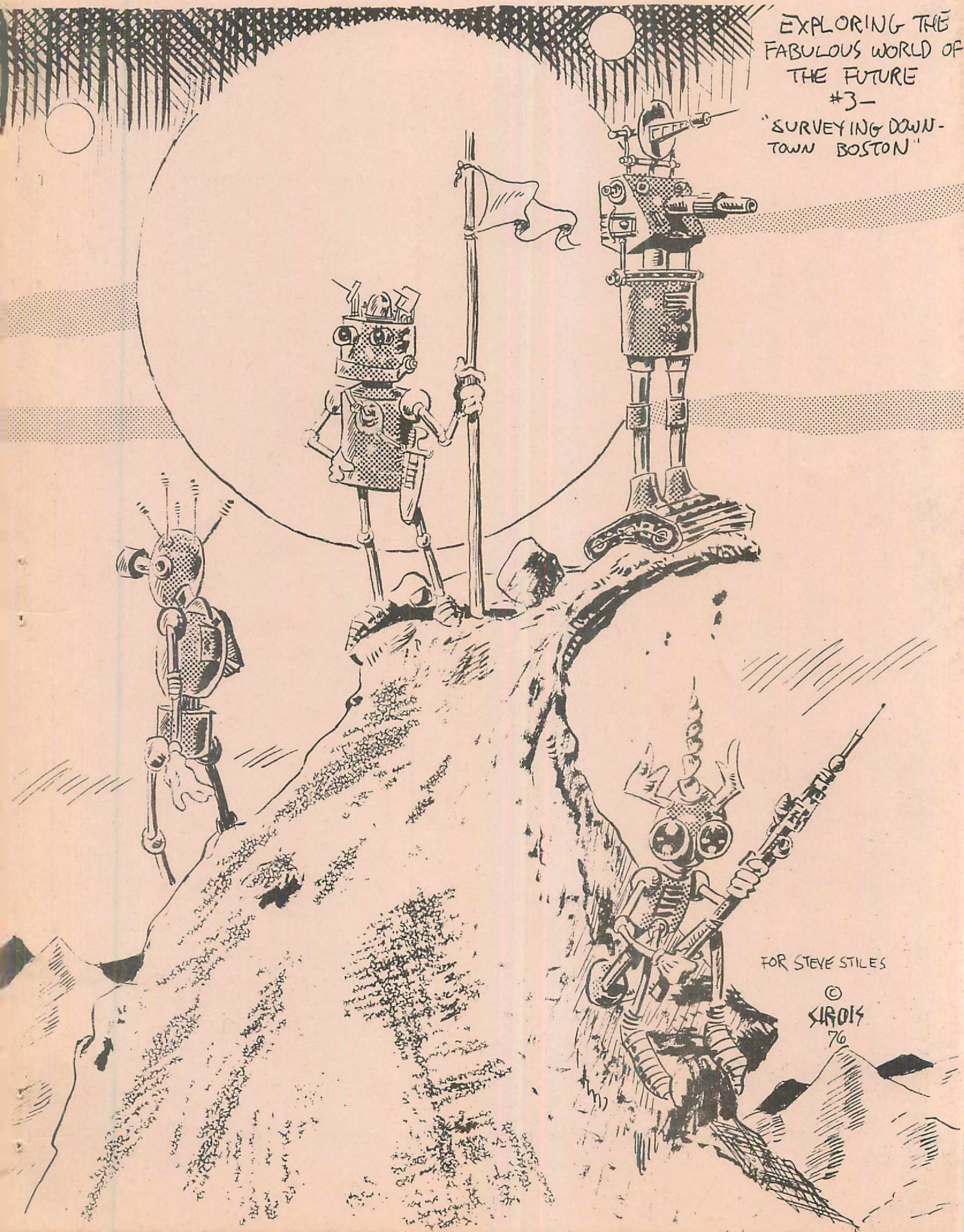
EXPLORING THE FABULOUS WORLD OF THE FUTURE #3—
"SURVEYING DOWN-TOWN BOSTON"
FOR STEVE STILES
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PROPER BOSKONIAN

14

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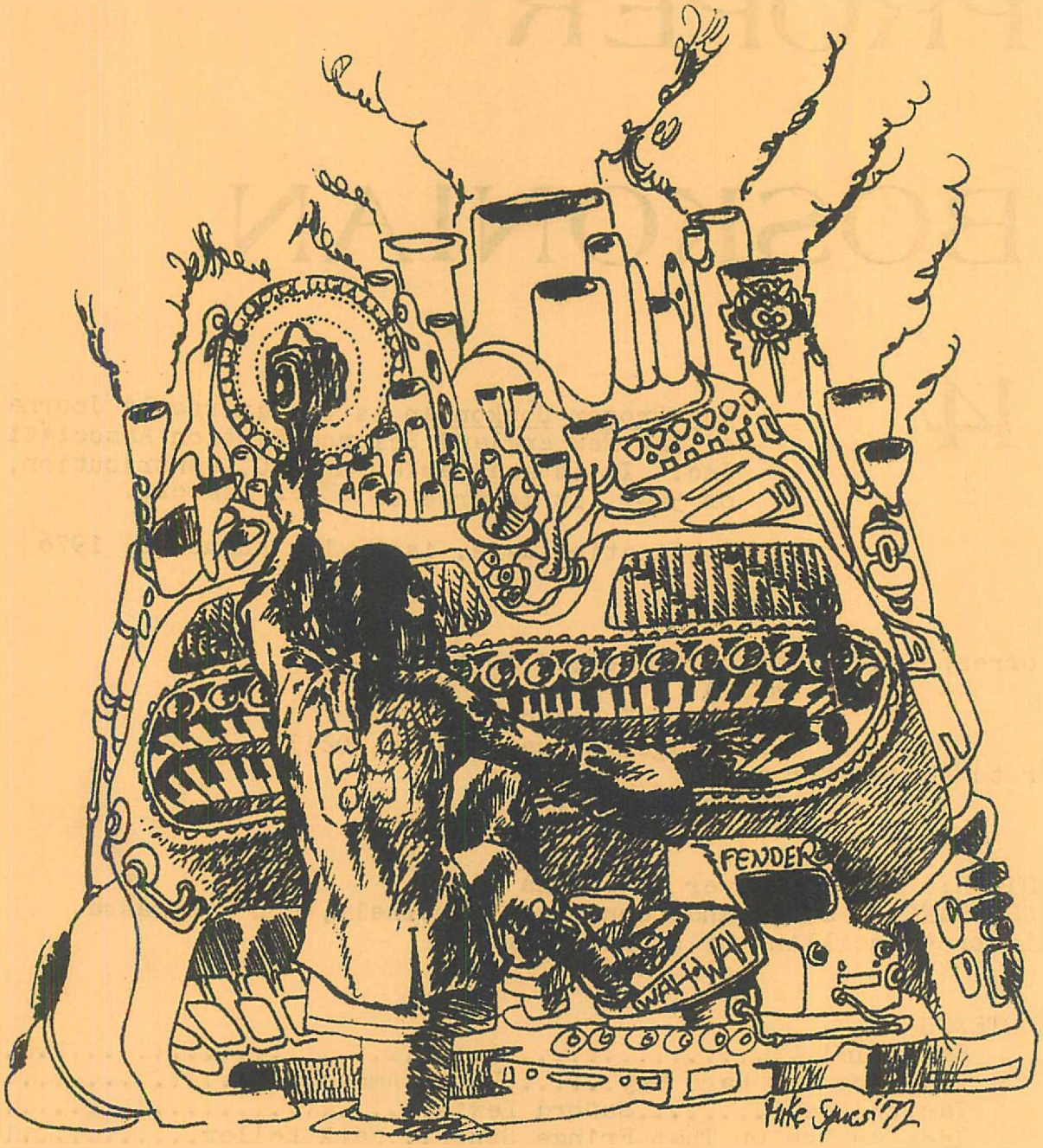


With this issue the editorial reins of Proper Boskonian change hands once again. This is the point at which the new editor traditionally promises frequent and regular publication. You may take these promises as read; grains of salt are available to those who request them.

Actually, I have promised NESFA that Proper Boskonian will appear quarterly for a year; even if it is only two pages long, it will appear quarterly. It should be interesting to see

whether a more frequent PB will elicit a greater response in the form of locs, contributions, and enthusiasm.

NESFA continues to be more or less non-fanzine oriented; it is my opinion that this is a pity, since I think that fanzines are still the main force binding fandom together. In hopes of coaxing more NESFA members to read and enjoy fanzines, I have asked Mike Blake to do a fanzine column, which will begin with the next issue.

Besides this bit of proselytizing for my favorite fannish cause, (More and Better Fanzine Fans), my plans for Proper Boskonian are mainly to produce a regular, neat, and legible fanzine containing material by and/or of interest to NESFA's members and friends. I hope to get articles from a few people who do not usually appear in fanzines. I don't mind publishing fiction or poetry or very long articles or one-paragraph book reviews or sercon stuff or faanish stuff...as long as I like it and in my judgment it would interest PB's audience. Contributions of articles, reviews, or artwork are eagerly sought after.

I would really like to hear from you what you would and would not like to see in Proper Boskonian. Especially those of you who are getting this because you are NESFA members -- PB is paid for out of your dues, and some sort of response from you is the only way I have of telling whether you like what I'm doing with your money! Really, feedback from the readers is food and drink to the editor; I think that the lack of such response is one reason why enthusiasm for getting PB out has faded in many would-be editors, writers, artists, and helpers.

I am especially eager for Proper Boskonian to succeed, because this is the first fanzine I have ever edited. I've done apazines for six years, mostly nattering and mailing comments, and I produce Mythologies, a fanzine edited by my husband, Don. (By "produce" I mean that every so often he hands me a pile of typed stencils with blank spaces every so often. I letter titles, patch in illustrations, run them off on Ronald, my mimeo, and a week or so later hand him a pile of fanzines. For PB, I hand me the pile of stencils...) I have loved fanzines since I first encountered them ten years ago, and to be editing one on my own after all these years of admiring the efforts of other people makes me very proud and happy. I will undoubtedly make mistakes, but they will be errors of inexperience and not those caused by indifference or lack of caring about what I send you. I promise you my very best efforts, and I hope you will enjoy the results.

If you do, please tell me!

Syd

LEARNING THE HARD WAY

by DON D'AMMASSA

It doesn't take very long for a young SF fan to discover that he's a second class citizen. The first time he displays a spaceship-bedecked paperback cover in public, particularly in the view of a high school teacher, it becomes obvious that reading alone is not enough to win the approval of adults. You also have to read the right stuff. No other genre seems to awaken quite the degree of disapproval that SF does. Murder mysteries, war stories, westerns, even nurse novels are tolerated, if not exactly encouraged. But one has but to show a single SF novel to be met with a squad of literary experts concerned with your intellectual welfare.

I was fifteen years old, had read SF for only one year, when my parents moved from Connecticut to Rhode Island. Because the curricula of the two systems was radically different, about half of my classes were with junior and senior students, even though I was only a despised freshman. Cumberland High School was at that time on split sessions, with grades 11 and 12 meeting in the morning, 9 and 10 in the afternoon. The peculiarities of my schedule required that I attend both sessions, taking classes for two of the five morning periods and three of those in the afternoon. It was impractical for me to go home between classes, so I had four study halls per day, five days per week.

