

DAGON

#362, APA-Q DISTRIBUTION #272

21 November 1987

THE ONE-SHOT MURDER MYSTERY

Once a writer gets started in the exacting discipline of the murder mystery, he or she is tempted to locate one in some region or situation that was found intriguing. Dorothy L. Sayers had a very enjoyable vacation in Scotland, and Ruth Rendell had one in China - so they respectively produced the murder mysteries Five Red Herrings and Speaker of Mandarin, which turned out not to be up to the author's usual standard.

I very much fear that Sharyn McCrumb has fallen into the same trap with her satirical novel Bimbos of the Death Sun (\$3, Windwalker, 1987). Mark Blackman has informed us that, prior to writing this novel of a murder committed at a science-fiction convention, McCrumb attended precisely one con, a little regional called RoVaCon.

McCrumb seems chiefly interested in scoring points on the sort of people who attend s-f cons, as writers or as fans. She has two mouthpieces through which she says what she wants to say about fans: Appin Dungannon, the cult author and eventual victim, and Marion Farley, who teaches a s-f course in the English Department of the local university. Dungannon is most obviously modeled after Harlan Ellison, though McCrumb makes a feeble attempt to conceal this by having Dungannon and Ellison dislike each other. Moreover, while Ellison writes science-fiction, Dungannon is the author of an endless series of books about a Conan-type from the Dark Ages. (Do we get to guess that McCrumb has read Dark Valley Destiny, L. Sprague de Camp's biography of Conan's creator Robert E. Howard?) Dungannon is presented as a scrawny little runt, presumably on the theory that such people would "compensate" by writing about big, muscular barbarian heroes. Actually, most authors of heroic sword-and-sorcery fantasy are big, stalwart types: Howard, de Camp, Fritz Leiber, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Katherine Kurtz, Joel Rosenberg, and so forth. Slender people like Don Wollheim, Fred Pohl, Lester del Rey, and James White tend to write more cerebral fiction.

There are recognizable sub-fandoms loose at the conventions: Trekkies*, SCA-dians**, Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) players, and even the intrigues of Slobbovia, here called "Far Brandonia". (Left unstated, here and almost everywhere else, is the extent to which both D&D and Slobbovia may be indebted to a craze called "Coventry" that was running around the Los Angeles Science Fiction Society (LASFS) in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Coventry, which borrowed its name but nothing else from Heinlein's isolated enclave of ideological enthusiasts who refuse to come to terms with reality, was supposed to be an entire world located on an interstellar spaceship. The players took personae and engaged in violent battles or underhanded intrigues among themselves.) McCrumb has three characters who serve as reader-surrogates wondering what these nuts are up to: an engineering professor named James Owen Mega who as "Jay Omega" has just written his first s-f novel; a police officer who is called in to solve Dungannon's murder; and, most effectively, a Scottish folksinger on an American tour, who is staying at the same hotel, and who gets dragged into the mess through a

* - Sometimes you find a Trekkie who tries to distinguish carefully between "Trekkies" (evil) and "Trekkers" (good). The distinction means about as much as the distinction between a fiddle and a violin, or between a Libertarian and an Anarchist.

** - This is what, much to their displeasure, the members of the Society for Creative Anachronism are being called by others these days. By rigorously excluding those who know anything about the real Middle Ages, they have built themselves a mystique about how things ought to have been during that squalid and bloody era.

filksinging session. (To the obvious question he replies: "That phony Scot on the program...the one with the vaudeville Glasgow accent.")

Mega has more or less by accident written a s-f novel which his publisher retitled Bimbos of the Death Sun, and on the strength of it has become, along with Dungannon, guest author at the con. Farley is playing Vergil to his Dante during his first acquaintance with cons and fans; they have an off-hand sort of affair going until it becomes certain whether or not they'll both get tenure.

McCrumm has a low opinion of fans. They are social misfits, who'd rather have fantasy lives in their reading and their D&D games, than cope with the (bow, bow!) Real World. This is an old complaint about fans, and was as lively fifty years ago as it is now. What no one has ever bothered to explain is, why people should be warned against escaping into Escape Literature. Has the Real World been behaving itself so well, that people should be exhorted to live there rather than in a years-long D&D campaign, Middle Earth, the Good Ship Enterprise, or some Dark Age Keltic never-never-land where magic really works? Would you prefer James T. Kirk or Ronald Reagan as your Leader? If you happen to be female and overweight, or male and painfully shy, would you rather spend your free evenings in a singles bar or a Darkovan sex orgy? Should you slice to bits a gold-guarding griffin in a D&D game, or an overbearing boss at work? Would you rather join a military expedition to Ithilien, Imp-land, Inquanok - or Iran?

