Gilgamesh

#66, January 1984, comes from Terry Carr,
11037 Broadway Terrace, Oakland CA 94611.
TCarr Publication #379, for close friends
and likable strangers, completely at whim.

Coke is God's way of telling you your jump shot's too good.

Sid Coleman was here over the holidays, visiting his mother and various others whenever the rains were too bad for his frenzied hikes up muddy hills and down puddled dales. He even inveigled some of us into you should excuse the expression trekking with him, though some of the rest of us were too busy doing all the things we should have done earlier in the year.

We did manage to spend an evening with him talking computers, getting sercon, and playing charades, which is Sid's only vice. He's a bit of a purist about the game; at one point, when I was trying to act out The Blue Nile for Carol, I'd just gotten to the point where she knew it was a book with a three-word title and the second word rhymed with "boo" when she began suggesting, "Doo, foo, goo, hoo..." I shook my head and made back-up gestures with my hands, but Sid as referee cried, "No cursors!"

I know some of you are still suspicious when I tell stories about Sid; Gary Farber and the Nielsen Haydens have claimed Sid doesn't exist, and this rumor seemed to gain credence at the worldcon when I kept telling everyone that he'd be there, he never missed worldcons, he'd surely arrive tomorrow. But Sid had just come back from a trip to Europe and he was feeling a bit under the weather, so he decided at the last minute to stay home. You may imagine the knowing looks I got as the convention waxed and began to wane and the fabled Sid Coleman continued to be nowhere in evidence. "I don't understand," I said weakly. "Maybe he's here and we just haven't found him among all these six thousand people." Heads were nodded and small smiles were displayed. "Sure, Terry, that must be it. I haven't even been able to find Carl Brandon all weekend."

I've probably made matters worse recently by telling several people that Sid would be at Corflu, the fanzine fandom convention to be held at the Claremont in a few weeks. I said this because I knew Sid was coming back for some physics conference the weekend of January 21 and I'd gotten the date for Corflu mixed up; it's actually the following weekend, by which time Sid will be back in Cambridge. No doubt I'll find myself trying to explain at that con too why no one can find him. "Sure we understand, Terry; you forgot what weekend Corflu was to be held. The date was only announced less than a year ago, after all, so how could you be sure? Say, wasn't that Paul Thorne who just walked by?"

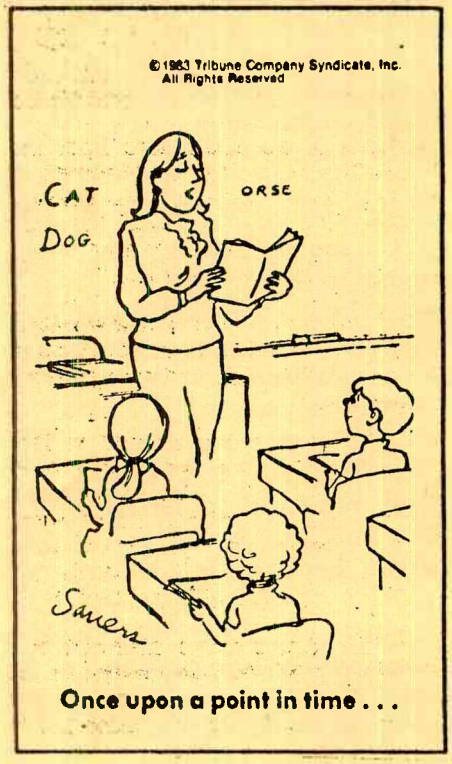
Well, maybe Patrick and Teresa will be here; they've exchanged a letter or two with Sid lately and Sid says they now believe in his existence. "Or

at least Teresa does; Patrick won't commit himself," says Sid. On the off chance that the Nielsen no-hyphen Haydens do make it to the convention, perhaps Teresa will support my fantasy (while Patrick maintains a discreet silence).

I asked Sid what he had to say about people who question his existence. He said, "Such an attitude is beneath reply." Hmm; maybe Sid doesn't exist after all -- the Sidney Coleman of legend would have had a better comeback than that.

-oOo-

I've been reading again. I don't mean the kind of reading I usually do, the science fiction short stories, novelettes, and novellas I have to read every year for my Best SF of the Year anthology, but rather the books I read when I have a little time to read purely for pleasure. I have an enormous bunch of books and such stockpiled over the last twenty-plus years that I really want to read if ever I get the time, and when I finish my sf reading each year I turn to them for maybe a month of pure pleasure. It's always a hyper time for me and I gleefully run around from one room to another grabbing books off the shelves that I've wanted to read for a decade or two, quite literally. The book I finished reading most recently was Darwin and the Beagle by Alan Moorehead, which tells the story of the young Darwin's voyage to many strange climes, mostly the east and west coasts of South America plus of course the Galapagos Islands, during which Darwin developed his "Theory of Evolution, or, The Survival of the Fittest." Moorehead is my favorite writer of such historical texts; I've read with pleasure The White Nile, The Blue Nile, The Russian Revolution, Cooper's Creek, and The Fatal Impact, and I looked forward to this book as something transcending the others in its subject matter. Alas, it proved to be Moorehead's last book, written from a film treatment in collaboration with his wife (I gather the movie never got made). The text is very short, hardly more than a hundred pages, though the book runs to well over two hundred counting all the illustrations, which are superb. Maybe Moorehead felt he didn't have to go into as many descriptions as usual because of the illustrations, but I missed the fullness of his usual prose. The story remains fascinating and I did enjoy the book a lot; it's just not as fine as I've come to expect from Moorehead. (Yeah, I know -- if I want the full treatment I ought to go read Darwin's own account of the voyage. Maybe I will.)



The book does have a lot of the little character touches that Moorehead tells so well, including a note on Darwin's later work habits that I found slightly horrifying: "His library became large, but above all it was a working library; for books in themselves he had no feeling, and when studying a heavy book would sometimes tear it in half to make it easier to handle." Aargh!

A little earlier I read The Last of the Incas by Edward Hyams and George Ordish, which despite its title spends much more time describing the makeup and earlier history of the Tahuantinsuyu than its downfall at the hands of Pizarro

& Co. Hyams and Ordish are both specialists in agriculture, which leads them to interpret the empire largely in terms of its careful ordering of produce, which they see as more basic to its strength than force of arms; according to them the Tahuantinsuyu was a communistic collective in which everyone had a specific role, nobody went hungry, and there was very little of what we'd call individual freedom, which they didn't miss because they hardly even had the concept. Hyams and Ordish take frequent delight in comparing the Tahuantinsuyu with the government and customs of their own country, England. For instance: "Topa Yupanqui was a good Mid-Victorian, and he proved it by further decreeing that the 'poor' could not bear witness in court, on the admirable grounds that the poor man was too easy to bribe."

I use the term "Tahuantinsuyu," by the way, because to say "the Inca empire" would be about as misleading as, say, "the Pharaoh empire." Comparatively few of the inhabitants were Incas; that was the name for the highest caste only. "Tahuantinsuyu" referred to the league of tribes that constituted the empire.

