

# The Cafe - Former

Official Organ of The Society for the Defense of Tradition in Pyrotechny

I.: O.: O.: J.:

“Magna est Veritas et prævalebit.” – I. *Esdras*, iij: 41.

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## THE DAY THE PIGEONS SHOT BACK

*And I promise you shootinge, by my iudgement,  
is the most honeste pastime of all, and suche one,  
I am sure, of all other, that hindereth learninge  
littel or nothings at all, whatsoever you and some  
other saye.*

—ROGER ASCHAM, 1544.

Our readers are no doubt familiar with exploding targets, designed for use with rifles and handguns. These devices are relatively simple to construct and need not be dangerously sensitive; in fact one version is commercially available.

Several years ago the author was having tea with Mr. Bertram Q. Whitworth, an enthusiastic shot-gunner and a key member of the local trap club. In the course of conversation the possibility of an exploding clay pigeon was raised. Obviously this was a far different proposition than the stationary targets with their chlorate or perchlorate flash powders. A pellet of #7½ or #8 shot carries much less energy than a .22 caliber bullet or even a fast-moving air rifle projectile. Furthermore, a fractured clay bird offers no anvil surface comparable to the earthen backstops used for rifle shooting. The obvious question was whether a mixture sensitive enough to function reliably would be stable enough to withstand the powerful thrust of the throwing machine – or to be carried in one’s bare hands! Nonetheless, Mr. Whitworth felt such a target would be the ideal way to enliven summer practice, and we decided to proceed with the project.

The preliminary experiments involved targets loaded with priming compound only. Each mixture was made into a thin paste with water and dextrin, then generous beads of this slurry were placed around the insides of target domes and allowed to dry. Top secret testing at Whitworth’s personal trap-house quickly narrowed our range of choices. Mixtures of chlorate and sulphides, even with catalysts like black oxide of manganese, would not ignite when the targets were hit. Perchlorate of potash with red phosphorus was also tried, with equally

disappointing results. It was evident that of the “normal” pyrotechnic compositions, only the dreaded Armstrong’s mixture would suffice.

Clay targets conform to narrow size restrictions but vary in contour; the ones in use had a pronounced step or lip at roughly the middle of their height. Thus it was a simple matter to glue a cardboard disc on this ridge, creating a sealed chamber in the dome of the target. To our delight we found that this modification did not spoil the aerodynamic properties of the saucers.\* The flight of our “birds” showed no detectable difference from that of the factory product. Some of these targets were charged with a mixture of chlorate of potassa, nitrate of baryta and an excess of bright aluminum. Others received salutes, whistles or bright magnesium stars along with a bit of black powder, while a few were simply filled with feathers for the

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\*ED. NOTE.: *The following gloss on the above passage is contributed by Dr. S. Dulcamara, Chirurgion-General of our Order, who occasionally reviews articles submitted to The Case Former:*

*“The peculiar felicity of Brimstone’s selection of words is nowhere more evident than in this pregnant phrase. Is not the choice of ‘saucers’ suggestive? We are aware that there are those on the lunatic fringe (Anticyram navigant!) who allege a connection between fireworks and unidentified flying objects, presumably occupied by little green men with pointed ears. Yet the concept of luminous, burning, or otherwise pyrotechnically charged targets, the simple product of human artifice, is much more logical as an explanation for such phenomena, than is extraterrestrial phantasmagoria. . .*

*“We know that the best training for fighter pilots or anti-aircraft gunners is ‘shooting flying,’ and that the principle of leading or swinging through a flying target is the same whether the target be a clay pigeon, a bird, or an enemy plane. . . all the great aces, from von Richtofen to Yeager, have been devotees of the scattergun. Is it not entirely probable that purported ‘UFOs’ are no more than giant ‘flaming clays’ launched to teach military personnel how to shoot; and in fact, what the government secretly constructs and suppresses publicity about is in fact fireworks, rather than science-fiction creatures as some fabulously suppose?”*

sake of variety. Finally all were carefully stacked in a box, with rags or paper toweling between to prevent these pigeons from quarrelling in their dove-cote.

In order to make our invention more memorable its debut was unannounced. The club is a rather informal one, where members take turns pulling or even setting targets when trap boys are scarce. Thus it attracted no attention when the author and Mr. Whitworth ambled down to the traphouse with an odd lot of targets. There was some trepidation on the part of the perpetrators: what would happen if the box were dropped, or if a hasty pull tripped the arm before the loaders were clear? Also to be considered were irate shooters. Trap is a conservative sport where concentration is at a premium and any breach of protocol can be very disruptive. Mr. Syms, a visiting hotshot, was friendly enough but took his trapshooting very seriously. One of the regulars, a Mr. Blunt, was gruff and short-tempered, but fortunately was a close friend of the author's partner in mischief.

The first choice among victims was clearly O. J. MacNaughton. This affable gentleman was still shooting well, despite being in his 70's, and he was easy-going with a fine sense of humor. He grew up in the 1930's, and between this factor and his ancestry was cautious with his money - some would say tight. Despite his considerable wealth, he scrounged lead to make his own shot, and he used any and all reloading components left over from his chain of sporting-goods stores. In particular he was known for using heavy hunting loads at trap practice, so that shooters three stations away were never safe from his ejected hulls. For variety he might load a few light shot charges over slow AL-7 or AL-8 powder, resulting in "bloopers" or squib loads. In short, fellow shooters never knew what to expect, but could count on something unusual. We determined that MacNaughton had signed up for the fourth station, then chose a flash powder pigeon from our box of surprises.

After the customary sample target, which is not shot, we began counting. Each shooter, including our unsuspecting victim, was allowed one normal bird to establish rhythm. Six - seven - eight - the ninth bird settled very gently on the moving arm, then took flight. O. J. MacNaughton obligingly centered the target, which disappeared with a brilliant flash and a mushroom cloud of gray smoke. This was followed by silence - no cries of "pull", no shooting, no sounds at all except from the surrogate trap boys, who were gasping for breath and trying not to roll on the floor.

After a few suspenseful moments the shooting resumed. A second "special", also intended for MacNaughton, was missed; it sailed lazily over the hill, where its salute exploded with a muffled boom. This time, even from our concrete sanctuary, we

could hear muttering. It is highly irregular, and probably against A.T.A. rules, for the targets to return fire!

For the remainder of the round, we loaded our unorthodox pigeons at random. One exploded on the machine but caused no harm; its inertia carried the burning stars safely out of the traphouse. Those containing feathers produced a subtle, dreamy effect by comparison with their violent cousins, offering a foretaste of the bird seasons ahead. Perhaps the best, rivalled only by the flash charges, contained several whistling bottle rockets without the sticks.

Upon emerging from the traphouse we were greeted by a mixture of amusement and incredulity. Blunt and Syms were silent at first, but eventually even they managed a smile. Most of the shooters enjoyed the spectacle; in fact they were more curious than indignant. Of all the practical jokes the author has tried this was the best; in fact it exceeded our expectations.

When Mr. MacNaughton blasted the first bird, neither he nor any of the observers had the slightest idea what had happened! There is a special type of 12-bore ammunition, sold for wildlife control, which is nothing more than a small aerial salute. It did not occur to anyone that the explosive might have been in the target; instead it was decided that one of these "cracker shells" had found its way into MacNaughton's shooting bag and that, against all odds, he had managed to hit the target with the exotic projectile! Poor old MacNaughton doubted this theory but, shaken by the flash and lacking any other explanation, he found himself accepting it. The second surprise, with its miss and delayed report, only served to reinforce the shooters' erroneous assumption. It was not until the pigeons began whistling and dropping feathers that their creators were recognized. In fact if we had quit after the second bird we might have left people guessing for years, but we had no way of knowing this at the time. The author was later questioned by a constable, not about explosives law but about technical details. It seems the officer had tried gluing primacord and commercial "Bullz-I" targets inside clay pigeons, naturally without success.

