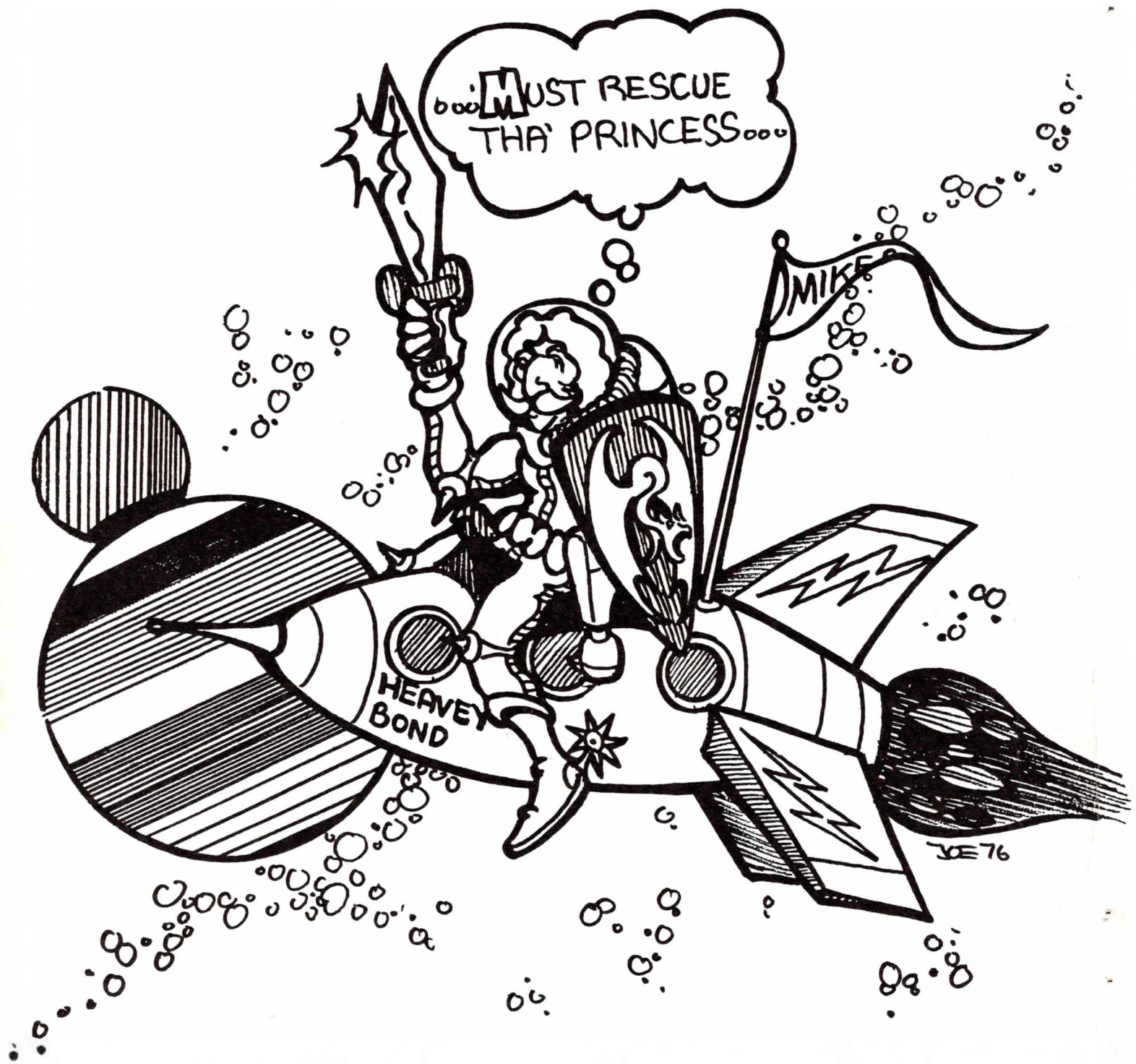
Knights


...MUST RESCUE THA' PRINCESS...
MIKE
HEAVEY BOND
JOE 76

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Thomas F. Monteleone

"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."

Mike Glicksohn said that in last issue's lettercolumn and even though I made some sort of comment to the affirmative, I didn't really understand what he was saying. Now I think I do.

Many of the letters I've received since issue 13 came out have contained comments to the effect that each of the latest issues was "much better than its predecessor". I've had a tendency to sluff off these comments with the thought that "everybody's being nice" (indeed, people like Gil Gaier and Ben Indick are never at a loss for kind words) and I have an alternating knowledge/fear of knowing I can produce an ALGOL/OUTWORLDS/SFR, and fearing that I'm producing a crudzine with slick covers. I rarely find my thoughts settling anywhere in the middle ground, and so I find myself coming across frequently as an overblown ego without quite enough talent to back it up (pretention they call it nowdays), or, as Glicksohn says in this issue's letter-column, coming down "a little hard" on myself. (Hell. As a momentary aside here; a number of people have commented that I don't come across as anybody in these pages.)

Well, I subscribed to LOCUS recently and #188 came as my first issue. In that issue is contained the results of the 1976 Locus Poll, and I was knocked on my ass when I glanced through it and found KNIGHTS rated #11 in the fanzine category. And no matter how I altered the voting information KNIGHTS still wound up in the top twelve. What further blew my mind is the fact that a number of my favorite fanzines --the ones I look up to and, in my own way, try to emulate--didn't even make it into the listing. Just as important, and just as exciting, to me is that I seem to be the new kid on the block in that list of the top 13 fanzines; as far as I can tell, nearly every editor whose zine made it into the listing has been editing fan-zines far longer than I--in many cases two or three times longer.

Now that is a hell of a rush.

BRACKEN'S WORLD

What it tells me is that the people on my mailing list, many of whom I consider friends or close aquaintences, are deadly serious when they tell me I've done something right and, conversely, deadly serious in their criticisms. All of you seem to want me to do as well as I'd like to.

Terry Whittier said something in a recent letter which seems to fit right in here; "You have put a lot of hard work and caring into your zine. And people can see that." Yes, I have, and the more I put into it, the less I seemed to be getting back (there are a number of nasty fanzine reviewers out there). But now, thanks to 16 people whose names I'd prefer not to know, my faith has returned, and seeing KNIGHTS listed in that poll has caused the day-to-day egoboo to mean quite a lot more to me.

Even so, the future of KNIGHTS is up in the air. Although tomorrow I start my first job in over a year, my plans don't seem to match my bank account, and the thought of having to take a step backward and get cheap-o covers and the like disheartens me. (This issue I've been lucky in that Victoria Vayne recently started an inexpensive electrostenciling service, and Terry Whittier steered me towards an inexpesive printer in Northern California who does work through the mail--my covers still cost the same, though, since I'm staying with my local printer for them.)

Besides not having a bank account to match my plans is the fact that I may be attending Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville starting in September. While attending school will mean that I'll have less time to spend on KNIGHTS, the most important effect of it is that August and September of this year will be screwed-up months. Since next issue would normally be out in September, this means a change in plans. Next issue, then, won't be a "normal" issue; what it will be is more of a mass letter telling everyone whether or not I made it to the University and, if I do, my new address.

Issue 17, then, won't be out until the end of the year and will be my third an-

(continued on page 59)

EXPLORING KNOWN SPACE

DON D'AMMASSA

AFTERWORD BY LARRY NIVEN

One of the more meaningless controversies that sf fans are periodically caught up in is the importance of "hard science" (whatever that is) in sf. The truth is, that a good story remains a good story regardless of its scientific content and a bad story remains bad no matter how accurate and detailed its technical background. Equally true is the converse, that hard science fiction stories are not inevitably boring, pedantic, and overly technical. But there is a discernable difference in thematic approach from author to author; there are authors whose work hinges more on scientific ideas than on others. Arthur C. Clarke and Hal Clement both write excellent stories around a core of scientific extrapolation, for example.

It is true that a relatively small proportion of the published sf is oriented in this direction. It is not true that this indicates a radical new trend in the field, and it is emphatically not true that it results primarily from the incursions of "literary" writers. Even in Gernsbackian days, the majority of published hack-work were transplated adventure stories, provided with the trappings of science. The same is true today.

But there are still some writers--just as there have been from the earliest existence of sf as a semi-separate genre--who specialize in using detailed scientific knowledge as the core around which to build their stories. And possibly the best known recent addition to their ranks is Larry Niven.

Niven's first published story was "The Coldest Place" (1964), an unprepossessing problem story featuring the team of Howie and Eric. Eric is a cyborged spaceship, whose sole organic crew is Howie. In this, the first of two appearances, they explore the dark side of Mercury. They reappeared the following year in "Becalmed in Hell", a much better story, though still not indicative of the kind of writing Niven was eventually to prove himself capable of producing. Eric is unable to free the ship from the gravity well of Venus. Eric believes the trouble to be an equipment failure; Howie is convinced that the problem is psychosomatic.

Two other short stories appeared in 1965. "Wrong Way Street" is interesting, following the investigation of an abandoned alien base discovered on the moon, which inadvertently results in the activation of a time machine. The ending is somewhat confusing, but the story hints at the kind of sweep Niven's later stories were to encompass. The same can be said about "One Face", in which a starship inadvertently is projected into the far future, and must use its engine to alter the rotation rate of the dead Earth in order to melt the atmosphere.

Had Niven's career ended at this point, his name would be largely unknown. But it didn't end. WORLD OF PTAVVS, published that same year, was to begin a series of stories that would rapidly make Niven one of the leading writers in the field, a position he still holds. PTAVVS is a fairly short novel, exaggerated by the simple plot line and clear narrative style. Kzanol is a thrint, a master race of alien slavers whose domination of our galaxy is complete, reinforced by their mental powers, which enable them to force obedience upon all other races. As a result of an equipment error, Kzanol is put into suspended animation in a stasis suit, which becomes lost on Earth. Two billion years pass before it is rediscovered by contempory humans in an age when the thrints have disappeared from the universe following a war of rebellion that destroyed them and all of their subject races.

Larry Greenberg is a telepath who agrees to attempt to read the alien's mind. As a result, he is imprinted with Kzanol's personality, believes himself to be the alien,

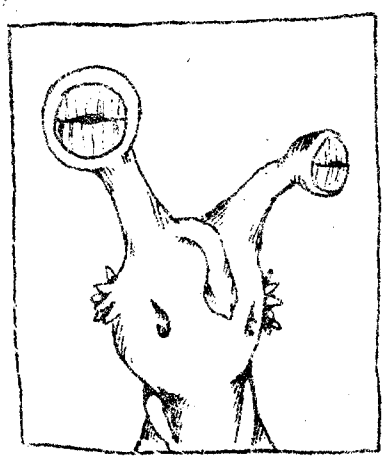
even acquires some of the thrint mental powers. Greenberg/Kzanol and the real Kzanol both steal ships and set off to Neptune, where a second stasis suit holds an amplifier, with which a single being could dominate the entire system.

When I read PTAVVS in its magazine version a decade ago, I was captivated with Niven's inventiveness. The novel aged well, and now seems primitive only when compared with Niven's later achievements. I suspect it would have attracted a great deal more attention than it did had it not been overshadowed by "Neutron Star", published in 1966, a Hugo winning short story. This story introduced Beowulf Shaeffer, human starship pilot, and Pierson's Puppeteers, a race of tripedal aliens with two "heads", one on the end of each of their two necks. The Puppeteers--abject cowards because of their herbivorous nature--hire Shaeffer to test a General Products starship hull around a newly discovered neutron star. Shaeffer discovers that tidal effects within the gravity well are responsible for the death of an earlier reasearch crew.

A string of first rate stories followed within that same year. "A Relic of Empire" featured a battle between a scientist and a crew of murderous space pirates. The scientist makes use of the explosive properties of thrint stage trees--organically grown propulsive units for starships--to destroy the pirates.

Beowulf Shaeffer returned in "At the Core". The Puppeteers hire him again, this time to pilot an experimental ship to the core of the galaxy. Shaeffer learns that the core is exploding in a chain reaction that will eventually engulf the entire galaxy, though many millenia away. The Puppeteers panic and begin an immediate evacuation of the galaxy.

Niven began a subset of what was to be called the "Known Space" series, centering on the exploration of Mars. The first story was "How the Heroes Die", in which a colony dome is destroyed by an unsuspected Martian tribe living underneath the sand ocean. A stranded smuggler from the Belt tries to reactivate the dome in "At the Bottom of a Hole", but he and several of the attacking Martians are killed in the ensuing battle.



One of Niven's best, and most gruesome, stories is "Bordered in Black". An exploratory ship observes an expanding black ring on a farm world, which upon closer examination is found to be a moving line of humans, literally eating their way across the surface of the planet. There were several minor stories published in 1966 as well. "Warriors" portrays the first encounter between humans and the kzinti, a race which was to wage a series of unsuccessful wars against humanity over the next few centuries. The Kzinti vessel is incautious because a telepathic probe reveals the human ship to be unarmed. But the human crew is able to use the ship's drive as an offensive weapon and destroy the attacking ship.

"Eye of an Octopus" is another in the

Martian series, though chronologically earlier, chronicling the discovery of a Martian burial well. "By Mind Alone" was Niven's first treatment of teleportation, which he describes as being subject to the various laws of conservation of energy. When a young girl teleports out of a moving car, her momentum is retained and she crashes into the wall of a room at sixty miles per hour.

There was another string of successful stories in 1967, including "The Adults", which was later to be included as the first half of THE PROTECTOR, and which shall be described later. The best of these was "The Soft Weapon". A human and a puppeteer battle with a ship full of kzin for control of an ancient weapon developed by the tnuctip race in its attempt to end thrint rule. The weapon alters shape and function at different settings. The kzinti are thwarted because they fail to realize that the weapon is itself sentient after a fashion, a computerized intelligence.

In "Flatlander", Beowulf Shaeffer and a wealthy friend discover a phenomenon which can actually penetrate a General Products hull--an antimatter world. This is the least successful of the Shaeffer stories. The idea of antimatter is not something new, and I can't accept that the Puppeteers never heard of it. In "Handicapped" (alternately titled "Handicap") we meet the Grog, a race of non-ambulatory sentiences which telepathically force their prey to approach. It is eventually learned that the Grog are degenerate descendants of the thrints, their telepathic powers greatly reduced.

One of Niven's more powerful stories is "The Ethics of Madness". In the grip of insanity, and Earthman murders the family of a former friend. He is captured and cured, eventually released. He is leaving the colony in a spaceship when he discovers that he is being followed by the former friend. Both men are nearly immortal as the result of their use of booster spice, so the ensuing chase through the galaxy spans 120,000 years. It is at that point that the protagonist discovers that his pursuer died after a short battle fought at the very beginning of the chase, and that his own guilt was what pursued him ever since.

No one is always at the top of his form, and some of Niven's stories that year were less memorable, particularly "Safe at Any Speed", in which a long-lived human in an invulnerable aircar is swallowed by a giant bird and must wait for the corpse to rot before he can escape. This is probably the poorest story Niven wrote in the first several years of his career. Better but still not entirely satisfactory was "The Jigsaw Man", in which the quest for more organs for the organbanks leads Earth to inflict the death penalty on increasingly petty offenses. Another minor story, but one for which I confess a great deal of fondness, is "Convergent Series" (alternately titled "The Long Night") in which a demon is foiled when the pentagram in which he is forced to appear is inscribed on his own belly.

The excesses of the organbank program were handled more thoroughly in A GIFT FROM EARTH (serial title SLOWBOAT CARGO). The colonists on Wemadeit are subject to the dictatorship of the descendants of the original crew. The crew controls the organbanks and most of the other technology of the colony, and they use it to enforce a rigid caste system. Their control is menaced when Matt Keller becomes unwillingly involved with a revolutionary group. Matt has an unsuspected ability, a mental power that allows him to become functionally invisible in times of stress. People fail to notice him, forget their instructions regarding him. As a result, Matt is able to penetrate their stronghold and free the captured revolutionaries, eventually destroying the crew's power almost singlehandedly. Unfortunately, endow-

ing a character with a power such as this is a built-in dues ex machina, from which the fall of the crew is inevitable. It's a competent, sometimes amusing potboiler, but still not the kind of novel one makes a mental note to re-read.

1968 was not a particularly good year for Niven fans. The only outstanding story was "Grendel", the fourth Beowulf Shaeffer adventure. Shaeffer is forced to kill an old friend in order to foil his attempt to kidnap Lloobee, a kdatlyno artist. "There is a tide" is notable only because it introduced Louis Wu, who was later to figure in RINGWORLD. In this early story, Wu battles for possession of another stasis box, this time with the trinocs, a new alien race.

The other stories published that year are as technically competent, but lack the enthusiasm and imagination of the earlier stories. I suspect that Niven had worked out most of his earlier ideas and was already thinking more in terms of novels than short stories, for his best ideas seem to have clustered primarily in the longer works from here on. "All the Myriad Ways", for example, is an interesting concept--the pyschological effects of branching universes--but does very little with the idea. It is the earliest hint of Niven's soon to be prominent experimentation with the blend of sf and the traditional detective story, best shown in the Gil Hamilton series.

A human is frozen alive and conscious on Pluto's surface in "Wait It Out", a condition I find implausible, and a story that seems to exist merely to pose that proposition. "Deceivers" (alternately titled "Intent to Deceive") is a humorous bit of fluff about a man who is apparently eaten by an automated restaurant. In "Like Banquo's Ghost" mankind receives the secret of faster than light travel in return for our own ability to develope sophisticated instrumentation. An anthropologist and a private detective appear in "Meddler", but Niven still hadn't quite gotten the knack of writing a detective story. He tried again in "Dry Run", a tale of paradoxial murder, and actually wrote a successful suspense story--not sf--titled "The Deadlier Weapon". In this last, a man overcomes a knife-wielding hitchhiker by pretending suicidal impulses in a speeding car.

In 1969 Gil Hamilton, an investigator for the UN's police forse, ARM, made his debut in "Death by Ecstacy" (alternately titled "Organlegger"). This is the first of Nievn's successful detective/sf stories. An old friend is found dead in a hotel room, apparently having killed himself through overstimulation of his brain's pleasure centers. Hamilton refuses to believe the official verdict, however, and eventually uncovers connections between the murder and a gang of organleggers, criminals who abduct people and use them as organ banks for illegal transplants. Hamilton lost an arm while working in the Belt, and before he had it replaced, he discovered that he had telekinetic powers, although they were psychologically limited to the distance he could reach with a normal arm. Hamilton believes in individualism and self-determination: "A human being should be all human. He should have habits and possessions peculiarly his own, he should not try to look like or

behave like anyone but himself, and he should not be half robot." Niven's philosophical views were to be increasingly reflected in his fiction from this point on, although unlike some writers, he seems to have been able to make it unobtrusive, hence more effective.

Niven initiated his humorous time travel series in 1969 as well. "Flight of the Horse" (alternately titled "Get a Horse") introducted Svetz, a hapless time traveller whose mission to find a specimen of the extinct horse goes somewhat awry, resulting instead with a unicorn. Niven was later to write an article/speech titled "The Theory and Practice of Time Travel" in which he stated that time travel stories were fantasy, not sf, and the logic of the Svetz stories is considerably less rigorous than in his other fiction. Unfortunately, when as author takes his fiction less than seriously, so too does the reader, and none of the Svetz stories are particularly worthwhile. Another article, "The Theory and Practice of Teleportation" detailed the reasoning behind the effects mentioned in connection with "By Mind Alone" above.

