

THE SATURDAY EVENING KENIUM

Founded A.D. 1973

by Mike Glicksohn

Spring 1978

One Dollar



© DEREK CARTER 1978 (WITH
APOLOGUES TO NORMAN
ROCKWELL)

arises Phoenix-like from the ashes of a fandom far, far away but still emanates from Mike Glicksohn at 141 High Park Avenue, Toronto Ontario m6p 2s3, Canada. As always, it is published for the simple hedonistic self-indulgent pleasures that producing it provides the publisher and is available on editorial whim *only*. I feel amazingly whimsical towards friends, the generous and talented writers and artists who support this fanzine despite its sporadic appearances, and faneds who publish appealing fanzines. Letters of comment from any of the above are always appreciated but never necessary; letters of comment from anyone else will certainly make me humble and grateful but may not necessarily render me whimsical. Bottles of good Scotch will definitely gain you my friendship and perhaps even a fanzine or two if my memory holds up that long.

Ssscotch Press #51



February 1978

TABLE OF CONTENTS There isn't one. This isn't bloody TIME or ALGOL, after all. However, out of gratitude to my two contributors who do deserve to see their names writ large I'll point out that **BEN ZUHL** has an amusing article which starts on page 8 and for the sercon element that lives within the most fannish of us, I'm very proud to point out that **JOE HALDEMAN** has some words about Robert Heinlein beginning on page 10. The rest of the issue will be typical editorial blathering interspersed with witty or insightful quotations drawn from a variety of sources.

ART CREDITS will wait until the bottom of the last page except to point out to those who might have been taken in by the brilliant realism of the cover illustration that is was actually created by **DEREK CARTER** after an idea by Mike Glicksohn.

Welcome back to XENIUM, The Fanzine That Gives You Something Extra.....





 What seest thou else
 In the dark backward and abysm of time?

Wm. Shakespeare, THE TEMPEST

It is with a definite sense of disbelief that I note it has been nineteen months since the last issue of XENIUM. And in all that time I've published only three times, and only one of those was a "real" fanzine. I guess I always knew that eventually I'd get Old and Tired and useless but I never thought Bowers Syndrome would strike while I was still so young! In the months since #2.6 I've certainly done enough things, been enough places, met enough people and discovered enough new diversions to fill a dozen fanzines. And I guess that's why I've not had the time or the inclination to publish any of 'em!

Despite the non-appearance of XENIUM, however, it would be most definitely incorrect to suggest that I'd cut back on fanac in the last year and two thirds. Even ignoring Tucker's classic definition of fanac as "anything two consenting fans do together", I've still been more active fannishly in the last two years than at any previous time in my eleven years as a fan. I've been to more conventions than ever before, I've written pretty well as many locs as I traditionally have and, something that's important to me, I've written more articles and columns than I ever dreamt possible. I even garnered a Fanwriter Hugo nomination for them, and I assure you there was no more surprised person in fandom when that news was released than I. But I've just not felt the desire to publish.

Andy Porter once said, in a related context, that death will not release you and in my undoubtedly perverted view of things, I feel that way about publishing fanzines. I just can't imagine never publishing again. I can't imagine giving up sex, or pinball, or drinking, or poker. Or eating, reading or sleeping. Cutting back perhaps, but giving them up? No, it just doesn't seem reasonable. One might possibly become temporarily sated by one of life's pleasures but it seems unrealistic to me to believe one could thus abandon it forever. So it has been in the back of my mind ever since XENIUM 2.6 that XENIUM 2.7 would appear, just as soon as the time was right for it.

The pilot light that kept this issue slowly simmering in my subconscious was the promise of the cover that by itself makes this fanzine a collectors' item. Over the last two years Derek Carter and I have deepened and intensified a ten year friendship (to the point where we have been roommates for the last five months) and somewhere in the months since the last issue Derek promised to take off on an idea of mine for a cover illustration (after he'd proposed the idea of "Saturday Evening Xenium" at a Chivas covered convention-for-two, of course.) He borrowed the necessary resource material from his charming estranged spouse Anna and over a period of several months, involving dozens of hours of painstaking work, the cover took shape. And as it grew and developed and filled out, so my thoughts of another fanzine began to crystalize around it.

The catalyst for this issue, though, which led me to this typewriter instead of Boskone this weekend, was the arrival last week of Joe Haldeman's manuscript. As anyone who knows anything about (a) me, (b) fanzines or (c) fandom should know, I am (a) not an unreconstructed sercon fan and (b) a very close friend of Joe Haldeman. Still, the sudden appearance of his introduction to a new edition of DOUBLE STAR was as surprising as it was delightful. Surprising, because XENIUM has rarely if ever published anything about science fiction and because Joe could easily have sold the piece to a dozen places with a readership at least ten times that of this fanzine. And delightful because I can't remember a piece of theoretically sercon writing that

struck me as so perfectly fannish. When I read Joe's covering letter, I mentally sighed and started composing an appropriately tactful letter suggesting he send it to Dick Geis. Less than a third of the way into the piece I knew I'd be publishing another issue of XENIUM within the month! If death will not release us from fan publishing, it's life, in writing and in art, that provides the impetus to start anew.

So blame this issue on Carter and Haldeman and leave me out of it!

 "Ten fans were asked if they preferred reading GOBLIN'S GROTTTO or having half their brains scooped out. Fifteen out of ten preferred having half their brains scooped out. Afterwards they preferred GOBLIN'S GROTTTO."

Leroy Kettle, TRUE RAT 8

 I intimated above that the last nineteen months have been very full ones and that's certainly no exaggeration. But don't worry, I'm not going to bore you with a lengthy recitation of the cons I attended, the people I met, the places I visited, or the games I played. I'm saving that for the next issue when I'll have the time to do a proper job on it and when I'll have a captive audience of sci-fi guys wanting to read the responses to Joe's article/introduction on Heinlein! But since I'm forced to fill in the next four and a half pages so we can get to Ben's article with a discontinuity in the page numbers, perhaps a few brief summaries might be in order.

Comparatively speaking, the summer of 76 was a quiet one. One of the reasons I went into teaching was to have the summers free and I like to think I've made pretty good use of them. In 72 I went to California by way of Albuquerque. In 73 it was San Francisco again. In 74 I took a trip to England for summer vacation. In 75, it was California followed by Australia and New Zealand. And last year, in 77, I went back to England and followed that by going as far south as it's possible to go and still be in the continental United States. In 76, though, I stayed home a lot, hit parts of the Midwest, and took a trip as far as Kansas City. It was a summer filled with highlights, of that there is no doubt, but it wasn't as exotic as some other summers I've spent.

And yet it helped shape an aspect of my personality that may well turn out to be one of the things I'll be remembered for, if I'm remembered at all, by future generations of fans. It helped turn me into a poker player!

I've always been competitive and always been game-oriented. When I was six and seven I'd bet on the Grand National with my paternal grandfather and play Canasta with my uncle. My father taught me chess; and stopped playing with me when I studied enough about the game to beat him consistently. I've always enjoyed cards in any form, even though I was very late in encountering many standard games such as bridge (at age nineteen) and Crazy Eights (!)(at an age I'm embarrassed to mention.) Backgammon immediately caught my fancy, as did poker, Monopoly, Risk, Diplomacy and Dungeons & Dragons (a game I've assiduously avoided because I recognize the hypnotic attraction it has for the gamesman.) And, naturally, poker has always been a game I've been aware of although not active in.

I'll tell you why.

My grandfather, already mentioned above, was a compulsive gambler. And I mean compulsive. He left Poland at the age of seven and travelled to England to stay with relatives, at around the turn of the century. By working incredible hours each day and by having a good head on his shoulders, he became moderately rich and successful as a furrier in London. By being a gambler, he became very rich, very successful and even notorious in London. Although honest himself, he was an associate of almost

every well-known criminal in the London underground. At the same time, when the then-reigning world champion bridge players went to England, it was my grandfather they contacted for some social card playing. I regret that he died before I was old enough to appreciate the wealth of experiences he could have shared with me.

