

6

It is a pleasure to join you all once more. It may seem unfair to those of you on the waiting list that codgers like me manage to show up here once a year, but that's how the FAPA bounces. Better luck next time. Meanwhile, here is

THE VINEGAR WORM  
Vol. II, No. 6, published  
at 257 Santa Fe Drive, Bethel  
Park, Pa., by Bob Leman, for  
FAPA and some real people as well.

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A while back I published in this magazine a set of verses which I intended as a parody folksong. As it turns out, it was nothing of the sort. What is called a folksong today has nothing whatever to do with the dictionary definition of a folksong, nor with what you and I think a folksong is. I have discovered this the hard way. My children have been struck by the current popular passion for "folksinging", and their record player bombs the damn' things at me from morning till night. I have come to learn a little about them, through the excruciating experience of being exposed to Joan Beaz, Bob Dylan and others, and while it hasn't been fun, I have been considerably enlightened. I now know that the capacity to strike two chords on a guitar is all that a performer need know about music, and that the ability to sing is probably a detriment. I have also learned that the words that are "sung" should be as repetitive, stupid, pointless, banal and meaningless as possible. The words, as a rule, seem to fit the mentality of the singer. This is a matter almost beyond imagining.

But since I pride myself on being a conscientious reporter of our times and mores. I want to offer here the words of one of these folksongs which I recently transcribed from a record. Historians may value this as a typical bit of Amurrican culcher as it existed in the last half of the twentieth century. This ancient treasure of the history of the race was invented in a pad that was like cool with pot, on June 15, 1964, in Tin Pan Alley.

Turn to next page for folksong

- 1 -

BAD EARTHQUAKE A'COMIN'

They a bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad earthquake  
a' comin',  
They a bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad earthquake  
a' comin',  
Yas, they a bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad earthquake  
a' comin'  
Unless you ban that bomb.

Second verse:

They a bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad earthquake  
a' comin',  
Yas, they a bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad earthquake  
a' comin',  
Ya-has, they a bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad earthquake  
a' comin'  
Unless you desegregate.

Third verse:

Yas, they a bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad earthquake  
a' comin',  
Ya-has, they a bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad earthquake  
a' comin'  
Oh, ya-has, they a bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad earthquake  
a' comin'  
Unless you turn Walter Reuther and Jimmy Hoffa loose to beat  
people up.

Etcetera for from twenty-seven to thirty-three verses. This should be "sung" in a monotone (soprano or baritone), and either both or only one of the chords on the guitar may be used. It will add a touch of novelty to the performance if the soprano is female or the baritone male.

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On the whole, I do not suffer fools gladly, and I tend to become testy when confronted by egregious foolishness. I have made a continued effort to be restrained in manner and language, and above all, not to become involved in fannish feuds. This effort at detachment is no doubt open to criticism, on the ground that in many feuds there is a faction with justice on its side, but I encounter enough controversy in my daily work to hope for a more peaceful kind of stimulation in my hobby.

I therefore cast no vote in the Martin affair. If the fanzine upon which his expulsion was based was typical of what he was likely to produce, I'm happy to have seen the last of him. Further, I don't believe that anybody has a right to belong to any organization whose members don't want him. On the other hand, the formalists who argued that it wasn't certain that the organization didn't want him may have been correct. I was just an observer, myself.

Which brings us, naturally enough, to l'affaire Breen. I didn't vote on that either--neither on his expulsion from the waiting list nor on any petition for his restoration. I've met Walter twice: first at the '63 Midwestcon, which he attended with Marion Bradley and her son, and in the Fall at the Discon. I enjoyed talking to him both times. I had no idea then of his purported venereal habits (indeed, the first I heard of the matter was in Boondoggle) but it was of course immediately apparent upon meeting him that he varies in many ways from the norm. Still, I enjoyed talking to him, and my wife found him amusing (it may have been in the sense that one is amused by a rare and ~~exotic~~ exotic creature from a totally different environment--a coelacanth, sa,) and the kids thought he was "neat". I should add that my children are both girls in their early teens. I saw no indication that they were in any way menaced by Walter. Of course that could have been precisely because they are girls in their early teens.

