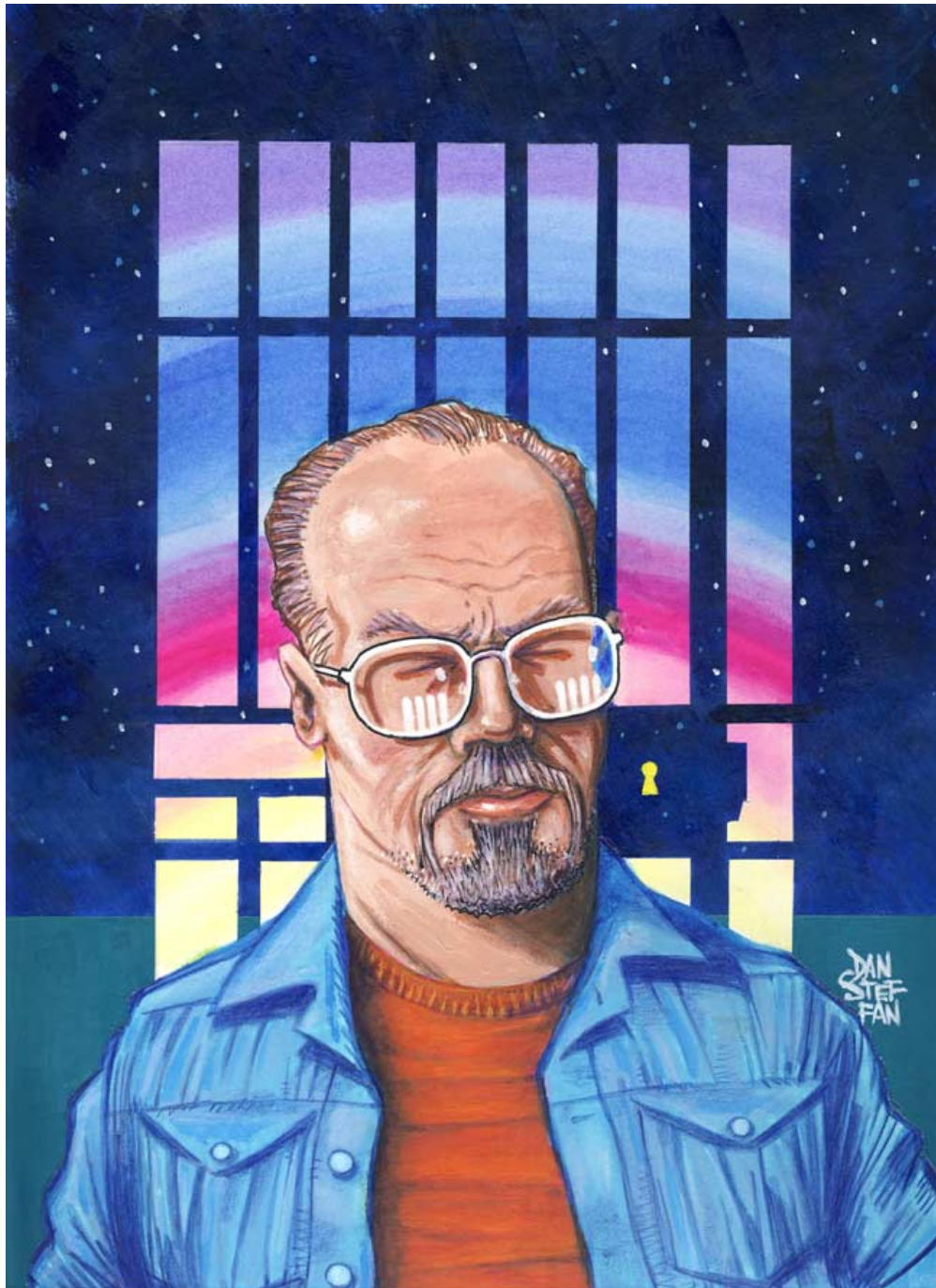




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Cover by Dan Steffan for *Letters from Jail*

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Back cover: “Non Standard Space,” by Ditmar [Martin James Ditmar Jensen]

Anybody who announces that he is a science fiction writer is announcing that he is in damn bad company financially and artistically.

--Kurt Vonnegut, *Who Killed Science Fiction?*

THIS ISSUE OF *eI* is for Ted White and Dan Steffan (backed up by Bill Burns, Victor Gonzalez, Robert Lichtman, and Peter Weston).

In the exclusive SF world, it is also in memory of Martin H. Greenberg.

#

As always, everything in this issue of *eI* beneath my byline is part of my in-progress rough-draft memoirs. As such, I would appreciate any corrections, revisions, extensions, anecdotes, photographs, jpegs, or what have you sent to me at earl@earlkemp.com and thank you in advance for all your help.

Bill Burns is *jefe* around here. If it wasn't for him, nothing would get done. He inspires activity. He deserves some really great rewards. It is a privilege and a pleasure to have him working with me to make *eI* whatever it is.

Other than Bill Burns, Dave Locke, and Robert Lichtman, these are the people who made this issue of *eI* possible: Lenny Bailes, John D. Berry, Victor Gonzalez, Lucy Huntzinger, Mark Kernes, Patrick and Teresa Nielsen Hayden, and Peter Weston, and Ted White.

ARTWORK: This issue of *eI* features original artwork by Ditmar and Dan Steffan, and recycled artwork by Dan Steffan and Ted White.

Things are going to get unimaginably worse, and they will never get better again.

--Kurt Vonnegut, 1970

Editorial: Going....

by Earl Kemp

IMPORTANT! READ THIS!

Approaching the end of a ten-year run of continuously publishing *eI*, I have arrived at a significant decision: It is time for me to retire, I am shutting down my involvement with *eI* as of the end of this year. There will be two more regularly scheduled issues of *eI* following this issue, *eI57*. My plans include the publishing of one additional issue, *eI60*, that will contain an Index to the total run and any other, if appropriate, clean-up material.

Please note that this is effectively Last Call! I suspect the year-end wrap-up issue, *eI59*, will be your last chance to condemn or praise the ezine.

If there is anything your conscience compels you to say, write it now and send it on to me. Think of it as a grand going away party, an issue celebrating ten years of earnest effort, of thousands of pages of significant text and many, many visuals...old photos of forgotten fans, cover scans of obscure and valuable publications, memories from fans long gone from the scene...a tribute to an SF life spent in search of more and better glories for the genre.

Or condemnation for a job not at all well done.

Your choice. Your last chance.

Sock it to me!

"It's hard work," he said. "It's not pleasant—just in solitude, writing. You can't have anybody around. It's a very lonesome business, and we're social animals."

-- phone interview with Kurt Vonnegut, *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, 4/01

Introduction: Lock-Down Letters

Recycled artwork by Ted White

by Earl Kemp

In February 2005, Corflu Titanium was held at the Civic Center Holiday Inn in San Francisco from the 25th through the 27th. The hotel was also hosting a Rastafarian music event of some sort going on simultaneously with the SF fanzine editor's convention; they were every where with their duded up hair, chain smoking (even in the elevators), and brain-time reliving familiar Bob Marley tunes.

Some of us Corfluers, thinking of escaping the machinations of the SMOFS who were trying to control everything, decided to slip away from the gaggle for a little quiet, peaceful conversation, better known as gossip...especially about the SMOFS we were trying to leave behind.

We, the non-SMOFS, were Victor Gonzalez, Peter Weston, Ted White, and little old me. We walked

around for a bit, moving away from the Holiday Inn, and finally settled on a neighborhood bar a couple of blocks away. It was reasonably quiet inside, in the middle of the afternoon, and not at all smoke-filled. It worked perfectly for us for a nice chunk of time and a couple (maybe more) of beers each.

And gossip we did, dredging up all the more interesting (sleazy) stuff about all our closest friends and SF contemporaries.

Somewhere, in the midst of all this yammering, Victor Gonzalez had a vision. "You know," he said, addressing all of us, "what would be a good idea?"

"No," the rest of us said, in unison, a beery chorus line, "what good idea?"

"I think you..." (he meant me) "...should gather up all of Ted's jail-house letters and publish them as a one-shot issue of your ezine, *eI*," Victor said.

Aghast!

What a thought!

"I like it," I said.

"I second the idea," Peter Weston said.

"It could be done," Ted White said.

...and the idea took off and began running on automatic.

#

As soon as Corflu Titanium was over and we all returned to our home bases, the concept was put into motion.

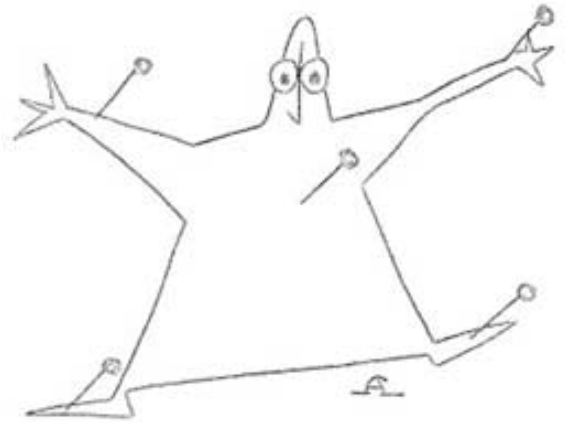
Bill Burns agreed as to how it could all take place. Robert Lichtman, doing his usual masterful best, assembled all of the pieces from all the various issues of fanzines in his collection, and we began OCRing them without delay of any sort.

#

FLASH FORWARD! Six years and six months later (my, how time does fly when you're having fun)... *Shazam!* Here it is, all together for the first time, partially cleaned up from some terrible OCRing, dressed in all new clothes by the one and only Dan Steffan, with a little new text to explain whatever the heck it is to the multitudes out there who have eagerly awaited through those six years and six months for something to appear that they might never spend the time to read,

#

I, myself, had done something very similar in the past. In *eI10* (October 2003), in ["I've Got Some Friends](#)



[Inside](#),” I published the letters that I had written from prison when I served three months and one day in 1976 after having been convicted of “conspiracy to mail obscene matter.”

I did trim my letters down a bit, deleting some of the personal family matters but leaving all the relevant prison stuff intact. Ted White’s letters are quite a bit more detailed than mine were, but he spent more time working on them than I did. Ted’s letters were published in a variety of fanzines produced by a number of fans. Because Ted included all of them in his Acknowledgments, I will not list them again here.

#

After the clean-up had been done on the OCRing, the illustrations completed, and the additional material written, it was time to close up the issue of *eI* and get the issue (*eI*57 August 2011) composed and posted on efanzines.com.

At that point I asked Ted for a photo of himself from 1986 to include somewhere inside the text.

Ted replied, “No, I don’t offhand have any such photos. I rarely keep photos of myself.”

Then he went on to say, “Okay, I have *one* possible photo, which I’ll attach, but it must be used *outside* (before or after) Dan’s package. It was taken in 1987 as a Polaroid, and subsequently used as a CD cover. It’s a shot of me with my band, Barbara & The Bohemians. Left to right: Matthew Moore (keyboards, drum machine, effects), ‘Data’ Dave Chandler (bass, drums, percussion, effects), and myself (keyboards, saxes, effects). Moore is mentioned as one of my visitors in jail.”



And that photo is included here “outside of Dan’s package” using Ted’s text as the photo caption. The picture is, unfortunately, very lacking in detail.

#

At the risk of repeating myself even yet again (apparently I do this rather frequently), after six years and six months, all of us are heaving a heavy sigh of relief at finally being able to post the issue, kick back, and relax a bit.

While Ted, in his Acknowledgments, credits all of the people who worked with him to produce all of these letters, I want to join him in thanking all of those same people for publishing Ted’s letters in the first place and, in some cases, actually helping with the production of this issue of *eI* as well.

Thank you again, one and all.

Writers get to treat their mental illnesses every day.
-- Kurt Vonnegut

Letters From Jail

Artwork by Dan Steffan

by Ted White

PROLOG

Big Drug Bust Made In Falls Church

By SANDY STONE
Sun Staff Writer

FALLS CHURCH — A 48-year-old Falls Church man was arrested Friday and charged with six separate drug offenses, breaking up what police called one of the largest and most diversified drug distribution operations ever uncovered in the city.

Theodore Edwin White, who told police he is an unemployed science fiction writer, was arrested at his home at 1014 N. Tuckahoe St. after police searched the house and seized more than \$5,000 in cash, and canisters, bags and boxes filled with suspected marijuana, LSD, cocaine, hashish, and psilocybin mushrooms.

"In Falls Church, this is the largest drug operation since 1978," said Investigator Philip G. Hannum, who headed the narcotics surveillance at White's home. "And it also had the most diversity of drug items that we've ever acquired."

'In Falls Church, this is the largest drug operation since 1978.'

— Philip G. Hannum

White, who is being held on a \$50,000 bond at the Fairfax County Adult Detention Center, was charged with possession of cocaine, possession of LSD with intent to distribute, possession of psilocybin mushrooms with intent to distribute, possession of marijuana with intent to distribute, and possession of hashish with intent to distribute.

He also was charged with distribution of marijuana after police observed a man purchase five bags of marijuana from White at his home Friday. The man, Paul W. Umstead, 22, also was arrested and charged with possession of marijuana. Two juvenile females, who were passengers in Umstead's car, were taken into custody by

police.

According to an affidavit filed Friday in Fairfax County Circuit Court, Umstead told police he had observed large quantities of pre-packaged one-quarter and one-half ounces of marijuana, four types of sensimilla, West Virginia Leaf, and LSD in White's home.

Following his arrest, White's 15-year-old daughter, who he lived with in the house, was placed with the county's child protective services, Hannum said. She is a student at George Mason High School.

The investigation of White began in May 1985 by the Falls Church police department after continued calls from White's neighbors, who

complained of constant visits to White's home at all hours of the day and night. Many of the cars had out-of-state tags, neighbors said, and most of the visitors were in their early 20s.

One neighbor provided police with about 25 vehicle tags, motorcycle tags, and cab company tags that had visited the White residence at all hours of the day.

The neighbor told police that he had observed young men "exit their vehicles, run into White's house, exit with brown paper bags in their hands whooping and yelling and get in their cars," according to the affidavit.

Investigator Hannum said the ongoing investigation could lead to additional arrests nationwide of drug dealers that White allegedly had business dealings with. "From mailing labels and letters that we got from his house, we will notify the appropriate authorities in many different parts of the country."

In early 1985, disgusted by the crappy quality of the marijuana then locally available, I decided to buy a higher quality in bulk (by the pound) and begin selling it (at a fair price) to my friends. This I did, quite successfully. Indeed, my business was so good that I expanded my range of products to include not only "boutique" buds but "shrooms" and acid – all drugs I personally approved of. But, it turned out, business was *too* good. The "traffic" to and from my house attracted attention. Two of my neighbors complained to the police, who began surveillance of me (from a white van parked up a side street) in May 1985.

Nearly a year later, on March 20, 1986, I answered the door early in the evening, to be confronted by two men in business suits, who pointed guns at me and told me they were cops and I was under arrest.

I was backed into my dining room and handcuffed while uniformed police poured into my house to begin searching it. After only a few minutes I was taken, coatless, outside to a police car. The temperature was around freezing.

I was held in the car for perhaps twenty minutes, then taken to the Falls Church police station in the basement of City Hall. There I was placed in one of two holding cells to while away the next six or eight hours, interrupted, but not often enough, for fingerprinting and an interview. The cell, typically, was a concrete-and-tile room big enough to contain a concrete shelf three feet wide and seven feet long, and a combination toilet and sink. I spent most of my time sitting or lying on the bare concrete shelf.

Around 3 AM, after a magistrate was brought in to sign six charges (all counts of drug possession) against me and set my bond at \$50,000, I was taken to the Fairfax County Adult Detention Center, and put in a holding cell which was effectively a drunk tank. It was only a Thursday, but the large cell held over twenty men.

The room was long and had narrow concrete bench seats running down each long wall, with a waist-high tiled-concrete partition across the far end, beyond which were a sink and a toilet. The front wall was just floor to ceiling bars. Men sat or sprawled on all the available bench space; more were lying on the floor amid cigarette butts and general filth. There was little conversation; most were dozing. I found a spot on the floor and tried to sleep.

At 5:30 in the morning they brought us “breakfast,” which was passed in through a slot in the barred door. Breakfast consisted of a tin cup of “coffee” (actually, I learned later, chicory – caffeine free), a half-pint carton of milk, an individual-size box of cereal (I got cornflakes) and a tin bowl at least one-quarter full of white sugar. I was able to eat relatively little before my gag reflex overcame my appetite.

The barred end of the cell faced the receiving desk, and people came and went noisily. It was hard to sleep in that cell, but there wasn’t much else to do. I was asked what I was in for, and when I said “possession with intent to distribute,” I was immediately asked what I’d had. “Oh, man, I wish I’d of known you when I was Out,” one man told me. And I was told some hash had been smuggled in and smoked earlier that night, before my arrival.

I spent only until the middle of the afternoon in that cell before I was released on bail (the deed to my house guaranteed my bond). I had been confined for less than twenty-four hours. (And that was counted as my first day of incarceration when my total time was calculated.) But in many ways that first brief period of confinement was worse than the three months I subsequently spent – the more so because I had not expected it, was not emotionally ready for it, and was both frightened and discomfited by it.

It does something to you when you’re chained together with twenty other men and taken into a courtroom in which your gallery is divided from the rest of the room by bulletproof glass. It tells you that the life you’ve lived and the attitude you had about yourself no longer apply; now you are in the charge of the state.

When I got home I had to wash my hair to rid myself of the cigarette-butt stink of that cell.

The period between my arrest and sentencing was one of considerable depression: It was hard to watch the news on TV when someone was shown being arrested, under arrest, or incarcerated – no matter what the crime was, I empathized with the experience the arrested person was undergoing. In those months I had a number of court appearances which culminated in my appearance for sentencing (I pleaded guilty) on September 5, 1986. I went directly from the courtroom to jail, without leaving the building. I did not pass Go.

Subsequently, while incarcerated, I wrote twenty-one letters from jail for publication for my friends. The first fourteen were published – by the Nielsen Haydens, Victor Gonzalez, Mark Kernes, Lucy Huntzinger, and John D. Berry – before my release on December 4th. The Nielsen Haydens and Tom Weber typed up the remaining seven (all were hand-written), but once I was out, the urgency to publish them diminished. Eventually Lenny Bailes volunteered to publish some of them, and I sent him #15, #16, and the first half of #17. I published the rest myself in August 1987, editing out material which no longer struck me as of much interest.

Their publication here is their first appearance as a single “volume,” collected together for the first time. In addition to the letters themselves, there is a Postscript, written in 1993, describing my exit from jail, and an Epilogue, written in 2011, which wraps up the last (I hope) threads of this story. There is some irony in that Epilogue.

Letters from Jail #1



September 6, 1986

“This man has a sixties mentality,” the female prosecutor said. And, unstated, “He ought to be punished for it.”

“You may think the drugs you sold were not harmful,” Judge Jennings said, “but they inevitably lead to worse ones.” What era mentality is that?

The judge pronounced the sentence: “Ten years of incarceration” – I stood very still – “with nine suspended.”

One year. Or less. How much less I do not yet know. Estimates I’ve heard range from 45 days to six months.

I was taken directly from the courtroom to a cell outside and was told by a deputy that I would serve my sentence there (here) at the Adult Detention Center, a jail in Fairfax City.

Then he left me in a concrete cell for an hour while my paperwork was processed.

From there I was taken downstairs via private passages to G(eneral) H(olding) 2 – the same cell I’d shared with around 20 drunks the night of my arrest in March. I sat on a concrete bench for about three hours with 18 others – some of whom would be processed with me in the days to come.

Later that afternoon I was taken to a receiving cell – R44 – where I spent Friday night, Saturday, and part of Sunday. It was hellish.

Imagine a concrete cell ten feet high, seven feet wide, and eight feet deep. A bench-shelf ran across the back wall, and – thank ghod – had a thin mattress on it. In the corner to the right of the door was a stainless steel commode/toilet. A fluorescent light overhead was lit 24 hours. The door had a barred window and a slot which opened to admit trays of “food.” (Pig swill is a better description.) With rare exceptions, when I was taken out for “classification,” etc., I spent my time in that windowless cell doing nothing, allowed nothing to read. I dozed much of that time, escaping reality in vague dreams, punctuated by noises from the corridor outside and cells down the way. It was air-conditioned, and uncomfortably cold. There was no blanket, no pillow. Eventually my body ached in every position.



Around 3 AM, Sunday morning, I was taken to a room where I surrendered all my clothes – my watch and everything in my pockets had already been taken – showered, and was issued my prison clothes, rather

old and threadbare.

From there I was taken to DT-2, a cell-block where I was given a cellroom off the dayroom. It was larger and nicer than R44 – in addition to a separate commode and toilet, it had a table and lights that dimmed at night, and I was issued two sheets (very thin) and a blanket (ratty and too short).

This began a less unpleasant existence. I didn't sleep much the rest of that night – I was slept out – but the surroundings were better.

Around 5 AM the lights came on, my cell door unlocked with a loud bang, and I rose to join eight others in the dayroom for breakfast. I gave my stainless-steel tray of swill to the others and returned to my bed. At 9 AM I had to leave my cell for the dayroom – my cell door was locked and my cell inaccessible until evening.

The others in the dayroom were four whites and four blacks. I recognized several from GH-2 – two had gone in with me that morning.

I found it easy to make friends with all of them, and soon began playing cards with them. (I played Spades with “spades.”) Jesse was a tall black with a motor-mouth – a line of jive and clever with cards. He christened me Theo. (I am officially Theodore White here.) Rick Washington was a soft-spoken black with whom I became friends. The whites stayed more by themselves that day. I found my accent thickening as I spent most of my time with the blacks.

The day (Sunday) passed quickly and enjoyably. We played cards, the food got better, and I found myself smiling to myself in bed that night. *This isn't that bad*, I thought to myself.

Half of us were transferred to permanent cells in the general population that evening – the rest of us to follow 24 hours later. During the “night,” three new ones were added.

Monday morning I rose for breakfast feeling pretty good. The day passed with card games – something I always enjoy – and conversation. I used the phone (collect outgoing calls only) to talk to my mother and my daughter. A minister came by and gave us pencils and paper.

Around 9 PM five of us were transferred “upstairs.” I was separated from my newfound friends and put in Cellblock A-5.

This is a smaller cellblock than DT-2. The dayroom is smaller, and there are only four separate cells off of it. (DT-2 had six.) There are seven of us here, and as the newest I sleep on the floor of the dayroom with two others. No privacy at all. This does not strike me as an improvement. But we have a TV set (13” B&W), cards, etc. Four blacks and three whites, all “older men” like me.

When I came in, everyone was watching Monday Night Football, so I haven't really “met” most of them yet. (Instead, I've written this.) I've yet to settle into the routine here, but I hope I'll move up to a cell eventually. I'll keep you posted.

Letters From Jail #2



September 11, 1986

It's Thursday, September 11, and there's another football game on TV. I dozed through the 6:00 news on Channel 4, and woke after the game had begun, the noise of the TV and the men here bringing me back to life. I've been reading a Louis L'Amour book, and the quasi-archaic prose will probably influence what I write.

I've had three days to get used to the routine here in A-5, and I seem to be adjusting to it. The days pass hazily, as if I'm still somewhat stoned – probably from residual fatigue.

The day starts around 5:00-5:30, when the individual cell doors unlock with loud bangs, and our breakfast arrives. Breakfast is usually milk, coffee (which I don't drink, since I want to go back to sleep again), and a tray of "food." Today the menu was French toast (highly regarded here, but weak on egg and swimming in cheap syrup), some cake, and scrapple. On better days it will include fruit (peaches, pineapple), but there hasn't been any the last couple of days. I can't force myself to eat much at that hour, and give most of it away. Then, it's back to sleep for another few hours, until lock-out. (On lock-out, I put my mattress in a cell, and sleeping is – for me – impossible.)

Sometime between 8:00 and 9:30 – it varies – there is a gym call, and most of the others head off for that. I skip gym. I always hated it in school, and feel no incentive to try it here...yet. It's quiet when the others are in gym. I can sleep, or – if gym is late and lock-out has already occurred – I can read the paper or watch TV (which is turned on – from outside – around 9:00-9:30). Charlie (also known as "Doc") also skips gym, for medical reasons, and we may just talk quietly. He's a black man, 40, and a recent grandfather. We have in common a love of animals, and I find him gentle and decent. He has a lot of problems, ranging from an incompetent – or worse – Public Defender to a urinary-tract problem that causes him much pain, and we talk about those.

