

Implosion

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

My memory, stunted as it is by decades of decadent, dedicated debauchery, reveals few recollections that associate holidays with fandom. That seems strange, in a way, because I have always placed such faith in fandom as a surrogate family. Yet it seems that when we carve the turkey, trim the tree or toast in the New Year, it has been in a non-fannish context more often than not.

Not that fandom hasn't figured in my holidays, notwithstanding the 15 year gafia gap. Conventions themselves are rather like holidays, but we've sometimes shared the more traditional, mundane ones with fans.

In the early 1970s, Joyce and I hosted a series of New Years parties that drew fans from several states. We did it about three times before it grew to be too much work. The experience of waking up early on New Years Day and finding fans sleeping in every corner of our apartment is one not easily forgotten. I'm sure the guy who tried to break into the house through the kitchen won't forget the way those fans looked the Morning After, either.

The would-be thief wanted the liquor bottles on the on the kitchen table. He got as far as standing on the fire escape of our sixth floor apartment and tentatively sticking one leg over the window sill. That's when the women set up a caterwauling, and hulking brutes like Jeff Schalles and Frank Lunney stormed into the kitchen, newly conscious and not happy about it.

In more recent times, we've held several non-cons to celebrate the Labor Day weekend, but I can't say we've established a local tradition. Perhaps Toner, if it attracts enough fanzine fans, will fill that niche for Glitter City.

For the first time, Joyce has coordinated her annual Trim the Tree fest with a Vegrants meeting. Normally, she holds it in the dead of night or Sunday morning before breakfast, to reduce the incidence of volunteer superintendents.

I can't wait to see how she copes with the abundant opinions of people not yet cowed by 25 years of marriage to her. Our ebullient band is generous with everything, especially advice.

Exhaustive knowledge of Joyce leads to my caution. I've learned to tread lightly in weighty matters such as Christmas Tree Decor. Joyce has Very Definite Ideas about Christmas Trees, and it is a foolhardy (and celibacy-prone) husband who contradicts her in the slightest degree.

I'm putting my second Bureau of Fannish Detection story into this issue of Implosion, mostly because I can't wait for you all to read it. I expect to publish the first story, "A Messy Situation," which you've already had in apa v, next issue or the one after that.

I would like to reduce a point.five called **Trufan Detective**, so consider this an enthusiastic invitation to all Vegrants to try writing a fannish mystery or suspense

story. They can use the mythos I've just created (though the writer should make him or herself the actual detective), or exploit some other form of the varied genre, as Tom is doing with his *Hot Dog Mystery* trilogy. As you can tell from my stories, the plots (and the crimes) don't have to be earthshaking....

Sleazy in Seattle

A BFD Case

By Arnie Katz

Chapter One: A Sinister Omen

"There is no license." The hulking man leaned forward to keep casual listeners, including the waiter, out of our conversation. He would've asked us to talk in Italian, if we weren't sitting in an Italian restaurant full of waiters fresh off the boat, or maybe the Concorde. Besides, our combined Italian vocabulary consisted of a dozen words, 16 if you counted "Cosa Nosta" and "La Famiglia."

The precautions seemed unnecessary, but they were second nature to the man across the table. I'd assumed that a 300-lb. bullet-headed black bentnose in a midnight blue suit and matching fez had blown any chance of anonymity. Maybe that was just my New York conservatism, but that's how it seemed to me.

Besides, everyone in the place recognized Vito Bartiluchinetti, top button man of the Beldone Family. At least a few must've made me from the old days, too. Andre Kassino had been away from the neon night world for a while, but I'd been kingpin of the phantom trash-hauling racket in Clark County. For wiseguys with a memory, my name was still synonymous with garbage.

"I was banking on that license," I told him, sidestepping the truth. I wouldn't want him to think I had gone to Don Cheech on a trivial matter. Really, this was a long shot, an attempt to cut through red tape and handle a situation before it became a problem. I'd contacted Don Cheech, my former Godfather, because I couldn't think of anyone else with the needed juice.

I hated the prospect of driving with my one poor eye. I didn't think it was a good idea even if I used my hands. Without the license, I might have to walk.

