

PARSECTION



THE WASTE CAN

Campbell's was the cruellest mag, tossing
Manuscripts out for the wrong reasons, mixing
Pscience and bent wire, stirring
Sly hacks to spin yarns.

Boucher kept us warm, lavishing
Art on belated rejections, printing
Light bits of sex done by 'droit hands.

H. Gold confused us, coming up out of nowhere or other
With a shower of pelf; we paused at his hog trough,
Then moved on, when he changed, into men's magazines
And wrote sex-tales and said stf was dying.

But not any louder, I guess, than we were forced to,
For, lo, it was we who had killed it,

My brothers. We hoisted stf up like a flag
Then deserted it. John said, boys,

Boys, hold on tight, and down we went.

Back at Street & Smith, ANALOG blossomed.

I write, much of the day, but factual fiction?

..... Dean McLaughlin

PARSECTION

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Publisher this issue,

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See you at Pitt.

THE FAN WITH THE MYSTERY

BY

WILSON TUCKER

This fellow walked into my office one day and said he had a mystery, a baffling enigma. Further, he said that neither Ellik nor Carr nor FANAC knew anything about it; the strange matter was as yet unscooped, to turn a phrase. He had come to me (the old fellow said) because I was the man to crack the riddle -- obviously, I knew everything there was to know about science fiction and fandom. I wouldn't let him down.

I looked the old fellow up and down, deciding that he was an old fan and tired. That was understandable if he'd been following Ellik around the country. I asked the nature of the mystery.

Eagerly, he handed me a battered copy of Bretnor's 1953 volume, MODERN SCIENCE FICTION, and urged me to read a paragraph near the bottom of page 90. The pertinent sentences were marked in red pencil;

"Stories predicting the atomic age already have a faintly archaic atmosphere, even Cleve Cartmill's 'Deadline', which sent the FBI men to put the arm on John Campbell."

I read that and nodded. Fletcher Pratt had said that in his chapter of Bretnor's book. But my visitor did not stop there. He next directed my attention to page 101 of the same volume and asked me to read the sentence marked there. I did;

"The fact that Jules Verne described the submarine before it was invented, or that Murray Leinster predicted the atom bomb with such accuracy that he was called upon by the F.B.I. is -- for the purposes of this chapter at least -- a splendid but secondary by-product of their stories."

I nodded again, commenting that Rosalie Moore had written that for her chapter on the same volume. But my old visitor was perturbed. He sputtered and shook his greying head. How did Leinster get into the act? he demanded.

For that matter, I replied savagely, how did the FBI get into the act?

The old fan was twice bewildered. Well, he said feebly, the FBI called on somebody, didn't they? Whoever it was that wrote the bomb story?

I said no. It was merely part of the myth.

The fan was perturbed and greatly disturbed. To increase his bewilderment (and to demonstrate my vast knowledge) I showed him my battered copy of Conklin's 1946 anthology, THE BEST OF SCIENCE FICTION. On page 46 I had marked in red pencil;

"Within a few days agents of the Military Intelligence approached the author and the office of the magazine demanding to know who, on the Manhattan Project, had been talking."

Ah, the old fellow opined with some relief, so it wasn't Leinster and it wasn't the FBI.

Nor, I shot back, was it Cartmill or Military Intelligence. As a matter of fact, no part of Manhattan Project and its bomb were involved. All that is pap to impress the gullible fans. Mere myth.

The tired old fan was dumbfounded. He sputtered incoherently. Well, he demanded finally, what did happen to who?

I said, I'm glad you asked me that question. Now listen carefully: It wasn't Astounding, but Amazing Stories. It wasn't Campbell, but Ray Palmer. It wasn't Leinster nor Cartmill, but "Richard S. Shaver". It wasn't the FBI nor Military Intelligence, but the US Customs Department. And it wasn't the atom bomb, it was firecrackers.

What? the old man gasped.

