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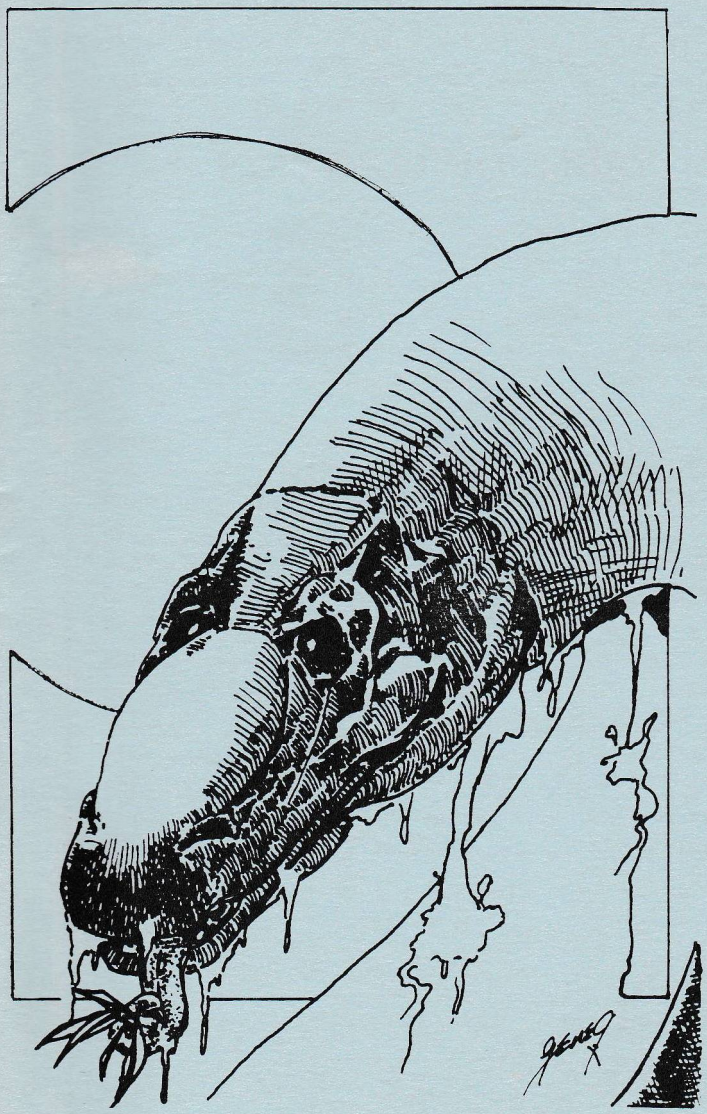
RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY



RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY

Volume 8 number 2 (whole number 30) March 1988

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RQ Miscellany

"A GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED"

Printed in a recent Newsletter of COSMEP (Committee of Small Magazine Editors and Publishers) was an article, by one "Moses Maimonides, Jr.," with the same title as the caption above. Instead of the usual "guidelines," explained MMJ, the RQ sends letters requesting potential contributors first to read the magazine to see the type of thing it prints. (Quoted here was Fred Pohl's remark that IF received 2,000 MSS a year that never would have been sent had their authors bothered to read a copy.) "Guide" also listed other things a writer should and should not do, with that category of positives and negatives being summarized about like this:"If your story elicits a rejection letter, try to learn something from it. Do not waste time composing still another letter proving that the editor is 'crushing down all rising talent' [a phrase quoted by the late Anthony Boucher] or that he's too young, too stupid, or just plain crazy." Herewith, as promised in COSMEP, is printed one such letter. The spelling has been corrected, but not the syntax or grammar.

Dear Mr. Sapiro,

As a modestly well-published author, rejections are not new to me. However, in my years of contacts with editors I have not before received such a pretentious and downright snotty letter as yours. I do wonder whether your letter reflects conscious intent. I think it may not. That is the only reason I think the trouble of responding may be justified. Surely there is no reason to suggest to an author (even when true) that his theme "has been done many hundreds of times." If my reading of your comments is correct, hostility that is so ill-concealed ought best be taken to a therapist, rather than sent to an unknown and hard-working author.

Sincerely,

-------- --------

Setting aside the question of how a writer can be both "[moderately] well-published" and "unknown," I'll simply note that sending individual criticisms instead of rejection slips transforms the editor-author relationship from the mechanical to the personal, but at the same time discloses a way to "retaliate"--since indignant writers send no letters to machines, only to people. I'd assume this is why some editors feel that rejection slips are not just desirable but necessary, and hence generally abstain from person-to-person criticisms.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Connie Willis, whose short-fiction collection Firewatch was named a 1986 Notable Book by the New York Times, has published a fantasy novel, Water Witch (with Cynthia Felice), her first solo novel being Lincoln's Dreams (Bantam).

Nancy Kress, winner of a 1986 Nebula for her short story "Out of All Them Bright Stars," is author of An Alien Light (Bluejay).

Earl Ingersoll, currently Professor of English at SUNY-Brockport, has published numerous interviews with s-f and fantasy writers.

(continued on page 146)

Heroism in Science Fiction: Two Opposing Views

by

Dennis Kratz

Heroism has long stood at the centre of western literature -- from the great canonical masterpieces like the Iliad or Aeneid to the least pretentious and most widely read pieces of popular entertainment like Tarzan. The hero has been in decline, however, in the mainstream literature of the twentieth century. With a few notable exceptions (mostly in feminist fiction) contemporary novelists have fashioned works either without heroes or dominated by so-called anti-heroes, characters who are essentially powerless in the face of their circumstances. [1]

At the same time, heroism has retained its popularity as a feature of popular entertainment. And this situation seems to bear out a prediction made almost fifty years ago that the hero would eventually be restricted to popular culture --"the territory of the cowboy and the private eye." [2] To that prediction we must of course add heroic and sword-and-sorcery fantasy.

And what of heroism in science-fiction? S-F is too complicated a fabric woven from too many threads to allow a simple answer. The field has produced almost as many varieties of heroism as it has movements and waves. But two works--Stanislaw Lem's Solaris and Timescape by Gregory Benford -- represent in their treatment of heroic action one important tear in that fabric.

On the one hand, s-f is a form of popular entertainment. On the other hand, it has become, especially in the last twenty years, increasingly intellectualized, become the province of mainstream writers (for example, Doris Lessing and Thomas Pynchon) and of academics who write scholarly books about it. The s-f of popular tradition has retained an interest in depicting heroism -- effective action by an individual for the good of society. The more intellectualized s-f has, like most mainstream fiction, de-emphasized the hero.

Like heroism, communication has also long been a concern of s-f. Will humans be able to understand and communicate with alien species or human beings from different planets and/or times?

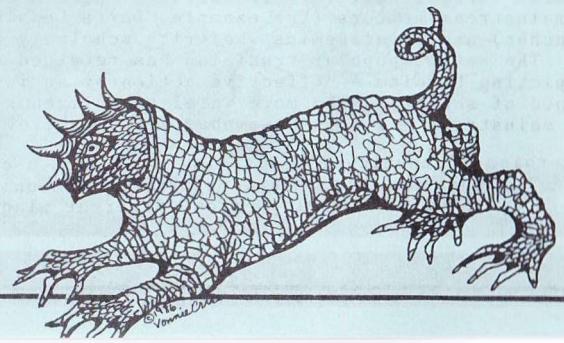
At one extreme, writers have given an affirmative action by avoiding the issue -- for example, through aliens who somehow speak Earth (usually English), through telepathy or even a "translation device." The last category would include, for example, the semi-sentient information-processing device that enters the protagonist's body and thereafter translates for him in Roger Zelazny's Doorways in the Sand -- perhaps the model for Douglass Adams' now famous "babel fish" in The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. Many "First Contact" stories, including Murray Leinster's story of that title, simply assume that we will be able to figure out one another's language. And a recent award-winning novelette, Stardance by Spider and Jean Robinson, managed to get away with the plot device of aliens being convinced not to invade Earth by their interpretive reading and response to the defiantly heroic outer-space dance of a ballerina! But notice here the heroic theme -- the individual whose courage saves humanity.

At the opposite extreme are the writers who argue that "it will be impossible for human and alien to have truly meaningful communications, due to totally different cultural backgrounds.[3] Recent stories based on this notion would include Sydney J. Van Scycoc's "Deathsong" and Terry Carr's "Dance of the Changer and the Three." Such a position is more in line with the so-called mainstream literature of the twentieth century, in which, along with anti-heroism, "the impossibility of communication is one of the now-unchallenged axioms."[4] Since understanding must precede action and since an action to be heroic must be understood by the larger community, the absence of heroism and the failure of communiction go together.

Solaris and Timescape both explore the relationship of heroism and communication.[5] Solaris, written in 1961, is an early novel by Lem, a Polish writer who has since gained a reputation as one of Europe's leading intellectuals. It was the first of Lem's works to be translated into English. Benford is an American physicist whose s-f ranges from extraordinarily thoughtful explorations such as If the Stars are Gods to commonplace adventure tales like Shiva Descending (with William Rotsler). Timescape was published in 1980.

Both novels concern the attempts of scientists to interpret a message from an uncertain source. In one, the attempt fails, and heroic goals are not met; in the other, the communication succeeds, and heroic actions seem to save the world.

The two works have differed also in their critical reception, despite their sharing the best qualities of s-f -- an alluring story that is combined with the thoughtful exploration of ideas. Solaris has generated an enormous body of criticism.[6] Timescape has not; indeed, Benford has been generally neglected in critical literature, with the unfortunate exception of a debate about his use of allusion to William Faulkner.[7]



Both Solaris and Timescape concern the attempts of a scientist to interpret the meaning and significance of a puzzling message. In Solaris, Kris Kelvin lands on a station orbiting the planet Solaris, which is convered by a mass of constantly shifting gelatinous material. The planet itself may be a sentient being. If so, it may be behind a strange event: there has appeared suddently to each of the scientists engaged in studying the planet the simulacrum of a person from his past. Are these visitations an attempts at communication by the planet? (Cf. p. 153: "Possibly you are here as a token of friendship, or a subtle punishment, or even as a joke.") Kelvin's quest is to provide an interpretation of these visitations, thereby perhaps achieving the long elusive goal of real communication with the planet.

Kelvin's effort is linked to the long tradition of Western heroic quest literature. For example, Lem names the two spaceships in the narrative the Ulysses and Prometheus. The scientists investigating Solaris are compared to the Knights of the Holy Grail (p. 81: "We think of ourselves as the Knights of the Holy Contract"). Kelvin even falls in love with his "visitor" -- the image of the wife whom he had driven to commit suicide -- and for a while acts the role of the hero of a romantic adventure who will keep his beloved by his side no matter what (see p. 153). Indeed the entire tale of Kelvin's quest for the elusive planet, punctuated as it is with long "learned" digressions also seems in part a parody of the great American novel of heroic quest, Moby Dick.

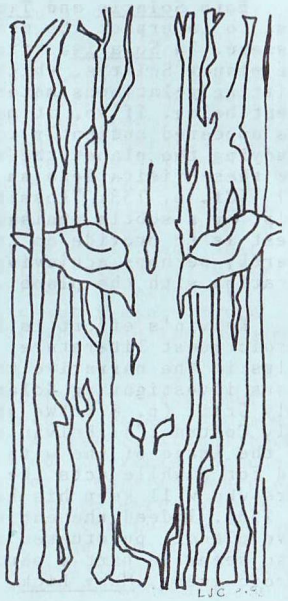
This quest fails. Kelvin is unable either to solve the mystery or make contact with the planet. The reason for his failure is in part the ultimate incomprehensibility of the mind, if there is one, of Solaris. Again and again Lem has events, characters or fictional "authorities" affirm the impossibility of communication between human and alien in general (e.g., p. 178: "Grastrom's conclusion was that there neither was, nor could be, any question of 'contact' between mankind and any nonhuman civilization") or between human and Solaris in particular (p. 211:"[the planet] bore my weight without noticing me any more than it would notice a speck of dust "). But the failure lies also in the nature of the questers. The human mind, argues Lem, previewing a philosophy that would dominate much literary criticism of the 70's and 80's, is locked in its own vision (p. 165):

> Man has gone out to explore other worlds and other civilizations without having explored his own labyrinth of dark passages and secret chambers, and without finding what lies behind doorways that he himself has sealed.

Images of isolation, of individuals "sealed off" dominate the novel. For example, the scientists observe Solaris while sealed in their space station. They see it only through windows. The station's library, supposedly a source of knowledge, has no windows. The scientists, appalled and/or ashamed at the visitors conjured by the planet, lock themselves in their cubicles.

The most complete statement of this view links the impossibility of communication with the theme of heroism. One of the scientists, Snow (a name, like Kelvin, that carries with it a connotation of coldness) says (p. 81):

Modesty forbids us to say so, but there are times when we think pretty well of ourselves. And yet, if we examine it more closely, our enthusiasm turns out to be all sham. We don't want to conquer the cosmos, we simply want to extend the boundaries of Earth to the frontiers of the cosmos. For us, such and such a planet is as arid as the Sahara, another as frozen as the North Pole.....We are humanitarian and chivalrous: we don't want to enslave other races, we simply want to bequeath them our values and take over their heritage in exchange. We think of ourselves as the Knights of the Holy Contact. This is another lie. We are only seeking Man. We have no need of worlds. We need mirrors.



The heroic or knightly quest is based not on understanding or communication, but on the imposition upon others of our own unexamined desires. Even the simulacrum of his dead wife, which Kelvin assumes that he loves is just "a mirror that reflects a part of [his] mind" (p. 162).

The novel ends with Kelvin frozen in a state of intellectual and physical inactivity. Instead of creating a new love and life, he has "killed" the simulacrum of his wife: that quest has failed. Although convinced that the planet's "activities did have a purpose," he has not made contact with it: that quest too has failed. His conclusion concerning human powers (p.211):

> We all know that we are material creatures, subject to the laws of physiology and physics, and not even the power of all our feelings combined can defeat those laws. All we can do is detest them. The age-old faith of lovers and poets in the power of love, stronger than death, that finis vitae sed non amoris, is a lie, useless and not even funny.

Kelvin ends with a rejection of heroic values. The heroic knight, to whom he was once compared, overcame all obstacles fighting for love; but now Kelvin ends with an affirmation of the inconquerability of those obstacles. The heroic knight once, setting out on adventures, acted out of a faith in divine aid. Kelvin, persisting ironically in (p. 161) "the faith that the age of cruel miracles was not past," now merely sits. Communication is impossible; therefore heroic movement has been replaced by passivity.

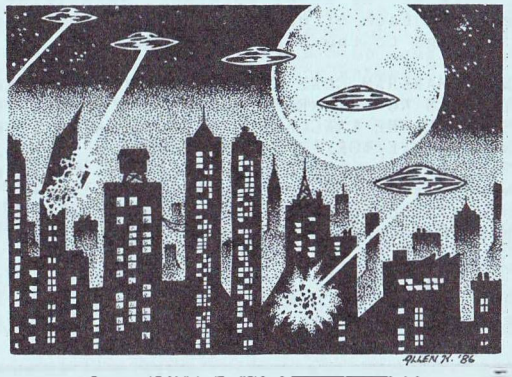
The heroism of Timescape lies in the effort by a group of scientists in 1998 to send a message to 1962 to cease activities that will grievously pollute the oceans. The leader of the senders is John Renfrew. Gordon Bernstein is an assistant professor who receives and seeks to decode the message. Both men play essential, heroic roles. It is Bernstein, the receiver, who in the novel receives the official recognition, in the form of the Enrico Fermi prize. Moreover, Bernstein's success "changes" the future -- or at least creates an alternate future (one with the possibility of avoiding ecological disaster) in addition to that from which the message came (p. 358):

> Thus the future world that had sent Gordon the messages was gone, unreachable. They had separated sometime in the fall of 1963; Gordon was sure of that.

Renfrew, to whom I will return, is, appropriately enough, present at the ceremony honouring Bernstein. He will exist simultaneously in both the futures: the one in which a message is sent and the one in which that message would be superfluous.

Heroes conquer obstacles. In Timescape the main obstacle to be overcome is "static," that is, those elements that either distort a message or interfere with the intended recipient's ability to interpret it correctly. Benford threads this theme of static throughout the novel. For example, Bernstein initially regards the message from 1998 as nothing more than static. It is "the damned noise in [his] experiment" (p. 16) that he has to get rid of, merely static ruining his work in "nuclear resonance" -- jagged traces on his instrumentation instead of the "smooth and meaningful" nuclear resonance curves he was expecting (p. 109). Ironically, Renfrew himself is bedeviled by "interference...a lot of incoming noise" (p. 84) -- a problem that returns at the philosophical conclusion of the book -- as he attempts to send the message that for a while is "noise" to Bernstein.