"Passerby" is another rather improbable story. A crippled spaceship is helped by a gigantic humanoid that strides between the stars. This was a laughable idea when Lin Carter did it in THE STAR MAGICIANS, and Niven has made it no more palatable. Niven also used this story to muse on the theory of evolution, and one character remarks that "when a species begins to use tools, evolution stops." He goes on to say that "environment no longer shapes that species. The species shapes its environment to suit itself. Beyond this the species does not develope." But another character poses an alternative: "But suppose two tool-users evolved on the same world? Then evolution might go on until one race was dead."

Niven also wrote his first straightforward fantasy in 1969, "Not Long Before the End". A master magician wins a duel with an enchanted swardsman by employing a device which uses up all of the manna (magic power) in the area. Niven's story is in some ways symbolic of the rivalry between science and romance, tradition and change, superstition and technology. Niven, like his magician, apparently believes that technology will ultimately triumph: "When the manna runs out I'll go like a blown candle flame, and civilization will follow. No more magic, no more magic-based industries. Then the whole world will be barbarians until men learn a new way to coerce nature, and the swordsmen, the damned stupid swordsmen will win after all."

Svetz returned twice in 1970. In "Bird in the Hand", he captures a beast which alters its nature in the future into that of a giant roc. A tentacled sea monster is his target in "Leviathan". As with the first story, these two suffer from Niven's lack of belief in his own creation. "Bird in the hand", in particular is inconsistent, disregards cause and effect. "Unfinished Story", a vignette, was a fair joke, but a poor story.

With David Gerrold as his collaborator, Niven produced another novel that year, his longest yet. THE FLYING SORCERORS (magazine version as THE MISSPELLED MAGISHUN) is a madcap adventure on a strange world where magic appears to work, thanks to autohypnosis, augumented by some psychic powers. When a researcher from Earth arrives, he crosses paths with an indignant village magician, and the ensuing struggle is the core of the novel. THE FLYING SORCERORS is an entertaining--often hilariously funny--novel that inexplicably attracted little attention when it was originally published.

Niven's greatest accomplishment that year, however, was RINGWORLD, Hugo and Nebula winner. RINGWORLD is probably one of the half dozen most widely read sf novels, and was pointed to for some time as indication of the resurgence of hard sf. It is unquestionable that the scientific background in the novel was a major topic of conversation in some quaters. At Boskone a few years ago, I recall passing a group of MIT students chanting "The Ringworld is unstable." Frankly, I don't care whether or not Niven's math and physics are spotless. The novel remains an exciting, fascinating adventure story.

Louis Wu returns, joined by Nessus, the same puppeteer who was featured in "The Soft Weapon". They are joined by a kzinti warrior and a young human girl, Teela Brown, on an expidition commissioned by the puppeteers to investigate an unusual ring shaped world, its inner surface facing the sun it encircles. During their adventures, they learn that the puppeteers have been secretely manipulating both humans and kzinti, breeding the former for luck and the latter for cooperation. Teela is the end product of that process, a person so lucky that it appears that free will ceases to exist when it impinges on a situation that contributes to her own personal happiness.

Personally, I think Niven made a tactical mistake in making the builders of the Ringworld human. The discovery of that fact is a considerable let-down, for Niven has come to be associated with the creation of bizarre and interesting aliens. Despite this, RINGWORLD remains a considerable achievement, one of the best sf novels so far this decade. The novel contains one observation which one might want to keep in mind when reading Niven, the idea that "it was unpleasant, like all learning processes", This reflects modern American opinion about education, an opinion open to considerable question. Even Teela Brown is exposed to unpleasantness before she learns what to do with her life.

1971 was a year of ups and downs. "For a Foggy Night" is an adequate but unexceptional treatment of parallel worlds impinging on one another. "Man of Steel, Woman of Kleenex" is an amusing speculative article, examining the problems involved in Superman's sex life. "What Can You Say About Chocolate Manhole Covers?" is a silly title for a mediocre story about aliens using humans as breeding stock. "No Exit", written with Hank Stine, is an awkward and confusing story of hypnosis and the devil.

On the other hand, "Inconstant Moon", another Hugo winner, is an emotionally purging story of a future disaster that does an excellent job of dragging the reader into the atmosphere of the story, making him feel the same sense of impending doom as do the characters. "Rammer" is set in a future dictatorship where a recently awakened cryogenic sleeper steals a starship for his own purposes, rather than subject himself to the will of the State. "Fourth Profession" introduced the Monks, a mysterious alien race who dispense pills of knowledge to humans in payment of debts. The fourth, and best, of the Svetz stories appeared in 1971 as well. In "There's a Wolf in My Time Machine", Svetz finds himself in a parallel universe where man evolved from wolves, not apes.

Svetz made one final appearance in 1972. In "Death in a Cage", he encounters a "ghost", a man whose existence appears to somehow transcend the many universes. The lack of serious explanations which pervades the entire series mars this story as well, and I'd just as soon see no new time travel stories. Niven's warlock made what is reputedly his last appearance in "What Good is a Glass Dagger?", this time

helping to destroy the power of a rival warlock who is using up manna at an unprecedented rate, and for nefarious purposes. Niven writes fantasy quite well, particularly considering his reputation as a writer of hard sf, and it would be a shame if he sticks by his intention to write no more of it.

"Cloak of Anarchy" is a didactic piece, a kind of political morality tale. Anarchy parks are areas where the only law is one forbidding violence against other people, enforced by police monitor devices. When an electronics specialist knocks out the monitor system, the park's inhabitants are exposed to real anarchy for the first time, and find that their opinions are rather different.

1973 was the year of THE PROTECTOR. This novel consists of a revised version of the 1967 novellette, "The Adults", plus a sequel. In the first half, Phssthpok the Pak journeys to our solar system in search of a lost colony of his race. He captures a human named Brennan and then hides his ship under the Martian sands. Phssthpok is a protector, a post-adult stage in his race's existence in which the individual's only function is to protect others of his bloodline. Brennan becomes a protector as well, exposed to a food that brings about the change, and realizes that humanity is a mutated form of the unaltered Pak race. He kills Phssthpok, realizing that the Pak will destroy humanity as a blasphemy if he realizes the truth.

In the greatly inferior second half, Brennan and a human companion set off to meet an oncoming Pak fleet, following Phssthpok's quest. Brennan's plan involves transforming the population of one of Earth's colonies into an army of protectors. When the human realizes this, he takes steps to prevent Brennan from succeeding. Although THE PROTECTOR also was in contention for a Hugo, it is a far less satisfactory novel. The long space journey in the second half is as boring for the readers as for the characters.

There were also four short stories in 1973. "Flash Crowd" introduced a new theme in Niven's work, the social problems involved with a cheap, efficient teleportation system. Because of the extensive use of teleportation devices, a new phenomenon has arisen, flash crowds, spontanteous riots that grow too fast for the police to react. Jerryberry Jensen, a reporter, is blamed for starting one such riot, and he decides to clear his name by finding a solution to the growing problem. Jensen returned in "All the Bridges Rusting", a rather dull story about overcoming public resistance to financing a space rescue mission.

Teleportation booths are also central in "The Alibi Machine". A murderer is unable to escape the scene of the crime when the booth fails to operate, and he is so dependent on them that he never thinks to simply walk away. Gil Hamilton returned in "The Defenseless Dead", this time to foil the plot of out of work organleggers who plan to acquire new bodies for themselves.

Niven returned to consideration of teleportation in 1974 with two minor stories. "The Last Days of the Permanent Floating Riot Club" is about a gang which capitalizes on flash crowd riots, until their internal squabbling leads to their undoing. "A Kind of Murder" features murder by means of teleportation.

"The Hole Man" won Niven his fourth Hugo, the story of a black hole released into the interior of Mars, which threatens to absorb the entire planet. This was not one of Niven's better stories, suffering from flat characterization, and its evident popularity is rather surprising. "Night on Mispec Moor" is almost a very

good story, a horror tale of a man fighting for his life against a host of reanimated corpses. "Plaything" is totally trival, doesn't even read like a Niven story. Martian children destroy a module sent from Earth.

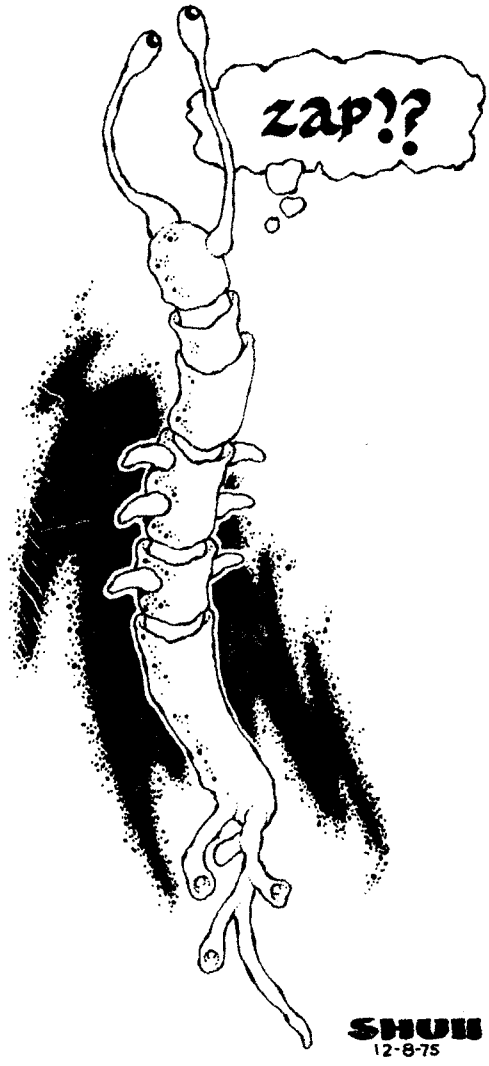
The "Nonesuch" is a predatory beast who is thwarted from preying on humans simply because they refuse to believe it exists. And Niven thinks time travel is fantasy? An amusing tale in some respects, I find it hard to think of this as sf. It certainly isn't the style of sf that Niven is noted for. Niven dabbled with time travel paradoxes in "Singularities Make Me Nervous", but really didn't do anything new with a vein that is already richly overworked. Niven also wrote another straight suspense story; the tables are turned with a vengeance on a blackmailer in "$16,940".

Niven's most spectacular accomplishment in 1974 was one he shared with Jerry Pournelle. THE MOTE IN GOD'S EYE is a long novel, over 500 pages, and is certainly the longest first contact story yet to appear. Collaborations are difficult to assess. Even in the best of situations, it is impossible to tell who wrote which part, and the authors of MOTE contend that both did some untypical things in this novel. I'm not going to make any attempt at separating the Niven parts from the Pournelle parts; except for one brief section, I don't even have an opinion.

MOTE is a novel to rank with RINGWORLD. It deserved the nomination it received for the Hugo, though it may not have been the best novel published that year. The civilization of the Moties is possibly the best realized alien culture in the last few years, even though seasoned sf readers should be able to figure out the major mysteries early in the book. MOTE contains one of the most horrifying scenes in modern sf as well. While exploring the strange Motie culture, a human ship becomes infested with what the crew believes to be pets of the sentient race. Eventually they learn that these "miniatures" have a specialized intelligence, that they can use tools, and that they are quite capable of taking control of the ship. All attempts to root them out fail, and it is eventually decided that the ship should be abandoned to them and destroyed. During the evacuation to another ship, several miniatures occupy a human spacesuit, holding a severed human head up inside the helmet to fool anyone who examines them.

Niven and Pournelle teamed up again in 1975 for another novel, this one an outright fantasy novel, INFERNO. The protagonist of this story is a dead sf writer who finds himself quite literally in Dante's Hell, and who gets a grand tour in company with Benito Mussolini. Some of the images in this novel are powerful and repulsive, although it occasionally drifts off into self-indulgence. Readers unfamiliar with Dante will find it clever and original; those who have read Dante will consider it an interesting but minor popularization.

Four more stories have appeared in 1975 and early 1976. "Borderland of Sol" is an interesting and well written story about a band of pirates who make use of a black hole for their own purposes. Gil Hamilton's most interesting adventure is in "ARM", in which the time of death in a murder case is complicated by the victim's presence in a localized time field. "Down and Out", the sequel to "Rammer", is disappointing, seems to be the transitional story leading to a third, as yet unpublished piece. "Mistake" is a joke rather than a story. An alien monster sobers up a human who has taken drugs, and promptly fades out, having proven to be an illusion.



Larry Niven is one of the most successful of the new sf writers in terms of awards. Since that first Hugo for "Neutron Star", he has won twice more for short story and once for novel, and that novel also won the Nebula. Twice he has had novels on the final Hugo ballot which did not win. WORLD OF PTAVVS was in contention for the Nebula. He has had three shorter pieces on the ballot for a Hugo which did not win, "Fourth Profession", "The Jigsaw Man", and "Not Long Before the End", the last of which was also in the running for the Nebula. "Flatlander" and "Bordered in Black" have also been close to winning Nebulas. There can be no question then that Niven has become, and likely will continue to be a major figure in the sf field. The emphasis seems to be switching away from short stories and toward novels. According to LOCUS, Niven is now working on the sequel to RINGWORLD, and according to fannish scuttlebut, it features Teela Brown going protector. There is also talk of a new future history series, centering on the Monks from "Fourth Profession". And there are certain to be more collaborations with Jerry Pournelle.

It is impossible to say just now which direction Niven's work will take. But it is almost certain that no matter which way he goes, Larry Niven is going to pull a substantial portion of the sf reading public along with him.

-- Don D'Ammassa

AFTERWORD (from a letter) by Larry Niven

1) BORDERED IN BLACK was gruesome, right. That's as nightmarish a situation I've ever built. But the humans weren't "eating their way across the surface of the planet". They surrounded the shores, eating a gene-tailored sea-algae.

2) Suggest you reread FLATLANDER. The puppeteers were well aware that antimatter

(continued on page 24)

THE MOTHERS AND FATHERS ITALIAN ASSOCIATION

THOMAS F MONTELEONE

WRITING YOUR FIRST NOVEL AS A TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE (ESPECIALLY IF IT'S FOR LASER BOOKS)

I don't really want to write about the above topic, but I'm sure that many of you would be interested in reading about it. There is also the chance that the whole thing will have some wonderful cathartic effect on me, and I will be the better person for the experience. Let's hope so.

Before I begin, though, a disclaimer.

Everything I say in this column should be construed as fact--especially when I name names--to the best of my knowledge. I am not trying to slander anyone, but merely wish to set the records straight as I perceive them to be. I am quite sure that there are people out there, who after reading my personal view of this experience, will disagree with my version. This is natural, and I expect it to some degree, but I don't want anyone yelling that I am distorting anything. I am not. And no, the lad does not protest too much. It's just that I know the persons whom I will be talking about. Enough said.

The year was early 1974 (January, I think) and I was becoming reasonably successful selling many of the short stories I was writing. The thought of doing a novel had been simmering on a back burner for a while, but I had never gathered up enough momentum to begin such a project. In fact, I did not know if I had any ideas that would "hold up" long enough to contain something book-length. I felt that I was still learning how to handle short story lengths and that was challenge enough.

Then I received a phone call from the much-maligned, but good-intentioned editor, Roger Elwood.

Roger was one of my first editors, having bought several of my stories for his hardcover anthologies that were proliferating the field a few years ago. I will always remember him for "taking a chance" on me during those early days, and I will always be thankful to him that he did. Anyway, he told me that he was involved in a new project that would be something new and innovative in the sf field and that he would like to know if I would be interested in participating. The proposal was simple enough: write a sf novel for his upcoming series of books for a Canadian-based publisher, Harlequin, largely known for their racks-upon-racks of nurse/romance novels. I balked a bit, not knowing if I could, in fact, write anything that long, but I wanted to try it, which led me to say yes.

Roger outlined the basic requirements to me: the length would have to be from 55 to 60 thousand words; the story must have a male protagonist with a female sidekick/associate/love interest; there would be no explicit sex; the story should be an action/adventure type of tale (implying: there should be no grappling with great metaphysical issues, I presumed); and that the tale should have an "upbeat" ending. Elwood went on to say that the audience Harlequin was aiming for was a cross-section. In other words, his publisher not only wanted to sell books to regular sf readers, but also to those readers who were not. It was therefore important, he said, that the novels be understandable to a reader who has never read a science fiction story before.

All right, I thought, this seems like an undertaking that I can handle. I agreed and Roger instructed me to write the first chapter of the novel plus a detailed, chapter-by-chapter outline of the book, then send the package to him. If he, as the editor of this new sf series, liked the outline and the basic story idea, he would draw up a contract (at this point, my mind seized upon the word "contract" like a steel trap--I mean, this was Big Time stuff. Real writers got contracts!) and I would receive half of my advance upon signing it. It was understood that after I delivered the manuscript, if Roger liked it, I would receive the remaining half of the advance. This arrangement is standard procedure in the publishing world.

And so, keeping in mind the requirements laid down, I drew up an iron-clad story outline that seemed to have enough happening to hold out for 200-odd pages of typescript. I chose a plot-line that I had read somewhere was one of the easiest to write--especially for beginning novelists. It's known as the "paranoid-plot," that is, a story in which the protagonist knows little or nothing of what is happening to him, and the novel is spent slowly (or rapidly if you want lots of action) piecing together all the loose ends, until the protagonist finally understands the whole scene. The more perceptive of you Out There will recognize this structure occurring in many of A.E. Van Vogt's books; that author uses this kind of plotting masterfully--so well, in fact, that the complex twists and turns he hangs upon its frame tend to cover up all the godawful writing.

The setting I chose was a painfully familiar one to veteran sf readers: the oppresive Supersociety, where individualism is a curse, where revolution is a must if there is to be an interesting story. I chose this setting because I kept in mind an audience that primarily would have little or no prior knowledge of this type of world, and I figured it would be a treat for them to see what the standard "Brave New World" scene is all about.

All right. I sent in the chapter and outline, and within a month, Elwood called to say that it is fine. It is, in fact, exactly what he was looking for. A few days later I received the contract. And now for a few words about that. Having never seen a book contract before, and at that time having no agent to guide me in such things, I did not know how to evaluate the document. I have since become more worldly-wise, but as they say, hindsight is for assholes, right? There were a few oddities about the contract that did not strike me as odd until long after the entire project was finished: (1) nowhere on the document was there any mention of the title of my book. Nowhere does it state that the book will be fiction or non-fiction, much less science fiction. Under the section titled "MANUSCRIPT AND DELIVERY" it says (and I'll quote from the copy laying on the desk as I write this):

> "The author agrees to deliver to the Publisher on or before _____ and in final revised form an English language manuscript of approximately _____ words."

That's right, an "English language manuscript," that's what it says. Technically, I could have fulfilled that contract by sending in A Treatise on the Existential Benefits of Pressed Turkey Roll. (2) The second oddity was the timespan between the signing of the agreement and the delivery date of the finished manuscript. I signed the contract on March 15, 1974 and was expected to deliver the book no later than July 20, 1974. That's a total of 127 days or a little more than 4 months (actually, according to my Rockwell 18R, it's 4.2333333 months, but what the hell...). I didn't know it at the time I signed the contract, but 4 months is an incredibly short time in which to deliver a novel manuscript! Most publishers--actually I should say virtually all publishers--allow authors a minimum of 12 months to deliver a

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novel, and the norm is probably around 18 months. (3) Another anomaly was a mention of galleys to be provided the author before the book went into print. As it turned out, I saw no galleys of the book, ever. More on this later.

