

otherstuff

Fandom is a Way of Life, Not Life Itself

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**HUGO NOMINEE STEVE STILES
SAVES PUPPY FROM
HORRIBLE FROZEN DEATH!!**



My Favorite Four-Color Flops

the den

What's Going on Here?

The cover logo reads “otherstuff,” but let me assure you that this is **fanstuff #36**. In fact, it's the fanzine's First Annish.

In the past, I've marked such occasions in a variety of ways, from 100-pagers to not publishing anything.

This one, I guess, falls somewhere in the middle. It's not especially large, but it is definitely not “business as usual.”

I published 35 issues in **fanstuff's** first year. I'll have exact figures when I do an index, but it's probably in the neighborhood of 600 pages.

And every last one of those pages was devoted to material about fans and Fandom. I wrote more than 50 feature articles and many short pieces during the year — and every one of them was about fans and Fandom.

Fanstuff's editorial mission is to celebrate the varieties of fannish experience and provide a forum for discussion of fannish topics. With the help of all you fine fans, the fanzine has done pretty well on both counts.

That's **fanstuff**, not me. My interests are far more wide-ranging—and definitely extend beyond the borders of Fandom.

When I realized that the First Annish was coming soon, I decided to mark the occasion by taking a short breather from **fanstuff's** editorial format. That's why this issue is composed of material about subjects other than Fandom.

Rest Assured, **fanstuff #37** will return to its regular editorial policy, including “locker room” with your comments on #35 and this issue.

I didn't learn how to read from comic books, though they helped, but comics certainly strengthened my motivation to acquire that skill. Very few adults want to read *Superboy* aloud. My choice was to read the comic books myself or continue to puzzle over the pictures.

The mid-1950's, when I discovered comics, represented a low point in the popularity of comics in general and super heroes in particular. The hypocritical Comics Code Authority had sanitized most of the interesting titles, including the EC group, out of existence.

My lack of enthusiasm for funny comics further limited my choices. Eventually, I became an Archie Comics reader and also



sometimes bought DC's science fiction titles like *Mystery in Space* and even an occasional western book, but I never warmed to *Little Lulu*, *Casper the Friendly Ghost* or other (allegedly) humorous series.

Super heroes looked like a dying breed when I got into comic books. DC had Superman (and Superboy), Batman and Wonder Woman, but the "big three" had fallen on hard times. Superman spent a lot of his time battling various colors of kryptonite, Batman fought space aliens, and the largely de-kinked Wonder Woman offered a growing boy less stimulation than *Betty & Veronica*.

The *Showcase* revivals of Flash, Green Lantern and Hawkman ushered in the costumed hero boom. Soon, Marcel, Charlton and even Archie started publishing super hero comics. Before long, almost every existing comic book publisher had superhero titles. New ones rose up to meet the demand and, eventually, ground level comics companies had super heroes, too.

It was paradise for superhero fans, who no longer had to search the back pages of anthology comics like *Action*, *Adventure* and *Detective* for terse six- and eight-page tales of Robotman and Martian Manhunter or settle for a Roy Raymond or, worse, Congo Bill.

Adding all the Silver Age super doers to the Golden Age crop turned scarcity into abundance. The proliferation led, by an inexorable chain of cause-and-effect, to a less-than-ideal consequence:

1. The more publishers, the more super heroes.
2. The more super heroes, the more creativity is required to invent a good one.
3. The more creativity needed, the more likely that some attempts will fall short.
4. The Golden and Silver Age super hero booms yield some great, memorable characters – and about 10 times as many wretched ones.

I loved origin stories. Seeing so many of them inspired me to design my own costumed characters. My lack of artistic ability posed a problem, but then, I never expected to be able to draw a comic book. (Had I been more familiar with some of the golden age artists, I might have foolishly pegged my goal a lot higher.) I found a suitably muscled generic superhero posed to display his costume. I first traced and then, through dogged repetition, learned to draw the simple figure. I then colored a costume and wrote a short text piece explaining the origin and powers.

I can't say the results were scintillating. There wasn't a Superman,



When Super Heroes Go In the Wrong Direction

Sometimes, bad things happen to good super hero characters. A series may coast along for years, good or at least adequate, and then take a bad creative decision that sends the whole thing down the dumper.

Even Superman's powers couldn't protect the Man of Steel from such mistakes. In fact, DC has taken a



wrong turn more than once.

