

ZINE WITHOUT A NAME



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And now I'm married.

Who would have thought? Certainly not me. I've wanted to find the right person and get married for a long time, but it seemed most unlikely. It just goes to show that life is full of surprises, I guess.

I should introduce my new wife, but she's not here right now and—as always—I'm writing this at the last minute. I'll let her introduce herself next issue, if she's up for it. She's not exactly "one of us"—not a gamer or fan—but she's not a mundane, either. Kind of an in-between, which is good. For example, she introduced me to Chinese food and *Stargate SG-1*, and I introduced her to *The Lord of The Rings*. Not a bad exchange, huh? ☺

There's a lot to tell about the wedding and honeymoon, so I have to write quickly. But there are some other quick issues to cover first!

PUBLISH-IT TAKES THE BIG SLEEP

Publish-It for Windows, that ancient program, has finally taken the Big Sleep; it still works, sort of, but has become so unreliable that I've given up trying to use it. It's practically *guaranteed* to crash within five minutes of start-up, and I got sick of trying to get things done and printed before the inevitable crash.

Fortunately I've much improved my knowledge of Word in the last few years. I know that Word is no desk-top-publishing program, but it's good enough for my simple purposes. And although Windows sucks (more about that later), it's infinitely more stable than Publish-It.

So thus ends my long career of complaining about the problems with that damned program. Here's hoping this isn't the beginning of a new career, complaining about Word. ☺



DOWN, NOT OUT

Of course, marriage hasn't completely changed my luck with the world of technology (why does it treat me so badly, when I love it so?). Thanks to a huge tangle my web site was unavailable to the outside world for ten days in March. It was awful.

I'd lost my domain, www.maranci.net, which I'd gotten for free from a company called RegisterFree.com in March of 2000. The problem was that I didn't *host* my domain until June 2000, and then not with RegisterFree but with a local company: Your-Site.com. But I never changed the registry of the domain to Your-Site. Thus, when my domain registration expired in March, the idiots at RegisterFree failed to contact me and my domain was de-listed.

De-listing really sucks. Not only can no one reach your web site (including you), you can't even reach your email. And it turns out that when you are de-listed, you can't change your site to a new registrar - you have to *renew* your domain with the original registering company and THEN move it.

Lots of time on the phone, some detective work (RegisterFree didn't have a contact number, but there was another company that did—turned out they were the same people under a different name), anger and rage, money...ten days twisting in the wind, and...done. The site went back up. Any email sent to me in that time is forever gone, but everything is back up and I will NOT let that happen again. One unfortunate side effect: several search engines deleted my RuneQuest site from their lists, and thus my hits went down a bit.

RE-VAMP!

Did I mention in the last issue that my web site had undergone a major revamp? Good lord, no I hadn't. Well, it has. A while ago I saw a short review of my RuneQuest site which was





basically quite positive, but added “despite the fact that it looks like a 1960's kitchen”.

Actually, I'll interrupt myself to note that since I last wrote there has been a world of changes. I've taken to heart the axiom that the most interesting material must be “above the fold”—which online means on the first screen, of course. I've given in to progress a little bit and started using tables to format my pages, with the result that everything is much more compact yet (I think) easier to read.

I also added something called The Chaos Project—I can't remember if I already mentioned that? It's simply a set of three “living” lists, which can be added to by visitors to the site. There's one list apiece for magic items, chaotic features, and found items—the last including almost anything I care to put in it. Some visitors *have* contributed, which is great, but the best thing about the Project is that it makes it much easier for me to put up my own ideas quickly. About 90% of the material online is mine.

The crash in web advertising affected me minimally, since I was already deeply opposed to online commerce anyway. The guestbook service that hosted the three guestbooks which made up The Chaos Project changed from free to pay; I told them to stuff it and found a free service that doesn't even use banner ads. They also wanted to charge me for using a site counter; again, I found a different free service. Now if only I could find a way to stop receiving their damned newsletter! ☺

All in all I've tried to neaten up the site. I've improved the graphics, made navigating easier with a toolbar, moved a lot of the excess verbiage into a section called *Chatter*, and put non-game reviews and nostalgia in a separate section as well (*Pete's Non-Game Favorites*). I'm actually rather proud of the site, now.

GAMING



I'm hoping to do more gaming, now that the wedding's over and things are a bit less hectic. Joe, Kiralee, whatever happened to Timmy? ☺


THE WEDDING

Teri had been planning the wedding since the moment we were engaged on New Year's Eve 2000. On April 21st all of her work paid off *spectacularly*. We were married in front of the bandstand at Roger Williams State Park in

Rhode Island. Although on April 21st of 2000 (last year) it had snowed—**SNOWED!**—apart from a few drops on the windshield going down to the park the weather was beautiful, not too hot, not too cold...at most a little too sunny, which is hardly anything to complain about.

The reception was at the Casino, which is a beautiful old manor next to the duck pond and bandstand—literally a few steps up from where the wedding was held. We'd rented the whole building, and I can't tell you how lovely it all was. The food, the flowers, the chamber music, the cake, the Armenian band...it was all perfect. I usually dislike weddings, but this was the nicest one I've ever been to, and I'm not just saying that because it was mine. Many people have since told Teri that she should become a wedding coordinator. They may have a point.

It was great to see several former IR regulars there, including Rich Staats and partial clan, Scott Ferrier, and Lois Folstein (she was one of the ushers). I wish I could have invited you all, but as it was our guest list was bursting! But it all went wonderfully, and I can honestly say that when Teri and I had our first dance that night it really felt like magic. 'Nuff said.