The next step was mailing off the contract, and as if by magic, receiving about 10 days later a Canadian "cheque" for $875.00--more than I had received for all my previous writings combined. But the money was a double-edged sword. I was elated at having so many extra ducats in the house, but I was shaken to my roots by the thought that I had reached the point of no return. I was committed; I must write a 200 page manuscript. Me, whose previous record for length was 48 pages! And now I must produce more than four times that much copy in less than four months--this at a time in my career when a short story might founder in my typewriter for 5 to 6 weeks.

I decided that I would try to put myself on a schedule that would be rigid enough to ensure that I wrote something on the novel every night, but still flexible enough that if I should miss a few days I would still complete the book on time. The goal I set for myself was 10 good pages per week--by "good" I mean 10 pages that, with minor corrections, I could pass along to my typist for final drafting. Some weeks I attained that goal or even more; other weeks produced far less. But I finished the book and had it typed into final draft around the beginning of July. I sent the book in, Roger Elwood gave it a hearty nod of approval and I soon received the second half of my advance.

But what was it like? What did I gain or lose or learn from the experience?

Many things. Allow me to enuermerate.

As I was writing the book, I discovered several very important things that were happening to both my head and my basic "style". Neither of which gave me pleasure. My selection of the paranoid plot structure had within it, I soon discovered, a dangerous element. Think about this: if your protagonist must, by definition, be totally ignorant of what is happening around him, he tends to be a fairly dull person to write about--especially if you, the writer, already know everything that he doesn't know. At times you find yourself writing a particular scene and inwardly reviling your main character because he can't figure out what is going on (as he must not for the sake of the plot). I learned, then, that unless you have mucho experience in writing the paranoid-plot, it can be a hell of a lot of trouble, a good source of depression, and an exercise in tedium.

As to style, I suppose I should have said overall mood and technique, as well as style. Because as I wrote SEEDS OF CHANGE (the final title of my Harlequin novel), I gradually sensed that the writing was vastly different from the style I had grown comfortable with when writing my short stories. At first, I had difficulty pinning down what was so goddamned "different" about the style of SEEDS OF CHANGE. But the more I wrote, the more I grew aware of the differences. The narrative was straight-from-the-shoulder stuff, no pausing to take a breath or get into a character's head any more deeply than a sentence or two--and this differed greatly from my short stories in which I generally had been working on largely internal levels. Another difference was of course the content. I had never written a bold-faced adventure tale--all my shorter work generally carried with it a thought or an idea that hopefully left the reader thinking or wondering about it (at least that's what I worked towards!), but SEEDS OF CHANGE did not seem to me to have any of that

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flavor to it. The narrative, by its very nature, was linear and one-dimensional. The odd thing was, that about halfway through writing the novel, I became aware of this aspect, but could do very little to change things. I still don't know why I could not do it.

I also found that the prose was somehow "colder", more "detached" than that found in my short stories, and this botered me a lot. I think now that part of it was my sense of everything being very external in the novel and nothing going on below the surface--there was very little, if any time taken to set a mood, to create an atmosphere that supported strong images. I suppose what I'm saying is that the book lacked any emotion. As to why this was so, I'm not sure I can articulate the reasons. Even though it's been more than two years since I finished the book, maybe I'm still too close to it to give a completely objective appraisal.

Another, rather frightening, thing I learned while writing SEEDS OF CHANGE was my sudden inability to write a short story. And let me tell you--that really distressed me. Here I was, writing a novel that did not really turn me on, and getting ideas for short stories that I could not get down on paper. The only analogy I can come up with to describe it is like having a runner who's been doing cross-country stuff suddenly try to do the hundred yards. My mental gears had been re-adjusted for the elongated, detailed movements of the novel, and when I tried to do a short story (as a change of pace, for instance, on a week-end when the novel was bogging down) I found myself rambling on and on for 5 or 6 pages--wheel-spinning and getting nothing accomplished when I should have been deeply involved in the tale by that point. It got to be so depressing that I finally gave up the effort, resolved to the fact that I just couldn't do any shorter pieces while still wrapped up in the novel. Of course then there were the nights I'd get into bed--wide awake, mind churning on like a great engine while the body screamed for sleep--and I'd nurse these fears that I'd never be able to write another short story, ever again.

Of course that didn't happen. Thankfully.

All right. The book was finished. How did I feel about it? Frankly, I didn't care for it much. I did believe that it was fairly well written--good action scenes, suspenseful enough, passable dialog; I did believe I had

produced what the editor and the publisher had wanted; I did believe that people who had never read an sf novel before would probably get a kick out of it; and most importantly, I did believe that the fan press would kick the living shit out of it.

All of these beliefs were proven to have been well-founded, as it turned out.

Let me stress this one point, though: the reason I didn't dig the book a lot was because it was not the kind of book I would like to read. To wit: I don't like Sword & Sorcery, Perry Rhodan, Doc Savage, Barsoom, a lot of the Ace Doubles, a lot of what DAW Books publishes, etc. etc. Not that I'm saying that SEEDS OF CHANGE is even as good as the above titles, it's just that I feel they are all in approximately the same league, okay?

So what happened next? Months passed and I got another phone call from Roger Elwood. He asked me to write a sequel to SEEDS OF CHANGE, and I turned him down. No, I told him, I think I've had enough of that setting. Maybe something else, all right? Roger accepted this and offered me a contract to do another book for "the series" (still un-named at this point). I hesitated, but somewhere my mind was counting up the Sheckles and I said yes. (But that's another story.)

Business out of the way, Roger then told me that he had a surprise for me: Harlequin, and a "special board of readers" or some such group, had read the first six novels selected for the series (mine included) and guess what? The publisher, in agreement with this special group, had selected SEEDS OF CHANGE as the book that most typifies the kind of story they want to market (!). In addition, they were not going to put my book on sale, but would instead print up a half million copies of the damned thing and give it away all over the country.

To say the least, I was dumbfounded. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry, as they often say. Imagine how it feels to be told that the book you thought was going to be sold for money (like just about every other book that's published) is going to be passed out to the masses like penny candy or those little vials of New Detergent that magically appear dangling from your doorknob every now and then. I don't know about you, but I was not exactly overcome with joy. I also had a hunch at this point that fandom would definitely be unkind to the book, especially since it was going to receive the special promotional hoopla that Harlequin planned. Well, I did not say this to Roger, especially since he sounded so ecstatic over the whole thing, although I did ask him if I had any choice in this decision.

He said no.

When May, 1975 rolled around, I knew that the publication of my novel would soon be a reality. "June or July," Roger had been telling me. He had also told me that the series would not be published under the Harlequin imprint, but rather a new name called "Laser Books". In fact, at the 1975 Nebula Banquet hald in New York that year, Roger Elwood appeared with what are called "dummies" of the first seven Laser Books. They were covers of books, complete with artwork, blurbs, titles, etc. but the inside pages were blank. It was then that I saw the cover of what my book would look like--and I didn't care much for it. The art was by Kelly Freas (an artist whose work never turned me on--and I am to this day amazed at the level of popularity he enjoys) with a large, ugly face in the lower right hand corner, depicting a character who does not appear anywhere in the book I wrote. In the background there is a domed city under attack by several Oldsmobile hood ornaments and a blood-red

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sky. But the thing that disturbed me most about the cover (other than its generally grade-B appearance) was the fact that my name (after all, I only wrote the book) was almost unreadable since it was in thin-line black lettering that blended in with the painting; while the words "Series Edited by Roger Elwood" is emblazoned across the bottom left corner in bold-faced white, and very readable lettering.

This pissed me off.

But since I was at a fairly formal function with lots of people around that I did not know all that well, I kept my mouth shut. When Roger and his publisher, Mr. Bernard O'Keefe, asked me how I liked the cover, I lied and said that it was fine. We all make mistakes--that's why they put erasers on pencils, I'm told.

On Memorial Day weekend, 1975 I walked into the Sheraton Hotel in Washington, D.C. to attend the annual sf convention, Disclave, which was being held there. When I reached the registration desk in the lobby, there was this rather large female fan handling the necessary bureaucracies. I filled in my name on the index card and my name-badge, and she said something like: "Oh, and here's a free novel, compliments of the convention," and she handed me a copy of SEEDS OF CHANGE. I looked at the book and then at her and while I felt like saying something to the effect of "No shit, you dumb unterfrau, I wrote this book, and it's not compliments of this convention, it's compliments of me."

Instead I said nothing, and merely waited until she looked several times from the book's hidden byline to my nametag. When recognition flashed on her Visigothian features, I picked up the book and walked away. Actually, I was not angry with her; I was angry with Laser Books. But there was no way I could express my feelings to the Publisher and I, being the flawed human that I am, directed my hostility at the fan. Think of it: the first view I have of my completed, published novel was like having a pie heaved into my face. The Publisher did not have the courtesy to send me any advance copies prior to beginning their Free Detergent Campaign, and that hurt.

I walked into the Huckster Room and saw that Laser had a large display table, replete with copies of my book, huge promotional posters, and a well-scrubbed representative of the publisher. On the posters I saw covers of my book and the first six titles of the series that would actually go on sale. There was a rather large crowd of people milling around and lots of younger fans were asking me to autograph copies of my book. I complied with a machine-like perfunctoriness, and oddly found myself not enjoying what should have been a satisfying experience.

But several things had by now added up which imparted a sour taste to the whole venture. I have already mentioned how the author's name on the Laser Books is almost unreadable, while Elwood's name is very prominent, but another distressing aspect of the books was their virtual sameness. Every title was laid out in exactly the same way, every piece of cover art had a large grotesque face in the bottom corner, and every cover was done by the same artist. I realize now that I was caught between a rock and a very hard place. Here I was, expected to be pround of my first published book and being unable to be so because of the tawdry packaging and promotional job my book was getting. I knew that the book was not deathless prose, but I did not feel that it should be so badly marketed as second-rate stuff. And so, standing in the Huckster room, I finally faced the reality of the moment, accepting satori-like, the insight and recognition that I had been reluctant to receive. Simp-

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ly, that Laser Books were intended from the very beginning, to be what is known in the garment industry as "Brown Goods"--i.e., expendable material that is pulled off great rollers with measured indifference, cut, wrapped up with cold efficiency, and sent off to manufacturers of seconds. By their very appearance, it was obvious that Laser Books were supposed to be no more individual than links of sausage in a long chain. Why else would the covers be so similar? Why else would the author's names be so blatantly de-emphasized? Why else would the books be numbered like so many faceless Emile Loring titles? ("Harriet, did you read 43? It was a lot better than 74.")

The result of all this and the months that followed caused me great concern. The fanzine reviews started to appear and most of them were uncommonly viscious in their attacks on SEEDS OF CHANGE and the other early titles in the series. I could accept this, since I had expected it somewhat, and since many of the reviews were little more than a veiled excuse to disembowel Roger Elwood--a well-intentioned editor, who for some reason never seemed to catch the fancy of fandom (the reasons for which, I'd rather not go into at this time, although I think I have some fairly valid theories as to why Elwood was not favored by fandom). I eventually read two of the other Laser Books (which shall go un-named here) and found them to be unconscionably bad: pedestrian writing, clichéd plots, dumb characters, predictable, etc. God, I asked myself, is mine this wretched? If it indeed was, I had certainly become involved in a sticky mess. And I have a decidedly atavistic dislike for things stickey and messy.

Close friends who are writers themselves seemed to be divided in their opinions of what was happening to me. Grant Carrington claimed I had ruined my career, made an asshole of myself. Roger Zelazny said don't worry about it, they only remember the good stuff. Ted White said my name in fandom would be tarnished to say the least. My agent, Kirby McCauley (who I acquired just about at the time SEEDS OF CHANGE appeared), said that I should not worry and that the book was at least a credential that would get editors to look at future projects. Others told me it was a "fun" book, an easy read, a piece of shit, etc, etc.

But the comments that cut the deepest came from people like the Publisher and Roger Elwood himself. On the phone, after the first wave of fanzine reviews had crashed home and the prozine reviews were coming down almost as hard, he said that Laser should have edited my book more carefully, that perhaps he (Roger) should have required a re-write, that the book was not all that good and that it was pushed through because of time-scheduling (which was the reason I was given for never receiving galley-proofs of the book).

Now this kind of talk angered me.

All of a sudden, just because a tiny sub-culture of self-proclaimed "critics" panned my book and the Laser series in general, Roger was squirming out from under his previous views. Why, I asked myself, is he saying this? If he didn't like the book in the first place, why did he approve my outline? Why did he then accept my finished "English language manuscript?" Why did Harlequin-né-Laser go on to proclaim my book the novel that best exemplified what Lasers were all about and promote the hell out of it?

Because I gave them exactly what they wanted, that's why.

And that was the reason why their bad-mouthing, and their hindsight stuck in my craw afterwards. To say that I lost respect for the whole venture would be like saying that maybe the Titanic should have considered a more Southern crossing.

What I then did was wrong, I see that now. I started publicly denouncing SEEDS OF CHANGE, writing letters to fanzines agreeing with their trashed-out reviews, prostrating myself at their fucking clay feet. I didn't know what else to do, especially since anger and frustration kept me from thinking objectively about the whole project. It was a mistake.

In one letter to a fanzine (which I will not name because it was a turgid, pontificating rag not worth its weight in postage), I wrote a reply to one of the more viscious attacks on SEEDS OF CHANGE. The "reviewer" had called the book a dreary piece of hackwork to be avoided; I had, in turn, answered the reviewer, by sarcastically agreeing that the book was hackwork... "to learn, to improve, to eat." I thought that I was being fairly clear and easily understood in that letter, but apparently I was not.

Roger Elwood, or one of his minions, saw the letter and very shortly after it appeared I received a phone call from him. He was rather upset with me. He claimed that I had done a great dis-service to myself and to Laser Books. He said he had never heard of an author calling his own book "hackwork."

I replied that the reference was in sarcastic reply to a review in that fanzine, although I did agree that SEEDS OF CHANGE was not a book that veteran sf readers would particularly enjoy. Besides, I said to Roger, it is my book--I did indeed create it and it was a part of me, and I can say whatever the hell I please about it.

Roger did not agree with me, saying that it was not really my book, but rather it was Laser's since I had sold it to them.

What is this bullshit? I thought.

But then it ocurred to me why Roger was so upset with me. I think he was angry because he did not see my comments as an attack on the book as much as an attack on Roger Elwood. It seemed apparent to me that Roger considered the Laser Books his own property and his attitude intimated that the authors of the books were little more than worrisome middlemen in a greater business proposition. At least that's the way I interpreted it. And here is why I felt that way. While at the 1975 Disclave, Roger Elwood was also present. At one point during the convention, a friend of mine--Art Saha--walked up and asked me to autograph his copy of SEEDS OF CHANGE. Just as I began writing in the book, Roger Elwood joined us, watching until I had finished. Then, just as I had extended the book, and in the moment before Art had a firm grip upon it, Elwood reached in, grabbed the book himself and pulled a pen from his coat pocket, saying "You want me to autograph it, too?" Before a startled Art Saha could reply, Elwood had scribbled something on the title page near my own signature, handed the book to Art, and then walked off smiling to himself. Art and I looked at the page. Written cryptically was: "Thank you, Roger Elwood," Why "Thank you"? Why "Roger Elwood"? Well, I really don't know, but I think it's because Roger really believed that SEEDS OF CHANGE was as much his book as it was mine.

But I felt justified in feeling the way I did--for the reasons outlined above.

You will recall me saying that after I handed in SEEDS OF CHANGE and Harlequin wanted a sequel which I declined, I soon after signed a second Laser contract. The difference being that this time, I decided, I would write a book that I wanted to write--it would be a story I was intrinsically interested in. When I sent in the finished manuscript, Roger rejected it because it was not the kind of novel Laser wanted.

Months later, when SEEDS OF CHANGE appeared, I was glad that my second novel had been rejected. I went on to sell it later, by the way, for a handsome advance to another publisher.

But was it really a "traumatic experience"?

No, I suppose it wasn't. A learning experience would be a more apt description. Because I did gain invaluable in-the-field knowledge about what it takes to write a novel. I am now working on my fourth novel and I think that I am finally getting to feel comfortable working at that length; I think that I am finally becoming proficient. If Roger Elwood hadn't given me a chance to write a novel back then, odds are that I still would not have much experience in that specialized area of writing. I am thankful for that.

I also learned that it's not a good idea to have a book so completely outlined that you know everything that's going to happen. If there are no areas left in shadow, no intriguing things to work out in your head, the writing ceases to be the spontaneous enjoyment, and becomes instead just plain dreary work. And writing should never be that.

Now if you only retain one idea from this entire column, let it be this: I am not apologizing for SEEDS OF CHANGE. I believe that I wrote exactly what the publisher and Roger Elwood wanted when they first approached me, and I will always be proud of the fact that I was able to deliver. The fact that I wrote a book that I would not normally read myself did not bother me while I was cashing Laser's checks or writing the last few chapters... and so it should not bother me now. And it does not. The novel should stand and speak for itself, and I suppose it does.

What I was trying to do here was speak for myself, and I hope that I have.

Contentment in your days and your nights. Til next time.

--Thomas F. Monteleone

AFTERWORD to EXPLORING KNOWN SPACE continued from page 13

would ruin a GP hull. They didn't know there was antimatter in this galaxy. (That's not to say the story was successful. Mostly it was just a Shaeffer's-eye view of Earth, written for fun; the plot was very loose.) (But it got me a compliment from Greg Benford, who cussed me out for figuring out the many ways there are to recognise an antimatter system.)

3) Gil Hamilton's opinions are not mine. I've got nothing against cyborgs; but Gil had to have that prejudice.

4) Question. Did Carter's THE STAR MAGICIANS appear before PASSERBY? I've never seen it.

5) LEVIATHAN! earned me 50¢/word from PLAYBOY! Yet English publishers won't have the Svetz stories at any price. Matter of taste, I guess.

6) I was surprised too when THE HOLE MAN won. It's a competent story, but not inspired.

7) Why are you trying to think of THE NONESUCH as pure STF? Why bother? Same question with regard to who wrote what in MOTE.

Well, those are the quibbles. The article is comprehensive enough. What bothers me a little is the way you blow my punch lines. "Mistake" is a tiny joke-story, worth a laugh; but you've blown it in one sentence.

Regarding the humans on the Ringworld: check back in a couple of years. If Homo habilis (or the Pak breeder) was allowed to evolve on the Ringworld, starting a couple of hundred thousand years ago, with slightly decreased mutation rates due to some shielding from the Ringworld floor, and a population in the trillions, there will be as much variety in THE RINGWORLD ENGINEERS as you could possibly desire.

-- Larry Niven

A COGNITIVE CONTEMPLATION OF THE FORMATIVE INFLUENCES OF FANNISH PEER GROUP RECOGNITION

by Mike Glicksohn

Illustrated by Al Sirois

So you want to win a Hugo, eh?

Well, why not? They're nice looking things. Impress the hell out of neos. And quite useful, too. Chesley Bonestell keeps the top of his toilet on with one. And Harlan Ellison plays checkers against Kelly Freas with theirs. Plus they're the only instrument known to man capable of cracking a macadamia shell with a single blow. All sorts of good reasons to get one. But how?