The circulation war between Superman and Captain Marvel fueled a super power race. Siegel and Shuster's original character was mighty, but not omnipotent. By the early 1950's, nothing could threaten the Caped Crusader, which made the stories very, very dull.

The series' writers invented two weaknesses: magic and kryptonite. Adding vulnerability was a good idea, but the stories quickly became repetitive. Then they invented other colors of kryptonite. Like any over-used gimmicks, both rapidly exhausted readers' interest.

The introduction of Krypto the super-dog won't win any awards for brilliance. The dog didn't add much to the plot.

Unfortunately, DC kept adding to the menagerie. I don't think they got around to a super-ferret, but the super horse was bad enough.

The 1950's revival of Captain America deservedly flopped on the newsstand, but saddled Marvel with a huge problem after the Avengers chipped the shield-slinger out of the iceberg two decades later.

Despite its commitment to series continuity, Marvel pretended the 1950's Cap didn't exist. When they finally tackled Captain America's history, they revealed that the fanatical and brutal red-baiter was a lunatic, not Steve Rogers.

Captain Marvel or Spider-man in the lot. I knew it, so I never considered sending any of my efforts to any of the super hero-hungry publishers.

Sadly, many super hero inventors with even less skill at it than me didn't let that deter them from pushing their pallid protagonists into print.

Most of the bad Golden and Silver Age heroes were dull and derivative, but some of them had the same wayward spark as the movies of Ed Wood. It is those outrageous failures that have found a very special, and very small, place in my heart. Admittedly, even the worst costumed champions often had some interesting aspects, but the overall results were just plain awful.



Let me share some of these lurid low-lights:

The Atom. This probably deserves to lead the parade. It's not the worst of my favorite four-color failures, but the Atom has the distinction of being a dud in the Golden Age and then, after a complete make-over, proved every bit as hopeless in the Silver Age.

The original Atom had no super powers, he was just very strong. The resurrected Atom was much more ambitious, so was able to fail on a much grander scale. The new Atom, named after promoter, charlatan and editor Ray Palmer, could shrink

down to any desired size. Atom retained his full mass, so he hit with the force of a full-size man, though he jumped around like he was weightless. He also could enter the mouthpiece of a telephone and exit any other phone!

The Flash was pretty silly, with his entire costume somehow jammed into a signet ring, but Atom did him one better. Ray Palmer wore his super hero suit on the *outside* of his clothes. The fibers of his costume were so far apart that no one could see them. When the suit shrank along with its wearer, the outfit appeared.



Green Arrow. DC Comics showed that no one could imitate their characters better than they could when they introduced Green Arrow. Before the Denny O'Neil-Neal

Adams overhaul, Green Arrow was a closer copy of Batman than any other company would have dared to publish.

- Batman had a sidekick, Robin. Green Arrow had the insipid Speedy.
- Batman had the sleek and powerful Batmobile; Green Arrow had the dinky Arrow Car. Its only point of distinction was that it propelled the archer and his protégé into the action like human jacks-in-the-box.
- Batman had the batarangs; Green Arrow had his trick arrows.
- Bruce Wayne was a wealthy playboy; Oliver Queen was a less suave playboy.

Small wonder that Green Arrow never got his own comic in the 1950's.

The **Black Hood**. The biggest mystery about the so-called "Man of Mystery" is why MLJ, Red Circle (Archie Comics) and Drunk Elephant



A Few Four-Color Favorites

This article ventures into the lurid low-rent district of super herpo comic books, but I've also got a long list of favorites.

So, in no particular order, some of the ones I like the best in this genre:

Watchmen. Alan Moore's graphic novel featuring transmogrified Charlton characters is still my favorite single four-color work.

Spider-man. The first decade of the *Amazing Spider-man* epitomized the Marvel style. The subsequent proliferation of storylines has hurt the strip, but the first 100 issues were grand.

Captain America I'll admit it; I'm a mark for Simon and Kirby Patriotic heroes. Captain America is the best of them, though Fighting American, The Shield and *Double Life of Private Strong* all stand high in my comic book pantheon.

X-Men. I especially liked Todd MacFarlane's tenure, but X-Men has had a lot of great moments since Professor Xavier opened his school for mutants.

Batman. The Cowled Crimebuster has had his ups and downs, but the Denny-O'Neil-Neal Adams collaboration and early Frank Miller stand out on memory.

