

Implosion

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Implosion: The Fanzine that proves anyone can publish a fanzine.
Member, fwa.

A Messy Situation
a case from the files of New GDA
by Arnie Katz

Chapter One: The Party of the First Part

I've often remarked on how local fans tidy up after our parties. There's always going to be some clean-up after a Night of Frolic, but fans rarely leave until they've gathered up the drink can, emptied the ashtrays and stacked the chairs in the garage.

I am almost embarrassed by the pleasure I feel when I see this process underway. Hosts in less fortunate fandoms often experience post-party depression when they survey the wreckage of the event. Even after a Social, usually a gathering of 30-50, we seldom spend more than a half-hour -- plus the same amount of time the next morning to empty the sodas and beer cans out of the bathtub and get plates and glasses into the dishwasher.

The Vegrant's predilection for cleanliness continues, but the fanzine fan club isn't the totality of the Fandom of Good Cheer. Some recent newcomers -- I hesitate to call them fans -- are apparently unaware of social niceties like not dropping chicken bones in the corner of my office or toeing out cigarettes on our just-refinished coral pink deck.

The Thursday night Silvercon 4 kick-off party drew over 60. Most were considerate. Enough who weren't, though, that I found a mountain of debris in the backyard Friday morning.

I'd just gotten a letter from John Berry (the fingerprint expert, former Wheel of IF and founder of the Goon Defective Agency) a couple of days earlier. I'd dug out my beloved, bulky file of **Retribution**, painstakingly acquired one at a time from zoned-out fans at Corlu parties. I thrilled anew to the daring exploits of the crimefighting colossus in the trilby hat and luxuriant mustache. Those exquisite zines were sitting on my desk, not the one with the Macintosh, but in my secret *sanctum sanitarium*.

If only the Goon were here! I thought about the disks packed solid with porno GIFs. They'd be ideal to pay his customary fee. And thanks to the miracle of computer technology, I'd be able to retain that shot of Julia Parton bathing with her rubber ducky. A woman who knew how to enjoy herself, I thought, and a lovely visual image.

After a couple of hours, I pulled away from this reverie. Daydreams would do no good. The Goon was retired, living in England and trying to become a Filthy Pro. He could not help me.

I thought again of **Retribution**. I might need them now, as I had on another occasion when I had

faced a deeper, more personal problem.
It was time to Contemplate the Infinite.

Chapter Two: Hyde in Secret

I listened carefully. Nothing. Toner Hall was empty except for me and Slugger, the yellow-and-white monster who pretends to be our family cat. My secret was safe in his paws. No one would ever make him talk -- or do anything except eat, sleep, and use his litter box -- and bite and claw anyone who challenged his domain.

I hurried down the hall and turned left into the guest room that doubles as Marcy Waldie's office during the business day. I darted into the huge closet, tripped nimbly over a box of x-rated video tapes from Mark Kernes and closed the door behind me. Practiced fingers flicked the hidden light switch.

I moved a few cartons of old video games and rotated the middle clothes hook on the wall. Gears turned. The previously invisible ceiling hatch opened with a barely detectable swoosh. (Actually, it was mechanically perfect and noiseless, but I had the sound on tape loop for atmosphere.) I climbed up the retractable ladder into the secret room.

I revealed the hatch. I was again among the Unreachables.

The digitized explosions and strobing colors of my workaday world stayed on the other side of that trap door. I settled into the padded chair behind the mahogany desk.

Arnie Katz, resurgent fan, was replaced by Andre Kassino, Vegas hotshot (retired).

I remembered the beginning. Once I had been a footloose Insurgent, happy and frivolous. Then Brooklyn got too crowded, too cold. I had to find a new base of operations. Then came the move to Las Vegas and the kindly mafia family that took me in and staked me to a new life in the golden West.

They renamed me Andre Kassino. "Get dis guy a new name, none a dat hebe shit around here." Don Cheech said one late night, and everything Don Cheech said was a Done Deal.

"Katz... Katz..." he muttered. "What can we make from that, Vito?"

"How about Arnie Catelamongaluzzo?" It was the kind of name one would expect from someone who styled himself Vito "the psychotic dyslexic Viper" Bartiluchinetti. Vito, who first saw daylight in New York's Harlem Hospital as Nelson Mandella Washington, did not take kindly to those who found fault with his adopted moniker.