> "It's a goddamn message [his research assistant] Cooper said. "Must be."
>
> Gordon nodded, fatigue seeping through him. "There's no avoiding it," he said. "We've got hours of signal here. Can't be coincidence, not this much."
>
> "No."
>
> "Okay then," Gordon said, summoning up optimism in his voice. "Let's decode the fucking thing."



But static now takes other forms -- the most important being the limiting effect of inherited ways of thinking. One of the limits of the paradigm shared initially by Bernstein and just about everyone else in the novel's 1963 is the impossibility of time-travel or time-communication. As a result, Bernstein at first misreads the coded message as coming from aliens, rather than from the future.

Others simply refuse to accept the idea of such a message (p. 42):

> Lakin studied the jittery lines with occasional sharp points...Impassively he said, "Nonsense."
>
> Gordon Paused. "I thought so too,at first. Then we decoded the thing, assigning the 0.5 centimeter intervals as 'short' and one centimeter as 'long' in Morse code.
>
> "This is pointless. There is no physical effect which could produce data like these..."
>
> "But look at a translation from the Morse," Gordon said, scribbling on the blackboard. ENZYME INHIBITED B.

Lakin, the senior professor in Bernstein's department, becomes another form of static. He develops his own interpretation of the phenomenon -- that it is a purely natural effect which he labels "spontaneous resonance" (p. 54) -- and uses all his academic / bureaucratic authority to punish Bernstein for clinging to his own view. Convinced that the apparent organization of the noise can be explained only as a natural phenomenon, he chides Bernstein for "imposing order" on the static because his own mind, like the minds of those who saw canals on Mars, was tricking him (pp. 113-114).

Other forms of static plague attempts at communication that need not cross the barriers of time. In the middle of 1963 Bernstein cannot communicate with his mother; and his pursuit of the elusive message alienates him from his lover. As he realizes later (p. 327) "...he had loved her all along, but there had been so much in the way."

In the world of 1998, Ian Peterson, the British government official overseeing the project to send a message back in time, manipulates under the guise of communication. He spends much of the novel trying to bed as many women as possible. His seduction of one young woman is accomplished through such manipulative conversation (p. 211-213). But Peterson himself is deceived to a degree by Renfrew (p. 84), whose sole concern is to continue his experiment at communicating with the past.

The last form of static introduced formally into the narrative is, significantly, the very medium of communication--language. Late in the novel Peterson, despairing of the experiment after the death of one of its key members, sends a rambling message to the past (p. 324):

> WITH MARKHAM GONE AND BLOODY DUMB RENFREW CARRYING ON THERE'S NO FUTURE IN OUR LITTLE PLAN NO PAST EITHER I SUPPOSE THE LANGUAGE CAN'T DEAL WITH IT BUT THE THING WOULD HAVE WORKED IF Then came a scramble of noise. The long passage disappeared and did not return. There were missing words. The noise was rising like a tossing sea. Through the last staccato sentences there ran an unstated sense of desperation.

Ironically, this message, received by Bernstin, confirms his belief that the messengers are from the future. The "sea" of noise contains information that will save the Earth's seas.

This theme of the inadequacy of language is repeated at the conclusion of the novel. Renfrew, while sending a message to the past, ponders the problem (p. 346):

> He grimaced...Human language did not fit the physics. There was no tense of the verb <u>to be</u> that reflected the looping sense of time. No way to turn the language on the pivot of physics, to apply a torque that would make the paradoxes dissolve into an ordered cycle, endlessly turning.

But the fact remains: despite the various forms of static, despite the very inadequacy of language, communication does take place. The past changes the future. Understanding leads to positive action.

Two conclusions work together to complete <u>Timescape's</u> success as a work that weds entertainment with intellectual speculation. In one conclusion, Bernstein the decoder and translator receives his recognition. In the other, Renfrew the sender becomes himself a receiver. He discovers a new interpretation for the "noise" in his own instrumentation (p. 347: "For brief snatches of time the noise resolved itself into these snakings across the screen. Signals, clearly. Someone else was transmitting"). LIke Bernstein responding to his own message, Renfrew is uncertain whether the message is from aliens or a future Earth. But he responds with the same optimism that underlies the entire novel (p. 349):

> Whispers came flitting, embedding soft words of tomorrow in the indium. Someone was there. Someone brought hope.

For the reader, this optimism emerges in part from the story of Bernstein's successful reading of the message from Renfrew, in part from Benford's own emphasis on the ability of the human mind to understand the "messages" of the universe. As he has Bernstein think -- immediately after a partially readable sentence is interrupted by "a blur of noise" (p. 312):

> ...sometimes you had to press on...the world would yield if you just kept at it.

This message too -- be it human or alien attempts at communication or a natural phenomenon -- can be understood and used as the impulse for action.

<u>Timescape</u>, then, presents an alternative to the pessimism of <u>Solaris</u> by emphasizing not only the capacity of the human mind for understanding but also the comprehensibility of the universe and its creatures. Benford's fictional articulation of this belief precedes by two years a similar statement from <u>The Cosmic Code</u>, a non-fiction work by another physicist, Heinz Pagels:

> I think that the universe is a message written in code, a cosmic code, and the scientist's job is to decipher that code...[scientists] share a deep conviction that an order of the universe...can be known.[8]

By emphasizing the difficulties of this search, and the need for both analytical rigour and imagination in it, Benford moves beyond the naivete of too much s-f, particularly that which underplays the many forms of static that interfere with all communication or portrays heroism primarily as action, with little attention to understanding. Benford's attitude, I think, will prove to be more influential than the pessimism of Lem and much mainstream fiction. The writers who, I believe, represent the more powerful and lasting branch of s-f are those, like Benford, who build narratives on the notion that -- successful or not -- the search for interpretive understanding of the messages of other humans, aliens, and the universe itself is a heroic act.

As noted earlier, a split exists in which s-f is seen as either a form of popular entertainment or an emerging genre of serious literature. Timescape, which retains the popular fascination with heroism while making it intellectually challenging, shows that this rift can be closed. It also provides a form of heroic deed -- combining intellect with action -- that recovers the heroism once celebrated in epic literature and which mainstream writers, who are already borrowing many s-f themes, would do well to adopt.

FOOTNOTES

1) For an overview on the decline of heroism and the rise of the anti-hero, see the special issue of Studies in the Literary Imagination IX, 1 (Spring, 1976) entitled The Anti-Hero: His Emergence and Transformations.

2) Sean O'Faolin, The Vanishing Hero (New York, 1956), p. 204.

3) Joseph Green, afterword to "Encounter with a Carnivore," in R.Elwood and R. Silverberg, eds., Epoch (New York, 1975), p. 196.

4) Walter E. Meyers, Aliens and Linguists (Athens, Georgia, 1980), p. 100.

5) Citations are from the following editions:

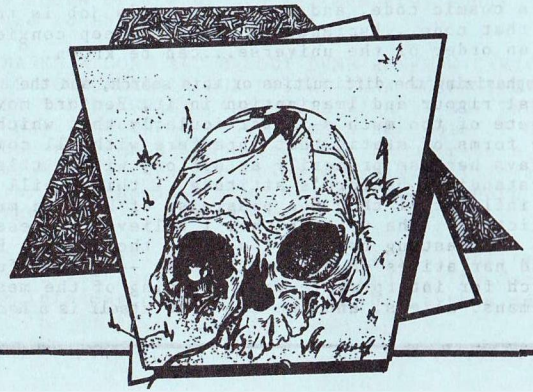
Stanislaw Lem, Solaris (Berkley Books paperback edition: 1971), translated by Joanna Kilmartin and Steve Cox,

Gregory Benford, Timescape (Pocket Books paperback edition:1981).

6) H.W. Hall's Science Fiction and Fantasy Reference Index 1878-1985 (Detroit, 1985) lists 96 entries concerning Lem, more than 25 of which concern Solaris specifically. By contrast, it lists 30 entries for Benford, of which only 3 are critical discussions of his fiction.

7) See "To Borrow or not to Borrow" by G.K. Wolfe in Fantasy Review 8 (4), pp. 9-12, for a wrongheaded attack on Benford's use of allusions to a "mainstream" writer.

8) Heinz R. Pagels, The Cosmic Code: Quantum Physics as the Language of Nature (New York, 1982).



YMIR'S MIRROR / EISELEY'S GLASS

From the skull in the stone
Eye sockets scrape the sky:
Both are wayward worlds
Aglint with stars.
Black, bleak caverns
Where the lightning grows,
Spiral convolutions
That only dreamers own --
The knower and the knowledge,
The spirit and the bone.

-- Ace G. Pilkington --

REARING MYTH-HEAD

maiden
untamed
mystic symbol
sage-bearded
   herald horn raised flashing to the heavens
fierce and fiery
   sun blazing on midwinter chastened drifts of snow
fierce and fiery soft-miened as archangel
   justifies rampant devastation pure
nativity forerunner Confucius and The Lamb
paradox
      slaughtered for your potent legend-twisted lance

beneath moonbeams
pawing gently at the greensward
dancing circles of the faery ring with moths and silver hares
   and woodsprites
beneath rainbows
nuzzling the rose-tinged cheek of cobbler's daughter or of princess
leaping bounding ravines and spring-wild mountain torrents
splashing joyfully amidst the bobbing water-lily
                pads and pastel palette blossom riot
showering the mallards teal and swans
      with a rain of kicking bellowing bullfrogs
hooves dangling a veil of cool green moss

maiden
   untamed
      mystic symbol
  sage-bearded
paradox

-- t. Winter-Damon --

THE HEDGE-RING

in the hedge-ring is not winter,
no warriors on horses
here Amalek cannot enter
for the stones are set behind the trees,
here is sight beclouded, and their
clothing colours smeared on a palette,
hearing thin, and under the feet
thunder that is their falling
from horses.

here is fear devoured by one
ravenous dream and I have turned
coyote to howl in this clearing
where is not ice but pellets of
hail clinging to hair and trees
gleaming like the eye of the wolf
staring clean at the prey being
torn, staring cold at bleakness
out of clarity.

-- Toni Conley --

A Conversation with Connie Willis

by

Earl Ingersoll and Nancy Kress

The following conversation took place 10 July 1986 at the State University of New York College at Brockport, where Ms. Willis was a guest of the Brockport Writers Forum. Speaking with her are Earl Ingersoll and Nancy Kress.

Ingersoll: Your short story "Firewatch" had such a ring of authenticity that I checked the book jacket to see if you had lived in England. I'm curious about where that story came from. How did it get started, and how did it take shape in this form?

Willis: It started with some research I was doing because the family was taking a trip to England. While I was reading about St. Paul's, I discovered the interesting fact that during World War II the priests and vergers had slept in the crypt with Nelson's tomb and had gone up to the roof of the cathedral at night to put out fires. I was interested in this bit of history because I thought maybe there was the germ of a poem in it, comparing the people facing World War II with those who had faced previous battles in England's history.

When I walked through the west doors of St. Paul's , I was so impressed by the beauty of the cathedral that I decided it just could not be allowed to burn. I didn't realize how bad the destruction in the area had been until I went up into the dome and saw that many of the surrounding buildings were brand-new, chrome and glass -- something fairly rare in England.When I asked the verger why all the buildings in the area were so modern, he said, "That's because everything else burned down." It wasn't until that moment, when I realized how impossible it was that St. Paul's had not also burned, that I found the heart of my story.

At that point I took the friends we were traveling with down into the crypt again and forced them to stand around for three and a half hours while I took notes on everything -- how many steps there were, where the folding chairs were, how high the ceilings were, where Nelson's tomb was.

When I got home and started to write the story several thousand miles away, I discovered that I needed all kinds of details I hadn't written down and had to do the rest of the research, long-distance, using books. But the story has less to do with St. Paul's than with making history real and trying to connect with the past. It had to do also with my concern with civilization, which is usually a theme in my work.

Kress: Do most of your stories begin with that much extensive research?

Willis: Most of my stories start with something that really matters to me -- sometimes a fact. I feel that I want to take people by the shoulders and say, "Listen to this fact," although it's the emotional implications that I'm really interested in.

When I wrote the story "Samaritan," for example, I had been doing "research," or reading on a given subject, not with any particular story in mind. I had been reading about apes and was interested in the story of a woman who was one of the pioneers in domesticating apes almost a hundred years ago. She kept a gorilla that had a pet cat. As I read on, I was waiting for the story to end with the gorilla's killing the cat, but it took perfectly good care of its pet. At that point I started grabbing people by the shoulders at parties and saying, "Do you know that apes can have pets?" They would look at me blankly, and I realized that I was getting across the fact, but not the implications: if an "animal" can have a pet, it can no longer be considered an animal, because my definition of "human" includes having pets. If they can have pets, what does that say about apes' kindness, their control of power, their concern for another creature that is less intelligent?

Kress: Do you write the story before you know where it's going, or do you have the story all worked out in your head before you start? What's the next step past knowing the emotional implications of that interesting fact?

Willis: Past the emotional implications, I make up the story. I use the term "make up" because I don't usually write it down at that stage. Once I knew I was going to write a story about a primate, I started doing more research, but I wasn't actually writing down any of the story. I wasn't doing scenes or character descriptions, or any of the preliminary work -- just doing research, thinking about the story, and "making it up." I was thinking about what if there were an ape that wanted to be treated like a human, and gradually the characters sorted themselves out.

At first they were characters that I needed as props -- someone to talk to the ape, someone to employ the ape, and someone to care for the ape. Then, of course, they developed characters of their own, and I realized I had my "cast" assembled.

In talking to other writers, I have the feeling that what they call a first draft I do in my head, so that by the time I write the story down, it exists fairly completely in my mind. I'm doing my first and second drafts, then, in my head and writing them down.

Ingersoll: You seem to be saying that a good deal of your writing is conscious craft -- you have the story worked out and you know where it's going before you actually begin to write. How do you keep that conscious craft from robbing the story of its "life," the sense of passion or resonance in the characters?

Willis: Yes, it's a "left-brain, right-brain" problem. If you're totally a craft writer, you're a hack. If you're totally an insides-spilling-out writer, you're Thomas Wolfe. And I have no desire to be Thomas Wolfe. You need to strike a balance,as most writers do.

For the story to work for me, the emotional heart of it -- the implications of apes having pets, for example -- must be strong enough to bear the full weight of plot, characterization, symbolic detail, and all the things I work with.

Kress: "Firewatch" is about a student who goes back into the past and tries to come to grips with what the world is -- all its disillusionments and concrete realities. "Daisy, in the Sun" and "A Letter from the Clearys" also deal with adolescents. Are you consciously attempting to adapt the rite-of-passage novel to s-f?

Willis: I am very interested in the rite-of-passage novel. Every writer does one, I suppose. Usually it's seen as a sign of the beginning writer. I don't want to write only rite-of-passage stories, since I'm an adult and most of the "rites"are behind me. Most of what I write comes from my feeling that nobody has done these things properly before. I read time-travel stories and say, "Nobody has ever written a decent time-travel story, and I am going to write it, because obviously nobody else will." It isn't always that overt, but it's an emotional response once again to something I'm reading.

The theme of many rite-of-passage stories -- take "E.T.," for example -- is that the child must become "disillusioned," the term implying that the child must give up innocence and settle for what the "real world," or adult world, has to offer. I don't see the issue as that simple. The child's world is innocent, but also very violent and uncontrolled. The adult world is limited in some ways, but there is also a certain freedom that comes from structure and will and knowledge. I've always said that I'd rather be virtuous than innocent. Innocence implies that you have no choices; you're ignorant. Virtue, on the other hand, means that you're fully aware of all the paths,and you've chosen this one.

Rite-of-passage stories speak to all of us, because they define what we're passing from and what we're passing to. Therefore, what you're really doing is defining the child's world and the adult's, the world of fantasy and the real world. And I guess I'll deal with that for the rest of my life in all of my writing.

Ingersoll: I'm interested in this question of where stories come from, how they get started, and how they take their particular shape. Where did "A Letter from the Clearys" come from?

Willis: If you had asked me about five years ago, I'd have given you this whole spiel about how writing is 95% the conscious mind at work and that writers who talk about stories "just coming to me" or "the characters" taking over the story" are feeding you a real line -- that, in fact, writing is almost all craft. At this point I can no longer say that.

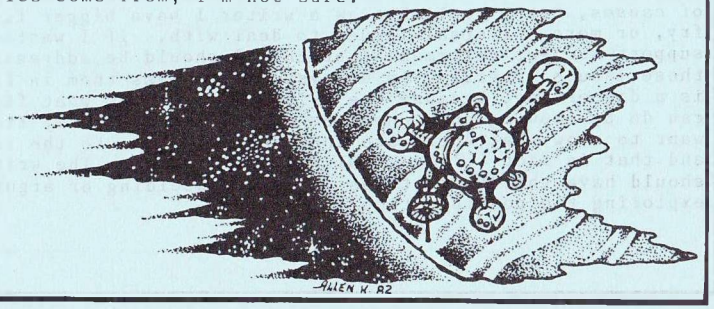
The more I examine the sources of my own writing, the more I see the subconscious at work constantly. While I think I'm in control and applying all these rules of craft, the subconscious is at work and doing my best writing for me.