The Flash. The charming simplicity of the revived Flash, mostly written by Garden Fox and drawn by Carmine Infantino, evoke Golden Age minimalism that I find it hard to resist.

The Fly. The first few issues, by Simon and Kirby, are the best in a series that declined through its Archie Comics run — and then fell further when DC bought and revived the title.

Captain Marvel. Fawcett sold its comic book like to DC, which killed all the titles, long before I started reading comic books (or anything else). My boyhood pal Lenny Bailes acquired some old issues and let me read them. CC Beck's light-hearted, fantasy-tinged approach was a refreshing change. (AK)

My Life

In the Comic Book World

I've never worked in the comic book industry in any capacity. The closest I came was Stan Lee's offer of a job as a Marvel Comics editor. The magazine I edited dispatched me and a salesman to visit Lee and see if Marvel was a potential advertiser.

At the end of the long meeting, Stan pulled me aside and offered me the position. After giving it some thought, I thanked him for the opportunity, but declined with thanks.

I *have* made a few appearances in comic books, though, thanks to a few friends who've done comics for a living.

Jay Kinney was responsible for my comic book debut. One of the main contributors to the underground classic *Young Lust #1*, Jay put me in a parody of the White Cloverline Salve ad on the inside front cover. I'm one of the testimonials about how easy it is to sell salve door to door and get a bicycle.



Artist Joe Staton inserted me into the E-Man super hero comic book in an extremely subtle and clever way. In the office of E-Man, in his secret identity, a framed picture on the wall held a drawing of the cat character Joe invented for me in the 1960's for use in my fanzines. It was a surprise, a

very pleasant one, the first time I saw it.

It took a comic book writer, my late friend Bill Kunkel, to make me an actual character in a strip. In the mid-1970's, DC hired Bill and artist Grey Morrow to revive its motorcycle cowboy hero The Vigilante. Bill made me the hero's manager in his secret identity as a touring rodeo performer.

kept publishing his exploits.

Empirically, those publishers were right and I'm wrong. The Black Hood has *something* that accounts for his longevity and durability. I can't see it, but on the other hand, I also bought a lot of *Black Hood* comic books.

Maybe it was a sense of... expectation. Surely, something remarkable was just about to happen in this consistently dull strip – and what comic book fan would want to miss the eruption?

Take away Batman's Batcave, Batmobile, utility belt, batarangs and the grim appearance that scares superstitious criminals and you've got the Black Hood. The closest he came to a distinctive feature was the full-head black mask that contributed his name.

What a survivor! The Black Hood had no super powers and fought crime pretty much the same way he did in his secret identity as a police officer.

The Wizard. Another creation of MLJ, the House of Unnecessary Costumed Heroes, The Wizard was strictly back-of-the-book material. The nearest to stardom he came was *Shield-Wizard Comics*, a marketing tactic that forced readers to accept the insipid Wizard in order to get the stories starring MLJ's lead character, the Shield.

The Wizard didn't look like a Wizard, he didn't talk like a Wizard and he didn't do wizardly things.

And if he was as smart as his writers claimed, how come The Wizard couldn't come up with a better name for his dorky sidekick than "Roy the Super Boy? (Roy wasn't very super.)

Hellcat. "Because we can" is seldom a good reason for doing something. Case in point: Marvel Comics turned Patsy Walker, its 1940's teen fashion queen, into a non-super, costumed hero. She evolved into "Patsy Walker, Miss America," but that was a lot more reasonable than her revival as Hellcat.

The perky-flighty-flirty redhead had little credibility as a model who suddenly manifested martial arts skill worthy of Rhonda Rousey.

Ragman and The Creeper. These DC characters had little to recommend them beyond their outré appearance. The former's main ability seemed to be that he could look like a pile of rags, while the latter's could well frighten even non-superstitious non-criminals. There's some very good comics art in both books, but I disliked the stories.

The Creeper was supposed to be a vehicle for Steve Ditko, but it never jelled. Apart from looking like a refugee from a jack-in-the-box, he didn't have any abilities or devices with which to fight crime.

Now It's Your Turn!

I hope the many comic book lovers will tell us about some of their horrible examples and favorites, too. Naturally, I'll print all comments in **fanstuff #37's** "locer room letter column.

Katzenjammer My Secret Life As a Super Hero

I have never been a professional comic book editor, writer or artist, but I did have a career as a super hero. It lasted only a brief time, but it was a heady experience for me.

