

The Megaphone

February 24, 2000

An organ of the Rascals Rogues and Rapsallions

Number 10

Editors Note

It has come to my attention that I have frittered away much of the year in anxiety, attention deficit, and sickening self-pity. In as much as this has brought harm to our Lair (as evidenced by the absence of a quarterly meeting in December and the publication of this newsletter an entire year after the intended date of issue) I beg your corporate forgiveness.

Well, enough of confession. We had a grand time in 1999 and I want to write home about it.

-- Charlei George

5th Annual Rascals Ball

We, our spouses, and escorts had a gay old time downtown at Mitchell's. Dinner was splendid as usual. Many thanks go to **Dennis Looney**, **Steve Rine**, and **Jeff Brooks** for their efforts in preparation. Abandoning the usual song-and-dance, we were regaled by a touching monologue from **Dan Morrison**, who transported us to his retirement home in the year 2050. The now old codger relieved our mortal anxieties by recalling the precise time and mode of each member's demise -- not once forgetting to swirl the brandy snifter after each toast/roast. The play's impact on the economy could be felt throughout the year as rascals cancelled their insurance policies and flooded the market with new investments in stocks.

The rascal of the year trophy was passed on to **Victor Norman**, whose research on the Allegheny County Sewer system, in the words of his father-in-law, **Don McBurney**, "just shows how much the boy is

full of his subject." In keeping with tradition, his trophy has since been preserved in a place of honor in his living room for this year.

The **Jon Z Landgraf**[†] award was bestowed on **Dave McFadden**. His multimedia presentation of his exploration of the Pittsburgh's south side had won the hearts (and Beer-Bellies) of rascals in attendance. [If only all mass challenges could be bought for a grateful dead song, a six-pack, and the story of a walk to a bar...] After graciously accepting his honor and briefly re-telling his adventure for the sake of our spouses, David proceeded with a shameless promotion of his *Capo Lavoro*, the galley proof of his first issue of *McFadden's Funnies*.

The Mass challenge for 1999 was issued by **Victor Norman**, who during a litter pick-up of West End Circle, found a discarded note from one Jon (or Jan depending on the lighting) to one Jerod regarding an unspecified event at Niagra [sic] Falls. The challenge: determine the real story behind the Jon and Jerod letter.

[The following scene, for reasons of tact and timing, did not actually happen, but is recorded here by way of explanation to any who may feel that Susan George is still in the dark about her husband's activities:

Lee Wolfson thanked those gathered for their participation under his Assistant Directorship and passed the mantle of his office to **Charlei George**, whose wife, in a display of overwhelming surprise, emptied her wine glass down the front of his shirt...]

Craig Street Underground

Those gathered at our March meeting were entertained by **Craig Elias** account of his exploration of an seemingly unused rail tunnel that passed under the notoriously congested Forbes and Fifth Avenue, Bayard Street, and Baum Boulevard -- roughly beneath Craig street. His research on tunneling in general revealed that the engineering methods were as ancient as civilization itself. The mechanics of modern tunnel drilling stem from tools used to build the New York subway system. Although he discovered many interesting facts on tunnels in general and some about the one that triggered his curiosity, Craig could not find a person who would actually give him permission to explore.

So, one fine morning he set out with his camera to the bottom of Neville street and began photographing the entrance, the "Property of Conrail" signs, the "Do not Enter" signs, the "Violators Will Be Prosecuted to the Fullest Extent of the Law" signs... Well, having observed this rail line long enough, and having never seen any traffic on it -- especially a weekend, Craig took the most prudent course of action and leisurely strolled into the tunnel.

Tunnels are quite solitary places... especially rail tunnels -- even infrequently used ones, with very little litter, a damp, sandy floor and dank air. There is no room for anything but a passing train, except for the occasional nook in the shape of a vertical coffin allowing workmen to stand clear of the train. Any fears of encountering

another soul quickly subside by the time one is halfway through.

It was at about this time that Craig noticed a light shining in from the entrance in which he had come. A rail car was making its way toward him! Hoping to avoid observation and prosecution "to the fullest extent of the law" – he ducked into the nearest workmen's nook. The passing car was a service vehicle driven by two workmen intent on the track beneath them. They did look up to give Craig a wave as they passed. The car stopped a about a hundred yards down the line.