Well, I suppose I could mention the excitement when it looked as if I wouldn't make it to the wedding in time! At one point Teri's bridesmaids literally blocked her from coming or looking out of the house while I dashed, half-dressed, from my parents' car to the rental—but I made it, and it was perfect, and that's all there is to it. 

By the way, if you live in New England I'd heartily recommend visiting Roger Williams park. It's simply enormous, and is packed with things to do and see: paddle-boats are available for rent in season, there's a beautiful Japanese garden, a Temple to Music which is a reproduction of a classic Greek temple with grass on one side and a lake on the other (many of our wedding photos were taken there), a glassed-in old-fashioned carousel that kids can ride, a small and quiet museum with a planetarium on top, one of the ten best zoos in the United States (lions, elephants, giraffes, a baby polar bear, etc.), waterfalls, fountains, and a lot more. Plus frozen lemonade (a Rhode Island tradition) is abundantly available. ☺

THE HONEYMOON

The honeymoon was a bit...odd. We'd planned to fly to New Orleans, but had to change our



plans when we discovered that **WE'RE EXPECTING!**—oh yes, did I forget to mention that we're expecting a baby in October? We are. Which probably took the pressure off us; neither Teri nor I were at all nervous before or during the wedding, despite the fact that so many people were almost demanding to see us freak out (we'd done all our freaking out in private months earlier, when the test strips changed color ☺). So far everything has been great, and the baby is in excellent health. We had an ultrasound recently, and although the baby was *very* active—a good sign, they said—and everything was perfect and developing properly, the baby simply would NOT cooperate and let them determine gender. Personally, I'm happy about that. Either one would be fine by me, as long as the baby is a geek like poor old Dad. ☺ But geek or not, I'm very happy.


Where was I—oh yes. When we found out we were pregnant, we started having all sort of problems; Teri couldn't fly, so we had to find someplace in reasonable driving distance to go to. For a while we considered Savannah Georgia, but after some careful thought and earnest discussion I persuaded Teri that three eight-hour days of driving right after the wedding were a bad idea. So instead we found a resort in Virginia called The Founders Inn, near Virginia Beach, and booked five days in a suite. We'd rent a car and drive down. Mere moments after we booked it, though, my father called me with an interesting discovery: The Founders Inn was a Christian place. We weren't sure what that meant (it wasn't on their web site), but we hoped that it wouldn't be too strange.

I don't think that I've ever detailed my own feelings about religion in print before; in part because as editor I was reluctant to, for some reason. I'm not going to change that now (maybe someday), but I don't think that anyone will be surprised to hear that I am deeply opposed to the Religious Right. Neither Teri nor I was entirely comfortable with the idea of being prayed at on our honeymoon, of course. But we'd already booked, and time was running out. There was no time to change plans.

The wedding was on Saturday (April 21, 2001, for the record). After the wedding we drove home together. The next day we packed up and started south for Virginia. Interstate 95 would take us almost exactly there.

We went through Providence (waving to the Big Blue Bug), and stopped in Coventry RI for breakfast at a Cracker Barrel (if you haven't had breakfast at a Cracker Barrel you're missing something, believe me). Then on through Connecticut with little traffic. As we neared New York City things got a little more crowded, but not too bad—it could have been much worse. There's something about New York that fascinates me, by the way. Much as I've always loved Boston, I can't deny that there's part of me that would like to try living in New York City, if only for a while. It's so BIG, and gives such a feeling of age! Boston's old too, of course, but a lot of the charm has been wiped out by greedy bastard developers (Cambridge's Harvard Square is a good example of this; the last five years have been like watching the twitching corpse of a well-beloved friend being rented out for entertainment by greedy monsters). New York is simply too big to have been completely swallowed up by those money-grubbing pigs.

Anyway. Downward we drove, through New Jersey. We made a quick stop for lunch at a Roy Rogers (I love their burgers, too bad they're all gone from the MA/RI area). As we approached Delaware, Teri (acting Navigator) had an idea: avoid Baltimore and D.C. by taking Route 13 through Delaware, which would put us onto the Chesapeake Bridge and Tunnels as we crossed over into Virginia. We'd stop for the night somewhere in Delaware. My father had mentioned the Bridge and Tunnel (I hadn't quite followed him, I'm terrible with directions), so this sounded great. Teri's father endorsed the route change too, and since he used to drive a truck I wasn't going to argue with him. ☺

Parenthetically, I have to say that it's really great having a cellular phone. I've been against them for a long time, but Teri had one when I first met her, and I've become convinced that they're incredibly useful—so much so that I'll be getting one myself sometime in the next month.  Although I should mention that I don't think cell phones should be used AT ALL when driving — my daily commute is now more than 4 hours a day, and I see far too many idiots driving, talking, eating AND READING at the same time!

Anyway, we took the exit for 13 near the Delaware border. It was a large commercial route, speed limit 50 or so with lots of stores on each side. It wasn't long before I saw a large sign saying "USED BOOKS". Teri said she didn't

mind if we made a quick stop, so before she could think twice I pulled in.

If you ever happen to be near the town of New Castle in Delaware, and have any interest in used books in general or science fiction in particular, Manorbooks should definitely be high on your list of places to go. It's a large free-standing house which is *packed* with used books; one of those stores where it's actually a little hard to get around, because the shelves are close together and piles of extra books are stacked high in corners and against the ends of shelves. I felt as if I was looking at my own collection, there were so many rare titles.

