson, Rose’s husband, bearing the care package from Alyx Rose had picked up yesterday. I’m delighted to see him. He relaxes in a chair by the window and we exchange hospital care war stories. Then, naturally, we discuss the Persian/Greek wars, Thermopylae, Salamis, Darius, Xerxes, et al. How about that Leonidas eh? You just never know what fen will talk about. Anyway, many thanks to Rose and Dave for making sure I got my package.

After Dave leaves I open the ‘care package.’ Fresh clothes, dental floss & other toiletries, and ‘Conway’s All The World’s Fighting Ships 1860-1905’, the book I ordered online and have been waiting for a long time. Wowzers! Am I glad to see it. This goes with the 2nd volume (1906-1921) and the third volume (1922-1946) I already possess. Vital background for all those miniature pewter warships I’ve been collecting.

The rest of the day passes in a blur as I bury my nose in the book taking in the photos and diagrams of innumerable pre-dreadnought warships. There’s even a section on Confederate ironclads! Very cool. The day stretches into evening and eventually I fall asleep.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 12th 2012

I spend the early part of the day reading. Around 3:00 I am moved yet again, to a new room higher up on the 7th floor in the Medicine Ward. The view is roughly similar, but better in that I can see more buildings. Cheerful, somehow.

I’m feeling better generally, enjoying the freedom of moving my arms about without having to worry about attached wires and tubing. I phone Alyx, and feel a bit guilty about feeling better, as she’s feeling much worse. Worn to a frazzle, didn’t get any sleep, still suffering from pneumonia, and behind schedule. Now that I’m on the mend I’m optimistic about myself and worried about her.

For some reason, possibly the hospital food, I’ve started having digestive troubles. Mention this to the nurses. “*We’ll get you a Mexican hat.*”

Say what? One of them brings in said device, an admittedly hat-like contraption you fit over the toilet to collect stool. Ok, fine, no different from using the toilet itself. I use it, shuffle back to bed and ring the call bell.

A nurse I’d not seen before enters the room. A nurse with a rather lugubrious expression. She goes into the bathroom.

She pokes her head out. “*There’s no blood.*” She sounds offended. Withdraws.

She pokes her head out. “*It doesn’t smell bad.*” Withdraws.

She pokes her head out. “*It doesn’t look bad.*” Withdraws.

Finally she emerges, carrying the ‘Mexican Hat’ covered with a cloth. “*Probably just a bug,*” she says sadly, then leaves.

And I thought MY job was bad. A human poop expert. No wonder she was so mournful. Nothing to look forward to when a fresh day dawns. I’d be lugubrious too.

Speaking of hospital food, I figured out the secret of maintaining one’s appetite. Hospital food tends to be very bland, tasteless, and of a uniformly mushy texture. But it looks great! Everything looks exactly like it’s supposed to. It just doesn’t taste or feel what it looks like. So concentrate on the looks! This makes it so much easier to pretend it’s actually what you think it is. With hospital food, imagination is very important.

It turns out the ward nurse is from Poland, and she’s a science fiction fan! She doesn’t like modern SF though, as it has too much of a fantasy element for her taste. She much prefers hard SF. I tell her about our annual SF convention VCON, but she’s not interested. She just reads the stuff.

I read more about obscure historical warships, and then to sleep.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 13th 2012

Spend a near sleepless night for some reason. Well, I do know the reason. The room seems very cold. This has me worried, because people with slow heart beats can't circulate heat very well, and I'm worried something has gone wrong with my heart. I call the night nurse and she brings me extra blankets, pre-warmed blankets. Very soothing. I manage to fall asleep.

In the morning I'm back to normal. Besides, with the curtains open and the sunlight streaming in, I feel very cozy. Even better, I'm taken off oxygen! I'm breathing properly on my own for the first time in days. And as a final boost to my mood I'm informed the third TB test is negative and I'm officially no longer a contagious threat to the population of the Lower Mainland. Huzzah!

As if to proclaim my newfound 'mostly harmless' status, for the first time ever the door to my room is left open. I stand in the door and examine the hallway with interest. Feel like I've been let out of prison.

A nurse comes up. *"Like to go for a walk? You should get some exercise. See how many times you can circumnavigate the ward."*

I point down at my blue paper booties. *"Liable to slip in these."*

"I'll get you something better." She goes and gets me a fetching pair of brown socks covered with raised white happy faces. Very stylish, and sticky. No traction problems whatsoever.

I circle the ward ten times, stomping determinedly along with the aid of my cane. It's a greater effort than I expected, but I persevere. Later in the evening I circle the ward twenty times. Getting better.

In between I'm approached by a perky 20 year old volunteer asking how I like the food. Bit of a risky job that. I tell her my secret to eating everything and she seems rather struck by it. Perhaps she'll use it as advice to others. She takes time to chat a bit and I discover she's having a hard time finding a suitable mate. I wind up giving her advice on marriage and finances. At

last, my chance to be a boring old fart. Now I know I really am a retiree!

