

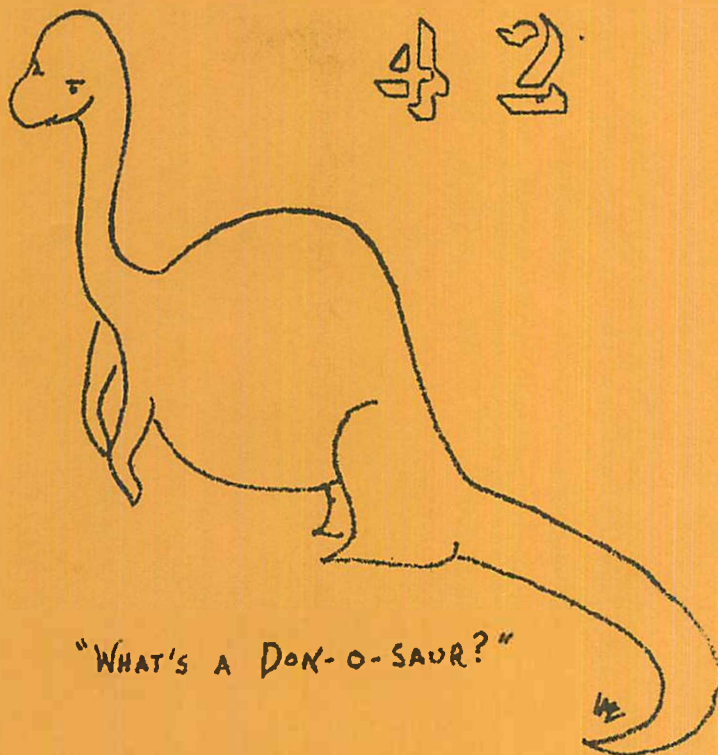
June/July 1975

DON-o-SAUR

DON-o-SAUR is a fanzine, published bi-monthly (more or less) by Don C. Thompson of 7498 Canosa Court, Westminster, CO 80030 Ph. (303) 429-6562

This zine is available in exchange for other such fanzines, for letters of comment, for artwork, or for almost any show of interest, including money. Price is 35¢ per copy; a six-issue subscription costs \$2 and a 12-issue sub costs \$3.50.

The retreat to mimeograph is continuing. Only the front cover, pages 7-8 and 27-28 are done on offset. All the rest is mimeographed. Print run this issue: 400.



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DISCOURSE ON AMBITION

You probably already know this, but in case you don't:

Ambition is a terrible thing. It is insidious; it saps the will, gnaws at the moral fiber, loosens the underpinnings of judgment and makes you do dumb things.

When I first started doing DON-o-SAUR COPROLITES for D'APA, back in October 1971 (Ghosh, was it really that long ago? It really was!), I had nothing at all in mind. Paul Angel was starting a new apa; he invited me to join. He had to explain to me what an apa was and how it worked. It sounded like fun. It quickly became an obsession.

There is something about publishing, even if it's just a two-to-four-page apazine with a readership of no more than a dozen or so, that carries with it a certain sense of power. Or something. It's hard to explain. Look, I've been in newspaper work most of my life. I started seeing my own written words in print when I was in high school (writing high school sports for the Laramie Daily Bcomerang), and it was a thrill of course, but one I quickly became accustomed to; and writing for publication is just not the same thing as actually publishing the writing yourself. There's a significant difference, too, between a mass medium such as a newspaper and an intimate medium like a fanzine. There's something terribly impersonal about the words that are written for a newspaper, quite apart from the fact that the subject being written about is usually something assigned. Even if it is a story that the writer is deeply interested in, the words go through so many hands--editors, copy readers, printers, compositors, proof readers-- that by the time they appear in print they're no longer the writer's words. All the little personal touches have been carefully removed. The spelling, syntax, punctuation and capitalization have been standardized to conform to the style of the publication. The story has been sterilized and depersonalized.

(In defense of copy editors, of which I am one, it is my duty to point out that stories are nearly always improved by that sterilization/standardization process -- in terms of clarity and readability, anyway).

Another significant difference that I discovered between pro and fan publishing is in the feedback factor. And surprisingly, this is the area in which I had long considered amateur publications decidedly inferior. (After all, I had seen some fanzines long before I really understood what they were, and long, long before I had the slightest inclination to produce one myself). I was amazed and appalled by the enormous time spans between publications and hence

(Continued on Page 5 because Page 4 contains a Guest Discourse)

Guest Discourse

By Carolyn H. Thompson

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Yes, this is my wife. Several people have wondered what Carolyn's attitude is toward some of the rather personal disclosures I have made in DoS. This answers that question without actually being directed toward it. I'm allowing Carolyn space in my zine in the desperate hope that she won't decide to publish her own. My disclosures are nothing. Carolyn, quite obviously, is prepared to tell ALL!]

One of the significant differences between Don and me is our attitude toward books.

For me books are a means to an end, tools to be used and when not needed, put away. Once I have read a book, I am finished with it. I can pass it along to another with no qualms. I am a good librarian since I can loan out books and watch them come and go with perfect dispassion. Even if they are returned torn and damaged, I merely decide if they are to be repaired, replaced or discarded with no emotional distress. They are simply objects to be judged for usefulness and eliminated when they become worn out, dull, or outdated. They're OK in their place (at the library) but you don't have to clutter up the house with them.

Don, on the other hand, is a book-lover. He needs books, wants them around him, wants to caress them, feel them, possess them. Mostly he likes his books new, virginal, untouched by other hands, but with the fervor of a fundamentalist preacher, he is also fond of old whores, found in the skid rows of second-hand book shops and raised by his love to a new respectability.

I think I have the basis for an alienation of affection suit, Thompson vs. The Printed Word or something resounding like that.

Politics, religion, how to raise the kids . . . these questions never ruffle the calm waters of our marriage. But every day he has his hands on those books, spends hours with them, squanders our money on them -- loves them.

He is a book pervert.

Discourse on AMBITION

(Continued from Page 3)

between the presentation of an idea and the visible reaction to it by the readers. Six months seemed to be a not unusual gap, and it seemed inconceivable to me that conversations extending over so long a period could possibly have any meaning or interest. In newspaper work we become accustomed to either no reaction or very prompt reaction. But a letter to the editor concerning an item that appeared in the paper more than a week ago has virtually no chance of being published because the assumption is that readers will not remember the original item. And it's a perfectly valid assumption. Newspapers contain such a deluge of information and misinformation and speculation and such masses of meaningless wordage, and newspaper readership is generally so cursory that of course there is nothing as old as yesterday's newspaper.

It is still the time-lag in fanzines that distresses me more than anything else about them -- especially in a zine such as *Algol*, which comes out only twice a year. I can't remember what was being discussed six months previously and I seldom have time to re-read the previous issue, and so I either don't understand or else just don't read a lot of the letters. (I hope Andy Porter doesn't take this personally; I like *Algol*; I consider it one of the greatest, and I didn't mean to single it out for criticism. It was just the first one that popped into my mind as an example of a good zine marred by time-lag).

What I failed to understand before I got into fan publishing is that there is a fundamental difference in the very nature of the feedback factor for prozines and fanzines. Again, it's the difference between the personal and the impersonal. Letters to the editor of a newspaper are seldom directed to the editor or even to a particular reporter; they're directed to issues, to abstractions, to ideas. The fact that actual persons were involved in the communication of those abstractions seems often forgotten. LOSs, on the other hand -- letters of comment to the editor of a fanzine -- while frequently dealing with ideas and abstractions, are directed to the person: to the editor as a human individual.

None of this is irrelevant to my announced topic of ambition.

I know any number of reporters who started out with tons of talent and enthusiasm, and ambition, who have turned into lackadaisical word mills, getting their assigned stories in by deadline, written the way the editors want them, and with all their facts more or less straight, but no longer making any attempt to be creative or imaginative. These reporters have been bought off, for one thing. They're drawing salaries set by Guild contracts, and it is not bad pay at all (\$200 a week for a beginning reporter on the RMN right now, \$341 for one with five years' experience, plus night differential of \$1.75 for those stuck on the late shifts, and of course, the health insurance, severance pay and pension benefits, all of which taken together makes a pretty comfortable bundle. Newspaper pay has actually managed to keep ahead of inflation, at least in Denver). The financial rewards come with mere competence. There is no reliable system of bonuses for excellence. Oh, occasionally the management of the News gives someone a merit raise of \$8 or \$10 a week, but merit raises are always wiped out in each new contract increase, and so they're not even much sought after.

Even more important in the transformation of reporters into vegetables are those other factors that I was talking about -- the deadening effect of having one's words lathered and barbered and trimmed, manicured and pedicured and amputated if necessary to make them fit the uniform mold; and that absence of feedback which is a form of sensory deprivation.

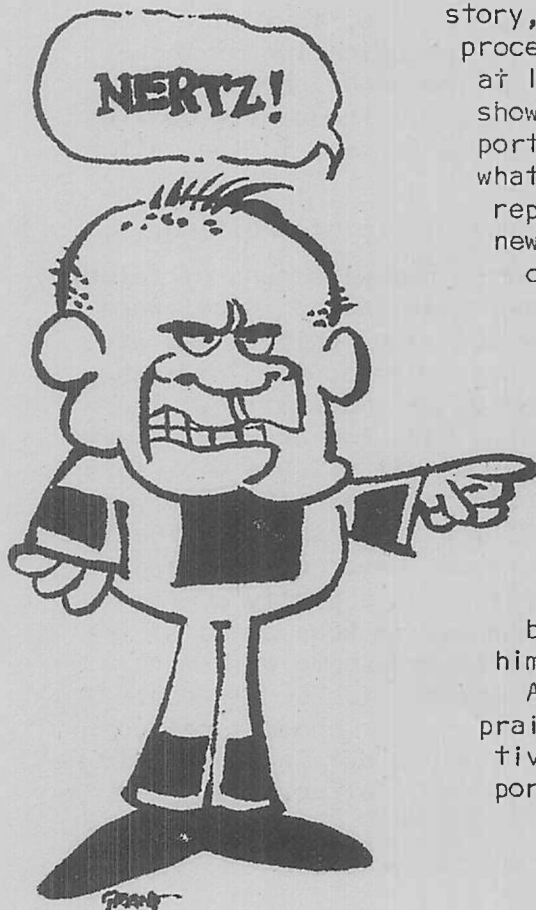
Sometimes reporters must have the feeling that the only ones who read their stories are themselves and the copy editor who butchered it. The city editor is supposed to be the father figure for reporters, the one who scolds them if they do something wrong (gently of course, pointing out their shortcomings and explaining how they can be rectified), and showering them with praise when they do something well.

(No, I don't know of any newspapers where it works like that, sure as hell not at the Rocky Mountain News; and come to think of it I can't remember who said it was supposed to work like that; maybe that's just something from a subconscious vision of what I think it should be like).

