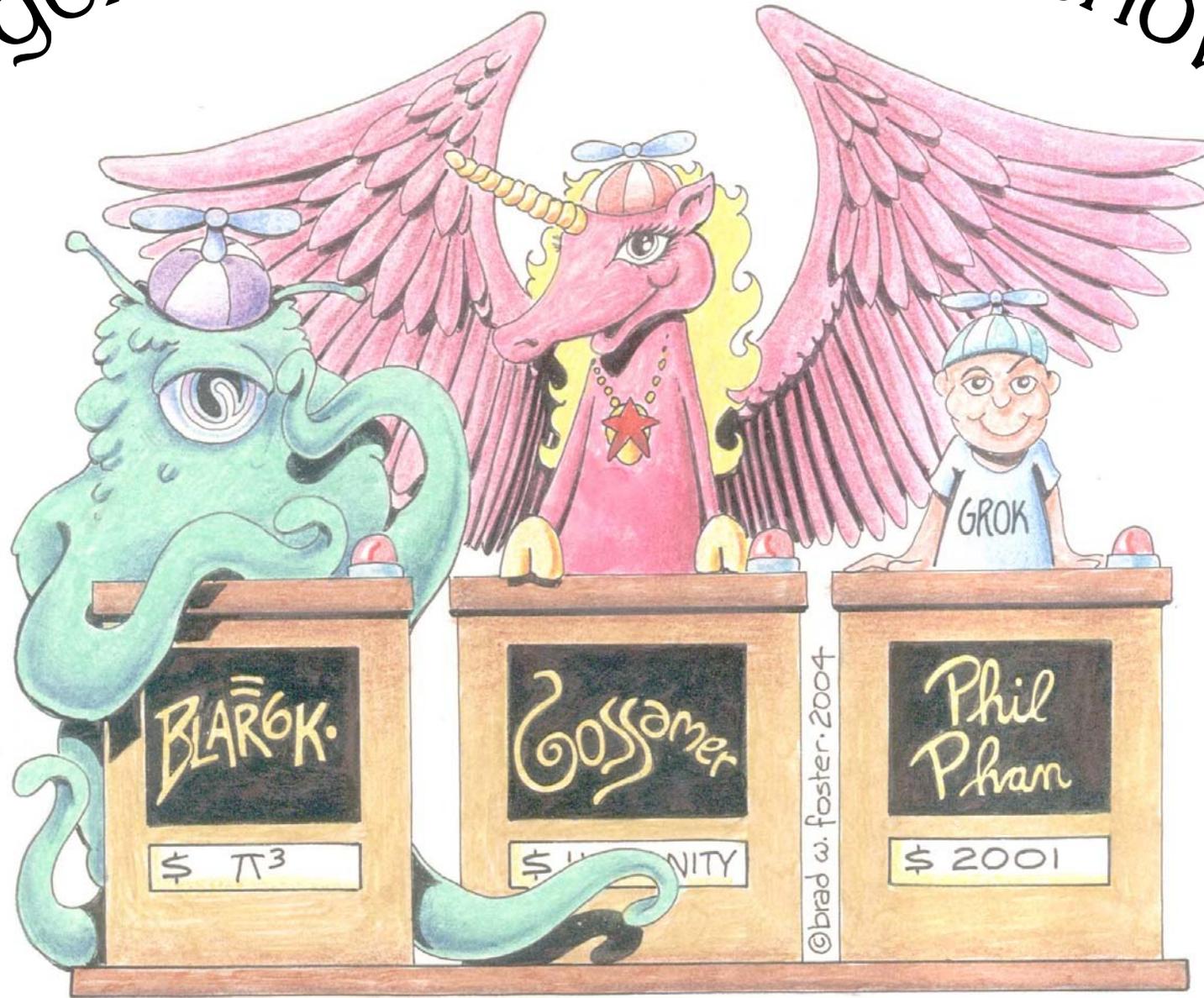


Argentus Guide to Gameshows



Certainly not a complete list, but here are some fans and authors who have appeared on game shows:

The Adventure Game: Pat Silver; **Call My Bluff:** John Boardman; **The Crystal Maze:** Pat Silver; **Escape from Experiment Island:** Roxanne Meida King; **Fifteen to One:** Roger Robinson, John Waggott; **Greed:** Tom Galloway; **Guess What:** Lee Brown; **Jeopardy!:** Abro Cinii, Rick Cook, Janice Gelb, Ruth Judkowitz, Peggy Kennedy, Jack Lechner, Rob Mitchell, Christine Quinones, Joanna Russ, Steven H Silver, Melissa Ann Singer, Lynn Wexler, Faye Wringel; **Mastermind:** Jenny Glover, Ross Smith; **Reach for the Top:** Lee Brown; **Sale of the Century:** Janice Gelb; **University Challenge:** Andrew A. Adams; **Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me:** Perianne Lurie; **The Weakest Link:** Roger Robinson; **Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?:** Rich Horton, Jeffrey Kooistra, Jack Lechner; **Win Ben Stein's Money:** Stephen Goldin, Michael Lowrey

Actress Kari Wuhrer, best known for her role in science fiction fare **Sliders**, spent two years as the host of MTV's **Remote Control**.

Greed	3
Tom Galloway	3
Jeopardy!	29
Steven H Silver	29
Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me.....	55
Perrienne Lurie	55
Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?	57
Rich Horton	57
Who? What? Where?.....	68
Guy Lillian	68

Even though I'm going to press, I'm still hoping to receive a couple more articles by fans who have been on game shows. If anyone who has been on a game show would like to write something up and send it to me, I can arrange to have it added to this 'zine.

ARGENTUS is published once a year by Steven H Silver. All submissions, letters or other correspondence should be directed to him at 707 Sapling Lane., Deerfield, IL 60015-3969 or e-mailed to shsilver@sfsite.com. Issues of *ARGENTUS* are available for \$5.00 or "the usual." The *Argentus* website can be found at <http://www.sfsite.com/~silverag/argentus.html>

Greed

Tom Galloway

My **Greed** appearance aired on November 18, 1999, and the following was written shortly afterward, so bits of it may appear somewhat dated. Particularly the Silicon Valley and stock option references.

For those who didn't see the show, here's a rules summary, as taken off the web.

We'll start in my childhood, when I was a big fan of the original **Jeopardy!** (and I still think Art Fleming was a much better host of it than Alex Trebek) watching it whenever there was a school holiday or I was out sick. Continuing in my various colleges, I was usually active with the College Bowl team, pretty much always in

the top six or so players at that school. Even after finishing school, I'd still help local teams practice or work as a reader/judge at local tournaments.

Also, for the past five years, I've been captaining a team of comic book fans who play

against a team of professional comics writers on comic book trivia at the San Diego Comic Convention, the largest one in the US.

So, I'm clearly a trivia nut, and more importantly, a competitive trivia nut. I've been trying to get on the current version of **Jeopardy!** literally since before it got on the air. I was in Los Angeles over



Labor Day weekend in 1984 for Worldcon, and saw an ad in the LA Times that the show was coming back and they were looking for contestants. I got an appointment, and that was the first of 11 times I've tried out. Score on the written test is 9-2, to the best of my knowledge the second most times anyone has passed it. But I've never gotten a callback. I asked a few times ago if I was doing anything horribly wrong in the mock game/interview portion, and the response was that I was in a bad demographic. White male computer/writer types were way over represented in the contestant pool. I've also tried out once for **Win Ben Stein's Money**, again not getting a callback.

Then came **Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?**; a new game show which has the advantage of no non-knowledge/speed based prescreening at all! Unfortunately, I'm not in one of the 8 or so states that for the first series got to do toll-free calls, so I did limit myself to two calls a day. I still managed to make the semi-final round twice, but only got to play it once.

The first time I made it, the show messed up. They were supposed to call between 12 and 3 Pacific time, so I made sure I was at my desk or had someone watching it for that period. At 3:47, I was in the bathroom when they called, leaving a message saying they'd call back. And, per the

rules, they should've made three attempts. Nope, they never did, and when I got the call for the other semi-final round, they were unable to do anything about it (the show's apparently subcontracted the call making to one of the telemarketing call centers).

On my semi-final round, I think I messed up the button pushing on one answer in my haste, and missed another one for sure due to blanking on pleurisy being lung based.

But, Millionaire did great in the ratings. So, Fox decided it wanted in on this and got in touch with Dick Clark. His production company threw together a game show in a few weeks, resulting in **Greed**. This was put together *very* quickly, in order to beat Millionaire's return to the air.

Someone from LA posted the phone number being advertised for **Greed** tryouts in the LA Times to the Usenet alt.tv.game-shows newsgroup. As I later found out, there was also an ad in the New York Daily News, where people in the NYC metro area could try out by phone.

I thought about it, and realized, based on a report by someone who tried out Monday of that week, that there's only going to be one week of tryouts for the initial contestant pool for the first few one hour long shows. Which'll need 6 people per team, and so will need a fair number of contestants. Doing some math (3 tryouts per day,

10 people passing per tryout, 5 days), I realized there'll only be 150 people in the pool; about the best odds I'll ever have on getting on a show.

And, yes, it might be considered egotistical that I was sure I'd pass their written test. But see the nine J! tryout passes above; it's by far the hardest game show written test out there, not just in my opinion but in others' who've taken it.

I made the call, and set up an appointment for the noon on Friday session. I then arranged with my boss to make up the work I'd miss on Friday on Saturday. Fortunately, there wasn't a pressing deadline, and Silicon Valley tends to be flexible about work hours in the sense of not caring when the work's done, as long as it gets done.

Due to it being only a couple of days away, and no tryouts the next week, I had to pay full fare on Southwest down to beautiful downtown Burbank; about \$90 each way. I got in about 9:00am, got the rental car, and went up to Pasadena to spend the morning. I found some action figures I'd been unable to find in the Bay Area; two Star Trek transporters and a Star Wars Queen in kabuki makeup, so the trip wouldn't be a total loss.

I then drove back to Burbank proper. Dick Clark Productions is in what seems to be a converted basic LA apartment building; couple of stories high, central courtyard with offices off it,

frankly not that upscale. It is, however, right down the street from NBC Studios and the local NBC affiliate, the main Warner Bros. Studios (and for those who watch **Animaniacs**, yes, the water tower really is there and visible from the outside street), and Nickelodeon's LA studios. Oh, yeah, there was this big Walt Disney complex as well. So DCP is nicely located, if a bit low rent in buildings.

I got there about 11:45, and sat outside with the other hopefuls. Looking and listening, you could pretty quickly rule out about a third of the crew from getting on, unless standards were very low. We'd been told to dress casually, but neat, and a fair number were poorly dressed even by my low standards. And some conversation just didn't seem to indicate intellectual quickness.

At a bit after noon, we were all let into a room and told to sit in alternating chairs. We were told a bit about the game, and filled out the standard personal sheet; where do you live, what do you do, do you work or live with someone who works for Fox, Dick Clark Productions, etc. Present were a producer and two contestant coordinators.

Then we were given an answer sheet with 24 spaces and given instructions for how the test would be done. The producer would read out questions, and the coordinators would hold up

placards with possible answers, each answer designated by a number. Some questions would have more than one answer (i.e. "Which of these Presidents were elected after 1982?"), and we should put down as many of the answers as we'd be told to (i.e. the coordinator would hold up three fingers if we should put down three answers, four fingers for four answers, etc.). The final, unusual, rule was that you couldn't scratch out a wrong answer; if an answer was scratched out and replaced, it'd be counted wrong, even if the new answer was right. The explanation was that you couldn't correct yourself on the show...on the other hand, once the show started airing, I saw at least one example of someone doing just that.

After the test, we were all sent back outside while they graded them. We'd been told only the top ten would make the cut. We were called back in, and names read of those who passed. Obviously, I was one of them.

A quick mention of demographics here. Some of you may have heard about the fuss of the vast majority of contestants on **Who Wants to be a Millionaire?** being white males. Sorry to say, but if the producers had done any research, this wouldn't have been a surprise. For whatever reason, if you look at the top **Jeopardy!** players over the years, the composition of the

Tournament of Champions and its winners, the roster of the very best College Bowl and related collegiate academic quiz programs, etc., you'll quickly come to the conclusion from all this empirical evidence that if you go looking for people who are very fast and trivia knowledgeable, you'll end up with a vast majority of them being male. Not that this is necessarily a good or bad thing, but it's how it is, at least these days.

So my group of ten's demographics were nine males and one female. In an odd twist, it also turned out that three of us were UNC-Chapel Hill alumni, one from the 60s, myself from the 80s, and one from the 90s.

They split us into two groups of five, not bothering with the qualifying question. Each group was supposed to be captained by one of the two highest test scorers, with the others in what could've either been random position or by score; we weren't told. I was in the second group, and was supposed to be its captain but the supervising producer, Jeff Mirkin, came in and decided he wanted Lori, our female member, to be captain instead. So I ended up in the 100K spot.

I thought I handled the actual game play fairly well; they seemed to like how I talked out my answers. For the 100K, I verbalized how I

eliminated various possibilities and expressed how confident I was in my answer. For the 200K, a question about sports in the Olympics, I commented that I recalled seeing beach volleyball (which I thought was the most obscure sport up there, and the one most recently added to the Olympics) on television during the last Summer Olympics.

They were still tinkering with the rules, even at this date. At this point, the way the Terminator worked was that if whoever got it didn't challenge anyone, the Terminator was run again on the other players, and whichever one it picked that time had the option of challenging the first player who'd gotten that round's Terminator and that player only.

On the other hand, I didn't think the interview went anywhere near as well. The did Lori as captain first, and it was clear to all of us that she was a lock for the show; female (remember those demographics), reasonably attractive, used to be in the Army now a psych grad student, articulate, etc. In comparison, I didn't come close to equaling her performance, particularly since I didn't feel I really hit it off with Jeff Mirkin, who was doing the interviewing. He's very much the stereotypical New York City wiseguy type, and didn't really share any of my interests or hobbies (well, save for his being a Yankees fan and my

managing to get in late that I liked the Red Sox). Somehow my customizing action figures to be characters who haven't been made yet came up, and he really didn't understand why someone might want to do that. I got a little defensive; nothing ridiculous, but somewhat noticeable.

So I figured this'd end up as yet another tryout where I don't get a callback. Fortunately, this was one time I didn't mind being wrong. Jeff was quoted on the E! Game Show Mania show as saying they were looking for reasonably intelligent people who had something of a "character" vibe to them, so I guess I qualified on that in his opinion.

After finishing up, I just wandered around the Burbank/Pasadena area for a few hours, hitting book stores, treating myself to dinner at a good restaurant, etc.. When I got to the Burbank airport, there was a long line for my return flight. Just before they started boarding, they asked for bump volunteers. I quickly made my way to the gate desk and became the first to volunteer, with the end result being put up for the night at a local Holiday Inn (quite nice; I was surprised they hadn't renamed it to their Crowne Plaza upscale brand), getting a refund on the one-way flight back up to San Jose, and \$200 on a flight voucher. Along with a seat on the first flight out

the next (Saturday) morning. So I ended up pretty much making a small profit on the day.

A week or so later, I got a call on my answering machine saying I needed to call back to Greed that day. One problem; it was on my home machine, and I didn't hear the message until after business hours. I called back and left a message, stressing calling my business number the next morning. Fortunately, the slot was still open and they called back. I talked with my boss, and got permission to take the next day off and make up work on the weekend.

We were supposed to arrive at the studio in Hollywood at 1pm. I was familiar with the area since it's where **Jeopardy!** used to be filmed before they moved to the Sony lot in Culver City a few years back. I'd probably attended three or so tryouts there at KTLA. So I planned to arrive at LAX about 10:30am, which should've left plenty of time to get the rental car, drive there, and grab a quick bite to eat. Except the plane ran late, and there was a long line at the rental car place. Fortunately, traffic was not a problem and I got there about 12:50pm, just enough time to grab some fast food and get to the designated parking lot.

The actual studio turned out to be about a half mile away, and we were shuttled to it in groups of 10 or so. Once we got there, we were escorted

to the contestant mill, as it was called, and our lives were no longer our own. To start with, we had to walk through a metal detector to make sure we had no weapons or cell phones or the like (we had been told not to bring cell phones and pagers). When I dumped my change and the like into the bucket before going through, they were surprised that my stuff included a Swiss Army knife. I was asked "Why are you carrying that?", to which I responded "Um, because I always carry it?". I had to check it for the duration of the day.

The mill was a very large room with long tables. A couple of areas had been screened off as dressing rooms for men and women (we were told to arrive dressed comfortably, bringing several changes of clothing for the set). There were snacks and drinks along one side of the room, and a table where various producers, Standards and Practice types, etc. were sitting. Most of the staff were linked via radio headsets. I asked about getting a book out of my bag to do some last minute studying, and was told that wasn't permitted. There were also various handmade motivational signs up around the walls. If you catch the **Game Show Mania** show on the E! network, there's a shot of the current mill during the **Greed** segment, which is roughly

between 30-45 minutes in. While it was filmed the day I was there, I'm not visible in it.

I quickly spotted three other people from my tryout group, including Lori. I sat down next to one of them, the unfortunately named Mike Wallace (think **60 Minutes**), and chatted with him and the other people sitting in that area. They were calling out names to go to the staff table and get a fairly long release form and other documentation, which had to be read, signed, and then your own documentation of proof of id and Social Security number presented. Eventually, they started going over the rules, which had changed from everyone's tryout. Yep, this was being put together so quickly that rules had changed significantly, particularly for the Terminator, from Monday of tryouts to Friday of tryouts to the actual show debut.

In particular, the way the Terminator now worked was that the challenger was given a 10K bribe to try to terminate someone, win or lose. This was because formerly people were hesitant to use it, since they were risking their share of the money as much as the person they were challenging. They thought the bribe would boost Terminator usage, and they've been right.

Other fine points were covered, such as what would happen at the one million and two million level questions. It was loud and hard to hear,

and I was called away in the middle for my session with the release form. I thought I'd managed to get most of the rules down, but wasn't 100% certain. There was a mock game played with people who'd flown in from New York; apparently an ad had been run in the NY Daily News, and these folks had been qualified via a phone test and interview. So unlike the California contingent, they hadn't actually played a sample game yet.

Then we waited for a while. About every fifteen minutes, a staffer would announce that a bathroom run was being made, and anyone who needed to go was escorted to a bathroom a couple of buildings away, with the staffer staying in the bathroom. Due to the game show scandals of the 50s, networks are pretty paranoid about any hint of collaboration, game fixing, etc.