When I wrote "A Letter from the Clearys," I had gotten a letter from some friends of ours in the Midwest, but the letter arrived late. I can't even remember why because I've made up so many circumstances around that letter. LIke Mark Twain, I remember only what never happened. In the interval between their writing the letter and my reading it, I had heard from them by phone, and all sorts of things had changed, so that the circumstances in the letter were no longer true. I got to thinking on my way home from the post office with my dog,"What if the writer of the letter had died or some catastrophe had overtaken the family? What would be the implications of receiving this kind of letter from the dead?" That's one source.

In addition, I had been wanting to write a post-nuclear holocaust story, because every s-f writer has to write at least one. That's a rite-of-passage for the s-f writer! I also don't agree that anybody else does those correctly. I sat down consciously to combine these two ideas and began to deal with all the technical aspects of the story I wanted to do.

Since I had chosen a thirteen-year-old narrator, I spent weeks and weeks being concerned with how thirteen-year-olds speak, what kind of sentences and words they use, how they swear. And since I was setting the story in a locale that I was familiar with and wanted to create both a real landscape and a psychological landscape, I was concerned with how I could deceive the reader into believing that the world still existed as we know it and thus allow the reader only gradually to discover the catastrophe that had taken place: what details should I provide and at what points? I was dealing with all those circumstances, and that's what I thought the story was about. I had also decided that the story would be about my own thirteen-year-old daughter's anger as an adolescent.

But after the story had been published, I was talking to a friend about an incident in my childhood in which I had felt a tremendous anger and the desire to blow apart a roomful of people, not physically but through the force of what I would say to them. I realized then that the story was really about me and could be traced back to all those buried traumas of childhood and that I hadn't really known what I was doing at all! I was writing one story, and my subconscious was writing another story that I knew nothing about. So I can't say where my stories come from; I'm not sure.



Ingersoll: Are you suggesting that when writers start out there is a temptation to write autobiographically, using more superficial details and incidents, and that eventually writers draw more subtly from deeper parts of their beings?

Willis: I've always liked to use the metaphor of distilling: it goes in grain and comes out whiskey. I have a friend who talks of material "festering" inside of the writer, and maybe he's closer to the truth. Some process of change is going on with the material.

Kress: We were talking earlier about writers having a limited number of themes, because they have only so much "grain," or so many "festering sores," whichever it is.

Willis: Writers do have a certain number of themes that they return to again and again. I will write a story and five years later discover I'm at it again, I guess because I didn't get it right the first time.

Kress: Besides the rite of passage, what do you see as your major theme?

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I write about personal relationships, especially about the responsibilities involved in them. I'm very concerned about civilization, about people who are fully aware of the abyss beneath us, yet try to build a platform to keep from falling into it. That's a theme in "Firewatch," in which St. Paul's is a symbol for me of all the things we try to make in the face of destructive tendencies: distrust, hatred, and most of all our limitations -- our ignorance and misunderstanding of things as they really are. Those tendencies work toward the collapse of civilization; and yet our best impulses -- kindness, cooperation, love, the desire to make or save something -- are also evident in my characters. For that reason, my characters are frequently described as "old fashioned."

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Willis: First, I probably should address the issue of the "public-service announcement." Frequently I've been urged to address the themes of feminism in my work, or this or that cause. It is very important to me as a writer not to espouse any causes at all -- not that as a person I don't have plenty of causes, but I feel that as a writer I have bigger fish to fry, or more universal issues to deal with. If I wanted to support nuclear disarmament or ERA, I should be addressing those issues directly, in essays. To address them in fiction is a disservice, because the writer then limits what fiction can do by showing only one side of the issue. In my fiction I want to show that there are thousands of sides to the issue and that in fact it's a problem, not an issue. The writer should have the desire to be fair, not deciding or arguing but exploring the possibilities.

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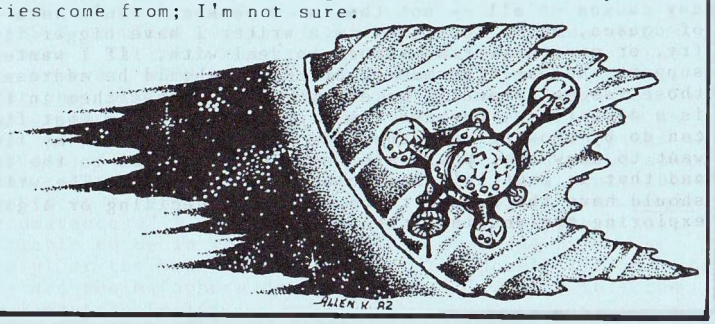

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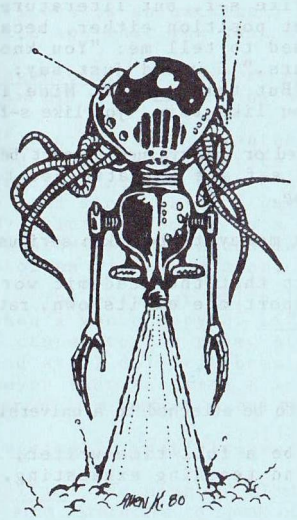
Kress: In taking this rather even-handed approach to subjects like feminism, you're not saying that the position of women writers in s-f is the same as that of male writers in the field. What do you see as the differences?



Willis: That's not a writing issue; that's a writer's issue affecting me as a person. Historically speaking, women came late to s-f as they came late to everything. As a person, I get some flak, and I have to deal with the problems that any woman does. The key word for women in the Eighties is not liberated; it's harried. They feel pulled in all directions. They want to "have it all," find they can't, and then have to decide what to give up. But those are the problems of women in any field. Those problems are much more real to me than the problems of men making chauvinistic remarks like, "Women can't really do male viewpoints."

I like to do male viewpoints and male voices, and it's difficult sometimes to get those down on the page, because when you're pulling from your deepest subconscious, obviously what's coming out is you, and that's very sexually charged.

Kress: Some s-f critics like Joanna Russ and James Gunn have said that s-f needs to be judged by different standards, because s-f writers are dealing more explicitly with ideas; therefore character, style, and some of the traditional touchstones of mainstream literature should exist only to the extent that they serve the idea. What intersection do you see between the critical values by which mainstream has always been judged and s-f as it grows?

Willis: S-F is part of literature; its subject-matter may be different, but its nature isn't. The attitude you just expressed can be a way of making excuses for stories that lack the essentials of all literature. S-F has been trying very hard to justify itself -- it's sort of the nouveau riche of literature, and we try too hard to prove that we do "belong in the neighborhood," and like Molly Brown we tend to be a little loud and garish but very open and kind-hearted. When I write stories, I want to be judged by the same standards as any other writer.

Ingersoll: Do you feel that you are being judged by the same standards, or do you feel that more is being expected of you, because s-f is a kind of "poor cousin" of mainstream?

Willis: S-F is often guilty of taking itself far too seriously, and I'm sure I fit into that category sometimes. It is frustrating, however, when people say, "When will you write something serious, or important?" These are the best I can do. To me, stories about death, life, time, and the universe are as important as I can get. People are put off by the trappings of s-f, and ask, "What possesses you to write stories about spaceships and robots?" I answer, "I've never written a story about a spaceship or a robot in my life. I write stories about people and circumstances." I personally like all the metaphors that are available to me in working with this expanded universe. Time-travel or the expanses of space or the possibility of other cultures are the metaphors or tools of s-f I use to tell the stories I want to tell.

One option available to s-f writers is to say: "Take the money and run. We're laughing all the way to the bank. How much do journals pay you for your poems?" I don't feel that way; I don't write merely for money. And the people who say that don't either, but they're forced into that position. Another option is to say: "Well, I don't actually write s-f, but literature disguised as s-f." I can't accept that position either, because what I write really is s-f. People used to tell me: "You know, I don't like most s-f, but I like yours." I would just say: "Thank you." Now I'm likely to say: "But this is s-f. Mine is right in the middle of s-f, and if you like this, you like s-f."

Ingersoll: I wonder if you don't feel ignored or undervalued in part because many of you who write fantasy and s-f are not attached to a university, the way poets have to be.

Willis: Do you mean we make too much money to be taken seriously?

Ingersoll: Not that so much as the fact that the academic world, like any group, is more likely to support one of its own, rather than "one of you sci fi people."

Willis: That's a possibility.

Kress: Do you think it's an advantage not to be attached to a university?

Willis: I see it as an advantage to be a full-time writer, rather than to have another job. I find teaching exhausting, even though I love it.

Kress: How about the question of teaching? There are some people in the s-f community who say that writing cannot be taught; therefore, writers' workshops are a waste of time. Even professional gatherings in which writers give critiques of each other's manuscripts are not fruitful. How do you feel about that?

Willis: I feel that writing cannot be taught, any more than painting can. But is there any argument that you shouldn't teach people to mix colours and do perspective and draw? No one says that you ought to tell aspiring painters to slop paint on a canvas any old way they want and call it painting. That's the way I feel about writing classes. You can learn to use the tools --plot, characterization, detail -- and to study pieces of literature that work and figure out why. I just don't understand why there is argument in writing when there's not similar argument in painting. Would there be an advantage to a painter in not knowing how to do perspective?

On the other hand, I don't believe that a writing instructor should tell students: "These are the rules of writing. This is what a story should be." When I began writing, that was a problem because what I was trying to do was very different from what others in classes or professional groups were doing. They would try to force me into a mold, and I didn't want to go. I was afraid that they might be right, and that theirs was the only way stories should be written.

Kress: I think writing classes should be taught by writers and not by academics who are not practicing writers themselves. But I want to ask you about something else. You got your start by writing "confession" stories. What did that do for you?

Willis: I loved writing "confession" stories because they were a simple form that I could easily master--they're chronologically plotted and have a small cast of characters who speak in terms of a very narrow world of today. It's the classic format of this-is-a-flaw-that-has-become-a-problem-that-leads-to-a-crisis-and-then-a-resolution. And I was able to sell them, which for writers is an extremely important form of validation, even if it's not what you want to be writing eventually.

Ingersoll: Let me take you back to your beginnings as a writer. When did you start writing? When did you decide that you were a writer?

Willis: I always wanted to write. I was born making up stories. I didn't actually write for a long time: I didn't even keep a journal until I was in seventh grade, and I didn't write a completed story until I was in high school. But I made up stories. My chief amusement as a child was sitting in a swing and making up stories. My second-most favourite activity was acting out stories with my sister.

The point at which I found my role model was in sixth grade when I won a copy of Little Women, abridged with four or five pictures to the page. At that point I wanted to be Jo March--and still do! It's been something of a disappointment to discover that becoming a writer doesn't mean I can sit around in a garret in a long skirt and eat apples and spend all my time writing.

Ingersoll: What else were you reading at that point?

Willis: Nothing but slosh. I had no guidance, and there was no children's literature to speak of--no Judy Blume--so I was reading junk.

Ingersoll: Which writers in s-f did you read first?

Willis: At one point, lacking any other way of figuring out what to read, I started through our branch library reading books whose author's names began with "A." I never made it to the letter "B" because I read Asimov and liked him so much that I began looking for the books with the spaceship and atom on the spine to indicate that they were s-f, which used to be shelved in with the mainstream, instead of being segregated in a separate section of the library. I went on to read Heinlein and Tolkien and just about everybody else in Fantasy and s-f --but never exclusively because in college I was an English major.

Kress: Who is important to you now?

Willis: For the past ten years, William Styron has been my hero and model; however, he just slipped a little. For some reason, I had never read Nabokov. I needed to read Lolita (which I had read before but not very carefully) because I had remembered the very poignant confrontation scene at the end. Since I wanted to do something similar in one of my stories, I decided to go to the master to see how he handled the scene. I ended up reading the whole book, dismayed that I'd somehow missed him but delighted that I had all his other books waiting for me. Most of the books that I read and that are important to me now are not in s-f. That's not s-f's fault; it's just that I read very eclectically.

Kress: What does that say about the genre, though, that your favourites are not in s-f?

Willis: Nothing. S-F has produced proportionately as many classics; but it just hasn't been around so long, so there will seem to be fewer.

There are classics like A Canticle for Leibowitz, and many short stories. I think s-f has never done as well in the novel as in short fiction. There are brilliant s-f short stories that I will stack up next to anything done in mainstream, but I have trouble compiling a list of "classic" s-f novels.

Ingersoll: Why is that?

Willis: I have no idea. When I started reading s-f what I had discovered was that after doing Asimov and Clarke and Heinlein I went on to read books like The Year's Best S-F and never went back to the novels. What I liked best were short stories in s-f, and that's what I decided I wanted to write. I do write novels, but I don't have any desire to be only a novelist. And I didn't write short stories to make a name so that I could sell my novels. I intend to write short stories always, and I think it's a different genre.

Perhaps it's because an idea that is fascinating enough to hold a short story together is insufficient to sustain a novel. It's maybe like a metaphor that you can push only so far.

Ingersoll: Or the difficulty in writing a long lyric poem.

Kress: Of your short stories, your two Nebulas are for "Firewatch" and "A Letter from the Clearys." Sometimes awards are not given for what writers consider their best work. Are they your favourites? Do you think these are your best stories?

Willis: "Firewatch" is the child of my heart; it's my favourite story, but it's probably not my best. I think my best work is what I happen to have just finished. "All My Darling Daughters" is the most powerful thing I've written. Lincoln's Dreams, my new novel, is the best thing I've written.

Ingersoll: What does it mean to you, as a relative newcomer to the field, to have received these s-f awards?

Willis: It's one of those things that it's difficult to confess to. When I was reading the Nebula collections -- I found those very early, loved them, and wondered why they were better than all the others -- I was secretly saying to myself, "I'm going to have one of those." When I won the Nebula, it was the fulfilment of a lifelong dream. Since then, of course, I've had my disillusionments about the whole system of awards and lobbying and politicking.

Kress: In what sense?

Willis: There's the same mix of compromising and improvising as in any other human enterprise. At the same time the awards have not entirely lost their glow --I was fulfilling a childhood fantasy in winning them.

Kress: What advice would you give to aspiring s-f writers?

Willis: Start with the "As," and read everything you can -- not just s-f but history, science, and especially biography. Read only what interests you, and read exhaustively in subjects of interest. I don't see any other way to become a writer than to read.

EVENING STROLL

Facades of mansions sail
Past like resurrected
Spanish galleons as the
Sidewalk cement discharges
A milky way of stars. I
Wonder if some hadn't
Spilled from my own head.
Each tree is a newsreel
Of data delivered
Graciously by their
Recording greenery.
All reports inform us
Of the view from above
And beyond.
They have seen cartwheels in
Mire prior to screeching
Metallic asphalt.
They have whispered to Wilde
In his wilderness of thought.
They floated directly
Into Huxley's pupils
And embedded themselves
Within his awareness.
They swayed to the rhythmic
Flight of Isadora's torso.
And now they bless me!
I can see it coming in waves.
My mind, it is immaculate.
My soul is open.
Let all seeing things
Pour into it.
Split me in half.
In half again.
Let darkness bleed from me
Until only pure light remains.
I will radiate like the
Shining white knight who is
Raiding my brain again.
His armour reflecting sunlight.
Blinding the moon. bleaching
The evening and moving.
Always moving....

--Richard Mandrachio--

REMNANTS

Cast by the withered arms of the rose
within a sultry soil all flowers melt forgotten.
Promiscuously the bald summer delivers
its buds to death, the queen of irony.

One witness in the drama desires
the spectacle of winter's thrashing pulse,
or the pleasant shores of autumn
and those gifts of its contemplative muse.

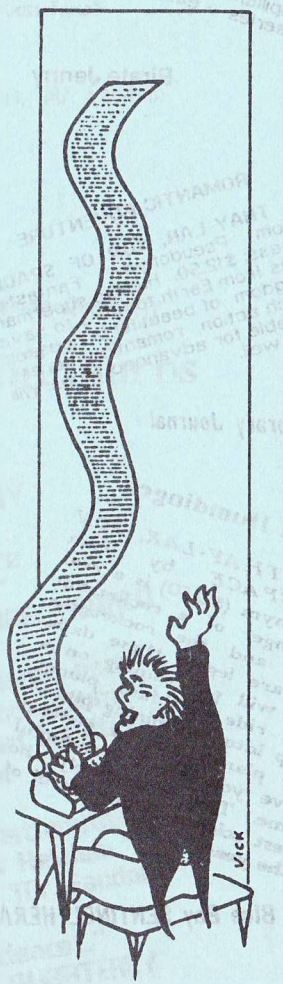
Autumn is ingenuous
this evening of our year.
Our evening is a placid enterprise
despite events and flourishes.

