Aunt Jan, Aunt Evelyn, Aunt Toni & Uncle Scott, and My Mom Present...

# THE COBRA'S NOSE

Vol. 30 It's good to want things. 13 July 2001

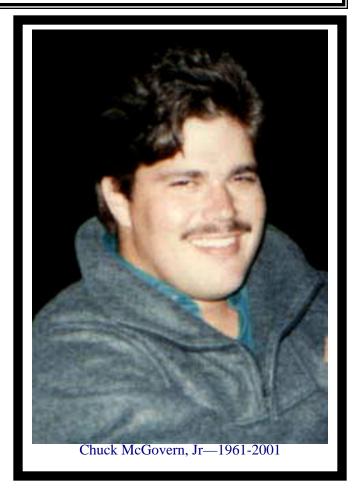
## The Cobra's Notes...

I'm beginning this on the morning of May 31 and I'm pretty sure I won't be done by five, so so much for the May edition. Not that anybody seems to mind. I am shocked and appalled at how little demand there has been for Vol. 30. So I choose to assume you saw, as I did, *With a Friend Like Harry* and didn't want to press your luck.

With a Friend Like Harry, or Harry, or un ami qui vous veut du bien as it is known in it's native tongue, is a French entry in the writer's block genre. Writer's block movies would be horror movies if they had any guts, and I don't mean gore-ific displays so much as the integrity to present terrible things as terrible. In this one, the murders of five people are of less significance to the protagonist Michel than his acquisition of a new SUV and a budding career as a writer, even though the victims included his parents and brother who were, to be fair, obnoxious and dismissive of his work. All told, it's not so much that the hero is in *favor* of homicide (except perhaps that of his number one fan and hit-man-without-portfolio Harry), but it is his satisfaction at the way it ultimately benefits him that distinguishes the movie and would give friends and relatives of frustrated writers pause. If you have seen it and are nervous, go with that and send me encouragement and praise (if not offers to eliminate the nuisances in my life, and I do have a list). If you haven't seen it but are intrigued, let me dissuade you: Harry is a fat, hirsute Frenchman who likes to sit around naked, eating raw eggs and talking about orgasms—a lot.

Even if I don't have a Harry in my life, there are some similarities between Michel and myself. For instance, he has a whiny family to deal with (unlike my own faultlessly stoic family), and as soon as I returned from my vacation in beautiful Fresno (raisin capital of the earth), I was besieged by trainees whining about badges. Some of them breeze past me with haughty unconcern. Being too lofty to speak with me, they rank as my favorites. The next category defiantly string the badges (yes, they are on strings) around their necks so I will know they took them away for the evening. They aren't supposed to do that, but as far as bucking the system goes a man's failure to wear socks to an official BYU event has it beat. Still, the plump men stride past like gladiators, and women like flappers with cigarettes in long holders shrill "hahahaha" over their bold immunity to convention. But the worst by far are those, and they're always men, who make an enormous deal out of taking and especially returning the badges. "I don't want to be punished," they snivel. Well, "punished" is common, but "spanked," "beaten around the head and neck," "shot" (if only) are other favorites, and they all fill me with profound revulsion and the desperate wish that they would market their submission fantasies elsewhere.

Listen. I know there are more important difficulties in the world than the dipwads who flit around my office (don't get me started on The Giggler who has recently insisted on calling me "Shannon"), jerks who when I



ask "may I take your name?" say "yes!" then wait for me to say, "What is your name?" or fleeing "art" films you haven't heard of. **OR** (this just barely happened), callers who query, "Will you be open on the Fourth of July?" and when I say yes, follow up with, "And what day would that be?" But when it comes to complaining, I say, "play to your strengths."

Now a couple of warnings. I short changed a couple of articles due to space restrictions and I apologize for my poor planning. Fresno, for instance, is way more fun than I probably made it sound. Also, I've decided to start calling my brother Patrick "Partick," but haven't totally gotten the hang of it yet so try to be patient with the transition.

Now, here's Vol. 30.