Finally, they read off 36 names who'd be the first batch. This was out of close to a hundred people there. Fortunately, I was one of 'em. We changed in the makeshift dressing rooms, and then had to be approved of by someone from wardrobe (we'd been told not to wear black, white, or busy patterns). Took a bit to get myself approved; my sport jacket was too busy, and my shirt was considered too wrinkled...so they offered to iron it on the spot. We in Silicon Valley are a simple people, who don't speak this "coat",

“tie” and “iron” language. :-) More seriously, my “formal” outfit is black from head to toe and the aforementioned sport jacket, so I'd actually bought a couple of shirts the night before.

After we got outside, they split us up into two groups of eighteen. Again, I was lucky enough to be in the first group. The second group was taken to a satellite holding bin, while the rest of us were escorted to the stage itself...which was still having final touches being done on it, with “Wet Paint” signs on the podiums and the like. We got a chance to stand and sit at the various positions and get a feel for the layout. This was the only time I saw Dick Clark himself, who was standing in the background watching things. Didn't get a chance to talk to him, but unless he was wearing makeup for some reason, he really does look that young in person.

We were then taken back stage (directly behind the center seats) and put in the bin, a curtained off contestant holding area barely large enough for the eighteen of us plus two contestant coordinators. At this point, we're assigned to three teams and told what order we'll be appearing in. I considered it good that I was on team three; since there was a monitor in the bin, I'd get to see two teams play the game before we got up there and get a feel for actual game play and questions.

Over the next while, we got our name tags (and no, we didn't get to keep them), were miked with small mikes attached to shirts and power packs attached to our belts in back, and got fairly light makeup done; pretty much just face powder (which suited me fine; back during high school drama club I never liked the much heavier makeup used then).

The first team was called out; everyone wished them well. They ended up missing the \$200,000 question, but not before one player challenged the Captain with the Terminator and won, thus getting the \$10K bribe. The second team then went out, leaving just the six of us in the room. We then had to go over what we'd say when Chuck would ask us “What would you do if you won \$2 million?”. It was also decided that I'd say I was from “Silicon Valley, California” rather than my actual town. Similarly, anyone who lived in Los Angeles or the vicinity was asked to use their birth town rather than LA to create the image of geographic diversity. Since most folk know Silicon Valley is in Northern California, it'd sound better than a town which most people probably wouldn't know isn't an LA suburb. It also didn't hurt that being from “Silicon Valley” makes you sound smarter than “Random, California”, and I didn't want to be challenged on the Terminator.

The second team ended up with a guy named Curtis as a captain. We'll be coming back to him later. On their \$100,000 question, they got "How many money squares are there on a **Jeopardy!** board?". My team all knew the answer; 30. However, this guy chooses 35...and Curtis accepts it (I later learned he'd been *on Jeopardy!* so there was no excuse). We all got up, ready to go on since we knew they've just blown it. And yep, they had.

Just before we got on stage, Jeff Mirkin stops us and tells us the bad news; we won't be playing for \$2.15 million (the jackpot went up \$50K for each time it wasn't won) but only for \$2.1 million. Since they wanted to have big winners or big losers on the first show, and since unlike the first team, no one had won any money on a Terminator, they'd decided not to use the tape of the second team and just pretend they never existed. However, they were putting all of them back in the contestant pool. Seemed fair enough to us, so no one had a problem with it.

We walked out and assumed our positions at the initial podiums. I realized that it didn't feel odd or scary to be out there being filmed; I was just waiting for the questions to start. Up came the qualifying question; how much would you pay in rent if in Monopoly you landed on Boardwalk with 2 houses. I thought about it and went with \$800.

Turned out it's only \$600, and two other players went with \$750, so I ended up in the second, 75K question, position.

We easily got the first two questions, then mine came up. Which of these terms is **not** used in golf; birdie, divot, mulligan, eagle, shillelagh. I respond that it's shillelagh, since that's Irish for stick. It's accepted, and things are going well. I was glad to realize that despite the cameras and lights and all, I was still ice calm; no nervousness at all. It probably helped that other contestants felt the studio was uncomfortably cool; I have a weird metabolism such that 58 degrees F is roughly my optimum question, so the lack of heat made me more comfortable rather than less.

Then came the \$100,000 question; Which of these artists holds the record for consecutive years with a single on the Billboard Top 40 charts? Choices were Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra, Elton John, Barbra Streisand, or Billy Joel.

Uh-oh. I was thinking there was only one really obvious wrong answer, Streisand. Maybe knock out Elvis due to his two years in the Army, but I was not sure if songs were released by him during that period. Our 100K guy went with Sinatra, our Captain accepted it...and we're toast. Correct answer was Elton John [as a side

note, looking it up after I got home, Sinatra was the fourth worst answer, then Presley, then Joel].

So we were done...except as we're leaving the stage, Jeff came up and offered us the same deal as the previous team; they don't use the footage, and we're all back in the pool. Thinking this over for a whopping one second, (gee, we can leave with nothing or have another chance at winning something, whatever should we choose?), we all accepted the back to the pool offer.

We were taken back to the contestant mill. At this point, it's almost six o'clock. We don't have any connection to the stage, so we're dependent on Production Associates for the occasional word on what's happening back on the stage.

People are playing cards, sitting around talking, listening to a portable radio playing a baseball playoff game, etc. Some people, including a few from we of the destroyed tape teams, get called out as contestants and taken over to the bin. I wasn't one of them.

We're told that they've ordered pizza for us, but before it can arrive we're told that we're all going over to the stage to be an audience, as a fair number of people in the audience have bailed. By this point it's about 8:45 pm.

Once we all got over there, they played about one question, and then a union mandated dinner

break for the crew cuts in. So we're basically stuck there for a bit over an hour with nothing really to do. The pizza finally arrived and was distributed, but poorly. Each section got all the same kind of pizza; i.e. section one's pizzas were all pepperonis, section two's were all plain, etc. Unfortunately, my section got all veggie garbage pizzas (i.e. every available veggie topping on the pizza). Not one I could eat, so I was glad when a bit later take out chicken was brought in. So I grabbed some of that for my dinner.

At around 10:23, karaoke broke out. The announcer, who was later replaced with the current "deep voice" guy, was desperately trying to keep what was left of the audience "warmed up" for when the show would resume. Somehow, I forget just how, he started taking singing requests. Not a bad voice, but it was mostly old disco songs. This was probably the most surreal moment of the whole experience; I was being forced to hang around as a fake audience (by this point, it was clear that anyone who'd been brought in for audience bodies would not be appearing on the show that was taping), eating take-out chicken, while listening to what amounted to karaoke.

This is where the Los Angeles located readers of this should thank me btw; The reason I'd not contacted anyone about being in the audience

was because the forms said it could go as late as 11 p.m.. Having sat in on the filming of a sitcom once (**Parker Lewis Can't Lose**, which was unusual to sit in because it was not filmed in front of a studio audience. It was one of the first shows to clue into the existence of the Internet and mailing lists, and the producers regularly read the Flamingo Digest mailing list about the show and incorporated some listers' names into the show, named the school newspaper in the show the Flamingo Digest, and had a semi-open invite for listers who visited the LA area to be able to see filming. Very nice experience all around; even got to sit in on a writer's meeting. Main regret is that I didn't want to bother the episode's guest star, since I was aware that he was on a tight schedule, and so turned down a couple of offers to be introduced to Phil Hartman), I could figure how boring most of filming would be when one is restricted to sitting in the audience, not able to move about or talk to people offstage and the like.

Frankly, I couldn't think of anyone in the LA area I *dis*-liked enough to have sit around in an audience for up to seven hours, particularly since there wouldn't be any actual contact with me. As this taping was taking on aspects of the Bataan Death March, I was glad I'd not subjected anyone to it...and after this, I sure wasn't going to

subject someone to the possibility of it repeating during my second taping.

Eventually, the dinner break ended. My group were sent back to our earlier location, basically behind the 50K station. If you have a tape of the 11/4 show, while the audience area is very dark to keep you from realizing that area has a whopping one row of people sitting there, you can actually spot my body pretty easily. I was the only one wearing a light colored shirt, light blue in this case, and it shows up very well in the background although you can't make out my face.

The show continued, until at the end a qualifying question was asked, setting up a five person team to start the next show. Curtis, the J! missing captain, was in this group and ended up in the 100K position this time.

It was now close to midnight. By the time we got shuttled back to the parking lot, it was close to 12:30 am. I drove across town to the Santa Monica youth hostel (cheap rooms, and it's a very nice hostel for the US) and crashed at about 1:15. Or tried to. Some idiot got up at about 4 and shaved, got dressed, etc. with a light on and no real effort to keep quiet. In contrast, when I officially woke up at 5:15, I did as much as possible by touch, or by dragging stuff out to the hall, trying to stay quiet. Needless to say, I

decided that for the next taping, I'd book a later flight back, if only by an hour or so. When I got home, I decided to get a couple of more hours sleep and go to work in the afternoon, making up time later since I figured working when I was awake would be more productive.

Over the next few days I explained to people who knew I'd gone down what had happened. I then got a call that I was invited back for the very next taping, so I made flight arrangements and got permission to take another day off work. I also made sure I watched every bit of the two hours of existing shows, thoroughly understood the rules, memorized as much of the latest People Entertainment Almanac as I could (the categories tended to be pop culture, and I'd noticed one "timeline" question had had to be taken from the PEA), and started planning strategies.

This time, they wanted us to be at the studio at 11a.m.; I figured they'd pushed the tape time back due to how long it took before. Turned out that it was actually the same tape time. What it meant to me was taking a 7:30am flight out of San Jose down to LAX, just in case of any problems at any of the actual flight, rental car, or traffic. Fortunately, there weren't any, so I stopped off at a Beef Bowl a couple of blocks away and had an early lunch.

Same parking lot as last time, but this time they'd moved the show to a set at the actual KTLA lot, rather than one several blocks away. A bit more upscale, and more permanent seeming than before. So as groups of about ten arrived, we were walked over to the new contestant mill.

Pretty much familiar faces; there may have been a few new ones but not many. I successfully got my reading material approved; as I pointed out, there was no way they'd be asking any questions from a draft tech manual about an Internet cache product that wasn't even on the market yet. In general, people just chatted with others. Strategy #1: I did what I hoped was a subtle but clear campaign to demonstrate that I was really smart and not someone you wanted to go up against on the Terminator. The aspect of getting locked out by hitting the buzzer early really worried me about it, so I figured the more people who heard about my passing the J! test multiple times and the like, the better.

After going through a mock game again (during which I asked several rule clarifying questions; see campaign above), they eventually called out seventeen names to go upstairs. Yes, seventeen. This ended up causing some confusion later on. I was the very last name called, which was a relief because everyone

figured they'd have to go through at least three teams on two shows.

Now, as to why there were seventeen; the previous show had ended with the Daniel/Curtis/Melissa/Jackie/James team being selected, eliminating one player in the qualifying question. This time, instead of putting upcoming teams all together in a curtained off area back of the seats, there were six separate dressing rooms. Each team was divided up so that only one member of a team was in any given dressing room. D/C/M/J/J were all numbered one on their separate room rosters, but instead of leaving slot one blank in room six, my room, they'd put down someone from the team that'd follow the D/C/M/J/J team. All the others on her team were listed in the number two slot for each room...except for me, who was to be on team three (again!), but was listed in the two slot. To add to the confusion, they'd not called out the person listed in our three slot. While this all got straightened out, it did cause me to be sent from the dressing room to the cage about three times in error, thinking I was to be on the second team.

The cage was the new next team up holding area, a storage area with walls of floor to ceiling chain fencing that was behind the audience chairs to Chuck's right. More on it later. You can see it right at the very end of the **Greed** segment

on the E! show, and the corridor that John Stewart and Jeff Mirkin are walking down at one point is the corridor with the various green rooms.

The dressing rooms were much nicer than the previous time's facilities; each had a separate bathroom, which people used both for changing and for the intended purpose; no more having to be policed to the bathroom. They also each had a TV with the feed from the set, so we could watch the show while waiting. This turned out to be much more useful than we'd have expected.

Each room also had a resident PA (Production Associate, about the lowest rank on a set. Think "gofer" and you're about right. It is a position people use to break into the industry though), who went out and got drinks and finger food if we asked, and was to monitor us to keep us from leaving the room until told to. Part of the reason for the new set up (other than just having better facilities) was to try to keep team members from finding out much about each other and/or bonding, the latter making it less likely someone would use the Terminator, something Fox obviously wanted to have happen a lot.

First up in room six were myself and Lizzy Evans, who'd end up getting Terminated in the next game. She'd been flown in from New York, and as I learned later from people who watched

the show, but not then, we had some mutual friends there. Eventually, Randy Silver, our missing third person, got called up. Turned out that he was almost ineligible, as by random chance at work at the car lot, he got assigned **Greed** Producer Jeff Mirkin's car lease. Fortunately, they'd not interacted, and he got the lease passed off to a co-worker immediately.

After a while, the show finally started. Lizzy was moved down to the cage, and several times I was taken down as well, then they'd realize that they had seven people and I was odd man out and I'd be taken back upstairs. Fortunately, I didn't miss any of the game since it turned out, for several reasons, to be the most exciting one to date.

At first it seemed like a regular game. They quickly went up to \$200,000, with a category of Movies, and were asked to name which four pictures had won an Oscar for Best Picture. Before the question, Melissa challenged James on the Terminator. For someone who claimed to be a web designer, you have to wonder about James thinking Compaq makes Pentiums. Melissa thus won by default. A later story by someone about being on **Winning Lines** explained this; a lot of unemployed, haven't hit it big yet, actors try out for game shows, and they want them to say they're anything but actors.

Apparently these days, "web designer" is a popular substitute job to use.

The \$500K category was Popular Foods. Uh oh. Survey question almost certainly. One thing I (and others) had noticed from the first couple of shows was that about every other question at the 200K level and up was what we'd call a survey question; instead of being a raw fact that one could reasonably expect to possibly know, the question would be of the form "According to company X, what four Ys sell best". These are impossible to know for sure, particularly when distinguishing between the fourth and fifth most popular. As an example from an earlier show, one survey question was what are the four best-selling Kool-Aid flavors, with possible answers being grape, cherry, orange, lemonade, ice tea, and tropical punch. While ice tea was obviously a wrong answer, I defy anyone to say for sure which of grape, cherry, or orange should be left off. Fortunately, the team used its Freebie to eliminate one wrong answer. And as we'd been told during the briefing, it'd eliminate a non-obvious wrong answer. So it got rid of orange, and they successfully answered the question.

Curtis was shaking his head violently, but the rest wanted to go on, as did Daniel. Melissa got the Terminator again, but decided not to press her luck (and she did already have a double

share plus the guaranteed \$10K from the previous challenge) and doesn't challenge anyone. Fortunately, they got a fairly easy one on the four most popular cheeses, and while Daniel used their freebie, they got it.

Everyone wanted to stop before the \$1 million Dead Celebrities question... except Daniel. At this point, we in my room decided that Daniel was insane. :-) They then went to commercial.

Thing was, they didn't come back from commercial. The sound was quite low, and the camera was focused on where Chuck should've been. To summarize what took about 20-30 minutes, Jackie had a panic attack and even fainted for a moment. It's unclear what the cause was; getting up to that level of money, losing sight of her mother in the audience (it was unclear what happened with that), etc. But it certainly took a while before she felt she could continue, and frankly she looked like she could go at any moment.

In addition to being concerned for her, those of us waiting did have to wonder what would happen if, either in her judgment or the show's, she couldn't continue; toss out everything so far and start from scratch with a new team member, maybe the one eliminated on the toss-up? Treat her like she'd been terminated by everyone and split her share among the remaining three?

Freeze the question stack and continue with the same team on a future taping/show?

Eventually, Jackie felt ready to continue. They restarted taping, Chuck hit the Terminator button...and Curtis gets the choice.

And he chose Jackie.

Who, as she went down to the podium, uttered an audible "How can you do this to me?". Needless to say, he quickly beat her, sending her away with nothing.

In our Green Room, and probably all the others, as well as more when the show aired, there was considerable debate over what Curtis did. One question, which can be quickly cleared up, is why he didn't challenge Daniel, the captain, to stop him from continuing to go on. I don't know for sure, but I suspect two reasons were involved. First, as I found out later but Curtis may already have known, Daniel had been on **Jeopardy!**. So he's not going to be anywhere near a sure bet for even someone like Curtis, who's won big on multiple game shows in the past, to terminate and win. Second, Curtis likely remembered the rules, and per the rules, there was little advantage to removing Daniel at this point. They were committed to trying to answer the \$1,000,000 question anyway. And, after that, each individual player could opt out of going for

the \$2+ million, so it didn't matter if Daniel would want to go on or not.

As for taking out Jackie, well, again it can be looked at in a couple of ways. One can very easily argue that in her state, she's a detriment to the team. If she gets to answer in the million dollar question, it prevents Curtis or Daniel from providing a second answer, and even before her breakdown, I'd rather have the info coming from one of them. It's also the case that, if they get the million, this is about the easiest \$200K possible for Curtis; barring his getting struck by lightning, he was going to win a Terminator against her, and every single person watching knew it.

The other way of looking at it would be that Curtis is a jerk. See my thoughts on the Terminator concept at the end for more on this.

At any rate, the million dollar question went to Melissa/Curtis/Daniel. It's on which four celebrities of the eight listed died before their 30th birthday. Melissa picked the easiest one, Joan of Arc, and essentially disappears after that. Curtis picked James Dean, saying "This is easy money, we've got this one". Daniel then picked Rudolph Valentino. Curtis then started doing everything this side of semaphore and Morse code to indicate that Daniel has chosen incorrectly. Daniel did pick Curtis to give the fourth answer, which was Janis Joplin. Curtis

continued to use everything he can to indicate that there's a problem. Daniel decided to change his answer... the suspense is now to what will he change it to; Buddy Holly, Chris Farley, Lou Gehrig, or Harry Houdini. He changed it to Buddy Holly, and the relief on Curtis' face (and shoulders, and arms, and hands, and chest...) was palpable.

All four were correct, and they're now splitting a million bucks. Will they go on for \$2 million?

And then things ground to a halt on stage again. You could see producers conferring via the feed...and it occurred to us what's going on. The question is, do they have enough material that they can manage to make this a single show, so that the decision for the \$2+M and the actual question can be done the following week...giving Fox a full week to promote it.