There was no other choice. Asking Joyce for a lift was out of the question. I could not expose her to the risk, the danger, the possible injury or the potential egoboo.

Fannish crime is my beat. I didn't want to share the spotlight with anybody, not even the Gracie Allen of Fandom. I knew how *that* partnership would work out: I'd solve the cases, and she'd collect the credit -- and the special fee. Before long, we'd be awash in GIFs of oiled muscleboys with shaved bodies. The job of Driver and Sidekick requires a young fan, hungry for the scraps of egoboo that fall from the Master Detective's plate.

Those who have read my first case will say to themselves, "Why is the Great Sleuth looking for an assistant? He has the ideal second banana in JoHn Hardin!" Well, it *sounded* like "Great Sleuth" to me, so you can insist it was "Great Stoop" as much as you want, and I won't care. I won't.

And since "A Messy Situation" has come up, let me address non-readers of my first case. Read it now. Otherwise, I'm liable to

provisions of the Series Character Writers Act of 1937 (amended, 1943). The gist is that either you read, and if possible enjoy, "A Messy Situation," or I have to write a ton of boilerplate to reestablish the characters and background in each new story.

It's up to you. We can have a tidy little short story here, or it can become a novel heavy enough to break the strap on Bill Kunkel's tote bag.

"You all right?" Vito said from the main plot thread. He seemed very far away, and mental distance muffled his words. A meaty hand shook my shoulder to rouse me from this digression. I'd battled CND (Chronic Narrative Digression) throughout my fan career. I suffered from CND back when they still called it Van Arnam's Syndrome.

That jolt was all I needed to break the captivating reverie of CND.

Back to the story!

I became one of Harry's Kids at the big CND fund-raiser. Harry hadn't been there, of course. The letter he wrote to the CND committee from his Hagerstown Hermitage mentioned aches and pains, the squirrels in his attic and the magic of Kim Darby. It fetched staggering bids at the auction.

It turned out that Harry... No, wait. That's another digression. Give me a minute.

Ok. That's better.

I'm centered. I'm ready.

Back to the story!

Stress must have brought back my CND in such virulent form. I fought it down. "'Sleazy in Seattle' has to go to my secret office before long," I told myself. "That's the appropriate place for flashbacks, plugs for old articles and oblique references to getting sercon." Yes, I could lean back in my chair, close my eyes and...

Vito shook me again.

Back to the story!

"There is no license," Vito repeated for readers battling short-term memory loss.

"Don Cheech can't fix the license?" I said.

"Don Cheech asked me to convey to you, personally like, his regrets. Unfortunately, it is not within his power to do the thing you have asked of him."

"We obtained for Stevie Wonder," Vito Bartiluchinetti rumbled. "but for you the Godfather, he can't do nothin'. They don't wanna give you no license, Andre."

I nodded. I chose my words as if my life depended on them. Which perhaps it did. "I hope you will convey my unwavering respect to Don Cheech. The whole world knows him to be a Man of Honor, a man worthy of respect"

I signed, resigned to the lengthier and more difficult process of finding a new sidekick. When I become a confidential investigator, like my idol Goon Bleary, and founded The Bureau of Fannish Detection, I thought I'd said "good-bye" to pedestrian fanac. Now, I was saying "hello" to pedestrian fanac, again. Even Don Cheech Beldone, my former Godfather, could not finagle a driver's license.

"The Don cannot help you in this license business," Vito said, "but he desires to be of service to you, an old and valued friend of La Familia." He passed me a folded sheet of paper. "Put this in your pocket, and examine it when you are alone." I nodded. It disappeared into my pocket.

"Thank the Don for his kindness and consideration," I said, bowing reverently.

"I will do as you ask," Vito replied, "but there is one thing more."

"Yes?"

"There is a situation..." his voice trailed off. He gulped twice, finding it hard to put the words together.

"Yes, Vito?"

"There is a situation that is very painful to me," he finally managed.

"You?" I said. "Not the Don?"

"No, this is something for me, personal"

"For you?"

"Yes, Mr. Kassino," he said.

