

Personal Notes

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This is issue #2 of PERSONAL NOTES, produced by Richard Harter, etc, from 5 Chauncy St. #2, Cambridge MA 02138. Subscription rates are ten dollars for one issue, five dollars for two issues, and three dollars and thirty three cents for three issues.

Most of you who are receiving this are also receiving issue #1 with it. As you may have noted there is a slight gap between #1 and #2. Now part of this is simply that I have been busy with other things and the whole project got shifted far enough down the queue so that it merely recirculated at the bottom. These things happen. The other factor is simply that I never quite got around to constructing a mailing list. That may seem peculiar to you, but that's the way it goes. I finally decided to reactivate the whole thing and get out a second issue. Aren't you excited?

Running over the previous issue, I see that I predicted our things for TORCON which turned out much better than expected. However DISCON does promise to have that certain air of relaxed spontaneity, of ineffable confusion, that all trufans have been waiting for.

Since the last issue I have been enlightened on certain aspects of Equestrianism that were hithertofore unclear to me. Posting turns out to be quite simple when you get the hang of it. I was immensely encourage the other day. I got Pammy to canter from a walk. A canter, for youse non horse freaks, is the same gait that a horse uses in a gallop, only slowed down. It is perfectly natural for a horse to shift from a trot to a canter when it wants to speed up. But going from a walk to a canter directly is sort of like going from first to third at slow speed. I had always sort of put this down as one of those advanced things that people who really know what they are doing can do but that are far beyond ordinary slobs like me. However it turns out to be very simple - amazing.

Strictly as personal notes for them as is interested I have a new job and have had my car destroyed. My job amounts to be a consultant for a company in Texas on salary. My car was totalled by somebody driving a stolen car who ran a red light and crashed into me.

Contents this time are going to be minimal - I simply want to get this thing activated again. There is a little portfolio by Mike Gilbert and Howie Green. There is an essay on SF which I ran through APA-NESFA and APA-L. Said essay may also be reprinted by Mike Glyer in prehensile (which is rapidly becoming an excellent fanzine.) The one thing that it lacks at present is a diatribe by Ted White who seems to be trying to set a record for most feuds conducted concurrently in the pages of leading fanzines. Sigh. There may be some other stuff if I get excited by the idea of putting something else in. Read the rest of the zine to find out if I do.

The Gilbert & Green portfolio that follows was created at the Boskone. Basically it came about because Mikie and Howie are long lost playmates who merge into a mad session of sketching whenever they get together. In this case these are some of their impressions of Boskone (74) and some of the activities that occurred there.

One of the things that happened at Boskone was that Marsha and Eddie and I and a few others got together for a small wine tasting of German white wines. They brought over a couple of bottles from England and I kicked in a couple or three bottles from my cellar. As I recall this started with a Berncasteler Doctor Auslese and worked its way up to a Goldbeerenauslese. I disremember exactly what the wines were but I remember the tastes very well. Yummy.

In any case Mikie and Howie were there. Now they are the best of all good fellows but wine just isn't there thing. So, while we were sitting around sipping and appreciating, they were busy taking their revenge in caricature.

They also appreciated the costume ball - which seemed to be quite successful, if a little discombobulated. You may enjoy their version of it. They were particularly taken with Freddie as the Bastard Son of the Tooth Fairy. (They weren't the only ones - Freddie keeps muttering about certain male fans who were also taken with his costume.)

Mikie and Howie and Sheila also got introduced to Ken's at this Boskone. At least they ate as though they had never been there before - in fact they ate as though they had never seen food before. Tsk. Tsk! See for yourself.

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And, for those that like verse, and because I want to fill out the rest of the page, here is a poem:

The hours go by, and a day is gone.
The days go by, and a month is gone.
The months go by, and a year is gone.
Does it hurt any less?
Do you want any less?
Do you care any less?
A little, but only a little;
And the scars will take forever.

And do they take forever, those scars? Sometimes yes, sometimes no. If one has been hurt deeply it takes a long time to recover and the scars never quite fade away. But eventually they do become only a residual trace that is of no particular account, like a joint that twinges every once in a while and is otherwise perfectly normal. But then, this is nothing new. Most of us, not all, perhaps, but most of us know, one way or another.