Anyone wishing to duplicate this stunt must remember that Armstrong's mixture is extremely sensitive. There is a strong temptation to use powerful explosive fillings, but this could be disastrous if the target cracked on the throwing machine. Even with the milder payloads, gloves and safety glasses are advisable. Also, these targets must be loaded singly by hand; they are obviously not suitable for automated machines which have a "magazine" of clay birds. If the author ever tries the trick again, fillings will include black smoke stars, dragon eggs

and colored smoke puffs. At any rate, nobody who saw it will ever forget the day the pigeons shot back.

T. BABINGTON BRIMSTONE

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## A CRATER IN ONE

*Forsan et hæc olim meminisse juvabit.*

—VIRGIL, *ÆN.* I:ccij.

I had waited patiently and suffered silently for almost two years to arrive at this week. I had made countless thermodynamic calculations, had pulled all-nighters studying the effects of electron spin, polymerization, and countless other sources of quantum tedium, to arrive at this week, which I had known had to come sooner or later. This week Dr. Inca Allen began a series of lectures, scheduled to last all week, on the detailed effects of nitration. Organic Chemistry 203, Framingham State University.

For five days I was in a State of Grace, arriving at class with spring in step and twinkle in eye previously unknown. All that week I sat enraptured, taking copious notes, as Dr. Allen laid out the intimate hows and whys of explosives.

As the week's lectures ended, I found a sense of elation and peace I'd never known. Suddenly Charles' Law, Boyle's Law, Avogadro's theorem, and myriad other tiresome mathematical exercises came together in one gleaming, brilliant moment of comprehension. I understood everything. I knew the meaning of the Universe, or at least how to blow it up; same thing.

After some thought as to a practical demonstration of my learning, I approached friend and colleague Chris Manning, a Chem. major at another college. Like myself, Chris had always held dear the belief that knowledge was sacred, and should always be used to wreck things and cause chaos and consternation wherever possible. It was almost a moral obligation with us, not unlike the oath lawyers take.

Chris was brilliant. He had once stolen an oxy-acetylene welder, poked a hole through the ice of a skating pond, and flooded the underside of the ice with the explosive gas mixture. The blast threw foot-thick ice cubes onto the nearby road and into the woods, dismembering some large trees in spectacular fashion. The returning skaters found their pond shaken, not stirred.

Chris, his friend Carbide (so nicknamed for his abrasive personality), and I sat at Chris's kitchen table, cracked a couple beers, and talked it over. I proposed we try an initial experiment with ammo-

nium nitrate, because of its easy availability, low cost, and unrecorded sales. There were drawbacks, though. You couldn't just fill a firecracker with the stuff and put a fuse in it. It had to be sensitized, boosted to high-order detonation, and initiated with a primary explosive. We had none of the stuff to do it, but college had at least taught us resourcefulness.

Ammonium nitrate is a common fertilizer (34-0-0 analysis), and we obtained one hundred pounds of it, no questions asked. Booster explosive was found in the form of Hercules Bullseye, a double-based smokeless pistol powder, which contains 39% nitroglycerin by weight. 6% #2 diesel oil by weight served to sensitize the ammonium nitrate and replicate ANFO, a commercial blasting explosive then made by DuPont. The electric blasting caps were provided by Chris' brother, a National Guardsman.

It took up only several days to assemble the necessary materials. Now came the more worrisome task of designing a definitive experiment that would hurt no one and keep us out of jail. My reputation with the local constabulary was such that I was sometimes interrogated for stout thunderclaps, and I could ill-afford trouble from this leap of destructive technology.

Chris proposed an underwater test, which would minimize noise and shock-wave damage. The Leo J. Martin golf course provided the water in the form of a brook that meandered through it, and although it was quite wide and hopefully deep, we had misgivings about tampering with what the local doctors, lawyers, judges, and other various elements of the local power structure called their playground.

Chris and I voted for a ten-pound device to start out, but Carbide would have none of that.

"Goddam pansies! Fifty fuckin' pounds! That'll goose 'em!," was Carbide's recommendation. Chris and I were horrified, explaining that we wished to "goose" nobody, and we drew the line at twenty pounds. After more verbal abuse from Carbide, we got him to agree to twenty pounds.

We were concerned enough about the police that we built a digital timer/detonator to assure that we'd be nowhere near the blast. What the BATF and FBI call hi-tech terrorist's detonators are pitifully easy to create. Anyone with fifteen bucks in his pocket and a local Radio Shack can do it in half an afternoon.

We took a digital travel alarm clock with a piezoelectric buzzer, disconnected the buzzer, and used its wires to bias an NPN power transistor in the common-emitter configuration, hooking the blasting cap between the transistor's collector and ground. It could be set for up to twenty-four hours. I suppose a VCR timer could be set thusly for up to a couple weeks, but I have yet to try it.

It was agreed that Chris and Carbide would set the timer, and that Carbide would drop the device in the brook from a small bridge, while I was bagging groceries at Stop and Shop and Chris was working at the laundromat. We would set it for a 24 hour delay, or 10:30 p.m. Nobody should be on the golf course then, and we'd return the next night to watch from a railroad trestle, about a mile from the first tee, where the brook and device would be.

It sounded like a good plan, but Chris and I were concerned about trusting any part of it to Carbide, whose nickname was not chosen inappropriately. Carbide was a chisel-jawed jock with a blond crew cut and weight-lifter's physique. He raved and bellowed when he spoke upon any subject. Although a college student, we didn't know, nor could we imagine, Carbide's major. Whatever his course of study, it apparently placed such a strain upon him that he had taken to amphetamines to keep pace with its rigors. He had found a cheap source of virulent speed then known as Black Beauties. While I never liked Carbide that much, nor was I in any position to lecture against drugs, Chris and I were both concerned for the fellow. Carbide's judgement suffered terribly, and when we all met at Chris's house to set the timer and put the finishing touches on our experiment, Carbide's appearance left us aghast. He strutted jerkily into Chris's kitchen, his bright blue eyes replaced by vast, black orbs. He sported cowboy boots, Bermuda shorts, and a tank-top reading "Basketball Jones."

Chris and I exchanged glances of horror. Finally Chris cleared his throat and said, "Say, ah, Carbide, love your threads, man. Great outfit! But don't you, uh, want to borrow my cammies and sneakers for, uh, planting bombs?"

Carbide snorted petulantly, called us pansies again, but went to change.

Chris and I were nervous. We were about to connect a nigger-rigged, half-assed detonator to something that would blow us all to atoms. Worse yet, we were about to entrust the damned thing to a speed-freak with the common sense of a teething two-year old. I had begun to catch faint whiffs of doom from this project's inception; now its pall hung heavy all around us.

We sat down and connected everything up, doing a final continuity check and circuitry check. Chris and I poured sweat, our mouths parched, both secretly wishing I'd never thought of doing this. Carbide was gleefully bobbing back and forth up on his bar stool, chortling and mumbling when he wasn't humming a Grateful Dead selection.

Our task finished, we left the bomb with Carbide, who fondled it lovingly while breaking into a whistle of some morbid Gerry Garcia lead. Now all Carbide had to do was set the timer and throw the whole thing in the drink.

We glanced back at Carbide once more as we left. The man didn't look well at all. And had those facial tics been there yesterday? Very worrisome indeed.

Chris and I went off to work but it was an evening filled with dread for us both. The first shoe dropped when Chris called me about midnight, after our work shifts, and asked if I'd been to his house to collect the remaining eighty pounds of ANFO. I said no, but that Carbide had probably just hidden it someplace; a prudent thing to do. But Chris and I both know how hollow that rang. Prudent things hadn't been Carbide's forte recently. We knew good and well what had happened. Carbide had gone and built a hundred pounder anyways. Yet the situation wasn't yet hopeless, for we could find and disarm the thing tomorrow night before it blew. And so we slept on it.