I was instantly on guard. He'd called me "Mr. Kassino." "I try to get out of the rackets, but they drag me back in with both hands," I said.

"No, no, no," he soothed. "My problem is not in the world of *La Familia*. I come to you because you are no longer of that world, of that life. I know you are to be trusted in this thing."

"I'll do what I can, Vita," I was wary of contact with my former lifestyle, but helping Vito was only sensible. You never knew when you'd need someone to not break your fingers with a large meat mallet or not whack your kneecaps with a baseball bat. Vito "the Psychotic, Dyslexic Viper" Bartiluchinetti, as he was known to national and local true crime shows, is the only hope for such extremities, since it was usually Vito who swings the mallet or baseball bat on such occasions. Having him in my debt was better than a "Get Out of Jail Free" card.

"I come to you, because you are a man of discretion, a man of taste, a man with secrets of his own that he wouldn't want **File 770** to learn," said Vito. He leaned still closer, sharing the aroma of his veal in garlic butter sauce. "Don Cheech must not learn of this."

"Tell me about the... situation," I prompted.

"My wife's second cousin is a Man of Respect in Seattle," he said. Now, I understood this story's title! This discovery scored another notch on the casebook of Andre Kassino! Now that I understood the title's Seattle reference, solving the case was inevitable. Well, practically. "The son of our honored friend in Seattle is not part of our business, either."

"He left the business?" I asked.

"He went away to college. He's a collage graduate," Vito said. "He writes for some fishwrap in Tacoma."

"I wonder if he knows a friend of mine..." I mused, half to myself.

"He is the friend of yours," Vito corrected. "He was born Vittorio Gonzalini, but he has adopted the name 'Victor Gonzalez'."

"Victor Gonzalez!" Heads swiveled toward us.

"No show here, folks," Vito growled. "Nothing to see here, unless you wanna make something..." The sight of the behemoth rising from his chair restored the diners' interest in the food on their plates.

"Victor Gonzalez?" I repeated, this time in a whisper. I didn't want Vito to feel he had to rub out the witnesses. The pasta was pretty good, and I wanted to bring Joyce here. As an accessory to a massacre, I might not get a good table, and it could also affect the service. Joyce was a stickler for efficient service.

"Yes, he is your friend," Vito said. "Trouble follows him. He is an unknowing pawn in a deadly game."

"There is a man who wants the place at the head of the table where Vittorio's father now sits," explained Vito. "He weaves a web. His people manipulate Vittorio."

"Why?"

"He wants to use the son against the father by putting Vittorio in the power of one of his fronts."

"You know I left *La Familia*," I reminded Vito. Stalking scoff-locs with a plonker was my turf. I didn't intend to trade hot lead with real crooks. Gunfire could delay **Wild Heirs** or cancel my 50th birthday party.

"This is about your thing, not ours," Vito said.

"My thing?"

"What you call 'Fandom'," Vito said. "That's why I need

your help. It's a different world, with different rules. You know those rules."

"Yes," I admitted. Could this be my second BFD case? I imagined readers all over the world nodding vigorously, having invested the time to read several pages of set-up.

"Look into things, find out what they've got in store for Victor Gonzalez and break up their action."

"Break up?"

"You goin' soft on me?" Vito asked, agitation cracking his thin veneer of sophistication. "You don't hafta whack nobody. Just stop the scam so they can't get their hooks into Vittorio."

"I can certainly look into it, Vito," I assured him.

"Vittorio's father will be grateful for this service, and so will I," he said, calm now that I'd agreed to investigate.

"I understand there is a customary fee..." Vito began.

I waved off his suggestion. "Not for you, Vito," I said quickly.

"I will not give insult by asking you to do what you do so well for nothing," he insisted. He produced a manila envelope and slid it across the table to me.

I deftly undid the clasp and lifted the flap.

"Not here!" Vito ordered.

I looked inside the envelope without withdrawing the contents. It was a small photo album. Lettered on the cover was: "Nevannah Smith, the Early Years."

"Unretouched," he assured me. "Another album of equal interest when you report."