Sharon C. McGovern Editor/ Publisher/ Cobra-in-Chief

# **Broken Hearted Jubilee**

woke up the other morning with "My Brave Face" in my head—the song if not ne metaphorical object, heh, heh. So I found the cd from which it came in 'artick's library, carted it off to work, and was astonished at the reaction it eceived. That album, Flowers in the Dirt, was released in 1989 by Paul IcCartney, and you might think that alone would lend it some respectability, or t least nostalgic approbation. Instead, it was met by my fellow Cosmodemons 7 ith the sort of derision to which you'd think a former Beatle would be immune. 'aul may not be my favorite Beatle (that would be George and you'll want to now it for the pop quiz), but he is undeniably one of the most agile songwriters f the past century. And probably better than anybody else's (I haven't given this xhaustive thought, so let me know if you can think of a better candidate) his ork exemplifies what pop music is all about: love and joy in fleet, catchy ackages. And he does it so well that his forays into classical music seem like When his former colleague John Lennon attacked this ethos, AcCartney blithely replied with perhaps the most reviled song in his oeuvre, Silly Love Songs." The first verse goes:

You'd think that people would have had enough of silly love songs. But I look around me and I see it isn't so. Some people wanna fill the world with silly love songs. And what's wrong with that? I'd like to know, 'cause here I go again I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you

w! Couldn't you just *die*? Thing is, he *believes* this stuff—and what **is** wrong *i*th that? No, seriously.

know the complaints against Paul McCartney. I've made them myself: too weet, too light, way too sentimental, and so, so old fashioned. But listening to *'lowers in the Dirt* for the first time in years, I am persuaded that these criticisms re not so much wrong as stupid, and they melt like sugar on my tongue. His usic is sonic and psychic ice cream, you might not want it as an exclusive diet ut it is uniquely delicious and comforting. And while McCartney needs my ndorsement even less than ice cream does, I would still invite you to listen up nd take a bite. So to speak.

Let's take Flowers in the Dirt. I realize some might not think it the most epresentative McCartney album because a significant portion of it was written rith Declan MacManus, aka Elvis Costello, as were tracks from four of their ubsequent albums. But as with his work with John Lennon, his formation of Vings, and his endless promotion of his photographer wife, Linda, as a musical alent, McCartney has always sought out musical collaborations. The results ave been as varied as those partnerships, with poor Linda bearing the brunt of ome pretty nasty criticism. Costello, on the other hand, had an established areer before he met McCartney, and a sensibility different enough from his to take him an interesting foil.

Compare, for instance, the rivalries described in the McCartney-Michael Jackson The Girl is Mine" in which Jackson finally begs off by quipping "I'm a lover, ot a fighter," (mm-hmm) and the McCartney-Costello "You Want Her Too," where the object of their desire is a heartless manipulator (rather than the lightly onsidered "doggone girl"), and the dialogue cutting:

I've got a better chance than you do I know that you want her too You're such a hopeless romantic She told me you're predictable and nice She only did you a favor once or twice

'redation and paranoia are atypical themes for McCartney, to say the least, and ne anomaly is accented by an introduction that sounds lifted (cont. on page 6)



# My Brave Face

(McCartney, MacManus)

My brave, my brave, my brave face

I've been living in style
Unaccustomed as I am
To the luxury life
I've been hitting the town
And it didn't hit back
I've been doing the rounds
Unaccustomed as I am
To the time on my hands
Now I don't have to tell anybody
When I'm gonna get back

Ever since you went away
I've had the sentimental inclination
Not to change a single thing
As I pull the sheet back on the bed
I want to go bury my head in your pillow

Now that I'm alone again
I can't stop breaking down again
The simplest things set me off again
Take me to that place
Where I can't find my brave face
Where I can't find my brave face
My brave, my brave, my brave face

I've been living a lie
Unaccustomed as I am
To the work of a housewife
I been breaking up dirty dishes
And been throwing them away
Ever since you left I have been trying
to compose a "Baby, would you please
come home" note meant for you
As I clear away another
Untouched TV dinner
from the table I laid for two

Now that I'm alone again
I can't stop breaking down again
The simplest things set me off again
Take me to that place
Where I can't find my brave face
Where I can't find my brave face
My brave, my brave, my brave face



# Raisin Capital of the World

would like to begin this article by announcing a couple of promotions. President Lovezap and Secretary of Treasury Amy re promoting their asses right out of Toastmasters and Cosmodemonic generally. Maestro Toe was elected in Lovezap's lace and shall henceforth be known as President Toe. As you know, he is particular about his titles so you may want to ake a moment to update your files. Also on deck, one faithful Cobra reader (Aureng Zebe), one who faithfully scans the ewsletter for mention of his name (Scholar Lee), and one (John) who pretends to listen while Aureng excerpts from various ditions, all have doctorate degrees pending. In fact, Aureng will be Dr Zebe by the time this gets out so call him that, or else kind gentleman who gave Cobra a taste of Fresno." Nah, that's too long.