[Charlie had problems with an enlarged prostate, which made urination difficult and painful for him. Now that I've been taking medication for mine for the last ten years I think of him occasionally and always with compassion.]

After gym, we get out the cards. Mostly we play "Dirty Hearts," for which the penalty for losing is 15 pushups (10 for the runner-up loser). My chest muscles ache from the more than 100 pushups I've done in the last two days, but I *am* getting into better shape.

Tuesday I mentioned the Jack of Diamonds Convention and they decided – without my urging it – to try it. But they dropped it Wednesday. Tuesday we also played Whist, which I prefer, but it's been solid Hearts, Wednesday and today. I think they're breaking me in.

Lunch interrupts the game. Lunch is soup, a sandwich, and "juice." The "juice" is weak – watered –Kool-

Aid. About half the time I skip the sandwich, but always eat the soup.

The game resumes, until dinner. Six of us play cards, so we rotate, with four in each game, the loser and runner-up loser sitting out. The TV is always on – *Perry Mason*, soap operas, *Hart to Hart* – but largely ignored except by Skip, who does not play cards. (I asked him why he didn't play, and he pointed out that as an almost-trusty he was outside, working, most of each day, anyway.)

Dinner is a tray of food (today: macaroni & cheese, fish, peas, two pieces of bread) plus a cup of salad (coleslaw today), a cup of dessert (usually pudding, sometimes Jell-O), and "juice" or coffee. The quality varies, but there is usually a lot. During and after dinner, the 5:00 news is on Channel 4.

I napped after dinner, because at 5:30 the cells unlock and I can take out my mattress. I yearn for a cell of my own – for the privacy, mostly, and a sense of a place of my own. I liked having one in DT-2, and miss it here, where – as the newest inmate – I have only a place on the floor of the dayroom. I shall have to await my turn – two others sleep out here.

A few minutes ago I took a break from writing this to participate in Cleanup. We sweep out and mop down the dayroom each evening around 10-11 PM.

#

The night I arrived in A-5, the first man to greet me was one of the men who also sleeps out here on the floor, a white man named Bob. He had a quality of compassion which I – new among an established group – needed. About ten years younger than I, he is a former clinical psychologist who has been for the past five years a hard-core junkie. He has a formidable intelligence, which is now reawakening – he cold-turkeyed in Receiving, a far more hellish experience than mine – and regards his time here as "R and R," a chance to put himself back in shape. We have long talks on a wide variety of subjects, and I have come to regard him as a genuine friend – someone I'd like to know Outside. He has a daughter 18 years old, and family circumstances which parallel mine (but his is a far more distinguished family – famous, in fact).

The second man to help me was Skip, who suggested I sign up for a class in problem-solving given by the psychiatrist, since attendance will both add variety to my days, and take five days a month off the time I serve. He not only suggested this, he provided a Request Form (a Request Form is required for nearly everything), and told me what to say on it. Skip looks like a young Charles Mingus, and is using his stay here to improve himself with a variety of classes, which he takes quite seriously. Skip also sleeps on the dayroom floor by choice, having passed up a chance for a cell.

The others here, whom I know less well, are Red Bob – the other white man, an alcoholic – B.B., and C.W.

My first night here in A-5 I decided I'd have to put in for a change of cellblock. B.B. has a radio and plays it in his cell much of the night. I couldn't sleep through it, and it bugged me. But now I've adjusted to it – I slept a little Tuesday night, and better last night – and I've decided this is not a bad group to be in.

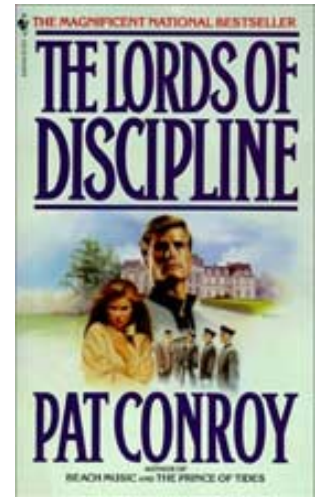
I've discussed my sentence with the others, and C.W. tells me that I'll have Mandatory Release in four months – January 5th. It could be sooner, depending on a variety of factors, like that class. I'll be eligible for parole in 2½ months – but the Parole Board meets only four times a year, and actually met this week, which means it will meet next in early December, so I couldn't get out before then.

It's not a *bad* life here. The food is sometimes cruddy – and the lack of vitamins leads to canker sores in the mouth (I have a couple now) – but the only thing I truly miss, the only true addiction I have, is Pepsi/RC. Even a Coke would taste real good now.

#

I picked up a copy of Pat Conroy's *The Lords of Discipline* down in DT-2, and brought it in with me. What an excellent book! I passed it on to Bob when I finished it yesterday. It will be hard to find anything as good here, although I'm told a library cart will come through eventually.

In the meantime, I've made arrangements to have books sent here. We're not allowed to have friends privately send books – or publications (no fanzines, please) – but publishers may. Last night I called the Nielsen Haydens – we are allowed unlimited collect phone calls – and had an enjoyable hour's conversation with Teresa, Tom, and more briefly with Patrick. I told them the situation with books, and they've promised to have several NYC publishers send Care packages. I'll leave them here for A-5's private library.



They gave me the phone numbers of some of my other friends, and I'll probably call some of them...but I hate to lay a collect long-distance call on someone who isn't expecting one. (P & T had told me previously to call.) So, if you'd like to have me call you collect, drop me a letter with your phone number and the best time to call. Teresa sounded quite pleased to hear my voice – thank you, Teresa, you lightened my day considerably – but I hesitate to call, say, Rob & Avedon collect, out of the blue (but I do have their number). [They lived then, as they do now, in London, England.]

Teresa told me they'd received word of my sentence from Dan Steffan (who, along with rich brown and Dan Joy, attended my sentencing in court Friday), and had passed the news along to Rob and Avedon, Sue Harris (Chuck's wife), and Phil Palmer. (In fact, both Phil Palmer and Pam Wells had called me Thursday night, while I was playing a final card game with the Steffans – thanks, people – and Rob and Avedon had called for a brief chat earlier, and I appreciated those calls.)

After I told Teresa the details of my stay here, we went on to fannish gossip, which I greatly enjoyed. We talked about the Con in Atlanta, Greg [Pickersgill]'s experiences on the West Coast, and suchlike. The hour (or more) went too quickly.

The ConFederation was a mixed experience for me. The Marriott Marquis is an incredible Worldcon hotel – it has a 42-story-tall atrium that looks, from almost any angle, like the actual embodiment of a 1939 Frank R. Paul cover painting, the design elegant beyond any I've seen before. And it was great to see Greg Pickersgill enjoying himself with a sort of belligerent bemusement at an American convention. It was also good to see Dave Bridges again, along with all the others whose company I value. (No point in dropping lots of names – I'd surely leave out too many....) But I grew awfully tired of having to explain what I knew and what I expected to occur on and after September 5th, over and over again to so many well-wishing people. And, gratifying as it was to have someone like Jerry Pournelle asking what he could do for me, it was also a bit embarrassing.

The highlight of the Con for me was the party Sunday night in Terry Carr's room. Tom Weber, Victor, and I had decided to trip that afternoon. We started in Victor's room at the Hyatt, listening to tapes of music he and Tom had made, and continuing with the Young Marble Giants and Eno, finishing up our time there with Eno's classic "Here Come the Warm Jets." It was then about 8:30, and we made the intrepid journey back to the Marriott and Terry's party. Terry had said he didn't want his party to run much past midnight, but when we all finally left it was 4:30 in the morning – an excellent party.

It was weird being "fannish" in such a chemical state – Tom and Victor were more observers, but I found myself trying to be a participant (albeit a semi-coherent one) in the room's conversation.

Topics of that conversation included the convention's assholes: principally Brian Earl Brown and Marty Cantor, with digressions for Eric Mayer and his wife [now his ex]. Brown had, on Wednesday night, given me *Sticky Quarters* #15, and even made a point of directing my attention to his asinine piece about the "Conspiracy of Silence" surrounding my bust. The poor fool was wholly undercut by the appearance – that same weekend – of the latest *File: 770*, in which Mike quoted my letter on that topic. Cantor had been running around being his usual dorkish self, and had wound up being confronted on one panel by an angry Teresa NH ("Don't patronize us, Marty!").

Unstated, lurking behind all this, was the Svengali of Puerto Rico, whose latest Trilby is Dave Locke, and their attack on Pickersgill's TAFF win, which they took in such poor grace. (Locke didn't have the guts to send me *Time and Again* #1 when that came out, but had nerved himself to send me #2. After skimming through it, I did something I'd never done with any fanzine before: I tore it up – and sent the pieces back to him by return mail. I wonder in what way he'll construe that....) When we finally allowed *Wiz* #13 (distributed to several hundred fans with bizarre timing) to surface as a topic, Terry told us that he, from his Olympian Height, was ignoring it – despite being extensively quoted out of context in it. I tried – without success – to convince him that it was time to get off the /p/o/t/ fence and publicly refute this crap. He felt he shouldn't "dignify" it with a response, claimed massive Behind The Scenes efforts in earlier days, and suggested we just "ignore" the individual behind it. I became heated, but no more articulate... *sigh*. I was unable to convince him that a public repudiation was not the same as a private communication to the source, nor that sticking one's head in the sand was hardly the most effective strategy.

Terry simply does not realize how little he participates in current-day fanzine fandom – and how little his restraint from comment will impact upon today's fandom. It's as if Dave Hartwell said "Let's ignore the bugger" – no one really expects him to do otherwise.

The party gained momentum when Gary Farber suggested we call room service for coffee, and Charlotte Proctor – in her official ConCom persona – amended that suggestion to include club sandwiches and pizza for us all. Thanks, Charlotte.

This has been Not A Con Report....

#

During the writing of this it became Friday, the 12th, and midday Friday I was moved without prior notice to another cellblock – A-7. We'd had lunch, stopped playing cards (I did around 50 more pushups...), and I was working on this letter, when a guard opened the cellblock door and said "White! Get your things!"

I said something like, "Huh? Um, yessir," and collected my stuff – moth-eaten blanket, two sheets, pillow, and paper bag of personal items – and shook hands all around. Bob was showering. "I'm in the phone book – look me up Outside," I called to him, and followed the guard out into the corridor, where I was taken two cellblocks down.

I think I was moved because A-7 had just lost three inmates – one was Going Home and two spoke only Spanish and were being moved to a Spanish-speaking cellblock. There are five of us here – I'm still out on the floor of the dayroom – but I'm alone out here, which gives me more privacy. More important, it's quieter here: the TV isn't turned up so loud that you have to shout over it (sound rebounds from the concrete-block walls), and the men are quieter. There are three whites, including me, and two blacks, and all are easy to get along with. And, for the moment at least, there are extra mattresses – I have two, stacked. I have more control here, too – I can choose what to watch on TV, if I wish. It's turned out to be an improvement. Of such small advantages life here is measured. (And, they play Spades here, rather than Hearts. I prefer Spades, and no pushups are involved....)

The guys here showed me a sheet issued in 1981 which indicates the time one serves for one's sentence. It's old, and I've put in a request for an up-to-date one, but, if this sheet still applies, I have even less time to serve than I'd expected: about *two* months! I could be out of here before Halloween, and certainly before Thanksgiving! Wow!

Suddenly it's starting to look like a piece of cake...relatively speaking. It's certainly not nearly as bad as I'd expected – in either the experience itself, or the amount of time involved. At the moment I'm happier about being here than I've previously been. That may change, of course – “You'll find there are good days and bad days,” Bob told me the other day – but I'm optimistic now,

And that's probably a good place to end this Letter. In future Letters I'll describe various aspects of life here which I haven't yet gone into, and continue the general chronicle of existence.

Letters From Jail #3



September 15, 1986

It was a little after 9 PM, Sunday the 14th of September, when I called the NH's for a little fannish gossip. Little did I realize. Tom Weber answered, but passed me over almost immediately to Teresa. Teresa's voice sounded funny. "I don't know how to tell you this, Ted," she said.

"Good news or bad news?" I asked, certain from the tone of her voice which it was.

"Bad news," she answered, confirming my impression. "Jerry Jacks is dead."

I heard her, but I barely comprehended what she said.

"He died Friday," she said.

"How?"

She told me what she knew, and told me there was a get-together going on right then at the Lupoffs' for Jerry's friends. We were still talking about that when a guard called me from my cellblock door. "White! You got a visitor."

I'd had several visits that weekend already. Michael Nally (a close friend, owner of Hole in the Wall Books in Falls Church, and my current employer-of-record) had been by early Saturday afternoon, followed later that afternoon by my business partner, Matthew Moore, and my daughter. Kit had returned Sunday afternoon with my mother. I wasn't expecting any evening visits Sunday, but now I could guess who it might be.

I was right: It was Dan Steffan, come to tell me the same news. "I wanted you to hear it from someone face-to-face," he said.

"I called the NHs," I told him. "They could hardly keep it from me."

He nodded. We talked about what was known. "I talked to Grant (Canfield)," Dan said. "He and Paul Moslander found the body, after they got the landlady to let them in. They were going to take him to the hospital that morning." Jerry had died suddenly, quickly, sitting in a chair at bedside, after stripping the sheets from his bed.

#

I thought about how Jerry had sounded, the last time I'd talked to him, only a couple of weeks earlier.

He'd down-played his own health problems, which had been recurring over the previous months. He was more concerned about my legal problems and enthusiastic about his plans to start a small videodisc company.

I thought about the way I'd used his flat as a home base, all the times I'd been in San Francisco: The pleasant mornings in his all-white front room, bay windows overlooking Carl Street and the passing trolley cars, listening to compact-discs on his stereo and smoking companionably. I remembered the restaurants – his favorites – he took me to, the trips to the library for videotapes, to Tower Records for CDs; his love of San Francisco, the buildings he delighted in pointing out as we walked or rode past – his enjoyment of the city and his pleasure in communicating it. I recalled a dinner he'd cooked for Grant, the Lupoffs, and myself, and our care in selecting the wine that afternoon.

When I think of San Francisco, I think of Jerry Jacks.

When I think of Jerry Jacks, I think of the friendship, the comradeship, the love we shared. It's very hard to realize he's gone.

When I got back to my cellblock, I called the Lupoffs. I talked to Dick, to Grant, and to Liz. They filled in missing details. An autopsy will be performed, but the feeling seems to be that it was AIDS. The first fan, the first close friend of mine, to be claimed by that disease.

"He didn't want to be put in a hospital and stuck with tubes and all that," Grant said.

"He lived the way he wanted to live, right up to the end," Dick said.

He lived the way he wanted to live – but what a shame it was cut so short. How glad I am that he made it to Corflu – the last time I saw him.

"He changed in appearance the last few weeks," Dick said, "losing a lot of weight in his face, his arms, and his legs. I think he knew."

"He refused to be tested for AIDS," Grant said, "and he wouldn't see a doctor. I think he knew what it was – he just wanted to go on living at home as long as he could."

"At least it was fast. It didn't drag out over months or years," I said.

"Well," Dick said, "he had all those recurring things – shingles, herpes on his face...."

"I thought they were just separate things," I said.

"He didn't have much strength – he tired easily," Dick said, talking about his last few weeks. "But the important thing is that when he went, he went quickly. He may not have known at all. He just sat down and died."

I hope so. I hope his suffering was minimal. He deserved that, at least.

Good-bye, Jerry. You were a good and valued friend.

#

We have two new cellmates.

Mike is a biker, in for parole violation and suffering a broken collarbone. “The fucking doctor wanted to put on an Ace bandage – can you dig *that?*” He has his left arm in a sling. He is in constant pain, his left shoulder as red as it would be from a severe sunburn. He is receiving minimal medication – no antibiotics, minor painkillers. He plays cards – very well – and only occasionally says, “Man, this really burns!”

Like Charlie in A-5, he is not getting proper medical attention.

Vitamin supplements are not available here either. Everyone farts a lot. It reminds you that this is a jail – we’re here to be punished.

Steve is a Virginia Power employee – in here until his bond, \$1,000, comes through. He expects to go home today. I hope so – it’s crowded in here now with three of us on the floor. (My only advantage is my relative seniority.)

Lonny, in Cell D, hopes to leave today – he’s in court right now – and I hope he does. I want his cell. I want to sleep in a room of my own. Some nights the guards – officially they are Sheriff’s Deputies – come in every half hour, singing and joking, and making sustained sleep impossible. Two nights ago one stole cookies – purchased from the commissary and legally mine – from my paper bag. He missed the apple that was under my clean underwear. Although a few guards are decent guys, the majority are assholes – far worse in the way they treat us than our fellow inmates are. I suspect the job selects for this kind of person.

When I moved into A-7 the inmates already here were:

Phil – a white man, Vietnam vet, with blackouts, who assaulted someone and can’t remember it. He’s a country boy, reads his Bible regularly, and has a friendly twinkle in his eye. We get along very well.

Wayne Treon – the other white man – weighs over 300 pounds, and is here for writing bad checks. I enjoy him. We occasionally have long talks.

Jackson – a family man (he calls home every day) is very quiet, has a good sense of humor.

Lonny – born in Louisiana, grew up in Chicago, boxed as a welter-weight and is still trim. He has a voice uncannily like Muhammad Ali’s and a sleepy smile. He wouldn’t play cards yesterday: “It’s bad luck the day before Court, man.”

While it was just the five of us, we had a quiet, friendly cellblock. Mike’s a hardcase – and unlike the rest of us, not a first-timer (or, as Phil puts it, a “last-timer” – “I’m never coming back here, man.”) – but he gets along well with the rest of us. There’s a camaraderie that functions among most inmates in here. We respect each other, treat each other decently. I hadn’t expected that, but it’s logical: we’re all in this together, and it’s a lot easier to get along with each other than not to. Blacks and whites, no matter what their prejudices Outside, have everything in common in here.

The only example of prejudice I’ve encountered here was in A-5, from C.W. He’d misdealt a hand of Hearts, and when all but the last trick had been played, I was short a card – out of cards, in fact.

“You a cheater, man,” he said, his voice bristling with resentment. (I’d taken the Queen of Spades and it had been a bad hand for me.)

“Hey, man, don’t call me that,” I said softly. “You hurt my *feelings*.”

“You white, ain’t you?” he responded. “You *cheat*.”

Doc (Charlie) intervened. “You know how we say, ‘You in here, you a cheater – we all cheaters in here.’”

“Yeah,” C.W. said, “we all cheaters in here, you a cheater, white boy.” But the situation had been defused. And two hands later C.W. reneged. B.B. leaned over to me: “You see how it is, man calls you a cheater because that’s what *he* is.” C.W. had thrown down his cards and left the game.

A-5 was definitely rougher than A-7 – despite which, I got along there.

I’ve been here eleven days. About 60 to go...that’s not too many.

LETTERS FROM JAIL #4



September 18, 1986

For several days life in A-7 was close to ideal – for jail, anyway. Then, in one day, two new inmates were assigned to our cellblock. Mike, an aging biker with a broken collarbone, came in Sunday afternoon. He'd suffered his injury running from the police – he'd jumped a guardrail and fallen over a 30-foot drop. The "doctor" here wanted to put an Ace bandage on him – an incompetent treatment. Instead, he insisted on a sling for his left arm, to ease the pressure on the break. But he's received no other treatment; and his left shoulder has been an inflamed angry red. (The medical treatment here – or lack thereof – is truly criminal.) Mike claims extensive brain damage from the excessive use of many drugs, but reveals in conversation and card playing a sharp mind. I can get along with him – he responds readily to friendly acts.

But Steve is another story. He was put in here Sunday night, after lock-in, and was relatively quiet the first day, but has developed, over the following week, into a pushy, insensitive asshole. He commandeers the TV, tries to change the rules of the card games, and shoots his mouth off with profound ignorance, insulting us all with his bullshit. He told us Monday that he'd be out that evening – "All I gotta do is make bond, man, and I got the money" – but he's still here at the end of the week. Yesterday, he was going to be out "in two hours, man – I got my man downstairs right now," but that too was a false alarm. Each day he gets harder to take, and we've decided that if he's still here by next Monday we'll "write him out" by requesting he be reassigned to another cellblock.

The five of us who were here before get along well, and like each other. The other four can retreat to their individual cells after dinner (5:00-5:30) and escape, but I'm stuck out here on the floor. I miss the quiet of the first few days here in A-7 – and so do they.

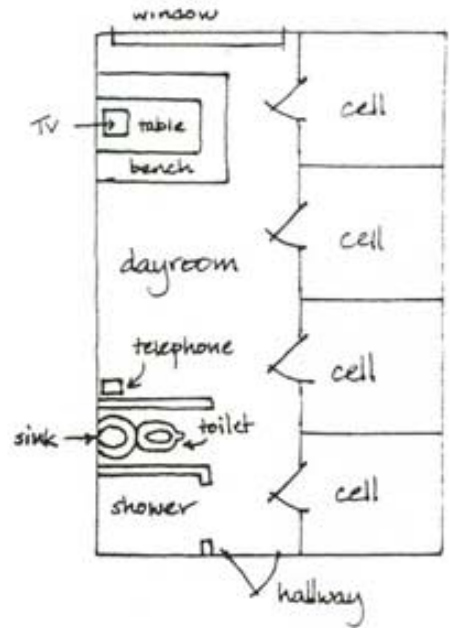
This Thursday I attended my first meeting of the Psychologist's Group. This was represented to me as "a class in problem-solving," which it is, but it's really a group-therapy group. The hour passed quickly and rewardingly. The psychologist is a decent guy, and several of the guys (there are six of us) are obviously intelligent. B.B. and Red Bob from A-5 are in the group, and it was good to see them again.

I've received regular mail – averaging a letter a day – and books have arrived in considerable quantity. The rule is that one can receive books and magazines only from their publishers. I relayed this through the Nielsen Haydens, and Gary Farber sent 59 (!) books from Avon. They arrived in a big box and a Jiffy bag. The deputy in the property department looked up the regulation and determined that I could have only five at a time. I'd have to check in the first five when I was ready for the second five, and so on.

But today ten hardcover books sent by Moshe Feder from Doubleday arrived (in two batches), and the deputy on duty this time let me take all of them back to the cellblock. Thanks to both of you – I think I've already got enough to read, and I'm told there's still more on the way....

#

Have I described what these cellblocks are like? The sketch [see diagram] gives you a rough idea. The room is all concrete blocks, with a half-wall separating the combination toilet/sink from the rest of the dayroom. (Individual cells have their own toilet/sinks as well.) The table and its surrounding bench are steel, bolted to the wall and floor. The doors – to both the cells and the hallway – can be locked and unlocked by either keys or an electric control in the hall. The cellblocks are intended for four inmates each, but typically have as many as seven and in some cases *ten* occupants. Because there are no sound-deadening materials, it can get noisy easily. The TV becomes shrill, its sound bouncing from wall to wall, and we must raise our voices to be heard. Telephone conversation is then difficult. This has become much worse since Steve arrived. My mattress goes along the wall opposite the cell doors, my head near the phone. My mattress is a narrow gray-vinyl-covered pad, maybe two inches thick. My pillow is a pillow-shaped pad, of similar construction. I have two sheets, a pillowcase, and a thin gray blanket. When it's cold – which it has been (the air-conditioning is too strong) – I sleep with all my clothes on.



Tonight Phil Funk and I ended up in Wayne Treon's cell, swapping stories until 1 AM (lock-in was late), just to get away from Asshole Steve, who watched TV by himself (the others had crashed already). It was cozy and pleasant in Wayne's cell. We talked about cars, car accidents, truck (tractor-trailer) driving, and, eventually, Vietnam. Phil was a gunner there, and, in his words, "It like to fucked up my nerves real bad." He told us some truly amazing stories – and made very real for me the incredible experience he'd undergone. "After 'Nam," he said, "this place is a piece of cake." I believe him.

These are guys I find easy to like. What I find less easy to like is the constant coarseness of attitude this jail (and all prisons) breeds in men. TV is watched mainly to comment on the "pussy" being viewed. Yesterday a half-dozen female inmates had their hair cut in the barbershop directly across the hall from our door. None was really attractive, but we piled up against our door to watch them...myself included. The lack of normal social interaction with women makes even something like this a strange treat. We smiled, winked, made lewd comments, and were inordinately pleased when one of the women smiled or winked back. "Look – she's licking her lips!" "Oh, man, would I like some of that!"