It seems that there are brief moments in the making of any great mistake when the whole thing could be avoided, given just a moment of wisdom and common sense. However, without such attributes (never my strongest suit), it appears as though minor mistakes compound into vast blunders, obtaining eventually an almost farcical level of darkness and doom, as Mick Jagger doubtless knew when he wrote "Paint it Black."

And so it was that the second shoe dropped when I was rocked out of bed on that Saturday morning by a shock wave that knocked my Red Sox pennants off the wall, crashed my model B-25 to the floor in pieces, and sent my cat scurrying for cover. My half-awake mind worked frantically to assure me that it was a sonic boom from a jet or a nearby thunderclap, but as my eyes opened upon a sunny day years after the Air National Guard had been forbidden from shaking the world thusly (a pity), I knew what had happened. I knew even before I looked at my watch - what time was it? It was 10:30 a.m. of course. After all, it couldn't have happened any other way.

I donned my jeans and tee-shirt with a strange sense of calm. Surely the first tee would have been crammed with golfers. Surely their broken bodies would litter the fairways and have been sent flying into distant trees, where they would now hang like grisly, gaudy Christmas ornaments.

On the three bicycled miles from my house to the golf course, I reflected upon what must have happened. Obviously, Carbide had mixed up his A.M. and P.M. on the digital timer. It was understandable, but making such a mistake with a hundred pound charge was a miserably morbid one. This was Endsville. . . . no doubt about it. I was gone.

My arrival at the golf course awed even me. Every cop and his brother from every department imaginable was present. So was the Fire

Department, rescue units, bomb squad, air-evac. helicopters, Elvis — EVERYBODY.

The calm, damp morning nurtured the blanket of white nitrate smoke that hugged the fairway. High in the air still hung the remnants of the dirty brown mushroom cloud, which had risen to a titanic height above the clubhouse.

It occurred to me that I shouldn't be seen here, but that illusion slid away like diarrhoea. It didn't matter where I was. I was in TROUBLE. The biggest TROUBLE of my life. While I've had various misadventures with fireworks and explosives on a smaller, marginally humorous scale, this was something else. The first tee looked like Hiroshima; a Hole in One Holocaust. Mud was everywhere. So were decades worth of golf balls that had strayed into the brook. The first fairway looked like a sewage treatment plant. The ooze dripped like vomit from those trees that still had leaves, which were few. The small bridge crossing the brook had been blown into something useful only to a maniacal motorcycle jumper, for it was horribly gnarled and twisted.

I resolutely waded into the crowd to try to establish a body count. Miraculously, nobody seemed to be carting off muddy human appendages to the ambulances. People stood around looking perplexed, muttering things like, "Damned, just like Normandy Beach."

Golfers, who in that day usually dressed like chubby John Travoltas, smeared in vain at the mud caked on them.

No one spoke to me except Father O'Malley, who was still searching for his toupée amongst the madly look-alike divots that seemed to be everywhere. He knew of my interests, as priests are generally well-informed of things about town. He glanced up at me from his knees while eyeing a suspected toupée, only to find another divot. His glasses sat askew on his face, one lens plastered with mud. He gazed up at me with what seemed sardonic glee. "Making joyful noises unto the Lord again, eh Eddie?" O'Malley queried, but not without a trace of humor. I could only return his knowing smile, shrug, and amble off, after asking if he was O.K. He was. He laughed.

I shambled up behind a mobile T.V. truck, where a live broadcast was taking place. A pearly-toothed, perma-curved blond was describing the chaos abounding. Officer Maccini was standing among a coven of cops on my left, so I slithered under the T.V. truck to my right and listened, prepared for the worst.

It did not come. With the relief that can only be imagined as that of a last-second death-row reprieve or the accomplishment of the most urgent urination of one's life, I learned that apparently nobody had been hurt. Beneath WCUB-TV's truck, I wept with relief to think that we'd killed no one.

I was about to crawl out from under that truck again and make myself scarce, sensing possible survival of this situation, when a cold, huge, wet hand slapped me on the back of the neck. I sprang up with demonic tension, braining myself on that truck chassis so soundly that the world closed briefly into darkness, reappearing after several seconds.


I found myself staring into the bright green eyes of a huge bullfrog whose leap onto my neck I had mistaken for a hand's grasp. It regarded me accusingly, it seemed. I reached out to pet it, to reassure it. Yet something else was needed. I had blown the frog from its home and I had wrecked its world.

I scooped the frog up and scuttled from beneath the truck. The brook on the eighth green, about 150 yards away, looked about like the first tee's brook had been, so I cradled the frog and began walking in that direction.

I hurried through the excited mob towards the eighth green. I glanced towards the horde of Wellesley Police, not fifteen feet away, only to see Officer Paul Maccini was looking directly at me. Nobody else; just Paul. I stopped for a moment and we locked eyes. The frog swiveled its head and gazed at Maccini. I wonder to this day what Paul Maccini saw. Surely my eyes were red and tear-streaked, my face muddy and sorrowful. He must have seen the frog, for he seemed to smile faintly before I vanished back into the melée of panicked people.

I let the frog go back to a place very much like its home that I'd wrecked. I guess Maccini let me go too, for reasons unknown. Perhaps he had seen, in that brief moment of honesty that passed between us wordlessly, that I had learned a lesson. Oh, I had indeed.

It was a simple lesson for me, really. It's this: With liberty comes responsibility. They seem to go hand in hand.

Mild mischief in one thing, but life-threatening, random destruction is another. I hope never again to use my knowledge so as to harm those that are not a direct and dire threat to my life and liberty. 

EDUARDO TELLERINI



## CALL BOOMO-ROOTER; OR, PLUMBING WITH GUNPOWDER

Ancient Chinese chronicles are confusing to scholars, and it is impossible to assign a certain date to it, but it is well understood that gunpowder has been made and used in the Orient since very

remote antiquity. By the middle of the thirteenth century, firecrackers and rockets were known in Western Europe, as confirmed by the writings of Roger Bacon and St. Albertus Magnus. A cannon is illustrated in the so-called Milimete manuscript (Christ Church No. 92) dated 1326, and guns are recorded to have been used at the battle of Crécy in 1343. Gunpowder was employed for military blasting by the sixteenth century, while German engineers originated its use in quarrying and extractive mining *circa* 1627.

It is evident from the history of gunpowder that the utmost exertions of human genius have been expended upon the discovery of new applications for this useful and valuable invention. Indeed, one might suppose that all its potential had been realized long ago, and the finding of the last new application occurred well before the memory of any man now living. One might suppose that – but one might suppose wrong. I was witness to such a new application as recently as a sultry summer afternoon in the early 1980's.

My erstwhile companion in pyrotechnic mischief, one Gregorio Buoncalze, possessed a spacious detached garage in the back yard of his suburban lot in a large Southern city. It was big enough for two cars and then some, though seldom were two cars parked in it, since an empty stall was the usual site of many of our pyrotechnic endeavors. In the center of the concrete slab that was its floor was a gently-inclined area leading to a floor drain. This drain, covered by a coarse circular iron grating, was the recipient of many gallons of wash water from cleaning the car, as well as (with a nod to the horror of environmentalists out there) the occasional tank of year-old lawnmower gas, or discarded crankcase-full of oil. The grate, though intended to intercept large clods of solid matter, was evidently not enough to prevent what came about – the drain had become stopped, and water was standing above the grate. Lye and a plumber's plunger were of no avail.

But Gregorio was not weary in well-doing, and this did not stop him. Having an acquaintance with the useful properties of gunpowder, he knew the solution to his problem. A waterproof gunpowder bomb was soon fashioned with several ounces of DuPont's FFFg, visco fuse, a Dixie cup (it was printed with little blue Smurfs – remember them?), the whole being thoroughly wrapped with duct tape.