It happened in the late 1980's. Quantumlink, the predecessor of AOL, used both Joyce and me as consultants. Joyce did some writing for them and also served as an online host.

In that guise, Joyce met a suburban housewife named Pat who had started to break out of her home-and-family lifestyle. Since, as she told Joyce, the Bible didn't specifically prohibit it, this thirty-something married mother of two had started to explore lesbianism.

Somehow, she encountered a small group of woman who invited her to a motel for an all-girl party. They didn't treat Pat very nicely. Not only didn't they let her join in their games, but they revealed that they were all witches — and that they had placed a curse on Pat's head.

A naïve and gullible person, Pat went into Total Panic Mode with fits of hysteria for extra excitement.

She told Joyce of her troubles, but nothing Joyce could say or do seemed to have any effect. They talked on the phone for hours, but Pat was a prisoner of her fear.

Joyce asked for help. I knew half-measures wouldn't work on Pat, so I decided to take a walk on the wild side.

I assured her that I had perceived her situation and judged her a blameless victim of spiteful witches. I explained to the petrified Pat that my own mystic powers were orders of magnitude greater than the women who menaced her.

"I am the Sorcerer Supreme of the Western Hemisphere," I thundered. "I have used my powers to shield you from all harm from dark magic," I continued. "I have lifted their puny curse, dispelled its magic."

"Thank you," she said.

"Go forth free from worry," I said. "These witches will not be able to harm you with their curses."

She went off happy for the first time in days.

Thus ended my superhero career.

*A Mid-Mannered
Journalist
Transforms
Into a Mighty
Super Hero!*

**By
Arnie
Katz**

Miller Time Beginner's Guide to Torrents



*Here's how to
Get Started
Downloading
Music & Movies*

**By
Don
Miller**

Looking for a rare movie, or some music to download, free of charge? Torrent downloads may seem complicated at first, but once you learn the ropes, it's really quite simple. First you will need the basic software to download your torrent files. I recommend one called UTORRENT. I could spend days discussing different apps, but it's a waste of time. Trust me, just go to utorrent.com. It's a very user friendly program with no bugs, no ads and no spyware. It's a small program that will download very quickly, just follow the instructions in the install wizard.

For the uninitiated, a torrent download is a basic peer-to-peer download, but it is non-linear, with bits and pieces coming from many different people, called 'seeders'. A seed is someone online with a complete file, available for uploading. People downloading are referred to as 'leechers'. The more seeds there are, the more quickly your file will download. All torrent websites will display the number of seeders and leechers for a specific file. All torrent sites have simple search fields, at the top of the page. Your search results will appear in a list, with the item at the top having the most seeds, and declining numbers of peers as you go down the list. Click on the item you want, or conduct another search. Once you reach a page for a specific file, you typically want to avoid big colorful buttons that might say 'sponsored link', 'download now', 'download direct' or 'download free'. These are 'red herrings', that usually take you to pay sites. If you accidentally end up clicking on a link like these, use your back button to return to the torrent site. Never accept any offer to sign-up for a service. If you should arrive at a page that requires registration or a fee, you're in the wrong place. Every torrent site has a different layout.

With a little experience, you'll learn what works, and what to avoid. I'll just name my two favorite torrent websites. 'Kick Ass Torrents' has a very nice web site, with no bogus buttons which might lead you to a pay site. My all-time favorite site is Bitsnoop.com, which frequently gives me the best search results.

Here's an illustrative example. It's the same scenario you'll find at any torrent site. Once you find a file you want, select the button la-

beled 'Download Torrent'. A download bar will appear at the bottom of your screen, with the option "Do you want to download, or save?" Make sure the file extension is "torrent," before accepting. NEVER accept a download with an '.exe' extension!

Select "SAVE," and within a few seconds, the message will change to "filename).torrent download has completed". This is just a small file that tells your software how to acquire the file. Then, select 'OPEN' and a new window will pop up, displaying the file, or a list of files that you are trying to download.