Reporters at the RMN are hired on a 40-day trial basis, meaning that at any time during the first 40 days they can be dismissed for no reason at all. Generally in such dismissals they're told only that their work is not up to the quality required by this paper, but there's nothing that says they have to be told anything . . . In practice though, most new reporters are kept the full 40 days, and then they're told either that they didn't make it or that they did. During the neo's 40-day limbo he is given a copy of the style book and instruction on how to use the IBM Selectric II, and then he is given assignments -- usually writing obits or rewriting PR handouts to begin with. An assistant city editor or rewrite man, if he's feeling charitable, will point out style errors, misspellings and incorrect names. If there's something more serious wrong with the story, the rewrite man will cuss a bit and proceed to rewrite the whole story himself, at least half the time never bothering to show the rewritten version to the new reporter, let alone take the time to explain what was wrong. If one of the experienced reporters happens to take a liking to the new kid he'll have a fair to middling chance of learning his way around, though that doesn't necessarily improve his chances of becoming a permanent employee at the end of those 40 days.

If our cub (can you imagine that? beginning reporters used to be called CUBs! I haven't heard the word used inside a newspaper office other than in jest since 1944--when I was the cub!) . . . Anyway, if our "cub" does survive the 40-day trial and becomes a permanent employee, nobody tells him why, or what he was doing right.

And from then on, about the only words of praise he will hear will be from close relatives or, on rare occasions, from other reporters.



Sure, I'm exaggerating. A little. Any of the reporters at the RMN or at the Denver Post would have a somewhat different version. Some could even tell of having received praise and encouragement from the editor himself, and I have occasionally overheard copy editors saying nice things to a reporter about the reporter's work -- even been guilty of it myself once or twice.

Still I will defend my basic point -- that many, many reporters who are quite capable of excellence settle too soon for mediocrity because of the factors I've mentioned: high pay for bare competence, the necessity to standardize one's writing style, and the absence of feedback. (Everything that I've said is equally true of copy editors, but since hardly anyone knows exactly what copy editors do it seemed better to use reporters as my example.)

Ambition is easily stifled on a professional publication, particularly a newspaper, but the same situation must exist in books and magazines too.

In fact . . .

Someone (but who was it? I can't find the loc if that's where I read it; possibly it was in a fanzine) . . . pointed out recently that nearly all professional publications are in a quality decline because ownership of most of them has passed to people who are interested only in the financial returns. No one at top management levels cares whether manuscripts are carefully selected, edited or proofread.



More and more, book publishers are producing only what they think the public will buy in greatest quantity (crud), and more and more, writers are being forced to write only what they think some editor thinks the public will pay the most money for. As a result, whoever it is that I'm paraphrasing says (and I certainly hope somebody will hasten to claim credit for these observations; they're not original with me), it's getting so the only place we can find honest, spontaneous, individual writing is in small, non-profit publications -- such as fanzines.

Mae Strelkov makes a related point in a recent letter -- and I'm happy to be able to give her full credit for the thought, and to quote her exact words:

. . . in the future the "classics" of nowadays won't be the present best-sellers that are so quickly forgotten and dropped, but rather a zine like yours, lovingly treasured issue by issue by friends, and becoming part of a collection that lasts beyond our own times. (I'm binding-at-home your zines and several others also favorites of mine, right now!)

That excerpt is from a long letter of Mae's (four pages, legal size, single space typewritten) in which she begins an issue-by-issue commentary on a full year's supply of DON-o-SAURS. I'll have more to say about the letter and my plans for it a little later, but the mere fact of its existence makes at least one of the main points I'm trying to establish-- that about the personal quality of fanzine feedback.

It also makes my point about ambition.

If the absence of personal feedback is helping to stifle ambition in newspaper and magazine writers, the presence of it can serve as a spur to the ambitions of fanzine writers and editors.

But ambition is a terrible thing.

Now I've got to go clear back to the beginning.

When I first started Don-o-Saur Coprolites back in October 1971, I had nothing special in mind. It seemed a fannish thing to do; and I wanted to help Paul Angel with this project which I but vaguely understood. I sure as hell had no ambitions for DC.

In fact, I was at a stage of my life where I had (or thought I had) given up all my ambitions and I was reconciled to being a failure. I had finally acknowledged that I wasn't going to become a world-famous novelist or short story writer any time soon; I had been a moderately popular book review columnist (while still a full-time copy editor) on the News, and when the column was taken away from me, that killed the last of my newspaper ambitions and I had gotten out of newspapering in 1968. I never did develop anything that could be called ambition as regards teaching.

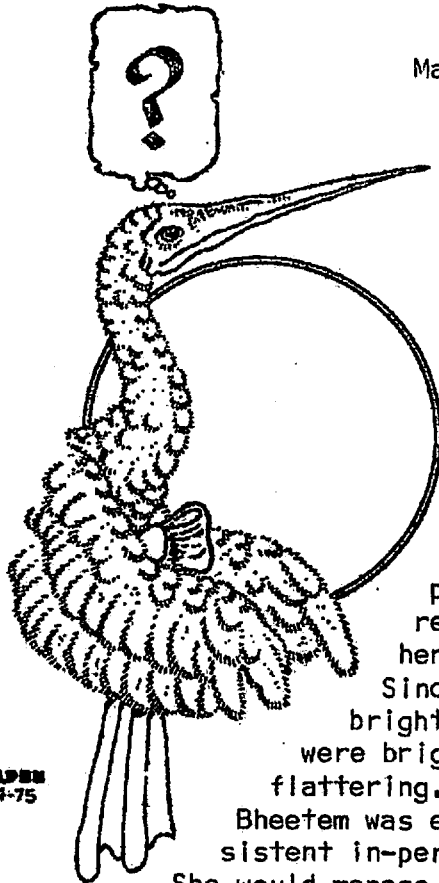
So in 1971 I was actually fairly happy, or at least content. I wasn't being driven by anything, and for me that was a dramatic change from my normal condition.

Then I started doing an apazine.

And I started getting feedback.

It was indescribably fascinating to read what other members of the apa wrote in their zines about my zine.

Matter of fact, they didn't say much, at first.



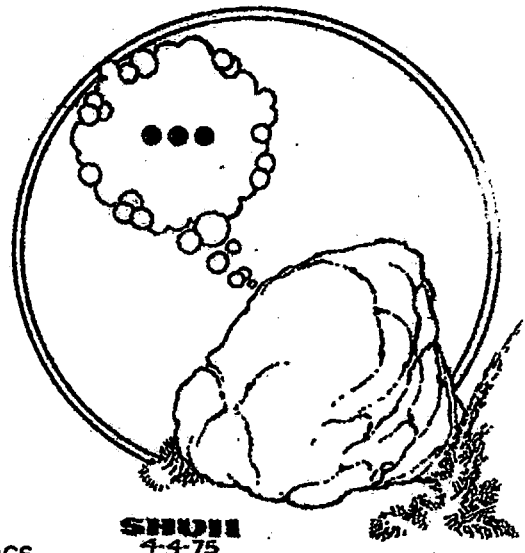
Maybe there just wasn't much to say about it at first, or maybe it was just that none of us in D'APA knew for a while what to say to each other or quite how to say it. No matter.

Actually, right from the beginning and continuing at least until DON-o-SAUR and COPROLITES split, the most influential feedback I got was from the Beetems -- particularly the Elder Ghoddess, Doris Beetem, and her daughter Rose, who joined D'APA with the second issue and has had a contribution in every single issue since, a record second only to mine -- I have been in every issue, and I take an intense and totally irrational pride in the accomplishment. I've always respected Rose's opinions. When I first met her she was young but extraordinarily bright. Since then she's become a little older and brighter still. Her comments in D'APA about DC were bright, perceptive, intelligent and often very flattering. I had to take them seriously. The Elder Bheetem was even more influential with her quiet, persistent in-person combination of flattery and nagging.

She would manage to corner me either at the DASFA meeting or at the Dead Dog Party afterward and would comment at length on my apa-zine, usually in complimentary terms, but nearly always with the admonition to "write more; come on, don't be satisfied with just two pages. The stuff you write is so much fun to read you've got to start doing at least four." And when I was doing four pages consistently she was nagging me to write six, or eight. She encouraged me to experiment with different methods of reproduction. My early issues were all on ditto because that was the only method that I was familiar with, and because I had easy access to the English department's ditto machine. Then the English department office got a Xerox machine, and the Ghoddess clued me in to the fact that libraries have copying machines that will do photo-reductions. So for a few issues I typed my zine on a very large size sheet of paper (in three columns, taped together), took that to the library and photo-reduced it and then took the reduction back to school and ran off the required 20 copies on the Xerox. The results were never quite as attractive or impressive as I hoped, but I became fascinated with the problems of repro, and I started writing in DC about my dreams of the Enchanted Duplicator and my hopes for producing the Perfect Fanzine.

The fatal dream.

During those first two years, the only locs I received were from the Elder Ghoddess, and I didn't even know enough to call them locs, much less what to do with them.



But those letters did, somehow, make me feel important. And they spurred my thinking even more toward doing a real zine.

The point of no return was reached a couple of years ago (I'd have to look up the exact date, and in view of what I'm going to say a little later it might be superfluous -- and don't you just love the little tricks I use to keep you reading, wondering what all this is leading up to?), when I bought a second hand Speed-o-Print Liberator 300 mimeo from Stevie Barnes, who had employed it almost exclusively to produce a couple of issues of GRUP, a sexy STrek fanzine of some renown.

I learned how to use the mimeo, and about electrostencils so I could use artwork.

DON-o-SAUR COPROLITES became bigger and bigger, and I started sending it out to a few people beyond D'APA -- people whose names I found, for the most part, in the N3F zines (I don't remember exactly when I joined N3F, but that too was at the instigation of the Elder Ghoddess) and in the few other zines I was getting. I started getting locs, and more fanzines in trade for mine.

Under pressure from some of the D'APA members who said they were being intimidated by the "big" zines in D'APA -- mine and Fred Goldstein's and Gordon Garb's -- I decided to split my zine in two. For a couple of issues it was DON-o-SAUR Coprolites for the public circulation zine and Don-o-Saur COPROLITES for the apazine. That just seemed to confuse everyone, so before long I split the names too.

DON-o-SAUR's circulation grew. More locs came in. Most of them were highly complimentary. Irresistably so.

By the time I acquired an offset press in co-ownership with Fred Goldstein, ambition had me firmly in its clutches. Insidiously it had sapped my will and was gnawing at my moral fiber.

For quite a while the ambition was rather generalized -- to produce The Perfect Fanzine, or at least to make each issue of DON-o-SAUR better than the one before, but I still had nothing definite in mind. I didn't know what I wanted to make each issue of the zine better for.

That started changing at DisCon last year, with Andy Porter and a few others talking in terms of a possible Hugo nomination. The underpinnings of judgment gave way, and I set myself a very specific goal. "Just the nomination. If I really could win just a Hugo nomination, that would satisfy me for the rest of my life."