She puts some of these opinions into the acidulous words of Dungannon, who, according to his custom, has just awarded the prize for Best Costume to "the Galadriel with the best cleavage". However, I have never heard the obvious Dungannon-prototype, Harlan Ellison, snarl in any such way at his readers. Harlan still remembers the shy misfit that he was 35 years ago, and despite his mannerisms is too decent a person to say: "Isn't ridicule enough for you? Must you have contempt as well?"

(I am not. It's a lovely line, and I plan using it on Hawks quite a bit during the upcoming American invasion of the Middle East.)

There are the usual in-group jokes in a novel directed at a specialized readership. When warming up his computer, Dungannon types in symbols which most people will pass right by, but is the formula for relating the velocity of light to the electrical and magnetic properties of space. The evanescent Chip Livingstone is an updated and computerized version of Carl Joshua Brandon of hilarious memory. Nancy Lebovitz's calligraphed buttons are all over the place. An obstreperous Canadian fan is named "Diefenbaker". I think I know whom McCrumm satirizes as Brenda Lindenfeld; the portrait is most unfair, but the lady is quite capable of doing her own resenting.

Mark Blackman believes that Mega is modeled after Fred Pohl, who was Guest of Honor at the one convention McCrumm attended. As Mark observed, "...from Fred Pohl's GoH speech on science, she extrapolated an author who knows all about things but nothing about people, which doesn't describe Pohl at all."

On the morning after the murder, Mega finds himself running a D&D game as Dungeonmaster, though he knows practically nothing about it. This simply can't be done. I have knocked around the fringes of D&D for years, but I would undertake an enormous amount of work before I set up and ran a game, and I would need quite a bit of preparation even for dungeonmastering a dungeon designed by someone else. To have Mega step into it so easily, and simultaneously solve the murder, is a bit too much to expect.

There is a good murder mystery waiting to be written, about a murder at a science-fiction convention, which at the same time explores our sub-culture as Sayers explored change-ringing in The Nine Tailors, or as Tony Boucher explored the s-f world of his day in Rocket to the Morgue. But Bimbos of the Death Sun isn't it.

Still, there are many observations that are worth the price of admission. Consider the way that people from the Baker Street Irregulars to the Hyborian Legion to the Trekkies explore the minutiae of their beloved series. "The demented fans who read the series," Dungannon's thoughts run, "had hours of fun devising plausible explanations for his sloppiest screw-ups....So far, the two likeliest explanations - apathy and Chivas Regal - had not been suggested."

I'LL SEE YOU IN THE FUNNY PAPERS

XLVII. Comic Strips, Strikes, and Scabs

The up-to-date, "with it" comic strips always seem to be tagging along behind the news stories. If President Reagan does something particularly stupid even by his standards, another "Reagan's Brain" sequence soon appears in Doonesbury. If Congress commits an inordinate stupidity, dear old Senator Snort in Grin and Bear It will have something to say along the same lines. In For Better or for Worse, Ellie and Annie sometimes discuss current affairs over coffee. If men stop wearing their hair long, and instead cut it with the ends sticking up and "moussed", Cathy's Irving and Mike Doonesbury get the treatment. (No, I don't know what "mousse" is, and I don't think I want to know.)

And so, when the professional football players struck, the characters in Bloom County went on strike. Laggards like Opus were rounded up, fainthearts like Steve Dallas were locked in their rooms, and the "management", represented by a "businessman" caricature out of an old Gilbert Shelton comic book, hired scabs. Steve escaped from his room and tried to organize a "scab" strip, and one of the "scab" players got Bloom County censored. (There'll be more on this later.) In one episode, Steve called upon the substitute for Bill the Cat, only to find that it was an attractive young lady in a striped cat outfit. (4 November 1987) "What did this cat being normally do?" she asks Steve. "Lick me all over the face," he responds eagerly, "twice, maybe fifty times a day." Unimpressed, the actress replies, "Which explains his constant wretching!" Apparently Bloom County's spelling crew is also on strike.