I resealed the clasp. "Entirely satisfactory," I announced. "Andre Kassino is On The Case."

"Thank you, thank you," he said. "Our friend in Seattle will light a candle in your honor when he hears of this." I hoped Vito didn't mean a memorial candle, but I could not see any way to ask.

"I'd better get on it, Vito," I said, daubing at my lips with my napkin while keeping my hands as far away from the check as possible.

He took the hint, and the check.

Things were going splendidly, I thought. The case was just starting, and already I was ahead a free meal and half my fee!

I slid into the back seat of the cab. It pulled away from the curb with multi-g acceleration before I could firmly slam the door.

"Where to, sir?"

"3701 Bridgeglenn," I said, giving the address of Toner Hall.

I pulled out the folded piece of paper. It was a one-liner, but I didn't get the joke. "555-9669" could be a phone number. I'd have to check it out back at the *Sanctum Sanitarium*.

It was time to Contemplate the Infinite.

Chapter Two Safe at Home

This is where having read about my first case really cuts minutes off reading time for this one. I'm going to assume you know about my secret office above the front bedroom of Toner Hall and the laborious means by which I reach the hidden room with its cluttered desk and massive portrait of Goon Bleary. Nor does it seem necessary to minutely describe my hero's remarkable physiognomy.

I sat at my desk in the secret office above the front bedroom of Toner Hall. I winced as I rubbed my shin where it had collided with the carton of x-rated video cassettes from Mark Kernes.

As I sorted through the accumulated hardcopy mail, I hit a series of switches that played back recorded phone

messages from the BFD Hotline (1-900-TRUFANS) and checked for incoming e-mail from APPREHENDED!, our BFD web site.

A digitized version of *Apparatchik* filled the screen. I ego-scanned for my name, encountered it in the joint con report by Hooper and Gonzalez and back-tracked to the start of this remarkable production.

That's when I discovered a major case right under my nose -- evidently hiding in the unruly thicket I call a mustache. It hit me right at the opening of the article: the death of Dave Wittman.

I scolded myself for not checking e-mail every day. Otherwise, I'd have seen *Apparatchik* #44 before last Saturday night's Social instead of after it. I had a hunch that his death was somehow connected with the scheme to entangle Vittorio Gonzalini in a dangerous trap.

I could have gotten a hell of a lot of information about the whole incident if only I had known about it. I gnashed my teeth over the things I hadn't asked Dave Wittman when he was sitting with a bunch of the Vegrants at the end of the evening. Now I'd have to waste money that could've gone for *Wild Heirs* postage on a cab to go see him and find out more about the circumstances surrounding his death.

Realization exploded like a thunderbolt between the eyes. What a fool I had been! The obvious stared into my sensitive fannish face, and I missed it completely.

Did the portrait of Bleary look sterner than usual? I shook my head. Just when I thought I was becoming a real shamus, something like this happened.

I didn't need that cab at all. I'd just phone him.

I picked up the receiver. "Dave Wittman," I said with my crispest diction. I heard the touchtones, followed by rings. I gave it more rings than a Moonie wedding, but Dave Wittman didn't answer. I'd have to call him later.

"Victor Gonzalez," I said into the phone. Again a brief medley of tones and then the ring. Victor got it before it had a chance to ring the next time.

"I won't do it!" he screamed into my ear. "You can't make me do it!"

"Victor? Victor?" I asked, stunned by the unexpected outburst.

"This is you, isn't it, Andy?" Now it was his turn to be tentative.

"No, it's Arnie Katz," I corrected. I don't always get an effusive reaction, but his total silence caught me off-guard. "From Las Vegas," I added.

"Oh, hi, Arnie," he said.

"Hello, Victor," I said. "What won't you do?"

"Nothing, nothing," he said. "Nothing at all. I thought you were someone else."

"You did? Who?" Due to his slip of the tongue, I had a pretty good idea that it had something to do with someone named "Andy," but I didn't want to tip my hand. You never know what someone may reveal when they think you know more than you really do. This technique always works for me, since I generally don't know as much as people expect.

"Andy Hooper," he said. "I was just on the phone with him, but... we got disconnected." The fan who wanted Victor to do something was Andy Hooper.