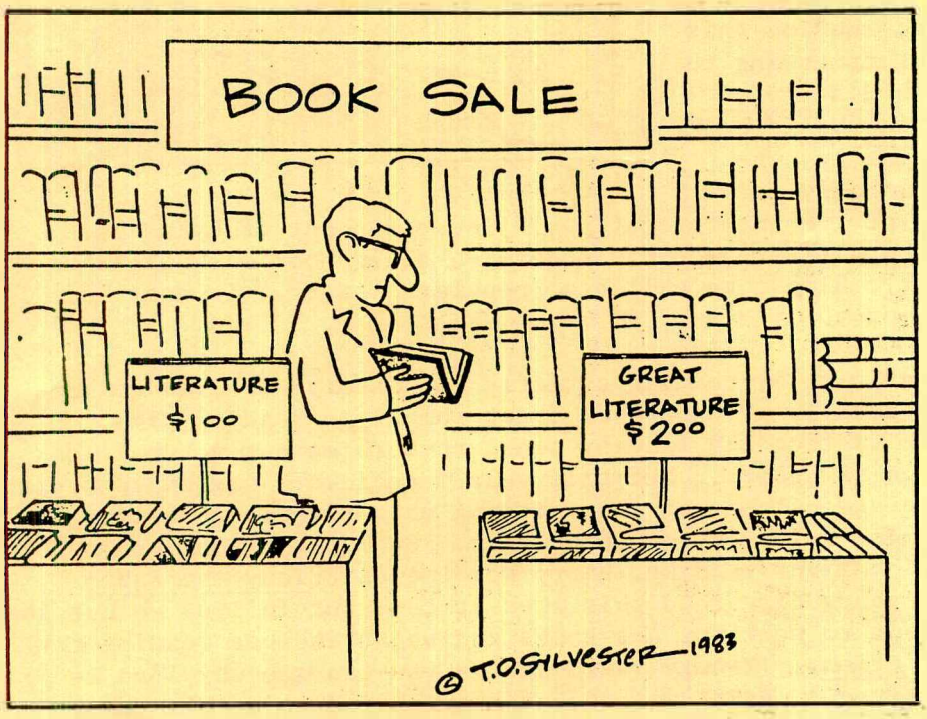
Fascinating stuff; reading this book beats the hell out of trying to plow through Prescott's History of the Conquest of Peru, the basic book on the subject. (Originally published in 1847, and now badly dated both in style and many of its interpretations. The viewpoint of Hyams and Ordish may be quirky, but it's reasonably modern -- their book was published in 1963 -- and while it couldn't be called a "popular history," it does have some sly touches of humor.)

I haven't been confining my reading strictly to history, or even to non-fiction, though that's usually my wont when I get some free reading time. Reading so much science fiction and fantasy tends to burn me out not only on the genre but on fiction in general, but this year I decided I was up to trying a novel or two -- there are batches of them sitting on our various shelves that I've been promising myself I'd get to one day. So I first took up one that promised to be quick light reading, Harry Kemelman's Friday the Rabbi Slept Late. Yeah, everybody else read this when it came out in 1964 -- but that was the year I first went to work for Ace Books and began endless reading for World's Best Science Fiction. (Twenty years ago -- you can see why I've been feeling culturally deprived.) FtRSL was indeed a quick and enjoyable read; I finished it in one day, which is almost unheard-of for me. I read slowly anyway, but when I'm reading stuff I've got to read, and much of which is rather lousy, I tend to plug away at a book or magazine in a grimly determined way, only occasionally picking up any kind of speed when I run across a story that I actually enjoy. It's a nice surprise when I'm reading something by choice and find myself turning the pages at twice my normal "speed." Kemelman's novel isn't a classic, even in the detective genre, but it's got some engaging characters and a nicely unfolding mystery. Quite satisfying for this year's

initial dabbling into fiction; I immediately went back to the shelves for another novel.

Perhaps something a little bit more meaty this time, I thought, and scanned the section full of historicals. Ah, just the thing: Robert Graves. I loved I, Claudius and Claudius the God, and got an almost science-fictional sense of wonder from Graves's historical speculations in Homer's Daughter and King Jesus. (Technically speaking -- that is, speaking in terms of technique -- a lot of historical novels, especially those by Graves, could be classified as science fiction, with the speculation being done in the "science" of history.) My gaze landed on one of his less famous books, They Hanged My Saintly Billy, the story of a nineteenth-century English blackguard who was a proven swindler and worse than that: Dr. William Palmer had a habit of taking out large insurance policies on relatives and acquaintances who tended to die soon. He sobered up his brother long enough to enable him to pass a medical exam for life insurance, then bought him so much liquor to finish the job he'd already been doing of swilling himself to death. His wife died of poison -- a suicide, perhaps. There were similar cases, and though nothing could be proved against Palmer the authorities started watching his doings carefully. When yet another friend died apparently of poison, they arrested, tried, and hanged him.

Graves's angle on this story is that Palmer didn't actually murder the fellow, that Palmer's luck just got stretched too thin. (He was really pushing it: after his brother died and Palmer collected on his insurance, he took a bunch of friends to the local pub and bought them all drinks, asking, "What's your poison?" Graves suggests that this was the origin of the phrase, by the way.) So while Graves happily recounts all of Palmer's earlier crimes, he presents him as a victim of ironic circumstance. He tells the tale with rich detail about English life in the 1850s, and he seems to have the spoken language of the time faithfully reproduced; the novel is certainly convincing in those ways. But he doesn't convince me for a moment that Palmer was convicted in error; his excuses and red herrings are transparent. I found the book a bit discouraging of my trust in Graves's honesty as an interpreter of history, in fact. If he'll go to such lengths to try to exonerate a murderer, how much faith should we have in his arguments about Claudius and the characters in his other novels?



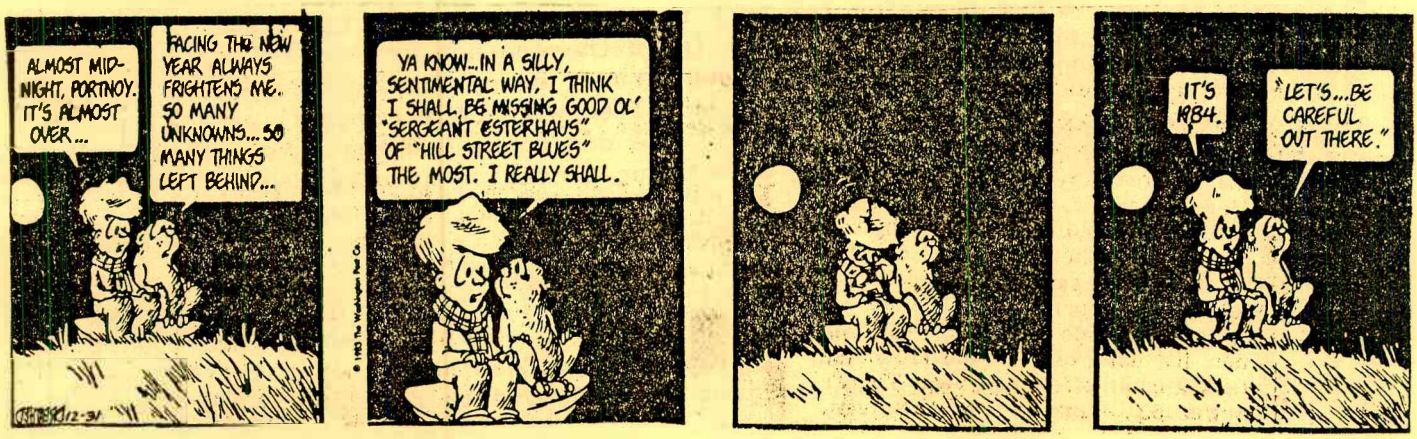
Well, maybe he was just playing in this one. Certainly his remark about the book, quoted on the cover of this 1958 Avon paperback (price 50¢) shows he wrote it with at least a faint smile: "My novel is full of sex, drink, incest, suicide, dope, horse racing, murder...and ends with a good public hanging."