Berke Breathed probably counted on the football strike going on for weeks and weeks, providing him with huge amounts of material for the strip. Instead, the economic realities forced the jocks to cave in fast, and the National Football League is back to its old ways - with the defending champion 2-5 at this writing.

This was the most publicized strike since the Professional Air Traffic Controllers' Organization (PATCO) walked out in 1981. That one also got very little attention from the media, except for Bloom County, where Santa Claus's elves walked out (their union was called "PETCO") and, like the air traffic controllers, all got fired. Prior to that, strikes had been virtually ignored in the comics. In Brenda Starr, the Flash's drivers' union once went on strike, but this turned out to be a maneuver by a Murdoch-type who had taken over the Flash's rival the Comet, and who fired the drivers as soon as they had served his purpose. On the rare occasions when the older comic strips noticed strikes at all, they denied that the interests of labor and capital were separated to such an extent that conflict was sensible. (See a famous Gasoline Alley panel to that effect, often reprinted. It appears on p. 174 of A History of the Comic Strip by Pierre Couperie and Maurice C. Horn, and also on p. 276 of Horn's The World Encyclopedia of Comics.) In Peanuts, Charlie Brown's beloved teacher once joined a strike - and she was not only fired, but disappeared from Peanuts permanently. (Like all adults in Peanuts, she never actually appeared in the strip.)

Ever since America's labor unions started beating up Pacifists about 20 years ago, they have sunk badly, both in membership and in the public estimation. Middle management levels, and even higher ones, are now staffed with people who, 20 years ago, were getting clubbed in the head by union goons because they thought that peace is better than war. Such people are not going to be overly friendly to unions now, whether they are comic strip artists, football fans, or computer programmers. Terms like "scab" and "fink" belong in bad folksongs of the 1930s, not in 1987 news stories. Personally, I rejoiced when the jocks' strike was broken, particularly since they were getting loud support from members of less publicized unions, who were apparently taking this opportunity of getting their decaying cause back into the headlines by joining football players' picket lines.

The main issue in the Bloom County characters' strike was allegedly the steady shrinkage of comic strips. This has been going on for years, and this is by no means Bloom County's first expression of concern over the artistic problems thus presented.

During one of the "Starchair Enterpooop" episodes, Cutter John's well-laden wheelchair was transformed into a spaceship that was being drawn into a Black Hole - namely, the ultimate limit of the shrinking comic strips. Few people now alive can remember the old six-panel strips of the 1920s; shrinkage is not a new problem. Calvin and Hobbes also deal with the problem, in their strip of 11 November 1987. It is done in a parody of the "talking heads" style to which small available space has reduced the modern comic strip; there is now little room for elaborate backgrounds or detailed illustration. In four virtually identical panels, Calvin tells Hobbes that:

"Grandpa says the comics were a lot better years ago when newspapers printed them bigger. He says comics now are just a bunch of xeroxed talking heads because there's no space to tell a decent story or to show any action. He thinks people should write to their newspapers and complain."

Instead of laughing at that last line, which is one of the funniest that has appeared in the comics recently, Hobbes replies: Your grandpa takes the funnies pretty seriously." "Yeah," Calvin agrees, "mom's looking into nursing homes."

Worse than shrinkage is censorship, and Newsday and other dailies have been engaging in a lot of that lately. The Doonesbury strip of 11 October 1987 has Zonker Harris dropping by the ad agency where Mike Doonesbury works as an artist. Mike is doing a layout for a new 10-speed bicycle. What we see on his drawing board is a mess of writhing bodies, mostly unclothed, with everything showing except faces and genitalia. "Where's the bike?" Zonker asks. "Don't need it," replies Mike. "We're just capturing the mood, the spirit of the product."

In apparent surprise that sex is being used to sell merchandise, a lot of newspapers refused to run this strip. As it happens, we get both the Daily News, which ran it, and Newsday, which did not. At least 50 years ago, Philip Wylie told us that the basic message of American advertising is: "Madame, are you a good lay?" But Newsday has its headquarters out on Long Island, and so hasn't yet caught up to the modern urban values of the Daily News. Instead, they printed a disclaimer to the effect that "Newsday found the strip suggestive and possibly offensive to our readers and withheld it."