And the funny thing is that we can't really see these wounds in others - at least most of us can't, not really. We can see others being hurt and sympathize and empathize, but we don't call up our sharpest pains and say, yes, this is what that person feels. At best, when someone else's old wound twinges, ours twinges too, and we are both silent, for there is really nothing to be said.

OH THE SUBTLE
FRAGRANCE, AH THE LEGS
QUITE AN AMUSING
BOUQUET, WHAT THIS
LITTLE
GO. the Bath water!?

WINE SNOBS
ON PARADE

BOSSON WINE
SNOBS ARE BAD

MY GOD
EDDIE,
THERE'S
DUST IN
THIS ROOM
MY WINE
MY WINE

BUAH!

MY GOD
IT BUBBLED!

I DON'T CARE
IF IT COST
\$1250 A BOTTLE
IT TASTE
LIKE FRUIT
PUNCH...
WHERE'S
THE GRAPPLE

\$1500 A BOTTLE
CHRIST I'M
ONLY \$10 BUCKS
AN HOUR

REMEMBER
KIDS
MR. GRAPE
ALWAYS
SAYS:

RINSE THAT
GLASS

BAD

PIERRE
GRAPE

YECH



HOWIE AND MIKIE

Present

THE BOOBS BUTTS AND BALL



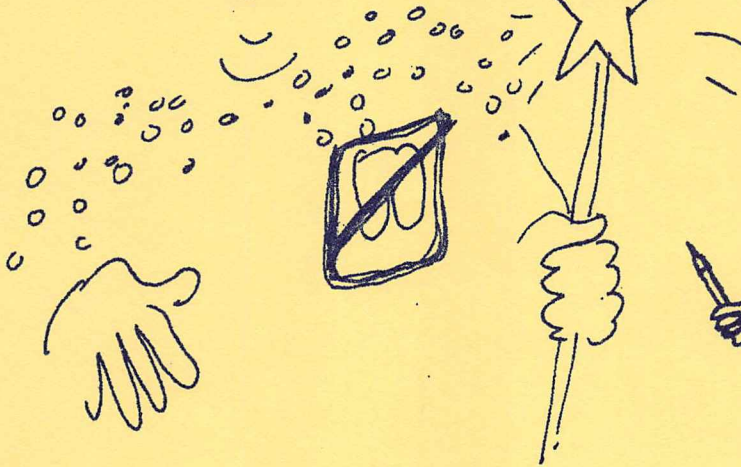
you're Jack FAUGHAN
BIG WHOOP!
yes I thought HE WAS
TAKER!

LOOK CAPTN. KENNEDY
THE BREAST OF
ALL WORDS, ...



Hi Ho
FAWS HI
IT'S MAGIC FREDDIE

I MUST PROMOTE THE QUALITY
OF VEGA SUPER PLASTIC
PEN SOAKED IN IPA
AS A TOOL



BOY, FAWS
ARE AWFUL!!!

oooooooooooo
KIDS.

WANT A GRADE
DREW?
HUH
HUH
HUH



1976

MY GOD THE
BREAST OF
76

← THE ROBOT
BOOB





MIKEY MEETS KEN'S



“HOME WIFE”



OR ANOTHER MEAL AT KEN'S Copley

a short essay on sf

In a recent issue of APA-L (L-470 to be exact) I casually tossed off the following definition of science fiction: *Science Fiction is that branch of Fantasy in which the existence of science is used as a mythic rationale.* Like most of my APA contributions it was written without any thought before hand. (Indeed certain of my critics hold that thought and my APA contributions are usually unrelated.) Having written this gem of illiterate prose I stopped to read what I had read (it might have been interesting, you know) and was surprised to read the makings of a good legitimate definition of SF.

There are two major nits I will pick to begin with - first of all "existence of science" is not quite the phrase I want, and secondly the phrase "mythic rationale" is a neologism. Before I demolish the definition irretrievably, however, let us look at what it is actually saying.

To begin with, the definition advances three theses: that SF is a branch of fantasy, that all fantasy requires a "mythic rationale", and that the appeal to "the existence of science" is the characteristic mythic rationale of science fiction. Now the first thesis, that SF is a branch of fantasy, is meaningless unless we also have a definition of fantasy. The second thesis, however, implies an operational definition of fantasy.

