



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*, iiij: 41.

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AVANT-PROPOS

*To make each prisoner pent
Unwillingly represent
A source of innocent merriment,
Of innocent merriment.*

– W.S. GILBERT

While the I.O.O.J., like many another order charged with the safeguarding of an ancient craft and mystery, may be said to be “constituted with time immemorial status,” its first published manifestation was issue no. 1 of *The Case Former*, appearing in April of 1991. Although it was distributed to only a small list, totalling less than one hundred – either companions of the I.O.O.J., or a select few candidates and others to whom the publishers thought it might interest – its impact was far greater. The combination of photocopiers and telefax machines with its pointed satire, touching the raw nerves of those it lampooned, saw to that.

Some months ago one of the publishers received a scurrilous letter from a self-important fellow who will, for the purpose of these pages, be identified as Mr. Mountebank Witless. You all know this person – he is the one who has to wear a shirt two sizes too large, to accommodate all of those silly patches and badges. Perhaps he never got enough merit badges as a Boy Scout, and is compensating for it. The effect of this get-up, on a grown man, is as incongruous as that of the South American generalissimo’s uniform worn by doormen at a certain class of hotel; the difference is that the hotel doorman is required by his employer to wear what he wears, whereas Mr. Witless has only himself to blame.

Mr. Witless took us to task for publishing the article “Flaming Justice,” which he averred was a racist attack on the wife of a P.G.I.I. member. We asked Mr. Witless how he came to that conclusion – was it that the member’s wife was a negress? that she abused marijuana? was grotesquely obese? We had no acquaintance with this member’s wife (we told Mr. Witless), nor any fault to find with

her, save perhaps her taste in husbands. The story was in fact a true account of an event that took place some years ago in Ft. Worth, Texas, and we doubt very much that the wife of the member in question emigrated thence all the way to LaCrosse, Wisconsin. The story seemed to us to be a beautiful illustration of the principle of justice enunciated in W.S. Gilbert’s libretto to “The Mikado.”

We doubt that Mr. Witless understood that, or even knows who Gilbert (or Sullivan) were. His literary tastes were set forth in a fulsome encomium, printed in the *P.G.I. Bulletin*, to the publisher of an irregular periodical that commingles scatological attacks by name upon long-standing P.G.I. members with articles about spacemen in flying saucers visiting the Earth and allegations that government officials are snooping through the publisher’s mail. Occasionally the publication talks about fireworks. We would not *dare* to express an opinion about that publication, but would like to know what a competent clinical psychologist thinks of it.

Mr. Witless also averred that the suggestion, in *The Case Former* No. 2, indicating that the I.O.O.J. would be holding a party on Saturday, August 10, and members should bring guns and ammo for target and trap shooting, as well as plenty of Class “C”, was a “threat to the P.G.I. officers.” As those companions who were present at the highly successful party at “Shaggy’s” will attest, this was a perfectly straightforward declaration; we had trap-shooting in the afternoon, Class “C” after dark, and a very convivial induction of new members and installation of officers. How Mr. Witless could construe this as a “threat” is another question that begs the attention of a competent clinical psychologist.

The Case Former will *not* cease, because of such absurd importunings, to pillory those deserving of ridicule in its pages. It is not to be expected that those pilloried will be pleased; but no consequence save being the butt of “innocent merriment” will ever befall such people. That, after all, ought to be enough. It is unfortunate that the P.G.I.I. must harbor individuals who see it as a means of ego-gratification, being “big fish in a small pond,” or

who regard it as a wonderful flock of sheep to be fleeced. A good honest horse-laugh is the best possible remedy for all their cant and hypocrisy and we will go on providing it whenever and wherever we can. Mountebanks – be warned! *Great is the truth, and it SHALL prevail.* ¶

PASQUINO DEI FUGISTI



FIREWORKS SAFETY

There are as many views regarding fireworks safety as there are pyrotechnists: a hot and much-debated topic. Since I've never been able to resist fueling a conflagration, I think I'll have a go at it here.

Our society's obsession with cradle-to-grave safety, and our legal system's embrace of the same, means ever-increasing encroachments upon the range of fireworks activity which we can legally engage in, be it for business or recreation.

In the name of safety, the professional pyrotechnist now finds himself under the governmental auspices of the B.A.T.F., B. Ex., D.O.T., E.P.A., C.P.S.C., as well as state and local fire and police authorities. Economically, the insurance industry enters into the mess. While not strictly illegal, in places, to shoot a display outside of National Fire Protection Association (N.F.P.A.) guidelines, doing so frequently nullifies insurance protection. For reasons unfathomable to me, elements of the pyrotechnic community have actually participated in the writings of these codes. What sort of person cleans, oils, and sharpens a guillotine while sitting on death row? Some of these persons are P.G.I.I. members; another contradiction of realities. If N.F.P.A. codes were enforced upon P.G.I.I. activities, the latter would cease to exist as we know them. Conventions would be reduced to a handful of idiots lighting Black Cats in the dirt. Has the P.G.I.I. some immunity to the N.F.P.A., or has its date with the headsman yet to be arranged?

In purely practical terms, (as opposed to those government and insurance) some general observations with regard to safety may be made.

First, manufacture is dangerous. Given the sensitivity of pyrotechnic compositions to mechanical, thermal, electrical, and chemical initiation, and the number of such opportunities for such initiation in the production of fireworks, it becomes obvious that accidents are inevitable. History supports me here. A look at recorded manufacturing accidents whose causes can be ascertained shows that sometimes they just simply happen, like the bumper sticker says. The backside of that is that the majority of them were caused by ignorance, stupidity, and indiffer-

ence, and could have been avoided. Can knowledge, intelligence and responsibility be legislated into being? The obvious answer cannot be found in our laws.