Polley
TLW. countdown
FARBER

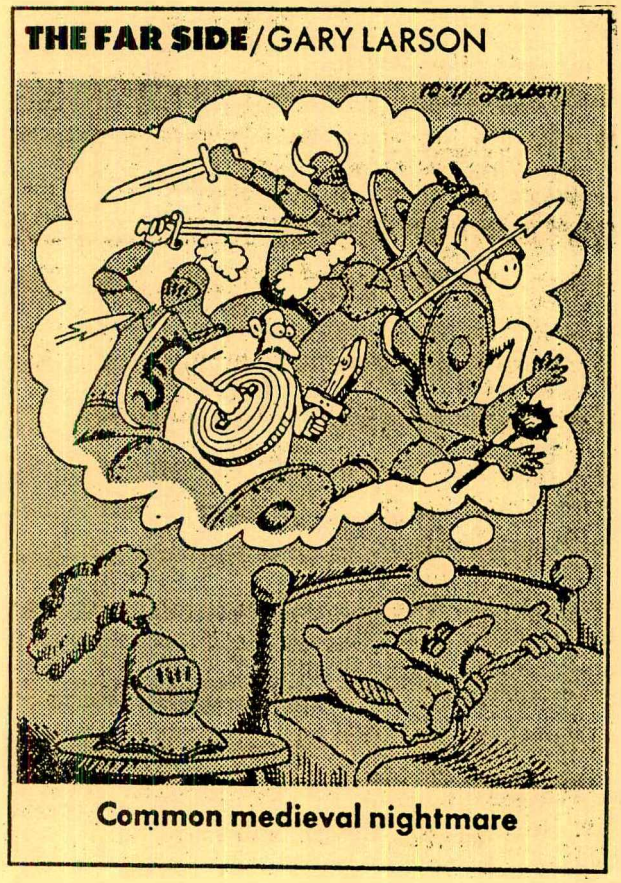
Having read two novels, I reflected that I've been known to cast asparagus at people who never read short stories, which are after all my favorite type of fiction. The short story, I like to lecture people, is a higher form of the writer's art, necessitating a complete command of one's material and the wasting of nary a word from start to finish. Why, it's almost as demanding as poetry. (Never mind that I seldom enjoy poetry.) That's why I edit so many anthologies; that's why most of my own writing has been short stories. The short story, and the novelette and novella, is the ne plus max of literature and anyone who reads nothing but novels is probably a closet cretin, I say. So I suddenly remembered that there are meganumbers of short stories both classic and contemporary that I hadn't read; I began looking through our vast library for short-story collections.

I first pulled out Ward Six and Other Stories by Anton Chekhov, a 1965 Signet paperback that I'd started reading a year or two ago. I'd been reading a book of Katherine Mansfield's stories, which I thought were good but not great, and then noticed in D. M. Davin's Introduction that Mansfield had patterned her stories on those of Chekhov -- what the hell, said I to myself, why read the disciple when I can read the master? So I turned to Chekhov himself and read a sampling of his stories, which came to me as a revelation; Chekhov, at least in this translation by Ann Dunnigan, struck me as a very fine writer indeed, especially in "A Dull Story," which was anything but. That novella struck me as just about perfect, a quiet and understated story of great power; the other stories I read then were also impressive. So this year I turned again to Chekhov, and read the title story, "Ward Six," also a novella. Wonderful stuff again; Chekhov had a way of summing up a person's life in a very moving way and with telling details.

But there were more recent writers who'd done stories in the shorter forms that were famous too -- Ernest Hemingway, for instance. Never mind his stories about "the good, the true, the beautiful" that he'd written later in his career when like many excellent authors he'd come to parody himself; what about his early stories? After all, I'd tried reading the late novel Across the River and into the Trees and hadn't liked it (I didn't finish it), but The Sun Also Rises was as good as its reputation. I hadn't been all that much impressed with his classic short story "The Killers" either, but there were many more in The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway, especially "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," which had impressed several of my friends. So I read that one, and was surprised to find that it struck me as only average. I could see every auctorial trick Hemingway was playing, but also some things I considered cheats -- the viewpoint narration wavers more than it should, for instance. But I didn't quit there; I also read the first story in the collection, "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," which I did enjoy. Hemingway, I think, was a craftsman rather than a pure artist; when he got his viewpoint down



right, he produced fine stories, and this was one of them. No, not a great story, but a very good one. "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" is a good example of how very much can be accomplished with pure craft -- which at its best is just about indistinguishable from art anyway. I'd venture to say that the title of "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" is a good example of craft: the lack of a comma between "short" and "happy" is a precise wordsman's way of specifying that Macomber's happy life was short, that it wasn't all of his life. But you could argue that the title was a result of artistic inspiration. (You could also argue that Hemingway dropped the comma by accident, but I wouldn't believe you; the story fits the title too well for that.)



Another novelette, this one from TriQuarterly 58, Fall 1983 (time to read something contemporary). It's "The Storytellers" by Fred Chappell, and I liked it a lot. The writing is marvelous: unmannered, precise, and with telling details. Plot and theme go together well. Oops, it turned out to be a fantasy story; well, no harm done. For that matter, it wasn't all that surprising that it was a fantasy: Fred Chappell used to be a member of fandom. He wrote a column for Harlan Ellison's DIMENSIONS and stuff for Dean Grennell's GRUE, among others, back in the 1950s. After he disappeared from fandom he took up writing novels in the Southern Gothic mode that was in vogue then; I read one of them -- was it It Is Time, Lord? -- about the time it came out, and found it to be a strange combination of Flannery O'Connor and H. P. Lovecraft. "The Storytellers" is a "Southern" story too -- Chappell teaches at the University of North Carolina -- but the doom and hovering guilt of his earlier book is gone from this; it's more, like, warm and folksy (but not cloying).

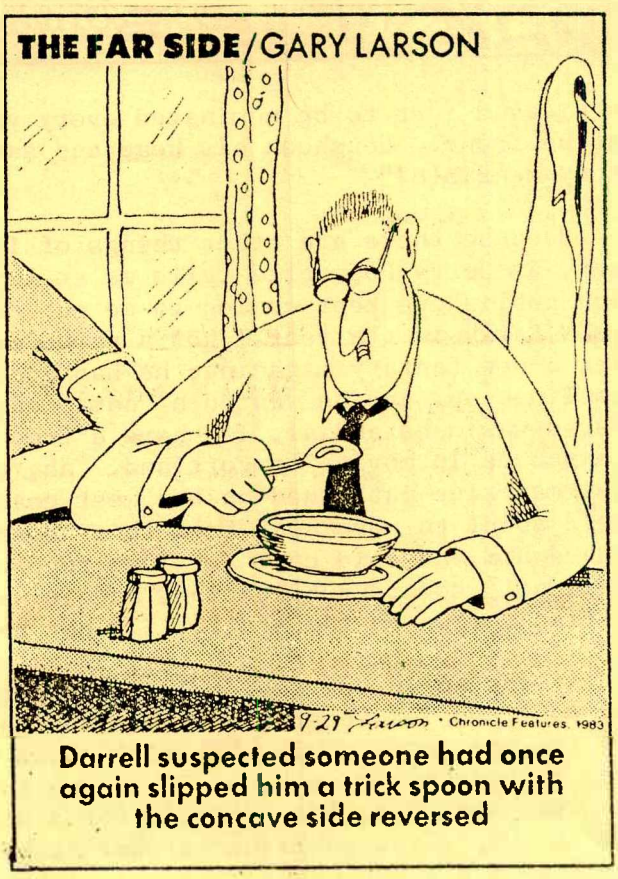
So much for What I Read on My Vacation. I offer the above nattering partly out of exuberance, but also because I'd like to encourage others to tell me what you've been reading lately. I know you read; I also know that most of what you read isn't science fiction or fantasy. Great; tell me what you've read that was interesting. I'm not asking for book reviews or literary criticism; I usually find such things dreadfully dull (when they're not written by, say, Algis Budrys or Debbie Notkin) and I spend part of every Thanksgiving being glad that the days when most fanzines were filled with book reviews are now long gone. But I'd enjoy hearing about some of the odd books you read, your thoughts about them, and maybe an interesting or amusing quotation here and there.

