

# THE H. SIMON GREGORY CHRONICLES

By H. Simon Gregory  
With an Introduction by SNN Associate Editor Mark Wilson

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## Introduction

By Mark Wilson, SNN Associate Editor

A long time ago, a disheveled-looking man walked into my office on the 13th floor of SNN Center in Chicago. His clothes were ragged, his hair unkempt, and he reeked of onions and axle grease. He was holding a classified ad clipped from the Chicago *Tribune*, the one I put in there. It said, “Columnist wanted; college education optional. Must be able to write on odd schedule. Apply at SNN Center.” I looked at the ad, and then at the person. I had seen strange things, but never a homeless person applying for work as a columnist.

“I’m not homeless,” he said. “My dry-cleaner had a horrible fire. Everything was destroyed; these were the only clothes I had. Also, my water company had a break in the pipes, and I haven’t been able to shower for days.”

I asked him about the onions and axle grease, to which he responded, “I was having some salad when my car exploded in my face.” Everything seemed to make sense, so I hired him on the spot.

His name, of course, was H. Simon Gregory. Since that fateful day in 1987, he has been faithfully writing some very off-the-wall stuff – sometimes for us, sometimes for *Aye on the WeBB*.

A couple months ago, I realized that we had a lot of stuff from both Gregory and “Ed-dington,” so I approached him about the project. He put down his foot-long pastrami sandwich and said he would do it, as long as I did all the hard work. So, here it is, the result of hours of scouring the archives at SNN Center – the H. Simon Gregory Chronicles.

## THE EARLY YEARS

*I can't say that these columns are especially good. I can't even say that they're remotely good. It would be best to say that they're less-than-good. These were the very first columns produced for Headline News by H. Simon Gregory. Initially, they were just snippets – a few paragraphs – to fill space in the middle of some of the issues.*

### Gregory's Corner

First published in II.07

If I go back into the past and meet my grandfather, and say to him, “Hey Gramps, think about what she’ll look like in forty years,” and I make him not marry my grandmother, I would never be born. A few questions arise: if I was never born, that means I can’t discuss dating with Gramps, which means, thus, that I **will** be born, and go on to uncreate myself. That’s the Time-Travel Paradox.

Second, would I disappear gradually, like Michael J. Fox in *Back to the Future*, or would I just cease to exist like that one episode of *Super Friends*?

If you’ve ever played *The Journeyman Project*, then you’ll versed in the ways of time-travel. For the uninitiated, a temporal disruption appears at the point of the historical change and ripples, like a wave, forward through time, changing events and “uncreating” people in its path. Depending on how far back in time the rip was, it can take hours or minutes to reach the present.

I like this theory. It makes interesting conversation when I’m trying to pick up women at the Antimatter Cafe.

But I always come Home Alone, anyway.

Aaaugh!

### Gregory's Corner

First published in II.10

Yes, I remember the 1st edition of *SNN Headline News*. I wasn’t in it. These cretins didn’t hire me until the 6th or 7th edition – and that was because they needed to fill up space. Do you know where I was working before this? The *Romulus Daily News*, that’s where. Quality journalism, but if you got on the Tal’Shiar’s bad side it was ugly. And then I worked for *The Vulcan Times* and the *Qo’Nos Gazette*. But I really wanted to write for the *Cardassia Register*. Those are award-winning periodicals. And I’m stuck with the Starfleet News Network? They pay my bills, at least. And I give them quality work like this. Until they read this.

## THE LATER YEARS

*These columns are much better – and much longer. It was about here that I realized that Gregory should be writing longer stuff. Headline News was quickly becoming the WeBB source for uninformative news, and I believed that Gregory should evolve with that, too.*

### I Like Popcorn

First published in II.21

As the fall season draws to a midpoint, I'd like to reminisce about the fun-fun silly-willy things that have happened over the past couple of months. For starters, I found my pants. I took awhile, but eventually I discovered that they had been left in my water heater by an uncaring sales representative. And to think that for three whole weeks I came to work with no pants! Not like anyone would notice, since the Starfleet News Network prohibits the wearing of pants; I manage to sneak them in every now and then, though.

Cars run on gasoline. It's a fact, even though I ran mine with liquid nitrogen for an entire month. It's a good thing I remembered the clutch, or I would have had shattered engine pieces all over the freeway! Boy, would I have looked silly then! As I recall, it was Larry "OK, so the **20th** president was" Garfield who told me to fill my tank with liquid nitrogen. I'll have to have a word with him.

Donuts are a valuable tool, even when you least suspect it. Why, just yesterday I fended off a mugger outside my house with a glazed donut. Sprinkles are equally deadly, if used incorrectly – they have the potential to destroy lives, and in the process make things yummy and delicious. Did I bring up the subject of cream filling? It's like mace, the stuff is! Throw it at someone and they become completely helpless! You can bet I'll be going to Dunkin' Donuts instead of the local gunshop for my lethal firearms.

### ¿Puedo Tomar Prestado Un Sentimiento?

First published in II.26

I find that the holidays are a very stressful time of year, especially for my family. My brother-in-law, Terrance, escaped from prison recently and came to live with us. It was hard every time the cops came around, trying to hide him from justice while we stood around like frightened chickadees. He's moved on, though, so we don't have to worry anymore.

I received a new computer for Christmas. A Cray XMP, I believe. My sister (she splurges on everything) asked what kind I might want. I said, "Just something I can use to predict weather and calculate variables in the space shuttle launch." I was joking, but she probably didn't understand. She's completely immune to sarcasm. I think I'll keep it, just to predict the weather.

My son-in-law bought for me a Red Ryder 200-shot carbine action range-model air rifle. I said I had only wanted that when I was 9, and had grown up. I didn't tell him to take it back, though.

So, this is why I detest Christmas! Getting presents I don't want, more presents I want, and a couple I don't want! Call me greedy, do you? Well, buster, you have no idea how right you are.

### I Can't Feel My Legs!

First published in II.27

Space. The final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship *Enterprise*. Its continuing mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations; to boldly go where no one has gone before. . .

Espacio. La ultima frontera. Estos son los viajes del buque de las estrellas *Enterprise*. Su misión continuando: a explorar nuevos mundos extraños, a buscar nueva vida y nuevos civilizaciones; a ir aduazamente dónde nadie ha ido antes . . .

Space. The ultimate unprotected border. These are the traversements of the interstellar vessel *Enterprise*. Its perpetual journey: to quest for as-yet-unknown biological entities and undiscovered products of creativity or ingenuity as layed out by a distinct species; to daringly venture where no person has yet ventured . . .

Spas. Thu finul frunteer! Theez iz thu voiujis uv the starshpip *Entirpriz*. It's cuntinyouing mishun; (to explor stranj nu wirldzes): two seek out nu lif 'n' nu civilizashuns-too bodily go wear knowbuddy's gon beefore . . .

As-pay. Ee-thay inal-fay untier-fray. Ese-thay are-ay e-thay oyages-vay of-ay e-thay arship-stay *Enterprise-ay*. Its-ay ontinuing-cay ission-may: o-tay explore-ay ange-stray ew-nay orlds-way, o-tay eek-say out-ay ew-nay ife-lay and-ay ew-nay ivilizations-cay; o-tay oldly-bay o-gay ere-whay o-nay one-ay as-hay one-gay efore-bay . . .