Since Newsday is the most liberal of the four New York City dailies, they felt they could not leave it at this. In his column in that newspaper 2 days later, Anthony Marro quotes himself as telling a complaining reader that "It's not really censorship. It's just a matter of taste." What kind of idiots does Marro imagine Newsday's readers to be? Apparently someone at Newsday is assigned the job of spotting "things that seem offensive, obscene, or in questionable taste." If this were true, why did they print all of Lieutenant Criminal North's testimony? Furthermore, Marro says that "the comic nonetheless runs in a section aimed largely at children."

At children? Cathy takes vacations in Hawaii with Irving, and if Mike and J. J. ever got married, I don't recall seeing it in Doonesbury. What are children to make of the almost ceaseless marital squabbles in The Born Loser and The Lockhorns? Are they to assume from Blondie that a man who gives long and faithful service to his company is still so poorly off that he has to eat lunch at a shabby hashhouse? The principal characters in Peanuts and in Calvin and Hobbes may be children, but the humor in those strips is aimed at adults. And sometimes the humor in The Far Side seems to be aimed at another species than ours.

Besides, if the "orgy" panel in Doonesbury is capable of doing damage, we are already doomed. The strip ran as drawn in the New York Daily News, the Miami Herald, the Dallas Times Herald, the Boston Globe, and even in those two citadels of political reaction the Chicago Tribune and the Los Angeles Times.

Fresh from this triumph, Newsday also censored one of the Bloom County strips during the "strike" sequence. One of the "scab" characters hired was a substitute penguin, a little squirt named Ollie Funt. On 6 November, Li'l Ollie expressed the opinion: "Reagan sucks!" Even though this expression of exasperation is altogether appropriate to the present national scene, Newsday pulled the entire strip, while the

Daily News changed it to "Reagan stinks." According to a brief story in the next day's Newsday, when asked to "say something wistfully poignant", Li'l Ollie "utters an obscenity".

When the Bloom County strike was over, and Li'l Ollie sent back to his dreams of someday becoming a big franchised star like Opus, the regular cast returned, and on 11 November Opus and Milo discuss the "replacement penguin". "He is very politically astute, isn't he?" a nervous Opus asks. Milo replies that Opus could do just as well - as, indeed, he has. Opus tries. "Reagan stunks!" he shouts. "Close!" replies Milo.

While Breathed agonizes over how to express his opinion on Reagan in a way that is both accurate and printable, the management at Brenda Starr has solved the problem. (I can't identify them; the strip has shrunk so much that their signatures are illegible.) In the strip of 20 October, we get a look at the family life of Brenda's rival, the pretentious Gaby, and the three men in her life - her father, an amiable old geezer who spends his time drinking beer and watching TV in a slum walk-up, her coniving ex-husband, and her handsome, 20-year-old son, who is of course in the process of falling for Brenda like a ton of bricks. The overweight Gaby is puffing upstairs on a visit to her father, while two slum kids make fun of her efforts. She snarls: "Petits cons," and the newspapers printed it. That's French; it means "Little cunts."

On the editorial page of the New York Daily News of 8 November, an editorial cartoonist with an illegible signature borrows his theme from Calvin's fantasies in Calvin and Hobbes. One of Calvin's daydreams involves "Spaceman Spiff" being taken captive by some fearful monster - which, in the last panel, turns out to be a parent, teacher, or principal. In the first four of the five panels, we have a spaceman on board a 1930s movie spaceship, being quizzed by a ravening monster. "Faced with the total annihilation of his planet," says the spaceman, who bears a considerable resemblance to Ronald Reagan, "the Courageous Spaceman Gipp meets his captors!" "You and you alone can stop it," the monster bellows. "Simply tell your people that our - heh, heh - 'program' was right all along." "Get yourself another lapdog, you miserable space mutant." "Gipp" replies. In the last panel, we see that President asleep at dreaming at a table where Congressional leaders are sitting debating the budget. "It'll take more than a rabid Zorg to make me raise taxes!" he mutters. A Senator is cautioned that "it's dangerous to wake a sleeptalker."

Bruce Schneier has sent along the Washington Post of 27 August, which runs more comic strips than all four New York City dailies combined. Aside from strips that run locally, they have Bill Griffith's Zippy (a very poor "underground" strip which nevertheless is slowly edging into the "mainstream"); Hi and Lois; the veteran Miss Peach; the excellent and underrated Tank McNamara; Sally Forth (which only runs Sundays in the Daily News); the increasingly lame Crock; Mark Trail; a sort of Black Calvin and Hobbes called The Middletons; Frank & Ernest (a junior-grade Far Side); Kudzu (in which the preacher is being investigated for negotiating with a 900-foot terrorist, while Veranda shreds his sermons); The Phantom (who is currently fighting a "snake goddess"); Steve Roper (who has finally hired a new letterer); Herman; and two venerable soap-opera strips, Judge Parker and Rex Morgan, M. D.