They did a couple of short bits; Chuck introducing an "instant replay" for people just tuning in after being called by friends, etc., and wrap it up with saying that this is too big a decision to be made at once, so they'll give them a week to think it over. Um, actually, they got about 15-20 minutes while everyone went and changed clothes. And, yes, the three contestants were kept completely isolated from each other during this period.

Most amusing moment was watching Chuck practice several ways and intonations of saying “2 Million Dollars!”. We decided in our room that we'd pay money to see him say it “Dr. Evil style” from Austin Powers (“Two meeeeeelion dollars!” with his pinky in his mouth).

When the show actually aired on November 11th, the second half padding was pretty bad. The show itself pretty much ended around 9:40pm, with almost 20 minutes, including commercials, of padding. I'm pretty sure they wouldn't repeat this if the situation comes up again, but given the ratings wars and that they didn't have a renewal past the initial six ordered episodes, I can see why they did it this time. Needless to say, people are rapidly revising the odds of appearing; in my room, we figured Lizzy's team would definitely appear, my team was likely, Randy maybe, and probably not anyone else unless teams all bombed out quickly.

For those who didn't watch the beginning of the Nov. 18th, Daniel was, as expected, the only one who went for the 2.2 million, while Curtis and Melissa were more than happy to walk with \$410,000 each. Particularly since the category was “Odors”, meaning another survey question.

This one turned out to be according to a Yale study, which four of these nine odors are most

recognizable. Daniel went with Coffee, Vicks Vaporub, Peanut Butter, and Tuna. The first three were correct, but the last was Chocolate, not Tuna (other choices were Moth Balls, Baby Powder, Cinnamon, and Dry Cat Food). So he went home with nothing. Several people were suggesting to Curtis and Melissa that it'd be really nice if they gave Daniel something from their winnings, since neither would've gone near the \$1 million question without him pulling them there, but I've no idea if anything resulted from such suggestions.

This February, **Greed's** been bringing back big winning contestants for a “Million Dollar Moment”; two former winners play on a single Terminator question for the right to try to answer one question for one million bucks. Since they were teaming people who made the same amount, Curtis and Melissa were brought back and played. To no one's surprise, Curtis beat her easily. And then got an easy, factual question; which of four of these eight TV shows have been made into movies. He quickly got **McHale's Navy, Beverly Hillbillies, Dragnet, and The Brady Bunch** and thus won a million bucks more. In the final one, Daniel and Jackie went up against each other. Daniel easily won, but missed the fourth answer again on another survey style question.

Now, while Curtis is clearly a very smart guy, and not someone I'd feel confident about beating in "Trivial Pursuit" or whatever, he's also been incredibly lucky. Getting the J! question wrong in his first game, the only time to my knowledge when they've let players come back (there've been cases of teams missing the \$100K question on later shows which were shown), was lucky. Getting Daniel, the only captain to go for \$2M, was lucky; Curtis'd been wanting to bail since \$500K. Getting Jackie, the closest to a sure thing on the Terminator. Getting brought back and playing against a player that basically he and Daniel had propped up. Then getting a gimme \$1M question.

A while into the Daniel/Curtis/Melissa game, they brought up the next team. Our room got Brian Noonan, who'd just moved to LA from Chicago, and was a stand-up comic. Due to the length of the D/C/M game, he never even made it into the cage that week, but did end up on the second team the following week and won \$100,000 out of a team total \$500K.

Fortunately, given the close to two hours to tape the D/C/M game, I was in a good room; Lizzy, Randy, and Brian were all nice and interesting people with good senses of humor (as one tended to MST3K the games as they were shown over the monitor).

After Daniel lost, we were then taken down to the cage, this time for me with the right team. We were immediately told that we couldn't talk to each other to prevent bondings and the like; every thing had to be addressed to Thelma, the contestant coordinator. As she said, the poor team before us which had been in the cage for close to two hours now knew her life story forwards, backwards, and sideways.

I looked the group over, and realize I'd not really talked to any of them. One, Sean, who'd end up in the \$50K position, I recognized from a comment Randy had made upstairs in the green room. According to Randy, who'd been on **Win Ben Stein's Money** and made it to the final round against Ben (i.e. not someone you'd want to go up against on the Terminator), Sean was the high scorer on the tryout test in his tryout. He's also activating my nerddar, so I'm quite sure that should the Terminator come up, he's the last person I'd want to challenge.

Thelma then had us go over how we'd answer the ever popular "What would you do with \$2 million?" question. I repeated what I'd used last time; "Well, I'd actually be able to afford to pay off a Silicon Valley mortgage". This was rejected as too many people were mentioning paying off mortgages. I thought for a few minutes, and came up with "Well, I'd probably get a lot of

requests from my Silicon Valley friends to fund startup companies”.

Notice that both were phrased as what I could do or might happen; my truthful answer would've been “Invest it while working for a bit longer to vest my way overwater stock options, then retire for a bit and evaluate life goals”, which I knew would be too boring. A while later, after the show aired, I did come up with the perfect response; “I'd emulate Scrooge McDuck by building a replica of his money bin, filling it with coins and paper money, and then diving through the money like a porpoise, burrow through it like a gopher, and toss it up and let it hit me on the head”.

At the very least, I think the expression on Chuck's face would've been interesting.

The next team got a qualifying question I would've loved to have gotten; What is the total number of Americans sent into space to date? I was sure it was over 200, and probably would've gone with 250, with the correct answer being 243. The highest anyone on this team guessed was 65.

They got up to the \$200,000 level and were asked a question about which four electronics items are in the most US homes; TVs, radios, CD players, VCRs, answering machines, or PCs. The team went with TVs, radios, VCRs, and

answering machines. The captain, Bob, changed answering machines to PCs.

As soon as Bob changed the answer from answering machines to PCs, we were sure we were about to be on. While I personally was somewhat wavering between VCRs and CD players as the correct fourth answer, I knew PCs didn't have that sort of market penetration yet. Yep, they were wrong, and gone.

So we're walked out in the order in which we'll start on the qualifying question. While we were standing there for a few minutes as they did some last minute checks, a producer was talking to Rachel, who was in position five next to me, about what to say about her profession. Turned out her real job was a production associate on **Friends**, her first job out of college at West Virginia University. For those into gossip, the claim is that all the stars on the show are really nice to the peons.

OK, showtime. Did the introduction bit, and Chuck read the qualifying question; “According to a *USA Today* poll, what percentage of newlywed men say they fell in love at first sight?”.

Oops. Nothing factual here. Time to go with strategy. I'd noticed that on all of the survey type questions, the answer was significantly higher than one (or at least me) would think. So, I picked the midpoint (50%) and added ten to it. I

was still too conservative, as the answer was 86 (as someone later suggested, the full text of the question probably was “what percentage of newlywed men, with their brides standing next to them...”). Still was good enough for the first non-captain position. As it turned out, it would've been *much* better for the team had I gotten the captain slot. Rachel was eliminated, but came back on a later show and won \$40K.

If you watch the tape, you'll notice that I stumble slightly on leaving, forgetting just how close the steps were to that position at the end of the podiums.

We went through the early questions. The first three were easy as always; “What product is associated with Mmm Mmm Good?” (Campbell Soup) “What toy was sold to the public in plastic eggs?” (Silly Putty) “Which is the only bird that can fly backwards?” (Hummingbird). The only significant thing here was that Joanna didn't sound completely confident in her hummingbird answer, which to me made her a possible Terminator candidate.

Then comes my turn. Did the standard exchange with Chuck (“Tom.” “Chuck.” “What would you do with two million bucks” “I'd probably end up fielding requests from my friends in Silicon Valley for startup funding”

“Starting new businesses, eh?” “Yep”.) and then I got the question.

“For \$100,000, Which gas gives the Goodyear blimp its lift?”

Two things immediately went through my mind. First was “I so know this one!”. Second was “I am smarter than at least one New Jersey science teacher.”

The reason for the second one was that a couple of nights before, on **Who Wants to be a Millionaire?**, there was a question of what element makes up the majority of Earth's atmosphere, with choices of Oxygen, Hydrogen, Nitrogen, and Carbon. Guy said that he's not really a science person, so he'll call his friend, Tom, who's a science teacher in New Jersey. Tom wasn't sure, but thinks it's either hydrogen or carbon...the two worst choices (if the atmosphere had that much hydrogen, you'd explode whenever you tried to light a fire. And even if you're thinking carbon dioxide is a majority gas, that's still two oxygen atoms for every carbon atom). The contestant then used a 50/50 and both hydrogen and carbon disappeared, prompting Regis to ask “Where does this guy teach?”.

In fairness, the contestant later posted on Usenet that the guy's real expertise was in history, and he'd been a substitute science

teacher in New Jersey once for a couple of months.

Anyway, I knew the answer was helium before any answers come up. So as each wrong answer (“Hydrogen, Oxygen, Nitrogen”) came up, I made a point of shaking my head no, to indicate to the captain how sure I was. When Helium came up, I shook it yes. When the last answer, Ozone, came up, I raised my eyebrows a bit and shook my head no. I then said “I am absolutely positive it's helium”.

We'd been warned not to say things like “I'm absolutely sure” as it might make one appear to be a dork on TV. Frankly, I didn't care; I just wanted the captain to make sure that I *knew* this, and if he changed it, I might actually do something to him in the parking lot. :-). Fortunately, he accepted it.

Then came the \$200K question. Chuck revealed that the category is “Arnold Schwarzenegger movies”. All four of us in the cheap seats were nodding our heads to go on...but our captain decided to stop, surprising all of us. As of February, only one other captain has ever decided to stop after 100K.

Because of this, the two most frequently asked comments/questions of me after the show aired were; 1) “Boy was your captain a wuss” and 2) “What did y'all do to him in the parking lot after

the show?”. Just wait; it's even worse that you know.

Not being sure if they had enough footage to fill out the hour, or enough time to bring out a new team, they kept us on stage for a while. In bits that were taped, but not shown, Chuck first asked each of us individually if we'd have gone on. All of us said yes. I decided to spice up my answer a bit and went “I'd be back” in my best Ahnold imitation. The joke went so far over Chuck's head that NASA may have started tracking it.

They then showed us the 200K question, and had us try to answer it as we would've on the show, “just for the heck of it”. The question was: “Which four of these six films starred Arnold Schwarzenegger?” with the choices being: **The Running Man, Cobra, Twins, Kindergarten Cop, Jingle All The Way, and The Fifth Element.**

We promptly answered the four correct ones (**Cobra** was Stallone, and **Fifth Element** was Willis), with myself wrapping it up with **Jingle All The Way**. And yes, I knew all four. I was amused by getting to pick **Jingle**, since it centers around trying to find a rare action figure at Christmas, something that was considered amusing during my tryout.

Jonathan, the captain, was asked if he'd change any of 'em, and he changed one to **Cobra**. I'm of mixed feelings about whether this would have happened in the actual game; Jonathan later claimed one of the reasons he didn't go on was that he didn't know any Schwarzenegger movies, so why change something he supposed didn't know anything about? Except to try to make us think that had we gone on, we would've lost so he did the right thing. And in the actual game, I'm sure we would've been more animated and delivered commentary; instead of just saying **Jingle All The Way**, I would've said something like "Arnold vs. Sinbad for an action figure; **Jingle All The Way**" to indicate that I knew that movie, and had Jonathan started to indicate a change, taking a lead from Curtis' earlier performance, I would've been doing everything shy of semaphore flags in terms of body language to indicate that he should leave 'em alone.

We were then taken offstage, back to the cage to retrieve our various bags and the like. While there was a team in the cage, they weren't the ones who showed up appearing after us. Apparently, they decided not to use the taped 200K question bit, but then had time left. So at the next taping, the day before my show aired, they put Chuck in the same suit and brought out

a team to be introed, then added that tape to the end of my show. Probably to prevent people from getting to know each other while waiting in the mill, they divvied up the waiting team in the cage onto new teams.

After getting our stuff, we had to sign various releases and receipts for the prize money, and were reminded they had up to four months after air date to get it to us (finally got mine on February 19th. Don't mind much, since I'll have over a year to pay the taxes on it, instead of a couple of months). Daniel, Curtis, and Melissa were still there, but we didn't get a chance to say anything to them.

As it happens, Jonathan, Joanna, and I were escorted out to the parking lot together. Talking with Jonathan, I learned of his claimed lack of knowledge about Arnold, but more importantly that he didn't have anywhere near as good an understanding of the game rules and strategies as I had. He'd initially thought we could all come back on the show; nope, no show ever brings back contestants who appear on air unless a factual error was made or it's a Tournament of Champions type of thing. He'd forgotten that for the 200K, we would've had a freebie, and it would've eliminated the non-obvious wrong answer (I'd have wagered it would've gotten rid

of the older film **Cobra**). So we would've only needed four out of five to win. Etc.

My own strategy, had I been captain, would've been to go through the 200K question; with the freebie available to get it down to 4 of 5, with the 5th likely an obvious wrong answer, the odds seemed good. After that, it'd have depended on the category of the 500K question. If it seemed to be a survey question, I'd have bailed. A factual one, it'd depend on my confidence in the category (they'd had a Bill Gates category at 500K once that the team declined to hear; I'd have loved to know what that one looked like). I might actually have been more willing to go for the \$1M question, since if you got three right, each player had the option of bailing out with a car and \$25K for a \$100K payout. My personal nightmare would've been to have an insane captain who dragged us up to the \$2M question...and the category would be something I'm an expert in. Pure hubris, but I'd almost *have* to go for it.

At this point, I got in the rental car and thought about what to do; it's just after 9p.m., and I'd not really eaten for a while. Despite the disappointment in not getting the \$40K, I had just won \$20K (a bit over \$12K after taxes), and figure it's worth doing a few celebratory things. So, I checked my Zagat's for high quality

restaurants on the Westside (where I'll be staying due to proximity to the airport) and decided on the Santa Monica branch of the Pacific Dining Car; both high quality and open late.

It also felt appropriate somehow; the original PDC has been there for over 50 years, and the branch has what I assume is similar design; an old style steakhouse, leather chairs, very attentive service, very high prices...but, like I wrote, I wanted to do something fun and unusual with a bit of the money. So I had a nice filet mignon and crabcake combination, then went off to a basic hotel to spend the night. I figured I'd upgrade over sharing a room at the hostel, but didn't see any point in spending for a luxury hotel when I'd be asleep for my entire stay.

On the flight up to San Jose, I looked through the *LA Times* I'd bought at the airport, turning to the business section to see how my various stocks had done. I started laughing when I saw how the company I'm currently working for had done the previous day. Its price had dropped just the right amount so that my stock options in the company had declined in value by \$20,000, the exact amount I'd won on Greed that day. So I'd basically broken even! (don't worry; the stock price has tripled in value since) (2002 update: worry; it's since gone down by 98% :-)

That got me thinking about the whole thing, and my main attitude was “bemusement”. Partially due to the breaking even thing. But it was also that I'd answered one, very easy, question and won \$100,000. Admittedly split five ways, but still the amount the winner of the **Jeopardy!** Tournament of Champions gets. And \$20,000 is a very good day on **Jeopardy!**. The value vs. difficulty scale was just completely out of whack. I was also bemused by having won the \$20K, but knowing for sure that we would've won \$40K each had Jonathan gone on. On the other hand, had he gone on, it's unclear if he would've known to have stopped there, rather than take a chance on what'd almost certainly be a survey question at \$500K.

Until the show aired the next week, I tended to annoy people, including my family, who asked me how I did by refusing to say. The most I'd say was that I wasn't unhappy with the result, but that they should note I was still going into work each day.

Wednesday, I sent out the various messages to people I know and mailing lists I'm on. I had to call writer Harlan Ellison though, because he doesn't do email. What I'm about to recount will be much more interesting if you know or know of Harlan, but for those of you who don't, Harlan's very strong in his beliefs.

The conversation went something like this: “Hello?” “Hi Harlan, it's Tom Galloway. Just wanted to let you and Susan know I finally made it onto a game show.” “Which one?” “**Greed**. It's a new...” [interrupting] “Oh, yeah, I've seen it. I want you to do something. If you get the chance to use the Terminator, I want you to say 'I am a kind and decent human being and refuse to use this abomination towards human dignity and my fellow man'” “Um, I've already taped the show.” “Oh.” “But while I can't tell you how I did, I guess I can say I didn't get the opportunity to use the Terminator...” [A few minutes of chitchat follow until the end of the call]

On Friday, after the show aired, I talked to my two nieces who at that point knew what had happened, but hadn't seen the show yet. Together, they did a nice job of keeping me grounded. My eight year old niece was able to answer the blimp gas question correctly (I thought; “Great. I win \$100K on a question an eight year old can answer...and since I was more science oriented than her at her age, I've probably been able to answer it since I was six”). And her three year old sister and I had the following dialog; “Ansley, I won twenty thousand dollars on TV!” “Is that more than fifty cents?” “Yes it is.” “Then you won a *lot* of money!”

The next week I flew cross-country from Silicon Valley to North Carolina. No one recognized me from the show, and so far the only people who didn't know in advance about the appearance and spotted me that I know of were people I know off the net. To date, no one has come up to me in person asking if I was on the show.

As for my feelings at this point, well, I'm currently a bit peeved that **Who Wants to be a Millionaire?** has added a new rule which states that if you appear on a *prime-time* game show, you're ineligible for it until a year after your appearance. Meaning that winning the **Jeopardy!** Tournament of Champions wouldn't disqualify you, but answering one question on **Greed** does. So at this point, I'm ineligible for pretty much every game show until November, unless **Greed** gets really desperate for someone for their "Million Dollar Moment" return bit.

So, going back to Harlan's rant on it, my thoughts about the Terminator. In the context of other game shows, it really comes down to being objectionable only because the contestants are initially set up as a "team". After all, on **Jeopardy!**, only the winning contestant goes away with money, and oftentimes the Final Jeopardy! question amounts to a one question

showdown that determines who's going to be that one person.

However, **Jeopardy!** sets it up so that the three contestants are competing against each other from the start. Thus, competition between them, and there being only one winner, is the same every time, and it's known competition. The only "courtesy" aspect of J! I can think of is that it's traditional for a four time champion leading going into Final J! to only bet enough so that the second place person can tie for a win if they both get the Final J! question right. That way the second place person gets to come back...but the champion doesn't have to face them as one retires after five wins. It's a non-competitive courtesy.