### Post-election Analysis

First published in II.31

STARFLEET ASYLUM DELTA-5, RIGEL IV – now that election season is over (for this eight months, anyway), let's all compare this election to the last one. Certainly the entire election was WeBB-based; perhaps the only STFer that was not on the WeBB was law student and FComm-1 Dennis "Dining Room" Hannigan. This makes this election unlike last year's, where the balance was semi-equal, though much more favorable towards the Prodigy side. In fact, I'll bet that a sizeable portion of Prodigy members (there were enough back then to have a *sizeable* portion) did not vote for Longanbach for the simple reason that he did not advertise on Prodigy, and many of the Proprietites (yes, even Associate Editor Mark "Why are you so obsessed with my intriguing closet of mystery?" Wilson) had no idea Longanbach was running. He made himself known this time, though. Ooh, I have to leave now, warden's coming by. . .checking for anything that's not allowed here. That includes computers ("we're not allowed to read newspapers; they angry up the blood"), so I'll join all of you in my next column (or when I escape. If the latter is the case, I'm heading to Colin Wyers's house).

### Back in the Day

First published in II.32

When Genesun Han took the name “Larimda ME,” it was to satire a rank inflation that was going on at the time. Today there is also a kind of rank inflation permeating STF. It’s WeBB inflation, a disease that began to bubble and brew within STF’s arteries from day one of the WeBB. The first members were given high ranks, since there was no one at the time to command anything, except for veterans who the crossed that Bering Strait to get to the WeBB. In under a year, folks had CO-ships (and were the COs of ships), sometimes outranking veterans who had been in STF twice as long. The top brass in San Francisco should keep in mind just who it is they have in charge; they should be seasoned, not accepted because they ask and beg and plead, although that is just as effective here.

### Kiloquad Code Cracked

First published in II.35

Binary code. 1s and 0s. 0s and 1s. And, or, not? Binary code is for losers, however. STF now has the quaternary code, developed by *Titania* CO Nathan “Steve” Miller, IDir Mike “Who says I like Berkley?” Bourdaa, and AFComm-1 Mark “I certainly don’t like Berkley” Wilson.

The quaternary code is the key to understanding the kiloquad, the *Star Trek* method of computer calculation. Sure, I know that your good friend Mike Okuda designed the kQ so that it wouldn’t be equatable to anything modern. He failed, though – the *quad* is what gave it away. And if you pay attention, I’ll tell you just how 63 MB is equal to one kQ.

Listen: there are four operations in the quaternary code. This is the part of the theory that comes from Mr. Bourdaa. We’re not sure what the four operations are, but there are four of them.

The number of calculations in the system times two times that number equals the number of “bits” in one “byte.” It works in the binary system like this:  $2(4) = 8$  bits in one byte. In quaternary, it looks like this:  $4(8) = 32$  bits in one byte. Now, the number of bits in one byte times two times that number equals the largest bit in a byte. In our system, this largest bit is 128, obtained as such:  $8(16) = 128$ . In quaternary:  $32(64) = 2048$ . And finally, multiplying the largest bit in the byte by the number of bits in the byte equals the size of the kilobyte. For us:  $128(8) = 1024$ . For them:  $2048(32) = 65536$ . So, dividing 65,536 by 1024 equals 64,000 even. So, the kiloquad is 64000 times larger than the kilobyte. This means, conversely, that 1 kilobyte is 0.0064 kiloquads. Multiplying both sides by 1000, we realize that 1 megabyte is equal to 64 kiloquads.

There. The answer you’ve been waiting for. If you feel that some of the logic is flawed (which it is, trust us), write to [mwilson32@hotmail.com](mailto:mwilson32@hotmail.com) or [mhb@delta.fullerton.edu](mailto:mhb@delta.fullerton.edu).

Poo-tee-weet?

## Unquestioned Answers

First published in II.36

This IS the Gilligan's Island edition, so I might as well ask the question: "How did they get off the island?" Obviously if there was a follow-up film, titled *Return to Gilligan's Island*, they made it off of their somehow; in that film they built a resort there! I have asked the opinions of several leading scientists (living and dead). Here are their answers.

### PROFESSOR STEVEN HAWKING

"It is my belief that everyone on the island ended up there through a phenomenon that caused space and time to distort briefly, propelling the castaways onto the island. How they returned from the island can be easily explained; the island itself was a black hole. Due to radio (and possibly gamma) waves given off by the Professor's coconut radio, the black hole remained inactive; when it was shut off, the black hole sucked in – for lack of a better word – the castaways and deposited them in a different time and place; namely, time had advanced thirty-four hours and the castaways were on the shore."

### DR. SIGMUND FREUD

"In asking this question, you show the world your own sexual aberrations. Your opening sentence phraseology of 'pronoun - verb - article - possessive noun - noun - noun' shows that you have a strong desire for women with brown hair. Using this piece of information, we can discern that it was YOU who rescued the Castaways, seeing as how you had a lust for Mary Anne and believed that the Professor was invading your space."

### ALBERT EINSTEIN

"My theory of special relativity clearly shows that because time and space are curved, the castaways were in fact closer to home on the island than they were when they were home. The equation  $E = mc^2$  indicates that energy is equal to mass times the speed of light squared. Let us assume that the total mass of the castaways was 1,500 pounds. Multiplying this by the speed of light squared, we arrive at the answer of  $5.1894 \times 10^{13}$ . For simplicity's sake, we'll round it to  $5.2 \times 10^{13}$ . This means that the energy generated collectively by the castaways was enough to propel them home. What was the question again?"

## THE BETTER YEARS

*Gregory had finally gotten good at this point, which was the same time we switched to a white background. Coincidence? I think not! This was also the point at which the articles became longer and funnier. Once I got Gregory to understand the concept of “500 words,” he was on the Pulitzer list in no time!*

### Mr. Ballway goes to Mentor

First published in II.37

Several weeks ago, my geographic position enabled me to meet the inscrutable Mike “Moran” Ballway, FComm-2 and *Constellation* CO. Previous to this, the only other people who have survived a Ballway attack were his partner in crime FComm-4 Larry “Bird” Garfield, *Ark Angel* CO Randy “REM” McCullick, and *Merlin* CO Jeremy “Sauteedman” Friedman. Judging by their current psychological condition, they must have been very traumatized (or else they were always that way).

I had the opportunity to talk with Mr. Ballway in the airport terminal as he was waiting for his luggage (Cleveland Heights is very far away). He told me in detail his life story – living on a planet light years from ours, being shot to Earth as it exploded, having powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men, and rooting for the Cubs. I was also told about the true nature of Larry Garfield. “That isn’t his real hair,” said Ballway. “His real hair was attached to the cryogenically frozen head of Walt Disney.” I was also filled in on a great amount of STF history that I had previously known nothing about – the Command Crisis, his own tenure with Fleet 2, and why Colin Wyers was a vampire.

Philosophical discussions of the nature of the designated hitter, Dick Feagler, and Barry Goldwater were also a part of the day. We toured the finer sections Mentor – the K-Mart, the mall, the historic section where 100 year-old buildings were torn down to make room for a Rite-Aid. Mr. Ballway offered a comment about Mentor. “This is ri-godamm-diculous,” he said. “There’s nothing to do in this down!” I concurred, and soon he told me about Chicago and how organized crime there is better than organized crime in Cleveland. “We had Al Capone. You had Art Modell.” I could only point out that the entire South Side gang put together had more morals than Modell.

