



DEROGATORY REFERENCE 73

Derogatory Reference

is written, edited, and published four times a year by

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Staff: Bernadette Bosky, Kevin Maroney, Dell-Viking,
Daphne, Courageous, Earl Warren, and Lee Harvey Oswald.

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Now let's see: Where was I? In North Carolina, telling you I'd be in New York somewhere. Or maybe just arriving here in Yonkers, knowing only the address. In any event, it appears time for a more coherent account of the move to Yonkers.

Bernadette, Kevin, and I had decided to get a house together, but we weren't sure where. We liked North Carolina, but we were all looking for knowledge-industry jobs, and there are not a whole lot of those available in NC. Insofar as there any such in this Bushwhacked economy, they are in the New York Metropolitan area, and when it appeared that my mother was going to leave me the house in New Rochelle in which I had lived for almost 40 years, we planned to move there.

As I mentioned in a previous issue, it turned out that I had been left, not the house, but the money to buy it. That inheritance, however, would be insufficient to cover the many needed repairs, so we decided to let the house be sold to others and buy another.

This turned out to be a Good Thing for several reasons. Besides the problem of repairs, there was the fact that I am at least a second-generation pack rat. The possibility of leaving all that stuff in place, even with good intentions to go through it eventually, would have been a diabolical temptation and a potential source of divisiveness. Having to actually pack up and move everything we were keeping was good for us.

Of course, some of the stuff was salable, and professionals held a tag sale, then some of what was left over was given to the poor. Bernadette likes to quote a discussion she and I had about the old house: She: Your family had the place almost 50 years. When was it last redecorated? Me: Redecorated?

My statement was oversimplified. There were some changes, like new furniture in the living room. I no longer remember the exact year (50s or 60s), but it came at a time when the furniture industry had figured out how to simultaneously minimize comfort, attractiveness, and durability.

I've seen worse, or at least I once saw at the Museum of Modern Art a display of what may have been meant as abstract furni-

ture. (It appeared to have been intended for people with an odd number of buttocks.) Short of that, however, this was in a class by itself--angular wood outlines of chairlike entities, more or less supporting small cushions. The paying customers ignored it, but paupers of sufficient desperation were found to take it.

With the old house gutted and sold, we turned to the search for a new one. It was surprisingly easy; in fact, the fourth house we looked at was right.

It is, as you have guessed, at 206 Valentine Street in Yonkers. The street name led us to stoop to borrowing a title from Robert Silverberg and calling the place Valentine's Castle. Worse yet, since I am a Discordian Pope, that makes me the Valentine Pontifex.

The house overlooks the Cross County Parkway. It also overlitens the Cross County Parkway, but from within the house, the noise is bearable. As my hearing aids amplify traffic sounds at least as well as speech, we find it challenging to have an outdoor conversation, but that's a relatively minor problem.

It is convenient to a seminary and a racetrack, neither of which was much of a selling point to us. The seminary may once have been a monastery, and occasionally is referred to as one. As a result, smart-ass friends have wondered if we would be bothered by drunken monks coming around at odd hours of the night in search of nuns. Alas, no. It is a pleasant and peaceful neighborhood, mostly Italian Catholic.

The house is two stories, plus a full finished basement. The first floor includes a sunken living room, with fireplace; my study; the kitchen; a half-bath; and a truly sizeable dining room (one of Bernadette's favorite things about the house; we have, from her family, a dinner table that expands to seat 14). Upstairs are the bedroom, also oversized; Kevin's and Bernadette's studies; and two count 'em two oversized bathrooms.

Our first thought was to get a mortgage on the house. Rumor had it that the loan biz is so desperate that banks are offering mortgages at moderate fixed rates

even to the likes of me. Rumor was wrong. What we were offered was a variable-rate mortgage that even at the current rate would soak up interest faster than we could accumulate it through any sort of investment safe enough for a wimp like me.

So we bought outright. As with having to get a new house, second thought tells me that I'm glad this was imposed on us. Perhaps I take the phrase "real property" too seriously, but the government and the banks seem less likely to louse up our house than the investments needed to keep paying for our house.

Before late April, when we closed on the house, we stayed with friends while visiting New York, but we did have one adventure. A few blocks from the house is the Yonkers Motor Inn. I'd noticed a sign saying \$20, and when we needed a place to stay overnight, I remembered that. Had I looked more closely, I would have seen that it's \$20 an hour. We survived. There was no TV, phone, or other such distractions, but the sheets appeared fresh, and nothing crawled out from them.

And so we packed up our ménage and moved it.

We moved five vans and about five carsful of stuff from North Carolina, plus most of another vanful that we had in storage up here, into Valentine's Castle. Taking Kevin's estimates and adding some other data my mind has not yet been able to repress, I would guess that this included fourteen filing cabinets, forty or so bookcases, thirty-five boxes of comics and twenty or so of magazines and fanzines, two computers, six desks, a king-size bed and a double bed, two tv sets, three stereos, a VCR, 30+ shelf feet of records (the quaint, old-fashioned ones made of vinyl), two rabbits and a gerbil, two futons and frames, literally hundreds of boxes of books, a photocopier, three sofas (including a fold-out couch), a couple of dozen chairs, a 12' removable-leaf dining table, many stuffed animals, at least a dozen display boxes filled with *chachkes*, more posters and other artwork than we could put up (even if we were willing to cover not only all the walls, but the windows), and cement and marble lawn ornaments.

Among those who helped: In New York: Vicki Rosenzweig, Andy Hickmott, Vijay Bowen, Walt Keay, Vinnie Bartilucci, Avram Grumer, Danny Lieberman, and Nancy Lebovitz; in Durham: Sean Haugh, Sarah Ovenall, Carole Breakstone, Sid Stafford, Charlie Martin, Paul Wegner, John Reiber, Dave Drake, Georg Patterson, Richard Case, Eric Bracey, Brett and Tehri Cox, and Dan Breen. (I'm sure I've left someone out, and I apologize.) But the most remarkable assistance came from Charles Sperling in New York and Richard Onley in Durham, and without either we might not yet be moved.

