

DAGON

#370, APA-Q DISTRIBUTION #279

16 April 1988

I'LL SEE YOU IN THE FUNNY PAPERS

LI. Counter-Archie

For more than 40 years, Archie comics and its spin-offs have been commenting on what its artists and authors thought was the contemporary teen-age scene. The major characters of Archie have remained just about constant: its hero, his friend Jughead, his brunette girlfriend Veronica (who, sometime in the 1950s, began to be written as incredibly rich), the blonde Betty, in futile pursuit of Archie, and the sleazy Reggie. The strip runs to this day, as a daily and in comic books, and has survived a parody "Starchie" in Mad in the 1950s, and a underground parody that appeared in National Lampoon and elsewhere in the early 1970s, which had Archie as a disillusioned and dying Vietnam veteran, Jughead as a junk-head, Veronica as a jet-setter with huge bills for Guccis and abortions, Betty as the wife of a red-neck, and Reggie as a police informer.

In 1982 Larry Welz started a new take-off - Cherry Poptart, simply Cherry after the first of the five issues that have thus far appeared. The logo and artwork are straight Archie take-offs, and in #1 there is even a piece by Larry Todd in which Archie's girlfriend is parodied as "Vampironica", with "Bidly" as a born-again prude, a leather freak named "Ridgie", and "Orgie" and "Junkhead" at a "Mick Jugular" concert. (Vampironica discovers that Mick is a vampire too, but he is gay and only bites boys; in reaction she bites Junkhead and instantly OD's.) Cherry is published purportedly by "Yentzer & Gonif" and actually by Last Gasp, P. O. Box 212, Berkeley, Calif. 94705. ("Any resemblance of the images printed herein to Actual Reality is a really Weird Coincidence.") By mail they're \$3.50 each or all 5 for \$15.

A lot of people are trying to make us believe that the Great Sexual Revolution is all over, and that the world is drifting back to the certainties of the Ike Age. AIDS, we are told, has put an end to all this screwing around that kids were doing back when it was believed that peace was preferable to war. Welz obviously still believes that peace is preferable to war, and Cherry thinks "this AIDS virus thing was cooked up in some secret gov't germ warfare lab especially to wipe out the gays - and some junkies, too - and to scare the shit out of you so you'll be afraid to fuck!.. Sure, you gotta be careful, you always had to. But don't panic! Are you gonna cave in under this kind of gov't-media mind control bullshit? - or what?" There are even Cherry merchandise spin-offs - sexy negligees and that sort of thing. There are no Cherry sex aids yet, though to judge from the back page of #3 they cannot be far off - it shows a half-naked Cherry in a Statue of Liberty pose, holding a vibrator aloft and the Bill of Rights in the other hand, while a pack of prudes led by Ed Meese prepares to open fire on her.

Cherry is a high-school girl who does not compromise with an alleged slackening off in the "Sexual Revolution". Although she screws around a lot, both with numerous boy-friends, older men, and sometimes her girlfriend Ellie Dee, she is realistic about it. One scene in #1 shows her walking out of a public health clinic, rubbing an aching buttock, and telling Ellie: "That hurt! That Billy Ferguson'll never get me up in the projection booth again!" (Projection booths obviously have not changed since I was in high school.) She does more cocaine than Coca Cola - but then, if you're not a fanatic of some kind you have already realized that the stuff is going to have to be legalized someday, and it is only a question of how long till the U. S.

government recognizes the obvious, and starts collecting rather than wasting tax money on drugs.

Cherry is, of course, a Californian, which is the only thing I have against her; her conversation is studded with expressions like "y'know", "swear ta god - rilleeee!", "and "bitchin'". (In another ten years we're going to need interpreters to talk with those people.) Her mother is an attractive blonde divorcee who sometimes rips a hunk off one of her daughter's boyfriends. ("Listen, Steve, you're at a crucial point in your development!") There either is or is not a kid sister named Cinnamon Poptart, depending on how Welz feels about having a run-in with the kiddieporn laws.

There seem to be two types of Cherry Poptart stories in these books. One of them is a straight erotic comic strip, perhaps a party of teen-agers in Cherry's house, or the tired old improve-your-grade-by-screwing-the-teacher routine. (I have been in higher education as a student or instructor for 39 continuous years, and I can assure you that situations like this are extremely rare; your daughter is in far more danger from a preacher or a politician than she is from a professor. If, of course, you consider it "danger".) It is in the other type of stories that Welz really makes his points - parodies or fantasies in which Cherry plays a leading role, usually as a take-off on some currently popular book, film, TV show, or political or religious scandal. We therefore see such things as "Dirty Cherry", "Oklahoma Smith and the Lost Temple of the Doomed Raiders" ("The guy's pretty macho for a scientist, y'know?"), or "Cherry the Barbarian, Chapter 73". In this last one, Cherry is a hide-clad barbarian warrior in the early iron age scene made famous by Conan, Fafhrd, Brek, Elric, and the rest of that gang. But she swears "By the huge hairy bush of the Great Mother", and when a "badass" with "something to prove" declares: "None may cross this bridge without first doing battle with me!", Cherry replies, "Oh wow, I think you've got a serious attitude problem!"

It is in Cherry #5 that all the stops are pulled out. In the first episode, Cherry's sexuality pulls a male soap operette character out of the television to get it on with her in the privacy of her living room. The second story is "The Job Interview" - and in it, she tells about an employment background which, for all practical purposes, puts her in the successive roles of Fawn Hall, Jessica Hahn, and Donna Rice. For the purpose of the story, it is taken graphically for granted that she gets it on with a presidential aide named Wally Norse, a preacher named Brother Billy Bob, and an unnamed Senator and presidential candidate. But the prize of the issue, and possibly of the whole series, is "The Clan of the Cave Bear", which takes on not only Jean Auel's Clan of the Cave Bear but the whole prehistoric scene from the Flintstones' to Alley Oop. The plot of the original book is followed fairly closely, starting from when the young Cherry, as Pebbles Flintstone, falls out of her parents' car and is found in a cabbage patch by a tribe of Neanderthals, who consider her to be the ugliest thing they've ever seen. She grows up with the tribe and learns their hand-talk. ("Why do the men drag the women by the hair?" "Because when they drag them by the foot, they fill up with rocks and dirt.") The secret masculine ritual, at which the Cro-Magnon woman grows up to excel, is in this version not hunting but baseball! Finally, there is another in a continuing routine about Ellie Dee - who, we learn, is a superb computer hacker, sometimes getting into the system and finding new meanings for the word "hardware".

Eight years of the now decaying Reagan Administration have failed to get such sexually explicit comic art as Cherry out of the shops. I know of four places in New York City which carry it on open racks, though of course it may be having distribution problems elsewhere. This and other developments put a good deal of sense behind one of Nancy Lebovitz's newest buttons: "What sixties revival? The sixties never died!" Many of the social advances made during that decade (actually, from about 1965 on) have become a permanent part of our culture. And, to judge from both the Rambo parody in Cherry #3 and from the obvious public rejection of U. S. military adventurism in Central America, the political attitudes that some people dismiss as belonging "back" in the 1960s are still alive and well in 1988.

A "THIRTY YEAR RULE" IS BETTER THAN A THIRTY YEARS' WAR

or

TWO TIMES THIRTY IS SIXTY

or

IS BOARDMAN OFF ON THAT NOTION AGAIN?