On the animation scene, Warner Brothers is at last restoring Daffy Duck to the movie screen. The New York Post announced on the 10th, and Newsday on the 29th, that an 8-minute feature called The Duxorcist will be released later this month. It is the first Looney Tunes short for theater presentation in 20 years. It will star Daffy Duck and a lady duck who is possessed by demons, with the obvious intent of parodying both The Exorcist and Ghostbusters. (It even has the joke about what happens if you don't pay your exorcist. It will probably not have the exorcist joke that appears in Acts 19:13-16.) It "is filled with sight gags, puns, double-takes, and 'in' jokes, just like the cartoons of old," reports Jami Bernard in the Post. A second cartoon, Night of the Living Duck, is in the planning stage. Daffy's voice is done, as always, by Mel Blanc, but the 79-year-old Blanc has topped off a long and glorious

GETTING CAUGHT UP

APA-Qover #271 (Blackman & Malay): After Garry Trudeau has given us "Ron Headrest", and Russ Meyers has presented "Max Headwound", now we have "Max Bedroom" - as the original Max Headroom slowly stutters off to TV heaven. But flattery will get you nowhere - Streak Gordon will not return.

The Return of APA-Q #63 (Sacks): "The new Captain and Executive Officer of this Enterprise are both improvements over Captain Kirk..." Combined, they both are Cap-tain Kirk!

Blancmange #191 (Blackman): I don't know what happened to the stencils you provided me with, for printing this. I poured the ink on - so much so that the excess matted up some other stencils I was printing in this same run. Yet the centers particularly had trouble printing.

Yes, the new TV show Beauty and the Beast is - er - different. ("The Yuppie and the Yucchie"?) There is an odd comparison with Jean Cocteau's classic Beauty and the Beast, in which beauty found an inner beauty in the Beast that outweighed his ugly* appearance. He's too well-groomed to be a Lionman from the classic Flash Gordon serials, but the comparison with Heathcliffe (the comic strip cat, not the Brontë hero) might be valid. Garfield is a gross slob, but Heathcliffe has some class.

Thanks for the Dallas comic strips.

Not long after the senile actor sent the Bork nomination to the Senate, a Black columnist in the Daily News was telling about a speech he'd made on the Constitution at a college campus. One of the students asked him what he thought of Bork's views, and he replied that if the Constitution was what Bork says it is, he himself wouldn't be there - he'd be out throwing gasoline bombs.

I am not surprised that Ron Paul, the Libertarian Party's candidate for the presidency, "sends out an investment newsletter filled with the traditional warnings against...the 'Israel Lobby.'" There is a lot more overlap between libertarianism and anti-Semitism than local Libertarians, especially Jewish ones, would like to admit. You can buy at Libertarian bookshops books 'proving' that the Holocaust was a hoax, and Libertarian views that only gold is 'real' money have crossbred with anti-Semitism in the Midwest, where it is being preached that the money borrowed on farm mortgages from "Jewish bankers" is not real money and therefore doesn't have to be repaid.

The Swiss game that Hsu calls 'jass' is, I think, related to an eastern European game called klaberjass or "klob". Characters in Damon Runyon's stories were always sitting down for a few hands of "klob". I think it is played with the 32-card German deck, and may be related to skat, schafskopf, and euchre, and somewhat more distantly to pinochle and bezique.

Quant Suff! #155 (Malay): A couple of years ago, some orthodox rabbis got together, constituted themselves a sort of Supreme Rabbinical Court, and formally "expelled" from Judaism a few people, including Ed Koch, whom they thought were too tolerant towards gays, or towards Middle Eastern peace plans. Now, I see, the haughty Episcopalians are trying the same thing with this "Prayer Book Society". However, there is no need to "wonder how somebody with the fatal virus of tolerance got to such a high position in the established church". The Church of England, or the Protestant Episcopal Church as its American descendant is known, is virtually unique among religious bodies. Almost every other religion, church, sect, or cult in the world got its start when some charismatic, ideologically motivated enthusiast got up and defied and blasted the powers of his day in uncompromising tones - from Moses before Pharaoh to the Russellites telling President Wilson where he could stick his war. The Church of England alone was established by reasonable men, practical politicians sitting down around a table and working out doctrines which most of the country would accept without too much trouble. This spirit still governs the Episcopalians today.

