
1. Crash Dive

But first this word from our sponsor, the editor of this apazine Mike Glycer -- 14974 Osceola St. Sylmar CA 91342 with the semi-new phone number (213)362-3754.

Only a fanzine editor can squeeze blood from a turnip. At least that seems an appropriate metaphor to use when I'm about to reintroduce some topics that have been beaten into the ground. But they've been exploited so often that I would be violating tradition to overlook them as I produce the tennial issue of SPEED OF DARK. Every month more fanzines come in commenting about: (1) the fanzine Hugo, (2) Ted White, Ultimate and SFWA, the original morass a trois, (3) why this year's worldcon staff should be committed to an institution, (4) why the author's fanzine should be nominated for awards, and (5) the state of criticism. In fact I think I just published one. But I feel it's my duty to finish off each of these topics before getting on to the ~~interesting~~ rest of the zine.

(1) THE FANZINE HUGO. The fmz Hugo can never be reclaimed for amateurism -- I shall not even try to define it. Abandoning the usual legalistic, logic-chopping appeal found in KARASS, I shall resort to the strongest argument of all: prejudice.

Locus, Mythologies, Outworlds, SFR and The Spanish Inquisition are the contenders. If you want your vote to count, pick SFR or Locus. If you yearn to feel the Secret Grip of Fandom, vote for Outworlds. If you want to vote for an amateur magazine, check off The Spanish Inquisition. If you want to vote for the best fanzine, vote for Mythologies.

(2) WHITE, SFWA, AD NAUSEAM. It just came to me why I don't like to hear AMAZING and FANTASTIC referred to as fanzines, as various pros habitually do to humiliate Ultimate, Cohen and White. The term grated on my ears. Then I understood why. It resembled the "He is so fit to eat with pigs" defense. If Ultimate's products are fmz, what does that say about real fmz? To hell with that. Write a letter to your nearest SFWAN and demand that the Ultimate mags be called anything they wish, now that they shall no longer be called prozines, except fanzines. We have our standards, after all. You never heard of Geis or Porter publishing something without paying for it.

(3) COMMITTING THE COMMITTEE. Suncon has elected to put the Art Show and all fan programming in the Eden Roc, the overflow hotel. Still we must not complain too loudly. They were kind to permit any fan programming at all.



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(4) NOMINATING THE AUTHOR'S FANZINE FOR AWARDS. While you might do so on its merits, you could always nominate my fanzine knowing that by placing it in contention you expose it to the tender mercies of pieces like these.

(5) THE STATE OF SF CRITICISM. It's either Oregon or New Jersey. Stay tuned for further bulletins.

2. Time on its Ear: WORLDS OF THE IMPERIUM by Keith Laumer: Berkeley \$1.50

Ben Bova's "In Times To Come" blurb informed readers that a major Keith Laumer novella will be the next ANALOG's cover story. Will it mark his return to prime form? For a long time Retief rehashes have been his output, well below the standard of quality he established in the '60s. Ill health, two hospital stays, even that loss of momentum that hits most writers after they've been working for years, may explain matters. Only two writers ever appealed to me to such a degree that I bought everything of theirs I could lay my hands on: my overcrowded bookcase includes 41 novels and collections by Anderson, and 28 by Laumer. It's been seven years since I collected the bulk of them. Even so Berkeley has reissued some of his books for the umpteenth time, indicating that somebody remains enthusiastic about them, and that this would be as good a time as any to recall the merits of Laumer in his prime.

WORLDS OF THE IMPERIUM, once half of an Ace Double, bears a 1962 copyright. Written in Laumer's brisk, Chandlerian style, with economically-portrayed characters, the novel concentrates entirely on action. Only a few pages in total are devoted to background detail -- Laumer does one of his best jobs of explaining the parameters of this new universe of ideas without letting us off the narrative hook.

The alternate-time-travelling Maxoni Drive destroyed most of the world-lines where scientists experimented with it. Of the worlds with a history similar to ours, just one developed it safely, ruled by the Anglo-German Imperium. After agents of the Imperium find our worldline, they know of only three civilizations to have survived unblighted in a region of probability cluttered with the rubble of failed drive-discovering civilizations. But even these few seem about to plunge into war -- and in our time the Imperium kidnaps one man whom they hope to use to avert the war before it starts.

During the 60s I thought Laumer got taken too much for granted. Reviewers dismissed his work as superficial fast-paced adventure. Because his most serious and tightly-written fiction came early in his career, with the potboilers and Retief rehashes eventually taking over, there was little evidence to refute them. While LeGuin produced LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS, Laumer turned out Lafayette O'Leary. And undeniably he wrote in a borrowed style, even though his use of Chandler's idiom was the most effective by any sf author (including Zelazny) -- down to the wasteland and Grail imagery that permeated THE BIG SLEEP.

In the trendy Great Society era, with its experimental styles, plotless fragment fiction, antiwar sentiment and human liberation, Laumer championed conservatism, craftsmanship, plotted action, military protagonists and sketchy heroines. His recipe guaranteed obscurity, particularly since the best of his fiction has no overt message. Whenever he took his typewriter into the pulpit, his message was usually

laid on with a trowel. His best writing contained symbolism unrecognized by most readers, and several decades out of vogue ("The Wasteland" is, after all, from 1922)(a remark that will probably get me crucified by aficionados of the classics)(well, it's very in vogue with academics) So he'll never stumble accidentally onto a list of major sf writers, but for today he provides two commodities in great demand: craftsmanlike adventure, and a moderate degree of literary complexity.

3. Monty Python In Dentist's Heaven

The pose of Mr. Glycer, Public Defender, seems, at least to me, stuffy and a bit putrid -- especially when embarking on another complaint about misleading film advertising. The only way to look at it is that maybe my experience can save you a couple hours of boredom and a couple of bucks worth of tickets.

JABBERWOCKY has no discernible connection with Monty Python's Flying Circus. Oh, yes, Michael Palin is the lead actor, and Terry Gilliam directed the film, but let's look at the evidence. After half an hour I was falling asleep in the middle of the picture. Most of the humor concerned urination, dismemberment, gore and ugly women -- if seeing somebody get pissed on is your idea of a laugh, don't miss this film.

For various reasons the best-done features of the film contributed little to its acceptability. The settings, costumes, and horribly discolored teeth provided a background of gruesome medieval reality. The procession of flagellants reenacted one of the ugliest events of the dark ages, and probably succeeded too well considering how few laughs the film got out of it. When the Jabberwock actually appears, it's a well-made, thoroughly disgusting monster reminiscent of Harryhausen's effects in Sinbad films. But hardly funny.

Aside from the sedan-chair race through the streets of the town, and the king's reaction when his minister addresses him as "sire" for the first time, and the method used to select the king's champion against the Jabberwock, the film had nothing of the originality, wit, and disciplined word-comedy that marked Monty Python. Give it a miss.

In fact the only thing Palin accomplished was to narrow the field in our search for who really made the group a success. Cleese, the funniest, most versatile, best actor and writer in the group has already gone on to the 6-episode Fawlty Towers, shown on PBS this year. Eric Idle's independently established his credentials as a comedian with albums based on "Rutland Weekend Television." He's limited in range to things like parodies of David Frost (and his ilk) or pseudosophisticated Englishmen, but makes them work pretty well. If Graham Chapman ever resurfaces, that should finally decide who was most responsible for creating the comedy program that swept fandom (not to mention America) two years ago.

mental reservation