-oOo-

1983 was a nice year for me, especially in terms of egoboo and even money. If you stick around long enough and do your best (or sometimes even if you don't always do your best) eventually you'll probably find you have a certain reputation and even fans -- not necessarily just in fandom, either. I get a kick out

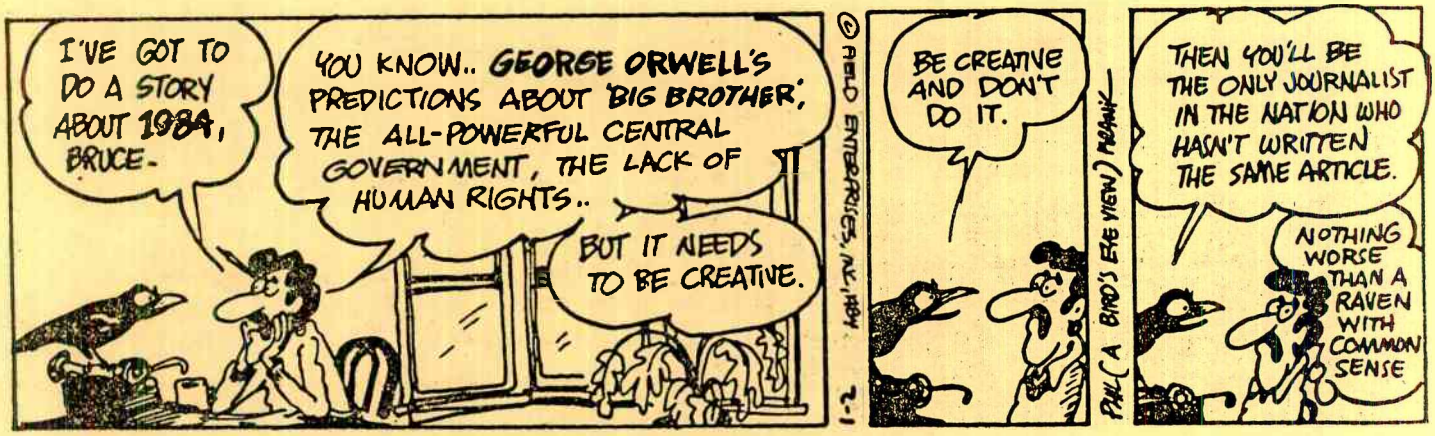
of meeting people at non-sf parties who say, "Oh, you're Terry Carr? I've been reading your anthologies for years!" A few of them have even read my stories. When I met Kim Stanley Robinson's wife, Lisa, she told me she'd originally discovered science fiction through my anthologies and Damon Knight's -- nor was she the only person who's told me similar things. (Of course, it's not an unmixed delight to hear from people in their twenties or even thirties that they "grew up reading your books.")

Last April or so I got a letter from the organizer of the J. Lloyd Eaton Science Fiction Conference asking me to come down to Fullerton so that they could present me with the Milford Award for lifetime achievement in editing; I was of course delighted to go, especially since they paid my fare. The conference was an academic one, with about fifty people gathered in a meeting room on campus to listen to people deliver papers on this or that topic of utter science-fictional seriousness (though Greg Benford's talk, which he gave extemporaneously rather than reading a prepared text, was lively). After the talks on Saturday they called me forward to receive the award, and I didn't know if I should give an acceptance speech or not, so I just said thank you and sat down. Turned out later that I probably should have, but oh well. It wasn't that I was struck dumb, either; I had a few thoughts I wouldn't have minded voicing, like mainly about people, usually publishers, who claim nobody ever lost money by underestimating the intelligence of science fiction readers. I wanted to remark that I think publishers sometimes overestimate the readers: I've seen good books rejected that I suspect readers would have liked just as much as the bad ones that got published instead -- what makes publishers think those bozos can tell the difference between good and bad? But maybe it's just as well I didn't say anything quite so cynical at what was, after all, a rather idealistic gathering.



The award, by the way, is a very nice plaque that says simply 1982 MILFORD AWARD, with my name under that. That 1982 date puzzles me, though. The award was given in 1983, not 1982, and the date can't refer to the year of eligibility since it's for "lifetime achievement." Well, I'm not going to look a gift award in the mouth, even if that were possible.

I got another nice trophy in July when I was presented with The Invisible Little Man Award, but I told you about that last issue. Two awards in one year -- that's not too many. But I missed pulling the hat trick when I lost my tenth straight Hugo for Best Editor at the world convention in September. As we were leaving the hall, ever-cheerful Charles Platt said to me, "God damn, doesn't it piss you off to keep losing the Hugo?" So I explained to him that I didn't see a chance in Hell for anyone who doesn't edit a magazine to win that award and I



was pleased just to be nominated every year -- this way I always get a reserved seat up front. He shook his head and said, "Why do you always have to be so bloody sensible?"

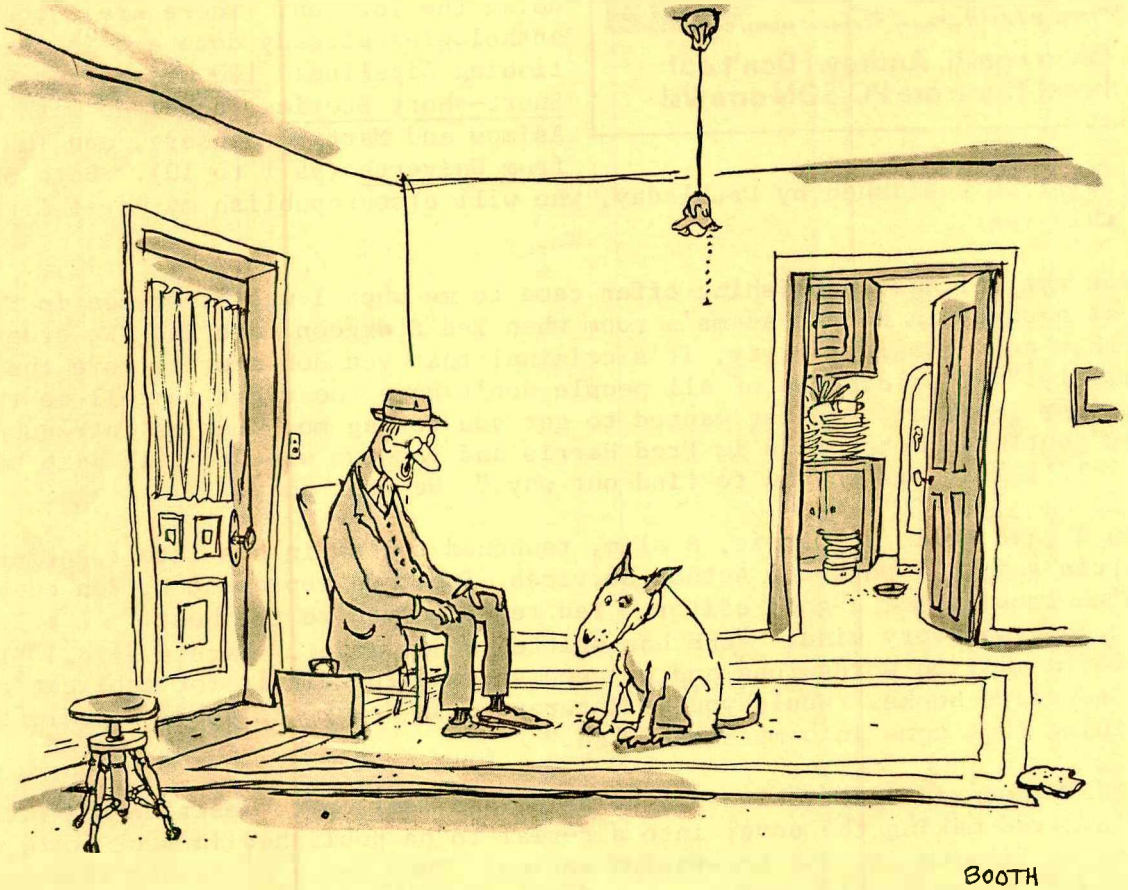
Because there are other things of importance besides awards, that's why. Like money, as Jerry Pournelle tells me at least once a year. 1983 was a year during which publishers kept coming to me out of the blue wanting to hire me to edit for them. Early in the year I got a phone call from someone who was planning to start a new fantasy magazine; he had good financial backing and solid distribution lined up, and he wanted a "name" editor. Like mainly me. The salary he offered was substantial, I'd have a free hand in what I published, and he'd pay my expenses in moving to Portland. Ah, there was the catch. Even if I believed a new magazine published on the west coast stood any chance of succeeding, I wasn't about to move away from this house, which Carol and I both love. So I thanked him and said no. (At last report, in November, the magazine was moving confidently toward publication, and it was hinted that there might still be a position for me on the staff. I'm not holding my breath about that, though.)

