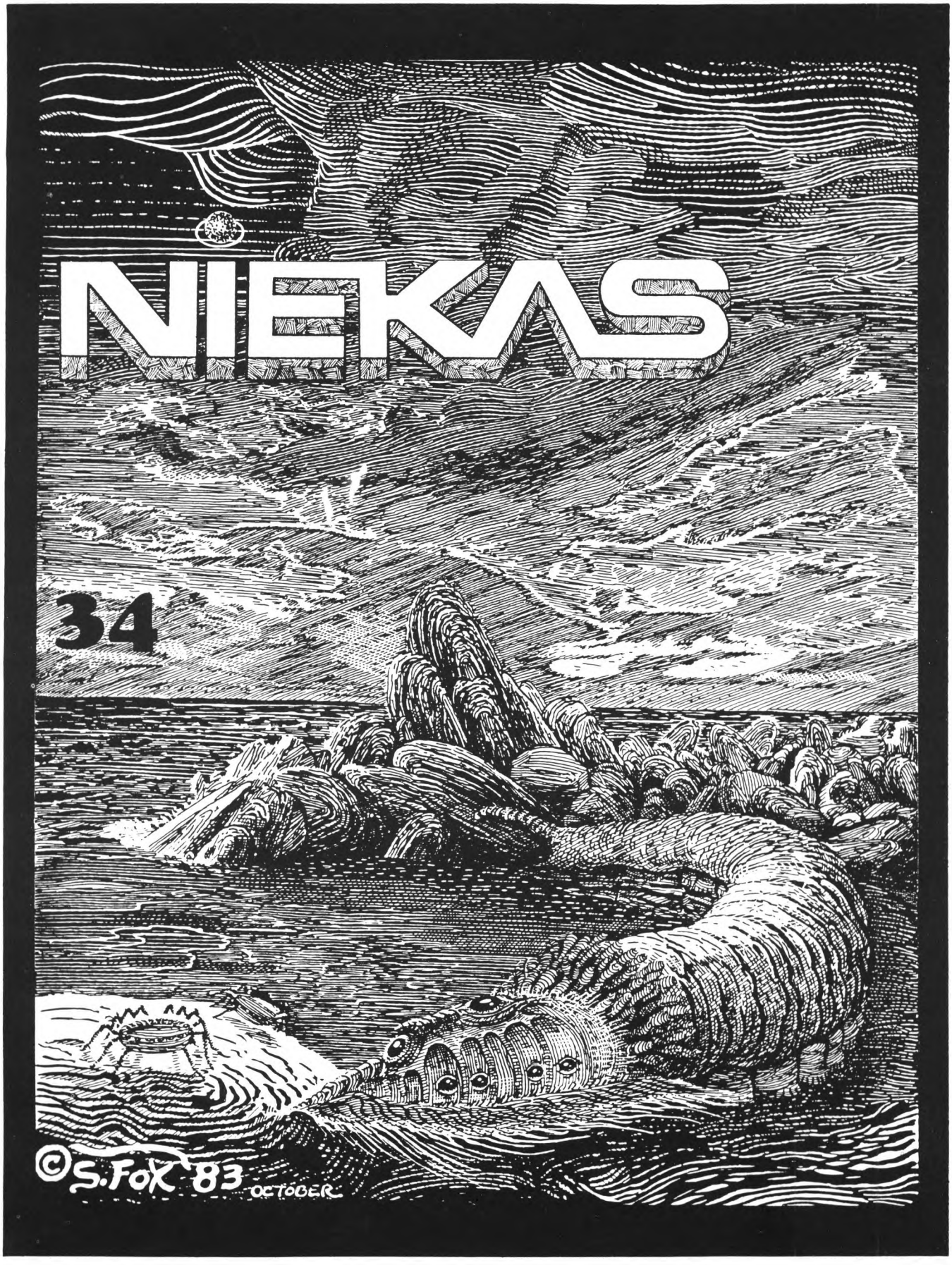
NIEKAS
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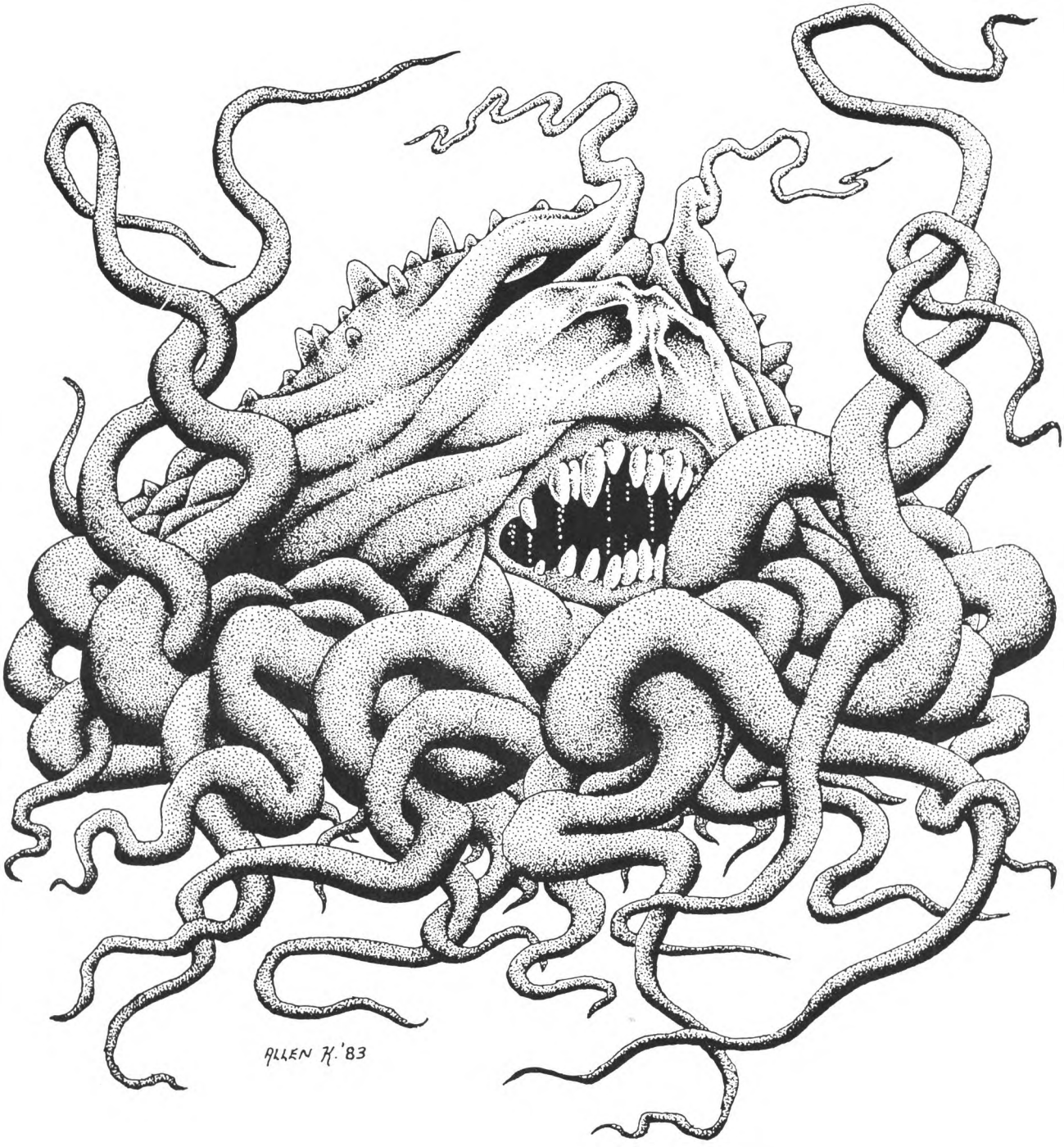
ALLEN K. '83

NIEKAS

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

"The Under-Sixty-Page Fanzine"

Contents

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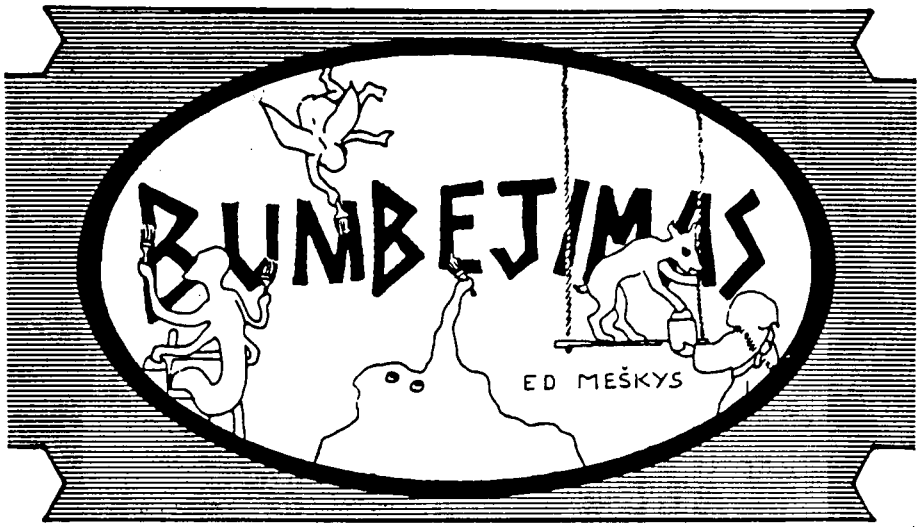

PKD AND ME

I recently finished the book PHILIP K. DICK, IN HIS OWN WORDS by Gregg Rickman (see review in NIEKAS # 33), which brought back many memories of the time I knew him and visited him almost weekly.

I was in the Bay Area and part of local fandom from June 1962 to Dec. 1965, and I published the first issue of NIEKAS for an amateur press group my first month there. By issue # 4 it had become a general fanzine, like today, but smaller. As I said a few issues back, one of my friends at that time was Alva Rogers who was publishing his fanzine BIXEL for FAPA. Alva was unable to use an article by Poul Anderson comparing Phil Dick's then new book MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE with another alternate world book called SWASTIKA NIGHT. The following NIEKAS had extensive comments on the article. Someone gave me Phil's address in Berkeley and I dropped off the two issues while picking up Grania Davidson, who was then living with him, to go somewhere with her. Phil was quite impressed with the article and comments and wrote a long reply which I published in the next ish.

I had known Grania Davidson (now Davis) for some time and she came to a number of NIEKAS collating parties (and even hosted one) and other events. Through her I came into regular contact with Phil. (She wrote one of the many eulogies of Phil that LOCUS published, and discussed her life with him in it.)

About this time they moved into an old wood-frame house in East Oakland, only about a mile from an exit on the freeway I used to go home to Livermore after Little Men's meetings in Berkeley. I drove into Berkeley for a Little Men's meeting, a Golden Gate Futurian Society meeting, or some other event almost every weekend and stopped off to visit on my way home. Phil and Grania were night people and it would be quite all right for me to stop off at 2 AM.

What do I remember of this period? The only picture of Phil that I had seen was that published on the back of the hardcover edition of THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE, where he was beardless, and looked remarkably like a prominent fan of the period, Andy Main. But when I met him he had a full beard which he kept during the entire period I knew him. He was writing novels for Ace Books at the time and told me that they paid an advance of about $1200 per book, which was low for the field. He said that Don Wollheim kept writing him complaining now that he had a major success with CASTLE he would be abandoning Don and Ace. Phil also complained of strange quirks in the royalty reports from Ace. Back then Ace was publishing its "Ace Doubles", two books back to back. Usually one book was longer than the other and they were by different authors and unrelated in any way. Occasionally both sides were by the same author. One such pair was by Phil, and the royalty statement in question gave totally different sales figures for the two halves of the same book. Obviously this made Phil very suspicious of the veracity of other royalty statements from Ace.

He had an electric typewriter, a standard office model with typebars, for the Selectric and its imitators had not yet become ubiquitous. He said it had been a gift from Robert Heinlein, and the generosity and spontaneity of the gift had greatly impressed him, for he didn really know Heinlein and the two were so different in philosophy and style. I don't remember Phil's explanation of why he had been given the machine, only that it came to help him in his writing. He had tried using it but he typed very rapidly and in such a way that on the electric the keys often became tangled. He found this happening so often that he regrettably had to give up using it and go back to his manual.

Phil was troubled by crowds. He appreciated classic films but the only way he could see them was to go to an all-night theater late at night when it was almost empty, and sit in the balcony where there was no one else. He was very knowledgeable about old films and classical music. He won a pair of tickets to a theatrical presentation in San Francisco but could not go himself, so he sent Grania and me to it. I was VERY surprised when he came to the World SF Convention which was in Oakland that year, 1964. But perhaps it was a matter of being among friends and comrades rather than among strangers, as in a theater.

I also had the impression, from general reputation and his behavior, that he suffered from paranoia. The only concrete example I remember was his brandishing a tiny woman's pistol and saying something about agents being outside his house. Thinking back on it, he might have been putting me on. He did have a very strange sense of humor. However, I was not at all disturbed by the incident, but I believe Grania was.

When I met Phil I had only read his THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE, plus a few shorts in magazines that I didn't remember as being by him. I had read P. Schuyler Miller's reviews in ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION of THE SOLAR LOTTERY and EYE IN THE SKY which made me want to read both of those books, but I simply had not gotten around to them. I did finally read EYE while I was visiting Phil and discussed the book with him. It was an UNKNOWN WORLDS type of fantasy. A group of people are touring the cyclotron at U Cal Berkeley when there is an accident. As a group they go through a series of fantasy worlds, one in the mind of each of the participants. I remember one was the world of an extremely prudish spinster and they find themselves all totally sexless

like children's dolls. Another is the world of a paranoid, and a house that they're in tries to eat and digest them. The foyer carpet becomes a tongue which tries to cram them further inside and swallow them. Phil talked about how it was important to maintain the pace of the book by making each adventure shorter than the one before it.

The paranoid adventure was extremely effective and frightening. When I read it I thought of his reputation and thought about how he must have been writing from his own feelings. On the other hand, in IN HIS OWN WORDS, Phil is quoted several times as saying, "you don't have to be an X to write about an X", and his point is well taken. I should not have judged him on his reputation and one scene in one novel.

I did finally read SOLAR LOTTERY, only a few months ago when it was specially taped for me by Phyllis Randall. His last SF novel was recorded by the Library of Congress and I have requested it from my library, but it has not come yet. I have read none of his other novels. After reading IN HIS OWN WORDS I am more anxious than ever to read a number of his other books, and will probably arrange to have them custom recorded for me.

Getting back to CASTLE for a minute: that book was of an alternate future in which the attempt on FDR's life in the early '30's was successful and he was replaced by a wimp not ready to take a strong stand when WWII loomed. As a result we lost and were divided, the way Germany is in our world, but with the added touch of a Rocky Mountain buffer state. It is in the early '60's, the time the book was written, and there's a cold war between Germany and Japan. There were a number of very nice touches in the book, with technology both more advanced and less than in our world. One of the nicest touches is another alternate world novel written by a mostly off-stage character who motivates much of the action. In this one the Allies did win, but in a totally different way than in our world. One character has a brief mystical experience and is briefly in our San Francisco, another nice touch. Several characters have taken up the I CHING, and it plays a major part in their motivations. This was long before it had become a part of our culture and most readers of the book had never heard of it before. It was in several Herman Hesse novels, but this was before he had become popular in the US and most of his books were still only available in England.

The book was Phil's first major breakthrough to recognition, and was the only one to receive a Hugo. However, the book did sort of fall apart at the end. An explanation of this is the fact that Phil had himself become an avid user of the I CHING, and consulted it whenever he came to a crucial decision point in the plot. I think this was a great benefit to the story as a whole, giving the details many spontaneous and unexpected twists. However, it did not help resolve the conclusion.

While I was very friendly with Phil, we were not really intimate and I was not a confidant of his. Thus I cannot be sure, but I believe he never himself got into major drugs like LSD. In fact, he seemed scared of the effects (at least of LSD.). Once he told me he was riding in a car with someone who had taken LSD the previous day, or perhaps earlier, and presumably had long recovered from its effects. However, as they were riding along on a blacktop stretch of freeway he was scared out of his wits when the driver remarked that he had never noticed before that the pavement was brown.

During this period he acquired two black-and-white kittens he named Horace L. Gold and John W. Campbell Jr.. I remember them as liking to scamper up pants legs at unexpected moments. One afternoon I remember them being on the dining room table and chewing on some donuts in a platter.

I attended my first opera, an outdoor performance of Verdi's FALSTAFF, about a year before I met Phil and got interested in the genre. I attended additional performances, especially in the San Francisco Spring Opera which was mostly in English, and listened to opera on record. Phil introduced me to the magnificent London recording of Wagner's DAS RHEINGOLD. He had an excellent but inelegant mono hi-fi. I remember naked speakers scattered over the living room rug connected to the amplifier.

I enjoy the sound of classical music, especially vocal like opera or oratario, tho I never got into lieder. I think I am either partially tone deaf or simply have an extremely weak auditory memory. I cannot recapture in my mind themes and so follow their development and variations. Phil did play some lieder for me and had me follow along in score books. While I could not read music to make any use of it, I could follow along looking at the notes, the German, and the English translation. It was a magical feeling for the first time really following a piece of music, but I never followed it up by buying records and scores and doing it on my own.

Another area I never got into was chamber music but I remember Phil playing for me what I think I remember was a string quartet called "The Turkish" because of a touch of Mid-East sounding music in the middle of it. Again I followed it in a score and enjoyed it, but did not follow that up.

In late 1962 the late Ron Ellik got me interested in Gilbert & Sullivan, and I was fortunate in that San Francisco had a G&S repertory company that did nothing else. During the next three years I got to see all the operettas except SORCERER and GRAND DUKE, and through a plug in SATURDAY REVIEW I found a semi-professional company in DC that performed rare G&S and associated works and recorded them. Thus I had the only recording made to that time of UTOPIA LTD. Since Phil shared my love for G&S I brought the album down. He wanted to hear certain songs and had a beautiful knack for putting the needle down on the the right spot on the LP to get it. He spoke enthusiastically of Sullivan's growth as a composer over the years since he had written GONDOLIERS, but was not interested in hearing the entire album even tho I had offered to leave it with him.

About this time Phil became friendly with Ray Nelson and Jack Newcomb, who also were frequent visitors. He was living alone at this time and he and the other two made a number of cynical remarks about the nature of women. They coauthored a half-page statement on this which I ran in NIEKAS. Later Phil wrote a wonderful half-page satire of a

typical story in DANGEROUS VISIONS which I also ran. It was absolutely delightful.

Shortly before I moved east I began to see a lot of two quite young sisters at Phil's house. Eventually one of them, Nancy, moved in and he later married her.

I remember Phil saying that he was Episcopalian. He said that while he had been married before he had only one more chance at it in his church. If that marriage did not work out he would not be able to marry again in his church.

After I had moved East in January 1966 we drifted apart. I had hoped to keep up a correspondence with him, and that he might continue to occassionally contribute to NIEKAS, but that was not to be. It was probably both of our faults that the correspondence floundered.

Over the next 21 months Felice Rolfe published 4 more NIEKU, and then over the next 15 months I put out two more with Charlie & Marsha Brown and Elliot Shorter. After that NIEKAS went into hibernation for eight years.

When I was in Oakland for the 1968 Worldcon I spent several weeks in the Bay Area visiting friends. I talked to Phil on the phone several times but he was living up north near Sausalito and bus connections there were awful, so I never got around to visiting him there.

I took a summer course in San Diego the following year and spent two weekends in the Bay Area, one with my fiance Nan. I remember writing him that I wanted him and his Nancy to meet my Nancy, but nothing came of it.

About when I moved East Terry Carr made a visit to the Bay Area and became friendly with Phil. Phil wrote several pieces for Terry's fanzine at that time.

Most of the SF magazines had died off and the paperback field had not yet come into its own. There had been alot of talk about whither SF in fandom, and Earl Kemp published WHO KILLED SF? I lent Phil my contributor's copy which got buried in his clutter and he couldn't find it to return to me when I moved East. I always wondered what had happened to it, but it had probably gotten lost during one of his many moves.

I totally lost touch with Phil for many years and about a year after I revived NIEKAS I found an address for him in Santa Ana. I sent him a sample NIEKAS and got a rave LoC and a check for a three-year sub, and a short time later a two page story/article about the further adventures of Horselover Fats. Just about when we published that piece, and I had responded to the article and accompanying letter we heard of his death. I ran a short memorial piece in Bumbejimas at that time.

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ABOUT NOTHING

We seem to be fitting fairly comfortably into a semi-annual schedule tho my ideal would be to up it to three a year. It is probably some time before we can do that, but I do have it as my goal. Before this issue comes out I will have a talking word processor, and should be able to do a larger part of the copytyping myself. (I spent most of my free time at the National Federation of the Blind convention this Summer in the huckster room looking at various systems and I have narrowed it down to one of four --three based on the IBM and one on the Apple 2E or C.)

Anne Braude is also thinking of getting a computer and if she does she will be able to do some of the copytyping, or at least copy type her own material. With additional hands to do the work, it should go faster and maybe we will be able to up our frequency. I certainly hope so.

Mike Bastraw is proud of his new Macintosh and is learning what fonts work best for the NIEKAS format. What we used last ish was a little too small, but we hope all is well now.

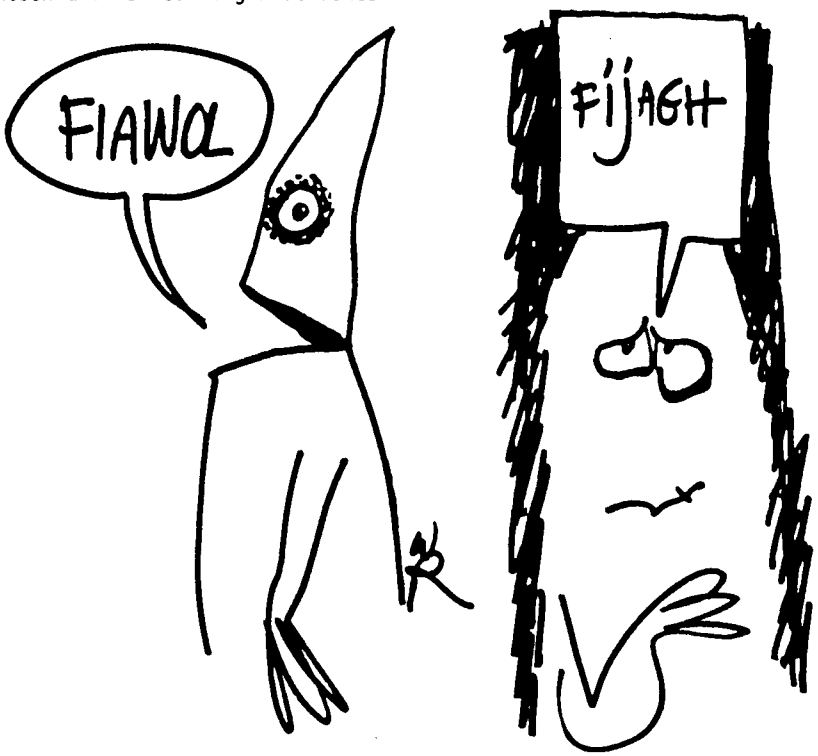
And we got our first article submitted on floppy disk. Diana Paxson also has a Macintosh and sent us her column on a floppy which Mike ran off on his machine. I suppose the day is coming when Mike or I will have a modem and we will be getting much of our material over the phone or on floppy.

Now a plea for help from the readers. We are proud of our magazine and publish it for people to see and read it. It is hard to get the word out to the right people that we exist. If you have a friend who might enjoy NIEKAS please tell him or her about us, or buy them a sub as a Christmas /Hanukkah or birthday gift. We are not trying to make a profit on NIEKAS, for we could never make enough to pay us for our time. We publish because we want to and we want to be read.

Also we would like to lose a little less money on the magazine. If we did turn a profit we would feed the money back into the magazine to have better equipment to turn out a better product with less work.

And remember...we are always anxious to receive letters of comment, reviews and other material from our readers!

[It is time to explain again that NIEKAS is the Lithuanian word for NOTHING, and Bumbejimas means complaining and muttering under your breath.]



DREAM MAKERS

I always seek the truth. I am about as compulsive in this respect as any person is, and I have stirred up considerable animosity in others who do not share this goal. But the truth is not necessarily easy to come by. It has to be constantly sought, and verified, and reverified, because sometimes the truth is false, and often it is a matter of perspective. In short, this pursuit is a lifetime challenge, with uncertain prospect of success.

We in the speculative-fiction genres deal with those deliberate and drawn-out lies called 'stories' and 'novels'. Not only are they false, they are often completely unbelievable, and that can be part of their appeal. No sane person believes that anyone is about to step into a matter transmitter and traverse fifty thousand light years in zero time and step out at the other end to encounter gastropods who feed on anti-matter and just happen to speak contemporary English. But once we have succeeded in stunning our credulity into submission, we can settle back and enjoy the adventure, insisting that scientific details be accurate and the characterizations believable. For some reason outsiders have difficulty comprehending this attitude--but of course that is why they are outsiders. Selective suspension of disbelief: a very special talent, and we are all the better for it. I know, because I earn my living from it. But I also make sure I know the distinction between science fantasy and mundane reality. There are those who evidently do not.

I believe that most other genre writers have a similar attitude. I am curious about them, both as fellow tale-tellers and as the authors of pieces I may admire. My own life has followed a course that is alien to the normal, and what I have learned of the lives of other writers is that their situations are similar in their abnormality. I suspect that literary ability is inversely proportional to mundane normalcy. If so, the implication for the true sources of genius is intriguing. But is it so? What is the truth of this matter?

Thus my interest in books like the two Dream Makers volumes. Charles Platt, evidently obsessed by a similar curiosity, has gone to the trouble to seek and interview more than fifty of the 'uncommon people who write science fiction'. His selection is based as much on convenience as on the significance of the authors, but he did make a serious effort to catch as many as he could. He generally went to the subjects' homes, and recorded the interviews, and gave the subjects the chance to review and emend their interviews before the volumes were published. All this is obviously professional treatment, and the truth about a major segment of the creators of this type of literature is now known.

Sigh. Remember when I said that sometimes the truth is false? Dream Makers is a prime example. I shall provide generalities and particulars.

I have a shorthand system for ascertaining the merit of reviewers, critics, interviewers and similar creatures. I judge them by myself. That is, I examine how they handle me, because I know about me, and can readily detect the extent of their accuracy. If I read a critic taking off on another writer, the critic may seem to make sense, because I may not know much about either the work or the person of that writer. But when that critic takes off on a subject with which I am thoroughly conversant--me--then I have a scale against which to calibrate him. Thereafter I modify his comments on others according to that calibration. Does this seem like rationalization? Well, if you know any of the authors covered in these volumes, or Charles Platt, you may form your conclusion. Because I was interviewed for this production, and have zeroed in on its author, this is my reaction.

Dream Makers (by this title I refer to both volumes) is a fascinating work, and does represent a significant service to the genre, and perhaps to literature itself. There is much truth herein, including information I suspect is available nowhere else. I recommend it for the shelf of every serious reader.

But.

But do not for a moment accept it as the real story. I understand that Platt has sown rage in his wake, and I dare say that I am not the only subject who is sorry he agreed to be interviewed. How can this be, when we were given such completely professional treatment? Are we all unwilling to face the truth about ourselves?

Not exactly. It is that Charles Platt views the world through strangely distorted spectacles, so that the truths he perceives may appear more like parodies to those targeted. We have all been shaped according to his vision, and we would hate to have others think that was objective. These interviews do not show the subjects so much as they show Platt's notion of these subjects, and his notion is aggravatingly biased. Thus his truth is our false image. For example, in my case: I am a very busy writer. I am not a fast worker; I simply make my time count, keeping at work instead of finding pretexts to avoid work.

But I do try to meet my commitments, express and implied, such as answering my fan mail (which can run to more than a hundred letters in a month) and cooperating with others in the genre. So I made time to accommodate Charles Platt's interview, though such things are not my delight. Then I discovered myself pilloried by a presentation so determinedly slanted as to make complete correction just about impossible. It wasn't that the facts were wrong--though many were, as with Platt's assumption that I was a complete hermit who had met no other writers--but that a twisted interpretation was put on even the most normal aspects of my life, such as my effort to facilitate his interview. I sent him a list of something like 25 significant genre writers I have met and/or interacted with, ranging from Anderson to Zelazny; he simply deleted that reference, while leaving the implication of my hermitage: "And he seems reclusive: many people I know in the science-fiction field have never met Piers Anthony..." Many people in the field have not met Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov or Arthur Clarke, either.

To him, I am a "wild-eyed" man, "looking like some hippie-hobo of the forest, with a pen full of dogs. Those who have met me may judge my appearance: as for the dogs, what he described as a pen is actually a half acre yard for the three dogs, with grown pine and oak trees, a swing set (our daughters use that, rather than the dogs), and a fiberboard, metal-roofed house for them about twelve feet on a side. They don't like strangers, so they were limited to their yard for Platt's protection.

All of which is not to be taken as a catalogue of private injuries. My point is that if this is the way Platt distorted me, what has he done for his other subjects? Other writers in these volumes do come off as similarly weird, and the genre as a whole begins to seem like a refuge for refugees from sanity. My wife was unable to finish reading Dream Makers; she was turned off by the crazy nature of the writers presented. There are some strange figures in the genre--but hardly to the extent that Platt suggests. I am sure that Platt was not trying to discriminate against me; he treated me as he treated all the subjects, never letting the facts interfere with a lively presentation. And I think it genuinely did not occur to him that a hard-working and thoroughly professional writer might object to being characterized as a wild-eyed hippie. I am sure that most of the other subjects of these volumes could recite similar examples; if any read this column, perhaps they will comment.

Despite Platt's flair for the provocative, much of significance has been omitted. You won't learn from this work why Thomas M. Disch, touted as one of the two most promising lights in the genre (the other was Roger Zelazny, who is not represented here) back in the 60's, abruptly turned his back on it all and remained a relatively minor genre figure. Why Piers Anthony never suffers Writer's Block. That Ursula LeGuin exists. How one interviewee reneged on a contract, then threatened the publisher with an SFWA boycott. On the other hand you will learn how Frank Herbert's Dune was rejected 22 times and was panned by every critic, the first time around. How the Nebula Awards are corrupt, according to E.C. Tubb, with whom I do not disagree. How Edward L. Ferman was introduced to Isaac Asimov, who "instead of shaking my date's hand, shook her left breast." Ian Watson, calling me an appalling writer, and Heinlein totally unreadable. Don't worry, he's not the only British fan I have; Christopher Priest claims to have been the British expert on me: "I had read every fucking word that Piers Anthony had ever written. That is something which actually burns brains out!" I believe my opinion of self-styled experts is known; it's nice to see it comfirmed. He likes Larry Niven, too, who "gets almost a million dollars for some garbage he turns out in three weeks..." So what does Niven say? He tells how Damon Knight turned down his story "Inconstant Moon" for ORBIT, and how the story went on to win a Hugo award. "And I stopped taking Damon seriously as a critic." Aha, the plot thickens! What does Damon Knight have to say for himself? "Yeah. When I became an editor myself, my ideal was to be somebody who wouldn't turn down good stuff...but I found I couldn't do it..." Right on, Damon! And he says: "...a lot of really mediocre stuff has been getting a lot of applause and awards..." Perhaps Keith Laumer sums it up best: "CRAZY BULL SHIT."

As I said, these are fascinating volumes, as long as you don't take them seriously. And I don't mean to imply that there is nothing of value here; there is an enormous amount of excellent stuff. Tucked away in the interstices is a lot of good thinking. Consider D.M. Thomas: "Those of us who are relatively sane have had to come to terms with hypocrisies; we create our own fog which makes life bearable. But of course the psychologically disturbed patient hasn't got that fog, and sees everything with a kind of piercing vision. Of course, writers have always had this feeling..." Or Barry Malzberg: "Most people who want to write fiction want to do so to compensate for real or perceived flaws or inadequacies in their real lives. That's okay except that I began to feel somewhere in midlife that perhaps compensating as a way of life was kind of a sad thing for an adult." And Arthur C. Clarke: "The creation of wealth is certainly not to be despised, but in the long run the only human activities really worthwhile are the search for knowledge, and the creation of beauty."

Having discovered the nature of Platt's interviewing technique, I resolved to give him a taste of his own medicine. So I wrote up a mock interview of him, carefully using his techniques of selection, distortion, conjecture and implication against him, so as to make him look like a fool without actually saying anything untrue. His reaction, and that of those who know him, satisfied me that I had scored. I did it in part to strike back, but also in part to show him my power. For I, like so many of the subjects in these volumes, am at the core a pretty apt writer, and can employ unfair devices like these if I choose. The reason that I don't normally do so is not because I am inadequate, as he once implied, but because I regard my writing talent a trust that should not be abused.

Here is that parody:

Charles Platt is a difficult person to pin down. We had arranged for him to come here in November, but the month passed without his appearance or letter, and his whereabouts were unknown. Such reliability, I realized, is common in people from the big cities; the pollution causes their brains to deteriorate. In February he finally remembered to phone to explain that he had run out of money--big city life is expensive--and had to work on a more important project, but I get the impression that he might simply have lost his nerve. What secret was he hiding? I encouraged him to try again, and he promised to come in March, on a Monday. Monday is traditionally a bad day, and one that is reserved for unpleasant chores. He phoned near the time to ask if it would be all right to change the date to Sunday, so he could come directly

from a function he had abruptly decided to attend in Florida. Naturally I agreed; people associated with the publishing industry are notoriously awkward about keeping schedules. He was obviously trying to launch himself into the interview so rapidly that he could not again avoid it. Then, a few days before the set date, he phoned again, nervously explaining that other writers had fouled him up, and begging to be excused a few more days. Obviously he had a problem, and I agreed to provide him the time he needed to restore his confidence, encouraging him to come Tuesday. When that day came, he phoned again; he had gotten lost, being unfamiliar with the terrain beyond the big city and perhaps dazzled by the size of the world as revealed when pollution did not limit visibility to fifty yards. My wife, perhaps realizing that Platt was on the verge of fleeing back to New York, soothed him and graciously provided more detailed directions for navigation in open country. She was able to reassure the timid caller, and he agreed to resume the trip.