You see, every year there's this big contest and all the faneds do their best to be creative and impress their friends but that isn't all. It depends on <u>what</u> you publish and <u>when</u> you publish it and <u>how</u> you publish it and <u>who</u> you publish and <u>where</u> the convention is and all sorts of silly things like that. And when it's all over, to

the victor goes the Hugo and the runners-up and never-rans are Les Miserables.

I suppose somewhere, sometime there must have been a fan so isolated, so naive, so ingenuous as to the nature of life and reality and awards as to believe that Hugos went to the best of everything. Whatever that may be. But this chap, probably living somewhere in the heart of Wyoming or Utah where the desity of fans per square mile is a number most scientists would be happy to achieve for their vacuums in a laboratory, has probably long since gafiated after his first sight of a Hugo ballot. The rest of us are made of sterner stuff. "Nice guys finish last" and "The end justifies the means" become the prevailing philosophies of the day. Anything that brings that rocketship a step closer is fair play. So how to maximize those chances?

It is said that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat past failures. (This is most often said by history teachers desperate to boost enrollment and save their jobs, but it contains an element or two of truth.) So, as Al Smith once said, let us look at the record. (He never won a Hugo, come to think of it, but what the hell.)

I've been in fandom for a little over nine years, and in that time there have been ten world conventions. (Ifthis confuses you go outside and count fenceposts; then take up building skyscrapers out of wooden matches because you're not good fan material.) I've been to nine of them, and have seen nine fanzine Hugos awarded. If we add in that tenth award--which was moderately well publicized despite my absence, so I'm almost inclined to believe it was actually presented as they say it was--we should have a representative sample of what wins a fanzine Hugo. Perhaps we can learn from this. (How to win a fanzine Hugo in ten easy observations?)

For those of you of a more recent fannish vintage, the ten winners we can consider are ERB-DOM, NIEKAS, AMRA, PSYCHOTIC, SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW, LOCUS, LOCUS, ENERGUMEN, ALGOL-THE ALIEN CRITIC and THE ALIEN CRITIC. (This of course makes for eleven fanzines because of that naughty tie. Eleven is a prime number and nowhere as

neat as ten: a pox upon the Discon committee and their casual disregard for the mathematical precision of this article.).

Even a casual examination of this list provides several clues as to how a would-be Hugo winner can increase his chances of copping the rocket. As every student of fan history knows, PSYCHOTIC, SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW and THE ALIEN CRITIC are merely different geises of the same fanzine. Thus, out of the last ten fanzine Hugos, three and a half have been won by Richard Geis. Surely even a mathematically unsophisticated reader should realize that the simple expedient of changing one's name to Richard Geis will enormously improve one's chances of success. (Changing one's name to Charlie Brown will increase one's chances of winning also but only by about half as much as the Geis switch. The difficulties encountered in making telephone reservations with the name "Charlie Brown" plus the problems inherent in creating a steady stream of snappy answers to the question "Where's Snoopy?" render this a rather poor choice. Changing one's name to Dena Brown is less troublesome but unfortunately the sexist nature of our society would make this a bit of a bust for most people.)

(Changing your name to that of any other Hugo winning faned of the last decade is clearly counter-productive since no other faned has won in the past two years. Andy porter half won, but even being half of Andy Porter is more than most fen could stand. Because of the vagaries of chance, changing your name to that of some other leading faned is a gamble at best. There is little point in becoming a second Bill Bowers or, worse!, Larry Downes, as only the degree of abuse you'd have to endure would be appreciably increased.)

If we turn to an examination of the method of reproduction used by the eleven fanzines that have copped top honours during the last tenth century we find (if memory serves correctly and damn Geis and his constantly-changing fanzine) that six were mimeographed and five were offset. This is not a statistically significant breakdown, but a closer examination shows that the last three winners were all of the offset persuasion. This could well indicate a trend. With the near balance between mimeo and offset and the trend away from mimeo, a smart faned might well invest in a floor model offset, just to be on the safe side. (The possibility of a move to hecto should not be discounted and a clever entrepreneur might well swing the scales in any direction he or she chose. By all means hold onto any stocks you have in bone companies.)

A look at the basic nature of the trend setting fanzines might well prove instructive. Of the eleven biggies under consideration we find two newszines (a significant percentage), six of what might best be called genzines, (although the Geisian entries walk the line between personalzine and genzine on occasion) and three special interest fanzines (ERB-DOM = Burroughs, NIEKAS = Tolkien and fantasy, AMRA = sword and sorcery.) Possibly the single connecting link in all eleven of these zines is an interest in literary sf of one sort or another. Perhaps here lies a clue to the shape of things to come. A fanzine capable of combining all the essential ingredients of these three different types of fanzines ought to sweep the award with little competition!

At this point some insightful potential BNF is probably clamouring about circulation and since it fits nicely into this point in time (as you Americans say) let us consider this aspect of fannish publication for a moment. The print runs of the fanzines we are considering vary from a low of two hundred and fifty (!) to a high

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"...IT CERTAINLY PAYS TO HAVE FRIENDS..."

of about four thousand. My best calculation of a mean distribution would be about fifteen hundred, although once again trends would indicate that along with breasts, incomes and presidential incompetence a "bigger is better" syndrome is at work in the area of fanzine circulation. There are those who argue that a fanzine with a circulation of less than the fifteen hundred mean figure quoted above has practically no chance of winning a Hugo. Since these people often tend to be the winners and the losers of recent fanzine award contests it behooves us to give their thoughts some serious consideration. (Anomalies such as the victory of a two hundred fifty circulation fanzine just three years ago will be dealt with shortly under the "Special Considerations" section of this paper.)

(As an aside it might be noted that Hugo winning fanzines have appeared as often as twenty or more times in a year and as infrequently as twice a year. It seems to be less a case of How Often as a case of How Many or--just possibly--How Well and hence this aspect of fan publishing shall be ignored. In fact, it's probably best if you don't even read this paragraph at all.)

Now that we have a firm grasp of the basic requirements of successful fanzine production, perhaps we can examine the special characteristics, if any, of the successful candidates of our recent past with an eye to incorporating their keys to success into our own endeavors. It would be foolish indeed to overlook any tactic that has already proven itself in the vicious battlefield of the Hugo ballot. All's fair in love and Hugos, as they say.

ERB-DOM proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that regardless of what you publish it certainly pays to have friends! There's nothing like a dedicated group of loyal supporters all working together to ensure the successful outcome of an election. The

faned who faunches to become a member of the elite of faneds might do well to remember this long-unused but highly effective weapon.

NIEKAS shows us that if you put out issues that are big enough and filled with small enough print, and contain the widest possible variety of material in terms of content and quality, then enough people are going to be intimidated into believing it's first class. "What they don't read can't hurt them" may well be the yellow-brick road for some future publishing jiant.

With AMRA we learn once again never to underestimate the power of concerted voting by special interest groups. The reappearance of this time-honoured technique marks it as a gambit to remember.

With PSYCHOTIC and SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW we are faced with the two pronged attack of C*O*N*T*R*O*V*E*R*S*Y and the gimmick of a back-talking back-stabbing Alter Ego. For the first time the impressive weight of Pro contributors makes itself felt, and as Richard E. Geis is the nonpareil of fanzine award winners we can only conclude that the sight of the top names in any field making fools of themselves in print is fascinating to the majority of fanzine readers. (Insults, it would seem, are sure fire vote getters as long as they're not aimed at the voters themselves.)

The double victory of LOCUS shows clearly that you can't lose with a thousand or so paid subscribers who don't know a fanzine from a roll of toilet paper. Clearly a service publication can be self-serving as well if handled correctly.

ENERGUMEN, that anomalous midget circulation winner, is perfect evidence of one of the most sure fire approaches to the copping of a Hugo rocket. When hopelessly outclassed in terms of distribution, production values and reputation, anyone can win a Hugo as long as his friends are running the worldcon that year!

The ability of ALGOL to slip into the hallowed halls of greatness clearly indicates that money <u>can</u> buy happiness! If you care enough to buy the very best (and beg and plead enough along the way) you too can be a Hugo winner.

Then of course there's another installment and a half of Richard Geis, proving that the time-honoured verities of size, dirty linen, and mindless readers, all liberally doused with showers of money, is still nigh near impossible to beat.

So there you have it: an exhaustive study of the complex psychological and sociological forces that mold the fanzine Hugo winner each year. A careful evaluation of the information conveyed by this analysis should set any faned on the path to greatness, but on the offchance that Bowers is still reading out loud to himself, syllable by painful syllable, allow me to summarize for you.

Putting together all of the clues and hints to be gleamed from the success of the past decade's "best" faneds, we should be able to predict accurately the precise fanzine most likely to win the award in 1977. (The 1976 award is beyond our reach, of course, as the contentious issues have already appeared.) Anyone who wishes to make use of this information is quite welcome to do so: all I ask is a humble 'thank you' in your acceptance speech.

The 1977 fanzine Hugo is open to anyone willing to change his (or her) name to

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Richard Geis immediately after moving to Orlando, Florida and ingratiating him (or her) self with the Suncon committee. This fanzine should have a print run of at least fifteen hundred (although ten thousand would be preferable) and should pay contributors to be rude and childish to each other, all in an offset production with four colour wrap-around covers by a name professional artist. The fanzine should carry a lot of news but ought to appeal to a rather insular but populous special interest group. Editorials begging for a Hugo should be interspersed with controversial material of a general interest nature. All things considered, a general interest mass-circulation offset newszine aimed at Perry Rhodan fans seems unbeatable!

And all this time you thought winning a Hugo was difficult!

-- Michael Glicksohn

2/25/76-HD-AFTER

HÄGAR
The Horrible

FROM THE FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN

C L GRANT

One of the fundamental problems with trends is that by their very nature they are trends before anything can be done to avert, divert or manipulate them into something better than they might be. I am disturbed now, and have been for some while, about a trend I see in science fiction which threatens to disrupt, if not actually subvert, what I consider to be one of its most vital characteristics: exploration of and by the intellect.

Item: several Nebula Banquets ago, Isaac Asimov made a short speech in which he said (claimed, perhaps, is the better word) that sf readers are by and large more intelligent than the general public, primarily because science fiction requires something more than simple casual reading to grasp most, if not all, of its implications, implementations, and so forth. He was roundly applauded. How great it is, we thought, that we are writing for a select group of people whose intelligence must be reasonably high in order to get our messages. It made us feel pretty good, despite the fact that afterthought made me wonder just how oversimplified Dr. Asimov's proclamation was.

Item: a handful of major textbook publishers have been, over the past several years, rewriting some of their basic texts aimed at the college level because they are too hard for a fair percentage of the college population. Standards are being lowered. It is no secret for anyone who reads a daily newspaper or a weekly/monthly newsmagazine that the reading ability of the country's youth is gradually dropping to a point where more than half the country's graduating seniors are reading at least one grade level lower than they were ten years ago.

Item: The New York Times has just completed an intensive survey of American History courses, a survey which compared the retained knowledge of students in two different types of history courses: the linear (or basically chronological course complete with dates, names, battles, laws, etc.) and the concept (in which so-called concepts within history are studied without stress on the linear aspects--mercantilism, for example, or unionism, liberation movements, etc.). Always excepting the 'cream of the crop' students who learn no matter what, the survey (among other things) indicates that today's secondary history student may be well-versed in the

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'concept' training, but sadly lacking in the ability to understand specific major events within the context of the world/national/local situation. In other words, a student may well be able to give us fascinating and even important information concerning the rise and expansion of mercantilism, but he will not, on the average, be able to understand the implications of, say the Indo-China debacle as it concerns the US relationship with not only its own people, but also the world. There is more to the Vietnam War than the fighting of it. The 'concept' student apparently is being short-changed in this area--and most importantly, this student will be part of the generation which provides us with our future Secretary of State, Defence, our Presidents and Congressmen.

What's worse, the courses themselves are on the average less demanding.

Item: at least two publishers in New York have released books which have 'rewritten' Shakespeare so that the ordinary (read 'common') citizen can understand it. "To be or not to be, that is the question..." becomes "I wonder if I should do it or not?"; "Is this a dagger I see before me, its handle toward my hand" becomes "Is that a dagger?" This, so the ordinary citizen can understand it. It makes little difference, of course, that half the enjoyment of even Shakespeare's minor plays is the richness, the complexity, the soaring beauty of the language itself, never mind the levels of symbolism and what have you that are behind it. The King James Version of the Bible has been updated many times because of the inaccuracy of the original translations. Fine. But the Shakespeare thing implies something more to me: that the average citizen doesn't know how to read and/or use a footnote.

The average citizen, by the way, being a college graduate.

Item: Robert Silverberg is leaving the field as a writer.

Item: The above-mentioned author has, if I may paraphrase several comments heard and read, been accused of doing the marble bit: if you guys aren't going to play my way, I'm going to take all my marbles and go home.

Item: after a decade teaching in secondary systems in New Jersey and Connecticut, after visiting/lecturing at systems in these and other states, after libraries and fairs, conventions and conferences, I have seen all too drastically the decline of the public school in the US. Besides the fact that teachers are not policed enough in their continuing education; besides the fact that the tenure system has a major fault so glaring Boards of Education tend to say: I know it's bad but what can we do about it?; the schools are no longer providing their students with sufficient challenge, sufficient motivation to go beyond the state required minimum attendence. The introduction of the mini-course program has lent itself to the college equivilant cop-out: the 'gut' course (let's take this thing so we don't have to do any work). It's also damned hard to fail a student anymore. If he shows up and occupies a desk, he passes. The minimum grade, to be sure, but the guy still passes. By the same token, college education isn't what it used to be, and the old 'sheepskin' is barely worth the paper it's made of. Costs are driving good small schools out of business, and students are forced into the state factories, euphemistically known as universities. There is, belatedly, a 'back to the basics' movement in English, for example, which is laudatory in its intention, and about ten years too late for those who have already been ground through the colleges and are trying to figure out why their company reports, resumes, what have you, are being snickered at.

Barn doors and horses.

Item: Barry Malzberg is leaving the field.

Item: at Philcon in December of last year I spoke with a few fans who were decrying the loss of Silverberg, Malzberg and a couple of others whose names escape me at the moment. They blamed the publishers for not printing, distributing, doing whatever they thought publishers had to do to keep their men in science fiction. I asked one, a young lady of my acquaintance, if she thought something like "Born With The Dead" was the kind of sf she enjoyed reading. She said no, because it was too hard.

Item: Fred Pohl said, in January of this year at an sf fair held by a high school in New Jersey, that science fiction at its best makes you want to think.

Item: Richard Geis, in his GALAXY column (Oct 75) defends 'junk' sf because it is what the reader wants to buy. He also says, and I agree, that 90% of the so-called 'literary' sf is lousy. But that we should place the good 'junk' over the bad 'literary' is the core of this discussion.

This trend I was speaking of several pages back. It is a movement of anti-intellectualism, both in and out of the field, which is sapping that high-flung readership Dr. Asimov embraced at the Nebula Banquet. It is no longer a 'good thing' to be an intellectual, to be a thinker, to be a student of ideas (and not necessarily find instant and practical application for those ideas). It is no longer desireable to push for the high standards of literature needed to convey those ideas. Sure, an 'idea', 'message' whatever, can be couched in 'junk' literature, in novels and stories unoriginal and hackneyed; but that does not redeem the 'junk'.

Junk is junk.

A truly professional writer knows more than anything that his material must entertain the reader first, or that the reader won't stick around long enough to find out what the author has to say. A truly professional writer knows that he doesn't have to have a 'message' in every blessed thing he writes. But a writer is also an inheritor of that which has gone before. He is the heir in profession, if not in skill, of Thackery and Faulkner, Poe and Melville, Shelley and Frost. As such, then, he has a duty (if not an obligation) to work at lifting his material above the mundane to something greater. Whether he makes it or not is dependent upon his abilities, but he has to try. To do less will be a crime.

Against the tradition.

And against the reader.

Does the reader seem to prefer junk? Laser, Perry Rhodan, screaming dozens of titles in every prose form sell consistently. They are commercial. They make money for the editors, the publishers, and the writers. But is the monetary yardstick the measure by which we have to judge? It's beginning to look like that to me.

Is it the reader's fault, then?

Is it the writer's fault?

Yes. To both.

And no.

It's the reader's fault in that he continues to buy the worst kinds of sf in apparent disregard of the finest. I tend to think, however, that he does so less because he prefers it one over the other, than because the society he is growing up in is not presenting him with educational challenges sufficient to carry over into his lesuire reading. If you're not given incentive to perform intellectually, you're not going to do it. Incentive, these days, is unfortunately tied in with...money. What's in it for me? How much? Will it get me ahead, raise my salary, nudge me into that next tax bracket? Read/Learn something just for the hell of it? Nonsense.

I hear it from students constantly: why should I take English Literature/Chemistry/Psychology if it isn't going to help me out...I mean, I'm going to be a mechanic, dentist, real estate agent, math teacher, for crying out loud. Why should I learn about Browning, Dickens, all those dead guys? Learn for the sake of learning, learn to make the world outside my own little universe more comprehensible/interesting--don't be a fool.

Only intellectuals do things like that, and we all know how much money <u>they</u> make.

And it's the writer's fault for not trying hard enough to avoid writing junk. Sometimes he can't help it--a bad idea, used idea, weakness in plotting/characterization/mood skills--all this contributes (and let's not forget, by the way, the editors who buy the junk). But he is forced by economics to survive by writing junk. The economics are determined by the readership, and they are in turn being subverted by the very school systems that proport to educate them.

It's a vicious cycle which leads one easily to the type of thinking that puts the skids on progress: yeah, well that's all well and good to say, but what can <u>I</u> do about it?

Let's back up a minute before we have to state the obvious.

There are a number of people in sf I would like to meet (though I'm not sure the reverse is necessarily true). Among them are Richard Geis, Don D'Ammassa, Keith Justice and Mike Glicksohn. I choose these four not because I agree with everything they say in their letters and magazines (which I don't, and it would be bloody dull if I did, anyway), but because they seem to me to exemplify a group within fandom who are not afraid to challenge the writer when he fails to provide 1) an entertaining piece of material; and 2) an intellectually stimulating piece of material. They are usually quick to penetrate pretention, yet have been (as far as I have read) unquestionably fair in their basic tenets for criticism. I don't know what their ages are, but I suspect that they have long-ago escaped the educational system which is at the bottom of this anti-intellectual movement.

(and if I seem to be contradicting myself in the person of REG, it's because I am, frankly, not completely sure of precisely where he stands on this topic of mine; but I respect him nevertheless)

On the other hand, I have been receiving lately a number of new fanzines (either

new to me, or to the field) in which I find examples here and there of exactly what I'm talking about. Something called BLESSINGGAME, in which the editor claims that authors should be hanged for trying to experiment with new forms, new methods of communicating with the readership.

You're kidding, right?

The rationale is predictable. It's too hard to read.

So hard equals bad.

It goes on.

I foresee, in the not-too-distant future, this new generation of fans spawned by the public schools (US) who will perpetuate the crime of anti-thinking to such an extreme that the newer writers of some skill and merit and with a bent for the intellectual will be driven out before they even have a chance to find their own, distinctive vocies. And when they go, the cry will be: "Good riddance."

But that's because this whole thing depresses me. It depresses me because I can see among the more thoughtful of fans and pros, among the more thoughtful of students in both high school and college, a kind of quiet despair marked by a yearning for more and, because they are not numbered among the 'exceptional' students, need assistence and guidance; and that's exactly what we are not giving them. Not me as a teacher and taxpayer, not you as the same.

This digression, then, leads me back to the question which I should hope the answer is obvious.