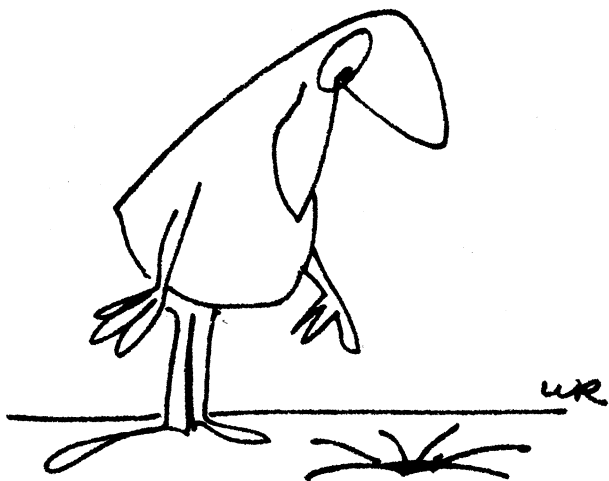
The significant factor, however, is that my granddad had been a millionaire, in England, when the pound Sterling was worth about five American dollars, and he died a pauper. Practically penniless, having gambled away a fortune, quite literally. His downfall was racing, horses, and cards were only a sideline with him, but I'm convinced I absorbed a lesson from him, as young as I was at the time. For years I would not gamble, I stayed away from games of chance played for money and I kept my interest in horse racing purely academic. (Quick: name the last three winners of the Triple Crown of American horse racing! Hell, for that matter, name the three races that make up the Triple Crown. I'd bet seven out of ten fans couldn't even answer the latter without checking an almanac. And nowadays I'd bet money on it!)

The first more-or-less regular penny-ante poker I played was at the house of and with the family of my good friend Joe Haldeman. There I was taught that one should not draw to an inside Royal Flush...unless one's name is Lorena and one has silver hair in which case the odds are ten to one you'll make it. And somehow, starting with the fannish summer of 76, my inhibitions against gambling were swept away and heredity rushed to the fore. Increasingly I found myself playing poker at conventions, and paying part of my expenses by doing so. The school year of 1976-77 found me spending two periods a day in the cafeteria playing nickel-ante with a circle of students and one particularly together administrator covering for me ("Money! You say they're playing for money! If you can prove that to me I'll order them to stop immediately." So we played for chips and settled at the end of each week) while the rest of the office staff feigned ignorance of what was happening. And I found within myself the same compulsion to gamble that destroyed my grandfather.

I like playing games and I especially like playing games for money. So far, though, I've had two things on my side: I gamble well, so I generally win, and I don't like loosing and quit when I'm doing so. If I can maintain those two checks on my natural tendency to gamble, I ought to be able to keep up the record of the last year and a half: so far, I've broken even at several cons, marginally won at three or four

more, won heavily at perhaps five conventions and lost at only one. My art collection has grown nicely thanks to the generosity of fannish card-smiths and my wallet has shrunk less than it might have done otherwise. And I've had a lot of fun, because I enjoy poker even if I happen to lose. All things considered, though, I would rather win.

So look me up at the next con we happen to be at together. Perhaps we can sit down to some penny-ante poker, or even dollar-ante head-to-head if you like. How about backgammon at a nickel a point? With the doubling dice, of course. Or Chinese Checkers for twenty five cents a ball? There's only one thing I'm afraid of: someday someone will suggest playing pinball for a cent a point up the line and I'll have to auction my fanzine collection to pay my debts!



SMART MAN WHO KNOWS
HOLE IN GROUND FROM
BODY ORIFICE —

"The heat from the sun and fire was so intense that the atmosphere was tremulous and wavy. The corpse fell open and the heart was laid bare. The frontal bone of the skull, where it had been struck with the mattock, fell off; and, as the back of the head rested on the red-hot bottom bars of the furnace, the brains literally seethed, bubbled, and boiled as in a cauldron, for a very long time."

E.J. Trelawney, describing the cremation of Shelley.

Of course, the supposed fannish focal point of the summer of 76 was not the creation of a card-carrying Frankenstein but rather the worldcon in Kansas City, billed as "the Ultimate Worldcon." One is tempted to say that it was sneaky of the MidAmercon committee not to let on beforehand that they were referring to Ultimate in the sense of Sol Cohen's publishing company but that would be much too hard on them. If MAC wasn't all it had hoped to be, it was still a pretty good worldcon and a fitting end to a low-key yet very intense summer.

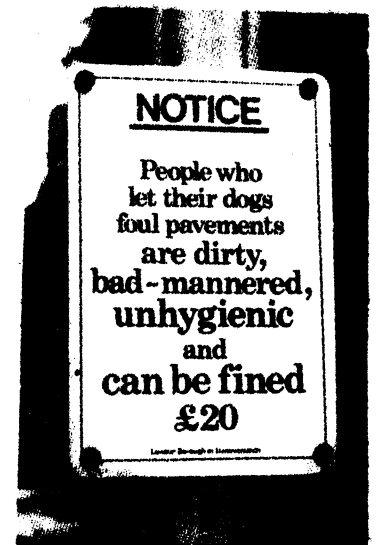
To a teacher, the nine months between September and May are merely an inconvenience you learn to put up with so you can enjoy the summers. Luckily a fannish teacher has several interesting events to spice up that toleration. (I'm jesting, of course; if I didn't enjoy my work not even three months off in the summer would be tolerable. But we like to over-emphasize the obvious advantages of our situation, just like the cretins in Florida who write to Canadians and mention eight times in passing that it's eighty degrees while we're under six feet of snow.) Between MAC in 76 and the summer of 77 there intruded such delights as Pghlange, Confusion 14 and The Blizzard That Ate Northeast America, several decent cons like Marcon, Minicon, and Midwestcon, and the epochal Wilcon 77 which I hope to try and do partial justice to next issue. (If nothing else Randy Bathurst's memorial Wilcon dinner plate *must* see print.) But good as those events may have been, they paled before the glories of the summer of seventy seven, which rates as easily the finest I can remember enjoying.

Part of that summer was recorded in a one-shot called OH I.C.! published last July and reprinted in the fall to save my FAPA membership. Some of you will have seen it, most of you won't really care and I've got a few --very few-- extra copies for the diehard completists in the audience. Since that document foreshadows and the next XENIUM will overkill the events of that summer, I'll admirably restrain myself to a twenty-five words-or-less summary of the first half of last summer. Start counting: Midwestcon/tan/Wilcon/marathon/Chicago/Iowa/pinball/Downes/Oberembt/Archon/Brazier/poker/Cincinnati/Bowers/A*U*T*O*C*L*A*V*E and that still leaves me ten words to keep repeating "England" if I want to!

I was born in England and lived there until I was eleven. As I've said many times recently, I'd love to be rich enough to spend a quarter of each year in England, especially London, just as long as I didn't have to work there!

Despite the economic woes and the labour troubles and the occasional disintegration of society, England is still a wonderful country to visit and the English are still the English. Where else but in London would you find the sort of municipal sign shown to the right? (It was, after all, in England that, according to David Frost, a sign was found in the middle of a lonely deserted moor stating "It is forbidden to throw rocks at this sign.")

I've written extensively in a pair of fanzine articles about the joys of England and English pubs and some of the delights visiting North Americans can look forward to in 1979



so I won't repeat myself here but I will reiterate another point I've often made as I discovered it for myself once again this past summer. There are a lot of really fine people in English fandom and interacting with them at Brighton in 79 is going to be a real pleasure.

I visit England as a tourist, for the pubs and the beer and the food and the sights, and as an expatriot, to see my family once again, but I also visit as a fan, to renew friendships and build new ones among active members of English fandom. I attended my second One Tun meeting, the rowdy monthly get-together of London fandom with a sprinkle of non-locals who may be in London at the time or who just might feel like making the trip down once in a while. I thought I might surprise a few people by showing up so I'd tried to keep my presence in England relatively quiet. I should have known fans better than that! The meeting was in full swing when I arrived and the first thing that happened was two people handed me copies of their fanzine they'd brought along to save postage on. So much for surprises!