He finally did arrive. Concerned that he might suffer another siege of uncertainty and depart immediately, I hurried out to greet him, inquiring whether he had enough time available for the interview and expressing interest in any news he had. It had not occurred to me that my informal attire and approach would daunt him, though I suppose the signals had been obvious. He was of course a bumbling, insecure, somewhat disheveled character whose most immediate concern was the state of the piece of cheese he gnawed on while driving. His security blanket, it seemed, was edible. We put the cheese safely in our refrigerator where it wouldn't be lonely and I quickly conducted Platt to the security of my study. He confessed to feeling disquieted by trees and animals, suffering a kind of agoraphobia of nature; it had evidently been a considerable challenge for him to brave the wilderness of the countryside. I'm sure he was desperate to return to his abode in the depths of the biggest available city, surrounded by comforting smog. His ultimate fear is perhaps exemplified by the title of his novel, Twilight of the City. What, I wondered, did he perceive as following the demise of his beloved metropolis--Garbage World?

I reviewed in my mind what I remembered of Platt's career, which has been as spotty as his personality. He tried writing, gave it up to become an editor at Avon--which was where I first encountered him, selling him a novel that contained, at his request, one of the strangest casts of characters extant--and gave that up to return to writing. He confessed to being pretty much of a failure as a novelist, but kept trying, as some failures do. He managed to obtain a six-figure contract for a series of historical novels, but soon aborted it when he discovered that he didn't really like history. History, you see, is prepollution. Now he was travelling around the country meeting more stable writers, perhaps in a vain attempt to get off the smog and discover how to settle down himself.

I thought he would have relevant questions for me, such as how I avoid ever suffering from Writer's Block, whether my fantasy is really sexist, and why success hasn't spoiled me, but he wasn't interested in success. I thought he would want to meet our unicorn, but to him a unicorn is a barnyard animal. It is hard to deal with a depressed person, but I tried. I talked with him for some time, telling him of the way I love writing and strive to get my work into print despite the resistance of editors, but I'm not sure I was able to get through to him or to persuade him to feel and do likewise. His obsession was with any frustrations and fears and hangups I might have. He says he has a positive attitude about the genre and about people in general, but he seems to be deceiving himself. I suspect that suppressed beneath that uneasy exterior there exists a pervasive melancholy of perception that manifests as a fine eye for the negative foibles of others, real or imagined. Platt does not choose to perceive secure or happy or fortunate people; he sees obscurely fouled up characters. He seems preoccupied with failure, in himself and others, and this manifests when he writes about either. Yet in a peculiar paradox of his mental state he seems genuinely innocent, unable to perceive why anyone should take exception to having the negative accentuated and the positive ignored. He was deeply hurt by the reaction of some of the people pilloried in his publication PATCHIN REVIEW, a virtual manual on How To Lose Friends And Alienate People. I tried to suggest to him that his surprise was naive, but he brushed that aside as paranoia on my part. His antennae are highly attuned to paranoia; he can find it where others cannot.

Now he is sweating. Can we move outside, he pleads? The heat in the study has become too much for him, though I do not notice it. He can't take the heat. But there is a wasp buzzing on the screen door. What's that?!, he cries with alarm. I let it out, explaining that the wasp only wants to go about its own business, and Platt relaxes. Perhaps he feels that all wasps are out to sting him. I wonder whether this relates to his life philosophy; did a wasp sting him in childhood? Did he flee wasp-country for the city, where the leaden atmosphere prevents wasps from flying? Does he now perceive the ghosts of wasps intruding in whatever temporary employment he tries? Did a wasp get lost in the Avon building, driving him out? Does it occur to him that if he ever turned and stood up to a wasp he might discover that it was as nervous about him as he was about it?

But there is no time for such questions, for he is sweating profusely and says he must hurry off to his next interview, about which he is already nervous. In his haste he forgets his hunk of cheese. Too bad; he will be hungry on the road.

[A copy of this column was sent to Mr. Platt by Mr. Anthony. NIEKAS received the following.]

This is the second time that Piers Anthony has complained in print about being "pilloried" by my profile of him. I remain somewhat puzzled. His only specific complaints seem to be that I said he dresses like a hippie, and keeps dogs in a corral in his back yard. This hardly seems sufficient for a lasting grudge, does it? At the same time, he makes a lot of very vague, general accusations, none of which he supports with any evidence at all. For instance, he implied that many other people I interviewed were as unhappy as he was with the way I depicted them. But this is simply untrue; to my knowledge, of the nearly sixty people I interviewed, only three (including Piers) were seriously dissatisfied, and none of them (including Piers) asked to withdraw their profiles from the book. From a "seeker of truth", as noble Piers claims to be, I expect hard facts--names and quotes--rather than this kind of innuendo, which is little better than a smear campaign.

The shortcoming of my profile of him is not that I said too much, but that I said too little. In the time available, I was unfortunately unable to learn enough about his

rather complex personality--especially since he is a nonstop talker whom it is almost impossible to interrupt. As a result, my piece on him was disappointingly superficial, and I was able to make only a few observations: that he works obsessively, lives in virtual isolation, and tends to overreact to events in the outside world which he interprets as attacks upon him. The first two statements are verifiable by observation, and by his most recent denial of the third, he ends up confirming it. My assessment of him was alas shallow, but it was not inaccurate.

As for his parody of my interviewing style: It's quite funny; although I like much of Piers' work, the structure is poor and it could use a rewrite. He originally conceived it as a way of inflicting the experience on me that he felt I had inflicted on him. As revenge this was okay, but as tit-for-tat it wasn't entirely fair: he had invited me to write about him, whereas I certainly never invited him to write about me. Nor did I give my agreement that he should publish it; but I think Piers feels real angst if any piece of his writing remains unpublished. Anyway, I've received enough critical acclaim for my serious endeavors so that I really don't feel my ego is endangered when someone puts a slightly presumptuous profile of me into print.

I wish Piers could say the same.

Charles Platt
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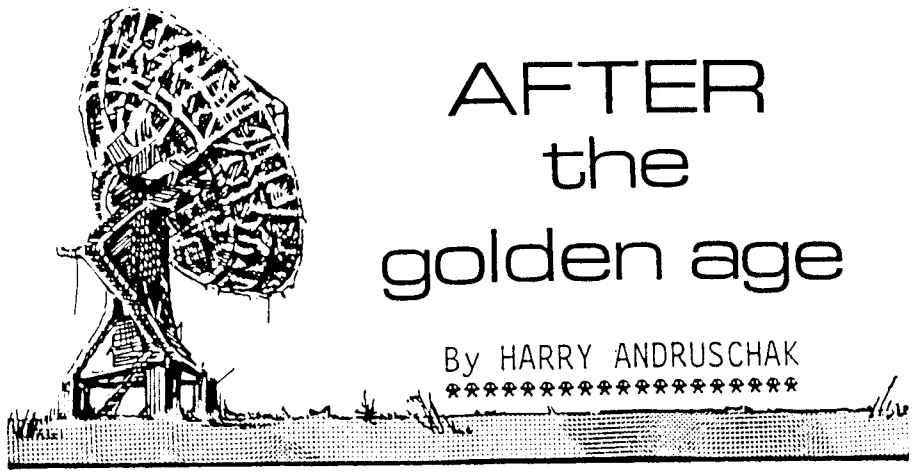
Piers Anthony is not responsible for representations of his positions made by others.



AFTER the golden age

By HARRY ANDRUSCHAK

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL SPACECRAFT IN THE WORLD

There has been a lot of activity at JPL on the Galileo Jupiter Orbiter and Probe Mission. All Environmental tests have been completed. We started out with vibration, acoustic, pyrotechnic shock, and radio frequency tests, all designed to demonstrate the Galileo could survive the severe launch environment. Then we moved the spacecraft to the 25-foot Space Simulator, where it was tested in a chilled vacuum chamber with a battery of sun lamps aimed at it, to simulate deep space conditions. All tests were satisfactory.

Now Galileo is back down in the Spacecraft Assembly Facility, for final calibrations and checkouts. The target date is 1 November, after which we wish to ship the spacecraft to the cape. There we will begin the process of integrating the spacecraft to its Centaur Upper Stage.

Last time I mentioned we had four potential problems that could affect the mission. One of these has been solved: the problem of the memory chips in the on-board computers being affected by the Jupiter radiation environment. New chips from the Sandia Laboratories were incorporated, and the results are satisfactory. That problem is out of the way.

Problem # 2 is still there. We have a lot of bugs in the Telemetry Systems that will process the data sent back by the spacecraft in real-time. We have four (4) Multiple Device Controllers (MDC), all of which have endless problems that are nowhere near to being solved. We have engineers working on the problem, and hopefully the systems will be ready by launch.

Problem # 3 is the Shuttle system itself. Will it be ready in May 1986 to actually launch the spacecraft? As I write this on 23 March 1985, we have had a two-month delay in shuttle launches. It started back in December of 1984, when a DOD launch was delayed to January 1985, causing the Spacelab 3 mission to be bounced from January to April 1985, which in turn caused the Spacelab 2 mission to be bounced from April 1985 to whenever a launch slot could be made ready for it that did not conflict with the priority of commercial launches.

But the February 1985 launch was first delayed to March, and now has been cancelled. The whole schedule is in ruins, and I see no way for NASA to avoid lots of discontent from its commercial customers. The two Spacelabs will be delayed as well. The Department of Defense has got the go-ahead from Congress to buy 10 new expandable rockets to take the place of the shuttle launches. The question now is... will the shuttle be ready in May 1986?

Problem # 4 is the Centaur Upper Stage that will be used with the Shuttle. It has run into overcost problems. It is also on a tight time schedule to be delivered to the Cape for the May 1986 launch date.

Still, we do have a success in the Galileo Spacecraft. I wish I could run a color picture thru NIEKAS of the assembled spacecraft. You would see what I mean by the word "beautiful".

CLOSING IN ON URANUS

Another activity at JPL these last few months has been preparations for the Voyager Two Uranus Encounter. And the proper NASA pronunciation is YOUR-a-nus. Accent on the first syllable, please. The date of the

closest encounter is still 24 January 1986, but in actual fact we will start the "Far Encounter" by the middle of August of this year. Even then the pictures from the spacecraft will be superior to anything that has been obtained by Earth telescopes. We are starting to expand the Science Area to accommodate more line printers and plotters that will print out the science data in real time. Personnel are being hired, or sometimes re-hired, to operate the spacecraft in three shifts. Currently we have only one shift working 8AM-4PM Monday thru Friday.

GALILEO MISSION MODIFICATION

I almost forgot to mention that there has been a change in the proposed mission profile. NASA headquarters has been debating for two years if the GALILEO spacecraft should try to fly by an asteroid on its way to Jupiter. The final decision was yes, and the target is Asteroid 29 Amphitrite. The flyby will occur on 6 December 1986.

After the flyby there will be a course change on 10 February 1987 to bring the spacecraft back onto a course for Jupiter, with a new arrival date of 10 December 1988. But because this will use a lot of onboard fuel, we will no longer be able to do 11 orbits around Jupiter as originally planned. Instead we will do only 10, losing the trip down the Jupiter Magnetotail among other losses.

HOW I BECAME A UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST

As I type this, I am one year sober. I want to thank the many fans who have supported me in this last year, probably the hardest year of my life. Alcoholics Anonymous has published a pamphlet in which it states that an alcoholic with less than 1 year of sobriety has only a 41% chance of making it thru the next year without a drink. Well, I've done it, and how can I adequately thank all of you who have had a part in this achievement?

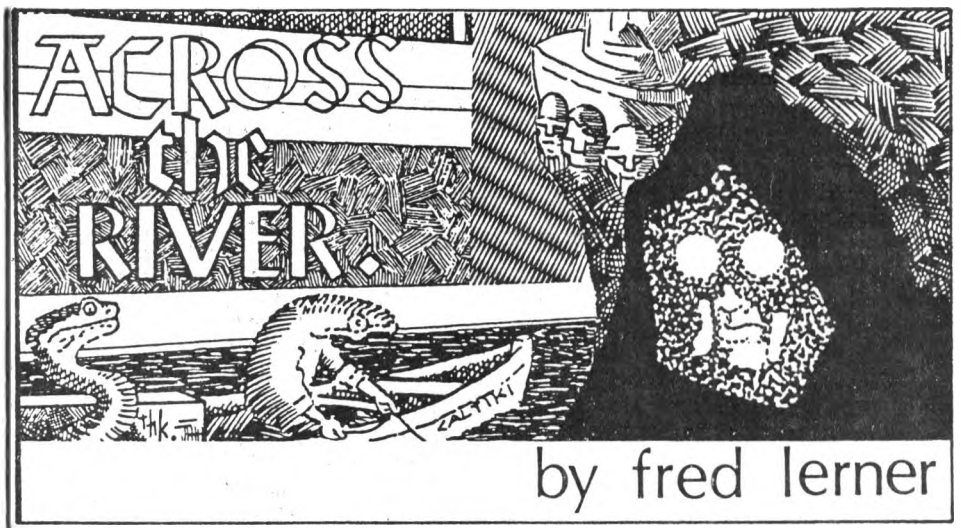
The same AA pamphlet suggests that an alcoholic with 1 to 5 years sobriety has an 86% chance of making it thru the next year without a drink, and that an alcoholic with over 5 years sobriety has a 92% chance of making it thru the next year without a drink. So I have maybe a 1 in 8 chance of going back to drinking in the next year. Not bad odds, really.

It is a widely accepted principle of recovery from alcoholism that the alcoholic must find a spiritual way of life. The 12-step program suggests that the alcoholic turn his will and his life over to the care of God, and seek thru prayer and meditation to improve his conscious contact with God.

However, I happen to be an atheist, and have been since age 16 or so. A lot of this had to do with reading Dr. Isaac Asimov, and later Lord Bertrand Russell and other scientific philosophers. Is it possible to find a spiritual way of life with this belief? Maybe it is. One of the AA pamphlets mentioned the Unitarian Universalist Association, and from what I read about it in the library I decided to give it a try. That was last October, and since then I have never regretted that decision.

Actually, most UUs do have a belief in God. However, since the church is non-credal and non-dogmatic, it is perfectly OK for Agnostics and Atheists to be members, and they are as welcome as any other person. I do not know if this will actually help me in my battle against alcoholism. Only time will tell. What I have found in the church is a fellowship of free thinkers that I feel comfortable with, in a way that I am not in AA meetings with Christian overtones.

I sometimes wonder what Isaac Asimov or Carl Sagan would think about all this.



A BOOK OF MY VERY OWN

The three great achievements that a man can accomplish in his life are to father a child, build a house, and write a book. I remember reading that in a book on management. I can't imagine what that statement has to do with management, but it has stayed in my memory.

A bit less than two years ago (as I write this) my daughter Elizabeth was born, and she is certainly an accomplishment to be proud of. I haven't ever built a house, and wouldn't dream of trying. (Putting together Elizabeth's swing set was challenge enough to my rudimentary construction skills.) But two out of three isn't bad: and I've written my first book.

It isn't anything that many of my readers haven't done many times over. But for everyone there is a first time, and that must always be an exciting event. In less than a month Scarecrow Press will publish MODERN SCIENCE FICTION AND THE AMERICAN LITERARY COMMUNITY. And I can't wait to see what it will look like in actual print, and to see how it will fare at the hands of readers and reviewers. Which is fitting, for the book itself is a study of how modern American science fiction has fared at the hands of literary people during its first fifty years.

In my book I defined the American literary community as those people whose business it is to deal with literature: publishers, reviewers, scholars, journalists, critics,

teachers, librarians, and futurologists. I defined modern American science fiction as the SF stories produced by writers working in the science fiction magazines or in the SF magazine tradition. (Thus I deliberately excluded those mainstream writers, such as Aldous Huxley and George Orwell, who occasionally employed SF themes.)

Having established these definitions, I then proceeded to examine in detail the response of the American literary community to modern American science fiction during the field's first fifty years, from 1926 to 1976. And I traced the ways in which this response changed with developments in the genre and events in the outside world.

What did I find?

It's hard to sum up 343 pages in a paragraph. But my major observations are these: modern American science fiction's reception by the American literary community was generally favourable; and the major outside influence (both quantitatively and qualitatively) on its reception was the dropping of the atomic bomb at Hiroshima. The atom bomb was the single most important factor in science fiction's attaining a place in the classroom, the library, and the laboratory; and it was this that secured the commercial viability of the field and made it possible for a conscientious writer to make a living at science fiction.

What's the purpose of the book?

MODERN SCIENCE FICTION AND THE AMERICAN LITERARY COMMUNITY is, to my knowledge, the first scholarly study of modern science fiction's reputation. Science fiction has helped to shape the world in which we live. Many of the scientific discoveries, technological innovations, and policy decisions that are determining the future of mankind are being made by people whose thinking about science, technology, and the future were influenced by their reading of science fiction at an impressionable age. Thus the history of modern science fiction is an essential fraction of the intellectual history of our times. And the history of its reputation is an essential part of the history of modern science fiction.

My research for MODERN SCIENCE FICTION AND THE AMERICAN LITERARY COMMUNITY included reading several hundred articles (in popular magazines, scholarly journals, the educational and library literature, and futurological publications) and over a thousand book reviews. (All these are cited in two appendices for the benefit of anyone wanting to expand upon my research.) I also used scores of published and unpublished first-person accounts by people who were active in both the SF field and the wider literary community.

I can't claim that my book is the ultimate history of science fiction's literary reception. I'm sure that reviewers in the fan press, the SF magazines, and the scholarly media will find errors to correct and gaps to fill. But I feel confident that MODERN SCIENCE FICTION AND THE AMERICAN LITERARY COMMUNITY makes a worthwhile contribution to the historical record; and I hope that it will give some pleasure to those whose enjoyment of science fiction is enhanced by reading it in a larger context.

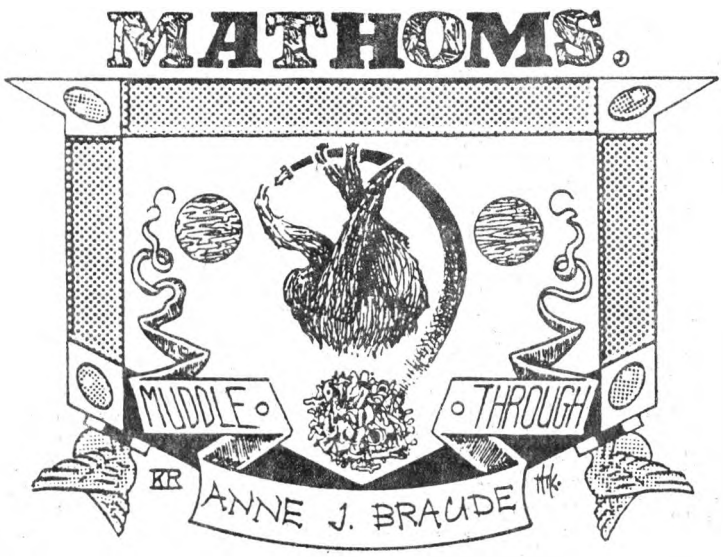
Obviously I didn't undertake this book as a money-making proposition. Given the hours it took (not to mention the out-of-pocket costs of photocopying, postage, and materials) dishwashing or ditch-digging would have been far more lucrative.

MODERN SCIENCE FICTION AND THE AMERICAN LITERARY COMMUNITY is a revised and expanded version of my doctoral dissertation, "Modern Science Fiction and Its Reception by the American Literary and Educational Communities, 1926-1970" (D.L.S., Columbia University, 1981). The dissertation has been available for the past two years from University Microfilms International, which sells on-demand microfilm and xerographic copies of dissertations from most North American universities. To my surprise, I recently received a small royalty check for the fifteen copies they sold in 1984. It came to all of $21.62--but that's $21.62 more than I ever expected to realise from that dissertation. I'd like to take that as an omen.

But I'm not planning to make a career, or even an avocation, of writing books about science fiction. I have a few other topics I'd like to learn about and write about. And there's this idea for an SF novel that's been kicking around the back corners of my mind...

# # #

(MODERN SCIENCE FICTION AND THE AMERICAN LITERARY COMMUNITY may be ordered directly from the publisher: Scarecrow Press, PO Box 656, Metuchen NJ 08840, for $26.00 per copy, with a postage and handling charge of $2.50 for the first copy and 50¢ for each additional copy.)



Will the Real Secular Humanist Please Stand Up?

PEOPLE FOR THE AMERICAN WAY is an organization founded by Norman Lear and others to defend the Constitution against the political and social agenda of the attention to the separation of church and state and to censorship. Their most publicized victory to date is the breaking of the Texas state textbook selection committee's traditional ban on science books which discuss evolution, which had constituted a de facto national ban on the subject because of the importance of the lucrative Texas market to publishers. As a card-carrying member of the group since its inception, I always scan the newsletter as soon as it arrives for the latest bulletins from the censorship front, and I am seldom disappointed. The January, 1985, bulletin announces that PEOPLE FOR has filed suit against the U.S. Department of Education to compel it to define "secular humanism" -- an action proceeding from an obscure clause in the 1984 Education for Economic Security Act which forbids the use of federal magnet school funds for "any course the substance of which is secular humanism." PEOPLE FOR counters that "the term is undefined and undefinable except by those who created the hoax of secular humanism," and that it is unfair to "attempt to solve this problem by dumping it in the laps of already overburdened local educational agencies." Being myself not averse to rushing in where armies of federal bureaucrats fear to tread, I have decided to have a bash at the definition issue, by scanning some of the different definitions and descriptions of "humanism," secular and otherwise.

The term "secular humanism" was pretty much unheard of until a few years back, when the likes of Jerry Falwell and Tim LaHaye began claiming that it had pervaded public education and was responsible for all sorts of social ills, including young people's challenging the authority of their elders, antiwar activism, sexual permissiveness, the use of recreational drugs, the decline in SAT scores, and the annual flooding of the Wabash River. Somehow I don't think that what they meant by this was that students in public schools were spending too much time reading Erasmus, Thomas More, and Pico della Mirandola, the names that leap to mind most readily in response to the mention of humanism. The term was originally used by Cicero to designate education in the liberal arts, or the form of culture most worthy of the dignity of man; during the Renaissance, scholars and writers who looked to the secular literature of classical Greece and Rome for stylistic and thematic models, rather than to Christian medieval literature, came to be designated humanists. Many of these Renaissance humanists were pretty boring, slavishly devoted to their models to the point of active hostility to originality -- some would refuse to use a Latin word if it could not be found in Cicero. And of course they were choosing Latin as their literary language at precisely the time when it was being supplanted by the vernacular throughout Europe. These scholars, philologists, and pedants may indeed be secular in their concerns; but the greatest of the Renaissance humanists, including Petrarch, Milton, and even Montaigne, as well as those mentioned earlier in this paragraph, found the classical tradition meaningful only in a Christian context. In the words of Douglas Bush: "Humanism in the Renaissance normally means Christian faith in alliance with God-given reason, which is the most human faculty in man. Humanism is that way of life and thought which keeps man in union with God and above the biological level." If its allegiance to faith set humanism against irreligious scientific rationalism and naturalism or Epicureanism, the central importance it gave to reason brought it into conflict with both the Protestant Reformation of Luther and Calvin and the Counter-Reformation of the likes of Savonarola; and it is these who are the spiritual ancestors of the Moral Majority.

But, as I suggested above, American public education is not suffering from a surfeit of More and Montaigne. So what is it that is infuriating the funnymentalists? And should it worry the rest of us? For informed criticism (as opposed to preprogrammed partisan diatribes) I recommend Richard Mitchell, who is a professor of English at a teacher-training college, New Jersey's Glassboro State College, and not at all incidentally the author, editor, and publisher of THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN, a subversive monthly that likes to poke the soft underbelly of educationism, the field not of classroom teachers but of administrators and of teachers of education courses; Mitchell finds their lack of mastery of the English language so appalling that it is only with great diligence and difficulty that one can disinter what they are trying to say -- which usually turns out to be even more appalling than their prose. Mitchell is concerned about a secular institution -- state-supported education -- and would seem to qualify as a humanist in the great tradition, as his heroes are Aristotle, Jefferson, and Tom Paine; but a lot of what he objects to in the schools is identical with what bothers funnymentalists, though for quite different reasons.

In THE GRAVES OF ACADEME, Mitchell cites the views of Thomas Jefferson on the underlying purpose of public education: "He wrote of the 'informed discretion' of the people as the only acceptable depository of power in a republic. He knew very well that the people might be neither informed nor

discreet, that is, able to make fine distinctions, but held that the remedy for that was not to be sought in depriving the people of their proper power but in better informing their discretion. Jefferson saw the informed discretion of the people as one of those checks and balances for which our constitutional democracy is justly famous, for it was only with such a power that the people could defend themselves against government and its institutions. Jefferson knew -- isn't this the unique genius of American constitutionalism? -- that government was a dangerous master and a treacherous servant and that the first concern of free people was to keep their government on a leash, a pretty short one at that. This informed discretion would be the result of an education that made all citizens literate: that is, not just possessed of basic minimal competence in reading, writing, and figuring, but with a fund of general knowledge and well-trained critical faculties, so that they could reason about, and judge, ideas, programs, and persons. The concept that public education should provide knowledge of facts and training in verbal and arithmetical skills held sway until the establishment in 1913 of the National Education Association's Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education (The Gang of Twenty-seven, according to Mitchell), whose 1918 report, CARDINAL PRINCIPLES OF SECONDARY EDUCATION, established the guidelines that educationists -- even those who have never heard of it -- have been following ever since.

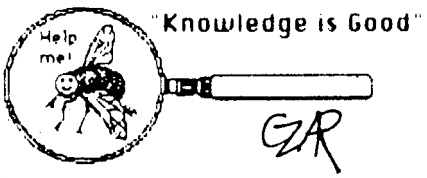
The Commission rejected the views of an earlier commission chaired by Harvard's Charles W. Eliot (of Five-Foot Shelf fame), which had advocated traditional academic study -- language and science to cultivate observation, mathematics for reasoning, history for judgement -- because they considered such a curriculum primarily oriented toward college preparation and therefore elitist and irrelevant to the needs of the majority of students who would not go to college, who needed instead "preparation for effective living." The fact that most high school students would not go on to college was the very reason that the Eliot commission thought that they should have the advantage of academic studies in high school; ironically enough, this "elitist" group assumed that most of them would be able to master the academic curriculum, while the "democratic" Gang of Twenty-seven thought it would be too hard for all but the very few. Command of Fundamental Processes (now known as Basic Minimum Competency) was the least of the seven cardinal principles of education espoused in CARDINAL PRINCIPLES, taking a back seat to such preferred objectives as Health, Worthy Home-membership, and Worthy Use of Leisure. This agenda has subsequently resulted in schools that emphasize "life adjustment" and "values clarification" and turn out subliterate students, schools presided over by educationists who are resentful rather than apologetic when their students fail competency tests -- and who utter screams of outrage when they are required to take such tests. In Mitchell's view the schools, which are supposed to provide future citizens with the skills that make informed discretion possible, have abandoned the teaching of skills and the inculcation of knowledge (now dismissed as "rote learning"), substituting open discussions for knowing what one is talking about and "appreciation" for understanding and judgement. (It is interesting that "appreciation," which comes from with approval or acceptance. One might call this a doctrine of absolute relativism, but then life-adjustment oriented educationism does not encourage critical thinking.) And the Gang of Twenty-seven and their heirs have done this is the name of "humanist" values, it being inhumane to expect adolescents to bother their little heads with the date of the Norman Conquest, the value of pi, or the correct spelling of harassment. Is Richard Mitchell, who contends that educationist humanism (which he calls "humanisticism" to differentiate it from the real thing) has made American public school education a scandalous failure, on the same side as the funnymentalists?

Well, no, though he has a hard time making them realize it and is frequently embarrassed by laudatory letters from the proponents of the Christian school movement. The religious and political Right objects to the values-clarification type of educationism not because they want young people to be trained instead think critically about values but because they want their own values inculcated. The schools have not been totally blind to the twentieth century, and in addition to career educationists they are staffed by teachers, some of whom actually have brains and use them despite what they have been taught in teachers' colleges. The old-fashioned values the Gang of Twenty-seven had in mind, which the Right was perfectly content with, have been replaced by a more contemporary, if not necessarily more rigorously examined, awareness of such imperfections in the national fabric as racism, sexism, recreational sex and drugs, spouse and child abuse, Watergate and Abscam, and so forth. Mitchell complains that students are encouraged by educationists to have facile opinions on such matters without being given the skills and the facts required to form sound opinions, and, in the name of "self-esteem," they are led to believe that all opinions are of equal worth. The Religious Right complains that students are encouraged to have the wrong opinions -- more specifically, to have opinions which are in conflict with those held by their parents. To summarize: Mitchell objects to what the schools do because they substitute life adjustment and humanisticism for their true purpose, the imparting of skills and knowledge. He believes that they do so partly because of an unstated philosophical bias against academic "elitism," and partly because it's a lot easier to do, especially for self-styled professionals who are uneasily aware that they themselves do not qualify for admission to that same elite. (I have grossly oversimplified his argument here; read the book for yourself.) The funnymentalists object to what the schools do partly because their children emerge from high school barely literate, but mostly because their children learn about things and ideas that the parents prefer to keep from them and often have the temerity to hold views different from those of their parents. These parents blame what the schools are doing on secular humanism, which they see as a deliberate and probably diabolically inspired rejection of Christianity and Christian values. They would be even more appalled if the schools actually did what Mitchell wants them to do; and Mitchell would probably reach for his gun if the schools did what Falwell & Co. want them to do. In short, Mitchell wants the schools to teach our children how to think; the Right wants the schools to teach them what to think -- as prescribed by that same Right.

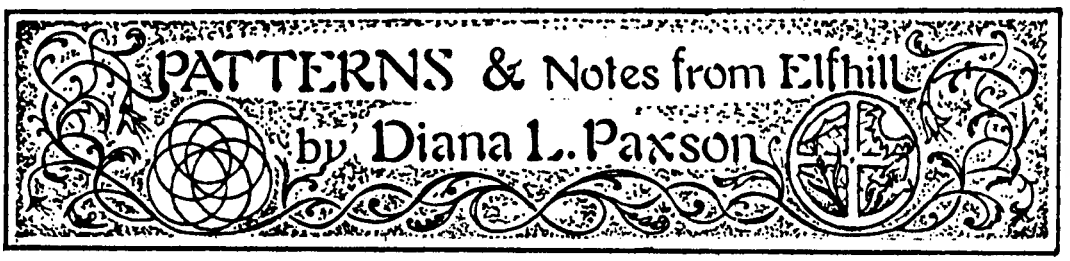
American public education, then, can accurately be described as secular, which is entirely appropriate in a pluralistic society and should offend only the kind of people who think the phrase "Christian ethics" a tautology -- as if no one but Christians ever condemned lying, theft, and treachery or praised courage, charity, and honesty. (This point is made and firmly buttressed by C.S. Lewis in The Abolition of Man, a book intended to criticize the views of certain educators who would have found themselves quite at home in the Gang of Twenty-seven.) But that education has no right to call itself humanist, nor do its enemies fairly damn it as such, insofar as it has abandoned the faith in and respect for human reason that are the hallmarks of humanism. In this the educationists and the

fundamentalists are a lot more like each other than either is like the central tradition of Christian humanism, but you will never get either of them to admit it. So is there anyone out there who can be called a true secular humanist? There is something called the American Humanist Association, to which some famous intellectuals belong; but it is hardly in the forefront of the molders of public opinion. It utters a manifesto every so often and then disappears back into the woodwork, and it seems as unwilling as the Radical Right to acknowledge that there are large areas in which Christianity and humanism overlap. The true secular humanist would be someone engaged in what Mitchell calls "the practice of rational thoughtfulness" in the study of man and his institutions, without appealing to -- but also without automatic rejection of -- the values endorsed by religion and ascribed to divine revelation. I have recently discovered a book whose author meets these requirements.

Judith Shklar is a professor of government at Harvard and, judging by the list of her publications, a specialist in political philosophy. In her most recent book, Ordinary Vices, she examines the effect on society and



the individual of "the sort of conduct we all expect, nothing spectacular or unusual," which is evil but which does not appear in the traditional Christian list of seven deadly sins. Her list of "ordinary vices," derived chiefly from Montaigne (who like those other humanists Montesquieu and Moliere is a hero of the book), includes cruelty, hypocrisy, snobbery, treachery, and misanthropy. With each she follows Montaigne's method of considering it the chief of human ills and then seeing what conclusions follow from such a premise. What impressed me most about the book was its thoughtfulness; it is a model of informed discretion. Shklar refuses to settle for easy answers or half-truths, as when she shows that a hatred of cruelty may lead us into a lack of respect for its victims (as, for example, a patronizing attitude toward those who died in the Holocaust), or considers the inevitability and ineradicability of hypocrisy. She is secular in that she deliberately excludes Christian moral definitions (though of course her ordinary vices are, most of them, offenses against one of the seven cardinal Christian virtues -- four of which were themselves originally pagan) and humanist in her concern with the nature of man and with relationships in human society, rather than between man and God, and in her esteem for human reason. Ordinary Vices sets a standard for secular humanism that exceeds anything demanded by the schools of their students -- that exceeds, in fact, anything the educationists themselves would be capable of. The Radical Right would no doubt hate it on principle without bothering to read it, simply because it doesn't insist that the answers to all ethical problems are to be found in the Bible. Richard Mitchell, on the other hand, would probably regard it as the shadow of a rock in a thirsty land. If this be secular humanism, I say thank God for it; and rather than requiring that the government refuse to fund it, we all ought to be out marching on the Department of Education with torches and pitchforks, demanding more of it in the schools.



Climbing the Tree of Life

Background

Some time ago I wrote a column on "Science Fiction, General Systems Theory, and Magic", in which I discussed (among other things) the relationship between GST and some aspects of the system of mystical philosophy known as Kabbalah. Last year at Worldcon, Ed asked if I would like to write something more on the subject, including some discussion of how I've been using its concepts in my fiction. But if my explanation is to make any sense, I should first try to explain what Kabbalah is.