"You seemed so agitated," I observed. "Is something wrong?" "I've been under a lot of stress since Silvercon 4," Victor said. "A lot of stress."

"What do you think is causing it?" I ventured.

"What do I think? What do I think?" Victor's voice ascended the scale. "Isn't being involved in the death of a fan enough?"

Another fan dead! This was turning into a new Year of the Jackpot -- with eleven months still ahead. Was this yet another case in the making? If business continued this way, I'd have to

hire a bunch of new BFD operatives. They'd go out and solve more fannish crimes. Maybe they'd write up their cases, too. We could print them in **Wild Heirs** -- or at least some point.fives. Or maybe they'd get bored and write nothing. Then **Wild Heirs** will have to print stories about canoe trips and Tupperware.

"Involved how?" I said.

"He'd be alive today if it weren't for me!" Was that the sound of a muffled sob -- or a smothered laugh? With Victor, it was sometimes hard to tell.

"Who'd be alive today?"

"Dave Wittman," said Victor. "I killed Dave Wittman." It was hard to avoid feeling a bit disappointed. I already knew about Wittman, so Victor hadn't brought me a new case after all. Still, perhaps he could shed some light on the Wittman matter.

"Maybe so," I conceded, "but when I saw him at the Social, he didn't seem to bear a grudge/"

"You saw him??"

"Why are you getting so excited?" I inquired. "He's been to plenty of Socials. I expect he'll be at the next one, too."

"But he's dead!" Victor said. "And you say you saw him?" Wait a minute.

Suddenly, I had a head full of ideas that were driving me insane.

An unbreakable and irrefutable chain of logic led inexorably to an inescapable conclusion. Dave Wittman had attended the last Social. The last Social took place after Silvercon 4. Dave Wittman had apparently died on the first night of Silvercon, during the kick-off party.

This could only mean one thing: as with the LASFS, death does not release you from the Social. Maybe it had something to do with our proximity to Area 51.

Victor was yelling at me about something, but I didn't let him divert me from the case. My singular powers of concentration rescued me from his distracting shouts and questions. I tuned him out, so I could focus on the revelation about Wittman.

Would other dead fans show up at Socials, now that Wittman had ripped aside the Last Veil? "We're hoping Francis Towner Laney will attend next month," I said. That was idle boasting. I didn't know if Wittman, self-styled demon publicist, had carried news of the Social to Laney at the Netheregional..

"He was there?" Victor said, unaccountable excited.

"No, Laney is coming next month," I said. I decided not to scold him for paying so little attention. No sense exiting him even more.

"Wittman! I mean Wittman!" he said, strangely excited. Maybe he liked Dave Wittman more than I'd thought. "Dave Wittman was there?"

"Yes, though I don't know why you're making so much of it," I admonished. These flighty Seattle fans get wound up about the darnedest things, don't they? I knew I ought to say something soothing: "Dave said he enjoyed seeing you at Silvercon." The subject hadn't actually come up, but I was sure Dave would've wanted to say something nice about Victor if I had solicited his opinion.

I held the receiver away from my ear, but I could still hear Victor's desperate, ululating scream. "You all right, Victor?" I hoped there wasn't some emergency at his end of the connection. Narrative momentum could not flash me to Seattle in time to participate, and I hate to be an outsider in my own story.

"Arnie, don't you understand?" he wailed. "Don't you see?/"

"You see something in the telephone?" Victor said, though I didn't think he had a videophone.

"Katz you...." he made some inarticulate sounds that

require special characters lacking in this font. "If you saw Wittman at the October Social, he couldn't have been killed at Silvercon 4 at the end of September!"

He had a point. This demanded immediate re-evaluation. Maybe Wittman *hadn't* been at the Social. I seldom talk to him much, and my dubious vision might have confused Wittman with Don Miller or Tom Kurilla.

Or just possibly, Dave Wittman was alive! **Apparatchik** said he was dead, and all truth is supposedly contained in fanzine. Yet my research had convinced me that the converse was not always true. That is, all truth is contained in fanzines, but all fanzine contents are not necessary true. Especially Seattle fanzines.