A popular TV show in here is *The New Dating Game* – the "bachelorettes" are dissected and rated by their anatomical attributes. Jerks like Steve ignore their personalities, although others may comment, "What an airhead!" (Steve will say, "Thass all right – I take her anyway.") One joins in, in order not to seem different – I wonder if we're all trying to live up to some commonly perceived peer attitude. (But, when the 5:00 news tonight reported a rape in which a woman's screams were heard but ignored, several men, Steve in the main, opined that, "Thass how you gotta treat them bitches." The black men in here seem to genuinely hate women – perhaps a result of growing up in female-dominated families; I don't know.)

What I fear in myself is the ease with which I can adapt to prison life. My accent has appreciably thickened. Among whites I talk "country" and among blacks I talk black...there are only subtle differences between the two. I have never before sounded so "Southern." Attitudes are closely linked with patterns of speech. I feel myself coarsening. Thank ghod for the occasional visits, and the phone calls, in which I can return to former contexts.

I've been here for two weeks now. I have roughly eight to go. That seems – right now – easy enough. But what I fear is change: new people with whom to deal.

#

I was really shaken up when they moved me from A-5 to A-7 – even though I soon realized this was a better group. When the group here was expanded, I resented the change. (That's separate from resenting Steve.) Bob, in A-5, told me, "The dynamics really changed when you moved in here, Ted." And they keep on changing.

Next Monday – the 22nd – more change may occur. A new wing is to be opened in the jail. How this will affect us, we don't know. Will I be moved again? Will others here be moved? I crave stability, with companionable cellmates. But, as one guard pointed out to us when someone complained about something, "This is a *jail*, man!" I guess it's all part of the punishment.

#

Life for my daughter has had its ups and downs. Matthew Moore – my business partner in the small record company we own, and a fellow member of Barbara & the Bohemians – was to move into my house, but had a dispute with Kit, and did not. Instead, she lived alone, with frequent visits from my mother. It seemed viable for 2½ months, and she said she was enjoying it. At sixteen, she has learned to be responsible for herself, after all. But it reached her school counselor that she was living alone, and that person threatened to have her placed in a foster home, so now she's staying with a family in Falls Church which had offered her a place to stay if she needed it. I have come to resent more and more the officiousness of social workers and school authorities who treat nearly adult teenagers as irresponsible children, and who follow inflexible rules.

Then Kit's mother, my ex-wife Robin, wrote my mother an incredibly condescending letter in which she said I was, in effect, a bad father, a bad influence on Kit, and liable to expose her to sexual abuse from my irresponsible friends, and she requested custody of "her daughter," for whom she had always cared so much...blah, blah, blah....

My mother wrote her a cool reply, and let Kit have her mother's letter. The letter pissed Kit off and, when she read it to me on the phone, pissed me off too. To properly appreciate why, you have to know that Robin abandoned Kit to me when Kit was only three, and has rarely been of any help in raising her since then (she presently lives in Arizona).

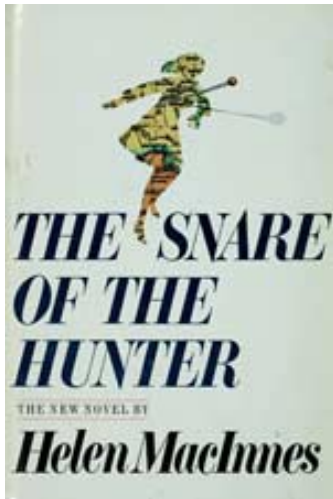
"I love her, because she's my mother," Kit says, "but I don't *like* her." Robin has, over the past fifteen years, lost most of those qualities I once valued in her and loved her for, and has become the quintessential bitch – self-obsessed, ego-driven, and arrogantly condescending. I sometimes wonder if this was inevitable – in which case, I'm glad we split up, much as it hurt at the time – or if it's the product of her experiences since leaving me. Surely the fact that she walked out on us is an indication of the tendencies that have developed in her since then, but I was stunned by the attitudes implicitly expressed in her letter. Needless to say, she'll not gain custody of Kit now – nor does Kit want her to.

#

I read two Helen MacInnes books which were in the jail library: *The Snare of the Hunter* and *While We Still Live*. I hadn't read her before, but I found myself enjoying both books quite a bit, and I'll have to try some of her others. The sense of place – Europe – in both books was good, and *While We Still Live* (first published in 1944) has a shattering insider's description of the Nazi invasion of Poland. It's interesting to contrast the situations described in that book with life here in jail – and it makes life here seem pleasant in contrast.

I haven't had much purely fannish news since coming here – and there hasn't been much time for any, I guess. So I continue to think back to Atlanta, and the Worldcon. The fannish sub-convention seemed smaller than usual, for reasons I haven't fully pinned down.

The fan-lounge was nowhere nearly as successful as a place to hang out and meet people as was the fan-lounge at LACon, despite the friendly proprietary presence of Linda Blanchard and Dave Bridges. The cash bar seemed grossly underused (the hotel staff members running it looked bored by the lack of business), and all too often most of the people hanging out there were costumed types or media fen poring over Doctor Who fanzines. I asked several people why they weren't in the fan-lounge more and was told that in their cases it was because it was a no-smoking area. (The explanation for this was that it adjoined the fanzine sales room, where Marty Cantor – contrary to previous announcement – had set up shop, and Marty had of course declared that room a smoking area. I have never smelled such a foul-smelling pipe-tobacco as that which Cantor uses. I hear it's his own special blend. That figures....)



In any case, the con seemed to lack much focus – there was really no central meeting spot, lounges being scattered everywhere in the two hotels. There wasn't even just one bar in which to congregate – each hotel had several. “The Hub” in the Marriott had a free-food bar open in the evenings, which Frank Lunney and Catherine Jackson discovered Thursday. Sandy Cohen and I tried it one night, and enjoyed it, but never made it back again.

Monday evening several of us tried the Marriott's seafood restaurant, which turned out to be quite good. Victor Gonzalez treated me to an excellent meal which climaxed with Blackened Swordfish – thanks again, Victor.

Several nights we ended up at the Bridge Publications parties on the 40th floor of the Marriott. I felt strange taking advantage of the hospitality of Scientologists (whom I despise as lying fascists), so I did not avail myself of

either the food or drinks they offered – but it was a good suite for party conversation. Terry's room, Sunday night, was much better, however.

#

Today (Saturday, the 19th) I received a copy of the Nielsen Haydens' letter, along with my Jail Letter #1, and I see there are some points I should clear up.

Sentence time: Basically, one serves one-sixth of the State Time one receives (more, if it's County Time). I have seen several computations now, and, with “Good Time” (time off for good behavior) figured in, it appears my one-year sentence translates into about ten weeks, or two months and thirteen days. In addition, I can shave off another five days every four weeks I attend a class – any class – but two classes will not make it ten days, so there's no advantage in taking more than one class. My class in Problem Solving will thus take off *at least* five days, and, if I have time to complete the second four weeks, ten days. So I have, as of now, about eight weeks to go. I can live with that.

Visitation: I am allowed six visitors, each of whom can visit only once a week. I filled out a card, listing six visitors – my mother, my daughter, Michael Nally, his wife Edie, Matthew Moore, and Dan Steffan. When I did that I thought I'd be moved downstate, and Edie had promised Kit she'd bring her for a visit. As it turns out I'll stay here, and Edie, who has two small children, won't need to bring Kit and would have a hard time getting here herself. Michael, who visits me Saturdays, says it's okay to take Edie off the list, so I can add Lynn Steffan. There's no real point in anyone else bothering.

Size: I think Teresa misunderstood me. The jail is not particularly small. There are over 300 inmates here.

We are situated on at least four floors. GH-1 and 2, the many Receiving cells, and DT-1 and 2 are all on the lowest level. I am now one floor up on the A-level. I'm not sure how many cellblocks there are here on A, but I know of at least thirteen. Above us are the B and C levels. The B-level cellblocks are slightly larger, having five individual cells each of which houses two inmates. B-cells lack individual toilets. The B-level is for younger inmates. The C-level I know least about, except that it's for the true badasses, and to be avoided.

In addition to cellblocks, each level has other areas as well. Visiting, Property, the barbershop, and the psychologist's office are all on A-level. The classrooms and library and gym are on the B-level. I've never been up to C-level.

Teresa's confusion arose from thinking that *one* cellblock is all the jail has. As should be obvious from the foregoing, there are *many* cellblocks here, *each* of which has a dayroom and four or five individual cells. One stays in one's own cellblock except when seeing a visitor, receiving property, attending a class, or going to the gym. I hope this clarifies things.

LETTERS from JAIL #5



September 22, 1986

“White!”

I look up from a card game, or maybe the book I’m reading. “Here!”

The door had already buzzed open; the guard – a sheriff’s deputy, actually – looks at me for a moment. “Put your shoes on,” he says.

I shuck off the “shower shoes” – white rubberoid flip-flops – and pull on the tennis shoes I was issued with my first set of prison clothes. The right shoe is missing its insole. The shoes close with Velcro straps, badly worn. I hike up my pants. They are too large at the waist, and I am not allowed a belt. The pants are dark blue, unhemmed at the cuffs, and worn quite thin. I exchange dirty pants and shirts on Sundays and Wednesdays for clean ones. Each time it’s a gamble. Each time I say “thirty-six,” and sometimes they fit. One time I was issued jeans that said “38” inside the waistband and had no pockets. That was after I’d rejected two 36s that were so tight at the waist that I couldn’t even zip up the flies. My shirt won’t button shut – there’s a two-inch gap. But it’s long-sleeved. Last time I had to settle for short-sleeved in order to get one I could button. There *are* long-sleeved shirts that fit me, but I usually have to try three or four to find one. The Trusty in the hall, shoving shirts in through the slot in the door, was too impatient this time. The shirts are light blue, with missing insignias over the pockets. From their shapes you can see that some said “Ford” and others “Chrysler”. The shirts are also worn and old, and come, like the pants, from a commercial work-clothes service.

The deputy waits impatiently while I get ready, and lets me into the hall. I turn left and walk about 20 feet to where another hallway branches off to the right. I walk perhaps 30 feet down this hall, almost to the glassed door that signals its end, then turn left into a narrower corridor. This leads a short distance and turns right. Ahead is some new construction – a block wall on the right side that is yet unpainted. At the end is a locked door. On the left (older) wall of this final stretch of corridor is a window, closed with a slatted metal roll-down barrier. To the left of this window is a doorbell-type button. This is Property, and when the window is open one can see into the property room beyond.

Opposite the Property window is a break in the corridor for an incongruously placed toilet, sink, and shower. One stops here and waits, and as perhaps a dozen men gather, some use the toilet. There is no privacy, but we are all used to that.

We wait, and then the door opens. An inmate comes through it and walks between the waiting men, who lean against both walls of the corridor, leaving only a narrow passageway. The door opens again, and one or more others come through. Each time the heavy door slams shut.

Then the door opens again, and a guard blocks it open. He consults a list, then calls off names. “Here,”

“Yeah,” “Uh-huh,” we answer in turn. He disappears again, and more inmates come through the door, their visits over. Then the guard reappears, and again reads off the names. This time there is a number appended to each name. “White, eleven,” he says, and this time we file in turn through the door.

On the other side of the door is another corridor, much shorter, and perpendicular to the one we’ve just exited. We turn left, and, at the end a few feet away, right. Before us are the visitation booths. It’s basically a long and relatively narrow room divided into 26 separate booths by narrow divider walls, thirteen on each side. They are numbered, and I find Number 11. Like the others, it is about four feet wide, with a swivel chair bolted to the floor, a counter, and, above that counter, a glass window. A telephone handset hangs on the divider-wall on the left. Beyond the glass is a mirror image of my booth, with the telephone on the right. One or two chairs sit there.

My visitor pulls up his or her chair and picks up the telephone. I pick up mine. Not all work very well – there may be static, or a bad connection. Sometimes you can hear others’ conversations faintly. It’s safe to assume that a guard can eavesdrop, if he wishes.

Another inmate’s girlfriend raised her blouse and revealed her breasts to her guy through the window. She was arrested on the spot.

If we’re lucky, we get 20 minutes. Often, on Sundays, it’s less, due to the large number of visitors. When a visit is over, we return through the corridors, running the gauntlet of inmates waiting their turn, finding our way back to our cellblocks and awaiting a deputy to unlock our cellblock doors.

It’s at once satisfying and frustrating. “It’s a *jail*, man.”

#

Around 4:15 AM the cellblock door buzzes open and the door for “C” cell unlocks with a bang. “Treon!” a deputy shouts. “Time for yer fix!”

Wayne Treon is heard groaning awake, dressing, pulling on his shoes. “Let’s go,” the deputy shouts impatiently. Mumbling to himself and blinking in the bright light of the dayroom, Wayne pushes his 300+ pounds out through the cellblock door, off for his insulin shot. This almost always awakens me, since I sleep on the dayroom floor. But as often as not I sleep through his return, a few minutes later.

About 4:45 AM the little door in the cellblock door – 18 inches wide and 4 inches high – slams down into its horizontal position, projecting out into the hallway and becoming a miniature shelf. Sometimes an obnoxious guard will also bang several times on the door, making a loud noise and yelling, redundantly, “Breakfast, breakfast, breakfast!” Noise is amplified by the painted bare concrete walls.

From outside comes the sound of dishes clattering. Sometimes we wait ten minutes or more and sometimes there is no wait at all before a big metal cabinet – bigger than a refrigerator, and taller, with two vertical doors and an electrical cord dangling uselessly – rolls up. A door is opened; inside, metal trays sit in racks. One by one, they are pushed through the door-slot. I pull each one out and pass it on to Phil Funk, who passes or carries them on – three to the table, one to the floor for Mike Pendleton (who has a broken collarbone), and the rest to be carried back into the individual cells, which have all unlocked with loud bangs. After the trays of food come the metal cups of “coffee,” filled from a big plastic tub dipped into a huge metal pot by a Trusty who pours sloppily and fills the cups too full. They spill on the floor as we carry them. Last come the little cartons of milk. One of the Trusties tells Wayne, “Now, don’t eat the jelly on your tray,” in lecturing tones – he knows Wayne is a diabetic, and not much else.

The metal trays have compartments. Sometimes these compartments hold a little jelly and two slices of

buttered toast. Sometimes there is meat – sausage, scrapple, fried tongue, or fried bologna – or scrambled eggs. Once in a while there will be two hard-boiled eggs (which can be saved and eaten later as a snack). Occasionally there will be a bowl – metal or green plastic – a quarter-full of white sugar, with a box of cereal. Most of the time there is fruit of some kind on the tray – canned peaches, sliced pineapple, melon balls, or sections of orange and grapefruit. There may also be – instead of eggs or cereal – two pieces of French toast or two pancakes, swimming in cheap syrup. I always eat the fruit, and the toast with jelly, and drink the milk. I'll eat the sausage, if there is any, but I avoid the rest, including the coffee, trading it if possible for more fruit.

When we're finished we stack the trays, bowls, and cups by the door on the floor. Unwanted food goes in the toilet.

Then it's back to bed for another three or four hours of sleep. I'm a light sleeper, but I'm learning to sleep through more and more noise. I often sleep through the gym call – which can come as early as 6:30, or as late as 8:30 – and today I slept through one inmate's summons for court.

Between 8:30 and 9:30, but usually around 9 AM, a guard pokes his head in and shouts, "Wake up, lock-out!" He may open each cell and repeat this admonition, and while most of the deputies are relatively good-humored about it, one was a real prick. Asshole Steve gave him some lip and he gave us virtually no time before closing the cells. This didn't hurt me, but it caught several of the others off guard and their individual cells were locked before they'd had the chance to retrieve books, cigarettes, personal laundry (to be done that day), etc. Normally we have about ten minutes between the warning and actual lock-out. In that interval I get up and fold my mattress and bedding in half and wait until Phil is finished in his cell. Then I move my mattress into his cell, to be locked in. We're allowed to keep out only our towels and pillows (sans pillowcases). We use the pillows to sit on, on the cold metal benches. (There are also four chairs which are brought out of the individual cells.)

At lock-out the TV is turned on (from outside), and the other overhead light, along with the shower light and light over the toilet is turned on. We usually watch *Love Connection*, and then the various morning shows – often movies. The Fairfax *Journal* is delivered to each cell on weekdays, and I read that. The paper is almost wholly lacking in journalistic values (or virtues), smugly self-congratulatory, and carries very little news. Its half-page of comics has only one worth reading – "Steve Canyon" – and *that* hasn't been very good lately.

Lunch comes between 11 and 11:30. It consists of either a sandwich and a bowl of soup, or two sandwiches – one of which is always cheese – plus a metal cup of "juice" (watered and off-flavored Kool-Aid). Usually I prefer the soup and give away my sandwich (or save it for later), but yesterday the soup was lima bean, and tasted of tin or soap or something. No one could eat it – the whole cellblock dumped their soup in the toilet. (The best was chili – almost really good....)

The afternoon is passed with more TV (*The New Dating Game* is a winner here, as is *The Young and the Restless* and afternoon movies) and cards. Today Phil and I won three games of Spades, and right now Steve, Mike, Jackson, and Wayne are playing Bid Whist, which I learned, but don't enjoy that much. (Truthfully, I don't like playing cards with Steve anyway – he's aggressively nasty, he lies about what he supposedly bid, and probably cheats. When he's in the game it loses its friendliness.) I read or write when not playing cards, rarely watching the TV more than casually. (When something is on that I want to watch either Steve or Mike get noisy or they change the channel, so I mostly ignore the TV.)

Supper is served between 4:30 and 5:30, and is presaged by Wayne's second insulin shot. Like breakfast, supper comes on metal trays, served from the big rolling, heated, metal cabinet.

"Where's my diabetic?" the Trusty yells, shoving through first a tray lacking in dessert. Or he'll push

through a regular tray and say, "Now don't you eat that cake!" This meal is often accompanied by a salad, coffee, and "juice." Wayne is given milk at both lunch and supper, but the rest of us get milk only at breakfast. The food varies between awful and edible. We trade around. I usually give Wayne my dessert – Wayne's a generous fellow and shares his candy and cookies with me.

After supper the cell-locks bang open like gunshots, and the guys with their own cells often go in and lie down for naps. At this point I pull my mattress out, and, if I'm tired, open it up and nap. I've managed to nap through Sunday-night, Monday-night, and Thursday-night football games, wild shouting and all. You learn to do it. If I don't nap I'll read, watch TV, play cards, or get into a conversation. I also help Wayne with his homework (he's taking high-school equivalency classes, although he has a high school diploma already).

Later in the evening, Mike, Phil, Wayne, and I play Hearts. I taught them the version I play, with the Jack of Diamonds Convention, and it makes for a good two-hour (or longer) game for us. Mike often wins, and Phil usually loses.

Somewhere between 12:30 and 1:30 AM, the TV is turned off and lock-in occurs for those with their own cells. I may read a little before putting my shoes under the head of my mattress (to make up for a flat pillow), and going to bed. There are only a few hours to sleep before breakfast, and those hours will be punctuated every fifteen to 30 minutes by deputies entering the cellblock to shine their flashlights into each individual cell, "to make sure no one's hanged himself" as conventional wisdom has it. I think it's just harassment. They tend to be noisy, often singing loudly to themselves, or whistling, or talking loudly to someone still out in the hall. They slam the cellblock door loudly, and sometimes use our toilet, which flushes very loudly. One stole some of my commissary cookies – I heard him digging in my paper bag, but didn't realize what he was up to. Lately I've been sleeping through these nocturnal visits: I'm adapting....

Then, at 4:30, "Treon!" – and the cycle begins again....

PS: I mentioned in an earlier letter that there are more than 300 inmates in this jail. Today I heard that the current number is 518. The jail was built for around 200.

Letters from Jail #6



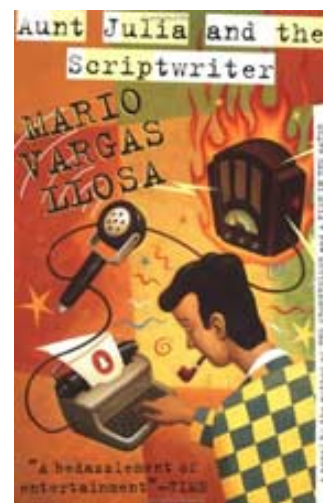
September 25, 1986

“You have your good days, and you have your bad days,” Bob said to me in A-5. As time goes on, that becomes more and more obviously true. Yesterday was a Bad Day; today has been mixed, but somewhat better.

Yesterday, when I went to my psychology group, I learned that it was unrealistic to believe that I’d be getting out as soon as mid-November. It would be more realistic to expect to leave on my Mandatory Parole date – early January. Had I not begun thinking my sentence already almost one-third served, that would not have hit so hard. “Expect to leave when they *tell* you you’re leaving,” Mike counseled me, from his own experience. .

Then, as pre-arranged, I called the Nielsen Haydens that night and learned that my collect calls were being billed at \$1.09 a *minute*, and that thus far I’d added over \$200 to their phone bill. *That* was a shock. I’d come to especially value those calls, and the long chats with Tom Weber, Patrick, and Teresa – a chance to escape the context of this jail and roam once again the corridors of fandom. Teresa and I had enjoyed a particularly *good* conversation on my previous call. But, despite their desire that I continue to call once a week, how could I burden them with huge phone bills on an ongoing basis?

That night – last night – I had my first Jail Dreams. I have always enjoyed – and usually remembered, at least in tone and overall shape – my dreams. From my early childhood, I’ve thought of my dreams as entertainments, stories, to be enjoyed as one might a movie. (I can to this day recall in considerable detail the dreams of ten, twenty, and thirty years ago – both awake, and when dreaming.) I used my dreams here as a form of escape – as I do the books I read (the latest: Mario Vargas Llosa’s *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*, a marvelous tour-de-force) – especially during my stay downstairs in R-44 (the R-cells are known as “The Hole”), when there was little other means to pass the time. To dream was to be Outside again, for at least a while. But this morning I awoke from a series of dreams which centered around a common theme: my confinement here, and its depressing aspects.



That kicked my emotional legs out from under me, underscoring the disappointments of the day. I have until now managed to avoid the depression that dominated the several months before I was sentenced. I took each day as it came, got along with my fellow inmates, and did not look ahead, content to serve my time and get it out of the way. I did not tease myself with the facts of my confinement – I did not look longingly out the cell window. I accepted the cellblock and its immediate environs as my home for the time being.

In my dreams I was home, but only briefly, all too soon to return to confinement. There was a bittersweet

quality to these dreams, and resentment as well. (In one I shared a narrow cot with my Pooh-cat, who in actuality died of old age, at 17, a few years ago. He crowded my legs. In reality, sleeping on a thin mattress on the floor causes my legs to ache in nearly every possible position before night's end.) These dreams offered *no* escape, only a bitter reminder of my incarceration.

Fortunately, today things changed again.

This morning Asshole Steve went to court. This offered the rest of us the opportunity to discuss how we felt about him. Five of us – the original five – wanted him out. (Mike didn't care.) We "wrote him out" on a Request Form, all five of us signing it. "He's a liar, man," Lonny said. It turned out Steve (who was also black) was the only reason Lonny wasn't playing cards. (Phil and I had stopped playing cards when Steve was in a game.) "He's always bragging about having the most money, the most women, the most of everything," Jackson said, "but he's too cheap to make any phone calls." (Steve was always harassing the guards to be allowed to use a "free" outside phone – apparently none of his "many" friends would accept any more collect calls from him....)

"This cellblock has the best reputation in the whole jail," Wayne said, "and he's ruining it." (Steve was always bitching and moaning about something to the guards, had almost cost us our TV privileges one morning, and had actually filed a Grievance Form against one guard.) (Wayne was speaking the truth about A-7's reputation among the guards – I'd heard it from several deputies myself.)

We filed the request for Steve's transfer to another cellblock this morning (you stick the Request Form through the door, and a guard takes it), and only a few hours later – early in the afternoon – a guard came and called "Payne, get your stuff together." He'd been back from court only an hour or two – "All I gotta do is come up with sixty-five dollars, man, and I'm gone. I should get a check in the mail soon..." – and may have thought he was leaving. I pity his new cellmates.

But with him, Wayne Treon also left – to become a Trusty. He'd received notice last week that, due to his application, he was on the waiting list. But we didn't think it would happen so soon.

Trusties get different – better – living quarters, with "real beds" and color TV, and can roam more or less at will within the jail. But – a large *but* – they work a 16-hour day. This may appeal to those who do not read and find confinement in a cellblock boring, but it does not appeal to me, since I am by nature indolent.

I'll miss the Big Guy. He was a genuinely nice man, with a good, if at times self-deprecating, sense of humor, and we had become good friends. He was also the "godfather" of A-7, the man who set the emotional tone for the block. We centered around him. (He was here for writing bad checks, a minor crime in my book – and, unlike Larry Janifer, who still owes me for the bad checks he hit me with in 1961, Wayne has been making restitution....)