You may recall, I said smartly, that after fandom failed to get on the "Shaver" bandwagon and ride the Dero Express, Ray Palmer denounced them. He promised them done, kaput. He said that science fiction fandom was passe. He said that it would be swept away by the "new" fandom, Dero Fandom. He said that the science fiction fans had outlived their usefulness, and now they could do nothing but sit by helplessly and watch the Dero fans take over. He promised fireworks.

Fireworks! the old man ejaculated.

Of course. Fireworks, not an atom bomb. So the Customs Department entered the case when it was discovered that fireworks were being smuggled into the country from China. Dero fandom was hoist by its own petard. But the myth took over from there, strangling the facts. And you know how it is with myths --- they are twisted by each new telling, distorted more with repetition. Is it any wonder that Moore supposed Leinster had invented a paper bomb? Is it to be remarked that both she and Pratt thought the FBI had called on John Campbell?

Ah, the old man wheezed, I see it all!

No you don't, I contradicted him. Not even Conklin saw it all, but he was the most suspicious of the lot and if you will read his statements with careful attention you will find distrust seeping through. He had dismissed the FBI and substituted Military Intelligence; now see what he says about the author and editor. Does he mention Cartmill? He does not. Does he mention Campbell? He does not. He merely said that agents "approached the office of the magazine". Do you see how circumspect he is when retelling the myth?

But WHAT does it mean? the old one quavered.

That I cannot tell you, I shot back. The final scene is yet to be played. All that has gone before, all of the confusion and contradictory reports, is but part of the master pattern, The Plan. The end is still to come.

A sort of second coming? the old one whispered.

Yes, I said. Watch for Gosseyn!

Lost Starship

Star ways you travel all alone

Speeding toward the rim;

Old and tired, wrecked and rusty,

Calmly 'waiting the dim.

Do not regret the dying embers

For you have known the glow.

Hold fast the blessings of
the fire...

And let the absence go.

All that comes into your path

You sense must surely be

Preparing you for greater realms

Through all Eternity.

..... Lahoma Heisa

A SMALL SYMPOSIUM ON SF

During the last few years much has been said concerning the demise of SF and many have been the reasons given to explain its so-called decline. PARSECTION thought it was time for a positive question to be asked in this long term argument. Namely;

"What do you think can or should be done to help SF in any of its aspects?"

DEAN McLAUGHLIN SAYS

I've held forth on the whys and wherefores of SF's recent troubles entirely too many times. SF magazines have been dying like flies --- usually because they were losing money --- and no one can claim that magazine SF is in a state of unprecedented health. It isn't, either as a business or as a literature.

But after a while I start repeating myself when I sit down to figure out what hit us.

So it's refreshing to be asked a positive-type question for a change. Hand-wringing and the finger of blame have their place and their uses, but even grave-diggers are required eventually to fill up the hole with something or other. And just between you and me and the microphone, I'd rather it wasn't SF's corpse.

But before prescriptions can be written, we have to know what's the disease? Usually, I have held to the economic theory --- that SF doesn't pay off financially either to publishers or authors, and that therefore publishers refrain from wasting their money and the authors devote more and more of their time to writing something they have a decent chance of making bread and butter money out of. There are exceptions, of course, but only one man, to the best of my knowledge, is making a living exclusively from the writing of SF --- and Robert A. Heinlein doesn't depend on the magazine for that income.

Of course there remain pocketbooks --- and even hard cover books. These areas of the literature business seem to be doing all right.

There has been no apparent decline in the number of SF pocketbook titles published for several years --- and lately I think there has been a slight increase. Simon & Schuster has revived its interest in SF and plans several titles within the next year. Doubleday carries four SF titles in its Fall '60 catalogue, whereas a year ago there was only one --- and that one had been postponed several times before it finally was brought out.

But I believe that the magazines are the nest and place of origin of SF as we know it, and for the most part the books --- hard and soft back alike ---- consist of material which originally was written for and appeared in the magazines. And I doubt that the book industry could enjoy its vitality without the magazines as a source of supply.