At the world convention I walked into one of the parties one night and found Fred Pohl and Tom Doherty just inside the door. Fred said, "Ah, Terry! We were just talking about you." "Really? What were you saying?" Fred waggled a finger. "None of your business." So I went on into the room and began mingling, till Tom came over and said, "Can we talk for a minute?" We found some space in a corner, and Tom, who's the publisher of Tor Books, told me that since Jim Baen was leaving to form his own company Tor was interested in hiring me as an associate editor to work with Harriet McDougal, who would be moving up to senior editor. I quickly said, "I won't move back to New York," but he said that was no problem, that Harriet would be working out of her home in South Carolina. "I've never thought it was necessary to have editors in the main office; who they are is more important than where they are." How terribly sensible, I thought, and we went on to discuss a contract calling for me to buy six sf novels for Tor. I was then just about finished on my six-book contract with Ace for the New Ace Science Fiction Specials and I figured they wouldn't want to renew the contract till they'd published the books and found out how well they'd sell (an assumption that Susan Allison and Beth Meacham confirmed when I checked with them), so it didn't seem there'd be any conflict there. Tom asked me to name a price and I quoted one a bit higher than I'd had from Ace; he said okay.

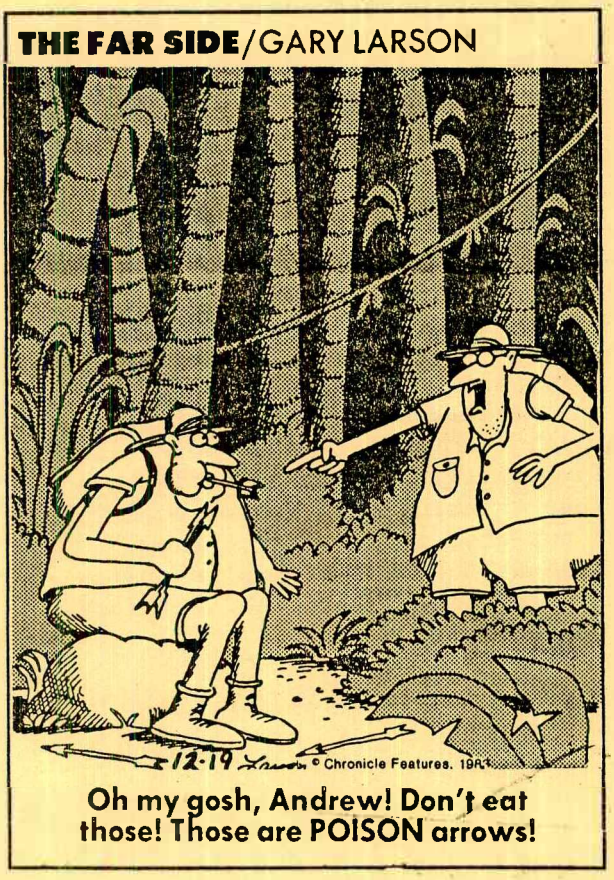
So a month later we confirmed the deal over the phone and Tom asked me to send him a proposed contract, which I did, basing most of it on the Ace contract. "What deadlines do you want for the books?" I asked at one point, and Tom said, "Let's not have any deadlines; I'd rather have you buy good books than pick up

some bad ones just to meet a deadline." How sensible, I thought again. Indeed, Tom is a very rare publisher: he's a pleasure to work with because he cares about the quality of his books (he's been an sf fan for decades and once remarked that if he hadn't become a professional publisher he'd probably be publishing fanzines today) and from everything I've seen of his doings he's scrupulously honest -- it was Tom, for instance, who took over Ace Books in the '70s and immediately brought the company back to respectability by paying out all the money that even seemed likely to be due judging from the chaotic financial records he inherited. I feel good about working for Tom, therefore, and I can illustrate what I mean about him by telling about how I bought my first book for Tor: It's Damon Knight's next novel and we bought it for a thousand dollars less than another publisher had offered. Damon decided to sell it to us because Tom agreed to do a hardcover edition before the paperback. "We probably won't make any money on the hardcover, but it'll give Knight some extra exposure and he deserves it," Tom said. Damon more recently wrote to me saying that Tor "gave me nearly everything I asked for in the contract (a clean one to begin with)...I keep thinking this is too good to be true. If there is a catch and you find out what it is, let me know." Anyone who's read Damon's dissections, in the SFWA FORUM, of publishers's contracts knows that he's very picky about such things, so if he's pleased with the deal you can trust that he got treated well.

Thus I'm currently working as an editor for Tor Books and am delighted to



"On my way home today on the bus, a lone grape rolled down the aisle and came to rest near my foot. It was pale green and looked to be of the seedless variety."



be doing so. I have the opportunity to offer some pretty decent advances in order to attract Name writers -- I've always worked on comparatively tiny budgets in the past -- and Tor is definitely an up-and-coming publisher, as a recent story in LOCUS attests: Tor's sales increased 100% in 1983 and even the sales reps are very impressed; the future looks awfully good.

I'm continuing my anthology work, of course. Universe's sales from Doubleday are higher than those for most of their novels and though I worried that Pocket Books might drop the Best SF of the Year series when Baen Books took over, Baen instead increased the advance and seems willing to continue the series: evidently those books too are selling well. Fantasy Annual might even be resurrected once again, though I have some hesitation about resuming that much work-reading while I'm doing the Tor job. There are a couple of anthologies already done and in the publishing pipeline: 100 Great Fantasy Short-short Stories, coedited with Isaac Asimov and Marty Greenberg, and The Best from Universe (#s 1 to 10). Both of the latter will be published by Doubleday, who will also republish my novel Cirque early this year.

But the weirdest publishing offer came to me when I was at Orycon in November. I was at a party in Robert Adams's room when Ted Sturgeon came in. We greeted each other and he said, "Terry, it's criminal that you don't write more than you have lately." I said, "You of all people don't have the right to tell me that," but he just laughed: "I just wanted to get you to nag me. Let me introduce you to this gentleman here; this is Fred Harris and you two want to talk with each other. I'll leave it to you to find out why." He went away.