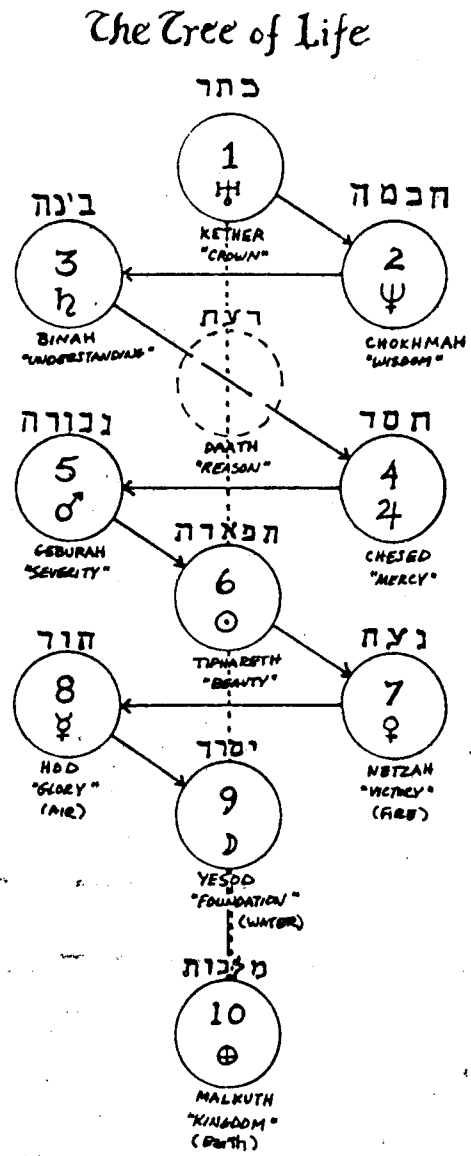
"Kabbalah" means, literally, "the Tradition". Dion Fortune refers to it as the Yoga of the west. This tradition is rich and extensive, and I have only made a small start in studying one aspect of it-- the mandala called the Tree of Life, which can appear as a tree, or as the structural diagram shown in figure 1, which looks rather like a General Systems flowchart. In fact, the Tree is a system-- a system which is so comprehensive that all other systems can fit within it. It functions as a kind of cosmic filing cabinet, whose ten spheres, or sephiroth, can be used to organize all possible experiences and archetypes. Obviously an essay such as this can only hint at the richness and complexity of such a system. The Hebrew Kabbalist makes it a life work, and even the western esoteric tradition of the Tree will yield years of rewarding study. However, in the understanding that this must be only a cursory presentation, the results of my own synthesis of material derived from a variety of sources and therefore heretical from the point of view of almost everyone, I will attempt to cover the essentials.

History

The first surviving kabbalistic texts

were written down in the twelfth century by Jewish mystics living in Spain, though much of the tradition may be older. The earliest significant text was the SEFIR YETSIRAH, or BOOK OF CREATION, which identifies, among other things, the ten sephiroth (or emanations) and the mystical significance of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Medieval Kabbalism evolved into two branches, the speculative, which dealt with mystical philosophy, and practical, which involved magical operations.

Jewish Kabbalism was discovered by Christian philosophers and magicians in the late Middle Ages. They incorporated the Hebrew names of archangels and demons into ceremonial magic and alchemy. Gradually, Kabbalism, alchemy, astrology and other systems began to exert a mutual influence. At the end of the 19th century, some of the Kabbalistic texts were translated by MacGregor Mathers, and the doctrine of the Tree of Life, as interpreted and developed by Mathers and others, became part of the fundamental teaching of the Order of the Golden Dawn. At present, The Tradition appears to have divided into two streams-- orthodox Jewish Kabbalism as it is taught by Hebrew scholars and rabbis, and the Tree of Life system of the Western Occult Tradition, to which Christian, Egyptian and Greek, and other material has been added by such teachers as A.E. Waite, Aleister Crowley, Dion Fortune, and more recently writers including Delores Ashcroft-Nowicki, William Gray, and A.C. Highfield. In some ways the divergence of the two streams is considerable, but those who study the gentile Tree remain aware of their debt to its Jewish originators.



archangels originally ascribed to each sphere on the Tree. My own contribution has been to identify both male and female deities for each sephira, and to explore the relevance of mythologies such as Norse, Celtic, African and Amerind.

The first sephiroth is KETHER, the Crown, whose number is One, and which glows with white light. Kether is the original, undifferentiated Divine Power-- pure existence. From Kether the power passes to the second sephira, CHOKHMAH (Wisdom) whose color is silvery grey, and which is astrologically associated with the zodiac (Note-- Ashkenaz and Sephardic pronounciation differs for many Hebrew words, but no matter what your tradition, the initial "Ch" in Chokhmah and Chesed is pronounced back in the throat, like a gutteral "h", not as in church). Chokhmah is usually personified as the sage, or wizard (although the feminine image of Sancta Sophia also belongs here). Think of Gandalf. In Chokhmah the Divine Word which patterns all things is first spoken, and that vibration is the Force that acts upon the third sephira, BINAH (Understanding) to produce Form. As Chokhmah was the supernal father, Binah is the Great Mother, but a mother at the cosmic level (as well as Father Time with his scythe). "Her" attributes are reminiscent of those of the Navajo Spider Grandmother. Binah's color is the black of deep space, and its astrological association is Saturn. Chokhmah and Binah are the Sage and the Wisewoman, Time and Space. In his Arthurian poetry, Charles Williams (who studied Kabbalah with A.E. Waite for many years) personifies them as Merlin and Nimue.

The Big Bang

To simplify drastically, according to the Tradition, all possible existence originally consisted of undifferentiated, undefinable Divinity. The name given to this state is AIN SOPH (without end), and it both is and is not any term by which humans might try to define or limit it. It is The Force, and it is the Void--It is the ultimate koan. Contemplation of Ain Soph engulfs the intellect in paradoxes of unknowabilitites and impossibilities until sheer frustration pushes awareness over the edge of logic for a momentary glimpse of the truth.

According to this theory, existence is the result of a momentary contraction of the infinite unmanifest, causing a release of energy. This contraction left a small empty space into which the relaxation of Ain Soph caused a beam of energy to blast. As this energy was transmuted to one level to another, it formed the ten sephiroth, envisioned as ten lights shining in the void. The first, KETHER, appears as white light, which filters through the spectrum until it arrives at the multicolored sphere of manifestation, MALKUTH.

The Tree of Lights

As the first figure shows, the mandala of the Tree is organized into three columns, or pillars. The one on the left is usually colored black, and is known as the Pillar of Severity. The one on the Right is white, and is the Pillar of Mercy. In the Middle rises the Pillar of Equilibrium.
As the Western tradition has evolved, a variety of deities from Egyptian, Mediterranean and other mythologies have been added to the angels and

Kether, Chokhmah and Binah form what is called the Supernal Triad. There is an abyss between them and the next sephira, in which is placed an invisible sephira, DAATH (Reason, or Knowledge), which must be understood in order to bridge the gap between pure consciousness and action. Across it, one finds the sephira of CHESED (Mercy), whose number is four, whose color is blue, and whose planet is Jupiter. Chesed is the Divine King, ruling by Law and Love. Much of the symbolism which C.S. Lewis uses in his introduction of Ransom as the Fisher King in THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH relates to Chesed, as does his characterization of Glund-Oyarsa in the chapter describing the descent of the powers in the same book. Chesed is necessarily linked with the fifth sephira, GEBURAH (Strength), whose color is red, and which is the sphere of Mars. Without the Law of Chesed, the force of the warrior is

destructive, but without the vigor of Geburah, there is no power to the Law. As Chesed includes the great Queens as well as the Kings, Geburah is associated with war goddesses like the Morrigan or Durga as well as with the war gods. The Norse myth of the binding of Fenris epitomizes the paradox of Geburah, which includes both the wolf-power of destruction and the strength of Tyr which binds it.

On the Middle Pillar below Geburah and Chesed we find TIPHARETH (Beauty). This is the sphere of the golden sun, and as its position suggests, it links and balances all the others. It has three archetypes-- the Divine Child, the King, and the Sacrificed God. The goddess most appropriate to this sphere would be Isis, the mother of Horus, Lady of Life and Death, and consort of Osiris. Here is where Christians place the Christ, and both Apollo and Dionysos belong here as well. The sixth sephira is primarily one of healing and mediation, the equilibration of opposites.

From Tiphareth, power moves right to NETZACH (Victory), whose color is the green of new leaves and whose planet is Venus. With this sephira we approach the world we know, for Netzach is also the sphere in which the fire of life burns. Here we find Aphrodite and Pan, Freyr and Freyja-- the deities who represent the force that impells life to go on. The passion of Netzach is balanced by the intellect of HOD (Splendor), on the other side of the Tree. Hod's planet is Mercury, its color orange, and its element Air. Deities appropriate to Hod are Hermes and Athena, as well as Odin and Coyote and all the trickster gods. Hod holds the power of the Magician who moves between the worlds. The descent of the Powers in THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH is illuminating in relation to the nature of Geburah, Netzach, and Hod as well as Chesed. It is also interesting to listen to Holst's suite THE PLANETS, when studying them.

The life force which was kindled in Netzach and channeled by Hod takes form in the ninth sephira, YESOD (Foundation), which is ruled by the Moon. This sephiroth is concerned with fertility too, after its own manner, which is that of the inner tides. As the moon rules the tides, so Yesod rules the element of Water, the oceans of the world, and the sea of the unconscious, for it is from Yesod that images and archetypes emerge. Its deities are the goddesses and gods of moon and sea, and its color is purple.

Finally we come to MALKUTH (The Kingdom), which is the sphere of manifestation, the element and the planet Earth as well. Malkuth is the sephira in which we perceive the effects of all of the others, the sphere in which the four elements take physical form. Earth is the Mother and the Bride and the gateway to all that lies beyond the fields we know. Its number in the system is ten, and it has four colors: olive, citrine, black and russet.

Climbing the Tree

The system described above is undeniably pretty, but its value must depend on what it is to be used for. As a philosophical system, the Tree of Life provides endless material for meditation, along with a metaphysical structure within which one can consider concepts from a multitude of fields. It can also be used as an aid to the study of the psyche. Jungian psychology is particularly harmonious with the Tree, which serves as a way of filing and accessing the contents of the collective unconscious.

As with any philosophical system, it is impossible to know for certain whether the ideas involved belong to internal or external reality. As long as we are finite creatures wearing physical bodies, we can never have such certainty. However for those of a certain cast of mind, the study of the Tree is of practical utility. The "natural Kabbalist" is one who enjoys the contemplation of symbols, and is intrigued by their connections and resonances. He or she is particularly sensitive to the patterns in things. The eclectic content of the esoteric Tree requires an ability to appreciate diversity without losing sight of its essential unity; to contemplate paradox and polarity without fear. Because all ten sephiroth, with all their qualities and reflections in the physical world, are emanations of Divinity, all life must be considered as holy-- the flesh as well as the spirit, both active and passive powers.

The student who "climbs" the Tree of Life not only develops a greater appreciation for all aspects of the world within which we are living, but acquires a powerful tool for psychological integration and spiritual development. Useful qualities can be understood and reinforced, while deficiencies in the personality are compensated and faults neutralized by working with the symbols of the forces that balance them.

One useful approach is to study one sephiroth each month, integrating real-world experiences with meditation, and culminating with a ritual. This is the procedure being used by the study group I have been leading, and the results have been quite rewarding, though sometimes unexpected, as when my water-bed flooded while we were studying Yesod.

Writing the Tree

A working knowledge of the Tree of Life can be useful to the writer in several ways. At one level, it can serve as a kind of thesaurus of archetypes. Most writers would agree that it is the unconscious that actually creates the stories-- the consciousness of the writer is only concerned with editing and structuring them and writing them down-- and knowledge of the Tree can speed things up by focusing attention on that part of the unconscious that will be most useful. It is like having a menu from which to access computer files, instead of trying random commands in the hopes that something will click. Once the mind has begun to work with the desired archetypes, images, characters and characteristics, and even plot developments flow naturally.

An example of this can be seen in the work of C.S. Lewis. Lewis was not himself a student of Kabbalah, but THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH appeared shortly after the death of Charles Williams, who was. Of all Lewis' work, it is the one most marked by Williams' influence. In THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH, Ransom has become the heir of Arthur-- the Pendragon-- and the Fisher King of the Grail legend. His room is called the Blue Room: the screen behind his bed gives the impression of massed hangings of blue, and through the window one sees only blue mist, as if you "...were perched in a blue tower overlooking the world." The blue color, and the fact that Ransom has a full beard, are symbols of Chesed. A Kabbalistic association is suggested specifically because it is royal blue rather than the traditional purple or the crimson which features so prominently in British royal ceremonies. Chesed is also indicated by the square (four-sided) entry to the Blue Room.

However in his description of Ransom, Lewis uses also symbolism associated with Tiphareth-- the six steps up to the entry, and the insistence on gold, the color and metal of Tiphareth, as a secondary color in the room.

> "And the voice also seemed to be like sunlight and gold. Like gold not only as gold is beautiful but as it is heavy: like sunlight not only as it falls gently on English walls in autumn but as it beats down on the jungle or the desert to engender life or destroy it."

A little earlier the symbolism is made even more specific. Solomon-- for the first time in many years the bright solar blend of king and lover and magician which hangs about that name stole back upon her mind. ...She tasted the word King itself with all its linked associations of battle, marriage, priesthood, mercy and power." (Chapter VII, section 1). Ransom is a king, but his kingdom is not of this world. The dominion of Chesed is overshadowed by the sacramental kingship of Tiphareth. The wound Ransom received from the Adversary in his battle for Perelandra continues to bleed, and Ransom is thus not only the King, but the Sacrifice, which is the other major image associated with this sphere.

My own fascination with the Tree of Life has led me to use it in several ways. When I first began to write about Westria, I was working with the symbolism of the Four Elements. In the system developed by the Order of the Golden Dawn, the four elements were associated with the four lower sephiroth, and the initiations for each of the first four grades were intended to confer mastery of both the powers of each sephira and its element. I therefore realized that in systematically exploring the elements, I had the opportunity to begin working my way up the Tree. It should be understood that in what follows I am defining what I have attempted or hope to do. The extent to which I have or have not succeeded must be decided by my readers.

Before I could write those books, I needed to establish what had happened previously to set up the problem. Therefore, the first of the Westrian books to actually see print were LADY OF LIGHT and LADY OF DARKNESS. In a sense, they frame the rest of the series, and their titles refer to the two pillars which flank the Tree. This symbolism operates in two ways. If the pillars as taken to represent the male and female polarities, the weakness of Caolin is the fact that he is focused in the masculine polarity, while Faris clings to the feminine. As long as the King maintains a position of equilibrium between them, everything prospers, but he cannot support that tension, and when he is gone, the unbalance in both Caolin and Faris destroy them.

The second interpretation of the pillars is as Mercy and Severity-- bright, or beneficent, versus dark or destructive power. The point here is that the dark powers of the unconscious may destroy, but they are not necessarily evil. Destruction itself plays an essential part in the working of the world, for without death and decay there would be no room for new life to grow. The healthy personality is one in which these forces are integrated. Faris tries to avoid this, and so can only react to the actions of others until the end of the book, when she finally accepts and integrates her own "dark" power and is able to oppose Caolin. The fact that her physical body has by this time been weakened beyond the possibility of survival does not diminish her triumph.

The next work in the Westrian series (which should appear around the end of 1985) is SILVERHAIR THE WANDERER, which chronicles the adventures of Faris' brother, the harper, over the next eighteen years. Its purpose is partly to tell his story and to express some of the things I feel about music in general and harps in particular, and partly to present the events of the period during which the child born in LADY OF DARKNESS is growing up. In terms of the Tree, it represents the period of wandering outside the gates which often precedes entrance to the spiritual path.

The book I am working on now is called THE EARTHSTONE. It begins the story of how Julian, the son of Faris and Jehan, recovers the four elemental jewels lost at the end of DARKNESS, and wins his throne. Its symbolism and action derive largely from ideas associated with the element of earth and the sephira of Malkuth, for instance, one of the Guardians of the plant world, the Lady of the Madrones, becomes his companion. It will be followed by THE SEA STAR (water/Yesod), THE WIND CRYSTAL (air/Hod), and THE JEWEL OF FIRE (fire/Netzach). At the end of all this Julian will be the most thoroughly initiated King in the history of Westria. If my strength, nerve, and the support of my editor hold out, I may one day attempt the stories of what happens during the reign of a King who has been so trained, which will carry Julian the rest of the way up the Tree.

I am addressing Kabbalah in a different way in the other novel with which I am presently involved. This one will be another contemporary

GOD-FORMS ON THE TREE

	Greek	Egyptian	Hindu	Norse	Celtic
Kether		Ptah	Brahma	Eldest	
'Hochmah	Uranus Athena	Thoth, Neith	Vishnu Shiva	Odin	Bran?
Binah	Rhea, Saturn	Mut	Shakti	Heide	Cerridwen
'Hesed	Zeus, Hera Poseidon	Amon	Indra	Thor,Odin Fricka	Taranis Brigantia
Geburah	Ares	Horus Sekhmet	Varuna Durga	Odin, Tyr Valkyries	Nuadha Morrigan
Tiphareth	Apollo Dionysos	Ra, Osiris Isis	Krishna Rama	Balder Odin	Maponus Lugh
Netzach	Aphrodite Pan	Hathor	Radha Parvati	Freyja Freyr	Branwen Cernunnos
Hod	Hermes Athena	Anubis	Hanuman	Odin Bragi	Brigid Lugh
Yesod	Artemis Atlas	Aah Shu	Ganesha	Heimdal Njord	Dagda Arianrhod
Malkuth	Gaea Demeter Hades	Seb, Isis Osiris	Lakshmi Prithivi Kundalini	Erda Hel	territorial goddesses Dis Pater

	Arthurian*	Santeria**	Amerindian (mixed tribes)
Kether	Logres	--	Wakan Tanka
'Hochmah	Table	--	White Buffalo Woman
Binah	Morgan	Orunla	Spider Grandmother
'Hesed	Guinevere	Obatala	
Geburah	Gawain	Oggun	Twins
Tiphareth	Arthur	Chango	
Netzach	Nimue	Oshun	Changing Woman
Hod	Merlin	Eleggua	Coyote
Yesod	Grail	Yemaya	
Malkuth	Camelot	--	Earth Mother

* Richardson, in Gate of the Moon ** Gonzalez-Wippler, in Santeria

fantasy, related, but not a sequel, to BRISINGAMEN. It s called THE PARADISE TREE, and describes what happens when an unscrupulous guru gives his students a new drug which propels the user into the world of the collective unconscious (or astral plane, depending on your frame of reference). The only way the protagonist can rescue an old friend who is lost among its terrors is by using the Tree as a map and guide. Naturally the criminal drug interests find out about it and want to take over the action, but their overt, physical danger is still less of a threat than the demons of the unconscious, who can be controlled only by understanding the symbols which can master them. The discipline of a background in computer programming helps too, and the willingness to pay the price of the knowledge of good and evil, which is responsibility.

It seems to me that the major theme of contemporary fantasy is the nature of power, its dangers and benefits, and the question of how it is to be managed without destroying its user. Very often "magical" power seems to be used as a metaphor for the kind of physical power humans now have over their environment, but the control of such power must come from within the mage. This is true, though less obvious, in the world of manifestation, for it is the intangible part of a man that makes decisions, including the decision whether or not to press the button that will start the final war. For the first time, humanity has the power to destroy not only itself, but its world, and it has become essential that we develop the discipline to control not the world, but ourselves.

Those who are attracted to esoteric studies find in them a means of integrating outer and inner worlds and developing such control. And the Tree of Life is one of the most useful paradigms yet developed for exploring the relationship between the rest of creation and the human soul.

References

I have found the following works to be most useful in studying the Tree of Life. They can be found in or ordered through most metaphysical bookstores.

Dion Fortune, The Mystical Qabalah (Ibis Books, 1935, 1979) This is one of the earlier works on the esoteric significance of Kabbalah written for a non-Jewish audience. It describes each sephiroth and its meaning for spiritual development. Fortune began her training with the Order of the Golden Dawn and went on to found her own group and become one of the foremost occultists of her day.

William G. Gray, The Ladder of Lights, (Samuel Weiser, 1981) Gray is one of the most useful of the more recent writers, and discusses each sephiroth in terms of its action in each of the four "worlds". He is also very good on the significance of the angels and archangels associated with each sphere.

A.C. Highfield, The Book of Celestial Images and The Symbolic Weapons of Ritual Magic (Aquarian Press, 1984, 1983 respectively) The first book gives an excellent description of the magical images associated with each sephiroth, while the second is the only one to deal specifically with symbolic "tools". It also features an excellent table of correspondences.

Charles Ponce, Kabbalah (Quest, 1973) This is the most accessible presentation of the Jewish Kabbalah I have found, with a good summary of its medieval sources and illuminating discussion of its basic concepts.

Israel Regardie, The Tree of Life (Weiser, 1973) This work addresses occult philosophy and spiritual development in general, and the particular sort of enlightenment the Western tradition can provide

A.E.Waite, The Holy Kabbalah (University Books, Citadel Press) Waite's discussion of the history anad sources of Kabbalistic philosophy is inclusive and balanced, and each work is analyzed in detail. It also covers the work of the major Christian kabbalists from the Middle Ages through the end of the 19th century, and relates the Kabbalah to other systems, such as alchemy and tarot. Even Jewish kabbalists seem to accept this one as a useful general introduction.

The Great Song of the Ainur

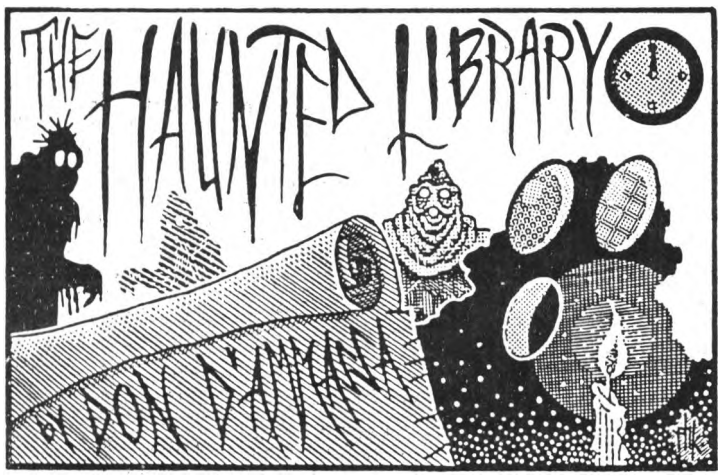
"From harmony,from heavenly harmony,
this universal frame began.":
for when the Ainur sang their golden glee,
the notes like swirling atoms ran;
when this one sang likeas a harp
and that one like a lute,
like pipes and trumpets,drums and bells,
nor would the viols be mute--
a harmony with flat and sharp,
as choruses of ancient language dove and soared
below,in midst,above,
an interwoven melody where dwells
great themes of beauty,high motifs of love.

Likeas a small and golden ball at first
which throbbed in inward movements deep,
and then exploded huge in harmony,
in music ever more complex it burst,
in high motifs its melodies forth-poured:
a flash of silver light might leap
in matter and in energy,
which by the laws which were its lord
would then compound itself a swirling galaxy--
from ancient polyphonic laws observed,unscored,
those rules which nothing jars,
a hundredfold the harmonies poured out in love,
"that love which moves the sun and other stars".

But Melkor,of the Ainur chiefest,
despised the music not his own,
loud it was and much repeated,
much repeated,loud,more loudly,
little harmony,much clamor,
like loud trumpets,untimed drumming,
chanting slogans more than singing--
so it grew to kill the music,
so it fought against the melos with harshest cacophony.

O great Iluvatar,O highest One,
who set the themes the Ainur earliest sang,
restore the music to the sweeter tone,
even though suffering must now add its tang--
for you alone have power and majesty
to set this sad,discordant world aright,
restore the ancient hour of harmony,
correct the flaws with all your loving might;
and if not yet you choose to interfere,
for reasons 'yond where all our sciences cease,
your diapason sounds some future year,
we know:in your high will is all our peace.

— Joe R. Christopher



It was occurring to me recently to wonder just what the fascination for supernatural fiction is. Personally I've been attracted to it for many years, enjoyed it long before the current wave of popularity. There is a greater awareness of it now, both in films and in print. In the literary world, we have authors like Stephen King, Peter Straub and others making the bestsellers lists. King in particular has become so popular that when he revealed his pseudonym recently, it made the wire services and was picked up by many newspapers. Old editions of his books immediately became valuable collectors' items. Several science fiction writers have openly stated that they would prefer to write horror fiction and do so, including Charles L. Grant, Dean Koontz and Thomas Monteleone.

The film world is the same. The classic horror figures of Frankenstein, Dracula and the Wolf Man always had a certain loyal following, although it was mostly for those in their early teens. But now we have a steady stream of hit horror movies, varying anywhere from the excellence of CARRIE, POLTERGEIST and HALLOWEEN to the routine hack and chop of the FRIDAY THE 13th series and its many clones.

A few definitions might be helpful here, although I'm sure any reader could find exceptions without a great deal of effort. Horror films, for example, do not have to be supernatural. Many of the current wave are simply psychopathic killer films with lots of graphic blood and gore. Charles Grant, among others, has pointed out that there is a difference between horror and revulsion, and most of the 'splatter' films are actively designed to be as revolting as possible. Eyes pop out of heads, axes sever limbs, chainsaws churn their way through intestines, maniacs sew bodies together out of spare parts, or make furniture out of them, and so on. There is, it must be admitted, a certain fascination about this as well, and anyone who has attended a FRIDAY THE 13th film has doubtless noted that the cheers are for Jason, not for his victims.

But I wanted to know what attracted people to pure horror fiction, particularly supernatural horror. The traditional psychological explanations don't satisfy me, the idea that vampires are sexual symbols that appeal to our supressed sexual desires, that the werewolf is archetypical of the animal wants and needs which we hide even from ourselves, revealed vicariously on the movie screen or in the pages of a lurid novel. Nor did I want to confuse it with suspense. There is certainly suspense in the pages of any good horror novel, but there can also be suspense in the pages of a mundane thriller. No, the horror element appears when the suspense is over, when the final confrontation is at hand, when the protagonist is about to triumph or fail.

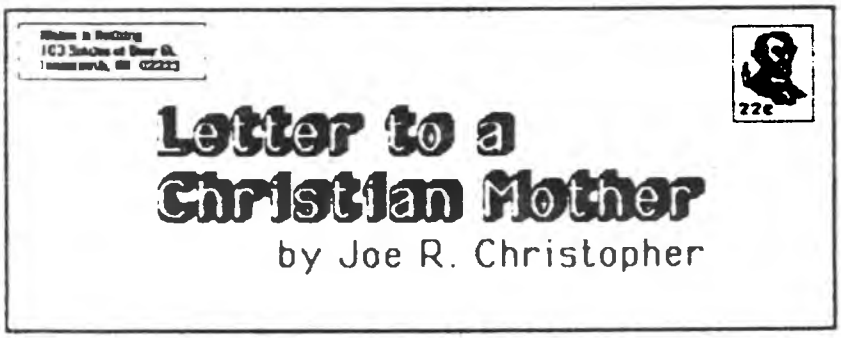
I think that the core element of a horror story is the realization that the rules which we accept as governing the universe are not necessarily true. the geocentrists might well have been "horrified" to discover that some people believed that the earth revolved around the sun rather than the opposite. When we see that the harmless, familiar character from a film is actually a monster, or can commit murder, the emotion we are are experiencing is horror. The most frightening horrifying moment in William Goldman's novel MAGIC was not the bludgeoning to death of the protagonist's friend or any of the other murders, it was the moment when the reader suddenly realizes that the narrator of the novel is the ventriloquist's dummy. The most horrifying moment in Stephen King's THE SHINING is not the animated garden, or the decaying corpse in the bathtub; it's the moment in which you realize that the hotel is not merely haunted (we have accepted haunted houses into our literary lives) but is actually in some macabre fashion a living entity.

This is probably why traditional horror themes are no longer popular. Vampires, ghouls, ghosts and goblins have all found their homes in our literary and film lives. A lurching Boris Karloff no longer has the power to frighten us because we have pigeonholed him; we know where he fits within our overall worldview.

So why this desire to seek out new sources of horror? Given the conservative nature of the majority of people, we would expect only grudging acceptance of new ideas into the corporate mind. Remember the low esteem that horror films and fiction have enjoyed over the years. Even within the field of science fiction, there is little fondness for the ghost story, and the occasional lapses into horror fiction by "our" writers over the years have largely been ignored. Who talks about Theodore Sturgeon's SOME OF YOUR BLOOD?

If it were a teenaged phenomenon, one might assume that it is tied in to the traditional desire to question authority, to cast into doubt all the rules and eternal verities that the older generation holds dear. Indeed, in some cases this might be the unconscious motivation, and it might explain why, for some, the lure of the horror film fades as the years pass and individuals find themselves co-opted into the established way of the world. But what of the rest? I suspect that the truth lies for them in the fact that if, even for a few moments, we can accept the possibility that the dead walk, that science is not always right, that the laws of the universe are not without exception, then it might well be true that what we believe about death is also untrue, that the dead really can return, and in order for them to return, there must be someplace for them to return from.

It is ironic, if true, that we might seek our own personal immortality in the fictional death of books and movies.



The following letter is authentic; it is not an essay disguised as a letter. (It may have grown from a proper letter into essay, but that's a different problem.)

Here's the background.

A mother of a young teenaged boy spoke to me at the coffee hour after the Sunday service at our church, asking me about Dungeons and Dragons. Her son was playing it, and his grandparents (probably on her side) were concerned with it being non-Christian. I said, quite truthfully, that I had never played it or read any of its literature, and so I couldn't make any comments about it with authority, but I hadn't assumed there was anything wrong with it. I suggested she ask another member of the church who had been a Dungeon Master for a group. She wasn't enthusiastic because the person I suggested wasn't very regular in his attendance at church, but I thought I had deflected the business.

Instead, she went to my wife who said that I would be happy to read a manual and discuss the Christianity (or lack of it) in the game. So the mother brought over Dungeons and Dragons: Players Manual, by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson, 1983 revision by Frank Mentzer. I was stuck. I suppose I could have written a nice short comment about the game improving the players' imaginations and let it go at that, but I understood from my wife that the grandparents were upset over some minister saying that the game was devil-inspired. I suppose that that will sound laughable to many science fiction and fantasy fans, but the pains and upsets in families are real enough from such things. And, as a Christian, I suppose I had to admit the theoretical possibility of such a thing.

Actually, if one compares Dungeons and Dragons to something really meant to be evil, such as the Tarot deck designed by Aleister Crowley (I have seen a copy), D&D is innocent enough. I suppose the worry is that D&D is the first step of temptation on the way to something more evil. It is difficult to answer anyone who is really taking the devil seriously, and when I looked at the manual I found a number of things which could be faulted from the Christian point of view.

At any rate, I tried to discuss the matter rationally in the letter. My basic suggestion, made near the end, that the Christian teenager should have the limitations of the game discussed with him or her is an obvious thing to say. But I thought that the discussion, since I had spent some time on it, might be of interest to readers of NIEKAS, whatever their religious attitudes, since most of them will be familiar with Dungeons and Dragons.

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Dear _____,

I have looked through _____'s Dungeon's & Dragons: Players Manual, and I have found ten areas which might upset fundamentalistic Christians. Most of them are not likely to upset anyone outside of that orientation, but perhaps they are worth discussing. (You'd better not pass this letter on to such a preacher *in toto*: it may give him ideas about something he missed!) I suppose it is not necessarily one thing which causes an upset, but probably the combination of materials.

(1) The whole concept of role-playing will bother some people (p. 2). Most fundamentalists are rigid personality types, holding onto the Bible as a law book: therefore, anything which might cause a person to be less rigid, to be imaginative, is suspect. This same type has denounced all types of imaginative literature in the past. And obviously, in one sense, it is quite true that imaginative people are not likely to be rigidly orthodox (flexibly orthodox, maybe!).

(2) The fantasy world which is being advanced involves magic (p. 2). Further, one of the major role types is the "magic-users" (p. 37). There are a number of Old Testament rules that fringe on such things: "Do not turn to mediums or wizards" (Leviticus 19:31, 20:6, 20:27; Numbers 18:9-14) and the command which caused the Salem witch trials, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (KJV) or, in the RSV, "You shall not permit a sorceress to live" (Exodus 22:18). Does the sort of imaginative play which D&D encourages really involve magic? Obviously not, but, from the rigid point of view, it involves playing with fire. You can see why a fundamentalist would be bothered. One way to discuss the matter is to find out if the person involved was enough of a purist to have written complaints when BEWITCHED was on TV or to have picketed any theater where a production of BELL, BOOK, AND CANDLE was taking place. If the preacher, or other Christian, did not carry out compaints against these works, then he or she is presumably just attacking D&D because it's currently a fad, trying to hitch his/her popularity to denouncing whatever will make headlines.

(3) A person playing D&D can play a character of the opposite sex from himself/herself (p. 2). If you want a Biblical text against this, perhaps Deuteronomy 22:5 will do: "A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God." Again, the rigid personality type may well be afraid of the chaos in his or her unconscious, and the marginal sex roles of many people, and so denounce this type of role-playing. Actually, homosexuality and sexual-role shifts are probably deeply planted in the person's mentality and D&D is hardly likely to create them--it might, however, reveal them. On the other hand, in these days of greater consciousness about sexual-role problems, it might not be bad for people to sometimes look through the eyes of their sexual opposites. (Fiction is more likely to do this well than is D&D.) I suspect, by the way, that most teenage boys playing D&D are not secure enough in their own sexuality to play female roles in the game, so this particular item is probably not very important.

(4) D&D involves a great amount of fighting to the death (p. 4 and passim), even of neutral figures like the Rust Monster (note the reward for killing the latter, p. 21). A pacifistic Christian might object to this ("Thou shall not kill"--not making the distinction, which I am told is in the Hebrew, between murder, the condemned, and other killing). Even a Christian who does not object to all killing might be disturbed by the emphasis on killing in this game. Here again, I suspect the only fair question is what the person does in other areas.

Does this Christian allow his or her children to have cap pistols? Does he or she ever picket stores which sell toy soldiers at Christmas time as being anti-Christian? If the person does not, then I do not see that he or she can make any objection to D&D on this score. After all, many of these teenagers will end up in the military during war time; since its early years (not since the very first), Christianity has not objected to Christians serving in wars. Why object to war-like play? Only the thorough-going Pacifist has a consistent position here.

(5) Some minister might object that this book shows a lack of seriousness about dying--since the person playing, if his/her character is killed, can just invent and introduce a new one (p. 8). Indeed, if he was clever enough, he might argue that this is sneaking in an idea of re-incarnation! Obviously, the writers of the D&D manual are just trying to keep the kids who are playing the game from being so involved with their characters that their deaths devastate them. I doubt that this passage, by itself, would cause an objection to D&D. Indeed, if one took this objection seriously, it would also argue against any work (movie, play, novel, what have you) in which the viewer/reader identified with a character and that character died. Do we really grieve for Hamlet after the play is over? Do we pray for his soul?