All of this I have said at greater length --- and perhaps more clearly in Earl Kemp's WHO KILLED SF? But when I wrote my statement for that symposium I was unable to make any suggestion of a possible solution to our troubles. Even now, I realize there are no easy answers and to make any proposal may very well cause me to appear the fool. Nevertheless.....

The magazines suffer because, to put it simply, they aren't selling. Not enough, anyway. One of the reasons --- one mentioned time and again in Kemp's compendium --- was that all too often the magazines were not being exposed to the potential customer. Not being magazines that sell by the bale, supermarket mentalities refuse to display them --- even though in most cases the seven, eight, or ten cents profit the retailer would earn per sale is money he would not receive otherwise.

Magazines like the SatEvePost, Life, etc., could thrive nicely without ever appearing on a newsstand. The bulk of their sales is via subscription --- and in fact such mass magazines could probably show a profit even if they gave their copies away; they make their fat cash off advertising. (That is, they used to; more and more, all magazines are feeling the squeeze. For details, see Theodore White's novel THE VIEW FROM THE FORTIETH FLOOR, which chronicles the demise of Colliers in fictional guise, and see also John Fisher's editorial in the June, '60 issue of Harpers.)

But SF magazines, at present, are dependent on newsstand sale for their survival. That we have any magazines left is something to be grateful for and --- perhaps --- a cause of surprise. I'm inclined to doubt that any of them, right now, are making much money. With luck, they're breaking even.

But the battle for newsstand space cannot be won. David vs. Goliath is a very nice myth, but outside of the Bible the usual outcome is that David gets clobbered. Small circulation magazines cannot hope to get the same display space as Time or Good Housekeeping.

So the problem is, how do we get the magazine to potential customers?

I have already observed that pocketbooks have not suffered the

same fate as magazines. Even when segregated into their own separate category for distribution purposes, SF pocketbooks generally seem to return a profit to their publishers. If they didn't (or, for that matter, if they ever stop doing so) we would see no more of them.

I do not propose the wholesale conversion of the surviving magazines into pocketbooks --- this was, in effect, tried with Fred Pohl's Star SF series. Some issues, apparently, sold quite well, but for some reasons I know nothing about the series petered out. And, in spite of a number of magazine-like qualities, the Star anthologies never really resembled a magazine.

A magazine has character --- a personality. Anyone who doubts that Astounding (beg pardon) Analog is John W? Campbell, Jr. has either never met the man or never seriously thought about the question. Similarly, for many years, Fantasy & SF radiated the charm and essence of Tony Boucher, and Bob Mills is having a difficult time filling those hand-me-down shoes.

No. I propose that the magazines experiment with a new method of reaching their potential customers. I don't know whether or not the experiment will be successful, but I do believe it is worth trying.

I propose that the magazines advertise and solicit subscriptions in pocketbooks.

There are some obvious criticisms to this idea. Most pocketbook publishers, in the first place, don't publish advertising in their books except for advertising other of their own kind of books. However, several pocketbook publishers do include advertising, either in the form of glued-in inserts (usually on stiff cardboard, and personally very annoying since it is impossible to read the book until the insert has been torn out --- often at the expense of the binding) or, less commonly, printed on regular pages in the back of the book.

About a year ago, Doubleday's SF Book Club tried this form of advertising. Since the inserts have now stopped appearing we can gather that the experiment was not a success --- that the return from these ads didn't pay off. I think, however, that the experimental results of magazines can be different. The book club was advertising books priced at \$1 in other books which were priced at 35¢ --- and very often the very books they were pushing were available in pocketbooks at that same 35¢ price. (It may even happen that on some occasions the 3 for a dollar come-on offer featured the same book as the ad appeared in.) Magazines, on the other hand, would be offering a price-competitive product which was individual and different, while at the same time (by judicious selection of the titles to be advertised in) giving a genuine sample of what the magazine is like. An ideal example: F&SF might place its ad-inserts in the Ace book reprints of BEST FROM F&SF. A novel which originally appeared in Galaxy or ~~As~~ Analog would be the likeliest spot to place ads for those respective magazines. And so forth.