So I said hello to Harris, a slim, rawboned fellow in his late twenties, and Harris said, "I work for Author Services, Inc.; we represent L. Ron Hubbard and we're looking for a good editor. Ted tells me you're the best." I allowed as how Sturgeon was very kind. "LRH has written a new novel," Harris said. "It's well over a million words long and we need someone to edit it for publication as twelve separate books. Would you be interested in doing the job?" I said the first thing that came into my head: "No."

"Well, don't decide too soon," he said, and went on to describe the project, which involved making the novel into a serial to be published in book form, with thoughts of filming it as a television series. They had a publisher lined up -- Bridge Publications, which had published all of Hubbard's nonfiction from Dianetics on -- and it was obviously going to be a major publishing endeavor. "So what would it take to make you change your mind and say yes?"

I grabbed a daunting figure out of the air: "Eighty thousand dollars."

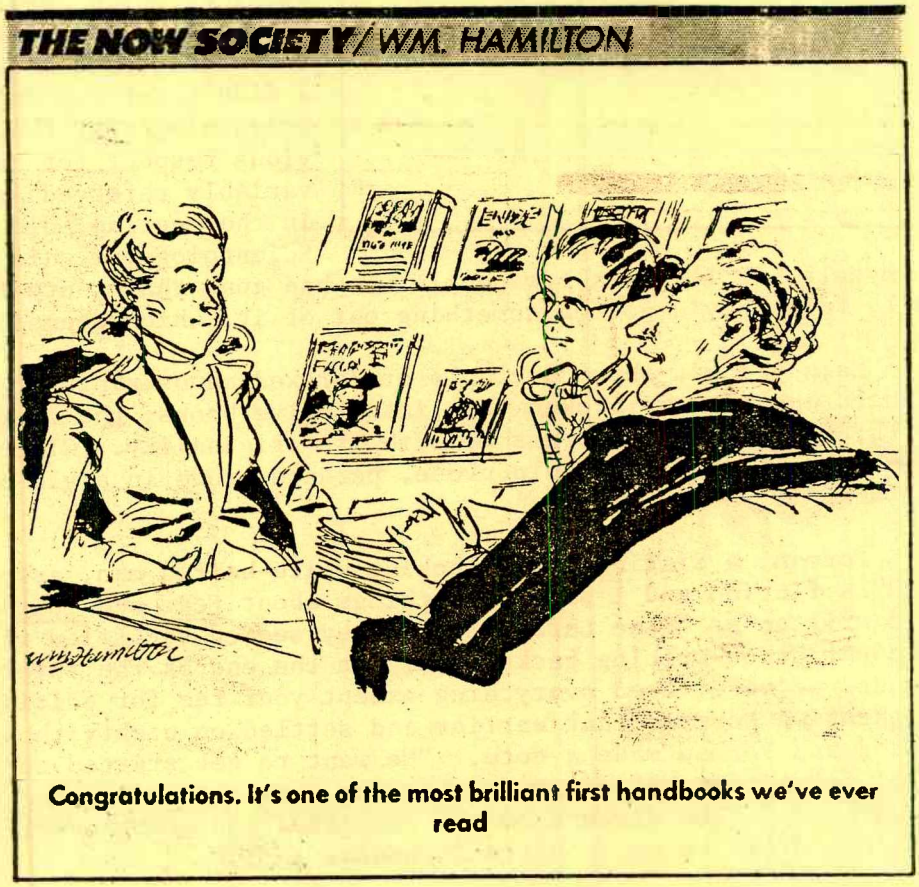
But Harris didn't even blink; he just wrote it down in his notebook. I said, "I can recommend some other editors who might do the job for less, if you'd like." He shook his head. "The money isn't necessarily the most important thing," he said enigmatically. "Let me talk with the people at ASI and maybe we'll get back to you."

I chuckled about this all the way back from the convention. $80,000.00? That kind of money is way out of my league, even in a good year. When I told Carol about the conversation I told it as a funny story. She laughed with me, but then she looked bemused and said, "How much?" I told her again. "I could buy a computer," she said, and began to breathe hard. Carol's been wanting a computer for a year or more; she's been almost fixated on the subject. "But," she said, "would you really want to take on such a big job? How long would it take you to do it?" I said, "Probably six months; maybe even longer if I have to shift scenes and restructure the story to make each book into a coherent unit." "Don't you think you'd hate it?" "Christ yes. That's well over a million words -- I think he said one million, a hundred and eighty thousand. And it's Hubbard's writing. If he was as self-indulgent in this as he was in Battlefield Earth it might take me six months just to do the basic line-editing. I'd probably have to cancel some projects I had planned..."

I stopped. "Wait a minute. This isn't going to happen. Don't get me started making plans."

Then the phone rang. A man introduced himself as Doug Hay of Author Services, Inc.; he'd been talking with Fred Harris and he wanted me to fly down to Hollywood to discuss the project with the people there. They would pay my expenses, pick me up at the airport, etc. I said okay.

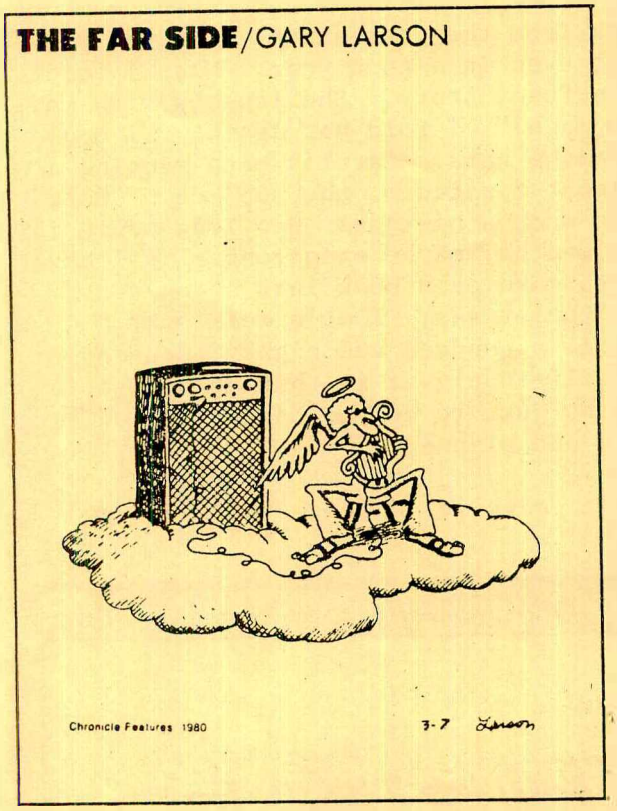
When I told Carol about this, her eyes grew wide and I could see that they'd changed color: they were now illuminated by green phosphor-dots.



So I called Bob Silverberg to tell him what was happening and get some advice about what kind of contract to ask for. He said, "You should have asked for more money." But he gave me some good suggestions. Then I called Harlan Ellison and asked if I could have dinner with him that evening and spend the night at his house. He said

sure, and added, "Be careful what you sign -- those Scientologists are sharks." I promised to try not to get blood all over his doormat when I showed up.

So I flew down to Burbank, where Doug Hay met me and drove me into Hollywood, took me to lunch at a nice restaurant, thence to the ASI offices in a spiffy building where they occupied what looked to be a whole floor. There were photos of Hubbard on the walls, along with those of other writers like Hemingway, London, Fitzgerald, Twain, etc.; I don't know what this signified. He led me into a comfortable conference room whose furnishings included a large glass case in which old pulp magazines featuring Hubbard's stories were displayed; the central item was a battered old Underwood manual typewriter with a card next to it identifying it as the machine on which Hubbard had written his stories in the 1930s.