(6) More seriously, there is the "alignment" of characters in D&D: lawful, neutral, chaotic (pp. 9, 55). (For lawful, read good; for chaotic, read evil.) There are two objections which might be made to this. First, that it is permissable for a person to choose a neutral or chaotic alignment if he/she wishes. That is, a player may choose to be "evil" for the duration of the game. Here is the question about role-playing (no. 1, above), indeed. I can't take this one very seriously, for the description of "lawful" is so much in terms of the group, and teenagers so desperately want to be members of groups, that almost all will choose "lawful alignments." I feel sure that some will occasionally have a character of a different alignment in order to surprise the others, but if someone deliberately, time after time, chose the "chaotic alignment," I'd suspect it was not something which the game was doing to the player, but something which the player had brought for a character to change his alignment. In the real world, people are occasionally converted from "chaotic" to "lawful"; others backslide from "lawful" to "chaotic." Probably a third of the population is "neutral" (as it is here described) most of the time. All that one can say to this is that, if this game is here simplistic, it shares that simplicity with lots of the older formula fiction and movies--good guys vs. bad guys in westerns, mysteries, etc. Probably most fundamentalistic preachers are not likely to make this second objection ("Once saved, always saved" as one denomination's slogan has it).

(7) I wonder if some people do not object to the introduction of elves, dwarves, and halflings among the good characters (pp. 10, 23, 45-47). (By the way, the choice of these characters show how influenced D&D was by Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, even to the technically incorrect plural of dwarf.) Does an elf have a soul? In traditional myth, it does not (most of the time, anyway). An elf will live for long periods of time, but it has no life after death. In Tolkien, interestingly enough, the elves are involved in some type of reincarnation: their souls come back to earth in newly born elves, usually (it seems) in their own lineage. Obviously, neither situation is going to make a fundamentalistic minister happy, especially for players to role play as these creatures. (The mythic background for dwarves is less familiar to me. Halflings as Hobbits were invented by Tolkien: I'm not certain of what beliefs tie to halflings otherwise.) On the other hand, since no D&D player can literally grow up to be an elf, a dwarf (in the mythic sense), or a halfling, then it's doubtful that role-playing these parts is going to be greatly influential. Obviously, no matter how much he or she role-plays elves, the player will not grow up to be able to see hot and cold objects in the dark!

(8) Although it should have occurred to me earlier, the rolling of dice throughout may bother some people (p. 2 and passim). I don't know of a Biblical command, "Thou shalt not gamble," per se, and the casting of lots (as in Acts 1:26) is a traditional way for letting God decide an issue. In D&D I think we may make some distinctions. Some of the use of dice here--for example, the rolling for ability scores (p. 48)--is at the level of genetic chance in the real world. One sibling may get strength; another, dexterity. The use of a die may be a satisfactory metaphor for this. The rest of the use of dice seems (so far as I noticed) to be tied to what happens in various combats and other actions--who gets in the first blow, etc. Most of us would say that there's a goodly amount of chance about that in the real world too. Where the Christian objection comes in, I think, is that in this game (like most games) chance rules, while the Christian affirms that in this world (in some sense) God rules. I don't know if many Christians are at the level of the early New England Puritans who thought storms were sent by God as punishments for sins; on the other hand, Dante has a long discussion in La Divina Commedia to affirm that Fortuna is beneath the rule of God. (Charles Williams' phrase about "Holy Luck being with someone" indicates the same attitude in the Twentieth Century.) There are theological brambles here which I don't care to crawl through. I think we might agree (a) the roll of a die and the element of chance which it introduces into D&D are useful for D&D considered simply as a game, in that they cause uncertainty and suspense; (b) the use of the dice may stand metaphorically for the way most people experience this world; (c) if one wanted to introduce a Christian perspective into the game, it would have to be at the level of God deciding (in some sense) what the die was going to turn up. But I have taken this beyond where I suspect a fundamentalist would be; he or she simply would dislike the use of dice because of their association with betting.

(9) Back to role-playing for the last two points. First, one of the human characters who can be chosen for a role is a thief (p. 43). This may be an influence from Mr. Baggins, burglar, in The Hobbit. (If the inspiration also included Fritz Leiber's Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser series, the Grey Mouser may have influenced this choice.) Whatever the origin, obviously no fundamentalist is going to approve anyone role-playing a thief. (The book suggests, gently, on p. 43, that it is not wise to steal from one's friends; but the argument is based on social ties, not on Biblically-based morality.) I don't think there's much of a way around this one at the level at which the fundamentalist is arguing. Is play-acting a thief likely to make, not necessarily a thief, but more casual about moral categories, less rigidly proper? Is simply playing a game in which a thief is acceptable as a character likely to break down rigid moral codes? It seems to me that there is the possibility of influence here, for I believe environment, including the games we play, influences us. On the other hand, one must admit that D&D is not likely to be a major influence in one's life. If one's father cheats on the income tax and brags about it, that is likely to be a greater influence toward dishonesty than any game, however intensely played for a number of years. Games, like books, influence us; but, because of their existence as art--or play-forms, they are not likely to have quite the same type of influence that real life does. Not everyone who went to see SCARFACE or BONNIE AND CLYDE became a gangster--the social environment in which one grows up is

likely to have a greater influence. I use movies because they are well known, but rogue tales, or the picaresque novel, are equally good examples. One can think of a number of series of stories about thieves in the mystery field: Hornung's stories about Raffles, Leslie Charteris' series about the Saint (Simon Templar), Ed Hoch's series about Nick Velvet. Psychologically, these can be thought of as holidays from moral concerns on the part of the public, escapes into being the type of persons they probably would not want to be in real life. Is this healthy? Is this dangerous to the reader's morality? Is this a necessary allowance for the libido so the superego can run most of life? I don't know the answers here, but I know what answer the fundamentalist would give (perhaps noting I Corinthians 5:11).

(10) I have saved the most interesting role-playing for the last: the cleric. I don't think the fact that, in the first adventure, the cleric is a woman (p. 4) will bother too many people--Roman Catholics, perhaps, and some fundamentalists ("As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches"--I Corinthians 14:33b-34). But that the cleric does some magic (p.4) will certainly bother the fundamentalist. In the first adventure, besides a curing spell (p. 4), the cleric uses an undescribed symbol from one of the town churches to drive off ghouls (p. 5). What is behind this is the old tradition of a vampire being driven off by a cross. The writers of this book, in order to reach the largest possible audience, doubtless, have avoided saying what the symbol is: they want Jews, the unChurched, and other, smaller religious groups to be able to play without discomfort. Later in the book, the avoidance of any specific ethical or theological beliefs (p. 24) is, I assume, this type of commercialism. (Probably a Jew will have his or her cleric carry a Star of David--which is the intention, despite the use of the word "churches"; no doubt a few teenagers will come up with odd religions, and even odder symbols, for their clerics--but these teenagers are not likely to come from fundamentalistic churches to begin with.) A sophisticated attack on the concept of the cleric here would point out that the spells coming from meditation (p. 25) smacks of Gnosticism, rather than orthodox Christianity. Some of the other attributes of the cleric are not unknown in Christianity: his or her ability to fight (remember the World War II song "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition": remember the Episcopal bishop who, during the Civil War, served as a general--on the Southern side; etc., etc.) and his or her use of armor. The restriction that the cleric cannot use a sharp-edged weapon (p. 24) is an oddity; I feel certain that its intention is just to make him or her a second-rate fighter, but the statement that sharp-edged weapons are "forbidden by the cleric's beliefs" creates a fantasy-based cleric and fantasy-based religion. I can guess what a fundamentalist would say about such an idea.

The terms for the clerical levels are not such a traditional Christian hierarchy as bishop, priest, and deacon (or, in some churches, minister, elder, and deacon; etc.) but priest or priestess (highest), adept (middle), acolyte (lowest) (p. 24). Acolyte and priest (a shortened form of presbyter) are used in a number of Christian churches--Roman Catholic, Episcopal, etc. Priestess is not used in Christianity, I believe, and it usually refers to a woman serving a pagan god. Adept usually refers to a magician. Obviously, the devisers of this game chose, from a Christian perspective, very poorly. (The use of adept + the illustration of an odd magical gesture on p. 26 are enough by themselves to upset any fundamentalist.) Quite frankly, I think the whole decision to introduce a "cleric" probably was mistaken because it raises many problems for anyone who is trying to be orthodox. If the creators had said "scholar," probably they would have created less tumult--although (a) from the game-makers' point of view, the character might be too close to the "magic-user" and (b) from the fundamentalist's point of view, the character would still be a human using magic. (I wonder if "mystic" might have been even better.) A Christian boy or girl playing this role might want to get rid of the term cleric and make the whole role a fantasy role, calling the character a "mystic," "mediator," or something of that sort. At that, the fundamentalist would object to a "meditator" in the same way he or she would object to the "magic-user"--but the shift in terminology would maybe eliminate some of the problems.

Now then, what do we make of the game over all? It seems to me no better and no worse than much of the world around us--not evil in intention (just commercial in intention), but certainly not thoroughly Christian as published. A fundamentalist who objects to superhero comic books because some of the heroes use magic (and occasionally the villains do, in such comics as Superman) and who equally rejects TV shows or movies which suggest magic, is at least consistent--although I think there are more obviously evil things around than comic books and light fantasy works like BEWITCHED, or, for that matter, than D&D. Has this person picketed what are called "slash movies"--movies with great emphasis on cutting people up--which, despite the fact that they are done with special effects, are our equivalent pictorially to gladiatorial combats? (These movies are usually about men cutting up women, at that, although there are some with groups of men against each other.)

You can probably think of a large number of other things in our age which are more serious than D&D. As I said, the game is not pure, as the World around us is not pure; but other than pointing out to a Christian teenager where the problems are, it seems absurd to put great emphasis on its failures. Teenagers are killing people in most large cities and we worry about a game which keeps them quiet and develops their imaginations? As long as we live in the World, the things we use will be mixed in their values. D&D seems milder than many things around.

I have sounded negative about the fundamentalist in this letter, I suspect. I'm not, in most ways. It seems to me that the rigid Christian has two ways of serving the Church through the ages. First, he or she, in times of persecution (if the person's faith doesn't snap, as sometimes happens to the rigid), becomes the martyr to the faith. The Church grows through its martyrs. The rigid, who stands firm in times of attack, becomes an inspiration to those who follow. (The flexible, who bends with the storm and returns upright after it is passed, is hardly as praiseworthy.)

Second, the rigid keep the traditional truths for the Church through the ages. Such a person is seldom alive to any new fruits of the Spirit in his or her time, but not all gifts are given to each Christian. (I have used "rigid" and "fundamentalist" as if they are equivalent terms in what I've written, since the context of the discussion suggested it, but the rigid in the Episcopal Church are likely to be high-church Anglo-Catholics. Their virtues and limits are the same, I think, as I have described as belonging to the fundamentalists above in this paragraph.)

This has been far too long an answer to your request, but, like most things in this world, a simple answer won't really cover the situation. Maybe something in this will be useful to you.

Joe

THE ACTUAL FALL.

ILLUSTRATED BY JOAN HANKE-WOODS

JOHN BRUNNER

I've just had to explain, countless times, not only to my colleagues in other fields than SF, but even to those of my fellow SF writers who neglect the opportunity offered by conventions, how greatly I value the feedback I can obtain from events like this. Most writers have to depend on the response of their publishers, their editors, a handful of reviewers and a select circle of personal friends; a science fiction writer, on the other hand, can rely on walking into a convention hotel and meeting dozens of total strangers who have read his or her work and are prepared not only to say, "Goshwowboyoboy, your Squares on the Hypotenuse was the best thing I've read since Tesseracts of Downtown Los Angeles!" No, they're also willing to offer constructive and informed criticism, often because they are specialists in their field and want to prevent you from making gaffes in your next book as bad as those you committed in your last one.

The First Worldcon I ever attended was the one held in London in 1957. Its total membership was approximately equal to the number of boozers present at one of this weekend's con-site bidding parties. Marjorie and I got ourselves up as a pair of Sprague de Camp's Krishnans, with green hair (that Leichner makeup took days to wash out afterwards, but it gave a kind of proto-punk effect, I suppose) and antennae made from green pipecleaners stuck on with adhesive plaster. Attired in a yellow outfit copied from Edd Cartier's cover for Sprague's The Hand of Zei, and a pair of my father's African mosquito boots which were far too big for me, I was resplendent enough to get us interviewed on the BBC's television programme TONIGHT, even though a lot of the effect was wasted because this was in the days before colour TV. The interviewer was Alan Whicker, who is now a globe-trotting millionaire, so I suppose some good came of it in the long run.

What I want to talk about is something lots of would-be authors keep asking me, both here and in Britain: "What's it like being a writer specialising in SF, and can someone like me in the 1980's risk following your example?

Now that's one hell of a tough question to answer. I can, however, begin by stating that when I set up in business things were a great deal easier in some respects than they are today.

I don't mean you could simply scribble down the first wild fantasy that crossed your mind and rely on selling it to some nickel-a-word market. In fact, in 1957 I'd tried earning my living as a fulltime freelance and hadn't made it, so I was actually employed as the editorial dogsbody with a firm called Books for Pleasure. It had been founded by a guy who made his fortune out of the remainder trade, who later went on record as saying that books ought to be marketed the same way as cakes of soap.

That wholeheartedly commercial attitude prevaded the entire company, which goes a long way towards explaining why, on making my first U.S. novel sale, to the Ace Doubles, towards the end of 1958, I resigned my post from the hospital bed where I was recovering from an appendicectomy. Marjorie, whom I'd married in the summer of that year, was appalled; she cherished secret dreams of my becoming a director of the firm and making a five-figure salary. Well, she put up with it in the end, and indeed I'd like to pay public tribute here and now to all the support she's given me over the years.

And I think on balance we made a good trade. Besides, if I'd stayed in publishing I'd probably by now be on my second ulcer and my third divorce, whereas in fact we just celebrated our silver wedding anniversary.

In any case, I wasn't cut out to be the director of a publishing firm. Because, you see, I'm hopelessly in love with words, and have been all my life. I count myself incredibly fortunate to have been born to English, whose colossal vocabulary exceeds by at least one hundred per cent the best that an unabridged dictionary of any other tongue can offer. What's more, it grows so fast it's positively science-fictional in its own right.

I was explaining what I meant when I said it was easier to set up in business as a science fiction freelance in the late fifties than it would be now. There are a number of reasons for this. The inroads made by television and, more recently, electronic and computer gaming, on other pastimes competing for people's leisure obviously constitute a key factor. The economic recession is taking its toll, too. When I began, Ace--the line that paid me, let's face it, for publishing a lot of my juvenile mistakes--was issuing sixty SF novels a year. That's right: sixty, two doubles per month plus a single. And at the peak of SF publishing in the fifties, I once counted 47 SF magazines in English alone. Most of them lasted only a few issues but there was an inarguable boom.

Since it was traditional in popular fiction (not just SF but almost every field you can mention, back to the days of Dickens and beyond) for a new writer to "work his way up the lengths", selling short material and creating an audience before graduating to book publication, and since this tendency lasted, by happenstance, longer in SF than in any other field except perhaps romance, new writers were assured of a sort of apprenticeship.

There were many editors (and for all his other shortcomings John Campbell was among them) who were prepared to write and mail a four-page analysis of a promising but not purchasable story in the hope that the novice author would think again and revise his work. The nearest comparison I can make to that today is with the impact of a Milford or Clarion workshop, a sudden enlightenment concerning faults often suspected but virtually impossible to identify and eliminate without advice.

For me it was not Campbell but rather Donald Bensen, when he was at Pyramid, who provided that necessary degree of insight. I'd sold a three-part serial to Ted Carnell's New Worlds. By then I'd learned to keep a meticulously legible carbon copy for second submission. Out it went to my agent in the States... and back it came with a long list of comments which -- I swear -- it took me 48 hours to pluck up the courage to read.

When I finally did so, I wiped the sweat off my brow and said, "The guy's right, damn him!" And rewrote the lot, adding 8000 words of new material to explain away some of the flaws in the first version.. Whereupon it sold for my (then) best-ever advance and what is more is still in print after twenty years... if only in Japanese!

Which brings me to another and subtler reason why it's harder to set up in business as an SF writer in the 1980's. Gone are the days when one could populate Mars with noble savages borrowed from Rousseau and James Fenimore Cooper, or a frontier town on Ganymede with cardboard characters straight out of last month's Ranch Romances. Yet this in itself is not a reason for turning one's back on SF. Actually we are no shorter of plot-material than we were, and indeed in one fundamental sense we're better off, although today's material is tougher to deal with. This planet Earth is infinitely more alien than most of us imagine in the fifties, and the fact has been borne in upon us until it positively hurts. Once you figure out where to look for them, you can find all you need for the highest

of high adventure: monsters, catastrophes, mysteries.. weirdly different cultures, even magic. I ran across some just the other day, in one of the world's most technically advanced nations!

You see, by sheer good fortune I recently had my first opportunity to visit Japan.

The phone went one day, around mid-June, and a voice on the other end asked if I would like to be invited to the First Hiroshima Conference of Asian Writers.

Promptly setting aside the fact that I hail from the wrong continent and indeed had never set foot in that part of the world, I said that wild horses -- let alone the book I was trying to finish before coming to Baltimore -- would not stop me, and how come they had picked on me?

The explanation was a trifle down-bringing; they actually wanted James Aldridge, but he couldn't make it, so the lady talking to me, a friend of one of the organisers, had gone to the London office of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (of which Marjorie and I are founder members), and asked the general secretary Monsignor Bruce Kent for an alternative. Thanks to the sheer accident of our having invited Bruce to dinner on a recent visit of his to the West Country where we live, he'd thought of me. In the upshot I wound up being appointed official delegate not only to the Writers' Conference but also to the Tokyo World Conference Against A & H Bombs on behalf of both CND and the newly-constituted group Book Action for Nuclear Disarmament, BAND.

So I whistled up my travel agent and off I went.

During my trip, on a couple of days I sported my favourite T-shirt. I found it last year at the Westercon in Phoenix, and I couldn't resist it. (In fact I brought it with me on this trip too, and shall go on using it until the design faces beyond recall.) It's the one showing a sketch of a spiral galaxy, with a long arrow pointing to a spot about two-thirds of the way towards its rim, and the caption that reads YOU ARE HERE.

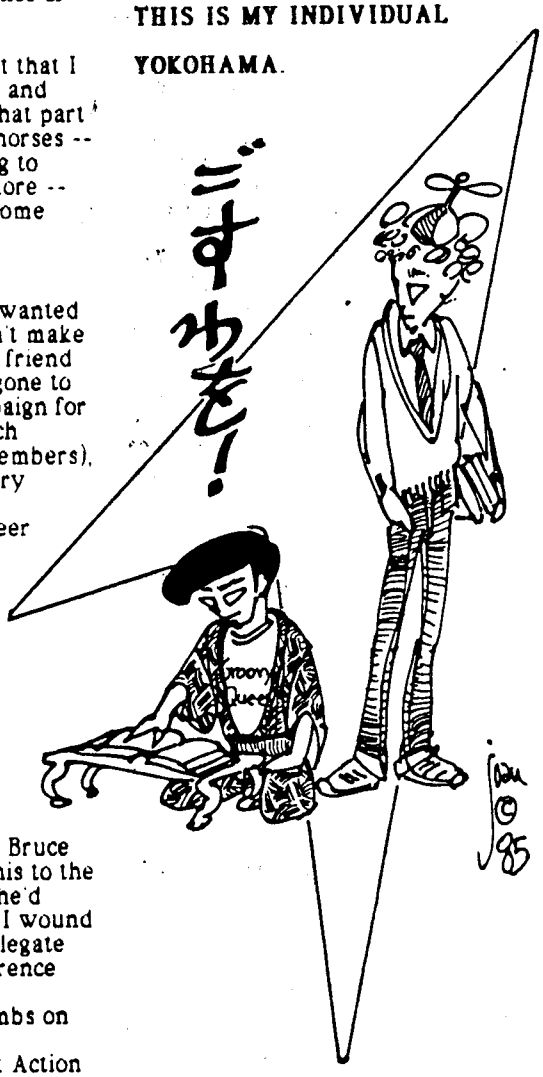
But if I'd known how totally surreal Japanese T-Shirts can be, I'd have left it at home and gone shopping immediately when I arrived. Consider the following, and ask yourself what you'd make of the person wearing one:

TINY JC

IVY SPIRIT FOR EVER

THIS IS MY INDIVIDUAL

YOKOHAMA.



Or --

HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD BLINDING FASHION

CAREER LYCEE FIFTH AVENUE

Or --

DREAM OF LILLIPUTIAN

IT'S A FINE DAY WE FEEL WELL VERY MUCH

Or --

COW FRONTIER SPIRIT

Or (this on a man, incidentally) --

DAZZLING QUEEN

Or --

No, I could go on indefinitely. I'll epitomise the lot with a label seen on the waistband of a pair of tight pink jeans worn by the girl serving as interpreter for the Russian delegate to the aforementioned conference in Hiroshima:

ADMONITION

As it's in a song

EVEN IF I'M IN RAGS

I AM STILL FINE

Groovy Division

... of which I can make just about no sense at all. I'm obliged to conclude that it's magic.

Magic in an industrialised society is not so rare a phenomenon as one might imagine. Many years ago Marjorie and I were friendly with a Maltese doctor practising in the English Midlands, and he told us of one incontestable example. He often noticed that boy babies brought to his surgery for attention wore a red thread around the right wrist. He was puzzled by this, and made inquiries, and finally tracked down the explanation. It was a magical symbol representing what we in Britain call a "navvy's bracer" -- a leather band worn by men doing heavy manual work -- and it was intended to ensure that the baby would grow up with a strong right arm...

Our planet really is weirder than we ever dreamed of, especially those of us who -- sometimes at the dictate of our editors -- painted the picture of a future dominated, even when we were exploring other planets and other stars, by tall fair people with good old-fashioned Anglo-Saxon names. A Celt might be allowed in now and then, but even so...

I was lucky. The captain of the very first starship I ever put into an American magazine (in "Thou Good and Faithful", by "John Loxmith", ASTOUNDING March 1953) was called Chang: "a good Terrestrial name". I got to that one by the simple means of remembering that there were more Chinese than any other single nation, and asking a friend for a Chinese name as common as, say Smith. But

five or it may have been seven years later a certain influential New York editor vetoed my proposal to make my protagonist in a projected novel "a small dark clever man". He was to have been called Post, I remember. But I was warned that the US readership would refuse to identify with anybody of a dark or swarthy complexion.

I got around that one, too, though it was years later, when I created Max Curfew, my Jamaican-born political agent. I wrote three books about him first-person black, and it is still among my proudest achievements as a writer that not once, not twice, but three times a black reader who had never met me previously has admitted to imagining beforehand that the author of those novels might very well himself be black.

I was talking about the way in which we've lost so many of our former free-and-easy approaches to science fiction, but are compensated by learning about the ways in which even the resources of this single planet - even the resources of our single species - can carry us over the frontiers of what we used to regard as either alien or magical. I insist that the inscriptions on Japanese T-shirts are not chosen as messages to the rest of the world; they are in fact magic charms or symbols, just as their opposite numbers would be in a Western home. Are there not lots of people, and have there not also been many in Western culture for literally centuries, who fell in love with oriental calligraphy and hung up what an expert would regard as second-rate writing as a work of art? Even the artist Whistler's celebrated butterfly signature was inspired by Japanese art.

And the same applies to myself. I brought home from Japan my own name written in Japanese characters, on the paper scroll used to signal from the platform who was speaking at the writers' conference, and I plan to hang it in my study regardless of whether it's finely enough done to meet with a critic's approval. To me it will imply something more than just the sounds it symbolises. It will be magical.

And so too are T-shirt slogans. Even in our modern world, magic crops up that unexpectedly, and because it's unfamiliar, our first reaction is to regard it as alien. It's not. It's part of the wonder and mystery of being human which went relatively unexplored by our predecessors in SF, who were concerned above all with conquering new planets. People of that stamp are still among us, but the planets don't look so tempting any more, and the idea of conquest in itself is turning sour.

Have you ever played the game which I do now and then, when I need to spark my imagination into creating a convincing future world? I pretend that I've invited someone to dinner from a hundred years in the past, who arrives by train (they had trains in those days) and has to find his/her way from the station to our house, preferably in a city environment. I also use this exercise when teaching SF writing courses, and it never fails to generate some surprising observations. Once, for example, a student who had really got into the swing of it, burst out excitedly at the point where the visitor crossed the threshold, "You might have a black wife! That would shake him rigid!"

Very well: we get our visitor from the past to our dinner table, with or without our black wife, and we feed him on imported delicacies and show him colour TV and conjure up music such as in his day could only be heard if you were fortunate enough to live within easy reach of a major concert hall... and then he asks how all this came about.

Could you explain television to a visitor from a century ago? Barely, perhaps; he would presumably know about electricity, so you'd make analogies with the telephone and hope for the best. But when you got on to the reason why there aren't servants in every middle-class house any more, and why those women he passed on the street who weren't wearing trousers were in skirts shorter than a chorus-girl's... then I think you'd be in deep, deep trouble.

I foresee a situation arising where at six in the morning you'd still be arguing against the most enlightened 19th-century preconceptions, particularly if your visitor got on to questions of relative truth in revealed religion along the lines exemplified by that celebrated comment in the first post-WWII recension of Roget's Thesaurus, where the editor said the final section had been revised so that nonconformists and other dissident Christians were no longer classified with idolators and devil-worshippers.

At all events I trust the foregoing will have sufficed to illustrate my preoccupation with the way in which even a minor change in society can serve to help a writer when striving to create a convincing future world.

Now finally I come to the worst problem of all those faced by anyone who says to me now, in the eighties, "I'm planning to set up as a science fiction writer" - the chief reason why I'm inclined to answer, "Don't!"

You might express it by saying, "We've lost our innocence".

Little by little, the optimism inherent in the SF of my youth has been eroded. The cars which liberated people - I speak of those societies where most SF has been created, naturally - the cars which liberated us from that dead world where only the most leisured could afford to visit another county, let alone another country, did indeed rid the city streets of horse-manure and its attendant flies... but they bequeathed us smog, and lead in gasoline affected children's brains. The noise of aircraft bigger and faster than what SF writers dreamed of in the 30's proved unbearable to people on the ground, and instead of fewer laws we found we had to make more, to control these and other forms of public nuisance. (That one, at least, should have come as no surprise; the godfather of us all, H.G. Wells, foresaw it in A Story of the Days to Come when he spoke of adding another responsibility to those already imposed on urban authorities, like water and drainage, and that one was ventilation. Clean Air Acts, anybody?)

The byproducts of modern industry turned out to be worse than a nuisance, and often outright poison: think of DDT, and dioxin in 2, 4, 5-T, think of Minamata Disease and the Love Canal scandal, now the danger posed to Californians near the most modern factories making the most modern products, computer chips. Think too of the danger posed to our very oxygen supply by rapid deforestation...

Oh, one could extend the list indefinitely, but every instance points the same moral: We are not competent to "have dominion over" what was promised to Adam in the Book of Genesis.

And beyond this - beyond my brief tally of well-meant mistakes, which given half a chance we certainly could set to rights, our lesson learned - there's another consideration which is infinitely, literally infinitely, more appalling.

I refer, of course, to the fact that we are living in a millennial age, where people go in fear of some kind of imminent apocalypse not because divine wrath is about to be visited on a stiff-necked and rebellious people, but because, by a succession of deliberate acts of will, we have created the means to encompass our our destruction. I know this is so in

my own case. I don't expect to live to a ripe old age, which explains, no doubt, why I go on smoking and drinking although I know perfectly well that tobacco and alcohol are harmful drugs.

Granted, we may be overtaken by something else before a world-wide shooting war breaks out. According to recent reports AIDS is spreading at a rate which implies it is destined to be the Black Death of the 20th century and will wipe out the population of the United States within twelve years.

Now our predicament might not be so bad were it not for the infuriating fact that at the same time as we've devised and manufactured nuclear weapons we are entering a new age of

wars of religious intolerance. Fanaticism equipped with nuclear bombs is incompatible with our survival.

Let me emphasise at this point that I am not only referring to the alarming epidemic of "born-again" Christianity currently infecting this country and sundry others unders its control - though that does scare the daylights out of me, in view of the fact that Christian armies have thus far slaughtered more of their fellow beings than the armies of all other religious faiths added together. Even in what the Guinness Book of Records calls the bloodiest ever civil war, the one in China in the middle of last century where the casualties numbered 20-30 million, one side was led by a guy who claimed to be the younger brother of Jesus.

That is not to say, of course, that soldiers of other religions haven't tried their damnedest - only that Christian armies notched up their score at a time when the world's population was large enough, and the weaponry powerful enough, to permit a lot of record-breaking.

No, I'm thinking just as much about the war between Iraq and Iran, which has so blemished the traditional solidarity of the Islamic world. I'm also thinking of the tragic fact that the meant-to-be rational teachings of Marxism - which began, never forget, as a Judeo-Christian heresy! - have been perverted by taking root in what purports to be a superpower but is in fact little more than a Third World country with grandiose ideas. Soviet communism has all the worst characteristics of a religion, including and especially a marked unwillingness to allow the purity of its dogma to be tarnished by unwelcome real-world facts.

Of course, one can maintain precisely the same thing about the western system, and will be obliged to do so as long as its various heads of government persist in saying, "Well, it didn't work last time, but according to our theories it should have done, so we'll go on doing it until it does work!"

Confronted with people of that stamp in positions of power, it has become awfully difficult to visualise a bright and brilliant future for our civilisation, and our eventual conquest of the stars.

Yes indeed: the worst problem confronting a contemporary SF writer is not the way our field of action has been narrowed by astronomical discoveries, for we can always cheat our way into parallel worlds or the distant future; nor is it the deflating recognition that our own planet is far more alien and mysterious than we believed a generation or two ago for we can actively exploit that knowledge; nor is it the economic recession, because (I quote Wells again): "It's no use telling me I write too much. If you're a writer you write. If you were to fine a writer a hundred pounds for every book he wrote - no, a thousand - he would still go on writing though he had to do it in a debtor's prison."

No more, as I trust I've shown, is it the daunting realisation that even some of our best-intentioned ventures have resulted in unlooked-for harm to ourselves and our environment.

It's the shock of having to accept that there are people in positions of power who are perfectly prepared to wipe us out - and perhaps even themselves - on grounds that can only be regarded as insane.

And what does that do to the concept of the universe our playground? You can only write the nuclear holocaust novel once, and it can only have one ending: a picture of a handful of miserable savages fighting like crazy rats on what was once good land and is now a blighted desert.

I gather there are some people who view such an outcome as actively desirable. Some of them write SF. To them I can only say, "You're a bunch of ignorant fools."

Now how the hell do you write science fiction against that kind of background? It quite simply renders it out of the question to believe in any other future but a third world war! I am beginning to understand why so many fine writers have abandoned literature of any kind and gone into politics, or (like many of the best Necaraguan writers, some of whom indeed are actually in the Sandinista government now) a resistance movement.

It seems to me that it behooves any moral person to oppose evil, by whatever means comes to hand. But then there arises the question of what constitutes evil in this modern age. There's no doubt such a phenomenon exists; we do not lack for evidence, for

it s to be found in the concentration camps of the past and present (invented, incidentally, by the British during the Boer Wars), in the Nazi gas-ovens, in the slaughter at Babi Yar, in the massacre at My Lai, in countless places.

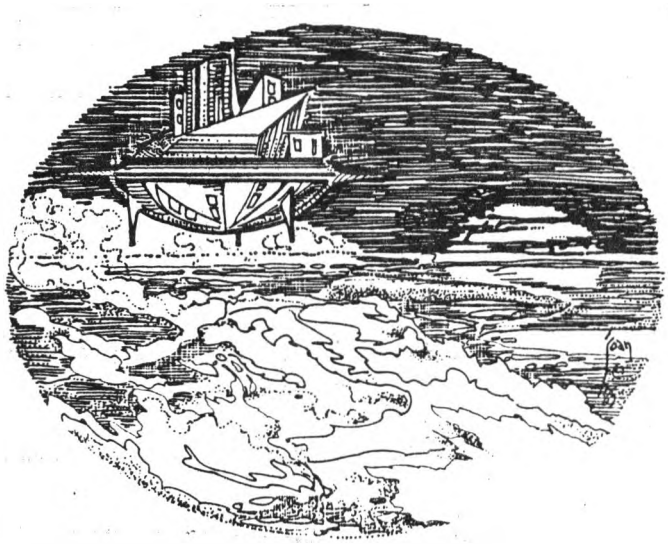
I put this questions to myself long ago, when I was writing a half-forgotten book called The Devil's Work, and I came up with an answer that so well satisfied me I have never subsequently seen any reason to alter my conclusion: Evil consists in treating another human being as a thing.

I want those who come after us to be able to look forward to just as much fun out of life as I've had. I want them to live comfortably - to eat well - to enjoy a decent education - to travel so as to make friends in many different countries - to learn how precious life is, and what there is to be got out of it.

You might say I want people to have a chance to become as excited as I was lately, by finding magic still alive and well in a modern country!

Of course, I realise that some of our own bad habits are too wasteful for the earth to tolerate for long, but I dare to hope solutions may be found to that problem. After all, if we merely stopped making things designed to be used once and thrown away, and instead decided to make nothing which could not be used at least twice, if not several times, half the difficulty would instantly disappear, perhaps for long enough to grant the necessary breathing-space.

I also want those who come after me to have the time to invent limericks,



and Feghoots, and sing and crack bad jokes and carry on the grand tradition of humanity as it has existed since the Stone Age.

And I want there to be science fiction in the 21st century, too! I want there to be a chance for people to console themselves about the prospect of mortality, by dreaming of a brighter, better future in which we can explore the universe. It's out there, and it's up to us whether we choose to let it go to waste.

What I do not want is to die convinced that the only lasting trace of all the love and laughter, all the hope and aspiration of our species, will be the accidental discovery by some saner race of the world that once was home to us, despoiled of its wealth and overlaid with a radioactive crust.

I don't want that. I'm sure you don't, or else you'd not be here.

But just in case you think I'm merely crying wolf, let me leave you with this thought from Australia's Nobel prizewinner Patrick White, the source from which I took the title for my talk. In his novel Riders in the Chariot he said:

"But bombs are unbelievable until they actually fall.

He's absolutely right, you know.

Thanks for listening.

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The preceeding is an edited version of the author's Guest of Honor speech at the World Science Fiction Convention in Baltimore, ConStellation

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(Dates in parentheses are original copyright dates.)