If the convention committee is convinced that Walter is what he is alleged to be, then I do not see that ~~xxxx~~ they had any alternative to taking the action they did. And if they are right, then it seems only proper to exclude him from organizations like this one, where his membership will bring him, sooner or later, into personal contact with people who might be endangered. As far as FAPA is concerned, the question is now purely academic, Walter is in, by a substantial vote. But I have noticed that the pro-Breen faction has never made a real denial that he behaves in the way the anti-Breens say, and this leads me to believe that the anti-Breens are telling the truth; still, in the absence of what I consider to be strong proof, I have remained a bystander.

I will admit, however, that despite the fact that the anti-Breens include a great number of FAPAs whose judgment I trust, the idea has occurred to me that it just might be possible to railroad somebody this way. (Be perfectly sure that I am not alleging any railroad in the instant case.) I bring the matter up because an incident has occurred which reminds me that a total lie can be told, and be publicized and perhaps (who knows?) be believed.

On June 13, 1964, there arrived, from Dick Eney, Oh, Bloody Hell; numbers nine and ten. In number ten there was a letter from one John Boardman, who is evidently one of the pro-Breens. Boardman's thesis, in this letter, is that if a child-molester can be thrown out of an organization, then so can a communist or a fascist or even you or me.

Now I can't see anything whatever wrong in throwing out a communist or a fascist (or a member of the reverend clergy or a Realist contributor, or even you or me, for that matter) if the membership wants him out; this is, after all, a private club, and we ought to be able to decide for ourselves who's going to be in it. If anybody wants me to get out of FAPA, let him put it to the membership. I don't like to hang around places where I'm not wanted, and probably Walter doesn't either. It turns out that most FAPAs want him in, and therefore Welcome, Walter, for good or ill. What I don't like about this hassle is the notion that many people seem to have that tossing somebody out of FAPA is tantamount to depriving him of his civil liberties, and that there is a matter of moral and political principle involved here. Such an idea is wholly in error. I belong

to a number of organizations, including FAPA and, say, our neighborhood bridge club. If the other three couples in the bridge club don't want us in it, I sure as hell don't want to be there. And FAPA, it seems to me, is exactly the same kind of club, except that we're playing a different game here. To throw out an undesirable is not to infringe upon anyone's political rights at all; it is more akin to a bartender's saying to an obnoxious drunk, "All right, OUT!"

But I digress; I was starting to tell you about this Boardman and what he did. In his letter to Eney he made the argument I've outlined above, and then he said: "Who comes next? . . . Master race nuts like Bob Leman, A.G. Smith, Madole, Burros, or Wetzel?" Boardman's intent here, I guess, was to push the idea that everybody ought to be a member of every organization that he wants to be in, and to gain kudos for himself by equating child-molesters and race-nuts and holding that an organization has no right to eject such undesirables. It is my own opinion that we would be well rid of both.

Broadman may be making an attempt to be disingenuous here, but I incline to believe that he doesn't think or write that cleverly, if we may judge by this letter. I believe that that's really the way he thinks. There is a certain simple-minded consistency here: everybody who is politically conservative, Broadman believes, must be a race-nut.

I very much resent this, even though it comes from a character of this kind. I don't know Broadman from a cake of soap: I've never met him, I've never read any of his magazines, nor sent him one of mine. We've never corresponded, and, in fact, I had been aware of him--if at all--only as a name in the letter column of fanzines.

What, then, I have to ask, is the purpose of this peculiar listing of my name with those of Wetzel and some people named A.G. Smith, Madole and Burros, of whom I've never heard, but who must be pretty awful, judging by the context? I have never in my life uttered or written a ~~sa-~~ that could--however remotely construed--be called racist.