Dawnlessly uncultivated fields are honest without flowers.
The reigning shadows dissemble nothing.

-- David Castleman --

Blurb Happy by Bob Tucker

Thay-Lar Son of Space by Tom Pseudonym



"A man of mystery was seen to enter the darkened flat at 313-B Jackson Street, carrying beneath his cloak a sinister black bag. The man never emerged from the building, but minutes later a dazzling pillar of fire shot skyward, and the ground shook. Quickly the FBI threw a cordon about the block and moved in to investigate. The strange man with the terrifying powers was gone, with the only clue to his disappearance a scorched, gaping hole in the roof."

Once again that master story-teller, Tom Pseudonym, has written a clever, fast-moving novel of double agents and derring-do of the atomic world. As always, Pseudonym has peopled his story with believable characters, with living human beings and eldritch aliens. His scenes are colorful and exciting, his pace is breath-taking, and his background is solidly grounded on the very latest scientific research. The far planets have never been presented so dramatically.

This is an original novel, and has never before appeared in print.

The Reviews

From Brooklyn to Barsoom

We've already read science-fiction novels that were illiterate, illogical, or just plain silly -- but Tom Pseudonym's THAY-LAR, SON OF SPACE -- an unthinking mixture of Mickey Spillane and the Barsoom series -- easily tops them all.

Pirate Jenny

ROMANTIC ADVENTURE

THAY-LAR, SON OF SPACE: Tom Pseudonym; Fantastic Press; $12.50. Humble superman flies from Earth to Mars to save kingdom of beautiful princesses. Much action, romantic interest. Suitable for advanced teens. Will rent well.

Library Journal

Real Humdinger

THAY-LAR, SON OF SPACE by Tom Pseudonym ($12.50) is a real humdinger of a rocketship story, and the rocketship fans are legion these days. You will go zooming on a wild ride to Mars, plunge deep into the mining pits of the planet, and in general have yourself a wonderful time. This is probably the best science fiction novel of the year.

Blue Bay SENTINEL-HERALD

THAY-LAR, SON OF SPACE, (Fantastic Press, $12.50) by Tom Pseudonym, is the damndest piece of tripe I've ever read, and I have been reading good and bad science-fiction since twelve years of age. Pseudonym is a chucklehead who was born without imagination and has been earning a living in that vacuum ever since. Imagine, if you can, a sinister man with three eyes living peacefully and undetected in a quiet Brooklyn neighborhood; imagine that man constructing a space-ship -- piece by smuggled piece -- in his apartment building without anyone being aware of it; and try to imagine that ridiculous alien blasting off from earth without pulverizing the entire block and the hundreds of humans living in it.

Not content with that, Pseudonym commits stupidity upon stupidity after his hero's departure. Thay-Lar (and what is that supposed to mean? Is it spelled backward, like another cathartic?) possesses the power of psi, if you please, and wills himself to live in naked space without the necessary nuisance of breathing -- but nine pages later the stumbling dolt is down with "Martian strep-throat" (whatever that is) because his creator forgot he had the magic power to will off physical limitations. For that matter, his psi powers alternately work and not work all through the book: Pseudonym can't remember from one chapter to the next. Carrying on from this ridiculous point would be useless. Pseudonym's previous books each set a new mark, one below the other, and this volume does not depart from that tradition.

Damon Knight

Another new book from the never-ceasing science-fiction presses is Tom Pseudonym's interplanetary thriller, THAY-LAR, SON OF SPACE. I was talking to Tom at the convention a few months ago and he told me about the book, and the plot is real cool. The fake fans -- the loud mouths always knocking science fiction and fandom -- have never had a good word for Tom, calling him a "world saver" and a "superman hack" but I've read this book and I can truthfully say it will stack against anything written by Bradbury or Heinlein. The science is pretty darned good, too, and nobody in the whole field extrapolates like Tom does. The critics have been knocking it, but then they knock everything said about psi these days -- and they claim to be real science fiction fans! Get Tom's book. You won't regret it.

Sid Tokus, "Mr. Fandom"

What's incredible about THAY-LAR is not its zero-dimensional characterization or even its inept "super-science"; it's the decision of Fantastic Press to publish it in the first place.

Riverside Quarterly

The Paperback Reprint Blurbs

"THAY-LAR, SON OF SPACE... easily tops them all."
PIRATE JENNY

"...probably the best science fiction novel of the year..."
Blue Bay SENTINEL-HERALD

"Pseudonym's previous books each set a new mark.....and this volume does not depart from that tradition."
Damon Knight

"...it will stack up against anything written by Bradbury or Heinlein."
Sid Tokus, "Mr. Fandom"

"...incredible...super-science..."
RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY

The Scoop

Flash, flash, fans! Good old Tom Pseudonym has done it again! Not content with racking up several hundred thousand dollars with a hardcover and then a paperback sale, he has just announced exclusively to LOCUST that THAY-LAR, SON OF SPACE has been sold to the movies! Yes! Another half million bucks (at least) in Tom's pockets and another swell science fiction movie coming up! Watch for it!

Sol Drek, Locust 606, "Fandom's Reliable Newspaper"

The Trade Press Notice

Bem Boom Big Bo

Benny C. Goldman, production chief of Mammoth Studios, announced today the purchase of *THAY-LAR, SON OF SPACE*, which he described as a natural for the booming monster market. The property was penned by Thomas Pseudonym, a top writer in the science fiction field. To be shot in Mammoth-Scope and Mammoth-Color, the seat-gripper is slated to roll about the first of the month. Harry Zinwheeler has been set to do the screenplay, and the first of his chores will be the creation of an awesome monster which — according to the storyline — threatens to destroy the earth. The monster is something of a shocker: it can live in space without breathing which, Zinwheeler said, makes it something special indeed. Jim Strum, who directed *The Creature from the Star Islands*, will pilot. The original title, deemed unsuitable to a marquee, will be changed to *The Son from Outer Space*. Get it?

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&
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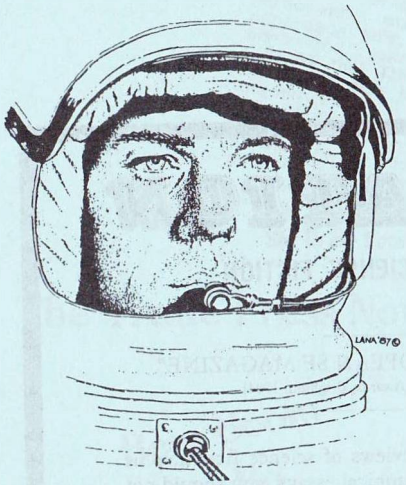

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The Mage

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— *Fantasy Review*

". . . an extraordinarily well-produced work at an absurdly low price . . ."
— Michael E. Stamm

". . . it ain't bad, kiddo, not bad at all."
— Harlan Ellison

The Mage: a biannual magazine of science fiction and fantasy that prints a balance of fiction, articles, poetry, commentary, reviews and artwork. Typeset in an 8 1/2 by 11 inch format, a typical issue runs 60 to 64 pages.

Winter 1987 — includes: fiction by Harry Dolan, Wade Tarzia, and others; a tribute to fantasy/horror artist Frank Utpatel; poetry by H. R. Felgenhauer, Tom Rentz, and others; a critical article on the work of H. P. Lovecraft by Peter Cannon; and more.

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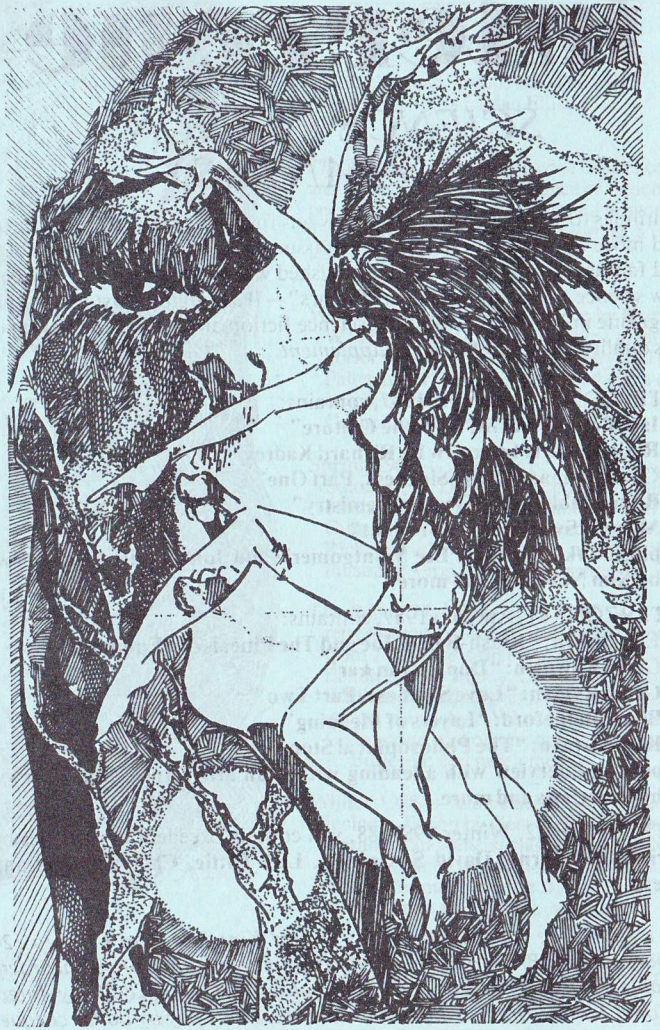
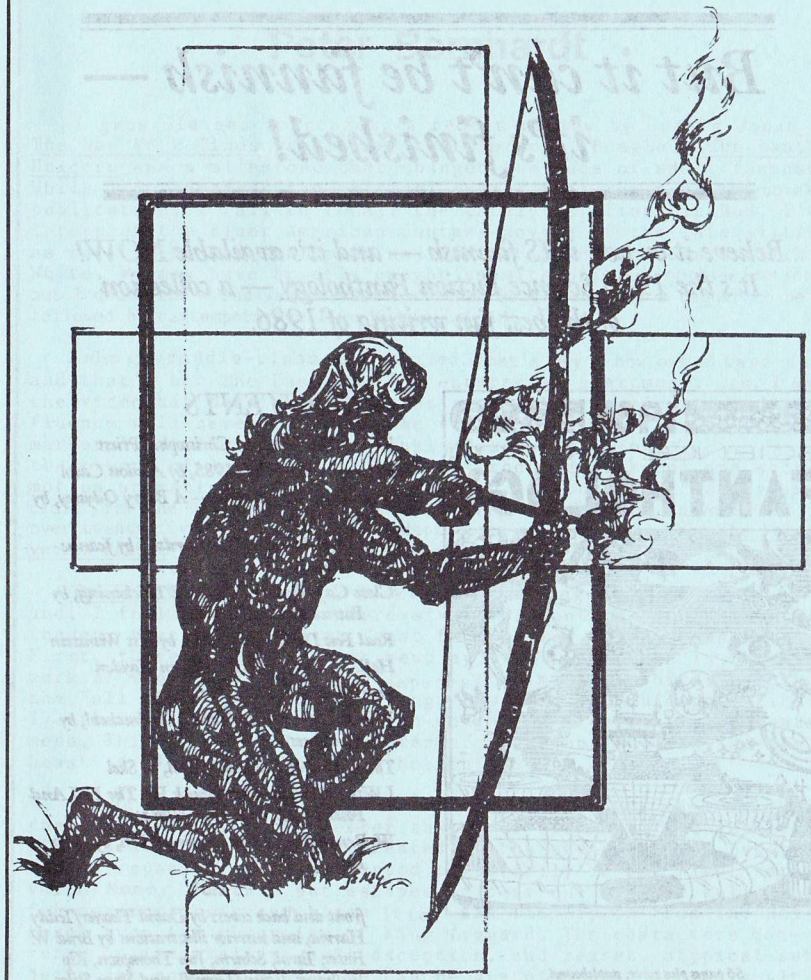




Theatre of the Fantastic

by

Peter Bernhardt

I grow old and forgetful. A recent review by Gerald Jonas in The New York Times proclaimed that Peter S. Beagle's The Last Unicorn was a milestone that changed the face of adult fantasy. While I do remember the critical praise that followed the novel's publication, I fail to recall the catalytic effect it had. I'd interpret the finer American fantasy novels of the late sixties as reflecting the influence and admiration of Tolkein and T.H. White. We may have briefly caught up with British sophistication but I doubt the trend was pervasive or that Beagle carried a banner to be followed by contemporaries like Ursula LeGuin.

I also grow middle-class and married. That's why I now own a tape deck and that's how The Last Unicorn entered my apartment. Yes, I know the video has been available for years, but my rise toward affluence will never parallel the rising prices of the electronic marketplace. The film is a Rankin/Bass production. You've seen their work often enough as they've produced both cel and stop-motion animation for Saturday morning cartoons and "family specials" for the holidays. Rankin/Bass have remained fantasy omnivores for over twenty-five years, providing adaptations of everything from The Velveteen Rabbit to The Dragon and the George.

The Last Unicorn must be Rankin/Bass's longest film to date and, I feel, their most impressive. VCR renters should be warned, though, that there are at least four movies in this cassette. First, there is Beagle's screenplay. Second, there is the artwork of Rankin/Bass and the Japanese animators. Third, we have the "all star" cast and the songs provided by "Chicago." Finally, there is the fourth film in which the previous ingredients mesh. This is a fabulous monster of a cartoon but, unlike the beast it glorifies, rarely a harmonious one.

Beagle appears to have been encouraged to write a screenplay that would respect the deeper themes of his novel and leave the plot intact. We are still treated to the she-unicorn's quest for her species. She is trapped temporarily in the night carnival of Mommy Fortuna but escapes to confront the Red Bull, suffer metamorphosis and human life, and finally to free the unicorns from the obsession of King Haggard. The characters converse on immortality, self-deception, and regret, atypical subjects for most cartoons. We can be grateful that Beagle's wit and sense of fun haven't been lost. However, one might just as well turn off the machine and re-read the novel to take advantage of Beagle's descriptions and character development. Those in charge of audio/visual aspects of this cartoon do not keep up with this writer.

Now we've all read vindictive reviews in which the critic attacks the film makers for spoiling a favourite book. Remember how the daggers glinted following Ralph Bakshi's version of The Lord of the Rings? I'm no Inklingoid, and you will not hear me suggest that Beagle be canonized. We are still left with the typical sloppy work of Rankin/Bass that smacks of budget cuts and with bored actors who make a quick profit providing the voice of a dullard prince or a Brooklyn butterfly

You just can't be convinced of the wildness of magical forces when they are declaimed by a figure displaying less fluidity of line than a Turkish shadow puppet. If we are going to portray the power of illusion, the deception of life and motion must be protected. The figures start and stop dead to that monotonous brand of Japanese animation which demands that when a character speaks, not a single part of his body move except his mouth.

Rankin/Bass provide us with their usual limited sense of the grotesque. Greedy, crude people are invariably short and fat, with warts, double-chins and hunchbacks. Serious villains remain tall, thin, and angular, with noses sharp and flat enough to open envelopes. This is an unsuccessful attempt to distract us from the really disturbing elements of myth. A harpy is not a fleshy condor with droopy dugs like a sow. In fact, it is this attention to bare tit that is supposed to remind us that The Last Unicorn is a cartoon for adults. Mammaries return in various guises, but I should think that even hack animators would be more interested in portraying Beagle's wondrous interpretation of Celano.