The problem in defining fantasy is to distinguish it from fiction in general. If fiction is a story that doesn't happen to be true, (a reasonable definition) then what is the special character of fantasy. Now it is characteristic of general fiction that it is tied pretty close to reality. The tale that is being narrated is not one that happened but it is usually one that could have happened. (Allowing, of course, for the distorted perception of reality of the Author.) Fantasy, on the other hand, always contains an essential element of unreality - not of matter-of-factness, but of world view Dracula is not fantasy just because there are no vampires - it is fantasy because vampires cannot be; for there to be vampires in the classical sense the world must be essentially different in nature than we understand it to be. This is, of course, a relativistic conception of fantasy, but I think that is fair. To Homer the Odyssey and the Iliad were simple narration, to us they are fantasy.

This conception of fantasy does not require a "mythic rationale". Indeed it is possible to point to examples of stories which I would call fantasy which do not. A good example is the fiction of Borges, which usually starts out apparently rooted in reality and then quickly wanders off in the most inexplicable directions. Another kind of example is the historical what if essay or story. A good example is If Burgoyne Had Won At Saratoga. Such a story accepts the standard world view - it makes use of no fantastic elements except the initial hypothesis - but the secondary universe created is so far from our reality that we cannot accept it as being within our reality. Such a tale must therefore be classified as fantasy. However it, too, does not need a "mythic rationale".

Nonetheless most fantasy does need such a rationale. If fantasy is to be explicable (and it need not be) then there must be a basis for understanding the element of essential unreality which it contains. In the "what if" story we get it free. We start with a permissible variation in reality following the ordinary rules of fiction. However we extend it to the point that the world portrayed is no longer "our" world. In a story about vampires, however,

we start out with an element that is outside our ordinary reality. If we were not already familiar with vampires and a conception of reality in which vampires make sense then the story would be inexplicable. Vampires and all the rest of the paraphernalia of traditional fantasy are all familiar and explicable.

The reason they are is that they are all creatures of a world view - the world of mythology and magic. It is not the particular mythology that is important - our imagination suffers no strain when hobbits and orcs are added to the list. Rather it is the entire world view of animism and magic that makes "sense" out of traditional fantasy.

What then of science fiction and "the existence of science as a mythic rationale". The contention evidently is that science can be used instead of the traditional magic and mythology as a basis for fantasy and that when this is done the result is science fiction. At first sight this seems to involve a paradox. Science is, after all, part of our world view - part of our reality. But note that science in science fiction is not used that way - the science in SF is not really science; it is pseudo-science. Nor are the stories really about science and scientists as they really are.

What is done is that science is used to justify the essential element of unreality that is characteristic of fantasy. Naturally enough science cannot justify them. Instead the appeal is made to the existence of science as a rationale. (Now there is a cloudy sentence if I ever heard one.) In its simplest form this is done by a straight replacement of magic by science. (*Let me tell you a tale of a marvelous scorcercor... Now let me tell you a tale about a marvelous invention...*) Much early science fiction had just this characteristic.

One of the common features of traditional fantasy is the creation of a place for the story to happen - a secondary universe, a place where the laws of magic are allowed to operate. This invention is all too necessary; it is hard to believe in trolls, wizards, and dragons in Orange County. In SF the future plays a similar role. Not only does the future have the great advantage of being not-here, but it is a place where we can confidently expect that the powers of science and technology will be greatly extended. The future is the middle Earth of science fiction.

In essence I believe the definition is accurate and complete. It explains why stories about science and scientists are not, per se, science fiction. It accounts for the relationship of fantasy and science fiction and provides a means for telling them apart - a test that seems reasonably adequate. It explains why the future is so associated with science fiction but does not insist that science fiction must be associated with the future. The only real complaint I have with it as a definition is that the wording is not sharp.

If all of this makes sense (which I believe it does) then the urge upon the part of some critics and authors to rename SF as speculative fiction is misguided. Speculative fiction is another branch of fantasy. It is, or can be, closely related to science fiction, but it is a different breed of animal. That, however, is another story...

The following comments are by Susan Lewis and appeared in APA NESFA '#49.