Homework, obviously, was no problem, and most of the time I could spend at least part of the day reading paperbacks. Unfortunately, there were no normally scheduled study halls, so a special area had been set aside for me in the office of the vice-principal, Thomas Skahan. Skahan decides that he was personally responsible for my welfare, and he took an almost missionary interest in my reading matter. When I began reading SF novels, he initially clucked disapprovingly, apparently believing it to be a passing aberration. I persisted. On one occasion I was reading I, ROBOT. When Skahan happened to enter my cubicle. With a cursory glance at the title, he asked, "Don't you have nightmares after reading those books?"

Naively, I thought he was expressing honest interest, and I attempted to explain to him that the book dealt with robots as devices of technology rather than monsters, that Asimov was a scientist himself and that the book was not a sensationalist piece of juvenilia. I might as well have saved my breath. "Don't you ever read any good books?" There were any number of sarcastic remarks I might have made at that juncture, but I was at the time trying to get permission to audit a typing course, so I tactfully told him that I had fairly wide reading interests. He harrumphed, plainly not believing a word of it, and I decided that it would be impolitic to press the matter. I thought that that would be the end of the discussion, but I was wrong.

The following morning, there was a stack of hardcover books waiting for me with a note indicating that Skahan felt I might want to try some "real books" for a change. The stack included THE COSSACKS by Tolstoy, which I had read and enjoyed a year or two before, THE UNIVERSE AND DOCTOR EINSTEIN by Lincoln Barnett, which I'd also read, THE EGOIST by Richard Meredith, and a non-fiction piece about the nine planets, originally published in the 1940's, as I recall. I read the Meredith that day, and late that afternoon found myself discussing the three books with Skahan, who seemed skeptical that I had really read them. The following morning I returned the fourth book to him, and pointed out that there were a large number of factual errors, such as the number of moons Jupiter possessed. Skahan asked me what made me think the book was wrong and I confessed that I had learned the true state of affairs from reading SF. "Well," he scoffed, "How can you accept the opinion of some half-literate paperback writer over that of a real scientist?"

I'm a fast learner; I realized immediately that I was going to attract a great deal of unwanted attention if I persisted in arguing in favor of SF. My mother had already expressed a growing displeasure with the direction my reading was taking. I managed to derail some of this disapproval by getting her to read a few carefully selected SF novels. Unfortunately, she began selecting books at random from my shelves before I realized it, and read STRANGE RELATIONS by Philip Jose Farmer and the only Harold Livingston SF novel, THE CLIMACTICON, in rapid succession. From that point on, I was careful to keep any sexually oriented SF from falling into her hands.

I found myself increasingly on the defensive. One of my English teachers began to make indirect references about wasting time reading trash, obviously for my benefit. I walked into economics class one day with Robert Sheckley's THE STATUS CIVILIZATION in my pile of books. William Beck, the teacher, thought the title was THE STATUS OF CIVILIZATION, and he began to lecture the class about how here at last was a student who was interested in the nature of society and so on and so forth. Then he asked me to summarize what the book was about, and when I haltingly told him that it was in fact a science fiction novel, his embarassment turned to a personal animosity that followed me until graduation. He was, unfortunately, my class advisor.

And then, one day, I was sent to the office for having brought a dirty book to school. The book: Theodore Sturgeon's THE COSMIC RAPE.

I think that was the turning point. I'd been ridiculed and lectured to long enough. I vowed that from that time on I would be militantly supportative of SF. I brought no other reading matter to school, indulged my other reading tastes only at home. I began to find methods of inserting my interest into my schoolwork. Whenever we were told to use words in a sentence, I'd exercise my ingenuity.

"Preternatural": There was a preternatural calm over the spaceport.
"Portuitous": The fact that the meteor missed my spaceship was fortuitous indeed.

I was indefatigable. I wrote term papers on SF subjects. For Rhode Island History, I did H.P. Lovecraft. For Civics, I did Orwell's 1984. For science, I did an essay on the possibility of life on other worlds.

My English teachers counterattacked. One gave me an approved list of authors for all book reports, hoping to sidetrack me in the direction of "good" literature. So I read A FABLE by William Faulkner, MAGISTER LUDI by Herman Hesse, THE DEVIL'S DISCIPLE by Taylor Caldwell, and BRAVE NEW WORLD by Aldous Huxley, all involving science fictional or fantastic elements. Another required us to read one short story by each of fifteen writers, including Jessamyn West, Jesse Stuart, James Thurber, Charles Dickens, and Rudyard Kipling. I found fantasy stories by each of them as well, even though it sometimes meant reading entire collections of stories in order to locate one.

My creative writing teacher capitulated early. Even when given a straightforward exercise, I would work an element of fantasy into it. On one occasion, we were asked to describe in minute detail a single human being. I wrote a one thousand word description of an elderly woman sitting in a chair, utterly motionless except for two long, white hands that were in constant motion in her lap. Then, borrowing shamelessly from a Theodore Sturgeon story, I used the last sentence to explain that, despite her animated hands, the woman had died.

Eventually, to the relief of the teachers as well as myself, I graduated and left for college. Since college instructors are less likely to interact on this same basis, I had little difficulty there, and had the added reinforcement of finding a small group of real SF fans at the same time. In fact, I began writing for fanzines, and began receiving things like TWILIGHT ZINE, edited by Leslie Turek, and STROON in the mail, one of the latter of which included a handwritten note from one Tony Lewis, asking if I'd be interested in becoming one of the charter members of a new SF club that might be forming in New England.

A relatively peaceful time, but there was one incident. Michigan State University is a vast, sprawling campus, and it's a long walk to the library from some areas. In my sophomore year, the library announced that it was going to set up individual branch libraries in some of the dorms, concentrating on fiction, which would be kept open seven days per week and all night, if students would volunteer to staff them without pay.

It sounded like a good idea to me, so I joined a group that met with one of the library administrators to iron out the details. The administrator was a beaming, grey haired woman, who bubbled over with enthusiasm for books. She had whipped us all up to a high pitch of interest when she dropped the bomb.

"Now, we're going to want a good selection of classics and contemporary fiction, some of the better mystery novels and westerns, and, of course, none of that trashy science fiction."

I reverted immediately to my high school offensive mode, rose from my chair, and said in a stage whisper: "I don't think I want to work with a librarian who feels that books are trashy." And I walked out, never to return.

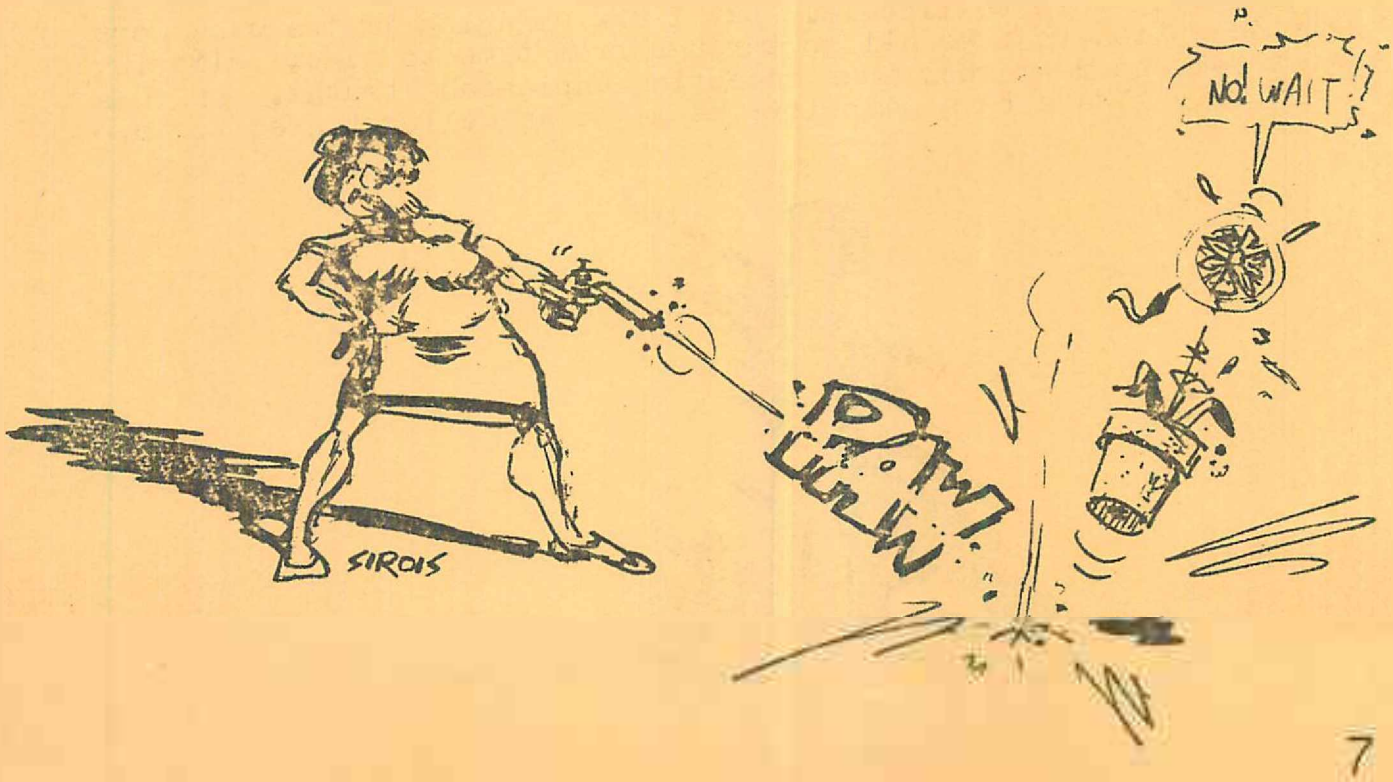
A couple of years later, I was going out to do my student teaching at a Michigan high school. I was particularly pleased to learn that Waterford-Kettering High School actually gave credit for a course in which the student was allowed to read whatever he liked, marks being derived from periodic bits of writing based on past reading. Naturally

I was determined to foster every grain of interest in SF I found, to defend any student I saw reading it against the depredations of my well-meaning but ill-informed colleagues. I had my cause, you see, and was determined to carry its flag.

Things didn't work out quite that way. My earliest hint that something was wrong came when my English Literature class was reading BEOWULF. Some of the students objected that it was unbelievable because Grendel obviously couldn't exist. I tried to explain the role of fantasy in literature, and asked for members of the class to suggest good stories they'd read that involved fantasy figures. There were no suggestions. I asked how many remembered the ghost from HAMLET, but none of them had read HAMLET. I asked about 1984, BRAVE NEW WORLD, and THE ODYSSEY, but no one had read the former, and the few who had read Homer couldn't remember much about it. Well, thought I, I seem to have collected all of the non-dreamers in a single class. So I tried with each of my other classes in turn, and got pretty much the same results with each.

One day I was monitoring a study hall and spotted a girl reading one of James Blish's STAR TREK books. I wandered over to where she sat and asked her if she was enjoying the book. Warily, she said yes. I asked her if the read much science fiction. She looked puzzled. "I don't read science fiction. I just read these because I think Spock is keen."