Don Cheech saved me the embarrassment of protesting Vito's unspellable (by me) suggestion. "How's dat gonna look onna business card?" the Don asked. He raised his arms in supplication to heaven. "We gotta have a classy name for the kid." He looked at me, sitting tensely in the straight chair. "Hey, you're some kinda genius writer -- gimme a

name for yourself!"

"André Kassino," I said, before Vito could blurt out another tongue-twister. "Does that sound right, Godfather?" The gray-haired boss nodded, bringing his multiple chins into additional prominence.

I became Andre Kassino.

I recalled my final year of *gafia*, those days of hot lead and hotter women. Computer game expert Arnie Katz by day, flashy player Andre Kassino at night. I heard the clicking of roulette wheels and felt the rumble of trucks hauling tons of nothing to parts unknown -- at double golden holiday wages.

Those bogus trash trucks had made my fortune. How appropriate for a fanzine editor, I often mused as I watched the phantom fleet head out on the highway with non-existent loads of refuse. Garbage and I were made for each other.

Then as suddenly as it started, that chapter of my life ended. Like most revelations, it came unexpectedly. I was sorting through old fanzines, thinking about the fine fannish times of my youth for the first time in over a decade. When I unearthed **Retribution**, the official organ of the Goon Defective Agency co-edited by John Berry and Arthur Thomson. I thumbed the immaculate buff-colored pages, captivated by ATom's cartooning. Inevitably, I reread **Ret** from its first issue.

It had been a long time since I'd read those accounts of the GDA's many fannish cases. The Goon's exploits had lost none of their entertainment value or moral vigor.

Time lost its meaning as I read tale after tale of Goon Bleary's manic manhunts. I thought of that heroic figure, plonker cocked and ready to blast evil-doers, and I was ashamed. (I was not "ashamed" or even Ashamed, because I was not yet a reborn fan.)

I knew what the Goon would say. He would look at me sternly, disappointment dulling the abnormal gleam in his eyes. "Sufferin' catfish," he would say, and perhaps even throw in a "crikey." "Yer a trufan gone fake!" I would never have been able to meet his steadfast gaze. The mere thought of his disapproval kept me sitting and thinking in the tiny room for many, many hours.

Certainty arrived with the sunrise over Mt. Charleston. "Red sky at night, sailor's delight; red sky at morning, sailors take warning," the adage said. I wondered if there were similar portents for guys who want to get back on the right side of the street.

After working up my courage for a couple of days, I went to see Don Cheech.

"A family must stay together, for in that unity lies its strength," he said once I had placed my petition before him. "The strength of the family is its unity."

"I understand that, Don Cheech," I soothed. "And you have built a strong family." He grunted noncommittally at the compliment. "I am just a fanzine fan. Let me leave. You can trust me. I wouldn't repay your kindness with betrayal.

"How do I know this?" the Don said. "Maybe you're gonna go talk to the Feds."

"With all respect, Don Cheech, you would not have kept me with you this last year if you thought I was that kind of man."

"Yes, yes, you're right." Several big sighs. "You're a good boy, Maybe you're not cut out for this family life." I started to speak, but he commanded my silence with a gesture. "You do not need to speak further of this to

me. You may go."

"Thank you, Don Cheech," I said.

"But you better not get mixed up in my business," he said, his voice now low and rumbling. "I let you go, but not to work independent!"

"That will never happen," I promised. He poured small glasses of some thick, amber-colored cordial.

"Now let us drink to your new life," Don Cheech said. We each picked up a glass and downed the liquor in a single swallow. I didn't know fire came in licorice flavor.

I walked out of Don Cheech's paneled office, afraid to look back to see whether my erstwhile benefactor had sent one of his boys after me. It took all my willpower to keep my eyes straight ahead and not glance over my shoulder. If Don Cheech intended to send someone to "see me off," I was as good as dead anyway. There was no sense finding out about it prematurely. If he was really letting me go, which I devoutly prayed he was, looking back would have been a sign of disrespect that could've changed his feelings about my future health.

I walked out of Don Cheech's office that day, out of the half-world of glitz and glamour. I walked away from Andre Kassino and back to Arnie Katz.

I rejoined fandom. Soon I was pubbing my ish, trading letters with faraway fans, and all the rest of it. I was Arnie Katz, whole and at peace for the first time in years.

The other side of my life was gone, but not forgotten. At times of utmost tranquillity, I missed the excitement, the danger, the sheer adventure. I never seriously considered becoming the Andre Kassino of yore, but I faunched for that adrenaline rush that spells high voltage thrills.

