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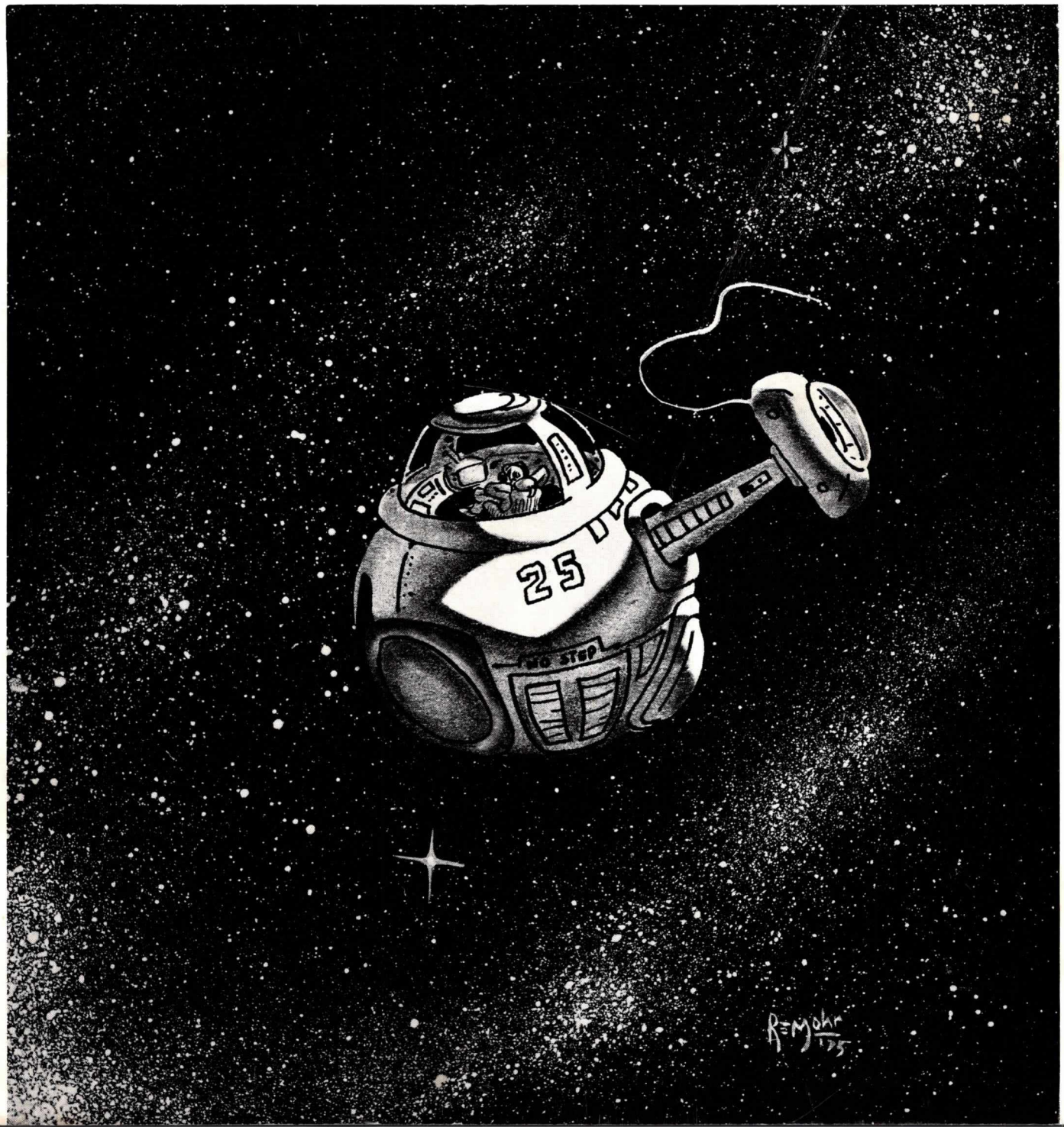


M. Streff
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# KNIGHTS 15

March 1976. KNIGHTS is edited and published four times a year by Mike Bracken, PO Box 7157, Tacoma , WA 98407. This is a new address. It is available for $1.25, 4/$4, accepted contributions of art and written material, printed LoCs and upon Editorial whim (which includes trades). 'Payment' is in Contributor's copies and subscription extentions.



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ART


BRACKEN'S WORLD

Mike Bracken

If you take the first through last issues of any fanzine that's been published for five or more issues, and study them carefully, you can see a steady change as the editor becomes more familiar with his equipment, and more familiar with the editorial processes. Oftimes the editor finds a fork in the editorial road and must decide which fork to follow; occasionally a fork leads to a dead end and the editor must then either give up or retrace his steps to see where he went wrong.

Somewhere along the line while working on issue 13 I came to one of those forks, made a choice, and skipped merrily along the path. It was a relatively long path, and it lead me through issues 13 and 14; however, when I started work on this issue I found that my path had come to an abrupt end. After discovering this unfortunate occurance, I've had to sit down and reasses my reasons for publishing a fanzine. And I've had to swallow some ill-chosen words as I picked my way back down the path to the offending fork, where I could once again gather up my things and be on my merry way.

I found the dead end in an odd way: I was thinking of purchasing a binding machine and was discussing its relative merits with a salesman. He asked me,

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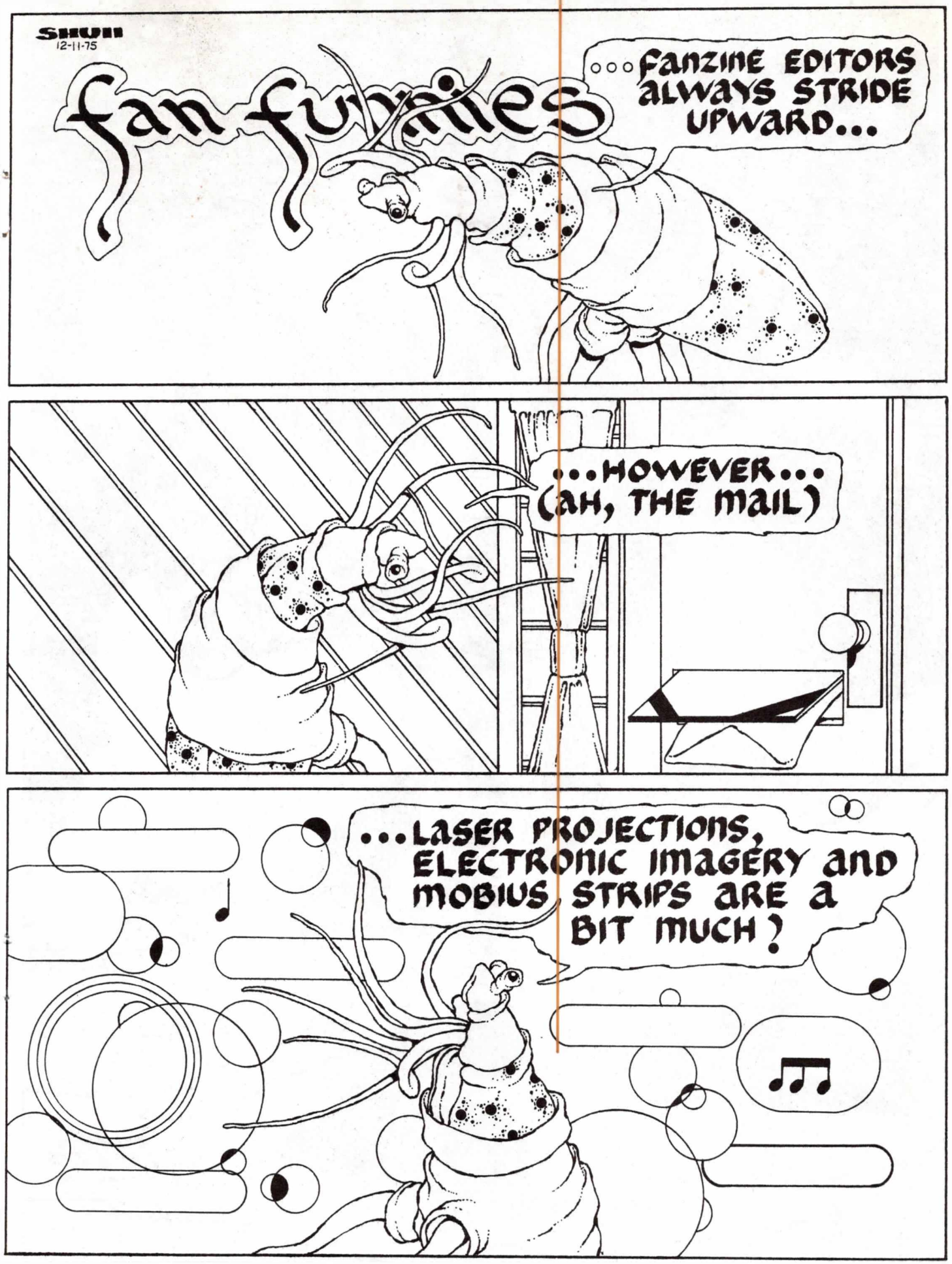
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fan funnies
...FANZINE EDITORS ALWAYS STRIDE UPWARD...
...HOWEVER... (AH, THE MAIL)
...LASER PROJECTIONS, ELECTRONIC IMAGERY AND MOBIUS STRIPS ARE A BIT MUCH?


EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT SEX
X-1

# EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT SCIENCE FICTION: BUT WERE TOO NARROW MINDED TO ASK

KEITH L JUSTICE

Most science fiction definitions are so incorrect or nebulous that the village halfwit could twist them to include anything that's ever been written, then regroup and twist them again to exclude everything that's ever been written.

So I'm not going to advance another silly pigeonhole, nor support any of the questionable pigeonholes that already exist. What I want to do is take a look at sf and try to show why I believe it is increasing in respect and popularity despite the decline of the so-called 'mainstream', why sf is becoming important and relevant (surprise! it has been both all along, it's just that somebody finally noticed), why it's suddenly of enough import to teach in college level courses, and what makes 'good' and 'bad' sf; but I refuse to guarantee that all questions will be answered to everyone's satisfaction, or that a few other questions won't be raised, answered, or left open along the way.

Though the learned and scholarly (elected? self-appointed?) may claim to have attended the funeral services for the short story, lo and behold, it is still alive and thriving in the pages of sf magazines and books everywhere. Why this is so is probably more a question of subject matter than anything else.

Man's psychological understanding of his immediate environment is probably a good century or two behind his technological understanding of said environment. And I use the words 'immediate environment' for one reason; to avoid a careless reference to man's relationship to the universe, which as any sane person can see, is probably zilch. People by the thousands die every day. Does the universe change? Nope. Any hotheaded arguements over this statement will land in the little gray

ILLUSTRATED BY PHIL FOGLIO & RANDY MOHR

round-file which sits on the floor by my desk and gobbles paper tidbits. I suspect that there will be few disagreements, because most readers of sf already have a basic understanding of this mute and omnipotent principle. And you will note that this alarming concept is easily understood even when written in Latin; pro quo no nada homo sapiens zilch yech thumbnose raspberry.

An sf reader, it would seem, is consciously or unconsciously seeking to further understand this seeming lack of any constructive relationship between man and universe. But those who see mankind as the universal epitome of divine and/or biological evolution are invited to run to the nearest telescope and check out the heavens the very next time a busload of school children gets smeared across the landscape. I'm afraid he'll find that deaths by the tens, thousands, millions, or even by the planetful have no effect whatsoever on very much of anything, least of all the nasty old universe. The inevitable conclusion is that a real, dynamic, purposeful, or constructive relationship does not exist; if it exists, it is manifested only in mass delusions, and in the symbols we invent and revere in the hope that at least one of them will be the galactic nitelite that will light our hesitant footsteps as we stumble through the cosmic darkness of lifelong uncertainty.

That a relationship between man and his universe should exist is a laughable assumption, and contemporary writers are just beginning to scratch the surface of this eternally mystifying/maddening/frightening concept. Perhaps there is a relationship; I don't know, but neither does anyone else, and to keep from having to think or wonder very much about it, the word 'faith' has been liberally misused. We won't know for sure until Judgement Day; if it ever comes. A few writers are beginning to suggest that it will not, that life is gloriously pointless and a rather silly, not to mention quite often cruel, impractical joke on just about everyone. Writers like Vonnegut seem to be saying that this ultimate pointlessness is, at least, a distinct possiblity, one that should be as seriously considered as any other possibility. And one that might have even more important repercussions than other beliefs, for it would place much more personal responsibility on humans. No more "It's God's will that I save your soul by killing you." Ultimate personal responsibility; "I'm going to kill you because I'm sadistic, selfish, and because I like blood, death, and murder." It's easy to blame something else for your problems/shortcomings; but when the pointing finger comes home to point at a person's own nose, how quickly he is ready to quake in his boots.

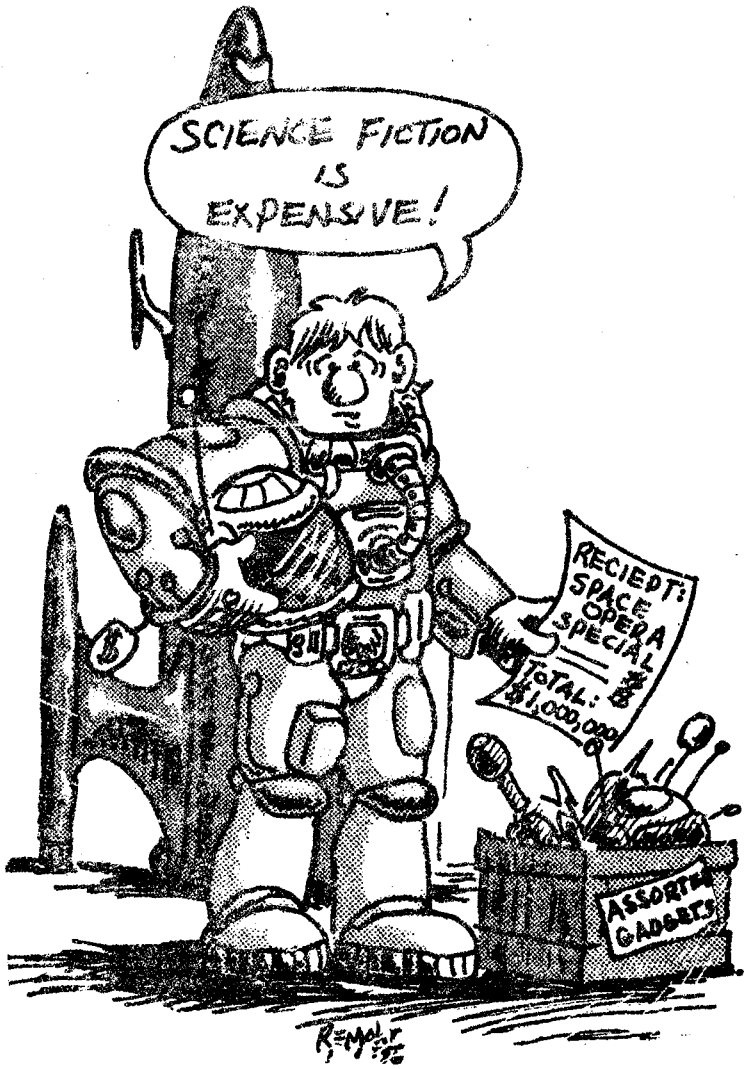
Even people like Robert Frost and Emily Dickinson were exploring the possibility of a universal nothingness-cum-absurdity years ago, though they also wrote material that leans just as far in the super-religious direction. This is not a contradiction of their personalities or abilities; it is merely a reflection of the human inability to cope with the universe as a whole. So, as a go-between, man invented his gods, his religions, and his superstitions, spiritual institutions that could be pretended or imagined to have some mastery over the environment; thus man was able to gain some sort of 'control' over the universe by means of a spiritual proxy that demands unwavering (but mostly unquestioning) obedience. Spiritual symbols were probably introduced at a time when thought of the earthly environment, let alone the cosmic environment, could induce blind fear. Everything is a set of inter-related processes, and when none of the precesses are understood, this can very logically cause fright. In a situation where relating to environmental reality is hampered or obstructed by misconception, ignorance can truely be synonymous with fear.

This has changed, and never more rapidly than in the last century. In this day and age, people have instant communication, highly accelerated methods of transportation, and a much broader spectrum of experiences that are available to anyone who wants to participate. A hundred years ago, it wasn't unusual to meet a man who'd

spent a lifetime without traveling further than fifty miles from the house he'd been born in. Today, travel is so passe that a man who has been around the world ten times may seldom bother to mention the fact.

Travel may have some bad side-effects, such as jet-lag and other travel-spawned ills, but it also has some very good effects, too, not the least of which is the development of our heretofore atrophied ability to see other sides of a question and accept other viewpoints. People today are beginning to wonder, and well they might wonder, how can only one religion be a true religion when there are hundreds of religions? Who are the 'chosen ones'? Who makes it to heaven on Judgement Day, and who gets charcoal-broiled in the Devil's lair? Who's right? If your religion is only one out of a hundred, and there really IS a God, and there really IS one true religion, and there really WILL be a Judgement Day, then your chances of having enough gold stars by your name to answer when the roll is called Up Yonder are only one in a hundred. Not very good odds.

And another thing people are beginning to wonder; if there is a God, is he a benevolent God? Or is he indifferent? Does he really lounge around counting the hairs on our heads, or did he really wind up the world just to watch it run down? Are we the equivalent of a cosmic soap opera? Or is He malicious and spiteful, playing with us for our own pleasure, using us as His own personal five-billion-ring circus? This feeling is very well reflected in a short story by Terry Carr entitled "If God Is God." And still another unorthodox look at the question of man and his relationship with God and/or the universe is Vonnegut's CAT'S CRADLE. And another is THE SIRENS OF TITAN. And yet another is Del Rey's "Evensong."




The above (religious?) questions are the basic, the important, and the most likely never-to-be-answered questions that will face man for the rest of his existence, whether that uncertain duration of temporal segmentation turns out to be a billion more years or fifteen more minutes. And the only literary form seriously considering any of these questions is-- you guessed it, science fiction.

The mainstream just isn't happening any more. Let's face it, THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE and MAIN STREET are interesting and well-done (to say the least) and are subtle commentaries on man's relationship to his society, but

man's relationship to his society has been looked at and worked and used and raped and mauled over until it has become persecuted almost beyond hope of resurrection. Although the subject (like any subject, however shopworn) will no doubt be competently re-examined from time to time in novel form, on the whole the subject is near-dead and looking for a grave and some dirt to cover itself up with; and with any luck at all, it will only be disturbed by your occasional conscienceless literary ghoul, and by the rare talent who will do the subject justice rather than reviving it just to kill it even deader than it was before.

This has come about because society is finite. If a man shoots his wife, there are only so many ways for the situation to proceed to a conclusion. The wife can come back from the grave and get revenge (horror story), the husband can be tracked down by Colombo or Barnaby Jones (mystery story), the husband can be hounded into confessing by psychic phenomena (supernatural story), he can commit suicide out of remorse (pseudo-introversion of moral values, a new story form that is gaining popularity), he can give himself up to the police (standard man-relative-to-his-society tripe), or he can be hunted down and messily murdered by the wife's enraged brother (the usual violence guff that is handed out to the reading/viewing public like candy to youngsters on Halloween night). Greater or lesser variations produce varied results, but the overall effect is that of rehashing some rehashed hash. The palate shudders at the thought of ingesting some more pre-digested pablum.

But man's relationship to the universe; ah, now there's a subject that will never be used up. No one could even touch all the bases or list all the approaches, let alone see even a small fraction of the possibilities.

Since learned commentary on man's relationship to society is fast disappearing, something must take its place. The vaccuum has been filled, however inadequately, with a no-nonsense sensationalistic disposable fiction. Its mottoes are as crisp as the story dialogues they represent, and whole books revolve around the dual hubs of sex and improbable situations. The writers of this (stuff? material? fiction? crap?) are literary mainstreamers turned mainstreakers.

This type of fiction does not rest on time-proven laurels like Faulkner's work, or Twain's, or Lewis', or Hardy's, or Stevenson's. The new fiction gauges its success by the flashy dust-jackets it can produce, and by the number of people it can beguile into parting with their money. The new fiction's banners and battle-cries have become so trite and cliche-ridden that they almost fail to register; 'sizzling new novel by the acclaimed author of' and 'umpty jillion copies in print' and 'fifteen minutes on the bestseller's list' and 'number five-thousand in the spine-tingling Childslayer series' and etc. As a minor point of interest, I would like to know how a novel goes about sizzling; I rarely care if there are 50 million copies in print, or only one; I don't care what jackass thinks that bestseller lists are an indication of anything except how much money a given number of gullible people have to spend; and last, but not least, I have never had my spine tingled, nor has my flesh ever crawled (except, perhaps, when the rest of me was crawling, too).

The new fiction makes no attempt whatsoever to appeal to anyone's intellect. It excites, it titillates, it doles out measured portions of gore and unrealistic sex, drags you from cliffhanger to contrived cliffhanger, tosses off satirical remarks on so-called relevant issues, often pays mocking and momentary homage to current godworks (like ecology, detante, faltering economy, etc.), sprinkles the plot liberally with crisp snappy smartass dialogue, and ends on an attempted pseudophilosophical note. The overwelming majority of these novels are read once and forgotten. Ten years later--or even five or three--these books are as if they had never existed, and even those who noted the book on the bestseller's list and rushed to the nearest

bookstore to procure their copy will have probably forgotten them completely.

To test yourself whether or not this is really the case, ask a friend to remember back to the old 'classics' he was 'forced', for one reason or another, to read in school. TOM SAWYER, HUCKLEBERRY FINN, MOBY DICK, MAIN STREET, BABBITT, ROBINSON CRUSOE, TREASURE ISLAND, GULLIVER'S TRAVELS, A CONNECTICUT YANKEE IN KING ARTHUR'S COURT, THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE, AS I LAY DYING, THE SOUND AND THE FURY, BRAVE NEW WORLD, etc. Memories of such works, even if read years ago, are usually vivid; if not, at least the friend will probably remember SOMETHING about those he read. But how many members of a novel-of-the-month club do you know who could tell you what monthly masterpiece they were reading six months ago? Not many. I belonged for two years, or over two dozen monthly selections, to a computer-masterminded plot to abandon brown cardboard book packages on doorsteps like unwanted orphans, and yet the only book out of the whole batch I remember vividly, without referring to my bookshelves, is a hardbound copy of PENUTS cartoon strips. I suspect there are many people who share this problem; it's not that I can't recognize good fiction when it leaps out of hiding and bites me on the left buttock, it's that precious little good--I mean really goo-- fiction is produced anymore.

I hope no one construes this to mean I am saying that NO good contemporary fiction is being written. Lordy, hesh my mouf if I should ever utter such a thing. Over the last few years I've enjoyed CATCH-22, FAIL SAFE, THE PRESIDENT'S PLANE IS MISSING, SOMETHING HAPPENED, CAR, THE BREAST, THE BOY WHO INVENTED THE BUBBLE GUN, A THOUSAND SUMMERS, JAWS, THE POSEIDON ADVENTURE, etc. (Though few of these could even be considered to be examples of true 'mainstream' work. Some of these are merely competent adventure stories.) It's just that, on the whole, good mainstream fiction is becoming scarce, and people like Robbins and Mailer and Hailey are intentionally and purposefully aiding that scarcity while lining their pockets. This may account for the funeral the mainstreamers claim to have attnded; possibly they are just a bit confused as to whose it was.

It is not surprising, then, that many people are turning to science fiction. This is no attempt to glorify science fiction; it has had its ups and downs, and Sturgeon's Law applies to it just as surely as it applies to just about everything. There has been some sf written that wasn't worth the powder to blast it to inkspotted confetti. Worse yet, the stuff was actually defended not on its merits but on its demerits. It seems incomprehensible that something should be defended for what it is not, but it happened in a logical and understandable way.

I have never subscribed to the theory that Hugo Gernsback was the father of science fiction. If he was the literary father of anything, I would--even under conditions of greatest duress--go so far as to admit that he was the father ONLY of Gernsbackian science fiction, and that unfortunate offspring was born as out-of-wedlock as it is possible for a genre to be.

Before Mr. Gernsback came along and deflowered science fiction, it was an acceptable medium published widely in popular 'mainstream' magazines. In fact, no one took any note of a difference between mainstream fiction and sf, because there WAS no difference. They were both considered to be forms of fiction, and that was that. Jules Verne was blessed by the Pope for his writing; H.G. Wells was one of the intellectual darlings of his day; Poe's grim and/or fantastic tales were widely published in newspapers and magazines; Mary Shelley's FRANKENSTEIN met with immediate acceptance and success; but after Gernsback stripped sf down and crammed it between the ragged pages of a small and gaudy magazine, the field-- like an aged and undesirable prostitute--lost its last vestiges of respectability. The stories became formula adventures, replete with interchangable cut-out characters and a malleable

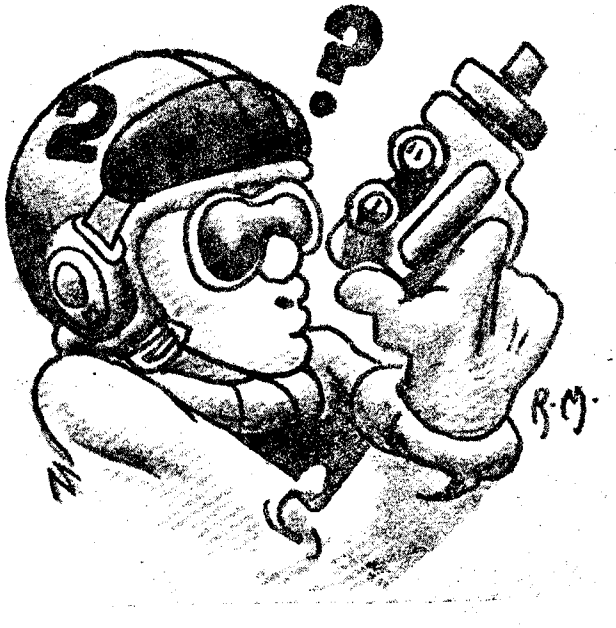
superscience founded on vacuous words and nebulous sentences instead of sound principles.