I retired in confusion, and didn't return to the fray until my supervising teacher one day suggested that, as a change of pace, I read a short story aloud to one class. That night, I agonized over my decision. What should I read them? Not a technical story, that would turn off many of the girls. Not a love story, that would turn off the boys. Skip Ballard, he's too difficult for most of them. I dismissed "All You Zombies" because I didn't think everyone would be able to



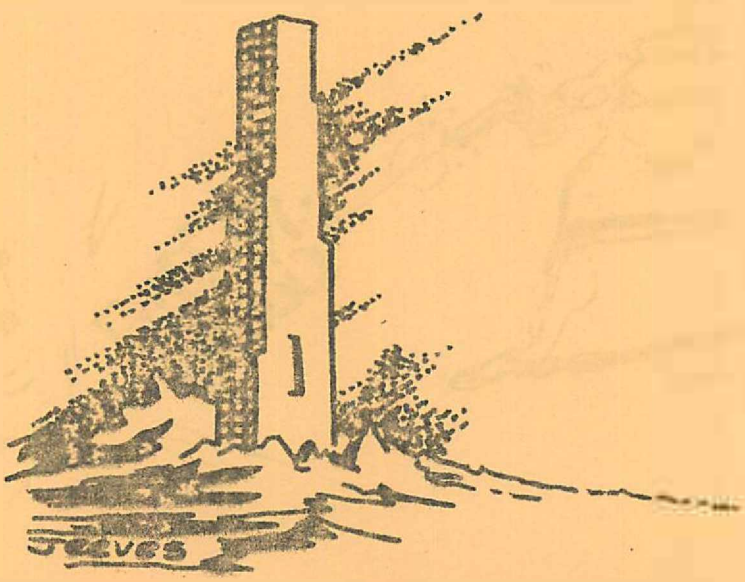
follow the logic, and I didn't want to try to explain time travel paradoxes to the uninitiate. Then I had an inspiration. It was getting close to Christmas, and one of my favorite fantasy stories is a Christmas story, "Nackles", by Donald Westlake, written under the penname Curt Clark.

"Nackles", for those unfamiliar with the story, is an anti-Santa Claus. His sleigh moves through tunnels beneath the Earth, drawn by a team of dead white goats. His purpose is to visit the boys and girls who haven't been good, and take them away forever. Nackles is invented by a particularly nasty father, and the idea catches on so quickly that it has soon spread across the country. So many people believe in Nackles that he becomes real, and ironically his first victim is the father who created him.

Now don't get me wrong. "Nackles" is not a great piece of literature. But it's well written, involves no prior familiarity with SF, appeals to a wide variety of backgrounds, and is simple to comprehend. When I had finished reading it, I asked the class for their reactions. A few failed to understand the ending, chiefly because they hadn't paid enough attention. One or two thought it was kind of cute, but nothing to brag about. The vast majority objected that it was a terrible story, because you couldn't make something real just by believing it to be so.

Obviously I was disappointed. I'd played my best card, and it hadn't been good enough. I thought about the incident for a long time, trying to figure out just what it is that makes some people receptive to unusual ideas and others not. I came to no conclusions. Maybe people are just afraid of the free exercise of their imaginations. And those same people often resent the fact that some of us aren't. It was apparent that the experiment had failed, that I had not conveyed anything to my students.

But it wasn't a total failure either. I learned a lesson from the experience. I learned that the students were right, that you can't make something real just by believing it to be so. I believed that people really would like SF if they were only exposed to it in an atmosphere that encouraged them to like it. But I was engaging in the same sort of self deception that we all go through from time to time, believing pleasant falsehoods rather than accepting unpleasant truths. SF fans will probably always be a minority; we might as well get used to it.



TANITH LEE

3 NOVELS OF SELF-SEARCH

The Birthgrave (DAW 1975)
Don't Bite The Sun (DAW 1976)
The Storm Lords (DAW 1976)

by Suford Lewis

With that title, those who read LitCrit for plot can skip the rest because I am merely going to elaborate on this basic theme. Oh sure, I'm going to compare and contrast and talk about style and myth. If what you really want to know is "did I like 'em", 'course I did or I wouldn't spend any time rereading them. Now that I've given away the plot of this article, you should be warned that I'm going to talk about the plot of these novels enough to give away their plots too.

Tanith Lee explores the culture of her characters as her characters stumble towards figuring themselves out. None of them sets out to figure out who they are; this just happens. In fact, one of the weaknesses of The Birthgrave is that the protagonist does not set out to do anything at all. She floats with the story, reacts or runs away. At least the protagonist of Don't Bite the Sun is looking at the culture she is in, trying to figure out where she belongs. Considering she is in her own culture and Karrakay isin a strange new world, Karrakay seems limp.

In The Birthgrave, Tanith Lee plays a trick on us. SF readers are used to straightforward, objective narrative even in the first person. The events may be odd, even fantastic, but they are assumed to have rational, external causes. It was with a feeling of chagrin that I read the denoument of The Birthgrave. "And then he woke up" is the SF cop-out ending. When I discovered that the problems to be solved (which revolve around the nature of Karrakay) are internal to the narrator I felt a bit cheated. As a long-time SF reader my expectations were to discover the old nemesis of the Lost Ones. In the usual SF novel the protagonist does overcome the ancient nemesis of the race with the long-quested-for talisman (the green jade in this case, her soul mate). Well, in a sense Karrakay did find her soul mate and did overcome the ancient nemesis of her race. She is her soul mate and the Power she thought she had to deny is part of her like the green jade. And arrogant pride of power was surely her race's nemesis and the horrible plague that destroyed them is either the symbol of their rottenness or a direct result of their perception of it.

This gives us the key to why Karrakay survived the plague. At four she did not have that arrogance nor when she awoke sixteen (?) years later does she behave as her race had. Also, she struggles against the idea that she is evil; she externalizes that part of her and resists its attempts to kill her. She also

perceived her race and their acts through the eyes of humans and knows them for evil. She may aaccept them as the rightful acts of superior beings but not as her rightful behavior.

To have these perceptions she had to renounce her power and see herself as weak and human. However she could not continue to see her Power and part of herself as evil and still live. Here Tanith Lee cheats a little. Instead of Karrakay confronting herself, she calls down an alien starship to straighten herself out almost against her will. Deus ex machina (actually it's the computer that gives her back her past and her race's culture so it's machina ex machina....). Now that is a decided flaw. I don't care what one can claim it symbolizes-- reaching outside oneself to find oneself etc. I don't care how many UFOs were sighted earlier in the story; they are not integral. They are dragged in to get the author out of a corner in the last thirty pages.

Up to that point, and in the repetition of themes of the Lost People's culture transmuted into events in Karrakay's life (birth out of the earth, from under a mountain, worldly power in the shape of servants and command, the knife of death that only comes when accepted) the plot has unity. The men that echo the priest, Sekish, echo him in their actions even though they really are not any manifestation of him. So these things are in her mind and real simultaneously and she must come to terms with their different meanings and their importance to her. That's fine and we get a lot of neat local color along the way but the solution is not of a piece with what goes before.

Another problem is how long Karrakay was under the mountain. Sixteen years is too short a time for the monuments to be weathered away, the roads and cities to be overgrown and the memories of men to be so dim about the Javhovor. A couple of generations at least must pass before humans can be sure there are no old ones left. Some of the weathered remnants of colossal buildings of monumental durability are faded into oblivion-- this literally takes a thousand years (without smog, anyhow).

I'm not going to drone on about how we all simultaneously fight to find ourselves and to lose ourselves, to live and to die. That's rather trite and obvious and trivializes Karrakay's dilemna, but because it is so it makes her problem more vivid to us. ..

In contrast to Karrakay, who is trying to lose herself but finds herself, the protagonist in Don't Bite the Sun is trying to find herself and never does. She even loses her feeling of identification with her city in the trying, and we never do learn her name. It never occurs to her to tell us or anyone else. The assumption that everyone knows her is an indication of her egotism. Where Karrakay starts out timid and fearful, she is confident and active. But Karrakay is living in a brutal primitive world and does and causes more than the girl of four BEE can in her safe city where you can always get a new body.

Don't Bite the Sun is deceptive. The first time I read it I didn't think there was much to it but some important things happen. At the start, she can't return Hatta's passionate regard because

Hatta makes ugly bodies for himself. She hates paying for things (the currency is emotion); she wants to do something meaningful but not anything inconvenient. She is fond of things that don't demand anything from her, like the dragon that is decorative and harmless and Hergal whose passion is Byronically self-centered. Then she steals a pet-- a real native animal from outside that demands respect (it bites). It's the only creature she goes out of her way for. She goes back to an old body so it will know her, she stays "herself" for it, and it teaches her something, something that makes her feel differently about the decorative synthetic animals and, finally, about herself. It is worth noting that just as she reaches her best understanding of the pet in the rainstorm and names it Thunder-flower, in going back to the small piece of the city that is the archaeological camp, the pet is killed--killed by the camp's defense screen.

Though they can have new bodies almost at will, there is no new body for the pet. Reality intrudes. The cities seem to require that no deep attachments be made, no meaningful events can happen and we certainly don't see anything more than superficial occur. The Jang try to destroy things so something will happen, even if it's only rain. but they can't do any real damage. The Jang, the youth, are so catered to by this culture because they have emotional energy to spend and they haven't found anything to do with it yet. Really important things are internal, I claim, and the protagonist is still groping toward this at the end, having decided to reach out to Hatta in spite of his neurotic ugliness because he is such a kind person.

The more I think about it, the better I like Don't Bite the Sun. The painful quest for something real and meaningful seems to be stymied in the city bubbles where no one can die. But reality and meaning aren't generated by death and suffering; they are generated by people internally. Death and suffering call them to our attention, rudely mocking the permanence of what we build inside ourselves and connect to the world outside ourselves.

The Storm Lord has a lot more action in it and is a much more conventional SF novel. It also has the mythic elements of the lost king, the conflict of two races and cultures, the reassertion of the older religion. We can see the culture's history clearly through references to the men who "rode dragons down from the sky" and can deduce how the dark, black-haired people carved their empire out of the pale, light-haired people's nations. In developing Raldnor, Tanith Lee gives us a tour of the nations of the dark men and the different cultures of the paler men are illustrated. She has set up this world carefully, having the Dragon Lords carve theirempire out of the nationstates of the pale men (who are not uniformly admirable) instead of out of the pastoral communes where the pale peoples' mind-speech is an integral part of their lives rather than a private thing between close friends or relatives. She has the major portion of her pale people give up some of their mind-speech and other psychic abilities in favor of cities and trade and kingship.

In The Storm Lord as in the other two, Tanith Lee makes her individual characters work both as symbols of their type or culture and as characters with understandable, consistent motiv-

ations. Mal Vala is not merely a useful villain to make the plot work, she has reasonable human motivations. I object to her being an almost classic example of the disappointed romantic turned bitter and lusting for power but not on realistic grounds.. (i object to the women being such passive dolls. Astaris is so passive she hardly breathes. Except for Mal Vala and the Princess Ashnesea--who isn't alive-- none of the women do much and the culture isn't set up for them to. However, that is a complaint irrelevant to what Tanith Lee is doing with her storyand, I might add, to my enjoyment of it, since I always identify with the most interesting character on stage at the moment anyhow.)