If your experience with science fiction club meetings is based on LASFS or OSFiC or, I suspect, any North American club, you're unprepared for a One Tun gathering. The One Tun is a London pub in what one might call a slightly quiet area of the city, at least at night. It's down a narrow little side street and the chances of any tourist finding it without being specifically on the look-out for it are very slim. I would guess that it does a steady but rather quiet business during the week. Except for the first Thursday of each month, that is!

On the first Thursday of each month, London fandom gathers there. Along with as many other English fans who can get to London that night, visiting pros and fans from out of the country, and occasional old-timers who just want to see if fandom is still alive. By the time I arrived at the pub, quite early in the evening, twenty or more fans had already spilled out onto the narrow sidewalk, almost completely blocking the road, and were animatedly quaffing beer and engaging in spirited conversation. There within a five yard radius stood -- or listed, in some cases -- many of the best known fans in England: Leroy Kettle, Greg Pickersgill, Simone Walsh, Robert Holdstock, Malcolm Edwards and John Brosnan, to namedrop just a few. Inside the pub was pure pandemonium. Solid bodies from the doorway to the bar, all shouting at each other to be heard over the general cacaphony and hence adding to it, faces flushed with pleasure and excitement and best bitter or Guinness. Eventually I was able to fight my way to the bar, exchanging quick Hellos with various fans I knew along the way, pick up a round of drinks for a few friends outside and escape to the slightly less enervating exterior of the pub, where I spent the rest of the evening in lively fannish conversation. Interrupted, of course, for occasional trips to the bar or the bog.

It is always good to renew old acquaintances, so that night in London and the week I would later spend as a guest of Greg Pickersgill and Simone Walsh, replete with fan parties and visits and pub crawls, were definitely highlights of the trip. Hell, just being one of the select few who'll be able to proudly say they were there The Night Andrew Stephenson Got Drunk would be enough to make the trip worthwhile. That I got to see some plays (Chorus Line, Sir John Gielgud, Glynnis Johns) and visit with my family (finally meeting my twenty four year old step-mother) were added bonuses to being with good friends and being in a great city.

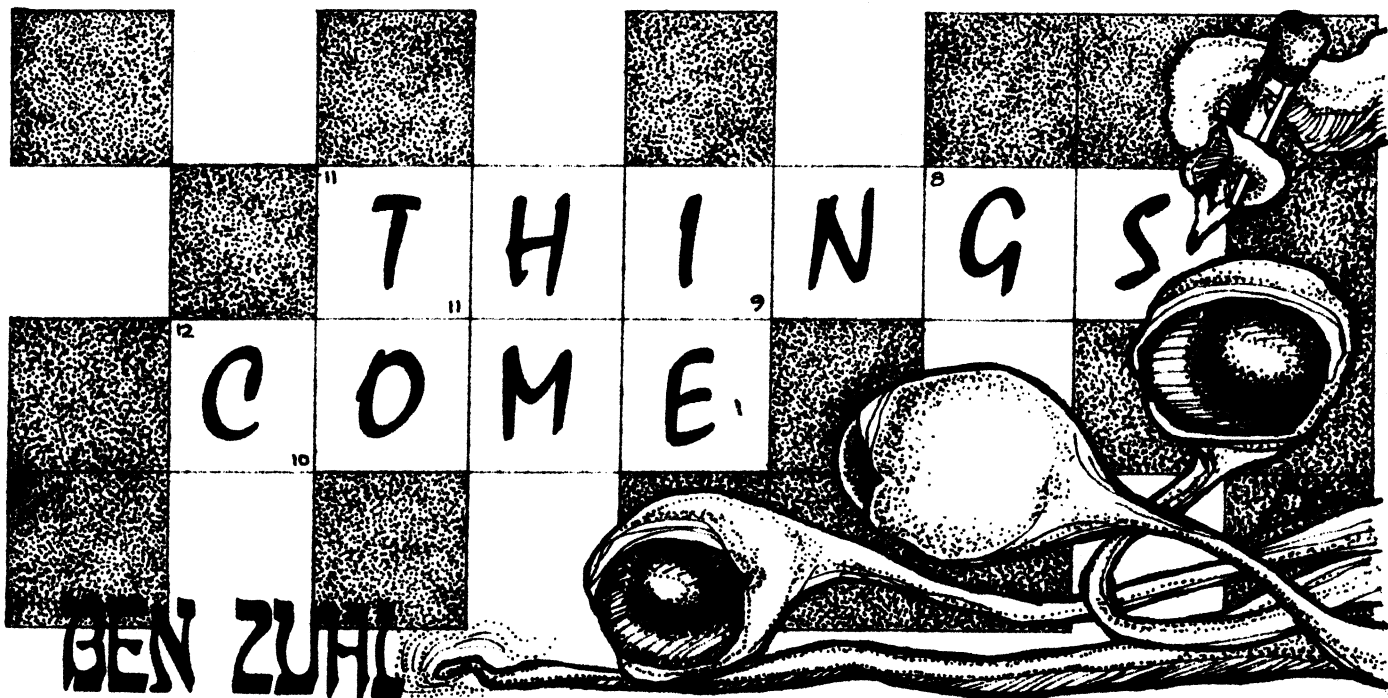
Meeting new people, though, is equally stimulating and I'll definitely remember the summer of 77 for the chance it gave me to get to know some of the fans in the northern part of England. I'd previously arranged to take the train up to Newcastle (home of Newcastle Brown Ale, one of the world's pleasures) the day after the One Tun meeting to visit with and party with Rob Jackson and northern fandom. I'd met several of these convivial people briefly at SEACON, the 1975 national convention in Coventry, but this was my first chance to really get to know them. It was a pleasure indeed.

Rob, whom I probably knew best of the fans in that area, had arranged a party for the Saturday evening and it was a star-studded soiree to say the least. Mike and Pat Meara and Paul and Cas Skelton, old fanzine friends, drove several hours to get to Newcastle and join many stalwart locals, among them the indescribable (and undecipherable) Ritchie Smith, little Ian Williams and the urbane and charming Harry Bell. When Bob Shaw and his charming wife Sadie showed up -- even though I *didn't* have a FAAN Award to give to Bob -- the party took on an international flavour. And that flavour was later increased by a Transatlantic call from Ben Zuhl and Jackie Causgrove, the genesis of which I must someday write up for a fanzine.

I'd originally planned on a three day stay in the Newcastle area but the hospitality of Rob and Harry was so warm and the area so attractive that I stretched it to a full week. It'll no doubt embarrass Harry all to hell but I have to say he's not only one of the best cartoonists I know (the gathering together of Bell, Shaw, Jackson and Glicksohn was somewhat of a fannish first as it represented the largest collection of FAAN Award winners ever to assemble in one room) but also one of the nicest people I've met. Getting to know Harry a little better was certainly one of the most worthwhile aspects of the trip to England and I'm hoping he'll carry through on his plan to visit the US sometime this summer. I'm sure he'd have a ball at MidWestcon and I know damn well American fandom would enjoy meeting him.

So the summer of 77 started off Damn Fine thanks to many good people in England. I'm about out of space, though, so I'll have to hold off on relating the rest of the events that made up my best vacation ever: Mooncon -- aka Pidgeoncon -- and Suncon -- also known as Stuncon, as well as Haldecon. Maybe next issue. In the meantime, it seems especially fitting to let my good friend Harry Bell have the last word.....





There are ten silent ways to play pinball. Phil Foglio has taught me all of them. Unfortunately, Phil is a very good teacher. I proved this at Windycon this year. It's not often that I get a chance to be beaten by a burned out, distracted to the point of committing an expletive without deletion in public (on a pool table to be precise,) hairy alien who has to stand on a chair to see the pinball board in the first place. It happened, though, and unfortunately there are witnesses to this low point in the gaming career of this hirsute ex-huckster. Yes, I have to admit it; Mike Glicksohn did indeed beat me on Captain Fantastic.