Again, verify that none of the file extensions are '.exe'. If the files appear to be correct, just click 'OK'. The window will disappear, leaving the UTORRENT application on the screen. Your download will appear in a list, with very simple to understand information, giving you the status of your download. At the bottom of the UTORRENT screen, you'll see some tabs that you can select, to see specific information. The most important one to check, is the one labeled 'peers', which will show how many people are providing uploads. With popular files that have a lot of peers, I've had some movies download in as little as 15 minutes. With obscure, hard to find items with few seeds, I've waited several weeks in some cases. For those of you concerned about copyright issues and the potential danger of being 'caught' guilty of infringement...I can only say, let your conscience be your guide and don't worry about it.

In the many years I've been downloading, I've only received one notice, from Paramount Studios. Ironically, I did not want the movie itself. I only wanted a secondary audio-track that was produced by another entity, outside of Paramount! The majority of items I've downloaded are in the 'public domain', meaning the copyright has expired and the movie is not available commercially. I've found many rare old science fiction movies that I've waited decades to see.

So there you have it, in a nutshell. Torrent downloads made easy! Have fun and err on the side of caution. Checkout Wikipedia's article on torrents, for loads of additional information. If you'd like a nice, free, simple program to burn movies to disc, I recommend "Freemake Video Converter" It's the best I've found and it's 100% free. It's so simple, a child could use it!

web addresses below

UTorrent software can be downloaded at <http://www.utorrent.com/>

Bitsnoop.com can be found at <http://bitsnoop.com/>

Kick Ass Torrents' can be found at <http://kat.ph/search/kickasstorrents/>

Freemake Video Converter can be found at <http://www.freemake.com/>

One last suggestion. I rarely use it, but TorrentZ is a great site, which will give you search results from many different torrent sites. It's good if you want a general overview, for the availability of an item you seek.

— Don Miller

Internet Archive:

A Treasury of Entertainment

Another great source of free entertainment is Internet Archives (<http://archive.org/details/oldtimeradio>). This mammoth site has many categories of audio and video, but my personal favorite is the Old Time Radio (OTR) area, which has well over 100,000 programs available for free download and streaming.

Let me recommend a few programs that may not be as well-known as "The Jack Benny Show" or "Lights Out," but which are worth a listen.

Crime Classics (<http://archive.org/details/OTRR>

Crime Classics Singles) is an anthology series of half-hour dramas based on actual crime case histories. It's witty and sophisticated.

A Canticle for Liebowitz (<http://archive.org/details/ACanticleForLiebowitz>) is a 15-part dramatization of the Walter M. Miller novel. Some good acting performances and outstanding production make it an audio classic.

Rex Fisher Union Buster (<http://archive.org/details/RexFisher-UnionBusterJuly13th1949>) is an outrageous piece of audio humor. It purports to be a 1949 show in which Bing Crosby starts as a booze-soaked red-baiting federal agent.

Flywheel, Shyster and Flywheel (http://archive.org/details/otr_flywheelshysterflywheel) uses the original scripts of the largely lost 1930's comedy series starring Groucho and Chico Marx. You can tell the imitators from the originals, but overall, they do a fine job.

The Clock (http://archive.org/details/TheClock_451) is a dramatic anthology created in Australia right after World War II in hopes of cracking the US market. Father Time is the host for this outstanding presentation. The accents occasionally slip, but that's a minor quibble. "The Clock" is as good as "Suspense" or "The Whistler."

My Favorite Husband is the bridge between Lucille Ball's film career and her TV stardom. It's a "must" for fans of "I Love Lucy."

--Arnie

Them Daze

Two Kinds of Newsboys

*The Latest
Chapter of
Dick Lupoff's
Memoirs
Blends Rock
Nostalgia With
Events
In His Life
Today*



My friend Arnie Katz, clearly in a reminiscent mood, asked me, Whatever became of Cat Mother and the All-Night Newsboys? For anyone who has never heard of Cat Mother and the All-Night Newsboys, let me explain that they were a splendid rock and roll band of the late 1960s and early 1970s. They started out in New York, then moved to Mendocino County, California, and finally to San Francisco.

The answer, ah, well, I'm afraid that all things must pass.

In the early 1970s I was doing a lot of media journalism, juggling assignments as the West Coast Editor of the then-current incarnation of *Crawdaddy*, writing articles for a periodical called *Changes*, working for *Ramparts* magazine, and contributing to assorted other short-lived and now thoroughly forgotten publications called *SunDance*, *Night Times*, and *KPFA Folio*.