Have no fear. I am not going to become the Norman Bloom of fandom, imitating that tiresome old fart who goes from campus to campus in the metropolitan area, passing out handbills about his elaborate ideas on interlocking cycles and numerological calculations, all purporting to show that a god exists and that Norman Bloom is his messiah. But the idea that many human affairs seem to run in cycles of roughly 30 years seems to have a lot of proponents at present. The principal one is the historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. Henry Steele Commager also seems to be interested in it. In the pages of DAGON, Bruce Bergees has written eloquently in support of a comparable cycle in science-fiction and fantasy literature, showing what all of us know - that science-fiction does not predict and anticipate the future, but reflects the same ideas that at any moment happen to be at large in the general population.

However, consider this scenario...

One of the most unusual candidates in the history of American presidential politics was a favorite for the Democratic presidential nomination. Though people of his ethnic background had given heavy support to the Democrats for many decades, none of them had heretofore been considered worthy of the Democratic presidential nomination. Old-line Democratic politicians, fearful of the many voters who would be alienated by his nomination, looked with dismay on his strong drive for the presidency.

Not that things looked very good for the Democrats anyway. Eight years earlier their last President had left office in a ~~stern~~ of scornful remarks. He had been an unregenerate idealist, hopelessly out of touch with the realities of practical politics. If his name was mentioned at all, it was with contempt. The Republicans had piled up two straight landslides over undistinguished and incompetent Democratic nonentities, and a third seemed likely. Even a third-party candidate from the Midwest had not drawn enough votes to lessen one of the Republican landslides, and that ex-Republican had sunk without a trace, only intensifying his Republican opponent's triumph.

The popular Republican incumbent was now retiring, untouched by any of the many scandals that had stained his party's rule in the past eight years. His hand-picked successor was a man of superior intelligence and education, who had served creditably under Presidents of both parties in several high federal positions. The economy was generally doing well, though a handful of malcontents persisted in pointing out disturbing indications which, they said, pointed to a general economic collapse in the not too distant future. Only after the collapse took place were these warnings taken, in retrospect, seriously.

The Democrats did indeed nominate their unlikely front-runner, despite the misgivings of the party bosses. And the expected debacle came to pass. The Democratic candidate's unfamiliar dialect, his ethnic affiliation, and the radical proposals of his supporters combined to make him the victim of one of the greatest landslides in American electoral history. People who had voted the straight Democratic ticket all their lives turned to the Republican. The combination of the Democrat's support in the south and in the large cities could not stand against the Republican landslide.

And yet the concern about the economy was justified. The forebodings of the doom-sayers were confirmed less than a year after the landslide. The economic twitches before the election joined to become a crash and depression afterwards.

And, four years later, was the rejected Democratic candidate the beneficiary of his countrymen's disillusion? He was not. That year, a different candidate took the

Democratic nomination - a highly popular, liberal, Democratic Governor of New York who swept the Republican incumbent out of office and brought in a new program of badly needed economic reforms. As for the previous, unsuccessful Democratic candidate, he became increasingly embittered at the man and program that had succeeded where he had failed, and ended his days as a grumpy, old, disregarded, out-of-favor politician who sometimes even campaigned against Democratic candidates.

If you are as well-grounded in this country's political history as you ought to be, you have probably recognized my description of the presidential elections of 1928 and 1932. I have no doubt that Governor Mario Cuomo of New York has already recog-

Calvin Coolidge	nized this fact, which is why he is no more running for President this year than Franklin Delano Roosevelt did in 1928.	Ronald Reagan
Woodrow Wilson	Correspondences between the politicians of 60 years ago and those of today are indicated to the left and right of these words. Although I realize	Jimmy Carter
Robert La Follette	that these correspondences are just an expression of the fact that similar socio-political conditions call forth similar	John Anderson
John W. Davis	types of leaders and would-be leaders, I find the parallels	Walter Mondale
Herbert Hoover		George Bush
Alfred E. Smith		Jesse Jackson
Franklin D. Roosevelt		Mario Cuomo

almost chilling in their similarity to each other. So do others, which explains why: such Democratic heavyweights as Mario Cuomo, Bill Bradley, and Sam Nunn are letting 1988 pass them by and, presumably, waiting for 1992. The New York Times has already referred to the Governor of New York as "Franklin Delano Cuomo".

I obviously have a sixty-year rather than a thirty-year cycle in mind here. However, something of this length has already been making itself evident in economics, to judge from all the comparisons being made between 29 October 1929 and 19 October 1987. I am reminded of the way in which the allegedly 11-year sunspot cycle turned out really to be a 22-year-cycle. But major political changes - the sort of thing that would be called a "revolution" in a country not as well regulated as this one - do seem to me to run on a roughly (very roughly) 60-year cycle.

And will the economic cycle go along with the political cycle? (Or vice versa; I have long been of the opinion that technology is basic, and that it drives economics, which in turn drives politics.) Have we already had the 1980s' equivalent of the great depression that began with the stock market crash of 1929? To judge from the books that I've read on the 1929 crash and its aftermath, I'd say no. The October 1929 crash that everyone knows about was preceded by several months of twitchy behavior by the stock market. There were heavy losses on 12 June 1928, on 26 March 1929, and on 5 September 1929. Each time, the market lurched, was feared for, and survived. This made investors think that the bull market was invulnerable. They continued to think so, even after the October 1929 collapse; economic forecasts for 1930 were rosy with optimism. The books listed to the right put the whole matter into perspective.

Frank Lewis Allen, Only Yesterday, (Chapters 12-14), 1931

John Kenneth Galbraith, The Great Crash, 1954

David Alexander, Panic: The Day the Money Stopped, Regency Books, 1962

Another cause of the 1929 crash, according to the authors cited above, was the way in which banks also acted as stock brokerages. This was ended during the New Deal by the Glass-Steagale Act. Congress is currently passing a law which effectively repeals this provision of the Glass-Steagale Act. This time the economy is jumping over the cliff with its eyes wide open. A day is certainly going to come, in a year or two, which will make President Bush look back on 19 October 1987 as "the good old days".

THE END OF A DELUSION

"We are always the invaded, we are always the ones to suffer, we are always the ones to sacrifice...we have the right to insist in certainties." - André Maginot, 1919

"If a bomb is ever dropped on Germany, you can call me Mayer!" - Herrmann Wilhelm Goering

"He flung himself up the stairs and to the nearest teletype. He barged out, 'Get me a defense. I want an impenetrable shield. Urgent!'" - Theodore Sturgeon, "Microcosmic God", 1941

"It lies in a role Ronald Reagan played in a 1940 movie titled Murder in the Air...Michael Rogin, a political scientist at the University of California, Berkeley, who has studied the movie, told the authors, 'There's no question that it influenced the President's views.'" - Richard Rhodes, review of Boffey, Broad, Gelb, Mohr, and Noble, Claiming the Heavens: The New York Times Complete Guide to the Star Wars Debate, New York Times Book Review, 20 March 1988

About ten years ago, it seemed that another great technological idea was about to make the allegedly frequent transition from science fiction to actual usage. There is, of course, a little problem with this notion if you know much about science fiction. Although some science fiction writers do seriously attempt to predict the technological developments of the future, and even their sociological effect, science fiction over the decades has most commonly expressed the concerns of the present in the language of future events. Algis Budrys, son of a Lithuanian politician of the interbellum period, has written an analogy in which Earth is annexed by a tyrannical alien empire and rescued, more or less, by a large but not terribly concerned democratic human federation. A woman writer who was sexually abused by her father when she was a child, has written a long series of aggressively feminist s-f novels. Science-fiction writers whose minds took the ply during World War II have presented everything from the "Cold War" to interstellar conflicts as repeats of World War II, with the same attitudes still completely appropriate. Randall Garrett, of an arms-bearing family which produced three Lords Mayor of London, made his characters happy and aristocratic subjects of capably ruled monarchies. Such a list could extend indefinitely.