I have no wish to talk down to anyone in this regard. As I once alluded to, I used to make a damned fine flashpowder by grinding $KClO_4$, aluminum, and sulfur together in a porcelain mortar and pestle. I did this for months without event, gaining confidence in the procedure's safety, until one evening when Roberto Davenportiano (Italization just doesn't always work) and I decided to make a FIRECRACKER. We smoked about a gram of blond hash and floated down to the Laboratory. Stoned as a statue, I put the elbow grease to about a third of a beer can's worth of flashmix in that porcelain rig. Stephano and his brother visited briefly a few minutes before my kiss-off, and warned me that I'd blow myself up. They were right. I'd just gotten into the grinding rhythm of things with Creedence when the world went searing white, my ears pounded, and the basement stank of burning flesh, hair, and clothing. Better Run Through the Jungle.....

Dav was standing about two feet behind and beside me when I exploded, eating pistachio nuts. When I began to hear again, he was asking me if I was all right.

"No Dav, I'm not all right," was my reply, followed by, "Put me out, Dav."

He did that, and then I staggered back into a corner, blind, where I stepped on a rake. Another fine mess.

My Dad came charging down the basement stairs, bellowing about those damned explosions all the time, and realized what had happened. As he led me up the stairs, a couple minutes later, my vision began to return. That experience was almost worth the price of admission. I'd had perhaps four or five minutes totally blind, able only to smell my own cremation and hear the panic around me, and I was in poor humor. Getting my eyesight back, followed by the two-week morphine holiday in intensive care, fixed me up just fine, although my hands still break open and bleed rather easily, and I still have a fond remembrance of morphine.

There really is no moral to this story except the obvious: Boneheads that get hammered and ignorantly screw around with explosives will probably blow themselves up. Always have, always will. Having survived that experience, I decided to do the only prudent thing; I majored in chemistry at an eastern university, so that I might get hammered and screw around with explosives safely. It has worked so far, although tomorrow's always another day.

Several years with a major in East Coast display company greatly increased my knowledge of and

skills with fireworks, which brings me to my second point. Display operation is dangerous. I have cross-stapled countless finale chains together without event. Yet, one tragic day, a display operator with another company struck a spark with a staple gun and lost his life for doing so. Again, like flash-powder, any manipulation of explosive/combustible materials contributes some form of energy, be it friction, impact, thermal, electrical (static), in the direction of that compound's reaction threshold. Maybe a given action won't prove eventful in hundreds, or thousands of repetitions. Nevertheless, many are potentially dangerous in that they approach that reaction threshold to a largely quantifiable degree.

When fireworks are safely assembled they sometimes don't work as they should. There can be an awful lot of work potential in those shells, and when things go wrong, that can be used to dig big holes, throw much steel, and overturn other mortars. It happens. There is no certain way to know whether a shell will work other than to light it. Barricades? Sure, they work, but not everyone is going to lug some concrete slabs around for each display. Electrical firing can put one at a much greater distance from potential trouble, but not everyone does that either.

Roberto Cassiano, a display operator and friend, has a horrifying collection of jagged, twisted, heavy steel fragments from mortars that have exploded on him over a long career in fireworks. Faulty shells, every one. Bob does not manufacture, I should hasten to point out. He barricades his electrical firing positions like Quadaffi does his house. I snickered a bit at this practice until I'd seen his shrapnel collection. Now I'm sort of meek about it, realizing that I was real lucky, and lucky to have good shells, those years we fired from barges on Boston's Charles River, not many yards from an awful lot of potential hurt. Purchasing and building first rate shells is the single most important procedure to keep from starting a shrapnel collection of your own.

My third and last point is that Class "C" is dangerous, to an extent. How many times have such artifices whizzed just barely past your head? Probably a few, if you're reading this. A few inches either way could have cost an eye in many cases. Statistically, how many of us lose eyes? I really don't know, but how many of us walk around with eye-patches? I've yet to see a one, nor do I personally know anyone or know of anyone who has lost an eye to Class "C". Which isn't to say that it can't happen; we all know better.

The most convincing evidence of the *relative* safety of Class "C" is the annual Lake Party, hosted by Imbibo Bourbonini, of Minnesota, of which many I.O.O.J. members are veterans. At this event, scores of underdressed, overintoxicated lunatics in the last stages of alcohol poisoning totter over to the roaring campfire and dumpin cases of Class

"C". Then they caper about hysterically with Colorful Birds, Jumping Jacks, Sunflower Helicopters, etc., buzzing and whizzing and screeching in a fiery hail around them. The result: An orgy of ocular injury? No, of course not. Nothing happens to them at all, save the occasional blistered finger, singed hair, or scorched feet. In that event, they are promptly sent to the medical tent for the administration of first aid; Jack Daniels and powdered sugar donuts, Dr. Bourbonini's standard prescription for such complaints.

An attitude of contemptuous disregard for safety, coupled with vast intoxication, is therefore the approved I.O.O.J. method for Class "C" display. (That'll be a question on the written part of your I.O.O.J. Class "C" Certification Test. You may be asked to demonstrate this technique in the practical exam.)

The point of these ramblings is that there *is* an element of danger in working with and using fireworks, be they class A, B, or C, and be it for manufacture, display, or just screwing around. We accept that. We do our best to assess and minimize risk, and go forth. If someday we get hurt, we accept that, too, and the responsibility for it. Way it goes.

Now, our society these days doesn't like that. Bad attitude, Little Brother. We are to be saved from ourselves, our dangerous toys taken away. In practical terms, this is happening by our government regulating us into oblivion. Several experienced professionals I've talked to see the day coming when it will simply be too complex, expensive, and exasperating to continue in the fireworks business. This is not speculation - it is already happening.

The number of federally licensed fireworks manufacturers in America almost certainly will drop in coming months (and may have done already), as the effects of new B.A.T.F. rulings manifest themselves, along with other agencies' added garottes. The Feds insist that a dropped level of licensed activity is not the intended outcome, but rather an eventuality of, their rulings. Yet they knew what would happen before the rulings' imposition. I'll leave you to ponder it. If you need time, don't bother.

I don't see a great deal to be done about the government. We don't have the power, money, or cohesiveness to fight them on any meaningful scale. Of more practical concern is the creeping of these attitudes into the P.G.I.I. Safety zealotry, without reason or decency, is a nasty business that plays very poorly indeed to this crowd. We've had enough from Big Brother. It is sad that the role of policeman is so often coveted by the empty and impotent.