In the evening I borrow a pencil and start writing notes about my hospital stay in the white margins of the information sheets they gave me. Figure it can make a mildly amusing article for SPACE CADET.

I check on Alyx. She's feeling very much worse for the wear, especially as the aviary is only half finished. Poor Vincent is watching from his cage feeling deeply suspicious and stressed. It remains to be seen if the birds can adjust. I can't quite picture the aviary. Alyx says it's roughly Tardis sized. Hmm.

I tell the night nurse of progress. She tells me I'm not quite normal yet (if ever, I think to myself) and the doctors aren't ready to send me home yet. In fact they absolutely won't till I'm pronounced cured AND the birds have been moved outside.

It suddenly occurs to me that having a private room is one of those things not covered by Medicare. I think they charge \$100 a night. I express my concern.

"Oh, don't worry about that. You didn't ask for your own room. The doctors decided to quarantine you. Our decision, not yours, so no charge. You'll be moved to a ward as soon as a bed is available."

Relieved, and tired, again to bed.

MONDAY, AUGUST 14th 2012

In the morning I am greeted with the news that a pneumonia-like bug was found in my lung but in insignificant numbers so not a factor in my illness. Bird dander be the culprit. The young doctor who tells me this notices my 'Fighting Ships' book. His eyes light up. *"Are you in to old warships?"*

"I collect pewter miniatures of them."

"How big?"

"Half an inch to four inches, depending on type."

“How much?”

“Varies from \$9 for 5 destroyers to \$14 for a single battleship.”

His eyes are positively gleaming. *“That’s very little cost. Where do you get them?”*

“I order them online. GHQ makes them.”

“How many do they make?”

“Hundreds.”

He takes a deep breath. *“Do they make... Dreadnoughts?”*

“Absolutely. Some pre-dreadnoughts too.”

Here I would use the Monty Python phrase *“His nipples explode with delight.”* He was positively ecstatic by the time he left. I have the feeling he rushed to the nearest computer to check the GHQ website. There go his life savings.

Breakfast is served! More porridge! Yummy! But I’m not allowed to touch it. I’m directed into a wheel chair and taken to the pulmonary ward on a different floor. Here a young woman (all the nurses and doctors look like they’re fresh out of high school!) gets me to blow into an infernal machine designed to make me cough and wheeze and generally collapse. We do this several times until she gets bored, I figure. While we wait for my lungs to recover so she can torture me some more, I point at the huge photo of Vancouver harbor covering most of one wall.

“I saw that exact same poster in a travel agency in Guatemala City in 1981. ‘See exotic Vancouver’ said the sign underneath. Puts things in perspective. To them we’re exotic.”

“You’ve been to Guatemala?” She looked miserable. *“I’m not old enough to have done anything interesting.”*

“Oh, now, that’ll change with time. Not only will you do many nifty things but you’ll also meet others who have stories of their own. For instance...” I then nattered on about an old chap I used to work with who, as a child growing up in

Newfoundland, had become accustomed to watching the Hindenburg passing overhead numerous times in the summer travel season. Only later, as I was scarfing down my terrific cold porridge did I realize she hadn’t a clue what I was talking about. Hindenburg? What’s that? But it was nice of her to politely listen.

I forget sometimes (all the time) that young people haven’t had the time to pick up the same background knowledge I’ve acquired over a lifetime. Some people have never heard of the Beatles, for example. Way before their time. Why, I’ll bet you the average teenager has never heard of Eddie Cantor, or George Raft, let alone Gudea the Ensi of Lagash! So it goes.

In fact I believe we’re on the verge of a generation of teenagers who will dismiss anything and everything to do with the 20th century as old hat and irrelevant to their contemporary world. And they’d be right. (But I remain a 20th century kind of guy!)

Alyx still not ready, the aviary still incomplete. And there’s the apt cleaning to be done. Michael and Susan Walsh have offered their home as a temporary haven should I be booted out of hospital before the apartment is ready to receive me. We may take them up on their very generous offer.

I spend the day doing laps of the ward interspersed with reading bouts. Feeling very hopeful about getting out soon. To bed.

TUESDAY AUGUST 15th 2012

At one in the morning I am awakened with the news I am to be moved to a ward immediately, a bed having opened up and the room I’m currently in desperately needed by someone else.

I gather all my possessions and am placed in a wheel chair to be taken to yet another ward. There I sit at a desk in the empty hall, and sit, and sit. They need to change the bedding of my ‘new’ bed but they can’t for some reason or another. I sit bolt upright for hours, tired as all get out, and rather bored. But at least they bring me a nice cup of tea and ask me how I am every ten minutes or so. Time for Zen meditation (if only I knew how).