I mentioned some other inhabitants of our house. Bernadette is strongly biophilic; she likes having lots of small, living things

around the house. I am not, and I am allergic to many kinds thereof, including cats, dogs, and horses (so we can't have even a little horsey in the house). Kevin is somewhere in between, but closer to Bernadette.

Our previous compromise was to have one or two outdoor cats. The trouble with that was that they tended to ~~play~~ run afoul of traffic. When Sir Guyon, who had shown a strong disinclination to go out into the street, met the same fate as his predecessors, Bernadette decided that she was through with cats, and we'd find other kinds of pet, with Bernadette and Kevin taking care of them and me tolerating them.

So we got a gerbil, whom we named Daphne. From my point of view, gerbils may be the ideal pets (if one must have pets at all). Daphne stays in her cage all the time and requires little feeding and cleaning. She likes toilet-paper rolls, which she crawls through and chews up to make nests out of, so we save them for her. When Bernadette and I visited Canada, we brought her an exotic *Papier Hygiénique* roll, but she apparently found that no better than ordinary toilet paper. She doesn't misbehave, but if she did, we could threaten to give her to a Philadelphia newscaster. (West Coast readers: substitute Richard Gere.)

We've decided that Daphne's actually fannish: She sleeps most of time, and when she's awake, she craps up her environment with paper. Not only that, but she's gluttonous (she literally ate herself out of house and home, chewing up a little plastic house that came with her cage), and she has fannish table manners. When we give her a sunflower seed (her favorite), she grabs it and runs off to wolf it down. Kevin says she acts as if she's afraid that the other twelve gerbils in her cage will get it first. There are those who say that I eat as if I were afraid the other twelve gerbils would beat me to the food.

Then we got the rabbits. A friend in the Durham area has a pair of French lop rabbits, and this summer Bernadette and Kevin selected two from their current litter. The owner examined them and assured us that they were both males, though of course one can never be entirely certain. (Why is the organ playing that sinister foreshadowing music?)





What am I
doing floating in
the middle of a
fanzine page

There's another new denizen of the house that I find more interesting--the computer on which I am writing these words.

NEEP-NEEP ALERT

It's a Dell 325SX, a 386 PC clone with 2 MB RAM, an 80-MB hard disk, a VGA screen, and pre-installed MS-DOS 5.0 and Windows 3.0. These words are being processed with PC-Write Advanced 4.0, which seems to have ironed out almost all of the undocumented features of earlier PC-Writes. I've brought over Paradox 3.5, Fontasy, New Print Shop, and As-Easy-As from the old machine. The color monitor is one of the things I was really looking forward to.

I can now recommend two of the amusements that the color monitor supports. *James Gleick's Chaos*, which is programmed by sf writer Rudy Rucker, illustrates Mandelbrot sets, strange attractors, cellular automata, etc., with wondrously garish graphics. You can use it as a visual aid to learning the mathematics of chaos, or you can just look at the pretty pictures. (Kevin points out one drawback: Some of the effects, because of their complexity, run very slowly, even on a 386, unless you have a math coprocessor.)

Mah Jongg is actually a solitaire game which can be played with pictures of mah jongg tiles. The object is to remove 144 tiles, two at a time. One nice thing about it is that there are many delightful-looking alternative tile sets, representing birds, stamps, flags, etc. The basic game is \$15 (+\$2 shipping) from Nels Anderson, 92 Bishop Drive, Framingham, MA 01701-6515. Or you can pick it up as shareware and pay for it if you like. (Of course, as with all shareware, if you use it without paying for it, you are a subhuman, parasitic scumbag.)

Windows, which I wouldn't have bought if it hadn't been thrown in free with the computer, turns out to have some fun stuff, such as a Paint program. I still wouldn't use it to run software that runs under MS-DOS.

My new printer is a Panasonic KX-P2123 24-pin dot-matrix printer. It is remarkably quiet, and I would say that its "Near Letter Quality" was not (as the adapted old joke has it) named by the same lousy judge of distance who named near beer. Even Bernadette finds it acceptable. (And I hope you do too. It's printing these words.)

Since the computer is a Dell, I've named it Dell-Viking. I'm quite happy with it. I plan to get a modem soon, and I hope to have an electronic address in the next issue. Other possible additions, depending on price and quality, are a CD-ROM player and a scanner ~~which will live in a fan~~.

END NEEP-NEEP ALERT

One challenge we are facing is getting all of our paper organized. (Daphne and the rabbits have offered to eat anything we can't find a place for, but perhaps they overestimate even their own gluttony.)

Our fanzines and apas do fit somewhat comfortably into our 16 filing cabinets, but that leaves the books. Contrary to what might be expected, we are not furnishing

Their names are Earl Warren and Lee Harvey Oswald the Rabbit, puns for which I bear no responsibility. Everything was going fine until we noticed that they appeared to be copulating. Just to be on the safe side, we sought professional advice. Lee was always on top, so we took Earl to a vet to be examined for gender. The vet reported that Earl is male (though of course one can never be entirely certain). Apparently, male rabbits simulate sex as dominance behavior. That was OK with me. Like Gore Vidal, I believe that fucking, even if it's two males, is nobody else's business, but breeding is Serious Stuff and has to be regulated.

But then, while Bernadette and I were at worldcon, Earl gave birth to a litter. This bothered me, but it bothered Earl more. She did not nurse them and eventually decided to eat them. She didn't even do that right. She gobbled one down, then began biting legs off the others. Kevin took them all to the vet, where the legless ones were euthanized. Valiant efforts were made to save the one unmaimed one, but he (?) didn't last long.

So we now have two rabbits, known to be of different sexes, but both sterilized. (That apparently is something the veterinary profession can do with confidence.) And the whole thing has given us a new perspective on abusive human parents. Now when discussing bad mothers, from common or garden variety ones down to legendary figures like Joan Crawford and Nancy Reagan, we say, "Oh, well, at least she didn't bite their hind legs off."