Tanith Lee uses the conventions of myth to simplify the explication of the plot. After all, we know who the lost king is, and we know that he is supposed to right the wrongs of the past, both personal and political, we know that he has to be a top notch fighter and leader so if he meets a few useful people by luck at key times, though things would perhaps not normally work out so neatly and quickly, we aren't jarred because it fits in the mythic framework and, if perhaps the meeting is serendipitous, the motives of the parties are clear and reasonable so that the outcome of the chance meeting is not mere luck. Tanith Lee even cleverly uses this mythic element as a causal force in the plot by clothing it as a dead princess stirring the affairs of men or the power of the old goddess reemerging. After all these are legitimate forces in novels and (suitably culturally reinterpreted) in history as well. The usurper culture is losing its steam (as its Storm Lords lose their strength through inbreeding) and the older culture and it must strike a new balance.

As in myths, the vehicle of the new balance is a new king born from both ruling lines, old and new. Unlike the cardboard mythic hero, Raldnor must personally solve his internal conflicts due to being part of both cultures and, like Karrakay, he begins by rejecting part of himself; then, without realizing he really is a dragon, he dyes his hair and masquerades as one just as Karrakay masquerades as a Goddess without believing she is one. Thus they both learn a bit about themselves at arms length, deciding what they think of those elements of their personality.

Again, like Karrakay, Raldnor must rediscover his birth and true nature but this time Tanith Lee has figured out a reasonable way to do it, and Raldnor has solved most of his internal conflicts by the time it happens. Instead of separating him from the culture around him it suddenly brings him into focus with it and he sees he has a duty he owes to the past which he must fulfill so both he and his culture can be freed from the unresolved conflict. Again Tanith Lee uses the mythic elements to forward the action by making it a foregone conclusion that the imbalance is felt throughout the culture and everyone feels a vague urge to rebalance it. And correspondingly, Mal Vala and Amrek feel their rule to be tenuous and their time to be turning. Raldnor finds himself like a seed crystal in a supersaturated solution and events crystallyze around him rapidly.

It is interesting to note that where Karrakay and the narrator of Don't Bite the Sun find themselves outside of their cultures, Raldnor finds himself, as the union of two cultures, at

the center of his. This probably reflects the relative ease we have in this culture of perceiving a male's relation to his culture and the continuing difficulty we have with the female's culture (which used to be a separate-- but equal-- culture from that of the male but which has disappeared).

The most violent quibbles I have with The Storm Lord have little to do with Tanith Lee. The cover is execrable! It is a base distortion of what belongs there: the towering ivory and gold idol of Anakira-- an eight-armed woman with golden snakes for hair, her hips merging into the coiled body of a snake-- incense wreathing up to a dim ceiling filled with ghosts--in particular the Princess Ashnesea, dead and her city in ruins before the story begins, the priestess Ashnee who knew what she was to bring forth, and the child Anici who appeared in dreams as a pale ghost blown to ashes. In the foreground is Astaris like a carved icon, dark, with blood-colored hair, her eyes unfocussed, her gaze all inward, waiting, and Raldnor, dark but with pale hair and amber eyes, searching, burning after something. After all, that is most of what the story is about. And the map shows barely half the lands described and far too few of the cities! Both the map and the cover are slanderous truncated versions of the story.

Sure The Storm Lord is an almost standard retelling of a tale of a mythic king, but all the action is doubly motivated both from the mythic cultural standpoint and from the individual human standpoint. The characters aren't cardboard counters on a game board moved about by "greater forces"; they move of their own power, their internal drives consistent with and part of the things they symbolize.

Tanith Lee has the ability to make her characters real and her cultures hang together. She is particularly good at naming things and attatches importance to names and the act of naming. It is no accident that Ashnesea, Ashnee, and Anici are related names. The details of clothing and mannerisms are well invented and plentiful. The wealth of vivid description, colors, textures, odors, sometimes dazzle us. When rain is described as molten golden streams the reader may have to scramble to determine whether a volcano is erupting or whether it is just raining. Partly this is due to the use of vivid metaphor and partly to the first person style of narration. Even though The Storm Lord and The Birthgrave are not strictly first person narratives the point of view is such that the reader is told the story in terms of the protagonist's feelings and perceptions. This makes for heightened vividness the way Tanith Lee does it and she uses it to both draw the reader in and to remind us that life and perceptions are all subjective, objective narration is an illusion, an approximation of reality sometimes good, sometimes not. One could even claim that Tanith Lee redefines reality in terms of what it does to our feelings and perceptions. Reinterpreting The Birthgrave with this definition makes the space ship plot resolver seem less out of place but still leaves us with a to my mind disagreeably passive protagonist-- watching shadows on the cave wall until someone shakes her shoulder and shows her a viewpoint that makes the shapes clearer. I prefer the idea that the protagonists may (somehow) interact with reality (whatever it is) as they do in the other two novels even though one of them reminds us in its very title that reality is bigger than we are and we can get hurt.

KEEP AN EYE ON THAT FRINGE STUFF!

--MARK KELLER

As we all know, publishers and authors are sometimes reluctant to use the label 'science fiction' because it might damage sales. At the very least, it causes many managers of bookstores to dump the stuff in a corner and deprive it of display space.

Here are ten books that came out in the last few years, some good, some bad - all of them about themes familiar to SF readers, and none of them labelled SF on the cover. They include a retelling of a very old legend, a utopian travelogue, a story of pl planetary engineering, and an adventure about a new weapons system that wins the war at the last minute.

I didn't notice reviews of any of these in the fan or pro SF press. This is a shame, because there are at least two good books in the lot. There are also three absolute stinkers, but then Sturgeon's Law applies to mundane fiction as well as SF. ("Mundane" sounds more scornful than "mainstream", doesn't it?)

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Let's start with one which is not terribly bad, but not terribly good either: just a pleasant read - Eaters of the Dead, by Michael Crichton. (Hardcover is Knopf, 1975)

Crichton prides himself on being versatile - Andromeda Strain, Great Train Robbery, and all those John Lange action adventure paperbacks for NAL. In Eaters, he goes into the far past for a historical novel, backed up with false scholarly appendices such as confused folks in Andromeda Strain. The story starts with an actual historical person: the Arab merchant Ibn Fadlan, who traveled up the Volga River in 921A.D. and met a number of Norse or Viking traders on their way south to Constantinople. Ibn Fadlan was the product of a wealthy, civilized nation: the Iraq of Harun al-Rashid, represented by the incomparable jewel-city of Baghdad. The Norsemen were representatives of the lowest depths of the European Dark Ages - unwashed, suspicious, nervous about charms and omens, ever ready to bury an ax in the skull of a foreigner.

Ibn Fadlan left a manuscript report on his travels, copies of which exist to this day. It is a useful source of information for historians concerned with the habits and customs of Norse expansion,

since little other documentation has survived, at least for those bands that went east into Russia.

Crichton adds an imaginary chapter to Ibn Fadlan's travels. Instead of returning home in 922, the Arab traveler is forcibly invited by a band of Norsemen to accompany them back to Denmark. They are mostly drunk, and friendly enough, but very insistent. So it's north up the Dnieper we go.

So far, you say, an adventure story set in Dark Ages Europe. Why do I list this as fringe SF? Crichton sneaks up on it gradually. The Norsemen are afraid of foggy nights during the voyage. Back in Scandia, something bad lives in the marshes and slips out to visit human habitations on such foggy nights and...well, Ibn Fadlan can't quite follow the whispered story, not yet.

At this point, I began to feel a touch of something familiar about the plot, but couldn't place it. Read on, says I. --We arrive in Denmark, and find a burned-out village along the shore. Viking raid? No, something else, claim the Norsemen. Big hairy things that slip out of the fog, and kill people, and steal their heads for...what? The Creatures of the Mist, the Eaters of the Dead, the Wendol have struck again.

Now <u>where</u> have I seen this before? Crichton is copying an old story, I'm sure. But at any rate this seems to be developing into a nice heroic fantasy, men versus monsters. The Norse band travels across the sea to Gothland, an area unusually hard hit by Wendol attacks. The band's leader, Buliwyf, tells King Higlac that he and his men will fight the monsters. Ibn Fadlan is included in the deal, although he would much rather be in Baghdad.

King Higlac has a fortress, Hurot, which the Wendol are sure to attack. Buliwyf and his men wait in the darkened hall for the creatures. (Wait a minute! Wait a minute! Now I recognize the plot!!) --Here they come, kicking down the door, huge hairy stooped men carrying stone axes: the Wendol. And sure enough, the heroes drive them back, and Buliwyf cuts off the arm of one of the monsters, and displayes it in the hall next day.

The Last of the Neanderthals - cannibal headhunters is what they are. You recognize what comes next, of course. Buliwyf has to hunt down the "Great Mother" of the Wendol in a cave under water, and he has to fight a dragon, too. As I said, this is the retelling of a very old story. Crichton does it with a perfectly straight face. Part of the game is to see how far you get before you realize the parallels with a certain famous Old English epic poem.

Quite likely some of Crichton's readers will finish the book and never get the joke. This one is fun to read, and if you already know the story it's based on, why you can admire his ingenuity in working out rational explanations.

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<u>Eaters</u> is arguably fringe SF. It might be as easily called fantasy, or simply pastiche. But the next book, <u>Floating Worlds</u> (Knopf, 1975), by Cecelia Holland, is definitely science fiction

in theme and subject. It is by an author who until now has done historical novels only, and this shows in the narrative and characters. I can't say the book is a success.

I was waiting for this one when it came out. I have long been fond of Holland's historicals, which are mostly set in medieval Europe between the Norman Conquest of England and the Fall of Constantinople. I especially like the extremely restrained and honed style she uses.

There are two ways to establish background in a period strange to the reader, such as twelfth-century Italy in Holland's Great Maria. One way is to show off all your research. Give minutely detailed descriptions of the rooms, the costumes, the weapons, the landscapes, the jewelry. Convince the reader that all this exists by painting elaborate word-pictures, in such complete thoroughness that an illustrator could draw the scene from your description and leave no blank spaces.

Many pop writers do this as a matter of habit - Robbins, Wallace, Hailey. A flow of details convinces the reader that the writer must have seen the place or have knowledge of it. Thus the "insider" novels: we are given all the authentic inside details of an airport, or an automobile executive's office, or even the mouth of a shark.

Many SF and fantasy writers do this too, attempt to swamp with details. The example that comes to mind is John Brunner in Stand on Zanzibar, The Jagged Orbit, and The Sheep Look Up. Going way back, A. Merrit used to paint elaborate word-pictures of the scene in the cave, or the weeping Face.

There is another way, however, which is just the opposite. This is the method Holland uses, that of very careful selection of detail. Her characters move about their medieval world, and it is very intensely realized; it is a solid world. Yet, when you look over the books, you realize that Holland spends very little time t alking about landscapes, or rooms, or clothing. The things her characters would take for granted - the backgrounds - are just not mentioned. Only what is unusual for the period, what is perhaps slightly out of place, attracts the attention of the inhabitants of the novels, and thus is brought to our notice.

