

# CHEAP TRUTH

For a  
*Luxury Vacation at Low Cost*



EDITORIAL by Todd Refinery. Regular CT editor V. Omniaveritas is currently out of touch in Haiti, where he is pelting the Tonton Macoute with concrete blocks. And longtime CT contributor Sue Denim has our passports ready for a romantic tour of her own.

## CHEAP TRUTH TOURS CENTRAL AMERICA with Sue Denim

The current chaos in Central America is the result of foreign meddling, greed, laziness, guilt, and misplaced idealism. That's a lot of factors, but then, Central America is a hell of a mess.

So is this year's Nebula ballot.

What happened? Take an area -- say, Central America, or the SFWA -- that has traditionally been governed by enlightened self-interest. Sweeten the pot by making this area suddenly very valuable -- either politically or monetarily -- and the adjective "enlightened" tends to disappear.

For example. Say you're an over-the-hill SF writer or politician, like Anastasio Somoza. You're going to do anything you can to keep your power -- beg, plead, humiliate yourself, take help from anybody, even the U.S., just to get those votes. If you're an up-and-coming politician, you're going to curry favor as widely as you can (one reviewer recommended over 125 stories in one category alone, bloating the ballot like a drowned corpse).

But enough generalities. Climb into our Mi-24 Hind gunship and let's have a look at the countryside.

First stop: Costa Rica. Here is a fairly stable democracy -- conservative, predictable, with a comparatively high standard of living that's a result of guilt -- American guilt over the country's former banana republic status.

How like this year's novels: Greg Bear's BLOOD MUSIC, which expands predictably his earlier brilliant (and award winning) short story. DINNER AT DEVIANT'S PALACE by Tim Powers, on the ballot for everyone who really liked his ANUBIS GATES and forgot to vote for it before Powers joined SFWA. ENDER'S GAME by Orson Scott Card. (How many people voted for this because it has a strong, compassionate ending -- and how many voted for it because it has all the ritual trappings of military SF, complete with cadet school and blowing up alien ships real good?) David Brin's two-dimensional POSTMAN. Malzberg's REMAKING OF SIGMUND FREUD. (Surely we should give him a Nebula for something. He's always telling us what an unsung genius he is.)

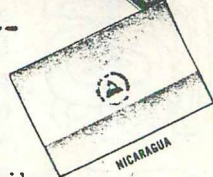
Even the good stuff here in Costa Rica is tainted with guilt and predictability. Bruce Sterling's SCHISMATRIX is first-class futurism. But in many ways it's the book he was expected to write, the logical culmination of his popular "Shaper/Mechanist" stories. Erian Aldiss's HELLICONIA WINTER is by no means the strongest element of the trilogy (and why the hell isn't the trilogy on here as a single item, HELLICONIA?), but it's too late now to recognize the first two books.

A few hundred miles north is El Salvador, Costa Rica gone wrong. Here democracy is enforced at gunpoint, and inspiration is in jail. It is the dictatorship of the novella. Here Generalissimo Silverberg rakes in the big bucks with his predictable "Sailing to Byzantium." On his right hand sits the former firebrand James Tiptree Jr., now apparently suffering from a Heinlein-ish senility and turning out gushing '40's space opera like "The Only Neat Thing To Do." Kate Wilhelm turns in a limp nod to Castaneda with "The Gorgon Field" (it's too hot to work hard here in El Salvador). Kim Stanley Robinson, the American attache', is eager and earnest in his walking shorts and knapsack, but his "Green Mars" is marooned in the '70's. There is some nice landscape -- Roger Zelazny presides over a scenic province called "24 Views of Mount Fuji" -- but it has no life or heart.

Then there are the "desaparecidos," like Norman Spinrad's "World War Last," which you won't see on the ballot. They have simply ceased to exist, for being too noisy, too unorthodox, asking too many hard questions.

But wait! What's that up in the hills? It's Bruce Sterling's "Green Days in Erunei," the single most visionary and exciting piece of fiction on the ballot, armed to the teeth and about to blow this fatuous and complacent government off the map! We'd better head back to the gunship and be on our way.

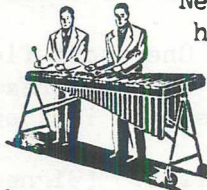
Welcome to Nicaragua, home of the dream gone sour. Liberals



COFFEE PLANT



CASTANETS



MARIMBA



ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUN



Sombrero



quetzal

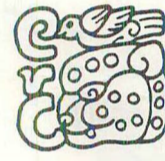
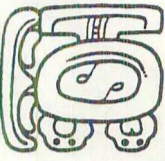
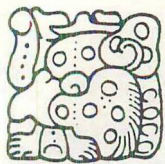