APOLOGY:

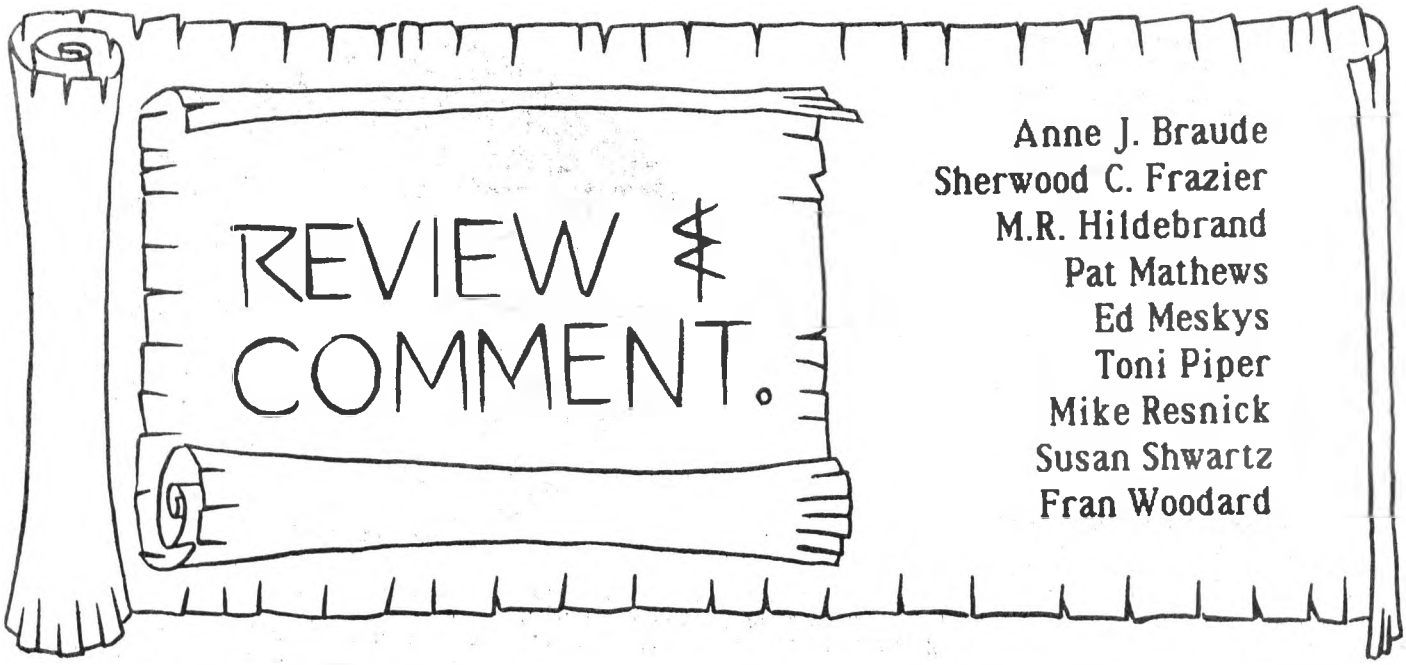
PLEASE NOTE: The following articles which were scheduled for this issue have been postponed for reasons beyond our control; all will appear in NIEKAS #35 (scheduled for Summer of 1986). We apologize to all concerned for the inconvenience- but especially to Alexei...

HEINLEIN, MOSKOWITZ AND ME, by Alexei Panshin

TIME TRAVEL APOCALYPSE, by Joris Bell

LANGEVELD'S CATALOG OF MILITARY HISTORY, UNIFORMS AND TRADITIONS, by Colin Langeveld

ON DR. WHO, by Tamar Lindsay



THE HERO AND THE CROWN by Robin McKinley. New York . Greenwillow Press, 246 pp. $11.50

THE HERO AND THE CROWN is the remarkable Newbery award-winning prequal to THE BLUE SWORD, a 1983 Newbery honor book which introduced McKinley admirers (a growing contingent) to Damar, a land of deserts and lawful magic menaced by demons from the North, and to Harimad-sol, the Homelander girl who found a home, a heritage, love and a throne there, somewhat in the fashion of Kipling's THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING--- but with a happy ending.

This story, set centuries before the Homelander armies and civil service ever moved to Damar, deals with Harimad-sol's patron and inspration, the Lady Aerin, Dragon-killer and Queen, and tells how an alienated girl became a national hero, and a myth. Like many of McKinley's other heroines (notably Beauty, in her lyrical retelling of BEAUTY AND THE BEAST), Aerin ia an awkward girl, unsure of her place, and happier in the stables than anyplace else, but her insecurity goes deeper. Though she is King's daughter of Damar, her cousin Tor is to rule: she is the "witch-woman's daughter", the too-tall, too-awkward reminder of her mother's Northern blood, subject to the taunts of the older and prettier members (both sexes) of the royal family. Except, of course, her cousin Tor, who teaches her to wield a sword and to keep hope.

Taunted into testing what seems to be her feeble kelar, or the royal magic, Aerin all but poisons herself. Unable to see clearly, or walk without staggering, she finds healing in her work with Talat, a crippled warhorse whom she retrains, and in her study of herbs, which helps her to reinvent the salve which protects dragon-killers from their prey. But the fame of Aerin Dragon-killer does not make her less suspect, and, during treaty negotiations, she must be left behind as bad luck.

Pressure from the North causes Maur, last of the ferocious great dragons to appear. In destroying him, Aerin sears her lungs and begins a decline which could kill her until a vision forces her up off her deathbed and into the wilds. Here she meets Luthe, the nearly immortal wizard we first meet in THE BLUE SWORD. He heals her and prepares her to go up against the ruler of the North, who is both her kinsman and her hereditery enemy. In vanquishing him, she discovers the long lost crown of Damar just in time to rescue her country from invasion.

Put that baldly, THE HERO AND THE CROWN might appear to be only an avatar of the standard "quester who becomes king" fable, with some wish-fulfillment thrown in for readers who feel marginal. However, that's about as simplistic as dismissing THE WIZARD OF EARTHSEA as a story about a boy who learns magic. In THE HERO AND THE CROWN, McKinley unleashes fruly formidable narrative powers to produce the sort of haunting young adult nobel that adults save to reread and pass on to special children. Aerin's quest is not just for magic, love and adventure: it is a quest for survival both of a physical and moral level.

McKinley's spare but lyrical prose is reminiscent of LeGuin's in its integrity and tautness: here are no archaisms, no purple passages but only simple, right words that are capable of evoking joy and tragedy, at times simultaneously. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Aerin's discovery of her destiny. "It was not that she left what she loved to go where she must, but that her destiny, like her love, like her heratage, was double."

That passage may hint at the book's ending, but that doesn't matter. In its treatment of the archetypal hero who passes through death to regain a crown, THE HERO AND THE CROWN joins the ranks of stories one rereads, not to find out what happens, but to savor the journey along the way.

ss

THE REMAKING OF SIGMUND FREUD, by Barry Malzberg (Del Rey, 1985)

On the surface of it, one would think that Barry Malzberg and Del Rey Books go together about as well as cold pickles and warm ice cream, or maybe Tip O'Neill and erudition.

But there it is, out there on the stands with what can only be described as an archtypical Del Rey cover, a marriage between the field's most literary writer and the publishing house that was built upon the broad commercial shoulders of George Lucas.

What's more, I don't think a divorce is in the cards.

What we have here is a truly collaborative effort-- an attempt, no less, to bring Barry Malzberg to the masses.

The book begins with a Malzbergian concept: that Freud, the great alienist, is the logical man to have along with you when you run into honest-to-God aliens.

It continues with a Malzbergian conceit: anyone can write about the Freud who existed; Barry prefers to write about the Freud who never was, changing his life, his friends, even his death.

It proceeds through Malzbergian games in perception: Emily Dickinson makes as appearance, as do Mark Twain, Gustave Mahler, and eventually even the psychotic Vegans, and none of them are exactly what we expect.

So far, so good-- a typical Malzberg tour de force.

So where does Del Rey come into the picture?

Well, for starters, where almost all of Malzberg's serious work is told in the present tense, and frequently in the first person, this novel employs the standard third-person, past-tense narrative. Easier for a Del Rey reader to swallow.

Then there are the interior monologues, the cornerstone of any Malzberg work of ambition. They're still here, to be sure, but the sentences are shorter, the paragraphs are shorter, the monologues themselves are shorter. Easier for a Del Rey reader to digest.

The humor, always there but always subtle in Malzberg's books, has been signposted. Easier for a Del Rey reader to find.

What we have, in effect, is a watered-down Malzberg, a Malzberg for people who hate Malzberg, a Malzberg for the Masses.

I saw the original manuscript, before Del Rey--with Barry's permission and participation--went to work on it, and in my opinion it was a better book. It was also a book that would have appealed to me and perhaps 10,000 to 15,000 other readers. This one may reach an audience ten times that size; it's certainly being marketed that way. Malzberg has made a conscious decision (or at least a conscious agreement) to reverse the course most writers claim to covet and take a shot at the mass market after 90+ assaults on the intelligencia. (Not that this book aims directly at the Least Common Denominator--but it at least makes an obeisance in that direction.)

It is an interesting experiment. For years we've been wondering: now that Del Rey has got all those Trekkies and Wookies in the habit of reading books, what are they going to do with them when they grow up?

Here is one surprising answer. I'll be curious to see if it succeeds.

MR

ROBOTS AND EMPIRE, by Isaac Asimov (Phantasia, 1985)

This book is going to be a best-seller, have no doubt about it.

Now, in this day and age, there are a lot of things a best-seller aught to be, but there is only one thing that it must be: it must be thick enough to justify the price that the publisher has to charge in order to recoup his advance and his advertising budget (which are frequently about equal), and to make nondiscriminating readers feel he's getting his money's worth.

And therein, I think, lies its problem.

Asimov has said frequently in the past that he feels the ideal length for a novel is 70,000 words, if only because that was the length Doubleday required required when he began writing them.

Well, that may or may not be so in general, but I would tend to say that it is definitely so for an Asimov novel. At 70,000 words he could turn out such wonders as CAVES OF STEEL and the various EMPIRE books. At 150,000 words--best seller length-- he has run into problems with his last three novels.

There are many things that the Good Doctor does exceedingly well. Character definition, alas, is not one of them. Neither is action. Both defects are easier to hide in a shorter book than in a long one.

When you've got a 70,000 word mystery, action isn't all that important. Of course everyone talks incessantly; examining clues and motives is the heart and soul of a mystery novel. And when you're painting a thousand-year tapestry of events with very brief brush strokes, you can be forgiven the fact that the only memorable character is the mutant Mule.

But in ROBOTS AND EMPIRE, what we have is a 150,000-word semi-mystery that contains no action to speak of (and by action I don't mean sword-fights and zap guns, but simple movement through the plot). The dramatic highlight of the book--and I'll confess that it's very well done-- is the failure of R. Daneel Olivaw to fall down in the climactic scene, a non-action in itself; just as the dramatic highlight of THE ROBOTS OF DAWN was Lije Baley being caught in a rainstorm. Both are memorable scenes, to be sure, but to some extent they're memorable because nothing else happens in either book.

The mystery is too trivial to stretch for 150,000 words. It has to do with the fate of Earth; anyone who has read PEBBLE IN THE SKY already knows the outcome, and anyone who has read an occasional news paper during the past decade will know the location of the climactic event the instant the first clue is given. This tends to diffuse the dramatic revelation, which comes tens of thousands of words later.

The two main characters--some may argue that there are three, but in terms of moving the plot along, there are only two--are both robots, Daneel and Giscard. We are told that they barely need to speak to each other, that a simple monosyllable will reveal the entirety of one's thoughts to the other. And, shortly after we have been told that, we are subjected to an endless Socratic dialogue in which each robot in turn asks simplistic and leading questions of the other, who then feels compelled to explain the obvious (at least it should be obvious to his fellow robot) at length.

There unquestionably is material here for a good book. Many of Asimov's strengths are evident, the plot is acceptable, the characters are possible, different societies are presented, and he is, as always, accessible even to the densest, laziest reader. At 150,000 words it's talky and static; at 70,000 words-- the perfect Asimovian length--I think it might even have been a very enjoyable bridge between the ROBOT and FOUNDATION stories.

And yet, and yet...At 70,000 words there would have been no half million dollar advance, no matching ad budget, no reviews in major mainstream journals, and (probably) no best seller.

And let's not forget, either, who the audience is for a best seller. It's not you, and it's not me. If everyone who buys science fiction on a regular basis avoids this book, that will cost it perhaps 5% of its 1.5 million anticipated sales, the tiniest drops in the largest bucket. As for the real audience, the guy on the street or the member of the

sci-fi book club who wants to read a real sci-fi book by a real grand master, there is no question that they will enjoy it. The climactic revelation will be a climactic revelation, the Socratic dialectic will be a new and stimulating experience, and hopefully they'll go out and buy a few more skiffy books one of these years.

So is ROBOTS AND EMPIRE a good book?

Alas, no.

But is its publication (and assured best-sellerdom) a good thing for the field?

Very likely.

MR

THE MONSTERS AND THE CRITICS AND OTHER ESSAYS by J R R Tolkien, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1984, 240pp

Christopher Tolkien continues to provide us with a bonanza of his late father's writings. This is a collection of seven of his semi-works which had, for the most part, been given as lectures. They are accessable to the intelligent but non-specialised reader.

Before getting them packaged conveniently in this one volume I had only read "On Fairy Stories" in TREE AND LEAF tho "Beowulf, The Monsters and the Critics" was available in AN ANTHOLOGY OF BEOWULF CRITICISM and "English and Welch" in ANGLES AND BRETONS. Two of the items had never been published before.

The first two essays taught me much more about ""Beowulf" than I had ever learned in my college Survey of English Lit" course. The title essay showed why it should be studied as a truly major piece of poetry, and not just studied by historians and folklore specialists to discover details of Anglo Saxon culture. I was fascinated to find that it was written in a newly Christianized milieu where pagan beliefs were still remembered, and that the author tried to excise all references to Christianity and its worldview when presenting the words or thoughts of the characters, tho occassional similes were present in the impersonal narration. I thought this sort of writing of historical fiction was a modern phenomenon. ""On Translating Beowulf" went into very interesting detail on Anglo Saxon metrical forms, alliteration, rhyme, etc, and discussed the merits of verse vs prose translations into modern English.

"Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" shows that the primary concern of the author was his protagonist's moral dilemma and his resistance to seduction by his host's wife. Various standards of moral behavior are put into conflict and Sir Gawain is guilty of violating only the lesser.

Tolkien fen are already familiar enough with "On Fairy Stories" from its appearance in TREE AND LEAF and THE TOLKIEN READER for me to merely remind the reader that it is here that Tolkien invented the word "eucatastrophy", defined the genre of fairy story and clarified the concept of authors' subcreations of secondary worlds.

In "English and Welch" Tolkien discusses his love affair with the Welch and Finnish languages. This is the most technical of the essays in this collection and goes into the lingering influences of the previous languages on each successive wave of invaders of the British Isles. The pre-Indo-European, pre Keltic languages affected Welch, especially in place names, as Welch affected Anglo Saxon and so on. I was interested to learn that the Keltic languages has phonetic affinity to Latin so that the Roman alphabet was easily adapted. But an early form of Latin was used so that no K appears in Keltic orthography, hence the confusing spelling as Celtic. Orthography has distorted pronunciation and I note that most people today mispronounce the word as Seltic, as in the athletic team.

"A Secret Vice" is about the very common game of inventing languages of varying intricacy in which Tolkien first publicly announced his own languages, about five years before THE HOBBIT was published.

Finally "A Valedictory Address" was his speech given on retirement in which he observed the return to respectability of philology as a part of English studies.

Christopher Tolkien gave the history of each piece in his short Foreword, explained the variant mss in existance, and why he chose the version he did. The versions here are usually different from those previously published.

This book is available in Braille from the Library of Congress and on cassette from Volunteers of Vacafille.

ERM

The White-Boned Demon, Ross Terrill, William Morrow, 1984, $18.95 hc

When I was taking Survey of English Lit in college, Way Back When, I remember the professor remarking about the Victorian period that it would never have occurred to anyone to combine the writers comprising it into a single literary epoch if it had not been for the coincidence that Queen Victoria reigned for so long, otherwise the "Victorians" would have been separated and grouped more logically. It may well be that some similar phenomenon underlies the endless debates over what science fiction is and how it differs from fantasy. In a century or so, the walls of the literary ghetto may have come tumbling down, and it will be recognized that some forms of sf have more in common with some mundane writing than with other types of sf

All this is prologue to pointing out that The White-Boned Demon posesses in abundance qualities usually cited as essential to good sf or fantasy: a fascinating setting alien enough to be exotic but sufficiently like our own world to involve us emotionally, political, social, emotional, and military conflict; a complex main character whose career spans the heights and depths; and ambitions and ideals in conflict. But it is not science fiction; in fact, it is not even fiction - it is a biography of Mao Tse-tung's wife Chiang Ch ing (or, if you insist on the

pinyin system of romanization, which I absolutely hate, Mao Zedong's wife Jiang Qing). Most of us know very little about her - that she is an ex-actress, that she was the leader of the ill-fated Cultural Revolution, and that after Mao's death she was convicted and imprisoned by China's current leadership as one of the "Gang of Four." Ross Terrill, a leading Sinologist, has gone to original sources unavailable in translation and written a biography that reads like a novel by Gene Wolfe, about a woman who is a sinister version of an Anne McCaffrey heroine. Terrill compares her at various points, with reason, to Joan of Arc, Evita Peron, and Eleanor Roosevelt, an even more relevant comparison, I think, is to Scarlett O'Hara. Like the heroine of Gone with the Wind, Jiang Qing ruthlessly pursured her personal ambitions for power and self-fulfillment - but in a society which did not recognize or allow for such qualities in a woman.

She was born in 1914, three years after the fall of the last dynasty of Imperial China, the daughter of a small farmer and the concubine he eventually discarded. When her feet were bound in the traditional manner, the young Shumeng (as she was then called) ripped off the bindings, an act of nonconformity symbolic of her future career. Her mother, after some years of impoverished wandering, eventually returned with her child to her own family. At the age of fourteen Shumeng, now called Li Yun-he, became part of an itinerant theatrical troupe; it is unclear whether she ran away to join it or was kidnapped and sold to the troupe (a not uncommon happening at the time). After her family bought her out, she managed to get into a couple of drama schools and, via a lover, into the Communist Party. At nineteen she went off to Shanghai, the cinema - and sin - capital of prewar China, where she changed her name to Lan Ping, acquired several lovers and a husband, and became a moderately successful actress. Her greatest success came in her stage portrayal of Nora in Ibsen's A Doll's House, a role she identified with passionately for the rest of her life. In fact, all her most successful parts were, like Nora, essentially opportunities to play herself.

After four years, with the Shanghai film industry crippled by the Japanese invasion, she decided that her future lay with the struggle against imperialism and took off for Communist headquarters in Yanan where, in 1938, she managed to hook Mao, ironically - and much against her intention - becoming a real-life Nora, as the Party disapproved of the marriage and made it a condition that Mao's new wife, whom he named Jiang Qing, have no career or activities outside the home. The rest of the book is basically the story of her struggle for personal status and fulfillment against a society, a Party, and a husband who wanted her to fade into the background. It is a fascinating picture of maneuvering, manipulation, and the attempt to make reality conform to ideology.

Jiang Qing finally got herself a place in the limelight when Mao launched the Cultural Revolution, of which she became the charismatic leader, though Mao was basically using her as a cat's-paw. The way in which she made use of her first real power is illuminating - she took revenge for real and imagined old injuries dating back to before her Shanghai days, bringing about the beating, imprisonment, and/or death of people who much of the time could not even remember why she was mad at them.

As portrayed in this book, Mao Zedong was a cold, self-centered, manipulative person who made a rotten husband and father. The same traits, in his political style, were part of the reason he had no heir apparent; even before the Cultural Revolution, possible successors were circling for position. One of them was Jiang, who saw at last a chance for complete self-fulfillment by attaining supreme power. Here she had to contend with centuries of Chinese cultural conditioning. The Chinese believe that a woman only attains a position of power through exploiting her sexuality and manipulating a man in power - the powerful women in Chinese history are Empresses or Imperial concubines. After Mao's death, Jiang gambled that she could rule in her own right as Dowager Empress, Communist style - and she lost.

The irony of this outcome is that Jiang did in fact rise to power only because she was Madame Mao; the book makes clear that despite her passionate ambition, she was not really a very talented woman. It was not just Mao's promise to the Party to keep her in a housewifely role that kept her from carving out a career for herself in the Party (as did, for instance, Madame Chou En-lai). She had genuine acting talent, but she was no Meryl Streep; and as a Communist ideologue, she lacked intellectual brilliance, personal commitment, and the patience for hard work.

Just as Jiang Qing is no genius, she is not really a likeable character, either. She is at her most sympathetic when most a victim herself, as in her early childhood and at her trial, a staged political ritual. Although fascinating as a woman of an essentially Western sensibility struggling to succeed in an Eastern culture - one which despite the changes brought by twentieth-century political upheavals remains in many essentials Imperial and Confucian - she is as mean, selfish, and manipulative as any of her opponents. But one cannot help admiring her stubbornness, her guts, her sheer unquellableness. The White-Boned Demon, like its subject, is compelling, memorable, and not to be ignored.

ajb

BENCHMARKS , by Algis Budrys
(Southern Illinois University, 1985)

In the beginning there were Damon Knight and James Blish, and what they did was essentially technical criticism. They were concerned with how best to tell a story, and only infrequently with whether or not the story was worth telling in the first place.

Today there are the academics, who tend to worry a piece of literature the way a dog worries a bone (especially, but not exclusively, those pieces written by Ursula LeGuin and Samuel Delany) and make value judgements, some reasonable, some incredibly silly, all over the landscape.

What we have here is the missing link, the five years of columns (I hesitate to call them reviews) that Algis Budrys wrote for Galaxy from 1966 to 1971, which form a transitional step from Knight and Blish to the plethora of pundits and pretenders who abound today.

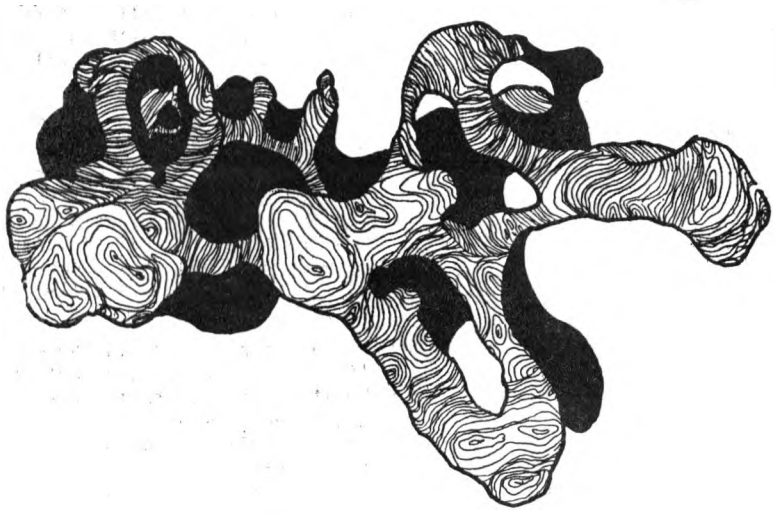
And yet, if you're looking for a book that is chock-full of literary criticism, you're going to have to look elsewhere. I'd be surprised if as much as a third of the copy relates to the books under conisderation.

The bulk of it is a combination of personal and artistic philosophy, self-analysis, and general observations by and about Algis Budrys, and how you feel about this book will be predicted, to a large extent, upon how you feel about Budrys. (I should note that he does do as well-reasoned a critical appraisal as you're ever going to find--on THE UNIVERSAL BASEBALL ASSOCIATION--just to prove that he can.)

Now, since Budrys is neither a simple nor simplistic man, These are neither simple nor simplistic essays. And since they are, above all else, essays rather than reviews or statements of fact, it's unlikely you're going to agree with all or even

most of what this idiosyncratic man has to say. (I personally disagree with about 75% of his generalizations about how and why books get written--and when he gets down to specific books and states, for example, that James White's ALL JUDGEMENT FLED is a well intentioned failure, I want to scream at him that it is RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA done right.)

But these essays were not written to create a legion of fawning sychophants, an out-and-out impossibility given his cultural and literary matrix. Rather, they are there to make you think, and since Budrys can be a pretty tricky thinker himself, and never moreso than when he is on thin literary ice, he forces you to order your thoughts before pronouncing him wrong.



And a book that can accomplish that has got to be a success by anyone's measure.

Recommended, if only so you can work out your own critical criteria and tell him, with the advantage of hindsight, where he was right and where he was wrong.

mr

THE VOID CAPTAIN'S TALE by Norman Spinrad, Timescape, 1983

There are about half a dozen books in the history of this field, that I wish I had written. This is one of them.

Norman Spinrad has always had excellent ideas; one need look no further than BUG JACK BARRON and THE IRON DREAM to appreciate the scope of his vision and the passion of his convictions. But his execution, while never pedestrian, has occasionally fallen short of his conception.

Not this time.

THE VOID CAPTAIN'S TALE is a story of obsession, a point a number of readers have missed, but obsession of the unobtainable, which in this context happens to be a quasi-sexual high coveted by the books narrator, Genro Kane Gupta, the Void Captain of the title.

Spinrad has postulated a totally unique means of hyperspatial travel which consists of the orgasmic psychic joining of a Void Pilot (always a female) and a spaceship. The joining is so powerful that it drains the Void Pilot of all other feelings and responses, even that of self-preservation. Gupta's carefully constructed obsession is to feel, just once, what a Void Pilot feels during the Jump. He breaks all the taboos of his society by seducing Pilot Dominique Alia Wu, discovers that she cannot supply him with the sensations he seeks, and ultimately destroys his career and his ship in his compulsive attempt to experience what she has experienced.

This is strong, heady stuff, especially in the hands of a writer like Spinrad, who never backs away from the philosophical or sexual implications of his materials. I was especially impressed by his willingness not to make Dominique Alia a three-dimensional character, which is perfectly in keeping with his obsessed narrator's perception of her. But if obsession was all that this book was about, it would merely be another good novel.

What makes it special is its ambience. Spinrad has created a decadent cafe society of the future, made it both fascinating and consistent, and by giving us its microcosm aboard Gupta's ship, he has been able to delve deeply into its morals, mores and manifestations. It is not only fascinating, but it feels right.

Moreover, where Alfred Bester merely referred to the creation of Black Spanglish in THE COMPUTER CONNECTION, and then had his narrator speak in standard 20th Century English, Spinrad has extrapolated a cohesive yet comprehensible language for his Second Starfaring Age. Unlike many inferior attempts, you will require no glossary, and yet it is demonstrably not colloquial English as we know it.

Quibbles? A couple. First, I think the book might have been 20 pages shorter if the word "tantric" had been stricken from the language. Second, I wish I had been able to sneak into Norman's office and break the double quote key off his typewriter before he wrote the final chapter. It has some other problems, equally minor.

So it's not perfect. Big deal. What it is is the best science fiction novel to appear thus far in the 1980s.

mr

SO LONG AND THANKS FOR ALL THE FISH by Douglas Adams

While SO LONG AND THANKS FOR ALL THE FISH (hereafter referred to as SO LONG) is obviously done to complete the HITCHHIKER'S trilogy, it is still Douglas Adams'. SO LONG contains a lot of the same gentle insanity that I was accustomed to in his other books. In SO LONG Adams brings all the characters back for an encore performance.

SO LONG centers on Arthur and his life after he has returned to Earth. I was eager to read SO LONG, and thus read it so quickly that I was confused. How could Arthur be on Earth when I knew it had been demolished to create a hyper-space by-pass? I do not recommend reading this book quickly because there are a lot of things that can be missed and misunderstood, especially in Adams's books. I had to reread SO LONG before I understood where Earth had come from.

Arthur returns to Earth to find that nothing has changed. He and Ford have long since parted company and you learn that Arthur has been fumbling along through time and space until he is returned to Earth. It was comforting to find that

Arthur was as confused as I was that Earth was once more in existance, as is Ford some time later. Arthur also falls in love, and once more the reader is treated to Adam's intriguing characters, such as the Rain God. The book proceeds fairly normally from this point. As Arthur muzes about the sudden lack of dolphins, so does the reader, along with the meaning of the words that were left etched on the crystal the dolphins left behind for all the humans as a present. The message is quite clear. It reads, of course, "So Long, and Thanks For All The Fish." But I knew that it also tied in to where the dolphins went and why Earth exists again.

Ford makes his grand entrance into Arthur's life about three quarters of the way through the book. I thought that his re-entry was the funniest chapter in the book. It is also through Ford that you learn of Zaphod's and Trillian's fate.

Arthur and his girlfriend, Fern, decide to find out where the dolphins have gone, and in doing so, learn that God has left a final message to mankind. They then set out to read this final message themselves. This is where Marvin reenters the story. Marvin hasn't changed, at least his personality hasn't. However, after he and Fern and Arthur have reached their destination and read the message, Marvin does something that is so sad that it stayed with me long after I had read the book.

SO LONG AND THANKS FOR ALL THE FISH is the best conclusion to a series that I have read. While quiet and contained, Adams' delightful sense of humor still shines . . though. If readers of the previous books in Adams' HITCHHIKERS Trilogy have not read this one-- Get To It! Also, the HITCHHIKERS Trilogy is a must for every reader, and an important addition to every person's library.

fw

THE HARP OF IMACH THYSSEL, by Patricia C. Wrede, Ace, 1985, 234pp $3.50

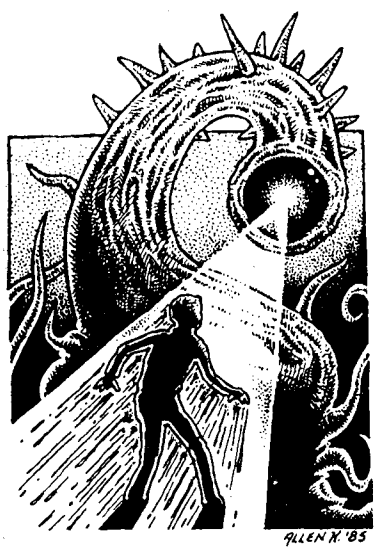
There's magic in music-- a long held assertion, especially in fantasy literature. Though the harp in question possesses powerful magic, the story draws its interest from Emereck, an ordinary minstrel, who finds himself in the unenviable position of having to protect and transport the harp during a time of war and intrigue.

Unknown to Emereck, several other factions have become aware ot the unearthing (literally) of this instrument and are making their way towards him in order to relieve him of it. One of these groups intends to use the harp for the righting of a great evil, one for self-enhancement, and one is the emissary of the evil who would use it to destroy the first group. Emereck just wants to get it to a safe place where it can be studied without doing any real harm.

Meanwhile, mere possession of the harp is causing havoc in Emereck's life. His best friend dies, he falls in love, only to put his own and his lady's life in great jeopardy, and all three above mentioned factions, as well as his lady's father arrive in one place with the fleeing Emereck and lady for a showdown which will require the minstrel to use the magic of the harp, and action he has avoided in fear, or allow many people to die, including himself.

The writing is generally good. The romance which blossoms in the midst of so much death is a bit hard to believe, but it is done gradually, so it is possible to overlook the strain there. The deaths are well handled, being both necessary and believable. Action is sustained enough without exhausting the reader. A good solid fantasy. Recommended.

tfp



THE CHANGEOVER by Margaret Mahy Scholastic, 1984, 236 pp., $2.25

The young adult romance may not be standard fare for most NIEKAS readers, even those stories that tend toward horror or the supernatural as this one does. Nevertheless, THE CHANGEOVER has an appeal beyond its immediate readership.

The protagonist, Laura, is psychic, though her mother refuses throughout the book to believe it. Laura's younger brother is possessed by an incubus, and the plot centers on Laura's attempts to free the boy before his life is drained away. Her only hope is to gain the help of a male witch named Sorenson Carlisle (or Sorry for short) who attends her school.Sorry's mother and grandmother are also witches. Complications develop when Laura's mother, a divorcee, falls in love and when Laura is asked to become a witch. The requisite love interest between Laura and Sorry is never maudlin, as Sorry is a dyed-in-the-wool cynic. The sexual element is played upon verbally, not acted upon by the younger set, tho Laura's mother is revealed to have slept with her lover.

While the details of the occult used by the author may be open to question, Mahy does seem to have a solid grasp of the philosophy of "white witchcraft" and the danger inherent in the power to do unusual things. The backdrop of the story is her own native New Zealand. The writing is truly exquisite, including several well-crafted puns in the last chapter. Recommended to the young adult interested in the supernatural and in romance, as well as to the young-at-heart.

tfp

RENSIME, Jacqueline Lichtenberg, Daw Books 1984, 255pp., $295

Assuming one accepts the premise of a human race divided into two subgroups, killers with tentacles (Simes) and human-norm-appearing producers of a life-energy called selyn (Gens), Jacqueline Lichtenberg's Sime/Gen Universe is amazingly consistent and absorbing. RENSIME maintains the quality of the series, falling chronologically near the end of the projected history.

Research Biochemist Laneff Farris ambrov Sat'htine is on the verge of synthesizing a substance which would make it possible to find out whether a child would grow up to be Sime or Gen--in utero. The story centers on the political implications of this imminent discovery for the Tecton (the government in power who believe each Sime must be responsible not to kill Gens), the Distect (who hold that it is the Gens' responsibility to keep the Simes

from killing by not fearing them), the Diet (who see all Simes as evil and want to exterminate them), a group of intellectuals masquerading as illiterate gypsies (who protect much of the old knowledge), and Laneff and those she loves.

Laneff's research is interrupted by several catastrophes, both life-threatening and emotionally crippling. A time element is introduced through two events; a member of Diet causing her to kill, or become junct, publicly at a time in her life when she will no longer be able to disjunct, and an unexpected pregnancy. The first will make it impossible for her to live more than a year without killing again, so she must flee her home. The second requires her body to use more selyn, thus hastening the day when she will have to kill which she has vowed not to do. However, it soon becomes apparent that the substance she is synthesizing will be a purer form of a substance the gypsy group has used on occasion to "blank" the programming of the Sime physiology allowing total disjunction. The substance, however, has always caused pregnant women to abort. Laneff decides to gamble that her substance won't abort her child and takes a dose. The rest of the scene and the story are done in a rather unexpected and nicely handled way.

There are a few problems with this novel. Yuan, the leader of Distect, was almost too fanatic to make Laneff's short romance with him feasible. The story slows down quite a bit during the period of depression which Laneff suffers, and nearly loses the reader. However, the majority of the story is fast-paced and exciting. The love scene between Laneff and Shanlun, the father of her child, was particularly vivid, almost exotic. And the hallucination scene was beautifully worked. A good read. Recommended.

tfp

CHRISTENING QUEST by Elizabeth Scarborough, Bantam Spectra, 1985, 231 pg. $3.50

In CHRISTENING QUEST we meet an incredibly large number of charactors with magical heritage on one or both sides of the family.