Among the many things he showed me was the SNN-mobile. What sounds like it must be a Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow is nothing more than a white Ford Escort with a mysterious dent in the side. This isn’t to say it’s a bad car; it’s just not a Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow (then again, neither is a Corvette). There was also the Cubs hat. No one in their right mind should walk into Indians country wearing a Cubs hat. “It could have been worse,” he pointed out. “It could have been a Yankees hat.” Well said, Mr. Ballway.

The end of the column is near. At this point I should note that none of the direct quotes are Mike Ballway’s. He *did* wear a Cubs hat, though, and *did* drive the SNN-mobile that was described. To some, he seems elusive and phantasmic, like a ghost or an honest politician. There is nothing mysterious about Mike Ballway, though. He is an ordinary person that speaks ordinarily and looks ordinary and drives an ordinary car. Be forewarned, though; Mike Ballway is as far from ordinary. After all, he’s Mike Ballway.

## Greetings from Beautiful Lake Erie

First published in II.38

As I walked down to the lake I could smell the salty sea air (and oddity, since the lake is fresh-water), hear the boats in the background, and look at the half-dozen dead fish that washed up and filled the air with the rancid odor of decay. Ah, beautiful Lake Erie!

Those in Utah have the Great Salt Lake, whose level of sodium chloride is rivaled only by the Dead Sea. Dwellers of southern Europe have the Mediterranean, a sea with more history than a storeful of Michael Jackson albums. We in Ohio have Lake Erie, whose level of filth has, in the past, has only been surpassed by the River Thames and possibly the Cuyahoga River.

You know the Thames story – unbelievable filth, and then on a summer day the level of the river fell and the stench was unbearable. Then there were the boaters who fell out of their ferry and drowned – because of the toxicness of the water. That’s nothing! The Cuyahoga River was so polluted that it caught fire – twice – and didn’t stop burning for hours.

Then there’s Lake Erie, once closed with fishing prohibited, its beaches shut down because the water was deemed unfit for humans. Indeed, it was hardly fit for any living organism (except white supremacists, who would survive a nuclear bomb blast along with cockroaches and Twinkies), as there were hardly any fish to be seen. Then a program was begun to clean up the intolerable lake. Within a few years, the water was once again swimming with fish and boaters were once again arrested for being intoxicated while driving their vehicles.

I suppose those of you that live around the Pacific Ocean or maybe one of the other four Great Lakes would consider yourself lucky, but you all live without adventure. There’s nothing like stepping into the water, wondering what manner of sub-human is dwelling below, or how the garbage in the water will gash your feet. Lake Michigan, indeed!

## Douglas Adams Was Right

First published in II.39

It was either Douglas Adams or Kurt Vonnegut who noted that all air and space traffic throughout the universe goes through Atlanta, GA. If it was neither of them, I lose my remaining credibility. In any case, *someone* said it and I've come to tell you that it's unbelievably true.

Don't discount Salt Lake City or Cincinnati, either. They process a good deal of the traffic that comes through this galaxy only. Paris is another hub in the grand scheme of things, but it only handles the Sol System. You'd be surprised what interesting people can be found in interstellar flight terminals – like Ambassador Worf. I caught a glimpse of him as was heading for a charity event on Rigel VII. I asked him what he thought of the Galactic United Way, and he responded, “A waste of valuable space-bucks. Wasting money is dishonorable. Invest in the March of Silver Dollars instead.”

Once I arrived at my destination (courtesy of Omega Airlines) on planet Winnebago V for a journalism convention, I actually saw Douglas Adams . . . or at least his preserved head. It was at a promotional booth entitled “Ask Douglas Adams's Head a Question.”

“Mr. Adams,” I said, “how do you get 42 from 9 times 6?”

“Isn't it obvious?” his head snarled. “Mathematics as we know it is wrong!”

“But the Vulcans' math system developed independently of our own and even they get 54 from 9 times 6.”

The head of Douglas Adams thought for a moment, then sent some hired goons to rough me up and throw me out the door. It was interesting to meet the preserved head of Douglas Adams, but something about being roughed up by hired goons spoiled the experience. In any case, I left the journalism conference and was ready to sit back and enjoy a snack of one partially dehydrated peanut-flavored wafer when a disgruntled William Riker hijacked the plane. “I've gained so much weight . . . I can't go on, and I'm taking all of you with me!” Soon thereafter, some of Douglas Adams's goons roughed him up and tossed him out the airlock. Needless to say, I arrived back at SNN Center relatively unharmed and I just wanted to point out that the hub of the universe is Atlanta, Georgia. Strange that I didn't see Emily Braunstein . . . maybe she was roughed up and thrown out an airlock, too.

## Gamblers Anonymous Opens STF Branch

First published in II.40

The sad truth is here – STFers simply can't say "no" to poker, blackjack, and pachisi. It became most obvious that there was a problem when STF Internet Director Mike "Wallace" Bourdaa blew \$2 million on blackjack. "My brother did it," stuttered Bourdaa. "He was playing blackjack! I mean, he was hitting on hard 19 with the last \$600,000 when I walked in the room."

Excuses. Bourdaa obviously doesn't want STF to know about his gambling problem, so he invents a "brother" to place the blame on. Dr. Holt Rhinehart-Winston calls this phenomenon "antidisassociationism," characterized by "a morbid desire to gamble, invention of false siblings to cover one's tracks, and compulsion to write a Perl-based bulletin board system."

Mr. Bourdaa is not the only one afflicted by this, however. B.J. "It's showtime!" Phillips also has the mania. Latest reports have shown him to be in mostly poker areas, although he does go to pachisi and blackjack from time to time. Greg "I'll hit you when I'm good and ready" Hertzsch was also committed to the center, now called "The Betty Bourdaa Clinic," for excessive insanity when he would not stop repeating the phrase, "I am the GDMF Pachisi-playing MAN!" Fortunately, FComm-6 Seamus "Don't confhughes him too much" Hughes was at the reins of the Personnel Department, so STF can continue running in its normal way.

Not to be outdone, FComm-1 Mark "McKinney" Wilson, formerly of *Kids in the Hall*, has been seen wasting continuous intervals of \$5,000 on hands that looked good, but weren't quite good enough. "Top o' the world, ma!" said Wilson as he jumped to his injury into a TrashCo-brand dumpster. He later commented, "These are nearly as good as Dumpster™ brand dumpsters."

What is happening to STF? A good majority of the members have now become hustlers on the side. FComm-2 Mike "I'm Kevlar™ and you're glue, anything you say bounces off me and sticks to you" Ballway has become a professional loan shark, known on the street as "Mikey the Blob." Former FComm-5 Nathan "Detroit" Miller has become a major player now in the Vinchoscheskofonzarini crime family of Medium-sized Italy. One by one, members of the Cabinet are succumbing to a simple Internet game, a game that has become more horror and heartache than fun. When, oh when will the hurting stop?

To participate in the hurting, go to <http://www.won.net/gamerooms/hoyle/> and download the Hoyle® program.