Gregorio weighted the device with an old bolt or two so it would sink to the bottom of the drain. He removed the grate, lit the fuse, and dropped his depth charge into the gaping abyss. Then he replaced the grate, covered it with a piece of carpet remnant, and over this a large pine plank. To ballast all this further, he stood atop the plank.

Only a few moments of ominous silence elapsed before a deafening explosion rent the garage like

the bombardment of Port Arthur, hoisting Gregorio roofward and filling the place with smoke. The circular grating flew toward his pickup truck, crashing through its windshield, then out the driver's side window and into the hands of one of the crowd that had assembled to gawk at the spectacle. His ascent interrupted by the rafter that jumped out above his head, Gregorio fell from his acme and landed on one knee and one elbow on the concrete floor, splitting both joints to the bone. We never found how he explained his injuries at the hospital emergency room.

The standing water level eventually fell out of sight, though whether whatever was clogging the drain was actually dislodged was never established for certain. More likely, the explosion had cracked the pipe and allowed the water to seep out into the earth beneath the slab. Gregorio gave up pyrotechny about then, and the rest of us drifted apart. Thus, while I cannot claim that of those of us who saw this premiere application of gunpowder to the art of plumbing, I alone am left to tell the tale – probably, I'm the only one who will admit to it.

GIUSTIZIARE FIAMMANTE



## FLAMING CLAYS

### *The Game*

Shotgun target sports include trap, skeet, and (relatively new to the United States) sporting clays; because American and international rules differ slightly for both trap and skeet, there are five basic games, as well as numerous informal variations. All told there are probably almost as many ways to shoot at a target with a shotgun as there are ways to play billiards. Prudence might deter one from adding to them, but then, prudence was never one of our strong suits, and besides, all the mentioned sports have one salient limitation: they require daylight. Daylight for the shooter to see the target – daylight to see that he has broken or missed it.

Our new addition to this burgeoning field of sporting activity eliminates that problem by providing targets coated with pyrotechnic composition, which, being ignited, gives a brilliant indication of where the target is as it hurtles through the nighttime sky. These targets are then shot at using several kinds of pyrotechnic ammunition. Those who have been present at Imbibo Bourbonini's annual lake party can attest to the novelty and interest of this recent addition to the shooting sports.

## The Targets

Standard clay pigeons, available at any decent hardware or sporting goods store, require only a bit of simple modification to be converted into "flaming clays." Different brands of standard clay target have slightly different profiles, but all have a common diameter and height, and all have a flat spot on the top of the dome. This flat spot is surrounded by a small ridge. It is this central area that is coated with composition.

Snowdon's titanium sparkler composition (*Pyrotechnica • IV*, p. 23) is well suited for the purpose. It is as follows:

Potassium perchlorate	1 lb.
Titanium, 100-300 mesh	1 lb.
Dextrine	6-7 oz.
Water, warmed to 90°-120° Fah.	8-12 oz.

This is dampened with water to a suitable consistency for making sparklers, but instead of using it for that purpose, the slurry should be poured into the central area on each pigeon. If desired, stars may be stuck in the slurry like cloves in a ham. The pigeons are then allowed to dry.

A spot of priming paste (meal powder/nitrocellulose lacquer) about the size of a quarter should be applied to the dried surface of the sparkler composition, and in this should be embedded a piece of black match or visco fuse. Once the prime is dry, the targets are ready for throwing.

To throw the targets, an *all-metal* spring trap, of the type used for informal practice, is best. If there are any plastic parts on the throwing arm, they will quickly be cremated. Using a spring trap a single operator may easily set the target on the throwing arm, light the fuse, and when the composition has caught, pull the release.

The objection to plastic parts on a spring trap is, oddly enough, reversed in the event a hand trap is used. Excellent and cheap plastic hand traps are available for \$5.00 and they have the virtue of being ambidextrous. The metal, spring-loaded, hand traps are suited only for the right-handed thrower, are more expensive, and often shatter the target. The cheap plastic traps can simply be thrown away when they get too burnt-up. Using a hand trap requires a bit more coordination, and a third party (in addition to the one with the shotgun and the one with the trap) whose function it is to light the fuse while the man with the hand trap is in the "wound-up" position, ready to throw.

Needless to say, this activity best takes place with the targets may be thrown over water. Missed targets often fall while still alight, and the neighboring farmer will probably not be pleased if you burn down his wheat field.

## The Ammunition

Over the years, many types of pyrotechnic ammunition have been devised and manufactured, and then abandoned. The Germans, with their genius for toy fireworks, were especially prolific inventors. At present there are only four types available, to this author's knowledge. All are 12-bore 2¾" standard. Though such cartridges have been made in other sizes in the past, it is probably the makers' judgment that the above is the most common variety of shotgun, and they make their ammunition to fit. 10-bore, 8-bore, and especially 4-bore would offer more room for pyrotechnic effects. The writer recently purchased a 4-bore side-by-side flare pistol from Companion Guistiziare Fiammante. No ammo came with it; alas and God-damn.

1) *The "shell-cracker."* These shells contain a single, "M-80" size firecracker as their only projectile. Nominally used for wildlife control (bird-scaring) by farmers, in fact their best market is probably among people who can buy them legally for use as fireworks, whereas the report component inside the shell would be illegal if vend-ed as a firecracker! A strange society we live in these days.

Whilst ammunition of this type has been made by European, American, and Japanese firms in the past, that currently available is of Chinese origin. The cartridge is all-plastic, having no brass at the base or rim. Despite this *avant-garde* appearance the contents are quite low-tech - black powder propellant and a report insert fused with Chinese fuse around which is consolidated a clay plug (just like a "Flashing Thunder" candle insert).

2) *The signal flare/tracer.* The cartridges of this type familiar to the present writer are of European origin; some have been marked Zink Feuerwerk, others Cheddite. Wherever made, they have, by contrast to the Chinese shell crackers, a very old-fashioned external appearance and comparatively modern innards. Outwardly, the shell is a low-brass, paper, roll-crimped load reminiscent of those in use fifty years ago; the initial "R", "G", or "W" is stamped on the "overshot wad," denoting red, green, or white. Inside, one finds a one-piece spun aluminum cup, approximately 2" long and 1¼" in outside diameter. Into this cup is charged perhaps ¾" of a nitrate/magnesium/PVC type color composition over which is a thin layer of prime. The apparent "overshot wad" is actually the closed end of the aluminum cup. The propellant powder is a coarse, macaroni-shaped smokeless powder that is evidently capable of quick burning despite a sloppy fit of the projectile in the bore, and accordingly poor obturation.

The appearance made by the tracer is not like that of a military tracer in a rifle calibre. Rather, it resembles a large Roman candle star, well-propelled to perhaps 70-80 yards. Because of the low pressure generated, a fair amount of the coarse smokeless powder is left unburnt, and this, falling out of the bores onto the standing breech, action flats, and underlumps of the gun may, in time, make it impossible to close a tightly-fitting action. Simply taking the weapon down and brushing out the powder makes everything right again, but it can be disconcerting as the writer once found at one of Imbibó's lake parties!

On one occasion the writer actually *hit* the target with one of these tracers; a rare experience, rather like a hole-in-one. Commonly with these, as with the shell-crackers, the best one can do is see how close to the target it is possible to shoot.