During the set-up of the 1991 P.G.I.I. public display in LaCrosse, several of us were pestered by

a mangy little tyrant plodding purposefully about like an orange-bedecked Cotton Mather, threatening us for smoking our cigarettes and drinking our beer, although none were drunk or smoking near live material. Another I.O.O.J. member was *ordered* to wear safety goggles near (not *in*, mind you – just *near*) the Class “C” area by another Orange Entity. The goggles were promptly trod into the dust beneath a bootheel and the matter was settled. Also, it apparently was decided that we were too irresponsible to be trusted with our Class “C” purchases. Of those that bought them, most retrieved them (minus some articles that “disappeared” in storage) at week’s end. I wonder what that did to the Class “C” vendors’ sales.

While I personally disagree with the rulings that have apparently become poorly announced policy regarding P.G.I.I. Convention behavior, I suppose I can understand their origins; an unfortunate sign of the times. If indeed this is P.G.I.I. policy, (i.e. mandatory safety goggles, mandatory halo) instead of the personal initiative of a couple of loose cannons, it would be nice to announce it very openly, so that those of us that can’t live thusly will otherwise convene, as has already begun to happen, and those that do show up won’t be surprised.

If the P.G.I.I.’s trend towards safety fascism continues, some of us will just stay home. Who needs the hassle? Somewhat more likely is that we will stop taking the P.G.I.I. seriously, as it now exists. Those that poured countless hours and dollars (and it has become common knowledge that not everyone was even properly reimbursed for their materials) into the LaCrosse show, will probably bring a string of crackers and a fistful of bottlerockets to Idaho, if they go at all.

It is unfortunate that things have come to this. The P.G.I.I. has grown more quickly than anyone might have guessed, and with that has necessarily grown the need for greater organization, and perhaps to a degree, greater regulation. But to have such regulations enforced in the form of constant interference by abrasive, discourteous orange-vested vermin is a kiss of death for an already-oppressed minority such as American Pyrotechnists. My reading of the situation is that the days of open-ended contributions and efforts are over for many until such a time as the P.G.I.I. takes an accounting of its regulations and enforcement personnel.

It pains me greatly to break away from my happier, lighter penning. I’m looking forward to leaving this political miasma behind and thinking of far brighter things, like fuses and timing devices and what can go oh-so-very-wrong with them. Until then...

EDUARDO TELLERINI

THE MALEVOLENT ARTIFICER

Amicula, delicia, num is sum que mentiar tibi?

– MILANO

Countless volumes have been written about the arts, many of them devoted to the dark or obscene side. In this regard, pyrotechny, the noblest art, has never been sufficiently explored, and so I hope to do.

I intend to write about many pyrotechnic people, devices, and practices, all purely fictional. Any resemblance to real persons, living or (wished) dead, is purely coincidental. The exaggerations in this column are not to be taken seriously; do not build any of these devices, or use these practices.

The writer hopes we all learn something from this column, even if at times some might call it hyperbolic or “mean-spirited.”

I intend to award my “Pyrojerks” certificates in two classes. The first is the “Cedric Adams” award; this is for people who are purely destructive to pyrotechny. The second is the “Robert Mapplethorpe” award – enough said. Now here are your first two Super Special fun things to (not) do – unless you’re really artistic.

S * * * S * * * Litterbug Shell

Take one roll of cheap toilet paper. Ram a 1" thick clay plug centered around a piece of stout match in one end of the core, as when claying-in a fusillading shot. Fill the remaining space with FF blasting powder, leaving about an inch on the other end of the core to plug with more clay. Spike with 12 vertical strings and lift and leader dry (bottom fused). Shoot these *only* at night – they don’t look so good in daylight.

S * * * S * * * Ready Box Mine

(as exhibited at the 1991 P.G.I.I. Convention)

Quivi le brutte Arpie lor nidi fanno

Che cacciar de le Strofade i Troiani

Con tristo annunzio di futuro danno.

Ali hanno late, e colle e visi umani

Piè con artiglie, e pennuto il gran ventre

Fanno lamenti in su li alberi strani.

– DANTE, *Inf.* xiiij, 10-16

Boy, this is real easy. Take a box two feet long, three feet wide, and one foot high. Place an inch of powder uniformly on the bottom. Over this put a perforated sheet of chipboard. Fill the remaining space with stars, comets, firecrackers, jumping jacks, etc. Now glue on the lid.

Through a small hole at the bottom of the box thread a piece of Visco fuse about five feet long. Light and retire. This mine really gets the action started at any show or competition. The crew or competitors are nicely silhouetted for the viewing

crowd. It is especially nice when viewed over water (we think those who saw its debut at the LaCrosse convention will agree).

Well, enough for now.

MILANO GIANSLAVI

IT'S TIME TO CLEAN HOUSE (FROM THE BOTTOM UP)

*When all its work is done, the lie shall rot;
The truth is great and shall prevail,
When none cares whether it prevail or not.*

— COVENTRY PATMORE

*Our mistake is in supposing men better than
they are. They are bad, and will act their character out.*

— FISHER AMES

Reading Bianco Gasolini's thoughts about the unpleasantness within the P.G.I in 1990 thanks to "F(r)iends of the P.G.I" brought up a lot of feelings for me, since I was one of the primary targets of that effort of a libel and whispering campaign. Rather shell-shocked (!) from all of that, I greeted the approach of 1991's convention with anticipatory fear and trepidation, tail between legs, sort of wondering: "What will it be THIS year?" Soon enough I was to have my answer. On May 31, 1991 I received a letter from a friend who is a fellow collector of old fireworks books and pyroephemera. In the past I had sold him a number of books when I was asked to disperse another collection. I also had sold him some of my own duplicate titles, making no secret about the fact that since my wife and I took the plunge and started our own businesses in 1987, times have often been very lean, and sometimes cash has had to be scared up from whatever corner. The recession since last summer hasn't helped matters either.