On the other hand, I inherited his cell – "C" cell – along with his oversize mattress. Yes, at last I have a "room of my own." The "bed" is a concrete shelf with a mattress on it, but there's a toilet, a sink, a chair – taken out to the day room for the day – and a desk-shelf unit fastened into the wall, into which I've put my books, and on which I'm writing this. It's nice to have a place to put my things, to be able to leave my toothbrush and toothpaste on the sink, to be able to lie in bed and read – there's a light right over my head there, perfect for reading – and to be able to sleep in relative darkness (I napped in here after dinner tonight). Altogether, this has really raised my spirits, especially since I hadn't expected to get a cell for at least another month.

For a few brief hours, Mike had the prospect of the day room for himself – as I had for two days when I moved to A-7. Then, this evening, just following my nap (it woke me up) two new men were moved up

from DT. Both are quiet, middle-aged men. Chester is black and is waiting sentencing on his second DWI. The other, whose name I didn't get yet, is white, a bit fussy, and a reader. I showed him my books. And now once again, We Are Seven. I feel like an old hand, now – and grateful that I'm off the floor at last.

A mixed day, but an improvement over yesterday.

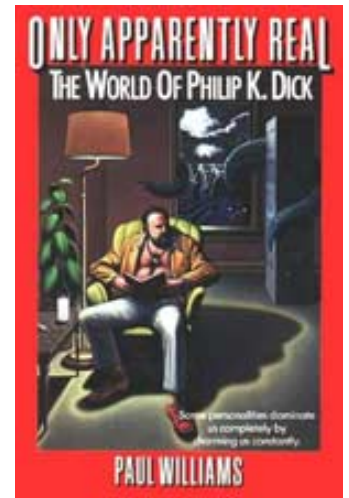
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September 26: Chester doesn't play cards (I pity anyone in here who neither reads books nor plays cards – they have only the TV to help allay boredom) but Bill (the other new guy) does. Bill turns out to be 62 years old, and is in here for fraud (no other details volunteered). He plays well, but Jackson and I won three games of Spades, Phil and I won another Spades game, and I (for once) won the game of Hearts we played. (Thass me – a real winner....)

It was, basically, a Good Day. Mike and I had several real conversations (my respect for him keeps going up) and although breakfast was lousy (no milk, no jelly for the toast), lunch (a bowl of good chili) and dinner (barbecued chicken, potatoes au gratin, peach cobbler) made up for it. (That was the best dinner I'd had here. "You've really adjusted to this place, Ted," Phil said. "The food's starting to taste *good* to you." "My compliments to the chef," I said.)

Paul Williams sent six books from Arbor House, including his own book on Phil Dick, *Only Apparently Real*, which I particularly look forward to reading. Thanks, Paul. (Thanks also to Jay Kinney for *Gnosis* #2, which arrived earlier this week.) And Andy Porter sent the last three *SF Chronicles* – which, unfortunately, I'd already read. Topping off the mail were letters from Linda Pickersgill, Chuch Harris, and Phil Palmer, all of them a pleasure to read.

But the overseas letters create a problem for me, since I cannot mail anything overseas from here. (I am allowed to buy, from the commissary, up to ten envelopes which are prestamped with 22 cents in postage [then the domestic first-class rate].) What I plan to do is to send my replies with this Letter to the Nielsen Haydens and once again presume upon their good will to remail those letters to their overseas recipients.



I am enormously buoyed by the friendship I have been shown by so many of you, and the Nielsen Haydens in particular. Without their help (and that of Tom Weber and Victor Gonzalez) my incarceration here would be far less pleasant. Again, deep thanks.

I slept better last night than I had on any previous night here. The cellblock has again settled down to quiet camaraderie. It's jail, but it's not that bad. I can live with it. ("I say, 'live it, or live with it!'" – Firesign Theater.)

Letters from Jail #7



September 28, 1986

At the end of this week, I will have been here a month. And it's starting to get to me: The tedium, the basic unrelenting banal boredom.

It's Sunday, and the TV has been football all afternoon. Football – on TV – bores me. It's repetitious and unreal, full of intense commentary and crowd noises, and totally ephemeral. When one game ends there is another, back to back, stealing away whatever sense of uniqueness a single game might have. And during one of the interminable breaks in the action of one game, "highlights" – looking exactly the same – from another one are shown. Football for the sake of football; meaningless action that adds up to nothing except a list of final scores.

Earlier, before lunch, we played three games of Spades. Phil and I (as partners) won all three, but mostly because we were dealt better hands – I had trouble concentrating on the games.

You can only play so much cards. You can only read so many books. You can only sit around for so long. Lonny and I have been pacing back and forth. It's five o'clock. Where's the food? Where's supper? (And – will it be any good?)

I read Paul Williams' *Only Apparently Real*, correcting the typos with this pen, wondering if my contributions to the Phil Dick Myth would be acknowledged (they weren't, even in discussions of the publishing history of a work I exhumed from his agent's files, after years of lying fallow), comforted in this only by the omissions of Calvin Demmon (an almost-collaborator of Phil's), Ray Nelson, and Roger Zelazny (actual collaborators). Paul's view of Phil Dick doesn't include most of his '60s friends and associates, nor the possibility that Phil *could* collaborate with anyone else (Phil is too unique, too much the property of his '70s friends now). But despite the unbalanced focus of the book (was that 1971 break-in *that* important? More important than Phil's 1974 conversion to Christianity and its effects on his subsequent work?), and the coy way Paul turns himself into a work of art (*Phil's* art), there are insights to be gleaned, almost inferentially, from the book, and the book *does* evoke the Phil Dick Experience.

The major insight is one Paul appears not to recognize: Phil had a *very* poor grasp on his own reality, and almost unfaillingly Got It Wrong when relating his experiences with others, especially editors, agents, and publishers. Virtually *every* story he tells about his experiences is suspect, a point Paul verifies the one time he checks one out with Phil's agent's records. Few of Phil's scurrilous stories about his editors are given, but Terry Carr alone is named – unfairly in this respect, which is a shame, since Terry was one of his most sympathetic editors.

Still. It was engrossing reading, and filled in a lot of factual and chronological details, lending context to my own (1964-72) experiences of the man. (Maybe my sourness today is influencing my reaction to the book as well.)

At first the Jail Experience is new – there are new things to be found out, new people to be met – but after a while you begin to realize that the essence of the Jail Experience is the dull sameness of each day, one after the next. Small differences assume great importance: The nature of each meal, the arrival of fresh mail, a visitor, a class. Little things get on your nerves, like one man's unfailingly bad jokes, or another's cackling laugh. The very *predictability* of these things get to you.

Supper was better than usual: "steak" – overcooked to falling-apart tenderness (just as well, since the only eating utensil is a plastic spoon); mashed potatoes with gravy, string beans, salad ("French" dressing), and butterscotch pudding, with lemonade. I ate it all, giving away only the redundant two slices of white bread.

I took a break from Paul's book to write the second installment of the serial I have been running in Lee Hoffman's *Science-Fiction Five-Yearly*. It was inspired by Phil Dick (as was the first installment, written in 1981), and suddenly I felt the desire to write it. That's the first non-letter (or non-Letter) writing I've done here. It makes me wonder if I can – or should – try writing some "real" fiction here. I've resisted it up to now, mostly because of my impatience with hand-writing – which, among other things, cramps my hand and leaves a groove in my middle finger.

They just unlocked our cells, and I've moved inside to write this on my "desk." It's a lot easier than my lap.

I've had several days to get used to this cell now. I "enjoy" it in the sense of having a place for my things, privacy, a place to nap in the evenings, etc., but there are liabilities. The major one is remembering everything I want to take out with me in the morning. Wayne used to forget his cigarettes, or, on laundry days (Sundays and Wednesdays), his personal laundry (underwear, socks). I have to be sure I have the letters I want to answer, the books I want to read, and the snacks (hardboiled eggs left over from an earlier breakfast, sandwiches, or commissary candy) I may want to eat. I usually make a pile of these things the night before, adding to it as I think of things. But the anxiety stays with me each time: Have I forgotten something? (Like everything else, I expect this will eventually become a boring routine – until I mess up.)

The air-conditioning in here makes the individual cells colder than the dayroom. The hotter it is outside, the colder it is in here. Last night I slept with most of my clothes on.

I'm not sure there's much more to describe about life here. Surely most of what is yet to come will be a dull recital of menus, interleaved with my reactions to the books I've most recently read: boring stuff. Who cares if Bill (the 62 year old) is from New England originally, and that I guessed this from his accent (which stands out in contrast to the accents of the rest of us here)? Or that Chester is 51 – making me (at 48) only the third oldest, instead of the oldest in here? These are petty details indeed – worthy of Michael Ashley's puny contempt.

So what's left for future Letters? Shall I delve Into Weighty Philosophizing? Or relate the tidbits of gossip which come my way via phone and letters? (Dan Steffan finally landed a really decent job as the Art Director of a slick Washington, D.C. monthly, and will get to redesign it; the Jerry Jacks Estate is being settled somewhat more decently than I'd feared from first reports; my daughter is not only bearing up well on her own, her grades are improving and she's gaining more friends....)

I need to maintain this channel of communication, mostly to keep some sense of direction to my life in here, but simultaneously I worry about running out of things to say, and about writing too much, too frequently, clogging the channels with verbiage.

I guess I'll have to start on that novel.

Letters from Jail #8



October 1, 1986

This is the seventh ballpoint pen I've used in the nearly a month I've been here. Of such small frustrations is prison life fashioned. Each pen – two Papermates, three Keymids, and a Bic – runs “dry” after using between a quarter- and a half-inch of ink in its transparent plastic tube. Oddly enough, when you remove the basic part (a plastic tube filled with ink and attached to a metal point mounted in a brass-colored plastic surround), there is no visible difference between these three different brands. And there is no difference in performance, either – they all quit too soon. I've wondered if it was the paper I write on, increasingly damp from the excessive humidity, but each pen starts out writing in a clean, dark ink, and grows progressively lighter until every stratagem (taking the pen apart, blowing into the open end of the inner-ink tube, etc.) ultimately fails. Frustrating. A microcosmic example of life here.

Today was not a good day. I was assured in my psych group today that I'd do the full four months until mandatory parole – “By the time they had a meeting with you and processed the paper work, it would be four months anyway” – which only sounds bad if you've been expecting less, and maybe hoping to be out by Thanksgiving, or Christmas at the latest. Oh well....

According to a front-page article in *The Fairfax Journal*, “on a recent weekend, the 315-bed Fairfax jail held 567 inmates – the most in its history... As many as ten inmates have been crammed into jail cells built for five people.” I can attest to that. I understand that one reason is the large number of State prisoners (like myself) being housed in this County facility. And the reason for that is that the state pays the jail \$70 a day for each state prisoner housed here – more than the county pays for county prisoners. Isn't that delightful? I know they don't *spend* more on us (my cellblock has both state and county prisoners and we're all treated alike), nor does it add up to any \$70 a day. “It's all politics, man.”

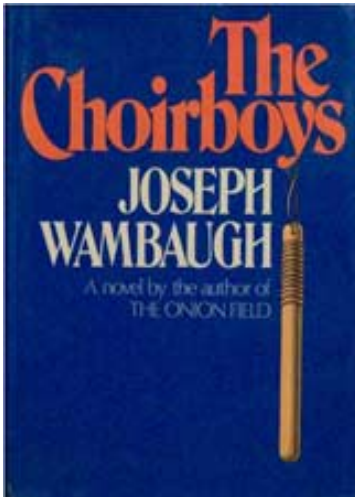


I'm enclosing the article with this Letter. The photo shows a typical cellblock dayroom. Ours is identical, but somewhat neater.

Ten inmates at the Fairfax County Adult Detention Center fill their minimum-security cell that should hold five inmates.

They are building a new wing here, originally supposed to be open July 15th, and now expected to open in late December; the contractors are now paying daily penalties. Parts are being opened now – a new visitor's facility is supposed to open this week – and we've heard air-hammers taking down old walls; the electricity in most circuits went off for a couple hours last week, forcing us into an early lock-in that night; and the fire-alarm bells have gone off at odd moments for over a week now.

So it wasn't surprising when the alarm bells went off again tonight, around 7 PM.



I was lying in bed, reading Joseph Wambaugh's *The Choirboys* (the *truth* about American police, as told by an ex-cop). The alarm went on and on – no less than five minutes, and maybe twice that. I heard someone yelling, “Fire! Fire!” and figured it was some wiseass down the hall. But after the alarm finally stopped, I happened to look out the (rather high on the wall) window, and saw at least three fire trucks outside, a hose snaking up to the building.

There was no smell of smoke and no attempt to evacuate us, but, as I stood at our door, peering out into the hallway and the stairway up to B-level, I saw grimy-faced men in fire-fighting outfits coming down, and heard a guard tell someone else that someone – an inmate, I assume – was dead. I was curiously abstract and removed from us. I wonder if we'll ever hear what actually occurred.

#

Wayne stops by outside our door when he can, to chat and cadge cigarettes. He is not enjoying being a Trusty. They work 16-hour days. “My feet are killing me,” he says. He's working the kitchen detail, mostly scrubbing pots and pans, occasionally pouring the tin cups of “juice” for our lunch out in the hall. He misses our card games and wishes he was back in here, but hopes he'll be getting Out soon.

Lonny gets Out on October 12, and has papers to show it. Mike will get his cell. Jackson was finally sentenced in court today, and received 12 months. (That means County Time; if it was one year, it would be State Time.) When Lonny leaves, I'll be third-senior here...I wonder if Wayne will be returned here, get Out, or stay a Trusty. I like the Big Guy, and would welcome his return.

Sunday, I fixed Chester's glasses. One temple-piece had come off – a screw had fallen out. I pulled a staple from a magazine (an overlooked item, heh-heh) and bent it into a wire that replaced the screw. He was *very* grateful, but not enough to let me watch *St. Elsewhere* on TV tonight – *he* was watching a *Magnum* rerun.

I'm becoming annoyed by Bill. (He is, you'll recall, 62 years old and in here for fraud.) He isn't an asshole, like Steve Payne was (and Payne is still here, down the hall in A-9, despite his story that he needs only \$65 to get out...) but he's fussy and tends to do unwanted things which simply have to be undone afterward. I can't dislike him for wanting to be helpful, but he gets on my nerves. He lacks “cool,” I guess. I'm afraid I'm soon going to start snapping at him (“I've already told you that!”), and that will mess up my “cool.” Plus, he tends to wander into my cell to look at what I've got in here, which Is Not Accepted. (In my psych group today, we discussed “personal space” and people who enter others' cells uninvited, and how to deal with them.) I wonder what his “fraud” was – he says he can't discuss it on advice of his attorney (“there are still some suits pending”) – if his fussy persona is a con-man's front, I'll probably never know.

#

October 2, 1986

Bang! Bang-bang-bang! Sometime before 5 AM the cell doors unlocked. Actually, I'd been awakened by the sounds of the cell-doors unlocking in A-6 – the sound through the back wall of my cell was almost as loud as it would be when ours were unlocked. I listened for the sounds in the hall. No dishes clattering yet

... I dozed some more.

“Chow time!” came Bill’s cheerful voice. “Chow time, guys!” Shit! They hadn’t even let down the little door that opened the slot in our cellblock door. They hadn’t yet banged loudly on the door with something metallic (keys? You can always tell the approach of a guard by his jangling keys...) and yelled out, “*Breakfast!*” Sometimes a half hour passes between the unlocking of the cells and the arrival of breakfast. But there was helpful old Bill trying to rouse us so we could sit around and wait for our food. I turned over and tried to remember what I’d been dreaming: something about living in an old (late ’20s) Packard roadster ... something about living outdoors and how it would have to end soon when winter came ... something about standing outside a building with lit windows, waiting for it to be opened – to serve breakfast?

“Let’s go, guys!” Bill called. *Fuck him! Officious turd!* I could hear him clearing the table – although only two guys eat breakfast there, the rest of us waiting in our cells, Mike on the floor next to his mattress. Yes, I could get real tired of Bill.

Soon enough – but at least half an hour after Bill’s first chirpy call – the slot-door slammed down. “*Breakfast! Breakfast!*” said the deputy, banging on the door. I pulled on my pants, and went out for my tray. I gave Mike the first one passed to me and took the second. “Want yer fruit today?” I asked Mike. It was mixed slices of orange and grapefruit. “Take half,” he said. “I’ll take half yer eggs!” He knew I never ate the “scrambled eggs” – “curdled rubber” would be a better description.

I took my tray to my cell. By the time I came back out, the coffee had been brought in; I picked up the seven half-pints of milk, and passed them out as I headed to my cell. “Here’s your coffee, Ted,” Bill said. “I don’t drink that stuff,” I told him for the seventh straight day in a row.

I put the jelly on my toast and tried to open the milk carton. This was one of the ones that didn’t want to open – I had to tear it open, making a torn spout that would dribble down my chin if I wasn’t careful. I alternated sips of milk with spoonfuls of fruit and bites of toast. I scraped the remaining egg off into my toilet, and pissed on it. After I’d taken my tray and milk carton to the door (they count the empty milk cartons and plastic spoons – never know what you might use to hang yourself), I brushed my teeth, pulled my cell door shut, and went back to bed, for a few more hours of sleep.

A little after 8:40, the guard came by to announce lock-out. I had my stuff ready, dressed, and moved everything I expected to need during the day out into the dayroom. Bill was lying on his mattress, dozing. Since his mattress goes in my cell during the day, I had to wait for him before I could close my door, unload the stuff off my chair, and sit down in front of my cell door. He gave no sign of waking and rising. I wanted to shout, “Chow time, Bill!” in his ear, but I didn’t. I don’t kick puppies, either.

Mornings are silent times. No one wants to be awake. We sit silently, reading that cruddy newspaper, *The Fairfax Journal* (nothing in it about last night’s fire – it’s not a *real* newspaper), or just waiting for the TV to come on and, at 9 AM, *Love Connection*. Sullenness hangs in the air. I picked up *The Choirboys*, nearly finished the night before, and waded back into it. Heavy stuff: despite the absolute scumminess of the protagonist cops, what happens to them in the final chapters was getting to me. Existential police fiction. Just the thing to read in here.

#

Lonny and I went up to gym, looking for Wayne, but Wayne didn’t show. Red Bob was there, and told me Bob the ex-psychologist was getting Out today or tomorrow. “He’s getting real impatient,” Red Bob said.

Wayne came by later to our door, and showed us a new warrant that had been issued against him. He’d

plea-bargained his counts down, but now the County was issuing warrants for the charges the State had agreed to drop. Shit. Typical. I guess he'll be here a while yet. I hope he moves back in here when Lonny leaves. (If he doesn't, someone else will....)

They tried to deny me access to my remaining books in Property today. "You gotta get them direct from the publisher," this old turkey of a deputy said smugly. "I did," I said. He didn't believe me until he'd looked at them. "How'd you get all these books?" he asked, shaking his head. But he let me exchange the five I'd originally pulled for five more.

I've (hand)written less than six pages of this Letter. When I started, this pen was brand-new. Now the ink is light and getting fainter. Good thing I ordered two more from Commissary. I'll need another pen by tomorrow.

Shitty jail; shitty pens.

So it goes.

LETTERS FROM JAIL #9



October 5, 1986

How do you put yourself to sleep at night?

I don't know about you, but for as long as I can remember I've told myself stories. Perhaps I should make that "stories" because these are not stories in the conventional sense; they are not complete (with beginning, middle, and end), they rarely have coherent plots, and sometimes they might be more accurately described as "plans" or diagrams. Sometimes they involve dialogue and social interaction, sometimes adventure, and often fantasy. But as often they are static – imagined situations, imagined things.

I started doing this as a very small child. I can remember lying in my bed on a hot summer evening, perhaps four or five years old, thinking about a model airplane one of my uncles had made while he was hospitalized, late in World War II. He had given it to me, and I was thrilled with it. It was made of a balsa wood skeleton, covered with white tissue paper that formed its skin and was never painted. All the control surfaces – rudder, stabilizers, ailerons – worked, controlled by a joy-stick and "pedals" in the cockpit. It was marvelous. I thought about how it had been constructed, and thought about how I might make one like it – maybe big enough to sit in, or even to fly. In the years that followed I "planned" many objects like that model plane: cars, airplanes, rockets, weapons, dwelling places (secret caves, tree houses, etc.), whatever caught my fancy at the time. These might be called "daydreams," but they always segued into actual dreams.

The common feature in all the "stories" I told myself each night and every night was that they were serials: each ended for the night in my transition into sleep, and if each remained unfinished it would be continued the following night. (If I "finished" one, I'd start another immediately. A "finished" story would not put me to sleep.)

As common as the static "plans" (which put me to sleep through the contemplation of minute details) were the adventures. These, my mother was convinced, kept me awake. She knew about them because they were, in my childhood, quite noisy.

I grew up in the radio era – before television. I was ten when commercial TV made its debut in my area – but my father, a lover of 19th century classical music broadcast on the radio (and an early enthusiast of FM radio for this reason), found one excuse after another to put off buying a TV set. At first he was "waiting for color TV." When this came about, he was "waiting for them to perfect color." Later, he was "waiting for the price to come down." He finally bought a Sony TV in the mid-'70s, only a year before his first stroke diminished his ability to enjoy it or the radio and his music. So I grew up without TV, and was very aware



of the death of all forms of radio programming, except music, in the mid-'50s, as one by one my favorite dramatic and comedy programs disappeared (or made disappointing transitions to TV – no one can convince me that Jack Benny, for instance, was better on TV than he was on radio).

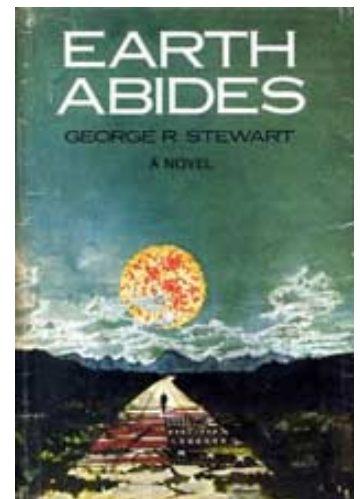
Radio fed the imagination almost as much as reading did. With marvelously contrived sound effects, radio could evoke a panoply of scenes which remained beyond even Hollywood's visualization, and far beyond that of television. As a kid I tried to imitate radio's sound effects, and practiced the many voices of the various character-types. All of us kids did the sounds of cars shifting up through the gears, the squeal of brakes, and gunshots and explosions. I did these and other sound effects in my bed each night – to my mother's occasional annoyance.

I think what annoyed her was not the silly noises I made so much as the fact that I made them for hours on end. It used to take me two hours or more of this before I wore myself out and fell asleep. (I always protested that it was not my acting-out of the stories I told myself that kept me awake, but the fact that my mother put me to bed too soon – while I was still wide awake. To this day I still think that was true: my bedtime had advanced only to 9:00 PM by the time I was out of grade school.)

By the time I was setting my own bedtime, the interval during which I told myself stories had decreased considerably. And the stories had evolved greatly. When I was thirteen, I started fantasizing about the fanzines and prozines I'd some day put out. Each seemed, then, to lie beyond my actual grasp. (In school I filled my notebooks with logo designs for imagined prozines the way I'd once filled them with futuristic cars and rockets.) It's mildly fantastic to look back on my life and realize that I've actually lived out some of those fantasies.

During the dark years of my adolescence, my fantasies were also darker – self-pitying fantasies of being maimed and causing those who'd scorned me to realize too late what horrible things they'd done to me. I look back on them now with no pleasure at all, but at the time they filled me with a deeply perverse satisfaction.

Since I read science fiction and fantasy, my "stories" began to reflect this, but rarely in a realistic way. The purpose of these "stories" was not precisely to "entertain," but rather to induce sleep. Nonetheless, some of what I read seeped into my "stories." George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides* triggered a memorable, several-year-long series of fantasies about what I'd do in a world undevastated but newly devoid of people. (I liked the idea of moving into New York's Museum of Natural History....) More often, I entertained "superhero" fantasies: what it would be like to have wings, or some other realistically impossible attribute. Sometimes I tried rationalizing the fantastic, sometimes I tried figuring out what the realistic consequences might be of an unrealistic attribute, and sometimes I pursued the ego-satisfaction of utterly unrealistic premises unrealistically pursued. (One of the latter was the notion of a being with such total mental/telepathic powers that he could go anywhere in the Universe, and survive any environment: total wish-fulfillment fantasy.)