- 3) "*Dragon's-breath*"/"*Flame-thrower*" loads. Often sold at elaborate prices to the *Soldier of Fortune* types during gun shows – along with flechette loads, chain-shot (two .69-cal. balls joined by a piece of piano wire), etc. – these shells deserve consideration for flaming clays, although the writer must confess never to have tried them. Dissection reveals the "shot load" to be little cylindrical pieces of misch-metal (a semi-pyrophoric cerium alloy used for cigarette-lighter flints). Indeed, the shot is just about the same as cigarette-lighter flints except for the red lacquer coat found on the flints. Unlike the two previous types of ammunition, "dragon's-breath" loads are loaded at full service pressures and the "shot" is capable of breaking a target. Some of it ignites immediately as it leaves the bore, whether from friction with the bore walls or because of its velocity through the air; some of it ignites upon striking a suitably hard target. I am told that a blast directed against a concrete block wall from a suitable distance is a spectacular display.
- 4) *Shot/tracer ammunition*. This, in the writer's opinion is the best choice among pyrotechnic ammunitions. Once made by major U.S. manufactures such as Winchester and Remington, it was discontinued by them years ago for fear of the fire hazard. Now it is available again under the name of "Tru-tracer" from Bottom Line Shooting Supplies (P.O. Box 258, Clarkesville, Georgia 30523, catalog number 43392); Cabela's (812-13th Ave., Sidney, Nebraska 69160, catalog number HD-21044); Gander Mountain (Box 248, Highway W, Wilmot, Wisconsin 53192, catalog number 160-L-10004) – and possibly even your local outfitters. The idea is to provide a

modest (1-oz.) trap load combined with a visible pyrotechnic trace. These are used to teach shotgun shooting during the daytime. It is well-known that an instructor can stand beside the shooter and see the path of the wads – or, with a little practice, *the shot itself* – and tell the shooter, in the event of a miss, that he was high, low, before, or behind the target. On the other hand, it is difficult for the shooter himself, preoccupied with the target itself and the handling of the gun, to see any of this. Thus the shot-tracer was devised. A small tube charged with tracer composition is incorporated in the wad column, taking fire from the explosion of the powder. Bright enough to be seen in daytime, the tracers are a fine display at night, coupled with the potential for actually shattering the flaming clay!

#### *The Guns*

Needless to say, the writer's strong preference would be for a graceful side-by-side of impeccable balance and fit; practically speaking, almost any fixed-breech gun will work with all four types of ammunition. There is virtually no recoil from the shell-crackers and signal flares because of the light projectiles and small amounts of propellant. Self-loading shotguns, whether on the recoil or gas-operated principle, would thus be unsuited for these types, unless the action were cycled by hand. The Chinese shell-crackers with their all-plastic rims are rather fragile and are best used with a broad, gentle extractor such as is found in break-action single and double guns; the hook-type extractor/ejector of a pump gun might tear right through such a rim. Indeed, the writer has found that sometimes the rim will slip over the extractor of a double gun upon opening, and the empty case must be knocked out via a cleaning rod down the muzzle.

With "dragon's-breath" and shot/tracer rounds, chamber pressures are at normal service levels and operation of an auto-loader should be without problems. Nonetheless, with both these and the other types, residue is left behind from the pyrotechnic combustion as well as from the powder; claims as to its non-corrosive characteristics should be viewed with scepticism. Immediate cleaning of the gun is *necessary* after using all types of pyrotechnic ammo! The writer would be particularly shy of using a gas-operated auto-loader with any of them because of the extensive cleaning required. Maybe the best advice as to choice of guns is to pick one you don't care too much about or else be prepared to clean your gun *thoroughly* and *quickly* after shooting.

#### *Final thoughts*

Upon broaching the idea of this new sport to fellow I.O.O.J. companions, the writer was



astonished at the remarkable resonance the idea had with them. Many of us are just as enthusiastic about shooting as about pyrotechny, it seems – anything that goes bang! – and why not combine the two? One, a courteous gentleman of Norwegian ancestry who makes his home on the Northern plains, told of setting off enormous quantities of Silver Jets and Buzz Bombs from sheets of plywood, while his friends lined up with shotguns and tried to knock them out of the sky. The development of the idea that outstripped this writer's wildest imaginings, however, may be found in T. Babington Brimstone's article "The Day the Pigeons Shot Back" (*q.v.*, elsewhere in this issue). We at *The Case Former* would be most interested in other developments along these lines, and encourage our readers to send 'em in. *Waidmannsheil!*

ERNST PFANTODT

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## MOVIE SPECIAL EFFECTS

*"These three guys were chasing me up a hill with murder on their minds, and all I had to defend myself with was dynamite."*

—JIMMY STEWART in *Fool's Parade*

*"You think we used enough dynamite there, Butch?"*

—ROBERT REDFORD in  
*Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*

When most people think of movie special effects, they think of *Star Wars* and Harrison Shylift with the Crossettes of Doom. Me, I remember other things – the Henrys (Greasy and Mean), and the Unearthly Scream.

Mean Henry and Greasy Henry were father and son. They owned the High Times Drive-In, and with all the activities going on there, it was aptly named. Mean Henry, the father, was a million years old; factual proof that the undead exist. I never heard him begin a sentence without swearing. He was so cold that if you poured boiling water down his throat, he'd pass ice cubes. Mean Henry was the projectionist. In his concrete blockhouse, there were rifle slits for Mean's B.A.R. At various times during the show, Mean would thrust out the barrel and survey the crowd – definitely an attention-getter.

Greasy Henry was a large, heavy-set guy about five feet ten. His father signed him up for the Marines when he was sixteen. He did one tour in Korea, one in Okinawa as an M.P., and two tours in Vietnam. Greasy and Mean lived for two things

– swilling beer and hoping that someone would rob the High Times. Greasy had paid off the right people, so he carried his service .45 at all times. He kept a 12-ga. autoloader in the ticket booth. One afternoon, the dumbest group of ghetto apes ever bred tried to rob the drive-in. No one was there – the money was in the bank. Greasy and Mean were soaking up beers in the shade of the concession stand. Suddenly, these yard apes crashed their car through the chain-link hurricane fence. The car broke down, and one of the mooks descended from it, saw Greasy, and let fly with his .38. Greasy returned fire. Scratch one mook. This woke Mean from his alcoholic stupor. He chugged around the corner and opened up with his B.A.R. The mooks never knew what hit them. It is a tribute to Marine training that, as drunk as Mean was, he was able to hit a disabled car at ten feet. Sometime during the exchange, the mooks managed to snap off a couple of shots.

Grease meanwhile got his grease-gun from the snack bar and counterpointed Mean's fire. Reports say after they emptied a sack of clips into this car (four dead porch apes), Mean then staggered forward and urinated on the car. The coroner packed off the pieces, and Mean had the wreck towed to a corner space. It sat there for years, peacefully rusting into oblivion. Grease and Mean would get looped and pose for pictures like the Great White Hunters, feet on the bumper, and guns in hand.

Grease took a liking to me and my beer. I spent many a Friday night there, watching bad T. & A. movies, drinking beer, and shooting fireworks. Grease loved fireworks, especially bottle rockets. He fired them singly out of his empty beer bottle, again and again; he fired them out of buckets and pails, and every now and then when alcoholic poisoning set in, he would take a mailing tube, fill it with powder, drop in a whole shit-load of bottle rockets on top of it, then lay a train of powder to the lip of the tub. After he hoisted this contraption to his shoulder, he'd chuck his cigar butt into the end. The resulting flash fired out bottle rockets *en masse*, illuminating whatever target at which he chose to aim. Greasy's only problem was that this led inevitably to burns from the dross. He'd hop around, cursing and swearing at everyone and everything. To approach him during one of these rages was tantamount to suicide. Grease would rant and rave. Then he'd pound back half-a-dozen beers and look all over for someone to hit. Finally, he would find the tube and reload, waiting for another such chance for fire it.