What can I do about it?

Well, for one thing you <u>do</u> <u>not</u> play the suplicant and beg the Silverbergs and the Malzbergs to come back all is forgiven.

What you <u>do</u> do is fight fire with fire.

For example. Laser Books. An incredible number of novels being published throughout the year by one company. I have read most of the first dozen, a few of the next dozen, and unless my critical facilities have gone completely haywire I see among them a too-high percentage of just plain poor writing, poorer construction, worse execution. We're not talking here about the competent books--they are to be accepted if only because it ain't that easy just to be competent. But we, as readers, should not accept the rest; we should demand more. Better. The best. You do it by insisting that the level of quality be raised in a continuous curve, not be satisfied with a plateau of competency. You can insist in all the reviews you want, in all the letters you can write, but the best way to insist is through the marketplace. If the series is not living up to expectations, then you just don't buy the stupid books.

For example. The original anthology field. In the past five or six years, dozens of these little devils have popped on and off the book shelves. The marketplace was flooded. Overrun. But there aren't that many any more, and it's harder to get a publisher to agree to a concept like that than it has ever been. Why? Because You, the reader, discovered that a vast majority of these books were not nearly as quality-

ridden as they should have been. You didn't buy the stupid books, and they vanished.

Sure it's hard on the writer; the market has gone--but what's left is more selective, more competitive, and as a result (though not perfect) of a higher quality.

The reader benefits because he's exposed to better material.

The writer benefits because he's forced to produce higher quality.

Let's face it. Writers tend to be lazy. If they can get away with competency, they will; but if the readership (magazine or otherwise) insists on something more, the editor has to make some attempts to provide it or he loses his job, the magazine suffers in circulation, and so forth. Naturally, an editor is limited by the source-pool he draws from. But there is no reason why that pool can't be reasonably stocked. We don't have to have a perfect issue of ANALOG or F&SF every blessed time, but neither should we accept decline if it becomes evident.

I do not mean to suggest, by the way, that by raising the level of science fiction we will raise the educational/intellectual level of the country; it probably won't even do all that much good for New Jersey. However, if we accept this gradual drain, this insidious weakening of our foundations here, there's every good chance that we'll be accepting it in other phases of our lives. And by accepting it, we fall prey to it. And the older generation is not exempt simply because it had the benefit of a superior education (quality, folks, not quantity; and range, not tunneled). The most liberal of our youth tend to become raving conservatives when the 'real world' lays its responsibilities down; and conservative often leads to 'safe', which means not thinking and acting.

Fire with fire.

Excuse: it's what the marketplace demands.

Well, unless they've changed the rules on you, you ARE the marketplace.

Hopefully, then, what would you have if you refused to accept the notion that good 'junk' is better than nothing: you'd have a steady if not spectacular flow of solid, entertaining and skilled science fiction. Within it you would have people interacting with people, ideas, and all that goes with it. At the pinnacle you'd be treated to superior work of consistent quality which would not be evaporated simply because that 'marketplace' couldn't bear it. You might get Silverberg back, and Malzberg, and the others we will surely lose along the way. You might. But if you didn't, you'd be encouraging others to aim higher than mere competency. A few will make it, and those that don't will have nothing to be ashamed of. It goes without saying that there has to be a bottom to all this, that there will inevitably be junk as long as editors are willing (or forced) to buy it and writers are willing (or forced) to produce it. But there's absolutely no excuse for tolerating it, and by not tolerating it you can at least reduce its size/impact.

And that smacks of a crusade.

And if there's one thing most people are leery of, it's crusades. Especially when it deals with the intellect, minds, the intangibles. It borders on endorsement of a type of censorship for the control of a population (Control men's minds, and

all that). No problem. I admit it up front. It is a crusade, and it does more than border on endorsement. Trends, unfortunately, are often subtle symtoms consisting of diverse factors which do not become readily apparent until, as I said at the opening, it's too late (assuming there's anything to be too late about, of course). A crusade is a loud and boisterous thing which has as a primary characteristic the need to call attention to itself. It would seem, then, that to counter a trend which isn't necessarily manifest or apparently vitally important at its outset, one needs to call it to people's attention. Make them aware of it.

It and its ramifications.

And the trouble with that is, few people are willing to take the long view about anything that doesn't directly and materially affect their lives--as much as many of us like to talk about the future, we seldom work at it beyond the three score and ten we may or may not have. It's not, after all, our problem because we'll be dead.

But my son won't be. And neither will yours.

As members of a community specializing in the future, I would think that we'd have long ago spotted this trend, spotted it and stamped it out. Anti-intellectualism is a disease of a society that has begun fumbling for a direction lost; it's a disenchantment with, among other things, unchecked and untempered liberalism. And it's dangerous if we expect to survive as creatures distinguishable from sheep.

And if science fiction has begun losing its direction...

-- C. L. Grant

A PEACE CREEP

See the furry peace creep
    give the victory sign;
his hair is long and tangled
    but his head is doing fine.
Too bad this easy rider
    is so easy to malign
by the folks who brought you Vietnam
    and so on down the line.

-- Neal Wilgus

JUST PIDDLING ALONG

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

A farmer dog came into town, his christian name was Runt.
A noble pedigree had he, "Noblesse Oblige" his stunt.
And as he trotted down the street, 'twas beautiful to see.
His work at every corner, his work at every tree.

He watered every gateway too, and never missed a post.
For Piddling was his specialty, and Piddling was his boast.
The city curs looked on amazed, with deep and jealous rage,
To see a simple country dog, the piddler of the age.

Then all the dogs from everywhere, were summoned by a yell,
To sniff the country stranger o'er, and judge him by his smell.
Some thought that he a king might be, beneath his tail a rose,
So every city dog drew near, and sniffed it up his nose.

They smelled him over one by one, they smelled him two by two,
And noble Runt in high disdain, stood still till they were through.
Then just to show the whole shebang, he didn't give a damn,
He trotted to a grocery store, and piddled on a ham.

He piddled on the mackeral keg, he piddled on the floor,
And when the Grocer kicked him out, he piddled through the door.
Behind him all the city dogs, lined up with instinct true,
To start a piddling carnival, and see the stranger through.

They showed him every piddling post they had in all the town,
And statred with many a wink, to Pee the stranger down.
They sent for champion piddlers, who were always on the go,
Who sometimes did a piddle stunt, or gave a piddling show.

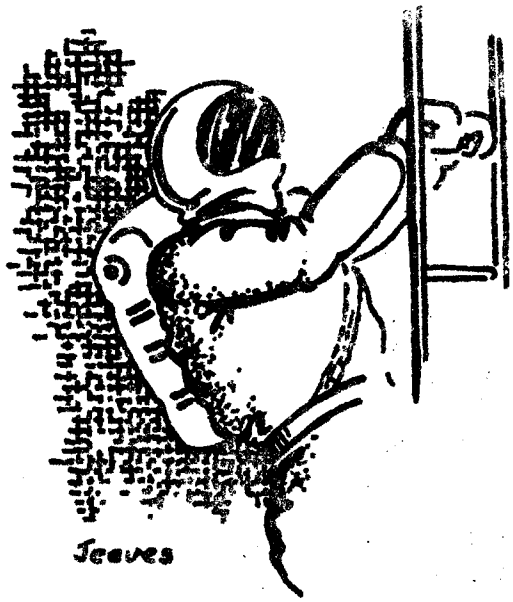
They sprung these on him suddenly, when midway in the town,
Runt only smiled and polished off, then the ablest white of brown.
For Runt was with them every trick, with vigor and with vim,
A thousand piddlers, more or less, were all the same to him.

So he was wetting merrily, with hind legs kicking high,
When most were hoisting legs in bluff, and piddling mighty dry.
Then on and on Runt sought new grounds, by piles of scrap or rust,
Till every city dog went dry, and only piddled dust.

But on and on went noble Runt, as wet as any rill,
And when the champion city pups were peed to a stand still,
Then Runt did free hand piddling, with fancy flirts and flings,
Like "double drip" and "gimlet twist", and all those graceful things.

And all this time that country dog did never wink or grin,
And piddled blithely out of town, as he came piddling in.
The city dogs convention held to ask "what did defeat us",
But no one ever put them wise that Runt had diabetes.

-- author unknown



THE NEAR FUTURE OF MAN IN SPACE

D GARY GRADY

A widespread belief which has surfaced in recent months is the impression that US manned spaceflight is a thing of the past. Furthermore, this is, in the eyes of many, a Good Thing. After all (their reasoning goes) we have a hell of a lot of problems right here on Earth. Why do we need to spend billions to go out there and find out how old the Moon is or do some similarly worthless piece of timewasting research? Pointing out that the annual flow of funds through HEW is more than twice the combined total cost of Projects Mercury, Gemini, Apollo, Skylab, and Apollo-Soyuz is not likely to faze them. Though they may agree that spending some small fraction of the budget on space is justified, they automatically define the existing proportion as too large.

This anti-pure-research attitude is properly called the crisis management philosophy. Cross that bridge when you come to it. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. And so forth. The end result of such a philosophy is that every new crisis catches us unprepared. It is interesting to note that the opponets of the space program, and technology and science in general, seem to ignore the fact that most of the problems we have are not entirely new. They are things that have been perceived as hazards only with the advent of scientific and technological techniques--including space research--which enable us to grasp subtle threats.

When pressed with the more obvious benefits of space exploration (large scale surveying by satellite is about 100 times cheaper than by plane, for example) these cosmic isolationists do sometimes grudgingly concede that we have benefited from the programs. But why, we are asked, waste money on manned exploration when unmanned flight is just as useful? Adherents of this shortsighted vies include some major names; Carl Sagan, for one.

Despite their efforts, manned space flight is hardly at an end. The Soviets will continue to fly their Soyuz-Salyut system in the forseeable future, I expect, and some impressive ideas are appearing on this side of the world also.

Colonization of the solar system is already a topic of serious research and planning. The Moon will probably be first, perhaps followed by Mercury. (I have always felt that the solar energy and mineral resources of Mercury would make a polar colony there a paying proposition. I wonder if I'll get any credit for the idea?)

A little more esoteric was the recently broached proposal of building spinning cylindrical colonies at Lagrangian points L4 and L5. These points are gravitational nodes in space first computed by the mathematician Lagrange (hence, obviously, the name). An object placed at any of the Lagrangian points is in gravitational equilibrium with the Earth, Moon, and Sun. At L4 and L5 a slight displacement tends to produce a return to the point, and this stable equilibrium would make the Lagrangian points a very practical place for a space colony. NASA is looking into this, considering the possibility of putting space factories into these colonies.

Space factories seem to be the coming thing. Representative Olin Teague (Democrat, Texas) predicts space manufacturing will be a fifty billion (constant) dollar a year concern by the end of the century. Money aside, Dr. Krafft Ehricke of NASA points out that space industry in the only chance we have of developing the Third World (as they demand) without ecological catastrophe (as we would prefer to avoid).

A not too frequently mentioned advantage of extraterrestrial colonization is the protection it offers us. When and if we <u>do</u> manage to blow ourselves up, or otherwise end the life of this species on Earth, there would be someone, somewhere to carry on.

But what's coming up in the <u>near</u> future that would indicate that the U.S. manned spaceflight program is still with us?

In a word, the Shuttle. We are steadily moving toward the developement of the orbital version of mass transit. Although the first launch is a good three to five years away, the fact that we <u>are</u> working on it is solid evidence of the health of the space effort.

Most pictures of the Shuttle make it look rather small, like a Cessna 140 or something. It will be, in fact, roughly the size of a DC-9. The cargo area will compare favorably to that of the transport version of the 707. It will carry a good sized crew in separate control and passenger compartments.

You may not have known that the Shuttle is strictly a near-Earth orbit vehicle. It cannot, for example, reach a synchronous orbit. Fortunately, a space tug is being developed which will ride in the Shuttle's cargo bay and act as a high-orbit unmanned retriever for the mother ship.

The U.S. is not the only projected user of the versatile Shuttle. The European Space Research Organization (ESRO) plans several programs of its own. One of these, Spacelab, will be a built-in space station for the Shuttle cargo bay. Participants in Spacelab include Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and Spain. (With that mixture of languages perhaps someone will convince them to adopt Esperanto.) The projected cost is in the neighborhood of

$400,000,000.

Now comes the good part. All this is going to shove what the unmanned operation freaks have been saying down their collective throats, hopefully producing the greatest chorus of choking since the premier of Time Tunnel.

Remember the first U.S. satellite launch? Explorer cost something like $100,000 per pound, pre-inflation, to put into orbit. The Shuttle could deliver a much larger payload for about $160 a pound, with each Shuttle launch running $10,500,000.

In program terms, the cost of "unmanned" projects will be cut substantially. The ERTS launches, for example, would have run 38% cheaper with the Shuttle. Most communications satellite systems would be around 42% cheaper.

So why not just build an unmanned Shuttle? Ah, here's the point: Shuttle programs are cheaper only partly because of the reusability of the launch vehicle. NASA studied 131 satellite failures occuring immediately after launch and determined that 78 of them could have been repaired by the crew in the Shuttle. The others could have been brought back for a factory adjustment. Moreover, each flight could involve the launching, repair, and recovery of dozens of satellites. With servicing a practicality, it would no longer be necessary to build satellites quite no near-perfect.

So the truth is finally out: Manned space flight is not only more romantically appealing and more productive, it is cheaper, too!

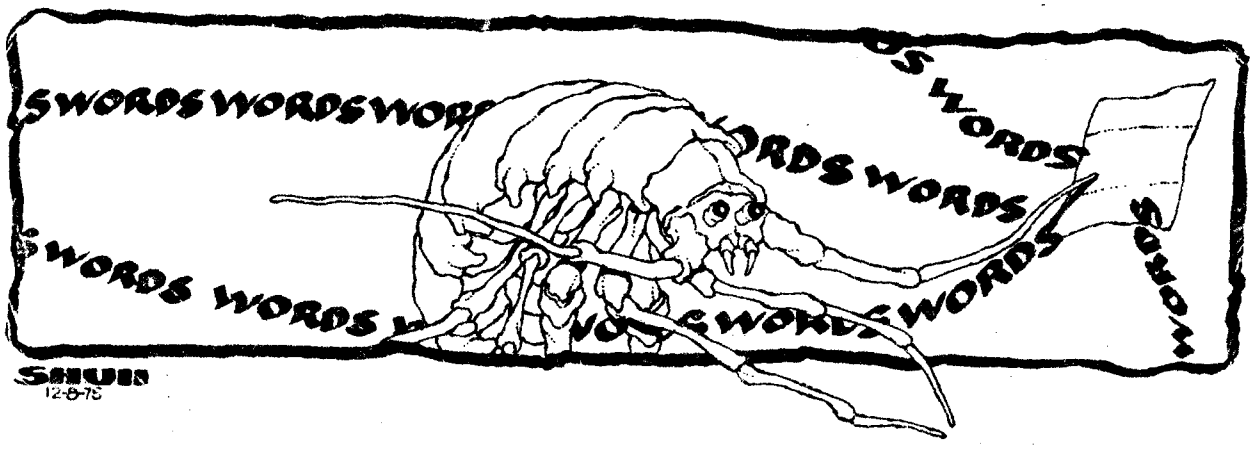
And it doesn't hurt to add that the Shuttle will create jobs here on Earth. Fifty thousand of them, NASA estimates.

Now this is a touchy subject. It can be shown that other types of government spending directly generate perhaps up to (on the outside) twice as many jobs. Does this mean that the jobs argument is not valid? Not exactly. The reason for the difference in numbers is simple arithmetic. The average aerospace worker is quite well-paid. Obviously, a given quantity of money will employ fewer of them than os, say, teachers. But this is deceptive. Employing people in space-related industries may be a less-than-perfect way to attack unemployment, but it is an excellent way to attack underemployment. An aerospace worker is generally performing at his or her full potential. Any other job that worker happened to hold would be a step down the employment ladder. That would bump someone else to a lower position, and so on. The effects of underemployment are not as well-documented as those of unemployment, but they are nevertheless significant. (In any event, the space program will not markedly effect the economy of the nation until space factories go into operation in a decade or two.)

Arthur C. Clarke has noted that all major advances in history have gone through three phases of public reaction: (1) It can't possibly be done. (2) Well, I knew they could do it, but it's just a waste of time and money. (3) I said it was a good idea all along.

We should move into stage three fairly soon now.

-- D. Gary Grady



Ted White, Falls Church, VA

The comments on the previously published article on VERTEX interested me. Someone showed me the issue in which that piece appeared while I was at the Philycon last December and I recall thumbing through it to see if my name was mentioned (I had one story in VERTEX), but if it was I guess I missed it. I'd agree with most of the criticisms leveled at the piece, but I can't agree with Rick Wilber, who comes on with the Revealed Word on VERTEX's failure (commercial failure) and doesn't appear to know what he's talking about.

"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 expensive a press run without a significant amount of advertising support." That's errant nonsense on the face of it.

Only the people at Mankind Pubs can give us any of the real inside dope on why VERTEX didn't succeed, but some of that information has leaked out. I don't pretend to have the Revealed Word myself, but let's consider several facts and rumors:

First, a lot of people in the publishing field thought VERTEX was doomed from the start--but not because of the pretty package. There is a superstition (rather well based in historical fact) that no sf (or fantasy) magazine published on the West Coast can succeed. In fact, none ever has. SPACEWAY, COVEN 13, VERTEX--I'm leaving some out--none of these magazines, all West Coast-based, made it. I don't really know if the fact that they were published from the West Coast made the difference (it's more likely that other factors were more important), but it's become a popular trueism that sf mags published on the West Coast can't and won't make it. So a lot of people who hold this opinion felt themselves justified in holding it when VERTEX folded.

In truth, I think VERTEX's distribution was its weakest link. VERTEX had a very

weak national distributor--a West Coast outfit which is primarily a distributor of hard and soft-core pornography. For that reason VERTEX appeared primarily on the newsstands of retailers who do a brisk business in pornographic magazines and books --at least on the East Coast. (I once heard that more than half of VERTEX's sales were in California.) New Yorkers told me VERTEX was impossible to find in that city. It was hard to find in DC too. It's an old story, but magazines which aren't well-displayed aren't going to sell well.

But VERTEX (at least initially) was claiming very high sales. Sales equal to ANALOG's. I have no way of knowing the truth of this myself, but my publisher (Sol Cohen) totally disbelieved such slaims--and he has been indistribution since the late 1930's, and has access to much inside information.

What Wilber seems to be ignoring in his diatribe on packaging and advertising is that VERTEX was published by a company which puts out a lot of other magazines on slick paper with color printing. One of these is MANKIND. I don't buy MANKIND, so I have no idea how much advertising it carries--my impression is that it doesn't have a lot. More important, VERTEX's publisher was a major West Coast publisher of pornographic magazines and pseudo-porn: the slick-paper, many pages of full-color, "nudist", skin, and hard-core pornographic magazines. The major difference between those magazines and VERTEX (content aside) was that VERTEX cost $1.50 a copy; the others went for $5.00 to $10.00 a copy.

Pfeil's original proposal to his publisher was a sf-oriented porn magazine. His publisher (whose own ties to sf go back more than twenty-five years) suprised him by coming back with the suggestion that they do a <u>real</u> sf magazine.