By this time I was starting to *write* science fiction, but I rarely borrowed from my bedtime fantasies – I saw little or no connection. (One rare exception was the winged creatures in *Star Wolf*, which I based on the sleep-inducing fantasies I'd told myself some years earlier. But I can think of no others.)

By this time my fantasies had turned in other directions. While I was married, living with someone, or having a regular love-life, my "stories" tended to be escapist fantasies of the sort I've already described. But when I was between lovers, I might fantasize a relationship with someone I knew (and lusted after), or with a fictitious lover. At first these were pure wish-fulfillment, but I found those too "easy" and thus too

unsatisfying. I wanted the patina of reality. So I tried to mock up realistic situations and realistic individuals. If it was someone I knew, I tried to imagine as accurately as possible how she would react and what she'd say and do in the situation in which I'd placed her. I tried to hear her real voice, her own choice of words. This often involved "redrafting" when I realized I'd gotten some essential detail wrong. And this, I think, was of value to me as a writer, in my fiction, although I didn't realize it at the time.

As I got older I tended to ring changes on all the varieties of "stories" I told myself. By now the "stories" might be thin fragments that occupied only a few minutes before I fell asleep: mood-inducers, supplied mostly out of habit. And, increasingly, nostalgia played a major role – nostalgia for actual events of my past, or nostalgia for old "stories," dusted off and reused more for the benefit of that nostalgia than for the "stories" themselves. Falling asleep was rarely difficult any more.

Then, last March, I was arrested. The even emotional equilibrium I'd achieved was shattered. On occasions I was severely depressed, and I worried about what would happen to me. I had little appetite, and suffered routine indigestion. The bottom fell out of my stomach every time certain thoughts occurred to me – which they regularly did. It was much harder getting to sleep. I found myself trying the old "stories" – but they didn't work. I did not sleep well.

That continued until my sentencing – until my fate became known to me. Then I had the *reality* of incarceration to deal with, rather than my speculative fears.

As I described in my first Letter, I had little to do for my first three days here except to doze. I was in a relatively featureless cell, isolated from others, with nothing whatsoever to do. (The inmates here call the "R" cells – I was, you'll recall, in R-44 – "The Hole." One can be sent back to "The Hole" for infractions of the rules, like fighting, and I suppose we're put there first in order to show us just what it's like.) It's hard to sleep under those conditions: it's cold (and you don't get even a blanket), the mattress is a thin vinyl-covered pad on a concrete shelf, there is no pillow, and the bright light stays on all the time. I tucked one end of the mattress under itself to create a sort of pillow, and tried to sleep the time away. The noises made it even more difficult: new inmates flipped out on PCP, or kicking heroin cold-turkey, others cadging cigarettes from each other ("Gimme a cigarette, man. Aw come *on*, asshole!"), or cursing each other ("I gonna whip yo *ass*, mutha!"), or howling like wolves, often in bizarre choruses, like real wolves. One, in the cell next to mine, sang the same simple-minded chorus of a song, loudly, for more than an hour at a stretch, for two days.

I was reminded of the six months I'd shared Brad Balfour's apartment on East 95th Street in New York City, in 1979 – sleeping in a tiny triangular room with only one window that opened onto an airshaft, forced to listen to someone's TV set. On that occasion, I fantasized about having my own apartment, planning out a fantasy apartment with a secret garden (I missed my Virginia home).

I tried some of my oldest escapist fantasies in that R-cell, and they worked, taking me in and out of waking-dreams and deeper sleep. There was no way to tell the passage of time except by the meals.

Getting up to the A-Blocks, but having to sleep on the floor, with minimal privacy and minimal opportunity to sleep, I found myself fantasizing an old role – that of the Avenger, a character who Righted Wrongs from a position of invulnerability, protected by a force field and able to act at will. I didn't consider righting my wrongs – that was too close to reality, too depressing to contemplate. (I'd fantasized blowing up the Falls Church Police Department the night after my arrest, but it only made me angry, adrenalated, and more awake than ever.) Instead, I went into the situations of the books I'd been reading, and clobbered those Bad Guys who'd escaped the hero. The first was *The Lords of Discipline*: the self-righteous General who orchestrated the corruption of the Institute. That was fun: I put myself to sleep (twice a day, the second time after the 5:00 AM breakfast) for a week with that. Later, I used the corrupt politicians in Robert Douglas Mead's *Heartland*. It was very satisfying.

Now that I've achieved a cell of my own (my own little room off the dayroom, wherein I sleep, nap in evenings after dinner, and keep my books and extra underwear) it's easier to go to sleep. There's little light (except when the guard, on his nightly rounds, shines his flashlight through the window in my cell door and into my eyes), and a sense of being in my own snug little nest. (Actually, it's no worse than that room in Brad's apartment.) So the Avenger has slipped off stage. Now I think of lovers, past and future, of driving a car cross-country, and other forms of mental escape. I look ahead, to the freedom that lies only a few months before me.

And I sleep better.

letters from jail #10



October 7, 1986

“You can’t have these stamps,” the guard said to Phil. He’d just opened the letter and shook out the loose stamps.

“My wife sent them,” Phil said helplessly.

“Well, you can’t have them,” the guard said, unsympathetically. “They’re not allowed.” He pushed the envelope and accompanying letter through the door. Phil stared at him. “They’ll go in your property. You can have them when you get out.”

“Sure,” Phil said. “Lotta good they’ll do me then!” But the guard had turned away and didn’t hear him – nor care.

“Shit,” I said. “I asked my mother to send me some 17 cent stamps – for when I go over an ounce.”

“They’re not all like that, man,” Mike said. “He’s a real asshole. Some of them don’t care.”

“Why the fuck *should* they care?” Phil asked, looking more and more angry as realization sank in.

“They’re worried about drugs,” Mike said. “They think them stamps might have something like acid on their backs. That’s why they take the stamps off the letters you get.” (I’d noticed about a quarter of the letters I got were missing their stamps, but I’d assumed that was because some guard was stealing them.) “It’s an easy way to smuggle in a hit or two of blotter (LSD),” Mike added.

“I seen on the television where they got this test,” Chester said. “They put a cigarette in a glass of water, and if it swells up, it’s got dope in it. Thass why they don’t let you bring no cigarettes in here wit’cha.”

“I dunno,” I said. “Guys in GH-2 when I was down there had their own cigarettes they’d brought in.”

“No, sir,” Chester insisted. “They don’t let you bring in no cigarettes – might have *dope* in them.”

“You telling me I didn’t see any cigarettes in GH-2?” I asked.

“Thass right,” Chester said. “They ain’t gonna let you bring no cigarettes in. They *search* you, man.”

“They used to do that, but not any more,” Mike said quietly. “They let me bring in my cigarettes.”

“No, sir, they don’t allow it,” Chester said, as though Mike had not spoken. “They got this test.”

I snorted. “Great,” I said. “And if your cigarette passes the test, you’ve got a ruined cigarette.”

“It’s a *test*, man,” Chester said. “Saw it on TV.”

“Sure you did,” I said. “What is it a test *for*?”

“*Dope*, man,” said the 57-year-old black man, who had *never* smoked any drug but nicotine.

“What *kind* of dope?” I persisted. “Marijuana, PCP, what?”

“I dunno – just *dope*. It swells up. They take the tobacco out and put the *dope* in, then they put a little tobacco back in the ends. Doncha know *nothing*?”

“I know this much,” I said. “I know marijuana doesn’t swell up. Neither does parsley – that’s what they put PCP on.”

“I’m talking ’bout reefer, man,” Chester said. “You don’t know nuthin’.”

“I know a fuck lot more about that shit than you do,” I said, getting angry. “What do you think I’m in here for?”

“You don’t know nuthin’,” Chester repeated, adamantly. “I saw that test on TV!”

“You believe everything you see on TV?” I asked, sarcastically.

“Thass right,” Chester said, “I do. They don’t lie on TV. I believe them before I believe you.” His voice dripped with scorn.

I shook my head. “Okay,” I said, shrugging my shoulders. “You believe the fucking *TV*. Stay stupid.”

Chester laughed derisively. “You stupid,” he said. He shook his head in disbelief. “Man don’t believe the *TV*,” he said. He knew who was the fool.

#

I have never before had to deal with real stupidity. Some of the other guys in here are not real bright, and have problems spelling or doing arithmetic, but they’re not *stupid*. They have their own areas of cleverness, of quick-wittedness. Lonny may not spell well, but he plays cards well. Mike and Phil both read a fair amount – I pass along books to them – and most of us peruse the paper each weekday. Wayne, when he was here (he may have gotten out today – no one knows for sure) asked me to go over his homework with him (and had most of his answers right).

Chester doesn’t read. He doesn’t play cards. He sits and watches TV. Apparently he thinks it’s all Real.

The other evening, a guard stuck a receipt through the door. It was marked “A-7” and indicated that money had been credited to a commissary account. Mike, Chester, and I looked at it. (It was evening, and everyone else was napping.) Neither of the names on the receipt – the donor, nor the recipient – was familiar to us. Mike and I saw this at first glance.

“Who this for?” Chester asked, puzzling over the slip of paper.

“It’s for (So&so),” I said. (I have forgotten the actual names involved.)

“Which one he is?” Chester asked.

“No one in here,” Mike said.

“He that guy in A-cell?” Chester asked.

“No,” I said, “that’s Jackson.”

“What about the guy in B?” Chester asked.

“That’s Phil,” Mike said.

“Phil? Whass his last name?” Chester asked.

“Funk,” Mike said.

“Huh?” Chester said. “This for him?”

“No,” I said, “This is for (So&so).”

“Maybe it for Bill,” Chester said. Bill Leamy had come in the same night as Chester.

“Nah,” Mike said. “They got it wrong. It’s somebody in another cellblock.”

Chester continued to look at the receipt. He shook his head. “It ain’t for neither of you?”

“No,” I said. “Give it here.” I took the slip and wrote across its end in pencil, “Not A-7.”

“What are you doing *that* for?” Chester asked.

Without answering him, I stood up and took the slip back to the door and stuck it through the space between the door and the doorjamb – the place through which we stick commissary orders and Request forms.

“What you doin’, man?” Chester asked.

Mike explained what I had done.

A passing guard took the slip moments later, and perhaps even found the correct cellblock for it. Half an hour later Chester looked up and noticed the slip was gone. “That paper’s gone,” he said. And then, another half hour after that, he looked up again and exclaimed, “The paper’s gone – they done took it.” Mike and I just looked at each other.

This sort of thing could get on my nerves.

Letters from Jail #11



October 9, 1986

I was watching *Love Connection* in a desultory way yesterday morning when a guard came to the door. “White!” he shouted through the door. “You going to your forensics class today?”

“Sure,” I said, wondering why he was asking.

“Okay,” he said. “I’ll be back for you in ten minutes.”

My “forensics class” is not a class, and not about “forensics” either, as I understand the word. It’s basically a group of inmates who get together at 9:45 AM Wednesday for an hour of discussion moderated by a clinical psychologist named Chris Tull – “group therapy” in a loose sense. There are no tests and no grades.

It’s a decent group. Regulars include Dan, from A-10, who is a musician and a serious composer (and is in here on charges similar to mine), Red Bob from A-5, and two other guys from the B-floor whose names I’m not sure of. One is a young bearded guy who has had problems with being bullied by his cellmates (he’s moved cellblocks six times, and seems to have found a safe haven at last), and the other is quiet but endeared himself to me by stating that my entrance into the group had “livened things up.” The intelligence level is higher than that of the general population here, which makes for good discussions.

This week I unloaded my annoyance with Chester – with an abbreviated version of my last Letter – and Dan said, “I know where you’re coming from, man. I have *so little* in common with my cellmates, there’s just whole areas you can’t talk about with them.” This led into a discussion of the macho poses so many of the younger inmates adopt.

“One of the guys in our cellblock,” Red Bob said – and then in an aside to me, “C.W.” – “he would come up to gym and act like he was the baddest of the bad, but back in our cellblock, he’d cry and just go to pieces. He just couldn’t deal with being in here.” That had happened before I was in A-5.

“A lot of these guys, they’re really into stealing,” the quiet guy said. “They come up here to a class, and they have to steal something, doesn’t matter what it is, or whether they got any use for it. It’s like a habit with them, stealing.” Then he launched into a sudden impassioned diatribe:

“There’s a guy in my cellblock, we just wrote him out today – he oughta be gone by this afternoon. He really turns my stomach. One of our guys was in court with him yesterday afternoon, and found out what he’s here for.



“This guy pushed his way into a woman’s apartment while she was carrying in a bag of groceries, and he, like, beat her, cut her up, and raped her. He caved in the whole side of her face with a lamp, then beat on her till she looked like hamburger. *Then* he starts cutting on her. And all the while he’s raping her! He’s got her tied up with an electrical cord the whole while. She’s in the hospital for two months now, and they just caught the guy. And – get this – when they catch him, two months after he’s done it, he’s got her underwear around his neck, like a necklace, under his clothes! I mean, this is one sick animal!

“We knew he was sick. He’d talk all the time about beating up women – he was down on everything, you know? But he wouldn’t talk about what he was here for until we confronted him with it last night. Then he admitted it – and he was *proud* of it! Man, that just turned my stomach!”

“What’s he doing in a B-cell?” the kid asked. “He-ought to be in C.” (C is for murderers and rapists.)

Dan shook his head knowingly. “He’s not sentenced yet.”

The “presumption of innocence” in its most perverse form.

“Man like that,” the quiet guy said, “they ought to just take him out and shoot him – like a rabid dog!”

“This really upsets you, doesn’t it?” Dan asked.

“Yeah, it really does.”

“Why’s that?”

“Shit, he just really turns my stomach!”

It’s said that child molesters rarely last long in the general population. Someone sticks something sharp into them. Even a pencil can do it. The rapist was getting off easy by being written out.

Chris Tull is soft-looking – a little pudgy, wearing glasses and a mustache, prematurely balding – and a “Cognitive Psychologist.” He often says little, but asks perceptive questions – when they’re not too pointed. I asked him whether I’d really get any time off for attending his “class” – after 30 days one puts in for a slip and he awards up to five days – since supposedly this is awarded by the sheriff, and State prisoners can’t receive “favors” from a local authority. He said he wasn’t sure himself, having recently come from the Maryland system, which is entirely different, but it wouldn’t hurt to put in for it. I’ll be eligible to put in for the reduction next week – 30 days after September 18th, when I attended my first class. Chris is friendly, and says he reads science fiction – but not the SF magazines.

Wednesday is also laundry day, so when I came back downstairs from the classroom, a little before 11 AM, I was not surprised to hear from the hall deputy that shirts and pants had already been exchanged in my absence. This happens about every other week. The deputy took my requirements – “large” shirt and “36” pants – and came back with the laundry Trusty an hour later. I pulled off my pants and took off my shirt and passed them both through the slot in the door. A shirt and a pair of pants, both rolled up, were passed back to me. The shirt was too small to button, the pants impossible to close. The pants said “32” quite plainly on the inside waistband. I passed both back out with a shrug of disgust, and properly sized clothes were passed in.

At lock-out, earlier that morning, a mesh bag was left for our “personal laundry.” We loaded it with our underwear. It came back shortly before noon, its drawstring tightly knotted. Our underwear, like most of the laundry, comes back smelling of Clorox. I suppose that’s necessary, considering what some cons have

living on their bodies. The “personal laundry” goes through the wash in the mesh bags, keeping it sorted by cellblock.

In the evening, after our cells are unlocked, our sheets, towels, and pillowcases are collected. These are counted as we pass them out the door slot, and we get back the same number.

Wednesday night is my night to chat on the phone with the Nielsen Haydens and Tom Weber. I was vastly relieved to hear that my collect calls were *not* being charged at \$1.09 a minute, as a representative of AT&T had told them, but at a much lower rate, as their phone bill for September had revealed. I was so relieved that I talked with Patrick, Teresa, and Tom for at least two hours. Indeed, I was surprised that the phone – which is usually cut off shortly after 11 PM – was still functioning at 11:45.

As we talked, clean-up took place around me (I’ve done it often enough that I feel no guilt when I don’t – it only takes three people, anyway), and the sheets, etc., were returned. I snagged two sheets – making sure neither were the thin, cheesecloth variety – but missed my towel and pillowcase. When I finally got off the phone, I asked around for the extra towel and pillowcase. “Uh, didn’t you get yours, Ted?” Bill innocently asked.

“No,” I said, “just my sheets.”

“Oh,” he said, slipping them out from under his sheets, where he’d hidden them. “I thought these were *extras*.”

I’ve learned a few tricks about making up one’s jail-cell bed here. I noticed in A-5 that Skip – also on the floor – knotted the ends of his sheets, tying the corners of each end together. This creates a “fitted sheet” that fits over the ends of the mattress pads. This appears to be a common practice here, and works quite well. My cell’s mattress, formerly Wayne Treon’s, is larger than the one I had on the floor – longer and wider by about four inches in each dimension. It’s also very thin in its center, most of the padding having migrated to the edges. At first I thought I couldn’t “fit” my bottom sheet to it, but I learned that I could scrunch the corners of the mattress in enough to make it work. I also took my old mattress from the floor into my cell, slipping it under the larger mattress and creating a little more padding between me and the concrete shelf. So far no one has objected to this, although one guard did notice.

It’s not *truly* comfortable in my cell-bed, but relatively speaking it’s a lot more comfortable than the floor. I can’t lie in one position too long, though, before it puts the part of my body I’m lying on to sleep – in the pins-and-needles sense. There’s no “give” in the padding, you see. Yet, being sufficiently adaptable, my body has learned to get a decent night’s sleep under these conditions. I now sleep better than I ever did out on the floor. (My “extra-firm” bed at home will probably feel obscenely soft when I return to it.)

Most of my dreams are pleasantly escapist – in one Dan Steffan showed me a fascinating dummy for a digest-sized SF magazine which intrigued me for several days thereafter with its freshness and novelty (Dan is now art director for a slick D.C. monthly, and has the enviable task of totally redesigning it, which undoubtedly was the root of my dream) – but every so often I have dreams about being home, but only temporarily, and having to come back here. These are sad dreams, a sign of Reality breaking through my Fantasy, my awareness of being stuck here.

“Some people just can’t handle being in here,” Red Bob said yesterday. “Me, I figure I did it, they got me, and I’m here to do my time. I don’t worry about it – I just accept it.”

I try to do the same. Usually it’s not that hard. I don’t tease myself by staring out the window for hours.

I accept the confines of the cellblock as my present “home,” and welcome the opportunity to retreat into

my cell in the evenings.

“You doing it right,” Lonny told me recently. Lonny has a twinkle in his eyes. “You got a handle on it okay.”

I’ll miss Lonny when he leaves this Saturday. Like Wayne and Jackson, he is a force for stability and calm, unfailingly good-humored and easygoing. These last few days have been the hardest for him, waiting for them to crawl by and his release to occur. We talk about it. We talk about where he’ll go – “I want to go somewhere *warm*, man. California appeals to me.” He’s never been to California. It’s hard for him to sit still now. He mock-boxes with the shower curtain. He paces like a caged animal. It’s getting close now. He can almost taste it. Only one more full day in here. He’ll leave Saturday morning.

Phil mentioned a guy who was here before I was. They’d told him his release date a week or two earlier, and on that date a guard came and called him. “There’s been a change in your release date,” the guard told him. “They’ve given you two more months.”

“His face went white,” Phil said. “Then the guard told him it was just a joke” – Phil snorted – “and to get his things.”

“Some joke,” Lonny said. “Thass some joke all right.” He shook his head with disgust.

#

AFTERMATH: We’d been watching NBC – *Cheers*, *Nightcourt*, *Hill St. Blues* – and then started playing a game of Hearts. It was 11:30 or a little later when the fire alarm went off – again. It had gone off for an extended time – fifteen minutes or more – last night, between 8 and 9 PM, and fire trucks had pulled up outside, but a guard told me it was “Just a drill.” Tonight was no drill. Not only were there lots of trucks outside, the air-conditioning system carried the distinct odor of smoke into our block.

Lonny had locked himself into his cell early tonight. When I went into mine (after winning the game) the smell of smoke was much stronger. I hope Lonny didn’t have bad dreams.

Letters from Jail #12



October 12, 1986

Lonny got Out last night. His official release date was today – a Sunday. Apparently they don't release on Sundays (or holidays, which Monday is), so at a few minutes before midnight, while Bill, Phil, Mike, and I were playing Hearts and watching *Saturday Night Live*, a guard came to the door and shouted through it, "Ratcliff! Pack your things!"

Lonny was asleep in his cell, and Phil kept laughing so much that he wasn't sure if his leg was being pulled. But sure enough a few minutes later, after we'd all shook his hand, wished him luck, and offered some variation of "Now don't you come back, you hear?" the guard took him out.

I wonder about a system that dumps a big black man out on the street, homeless, at midnight on a Saturday night. (And I wonder if I'll be given the same scant notice to call Michael Nally to come get me. He has my Honda and says he'll come get me any time, day or night, but he lives an hour away, out in the Virginia countryside. Well, time enough to reach that bridge....)

Yesterday was a strange day. The night before it got *very* cold in here: down to the mid-50s (F) in my cell, where I wore all my clothes under my sheet and blanket and was *still* cold. It's the air conditioning, which stays far too cold, and blows a strong draft. Around 4 AM the fire alarm went off, ringing for ten minutes or more, and then ringing again for three shorter bursts. My assumption is that some poor fool got so cold that he set a fire in his cell. I couldn't blame him if he did, but the alarm didn't improve my sleep.

Then when the mail came, they opened my mother's letter and removed the stamps she'd enclosed. She had sent me, at my request, fifteen 17-cent stamps, to use on letters that might weigh over an ounce. "You can't have these," the guard said. "Why?" I asked. He gave me no reason, but just told me to put them in an envelope and he'd put them in my property. Later in the day another guard brought me a receipt for *six* stamps. Your guess about the whereabouts of the remaining nine stamps is as good as mine....

I had two visits that afternoon, and while I was waiting in the corridor for the first, I listened to two inmates bullshitting. One, tall and thin, with wavy manicured hair, was going on about what a tough guy he was, and how he knew that you could take gunshots in the head because he'd known of a man who'd taken five .38 caliber shots (at close range) to his head and still taken out the would-be assassin (on Capitol Hill, no less), and of another "out in the desert" who'd survived three shots in the head. The other guy, much younger, a blond ex-Marine, reacted derisively, and said he'd volunteer to go out in the woods with the first guy, with one bullet apiece, and "take you out, man." Naturally, the first man came back with, "Hell, I don't *need* no bullet, and I'll *still* get you!" The rest of us were much entertained by all this macho-Rambo crap.

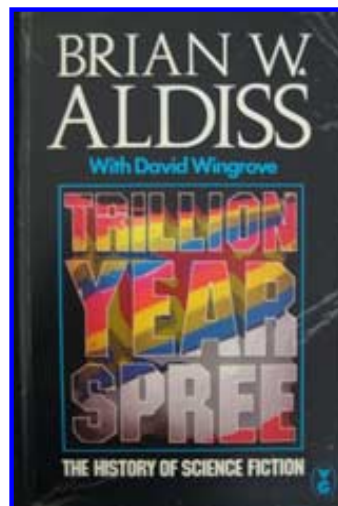
Michael Nally was my first visitor, and Matthew Moore my second. They each make a point of visiting every Saturday, which I appreciate. Matthew tells me that our band's tapes are now being played regularly

by three or four of the deejays at the U. of Maryland FM station, “Crimson Tide” being the current favorite, “Unanswered Questions” a close second.

I called the Nielsen Haydens that evening, as pre-arranged, to work out Greg Pickersgill’s visit here, and talked briefly to Greg Himself. Later I called Victor Gonzalez in Seattle, and we chatted about fandom, music, and our personal lives (not that mine is all that interesting at the moment).

I’ve noticed that if I don’t have a specific reason for calling someone it isn’t necessarily a good idea. “How’re you doing?” is a question I can answer only so many ways, so many times. There’s not much to talk about that doesn’t end up in these Letters anyway. I don’t *like* it here, but my dislikes are petty, taken individually. It’s the fact that I’m under others’ control – and the unreasoning petty bureaucracy of that control – that gets to me. “Assholes!” is our most common epithet for the deputies who run our lives here. They range from almost-decent human beings to petty tyrants – bullies, enforcing the letter of The Rules as they choose to see them. A number of them think it’s funny to try to provoke us into anger by teasing us. One, for example, opened a package of three books – from Avon; thanks John and Gary – and said, “I’ll give you this one, and keep these two,” giving me a sly look to see how I was taking it. Another took several letters I’d given him to mail, and said, “I’ll just throw these away, ha-ha. Here – “ to a passing Trusty, “*you want ’em?*” I keep a blank expression and say nothing, waiting them out. If I said it wasn’t funny, they’d just push it farther. What they *hope* is that I’ll snap and do something that would give them the excuse to beat me up and throw me in The Hole. I refuse to give them the satisfaction, but it *has* occurred to me that if I ever ran into one on the Outside, I’d love to kick the shit out of him. This is not a Good Attitude, of course, but it *is* a good example of the lessons they teach us here. (If I stay here long enough, they *will* make a criminal out of me, if only in self-defense.) No, that’s not something that makes for good phone conversations....