We Scoop Webbsights Like So Many Shovelfuls Of Coal  
 First published in II.41

Forget the old games of Kick-da-Seamus or Jell-O Wars. Pachisi is STF's newest game. Based on Parchessi, *Sorry!* and *Trouble*, Pachisi pits four players against each other in an effort to get all four of their pieces home. Players can create blocks (a favorite tactic of Pachisi grandmaster Mike "Countertop-a" Bourdaa) or "jump" opponents, sending them back to home. Much swearing and threatening is involved.

Recently, the team of IDir Mike "Cord of wood-a" Bourdaa, AFComm-3 B.J. "Magnavox" Phillips, AFComm-6 Alan "Greenspan" Felts, and FComm-1 Mark "Spalding" Wilson have begun to hold 3:00 AM games, usually ending in Bourdaa being the winner. In some instances, Phillips has won, and Wilson has won once. These players like to call themselves the "Bored Gamers" and when they play Spades, the "Cardshark Captains."

In one memorable game, Seamus "Yellow Wonder" Hughes confessed that he still had the ability to win, despite being 1,336 squares behind the winner. Another close game pitted FComm-2 Mike "I can't believe it's not *Trafalgar*" Ballway against Phillips for control of last place. Ballway lost, though it was reportedly close.

Group leader Bourdaa informed *SNN Headline News* that each player has a standard seating arrangement. "I take green, B.J. takes blue, Mark takes red, and either Alan or our guest takes yellow." A minor civil war broke out recently over control of the blue seat. Felts claimed that it gave him spooky supernatural powers, but Phillips maintained that he needed to defend the honor of Blue Jello [*sic*].

As the "Cardshark Captains," the Phantasmic Phour tackle games like Spades and Hearts while discussing STF. "I'd like to see all cabinet problems resolved by a game of Spades," said Phillips. Framers of the Articles of Organization are working on that particular request as we speak.

These days, Pachisi activity has lulled in favor of a new game – high-stakes Blackjack, baby! In such a game, Mike "Plank-a" Bourdaa advises inept STFians on how to play Blackjack . . . and win. Part of the process involves betting everything you've got. The other part involves using Felts's spooky supernatural powers to get the dealer to stop cheating. For now, we'll leave the Cardshark Captains to their money, and cards, and hope that one day their abilities will be put to good use. But, to quote Colin "Cut the red and green" Wyers, "Not bloody likely."

## THE BEST YEARS

*I chose this next column to open the “Best Years” section because I felt it was the best of all the columns. This next piece opens up a different kind of Gregory, one that is more like the Headline News of today than ever before. It is totally irrelevant, and at the same time, it has a heart to it. Wait, scratch that; it’s just irrelevant.*

### Borg Have Changed In Recent Years

First published in II.42

Remember the good old days, when the Borg would use their funny cybernetic arm extensions to assimilate the populace? Or when the Borg cube didn’t have an eerie green glow, or when there was no color at all to the interior of said cubes? Those days seem to be past, as today’s “modern” Borg phase out the old-fashioned technologies in favor of hipper, more high-tech ideas. *SNN Headline News* correspondent Arthur Treacher had the chance to interview 3rd of 5, one of the Borg who was responsible for the massive overhaul.

“We do not like simple things,” said 3rd of 5. “We enjoy complicated things, like a jet engine or the instructions for programming our VCR. This is why we changed our designs to a more complex approach. Simplicity is futile. You will like John Deere instead.”

Instead of long arm-extensions, the modern Borg of today use funny devices on their hands that shoot cords from the device to the victim, infusing him with “nano-probes,” cell-sized machines that turn the victim into a Borg. In the olden days, there was no explanation for how one was “Borgified.” It was just accepted that Borgification would happen, and we didn’t question it. “With the introduction of nano-probes, it is much easier to undo Borgification,” noted 3rd of 5. “This provides a nice plot element for your television shows.”

The Borg Cube has also changed. What was once a very dark, grim three-dimensional form now has an eerie green glow to it. “Martha Stewart suggested that one,” said 3rd. “She said the green accented the black and white of the cube interior, and reminded her of nearly being assimilated; a memory she holds dear to her heart.” And now, the Borg have introduced a sphere, a device that is capable of time-travel. “Also a convenient plot device. In our opinion, time-travel to the late 20th century isn’t done nearly as much as it should be.”

3rd of 5 also shared with us some plans for future enhancements to the Borg. “In years to come, we will be outfitted with a ‘cruise director’ unit that will be responsible for planning activities aboard the various Cubes. It gets boring out in space, even with billions of voices chatting away like there was no tomorrow. We have also ordered ‘How is our assimilating?’ bumperstickers. The Borg Queen saw those in a catalog and had to have them, along with a set of clever regeneration chamber magnets. Hmm, let us think . . . yes, we will also retro-fit the Cubes with Primestar satellite television. Their selection of programming is unmatched this side of the Barzan wormhole.”

No matter how they redecorate, onlookers say that this is a change for the better. “I’m glad the Borg have changed,” said *Enterprise* Captain Jean-Luc Picard. “Back when I was Locutus – did I mention that I was Locutus? – anyway, back then it was all black and white and what-not. Then, mysteriously, somewhere around 2373, the Borg changed most of their technologies. I still can’t explain the abruptness of that one. In any case, I’m glad they don’t clash anymore.” Others aren’t so optimistic. Officer Cosgrove could only say, “Hey Freakazoid, wanna go to the Spackle Museum?” His haunting words are perhaps a foreshadowing of things to come.

## Technology Shop Introduces “Bag of Dirty Tricks”

First published in II.43

It has become harder and harder to get elected in STF, what with five nominations and acceptances in the first week. The competition is heated, as most of the electees have about the same credentials. One wonders what it is exactly that will separate the winners from the losers. Enter The Technology Shop, Jason “Y” Lee’s transdimensional one-stop shop for absolutely anything. Lee, like all devout capitalists, takes advantage of special events when they knock on his door to peddle a subscription to the Antedian *Herald-Tribune*. This week, the Technology Shop’s owner announced a special on election technology that is sure to stifle any competition – either by reason . . . or by force.

***Soft Money Contribution Kit, =/299.73.*** This lovely Kit is a pre-assembled set of documents and pamphlets designed to get companies everywhere to contribute “soft money” to your party for the alleged purpose of “party activities.” These “activities,” as anyone with five-sixteenths of a grip on reality knows, are propaganda designed to promote a certain candidate. The Kit includes documents that record the transfer of money from large special interest groups (an up-to-date list of these groups and PACs is included, in case you’re not sure where to start), and fill-in-the-blank pamphlets that try to sell you as a candidate. And just in case soft money becomes disputed in any major legislative houses, the Kit comes with a fourteen-hour Filibuster®-brand audio CD that explains, in the most confusing language possible by modern instruments, the pros of “soft money” contributions.

***The Electee’s Concise Guide to Demagoguery, =/149.12.*** Ever wanted to appeal to peoples’ emotions like the pros? Now you can, with this handy volume from the authors of *Doublethink for the Soul* and *How to Violate the Laws of Rhetoric Without Really Trying*. Within the book’s 741 pages are easy ways for beginners to exploit the feelings of society toward a particular issue. It’s also a handy refresher course for career politicians who have become so incumbent that they needn’t worry about campaigning at all. Chapters 1-6 deal with “Issues that the public feels strongly about,” and chapters 7-57 discuss ways to use these issues to your advantage. Want to give nonexistent relevance to a meaningless discussion about Klingons and Romulans? Use the word “Khitomer” in the opening sentence – even if out of context – and everything you say thereafter will be given immediate importance.