Sounds kinky, doesn't it?

Pinball is a game played best when one is drunk and tired. This allows one to ~~lose~~ disengage what's left of the brain and exist only for the bounces of the pinball. Therein lies my problem. How can I even think about competing with the canny Canadian Chivas destroyer, a spongette among men, the only shot glass that can contain a fifth (and more)? The man who in a fit of desperation at Marcon last year bid and paid \$117.00 for a sixpack of baby Coors is not the man to try to out-drink. So after an afternoon and evening of drinking to dead dogs, I was still relatively sober compared to the man who will probably be Tuckerized as a distillery. No wonder I lost.

What, you should be asking if you pick up on your cues, were you doing playing pinball at a Science Fiction convention? The answer is obvious...pinball is a fand. ("Fand"---combination of fandom and fad.) There have been several fands I have noticed. The first and probably the most long-lived and best-loved was sex. This worthy pastime gave way to poker. Pinball followed closely in the wake of poker. Now Deb Stopa informs me that the future fand is Scrabble.

I object! It's been a downhill progression since it started but Scrabble is going too far. Will there soon be closed-door Scrabble orgies at conventions? Are invitational Scrabble cons going to become the in thing to attend? And the most frightening thought of all: what is the next fand if this trend continues?

Imagine this scene at the registration desk of a convention...

"Hi, I'd like to register."

"Sure: what's an eleven letter word for flavored with a certain mint?"

"Uh...I'm not sure. What's the clue for the first down word?"

"Okay, but this is your only helping clue. It is eight letters. The clue is: Snack foods."

"I've got it! The answers are Munchies and Mentholated, right?"

"You've got it. Congratulations. Here is your membership badge and Crossword Puzzle book. Watch out for crashers; we've had some trouble with people claiming to be fans who don't even like these great games."

"All right, I will. Hey, howcum I'm #28? I mean, it's Saturday morning and that would mean that only twenty seven other fans are here. Howcum?"

"Well, the other two hundred and fifty six people who tried to register just could not answer their clues."

"Oh well...How's the huckster room this year?"

"Pretty good! There are some really good puzzle books there, but watch out; Rusty Hevelin is in there with -- believe it or not -- Science Fiction books! He just doesn't quit, does he?"

"I guess not. But when he doesn't make expenses maybe he'll leave us alone next year."

"Yeah, I hope so. Well...have a good MidWestcon."

Don't let this happen. Help save fandom. Join me in this fight. When you attend a convention, do not play Scrabble. It is the first step on the road to _ _ _ _ (Satan reigns there.) Play cards if you must; after all, card playing is a time honored fannish tradition. (Anyone seen the Ten of Clubs?) And above all, be sure to take every opportunity to join in on Fondlecons, very small private parties and orgies. Join the Haldeman Sex Commandos before lifting a Scrabble tile. With your help and a lot of hard work we can keep fandom the loveable place it should be.

Thank you.

EDITORIAL NOTE: While the basic ideas behind this article are sound and while the extrapolation is indeed droll, there are gaps in the author's logic one could pilot a DeathStar through. Unlike the writer's gamesmanship, the overlap between successive fands is not zero. Poker didn't replace sex, it merely augmented it. Similarly, both sex and poker remained popular when pinball became increasingly fannish. And it isn't beyond the realm of possibility that many fans, who aren't ex-hucksters from Chicago and thus are capable of maintaining an interest in more than one activity at a time, could assimilate Scrabble and crossword puzzles as well. (Personally, of course, as a games-oriented person, I welcome the advent of poker, backgammon, Scrabble, crosswords and even Monopoly as secondary convention activities. One can always find enough rubes around willing to play for money to finance one's convention expenses!)

'I always feel a great deal more human,' he said, 'when I've drunk just over half a bottle. A little less than half - that's no use at all, but a little more... Of course the effect doesn't last, but half an hour of feeling really good is worth some sadness afterwards.'

Graham Greene THE HONORARY CONSUL



DOUBLE STAR

HALDEMAN
on
HEINLEIN

An Introduction To The Gregg Press Edition of DOUBLE STAR by Robert Heinlein

BY JOE HALDEMAN

You have, I trust, a sturdy hardbound book in your hands; my own copy of DOUBLE STAR is a yellowed paperback almost half as old as I am. The price on the cover is low enough to evoke nostalgia; the cover itself is held on with two layers of Scotch tape. To me, though, the most telling detail of its age is what's written inside the front cover: my wife's maiden name.

When we were courting, my future wife was canny enough to realize that it was politic to show an interest in your boyfriend's obsessions. She tolerated freezing nights at the Naval Observatory and long hours of rummaging through musty bookstores; she even learned how to fence. And she asked me what the best science fiction was. Out of the five or six books I gave her, two were by Robert Heinlein: THE GREEN HILLS OF EARTH and this volume.

If I were to make up a beginner's collection today, it would have to be twice as big, since there was no Zelazny in those days, nor Delany, nor Le Guin, nor mature Silverberg. GREEN HILLS would be replaced by the more comprehensive omnibus THE PAST THROUGH TOMORROW. But along with two other volumes (Clarke and Bester, guess which), DOUBLE STAR would remain.

Fair warning: if you've never before read DOUBLE STAR, please stop reading this introduction and proceed to the main text. The story contains at least two lovely surprises -- the best kind; the kind that is inevitable in retrospect -- and I don't want to blunt them for you. If you forget to return and read my incisive analysis, well, you can always fall back on your own opinion of the book.

#

Let me begin by exposing my own prejudices, so far as I am aware of them.

Most science fiction criticism either bores or angers me. Much of it is unnecessarily effusive. Much of the rest is destructive, in effect if not in intent. Too much of it

is ill-informed, and too much of it exists only to serve as a display of otherwise unpublishable prose by otherwise unpublishable writers.

If you yhink my opinions on this matter are affected by the fact that I write science fiction for a living, you are of course dead right. To paraphrase an English playwright, asking a writer about critics is like asking a fire hydrant about dogs.

Let us force that image out of our minds, for reasons of propriety and trajectory, and consider the writer who is also a critic. In science fiction, a few of them are good; those that are very good I could count on the fingers of one hand if I were a two-toed sloth: Damon Knight and James Blish. Blish is dead and, to my knowledge, Knight has turned to literary history rather than criticism. Of the writers who regularly produce criticism now, I only seek out Silverberg and Budrys. A narrow attitude, I admit.

A second relevent prejudice has to do with politics, since DOUBLE STAR is a novel of political action. It's obvious from the density of realistic detail in the book that Heinlein knows a great deal about practical politics; his biography says that he once ran for office. My own attitude towards politics covers a narrow spectrum from dismay to horror, and not just from a trendy sense of post-Watergate cafard. I grew up in a suburb of Washington, D.C.; my neighbor was Richard Nixon's (1952) campaign manager; two of my friends were pages in the House and Senate; my father was an HEW bureaucrat who regularly testified before Congress. A child exposed to this sort of overload of information and impression might go either of two ways. I took the low road, growing up convinced that if there ever were any good politicians, they are safely dead and in the history books; the live ones are scoundrels who haven't yet been caught. Age has softened this attitude somewhat, but the roots of it remain. I see politics as a sort of poorly-trained monster, serving humanity with balky inefficiency, periodically turning on its master and maiming him.

The final prejudice has to do with the body of the author's work. I think Heinlein is the best science fiction writer. This is not a particularly controversial opinion for a reader (a quick count of titles-per-author in any book store would confirm this quantitatively*), but it seems to be an uncommon position among critics today.

Which brings us back to the writer-as-critic problem. Why should someone with such a low opinion of criticism agree to do it in public? Maybe it's because I don't want to see what somebody else would do to this, one of my favorite books. I admit to a lack of objectivity. Heinlein's work has had a profound effect on my own writing; I doubt that I would ever have written science fiction if I hadn't fallen under his spell as soon as I began to read. I'll try not to overcompensate.