So, the reason people are uncomfortable about the Terminator is due to the team aspect of **Greed**. Problem is, from that viewpoint, it's not really a team. It's not like **Family Feud** or **College Bowl** where a team is pre-assembled and knows each other, and has picked players for their strengths. There's no real consultation with each other, save by facial expression and limited body language. Currently, the show is going to some lengths to prevent bonding or knowledge about one's teammates before going on the air. And the captain, the most important figure by far for the middle of the game, can

come close to being picked at random; see the various survey questions for the determiner, such as the one I got; there's no question in my mind that I'd have been a better captain than



Jonathan.

Because of this, I can understand why people use the Terminator, particularly with the 10K guarantee, and particularly if they aren't captain. It gives them at least some control over their own destiny, and frankly you're not necessarily getting teams where there aren't obvious and significant weak

links towards moving upward. Granted, I'd like it better if the result of the Terminator left the loser with some small amount, or a small percentage of the team's eventual winnings, but I can understand why people use it.

Anyway, to wrap up a very long report, it was a fun experience. At this point, **Greed** would rank third among big money game shows I'd want to get on, with **21** being first (lots of money, no cap on winnings, and one on one competition; also, I wouldn't do the "bring a family member as my Second Chance" bit that everyone seems to be doing; I'd line up a J! five time winner or a nationally ranked trash trivia player from the academic quiz circuit and use 'em, going for two round blowouts), then **Millionaire**, then **Greed**. The two problems with **Greed**, from my personal perspective, are first that the captain has way too much control; it's great if I'm the captain, but too often one's fate is in the hands of someone who isn't as knowledgeable, either about trivia or game rules/strategy. The other problem is the use of the survey questions, which no one can know for sure. Either you get lucky and get one where the answers are obvious, or you're dead if the fourth answer has any sort of twist to it. Still, it was fun, I made some money, and I finally managed to get on a game show. I'm sure I'll be trying out for whatever's left on the air come November, or earlier if any of the new shows don't have previous game show appearance bans.

Jeopardy!

Steven H Silver

For years, people have been telling me that I should try to get on **Jeopardy!** However, living in Chicagoland, it wasn't the easiest thing in the world to audition. Until recently, all **Jeopardy!** tryouts were held in Los Angeles, which would mean flying myself out on the off chance that I would qualify. If I did qualify, I would have to fly out a second time to appear on the show, all at my own expense. Of course, that wouldn't guarantee that I would win anything.

A few years ago, **Jeopardy!** began taping a few shows on the road. In 1999, they announced they would be taping the College Tournament in Rosemont, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago in which I happened to work at the time. As long as they were in the area, they would be holding auditions for the show. My parents jotted down the phone number to call to set up an appointment and I called the number

The number dropped me into voice mail, where I had to provide some demographic information: age, address, job title, etc. I did so and waited for **Jeopardy!** to call back. Actually, I pretty much ignored it, figuring that if they wanted to call me, they would and there was nothing I could do about it at that point.



Then one evening, I was sitting at home with my wife when the phone rang. Elaine picked it up and got a rather strange look on her face. She held to phone out to me

and explained, "It's for you. It's Louis. From the **Jeopardy!** show."

Louis asked me if I was interested in trying out for **Jeopardy!**, a question I thought was rather silly since I wouldn't have called their number if I hadn't wanted to try out. He confirmed the information I had given over the phone on my initial phone call and we set an appointment for April 14, 1999. Louis told me I would receive a confirmation package in the mail.

And I waited.

Meanwhile, my mother had begun filling out forms to enter the family in the raffle to win tickets for the College Tournament tapings. Each entry would be entered in a raffle to win up to four tickets for one of four tapings to be held the weekend prior to my audition. By the time she was finished, she had sent in 35 requests for tickets. Eventually, we received word that we had won four tickets in the raffle. Only one of the requests had been selected.

By the time the taping had rolled around, I still hadn't received a confirmation letter from Louis and I was a little concerned. When we arrived at the taping, I decided that during one of the breaks I would corner one of the **Jeopardy!** people and find out how I could get a confirmation, or if one was actually necessary.

During the first game taped, one of the contestants was a fellow named Stephen, whose family was sitting next to me. I talked to them a little during the show, trying to get some idea about what would be in store for me the following Wednesday. As it happened, Stephen won his game and a camera zoomed in on his mother during the credits. If you look at the left side of the screen, you can see me applauding, although the letter V (for Volvo) was superimposed over

my face. Even if I flubbed the audition, I could be seen on **Jeopardy!**.

On Monday, I called **Jeopardy!** and arranged to have a FAX of my confirmation sent out to me. It arrived on Tuesday, and I'm really glad I made that call.

The Audition

When I had heard that I had a **Jeopardy!** audition, I naturally asked to take the day off of work. I did not tell my boss or co-workers why I needed the time off and they naturally assumed I was interviewing for a job. I figured that if I did poorly at the audition, I wouldn't have to face a few days of questioning afterwards, and if I did well, I could return to work in triumph.

The auditions were held at the Marriott in downtown Chicago. When I arrived, they asked to see our pink confirmation letters. I turned in my glossy confirmation letter on FAX paper and Suzanne, the producer looked at it and asked what had happened to the letter they had sent me. When I explained the situation, she let me in.

The room held about eighty people. We were each given a **Jeopardy!** pen and a couple of pieces of paper. One of the pieces of paper asked for contact information and five things we could discuss with Alex Trebek if we appeared

on the show. The other piece of paper simple had a line for our names and fifty numbered lines where we would be able to write down our answers.

Suzanne and Glenn explained that they would be showing us a videotape with fifty questions, each in its own category. We would have eight seconds to write down each answer before the next question appeared. Answers did not need to be in the form of a question and spelling did not count (a good thing for at least one of the answers). They recommended that if you did not know the answer you just skip it rather than try to come back, a technique which they found caused people to lose their rhythm and do poorly on the test. To pass the audition, you needed to answer thirty-five of the questions correctly.

I've been asked many times if the questions were difficult, and I have to say that although I didn't think they were, I also passed the test. Seventy of the eighty people I took the test with, however, did not pass, so I guess that objectively they could be considered difficult. In any event, I only remember a handful of the questions.

I've also been asked how many I got correct, and the answer is that I really couldn't say. Because there are only two people grading papers and they have to get through eighty of them in about ten minutes, they stop grading a

paper as soon as the person has gotten sixteen questions wrong or thirty-five questions right. It is possible that I only got thirty-five questions right, but I think the total was closer to forty-three.

While waiting for the **Jeopardy!** people to return, we filled out our topics for discussion with Alex and talked. I discovered the woman next to me was an attorney who was taking the test for the third time. Very few people made it into the contestant pool the first time they took the test and even fewer managed to make it on the show.

Suzanne and Glenn returned to the room and called off the names of the qualifiers in random order. As it happened, my group had ten people who passed and I was the tenth name they called.

The ten of us were asked to fill out more paperwork, have our pictures taken, and then it was time to participate in a practice game of **Jeopardy!**. We were divided into groups of three and handed the "lock-out device" or buzzer, which is the bane of so many **Jeopardy!** contestants. We were told that the trial was simply to see how well we could handle the buzzer and work the board to keep the flow of the game moving along. We were not in competition with the other people holding buzzers. In none of the mock-contestants could

answer a question, it would be thrown open to the remaining seven.

After we each had our turns to pretend to play **Jeopardy!**, we went through a small interview, in which we explained who we were, what we did, and what we would do with our winnings if we made it on the show. Eight of the potential panelists explained they would travel, one said he would buy a house in Ireland and become a full time writer (and I was thinking that **Jeopardy!** just does give out that kind of prize money), and I said I would invest the money to pay for my daughter's college education (she was one at the time).

We were told that we all had qualified and would remain eligible for one year. The show would tape its sixteenth season from June to February. If we were selected, we would receive a call (or e-mail or letter) asking us to be in Los Angeles for our taping date. We would have one month to make our arrangements and it would be entirely up to us to pay for the airfare, hotel and any other costs incurred.

I was so happy that I had passed the audition that I wasn't even unduly bothered by the flat tire I had as I drove home.

The Wait

And so I waited. I knew I wouldn't hear from **Jeopardy!** until at least May, and probably later, since they tried to use up people whose eligibility was expiring first. The months past. I left my job and took another. 1999 turned to 2000, and I began to lose hope that I would receive a phone call.

In January, I was at work and decided to check my answering machine. One message asking me if I would be able to fly out to LA to be on **Jeopardy!**. I jotted down the name and phone number and borrowed the cellular phone from Bob, who sits in the cubicle next to mine (and has long distance built into his plan). I called Grant Loud at **Jeopardy!**, but he was away from his desk. I called my wife.

"Elaine, I'm going to be on **Jeopardy!** I'm going to win a million dollars!" I blurted into the phone.

"Wrong show," she said, her voice filled with excitement.

"Okay, but not having to deal with Regis Philbin has got to be worth \$950,000," I pointed out.

That evening, I managed to get in touch with Grant and he invited me out for the show that taped on March 1. He explained that they would tape five shows that day and then go on a four

week hiatus. If I won the last show and it was not my fifth show, I would have to return to LA on March 28 for additional shows.

When I had started my new job, I mentioned to the human resources representative who made me the offer that I would need some time off in 2000. One week in August/September for the Worldcon and possibly one week in the first quarter of the year to appear on **Jeopardy!**. She told me it wouldn't be a problem and I would have to let them know when my **Jeopardy!** show would be on if I made it.

The next day, I was talking to the CIO at a company cocktail party, and he made it clear he had heard about my potential to be on **Jeopardy!** and wanted to know when I would be going out to California. I told him I didn't know. After talking to Grant, I walked into the CIO's office the next morning and explained I finally had an answer to question he had asked me several weeks earlier. He knew exactly what I was talking about. Bob kindly loaned me a videotape of the old Weird Al Yankovich song, "I Lost on **Jeopardy!**"

Over the next couple of weeks, I made reservations for a trip to LA with my wife and daughter. Arranged to stay with an uncle in Yorba Linda and see some high school friends. My parents asked if they could come along and

we said yes. My mother offered to pay our expenses in return for 10% of my winnings. A great deal if I did poorly on the show, but possibly making for an expensive trip if I won more than \$6,000. I declined her offer. My wife became a little nervous about the money we were spending and I told her that I came up with a figure which represented the cost of the trip and the amount of lost wages for both a week in LA and the week at Chicon, and I told her that if I didn't think I could win that much money, I wouldn't be flying the family to LA.

People have asked me how I prepared for **Jeopardy!** and tend to be a bit disappointed with my answer. I began by taping **Jeopardy!** shows to watch, but that only lasted about a week. I didn't read any trivia books, encyclopedias, dictionaries, or anything else. I didn't practice pressing down on a buzzer or a pen. In fact, I tried to ignore the entire situation. I figured that there was really no way of studying for the show. If the information wasn't internalized, it would take too long to access when I was on stage.

The closest I came for preparing was contacting a local bartender. In October, a local bartender had appeared on **Jeopardy!**, winning \$7500 on his first day and a trip to Hong Kong on his second day. I decided to talk to him and see if he had any pointers. His main comment was

that 80% of the game was the buzzer. I also discovered that several other fans and science fiction people have appeared on the show. Janice Gelb was on, as was Rick Cook.

The other question I received, which is apparently the number one question asked of **Jeopardy!** contestants and staff, is whether the show sends out a list of topics to study. They don't. In fact, all I received from **Jeopardy!** prior to the date of taping was an eight-page contract, a personal questionnaire (those topics to discuss with Alex, again) and directions to the Sony Pictures Studio lot. They also recommended an hotel which gave a good rate to **Jeopardy!** contestants.

The day of departure approached. We were flying out of Midway Airport on Sunday, February 27. While we were packing, my mother-in-law from Lexington, Kentucky called. She wanted to wish me good luck and let me know that according to the Thursday issue of the University of Kentucky paper, a student from UK would be flying out to tape an appearance on **Jeopardy!** that week. On Friday, another article appeared stating that the editor of the geological journal would also be flying out to tape an appearance on **Jeopardy!**. I took down their names and, for the first time, became nervous. The faceless,

nameless contestants I knew I would be facing had become potential adversaries.

California Before the Day

Our trip out to California was pretty booked up ahead of time, so I really have a chance to focus on my upcoming **Jeopardy!** appearance. The Saturday before, we attended a wedding. On Sunday, my parents, wife, daughter and I flew out of Midway in Chicago, spending a couple of hours at the Albuquerque airport where we visited with cousins from both my parents' sides of the family. When we arrived at LAX, we rented a car and drove out to my uncle's house in Yorba Linda.

For those who aren't familiar with LA, Yorba Linda is about as far east as you can go and still remain in California, at least, that's the way it seems. The only thing Yorba Linda has to offer, in the way of tourism, is the Richard Nixon Birthplace, Library and Gravesite. This means that whenever you want to do anything, you first have to spend an hour or more in the car getting to the general area to which you wish to go.

On Monday, we took my two-year-old daughter, Robin, to Disneyland. No matter what anyone says, the perfect age to go to Disneyland is in your thirties, assuming you are bringing your

child along and can watch her expression as she tries to deal with the sensory overload, the shock and the pure, unadulterated enjoyment. In the weeks leading up to my trip, I was telling people that I was more looking forward to taking my daughter to Disneyland than I was toward **Jeopardy!**. After my return, I stand by that statement.

On Tuesday, Elaine, Robin and I met some high school friends for lunch at a Mexican restaurant, El Coyote, which, I am assured, is where Sharon Tate ate her last meal. I was not particularly impressed by the food, the service or the history. Our subsequent plans to visit Griffith Park were scuttled when Robin decided (much to her parents' appreciation) that it was time to take a nap. While she slept in the back seat, we drove up into the San Fernando Valley where we had dinner plans with some other friends.

After dinner, we drove back into LA proper and checked into the Radisson Hotel in Culver City. I checked in at the concierge's desk and was told that somebody had already booked a cab over to the studio for 8:00 the next morning and someone else for 8:30. I decided to aim for the 8:00 ride with the option of switching to the later ride.

The Day Dawns

On March first, I awoke at 3:00 in the morning with a splitting sinus headache and the sounds of the elevator running in the hall outside our room. I stumbled to the bathroom and managed to locate an allergy pill, but nothing for the headache. As I lay in bed, wishing I were asleep, I could hear the whirring of the elevators continue. Eventually, I did manage to fall back asleep, but I kept waking up, the headache still there and the elevators still moving.

When I did wake up at 6:45, my headache was miraculously gone. A wake-up call came while I was in the shower and Elaine and Robin wound up joining me for breakfast in the hotel restaurant. I still hadn't decided whether to leave for the studio at 8:00 or 8:30, but as I ate, 8:30 seemed like it would work. I didn't see any point in rushing at the hotel so that I would sit around the gate at Sony for an extra half-hour.

At about 8:15, I wandered over to the concierge's desk to see about getting a cab over to the studio. There were three women standing around and I had a feeling they were also looking for transportation to Sony. I introduced myself and learned that one of the women was Meg Smath, the woman my mother-in-law had seen an article about in the paper the previous week. The other two women were her cheering section.

When I heard her name, I commented that she was from Lexington, KY, immediately explaining how I knew. She later told me that for a split second, she thought “He memorizes phone books, I don’t want to go up against him.”

One of the interesting things about the **Jeopardy!** contestants I would come to meet that day is that none of us felt that we knew everything. In fact, we were all very aware of the limitations of our knowledge. Similarly, we were all positive that our opponents knew everything, or at least more than we did.

We were shortly joined by Kari Elias, an investment banker from New York. Elaine and Robin came by to join us and we chatted for a while, trying to determine if Meg or her companions knew my in-laws (they didn’t, but one of Meg’s companions works in the building next to my mother-in-law’s office). Eventually, the hotel bus arrived and took Meg, her supporters, Kari and me to Sony. When we arrived, there were already four contestants waiting by the gate. Eventually, when we all arrived, we were escorted to the Green Room for our orientation, paperwork and make-up.

The green room is a small room with a coffee set up and pastries in one corner, two bathrooms at the back, a make-up area which leads to a changing room, and a wall of photos of former

Jeopardy! celebrity contestants. Regis Philbin’s picture had been turned conspicuously upside down (he had also done very poorly in his various **Jeopardy!** appearances).

We all hung up our bags and sat at a long table to fill out our contracts and make sure all the information they had was correct and current. We were also asked to think about what we wanted to say when they filmed something they call a “Hometown Howdy.” This is a short promotion which can be run on local television, basically informing people that a local resident will be appearing on **Jeopardy!**

While we filled out our paper work, Jennifer, the make-up artist, began pulling people to have a base coat of make-up put on. Maggie, one of the contestant handlers, tried her best to make everyone feel at ease in the green room. Two of the members of the contestant pool, Ted and Camille, had been potential contestants from the day before and they began to tell us about the returning champion, Jason Parker, who had not yet arrived.

Jason was a graduate student in American history from the University of Florida. He was six-foot-six and very quick on the buzzer. Over his first three days, he averaged \$10,000 in winnings each day. Neither were looking forward to the possibility of facing him and hoped that by

coming in on the first they would be thrown into the pool with the rest of us and gain a reprieve. Everything Ted, Camille and the **Jeopardy!** staff said made it sound like Jason was unbeatable and would rank in the pantheon of five-time **Jeopardy!** winners.

Meanwhile, the rest of the contestants joked in a friendly manner until Suzanne came in and began to explain how the day would work. Despite the fact that everyone in the room had seen **Jeopardy!** on television, it was necessary for Suzanne to cover the rules, explaining that there were two changes from the contract which was sitting in front of us. Although the contract stated that all trips won would originate in Los Angeles, they could now originate from the major airport of the winner's choice. Secondly, the clause about not revealing the outcome of the games only applied to the media. We were allowed to tell our friends, family, enemies, co-workers, etc., if we so desired.

Eventually, we were led onto the stage, where we met John, the stage manager. They showed us how the podiums and buzzers worked and had us run through a practice show. Our instructions were to play the game until we had answered three questions correctly. This would give us a feel for the pace of the game and, more importantly, a feel for the buzzers. The first

group was made up of Ted, Camille and Jason, but Jason was replaced after he buzzed in once. He hardly needed the additional practice. I was in the second group, and Suzanne quickly asked me to refrain from buzzing in. I was having no problem with the buzzer at all.