How much this would cost, I don't know. Perhaps the cost would be prohibitive. Doubleday might have that kind of cash to risk in such an experiment --- but would Mercury Publications? Joe Ferman may not be

rich, but I do think he has the dime required to make the phone call that will yield the information.

And, of course, to sink into the apathy of believing that nothing will help will definitely not improve the situation.

Other random thoughts come to me. One is my recent realization that the mass-magazine mythology --- the editorial conviction that men do not read fiction --- is hogwash. It is true, of course, that men generally do not take much interest in the type of stories published in, say, Ladies Home Journal, and little more in the Saturday Evening Post. But so long as the Post's editors select their stories with the myth in their criterion, men are going to stay away in droves.

But men do read fiction. Tons of it. Pocketbooks --- outside of the bestseller reprint category --- are written for men, are selected by editors with a masculine audience in mind, and are --- presumably --- purchased mostly by men. I'm not sure how this message can be put through to the general (all the family) magazines and the men's magazines. Offhand, a message tied to a brick and tossed through the office window strikes me as about the only way to make an impression.

Another thought --- and to many of my fellow pros this may sound like treason --- we need more John Campbell type editors. Magazines that attract notice --- even in so limited a field as SF --- are those commanded by tyrannical, quirky, demanding editors. To have a strong personality in the magazine, the editor himself must have a personality to match. This seems to be a law of the universe.

I am not in love with John Campbell. I have felt his domineering pressure and arbitrariness as much as anyone. I have felt annoyed as anyone else when he has gone hog wild over one or another of his vast enthusiasms, of which the Heironymous machine, the dowsing rods, and the Dean Space Drive have been only the most recent.

Nevertheless, credit must be given. He has kept ~~As~~ Analog the most vital magazine in the field. When the quality of stories in Analog declines, it slips in the other magazines also. Analog remains in the lead.

What we need, I think, is two or three men like John Campbell, equipped with budgets equal to Campbell's for copy and reproduction, financial backing to support them long enough to establish themselves, and exposure in the marketplace.

But I don't think this will happen. It almost happened when Horace Gold's Galaxy appeared, and for about eighteen months we had what seemed like a breath of fresh air. Then something happened --- I don't know what. I rarely read Galaxy --- or anything in it anymore. Fantasy & SF even with its lower budget, has long been a close competitor to Analog, and frequently --- because it is less narrow than Campbell's product --- it has published stories far better than those appearing in Analog.

The trouble is, John Campbells don't grow on trees. Neither, as those who have met him will testify, are they born. They just happen.

GORDIE DICKSON

And who is going to invest a pile of money in a madman? The last large publisher to stick its neck out on a SF magazine was, to my knowledge, Hillman Publications. Worlds Beyond was murdered, with the first issue still on the stands. Where can we find a publisher with nerve and money to burn? Right now, all I can think of is Doubleday. Would they consider sponsoring a magazine, perhaps even as a subsidiary corporation? They're not a magazine outfit, and perhaps wouldn't be interested in entering into an industry which is full of disease and dry rot. But well, it's something to think about.

Anybody got nerve enough to try belling the cat?

FROM GORDIE DICKSON

Possibly I am a maverick. I have grave doubts that anything can be done to help science fiction by anyone but the great mass of unorganized readers that make up the bulk of SF sales. And I suspect that they are not going to do so. My reasoning goes as follows.