The notion that has just collapsed in the harsh light of reality was the belief that an absolute technological defense could be provided for the United States of America against a nuclear attack. As it first appeared about ten years ago, this notion based its hopes on nuclear powered, laser-armed satellites that could shoot down anything aimed at the United States before it could strike. Nuclear weapons were thus going to be made "obsolete". There would be no need for any more treaties with the Soviet Union; furthermore, among the proponents of this notion it was axiomatic that the Soviet Union could not be trusted to obey treaties even when they were in the Soviet national interest.* The proponents of this idea claimed that "Mutual Assured Deterrence" ("MAD") was inhumane. MAD would make universal destruction the penalty for starting a nuclear war. With their new plan, the penalty would merely be the destruction of the first wave of attacking rockets against this technological shield. (We were not supposed to ask where the debris from these destroyed nuclear weapons was going to settle out after the satellite lasers had shot them down.)

This notion (for it is really unfair to dignify it with the word "idea") was at first called High Frontier. Later it acquired other names: some, like "Peace Shield",

* - It would probably not be a good idea to cite the historical record on this point. A large number of the world's more notoriously violated treaties identify the Party of the First Part as "the Great White Father".

from its supporters; some, like "That Great Big Maginot Line in the Sky" from its opponents, and some, like "Star Wars", from both. (Ben Bova, one of the strongest proponents of the thing in s-f, uses this term.) Other names are "Strategic Defense Initiative", its abbreviation "SDI", and "Wedtech Welfare".

The popular impression given of this scheme was a big roof over the United States of America, off which incoming Soviet rockets would bounce harmlessly. In practice, if this analogy is to be used, it would be more like a roof over the Soviet Union, keeping missiles from getting out. Whether the rising rocket was bearing a nuclear bomb aimed at Washington, or the first human beings striving to set foot on Mars, the nuclear powered satellites would blast them into smithereens with X-ray lasers.

For the original impulse behind the building of this scheme, I refer you to William J. Broad's 1985 book Star Warriors, which examines the motivations of the bright young men who are designing this system of weaponry, and the obviously insane older men who are promoting its development. Several of these scientists are s-f readers of long standing, whose s-f reading inspired them into this field. (Rod Hyde, a 31-year-old prodigy, claimed that: "Throughout adolescence his love of space had been nurtured by a stream of science fiction, most especially by authors Gordon Dickson, Keith Laumer, and Robert Heinlein." The legacy of what we now can call "Rambo science-fiction" will haunt us for years, especially on the 1st of April.)

The idea of defending your country by an absolute barrier against any incoming weapon whatsoever has a long and inglorious history. It is the notion behind the Great Wall of China and the Roman limes, which ignores that in each case, and frequently, the wall was breached by people on the civilized side calling "barbarians" in to do their fighting for them. Its first application to three-dimensional warfare was proposed by Herrmann Wilhelm Goering, who claimed that a defense system that could prevent any enemy aircraft from entering German airspace would preserve Germany absolutely against enemy attack. It again came up as a bright idea of President Alekssei Kosygin some 20 years ago, protecting the USSR by setting up a missile system that could shoot down all "incomings". As President Johnson realized, but President Reagan seems to have missed, this would be an essentially offensive weapon, enabling its possessor to do anything he pleased without fear of retaliation. Johnson summoned Kosygin to a sleepy college town in southern New Jersey and lectured him about the consequences of such a "defensive" system, and it was thereupon abandoned.

And there it slept until the late 1970s, when a retired general flooded the decision-making circles of this country with a little book proving how immoral "MAD" was, and how much nicer it would be to build a kinetic and electronic version of the Maginot Line in orbit around the Earth. The dissatisfaction of American conservatives for the process of disarmament negotiation did the rest, and science-fiction's own Jerry Pournelle is said to have personally sold President Reagan on the development of Star Wars. There was even a comic-opera law suit in which George Lucas sued somebody or other, claiming that he had exclusive rights to the name "Star Wars" - and lost.

Meanwhile, the great glaring holes in the Star Wars plans became apparent. The system would be extremely vulnerable to "conventional" anti-satellite warfare, and also to the electromagnetic pulse ("EMP") of nuclear warfare. (For a study of the EMP and how it would affect sensitive electronic systems, see S. I. O. P.: The Secret U. S. Plan for Nuclear War, by Peter Pringle and William Arkin. This book is a detailed account of the efforts of successive U. S. administrations to prepare for nuclear war, including "pre-emptive" strikes against an unsuspecting victim. The belief that Jimmy Carter preferred peace to war will never survive a reading of this book.) Star Wars required that millions of lines of computer programming must be written absolutely without errors, and work without fail on the first try. (Ask any hacker of your acquaintance about how likely this is.) Polaris-type missiles, fired from submarines, could not be dealt with by this system, nor could Leo Szilard's old fear about nuclear weapons smuggled into this country on cargo ships. The tests alleged to prove the workability of Star Wars have been described with too much enthusiasm by Edward Teller and his protoge Lowell Wood, the man in charge of Star Wars'

development. Peter Hagelstein, the most brilliant technologist involved in the development of the X-ray laser, has developed a revulsion against military application of his discoveries, and has left the project.

Nor do any two proponents of Star Wars seem to agree on what its effects will be. President Reagan has said that the system will be entirely non-nuclear, yet he has directed that more than 10% of its budget be devoted to nuclear weapons development. "No one seems to know what SDI's goals are. Only a handful of ideologues still believe in the system that will provide an absolute protection against every rocket aimed at the US. On 27 March 1988 the press announced that "The Defense Department has scaled back its plan to develop a massive space security shield and instead has settled on a far less ambitious goal of protecting only military installations." (Washington Post) This takes us right back to "MAD", for whose credibility the bases which would counter-attack had to get first priority of protection. Furthermore, this change, really an abandonment of the whole basic idea behind Star Wars, "reflects broad agreement within the administration that the President's dream was unattainable."

However, the money keeps on getting spent. On 31 March the New York Post reported that, largely due to Star Wars spending, "McDonnell Douglas Corp. became the Pentagon's top research contractor in 1987, winning awards totalling \$1,700,000,000." Altogether, spending on "missile and space systems" went from \$6,900,000,000 in fiscal 1986 to \$7,900,000,000 in fiscal 1987. Right after McDonnell Douglas on the Pentagon's welfare rolls were Martin Marietta, Lockheed, Boeing, Grumman (which cannot build a functioning city bus), General Electric (who owns NBC, and guess what slant NBC News will put on Star Wars?), Raytheon, TRW, Rockwell, & IBM. Next after this "Top Ten" was not an 11th corporation but the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the nation's largest military brothel. (Am I ever glad I turned down a scholarship offer there in 1949!)