I did a lot of interviewing for print or broadcast outlets (the latter, mainly over KPFA), and scored a coup by setting up an interview with the Cat Mother people, who at that time were living in Mendocino County. They were wonderfully hospitable, actually invited Pat and me and our three kids to spend a weekend at their rented house in -- I think it was Ukiah.

We hit it off nicely and became good friends. When the band was playing in the San Francisco Bay Area you could see their bus parked in our driveway. One summer -- was it '71? '72? Ah, the old geezer's mind is failing, alas! -- they put on an invitational rock festival in Mendocino. Again, Pat and I and our kids were invited. Bands were playing, food and wine and dope were all plentiful, people were dancing, and there was much skinny-dipping in a nearby pond.

Some photographs of this event survive. Of all the swimmers, one was too modest to doff all garments. You can see this little girl wading knee-deep in the pond, surrounded by naked, celebrating hippies. Our daughter. The day was pretty hot, and at one point Pat and I retreated to the shade of the bus, only to encounter singer/guitarist Taj Mahal. He'd apparently found it too hot outside, too. He played and sang and we sat and listened -- talk about a small audience. It was a private performance.

By Dick Lupoff

Photos from that weekend appeared on the cover of the next Cat Mother album, *Last Chance Dance*. There's one crowd shot in which a man with a prominent bald spot can be seen. Camera angle shows no face, just the back of his head. That's me!

On another occasion, when Cat Mother was playing in Berkeley and the band bus was parked in our driveway, I found myself suffering from a severe case of the munchies. It was around 2:00 AM. Fortunately there was a twenty-four hour supermarket not far from our house. I headed down there to purchase some ice cream, which was displayed in an open-top, half-height freezer.

Looking for the right products, I was rather surprised to find the Cat Mother equipment manager / roadie, Lloyd, lying amidst the frozen comestibles. "Lloyd," I exclaimed, "what happened? What are you doing there?"

With total equanimity, Lloyd explained. "I was looking for popsicles and I leaned over and fell in. Would you help me up?"

So I did, and gave him a ride back to our house, and we all ate ice cream.

Cat Mother was one of the talented bands of the era that never achieved the degree of commercial success that they deserved. The mainstay of the band was Bob Smith, a hugely talented song-writer, keyboard player, sometime percussionist, and vocalist.

On one occasion he and I tried writing alternate sections of a hot-chair story. I remember when it was finished I read it over and our styles blended so smoothly I couldn't find the transition points. I don't know what became of the manuscript.

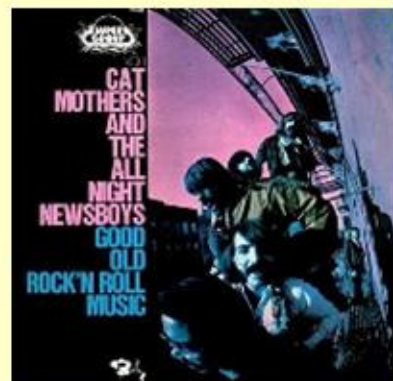
The last I heard, Bob Smith was deceased, an early victim of the AIDS epidemic. His wife, Alice, on whom I had a fierce crush in those days, was working for the Actors Conservatory Theater (ACT) in Los Angeles. Michael Herwig, the band's drummer, was in the slammer on a drug charge. Roy Michaels, the bass player, and his wife, Ellen, were divorced. Charlie Chin, a guitarist, was tending bar in New York. Larry Packer, a fiddle player, turns up now and then as a recording artist.

No more All-Night Newsboys, although by happenstance Pat and I are friends these days with a San Francisco band called the Irish Newsboys. Most of the members work for the San Francisco *Chronicle*; hence the name. The leader of the band is a *Chron* reporter, Kevin Fagan. He and his brother are both Edgar Rice Burroughs fans and Kevin seems to think I'm a celebrity because I wrote a couple of books about Mr. Burroughs almost fifty years ago.

The Irish Newsboys include Barry Melton, who was one of the Fish in Country Joe and the Fish back in those halcyon days. He's been a practicing lawyer for several decades, but once a month, when the Irish Newsboys perform at Lefty O'Doul's saloon in San Francisco, he warms up his guitar and cuts loose.

The music is rough, loud, and great fun. The food is plentiful and cheap, and the drinks flow freely (although not for free). O'Doul's is near Union Square in SF, a heavily-frequented tourist area. Most of the clientele are locals, and regulars at that, but once in a while a tourist couple will wander in by mistake. Mainly you can identify them by the women's shoes. Spike heels, tourist. Sneakers, local. The men are not quite as easy to identify, but you can usually tell by the stunned expression when they hear the Newsboys (at least two of whom are girls, by the way) belting out, "There's Whiskey in the Jar."