Rupert Rowan, prince-in-diplomatic training, ends up with the quest of locating his sister's first-born child which had been stolen away before she was christened, due to an agreement that had allowed her and her husband to retain their kingdom in a time of war. Carole, a friend of Rupert's, is enlisted in the quest because she is of the magical lines that would make the magics of the christening come into full power. The people whose aid Rupert and Carole engage along their way, add gifts to those originally for the child. Before long it becomes evident that there is really no situation that doesn't have some kind of magical solution, and the main characters are never in any really sticky situation (other than the fact that Grippledice, a dragon, has fallen in love with Rupert, and that problem was never solved within the story). Someone almost always had a way, usually magical, with which to get out of a problem, or there was, by some coincidence, someone who could get them out of the situation without anyone coming to any harm. How terribly convenient the whole way through.

There are few books I've ever read that I have had to fight to finish reading...and those had been school texts on subjects that were of no interest to me. This book, I am sorry to say, falls into that same catagory of dislike. With every character being magical, and all the careful coincidences, the story soon wears thin around the edges. There was a reasonable plot, but it was carefully murdered. Maybe if I had read it in third grade I may have been young enough to have enjoyed it. (That was the age when I first started to read Norton, Asimov and Heinlein books.) As it stands, though, I really did not enjoy the story, and wouldn't recommend it...not even to an enemy.

TP

LIFEBURST by Jack Williamson, Del Rey, 1984, 282 pg. $2.95

The world menaced by an asteroid size, interstellar, nuclear powered, cybernetic wasp? Definitely a different 'Earth Doomed' angle...but that is part of the excitement (or helps add to the excitement) in LIFEBURST.

In LIFEBURST there are three distinctly different angles from which the story is told. One is the view of the Seeker Queen, looking for a new stellar system in which to hive (yes, this is the giant nuclear powered hornet). The second view is that of the Eldren, a group of space-adapted, intergalactic races who have forsworn all violence and spend their time studying planetary races that are venturing into space. The third angle from which the story is told, and certainly the largest part of the story, is the human angle. In specific the human angle is told from the life of Quin Dane, born in space enroute to Hallow Station on a relief ship. He had no 'Sun Spot' and therefore Earth was closed to him, and he dreamed of going there. Yes, the stellar politics play a goodly part in filling out charactor profiles and in setting the taste for this section of the book.

It is my opinion that Williamson did a good job with this unique 'Earth Doomed' storyline. The politics, well handled, and the aliens, could even have been plausible (except maybe for the nuclear wasp). I did enjoy this book and would recommend it to friends who have the same taste in reading matter.

TP

RED FLAME BURNING by Ward Hawkins Del Rey, 1985, 280 pg. $2.95

SWORD OF FIRE by Ward Hawkins Del Rey, 1985, 297pg. $2.95

These two books are numbers one and two of a series, in the listed order.

In RED FLAME BURNING we are introduced to Harry Borg, a lonesome eccentric alcoholic, (a scene which was very much overplayed), and Guss Rassan, a Nassan from Essa, as well as some others who make up this double-universe story.

Guss breaks through the fabric which separates the two universes, right in the middle of Harry Borg's livingroom. Harry doesn't take him seriously, believing him to be an alcoholically induced hallucination. It rather surprised Harry to wake up after passing out in the kind of physical condition he had been in thirty years in his past, and cured of his alcoholism...then he began to take Guss and the other Nassans seriously.

Guss and the others from his world (which, incidentally, occupies the same time and space as Earth, and even has the same geography) are saurians. In Guss' world the humanoids are seemingly nonintellegent and fur-covered...a source of meat. Harry, and the other human 'visitors' of the Nassans are just considered to be better meat stock by many of their hosts. Bucking this kind of attitude, Harry and the other humans, with the help of some Nassans who have accepted them as being individuals and not meals, have to stop a centuries old war with the Nassans being victorious--

or the humans will end up as meat. This story had a few surprises in it.

SWORD OF FIRE picks up later on, after the passageway between Essa and Earth has been sealed. Guss has found out from a friend, a highly respected scientist, that Earth is about to be destroyed by a major nuclear explosion. Both worlds being, theoretically, in the same time and space, though different universes, will suffer the effects of the destruction. Guss and his 'girlfriend', Sissie, risk the death penalty to cross into Earth to try to find their friend Harry Borg to try to stop the bomb. Harry, in the mean time, is trying to get his wife and daughter back from the madman who had them kidnapped and ordered the nuclear bomb built. These two little tricks were to try to divide Harry's attention and force him into revealing some of the secrets he brought back from Essa on his last escapade.

Unable to locate Harry and Company, Guss and Sissie contact another family; George, Sara, Jillie and Jackie Bushby. After finally convincing George and family that the Nassans are friendly, and that Earth (and possibly Essa) are in grave danger, Guss, Sissie, the Nassan Scientist and George set out to find and deactivate the bomb. By the time that Guss and Company have decided they have almost found the bomb, Harry and company find out from their captor that the bomb had been stolen and placed, and get a chance to start their own search for the bomb. Before the end of the story, Guss and Harry manage to meet up again, the bomb is found, its detonator is located, and thus the worlds are saved. The story, however, is not completed.

This set might have had a workable plot if it hadn't been squashed. The series looks to me as if it is going to turn into one of those terribly redundant, male chauvinistic, soap opera style serial. In my opinion, the author tried to destroy a workable, possibly saleable story. It is another book I wouldn't even recommend to an enemy...for obvious reasons if you bother to try to read it.

TP

THE HARP OF IMACH THYSSEL by Patricia C. Wrede, Ace Fantasy, 1985, 234 pg. $2.95

THE HARP OF IMACH THYSSEL was believed, by most to be a legend... but, then, aren't most legends based on just a little bit of truth? The little bit of truth turned out to be a lot of truth before Emereck and his companion Flindaran made it back to Flindaran's home-castle after leaving the caravan to take a more interesting shortcut home.

The Harp had been hidden in the Castle Windsong (also believed by most to be a legend) to keep it safe from the Shadow-born. The Harp was a tool of magical power...with it healing could be wrought, or cities razed. The time of its finding was a time when the Shadow-born were begining to break the Bonds which had kept them from ravaging the world, and they were not the only ones who sought after the Harp. Rylorien, one of the Five Guardians searches for it, to rebind the Shadow-born and to save one of the other Guardians from the Change, a spell wrought long ago by the Shadow-born in an attempt to take the world and make it more like themselves in their bodiless form. Others sought the Harp because it was a tool of Power. Emereck feared the Harp, for the Price it demanded for its use, but in the end, when the servants of the Shadow-born confront the Guardian and looses the Change, he plays the Harp, using its power to kill and to heal, and then, with great care, turns off the power he had wakened.

This story had a couple of surprises in it, and some of the situations characters found themselves in were at times hilarious, and at other times saddening. The serious thinking that the book can cause, as to whether the end is worth the means could, if you took the book too seriously, could seem preachy. All in all, as an adventure in a wonderful imaginary world, this was enjoyable and worth reading and I would recommend it for anyone who enjoys a moderately paced book.

TP

THERE IS NO DARKNESS by Joe Haldeman and Jack C. Haldeman II, Ace 1983, 242pg., $2.75

"Space Cadet a la Haldeman," according to the cover blurb.

Not really.

This book purports to be the account of one colonial young man's education aboard the giant advanced-training ship called "Starschool". Too bad it isn't.

The first 99 pages is one flight after another, as the stupid pride-ridden hero seeks to pay off a debt he never incurred by hiring out as a gladiator- after recieving a sharp lesson in the fact that an untrained big guy can easily lose to a well trained smaller fighter. Fine if you like bullfights, catfights, bearfights, etc....a dead bore if you don't.

The next long chunk was a press-gang story; how the hero would get out of the trap was telegraphed when one of his friends vanished on a supposed survival test. A remarkably self-centered hero; we hear a lot about how hard the tests are for him, with his size and experience; but the group includes a woman he's interested in who is about half his size and from a much softer environment and there's not one word on how she does or how well she takes it or doesn't. Big dumb louts get very tiresome as viewpoint characters after a while.

The third chunk, "Construct", should have been most of the book. In this, the students are introduced to the meeting point of the known spacegoing species, all of whom are alien enough to be both interesting abd frustrating.

I would like to see the book this was supposed to have been.

PM

The Dungeon Master: The Disappearance of James Dallas Egbert III, William Dear. Houghton Mifflin, 1984, $16.95 hc

A lot of people in fandom have probably heard, if only in the form of garbled rumors, of a fan supposed to have disappeared while playing Dungeons and Dragons in the service tunnels under Michigan State University. This is the presumably definitive account of what happened, written by the private detective, hired by the family, who eventually found him. In this case truth, while not stranger than fiction, is a good deal sadder.

Dallas Egbert was an extremely bright, but immature even for his age, youngster who entered MSU at fourteen, two years before his disapppearance. In addition to being too smart and too young to fit in well with those around him, his problems included strong parental pressure to excel, homosexuality, and heavy drug use. Although he attended meetings of the MSU science fiction club and Tolkien Society, he never made really close connections with either group, although fandom is usually a haven for bright kids who don't fit in; fans questioned by Dear said he always showed up stoned. He enjoyed Dungeons and Dragons and was apparently good at it, but was not really part of any of the groups who played in the tunnels: he wanted to be, but they wouldn't have him, since he was too young and too flaky. When Dallas went missing in August, 1979, there were a variety of possible explanations, each more fantastic than the last.

The private detective summoned to find him, William Dear, was an appropriate figure for such a case, being the sort of man the adjective "colorful" was coined for, one who takes care to point out in his preface that his cases have been used as bases for TV private-eye shows. Dear is apparently highly competent and successful at his work, but he was definitely not born to blush unseen. In fact, the book is much more about Dear than it is about Dallas, as most of the exotic scenarios take place only in his imagination. Facts in the case were hard to come by, partly because Dallas was such an outsider and partly because those who were involved with him, especially in the gay community, were leery of coming forward because he was a minor. Dear did follow up what leads he could, whether it was hanging from a railroad trestle while a train went over (another of Dallas' hobbies); sending his minions to infiltrate the 1979 Louisville con, which Dallas had expressed an interest in attending, only to find the fans eager to help in any way possible; perching in a tree to spy on a midnight gathering that turned out to be nothing more sinister than a conventicle of earnest Theosophists; impersonating a door-to-door vacuum-cleaner salesman in order to interrogate a little old lady who knew nothing useful but turned out to be very anxious to buy a vacuum cleaner; and searching the eight miles of tunnels under MSU, an exploit which makes Dante's jaunt through Hell a vacation trip by comparison. He even arranged to play a game of D&D, his account of which is a good deal more self-revelatory than I think Dear himself realizes. Dallas eventually surfaced in Morgan City, Louisiana; exactly what hapened between the time he disappeared and the time he showed up for an arranged meeting with Dear is and will remain murky, as he never told anyone but Dear the full story, and Dear was sworn to secrecy about a lot of it. Apparently Dallas went down into the tunnels to commit suicide; when his attempt failed, he went into hiding with some "friends" who passed him on and eventually turned him out when Dear's investigations made things too hot for them.

Dear lays a heavy weight of blame for Dallas' troubles on Michigan State, first for not taking its *in loco parentis* role more seriously (it seems to me entirely reasonable to demand of a university that if it is going to admit a 14-year-old, he should not be left to sink or swim unsupervised as if he were an 18-year-old), and secondly for persisting in the claim that the tunnels were inaccessible to the general public, despite clear proof to the contrary (Dear makes the point that the tunnels gave access to the dorms and may well have been used by the perpetrator(s) of several unsolved rapes and assaults). He would also probably have harsher things to say about the parents if they had not been the ones paying his bill. Despite his self-advertisement, one has to give him credit not only for finding Dallas but for standing by the troubled teenager afterwards, maintaining (as much as was possible given that he lived in Texas and Dallas in Ohio) his role as friend and confidant. Unfortunately, it was not enough: Dallas Egbert, a lost boy in more than the physical sense, committed suicide a year later.

I can recommend this book only to those who have heard of the case and are curious about how it came out, as it is really not a particularly good true-mystery narrative; nor does it have much to do with fandom or gaming. It is also a valuable cautionary tale for anyone concerned with the education of high-IQ children. I myself got into enough difficulty by starting school at five (because of a January birthday) and then being skipped a grade; I can't help wondering if those young geniuses who go off to college at twelve or fourteen ever turn out well-adjusted. All through the book, I kept thinking of the school set up for the mutant kids in CHILDREN OF THE ATOM, and wishing something of the sort had been available for Dallas Egbert.

ajb

The Misenchanted Sword, Lawrence Watt-Evans. Ballantine/Del Rey, 1985, $2.95 pb

Lawrence Watt-Evans likes to get the protagonists of his novels into absolutely inescapable traps and then sit back and watch them get out. He did this over and over in his four novels about Garth the Overman; and he does a dandy job of it here. The story takes place near the end of an interminable war. The hero, Valder, a scout fleeing an enemy patrol, takes refuge with a misanthropic wizard, the only inhabitant of a marshy waste. When the baddies catch up, the wizard's hut and most of his supplies are destroyed and the two barely escape with their lives. Although not feeling particularly cordial toward Valder, the wizard (mainly in order to get rid of him) puts a melange of protective spells on his sword. By trial and error, and from the research of staff wizards once he and the sword get back to army headquarters, Valder learns that the enchantment is one he could well do without: once the sword is drawn, it cannot be sheathed until it kills a man, and by a perverse variant of the Spell of True Ownership, no one but he can draw it the first 100 times (approximately!); then anyone can draw it except him, and he will be the first to die by it. Moreover, he cannot die as long as he is its True Owner, though he is not immune to injury, age, and decay.

Valder is no superhero; nor is he particularly brave, wise, or noble. When his commander decides that the best use he can make of the sword is to make Valder his chief assassin, he finds the assignment extremely distasteful but goes along because it is his military duty. Once the war is over (due to mighty and spectacular events in which the hero does NOT participate), he eagerly hangs up the sword and settles down as an innkeeper. Eventually, as an old man going blind, he tries to lift the geas

and end his life. His problem is that he is a decent, fair, and reasonably honest man who can't just go out and kill people. He tries for a job as headsman, but the Lord High Executioner isn't hiring. He consults various magicians, but there's no way out: either he kills 19 people or he just keeps getting older, eventually becoming too feeble even to lift the sword.

There IS a way out, which I won't give away except to say that it involves magic and it is available to Valder only because he is a decent, average Joe and NOT a heroic type. Besides the problem of the sword, the story is interesting because it centers on someone essentially unimportant, whose deeds are not world-shaking. If there were a film version, Valder should be played by Jimmy Stewart. I wouldn't go so far as to call the book offbeat, but it does have an unusual perspective for a fantasy novel. This isn't the sort of book to change the mind of any diehard hater of fantasy; but it is well done and sufficiently original to appeal to most of those of us who do like the stuff.

ajb

The Gallatin Divergence, L. Neil Smith Ballantine/Del Rey, 1985, $2.95 pb

Why is it that with all the self-proclaimed Libertarians we have hanging around this joint, when a genuine, card-carrying Libertarian, a former member of the party's platformcommittee, writes an sf novel, the only person who undertakes to review it is an old-fashioned, museum-quality moderate Democrat like me? (I used to be a liberal Republican back when that meant voting for Nelson Rockefeller; now a liberal Republican is someone who disapproves of lynching on Sundays, and most liberal Democrats seem to be members of the Mutant Liberation Front, so I am a moderate Democrat.) Smith has previously written several presumably serious sf novels, three STAR WARS novels, and a hilarious sf murder mystery, Their Majesties' Bucketeers, which I lauded in NIEKAS 28. This book (and apparently some if not all of his non-STAR WARS books) takes place in the same alternate universe as Bucketeers, one wherein the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794 was successful, largely because Albert Gallatin became its leader by penning a Libertarian sequel to the Declaration of Independence. The Constitution was repealed, George Washington was shot as a counterrevolutionary, and Alexander Hamilton fled to Prussia. In this novel, a dastardly Hamiltonian has seized a time machine and traveled back from 2119 in order to assassinate Gallatin. Our hero, an ex-cop from Denver in our universe who got into this one by being snatched through a probability broach, leads a dedicated but peculiar team of Gallatinists back to foil the plot. Their mission is masterminded by the 22nd century's leading scientist, who just happens to be a porpoise.

Like Bucketeers, this book offers lots of action and is genuinely funny; the plotting, however, isn't as neat or as satisfactory. I had a great deal of difficulty accepting the notion that the Constitution is a reactionary document or seeing George Washington as a villain and Alexander Hamilton as an archvillain; and I think that most readers, having grown up with the traditional view, would have the same problem. The whole thing might be a lot easier to accept if the events were the same but the names changed. I also find it difficult to believe that a Libertarian society would be so much more idyllic than what we've got, especially since about half of the scientific advances mentioned in the "historical" appendix seem to deal with weaponry. The appendix is, however, arguably the best thing in the book, depicting an America whose presidents have included Frederick Douglass, H.L. Mencken (assassinated), and Ayn Rand; and such historical events as a joint paper on evolution by Darwin and Wallace (1858), the San Francisco Earthquake, Fire, and Barbecue (1906), the decisive naval battle against Russia in the Bering Straits won by Admiral Heinlein (1957) -- and oh, yes, the murder of actor John Wilkes Booth in 1865 by an obscure lawyer from Illinois. And there's something irresistible about a universe in which None of the Above is elected President for Life. The Gallatin Divergence is for those of us who don't demand that sf be deadly serious, and who are intrigued by social/political speculation as much as by science. While not as good as Their Majesties' Bucketeers, it is a very enjoyable read.

ajb

Science Made Stupid, Tom Weller. Houghton Mifflin, 1985, $6.95, 80 pp (magazine-sized, illustrated pb)

This marvelous parody does to science what The Pooh Perplex did to English lit courses, what 1066 and All That did to history, what Stewart Cowley's Do-It-Yourself Brain Surgery did to home workshop projects, and what Richard Armour did to almost everything. It is a bargain at the price, since every page is worth at least a dollar. Too many parodies fall apart because after an initial attempt to stay close to the subject/victim, they wander away into jokes that the author may think funny but which have nothing to do with what is being parodied. (I'm thinking particularly of Bored of the Rings here.) Weller is bang on, from the frontispiece listing the geological eras from the Atonal through the Cretinous all the way to the appendix, glossary ("half-life: Saturday night in Fresno"), bibliography (The Picture Book of Racial Degenerates by Norman and George Lincoln Rockwell), tables (325 cubebs = 1 furbish), advertisements ("Be a quantum mechanic...study at home!"), note on format ("This book is set in 12-point Monotone Bimbo, with chapter headings in Basketball Overextended....It was printed by upset lithophagy on 70-lb. Tropicana Ivory mislaid Cowabunga Slipshod Overcoat. The ink came out of a can.... Whole forests were leveled, thousands of furry animals left homeless, and vast virgin landscapes devastated, to make this book.), and laudatory bacover quotations including praise from THX 1138 and the Bubble Chamber Director of the Lawrence Welk Radiation Laboratory. Perhaps my favorite item in the book

is the table of properties of that well-known sub-atomic particle, the quack (p. 27), but it's damned hard to choose. This is a book to buy for yourself, your best friends, and your favorite scientists. Absolutely splendid!

ajb

Dragonlance (TM) Chronicles, Vol. 1 Dragons of Autumn Twilight, Vol. 2 Dragons of Winter Night). Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman, covers by Larry Elmore, interior art by Denis Beauvais, TSR, 1984, $2.95 pb, 447 pp. and 1985, $3.50 pb, 399 pp. respectively

I started to read these with a "show me" attitude and frankly the first part of Dragons of Autumn Twilight did nothing to change my opinion. The fact that these books were set in a prefabricated gaming world (Dragonlance (TM)) didn't encourage me. The characters seemed shallow and the action forced. But I had asked for these books at the ABA with the promise that I would review them so I forced myself to continue. As the book continued I began to see the characters break out of the stock molds which seemed to have been used in their formation and begin to breathe. The multiple viewpoints which had seemed so forced and jerky at the beginning became smoother and the story moved quickly and naturally. The half-elf began to show real signs of the doubts and strains with which his mixed parentage had cursed him. The neutral cleric began to show signs of caring about others as well as driving ambitions. His brother, an oafish warrior (duh, me Conan), began to show that having an ambitious, clerical brother who was mistrusted by his friends often caught him in a web of conflicting loyalties. The other characters, too, began to show individual foibles, except for the dwarf; but being straight out of Tolkien is at least good parentage.

The plot itself follows the classical tradition of a conflict between the gods. Mortals act as pawns in their battles, seeking objects of power to be used by one side before the other side can obtain them or destroy them. It generally follows the pattern of multiple quests, interspersed with battles. There is plenty of action and the multiple viewpoints function smoothly after the first half of Dragons of Autumn Twilight.

The strong points in this trilogy so far are some of the descriptions, which made me ache to be an artist, and the attitudes attributed both to individuals and to the various races. The humans don't believe in the gods since they have not been active since "the Cataclysm" roughly three hundred years earlier. There have been practically no true magicians or clerics since then, not even among the non-human races. The humans also distrust all non-humans. The elves are not noble keepers of the faith but rather bitter, cynical snobs who feel that the Cataclysm was caused by the humans and want nothing to do with humans or with other groups of Elves. Each Elven group holds its own set of ancient, bitter grudges. Even outside attacks which drive the Elves from their homes do not change the attitudes of the majority. Some of the characters overcome these attitudes but the fact that the attitudes exist at all adds a real touch of life to both the world and its people. Although I usually dislike this style of plotting, I found the handling of it is these books to be clear, realistic, and sympathetic.

If you are either a classical fantasy fan and/or a fantasy gamer, I recommend these. The third book of the trilogy, Dragons of the Spring Dawning, is due out in Sept. 1985.

mrh

Magic to Do, Melinda McKenzie, Signet Romance pb $2.50, 182 pp., 1985

I do not ordinarily review romances for NIEKAS. But since this romance deals with the subject of psychic powers, is a *roman a' clef* of the writers who visit Greyhaven (the home of Paul Edwin Zimmer, Diana Paxson, and their spouses, children, et al), and is written by Melinda Snodgrass, author of the STAR TREK novel, Tears of the Singers, I thought it might have interest to the science fiction/fantasy reading community.

Reading this book, I found myself impatient with the sex scenes, not because they weren't well done, but because I wanted to get to know more about all the characters. I not only enjoyed the characters whom I could identify, but strangely enough I also enjoyed the ones used simply to show a range of opinions about the psychic. From one of the opening characters, who is pitifully sure that she is psychic and isn't, to the rabid anti-psychic, who says that if someone is showing psychic ability that there is something wrong with the test, I found them all true to life.

The plot development too was handled fairly well, although I didn't care for the ending, feeling that it was too contrived. I felt that an ending in which more effort had to be made to accommodate the needs of both protagonists would have made a better story. But taking into account who the audience is supposed to be and what I know of the requirements of romance editors, I think she has done well. I do not recommend this to non-romance readers as a serious book; but if you like to play "Guess that Character," you'll enjoy this one.

mrh

(I read this book at Hildy's urging, since I know at least some of the same people; and I feel moved to comment on one disturbing aspect of it. As she points out, it deals with the psychic, and at least one of the characters has genuine psychic powers. This seems to be a developing trend in romance novels, as far as I can tell, my reading of them being minimal since finishing the essay on the romantic. The psychic hero is being investigated by a group called the Esper Society, which seems to be a fictionalized version of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, the outfit that publishes THE SKEPTICAL INQUIRER. However, though the novel depicts both genuine and fake psychics, the investigators are portrayed as deeply biased and prepared to throw out even valid experiments if they should support psychic claims. Moreover, the chief of the group (the hero's rival for the heroine) was the hero's faculty adviser in graduate school and stole his original research; later he led a witch hunt that got the hero fired from JPL because he had used his ESP to help the police in a matter unrelated to his work. There are plenty of surveys and studies that indicate that the general public is deplorably credulous on the subject of the occult; I am disturbed to see this attitude reinforced in pop fiction, with prejudice against the nonbeliever and no reinforcement for the open-minded. I doubt if Magic to Do will become one of the most influential books of our generation, but I bet a heck of a lot more people will read it than ever read THE SKEPTICAL INQUIRER or Martin Gardner's debunking books. ajb)

Tailchaser's Song, Tad Williams, DAW Books, hc $15.95 (tentative price) 352 pp.

I received an advance copy of this at the ABA and looked forward to reading it with great anticipation since it was a fantasy about cats. Perhaps I was disappointed because I expected too much of it as one of the two first hardcovers from DAW, or perhaps I was put off by the strong anti-spay/anti-neuter propaganda in

it; but I didn't care for it.

To my taste it was too much of a fairy-tale to come across on the same level as, say, Watership Down, where the rabbits act totally within the behavior patterns of rabbits. But it is too much like real life when the villain is portrayed as victim as well as victimizer. Also against fairy-tale conventions is having the hero, Tailchaser, find that getting what he thought he wanted isn't what he really wanted.

The form of the book is that of a quest. The hero loses a female to whom he is very attached. Thinking that she has been taken by whatever has been causing the mysterious disappearances of cats in the area, he starts out to find her. The quest is long and parts of it are tedious; but on the whole one is interested in what will happen next. The book is nowhere near a flop; there are some excellent scenes, such as the one where the hero overdoses on catnip and takes an out-of-body trip to meet the villain. On the whole, however, I found it to be weak. It never did say how the villain, who could not stand light, was going to arrange to be able to come to the surface and rule the world. Also it acknowledged humans as existing but did not show them as being touched in any way by the encroachment of this great evil upon the world.

I don't recommend you buy the hardcover version of this, and you might check it out of the library before you pay for the paperback.

mrh

Natural Acts: A Sidelong View of Science and Nature, David Quammen. Nick Lyons Books/Schocken Books, 1985, $16.95 hc

When I reviewed a book by Lewis Thomas in these pages some time ago, I remarked that good scientists who write well are so rare as practically to constitute an endangered species, or words to that effect. Fortunately, the converse is not true: skilled writers with an informed amateur interest in science form a tradition from Pliny the Elder through Gilbert White, Thoreau, and John Muir to Robert Ardrey. David Quammen, a novelist who writes the "Natural Acts" column for OUTSIDE magazine (the source of most of this material), is a worthy successor to these -- an observer of nature himself and an interpreter to a popular readership of the work of scientists. He writes of the natural world and of the people who study it with wit, perception, and passionate concern, whether he is saying a good word for mosquitoes or sneering at butterflies ("the bimbos of the natural world"), marveling at the behavior of sea cucumbers or boggling at the behavior of scientists ("If you freeze a dead seal and then cut him in half with a band saw [one relentless physiologist has done this, thereby setting a record of some sort for barbarous scientific literal-mindedness], in cross-section the poor seal with his blubber looks something like a Hostess Twinkie.") The natural world is so full of strange wonders and wonderful strangeness that it requires an Olympian incompetence NOT to write an interesting book about it; David Quammen has written a fascinating and endlessly rereadable one, which belongs with The Medusa and the Snail, The Dragons of Eden, and King Solomon's Ring. Very highly recommended.

ajb

CHECKLIST AND BIBLIOGRAPHY OF STEPHEN KING by Owen Haskell, available from the author at OTHERWORLDS 197 Wickenden St, Providence RI 02903, 44 pages plus errata, no price on book.

This bibliography lists the first edition of every book and the first appearance of every short piece. It includes a number of very rare items of limited circulation, but only those that the compiler has personally seen. No items are included on general reputation or word of mouth; unlike other bibliographies. In the next edition it might be a good idea to include a separate listing of such reputed works and a list of any wrongfully attributed works, if any, to clear up errors in circulation.

This is an important item for the serious King collector to have. Unfortunately the publisher did not put the price on the book, which is saddle stapled digest sized with heavy paper covers. I would guess that sending $5 to the address above would bring it to you. ERM

HALLEY'S COMET by Francis Reddy, illus by Thomas L. Hunt, prod by Pat La Brecque, Astro Media Corp, 1985, 59pp., no price on book.

This ring bound hard covered large format (over 8½ x 11) book is well worth the $12 or so the publishers are asking for it. Many books are being marketed to exploit the interest aroused by the passage of The Comet and this is the best of the ones I have seen. This is to be expected since it comes from the people who produce ASTRONOMY magazine.

The first half of the book is explanatory material. There is a chapter on comets in general, a history of Halley's Comet, a discussion of other famous comet encounters (including Comet Kahoutek), and a chapter on viewing and photographing Halley's Comet. The book recommends the use of binoculars or a low power wide field telescope. It is aimed at the novice observer.

The remaining half of the book is made up of charts to find Halley's Comet on various dates during its passage with maps for various lattitudes including the Southern Hemesphere. The whole book is published on heavy stock, about like that of NIEKAS covers, so that it will stand up to heavy outdoor use. The ring binding helps keep it open to the desired page. The back cover is a summary map of its observable passage. There is also a brief chapter on the various observations that will be made from space. SF & ERM

HOW THE GODS WOVE IN KYRANNON by Ardath Mayhar, Ace 1979, reprinted 1982, 181pg., $2.25

Both the title and the cast of characters sounded intriguing; so did the theme, which made itself clear enough that it never needed to be spelled out. A pushy king has decided that it is intolerable that certain people, houses, etc., should not be under his control; a variegated assortment of these free peoples unite in their own ways to stop him.

If only Mahar had written the novel out in full, it would have been well worth the $3.95 it would have sold for. Unfortunately, the outline was good enough that the publisher bought it, and the public did too.

It would be nice to mix the richness of detail and the background of Diana Paxson with the plot and people of Mayhar's book, stir well and serve up the results. It would taste a lot better. In other words expand this book a lot more!

PM

THE DRAGON RISES by Adrienne Martin-Barnes, ace 1983, 244pg., $2.75

Things are never as they seem; hot chocolate masquerades as cream.

This is a very good book, but not the book it claims to be at first.

The spirit of King Arthur, an immortal who has been many other heroes in the past, is reincarnated in an Imperial war hero much like Darth Vader. What purpose this serves on the larger scale is never spelled out; presumably, to prevent a string of stupid atrocities. On the personal scale, the hero, Gilhame ur-Fagon has the task of somehow breaking the endless cycle of reincarnations, war, death, and rebirth that his jailer, the Goddess Arianrhod, has set him. So far she has been disappointed.

But ur-Fagon's war is no longer an attempt to hold back the Darkness, but just another ongoing power struggle between superpowers; his lady, Alvellaina, is nothing like Guinevere; his Lancelot is happily married to Guinevere's sister; his sister's son, Hamecor, often mentioned, never appears nor amounts to anything, let alone a major menace on the order of Mordred. It's a good story in its own right, but rather like going to see Chariots of Fire and finding out that the one runner, who could never beat the other, is now engaged in a baseball game.

The front cover seems to be an attempt to package the book as a romance; the love interest subplot does follow all the conventions thereof. This may be the newest publishing convention; Pocket Books did the same thing with Diana Paxson's LADY OF LIGHT, which was enough to delay purchase of the book for over a month.

PM

LADY OF LIGHT by Diana Paxson, Pocket Books (Timescape), 1982, 261pg., $2.75

This book, if you believe the back cover, is a romance, with a dashing young king setting out to find "the lady who could not only be mistress of his heart, but Mistress of the Jewels". What it really is, is the story of the making of a queen, a girl's growing up. The setting and background is far richer than the plot to date, but private sources say it is half of a book, that the publishers decided to divide down the middle and publish two parts. The sequel should be worth buying, then.

The setting is a post-Catastrophe Northern California, pure Ecotopia with a pagan religion, very well realized; and in this culture magic (or psi powers) work. The heroine is psi-gifted, intelligent, and totally unready, as yet, to rule; but she must rise to the occasion as fast as possible. Buy it now, but hold it for part two.

PM

THE NAGASAKI VECTOR, by L. Neil Smith, Ballantine, 1983, 242pg., $2.75

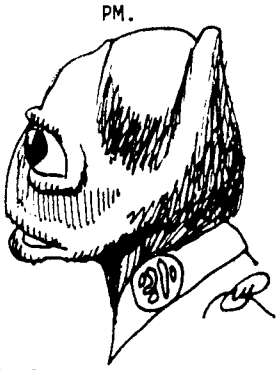
Why do we bother with page counts, anyway? There're all about the same price and size anyway, and about a penny a page. More to the point, anyone who could write THEIR MAJESTY'S BUCKETEERS can be counted on to be both funny and readable, with a good story that stands on its own.

Alas, it is told first-person in the sort of slurred dialect Poul Anderson would use to reproduce Mike Hammer's speech, which can get on a reader's nerves.

However, our hero and his time machine, with three alien diplomats have fallen into the hands of some very nasty cardboard villains, and in the course of action, materialize over Nagasaki on August 9, 1945, and are thrown into Smith's #1 alternate world, Confederacy, in which all sentient beings are considered human, and polite anarchy is the law of the land. I think there are some broad slices of Heinlein's later works, especially in the hero's relations with his time machine, who has a female personality, but it's hard to be sure; like going on a roller coaster, you're there to enjoy the ride, not get anywhere. There is even a tragic minor character who is wasted in a secondary role, G. Howell Nathual, a detective, gentleman-rancher, disappointed opera singer, and coyote- Howell is very likeable, as canids often are and Smith's characters especially. His owners had been debating whether he was livestock or an item of farm technology, when he piped up from his cage "I'll tell you what- I'll compete in both categories."

Enjoyable.

PM.



THE BOOK OF KELLS by R.A. Mac Avoy Spectra books 1985

I have no background in Irish history on which to base any judgement of the authenticity of the historical elements of the story. This I freely admit, so that any seeming bias isn't misunderstood.

I enjoyed this story and its unique twist to the time travel adventure. I have, for some time, agreed with the ideology that art and music of past ages can be doors into the past. BOOK OF KELLS takes the idea one step farther, with an artifact (or the artwork from it) and a piece of music of the past open up a doorway into Ireland's past, during the times of the Viking raids. John Thornburn, of Newfoundland had settled in Ireland for the peace and quiet to persue his art, (at the behest of Derval, a one time lover, and very domineering woman) was in for a major surprise.

While listening to pipes and tracing out the design of Bridget's Cross, he managed to open a time-door through which Ailesh, out of Ireland's past, first enters the story. Along with Ailesh and Derval John ventures into the past to try to help collect the murder price for the Abby of the Hill of Ash (Ailesh' town). At the town they pick up the only other survivor of the Viking attack on the town, McCullen, a traveling poet and historian. Through combined efforts and some strange talents of John's,, the group makes their way to Dublin, only to find out that the King of Dublin has no real interest in the well-being of outlying towns. While this has been happening the Vikings who had razed Ailesh' town have finally caught up with their quarry (of whom all had been dedicated, by their battle leader, to Thor). The group, along with new (and in some instances old) friends, sets out for a place believed to be safe. En route the Vikings make their attack (again the target is an abbey, at which the characters have temporarily stopped). John's ability to warp time with music and art (this time in the form of an old song)proves useful.