At first thought it sounds reasonable that those concerned with the producing of SF --- publishers, editors, writers, --- could take on the job, if they wished, of improving the current state and crop of SF found on the market. However, assuming they could ignore the economical angle which operates against their doing so (in the case of the publishers, making a profit; in the case of the editors, large enough budgets to outbid competition; in the case of the writers, good enough rates to tempt them from other fields). Their efforts at improvement would all boil down in the end to each his own guess at what that great mass I earlier referred to would like better.

Likewise, the loyal readership (that hard core of SF readers) could, it sounds reasonable, by sensible criticism and useful comment, point the above mentioned class in the right direction toward improvement and keep them on it.

But publishers have made profits and lost them, editors have had large budgets and seen them dwindle, writers have gotten rates which they were glad enough to take and ignored the fact that other rates were not as high as they would have liked them. And the loyal readership has been loyal passing the readership loyalty requirements of the most addicted.

With all this, the great herd of dogies who followed the rest of us across the great plains of the forties, has dwindled through dropouts and strays. And with them goes the margin between profit and loss. How come they left us?

GORDIE DICKSON

For the best reason in the world I'd say. We left them first. Not just writers, though we were breaking ranks early, late, and continuous; but the publishers, the editors, and the loyal readership as well. No wonder the great mass of casual readers don't buy SF as much as they use to. Nobody's publishing it, editing it, or writing it --- or even writing letters about it and talking it up. They're all concerned with something else which goes by the same name. In short, there's nothing wrong with our cider drinking customers except that we're trying to con them into buying applejack.

And I don't think applejack is very good cider. Cider isn't good applejack either, so the standoff is even both ways. You can't reverse the distillation process, so why try? Science Fiction is an evolving creature; which stands to reason, for if it wasn't, it would be an aging creature. It has evolved away from one great supporting mass of casual readers. I hope and believe it's going to evolve into the literary fare of another and different mass. We started up the mountainside with rod and gun; we may come down the other side with camera and notebook.

So say, myself --- let it happen. Firstly because I don't think any of us who want to do anything can, much as we'd like to. And secondly because I believe that the process is essentially a good one. We're on the same trek we've been on since the beginning, and if we're to survive to reach our destination, then we will. If we don't, well then, we never had anyplace to go from the start. We might as well tighten our belts, shove ahead and enjoy the adventure of finding out what the future holds for SF and for us.

A Writer's Lament

My ribbon's gray; my brain is numb.
And where, oh, where do ideas come from?

A rejection today, another tomorrow.
Credit's too bad, can't even borrow.

Can't read my notes on yesterday's plot.
Might've been good. Doesn't matter a lot.

The paper stays white, the hour is late.
Getting it down is the part I hate.

I hear the TV, and the tinkle of ice.
And here I sit waiting for a story -- no dice.

But wait ... no, it's gone. Oh well,
It can't all be rosy. Part of it's hell.

..... Kate Wilhelm

H L GOLD

There's about as terse a statement as should be needed for the symposium --- I need material.

Science fiction, you see, is not in trouble. Readers and writers who haven't lost the glow won't argue with that. Those who have won't be moved or won back by the logic of total sales of all science fiction in 1960 as against any period that they might want to take--- including the alleged boom of a few years ago, which was actually a gold rush, when publishers figured there was a killing to be made in this field and slunk out with bleeding pockets. Are booms new to me? Or, for that matter, to anybody else who is in or carefully watches publishing? Not at all. It happened in the comics, which jumped from 100 or so during paper rationing to something over 500 when quotas were lifted. Same with fashion magazines; the survivors outlasted a flood of competition. Remember the bitter fight for domination of the television-listing market? It happens that we were offered TV Guide for \$4,000 back then --- but \$4,000 was just the down payment needed to make it win out --- and there wasn't any sign that it was more of a winner than its rivals. And, more recently, publishers rushed into men's magazines; some did fine, but most got badly hurt.

Boom? In the sense of boom and bust, yes, but there was no boom in science fiction, only wilddcatting.