This is very hard to do, this feel for what would be noteworthy in a society 800 years past. Sometimes you may have to reread a paragraph in one of Holland's books before you grasp what the characters are looking at. They never lecture each other about ways of attaching bridles, or how poultices are applied, or other commonplace details of life.

Once again, notice the applicability to SF. There is the problem of giving the background of a society strange to the reader. SF, like a historical novel, shows human consciousness in a setting other than that of common experience. Many SF writers lack skill in inserting background; they start off a story with 500-word quotes from the "Encyclopedia Galactica", or they have characters lecture each other about star-drives. How hard it is to use the Heinlein approach and have the strange aspects accepted without notice: "The door dilated."

So I knew Holland could have characters move effectively through a solid and lived-in world. I knew she could convey background without excessive detail. When I heard she was writing an SF novel, my question was - can she come up with a background and plot that is half-way convincing?

Reading the cover blurb may produce groans. Floating Worlds is about the Space Mongols from the outer planets who stage raids on the asteroid mines and space stations of Mars and Venus Crichton can swipe Beowulf, Niven and Pournelle can swipe Dante's Commedia; why not a swipe of "Raiders From the Rings"?

It's too bad, in a way. Holland has done two novels about the steppe riders invading Europe, The Death of Attila and Until the Sun Falls, which are very effective in depicting the proud warriers of a plunder-based society. In Floating Worlds, they drive their manually controlled spaceships down past Jupiter, rather than riding a string of hairy ponies past the Carpathians. But the personalities and the motivations are the same.

The characters are well done, and that's part of the trouble. You can believe that if space barbarians based on Saturn raided Earth, this is how they would behave. But that major premise just isn't acceptable. It sticks in the mind and keeps shaking that suspension of disbelief. This resembles Arslan, by F.M. Engh, a book in which a 25-year-old Turkistani general conquers the USSR and the United States, then sets up his capital in the American Midwest. On any one page, the story is believable, and the actions seem to fall into place. But when you stop for a minute to think about the underlying assumption - it all falls apart. No way, no way.

Floating Worlds falls into fragments, each individually well done. But they do not hold together. Each micro-society is effortlessly sketched through dialog and casual references. It's just the major society that doesn't make sense. It is vaguely medieval in outlook, with enclaves of twentieth century hippie anarchy (Earth), nineteenth century militarism (Mars), post-industrial loose utopianism (orbital stations), and pure Genghis Khan tribal warlordism (Saturn and Uranus).

What we are shown of Earth Government resembles the committee politics of a Dormitory Steering Collective in a Free University. The people would certainly be capable of handling pizza deliveries or laundry schedules. Their doubtful skill in planetary politics is stated but never shown. From this group, Paula Mendoza is sent out as Ambassador to the Styth, the violent raiders who live in floating cities deep in the gas-belts of Saturn and Uranus.

The Styth are a different subspecies of humans, derived from Earth-human stock but now tall, ebony-skinned, with retractible claws. Paula works her way up from near-slave to mistress, busily scheming to make "her" Styth war-lord the ruler of the Styth Federation, and then perhaps the Solar System. Most of the book takes place in the cold, dim, floating cities. These are only briefly described: they cover the entire inside surface of the bubble-domes, thanks to gravity polarization perhaps, resembling Clarke's Rama or O'Neill's original L-5 cylinders. Why anyone would sink one of these into the surface of a gas-giant planet is never made clear.

Read the book for the scattered brilliant scenes: the trial of the Styth raders before an orbital Arbitrator; the ritual duels in the Styth tribal councils; Paula's growing isolation from her boy-child, bastard of a Styth war-lord. It makes you wonder what Holland could have done with a background that held together better.

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That's two near-misses, books that I liked but would not make an effort to buy or save or re-read. Now comes a winner: Ecotopia, by Ernest Callenbach (Berkely: Banyan Tree Books, 1975). It's a large-format paperback, and I don't think the publisher has very good distribution east of the Rockies, so you may have to search for this one a bit. It's worth it.

What's the book about? The subtitle is "The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston". A generation from now, the Northwest U.S. has seceded from the Union to form its own province: Ecotopia, incorporating former Washington, Oregon, and northern California. The new country is run by "stable-state" oriented technocrats, who are busily phasing out private cars and installing windpower generators on all the houses. The emphasis is on decentralized industry, recycling, natural foods, planting forests, stabilizing population, and I think you can carry the list on from theres. It is the nightmare of the subdivider and land developer - the "eco-freaks" have taken over.

William Weston is a reporter from New York, one of the few Americans allowed into Ecotopia since the Secession. He is working not only for his editor, who wants feature material on the strange people behind the "Green Curtain". He has been asked by the President of the U.S. to find out how close Ecotopia is to collapse, how long before the United States can reabsorb the breakaway nation. The President is sure it must collapse soon; how could a bunch of eco-freaks possibly maintain a comples economy while rejecting fossil fuels and nuclear generators?

So weston is on his way, carrying two sets of orders. As the subtitle suggests, this is an epistolatory novel, running on two levels. The standard travelog stuff comprises the "reports", sent home to his paper by way of Canada (no direct contact). The emotional responses of Weston, an Easterner trying to grasp the new society of the West, are given in the alternating "notebook" sections, reserved for his own, and the President's, use. Slowly you begin to notice a shift - Weston becomes less critical, discrepancies start to appear between what he sees and the laundered versions he sends back east. He is perhaps becoming a bit comverted.

The first impression you might have of the book is "Oh grump -- another ecological fantasy, neo-Indians in tents talking about harmony with Nature", and you might be tempted to pass it by. But Callenbach has thought things out more than most, and his ideas sprinkle every page. Part of the background comes from his previous book, Living Poor With Style (Bantam), which describes what may be called "less environmentally damaging lifestyles". Part comes from current experience. The reforestation collectives in Ecotopia, whose tree-planting passion comes close to worship, have small-scale 1976 analogs in groups like the Hoedads of Oregon. This is a 200-member cooperative that lives in campers and trailers, and is legally bonded as a reclamation corporation, getting contracts from Federal agencies and timber companies for brush-clearing and for replanting slopes. They work hard at it, for not much money. But clearly they could become the core of a much larger organization, if the political climate is right. They are already living the Ecotopian life, and some of them say so in just those words. The technical capacity for decentralized, low-impact Ecotopian lifestyles certainly exists today in the U.S. What is lacking is the consensus desire to implement them. this is one thing which distinguishes the book from many other utopias: no major change in Technology or human nature is needed, merely the convincing of a majority to believe what maybe 3% of the population believes already.

The traditional utopia, going back to Thomas More, supplies three things: permanent peace, guaranteed abundance, and conditioned virtue. No more war, no more hunger, no more evil thoughts. It is the method used to achieve the last of the three that generally sparks anti-utopian writers. Nobody says that war and hunger are good, not any more, but many claim they would prefer the risk of war and hunger if the alternative is government "tyranny over the mind." (Did I hear "Seeds of Change"?)

By these standards, Ecotopia is not traditional. It is pacifist, but has considerable ability to wage defensive war if need be, with no qualms about killing. Weston is shown a hidden junkyard with the remains of thousands of U.S. Army helicopters, shot down by locally-produced SAMs during an abortive attempt to retake Oregon with Airborne troops. Weston does not write home about this, since the entire incident was labeled "top secret" by the Defense Department, and is still unknown to the U.S. public. Also secret are the locations of the Ecotopian nuclears hidden in New York and the District of Columbia, which have preserved an uneasy balance of terror. A tough utopia.

Then, too, the social pressures in Ecotopia are rather difficult for an Easterner to understand. No government "brainwashing"

or "therapy" is needed, since the citizenry will quickly lean on anyone who gets too far out of line, say by dropping a candy wrapper on the street, or running a gasoline engine. Group support is very big in Ecotopia, an outgrowth of Esalen-type "expansion" courses. When Weston explains that he wants a little privacy to sort out his thoughts, his new friends are amazed. "But why don't you tell someone, and let us help you? It's not human to keep all those emotions tied up inside yourself. Tell us what's troubling you, and we'll give you support and comfort."

This is not to say that the Ecotopians meddle in each others lives constantly. In one striking scene, Weston hears a couple arguing in the hall outside his assigned room. Looking out, he sees a man and woman screaming and cursing at each other, loudly and viciously, while a crowd of eight or ten Ecotopians stand on the side admiring the invective and making comments on style and form. Nobody interferes. Finally the couple falls exhausted into each others arms, wherupon the crowd disperses, commenting on the free show they just saw.

Well, I thought, Callenbach certainly depicts a strange kind of society, but it's internally consistent and plausible. A Californian soon enlightened me. "Callenbach's not making anything up. That's the way people really are around the Bay area." There is extreme emphasis on ventilating emotions and stating honestly what you think, what you can or cannot do, and especially how you feel. I can just imagine myself in such a group - I'd fit in like Mr. Spock in a Primal Scream session. "Come on, Pointy Ears. Just one little scream. It won't hurt you. Don't you want to be authentic?"

Here I am with a thousand words on Ecotopia so far, and I haven't even begun to touch some of the other aspects of the book. There is the local ideological dispute over building codes: are plastic domes allowable or should all houses be strictly wood? How about electronic amlifiers for rock music? Medical and mental health care is, as you'd expect, very personalized and very effective. But then there are the inter-village wargames, which are bloodier than any SCA melee I've ever seen. There is Soul City, a voluntary Bantustan, more or less, and many other fragmenting ethnic enclaves. There is the rather nerve-wracking "cooperative criticism", whereby a restaurant customer who dislike the way his eggs are cooked will gather a group of waiters and other customers, and visit the kitchen to do a mass critique on the cook. There are the screaming unregulated schools. It's an interesting portrait of a complete working society. I wonder how much of this is actually going on in California now?

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That's three of the better books I've listed up front. For those of you who purely admire killer reviews, consider the list of titles below. None of these turkeys are worth 10¢ for a mint copy at a yard sale.

The Hab Theory, by Allen W. Eckert
Star Child, by Fred Stewart Mustard
The Canfield Decision, by Spiro Agnew
Ratner's Star, by Don DeLillo

These are all, in their way, fringe SF, and I'm glad they weren't labeled SF because they would be an embarrassment to the field. They're all hardcover so I doubt you'd rush out to buy them. Keep the names in mind for your "avoid" list just in case they ever make it to paperback.

Some brief notes: Hab maybe known to you, since a member of NESFA was involved in its production - purely on the technical end, let me hasten to add. This Nesfan gave me a review copy so I could talk about the book here, for which I thank her, since there was no way I would have bought the book, not after reading the first chapter. Eckert has made his name in other areas: nature writing, tales of the Western frontier. Why he picked SF I don't know. The writing is competent, on an Irving Wallace level; the male lead is torn between his wife and the Other Woman, which provides lots of sexual tension, and two confrontation scenes. Wife decks Mistress with a solid right to the jaw, which beats a hairpulling scene that I expected. It's different.