I felt a few moments of nervousness when I first walked on to the stage. Just as hearing the names of potential competitors had made the whole situation more real on Sunday, actually being on the stage furthered the reality of the situation. However, the nervousness only lasted a few minutes and I was fine.

While we were sitting in the audience being briefed, a woman and a teenage girl came into the studio. Apparently they were the wife and daughter of one of the contestants, Scott. They had managed to get in early and were quickly escorted out.

The audience is divided into two portions. The larger part, taking up about two-thirds of the audience, is for the general audience. These are people who have written for tickets to **Jeopardy!** or been given tickets while looking at the sites of Hollywood. The smaller section is reserved for the contestants, their guests and guests of Sony, **Jeopardy!** or similar organizations. A wall divides the two parts of the audience from each

other. The majority of audience shots are taken on the larger side.

We were escorted back to the green room for a final make-up touch up. At about this time, Suzanne informed us that the shows we would be taping would not air until the week of June 12. Although contestant order was determined at random, I asked if it would be possible for me to appear in the third show, which would air on June 14, my anniversary. Suzanne responded that if I were selected for one of the first two shows, I would have to earn my way to the third show and there was no way they could simply put me on that show. I joking said, "Then I'll just have to beat Jason."

Sitting in the Audience

Grant announced that Jason would face off against Ted Miller and Camille Brovold, the two contestants left over from the day before. The three of them were sent to Jennifer to receive touch-ups on their make-up.

They shepherded the remaining ten future contestants into the audience, which was already full. I sat on the aisle of the first row. Across the aisle from me was a woman I had never seen, my parents, wife and cousin. We had been warned not to communicate with our guests since it could result in our disqualification. Our

guests had been warned even more harshly that even waving to us could result in our disqualification. I later found out that the woman on the end of the aisle was Jason's mother.

Jason completely dominated the first game. The single-day record for winnings on **Jeopardy!** is \$34,000. Although Jason could have set a new record, he chose to bet conservatively in Final Jeopardy . Nevertheless, he finished the game with \$28,000, the fourth highest single-day total, which set his four day winnings at close to \$60,000. The contestants in the audience looked at each other and it was clear we were all thinking that we didn't want to go up against Jason in his fifth game.

Grant walked over to the front of the audience and announced the sacrificial lambs (although he politely called them challengers) for the second game. The first name was Kari, who had been on the bus over to the studio with me. I was the second name he called off. We rose from our seats and went to get our makeup touched up in the Green Room. The other contestants were led off after us.

I later learned that when my wife and mother realized I would be facing Jason, their hearts sank. Jason had demonstrated that he was a power house player, not only knowing the categories, but quite competent with the buzzer.

They figured we had traveled all this way only to have me go up against the invincible. With a mother's optimism, my mom tried to reflect that there was no reason to think I couldn't beat Jason, but her hope seems to have been half-hearted at best. I know that my goal at that point was simply to enjoy my half hour on **Jeopardy!** and to do the best I could. Perhaps second prize would be a trip somewhere nice.

Grant held out two slips of paper in his hand, asking Kari and me to each pick one to determine which podium we would stand behind. Each selecting the paper closest to us, I wound up on podium two, next to Jason.

Against Goliath

Before I knew it, our game was underway. I'm afraid I can't really give too many details, mostly because the game is something of a blur. I'm looking forward to seeing it when it airs because I couldn't tell you what the categories, answers, or questions were. I do know that Jason proved amazingly adept at finding "daily doubles." Fortunately, I seemed to be a match for him when it came to handling the buzzer. During the first round of **Jeopardy!**, the lead went back and forth between us several times.

Jeopardy! is filmed in real time. When the show goes to a commercial break, the

contestants stand around on the set, talking to each other or to the crew. Jennifer rushes onto the stage to touch up make-up as needed and a stagehand brings a tray with water cups for the contestants. During the first commercial break, I told Jason he should focus on deciding which car he would choose when he won the game (Five time winners receive their choice of four cars in addition to their cash).

When we came back from the first commercial, Alex Trebek began his interviews. We had to supply the **Jeopardy!** staff with several topics which Alex could discuss with us ahead of time. Before the show, Grant came up to us and showed us the note card Alex would receive. Each had our name, hometown, job description and three topics of conversation. Grant had highlighted the first topic, and confirmed it with me, noting that Alex occasionally deviated from the cards.

He did not deviate, but asked me about the Sidewise Award. I explained what the award was and gave a brief description of what alternate history was. Alex then surprised me by asking for an example. Our contracts specifically prohibited us from promoting products unless in response to one of Alex's questions. Of the four winners so far, the most typical alternate history was probably Harry Turtledove's *How Few*

Remain (1998), so that is the one I mentioned. During the next commercial break, one of the contestants and three of the crew members asked me for the name of the book and author again.

Going into Final Jeopardy , I found myself in second place in a game which was reasonably close. I felt comfortable with the category, but merely bet enough that I would ensure myself a second place finish if all three of us answered the questions correctly.

The category was “Famous Scientists,” and the answer was: “Upon his death in 1727, he left several manuscripts on the occult.” I quickly wrote down “Who was Isaac Newton.” Kari also got the answer correct and it was just a matter of waiting to see how much Jason won by.

When Jason answer was revealed, “Who was Francis Bacon?” and I realized I had won, an expression of shock came over my face. I can only hope the camera was on me to pick it up. Although I knew I had won, when Alex came up to me and said, “Congratulations giant killer,” it took me a moment to figure out what he was talking about. I won \$7,400. Interestingly, as the second game began, I realized I had no idea how much I had won.

Defending My Own

I was hurried off stage to change clothes. When I came out, I learned that I would be facing Mary Friedman and Allen Tatman. The game played out similarly to the first in many ways, although I had a slight advantage since I was the returning champion.

During the interviews, Alex was supposed to ask me about a mock historical paper I presented several years ago about the Bubonic Plaque. The idea for the paper came from the frequent typographical errors on the word plague. Unfortunately, Alex referred to it as the Bubonic Plague, driving home our point, but requiring me to explain it.

During this (and the other two games), there were points when the judges stopped the game to double check on answers. When this was done, the contestants were made to turn their backs to the game board and talk to each other and the handlers. In at least one instance, a call which had initially gone against me was reversed, although at a later point, I lost points because the judges didn’t like my pronunciation of Chaillot.

Going into Final Jeopardy , I was again in second place. The second place prize was a trip to Hawaii, where Elaine and I had gone on our honeymoon. Since this show would air on our

anniversary, I figured I had just received a sign that I would finish in second place.

This time, the category was “Airport Codes.” I felt reasonably confident, but wagered with the same philosophy as in the first game. The answer was: This airport gets its three letter designation from its former name, Orchard Place.

The answer was tailored to me, but I almost got the answer wrong. I began writing the answer down and thought about the advice Grant gave us going in to Final Jeopardy : “Even if this is the Final Jeopardy question you’ve waited your whole life for, think about it carefully.” I re-read the question and realized I was giving an answer different from the one they were looking for. I had started to write down What is ORD and realized that they were looking for the name, O’Hare, rather than the designation.

I was the only one who answered the question correctly. As Alex walked over to see what our answers were, he commented that one of us had probably flown out of this airport to come to California (actually, I flew out of Midway).

Allen, who was in first place going into Final Jeopardy wanted to know who I had bribed to get the questions we got. I ended this game with an addition \$7,601.

Lunch

After my second show (the third of the day), we got a lunch break. While my family went off site to have their own lunch, I was escorted, along with the six remaining contestants to the studio commissary. While the rest of the contestants generally had their own handlers, I, at this point, had one of my own. They aren’t trying to segregate the champion from the others, although it does have this effect, it is just that there are things the champion has to do, for instance change clothes, which the other contestants do not take part in.

I wound up eating with the other contestants and talking a little about what it is like being up on the stage and actually playing the game. A few joked about slipping a mickey into my drink when I got up in the same manner we had joked about slamming Jason’s thumb in the door frame before his games. We didn’t damage Jason’s thumbs and, as far as I know, my drink remained unadulterated.

The Outcome

After lunch, it was announced that I would be going up against Scott and Meg. We took our positions behind the podiums and began the game. Within a few questions, I had a feeling

that I was not going to go any further, although I did well enough in the first round.

I had been told that Alex would probably ask me about the time I was stopped in front of the KGB Building in Moscow, but instead he chose to ask me about my job. We continued the game and Meg gave me a run for my money, although Scott couldn't seem to get his buzzer to function. During the break between rounds, they checked his buzzer and declared it functional, a fact he proved in Double Jeopardy .

During Double Jeopardy , we had another break to check on an answer. Once they were ready to continued, they played the tape back several times trying to find an appropriate starting place. Unfortunately, that meant that I got to hear Alex informing me that I had given a wrong answer about ten times. According to my mother, that is when my concentration went.

Before Final Jeopardy, Grant gives the contestants some advice. In addition to the advice mentioned above, he explains that there is a blue card in case your pen stops writing, although this has never happened. They also give the contestants paper so they can figure out their wagers. Once the wager is placed, it is locked out so it can't be changed and a stage hand copies the amount down onto a note pad. The question field is then opened and the

contestants are told to write either "Who" or "What" on their screen, depending on what the question should be, as a reminder that they need to answer in the form of a question. If a word is illegible or misspelled, the judges will decide whether or not to accept the answer.

Going into Final Jeopardy, I was in third place. The category was a nightmare category, "The Supreme Court," which could mean anything from John Jay to Clarence Thomas. I figured that if I made only a token bet and got it wrong, I wouldn't be much worse off. I also figured that at least one of my opponents would get the question wrong and I could wind up in second place, which is what wound up happening. What I couldn't know was that if I had wagered as little as \$801, I would have won the game.

The answer was: These two supreme court justices, who finished first in their class, were originally offered positions as typists for the court.

Unfortunately, by applying a little logic to the answer, the question becomes apparent, Who are Sandra Day O'Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsberg, the only women on the court.

My \$10 bet was not enough to move me past Meg, who bet nothing and also got it right. Scott, however, drew a blank and wagered enough that

I came in second and won an HDTV, satellite dish and a year's subscription to DirectTV.

Although I received a bag with a copy of the **Jeopardy!** CD-Rom (which I already had) and the **Jeopardy!** Hand-held game (which isn't a great design), I wouldn't receive any of the prize money (\$15,001) or the second place prize until about 120 days after the show aired. I would receive a photograph of Alex Trebek and me, however. Also, before the prizes were sent, I would receive a tax bill for the television and the taxes would be deducted from my cash winnings.

People have asked how I intend to spend the money. This is a topic of debate in the house. I would like to do what I had originally said and put it into a college fund for my daughter. My wife is interested in using it to increase the down-payment on a house when we buy a new house sometime in the next couple of years. As of now, the debate still rages.

Aftermath

After the end of the fourth show, we left the studio to retrieve my daughter from the college friend who was watching her and go out to dinner. We had to stop at the hotel to pick up our rental car after dinner, and when we did so, I picked up the house phone to call Meg, who had beaten me in the third game to see how she did

in subsequent games. While on the phone, Allen, who I overcame in the second game, approached to say "Hi," as did a contestant who had taped his shows on Monday, but was sticking around. On my way out of the hotel, I bumped into Camille, who had lost to Jason in the first game. She had heard that I had beaten Jason and was wondering how I had done in subsequent games.

Overall, the experience was quite good. In the weeks since my trip to California, I've been in e-mail contact with Meg, and she has had lunch with my mother-in-law. I've also e-mailed Doug Souleyrette, a student from the University of Kentucky who taped his show the day before I did and was one of Jason's victims. I'm looking forward to seeing the shows, because I have no idea how I came across and can't even remember many of the categories, let alone the specific questions (with a few exceptions of questions I either got wrong or didn't answer).

The weekend before the air date, I was at a meeting and found that the one thing people wanted to ask me about was. . . Jason, ironically the one person who I feel I didn't get to know at all. My family, however, did sit next to his wife and mother during the tapings and were able to tell me that he seems to be a really nice guy.

During my second show, Kari went back into the audience and sat next to my family and, I'm told, also had good things to say about me and the experience of playing on **Jeopardy!**.

The Wait, Again

From March 1 to June 13 is just over one hundred days. When you are waiting to see yourself on a show like **Jeopardy!**, it feels even longer than it is.

When I returned to Chicago, of course, everyone wanted to know how I did. Initially, I was not going to tell anyone, but I quickly realized that most people didn't really want to be left in suspense. The course I eventually settled on was to not make any statements about how I did in a public forum, but to let people know how I did on an individual basis. Naturally, I wouldn't say how I did to anyone who could be considered a member of the press. This resulted in a strange mixture. For instance, I was at a meeting on Friday, June 9 where some people knew the outcome of the game and some people did not (and didn't want to). I was careful to remind the people who knew not to say anything that would give the outcome away.

As soon as I returned to Chicago, however, I did let a wide variety of friends know when my first show would be aired. I carefully decided that

the notice in my e-mail .sig and on my website would inform people that they should watch for my **Jeopardy!** debut on June 13, with the suggestion that they also watch the day before so they could see Jason's spectacular performance. Of course, if you only saw my victory on June 13, it looked like a well-played close game. Only by watching Jason the day before could you really get a feel for what I achieved by defeating him.

I also began exchanging e-mails with Meg and, eventually, Doug Souleyrette. Doug is a University of Kentucky student from Lexington who faced Jason on June 8. During my taping, the **Jeopardy!** crew only had fantastic things to say about him and, of course, his Lexington connection made me feel as if I had some link to him apart from both being on **Jeopardy!** and facing Jason. It turns out Doug is dating a girl from Chicago who appeared in last year's **Jeopardy!** college tournament. With luck, we'll be able to meet on one of his trips up to see her.

In one exchange of e-mails, Doug asked if I thought people would recognize us on the street after our appearance. I have a feeling that it is more likely that he is recognized, partly because Lexington is a smaller place than Chicago, but, more importantly, in Chicago, **Jeopardy!** is shown in the middle of the work day. In

Lexington, it airs in the evening when it can garner a larger audience.

In May, I received an e-mail from Meg informing me that she had received the photograph they took of her with Alex Trebek. I wouldn't receive mine for a few days after that. When it finally arrived, it was a digital photo of the two of us which had to be cut down to size. It came with a glass frame etched with the name **Jeopardy!** in the corner.

The Week Before

Because **Jeopardy!** is on in Chicago at 3:30 in the afternoon, I rarely get to actually watch the show "live." Beginning on June 5, I began to tape the shows. I wanted to see the person Jason would beat and, of course, I wanted to see Jason's games.

Also on Monday, June 5, I received a phone call from Marc Dadigan, an intern for Pioneer Press, publishers of the *Northbrook Star*, a local weekly paper. Each week, they run a short background, with a photograph, of a Northbrook resident. These articles are about two hundred words. We spoke on the phone for about twenty minutes and arranged to have a photographer, Joe Cyganowski, drop by my house on Tuesday at lunchtime to take the picture.

Joe was waiting for me when I showed up and came in. Glancing around the house, his eye fell on our bookshelves (the one feature everyone seems to comment on) and he asked me to pose leaning against the ladder. When I spoke to my wife later in the day, she asked if the picture had been taken in front of the bookshelves. The next day, I received a call from a friend who works for Pioneer Press, he thought he had noticed an error in the column and wanted to double check. It was an error, and was excised before the article appeared in Thursday's edition. Nevertheless, Elaine and I counted four or five factual errors or misleading statements in the article in its final form.

On Thursday, Jason was challenged by Doug Souleyrette, a student from the University of Kentucky who I had been in touch with. Although I knew the outcome before the game started (as well as the Final Jeopardy question, since Doug e-mailed it to me), it was a good game and one of the closest games Jason played. Despite Doug's strong efforts, Jason went into Final Jeopardy in an untouchable position. I had sent Doug an e-mail of support about his game, although it was a little difficult to figure out what to say. "Good luck," was inappropriate since the outcome had been decided three months earlier. Also, I knew what the outcome would be. I

settled for commenting that I looked forward to seeing him and how well he was able to do against Jason.

As I mentioned, I had a meeting on the evening in which Jason won his third victory. I was a little surprised to find myself bombarded by a series of questions, not about Alex Trebek or my own appearances, but about Jason. Of all the contestants I met, of course, I feel as if I knew Jason least, which is rather ironic, given that by dethroning him in his fifth game, I am rather linked to him. Most of what I knew about him came from watching his shows and the fact that during the taping, my family sat next to his mother and wife in the audience and had a chance to talk to them. My understanding is that he is not only exceedingly bright, but also a very nice person.

One friend mentioned that all of Jason's victories to that point were "easy" victories, meaning that Jason had enough going in to Final Jeopardy that it didn't matter whether he got the answer right or wrong, he would win. I didn't mention that his performance on Monday's show would practically equal his combined performance so far. In any event, I disagree with the characterization of those as easy victories. Jason managed to win his first four games in the Double Jeopardy round, a feat which I feel is

more impressive than the come-from-behind victories which I managed to pull off on my first two days. He did it by a combination of knowledge, luck, and astute wagering, the three things which are necessary to become a **Jeopardy!** champion. Had I shown a little more aptitude with the final trait on my third day, I would have continued to reign as champion.

Over the weekend, I tracked down Jason's e-mail address and sent off an e-mail similar to the one I sent Doug, expressing my admiration for his playing in his first three games and commenting that I remembered few of the details of our own game (I remembered few categories, specific questions, etc.) and was looking forward to seeing the actual game itself. I also sent out e-mails to the people in my address book reminding people of my appearance and placed notices in some select Usenet groups in which I participate.

On Monday, I made plans to watch Tuesday's show at my parents' house. They take care of Robin on Monday and Tuesday and, although Robin would most likely be napping during the show, I thought it would be fun to watch there. However, those plans were shunted aside when my boss suggested we set up a television at my office to watch together. Unfortunately, the television we had does not have an antenna,

being used exclusively for video-tape training, and we weren't able to pick up the WLS, the ABC affiliate which carried **Jeopardy!**. I was back to watching at my parents' house until another manager, Brad, said he would bring in an antenna.

Day One

On Tuesday, Brad brought in an antenna, but when we hooked it up, we could only get UHF channels. An announcement was made, however, that a television would be set up in the cafeteria of the corporate offices, about a mile away, for anyone who wanted to watch from there. I decided I would watch from the office, a decision which turned out to be good for a variety of reasons.