#



October 14, 1986

Two days have gone by without anyone new coming in to our happy little cellblock. I miss Lonny, but as time goes on, I find myself moving up the pecking-order. It’s little things: I used to bring cups of coffee or “juice,” etc., in for others. Now my tray, cup, etc., is, as often as not, brought to *me*.

With Lonny gone there are only five of us who play cards, so we can’t form teams with the team who is sitting-out ready to play the winners of the last game, rotating us all. This has forced a readjustment in the way we rotate players, more informal and less certain.

Wayne is still here, working as a Trusty, and needing \$300 to get out. It looks like he'll have to work it off in more time served. Poor guy. We see him in the hall, serving food occasionally, and swap a few words with him.

And the evidence is that Asshole Steve is still here, too, in A-9. *He* needed (he said) only \$65!

Lynn Cohen at Marvel Comics has been sending Care Packages of comics in to me: three batches last week, and a batch of "Graphic Novels" that came today. (Mike Kaluta and Elaine Lee's *Starstruck* is brilliant stuff – right up there with Mobius – although I found few connections with the original Elaine Lee play of the same name. On the other hand, Frank Miller and Bill Sienkiewicz's *Daredevil* is pretentious, arty, and banal – a complete waste of paper. I haven't read the rest yet.) In any case, my thanks to Lynn.

And thanks also to Malcolm Edwards, who sent me Brian Aldiss's *Trillion Year Spree* and Phil Dick's *Humpty Dumpty in Oakland* from Gollancz. I've been reading the Aldiss at night – puts me to sleep quite readily....

And so it goes....

Letters From Jail #13



October 15, 1986

The Saga Continues: today I received a Communication from Above. Namely, a response to a Request Form I'd filed on October 7th. I'd asked why I had not yet been "classified" by the state, as I'd been told I would be within a month or so after my entrance to this durance vile. More precisely, I'd written, "I would like to know my classification by the state. I have been here for more than one month."

Today, in lieu of Real Mail, the deputy distributing the mail returned my Request Form. Scrawled down the right side was the following message: "You will not be classified by the State on 1 year sentence is Mandatory Parole after you've served at least 91 days in jail" (all totally *sic*).

I checked the handy calendar stuck in the phone (courtesy the Fairfax County Jail Ministry) and counted off the days. December 6th. Could I be released then? Dare I hope? What does "at least" mean in this context? Illiteracy? Or does it have to do with "Good Time" (or, conversely, infractions – like fighting – which might add time)? If this is true, it means I've served almost half my time in here already. I'd certainly love to be Out before Christmas, but I've been on this emotional roller coaster before; part of me remains skeptical. We shall see....

#

Last night we became seven again. Around 9:30 PM they brought in Jack Urban. He's here on a DWI – and claims he was arrested (in Falls Church) in a 7-11 parking lot while sitting in a parked van. He's here in lieu of a \$5,000 bond, his court date not until late November. He appears typical of a kind of prisoner of which there are too many here: accused but not (yet) convicted of any crime, here because they can't raise bond. Jack admits to a number of prior DWI charges, which no doubt is one reason his bond is this high (relatively speaking – mine was ten times greater).

In appearance he is old and scuzzy – he looks like a wino, with the typical sunken cheeks and toothless jaws of a mouth that closes too far, bringing his chin too close to his nose. He's small, wizened, and ratty looking. It came as a shock to me when I inquired his age and discovered he is one month *younger* than I am. It's too early to know for sure, but he seems quiet and inoffensive. He talks little, doesn't play cards much (none at all, yet, but he said he "used" to play Spades), and doesn't seem to read. (I asked him if he read comics, and pointed to the stack I'd donated, but he's yet to pick one up.) He has fit unobtrusively into things here, and I gather this is not his first stay in this jail. He'll do.

#

In Forensics Class today there were only three of us inmates: Red Bob, Dan, and me. The subject turned out to be cellblock behavior, and I began to realize just how lucky I am to be in A-7.

Dan started by describing a (black) man in his cell who constantly pesters him for things – primarily cigarettes.

“Now, I have lots of money in my account here,” he said, “and I get a couple of bags every time from commissary.” Commissary days are Tuesdays and Fridays. Our orders come in little paper bags. “And there’s two other guys who have money. But the other four guys don’t. They can’t spend more than maybe a buck or two a week.” (Cigarettes cost 90 cents a pack here, with no discount for cartons.) “So this one guy, he calls me ‘bourgeois,’ and he’s always hitting me up for cigarettes. All the time! And if I say no, he starts screaming at me about how I better not ever ask him for anything, ’cause he wouldn’t give it to me. Now, this is a guy I never have asked for anything, and it’s not likely I ever *will*, because he never has anything, anyway.

“See, I’m a fairly generous guy. I give away a lot of cookies, candy, stuff like that. I’ll give a guy a cigarette lots of times – even a pack – but I expect a little back. Like, if I’m out, he’ll give me a smoke. But this particular guy, he never pays *anyone* back. He just pesters you until you give him what he wants. He threatens. I’m not intimidated” – Dan is a big guy – “but if I was maybe a lot smaller, I might be.”

At this point Chris Tull, the psychologist, pointed out that this is a classic behavior pattern. “If you put rats in a box where they have to push a button for a food pellet, and in some boxes each time the button is pushed the rat is rewarded with a pellet, and in other boxes the rat has to push three times for the pellet, which box do you think the rat goes to?” It turns out the rat chooses the box where it takes several pushes on the button.

“Why?” I asked.

“Good question,” Chris said, with a grin. “Apparently, having to push the button several times reinforces the behavior pattern. It’s the same way here. If you give the guy a cigarette *every* time he asks for one, he won’t ask as often as he will if he only gets one every three or four times he asks. By giving him a cigarette only once in a while, you teach him to pester you more.”

“Well,” Dan said, “I cut him off. I didn’t give him any reasons or anything. I just said ‘no.’”

“The way I deal with that” – cigarette cadging – Red Bob said, “is this:” and he pulled a pouch of rolling tobacco out of his shirt pocket. “It’s cheaper, and it cuts down on the requests.”

I recall Lee Hoffman rolling her own in the Old Days of New York fandom. “It cuts down on your consumption, too,” I said, “when you have to roll one before you can smoke it.”

Bob grinned: “Yeah – and sometimes just when you got it rolled, the paper tears and breaks, and you got tobacco all over the place....”

“Thing is,” Bob said, “I used to buy cigarettes, but I found guys were going into my cell while I was in gym, and stealing them. So now there’s nothing to steal – they can’t be bothered with rolling their own.”

From there we went on to general behavior. I recalled Teresa saying in a recent letter, “When I typed out the letters where you discussed Asshole Steve, I was first struck by how obnoxious you found him. Later on, after I’d digested it a bit, I went back and reread those passages to see again just exactly what it was about him. I wondered if I’d read it correctly the first time, mistaken minor nuisance for major nuisance. That’s when I realized that his behavior – simple assholery in the outside world – was inconsiderate squared and cubed in a situation where you can’t get away from him. I decided you’d been restrained in your appraisal....” I offered a boiled down version of that: “Here we are, seven guys in a cellblock, and you *gotta* get along. Everybody’s inside your personal space.”

“Yeah,” Bob said, “we got one guy now, he acts like he’s living at home.”

“What do you mean?” Chris asked. .

“Well, he just acts like we’re not there. He takes a shower, he stands out in the middle of the dayroom to towel off, getting water all over the place. He’ll get up and shower before breakfast while everyone else is trying to sleep” – showering is noisy – “and there he’ll be out on the floor, toweling off and blocking everyone from the food when they’re passing it in.” (Mattresses on the floor leave a limited space in the dayroom for maneuvering for breakfast.) “We’ll be sitting at the table, playing cards, and he’ll push his way in and sit down on the bench in front of the TV to watch something, instead of pulling up a chair – and he’s *big*, he weighs over 250 pounds, and he takes up a lotta space. He just pushes people out of his way.” Warming to the subject, Bob continued, “He leans right over the card game to change channels or turn up the sound. And *then*, he’ll go make a phone call and demand we turn the sound *down*. Hell, he’s so loud, you can’t hear the TV over him!” He grinned. “We just turn it up.”

I thought about how considerate we generally are of each other here in A-7. When we’re playing cards we make sure we’re not blocking Chester’s view of the TV. We turn it down if someone’s on the phone and can’t hear. We ask each other what we want to see (I’ve established my priorities – I gave up *St. Elsewhere* on Wednesdays for NBC on Thursday nights, and *LA Law* on Friday nights, plus *60 Minutes* on Sundays). We share cookies, candy, and – among those who smoke – cigarettes. (I bought Mike five packs of Kools one week – he paid me back in Hershey bars when he got some money a week later.) We kid each other, but with an underlying respect for each other that does not seem to be as common in the other cellblocks. Nobody begs, pesters, or threatens in here – now that Asshole Steve is gone. This *is* the best cellblock in the jail. I hope it stays that way.

#

Talking with the Nielsen Haydens tonight made me aware of something. I tend to write down (and thus externalize, and get off my chest) my gripes about the guys in here like Bill and Chester. What I *don’t* do is to offer subsequent write-ups of ameliorating behavior, or the modification of my feelings. That’s a disservice to them, Bill in particular. Bill has a fussiness that goes with his age and his New England background. He *is* also forgetful – forever forgetting who just dealt a hand of cards (even when it’s him). But his traits in this regard are only slight exaggerations of those shared by the rest of us. (Mike and I share the joke that it’s the *absence* of drugs that’s rotting our minds. “I’m gonna end up like Bill, I know it!”) And in consequence we kid Bill about his shortcomings but we rarely snap at him or get angry with him. And he responds with cheerfulness to this kidding. (It’s fascinating to watch Mike reveal considerable sensitivity in his judgment of just how far the kidding should go, and where it should stop.)

Once, one morning, Bill called, “Lock-out, Mike,” into Mike’s cell (Mike inherited Lonny’s cell), and Mike came out and grumpily told Bill, “I don’t need to hear that from *you*, Bill.” But we’re *all* grumpy then, and it’s to Bill’s credit that he usually doesn’t need to be told twice. You get used to it. And Bill’s chirpiness is far from the worst behavior one could encounter in here, as the previous section of this Letter may have made clear. He means well. That counts for a lot in here.

#

“I go out on clean-up detail in the evenings,” Dan remarked in Forensics Class today (in fact, I’d seen him last night at clean-up and exchanged a few friendly words with him), “and there’s this one deputy, he uses dice to decide how he deals with requests.”

Deputies are routinely asked for Request Forms, or given Request Forms, or are asked for other things

that range from requests to call attorneys from a free (non-collect-call) phone, to requests to get out into the hallway on a work detail. Sometimes they do as requested, but as often they don't. (None of them responded to our requests for Request Forms for five days last week – a serious dereliction of duty on their part.)

“I watched him,” Dan said. “He has this die, and he has three things written on it, 'Yes,' 'No,' and 'Maybe.' I watched him. When he was asked to do something, he'd roll the die. If it came up 'Yes,' he'd do it. 'No,' and he'd ignore it. If it was 'Maybe,' he'd wait a while, and then roll it again. I saw him read a Request Form, roll the die, see it come up 'No,' and wad the Request Form up and throw it away.”

“They're not supposed to do that,” Chris protested.

“I saw him do it. I saw it with my own eyes, man,” Dan said. “He laughed to himself when he did it, too.”

“Wotta asshole,” I said. Dan and Red Bob nodded in agreement. Chris looked unhappy.

So it goes.

LETTERS from JAIL #14



October 16, 1986

You could hear it coming, from way down the hall.

Bang-bang-bang-bang! “A-5! Gym in fifteen minutes! Gym at 7:30!”

Bang-bang-bang-bang! “A-6! Gym in fifteen minutes! Gym at 7:30!”

BANG-BANG-BANG-BANG! “A-7! Gym in ten minutes! 7:30! Gym at 7:30!” The gym director, Trusty, or whoever it was, was banging something metal and loud on the doors, then shouting his message through the door slots as though heralding the Apocalypse.

“Get stuffed!” I shouted back at him through my cell door. Who needs to have his remaining sleep defiled this way? And who wants to go up to the gym at 7:30 in the morning, anyway?

Bang-bang-bang-bang! “A-8! Gym call! Gym in ten minutes!”

Bang-bang-bang-bang! “A-9! Gym at 7:30! Gym in ten minutes!”

Gym is located one flight up, adjacent to the classrooms, and flanked by the “B” cells on the west side, and the “C” cells on the east, their windows overlooking the volleyball court. Gym consists of the “outdoor” volleyball court, its two-storey walls topped with a steel mesh “roof” through which both sunshine and rain can fall, but with few other aspects of the outdoors; plus an indoor half-court for basketball, and a run-down “weight room.” The latter contains some workout equipment and a broken standing scale. Some guys go up there every day, but I do so rarely, usually to stand around and visit with someone, or to breathe fresh air. I skipped it today.

#

“It is the oldest story in history. For a brief period a community existed of the appropriate size to stage its quarrels, create its consensus and express its needs with confidence, energy, and grace. Then, in pursuing its Manifest Destiny, the community outgrew itself – and fragmented.”

—Melvin Maddocks, describing the history of Harvard University in *Smithsonian*, September 1986

As fandom goes, so....

#

We've been hearing for weeks about the new visitation area, which is in the New Wing of the jail and has been Just About To Open since September 22nd.

Today – October 16th – it opened.

Today Dan Steffan brought Greg Pickersgill to visit me here.

“White! Visitation!” the guard said, at about 7:30. “Take that pen out of your pocket,” he added. “Leave it here.” The last time I had a visitor I was told to wear my crummy blue short sleeved “uniform” shirt over the long sleeved sweatshirt I was wearing, and on this occasion I had a pen in my shirt pocket.

As I headed out my cellblock door the guard said, “You're gonna get to use the new visitation area today. It's just been opened.”

“Where's it at?” I asked.

“Just go upstairs and turn to your right. The deputy in the hall will escort you.”

I went up the same stairs I take to class or the gym, but turned right instead of left, entering the B-section hallway which is directly above the hallway outside our cellblock. There I found a guard who sent me down the hall to another guard who was standing where the hall took a slight bend. At that point it became part of the new wing, the paint very fresh and new.

There I stood and waited for ten minutes while other inmates joined me. (One was just made Trusty that day. We talked about that.)

Then the guard (an Asian with a Germanic name) read off our cubicle numbers and led us into the new area. As we entered, inmates concluding their visits exited past us. “It's no good, man,” one said as he passed us. Soon we understood what he meant.

The old area was subdivided into cubicles with walls that extended perhaps four feet into the room. The cubicles in the new area are partitioned off from each other with little barriers that extend out no more than one foot.

The old cubicles had swivel-chairs bolted to the floor on the inmates' side and ordinary chairs (like the ones in our cells) on the visitors' side. The new cubicles have concrete pedestals – hard, fixed, and backless – on both sides.

And, most important, the old cubicles had telephones to talk through, while the new cubicles have tiny grilled apertures under the windows to talk through.

We filed in, sat at our assigned cubicles, and looked at each other. There was much less privacy – no real isolation from each other. “We gonna have to keep our voices down,” one guy said. “Shit, man, I don't like this at *all*,” another said. I had to agree.

We waited another five or ten minutes and our visitors came in. Mine were Dan and Greg. Dan had visited me before, and was aware of the change.

It was all new, of course, to Greg. .

We tried to talk. It was not impossible, just difficult. The one speaking had to put his mouth close to the grill, while the listener had his ear to his side of the grill. Soon, both the inmates' side and the visitor' side were filled with raised voices, and it was even more difficult to hear or be understood.

I held my Request Form with the message that I had a total of "at least 91 days" to serve up against the glass so they could read it. Then we attempted conversation. It wasn't easy on either side. We quickly realized that it was pointless to get into any extended conversation and arranged for me to call the Steffan house the next day after lunch (around 11:30 AM), to talk with Greg at greater length. Then we filled in our remaining time with pantomime and grins.

My impression is that Dan and Greg had been at the Vietnam Memorial, and the Smithsonian Air & Space Museum that afternoon, and planned to go to the Science & Technology Museum tomorrow. Greg said he'd found a lot to enjoy here, and wanted to come back, lamenting as I have the distance and expense that separate our respective countries. It was frustrating to try to talk – we had a lot we each wanted to say, and the new cubicles made it so difficult.

Although the new visitation area has 32 separate cubicles, in several rows in a large room, most were not in use, and we were still allowed only about 20 minutes (and the visitors still had to wait until the first group had come out before being let in). That made as little sense as the design of the new area itself did. But I've given up expecting the people who run this jail to do things for logical or sensible reasons. The new visitation area is Kafkaesque in design and execution – a new form of punishment for both us and our visitors.

As we filed out, the men were disgusted. "My mother came 600 miles, man, and she couldn't hear a word I said!" "This is *fucked*, man!" "I don't want no more visits here, man – I use the phone from now on!" "Shee-it!"

I'm going to tell my visitors to stop coming. There's just no point to it. The phone *is* better.

Score: Jail – 1, Inmates – 0.

#

October 17, 1986

I called the Steffans this morning at about 11:30, and talked with Dan and Greg for more than an hour. It was all the visit had not been. Greg and I compared opinions of the people we knew, discussed how we each feel about writing (he feels about fan writing not unlike the way I feel about pro writing – that once you reach the peak of your abilities, your ambition to write *better* works against you, making you impatient with the level of what you're writing and making the task of writing grim work, and no fun at all), and agreed that it was a bloody shame that it wasn't easier and cheaper to commute between the US and the U.K. "I definitely want to come back again." I told him how much I enjoy driving cross-country and really seeing the West. "Linda wanted to do that," Greg said. I urged him to plan for it for a future trip here. And we talked about Brighton. "I'm looking forward to the Worldcon," I said. "This time I'll have a much more fannish convention." "The whole situation has changed completely since 1979," Greg said. We agreed the current state of rapprochement between the fandoms of our countries was a marked improvement, both for us each, personally, and for fandom in general. It was an excellent conversation, and one I'm glad we were able to have, away from the pressures of the Worldcon and in a more relaxed mood.

#

EPILOGUE: Capt. John J. Snyder, Chief of Confinement in the Fairfax County Sheriff's Dept., sent us all the following memo:

"I want to take this opportunity to apologize for the inconvenience you, your family, and friends have experienced during your recent personal visits. I feel I should advise you, so you can inform your visitors, that the problems we are now experiencing will be corrected as soon as possible. We are going to return to the telephone type communication in the visiting area.

"I ask you to take into consideration the visiting communication now in use was installed and recommended by the contracted construction companies, not the Sheriff's Department. In brief, don't blame the deputy on duty. Be patient and understanding. We are in the process of correcting the problem."

While I'm glad changes are in the works (how long will they take? Days, weeks, or months?), I don't accept the copout of responsibility offered by Snyder. The "construction companies" built according to detailed specifications – as all contractors for governments do – and those specifications were the responsibility of the Sheriff's Dept. Someone fucked up.

"When we were leaving," Dan told me on the phone, "*everyone* was complaining to the deputies." And somewhere along the line the number and magnitude of those complaints had an impact. Now the Sheriff's Dept. is acting – well after the fact, and probably only *because* pressure has been brought to bear. It should not have been necessary.

So it goes.

Letters From Jail #15



October 18, 1986

One of the best things about living in New York City in 1979 and 1980, while I was editing *Heavy Metal*, was the music.

I'd hired Lou Stathis as HM's rock ("rok") columnist, and together – and occasionally with Dan Steffan, when he started working in the art department – we'd hit the various nightspots in the city. New York was unique in my experience for the fact that even on weekday nights the music in most of the rock clubs started around midnight and lasted until four or five in the morning. I don't know when this tradition was established – in the fifties and sixties when I was hitting the jazz clubs the set started much earlier and ended no more than an hour or two after midnight – since I was absent from the scene for nearly 20 years, but even with an 11 AM arrival time at my office, I often ran very short on sleep.

My favorite club was Hurrah, located a few blocks away from Lincoln Center, on the Upper West Side. You climbed a ratty stairway up several dingy flights and suddenly found yourself in a vast room with mirrored walls, a large bar, a lounge with carpeted seats, a big dance floor, and a small bandstand flanked by TV monitors. It was here that I saw for the first time most of the premier British New Wave bands like XTC, Orchestral Maneuvers in the Dark, and Ultravox right after Midge Ure joined, as well as lesser, but quirky, bands like the Slits. It was here that my mind was blown by Kid Creole and the Coconuts, and here that I saw Suicide and Lydia Lunch and James Chance's James White & the Blacks. And here that I saw, met, and became friends with Nash the Slash, the one-man band whom I wrote up myself in *HM*. I spent New Year's Eve at Hurrah with Nash, several of the Talking Heads, and Walt O'Brien (Now with IMPortant Records).

The person who made my frequent forays to Hurrah possible was the club's booking agent, Ruth Polsky. Not only did she book in so many of the bands that I wanted to see (making frequent trips overseas to catch new bands before they were even heard of here), she was always willing to put me on the guest list whenever I called – often only the afternoon before. I'm sure my *HM* connection was a major factor, but once she knew me – and especially after my write-up of Nash appeared – our relationship became more personal and friendly. I liked her taste in music, and I liked her.

I lost track of her when I left *HM* and NYC in August 1980. Hurrah, I heard, closed in 1981. Ruth's name appeared from time to time in the rock press as a booking agent for other clubs.



But I was totally unprepared for her obituary which appeared in the October 23rd issue of *Rolling Stone*, which I snagged from the rolling library cart here yesterday afternoon. She was “run down by a taxi while she was standing outside the Limelight, a desanctified church turned nightclub in Manhattan,” on

September 7th. She was 32.

Shit.

#

October 19, 1986

Sometimes they let you sleep and sometimes they don't. For two nights now they haven't. The night before last the guard who routinely came into our cellblock to shine his flashlight into our eyes slammed the door loudly on his way out. "Hell," Jack said. "How's a man to sleep through that every fifteen minutes?"

Last night was worse. Minutes after the one guard conducted lock-in, another unlocked the cells from outside with the characteristic bang-bang-bang-bang! of gunshots (amplified within each cell by the confined concrete-walled space), did it again, and then came in and pulled open each door and shut it again, automatically relocking them. I was still awake, but Mike, Phil, and Jackson had been sleeping. I heard Mike's querulous "What's *wrong* with you, man?" from the next (D) cell. The next few passes through were relatively uneventful, but for the flashlight beam in my eyes. But somewhere around an hour before breakfast a flat-topped guard came through and unlocked each of our cell doors with a key and then slammed it shut again. Why? Who knows? Maybe just simple sadism. Maybe boredom. Is it worth complaining about? Probably not.

Every time I get to thinking, "This isn't so bad. I can get along here," something mindless like this occurs. Simple bullying – reminders that this is supposed to be punishment, and loss of regular sleep is punishing in many ways, both subtle and overt.

Letters from Jail #16



October 22, 1986

Today at “Forensics Class” Dan wasn’t his usual talkative self. I asked him what was wrong.

“Oh, man, this place is really getting me *down*. It’s really getting to me! I’m in a cellblock full of assholes with nothing to do all day but just sit there and try to ignore them. I ought to be getting out in a week or two, but there’s this fucking investigator from Alexandria trying to pin a bad-check charge on me – even though I was *in here* when it’s supposed to have happened – and I know he’s gonna fuck up my release, the asshole!”

I’ve never seen him like this before. He’s really depressed. I’d brought him a book he wanted to read – *The Choirboys* – and was looking forward to seeing him. “I don’t like *anybody* in my cellblock,” he said. “There’s no respect, no friendship – just assholes wising off all the time.”

“I think Classification is fucking up,” Red Bob said. “We’re getting all these kids in A-5. They yell all the time, and they watch fuckin’ *cartoons* all day on the TV. Always switching channels, always making noise. It’s getting on my nerves.” He’s 42. “We’ve done written out three of them – three at once, that’s some kind of a record for us!”