So I set up the secret room, the one above the guest room. I got in the habit of spending odd hours there, reading old fanzines. Gradually, after a while, I moved some memorabilia to this sanctuary. Just a slow trickle of things that even sharp-eyed Joyce didn't miss among the knickknacks and objets d'art that cover most of the flat surfaces in our home.

As I filled and lit the pipe, I looked at my surroundings. As always, my eye came to rest upon the huge oil portrait on the wall opposite my desk. I studied the lined face under the deerstalker cap. Those fiery eyes! They missed nothing and met any gaze. The painting was so lifelike that the sweeping wings of his mustache looked poised to flap at the first movement of his noble head.

Beneath the painting was a small gold nameplate inscribed in forceful block letters: The Goon!

Yes, Goon Bleary, watchdog of fandom for two decades. He'd retired years ago, and fandom had never been quite the same.

How many times had I poured out my heart to this painting? None, but this was a good time to start. Now, as I pondered the biggest decision of my life, I silently implored the Goon to give me a sign.

I waited with mounting anticipation for a steaming teakettle, or similar trufannish manifestation, to speak words of wisdom to me. None did, though a clock commented on my possible mental state when a little birdie popped out to mark the hour.

I hadn't read "The Minute Manager," but I once walked past a bookstore which, at a previous time, had featured it in the window. I knew there was no percentage in sitting there, reeling off flashbacks like a fannish Joe Franklin

Chapter Three: A Fan of Action

Then it came to me: Lack of a *Sign* -- I'd been back in fandom almost five years and rediscovered the sterisk -- could itself be a sign. Yes, that was it! With his awesome silence, the Goon was telling me that I couldn't rely on the past. He could not come to my aid, so it was definitely up to me to unravel the puzzle of the mysterious mess.

I closed up the secret study, and when I was sure that no one would see, scampered down the ladder and tripped over that box of x-rated video tapes. I hurried to the door and bounced off the jamb with only minor contusions. I staggered across the hall, through the master bedroom, into the master bathroom and out the door to the back yard.

I was in a deductive frame of mind as I paced what I mentally dubbed The Scene of the Crime. As I tugged at my mustache thoughtfully, I wished I'd known about this case -- my first case! -- sooner. I would have put more effort into growing it fuller in emulation of my hero. If it was bigger, maybe I could've had bigger thoughts.

"Too late for regrets," I muttered as I surveyed the area, alert for the slightest incongruity. And right at the epicentre of the worst of the mess, among squashed beer cans and abandoned plates, I found it.

I felt like Philip Marlow, Sherlock Holmes, Nero Wolfe. Aw, heck, I felt like Goon Bleary. I'd have worn a trenchcoat, except it was 97 degrees -- but it's a dry heat -- and I didn't want the Police Flasher Squad to recognize me.

No mistake, this was a clue to the identity of the worst slackers. I'd bring them to justice. My investigative brilliance would indict them before the court of fandom. I would be judge, jury ad D. West allrolled into one.

The Clue beckoned to me. It was a jewel set in a crown of trash. I picked it up and examined it closely through a magnifying glass some software company had sent me as a promotional premium for a detective game

It was small, black and plastic. I turned it over in my hand. It had 10 faces. That immediately exonerated most fans, because they seldom have more than two. We must be looking for some very special fans, even apart from their garbage-strewing ways.

I looked closer and saw that each face had a number, from zero to nine. Soon all their numbers would be up. Arnie Katz, formerly Andre Kassino, would see to that.

I needed some help.

Chapter Four: Whatsa Watson?

I went to my public office and got busy on the phone. Within minutes, the door bell rang. I heard footsteps, and JoHn Wesley Hardin stood before me.

"What is it, Arnie?"

"Call me Chief," I spat.

"Can't I call you 'Godfather' like always?" he asked, after he wiped the moisture off his shirt.

"I'm on a case, JoHn," I told him. That wouldn't explain anything, but I had no time for explanations. No time for anything but solving this case. Except a pun or two, and a few asides and digressions.

"A case of what?" JoHn demanded. "Will it get me high?"

"It depends on how far up the conspiracy goes," I

told him.

"Conspiracy?" he echo'd, dubiously. "This isn't about those fantasy fans again, is it?"

"No, that was Joyce's conspiracy," I corrected. "I'm talking about the incident at the party."

"Incident?" JoHn asked, tempting me to pad this narrative with a repetitious explanation. I handed him the story so far and waited while he read it. Then I waited while he read all the fanzines on my desk and the instructions to three new discs for the Sega Saturn.