Now that the Star Wars nonsense is trickling down into the trivia contests* we have some housecleaning to do in science-fiction. Many big names in the editing and writing of science-fiction have committed themselves to the feasibility of this boondoggle, and wouldn't I like to have a search through their investment portfolios for the names of the above-listed corporations! Ben Bova wrote a book defending this notion. Jerry Pournelle is supposed to have talked it up to President Reagan and to other top administration officials. The L-5 Society has been seduced away from its original goal of colonizing space by the promotion of Star Wars. It is time to let these spendthrifts and con men know that they are no longer welcome among us. The dreams of thousands of neo-fans about riding out into space have been perverted into a military technology which will not work, can not work, and may not even have been intended to work, except in the operation of a money pump out of the public treasury and into the pockets of the electronics and aerospace industry's stockholders.

GETTING CAUGHT UP

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 which is collated at this same address and frequency. DAGON also goes to subscribers (12 issues for \$10) and others who have indicated an interest in it. The copy count for APA-Q is 35, and the next collations are on 7 and 28 May, and 18 June. If you want to subscribe or, better, contribute to APA-Q, see the information under "The Ministry of Finance".

This present issue of APA-Q is being put together sometime on the weekend of 16-17 April - when is a dubious question at present, since I will be refereeing the

* - When George Lucan finally brings out his next Star Wars film in, let us say, 2001, that year's edition of Trivial Pursuit will ask: "Besides being the name of a space adventure film, 'Star Wars' was applied to what military system?" Younger players are sure to be stumped by this one.

Diplomacy tournament at I-Con. At present writing I am not certain whether I will be staying over at I-Con on Saturday night and attending it Sunday, or coming back Saturday and putting APA-Q together on my own on Sunday.

No such problem seems to be in evidence for the 280th Distribution of APA-Q on Saturday 7 May. So, as far as matters now look, we will be assembling that Distribution on that date, beginning at 2 PM. The 281st Distribution takes place on Disclave weekend, and will probably also begin here at 2 PM.

Incidentally, the 38th Mailing of APA-Filk will be assembled here on Saturday 30 April 1988; technically the deadline is 1 May, but since there is no mail delivery on that date I plan to get the job done on the 30th.

And now the comments:

APA-Qover #278 (Blackman): This is a parody of something, but I'm not sure what.

Farblondget Voyage (Blackman): The question of whether a search warrant can cover, or is necessary for, an internal search of a person has always been a knotty one legally. However, I believe that courts have frequently not accepted the argument offered by "Fleish" Gordon in this installment of the ever-popular "The Adventures of Baruch Rogers, Space Rabbi".

As for bagels being forbidden during Pesach, I don't think there's anything forbidding making matzos in that shape.

(Have you shown this episode to Isaac Asimov? If so, what did he think of it?)

Black monoliths yet!

Blancmange #158 (Blackman): Yes, Dollar Bill Buckley did indeed write about carefully sailing out beyond the limit of US territorial waters on his yacht before sampling cannabis indica. However, he didn't say whether a little maza in a rowboat then came up and sold him the stuff. We are left to guess where he got it - presumably through his CIA connections. (Does anyone out there still believe that Buckley is a former CIA agent?)

"What Soviet victory over Japan's main army?" During the last months of World War II there was a rumor that Japan had a huge reserve army in Manchuria, which they had conquered in 1934, and that this army was to be turned loose on the Allies in the final battle for the home islands. The army was also supposed to be a deterrent against a Russian declaration of war. However, in August 1945 it developed that this big army in Manchuria, if it had ever existed, had already been drawn on so much for reinforcements against the Americans on the Pacific islands that it could offer virtually no resistance to the Soviet Union.

However, before World War II there was an important but virtually unknown battle between Soviet and Japanese troops at a place called Khalkin-Gol, on the border between Manchuria and Siberia. Although the fighting involved more troops than many World War I and II battles that got into the history books, I can find nothing about it, not even the date or circumstances, in my library. The fighting, which seems to have been a border skirmish that got out of hand, ended with a severe Japanese defeat. However, neither nation really wanted to follow it up with an all-out war, and nothing further came of the matter.

I have heard nothing further about the American premiere of Barefoot Gen in Dallas. I plan to check the Dallas newspapers for the next couple of days when I'm next in a suitably equipped library. Meanwhile, a British anti-war animated film called When the Wind Blows has just been released in this country. (New York Post, 11 March 1988) This appeared about 4 or 5 years ago as a cartoon book. Its message is that blind trust in the Powers That Be will lead us to disaster.

I had never heard of the apa The Final Frontier until your comments about the Brooklyn College S-F Society's clubzine of the same name.

The Ubbelohde effect happens when ordinary hydrogen is replaced by heavy hydrogen in some molecules. Certain bonds that ought to be tightened are instead loosened, for reasons I fooled around with in my M. S. thesis.

Quant Suff! #161 (Malay): The Mets have an impressive record during spring training. Unfortunately, it is possible to point to many teams that had impressive records during spring training, and finished poorly.

Best of luck with your West Highland terrier. They are supposed to be dogs that

think very well of themselves.

I have no objection to text-only adventure games. Fancy graphics only take up bits that could be better used in making the game more interesting.

In Zork III you can, at the side of the lake, issue the command "Walk on water". The program will respond as if you had said, "Jump in the lake."

Vaudeville Lines #194 (Lipton): I have heard of some interesting ways to get past sullen answering machines, uncooperative secretaries, and such human or mechanical creatures. One is: "Unless he calls me by ----- o'clock, I'll just go ahead and print the story as it now stands." Another is: "I've just been going through my late mother's papers and I think he might be my father."

The collapse of Pat Robertson's presidential campaign does not mean that he is finished. For one thing, the 700 Club has just gone eyeball-to-eyeball with the National Review for leadership of American conservatism - and won. (Compare Robertson and Kemp votes in the Republican primaries.) For another, Christians have realized that their legislative program can never be put into effect in an even nominally democratic society. They will therefore conclude, not that their program is wrong, but that democracy is evil. Guess what comes next.

I would rather doubt that children born in the 1960s can be considered as "baby boomers". People Deirdre's age are not yuppie material. People old enough to note and be impressed by the anti-war demonstrations of the late 1960s were probably the first post-boomers. (I am assuming for the sake of this argument that a yuppie is a baby boomer with a white-collar job.)

As for who believes in god, I am convinced that there are two things that the American people are very reluctant to do:

1. express disbelief in god.
2. Act as if one existed.

This is

The next star of the Evangelical Follies will probably be Al Sharpton, who has crawled out on the limb over the Tawana Brawley case and may find that she has sawed it off after him. Then, unless the press has turned up something really juicy about Jesse Jackson, Oral Roberts will be found playing games with all that money he got from the owner of that dog track in Florida. After that, a Palestinian arrested for throwing rocks at Israeli soldiers will claim to be Jesus Christ - and found to be perfectly correct.

O At
P Great
E Intervals
R This s
A Appears
T To
I Inflame
O Optic
N Nerves

I have long considered that Machiavelli's The Prince is a heavy-handed satire on the crooked monarchs who ruled the Italy of his day. I would be willing to entertain the supposition that Thomas Hobbes's Leviathan is a satire on the absolutist pretensions of the monarchs of his time.

1488

DAGON #369 (me): Only the sketchiest information about the new postal rates has thus far come out, although if more appears before this DAGON goes to press I'll include them. I am quite likely to need information about what it costs to send a ten-ounce package to Canada by printed matter rates, and similar recondite information.

Fremont's Intelligence Newsletter #3 (Hauser): Hall games are apparently going to become a greater part of s-f conventions, a matter about which I am not altogether enthusiastic. However, the game of Double Exposure at the 1988 Lunacon seems to have gone off without disturbing non-players. Some players complained about the way the final score was settled up; apparently the referees had not thought out the rules completely, and had to improvise a scoring system at the end.