Finally, since I am a hydrant not a dog, I have to admit that the following essay is not criticism as she is normally spoke. It is not formalistic, psychological, archetypal, structuralist, or pointillist. It is just a writer taking a friendly look at a book he admires, and trying to figure out how it works. End caveats.

#

In his exhaustive work HEINLEIN IN DIMENSION, Alexei Panshin dismisses DOUBLE STAR as "good light entertainment, but no more than that." He's wrong. It is entertaining, and it is "accessible," but it's more than that.

If there were some set of objective criteria we could apply to a book and come up with a rating of bad/fair/good/great/classic, then all the critics would have to learn a trade. No such set is possible, of course, but a tool toward that end was

*At B. Dalton's: Heinlein - 12; Asimov - 7; Clarke - 5; Van Vogt - 4

loaned to me by Stephen Becker. It goes like this:

Besides making a living for its author, a literary artifact can serve any of four functions. It can

1. Entertain
2. Educate
3. Edify, or
4. Impress.

It would be difficult to write anything that didn't do one of these things, however poorly. And a book that does only one of them, however well, is a literary cripple. Possible examples:

1. Comic book,
2. Textbook,
3. Inspirational text, and
4. Literary pastiche.

(As a corollary, note that a poorly rendered example of any of these things has the opposite of the intended effect. Dull sermons serve the Devil.)

I posit that a book cannot be a *good* book unless it does at least two of these, and does them well. Furthermore, and I can't think of a single counterexample, no book can be considered a classic unless it does all four of them well.*

At least this gives us a loosely quantitative rule for assessing the potential of a work. As a tool, it is remarkably flexible.

It can be applied to any subset of readers, down to any individual reader. For a ten-year-old, a Superman comic can do all four things -- so long as it is well made, contains no false information, and has a moral that is edifying to the child. It's trivially true that FINNEGANS WAKE, for instance, would fail in all four criteria for the child, and symmetrically, someone who got all four out of WAKE (I only get one myself) would be unlikely to find anything of other than anthropological value in the comic.

Focussing: these criteria can likewise be applied within a genre, to define the set of works that have the potential of being classics of their genre. The four factors are variously more important or less important, depending on the genre's restrictions and strengths. It would be an odd Western novel, for instance, that had a strong educating function, since the historical period they use as background never did actually exist. A detective story might educate, about police procedure and so forth, but you wouldn't expect it to edify. We don't call on literary criticism for entertainment value.

If you are a reasonably slow and thoughtful reader (and not fussy about the genres you read), then you made up a list as you read that paragraph. Lee Hoffman's Westerns are dense with accurate historical detail. Raymond Chandler is often curiously edifying. Somerset Maugham's THE ART OF FICTION is more entertaining than most of the novels it discusses. This is part of the point. A good writer is aware of the expectations most readers will bring to the type of book he's writing, and he will not only fulfill those expectations but attempt to transcend them.

In terms of those four functions, what do we expect to find when we open a science fiction novel? Entertainment, of course, and I think that most good ones also edify. How well a book does either is ferociously a matter of taste.** It might also edu-

*Disregarding works that owe their "classic" stature to considerations other than literary, such as the Marquis de Sade's JUSTINE, which is not particularly edifying.

**The argument *de gustibus non est disputandum* reduces most literary criticism to the senseless murder of trees.

cate, but this is classically thin ice, not only because most science fiction writers don't know enough science to teach with authority, but because science changes fast and good books stay in print a long time. The author might impress us with the felicity of his prose (a rare enough quality in science fiction, but unimportant to most readers) or with an especially clever handling of plot, structure or character.



The obvious target of this argument is to show that *DOUBLE STAR* does well entertain, educate, edify and impress. But let me digress long enough to avoid the usual critical fallacy of lying by avoidance. There's a hole in my reasoning large enough to drive a copy of *DHALGREN* through.

Samuel R. Delany's *DHALGREN* is to my taste a shambling Quasimodo of a book, a fascinating cripple. By the standards outlined above, it should have been a miserable failure. Most of the readers I've talked to and most of the reviews I've read agree that it does not entertain, educate, nor edify. It does impress, in grand slam spades, for its language, its invention, and the brazen daring of its static sprawly structure. And in spite of the fact that all save two critics reacted to the book with vituperation and scorn, *DHALGREN* became the season's best-selling paperback and came close to copping both the Nebula and Hugo Awards for best science fiction novel of the year. For which I, as a frequently-dampened hydrant, can only praise the gods and readers.

At the other end (the beginning, actually) of the shabby tapestry that is science fiction lurks Hugo Gernsback's *RALPH 124C41+*, and all of its brothers and sisters of the "Look how great it is up here in the future!" school. These strange artifacts, with their personal dirigibles and color radios, are more entertaining now than they were in the 1920's. Their aim, according to Gernsback, was "primarily instructive and educational," and they were "not primarily intended to entertain or to amuse." They don't educate any more, except as lessons in humility for would-be prophets, and they neither edify nor impress. All they did was fire the imagination of the children who would become the engineers and scientists that America would need most desperately in the 1940's.

What makes a book important, then; what is a classic? If you drew a line from *RALPH* to *DHALGREN*, would it pass through *DOUBLE STAR*?

Obviously not. Those two books are worthy for their own reasons, but they are sports, mutants, that exist outside the main stream of science fiction -- which I define as being concerned with entertainment, edification, education and impressiveness in rapidly descending order. Tripping (stumbling) lightly over the fact that you can prove anything if you disallow enough special cases, let us consider *DOUBLE STAR* in the light of these four qualities.

#

ENTERTAINMENT. Is the Pope Italian? The facts that the book won the 1956 Hugo Award and has sold consistently well for two decades speak louder than any formal analysis. At the risk of degustibating again, it has to be allowed that people whose tastes run to reading Bacon in Latin or pornography in dark stores might not be entertained by *DOUBLE STAR*. But a person who likes science fiction can hardly help

being entertained, from the first line on.

That first line is worth investigating in some detail. It's a good example of the kind of romantic/realistic writing that Heinlein staked out and made his own, and is an exemplar of the "narrative hook" -- not the annoying kind that shouts for attention, but the kind that engages your curiosity and makes you want to read the next line:

If a man walks in dressed like a hick and acting as if he owned the place, he's a spaceman.

Gordon R. Dickson (who's written some snappy first lines himself) once expressed an interesting opinion about what makes a science fiction or fantasy story "work." The author of such a story is under an obvious and primary disadvantage, compared to the author of a mundane work, in that the setting of his story is necessarily imaginary. The reader begins with no notion of what sort of world he is going to encounter, save preconceived and possibly wrong ideas based on the author's previous work and the appearance and title of the book.

The author's job is to coerce the reader into temporarily accepting this world as real. The sooner they agree on this, the sooner they can get on with the story.

Dickson claims, and I agree, that if you read with a properly subjective-analytical eye, you can feel the exact place in the narrative where this happens. He describes it as "falling through the page." I feel it as a barely audible *click*.

For me, DOUBLE STAR clicks on the last word of the first line. That is quick work.

The character who makes this observation about spacemen is one of the most interesting people Heinlein has ever invented. He's also a rather startling departure from the typical Heinlein protagonist.

Most of Heinlein's heroes -- and they do usually turn out heroic, by story's end -- are competent, likeable men and women. Circumstances may have reduced their station temporarily. They may be callow or crusty, from lack of experience or surfeit of it. They are usually skeptics, but never cynics. If they act in self-interest it is tempered by concern for others.

Enter Larry Smith, aka Lorenzo Smythe, aka The Great Lorenzo, One-Man Stock Company, Pantomimist and Mimicry Artist Extraordinary. Con man and boob. The perimeter of his life stretches all the way from deception of himself to deception of others. An out-of-work ham actor, his only interest in other people (aside from their money and applause) is in cataloguing their mannerisms for use in his muggery. He is marvelously venal and mean.