At 3:25, the receptionist made an announcement over the PA that anyone interested could see me on **Jeopardy!** from 3:30 to 4:00 in the cafeteria. By the time the show began, there were about forty people in the room, many of whom I didn't know. It was strange standing there having people point at me and whisper "That's him."

What was even stranger, and I would love to have an explanation for this phenomenon, is the fact that I was more nervous watching the shows than I was when I was in California taping them.

One co-worker commented that I looked like a caged animal, jumping up from my chair as soon as I sat down and pacing back and forth nervously.

During commercials, I answered questions about how the show was taped, how I had qualified for **Jeopardy!** and, of course, what Alex Trebek was really like. I also watched the reactions of the people I worked with. Although everyone was rooting for me, when we went to the first commercial break with Kari Elias running a distant third (I was leading 2000-800-300 at that point), someone shouted "Go, Kari!" They did form quick communal decisions about the contestants I faced. Kari was seen as an underdog and they liked her. Jason, they declared was bereft of a sense of humor and seemed a bit uptight. Based on my experiences with him, neither comment about him was correct.

When the show came back from the first commercial, Alex conducted his interviews with the three contestants. As mine began, WLS, the affiliate who carries the show, began a crawl across the bottom of the screen announcing a severe weather bulletin. I contacted WLS to see about getting a clean copy, and received a video tape in the mail a few days later.

The pace of the game was surprising. I discovered I got off to a much slower start than I remembered. The lead didn't change as much as I remembered and Kari did much better than I remembered. This latter fact was a recurrent theme. I remember the first game as being primarily between Jason and me, but Kari had a strong role. I remember the second game as being between Allen Tatman and me, but again, Mary Friedman spent a significant portion of the game in first place. She was defeated as much by Allen's incredibly strong showing in Double Jeopardy as by anything else. For some reason, this dynamic does not hold true for my third game, perhaps because I was in third place going into Final Jeopardy rather than second place. I know Scott Myre had a slow start in the first round, to the extent that they checked his buzzer, and Meg gave me a good challenge in the first round, but I remember the Double Jeopardy round as a duel between Meg and Scott. Meg tells me that she remembers her second show as a duel between herself and Gregg Fanselau. In reality, John Edkins was very much in the game, so perhaps it is a normal perception.

When Alex announced the categories at the beginning of the show, none of them sounded particularly familiar to me. Even once the game

began, the clues were surprises and I couldn't always remember who managed to buzz in first and whether they got the right answer. This would be repeated over the next couple of days as well.

When the Final Jeopardy question appeared, only one person in the room knew the answer. Rather than shouting it out, he whispered it to the person next to him so she could confirm that he was correct.

When I returned home, the phone was ringing off the hook. One of the first calls was from Paul, a bartender who had appeared on the show in October with whom I had spoken a few months ago. He wanted to officially welcome me to the club of **Jeopardy!** winners. Both my parents and in-laws also received calls from relatives I had never met, and friends. My parents received a call from a salesman who worked for my father more than a decade ago. My mother also spoke to a friend of my grandmother's who recognized me on the show. A woman I used to work with who was home sick saw me and notified the people at my old company. A good friend's mother saw the show and he was berated for not letting her know I was going to be on. I received e-mails from people I had never heard of who had seen my messages on Usenet or on my website.

Elaine, Robin and I went out to dinner. When we got home, there were fourteen messages on our answering machine. I also found out that my parents and sister had experienced a cable outage which only cleared as the show began. Their cable dropped out again briefly during the commercial between the Final Jeopardy category and the revelation of the question.

Day Two

On Wednesday morning, the first thing I was asked when I walked into the office was if I had a copy of the show. Since I live about five minutes from the office, I was dispatched home to pick it up. At 11:30, the Tuesday show was run in one of the conference rooms for the benefit of those who had been in a meeting on Tuesday when we watched the show. It was a smaller group, but the dynamics were similar.

Things worked similarly on the second day, with the addition of popcorn for the viewing.

The opinions on the second day were similar to the opinions on the first. The crowd liked Mary, but, perhaps this is an urban or a Northern bias, they ridiculed Allen based on his appearance and his accent. Even his impressive demonstration of intelligence was not enough to overcome the initial reaction.

When the Final Jeopardy question was revealed, the crowd went wild. People on the opposite side of the building heard the noise and came down to find out what had happened, working from the assumption that I had won a second day.

I left the office to pick up my daughter at day care and meet my wife for a celebratory dinner. It was our eighth wedding anniversary and my second **Jeopardy!** win. We went to Lovell's an expensive wine bar in Highland Park which is owned by the son of former astronaut James Lovell, Jr. The food was fantastic, but Robin wanted to look around the restaurant rather than sit still. Actually, Elaine and I wanted to look around, too, but we figured we would wait until we had finished eating.

When we returned from celebrating our anniversary, the answering machine informed us that there was only 3 minutes and 10 seconds of unrecorded time. One of them was from my former boss who had been informed that I was on the show. He wanted to know if he could get a tape of it to show at his next staff meeting.

Day Three

Once again, we showed the tape at 11:30 on Thursday for the people who missed it on Wednesday. Once again, their opinions of my

challengers matched the opinions of the crowd who watched the day before.

Since I now had documented proof that I was worth \$15,000 an hour, I tried to convince my boss to give me a raise. If he had, I figured that working one day a week would be more than enough to keep me happy. Unfortunately, he didn't think the company could quite afford to meet that salary at this time, but he would give it all the future consideration the salary request deserved.

I now had a difficult decision to make. Elaine works Monday through Wednesday, which meant I couldn't watch the show with her on those days. On Thursday, however, she does not work. I wanted to watch the show with her, but by now I had determined how much fun it was to watch with other people. Furthermore, I was afraid that if I watched from home, the people at work would decide I had skipped out because the outcome of the third show was not to my advantage. I suggested Elaine bring Robin to the office, but the show falls in the middle of Robin's nap. For the same reason, I didn't feel I could invite people to our house (and we weren't really desirous of hosting forty or more people). We managed to solve the problem by finding a neighborhood girl who could watch Robin for an

hour or so when the show was on and Elaine could join me at the office.

In the third game, I lost my concentration when they stopped taping for about ten minutes to check answers and scores. When they came back, they played a tape of Alex announcing my wrong answer several times and I never really regained my rhythm after that. The strange thing is that during the first round, when I was doing well, I felt I had gone as far as I would.

Watching the show, I was surprised to see that I spent much of Double Jeopardy in the lead. A few bad answers lowered my score, but it was a much more competitive round than I remember.

In Final Jeopardy, I bet a measly \$10, and people have been asking why I bet such a strange amount. My thinking was that although a category like the Supreme Court seems reasonable tight, it is actually quite broad. Questions can range from John Jay to Oliver Wendell Holmes to Thurgood Marshall to Clarence Thomas. They can ask which president appointed a justice or expanded the court. They can ask about particulars in a specific case. If I were a lawyer or a constitutional historian, and felt more confident, I would have bet more. As it was, I was working from the assumption that I would get the answer wrong. Because of that, I didn't want to bet too

much. Looking at Scott and Meg, they were close enough to each other and me, that they had to take all three scores into account. I figured that if both got the answer right, it wouldn't matter what I bet since I would come in third. If one got it right and one got it wrong, I would probably wind up in second. If both got it wrong and I bet nothing or only a small amount, I might actually win. Of course, I couldn't know that Meg would bet nothing, and so if she got it wrong and Scott got it right I would still come in third. As it was, I was happy (but, of course, not ecstatic) about the results.

Reactions

As I mentioned, I received several comments from people, some of whom I knew personally, some of whom I knew by reputation and some of whom I had never heard of. I received e-mail from Del Rey thanking me for plugging one of their books on national television in my first game, from a graduate student who attended my talk on the Bubonic Plaque mentioned in the second episode, and a mention on a technical writers' list serve because of my interview during the final game.

I've sent e-mail to Jason and left a message for Kari, but haven't heard from either of them. Attending a science fiction convention the

weekend after the shows aired, I fielded questions about the show and accepted congratulations from people who I had previously only seen in passing. At one point, the guest of honor congratulated me and I started talking about the show, only to realize she was congratulating me on my Hugo nomination. *BookPage*, a magazine which publishes my monthly review column, contact me asking if it was all right to include a line about my **Jeopardy!** championship in the bio which appears with my column.

A week after my first game, I still haven't been recognized on the street (no real surprise), although I did get an e-mail from Meg saying that she was recognized by a store clerk the other day when she was paying for something.

I'm glad I was able to appear on the show. I would like to think that I would have enjoyed the experience as much if I had lost to Jason or if I had managed to become a five time champion. In the end, it doesn't matter. The people involved with the show were great, professional and knew how to put the contestants at ease. I was lucky in the group selected for my day since all of them were friendly and there was no real feeling of competition or psyching each other out. As Meg wrote in an e-mail, "I look at it this way: you and I weren't so much competing against

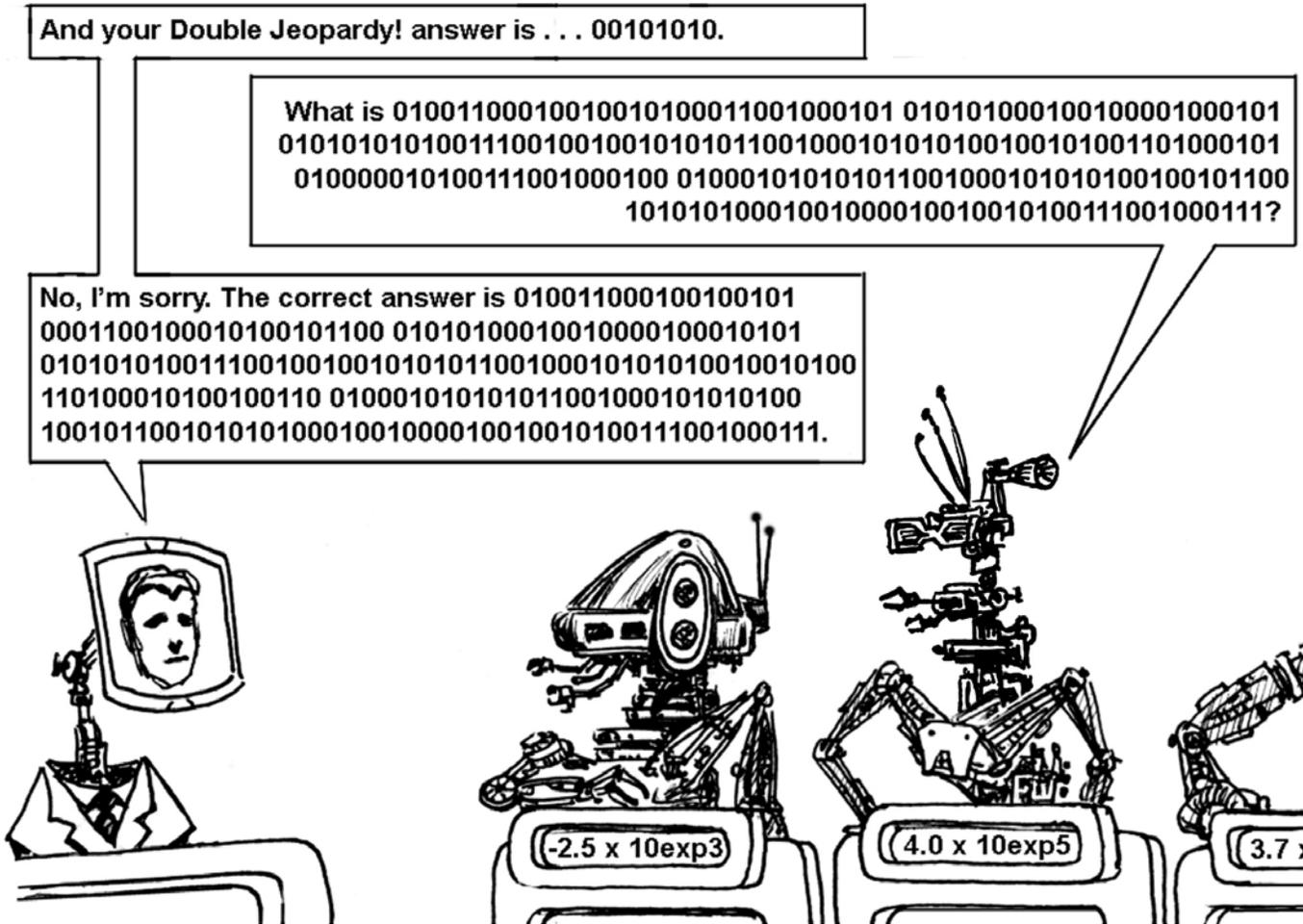
each other as we both were just trying to do well.”

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Alex Trebek really like?

Your guess is as good as mine. The sum total of my discussions with him can be seen on tapes of the three days I appeared on the show. He doesn't see the contestants before the show because he is afraid he might let something slip and cause a contestant to be disqualified. After each show, Alex, and the winner, have a total of about ten minutes to change clothes before the next

show begins. He doesn't eat lunch with the



contestants and leaves as soon as the final show is taped.

Do you have to pay taxes on the prizes?

Yes. Taxes are deducted from the cash prizes before the check is mailed. Before a prize is sent out, the recipient receives a bill for the tax on the prize. The bill must be paid before the prize is delivered.

When do you get your prizes?

According to the people at Kingworld, prizes are generally sent out about 120 days after the show's air date.

Why is there a delay?

Although I haven't been told, I imagine it is so they can continue to accrue interest on the amount for another four months.

Does the show send you a list of categories to study?

No. They send a contract, a set of directions to the study, a page explaining what you need to bring (changes of clothing, social security card, etc.), and the name of a hotel which will offer a discount to contestants.

Did you study for the show?

No. I figured that studying would be too haphazard and wouldn't allow me to fully incorporate the information. The only preparation I did was to read from Alex Trebek's *The Jeopardy! Book*, speak to Paul and work crossword puzzles, which I would have done anyway.

Does the show pay for your trip?

No. The contestants are fully responsible for paying for their flights, hotels, food, and any other expenses incurred.

How many days did you tape?

Jeopardy! tapes five shows a day. The shows will run over the course of a week, Monday through Friday. Since my shows ran Tuesday-Thursday, they were the second, third and fourth shows taped that day. Contestants had to be at the studio by 9:00 and the taping started at 11:00. There was a lunch break (which they paid for) between the third and fourth shows.

What were your Final Jeopardy questions?

Day One: Jason-Steven-Kari
Category: Famous Scientists

At this scientist's death in 1727, he left behind several thousand pages of writings about alchemy and the occult.

Who was Isaac Newton? (Kari and I answered correctly, Jason answered Francis Bacon. Kari took second, Jason took third).

Day Two: Steven-Mary-Allen

Category: Airport Codes

This airport takes its three letter designation from its former name—Orchard Place.

What is O'Hare (Allen answered Buffalo, thinking of Orchard Park, NY, Mary answered Orlando. Allen took second and Mary took third.)

Day Three: Steven-Scott-Meg

Category: The Supreme Court

These two Supreme Court justices who finished first in their class were offered jobs as typists at major legal firms.

Who are Sandra Day O'Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsburg? (Meg and I answered correctly, Scott answered Frankfurter. Meg came in first, Scott came in third.)

How did you "fix" the Final Jeopardy question on the second

day?

I didn't. It was the luck of the draw. Similarly, on the first day, I almost mentioned a book called *Newton's Cannon* which is about Newton's researches into the occult. It could have dramatically altered the results of the game if I had.



Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me...

The "Oddly Informative" Weekly News Quiz

Perrienne Lurie

This is Carl Cassel of National Public Radio. If you want to talk to me, you've dialed the wrong number. This is Dr. Lurie's answering machine...

Yes, I won "the most coveted prize in public radio, Carl Cassel's voice on my home answering machine. And you could, too. All it takes is a little luck and a knowledge of current events (or sometimes historical ones).

The luck part is mainly in getting on the show in the first place. You can call their toll free number (1.888.WAIT-WAIT) or send e-mail to waitwait@npr.org. In my case, I e-mailed.

When I moved from Annapolis, MD, to Harrisburg, PA, in 1998, I discovered that my local NPR station did not carry *Wait, Wait*. Although I sent letters and e-mail to them, they stubbornly refused

to acknowledge my correspondence, and *Wait, Wait* was no where to be heard, at least in Harrisburg. Fortunately, the programs are archived on the web (www.npr.org/program/waitwait), so I could still get my weekly fix. So in my e-mail, I recounted this sad state of affairs, and joked that if they put me on the show, perhaps we could shame WITF into carrying it. This got me on the show, but WITF didn't carry *Wait, Wait* until years later, so my clever ploy didn't entirely work.

The program features a panel of three NPR celebrities (as opposed to real celebrities, -- i.e., people you would have heard of) and has included Roxanne Roberts, of the *Washington Post's Style* section, Roy Blunt, Jr., who's written many humorous books, Paula Poundstone, the stand up



comedienne, P.J. O'Rourke, who, AFAICT, is a Republican humorist. The host is Peter Segal and it originates from Chicago. However, the panelists may be in Washington, New York, Boston, or wherever they happen to live.

The show is divided into several segments, including "Not My Job," where a celebrity guest has to answer two out of three questions about something s/he knows nothing about, with the prize going to a random audience member, and "Lightening Fill In the Blank," where their panelists answer a series of questions to determine the winner for the week. They get points for correct answers, etc., but all they get for winning is bragging rights.

The "callers" have a choice of several contests. I was on "Who's Carl This Time?" where Carl Cassel recreates quotes from the week's news, sometimes with really bad, but usually he just sounds like Carl Cassel. Other possibilities are topical limericks where the caller has to fill in the last word or phrase, and a segment where the caller has to correctly pick the one true news story out of three possibilities, all seemingly improbable. In the first two contests, the caller has to get two out of three right to win Carl's voice.

Although the program airs on Saturday or Sunday (check your local listings), it is taped on Friday afternoons. So I sat in my office awaiting a call from the producer. We recorded it right then.

I'd spent the week religiously listening to *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered* and memorizing the name of the newly elected President of Mexico, none of which did me any good. My three questions had to do with sports – Anna Kournikova's endorsement of sports bras, the computer industry – Oracle spying on Microsoft, and something else. If you want to find out what it was, you'll have to listen to the archived webcast. Check July, 1999.