The Shakespearean role-playing game sounds like fun. I, of course, would have liked Falstaff.

Lunaya Pravda: Thanks for sending these in, Mark. Did you actually get questions from people who thought that the name Lunaya Pravda was somehow Communist? I know that Heinlein has, deservedly, fallen out of fannish favor in recent years, but I hadn't imagined that he'd fallen that far. The Anarchists in fandom should have been able to correct this misconception, as they seem to hold Heinlein in a regard second only to Rand. I'll still go along with Sharyn McCrumb's character Appin Dungannon, who

said of them: "You should all be belled, like lepers!"

What's the critter on page 2 of Lunaya Pravda #3? A Swiss Army Unicorn?

THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE

If you'd like to receive APA-Q, just send a few dollars and I'll enter a postage account for you. From this account you'll be charged postage plus 25¢ for the envelope. If you don't have printing facilities, send me any kind of a stencil that will fit on a Gestetner, and I'll charge you 2¢ per sheet per copy. (The copy count for APA-Q is 35, but if you want additional ones let me know.) These costs can come from your postage account. Your copy of APA-Q will be sent to you by 3rd-class mail unless 1st-class mail costs no more; you can also request 1st-class mail no matter the weight.

If you get both APA-Q and APA-Filk on this account, then your copies of APA-Filk #33 and APA-Q #280 will be mailed to you in the same envelope on 7 May 1988.

As of 3 April 1988, postage and printing accounts are:

Lee Burwasser	\$4.08	Robert Bryan Lipton*#	\$17.41
Philip M. Cohen	\$9.58	John Malay#	\$11.98
Don Del Grande	\$11.20	Alan Rachlin	\$14.35
John Desmond	64¢	Lana Raymond*#	\$2.32
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- You get APA-Q by 1st-class mail.

* - You also get APA-Filk on this account.

Your balance, including costs for this Distribution, is in the space to the right.

Accounts that fall into arrears will be suspended. Presently suspended accounts are:

Vinnie Bartilucci	-76¢	John Hartzell	-79¢
Andre Bridget	-72¢	Mark Keller	-86¢
Shelby Bush	-\$5.98	Ted Pauls	-39¢
John Colton	-88¢	Joyce Scrivner	-75¢
Liz Ensley	-37¢	Peter G. Trei	-73¢
Harold Feld	-69¢		

Refunds coming to two former members are: Dana Hudes 72¢, Elizabeth Willig 92¢.

THE MINISTRY OF MISCELLANY

In my review of Eric Lurio's The Cartoon Guide to the Constitution of the United States in #366 I commented on Eric's views about the booby-trap in the 25th Amendment. Dave Schwartz has informed me that the term "principal officers of the executive departments" has been defined by act of Congress as the members of the President's Cabinet, and only them. This is important because, according to the 25th Amendment, these are the people who get to say whether the President is incompetent to continue in his duties.

There are still problems. Cabinet members serve at the pleasure of the President and can be instantly dismissed if he says so. Suppose that, while a meeting is pending to consider the President's disability, the President fires the people who are likely to vote him into a rest home. Can a rump cabinet composed only of his supporters legally vote him competent to continue? Can cabinet members holding interim appointments pending Senate confirmation vote on this matter?

While you're pondering this question, here's another. Suppose that Jesse Jackson is elected President this year - and the armed forces refuse to let him take office, claiming that considering his announced views on foreign and military policy, such a step would be in violation of the officer's oath to preserve, protect, and defend the

United States of America. If this doesn't happen late this year with regard to Jackson, then eventually it will come to pass. The desire and ability of the American people to support with their taxes an ever more powerful military machine will eventually come to an end, and they will indicate this by electing a candidate pledged to massive cutbacks in commitment and expenditure. They may even do this while, and as a result of, an American invasion of some third-world "trouble spot". The U. S. armed forces are already smarting with resentment because they "weren't allowed" to win in Vietnam. What do you suppose they'll do then?

*

On the day after I put on stencil the comments on pp. 3 and 4, an analyst for National Public Radio made the same analogy between the Smith campaign of 1928 and the Jackson campaign of 1988. Although Smith lost, and lost big, the analyst pointed out that a big increase in the turn-out of Catholic voters resulted - and that these voters were one of the key elements in the great electoral coalition that Franklin Delano Roosevelt assembled in the next decade.

The elements of another such coalition are now coming together in the Jackson campaign. Jackson, whose administrative abilities are not great, may not know what to do with them. But someone is sure to come along who will know.

Besides, I've had enough of preachers in politics.

*

There seem to be two classes of people who claim that they were carried away by flying saucer people. (Oh, they prefer the term "UFO" for "Unidentified Flying Object", but since they go on to identify them in such great detail, I scarcely think that "UFO" is the proper term.) One class comes away from these alleged encounters with exalted emotions and the feeling that they have a message to transmit from the saucer people to the residents of the Earth. The other class of "contactees" claims to have suffered traumatic experiences that leave them in shock, and are looking for a support group to help them deal with the resulting trauma, much as victims of rape, torture, or child abuse do. They cannot understand why contact with "extraterrestrials" should be regarded as a rare and wonderful experience.

These latter cases can probably be explained in terms of traumatic experiences regarding the all too real dangers of life on Earth. A couple of weeks ago, WNYC reported on a meeting of such a support group. One woman claimed that she and her daughter had been returning home with a take-out pizza when their car was stopped by aliens in a flying saucer, who subjected them to intense and unpleasant physical examinations, stole the pizza, and then departed. She reacted indignantly when the interviewer suggested that perhaps they had been stopped by humans and subjected to an experience which they would rather forget, and therefore have. Yet what other possible explanation can there be?

Philip J. Klass has analyzed the stories and alleged investigations of several "contactees" in a new book, UFO-Abductions: A Dangerous Game (\$19, Prometheus). Among his targets is the preposterous story told by Whitley Streiber in his best-selling book Communion. According to the review in the New York Times Book Review of 28 February 1988, "he pays particular attention to the use, and abuse, of hypnosis in analyzing UFO reports. During treatment, for example, the hypnotist can inadvertently plant 'pseudo-memories' that later seem real to the subject."

*

The most recent issues of What's New continue to poke fun at the U. S. government's fumbling attempts to set a policy on superconductivity research. The chief butt of Dr. Robert L. Park, who publishes this weekly newsletter for members of the American Physical Society, is the President's science adviser, William Graham. Last summer President Reagan appointed an "Advisory Group to the President on Commercial Applications of Superconductivity". The distinguished scientists in this group have yet to be consulted on this subject by the President or any of his advisers. Meanwhile, the President's "Superconductivity Competitiveness Act of 1988" has yet to acquire one member of Congress as a sponsor - and a good thing, too, as this legislative notion amends the Freedom of Information Act to require agencies to withhold "commercially valuable scientific and technical information generated in government laboratories."

Park tartly remarks in What's New of 11 March: "I have been trying ever since to think of a discovery that lacked that potential."

Meanwhile, in Japan (which does not have a "Superconductivity Competitiveness Act") superconductivity has been achieved at 120 K. (That's -153°C or, if you're still stuck in the old system, -243°F .) This is not "pre-superconducting behavior", which has been seen at considerably higher temperatures, but actual superconductivity. Meanwhile, the US National Science Foundation is cutting grants in this field.