The sole distraction is a grizzled old skid row type wandering the hall in his hospital gown and loudly demanding to leave the hospital. He takes to pounding on the locked ward entrance doors with his fist. I feel grateful. The noise helps to keep me awake.

Finally they settle him down in his room, and I'm taken to my bed in the ward at about four in the morning. Only three other beds in the ward, with a single bathroom for all, but curtains for privacy and everybody gets their own phone. It will do.

The loud snoring emanating from the other guys is so cacophonous I fall asleep with great effort and through much exertion of sheer will. I suspect I will find the remainder of my stay here less than restful.

Imagine my surprise upon awakening to discover the other three 'inmates' are women! This startles me. The last time I stayed for any length of time in a ward at St. Paul's Hospital the wards were segregated by sex. I guess they don't do that anymore. Shows how much of an old fart I am. Not keeping pace with the times.

Oh well, just means I have to be more mindful of the privacy curtains, be sure to keep my hospital gown closed tight when I head for the washroom and, oh yeah, be especially careful when swinging my legs on and off the bed (since the gown tends to ride up).

It's not that nudity is totally taboo with me, I took part in the nude swim parties BCSFA held in rented community centre pools (I think we called them Drunken Elephant parties for some reason) and the occasional nude sand castle competition at Wreck Beach (again as a BCSFA activity) but I'm less pleasant to gaze upon than I used to be and, mainly, I don't want to get a reputation as one of those casual exhibitionists dangling in the breeze which plague hospitals from time to time and offend, not the staff, but other patients and their visiting family members. It's all about maintaining personal dignity and showing respect for others and their personal dignity.

So, not a problem sharing the ward with three women. Just came as a bit of a surprise is all.

Another young volunteer comes by. This one actually is a High School student. Apparently it's a requirement now, something one must do before one can graduate. I wonder when this became the practice? Probably decades ago. I mean, I graduated High School in 1970 and we never considered volunteer work back then. Heck, it was all they could do to get us to do homework. I imagine things have changed a bit since then.

Anyway, her job is to offer magazines. She takes requests.

"How about Discover, Scientific American, and National Geographic?" I ask. Delighted, she runs off, and twenty minutes later returns with the latest editions of each. Excellent! I start to read, picking Discover first.

A nurse comes by. *"You can go home now."*

"What? I can?"

"Yes. Just get into your clothes and leave. We need your bed. The doctors have released you."

"Supper is coming in a few minutes. Can I stay for that?"

The nurse sighed. *"Most people would leave quickly to avoid... never mind. Sure. But we'd like you to be out within a couple of hours."*

"No problem." She leaves. Supper arrives. I eat the faux roast beef and the sorta potato mash, drink my tea, relax for a few minutes, then get out of bed and slowly and methodically gather and pack my things, put on my street clothes, and make one last trip to the institutional bathroom to tidy up.

Jauntily I stride to the elevators (all the nurses being too busy for me to interrupt them to say goodbye) and head down to the main floor.

There's no bill. Provincial government Medicare covers all my expenses. Doesn't cost me a penny. A cat scan, multiple x-rays, multiple blood tests, a Bronchoscopy, multiple specialist consultations, and it doesn't cost me a penny. I love being Canadian!

DELERIUM TIME

There's a notice posted in the main hall listing expenses for foreigners making use of the hospital's services. Not all of the tests done on me are listed, but I guesstimate my weeks stay and everything involved would have cost me a minimum of \$28,000 had I not been covered. I repeat, happy to be Canadian.

Michael Walsh picks me up and drives me to his house in Kitsilano. He and Susan put up with me for the better part of two days and I must say it is very good of them. Lots of stimulating conversation re politics, film, and SF Great fun.

Then home. The birds are in the aviary. The apartment has been cleaned of bird dander. Alyx is totally exhausted. Now she can relax. I can relax. The birds can relax. All is well.

POSTSCRIPT:

Though winter rain and cold are upon us, the birds seem dry and content in their large wooden cabinet with solid doors swinging open to reveal mesh and Plexiglas walls. They have much more room than previously had in their cages. They even have lights and a coop heater which should enable them to survive the winter chill even if the temperature drops below freezing. I just have to remember to wear a high quality filter mask if I step into the back yard for any reason. Hepa filter air purifiers are running day and night in both my den and our bedroom. I monitor my breathing constantly. So far so good.

Alyx got over her pneumonia and sold a novel to Prism Press in the States. Titled SHROUD EATERS, it will be available in February.

I did follow-up x-rays and was informed, apart from some minor pulmonary fibrosis (scarring of lung tissue) my lungs are working just fine.

It's a pity I must give up my lifelong dream of becoming a bird juggler. Oh well.

I continual to collect miniature pewter warships, and have started collecting WWII pewter tanks, as well as Napoleonic and Civil War miniature figures, and Napoleonic warships too. I think GHQ is very happy with my monthly orders. A most relaxing hobby.