"I see," he said. "This is a serious matter."

"I'm glad you realize the gravity of the situation," I continued. "We must solve this case and rescue the reputation of Las Vegas Fandom."

"I didn't think you could rescue that kind of reputation." He paused. "I didn't think you could touch it without gloves."

"We'll see," I said grimly. "We'll see"

"Look, Arnie," JoHn said, "we've got a 10-sided die." He held it up between thumb and forefinger. This reminded me that I should've dusted for prints. Whatever that means. I was out of Pledge anyway. "You know what that means?"

"Someone's gonna failg their agility roll?"

"That's true," JoHn acknowledged, "but that wasn't what I had in mind." Did he expect me to read his thoughts? The next thing, he'd be expecting me to be a psychic psychologist.

"Sufferin' catfish, JoHn," I said.

"Do you think catfish really suffer?" John inquired. "Do diners at a fish fry have the viscous fluid of suffering catfish on their hands?"

"Only if they're sloppy eaters," I replied. It made me feel good to have some of the answers, even if I didn't have a clue about this case. Well, to be technical, I *did* have a clue. I just didn't know what to do with it.

"You said it yourself, Arnie," JoHn said. He can be so insistent. "This is a percentile die."

"Don't we need another to play?"

His eyes screwed up, his shoulders hunched, and he emitted a sound like "dough," only elongated into a moan. I hoped it wasn't a sudden attack of indigestion or other untoward occurrence that would frustrate our work on this case. "That's the point," he said when his facial muscles stopped twitching.

"Gee, JoHn, this die has so many little points," I rubbed my finger along one. "It's easy to get confused about which one you mean."

"They're slightly rounded, it appears. Do you think that's significant?"

"No, not really," he said. I wondered why he was doing eye-strengthening exercises at a time like this. Rolling them around that way must be uncomfortable. I supposed it would make him a fitter Arfer to my Goon, so I knew I should be grateful. Still, I wondered about the timing. "But you're overlooking the forest for the trees."

I whirled around. No trees. At least none that I could see. Those eye-strengthening exercises were already improving his vision! "Good work, JoHn. Lead me to those trees!"

He made that "dough" sound again, which wasn't what I kneaded. "No, Arnie, what I meant was that the presence of the die itself is significant."

"Why didn't you say so?" I'd have to get him a supply of No-Doughs if detecting became a regular job. "This is incontrovertibly a percentile die, the certain spoor of the

roleplaying gamer!"

"Yeah, they use 'em to see if they can climb a wall or drink your blood or something, right?" I'd led a checkered life, so I knew how the game was played. Someone had dropped the die, and when I put a plonker bolt in the middle of his or her forehead, they'd sing like 20 drunken filkers in a soundproof room.

"That's right, Arnie," he said. "Now what we have to do is find the gamers, and see which one is our quarry."

"So what you're saying is that the litterbugs were not loyal and true science fiction fans," I summarized. What a tonic for my trufannish sensibilities! Now I could just blame it all on another tribe.

"You've got it."

"I think we'd better pay a visit to some gamers," I said, putting an edge into my voice.

"And you are...?" April asked from behind the registration desk.

"Arnie Katz," I spat. Ever the gentleman, JoHn sprang forward, handwipe rampant, to mop it up.

"How do you spell it?"

"Correctly most of the time, except when my fingers slip and it comes out 'Arine'."

While April was banging her head against the wall, her replacement efficiently prepared our badges. Silvercon, here we come!!

Chapter Five: Interview with a Vampire

"Hello, fanboy, I was wondering when you'd show up," a voice husked from a doorway. I noted the heavy breathing and come-hither look.

I reached for my wallet. No detective yarn is complete without a sex scene, and I was willing to pay up to \$20 to add one to this story.

Then I saw she had a con badge and put away my wallet. I wouldn't need the \$20 this time. This was one of those fanzine femme fatales, with love and flesh in equal superfluity.

"You look like a woman who knows where it's at," I said to her. I blinked my eyes. This close to the gazebo, the smell of steer manure irritated my sensitive orbs.

The femmefan must have been experiencing the same difficulty, because she blinked her eyes, or one of them at any rate, back at me. "I sure do," she said.

"Good, then you can tell me where it is," I said. "I'm looking for games."

"Come inside, and we'll play," she said.

"No time for games. I'm on a case." I held up the percentile die. "Lose this?"