Why Fresno?" you may ask. Well, it's the raisin capital of the world, but that's not vhy. I went because that's where the University of California Fresno is, and that's here Dr Zebe and John—partners in life and love, and yeah, I'm gagging a little Do but let's just say it's envy-teach. And let me tell you, I love having university rofessors in my circle however hard they try to get out of it (Scholar Lee, for one, 3 fleeing to Ireland on a post-doctorate research fellowship in the School of Celtic Studies at the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, which I think you'll agree is a nouthful). So I drop in on them between the last days of class and finals, nod my ead sagely when I don't understand the words they use, and go home with a

ctually, this time I arrived with a sore neck because a horrible woman stole my eat on the plane. She was a skinny blond chick going to Fresno but dressed like pilgrim from central Africa with toenails filed into points and painted pink. For ne whole trip she studiously stared out the window, from the window seat, which hould have been mine but she got there first and TOOK it, and clearly felt guilty bout it because she didn't look at me or even forward once while I sat on the visle and tried to pretend that I was not the sort of person who got bent out of hape by these sorts of affronts. So I missed most of the overhead, nighttime iew of Fresno, but saw enough to conclude that it's no dinky, grape growing urg. It sprawls. It's flat, and it's hot. Did you know it was hot? I'd heard, but, eck, I live in Scottsdale, AZ, and I know hot and figured anything in California nat wasn't Death Valley would be a relief. Unfortunately, the drop from 106° to 03° was less refreshing than I had hoped. But it was perfect weather for hiding ndoors, which is one of my favorite pastimes.

he first building to provide me refuge was the Fresno airport, which is a lot like Burbank's, but without the TV stars (I'm way taller than Courtney Cox), and I printed to it after a brief, Jackie O-esque descent down the airplane stairs onto ne tarmac. I don't think much of Jackie O as a person, but my, could she delane! Dr Z was waiting for me even though I was late (I don't know how, but I'm ure it was that lousy seat stealer's fault), and whisked me off to Club red—Fresno's most notorious nightspot. There we saw two bands, one of which vas Monkey to the Monster, but I don't know which one. The second performed a song about tacos called "I Hate Fresno,"



Just Some Tree Hugger? No! He's Dr. Zebe to You

nd suddenly tacos—nature's perfect food—were nudging out oxygen in terms of my basic needs. Immediately. I asked ureng to take me to some, and he did his best, leading me though the lonely streets of Fresno at midnight whilst telling me of the strange scandals and murders (really urban legend sounding ones like the madman with the pitchfork) that regularly ccur in the vicinity, of which the Condit mess is only the latest.

low before I go on, the thing you should know about Dr. Zebe is he's the most personable person I've ever known. Ever ince High School I've been watching people clamor for his attention—which begs the question of how I managed to get any f it, but I'll let that go for now. The point I mean to make is when I report that he delivered me to tacos in the middle of the ight, and listened to, nay encouraged me to opine about movie monsters, you should believe me not so much because my novie monster rap is so engaging (though it's pretty good, try me), but because that's the kind of guy Aureng is. On the ther hand, when I got back and Partick asked me what I did in Fresno and I told him, "Aureng and I watched Evil Dead II, and talked about books and movies so much," he let out a groan, rolled his eyes, and didn't speak to me again for hours.

'artick was also unsuitably impressed with the vintage Burger • • • • Ging Empire Strikes Back glasses I got at Fez Girls in • resno's historic Tower district. (I found Luke Skywalker & 'oda, Darth Vader & Boba Fett, R2-D2 & C3PO, but I'm • Who is Cobra's favorite Beatle? nissing Han Solo & Princess Leia, so if you happen upon one and the price is reasonable, please get it for me—I promise m good for it.) Anyhoo, what I'm going to do (cont on page 5)

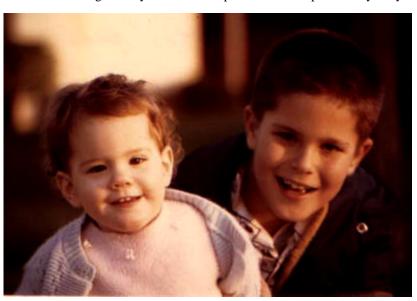
# Cobra Pop Cwiz

(Answer on page five)

ne kids on this page are my older brother Chuck—or Buddy, as he of) was his ability to quote Fox in Socks in its entirety upon demand. ack of old photos after Buddy—Chuck—died a few weeks ago.