What, you ask, can or should be done to help science fiction? Well, the big problem for all magazines, ours included, is distribution. If readers and writers would badger newsstands and wholesalers into putting and keeping us on sale, that would give science fiction the largest road crew in the country. The slicks work furiously --- and unthinkably expensively --- to keep newsstands sales down to 10% or less of total sales, from making countrywide mailings to giving subscription agencies 103%. No misprint, that. Whole amount plus 3% for the trouble. Their real revenue is in advertising and subscription renewals, of which advertising of course is the main money. Ours comes entirely from sales, with advertising merely bringing down the breakeven a few points. We can't bypass the newsstands, so getting us on them would be an enormous help.

Nothing can be done to lower the rising costs. We're in the same squeeze as everybody else. But increased sales would offset at least some part of the spiral.

It's a sad fact that a small percentage of people must get divorced so violently from science fiction that they sound like the majority. They have to rip themselves away by trying to destroy the thing they once loved.

The pity is that they dominate conventions to such an extent that they make those still in love feel somewhat ashamed of loving science fiction. "What's wrong with science fiction?" and "Why doesn't it have the good old sense of wonder any more?" are the persistent themes of conventions. As I said recently in Galaxy, golden ages exist only in retrospect, and it seems incredible that those were the questions of the disenchanted all through the past three decades, when so many undisputable masterworks were being published.

Only a few marriages per thousand smash all over the front page. The same is true of readers and writers who leave science fiction; by far the greatest number do so with quiet or no regret. But conventions are all too much like gatherings of the front-pagers out of the hundreds of thousands of the quietly divorced.

It would be a help if this weren't so. I know a great many readers and writers come to conventions eagerly, full of the sense of wonder, finding nothing wrong with science fiction because nothing really is wrong with it, only to be shamed, shaken, and discouraged by those who have fallen out of love and have every criticism to make but this one true one.

If readers buy and writers write and the disenchanted would just go away and let conventions be the pleasant things they could be, inspirations instead of disheartenments, and we do get that largest of all road crews I've mentioned, there would be nothing at all needed to help science fiction. Little enough is needed, for readers are buying and writers are writing and we do have that road crew to a remarkable extent, only we could use more.

But these knocks in the engine of every convention -- don't they get as tired of hearing themselves as we do? Isn't there anybody around with a can of Bardahl?

QUOTED WITHOUT COMMENT

"In my opinion, SF readers (and writers, too) have become a bunch of old Aunt Nellies hell-bent on preserving the status-quo, glorifying the present norm, and ready to crucify anybody who dares rock the boat by thinking. Astounding science fiction? It's astounding that anybody would think that SF could astound anybody but an idiot."

James V McConnell

LYNN HICKMAN says;

Perhaps I'm not the proper person to spout forth on this, or maybe I'm the only one of this group that should. I'm a reader, collector, and fan. I'm the poor joe that buys the magazines that Horace edits, reads the stories that Dean and Gordie write. I've been doing this for 25 years and I'm still doing it.

I'm also a newsstand hound. I love to browse through them, and re-arrange the displays. After I make a tour through the stand the science fiction mags and paperbacks are displayed. I think this helps. I talk up SF to my friends and to the newsdealer. I have gotten undoubtedly hundreds of people to read science fiction during those years.

BUT --- that is about all a fan can do. The rest is up to the publisher, the editor, and the writer. They have to put out a good product that is interesting and is in an attractive package. Some are doing this, but not well enough. Stories on the whole, today, have a sameness about them that is discouraging to a reader, especially a new one. Themes and theme stories have been run into the ground. I am of the opinion that we need some good fantasy/sf adventure.

Of late I've been digging through my Argosy, All Story and FFM files and rereading a lot of stories. Haggard, Merritt, Cummings, Kline, etc.. They are still good, and they are fun to read. The authors weren't any better writers than the present ones but they had a tale to tell and they told it in an interesting way. The stories had more scope to them, they weren't concerned with the same old line over and over. They were written to entertain. And they did the job ably.