I doubt that I ever believed that; it was just something to say that seemed suitably humble. Ambition was already making me say and do dumb things.

Now it's making me do even dumber things.

I have gotten a Hugo nomination, right?

(And that is right. You have convinced me. And a letter from the Cleveland Thompsons makes it official as far as I am concerned. If the Aussiecon Committee still thinks that Don A. Thompson of Colorado publishes DON-o-SAUR and Don C. Thompson of Ohio writes for UNKNOWN WORLDS OF SF, that's their problem!).

Ambition did not die when I got the nomination as Best Fan Writer. It grew.

A careful examination of my aspirations in their present state indicates that I cannot be satisfied now until I have actually won the Hugo itself.

There are a couple of announcements or revelations or maybe they're just simple statements that I want to make right here about my writing future.

One is that, in spite of the noises I've been making lately about a growing confidence in my ability to succeed in professional writing, I find that I'm in no hurry to make the Great Leap. I can't see myself cutting loose from one or more of my jobs and channeling the equivalent amount of time and energy into professional writing for at least another two years -- or three or four. The reasons, or some of them, should be implicit in what I've already said, and if not I'll make it explicit:

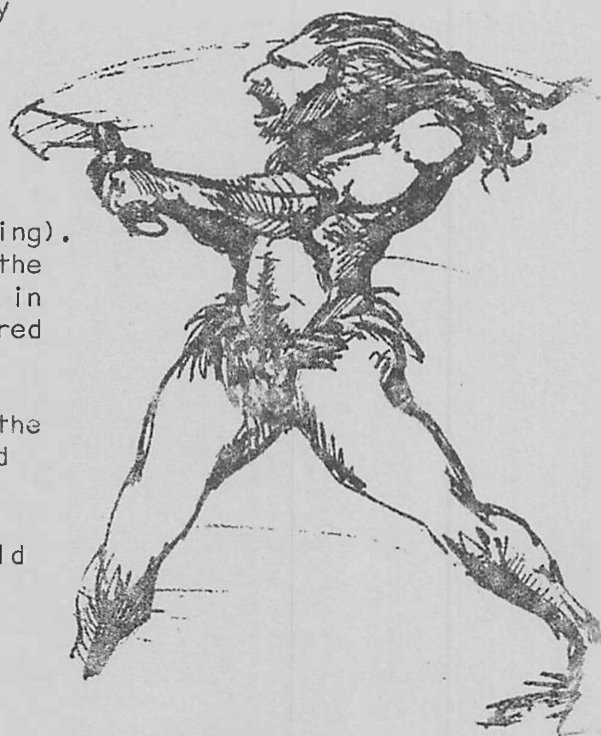
I am honestly not convinced that the writing I do for DON-o-SAUR-- done to please only myself and a small circle of appreciative readers, without regard to some editor who "knows what the public wants" . . . What I'm trying to say is that I DO believe that this writing might be just as significant in the long run as anything I could write for money.

Of course, if some enlightened editor should decide to offer me generous sums of money to write for a mass circulation publication the same sort of thing I write in DON-o-SAUR, I would certainly have to give the matter serious thought. But I'll worry about it when it happens.

The other announcement that I want to make has to do with the measures I'm contemplating to try to win that Hugo. (All this is based on the assumption that I won't get the Hugo this year. If, by some fluke, I should, then all my plans would be nullified and I'd have to start thinking all over again. I might after all decide to hasten my entry into the professional field with the

idea of going after a more reputable Hugo than one in the mere "Best Fan Writer" category. Ambition is a terrible thing). I've had a number of ideas for making the name Don C. Thompson more widely known in fandom. Most were but briefly considered and hastily dropped.

For instance I could discontinue DON-o-SAUR and just write locs to all the other fanzines. Trouble is, that would put me in direct competition with Mike Glicksohn. I am wise enough to know when I'm hopelessly outclassed. I could never begin to match Mike as a letter-hack, either in sheer volume or in quality of wit and perceptivity.



Mike is unsurpassed as a loc-smith, as far as I'm concerned, and if there's ever a Hugo for that specific category, I can scarcely imagine anyone else even being nominated.

Another possibility that occurred to me was the obvious one of continuing DON-o-SAUR maybe (or dropping it; under this plan it really wouldn't matter much) and loosing a flood of articles and reviews and columns and such in other people's zines. There are two things wrong with that. One is that the thought of writing something and not publishing it in DON-o-SAUR does not appeal to me. It seems wasteful to me in a way I won't stop to try to explain. The other thing wrong with the idea is that writing articles and reviews etc. would put me in direct competition with Don d'Amassa, and there's not much point in that, either. Again I'd be hopelessly outclassed. Don is unsurpassed in his special field, just as Mike is in his.

I also discarded the idea of going big-time with DON-o-SAUR -- getting big-name people to write for it and advertising it in the prozines and building up a circulation in the thousands. Why should I try to compete with Geis, Porter, Bowers and Brown?

That is, I almost discarded that idea.

The scheme that I finally came up with is not far removed from it, in some ways.

What I've decided to do, to try to improve my chances of winning a Hugo (next year) is to put out an extra-super-special giant economy size issue of DON-o-SAUR. It would be actually a compilation of some of the best material (as selected by me, of course) that has appeared in DoS and DC from the beginning -- a sort of "Best of Don-o-Saur" collection. Except I'll give it a better name. It will be either DON-o-SAUR TRACKS or DON-o-SAUR BONES. It will run close to 100 pages and will have a print run of 1,000 or 1,500 and I'll sell it for \$1 (or \$1.50?), except that all my regular readers will get a copy free. I'll advertise it in LOCUS and in the prozines and make it available at as many cons as possible. I'll have it finished and in circulation before the end of this year (November, I should hope).

I know, I know. It'll be a lot of work (except maybe not so very much, since it'll be mostly just a matter of retyping). It'll be expensive (except that by charging a dollar or so I'll be getting some of my money back). And there's no assurance whatsoever that all that work and expense will do anything at all for or against my Hugo chances. I suspect that I'm using the Hugo as a sort of excuse to do something that I very much want to do.

And you want to know why I want to do it? What my real motive is? I should be ashamed to tell you, but I'm not.

It's because of another ambition, one that I first developed a long, long time ago and thought I had outgrown.

Mae Strelkov's comment about "classics" and fanzines crystalizes a notion that I'd been toying with for some time. Some of the stuff in DON-o-SAUR is good. I'd like very much to make it available to a larger audience and in more compact form (and to make Mae's long loc part of the collection, to help tie it all together).

What I'm interested in is posterity. I can't be satisfied with just a Hugo. I'm after immortality.

Ambition is terrible. It makes us do DUMB things!

Report on Polly

Not knowing how much time she might have left, and having been told frankly by her doctors that the kind of cancer she is suffering from has an extremely low recovery rate, my sister Polly has been trying to complete all of the long-term projects she's been working on, and to repeat as many as possible of the sort of experiences that have made her life enjoyable and meaningful.

Not long after her letter in which she announced her decision to reject the chemotherapy treatments that are prescribed for melanoma, she flew to Costa Rica for a visit with her eldest daughter, son-in-law and grandson.

When she returned from that, our parents went to Virginia and took Polly and some of her kids on another tour through the hill country that is still home to them, visiting family graveyards and an impressive number of other, still-living relatives.

For several years, Polly has been working on a family history, from as far back as she can trace it up to our parents -- not just a genealogical account of who was born when and married whom and had how many children, but including as many as possible of the sort of episodes and incidents that lend themselves to dramatization.

She's finally finished the book, and it is now in the hands of the printers. It might be possible to interest a publisher in paying for book of this nature, but it isn't likely, and even if it could be done it might take years, and time has become important, so the job has been given to a small but reputable printer in the area.

Polly had been planning a trip to Wyoming towards the end of August. But several weeks ago she started losing weight and strength rather rapidly and decided to move the trip up.

The doctors were reluctant to give their permission for her to do any more traveling. Her red blood count had fallen to something like 20 per cent of what it was supposed to be. The last time it had gotten dangerously low, they'd given her a blood transfusion and it had helped but it was accompanied by violently unpleasant side effects and reactions. Polly insisted that she was going to take the Wyoming trip, regardless of the doctors. They said okay, and then decided to try a transfusion of red corpuscles only.

It worked. Polly said it was amazing. "When I went in, I felt like I was dying -- weak and dizzy and apathetic. And then they pumped five units of red corpuscles into me and in no time at all I was feeling great."

The Ryans have always done most of their traveling by VW van, carrying tents and sleeping bags and food provisions carefully calculated so they don't have to eat in restaurants. This time Polly really wasn't feeling up to that sort of traveling, so her husband Howard took most of the kids and started off in the van, while Polly and Teresa, the eldest daughter still at home, took a plane to Denver. The van developed a fatal engine ailment in Ohio and was delayed for a couple of days while a whole new engine was being installed. That was bad for them, but good for me in that it meant Polly had to stay here with us that much longer than she'd planned to, and they happened to be days that I had off from the News, so we were able to do some real talking and visiting.

When I met Polly at the airport, I was half expecting her to be in a wheelchair because the last I'd heard was that she had been losing strength.