A few years later, Grease and a couple of his buddies were chugging boilermakers. This led to the brilliant idea of firing off a massive bottle-rocket volley. Grease picked up his tube, grabbed a can of black powder and emptied the whole thing

into the tube, then crammed bottle rockets into it, and added more powder. Then another layer of rockets on top of this! Grease grinned like the Cheshire cat. This would be the world's greatest rocket launch. He stepped out into the lot and took aim at Kitten Natividad's naked chest filling the screen. He screamed, "die, you slope-headed bastards!" and touched it off; the resultant shot, if not heard round the world, resounded around the drive-in. Grease was never found – at least not his head.

Mean was never quite the same. A few months later, the High Times was sold. Mean emigrated to Israel to shoot at the "Ay-rabs" with his B.A.R. No crosses anywhere over there, so he would probably live forever. Every time I read about a new hot spot, I look closely at the papers for a picture of a cadaverous vampire with a B.A.R. "Good even-ing. Ah! The guns of the night. Such music they play."

Every Friday night thereafter for about three years, Tim, the world's crudest human being, would call me. The conversation included where we could score some beer and other potables, or any other mind-expanders. Then he'd mention the Hillside Drive-In and its porno movies. I'd ask if he'd gotten any women to come along, or were we just going to drink and drink. Tim could find the sleaziest babes you ever met. We'd pile into his station wagon and cruise to Wisconsin. Quick stop for pizza and beer, and then the naked people. These were *really bad* films, folks, and when they got exceptionally bad, Tim, I, and the other animals would spray each other with beer, shoot fireworks, and chuck M-80s. Tim bought grocery bags full of them from the Wisconsin bootleggers. This was an adventure in itself. Then, we'd park in the back row and party down.

Tim had staggered off to the flooded john. When he came back, he was aglow with excitement. "Come with me," he encouraged. We went down a row of cars, and there sat a brown Chevy Calais with dealer plates. Immediately, I recognized it as our neighbor Mr. Alt. "Who's he with?" I asked. By the dim light of the screen, I could make out the bottle-blond coiffure of his well-endowed sexy wife. They were sitting close together, smooching and carrying on like a couple of teenagers. For some reason, this thoroughly pissed off old Tim. As we slunk back to our car, Tim kept muttering about "those old farts," and how they should be at home, and not messing around, ruining his appreciation of what (had we then known about JFK and Marilyn) might well have been called the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

When we arrived at the car, Tim's anger had boiled over. He grabbed the sack of M-80s, and started passing them out. "I'm going to attack those

bastards. I'm going to blow the piss out of them. Remember Pearl Harbor! Marines, over the top!" – on and on he ranted and foamed at the mouth, as he got less and less lucid. We were afraid not to go with him. We crept up upon the car, crackers in hand, ready to surprise the Alts. We maneuvered into position – and to our surprise, we watched as Mrs. Alt kissed her husband, then dropped her head into his lap. Our fevered imaginations were rampant. We knew what *they* were doing.

"Now!" hissed Tim, after we had stood transfixed for a few minutes of prurient speculation. Zippo's split the night – fuses caught – arms threw – and KABLAM! Wiley Coyote couldn't have done it better. A brilliant white flash! Then, a sound that I'll remember forever – the most hideous unearthly scream, bellowing banshee-like over the sounds of the drive-in. On and on it went. Tim and I did the perfect Three Stooges double-take. Oh, did we split! Remember John Belushi & Company outside of the Dean's office in *Animal House*? That's how we moved! Back to the car, fired it up, and we ran like hell.

Weeks later a very shaken Mr. Alt was released from Miller Hospital after extensive reconstructive surgery. Now, we don't know exactly what happened, but our juvenile imaginations worked overtime on this one. Let me just say that Tooth Fairy jokes abounded.

The movies are great medicine. I know this article isn't a rant against political correctness, or the P.G.double I.Q. less, but the *Case Former* just doesn't come out often enough for such to be published in timely fashion. So, maybe the P.C. crowd has won after all. I just don't know anymore. We work all the time and still can't find a *Lust-Bombe*. I guess I'll just go see a movie. ♪

PAOLO DA GIRO

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## BBQ CHICKEN – I.O.O.J. STYLE

### Ingredients:

- Used grease barrel – cut in half
- Large bonfire (old tires make best fuel)
- Large caliber pistol (.45 is preferred, but 9mm will also do)
- 2 bags of charcoal
- a gallon of gasoline (lighter fluid can be substituted, but gas is preferred)
- 10,000 candlepower road flare
- two steel grill racks (square ones work best)
- Asst. pieces cut chicken
- BBQ sauce (home brewed is preferred, but store bought will suffice)

Start by cutting the grease barrel in half. As most places do not clean their grease barrels before throwing them away, there will be grease left in it. This can be easily remedied by putting the barrels on top of the bonfire to burn the grease off. After the grease has burnt clean off, remove the barrels and allow them to cool (open end up). As every fireworks man knows, there are two things a fire needs to burn: fuel and air. Since grease barrels are intended to keep grease in, there are no holes that permit air to feed the fire. This creates a large problem that can easily be fixed with your .45 (or 9mm). The holes should be evenly spaced around the bottom of the barrel to allow even air flow. A good sized barrel will need ten to fourteen holes. Next, dump charcoal into the barrel until you have a good sized pile. Douse with plenty of gasoline, stand back, and throw lit road flare in to get the coals going. Now it is time to wait awhile and let the coals burn until all of the coals have turned white and there is a good source of heat coming off the grill. When the coals are done, put steel grate onto the top of the barrel and get the chicken. Cook the chicken to your preference, adding BBQ sauce during the last five minutes of cooking. Sit back, grab a beer and some potato salad and enjoy. 🍷

ANTONIO GIANSLAVI



## THE MALEVOLENT ARTIFICER

*Sweetheart, baby, would I lie to you?*

—MILANO GIANSLAVI

Hello again, everybody. In this issue of *The Case Former*, Milano is going to pick on a few people. This may seem mean-spirited, but truthful words aren't always beautiful.

A new class of pyrojerks has come to my attention. You may have run across them before; however, because you are not divinely inspired like Milano, you could not properly name them. The name I have chosen for them is "FUNDAMENTalists" (*sic*). The work must be written with "FUNDAMENT" in capital letters, and "alists" in lower-case. A short trip to *Webster's* may be helpful to some.

The basic FUNDAMENTalist is the fuselighter, typically a dipshit who rises to the top solely because of an ability to float.\* Well, Mister Fuselighter, here is your shell.

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\*ED. NOTE: *As the continuing existence of Congress demonstrates; "turds of a feather, float together."*

### *Single Break Fuselighter Shell*

Take a six-inch plastic ball shell case; fill with two-inch pieces of visco that have their ends primed. Use FFA for a burst charge, and lift and leader as usual. Any competent pyrotechnist can make these for you.

### *Single Break Chitterling ("Chit'lun") Shell*

Take a box of frozen chitterlings, break out the center six or so in order to admit a flashbag. Use a dry wrap; lift and leader. Keep this shell on dry ice until ready to fire.

Now, you may ask yourself, "Just what in Hell is Milano driving at?" Well, I'm going to tell you. Wait and see what kind of fallout is going to be generated from these two little shells - every fuse-lighting FUNDAMENTalist is going to feel picked-on. Many of them will get faxes, calls, or letters from concerned friends saying "Look what was written about you, you should be mad!" Sadly, what needs to be said is "How in Hell, and by whomever in Hell, did this type of jerk get let into our midst anyway?"

I suppose we will again hear about how we are "racist," for the chitterling shell. I don't mean to be racist. I only want to show what should happen to our FUNDAMENTalist friends. Being caught in a shower of a\*\*holes is what the rest of us put up with, so I suppose it won't hurt them.