I missed the Anna Kournikova question, despite the "helpful" hint that her name's a palindrome (I guessed "Monica Seles"). For the Microsoft question, I didn't quite say what they wanted, and they re-recorded my answer for broadcast. I got the other question correct on the first take.

So, with two out of three right, I won the "most coveted prize in public radio" and got to tell Carl what to say.

If you would like me to record the message on your answering machine, you'll have to be a winning contestant on Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me, just like Dr. Lurie.

Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?

Rich Horton

This past year I had occasion to visit New York City for the first time ... no very big deal, to many people, I'm sure. Even to a confirmed suburbanite like me the step up from cities with which I am fairly familiar (St. Louis and Chicago) to New York doesn't seem that significant. And indeed, there would be little to tell except for the reason I went to New York: to tape an episode of the game show **Who Wants to Be a Millionaire**.

We flew out on Monday morning, into Newark Airport. (All paid for by the show, except meals.) The flight was uneventful—I read Jack Vance's murder mystery *The Fox Valley Murders* and started in on Muriel Sparks's *The Bachelors*. I did feel rather sick—partly the headache I usually get from pressure changes—partly something worse (a headache/flu sort of thing) that bothered me to some small extent the



whole time is was in New York. Once at the airport we were met by our driver, who took us to the Empire Hotel, across the street from Lincoln Center. Upon getting there we encountered one of the facets of New York life with which I was unfamiliar—constant tipping. We tipped the car driver \$5, which he seemed to find satisfactory, but the busboy at the door seemed offended to only get \$1. Eventually we decided that \$2 every time somebody breathed was what they expected. Naturally the hotel wasn't ready for us yet—so we had to put our bags in storage (cha-ching!)—only to get them out again in a couple of hours when the room was ready (cha-ching!).

We occupied ourselves walking around the area, then had lunch at a deli. I got a Reuben for \$9. It was a very generously sized sandwich, with tons of corned beef, but I was disappointed

in the quality. Not enough sauerkraut or thousand island dressing. We wandered over to Central Park, the southwest entrance to which was only a couple of blocks from the hotel. We just walked a little way into the park, over to some softball fields, and we watched a couple of teams, apparently from local bars, playing a decidedly desultory game of softball. The style was unusual: the ball is 12 inches, like the ball normally used in St. Louis, but it was bound in something like cloth, more like the 16 inch balls generally used in Chicago. Only 9 players played in the field, unlike the 10 more usual in the Midwest. There seemed to be no rules on arch of a pitched ball, and the pitching was very inconsistent. Not fast, though. The quality of play was very low. After a while we left and went back to the hotel, finally getting a room.

Our room was on the 7th floor of the hotel. It was a tiny room—much smaller than I would regard a standard hotel room to be—as much smaller, I suppose, as it was more expensive. I mentioned this to a producer the next day, and he laughed and said all the out-of-towners say that, but that to a New Yorker it was a big room—bigger than an average apartment, anyway (this with a little laugh). Looking out the window at the intersection of Broadway and 7th Avenue I was most struck by the colour yellow. At a guess,

90% of the cars driving on Manhattan streets (in that area, anyway) are taxis, and all New York taxis are bright yellow. As we later learned, all the legends about the way New York taxis are driven are also true—plenty of honkin, plenty of cursing, lots of close calls—though we saw no accidents.

I had to meet one of the Millionaire show producers at 6:30, to go over the Tuesday schedule and to get our per diem and some other stuff, including some nice Manhattan maps, and some papers to read and sign, and also to get approval for my wardrobe. They nixed the rather classy grey shirt Mary Ann had picked, because grey apparently doesn't work well on TV. We'd anticipated that possibility, and we had also brought a solid green shirt and a solid red shirt, both of which met with the producer's approval, along with a khaki pair of casual dress pants, and a black pair. There was a brief discussion of the logistics for the next day, and a chance to meet my fellow contestants. (Except for one poor woman who got stuck coming from California due to airplane difficulties—she didn't make it in until midnight, which can't have helped her the next day.) I found myself liking and rooting for the other contestants from the beginning—they seemed very nice folks, and the show does a pretty good job of promoting a certain

togetherness. You really don't get a sense of competing against the other people.

Then we were free for the night. We really did very little but walk around and eat an expensive dinner. We did learn that North-South blocks on Manhattan are very short—the walk from our hotel at 63rd Street to Times Square at 42nd street was not nearly the 3 miles or so we had feared. East-West blocks, on the other hand, are huge. I was struck by how safe we felt—we were out in the big city past midnight, and I was never worried. I don't think I would feel the same in downtown St. Louis. The difference in New York is that it is relatively crowded, and relatively light, at all hours.

The next day was tape day. The ABC Studios are on 67th Street, right next to Central Park. We had a 9:30 shuttle van. The van let us out at a small side door. We were let in and followed a maze of stairs and corridors to a rather pleasant conference room. There we were introduced to a couple of assistant producers who were assigned to keep tabs on the whole group of contestants. In addition, there were slightly higher-ranked producers who were assigned, ideally, one to a contestant. In our case, the ratio was more like one producer for each two contestants — someone was sick, and a couple producers had left the show—stuff like that. “My” producer was

named Jennifer (one is tempted to ask “What else could she have been named?”): she was (and I presume, is), rather pretty, painfully thin, and very pleasant. (You can occasionally see her (and some of the other producers) in the wings when a contestant is escorted off the stage.) A producer's job, with respect to each contestant, includes gathering a bunch of personal information, some of which (the more interesting stuff) will be put on cards to prompt Regis Philbin for neat things to talk about if you are so lucky as to get to the “hot seat”. I mentioned a variety of things, none of which seem terribly fascinating to me (I live a very prosaic life). They seemed most interested in the trivia contests I play in with my wife and some friends from church. (These have become quite popular in St. Louis over the past few years. They are usually fundraising events for schools or churches. Typically, 10 questions are asked in each of 10 categories. A common winning score would be in the low 80s. My regular team has entered 8 contests and won 5, finished second 3 times. A typical win means you break even after paying the baby sitter—second means you get your entry fee back. We have also organized and conducted a couple of these contests for our own church—which took some convincing of the more conservative church

members.) The other fact they were interested in was my attendance record at work—asked what sort of contests for money I had previously won I mentioned that I won a drawing for \$1500 at work one year, part of what they called a “Presenteeism” program: only people who hadn't taken a sick day in the previous 6 months were eligible. This didn't seem like much of an accomplishment to me, as I rarely take sick days (once going some 10 years in a row without one—and I'm not particularly unique at my job in this), but the Millionaire show producers found it fascinating. I don't know what to make of that, except to note that as I wrote above, they were short-handed that day. They showed next to no interest in my mention of my fondness for science fiction.

Both breakfast and lunch were provided by the show's production company. The former was just a continental breakfast thing in the conference room, the latter a cafeteria-style meal, not at all bad, in the studio building's cafeteria.

After the producers had extracted all the neat personal information they could from each of us, it was time for rehearsal. The twenty of us (contestants plus companions) tramped through another maze of corridors, guarded by a couple of assistant producers. They were among other

things particularly concerned that nobody had access to any further information sources which could compromise the show—they hustled us particularly quickly past the studio newsstand, as if the headlines of the New York Post might be the subject of one of the day's questions. The actual studio in which the shooting occurs is rather smaller than it appears on TV. It's quite cold, especially without the shooting lights on. The contestants were assigned seats in the ring around the “hot seat”, just as for the real shooting. The companions sat directly behind us—for the real shooting they would sit some rows higher (I suppose to preclude the possibility of illicit help). The floor of the studio, on which the hot seat is perched, is made of glass (or perhaps some hard transparent plastic). It's a bit of an odd feeling standing on it—it's also rather slippery (particularly, claimed the women, if you are wearing heels).

The first order of business was some fastest-finger practice. For those who haven't seen the show, perhaps a brief explanation is in order. There are ten contestants. In order to get a chance to play for actual money (to sit in the “hot seat”) you need to win a “Faster Finger” game. (There are typically 2 or three per show.) The game involves ranking four things in some order: a typical question would be “List these movies in

the order of their first theatrical release, beginning with the earliest." A. **Birth of a Nation**. B. **Casablanca**. C. **Star Wars** D. **Erin Brockovich**. Though probably a bit harder, and with a cute thematic link.

I was surprised at how low-tech the fastest-finger setup is. There are six buttons, not four as one might assume. There is one button for each choice (A, B, C, D), plus a backspace button, in case you decide you made a mistake, and an "Enter" button which must be pushed to register your four selections. The buttons are large and a bit balky—you need to push them fairly hard to make sure your choice registers. That, plus the fifth ("Enter") button, mean that it takes a bit more time to answer the "fastest finger" question than many think. In addition, the timer starts as soon as the question is asked—the four answers pop up simultaneously on each contestant's screen, though Regis takes a few seconds to read all four. Typically, you need to have your answers in before Regis finishes reading—indeed, we were cautioned not to listen to Regis, as that would slow us down. The screen itself is a decent flat screen, but encased in brushed aluminum, with a unreliable looking cable (wrapped in electrical tape) connecting screen to keyboard. It looks like something my company's

test-equipment lab might have thrown together in a day—in 1985.

We were then asked several fastest finger questions, to give us a chance to get accustomed to the setup. The questions were mostly pretty easy—list these parts of a bird from head to toe, stuff like that. After everybody seemed to have the hang of it, we were all given a chance to sit in the hot seat, and answer several questions, try out the lifelines, etc. Regis wasn't there: the questions were asked by one of the main producers, or maybe even the director—not a lowly assistant, at any rate. She had some fun doing broad imitations of Regis. She also tried out some sample chit-chat possibilities from the card the producers had made up for Regis, with personal info about each of us. The questions themselves were actually fairly hard—for a simple reason, it turned out. They used questions from the British version of the show for this practice session. So we got stuff about British royalty like "Who was Princess Margaret's husband?" (I know: the photographer Lord Snowden, but still!), and stuff about British TV shows.

After this we got a long pep talk from Michael Davies, the Executive Producer. Davies is an interesting guy. He's British, looks to be about 35. He worked for Jeopardy!, then set up shop

on his own, and invented a couple of successful UK game shows—besides **Who Wants to Be A Millionaire?** I think he did **Whose Line is it Anyway?** He's very energetic, and his talk was very upbeat and pretty funny. He told a few Regis stories, and a couple of (fairly acerbic) Alex Trebek stories—there seems to be a certain rivalry between the two shows. He gave us quite a bit of advice—take your time, don't worry about wasting time in order to give the other contestants a chance. (Much of the deliberation ends up on the cutting room floor—they have a pretty good idea how many questions they want per show, so the only real way you can give your fellow contestants more chances is by missing questions, and you don't want to do that.) He talked up the 50/50 among the lifelines—it tends to be the least highly regarded among viewers because it doesn't ever give you a single answer—on the other hand, it always gives you the correct answer (it's only that it also gives you another choice).

There was also a brief talk by a lawyer, going over things like your right to appeal a wrong answer. They admitted that they had been caught in an error twice previously. They mentioned potential audience problems—on one occasion just a week or two prior to our show, an audience member had yelled out an answer

while the contestant was deliberated. They rushed to the seat, ready to eject the person—only it turned out to be a mentally-handicapped man. They settled for urging his companion to keep him quiet. At any rate—the answer he yelled was wrong—the contestant had been thinking about giving the correct answer, but upon hearing the audience member, he wavered, but fortunately decided to stick with his original choice. Or so they told us—at any rate, I am sure that the whole business was edited out of the telecast.

After finishing the rehearsal, which took an hour and a half or so, we had the cafeteria lunch. Then it was time for dress and makeup. By this time the producers had contacted all the “phone-a-friends” to make sure they were ready. (My phone-a-friends were my brothers Bill and Paul, my Mother (with Dad expected to be by the phone as well), Bill's father-in-law Bob Olson, and the editor of this 'zine, Mr. Silver.) I dressed in black pants with a red short-sleeved shirt - simple colors work best on TV. We had to empty our pockets of any possible informative material—such as wallets, even change. (I remember one question which asked “On which U. S. coin does the head face to the right?” (Answer: Penny), so change could be useful reference material.) They even confiscated my

wife's purse. I had a brief scare because they had to verify my social security number, and I had forgotten my card. Fortunately, Missouri driver's licenses use the SSN as the ID number, and they were willing to accept that.

For men, the makeup process was very simple: just a little bit of pancake stuff to reduce the shine on our faces. The women took somewhat longer (and, I guess, the 19-year old kid, who had some acne they wanted to deal with). I was in and out in a couple of minutes, and we cooled our heels for a while, along with the holdover contest from the previous night. Then it was nearly 4 o'clock, and down we went to the studio again, ready for the actual taping.

The companions were led to their seats in the audience, while we waited in a line behind the audience seats. From such a perspective the studio looks rather makeshift—bare cement floors—the backs of the seating all exposed like the backs of bleachers at a high-school football stadium. Finally Regis came in and walked down the line of contestants, shaking hands with each of us. He is a rather small man, and seemed affable enough in that brief time. He went up to the stage, and we filed into our seats.

One thing the TV audience never sees is the entertainment during breaks. There was a comedian, who warmed up the audience before

the taping, and then during commercial breaks. He was reasonably amusing. He passed out t-shirts to audience members for various achievements—singing TV theme songs of his choice, or having the right birthday, or being cute and female.

There was one holdover contestant, who had already earned \$32,000. As I recall, he answered one more question correctly, then left. The next fastest finger question was “List these four artists according to date of birth.” The four were two older artists—an old master and an impressionist, I believe, then two fairly contemporary artists: David Hockney and Frida Kahlo. I had never heard of Kahlo (though I read something about a movie being made about her a couple of weeks after the taping - natch!) so I guessed she might be the youngest. Wrong. The guy next to me won. He moved fairly rapidly through his questions, winning \$32,000 before getting the \$64,000 question wrong. It was “What is unusual about a certain mall in Saudi Arabia?”, and the choices were “No Men”, “No Women”, “No Lights”, and something else—“No Walls”, maybe. I guessed easily enough that it would be “No Men”—the contestant tried asking the audience, which gave the wrong answer.

The next fastest finger asked us to list four fashion models according to date of birth—I don't

remember the models, but it was easy to get the order correct. Only, I was much slower than the winner, a woman named Kati Knudsen from Seattle. Kati was (and still is, I assume) roughly my age, a few years younger, perhaps. She's a doctor, and her husband was with her, a tall, reserved, man named Ernie, an accountant (who looked like an accountant).

There was a fairly significant bit of controversy while Kati was in the hot seat. At about the \$8,000 question, she was asked "What is a budgy?". This would have been a £200 question, I'm guessing, on the English version of the show: a budgy is a budgerigar, a pet bird (actually an Australian parakeet) very popular over there, but all but unknown in the U.S. (or perhaps we just call them parakeets). I read enough English novels so that I knew the answer immediately, but evidently no one else besides Regis and (as we shall see) one audience member also knew. The choices were "Bird. Scooter. Love Seat. Car.", as I recall. Kati agonized for quite some time (most of which was edited out), seeming to lean towards "love seat", because that's kind of bulgy, and bulgy sounds like budgy. Then she decided to use her 50/50, and the choices remaining were "bird" and "scooter". After considerable further agitation, and asking Regis for help ("I'd help you," he said, "but I don't know

what it is either!"), she settled on "scooter". "Is that your final answer?" asked Regis. "Noo!" came an anguished scream from the upper reaches of the audience. Shocked reaction. Kati said something like, "I guess I better change my mind", and answered "bird", which was correct. Cut to commercial, and some very stern words from the comedian to the audience, about how wrong such intervention was. All this controversy was edited out of the televised version.

Kati continued, having a bit of a problem with "What is the name of Xena's sidekick on the television show **Xena, Warrior Princess**?". The choices were "Lucy Lawless", "Gabrielle", "Callisto", "Ioleus". Regis had enormous difficulty with the pronunciation (the producers had emphasized that Regis often can't pronounce things properly, and they will come out (without the cameras running) and give you the correct pronunciation if you ask): he pronounced "Xena" "Xeña" once, correctly the other time, pronounced "Gabrielle" "Gabriela", and he simply couldn't get "Ioleus". At any rate, Kati didn't know, but she phoned a friend, and the friend blurted out the answer before she finished reading the question. That's the kind of phone-a-friend help you need!

Kati got up to about \$64,000, as I recall, before the show ended. Alas, no time in the hot seat for

me! At the end, Regis gave her a bit of a hard time (in a kind way) about her difficulties with the budgy question—she said “But you didn't know the answer either!”, and he replied, “Actually, for that question, I did know the answer. But I couldn't tell you that!”

There was a bit more, rather wrenching, drama in store for Kati, however. On the next show she successfully answered the \$125,000 and \$250,000 question. The \$500,000 question was “Which nation is the most recent one to be admitted to the UN?”. The four choices included two obviously wrong answers, and two others, Pacific Island nations both, that I would have had no chance at distinguishing. (Tonga and one other one—my guess was the other one, but Tonga turned out to be correct—obSF: Tonga is the home of the Queen of Sol in Wil McCarthy's *The Collapsium*.) Kati was agonizing between the same two—at last she announced “Women always seem to wimp out. I want to be the first woman to get to a million: I'm going to take a guess!” She guessed wrong, and she just look shattered when she left the chair, really distressed. I was quite upset myself—I was rooting for her. Some of my friends, having heard the story of the budgy question, said words to the effect “She got what she deserved!”, but I didn't feel that way at all. As I said, we really felt

a certain camaraderie with the other contestants, and I was hoping she'd win a lot of money. That said, there was a certain amount of grumbling among the other contestants to the effect that we ought to have got some compensation for our lost chance at another fastest finger: and indeed I think it would have been reasonable for them to allow us to be scheduled for another taping without going through the phone lines again.

One aspect of the show we weren't privy to was the technical details of editing and production. It seems to me that a lot of editing is done real-time, though—the taping took about two hours to fit the one hour time slot, and they knew just when to end the show. I'm pretty sure they like to guarantee at least two contestants from each group of ten. After the taping was over, they did take the time to retake one or two shots: telling Regis to place his arms just so, so that they could splice the retake in.