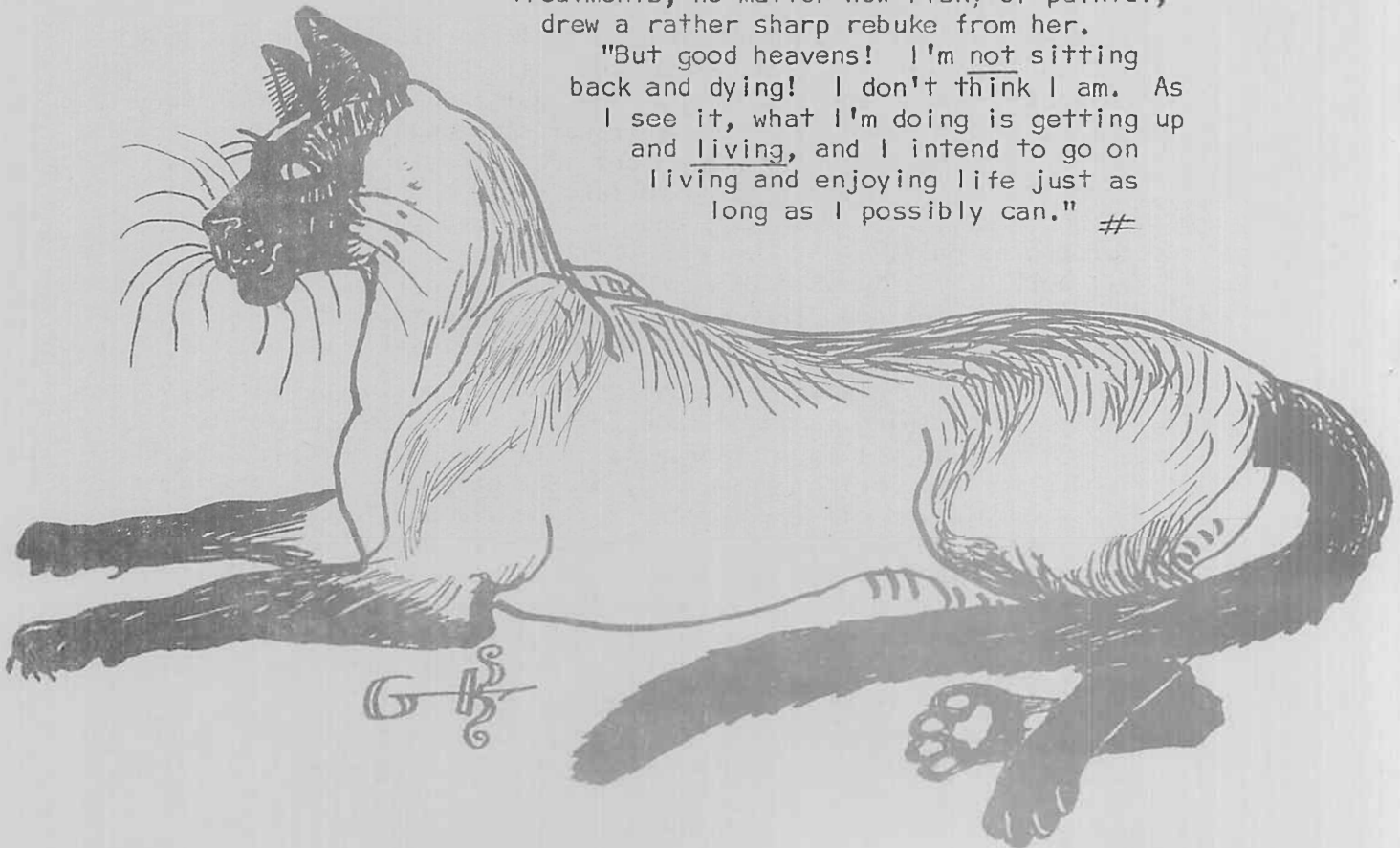
Not only was she walking around under her own power, she was even looking moderately healthy. Much thinner than the last time I saw her, but she was so obviously feeling good that from then on the thought that she is dying (except in the sense that "all not busy being born are busy dying") scarcely occurred to me. Even though Polly has no reticence in talking about her condition and the probable outcome of the disease, she is so totally unafraid and so totally unsentimental about it that she doesn't allow anyone else around her to feel fear or morbid sentimentality either. Her cheerfulness and zest for life simply crowd out any attempt at melancholy brooding.

Within an hour after I brought her to the house, I laid on her the bundle of DON-o-SAUR locs about her that I'd been saving to send to her. I was able to note her reactions as she read the letters, and it was fascinating.

She got an unabashed, pure egoboo delight out of reading all those letters, and her response to some of the individual letters was equally interesting. She had been honestly surprised by Rich Bartucci's letter, and she felt that no apology for the medical profession is necessary since doctors do their best and no one expects them to have a 100 per cent success rate.

Polly was less offended by the letters of Jim Kennedy and D. Gary Grady than I was. (They consider it morally wrong of her to refuse the chemotherapy treatments). Polly shrugged. "They have a right to their own opinions. They want me to perform a service to humanity by undergoing the chemotherapy. What they don't consider is that maybe I have already performed other, more important services to humanity and can be excused from this one. And I wonder how they can be so sure what they would do?" A line in another letter (don't recall whose) about "sitting back and dying" instead of accepting the treatments, no matter how risky or painful, drew a rather sharp rebuke from her.

"But good heavens! I'm not sitting back and dying! I don't think I am. As I see it, what I'm doing is getting up and living, and I intend to go on living and enjoying life just as long as I possibly can." #



*A REPORT ON WHAT I AM NOT WRITING ABOUT THIS ISSUE, BUT
PROBABLY WILL, EVENTUALLY*

When I started writing what turned out to be that Discourse on Ambition I really intended it to be no more than a page or two announcing my plans for DON-o-SAUR BONES (or TRACKS), and I was trying to think ahead a little to decide what my main discourse would be on. I had several ideas in mind, and even though it turned out that I didn't need to make a decision, it might still be fair to tell you what some of the ideas were, just so you'll know what to look forward to in future issues, if for no other reason.

For one thing, I'd thought I might be able to squeeze in a few book reviews, since I have read a few books since DOS 41, and I enjoy writing the reviews, and I always feel better about having read a book if I write a little something about it. It's as though I haven't totally read the book until I have written a review of it. Nevertheless, I decided to skip the reviews this issue.

There is still an enormous storehouse of untapped autobiographical material (growing constantly) for me to scoop up and shape into a form that imparts meaning.

For instance, I've never told you anything about my military career. I'm sure I've mentioned a few times that I was in the Army during a period that was still, legally and technically, World War II. Just because the fighting was over before I got in, you should not assume that I saw no action, endured no hardships, had no opportunity for heroism. I could tell tales of the hell hole of Camp Polk, La., that would make Bruce Arthurs' blood run cold. And when I describe the gallant defense of the Pasadena Perimeter, you will feel a surge of pride and patriotism in spite of yourself! But later. Maybe quite a bit later. The longer I delay telling about my Army experiences the more thrilling and significant they become. Perhaps I should wait until I can show how I won World War II single-handed. A few more years . . .

Some things are too far away to write about accurately or objectively, and some things are much too close. That's the problem with the subject that I most want to write about -- I can't. Not yet. It doesn't worry me that I don't know what any of it means; I can't know that until I do write about it, at which time I will either discover or invent the meaning. What I lack is perspective.

But I'm getting it all wrong already. What I want to write about is not a subject (though I guess I could give it a subject -- such as "The Strange and Wonderful Reasons for DON-o-SAUR Being Late Both This Issue and Last."

But what I'd be writing about -- what I have to write about -- are two strange and wonderful people. I want to write about Becky. And about Barb.

But the whole story in which they are the key figures is so magical, so powerfully fraught with symbolism and mythological overtones and so laden with emotional significance that it's absolutely impossible for me, as yet, to tell it as it should be told.

The best I can do is offer a brief, dry presentation of some of the facts and hope they will provide a few clues to the full richness of the story.

Barb was a student in my Freshman Composition class in spring quarter. At our first conference we talked for an hour and a half -- about Life and Love and Goals and Loneliness, and about Mystery and Magic and Dreams -- and about Purpose and Meaning. It was only the first session of a dialogue that continued all quarter and a month beyond: until about a week ago. And when we meet again (no matter when or where) we'll pick it up in the middle and go on with it. Barb believes in Purpose. She is 20 years old. She still believes in rainbows. I tried to explain to her that rainbows are only an optical illusion, that life has no meaning except the ones we read into it, no purpose except the purposes we set for ourselves. I still firmly believe all that, but now I watch for rainbows just the same.

Barb is from Illinois (Crystal Lake). She hadn't been in Denver long, knew hardly anyone. She was living in a one-room apartment off East Colfax, within bike riding distance of school. (I was certain at first that Barb had to be an English major, but I didn't have too much trouble adjusting to the fact that she was a PE major and that her main ambition is to become a race horse jockey).

A couple of weeks after school started, Barb came to me with a Real Problem. (She was already in the habit of coming to me with her problems, but this was a Real Problem. It really was.)

Becky was a 15-year-old runaway that Barb was sheltering. Barb wanted to help her, but had no idea what to do. She couldn't keep Becky indefinitely. Aside from the fact that she was about to get in trouble with her landlady, Barb just wasn't making enough money at her part-time job to feed two people.

So in desperation Barb brought Becky to me.

I didn't know what to do either, having never had to handle this sort of problem before. It occurred to me later that there are school counselors, state agencies, legal authorities that such cases are supposed to be referred to. No matter. I wouldn't have done anything different even if I had known of all the options.

Becky was amazing. She had the vocabulary of a college graduate; she is widely read, including a lot of science fiction; she had informed opinions on a wide variety of subjects; she had the poise and control of a person at least ten years older.

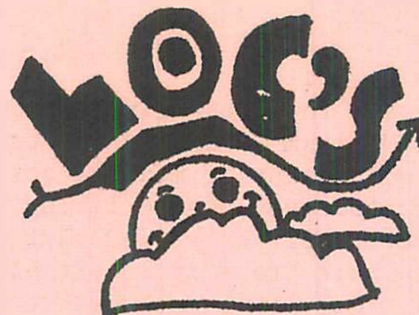
(But twice her upper lip trembled, giving me a quick glimpse of the bewildered little girl underneath; and I fell hopelessly in love, and I would have done anything in the world to help her, including adopting her myself if need be).

Fortunately, there was no need for me to do very much. A few phone calls, a little checking around, and I learned that St. Andrews Episcopal Church is still in the business of helping runaway kids.

I managed to contact Father John, and within 24 hours he had made arrangements for Becky to move in with a woman parishoner. Nothing was reported to any authorities until after Becky decided, on her own, what she wanted to do. (She had run away from her father in Lakewood and decided finally that since she couldn't be 18 immediately she would like to try living with her mother in Seattle). The last I heard, she and her mother were getting things worked out. I really hope all goes well with her. And I hope I'll be able to write about all this someday.

And there's that whole month of Barb, after school was out . . .

Since I've already given Polly's reaction to a letter from D. Gary Grady, it seems only fair to lead off with the letter in question. Here it is:



D. Gary Grady
3309 Spruill Ave #5
Charleston, SC
29405

...I approve of a calm acceptance of death, certainly. But I also approve of fighting for life if a real hope exists. And I agree that it is morally wrong not to contribute to the good of mankind. After all, we all have a good deal to be grateful for in what the Race has done for us. My mother, indidentally, is alive partly because people underwent experimental surgery -- and died -- years ago. Lord Jim may lack the authority to impose his conceptions of right and wrong (which I think I, to a great extent, share, as a Humanist); but he sure as hell DOES have the right and the authority and, goddammit, the obligation to say what, in his opinion, is right or wrong for someone else to do. Your answer is the first thing by you I could honestly say sucked.

Well, that may have sounded a bit angrier than I intended. But consider it this way to see what a ridiculous position you have put yourself in: You disagree with Jim. You say Jim should not say what someone else should or should not do. But you are therefore saying what Jim should or should not do!

What I actually said in my reply to Jim Kennedy's letter last time was that I don't believe anyone has the right to volunteer someone else as a guinea pig, and that I don't believe anyone has the authority, seeing someone else in a situation that he himself has never been in, to say what the person in that situation should do. I don't believe anyone knows, in advance, what he would (or even should) do in any given situation. Nor do I believe in "right" or "wrong" as absolutes. In my philosophy (which doesn't have a name, I guess), these are individual definitions, which have to be invented in individual circumstances.