We do have a cat again. One day while we were sitting around the Yonkers storage facility, a black cat came over and befriended Bernadette. She decided that a cat who grew up in a parking lot should be able to avoid cars, so we talked to the people at the neighboring business. They had been feeding her, but were willing to pass her along to people who'd give her medical care and vaccinations as well (us). They had named her Courageous, and we kept the name, not knowing at first that it was a cartoon reference.

She's a beautiful solid black cat, and quite friendly. I must say, though, that I'd like her even more if I were even deafer, as she has a piercing Siamese voice which she uses frequently.

entirely in Early Volume, but we do have a lot of bookcases.

We're still in the process of organizing the books. My study, for instance, has been done and is fairly representative of my interests: math, computers, information & library science, philosophy, sports, rock & roll, and offensive jokes.

One decision we've made is to give up on dividing fiction by genre and/or category. This may indicate that I have been brain-washed by library school and am in need of deprogramming, since neither the Dewey Decimal nor the Library of Congress system makes such distinctions. It does go along with my belief that the distinctions between "mainstream" and "category" fiction are more marketing devices than anything else, and that some of the most interesting writers and books cross or straddle those lines.

Actually, we've divided the fiction books by size. I realize that sounds a bit like the joke about how one's favorite ethnic group catalogs books (by color), but it does mean we can take advantage of shelf heights, and also have the impressive-looking hard-cover books on display in the living room while the paperbacks lurk in the basement like an objectified Unconscious.

Having all the 20th-Century English-language fiction arranged alphabetically does lead to some remarkable juxtapositions. My favorite is Charles Platt and Sylvia Plath. What makes that combination particularly putrid is that the Platt book is *The Gas*.

Moving means getting used to new radio stations. As I have mentioned before, my musical tastes are thoroughly regressive. I like the stuff that was popular in my extended adolescence (1954-1968 or so) and a few other things that sound sufficiently like what was popular in my adolescence.

Fortunately, these tastes make me part of an identifiable market, and there are oldies stations that pander to us.

The New York area appears to have two of these: WCBS-FM in the city and WQQQ in Connecticut. I prefer these to the oldies stations I listened to in North Carolina, which had abbreviated playlists. These play obscure 50s stuff as well as the standard Beatles-Beach Boys-Elvis-Monkees-Motown.

Their only problem, one that they share with the NC oldies stations, is temporal creep. They have gotten into the 70s and keep moving forward. You'd think they'd know better, particularly WCBS-FM. That station is celebrating its 20th anniversary as an oldies station. Obviously, it was needed back in 1972 because the music wasn't any good anymore.

One other Bad Thing: Oldies radio means oldies disk jockeys--those who are still around--and CBS-FM has brought back my least favorite 50s-nostalgia person this side of Richard Nixon: Cousin Brucie.

I think this will best explain Cousin Brucie: In those days the Heat Index was called the Temperature Humidity Index. Cousin Brucie always referred to it as "the THI," and almost always as "the THI--oh my!" his voice rising in what sounded alarmingly like a form of sexual arousal.

Alan Freed, Bob Lewis, B. Mitchell Reid--all the best disk jockeys of my youth have gone to that great radio station in the sky; Cousin Brucie goes on forever. He has, however, paid the price for his relative immortality, in the form of perpetual pubescence. He no longer has the THI to talk about, but his voice still changes in mid-sentence.

Yonkers itself seems reasonably pleasant, but it may have been designed as a rat intelligence test, a maze of one-way streets, surprising name changes, and streets which disappear, then reappear.

Consider just our vicinity. Driving down the Cross County Parkway near our house, one sees a sign which reads "Yonkers Avenue West Exit 2." Before any exit, there is another sign, in different format, saying "Yonkers Avenue East Exit 3," followed by an actual exit which lead to Yonkers Avenue East. (It also leads to Yonkers Avenue West, and about a quarter of the drivers defy the signs telling them not to go that way.)

We eventually realized that there is an Exit 2, after Exit 3, and it does lead to Yonkers Avenue West, although there is a segment of Yonkers Avenue that can be reached from neither exit. This includes the Yonkers Motor Inn, and perhaps that institution exerts a sinfully magnetic pull upon the drivers who make the illegal turn, destroying their will to obey traffic signs.

Midland Avenue runs North-South, parallel to the Parkway on the other side from us. It stops at Yonkers Avenue, then magically reappears on our side of the Parkway, protruding far to the south of Yonkers Ave., and a little bit to the north, after which it silently turns into our own Valentine Street. This particular part of the rat intelligence test foiled the Rand-McNally Map Co. Their map, refusing to concede to mere street signs, insists that Valentine Street intersects Yonkers Ave., and only then does Midland begin. This confusion, along with the fact that there is also a Valentine Lane in Yonkers, makes summoning a taxi to our house more of an adventure than it should be.

A POSSIBLY SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MY FORMER HOME AND MY CURRENT ONE

At Narcotics Anonymous meetings in North Carolina, one standard announcement is that anyone carrying drugs or paraphernalia should take them outside and come back without them. At New York NA meetings the same announcement is made about drugs, paraphernalia, or weapons.



One of the main things I read for is to meet people, real and fictional, and I'll tell you about some of my new acquaintances.

The real person Andrew Vachss, and his fictional creation Burke, fascinate me. Burke is a man who was abandoned at birth and abused as a child. He lives outside the law, making his living by swindling people more evil than himself. (There's a lovely bit in the first book about his flourishing business in tapes of Hitler's last hours, sold to the American Nazi market.) He gives meaning to his life by protecting other children from the kind of horrors he endured, or at least punishing those who inflict such horrors, and preventing them from doing it any more. This could turn into tales of allegedly justified aggression, like the Mike Hammer books or the *Death Wish* movies, but it generally doesn't. Burke is usually under control, by reason and his own code of honor, among other things. He's brilliantly and bitterly funny, and he's surrounded by a wonderful team who help him in his work and help the victims recover. He also has great musical taste, liking Chicago blues, doo-wop, and Judy Henske. His first book, *Flood* (Pocket pb), is a delightful introduction. The second, *Strega* (Signet pb), may be the best in the whole series. With the next two, *Blue Belle* and *Hard Candy* (both Signet pb), the series takes a darker turn, but it cheers up again with *Blossom* and *Sacrifice* (both Ivy pb). I recommend them all.