A recent dream:

This dream seems to take place in and around an apartment building I used to live in.

I'm in the lobby being interviewed by journalists. Seems I'm to be the first Canadian into outer space.

"If I like it up there I'll be doing a full sixty orbits."

I'm saying goodbye to my wife Jane. Despite the fact the room is crowded with journalists, my wife is naked. She resembles a combination of Marilyn Monroe and the early 'sex-kitten' phase of Jane Fonda (maybe that's WHY the room is crowded with journalists).

Now I'm in the Launch Control Room (which resembles my high school French Language Lab), waving goodbye to the assembled technicians and journalists.

"Thanks, guys," I say. *"All those billions of dollars and thousands of man hours just to send me where I want to go. Glad you think I'm worth it. See ya!"*

Everyone stares in disbelief at each other as I leave. Seems they expected something more humble.

The journalists start interviewing the guy who's supposed to put on my gloves. He starts prattling away quite happily. Someone asks if he shouldn't be doing his job.

"Oh my God, you're right." He panics. *"Where's the dressing room? Where is it?"*

In the hall outside my dressing room the journalists have hired a bunch of 'specialists' to boost my morale, namely cheerleaders, football players, and fat guys beating on drums, all bumping and grinding in a conga-line down a hallway while singing a song about a used car dealership in Malton. Observing this via monitors in my dressing room, my morale is, if anything, quite depressed.

Now I'm observing an elderly tenant whose apartment is being used as a ready room by the journalists. It's been trashed. Everything is smashed. She's also quite depressed.

"Don't worry," says a journalist, "Just wait two years after we're gone, then submit your bill. We won't throw it in the trash till we receive it."

Now I'm observing my wife, still naked, lying languidly atop the covers in our bed while she is interviewed by myriad journalists. I take this for granted. What disturbs me is the naked couple lying beside her. Friends of ours apparently, who've offered to 'console' her in my absence. She claims I agreed to this. I'm not sure. I don't remember.

A giant, naked man with a huge beer belly strides in to the bedroom. Seems he's a cousin of one of the friends, and wants to get in on the action. Announces loudly his name is Bubba Lampstead.

Suddenly I'm in the room arguing with him, telling him to go away. I accidentally push him around. I accidentally stab him in the chest. I stare at the penknife I didn't know I'd been holding. Lampstead exits, loudly protesting my lack of gratitude.

I'm back in the dressing room, congratulating myself I'd been there all along and couldn't possibly be accused of stabbing Bubba (despite the live TV coverage). I've got witnesses!

Now I'm being wheeled out of the dressing room on my way to the launch pad. Instead of wearing my space suit I'm swathed in bandages. I regard this as a bad omen. Flashbulbs popping everywhere. Damn journalists!

I'm sitting in the cockpit of my spacecraft, which for some reason is parked on the street. My wife is sitting next to me. I'm wearing ordinary clothes. Jane is still naked. Technicians are reaching through the twin hatches with cups of coffee.

I hear a tearful, blubbing woman journalist speaking to the TV audience, *"It's so sad... among the sentimental good luck charms strapped to the astronaut's forehead is his old army revolver, a condom, and his mother's gold and ivory university ring. She reported it missing four days ago...."*

With a start I suddenly realise my spacecraft is a Delorean! How the hell am I going to get into outer space in a Delorean? Nifty hatches though...

There's some kind of emergency in the control room. All the scientists and journalists don chemical hazard suits. False alarm. Now they discover their gloves are too thick and clumsy to allow them to doff their suits. Astronauts in training wander about laughing at their plight and refusing to help.

I'm in orbit! But too glum to look out the window. Can't for the life of me remember what happened to my wife. She was with me earlier. Where is she now?

The glove technician is running up a steep road flanked by dense forest. He stares frantically into the camera.

"I was watching the Howdy Doody show and lost track of time. I'm late! Where the hell is the dressing room?"

And then somehow the dream shifted into a quest involving Mafia headquarters in Sicily...

Despite the fact I stood on the lawn late one night with my family and watched the first satellite 'Sputnik' silently pass overhead back in 1957, and cut out newspaper clippings (since lost) on each and every spaceflight beginning with Gagarin's, despite the fact I was a 'Space Race' buff right from the start, the bulk of the dream seems to have been inspired by the films 'The Right Stuff' and 'Apollo 13' rather than my contemporary awareness of events.

And now that I think about it, my 'Jane' wasn't Jane Fonda (though as a young lad I had a crush on her, having discovered my Dad's secret stash of Playboy magazines in the attic, including the issue with her centrefold), but the heroine from the British WW II Mirror newspaper comic strip 'JANE'S JOURNAL – OR THE DIARY OF A BRIGHT YOUNG THING' in which she contrived to appear naked in at least three or four panels each and every strip (pun intended). She was very popular with British troops at the time. My subconscious remembers her from 'The Penguin Book of Comics' which I purchased in 1968 (and still have).