Obviously I don't dispute either Jim's or Gary's right to hold and express their opinions -- else I wouldn't have printed their letters. Here's another reaction to Lord Jim:

Patrick J. Hayden
314 Turner Rd. Rt. 4
Williamston, MI
48895

. . . I must take great exception to Jim Kennedy's letter. He states, "Death is not life's greatest adventure, Life is." Philosophical considerations aside, huh? That's like saying, "mountains are mountainous." Death is most certainly the greatest thing that we ever go through -- an unavoidable point in our existence, beyond which we do not know. Personally, I favor the old karma/dharma idea of reincarnation until we reach some sort of godlike state -- if there is any order at all behind the universe, this would seem the most logical way to run things. Of course, I can't claim to be able to explain the subjective experiences that have led me to a belief in the ultimate order of things to a complete materialist like Lowered Jim -- I can only say to him that if you see nothing behind the wall of existence, you certainly haven't really looked.

The whole letter angered me. The mentality that one should allow

oneself to be experimented on for the good of medical science smacks of Naziism -- and in any case, I'm not sure but that it might not be a good thing if medical science turned itself down a little - there are too many people living in this world already. But then, I'm pretty well convinced that we've got ourselves to the point where the Shit Storm is inevitable; the best any of us can do is try to live our lives the best we can, be ready for anything, and bend.

That second paragraph, I betcha, is going to draw some interesting response. I think I'll just stand back from it and let the rest of you have a go at it first.

Here's the start of Mae Strelkov's long letter. (Even though I plan to print all of it in the special issue, I just can't resist giving you part of it now).

Mae Strelkov

CC 55 Jesus Maria

Cba. Argentina

You are often in my thoughts these days, as you face this crisis . . . the glimpse of a shuttered door into the Unknown opening for a dearly loved one, ahead of our own time when it must open for us, too, turn by turn. I do not like the word "Death," perhaps because I do not really believe in it. The Universe is so alive, so tremendously vital and in constant change and motion, I don't really even believe in final Entropy at its "end" in space/time . . .

This last issue was tremendously moving, and the most beautiful gem is your sister's letter. I would say, in reading it, "Here is a wise and much-evolved soul . . . Wisdom, not just that she could have gleaned in her brief and busy lifetime -- but surely in many others -- shines through." Be that as it may, it is -- luminous! Truly so.!

The other letters of sympathy were all so heart-warming, so understanding. You -- we all -- have beautiful friends in fandom. Indeed, it reassures me of the quality of fans anew. The Universe is wide and many-dimensional for most s-f lovers, and we are able to face its wonders that fill us with awe, yet do so unflinchingly, avoiding the foolish euphemisms that crowd mundane speech to mask fear.

What shows through in Polly's letter, in the locs of your friends, and in your own writing, always, is tremendous sincerity and a thoughtful need to understand as much as possible and not avoid unpleasant facts when need be.

I seldom have anything to add to what Mae says, and I don't again.

The last line of my discourse about Polly, in DoS 40 ("I keep hearing a very little girl crying, 'Save me, Donnie, save me!'") aroused some consternation, confusion and even a few mild rebukes. Sheryl Smith, for one, pointed out that "she doesn't need you to 'save' her."

Here's one more comment on the subject:

Michael Carlson

35 Dunbar Rd.

Milford, CT 06460

. . . I'd like to add my own interpretation of your last line -- because I too found it very moving -- but the reason I did was that it conveyed to me the sense of your helplessness. Sheryl Smith I think missed the point a bit (I will withhold all other S.S. comments except to ask if that constant use of

"my dear sir" irritates anyone else as much as it does me?) which seemed to me to be your inability to do anything, your wanting to, and your failure to be as accepting as Polly. Who strikes me as being a marvelous human. I think your line covers all of Sheryl's explication -- Polly wasn't crying for help -- you were hearing her. It's human, and I don't think the line needs further explanation or justification.

Now, that really is almost exactly what I had in mind, and how I would have explained it if I'd taken the time. Thank you, Michael.

A number of people, in their letters, mentioned Richard Small and his fanzine THE GREAT RICH IS SICK. Therefore I was pleased that Rich himself sent me a letter and a copy of his zine. Here is the letter:

Richard Small

117 S. Meridian St. Apt. 3
Tallahassee, FL 32301

I was deeply moved by your account of your sister Polly, for I too at the age of 24 have cancer, though mine differs from hers in that it is lymph node cancer. Unlike Polly, I was not told I had cancer until they had already started the chemotherapy. However, once I found out and found another way (one with a 10-15% chance of success), I abandoned traditional cancer treatments (chemotherapy, cobalt) which didn't work for the unorthodox.

There is in Tijuana, Mexico, a clinic where an anti-cancer drug called Laetrile is dispensed. This drug is illegal in the United States and works as an arresting agent and not a cure. And the more surgery, chemotherapy or radiation you've had, the less the chances of it working. There are positive benefits in 60% of the cases. These include (1) vast reduction of pain, (2) a feeling of well-being, and (3) regaining of weight. I understand that the alumnae of this clinic include Betty Ford.

The treatments seem to be working somewhat for me (I was there April 8-30) and I am much better than I was when I left. When I left I was losing weight regularly, had lost my color and looked as though I had but a month to go.

Since then my color has returned and my weight has stabilized (loss of one pound a week); however this has been due to my diet and the fact that I become nauseous (and vomit sometimes) when I eat food. If you can't hold food down, you can't gain weight.

Also taking Laetrile has dietetic effects. It is entirely non-toxic and one suffers no ill effects from taking it -- only good side-effects (provided it works) and it doesn't effect any other forms of therapy you may be on.

A period of 3 weeks must be spent in Tijuana getting treatments. Unless it is injected in massive doses at first it won't work. Cost for my mother and myself to fly to Tijuana, pay for my treatments (\$14-\$20 a day) and buy a 3-month supply of medicine (\$600) was \$2000.

I'm not trying to sell you on Laetrile. If it works it can hold the disease in check for maybe 8-10 years, or if it doesn't there may be some partial benefits (pain reduction, etc.). If I can just reap the partial benefits I'll be happy indeed. However, I do hope to let you know via this letter that there is an alternative and one that may (though odds are slight) work. But this is a decision for Polly. I just wanted to let you know.

I greatly appreciated Rich's letter, and so did Polly. She was already familiar with the Laetrile clinic (that is, she had heard of it) but had already decided against it, at about the same time and on the same basis for deciding against chemotherapy. At its simplest (and implying no disrespect for Rich's decision) Polly wants to spend her remaining time living rather than fighting death.

Let's get on to something else, huh?

And since I've already mentioned the letter from the Cleveland Don Thompsons, it seems only fair to present it, in part:

Don & Margaret Thompson . . . Andy Porter nodded his head sagely at
8736 Hendricks Road us at last year's Midwestcon and 'lowed as
Mentor, OH 44060 how if we didn't get cracking, Don Thompson
 of Colorado was going to turn into A Focal
 Point or somesuch. And we would be left unknown, recalled only by a
 few ancients too feeble to be sure that we ever existed.

So things seem to be happening . . . It's nice to note in your
 "Personal" to David Kleist that someone is still thinking of Don A.
 Thompson -- but how long will that go on?

CONGRATULATIONS! Well deserved tributes are what you have there!

(By the way, I think you've had more copies of ALL IN COLOR
 shoved at you for autographs than its real coeditor has. I know that
 I, as author of a chapter in THE COMIC-BOOK BOOK, have been asked for
 an autograph only two or three times. Gee, you'd think I'd recall ex-
 actly how many, wouldn't you? I THINK it's three...) And I KNOW you've
 had more comments aimed at you about the column in UNKNOWN WORLDS OF
 SF than we have, since we've had no letters of comment or in-person
 comment on ANY of 'em.

Unless you get scads of nominators' mail to the contrary, I'm sure
 that you are, indeed, the Don Thompson nominated by all those SF fans.
 For some years now, it has been the view of a vast portion of a variety
 of fandoms that we are COMICS fans. That we have a better SF collection
 than all but a very few (Buck and Juanita Coulson probably have a better
 collection, for example, of fans whose collections we have visited)
 seems to go for naught. Nor does the fact that I had a letter published
 in Dean Grennell's GRUE when I was 11 or so impress them. No, they say,
 you read comics; therefore you are mere comicsfan, doomed to some lower
 level of afterlife than TruFen.

So when people cast their ballots for a Hugo for Fan Writer, they're
 casting it for Don C. Thompson.

Oh well. We trust that when you win the Hugo, you'll include in
 your acceptance speech a plug for ALL IN COLOR FOR A DIME, THE COMIC-
 BOOK BOOK, and "FANTastic Worlds" in UNKNOWN WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION...

Okay. Fair enough. It's a promise -- that is IF I win the
 Hugo this year. By next year, I'm hoping, there'll be no
 room for confusion. Oh, regards to Maggie from Mike Glicksohn.

Mike Glicksohn
141 High Park Ave.
Toronto, Ont. M6P 2S3

I for one was well aware of whom I was nomi-
 nating when I put "Don Thompson" on my Hugo
 ballot and I expect all the rest of your sup-
 porters were. Now that you're on the ballot,
 though, I guess there might be a small amount of confusion. I can't see

it being very large though: the other Don Thompsons aren't very active nowadays, and I doubt that even a sizable percentage of the people who'll get a Hugo ballot will have heard of them and those that have will probably have heard of you as well and will know who is who. (The problem of a large number of eligible voters never having heard of any Don Thompson is one that I won't go into at this time!) So relax; you've earned your nomination by the sneaky, underhanded and devious subterfuge of being a hell of a fine writer who has earned the admiration of a lot of people in fandom. It's time for that other fellow to start worrying about being mistaken for you!

I guess I can see and sympathize with all sides [in the Silverberg leaving the SF ghetto discussion]. Certainly I can understand Bob's frustration at not being able to escape from his hack reputation and his desire, perfectly natural, to achieve a wider reputation as a "serious" writer. And whether you approve of the fact or not, it's hard to deny that the chances of establishing anything in the way of a nationwide reputation as a writer are pretty slim inside the science fiction field. Now here I agree with you: this is not because of anything inherent in the nature of the fiction itself, but rather a consequence of the essential mediocrity of the producers and consumers of modern fiction. What we need is a massive re-education of the reading public. But I can hardly blame Bob if he's gotten tired of doing his best to bring about that sweeping change and wants to get out. Ben Indick can talk about writing sf for love of the field, but love of the field may not satisfy the ego/inner needs of a writer such as Silverberg. (It may not pay the bills, either, although that fact happens not to apply in Bob's case.) Bob has worked in the ghetto for a hell of a long time; he's amply shown his love of science fiction (and happily he's been relatively well paid for it, but that's not truly germane); if the genre can no longer satisfy him and keep him writing, then who are we to try and tell him what he should or shouldn't do?