But they don't only have books, although their selection of science fiction (and romance, and mystery) books is the best I've ever seen. They also have some comics (I picked up a rare *Nexus Meets Magnus Robot Fighter*, and several issues of *The Savage Sword of Conan*), and many neat science fiction toys and memorabilia (I saw original Star Trek commemorative plates, and a Klingon action figure in its original packaging...just *tons* of stuff). They're at 1005 N. duPont Highway, New Castle, DE, 19720. I only wish they were a lot closer.



Onward. It was starting to get late, so we started looking for a hotel. Naturally as soon as we needed a hotel they all disappeared! We'd entered a pretty rural zone. But before the sun set we saw clear signs that a more built-up area was coming up: Dover, Delaware.

There were a lot of hotels there, but we stopped at the first one we saw. It was a Holiday Inn Express, and it turned out that although they were open for business, they were still undergoing construction in the back. We booked a nonsmoking room with a king-sized bed, went upstairs to drop off our luggage, and then went down to find some food.

The desk clerk recommended a place called Pier 13 up the road. We went there, and discovered that it's true what they say about the South; people really *do* move slower! A lot slower. Service was *incredibly* slow, and when the food got to us it was inedible. How can you ruin a hamburger? I don't know, but the "chef" at Pier 13 does. Teri had ordered some sort of fried seafood; first it came out half-raw, and when she sent it back it returned as pure rubber. Blecchh.



Back at the hotel, we started settling in for the night. But suddenly we had a mildly nasty

surprise: Teri noticed a towel hanging on the shower rod in the bathroom which was covered with hair. *Pubic* hair, I noticed, or something very much like it. Teri wanted me to call the front desk, but I'm not comfortable complaining on the phone; I went down instead to have a chat with the front desk. On the way I accidentally hit the "Back" button on the elevator, and when it reached ground level both the front and rear doors opened. The rear door opened onto a dark and creepy construction area, totally unfinished.

The manager (a nice guy) apologized and moved us to the next room over, which was also empty (most of the hotel was empty, actually). I went back up, moved everything, and took a shower. After I was done, I looked down and saw a very large black bug floating in the water. I'm not an expert, but it seemed likely to be a cockroach. It was waterlogged and dead, so I picked it up with a tissue and dropped it in the trash. I'd considered flushing it, but I wanted to have it on hand as evidence the next day.

One thing for sure: I wasn't going to tell Teri about the bug that night. It was late, and I had a bad feeling that we'd be looking for a new hotel if she knew. She's a girl, after all. ☺



MONDAY, APRIL 23


So we packed up the next morning, settled our bill, and before we left the room I went back to pick up the dead roach and toss him in the bathtub for the cleaning people to find.

Okay, let me stop here and acknowledge that all this might sound weird. Okay, *very* weird. But in my defense, let me say that

- A. I'm a weird guy, I admit it,
- B. I didn't want to have a scene with the management,
- C. I didn't want to hurt their feelings—after all, they didn't *put* the bug there, and
- D. I didn't want to leave without letting them know that they had a problem.

But I had quite a shock when I looked in the trash and found the bug squirming and ALIVE! Man, those cockroaches really ARE unkillable. I left him to his fate and took off.

There was a Wal-Mart nearby, so we stopped in to pick up a few necessities; for me, that was a couple of pairs of suspenders. I've found suspenders much more comfortable than belts,

and noticed that the further South we went the more men wore them. Sometimes I wonder if belts compress the body and cause blood-circulation issues, the way that neckties do... 

Onward. Soon we were in an odd area. No less than THREE large chicken trucks passed us, filled with live chickens jammed into stacks of open-mesh crates! They were being squashed. I think Teri cried, and I felt pretty sad myself. We agreed not to eat non-free-range chicken any more.

Soon we found out where those chickens were heading: there was a giant Tyson Chicken plant nearby. And soon after we saw an empty chicken truck pulling out of a giant Purdue chicken plant! It was so sad. Strange, but there were thousands of seagulls sitting in front of that plant. It made me think of *The Birds*.

We left the land of Evil Chicken-Sellers behind, and got into a more rural zone. Apart from farms the only buildings around were fireworks stands—they were all over the place! Fireworks have been illegal in all the New England states I've known for as long as I can remember, so this was particularly bizarre and fascinating to me. We were truly in a different land!

Suddenly I spotted something I'd heard of, but never seen in person: a sign saying *Ten Miles to Stuckeys*. Stuckeys! Fabled store of mystery and excitement. I'd heard of Stuckeys all my life, and thanks to *Sam & Max, Freelance Police* (a great graphic novel and computer game) I've wanted to go to one for years. They're supposed to be filled with all sorts of weird crap that makes no sense and is totally useless—that's my *favorite kind* of crap!



The signs continued:

Five Miles To Stuckeys - Fireworks & Food!

One Mile To Stuckeys - Hamburgers and Fries!

500 Feet To Stuckeys - Souvenirs Galore!

And then we saw it: Stuckeys! But we had no time. I could weep. And the sign a few minutes later only rubbed salt in the wound:


Turn Back, You Missed Stuckeys!

I promised myself we'd stop there on the way back, and stepped on the gas. Onward, on to the Bridge & Tunnels!

The Chesapeake Bridge and Tunnel system costs \$10 to cross, one way. But I can honestly

say that it's worth it. It covers 17 miles of open bay; a set of long, long bridges with two mile-long tunnels that go down to the ocean floor, leaving two large openings which allow even the largest ships to pass through. Spectacular.

We reached the dry land of Virginia and continued our race south. The trees had been growing more green as we went; our voyage crossed the line from winter to spring, bare branches to buds. It was very green here in Virginia. Without too much difficulty we found our way to the Founders Inn, which oddly seemed to share grounds with something called Regent University.