as known at the time—and me. The picture was taken in March, Well, he also hummed when he ate, but I don't know that that counts 770. Mom wrote on the back "The two little peas." I didn't as a talent, per se. The thing is, there was nothing about him that member the event or the picture, until I started looking through a would lead you to think he'd take to wearing dresses in his leisure

nuck was the first cash intributor to The Cobra's ose and I want to encourage at sort of behavior. I didn't en ask him. In fact, I didn't en tell him about the wsletter at first because I ought I might want to write out him some day and he ould be awfully thin skinned out that sort of thing. But hen he was in town for our andmother's funeral mebody clued him in so I we him a copy. He read it d gave me ten dollars for amps, which I blew on a bag Rice Krispy M&Ms for m ( they weren't yet



ailable in the town in New exico where he lived) and lunch at IHOP—so he was also part of e first Misappropriation of Cobra Funds. That was after he oke me up to give me the money and I snapped at him for othering me.

mmediately wished I hadn't been so waspish. I wished I treated m better. I wished I liked him better. I would have kept him as y older brother-protector, he was always good at distracting my ster's ire away from me and to himself. They used to have these ic, house shaking battles in our living room in Maine. But when got back from his mission, our family had left Maine and Lauren as away at BYU. We were living in a two bedroom apartment in 10enix, and Chuck took my bed which consigned me to sleeping the floor. I don't recall how I was sucker enough to let that ppen. He was older, bigger, an adult. He had changed his name And between work, school, and om "Buddy" to "Chuck." ngles' Ward activities, he was rarely home. Unless he tripped ver my nest on his way to bed, I usually wasn't aware of him at all.

'e all moved to Mesa, and in terms of real estate, he became Pat's When Chuck ventured out of their room, he was equently wearing a blue skirt (he called it a "lava-lava") with a hite floral pattern and a shell necklace-Laotian dress he had lopted during his mission (to San Diego, not Laos—it's kind of a ng story). At fourteen, I found this behavior mortifying. Now as near the fourth anniversary of my 29th birthday, I wish I had preciated it. Among his siblings, Chuck had the highest regard r convention. He was a good student and devout Mormon. He ot only enjoyed, but willingly participated in football, and even crificed a knee to the sport. His only strange talent (that I knew

few weeks more and two funerals later, I'm still struggling with Okay, okay, I know it wasn't a dress in the Western sense, and mean hat to write. And I need to write something if only because no particular disrespect to any Polynesian readers who may happen

> upon this newsletter. But it was an unusual, even daring thing for him to do, perhaps more so than groundbreaking use of a hair dryer as a McGovern male Not that I think my enlightened response to the lava-lava would have inevitably led Chuck to David Bowie fandom or anything. Indeed, his wife Terry affirmed his favorite song was "Takin' Care of Business" by Bachman-Turner Overdrive.

Yeah, he was mostly square, but benevolently square. (Lauren might dispute that

point as he once made her push the Pinto out of a snow bank while he sat inside it and revved.) We probably would have had more to talk about if his favorite movie were Harold and Maude, but I'll always love him for taking Patrick and me to the best theater in the Valley—the Cine Capri—to see *Top Gun* because he strongly felt we should experience it properly. He would come home and announce he was taking the whole family to Burger King. He taped every episode of every incarnation of Star Trek, and offered use of his library to anybody who might have any interest whatsoever, plus everybody else.

And I think he picked fights mostly to get a conversation going, a practice easier to deal with in theory than in person. Chuck and I had fundamentally different philosophies of dealing with people. He would engage virtually everybody. His kids didn't like him to make any stops on their way to school because he would always dally to chat and make them late. I engage very few people, just on the off chance they might annoy me. Why make waves when you can walk away? In the last e-mail I received from Chuck, he complained about something I had written about him in The Cobra's Nose. I deleted it without replying.

I wish I could mourn my brother in a wholly uncomplicated, unselfish way, but that could only be for the Buddy in the photo—the one l don't remember. My memories of Chuck from the time I started having them to this very moment are tainted with anger, guilt, and regret. I loved my brother, but often wondered how two little peas from the same pod could be so different. Only now do I realize how little that question should have mattered.  $\diamondsuit$ 



Dr. Z & the World's Third Tallest Tree (Which Somehow Sits on His Hand!)