His only virtue seems to be an unusual talent for impersonation, and it is this talent that gets him into trouble on the first page, and keeps him running scared for the next sixty thousand words.

Unlike most science fiction characters, Lorenzo has a past and a family, and they haunt him, and so give his character dimension. His father was an actor, evidently a better one, and in the way Lorenzo ruminates over what he said, what he would have done, we see the image of a man who knows his father died disapproving of him.

By the end of the book, Lorenzo has become a different man, literally, and a good one. It would be facile and incomplete to say that he did it by putting his father's shade to rest, but that is part of it:

Perhaps I have not fully succeeded -- but I think my father would rate

it as a "good performance."

Most of the other characters in the book are or have become sturdy workhorses in science fiction's stable. Dak Broadbent: hero; rough-and-tumble Renaissance man; strong, brave, compassionate but ruthless when necessary; emotional but controlled. Doc Capek : world-weary observer of the human condition, full of sarcasm but ultimately humanistic. Penelope (Penny) Russell: professional woman, pretty, tough, competent, with a girlish streak a ribbon wide; hopelessly in love with her boss.

The politicians are interesting. John Joseph Bonforte, the man Lorenzo impersonates, is a realistic politico yet uncorrupted, perhaps incorruptable. Charismatic, a favorite of the people, but in and out of office, presumably as a result of not compromising himself.

It's worth noting that Heinlein had a good opportunity for sidestepping the labor of characterization here, and he siezed it. It's normally bad form, of course, to simply tell readers what a person is like; instead, you allow him to reveal his personality through his actions. In the case of Bonforte, though, we first meet him through Lorenzo's careful study of him, preparatory to impersonation. It's natural for Lorenzo to remark that his subject is kind to Martians and parts his hair down the middle.

King Willem is an engaging character, full of contradictions and quirks, but he requires a lot of "suspension of disbelief." His personality is American; his speech patterns are Midwest-with-grammer. Of course, if the House of Orange could wind up adding "Emperor of the Planets and the Spaces Between" to its paragraph of honorifics, it's not absurd to say that it might one day have an Ozark scion. Royal lines are full of interlopers from foreign countries. But if this is what Heinlein meant, I think he should have been more explicit about it.)

(A quick check of the almanac shows that at least four heirs to current monarchies have at least one-half imported blood, so perhaps I should withdraw the objection. But it has bothered me, every time I've read the book.)

What else makes a story entertaining? I made a little list: plot and pace, suspense, "business" (detail), and interesting language. It's probably not a complete list but it will do for the purpose of organization.

The plot of DOUBLE STAR is easily summarized: An important politician, leader of the "Loyal Opposition," is kidnapped; for interesting reasons, his party can't reveal the crime. They search guild records and find an actor who can substitute for him; luckily, the actor has had a sleazy enough past that he's easy to blackmail. The politician is eventually rescued, but much the worse for wear, and is unable to go through with the upcoming campaign and election. The actor agrees to keep up the charade. The politician dies on election night, having won, but the actor has by this time been ennobled by a kind of psychic osmosis with his role, and agrees to quietly submerge his own identity and be the politician for the rest of his life.

One interesting feature of this story is that it's a tale of character development, not action. Most of what happens concerns the shifting relationships between Lorenzo and various of Bonforte's intimates. The character change is profound and convincing, yet the novel is relatively short and moves with the rapid pace of an adventure story. This is a rare combination, in science fiction or out of it.

Might the plot have been more complicated? An obvious possibility concerns Penny, who loves Bonforte and initially despises Lorenzo. Her attitude evolves through ambiguity to (perhaps) a transference of love toward Lorenzo/Bonforte; finally she loves Lorenzo for what he is. When Hollywood gets around to DOUBLE STAR they'll

probably make a steamy subplot out of this. Heinlein wisely chose to de-emphasize it. Lorenzo's feelings toward Penny alternate between exasperation, desire for approval, and unrequited lust. The more complex aspects of the relationship are outlined with a few deft strokes, but relegated to the background where they don't slow things down.

I personally would have preferred to have seen more of the kidnappers, an evil bunch of rascals. Heinlein's politicians seem as interested in advancing the welfare of humanity (and martianity) as in the pursuit and application of personal power. The type of fellow who tries to win an election by slipping a needle behind his opponent's eyeball and turning his brain to Mayo -- that's *my* kind of politician.

By way of talking about "business," consider the fact that this plot doesn't really have to be rendered as science fiction. Allen Drury, for instance, could take the same story, translate it to present-day Washington (with a few exotic countries thrown in for spice) and come up with a mundane political best-seller. But it wouldn't be as good.

A parlor game we've been playing for half-a-century, with no clear winner so far, is the task of defining science fiction. Theodore Sturgeon said a science fiction story was one "in which the story would not exist if it were not for the scientific element." Heinlein quoted this definition in a 1959 essay, characterizing it as "admirably sharp ... but ... uncomfortably tight." Which leads to my less sharp and less tight assertion: a science fiction story is one that wouldn't be as good if it were translated into everyday terms.

Thus, you might turn DOUBLE STAR's Martians into Hanafi Muslims, or any other secretive, potentially dangerous group; seasickness could substitute for weightlessness, a .44 Magnum (inscribed) for the life wand, and so drearily forth. But it would take the magic out of the story.

Heinlein chose for telling his story the first person, past tense viewpoint mode.

This is notoriously the hardest mode in which to maintain suspense -- because as you read, you are constantly reminded that the viewpoint character did survive the experience.* Yet DOUBLE STAR is a suspenseful novel. I believe this is because Heinlein keeps Lorenzo forever off balance. Whenever he comes within sight of his goal, which is not physical survival but only to be allowed to return to his former low estate, yet another complication crops up. There are situations where guns are brandished, but they're only used as demonstrations of the seriousness of the matter, and are disposed of almost perfunctorily.

Heinlein has a flair for colorful language, and



*I view with suspicion any writer who cites his own work while discussing that of another author. But to keep these words from being thrown back at me some day, I do admit that once I wrote a long story in first person/past tense, in which the viewpoint character suddenly died, in the middle of the last sentence. I didn't do it out of ignorance of the literary and logical conventions being violated.

Lorenzo, with his theatrical ego, makes a good mouthpiece. Two examples:

I could play it with one foot in a bucket and the smell of smoke backstage...

I was as angry as a leading woman with her name in small type...

Which, as far as I'm concerned, takes care of the question of DOUBLE STAR's entertainment value. We can dispose of the other three, less important, functions in fairly short order.

EDUCATION. Beyond a mention of Coriolis force and computation of flight time to Mars, DOUBLE STAR has virtually no scientific content. We know now, alas, that Mars isn't like that -- in fact, it was probably wishful thinking in 1956. Torchships and life wands are just new names for everyday science-fictional hardware.

But there is lots of interesting information in the book. The parts that ring most true are Lorenzo's discussions of acting, which seem to my relatively untutored eye to be conventionally Stanislavskian: concentration, belief, and imagination. It's not empty theorizing, either; everything he says about acting he demonstrates in the course of the book, and his behavior would have been much less convincing without the discussions.

The details of running a political campaign are presented very well -- and the business about the Farleyfile is fascinating -- but I find it difficult to separate fact from opinion. However, as noted earlier, Heinlein has experience in this area, and I don't (aside from the occasional town meeting, my experience with practical politics begins and ends with trying to run for the local school board, and finding that my property line was twelve feet too far west). Similarly, the parts concerning the monarch and his court and parliament; I don't know where research ends and imagination begins.

As in all Heinlein books, there are tasty morsels of information offered for verisimilitude and decoration. We learn that the g in "gnu" stands for a Bantu click, for instance, by way of demonstrating the impossibility of transliterating the Martian language into English.

But education is more than the simple transfer of information. I think it fair to assert that there is didactic value, especially for young readers, in Heinlein's sure extrapolations, whether they are about breathing masks or social systems. There's the constant implied invitation to figure out how he got from point A to point B, and see whether you would do it differently.*

EDIFICATION and IMPRESSIVENESS. These are considered together because they are both demonstrated best in the same part of the book.