I can't agree with you that Bob will find a more intelligent audience inside sf than outside. And yes, I doubt that sf readers are substantially more intelligent than non-sf readers. Oh sure, we all know insightful critics within fandom who are assuredly more intelligent than your "average" reader, but fandom is such a small percentage of even the small percentage of readers of sf that it's unlikely to be statistically of any great significance. And within fandom there are probably as many dimwits as there are readers of perception and intellect. I'd probably agree that Bob isn't likely to find a more receptive audience outside the sf field but I'm not willing to accept that it's automatically going to be less intelligent. The fact is that Bob has presented his more ambitious works to the sf world and been substantially disappointed by the reactions they've produced. (The prime example being SON OF MAN which, at the time, Bob rated his most important work and it received negligible positive response). Is it any wonder that he's eager to try elsewhere? Maybe he'll find the same lack of reaction Out There. . . but he'll never know until he tries, and that's a motivation I can fully understand.

I say good luck to the teachers and the academics who are fighting the good fight to legitimize sf. Maybe they'll help do what the writers themselves haven't been able to accomplish; that is, redefine the words "science fiction" in the minds of at least part of the reading public. And then writers like Silverberg and Ellison may find what they apparently aren't getting right now from the ghetto. (But if the term "spec fic"

catches on, I think I'll start reading Harlequin Romances! Speaking of which, if you haven't seen the first of the new Elwood books for Harlequin -- actually they're called LASAR Books -- may you continue to be so lucky!! They're going to set sf back at least two decades and wipe out any significant advances that may have been gained in the minds of the public. That one man can singlehandedly offset the work of hundreds of academics and writers is a telling condemnation of the entire field of publishing. And I'm willing to bet that the books are successful: which will prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that readers of sf aren't by nature any more intelligent than any other group, despite the isolated pockets of superior readers that may exist. Ah, what the hell.. Fanzines are where

it's at, and we all know that anyway!)

Give my regards to Maggie.

Just did. Wonder what it would take to get Bob Silverberg to publish a fanzine?

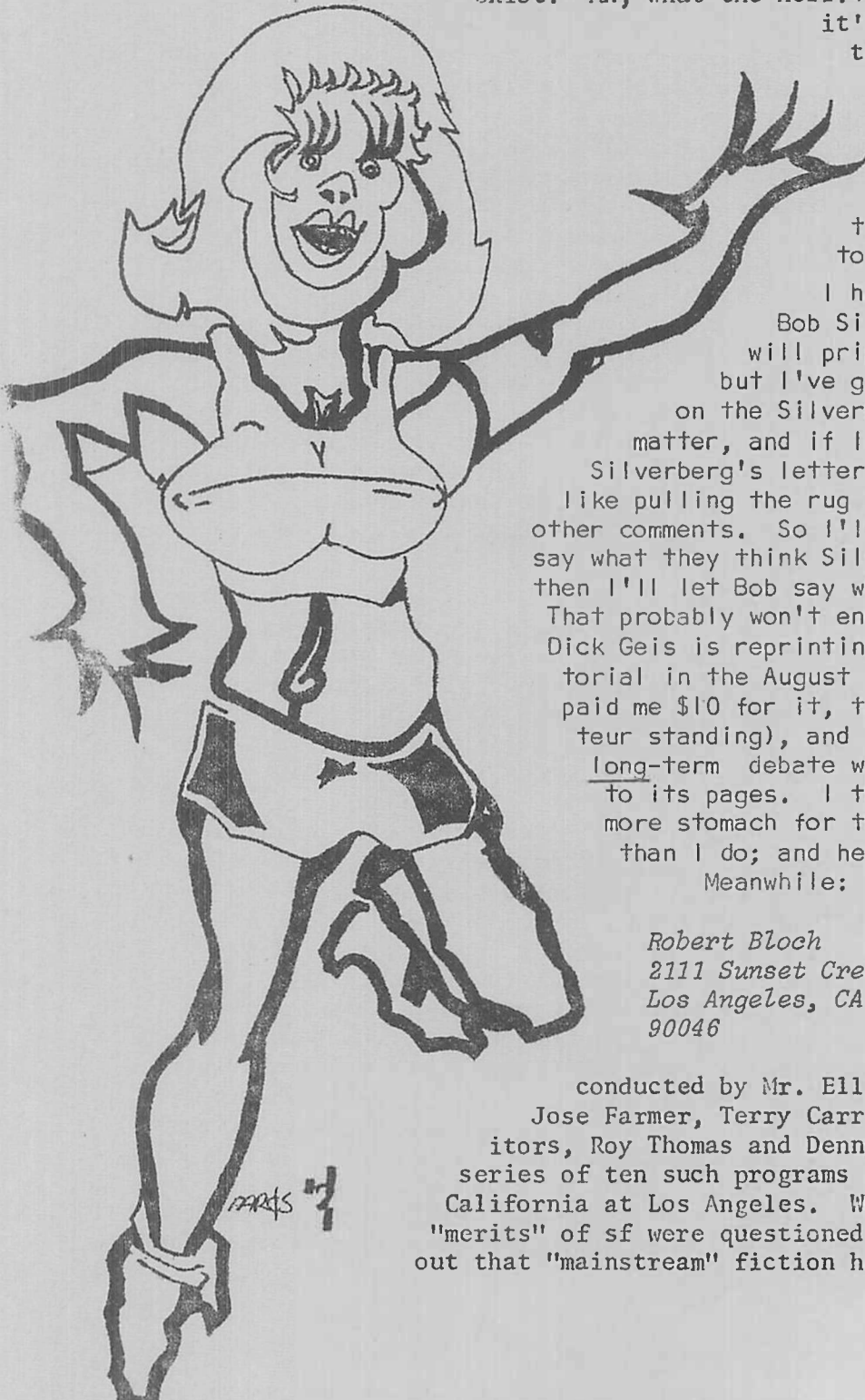
I have a letter from Bob Silverberg, which I will print in a little while, but I've gotten a lot of mail on the Silverberg-Ellison-Bryant matter, and if I were to present Silverberg's letter first it would be like pulling the rug from under all the other comments. So I'll let other people say what they think Silverberg means, and then I'll let Bob say what he really means. That probably won't end the argument. But Dick Geis is reprinting my "Spec Fic" editorial in the August issue of SFR (he even paid me \$10 for it, trying to ruin my amateur standing), and I'm hoping that the long-term debate will be transferred to its pages. I think Geis has somewhat more stomach for this kind of controversy than I do; and he's welcome to it.

Meanwhile:

Robert Bloch
2111 Sunset Crest Dr.
Los Angeles, CA
90046

...On the sad estate of sf--Tuesday night I appeared on a seminar program

conducted by Mr. Ellison, along with Philip Jose Farmer, Terry Carr, and two comic-book editors, Roy Thomas and Denny O'Neill -- one of a series of ten such programs at the University of California at Los Angeles. When, finally, the "merits" of sf were questioned, Terry Carr pointed out that "mainstream" fiction has had 350 years to



establish itself, whereas sf, as a distinctly recognized genre, has had only 50. So there's still hope.

Carrie Brennan
3405 N. Sinton Rd. #107
Colorado Springs, CO
80907

. . . Your editorial on the SFRA conference really irritated me. I am sick to death of people from Vonnegut to Ellison and beyond, who write SF, damn good SF, and then do "the secretary will disavow any knowledge..."

number. I do buy the Spec Fic label -- if one has to label-quibble -- as covering the ground more fully. But no matter the label, we readers (writers, editors, publishers) know what the genre is and why we like it. Ghod knows we buy enough of it! But everybody and his kzentti makes it up to BNP in the field and then isn't "recognized enough" and "stops writing SF" and goes "mainstream."

Whale dreck! Mainstream readers are no more intelligent and mainstream writers don't produce any less crud.

Carrie is the editor of GRUP, that Trekzine of renown that I mentioned in my discourse, and she announces that issue IV will be out soon -- also that excerpts from previous issues will be in Jacqueline Lichtenberg's Star Trek Lives, available in June in paperback.

Tom Jackson
40234023 E. 53rd St.
Tulsa, OK 74135

Your editorial was very interesting, but I don't agree with your opinions at all.

First off, that Silverberg succeeded in stirring up the English teachers does not bother me at all. A more narrowminded, unreceptive, ignorant and maybe downright incompetent bunch of people than a pack of English teachers can hardly be imagined. It's the English teachers who have kept sf in the ghetto with their stupid opinions, based on an utter ignorance of the field. Those English teachers who have read sf generally do not understand it.

Where does your English teacher friend get her basis for saying that Robert Silverberg is "narrow minded and almost bigoted?"

How could Silverberg possibly be accused of having a bigoted, uninformed view of sf? Perhaps your friend should be informed of Mr. Silverberg's close relationship with the field over the years.

What did Silverberg really say when he referred to Perry Rhodan? He says, "Science fiction readers don't want literary quality, they want space adventure -- Perry Rhodan and Cap Kennedy. That's what the public thinks of when you say 'science fiction,' and that's what science fiction is." I suppose that statement could be interpreted different ways, but I think Silverberg is referring to the attitude people have toward science fiction rather than science fiction.

I am majoring in journalism and English at Oklahoma University. I have met many English teachers and I'm a member of the English Forum, a group that invites writers to come to the campus. It has done this for years and has invited zero science fiction writers. Some of the mainstream writers I saw this year were incredibly shitty. If really good science fiction writers are less apt to get recognition than shitty mainstream writers, can Silverberg be blamed for being upset at being labeled a science fiction writer?

Tom's letter is one of the reasons I have little stomach for this kind of controversy: It degenerates too easily into simple vituperation.

Minor misinterpretations become blown into major issues, and the original point of the discussion becomes lost in the dust of battle. I won't attempt to reply to Tom's blanket indictment of English teachers, since I don't believe a defense would serve any more useful purpose than the attack does. I do feel constrained to point out, though, that the quotation Tom attributes to Silverberg was, in my editorial, very carefully not attributed to anyone. I'll confess that in the editorial I probably did attribute some views to Silverberg that possibly should have been credited to Ellison (and perhaps vice versa). And so this is what happens: I misunderstand what was said; somebody else misunderstands what I said was said -- and so on.

William R. Norris
1973 Shave Road
Schenectady, NY
12303

. . . If Silverberg doesn't like the way science fiction is or has been, don't abandon it. Keep producing the high quality material and give us something to be proud of -- as he has been doing. If an editor

hasn't the brains to see and reprint the good material, if the public doesn't buy it because they only know about the hack stuff or they only like the hack -- whose fault is it? If it's the fault of the fans and pros for not being more vocal and even physical about our desires; it's the fault of fans and pros for not doing everything we can to see that teachers have access and support re the good material when they do courses; lastly it's the fault of fans for buying pulp hackwork and of pros for writing it and of editors for accepting it. So what do we do -- throw up our hands and say, "Science fiction is in the ghetto and we reject it"? Well, if science fiction is in the ghetto, then it is one that I, you, Mr. Silverberg, Mr. Ellison, et al helped to create. Shouldn't we be trying to break out by redefining science fiction and its qualities?