From what I could extract from Victor's expletive-laced harangue he favored the latter theory. It seemed wacky to me, but he could be right.

I told him I'd get more details and call him back later. I pulled the slip of paper, the one I'd gotten earlier at the restaurant, out of my pocket. Don Cheech wouldn't have given me an address if it wasn't important. I decided to investigate immediately.

I punched the number for the Whittlesea Cab Company, Clark County's most efficient people-mover. There was no time to loose.

Chapter Three: A Saucy Tale

"Second and Main." I told the cabbie as I hopped into the back seat two hours later.

"You're the boss," he said. He roared around the Bridgeglenn curve that threw me against one door and then sent me skidding down the seat to bump into the other one as he turned onto Washington..

When the car regained equilibrium, I settled into the upholstery to enjoy a nice long flashback. If events hadn't taken JoHn Hardin out of the game, I wouldn't be rattling around in the back of a taxi like a bean in a jar.

My sidekick problem began with the abrupt fall of John Wesley Hardin, my Watson, my Cornfed, my Arfer. In one sickening instant I'd discovered that I could no longer depend on him to chauffeur me to and from crime scenes.

To be accurate, it wasn't so much an abrupt fall as an inadvertent trip. He didn't see one of my size 12s -- and you know what *that* means, Nevennah -- and tumbled to the carpet. As he fell, a card fluttered out of his pocket. He scooped it up nonchalantly and hobbled away, but I'd seen it all too clearly.

My blood ran cold. It was a Shrimp Brothers. card! My trusted aide had sold out to the crustacean crackers! I was devastated.

JoHn must have sensed my damaging discovery, because he disappeared the day after the Fatal Flutter, as I christened the incident. Personal betrayal of trust aside, it left me with a transportation problem. I couldn't drive due to poor vision, and there were no ready replacements for my erstwhile assistant. I'd be in trouble if forced to chase fannish malefactors on foot. My wits were quicker than my feet. Without wheels, I couldn't even keep up with OJ and AC in the white Bronco.

I came out of the flashback with a lurch as the taxi pulled over to the curb. "Keep the change!" I said as I gave the cabbie a tenspot. I barely cleared the door when the taxi pulled out again, motor whining like an Indy racer.

The neon sign in the window blinked uncertainly. The "E" in "Eat" flickered twice as fast as the "t." The large painted sign on the roof read: "Discount Shrimp." I always discount shrimp, but I decided to see if something fishy was going on inside.

The beefy guy behind the counter was out of place in the

meatless restaurant. He was smiling, though, so obviously, he had no beef with the place. "Hiya Mac," he said cheerily as I slogged toward him through the cigarette butts, sawdust clumps and discarded shrimp heads that littered the floor. "Do you want some of this shrimp?" "Who ya callin' shrimp," I snapped.

"I'm not calling anybody 'shrimp'."

"Do you see anyone else here?"

"Look, I'm just asking if you want to order shrimp," he repeated, no longer quite as cheery.

"I said 'don't call me shrimp'." I pitched my voice low and menacing like in *film noir*.

"Hey, I don't want no trouble." The counterman raised his hands in a defensive gesture. "What we got on the menu here is shrimp." He pointed to the row of steam table trays behind him. "I'm talking about shrimp."

"Look, I'm on a case." I told him. "I've got no time for small talk."

"Yeah?"

"I'm looking for a guy."

"I wouldn't have figured you for the type." I sucked my belly in a little. Have to hit the abdominizer starting Monday, I promised myself. I wanted to look like a detective.

"He's a big guy." I continued. "Bad dresser. Sandy hair. Maybe 30."

The counterman cocked his head toward indicate a corner booth. "He's here all day, every day," the counterman said. "He shows up in the morning, orders the all-you-can eat." The counterman looked at me, pleadingly. "Get him out of here. He's gonna eat me into debtor's prison."

I walked over to the booth.

"John, is that you?" I said. I didn't know what else to say.

He raised his head and even in the half-light I could see that his eyes were rimmed in red. He hadn't shaved in several days, either. "Katz?" he said. "You here?"