***10,001 Ways to Mudsling, =/89.06.*** Though the title may not evoke a sense of greatness, most politicians say that this handy pocket guide is their best weapon against honest campaigners. “I’ll bet Goldwater wished he had one of these,” noted Aldean President Lyndon Baines Daq’janab, referring to a recent election between himself and opponent Xanther Goldwater. *10,001 Ways to Mudsling* includes the best tricks from history, tips from the pros, and new ideas from the authors. Several sections are devoted to “sex scandals and all-around past-dredging,” as well as “taking your opponent’s quotes out of context.” You’ll wonder how you ever won an election honestly once you implement such keen tactics as using large words to confuse an ignorant populace, “discovering” an opponent’s criminal background (real police reports included – you fill them in!), and making the most out of a seemingly innocuous expense account.

***Spin Doctor-in-a-Box, =/1,999.83.*** While it is the most expensive item being offered by the Technology Shop, “Spin Doctor” comes with a live humanoid who is very proficient in the arts of advertising and public relations. A set of polls will allow you to track your own progress while the Spin Doctor boosts your image and promotes you *ad nauseum*. “Spin Doctor” includes

the award-winning *PseudoPræmium*<sup>TM</sup> software that generates hundreds of major awards and credentials for you (not included: Avery Laser and InkJet Ready-Plaques). Order before November 3 and receive, at minimal charge, two “Yes-men” absolutely free! Listen as they agree with every bone-headed and stupifyingly moronic thing you have to say! The combination of “Spin Doctor” and “Yes-men” can produce a campaign that can be called, in one word, more contrived than Woodstock ‘99.

### Unsafe Products for Your Children

First published in II.46

Though the Consumers’ Union claimed to have eliminated all unsafe products in the year 2209 (with the help of the preserved head of Ralph Nader), several recent products seem to show that unsafe products are still very much a part of society, like firearms or Monty Python. Most distressingly, the products are children’s toys – things that are supposed to be safe, but in the end, turn out to be huggable deathtraps. Take, for example, “Baby Sulfuric Acid,” also marketed as “Baby H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>.” On the exterior, it seems to be a perfectly ordinary doll. On the inside, a steel tank holds 100 mL of 6M sulfuric acid. The maker of “Baby Sulfuric Acid” defends its product, saying, “[the doll] teaches children the consequences of bad parenting. If the doll is mishandled, the acid is released. We feel that this will breed a new generation of responsible [and horribly burned –*Ed.*] parents.”

Even if “Baby Sulfuric Acid” can be defended, surely some problem must be seen in “The Killer Bee Happy Fun Playset.” The product, which retails for =/34.95, is nothing more than a large box filled with South American Killer Bees. The only “play” being done is the running in terror once the box is opened. Mainway Toys, maker of the product, said in a statement that “the killer bees are coming, right? Our product builds immunity to their unbelievably lethal venom so that when the large swarms come in, the families that purchased Killer Bee Happy Fun Playset will survive and loot the homes of those that didn’t.”

Finally, and perhaps most frighteningly, the number-one seller among toys this year is “Can of Concentrated Lead Paint.” The brightly-colored labels on the 2-gallon container claim that the product is “Non-Toxic” and that “you can fly off to your own magical land” once the product is used. A companion item is “The Can of Concentrated Lead Paint Snack Center.” Children are encouraged to use the lead paint to make lead cookies, lead brownies, and even lead cupcakes in an EZ Bake Oven-style device. Curiously, the Federation has made no legislation barring the sale of this very dangerous toy. Federation President Werner von D’ookChak announced that “sales would proceed as long as we are being bribed. I mean, er, ah . . . what’s that horrible thing behind you!” He then ran away and was last seen on Risa posing as a Ferengi call girl.

Despite concerns aroused by the deaths of thousands of children from these toys, they continue to be number one sellers. Perhaps it is best explained by the nature of kids today to be daring, even edging on stupid. More likely, though, are the advertisements that hypnotize parents into buying the product and forgetting what happened. If you would like to protest the sale of these products, write to – must buy . . . Killer Bee Fun Set . . .

### Is Fleet 8 a Reality?

First published in II.47

For a long time now, those fat cats down in Command have thrown around the idea of Fleet 7, but to no avail. Fleet 7 still remains on the drawing board like so many T-squares. It seems as though there will never be expansion beyond the six fleets that exist now - or does it? This is where Fleet 8 comes in. Fleet 8, a joint venture of AOL Daimler-Warner Chrysler WorldCom, has been granted (in secret) a charter to begin operation in February of 2000. These so-called "charter fleets," separate from the rest of STF and yet still a part of it, are all the rage these days as Command fails to see the need for expansion. One person put it best: "The future of STF is in Fleet 8, a Fleet with unlimited resources and a free toaster for joining."

STF President Seamus Hughes wasn't as optimistic. With his typical style, he dismissed the charter for Fleet 8, calling it "nonsense" and "more nonsense." After these two fragmented comments, Hughes went on to say that "Fleet 8 is even less a reality than Fleet 7. I don't know where you got this information, but there never has been a plan for Fleet 8." This may be so, but sources close to *Headline News* have dredged some top secret documents detailing Fleet 8's structure and function. They note that Fleet 8 will be run not by a Fleet Commander, but by a committee of twelve junior officers. Also, Fleet 8 will have one ship, the USS *Quetzal-Sacatanango* (home of merciless chili peppers of the same name, grown deep in the jungle primeval by the inmates of a Guatemalan insane asylum).

Other documents that were dredged up show that Fleet 8 was to be, by all accounts, the "newbie fleet." Sadly, these plans never came to fruition as the Fleet 8 headquarters-in-progress, Starbase 21A (Starbase 21 on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays), went up in a ball of flames, killing its only occupants - six gerbils assigned to run the warp core. It must be asked, then, who the victim is here. Is it Command, whose plans were thwarted by the whim of President Hughes? Perhaps it is the inmates of that Guatemalan insane asylum, whose peppers will never be eaten by anyone except judges in small-town chili competitions (and these people will presumably have delusions that urge them to "find their soul-mate"). Or maybe the real victims are those poor, poor gerbils - the end result of a society that has let its morals fall so low as to allow Barry Manillow to survive unpunished. Any way the bread is sliced, it still falls away from Fleet 8 and toward someone who will be crushed by the bread, possibly an artificially shrunken person.

## The Ultimate Price of Cheese

First published in II.48

Nothing had shown me more that the world was on a steady slope downward than what I saw last week at the Fourth Annual Galactic Cheesemakers' Union meeting on Rigel XXVI. I was there to report on the new and innovative kinds of cheese that were slated to come out that day, and I was rather psyched for a rousing day of curds when I was stunned into disbelief: someone had made off with the cheese. That's right; some vagabond had absconded with the priceless prototype cheeses for the new year: the 2377 Mercury Swiss, the 2377 Buick Muenster, and perhaps the most heinous of all, the 2378 Chevy Winsleydale. The Chevy Winsleydale was the product of ten years of research and innovation in the field of cheese research technology, and now the General Roquefort company (maker of all three new cheeses) will suffer incalculable losses.