A variety of people came in and were introduced, chief among them Len Forman, Executive Director of Bridge Publications. Fred Harris too was there for most of the meeting, which lasted a little over an hour. They all seemed like pleasant people and they treated me like a visiting dignitary; I didn't get the impression that they were Scientologists, though they all had an obvious respect for Hubbard, to whom they invariably referred as "LRH." One fellow, late in the meeting, did ask me what I thought of Scientology; I said I'd never investigated it myself but I knew a few people who had gone that route for a while and had apparently felt they'd gotten something out of it, which seemed to satisfy him.

Mainly I was shown a couple of Xeroxed manuscripts of the new book, which Hubbard had already broken down into twelve books; the overall title was Mission Earth, which didn't impress me with its originality. Glancing through the mss., I found them to be clean pulp prose, perhaps crude in style but quite serviceable for what it was.

Forman, a distinguished-looking white-haired man, asked me how familiar I was with "LRH"'s fiction and I said nice things about Fear and To the Stars, plus the stories he'd written as "René Lafayette." They seemed satisfied with my knowledge of Hubbard's fiction-writing background. At the end of the interview Forman said, "Well, I guess we've covered everything except your fee for editing the books." I said, "I think we covered that earlier and settled on eighty thousand dollars." Harris nodded and Forman made a note. "We want to get started on this as soon as possible; we'll get a contract to you within the week and we'll send you two copies of the manuscript." The discussion was completed and everybody left; shortly thereafter Doug Hay drove me up to Harlan's house.

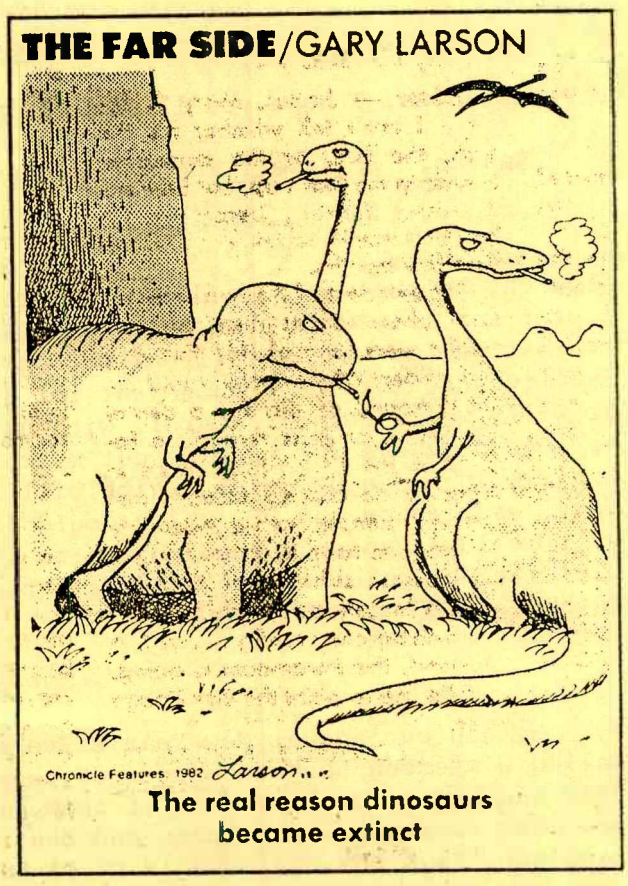
As usual, Harlan had several people visiting, among them Terry Dowling from Australia. We played pool in Harlan's game room, went to dinner at a Mongolian Barbecue place (Harlan paid for all of us), then returned to Ellison Wonderland and played some more pool till the wee, small hours when everyone went home. I could spend several pages describing the delights of Harlan's house, which I love, but that isn't germaine here. The next day I flew home and told Carol all systems

were go, and she immediately began reading computer manuals and magazines, calling friends who already had computers, and eventually settled on buying the IBM-PC, which had everything she wanted except a decent keyboard. She ordered one then, so that she wouldn't have too long a wait for it. We also ordered a Canon copier for me, because I decided if I was going to do this job I wanted to get a toy for myself out of it.

Then we waited for the contract to come from ASI, and when after two weeks it hadn't arrived -- they'd told me they wanted to get started on the project as soon as possible -- I called them. None of the people I'd talked with was there. I left call-back messages over several days in the first half of December, but nothing resulted from them. During that period I began hearing from Informed Sources that ASI had also interviewed several other people for the job, and had told them the same thing they'd told me: that the deal in each case was definite and they could expect a contract momentarily. I became suspicious and worried, and continued to call ASI with no results.

Finally, late in December, Len Forman called me. He said, "I just want to set your mind at ease. We've decided to do the editing as an in-house project, so don't worry, we didn't hire another editor instead of you." I was a bit stunned: "You told me very definitely that I had the job, Len." He said, "You mean no one's corrected that? Oh dear, I hope you haven't been inconvenienced." I told him I'd been inconvenienced a whole lot and I thought I should be paid at least a kill-fee. "I'll have to discuss that with people here; I'll get back to you soon," he said, and hung up.

But he didn't call me again, and my calls to ASI went unanswered...until early January, when Fred Harris called and said, "I hear you're annoyed at us. I'm afraid I haven't been keeping in touch with these matters; what's the problem?" I told him, rather vehemently, what the problem was, including the fact that they'd stiffed Dave Hartwell and Algis Budrys in the same way. "This kind of business practice," I said, "is what's politely called unprofessional." He said, "I see what you mean; I'll have to check into it and call you back." I said, "Before you go away, just tell me this: You were in the room when we discussed the project -- didn't you hear Len Forman tell me I'd have the contract the next week?" He said he had, and added, "This is very disturbing to me. Let's face it, I'm the one who gets sent to science fiction conventions, so I have to coexist with you. Believe me, I'll call you back in the next few days."



That conversation took place nine days ago, but I haven't heard a word from Harris or any of the other Hubbard people. Maybe I'll get a call from them an hour from now or in a few days and they'll make nice by paying me a kill-fee -- and paying the others too, as I suggested would be appropriate. But in the

"I don't know how to thank you two. This has been the most profoundly moving evening of my life."

circumstances, I hope you'll forgive me for doubting it.

Sharks. It's well known that they're stupid.

-oOo-

Oh, by the way: We did decide to buy a computer for Carol anyway, and a Canon copier for me. Call them mutual Christmas presents. The cost does dreadful things to what we laughingly call our savings, but we aren't quite bankrupt yet; and if 1984 turns out to be a good year for us monetarily, as we have some reason to hope it will, we'll get by. Carol, with much teaching from Rachel Holmen, is setting up some programs for working out my royalty payments to authors whose stories I publish in my anthologies, which will be a great help to me; Carol also hopes to write stories on the PC, which could do a lot to help pay for it. And my copier will be invaluable in enabling me to send out royalty checks with form letters, plus making copies of the stories I reprint to be sent to publishers. So both machines will be very useful.