My goodbye speech rings true though. I've always regarded the exploration of the Solar System as a something conducted solely for my personal pleasure and sense of wonder. I think it very good of NASA and other agencies to spend so much money and exert so much effort simply to please me. Very nice of them. I really appreciate it.

Other dream fragments:

I'm throwing a party in a vast, football stadium-sized nightclub in the rather large gondola of an incredibly huge Zeppelin tethered to a skyscraper in Vancouver. Seems to be the 1930s. Carole Lombard is one of the actresses I'm flirting with....

Somehow I get talked into flying the actresses across the Atlantic (presumably across Canada first) to Paris in a contraption akin to Lindberg's Spirit of St. Louis. I remember feeling very hungry, very tired, and absolutely drenched from the salt spray splashing through the cockpit windows (seems we're flying rather low just above the waves).

I take everybody on a tour of Paris in a flying toboggan drifting lazily along about two hundred feet above street level. Gazing down at the pedestrians below, I decide I'm glad I gave up my habit of jumping from four story windows to reach the street faster. My mother had been very worried I might hurt myself. Then I begin to wonder what's holding up the toboggan....

When I first woke up from this dream I remembered quite a bit more, including fair chunks of dialogue. However I neglected to immediately write it all down. Consequently, the above is all I can remember. It's very important upon awakening to immediately to write my dream down before it fades. Alas, sometimes I just dream I'm writing it all down, and wake up with nothing.

As I reconstruct the sources, a photo of Lombard I saw recently and subconscious recollections of the 1930 film 'MADAM SATAN' (which featured a dirigible nightclub) and the Jimmy Stewart movie about Lindberg are probably the primary culprits.

In general, flying dreams are always my favourites.

A POCKET FULL OF HISTORIES: COIN NOTES

By Taral Wayne

(Editor's note: though I've decided to make SPACE CADET much more of a perzine, I continue to include Taral's articles on ancient coins cause I likes ancient coins.)

The coins illustrated in these short written pieces are all from my collection. I've scanned each one, and drawn on my own knowledge to describe the coin, the Kings, the Queens, the Emperors, and the times. Certain statements are my opinions only, even guesswork, but that's alright. After more than 2,000 years in some cases, there's nobody around to sue!



Everyone knows Caligula as one of the maddest and most cruel emperors. In fact, he may not have started as such. In his youth he had seen much of his family murdered, or die of natural causes (it's hard to tell since the evidence is scanty). While he had not been brought up expecting to rule himself, he had nevertheless been brought up as a spoiled prince in a privileged imperial family. It would not be any surprise, therefore, if Caligula had possessed both a weak character and unhealthily large ego. But Caligula did not obviously turn bad until suffering a mysterious illness about 18 months into his rule. Contemporary writers say he began to act capriciously from that point, and it may well have been that fever had damaged his mind.

Caligula was not his real name. It was a nickname meaning "Little Boots" or "Booties", given to him as a child when his mother paraded him around the army camps. It has been reported that he both liked and hated the name, so who knows. After a couple of years, everyone had had enough of the young emperor though. He was ambushed in a passageway between his palace and

the circus, and stabbed to death. His wife and infant daughter were murdered at the same time. Belatedly his German body guards arrived and started killing everyone in sight. By the time everyone heard the news, soldiers began searching the imperial residence and discovered old uncle Claudius cowering behind some curtains. Pulled out of his hiding place, Claudius was certain he was about to be killed, but to his surprise, the soldiers hailed him emperor! That's the traditional story, but it's equally likely he was actually in on the plot. Caligula was dead, but the Julio-Claudian line had another couple of emperors to go.

Since Caligula ruled for only two or three years, he didn't have time to issue much coinage in his own image. It is rather hard to come by in my experience, whether bronze or silver. After a couple of years of hoping for the best at the local coin shows, I decided to proactively search the internet. I located this so-so example of a bronze As (pronounced "oz") for about \$200. (My usual dealer confirmed it was worth about that.) Around the outside of the face is the name Caius (or Gaius) Caesar Augustus Germanicus, and two of his more important offices Pontifex Maximus (chief priest), and Tribuniciae Potestates (power of the tribune).

LETTERS OF COMMENT:

OOK, OOK, SLOBBER DROOL!

From: ERIC MAYER, May, 2012
Faned of REVENANT.

Graeme,

Thanks for another enjoyable issue of Space Cadet. Somehow I'm not surprised you got FAAn award votes. Space Cadet is a terrific zine. The FAAns are a good idea. We do our fanac for fun but it is more fun to know that some readers appreciate our efforts.

Hope your pains go away. I think doctors tend to underestimate the long-term effects of surgery. Yeah, surgery can be necessary, but it is a shock to the body.

Unexpected and very peculiar pains afflicted

me for months, but I'm glad to say, nearly a year later, they seem to be a thing of the past.