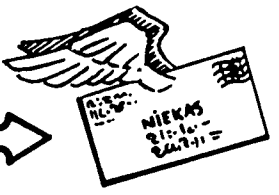
This story had enough action to keep it going, and enough lulls so that it is the perfect book for someone, like me, who gets to read just a little at a time and has to peg away at a book in order to get a chance to finish it. I found it enjoyable as an adventure, and really liked the unique twist to the time-warp accessiinto the adventure. I think almost anyone could enjoy it, and I do recomend it for those of us who have a harder time reconciling our mundane lives with our few moments of reading time.

TP

Varlak the Wizard

by J. Sibley

LAIŠKAI



Piers Anthony
Inverness, FL

I've been answering over a hundred letters a month this year (in contrast to the smaller volume at the time I wrote the column in NIEKAS 33), so again must answer your huge magazine with a mere card. Good stuff elsewhere in the issue, but two things about my own: First, I love that illo p. 13! (An irony is that now I can't locate my source for the "Swinehood has no remedy" quote; I think it's late Victorian Brit.)

[After I sent Piers my cartoon as a friendly gesture, he informed me that "swinehood hath no remedy" comes from The Symphony by Sidney Lanier; the importance of this contribution to Swine Culture need hardly be stated. RHK.]

Second, a disclaimer you might run: Piers Anthony is not responsible for representations of his positions made by others.

I like Anne Braude's remark on the Constitutional Convention. She might like the way I remark on the same subject in my novel Politician. There are indeed sharks in them waters.

Susan Shwartz
1 Station Square #306
Forest Hills NY
11375

Can you pass the word to Anne Braude that I'm very curious about her Arthurian work and the section of NIEKAS that's planned to deal with the Matter of Britain? It was my dissertation area at Harvard, and if she's interested, I can send her an article on the twentieth-century Arthurian Renaissance or one on the ambivalent figure of Merlin.

...and, you know...Piers Anthony not only writes like an idiot (DNQ), but an egotistical misogynist idiot.

Thomas M. Egan
69-36 43 Ave.
Woodside NY 11377

NIEKAS 33 has great cover art, as usual. Allen Koszowski does better (on the front cover) than Charles Lang (inside front cover) to capture the fairy tale/Lovecraftian sense of horror that will stir up our soggy imagination. It reminds me of the Eye of Sauron searching for its enemies in Middle-Earth. It goes well with the article "Tolkein's Cardolan" by Jon Douglas Singer. That was one grand piece of Middle-Earth epic!

The latter captures our sense of fun in Tolkeindom with his history of the Dunedain realm. Good research and good writing. Keep it up, from a fellow Tolkein fan. (Nick Cuti's portfolio art shows a pleasing variety of approaches in style.)

The "White Magic" essay of Professor Schumaker is a great boost to NIEKAS' scholarly hopes. For those who would like a readable and intelligent overview into the "other side" I recommend Richard Cavendish's The Black Arts [Capricorn Books] which touches on everything from witchcraft to Tarot to numerology/astrology. The Satanist cults of today (from Charles Manson to Son of Sam to numerous murder incidents involving devil ceremonies) testify to the horror of "life imitating art". I wonder why so few mention in connection with White Magic the strange book of angel lore (circa 100 BC) called The Book of Enoch. There, the Hebrew angels rule the world as "The Lodgers", sexually copulate with the daughters of men and beget monsters. Remember the angel worship in Asia Minor condemned by St. Paul in his Epistles? It needs looking into to see how "white magic" easily changes color.

Thomas Egan
[again, from an earlier letter]

NIEKAS 31 has the obvious problem of poor printing, but the contents are enjoyably varied in their character and style of approach.

I enjoy a good argument, but Anne Braude's letter is confusing in its condemnation of fundamentalism and authoritarian Catholicism, are Catholics who fight for their moral principles (universal absolute in truth-value, and eternal), condemned as "reactionaries" and "obsolete"? One should examine the logic of all propositions, and premises, not condemn something for being un-American or un-liberal or anti-rational. Americans are too overcome with the Rousseau-like spirit to understand the concept of truth. Dr. Warner Keller's The Bible as History and Cyrus Gordon's on ancient Middle-eastern cultures should be digested by Anne Braude before she relegates Biblical history as full of myth. Sometimes literary concepts show us a different way to understand literal word meanings than we are used to. (example, the use of days to express eras of time, re creation; the use of time re primitive generations of early man to show historical continuity, etc.) St. Augustine of Hippo noted this in his Confessions (last book) and in The City of God (book 9) when he saw the Biblical description of the "flat" earth did not have to be literally accepted and that eras of time can mean very different things in Biblical geneology.

I loved the art of your covers: Linda Leach does an excellent job on the woodland nature beings who could be Varda, Tolkien's earth angels". Her detail gives the sense of ethereal beauty and mystery to the reader. I know her work from MYTHLORE and DRAGON LORE. The back cover by Kurt Reichel gives an eerie, disturbing symbol for the concept of science fiction. In his kind of world anything can happen. Spaceships and weird plants, fish men and mini worlds. The feeling of vast uncharted space is here. Good use of drawing to convey a mood rather than a specific scene. (Randy Townsend's illo on page 30 is great epic stuff too!)

The Conan pieces by the de Camps are excellent tho I've read Sprague's words before. The background piece of Robert E Howard in Cross Plains is disturbing because of the loneliness of the writer it describes. "Cornan the Bold" was a great satire (Terry Jeeves does one fine job of

little tales) as was Robert Knox's grand advertisement, a "takeoff" on those old Charles Atlas adds. Anne Braude's Ballad of Conan was lots of fun for those who love the true Conan in the spirit of escapist relaxation.

I enjoyed the varied jungle of reviews. You never know what kind of book and opinion you'll get next.

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K Godfrey
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Cambridge MA 02139

In NIEKAS 31 I enjoyed the cartoons featuring Ned (or at least his nose). I'll miss seeing Ned at conventions, but I can sympathise with his feelings. Noisy crowds in large doses makes me feel uneasy too.

Fred Lerner: with regard to Durant, I wouldn't consider a 14 year old bride who roller skated to her wedding to be someone who led a bland life.

Raphael Folch-Pi: The Bizarre misdiagnosis you suffered through is not new, let alone unique. A classmate of my mother in college nearly died of an endocrine imbalance that was misdiagnosed as a mental condition. The poor man was almost driven into insanity by the refusal of the doctors he consulted to even believe that anything was wrong physically. Only when he collapsed and nearly died did anyone consider re-diagnosis.

Anne Braude: Thanks for the tip of Charlotte McLeod's pseudonym. The "Ballad of Conan" is a fine filk. After a few pages I stopped taking Holy Blood Holy Grain seriously, and read it as an amusing example of occult nonsense, silly enough to make the best seller list.

The Robert Knox ad was a neat parody.

Ed: If BYCon 2 and Chicon 2 weren't called by those names, what were they called? [Newyorkon and both TASFIC (for Tenth Anniversary SF Con) and XCon...both were used in the progress reports and other literature tho I don't know which was the official name. ERM]

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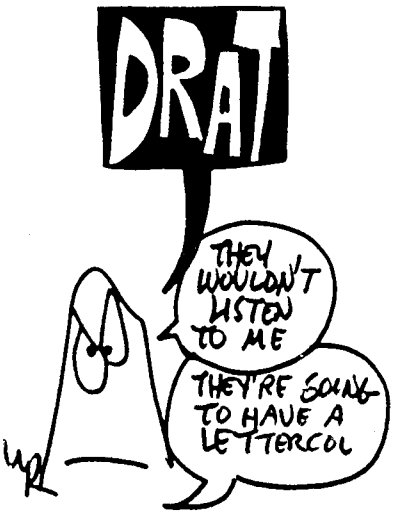
Joanne Forman
P O Box 3181
Taos NM 87571

I thoroughly enjoyed NIEKAS 33; the artwork is far superior to what one sees in most zines. Thanks also for the review of DRAGONSONGS. Every little bit helps. The tape has been reprinted three times already, not bad for a first year.

A couple of points of information:



I wrote the additional material; Anne herself is the narrator; Julia Ecklar first sang DRAGONSONGS at the worldcon in Baltimore; Kathleen Kingslight is the singer on the tape, and John Kingslight is the guitarist and made some of the guitar arrangements. [DRAGONSONGS is available for $8 from Joanne, from Off Centaur and from NIEKAS. ERM]

A new project: "Menole's Twiddles", is a set of 12 little solo pieces for flute, and has just been published on sheet music form for $4. This is a sort of "spin off", but the music is all new. I think Menole composed them while she was living in the cave with her fire lizards after she ran away from Half-Circle Freehold.

Since Performing Arts Press is still a one woman operation, please allow 4 weeks for delivery.

Oh yes! The Dragonsong book is in the works! Many thanks to our patrons for the patience and enthusiasm!

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Robert James Mapson
PO Box 7087
Cloisters SQ WA 6000 Aus.

I was interested to read M R Hildebrand's "The Magic of Herne" in N. 33, even if it was very short. I believe that Herne may be interpreted not as nature incarnate but as one aspect of that: the Jungian shadow, death, chaos, disorder, the cthonic base of life and order. It is that capricious aspect of nature which threatens man but which is inseparable from nature. I'd also like to bring up 2 more references.

The first, also from literature, is Shakespeare's The Merry Wives of Windsor. There womanizing Falstaff presents a somewhat inadequate Herne at Herne's geographical location of his Oak of Windsor Forest in a parody of Falstaff's failed sexual ambitions and constantly countered plots (Herne, the chaotic counterer, countered!).

Musicians have long recognized the value of disorder and confusion, if only to highlight the value of their opposites. Witness Wagner's Walkure and Weber's wild hunt from Der Freischtz . In Schoenberg's Gurrelieder, Waldemar, when he looses his love, curses God and takes on the psychological form of Herne, summoning the wild hunt to an orgiastic musical rampage before the return of light and reason.

Herne is just a pole of the states of existance. His personification acknowledges the existance of entropy without necessarily worshiping it.

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David Travis
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As usual I found NIEKAS interesting if a little ponderously academic. I read enough such as a member of academe myself.

I am fascinated by the variety of type styles. Does every one have a different word processor? Am I the only remaining "human" being who still writes in long hand and doesn't even own a word processor? Am I the only person in the world who wonders these things?

My writing career continues with minor successes and near misses which keep me trying. I did have a short story in ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE in January but the SF magazines continue recalcitrant. In fact today I got back an ANALOG submission with the lowest of the low, a printed rejection slip telling me such things as "check your plots, we get many that are hackneyed" and even "write about what you know" fergodsake! Oh well.

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Michael Moorcock
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London SW 6 England

I am surprised by the reference in your editorial to Barrington J Bayley. Barry Bayley is one of my very oldest friends. My first story in NEW WORLDS was a collaboration with him under the name of Michael Barrington. But he had been publishing for some time before that (as John Diamond, I believe, in things like VARGO STAATAN MAGAZINE) since the age of 15. After he went into the RAF he seemed unable to produce. I discovered from Ted Carnell that he (Ted) had decided Barry was just not doing what he

(Ted) wanted. He told me he thought Barry was a no hoper - I suggested to Barry that he change his name. This he did (to P F Woods which was the name of a friend of his so he could cash the checks without Barry having to reveal who he was.) And thereafter Barry began to sell stories to SCIENCE FANTASY, NEW WORLDS and SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES. I'm not sure what this tells us. Eventually we revealed to Ted what had been going on and Ted took the whole thing without comment and apparently amiably, continuing to publish P F Woods stories in the magazines until I took over NEW WORLDS and Bon Figlioli took over SCIENCE FANTASY. Barry had a story ("The Parch") in, I think, first NW and continued to write for NW thereafter. In the late 60s (as I recall) he bagan to write regularly for Don Wollheim who published most of his output in the US (Doubleday did one or two also). Altho badly ripped off by our mutual English publisher (Alison & Busby) Barry continues to write his sequel to The Soul of the Robot--The Rod of Light--is due to appear here from Methuen. In the early 60s Barry and I worked as a team doing all kinds of juvenile fiction, journalism and so on. He wrote a lot of stuff for the firms I worked for--Fleetway Publications in particular--and sometimes his work appeared under my name (if I'd pass the commmission on to him) resulting in some minor confusion amongst those bibliographers who suddenly come across a story by "me" in an obscure children's book. Mostly what we did, was under pseudonyms. He now lives in Telford, Shropshire, with his wife and two children. [I noticed at the 84 Worldcon that the book I discussed won the Japanese Hugo for the best translated book of the year. ERM]

Nice review from Anne Braude, thanks. I didn't mean the book to be hugely profound, by the way. Frankly, I don't think it's a genre much improved by attempts at profundity.

Enjoyed much of the rest tho I find C S Lewis morally disgusting and a lousy writer, so couldn't really comment on the World of Narnia. I suppose my views on all those horrid Inklings are fairly well known. It didn't, however, give me much satisfaction to see the latest National Front (neofascist organization over here) magazine containing a long article praising Tolkien's nationalist themes and saying that he would have attacked the Jews had he realised exactly what they were up to! I am sure Tolkien would have also been horrified, too, tho I have always felt that there was an unpleasantly rightist undercurrent to his (and Lewis') books which make them impossible for me to enjoy. Ah well.

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Ray Nelson
333 Ramona Ave
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Interesting question: how much should a reader be allowed to know about a writer?

Robert Heinlein seems to say, "nothing at all."

I can understand that. One reason I do not write autobiographical fiction is a desire for some measure of privacy. If I do use autobiographical material, the mask of fantasy allows me to disguise it as something that happened "long ago and far away in some other galaxy." Thus I avoid hurting myself, and more importantly I avoid hurting others associated with me. Even if I felt free to reveal my own secrets, what right do I have to reveal the secrets of other people closely associated with me?

In Robert Heinlein's life, as in my own, there must have been a lot of people who are not writers or otherwise distinguished people. These unknown people did things or said things that they are glad the world does not remember, but which would have to be revealed if the full truth were told about their famous friend.

Even after the death of someone like Heinlein, these people will live on, vulnerable to exposure. When I try to put myself in his shoes I think about these people, and I think about how little relation there is between what I write and the things I've done (sometimes shameful and illegal things) with these people, and I wonder if the biographical study of writers has anything of value to offer that would make up for the harm it does.

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George "Lan" Laskowski
55 Valley Way
Bloomfield Hills MI 48013

It seems that you, I and Marty & Robbie Cantor are the only people producing monster genzines nowadays. Now that the Cantors have gotten noticed on the Hugo ballot it's our turn to get nominated. [Amen. ERM]

I enjoyed the last NIEKAS, #33. The production, designs and layout are improving even more (if that's possible). I keep trying with LANS LANTERN, but I too rush things so they don't come out with the slickness that you usually get.

Altho not that much interested in fantasy the articles on magic were interesting. I found the other articles more appealing. I've wondered why Piers Anthony has turned down local fan groups for GoHship and now I know. He has quite a humorous style of writing and I enjoyed his article very much. I may have to try some of his novels now. [I suggest reading at least the first book of the Omnivore series, titled Omnivore, and if you like that, go on to Orn. If you want to read a nicely convoluted story, try Ox. MB] Yes, I have not read any of our current crop of Piers Anthony altho the students I have who read SF devour his stuff. I have read some of his earlier stuff and was very impressed with his first novel Chthon. I will have to investigate his later offerings.

Not being that much of a Heinlein fan I am not well read in his works. However in the ten years I have been in fandom if a novel of his has been nominated for the Hugo award I have read it. Indeed, as Ben Indick says in his letter, his later novels have not been very good, inferior to the ones I read when I first started reading SF. We have a copy of Heinlein in Dimension on our bookshelves but I have never gotten around to reading it. I had heard about a huge conflict between Heinlein and Panshin, but little of the details. The Moskowitz article has clarified some of this for which I thank you. My wife Maia Cowan has read the Panshin book (and all Heinlein's works at least twice) and agrees with Spider Robinson's assessment of Heinlein in Dimension. It is pretty awful. Keep up the good work. LANS LANTERN #17 will be mailed out in late July or early August.

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Roger Waddington
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Norton, Malton
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On magic in theory and practice, there seems to be a lot more theory than practice; but then I suppose that's the only way it can be taken seriously, outside any society where it's actually used; tho we can be sure that the present laws of science as we know them won't be regarded as belief in magic by some far future generation? Assuming there is one; with the present climate the one great difference between magic then and science now, is that magic is "user friendly" (to use an already overused phrase) whereas science doesn't give a damn; and magic depended on belief whereas science doesn't care whether you

believe or not. As for example, the aborigine witch doctor pointing a killing bone at a member of the tribe; both knowing what it meant, it had its desired effect, and the unfortunate native went off to die. But faced with a white settler who didn't know what it meant, to point a killing bone had no effect at all; indeed, the settler would point his killing bone at the witch doctor, to wit, one Lee-Enfield, and thanks to the laws of velocity, angle of fire, whether or not the witch doctor knew or believed in such magic, he'd be just as dead.

If magic was a primitive attempt to learn how things work, how the world went round, and more importantly, how to control them, maybe we're wiser in that respect, that we know now that it can't be done, we're at the mercy of a merciless universe. And the best use for magic in this modern world is for the "what if?" of fiction writers; any other use is just self delusion.

Delving into the Haunted Library, finding a definition for horror fiction might be easier than finding one for science fiction which can satisfy every reader; what about the depiction of the darker side of life? Tho what interests me most is, why do we read horror fiction? There are enough explanations for SF, usually invoking the ghost of Hugo Gernsback, and living scientists who read the stuff (and who would probably like such knowledge kept very quiet); but what excuses are there for horror fiction? With so much horror in this world already--as for example Uganda under Idi Amin, and now Milton Obote, Argentina under the Generals, the sight of stick people in Ethiopia and the Sudan--writing about horror seems largely redundant. Unless this is horror in a controlled form, something we can take up and lay aside, as easily as closing a book; there's no such choice with the real world.

But what worries me about modern horror fiction is a growing dependence on gore, on the more graphic depictions of terror, with each new writer, each new book, trying to outgross the one before; in both senses of the word. However old fashioned they may seem now, such writers as Arthur Machen, H P Lovecraft, even M R James, managed to achieve their effects with a marvelous economy of words, relying on the reader's imagination. Of course, they may have been restrained by public taste, whereas today we have become acustomed to the sight of blood-stained bodies every night on the TV news, either by private murder or public massacre, and demand the same in our fiction; but they can still teach a lesson to those writers of today who think that horror just means blood and more blood, whether by kitchen knife, axe, or even chain saw. I'm probably a lone voice, but here's a call for more restraint, and a return to more literary standards. Tho when they're selling so well why should they bother?

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Carol Kendall
Lawrence KS

Thanks for writing about Ned in NIEKAS 33. He had a good life with you, as will your new companion.

Also appreciated your good review of Michener's Space, which I'll never get around to reading but want to know about!

@@

Pat Mathews
1125 Tomasita NE
Albuquerque NM 87112

I am very sorry to hear about Ned... I liked him.

@@

Augustin Gauba
PO Box 22306
Flagstaff AZ 86002

As usual #33 was full of interesting articles, fine artwork and thoughtful LoCs.

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Jacqueline Lichtenberg
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Spring Valley NY 10977

Thank you for the lovely NIEKAS. Enclosed are some book flyers and a correction to my new book Dushav.

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Steven Fox
5646 Pemberton St
Phila PA 19143

I recently received NIEKAS #33...I must say that since [Bob Knox has] taken over the job of Art Editor, the art has really improved! The Allen K. cover is very good and really exceeds a lot of the art for covers in the past. You should get Charles Lang to do a folio of art for an upcoming issue...his work on the inside cover was Real Stunning! [Choosing artwork can be & often is a real chore (in more than 1 way), and sometimes worthy stuff gets left out for no good reason..allow me to stupidly apologize for the lack of Fox material in 33...As to CJL-a great idea which I'll take "under advisement". RHK]

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B Terry Jeeves
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Once again thanks for another good issue. Super front cover, excellent back cover and of course some very good interior art.

Tickled to see Don D'Ammassa tackling the hoary old chestnut of SF definitions. To my mind the best one is still the copping out "SF is what it means when I point to it and say 'That's SF.'" The more one tries to find a definition that includes A and excludes B the more one gets involved with self contradictory phrases until the eventual definition has more holes than a colander. To my mind the problem is akin to throwing a spectrum on a screen and then trying to point exactly where the red is no longer red, but definitely orange and so on. Full red or full orange are easy to spot, but just where do they change over?

[I have seen two approaches to the problem which I like. First is a very simple definition proposed by SaMoskowitz about 25 years ago. His definition, accepted by some major dictionary, and reprinted in SF TIMES, was "SF is that branch of fantasy which encourages the willing suspension of disbelief by a scientific or pseudoscientific premise." The other approach was explained to me by Fred Lerner and I think it originated with Samuel Delaney. SF or fantasy differ from reality by varying amounts. A book like Michener's Space differs only a little on the reality/unreality axis and is, say, 5% along the line. Something like Zelazny's Amber, Heinlein's Number of the Beast or Alice in Wonderland would be at the 80 or 90% level. 100% non-reality would be unintelligible. ERM]

Thoroughly enjoyed Andruschak's space natterings but in re that computer getting zapped by a cosmic and thus shifting a 1 to a 0 with disastrous results, I thought they used a similar 3 computer system computer system to airlines for cross checking for a majority verdict. The chances of 2 out of 3 computers having the same digit changed must be absolutely minimal.

Piers Anthony on how he met with ASTOUNDING was also interesting. How lucky he happened on such a good first issue. Sadly, had he met with a current issue his chances of finding a golden age book would have been much slimmer I feel. Somehow SF has become much more emasculated with its yearning to be recognised as adult or literary and its strivings to meet the current totems in the form of black vs white problems, atomic war, women's lib, conservation, can dolphins or apes talk and so on.

Social problems are OK in SF but not if that's all they are with the story used as a shakey framework on which to hang an argument. And so much of ANALOG's materials current material seems in that vein. As for the current abysmal on-going series about the amnesiac who wakes up, finds a letter telling him who he is, then solves a world problem over night before lapsing back into amnesia, Ghu selp us!

Nicola Cuti's art portfolio is superb, perfect, great and any other nice words you can think of, and what a welcome change from all those doe-eyed pointy eared creatures certain folios dwell on Chain Mr. Cuti to your editorial team with fetters of steel and don't let him out until he has illustrated the next issue.

Whilst enjoying Moskowitz on Heinlein (and a recent ANALOG note on RAH) I prefer to let my feeling for his stories remain divorced from my agreement (or disagreement) with his personal views. Whether or not RAH supports Jingoism or not is not relevant when reading certain of his stories, tho in others it may be that his attitude will surface. But I judge his stories on how I enjoy them, not on what he does out of school. A similar care applies here in the UK where we have two very well known authors, one of whom I cannot abide yet I love his fiction, and the other is a lovely bloke and I can't abide his stories. Shame, isn't it?

Tolkein: sorry, just can't get into him despite numerous trials, and it was a trial each time.[Guilty! RHK]

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Daniel Farr
1404 581 Kmoku St
Honolulu HI 96826

Your wrap around cover starts the fun. All the artists turned out imaginative work but the inside back cover is weak tho promising. Of course that's just my opinion. The only other thing that I'd change would be moving the back cover to the front and the front to the back replacing it. Only because it seems that every time I go to pick it up the spine is on the wrong side. Also perhaps I'm just a tad tradition bound.

Your Bumbejimas column made even a new reader like myself comfortable right off the bat. Heinlein is the topic of discussion this time round (but then, isn't he always?). Farnham's Freehold, if I can remember my general feeling about it, left me with some uncomfortable reelings about morality. Now I doubt I'd be terribly shocked. When I read The Number of the Beast some years later I bogged down half way through. Yet I can remember racing through Friday with the joy I felt for the old Heinlein, the Heinlein of the 40's. The later Heinlein has never seemed quite the same. Maybe that's why I have avoided a lot of his later work. Still, he awes me. When I am old and decrepit Heinlein will be high on my reading priorities.

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Ruth Berman
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By coincidence I have been reading a review by the physicist Jeramy Bernstein of Fritjof Capra's The Tao of Physics which Diana Paxson discusses in her Elfhill column. (Bernstein--the brother of the composer--writes essays on science for the NEW YORKER and various other magazines.) In this essay, "The Cosmic Flow," which originally appreared in AMERICAN SCHOLAR, is included in a book of his essays, Science Observed.

Bernstein dislikes the idea of offering similarities between scientific theory and any kind of philosophical theory as an indication of the probable accuracy of the philosophy--because, after all, the scientific theory is supposed to be, and frequently is, subject to change from new physical data, and the new scientific theory that makes a philosophy nonsense, if the philosophy depends On the physics for its proof. Specifically in regard to Capra, Bernstein comments, "The theoretical models about which he is most enthusiastic--the so called 'S-matrix' theory and the 'bootstrap,' which had a certain vogue a decade ago--are at best of largely academic interest to most contemporary workers in the field. On the other hand, the atomic model of elementary particles, the model according to which quarks are confined within these objects--which Mr. Capra is in despair of as not being able to provide a detailed dynamical theory--has never enjoyed more success than it does at present." More seriously, Bernstein complains that the similarities Capra finds between mysticism and physics are more often accidents of lanquage than similarities that lead to a deeper understanding in either one one when examined. He quotes, for example, Capra's comparison of the the eight extensions of of an I Ching diagram to the "eightfold way" of mesons--Capra says they are they are vaguely similar. Bernstein comments that you could just as well say that a Ferris wheel is similar to both, and so what? (From another essay of Bernstein's in the collection, on atomic particles, "Topless in Hamburg," I noticed that the predictions of eightfold families of atomic particles were further accompanied by predictions of tenfold and 27-fold families. I would imagine that an attempt to apply the I Ching to atomic particles would break down as soon as one tried divisions which would correspond in the same way for all of these groupings.)

It would be interesting to see footnotes on the remark (going back to the Elfhill column) that everyone knows people whose "mere presence can 'jinx' machines." It sounds kind of doubtful. Everyone knows people who foul up machines when trying to work them, and everyone knows people who make other people so nervous that they foul up machines when trying to work them with the kibbutzers around, but genuine "mere presence" jinxing sounds unlikely. [I remember in some physicist's autobiographical note I read a quarter century ago he emphasised how he is a theoretical and not an experimental physicist by making such a statement, but I am sure it was mere hyperbole for dramatic emphasis. ERM]

Piers Anthony's discussion of a difference between male and female writers--females start slowly and males quickly--and of a difference in reader reaction--readers like fast starts better--seems too stereotyped to work well. There are women who jump into the action of a story (say, Andre Norton, Leigh Brackett, Marion Zimmer Bradley) as well as those who start slow (say, Jane Yolan, Ursala K leGuin, much of Bradley's recent work). There are men whose books often start slowly (say, Poul Anderson, Fritz Leiber, Avram Davidson). And all of these seem to work well. A fast start may be a more effective way to get a reader's attention, as Anthony remarks, but I suspect he is wrong in saying that the "the reader typically returns eagerly for more." For return

reading, the slow start, which gives you time to get caught up in the world of the story and not just the action of events, seems to me more effective. (It might be argued that my reaction reflects a difference between male and female readers, but I suspect that other factors are more important--chiefly age. Adolescent readers are likely to be too impatient to get into a story. Older readers are likely to be both more patient and more demanding.)

Trouble with an Apple MacIntosh is none of its various type styles is legible except in the very largest letter sizes.

I was sorry to hear of Ned's death and I'm glad you now have a new guide.

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Jessica Amanda Salmonson
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I would have liked to hear more about Ned, a big appreciation and memorial recap of his life. I'd also like to know how you take to a new dog. I loved a dog once, quite intensely, and was never able to replace him emotionally.

A couple of tacky things to share on that subject, first being the television series Lassie, a very early episode, had a story about a sweet and dear old blind man whose guide dog had died somehow and nobody wanted to tell him about it. So Lassie went to visit the old guy; she sat beside his rocking chair and allowed herself to be called by the dead dog's name, while little Timmy (or perhaps it was Jeff) had to deal with the guilt of wanting his dog back. He just about decided to let Lassie live with the old chap when he came with Lassie, bringing her home, admitting he knew it wasn't his dog the whole time, but it was too awful to admit to himself. I suppose I was 8 or 9 when I saw that story, but it was an ace number one tear jerker for me at the time.

More recently I saw a sad sight indeed, a guide dog that was a bit smaller than most, not the usual German shepherd type, but just a good looking mutt of some kind--and his training was clearly insufficient, and the sad part was that the blighter knew that he was inept. He kept looking back over his shoulder at the young woman he was with, and that dog looked so worried for her. He bumped her into trashcans, and at street corners, he looked about wildly as if thinking, "oh shit, what do I do now, oh shit". I saw them going through the university a couple of times a week, and it was always the same, a totally inept guide dog on the verge of nervous collapse. About a year later, however, I started seeing them again, and the critter had finally become good at it.

[Either the dog was inept, as you said, and had gone back for more training during that year, or what is more likely, she was new at using a dog and was not keeping up the proper discipline and not responding to his cues, and she got better with time. ERM]

So much for tacky stories.

I have been gathering together, for over a year, all the works of Anatole France. Despite that he was a Nobel Prize author, a great amount of his material, in English language, is extremely rare. He has two styles basically--vulgar, and sentimental. Sometimes they mix, but usually he takes the two approaches separate. He's always very poetic and humanist and sometimes very funny. All of his stuff is good, some is great, and the occasional ghost story or fantasy spices up the mix. The Christian element gets on my nerves at times--the lives of saints excepted, they're nice period pieces--but the interjection of vulgarity makes them more interesting than just religious or moral fables. I worry sometimes that the sort of fiction I like most in this world--old-fashioned supernatural short stories for instance--may be totally unavailable to blind readers. It took me more than a year of concerted search to find France's Mother of Pearl collection, that was issued in the USA in a 500 copy edition a very long time ago. If someone started a program to make 19th Century stories available on tape, would anyone give a damn? Are the borderline-classic writers like Anatole France already available? Does the Jewish Guild for the Blind make Yiddish writers available in English? To live this life never having read Peretz, Oy!) If I told you you just had to read Ryunosuke Akutagawa's Kappa, could you get it? I'm not kidding. This has worried me for a long time.

[] phoned my talking book library to ask about these. Much of France is available but only in the original language and mostly in Braille. One book by Peretz has been recorded by the library of congress on 8 1/3 rpm phonograph records, The Case Against the Wind and Other Stories, catalog number RDI0222. Nothing by R.A. is in their catalog as done by themselves or anyone else. I will, however, write to the Jewish Braille Institute in NY to see if they have something they never reported to LoC for their Union Catalog.

You mentioned Jewish Guild for the Blind as a possible source There are two Jewish agencies in NYC, JGB and JBI, and they are as different as night and day. JGB specializes in recording current best sellers quickly on cassette, and I have borrowed sone SF and current affairs books from them. They run a very repressive sheltered work shop for uneducated blind people that has bad conditions and pays way below minimum wage. They are affiliated, like almost all BAD agencies, with NAC or the National Accrediting Council for Agencies Serving the Visually Impaired, which gives false respectability to bad agencies and opposes the true independence of the blind. e.g. they petitioned the government to cancel Job Opportunities for the Blind, a service which has helped over 500 individuals find competitive work at minimum wage or better.

On the other hand the JBI records and Braills in English Hebrew and Yiddish (and perhaps even Ledino) books by Jewish authors. They encourage the independent blind.
The local chapter of the National Federation of the Blind often meets in their building, A representative always speaks at the annual national convention of the NFB, usually the director. Their recorded magazine JBI VOICE strongly emphasises the Federation philosophy of real independence for the blind. ERM]

May I reprint your Allen K. cover on the cover of my own magazine FANTASY MACABRE?

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In re the continuing discussion of magic in fantasy I have just re-read Heinlein's GLORY ROAD for the first time since it was serialized in F&SF in the early 60s and found that it held up VERY well. There magic was used extensively but was explained as obeying Clarke's law...sufficiently advanced science looks like magic to the uninitiated. Also laws of nature are different in different universes.
I disagree with Mark Blackman about the appropriateness of the Gordons being together at the end of Number. It was understood that Oscar would go off on his own, but would come home to visit and live with his wife from time to time, so they attended the blast during one of these times.

The lead novella in the December 1984 ANALOG, "Elemental" by Jeffery A Landis, had a very nice alternate world touch. In Garrett's Lord Darcy stories magic technology was advanced at the expense of scientific technology so that wood burning trains and horse driven coaches were in routine use. In this story both technologies are well advanced. A simple spell converts ordinary matter into anti matter which is stored underground in a magically guarded cell. This is drawn out by a controlled spell through a pentagram on the floor of the control tower to interact with ordinary matter and provide the energy to launch a space shuttle. I liked very much both the gimmicks of the story and the story itself. I will have to watch for more by Landis.

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I've always been a sucker for time and paratime (or alternate worlds) stories. Like Number of the Beast, Heinlein's latest, Job, deals with people moving from parallel earth to parallel earth. In these novels, Heinlein re-examines his literary influences from the fantasy of Oz and the mythology of the bible to, in the finale of Number, contemporary SF authors, including himself. (By the way, about the identifications here, Isaac who hates to fly is, of course both Asimov and the dragon Isaac Newton; while Bob might be Heinlein--the other Heinlein could be his wife--the first Bob on the scene after the reference to "duty matters" is Asprin. "L'Envoy" could use a glossary nearly as much as Silverlock.) The last chapter of Number was vastly entertaining but too light fanfic. It was also dramatically disappointing to see Heinlein destroy his characters from previous works. It spoiled the established characters of Castol and Pollox Stone to have them chasing girls, and made the ending of Glory Road unsatisfying by uniting the Gordons, for instance.) I find many of Heinlein's endings (Glory Road, Number, Friday and Job too abrupt and not naturally growing out of the story. Twain characterized this as "One day he fell down a well and drowned". I side with those who see Heinlein's books as vehicles for lecturing--one friend calls Job a mystery play in novel form --and therefore endings aren't important to him. Phil Farmer has been mixing history and fantasy for years, treating Tarzan, Doc Savage, etc. as historical personages,, and, in the Riverworld series, historical figures as literary characters. As for pros and cons, i.e. writers and conventions, Norman Spinrad angers some people by pointing out that con attendees are an insignificant part of the science fiction buying public; with science fiction hitting the best seller list, he's probably right. Heinlein's work has been seen as advocating such diverse--and at times contradictory--viewpoints as militarism/fascism & Libertarianism/anarchism. Now there is a new group which finds Heinlein objectionable, feminists, who consider the notion (of I Will Fear No Evil and Friday) that all women feel incomplete unless they have children to be sexist. (Others see this obsession with fertility as a reflection of his regret over not having children and his first wife's death in childbirth.)