We were a bit tired after the taping, but it seemed a shame to waste a night in New York City. We debated seeing the reissued and recut Coen Brothers film “Blood Simple,” which is a favorite of mine and of Mary Ann's as well, but decided that too could wait until the movie came to St. Louis. Having missed Rockefeller Center the day before, we decided to make sure we saw it this night, and we recalibrated our maps

accordingly. This time we found it. Mary Ann wanted to see the ice rink, but of course it's not operative in July. (She reminds me that she KNEW THAT.) The location is occupied by outdoor seating for a place called the Rink Deli. However we did see the flower sculptures, and some of the aggressively whimsical cow sculptures that have been placed all around Manhattan. St. Patrick's Cathedral is not too far away from Rockefeller Center, so we visited that as well. It's a very impressive huge church. Then back to the hotel, with stops at the odd little shop on the way, and a bit of minor-celebrity-watching, as Mary Ann saw some guy she recognized walking out of the Fox News building. (Some host of one of their daytime political talk shows, or something like that.)

Wednesday, then, was the day reserved for busy sight-seeing. Our plane didn't leave until 7:30 PM or so, and we had to be at the hotel by 5:30 to meet our car. We woke up and packed, and took our luggage down to the lobby, leaving it in hock until time to leave. (Thus setting ourselves up for about four more tips, but what the heck.) Then we asked the guy at the desk what was the best way to deal with subways, and he recommended something called a Metrocard, or words to that effect. For \$4, you can go anywhere you want on subways and buses, all

day long, until I think 3 AM the next morning. Such a deal! (I say with complete sincerity: I was very impressed by the public transportation.)

We walked out of the hotel around the corner to a little deli, and had breakfast. We met Kati Knudsen and her husband at the deli, getting ready for their carryover show taping. We chatted a bit, ate a light breakfast, met another contestant on the way out ... then down into the subways. I was a bit nervous about using this unfamiliar form of transportation, but it is actually very easy, very convenient. The only thing I messed up was not figuring out the difference between Expresses and Locals. Thus we ended up taking a Local in the morning when an Express would have been best, and taking an Express later in the day when we wanted to stop at a Local stop. Oh well, no real harm was done.

I suppose it would be tedious to detail too much of our day of sightseeing. The Statue of Liberty was the main goal, so we took the subway to Battery Park on the southern tip of Manhattan. At the park we bought ferry tickets, and soon we were on our way to the Statue. We were far too late to go all the way up to the top of the Statue, but we did wait about 45 minutes to go up to the balcony on top of the pedestal. It's all worth seeing, nice to see the Statue itself, the presentations about how it was made, the

alternate designs, etc. The balcony is very narrow, surprisingly so, and hence crowded. The view of New York Harbor is kind of neat, too. On the way back we bypassed Ellis Island, as we wanted to see other things and time was pressing.

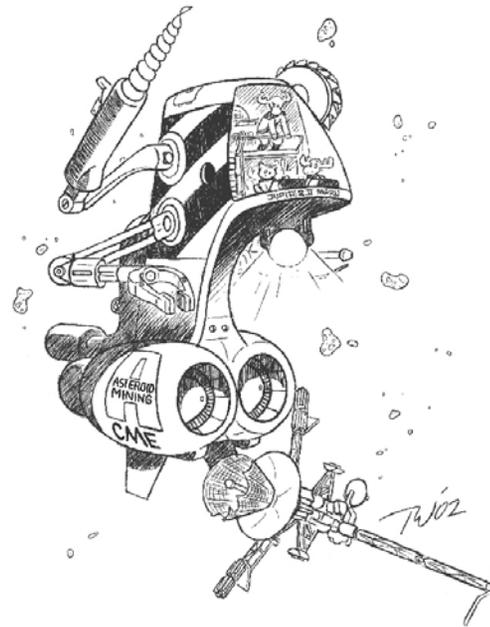
Our next goal was the Empire State Building. Here I miscalculated, and we got on an Express subway. We blew right by the stop nearest the Empire State Building, and stopped at Grand Central Station. We wandered around Grand Central a bit, which is pretty cool really, and then decided to walk south a few blocks to where we thought the Empire State Building was. We did gawk at the Chrysler Building, which is pretty cool, and much shinier than I had any idea.

It was a bit of a hike down to where we thought the Empire State Building was. And when we got there, we couldn't see any sign of it. We looked around us: no sign at all. You wouldn't think you could miss a building that big, but we did! It turns out we were one east-west block to the east of it. Still. Walking back to Grand Central we stopped at a little bar and had lunch. Partly just to get into air-

conditioning: it was finally hot. (I haven't mentioned the weather: it was quite remarkably nice for New York in July: cool and clear. Gorgeous, really.) At Grand Central we hopped on the subway shuttle over to Times Square. It was getting a bit late, and we just did a little shopping before heading back to the hotel.

Our car was waiting. We got our luggage out of hock and loaded up. On the way there we noticed all kinds of horrible looking traffic coming back the other way. The driver was getting pretty worried about his drive back. We finally realized that Gore (or somebody, but I think it was Gore, unless it was Hillary) was in town, and they had roadblocks and stuff all around Newark Airport. Luckily, the route the driver took into the airport was fine: but it looked like he'd have a headache getting back.

Everything went quite smoothly at the airport. The flight home was nice: the plane was not very full at all. It was nice getting back in our beds late that night, though.



The Who? What? Where? Game

Guy Lillian

Once I was young. Once, in fact, I was so young that it was August 27, 1973...and I appeared on a quiz show. The name of the show was **The Who What or Where Game**, and this is the story.

Actually, this is *twice* the story. In 1973, in fact on July 19th, the very night the show was taped, I wrote up the experience. The zine was called—surprise—**Who? What? Where?**

Nowadays I find the zine practically impossible to read. It was hacked out in elite type on ditto masters, which made it a chore to scan even then.

In its original incarnation it was adorned with a hideous illustration by the zine's publisher, Carl Gafford, and run through several amateur press alliances to which I belonged. I'm going to reprint some of the words of the 24-year-old GHLIII, and append, in this sans serif type,

reflections from my 30 additional years of life. Yipes—I just made myself feel *old*.

But once I was *young*, and I was on a quiz show.

To set the stage: in 1973 I was a student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro,

getting a Masters degree in Fine Arts. A girlfriend of mine from my Berkeley days was a medical student in New York, and she invited me to visit and stay for as long as I wished. I had a full and enjoyable summer, attending a Seulingcon for comic book fans with my friends Gafford, Charles E. Spanier and Dwight Decker, and met a slew of comics professionals,

including C.C. Beck of **Captain Marvel** fame, and Bob Kane, creator of Batman, and all-around...uh...uh...(Spanier?) *putz!* That's it! I contracted with Joe Brancatelli to write articles for his **Monster Times**, a commission I never, alas, fulfilled. I made frequent trips to DC



Comics, hung around Julie Schwartz as much as possible, and built contacts towards my first job, a story for another time.

And now, back to 1973...

There was another thing I did in New York. I tried out for a game show. Earlier on this summer I wrote Rob Greenberg Productions, which does **The 3 W's**, asking for info on becoming a contestant. Motive: all those afternoon half hours with that show on and easy for me, answering most every question before the contestant could come up with it; hell, I was told, why don't you try out for one of those, and so hell, so I did. I gave them the NYC address where I was staying and had a card waiting for me when I arrived on the last day in June. On it was a phone number to call for the interview, and so I called the number July 1, and set up an interview for the 9th.

So came the con and came the next Monday, when I duded up in the best finery I could put in my suitcase (at the time, a sweater and a clean shirt and pants with holes in the pockets, not the knees) and went down to the Madison Avenue address where the lady in charge, Cynthia, had asked me to come. I went to a room with standard folding chairs (apparently expecting Louis XIV thrones) and with about a dozen

others filled out a release form and took a written test with such questions as *Who was the first man in space?*, which is easy (sure, William Lundigan, we all know that) and *Name the four "Little Women" of Louisa May Alcott's novel*, which is impossible. (Think so? Jo, Margaret, Beth and Amy.) (Don't ask me how I found that out; I don't remember.) We ran through a quick oral exam and split. "We'll call you," said sexy, cut-you-at-your-ease-immediately Cynthia, "when we get a place for you." I went to see Carl Gafford at National Periodicals and figured that was the last of it.

I must spend an extra line or two on that "oral exam." I see now that it was designed to filter out prospective contestants who shouted out answers without raising their hands (or punching the button)—which could be ruinous on the air. I didn't muck up.

I was in the exact middle of collating and stapling 60 copies of **Worm Chowder** for K-a (the great comics apa) when the phone rang. It was July 16th. It was Cynthia. They wanted me to come in the following Thursday. And I immediately assented and just as immediately began to quote, have kittens, unquote.

The next four days were miserable with tensions and depression. I watched the show rigorously (whatever that means) and kept a

running score of how well I did answering every question. Got 2/3 right the first day, only half the second. By Wednesday, I was a miserable specimen indeed, almost as miserable as the frantically darting spermatozoa dashing randomly hither and yon under the microscope lens, a joint jumping under my eyes in the med school lab. (Huh?) I got a medical student to check out an almanac for me from the school library and frantically perused its maps and biographies. I measured my shoulders against the window frames. I went on long walks with my hostess, Mel, and her friend Lisa, thinking “If I get mugged I’ll have an excuse!”

(Explanation: New York Medical College’s student apartments were located at 106th Street and 1st Avenue—the edge of East Harlem. When I lived there a year or so later, I used to lean out of my window (on the 13th floor) and watch knife fights.)

But I was not mugged. From another med student I borrowed a blue tie. And the night before my 8:15 AM date with destiny, slept pretty damn badly, if you want to know the *verdad*. (That’s “truth” in Spanish. I remember Mel complained that I kept her up trying to memorize the provinces of Canada.) The **3W**’s theme kept tripping around headwise (which is to say, inside my head). *Dada DAT, dada DAT, dada DAH de*

dada DAH dadada DAHHHH dadada, dadada, dadada, dah dah DAH. Gad.

So I arose. I shaved again. I pulled on the fancy clothes I’d bought and borrowed. I slipped the blue tie over my head. (The med student I’d borrowed it from had been kind enough to make the knot for me. I still don’t know how to do that right.) I looked respectable enough. And at 7:15 I set out for the subway at 103rd and Lexington, and stood all the way to 51st Street.

The NBC Studios are located between 5th and 6th Avenues on 49th Street. That is a *ritz* neighborhood, or let’s say, since no one lives there, it is a rich place to walk. Money at work. The entertainment industry. The lobby of 49 W. 49th Street is dark, its walls a wine-colored marble; it looks like a posh 1930’s hotel. I found an elevator and took it to the 6th floor, as ordered, and the first thing I saw was the room marked *WHO WHAT OR WHERE contestants wait HERE!* Into which I walked.

Another contestant, named Ciel, was there. She was the most alive person I’ve met in NYC, probably because she was from out of town. (Note my reprehensible adherence to the stereotype of New Yorkers as surly, mean, and impatient. I apologize. I now know New Yorkers. They’re surly, mean, impatient and *rude*. Just kidding.) She instantly spotted my ripped nerve-

ends and told me to relax. On her previous visit, the week before (**The 3Ws** always calls in two more people than actually get on the air that week; they're automatically invited back) a fella had come in as nervous as the immortal and despised feline, and had done zilch on the show, he was so up-keyed. (Which means that he was so up-tight that he couldn't do well on the program, I think.) I began to breathe deeply, hoping either to calm myself down, or pass out from hyper-ventilation.

Cynthia came in, and one by one, our fellow contestants. Ciel, ever the kind lady, told me that a sense of camaraderie would develop among us, and indeed it did. We were hardly competing; we were all in the same boat and knew it. So Cynthia had us read the simple **3Ws** rules again, and practice bidding with a spare unit in the room.

(Time for me to go over the rules of **The Who, What or Where Game** as best as I can recall them. Three contestants. Each category, three questions, "who", "what", "where". The contestant was given a small bankroll to start, and advised to wager something less than the full amount on whether he could answer the question. I trust that's obscure enough.

Even more obscure is my memory of the playing board on which we practiced. Basically,

the board consisted of a top row of three large buttons, marked **Who** and **What** and **Where**. Below, in vertical columns, were numbered buttons on which we were to make our wagers.)

Cynthia explained that the row marking hundreds would be covered by a box during the early part of the show, and we were warned not to touch it; a union man would remove it when the time came. We were led into the studio itself for rehearsal.

TV magnifies the faults and greatnesses of man, and well it might, because TV studios are *small*. Oh, I suppose the room, with its stage and several hundred seats, could be considered well-sized as a theatre, but the stage itself was quite compact with none of the wide expanse I expected. The announcer, whose name is not with me at the moment (nor can it be recalled 30 years later [*ed—Mike Darrow*]), ran us three at a time through a few minutes of simulated show, relaxing us. (Hard to do; those stools were uncomfortably high and my head kept bumping my scoreboard.) Cynthia encouraged us to cheer each other on and we applauded each correct answer wildly. I cautioned myself not to repeat my applause for the wrong answers on the real telecast.

It was approaching the hour of eleven, the magic time. Three by three we were led to a

nearby room with low ceilings and many mirrors and there powder and other such light-gobbling glop was smeared generously upon our faces. (The makeup man said I had “a Nixon beard.”) We talked among each other about Watergate and '76 and so forth, and had our photos taken for our home town papers. (The photographer was gorgeous, I remember that, and a little sarcastic.) Then we were led back to the waiting room, where we waited.

Once again we were taken into the studio. The reigning champion, a stern young guy named Tim, had come in, and he and the first two challengers, Ciel among them, took their places behind the familiar counter. The rest of us sat in a special section in the audience, Cynthia nearby, and the announcer again came out to “warm up” the couple hundred people who had showed up to watch me make an idiot out of myself. After a while Art James was introduced, and the real thing began...and passed easily. The questions seemed ludicrously simple (“I *know* that!” I kept muttering). James told jokes during commercials and was, of course, a total professional. It was amazing that anyone could be well-prepared, well-composed. But then he wasn't risking reputation and soul the way I'd come to feel / was.

The show went its way and John, a middle-aged salesman from California, won. So now it was my turn, and that of Laurie, a thirtyish housewife from South Carolina beside whom I'd sat during the first show. I wasn't too nervous as I took my seat to the far right of the panel (as the audience saw it). The borrowed blue tie puffed up at the throat of my reddish-brown sweater. Cynthia came forward to brush my hair back into some semblance of neatness. “Ten seconds,” someone said. And then we were being told to face into the camera before us. “Smile—for those *dimples!*” Cynthia told me. “You've got a great face, and you've got *dimples!*” Loved that Cynthia.

“This is our champion, John So&So, returning for his second appearance. And this is Laurie Thus&Thus, a housewife from Blahblah, South Carolina, and this is Guy Lillian and this is *The Who What or Where Game* and here's our host, Art James!!!!!!”

We applauded, as we had been told to do, and faked applause later on, since real clapping that close to the microphones hung about our necks would bust tubes. We moved straight into the first category, and I was outbid. I knew the answers to the questions, but fell into third place immediately. I would be there for ten long, long, long minutes.

After the first commercial break James did his little interview bits, asking me where I was from. “Well, ahem, all over. I’ve lived in Berkeley, California. New Orleans, Louisiana, I go to school now in Greensboro, North Carolina, and my parents live in Lewiston New York!” “Fine,” said James.

Back to the game. I botched a question about



a George Bernard Shaw play, scored by knowing that Carl Albert was Speaker of the House, and missed one about what I bitterly described as some incredibly obscure hole-in-the-ground in Egypt called Karnak, with which I dropped down to \$75. A few categories later I was up to \$350.

Cynthia cheered wildly whenever I hit a right answer. Those dimples of mine were really doing me some good.

My best moment came in the horrible category known as ANAGRAMS. For this category James held up a card on which was written the anagram we were supposed to figure out—out of sight of the audience. The producers of **The 3W's** no doubt remembered the quiz show scandals of 15 years before and wanted to avoid even the semblance of dishonesty—even though we contestants still had to scope out the answer on our own. I had bid the highest in the “Who” category, so James read me a question about a high government official, saying the anagram, “Kings Seer.”

The card he held up read “Rumpot Fox” or somesuch. Huh?

“Uh, err, umm...‘Kissinger’!” I blurted. Right answer! James cheered and the audience erupted in applause. I made frantic hand signals to James. “You held up the wrong one,” I said. I was concerned that the other contestants might also get wrong cards, noble idiot that I was.

James glanced down at the stack of cards he held, went *oops!* and then turned to the audience. He explained the system. “Thanks for giving us away on national television, Guy!” he said, with a wink.

I shrugged my “anytime!” The crowd loved it.

(My great New York friend Neal Pozner later did a caricature of me at that moment. He shows me saying “You held up the wrong card—and I *still* got it!” I hope he made that up.)

Came the “pot limit” final round—and the topic freaked me completely out. ISLANDS OF THE WORLD. What do I know about that? I bid low on the Where question—and John the businessman outbid me. That lack of nerve cost me the championship.

“This island played an important role in World War II and gets its name from its *position* in the ocean.”

The answer sang in my head. *Midway*. Of course. John’s answer, “I have no idea.” The nervous little housewife from New Jersey won with a gimme question—*what nationality forms the majority of residents of Singapore?*—and she was so surprised I had to love it.

I did come in second, and I could have won with a bit more recklessness. After saying fond adieus to Cynthia and Ciel, to whom I felt very friendly all of a sudden, I walked out happily. Some kids recognized me. It was a good experience, a lot of fun, but not without its lessons.

And good ones. To win you gotta take *risks*. I’d been too cautious. I’d wanted a sure thing. I won \$350. But the glory?

I remember that I wore my makeup home. Never got to see the show—I was in Atlanta the day it was broadcast and they didn’t carry **Who What or Where**. My father took some good pictures off the tube and perhaps one of those accompanies this piece. The hair was long ... and now is long gone. My North Carolina girlfriend, who would (much) later become my first wife, watched and said I’d picked my nose. Everyone wanted to know if I’d known the answer to that last question, and a few jealous souls mocked me for not winning. \$350 and a great story for half an hour’s work—hadn’t I?

Years later, while in L.A. before Iguanacon, I remembered my fun on **The 3W’s** and tried out for **The \$25,000 Pyramid**. Risk it all, I thought. I made the second cut but was never called back. I have a hunch it was because I got too excited—the enthusiasm that enthralled Cynthia was too much for those people. And maybe I’d lost my dimples.

Cover: Brad Foster
p.28: William Rotsler
p.52: Frank Wu
p.54: Trinlay Khadro
p.67: Taral Wayne
p.73: Steve Stiles