Kendall Hailey (nonfictional) comes from a charmingly overmeshed family of writers. Actually, it's an overmeshed pair of families, and in *How I Became an Autodidact* (Dell tpb), she falls in love with the son of the other tribe, as she decides that high school is interfering with her education. Along with the love affair, she tells us about her reading and acting experiences, and while there's a certain amount of Ah-Now-I-Understand-Everything which I imagine will embarrass her in later years, the book is quite pleasant.

I enjoyed A. N. Wilson's biographies of Hilaire Belloc and C. S. Lewis, but maybe I thought it was all the songs, and not the singer. It's both. Wilson's *Penfriends from Porlock* (Fawcett Columbine tpb) is an excellent collection of essays, mostly literary. My favorite is an attack on C. P. Snow, in which Wilson says that *Strangers and Brothers* (Snow's novel sequence) is like *A Dance to the Music of Time* (Anthony Powell's novel sequence) narrated by Widmerpool (the latter's dullest, most insensitive, most power-mad character). I admire and envy that remark for its combination of cruelty and justice.

Wilson has begun his own novel sequence; *Incline Our Hearts*, *A Bottle in the Smoke*, and *Daughters of Albion* are available so far, all in hardcover from Viking, with the former two also in trade paperback from Penguin. I love it. These books succeed in a remarkable number of ways, with great wit,

fascinating character development, and self-referential cleverness. He does so much at once that sometimes he fails to keep the plates spinning while he's juggling the torches; in the second book, for instance, his narrator has trouble describing a blind infatuation from a later point of view of knowing better. Most of the time, however, Wilson does magnificently.

Molly Ivins is an intelligent woman, of liberal sensibilities, who has spent much of her life reporting on that inmate-run asylum known as the Texas legislature. As a result, few political excesses surprise her. *Molly Ivins Can't Say That, Can She?* (about to be a Vintage tpb) collects a number of her essays, virtually all of which are funny and make sense. Unfortunately, I returned the book to the library without copying out any good examples, so you'll have to trust me.

Edward Bennett Williams was a complex and fascinating person. He was a great lawyer, both as a performer on the courtroom stage and as a brilliant and hard-working analyst of his cases. He may have been even better as a behind-the-scenes negotiator and arranger. He supported the principle that even the vilest scum have the right to good legal counsel (and, like Alan Dershowitz today, sometimes seemed to run that into the ground), but had his own standards for refusing clients. He repeatedly had to be talked out of seeking elective office, though he knew in his more lucid moments that he would enjoy neither running nor serving. He believed that a man of his stature and success had the right to extramarital affairs with glamorous women, but apparently never particularly enjoyed what he pursued so assiduously. He had a sharp, though sometimes offensive, wit; asked about a client who had been producing and selling bestiality photos, he straightfacedly stated that he'd use an entrapment defense: "They were police dogs." All this is presented in Evan Thomas's biography, *The Man to See* (Simon & Schuster hc).

Flaubert's Parrot, by Julian Barnes (Vintage tpb), starts out like a work of literary criticism, but its narrator turns out to be a fascinating fictional person. I must admit that I've never read *Madame Bovary*, which Barnes's book discusses, but I imagine I would have enjoyed the latter even more if I had.

I was an unhappy football widow until I realized how much fun it was to kill the armchair quarterback.



Worldcon

Sometimes I wonder if I learn anything. Twelve years ago, I attended my first World Science Fiction Convention: Noreascon II, in Boston. The Fan Guest of Honor was a delightful writer named Dave Langford. (He still is a delightful writer, by the way. I recommend sending \$7 to NESFA Press, Box G, MIT Branch PO, Cambridge, MA 02139-0910, for his screamingly funny collection, *Let's Hear It for the Deaf Man*. You might also want to get on their case for stealing Ed McBain's title without credit, but that's another story.) I'd want to meet him anyway, but since he lives across the ocean, meeting took on particular urgency.

In any event, I failed. I was new, I didn't know where the fans hung out, and I never even saw him.

Cut to Magicon, 1992's World Science Fiction Convention. The Fan Guest of Honor is a delightful writer named Walt Willis. He too lives across the sea (same one). But now I have presumably learned more about worldcons. I knew where the Fan Lounge was, and what programming he was on, so there'd be no excuse for failing to meet him.

I didn't meet him.

I was in the Fan Lounge a lot, and so (I imagine) was he. There always seemed to be something else going on when he was on programming, and I kept assuming I'd see him. But I didn't, though I really wanted to.

That, however, is pretty much the extent of the bad news about Magicon. Bernadette and I saw friends, went to and appeared on programming, and found goodies at the huckster room.

Orlando has excellent facilities for a worldcon. There are several hotels grouped around a convention center with at least as much function space as necessary--enough room for major functions, huckster room, art show, fan lounge, lots of exhibits about sf and fannish history, and about a dozen tracks of programming. This latter bothers some people, but except for the problem of deciding which of two or more interesting but simultaneous items one wishes to attend, I don't see what's wrong with it. (Of course, any gathering with two or more tracks of programming will have two of the best items opposite each other, and at least one slot where there's nothing worth going to. It's a law of nature.)

Con committees should live up to the old ideal of conspicuous service inconspicuously rendered. A good concom is not noticed, and this one wasn't.

Well, actually there's one exception to that. Those of us who are on programming can't help noticing the Programming Division. Priscilla Olson, Janice Gelb, Eve Ackerman, et al. did excellently.