Those outside the field were perfectly justified in their sneers of superiority. The legendary trufan read the abominable tripe, and I suspect, though there is no way to prove, that the emotional reaction of a fan to the sf at that time was a reaction to what the field could become rather than a reaction to what it really was. (note that emotion provides clear precedence for such conjecture; human 'love' of one person for another is often based on idealism rather than realism. Note also that in no way do I attempt to indicate that ALL sf produced during this period in the retrogression of sf was bad.) Pulp stories may have been generously populated with slimy-tentacled green bug-eyed monsters, blond crew-cut Mr. America spacemen, and virginal young spacebelles attired in tinfoil G-strings, but just the THOUGHT of interstellar travel and alien beings was enough to stir a fan's much-maligned SOW. (In this respect, I am an old-fashioned trufan. Just standing in my yard on a summer night and looking at the silver dust of stars powdered across the sky is still enough to set my SOW awhirl.)

Since the fans had an instinctive subconscious grasp, but not a conscious and literal grasp, of what sf could eventually become, they defended it against all comers, and short-sightedly defend the shit along with the diamonds.

Hugo Gernsback reduced the field to its lowest common denominator, the idea, and proceeded to gather stories like plastic beads on a string. They were bright, pretty, and rattled when you shook them, but there is a hell of a difference twixt polyethylene and pearl. Early fans were forced to feed on an anemic stew with watery broth and invisible meat (and the wonder is they survived, and even thrived, on it), but the status-quo stage was all set to be upset. People came along, people with names like Heinlein and Campbell. (There were others, of course, but at this point I'd like to make a few comments on the two aforementioned godwords.)

Campbell isn't always regarded as just a man who did his best to further a literary form he firmly believed in; Campbell represents an entire complex set of value jedgements, beliefs, and convictions, a syndrome I call the Campbell Mythos. I respect the man and his beliefs and what he tried to do, and I'm sure that if I had known him personally I would have liked him tremendously, but I can't subscribe to the belief that he single-handedly made science fiction what it is today. There is no doubt in my mind that sf would have continued to evolve even without his help. Some aspects may have developed for the worse without him, but I'm sure other aspects would have developed for the better; to believe otherwise would be to subscribe to the belief that some humans are perfect, with no faults or shortcomings whatsoever.




ANALOG's fiction still bears the stigma of being technically and scientifically correct, yet with emotional-neglect and character-atrophy; a sort of literary repository for recycled and super-edited Gernsbackian refuse, but

this is decidedly not the case. Overall, I would have to say that sf may have been drastically different than it is if it had not undergone a Campbellian adolescence, but no one knows if it mightn't have been a BETTER difference.

Thus we come to Heinlein. I won't go into this in depth, because Heinlein is a whole nother thing I would prefer to discuss in another article. Suffice it to say that Heinlein was considered superfantastic for twenty-five years. Then, allofasudden (approx 1962), voices were raised at first tentatively and then not so tentatively, changing the verdict to 'guilty' and 'not as good as we thought.' This is all pure baloney, of course. Heinlein is one of the greasest sf writers that ever typed a word, and shortly I will attempt to explain why I think so.

For the moment, we are all set to show what differentiates 'good' sf from 'bad'. It has already been shown that sf, stripped to its basics in the Gernsbackian Era, was a barely digestible form of rampant idea-ism. The idea was the story, and people got in the way. Characters were used because a monologue on an idea would serve only to show how dull and bone-dry an idea can really be, and a writer of such manuscripts, if he depended on them for a living, would be more likely to find himself eating them than selling them. So what slowly seeped into the genre,in ever-increasing quantities, to turn a regressing genre into a revitalized genre?

Let's hint, because the answer is easy. At least half of the people who are likely to be reading this will probably know already. Heinlein was able to do it; Huxley did it in BRAVE NEW WORLD; Orwell did it in 1984; Bradbury did it in his own way; Clarke did it in a more scientific way; Asimov managed it at least part of the time; people like Leiber and Sturgeon did it stylistically and excellently; Vonnegut does it darkly and sarcastically, bless his atrophied soul, and may he live and write for a hundred more years; Ellison got better at it, up to a point, then dropped it for something else; Tiptree does it, may he live and write longer than Vonnegut; and the list is much much longer, but the point is made.

What is the illusive 'it'?

Emotion. So simple. That was what sf, by and large, had been robbed of so long ago when it was ripped from the mainstream and relegated to a damp and musty genre-celler. And the re-introduction of real emotion, or what could at least pass for real emotion in fiction, was what had to be put back to make sf whole again. Not scientific accuracy, though such accuracy can help to plug obvious holes in a story; not realistic aliens to replace the BEMs, though realistic aliens gave the characters something a bit more believeable to react to; but real and BELIEVEABLE emotion. Idea plus emotion; something to think about, and something to feel. Very simple.

You can prove it to yourself by thinking back over all the sf novels and stories you've read, and picking out the ones you remember best. (We will deal with category-crap and series characters in a short while.) Regardless of whether your favorite book is a masterpiece, a best seller, a lousy seller, a tour de force, a nought de nada; it might be funny, silly, salty, brilliant, nauseous, pretentious, or whatever; the author may have done it well, unwell, in a fit of extreme mediocrity, or so badly that you had to grit your teeth to read it; but if you got something out of it, and the story ranks in your brainfiles as one of the most unforgettable you've ever read, chances are it contained a strong dose of the duality I call 'something to think about and something to feel'. At least, this is what I find with books and stories that I most admire and remember; I can only assume the process is similar in other people.

The best books and stories, then, are those that give you both values. An idea, cast adrift on the paper sea between the dust covers of a novel, can't survive by itself. Idea without emotion is possible in a short story, if an idea is strong enough, or novel enough, or handled skillfully enough. Occasionally--not often--but occasionally, as with RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA, idea without supporting emotion can succeed well at novel length. I can understand why a writer would want to use the idea-without-emotion form occasionally, just because it allows a change of pace; it also allows the development of an idae/or an atmosphere without having to worry overmuch about characters tripping over the idea, getting in the way and clouding the issue. But success at the emotionless level requires a VERY strong idea and VERY skillful handling of it.

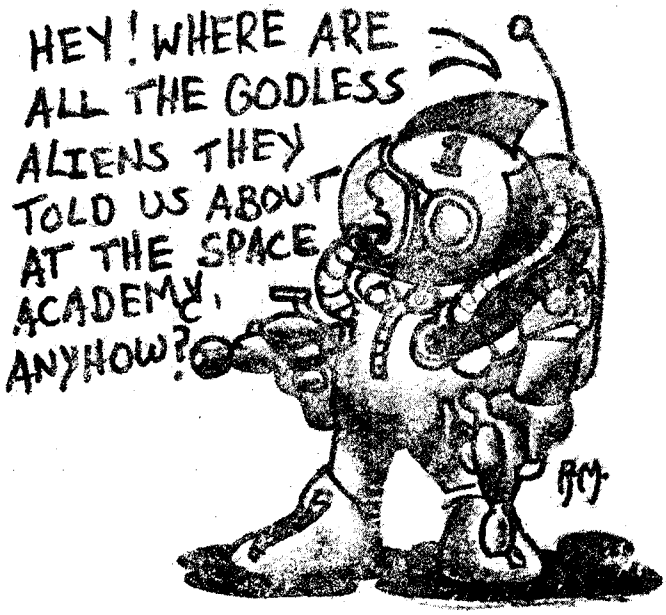
"The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas," an award-winning story by Ursula Le Guin, is an excellent example. She has an engaging idea, but there is little characterization. (Even so, you are still given something to feel, even if the feeling comes from resolution of a concetual issue rather than resolution by confrontation on a personal/individual basis, so perhaps this is a special case of idea-ism.) In any case, the emotion you experience in this story is not in any way connected to identification or antipathay towards a fully developed character.

Idea-ism (for the most part) is successful at short story length only. An idea for its own sake can hang together for maybe 10,000 words tops; after that, the idea premise loses novelty and evaporates, and the reader is left with nothing except some words that happen to follow each other in a more or less logical sequence.

Three fine examples of book-length idea-without-feeling are MUTANT 59, THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN, and STEPFORD WIVES. The ideas concerned are all good; some have been used many times before; and these three particular renditions are rather skillfully handled as regards form and mechanical aspects of the writing; but, as fiction, they fall rather flat. They're exciting, while you're hanging from their internal cliffs, but they are inherently forgettable once you close the covers, and none of the three have much in the way of 'something to think about and something to feel' that might draw one back for a second or third reading. Their ideas are born, allowed to go through their choreographed motions, and then they die right there on the paper in front of your eyes, and the show is over. The books make hasty little scuff-marks on the memory and then make a fast exist, stage left.

But Heinlein, Bradbury, Sturgeon, Tiptree, and Tolkien (to name a very few) are hard to forget. This is not to say that they don't make mistakes. Heinlein has been taken to task for the four separate and distinct sections of CITIZEN OF THE GALAXY, for adolescent cheekiness in PODKAYNE OF MARS, for belligerent patriotism in STARSHIP TROOPERS, for just about everything in STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND, for a weak plot and stereotyped characters in THE DOOR INTO SUMMER, for attempting to depict the possibility that forty years from now the use of the English lanuage will have changed for some groups or individuals in THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS, and for allowing his writing to portray an idealized version of himself somewhere in almost every one of his novels. The marks against him are many and serious, in other contexts; but some of his early novels are still in print in hardcover editions, and his paperbacks are still widely reprinted and available. In fact, I have seen many Heinlein books on Navy exchange bookracks and supermarket bookracks where there was NO other science fiction for sale. He is read and he is enjoyed and he is REMEMBERED, and that will probably always be my major criterion for deciding what is 'good' sf. If a book is technically and mechanically correct and sound, and the writer is aware of techniques and methods that lift his style far above the cramped parameters of category fiction, and the basic idea of his book is pretty good if often-used elsewhere, but the book is forgettable and so emotionally empty that a second read-

ing would be repulsive or unthinkable-- all of which, as far as I am concerned, applies to a dystopian novel like Levin's THIS PERFECT DAY-- then that book is 'bad'. And even if a book is semi-stereotyped, weakly plotted and over-romantic, but so lively and enjoyable and readable that I experience profound sadness at the end of the book because I want to read more about the characters involved-- all of which, as far as I am concerned, applies to a book like Heinlein's THE DOOR INTO SUMMER-- then that is a 'good' book.




Ray Bradbury is another whose work remains unscathed, despite years of flack from those who think they are in the know and who insist that his work is the product of an adolescent imagination that never outgrew its masturbating-in-the-bathroom stage, when pimples were of a greater social significance than philosophy and The System's semi-ordered chaos was cause for alarm, indignancy, despair, and protest. Mebbe so. Granted that Bradbury hasn't even got pseudo-science; what he really has is a naive and charming lackofscience. But he appeals to something that's on a different level than e equals em-cee squared, though that doesn't necessarily mean a less important level.

Relativity wouldn't mean a damn thing to any of us if there weren't at least a few of us who could understand it on a gut level as well as an intellectual level. Ask an engineer or theoretical mathematician about traveling faster than light and he'll tell you all about mass and thrust and velocity; ask a gut-level enthusiast about it and you'll probably get something on the order of "Wow!" If we didn't have anyone to get dreamy and glassy-eyed over knowledge and concepts, it wouldn't make a bit of difference in the world if we had five billion geniuses instead of five billion of whatever it is we DO have.

Further clarification is possible, and for that purpose we will use Verne and Wells. Verne wrote in excess of sixty novels; Wells wrote three or four times that, but much less than sixty science fictional titles. Verne's work is chiefly a handling of ideas. He used characters to say the words he wanted to say himself, and their only other use was as convenient mannequins which could be made to marvel at the ideas; but rarely do you feel that Verne's characters are people who laugh and cry and stumble and get hurt indigestion and get headaches and get horny and get their feelings hurt and experience fear and self-doubt. They are professors, lecturing, surrounded by students anxious to learn.

The 'average' sf fan, that is, one who hasn't gone out of his way to lap up all of sf's historical dregs, probably knows only two or three Verne titles offhand, but the same average fan might know as many as half a dozen Wells books. Wells has fared a little better in the memories of readers because he gives you a bit more than jsut an idea-cud to chew. The difference between Verne and Wells is the difference between ideas alone and ideas plus little feeling.

Something to think about and something to feel, because a person operates on (at least) two levels. If a person operates on two levels, it stands to reason that the most successful fiction is going to offer something on both levels. Now we can see why I 'arbitrarily' call some fiction technically good AND appealing on one emotional level or another; but this division between medium (format, style, etc.) and message (identification, emotionality, etc.) shows that 'good' fiction will, at the very least, evidence the latter, if not both, while inherently forgettable fiction will rely strongly on the former.

Unlike other basic criteria of 'good' and 'bad' sf, the test of 'something to think about/something to feel' rarely fails. Its major shortcoming is the fact that this test can also be applied to nearly any example of any other type of fiction, too. Ah, well. I said I wasn't interested in definitions, anyway.

According to the criteria we have developed, then, we can see why we remember the books we do. We can now, I hope, also see why I said Heinlein is one of the best sf writers that ever came down the writer's pike. His work may not be mechanically perfect but, by God, it is MEMORABLE. And I'd also like to think that I've made it perfectly clear why other writers I have mentioned are in the 'good' category. And why many other authors and works not specifically named are in the 'good' category.

And why many, many, many sf writers do NOT fall into the 'memorable' category.

Of course, categories always give rise to boundries and no-man's-lands. Naturally, one person's list of forgettable books will overlap with another person's list of memorables, but on the whole, if ninety-nine people say a book is memorable and one mantains it is forgettable, that should give you some kind of general indication as to which category will eventually claim the book.

Think back, oh marvelous data processor called Human Brain. Think back and remember those stories you remember best. "Of Mist, And Grass, And Sand," "Xong of Xuxan," "The Puiss of Krrlich," CHILDHOOD'S END, "Burger Creature," ROCANNON'S WORLD, "Forever to a Hudson Bay Blanket," THE SIRENS OF TITAN. Aye, and more, a forest-ful of story trees that rise trunk and branches above the world-mulch of the literary forest floor where dampness and mildew and decay reign over the countless books and stories that lack the essential duality of quality fiction. May the mulch rest in moldy peace.

And sf's demise? Improbable. In fact, it will probably keep getting stronger, right up to the very minute the universe goes poof! and entrophy gets the last laugh. This trend toward greater popularity will continue because just when everything seems to settle down a bit, along comes a vortex like Tiptree, who flashes off literary sparks that scorch the brain. Tiptree's perfectly co-ordinated one-two punch of something to think about/something to feel has made him one of the best short story craftsmen to surface in the sf field. I would venture to guess, though I know the man only through an exchange of a letter or two and certainly can lay claim to little or no knowledge of his writing preferences and motivations, that the reason he has not yet produced a novel is that he realizes most ideas can be distilled down to a short story.

'Proof' of my conjecture lies in the overall effectiveness of a basic presise. Take time travel, for example. There are dozens, hundreds of books that revolve around the idea of T-travel, half a dozen of which have been published in the last year or two. Yet the handling of the T-travel premise that remains as one of my most vivid and memorable reading experiences is Tiptree's "Hudson Bay Blanket".

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Most writers will take a basic idea, good though it may be, and pad it and fluff it up like a feather pillow so the story cane be large enough to be called a novel, and it can therefore justify its existence as a book. Why it is so widely accepted that a book, just by its existence, arbitrarily creates respectability for itself, I have no idea. Books are too often accepted as literal configurations of the symbols they represent, and their actual content is ignored or disregarded. Many people--especially people who are well-off, even, sometimes, highly intelligent people who are well-off -- own shelves of books that serve as nothing more than symbols. If you walk into a stranger's house and see a private library of thousands of leather-bound first-editions, you respect him more than you would if you saw stacks of comic books, or no books at all. This is an automatic emotional reaction to books as symbols because, in reality, until you have known the man for a while, you have no idea if he's read all the books or if he inherited them and considers them to be little more than wall decorations. Lawyers, physicians, and other professional people often take advantage of this reaction (as do encyclopedia salesmen and bookclubs) and leave shelvesful of lawyers' or physicians' reference books in plain sight of anyone who happens to be seated in their waiting rooms. The book as symbol lends its owner intelligence, education, and wisdom, just through the act of possession.

Since books are supposedly more 'respectable' than stories, a writer will often attempt to pad a good story idea into a script big enough to justify a book. (This is not entirely the fault of writers; publishers will often refuse to print collections of stories, though this problem is probably more prevalent outside the sf field; but publishers, in turn, are affected by the buying public, and if the story is losing out to the padded novel, it is ultimately the fault of those who would rather buy fluffed-up books than collections of lean, sharp stories.) But most basic themes can be distilled down to a few words--though oversimplification, just like padding, can be a dangerous evil. The desirable middle ground is an author who writes just exactly the length he has to write to get the idea across, no more and no less. Tiptree is just such a writer.

Too bad Tiptree didn't come along before natural evolution allowed sf to shed its Gernsbackian shackles and lose its aura of being read primarily by the addled, the absurd, and the adolescent; Tiptree could have speeded up the process by several orders of magnitude.

But the process had to stumble and ramble along at its own pace, and sf acceptance, outside its own limited territory, was slow. The hardcore sf haters didn't want to admit that the quality of sf was improving, so when something of quality was publised, they agreed among themselves that since it was good it wasn't sf. At that point in time, decree-by-established-order tactics were hardly necessary. Those who were busy defending the field were doing it a disservice, though they could hardly have been expected to have known it. Because they were glorifying the entire field, sins as well as virtues, they were becoming fantastically adept at heaping dung on their own diamonds.

But, given time and opportunity, the diamonds will separate themselves from the shit. It is a process that, for the most part, occurs automatically, and there is little you can do about it. (Thank Heaven.) After more than 15 years as an avid sf reader, I can let my gaze wander slowly over my bookshelves and prove the point to myself time and time again. I have one whole shelve of Ace shorty editions, bought mostly in the early sixties, that counts among its members such forgotten classics of pointless lore as THE INSECT WARRIORS and THE SPOT OF LIFE. I can tell you virtually nothing about either one (though I read them, I'm sure, in glassy-eyed awe, 12 to 14 years ago) excepting that the former is about tiny people to whom insects are huge monsters, and the latter is, I think, about an old house that is a dimen-

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sional door into another world that is (can you possibly believe that any aliens would actually BOTHER themselves with us?) intent upon destroying us, of course.

At one time or another, nearly anything and everything has been malignantly intent upon destroying earth; the reason, I presume, is all the fantastic wealth that would be theirs for the taking, provided only that they transport the booty halfway across the galaxy. I have no doubt that this psychotic idea, stripped utterly naked of any possible feeling, will continue to do an occasioanal epileptic bookdance while an inept author (who thinks he's invented a new and shocking fate worse than death for poor old earth) gaily jerks the strings. And, of course, there will be that one-in-a-million talent who actually WILL be able to invent a fate worse than death for earth, and more importantly, will be able to put enough feeling into the premise so that we will actually give a damn whether the protagonist and the planet survive.

Different strokes for different folks. And now we come to the subcategory fiction, which can be disposed of rather neatly by saying that it doesn't count. At least most of the series categories don't, despite their mushrooming popularity. The Doc Savages and the Cap Kennedys and the Perry Rhodans and the Star Treks and all the myriad Planets with all their myriad Apes, as well as several other institutions with large followings, aren't really true sf any more than the Avenger, The Butcher, the Destroyer, the Executioner, the Killer, Joe Gall, Travis McGee, Matt Helm, Peter Trees, James Bond, and Sam Durell are classic examples of the mainstream. In two words: they aren't. This assortment of spies, agents, detectives, anti-heroes, and free-lance peddlers of murder, mayhem, and semi-legitimized brutality was incubated and hatched by a throw-away society that uses up fiction like cheap toiler paper. These characters are cute, clever, exciting, sensationalistic, pornographic, vulgar, cynical, profane, voyeurish, violent, gory, pseudo-philosophic, vengeful, cruel, satirical, horrific, or whatever else they have to be to sell copies and make bucks. Period.

And since these books have the honesty to admit they are what they are, science fictional offshoots should have the courage to admit that they are what THEY are. Most of them are certainly not deep or thoughtful; in fact, their outstanding characteristic is that they represent an impossibly omniscient ego-building macho-mastery over the environment; even the universe-as-environment, for God's sake!

Contrast environmental mastery with Bradbury's characters, who almost always remind you of children, who often ARE children; contrast environmental mastery with Heinlein's characters, who usually have limited (if competent) control over their surroundings, but who are always doing (like most real people) the best they can in the best way they know how, because there is always a nagging reminder that no one lives forever (except Laz Long, of course); contrast environmental mastery with Vonnegut's characters, who usually, in one way or another, figuratively or literally, get a royal screwing right at the end of the book or story; contrat environmental mastery with Sturgeon's people, who are, first and formost, PEOPLE, with as many bad sides and weaknesses as good sides and strengths. There are more, of course, but it would take a book, or maybe several, to go over it all.

There, then, is your dividing line. If the book gave you something to think about and something to feel, and maybe most importantly, something to remember, then it is good sf, and there's no mooter a point than trying to classify a book as being mainstream with sf overtones or sf leaning towards the mainstream. Who cares? If it affected you other than causing you to wrinkle your nose in disgust and sneeringly curl your lip, and if it was memorable, then it was good. But I won't accept as rational any smug or offhand comments from Kennedy fans or Rhofans or whatever

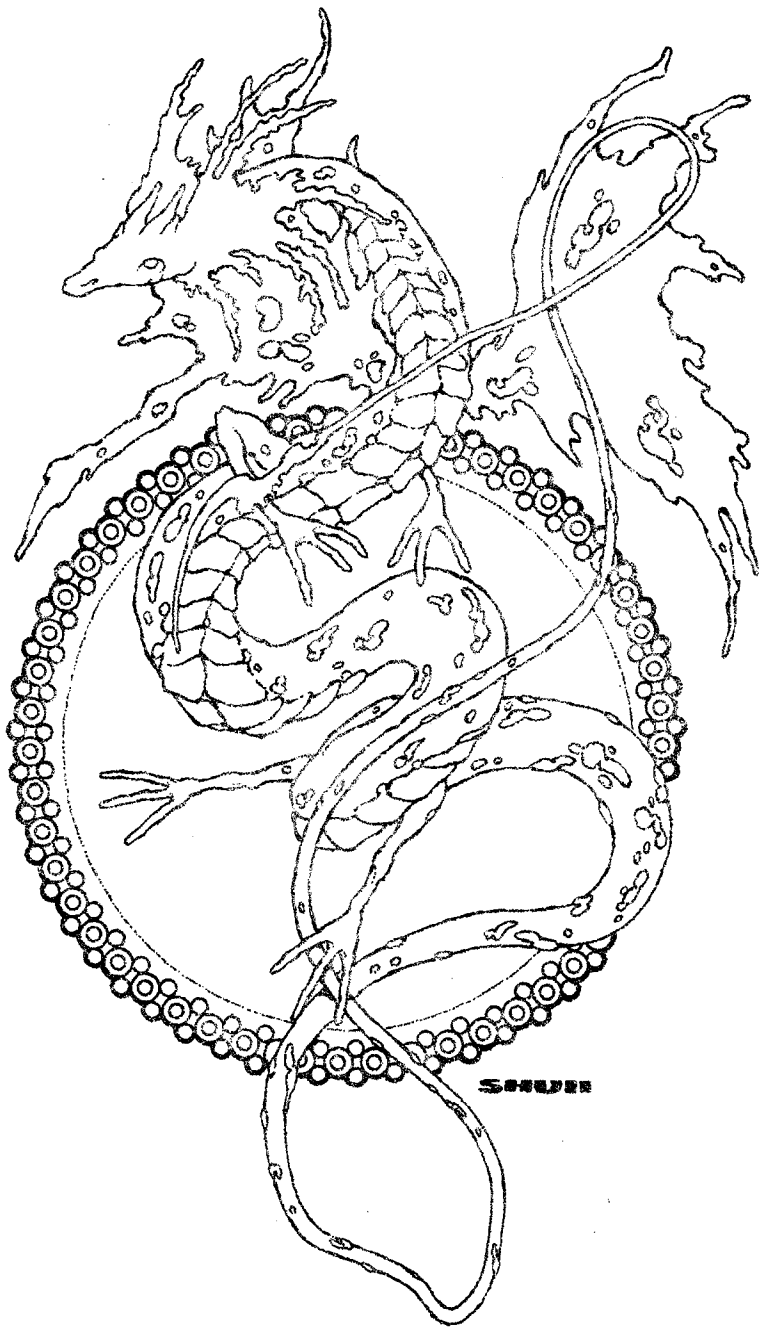
who might casually mention that number 85 in their particular series was a particularly memorable adventure, because that's all it was--an adventure--and a series cannot escape its inherent limitations. If there is no possibity of risk in a dangerous situation, there is no story; and if you drag a hero by the scruff of the neck through a hair-raiser with the premeditated intent of keeping his carcass breathing for the next book, you are defeating one of the major goals of quality fiction.