To summarize: We have too many FUNDAMENTalists in pyrotechny, and in the P.G.I.I., and too many people pay attention to them. Not enough is being done to get rid of this human debris. 🍷

Faternally,  
MILANO



## A DEATH IN FARGO (?)

*Was helffn Fackeln, Lichter oder Brilln,  
Wann die Leute nicht sehen wollen?*

—HEINRICH KHUNRATH

*If God had not intended them to be sheared,  
he would not have made them sheep.*

—CHARLATAN WHEEZE

Fellow pyrotechnists, I call out to you. Don your sack-cloth, grab your ashes. Burn the incense and chant the dirge in lament. Bring out your dead! Bring out your dead! (That's from Monty Python, folks, a comedy troupe; not the Mountebank, who is funny only unintentionally).

The Fargo convention of the P.G.I.I. may well have sounded the death knell of true amateur

pyrotechny in the U.S. It seems there are those who no longer want to see the unique, the best, the hand-made, the original. As the convention becomes more commercialized, what some want is five nights of Public Display/Product Demonstrations. This pernicious trend has, like the camel with its nose under the tent, great potential for future distress. What I refer to is the injection of monetary awards into the competitions. I'm not talking about the Bill and Sue Hoyt award, which is modest enough and comes from members' voluntary contributions. I'm talking about the notion of commercial sponsorship for competition. Some suggested (or rumored) amounts of prize money are such as to suborn the Guild, or individual competitors, making the Guild beholden to one big contributor instead of to its members, while altering the attitude in competition from one of striving for excellence for its own sake towards one of a "run for the money." Once the big bucks are on the table, where will the sharing of information and camaraderie among firework-makers, which has been so characteristic in the past, go? Expect to see it go straight down the drain, replaced by a close-mouthed rivalry that might become bitter and unscrupulous. We have heard laughing allusions in the past to the possibility of competitors pasting a layer of paper over a Japanese import and passing it off as their own. This could become a reality – if it hasn't already.

Safety-fakery continues to rear its ugly head. It even prevented a donation to Friday's public display from being accepted, though the proffered item was first-quality material from a true fireworks man. We of the I.O.O.J. were more than pleased to fire it at the late-night special manifestation for the induction of its creator, in the wee hours after the Friday P.G.I.I. event. Note to the Cody Flash: we're happy to shoot and appreciate your work, even if the Guild's Barney Fife clones don't want it.

Every year the convention gains a nickname. That of '93 will live in infamy as the Year of the Mosquito. Now, I've experienced mosquitoes before, but I've never been attacked in formation like I was in Fargo. I pulled out my shotgun and set up some ack-ack fire to knock some of them down, but three boxes of shells later, I gave in. The vampiric little bastards can suck my blood – they're no worse than the brain-numbing P.G.I.I. offissary.

It might sound from these comments as if I did not have a good time in Fargo. Well, I did. We had some good fireworks; second, I met some new fireworks men; third, I saw some old friends (always a good thing), the public display was good, and then there was the Party (see our "Proceedings," elsewhere in this issue).

Fireworks-wise, I saw four truly memorable shells; two in competition, and two in the public display. The public display had fantastic crossettes. An eight-

inch tremalon, and a five-break six-inch charcoal crossette – we all know who made them, and they performed flawlessly. Need I say more.

I saw something great in a ball shell. The maker called it a peanut shell, I knew it of old as a piled shell. Two twelve-inch spheres designed to break at the same time – all I can say is WOW! Then there was a "Hum and Planets." Now, I knew who built it, but somehow it was announced as someone else's. How can this happen? I don't know.

Old friends returned and we had a chance to speak of many things. Too bad and too sad that it soon ended. Happy to meet, sorry to part, and (devoutly I hope) happy to meet again! To a true Southern Gentleman: Glad you could make it! We were all pleased that you could be there. We have missed you in years gone by. Come back some time, and we'll buy you dinner. Remember, the Lake awaits.

So, old friends, let's talk about the Offissary. First, I recommend that the Offissary buy the following: *Miss Manners' Guide to Etiquette*, Betty Crocker's *Boys' and Girls' How to Give a Party*, and a tape of the musical, "Little Shop of Horrors."

Why, you ask?

As to the first-mentioned: to learn how to write a proper thank-you note.

As to all three: I'll answer this with a riddle. Someone asked our host at the I.O.O.J. Blast – what is the major difference between an I.O.O.J. party and the P.G.I.I. convention? His response – *we don't run out of food at an I.O.O.J. affair*. There, you don't go away hungry.

The Afterglow Parties at the P.G.I.I. convention suck. There are the final insult and indignity on the part of an uncaring, unconcerned, pikerish, overbearing P.G.I.I. offissary. Why do we spend good money on plastic binders and ugly tee-shirts? Instead, imagine us as the big Green Monster from Outer Space in "Little Shop of Horrors." "Feed me" we chant – "feed me." One plate of congealed cold cuts on a bed of wilted lettuce is not proper food. Spend money on what matters, not on junk! Remember, what matters, what counts, is making convention-goers happy. Wake up and smell the missing coffee. "Feed me – feed me." Enough – I could go for hours on the two-faced, double-speaking, mealy-mouthed offissary.

Rather than wallow in their mire, I would speak about the finest thing to happen at any convention – meeting genuine fireworks men. I met three of them this year. Sadly, fireworks people *properly understood* are dying out. There are probably only about a hundred or so left in the United States. Now, I'm not talking about people who simply love fireworks. These are more numerous, are friends, and help us out. I certainly don't mean "pyros" – this term has acquired a connotation like "Trekkies" or "Techno-Weenies." I mean the sort of person

who has a craftsman's technical command of pyrotechny, and perhaps an artist's vision.

Let me introduce you to three new fireworks people in my acquaintance. First is the Cody Flash. I was standing discussing the nature of God and His retribution against scoundrels. I was just about to talk about the scourging of plagiarists and charlatans, when this pleasant fellow asked about a method of building mines I had demonstrated. We talked about it, and he questioned me on another point. I told him if he walked with me, we could discuss this, but a fellow gun collector was going to show me some guns he had brought. When one of the shotguns was pulled from the trunk, the Flash recognized and discoursed on its features and the inventions of James Purdey. I was impressed; anyone who likes old shotguns can't be half bad. My conversations impressed me with his knowledge and common sense. Friday night, after the P.G.I.I. display was long done, during the Induction, I saw his work. This impressed me even more! A proper - let us say, *magisterial* - tourbillion. Why don't other people make these? Because they can't! Thanks, Cody!

With some embarrassment I confess I can't remember the second person's name\*. Since he makes ball shells (which some pyro-traditionalists think un-mentionable), let's call him the Man with No Name (hey, I like westerns). I've seen his work, and it's very impressive. I guess maybe ball shells *do* exist. Sorry - God, but it was beautiful work. So, No Name, wear your distinction with pride. You do good work. See you at the Lake.

The last "fireworks man" I met was in fact a beautiful woman. She spoke of the great shells she had seen, then she told me she was learning to build fireworks as she was involved with No Name. I told you to build the best shells she could - I wanted to know what she would specialize in. She didn't know. She told me that she loved crossettes, and as a matter of fact, dreams of a friend's multiple-break crossette when she wants to feel good.

Pretty Lady, what you should do is follow your dreams - built crossettes. A wise man once told me always to follow your dreams. I've chased mine for years. So, go the the shop and start on your crossettes - hope to see your shells soon.

Last but not least I'd like to thank our convention host, our brother Cam. Cam, you run a hell of a show. Hope you can host again some time (but maybe you're not such a glutton for punishment). Your unselfish conduct set a proper example in the contrast to those who would exploit (or have exploited in the past) these events for clandestine gain. Let's hope there's still life in the old-fashioned P.G.I. ideals, and the organization can

be steered back towards benefit to its members and the state of pyrotechnic knowledge, and away from commercialization and self-aggrandizement.