We parked and checked in. The lobby was huge and lovely; giant Oriental rugs that looked exactly like Titan-sized versions of the rugs my parents have. We were escorted to our room  and left alone.

The room was huge, with an enormous bed and a working fireplace! It was lovely. I started reading the hotel information book (I always do that in a new place), and soon came across a startling bit of information:

All guests of the hotel received free tickets to a nationally known TV show which was filmed daily on the grounds of the hotel. That show? *The 700 Club. THE 700 CLUB!*

This was Pat Robertson's *personal* domain. We'd reached the heart of the Religious Right in America. And we'd done it totally by accident.

The place was creepy. There was not one, not two, but THREE Bibles in the room! And everyone we saw was carrying a Bible too. Every conversation we overheard was about Jesus in some way or another, and everyone was so nice that it made your skin crawl. Not that they were proselytizing, because they weren't; it was simply assumed that anyone who was there was a deeply committed member of the Religious Right.

I found myself Zeligizing, quoting the Bible (I've read it several times and have an excellent memory), and acting like one of those zombies—a real Stepford husband. As Teri and I walked around I'd mutter under my breath "*Every time you tell a lie, the Baby Jesus cries!*" and similar lines (that's from the Simpsons, if you were wondering). We were both freaked out. Someone had left their filled-out comment card in the room, and from it I discovered that Regent University next door was also part of the

Robertson kingdom, a fortress to train anti-Clinton lawyers and commandos.

We went to the indoor pool, which was almost empty except for a couple of women discussing Bible class. We did some back exercises in the pool and went back to our room.

I should mention the service people we saw during our stay there: maids, waitresses, and clerks. They were all quite nice, but seemed to have a *beaten-down* quality; I couldn't shake the feeling that a large portion of their weekly wages were directly donated back to Pat before they even received their paychecks.

Dinner was part of the package we'd reserved, so we went to Pat Robertson's palatial restaurant in the hotel. It was almost empty. Decent food, though. Teri had Mahi-Mahi for the first time. Apparently it's good.

TUESDAY, APRIL 24

We were creeped out, so the next morning we headed over to Virginia Beach. There, we thought, we'd find some fun and plain old-fashioned touristy crap.

Folks, Virginia Beach is BORING. Or at least it was when we were there. It was pretty, don't get me wrong; miles of beautiful ocean and sand, along with palm trees that looked a little bit out of place. But the street that ran along the beach was crammed with giant souvenir and food stores, and the weird thing is that the same stores were REPEATED on every block! Every single block had a Sunations store, for example, fulfilling all your needs for Hawaiian shirts and tacky crap. I bought a hat (the sun was fierce), and Teri bought me a nice-looking blue shirt. Further down the boulevard there was a cool-looking horror museum made out of an old movie theatre—it had giant demons and monsters sculpted all over it—but it wasn't open, and Teri doesn't like those places anyway.

We walked around a bit more and realized we were once again bored out of our minds. Once you've looked at the sea and the sand and have bought all the souvenirs you need, what's the point?

So we hit the road. We drove semi-accidentally into a military area; no one stopped us. Circled an old lighthouse and headed back again. Back at Virginia Beach we stopped and had lunch, sitting out in front of the beach. It was nice. But there was nothing left to do, so we grabbed

some Hagen-Dasz and went back on the road. And got lost.

As we were driving along some highway, we spotted a sign for the Norfolk Botanical Gardens. Since we were riding free on the open road, Teri suggested we give them a try. It was a little expensive to get in, but we weren't short of money.

The gardens were absolutely beautiful; we took a tram ride through the grounds, and would have taken a boat tour too if the heat hadn't made Teri feel sick. The landscaping was exquisite. The only thing to mar the place was a set of giant 20-foot tall sculpted heads of US Presidents, featuring that arch-demon and vegetable Ronald Reagan (a man high on my list of people for whose deaths I will have a party). The GOP and media seem to be on a full-court press to deify that evil bastard. I considered hiding in the park and smashing the head to pieces after dark, but since it was my honeymoon (and I'm a chicken) I forewent the pleasure.

Beautiful place, though.

We found our way to the hotel, and in an odd conversation both discovered that we both really wanted to leave. I felt uncomfortable about it, but I went over to the front desk and told them we had a family emergency and needed to check out the next morning. There was no problem. I felt a little guilty, I'll admit.

That night we went to Shoneys for dinner. I'd heard of Shoneys; it had always sounded cool. But the food was absolutely awful.

That was our last night at the Founders Inn, thank goodness..

I will say one thing, though: Pat's place has excellent beds. That's the only bed I've ever been in which didn't make even the slightest sound in reaction to my huge and ponderous bulk. An absolutely silent and very comfortable bed. Not a common thing to find on the road!

By the way, if you were wondering: no, Pat's hotel does NOT have pay-per-view porn. Not that we were looking for it, of course. But it was interesting to note, because it was the *only* hotel not to offer it.

Oh, did I mention the license plates of the cars at the Inn? They were memorable: GDLYWMN, XIANROCK, LIV4HIM, etc. I've never seen such a devout collection of expensive automobiles in my life. ☺




WEDNESDAY, APRIL 25

It felt *good* to be on the open road again, free of that place. Colonial Williamsburg was only a few hours away, and we were sitting on a big bankroll; we decided to take a trip to colonial days and find a nice hotel.

One the way we looked for lunch, and when I saw Hardees I had to try it; my grandmother used to take me to Howdy Doody's for hamburgers, which later turned into a Hardees, then a McDonalds (I believe it's a mattress store now). Teri had never been to Hardees (nor Duchess; I wonder how much longer those smaller fast-food chains will be allowed to exist by McDonalds?).