Listen, if you're ever in San Francisco or near enough to that town to spend an evening in a splendid saloon listening to great rough music, check the entertainment schedule and see if the Irish Newsboys are performing. You just might get lucky. — Dick Lupoff



Saved by the **BELLS**

*The Charming
And Musical Tee
Recounts Some
Of Her Recent
Adventures with
The Bell Choir*



Our group from the Nevada Blind Center gathered in a meeting room under the stands of the Orleans Arena. The room thrummed with anticipation as we prepared to play for the Las Vegas Wranglers Hockey game.

Although I would have loved to try a shot on goal, we were here to play the national anthem. We strapped on our phone batteries and grabbed our choir chimes. The Blind Center Bell Choir was about ready to play!

When our director, Jerry, came to the Blind Center and asked if anyone was interested in participating, I jumped at the chance. Our first day about three years ago, I arrived early and was able to have a conversation with Jerry. He told me about his music-therapy training, his work with a deaf bell choir using hand-signs, and his desire to create a system that would allow blind people to be alerted when playing bells. He had had a student in the seventies who wanted to join the bell choir, but couldn't, because she was blind. He promised her he would find a way for blind people to play.

Jerry has worked in prisons, and also with the Gang Task Force.

He's a big, beefy guy, and doesn't take any guff from anybody. He is somebody not to mess with. but put him in front of his bell choir , and let him listen, and he melts like an ice cube on a hot Las Vegas summer sidewalk. He jokes, laughs, cries, and talks with openness and honesty. And yes, he does put his tough-guy persona on when we need it.

On this particular night in March, 2013, we all had our game faces on, including Jerry. "Turn your cells on," he commanded. I reached inside the case and flipped a switch for the cell-phone battery. This system, which Jerry calls arbecy (<http://arbecy.com>) was attached to a DJ light board for sending specific signals to each cell battery. When I felt a buzz from the battery, I knew I could ring the chime.

By Tee Cochran

The chimes are squared-off tubes with clappers on the outside. To ring, the arm is pulled forward so that the clapper slaps on the brass "bell". These are much faster than handbells, and you can really get down and get funky playing them. We once played "dueling banjos" with them, but not quite as fast as on the original recording.

At the pre-game rehearsal, we played scales, each note sounded by one player. Then we played "The Star-Spangled Banner", the song we would play before the game. This was one of the most exciting gigs for me. I had always wanted to play the national anthem before a local game, the 51s baseball team or the Wranglers hockey team. We had played between periods a year ago, but this was different. This was going to set the stage for the whole game. Uncharacteristically, I bounced on the balls of my feet and paced. I wanted to run laps around the basement to work off excess energy. I wanted to put on a pair of skates, lace up and grab a stick. I wanted to float up to the ceiling. But I had to stay where I was.

Finally, it was time to do a quick dress rehearsal. The techs actually put the carpet down for us. We walked out and did a sound check. This walk was across the entire billing through a tunnel. After the sound check, we all trooped back the quarter-mile distance to the meeting room. I was levitating at this point.

The game was about to start. Or so I thought. We went back out to the ice, so we would be ready at the start of the game. The Zambonis waltzed slowly around the rink. I think I said to myself every ten seconds, "aren't they finished yet?"

We were introduced and began to play. I will never forget it. I listened between the notes we played. I listened to the fans listening. A feather could have fallen and made a deafening crash. The silence was truly reverent. My spine felt electrified. I braced myself for the crescendo near the end, "o'er the laaaaand of the freeeeeeeeeeee!" I braced for the distracting whistles and cheering.

Silence.

I was astounded and delighted. When we finished playing, there was that wonderful delicious pause every performer knows, when the fans lived in that last note of the song and hung onto it.

Thunderous applause erupted. Feet stamped wildly. I was beside myself. The performance had been perfect. All the notes were in the right place. And the fans had eaten it up.

As much as I always say that I don't like being the center of attention (I would rather have a musical jam than a performance.) I loved that response. I took in its energy like it was food for the soul. I'm sure Jerry and the other members did as well. We were all elated. We gave ourselves a big hand and hugged each other.