-oOo-

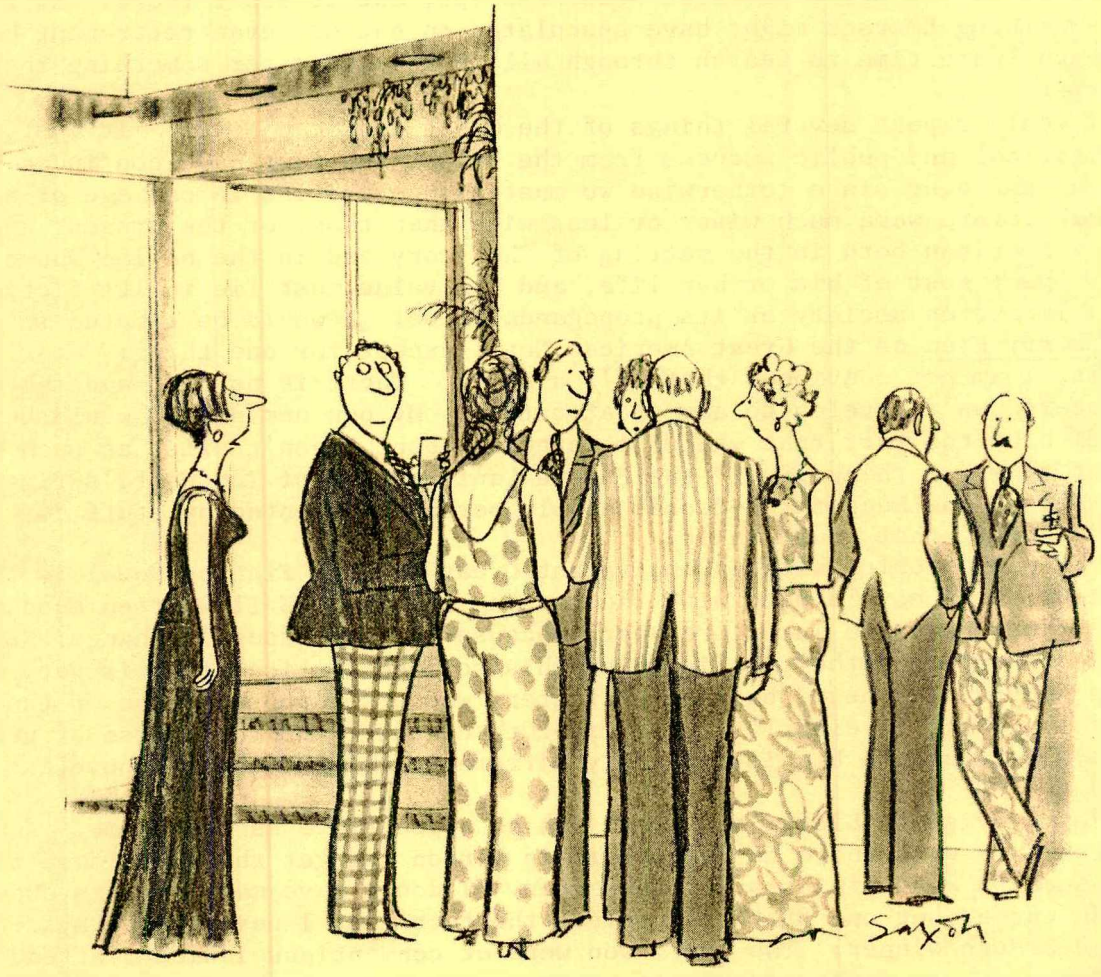
We had our annual New Year's Eve party again -- the one that's sometimes called Wintercon because hordes of people come from far and near to attend. This year there were over seventy of them, including Norman Spinrad from Los Angeles and east coasters Sid Coleman and Ben Yalow. Sharon Farber was here from St. Louis, too, but since the Bay Area is still her home ground that didn't seem unusual.

A good time was had by all, I gather -- quite a few people said it was the best of our parties yet. Part of that was probably because there was a larger percentage of people here who hadn't come before, so there was more variety. One of the new attenders said, "I can't believe it! Everybody here is interesting!"

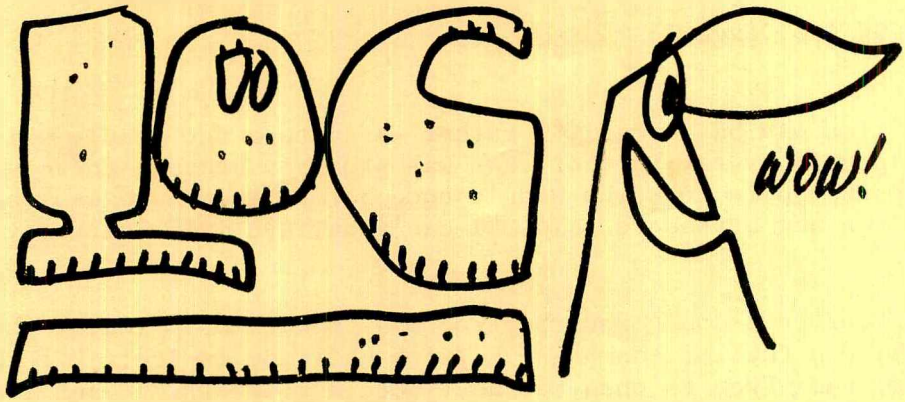
Naturally I don't remember too many specifics. (Carol put up a sign over the tub full of champagne bottles chilling in ice: "If the hosts are too bemused, feel free to open the next bottle yourself.") But I do remember Sid Coleman's proposed modern version of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, which would be called Dr. Benford and Dr. Benford: Jim and Greg Benford would take a potion and turn into each other. Debbie Notkin said, "Yes, but how would they know it when the potion wore off?" "It's a philosophical novel," Sid explained.

Lizzy Lynn arrived late, having come from another party, and not long after she got here she found the notion of taking a nap to be irresistible. She presented an interesting sight, lying asleep amid the coats on our bed with a balloon hovering over her, tied to her finger by a string. Somewhat later when a couple of people were ready to leave they came out of the bedroom saying, "Help! There's a black belt in aikido sleeping on our coats!"

Lizzy woke up before too long and rejoined the party, where she stimulated several of the rest of us to dance till the sun came up.



"Are you about ready to go home? I have given this occasion all I have to give."



[Actually this first item isn't really a letter of comment; it's a postcard sent from Montreal last November:]

SIDNEY COLEMAN:

Walking one night through the student quarter, we came across a woman's wear boutique named "Feu Sauvage du Herpes" ("Herpes Wildfire").

Ah, what do you expect from a town where the premier old-line fancy restaurant calls itself the "Beaver Club"?

[But here's a real LoC, from none other than:]

HARRY WARNER, JR.:

I hunted through the Mencken anthology of quotations in the hope of finding the source of the Great American Novel concept, but it isn't there. It sounds like something Emerson might have speculated on but not even retirement has brought me enough spare time to search through all those essays for something that might not exist.

I would expect several things of the Great American Novel: it must have had some critical and public success from the outset and must have continued to enjoy such success ever since (otherwise we must assume critics in one age or another and book lovers were much wiser or less wise than those of the present age), it must be American both in the setting of the story and in the nation where the writer spent most of his or her life, and its value must lie in its fiction, not in its impact on society or its propaganda value. I would be tempted to consider Huckleberry Finn as the Great American Novel except for one thing: dearly as I love it, I am not convinced that it's a novel. There is no plot and the major characters don't develop to any great extent. My own nomination would be disqualified by the fact that what I'm thinking about doesn't exist as such at the present time. I think if all the Eugene Gant portion of Tom Wolfe's fiction were published as one huge three-decker novel, perhaps augmented by stuff cut for space reasons, that would be it.

The main problem with an equivalent Great Science Fiction Novel is the way science fiction novels date with the passing of time. Well written mundane fiction remains just as valid in future years because the past doesn't change. But the years catch up with the time in which this science fiction novel is set, and that one is eventually absurd because characters who are supposed to be of the future use dialog which is clearly of the mid-20th century, and the course of events causes the future to be distractingly different from the one the novelist conceived.

Your Invisible Little Man Award was as appropriate as they come. And it's good that you were there to receive it in person and get the giant dose of egoboo which such an event injects into a person. I don't have many regrets about my fannish career but one of them involves the fact that I never heard myself announced a Hugo winner. The two I won were at conventions I didn't attend. I suppose I would have disgraced myself by crying in exactly the way I cried the day long ago when I looked up from my desk at the office and saw Claude Degler standing before me.