What about the plot? I was afraid you'd ask that. OK, here goes. --This is a pure Chicken Little story, only it turns out that the sky really is falling after all. Old H.A.B. has a theory that the Earth tilts on its axis each 7000 years because the weight of the polar icecap gets too heavy. (What?) Each tilt produces tidal waves, mass destruction of civilization, etc. Now you know what happened to Atlantis and Lemuria. The next tilt is due, and H.A.B. tells people, but Nobody Will Believe Him! After some publicity stunts, a scientific conference is called by the President of the U.S. to find out if the Earth is really going to tilt. The scientists come to the conclusion that Holy Smokes! It's wobbling and ready to let go at any minute. Panic in the streets. Is there time to build the shelter complex needed to bring key elements of humanity through?

Nope, there isn't time. Sorry about that, suspense fans. So much for Hab; let's get the rest of these out of the way fast. Mustard's Star Child is probably supposed to be a novel of "psychic terror" to run along with The Exorcist and The Other and The Omen. But it does have some SF elements in the plot. Young male loner in a little New England town has been responsible for the kidnap/rape/murders of a number of women, although the police don't seem to notice anything. He has these dreams, messages from an outer-space god, which tells him to do things, every other chapter or so. The reader is kept busy turning pages, knowing that another ritual murder with sexual overtones is just a few pages ahead. Narrative hook, and all that.

Several people in the town begin having these dreams. The new god will descend soon. The town psychiatrist is puzzled by multiple identical nightmares, from more and more patients. Well, the Star Child arrives, and it turns out he wasn't from another galaxy, but just a time traveller from the future with hypnotic telepathic powers, and a prankster. He and the young leader of his death cult are killed by a mob og angry villagers with torches, or equivilent, and everybody agrees to hush up the secret.

At least I got this from the library, rather than paying money for it. No literary merit, blood for the sake of horror, painful

death for the sake of filling up a few more pages, an idiot plot where nobody has an IQ of over 70 - Mustard has written a number of these books, and they seem to be moderately popular.

About Canfield Decision - it's by Spiro Agnew, a former Vice President of the United States, and it is set in 1983, which makes it "future fiction" if not "science fiction". The story is about a brave Vice President of the United States versus his nutty boss and the Zionist newspaper editors' conspiracy. Several Watergate participants have produced books lately. I asked a Providence bookstore mamager if any were selling. "Only Colson's", he said. "The Fundamentalists are pushing it." That's Born Again, by Chuck Colson, about how he turned from being a White House hatchet man and found peace by accepting Jesus Christ as his personal savior. Maybe if Agnew had done that, he would be selling more copies of Canfield

That wraps it up for - wait a minute, there's one more clunker. Bring it out, we might as well get this over with. Here's Ratner's Star, by Don DeLillo, which looks like a kitchen-sink novel a la Gravity's Rainbow or Illuminatis, but soon loses all coherence. The protagonist is Billy, a 14-year-old genius from the Bronx who just won a Nobel Prize for mathematics. Don't tell me there is no Nobel Prize in mathematics; I know that. Write a letter to DeLillo. To continue, Billy is invited to a secret conference way out in the desert, at Field Experiment Number One. What they tell him is, signals from outer space have come in on a new telescope. They seem to come from an unseen planet around Ratner's Star. He and his colleagues have been assembled to decipher the message, and find out what the space people are like.

Sounds like a familiar start, right? "What will the message be?" But that's not the point of the book. The scientists spend most of their time making inane speeches, leching each other, babbling nonsense about why we need to reach space, or engaging in incomprehensible riddles. They babble like crazy Barry Malzburg astronauts. The goal is lost sight of. Slowly it dawns - this is the message. All scientists are nuts. Billy should escape from this madhouse while there is yet time. He does. That's it.

Curious, isn't it? At least two of the four above-mentioned writers, Eckert and DeLillo, are capable of writing effective prose. Why do their efforts turn to sludge when they venture into SF? DeLillo has done a number of well-received novels before. Possibly this one will get good reviews also, in the literary journals. We all know that anyone who talks seriously about the Philosophy of Science has got to be a coo-coo bird, and Field Experiment Number One has some of the flakiest projectors since the days of Lagado Academy.

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Let's move on, to three more fringe SF books that I finished with pleasure rather than distaste.

Recently out in paperback is The Medici Guns, by Martin Woodhouse and Robert Ross. Readers of spy novels may recognize the first author; Woodhouse has done a series of technological puzzle and secret agent books, starting with the notable Bush Baby, which told of a very sophisticated British drone aircraft with a secret control system. (Hint- Maelzel).

Medici os not literally science fiction, I suppose, but many of the key features are there. Late fifteenth century Italy: the Papal forces hold the main fortress on the road to Florence, and unless the Florentines can take the fort, armies from Rome will move into their valley with no hindrance. Florentine siege cannon are pounding at the fortress walls, but making little headway. Time grows short. The Medici ruler of Florence is getting nervous. The Borgia cardinal in Rome is getting the troops ready.

But now a young artist in Florence, a kid named Leonardo da Vinci, gets an idea. He designs a set of light rapid-fire cannon with very unusual characteristics for 1487. Can he convince the Medici to use them? Can he convince the traditionalist gunners to handle them? How exactly does he plan to take a castle of 15-foot thick walls using the equivilent of two recoilless rifles?

It's light fast fun reading. There is a love interest with Duke Medici's brother and a visiting countess. There are conspirators in Rome who have a contract out on Leonardo's life. And there is a suitable villain, the commander of the fortress, who blatantly murders innocent hostages before the eyes of relatives. All this plus Leonardo more than make up for the improbability of the final raid on the fortress, which is right out of Sgt. Fury and His Howlin' Commandos.

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Maybe I should be more exact and say that the climax of Medici Guns is right out of The Guns of Navarone. Well, to the last two books,- both of them turned out to be better than I was led to expect by the covers and blurbs. How often does that happen?

Prince Habib's Iceberg, by Edward Hyams, had a 1974 hardcover edition, but no paperback in this country that I know of. (The author is English) You might look for this one at a library, or on remainder shelves. The story is rather simple; it's the

background details that count. The shah of a Persian-derived desert nation in West Africa has come to an English engineering firm. His country, roughly where the Spanish Sahara is in our continuum, has a few oil wells and a big dry depression near the coast. The Shah wants to mount engines on a Greenland iceberg, sail it to West Africa, and pipe the meltwater into the depression. Several dozen icebergs will be needed, one a month, until the depression is filled. The new lake will provide irrigation for farms on which to settle the desert nomads. Water entering will run hydroelectric plants. Oil money will pay for this. Can the firm manage it?

We've heard of schemes like this to supply, say, Los Angeles. But Hyams is probably right to suggest that if it's done, it will be done first by some oil sheikdom with a big thirst and lots of money. There are two sets of problems running concurrently: the engineering, which are obvious, and the political, which are more difficult. Unlike some "hard" SF, Hyams covers the clash of personalities in the palace as well as he covers the struggling team of engineers in the chilly Davis Strait.

The technical aspects are convincing. The squad of technicians riding their million-ton vessel south past the Gulf Stream are proud of their accomplishment. Since the berg started in Danish territorial waters, there is of course a Danish master on board, and the Shah is paying Denmark 0.001¢ per cubic meter of ice used. Over in Africa there are problems. Moslem traditionalists want to keep the desert dry, as it should be. Certain generals have their own plans for the lake - use it to irrigate cotton fields for their personal profit, and to hell with the vegetable gardens for the nomads. As the iceberg approaches the coast, fighting breaks out....

Hyams almost convinced me it was possible. It all seems so logical.

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Hm, here's another story set in a wealthy oil kingdom of the Middle East: The Poison Oracle, by Peter Dickinson. Lots of SF stories in the 30s were set in the private laboratories of wealthy eccentrics. Maybe these days the only supply of wealthy eccentrics is in Saudi Arabia?

Dickinson you might know for some of his SF books - Weathermonger, Green Gene. This one is fringe, but with a very interesting background. In the palace of the sheikh lives an old Oxford chum of His Highness. Said chum is interested in animal communication, so the sheikh is paying for a primate lab where the Oxford zoologist is teaching a chimp to talk with colored chips of plastic. The chimp lives in the Royal Zoo, which is right in the palace.

Meanwhile, out there towards the hills is the Great Marsh. In it live the Marsh People, a very old and isolated band of aborigines, who speak a language totally unrelated to any other on on Earth, and who are fast on the draw with poisoned spears. There is an uneasy truce between the Marsh People and the desert Arabs ruled by the sheikh.

(continued on page 36)

PETER PAN WAS RIGHT

ANN McCUTCHEN

Occasionally, I will wander away from the Science Fiction and Mystery sections of a bookstore, and commune with the Children's Books. Once in a great while, generally after two or three visits, I will buy one of these oversize volumes with big print. Finally, I bought one that was science fiction:

Enchantress From the Stars
by Sylvia Louise Engdahl

I got past the stumbling blocks of title and cover blurb ("stowaway on a dangerous mission"), and slid happily into Georyn's story. In charming fairy tale style, the woodcutter's son enters the Enchanted Forest to find and slay the fire-breathing dragon. In the Forest, he meets a woman who can only be an enchantress, for her coloring is completely unfamiliar and although she speaks an eldritch tongue, he can understand her.

At this point Elana takes over the narrative.(again), and explains how she was Sworn, and got into this situation, even before attending the Academy. This involves a lengthy explanation of the Federation, its non-disclosure policy, and the Oath. The entire set-up sounds so pompous and contrived that I nearly stopped reading. Unfortunately, the explanation is vital to the story.

Then Elana explains that Andrecia, Georyn's world, has been discovered by a star-faring race and is being readied for colonization, and natives take the hindmost. The dragon is really a combination bulldozer, power shovel, and flamethrower. The goal of Elana, her father, Evrek, and Ilura --who promptly, and deliberately, gets herself killed-- is to awaken and train the psychic powers latent in Georyn (as they are latent in all people), have him exercize them against the Imperials, and panic them into abandoning Andrecia.

This comes to pass. The important features, however, are the moral conundrums that the principle characters face, and the sacrifices they are willing to make to resolve them honorably. The scene in which Elana, among other things, makes it clear to Jarel, the Imperial, how vital it is that he never reveal her secret, is the climax of the book, and a very fine one indeed.

Eventually I got the sequel:

The Far Side of Evil
by Sylvia Louise Engdahl

This is the story of Elana's first mission after graduation from the Academy of the Federation. She is sent, with several other Agents, to be an independent observer of Toris, a Youngling world in the Critical Stage. Their mission is to gather data, no more. It is hoped that the data will contain the key to explaining why some worlds destroy themselves in nuclear war while others turn to space exploration, the most clear-cut choice known to the Anthropological Service. Agonizingly, the data the Agents collect will be useful only if the Torisians bomb themselves into savagery.

Randil, who should have been left behind to do research, decides that passive observation is wrong, breaks his Oath, and sets out to turn the Torisians' interest to space exploration. Elana reluctantly decides to stop him. This soon places her in the local prison, being tortured. In her copious spare time, she again describes the Federation, Oath, etc., at great, pompous, and contrived length. Again, it is vital to the story.

Elana describes the tortures she can protect herself from, the torture she contrives to use for her own purposes, and the torture she is sure she cannot endure. By means of this last, she is finally able to reach Randil, demonstrate that he is a conceited flat-head, persuade him to undo his harm, and give him the means to do so. From this comes the success of the mission. How the solution arises from the problem is fascinating, and makes this book almost as well worth reading as the previous volume.