It was awful. I ended up driving Teri across the street to McDonalds, and promising never to take her to Hardees again. Oh well! Some childhood memories should be left alone, I guess. ☺



The two-lane highways were beautiful and green. We sped down the road, free, towards a birthplace of freedom. 

My god, this is turning into a long zine. Good thing the deadline has been put off to Friday.

Williamsburg was green, green, green, and extremely beautiful. We drove along a commercial road, passing an absolutely amazing number of pancake and waffle houses (I think I counted six within five minutes), as well as all other sorts of stores. Obviously we weren't near the "historical" section yet! We passed a used book store, and I promised myself I'd go there later (a promise I wasn't able to keep, unfortunately). As the stores became more sparse we came to a huge open complex of factory discount stores, and stopped in. A few pieces of cheap pottery later we were back on the road, heading back towards the direction we'd come from - we'd passed the turn-off for Colonial Williamsburg before.

We made one more quick stop along the way, at a factory discount mall that had a Levis outlet in it. Unfortunately they didn't have my size (they NEVER have my size—what, am I completely beyond human norm? It's tough being over size 40), but the Gold Toe outlet we found there did. Gold Toes (if you didn't know) are high-quality socks, reinforced at the toe with heavy gold thread. They're reinforced at the heel as well (although not with gold). Filene's Basement used to carry them, but stopped many years ago and I

only had a few pairs left; they're hard to find in New England now. I stocked up on two three-packs, bought a package of tiny Gold-Toes for the baby, and we headed back to find history—and a place to sleep.

We went through a long tunnel which apparently goes right *under* Colonial Williamsburg and ended up at the entrance, of sorts. There was a hotel right there, but there were no non-smoking rooms left. Rather than be gassed to death we asked if there was anywhere else they could recommend. The clerk directed us towards the welcome center, which had a hospitality desk that could help us.

The center was huge, and a little confusing. It was out here in this green and relatively empty area, and patrons were *bussed* over to Colonial Williamsburg. Strange! But we found the help desk, and they booked us a king-size non-smoking bed at the Williamsburg Inn. It was pricey—about \$180 a night, as I recall—and I hemmed and hawed a little, but how often do I get married¹? Besides, we were still loaded (with cash, that is). We headed out for the Inn.

Wow. We kind of struck the motherlode! It turned out that the Inn was literally adjacent to Colonial Williamsburg itself, and was positively beautiful. Our room wasn't ready, so Teri and I sat at a huge old wooden table in the middle of their gorgeous lobby (the doormen were dressed as colonial lackeys), and played checkers on a large old checkerboard².

After a while we realized we were starving, so we went to the restaurant in the Inn and grabbed a late lunch. The waitress was *extremely* nice—she insisted that I try peanut soup which was a specialty of the house, and brought me a small free bowl of it. It was...odd. Not bad, a little like pea soup but peanutty—Teri thought it had the consistency and taste of peanut butter on warm toast, but I think it was more watery than that. Worth trying again, I think, though it won't become one of my -favorites. The rest of the food was quite good, too, making it one of the few decent meals we had on the whole trip. We ate and watched a mated pair of ducks waddling around a fountain outside the window; flying up

¹ Once.

² I won. Twice. Or was it three times? Fortunately she didn't hold it against me. ☺



onto the top of a covered walkway at times. Ducks are cute.

By the time we were done the room was ready. We were in a building in the back, apparently an add-on since unlike most of the rest of the Inn, it was made of wood. On the way, we passed an odd concrete structure at the edge of the parking lot. A huge amount of steam or water vapor was *pouring* out of the top, yet it was impossible to see in. I was filled with curiosity—was it a waterfall? If so, why cover it up? What else could it be? Later, I snuck over and peaked behind it. Didn't get a clear look, but I saw a metal grating floor and heard the sound of rushing water. A stream issued from near its base, but it almost seemed like a power-generator or something. Very mysterious!

The building was relatively small, and didn't even have elevators—we had to carry our luggage down a very narrow set of outdoor stairs. Our room was okay, but had a sort of abandoned feeling to it; there was a wall of shutters on the far end, and several of the slats were missing, for example. Anyone could have looked in, if they wanted. I blocked the holes with a magazine. Oddly enough, beyond the shutters were glass doors which led to a pretty little balcony that overlooked the stream and a green vista. But the chairs on the balcony were covered with dead and rotting leaves. Strange!

The bed was king-sized, but Pat Robertson would probably have sneered at it. It wasn't particularly comfortable, and was poorly supported—if the mattress was moved too far to one side, it fell off its supports, introducing a definite tilt. The whole room seemed a bit of an afterthought, as if it were an extra that would only be rented when the rest of the Inn was full. Even the toilet was substandard, with the weakest flush I have ever seen in my life³. But at least the room was clean.

THURSDAY, APRIL 26

The next morning we had the breakfast buffet (good, but no croissants⁴) and walked the short block to Colonial Williamsburg.

³ Mercifully, I will say no more about that toilet.