I do not agree with Silverberg, Ellison & Co. I do agree with the unnamed teacher that the only thing that can come of the "abandonment" of the label and the disparaging remarks is the undermining of those who feel strongly that science fiction (or the comparatively neutral designation "SF") deserves recognition as a viable, challenging and rewarding genre of literature.

Don D'Amassa
19 Angell Drive
East Providence,
RI 02914

I'm afraid I cannot entirely agree with your criticism of Ellison and Silverberg, although much of it seems quite accurate. There is not, however, general recognition of outstanding SF novels within the field any more than without.

Cy Chauvin and others have, for example, claimed that while Silverberg's *DYING INSIDE* is an excellent novel, it is not particularly good SF. This is a position I find widely held within the fan press. SF's ghettoization is, to a large extent, voluntary. I do agree that *DYING INSIDE* is unlikely to have received any more fair treatment had it been published as a mainstream novel, but that doesn't excuse the cursory treatment it received from fan critics. I suspect that fans have heard the line, "It's too good to be SF" so often they're coming to believe it. I read widely outside the field -- SF consists of about 60% of my reading -- and I can say frankly that the best of SF compares favorably with literature as a whole. We haven't had a Hemingway yet, but we've come very close from time to time, Sturgeon, for example; we'll come closer more often in the future.

Larry Downes
21960 Avon
Oak Park, MI
48237

...Maybe SF is a
ghetto after all,
a dirty, rat in-
fested, and most
importantly,

totally sealed off, shut in,
sterile one -- and like most
ghettos, there is little hope
for escape. Even if you can
educate yourself to their
(their meaning the outside)
way of thinking, and make
yourself look like them, and
do the things they do and
that they like seeing you do,
and try and claw your way out;
most likely all you will get
out of it are several cuts and
scratches, and giving them a good laugh:



Case in point: Harlan Ellison's (yes, how convenient that one of the instigators of this discussion serves as an example of its validity) two books, The Glass Teat and its sequel, The Other Glass Teat (Pyramid, 1975). Two excellent books which are collections of Ellison's television columns from the L.A. Free Press. These books contain delightful below-the-belt karate chops at television's vital organs, and expose the general stupidity, immaturity and banality of the tube.

Here is your assignment: Go find copies of these books in any book store. Where to look, where to look; decisions, decisions. Do you look in the Pop Culture section? Do you search the Mass Media department? Do you scrounge the New Paperback aisles? Or do you even hunt the teevee row? Answer: none of the above. No, you dummy, you look in the SF or Science Fiction or even Sci-Fi shelves! How could you be so dumb?

I did a random check of the local book stores. Dalton's had copies of TGT with, in alphabetical order, Ellison's SF books. TGT was also found in the sci-fi section of The Book End. Little Professor's wasn't carrying any of them anywhere, and one lone copy of TOGT was found wedged between several Burroughs, Lovecraft and Heinlein thrillers at Hudson's. The cupboards where the books should have been were bare.

Now, then, class, what conclusions can we draw from this? I see two: (1) All book store owners are illiterate and only learn to match certain names with certain shelves in their bookstore, or (2) Writers (especially SF) are hopelessly stereotyped. (1) I think we can disregard. Which leaves us, sadly, with (2) and the ghetto.

Ellison, Silverberg and Bryant expressed desires to "get out of the ghetto" of SF. I wonder though, has it ever occurred to them that they can't?

What a frightening thing for a writer considering entering the SF world to think about.

I've often wondered how Ralph Ellison feels about having his INVISIBLE MAN consigned to the SF shelves of used book stores. I certainly agree that not all bookstore owners are illiterate, but some of them must be.

Sheryl Smith
7512 N. Eastlake Terrace
Chicago, IL 60626

. . . ah, yes, the writers are getting restless again. Your viewpoint is a sensible one (though there seem to be about half-a-dozen other possible ones). It reads like a relatively mild form of the proprietary attitude fans tend to get about "their" genre.

Now I can accept that line; but I don't think I could adopt it any more than I could adopt the writers' contention that the SF ghetto is an unredeemably rotten place to write in. I mean only in your mind are the arts compartmentalized; and even though SF has become one of the more vigorous genres this last decade, just because a writer leaves for the mainstream doesn't mean he will stop writing good -- and yes, imaginative -- fiction. (That's a compartment, too, by the way, but it's the compartment this genre is a part of). It just means the writer wants to do his thing differently, be it for a while or forever; he wants a fresh audience/outlook/challenge for the nurturing of his art. This is not usually a desertion (though the writers from this chummy genre may themselves consider it one): it is a necessary change and expansion. FIJAGDH indeed.

I don't hold with those writers who run down the genre -- it seems a needless lack of ego on the part of some whose work has helped raise SF's level of achievement. But if these writers choose to leave, why should the Fan get defensive about it. After all, they're not going very far: only into the fiction next door. Relax already -- here's a golden opportunity for readers too, to check out new territory.

(I don't quite understand all this 'science fiction only' business, I really don't. There is so much this genre doesn't have! I suppose after conning it all year I must buckle down and call myself a fan, but if I had nothing to do with my spare time but read SF and do fanac, I'd go berserk within a week. What's with all these obsessive folk?)

Am I supposed to know? Does anybody know? With me, science fiction (or more accurately fandom and fanac, since I scarcely have time to read the stuff any more) is not an obsession. It's a compulsion. I hope there's a difference.

Darrell Schweitzer
113 Deepdale Rd.
Strafford, Pa. 19087

. . . I did an interview with Silverbob for AMAZING (It'll be out in maybe six months) in which he made this statement:

"I wouldn't mind making his [Harold Robbins'] money, but I don't want to do stuff that's so accessible that millions and millions of people all over the world read it, because all important fiction, all really powerful fiction, literary art, has been an elite art. I think that anything that is worthwhile is either folk art or elite but nothing in between. The gray area of commercialism is useless and short lived."

The interview was done at Discon II last summer, and unless Silverberg has changed his mind since, I can't see why he's so worried about Perry Rodent. The masses read trash and always will, and the good stuff has to appeal only to a few. Perry Rodent is for the otherwise non-reader, and I don't think it seriously cuts into the adult market. If Silverberg still wants to write for the elite, the intelligent adult reader, he has to realize that he will never be as widely read as the

Klansman of Gore, at least not in the near future. But the chances of his work surviving are far greater than they are for the hack stuff. And in the meantime there is the satisfaction of knowing that he has reached the discerning audience. Even if he had to resort to an Arkham House style specialty press (as all SF writers did 25 years ago) this should be enough. And since he can also make a living, and has some chance for being read beyond his lifetime, what more can a writer ask?

Well, I think it really is about time that I let Bob Silverberg have his say.

Robert Silverberg
Box 13160 Station E
Oakland, CA 94661

. . . In general you report me fairly, but there is one aspect of your interpretation of my remarks that disturbs me. I don't recall having said nasty things about science fiction, nor trying to antagonize SF scholars and students, nor wishing my books were published as mainstream novels.

I love science fiction. I love reading it, I loved writing it. Most of what's published disappoints me, because it fails to live up to my ideal vision of what s-f ought to be, but that's not the fault of the genre, only of the authors. In my own work I tried to create the sort of ideal s-f I had in mind -- books like SON OF MAN, TOWER OF GLASS, TO LIVE AGAIN, and the rest -- because no one else seemed to be writing it at the moment.

I have no wish to antagonize the s-f academic division. Those people are my most sympathetic and informed readers. I was only trying to warn them of my own melancholy discoveries -- that the bulk of s-f readers prefer fast paced simple-minded junk, and that the whole effort to make s-f a subject for academic study may be doomed because nothing but Perry Rhodan may survive the present purge. They can't teach Perry Rhodan except in pop-cult courses.

The problem I've faced is very simple. I wrote well, and my best books went out of print. I didn't want to outsell Harold Robbins, or even Perry Rhodan; I just wanted to stay in print, to be able to reach my audience. The publishers chose to cut me off from my audience. In effect, they penalized me for writing too well. I discovered belatedly that to most publishers, s-f is a mere schlock category of commercial fiction, half a notch up the esthetic scale from nurse novels. To those publishers, an s-f writer who gets delusions of quality is a mere nuisance, and an expensive nuisance, because s-f's sales at best are so marginal that a writer who loses readers through excessive literacy is a burden to his publisher. When I found out what was happening, I saw no recourse but to quit, and I did, and after five weeks of joyous retirement I feel better and better about the decision to get out. I was a very good s-f writer, yes, and I was breaking my health and spirit continuing to write (slowly and with much difficulty) books that publishers and most readers didn't seem to want. I have no answers to the paradoxical problems that have impaled me. The only cure, for me, is to go away. Books that aren't written can't go out of print.

If I did, to any degree, misinterpret or misrepresent Bob Silverberg's comments at the SFRA conference here, I most humbly apologize and I hasten to assure everyone that it was unintentional.

(Continued on page 29, because page 28 contains a tribute to the late Great Rich)

The Great Rich — is dead

I have just received word, via a 'gift' (not a contribution) to D'APA from Scott Lillie of Tallahassee that Rich Small died on Monday, June 16, in Copper Hill, Tenn. I will run the whole mailing, with the details, in D'APA, but there's a tribute by Brad Linaweaver that I want to print part of here. It's called:

WHY THE GREAT RICH WAS GREAT

Richard Small was the jester, always available with a joke, "never taking anything too seriously." We should not be surprised then at his courage and good humor when he learned of his cancer. His philosophy, "enjoy life while you've got it," was something he consistently practiced. Not even a shrouded skull face staring at our hero could wipe the grin off his face. I can hear him now, telling the Grim Reaper, "I am the Great Rich!" So he was.

Rich and I had many things planned for the future; there was a lot we were going to do. Strange, but I feel as though we did these things.

Great Rich meant this to me: going to the Dallas Con (five people in one car), trading comedy insults, Weird Nights and Captain Marvel and umbrellas, and popping balloons in the hall in the wee hours of the morning, mimeograph and ditto . . . and, finally, the ready, zany wit. Friendship is a response to common value.

Behind that crazy grin of his was a mind that knew some hard facts. Now we, his friends, have to accept the hardest fact of all. I am diminished by the death of Richard Small.

Rich's decision about Vitamin B-17, right or wrong, rests with him. If he had continued the cobalt treatments, he still might have died when he did. We'll never know. At least Rich had a few months without pain. When I talked to him for the last time over the phone, he sounded strong; he said he wasn't hurting. We had a pleasant conversation, one I will cherish. . . .



Silverbob's letter was intended to be the capper on this discussion at least for this issue, but I've decided that it isn't, after all.

