

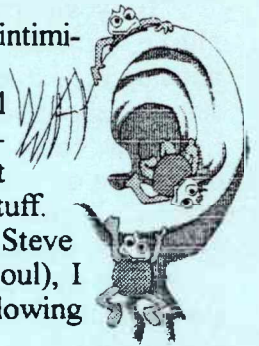


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A WRIGHT, awright, somethin' funny's goin' on a round ear, an' I wanna know what it is!
Well, I hafta admit, I was a bit intimidated by the topic. Dunno 'bout some of the rest of you, but I don't do so well when I set out to be funny. It's the pre-meditation thing, I guess. It's better when it jes' comes natcherly. Spontaneously. That stuff.

So, anyway, all seriousness aside (as Steve Allen never gets tired of saying, bless his soul), I am instead going to offer you the following spontaneous meditation on nature:



The Hummingbird

ON the Friday afternoon before Labor Day, clouds swept in over the Las Vegas valley and the ambient temperatures dropped. I was still at work. There was a brief shower around two-ish, and the sky was lowering—from two directions, according to Marcy. About 3 p.m., while I was driving home—both Marcy and I were shoed off early—a weathercaster announced the official temperature at 97 degrees. As I headed eastward I got a couple of light spritzes and intermittent punctuation across the windshield, but that was about all.

Marcy hasn't had that luck the last couple of times August showers came our way. We each head homeward toward opposite sides of town, these days, and she has the fortune to live on the West Side. It's is a nicer area than ours in many ways, but it's also closer to the major range of mountains that comprises one of our valley walls, and thus, it would appear, subject to fiercer weather.

Things lightened up as the afternoon wore on, but the sky remained patterned with clouds ranging from piling cumulus to wispy cirrus. Near sunset, Joy-Lynd and I stepped out to the patio, she to have a cigarette, I to see how things looked, and to share a few quiet moments with her away from the TV.

The official weather reports frequently vary from our neighborhood's eyeball observations, though we're not more than three miles or so from the airport. We've got one of those oversize thermometers hanging on the back fence. It's not well placed for accuracy—the sun hits it during some portions of the day—but great for visibility, which is a Ghood Thing. It has the degrees printed on it at 20° intervals, and the needle was loitering below the

100° mark. But the humidity had increased, so the air didn't really feel all that much cooler, coming as we had from our air-conditioned interior.

As we sat comfortably conversing her eye caught on something behind me.

I looked back and, near a power line just visible between the branches of adjacent trees, there hovered a hummingbird! Even as my mind registered what it was, it dropped to the wire and perched!

"Oh, look!" Joy-Lynd breathed. "I've never seen one land!"

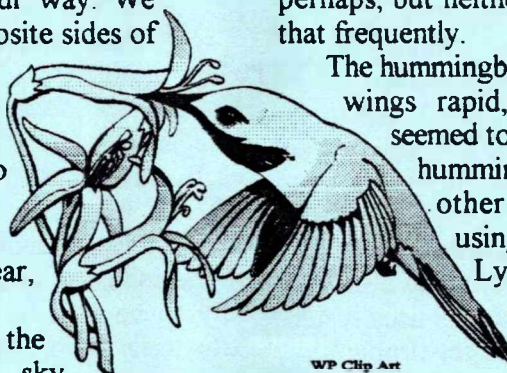
I concurred. If it's common, you'll chuckle, perhaps, but neither of us have seen hummingbirds that frequently.

The hummingbird lifted, dark against the sky, its wings rapid, though not really blurred. It seemed to me a little larger than your usual hummingbird, but I don't know of any other kind of bird that hangs around using its wings as hard as that. Joy-Lynd saw it as tiny—the image to the left would be about life-size—but the perspective was awkward.

It lit again for a moment, its profile in brief stasis pretty much like a miniature version of most any middle-sized bird, then it rose once more and swooped out of sight beyond the lefthand tree.

"If I got a hummingbird feeder, do you suppose they would come here?" Joy-Lynd wondered. She had seen one in some store recently, a fancy one, with multiple outlets, but she would prefer something simpler. That it would also be cheaper may never even have crossed her mind. [That got a snort from her when she read this!].

I supposed aloud that if she built it they would come. After a moment, she said, "Can they keep hummingbirds in cages?" I was vaguely shocked by



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the concept, and my immediate reaction was that I thought not. They wouldn't in my ideal universe.

"It would probably have to be a big one," she mused, possibly sharing my thought about their needing their freedom, but then adding some rough statistics about how many times their weight in food they must consume. (We weren't able to come to a consensus on whether the word should be "eat" or "drink"; I just came up with wishy-washy ol' "consume" even as I composed this paragraph.)

I didn't try to voice my muddled speculations about what kind of family life hummingbirds lead. I said I didn't think the cage would have to be all that big, if kept supplied with all the nectar or whatever the bird needed to survive. The image of a hummingbird enclosed in a cage of roughly cat size floated briefly through my mind. You can see I'm not a really a naturalist at heart.

She too had had a mental image of a small cage. "I was just seeing a hummingbird up there, about an inch above its perch, humming away..."

I chuckled, picturing it beating its little wings as in bobbed insouciantly in its little space.

"Or no, maybe not so much *humming*," she added thoughtfully. "It'd be pretty disgusted with the cage. Maybe it would be *humphing*—"

I winced, but that bizarre image tickled me in the right spot. We both let it amuse us a little while.