Love Brad's Planet Collector. I guess the ringed ones are the most desirable although I fear our poor earth is prettily colored which might spell out doom.

Brad's art is always great. The coloured art he does for some zines is particularly vibrant and striking.

Your account of FanExpo leaves me almost speechless. If there's one thing I hate as much as crowds it is waiting in interminable lines. Whoa. This was an experience I would pay to avoid. And no, not even the presence of Adam West would convince me otherwise.

I am turning into a hermit. Nothing, if it involves a crush of people, can convince me to leave the apartment. Not when there's miniatures to be painted, books to read, zines to write, etc.

Okay...own up...did you really dream this stuff? It's too good for a dream. "*Jesus and el Duce salute you.*" Would chickens be smarter if they had human legs? Priceless. My dreams are incoherent muddles with no continuity and far too many people who have been dead for years. Your dreams even have details like glittering dust shaken off thundering dinosaur feet. If I had dreams like these I'd be tempted to sleep all the time. Well, yes, I am tempted to sleep all the time anyway. Is it drugs you're taking something for the pain of that operation?

Yes, I do dream as if I were watching a movie, or living in an alternate reality. I have a dream eye for detail and vivid depiction of my dream environment, in living colour no less. I'd go so far as to say that my dreams seem more 'real' than reality does at times. Power of imagination. Even as a kid I wished I could somehow record my dreams on film. And no, I don't need drugs to come up with this stuff, all I need is a state of unconsciousness so that my unconscious mind can be unleashed. And yes, I do enjoy sleep. I enjoy falling asleep, and I enjoy the dream time. Hmm, isn't that what Australian aborigines call the real world? Dream Time?

The dream with Mary Tyler Moore and Three Stooges is inspired. Heck, if you had dreamed that back in the sixties you could have sold it to New Worlds. Or maybe not. It might have been too interesting. You should try developing it into a novel. Figure out what it all means.

I wrote several novels way back when (all unpublishable). I know even less about writing than I used to. But I confess I am beginning to toy with the idea of writing again. My conscious mind is too formulaic, too timid. If I could harness my dream visions, indulge in stream-of-unconscious writing, I might come up with something. One way or another my unconscious mind is the key to what creativity I possess.

It's always interesting to take a peek at Taral's coin collection. Mary and I once bought a coin from the reign of Justinian as a publicity giveaway for our books. It was amazing to hold that heavy lump of metal and realize that others, long dead, had held that same coin, had purchased who knows what with it, 1,500 years ago. Someone could have donated it to a church, or paid a prostitute with it, or just bought some new oil lamps.

I have a few Roman coins, rather poor specimens depicting Hadrian, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, Claudius II Gothicus, Diocletian, and Constantine, but at least the facial features are intact enough to convey their individual personalities. Diocletian a tough looking mug I must say. I also have, purchased from Gaukler Medieval who've attended the VCON Vendors Hall the past couple of years, a complete, albeit corroded Roman bronze ring I can actually wear, and an intact Roman writing stylus carved from bone which I display in a small plastic pouch hanging above my desk for inspiration. Next to it a small copy of a famous Roman portrait of a woman holding a wax tablet in one hand and tapping her pursed lips with a stylus in her other hand. She's very young and very pretty. This could be that very stylus! I like to think so, anyway. A genuine time binding experience to own an artifact from our distant past. Inspiring.

I also greatly enjoyed Andy Hooper's article about Blade Runner. I really have thoughts on the movie but the whole piece was so well done and so wonderfully evocative that it was a pleasure to read.

Now I had better get this away before the next issue is out.

Best, Eric

**From: LLOYD PENNEY, May 15th, 2012
Aurora & Faned Awards-winning Loc Hack
1706-24 Eva Road, Etobicoke, ON M9C 2B2**

Dear Graeme:

After an extended writing vacation, it is time to get back on the horse, and get moving again. Here are some comments on Space Cadet 19.

I admit I am hoping for the Aurora I am nominated for this year. I've been nominated a lot, so I am hoping I can finally break through. I have won a couple of Auroras in the past, but I haven't won one in 15 years. With the FAAn Awards, I came a distant second for Best Lochack, and I am pleased with that.

I too was hoping to win the Aurora I was nominated for. It would have been an honour to win for SPACE CADET. Alas, t'was not to be. But I won in 2001 (for VCON 25) and in 2010 (for WCSFAzine), so I can't complain.

Toronto was once the only city to have a huge comics/popcult convention, but now... Montréal, Calgary, Vancouver, Winnipeg and now Ottawa. I do not enjoy these megacons either, and I don't usually go. I went to one of them here a couple of years ago to take part in a fashion show, and the crowd crush was worse than rush hour and trying to get into the subway. You're right, the emphasis is on buying stuff and getting autographs, and that's never been it for me. These cons just happen (yeah, right) to be on the same weekend as a fan-run con, and they pull attendance away, and the fan-run cons are hurt every time.