⁴ Teri says "Excellent, one of the best I've ever been to. So much to chose from! Three full tables (I think they were 8-foot long) of traditional American breakfast stuff, scrambled eggs, bacon & ham, to more exotic food like Belgian waffles and crepes. One whole table had fresh fruit and pastry." But then, she hasn't been to as many buffets as me. ☺

If you haven't been to Colonial Williamsburg, here's a quick explanation: it's a large area which has been kept or restored to, um, colonial standards. No cars are allowed in. There are many people who wear period garb, some in character as well. But—and here's the odd thing—there is no charge to get in. That's because there are no walls or fences around the perimeter! It's just a section of town which is 225 years behind the times. Anyone is free to walk around, and some people actually seem to live there full time. But. If you want to go *inside* some of the historic buildings, you have to have a pass—and those are \$32 per person *for one day!* We bought a couple of passes and took a tour of the Governor's mansion, which was pretty. Apparently the British Governor of Virginia liked to decorate with guns, because there were guns *everywhere*—circles of muskets on the ceiling around the chandeliers, rows of handguns sprouting above the doors, just guns guns guns guns. It was like Charlton Heston's biggest wet dream, the one he'll have just before having a massive heart attack and ridding the Earth of his miserable presence⁵.

Teri's about four months along, so we couldn't do *too* much walking—it hurts her feet (it was really hot, and her feet were swelling—once again I'm grateful that men can't get pregnant ☺). But we bought a ton of souvenirs: a tricornered hat, a rolling pin, wooden dice, brown and white rock candy (delicious; the "brown" candy tasted like molasses), a charm for Teri's bracelet, and other stuff. We peeked at a beautiful garden next to a length of what looked like a canal, at a windmill, a blacksmith shop, a (bad) bakery...and then it was time for lunch. We'd realized that we were both homesick (especially for our cats), and would be heading towards home that day; so we'd splurge and have lunch in one of the historical taverns.

It was quite an experience! Very educational. For example, I had no idea that the "awesome blossom" was actually created by Benjamin Franklin, who called it "Poor Tom's Stinking Bouquet". Nor did I know that tavern wenches in 1774 wore miniskirts and rollerblades. And I'd always thought that 7-Up[®] and the juke box were invented much later than colonial times!⁶

⁵ Am I getting too political? Or mean? Tough. ☺

⁶ Sorry, this paragraph is complete BS. I'm getting a little silly, I'm afraid. Word's Footnote feature is addictive! ☺

I had a pulled pork barbecue sandwich, something I've recently discovered. Not bad, though I've had better. I forget what Teri ate (I tried to get her to try the bubble-and-squeak, which I'd read about in *The Wind In The Willows*, but she wouldn't go for it), but we did pick up a Tavern cookbook. Well fed and well-souvenired, we checked out and hit the open road.

We planned to basically retrace our route home, going up route 13 to 95 and thence northward. We'd overnight somewhere in Delaware, although not in the roach-infested Holiday Inn Express we'd stayed at before (I'd told Teri about the roach earlier—she wasn't thrilled).

But first we'd deal with the Chesapeake Bridge and Tunnel again. I was quite looking forward, since this time Teri was driving and I'd be able to take a better look.

It really is a spectacular crossing. On our way down the weather had been sunny and mild, the waves gentle, but this time the wind was strong and the surf was up. We decided to stop at the rest stop on the center of the system (right in the middle of the ocean) to check things out.

It was quite a kooky place! The bathrooms were kind of odd; they reminded me of bathrooms on ships, somehow. The lunch counter seemed well stocked; Teri got a soda, while I gave in to temptation and got a peculiar ice cream cone. It was chocolate soft serve, and there were little specks of chocolate throughout; not as appealing as it might sound, unfortunately.

Souvenirs have a strange fascination for me, and the other half of the place was a HUGE collection of souvenirs. I can't tell you how many bizarre and useless things were there, but one thing definitely stuck in my mind: fireworks. Tons and tons of fireworks. 300 fireworks in a giant firework-shaped tube, a full yard high (\$21.95); giant collections every kind of firework imaginable, in a glorious shrink-wrapped box (\$23.50); walls and walls of explosives, more shocking than hard-core porn. I was mesmerized.

I didn't *buy* any, of course. Frankly, I wouldn't dare. Because even if *every single citizen* of Rhode Island and Massachusetts bought a thousand dollars worth of fireworks and shot them off incessantly as they paraded unhindered across state lines past the police, I am the one who'd be arrested and fined \$1000 for having a cap-gun cap (used) stuck in my tire tread. I'm not lucky that way. Also, with my luck I'd have

either blown off my hand, put out my eye, or maimed some of my younger relatives. So I looked, and drooled, and didn't buy.

We went out and took a few pictures of the waves, and then went on. The road ahead was long but clear, our morale high, and our destination was...

STUCKEYS!!!

Yes Stuckeys, mystical Mecca of the South and the West. The "Last Stuckeys", apparently, before the Desolation of Smaug (I mean New England⁷).

Well, after all that build-up there was no way it wasn't going to be disappointing. There were lots of freaky souvenirs, including Stuckeys' famous Pecan Log, Mexican blankets (we bought one; it smells weird), and Virginia Hams (we bought one of those too, and it smelled even weirder—plus it cost forty bucks!). They had a great selection of fireworks for double the usual prices, and boxes of those little snake ash-things that sprout a long trail of ash when you light them. I figured those couldn't hurt anybody much, but unfortunately every box was either empty or mostly empty. Oh, there was also a small room just for cigarettes, and a lunch/ice cream counter. To my great disappointment, there were no souvenirs that actually said "Stuckeys!". We did pick up a couple of Stuckeys Fun-Paks, though, which featured candy and cool cheap plastic crap like an eyeball-cup that made your eye look all freakish and bloodshot. Kind of like a monster from those old horror magazines in the 1950's. Plus mini squirt guns that didn't work, and other bizarre and confusing stuff.