My dictionary says of the verb edify that it is "to instruct or benefit, especially morally." On the surface, the lesson of Lorenzo's slow conversion to the ranks of the just provides instruction mainly in the areas of coercion and domination. He is blackmailed, manipulated, seduced, and even hypnotized, and becomes a better person for it. This has more to do with behaviorism than morality.

Heinlein saves himself in the last two pages, through an impressive framing device that puts the story into a new perspective and suddenly gives it a moral dimension.

*It's especially fun, if not quite kosher, to play this game with the benefit of twenty year's hindsight. The offhand reference to Mitsubishi breathing masks is impressive in this context, even startling; that Penny has her hair up in bobby pins is less so.

And the final statement is an epiphany so moving in its simplicity that, having read the book ten or twelve times, and knowing it will be there, it never fails to give me a chill of revelation.

I would quote it here, but I suspect that some few of you, not having read the book before, disregarded my early warning and went on reading the introduction. I've spilled the plot, but you'll forget that soon enough. Get comfortable, move on to that marvelous first line, and prepare yourself to be edified, impressed, educated, and above all entertained.

--Joe W. Haldeman



Gerald Bishop started up the film projector and the sepia-tinted credits of SOYLENT GREEN started rolling. "Christ," groaned Rog Peyton, obviously more used to papier-mache rockets zooming across cardboard galaxies, "they've got the wrong film!"

Unfortunately they had the right film. I squatted down beside Peter Roberts. "That's Edward G. Robinson," I said. "He died shortly after they completed the film. He had taste. And that's Charlton Heston."

Peter turned to me. "Gee, Graham, you're just the sort of person everybody likes to sit next to in the cinema."

I was flattered. I told him how the film ended and left.

Graham Charnock, STOP BREAKING DOWN #4

THE RAPE OF THE LOCS

XENIUM has never been a response oriented fanzine. You get it because you're my friend or because I'd like you to be my friend or because you've sent me something nifty and this is my way of saying Thank You. Still, even though I've made this fairly clear in the 5 years XENIUM has been around (five years? That's not too many) I usually receive a smattering of letters when each irregular issue appears. And I'm certainly grateful when someone deems this publication worth the time and effort a loc requires.



The problem, if it merits such a name, is that XENIUM just isn't the sort of fanzine where it makes much sense to have a lettercolumn. Oh, occasionally I've excerpted particularly witty or interesting sections from letters received but if it's been almost two years between issues, there is unfortunately little point in publishing letters which comment on the great stuff that was in the previous fanzine. So if you get XENIUM you're in one of two categories: (a) You're a Special Person and not even a dispensation from Tucker will get you off the mailing list, or (b) You're an Interesting Person and you'll continue to get XENIUM as long as you continue to be interesting. As anyone who has seen me play pinball for three hours without winning a single free game can tell you, it doesn't take much to keep me interested. A loc may do it, but just as likely it won't, unless you've really got something special to write about.

As it happens, XENIUM 2.6 *did* have a mini lettercol and I thought I'd done a reasonable job of offering egoboo to both the writers in 2.5 and the people who'd responded to them. I should have known better! After all, I'm primarily a letterhack myself and I know the annoyance produced by sending a letter to a fanzine and not even making the WAHF column. Still, I was a mite surprised to receive complaints all the way from Detroit, Michigan to Newcastle, England -- delivered in person -- concerning my mis-handling of the lettercolumn in 2.6. It was with more than a little embarrassment and chagrin that I consequently rummaged through the mass of kipple that makes up my room (a perfect example of the Second Law of Thermodynamics and the inevitable victory of entropy) and discovered a bundle of letters on 2.5 that I'd put aside as useable in 2.6. It's too late to redress that omission but I apologize to SAM LONG, JACKIE FRANKE, SHERYL BIRKHEAD, LEAH ZELDES, PAUL SKELTON, DAVE LOCKE, ALEX EISENSTEIN, ROBERT BLOCH, ROB JACKSON, MIKE O'BRIEN, DON D'AMMASSA, GARY HUBBARD and VIC KOSTRIKIN. They may not get to see their deftly wrought responses in print but at least their names are writ (semi) large.

I did manage to keep the letters on XENIUM 2.6 together in one place and I'm most grateful to everyone who wrote. However, the passage of time and the idiosyncrasies of editorial discretion once more dictate that there be no normal lettercolumn this issue. A public doffing of the famous Glicksohn hat to the following trufen for response above and beyond the call of duty:

GRAHAM ENGLAND, GEORGE BARR, HARRY WARNER, PHIL STEPHENSEN-PAYNE, MIKE O'BRIEN, TONY CVETKO, RANDY MOHR, RICH COAD, BOB PAVLAT, BRETT COX, AL SIROIS, ALYSON ABRAMOWITZ, IRA THORNHILL, GEORGE FLYNN, TERRY HUGHES, CHRISTINE MCGOWAN, BRUCE TOWNLEY, GARY HUBBARD, ROSE HOGUE, SHAYNE MCCORMACK, BOB TUCKER, SAM LONG, ANGUS TAYLOR, LARRY DOWNES, DAVID EMERSON, JODIE OFFUTT, RANDY REICHARDT, ROBERT BLOCH, SUSAN WOOD, ERIC LINDSAY, GIL GAIER, and MIKE BRACKEN.

However, last issue established a tradition I'm luckily able to maintain this time around. In XENIUM 2.6 I took a letter from a well-known English fan who'd had only minimal contact with North American fans and allowed him to expose himself to a wider fannish audience. That earned Leroy Kettle a niche in the anthology of the best fan-writing of the year so my admiration for Roy's skill with words was vindicated. This issue I'd like to expose to you a fan most famous for his consumption of Scotch (and that certainly seems appropriate for XENIUM) who yet has a certain flair for locking. Yes, folks, once again it's that section of the fanzine known as...

LITTLE KNOWN ENGLISHMAN OF THE ISSUE

featuring PAUL SKELTON

This is just a few lines from your country cousin, your poor relation. The hick from the sticks. Remember all those "You know you're really stoned when..." or "You know

"Was most impressed by Leroy's sociological piece on cats, in which he manages superbly to encapsulate the essence of catness - vodka. Clean, precise, deadly, untameable, and altogether marvelous. Unlike the essence of dogness - whisky: warm, shaggy, bouncy and liable to leave a mess afterward." Loc from Phil Stephensen-Payne



you're really married when..."? Do you? Well, here's a whole new class of 'em. "You know you're really being subsidized when...a fellow faned sends you his zine airmail at *his* expense whilst at the same time sending you the money to send him your zine airmail at *his* expense." It lets us non-colonials know where the money's really at. Hmmm, now there's a thought. I wouldn't mind betting that this airmail postage of yours is being subsidized by the Canadian government, in an effort to encourage potential immigrants. "See how good the Canadian Way Of Life is. Canadians can even afford to send zines AIRMAIL. Come to SUNNY CANADA NOW!" It makes me feel proud and a little humble (but mainly proud) that the Canadian government considers me to be worth it... ME? Heehee, howsabout that? Or do I detect a trace of ulterior motive in all this subsidized largesse?

Casting my eye (thwunk-damn these loose eyes) over the Olympic medals tables and noting the pathetic medals haul of the host nation (Canada, you nit) I put two and six together and immediately make five: it isn't just me, it's all fans. In an attempt to make use of all those ex-Olympic facilities, Monsieur Prudeaux is planning on staging the World's First Fanlympic Games. With unusual political forethought and acumen, he is attempting to corner the market in fans. If all the active fans are Canadian then look at all those lovely gold, silver and bronze medals Canada will win. (I wonder what events he has in mind for me? The Mens 400 Metres Collating? Surely not the Pentathlon -- Pubbing, Locing, Contributing, Getting Drunk, and Putting On A Con -- why, we MaD Group members are notoriously weak in one of those events. It drags our whole score right down.) But I'm sorry, I can't do it. It would be churlish of me to turn my back on the dear old UK in this its hour of fan-nish need. Why, me, Fanning for Canada? It's unthinkable. Everything I am I owe to England. Everything I own, too. Come to that, everything I owe, I owe to dear old England. Me, desert England? Damn, where's that suitcase?