Now I'm sure his publisher did not get where he is by ignoring the economic realities of publishing. I imagine he set up a budget and determined that if a certain percentage of copies of each issue sold at the price of $1.50, he would break even--and above that point sales would equal profits. VERTEX's publisher either owns or has access to one of the best printing plants on the West Coast. I'm sure he took the cost of packaging into account when the cover price of $1.50 was decided upon.

I doubt very much that the advertising was ever expected to support the magazine. No sf magazine has ever succeeded on advertising support--although Conde Nast tried to do just that with the bedsheet-sized ANALOG of the early sixties.

Without access to the actual circulation figures of the magazine, and a knowledge of its breakeven point--which may have been too high, but certainly wasn't over 100% (as was Harvey Kurtzman's TRUMP--the magazine Hugh Hefner published for two issues in the late 50's)--I can't say whether VERTEX was succeeding before the paper crisis hit. I heard rumors of refinancing, but no magazine can expect instant sales success (SPORTS ILLUSTRATED ran in the red for nearly ten years), and certainly no sf magazine should be expected to become a success in its first year. The second-year figures on VERTEX would be the more significant ones.

However, the paper squeeze was very real there for a while. And I imagine it came down to this for VERTEX's publisher: "We have X amount of slick paper and that's not enough for all our magazines. Which ones should we short? The $10.00 books, or that $1.50 one?" Such a choice is no choice at all. VERTEX lost. So the decision is made to try a tabloid format. It was a disaster, to the surprise of no one I knew. DC's major newsstand--which had carried VERTEX since its first issue--threw the bale

of tabloid VERTEX's in a corner, unopened. Readers stayed away from those issues in droves.

Wilber wishes they'd started right out with tabloid issues. I'm grateful they didn't. A tabloid format implies certain things to most readers, primary among them Impermanence. Tabloid formats are for frequent (weekly, biweekly) papers which you throw away after reading. (Try keeping a stack of tabloid papers--like the old ROLLING STONE--for any length of time. They won't stack neatly, can't be stood on a shelf, and very quickly become ragged and worn, ending up resembling a stack of old newspapers.)

Sf readers more often than not keep the magazines and books they buy. I have only the first two tabloid VERTEXs (I never found a copy of the third one--if it was published); they are already, despite the care I've exercised with them, becoming yellowed and raggedy. And they don't look like sf magazines. They look like non-fiction tabloids.

The kiss of death.

To be sure, economics killed VERTEX. But not "an outrageously expensive format." That format was probably all that kept the magazine alive as long as it did survive.

A few other thoughts on VERTEX. One, the science articles were not on the same level as most of those which have appeared in other sf magazines. They were neither ANALOG-type, nor Asimov-F&SF-type, much less the "Science in SF" variety which I run in AMAZING. They were popular science articles written by Pfeil under a pseudonym in order to increase his income from a given issue.

Second, I have mixed thoughts about the quality of the material which appeared in VERTEX. On the one hand, Pfeil bought my own "Sixteen and Vanilla," a story which several editors (Terry Carr, Harlan Ellison, Damon Knight) rejected as not sf enough (or, as Knight put it, "we don't publish stories like this"), but which I remain stubbornly convinced is one of the better stories I've written. On the other hand, Pfeil bought a lot of stories which I had already rejected--although I was offering 1¢ or 2¢ a word and he was paying 5¢. In many cases, I thought them dreadful stories. Oh well; tastes vary.

In any case, the field is diminished by the loss of VERTEX, every bit as much as by the loss of IF.

Keith Justice, Rt 3, Box 42, Union, Miss 39365

I do indeed have a tendency to overkill, to belabor and explain a point into the ground, but faults must first be discovered and acknowledged before attempts can be made to correct them. The feedback has been valuable and appreciated, but some people (perhaps by my own fault of overwriting) failed to see what I was saying in a few minor cases.

Mr. Wilber; I didn't mean to give the impression that a tabloid format is worthless. What I said was that the VERTEX tabloid format seemed to be sloppily handled. I have a complete run of VERTEX, slick issues and tab, and the difference in the

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quality of the layout is amazing.

Mr. Fahnestalk; I didn't say that there was no precedent for science in sf--I simply question the validity of their juxtaposition. There are more technical journals than sf magazines, and though I may be alone (I suspect, however, that I am not), I don't care to buy sf magazines to read about the latest advances in thermodynamics. I wasn't foisting off my prejudices, but merely pointing out that the POSSIBLE motivation for the inclusion of such science pieces could be a sort of innate and unconscious snobbery. Certainly ANALOG is the biggest selling sf magazine--but does anybody ever wonder why? I did, and concluded that it might be because people might still believe that an offering of some good solid science in a magazine of fiction might make it more 'respectable'. And let's face it, literary respect is not a thing that sf has enjoyed much of until just recently.

Also, I wasn't blasting the artwork per se--but common sense tells me that 2 to 3 pages of illustration for a story with barely enough text to cover a page and a half is going overboard. But then perhaps my common sense has gone all haywire.

Eric Lindsay; Shame, shame. Hard science has had its fling in hundreds of books, and few of them were better off for it. All-science books such as RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA--books which have characters only in a secondary capacity, almost as an afterthought--and which are entertaining and successful are rare. The hard science that does appear in sf novels often strangles the story (THE PLASTIC EATERS, ANDROMEDA STRAIN, etc) though this is not to say that the stories don't have a thumping good element of excitement. My own conception of hard science wedded successfully to characterization is something on the order of THE LATHE OF HEAVEN. Ms. Le Guin's research on sleep is interesting and quite convincing, at least from a lay standpoint. My own opinion, of course, and I foist it off on no one.

Mr. Glicksohn; I don't think I looked at what VERTEX should have been, but at what it could have been. A fine distinction, perhaps an unexplainable one. I felt that it had much more potential--but then perhaps it didn't, in which case I was reading the potential into it when it wasn't there--in which case you are right. What a tangled web we weave. Also see above the remarks on the inclusion of science in a fiction magazine.

John M. Robinson, c/o Dee Berry, 1144 Park Ave, Alameda, CA 94501

Allow me, please, a few pedantic comments on Keith L. Justice's column in KNIGHTS 15: it was an intriguing piece and highly readable as well as perfectly stapled, so it is only natural I should wish to comment on it.

First, on the death of the short story: this is substantially but unnecessarily true and the reasons for it as well as the reasons for its flourishing in science fiction are related. In the 1920's Ernest Hemingway stole some story ideas from his vastly richer mentor Sherwood Anderson (compare, for instance big Ernie's "Up in Michigan" with Anderson's "Nobody Knows") and pared down any inessentials. In other words, Hemingway followed the example of Chekov, or Joyce's dictum of "scrupulous meaness" to an extreme. Often, for Hemingway, it worked. Unfortunately everyone else took off from his example. Only a few people avoided Hemingway's sort of stories: Faulkner in things like "That Evening Sun" or Virginia Woolf who opted for a sort of

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prose-poem method of short-storytelling. Another would be Flannery O'Connor who certainly belongs to a category unto herself.

Science fiction avoided this mimicking stagnation somehow: perhaps due to its rather cliquish nature or the fact that it has never had a writer who believed in "scrupulous meaness" in their short stories. I suspect however that the bedrock reason is because, for good or ill, science fiction has never been regarded as art.

The short story certainly need not die, in science fiction or otherwise: it simply needs to be liberated and allow for more personal expression of the sort Vonnegut or Pynchon display.

Also, in passing, I must say that don Justice's supposition that the universe is unaffected by man as a self-evident proposition is, kindly, a trifle naive. I would have whipped through it, assuming the author was only half-serious except for the remark "I suspect that there will be few arguments," etc. Isn't our amigo here making the rather hasty assumption that man's effect on the universe will be (A) immediate, and (B) visible. More to the point, this issue, like God, is both unknown and unknowable (unless Mr. Justice has some inside info he's holding back from his, er, friends?)

Using Vonnegut as evidence of this belief in modern writing seems rather peculiar and suggests a misapprehension on the part of Mr. Justice or myself (in case of a tie I vote that Justice is miscarried) concerning Vonnegut's work. Vonnegut's universe may be a practical joke, but only by terrestrial standards, and it is never pointless in Camus' sense of the absurd. In THE SIRENS OF TITAN not only do the universe and man interact and mutually effect each other but the Tralfamadorians provide some sense of meaning to the world. In SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE the Tralfamadorians offer the old theory of predestination: there are no why's but just a lot of is's. Now I may be out on a limb here; I used to think that Vonnegut was merely nihilistic and sardonic but further thought seems to belie this suggestion. Vonnegut's universe always has some sense to it. His God, as Mr. Justice suggests, may not be much more than a cosmic P.T. Barnum but he at least isn't the God of mere chance like Thomas Hardy's.

I like Mr. Justice's theory about world-travelling vis-a-vis a multi-sided reaction to issues. Bears thought.

But (ah, you knew it was coming, didn't you?) this idea that we are suddenly besieged by literary crappola compared to the work of Faulkner, Twain, Hardy, Lewis (in fact, I'm not that crazed over dear Sinclair, if that's who is meant. I always wondered what the hell he was doing in lists of important modern authors or how a jerk who worried about the sort of things that might have kept Charles Dickens awake at night but certainly no one else was ever voted the same prestigious literary prize that went to the author of THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN or the author of THE SOUND AND THE FURY? Eh!) is silly. There was plenty of crappola in the days of the aforementioned. As usual though the crap falls by the wayside with time. Presumably in fifty or sixty years people will be asking "Jacqueline Who wrote Valley of the What??!!" while names like Vonnegut, Pynchon, Heller, Salinger, or Brautigan will be well remembered.

Finally, and most importantly I am at odds with the idea that "emotion" sets off good sf from bad sf or as Mr. Justice puts it in Aristotelian terms, "something

to think about and something to feel". Besides the vagueness of the words "emotion" or "feel" I cannot understand why people like Huxley, Clarke, Sturgeon, Ellison or Vonnegut (Vonnegut!!?? Jesus Christ, what's HE doin' in there?) are stuck in there, though I can certainly understand how Bradbury fits in and Orwell too, sort of.

I mean, my idea of your typical Asimov character is a nifty, entertaining stick figure ala Dickens. Clarke can't even create characters that interesting and are seldom more than mouthpieces. Huxley and Sturgeon are funny, sure, but emotion? Do you really give a shit what happens to the Savage? Probably not as much as Wiston Smith, eh?

And Vonnegut! Here is a guy that out-Brecht's Brecht in pushing the reader away from the work. He doesn't want personal involvment between reader and character. Vonnegut writes like a G.B. Shaw after a very weird weekend with Hunter S. Thompson. Beyond the level of intellectual bemusement who cares about his characters? Do you cry when Billy Pilgrim gets blasted away? How about Eliot Rosewater's fate of horrible sanity? I'm not criticizing Vonnegut for this: it's a perfectly valid literary device: it's part of the point of all the literary engineering in Joyce's ULYSSES: to get the reader to stand back from the action and see it at a comic distance from an Olympian height. Bud vhat iz diz emotional shtuff?

Or Heinlein. Come on! Emotional. My idea of a novel with "something to think about something to feel" would be TO THE LIGHTHOUSE or THE SOUND AND THE FURY or STEPPENWOLF or the poetry of Yeats or Dylan Thomas. This is the sort of thing that knocks you on your ass and you come up saying, "What an incredible insight. Let me think about this sonuvabitch!"

I haven't run across this in science fiction yet. Bradbury comes the closest but he only knocks me out, there isn't enough to think about to revive me. I read him constantly and repeatedly the way I would constantly order a favorite dish at a restaurant or (more perversely) the way some people presumably take a drug. I get a rush off him, but it's purely an emotional one.

Ellison I can marvel at for his superb gift of invention but he sure as hell doesn't draw me into his stories. They're just there to go through and think about. I think Ellison is, in this way, like most science fiction writers (which puts Bradbury out on a lonely promontory): the idea is of central concern to them. Which is okay as far as I'm concerned. If sf writers wrote like Faulkner, how many current fans would read it. Can you imagine reading STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND if it were written in one long book-length sentence? Hmmm? This makes science fiction unique and a chance of pace but not better or worse that so-called "mainstream" fiction (and who dreamed up that unspeakable expression, anyhow?).

I see that, in my usual fashion, I have run off at the typewriter to paraphrase a cliche but these are a few of my thoughts on Mr. Justice's piece. I hope I have done it (gulp) justice.

Don D'Ammassa, 19 Angell Dr, E. Providence, RI 02914

I enjoyed Keith Justice's piece particularly, even though I disagreed with large

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sections of it. For example, Keith says that the theme of man against society is overworked. Well, to some extent possibly, but all of the fundamental themes of literature are overworked, because there are essentially so few. All literature, I suspect, can be reduced to either man against himself, man against man, man against society, or man against the natural universe. Or woman against...etc. Neither do I agree that mainstream novels are given a great deal of hype not found in the sf genre. Sf hypes its works just as much as any other field. Read the blurbs on paperbacks: "By two time Hugo winner", "the Dean of sf", "A science fiction masterwork", "in the tradition of DUNE, CHILDHOOD'S END, etc." It's all hype. It's just not as successful for sf, because the appeal of sf is more limited.

Keith is obviously correct that little "worthwhile" fiction is produced, proportionally, in the mainstream lately. But that has always been true. For every VANITY FAIR there is a HENRY ESMOND. 90% of everything is, was, and always will be crud. Keith's criticism of modern literature is marred by the fact that he cites no specific examples, does not illustrate the shortcomings of these works.

Even where he is fairly specific, his points are subjective, not objective. Mailer does produce some good fiction, most notably THE NAKED AND THE DEAD. And Keith fails to mention that excellent books have been written by John Barth, J.P. Donleavy, James Baldwin, Saul Bellow, John Knowles, Mary Renault, Mary Stewart, Donald Barthelme, John Gardner, William Goldman, Richard Brautigan, and, occasionally, even Louis Auchinsloss and John Updike. And I disagree that ANDROMEDA STRAIN was emotionally flat. Emotionally suppressed, for quite legitimate purposes, but not flat.

Neither do I believe that memorable stories are necessarily "good". I can remember quite distinctly some novels I read over a decade ago, and I remember them specifically because they were so awful.

C.L. Grant overlooks two factors in the problem of feedback to pros by fans. First, many pros don't care what the fans think, to some extent justifiably. Second, and causing to some extent the first, most fans don't express their reactions appropriately. I've seen letters attacking Ellison's fiction on the basis that he is obnoxious in public, for example.

What makes Cy Chauvin say that SHOCKWAVE RIDER is in the "Dos Passos" mode? It isn't. It's a straight narrative/flashback treatment. I agree with Cy that the novel is for the most part dual, but it has no structural relationship with, say, STAND ON ZANZIBAR, which was written in the style of Dos Passos.

Although I agree in principle with Barry Malzberg's comments on Kuttner, it is only fair to add that Kuttner didn't really sell "scores of novels". There were six mystery novels, and possibly a score of sf novels, if you're exceptionally liberal in interpreting word length. Kuttner <u>is</u>, however, a major influence, as the frequency with which his stories are reprinted sttests. He's not likely to be forgotten.

Frank Denton fails to point out one very good reason for reading outside the genre--perspective. It is quite obvious from remarks one reads in fanzines that many fans have very little familiarity with mainstream, yet feel perfectly qualified to pontificate upon it. This remark is not, incidentally, directed at Keith Justice, who appears to be fairly knowledgeable about other fields.

Why does Cy Chauvin continue to insist that "sf" has to have a precise meaning? A too restrictive meaning is worse than no meaning at all.

For Sam Long's benefit, I once wrote a short article on Martin Caidin, which implied that he stole all of his ideas. THE GOD MACHINE came out right after COLOSSUS, FOUR CAME BACK came out right after ANDROMEDA STRAIN, etc.

Pauline Palmer, 2510 48th, Bellingham, WA 98225

Lovely issue, beautiful covers in and out, plus a much more practical binding package (but still far too many typos throughout the copy). Also, I was particularly impressed by both of the Mike Streff drawings.

I've found C.L. Grant's columns in these last few KNIGHTS to be quite interesting, and I very much enjoyed Thomas F. Monteleone's column as well this time. For me they were the highpoints of the issue.

Grant is perhaps right in saying that fans should write reactions to the authors they most enjoy (certainly everyone needs some egoboo to keep going), but on the other hand if, as he mentions, an sf author who is aware of the fan press chooses to NOT read zines which contain comment/reaction to his or her work, that particular author's need for feedback must not be too great. Of course, while this may not mean that the same author would not appreciate a personal letter, it would make it less likely that a fan would be motivated to write one--in which case one means of communication has been arbitrarily cut off and another has been, whether intentionally or not, discouraged.

Amusing, incidentally, that Grant mentions Brunner specifically as having been responsive to personal communication, considering the response from Brunner you've printed on page 52.

Alas, Patrick Hayden's reaction to Grant's column last issue reflects much more negatively on himself than on Grant.

"The Mothers And Fathers Italian Association," including the delightful explanation of the title, is an excellent column--well written, entertaining, informative. As for feedback: all the possible subjects Monteleone suggests for future columns sound promising. And equally appealing is his comment earlier in the column that he may use it as a forum for "burning issues" or fragmented thoughts. I look forward to his future MAFIAs.

All in all, Mike, KNIGHTS gives the definite impression of maturing, both as a zine and as an expression of its editor. Well done.

Jerry Pournelle, Studio City, CA

Of course, one looks for one's name, and lo, I find comments on my letter to a previous KNIGHTS--and, sigh, I find them incomprehensible, because I don't remember what I said in the previous issue. Paper being what it is, fanzines in this house

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tend to be collected in the attic (unless my son takes them away to his room, in which almost nothing can ever be located again); and time being what it is, I can't go looking anyway. Ah, well, it couldn't have been important.

Charlie Grant, as always, is cogent and has the good sense to capture much of the essence of this crazy business. Mr. Heinlein once told me we're all professional gamblers, which is true; and I suspect it would make conversations with mundanes easier if we just said that. Charlie's reconstruction of the conversation with a non-writer is unfortunately accurate; so much so that I found myself thinking of what I would say to the chap who keeps asking, "yeah, but what do you DO?"

"I cover sheets of paper with words, take them to a xerox house, put a copy in an envelope, seal it with tape and string, and mail it to my agent who eventually sends me money. Next question?"

I do wish fans would stop worrying about SFWA. We don't, as one of your commentators implies, do very much "dirty work" that I know of, unless trying to keep publishers from screwing writers is "dirty work". Much of that IS done in private, and for damned good reasons.

On that score, I see Glicksohn departs from his usual high standards when mentioning SFWA; he's not unusual in that regard. I don't know why, but whenever SFWA comes up, some of the most respectable and otherwise fair people, who would never make vague and unspecific charges against anyone or anything else, and would be horrified if anyone esle did it--will de precisely that.

As did Glicksohn. I won't say that SFWA has never bargained collectively with any fan conventions, because of course we have, and do; but Glicksohn makes this sound as if something horrible has happened, only now things are "on the basis of mutual benefit, which is how it should be" implying that past actions weren't. Possibly he's right, although I think I know of most situations in which SFWA has "pressured" con committees; and I wouldn't, myself, have said that out "pressure" wasn't to "mutual benefit". I'd have thought, myself, that if we're going to be charged with various offenses, the charge ought to be made specific, with at least some reference to when, and by whom, whatever it was we're supposed to have done was accomplished.