Today, I most enjoy the Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction because they publish a little of everything. You don't find so much of the sameness. Bob Mills seems to have less tabu's than the other editors and is willing to stick out his neck and publish a story like Alley Man by Phil Farmer. It was nominated for a Hugo so readers must like offbeat stories like this. I know I do. Horace Gold is now doing this in his Galaxy-Beacon novels. I know a lot of the fans have said that they are just sexed up SF stories and laugh them off, but in most cases that is the fault of the package. Behind the garish cover and the awful blurb on FLESH by Farmer was one of the finest novels to appear this year. A theme that wasn't worked to death and that was handled with skill --- and that entertained!! More power to Bob and Horace. AND I hope that Horace follows this policy through to his magazine.

LYNN HICKMAN

As Basil Wells says in his Thud and Thunder column in my fanzine, JD-A (#55), the pb's seem to be selling well and they are selling science fantasy adventure.

Now by that I mean good science fiction fantasy adventure, not the trite stories that sent Imagination, SF Adventures, etc., to their graves. But there are many good authors that can write this type of story that would probably be available. A few that come to mind right now are Basil Wells, Phil Farmer, C L Moore, Andre Norton, Hannes Bok, Wilson Tucker, E E Smith, Lester Del Rey, etc..

The biggest boon to me would be to have someone revive Famous Fantastic Mysteries, and/or Fantastic Novels.

It will be interesting to me to see how Avalon's The SWORDSMAN OF MARS by Otis A. Kline will be received. I'm hoping that Avalon will continue on this theme and publish a number of the Argosy serials.

This is the last page we have to type up. We'll run this off and then George will be heading back for Madison, Indiana for the coalition and stapling job. I was pleased to have George here this weekend, I think he's done an excellent job on his first issue and hope that he will be in fandom for a long time to come.

Lynn the Hickman

An octogenarian bought a girl android,
Despite his psycher's dire warnings quoted from Freud.
Of frustration he died.
While going he cried,
"It's no good if you're both aneroid!"

..... Kate Wilhelm

MAY
THIS
HOUSE
BE
SAFE
FROM
REPUBLICANS.

CONFESSIONS OF A "SOMETIMES" WRITER

BY

JOE L HENSLEY

(Lawyer, writer, lecturer, politician, toe-nail biter, and all-american type youth.)

It is true that I stand for God, motherhood, and the American way (in that order). It is not true that I drink a fifth of whiskey per day. I spill at least that much. (I drink much more.)

But there is a reason for my secret and public drinking, for this urge to retreat and hide behind the fifth.

Alas, I am a writer.

There may have been a time in the dim past when I could have escaped what has now become the compulsion to write, a disease widely known as "Tucker's Twich", but now I must face the fact that I'm an incurable. Other men can rise in the morning and go to work and, when the day is done, come home to watch the television, argue with their wives, or beat their children. There is no such happiness for me. I didn't realize that this was so until recently, but it came upon me like a bombshell. I saw a small, blonde boy riding a bicycle across the street, while making one of my rare appearances into air not filled with cigarette smoke. And thinking of my lost youth, I wandered over to him. I watched his gyrations for some time until he rode up close to me and stopped and watched me with interested eyes.

"And who's little boy are you?" I asked.

His eyes became sorrowful.

"Yours," he said.

"Then you must be ..." I said snapping my fingers, hunting for his name.

"Michael."

"Of course," I said. "It was right on the tip of my tongue."

He said: "Sure, dad. See you next Christmas." He rode off again.

My kid believes in Santa Claus, but my wife says (now what the hell's her name?) that he doesn't believe in me. And when my wife says something to me around the house I always say, "For god's sake, don't bother me with that now. Call me at the office when I've got more time to think about it."

For if not all of my spare time is spent in writing, it is spent in thinking about it, plotting it, and -- most of all -- discussing it.