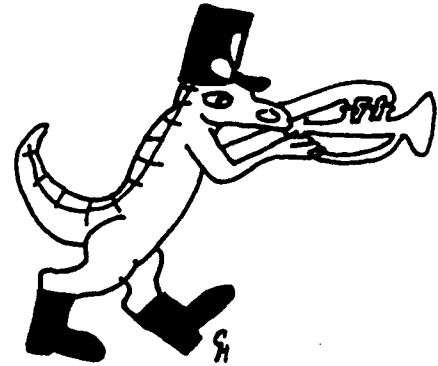
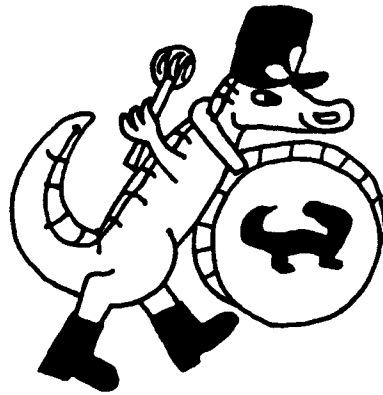
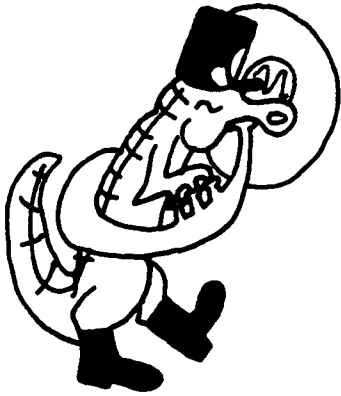
Friday, I was on a panel on "Incentives to Forget Technology." There are reasons to forget all technology. For instance, if you want to live in a society where the biggest and strongest get first shot at the food, women, and other goodies, technology would be a hindrance. Or, if you happen to be of the Church of Marx, forgetting technology would make it easier to pretend that labor is what creates value. There are just no good reasons to forget all technology.

Forgetting individual kinds of technology sounds better. There are technologies (military and other) which have great potential for harming people, and it would be nice if we could all forget them. There are problems with that, however, mainly caused by the stubborn insistence of some people on not forgetting even the most harmful technologies if there's something in it for them. Thus, "forgetting" means suppressing the not only the technologies themselves, but any kind of related knowledge that could lead to their reinvention. This would be a scary concept even in a fantasy world where those in power acted wisely, disinterestedly, and efficiently.

I was prepared to defend these views, but found that I was pretty much preaching to the converted, as the panel and most of the audience was in agreement. One can find technophobes at a science-fiction, but they are somewhat scarce; it appears advisable to seek one out for a panel of this nature, just as con panels on religion need at least a token theist.

This panel was followed by "Abuse Themes in Science Fiction," one of those panels that might be called "packaged"; i.e., designed as a unit, with preselected panelists most or all of whom have done the same panel before, and organized to present an approach or body of information in a more coherent manner than free-form panels. This one dealt with the presence in much fantasy and sf of material reflecting or commenting upon the beatings, rapes, etc. that are the lot of all too many children. We were of course also informed that this sort of thing is only of many aspects to any story in which it appears, and that the presence of such elements does not enable us to deduce anything about the childhood of the author. Laurie Edison, Kristine Kathryn Rusch, Teresa Nielsen Hayden, and Richard Dutcher knew the subject well and discussed it thoroughly and informatively.





Saturday, programming kept us busy. At 11 AM, Bernadette chaired a panel entitled "Fantasy/Horror in Historical Magic." This actually meant Historical Magic in Fantasy/Horror. Judith Tarr, Richard Lee Byers, Ashley McConnell, and Lisa Barnett talked about their own fictional use of magical systems, including African and Native American ones. This multicultural aspect was typical of Magicon. The Programming Division included a department of Multicultural Programming, ably run by Amy Thomson, and for that or other reasons, references to non-European cultures seemed to come up in other panels as well. (No, there were no chants of "Ho Ho Ho, Western Culture's Gotta Go.") I find myself wondering what this will mean in terms of the perpetual question of sf and fantasy's lack of acceptance by the guardians of the Academic Canon: Will we ride in on the coattails of the newly fashionable multiculturalists, or have we forever blown our chances of acceptance by embracing something even further from the mainstream? Probably neither.

After that panel, we had an hour for lunch, and then it was my turn to perform, on a panel on apas (amateur press associations). This one, as it frequently does, drew a small but knowledgeable crowd, and we went around the room asking audience members what apas they belonged to. One venerable gentleman said, "Just one." I recognized him from an earlier meeting in the Fan Lounge and couldn't resist introducing him: Jack Speer, charter member of the original sf apa, FAPA, and co-inventor (with the late Dan McPhail) of the mailing comment. At the risk of disillusioning those who know him only from his zines or by reputation, I will point out that he is not a cantankerous old curmudgeon in person. Quite the contrary; Bernadette and I thoroughly enjoyed meeting him.

Then it was Bernadette's turn again. She appeared on another packaged panel, the one on Fat, Feminism, & Fandom, along with Laurie Edison, Terry Garey, and Althea McMurrian, whom *The Official Politically Correct Book* would call a Person of Color, a Person of Gender, and a Person of Size. This

panel is designed to point out too-little-known facts about "overweight," such as that dieting does far more to cause it than to cure it, and to discuss fandom's attitude towards the problem (better than the rest of society's, but that's not saying much). The panel went extremely well. The discussion afterwards probably did, too, but Bernadette was on yet another panel, this one on Teaching SF. That also went well.

Saturday evening was the Hugo Awards. And others. I was under the impression that the Worldcon constitution mandated that the ceremony include only the Hugos (and the John W. Campbell Award for new writers, a Hugo in all but name, which appears on the same ballots). I was mistaken, but it would be a good idea. Instead, we have a system where unidentified concon members get to divide the non-Hugo awards into the good ones, presented with the Hugos, and the bad ones, shunted off to a special (as in "special education") ceremony. Iconic of the former are the First Fandom Awards, so heartwarming and lovable that only a cranky young fart would want to banish them from the big ceremony. Iconic of the latter are the libertarian Prometheus Awards, presumably so sectarian that their presence would sully the *H*U*G*O*S*.