Perhaps someone should write an open letter to the publishing industry, telling them that they can't fool us into believing that they have several geniuses chained to typewriters, cranking out an ultimate masterpiece on a monthly schedule.But then they probably already know that. Publishers, after all, are longer out to put ART on the market. They are out to put MERCHANDISE on the market, by god, and rake in the subsequent influx of bucks. There aren't half a dozen REALLY good books (as regards both medium AND message) that appear in any one year. And with original anthologies, all appearing faster than new brands of underarm deodorant, I doubt if it is possible for any one person to have read the only two or three dozen REALLY good stories that ever appear in a single year. God help us, most of us will never even know which ones they were, and will have to rely on ridiculously inaccurate methods of finding out-- such as watching to see which books and stories are nominated for sacrifice to the Alter of the Gods of the Multitudes of Annual Awards.

Just a closing thought or two. I come here to praise sf, not to bury it. Sf will continue on its merry way despite what any of us do or say. But because sf deals with the possibilities of man and his universe, I have great faith in sf, and would not be surprised if, fifty years hence, sf was the 'mainstream' and the present 'mainstream' was a tiny eddy out on the edge of sf, where scholars mimeo blurry little purple mainzines and defend their whole field self-righteously, shit and diamonds and all, and--

But you'll pardon me. Most of us, in one way or the other, have been that route before, and are perhaps better readers because of it; though there may yet lurk a few unworthy convictions that relegation to a low-paying, misunderstood, and overexploited genre would serve the mainstreakers right.

--Keith L. Justice



# FROM THE FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN

C L GRANT



Lonely. And alone.

There have been any number of articles, novels, plays and films attempting to describe to the lay public what it is like to be a writer. Not the three-hours-a-night-after-work-and-the-kids-have-gone-to-bed writer, but the all-day-every-day writer whose typewriter is the only instrument which stands between himself and the bill collector dressed as a wolf. Most of the fictional writers depicted in these films, novels, etc. seem to have a fairly good time at living despite the varied financial classes they are shoved into; many of them have adoring/hating families, strange and wonderful friends, browbeating/coddling editors, and all the rest of the characters that, stereotype or not, make up part of a writer's daily existence.

But what it is truely like to be a writer is too often glossed over, ignored totally, or transmogrified into something no real writer would ever recognize. The reasons for this are varied: ignorance on the part of the author/screenwriter, commercial pressures (it has to sell!), and perhaps the most compelling reason of all--depressingly alien. In other words, unless you ARE a writer, it is hard to imagine what it would really be like to BE a writer.

Lonely. And alone.

That's what it is like to be a writer.

You're not a writer when you're sitting down at a meal with your family. You're not a writer when you're visiting friends. Neither are you a writer when you're at a convention speaking from the distance of a panel, bulling in the coffee shop, trapped in a corridor, sitting in a suite with other friends who are also not then writers. You are not a writer when you're filling out Schedule C, applying for a teaching position, or spicing up your resume. You're not a writer on the telephone, in the car, on a bus, with an editor, in a bookstore searching for the places they've stuck your newest novel.

In all those instances, and more, you're not a writer but an AUTHOR.

There's a difference.

Author is the pose you assume; writer is the work.

So. Lonely? Alone? Absolutely, when the bills and the child and the wife and the rest of the real world depends on you and your imagination.

Work habits vary from writer to writer. Many prefer the silent night hours when

the sane people sleep and the dogs stop barking and the children aren't outside your window screaming in their games. Others need music, household sounds, traffic and passing airplanes. Some, like O'Neil, write standing up; others, like Hemmingway, write lying down; still others require space, while the rest require room only for themselves and their machine. Four hours a day, five, ten, fifteen.

You'll find writers walking around their workspace acting out their scenes, talking to themselves in tremulo and basso; you'll see charts and genealogies and notebooks filled with scribbles, 3x5 cards, and scrapes of paper lying all over the floor. Some drink beer while they work, or Pepsi or Coke or Dr. Pepper or whiskey or coffee or tea or nothing at all because the movement toward the glass takes too much time away from the typing. The smokers waste dozens of cigarettes that burn out in the ash tray because they're forgotten; the nonsmokers chew gum, pencils, paper strips, lips, tongues and fingernails.

But despite the children darting under your legs, or the radio blaring, or the stereo soothing, or the moon wondering what in God's name that guy is doing down there all by himself, despite all this there is a single common factor which all writers share--while they are sitting at the typewriter doing their newest story, they are alone, and they are lonely.

Alone.

There is no other way to do it. You and the typewriter, and that's all. Someone bending over your shoulder will snap concentration as sure as liquid hydrogen will shatter a rubber nail when the nail is dropped; someone calling you to the phone or the door or just to help out with something around the house will destroy a story-line or a character's development as surely as a vacuum will snuff out a life. There is no such thing as a partnership in writing; even in a collaboration there is always that time when the other guy has to take a silent, perhaps even distant back seat while you do what you must, do what you can. Betweentimes, of course, there is the interplay of ideas, minds, whatever you wish to call it. But that's only betweentimes.

The temptation, for writer and fan and reader, is to make of this a heroic scenerio in which the writer stands fist to heaven defying the elements and enticing the Muse. A Bryonic figure, if you will, unsullied by the compromises and hypocricies that are integral in the so-called 'ordinary' man. Or the struggling and starving stick of a man confined to the garret with quill and ink, parchment and nightmares. The Bohemian, Beatnik, Hippie, NonComformer, NonBeliever who stands outside the mainstream of what someone calls Life and laughs as he lifts his sword in salute to his own exalted self.

The temptation is there.

But it is too far from the truth to qualify as fantasy, much less a minor distortion of what actually is.

What the writer is, is alone. An ordinary man who has a talent, not a demigod who has magic; a fat/thin/balding/bearded/single/married man who must wrench hisself away from the temptation and the world in which he lives in order to make something of both, if anything is to make sense.

And he does it alone. In squalor, or in wealth, or more likely somewhere in between. But alone nevertheless. There's nothing heroic aboit it. It is the way things are for the writer, just as other conditions must exist for the carpenter,

the sculptor, the lawyer, the teacher. You accept this, or you stop writing seriously. There's no magic in the absolute fact of writing.

Lonely, then.

True, also. Beacuse a writer takes a look at the world and sees it differently than most people, reacts to it differently and sets those reactions down on paper. It is no great wonder that writers have few friends outside their own writing circles. What it comes down to is simply the following exchange which, while perhaps humorous on the face of it, is essentially a tragic comment on the role of the writing artist. You've all heard it. It's a cliché. And a bitter one.

"Say, what do you do for a living?"

"I'm a writer."

"Oh. Well, that's interesting. But what do you do?"

"I write."

"Yes, you said that. But what I mean is, what do you DO? I mean, what do you do to, say, pay your bills?"

"I write."

"I can see we're not communicating here. What I mean is, what do you DO?"

I make my living selling words. That is not funny.

But it is lonely. It's odd, but I didn't think it would be that way in the beginning. In the beginning, I was going to be famous and widely read and there would be letters pouring in from all parts of the globe to congrautulate me on my great success. Ha. So you change your goals and make your horizon a trifle more realistic. Which is not to say that I wouldn't like all of the above, just that all of the above isn't likely to happen. So a writer needs comiseration. Friends (and here let's be sure that we all know the difference between friends and close acquaintances) help somewhat, wifes and/or lovers somewhat more--but what a writer needs to fend off the lonliness that too often results in either a quitting of the professional before one begins or a depression that prevents one from working--what he needs is communication.

Communication, first with other writers. My closest friend and godfather of my child is a writer. Why? Why not the teachers I've worked with, or the couple who live in the apartment next door? Because this writer KNOWS what I do about the way we have to live. And we DO have to live this way, folks, because as I said, that's what writing is all about. No self-pity here. We chose this way, it wasn't forced upon us. So we communicate on a level that no one else ever can with us. It's heartening, and it's wonderful, and it's something we both need in order to continue doing that which we've decided has to be done. Yet it is not a self-defeating mutual admiration society. I'd like to think that we are about as honest as two people can be with each other in regards to our work. If we like something, we say so--and that's nice. And if we don't like something, we say that too--and that's just as nice because though our egos enjoy striving for perfection, our intellects ground us to the reality.

For example: I think it would be fair to say of myself that my stories (and the

forthcoming novels) are generators of mood and emotion, basically. This style I've fallen into has as a major trap the tendency to be somewhat purple, somewhat overwritten. My friend is my rein; and even if we do not talk over everything I write, I keep him in mind when I'm plugging through a descriptive paragraph so that, hopefully, I don't get carried away with the picture I'm painting, so that I don't sacrifice the story for the sake of the prose. The perfect wedding of this type of communication is, I add in flagrant digression, a novelet collaboration we've done (A NIGHT OF DARK INTENT) which we trust someone in the magazine world will like well enough to buy. Time, as some dolt has said a million times, will tell.

Communication, second, then, with the readers. This is where the fundamental aspect of loneliness enters. To date, and not counting reprints, eighteen stories with my name on them have popped up hither and yon, most of them in the past three years, and most of them in F&SF. It's apparent to me that I'm doing something right on the technical end because editors buy. That's good for the pure and practical reason that buying means paying bills. But it is seldom apparent what those who purchase the magazines think. Seldom, in fact, if ever.

And this is not only a fact of life restricted to yours truly. It happens to all writers, especially in the first years of their careers. A basic question, then: is anybody out there?

But why do I want to know?

I want to know because, like all writers, I write what pleases me; if I didn't, what I wrote wouldn't be much good--at least, not nearly approaching the goals I've set for myself. So there has to be a modicum of self-indulgence; but should I leave it at that, what would be the sense of trying to get a story sold other than the fantastic shot in the ego seeing a work in print would bring? It might do for the first time, or the second, but believe me it would quickly become tiring. So... a writer also has to write for the people who buy the books and magazines--though not necessarily writing what he thinks thay will always like, but writing what he hopes will provoke a reaction, good or bad, pro or con.

But is anybody out there?

Is there a reaction?

The Nebula Awards, both recommendations and nominations, will tell you what your colleagues react to; or rather, what they take the time to react to.

The Hugo Awards will give you the final reaction of the readers and fans. FINAL reaction.

There are, however, hundreds of stories and books which pass by each year which do not make the final lists of either Nebula or Hugo. Is the reaction to them all bad? I hardly think so. Taste, I think, dictates the final disbursement of the awards, not always the level of writing. So what happens to the others? Most of the readers either don't care or don't know--but the writers care. And they care very much. Spending hours producing a work which will most likely fall into a pulped limbo isn't the ideal way to keep on writing. Stimulus is needed, other than the aforementioned boost to one's ego.

And the reader is the only one who can provide that stimulus.

The only one.

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Stimulus, for all you non-Psych 101 folk, elicits response. The kind of response depends upon the kind of stimulus.

The reader picks up a magazine and reads the names he knows first. Then those he's seldom or never heard of. Then he puts down the magazine and goes on to the... hold it! Wrong! It shouldn't be that way, not at all, not if anyone is out there who cares about what's happening in the field of fantasy and science fiction. It shouldn't be that way, but it is.

There is a stimulus, but the response is stifled.

And that stifled response becomes a stimulus unborn which never reaches the writer; and enough unborn stimuli will result in a dying writer. True, many deserve the fate--but there are just as many who do not.

S-R-S-R-S-R-.....

The beginning lies with the writer. He produces the initial stimulus--the story. It appears. It is read. It evokes a response anywhere along the wide spectrum of possible reactions: love, hate, total indifference, excitement, boredom, whatever. The next step, then, lies with the reader. It is a special kind of crime to keep your response from becoming a further stimulus for the writer, a crime to block off a much-needed new avenue of communication. Remember: alone, and lonely.

The writer is not looking for a fan club, nor is he looking for an expansion of his circle of friends--friends, in the truest sense, are hard enough to come by in one's lifetime. What he does need, however, is a word or two about how he is being received. A positive reaction spurs the writer to produce more, and to produce better things; a negative reaction goads the writer to produce more, and to produce BETTER things. Letters to the editor aren't enough, not nearly enough, if only because the writer doesn't always know these letters are coming in--what you usually see in the letter columns of the professional magazines is only a small sampling of what comes in. Only a sampling. Letters to fanzines seldom reach writers because not all writers are (or were) fans, and many, believe it or not, do not read under any circumstances these fanzines.

The only recourse, then, is direct communication. It is, in fact, the only preferrable type of communication. The problem immediately apparent is how to contact the authors whose material provoked in the reader the urge to communicate something, anything, whatever has been stirred. It isn't as bad as it seems. When I first began reading and writing fantasy and science fiction, I never had the nerve to write to an author/writer and let him know how I felt. There was, for me, a certain awe which was difficult to overcome--that image I had of the heroic figure. It took me years to break through, and a specific event: Vietnam. I was stationed in Qui Nhon, some 250 miles north of Saigon, and decided that there was enough distance between myself and my favorite writers so that it was 'safe' to drop them a line without fear of some nebulous retaliation. So I wrote. And there wasn't a more surprised man in the world when most of them answered. Joanna Russ (who, five years later when I first met her REMEMBERED that letter), Asimov, Zelazny, Gahan Wilson, and a postcard all the way from England from John Brunner. Others, too. It was amazing (or astounding). My letters, I'm sure, were probably simple-minded and somewhat fawning; but I told them what I felt and how I felt, and they answered me. Not always immediately, and not always at length. But they answered. And that was enough. It didn't produce lengthy correspondence back and forth, even after I returned, but that didn't bother me.

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What it did do was keep me writing.

And how did I contact them? How did I get hold of their ellusive addresses? The primary source was the professional magazines. Most of them will forward your letters on to their writers, providing the postage is right and you don't presume the editor has a full staff to do this sort of thing. Secondly, there are the fanzines in which are published the addresses of the pros who either write the columns or letters. Not always, but I'm sure no faned would turn down a request to forward a letter--again, if you don't presume too much and too often. Thirdly, there is SFWA. SFWA will not hand out addresses to anyone who asks, but they will forward letters to the proper people.

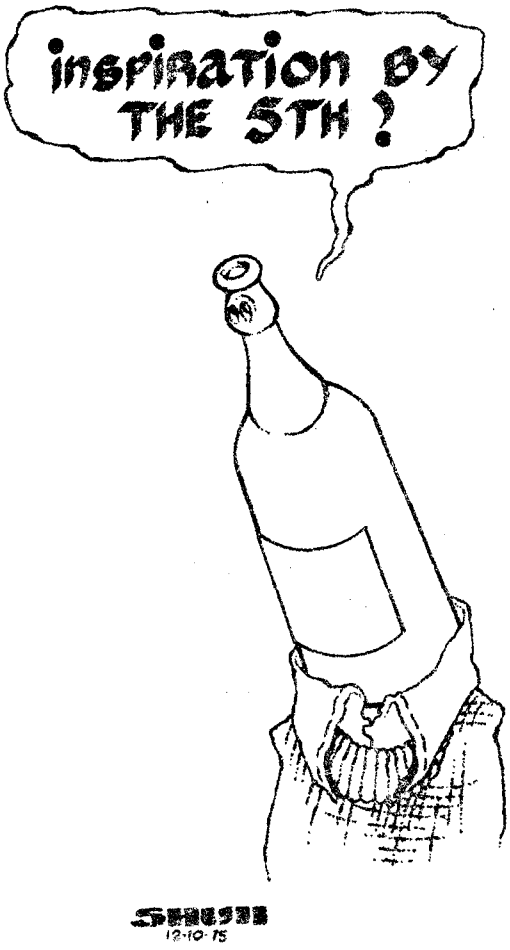
How do I know? As I once said, I'm the ExecSec, and I do it all the time. And if I don't have the address, I do my best to find it before I give up and have to send the letter back.

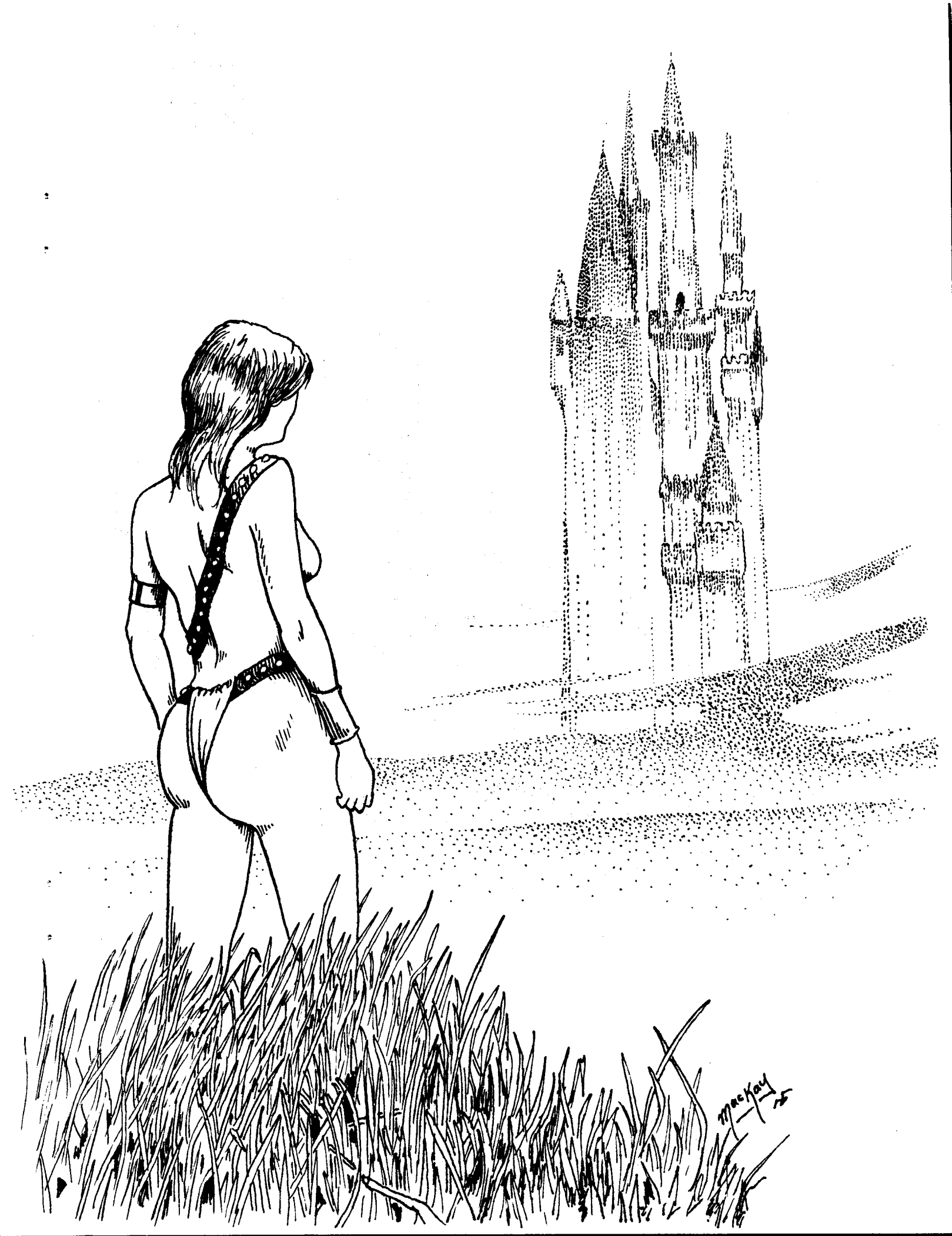
Communication. Direct communication.

It eases the loneliness, it makes the being alone more bearable.

A postcard would do it.

-- C. L. Grant

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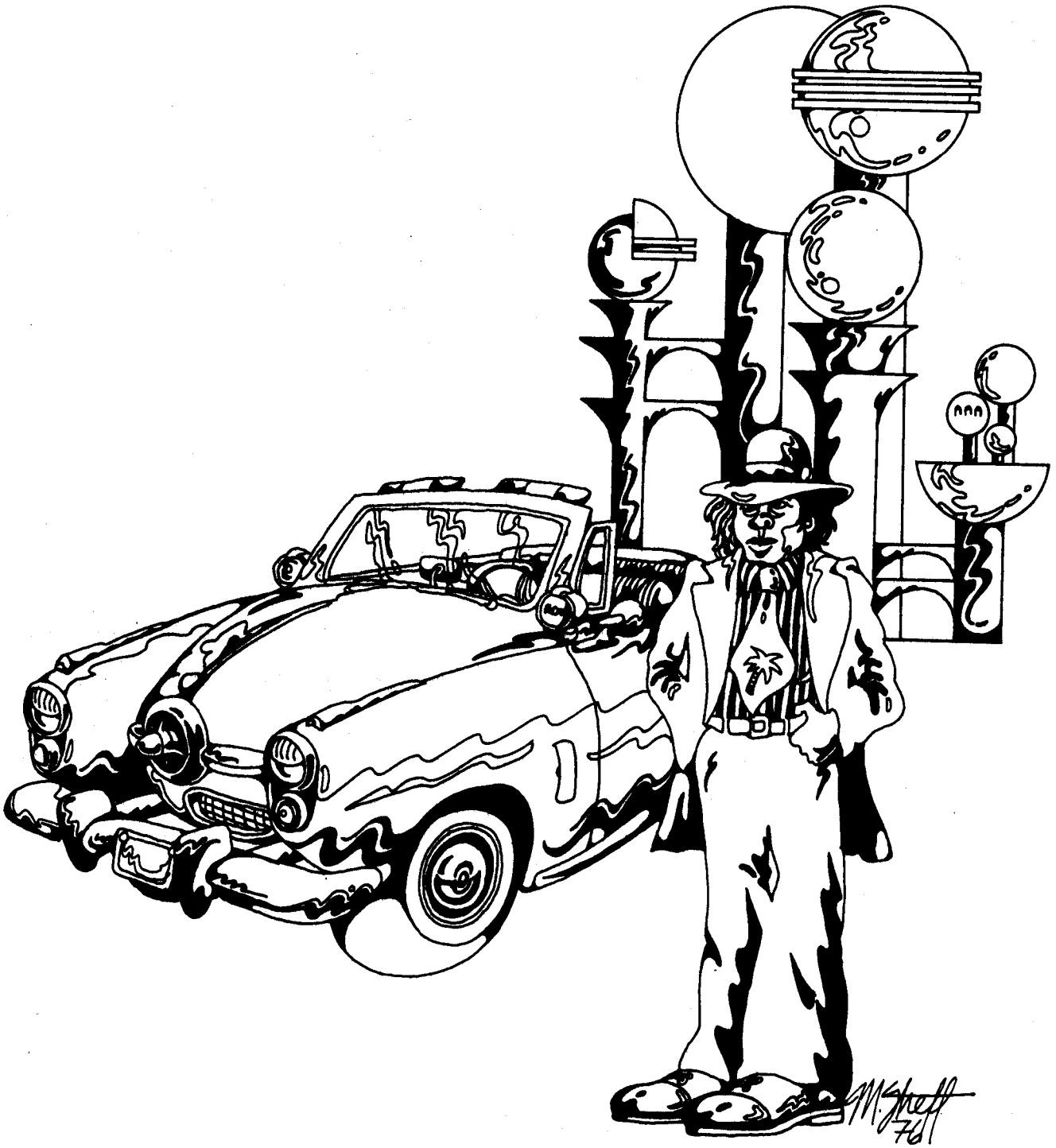

# THE MOTHERS AND FATHERS ITALIAN ASSOCIATION

## ——THOMAS F MONTELEONE



What you have here, Dearly Beloved, is a new feature in KNIGHTS. Mike Bracken invited me to be a regular contributor to these pages and frankly it was a temptation I could not resist. The main reason was simple: an enormous ego; but there were other. Having a column is good publicity, and it's free. Hard to ignore that. Also, there are times when you sit down at the desk and you just don't feel inspired to work on pay copy; you check out your correspondence and find that you're all caught up on your letters; there are no bills that need to be paid; you don't feel like playing with your pocket calculator. What to do? Some of us write poetry, some just get up from the desk and talk to our wives for a change, others succumb to the banal call of the Tube.

And still others write fanzine columns.

So there you are and here I am. Now since this is my first column, I want to use a little space to lay out the ground rules and tell you what you can and cannot expect from me. Mike Bracken said that I could write about anything that moved me, provided that it was even marginally connected with SF. That sounds fair enough. Some of the columns may be taken up with just one topic--if it happens that month that I am wrapped up in some burning issue of our times that is just demanding to be commented upon; other columns may turn out to be fragmented things, jumping from one thing to another. It will all depend on mood, the weather, and of course, you. I am a mail freak, as are most people associated with writing and publishing, and I will be responsive to your letters of comment, praise, condemnation, suggestion, interdict, etc. In the early columns I would hope that all of you will take a hand in guiding the direction of this little one man seminar.

Other things: The title of the column may interest some of you so I'll provide it's etiology. Last Christmas, my wife, Natalie, gave me a belt buckle made of cast bronze picturing a Dionysius-type lounging over a cask bearing the imprint "Sicily" and surrounded by a mountain of grapes. And this little scene is enclosed by an oval border comprising the words: "Mothers And Fathers Italian Association." The prosaic acronym notwithstanding, the phrase had a nice ring to it, and when the question of a title for a column arose, I naturally gravitated to it. That simple.