Anyway, my friend was writing to let me know that he had received a phone call from a very well-known, eminent (if blow-hard) collector and publisher who is also "official A.P.A historian," who called to ask whether he had any books to sell to Mr. Bigwig's "museum." Using a blank where my own name belongs, my friend reported the ensuing conversation verbatim as follows:

A.P.A Blowhard: "So what new books have you gotten?"

Friend: "I bought a 1745 d'Orval and a set of the three Faber books recently."

Blowhard: "Anything new in the works?"

Friend: "I know someone who has [4 books] but he wants \$3,000 and will only sell all four

as a group."

Blowhard: "Who has these, _____ [my name]?"

Friend: "No, it's someone else."

Blowhard: "Have you bought a lot of books from _____?"

Friend: "Not a lot. I bought a couple of books two years ago he was selling for [someone else]."

Blowhard: "Well, if _____ needs money, he should stop using cocaine."

Friend: "You think _____ is on cocaine?!"

Blowhard: "Oh yeah, real bad. *Everyone* knows that!"

Well, my friend wrote me that "thinking I ought to know what the bigwig collector, A.P.A historian, label seller, and publisher was saying about me." Need I add that I was crestfallen and thought, "Well, here we go again - two months before convention time and the shit starts flying." My wife took it much harder, enraged and indignant at the constant false attacks on my character and integrity which for years have emanated from a certain well-known, small group of small-minded but influential men in the Guild who seem to stop at nothing to ruin me or at least my pyrotechnic-related publishing. She grabbed the phone and was in the midst of dialing up Mr. Bigwig (she got his number out of a big AFN ad) until I stopped her and said it would just be grist in "their" mill if she "gave them a piece of her mind." Bear in mind I've never met Mr. Bigwig, much less spoken to him by phone. So he gets a call from so-and-so's pissed-off wife or even me - he'll just deny everything and say "You'll never guess who called me up the other day."

Unbeknownst to me at the time, my wife, still upset, called my father about the matter. He was once an executive in a large oil company and I suppose she felt he would have as much experience as anyone in dealing with "difficult people," and knew I would be too disgusted and embarrassed by the whole matter to seek his legal advice. She later told me dad gave her a "magna est veritas et prævalebit" type pep talk, but he also added, "Well I wonder why that Guild they are all in will tolerate such behavior from its members without its resulting in any censure?" It does seem a fair enough question, especially when it comes to mind that in the past Mr. A.P.A Bigwig Historian disrupted the seminar of a rival at 1990's convention. My question on that: Why wasn't Mr. Bigwig thrown out on his ear at that time for disorderly conduct? I also knew about Mr. Bigwig's large amount of advertising placed with an East Coast pyropublisher who has also carried on a "whispering campaign" about yours truly through the years. I also knew about Bigwig's treatment of a dear West Coast friend who knows a helluva lot

more about “fireworks history,” who was barred from a Western Pyrotechnic Association meeting at Bigwig’s home in a degrading and humiliating fashion, and threatened with police action should he show up! This nonplussed friend told me that upon calling to complain to the president of W.P.A., he was told that “[Mr. Bigwig] is a very important member of our club and it would be hard to do anything since people have traveled great distances to attend the meeting at his house.” Once again, no one dared to censure Mr. Bigwig for his conduct, although in fairness to W.P.A., they did later pass a bylaw covering such situations.

Hearing about Mr. Bigwig getting off scot-free with such reprehensible conduct brought back memories of 1990, when, as the subject of published libels, I had written the P.G.I. officers seeking redress, receiving instead a copy of a letter also sent to the chief “F(r)riend of the P.G.I.” asking us not to make trouble should we attend the convention – I was addressed not as the victim of a libel, but in second person plural with the perpetrator!

It seems to me that the people in the leadership positions of the P.G.I. are abdicating their responsibility to discipline, or at least have guidelines of conduct for disciplining those members of our society who persist in libelous, slanderous, and reprehensible behavior against fellow members. Perhaps also a closer scrutiny of the background and character of applicants for P.G.I. membership would eliminate the need for draconian safety regulations and training, although a certain clique has a vested interest in the *status quo*. Tacit support is appreciated, but I know of few people who will dare to stand up and confront these bastards. There needs to be more than one courageous person who will stand up and say “Enough!” and expose these whispering campaigns, vicious gossip and innuendo – and as of 1990 even “outright libel” – which these individuals pursue for their own private agenda which I suspect involves personal gain and putting what they see as a “competitor” out of commission. Let’s call it what it is.

Considering the way I feel now, I am inclined to complete the current projects in progress and then wash my hands of further involvement, perhaps attempting to find some other society of people who can see to it that those within their ranks act with a modicum of decency and where those who aren’t gentlemen will not be tolerated and will quickly be shown the back door.

In a recent editorial in *Chronicles* magazine, it was stated that change will never come from the top; instead we must “clean house” or nation or whatever from the bottom upwards. Charity and good behavior begin at home. So I think a smaller, close-knit and closely screened group like the I.O.O.J. is uniquely suited for this task of clean-

ing the Augean stables of P.G.I. That you *can* read in the *Case Former* of my recent experiences at the hands of eminent panjandrums in the Guild just proves my point – this story would never see the light of day in the *Bulletin* or for that matter as a letter on the P.G.I. officers’ desks. I think the time has come to acknowledge that this type of sleaziness is a rampant problem in P.G.I., that it touches lives and hurts entire families, perhaps even ruins businesses and livelihoods in the long-run. What David Hall said in 1989 about P.G.I. censorship also applies to these “Whispering Campaigns” – “If it can happen to me, it can happen to you.” In 1989, the chattering cesspoolers had me a member of the Ku Klux Klan; in 1990, I was “capturing and controlling information.” In 1991, I’m to be a drug addict. One wonders what 1992 will hold! How about a cocaine-addicted Kluxer who captures and controls information?