I would like to extend my condolences to the presenters of the Japanese awards, traditionally in the acceptable class, but demoted this year. I suspect that this fall does not represent Japan bashing or other ugly mundane political realities, but merely ~~my~~ internal politics among the concon.

Standing again at the right hand of the Hugos was the Gryphon Award, presented for the best unpublished fantasy novel by a woman. I can imagine myself considering this award necessary enough to be treated like a Hugo, but only if I were under the delusion that all those Hugos and Nebulas were being won by males named Louis Bujold, Conrad "Connie" Willis, et al.

One reason I regret not getting this issue of DR out earlier is that, for the

first time, I could wholeheartedly support Avedon Carol for the Best Fan Writer Hugo. She has been turning out quantities of brilliant, perceptive, and witty writing for more than 15 years now, and it's past time for her to get a rocket ship of her own. I suspect that such a plug would have made no difference, as the award once again went to Dave Langford. As the Bible tells us (*Hebrews* 13:8, KJV), "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and for ever."

In the huckster room, I picked up some goodies I'd like to tell you about. Pulphouse has published *The Collected Stories of Robert Sheckley* in five trade paperbacks. When someone says, "Who wrote that incredibly funny story about . . . ?" nine times out of ten, the answer is Sheckley, and those stories are here: "Bad Medicine," "Protection," "Watchbird," "Welcome to the Standard Nightmare,"--all of them. Like the earlier Dick and Bloch collections published in hardcover by Underwood-Miller and trade paperback by Citadel, these books belong in any good sf collection.

There are now not one, but two, books about fan fiction: *Enterprising Women*, by Camille Bacon-Smith (U. of Pennsylvania Press tpb), and *Textual Poachers*, by Henry Jenkins (Routledge tpb). They complement each other; the former is primarily sociological, looking at the community that builds up around the writing, while the latter treats the writing from the point of view of contemporary literary-critical theory. While each invokes some of the jargon of its chosen approach, both are generally quite readable.

Both deal with the vexed area of "K/S" or "slash" fiction, writing which imagines a loving, often sexual relationship between male protagonists far closer than the "normal" male bonding the networks present. This sort of writing reaches the insecurities of many within the sf community: It is homoerotic; it is media fandom; it is fan fiction; it is by women. Any one of these will scare a few people, and otherwise intelligent critics will suggest obvious absurdities like the idea that the only possible reason anyone would present these men making love with each other is to cruelly satirize them.

These authors do not fall into such traps. Bacon-Smith traces the history of slash fiction, presenting the suggestion that TV makes the characters seem more intimately connected because the small screen requires that characters get closer to each other than one would expect of mere friends, so that the viewers can see the expressions on both faces. But this is explaining, not explaining-away; Bacon-Smith shows us the psychological value of slash fiction and the related genre of "hurt-comfort" fiction (in which horrible things happen to a character, and his pal helps him to recover). Jenkins shows us the wit and creativity of these writers, in folk songs and the new area of videos, as well as more traditional narrative. I recommend both these books.

It has occurred to me that, now that slash fiction has been discovered by Academe, it may be time to move on. Fortunately, the ASCII keyboard offers us a new possibility--the backslash (\)--so all we need is a new subgenre to go with it. Perhaps, instead of a sexual relationship, we could look to that new paradigm of male bonding: Ren & Stimpy.

It doesn't seem to work with the usual media figures. It's hard to imagine either Kirk or Spock calling the other a worthless sack of protoplasm, so we may have to stoop to getting characters from what passes for real life. The first couple that came to my mind was B\Q. One needn't deform George Bush's features too much to have a plausible Ren, and his sidekick shares Stimpy's slowness, if not his essential good nature. I can see it now: George: Look, Danny! There's a media elitist! You can dump your litter box on her! Danny: Oh, joy! You want to look away, but you can't.

The sports field offers possibilities. It's a shame Howard Cosell has retired. He and Frank Gifford would have made a great Ren & Stimpy. George Steinbrenner & Billy Martin were both Rens, so that didn't work. George thought he had found his ideal Stimpy in Yogi Berra, but Yogi wouldn't play. And in science fiction, we could have backslash recursive fiction. In the N\P world the sequel to *The Mote in God's Eye* would not be *The Gripping Hand*, but *The Goblin in God's Nose*.

Oh yes, this was a Worldcon report. There are always a few loose ends. I want to mention what a great job Geri Sullivan and her crew did in running the Fanzine Lounge. Likewise, Nancy Atherton's fanzine history display.

The Fosfax dinner was a pleasure. We took over a small room in a nearby Chinese restaurant. There were enough of us that we took up two tables, so one didn't get to talk with everyone, but it was nice to see Tim Lane, Janice Moore, Martin Morse Wooster, Dave & Diana Stein, Taras Wolansky, Tom Feller (who does an alarmingly good imitation of a normal person), David Thayer (likewise), and Phil Tortorici, among others.

As usual, we had a Discordian Business Meeting at the same time as the Masquerade. (A Discordian Business Meeting looks a lot like a party, but if a bunch of 18-year-old white males with no known reading tastes come around and you tell them it's a Discordian Business Meeting, they will probably leave.) We were not in the main party hotel, and the con newspaper said we were, but we managed to have a good party anyway.

And like most of the conventions I have attended, it lacked one thing: something to inspire a good concluding sentence.

REVIEWS & SUCH

JFK (the movie) is a thoroughly enjoyable docudrama. It's visually fascinating and brilliantly acted, by star Kevin Costner and a number of cameo performers, particularly Jack Lemmon and Donald Sutherland.

It is, however, a lot better as drama than as docu. Its main factual deficiency might be called a Saint James Infirmary, transforming the publicity-seeking, rights-tromping, homophobic Jim Garrison of mere fact into a heroic defender of the reputations and civil liberties of those he is prosecuting.

Garrison's concluding argument, as presented on screen, is both dramatically and intellectually compelling, but not as a case for convicting Clay Shaw. Garrison didn't have a case against Shaw then, and he still doesn't.