Harry Warner Jr.
423 Summit Ave.
Hagerstown, MD
21740

. . . I've read one Perry Rhodan book and I thought it was splendid for the audience it's obviously meant for: kids who have just discovered science fiction and the grownups who refuse to tackle anything but the lightest, most conservative kinds of fiction. If the translations were livelier, I suspect that the series would become the superpopular thing it became in Germany and no harm would be done. I don't quite know why anyone should think that books attack each other and destroy one another. Vonnegut, Crichton and Clarke are evidence that science fiction meant for older people can sell in vast quantities, despite the existence of the Rhodan series and all the other elementary types of science fiction. Packing up their toys and going home with a parting grumble to the effect that we don't want to play in your yard won't solve anything. One possibility would be a big campaign to force magazine and paperback publishers to label their products with the audience for which they are most suited, just as some publishers identify juvenile titles in their catalogs and even specify the age group which will be best suited for each book. But that kind of campaign would undoubtedly fail, after publishers got scared of dwindling sales for books labeled juveniles and got a ruling out of some Washington office that it's unconstitutional under the freedom of the press provision.

[I'm pretty sure that such a requirement is unconstitutional, and even if it weren't I would oppose it on the purely practical ground that there's no way to ensure accuracy of labeling -- for years many of Andre Norton's best books were considered juveniles. The opposite alternative -- forbidding any kind of labeling -- has a certain perverse appeal to me, but I suppose there would be some objections to it, too].

I've got to print one more excerpt from Harry's letter:

Ned Brooks notwithstanding, there was once a Virginian from a plantation in fandom. He was Louis Russell Chauvenet, whose mailing address included the words "Tallwood Plantation." I can't remember now the exact part of the state where he lived, but a fan or two who visited him there considered it rather palatial. Russell's one major contribution to fandom was inventing the word fanzine. He has been semi-active from time to time in recent years, was a FAPA member for quite a while, but his primary interest for a long time has been sailboats.

Brian Earl Brown
55521 Elder Rd.
Mishawaka, IN
46544

. . . As one who reads both Perry Rhodan and Silverberg; Cap Kennedy and Ellison, I suppose I can speak with some authority about them. Yes, Perry Rhodan is bad, but no worse than a lot of other sf. The writing is klunky, but not so atrocious as E.E. (Doc) Smith; the characters in the series are bland and stereotyped, but no worse than Jules Verne's; the logic and consistency of the series isn't always airtight, but in SFR#12, Geis thoroughly shreds a story ("And Keep Us From Our Castles" - Cynthia Bunn) for its flaws in thinking, and this is occasionally mentioned as a Hugo contender! The differences between Perry Rhodan and a

minor story by Harrison, Laumer or Schmitz (or pick your own) are almost solely a matter of preference.

John Carl
3750 Green Lane
Butte, MT 59701

. . . I'm not sure just what it is you are trying to say on your post-piece to "The Legend of the Banned B.I." Are you saying: Don't put together funny newspapers or you'll be horribly murdered? Or: Gee, isn't this ironic? Or what? It seems a waste of five good pages if there is no purpose, and I can't see one, so I will leave it to you to guess at my conclusion.

[Could you at least give me a hint?]

Mike Kring
PSC #1 Box 3147
Kirtland AFB, NM
87115

. . . Your reprint was interesting, but the ending was a little weird. Death sorta stalks around in the stuff you write, doesn't it? I assume it's fascination with something that doesn't make much sense, especially a murder-suicide. Also the ending made it more than just another funny college story. Now, when did you say you're going to start writing professionally again?

[No hurry. Is there?]

Tim C. Marion
614 72nd St.
Newport News, VA
23605

. . . I very much enjoyed "The Legend of the Banned B.I." but what I enjoyed even more was the notes directly after that. What you wrote about the anonymous female member and her death hit me with the force of a load of bricks, to the extent that I felt rather dizzy. Even though almost unbelievably shocking deaths like that do occur, I really liked the way you wrote about it.

P E R S O N A L S

TO MAE STRELKOV: Of course I want you to continue the "loc-zine" -- If you have the time and inclination. Thank you from the deepest part of my heart, not only for that but for the paintings. They are breath-takingly beautiful, and the love and care that go into each of them is amazing. I'm having some of them framed and I'll always cherish all of them. Thank you.

TO BEN INDICK: Relax. Your good-will credit with me is very high. You've got a long way to go before anything you say will have the slightest chance of offending me. I apologize for not being able to get your letter in this time.

TO SHERYL BIRKHEAD: Thanks for your letter and the drawings. I do need more artwork from you. A cover, maybe? A logo. Even "doodles" are deeply appreciated. Silkie, our Burmese, is due to have kittens just any day now. I'll let you know.

TO JODIE OFFUTT: Your earlier letter arrived just a day or two after DoS 41 was closed, as I recall, which would explain why you weren't listed. Glad to hear things are OK.

A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE

As far as I can tell about the rest of this year, what lies ahead for DON-o-SAURS is mostly special issues. For several months now I have had in my possession a long article (almost a zine in itself) by George Beahm dealing with Ken Smith's zine, PHANTASMAGORIA, and now that I've received a cover from Ken the article is ready to go. Next issue looks like a good opportunity. Next issue is supposed to be out in August, but no way. I'll be in Australia most of August and anything that I write will almost certainly be in the nature of an AussieCon re-

port. I intend to take typer and stencils along but I'll surprise myself if I get much written. In any case, it'll be the middle of September at least before DoS 43 is likely to appear. And I've already announced

the October/November (or December). That will be the special, super-huge, large economy size compendium of the very best of DON-o-SAUR -- I think it has to be called DON-o-SAUR BONES, even though TRACKS might be more logical;

There's a reason.

But listen, isn't anybody going to talk me out of that project? I don't see how it can be anything but work.

I ALSO HEARD FROM . . .

Paul Anderson, Bruce D. Arthurs, Don Ayers, Sheryl Birkhead, Grant Canfield, Ann Chamberlain, Joan Dick, Tom Digby, Kevin Dillon, Andy Dyer (he was in Denver on June 14, gave me a call at work, and we had an all-too-brief visit), Graham England, Gil Gaier, Ken Gammage, Ben Indick (a couple of letters, in fact), Dick Geis, C. William George, Dwain G. Kaiser, Clay Kimball, Jay Kinney, Dave Kleist, Vic Kostrikin, Devra Langsam, Samuel S. Long (and I didn't print any of Sam's letter? That's as absurd as getting two letters from Ben Indick and not using them!), Wayne W. Martin, Ken Mayo, Steve McDonald (unchairperson of the SF Superhack Society and an impressively talented and energetic young writer; keep the name in mind -- you'll be reading novels by him before too long), Jodie Offutt, Russ Parkhurst (several, to some of which I absolutely must reply very soon or sooner), Dave Reagan, John Robinson, Dave Szurek, James Tiptree (just a card, but after all . . .), Bruce Townley (long distance phone call in lieu of a loc!), Elst Weinstein, and Stan Woolston.

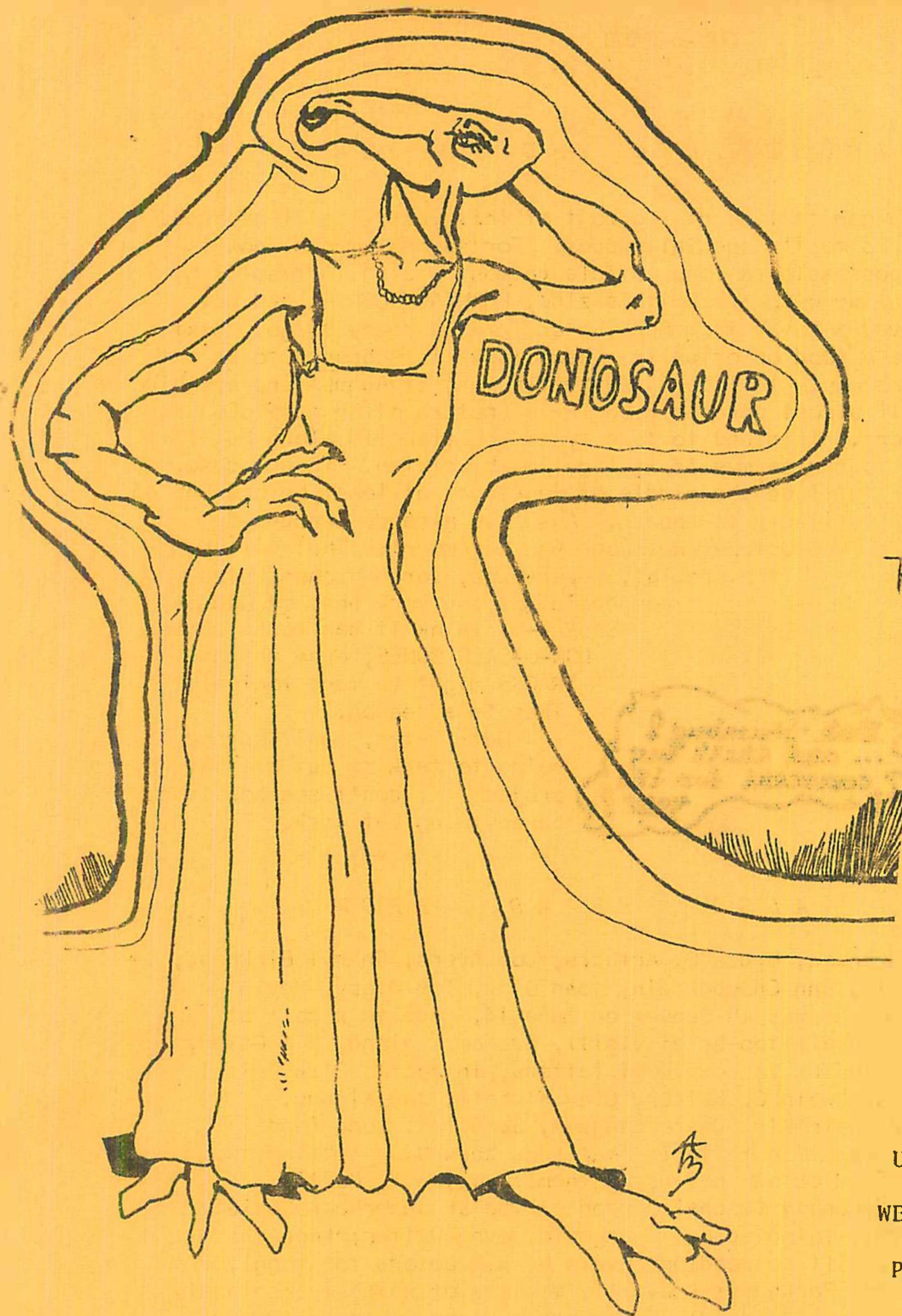
I think I missed Mike Bracken. Anybody else?

Well, then, here are a couple of CHANGES OF ADDRESS:

Gordon Garb (of Superamalgamation Presents fame, or infamy)
P.O. Box 1236, Fort Collins, CO 80522

Marci Helms, 1408 Caprice, Union Lake, MI, 48085





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