I think it's fair to say the FanExpo cons aren't really cons at all but rather what the name says, an exposition for fans. Nothing traditionally faanish but rather an event aimed at the general public. (Though I suppose it's a good thing Sci-Fi is mainstream now.) Overall, though, it's too huge and hectic an event for me. I feel like a victim when attending.

Turns out Con*cept may not be dead after all, so it looks like there might be two SF cons in Montréal next year. I think more news will soon be coming. General interest SF cons...don't forget Ad Astra and SFContario in Toronto. I am not sure about Halcon, I think it's a gaming/anime con.

I confess I've lost track of cons country-wide. I used to pay attention to such things. Hmm... it occurs to me that in those provinces where large general-interest cons have died out, it might be time to resurrect faanish relaxicons... a concept whose time has come? Nah, probably not. But if VCON ever dies a smallish relaxicon strikes me as a good alternative to pursue.

The local...yes, indeed, I am the bad Penney that keeps turning up. I used to go through the Roncesvalles Village on my way to and from work, so I got to know it fairly well. Not to worry about taking my name in vain...the Boston in 1989 Worldcon bid had a great bidzine called The Mad 3 Party (for Noreascon 3), and it was to well-received, it was to victim of not one, but two parody issues, and I was zapped in each issue. It's a badge of honour I have enjoyed.

Ah, THE MAD 3 PARTY... it ran from 1983/84 to 1990 and possibly longer. The WCSFA archive contains at least 19 issues, possibly including the spoof issues you mention, but I'm not sure. I gather it was originally a Noreascon 3 bid zine but turned into a kind of Smofcon zine? Leslie Turek the Editor? Because of several moves the US zines in the archive are all jumbled up, in fact all the zines with the exception of the Canadian zines, the latter being the only ones organized and readily accessible. I really must sort out the zines properly one of these days.

My loc...I had my echocardiogram, and I have heard nothing from either the lab where I went or my doctor, so I must assume that my heart is fine. The work at the advertising agency ended prematurely, so I am hunting once again. I've had some good leads.

Great lack of news re your heart. And recently I understand you landed full time employment. Congratulations on that. You've certainly been searching long enough.

I think I should fold this up and fire it off to you. Take care, see you next zine.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

**From: DAVE HAREN, May, 2012
Renowned Loc Hack.**

Hi Graeme,

I happened to catch a zine related video at thoughtmaybe.com. It's a busy propaganda muckraker site with lots of exposes of the seamier side of the world. The Net - Unabomber, LSD, And the Internet contains a nice vignette with Chris Garcia showing off the SAGE system. Unfortunately he wasn't even listed in the credits but fans should know who he is by now.

Indeed, all trufen know who Chris Garcia is. The site you describe is the sort I used to be interested in. Now I would find it too exhausting. As time goes bye I retreat more and more from current events.. The seamier side of the world is too depressing, and I now take for granted it will always be with us, so I chose to ignore it. No longer the news junkie I used to be.

I also located a dreadful time waster which someday may be the premier free turn based strategy SF game. It's called FreeOrion and is available at sourceforge. I've run off a couple of 1000 turn games in single user mode. Not for the faint of heart or slow machines. Unfortunately there isn't a reasonable set of documentation for the most intricate parts. Research and planetary structures interact in a lot of variable ways.

For the time being you'd have to get the source code just to be able to list out the options. I haven't done it yet but may out of desperation.

You can play this on-line also but from all I've seen you'd need a real monster of a high speed comp before you get into that.

It sounds fascinating but I restrict myself to BATTLEFIELD HEROES, a nice, simplistic shootem-up game I've mentioned before. I play it two hours a day on average, almost always as my sniper character 'Rudwulf' armed with a Panzer

Rifle. I'm either roaring about in a tank or quietly skulking in remote hilltop locations sniping at my prey from a distance. Sometimes I'm the top scorer in a game, usually second or third. It's mindless, cartoony, and loads of fun. It can be a very frantic game, but not the way I play it. Slow and methodical predator I am. Except in a knife fight. That can be intense. I generally avoid those.

Gaia dropped us a baby Raven, which will be around until it gets big enough to fly. In answer to the question "what does it drink?" I said wine, but don't be stingy.

A number of crows have passed through our household. Not Vincent though, his wing is deformed, he lacks the proper muscles to fly. He'll be with us another twenty years or so. But I digress. You have a Raven? How big?

Thanks for Space Cadet #19.

Warm Regards Dave Haren

**From: KEITH BRAITHWAITE, May, 2012
Faned of IMPULSE.**

Hi From Way Over Here:

I have not seen a copy of Space Cadet for a while. I used to get it as a SWAP back when I was editor of Warp some years ago. I wasn't sure if you were still publishing it; glad to see that you are. Enjoyed the Blade Runner stuff--I now have the urge to dig out my copy and view it again as I have not watched it for probably 10 or 15 years.