Not all the books I get are blatantly science fiction.or fantasy. Not long ago I got:

The Headless Cupid
by Zilpha Keatley Snyder

David's family has just moved into the Old Westerly Place, more or less. The more is David, age 11, the twins Esther (called Tesser) and Blair, age 4, Janie, age 8, their father, Jeff Stanley, a geologist, and their shiny-new stepmother Molly, an artist. The less is Amanda, age 12, Molly's daughter, who had been living with her father on the West Coast until things settled down.

Each character is sharply and subtly delineated, each with a distinct and consistent personality. The same treatment is given without sentimentality to the children's dead mother, a vague and fey person whose influence can still be detected.

Amanda is the key person. She is into witchcraft, hates her mother, and resents her new situation. This is all delicately presented, but everything demonstrates that she is a Problem. David chooses to involve himself and the other children in her occult activities in order to come to terms with her, as well as for the adventure. Eventually David and Amanda discover tht the wooden cupid on the bannister had its head hacked off by a poltergeist in 1896. Soon classic poltergeist activity begins, and David becomes convinced that Amanda is producing the phenomena to terrify her mother. How the real poltergeist reacted to this provides a tidy and satisfactory solution to the entire story.

Angeliclittle Blair is the key to many of the situations.

Although I enjoyed David's ingenious ability to cope, I was more entertained by the occasional demonstration of Blair's communion with animals, and of his startling clairvoyance, revealed in his occasional lapses into audibility.

I enjoyed the whole story immensely. At one point, Amanda asks what David's birthday is. Upon learning that it is October second, she nods, "That explains it." and I knew just what she meant; that's my birthday.

Of course, I <u>had</u> to buy:

<u>Day of the Ness</u>
by Andre Norton and Michael Gilbert

From the large print and multitude of pictures, this is obviously geared to very young children, and the simple plot confirms it. Still, it is a pleasingly presented story, without errors or condescension to grate on the reader's nerves.

The story opens in the twilight of the Project. The Project had begun several years before when a flying saucer landed in a nearby hill. The area was cordoned off, and a trickle of communication and trade began. There has never been a meeting with the aliens; the one attempt was a fiasco. Since then, contact has ceased, and many feel that there willbe no more, either because they are excusably afraid, or because they have left.

Hal and his cat, Susie, are alone at the monitering station, with the Project scientists in Washington, when a message for help comes in from the aliens. Realizing that there are no adults around to respond, Hal decides that he must answer and act for the good of both human and alien.

Boy and cat walk to the established hillside meeting area, past the familiar Gotchas, rock-shaped beings with spidery arms to grab and trip. Hal is greeted by two very different aliens, a Rav and a Stalker, who telepathically explain the predicament of their diverse communal enclave. The evil Ness, whom they fled many years before, have arrived on Earth, destroyed their big Think-Think, and enslaved all of them, from Clusters to Flyers.

It is for Hal (and Susie) to devise a method of freeing the Think-Think, for that is essentially the only brain the hive community has, and their only hope of resisting the Ness. With trepidation, Hal undertakes the decision-making for the helpless alien group, to produce a thoroughly satisfactory result.

Gilbert's illustrations form an admirable complement to the text, demonstrating the villainy and hideousness of the Ness, the amalgam of machine and organism of the Think-Think, and the insidiousness of the Gotchas.

There was a single theme running through all four books; in each, the main character had, and acted upon, a self-imposed moral obligation. This is something that adult works lack. There, the motivation is desire, self-preservation, expediency, orders, or whim. To find characters choosing to do something that is difficult or dangerous because it is Right, is delightful. I intend to continue to ferret them out of the Children's Section, both of the bookstore and the public library.

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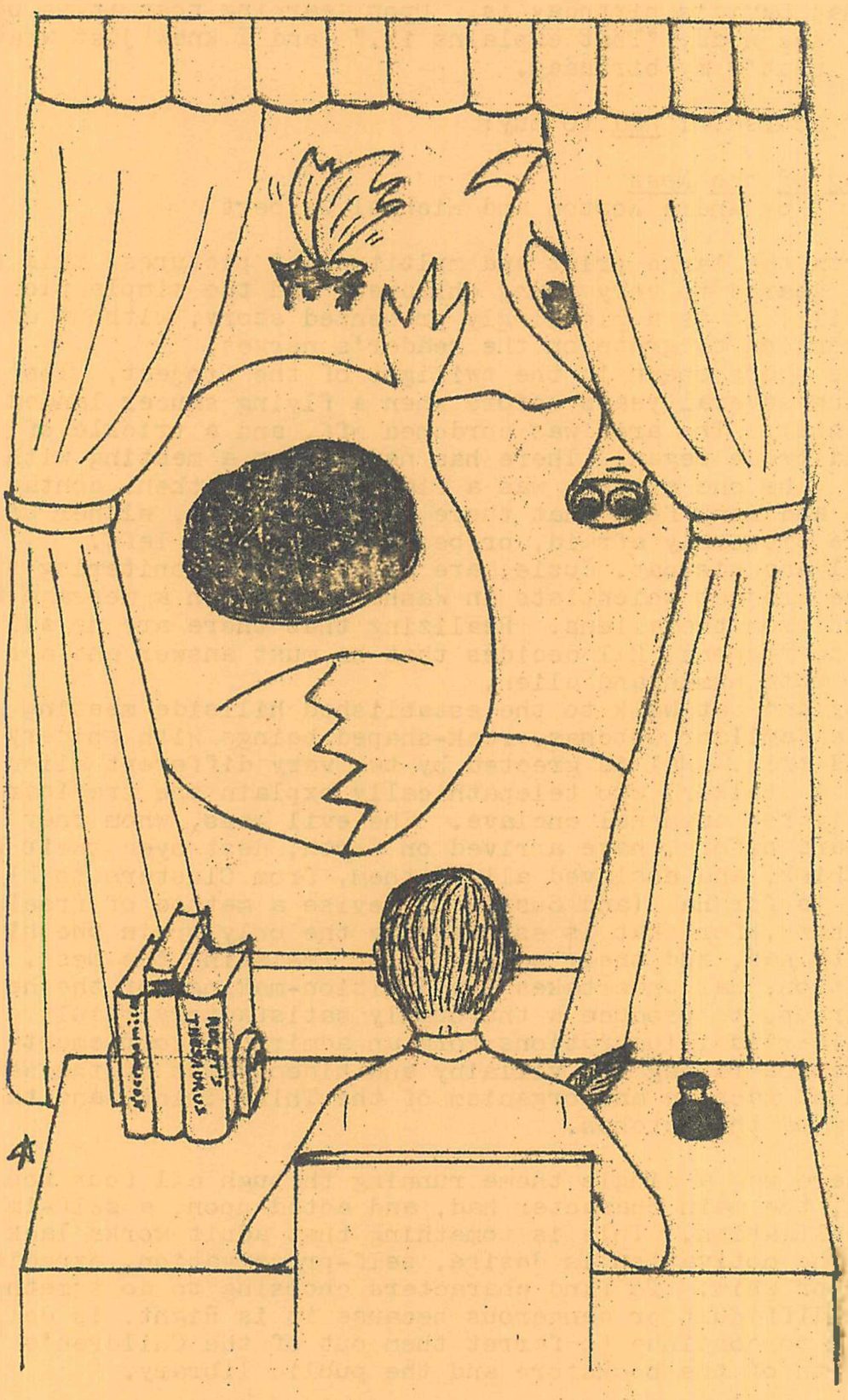

H P L

Foggy foggy night--
Howard sits alone at last
Dreaming of an age that's past
Which helps to sooth the darkness in his soul;
Shadows on the hills--
Howard thinks they can cure his ills,
Let him savour the spinal chills
That come from having knowledge old and grand.

Now I understand
What you tried to say to me,
And how hou suffered for your sanity
And why you tried to set Them free--
They would not listen, or They did not care,
But you knew They were there.

Foggy foggy night--
From afar, unearthly cries,
Half-seen shapes in darkling skies
Reflect in Howard's mind and Howard's pen--
There They are again,
Ancient beings long unknown,
Like the ones carved in the stone
Of ruins in a long-deserted land.

Now I understand
What you tried to say to me,
And how you suffered for your sanity
And why you tried to set Them free--
They would not listen, or They did not hear,
But you knew They were near.

But They could not love you,
Although your love was true,
And when at last they came in sight
On that foggy foggy night,
They went away again not taking you--
But I could have told you, Howard,
Their world was never meant for one who's not immortal too.

Foggy foggy night--
Delve into your old Roget's
Searching for the perfect phrase
To try to tell the sights you can't forget
Of the eldritch things you've met;
The night-gaunts and the Elder Gods
Who feast upon us mortal clods
And leave us broken as Their powers grow.

Now I think I know
What you tried to say to me,
And why you sacrificed humanity
Each time you tried to set Them free--
They did not listen, They're not list'ning still--
I hope they never will!

LETTERS

(((Anything that appears in triple parentheses like this is by me. I will omit paragraphs from letters but will generally leave paragraphs I print intact. Exceptions will be marked by ellipses. C'mon, campers, I want enough letters that I have to consider a segmented letter column. I don't want to do one, you understand; I just want enough letters to make me think about it. --sgd)))

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HARRY WARNER JR.
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Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

That's an impressive pair of covers for the 13th Proper Boskonian, which almost arrived on Friday the 13th. The back cover idea is particularly ingenious. While looking at it, I suddenly conceived a new theory about how dinosaurs found an outlet for their romantic impulses, a topic which occupied the entire last issue of the Proctors' fanzine, Citadel. Among all the conjectures and guesses that were included in that issue, I don't remember anyone speculating about the possibility that the big land-confined dinosaurs were transformed into flying dinosaurs something like worms and butterflies, and achieved satisfaction in one of their less cumbersome incarnations. I liked the front cover for its simplicity and its differentness.

I haven't read as much of the Poul Anderson output as I would like to have read, so parts of Don D'Ammassa's article don't penetrate as they should. In general, it's well done. But I kept wishing he would come right out and state whether the opinions he attributes to Anderson are to be found in downright statements which the author has made in writing or in conversation or are simply deductions that Don has drawn from things he has found in the stories. If it's the latter situation, then we need some kind of statement from Anderson about how much of the author is involved in opinions expressed in the stories and how many of those opinions are there solely because they come in handy for plot or characterization purposes.

But I agree with Don's implication in his opening remarks about the message that can be conveyed in adventure fiction, even if the author may not always agree totally with this message. I think that a message conveyed by the adventures of a handful of characters sticks in the memory and in the emotions more firmly than a message which is sent by means of a highly relevant story about an entire civilization's struggle with overpopulation or pollution or whatever. The human mind just doesn't comprehend mass suffering or mass struggle as it does the troubles of individuals. People will fret themselves into a fine tizzy over the fate of a kidnapped child or an old couple who burned to death,

while the death of tens of thousands of Guatemalans in an earthquake evokes only a brief "how awful" sensation. It's probably just as well, because otherwise the mind might burn out from feeling ten thousand times the shock of a major catastrophe compared with the shock of one or two individuals' fate.