Afterward, James and I went to the game. The blind Center had either been comped or paid for tickets. And guess who won? The home team, in a 5-4 shoot-out.

I'd say we really did set the stage for the game.

--Tee Cochran

Bill of Fare

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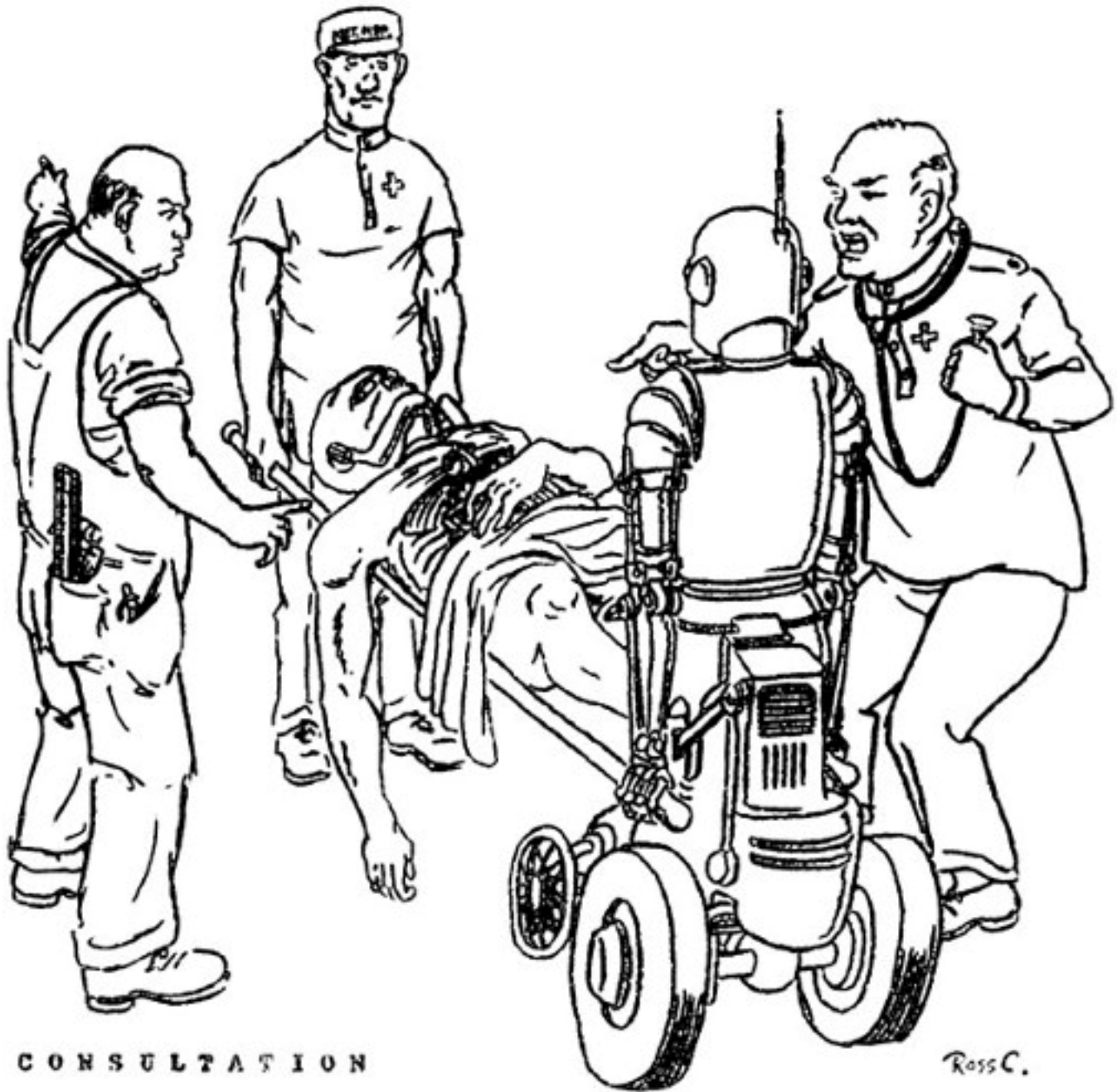
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Fanstuff gets back to what passes for normal next issue, which definitely includes “locker room,” with your comments on #36 and #35.

Deadline for Guaranteed Inclusion in #37
Friday, June 7, 2013

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