Now then, here we have this curious stranger named Broadman calling me a "race-nut". Since I've never talked to him and I've never published any matter that could have given him such an idea, it is necessary that I be blunt and say that this fellow is a liar. I am mystified about his reason for wanting to tell lies about me, but that is what he's done. Since I don't see his publication I don't know what he's said there, nor do I know what he's said in letters to people other than Eney. I only know that he has written actionable matter about me, and that his lies, which now have been published, have no doubt lodged in the minds of a number of people. The Big Lie technique can be effective, even here in fandom.

There have always been screwballs in fandom, and I suppose we've got another one here, in Mr. Boardman. But most of the previous ones have been harmless, and some of them were even engaging. This bird appears to be another matter. I well remember the difficulted Dean Grennell was caused by the lies of that other paranoid, George Wetzel, and I assure you that I'd much rather avoid that kind of thing, if I can.

On the other hand, I will not countenance having disgusting lies told about me. If this character wants to feud, fight, quarrel or litigate, why, let's have at it. I propose no legal action--that has always struck me as a ridiculous thing here in the microcosm--but why not let this creep come out and debate with me fair and square, if he can. Let him begin by citing a reason for saying, "Bob Leman swearing himself ready to lead armed revold our country is good stiffening for the backbones of moderate liberals who oppose segregation but do not put themselves to much trouble to assure its end." Let this odd person

show where and when I said such a thing, or wrote it; then he will have begun a debate. The fact is, of course, that I never did, nor could conceivably have done so, because I favor, in principle and in my personal actions, public integration of the races. Broadman is either a simply a random liar or he is (quite possibly) beginning a campaign to undermine the conservative political faction in fandom by libelling, in a thoroughly ugly way, those who are conservative. Either way, he appears to be a pretty contemptible critter. But I'll be glad to debate with him (in print, not in person--I don't think I'd like him) if he can fetch up any reason for writing these lies.

And I want to repeat once more: what Broadman has said are lies. simple, plain, deliberate (and, it seems, gratuitous) lies. I have no need to hedge or tack or elaborate; I just never said such things. I couldn't. But what the hell was the character's purpose?

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Reading over the above matter makes me wonder whether it might appear from what I've said that I think that Eney is a part of this thing because he published the unspeakable's letter. Such is emphatically not the case. Eney was of course simply publishing a letter, one of fan publishing's most ancient traditions. And he went out of his way to attach a note to my copy of OBH which said, in effect, "What the devilk have you been up to? Or isn't this something that happened in the real word?"

I take it from this that Dick knows where I stand. So, I like to think, do the rest of you.

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An extensive correspondence with eminent statesmen and other important public figures has persuaded me that the tone of this journal has been, over the years, entirely too frivolous. It is high time, they tell me, that The Worm should publish something Serious and Constructive--something about science-fiction, that is--and I think they're right. I propose, therefore, at this time to issue a dead serious article with an earnest concern for s-f.

I want to write about Venture Science Fiction. Some of you may not even remember it; the first issue was dated January, 1956, and the last, July, 1958, and that's a long time ago. But it was an uncommonly good magazine, and it deserved to be better remembered than it is. Its stories were, on the average, better than average, and there were a few that were really superior. Later on I'll have something to say about some of these stories.

Venture published, in all, ten issues. Joseph W. Ferman was the publisher. (He still owns the title, as you may note in the "Including Venture Science Fiction" in the masthead of F&SF.) Venture started as a poor relation of F&SF; Bob Mills, who was then managing editor of F&SF (Boucher was still editor) was given the job of editing the new magazine. Prior to publication of the first issue, Mills had this to say: "The slant will be toward good adventure stories, with special emphasis on story value. That is,

stories with beginnings, middles and ends--stories with suspense and pace. Which is not to say that the writing will be on a juvenile level; well-rounded characterization will be important, villains and heroes will not be flat black and white, improbability will not be substituted for excitement, cowboys will not ordinarily be central figures."

Ferman also had something to say about the new magazine. In a forward to Vol. I, No. 1, he had this to say: "This first issue . . . offers, we think, a pretty fair example of the kind of strong stories of action and adventure that the future issues will contain. . . . There will be two prime requisites for ~~the~~ Venture stories: in the first place, each must be a well told story. . . ; in the second place, each must be a strong story. . . ."