William Graham has been engaged in other fooleries as well. He attacked the Freedom of Information Act in hearings on a trade bill, claiming "that the Japanese had used FOIA to obtain design details for the space shuttle, thus saving them hundreds of millions of dollars and years of research." (What's New, 18 March) However, NASA denied that any such request has ever been made, and Graham could not come up with a single documented example of the FOIA being used to get such information.

What's New of 4 March also commented on the great X-ray laser boondoggle. "Just prior to the Reykjavik summit, Edward Teller described the X-ray laser to Administration officials as ready to enter the engineering phase." This was a flat lie, as subsequent developments have made clear. Recently a "spokesman for Lawrence Livermore Laboratories admitted that 'it would require at least another 5 years and \$1B to determine whether such a weapon is possible.'" It becomes obvious that this weapon is just as big a fraud as the menace it is supposed to fend.

*

I have finally obtained the rate schedule for the postal rate increases that went into effect on 3 April 1988. Below are the rates of greatest interest to fans. Surface rates are by the ounce, and air mail rates by the half-ounce. (It should be remembered that the US no longer has an air mail service domestically, or to Canada or Mexico.) Rates are given to the US, Canada, Mexico, and "Other". The numbers "1" and "3" respectively refer to 1st-class and 3rd-class mail, although it should be noted that these are terms in domestic mail, and outside the US you should label the mail not "3rd-class mail" but "printed matter", and probably also the equivalent French word "imprimés". All rates are in cents.

ounces	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>16</u>
1, USA	25	45	65	85	105	125	145	165	185	205	225	245	PRIORITY MAIL			
1, Canada	30	52	74	96	118	140	162	184	206	228	250	272	308	308	308	308
1, Mexico	25	45	65	85	105	125	145	165	185	205	225	245	326	326	326	326
1, other	40	63	86	109	132	155	178	201	320	320	320	320	320	320	320	320
3, USA	25	45	65	85	100	100	110	110	120	120	130	130	140	140	150	150
3, Canada	30	52	74	96	121	121	146	146	171	171	196	196	221	221	239	239
3, Mexico	25	45	65	85	105	105	125	125	145	145	165	165	185	185	205	205
3, other	40	60	80	100	128	128	156	156	184	184	212	212	240	240	268	268
ounces	<u>$\frac{1}{2}$</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>$1\frac{1}{2}$</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>$2\frac{1}{2}$</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>$3\frac{1}{2}$</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>$4\frac{1}{2}$</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>$5\frac{1}{2}$</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>$6\frac{1}{2}$</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>$7\frac{1}{2}$</u>	<u>8</u>
int'l air	45	90	135	180	222	264	306	348	390	432	474	516	558	600	642	684

Surface postcards are 15¢ in the US and Mexico, 21¢ to Canada, and 28¢ to anywhere else. Air postcards outside the US, Canada, and Mexico are 36¢, and aerogrammes are 39¢. For "Priority Mail" rates, which vary by distance, see a circular which the

United States Postal "Service" is going to publish Real Soon Now. There will be a separate booklet on international rate. In fact, there may be two, as the posted information from which I copied this material referred to them as "Interim International Rates".

A very handsome new stamp has come out to pay the new 25¢ rate. The only problem is that it does not carry the denomination "25¢" but merely the letter "E". The Universal Postal Union has this picky regulation about requiring denominations in Arabic numerals on international mail, so the "E" stamps can only be used for domestic mail.

*

Newsday of 3 April 1988 reviewed To Win a Nuclear War: The Pentagon's Secret War Plans by two physicists, Michio Kaku and Daniel Axelrod. (South End Press, \$30 hard cover or \$11 paperback) "Their study is based on recently declassified, top-secret documents made available under the Freedom of Information Act." According to reviewer John Gabree, readers will be surprised at the trigger-happy "readiness" of US political and military leaders to use this weapon in crises over the past four decades. "A surprising revelation of the documents is the vulnerability of what political scientists refer to as the permanent government - the inner circle of thought-to-be democratically unaccountable decisionmakers - to pressure by the public. Basic decency and common sense are fatal to the permanent government's militarist and authoritarian tendencies." A good example would be the way in which Richard Pipes and T. K. "With Enough Shovels" Jones were squeezed out of government after their more preposterously militaristic statements became public.

*

Several years ago, a war-gaming fan in Queens, named Edi Birsan, was faced with a big run of his 'zine on his ditto machine - and found that he was out of ditto fluid. Since this was Sunday, there was no place he could get more, and time is of the essence in postal war-gaming publication since games are played on rigid deadlines. So for lack of any other alcohol-based fluid Edi used the only substitute available - a bottle of eight-year-old Scotch whisky. The 'zine printed beautifully.

I was reminded of this story when I saw a clipping that Al Nofi sent me, from the New York Times of 3 February 1988. In times gone by, New York City cab drivers used to congregate in their off hours at the Belmore Cafeteria on Fourth Avenue, and solve the problems of the world. Then first Fourth Avenue became "Park Avenue South", and then the Belmore itself closed. But Harriet Blacker reported that "I saw a cab parked in front of where the old place had stood. The cab's hood was up, and its young driver was attending to a steaming radiator by pouring into it the entire contents of a large bottle of Perrier".

*

I first became interested in stamp collecting when I was 5½. I can remember this so clearly because in those days the Post Office Department sent a truck around that carried exhibits of interest to collectors, including announcements of new stamps.

The new stamp featured in the truck when it came to Rochester, Minnesota, was a square commemorative (the Post Office was experimenting with offbeat shapes in those days) showing a group of people in 17th-century costume coming ashore from a ship of the same vintage. This maroon 3¢ stamp commemorated the 300th anniversary of the "Landing of the Swedes and Finns" at a short-lived Swedish colony on the shores of Delaware Bay. (The Dutch of Nieuw Amsterdam conquered it in 1655, in a short campaign of which Washington Irving gave a humorous description in Knickerbocker's History of New York. The British took it over in 1664.)

It is now 50 years later, and so another stamp has been issued for the 350th Anniversary of "New Sweden". This is a 44¢ air mail stamp, for the half-ounce rate that became obsolete a couple of weeks after the stamp was issued.

Swedish colonization in North America was a matter of only 17 years. But it had a long-lasting effect on North American history. Most of the settlers were from Finland, then subject to Sweden, and in heavily forested Finland the log cabin was a standard form of housing for the lower classes. North America was, in those days,

also heavily forested. And so that structure indissolubly connected with North American pioneers came into being - the log cabin.

We got another legacy from the Fenno-Swedish colony on the banks of the Delaware. Art Saha, who is by no means inclined to diminish the Finnish contribution to America, has informed me that one of those settlers bore the name "Rambo". Real-life Rambos have been with us ever since. There is even an Arthur Rambo memorialized on the Big Black Slab.

*

To the surprise of many Americans, the Yuppies have not all disappeared following the stock market crash of 19 October 1987. This doesn't surprise me, since for reasons expressed elsewhere in this issue I am convinced that it was just a tune-up for the real crash, which lies a year or two in the future. Still, there is some resentment of the breed, as is shown in that sticker that is posted around Park Slope: "Help Preserve Our Neighborhood - Insult a Yuppie Today!"

Great Britain is also having trouble with these success-oriented, possession-obsessed, narrowly focused over-achievers. But, according to a story in the New York Post of 9 April 1988. An Anarchist group called Class War has proclaimed 16 September 1988 to be "National Anti-Yuppie Day". It will culminate a 22-city rock concert tour called "Rock against the Rich".