And here's a note of interest: From those fortunate enough to know me, you might learn that I am described as an outspoken, up-front kind of person. I am a firm believer in the tearing down of out-dated mores and social dicta, which is my personal rationalization for the use of what is euphemistically referred to as "salty," or

"indelicate," or "foul" language. I believe that in order to de-sensitize ourselves from these meaningless taboos, we have got to promote the use and acceptance of "gutter" (there's another one) language. The upshot of all this is that there may be some of you out there who do not agree with this position, and thereby may be offended by some of the expressions or words that appear in my column. If there are any of that singular persuasion, I can only apologize ahead of time with the warning that an occasional "shit" or "fuck" (or any of the other tools of the scatologist's lexicon) may pop up in this column. I'm afraid it's unavoidable, folks, and if you don't like it, I'd advise turning to the book reviews, or getting a subscription to READER'S DIGEST.

End of caveat. And onward to other diverse topics.

No doubt there are some readers among you who are wondering who, exactly, I am. Admittedly, I am relatively new to the SF writing game, but I have started to carve out a niche for myself in the science fiction ecosystem. But for those of you who are not familiar with my writing or my face (at conventions), I thought that, this being the first coulmn and all, I would spend a little white space telling you about life and times, and what brought me into science fiction.

Okay. Born in Baltimore, MD back in 1946. Which makes me about 30 these days. My father's family is a bunch of New York (Brooklyn, actually) Italians who are Americans only because my grandfater left Sicily when he was 15 and took The Boat to Ellis Island many decades ago. My mother's family is a blend of Irish and German lines that have been in America since the Civil War. I have no brothers or sisters and grew up in a small town called Pikesville, Maryland. It used to be a very pleasant place, far away (at that time) from the city of Baltimore, surrounded by open countryside which meant a childhood spent kicking around in the woods, fishing and sloshing and occasionally falling into several streams, skating on one of two ponds, baseball at the one little league diamond in the town, grade school at St. Charles Elementary and being beleaguered by nuns, and nights in the back yard with a telescope thrilling to the beauty of a starry night where Saturn just had to be out there, somewhere. It was also a childhood of evenings spent alone in the insular atmosphere of my room or the workroom in the basement, where I was constantly tinkering with erector sets, chemistry sets and microscopes, customized cars (models, that is) and the Battleship Missouri and Sherman tanks, and of course my father's magical array of woodworking tools.

My father taught me to read just as I was entering school and I was always a good reader and speller, learning to respect and love books. My first science fiction was picked up in an oblique sort of way--since my father used to be a reader of the pulps when he was a kid he was always telling me how it was going to be "in the future." It was from him that I first learned of comets and planets and robots and (as they called them back then) "rocket-ships" and plenty of ghastly creatures, of course. When I was around 9 years old, my parents started giving me books from the old, long out-of-print Winston juvenile science fiction series. I can still remember the thrill of reading the very first one: VANDALS OF THE VOID by Jack Vance, the story of a teen-aged boy who helps destroy a gang of space pirates and a mysterious villain called "The Basilisk." I guess I eventually read the whole series which included stories by del Rey, Lowndes, Ray Jones, Poul Anderson, Philip Latham, Clarke, and other now-famous folks. After the Winston novels, I invaded the Pikesville library and had soon read all of the science fiction the little building contained. But soon afterwards, I discovered the science fiction paperbacks--mostly from Ballantine--and fell in love with the worlds of Sturgeon, Tenn, Asimov, Pohl, Bradbury, Anderson, and all those great Groff Conklin anthologies.

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Also at this time (around 12 years old), I was given what I figure was the best birthday present I ever received: an Underwood portable typewriter. Initially I wanted it because I had gotten involved in this involved correspondence with my cousin Frank (Francis T. Monteleone) in New York who was only a few months younger than I, and I discovered early on that it was a hell of a lot easier to type long letters than it was to hand-write them. Frank and I were really tight in those days; he had two sisters but no brothers, so when we were around 10, we decided that we would be brothers, if not genetically, at least in spirit. We really got into it, so much so that we referred to each other soulfully as "Brother". (We still don't call each other by our first names, and probably never will.) At any rate, we started typing long letters to each other, averaging around twenty pages per correspondence, in which we would detail our lives down to facts like how many cigarettes we had smack that week and all the way up to the degree of conquest achieved with the girlfriend. All the way through our teen-age years and into the first few years of college "Brother" and I pounded out the wordage to each other--I think I was the ultimate recordholder of the longest typed letter (48 pages)--and it was during those years that I really learned to enjoy stringing words together, preserving my feelings and impressions, and occasionally creating little fictions (especially when writing about the girls). I had taught myself how to type (two fingers on the left hand, three on the right) without the aid of any manuals or courses, and started to fantasize about becoming a writer someday.

I attended a Jesuit high school, which gave me a sound, classical education, but I'm sure I read more SF in those years than I did of Cicero or Virgil or Thomas Aquinas. Especially in the anthologies, where writers would talk about themselves in the story introductions and forewards, I learned that many of the SF writers knew each other, saw each other frequently, and generally spoke of the life of an SF writer as very pleasant existence. More dreaming. Yes, it would be nice to do that for a living, I thought. But when I reached college, the urge to "be somebody", to make money, was strong in mind and I majored in Zoology, intending to enter dental school. Well, Organic Chemistry changed my mind on that score. Forced to accept the fact that no dental school would admit an Organic Chem washout, I changed my major to Psychology. All during these years, there was much extra-curricular activity: football games, cheap wine, expensive wine, parties, ladies, but... very little science fiction.

As much as it pained me, I just didn't have the time. Whenever I sat down to read something, it was always COMPARATIVE VERTEBRATE MORPHOLOGY or HENRY IV, PART 1 or PHYSIOLOGICAL PSYCHOLOGY or; well you get the picture. I suppose that in some back corner of my mind, I still harbored the fantasy that someday I would write SF, but I wasn't doing much about it at the time. During the summers I'd catch up on some anthologies and perhaps a novel or two but then again, I was always working a job with long hours and little pay, and at night I usually went out with neighborhood friends to bullshit, have a few smokes, play around with our guitars, or escort a lady to the movies. Now here's something that you may find quite intriguing: the year was 1968 or so and up until then, I never read the science fiction magazines. That's right. Honest. Now I knew that the magazines existed all right, but the newsstands in my town never carried any of them, and I never thought to even look for them when I was in college. So all the short stories I read were culled from the anthologies up til then; then I discovered a few issues of F&SF and GALAXY in a big box of books that a friend of my father had given me to root through. I started reading and decided that I should be subscribing to these wonderful things.

One of the most surprising things about discovering the SF magazines so late was the plethora of names that I had never heard of: Disch, Zelazny, Lafferty, Wolfe,

LeGuin, Niven, etc. There were other names that sounded vaguely familiar--Silverberg, Walter Miller, Terry Carr, Phil Dick, and others of that ilk--but by and large I had discovered that between 1961 and 1968 a whole generation of new talent had entered the field that weren't in the old Ballantine anthologies. Well, I liked what these new people were doing and I spent the next few years reading back and catching up on what these new people were doing and I spent the next few years reading back and catching up on what had been going on in SF, but in 1971, I still had no idea what those things (like "Lunacons" and "Boskones") were that IF used to list in its "SF Calendar" section. I was 25 years old, had been reading and loving SF for 15 years, and I had never heard of what is known nebulously as "fandom." Odd as it may seem, I never ran into anyone in fandom. Hell, it was a rare event when I met anyone that even read SF!

And so it went. By this time I was married to my lovely Natalie, and seriously learning how to write--ie. submitting stories to the magazines and piling up enough rejection slips to wallpaper the bathroom in Early Form Letter. You see, I had begun to "write seriously" in the beginning of 1970. I marked the auspicious event with the purchase of a new Smith Corona typewriter (regretfully severing ties with my old friend, the $40 Underwood Portable) and a subscription to WRITER'S DIGEST, which I read mostly for moral support and because it made me feel more like the writer I was trying to become. Of course I knew that magazine was not going to tell me much in the way of making it in SF; it was just a comforting, re-assuring, and ego-boosting experience back in those early days to open the mailbox once a month and see that issue of WRITER'S DIGEST, because: inside my head, somewhere, a little voice was saying at those moments "See, only writers read this magazine."

But I digress. Back to the point, which I think was leading to a statement about SF Cons...

Oh yes. Never knew that they existed and all that. So anyway, one evening, I happened to hear on Washington's local "underground" non-commercial FM radio station that there would be a science fiction convention held over the Memorial Day weekend at a very large, downtown hotel. It sounded interesting, since the announcement said something about meeting professional writers there, so I decided to go, fully expecting some academic-like symposium replete with lecturers and lots of people in dark suits.

Well, it wasn't like that, folks.

Lots of strange-looking young folk (archetypes all: the kind that joined the high school Chess, Photography, and German Clubs); Rooms carrying cryptic labels like "Huxters," and "Program," and "Con Suite;" A verbal atmosphere clouded by inscrutable pieces of argot such as "Fapa," "Sercon," "fen," "Fiawol!," "fanzine," "Gestetner," and Christ knows what else. Suffice to say that my mind was well-croggled by it all. I made my way to the Friday night party in the "Con Suite" and started feeling lonely and out of place. Everybody was talking to somebody...except me. Didn't know a soul. Hours went by and I finally crowbared my way into a conversation with a chap named Fred Lerner and a few other fans. From there I was introduced to none other than Gardner R. Dozois, and Gardner and I began rapping for almost an hour. Through Gardner I met Terry Carr, Joe Haldeman and his brother, Jay.

I remember feeling very good about establishing personal contact with science fiction, especially since I was not rebuffed by proven professionals when I made known my desire to become one of them. In fact, that 1971 Disclave was the turning point in my writing career since it was there that Joe Haldeman invited me to attend an SF workshop--modeled after the venerable Milford Workshops of Damon & Kate

Knight--that was being held every 3 or 4 months at Jay Haldeman's house in Baltimore. The next meeting (called the "Guilford SF Workshop" after the Baltimore neighborhood of the same name) was scheduled for the last week-end in August, 1971. I was invited and instructed to bring two short stories with some extra copies of each. Something else, however, had intervened: the birth of my son, Damon, on the week before the Guilford Workshop was to be held. I was trapped in the center of a great dilemma, trying to decide whether I should stay with my wife and new son, fresh out of the hospital, or spend a weekend that could advance my writing aspirations several quantum jumps.

What to do?

I could not sleep for two nights, wrestling with the problem, and afraid to ask Natalie for fear that she would not understand how much both alternatives meant to me. In order not to draw this whole thing out into an elaborate John Fowles-type melodrama, let me just say that I finally did explain things to Natalie and she, being the wonderful wife that she is, sent me off to the Guilford Workshop with her love and her blessing.

What followed was one of the most grueling, demanding, and ultimately rewarding week-ends I've ever experienced. Arriving late Friday afternoon at Jay Haldeman's place, I was greeted by the other members of the workshop: Joe Haldeman, Jack Dann, George Alec (Piglet) Effinger, Bob Thurston, Gardner R. Dozois, and Ted White, then editor of AMAZING and FANTASTIC. I was, of course, intimidated and humbled since I was the only unpublished member of the group, and I could pick up very definite vibes from everyone that I would have to "prove myself" worthy of future attendance in the workshop. I remember shuddering at the thought of the two stories I had brought being surgically dissected and me being run out of Guilford on a rail afterwards. Last week, I had been quite proud of them--now as I sat amongst this circle of elite young Turks, I was not quite as positive about the stories' mertis.

We spent that entire evening reading each other's submissions for the Saturday workshop, and finally getting to sleep around 5:00 a.m. The next day, after a cheery breakfast, everyone assembled in Jay's living room to begin the long hours of criticism. A TV script by Joe Haldeman was first, and as it was passed from one member to the other, I was duly impressed by the depth and thoroughness of the criticisms leveled against it. Thankfully, I was one of the last to comment on Joe's piece (I mean, what the hell did I know about TV scripts?), and I said little more than a summation of what had already been noted, plus what I thought might be a few original observations. Considering that it was my first attempt at sincere, in-depth crticism, I felt fairly good about it. So good, in fact, that when the next story came up, which was Ted White's, I did not mind that I was first in line to critique the piece. Ted's story, as I recall, was intended for young adults and a story that just did not hit me the right way--I simply did not like it for a variety of reasons, And I said just that, spending considerable time explaining why I thought Ted's story was quite pointless and shallow and not really worth reading. Naturally, Ted was astonished that I--a young nobody--would have the balls to trash his story like I did, but being the sincere writer and editor that he is, he did not take it personally. That is, he did not immediately decide that he was going to hate my very intestines for all of time.

In fact when my story came up for its turn on the chopping block (and it was roundly criticized; I had never imagined that there could have been that many things wrong with it!), Ted gave the story a throughough going-over, adding ways to improve it, and ending with an offer to buy it if and when I ever did revise the story. To say the least, I was elated. Until the next day, that is, when my second story

was so consumately destroyed that I thought I had no business trying to be a writer and that I should take up something safe and easy like plumbing. I mean, listen, the Guilford group just pulled on their golf shoes and went to work on that manuscript.

I went home from my first workshop with my tail between my legs, convinced that I would never be invited back, and that I probably didn't have what it took to be a writer. As the days wore on, however, the pain and embarrassment wore off and my confidence (read: enormous, indefatigable Ego) returned. I was soon back at the typewriter, between changes of diapers to newly-checked-in Damon, trying to learn about the business of writing. After all, I reflected, everyone seemed to treat me quite well, and Gardner had encouraged me late Sunday night as we were all preparing to leave.

I kept knuckling out stories (mostly bad ones) the rest of that year, without success, and was surprised to receive a letter from Jay Haldeman, inviting me back for another Guilford weekend in February of 1972. I won't get into the details of that second workshop since this column is already longer than I had intended it to be, but suffice it to say that I made great strides that weekend, learning much about myself, as well as my writing. I got to know Ted White a lot better and he invited me to try my hand at doing some book reviews for AMAZING (which some of you may remember appearing in that magazine during 1973-4).

That summer, 1972, was a happy one for me. My son Damon was almost a year old, growing up strong and handsome; I had entered graduate school; and best of all perhaps, I sold my first short story. Entitled "Agony in the Garden," it was a much-revised version of the first piece I had submitted to the Guilford SF Workshop, and it was published in the March, 1973 issue of AMAZING. And let me tell you, those seven months spent waiting to see that story in print was like seven eternities, but I don't think I'll ever forget the excitement, the sheer pleasure, that filled me when I tore off the mailing wrapper of that March issue and saw my name, MY NAME(!), on the cover of a professional magazine, and then turning to the text and reading words that had their origins within my own mind and were now committed to typeset print for any and all to see. It is simply an experience I shall never forget. I don't think any writer ever does.

And so, I eventually worked myself from there to here, which is a total of 21 short stories, three articles, one book introduction, one poem, and three novels--all sold and/or published as of this writing. More projects are in the works (as always, I hope) and I am finally beginning to feel comfortable with the idea that yes, maybe I am indeed a writer. (Yes, I did, and still do occasionally have doubts about that, despite all this bullshit about Ego and its enormity). Fact is, and "artist" (read: creative person) must have quite an ego to ever get started, much less survive the inevitable rejection, derision, failure, self-doubt, etc. But that's the subject of another column.

Which just about brings me to the end of this rambling monologue/introduction to your new columnist. I'll close with a few possible topics for future columns, depending upon the reaction Mike gets to this first one. Anyway, here are some things that we may get into in the coming months: WRITERS WORKSHOPS; WRITING YOUR FIRST NOVEL AS A TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE (ESPECIALLY IF IT'S FOR LASER BOOKS); THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT IN SF AND THOMAS F. MONTELEONE; FANDOM: A PERSONAL VIEW; LIBERAL-CHIC IN SF; THE YOUNG TURKS: NEW WRITERS TO WATCH IN SF; and a host of others too numerous to mention. If I don't get sufficient feedback from this column and some of the delicacies I've tossed out for your selection, then I'll just pick one of these (or perhaps something else) and run with it.

So thank you very much. You've been an attentive audience; I hope that I have been as interesting, (at least competitive with KOJAK and RHODA and the rest of that crew). May you all enjoy peace and light and truth.

-- Thomas F. Monteleone

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PAVING PLANS REVEALED by Neal Wilgus

San Dango, Cal. (LEAK)--The X, Y & Z Corporation announced here today a mammoth new program which company spokesman Jonathin Sellouy called "the most far reaching construction project ever devised to move a product." The essence of the project, already approved by the effected planning agencies, is the paving of the entire state with a two inch coating of asphalt. Initial grading of large areas of open land has already begun, altho official ground covering ceremonies will not be held until next week.

"There has been some misinformed opposition to the idea," Sellout commented, "but we're sure that when the full facts are known the public will wholeheartedly endorse us. Besides offering the most progressive errosion control program ever devised and creating a vast job market, this project will open up endless recreational opportunities. Pavement skiing and Pave-Pole (an X, Y, & Z patened product) are only two of the possibilities which leap to mind."

This project was made possible, Sellout went on, by radical new developments in the X, Y & Z Research Laboratories which has been experimenting with a concept called Chlorophyll Asphalt (CA). "Like any new product," Sellout said, "CA still has some bugs in it, but we expect to exterminate them before the project goes much further. And the CA concept is a real beauty, a true blending of paving products and organic additives and there is really no reason why it shouldn't eventually work."

Sellout was also enthusiastic about promoting the CA concept nationwide. "Even at our present level," he said, "we have a situation where a piece of paving in San Dango is ultimately connected with a similar piece in Chicago, New York or any other urban center. You can go almost anywhere without stepping off pavement already. All we need do now is fill in the blanks."

The X,Y &Z representative even hinted that plans were afoot for initiating a CA program on an international basis, altho he urged caution in order to avoid undue criticism. "There are those," Sellout said, "who feel that a system of worldwide paving would be aesthetically distasteful. What this group probably does not realize is that the outmoded black pavement of the past is dead and that it will soon be replaced by the lovely green of Chlorophyll Asphalt. From the viewpoint of a lunar observer it will be a vast improvement in visual effect."

Another aspect of the CA project was brought up by a representative of the Department of Social Stability, the government agency which funded the X, Y & Z pilot project in Desolation County earlier this year. The SS representative pointed out that the success of the CA project would signify a new stage in man's mastery of nature, comperable to the agricultural and industrial revolutions. "This is so," the representative said, "because at its most successful, CA paving of the planet will mean an end to all higher forms of life. We might think of this project, therefore, as the climax of human progress."

When asked if this didn't also mean the end of civilization and of the human race the SS man replied, "Of course this is true, but it should not be allowed to stand in the way of the most ambitious reconstruction project ever devised to enhance human welfare, should it?"

-- Neal Wilgus

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MANAGEMENT
NOT
RESPONSIBLE
FOR
ITEMS
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ON
RACK

# TENN HAS KLASS

## DON D'AMMASSA

William Tenn, whose real name is Philip Klass, is one of those rareties of science fiction, an English professor turned writer. Starting in 1945, Tenn produced a relatively small body of work, most of which has been collected in seven volumes. Considering the small amount of work he has written, it might be surprising to see how widely respected he is in the field. But one has only to dip into some of his short stories to find that he is a first rate writer, and one of the field's finest humorists.

Tenn's first story published was not an earthshaker. "Alexander the Bait" (1946) is one of several stories to appear over the years in which mankind is tricked into developing space travel by the machinations of an unselfish, foresightful individual. In this case, a millionaire inventor fakes evidence of valuable ore deposits on the moon, setting off a space race. Even if this story were more credible on the narrative level, it still shares the common failing of this particular plot, a failure to examine the morality of the hero.

In 1947, Tenn seemed to be searching for his own voice. "Confusion Cargo" is a traditional space opera, with a technical problem solved by the scientist-hero, or in this case, heroine, the only twist is an otherwise routine story. "Mistress Sary" was one of Tenn's few essays at the gothic horror genre. It's a fairly well done narrative about the battle between an eight year old witch and her thoroughly nasty teacher. In "Errand Boy" an unscrupulous businessman attempts to exploit the naivete of a young visitor from the far future. While competently done, none of these three stories was particularly outstanding.

Two other stories published that year were entirely different. "Me, Myself, and I" relates the adventures of one Gooseneck McCarthy, an ignorant bully sent back to prehistory to move a single stone. McCarthy returns to discover a radically altered present, and is sent back through time to set things back as they were. He arrives too soon, however, and an altercation erupts between the two versions of himself. A couple additional time loops move the story rapidly toward the sublimely ridiculous. "Child's Play", possibly Tenn's most famous single story, is yet another visitor-from-the-future story. An unsuccessful young man named Sam finds himself inexplicably in possession of a Build-A-Man set, the product of a civilization far in Earth's future. After various experiments, including the manufacture of a baby without a navel, Sam duplicates himself. When the inevitable searcher from the future arrives, he decides to destroy the inferior copy. Unfortunately, Sam has wrought too well, and it is the original who is judged inferior and destroyed. Despite the grim ending--a not unusual property of Tenn's fiction--"Child's Play" is in much the same vein of rather acid slapstick as "Me, Myself, and I", an approach that was to dominate Tenn's fiction from then on.

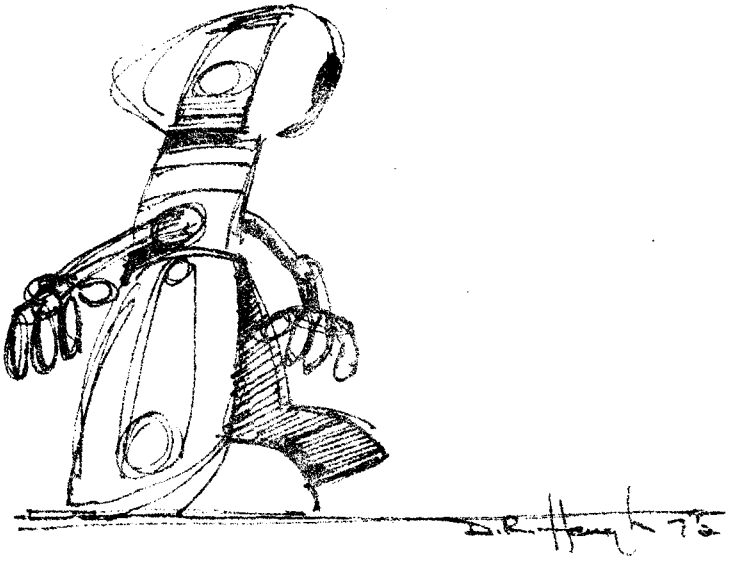
Another supernatural story appeared in 1948. "The Human Angle" is a vignette about a reporter who falls into the clutches of a vampire child. "Consulate" is one of Tenn's least successful stories, a tale of two men kidnapped to Mars by galactic agents to serve as ambassador. Of some interest is a cognet rebuttal of the Man-Saves-World school of SF: "If we hit animals smart enough to have disintegrators

and suchlike when we don't have them, and if they want this planet, they're going to take it away from us, and no movie hero in a tight jumper and riding boots is going to stop them at the last minute by discovering that the taste of pickled beets kills 'em dead."

The period 1948-1949 was one of Tenn's more productive periods. "Brooklyn Project" is set in the experimental time travel project of an American dictatorship. Their succession excursions into the past result is a series of changes in their present, until humanity is transformed into a race of amorphous blobs. In "House Dutiful", an ancient sentient creature impersonates a human dwelling place, responding to every unconscious desire of its occupant, eventually manipulating the thought processes of all mankind in order to keep its resident content.

"Venus and the Seven Sexes" is yet another wryly humorous piece, and another of Tenn's best known stories. The Plookhh, Venus' sentient race, consists of seven sexes, all necessary for reproduction, each distinct enough to be almost a separate race in itself. One sex flies, another burrows, a third is plantlike, etc. A has-been movie producer is assigned as Ambassador to Venus, but rather than provide technological aid to the Plookhh, to protect them from the varied monsters interested in eating Plookhh dinners, the ambassador decides to make a cinematic comeback. Remembering their old adage, "Pride goeth before a gobble", the Plookhh decide to cooperate, that film making must be the first step necessary to the attainment of civilization. Using authentic Venusians, therefore, the Ambassador makes a traditional love film. The Plookhh, believing it to have allegorical significance, adapt their way of life to match the film's warped, inaccurate view of their culture. The results are disastrously funny.

Three stroies appeared in 1950, of which one--Tenn's last attempt at traditional space opera--was a near total flop, redeeming itself only slighty by an amusing definition of maturity as "the period of settled stodgy dullness where you cultivate your ulcers instead of your mind." "The Last Bounce" is otherwise a surprisingly bad story of exploring other worlds. "Flirgeflip" (aternately titled "The Remarkable Flirgeflip") is another tale of a time traveler stuck in our present, unable to convince people of his sanity. By this time, Tenn had worked this theme for most of its best traces of humor, and seems to have started to repeat himself somewhat. Fortunately, he moved on to other plots.



My own choice as Tenn's best work appeared in 1950-- "Null-P". Following a nuclear war, researchers discover that George Abnego is a statistically perfect average man. As a reaction against the war and subsequent disorder, the population makes a symbol of Abnego, elects him President, and begins to pattern all of human society after the ideal median. Exceptionally good performance is treated as no less undesirable as exceptionally poor performance. Mankind becomes increasingly homogeneous and lacklustre as the generations go by, until we are finally supplanted by a race of intelligent Labrador retrievers.

Kingsley Amis has criticized this particular story because Tenn did not pattern Abnego after recognizeable contemporary US political figures, a criticism I find singularly myopic. The strength of the story lies in its universality; the requirement's of Abnego's character dictate that he not be patterned after an actual person.