About Virginia hams: they're really weird (like everything else so far, huh?). The one we got was the lightest one there, and weighed 14 pounds. It was in a canvas bag, and wasn't refrigerated! Supposedly since it was "cured" it wouldn't spoil. The baking instructions were on the bag. Personally, I was a little scared of it. From the shape I feared they'd torn off some poor pig's leg and stuck it in a bag, broken bone and all. I'm no vegetarian, but that was just

⁷ Not that I don't love New England—I do. It's just that I read *The Hobbit* aloud to Teri during the honeymoon, and it's in my head. I'm planning on reading her the entire *Lord of the Rings* before the movie comes out, too. I refuse to let her first exposure to *LOTR* be a Hollywood bastardization, even a good one.

gross. Getting it was Teri's idea, by the way. Me, I'd rather have gotten a Virginia hamburger. ☺

We stuck the giant stinky ham in the trunk and took off.

We were getting back into Dover, and by coincidence it was time to look for a place to stay again. Eschewing the Holiday Inn Roach Hotel Express, we stopped at a Sheraton instead—definitely a step or two up in quality. There was some sort of convention going on (actually most of the hotels we'd visited had conventions going on), but the giggling little southern girls at the desk had a nonsmoking king-size bed available⁸. There was a Triple-A discount (most places had one), so the room was a pretty reasonable \$129. I checked us in.

We dropped our stuff off in the room and went to look for dinner. There were three restaurants: one in the penthouse (too formal for us), and two on the ground floor. Both were empty. We picked one, had a decent meal, and headed back to our room.

But as we were heading back, an old bellhop came up to us, from the direction of our door. "Mr. Maranchi?" he said.

"Yes?"

"Just checking to see if you were here."

(!)(?) "We..are."

"Goodnight, sir".

How freaky is that!?

When we tried the door, it rejected our card keys. Both of them. Funny, they'd worked *before* dinner. Or maybe not so funny, since all of our luggage was in there. We went down, and the giggling little southern girls explained that they'd booked me for room 195, but accidentally given me the keys for 207. That room had been reserved by someone else. But they wouldn't move us out, they'd just put the other people in 195. In the meantime, they apologized and would fix our keys. I decided to be nice.

When we got back to our room the first key didn't work—d'oh! But the second one did, and our stuff seemed untouched. We settled in for

the night. The floor seemed a little noisy, a bit like a party floor at Arisia, but we ignored it.

Then at 10PM the phone rang, startling the hell out of us. It was the front desk.

"Mr. Maranchi⁹, did you leave some of your luggage in room 195?"

(*Huh?*) "No. We were never IN 195, so none of our luggage could be there." (Frantic wondering: *Could that bellhop have moved some of our luggage to 195? No, it's all here*).

"Oh. Sorry to bother you!"

And that was the end of the matter.

FRIDAY, APRIL 27

Time passes quickly...the breakfast buffet at the hotel was uninspired (not *one single buffet* on the whole trip had croissants! Not **one!**), and the waffle/omelet chef was a bit of a creep. We hit the road. There were about five or six hours of driving left, depending on how things went in New York City. And of course how long I spent in Manorbooks.

Alas, Manorbooks was not to be. As we got near New Castle the traffic became awful, and only a few miles away from the store we were stopped cold: the road was actually *closed*. Some big accident, I suppose. We looped onto 95 North and zoomed.

A quick bathroom break in a creepy New Jersey rest stop gave me one last opportunity to be taken for a sucker: I bought a huge green plastic "yard-o'-ale" which was actually a yard-o'-Sierra Mist. Tasted awful, and too big to handle—Teri or I had to keep a hand on it all the rest of the way home. It was sticky, too. "*Why did you even BUY this thing?*" was the question of the day.

New York City was a bit more crowded than going down, but not too bad. At the toll booth I gave into an uncontrollable urge and took a SpeedPass flyer, not that I'll ever need one.

We got through New York, and were entering lands that I knew from my birth: Connecticut. It was getting to lunchtime, and I wanted to take Teri to an old favorite in my old hometown, Westport CT. I'd given her a fairly extensive tour a while ago (including the truly bizarre Stew Leonards, the world's largest dairy store, home of animatronic cows and vegetables), but we'd

⁸ I should mention here that the reason I like king-size beds is that I like to have enough space to stretch out. And someday, I hope to have one at home...so the cats won't be able to push me around...

⁹ *sic*. But then everyone gets my name wrong. ☺

missed the Sherwood Diner, which always had good food and an insanely huge menu (Teri was impressed). We had a comfortable meal, quickly stopped by a cool alternative grocery store called Hay Day and bought another cookbook, and hit the road for the final homestretch. By the way, the whole time I was in Westport I didn't see *one single person* I knew.

On, and on, and home! Well, almost. As we pulled up to the house I had a horrible realization: no keys! I had *no idea* where my house keys were. This was a particular disaster because we really needed to get inside, if you know what I mean.¹⁰

But search as we would, we couldn't find the keys. So we made a quick cell-phone call to Teri's Mom, who'd been watching the cats while we were away. She was home, fortunately, so we ran over and grabbed the keys. Dashed home, flung the doors open, and hugged our boys who seemed delighted to see us.

And then we collapsed.

We found the keys in a souvenir bag later, by the way. What my brain was thinking, I can't imagine. ☺

So that was the first half of stage one of our honeymoon. We still had a whole other week off! If I have the strength I'll write it up next time. There's lots more to tell: the Cooking of the Ham, a trip to Cape Cod, the ultrasound...I'm sure I'll remember more soon...

By the way, so far married life just gets better and better—it's amazing!