Losses where? In the competitive cheese market, that's where. Every year, consumers of cheese expect to see new innovations in cheese technology, and every year, the big companies must deliver, or else they'll fall behind and other companies will take their business. "It's all over for GR," said General Roquefort spokesman Norman W. Klepsky. "I can't begin to imagine the losses next quarter. In this era of high-tech cheeses, it's kill or be killed. We can't afford to have those priceless prototype cheeses stolen!" GR expected to begin selling the new-model cheeses next quarter, at the beginning of March, but now, experts predict that competitors will take consumers that would have been rightfully GR's.

"Consumers get tired of older, more outdated cheeses," said GR Marketing Vampire Werner von Hossentheffer. "The cheese innovations are happening so fast that when you open up a package of cheese, it's already been replaced by a cheese that has fifty times the flavor and color. Did you know that the human eye can distinguish 32 million colors? Our Buick Muenster has a maximum output of 58 million colors. The flavor factor of the competitors' cheeses are about 350 Flz with a 133 Flz savor speed. Until a few months ago, no one had this stuff; we would have dominated the market. But now . . . now, we'll just have to prey, er, pray."

Indeed, one can only hope that the thieves will be caught or else they themselves will see that they have committed a heinous act return the proto-cheeses out of their own generosity. It says something about a society's values when cheese is taken in the open, with hundreds of cheese-makers watching. The cheese-makers aren't off the hook, either. They stood idly by while valuable cheese, the product of years of labor, was stolen from under their noses. This is the fault of society, too, for creating a breed of people that seems to be bereft of any ethics. Do these cheese-bandits know that they have done something wrong? Are they so morally diluted that they can no longer distinguish between the two? Where will it end? Today, it is cheese. Tomorrow, it could be far more heinous. Tomorrow, it could be luncheon meat.

## A Brief History of *Headline News*

First published in II.50

Most readers don't know the real story of *SNN Headline News*. They're content to believe what the Establishment tells them, like some sort of crazy robot that only believes what the Establishment tells it. *Headline News* was originally supposed to be a horror film directed by Wes Craven entitled *House on SNN Hill*, but the executives at Abraxis Filmworks just didn't think the idea would make it past the preliminary phases. In truth, *House on SNN Hill* made it into production, but when he got to the editing room, the director felt that the film was so awful it should be destroyed. He set fire to the editing room and left while the blaze spread to other parts of the studio. In all, twelve executives and a stubborn mongoose perished in the flames that warm winter morning. It was a lesson that should not have been repeated.

Which is good, because it wasn't. The director, James Fenimore Wainwright, who sometimes made barrels in addition to wagons, re-wrote the script and decided to turn the film into a weekly newspaper. No one knew how he arrived at this, and no one asked, for fear of what the answer would be. Wainwright thought it would be best to continue working with the Starfleet News Network, so he kept the SNN name, but called the paper *SNN Newspaper*. Marketing vampires thought that the name "Newspaper" just wasn't creative enough, so they renamed the periodical *SNN Headline News* after their late uncle, Thomas "Headline News" Jackson.

The first issue was slated to be about the changing faces of mailboxes in modern-day America. The paper's editor, Perry White, quit after his first day, citing "mismanagement and a general sense of apathy on the part of the writers." The writers – both of them – took offense at this and promptly quit. They soon found work at a nearby Radio Shack. As for *Headline News*, director James Fenimore Wainwright petitioned SNN Executive Editor Mike "Iron fist of doom" Ballway for an extension on the first issue. Ballway agreed, but stipulated that someone new would be hired to direct the project. Having not read the contract that would guarantee his removal from *Headline News*, Wainwright impulsively signed, and soon new-comer Mark "The convert from STNG" Wilson was directing *Headline News*.

Wilson, with his own troubled mind, scrapped the *Headline News* name and decided upon *Inside Edition*. The newly-christened periodical would cover various aspects of STF gossip, including Mike "Three rings for the coders under the sky" Bourdaa's liason with Romulan subcommander N'Vek. Sadly, that issue was a colossal failure. Wilson was severely beaten by SNN's team of "obedience protectors" and sent to do another, better issue. He received no lashings for *SNN Headline News* no. 1. Having taken the name his predecessor left behind, Wilson utilized juvenilian inside jokes and gags to appeal to the larger part of STF. Sadly, *Headline News* has degraded into a periodical with jokes that only a select few, if any, will understand. Still, the tradition set by James Fenimore Wainwright continues to this day, unheeded by journalistic integrity or a sense of honor. We salute *Headline News* for being all things we knew it could be . . . and so much more.

Beyond *Andromeda*: a *Nimitz* Mk-II Future  
 First published in II.51

The talk these days is centered around the modular, convenient, fuel-efficient *Andromeda* class. Since its inception last year, no fewer than five ships – the *Victorious*, *Alliance*, *Nautilus*, *Draco*, and *Aries* – have been commissioned or re-commissioned as *Andromeda* class vessels. Though it was designed to replace older *Aurora* class ships, the *Andromeda* has been replacing classes left and right, from the *Phoenix* to the *Trinitron*. Experts at Starfleet’s Engineering Department speculate that more ships will head the *Andromeda* way before the year is over.

But what about the *Nimitz*? Currently, STF1’s *Ark Angel* is the only ship that remains of Randy McCullick’s high-powered Dreadnought class. Ever since the loss of the *Montgomery*’s third or fourth bridge module, a secret faction of the Engineering Department has been preparing for many months to launch a new, revised version of the *Nimitz*: the *Nimitz* Mk-II, subtitled “The Wrath of REM.” This top-secret project, when complete, will have revamped the class to include eight wave-motion guns, several meters of hull plating, and a special anti-Borg mechanism whose identity is unknown at press time (speculations abound that the mechanism is a banana creme pie that rotates its frequency every 0.5 milliseconds).

STFians may wonder, “Is there really a need for ships with more firepower than the whole Borg collective?” The answer to that is: yes. In order to be competitive in today’s market, a ship must not only have speed and style, but a whole slew of stuff to blow things to mitherens. As was discovered in the Jem’Hadar war, it’s not enough to disable or destroy ships; they must be vaporized to the sub-atomic level, something that engineers didn’t think too much about until now.

But why the *Nimitz*? Says Joaquin Schwartzwelder, professor of Advanced Plate Tectonics at the Starfleet Institute of Geology, “I can only assume that it’s because the *Nimitz* has all the existing features in place; it would only be a matter of adding on to the existing specs. This would cut down on workload for designers and enable the *Nimitz* MkII to come out in a relatively short period of time. Then again, what do I know? Dammit, *Headline News*, I’m a geologist, not an engineer!”

Schwartzwelder is right about one thing, though: the new *Nimitzes* have a deadline of next month – that’s the time when the completed ship prototype must be delivered to the EDir’s office. Outside sources speculate that the new weapons and plating will be attached to the space-frame with duct tape and staples, which is okay in the expert opinion of STF President Seamus Hughes. “Duct tape holds together anything,” he said in a press conference/psychological exam last week.