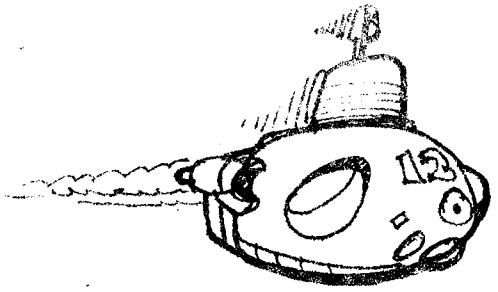
Tenn produced a delightful fantasy in 1951. "Everybody Loves Irving Bommer" is a classically patterned fantasy about a lonely man who receives a love potion, overuses it, and is destroyed by his own excess. "Betelgeuse Bridge", published that same year, drips sarcasm in its depiction of the publicity campaign launched to prepare humanity for the acceptance of a race of intelligent snails from another world. The snails, we ultimately discover, are confidence men planning to swindle Earth out of its entire store of radioactives.

There was a flurry of second rate stories about this time as well. "Jester" is a bit of inconsequential slapstick about a comedian who has a robot joke writer designed, and finds himself replaced by his own creation. "Medusa Was a Lady" (alternately titled "A Lamp for Medusa") is an Unknown type adventure story rationalizing the legend of Perseus, but which rarely rises above the level of rather flat fluff. "Venus is a Man's World" is about an Earth that has become dominated by women, and a very masculine Venusian colonist who runs afoul of the law. In "Generation of Noah", Tenn's sense of humor seems to have deserted him. Fearing nuclear war, shelter societes repattern their lives so that they never venture more than a few yards from their bomb shelters. When nuclear war eventually does erupt, one man vows that in the future, no matter what the provocation, no man should ever punish another. There are very bitter overtones to this story, one not typical of Tenn's other work at all. The hero remarks at one point: "You got tired of standing around in a hairshirt and pointing ominously at the heavens. You got to the point where you whished the human race well, but you wanted to pull you and yours out of the way of its tantrums."

"Firewater" (1952) is almost as bitter, but much more entertaining. An alien race has come to Earth, but seems incapalbe or unwilling to communicate with mankind. "A humorist had remarked back in those early days that the Aliens came not to bury man, not to conquer or enslave him. They had a truly dreadful mission--to ignore him!" Humans studying the aliens seem to invariably go insane just when they are beginning to make progress, but with their insanity comes a variety of psychic powers. It is clear, however, that the aliens are in many ways immeasurably superior to mankind, and a quasi-religious group moves toward a position of world dictatorship with its claim that there really are no aliens, that much of the human race is suffering from delusions. The fact that most of the characters are unbalanced--including the businessman hero--confuses the motivation in this long story, but it moves fairly well throughout.

"The Liberation of Earth" (1953) is another of my personal favorites. Earth is visited alternately by the military representatives of the Dendi and the Troxxt, two interstellar powers, each professing themselves to be the saviors of civilization. During each interchange, a monumental battle is fought in the vicinity of Earth, until eventually the ruined biosphere makes it worthless as a battleground. The few survivors of humanity lead a perilous existence on what remains of their planet. The concluding remark of one character is even more appropriate in the 1970's than in the 1950's, when no one had even heard of Vietnam: "Looking at us, we can say with pardonable pride that we have been about as thoroughly liberated as it is for a race and a planet to be."

"Custodian" (1953) is written in a quite different tone. Our sun is about to go



nova, so Earth's culture has been altered to a belief that pragmatism is all, that we should be bound emotionally to nothing, so that when the time comes to leave Earth, space will not be wasted on useless items such as art. One man manages to stay behind secretly when the vast colonization fleet leaves. His plans to die with the Earth are changed when he finds a still living baby, and instead he loads an obsolete starship with mementoes of Earth's culture, and sets off in pursuit of the fleet.

In "Deserter" (1953) a Jovian deserts its race's army to try to prevent its genocidal war against man, only to discover that man is just as bad as his own people.

"Project Hush" (1954) follow's the US Army's first moon trip, and its discovery there of another, previously unknown base, eventually revealed to belong to the US Navy. "Party of the Two Parts" is a frequently funny tale of an intelligent amoeba accused of selling pornography on Earth for use in high school textbooks. "Down Among the Dead Men", another of Tenn's better stories, concerns another interstellar war. This time Earth is hard pressed by the Eoti, an insect race that is rapidly outbreeding us. Women not pregnant are considered unpatriotic. Protoplasmic matter is used to build soldier surrogates, better known as zombies or blobs, artificially created men. There was also another fine fantasy story published in 1954. "The Tenants" deals with two men who inquire about renting the 13th floor of a building which, bowing to the superstitions of its potential customers, has no 13th floor. When the rental agency agrees, they move into a floor that no one without a legitimate purpose can visit.

"Servant Problem" (1955) is an intricately convoluted story. Garomma, the dictator of all humanity, poses as the Servant of All, while actually approaching "the day of complete control". As the story progresses, we are shown that it is actually Garomma's assistant, Moddo, who is in control, through his clever control of the dictator. But then we find that Moddo's physician, Loob the Healer, is in hypnotic control of Moddo. Except that we find that Loob is under similar control exercised by a young researcher named Sidothi, and Sidothi has been conditioned to worship Garomma. So who is really in control?

"The Flat-Eyed Monster" takes an old SF stand-by and turns it topsy-turvy. Clyde Manship is drawn by a mysterious ray to another planet, where the tentacled flefnobe look upon him as a flat-eyed (as opposed to bug-eyed) monster. There follows a typical SF horror film in reverse as the flefnobes pursue Clyde through their city. Clyde discovers that when he is frightened, his eyes emit a ray of some sort which disintegrates flefnobe bodies. Realizing this, he becomes confident, doesn't get frightened, his eyes don't emit the ray, and he is killed by the young hero protecting his flefnobe fiance.

"The Discovery of Morniel Mathway" (1955) is yet another time traveller from the future story, this time an art critic who becomes the artist he came back to study. "Wednesday's Child" is the artificially created baby from "Child's Play", now an adult, who betrays some alarmingly strange characteristics. When she gives birth to an infant, her personality is transferred to the baby.

Tenn's stories began to decline in quality in 1956. "A man of Family" is a hu-

morless tale in which population control requires families to give up their children when their income falls below certain levels. "She Only Goes Out at Night" deals with a doctor who finds a socially acceptable method of supplying blood to his son's girlfriend, a vampire. "It Ends With a Flicker" is a battle between two alternate futures who use time travel in an attempt to make the opposite alternative reality. "Time In Advance" was Tenn's best story that year. Criminals are allowed the option of serving their sentence before they commit their crime. Two pre-criminals return from having served first degree murder sentences, intent on killing two people who had done them harm. The first finds that his target has died while he was in custody. The second is presented with a series of calls from friends and relatives, each confessing guilt for incidents of which the hero had no knowledge, each begging to be spared. When he realizes how thoroughly he has been mistreated by everyone he knew, the pre-criminal is so disgusted he decides not to kill any of them, merely to keep them all in suspense for the remainder of their lives.

"Winthrop was Stubborn" (alternately titled "Time Waits for Winthrop") was the high point of 1957. Winthrop is one of a group of travellers to the future, but unlike his fellows, Winthrop refuses to return to the present. Because of the nature of matter transmission through time, the transfer cannot be accomplished unless the entire party is assembled. Each companion in turn attempts to convince Winthrop to return, unsuccessfully, but Winthrop's own enthusiasm for the future results in his death, hence unprotesting return.

"Dark Star" (1957) was distinctly less satisfactory. An astronaut declines to participate in a moon flight when he learns that it will probably result in his sterilization. "Sanctuary" is what is offered to a minority political figure by the Temporal Embassy of 2219, established in the year 2119. The fugitive travels to 2219, a future in which his movement has come to power. A purist, he resents the alterations that have been made in his philosophy, and the story ends with him seeking sanctuary in the embassy from 2319.

"Eastward Ho!" also reverses our view of things. The US controls only the northeast corner of the country, following a war, and is virtually a vassal of various Indian nations. There are anachronisms; the Indians have names like Chief Three Hydrogen Bombs and Makes Much Radiation. The culture of the white man is ultimately forced to set sail for Europe, in search of a new land to colonize.

"Lisbon Cubed" (1958) is a frequently funny story of spiderlike aliens conducting espionage on Earth in human disguises. "The Malted Milk Monster"(1959) concerns an ugly girl with the power to physically transport people into a fantasy world in which she is omniscient and omnipotent, to use as her personal playthings. Tenn's skill and reputation were such by this point that his next story, "Bernie the Faust" (1963) was sold to PLAYBOY. An alien (or is he?) tricks Bernie into selling him the entire Earth, lock, stock, and barrel. At first Bernie thinks it's all a joke, but then he recalls that he has been empowered by the United Nations to sell used equipment. In a panic, he manages to buy back the Earth, at a huge personal loss. But did he really save the world, or was he merely outfoxed by a confidence man?

There were only a few more stories, scattered over the next twelve years. "The Masculinist Revolt" (1965) reverses the role of men and women in society, with satiric and satanic glee. "My Mother was a Witch" (1966) is an amusing look into the nature of curses and witchery in a modern city. "The Lemon-Green Spaghetti-Loud Dynamite Dribble Day" (alternately titled "Did Your Coffee Taste Funny This Morning?") appeared in CAVALIER in 1967. A bunch of hippies slip some LSD into New York City's water supply, with predictable results. The hero's first suspicion is when

his radio announces that "The Cadillacs are loner, the Continentals are thinner, and the Chrysler Imperials have mostly snapped in two. Five thousand Chevrolet convertibles are building a basketball court in one uptown lane of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive."

Tenn's latest published story, the only one not in any of his collections, was "On Venus, Have We Got a Rabbi" (1974). An interstellar conference of Jews is thrown into turmoil when it considers the possibility of non-human Jews. An amusing story, but still without the easy humor that typified Tenn's earlier fiction.

All of the above stories have been collected in paperback. The titles are THE WOODEN STAR (Ballantine), THE SEVEN SEXES (Ballantine), THE SQUARE ROOT OF MAN (Ballantine), THE HUMAN ANGLE (Ballantine), OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS (Ballantine), and TIME IN ADVANCE (Bantam). A LAMP FOR MEDUSA was published as half of a double book by Belmont books, and is now long out of print. Tenn's last story is available in WANDERING STARS edited by Jack Dann (Pocket Books).

Tenn did write one actual novel. OF MEN AND MONSTERS (originally published in GALAXY as THE MEN IN THE WALLS) appeared in 1963, but was not published in paperback until some years later, reprinted again this year by Ballantine. Gigantic aliens have occupied the Earth, reducing humanity to scavengers living in burrows inside the dwellings of the creatures. It's another typical Tenn reversal of viewpoint, as man fills the role of mice or insects while the aliens employ traps and insecticides to destroy them. The novel follows a young human barbarian as he gradually comes to realize that man is much like the cockroach, perhaps not capable of what we might consider glory, but indefatigable, ineradicable, and determined to live despite every opposition.

The name William Tenn does not appear on new SF much any more, and that is discouraging for more than one reason. Tenn is, of course, a fine writer, and no field can afford to do without its fine writers. But more than that, it is a shame that Tenn is so unproductive because he had a sense of humor, a way of letting us laugh at mankind's foibles that has only been surpassed within the genre by the work of Robert Sheckley. There are signs that Sheckley is going to appear more and more often in the future, and it would be very satisfactory to see both writing once more. Hopefully Damon Knight's characterization of Tenn will be proven true: "Tenn is another artist who won't stop till he's had the last word."

-- Don D'Ammassa

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# IN SEARCH OF ELDORADO

## BOOK REVIEWS

THE EMBEDDING by Ian Watson, Scribner's, 1975, 254pp. $6.95
THE FOREVER WAR by Joe Haldeman, Ballantine Books, 1976, 218pp. $1.50
THE QUINCUNX OF TIME by James Blish, Dell, 128pp. 95¢
THE SHOCKWAVE RIDER by John Brunner, Harper & Row, 1975, 288pp. $8.95

reviewed by Cy Chauvin

> "Their reality', 'Our reality,' 'Your reality'--the mind's concepts of reality is based on the environment it has evolved in--all are slightly different. Yet all are part of 'this reality'--the overall totality of the present universe." (p. 137)

"To embed" means "to set in among another mass; to fix in the mind, memory." In one sense, that is our relation with our environment, and with 'reality'. We are profoundedly affected by it, in many small and large ways. Science fiction deals with the problem of change in our environment (most of which are man-made) and how these changes affect people. Some of these changes are physical (an interplanetary rocket); others are social or cultural--such as language. This is what Ian Watson's THE EMBEDDING is all about.

"The basic plan of language reflects our biological awareness of the world that has evolved us." (p. 45)

The novel has three interconnected stories to tell. One concerns Chris Sole, a linguist who works in an experimental hospital in England. Three groups of children are kept in "special environments", isolated from all contact with the 'normal world', and taught specially designed languages. One group is in a Logic World; another, in an 'Alien' World; and a third (Chris') group live in an embedded world, and are taught a special 'self-embedded' language. Language processing depends upon the volume of information that the brain can store short-term; in order to make sense of a sentence, we must be able to "remember" the first words in a sentence until we decipher the last. Each sentence is a fresh creation, unlike the signals animals use, which are fixed and unvaried. Each sentence is new because of language's "recursive" feature--we have rules for doing the same thing more than once in a sentence. ("The dog and the cat and the bear ate.") This is a self-embedding process, and one that the children in Sole's special environment are taught, only to an extreme degree. In a sense, it is almost an attempt to experience a totality of meaning. The children are also given a drug (PSF) to help speed up their learning functions.

There are some moral questions raised by the children's isolation, which bothers Sole, who loves his experimental group, seemingly, more than his own son. (He calls them "my children"). One of the other scientists (a cold-hearted woman named Summers)

tells him to think of "all the children that are going to be born before today's over--or wiped out tonight by accident! Do you think it matters one scrap that a dozen...are brought up...in somewhat unusual circumstances?" (p. 19) The children, incidently, are war-orphans. When a visitor asks if the children's brains have been altered surgically for the experiment, Chris explodes in anger. "Christ no! ... That's a bloody immoral suggestion." (p. 43)

In Brazil, a French anthropologist (and friend of Sole's), Pierre Darriand, has discovered an unique South American tribe, the Xemahoa. The tribe has two languages, one for everyday, and one for special religious ceremonies that is spoken under the influences of a fungi-drug. This latter language has some relation to the artificial language Sole is studying with his experimental subjects in England. A 'self-embedded' poem, NOUVELLES IMPRESSIONS d'AFRIQUE by Raymond Roussel plays a role here, too, for Pierre has been attempting to "understand" it for years, and believes he might do this if he learns Xemahoa B. (the native's second tongue). An American-Brazilian dam-project threatens to engulf the Indian's homeland, however, and destroy both their way of life and the special fungi they use in their ceremonies.

These two seperate plot threads come together when contact is made with the Sp'thra, aliens from outer space, who offer the secrets of space travel for "the widest possible knowledge of language." Chris Sole is among the special delegation that make contact with the aliens. The alien's quest is in part mystical; "you might say we trade in realities," says Ph'theri, their spokesman. The aliens are building a "language moon," and compiling all the "reality programme" of all languages. They are driven to their quest by "the Bereft Love we feel for the Change Speakers." The change-speakers have passed beyond this reality. "The universe here embeds us in it. But not them," says Ph'theri. They hope to "follow" the change-speakers in some way, once having completed their task.

> "The change speakers desired something when they phased with the Sp'thra--what it was we did not understand. They themselves were hurting with love. Our signal trading quest is to cancel the great sense of sadness, so that we Sp'thra can be left alone again--without that vibration in our minds, imprinted so many centuries ago by their passage...We are haunted by the change speakers, by this ghost of love, which is pain." (158)

This is an eloquent vision--Watson does a convincing job of conveying the inner urgency and compulsion of the aliens' quest. Their motives are partly explained, yet remain largely a mystery.

The Sp'thra and Sole negotiate, and in return for some information, the aliens want "six language units" from as widely scattered areas as possible--a euphemism, it turns out, for an adult human brain. The moral aspects are again downplayed: "The prospect, after all, was no more terrible--far less terrible indeed--than X or Y or Z happening in the world in Asia, Africa or South America." Again, the same arguement that Summers used in reply to Sole is repeated here: the fate of a few individuals don't matter when so many people perish every day in the ordinary course of human events. What are a few one way or the other? I don't need to point out why this arguement is specious, I hope.

Sole also happens to have the letter from Pierre (the Frechman) with him when he meets the aliens (a happy coincidence). He reads it, and the Sp'thra become enthusiastic about this tribe with the self-embedding language. They see the possibility of ending their quest here.

As I've described here, THE EMBEDDING poses many interesting questions and some

of the background detail is fascinating. The intellectual problems it deals with might be hard to pose outside sf--or at least could not be as effectively stated. It is a suspenseful novel, too, with intrigue and complications. While the emotional problems of the characters are not emphasized as much as other facets of the novel, they are there--Pierre was formily in love with Sole's wife, Eileen; in fact, "Sole's" son is actually Pierre's. (As I've mentioned before, too, Chris Sole's emotional involvement has been transferred from his family to the children in the special environments in the hospital--he goes there first when he returns home to England after the meeting with the Sp'thra.) Even the spear-carriers in THE EMBEDDING are distinct.

This is an excellent novel, perhaps even a major work of science fiction.

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THE FOREVER WAR originally appeared as a series of short stories in ANALOG (the most well-known of whish is probably "Hero", nominated for a Hugo award 2 years ago), where it aroused much controversy. Some readers thought it was very left wing, and near pornographic; others loved it.

The novel is about a future war: one in which women fight as well as men; a war that lasts centuries. The story focuses on Joe Mandella, who because of time distortions caused by travel at near light speeds, is able to survive the entire "forever war". The book is written from his viewpoint; we see the world change, and Mandella trying to adapt. Mostly, he longs for a lost girl friend, and feels alienated by the change. He advances in rank, becomes a major, and sees the war from another viewpoint. Mostly, he becomes alienated by the changes, and longs for a girlfriend whose bed he often shared during the long war (the army has also become promiscious, and casual sex is encouraged; unfortunately for Mandella, homosexuality becomes dominant in later years, in large part due to govt. encouragement). Of course, despite all the stacked odds and against all logic, Haldeman brings them together at the end, to live happily ever after.

The novel is suspenseful, absorbing, but I won't call THE FOREVER WAR the "anti-war" novel that many fans have labelled it. Certainly, there is no overt propagandizing against war: Haldeman wants to describe (in very realistic terms) how war in the future might be fought. So he goes into great detail describing various future weapons systems, fighting suits, etc., and the background society that might develope. Some of the details we may not like, but they are postulated facts in his story's environment, not lecturing by the author's characters.

Actually, a case might be made for the novel being more "pro" war than against it. At least, the story pbviously depends in large part for its appeal upon the very violence, blood, gore and adventure that some say it criticizes. And when Mandella rejoins the army after a brief stay on earth, he has two disturbing feelings: one is that he knew this would happen (that the army would trick him into rejoining); and the other is that he felt he was "going home." (I might add that the few days on earth did not strike me as revolting enough to motivate Mandella to rejoin. Contrast the novel version with the alternate version published in AMAZING as "You Can Never Go Back" which Haldeman said was too "dark and bleak" for his purposes in THE FOREVER WAR. Haldeman did not want to make it seem his characters were "forced" to go back into the armed forces, but wanted to leave an element of choice in the matter. War may be bad, but is it worse than civilian life? During the time period the novel covers, at least, the opposite impression seems to constantly emerge.

Of course, this has little to do with whether the novel is worth reading or not.

What loses me is my unwillingness to believe in one war a hundred years long, where dur to time-distortion one battle may last for a decade. How can anyone plan tactics over a time period like this? Moreover, most modern govts. are only two or three hundred years old; it's hard to believe in a war that lasts longer than the governments or cultures that originated it, and yet that is exactly what Haldeman postulates. I am also unconvinced that such a highly technological infantry is feasible (economically). To equip men and women as Haldeman describes would be a staggering investment, and it just doesn't seem as if the return per person would be worthwhile. Is an infantry really that necessary in an interstellar war?

In a black humor/satiric novel, things like this could perhaps be dismissed as merely exaggerations for effect, but sf writers (especially those in ANALOG) try to be realistic. Perhaps the problem is that the armed forces described sound too much like those of the present day, when actually things might be more radically different (in the part men and women play in wars) than Haldeman suggests in his book. It's hard to say, really. Describing the future with enough exterior changes to be different and original, while at the same time attempting to seem "realistic" according to present day notions, is a difficult juggling act. Maybe I shouldn't be too disappointed that Haldeman didn't make it.

It also seems impossible to write a future war story without using a guts-and-blood style, which is as much a part of the sub-genre as are the thee-and-thou and other anachronisms of the typical sword & sorcery tale. So it goes, I guess.

Not bad; but not a novel I'd reread, either.

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THE QUINCUNX OF TIME is based on a novelet entitled "Beep", first published in GALAXY in 1953. It has not been expanded greatly; this book is quite short (128 pages), with fairly large type and much white space.

In his introduction, Blish says that he rewrote "Beep" because it "was <u>about</u> something--and something important to me, if not to anyone else. It deserved rethinking and expansion, especially from the perspective of fifteen additional years of brooding about the things it discusses ((Blish's introduction is dated 1970)). ...One way of putting this would be to say that although the book is fiction, the successive and conflicting speculations which it contains about time, knowledge, and free will are all intended to be taken seriously."

Blish says that there is not much physical action in the novel (he is correct), and that the "structure of the story is still nearly skeletal, indeed nearly perfunctory." Instead of adding "new characters or psychological analysis or social commentary," Blish says that he has "tried to make a great deal more out of the speculations that promted the story in the first place. I had set out to dramatize these speculations in the short version; here, I am still going about that work, I hope more thoughtfully. The drama, for those capable of enjoying it in this form, lies more in the speculations than in the action, just as before."

The physical action in the story, the character conflict--everything that we'd normally consider to be the "drama" of the story--is, as Blish says, nearly perfunctory, and not particularly original or good. I can't imagine anyone being satisfied with it alone.

On the other hand, I'm not sure the book is worth reading for its "speculations", either. The book is largely centered around a device called a Dirac transmitter,

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which can pick up information transmitted at any time (the reciever "beep" is "the simultaneous reception of every one of the Dirac messages that has ever been sent, or will ever be sent."). In essence, they can see the future (or whatever portion of it is reported via the Dirac transmitter). Blish raises the natural paradox that arises from knowing the future--can't we change it? (The speculations about free will vs. determinism are thus raised. The characters then realize that "the events in the beep are only potentially real; and that we, as mere mortal men, have been given the power to select which of them we wish to have happen." And they decide: "Everything has to happen. Everything, good or bad." Blish explores the ethical question, and concludes that man doesn't have the ability.

Blish also speculates about knowledge; for instance, he says "We prefer the simplest theory that fits all the facts, but nobody has ever been able to prove that it is a real law of nature." And: "Now in the beep, we are confronted with vast masses of evidence that don't fit into the current ((scientific)) paradigm. What is much, much worse is that we are confronted with many future paradigms, which not only conflict with ours but with each other. ((But))...the very structure of science itself makes it impossible for us to choose among them, because that structure is in itself one of those paradigms."

To a certain extent, this is all very interesting, but I'm not enthusiastic about the form in which it is presented (lectures, a la Gernsback). Also, I think that Blish's comment that the book should be read only for its "speculations" (which others might term "ideas"--Blish's term is more accurate, but they're both pretty much the same thing) is rather old-fashioned, too. SF is not meant to be read solely for its speculations (nor, I think, solely for its literary values--though it depends on what you mean by that)--rather, we're interested in what is created when both work together. We don't just want to see an author's speculations, we want to see how those speculations might affect specific, individual human beings--the characters the author creates (or should create) in his story. It is the emotional and psychological effects of these speculations on individuals that give us what we find unique and valuable in sf. Blish has said much the same thing himself elsewhere--"The next question I ask myself after I've looked into the background ((of my story)) and worked it out is 'who does this hurt?' And the person that background hurts most becomes my central character." (CYPHER 10, p. 13).

The speculations/background in THE QUINCUNX OF TIME neither hurt nor affect anyone, and the characters are not developed fully enough for us to deeply care about them anyway. Blish would have been more successful, perhaps, if he had gone a step further, and turned his story into a fictionalized essay, similar to what Jorge Luis Borges has written. As it is, THE QUINCUNX OF TIME is very dissatisfying --Blish has written much better things than this.

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THE SHOCKWAVE RIDER is another one of Brunner's novels written in the Dos Passos mode, which Brunner used so successfully in STAND ON ZANZIBAR. It is put together in bits and pieces; unfortunately, it is not as cleverly constructed as STAND ON ZANZIBAR, nor does the future society it depicts hit with the impact of the other Brunner novel. It also may be that we are tiring of the structure Brunner has

adopted (which he uses, quite self-consciously, to draw attention to those novels he considers his "major work", I would say); he has used it in THE JAGGED ORBIT and THE SHEEP LOOK UP as well as in STAND ON ZANZIBAR and the present novel. Brunner has, perhaps, not realized that it cannot be used effectively in every science fiction novel.

Like his three previous books ("non-novels", the McLuthan title given at the end of ZANZIBAR), THE SHOCKWAVE RIDER has a heavy sociological bent. Brunner says he has drawn much of the material for his future world from Alvin Toffer's FUTURE SHOCK. Basically, the novel concerns a student who escapes from a very special kind of college called Tarnover, which specializes in educating bright but underpriveledged children for future jobs with the government. The student, Nickie Haflinger, has found a way to feed a false identity into the computer net (which is all pervasive in the 21st century, and one of the most important sociological-technological facets of the novel). He switches from identity to identity, never staying in one long until he meets Kate Gierson, daughter of Ina Grierson, who he meets at Space Industries. Kate is plain-looking, intelligent, and somehow attracted to him; and most important, she guesses what he is (i.e., a graduate from Tarnover and an identity-jumper).