There is a certain type citizen, usually female, who goes all to pieces when I meet them, leading to situations like this: The other night I was working on a novel (about a Martian beatnik, 200,000 words in blank verse, for John, of course) when I had a caller. My wife escorted the caller to my room, nodded coldly to me, and left. This one was a doll compared to most. She was about fifty, with a face like strained prunes. A notebook was clutched in one white gloved hand and a sheaf of manuscripts in the other. She had a determined looking eye.

I sighed and quit blanking verse.

"I've come to get the inside stuff," she said.

I wasn't sure what she meant, but decided not to call for help yet.

"You know," she continued. "The dope, the straight stuff." Her face was openly contemptuous of my glazed look. "About how you sell them."

"I put them in envelopes and mail them to editors."

"Oh come now, Mr. Hensley, I've read your stuff."

"Nevertheless, Madam, that's how it's done."

"You mean it's as easy as that?"

"Well you have to write the sort of thing they want to buy."

She shoved the top manuscript off her stack into my reluctant hands. "Read that!" she ordered. "It's my finest work, but it's been rejected by Kennel News, Galaxy, The Saturday Evening Posthole Digger, True Confessions, Confidential, and the Gnaw Bone Tri-Weakly Chronicle, besides some other minor markets not worth mentioning."

I glanced down at the story. Suddenly she snatched it back. "Before you read it you'll have to sign this affidavit that you won't steal it."

I took the affidavit she gave me and scribbled the name "Robert Bloch" on it, therefore making it much more valuable to posterity. I handed it back and she stuffed it back into her pocket without looking. I managed to steal her pen.

I read the first paragraph of her story, but couldn't get any further. It was, of course, about Martians taking over the Earth. They always are -- or about the final "H" war.

JOE L HENSLEY

"You need a better idea," I said, handing it back.

"You used it," she snarled.

I said modestly: "But that was a masterful story."

She raised her purse to hit me, but fortunately my wife came to the door. Together we got the old woman out.

When she'd gone, I turned to my wife. "Thank you, wife, whatever your name is."

She snarled at me. "I'm not your wife. I'm the baby sitter. Your wife hired me when she left you last week." She shook her finger under my nose. "But you'd better make an honest woman out of me, after last night."

I smiled at her. "Don't bother me with it here. Call me at the office." I went back into the den and shut the door and locked it. I started to beat the typer. After a little while there was a bright, hot light outside the window and, some seconds later a loud boom. I kept on typing.

Some damn fool is always interrupting.

PARSECTIONS,

Hensley tells of meeting a fellow named Turly Curd.

McConnell's little statement was printed without consent ... I just couldn't see wasting the 4¢.

A message to the Wabash, Ind. Police; Robert Coulson is planning to rob an armored car.

Ted Cogswell, due back from Mexico, will doubtless be loaded to the eyes with fresh Mexican out-house poetry. All connoisseurs who would like a choice lyric can reach Ted at 204 McKensie Rd., Muncie, Ind. Send a stamped envelope, paper, and a small but enticing fee.

I like Heinlein and I liked Starship Troopers.

I arrived at the Hickman's to find that the Rock River had over flowed into their basement. The multi-graph was knee deep in mud and it took three hours to clean it off and to throw out the minnows. Lynn, being a sweet and considerate soul, thought that since I was a guest and all that we should run off PARSECTION before he finished the JD-A 10th Anniversary issue. He was very careful to explain that a little water couldn't hurt the machine. With no trouble at all, we ran off one sheet every five minutes. Readable sheet that is. Lynn was busy prying the rest of the ream away from the ink roller.

Plato Jones also dropped in and lent a hand to the pump. Nice guy.

JOHN I HENSLER

How much a letter costs "I said, heading it back

you want it and I said

"I said, heading it back" "I said, heading it back"

How much a letter costs "I said, heading it back

you want it and I said

"I said, heading it back" "I said, heading it back"



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