Mr. Bigwig, the irony is that you’re pointing your fat finger at the wrong man on this cocaine canard. And you and your ilk damn well know who rightfully deserves any such accusation: Mr. NFDOC, Mr. ABQ 83 himself, darling and hero of many of the selfsame P.G.I. commidiots who now persist in giving *me* such a hard time! You can bet I got the word out far and wide when I heard about Mr. NFDOC’s cocaine-trafficking indictments last year. Did we hear a *word* of acknowledgment of this news from those who so viciously lashed out at Mr. NFDOC’s detractors in 1982-83? Hell no! Those of us who *did* question NFDOC, the “skimming” of the gate take, and all the rest of the sad sordid story were branded “naysayers” and “troublemakers” for our concern back then. I try to clear my good name of slander now and again I’m branded a “troublemaker.” Such craven behavior from our powerbrokers “who should know better” is beneath contempt. How *soon* they forget – and how *often* they forget!

We can receive mass mailouts mocking concern for freely-voted honoraria, yet never a satisfactory explanation for, say, the \$7,000+ that “disappeared” during a certain treasurer’s term of office. What priorities for muckraking! What selective concern! *Dat veniam corvis, vexat censura columbas*. I must wonder what sort of people will harbor liars and slanderers in their midst while wagging fingers in the faces of innocent men who cry out to defend their good names. These people had better never again tell me to “shut my mouth” and “not make trouble” till they clean up their own stinking trough!

FLAGELLO DEL CALUNNIATORE

LINGUINI TELLERINI

In keeping with the spirit of this publication, I'd like to pass on a recipe for linguini that is actually a synthesis of several preparations that I've encountered and combined. When completed, this recipe yields a linguini in rich, thick, creamy white sauce, heavily accented with garlic and seafood.

First, sauté $\frac{2}{3}$ lb. small to medium shrimp, and the same weight of scallops, in butter and garlic. With a slotted spoon, drain and remove the seafood from the resulting liquid. Do not over-cook the seafood, as this toughens it. Note: Use not a dab, but a *generous dollop* of crushed garlic for the sauté. You can buy the garlic crushed, or crush it yourself with a garlic press. Some people peel the cloves and liquefy them in a blender, but I like to crunch 'em up in my trusty mortar and pestle. It comes out silver that way for some reason, but tastes great.

Next, with the seafood set aside, add a tablespoon of olive oil, and at least another rounded tablespoon of crushed garlic, to the shrimp/scallop/butter broth. In this, sauté $\frac{1}{2}$ cup minced green onions, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup finely broken up cooked bacon, and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup fresh mushrooms. Sauté, stirring constantly, until onions are done. Note: That wasn't a misprint, and I'm not joking - use at least a *rounded tablespoon* of garlic, which is the soul of this recipe, for the second sauté.

Now, take an empty pickle jar, or something with a secure lid, and in it mix three heaping tablespoons of white flour with six or eight ounces of milk or half-and-half. Shake very thoroughly and set aside.

Next, flood sauté pan with one pint half-and-half and $\frac{1}{3}$ cup white wine, and stir in thoroughly.

Bring to medium high and pour in flour/milk mix, a little at a time, stirring constantly until thick. A blend of parmesan and romano cheeses may now be added and stirred in. Not, much, about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup.

Now, add seafood back to sauce and let warm briefly on medium heat, and ladle finished sauce over cooked linguini.

The linguini is best cooked *al dente*, or firm and pleasing to the teeth, in relatively heavily salted water with a splash of olive oil in it. Drain thoroughly. About one pound of linguini, perhaps a bit more, will do for the sauce quantity described. Bon appetit!

Warning: At this point, you have just assembled and ingested a critical mass of garlic, which will yield predictable results; you will stink to high heaven for a day or so, emitting unimaginable stench from all quarters. In the name of decency, don't circulate among those that'll notice, or if you must, offend someone that needs offending. Share a gut-

ter and a bottle of Ripple with a dying wino, or go have a long lunch across a short table with your local B.A.T.F. agent.

Ciao!

- EDUARDO



BARTS

Cælo tonantem credidimus Jovem regnare.

- HORACE, *Od.* III, v, 1.

Remember a backyard game of the '70s called "Jarts," which was short for Javelin Darts? "Barts" are very similar in appearance. Like all fun games, Jarts were eventually banned because the Safety Fakers' Board (SFB could stand for something else) spoke the famous words (all together now) "You *can't* do that, it's too DANGEROUS!" The nanny state triumphed again. However, the game can still be played safely using a little common sense, and is even more amusing with an added pyrotechnic twist.

Since I didn't want the reputation of being a mere fuse-lighter, the Bomb Dart (or "bart" for short) was a perfect solution - a few household items (at least in a pyrotechnist's household), easily assembled, brought it to realization. Needed are a $\frac{3}{4}$ " inside diameter paper tube, a spent 20-bore cartridge, a battery cup primer, the pyrotechnic composition of your choice, chipboard, paper, wood for plugs, and adhesives. The 20-bore cartridge is de-capped and the new primer pressed into place. The plastic or paper portion of the cartridge is cut down to the edge of the brass. The resultant primed brass portion is seated in one end of the paper tube, the rim of the cartridge firmly abutting the edge of the tube. Should it not fit snugly enough, the brass may be built up with a strip of paper. The tube, thus closed on one end, is filled with flash powder - or whatever - and closed on the other end with a wooden or paper plug. Three stabilizing fins are made of chipboard and glued on this, the solidly plugged end of the tube.

Another wooden plug, the size of the tube's outside diameter, is cut for the primed end of the tube, and a hole drilled through the center of it to accommodate a nail that fits snugly in the hole and is a little longer than the plug. This plug is affixed to the end of the tube, using a strip of pasted paper, so that the hole is aligned with the shotshell primer. The "bart" is completed by tying or taping the nail to its side (so it can be safely handled until the moment before "showtime," when it is inserted in the hole of the plug).