"Yes, JoHn," I answered. "What happened to you?"

"I thought I could handle it," he began. "You know, a few cocktail shrimp, maybe a side order of scampi with dinner."

"It's the old story," he said, sadly, and stared into his plate. "Too many plates of peeled and deveined, too many langostinos eaten in the wee hours." Tears stood in his eyes. "I couldn't get off the sauce, boss. I just couldn't get off the sauce."

"I'll help you, JoHn," I promised, as I patted his brawny shoulder. "Wipe that red stuff off your chin. We'll get you some treatment. Soon, you'll be back at Chicago Hot Dog, free of the shrimp stigma forever."

"I'll make you proud," he swore. I knew he meant it, because he shoved his plate away with one uneaten shrimp still plainly visible.

"The Shrimp Brothers card?" I offered, trying to get him back on the subject.

"I got so I couldn't stop. That's when they came to me." He looked away. "I took the card, ghu help me. I took the card. And then I was in their power."

"All right, JoHn, I want you to concentrate," I said in my calmest, softest voice. "Who gave you the card, John?" I persisted. "It was Andy Hooper, wasn't it?" If Victor Gonzalez was in trouble in Seattle, Andy Hooper had to be the prime suspect.

JoHn nodded, weeping openly now. "It was Hooper."

"What did he make you do, JoHn?"

"He said nobody would get hurt!" JoHn wailed. "He promised. And then Dave Wittman..." His uncontrollable sobbing interrupted his account.

"What did you do, JoHn?" I tried to sound stern, yet forgiving, like Robert Young on "Father Knows Best." I needed answers, and JoHn Hardin had them.

"I invited Dave Wittman to the Silvercon 4 kick-off party," he said.

"And..."

"He sent me a jar of powder, and he told me to pour it into Wittman's soda can."

"And then?"

"Dave fell right over," JoHn said. The obsessive references to the Firesign Theatre meant there was a lot of work awaiting JoHn in rehab before he was fully free of the Hooper Group Mind. "I didn't mean to kill him, Arnie!" he cried.

"He's not dead, JoHn."

"H-he's not?" For the first time, I saw the Hardin smile. I had lifted a terrible weight of guilt.

"It must not have been poison," I said. "Dave is already back to abnormal." I had an idea. "Do you have the jar, JoHn?"

"The jar?" he asked.

"The one with the powder."

"Yeah, there was too much of it to fit in the soda can, even after I poured half of it out."

"I want to see it."

"When I thought Dave died, I hid it," he admitted. "I can take you to it"

"Let's go, JoHn," I said as I helped him to his feet. "We've got no time to lose!"

After waiting in front of the shrimp dive for a taxi for about 30 minutes, I decided we'd better walk down Main Street to one of the downtown hotels. Getting JoHn, his reflexes disrupted by his shrimp sauce OD, the five blocks to Jack Gaughn's Plaza, wasn't easy, but it worked.

Abrupt shrimp deprivation had unsettled JoHn's stomach, so he took a front seat. I couldn't quite make out the address he whispered to the driver, but we were soon heading West on Sahara.

When we turned North on Valley View and then West on Washington, I thought I detected a familiar pattern. So I wasn't too surprised when we pulled up to Toner Hall.

I paid, and we walked up the driveway

"You hid it here?" I asked as he led me up the side path to the door which connected to the garage.

"I figured no one would find it among these old games," he said as we shifted cartons around in the dimly lit garage.

After some more rummaging, JoHn spotted the box he wanted. He dragged it clear and lifted the lid. He began pulling out copies of **Primal Rage**. I had to admit he'd picked a good place to cache the jar.

"Here it is," he announced triumphantly.

"We don't have time to play **Primal Rage** for the Sega Game Gear," I said. The words were hardly out of my mouth when John opened the game pack to reveal a little jar instead of the expected cartridge.

"I know you never play with the Game Gear," he explained as he handed me the bottle.

"Thanks JoHn," I said. "You came through in the clutch."

"You rescued me from shrimp servitude," he said. "It's the least I could do."