You see what Mills was after: action and plot, in that order, with some characterization thrown in, if space permitted. (I take it that Mills wrote the matter signed by Ferman.) Now if I remember correctly, Startling had but lately died at the time that Venture was undertaken, and I would guess that Venture was intended to fill the gap. The Boucher F&SF may well have seemed to Ferman to be a little too cerebral for the kind of circulation he was after, and Mills' plan for Venture must have appeared to be a reasonable undertaking. It would certainly have seemed so to me. F&SF, good as it was, was becoming a little precious, and Astounding was beginning to be pretty spotty, and Galaxy had long since fallen over the hump. There was definitely a need for the kind of magazine Mills proposed.

Well, he brought out the magazine, and it failed. It failed. I think, because Mills didn't live up to his prospectus; Venture became a much better magazine than he had in mind when he first planned it. It's my guess that he was thinking initially of something that would revive that Good Old Sense Of wonder: something with plenty of action in the far reaches of outer space, with perhaps just a touch of sophistication to meet 1957 standards.

The trouble was that Mills' taste was a little too good to let him publish the kind of magazine he originally started to publish. There somehow crept into the magazine a fair proportion of stories that considerably exceeded in quality the proposed standard; they were simply too good for the magazine Ferman wanted. It's possible, of course, that distribution difficulties contributed to the untimely demise of Venture, and there are doubtless many other problems that I know nothing about, but I lay the chief onus on the superior quality of the stories. (I take it as an axiom that a thing that is popular is probably no good.)

Venture published a total of sixty-seven pieces of fiction. Of these forty-seven were short stories and twenty were "novelets". (I set the demarcation point at 8,000 words, following, as nearly as I can, Mills' system.) There were, in addition to these, seven book columns by Sturgeon, and four pop. science columns by Asimov. There was a total of forty-one authors represented; (Sturgeon and Asimov both published fiction as well as columns.) A list of authors will be found below.

In format Venture resembled F&SF very closely. Its dimensions, paper and cover stock were identical with the F&SF of the day--and of today as far as that goes. The single important difference in format was that every issue of Venture had internal illustrations. These, on the whole, were not particularly good, but the initial plan for

the magazine--which called for a pulp-style magazine in digest size (as I durmise)--called for illustrations. Six interior illustrators were used: Emsch, Giunta, Schoenherr, Dollens Horwitz and Cindy Smith (her only pro appearance, as far as I know, and no issue was without illustrations.

Of the covers, eight were by Emsch, and one by Dollens. The Shelton cover (and who he?) seems to be an only slightly revised version of something originally intended for a mystery magazine, and is further marred by what looks like an effort on Perma's part to do some extra-cheap color printing. The Dollens is a better-than-average Dollens, done with the usual airbrush. "Right on Titan" is its title, and while it's not Bonestell, it's not bad. The eight other covers are by Emsch. They're all good competent work, ranging from some movie-posterish stuff in the early issues to a really superior painting Budrys' "The Edge of the Sea". (March, 1958.)

Sturgeon's book column, "On Hand. . .Offhand," appeared first in whole number four (July, 1957), and was in every issue thereafter. In his first three columns he used an uncommonly nerve-abrading style, affecting a third-person reference to himself, but nonetheless his reviews were almost always perceptive and intelligent, and his thumbnail-review section was extremely useful.

Asimov commenced his column in whole number seven (January, 1958), and wrote four in all. They were shorter and perhaps a bit more elementary than his current series in F&SF, but not very different. That is to say, Good.

And so we come come at last to a consideration of Venture's fiction, which is after all the reason you came down here to the carnival. The authors were, in the main, old pros: Anderson, Asimov and Sturgeon had four stories each; del Rey, Gunn and Kornbluth had three; and there were twelve writers who published two stories in the ten issues. Of these twelve, only the name of Robert Marner is an unfamiliar one, and he writes well enough to make me believe that he's somebody's pseudonym.