When I had completed my first "bart," I carefully put the nail in place and proceeded with its delivery. As the "bart" sailed through the air, gracefully arcing toward the pavement, I said "I think I have become death." BOOM!!! The evidence was gone, and I didn't hang around too long either. No more matches, no more lighter, and no need to cuss about the wind. Although I will not go into any jiggery-pokery details, I will say that it is not a good idea to build one any bigger than the limitations of a safe distance at which it can be thrown. A barricade of some kind is recommended, since we don't know which way the brass case head or the nail ends up going. The barricades I have used so far include a log, a tree stump, a Volvo, a ditch (big enough for a Volvo), and a German Shepherd named Lucky. *Chacun à son goût.*

Other things to try in similar configuration are whistling chasers, smoke bombs, delay stink bombs, thermite, or "H.E." Have fun with "barts" at your next party. In the immortal words: "This was tested, it is effective." ¶

PAUL VERONNE



POLITICALLY INCORRECT FIREWORKS

It is official. *The Case Former* has, as you have read on this issue's front page, been censured for *political incorrectness* in publishing the article "Flaming Justice." Mr. Mountbank Witless leads the politically-correct brigade within the P.G.I.

Political correctness, for those yet blissfully ignorant of it, is one of the more baneful cultural phenomena of the late twentieth century. It is based upon the theory that the civilized world (the politically correct would say, "so called" civilized world") has been evilly dominated by a white, Eurocentric, "phallogentric" (yes, that's the word they use) racist, sexist, conspiracy to victimize everyone who does not belong to its ranks.

The "P.C." brigade now has a considerable following, being essentially comprised of the folk who were burning flags, breaking the windows of R.O.T.C. buildings, and defecating in the filing cabinets of deans' offices back in the 'sixties. These people have come, twenty-some years later, into positions of considerable influence in the word-manipulating professions of academia, journalism, and government.

Now, America has, within most living memory, been a place pretty callous and case-hardened about general insult. This is attributable to the disap-

pearance of such old-time institutions as the duel, tarring-and-feathering, riding out of town on a rail, and the common practice of decent people (as opposed to criminals) going about armed. These were powerful influences in favor of civility. But - while you can feel free to insult anyone not a member of a Certified Victim Group, your speech and writing will be thoroughly vetted, these days, by the "P.C." enforcers; and whatever smidgen of offense a Victim of Society could possibly take, they assure *will* be taken, be it only from an inadvertency, a passing remark, or a glance askance. You will then know such misery as one might have endured upon being accused of heresy in sixteenth-century Madrid or Geneva, or perhaps today if one opened up a pork chop stand in downtown Riyadh.

The writer recalls a celebrated sports broadcaster of his youth who used to exclaim "Holy Moses!" when, during the course of his commentary, something particularly exciting (like a home run or a double play) took place. This continued until a number of Jewish listeners complained to the radio station that this was an inappropriate use of their great prophet's name. Obliging, the sportscaster began to exclaim "Holy cow!" in its place. Were the poor man still alive and working today, how long do you suppose it would be before he was upbraided for being offensive to the Hindus? It will not be long, I predict, before polite persons will have to say that their visit to the bathing beach resulted in an infestation of *chegroes* (or perhaps *parasites of color*).

But let us not grow weary in well-doing! Remember that the American Revolution was a fairly politically incorrect occasion. It was fomented, after all, by country gentlemen (many of whom owned slaves) against a bureaucratic central power that sought to impose higher taxes and more stringent regulations. The Party of Nicey-Nice, good socialists all, might probably have held their noses at an alliance with a monarch like George III, but the promise of higher taxes and more stringent regulations ultimately would have won them over to his side.

So, for your delectation, and the inspiration of our Class "C" importer members, we offer the following proposed firework brand names with which you can celebrate the Fourth in a politically-incorrect manner:

1. Drunken Nigger brand
2. Max Orgasm roman candles
3. D-Cup double cone fountains
4. A Fool and His Money firecrackers
5. Thunderfarce Jackass brand
6. NO P.C. brand
7. Hazardous Waste brand
8. Hiroshima multi-tube display (by the people who brought you Pearl Harbor)

9. Civil Servant firecrackers – they won't work and you can't fire 'em.
10. P.G.I. crackers – twice the price of anything else.
11. Girl of the Month crackers
12. Liberal fireworks – they don't whistle, they just whine a lot and emit a weak pink flame.
13. Burnt Lips cigarette loads
14. P.G.I. Safety Committee crackers – guaranteed *not* to work
15. Radioactive Brand
16. LaCrosse Convention Host crackers – who knows when they will go off – you just keep paying for them.
17. Ma Pimentel's cookies – old favorites we haven't seen in years
18. Chappaquiddick water fireworks – “swimmingly good”

Devising more of these names is easy and good fun. Feel free to submit your suggestions for publication in a future *Case Former*.

Just as I was agonizing over what America was coming to, and why the whiners and the “proctoliberals” (as an eminent physician of my acquaintance calls them) now dictate public opinion; what happened to brilliance, eloquence, and witty invective in public speaking; what happened to common sense; even what happened to the good, old-fashioned dirty joke; along came a breath of fresh air. The above list, I hasten to assure you, is strictly a theoretical one, and Mr. Mountebank Witless can put it in his pipe and smoke it for aught I care. However, in real, living, glossy, four-color printing someone handed me a catalogue of fireworks sold by a Finnish merchant. They were mostly “C” although on one page there was a picture of a fellow dressed like a *mafioso*, with slicked down hair and dark glasses, holding two cylinder shells complete with decorative wrap. But it was on the page next to the items for children's birthday parties that I saw my new favorite item.

It was entitled the *Lust Bombe*. Now, I don't know what this sucker does, but on the outside was a beautiful, scantily-clad Finnish girl in black stockings, black garter belt, and high heels, smiling whimsically at your humble scribe, as if to say, “come buy me, shoot me, use me, big boy. I'm yours, put me on your desk and piss off all those old bitches you work with. I'll really put out for you, erupting again and again...”

There is yet hope for pyrotechny. Just the thing for a little kid's birthday party. I think I'll order a couple of cases today.

PAOLO DA GIRO

MALICE AMONGST THE FUSE-CUTTERS

The LaCrosse 1991 convention was eagerly awaited by your humble scribe – after all, where else can you drink a beer with old friends and shoot and see good fireworks? Unhappily, this was not what I found. The convention might best be summarized by the question, “where was (or were) the...” filling in the balance from the list below:

Prime rib at the banquet? (We got the old Army favorite, “shit on a shingle,” but without the shingle)

Special viewing area for P.G.I. members?