"Do hummingbirds sing?" was her next thought. Beat.

"Nah. They don't know the words," I said. And then we chorused: "—They just hum the melody." Some oldies are goldies.

A half moon hung in the sky. In a few minutes we went back inside.

—Ross Chamberlain

Revel-Action—Marcy

I think that perhaps the hardest lesson about life I ever learned was the one embodied in the title of the song, *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*. (There was a book by that title before Tammy Wynette or whoever it was wrote and recorded the song.) And even yet I'm not sure that my innermost self has been convinced. Most of us grew up with happy-ending stories and are inundated with just such tales on the boob tube every day. We are reassured that the guys in the white hats will beat the guys in the black hats in the end, and the damsel in distress will be rescued in the process. By the Hero. In murder mysteries and action tales (yes, and science fiction, too. Sheesh!), regardless of all the nasty things that happen to peripheral characters (some of whom may be close to the hero or protagonist) the villain will usually get his comeuppance, preferably in a suitably ironic, fit-the-crime sort of way. The balance will be retained, or regained.

Yes, there are works of literature in which nothing is resolved, or the villains win, or the plot concludes in unhappy ways. Presumably realistic... or making an artistic point. Even SF has its depressing mavericks—there was one novel called *Invaders from Earth*, I think (I don't remember the author) that devastated me by its crushing ending. I've avoided reading anything by Thomas Disch. There are movies that end that way—often B and TV flicks trying to add artistry but without artistic merit. It's fair enough to do this when it's a neat twist, but one can only be amused the first dozen times the

camera pans away from the lovers' closing-credits clinch to see the skeletal hand burst from the ground or the spark crackle across the eye-ports of the killer robot.

And of course biographies, where the protagonist dies at the end, or dramas where he/she sacrifices him/herself for the greater good (etc.) are a different story. The movie I associate with the bad sad ending the strongest, however, was not a science fiction picture, but a tale of the music industry—A 1975 TV movie called *The Dream Makers*, starring the late James Franciscus. He's a university professor who discovers a knack for predicting trends in the music industry, turns record promoter, and turns greedy. He indulges in payola, loses his girl, gets kicked out of the industry, and finally ends up driving a cab, only to be shot by a mugger as the movie ends. Artistically valid, I suppose, but 20 years ago I was only watching TV movies in the search for light entertainment. I was familiar with Franciscus from Mr. Novak, the nice-guy school teacher, and this was a nasty blow. Never had quite the same positive feeling about him after that.

Oh, my Corel All-Movie Guide says that picture included Kenny Rogers' first cinematic acting role.

Implosion—Arnie

So, has anyone offered to fill the vacant position of local fugghead, yet?

I get vaguely troubled when someone wants to pin down a word and gather in the drawstrings around its definition. To define "fan" is to limit it

Mailing
Cross Words
Comments

(that's semantically redundant, I suppose). You note the importance of context in understanding fandom. Context is everything in the definition of "fan" itself, as it is in many of our most useful words. I just looked up "love" in the dictionary, and it has a long entry, as you might expect. On the opposite page, the word "low" has an even longer one.

And of course, the word "fan" has a respectable list, including baseball references to striking out—but mostly having to do with air moving devices. How suitable, come to think of it...

PowWow—Joyce

I found it interesting that you never mentioned the inferior Oregon Trail game that got out in the market before yours and helped prevent yours from being made. Probably a matter of decent restraint—the blue paper that *PowWow 22* was printed on no doubt substituted for the smokin' blue language you *could* have indulged in...

"All the Fans Were Heroes" is another possible title for your segment actually titled "All the Fan World Loves a Hero," which is a marvelous tribute that reflects and illuminates your own love for the Microcosm.

The additional segment on your brother that joins these two in their forthcoming *Wild Heirs* appearance brings something that adds up to more about the nature of heroism than the sum of the parts.

APA-tizer—Ken

What a story! Almost sounds perfect for one of those movie scripts starring Nicolas Cage or Joe Pesci or maybe John Travolta. I say almost...

I was thinking as I read this, gee, I'm glad I never knew anybody who runs in that kind of life. And then I remembered my days on the lower East Side in New York and I realized that I *did* know some petty crooks and would-be swindlers and the like. One, a red-haired hippy type who lived in the basement of the building (1 East First Street), was a motorcycle thief who made the mistake of ripping off some Hells Angels' bikes and paid the ultimate price for it. I knew him because he used to borrow some of my SF books. He wasn't too good about returning them promptly, but he did, usually, return them in the long run. It's almost 30 years ago now—

Dangerous Jade —Aileen

Robert Heinlein was, and I guess remains, one of my favorite SF authors, though I have to say that *Podkayne of Mars* almost ruined that for me. Not that I didn't love the book—right up until the worst cop-out ending I've ever seen in my life. Along the line there somewhere I also discovered that I did not like a lot of his philosophy, especially his hard line authoritarianism. I would, I'm afraid, be one of his lesser villains, summarily shot without compunction, because, frankly, the concept of taking orders without question is anathema to me.

I could see the point of the arguments he made within the context that he made them, of course—For one thing, he so loaded the deck that one could hardly miss those points. But he was a genius at portraying people of intelligence, a trait I've rarely seen elsewhere: only Spider Robinson comes to mind. I can certainly relate better to Spider's expressed philosophies, even though I do not necessarily subscribe to them all, either.