Figuring no ill-will was intended, Craig walked over and disclosed his purposes. The men were there to realign a fault in the track, and having left their night-sticks and handcuffs at the shop, decided to grant Craig first hand footage of their repair-work. At impressive speed and display of strength, the workmen spliced and buttressed a section of cracked rail, then offered a ride back to Craig's car. Superman would have been proud.

We ended the evening with a rousing rendition of a classic folk song "Drill Ye Terriers".

Found Epistle to Enoch

The rascals constitution is based on the premise that "... the world is more interesting than most people imagine, self-discovery is a product of other-discovery, the fun begins where the road ends, and real life can be stranger than fiction." Our members and guests were challenged to exercise their creative talents and give real life a run for its money in explaining the underlying mystery of the dear Jerod letter.

In June nine of us gathered at Max's Allegheny Tavern, and six (one via mail) made cases for their rendition of the story behind the real Jan/Jon or

whoever it was that signed the note and evidently didn't know the proper spelling of Niagara Falls.

Mark Miller intercepted communication between neurologically enhanced lab-rats at Pitt and Case-Western Reserve indicating that the letter was central to their plot to conquer the world. Noting that the "N" in Niagra had only a slight upstroke, **Charlei George** surfed the net for "Syracuse and Viagra." He found a usenet posting from one Bob (no doubt a pseudonym for Jon) praising the impotence drug, but affordability would be an issue until the price of Viagra Falls. To enhance our sensual experience of the letter's content, **Dave McFadden** hooked up his stereo to play hypno-therapeutic white noise. After having us all don raincoats (to the amusement of the other diners at Max's), he aimed a squirt gun on us to complete the effect of a *Maid of The Mists* tour.

But a more scholastic approach won the day for **Tim Esaias** who recalled a familiar pattern in the Burn-Marks on the letter from a book that he had read... "It was then that I achieved understanding," he wrote, "for these marks seemed terribly familiar. They are, in fact, nearly identical to scorch marks on the Shroud of Turin ... More astonishing, the marks on this Xerox of the Jarod Epistle, are almost the exact size of the marks in this photograph of the shroud in the book *The Mysterious Shroud!* ... For representations to match is proof."...

"The interesting reference to Niagra tends to support this reasoning. Not ... a misspelling ..., it is instead the Roman god or spirit who the opposite of the deity Viagra, the spirit of tumescence, of upwardness and

erection. Niagra, of course, represented impotence and downward tendencies. Niagra can be said to be the god of descent, and [the reference] to the underworld, perhaps to Satan himself ..."

"... The addressee of this letter, I assert, is the original Jared, he of the fifth generation of Man, as we learn in the fifth chapter of Genesis. A close reading of this chapter will disclose that Niagra was troubling the early men terribly, they usually took many decades to father a child, which must have been very frustrating. Jared himself was a hundred and sixty-two before he was able to procreate effectively. No wonder the defeat, or "Fall" of Niagra was eagerly awaited. This very early date might also resolve the question of spelling, particularly of the o for e in Jarod, for Hebrew at the time was notoriously negligent in the question of vowels, especially as writing systems had yet to be invented. I believe [the writer] was ... his son Enoch the father of Methuselah. Enoch would definitely have had a lot on his mind, because he, ... was to live forever."

Tim Concluded, "The signature ... is a poorly wrought fish symbol, the same that the Christians would later use to indicate eternal life, and the abbreviation for "Junior" on each side. This would be a logical designation for a son who was to live forever when writing to dear old Dad."

In awe, we made plans to enshrine our newfound relic, but no one seemed to know who had the original. Before we became overwhelmed by our brief contact with antiquity, we stepped out for some fresh air and completed our evening by introducing out-of-town Rascals **Ron DiOrio** and **John Blair** to the Foundry brew-works.

To Label a Cigar

We convened again at the Foundry Brew works in September. **Andy Deen** presented the Rascals with crayons, markers, scissors, and construction paper. We then took in a rather boring video on the evolution of cigar labels (provided courtesy of **Lee Wolfson**) and the printing process for cigar art. Before ennui overcame us, Andy urged us to synthesize some of the ideas presented and make our own label -- one that would be suitable for lair functions.