Bleachers or chairs?

Fence on the Friday night display?

24" shell (shot without announcement)?

Main convention headquarters?

64 magnum salutes?

Class “C” *stolen* from the “safe” magazine?

Food at the Afterglow parties?

Cardinal's passport?

Senior statesman of American pyrotechnics, Bob Pimentel?

Ma Pimentel's cookies?

Ground competition?

Honor and decency?

You may guess from all of the above that the LaCrosse Thunderfarce was not the smoothest-run convention I have ever attended. I wonder if the mysteriously scarce chairman was too busy superintending his various schemes/scams to care about the P.G.I.I. convention-goer. A wise man once said never to write a check with your mouth that your ass can't cover. 'Nuff said! Let me add that some of the nicest people I have ever met were LaCrosse citizens; I just wonder why they were not involved with the convention.

What I did find at the convention:

Old friends

The Cosmic Destroyer

A great rocket/ground-bomb string

OOGLE-OOGLE

Brilliant blue stars

The Casino Bar and Lounge, especially Denise Rasmussen, the bartender

Satan Ale

The Cardinal

FUSE-CUTTERS

Yes, the P.G.I.I. has been taken over by the Fuse-Cutters!

Monday night saw the shooting of the first, and hopefully annual, ready-box competition. We as craftsmen would like to propose this as an annual event. It is most illuminating how the safety-fakers scream about being careful and then manage to drop sparks in their ready-boxes. In our twenty years of display operation we have never done this. Perhaps we should be careful and start doing this! One, two, load and fire your ready-boxes!

The safety-fakers then built an amazing new ready-coffin. A large P.G.I. member was found sleeping in it the next day. He said, "well, it's as comfortable as my bed at the Holiday Inn, but the Holiday Inn is cheaper by the night."

Watching the rocket-bomb competition, I noticed a strange occurrence. People were holding lit cigarettes in one hand and rockets in the other. When a nearby safety-faker was informed of this fact, he said, "Ah, hell, this vest don't mean shit, we should all be safe and insane! I won't tell them to stop lighting up." I left, thinking only that at least if one was going to smoke while shooting fireworks, a nice cigar would be far preferable.

That night I sojourned to the gala cheese fête, and watched the Afterglow in full swing. Never had I seen such a collection of safety-fakers and fuse-cutters. The first such I met tried to explain to me how he was going to manufacture Class "C" fireworks "cheaper than the Chinese." He especially wanted to make multi-tube items ("birthday cakes") as he was sure he could make them cheaper, better and faster. I leave to you to assess the level of his practicality and business judgment.

The second worthy tried to explain to me how to string shells. I has mentioned that my fingers were cut up by the Fourth from tying knots. He suggested that I buy a pair of baling gloves and cut off the fingers as they would protect my palms. Of course it would continue to leave my poor cut fingers exposed to the string.

The third one wanted me to tell him the secret code words to say to an old-time firework craftsman, so that he might receive from him all the secrets of the trade and be called brother, friend, and pal. I told him the secret word was *work*. If you work hard enough and long enough, you'll find out what you need. He wandered away in a daze to seek out the quick-fix and Scotch tape boys. I hope they ate him alive on a stick.

During the ensuing week, I met more folk of this character - could something in the water have caused them to change? Even the poor Cardinal, visitor to our shores, was not spared the unceasing ravages of barbarous force. During one day's set-up, an officer approached him, seized a can of beer from his hand, berated him, and poured it out! Now, no explosives were present - why can't someone, working outdoors, without pay, on his vacation, enjoy a beer? Would the beer pourer have tried this on someone larger than himself, or is he just a craven coward? Had he tried it on me, he would had to visit a proctologist to have the can removed from where I placed it.

The capstone to the whole week was put in place the Saturday following the convention. I met the fuse-cutter. It happened like this. I was walking across the park when I saw three people bent over

a box. I asked them what they were doing. "Looking for duds," said one of them. "Find many?" I asked. "Can't tell," he said, then he pointed to his Sky Rocketeers baseball cap and said, "I work with these things, so I know what they are! But, I wonder which ones are live?"

I looked at the mixture of spent and un-ignited go-getters they had picked up, and said, "With these, it's easy. You have a cap on the bottom, and a piece of black match on top, if it's still live." He looked at it confusedly and said, "Which is the top and which is the bottom?" Showing him the go-getter I pointed my finger to demonstrate which was the matched end, and which was the plugged one. "No need to explain," he said, touching his hat, "I'm a member of the Sky Rocketeers."

I began to separate live objects from spent casings. After a while I saw an amazing thing. This great jerk had produced a wire-stripper and was busily cutting off the protruding match from a number of the live go-getters. "What are you doing?" I asked. "Making them safe," he chortled. Never mind that the tube is still full of composition and could be lit at any second. When Mr. Fireworks Expert cut off the match, the device was safe.

I took the box away from him and told him I had a safe place to dispose of them. Many of you may remember them from the bonfire at Shaggy's later that night.

If you are ever at a pyrotechnic gathering and you meet such a combination of arrogance and ignorance, take pity on your fellow I.O.O.J. companions and introduce him as a Champion Fuse-Cutter. This way we will know him for what he is without your having explicitly to identify him as such.

PAOLO DA GIRO



DUE AND TIMELY NOTICE

Those of you who have been companions of the I.O.O.J. and readers of *The Case Former* in the past know that this is an Order in which a good amount of levity may be expected, and precious little is published here that does not contain a dose of humor, or is not (at least) laden with cruel sarcasm. A time comes, however, when it is necessary to be absolutely serious, and this is such a time.

Our advice to those wishing to make fireworks, whether as a hobby or as a business, has always been to *get a federal explosives license*. If the money, space, and time to do all the necessary things

– buy or lease land, build a magazine, fill out forms, pay fees, submit to inspections, and maintain records – are not, for some reason, available, then find a sympathetic licensee who will let you work on his premises and under his license (at least for record-keeping purposes). Recognizing the wide variation in state and local regulatory conditions, we admit that staying completely legal may be vastly more expensive and difficult in some places than in others. Nonetheless, it is about the only way to be sure one will not face some very nasty consequences.