Incidentally, I remain unrepentant in one regard: I believe writers ought to be represented on any group that disposes of the profits from a convention. Not that we ought to have a final say on disposition of those profits, or anything like that; but that we damned well ought to be represented, and have a chance to be heard, and have a vote in the disposition, before the money is given away. I doubt there'd be much <u>profit</u> from any convention without writer participation; Lord knows, in the old days con coms did not hesitate to call on writers to bail them out when <u>losses</u> were expected.

Furthermore, I see no reason why conventions cannot and should not provide certain services to writers who attend--provided that the convention can afford to do it, of course. The principal request SFWA makes of large conventions is that a suite be provided for exclusive use of writers. It has inevitably been the policy of SFWA that the "SFWA Suite" is available to non-member writers, and that the convention committee and staff and panelists are generally welcome. Nearly every other organization that puts on big conventions has a place for the speakers and convention of-

ficers; sure, we go a bit further and invite all writers whether on the program or not; but what's wrong with that?

In the old days, the bar was the meeting place for writers. In the old days, either there were fewer fans at cons, or those attending had better manners, or both; certainly things have changed now. It seems to be a law of cons that writers cannot sit in the bar without everyone who recognizes them feeling free to join the conversation...and feeling very put upon if not instantly made welcome. Now sure: under the new dispensation, with the SFWA suite available for more private conversations, there's nothing wrong with that, and most writers rather enjoy attention from fans...but if we didn't have the blasted suite, just where would we get together to lie to each other about our advances?

Not to mention something I've said before, that conventions can be cruel places for new writers; again, things are so large that many parties are closed, fan as well as other, and just where else does the new chap, with one or two works in print, feel welcome? It's one reason I invented the SFWA suite during my administration, and it's one reason I for one will continue to insist on the institution so long as the con can afford it.

(As to the oft-mentioned query, why shouldn't the con provide a place for neofen, my reply is simple enough: I've no objection, but why ask me? Is that seriously meant that SFWA ought to "put pressure" on con committees on matters not directly affecting writers? To ask that question is to show how silly it is. Those who want various other special services should apply to the convention committees, who, after all, really do run the conventions; SFWA doesn't, won't, wouldn't want to, wouldn't be wanted to, can't, isn't interested...can I make it stronger? We don't operate fan conventions. We do, sometimes, represent the interests of writers as a group. Shouldn't we?)

Incidentally, I find one comment amusing: the bit about how so many writers don't find SFWA worthwhile. Possibly. Certainly true in some cases. The amusing part is when someone joins, and we find that in the same instant the newcomer, who has ignored us for a couple of years, has this problem with a publisher, and wouldn't the Grievance Committee give some advice...

(We always do, of course; but it doesn't make it less amusing.)

Mike Glicksohn, 141 High Park Ave, Toronto, Ontario m6p 2s3 CANADA

If anything, KNIGHTS 15 is your most impressive issue yet, which makes it ~~ironic~~ (sorry, the tv is on in the background) ironic that it contains your announcement of your new editorial policy. Not that I don't approve of what you said, because it epitomizes what I've always said above fanzines; do your own thing is the only possible editorial policy that can keep a faned coming back issue after issue to the mind-numbing work that is involved in the production of a fanzine.

Production values this time are good to excellent! The covers are superb! Randy Mohr is fast becoming one of the fan artists to watch. Artistically I'd rate his back cover as superior to the front, but the front is obviously better suited to being a cover for a magazine that needs "newsstand" type identification. I put that in

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quotes because several of my best-looking issues had covers that did not feature the name of the fanzine, and I've never thought it was necessary to have that information prominently displayed. Of course, except for humorous purposes, I never felt it was necessary to feature the names of my contributors either: that's the sort of ploy a magazine after subscribers, Hugos, and notoriety employs. I'll be interested to see if your new direction as far as policy is concerned is reflected in the way you put the magazine out. A faned who's more interested in the appearance of his fanzine, and less involved with how it looks to possible paying customers, just might have used that back cover as a dynomite front cover instead! It certainly would have been a wonderful thing...

Goddamn! I think you're the first faned outside of the Cincinnati group to get artwork from Mike Streff, and even though I publish on a highly infrequent basis, I'm envious as hell! Streff is one of the best fantasy oriented artists I've ever seen in fanzines, and it's about time he broadened his base of contributions. You're lucky indeed to get him for KNIGHTS and I hope he'll be a regular feature in the fanzine. Shull and Sirois are as good as always (and your electrostencils are as poor as always; so it goes) and the rest of the art ranges from adequate to good. Overall KNIGHTS is a preety fine-looking fanzine: congratulations. (So there, Brett Cox: who needs you?)

In your editorial, I think you're a little hard on yourself. KNIGHTS isn't lost in a sea of similar fanzines; it's a damn good fanzine that unfortunately stands very little chance of winning a Hugo because no fanzine of its size and print-run has much chance against the multi-thousand distributions of the big semi-pro fanzines. There is absolutely nothing wrong with having the ambition to win a Hugo: all that reflects is a desire to produce a fanzine so good that it ought to be an award winner, and anyone who publishes a fanzine that doesn't have that thought in mind is automatically publishing a lesser fanzine than they're capable of. There's nothing wrong with wanting to win a Hugo: but as you point out, although not in so many words, the wrongness comes in when you start working towards that end, to the detriment of other areas of your life. If you put out the best fanzine you're capable of producing, the personal satisfaction you get is the single most important reward there is. A Hugo is damn nice, but an awareness of all the really superior fanzines that never received one should make it easier to live with its absence. And there is always the FAAN Award, which you do have a damn good shot at! Sic gloria transit Hugo, mon ami...

I'd heard quite a bit about this KNIGHTS before our combined post offices saw fit to deliver my copy to me and the surprising thing is that the compliments on the Grant and Monteleone columns were not exaggeratted. Grant's column is extremely well written, and even though I think he might be overstating his case somewhat, one can't help but admit that he overstates it exceedingly well! I don't deny that a writer does his thing alone, and that while he does it he is totally cut off from his friends, his family and his surroundings. I've known enough writers and seen enough of them in action to admit the truth of what Grant says. But most of the writers I know don't quite make the production about it that Charlie (Charlie? Thanks, Mister Pournelle) does here. It's a very fine column, though, and has some interesting thoughts in it.

(Momentary aside: I couldn't pass over Charlie's apparent description of a writer as a "Bryonic figure". Having just watched Steve Austin in action, I can't avoid conjuring up all of the fascinating images of what a Bryonic writer might be

like. Undoubtedly he or she would type the manuscript of a new novel in a mere half an hour, and gathering research material would undoubtedly be as simple as blinking a Bryonic eye. There's a whole new potentially boring television show embodied in this simple typo!)

I guess there are fans Out There who still look on writers in general as godlike figures of Promethean importance, and possibly Grant's article is necessary to disabuse them of this rather far-fetched notion, but surely most current fans have enough personal interaction with pros to know that a Writer shits, blows his nose and gets impotent when drunk just like the rest of us? I can name quite a few who'd happily prove those assertions. For a small fee, of course.

I wonder how much of Grant's desire for communication from his fans is based on his relative newness to the area of fame and notoriety? I can't help wondering whether or not people like Clarke, Asimov, Heinlein, Bradbury, etc, would echo that thought? The problem with communication with a writer is that it ought to be two-way, and yet it cannot possibly be. The fan who writes to his or her favorite writer with expressions of approval over a latest book or story is eventually going to get discouraged if he or she never hears from said favorite writer. And yet the writer who even makes an attempt to personally respond to fan mail is going to end up writing less and less professional work, or else is going to ignore an ever larger percentage of such mail. And who could blame them? That's one of the joys of conventions! A writer gets to submerge him or herself for two or three days in the adulation of the readership, without having to give up an unreasonable amount of time responding to such response. A case in point is my very dear friend Joe Haldeman, who recently won a Nebula. At the Minicon, Joe spent three days talking to his fans and signing copies of his books: he proved himself to be a person to those who'd known him only as a Writer, and he was able to do that over a period of time over which he'd have been incapable of writing anyway. Had Joe received lengthy letters from all the people he talked to in Minneapolis, and had he felt an inclination to reply to them all, he'd have lost out on several extra days, or possibly weeks!, of writing time. So I don't send postcards, letters, telegrams, or phonecalls to my favorite writers. They're too busy for that sort of stuff. But I'll happily buy them a drink at a con we happen to share together. From what I know of writers, that's a gesture far more appreciated than a silly postcard!

Much enjoyed the Monteleone column, although such a distinctively personal column is hard to reply to. I have no objection to getting "fuck"ed by Tom Monteleone, nor do I intend to offer my own personal history in exchange for his. Mine is nowhere near as entertaining as Tom's anyway, despite the fact that we share certain background details. I never knew there were sf professional magazines until after I discovered fandom, for example. And I know all of the members of the Guilford Gafia, although entirely on a fannish basis, not as a proto-pro. (My loss, I freely admit.) Tom's column is a very enjoyable personal glimpse into the background of a writer, and I hope he maintains his output in KNIGHTS for some time. He's been the target of a lot of very negative fan reaction owing to his abortive Laser book SEEDS OF CHANGE and it's about time we got to see some of the positive aspects of his personality and talent.

I'm reminded of the time a year and a bit ago when I happened to be in Washington, DC for the Christmas holiday. As is my wont, I was checking out local bookstores, and happened into a chainstore in a big Washington shopping center. At the main cash register, there was a display of large-size, large-print, juvenile sf

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books. Books I'd never heard of, with stories by writers I'd never heard of either. But most interesting of all was a neatly lettered sign that said something to the effect of "The author of Blankety Blank Blank science fiction will gladly sign your copy of his book." Now despite the fact that I'm a faan, and read hunderds of fanzines every year to the decided detriment, lately, of my sf reading, I'm always interested in meeting the people who actually Write The Stuff. So naturally, I checked this situation out. I looked behind the counter, behind the stack of amateurish juvenile sf books they were promoting. And all I found were an attractive looking salesgirl and an ordinary looking clerk, busy ringing up orders. Well, I figured, the famous sf writer was evidently out to lunch. So I browsed through the store, picking up a book or two that hadn't come to Canada yet, and returned to the checkout counter, manned by the same two clerks I'd seen before.

I was still wondering when the Writer would make his (I'm a chauvinist) reappearance when the guy behind the register provided me with the greatest surprise I can recall experiencing by saying, "Say, aren't you Mike Glicksohn?" I almost fell on the floor! Here I was six hundred miles from my home turf, and a bookstore clerk recognized me! Of course, it turned out to be Tom, who'd pseudonymously written the sf stories being sold, was working part-time in a bookstore to earn a little spending money, and remembered my fannish hat from our brief introduction at the previous Disclave even though I didn't remember what he looked like. A man with that sort of memory has got to be destined for greatness!

Of all Don D'Ammassa's columns, this strikes me as the most reviewish and the least insightful. It's nothing more than a series of one paragraph summeries of Tenn's short stories, with no critical commentary, and no analytical writing whatsoever. Don usually mixes this aspect of his writing with some insightful remarks on the place of the writer under consideration in the field of af as a whole, or some alaysis of themes and ideas in the writer's overall output, but these are sadly lacking in this particular piece. The result is a good summary, but offers absolutely nothing of any real interest or value.

That John Brunner sure has a droll sense of humour, ho, ho, ho. Reminds me of the time at last year's national English convention that he told some of the most talented and best known English fanzine fans that they weren't important enough to get into his private-party-for-the-concom-only, even though they had been active in making the con a success. Chuckle, chuckle, Mr. B!

Despite some pretty desperate fancy footwork Wayne Hooks is pretty obviously caught out in some rather sloppy phraseology, and playing semantic games isn't going to enable him to dig himself out. And I doubt very strongly that any poll has shown that 17% of the people in the US are unfamiliar with Shakespeare: at best it may have shown that 17% of the people polled were that illiterate, and that is hardly the same thing, as Mike points out. Myself, I wouldn't touch a statistic like that with a ten-foot poll.

Good Ghod! Cy Chauvin says many of the same things I do later in the issue! I think I'll gafiate!

Patrick's point about the odd relationship between fanzine fans and sf reading is a very valid one, even if it's not exactly original. I rarely have the time to read sf nowadays, and when I do it's probably sf by writers I know personally, and I'll tell them my reactions in person at a con somewhere. It's quite possible,

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though, that some of KNIGHTS readers will be influenced by Grant's request for feedback and will send off a postcard to their favorite writers. I hope so. For myself, though, my appreciation of the many hours of pleasure that my favorite writers have given me over the last twenty years will continue to materialize where it has over the past three or four years: in the bar at regional cons in the form of a couple of drinks and a soft-spoken word of thanks.

Also Heard From were:

Greg Benford, K. Allen Bjorke, Richard Brandt, Howard Brazee III, Bill Breiding, Tony Cvetko, D. Gary Grady, C.L. Grant, Patrick Hayden, Hank Heath, Arthur Hlavaty, Shakrallah Jabre, Dennis Jarog, Barry N. Malzberg, Tim Marion, Thomas F. Monteleone, Dave McDonnell, Will Norris, John Robinson, Jessica Amanda Salmonson, Al Sirois, David Taggart, A.D. Wallace, Sylvia Wallis, and Terry Whittier.

STILL AVAILABLE

KNIGHTS OF THE PAPER SPACE SHIP #'s 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9; 25¢ each.

#13 ($1.50) - "Hal Clement: The Alien Engineer" by Don D'Ammassa, "Bradbury In Depth: 'The Pedestrian' and 'The Murderer'" by David McDonnell, "The Return of Dr. X" by Gary Hubbard, "From The Fire On The Mountain" by C.L. Grant; letters, book, movie and fanzine reviews. Art by Sheryl Birkhead, Barry Kent MacKay, Al Sirois and others. Much more. Cover by Sheryl Birkhead. 102 pages.

#14 ($1.00) - Second Anniversary Issue; "From The Fire On The Mountain" by C.L. Grant, "Vertex Survey"by Keith Justice; letters from Mike Glicksohn, Jodie Offutt, Jerry Pournelle. Strips by Al Sirois and Phil Foglio. Art by Grant Canfield, Phil Foglio, Marc Schrimeister, James Shull, and a wrap around cover by Al Sirois. Much more. 58 pages.

#15 ($1.25) - "The Mothers And Fathers Italian Association" by Thomas F. Monteleone, "From The Fire On The Mountain" by C.L. Grant, "Tenn Has Klass" by Don D'Ammassa, "Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Acience Fiction But Were Too Narrow Minded To Ask" by Keith Justice; letters from Gregory Benford, David Gerrold, Barry N. Malzberg. Strips by James Shull and Al Sirois. Art by Phil Foglio, Dave Haugh, Randy Mohr, Joe Pearson, James Shull, Al Sirois, and Mike Streff. Covers by Randy Mohr. 72 pages.

Advance subscriptions are four issues for $4. Make checks payable and mail to: Mike Bracken, PO Box 7157, Tacoma, WA 98407.

(continued from page 3)

niversary issue. If Bill Breiding and I can work out all the details, and if luck stays on our side, the two of us will be combining his STARFIRE and my KNIGHTS for a special double-anniversary issue similar in concept to the old Ace doubles. Bill recently got a job in a print shop and has nearly free access to offset printing equipment, as well as a boss that's going to be teaching him how to use it. By the time our double-anniversary issue is due to come out, Bill will, I hope, have successfully mastered the medium. Therefore issue 17 will most probably be offset.

I hope, too, that by that time I will have been able to master the art of layout for offset. I have had a little experience preparing things for offset since not only was I editor of my high school paper, but I did most of the paste-ups (which were lousy but which taught me what not to do).

My biggest problem between now and then, other than getting good contributions, will be getting the money for my share of the costs (which will be much less than normal, thank God). To that end I will be trying very hard to sell out my back issues (which currently total about $800 worth) as well as garner more advance subscriptions. Which means that I'll be placing ads in a number of places between now and then and I hope they're at least as effective as the ads that have already seen print. (Not only do I want to sell out the back issues for the money, I'd hate to have to pack them to Illinois should things fall into place with the University.)

Issue 17 then will be, if not something super-spectacular, at least another step forward in the life of KNIGHTS and myself, as has been every issue since I started.

Speaking of subscriptions, as I was, this issue will tell me whether or not I'm reaching subscribers as well as fulfilling my own creative urge since a dozen or so subscriptions that started with issue 13 end with this issue. I know a few people have already extended their subscriptions, which is encouraging, but I'm waiting for all the results to come in before making a judgement.

One of the hardest things I've faced as an editor, especially during the past four or five issues, comes on accepting an article or a piece of art. I have to decide if I'm making the acceptence because a) I like it, b) because I think others will like it, or c) because it was written by someone who's name I think will help me gain subscriptions. As I say, it is a hard decision to make but I think I've managed, with only a few exceptions in the past, to remain true to myself. And being true to myself is the most important thing I can think of, not only in regards to KNIGHTS, but in regards to my life.

As for this issue, I think I've come up with a winning combination of art and articles. This is another of the issues everyone says "easily your best issue yet" about.

The cover this issue is one which will even strike envy in the heart of Bill Bowers. Thomas Canty is a 23 year old professional artist who lives in Braintree, Massachusetts, and is one of the people I was speaking of in last issue's "World" when I mentioned the "promises of contributions" from people who'd seen my ads.

Actually I'm not sure Tom saw any of my ads. What happened is that an aquaintence

of his, Roy Porter (whose artwork has appeared in ALGOL and OUTWORLDS), saw my first ad in OUTWORLDS and asked for a sample copy. Although I haven't heard from Roy since, Tom sent me a letter not long after that saying nice things about KNIGHTS and asking if I'd be interested in a cover. Not having seen any samples of his work, I was a little leery and said something to the effect of "yes, but no promises".

That was in December. In late April, after a half dozen letters had been exchanged back and forth, the cover arrived. It was more than worth the wait; in fact, because of the high quality of the cover, Tom and I have agreed to make a special limited printing of it which will be colored, numbered, and signed by the artist. Although we haven't ironed out all the small details yet, the information will be available soon. If you think you might be interested in receiving a copy of the special print, please drop me a note and I'll make sure you're among the first to know of its availablity.

Thomas F. Monteleone's column is easily the most important, and most potentially controversial, contribution this issue. Not only does he discuss the writing of SEEDS OF CHANGE for Laser Books, he also paints probably one of the most fair pictures of Roger Elwood I've seen in the past couple of years. Tom doesn't take pot shots at Elwood, who seems to have become this decade's science-fiction-sitting-duck, but neither does he come out with kid gloves on.

What Tom does do is tell us how and why he wrote his first novel for Laser, and what the consequenses have been. The column is an interesting and entertaining look at Roger Elwood, Laser Books, and writing in general.

Don D'Ammassa discusses one of my favorite authors, Larry Niven, in his article "Exploring Known Space" and I have taken the liberty of quoting from a letter of Larry Niven's to use as a short Afterword. The photo on the backcover was taken by Michael Vilain/Creative Photography and provided by Larry Niven to accompany the article.

Mike Glicksohn, the proud(?) owner of at least one fanzine Hugo tells all of us struggling faneditors how to actually win one of the phallic silver rockets. Illustrated by Al Sirois, "A Cognitive Contemplation Of The Formative Influences Of Fannish Peer Group Recognition" does an excellent job of offsetting the seriousness of the two articles preceding it.

"Just Piddling Along", a poem I've had laying around for the past five years, has nothing to do with sf. I've never known who the author was, but the ditto copy I received while in 9th grade is becoming fadded and worn, so I've taken this opportunity to duplicate it in the hopes that others will enjoy it as much as I do.