To complete his challenge Andy has vowed to scan these images, and using artistic license, synthesize a label befitting cigars borne in our humidior.

Talking Trash

Special thanks to **Lee Wolfson**, **Vic Norman**, **Steve Rine**, and **Tim Esaias** for their participation in litter pick-up this year. The trash at West End circle is much more manageable now that we've been keeping it beautiful for the past few years. Evidently, a wild turkey agrees. Residents informed **Charlei George** the bird had been haunting the neighborhood, and after a few postmen made a point to put out seed for it, the young gobbler began saluting rush hour motorists as part of his morning routine. Perhaps he'll be waiting for us at our spring pick-up (assuming he survived the holidays)! Our next clean-up will be 11:00 Saturday March 18, at 11:00.

The Flag

Travels of our flag this year included the orphans cemetery in New Orleans, LA with **Mark Miller** and **Lee Wolfson**, and Highpoint, NJ with **Dan Morrison** and **Charlei George**.

Rascals Internationale

Inspired by the thrill of managing our lair's vast treasury, **Vic Norman** took a 12 week sabbatical from work to volunteer his time to Operation Mobilization, a Christian missionary organization. In August, he and his family toddled off to Carslile England (the group's international headquarters just beyond Hadrian's wall). His job was to optimize their home grown financial management software. He consolidated multi-step operations into simple routines called "Shepherds" (the sanctified equivalent of commercial software's "Wizards"). Vic returned home in December with an inspirational message, kids with a British accent, and a slightly more gravid wife.

A day later, **Dennis Looney** parted our shores aboard the *S..S. Universe*, the floating classroom and dormitory of Pitt's Semester at Sea program. He will be the dean on board the ship this year, helping students experience Dante by hiding the supply of dramamine. Coincidentally, joining him, will be Vic's en-laws, the **McBurneys**.

Rascals on the Net

Wired and we don't know it? Please E-mail (qqq+@pitt.edu) and he will subscribe you to our list service, (R-R-and-R@list.pitt.edu). You can also request subscription directly All members of this list are welcome to use it for the purposes of our lair.

I Lost my Lens

A mystery that remains unanswered according to **Brian Holly** is who took Langley's telescope lens from Allegheny Observatory? It unfortunately will remain unanswered as **Steve Rine** concluded that he was not up for the challenge.

Rather than convening our forth quarterly meeting, **Charlei George** opted to postpone, then cancel our gathering. Since this was to be a meeting in which officers (assistant director, treasurer, and secretary) for the year 2000 were to be elected, we are now in a constitutional crisis. (The anarchists among us may feel free to re-read that last phrase: "we don't know who's going help us to keep us in touch.") To resolve this, we must meet to hold business at the earliest possible convenience to the maximum number of members of our lair.

Our next quarterly meeting will be held April 25, 2000 to elect new officers and decide appropriate remedies to this situation. **Mark Miller** will lead us in a discussion of better ways to operate in the future.

The story goes that Langley's lens was found on the sidewalk intact, but badly damaged. Upon its reinstallation after a thorough polishing, the lens performed far better than it had ever in the past. It is this editor's hope that we can apply this metaphor to him and our lair, and be better focused on a future of hope and discovery.

Rascal's Embark on Mass Challenge 2000

As is our custom at our June meeting, each Rascal and guest will be granted five minutes to answer a challenge thrown down at the rascals ball. This year, that challenge will be to identify a character from a century assigned at random (i.e. the numbers 1 through 20 will be drawn from an urn and assigned to each participant.), and make a case for that character being the most rascally of his historical contemporaries. The best presentation will be determined by a majority vote of those present. The presenter will be declared winner of the coveted **Jon Z Landgraf[†]** award, and the character presented will be declared most rascally of the Bi-Millennium.

Those present at the February 26 Rascal Hoe Down will receive their number (as well as this issue of the Megaphone) in person. Numbers will be assigned and mailed with this issue to the remaining rascals. As one can tell, it is likely in June that one may find himself vying with another Rascal over the same century – possibly even the same character. Thus the presentation's quality may be crucial to the number of votes garnered.

My challenge for June 2000:
Come to the Rascals Rogues and
Rapscallions meeting and make
my case for the rascal of the:

Century

Rascals, Rogues, and Rapscallions
c/o Charles George
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