I did stop publishing SPACE CADET for quite a while. Now I'm back. As for BLADE RUNNER, it remains one of my favourite SF films. Watch it every two years or so.

Just a point of information: Con*Cept is, indeed, dead for this year, and quite possibly for good (some folk are looking at holding something smaller-scale this year then trying to bring it back in coming years), but please note that the con is a wholly independent operation, no longer affiliated with MonSFFA.

MonSFFA founded the convention in 1989, ran it until 1992, after which Con*Cept became its own entity. Following its cancellation in 2000 (for much the same reasons as is currently the case), MonSFFA agreed to take charge and succeeded in rebuilding the event over three years, from 2001-2003. Outside of the years I've stated here, MonSFFA was not or is not involved in the organizing and running of Con*Cept.

Thanks for stating the facts for the record.

People, perhaps, assume we are because many of our members have been over the years or are now involved at various levels, including long-time and as of last year, retired chair, Cathy Palmer-Lister. But they are involved not through the club, but as individuals. MonSFFA as a club supports the con and has helped out on con weekend with various things or sometimes provided a few hours worth of programming, but the con is no longer one of our club projects and hasn't been for some time.

VCON used to be officially supported by BCSFA, then by WCSFCCA, and finally by WCSFA. Many individuals contribute as well, outside of any organization, though technically anyone contributing to VCON is automatically a member of WCSFA. Another technicality, the VCON trademark is still owned by BCSFA.

Locally, fans have been debating whether fan-run cons like Con*Cept, and even fandom as we know it, are obsolete, victims of the big mega-cons like the FanExpo that you reviewed, which offer TV and movie star guests that few if any fan-run cons can match. And with sci-fi having become mainstream, are the multitude of people attending these big cons dedicated, hard-core fans or mostly casual fans interested in the media stars and little else? Are these casual fans the new face of fandom?

Some argue that they are and that the traditional models of SF cons and clubs are yesterday's news. The modern fan is mostly online, focused on one or a few particular areas (comics, a specific TV show, etc.) and once in a while dresses up in costume to go out and meet the actors who portray their favourite characters on screen. There appears to be little interest in exploring the genre further. Others argue that there is still a place for what they term "traditional fans" and their wider ranging interests.

I would venture that both of these views probably exhibit some truth.

Hmm, I'd say that the bulk of fans are general public fans, fans of the stuff, but not faans as we perceive trufen to be. I'm actually getting a bit tired of the eternal withering on the subject of faans vs fans. I think it's time for a paradigm shift. Mainstream is mainstream. Time to leave them alone. Time to stop comparing apples and oranges. Time to think of traditional trufen fandom as an entirely separate hobby/phenomenon/entity from general fandom. I think I will make this my new hobby horse for a while... say the next few years. I will think on this further.

As for cons and clubs like Con*Cept and MonSFFA, or V-Con and BCSFA, sooner or later, the people running these organizations (often a relatively small percentage of overall membership) get tired of doing so or simply no longer have the time to do so and step back or move on, leaving a void that, unless filled by fresh blood, spells the eventually entropic end of said organization. All good things...

VCON had a goodly number of volunteers this year, the most we've had in quite some time, but experienced difficulty filling all of our ConCom positions. A bit ominous that. Some of us old timers don't know how much longer we can continue. We need an entirely fresh ConCom within two or three years if VCON is to continue. Still, miracles happen.

Here in Montreal, Con*Cept certainly appears to have reached that point (hope I'm wrong and something fresh rises from this year's ashes). MonSFFA, meanwhile, soldiers on and continues to provide members a diverse menu of what we call "MonSFFActivities", but is not without its struggles against apathy.

Keep Well,

Keith Braithwaite

(VP, MonSFFA; editor, Impulse, MonSFFA's news bulletin)

TO SUM UP

Apologies to those who earlier read a short excerpt of this hospital tale of woe in e-APA or FAPA. It has taken me quite some time to find the energy to write up my notes. Still, tis done. I tried to make it amusing, or at least interesting. Certainly there were comic moments.

On the other hand, till they figured out what was wrong with me, I came close to dying. Struggling for breath for hours on end is a most unpleasant experience, not one I am anxious to repeat.

Though I was in a 'constant state of positive denial', I nevertheless whiled away a few hours contemplating death. I resigned myself to the idea 'if it happens it happens.' I won't say that I'd accepted the inevitable, that I had given up, but simply that I was prepared to die if need be.

The 16th century French philosopher Michel de Montaigne used to laugh when friends asked him in their collective old age if he had any advice on how to prepare for death. His answer was something like this (as per my dim memory):

"You fools! There is nothing more natural than death. You don't have to do a thing. Nature will take care of it for you."

COLOPHON

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