C. L. Grant offers some food for thought in his column this issue, especially to those of us who care about the future of sf, and D. Gray Grady's "The Near Future Of Man In Space" is a counterpoint to an article I ran some time back by David McDonnell. Mike Streff's excellent folio which winds up the issue is based on an idea I had and passed along to Mike. I think he has done a superb job of turning it into a series of pictures.

Space limitations caused me to do a drastic amount of editing to the lettercolumn this issue, and a number of excellent letters were forced into the "Also Heard From"'s. I tried to get a balance of opinion in the letters I did pick, as

well as comments on most of last issue's contents.

It wasn't intentional, of course, but I somehow managed to squeeze myself out of the lettercolumn. Reading it over again, I find that there weren't too many comments I could have made anyhow.

All in all, my best issue ever. (But haven't they all been in their own time?)

Read and enjoy.

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NEW POLICIES, OLD BUSINESS, AND OTHER THINGS OF POSSIBLE IMPORTANCE:

As you can see, there are no book reviews this issue. There are many reasons for my decision not to run any more book (or even fanzine for that matter) reviews. The most important of these reasons are that there are at least two other zines devoted specifically to reviewing books, and that I need the space in these pages for other things. So, please send your book reviews elsewhere. Thank you.

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 lost 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.

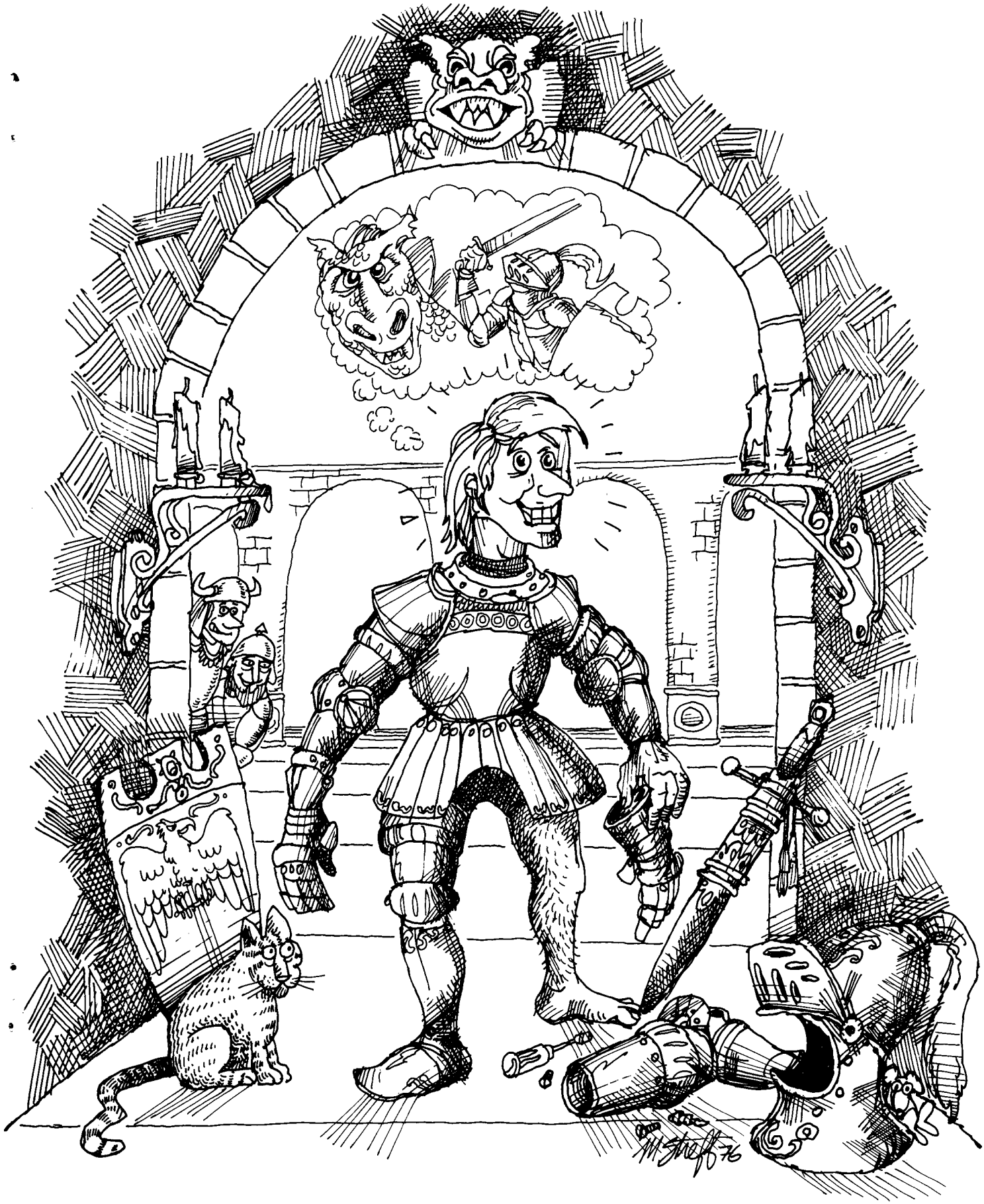
The Mailing Code goes like this: on the envelope, after your name is a number or a symbol. X means this is your last issue, please do something if you wish to continue receiving KNIGHTS. A number signifies your last issue. ? means we trade all-for-all or have some similar arrangement and I'm not sure what your last issue will be. ! means you will most likely receive every issue (but that doesn't mean I wouldn't like to hear from you).

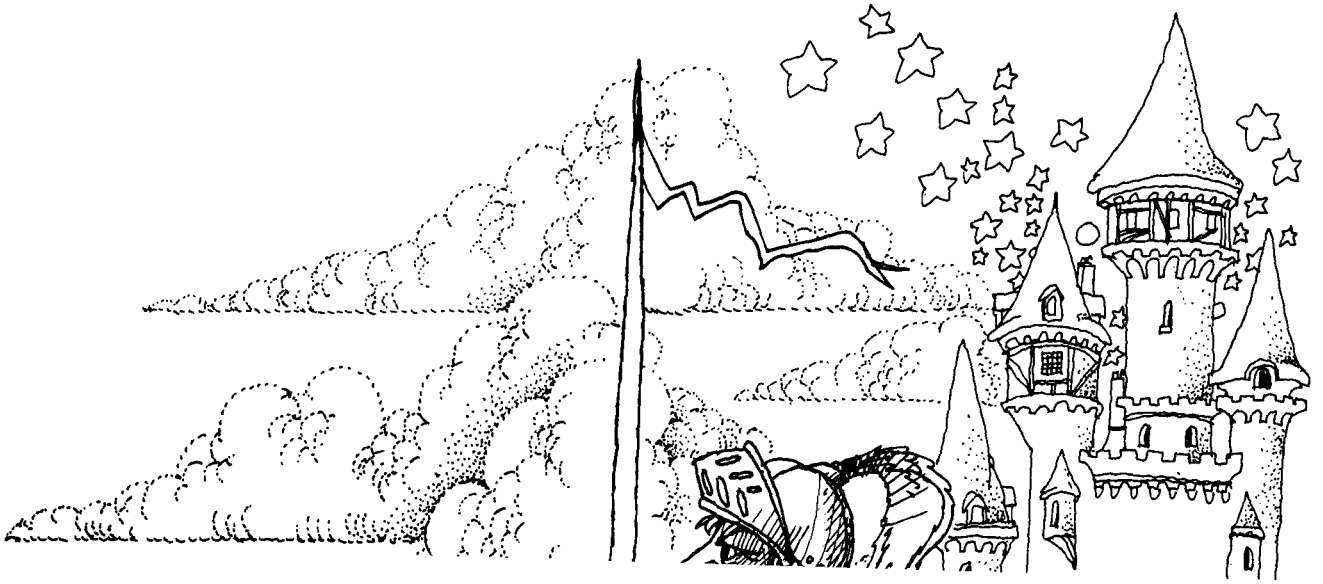
-- Mike Bracken, June 8, 1976

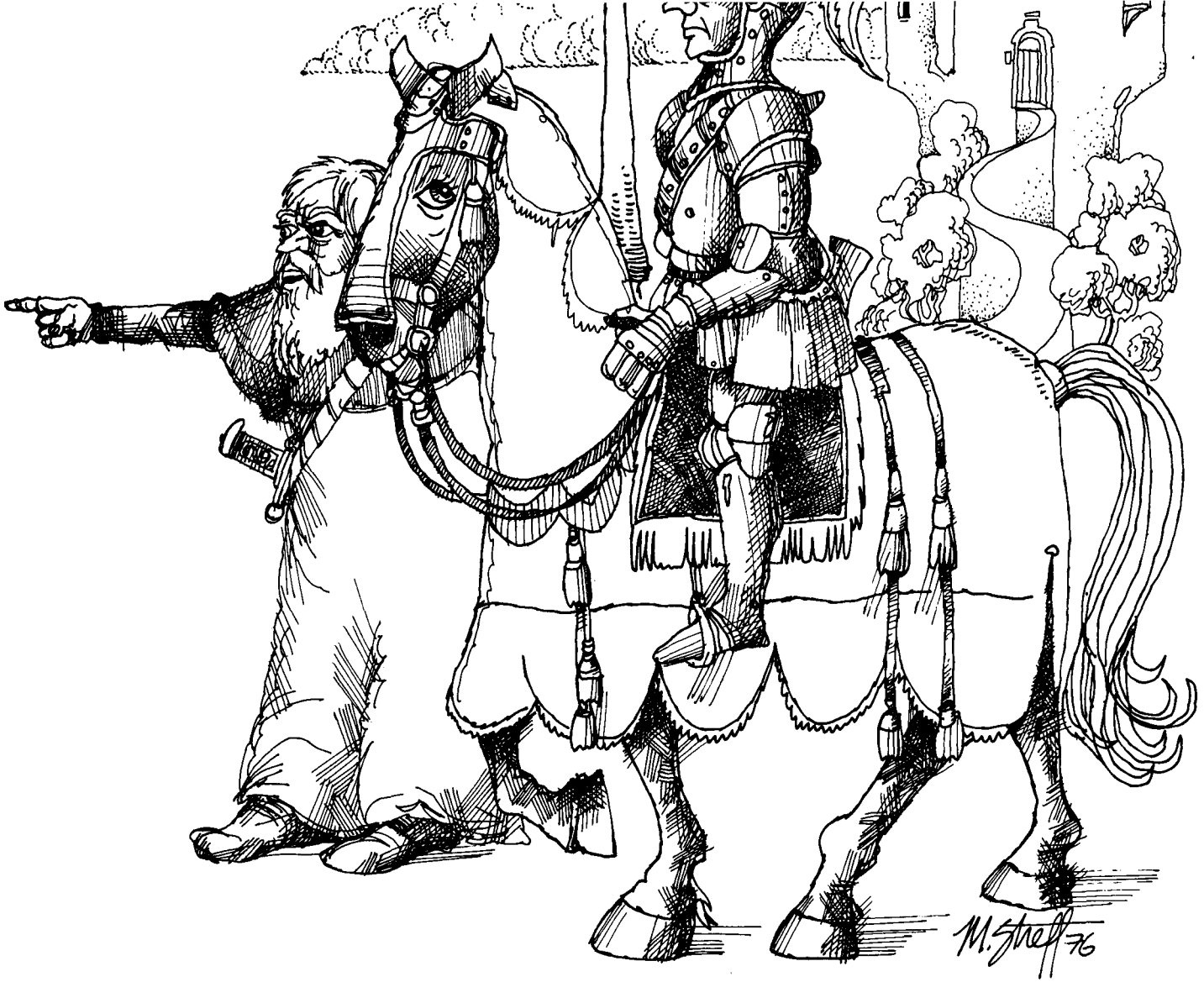
KNIGHTS AND DAZE

A FOLIO BY

MIKE STREFF



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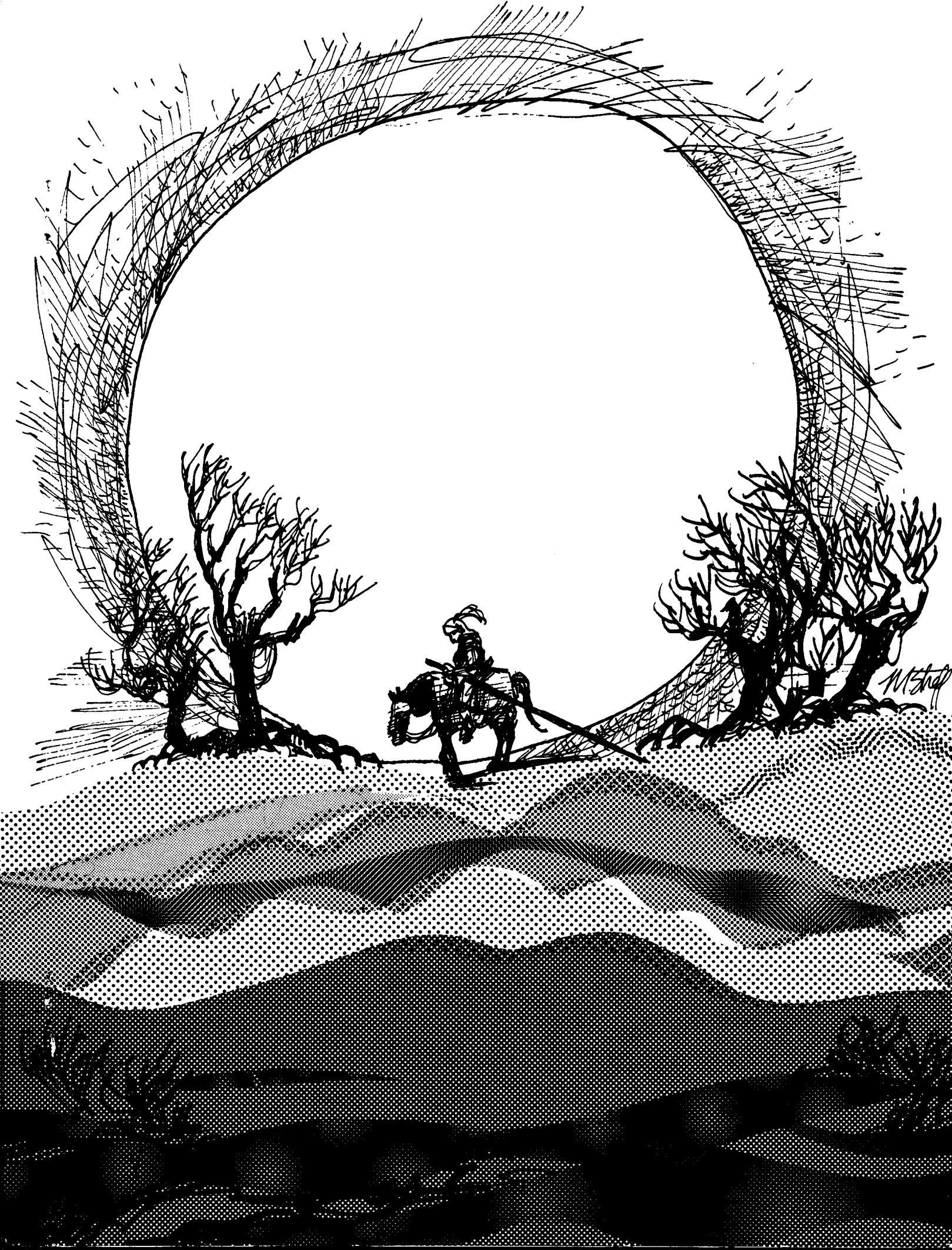

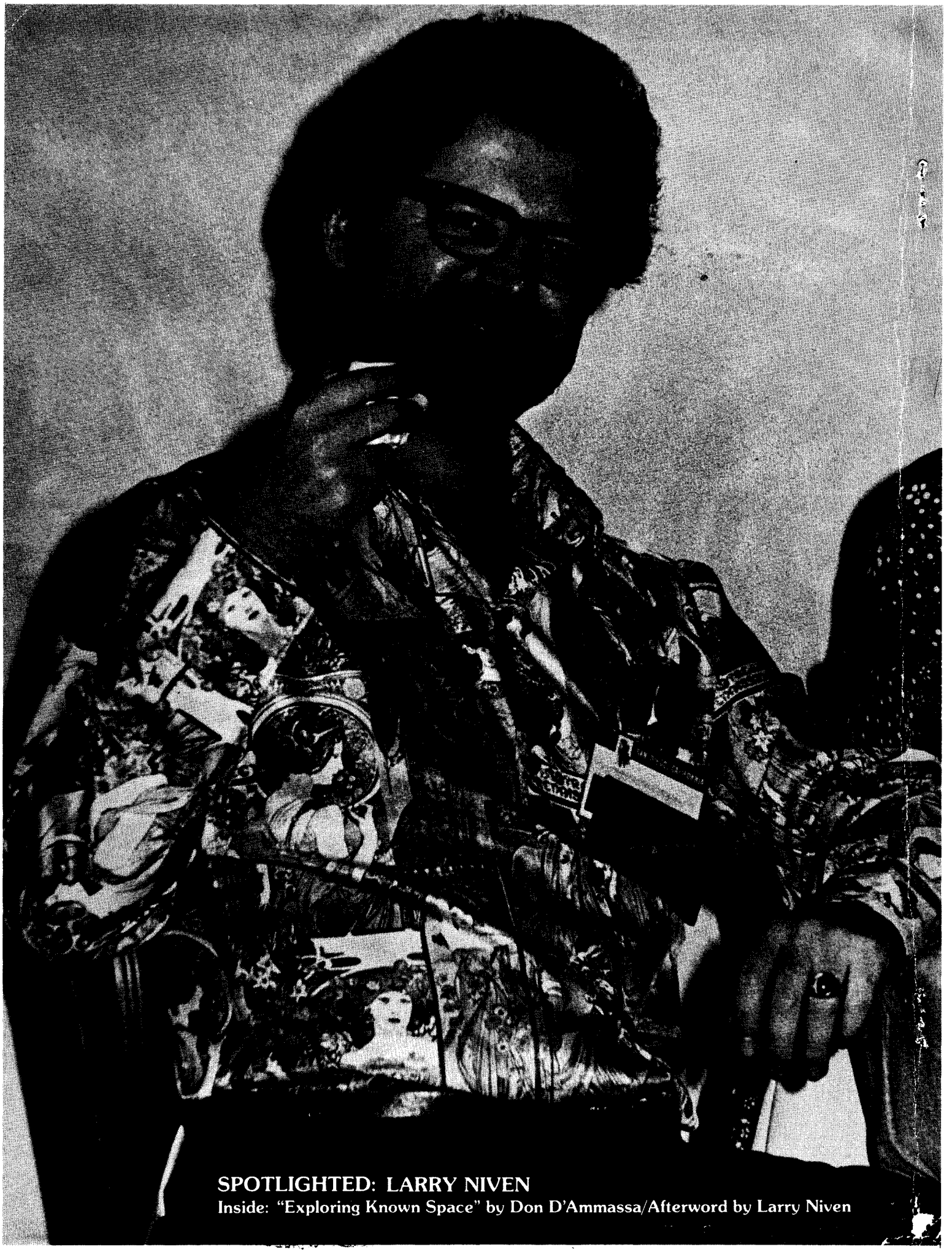

SPOTLIGHTED: LARRY NIVEN

Inside: "Exploring Known Space" by Don D'Ammassa/Afterword by Larry Niven