PAOLO DA GIRO

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ALLOCUTION OF THE RT. VEN.  
BIANCO GASOLINI, P.:G.:C.:,  
AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE GRAND  
MANIFESTATION OF THE SOCIETY

*Es siegte die Stärke,  
und krönet zum Lohn  
die Schönheit und Weisheit  
Mit ewiger Kron'!*

—E. SCHICKANEDER

Another year has passed, another convention has come and gone, and the I.O.O.J. is still alive and kicking. Messrs. Witless, Wheeze, and Mendacio can look forward to a bigger, better *Case Former* with this issue and many more to follow. Despite their wishful thinking, they are far far from hearing the last of us.

Fargo was, all in all, not a bad convention with only a couple of truly revoltin' developments. The first of these was the election to the First Vice Presidency of a man who mistakenly thinks that the summer flooding in his home state extended to the entire midwest, and selected his convention apparel accordingly.\* I *do* own a pair of penny loafers and I *was* fond of wearing them until I bore witness to such a spectacle. At least for now, said shoes reside at the back of my closet and will remain there.

We also experienced the pain of politicization of the races for PGI office. Tee-shirts? Posters? We only wish that the qualities thereon attributed to

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\*ED. NOTE.: *Companion Giustiziere Fiammante and several others conducted a pool on which day of the Convention the Mountebank would show up with the most badges and patches. Although Companion Girolamo the younger won, this aspect of the Mountebank's get-up was more subdued this year than in the past. On the other hand, his fetching ensemble of mid-calf length trousers, white socks, and penny-loafers drew much appalled scrutiny. Some contend, as Rt. Ven. Comp. Gasolini does, that the high-water pants were in recognition of Iowa's flooding. Other Iowans in attendance were, however, normally dressed, and this gives strong credibility to the theory of Comp. da Giro that in fact the Mountebank's attire was patterned after the torador pants fashionable among women in the 'sixties. We leave the final decision in this vexed question, as ever, to the peerless judgment of our learned readers.*

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\*ED. NOTE: *Paolo may not, but we know it, and will see he gets his issue - Case Former mailroom staff.*



*Off to an early start – Our Order's most junior member.*

Mountebank Witless really were present in his character. Oh well, the past year's elections, including those last November, have been a large disappointment.

1993 also brought something called the Public Display Inspection Team. Composed of two peckerheads who for all appearances don't know diddly-squat about fireworks, this team purportedly was set up to "make PGI Public Displays safer." How riding around in a golf cart yelling at people who have been in the display business for years while ignoring obvious real safety concerns will lead to this, I haven't the foggiest. As far as I'm concerned, those who are not capable of safely conducting a public display should not be asked to participate. This is all part of the egalitarian scheme to encourage "participation" by idiots and assholes, as well as craftsmen and *real* fireworks men.

The events in Fargo were followed by a wonderful party on Saturday night, complete with tire fire (to prepare the grease barrels for conversion into barbecues), an air show (provided by a crop duster, thoughtfully engaged by our host to blanket the site in mosquito-killer and assure us an insect-free evening), and high explosives. The presence of ample and excellent food, the absence of blood-sucking bugs, and the happy abandon with which those present shot numerous fireworks (all without untoward incident) thus distinguished our Grand Manifestation from the preceding PGI Convention.

Many new companions were inducted, and I had the honor of passing the reins of the I.O.O.J. to the Right Venerable Eduardo Tellerini, who was installed in due and ancient form. I wish him the best, and can assure one and all that our Order could not be in more capable hands. Keep those *Case Former* articles coming, folks, as all are a joy to read. May Vulcan smile down upon us all! 🍷

BIANCO GASOLINI

## W. R. WITHROW, 1940 - 1993

*Hor che luci sì belle  
con fulgori soave  
trattan del Ciel le chieve  
e trionfan le Stelle  
non san coi lampi lor pagnar gli abissi  
che soggetti non son gli Astri agl'eclissi.*

—ALESSANDRO STRADELLA

Though our Order, and this publication, exist primarily to share good friendship, good fireworks, and good humor – preferably for a long time to come – there must be times of somber reflection, and this is such a time. One of our great fireworks men is no longer among us.

W.R. (Bill) Withrow died on October 16, 1993. He collapsed on the way to the hospital with an acute pneumonia, never regaining consciousness. He suffered heart failure; his heart was started, and again failed.

Born on July 24, 1940, Bill was an enthusiastic pyrotechnist from youth. He was also an electronics expert and ham radio operator; via the airwaves he met another ham, Max P. Vander Horck, and found that apart from an interest in radio, he shared with Van the same birthday and also a passion for fireworks. Bill became an associate editor of *Pyronews* (1966-67) and later *American Pyrotechnist* (1968-70). By virtue of his association with Van's publication he was *de facto* a co-founder of the Pyrotechnics Guild International, and later its vice-president (1975-76). He served as an editor of *Pyrotechnica* for ten years (1983-93).

Bill was a consultant and lead pyrotechnist for Atlas Enterprises. Fireworks photographer extraordinaire, display operator, shell-maker, choreographer, long-time friend of Ron Lancaster, Jimmy Grucci, "Firecracker Bill" Engelke, Max Vander Horck, and many others, he was a walking encyclopædia of fireworks lore.

Although his health was delicate in latter years, Bill bore his suffering with stoicism; even as when he was prescribed oxygen for his emphysema, with self-mocking humor, he allowed himself to be photographed with the oxygen bottle and a ridiculous sign. Perhaps because of this, few of his friends knew the seriousness of his condition.

Two funeral services were held, one on October 19 at Fayetteville, Arkansas, and another on October 21 at Logansport, Indiana, Bill's home town. In characteristic fashion, Bill always said he wanted a Dixieland jazz band and a fireworks display at his funeral, but this was not possible. His wife, Karen Lamsens Withrow, suggested as an alternative that Bill's friends remember him by shooting a shell and in lieu of flowers, which Bill always thought a "waste" at funerals, a donation to a heart or lung charity was requested.

*Lux æterna luceat ei, Domine.*

*Important Announcements from*

# CHARLATAN WHEEZE ENTERPRISES, INC.

## *Publications Department*

We regret to announce that the *Journal of Pyrotechnic Farts and Sausages* will not be published until the Greek Kalends, or Hell freezes over, whichever comes later. This project has been taken over by the Canadian Authority for Testing Selected Highly Improbable Technologies, under the able direction of Prof. Traditore Detestabile, Ph.D., of Montréal. The new publication will be entitled *Revue d'escroquerie et friponnerie pyrobolique* and will carry articles from international contributors. Lead article in the upcoming issue: "Arschleckerei und Feuerwerkerei: Wegweisern nach einem Karriere" by the noted expert witness Dr. Blasius Rauchmantl.

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Dr. Rauchmantl's undergraduate work was done at St. Hoprig's College in the University of Poictesme, with a year of exchange study under the noted Prof. Asmodeo Beliál at the University of Salamanca, a revered member of the Faculty there. Rauchmantl's post-graduate studies in the Department of Inconsequential Studies at the Academy of Lagado led to First-Class Honours. His dissertation topic was "Selected Problems in the Extraction of Sunbeams from Cucumbers." He also researched the breeding of naked sheep, and the softening of marble for the manufacture of pincushions.

Following his attainment of the Doctoral degree, Rauchmantl worked for seven years under the legendary tutelage of Prof. Traditore Detestabile at the Canadian Authority for Testing Selected Highly Improbable Technologies. There, his incisive intellect permitted him to become thoroughly expert in pyrotechny without even once having to mix a composition or make a shell.

Dr. Rauchmantl now places his unrivalled talents at the disposition of shysters and litigants everywhere. Says Dr. Jeroboam Crankling, Executive Director of the American Association of Oriental Junk Importers and Regius Professor of Incompetent Arrogance at Benedict Arnold University, Blustertown, Maryland: "Rauchmantl outshines the ancient alchemists - he transmutes pain and distress into gold."\*

\*ED. NOTE.: *Mainly for himself.*



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