We are aware of various arguments that have been made to the effect that amateurs not making fireworks for sale or trade are not “engaged in the business of... manufacturing... explosive materials” under the meaning of federal law, and accordingly do not need to be licensed. This is a slender reed to lean on, and one we doubt will mean very much when law-enforcement authorities swoop down on your unlicensed firework shop. It will have to be argued in court, and even if you win you will have been through a costly and horrifying experience.

The amateur firework-maker is especially vulnerable to police action and prosecution. Unlike the skilled firework bootlegger, he is not well-financed and well-concealed. Law enforcement officials have the same human nature the rest of us do, and like everyone else they would rather do what is easy and safe than what is risky and difficult. Unlicensed amateur pyrotechnists are fish in a barrel, waiting to be shot. They often take the fall for law enforcement’s failure to detect large bootlegging operations or regulatory violations by legitimate operators who have subsequently had accidents. This writer is familiar with two cases in which unlicensed amateurs, “busted” with exemplary rigor, seemed to bear the brunt of the B.A.T.F.’s frustration at having failed to catch nearby and recent violations of much more significant character. One unlicensed amateur suffered because a substantial M-80 bootlegging business had flourished for years in the same federal judicial district, undetected, until its clandestine factory spectacularly blew up. The B.A.T.F. used this unfortunate amateur to wipe away the egg that had copiously besplattered its face in that case. A group of unlicensed amateurs were raided in Texas, their handful of handmade cylinder shells confiscated and blown up in the desert, and all haled into federal court, within weeks after the celebrated Aerlex explosion in Oklahoma (part of the same federal judicial district). A B.A.T.F. official, summoned to testify before Congress as to how his agency could have let so large an operation as Aerlex be managed unsafely under its regulatory purview, offered in expiation of this alleged “neglect” that, well, his

agents *had* just shut down a “major illegal manufacturing operation” in the same area.

The unlicensed amateur’s case before any court will depend upon subtle distinctions to which, as we’ve said, law enforcement authorities and courts are unlikely to pay much attention. If any doubt remains as to their indifference to these very distinctions, consider an article that just appeared in *The Detonator* (Vol. 19, No. 1, January/February 1992 issue) entitled “Expert Witness Pitfalls.” This article advises bomb squad personnel and prosecutors who may be involved in amateur-fireworks cases how to gloss over these subtleties and *get convictions!* We quote some of this advice:

“...(S)everal potential pitfalls come to mind...Often these problems go unchallenged and do not result in a lost conviction [*sic*]; never the less [*sic*], when the defense is highly motivated and well prepared, these can and do result in inappropriate conviction [*sic*] losses...When you testify, you need to carefully [*sic*] choose the words you use. Too often technical words are used, which help little or not at all, but may on occasion be turned to the advantage of the defense.”

Specific examples follow. Here are a couple of pointers for the successful prosecutor of amateur pyrotechnists:

“Even many of the words and terms which you know very well can get you into trouble. As an example, consider ‘Flash Powder.’ If you declare a pyrotechnic composition as being flash powder, you should be prepared to defend that declaration. Of course, you can offer a credible definition of flash powder; however, a well prepared defense attorney can probably still give you trouble. First he will get you to declare a high degree of certainty in your proclamation regarding the composition being flash powder. (If you do not, you will already have lost, the jury will fault you for declaring it to be flash powder for the prosecution, but admit [*sic*] uncertainty to the defense attorney.) He may then ask you if you are familiar with a few of the most well-known texts on pyrotechnics and fireworks. Then he could hand you a sheet of paper listing perhaps ten ‘well known’ published fireworks formulations and ask you to identify, which, if any, are flash powder formulations. You may think you will do well, but the chances are slim that you will get most correct. There are many strange formulations for flash powder, and today about half of all fireworks formulations contain metal powders, mostly aluminum. To someone unfamiliar with details of fireworks compositions, many that are not flash powder will appear to be so, and vice versa. When you don’t score perfectly, the defense attorney will

encourage the jury to question your ability to identify flash powder formulations with certainty.

"...(D)eclaring the composition to be flash powder, probably benefits the case very little at all. Thus it would be better to identify the material as, for example, a potassium chlorate explosive. In doing that, nothing is lost, and there will not be an opportunity for the defense to challenge your credibility.

"...(E)ven the terms like M-80, M-200, etc. should be avoided in testimony...To the jury, what is an M-80, just a big firecracker? Then what is an M-200, a bigger firecracker? Thus, the jury, guided by the defense attorney, may see the matter as the prosecution asking for a felony conviction for the defendant merely selling a few large firecrackers? The problem is easily avoided by calling such items 'explosive devices.'

"Some of the words and terms to avoid and some suggested alternatives are listed... If the prosecution's case is strong enough and it has been correctly charged, occasional problems resulting from the use of these terms generally will not cause it to be lost. However, when a case has some weaknesses, possibly not yet recognized by the prosecuting attorney or his experts, the case can seriously and needlessly threatened [sic]."

The above excerpts should give the amateur pyrotechnist an idea how his activities will be described in court. His colored star compositions will be described as "potassium chlorate explosives," his handmade aerial shells as "explosive devices." Can't have the defense attorney playing upon the gullible jury's sympathies by describing them as mere "fireworks". If he was allowed to do that, the case might become an "inappropriate convection [sic] loss."

Some of our readers may have guessed already from the style of the above excerpts, complete with reproduced illiteracies (the split infinitive is almost a signature), that the authors of this useful prosecution advice are K.L. and B.J. Kosanke.

The Kosankes, prominent P.G.I. insiders, are among the most significant suppliers of chemicals, paper tubes, fuses and other pyrotechnic sundries to the unlicensed amateur firework makers of America. We shall refrain from any speculation about their motives in publishing advice intended to help those who would, if they could, show "zero tolerance" for hobby pyrotechnics. Just remember that you heard it here first.

Forewarned is forearmed!

ERNST PFANTODT



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