*

This sort of anti-Yuppie feeling by Anarchists would be difficult to communicate to American Anarchists, who prefer to call themselves "Libertarians" and who to a large extent overlap with yuppies. The British Anarchists are of the more classic sort, who resent equally the powers of their government and of the wealthy, because their interests so frequently coincide. American "Libertarians", however, seem to believe that unreasonable restrictions on their economic freedom by Big Government is the only thing keeping them from being rich and therefore happy. Disciples of Ayn Rand, up to and including two cabinet members and the Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, may be frequently found in the Reagan Administration; it would be difficult to image a Randite being comfortable in the Thatcher cabinet.

Still, some American Anarchists are beginning to have second thoughts - not about the basis of Anarchism, but about some of their heroes. I know of few Anarchists who can argue their positions more cogently than does Nancy Lebovitz, well-known at s-f and war-gaming conventions as "The Button Lady". When I was kicking ideas around with her at PennCon a couple of months ago, she said she was reconsidering her admiration for fictional characters like Laumer's Retief or the hero of Eric Frank Russell's Wasp. These heroes have to operate within and often against a large cumbersome bureaucracy, while accomplishing goals that are by definition altogether good and worthwhile. They invariably turn the bureaucracy against itself and accomplish their missions.

The problem is that, while Retief is the dream, the reality is too often Lieutenant Criminal Oliver North. This is going to gradually sink in to a few Anarchists as North goes on trial. Opinion about the trial at present seems divided. Some maintain that once on the witness stand, North will turn against his accomplices and sing like a little yellow canary. (This is what a very North-like man, Boris Savinkov, did when the Soviet government finally laid hands on him in 1924.) Others, including myself, think that North will stand firm, defy the government, never bend an inch - and will instead break, committing suicide possibly preceded by a few murders.

*

A couple of years ago, during the controversy in Science Fiction Review about John Brunner's anti-war views, I was full of apprehension about the future of science-fiction. When Brunner ventured his belief that peace is possible between the United States and the Soviet Union, there was a torrent of abuse from SFR's readers. It seems now that, viewing with alarm, I had caught the tide just at its turn, and it has been ebbing ever since. Instead of being permanently infected with the values of Rambo, Soldier of Fortune magazine, and President Reagan, science-fiction was as always just going along with the prevailing intellectual and emotional trends of the rest of society. The revenge fantasies that have been dominant in American popular culture

from 1975 to 1985 have been deteriorating since about the time SFR's readers sent in a flood of letters denouncing him. The fantasies have an obvious origin - the defeat of the hare-brained plan by the U. S. government to impose its will by force on Vietnam. After this richly deserved defeat, there was some militarist effort to make it seem as if "we", as a nation, had been defeated, rather than their own selves. It now seems that this effort has failed. The interests of the United States of America were uninvolved in Vietnam; only the militarists who advocated, planned, and fought that war were defeated. Eventually, the American people can always detect private law-breaking disguised as operations of their government, and reject it.

Still, from 1975 to 1985 there was some attempt to win in fantasy a war that had been lost in reality. Feelings of revenge were directed against whatever target might seem most capable of being defeated: war scares were drummed up against Angola in 1978, Iran in 1980, ~~ababagon or Grenada~~ in 1983, Libya in 1986, and continually against Nicaragua. And, unless the fighting could be got out of the way in some 24 hours, the public was not interested. The spasm of militarism which swept the country after the 1986 raid on Libya quickly evaporated; the American people do not want to make war against even the most scabrous foreign dictators by killing their children. The first two Rambo films were enormously popular, but now the media use the word "Rambo" only to describe some wacko who goes off his head and kills some 12 or 14 people before being killed by the police or by himself. The third Rambo film has been experiencing production difficulties long past its expected date of release, and may be quietly stifled in its can before being allowed to see the light of a new and cynical day. Indeed, if the U. S. ever tries a protracted campaign again, anti-war groups will show Rambo I and Rambo II as fund-raisers, much as opponents of the drug laws show the notorious anti-marijuana film Reefer Madness.

And the U. S. government knows it, too. Only some 3,200 U. S. troops were sent to the highly debatable border between Honduras and Nicaragua - a ridiculously inadequate number considering the magnitude of the alleged threat. And they had no sooner been sent off than the U. S. government began nervously assuring the American people that these troops would never, never, never be sent remotely near to anyplace where there was actual fighting going on. And now, less than a month later, they are all out, and an even smaller number has been sent to Panama under the same restrictions. And the people instrumental in promoting a secret American war against Nicaragua are shortly going to go on trial, to the great detriment of their cause. We are never going to see Lieutenant Criminal North portrayed on the screen by Sylvester Stallone, Clint Eastwood, Tom Selleck, Charles Bronson, or the rest of the now declining stars who have made careers pandering to American revenge fantasies.

Science fiction only reflects this. Jerry Pournelle's drunken disgust over the SFWA Grandmaster Award given to that resolute Pacifist Isaac Asimov, and the great popularity of the works of Lucius Shepherd and William Gibson are further indications that the tide has turned. Baen Books still staggers along, marketing militaristic fantasies thinly disguised as interplanetary conflict, mainly to teen-agers whose views of war were shaped by violent Saturday morning cartoons, but their day is past as a major field within science-fiction.

About two months ago I bundled up the issues of DAGON that had dealt with this topic, #349-353, and sent them off to all the people whose anti-Brunner letters had appeared in SFR's last issues. (My cover letter was p. 9 of DAGON #366.) I have since received comments from a few of the addressees. Several of the people whose names I hadn't expected to see on letters attacking Brunner explained that they objected to the views he took on the Soviet-Afghan War. Brunner had had some things to say about this conflict, which is now ending with a soviet withdrawal despite the efforts of the Reagan Administration to keep it going. Brunner wondered why a lot of Americans were excited about a Soviet campaign against a nation where homosexuality is a generally accepted practice. A number of people whose names are not conspicuous in the fight for civil rights for gays attacked Brunner for allegedly saying that the Afghans deserved to be slaughtered by the Soviets because they were "pederasts". By the time they had finished with their private interpretations of Brunner's words,

they were accusing Brunner of supporting the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan because the Afghan buggers deserved it.

Widespread male homosexuality is going to be a part of life in a heavily militarized state with belief in the Warrior Mystique, and this has just got to be accepted as a part of human nature. (If you like historical precedents, compare ancient Sparta, or the sentimental romantic homosexuality which is a part of the samurai mystique.) For that matter, despite Soviet insistence that nothing of the sort goes on there, it is reported that whenever a Soviet dance troupe is in New York City, the gay bars tend to attract a lot of strangers with heavy accents.

The driving Soviet necessity to reorganize the economy for the production of consumer goods is putting an end to this loudly debated side issue, and we are back to the real character of Brunner's promotion of peace with the USSR, and the opposition to it by the likes of Poul Anderson, John J. Pierce, Mike Resnick, Charles Platt, Darrel Schweitzer, Alexis Gilliland, and particularly Larry Niven, for whom class warfare is as much an economic necessity as it ever was to Lenin. In particular, I got a long and thoughtful letter from Philip Jose Farmer, to whom I replied in kind. He writes:

"I agree with Brunner that the Russian people do not want war. This is not fresh news or something just discovered by Brunner. I've read a number of interviews with Ivan-on-the-street, and these agree that the Russian people's blood is chilled by the idea of war, nuclear or otherwise."