That is a great definition of SF. You seem to have defined fantasy as any fiction that uses a mythic rationale *other than that currently accepted as REALITY*. This is reasonable. You have forgotten that the philosophical explanation of the universe that we call "reality" is also a mythic rationale. The currently changing world view is the reason the main stream is so stagnant. There is no commonly accepted philosophy and all the old comfortable ones are changing or dying. Tales of the Apocalypse are naturally in for this reason.

You imply that fantasy has to have an essential element of unreality. This is clearly true if the mythos is not that of reality - for that is what the story has to be about. Otherwise what you have said is that the mythos of the story has to have a generating element. After all, when it was first written some of what we call fantasy was thought to be real. It is not any "essential element" that must be rationalized, it is the story itself, its universe. The piece must hang together, say something, explain part of the world through its mythic rationale.

The "not here" setting is not to allow odd things to happen but to allow the story to claim it could have happened anywhere. Of course, the modern practice is to claim reality through particularization - this is real because it is in New York. The stories we now call fantasy used to be told about "people like us" in "places like this" but the people and the places changed.

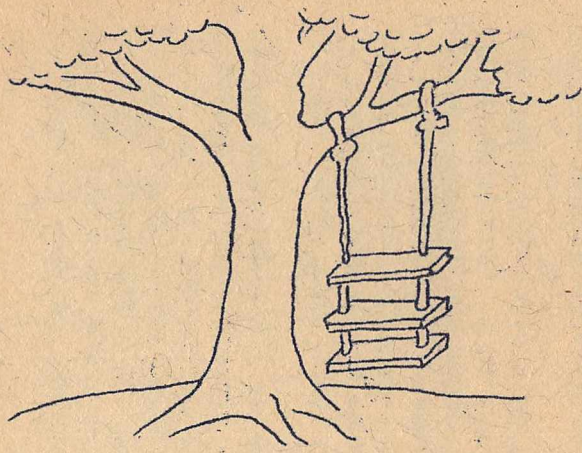
Much of the power SF has over its fans is because we have accepted the mythic rationale of SF. In this sense SF is a religion and fans deserve their appellation as derived from fanatics.

Let me steal your ideas and recast them as follows:

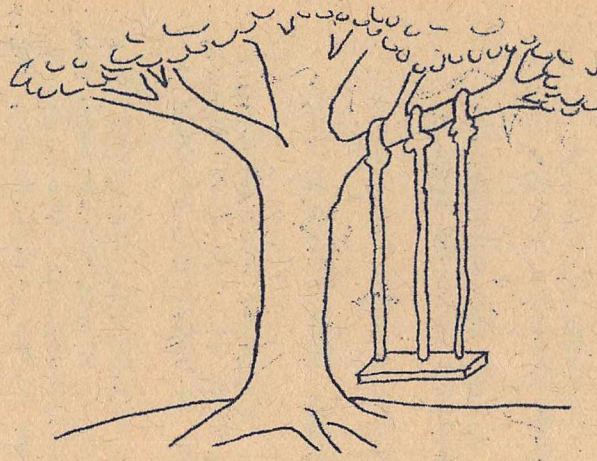
- 1) All fiction is a portrayal of a worldview or mythic rationale.
- 2) What we call fantasy is characterized by a mythic rationale other than the one we use for "reality".
- 3) Science Fiction uses scientific laws, known and postulated, to form its mythic rationales.
- 4) Under the constraint of logical coherence and some sort of cause and effect mechanism, a single "essential element" will generate a mythic rationale. (e.g. The Incomplete Enchanter)

This has the effect of making Speculative Fiction indistinct as a category, but then I'm not clear what people mean by that term and is hence a reflection of my understanding on the subject.