The relationship between the two grows; Nick learns to trust, and finally to love, someone. But the major focus of the novel is not upon the inter-personal relationships that are developed so much as it is upon the future world Brunner describes. One of the most interesting sections of the novel (in these terms) is Nick's and Kate's visit to Precipice, a community outside the data-net which has developed an alternate lifestyle totally apart from the "plug-in", extremely mobile one that most Americans are part of. The people of Precipice operate a service called Hearing Aid, which anyone with a problem can call, and have someone listen patiently to them (but listen only; they can do nothing to aid the caller). In a way, Precipice is an idealized form of the old "hippie commune"; but improved, and more middle-class.

Perhaps the reason this novel seems less a success is that the problems the protagonist encounters depend more upon the whims of the author rather than upon any internal logic in the story itself. Nick's predictaments seem too easily gotten into...and too easily gotten out of. For instance, both Nick and Precipice are saved by a hair's breath from a squad of US bombers, (by a simple call from a general), and the resolution seems contrived. "Realism," as I've said before, involves the willingness of a writer to depict failure as well as success--something that not all sf writers have yet realized. (Though I will add, from evidence in other books, that Brunner is well aware of this truthism.)

There is, overall, a staleness in THE SHOCKWAVE RIDER that is hard to fathom. I think, basically, that it is caused by the fact that the characters and plot of the novel simply do not live up to the "significance" and depth promised to the reader by the novel's background detail. The characters are still 20th century figures, and largely cardboard, at that; and the plot is a somewhat complicated chase sequence. The novel lacks emotion and intellectual meaning.

For an example of a novel that fits all these marks, read Ian Watson's THE EMBEDDING instead. A marvelous piece of sf--affecting and moving, and with some interesting background as well. It does everything Brunner's does not.

(Note: According to a letter in SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW, parts of THE SHOCKWAVE RIDER were cut without Brunner's permission, and one entire character eliminated--all of his actions and dialog were attributed to his brother. I do not think the

novel would have been improved greatly if it had been left unchanged, but even so, it is a poor and dishonest practice and one that should be protested by every science fiction fan and writer.)

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THE SHOCKWAVE RIDER by John Brunner, Harper & Row, 1975, 334pp. $8.95
THE NEW AWARENESS: Religion Through Science Fiction, edited by Patricia Warrick and Martin Harry Greenberg, Delacorte Press, 1975, 477pp. $9.95
THE ANIMAL DOCTOR by P. C. Jersild, translated from Swedish by David Mel Paul and Margareta Paul, Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, English translation copyright 1975, 267pp. $7.95
WORLDS OF MAYBE, edited by Robert Silverberg, Dell Publishing Co., 1970, 208pp. 95¢
CRASH LANDING ON IDUNA by Arthur Tofte, Laser Books, 1975, 190pp. 95¢
MISSING MAN by Katherine MacLean, Berkley Publishing Corporation, 1975, 252pp. $6.95

reviewed by Wayne Hooks

THE SHOCKWAVE RIDER by John Brunner is akin to 1984. Nick Haflinger was an anomaly in a planned culture. He was raised in a deprived atmosphere until he was picked to got to Tarnover. Tarnover was the outgrowth of primitive think tanks. Potential genuises were molded so as to give optimum service to society. For a time, he is happy, having found a haven from his loveless past. Then, he discovers that mutant freaks are being artificially created to hopefully cope with a run away world.

The use of computers have expanded into a hydra of immense proportions. Every aspect of life is monitered by the computers. With the proper code fed into the computers, a man may be ruined. It is into this system which Nick escapes and disappears. In his possession is a maximum security code with which he may alter his identity in the computer memory banks. In this manner, he is able to drift from job to job and identity to identity whenever discovery seems imminent. A genius in computers, he seeks a lover to bring about the destruction of Tarnover and the dismantlement of the computer network. It seems he has found such a place when he comes to Precipice, a community which is government subsidized for not having modern conveniences. However, he is captured by Federal agents and returned to Tarnover. Again, he escapes, but this time with the connivance of an enlightened interrogator. Once escaped, he returns to Precipice to bring down the system.

THE SHOCKWAVE RIDER is written well enough; there are no mechanical flaws. However, there is a deficiency in plot. It is overworked and pedestrian. Nick Haflinger is too much of a god figure: he does not overcome difficulties, he merely sweeps them aside. Yet, despite his perfection, he is able to be trapped by the government, which is portrayed as so stupid as to be paralyzed. Also, there is too great a reliance upon happy incidents. The government interrogator is subverted by Nick. With such an inept and bungling government, why should Nick even struggle against it? Its own clumsiness should have destroyed it long ago. THE SHOCKWAVE RIDER is enjoyable reading, but is vastly inferior to the other books on the same subject. ANIMAL FARM and 1984 said it before and said it much better.

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The bookstands are flooded these days with ill-conceived, hastily arranged anthologies. The latest of this mediocre group in THE NEW AWARENESS edited by Patricia Warrick and Martin Harry Greenberg. The unifying theme is supposed to be religion through science fiction. Each story is prefaced by remarks on the variety of re-

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ligion displayed by the story. These prefaces are the worst features in an atrocious volume. They are shallow and display a kind of pseudo-scholasticism. Quotes from Teilhard de Chardin and others do not render the prefaces deep, but rather spurious.

In this anthology are found such stories as "Night of the Leopard" by William Sambrot whose theme is as original as Tarzan and ever older. Of course, the same old tired favorites are trotted out for another appearance in another anthology for the millionth time. THE NEW AWARENESS is really the same old pablum. "Behold the Man" by Moorcok, "A Canticle for Leibowitz" by Miller, "The Nine Billion Names of God" by Clarke, "A Rose for Ecclesiastes" by Zelazny and "The Fire Balloons" by Bradbury have been anthologized so often that they may be skipped, thereby reducing the number of pages by half. Most of the other stories are straight science fiction and really don't deal with religion. The few stories which do deal with religion are either so humorous as to be trivial and the rest take suck a weak-kneed position on theology that Martin Luther is revolutionary. The introduction is a lie. No theological questions are answered or even raised. THE NEW AWARENESS has all the substance of charismatic religion and is just as much a rip-off.

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Translating anything from a foreign language is never an easy task. Each language has its own idiosyncracies and idioms. These must be taken into account by the translator as the book is translated into English, a difficult and highly idiomatic language itself. Always must the meaning and thoughts of the author be taken into account. All too often, nuances are lost in the translation. The translator enjoys the enigmatic position of damned if he does and damned if he doesn't. If the translation is too free, the traditionalits reject the translation as inaccurate and improper. But if the translator attempts to follow the rythyms of the original language too closely, the resulting translation will be either too wooden in expression or else totally unreadable. Finally, the translator usually bears the blame when the original author simply has no talent. The translator may only translate, not edit and rewrtie the deficiencies of the author's talent.

THE ANIMAL DOCTOR by P. C. Jersild was translated from Swedish by David Mel Paul and Margareta Paul. It is supposed to be a science fiction novel, but it is impossible to judge from the novel. It could just as easily be classified as mainstream. In essence, it is the story of a woman veterinarian caught up in a confining society which attempts to restrict her individuality. THE ANIMAL DOCTOR describes one woman's battle to preserve her individual cultural entity. The most notable feature of this book is that it is written in the present tense, and oddity among writting styles. The book fails, but the blame is neither the author's nor the translator's. A mood, an attitude, may not be translated so as to be comprehended in another cultural context. THE ANIMAL DOCTOR, though fascinating in some ways, suffers cultural shock.

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Robert Silverberg is one of the most prolific anthologizers of today. As it is with many prolific creatures, a good many of his editorial offspring are bastards, conceived in haste and regretted at leisure. His propensity for editorial abortions has become so marked, that one must hesitate before purchasing an anthology of which he is editor. However, WORLDS OF MAYBE happily rises above the mediocrity and banality of its siblings. The seven authors are all well known. In many anthologies, well known authors mean the stories are failures which they could not give away or else the stories are the same hackneyed, trite stories which have been anthologized

time and time again ad nauseum. The stories in WORLDS OF MAYBE are fairly well known, but do not appear in every spurious anthology on the newsstand. Their familiarity is the familiarity of an old friend, not that of an opportuning drunk. The theme is alternate universes and changes in the history of certain events were altered. This theme is rigorously adhered to. It is a pleasure to read again such stories as "Sidewise in Time," "All the Myraid Ways," "Delenda Est" and others. WORLDS OF MAYBE may be recommended to either the novice reader or the afficionado who seeks to fill some gaps in his lirary.

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When writing a review, it is always important to remember that the book should be critically analyzed and not ripped apart simply for the exercise. The credibility of the reviewer is threatened when the strengths of the book are not stressed as well as the faults or vice versa. Otherwise, the review degenerates into a complaint or overfulsome praise. This is a disservice to all other reviewers. In this aspect, CRASH LANDING ON IDUNA is grossly unfair to reviewers. If it is the responsibility of reviewers to review objectively and fairly, then it is the responsibility of authors to write so there is some balance between the weaknesses and strengths. Ary book which is as flawed as CRASH LANDING ON IDUNA is a disservice to any reviewer. Therefore this cannot be considered a review since a review balances the strengths and faults of a book. The deficiencies of CRASH LANDING IN IDUNA by Arthur Tofte renders this more in the nature of a warning. In his duties as an author, Toite is sadly remiss in regards to his resposibilities to reviewers.

The story line is so hackneyed and ill-done that there is no reason to reduce it. In all aspects of literary value, this book is worthless. The writing is insipid and amateurish, the characterization is flat and plastic. The most glaring omissions are talent and imagination. CRASH LANDING ON IDUNA is a rip off. In these days of ever increasing shortages, it is sad to see such an utter waste of paper.

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MISSING MAN by Katherine MacLean is not proper science fiction. It is rather fantasy with a futuristic setting. Set in the late twentieth century, the social and anthropological extrapolations are unlikely to have either validity or believability.

George Sanford has a special gift, the gift of empathy, whereby he can physically feel another's distress and using his body as a barometer, can find that person's location. It is only natural that he should become a member of the Rescue Squad. As special consultant to the Rescue Squad, he utilizes his talent more and more and the more he utilizes it, the more it changes and becomes more powerful. It is when George comes in contact with Larry, an irresponsible revolutionary, that he discovers the true nature of his society.

MISSING MAN is supposed to be Katherine MacLean's first novel, but actually, it is several installments, first published in ANALOG and then, with a little reworking, made into a novel. Sometimes, the connective tissue between the different segments is severed and MISSING MAN becomes stylistically disjointed. A fantastic and interesting society is constructed, only to be thrown away in an overworked, mudane plot. George, as the main character, is extremely well depicted, but beyond him, the characterization breaks down. The other characters are flat and two dimensional, acting only as foils to George. Several characters are never properly introduced and serve no purpose, merely being padding. The use of deus ex machina renders the plot predictable and the ending banal. The main failing of MISSING MAN is the dialogue. In attempting to make the chacacters speak naturally, street slang is employed. This

linguistic failing makes the dialogue artificial and stilted while rendering the characters ridiculous. Why should a person in the 1990s talk like a refuge from the Haight Ashbury of the early 60s. The slang used is pseudo-hippie and passe even today. MISSING MAN is reasonably enjoyable light reading, but by no strech of the imagination may it ever be more than that.

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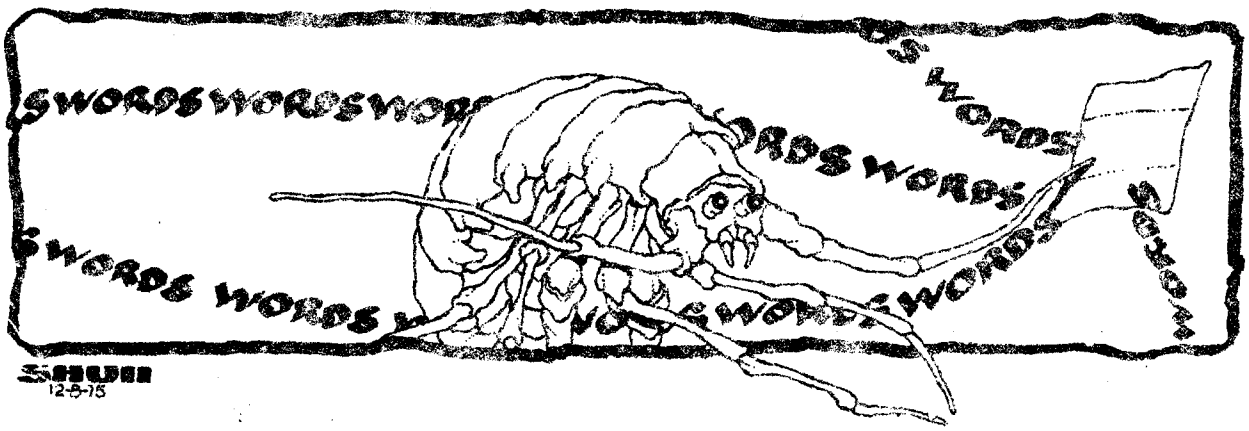


((First, a few more comments on issue 13...))

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Jeff May, Box 68, Liberty, MO 64068

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George Perkins' letter does require an answer. I am on the MidAmericon committee, and indeed, I introduced the resolution which decided that no ST oriented programming would be provided. Sf fandom complains about the overcrowding of cons and blames it on the fringefans and trekkies because the fringefans and trekkies are among those who have caused this overcrowding. However, we didn't intend to punish ST fans. We just don't think we're obligated to cater to ST, comics, or the other fringe fandoms which support their own conventions. After all, how many ST conventions feature programming oriented toward general sf fans? If Star Trek had appeared and no fandom of the show had arisen then ST would be a portion of a worldcon program the same as Buck Rogers episodes or reruns of sf movies. However no Star Trek fan is going to suffer unduly because of a lack of ST programming at the worldcon, just as I am not going to suffer unduly if the next STrekcon doesn't feature anything which I'd attend a con for.

George is wrong about one point he makes. He says, "If there were no such show as STar Trek, then 90% of the now ST fans would be straight sf fans." From what I've seen of ST fandom it appears that if there were no Star Trek then 90% of its fans wouldn't be any sort of fans at all.

Furthermore, the turnoff for sf fans contra Star Trek fans isn't just the people in Spock ears and Star Fleet uniforms. A lot of us think that people who dress up like that look silly, but they don't look any sillier than some non-Strek outfits I've seen at conventions. The problem is rather one of attitude. Generalizing, the people who dress up in Star Trek gear are more or less contemptous of sf fandom. These are the people who have no use for anything that isn't Star Trek. Needless to say, sf fans don't like that much, any more than a Star Trek fan enjoys being sneered at because he admits to liking SF.

I personally do not like large conventions. However, I'm quite willing to go to one if people I know are going to be there. On the other hand, I don't like being told "If you don't like the crowding don't go" when the crowding is due to an influx of fans who hold the con's basis--sf fandom--in anything from apathy to open con-

tempt.

Finally--aren't you glad there is a "finally"?--we don't want a scapegoat, nor do we want to wage a holy war on trekkies. We do feel entitled to take action to limit the size of a con, including pressure through programming or the lack thereof. After all, if you don't like what a con committee is doing you don't have to go. I certainly wouldn't.

I was a little surprised at the violence of Will Norris' reaction to DEATHWISH. I note with some irritation that his whole judgement of the film is based on his glimpse of one scene, which strikes me as an unsound basis to judge any film. The theme of the movie DEATHWISH is violence, specifically vigilante violence, and many people didn't like it. However, I enjoyed seeing the film as a story, though I certainly don't suggest doing as Bronson's character did. Within the frame of the story Charles Bronson's character acted in a believable fashion. I think it is only a question of time before people somewhere take the law into their own hands, and someone does just as the character in the movie did. That will be a tragedy, but I cannot bring myself to condem completely those who act as vigilantes. The people in NYC applauded because they're tired of being prey, and they were seeing someone like many of them doing something about it.

Will said he ran away when he saw the scenes of violence in DEATHWISH and that TV movie. I can't blame him for not wanting to watch, but I also think his reaction is not a realistic one. If Will encountered a real crime of violence--and such are even more sickening than the toned-down acts put on screen--would he run away then, too? If I had some pat solution I would offer it, but I don't. I do think that the way in which crime and criminals are handled in the US--our whole "justice" system, in short--is inadequate, especially in terms of how it meets the challenge of preventing crime, but I do not propose to begin a polemic on Jurisprudence According to May. I will simply note that while it is not especially thrilling to think of theater audiences applauding a vigilante it isn't especially thrilling to think that the thugs he shoots at are real, and that they're out in the city, and that the chances are if they rob you they'll get away with it.

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**John Brunner** The Square House, Palmer St., South Petherton, Som. TA13 5DB South Petherton 40766

*Date as postmark*

Thank you for your ~~letter/postcard~~/circular dated _____ 19____

under reference Knight #13

**It was:**

(a) Most interesting and welcome.

✓ (b) A load of codswallop.

(c) Junk mail fit only for recycling.

(d) Incomprehensible and probably meant for someone else.

**Further communications on the subject must be addressed to:**

~~(a) My literary agents.~~

(b) My accountants.

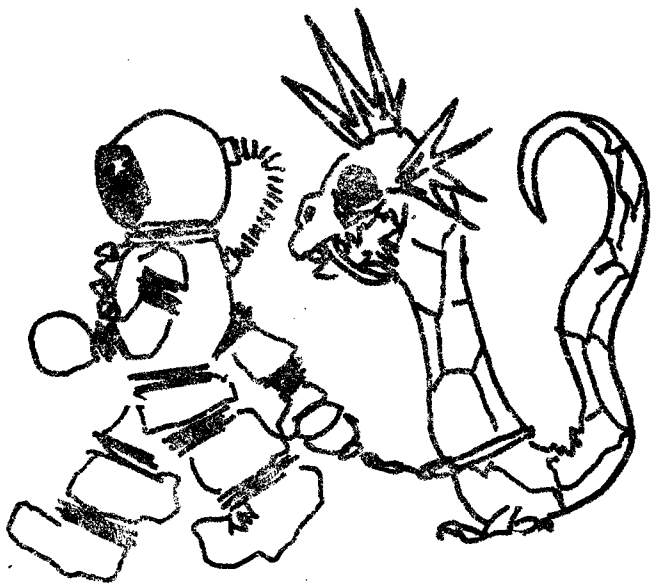
~~(c) My lawyers.~~

✓ (d) Anybody-but ANYBODY-so long as it isn't me.

Terry Floyd, 506 Holman Lane, Canyon, TX 79015

Mike Kring's piece brought out the Doc Savage fan in me. Even though I knew of the series quite some time ago, I never thought I'd like it. It took George Pal's Doc Savage film to get me to read any of the novels. So I read one. Then another. Later on, another. And still another. And so on. 'Robeson's' pulp style is easily recognizable as hack, but there's still a flavor of adventure about them that I can't resist. Thank Ghu George Pal has only bought the film rights to Doc Savage, or else I'd be reading the Avenger series, too.

Speaking purely visually, I didn't care for the layout of the YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN reviews. You shouldn't have left all that blank space above the title. As for the opinions themselves, I'm afraid I found Richard Brandt's more perceptive than yours. Brandt took into consideration not only the films plot, but also the technical aspects of the comedy--sets, score, photography, etc. But despite the film's technical excellence, several jokes fell flat. BLAZING SADDLES had a number of thuds, also, but these were far outweighed by its other sidesplitting lines and sight gags. While YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN suffered through considerably more 'failures', its winning scenes more than compensated for them.



As for the 'gutter-level humor' (your term, not mine), well...I remember reading somewhere that "Sex is the funniest thing mankind has ever thought up". And really, aren't we more likely to let out a guffaw at a whispered closet joke than a silly Benjamin Franklin witticism?

((I will admit that I probably didn't do YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN justice in my review. I was expecting much more from the reviews I'd read, and I wasn't familiar with many of the things the in-group jokes referred to. The opposite would fit a new movie I recently saw, entitled THE LAST DAYS OF MAN ON EARTH. I happened to see it in San Jose with Bill Breiding and we were laughing throughout the movie. Unfortunately, we were the only people in the theatre doing so. In fact, I heard a number of people complain that the movie was boring. In this instance, I was fortunate that I understood many of the in-group references.

((In the YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN review, however, I was writing as much about the audience reaction as I was about my own opinion. The movie just didn't seem to be reaching the audience. Plain and simple.))

Hank Heath, 250 Dale Dr, Cassadaga, NY 14718

One of the thoughts that resulted from reading the Bradbury article, was concerning the motivation of killers in general. The thing that started the thought was the mention of machine murder. While I regard mechaniside as possibly very

therapeudic, a rash of contempory assassination attempts and sniping incidents has disturbed my peace of mind. Specifically, we had a sniping incident not too far from here last year. The rationality of it all was never discovered, due to the fact that the sniper suicided a couple of weeks ago in a county jail, awaiting trail. It was his graduation present to the world, I guess.

Jon Inouye's short fiction is intriguing. I can understand the paranoia built into it. Last month, I was crashing on the couch, when the fire alarm (siren) went off. I was in a particular spot where it echoed, oddly enough sounding like an air raid siren. Having been brought up in the ban-the-bomb generation, it took a few psychotic moments gaining full consciousness.

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Gregory Benford, University of California, Dept. of Physics, Irvine, CA 92664

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You're fortunate to have D'Ammassa--he's the most intensive, scholarly of the critics who also has a good literary sense, finely honed for the particular slant of sf. His piece on Clement is masterly, combining a thorough piece of research with a genuine understanding of how Clement does his own brand of magic. Bravo!

I am awed at your energy, turning out such a finely tuned fmz with a diverse cross section of contributors. And it's good to see fans still interested in sf--I came into fandom at a time when one scarcely heard of it. But I'm still a fan, and I give myself away each time I visit a newsstand. I wonder if others automatically rearrange the sf magazines to give them prominence over Alfred Hitchcock's Mag and Sexology? And, further, ranks them in visibility according to one's taste: Cohen reprints cast into the recesses, out literary lady F&SF in a place of honor, Analog nearby, with Galaxy and Amazing/Fantastic completing the United Front? Similarly with the paperbacks: cover a Laser book at all costs, even with a Star Trek one if necessary (these are desperate times). The thud & blunder artists go to the back and our big ones--Dune, some Silverberg, etc--work their way forward.

It's a proud and lonely thing, it really is.

((I don't doubt that many fans do the same, since I find myself frequently rearranging the paperbacks and magazines. The best should be out there to catch the eye.))

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Eric Lindsay, 6 Hillcrest Ave, Faulconbridge NSW 2776 AUSTRALIA

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As a long time enthusiastic reader of Hal Clement's fiction I was pleased to read Don's appreciation of it, especially as it mentioned a few short pieces that I don't recall reading. I will now have the pleasure of tracking down copies of these. I was also impressed by the Bradbury article, which is unusual because I can't stand Bradbury's writing--his idiotic pronouncements on technology always give me the shits and so I hardly ever managed to finish a story of his, and haven't picked one up in ten years or so. Since I'm now slightly more tolerant I may even read some of his short stories as a result of the article.

Ben Indick is, I suspect, somewhat tongue in cheek in his writing on the positive moral benefits of fandom, but if fans can use Dr Wertham's book as a ploy to convince parents that fandom is good for their children (apart from having the obvious disadvantage of teaching them, not to think for themselves, but at least to think differently to mundanes) then I see absolutely no reason for not having more articles along the same lines.

YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN was a funny movie in parts, spoiled somewhat for me because some of the reels were apparently lost at the cinema that showed it--there was no tap dance scene, which I was expecting...but most of the audience didn't nctice it seems. The bits from other F movies, when sent up, gave it a pleasure beyond what could be expected from the acting, and the gags like Marty Feldman saying "Walk this way" and having Dr Frankenstin do exactly that.

David McDonnell takes far too pesimistic approach to the decline in space exploration. In fact, I doubt if the present approach is the correct one, since it implies large scale commitment for very little gain above the scientific or economic. Space is <u>not</u> a frontier for most people, and will not be under present methods. By analogy with Columbus, whose exploratory voyages took the resources of a ruler for backing, we can consider that the space frontier will be open only when it is open to the individual adventurers, like those who opened the American west. It will be open only when individuals, backed by thier own resources, and with voluntary aid, can explore it and make it their own, in a similar manner to the one man sailors of today in their round the world voyages. We can probably expect a similar time scale also, that is, about two centuries from Magellan and his round the world trip, and the same thing being done by Joshua Slocomb at the end of the last century, in a sailing ship that was even then ancient, and even what would be called obsolete.

((And now for comments on issue 14...))

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Barry N. Malzberg, Box 61, Teaneck, NJ 07666

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Pournelle's letter is fine with me. Whether or not HEROVIT'S WORLD was kicked off the final ballot, the novel, a loathing attack on sf, was not nebula award material. Had the novel won it would have done the field no credit.

Justice's long article on VERTEX is interesting and well thought out but it's like handicapping the ninth race on a rainy Thursday at Aqueduct into the ground. It means nothing. VERTEX was a manipulated job too. Besides, it's gone and forgotten.