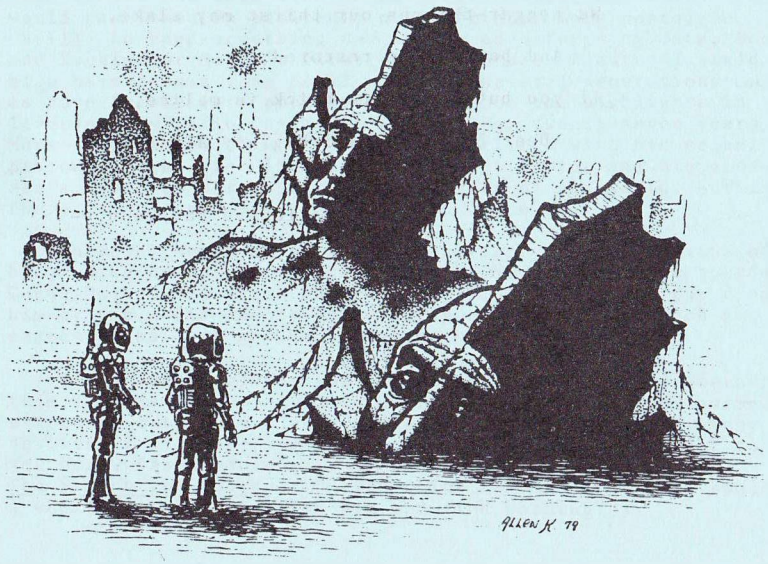
The Last Unicorn is even less satisfying when it tries to depict beauty. The sets are reminiscent of the "romantic"postcards favoured by teenagers in Mexico and Central America. Perspective is squashed to give everything a glossy sheen. Lovers have neotonously large eyes and the scalp of a beautiful woman resembles a collection of iced butter curls. Does anyone above the age of fourteen really want to watch a love duet in which the characters are transformed into fluttery doves that land in a dreamland of mauve bushes, billiard table lawns, and motionless pools? While we're on the subject, those songs fail to move the plot. They have been crowded into the Castle of Hagsgate sequence, well into the second half, when they should have emphasized the developing tensions and alliances between the characters.

Does Rankin/Bass squander the full potential of the cartoon? No, some segments are striking. Angela Lansbury provides the voice of Mommy Fortuna, the witch. She could have merely reprised her Mrs. Moffat from "Sweeny Todd." Instead, we are treated to a rich, low, and secretive voice. This time the potato body style really works as they've given Mommy dead white staring eyes and a hat that resembles a small, dead tree. Dramatic shading gives her an appropriate crazed look as she prowls around her "circus of home-made horrors." More attention (and money?) appears to have been spent on the sequence in the night carnival. I really enjoyed those short moments in which the manticore is revealed as an old lion and the satyr melts into a chimpanzee.

In fact, this cartoon takes quantum leaps when it depicts the magic with the comic. The artists become inventive and attempt to expand on the novel. Schmendrick the magician attempts to escape the ropes that bind him , but instead animates the tree, which promptly falls in love with him. Paul Frees gives the tree the voice of a romantic but slighted dowager as she attempts to cuddle the struggling magician between her root-bole breasts. The film is at its best when Schmendrick must fool a sarcastic skull by offering it non-existent wine. The skull drains the empty carafe, becoming tipsy and maudlin for a moment. The cheekbones take on a rosy blush. It's a lovely touch.

The opening credits give you an idea of what this film might have been. They roll against an old fresco or tapestry depicting a wild unicorn in a forest. But instead of that shaggy muscular creature we expect to see there is a sleek, fragile, half-pony and half-greyhound, with Mia Farrow providing her girlish voice amplified by an echo chamber. I think this depiction is calculated to appeal to what social critic Paul Fussell calls the High Prole fad for the unicorn motif. Emphasize the fey, benign aspects of the myth and the unicorn is as suitable for commercialization as pandas, koalas, or dolphins.

Once I thought that cel-animation studios would happily claim modern classics of fantasy and present them to an enthusiastic generation that grew up on cartoons. This is only half-true. Quality animation has become so expensive that one might as well spend millions on a live cast and spectacular effects. Furthermore, with a few important exceptions, the major animation studios seem less interested in adapting the fantasy novel than in presenting their own stories milked from a swollen heritage of classic cartoons made during the thirties, forties, and fifties. This leaves things pretty much in the hands of Rankin/Bass, and it's clear that they will continue to do what is expedient to keep the final product profitable. This film would not have pleased the younger Beagle. Nor would the older Beagle have been content with a series of compromises.



MIDNIGHT AT LOOKING-GLASS PUB

"Affection travels out and in,
Pub windows during daylight.
In liquor shops the bottled gin,
Weeps forsaken in the night.
It seems unfair and rather callous,"
Said Boozer to Baglady Alice.

"But windows have been known to break,
And drinkables be poured.
We beggar-thieves our thirst may slake,
And balance be restored,
If you but toss this brick in malice,
Dear Boozer," said Baglady Alice.

-- Richard Davignon --

HARMONY

by

Jim Harmon

One of the foremost and influential writers of fantasy fiction (and other genres) of the twentieth century has just had his first novel published at age 86. No, not reprinted, and not the first publication of something from his attic trunk. Carlton E. Morse has entered into the print medium for the first time with a novel composed within the last few years, after a long successful career in writing for radio, and a bit for TV, and after nearly as long a retirement from the writing scene.

The hard-cover book, Killer at the Wheel (available from Carlton Morse's own Seven Stones Press for $16.95 plus $1.50 shipping to Star Route Box 50, Woodside, CA 94062) is the first of a series of five novels he plans to publish over the next few years, including two that will feature his I Love a Mystery radio series characters, Jack Packard, Doc Long, and Reggie York. The lead-off of this duo will be based on one of the radio serials, The Widow with the Amputation (not surprisingly, since Morse once told me this was his favourite of the ILAM stories) and Stuff a Lady's Hatbox (a new story, apparently).

"What's it about?" That's the question the average person asks about a book or a movie. It's often considered low-brow--the more discerning person is supposed to be interested in style, technique, and execution, above all else. But in reality, some subjects are so mundanely boring or innately depressing, I can't imagine wading through a book or film about them. This is not the case with Morse's first book, but still, there would have been an admitedly non-literary, more nostalgic thrill to read something new in the adventures of Jack, Doc, and Reggie for Morse's first print venture. A natural would also have been a long novel covering several generations (such as have become very popular) touching on the highlights in the lives of his radio One Man's Family. For twenty-seven years, Morse chronicled Father Barbour's conflicts with his sexually precocious children like Claudia and Clifford, and his eldest son's, Paul's, adventures in many parts of the world. Surely, there is at least one book of print there.

Instead, Morse chose to get away from these creations of his, which hound him, I suppose, Like Sherlock Holmes hounded Conan Doyle, and which may remind him of restraints put upon him by the media and by advertising agencies, for which he expresses no love in the volume at hand.

It is almost giving some of the plot away to say whether this is a fantasy -- that is, a book dealing with paranormal events -- but since I am writing for an audience of fantasy devotees I will say, yes, there is something of interest to you here. (As someone said of the recent Star Trek movie, The Search for Spock-- "Do you think they are going to spend a whole movie looking for him and find nothing?")

Everything in life can't be boiled down to a common denominator. Yet there is an urge to get some kind of handle on a thing, to put it in some sort of category. I would say Carlton Morse's first novel, Killer at the Wheel, can best be compared to a Frank Capra movie, particularly one like Alias John Doe.

Both the Morse novel and the Capra film offer a fantastic premise, and then through human intervention (with varying degrees of Divine will also presumed) the fantastic becomes reality. Of course, Capra's long suit was lovable characters, such as played by Gary Cooper in "Doe" and Jimmy Stewart in other films. (As a matter of fact, Morse also created some of the most beloved characters in popular culture: the Three Comrades of the A-1 Detective Agency and the Barbour family, phantoms that still haunt the minds of those who met them decades after they disappeared from the public scene.) The parallel between Morse and Capra diverges here, because in Killer at the Wheel Morse presents almost no really likeable characters, and only a few one can sympathize with. The cast is huge, but if there is any one central character it is Cass Davenport, city editor of the Los Angeles Chronicle,"fifty-four, bald, grizzled...cynical, diabolical, maudlin and juvenile..." In Davenport, one suspects a projection of one-time newspaperman, Carl Morse, with a self-flagellating emphasis on his own perceived faults. One might even suspect a conscious or unconscious play in the name "Davenport" on the Morris (or Morse) chair. Davenport is a bigger piece of furniture in the newspaper game than Morse actually got to be.

The fantastic premise is: God speaks through an obscure minister and delivers an Eleventh Commandment, to the effect that Thou shalt not allow another to die through reckless disregard -- especially, it seems, when driving on the freeway. To establish this commandment, for seven times seven days (that's forty-none for those without a computer handy) the reckless killers shall lose their "best beloved" to atone for their killings, and the innocent victims shall rise from their graves.

After a long, long build-up, something indeed begins to happen. Do the "best beloveds" die? Do innocent victims return to life? Morse takes 389 pages to tell this story. Will Captain Kirk search for Spock through ninety-odd minutes of movie and not find him?

Richard Kyle, bookseller and author, once said to me that Carlton Morse was a master of "stalling." He could take the same kind of eerie mystery situation the Shadow wound up in one thirty minute episode and run it on for weeks or months on many fifteen minute or even half-hour episodes of I Love a Mystery and make it interesting. Morse uses much of this skill in Killer at the Wheel to keep one reading. He gets into characters very accurately -- even people about 15% of his age. One glimpse has a teen-age student looking on a library as a dusty, musty relic of another age that doesn't even deserve to exist now that we have television. I'm sure that attitude is "right-on" for many today, and some of them past teen years.

I would like to say right out loud that this book reveals not the slightest decrease in Morse's powers of writing, observation, and intelligence. Through some benevolent Providence, this is the same Carlton Morse who wrote I Love a Mystery and One Man's Family in 1939 or 1949. In Morse's own words, he is a thirty year old soul trapped in an eighty six year old barrel. Rex Stout was writing Nero Wolfe novels at eighty eight, and this is the same type of intellect.

Morse does make a few slips -- not because of his age, but perhaps because of his absence from broadcasting studios and newspaper offices since his retirement. Announcers no longer go down into studio audiences with microphones with "long black cords." Boom mikes from the main floor pick up people in the seats. And the Los Angeles Chronicle was getting out a few too many "Extras." "Extras" have virtually disappeared, owing to faster delivery of TV and radio news. An Extra is generally put out now as sort of a gesture to the historical importance of the event. The last Extra that appeared in the Los Angeles area was on the death of the Challenger astronauts. A minor point.

In the course of the novel, Morse (who lives in Northern California) proved to me he knows the streets and institutions of Los Angeles better than I do, and I have lived in this area for twenty-seven years. He proves he knows the human animal, and he proves he knows how to write. In an age where TV shows and movies are written by people who have had no experience with either writing or living, Morse can write. And for a man who spent decades writing virtually nothing but dialogue his exposition is clear, concise, and accessable.

Most people read fiction for entertainment through sex or violence -- action, if you prefer. There's some of that in Killer at the Wheel. But some people read fiction for ideas. These people are most often in the fantasy and s-f field.This book is presented as a "straight" novel, but fantasy fans should definitely be informed there is something for them in here. Besides, how many times have you read a review saying that a book has "elements that smack of I Love a Mystery" -- or that some movie or TV show had a "fun-loving relationship similar to the old I Love a Mystery" ? (In fact, every movie or TV drama that has a group of two or more heroes owes a lot to this particular show.) Here is a chance to read a new book by one of the most influential writers in the world of fantasy or popular culture. There will be no more new books by Conan Doyle or Lester Dent (Kenneth Robeson), or Walter Gibson (Maxwell Grant), but you have a chance now to read the first in a new series of books by Carlton E. Morse. The planet Earth does not produce many timeless originals like Morse --so don't miss your chance to read his first novel.

****

A personal note: I appreciate the letters of comment hoping that I'd get to join the world of radio drama by doing a new Tom Mix series for Ralston's fiftieth anniversary of sponsoring the show. Well, I did do it -- I wrote, produced, and appeared as sidekick Pecos Williams to Curley Bradley playing Tom Mix. But good things don't last forever. Richard Chamberlain did Shogun but don't expect to dial around and find it now. The brief revival lasted only a few months, through advertised premiums, broadcast interviews, etc., and there were only six radio episodes offered. Recordings can still be found on LPs and cassettes. There were some plans for putting our new Tom Mix show on the air twice a week for twenty-six weeks, but Ralston lost interest, even though their sales went up by 20% (according to an in-house bulletin). But as the first-time streetwalker proudly proclaimed: "I did it and I got paid for it!"

****

ASYMMETREE

Few now remember
The autumn of the wood,
Woodwinter envelopes us,
Threadbare elbows shun the cold.

Dogs spurn cement pillars
Spreading rusty limbs to shade plastic benches;
I am a treeweeper,
A styrofoam sweeper.

I still remember tranquillity,
Green shade dappling leafy humus;
Now Sunday artists paint palisades of copper,
And bowers of frenetic plastic.

Guilty memories, perhaps,
Make people turn away
When I jackhammer the cement,
Reiving the dead park to plant life within it.

I favour coarse weeds.
Only the ugly can survive;
Twisting green thorns are my garden in the light
of the modern paradise.

-- Lawrence Harding --

THE PEANUT VENDOR

When the peanut vendor asked
the elephant what he thought
about life he trumpeted,
loudly, into the back of
a snail shell, forgetting its
inhabitant was stricken
with a particularly
acute sense of hearing, and
burst its cochlea which wound
itself around the feet of
the peanut vendor who fell
into a dung heap dropped by
a star-spangled camel on
his way to Boston to vis-
it some left-over Pilgrims.
Upon finding a sequin
lodged in an extraordin-
arily pungent turd, he sud-
denly remembered that
elephants are notoriously reticent.

-- Hillary Bartholomew --

The Climax of "When the World Screamed"

Dana Martin Batory

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's fourth Professor George Edward Challenger tale, "When the World Screamed," appeared in The Strand Magazine in 1928 (April and May). Of the five adventures constituting the Challenger Chronicles it is the strangest and the most erotic.

The seminal idea can be traced back to French astronomer Camille Flammarion (1842-1925), who put forward one of the first schemes of digging a shaft deep into the Earth for scientific purposes. He sketched out his proposal in an article, "A Hole through the Earth," in the September 1909 issue of The Strand Magazine.*

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* For details, see the present writer's "When the World Screamed: Literary Echoes," Riverside Quarterly, 8 (pp.55-61), 1986.

Professor Challenger, after long consideration, has concluded that "the world upon which we live is itself a living organism, endowed...with a circulation, a respiration, and a nervous system of its own...It is quite unaware of this fungus growth of vegetation and evolution of tiny animalcules which has collected upon it during its travels round the sun as barnacles gather upon the ancient vessel. That is the present state of affairs, and that is what I propose to alter."

But Doyle's story is far more than just a simple tale of science: it's also a lascivious account of one man's search for the ultimate in copulation.

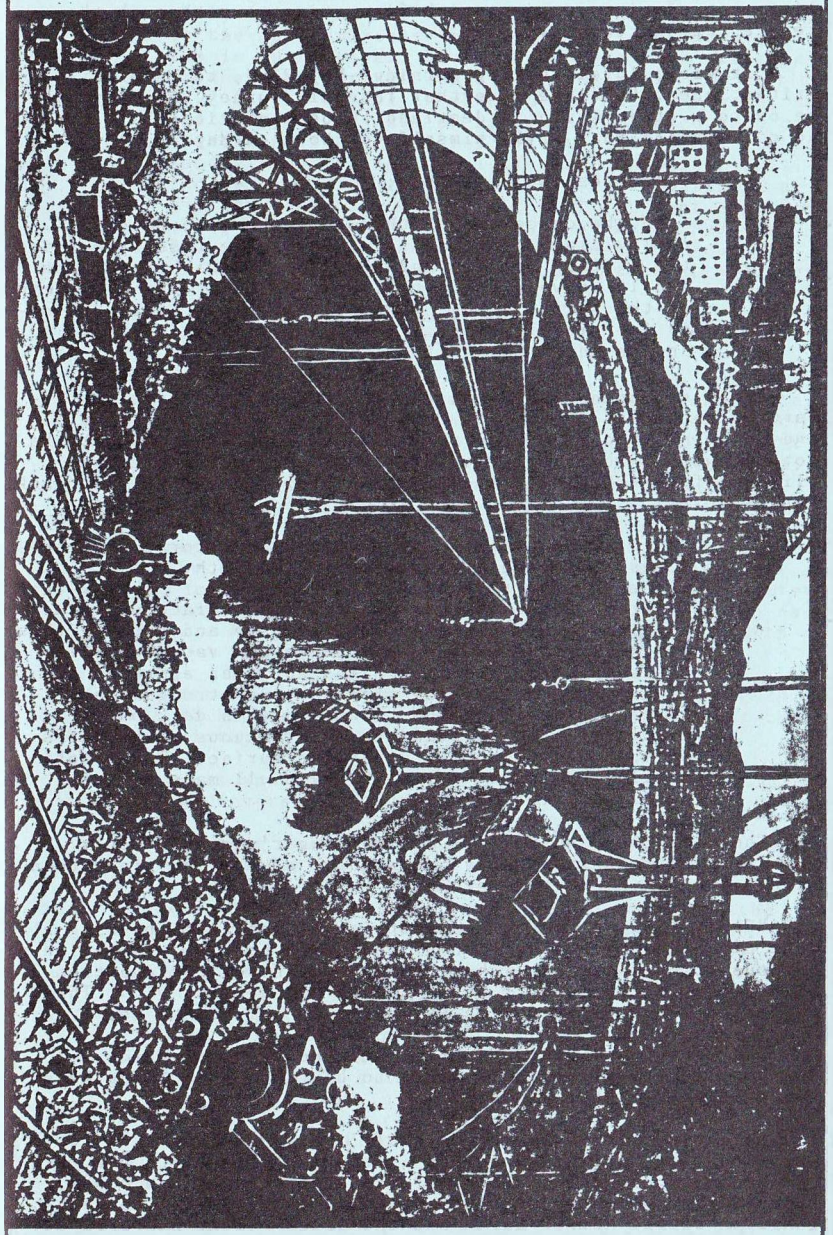
The Professor's plan is to dig "by every known species of drill, borer, crusher, and explosive" to the Earth's highly sensitive inner membrane and then to plunge a drill into it.