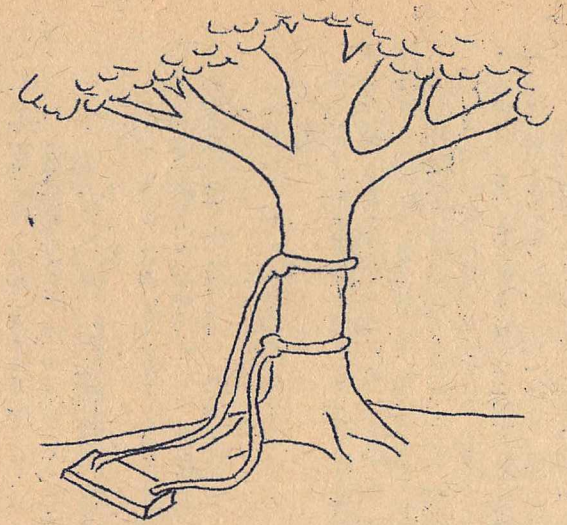
Sue's comments are interesting and thoughtful, but I suspect that the term "mythic rationale" has led to some confusion. I would rather say that The Incomplete Enchanter is science fiction because the author insists on rationalizing the story. That is, the author does the necessary hand waving to claim that it can be rationalized within the scientific viewpoint. It isn't the gadget - it is the necessity for introducing the gadget that makes it SF. We need a ticket and a means of transportation to never-never land. One of those tickets is the belief in a science and technology that is not yet but might be. But when we take our trip in that mode of transportation that we call SF we must accept its constraints, it demands for rationalization, just as when we travel by boat we travel on the water.



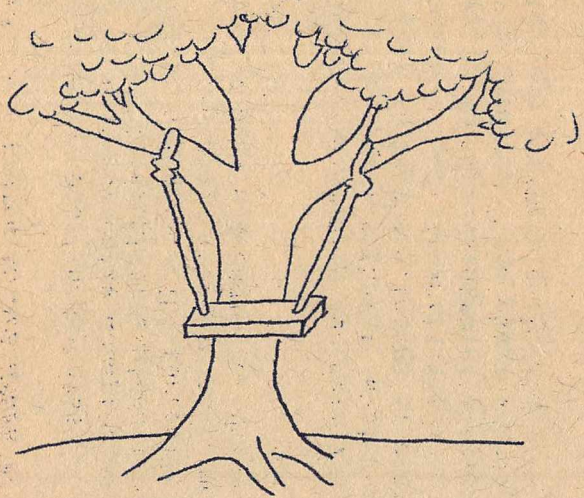
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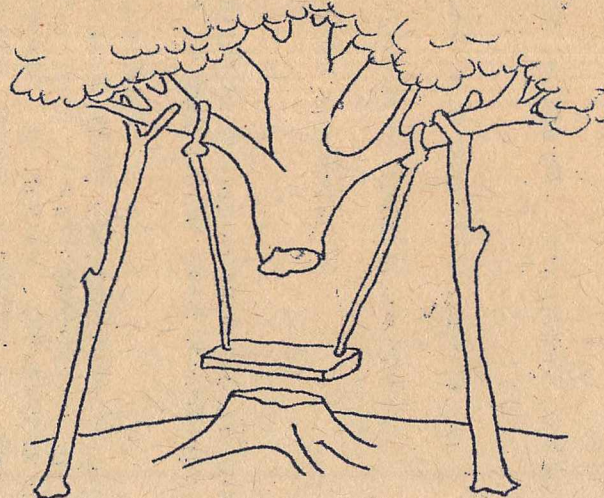
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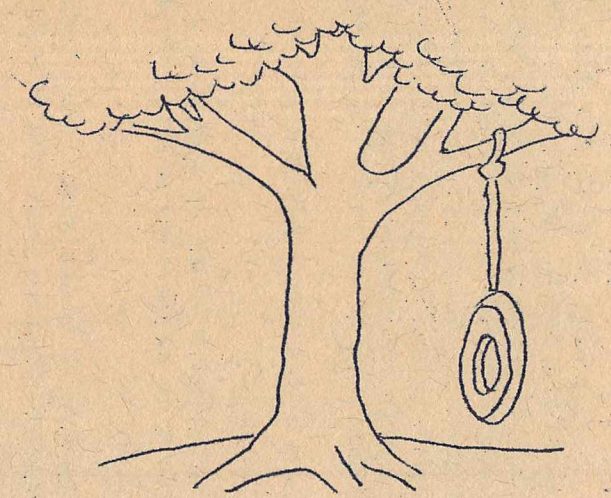
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As INSTALLED AT THE USER'S SITE



WHAT THE USER WANTED