Speaking of feminism, we come to Anne Braude's piece. My own reading on the early woman's rights/suffrage movement indicates that a number of women (by no means all) were racists, resented the fact that black males were given the vote before (white) women (ie, themselves). (Like all mass movements, of course, a wide range of views on such subjects were represented.)

For those of you who don't know, Robert Knox's title "Reduction of the Innocuous" is a play on Dr. Fredric Wertham's anti-comics Seduction of the Innocent. Many superior-human protagonists (Judge Dredd, etc.) are super heros without capes; maybe they can't fly but their gun-aim is preternaturally accurate. In his discussion of the ultimate comics, Knox has still to cover Aardvark-Vanaheim 's Cerebus (which was around for years before this article was written) First's American Flagg! (which has subsequently appeared), an adult-level (not a euphamism for dirty tho Howard Chaykin, I hear, is a pornophile) comic and probably the best one on the market today. Two postscripts: D'Arc Tangent has been hit by "artistic differences" and Spiderman's all-black suit (which will be called Spider Ninja) was tried out and abandoned.

[ROTI--not a terribly clever title, but I was stuck--was by no means intended to be all-inclusive, and I can't fathom why so many seem to think otherwise...for that matter, I can't fathom why I did the column in the first place, for, as I painfully re-discovered while going through all my review books, I don't really like the comics of today very much. They are like the TV of today: visually pleasing, but shallow, often quite tacky storywise, and generally geared toward Joe Blow & Co.--why bother??!! I personally enjoy the EC's of the 1950's far more than anything being produced nowadays. CEREBUS & FLAGG weren't covered because I couldn't get review copies from their respective publishers (& CEREBUS was known to me already: no great snakes), and I wasn't about to pay for books I knew I wouldn't like. As to D'ARC TANGENT: I'm not at all surprised. Though the book was nicely drawn (good balance between the different styles of Freff & Foglio), the story was virtually incomprehensible, and I honestly doubt that it sold very well. The Spider Ninja cancellation only proves that Marvel is veritably and utterly SLUG. And you can quote me. By the way, since ROTI was written, Pacific, First, John C. and Comico all went Belly Up--at least that's what the dealers tell me. I swear I'll never ROTI again. RHK]

Fred Lerner is correct in saying the US has suffered a national loss of self-confidence. Indeed, the rise of Ronald Reagan is a reaction to this; his glib platitudes of national greatness appeal to those nostalgic for the good old days of US supremacy, but are without substance. Some say "patriotism" has become a dirty word. No, what is obscene is the way "intolerance and meanness of spirit" (to quote Fred) are mis-labeled patriotism. The melting pot became long ago a salad bowl each "ingredient" distinct. Groups claim that they and they alone are the only true guardians of the American dream--NRA members, anti-abortionists, the Moral Majority--everyone else's "Americanness" is suspect. James Watt (who remained Secretary of the Interior long after he divided the country into Americans and Liberals (non-facetiously, according to one interview with him). Garry Trudeau in Doonesbury, satirized this tendency by calling the GOP "God's Own Party" and having God to TV spots for Reagan. During the Viet Nam war, dissent was frequently called treason. Is it unlikely now, Fred, that any suggestion that our society is a divided (or polarized) one, one with problems, may similarly be called being un-American? At the same time, public dissection of the constitution could backfire; I fear attempts to vandalize the constitution with balanced budget or anti abortion or compulsary public school prayer amendments, or limitations on free speech or the right of the accused in criminal trials. Such a constitution could no longer be a bill of rights but articles of intoleration, a blue print for repression.

While in historic times we have seen conversion at sword point, in the past, diffusion of religion often took the form of syncretism. That is, similar elements of foreign religions were adopted into the local

religion. Thus, the Greeks identified every sky god of chief god with Zeus (eg, Zeus-Ammmon) or fertility goddess ((Kybele, Ishtar) with Aphrodite, and thus, to, the multiple provinces or aspects of their gods

(Diana the chaste huntress is, seemingly contradictorily, goddess of childbirth--yet it's not hard to relate this latter to her role of moon goddess). More recently, local pagan gods were transformed into local Christian patron saints.

Asimov himself treated the Vulcan hypothesis in "The Planet That Never Was" (or "That Wasn't"--it's been a while). At this writing, the Soviets, Western Europeans and Japanese are sending probes to study Halley's Comet; NASA has no such plans. Maybe next time.

Fantasy today is overpopulated with dragons and unicorns, no fault of conversationists but rather a lack of "delightful originality in monsters" (to quote Ruth Berman). Traditionally, male gryphons have prominent, pointed ears while females have wings; Tenniel's gryphon had both (a hermaphrodite?). While Satan was serpentine, that great evil figure of modern fantasy, Sauron's, name conjures up saurian and now TV gives us Nazi iguanas on V.

And speaking of TV I thought Voyagers ripped off "Peabody's Improbable History" (from Rocky And Bullwinkle), only the kid was Mr. Peabody and Phineas Bogg (definitely derived from Phileas Fogg) Sherman.

[Hey, Mark--what ever happened to the Space Rabbi??!! RHK]

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I'm still optimistic about our society because the changes from liberal to conservative operate like a pendulum swings--as Stan Schmidt pointed out recently. They always go too far, and then swing back to too far the other direction. Of course, I'm not a liberal, and not too conservative, either; I haven't found a politician on either side for years that I can entirely agree with; Possibly, the major danger to the society is that the terms "conservative" and "liberal" are no longer states of mind but the espousement of a specific and fairly rigid set of doctrines Independent thought is--or seems to be--going down the drain in government. That and the fact that education is being emasculated in a lot of places to enable the stupid and lazy to obtain degrees. (Have the feminists objected to that use of "emasculated" yet? If not, why not?) But then, at 57 I suppose I'm entering the"old fart" stage (kindly do not comment that I entered it at age 17.)

Bastraw's computer-generated page, was so nearly illegible that I didn't bother reading it. Print too small, ink much too heavy.

"The Wall of Serpents" was originally published in the del Rey edited FANTASY FICTION, June 1953. I don't remember if "The Green Magician" had a magazine publication--if it did, it didn't impress me at much as "Serpents" did. [It did appear in BEYOND magazine. ERM]

Uri Geller hardly comes into the discussion of magic at all. He's a good "stage magician" and his claims of "powers" have been exposed more than once by other stage magicians, who can perform the same tricks he does. His powers are believed only by the gullible.

Add to Hildebrand's books using the horned god Flesh by Philip Jose Farmer, tho Phil's character isn't exactly the standard one. (For one thing, he's literally "horny"--his antlers stiffen when he has the urge.)

I thought the ending of RAIDERS was one of the best things about it. Storing the menace in government archives where it will never be found again? A lovely bit, not to mention accurate.

Note to Brunner; I reviewed New Settlement of Old Scores in the July 1984 AMAZING. You should be getting the magazine, for my reviews if nothing else). I don't send copies to the reviewees because it's not my magazine and I don't get that many freebies. In any event, I compared the protest songs to McCall and Peggy Seeger (whom I like) and said the space faring ones weren't that good.

I could agree with David Palter until he brought in Kent State. Throwing rocks at people with rifles is neither "trying to influence the American political process in an entirely legal manner" nor even logical behavior. College students have this illogical feeling that they can get away with anything by calling it a prank or a protest. And yes, I feel exactly the same way about the Boston Massacre--the British were justified, (and acquitted in an American court, which brief histories don't bother to mention).

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After thinking it over for some time, I've finally decided to send my comments on Islandia, even tho I probably risk being tarred and feathered as a result.

First of all I should point out that when I discovered Islandia in the library many years ago, I absolutely loved it. Fell madly in love with it, and reread it several times before I returned it to the library, then renewed it and read it several more times. It seemed so completely real and believable; so much so that I thought anyone who didn't know geography might well believe it was a description of an actual country. Why I never tried to buy a copy of the book for my own, and never even looked it up again in all these years since, I really can't say--I just remembered it with this great fondness. When Mark Saxton's The Islar came out, I bought, read, and enjoyed it very much. It seemed a good picture of what Islandia might be in the middle 20th century; and then I looked up and reread Islandia.

Unfortunately, the whole thing falls completely to pieces. The book is full of absurdities, impossibilities, and contradictions. Try to have patience with me, and I will outline the worst of them. To begin with, there is the supposed arrival of Roman Catholicism in Islandia, at about the time of the crusades. All right, take a look at the globe of the world. Place Karain in the middle of the Indian Ocean, and remember that Islandia is down at the southern tip,

far enough south to have fully temperate climate with snow in the winter, which would place it down around the 45th parallel, at least. No way could there possibly have been any contact with Europe or Roman Catholicism until the age of exploration, in the 16th and 17th centuries. (Unless, of course, flying saucers.)

The arrival of Islam is much more likely, and if you think Christians of the period were agressive, you should read the early history of Islam. The most you could hope for in the way of Christian contacts would have been the accidental arrival of the old Nestorians, Marinites, or members of some other small Christian group, on an Arab trading ship; but would not have been in any position to mount any kind of large scale effort, and if the Islandians weren't interested in trade, the traders wouldn't have kept coming, as such a long voyage wouldn't be worth it. Why did Wright put this nonsense in his history? Obviously, he disapproved of religion, particularly the Catholic Church, and he brought it to Islandia so he could have his people demonstrate their intellectual superiority by throwing it out. Now of course he was writing for his own personal enjoyment, not expecting publication, and there is no reason why he should have felt obliged to limit himself to the historical possible. But while one can pass over the mentions of this episode in his novel--they are brief enough, and unspecific enough , not to be glaringly anachronistic--when Saxton tried to use this as the basis for his supposed Islandia historical novel the impossibility is just too obvious to be overlooked.

Next is the fact that Islandia is thoroughly racist. Oh yes, definitely. Look at their history. For many generations, we are told, they lived in small tribal or family groups, scattered among the Bants; but while it was never actually stated in so many words, the implication is clear that they always kept themselves racially pure and culturally as well. No intermarriages or taking of concubines, no cultural exchange, no, they were always aware of their superiority, and maintained their difference. And when they came down from the Frays, we are told, there was a native population already in the land, whom they exterminated. Genocide. And given the weapons they would have had available, this would have taken a very deliberate long term effort, lasting many generations, to achieve. Why did Wright put this in his history of his ideal people, when he could have so easily have made Islandia an empty country? Did he really think of this as heroic, to wipe out all, men women and children alike, as long as they were black? Apparently he did. And then he would have us believe that once they had accomplished this, they proceeded to sit down quietly in their new land and limit themselves entirely to purely defensive war against those "nasty hostile Bants" from the north. Sorry, won't wash. The kind of attitude that produced deliberate genocide isn't going to be dissipated that quickly. The Vikings, you see, had nothing racially against the people they attacked. If they'd had nothing they wanted or weren't in their way, they left them alone. Eventually, when they got tired of raiding and looting, they might settle down among you and intermingle. (Not without a good deal of strife, of course.) But Islandian history speaks of a people with a different attitude. People with their attitude would have taken a couple of generations, no doubt, to up their own population, and then they would have to set out for the north again, to exterminate its inferior people. No, the most we can do is assume that we have only been given the Islandian version of history; that a few survivors from the south managed to escape to the north from time to time, to tell of what was going on, and the northern leaders realized what a dangerous people they had down there, took the offensive right away, and kept it up until Islandia finally got tired of trying.

Then there is Islandia's farming, and this is the biggest absurdity of all. No mechanization at all, we are told, not even the kind of horse-drawn machinery that would have been available in America at the time. Well, Wright clearly doesn't realise it, but he is talking about subsistance farming--stoop labor. And with the possible exception of the Hyth brothers (and note that Nattana is very bitter about their reduction in status,) we never meet any real farmers in Islandia! Never! We don't meet anyone doing the kind of before-dawn to dusk, day-in and day-out, all-year-round hard work that is necessary in that kind of farming. The people we meet belong to the leisured aristocracy--big land owners! Oh, their style of living is not as far above that of the ordinary laborers as was that of the British peerage at the time, or the New York 400. No doubt Dorn chops wood, or mends fences, Nattana has her weaving, and so on, but it's quite clear in all these cases that they don't have to do it. It's obviously a matter of choice, and if they don't do it there will be someone else who does have to do it. Can you really picture Dorn, or Mora, or Stellan mucking out the stables, piling the mixture of cow shit urine and dirty straw in a pile to be aged, and then in the spring taking the loads out to be spread on the land again? It was a pretty messy job even in my day, using a horse drawn, mechanical manure spreader; I hate to think of doing it with a pitchfork and wagon, as they would have had to be doing it in Islandia. Imagine the Islandian lords doing that? No, you can't. Does Dorna spend any time at stoop labor, going up and down the garden and field rows, say after day, hoeing, weeding, picking off insect pests, or hauling water? No, she has all the time she wants to loll around on the marsh duck. Can you see the delicate Stellina cutting off a chicken's head or wringing its neck, gutting it, cleaning it, plucking it, singing off the pinfeathers, and finally preparing it for dinner? Of course not. Or slopping pigs, or cleaning out the chicken coop? No way.

So the idea of the real farmers of Islandia, the people actually doing the necessary work and supporting the aristocracy with it, would have turned down the chance to buy modern farming machinery is simply nonsense. Most of what Wright says makes it all too plain that he had no idea what real farming was all about. The business of "mathematically straight furrows", for instance, is just silliness. For one thing, it's just ecologically disastrous except where the ground is perfectly level, otherwise you're asking for erosion. Wright didn't know this, but we'll assume Islandian farmers have that much sense; in any case, they're supposed to be going out there with a micrometer and callipers to measure? Time, kiddies, think of the time involved! There you are, walking behind a team of oxen or horses, with a single blade plow, walking up and down the fields, trying to put in enough seed for a big enough crop to provide your whole family with grain and vegetables for the whole next year, plus feed the livestock for the winter, plus a surplus for the tables of the aristocracy. You have to get in the seed early enough so that everything will have time to ripen before fall, and you have to finish so you can get at all the other jobs that need doing. You're worried about mathematically straight furrows? Forget it. Or a mathematically straight level of stubble? The same thing applies. You're cutting all the grain with a scythe, and picking the vegetables with your own hands, and all the grain and hay has to be cut and stacked before fall rains or snow--a rain at harvest time can ruin everything--and you're wor-

ried about mathematically even level of stubble? Balderdash! Not to mention all the other things that will have to be done. Sheep that have to be sheared, flax harvested and prepared, then the thread has to be spun, the cloth has to be woven, and finally it has to be sewn into clothing--all by hand! Obviously Wright had no idea of what this job would have been like, either. Then leather has to be tanned and made into harness, shoes, belts, etc. Wood has to be chopped for the winter's fuel. Seed has to be saved for the next year's sewing. Cows have to be milked twice a day. every day, otherwise you lose a cow. From time to time you may want to "dry out" a cow, of course, but this is a very slow and careful process; you can't just stop milking. Milk not used right away spoils quickly (no refrigeration, remember?) So much of it will have to be turned into cheese, yogart, kumiss, or whatever, and salted butter. And do you think those old recipe books had so many recipes for baking goods using sour cream or milk without good reason? That's right! No freezers, either, and probably no mason jars. , so all of your supply of food--until the next year's crop starts coming in--would have to be dried, or salted, or pickled in crocks, or whatever. Root vegetables would be stored in root cellers; some things such as turnips or kale, could be left in the ground with a covering of mulch for the winter, if the winters aren't too cold. Fruit can be cooked up into jams if they have sugar or enough honey; apples can be stored in barrels; and all of the stored produce has to be turned and picked over at regular intervals to be checked for spoilage. Oh, I could give you a lot more details, but you get the picture. So you can bet that the real Islandian farmers would have been clamoring for some imports of modern machinery, or at least for the plans to make them locally. Not comfortable for the horses? That again is urbanite silliness. Good farmers care for their horses, certainly, and treat them well, but can't afford to baby them any more than they do themselves. Besides, any agricultural exhibit of the period would surely have included pictures and descriptions of the heavy horse breeds--Percherons, Clydesdales and Belgians--or the American bred Morgans, small but having great strength and endurance. They might even have sent along a couple of teams and handlers, sponsored by American horse breeders. [The book was started in 1907 and finished long before its publication, and I don't think contour farming was discovered until the middle of this century. And I think the mathematical furrows and stubble were hyperbole, not meant to be taken literally. It was just a way of saying the farmers took pride in their work. My mother grew up on a pre-industrial farm of the 1890s and has told me how things are done, tho unlike you I didn't think of comparing it with Islandia. ERM]

Then there was the Singer sewing machine, and we are supposed to believe that, however pleased Nattana was with hers, Islandian women in general found it unappealing. Women of the aristocracy might well have looked down on it--"Just imagine, my dear, wearing clothes sewn together by a machine!" But the rest of the women--well, if ever there was a machine that women of the whole world took to their hearts, it has to have been the good old Singer sewing machine. It went to the Bedouin tents, south sea islands, Siberian villages, and for all I know, to Eskimo igloos. They required no electricity in those days, you know, it was built to last practically for ever, and it was very simple to operate--even the illiterates could learn. Also the Singer people would have been smart enough to send along an operator to put it through its paces. Only a man who hadn't tried it himself could imagine a whole nation of women prefering to stick to hand sewing instead of rushing to get Singer sewing machines.

Finally, there is the statement that makes the whole society absurd. Dorn tells John Lang at one point that "about 5% of the population owns 90% of the land." And we are supposed to believe that this situation allows us to have this thoroughly egalitarian society! We have been told and shown, time after time, that <u>every</u> Islandian has a home place, a piece of land large enough to be self-supporting in the modest Islandian fashion, which has belonged to the family for generations, to which any member of the family may go, whenever he or she chooses, for as long as he or she likes or needs. Sorry, but it's out of the question. Any time, in any society where you have 5% of the people owning most of the land, and the rest as tenant farmers, you're going to find that 5% living it up, practicing conspicuous consumption, while the landless majority scramble to stay alive. Why in the name of wonder did Wright make this absurdity part of his society, and why, for that matter, did he give them a hereditary aristocracy at all? Why the National Assembly that is supposedly representative, but always seems to be run by a few members of the large land owning families? Why not make it a society of small-to medium sized farms, all truly independent, with a government modeled, perhaps, on Icelandic "Thing?" It seems to me that Wright is basically a snob. He didn't really believe that a society of small independent farmers would have a high enough tone, or be able to keep from getting--well, <u>countrified</u>. He had that sneaking fondness, felt by so many Americans, for the British peerage, and he dreamed of a country that would let him have his cake and eat it too. The trouble is that in real life it never works.

And oh yes--what would have happened to Islandia in the 16th and 17th centuries, after their discovery by the Europeans? Well, it's sad, of course, but there's no doubt--they would have ended up as another British dominion. Their country would have been much too appealing for the British taste. So I recommend that if Mark Saxton wants to do more novels of Islandia, he stick to the period before 1498, eliminate all reference to Christianity or any other outside influence, and learn to use language that doesn't sound like 20th century American.

[I too find the US adulation of British nobility nauseating as well as the adulation of entertainment personalities. Lang dealt exclusively with Islandian nobility and the story is from his viewpoint. I could imagine it was the nobility that rejected all mechanical aids, giving no choice to the peasants. I looked on the isolation of Islandia as similar to that of Japan before Perry forced them to open to American commerce. ERM]

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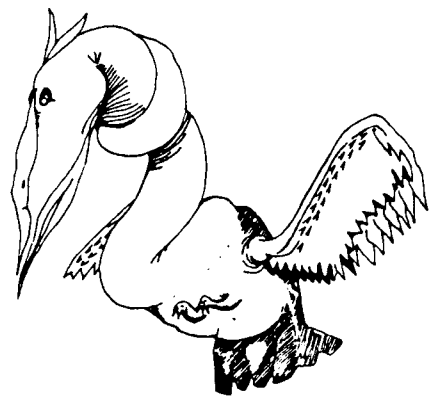
First, a couple of corrections: In Mathoms, p.43, col. 1, para. 1, lines 4 ff. should read "Elizabeth Pope's <u>The Perilous Gard</u> deals with some of the perplexities of human-faerie interactions. Although there have been some attempts to codify the laws of Faerie, notably in Poul Anderson's <u>Three Hearts and Three Lions</u>." And in the lettercol, p. 64, col. 1, para. 2, lines 15 ff. should read: "The Welsh Marches were the debatable lands between Wales and Norman England. Ambitious Norman lords built castles here, and there was much fighting between Normans and Welsh and among the Norman marcher lords themselves." Sometimes I think you people are determined to convince the world that I speak Gibberish like a native.

Ed, I think a reality/fantasy axis such as you mentioned would be unworkable because there are too many variables. For instance, Lord of the Rings is very unrealistic in that it depicts Elves, Ents, wizards, and the like, who do not exist in the real world; but it also depicts, realistically, realities like forests, feasts, battles, mountains, blizzards, and so on. And it is also very realistic in treating psychological and emotional experiences such as fear, friendship, ambition, uncertainty, and despair; in fact, most of us would probably have no difficulty in thinking of a book much more "realistic" in terms of physical data in which the characters' behavior and motivations are far less believable than those in LotR (romance novels come to mind). I don't think anything this complex can be reduced to a two-valued, graphable system; but if you insist on trying, I nominate Cranford for the reality terminus and David Lindsay's A Voyage to Arcturus as the fantasy terminus.

I think the book on the space program that you are looking for is The Decision to Go to the Moon. I don't remember the author's name, but he is quoted extensively in the PBS SPACEFLIGHT series that I sent you the tapes of. It is a sociological study of the decision-making rather than a history of the scientific development.

The runt of a litter of pigs is called a tantony, Anthony, or St. Anthony's pig because St. Anthony was the patron saint of swineherds, having originally been one himself. It also means a pet pig. There are additionally St. Anthony's Cross, the tau or topless variety, and St. Anthony's Fire, erysipelas, curable by the intercession of the saint. (Who said a swineherd was no remedy?) Do we want to take up Piers Plowman?

On the subject of magic and morality, I have recently come across an interesting exception to the traditional alignment of Light with Good and Darkness with Evil: a young-adult fantasy set in Wales, Call the Darkness Down by Dixie Tenny. Here the opposition of Light and Darkness is more like Nietzsche's concept of Apollonian and Dionysian, the rational, logical, and orderly vs. the intuitive, unconscious, and passionate. Either may be good or evil. The heroine of the novel invokes her hereditary powers of darkness, witchcraft, against the same powers used by her deranged and evil grandmother. The evil aspect of Light is exemplified by the efficient, ruthless conquest of the peaceful ancient Welsh by the Roman armies; a more modern -- and perhaps more accurate -- example might be the "efficient" and "scientific" operation of the Nazi death camps. Perhaps one of the reasons for conflict and misunderstanding between the scientific and the non-scientific communities is that scientists take it for granted that reason, research, knowledge, truth, and The Good all go together automatically, while the non-scientists know, even if they can't always articulate it, that It Ain't Necessarily So. (See, for instance, the controversy over Defense



Department-sponsored university research that began in the sixties, and the current fear of genetic engineering. I think scientists would get farther in eliminating irrational fears about their research if they admitted more readily that some fears are not that irrational; there just might be a Mengele in among the would-be Pasteurs.)

I want to make a formal apology for calling Robert Heinlein a lecticubularist. I meant, of course, to call him a practicing librocubicularist. This will teach me to quote Christopher Morley from memory.

Jessica Salmonson has done a good job of articulating the historical lessons of Vietnam -- ironically, just as the popular culture seems to be trying to avoid the lessons by rewriting the history (cf. RAMBO and the like). There is a very good discussion of the various levels of involvement in guilt in the MyLai massacre, from the actual perpetrators to the electorate back home, in M. Scott Peck's People of the Lie. As for rating wars and disasters in terms of body count, I don't think it works, because human beings simply don't react emotionally in direct proportion to statistical increases. The deaths of six million Jews under the Nazis is an abstract horror; the death of Anne Frank, because individual, is experienced as more real. The deaths in Vietnam were experienced as realities, rather than statistics, because for the first time war's victims appeared in our living rooms every night at dinner time, courtesy of television. One wonders if live coverage of World War I might have brought about an antiwar movement in 1916.

Incidentally, Ms. Salmonson, is a duck's foot tree anything like a shoe tree? And if so, isn't it prohibited by the Geneva Convention?

As for the controversy over whether Heinlein ought to keep his private life from public view, everybody today seems to belong to the Holden Caulfield school of literary criticism, after the hero of Salinger's Catcher in the Rye, whose notion of a good book was one that made you feel as if the author was a real good friend of yours and you could call him up on the phone (quotation extremely approximate as it's been over 20 years since I read the book). More soberly, it is the thesis that a work of literature is to be valued as an expression of the author's personality, a way of making contact with his mind, as opposed to regarding it as a thing in itself, a made thing standing alone. C.S. Lewis and E.M.W. Tillyard went at each other on this subject in a series of essays, later reprinted in book form (Tillyard and Lewis, The Personal Heresy, Oxford U.P., 1939, pb 1965), with Tillyard lining up with Holden Caulfield. (Those initials, by the way, represent an array of names even Piers Anthony might envy: Eustace Mandeville Wetenhall Tillyard. I've always wanted to name four cats after him.) Consider, for instance, all the critical ink spilled over Shakespeare's sonnets: Was he in love with the Dark Lady? Who was she? Was he in love with Mr. W.H.? Who was he? Nobody seems willing to consider the possibility that Shakespeare simply might have wanted to write a sonnet sequence, the IN thing to do in his day for an aspiring serious writer, just as today a successful short-story writer might feel it incumbent upon him to try his hand at a novel in order to be taken seriously. To my mind, valuing a work of art because it is biographically revealing is just a step or two above valuing it because it is politically correct (than which one can go no lower). Such an approach is a particularly bad way of dealing with Heinlein, a writer who likes to start with an idea (almost any idea will do) and test it to destruction. The private lives of authors may be interesting (especially if they are lurid, like that of Robert Burns) and even useful to the study of their writings (as T.H. White's homosexuality illuminates some of the characterization in The Once and Future King); but ultimately the work must stand on its own, face to face with the reader. Besides, as

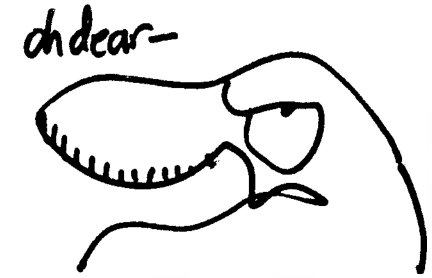
Lewis has pointed out with respect to reviewers and critics of his own work, the people who trace biographical causes for literary effects more often than not get them wrong.

All of which leads me more or less naturally to Suzette Haden Elgin's comments on my comments on her comments. I think we are arguing not so much with as past each other, she from the point of view of linguistics (a subject about which my ignorance is vast, or at least half-vast) and I from that of literary history. Moreover, we are arguing from different sides of that Great Divide of literature, the Romanctic Era, conventionally dated at 1798, after which originality, individuality, and sincerity -- formerly regard as unnecessary at best, as flaws at worst -- became the hallmarks of excellence. Ms. Elgin argues in accordance with the values of modern poetry (reasonably enough, since we are in the twentieth century and the subject is poetry); I, trained as a medievalist, argue from the precedents of Old English epic and the Child ballads (reasonably enough, since most of the world's great fantasy poetry was written before the Romantic Era). In fact, we are simply refighting the same old Battle of the Ancients and the Moderns that has been going on virtually since Aristophenes. This time around, I seem to be Samuel Johnson; Ms. Elgin gets to be William Wordsworth (tatty beard and bastard daughter optional).

Terry Jeeves' Law seems to be valid: ("Launcelot in Winter" is a finalist for the 1985 Rhysling Awards. Or could it just be that I wrote a good poem?

In announcing the Baffekabukuty Contest, I neglected to specify the prizes. The winner will get a no-expense-paid week in beautiful Bullhead City, Arizona, between the Fourth of July and Labor Day in order to enjoy its ever-popular monsoon season (temperature around 120 degrees and 30% humidity). Second place will get TWO weeks in Bullhead City....British winners will have the option of visiting instead neighboring Lake Havasu City in order to be reunited with London Bridge in its retirement home there.

I don't seem to be doing too well in business, as neither my moles-by-mail scheme nor my boutique for barbarians has been financially successful. As my talents may lie more in the direction of a profession, I have accepted a position as a trainee Norn.



(Addendum to Braude letter)

On the midday news on one of our local TV stations, they are fond of showing quick glimpses of useful trivia as they cut to commercials-- the top ten college football teams, the top five pop records, etc. They also give a brief list of important events that happened On This Day. I was decidedly bemused last October 21 to see the following: "1805-- Nelson defeated Spanish Armada." I have subsequently been even more bemused by discovering, when I quoted this to a number of people, that nobody, but nobody, could see what was wrong. Could this be baffekabukuty?

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Some points I wanted to make in my article in NIEKAS 33, "Runes In Print," were omitted accidentally. In my article I discussed and compared a number of books, new and old, and with varying viewpoints and prejudices. First of all, the last book I discussed, , Old Runic Monuments of Scandinavia and England by George Stephens and John Russell Smith, got separated from the body of the article and placed in "Review And Comment" where readers of the article might not find it. The last two books in the body of the article as published need further comment.

Futhark, a Handbook of Rune Magic by Edred Thorsson. As I did say, this book is based on the methods of the Asatru who rely heavily on the writings of the Thule Society. I wish to emphasize most strongly that the Thule was a secret society in Nazi Germany to which Hitler belonged. They used Norse magic to try to further their war aims. They also used and ruined a number of valid symbols. Thus the Fylfot, a sun symbol which also carried good luck, was reversed and made into the Swastika ruining it for all time. Many of the citations in the bibliography were to members of the Thule Society and their writings.

Other things done by the Thule Society may at best be grey. Anyone who relies on the Germanic for doing magic scares me! Someone interested in runic magic should stay away from this book and not incorporate any of its techniques. I have discussed this book with a couple of other people who have read it independently and they have come to the same conclusions.

The book does have curiosity value and could be studied profitably by someone interested in learning about Germanic runes or the history of Germany.

I don't know what the Asatru are doing, but they probably think they are doing good. I do feel, however, that the source of their information is more than suspect.

Ancient Norse Messages on American Stones, by D.G. Landsvark.

First of all, there was a major typo which obscured the meaning of a sentence. Let me give it as it should have been: "Certainly some Swedish and other Scandinavian immigrants who arrived on these shores knew runic, especially if they came from remote or rural areas where the runic was STILL the accepted form of writing."

Speaking of late use of runes, at a time of extensive Swedish immigration into the US books were still being published in runic. Another clue that some runic inscriptions originated with 19th-Century settlers and not 11th century explorers can be found in their forms. Runic, like Roman, writing varied with time and place. Compare a Medieval hand like Chancery Cursive with turn of the Century penmanship and then with modern handwriting. Or compare German "Gothic" print in common use until two decades ago with contemporary American print. Many of the supposedly ancient inscriptions shown in this book have a late Swedish appearance. It was the Medieval Icelanders and Norwegians who headed out for the North American continent. The western Swedes tended to go towards England and the western coast of Norway, while the Eastern Swedes headed into the Baltic for northern Russia.

The author shows extremely exaggerrated coding on the stones in North America but which appear nowhere else to my knowledge. These present a problem to explain and interpret. The Scandinavians did like puzzles, especially in their rhymes, and occasionally used but most of their written coding was in the form of contracted or bind runes. The American runes were overlapped like Chinese pictographs and are extremely difficult to interpret. Neither theories of Medieval or modern ori-

gin explain them well. As I said they have a modern Swedish look to them, and there is no record I know of which has this overlapped "squashed bug" look in European runes of any sort. Perhaps superstitious farmers tried to write half remembered things their grandmothers had taught them. On the other hand there is nothing wilier or cleverer than a farmer and they might have invented these codings for their own purposes.

In trying to interpret the meaning of some of these puzzles I think he is trying to reach too far at times. He is trying to make it come our more the way he wants it to than the way it seems to read. It is interesting to see how the author is really thinking and trying to puzzle it out. But then we all remember Erich Von Daniken and how HE tried to puzzle things out and the distortions of the evidence he used to reach the conclusions HE wanted. I think Landsvark did the same sort of thing, but in a much more esoteric area so that not as many people would catch on.

This book does have entertainment value and does reprint many of the inscriptions for individual study, but is not for serious study of the author's text.

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Mark Blackman
(on NIEKAS #33)

I of course heard before I saw it in NIEKAS, of Ned's passing. If I had to describe him in one word, other than friendly (which he was, of course), noble comes most to mind. No wonder that hotels expected a person when they had a reservation for Ned G. (for German) Shepherd. He will indeed be missed.

If not Black, Friday is of mixed blood and certainly dark-skinned. Re the gulfs between Gulf and Friday: though the Boss (Baldwin) appears in both and Gulf's protagonists are genetic parents to Friday, there are inconsistencies in continuity. There is no mention in Friday of a Communist takeover (as in Gulf) ever having happened, as just one example. Are the supermen of Olympus (which Baldwin tells Friday to avoid) those of Gulf? Was that effort a dead end? (The superior people in Heinlein's works always seem to be persecuted by the masses- the Howard families in Methusaleh's Children for being long-lived, Friday for being "enhanced".)

By the way, there was an Apollo 18 mission... the link-up with Sovuz in '75. The TV version of Space was pure soaper, with more time spent in extra-marital activities than extra-vehicular activities (bed romps rather than space walks). As for scientists reading SF, you know during the war Werner Von Braun used to get copies of ASTOUNDING via Sweden. The Moslem philosopher you were thinking of is Averroes.

Nicola Cuti is justly well-known as a comics writer (E-Man, Spanner's Galaxy): delightful encountering him as an artist as well. (I can see where he took a strong hand in the visual representation of his creations.)

I suppose Anne J. Braude is entitled to blow it once, as she does by calling the Book of Job a tragedy: blame it on Milton maybe. Not only is Job (the Book of) a comedy, but it is, like Dante's, a divine one. (Dante's work was simply called The Comedy.) Comedy in the sense that, while no pies are thrown, the hero (Job) is, after tribulations, triumphant. As is Heinlein's Job stand-in, Alex. Though it takes a deus ex machina ending (a device familiar in Christian Mystery plays- not the same thing as tragedy), Alex is ultimately triumphant at the end. (Not because he is made a saint but because he is reunited with Margrethe-a happy ending. Heinlein a practicing lecticubicularist? That's easy for you to say.

Roger Waddington: To those who claim Reagan is pro-Space Program I say I want to send probes to the planets and he wants to send the Death Star to Moscow.

the LAST WORD.

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