Wayne Hooks in his review of THE BEST OF HENRY KUTTNER picks up misinformation on the SFBC edition jacket blurb which infuriated me (I wrote Ellen Asher about this) and which I would like to straighten out for hooks who, I suspect, is a very young man. Henry Kuttner did <u>not</u> have a "brief" career. He sold his first story in 1934 at the age of twenty and a quarter of a century later, at the time of his tragic death, was still a prolific writer. He was a <u>major</u> figure in science fiction from 1940 until 1953, publishing hundreds of short stories and scores of novels. He published widely outside of the field also, particulary in the mystery/suspense genre. There was nothing in the least "brief" about his remarkable and valuable career and he is not a forgotten writer today, at least by his successors which every professional in this field is. I don't really think that this is good book reviewing; the first principle of competence in this field is to discard and disregard publisher packaging. It might also help if one had a decent knowledge of the history of the field in which one is reviewing.

((I forwarded part of Barry's letter on to Wayne Hooks, who replies, "I <u>still</u> say Kuttner had a brief career. 13 years as a major science fiction author does not constitute an unusually long writing career. I consider Poe to have had a brief career. Any author who dies in the midst of his creativity has a brief career--too brief even though it may span a century. Brevity is a state of mind, not a span of time." And he continued later in the letter, "In stating Kuttner has been forgotten, I was pointing out the general lack of literarcy in America today. Maybe every professional science fiction writer does know who Kuttner is, but these people are a

minority in the general mass. A recent poll showed 17% of everyone in the United States does not know who Shakespeare is. I doubt Kuttner is better known than Shakespeare."

((Personally, I agree with the term, "Brevity is a state of mind, not a span of time." and I would be interested in seeing the poll that said 17% of the US population knows nothing about Shakespeare; especially to see exactly they were interviewing. For course new-born babies no nothing of Shakespeare.))

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David Gerrold, Box 526, Hollywood, CA 90028

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I especially agree with what Charlie Grant had to say. Fans are best served by the writers through what they write--that's the part that survives, that's the core of why fans focus their attention on them. Anything that lessens a writer's performance at his typewriter is to be avoided. Sometimes, unfortunately, it's involvement with fandom. Sometimes it's the writer's fault, sometimes the fans'.

If some of the pros are sometimes less than human, if sometimes we don't live up to fannish standards, well we have enough trouble living up to our own standards first. So what? A fan isn't buying the books because he admires the writer's taste in clothes or the way he handles hecklers or because he's a tushy-pincher or anything else. A fan buys the books because of the author's skill at entertaining. Anything else demanded of a writer is an intrusion into the person's private life and should be done only with his or her consent.

The only thing a fan should ever demand of a pro is that he perform his best where it counts--in print.

Of course, I'm an idealist anyway--the cynical kind who recognizes that idealism is an invalid approach to manipulating one's environment. Sigh.

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Frank Denton, 14654 8th Ave SW, Seattle, WA 98166

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I was struck by a remark of Don D'Ammassa's. In writing about Victorian novels and the fact they are not innately boring, he mentioned getting tired of predictable sf. I find myself doing the same after 6 years of hard reading of the stuff. Am turning more often to a good mystery, which I'm sure, will do the same thing if I keep at them for too long. Become predictable, that is. But even moreso, I find myself occasionally picking up a mainstream book (is this heresy?) and enjoying it not so much for the fact that the writing is any better, but that it is just different from the hundreds of sf books I've been reading.

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Rick Wilber, 712 Hale, Edwardsville, Ill 62025

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The Grant column is excellent. I admire the writer, and appreciate the openness of the col. In many ways, it is the most enjoyable (at least for me) portion of the zine.

The VERTEX SURVEY was interesting to read, but much of it simply missed the boat. I edit two magazines right now, have edited three or four major efforts (on a regional basis) in the past, and learn and teach the subject here at Southern Illinois University every quarter. (If you really want credentials someday, I'll give

you a list). The major reason Vertex failed was that it was doomed from the start by the expense of its publication. No magazine can survive with that expersive a press run without a significant amount of advertising support. And Vertex did not have, and fairly obviously had little chance of ever getting, that kind of support. Advertisers still are unconvinced that fiction, much less science fiction, can really reach consumers. When Vertex first came out I wrote the editors a lengthy letter praising the thought but decrying the terrible waste. Had Vertex started out as a tabloid (which, by the way, is in many ways more condusive to the display of fiction than Justice gives the format credit for) it might have succeeded. Readers will buy a magazine switching formats if it is a move up in quality--but to move up you have to start at the bottom, which the tab format would have accomplished. Justice seemed to buy the idea that Vertex switched to tab because of the paper shortage. Bull. Money was the reason, and increasing price, or scarcity, of paper was only a small part of that financial crisis. It wasn't just Pfeil's fault--it was the publishers for being foolish enough to start such a publication in such an outrageously expensive format.

Many of the other comments about Vertex are, by the way, more than just a little valid. Science fiction is by nature, an expansive sort of fiction. It opens up the reader. To restrict your science fiction offerings to a particular sort seems to be contradictory in the extreme--offering readers a restrictively expansive fiction is perhaps as outrageous as starting out with color and coated stock.

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David Taggart, 215 Austin Hall, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05401

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I never skipped a grade in school, but I did start early. Pennsylvania law said that a kid could start if he was six before the end of January of his first year. My grandfather urged my parents to send me. They compromised, and I got to go to a child psychologist for his opinion. He said that they might as well get it over with. So I started school when I was five. As a result, I was the youngest kid in my class through all twelve years of school. Do I wish I'd waited a year? I've never thought about it much, except at times when I played sports, and wished that I had another year's height and weight. If I'd waited a year, I probably could have played varsity basketball my senior year. Maybe I would've even learned to hit curve balls, and wouldn't have had to retire from baseball after 10th grade.

One thing I do know about is moving. That is rough on kids. I moved after 1st grade, after 10th, and after 11th. It isn't too bad when you're in grade school, but in high school it is murder. I went to three different high schools, and the moves were tramatic. After all, by high school, people have been around each other for ten years or so, and they have their friends. They also know everybody, so when a new kid walks in, he gets stared at like he forgot to wear his pants.

Sometimes the move will help. I am glad I got out of my high school in Pennsylvania. It was an old farm highschool that was changing into rich-suburbon. Either you were supposed to be from a rich suburb and go to college, or from a farm and where you went they didn't care. As a farm boy, I resented this attitude. 11th grade I was in my first Vermont high school--it was a wasted year. For my Senior year, we moved again, to White River. After three days of school, I was "going steady" for the only time in my life. The girl wanted the prestige of having a Senior for a boyfriend. I didn't know anybody else in the school, so I went along with her. After a couple monthes I got to meet people. I got rid of the "steady" and had the time of my life.

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Do you realize with the new postage rates we're now paying 3¢ for delivery and 10¢ for storage?

Cy Chauvin, 17829 Peters, Roseville, Mich 48066

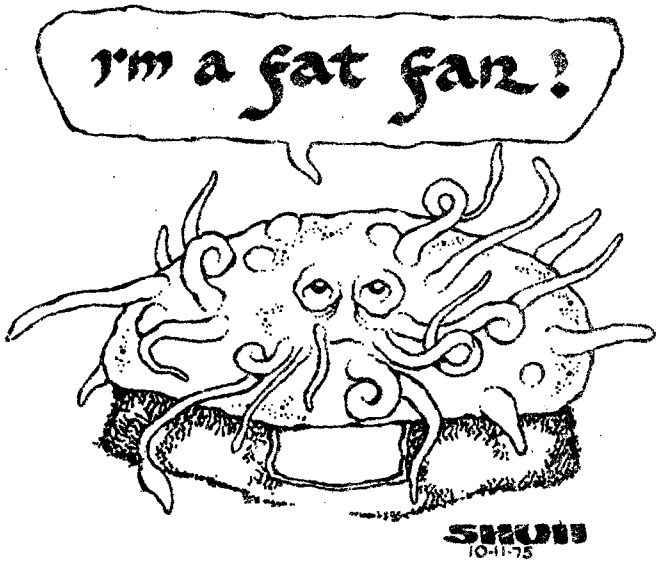
I had a sudden nagging at the back of my mind while reading Keith L. Justice's VERTEX SURVEY--do my reviews and articles read the same way his do? Keith's stuff is too heavy handed and long-winded; he smothers his subject to death. I mean, I agree wholeheartedly with him that the short, anonymous reviews in VERTEX were simply nonsense, and of use to no one. But to spend 2 pages of densely packed type on this small aspect (and another on the long reviews) is a waste of time. A reviewer should have more perspective. This has always been one of the problems with UNIVERSE: the thoroughly bad books are given as much analysis or more than the good. The artwork and illustrations were a much more important and noteworthy aspects of the magazine, and they were dismissed in half a page. How can Keith justify spending 3 pages on just reviews? His bias is perhaps showing a bit too much. And Keith doesn't even mention VERTEX's interviews--possibly it's best feature.

Occasionally, I think Keith is guilty of the very faults he takes so long to condemn re VERTEX's short reviews. Note pg. 7, 1st column: "'Occurrence in a Cincinnati Bog' is an attempt at humor that is funny only in that someone actually decided to publish it." That's his total review of the story; I'm not sure if it's any better than what the VERTEX crew did. Not that I'm really complaining: it probably wasn't worth more effort. It probably wasn't even worth mentioning.

I agree that people (and especially VERTEX's editor) used catchwords that were empty, and used them in a self-contradictory fashion: but I'm not sure if Keith's long explanation is helpful. It is better to avoid using faddish, non-meaningful terms like "new wave" than attempt to describe or define them. It's another case of Keith having a valid insight and then running it into the ground by over-explaining it.

I will say I am glad that Keith attempted this overview: few fannish fanzine writers attempt in-depth serious articles like this. I only wish it had not been made such a chore to read, for the reasons given above (and for the poor reproduction).

C.L. Grant's column is logical and fair, but he often writes in a sort of "hostile", defensive style that can easily turn me off. (But then he switches into warm, human again and I am captivated.) The bit about needing feedback and sending a postcard if you like a story is certainly an idea; I'm sure authors don't receive much feedback, in comparison with fan stuff. Generally, it has seemed to me that authors attend cons often for the same reason fans do, and really, on the same terms (besides those which status and friendship natually bring). SFWA doesn't seem to come into it much at all at the small local regionals. (Or so it seems in my limited experience.)




"Taking the 'S' Out of 'SF'" is fine, though to me the point is overtrue and over-obvious; but I'm sure there are probably still some true be-

lievers in the audience. I'm not all that sure I like (Dampn Knight's) definition of sf: "science fiction is what you point to when you say 'sf'". The problem is that few people keep their finger pointed at the same thing, but keep wavering and pointing here, there, everywhere. And communication is impossible if you keep changing the meaning of your terms (pointing at different objects); a word corresponds to some element in reality. What element is not important, so long as it stays at least relatively fixed. But the people who are usually enthusiastic about the "sf is what you point to when you say 'sf'" are usually the ones with the weakest and twitchest fingers.

I loved Al Sirois' two comic strips, and Phil Foglio's (but I really think you should have listed them on the contents page; that was artistic chauvinism for you just to stick them where you did!). Artists probably receive even less feedback than writers. The idea of an artist's strike is neat; Randy Bathurst had one years ago for SELDON'S PLAN (before I was editor, and when he did nearly all of the art), and it was hilarious. There were little protest catoons all over the zine.

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Jerry Pournelle, 12051 Laurel Terrace, Studio City, CA 91604

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And Hurrah for Charlie Grant; his column is excellent. I just hope it doesn't cost us too much of his writing--the underpaid job of SFWA Exec-Sec already eats into his time. I know, because until we got him (in, ahem, my administration) the President had to deal with all the daily crud that Charlie now goes blind over; and believe me that can eat into writing time.

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Sam Long, Box 4946, Patrick AFB, Fla 32925

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You've got two talented and faanish artists drawing for you, namely Sirois and Foglio, and their cartoon strips were without a doubt the high point of the zine. Poor ol' Don D'A seems to be getting a lot of friendly static from his fellow New Englander; that strip had me in stiches. (And I was inordinately pleased to find myself in the company of real fanartists like Rotsler and Birkhead and Jeeves &c, in having my cartoons caricatured by Al in his Apocryphal Funnies.)

The first half of the zine was heavily sercon, almost oppressively so. Since I never saw more than a couple of copies of VERTEX, Justice's survey left me out of things. Too, the pages were unrelieved type. But anyway... C.L. Grant knows whereof he speaks in his article on the SFWA, and it shows. I'm not in the SFWA myself, but various pro friends of mine have told me a fair amount about it, so I found CLG's article very interesting, tho somewhat defensive, perhaps a little too much so. But not to worry. Keith's article on Science and SF brings to mind a phenomenon that's puzzled me from time to time--the "distance" between technological fiction and science fiction. I refer particularly to the works of the local (he lives in Cocoa Beach) novelist Martin Caidin, who wrote MAROONED, and who is the originator, I believe, of the $6 x 10^6 Man. I've never heard him referred to as an SF writer, nor seen him at an SF "do" anywhere. He seems to be not so much a "specfic" author as a "techfic" one, who writes mainstream novels with a futuristic or technological setting. He moves in different circles from the Cape's SF community (which has only about 8 to 10 people in it anyway), and I've never heard or read anything by or about him (for he's somewhat of a local celebrity and appears often in the local press) that hints that he considers himself any sort of science fictioneer. Would Keith or Don, or someone, care to comment on this phenomenon?

The reviews were good and thoro. But let's get on to the locs... Jerry Pourn-

elle's letter was verrrry innarestin', and worth some thought. See also Poul Anderson's column in the latest OUTWORLDS. Your comments on Jodie's letter: I didn't get my driver's licence until I was 17 either, and I didn't get my first car until I was 21. But I didn't suffer greatly. Still, I know what you mean... And like Sheryl Birkhead I began school early too, by the expedient of going to a private first grade, as being too young at 5 years 8 months to enter public school. This was back in 1951; looking thru my archives, I find that my parents were paying about $18 a month to have me taught how to read "Fun with Dick and Jane", and that there were 21 or 22 kids in my class. The class picture shows me looking well scrubbed and innocent and six years old, but that was before I became a fan.

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Don D'Ammassa, 19 Angell Drive, East Providence, R.I. 02914

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Keith does a pretty thorough hatchet job on VERTEX (which deserves it). I'm not certain that Don Pfeil would recognize a good story if it stood up and bit him. I do, however, think that Keith has an overly exalted view of the role of the book review, a point I've discussed with him at length before. Different types of reviews suit differnt purposes.

C.L. Grant was quite entertaining this time. I recently managed to miss meeting him at the World Fantasy Con here in Providence, but hope to do so at one convention or another fairly soon. I'm one of those fans who really doesn't care much if he goes through an entire con without talking to a single pro. Not that I don't like pros, or that I avoid their company, but I'm more interested in meeting people I know or admire than meeting members of the specific classes pro or fan. I'd like a chance to talk to Grant because he interests me. Given the opportunity for a long talk with, say, Gardner Fox, I'd turn it down.

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Steve Fahnestalk, Rt 2, Pullman, WA 99163

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First, your artwork. The cover drawing by Sirois is VERY nice. It reminds me of a '50's Wally Wood (and I really like Wood's early cartoon work) and your glossy paper really sets it off. Sirois is a pretty good cartoonist, for the most part, but that cover is the best I've seen by him. Not that I'm an expert on his work, however. Of course, I liked the Canfield and Shull pieces, and to a lesser extent the Foglio bacover (inside); and the Schrimeister on p2 was good. He's not bad at all. As far as the rest of your artists, if this work is representative, I can take 'em or leave 'em. It's rather hard to make a judgement on the basis of one or two samples, so I'll wait for more examples before I make a value judgement as to whether their work is (at least as far as I'm concerned) any good.

Keith Justice's article about VERTEX--this is the kind of material which fanzines need to (and ought to) publish, but so seldom do, except for the BNF's zines (Geis, Porter, Bowers, et al)-- and I think that Keith's points are, mostly, justified. I have only seen two issues of VERTEX, but that's immaterial, because Keith produced the kind of review I love: loaded with examples and easy for the person who's not really acquainted with the subject material to read. I have a few points of contention with Keith, though. There is ample precedent for a science fiction magazine to carry a science article or even a series of articles (besides ANALOG, that is): F&SF has Asimov's articles, GALAXY and AMAZING do it, and many of the short-lived sf mags of the fifties had such inclusions. Face it, Keith, many of us <u>like</u> a bit of popular science in our fiction reading. It doesn't hurt us, and it does provide a break from a steady run of sf in whichever periodical you read. This is merely your own prejudice, and shouldn't be foisted off on everyone else. Besides,

you get off on another tack at the end of the "Science" section of your review--and start a polemic about "prediction posers" (I presume you me "Poseurs") and the comparison between Pfeil and Elwood. None of which is really germane to a section reviewing VERTEX's science.

And your blasting of Pfeil's quantity of artwork-- I can't believe it! You mean there's actually someone "out there" who doesn't like sf and sf-related art? As far as I'm concerned, the more the better, and I feel there are a hell of a lot more readers out there who will agree with me rather than you. As Jon Gustafson has said in SFR and our mag, the illustration (interior) provides a break from wordage, a sort of mental breathing space; and so has at least that much value. I feel your attitude is more atypical than typical; and I'd like to see some feedback on that from other readers. Again, at the end (or near it) of that section on illustration you wander from your chosen path to deliver another sermon on a differnt subject: the fiction. Before you tell Pfeil off so strongly, maybe you'd better check your own writing habits, hey?

I don't want to make you think, Keith, that I disapproved of your entire article. On the whole, I enjoyed it. I thought you made some very telling points, and for the most part, your style was lucid, readable, and enjoyable. It's just that your article was (like this commentary) a bit of overkill-- you set yourself up as some sort of pundit, which I doubt you really are. (As some of our more juvenile brethren would say, "'Nuff said?")

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Eric Lindsay, 6 Hillcrest Ave, Faulconbridge NSW 2776 AUSTRALIA

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C.L. Grant did a good job of ensuring that fans realise that pros are humans and have feelings just the same--trouble is, the ones who know this, and really feel it, tend not to cause any problems, while the ones who don't seem to realise it, will not be changed by the article, excellent tho it is. Still, we can hope for some response. Somehow I don't think any fan who has watched the SFWA suite empty while all the pros went to a fan party (and since the party was in my room I know of what I speak, er, write) will believe they refuse to go to parties. The one thing I do feel guilty about is not writing to authors when I've enjoyed their books-- I keep telling myself that I should, and somehow end up writing a loc to a fanzine that took up maybe a 20 span of my time, rather than a loc to the author of a book that entertained me for an hour or more. Real Soon Now...

Re Keith Justice, how the hell can you take the "science" out of sf, when it hasn't ever been in more than a dozen novels in the first place? More hard science is what is needed, not less. If I wanted to read about neurotic characters being impressed by "soft" (non) sciences, I'd read psychiatrist's reports.

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Patrick Hayden, 206 St George #910, Toronto, Ont m5r 2n6 CANADA

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Keith Justice's VERTEX article was surprisingly well-done, surprising I say since it is no secret that I haven't liked much of UNIVERSE SF REVIEW. Roger Sween reprimanded me recently for "not trying to appreciate what Keith Justice is trying to do"--if the ideals for and opinions about reviewing expressed in this article are any example of it, then I'll be happy to grant UNIVERSE a second look. Keith certainly pinpointed the problems with VERTEX cogently... the temptation to review sloppily as he outlines is strong, certainly, and I've fallen into it with fanzine reviews, though the squibs in THANGORODRIM! aren't marked as "reviews" as such. Question: Was the typesetting done by Keith for you, or is this a reprint? Either

way, it was hard to read.

((Keith did the typesetting for me--it wasn't a reprint. I know it was hard to read, one of these days I'm going to get the electronic stenciling process down pat. Having the stencils done by the local AB Dick outfit is a hassle at times--most of their salespeople know nothing about the machine, and I'm not too well versed either. So it goes, right?))

C.L. Grant's article was interesting, but empty. Hard-boiled style, emotional manipulation, and a nauseatingly condescending style, and what does he say? (a) SFWA is Good, (b) We Authors Need Egoboo & Response Too, and (c) Nobody Really Understands Us. This required an emotional harangue? Face it-- as long as there exists an organization which insists on being less than totally open with fans and fandom (not neccessarily a Bad Thing, but true nonetheless), rumors are going to grow and people are going to speculate. You can't do your dirty work in private and expect a good press, particularly when there occasionally emit peircing screams from the basement where you're doing it.

As for author feedback, what a lot of pros don't realize is that an enormous percentage of the fans that read and write actively are too caught up in fannish fandom to want to even bother with anything less than the top sf. Very few active fanzine fans read all the prozines and new books... I suppose D'Ammassa is an exception, but we all know about HIM. To want to read all of the new sf being published, you either have to be fantacilly, single-mindedly devoted to sf alone, or a phenomenon like Don. The result of this being is that most of the feedback a new author is likely to get will be from readers or convention fen. Certainly there will be exceptions, but there you are.

Incidently, is the use of the word 'semantics' as a smokescreen any worse than hiding behind a similar smokescreen of colloquialisms, emotionally loaded words and phrases, and tough-guy retoric? Semantic theory is certainly a valid line of thought, and there is nothing illigitimate per se in pointing out that an arguement is "merely a matter of semantics", since (gasp!) a lot of arguements often are. Language, like humans, is imprecise: what you transmit isn't neccessarily what I receive.

"I implied nothing in this column. I said it all." Sorry, I'm not buying. When I write, I imply things. People who read what I write infer things. If they infer the wrong things and say so, I correct them. If I infer the wrong things from someone else, they correct me. But nobody should get upset when people infer things from what they say just for the inferring itself...and nobody has even written anything from which it is impossible to infer something else: this even applies to the simplest statement "I am". And considering the imprecise and emotional tone of his column, I hope Mr. Grant will forgive me if I have the human analytic tendency to imply plenty.

And speaking of semantics, here's a semantic can of worms now. Keith Justice's other article here seems to me to make the all-too-common mistake of interchanging the word "science" with "technology". Science is a bit too broad and useful term to narrow down like this; at the root it simply means "to know". I would agree with Keith if he would simply substitute the word "technology" for "science" where pertinent-- I think "technological fiction" would be a good term for the sort of Analoggish, Cambellesque, hard-scince fiction he's talking about. But since when was there a great dichotomy between this sort of story and all others? And why should we try to create one? You can't seperate out the "science" and "fiction" or even the "technology" and "fiction" in sf; and try to seperate man's talent for shaping his environment ("technology") from the rest of "The Human Condition" is STUPID: the fact that 99% of the mainstream literary critics and essayists do do is irrelevent. Whatever Man does is part of "the human condition"; and as I sit here typing and

looking straight from my 9th floor apartment at the CN Tower, tallest free-standing structure in the world (1800) plus feet), it seems to me that men have been doing quite a passel of that very environment-shaping these days. Actually, such things as love, hate, jealousy, etc aren't even uniquely human-- animals do that too. Animals also shape their environments, but not quite as much. It seems to me that whatever it is we mean by "science", "technology", etc is one of the things that makes us what we are, human.

"The lasers and the subspace starships aren't the stuff of science fiction..." ...ah, but they are, in manys ways. "...what man does with lasers, what changes are caused by subspance ships, what problems he faces...these are the stuff of sf." Setting up a bit of a straw man here, Keith. First, I don't think anybody has been arguing against the second point for some time; it's a bit like taking time out to defend the Copernican solar system. And second, those lasers and starships are the stuff of sf! There really is something to that old turky the Sensa Wonder--these things, literature and seriousness aside, are neat! ((Bravo!)) I think most fans, if they try digging into their childhood, will remember beginning to read sf, not for social extrapolation, not for commentary on The Human Condition, but because these things were neat, were wonderful, were fantastic. And as we get older, we realize that these things aren't legitimate ideals in mundania, and start inventing literary gymnastic devices to show we're as mudane as the rest. But Ed Hamilton could produce gasps, and Leigh Brackett some awe, and Doc Smith thrills, because these things were good in their own right for what they were trying to do. And, despite all the Brian Aldisses in the world, this is the foundation that modern sf built up on. The foundation of a nine-year-old kid ogling a pulp with laser beams and subspace starships and going, "that's neat!"

Jerry Pournelle's letter is cogent and presents opinions that I find myself agreeing with, usually, but there is one point I'd like to see cleared up. Is he saying that it is an un-liberal view to want to get rid of the State itself, or an un-libertarian view? Believe me, there is a difference: the first is unquestionably true, the second is open for discussion. A capital-L Libertarian (Libertarian Party, usually) will support some type of State--from what I understand, a common term is "mutual self-defense community"--but there are people who call themselves libertarians who are quite sympathetic to the idea of doing away with the State altogether. Anarchists, really: I make no bones about where my sympathies lie, so I try to avoid being typed "libertarian".

I can empathize with your comments on high school. A disadvantage I managed to turn to advantage was the fact that I went to 12 schools in 12 years, though unevenly-- Grades 9 through 11 were all the same school. But there are advantages to always being the Guy From Somewhere Else, once you pass the original hurdles of grade school. You can pretend puzzlement at a lot of unfamiliar terminology and social ritual without appearing the utter unsophisticated and late-blooming dummy you really are. It makes it that much easier to fake it.

I don't think a car is as much of a phallic symbol as you seem to, though. HS students just aren't that sophisticated, even on a subconcious level. Cars may be indispensible in huge suburban megalopolises like LA (and much of California), but it doesn't work that way everywhere; certainly not in Toronto. Anyway, how do you account for the popularity of Austin Minis, MGs, and VWs? Or the guy who drives a pickup truck? Actually, owning a plush-lined van has a lot more sexual implications (not to mention practicallity and comfort) than a gas-guzzling Detroit standard monster with a big back seat.