"There'll always be a place of honor for you in the Bureau of Fannish Detection," I assured him.

Karla showed up a few minutes later to take JoHn home to begun his recuperation.

I couldn't afford to sit around feeling good about my rescue mission. There was still an investigation to finish. Jar in hand, I returned to my *sanctum sanitarium* to examine its contents.

Chapter Four: Making the Case

"You're probably wondering why I called you all here

today?" I said to the Vegrants gathered in the living room of Toner Hall.

"To mention us, so we'll like your piece?" Joyce guessed.

"To give yourself an audience at the end of the case?" suggested Cathi Wilson.

"Because you haven't seen *Pulp Fiction* yet, so all you can parody is some damn drawing room mystery?" Bill proposed.

"Will I have to draw this for the cover?" Ross ventured.

Well, at least one of them understood the priorities. I hoped the cover would reflect my recent weight loss.

"I've cracked the case," I announced.

Heads swiveled in my direction.

I held up the jar which JoHn had retrieved. "The key is contained in this small jar!"

"Why can't you be like everyone else and use a key ring?" Joyce demanded.

"No, this is a metaphorical key," I corrected. "The key to the case I call 'Sleazy in Seattle.'"

"You have our attention," Tom Springer observed.

"It all started with that *X-Files* parody in **Apparatchik**. It said Dave Wittman was dead, and when I talked to Victor Gonzalez on the phone, he thought Wittman had experienced the ultimate gafiation.

"Yet all of us, who saw Dave after Silvercon, know that he is still alive. Andy Hooper wasn't acting like someone who'd just witnessed a murder, so I deduced that he knew better, knew that Dave Wittman only *seemed* to be dead.

"When this jar, and its contents came into my possession, I finally understood."

"What's in the jar?" Ken Forman asked.

"I analyzed the powder and found it was composed of pulverized pages from **Lans Lantern**." Sharp gasps of surprise. "Yes, the most potent soporific in the known fan world.

"And this jar was sent by Andy Hooper to one of his misguided shellfish satellites right here in Vegas!" More gasps. A *traif* traitor in our midst was caused for alarm. I would have to explain about JoHn later, when emotions had sufficiently cooled.

"Hooper's minion introduced the LL powder into

Wittman's drink with alarming results. Wittman fell down, seemingly lifeless, just as Victor Gonzalez drove up to where he was standing.

"It all came off just as the diabolical Hooper planned. Wittman dropped just as Victor Gonzalez pulled into Toner Hall. It didn't take Hooper much to convince the travel-dulled trufan than he had somehow caused Wittman's apparent demise."

"But what was the purpose?" Joyce wanted to know.

"Hooper promised to get Gonzalez out of town and protect him from Vegrant vengeance. That was the plan all along, to put the innocent, blameless Victor Gonzalez in a position in which he would have to do as the nefarious Hooper dictated."

"What did Andy want him to do?" Ken inquired.

"I overheard a conversation at Silvercon 4 that puzzled me at the time. Once I had the rest of the facts, it was as clear as a Ted White essay on the meaning of fandom. He wanted Andy to write a KTF review of **Wild Heirs!**"

"Not only would this have proven a damaging blow to the hotdog-centered Chicago science Fiction League, but such a fuggheaded misstep would have pushed Victor even further under Hooper's huge thumb. I'm not at liberty to describe the consequences that would've have resulted from *that*, but you can take it from me, the streets of Seattle would have run with blood!

"But you stopped him!" Tom said.

"Yes, I did." I had just gotten off the phone with Andy Hooper. He knew when he'd been bested and readily agreed to my terms of surrender. He would make Victor a co-editor of **Apparatchik** and let him write the review strictly the way he felt it. In return, I let him keep his Shrimp Brothers scam, and I had also promised to gloss over his role in the plot against Victor when I talked to my former associates.

"Wittman is alive, Victor is his own man again, and Andy Hooper will go back to writing esoteric interlineations in **Apparatchik**."

I bowed my head modestly as the applause built.

And the second BFD case was fanhistory.

As I basked in my friends' fulsome congratulations, I wondered what adventure would next come my way.