Even though all COs polled said that they don’t want to be a part of the *Nimitz* MkII project, Schwartzwelder is certain that they’ll change their minds: “It’s got a meter of hull plating. Who wouldn’t want that?” Despite the strong opposition, this reporter thinks that the *Andromeda* class will be overpowered by the *Nimitz* MkII just as it overpowered the *Phoenix* and *Aurora* classes. In fact, I’m so sure that this new project is the future of STF, I’ve put my life’s savings into it. Why should I worry? 50 million tons of duranium can’t be wrong!

“Soft Money” Contributions Must Stop  
First published in II.53

Election Season is in full swing, and with that election comes fundraising. Each candidate must hold charity dinners and the like to raise the enormous amount of money required to run for President of STF. In The Year 2000, the cost was \$10 million to get elected. Here in 2377, the cost has jumped to \$50 trillion . . . and that doesn't even guarantee that one will be voted into office! Campaign fundraising laws stipulate that no one person can give more than \$6 million, which is a drop in the proverbial bathtub for the candidates.

As such, many candidates receive so-called “soft money” contributions. This money is highly illegal, and comes in the form of pillows, bedclothes, regular clothes, and other soft things. The money is woven into the fabric or, in the case of stuffed animals, stuffed inside the animal, to be taken out by the candidate. While a stuffed elephant may look innocent enough, inside is enough cold, hard cash to get a candidate through several weeks' worth of electioneering.

These “soft money” contributions were uncovered by SNN's resident drunk, Timmy O'Toole. “I were cleanin' out me locker,” recalls O'Toole, “when I found me a stuffed piggy in thar. In my drunken stupor, I thought it might be a pretty woman. My suspicions were further enhanced when the piggy didn't respond to me pick-up lines. Upon closer inspection, I noticed that it were a stuffed animal. In my rage, I ripped it open, and millions of dollars fell out. There were also a note, which read, ‘From Larry, To Seamus – You'd better win.’ I reported the pig stolen, but kept the money for meself.”

There it is. The Hughes Election of '99 was a sham, perpetrated by people who smuggled trillions of dollars into the campaign inside anything soft – clothes, stuffed animals, bed sheets. The preserved head of former Senator John McCain had only this to say: “See, I told you so! It told you it would get worse, and it did!” The glass jar containing Mr. McCain's head then rolled off the table and onto the floor, subsequently rolling right out the door . . . but you know the song.

Now, in the STF Summer Elections 2000, we must ask ourselves if our candidates are the types who could be easily swayed by money. Obviously they all have their price, but what is it? And, are we safe from stuffed animals and pajamas that may have billions in “soft money” contributions sewn into them? The answers, in order, are: \$50 trillion and no. Before you vote for a candidate, think for a moment about his (or her) morals, and just how many “charity dinners” have been held where attendees have been asked to bring lots of mink coats. Coincidence, or illegality. You make the call!

## Lamenting The Lack Of *Voyager*-Style Sims

First published in II.57

Each week, the starship *Voyager* boldly seeks out new life-forms and new civilizations and travels where only very campy television shows have gone before. Yes, many STFIans (most notably Larry “Ooh, I want to impale him so much!” Garfield) would like to destroy Rick Berman in the worst way for what he has done to the institution of Star Trek. The alien-of-the-week scripts became old years ago, as did Seven of Nine’s wetsuit (she must have been the only Borg that scuba-dived) that reminds us of those years of Troi.

But rather than complain about this problem, why not use it to our advantage? The GMD Office of Sims and RPGs reports that inventive sims are hard to come by these days. STFIans want originality, and they’re not getting it. “Not a problem,” said former Office of RPGs director Rodion Raskolnikov. “All we need to do is recycle old sims and tweak them a little to make them seem new. That’s what they do on *Voyager*; the real meat, though, is in Borg sims. They do that on *Voyager*, too. Then again, maybe they don’t. No, I’m pretty sure they don’t.” Raskolnikov told us he was feeling ill and decided to leave.

And there’s a good reason why Raskolnikov is a former Office of RPGs director: the current bourgeois administration feels that it’s too “good” for recycled plots and tons of Borg involvement. Says STF Brandy-Cheese Nick “Scratch” Lackie’s press secretary, “We feel that we’re too good for any of that sort of thing. And if you disagree, the secret police will come into your home and force you to watch that horrid new Fantasy Island with Malcom McDowell. Good thing it was cancelled.” Why must our President, too, disregard the obvious use of these *Voyager* plot-lines? Does he feel that he’s above the sort of tactics the use, which include, but are not limited to: having the Doctor save the day, having Seven save the day, using meaningless technobabble to obscure the fact that what they’re doing is blatantly against even the fictional laws of Star Trek physics, damaging the ship beyond repair only to see it fully functional thirty minutes later (and they say they have no supplies).

Surveys have shown that GM creativity is down 44.038% (+/- 43.030%), so where are we to turn? Certainly the obvious answer is that we should recycle old plots and make new ones that are very simple to understand. One proponent of this idea, who wished to remain anonymous, is FComm-2 Jaret “James” Hargreaves. “Listen, anyone out there would kill me if they heard this, so you can’t use my name,” Hargreaves told one of SNN’s urgency-impaired reporters. “People like Lou Gasco, they got to be gotten rid of. They’re bringin’ the others down, man! I like to recycle old plots! And, secretly, I like *Voyager*. But don’t tell anyone. Fight the power!”

So, what are we left to do? The answer seems to be obvious: rebel against the GMD ruling-class and institute a new order of mediocrity and confusion under the guiding hand of *Star Trek: Voyager*. Rick Berman would do it; why can’t we?

## STF Thanksgiving Turns Ugly

First published in II.59

As members of STF's cabinet and a few invited members of the Good Old Boys Network sat down for a lovely Thanksgiving meal, few would have guessed that trouble lay on the horizon. As STF President Nick "I'm no one's" Lackie prepared to carve the turkey (not a real turkey, of course; it was made of PVC tofu), an argument began from the other side of the table where FComm-4 Larry "Strawberry" Garfield and Vice President Scott Dale "Swiss Family" Robison were seated next to each other (and what poorly-planned seating it was).

Robison had brought up the issue of some sort of charter, and inquired of Garfield when it was coming. Garfield explained that the whole project was on hold indefinitely, to which Robison replied that "that wouldn't have happened with the STFC." A sergeant-at-arms present at the occasion (because Lackie knew that getting all the members of Command together meant a lot of out-of-control holiday cheer) attempted to quiet down the feuding twosome, but to no avail.

By this time everyone at the table had become distracted and were watching Robison and Garfield duke it out at the dinner table. Lackie, suddenly aware that no one was paying attention to him, summoned his Elite Guard to quell the disturbance.

Which only called into question the need to Lackie to have an Elite Guard, since no other president has had one (with the exception of Colin "Don't touch those downed" Wyers). More shouting ensued, and Lackie, carving knife in hand, gently suggested that everyone stop their quarreling and have a "damn happy good time." This comment only caused the situation to worsen, since it brought personnel director Greg "This joke still" Hertzsch into the fray. His innuendoes (which weren't as disguised or subtle as they used to be) caused more at the table to become ill.