"But it is essential," says Peerless Jones, expert artesian well engineer,"that you should let me know what soil the drill is to penetrate. Sand, or clay, or chalk, would each need different treatment."

"Let us say jelly," answers Challenger. "Yes, we will for the present suppose that you have to sink your drill into jelly." Scholar, ex-sailor, and man-of-the-world, Doyle was well aware that "jelly" was contemporary slang for a buxom, good-looking girl.

Further hesitation by Jones leads Challenger to state that: "All that I ask you is to have a drill ready which shall be as sharp as possible, not more than a hundred feet in length, and operated by an electric motor. An ordinary percussion drill driven home by a weight will meet every requirement."

Editor's note: Below and on p. 128 are two of the 1909 Strand illustrations -- more precisely, Mary Emerson's paintings of photographs of these illustrations--since our original photos were too blurred to be reproduced here.



A Hole through the Earth

Dr. Doyle, twice married and father of five, portrays the act of lovemaking in the traditional fashion. We are given the rough brusqueness of anxious, inconsiderate "bridegroom" (Challenger), the coy shyness of a "bride" (Earth)with all its lusty connotations, and a quick figurative tour through the female reproductive system.

"It was a lovely spring morning--May 22nd, to be exact--," writes Jones, "when we made that fateful journey which brought me on to a stage which is destined to be historical." It seems no coincidence that Doyle himself was born on May 22, 1859.

Jones describes the site thus:

> In the concavity of this horseshoe, composed of chalk, clay, coal, and granite, there rose up a bristle of iron pillars and wheels from which the pumps and lifts were operated...Beyond it lay the open mouth of the shaft, a huge yawning pit, some thirty or forty feet in diameter, lined and topped with brick and cement.

After stripping naked and donning coveralls, assistant Edward Malone leads Jones past this bristle of iron pubic hair and down into the round, narrow, vaginal tube of stone. At the bottom, with schoolboy curiosity, he gives him a secretive glimpse of what he is to violate, gently pulling back the black canvas covering.

> It was an amazing sight which lay before us [states Jones]. By some strange cosmic telepathy the old planet seemed to know that an unheard of liberty was about to be attempted. The exposed surface was like a boiling pot. Great grey bubbles rose and burst with a crackling report. The air-spaces and vacuoles below the skin separated and coalesced in an agitated activity. The transverse ripples were stronger and faster in their rhythm than before. A dark purple fluid appeared to pulse in the tortuous anastomoses of channels which lay under the surface. The throb of life was in it all. A heavy smell made the air hardly fit for human lungs.

The "foreplay" activities of Challenger's rough, burly workcrews have inadvertently aroused the slumbering giant to a frenzied pitch of nervous excitement.

"Funny-looking stuff," says the chief engineer, passing his hand over the nearest section of rock. His hand glistens with a curious slimy wet scum. "There have been shiverings and tremblings down here. I don't know what we are dealing with. The Professor seems pleased with it, but it's all new to me."

The Earth's clitoris has been reached and activated. A great liberty, indeed, is about to be taken -- nothing less than the rape of the World!

Malone and Jones leave the shaft in a panic when they observe that the drill has worked itself loose from its bindings. "We had not gone thirty paces from the shaft," writes Jones, "when far down in the depths my iron dart shot into the nerve ganglion of old Mother Earth and the great moment had arrived."

The response to the sudden cold iron rod's penetration is spectacular:

> What was it happened? Neither Malone nor I was in a position to say, for both of us were swept off our feet as by a cyclone and swirled along the grass, revolving round and round like two curling stones upon an ice rink. At the same time our ears were assailed by the most horrible yell that ever yet was heard. Who is there of all the hundreds who have attempted it who has ever yet described adequately that terrible cry? It was a howl in which pain, anger, menace, and the outraged majesty of Nature all blended into one hideous shriek. For a full minute it lasted, a thousand sirens in one, paralysing all the great multitude with its fierce insistence, and floating away through the still summer air until it want echoing along the whole South Coast and even reached our French neighbours across the Channel. No sound in history had ever equalled the cry of the injured Earth.

"Then came the geyser," says Jones.

> It was an enormous spout of vile treacly substance of tar, which shot into the air to a height which has been computed at two thousand feet. An inquisitive aeroplane, which had been hovering over the scene, was picked off as by an Archie and made a forced landing, man and machine buried in filth. This horrible stuff, which had a most penetrating and nauseous odour, may have represented the life blood of the planet, or it may be, as Professor Driesinger and the Berlin School maintain, that it is a protective secretion analogous to that of the skunk, which Nature has provided in order to defend Mother Earth from intrusive Challengers.

This drenching geyser is plainly analogous to the gush of blood that folklore says is a sure sign of a virgin. But there will be no birth; the iron is sterile.

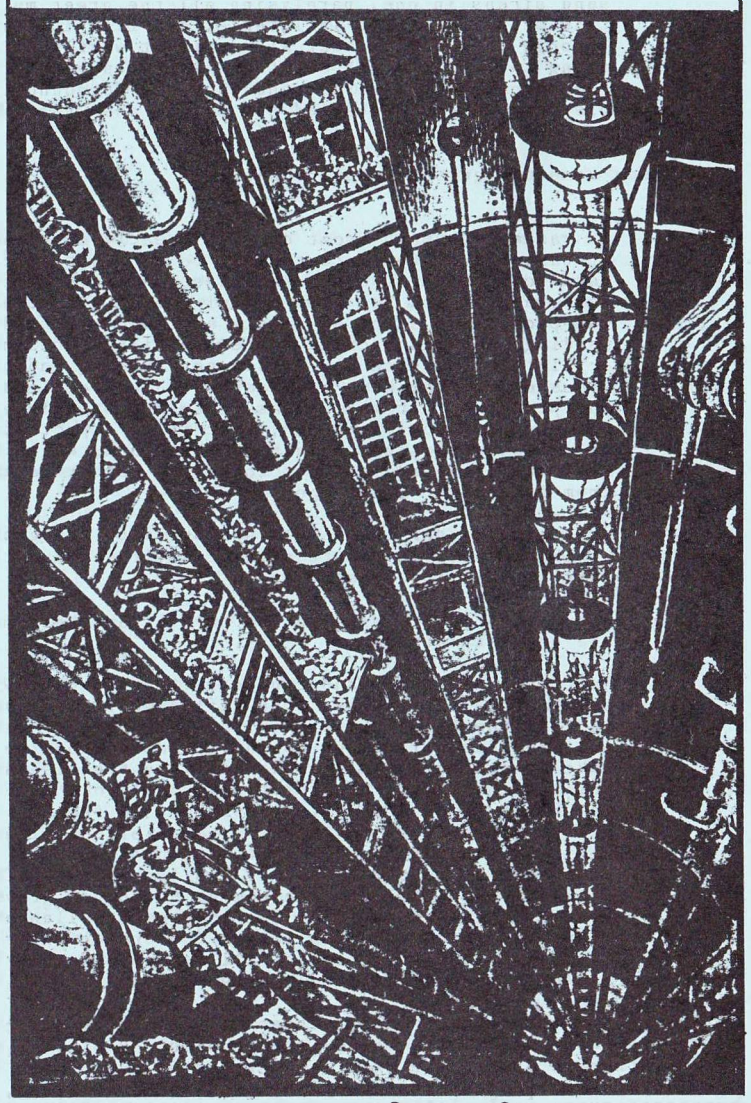
Then comes the time to brag to the boys of another conquest and enjoy the congratulations.

> And then came the grand finale [writes Jones]. With one impulse they turned upon Challenger. From every part of the field there came the cries of admiration, and from his hillock he could look down upon the lake of upturned faces broken only by the rise and fall of the waving handkerchiefs. As I look back I see him best as I saw him then. He rose from his chair, his eyes half closed, a smile of conscious merit upon his face, his left hand upon his hip, his right buried in the breast of his frock-coat...The June sun shone golden upon him as he turned gravely bowing to each quarter of the compass. Challenger the super scientist, Challenger the arch-pioneer, Challenger the first man of all men whom Mother Earth had been compelled to recognize.

The tale reverberates with psychosexual overtones and connotations that would later be called Freudian. Professor Challenger, through Jones, the peerless surrogate lover, with no consideration or compassion toward his partner's feelings, has surpassed every man's libidinous dream of coition. Pain, violence, force are the images that come to the forefront.

These elements of the story, I hasten to add, do not reflect Doyle's personal behavior, but rather served as a catharsis -- an elimination of some complex (or hang-up, as we would say) by bringing it to consciousness and giving it expression.

"It has been the common ambition of mankind," Jones concludes, "to set the whole world talking. To set the whole world screaming was the privilege of Challenger alone."



At Work in the Gigantic Shaft

THE OUTDOOR PARTY

You hover over me
like a secret.

A song
listening
to the landscape.

A spider
invading
the garden.

You hover over me
like a raindrop.

The spider
returns
to the naked stone.

AT THE LIBRARY

The pyrotechnics of your voice
glittered in the room
as you appeared at the doorway.

Gentlemen and ladies
dead for centuries
turned to you and smiled.

The ocean surged in its depth,
the sunlight made a harmony
of the day's infinitude.

-- George Gott --

IN A CAVE (NEW MEXICO)

Even air is cavernous.
A bat beats its
wings against rock;
my blood murmurs.
Time shuffles upon
slow historic feet.
Overhead, thousands
of bats open yellow eyes;
a cornfield ripens,
ripples, closes again.
Already, I am familiar:
a neighbour sharing
their vaulted oxygen.

I belong to loneliness,
as certain as death.
I have stumbled into
God's precious ash-pit.
An elite cave-dweller:
"The Troglodyte Philosopher!"
Bats are bored by my
conversation; little black
cave angels that wait
like Bohemian Brethren.
February's missing days
are all around me.

At first, a star
winks distantly.
Has it left its orbit
in sky to find me?
Is it the lantern
to a boat into afterlife?
Suddenly it is an angel
in a white cotton frock;
she is carrying a bright
spiny star, searching
underground for
God's loyal dead.

-- Glenn Sheldon --

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like a secret.

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listening
to the landscape.

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Suddenly it is an angel
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God's loyal dead.

-- Glenn Sheldon --

Selected Letters

P.O.Box 10541
Portland, OR 97210

Dear Leland,

I have no useful response to Gary Willis's article on LHD except appreciation of its sensitivity and fairness. LHD has been around long enough now to have gathered some really strange overinterpretations; it seems to me Mr. Willis isn't playing these games. I have been around long enough now that my memory isn't (if it ever was) reliable, but my guess is that in '67, when I was writing the book, I didn't know beans about right and left brain theory (and that if I had, I would not so freely have used the left/right symbology in the title and elsewhere, perhaps...) But of course the theory and evidences from neurophysiology are relevant to the book. What the author knew while writing it is, in this sense, irrelevant.

Because it was written in the mid-sixties, the book is, certainly, as Rabkin said, "a study of sex as a role indicator," but it never was principally or only that; and one aspect of it I find increasingly interesting as time goes on is the deep-level tension in it set up by the essential (unadmitted) paradox of a male view of an androgynous culture presented by a female. Probably feminist criticism is best equipped to wrestle with this. I suspect the real weaknesses and real strengths of the book are connected with it.

I am particularly grateful to Mr. Willis for his refusal to simplify various complexities in the book. It is so painful to be reduced to mottos and morals!

All best in the new year --

Ursula K. Le Guin

So your editor gets zapped on this one, since he promised Gary Willis he'd check the author's left and right-brain knowledge before printing the article.// Feminist criticism--of a male viewpoint presented by a female--seems to me as misguided as Gide's questioning Proust's view of homosexuality from a heterosexual standpoint.

1400 East Mercer #19
Seattle, WA 98112

Dear Leland,

As a poet, I especially appreciate the number of pages you devote to verse. My taste runs to the lucid and it balks at poetry of either the "From every keystroke, I raise armies of starfighters" variety or the "Facing the zircon-sharp pain of life, I spin into the void" type. The trivial and the pompous. Your selection usually avoids these aberrations. But not all of your poems are really s-f poems ("Response in the Night," a very good, but non s-f, piece by Matthew Diomede, for example).

Then there's your great articles, like Willis's bit on LeGuin--or Batory's latest analysis of Doyle--or Weinkauf's "Future Talk." Wouldn't it be great if someone (hint, hint) talked Ms. Weinkauf into working up a full bibliography of language-related s-f? Or into contributing an article on Spinrad's "Sprach," the language found in The Void Captain's Tale and Child of Fortune?

Which brings me to the only really bad thing about RQ: frequency. Shouldn't a quarterly come out four times a year?

Sincerely yours,

Mark Manning

Virtually none of RQ's verse is intended as s-f, with occasional exceptions like Morgan Nyberg's Black Hole poem in #28 or Jon David's "At L-5" in our last issue.// Mary Weinkauf made no pretence at completeness. For a more detailed bibliography see Joe Christopher's reference on the next page. // "Quarterly" has the same relationship to frequency that "Educational Comics" (EC) has to education.

5911 N. Isabell Ave
Peoria, IL 61614

Dear Leland:

The statements in RQ #29 re the sales departments taking over seem to be true, and the situation has been worrying us writers for some time. Also, some of the big bookstore chains require that MSS be sent to them by publishers, and the stores decide whom they're going to push. Just who in the stores decides I don't know, but my acquaintance with some managers and clerks of the big chains, whom I regard as semiliterate, makes me despair sometimes. Also, I've noticed a tendency in recent years for editors to attempt to get their writers to simplify the language, to remove anything that the semiliterate reader might not understand. Don't include any concepts that might bewilder our readers, etc. The publishers are wrong in this attitude, of course. Eco's The Name of the Rose was a best-seller, though I heard that about 26 publishers rejected it. It's certainly not a zip-zip novel.

[Regarding] Ballard's "painterly" eye, I've always thought of him as the supreme example of the "geometrical" writer, whereas Lafferty, for instance, is "algebraical." A fine example of one who is both geometrical and algebraical is Thomas Pynchon.

Best,
Philip José Farmer

A year ago I'd have pointed to the small presses, which often focus on merit instead of immediate sales. But see RQ #29 for an example of one such publisher remaindering a book after just six weeks because that's what the Big Boys do. Also see the next letter for evidence that the American fast-sell mania is contagious.

---

27 Borough Road, Kingston on Thames
Surrey KT2-68D, Great Britain

Dear Leland,

Cogito Ergo Sum wasn't bad, but the argument takes me back to my youth. I felt that I'd read it all before, and so I came to the conclusion that it was too long for the theme. But it may come freshly to new young readers, of course.

The best poem, I thought, was "At L-5" by Jon Davis. This was the only one that said anything to me. In the others, I'm afraid, the poets were talking to themselves.

Which brings me to your use of "Great Britain" for England. (But Northern Ireland is acknowledged to be a country on its own.) How about Scotland and Wales? Is this a postal usage?

It's not only in the USA where the sales/accounts are taking over. Here too. This year, an editor liked a novel (not s-f)--and returned it because the sales manager said it wouldn't sell enough copies. A grim outlook for all writers.

Or am I just old-fashioned? It's easy to say we're moving into an age of illiteracy (so far as the written word is concerned). Maybe we're moving into the age of video/television/computer literacy.

With all good wishes for the New Year.
Sydney J. Bounds

Severed heads were featured several times in Gernsback's Amazing Stories--but the focus was not on the act but the result. For a different aspect of the question--from the Head's own perspective--see David Zindell's "Caverns" in Interzone #14 (Winter '85-'86).// As an editor and hence instant expert on everything, I observe that Scotland residents would feel slighted if called "British," whereas England residents simply don't care.

Tarleton State University
Box T-189 Stephenville,TX 76402

Dear Leland--

I enjoyed Mary Weinkauf's "Future Talk," but I was disappointed in the secondary bibliography (two items) for her material. I've got Myra Edward Barnes's Linguistics and Languages in Science Fiction-Fantasy (New York: Arno Press, 1975) on my shelf, and I think there was another book on the topic--neither of which Weinkauf mentions. Barnes has a good discussion of Anthony Boucher's "Barrier" (pp. 75-81), which obviously takes in much more than Weinkauf in her three paragraphs on the story. They also both discuss Orwell's 1984 and Huxley's Brave New World. I hope I'm not just being picky in mentioning other studies: I always expect scholarship to build on other scholarship, not just start afresh.