(cont. from page three) is skip most of Saturday, because most of its joys were too subtle for me to adequately express.

Okay, except for one thing: that's the day Aureng's dog ate my shoe. It's not a big deal. I still liked the dog, a black pug (the largest of the toy breeds, according to Dr. Z) named Wilbur. I still wear the shoe. for Pete's sake—but Aureng suffers from baseless guilt even more keenly than I do and I can't resist prodding it from time to time. Besides, later that night, he really got me. We were reminiscing about high school and I felt moved to apologize for my past behavior. I was a geek and a harridan, even worse than I am now. Boy, I sucked. So I said sorry for all that, and he replied, "Every experience in my life made who me who I

am today, and I'm pretty happy with who I am so you only need to apologize if you don't like how I turned out."

I was to impressed with this masterly manipulation of guilt that I didn't even think to feel guilty. I just said, "Wow," and silently resolved to use this move as soon as possible.

Oh oh oh! That was also the night that I met John. He had been away evaluating high school students' essays. Remembering the essays I wrote in high school, I apologized to him as well.

The next day, Sunday, was my favorite because that's when Dr. Z took me to see the giant sequoias. They live about an hour away in the King Canyon National Park, which, counter intuitively, lies to the east; and which was a refreshing change from the flat, hot vineyards and orchards of Fresno.

Considering how big those trees are, they keep remarkably well hidden. At least I didn't see any until we drove right up to the rangers' tollbooth which sits across the inbound lane from a gigantic stump, and just beyond that a mature sequoia. Aureng paid the fee while I gaped at the trees. And they kept taking me by surprise. The only experience I can think to compare it to is Meteor Crater, which is sort of boring except for its enormity. "Will you get a load of that hole?" is about all you can say about it, but you can't stop saying it because it is one *heck* of a hole.

# **Cobra Pop Cwiz Answer**

George Harrison (Please see page two.)

There is more context for the trees, that is to say there are lots of other trees to compare the sequoias to whereas the crater is pretty much just the crater, but that only adds to their strangeness. Unlike their neighboring pines, the sequoias aren't surrounded by baby and juvenile models that look just like the adults—and those just come in two models, huge and extra-huge. Near the parking lot where we stopped, there was a group of five or six of them standing around a brook, looking as if they expected a stegosaurus to stroll through at any time.

And there are signs all over that order you to ponder them. "Ponder this...," they say, or"...as you stand under this majestic plant, ponder the history it has seen...." Stuff like that. And if you think you might need assistance in your pondering you can buy a "Ponder Rock" in the gift shop to help you, but the rocks only have words like "serenity" and "joy" on them instead of something evocative like "big \*\$%#ing tree."

And for vegetation, sequoias (yes, I'm still talking about the sequoias) are positively loveable. That's why I've got a picture of Aureng hugging one a page or two back. I hugged one as well, but I'm trying to suppress the evidence because my ass sticks out about a *yard* in the photo. If you go, and if you feel the impulse to embrace one of them, you should be warned that sequoia bark is thick and sort of fluffy, which is why they have such success surviving fires, and which will likely get splinters in any piece of clothing or length of exposed flesh.

Unfortunately, our tree-gazing was cut short by car troubles. We were going to go to another site in the park, but Aureng's car wouldn't start until it was pushed down a hill by a group of handsome men with tans and foreign accents (how's that for a silver lining?) and he didn't want to risk stopping it again. I would like to go back someday and see more of the park, and hope my smart, buff, well-favored, and gracious hosts will invite me to stay with them again.

The next day, Monday, I got to see the University where Dr. Z works, and was very impressed even if he doesn't collect mail in as many places as Scholar Lee does. It was the day of his Introduction to English Literature class's final, and it was fun to see his students grovel before him when we met them on campus. Later in the afternoon when he administered the test, I stayed at his and John's apartment to enjoy the ac and read the latter's essay "'Is He No Man?' Toward an Appreciation of Male Effeminacy in English Dance History," which was appeared in Vol. 30 of Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture—a hard cover publication. We discussed the essay and other esoteric topics over dinner, and let's just say my neck was really hurting when I went to bed that night.

The next day my adventure drew to a close, and my return to the Valley of the Sun was marked by temperatures that made the Valley of the Raisin seem balmy in comparison, but that was the least of my reasons for missing Fresno right away.