But if you really want your conspiracy center stimulated, see *Batman Returns* and ask yourself how Hollywood could do such a quick job of presenting a movie version of Ross Perot's candidacy. Even his physical resemblance to the Penguin is within reasonable parameters.



I see that Theodore Sturgeon's *More Than Human* is back in print, in mass-market paperback. To me, this is good news only in the sense that finding out that one does not have a fatal disease is good news. *More Than Human* should always be in print. It is a book that should always be available, in reasonably-priced paperback, in the mall bookstores, as well as the superstores and the specialty shops.

To me, it is a book that represents what I read sf for. An old joke says that science has finally discovered the missing link between the apes and civilized humanity: It's us. Science fiction goes from there to tell us what civilized humanity will be like. Things like space migration and life extension are somewhat clichéd answers to that question. (But they became clichés because they are good answers.) It was Sturgeon's genius to see that there is a place for moral, as well as technological, evolution, and to present it through fascinating characters and striking prose. If you have not read this book, do yourself a favor and do so.

More Than Human is published by Carroll & Graf, whom I've praised in these pages before for their program of reprinting good sf--by John Sladek, Philip K. Dick, and Clifford D. Simak, among others. Reports filter down to me that they do not pay terribly well for these books, but at least they are paying something and making the books available. I realized recently that they reminded me of someone, almost as if

publishing companies reincarnate. They are the new Lancer.

Like Carroll & Graf, Lancer published that form of fiction for which there is no neutral term, but if WE read it, it's erotica, and if THEY read it, it's pornography. In fact, Lancer tried to make most of their books look as if they fell into that ambiguous category. (All paperback publishers did that sort of thing, but the lower-class ones like Lancer did it more. The approach is somewhat less fashionable today.)

Lancer didn't pay well, and as a result, they probably had a lower average quality than the big paperbacks, but they managed to publish some good category fiction; in the mid-60s, when I started noticing the brand names on books, they were the main paperback publisher of Isaac Asimov. They also published a certain amount of good serious lit, of a sort that would not be expected to appeal to the masses; a couple of examples that come to mind are Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* and Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*. In the sf field, they were the publishers of Brian Aldiss's *Report on Probability A* and Samuel R. Delany's *The Tides of Lust*--books which go in my category of These Books Deserve To Be Published, Even Though I Don't Expect A Whole Lot Of People To Enjoy Them And In Fact I Didn't.

There was a time I was worried that there would never be another Lancer. There has been a theory going around that books would emulate the visual arts, with a few conglomerates putting out a small number of products, each intended to be a lowest-common-denominator best seller. It looks as though the culture is dodging that particular bullet, and I am glad.



For a long time, Thomas M. Disch has been one of my favorite fiction writers, with such brilliant works as *Camp Concentration*, *The Businessman: A Tale of Terror*, and "The Asian Shore." For a somewhat shorter time, he was one of my least favorite critics, writing things with titles like "The Embarrassments of Science Fiction" or openings like "We are all cripples," all promoting the idea that is a shameful and common thing to be a science-fiction fan, and that the writers of the stuff are base panderers. His attacks were more convincing than those by the likes of ~~PAKÉ/PALLY~~ Luc Sante, because they came from a knowledgeable person who himself wrote good sf; but one could find arguments against them.

One of the essays--"Embarrassments," I believe--compared sf with homosexuality, as a powerful, but evil, temptation: The mature reader should put aside sf as the mature male should find a normal relationship with a woman. It included the remarkable suggestion that Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* is a thinly-veiled gay allegory.

I hadn't seen any Dischian diatribes against sf, and I had seen material indicating that he has come to a full acceptance of his own gayness, so I suspected that he would now go easier on that other literally awful temptation. Then I heard that he had done another attack, in *The Atlantic Monthly*.

Well, yes and no. "Big Ideas and Dead-End Thrills" echoes some of the old phrases--"embarrassment" remains--but there's a gentler tone and a firm admission that the author himself is, always has been, and always will be, a science-fiction writer.

His point is that science fiction is all too often a Young Adult genre, and that, as they get older, both its best writers and its best readers burn out on its excitements, its big ideas and grand solutions.

I often feel that way. I sometimes say that I have reader's block, and I read much less sf, both absolutely and as a percentage of my fiction reading, than I used to. This excellent article speaks to my feelings about, and experiences with, the genre; and I find myself all too much in agreement with his conclusion: "I won't act as a booster for the genre as a whole, which has become, as a publishing phenomenon, one of the major symptoms of, if not a causal agent in, the dumbing-down of the younger generation and the lowering of the lowest common denominator."

And yet, maturity is, after all, growing older, and if nothing else, diminishing returns sets in on that. Perhaps outgrowing Young Adult science-fiction tastes is no more a cause for pride or rejoicing than outgrowing Young Adult sexual frequency.

What's 15 inches long and hangs down directly in front of a horse's ass? Dan Quayle's necktie.

What did Quayle do when the war in Iraq began? Asked his father to put him back in the National Guard.

The answer: Indianapolis 500. The question: Where did Quayle take the SATs and what was his total score?

I have now spared you the necessity of buying *Quayle Hunting*, by Bill Adler & Bill Adler Jr., an overpriced and ill-written collection of Quayle jokes.

Of course, the book is already obsolete, as it was written before Quayle's crusade to protect America's morals from Murphy Brown. This week, the media elite reran the episode where Murphy has the baby, but I imagine there is no truth to the rumor that the only Vice-President we have (thank you, Molly Ivins) saw it and said, "You see? She did it again."

I wasn't going to write anything more about the great Political Correctness debate, but then I heard Connie Willis at a couple of conventions.

Now when I hear George Bush, promoter of the abortion gag rule, defending free speech against the Demands of the PC Enforcers, I give it all the respect it deserves. (Here the reader is invited to imagine his or her favorite vulgar noise or obscene gesture.) When I read Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education* (Vintage tpb), I recall that earlier writings won him the name of Distort D'Newza. The book raises some good points, but in every area where I am familiar with what he is talking about, from philosophical trends to the atmosphere at Duke, I find that my agreement with him is inversely proportional to my knowledge of the subject. But when Connie Willis talks about this sort of thing, I listen.