TORTURE WITH THE BOOT



Chihuahua





around the world feel compelled to continue to praise the Sandinista revolution, even though its armies have regressed to the same terror tactics as the Guardia they replaced. Just as the "younger writers" (all of them at least in their thirties) continue to admire the bloodless, self-conscious work of Michael Bishop ("Gift from the Graylanders"), Lucius Shepard ("The Jaguar Hunter") or Harlan Ellison ("Paladin of the Lost Hour"). William Gibson and Michael Swanwick, like the Sandinistas' Commander Zero, seem terribly uncomfortable in this regime, managing only a heartless, pro-forma video-game exercise, "Dogfight." The chameleon-like Scott Card here offers "The Fringe," a competent and very politically correct tale of a handicapped schoolteacher. George Martin's "Portraits of His Children" is an insufferable bit of pretended self-criticism that looks like it was written to please a State Committee of Mandatory Literary Values. (Your tour guide is unable, at press time, to comment on S.C. Sykes' "Rockabye Baby" due to her inability to read ANALOG in recent years.)

It's time to get away from these poetic revolutionaries who are taking themselves all so seriously. Let's copter off to polluted, overcrowded, corrupt, and exciting Mexico City for a night on the town.

Did somebody say crowded? Eight nominees. But anything goes in Mexico City. Howard Waldrop, rather than gamble on actually winning a Nebula, got greedy and decided to leave both his stories, "Flying Saucer Rock and Roll" and "Heirs of the Perisphere," on the ballot. They're two of his best, full of fun and pathos and great characters, and after all, greed is the name of the game here in Mexico.

You see all kinds here. There's "Paper Dragons," the year's single best short story, a delicate construction of paranoia, innuendo, and crisp language. There's Nancy Kress' populist fantasy, "Out of All Them Bright Stars," organizing among the peasants. There are the local favorite sons like Dozois, Dann, and Swanwick, who can make the ballot with "Gods of Mars" no matter how poor a story it is, or William F. Wu, whose mundane "Hong's Bluff" is swept up in the popular imagination after the brutal editorial murder of his earlier story, "Wild Garlic." There's Haldeman's perfunctory "More Than the Sum of His Parts" and John Crowley's willfully obscure "Snow." So many of them! And what's that rumbling from the membership? The hotel is starting to collapse!

What's the answer to this glut of egos? More rules? Should Reagan send ground troops to Nicaragua? Obviously not. Power will come from the people, eventually. There will be a backlash from this year's Nebulas, mark my words. Innocents will doubtless suffer, empires will crumble. In the end, the dust will settle and the Nebula will either be restored to its former value or it will become a joke award, like the Hugo. In the meantime, as we stumble, sweaty and exhausted, back into the helicopter, let's dwell on the many new friends we made on our journey.

AND NOW for that popular feature, "Ask Sue":

Dear Sue: You're not going to do another of your bitter, tasteless, near-libelous, irrelevantly political Nebula diatribes again this year, are you? (Signed) Hopeful.

Dear Hopeful: Sorry.

Dear Sue: Why is the Hugo a joke award? (Signed) H. Gernsback.

Dear Mr. Gernsback: A couple of hundred people (at best) do the nominating for an award on which thousands vote, with no give-and-take or feedback among the nominators. At least the Nebula process allows a means to regularly display the titles of recommended works (the Nebula Awards Report) and includes a jury which often compensates for oversights.

Dear Sue: So what's your answer? (Signed) Wise Guy.

Dear Guy: Fewer rules instead of more. Hands off diplomacy. One short fiction category (say 30,000 words and under), one long. We've got enough awards already. Maybe even a public service campaign to remind both authors and publishers that it's only an award, not life and death.

Dear Sue: So what did you think was missing on the Nebula ballot? (Signed) Stupid Question.

Dear Stupid: NOVEL: TIMESERVERS by Russell M. Griffin (reviewed in CT 11, a Phil Dick Award nominee); THE GLASS HAMMER by K. W. Jeter; EON by Greg Bear (just to show that I'm not prejudiced against hard SF and that I still know how to have a good time).

NOVELLA: "World War Last" by Norman Spinrad.

NOVELET: "Tensor of Desire" by Wayne Wightman (a dizzy, headlong rush of a story, with teeth and genitals); "Storming the Cosmos" by Rucker and Sterling; "Solstice" by James Patrick Kelly (a known BOFFO proves he can wear mirrorshades with the best of them); "Dead Run" by Greg Bear (Bear has an amazing ability to think like a computer nerd but write like a guy on the street when he has to); "All My Darling Daughters" by Connie Willis (yes, you heard me, Connie Willis. How come all her so-called friends drop her when she gets really nasty, like in this story?).

SHORT STORY: "Klein's Machine" by Andrew Weiner (weird and literary at the same time); "You Never Asked My Name" by Brian Aldiss (in this category because the Nebulas don't have one for polemics).

Keep those cards and letters coming in.

Hugs and Kisses -- Sue.

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