"No, I don't use dice," she said. "though if you strung them together and insert them in your..."

She seemed to have lost the thread of conversation, but she wasn't the malefactor. She was useful, since she didn't know the location of the game room, but she was in the clear.

I relaxed. "No time for that now. I'm on a case. Thanks anyway," I added as I walked down the path toward a conspicuous building. One of the reasons it was so conspicuous was that JoHn was standing by the door hollaring his head off: "Hey, Arnie!" and pointing inside.

"You sure we'll find the gamers?" I asked JoHn as I climbed the three steps to the doorway.

"They're here, all right," he said, grimly.

We entered a large room, which was filled with fans grouped around tables. I heard the clink of dice and the growls of the lupines. I observed the oblivious knots of

gamers and wondered about the best way to proceed with my investigation. Not for the first time, I asked myself, what would Goon Bleary do?

Then I Knew. One instant I was just standing there, directionless, and the next I had a firm course and true. I would imitate the mustachioed sleuth. "Crikey, Arfer, I mean JoHn, what should we do?" I asked. I felt good. I was starting to get the hang of this fan detective stuff. I fancied that even Goon Bleary couldn't have asked that question any faster.

Before JoHn could speak, Will Ryan, an out of town gamer briefly active in Las Vegas Fandom in pre-contact days, strolled up to us. He looked worried.

"Hi, Will," JoHn said.

"Hi JoHn, Hi Arnie," Will said. "Have either of you seen my percentile dice? I'm looking for a little black one."

"I'd like to help you, Will," I replied, "but we're on a case. I'll tackle yours as soon as we get this one solved."

"Arnie..." JoHn said. "Don't you think we should show our clue to Will?" I thought one sidekick was enough, but I'd go along with JoHn if a show of harmony kept the investigation going.

"Good point, JoHn," I responded enthusiastically. This was the kind of sharp thinking that even the Goon himself would envy. "Maybe you can help us solve this case so we can accept your assignment," I said as I held out the IO-sided die.

"That's it!" He said, eyes wide with wonder. "You found my lucky die!"

"Glad to help, Will," I said. "Well, JoHn, we'd better get going."

"Don't you think we should question Will, since it's his die you found at the scene?"

"That's a point, JoHn, a definite point." I looked directly at Will, who seemed a little confused by the abrupt change in the mood. "Where were you Thursday night!"

"I was at your house, Arnie," he said. "I was there all night."

"And did you go out to the jacuzzi?" JoHn demanded. "Where you in the deck area after 10:00 on Thursday night?"

"Y-yes," he was warily. "Are you guys playing a life action version of *Maltese Falcon* or something?" It was a good idea, but I'd already written too much of the story this way. I would have to play the card, and dice, that fate dealt me.

"No, this is reality," I said. "Friday morning, I went out to the backyard and found heaps of squashed cans, half-empty plates, glassware and that die," I told him. "It was just sitting there, in the middle of the clutter. Got any idea how it got there?"

"Will Ryan, you are the mysterious messer, and I have caught you!" I thundered. "Guilty! Guilty! Guilty!" I screamed. I had read that in some classic novel, or maybe *Doonsbury*.

The accusation's effect on Will Ryan was dramatic. He reeled back, knees buckling slightly. His shocked gasp was the only sound audible in the vast room, which had quieted suddenly grown tomblike.

"Uh, Arnie, I think you may have, er, miscalculated," JoHn said as he pried my fingers from Ryan's spasmodically twitching arm. "If he made the mess, why would he have put the die in the middle of it? If he'd seen the die, he would have picked it up so he could use it today at the con."

"That's right, Arnie. It's my lucky die," Will put in quickly. "It rolls a lot of high numbers."

"It must have been someone else, person or persons unknown, who left it there for me to discover," I said. "You are innocent, Will Ryan, and I hereby exonerate you."

"Sorry about this, Will," JoHn said. "Maybe we can get you a job as the open act for OJ Simpson."

"Don't go yet," I said. Will looked really alarmed this time. "You may be an eye witness. Do you remember who was out there?"

"Well...." he was hesitating. I drew my plonker.

"I don't want to have to zap you," I told him as I waved the menacing muzzle under his nose, "but I will. Unless you cooperate."

"Cooperate?" he repeated. "Sure... sure, Arnie."

"That's the right spirit," I told him. "Now who were they?"

"I can't rat out my friends," he said, though I could tell his resistance was weakening.