As for the Soviet government:

"...a number of the Politburo are very conservative, old-line Marxists. They still want to fulfill the Marxist idea of a worldwide Communist revolution. But they're very patient and hope that the decadent capitalists nations will become weak and fall of their own accord."

As for the question of war in general:

"I have long been against nationalism. I would like to see all national boundaries erased. I would like to see all armed forces disbanded or put to useful work. I know that a nuclear war would kill everybody on Earth. No one's going to win this kind of war, nor is there any such thing, in my book, as 'acceptable losses.'"

Imagine the fun that Niven or Platt would have with that. It's a pity that SFR didn't last longer, or that Brunner was prevented from entering into the discussion more vigorously. There would have been lovely arguments among the people who agreed in protesting Brunner's views. Tim Hesse and Rick Norwood have, with less eloquence, taken the same view as Farmer. Norwood, indeed, still maintains that "You ignore the essentially defensive posture of those of us who responded." Su-u-ure.

However, I am much more optimistic about the future than I was during the period 1975-1985. I had about got myself used to the idea that we were going to have live through a war-time future in a militaristic nation. However, the skies are clearing now, the public disposition to go to war at the drop of a presidential statement is evaporating, and peace agreements are being concluded in many of the world's former "trouble spots". I am reminded of a remark that President Eisenhower made at the end of the last cycle of conservative domination of American political thought, to the effect that when the peoples of the world want peace, the governments will have to step out of their way and let them have it.

I am currently well into Peter S. Beagle's The Folk of the Air, and expect to review it in a future issue. Apparently the book was virtually ignored upon its first appearance in 1977, presumably as a story in Phantasmagoria. But in 1986 it seems to have hit a chord, since it won the 1987 Mythopoeic Fantasy Award.

The book takes us to the university town of "Avicenna, California", located on San Francisco Bay, and obviously intended for Berkeley. (After all, Avicenna and Berkeley were both philosophers.) The hero is returning ten years after the glory days of the late 1960s, and noting the things that have changed and the things that have not. But a retrospective on the "1960s" would not have been popular in 1977, which is why I would guess The Folk of the Air did not achieve book publication at that time. The cycle of reaction had to run its course, before Sixties nostalgia could develop again.

*

A couple of weeks ago I had occasion to consult something in Rebecca West's testy and opinionated book The New Meaning of Treason. (I can recommend all her books to readers, with the warning that while she is scrupulously accurate in her facts, her opinions and sense of proportion sometimes have to be examined critically.) But, writing in 1964, she had this to say about the unwillingness of many people to accept her ideas about a sinister, monolithic, worldwide, subversive Communistic conspiracy:

"Fiction ran away with the idea and seemed to take it for its own, simply because a secret society which is real has to be kept, so far as possible, secret. There are myriads of secret societies which stemmed from splinter forms of Freemasonry and from the Illuminati and multiplied before and after 1848; but they seemed tentative and unimpressive compared with the majestic machines which, omnipotent and omnipresent and unnamed, controlled the nations in the works of Eugene Sue; and he had imitators in every language when the disciples of the political philosophies of Blanqui and Nechaev* still numbered only a few thousand. The huge international conspiracy was part of the bag of tricks used by most writers of that nineteenth-century invention, the detective story. Thus it happened that international conspiracy was established in the common mind as a feature of a vulgar district in the world of fancy, and it seemed quite ridiculous to think of it as a real threat."

It might have been a good idea if Dame Rebecca had thought over this passage before committing it to print. For it appears that "the common mind" is indeed correct. The "conspiracy so immense", to quote Senator McCarthy, is at best a literary device. And there is a name for the person who believes that millions of lurking, secret enemies are out to get him. That name is not a political label.

*

Several months ago I noticed an advertisement for what might be called a "Yuppie aquarium". It was a videotape that you could put on the VCR. Then you looked, not into the side of a tank but into your TV picture tube, to see the fish swim about. There was never any bother about changing water or cleaning the tank.

Little did I realize that this just scratched the surface. According to a story in the New York Times of 19 March 1988, a couple named Peter Wild and Nancy Fisher have reproduced a Video Dog and a Video Cat. "With Video Dog," Douglas Martin writes, "you can settle back in an easy chair and take the cute little dog for a walk - the only human exercise is reaching for another potato chip. To groom Video Dog, you adjust the monitor for definition and accurate color."

After this, the only possible follow-up was Video Baby. And this Wild and Fisher have also done:

"For fast-aging baby boomers, what could be more wonderful than a baby?

"Maybe getting a good night's sleep. Or not having to wipe spittle from a freshly laundered shirt. How about going out for a dinner and a show without weeks of planning?

"Not to worry. Video Baby is here."

* - These were two 19th-century Anarchist leaders who played at conspiracy rather than trying to build mass movements. They spent much time in prison as a result. (JB)

Yes - for \$20, Wild and Fisher will sell you a 13-minute tape "showing a cute-as-a-button, blue-eyed 9-month-old clapping for Daddy, waving to Grandma and happily smearing porridge all over her face." You can even choose a name for Video Baby, and enter it on a birth certificate and a medical records sheet - which, just as with Cabbage Patch Kids, is provided also. And she won't even leave stretch marks!

Meanwhile, "Mr. Wild and Ms. Fisher are bursting with new ideas. Ideas like Video Husband."

(I am reminded of that old joke about the old maid who was asked why she never married. "Why should I get a husband?" she replied. "I've already got a dog that growls, a parrot that swears, a chimney that smokes, and a cat that stays out all night!")

Some 15 or 20 years ago, a s-f novel whose name I've forgotten told of a society divided between Realists and "Vikes"; the Realists wanted to live life fully with real, even dangerous experiences, while the "Vikes" wanted to do everything vicariously. The jacket notes didn't seem very interesting to me, so I never read it. Maybe I should have, if only to prepare me for life in late pre-Depression America.

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Just before Eileen Campbell Gordon's Rivendell Bookshop closed, I bought there a collection of rare old ghost stories: Icelandic Folktales and Legends (\$9, University of California Press, 1972), selected and translated by Macqueline Simpson from a two-volume work collected in 1862-62 by the great Icelandic scholar and antiquarian Jón Arnason (1819-1888). There is apparently a system for indexing folktales and legends by theme, and these are so indexed; many of them draw on material from the sögur, from Keltic myth, or the common body of Germanic folk-tales. There are continually references to other tales, including many from Great Britain and Ireland, and some of the ghost stories resemble those collected in this country by B. A. Botkin. Some of them are comic, like the tale of the trollwife who tried to seduce a human lover, while others raise the short hair on the back of your neck. Icelandic ghosts (draugur) are not ethereal wraiths flitting through castle halls, but the actual dead body, animated through its own will or a wizard's spell, and come back to the world of the living to accomplish some purpose. (Sometimes all that is needed is one bone, from which the rest of the shaping can be made; if you strike it where the bone is, you can defeat it.) Some of these tales are attempts of unlearned people to account for natural phenomena; mentally retarded children are understood as changelings, while a man who leaves human society and goes to live a demented existence in the wilds is in the process of turning into a troll. (Indeed, in present-day California, homeless men are sometimes called "trolls".) Whether you are interested in folklore and its scholarship, or merely want to read some good scary stories, I recommend this book.

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- There is an item on
p. _____ that may be
of interest to you.

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