Between the nausea, the fighting, the Elite Guard, and Lackie threatening to "decapitate the lot of ye," the inevitable happened. Much like the first shots of the American Revolution, no one knows to this day who fired, but nonetheless, mashed potato ended up all over FComm-3 James "Insignificant" Speck. Being prone to sudden, violent outbursts as he is, Speck responded by flinging several peas across the table at FComm-5 Dustin "Come viz me if you want to live" Bukowski. Bukowski responded by launching Jell-O in Speck's direction, but the sights on his fork were misaligned, and the peas ended up with President Lackie himself.

You can probably imagine what happened next. The all-out food fight began, followed by the Elite Guard stunning and arresting some guests for "high crimes committed against STF" which included attempts to overthrow the government and gross misuse of foodstuffs.

And so, Thanksgiving, like so many other STF functions – Christmas, Hanukkah, the Ashtons' wedding – was spent for many members in jail. Damages are estimated at three million bars of latinum, and several of the involved parties are filing suits for "emotional distress" and "turkey-related injuries." It just goes to show you: family togetherness, when used even in moderation, can be a dangerous thing. That's why I spent Thanksgiving at home with Wheel of Fortune and take-out pizza. At least Pat and Vanna won't kill me for not solving the puzzle right.

## Y2K Fears Unfounded . . . At Least, That's What They Want You To Think

First published in II.60

Last year, the world braced itself for what would be the end of humanity as we know it. Power plants would shut down, traffic lights would go haywire, vending machines would attack people and eat them. As last year proved, all of these (except maybe the last one) were unfounded. There's just no way all of that stuff could have gone wrong. Or is there?

Rupert L. Hanrahan, director of Starfleet Intelligence's "Conspiracy" division, reports that in fact there was a plot to cause problems all around the world. "I'll only tell you if you report it anonymously. I could be killed for this," began Mr. Hanrahan. "Starfleet Intelligence was involved with a plot to overthrow the world, and they saw Y2K as the perfect solution. At the last minute, though, someone replaced the Energizer batteries in their doomsday device with generic ones. Those batteries just keep going and going, don't they?"

After Mr. Hanrahan was dragged away by mysterious men in black suits, I set out to find the truth myself. Armed with nothing more than a notepad and my own brains (as well as the clothes I was wearing, of course), I interviewed every top government official from here to Timbuktu and back again. Those interviews turned up nothing. All I got out of the experience was seven thousand frequent flier miles and a whole lot of deflated self-esteem. Surely I could unravel this mystery, couldn't I?

Yes I could! I talked a bit with the Oracle's franchisee at Cleveland and she told me the answer: there was a conspiracy, and it reached to the highest levels of power imaginable. I was right all along! Moving quickly, I purchased an Oracle Burger and a Diet Coke, then left for the office of President Lackie.

The president, upon hearing my name, wasn't too happy. He tried to have his hired goons kill me, but I was far too swift for them. I finally arrived in his office and asked him to explain the conspiracy. "It's really quite simple," he said, his finger inching toward the trap-door button, "all we do is create lots of world chaos, then we proclaim ourselves omnipotent dictators!" Then the president and vice-president removed their masks, and they turned out to be none other than Pinky and the Brain! "Now that you've found out our plan," said Lackie/Brain, "we shall have to dispose of you."

"Narf," chimed in Robison/Pinky.

In no time at all, I was hurled out the window, where I landed (quite fortunately) in a marshmallow truck. Though the president and vice-president had failed to destroy me, I had a feeling that they'd be back for me. I truly believe they will . . . each and every weeknight at eight. I returned to SNN Center a wiser, more injured man than before. From then on, I questioned everything, even if it was certified and written in blood. Which brings me to my point: now I'm one of those wild-eyed conspiracy theorists. Deny everything! The truth is out there! Or is it? I'm not sure anymore.

When They Say “No User-Serviceable Parts,” They Mean It  
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My shuttlecraft broke the other day. It was morning, I was about to go to my job at SNN Center, where I sit at my desk and throw pencils into the ceiling all day. I was rather distressed; if I was late, I'd never get to the coffee pot on time. That lousy Larry Garfield would take it all, and everyone would be too lazy to make a new pot, so I'd be stuck in my office all day with no coffee. What was I going to do?!

Fix it myself, that's what. How hard could it be? A matter injector here, an ODN junction there, some funny-looking thing that's glowing and making me feel tingly. I put my briefcase down and got out an old set of shuttlecraft tools that my father-in-law had given me years ago. “H.,” he said, because he didn't know my first name, “use these tools whenever your shuttle won't work. But whatever you do, don't play with anything that says ‘no user-serviceable parts.’ That stuff's dangerous; it could kill you a hundred times and then come back for more!” He was a mechanic-turned-actor who made backing up the optical chips a grand and glorious occasion.

The shuttle self-diagnostic said that the problem was in the “fusion pre-burner,” something that sounded very important. I opened her up and saw what I dreaded to see: “no user-serviceable parts. Refer maintenance to a qualified shuttle technician.” But I threw caution to the wind. Maintenance? This is just fixing a bad fusion pre-burner. I had a dozen of them in the garage somewhere. How hard could it be to hook one up?

The first thing I did was disconnect the matter hoses. It wasn't the sudden release of exhaust gas that got me; it was the slush deuterium which was at  $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$ . That's very cold, especially against a bare face. I tried to wrench the pre-burner free as best as I could, but it was stuck. So I pulled on it until it came out. That's when the alarms started. Apparently, you're not supposed to remove the fusion pre-burner until you do something else that makes it safe instead of life-threatening. “Warning: fusion pre-burner assembly has been removed. Shuttle autodestruct in 35 seconds.”

Augh! Autodestruct? I panicked. I panicked a lot. “Did the computer say ‘autodestruct’ or ‘auto shutdown’?” I asked myself repeatedly. I dived under a workbench and waited 35 seconds. When I heard the happy power-down sound and not the unhappy kaboom sound, I knew that life was beautiful once again. I needed a towel to get the sweat off me.

After that little autodestruct episode, I threw the fusion pre-burner into a box and called in sick to work. Rigelian fever, I said. Let us know when the tentacles fall off, said the switchboard operator. Apparently she knew how Rigelian fever worked; I sure didn't.

And that was my foray into the world of the shuttle mechanic. It was a dark and dangerous journey – I would even venture to say that it was “perilous.” The shuttlecraft mechanic fixed the problem in about ten seconds and charged me 248 space-bucks. “248?” I said. “Isn't that a little steep?” It's an expensive part, he said. Plus, he had to fix the hoses and connectors. Some moron (probably another mechanic, he said) had ripped the fusion pre-burner out without disconnecting the matter distribution coil. “What a fantastic fool!” I exclaimed. “Only a fool wouldn't disconnect the matter dis . . . dis . . . what you said.”

## THE END?

One wonders if H. Simon Gregory will continue to publish the same quality material he has been for 65 issues of *Headline News*. When I spoke to him about it, he seemed curiously enthusiastic about this book deal. “I like royalties,” he said. “Especially that Queen Elizabeth; maybe she can get me a knighthood!” Even if he is knighted (or thrown in a mental institution, which is more likely), it’s obvious that H. Simon Gregory will continue to publish gems like the ones in this volume. I only hope that when he’s unbearably famous, he’ll remember the editor who took a chance on a disheveled-looking man who walked into my office reeking of onions and axle grease.