I also enjoy J.N. Williamson's "Horribile Dictu" column. I've published three Gothic stories in semi-pro magazines (two in Weirdbook), so it's a field in which I have some interest. Has he seen Brian Aldiss's interpretation [in Trillion Year Spree] of Stoker's Dracula as being, symbolically, about the spread of syphillis?

I've noticed that there's a book out arguing that the French Symbolists were influenced in their world-view by drugs and venereal diseases. I wonder to what degree horror fiction builds on unconscious or semi-conscious imagery from areas which polite society does not discuss. I recently called Sheridan LeFanu's "Carmilla" the best vampire story of the 19th century (in a checklist,"S-F and Fantasy Fiction Teaching Collections," Choice, 24:4 [Dec.1986], 597); what I didn't say is that I assume its emotional power is based on an undercurrent of lesbianism in the attraction between the vampire and her victim. But perhaps this element of perversity (of one sort or another, according to a society's standards) is too obvious for Williamson to discuss.

Best wishes,
Joe Christopher

On language in general--we at RQ think independently by ignoring opinions of others (including secondary sources) and get angry only when they ignore ours. On the Symbolists, in particular, it's naughty to imagine they were ever influenced by other than literary matters. So we pass over Baudelaire's reputation as Hermit of the Brothel to advise you you'll never gain admission to Mt. Parnassus by circulating that sort of rumour.

11037 Broadway Terrace
Oakland, CA 94611

Dear Lee,

Many thanks for the latest issue of RQ, which is a classy publication. Right here near the end of the year naturally I have to devote most of my reading time to the s-f magazines so I can finish Best S-F of the Year, but I did read Harmony and much of the letter column, will finish the rest later.

Jim Harmon's column was quite enjoyable, as his fan writing always is; and anyway, I love reminiscences about fandom whether they cover times when I was there or (and especially, I guess) times before I was there. Jim evidently wrote his piece without looking up what he was writing about, though, so I have some corrections to offer. (Naturally I have a better memory than anyone else, including God.)

Bob Tucker didn't break into print with his first mystery novel The Chinese Doll; he'd had several s-f short stories published before then. The Chinese Doll was his first major professional contribution, though--and whether or not it included names of fans, when I read it many years later I enjoyed it a whole lot. He subsequently wrote a fair number of first-class s-f novels too.

Quandry was not published in the "late 50s-early 60s." Move those numbers back a full ten years and they'll be right.

Yrs, Terry Carr

I'm distressed at publishing this fan-letter, probably Terry's very last, but not publishing it would distress me still more--since then I'd lose a printed momento of an old friend.// No doubt, Terry's memory was better than God's, since as Jean-Paul Sartre says, "God is not an artist."

9129 W. 167th St
Orland Hills, IL 60477

Dear Leland:

In re: Jim Harmon on fans turning into pros: Silverberg has said repeatedly that he believed other fans of his era such as Boggs and Willis had just as much writing facility as he, and the fact that they did not do so must have been that their inclinations just happened to be in different directions--and I don't think this was just so much graciousness or an attempt at modesty, but a considered opinion. With the growth of magazines to the point in the 50s where you could find dozens of prozines on the stand any given month it was only logical that fans could find a paying outlet for their wares. Fans of the period such as Joe Gibson, the Coles, Harry Warner and many others would turn up on occasion in everything from Imagination and Future to Vortex. Anne McCaffrey made a false start with a story in '53 for no less than Hugo Gernsback in S-F Plus. When the crunch came a year or two later, most of these fans-turned pros disappeared. But then, their stories were appearing in marginal magazines: they hadn't cracked the top markets like Galaxy, Astounding, F&SF. And doesn't Jim Harmon's turning to writing anything for money closely parallel Silverberg's career in this era? If he returns to s-f, he'll have the best wishes of a lot of long time fans.

His memory plays him wrong in one area: although Lee Hoffman's appearances in Ace Doubles may have been limited to Westerns, she did publish 4 s-f novels in the late '60s and early '70s.

[On Peter Bernhardt's review of Little Shop] the proprietor of the flower store is Mush-nick, not Mush-kin. But don't worry--even the film makers misspelled it Mushnik in the title credits.

Best wishes for continued success,
Dave Gorecki

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Of seven legendary fan editors (Redd Boggs, Charles Burbee, Terry Carr, Jim Harmon, Bob Tucker, Ted White, Walt Willis) two made the big time as writers (not necessarily of s-f) and two as writer-editors. Of the remainder, one was bogged down by a malevolent doctoral committee and another by the Los Angeles Slough of Despond--while the professional fate of the third is obscured by the Celtic mist. As to what can be inferred from all this--in my view, exactly nothing.

---

2 Copgrove Close, Berwick Hills
Middlesbrough, Cleveland TS3-7BP
Great Britain

Dear Leland,

I did not find it surprising that I preferred the articles to the poetry--the latter [doesn't] seem to impart anything to me. [A choice] at random [from Edward Mycue's Starting Out]: "We are a Fever on Ice/When We start Out..." is so many syllables which give neither image nor sense. "Fever" is subjective, a human condition; "Ice" is a natural object; and the mixture simply removes any theme--"We are a Fire on Ice" or "We Are a Flame on Ice," perhaps. The rest...

I found Jim Harmon's article fascinating simply because of the lateness with which I entered the fan field; I know so little of fan history that his mentions of various people, organisations, feuds and the like explain quite a lot which I've heard referred to elsewhere. I only wish I'd had this article when I first entered the field! (If Harmon is interested, Ms. Lee Hoffman did write at least one s-f novel--Always the Black Knight in the late 60s for Lancer I think--but it wasn't what you'd call memorable.)

I thank you for printing the fusion of my letters--though I'm still surprised Empire of the Sun was such an enigma to you since I recall seeing somewhere that it was "selling well" in your country--and for your answer. However, I'd suggest that few people read books solely on literary grounds; it doesn't seem enough to say a book is beautifully written if the judgment the author makes on mankind is inherently wrong. De Sade (did you know it is still illegal to publish his work in the UK?) was stylish, but his works are repulsive nevertheless. He was without generosity of spirit, which made him obsessed and humourless. I'd suggest Ballard is the same in print. (As it happens, I've seen a couple of TV interviews with Mr. Ballard, and I don't believe the books contradict his world view.) I am fairly sure that Ballard's stories can all ultimately be seen as one man playing mindgames with himself. "Inner space" is applicable because none of the landscapes do correspond in more than outline to any reality; those readers who profess to "recognise" people in Ballard seem more to recognise the characteristics of obsessive drive and isolation: the generalities of soap operas. If what you desire from literature is a series of diamond sharp images of altered Earths, fine--if, like me, you prefer the emotional interplay in which characters are actively distinguishable from the landscape, who neither reflect it nor succumb to it, then Ballard's works are so much redundant prettiness etched with acid.

Rosaire Orlowski is correct, of course. All current big budget s-f films are formed in such a way that nothing is incomprehensible to any child watching--the frisson we experience on connecting literary clues to alien societies aren't allowed to remain subtle, they're blown up, repeated, emphasised, there is no mystery to most films--and those with mystery don't "sell." I wonder if many s-f films don't succeed in spite of their "adult" audiences, who go not for the s-f plots but for the sections of plot which resemble other genres. Blade Runner was re-edited into a future private eye tale, e.g. Star Wars is a cross between a Western and an historical romance.

Sunrise & Twilight,
Ian Covell

Recall Shakespeare's line about "life's fitful fever." Try substituting fire or flame to see how neither word is appropriate. A similar (but longer) argument shows why fever is the only choice in the present case.// To enjoy a composition requires neither personal admiration of the artist (Richard Wagner and James Joyce come to mind here) nor sharing his general outlook (think of Milton or Homer).

6516 Wydown Blvd Box 5275
St Louis, MO 63105

Dear Mr. Sapiro,

Re the footnote on p.42 of RQ#29 about negative associations with the left hand: somebody should point out to Gary Willis and Carl Sagan that most primitive societies lack the industrial capability to manufacture such hygenic niceties as toilet paper. When you have no toilet paper, and all the leaves have fallen off the trees, you wipe your ass with your bare hand. Now I ask you: if you are wiping your ass with your bare hand, and you know that everybody around you is doing the same thing, and given that the greater proportion of homo sapiens is naturally right handed, that shaking hands is a custom which must be practiced with everybody using the same hand, and that forks are a thing of the future, which hand are you going to wipe your ass with?

I don't think we need formulate half brained conspiracies to understand why the left hand has a shitty reputation.

Yours sincerely,
Leon Kame

It's hard to disagree with an opinion so forthrightly expressed, so I'll just repeat what any Old Western fan knows: that being introduced to a lefty might be not just "dirty" but lethal. In the words of one movie cowboy, "Never shake hands with a left-handed draw."

---

230 Bannerdale Road
Sheffield S11-9FE, Great Britain

Dear Leland,

I really enjoyed "Cogito Ergo Sum," which edged gently into areas of ever greater menace and achieved that near impossible feat of ending on a "what happened then" note, yet one which suited the yarn perfectly. Full marks to Mr. Goldknopf. I've read far, far worse in so-called prozines. The accompanying illos also fitted well, and far better than these assorted faces which we get in almost every issue of Analog. (What ever happened to mainline s-f illustration?)

"Future Talk" was another excellent item, and by coincidence, it covered (more eruditely) a topic which I touched upon in the current issue of Erg. One has only to look back a couple of decades to see a society which would consider today's language queer--and if you go back forty or more, a dweller in pre-1940 would boggle at "switching on the tranny," or "spacemen doing EVA's from their LEMs" and so on. "Gay" meant you were happy, "coming out" meant emerging from indoors and so on.

Jim Harmon's "Oldest Continuously Published column" had me wondering. I've written for fanzines since the late forties but not continuously in any particular one. But I do rate myself as among his list of fans of that long gone era (Yes, I'm a member of First Fandom) and I'd like to enter my own fanzine Erg in the long-running stakes. The first issue appeared in April 1959. If not the oldest single editor/one-man fanzine, it must be well in the running, wouldn't you say? As for name-dropping of old fanzines, how about Henry Burwell's S-F Digest (which came out back-to-back [in] Ace double fashion, with Cosmag--or in the UK, Slater's Operation Fantast and Gilling's Scientifiction, the latter dating from 1938. I treasure my file of that short-lived fanzine.

All the best,
Terry Jeeves

Individual slang phrases have been added and dropped since (say) 1940 but grammar remains fixed--except for American TV commentators, who nolonger distinguish between singular and plural or subject and object ("Everyone has their price," "...nobody between he and the goal line").// Sorry, but Erg doesn't even come close. See the reference in RQ#29 (p.74) to an issue of Fantasy Commentator dated 1948--and that's in its second volume.

---

400 N. Acacia Ave C-26
Fullerton, CA 92631

Dear Mr. Sapiro:

The poetry in RQ is certainly better than that seen in the usual fanzines. There is little of the sing-song effect which results from overuse of rhyme and metre. (I certainly do not wish to denigrate rhyme and metre in poetry, but in the hands of many young and less experienced poets it too often turns into doggerel. Good use of rhyme and metre can add to a poem immensely; we need only turn to Poe, Shakespeare, and the great Romantics for numerous examples. Most modern poetry, however, seems to work best in free verse.) I do detect, however, a lack of concrete images in some of the poems. Poetry is often thought of as very ethereal and removed from the real world; this leads to vagueness and needlessly abstract phrases. Was it Marianne Moore who said that poetry is the placing of real toads in imaginary gardens? Your authors seem adept at imaginary gardens; less so at real toads. "L-5" by Jon Davis is a good example of a poem that avoids this problem by providing rich, authentic detail along with it philosophical musings.

I am less than impressed with the only story in this issue. Cogito Ergo Sum is a clever exploration of the nature of reality (somewhat reminiscent of Philip K. Dick), but the characters fail to come to life and many of the incidents seem pointless. In some ways, this seems to be more of an essay on the mind's perception of its environment rather than a work of fiction. Much of s-f suffers from this imbalance between idea and execution.

I would like to make two points about Mary Weinkauf's piece on futuristic language in s-f. For one thing, "bullshit" is probably a better translation of the term "whaledreck" (from Brunner's Stand on Zanzibar) than "hell." For another, much of the credit for the clever language in Stanislaw Lem's The Futurological Congress should go to the translator, who must have had a very difficult task in translating fictional, punning words in Polish into similar terms in English.

Yours,
Michael C. Perlata

In Cogito it's assumed that "unmonitored" sense data give knowledge of the external world--as with Dr. Plante's remark about Hume's only pretending ignorance in order to find out what "knowing" really meant. This is false for many Phil Dick characters, whose sense data may originate from a drug-induced fantasy or somebody's else's dream world.// Closer reading of Goldknopf's story would show it's exactly these "pointless" incidents that energize it, e.g., Plante's repeated embarrassment on being a head taller than his host--the idea being that after Plante literally loses his head, this inequality will be remedied.// You can't put in Shakespeare's category a versifier like Poe, who was lauded by French critics (like Mallarmé) that weren't familiar enough with the English language to recognize his defects. For details, see Aldous Huxley's essay, "Vulgarity in Literature," where some lines from Paradise Lost are paraphrased as Poe might've written them.

7234 Capps Ave
Reseda, CA 91335

Dear Leland,

[Regarding] J.N. Williamson's column, another aspect of the horror story market occurred to me. Horror stories and whiskey have one thing in common, since newness isn't a particular virtue for either of them. Everybody knows that musty old horror stories are the very best kind. Also, horror stories don't usually become outdated, so H.P. Lovecraft and even Edgar Allan Poe are still perfectly acceptable alternatives. By comparison, s-f dates fairly rapidly, so there is more of a market for new,up-to-the-minute material.

Gary Willis has managed to write an article on dualities in the work of Ursula LeGuin without mentioning Taoism even once. That undoubtedly is some sort of an accomplishment. Now it would be a real challenge to write an article on Ursula Le Guin without mentioning either Taoism or dualities. All of Le Guin's work that I'm familiar with seem to fall into the type of story that Heinlein called "The Man Who Learns Better." Le Guin's conception of "better" is a rather elusive thing. Maybe she's really trying to apply the uncertainty principle to human ideals.

Yours truly,
Milt Stevens

Only bad s-f is "dated"--and Stephen King fans (among others) will deny that old horror is scarier.// There are special names--"pulp adventure" or "melodrama"--for the type of thing you have in mind, with Good Guys vs. Bad Guys and a clear-cut notion of "better."

408 W. Capitol
Saginaw, MI 48604

Dear Leland,

I especially liked the essay about language in the future. It was informative, and even documented (I'm only used to seeing footnotes in term papers), although it's hard to imagine that English will change so much in a hundred years or so. Of course, Shakespeare probably wouldn't believe his ears if he heard one of the conversations my friends and I have.

The art by Richard Buickle was great. It really caught my sense of the ridiculous.

One more thing I liked about RQ: the size and shape of the zine. It's not bulky, and it's easy to sneak into economics class to read during lectures!

Yours truly,
Mary Metiva

Economics has something to teach us--but just what, nobody knows. Meantime, let's hope your Economics teacher isn't an RQ subscriber.

P.O. Box 1422
Arcadia, CA 92006

Dear Leland:

RQ#29 arrived at my old P.O. box, which I am in the process of closing down and transferring all my mail to my new Arcadia P.O. box. The La Cañada box was convenient while I worked at Jet Propulsion Labs. But after 13 years at JPL I have been laid off. It is all over. The planetary exploration programme is dead dead dead. The shuttle has killed off space science.

I have found a new job, not paying well and with no retirement plans. So obviously I am looking for something better. Until then, this half-ass job puts food on the table and enables me to write letters of comment.

And I did enjoy the article by Dana Martin Batory, complete with the news about the Channel Tunnel. I myself am following the current "Channel Story" via the magazine The Economist.

Other than job hunting, I am doing OK in my alcoholism recovery programme, mostly due to the two We Agnostics meetings I go to. My biggest problem has been the cigarette smoking, which is just awful in Alcoholics Anonymous, so much so that this last week I only went to the two no-smoking We Agnostics meetings. Something has to be done. I wonder, will cigarette smoking ever be abolished? Will it be permitted among "healthy" populations like space stations and moon colonies? I find it harder and harder to believe.

Harry Andruschak

If (as I'm prepared to believe) the planetary exploration programme is dead, then smoking on space-stations and moon colonies becomes (for Americans, at least) a purely academic topic.