((I spent my high school years in a very small town, and that's what I based my judgements on. Small cars really weren't much in evidence. For the most part, if you were male, you drove one of three things: (a) the family car because there was no

other choice, (b) a pickup or some other type of automobile built for rugged country (and which was used as a symbol of sorts; not necessarily phallic, but one of masculinity and he-man dominence), or (c) a hopped up, gas guzzling, Detroit killer. I think I put more emphasis on the phallic aspects of car owning for teenagers than I meant to, but I still think the basic premis is true; at least in my own experience and that is all I have to make judgements on.

((I currently do not own an automobile, have little actual need for one at the moment, don't really care to own one, and I think they are more costly than I am willing to pay. Living here where I do now, I really don't need a car because I can get most places I need to go by walking or taking a bus (Tacoma has a very good transit system). However, in Fort Bragg I had a very real need for a car; I lived three miles from the edge of town and had no steady means of transportation into town. Sitting at home reading was fine, sometimes--there were other times when I wanted to go to the show, shoot pool, bowl, and I couldn't expect my friends to go as much as five miles out of their way to pick me up.

((I admit it; I owned a Detroit killer. It was a '65 Pontiac Grand Prix. It did 0 to 60 in six seconds. Although it wasn't hopped up, I think I can honestly say it was one of the fastest cars on the high school parking lot. However, I never tried to prove that fact, and don't really think I cared to.

((Anyhow, back to the original point: I gave the car more emphasis as a phallic symbol than I intended to. However, the authmobile is a symbol and is used, right or wrong, as a symbol in this society. Tell me, what kind of person do you think of when you see a brand new Cadallac? A beat up VW bus? A '57 Chevy with a raised rear, wide slicks and a load muffler? Now try to tell me the automobile isn't a status symbol at the very least.))

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Brett Cox, Box 542, Tabor City, NC 28463

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First off, a few words ontthe phsyical appearance of KNIGHTS. I'm sure that Mike Glicksohn will be able to find something wrong somewhere, but with the possible exception of p42 (I've heard of white space, but this is a bit ridiculous, don't you think?), I can't. The wraparound cover and bookstyle binding are marvelous, providing a perfect setting for Al Sirois' beautiful cover and Phil Foglio's excellent interior covers. The text all came out very well, and the interior illos were all well-chosen. (The full-page Schrimeister in particular was brilliant.) In short, it was a beautiful issue. On a purely visual level, you're getting farther and farther along in your quest for perfection.

Ah, yes, C.L. Grant...my, he do go on. I can't really blame him, though-- being a writer can, I suppose, be a thankless task. And I have no bones to pick, except that when he said "To stay in (the SFWA), you have to publish one story every two years, a novelet or novella every three years, a novel every five years," I wish that he'd specified if this was an and or an or proposition. I assume that it's the latter, otherwise Heinlein and Ellison (to name just two) would've been out a long time ago.

I couldn't possibly say enough good things about Al Sirois' epic visit with the D'Ammassas. I can only hope that Al will take the cue and give us interviews with other fannish greats. A visit with Donn Brazier, perhaps? Mike Glicksohn? Brad Parks? (Hey, wait a minute, how'd he get in there?) Really, this Sirois fellow is getting so good it scares me--did I hear somebody mention a Hugo nomination?

((I hope so...))

To Mike Shoemaker and Don D'Ammassa: you're right, of course, about boredom being a relative thing and about a student's boredom with a "classic" work reflecting on the student as much as on the work in question. And I admit I didn't define my terms very well. But I stick by the basics of what I said nonetheless. Anyone who's been exposed all of his/her life to the fast-moving, straightforword, and simple medium of TV and who's reading probably has been limited to the generally compact (when compared to older works, anyway) fiction of the last couple of decades will undoubtedly feel a sense of suffocation when confronted with one of Don's "long, convoluted Victorian novels". I'm not saying this is good or bad, but I do think it's true in most cases.

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Thomas F. Monteleone

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Charlie's column was of course enjoyable--he has hooked into a good conversational style that works very well with the type of material he talks about. And believe me, what he says about SFWA is right on the money--we are a bunch of individuals just like the rest of you, trying to do what we love very much: be involved in SF.

Your book reviewers do an adequate job, although I'd like to have seen more books covered. Of course the time lag and the quarterly schedule hurts timely reviews of books that are already in paperback. When I used to write a lot of reviews for AMAZING, some of the books would be almost a year old by the time my reviews of same ever saw print. Regretful, but true.

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Mike Glicksohn, 141 High Park Ave, Toronto, Ontario M6P 2S3

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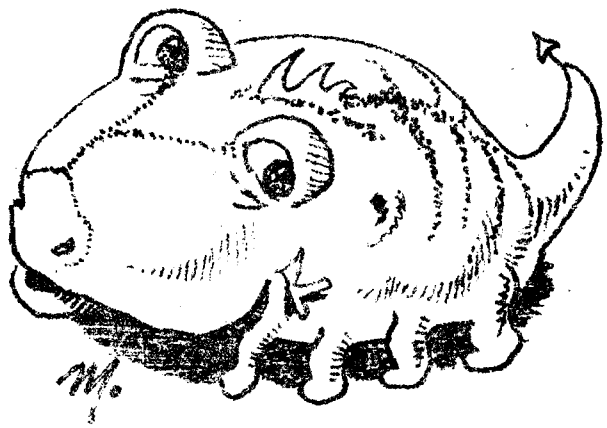
Al's cover is most certainly an effective opening for any fanzine and represents one of his most ambitious and most successful pieces to dat. It's one of those covers that inspire considerable study and awaken questions in the mind of the viewer as to exactly what is taking place. It's a pretty good job of printing too: not perfect, but certainly one of the better pieces of work I've seen recently. I might wish that Al had drawn the scene with a reversal from left to right, so that the man and spaceship appearded on the front cover, but that merely indicates my own preference for spaceships over buildings. As it appears it's extremely powerful as a cover and I hope Al is happy with the many hours he must have devoted to its creation. It's a fine cover, by any standards.

Interior production values don't quite live up to the standards of the cover, but I expect you're working on their improvement. The fuzziness of the electrostencils for the main Justice piece can be overcome with a little care on the part of the person cutting the stencils. If you saw Ted White's piece on the art of electrostencilling in the recent OUTWORLDS you'll recall his strong recommendation that a poorly cut stencil -- which these were-- ought to be returned to the cutter for a better job. If you're getting stencils done cheap or free as a favor, this may be hard to do,



but if a commercial outfit is involved you've every right to expect a better job.

The crispness of most of the mimeo stencils shows that the problem is not with the momeo itself, of course. But it's to be hoped that you can also overcome the regrettable tendency of your typewriter to punch out all the 'o's. (I hope that at the very least you're saving all those punched out letters for a care package for Bowers. It'll help him in his New Year's resolution to learn to read.)

Layout is competent and only falls down once, in the sideways orientation of the MacKay illo. While that's a very funny idea for a cartoon, it's a rather poor rendition, and you might have been better off asking Barry to redo it in a more useable size with a little more care taken for the lettering. For a bubblegum cards of the Cardinals he probably would have happily complied. But all in all this is a pretty good-looking issue.

There's a rather strange dichotomy, I find, in the rather heavy sercon nature of the material in the issue and the extremely hyper-fannish nature of the graphic extravaganzas (known to the non-cogniscenti as comic strips.) Both of the Foglio full-pagers and the two Sirois comics seem more suited to something like MOTA or possibly EFFEN ESSEF. Not that they aren't all delightful, for they obviously are, but I guess I'm getting a mental image of the "new" KNIGHTS and funny faaanish comic strips seem a little out of place. I'm glad to see them, though, and hope that means you'll be striving for this sort of diversity of material in the future. It'll be difficult indeed to create a hybrid of Keith's UNIVERSE SF REVIEW and Phil's EFFEN ESSEF but it might be fun to watch you try.

Now to the major written-- or typeset --controbution. While an examination of the failure of VERTEX may well be a worthwhile undertaking (an appropriate word considering the fate of the magazine) I'm afraid that I don't think Keith (I'm sorry but I just can't stop myself) really did it justice. If there's one major flaw in Keith's critical writing, I'd say it's a tendency to concentrate on minor quibbles at monstrous length, thereby padding out a piece to four or five times its optimum length. Despite the truth of many of the points Keith makes in this autopsy, I think he's drastically guilty of this weakness once again. He could have used half the words to achieve twice the impact without loosing any of the important points he wanted to make.

The other major error, as I see it, lies in the approach he took. He didn't review VERTEX for what it was, but rather for what he thought it should have been, and yet he didn't quite seem to realize that this was what he was doing. At least not until the last addendum. Personally I agree with him fully when he states that Pfeil made extremely poor use of the initial potential of VERTEX and I share with him a wondering as to what a really competent editor might have done with it. The problem is I didn't get that impression of his thoughts until the very end of the article and as a result the rest of what he's written has a tendency to sound dogmatic. Essentially he says "Pfeil did this and this and that when he should have done that and this and the other" and he hasn't any right to say that. He is, in fact, guilty at several points in the piece of precisely the faults he ascribes to Pfeil. If he'd stated/stressed his theme of What Might Have Been earlier in the article I think it would have been a much stronger piece.

For instance, at the very start Keith states "VERTEX is a failure in several areas..." but what he means is "VERTEX is a failure <u>for me</u> in several areas." Now perhaps he works on the assumption that that qualifier is understood in all critical writing, something I usually go along with, but the <u>way</u> he writes tends not to indicate an awreness of that fact to me. I got the definite impression that Keith considers Pfeil an incompetent who knew nothing about the sf field: nowhere do I see him admitting the possibility that Pfeil may simply have been a man whose critical

faculties differ from Keith's and whose tastes lie in different areas. Nowhere do we see Keith saying that just possibly VERTEX was exactly what Don Pfeil wanted and that its failure to appeal to the more critical sf reader was something Pfeil couldn't have cared less about. I'm not saying that necessarily was the case but I do think Keith should have considered the possibility and tried to sound less like The Voice Of Taste, Awareness And Financial Security In Publishing. It just ain't that cut 'n dried.

To take the article and respond to it in full would produce another article of almost equal length and the League Of Trivial Fanwriters would never allow me to produce another serious piece, at least not in this stage of my fannish existence. So I'll leave the in-depth replies to those better qualified to make them. But a few points as we go merrily along...

The section on the failure of the book review columns in VERTEX is an example of the overkill Keith is prone to. I fail to see what additional point is made by the constant repitition of figures showing the number of words in each column and the average words-per-review. I'm impressed that anyone would have the stamina or stupidity to count all those words each time, but once the point is made why belabor it? (Keith might look at his own remarks here and then reread some of his own plot summaries in the section where he deals with the fiction in VERTEX. On several occasions he states the title of the piece, dismisses it as worthless and goes on. We never know the author, what the story was about, or why it failed. Considering his looooooong discussion of the inadequacies of the short reviews in VERTEX I find I must cough politely and try to hide my amusement.)

The shame is that buried in the middle of the mass of words Keith has produced are numerous nuggets of truth. His remarks on the nature of real criticism are undeniably valid but his tendency to give four examples where one will suffice, plus the occasional lapse into unnecessarily complicated metaphor during which he seems enamoured of the sound of his own typewriter, dilute the validity of what he says. (I'd be interested to see what percentage of KNIGHTS' readership skimmed certain parts of this piece...)

I also find myself wondering whether one asinine paragraph by a reviewer in VERTEX who has already been shown to be incompetent really deserves an eight paragraph point by point rebuttal from Keith? I'm remined of Pope who said one fool in verse makes many more in prose: while Keith's points are valid, for the most part, they are also rather self-evident and could surely have been summarized in much shorter form. Minutes before this section Keith castigates a VERTEX reviewer for seeming to think that his readers haven't the brains to decide things for themselves, then he goes and lays out everything in very laborious detail, as if we didn't have the brains to read the initial paragraph and see for ourselves what its faults were. Hmmmm...

I think possibly Keith's lack of objectivity is shown best by his reaction to the inclusion in VERTEX of science material. He seems to feel that because he isn't interested in it, science shouldn't really have a place in a successful sf magazine. (The fact that ANALOG remains the undisputed leader of the magazine field and is aimed at precisely those people with an interest in science seems not to have made any impression on him.) Regardless of one's feelings about science, the simple fact is that Don Pfeil had every right to put as little or as much science into his magazine as he liked. And for Keith to attribute this to an attempt to give sf a spurious respectability is ludicrous. As are his insulting remarks about the sort of people who just might enjoy these sections in ANALOG or VERTEX. It's this seeming inability to accept that other people might have different tastes and standards from himself that most seriously weakens Keith's supposedly critical analyses. If one read this section alone, one would have to conclude that Keith was far too nar-

row minded to have any insightful commentary to make. (At a later point in the article Keith says something to the effect that "I read for the stories not the art so I suppose most other fans do too." He may well be right on that particular point, but the type of thinking that shows is rather frightening, don't you think?)

I was going to comment on Keith's statement that stories like IHNMAIMS and RWR are plotless but later in his exposition I gather that when he says "plot" he means something considerably different from "story". I'd thought these terms relatively synonymous but I haven't the litarary background that Keith has so maybe I'm wrong. As far as I've always been concerned both the Ellison short and the Clarke novel had plots in that they had a story, and described a certain amount of action, or series of events. Live and learn, I guess.

I'd also have to question Keith's setting up his own definition for what Don Pfeil considers New Wave to be. Such speculation is invariably specious, coming second-hand as it does. And even if one accepts Keith's definition of Old Wave (not Don Pfeil's I point out again) then it is hardly valid to criticize a short-short on the basis of a pseudo-definition of traditional sf. The short-short has always been a separate form, with separate rules, and to try and fit it into the Four Quarter Tradition is simply setting up strawmen to knock down. Once again Keith seems guilty of trying to force the evidence into his own narrow view of things regardless of how tricky a task it may be. (I'm not disagreeing with his overall reaction to the Pfeil short-short --it sounds like an inept piece of fiction --but simply with the way he chooses to attack it. A bad piece of fiction is simply that; it doesn't require an elaborate set of rationalizations to so classify it.)

Once we get beyond specifics, Keith is yet again on good solid ground. (Which is why this piece is rather frustrating!) The New Wave of today is the Old Hat of tomorrow and all the diatribes written won't change the directions sf goes in. Thank god!!

This could well have been a very major article (or even series of articles) but I think Keith went into it with the wrong attitude. It's still a most interesting article (or I wouldn't have written two elite pages just discussing the major points of disagreement) but considerably less effective than it might have been had it been better thought out and more objective in places. The occasional shoddy thinking, and the tendency to rampant dogmatism, make this a propaganda vehicle rather than a major work of criticism, and that's a shame. I would like to add, after all these words, that I agreed with a lot of what Keith said, and admired the job he tried to do. That I've concentrated on the areas where I think he fell down is merely because it's inherently more interesting to argue with someone than to agree with them. Keith has many valid points to make and when he learns to make them in a concise and logical and unbiased fashion I think he'll be a much better writer and critic. As it is, he's sure one hell of a provocative little devil.

Did I just type the word "provocative"? Hi there, C.L. Grant! Now this too is a rather inflammatory column: fortunately, or un-, depending on your viewpoint, much of the material here has already been aired, and could be passed over relatively lightly, leaving the passionate responses to those who find these concepts new.

The initial part of the article, about the history of SFWA and the benefits of being a member, are fairly cut and dried. (I must point out, though, that just about any editor of a major fanzine does as much as Ted Cogswell does for the SFWA publications and in addition pays most of the cost him/herself, which Ted doesn't have to bear. They too are not in their right minds, of course.)

Not being a member of SFWA or an aspiring writer, I can't comment on the intang-

ible benefits of SFWA membership that Grant waxes eloquent over but I can pass on the fact that several of my friends who are new young writers didn't think that membership in SFWA was worth having as recently as a year ago. And they were quite successful new young writers too. I'm not trying to draw any conclusions about SFWA, merely indicating that different people in essentially the same situation regard the organization in different lights.

Unfortunately all that Grant says about the obnoxiousness of certain fans is entirely too true. If anything he understates the case. On the positive side is the fact that a good many fans are truly good people: if you're lucky, you meet more of these good ones than the nerds, and you stay around, happily accepting the expenses of con attending for the pleasures of meeting one's frineds. (And, no, we don't go to cons to get drunk: we go for the same reason that Grant looks forward to meeting Pournelle or Dickson at a con. Because these are Good People who we're proud to call friends and if we tried to visit them all individually we'd go very rapidly, if happily, broke. At a con we can meet quite a few of them all at once, and share a few drinks, and get a little egoboo perhaps, and feel good while helping others do the same. And we could and have and would and will do all that without any "pros" there at all. Sorry about that, C.L. (The participation of pros who also happen to be friends is always welcome, of course. But people like Joe Haldeman and Gordie Dickson and Gardner Dozois and Bob Silverberg are not "pros" to me. Alfred Bester and Arthur Clarke and Fritz Leiber are "pros" --you understand we're defining, however subjectively, our terms here --and while I've enjoyed meeting them they are not why I go to conventions. But like I said, all of this is definitely passe. There are eight million ways of saying the same thing: this has been one of them...)

While I hate to disagree with someone who obviously feels that he is righting a generally-believed wrong, there have been incidents when officers of SFWA have tried to influence the running of a con, and even mentioned the possible withdrawal of SFWA services if their requests weren't acceded to. Despite what I said above about my own participation at cons, I'd have to agree that the success of a major sf con does depend on the participation of a number of well-known pros (regionals could and do exist without them) but it still disappointed me to see SFWA trying to put pressure on a con committee on this basis. Still, it seems to have been an isolated incident and recent SFWA-concom negotiations have been more on the basis of mutual benefit, which is how it should be.

Al's strip about Don is a delightful idea and a very enjoyable addition to the fanzine. Once again the stencils let you down slightly, but for such a comic graphic trip we can forgive these minor technical difficulties. (If this makes Don the Clone Prince of fandom I don't want to know about it.)

If winning the Hugo really showed you were producing a fanzine better than those created by your peers then it would be something well worth striving for. Unfortunately there's considerable discussion as to whether or not that is true: me, I'd rather aim at getting a FAAN Award. That is a peer group award and one equally as valuable, if not more so, than the current fanzine Hugo, which may well go to meritorious nominees but we all know the chances of ninety-five percent of currently published fanzines of ever winning that award are virtually nil, regardless of merit. So it goes.

Recognition, though, is worth striving for. Long letters, from people you respect, compliments at cons from pros and fans and people who've proven they know what they're talking about, unexpected written and artistic contributions from talented people who want to be involved in what you're doing, good reviews from people of proven critical judgement, even subscriptions from people who'll trust you with their hard-earned money; all of these things make publishing a fanzine like KNIGHTS worthwhile. Awards are icing on the ego's cake, but it's the meat and potatoes day-

to-day egoboo that makes the hard work of doing a solid fanzine worth it all.

((You've said it exactly.))

Also Heard From were:

Simon Agree, Sheryl Birkhead, Robert Bloch, Richard Brandt, Donn Brazier, Bill Breiding, Larry Downes, Terry Floyd, Gil Gaier, Gordon Garb, D Gary Grady, Dave Haugh, Hank Heath, Denys Howard, Ben Indick, Dennis Jarog, Wayne W. Martin, Dave McDonnell, Jodie Offutt, Joe Pearson, Andy Porter, Ron Rogers ("How'd Al change t-shirts so fast?"), Jessica Amanda Salmonson, Al Sirois, Rod Snyder, Lindsay Stuart, Victoria Vayne, A. D. Wallace, Joe Walter, Bud Webster, Neal Wilgus, Craig Ledbetter (who I just managed to list out of order) and others who I forgot.

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THE MAILING CODE goes like this: on the envelope, after your name is a symbol or a number. X means this is your last issue, please do something if you wish to continue receiving KNIGHTS. A number signifies your last issue. ? means we trade all-for-all or have some similar arangment and I don't know what you last issue will be. ! means you will receive every issue.

ARTISTS, please inform me when you make your first submission if you wish your art returned after use. If you do, and you have not received it back by the time you receive the issue it is printed in please inform me so that we can determine if it was my mistake or if the post office destroyed it.

EVERYONE: I would appreciate it if submissions were accompanied by a sase. It not only saves me a few dollars, but it insures that you'll get your submission returned if I can't use it,and for the times I'm caught without stamps, it also helps me answer faster.

"What type of clientel are you trying to reach?" and I began talking about "a magazine of literary criticism". Later that night, in bed, I began thinking about what I'd said to the salesman and realized I'd fallen flat on my face and was staring at a dead end.

I edit a fanzine, and when it comes right down to it, I edit a fanzine that is lost in a crowd of other fanzines.

Recent reading has led me through such books as 460 ADVERTISING TIPS, a book about Madison Avenue Advertising techniques, and I let its contents affect me to the point where I offered a "golden oldie, somewhat moldy prozine" free with each new subscription. Other books along the same lines affected me similarly until I began to think in terms of "literary magazine", and "clientel".

What I had forgotten is that KNIGHTS is published by me for my friends and for what egoboo I do manage to receive. If I were to publish this for any other reason I'd be a fool, for the out-of-pocket expenses are absolutely ridiculous.

So, because of my reassesment, and long letters and discussions with Patrick Hayden and Bill Breiding, I have given up on the bullshit hype. However, I am not going to give up advertising KNIGHTS. The two advertisements in OUTWORLDS have more than paid for themselves, and at least half the people who tried an issue because of one of those ads have liked KNIGHTS well enough to subscribe, thus cutting a few dollars from my out-of-pocket expenses. And because of those two ads I've contributions and promises of contributions from people I might never otherwise have come in contact with.

As for my stated ambition to win the Hugo Award, let me say this: at the time I made that statement I was desperately in need of a goal in my life--something to strive for, grasp for, dream about--in short, I needed a reason to exist. Now, after spending time with friends, both personal and fannish, I've crawled out of my depression and looked at the world and I've been able to view my objectives in a different light. I now have dozens of reasons to exist, any one of which could sustain me for years, and I no longer need to grasp for the phallic silver rocket.

At the same time, though, I'm not about to deny that I'd like to have one sitting on my mantlepiece; how many fans wouldn't? It's just the Hugo Award no longer holds the importance in my life that it did.

The one thing I feel worst about, in issue 13 when I made the statement about wanting to win the Hugo, is that either I did a bad job of writing the editorial, or that a number of people were incapable of reading the comment in context, or a combination of the two.

I'm not about to claim I publish the best fanzine going, but I know I don't publish the worst. However, some reviews have cut right to the quick when commenting about issue 13 and my "Hugo ambition". I may have gotten over my depression, but my feelings are still a little tender, and it isn't hard to make me upset. I can handle a review that says "this fanzine is bad", but I can't handle it when some bastard with a typewriter neglects to read what I wrote, pulls a few words out of context, and then wraps my ass around a tree. And I know the fault doesn't lie entirely with the way I wrote that editorial; enough people understood what I said or was trying to say, to convince me of that.

In the long run, though, there are a number of people who, without ever meeting

them, I'd be willing to call my friend. It is these people who have helped me, if not to find myself, at least to find out who I'm not. And they are too numerous to even try to list.

The one thing I'd like reviewers to take into account, and subscribers to know, is that I don't know myself well enough yet to know where it is exactly I want to go with KNIGHTS. I'm still searching out all the possibilities I know, and will probably try things I haven't yet thought of, or seen others do. I make mistakes, some pretty bad, others minor, and at times I contradict myself; I try not to do these things, but I frequently do. You have every right to take me to task for these things, but, please, make sure you're taking me to task for the right things. At least, I know where I've been, and I can look back along the road and see what it was that worked and what it was that didn't.

Anyhow, what it boils down to is this: I am finally, after two years and fourteen issues, beginning to publish the type of fanzine I want to publish. I am finally publishing a fanzine that attracts good material and which attracts enough of it so that I can pick and choose. That in itself is an accomplishment for me and that in itself, I hope, is enough to keep me publishing for a long time.

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As far as this issue is concerned, I have taken a step backward and a step forward. As you can see, this issue is side-stapled again. The reason for this is purely financial: by stapling it like this I save nearly $100 which I haven't got to begin with. In fact, even though this issue has more pages than last issue, by eliminating the binding and the coated paper, and by cutting down the print run a little, I save nearly half of what it cost to produce issue 14.

I found that issue 14 cost me more than $1 each to produce, and I had foolishly given them a cover price of only $1; which means that, even if I were to sell every copy, I'd still be in the hole. I would never have found that out if I hadn't been keeping books for the first time since I started publishing. And while my bookkeeping system is relatively simple and nowhere near foolproof, it is a frightening thing to discover how much I actually spend on this venture. I was probably better off not knowing.

The step forward is the addition of Thomas F. Monteleone as a columnist. How it actually happened is rather complicated and so I won't go into it, but I would like to welcome him to these pages.

Because of the length of the articles and columns this issue, a few things were bumped and I hope to get them into next issue. Included are "A Cognitive Contemplation of the Formative Influences of Fannish Peer Group Recognition" by Mike Glicksohn, and "The Near Future Of Man In Space" by D Gary Grady. In the works, but not yet in my hands are articles on Robert Heinlein, Ron Goulart, Larry Niven, and Robert F. Young, as well as the regular columns and features.

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Anyhow, enjoy the issue and hang around for the next one. The way things are going around here, anything could happen.

-- Mike Bracken

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OKAY, FOGLIO, DO ME ANOTHER ONE!!


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