That leaves twenty-three authors who had one story each. Among these I find only five unknown names: Lincoln Boone, Erik Fennel, Dick Hetschel, William Scarff and Albert Stroud. If anybody can tell me anything about these people, I'd appreciate hearing from him. At least three of them, I'm sure, are pseudonyms.

Mills was, then, buying his stories from accomplished professional writers, most of whom have written good stories for years, and who can turn out an at least competent story on order. And yet, Venture returned up with a considerable number of stories that were highly unusual and do not at all fit the stereotype (even our own stereotype) of science fiction for-the-mob. He certainly must have begun by combing S&SF rejects and asking the popular pros to send in stuff from their files; but it's very doubtful that he could have produced as many as ten issues in this way. And what is, in my opinion, the best story the magazine published (Budrys' "The Edge of the Sea") turned up in the antepenultimate issue. This would seem to indicate that Mills, in the latter days, was pulling in serious efforts from the best writers.

In the very first issue there is a story that looks like one that was dug out of the file for Mills because it hadn't found a home anywhere. I'm speaking of Sturgeon's "The Girl Had Guts".

It is, by anybody's definition, SF; but it is also based upon a most especially strange and gruesome idea, and I would bet that Sturgeon has the thing stuffed in a file together with a number of appreciative but regretful rejections at the time y at he heard that Mills needed some stories.

The featured story in this first issue is Poul Anderson's "Virgin Planet". Now I am prejudiced in Anderson's favor, and I have a tendency to believe that he can do no wrong. But this piece (the longest Venture ever published) is a slick and trivial novella that was probably written to order for the new magazine, and while it's amusing enough, it's eminently forgettable. So is the rest of the issue, except for the Sturgeon. Mills hadn't yet hit his stride.

Number three had some more Sturgeon, again out-of-the-way stuff. This was "Affair With A Green Monkey", the plot of which is simply a mildly dirty joke, but which urges the doctrine that Sturgeon has been peddling in almost everything he's written: that everybody ought to love everybody else. It's not a bad notion, I suppose, although Ted has gone pretty far out, sometimes, to argue it. Some Of Your Blood seems to me to be about as far as you can go--although that has nothing to do with Venture.

And since we're talking about Theodore R., we may as well mention his other stories in Venture. These were the well-known "The Comedian's Children" and "It Opens the Sky." The latter is what might be called a rattling good story, and is of course done with superb competence, but it's lightweight Sturgeon. "The Comedian's Children" is another matter. It is a story that has something serious to say about people and the way they treat each other, and while Sturgeon's technical virtuosity sometimes becomes a little too apparent, the story should be numbered among the few SF stories that are simply good stories. (Mills calls it a "novelet.")

The best story Venture ever published was, as I said before, Budrys' "The Edge of the Sea". Budrys, like Blish and Sturgeon and Anderson, is a craftsman who has learned his trade passing well, and I suppose he could tell "Little Red Riding Hood" in a way that would make it seem fresh and new. But he tends, again like Blish and Sturgeon, to overload his work with message and/or symbol.. (In his work and Blish's the message is usually an intellectual one, whilst Sturgeon's preachings are to the emotions.) "The Edge of the Sea", however, wraps up message and plot in an almost perfect way. Budrys is talking about human motivations, and the kind of man who will be strong under the gravest adversities, but he has put this idea into a strong and suspenseful short story. It's a story that has been written with cold skill, ending in precisely the right way, and it can easily and enjoyably be read simply as a facile piece of work done for the sake of two cents a word. But down inside the smooth carpentering is a close hard look at one of the important aspects of the human critter. It's not the all-round examination of people that Budrys gave us in Rogue Moon, but then this is a short story. A most superior short story.

There are a good many other good stories among the sixty-seven. (I think I forgot to mention that Venture never published a serial.) Apart from those I've already noted, attention should be given to Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s "Vengeance for Nickolai", Marioj Bradley's "Bird of Prey", Tom Godwin's "The Harvest", Avram Davidson's "Now Let Us Sleep", and A.J.'s "Falling Torch". These stories are outstanding for as many reasons as there are stories and authors; but