You ought to be able to answer me this, it being in the nature of a mathematical puzzle. If $(X) + (X + 2Y) = (X + Y) + (X + Y)$ where X is a fan and Y is enough booze to get him pissed, how come the first case (me and you), which is the same as the second case, is leaving me feeling depressingly sober? Or does one need advanced calculus to understand this phenomenon? Or just a case of advanced Glen Algebra? I know the expression representing you should be $(X+nY)$, where n is any number in excess of 250 (I lost count after what seemed to be the 48th bottle of Chivas...) but somehow even the laws of entropy, which are against any uneven concentrations of whisky anywhere in the universe, failed to slide any inebriation down-gradient to me. Sometimes I do feel that life can be a teeny bit unfair. Or so I thought until I realized the whole episode was sheerest fantasy. I would never have guessed it until you slipped in the bit about the half gallon of Johnny Walker Black Label. This is the modern equivalent of the crock of gold at the end of the rainbow, the most desirable thing in the universe and the most unattainable (hence, when one reaches a state of psychic benevolence, feeling that one has attained the unattainable, one is said to be 'crocked'.) Yes, the half gallon of JWBL is today's Golden Fleece, and at two hundred and sixty dollars someone very definitely was fleeced unless (oh unthinkable, unfannish horror) he didn't immediately spend the full amount on scotchy substances. Could this be? A fan? No, of course not Skel, don't be silly. Just put it down to dear booze. Quick, change the subject before you lose your grip on reality by contemplating a fan who doesn't immediately rush to the bar whenever he has money in his pocket.

((Editorial Note: Skel's loc refers to a fanzine whose contents will, undoubtedly have been forgotten by most of you but his extrapolation of the fact that I airmail his copies of XENIUM and pay to avoid a three month delay in getting his own very fine fannish fanzine plus his comments on the inundation of good Scotch that accompanied my 30th birthday should amuse even at this late date. Those acquainted with English fandom and with aspects of English English will gain a little extra from Paul's deft way with a letter.))

SOMETHING EXTRA...

Ever since XENIUM started, some five years ago, each issue has contained a little Something Extra, a lagniappe of a personal nature that offers a little part of me to the friends and acquaintances on the mailing list. Once again I've decided to stick with the idea, so this issue contains something I hope will stir up a little interest.

MidWestcon is notorious as the best of the fannish relaxacons. Two or three hundred generally convivial people gather around a swimming pool somewhere in Cincinnati and soak up lots of sun, lots of conversation and enormous quantities of alcohol. However, there was a slight difference at the 1977 MidWestcon. For the first time a MidWestcon was held during the Age of the Spayed Gerbil!

After checking into the Quality Court I immediately went to the bar and conveyed the recipe for Spayed Gerbils to the young bartender there. He endeared himself to several of us by retaining it immediately and making excellent drinks for the rest of the weekend. And each time I enjoyed one I carefully pocketed the swizzle stick. Just In Case.

But unfortunately MidWestcon is only a three-day con. I blush to admit I wasn't able to collect enough sticks for even my normal 165 print run, let alone the 200 copies I'm aiming at this time. (Had it been a five day Worldcon though...) So exerting all the bleary-eyed, boyish charm for which I hope one day to be famous, I approached the hostess of the bar and explained my desires. I also asked for a box of swizzle sticks. As you can see, my fascinating description of the wonderful world of fanzines won over both the hostess and her hard-eyed, tight-fisted boss and so readers of XENIUM 2.7 get a souvenir of one of the best of the 1977 conventions.

And just think, you may well be one of the one person in eight whose Something Extra was sterilized in a Mike Glicksohn Spayed Gerbil!! Yecchh!!!

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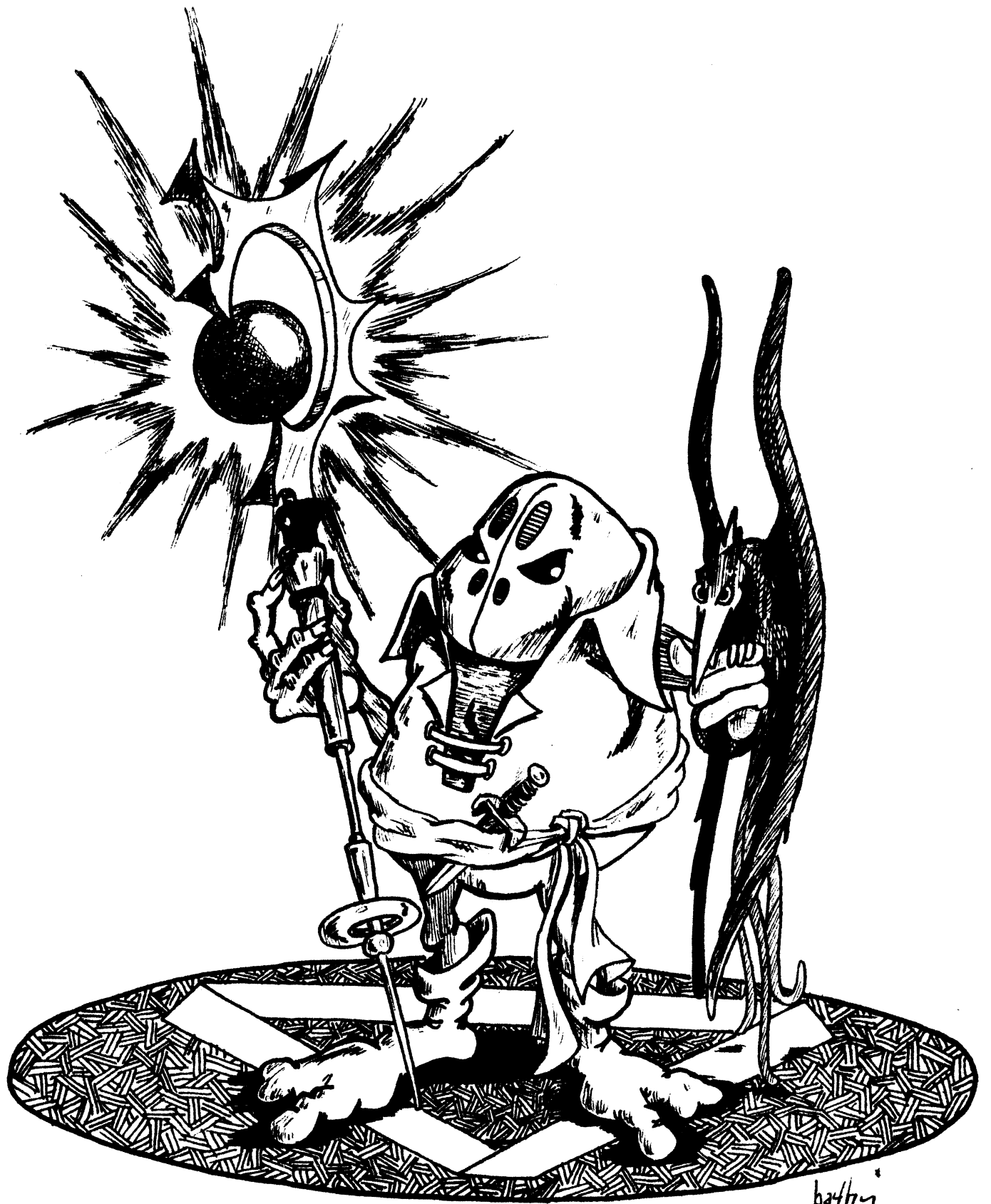
Joan Hanke Woods -- 8

"Hell! Beating booze is easy! It's beating life that's tough for all of us, pal!"

Robert Blake in "Baretta"

"Gamblers are a hard lot. They shouldn't try to act human."

Subtitle in "Yojimbo"



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