(cont. from page 2) from a carnival calliope, and McCartney's sweet voice and calls are distorted and mocked in MacManus's sneering responses as if by a sonic funhouse mirror.

McCartney: I've loved her oh, so long

MacManus: So why don't you just come out and say it, stupid?

The song has a big showbizzy finale, and provokes the image of the singers taking a bow before a tattered red curtain while trumpets blare. It captures the seediness of a vaudeville performance in a way more purely McCartney homages (like The Beatles "Honey Pie") couldn't. But there is a calculated artificiality to it as well, as if the artists-McCartney in particular because it's his album after all-couldn't take the conceit seriously themselves.

The McCartney-MacManus composition "My Brave Face" describes a different sort of performance. The singer begins by merrily describing his recently acquired bachelor status. Having kicked off the old ball and chain, he sings, "I've been living in style/ Unaccustomed as I am/ To the luxury life." Lyrically, this front lasts for two verses before he admits, "Ever since you went away I've had the sentimental inclination not to change a single thing." The music, however, remains insistently upbeat, hard-selling both the concept of his brave face and its absence so assertively that rather than canceling each other out, his excessive When "My Brave Face" was released, its aggressive protestations undermine them individually.

It's a florid exercise, perhaps amplified (like "You Want Her Too") under the influence of Elvis Costello. After all, Paul McCartney was one of the most notoriously married men in pop music. For all the ink spilled about Linda's infelicitous influence on Paul's career (including the rumor that she was writing "his" songs and that's why his eighties output was so crappy), they had been a devoted and affectionate couple for twenty years when Flowers in the Dirt was released. Still, not even the most tender songs on the album betray a hint of taking her for granted. "Motor of Love," which begins, "I can't get over your love/ No matter how hard life seems" ends, "I won't steal anything from you/ You give me more than enough." The bridge of "This One," a song which rues all the moments The best pop songs occur where glib meets profound, and the singer didn't express his love, asks:

What opportunities did we allow to flow by Feeling like the timing wasn't quite right?



Elvis Costello & Paul McCartney at a tribute to Linda McCartney

What kind of magic might have worked If we had stayed calm Couldn't I have given you a better life?

Even "Silly Love Songs" has a current of defensiveness and compensation.

brightness sounded like a goof-no way were Linda and Paul in trouble. Even the harmonic emphasis McCartney put on the word "housewife" sounded like a pre-emptive appeasement for using a description she might possibly find offensive. But time goes by, and the breeziest of pop songs sometimes pick up baggage that can suddenly hit a listener with the force of a gale; and since Linda McCartney's death a few years ago, it's hard not to associate "My Brave Face" with a profounder separation than a break-up. "She was my girlfriend," McCartney said at her funeral. "I lost my girlfriend."

often comfort whilst inflicting little twinges of heartache. They disarm and fortify, and lightly dancing, take me to that place where I can't find my brave face. \* \* \* \*

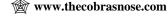
End Nose...Okay, so I took a couple of months off and The Nose is no better for its hiatus (after I let Partick read an early version of it I asked him what he thought, and he nodded as if to say, "Yes, it exists"). The Vol. 31 should be more timely, and, I hope, more...well, lots of good things. For instance, I plan to write about this whack place my sister took me to called The Mayan. Also, the Amazing Amy is in Costa Rica now, and having a better time since, among other things, the airline soaked her bags. "It's too damp here for them to dry," she wrote on Thursday, "so I'm still wearing the clothes that I put on Monday morning. It's a good look for me but I have to keep changing towns each day." I'm hoping she will let me quote more of her e-mail because, let's face it, she's way more interesting than me. So is my marvelous cousin Evelyn,

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Use them.

While I'm on the updates, Aureng Zebe did finish his thesis Men of Mode: Taste, Effeminacy, and Male Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century England, which USA Today calls "Riveting." John also finished his, and it has been called, "About a hundred pages longer than mine" by Dr. Z. We are awaiting better quotes.

who is returning from her trip to Denmark next week, and will, I'm sure, be full of news.

Finally, whilst perusing Google's bylaws trying to figure out why it refuses to acknowledge me, I noticed that they rank sites by the number of links they can find to it. At that time, I believe I was only linked to Partick's site (www.iamtheguvna.com), and Google didn't seem to think much of his either. Long story short, I started seriously sucking up to my fellow webmasters and now have a faint internet presence, detectable so far only by Lycos (good boy, Lycos!). But I'm hopeful. Now, take care, and be nice to your brothers.