A POEM

I used to read a bit of poetry when I was a kid, and memorized some of it. Recently a snatch of verse came back to me ("Mithridates, he died old"). I looked it up on the web, and found the whole poem. Strangely enough, as soon as I read it I found myself *memorizing* it—my brain just started sucking it all in. I actually found it soothing, and it was surprisingly easy. Easier, in fact, than I remember memorization being! It's strange, but I think I'm getting a little smarter—at least in some ways.

The poem is by A.E. Housman, and begins "Terence, this is stupid stuff". As I was driving in

to work one day, I found my mind coming up with lines for a parody of sorts. Verses dropped into place here and there, and before I knew it I'd assembled a poem that seemed a lot better than I had any right to expect, and a much closer parallel to the original (which was the last section of "Terence") than I'd planned. It even had the same number of lines.

I'm going to send it in somewhere for professional publication¹¹, so I've only published an earlier version in an online forum under my political *nom de plume*. But here it is, a special preview for you guys:

There is a Leader in the east:
 A wholly-owned corporate beast,
 Who never saw an eco-crime
 He wouldn't pardon, any time.
His water, it is filtered pure;
 His food, untainted, we are sure.
 But when it comes to public health
 He hears the siren song of wealth.
 Carbon dioxide in our air,
 He says the trees have put it there;
 He pours arsenic in our cup
 And smiles to see kids drink it up;
 Salmonella in school meat,
 He laughs to watch the children eat.
 He laughs and pockets tons of cash
 To fill the bulging far-right stash.
 —I tell the tale that I heard told;
 George Dubya, his heart is cold.

WHAT TO PRINT?

I've been wondering what to write for *Interregnum*. Specifically, should I reprint material from my RuneQuest web site. Would that be a waste? I don't want to be redundant!

For example, I'm not going to post this honeymoon zine online—not for a long time, anyway—in part because I want IR to have it

¹⁰ Bathroom.

¹¹ Probably *The Nation*, although I hear that anyone subscribing to or writing for them immediately has a file opened on them by the FBI—apparently being *that* liberal is tantamount to treason!



exclusively¹². I figure that at this point EVERYONE has web access, and a hard copy of something that's already available online will just be a waste of money and everyone's time. On the other hand, I know that most of my friends don't read my site—which is a little odd, since I've put a ton of new stuff on it. I don't know. I try not to get bitter about it. ☺

I don't want IR to take a back seat to my website when it comes to publishing my own stuff. Of course, if I've just finished something useful I'd print it in IR first, and keep it off my site for at least a couple of months. The problem is, I don't necessarily come up with new material at the right time, and since I haven't been gaming much lately I don't have a source of inspiration for game material.

The point, I guess, is to find stuff that I'd like to publish in *Interregnum* that I don't want to put online. The poem is a good example of that sort of material; I want to sell it, so I can't post it widely. Better still would be some short fiction, if only I could write some.

I'm babbling. Sorry.

Perhaps I can find a way to make use of the situation. I have several scenario ideas that I haven't been able to develop, because I have not had a chance to run them—I could write those up with some more detail and print them here. I'd love to get some feedback and ideas for improving them. We'll see.

VIDEO GAME JUNKIE

"Say, are you a junkie? You look like a junkie to me."¹³

I'm a junkie. I've spent years at a time *not* playing video or computer games, but I've been hooked—bad—for quite a while now. And it's getting worse; I used to only play ancient games, Turbo Graph-X and Atari. But lately I've been hooked on *Diablo 1*, both online and off—and now I have *The Sims*, *Diablo 2*, and *Black & White* sitting in my computer den!

But here's the cruelest irony: I can't run them! My computer is barely three years old, but it's starting to act...funny. It freezes solid about half

¹² Okay, I realize that probably won't be considered a big coup for IR. ☺

¹³ From *A Confederacy of Dunces*, which you *really* should read.

of the time on start-up, and has to be hard-rebooted. Then it gives me that snotty "You should have shut your system down correctly" (like I didn't *try*?! Someone has GOT to kill Bill Gates!), and goes through a laborious scandisk.

It's a 300mghz system with 64mb of RAM, but when I scan the system with McAfee I'm told that some of the memory is corrupt. But the memory is a single chip of ECC SDRAM! I supposedly have adequate resources to play most of the new games, but when I try, they tell me I don't and won't run. **ARGHHH!**

Windows itself is partially corrupt, as always seems to happen after a year or so (I did a full reinstall a couple of years ago). Some codecs are missing, as are some DLLs. I need to do another complete reinstall, but that's a huge pain and likely to go wrong—and I don't have Scott to help me out of a jam any more. It's obviously time to seriously consider getting a new PC.

My options are:

1. Upgrade my current system as best I can, RAM, motherboard, CPU, and a larger hard drive; that will cost about \$900.
2. Buy a "Blue Plate Special" at PCs For Everyone and add in the extras I need: \$1700.
3. Design a complete new system from the ground up, with everything I need: \$1900.

What should I do?

JUBILEE

I've been sorry to see some of the anger and hurt feelings on the part of various *IR* people over the past few years. Every time, I've meant to write to the people involved—but procrastination has a terrible hold on me, and I've failed. As former editor, I hate to see anyone leave *IR*, of course. It's like losing part of the family. And it only hurts everyone; we all suffer when a writer leaves. At the same time, participating in IR must be a pleasure, not a burden. *That's* obvious.

We all need to work restore and maintain the basic amity, the courtesy that keeps an APA (and a family) together. That said, I'd like to endorse the idea for a Jubilee of sorts, a time to reconcile and try again. As for the future of *Interregnum*—but that will have to wait for next time. Until then! —>Peter

Next issue: I impersonate a girl on Battlenet. ©