I had another idea. I told Will to stand there and gave him a look that I hoped was piercing enough to pin him to the spot. I pulled JoHn aside for a small strategy conference. He was dubious at first, but I stood on his bare foot until he saw the reasonableness of my idea.

"OK, Will," I said when we'd rejoined him. "I'm roleplaying the prison guard and you're a Denebian smuggler we've pulled in to try to get a line on the space pirates. JoHn is the dungeon master"

"This is a game?" he was positively bewildered.

"Yep. I invented it recently," I assured him. Two minutes ago, in fact, though I did not share this data with him.

"And then you'll leave me along so I can go back to the other game?"

"Absolutely," said Warden Hardin. "We'll spring you."

"OK."

"Loan me those dice for a second," I asked. He handed them over. "I'm torturing the prisoner, using Altarian vibro needles under his finger nails and shooting 5000 volts a jolt through his testicles."

Will moaned right on cue. I could see why he was considered a good RPGer.

I rolled a "72.." The plan was working!"Made my inquisitors skill roll," I announced triumphantly.

"Now you've got to roll for a resistance test," JoHn announced, exactly as I told him to do.

Will took the dice, cupped them in my hands. He shook them a long time as sweat trickled down his forehead. Finally, he tossed them. A "98"

"Oooooo sorry, you failed the role," JoHn reported. "But you were very close."

"Now you've got to tell me what I want to know," I reminded. "Where are those space pirates who left the garbage behind on their last mission at my house?"

Will Ryan hung his head, a defeated man. "They're in room 1848."

"Thanks, Will," John said.

"You won't fry my nuts anymore, right?" he called after us as I ran from the hall with JoHn pounding after me.

Chapter Six: The Final Scene

JoHn reached out to knock on the door to 1848. I reached out and stopped his hand short of the mark. "We'd better check our weapons<" I cautioned. "We can't hurry this. We've got to have our wits about us."

"Then you're only half-armed," he said.

"No, I've got the trusty plonker, too." I pulled it out

of my shoulder holster and checked the tension on the red-sucker-tipped bolt already lodged in the barrel. "I'm ready, what about you?"

"I've got this. Aileen thought we'd need it." He reached under his coat and brought out the multi-barreled nerf gun with which the Silvercon chairman had threatened early arrivals to the opening ceremony. The business end looked like a custom-made dildo for a cluster fuck. No question, my sidekick was prepared for the worst.

He banged on the door. I heard running footsteps and then the door opened a crack. "We're gaming," said the kid with long stringy hair wearing an "I (Heart) DOOM" teeshirt.

I recognized him from the party. Things happened fast after that. I drew my plonker as I bulled forward, put my shoulder into the door and blasted it off its rotting hinges like Jim Harmon paying a Midwescon visit to Harlan Ellison's room.

Well, I would've blasted it off its rotting hinges, except that the kid opened tit wide, slapped a diet Coke in my hand and showed me a seat.

"Hey, everybody," he shouted. "This is that Arnie Katz guy we went to on Thursday." A chorus of hellos issued from people dressed as everything from Klingons to Klingons.

"So," he said, returning his attention to me. "What can the Klingon Empire do for you, Earther?"

"When you were at my home..." I saw a disapproving look. "When you were at my space port the other night," I corrected, "you left all kinds of half-eaten food and crushed and leaking beer cans on the desk. It took me a half-hour just to clean it up."

"That's terrible!" our host exclaimed.

"Repentance is important," I said.

"You really shouldn't have moved it all," he said. "Now we'll never be able to reconstruct the crashpad scene from *Bohemians and Bourgeoisie*. We were playing it, and we had to go home before we were finished. I thought leaving the die there would show even one of you fanzine fans that there was a game in progress. Guess I was wrong."

"I'm really sorry," I said. The kid was explaining called The Klingon Test of Manhood when John and I back out of the door back into the light and the now familiar, and therefore comforting, smell."

"Well, JoHn," I said, shaking his hand. "I guess we can mark the Case of the Mysterious Mess closed."

"I guess we'd better," he replied.

"Let's have a sidebar to celebrate!" we both shouted simultaneously.

We went off to collect our friends.

Epilogue: Whatever That Is

I was back in my secret study, feeling pretty satisfied with myself. I had pursued my investigation to its conclusion, found the perpetrators and apologized to them.

A pretty full day for fandom's newest detective.

I looked up at the portrait of Goon Bleary.

Was he smiling?

My first case was fanhistory. Perhaps there would be others.