What she said was that she was Guest of Honor at a science-fiction convention a few years ago, and the feminist organizers of the con took the opportunity to tell her in some detail wherein she was insufficiently feminist, and precisely how she had to correct this failing. (Yes, the author of "All My Darling Daughters," that Connie Willis.) This experience bothered Willis, but led to the writing of her brilliantly "Even the Queen," a story I recommend to one and all, although (or perhaps because) it will offend some feminists and make some males want to throw up. It contains an exposition which, like the Hell sermon in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, can be seen by the enemies of what it discusses as a brilliant satire, and by its supporters as a brilliant exposition.

Anyway, it reminded me that while PC enforcement from the Left is both mild and infrequent compared with what is done to enforce George Bush's brand of Political Correctness, it does exist, and it does oppress people. Perhaps we need to recall something that's been said to the Israeli government and to those who've investigated Communist infiltration of the US government: When the Good Guys get so afraid of the Bad Guys that they start borrowing the Bad Guys' methods to use against them, then the Bad Guys have won.

But political correctness and political incorrectness have both become unfashionable, and it's time to move on. Now may be the time for Psychological Incorrectness, challenging the received psychological truths of our time. *The Psychologically Incorrect Book* might well be a best seller. It could have chapters like "Techniques of Passive Aggression," "Codependence: The Friendly Way," and "Denial: Your Road to Peace of Mind." One of the best titles, though, has already been taken by John Callahan for a cartoon book: *Digesting the Child Within*.

The DR List

St. Paul

Joe Bob Briggs

Harry Harrison

Robert A. Heinlein

Nat Hentoff

Horseshit Magazine

Florence King

O. S. Lewis

Guy H. Lillian III

H. L. Mencken

Albert Jay Nock

Murray Rothbard

Norman Spinrad

I ran this in DR 71 in the hope that many people would recognize that it was, like the *Spy* lists, based on some secret common factor, and they would send in queries and guesses as to what that factor could be. I'm not sure where that process broke down. Nevertheless. . . .

Horseshit Magazine is perhaps typical of this group. It published four issues back in the 60s, including some brilliant and incisive satire.

For instance, there was a story called "One of Our Soldiers Is a Killer." It told of a soldier who learned what the Army says it considers important (killing people), rather than what it really considers important (keeping a good shine on one's boots). So when his sergeant chastised him for his appearance, he tried one of the lethal hand-to-hand combat methods he'd been taught. It worked. The account that followed was delightfully satirical, including an official report which described as a complete triumph a sortie in which the massed forces of the entire base pursued their lone quarry, and he killed a couple of officers and escaped unscathed.

There were other goodies, like a description of efforts to teach elementary principles of sex to our nation's jurists. (This after Ralph Ginzburg was sent to jail for publishing *Eros*, which is tame by even today's backslashing standards.) "The American Nut Growers Foundation" was an alarmingly plausible conjecture that many elements of contemporary American culture, from the Academy Awards to the John Birch Society, were the work of a group of tricksters trying in vain to find something so ridiculous that the American public would not take it seriously.

But that wasn't all. There was the sf story of a young woman transported to an alternate world where the men take pleasure in denying sex to women. That was intended as a satirical reversal of the roles of the sexes in our world.

Or there was the suggestion that "girls" who mar themselves as esthetic objects by letting their rear ends get fat should be put in jail. Now this of course was a satirical exaggeration that only a humorless feminist would take seriously. I'm sure that the authors would have been willing to settle for punching the girls in the mouth.

There was a lot of that; it was ugly and in sharp contrast to the brilliance of the rest of the zine. I thought about that, and I realized that *Horseshit* was not alone. The contrast was less strong with others, but it was there, and so I made up this list of People Who Are Worth Reading When They Are Not Writing about Women or Sex.

OTHER UPDATES

In DR 70, I asked about a C & W song called "I'm Only in It for the Love." Dave Wixon, Dave Szurek, Seth Goldberg, and Peggy Burke all informed me that it was recorded by John Conlee. I was able to find it on Conlee's second Greatest Hits album shortly thereafter. Thanks to all of you. Truly, all knowledge is contained in fandom.

On one of the films discussed in "The Clarence and Pee Wee Porn Preview Show" (DR 72), Charles Sperling writes, "One of the highlights of *The Cowering Congressman* was Neil Kinnock's portrayal of Joe Biden's grizzled mentor 'the Coach.'"

"The October Surprise Pool" in the same issue brought suggestions of possible military interventions I had not considered. The most popular of these was Yugoslavia. I find it dubious that even George Bush would send American into a chaotic mess where there seemed to be nothing to win, where the sides shifted from day to day, and where even the names made no sense. Except for the names, the same argument appears to apply to another suggested intervention site: California.

In that discussion, Stella Nemeth noticed that the phrase "Can the Japanese be tricked into bombing Pearl Harbor again?" is ambiguous, meaning either "Can they be tricked again?" or "Can they be tricked into bombing-again?" That was on purpose, and the ambiguity represents my own doubts. Certainly, "the Japanese were tricked into bombing" is a gross oversimplification, but the US military was negligent in letting it take them by surprise, and FDR had been acting provocative towards the Japanese in the hope that they would start something, so the US could go to war against the Axis.

The usual incomplete, but heartfelt, We Also Heard From: Camden Benares, Carole Breakstone, Rusty Burke, Janice Christopher, Jeff Copeland, Mitchell Cross, Jim & Debbie Goad, Marion Hirsch, Ericka Johnson, Dave Langford, Tom Maddox, David Schlosser, Sally Syrjala, David Thayer, and Michael Waite.

Art Index: Gene Grynewicz--cover. Phil Tortorici--3,7.
Tom Cardy--4. Teddy Harvia--6. Cathy Howard--8.