“Too bad we’re full up,” I told Dan. “Or I’d suggest you come down to A-7. We got a friendly cellblock.”

“I gotta do something, man,” Dan said. “This place is doing bad things to my head.”

#

BITS: If you’re here without funds, you get certain items from Commissary without paying for them. Phil gets a tube – very small – of toothpaste every week. “I don’t use a tube every week,” he told me. “I got three of them now. If you need toothpaste, I’ll give you one.”

I’d bought a small tube when I made my first Commissary order. It turned out to be Crest with fluoride, which satisfied me. I normally use a fluoride toothpaste. So when it ran out, I asked Phil for a tube. But what he gave me was not Crest with fluoride, but Colgate *without* fluoride, and the tube was even smaller. Most odd was the sticker pasted on the box and on the (metal) tube: “MADE IN BRAZIL” it said. The writing on both box and tube was, naturally, bilingual – English and Portuguese. Why is the jail giving away Brazilian-made toothpaste?

Immediately after I was sentenced, when a Deputy took me from the courtroom, he told me, “I’ve been in all the jails in Virginia, and this is the best. You should be glad this is where you’ll be doing your time.” He also told me I’d be doing nine months of my one-year sentence. Both statements were false – and probably

knowing lies. The Fairfax County Jail – excuse me: Adult Detention Center – is the worst in at least Northern Virginia. It is worse than the Alexandria City Jail, the Arlington County Jail, the Prince William County Jail, and the Leesburg City Jail, that I know of. I base this on the statements of those who have been to these other jails. In those jails one is not locked out of one's individual cell during the day, and the food is better. Jackson, for instance, was taken to Prince William County for a court appearance which required him to be housed in the jail there for two days, and told us what it was like: "They put me in a regular cell – not on the dayroom floor – and the food was a lot better. We got a *full meal* for lunch." Here one gets a sandwich and a bowl of soup, or just two sandwiches.

General opinion is that the guards are a lot more decent in those other jails, too. Here, some treat you like a human being, but the majority like to pull petty sadistic tricks, some of which I've described already. (The other day one looked in during the evening, making a routine head-count. I was in my cell writing a letter. "Where's White?" I looked up and said "Yo!" and waved at him through the window of my cell door. He jerked the door open and said, in what I assume he thought was a joking voice, "Boy, don't you ever go up before a jury, 'cause you look *guilty*. Haw, haw, I never seen anybody look more guilty. Haw, haw. You sure look guilty, awright. You better not let a jury get a look at you! Haw, haw, haw." Then he left. "What was that all about?" I asked the others in the dayroom. "He's just jerking your chain," Jack said.)

We talked about that in our Group today. A new member of the group, the only black in it, recently said, "They racist here, man." He named names and examples – too many for me to recall them all – but one stuck with me. He'd filed a Request Form with a guard for the use of a free phone to call the hospital where his father was dying of cancer (such places don't accept collect calls), and had gotten no response. While he was in the company of the chief psychologist he asked her if she could help him. She called the guard over and asked him about it. The guard said no Request Form had been filed. Since the inmate knew he'd filed one, he accused the guard of throwing it away. The psychologist wavered between believing him or the guard so he suggested they look in the trash basket. She agreed, over the guard's protest. The trash was searched and "There it was, all wadded up, with chewing tobacco stains all over it, man!" His point had been proved, but he never did get his call. He was told he could write a letter instead.



After several exchanges of correspondence with the circulation department, I'm finally receiving the Washington *Post* here. Today I received Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday's copies with my mail. (Apparently, they'll come one day late through the mail, at a premium. Thank ghod I paid a year in advance last spring, because my remaining six weeks here may exhaust that subscription.) What a relief to have a real newspaper to read! I'll pass them on to the rest of the guys when I finish them, and then put them on the bench outside our door at cleanup, so others can enjoy them. I'm a news-junkie, and this really helps pass the time in here.

#

October 23, 1986

Well, maybe. Today no *Post* came in the mail. If Wednesday's paper doesn't arrive in tomorrow's mail (along with today's) I'll file a grievance form. It's more than pilferage – it's tampering with federal mail. The vengeful in me would love to pin that on a guard here.

They have a new trick they've been pulling this week: delaying opening our cells for several hours.

Normally Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays are Shaving Days. On these days numbered razors are

passed out, used, and returned. Each man who takes a razor has its number noted by his name. Normally the razors are passed out in late morning or early afternoon.

But this week they've been passed out after dinner. Normally, when a guard opens the cellblock door to remove the dinner trays and cups (using his foot or his pushbroom), he "pops the doors" of the cells immediately afterward, and we're free to enter our cells. I look forward to this. I like to lie down after dinner, to read, nap, or write letters (or Letters) at my tiny "desk," rather than on my lap. Tuesday dinner was very late – it didn't arrive until 6 PM – an hour late, and seven hours after lunch. (It was fried chicken, so we forgave the wait. Fried – or barbecued – chicken is the best dinner one gets here, usually about once every two weeks or so.) After dinner, the guard, as he kicked our empty trays out into the hall, asked, "Anyone want to shave in here?" The usual group did. (Mike and I have beards, and Jack, half Cherokee, shaves only once a week.) "I'll be back to pass out razors," the guard said, and disappeared without opening our cells. Half an hour later, he was back with the razors. "How about unlocking the cells?" Bill brightly inquired. The guard gave him a contemptuous look. "After you've shaved," he said, as though addressing someone who was mentally retarded. Bill doesn't have a cell, but has complained that the steel mirror over the dayroom sink is hard to use, since the light over it is far too high. He looked in my cell one evening and noticed that the light in my cell was much lower, just over the mirror, and made the mirror much more useful. Perhaps he'd thought to shave in one of our cells – I wouldn't have minded him using mine – or perhaps he was just being his usual helpful (sometimes too helpful) self.

So everyone shaved – using already well-used disposable razors – and then we waited, and waited and waited. Finally, the guard returned to collect them. "Can you open the cells now?" Bill asked him.

"When I'm done collecting the razors," the guard replied. He finally returned to unlock the cells with a ratta-tattoo of extra bangs at 8:30. Normally they're unlocked around 5:30. Last night dinner was late again, but without the excuse of passing out razors, our cells were unlocked at around 6:30. Tonight – again – dinner was a half-hour late, and – again – they waited until after dinner to pass out razors.

"Those assholes," I grumbled. "No sense letting it get to you, man," Mike said. "Don't matter none. They just playing with your head." It was 7 PM before our cells were unlocked. I skimmed a *Reader's Digest* (or *Digest*) while Mike played quick hands of solitaire, one after another. I noticed once the cells were unlocked, he disappeared into his.

#

Have I mentioned that the only eating utensil we get with our food is a plastic spoon – which we are required to return with our trays? Most of the food we get is soft enough to be cut with a plastic spoon – even the cooked meat – which is just as well, I think. A high percentage of the inmates are lacking a significant number of their teeth. (It was a bad joke when they gave Wayne Treon – still here as a Trusty – apples each evening as part of his diet as a diabetic after they pulled his last four teeth.)

#

Well, this evening they finally figured out that they'd given Phil a sweater that didn't belong to him.

They'd brought it to him a day or two after I moved into A-7, back in the middle of September. "What's this?" Phil asked.

"It's your sweater," the guard said. "Somebody sent it in to you."

"It ain't mine," Phil said. He looked at the collar. "Look," he said, "it says 'G.H.' on the collar. "That's not me." "Your name 'Funk'?" the guard asked.

“Yes, but....”

“It’s yours,” the guard said. He left.

Phil filled out a request form stating that it wasn’t his and had been misdelivered to him. Another guard came in and looked at it. “I’m not ‘G.H.’,” Phil said. “Well, maybe ‘G.H.’ sent it to you,” the guard said. “I don’t know any ‘G.H.’,” Phil said. “Keep it,” the guard said, and left.

It got cold in here. One day I asked if I could wear it, since he refused to wear it. He said sure. I wore it for most of a month. A couple of months ago Michael Nally, during one of his weekly Saturday visits, asked if he could get me anything. “Yes,” I said, “a set of thermal underwear.” I’d noticed a lot of the guys – including Phil – wearing thermals to stay warm. Last week Michael brought me a set. “I brought two,” he said, “but they’d only let me send one in to you.” I suggested that he try the second set the following week.

About five hours after Michael’s visit, a guard brought me the set of thermal underwear in a paper bag. I doffed the sweater and donned the thermal top. The next day I put the sweater (a sweatshirt, really) through the “personal laundry.” It’s been in my clean laundry bag since then.

Tonight a guard came by and demanded the sweater. “It’s not yours,” he told Phil sternly.

“I told you that when you gave it to me,” Phil retorted.

“Well, let’s have it,” the guard said. “Where is it?”

Phil looked at me. I nodded. “It’s in ‘C’ cell,” he said. It was after dinner, the razors hadn’t come yet, and the cells were all locked.

The guard unlocked my cell and watched while I went in and retrieved the sweater. “Close that door,” he said as I came out with the sweater in my hand.

“Why?” I said. “It’s after dinner.”

“Close it,” he said threateningly.

I closed it, and he left with the sweater.

“He’s not the one who’s responsible for unlocking these cells,” Mike observed.

“I knew they’d figure it out eventually,” Phil said, “There’s two other Funks upstairs in the B-cells. Gotta be one of theirs.”

I was just as glad I’d had the use of it until I had thermals to wear.

#

At mail call today a wimpy looking guard (one of those regarded by the guys in here as a “Georgetown fagot” with his regulation Gay Mustache) called “White!”

I got up from the chair where I’d been sitting, reading, “Yes, sir,” I said.

“You White?” he asked through the door.

“Yes, sir,” I said. “I’m White.”

“I can see you’re white,” he said, “but what’s your name?”

“My name’s White,” I said.

He peered at me. “Okay,” he said, and began opening my mail....

LETTERS FROM JAIL #17



October 27, 1986

It was about 10:30 this morning and I was playing Hearts when a black deputy – a sergeant – opened our cellblock door and called “White?”

I looked up. “Do I need my shoes?” I was wearing my “shower shoes” – rubberoid slippers – and they usually insist you wear shoes when you go to class, gym, or a visit.

“No, just put your shirt on,” he said.

I slipped my blue short-sleeved shirt over my long-sleeved thermal undershirt, and followed the deputy out into the hall, wondering what this was going to be about. It was outside the routine, and that can make you nervous. (The last time something outside the routine happened to me, it was my transfer from A-5 to A-7. That was an improvement. What would this be?)

The deputy led me down the hall to a desk located opposite A-10 in the hallway.

“Have a seat,” he said, gesturing to a chair beside the desk and sitting himself in the chair in front of the desk. He consulted a form. I could see the Virginia state seal at its top.

“You’re going to receive your Mandatory Parole on December 4,” he said.

“That’s sooner than I expected;” I said, feeling a rush of exhilaration. “Can you tell me when on the fourth I’ll be released?”

“Five-thirty,” he said.

”One of our guys was released at midnight,” I said. “That’s why I wondered.”

“If it’s a weekend, they release you at midnight,” he explained. “Weekdays, five-thirty in the morning.” Then he proceeded to ask me questions and fill out the form. The questions were: “Do you have anyone to stay with, when you get out?” “At what address?” “What was your *previous* address?” “Do you have a job waiting for you?” and “What’s your employer’s address?”

He gave me a slip of paper with my state number (#149676) on it, “MPD 12/4/86,” and the phone number of my parole board. “They’ll tell you, when you’re released, that you have three days to get in touch with your parole board,” he said.

That was pretty much it. He wished me luck and led me back to my cellblock where I resumed the Hearts game (Mike won).

December 4th is a Thursday. I'll be out that morning! (I've heard they don't like to feed you the day they release you. That's fine with me.) Receiving definite news like this is great. As of now I have only slightly more than a month to go. (And this letter, at the rate they've been getting published, may well not reach most of you until after that date. I suspect I may not bother writing many – or any more....)

I called Michael Nally, who has my Honda, and he said it would be back in my driveway at the beginning of the week. And I called Matthew Moore, who has a key to my house, and he agreed to pick me up here on the 4th. "I've got the schedule for it," Matthew said, laughing. (He works nights for CSPAN, the cable broadcaster that covers Congress.) Then I called Dan Steffan, who said he hoped I didn't want to play Pinochle that night ("traditionally" Thursday nights were Pinochle nights at the Steffans.). "I haven't played any in here," I said wistfully.

#

October 28, 1986

Bill left us this morning – at about 4:30 AM. The guard's voice woke me up: "Lee-may?" Bill's last name is Leamey, pronounced "Lee-me," but all the guards habitually mispronounced it and often couldn't find it on their lists when Bill pronounced it correctly for them. By now he was used to it.

"Leamey?" he asked.

"Get your things," the guard said.

"All of my things?" Bill asked. "Where am I going?"

"I dunno," the guard said. "Maybe you're going home."

"Oh, I doubt *that*," Bill said. He had a five-year sentence.

"He went 'down the road,'" is what we told the guy from Commissary when he arrived later that morning with our orders and asked for Bill.

"Give me his candy bars!" Mike demanded. Bill owed candy bars on the outcomes of both the World Series and the Giants-Redskins game the night before. But Sgt. Thompson, who runs the Commissary, just laughed at him.

"Down the road" means a downstate prison or camp. Bill was 62, and had colitis (which caused him to make almost liquid-sounding farts, to everyone's amusement but his), so it's likely he went to a "medical camp" where the duty would be light.

He didn't like to discuss his case, but revealed that he was a retired federal employee who had gotten into real estate speculation. Like those pitchmen on late-night "television seminars," he tried to do it without using his own money – he mentioned having *six* mortgages on one piece of property – and had extensive landholdings. But he cut it a little too close, and was found guilty of fraud. While he was in here half a dozen civil suits were filed against him. I suspect he'll be stripped and financially ruined before he gets out (a matter of a year or so), as a result of those suits, but he was almost unfailingly cheerful.

He sometimes annoyed me with his chirpy good cheer, and he was notable for his absent-mindedness in card playing ("You mean I still had the Queen of Spades? I thought I gave it to you!"), but he was a

civilized man, a rarity in here, and I find I miss him.

#

October 30, 1986

Chester finally got a look at Susie today. “Who *is* that?” he asked. “That a girl or a boy?”

“That’s Susie,” Jackson said.

“That’s a he-she,” Mike said.

Chester shook his head. This was *totally* beyond his comprehension.

A-4 is the gay cell and today they were getting their hair cut in the barbershop across the hall from us. I heard noise in the hall and wandered to the door to see what was going on. One looks for diversions.

“Susie’s getting her hair cut,” I announced.

“Come on, Chester, you gotta see this,” Mike said, laughing.

“*Why* do I want to see some goddamned queer?” mumbled Chester.

“Come on, man, you ain’t gonna believe this,” Mike said. He nudged Chester.

And Chester didn’t believe what he saw, either.

Susie is amazingly androgynous, with a small (five feet tall) body and an almost pretty face. “She” has a feminine voice, chats animatedly, sometimes wears a ponytail, and acts girlishly. I was told “she” had performed a grisly surgery upon herself, cutting off her testicles, and that “she” wanted to be a transsexual.

I was introduced to Susie when I was in A-5, which faces the psychologist’s office across the hall. One day Susie was in that office, the door open, chatting away with the female psychologist, and the guys in A-5 noticed. “Hey, there’s Susie!” they said. “You gotta see this, Ted.”

I was astonished to see someone so blatant in a jail. “That must take guts, to come on like that in a place like this,” I commented.

“You kiddin!?” was the reply, “she loves it.”

Apparently that’s true. Despite the fag-baiting talk one hears so much of here, Susie seems to inspire admiration and perhaps even lust. One day when I went up to gym she was holding court in the hallway outside the volleyball area, surrounded by five or six men, and chatting away animatedly as usual.

Susie gets along well with the guards – who sometimes have late-night parties in the hall with her, parties which used to keep me awake when I slept out on the floor. One wonders about the sexual favors dispensed at such parties.

“That looks like a *girl* to me,” Chester said. “You sayin’ that ain’t no girl?” For once his confidence in his own ignorance was shaken. He couldn’t take his eyes off Susie. He shook his head. “If that don’t beat all!” he said. “She pretty!”

#

November 1, 1986

Last night I dreamed about jail. This is the first time in more than a month that I did. I dreamed I was out for the day, but had to go back, or I'd be considered a fugitive. To get back, I had to find my way through a fundamentalist Christian encampment of some sort – very gaudy, almost circus-like. As I got closer to the jail I had to take my belt off, roll it up, and find a place to hide it where it would be safe. I don't think I ever got all the way back to the jail, but in a later episode of my dream I recall explaining to a friend my sleep schedule: "It's all supervised," I said. "I have no choice!"

letters from jail #18



November 4, 1986

We had a cellblock shakedown today. No particular reason – just “routine.”

The tipoff occurred, had I but recognized it, at lockout. “We’re taking that extra mattress today,” the asshole guard said as I started to get out of bed.

I’ve had two mattresses since I moved into this cell, and for a good reason. The mattress I had, out on the floor, was relatively new, and relatively thick, but short and narrow. The mattress in the cell I acquired was longer and wider, but worn very thin in the middle. I’d gotten Wayne’s cell, and Wayne weighed over 350 pounds. Wayne had slept on that mattress since March – more than six months. I put the smaller, thicker mattress under the bigger, thinner one. Together, they were fairly comfortable, relatively speaking. I slept almost well, considering that I was sleeping on mattresses with almost no “give” lying on a concrete shelf.

The morning before the shakedown did not pass without event. I was in the middle of a game of Hearts when the door opened and a guard called, “White! You got a visit!” It wasn’t visitor’s hours, so when I went out I asked what kind of visit it was. “Professional visit,” I was told. That meant my lawyer.

As I went upstairs I wondered why my lawyer was visiting me. Today marked the day on which exactly one month of my time was left. Was there a new charge? (I’d heard “noll prossed” charges were not truly dropped, but just tabled, and *could* be revived. I’d had three charges noll prossed. Could they have been revived? Was the state playing games with me? It had happened to others. *Some* prosecutors are sadists – they like to let you get close to freedom before slamming the door in your face again. I’ve even heard of inmates being re-arrested upon their release.)

The professional visitation area is just beyond the (new) regular visitation area. It consists of six or eight little bare “office” cubicles, separate rooms, furnished with a desk and two chairs. I guess lawyers don’t feel comfortable without a desk to sit behind. I was put in an empty room, to await my lawyer. Another inmate, who had come up with me, was shown into a room where a young curly-haired lawyer was waiting for him. “Your lawyer will be coming along shortly,” the guard who’d put me in the room said. So I waited there.

After ten minutes the guard came back. “He’s not here,” he said. “I guess he didn’t show.” He ushered me back to the hallway outside the regular visitation area. I trudged back down the stairs to A-floor, and my cellblock.

“False alarm;” I said, picking up my hand of Hearts. The game resumed.

A hand later, the cellblock door again opened. “White! Professional visit!”

“Again?” I asked, as I left the cellblock. “They found him,” the guard said.

So once more I climbed the stairs, went down past the row of B-cells; nodded at the guard at the desk in the hallway (“I’m back,” I told him), and headed down to the professional visitation area.

The guard who’d been there before met me again. “He’s the same one,” he said, nodding his head toward the curly-haired lawyer I’d seen before. “He’s got both of you. You should’ve waited.”

“What for?” I said. “He’s not my lawyer.”

The lawyer, in turn, gave me a blank look and asked the guard, “Where is he?”

“*This* is White,” the guard said.

“Geoffrey White?” the lawyer said.

“No,” I said, “I’m Theodore White.”

“This is the wrong man,” the lawyer said, displaying a brilliant grasp of the obvious.

Once again I trudged back to my cellblock. Lunch was being served. The hall guard made me sit on a bench in the hall and wait until all the A-cells had been served, and then gave me two sandwiches (cheese and liverwurst), a small bag of potato chips; and a metal cup of “juice.” Once I had these all in my hands, he had the door unlocked and allowed me to fumble it open. Inside, everyone else was nearly finished eating. “Another false alarm,” I told them. “They wanted a different White.”

Jack chuckled. “They really on the ball, ain’t they?”

Less than half an hour later came the shakedown.

The door banged open. Five or six guards swarmed in. “Get your shoes and blues on, and go out in the hall!” one announced in the same tones he might have used to say, “This is a bust!”

“This is a routine shakedown,” another explained in a calmer voice.

I had my shoes on already – one must put them on for any trip out into the hall, including classes, gym, or visits – so I went out into the hall. There we were lined up, braced against the wall (you know “the position” – you’ve seen it on TV a thousand times), and searched, hands running up and down our bodies. Some of us were told to take off our shoes and socks and show the soles of our feet, but I was not. As each of us was searched we were told to go up to the gym, which was empty. We played basketball there – and Mike and I each ran a hundred laps around the room – while our cellblock and individual cells were searched. After about half an hour we were returned to A-7.

Things were missing. Sandwiches saved from lunch were gone. The day’s *Fairfax Journal* was gone (small loss). A box in which Jack kept his things was gone, everything that had been in it dumped unceremoniously out on the floor. But left-over potato chips, still in their bags, remained in plain sight. I’d noticed my smaller mattress in the hall. Peering through the window in my cell door, I could see my room was disordered, but not what might be missing.

Jack had worn his shower shoes out. They’d taken his tennis shoes – but did bring them back. The

dayroom looked emptier.

After our cells were unlocked, I inventoried my room. Books were all there – in a pile on my bed. My Commissary goods – candy, cookies – were still there. So, amazingly, was the bag of hard-boiled eggs from breakfast (saved for a night-time snack). But the bag with folded up paper bags (in which things had come from Commissary) and a foam cup (rare contraband, left by Wayne) was gone. My letters were mixed up, those I'd kept separate because I'd not yet answered them, and those from Lynda, mixed in with the others. The neatly folded sheet of newspaper Wayne had left as "shelf paper" on the top of my tiny "desk" was gone. So also was the folded-up chunk of newspaper I used to keep my cell door from locking (when I wanted privacy in the evening without locking myself in).

My bed is now hard as a rock – or, more accurately, concrete.

#

Joe [a new man, whose arrival I edited out] still refuses to sleep after breakfast, but bangs around and keeps the rest of us, except Chester, awake. "What do I need with all that sleep?" he asked belligerently. "Ain't nothing to *do* in here, anyway! Don't *need* more than four or five hours!"

But for two nights now, he's been crashing – directly under the phone, making access to it difficult – in the early evening, around six or six-thirty, lying on his back and snoring loudly.

"Superman!" Jack snorted to Mike, with a nod at Joe.

Letters From Jail #19



November 7, 1986

Changes, and more changes: John Jackson left us yesterday, to serve the rest of his time at the Manassas Jail in Prince William County. He'd been there twice recently for court appearances, spending the night in the jail there each time. "It's a lot better, a lot better," he said. "Hot lunches, better breakfasts, better dinners – oh, it's a *lot* better," he said. It was warm enough I could *take my clothes off* when I went to bed at night!"

I swapped my flat mattress for his. Not a *huge* improvement, but I slept better.

This afternoon Bernie Loeh moved in. He'd been in A-6 for several months, but got mad at another inmate who, he said, was swiping his cigarettes. The resulting tussle put them both in the Hole for ten days. Later we found out the other inmate had to be taken to the hospital first. "And you know," he said, "while I was down there I hear this tapping on my cell door and there he is. 'Got a cigarette, man?' he's saying, and he don't even recognize me. He's had a shower or somethin', and he's wandering around, cadging cigarettes!" Bernie is 40, blond, and almost movie-star handsome, in a slightly ragged way.

"You been to court, been sentenced?" Mike asked him.

"Well, that's the thing," Bernie said. "I been to court, pled guilty to burglary, but the judge, he don't know what to do with me. He said, 'Bring him back in a couple of months.' He asked me what I done, I told him it's like the story about a man, he's pulling this big ol' 18-foot chain down the road. A cop comes along, asks him, 'How come you pullin' that big ol' chain down the road?' And the man sez, 'You ever tried *pushin'* one?' My lawyer, he throws all his papers up in the air. I ain't seen him since."

I asked him how it happened. "Did they catch you in the act?"

"I stole a vacuum cleaner – pulled it down the middle of the street, long ol' cord trailin' behind," he said.



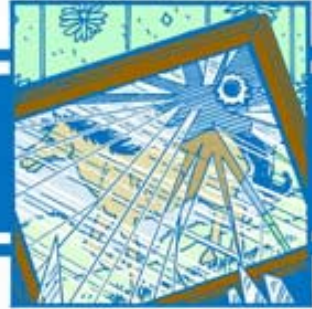
Suddenly I knew who he was. I'd read a feature story in the (spitui!) *Fairfax Journal* a month or so ago. "That was the State Theatre," I exclaimed, "in the middle of Falls Church!"