---

115 Markhouse Ave, London E17-8AY
Great Britain

Dear Mr. Sapiro,

David Goldknopf's "Cogito Ergo Sum" suffered from the major failing of amateur writing: the plot was transparent from line ten (I exaggerate but you know what I mean). Peter Bernhardt and J.N. Williamson leave me cold because I do not like horror fiction at all. My loss? Maybe.

Mary Weinkauf [shows] forth another major failing--this time the attempts to apply "research" techniques to s-f by the simplistic process of clipping a few bits from a few novels, cobbling them together under general topics and calling it literagure. It ain't--and no "paper" of this length and superficiality can be taken seriously, while a paper that did demand our attention would monopolize several issues of RQ.

Jim Harmon really bugs me, to be honest--big-headed and time-binding, two unpleasant qualities in any writer. Recollections are only interesting when they throw light on names that mean something to us and on their literary or fannish output. "Harmony" does neither.

Dana Martin Batory comes over nicely, a model of composition and content, thanks. Asking me, however, to judge poetry is like asking for my comments on knitting patterns--sorry.

Nice to see so many names I recognize in the letter column, including of course John Owen, while the appearance of Walt Willis is enough to make this issue for me anyway. I like the fact that you do allow adverse comment in your letter column, and quite understand your burning desire to correct these people in your parenthetic interpolations.

Yours,
Kenneth R. Lake

Cogito's ending (which is what I think you mean by "plot") was not immediately obvious since we'd expect the Brain Bank to be concerned with Dr. Plante's skills (at "refitting the dead") rather than his cognitions.// Length isn't a prerequisite for scholarship (what you seem to mean by "literature"), only for long-windedness.// On "meaningless" names, I can only paraphrase the Miltonic Satan and say, "Not to know them shows yourself unknown." ----------

30 N. 19th St
Lafayette, IN 47904

Dear Leland:

Well, nostalgia week [arrives] as Jim Harmon goes over his past. I'm not positive his continuity is completely uninterrupted what with the infrequency of RQ, and am not positive of his claim, since there may be a few fanzines Jim has missed. But Jim sent me at least one issue of his fanzine, titled not altogether unlike his column, and I thought it was stately and that this stateliness is maintained, even to the point of using British spelling. I expect [that] when the respect for British fandom started getting intense, Jim adopted this mode of spelling.

I well remember Peon, having received several issues. I am not able to see, though, why Boggs's Skyhook isn't ranked along with it as a leading fanzine of that era. I don't think Twig, Guy Terwilliger's zine, is properly left out either.

Best,
John Thiel

I agree Skyhook was the best.// Attentive reading would have disclosed that the editor enjoins British spelling for all RQ contributors (and has done so since the magazine started).

72-15 37th Ave 5I
Jackson Hts, NY 11372

Dear Mr. Sapiro,

Thank you for sending me RQ#29. I'd never read RQ before and enjoyed this issue very much, especially the bible paper and tiny print--perfectly subway-portable.

Regarding Tom Egan's review of Election Day 2084 A.D: to me, one hundred years from now must not seem as far off as it does to Mr. Egan. I'm not convinced by his criticism. I enjoy the kinds of "near future" stories which extrapolate conservatively more than the radically "science-fictional" ones because I don't have to rely upon the author to create the society--here's the premise, here in today's world. Imagine the outcome. ("Alternate history" stories are equally satisfying for the same reason.) When, for the sake of being s-f, this kind of story relies too much upon invention (social and technological), the point it has set out to prove becomes less convincing. This especially in a short story which must be pithy and not broad if it is to be effective. I haven't read this anthology yet, but as I don't believe the "premise" will change as dramatically in the next hundred years as it has in the last hundred (barring nuclear war, which would render doubtful any "election day 2084"), I don't think I'd find fault with the collection's lack of "scope." Yes, as Mr. Egan observes, the editors' and my viewpoint is "unprovable," but so is his.

That said, I don't disagree with anything else in RQ#29, and found the articles on "Future Talk" and the various literary influences on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's subterranean tales fascinating. "At L-5" is a beautiful and haunting poem. It was also nice to see a great big bug-eyed monster on the cover of an otherwise serious-looking publication.

On your reply to Jean Lamb's letter, about the Marines' perfecting techniques of loafing while appearing to be hard at work--I have an aunt who did the same during a World War II civil service job which involved filing hundreds upon hundreds of index cards. Every day she managed to file the cards in a few hours and her boss (who expected her to take a lot longer) wouldn't give her anything else to do. But she knew that if she appeared idle she'd be fired. Her solution to the Catch-22: she drew the markings of a deck of playing cards on the corners of the index cards, and played solitaire all day long. It looked very industrious, and no one asked any questions.

I look forward to reading future issues of RQ, whenever they may appear!

Sincerely,
Harriet R. Goren

Of course, plausibility (the closest thing to proof in fiction) is a function of many things besides temporal separation --so there are no easy generalizations available.// At one end of the zero-sum spectrum are those Depression era Canadians who kindled forest fires in order to be hired to put them out, and at the other end sits Odysseus' wife, weaving all day and then unravelling at night. Your aunt belongs somewhere between Penelope and the USMC.//You'll get mugged, reading RQ on the subway, so I suggest you read it at work--since the magazine is more fun if read on somebody else's time.

P.O. Box 645
Worthington, OH 43085

Dear Leland:

I enjoyed Jim Harmon's ramblings in Harmony. It's nice to know I'm joining a tradition older than I am. It doesn't make me long for the "old days" I've never known. [I'm] looking forward to being part of a tradition that still exists even in new formats of computer bulletin boards, audio and visual cassettes. The formats change, but the love and passion for s-f in all its forms, silly and serious, goes on.

Regards,
Kathleen Gallagher

Reading Sam Moskowitz' account of the first s-f convention--highlighted by some pro editor's condescending remarks about fan sincerity and his promise of a Big Surprise (which turned to be a hack publication called Captain Future)--you can see how far things fannish have progressed. In short, the good ol' days are now.

---

32 Warren Rd, Donaghadee, BT21-0PD
Northern Ireland

Dear Leland,

Most interesting to me for personal reasons was Jim Harmon's column. I learn here for example that Tom Scortia has died and that Marie Louise Shane never existed. Now I am suffering from two forms of bereavement. Come to that I still mourn the young Bjo Trimble, whom I still remember as Bjo Wells and even before that as the Betsy Jo McCarthy I met in Chicago in 1952. I know the later and current Bjo's are wonderful women, but when will we look again on anything as divinely cute as the Robin Hood Bjo whom Jim and I remember so vividly?

Best
Walt Willis

Despite being, as Sid Bounds says, "a country on its own," Northern Ireland is still "forever England," while the adjoining territory is not. This separation and the horrors resulting from it tinge with sadness even the cheeriest of Irish postcards. Walt, can't you fix this?

---

428 Sagamore Ave
Teaneck, NJ 07666

Dear Lee:

Peter Bernhardt's essay on Little Shop will be useful to those who could not see the play. I'm sure it will be done in the sticks too, but without the clever post-curtain bit of little Audrey II's dropping from the ceiling. It was a good movie (actually a filmed play in effect, but nicely open, with splendid use of the trio as a Greek chorus) , and toed the line between comedy and horror nicely. The producers actually tried a grim ending, albeit without the play's schtick at the end, but audiences refused to accept it and so they compromised on a stagy happy ending with a renewed threat of that smiling nasty Audrey II. Works OK if not as well.

[In discussing] one of my favourite non-canon Doyle stories [Dana Batory] mentions, if unenthusiastically, Stockton's Great Stone of Sardis. [He] should put the file back into mind and see it again, with its mild satire and its charming--to us--fin de siècle science and manners. It has some of the quality of those sweet, foolish, and sentimental period songs.

Ben Indick

Your comments on Little Shop are appreciated--but no thanks on Frank Stockton, who in the fin de siècle sense isn't decadent, just tedious. To capture that Decadence flavour, consult Yellow Book magazine.

WE ALSO HEARD FROM --

Diane Fox (1194 P.O., North Sydney, NSW 2060, Australia), one year late, who notes that

> Jim Ballard's four catastrophe novels fit rather nicely into a scheme of the four traditional elements: Air (The Wind from Nowhere), Water (The Drowned World), Fire (The Drought--the alternate title, Burning World, makes this more obvious), and Earth (The Crystal World). At first glance, crystal isn't "earthy," but it is the solidity, the unchanging nature of Earth that is the essential quality.

Thomas Ferguson (60 Melrose St., Lisburn Rd.,Belfast BT9-7ND, Northern Ireland), who dislikes Ballard's "bleak and despondent style," which is "repeated throughout, with no variety, no artistic validation,"

Martha Beck (8024 W. 147th Ave, Cedar Lake, IN 46303), for whom Jim Harmon's column "brought back tears, memories, laughter,"

Dale Rees(P.O. Box 421362, San Francisco, CA 94142), promising a copy of his own magazine Infinite Worlds,

Gary Willis (69, 5925 Silverdale Dr NW, Calgary, Alberta T3B-4N5, Canada), with appreciation for work done "in editing the article and for the improvements in it that have resulted,

Susan Yee (5 Ruben Ct., Novato, CA 94947), for whom Cogito had a special (but non-communicable) "personal significance,"

Chris Schendel (6409 Primrose Ave #1, Los Angeles,CA 90068),

Nola Frame (933-B Maple Ave, Inglewood, CA 90301), noting two areas--"pronounciation and grammar"--that the"Future Talk" article "didn't cover well,"

David Thayer 7209 DeVille Dr. North Richland Hills,TX 76180), who liked the cover and interior art, and inquires,"By the way, what river is your quarterly beside?",

Paul Brown (355 Murphy, Bowling Green, IL 42601) , who thought RQ "professionally done," but disliked its "small print,"

Brad Linaweaver (4159 Church St #17-F, Clarkston,GA 30021), whose latest book appearance is in Robert and Pamela Adams's collection, Friends of the Horseclans,

Priscilla Johnson (3563 6th Ave, Sacramento, CA 96817),

Wayne Fordham (9415 Beck #147, Dallas, TX 75228),

Monica Sharp (2422 E. Verde, Holtville, CA 92250), with instalment #2 of her and Dave Garcia's Chronicles of Panda Khan.

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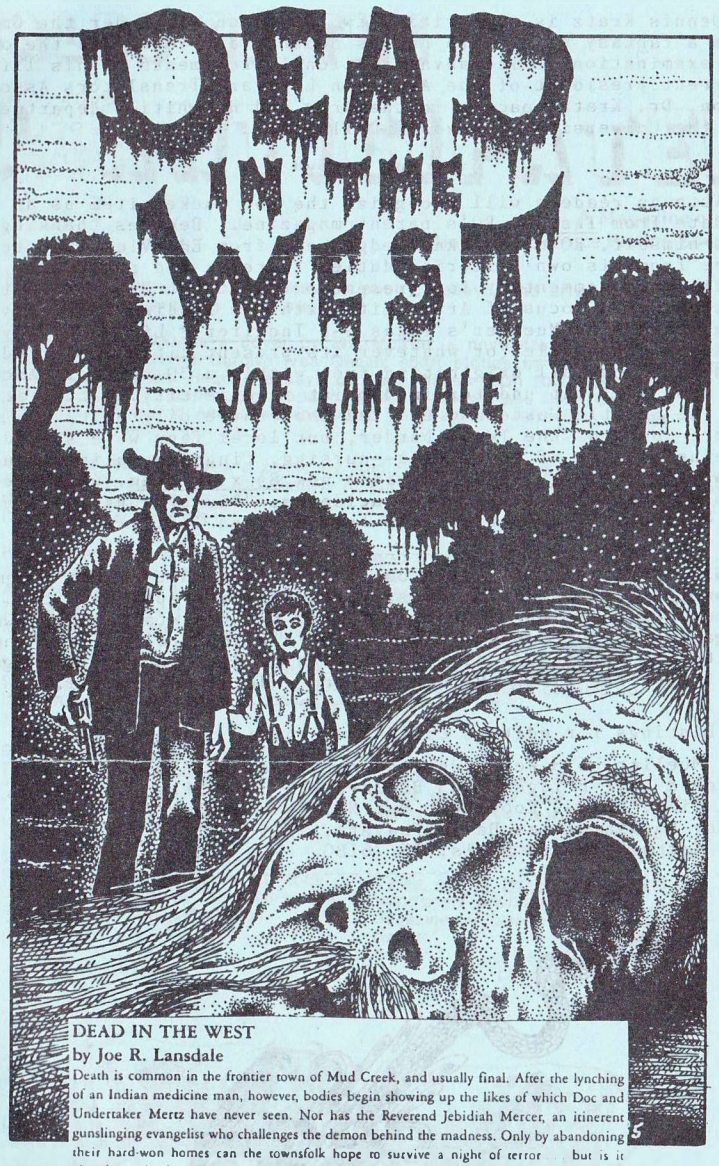

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS (continued from page 79)

Dennis Kratz is now writing two books on Alexander the Great, one a fantasy novel with him as central character and the other an examination of mediaeval fictional treatments of his life. Current president of the American Literary Translators Association, Dr. Kratz teaches in the Arts and Humanities department at the University of Texas @ Dallas.

"BLURB HAPPY"

Veteran readers will recognize the Bob Tucker item as an update from Inside, RQ's parent magazine. Besides thanking Bob himself, RQ must acknowledge help from Edd Vick, who took time from his own editorial duties to reset and physically refit this commentary for present publication. Until recently, Dallas was a focus of Art & Lit, with the leading specialty magazines--Pat Mueller's Texas S-F Inquirer,* Linda and Dave Bridges' Egoboddle (or whatever its present title), and Edd's own Fantoons--all originating from within a 30 mile distance of some real but undetermined point in this city. Vick's exile to the Seattle Wasteland shifted the centre of gravity to somewhere north of the Texas border, but local fans were spared the usual acts of contrition--cursing, finger-pointing, skull-bopping, etc.--by Teddy Harvia's new 8½ x 11 Zine, which restored the balance. By no coincidence, "Blurb Happy" carries an original illustration from both Edd and Ted.

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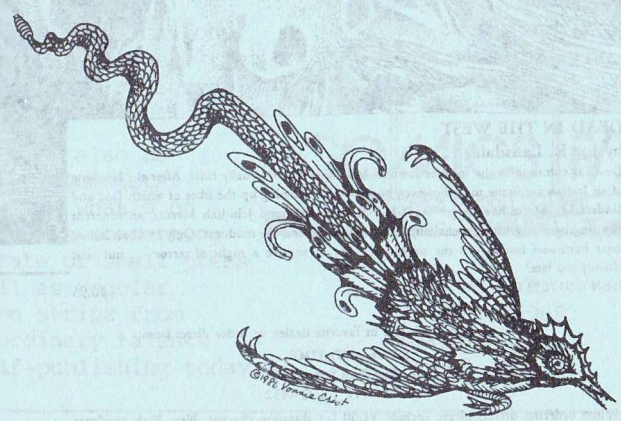
*Since writing this citation I've learned that Pat has resigned from TSFI because of new restrictions by its sponsors, the Fandom Association of Central Texas, and has started her own magazine, Pirate Jenny. Knowing Pat's unique talents and the editorial ineptitude of FACT's board of directors, I'm obliged to forget the first publication and endorse the second.

Listings for editors cited above are:

Pat Mueller, 618 Westridge, Duncanville, TX 75116,
Linda & Dave Bridges, 605 Ballard Rd, Seagoville, TX 75138,
Edd Vick, 5014-D Roosevelt Way NE, Seattle, WA 98105,
Teddy Harvia (alias David Thayer), 7209 DeVille Dr,
North Richland Hills, TX 76180.



Pat Mueller isn't tapering off — instead, she's publishing a new 'zine...

PIRATE JENNY

To shed a little light on the matter —

After five years of editing the Hugo-nominated fanzine *The Texas SF Inquirer*, Pat is now editing and producing a new, quarterly, general-interest science-fiction fanzine — ***Pirate Jenny***.

The first issue is scheduled to appear on the first of May, 1988, and features:

- "My Truck: A Tale of West Texas" by Richard Brandt (illustrated by Kip Williams)
- "The Mad Bombers of Canicadia Creek" by Dennis Virzi
- "Gauze Celebre" by Pat Mueller
- "The Return of the Funny Animals" — a four-page, three-color Minicon 22 report by Teddy Harvia (aka David Thayer)
- "The Crow's Nest" and "From The Recliner", columns by Edw. A. Graham, Jr.
- cover by Teddy Harvia
- plus more — News! Photographs! Art! Reviews! and maybe even an article or two about *(gasp!)* science fiction!

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Pat Mueller
618 Westridge
Duncanville, TX 75116

...and watch out for Pat's wicked sense of humor!