The tradition of the Scottish maritime engineer is still alive and well on the new Enterprise and, since it goes back many centuries, why not? In addition to MacDougal, there is another engineer named Argyle. (By his name he would belong to a bastard branch of the chiefs of Clan Campbell.) Despite Scotty's occasional Highland

garb, the Scottish tradition of maritime engineering is a Lowlands tradition. In fact, just about everything that has made the name of Scotland famous in the world has originated in the Lowlands, where Highlanders are regarded as a bunch of not altogether reformed cattle thieves.

I should guess that Jean-Luc Picard might be intended as a descendant of the Piccard family of our own time. At one time, about 50 years ago, August Piccard held the record for deepest descent in a bathysphere while his twin brother Jean held the record for highest ascent in a balloon. These Piccard brothers were Swiss rather than French.

I rather doubt that "Allan Bloom was permanently traumatized by the militant take-over of Columbia during the late 1960s when he was teaching there," since he was at Cornell at the time. The Closing of the American mind seems to be an intellectual equivalent of the Rambo movies - we couldn't defeat Them in real life, so we will write a fantasy, and not only defeat Them but justify it before the world. (Will Sylvester Stallone get to play Professor Bloom in the movie version?)

Pink Noise (Sherwood): Whether or not royal offspring were illegitimate was often a matter subject to political decision during the Renaissance. As Will Cuppy put it, in his account of Queen Elizabeth I in The Decline and Fall of Practically Everybody:

"In 1534, Parliament ruled that it was treason to believe her illegitimate. In 1536 it was treason to believe her legitimate. Signals were changed again in 1543, and again in 1553. After that you could believe anything."

In effect, the English crown had been elective ever since the consent of Parliament was obtained for the deposition of Edward II in 1327.

"Secession is just emigration writ large". Some of the busted-out Confederates tried just that after 1865. Some went to British Honduras, others to Brazil, where slavery remained until 1888. There is probably no truth to the rumor that one of them went to Buenos Aires and survived to 1945, when he was present at the docks to welcome a fresh set of racist refugees.

Vaudeville Lines #190 (Lipton): In a sense, those electrons in the beam do "cycle between spin up and spin down". You don't know what state any electron is in until you do a measurement. Until then, all you have is a 50% possibility of spin up and a 50% possibility of spin down.

Portugal was incorporated in Spain from 1580, when the House of Aviz died out and the King of Spain hoked up a claim to the title, until 1640, when a Portuguese duke with a smidgen of royal blood kicked them out. Between those two dates, Spain had declined so drastically in power that such a step was feasible.

These events had a considerable effect on the history of New York City. During their management of Portugal's colonial empire, they ceded northeastern Brazil to the Dutch. In 1640 the Portuguese wanted their Brazil back, and in 1654 the Dutch gave it to them. However, during those 30 years a Jewish community had settled there, the Dutch being a more tolerant lot than the Portuguese or Spanish. The Portuguese wanted the Jews out, so the Dutch resettled them in another of their colonial possessions - Nieuw Amsterdam. Thus began the Jewish community of New York City.

H. G. Wells, author of Floor Games and Little Wars, was often asked a sort of question which is posed to war-gamers today - how he could reconcile his strong and life-long opposition to war with his enthusiasm for playing war games with military models. His reply was short, to the point, and still valid today - "Lead soldiers leave no widows and orphans."

DAGON #361 (me): My German response to Don Del Grande's line "What do I know about weapons shipments? I'm a computer scientist." is "What do I know about extermination? I'm a furnace repairman." It is impolite, but no so much as a

This is

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1464

nuclear war is.

Headlines #21 (Blackman): Richard Burton (the original one, not Liz Taylor's sometime husband) once commented, in his notes to The Thousand and One Nights, that contrary to what Europeans might expect the mating of elephants is accomplished with, considerable dexterity. One can only imagine an expansion of this process for dinosaurs. In fact, in recent years two books on dinosaurs, both published in Great Britain, have shown dinosaurs mating in poses much like the one suggested by Dr. Halstead. In fact, I believe one of those books was written by Halstead. Halstead, an Atheist, testified at the 1982 legal case which demolished the Arkansas "monkey law", and did not in the least compromise with the religious prejudices of the locals.

THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE

DAGON is published every third Saturday by John Boardman, 234 East 19th Street, Brooklyn, New York 11226-5302. It circulates through APA-Q, an amateur press association that is collated at the same address and frequency. The copy count is 35, and you are invited to contribute. If you don't have your own printing facilities, I can print your contribution at a cost of 2¢ per copy per sheet if you send it in on a stencil that can fit on a Gestetner mimeograph. I can also mail you your APA-Q at a cost of postage plus 15¢ for the envelope. Just send a few dollars, and I'll keep you posted on the state of your account. Postage and printing accounts, as of 1 November 1987, are:

Nina Bogin	\$5.30	Robert Bryan Lipton*#	\$22.40
Lee Burwasser	\$11.37	John Malay#	\$19.53
Philip M. Cohen	\$17.35	Alan Rachlin	\$1.16
Stacey Davies	\$1.14	Anton Sherwood	\$4.75
Don Del Grande	\$8.09	Jane T. Sibley*	\$23.32
John Desmond	\$7.28	Peter G. Trei	\$2.06
Harold Feld*	\$6.37	Elizabeth Willig	92¢
Daniel B. Holzman	\$10.50		

* - Also gets APA-Filk

- 1st-class mail

Including postage and/or printing costs for this present Distribution, the amount of your balance as of today is given at the right. Accounts which fall into arrears will be suspended. Presently suspended accounts are:

Vinnie Bartilucci	-76¢	John Hartzell	-79¢
Andre Bridget	-72¢	Dana Hudes	-28¢
Shelby Bush	-\$5.98	Mark Keller	-86¢
Liz Ensley	-37¢	Ted Pauls	-39¢
Mike Gunderloy	-\$2.01	Joyce Scrivner	-75¢

If the weight of the letter is less than four ounces, the 1st-class and 3rd-class mail rates are the same, a situation that is likely to remain unchanged when the rates go up next April. This may be why some people who didn't ask for the additional expense of 1st-class mail received their last Distribution by that method.

The last Distribution, on 31 October, coincided with the publication dates of APA-Filk, a quarterly, and the latest issue of my war-gaming fanzine GRAUSTARK. This meant a particularly large amount of collating work. I would like to thank Mark Blackman, Stacey Davies, and Robert Sacks, who came over to do the work while I cut last-minute stencils for GRAUSTARK. The collation dates of the next few Distributions are to the right. If they are to be assembled by several people, collation begins at 2 PM. However, phone me before you come, as I may have other plans, and will collate them myself Sunday instead.

	#273	12 December 1987
	#274	2 January 1988
	#275	23 January 1988
	#276	13 February 1988
	#277	5 March 1988
	#278	26 March 1988
	#279	16 April 1988

I'LL SEE YOU IN THE FUNNY PAPERS (continued from p. 5)

career by training his son Joel, 47, to succeed him in future films of this new series.

If Warner Brothers is returning to the movie animation scene, can Disney be far behind? No, according to Marvin Kitman's column in Newsday of 19 November 1987. On 18 September there premiered an item called DuckTales - which, according to Anthony, is the name of Donald Duck's three nephews. (A Dr. Rose Goldenson of Cornell once claimed that the nephews were illegitimate and therefore "not good role models in children's TV." It should be recalled that Allan "Closing of the American Mind" Bloom had his opinions on our terrible modern world formed when he was on the faculty there. Just what is going on at the ravine-riven campus of the Ivy League's junior member?)

In addition to the usual Duckburg characters like Uncle Scrooge and Gyro Gear-loose, a couple of new characters have been introduced: Launchpad McQuack, "a soldier of outrageous misfortune", and a "Webbigail Vanderquack", otherwise undescribed. Kitman concludes by informing us that the British are getting in on the act; the same outfit that produces Dangermouse is going to release a Count Duckula. They are not original; a "Count Duckula" appeared in the old Superduck comic book some 40 years ago.

Yesterday I got, at the comic book shop in Greenwich Village, something I have been looking for for quite some time - a one-book collection of the English translation of Keiji Nakazawa's anti-war comic art creation Barefoot Gen. (There was a brief condensation of this in Schodt's book, which I reviewed in the last DAGON.) An animated film version of Barefoot Gen is said also to be in the works.