He nodded.

"I read about you," I said, trying to remember what else the story had said. "Did you see the piece?"

He had; he'd liked it. "Man came here and interviewed me after I wrote the paper a letter, asking if there was a school for auctioneers. As I recall, the piece treated him as a colorful character, an alcoholic drifter who was basically harmless. "I'm not really a thief," he says. He'd broken into the theater in the early hours of the morning and stolen only the vacuum cleaner, sitting in the lobby – for reasons he couldn't explain. The newspaper story told his background, and read like a life that – forty years earlier – would easily have fit into the adventures of Jack Kerouac in *On the Road*. I look forward to talking with him. He is a natural story-teller, with a flair for colorful turns of phrase which I've not captured well here.

LETTERS from JAIL #20



November 9, 1986

#20 is not included here, for reasons of space. On November 9th I phoned Lynda Magee in Oregon and proposed marriage to her. She accepted immediately. The bulk of the letter talked about another new guy, Lewis, who was somewhat deaf, “cupping his ear to hear repeated statements or questions. Bernie, irrepressibly loquacious, talked more to him than any of us – Bernie will talk to anyone and everyone. (When a medic came to offer aspirins and laxatives, Bernie said to him, ‘Here’s a question for you. A man is shot and killed while he’s in his house, straightening a picture. The picture is of something that is behind his house. What is it?’ It turns out the man is Jesse James and the picture is of his horse.)”

letters from Jail #21



November 11, 1986

We didn't get much sleep last night. And we alternated between testiness and humor this morning. Last night was the weirdest and least pleasant since I've been here.

Bernie Loeh went around the bend.

It had become increasingly obvious that he was Not Right. Yesterday morning he'd been talking about how he hated to see his (ex-)wife naked. (And this from a man who took four or five showers a day and seemed eager to prance about naked, once telling a guard, from the shower, that he wanted to attend a naked church service.) "She's real good lookin' but I told her to put some panties on and throw a towel over her shoulder, and she'd look a lot better."

I injudiciously said, "To each his own."

That triggered an argumentative rant from him. "You don't like that?" he yelled at me.

"Did I say that?" I countered. "I said, 'To each his own.'"

We went back and forth on that about five times before he finally dropped it. Later on he could even boast, "I was testy this morning, but me and Ted, we worked it out."

Mainly what he worked was his mouth.

"Mr. Kitherow, Mr. Kitherow?" he called through the door to a guard outside. "Bet I can tell you your wife's middle name. Bet I can! Whadya say, is it a bet? Huh? It's Gwendolyn, right?" (Apparently it was.) To Mike he said, "Know how many holes there are in that floor drain?" Mike guessed 60. "You're close," Bernie said. "You're real close." He shook his head in admiration. "Not counting the screw holes, there are 52 holes – just like in a deck of cards." Today Chester, having heard that story for the first time, counted the holes in the drain. 52, plus two for the screws. "Ain't that somethin'?" he said. "He right about *that*, anyways." To another guard Bernie flashed a picture of Eisenhower and asked him to name who it was and the year in which he was most famous.

He didn't hold conversations. He conducted quizzes and he orated. He described working conditions on Texas prison farms ("They use three-word sentences"), and enumerated his objections to spending any time in a mental institution (as opposed to his perfect willingness to spend time in any jail): "They stick you in the ass with those needles." He scribbled graffiti on the wall behind the toilet/sink, and on the wall over Phil's bed, in Phil's cell, while he was talking to Phil that evening.

While Bernie was in Phil's cell, Mike, Jack, and I discussed him. Mike and I have cells, but Jack had to spend the night out on the floor with Bernie. "That fucker don't let me sleep," Jack said. He said he just might *do* something about it. I told Jack that if he wanted to write Bernie out, I'd sign. My fear was that Bernie was going to bring the guards down on us. We had a quiet friendly cellblock, one with the best reputation in the jail with the guards. Bernie was attracting a lot more of their attention to us (every cellblock has a closed-circuit TV camera in it, by which the hall guards can monitor us); they were keeping a close watch on him. After supper, while Bernie was all but sermonizing on the subject of mental institutions, waving his arms excitedly, a guard popped in to ask, "Is everything all right?" (Bernie immediately told him an extravagant story, ending with, "You check out your Bible – Timothy I-dot-dot-2 – it'll change your fuckin' life!")

I went to bed around 11:30. An hour or two later I was awakened by the sound of the dayroom toilet flushing, and then the sound of Bernie's voice, an intense low murmur. I didn't hear anyone else (in addition to Jack and Bernie out on the dayroom floor, we had a black man named Joe, in for DUI, who had come in that evening) – just Bernie, rattling away. I drifted off, only to awaken to hear Bernie calling out to the guards, who were laughing in the hall, "Hey, you guys keep it down – we got guys trying to sleep in here!" Apparently he got into a conversation with one of them; I heard him asking one of his inane questions.

Joe says Bernie offered him a cigarette, which he refused. "I turned my back on him – I just wanted to get to sleep." Later he rolled over and saw Bernie kneeling over him, murmuring words at him. "I thought he was a queer," Joe said. "If he'd made a pass at me, I'd a slugged him."

Jack says he *never* got to sleep. "I told him, 'Keep quiet!' three or four times," he said, "I was ready to lay him out." Jack is about half Bernie's size.

I may have dozed off again, but around 3:00 AM his voice woke me again, and this time it was much louder. He was making no effort to keep it down. I have no idea who he was talking to. It might have been himself – he had gotten himself really wound up.

"Shut the hell up!" I said, giving vent to my growing irritation.

In the next moment he was outside my locked cell door. "What 'd you say, you motherfucker?" he demanded.

"I said to shut your goddamned mouth," I said.

"*You* shut up, faggot!" he shouted.

"Ain't you got no *respect*?" I said. "Running your mouth all night, how you expect people to *sleep*?"

"Why don't you come out *here* and say that, you dirty dope-dealer?" he demanded. "You goddamned filthy muther, you come out here, so's I can smash your face in!"

We both knew the door was locked and neither of us could open it.

"I'm gonna be right here when this door opens – two or three hours from now. I'll be right here," he promised. "You fuckin' slimey dope dealer! I know all 'bout *you* – selling that *cocaine* to little kids. I'm gonna beat the shit outta you! I'm gonna *teach* you, boy! Pushers like you are the scum of the earth! Yeah, I'm right here, waiting for breakfast to come, waitin' for that door of yours to pop right open!"

Shit, I thought. That's all I need. Get in a fight and you go to the Hole and your time's extended. I'm about

three weeks from release, and *this* has to happen! At the same time I was thinking about what I would have to do when the cell doors unlocked. I decided that since the door swung outward I'd slam it into him and then hit him with my chair. I was sure his strength was greater than mine – a crazed person is usually stronger and less able to feel pain – and the only way I could match him would be to get *really* angry, a towering rage. Well, I was pissed, but not anything like that angry.

"You better shut up," I told him, "or they're gonna put you back in the Hole!"

"Oh, yes!" he said. "I'll go in the Hole all right! *I* don't mind! I'll take you with me, cocksucker!" He banged on my door some more and continued ranting. He'd worked himself up with some kind of moral outrage over my alleged cocaine sales to children (which, in retrospect, pissed me off more than anything else he said) and had by now convinced himself that it was his holy mission to wipe the floor with me.

At that point the lieutenant came in. "Pack your stuff and let's go," he said.

"What?"

"Pack up your stuff, please." "What about this *dope dealer*? You gonna let him just sit in there like that? He sold *cocaine* to little kids!"

"Come on, let's go. Pack your stuff."

"Don't rush me now!"

"Let's *go*. Pack it up!"

"Say 'please.' I didn't hear you say 'please.'"

"I'm not going to tell you again – *pack it up!*"

"You gonna make me? Huh? You gonna make *me*? I gotta good mind to hit you – !"

I didn't see this. But I heard more guards running in and the sounds of a scuffle. By the time I had my glasses on and was standing by my door, looking out, four or five deputies had Bernie on his stomach on the floor, the lieutenant standing over them, and they were putting leg-shackles and handcuffs on him.

"Oh, that cold floor feels good," Bernie said, almost in a croon. "Hard and cold – just like my second wife!"

"You going to stop this stuff and settle down?" one of the deputies asked.

"Hell no," Bernie said, still struggling. "You gonna have to do it *right!* You know, I'm gonna get a job as a deputy, you know that? Then I'll show you how it's done!"

By then both Jack and Joe had moved to the far end of the room, and the deputies were packing up Bernie's few possessions. "This your book?" one of them asked him. It was a book I'd loaned to Bernie two days earlier – which Bernie had never cracked – *Heartland*, by Robert Douglas Mead.

"Nah, that's that goddamned gray-haired *dope dealer's* book! You know, he sleeps ten hours a day, has all that money – 'cause he sells that fuckin' *dope* to *little kids!* That's a *Western* book, an' he ain't never been west of *nowhere!*" Still ranting nonsense about me, Bernie was hoisted to his feet and taken out. Back to the Hole. "Tell that dope dealer," he called back, "if I ever see him in the hall, I'm gonna give him a kiss –

like a goddamned Georgia whore!”

“Hey, Jack,” I said through my door, “You got any idea what time it is?” Jack went to the hall door and looked at the clock in the barbershop.

“It’s 3:15,” he said.

We all tried to go back to sleep. I found it impossible. And so, I discovered at breakfast, had everyone else – except Chester, down in the A-cell, who had somehow slept through it all. (“Where Bernie at?” he asked, looking around.) Phil, Jack, Mike, and I lingered, after breakfast, talking about it.

“He was going to punch that lieutenant,” Phil said. “I’m standing right *there*, looking through my door, and they’re not two feet away from me. ‘I’ll hit you,’ he says to the lieutenant, and I believe he *would’ve* if they hadn’t wrestled him down on the floor right then!”

Mike said, “I was laughing. I was watching them and laughing like a motherfucker.” I’d heard him. “I went back to bed, I couldn’t get back to sleep,” he continued. “I like to beat my peter for an hour, an’ it stayed *limp*.” He shook his head in wonder.

“I ain’t got no sleep yet,” Jack said. After half an hour or so of ventilating our feelings, we all went back to bed. I drifted off about half an hour before lockout.

It was a strange day – and got stranger. Joe Love rejoined us from the Dispensary in the afternoon. Jack looked disgusted. “Here’s the *snorer*,” he muttered. Joe listened in amazement as we told him about Bernie.

Then, around 4:45 – around dusk (on a gray rainy day) – the fireworks occurred: The transformer outside blew up.

The transformer sits by itself about ten feet from the jail, and about fifteen feet below our window, directly opposite our cellblock. There was a low *boom!* and a fountain of sparks shot twenty feet into the air – a spectacular view from our window. Our lights and TV went off, our night lights cutting back on a moment later when the emergency generator kicked in. (The lights in my cell were dim red glows.) When the fireworks were over we could see a hole in the ground next to the transformer, from which smoke still wafted.

Supper – fried chicken – was an hour late. The elevator was out and the kitchen staff had to take all the meals up the stairs by hand to the B floor. Ours were nearly cold, but we were glad to get them. After supper I went into my dark cell and straight to bed, exhausted. It had been more than enough excitement for one day.

#

[Six and a half years later, I still vividly remembered and wrote about my departure from jail:]

THE POSTSCRIPT



They release their prisoners from the Fairfax Adult Detention Center at about 4:30 AM – or at least begin the procedure then – and the scuttlebutt was that this is done to save feeding them a final meal. Breakfast is brought to the cells between 5:00 and 5:30 AM.

I woke up some time before that – maybe 3:30; I couldn't see a clock – and couldn't go back to sleep. I had done all my packing the night before. There had been a lot of kidding with Mike and Phil about my getting out. "I'm gonna have to pop you one," Mike told me. Being involved in a fight – even as a victim – would put an end to my release and get me thrown in the Hole (solitary). Of course, popping me one would get Mike thrown in the Hole, too, and we both knew he was just joking; jail joking. They were glad for me, and envious.

With nothing else to do, I turned on my light and read a book, a series Western that I never finished and have since forgotten. And around 4:30 they came for me – me, and another fellow, a big guy in for just the weekend, who had held himself aloof from us common criminals, refusing to play cards with us. As we waited, he told me his car was parked several miles away, and he wondered how, at this hour of the morning (no buses running yet), he'd get to it. He obviously didn't want to walk it.

I had a different problem. I had too much stuff. Even leaving behind many of my books, I had all I could carry just leaving my cell. Property had another couple of boxes of books which I would have to pick up when I got to that point, and I just wouldn't be able to carry it all.

On the other hand, my friend Matthew Moore was coming to pick me up with his car. "I'll give you a ride to your car if you'll carry some boxes for me," I told the big guy. He agreed. His car was parked along the route we'd take home, so I wouldn't be forcing Matthew to go out of the way.

The two of us joined a short line at Property, where we were given back our own clothes and quickly stripped off our jail garb (old, threadbare blue shirts and pants, once worn by service-station attendants and owned by a commercial linen service before they were sold or donated to the jail). I was given the remaining boxes of my books being held by Property. Then we joined the line again and were led downstairs.

This was the first time I'd been back to that level since my own days in solitary (though which one passes before being placed in the general population). I'd forgotten the smell, which made my stomach turn. We

were taken back to one of the holding cells in which I'd first been held. We were a group of about half a dozen, and they kept us separate from the newcomers in adjacent holding cells. One by one we were taken out of the cell and up to the main desk, where we were again photographed, our paperwork checked and completed, and then it was back again into the holding cell. Since I'd left my cellblock at 4:30 it had taken about an hour to process me to this point. But that was just about it.

They took us into a small square room just a little bit bigger than a large elevator car, locking the doors behind us before unlocking a different set of doors in an adjacent wall, and ushering us through them.

That was it. Once we stepped through that second set of doors we were free. We were in a public hall. And at the other end of the hall, beaming to see me, was Matthew.

It was early December, and I was dressed as I had been three months earlier, in early September. It didn't matter. We dropped off the big guy at his car (without even mugging him – but he seemed grateful to see the end of us even so). Dawn was lighting up the eastern sky as I walked into my house, and thanked Matthew. My car was parked in the drive; Michael Nally, who had kept it for me at his place out in the country, had brought it back the day before. *I was home.*

I couldn't decide what I wanted to do first. I skimmed through a huge stack of mail. I turned on the TV set – every set in the house – to NBC's *Today* show. I took a Pepsi out of the fridge and drank it (my first in three months – and the only thing to which I am truly addicted). I undressed and went to bed. I couldn't sleep. I got up and took a bath and trimmed my mustache and beard. (My facial hair had grown untrimmed for three months: I looked like Santa Claus). I bounced from one thing to the next. I came back to my mail and read some of it. I turned off the TV and put on a CD. The clean sounds of well reproduced music that I liked filled the room. I went back to bed and got back up again. It was mid-morning by then, so I dressed and began to get back into the rhythms of a normal day. Later I wrote a letter to Lynda, my first as a free man.

I went back to the jail only once, a few days before Christmas. I wanted to leave ten dollars, as a Christmas present, for Mike, whom I knew had little money in his commissary account. But they told me Mike was gone, "down the road" already, to a downstate prison. He was a state prisoner (as I had been) with more than a year of time to do, so his stay in the Fairfax jail had been temporary. Wanting to leave the money for someone, I asked if Phil was still there, and when they said he was, I put it into his commissary account. Later I wondered if that had been a good idea. Phil had been moneyless – his was a heartbreaking story of compounded bad luck that included losing a house he had built when pest-exterminators poisoned it with chemicals which caused nerve damage to his entire family – and prisoners with no money in their commissary accounts were given certain items like toothpaste and toiletries free. Would my gift of ten bucks jeopardize his situation? I never found out.

I had been turned in to the police by two neighbors – the people who lived next door, across my driveway, and the people who lived diagonally across the street. They had tipped the police almost a year before my arrest; I had been under police surveillance since May of 1985 – virtually the beginning of my *Life of Crime as a Dealer*. The police report left in my house after my arrest was missing its first page, but detailed the relentless demands of my next-door neighbor to "*do something*" about me. He wrote down the license number of every car that pulled into my drive. Since virtually none of my customers parked in my drive, the numbers he turned in were those of my mother, members of my band, members of my writers' group (The Vicious Circle), and associated other friends, like, say, Avedon. Maybe that's what slowed the cops down.

That missing first page named my other neighbors and probably was omitted at their request. But they foolishly smoked dope (!) with, and bragged about how they'd "gotten" me, to a friend of a friend, and of course I heard about it.

It must have freaked them all when I showed up again after only three months in jail, and they must have wondered what revenge I might take upon them. I'd seen them in court; they knew I'd seen them.

I'd had time to think about the situation during those three long months. Naturally I resented them. I resented their dishonesty – pretending friendship with me while trying to have me arrested – more than anything else. I didn't exactly hold it against them that I *had* been arrested – that after all was because I'd broken the law – but their *eagerness* to have me arrested and their gleeful reaction to my arrest, when I had never been anything but a good neighbor to them certainly pissed me off. (My customers, mostly middle-aged, middle management types, although I did have a defense analyst from the Pentagon, and a member of the Redskins coaching staff, did nothing to annoy the neighbors.) While I was in jail, friends suggested they might indulge in some high-spirited Halloween pranks at my neighbors' expense, but as far as I know, nothing actually occurred.

Well, I wanted some sort of revenge or retribution, but I was keenly aware of the disadvantage I was at. I was then on parole, and when that ended I had nine years of probation – a suspended sentence which I would have to serve if I got into any further trouble.

My neighbors knew this too, apparently. They tried to get me in trouble with my parole officer by complaining first to the City of Falls Church that I had derelict, junked cars on my property, and then by trying to use this supposed infraction of a municipal law to have my parole revoked. I know this because I had to deal with the City about it and my parole officer told me about their attempts to revoke my parole – which failed. I went over the head of the petty city official who was trying to get me (as a favor to my neighbors), and had the case against me dropped, while my parole officer took one look at the actual situation and laughed at the absurdity of it (no derelict, junked cars).

So here were nasty, still vengeful neighbors, maybe frightened by and certainly annoyed by my return and my continued presence next door to them, plotting to have me put back in jail again. What *could* I do?

I knew that whatever I did I could not escalate this situation. If I did something to them, they'd just do something else back. That would be a karmic trap. What I needed was a Karmically Correct solution – something that would not rebound to harm me, something which would keep my hands clean, both morally and legally.

I found it. They thought the worst of me, and they feared the worst of me. That was what was eating them. They *knew* I'd take revenge on them. *They* would, in my shoes. They had guilty consciences.

So in February I sent both sets of neighbors valentine cards. These were "joke" valentines, the slightly nasty kind, but nothing specifically threatening. I signed them, "the White family." I planned to send similar cards on each appropriate occasion – Easter, Mother's Day, the whole lot.

The day I intended to mail the cards I noticed a "Hagar the Horrible" strip in that day's paper. It was a two-panel strip, and I shall have to try to remember it since I no longer have it. In the first panel Hagar is instructing his son, and is saying something like, "There are two ways to look at revenge." In the second panel Hagar gleefully says, "And I'm for it!" or something like that.

I cut out the strip, separating the two panels. I put one panel inside the card to one of my neighbors, and the other panel inside the card to the other neighbor. And then I mailed them.

Their reaction was considerably greater than I expected, satisfyingly so. Three days later I answered my door to find two uniformed Falls Church City cops standing there. One of them had both of my cards in his hand. "Did you mail these?" he asked.

“Sure,” I said. “What’s the problem?”

“Well,” he said, in a not-unfriendly tone of voice, “I wonder if you could tell me why you sent them.”

I told him. I told them both the exact truth of the situation, straight-up: Just why I’d sent them and what I had hoped to provoke. “I wanted to feed their paranoia and let them do it to themselves,” I said, “and I’d say I was pretty successful if they called *you*,” I concluded.

Both cops laughed out loud. “That’s pretty good,” the one who was holding the cards said.

“I got no problem with it,” the other cop said, grinning. “Have a good one,” he added, as they left, still laughing.

The cops’ visit told me several things, or confirmed them. It confirmed my neighbors’ collusion: they had obviously compared cards and put the two panels of the “Hagar” strip together. And they were alarmed, indeed fearful enough to call the police – although what they expected the police to *do* is hard to guess. My cards had gotten a bigger reaction than I’d expected, and it was obvious that there was no reason to send more.

I don’t know what the police told my neighbors, but a few months later my neighbors across the drive sold their house at a loss and left. I hear she left him at the same time. They’d never really been married; only pretended to be. As for my neighbors diagonally across the street, the ones who also smoked dope but were so self-righteous about my dealing it, he died painfully a few years ago of cancer (I hope he used marijuana to cope with the chemotherapy) and she has tried to suck up to me in an attempt to resume the apparent friendship we’d enjoyed before my arrest. I am polite to her, but distant. And the people who bought the house across the drive turned out to be the nicest people and best neighbors I’ve ever had.

And there it ends.

EPILOG



But not quite. There is still more.

My arresting detective was a man named Philip Hannum. He did a lot of strutting and posturing. At one point he told me I was unfit to be a father. He told me that with great moral indignation.

But Hannum was also a liar, who perjured himself in court, claiming to have taken evidence (drugs) from a refrigerator on my porch. After that court session, while my lawyer and I waited for the elevator, Hannum and his partner, Lt. King, joined us. So I asked him, "With all you got against me, why lie about more?" This made him very indignant and he took us to where his police vehicle (a Volvo station wagon) was parked. The back of the wagon held a lot of paper grocery bags, all labeled, all evidence. After warning us not to approach the car, he began rooting among the bags to show us the one with stuff he'd taken from my porch refrigerator. He couldn't find it, despite swearing it was there. "You must be crazy if you think I'd store anything of value on my front porch," I told him.

This was not to be my last brush with detective Hannum.

On March 15, 1987, I married Lynda Magee and in the process acquired two step-children, her daughter Rayne (one year younger than my daughter) and her son, Spencer (who was eight when I first met him). When Spencer had his next birthday (in February) the following year, we threw a party for him and he invited his new friends, most of them school classmates. Only one did not come. He turned out to be Philip Hannum's son. His father would not allow him to come to my house. His father was convinced I'd "get back at him" through his son. Frankly, the thought had never entered my mind, and until the invitation was declined I hadn't been aware of the kid's last name or connection to my former arresting officer.

Spencer and Hannum's son remained good friends, however. And one day some time after the birthday incident Spencer told me that his friend and the boy's mother had left Hannum. It seems Hannum was an alcoholic who would go into drunken rages and had physically abused both his wife and his son on a number of occasions.

Think of that.

Oh, and one more thing: Detective Hannum was removed from the Falls Church police force for unspecified reasons at some point around the time his wife and son left him. The police have refused to discuss Hannum's departure from the force, but confirm that the decision was not his.

Ah, karma....

Acknowledgments

These prison letters were written in long hand and mailed to Patrick and Teresa Nielsen Hayden who proceeded to have them published by various involved fans in a number of different venues. The letters originally appeared in print in 1986. The various letters were published in the following order:

Letters 1 through 3—published by Patrick and Teresa Nielsen Hayden (“on a subsidy from Victor Gonzalez”)

Letters 4 through 6—published by Victor Gonzalez

Letters 7 and 8—published by Mark Kernes

Letter 9—published by Lucy Huntzinger

Letter 10—published by Mark Kernes

Letters 11 through 14—published by John D. Berry

Letters 15 through first half 17—published by Lenny Bailes in *Whistlestar* No. 4, 1988

Letters second half 17 through 21—published by Ted White in *Spung* No. 1, 1987

Postscript—published by Ted White in *Blat!* No. 2, 1993

The Prologue and Epilogue are new, although the Prologue is based on material published by Ted White in *Blat!* No. 2.

#

My personal thanks to my close friends who visited me when they could, wrote me letters, and accepted my collect phone calls, and to my daughter, then 16, who had her life turned upside down.

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Special thanks to Victor Gonzalez for suggesting this project for *eI*, and to Peter Weston for seconding it.

Special thanks to Robert Lichtman for gathering and assembling the pieces, for making scans, and for general editorial assistance.

And to Bill Burns for putting up with all our PC stupidity.

People have to talk about something just to keep their voice boxes in working order so they'll have good voice boxes in case there's ever anything really meaningful to say.

-- Kurt Vonnegut



“Non Standard Space”
by Ditmar [Martin James Ditmar Jensen]