THE MINISTRY OF MISCELLANY

Last night, at a meeting of the Beaker People Libation Front*, Robert Sacks made one of the most distasteful remarks I have ever heard from him - and, as most of us know, he specializes in saying outrageous things not because he necessarily may believe in them, but simply for the effect they have on people. (Comparisons were made with Robert Bork during Bork's blessedly brief passage through the headlines.)

I happened shortly after a new arrival sat down, and I am not going to give the details because it would violate this person's privacy. But Sacks's remarks about his private life were so crude, so grossly offensive, that he got up and walked out. I have accordingly forbidden Sacks entry into this house, and he is also banned by Brian. I have no desire to subject myself, my family, and my guests, to the sort of cruel and unfeeling comments that Sacks is likely to make to them.

Since I don't own APA-Q, Sacks cannot be banned from it. However, from now on he must send in his contributions, and receive his Distributions, by mail. I do not want to have anything to do with him in person. And he should establish a postage account.

*

This is going to be a rather brief issue of DAGON, partly because time has been in short supply and partly because an issue of my gaming fanzine EMPIRE is also due to be published today. And, it appears, this is going to be one of the smallest APA-Q Distributions in many months. Stacey Davies phoned this morning, saying that she had lost track of the collation dates, and will try to get her comments into the next mailing. She has about 15 pages' worth, but it's all on disk and she doesn't have access to a printer.**

This Distribution's Cover was contributed by Mark Blackman, based on the cover of a book he got in England, and containing the traditional "Q" symbol. Mark's Blancmange #191, which I was unable to mimeograph acceptably for the last Distribution, is in this one in photo-duplicated form. Mark sent along a stencil for Blancmange #192,

* - The BPLF is a beer appreciation society, founded about 15 years ago by Brian Burley, Fred Lerner, and myself.

** - I am reminded of Nancy Leboxitz's button: "I Haven't Lost My Mind - It's Just Backed Up On Disc."

and you can see elsewhere in today's APA-Q how it has printed. Mark has also brought along a few fliers for today's Distribution, and Sacks has the obituary for NYClone III. As for Sacks's plans for a 1989 NYClone, at his present rate I doubt that anyone will be speaking to him by the summer of 1989, let alone attending a convention run by him.

*

It always seems that the most cogent announcements on the upcoming folksinging scene come out just after a Mailing of the quarterly filksinging apa, APA-Filk. Beginning next January, the Good Coffeehouse will go from a weekly to a twice-monthly schedule. The last two dates on the weekly schedule will be Friday 4 December and Friday 11 December. The former date is "Open Stage", at which "the first 8 performers to sign up will each be given 15 minutes of stage time." On the 11th, Steve Key "sings of city life using country-folk melodies and first-rate guitar work."

The next session after that will be on Friday 15 January. Thereafter, the Good Coffeehouse will hold folksinging performances only on the first and third Friday evenings of each month. Sessions begin at 9 PM at the Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture, 53 Prospect Park West (between 1st and 2nd Streets). Admission is \$4, and includes coffee and munchies.

*

"Well, shit; there goes my Supreme Court appointment. Still, the departure of Douglas 'Let's Party' Ginsburg in a cloud of, er, smoke, demands sober comment, and as soon as I can stop giggling, I'll attempt some." - Geoffrey Stokes, Village Voice, 17 November 1987

*

"Most of what I find in the sci-fi adventure-fantasy section of video stores fits into two categories: the director either thinks technology is a good thing or he doesn't. If films as diverse as 2001: A Space Odyssey, E. T., Close Encounters of the Third Kind, Cocoon, and the Star Trek films have nothing else in common, they all share a benevolent view of higher technology...and, by extension, the future. And if The Road Warrior, Blade Runner, Outland, Alien, Escape from New York, A Boy and His Dog, George Romero's Dead films, The Thing, and The Terminator have anything in common, it's either a nuclear apocalypse or a postindustrial landscape so bleak the destruction of civilization might be welcome. There's no question which category the moviegoing public prefers; every film in the first category was a box office hit, while except for Alien and The Terminator, every film in the second was either a box office disappointment in this country, or made a beeline from first-run to the college midnight cult circuit." - Allen Barra, Village Voice, 24 November 1987

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you may be interested in the
item on page _____.

F I R S T C L A S S M A I L