"Benjy" is an excellent story. But I think it would be even stronger withour the dialect-type telling, or with a more consistent use of dialect. The spelling is hit and miss, correct in a lot of difficult words and wrong in some simpler ones that even poor spellers usually get right. An occasional swear word scattered here and there isn't realistic: if we're going to have swear words at all, they should be as frequent as they would normally appear in the narrarive of a tough guy from New York City. I'm no authority on that city's dialects, but some of it doesn't ring true. Would a Harlem black really say "sireen", for instance? Little things like this kept distracting me from the really strong series of events and the good reproduction of conversation as far as choice of words is concerned. I think the story might be even better without the explanation of the monster as a bem; a Kafka-like handling of it might fit better the general mood of the story. All this sounds like nitpicking. But I still wish I could have read this story with orthodox spelling. I think I would have heard in my mind the speech mannerisms much more believably than they came across in this form.

I wasn't sure for quite a while if Kris' "true life adventure2 was real fact or just an effort to top the series of events in Val Novak's contribution. By now, I assume that it's real fan history. If you had to get hurt, it's a shame that this same injury couldn't have come in a fannish way, such as stapling yourself inside an issue of The Proper Boskonian or something.

The book previews are a welcome change from the usual form of reviews, now that so many fanzines are running book reviews and the chances of finding new information in a fanzine review section are minimal. Odd how your mention of Uncleavish Truethinking created a clear memory flashback of the evening I read that Poul Anderson piece in Amra. I don't usually remember specific items in fanzines very long, unless of course they happen to say complimentary things about me. Maybe I recall this one because I once suffered under a fellow worker who propagandized Anglo-Saxon words constantly.

Oddly, I don't remember the Blanchard bid for a worldcon. But I haven't started serious notetaking about the 1960's for possible fan history use, so maybe it's not too serious a bit of ignorande. I do remember a more recent worldcon episode when a bid for Bermuda intended as a joke came close enough to winning to scare the individuals who had dreamed it up.

Most of the interior illustrations are quite good. But some of them seem to lose some of their potential power by appearing on this darkish blue paper. Fine detail just doesn't show up as it should. Dick Bergeron's Warhoon is probably the most famous deep blue fanzine, and Dick usually stuck to large illustrations with heavy lines, little shading or complex small detail. Curiously, I had no trouble reading those blue pages in The Proper Boskonian, even though my eyes tire quickly from some other combinations of paper color and ink in fanzines.

JESSICA AMANDA SALMONSON
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Zenith, Washington 98188

Thanks for Bosko. Another sickeningly intelligent article by D'Ammassa (whom we know, from Bracken's KNIGHTS, is actually several clones and does not do all this work alone) this time on Anderson. A nice bit of fannish jumor about your clumsy awkward incoordinated spastic abilities. An intriguingly vulgar portfolio of third rate art and second rate comedy. So-so (not Toto) book reviews. The inevitable LoC column. Ye editoriale. And of course an award winning bit of fanfic (and not bad at all, though it is difficult to read the willfully illiterate style---I have a feeling it'd be much more exciting if Val read it aloud and I hadn't had to stumble over the bizarre letter-arrangements). All in all, Bosko appears to be a well balanced bear. Or fanzine, whatever. The only thing it lacks, for me, is Major Mundac; you know, the Major Topic that triggers a Fascinating Lettercol nextish ...

The art! The art! I neglected to mention the art! Bacover is superb, as is the inside front cover. Making allowances for APA-Napkin of dubious merit, all the art is average to outstanding. The use of colored inks is a pleasant effect.

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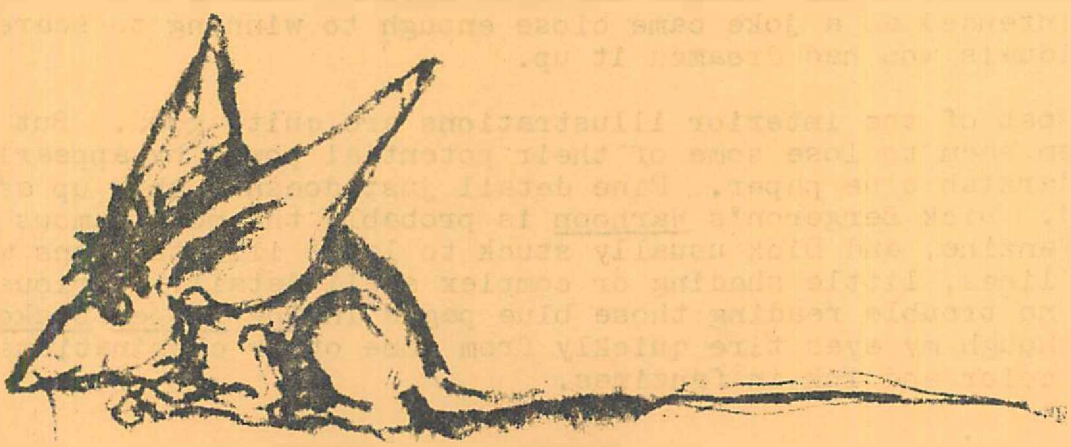
ROY TACKETT
915 Green Valley Road NW
Albuquerque, N.M. 87107

What? You mean that NESFA still exists? Why out here in the wilderness we had heard that the various members were busily kicking each other out of the club until only one remained. He was schizo and so kicked himself out. Just goes to show that you can't put any faith in rumors.....

I seem to have in hand the 13th Proper Boskonian. The cover has a picture of some odd sort of fish with a large sail attatched to it. It doesn't make any sense but the stippling is nice.

D'Ammassa's essay on Poul Anderson was worthwhile and interesting. (I chuckled somewhat at the typo in line 11 on page 4 -- there are those who would call it appropriate.) And I think, considering the source, that Brian Aldiss's consideration of Anderson's stories is not worth considering. D'Ammassa's essay seems remarkably objective--almost too much so. He does not leave much of



a handle anywhere to grab hold of and holler "Ah ha! You fool.) Pity. I'm not sure just how correct his assessment of Anderson is but feel that he is pretty close to the mark. Anderson has been pretty consistent over the years. And it is a viewpoint with which I generally agree. I can think of only one place over the years where I've found myself in strong disagreement with Poul and that was over his view on thermonuclear war. He is one of the finer writers in the field.

(((Rumors of NESFA's demise are greatly exaggerated. Many people on all eleven sides of the blowup still have scars, but the club is still functioning, people are still putting on conventions and out fanzines and in gardens. What the whole mess did to was to promote the growth of several other fan groups in the south-eastern New England area, without breaking up NESFA to any mortal extent. It was a bloody bad time, and I devoutly hope that in ten years the only person who remembers it is Harry Warner. --sgd)))

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STAN WOOLSTON
12832 Westlake St.
Garden Grove, calif. 92640

The Proper Boskonian No. 13, from Z to Z (first cover artist Zaino to back cover artist Zimet) was fine. I liked other artists, too--and Rotsler's style sure seems to be changeable for a change too.

The article on Poul Anderson reads well, but why should I agree with it all? Personally, I assume an author is not always reflecting all his ideas or beliefs when he writes a particular story. Instead, sometimes a story becomes a sort of warning--or an insight into what may be less than perfect, and perhaps can reflect a possible future to be worked against. That this author is one of my favorites, and probably the favorite of some people who seldom discuss him may be true; I enjoy most of his stories, and one reason is that while he writes with storytelling qualities in mind they are rounded out in characters and action, and not done in a way that involves the need of lots of descriptions that gets a reader away from the flow of the story. I admire him for this. He can write with wit and with humor. He can describe or rather show characters acting in a way I dislike--and characters who are, in effect, dictator or royalty minded--something I do not like. But at times looking at the mind of a Hitler or an emperor or a government bossman can help give us insights into how a person now might better react to monopolists in government or bureaucrats in anyplace.

"Benjy" was read through. It's an odd one! I sometimes stop reading fiction done by fans, but I read this through. Things happened. Funky stuff. Mad stuff. And I guess logical in the mind of the teller of the tale....

If NESFA members want to enter the N3F Story Contest--to win some of those prizes ($15, $10, and $5) I'd be glad to send entry forms and even entry fee for some. Entry fee is a quarter; I can afford to pay some! Possibly Howard DeVore will inform us whether he'll handle the contest nest time (deadline is usually Nov. 1 to

go to Judge.) Anyway, I'll make some copies of entry forms when I get the info to send to fan clubs with members who like to write --and if just one person decides to continue to write as a result of the '76 contest it will be worthwhile. Fiction is up to 5000 words, with rules making entries from people who have sold no more than two SF or fantasy stories possible. Typed manuscripts should (must) have title on every page but no author's name or address; that goes on spaces of entry forms, which include full rules. We want lots of entries. Unless a contestant is willing no one will publish the story without paying; in other words, purpose of contest is to encourage writers to find if they can finish a story someone thinks is the best received. In the past sometimes the Judge offered to buy a story; one man rewrote his entry a bit and got $50 for his first story. A lady kept writing and seems to be selling regularly now. Maybe a Boskonian will do things properly, tell a story in the SF of fantasy vein, and bleed the treasury of money. Luck!

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MIKE GLICKSOHN
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Whatever they may say about the 13th issue of PB -- and ghu knows they've already started, and the language they're using!-- they'll certainly have to admire the cover artwork you've managed to get. And the delightful thing is that the artists you're using who show such real talent are all new and relatively unknown. The Zaino/Hawkes front cover is most pleasing to look at (although the title could have been more dynamically and lettered more carefully: have you thought of contacting someone familiar with such graphic endeavors? A book designer, for example?) and the back cover by Matt Zimet is undoubtedly one of the classier pieces of work I've seen of late. There's something just a little off in the man himself -- mostly the legs -- but the dinosaurs are fun and the whole illo is impressive indeed. I might even have used it on the front myself. And this Rotsler chap shows promise too although there's something in his style that says he ought to try humorous stuff perhaps. A good graphic show, David. Who did it for you?

I enjoyed the fruits of Don's research into the Anderson stories and he certainly puts together considerable evidence for the case he wishes to make. However, I'm very dubious about his original premise. I may will be the leader among active fans who read very little science fiction nowadays but even I know that Poul Anderson's political and philosophical beliefs are extremely evident in his stories. In fact his political beliefs are probably the second most well-known aspect of the man. (If you have to ask the first you haven't been in fandom long enough.) To the extent that any author can be held to believe in the things that his characters say (a dicey bit of fallacious criticism in many cases) I guess Poul can be, as his fiction usually mirrors the strongly held beliefs he has made widely known through his factual articles in fanzines. So Don didn't really need to justify the article the way he did, but simply to write it, since this is hardly a startlingly new insight. What Don is best at is marshalling the evidence to support the theories he presents, or elucidates upon, in these

articles of his. I expect he'll earn a Hugo nomination for it.

I read the short story winner, which in itself is a singular occurrence indeed. That I enjoyed parts of it is even more amazing. Semi-literate dialect is damnably hard to present realistically in print and while I don't think this story was totally successful it did a better job than I'd expected. Perhaps not quite of professional quality yet, but not a bad job at all. ...

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ROBERT CHILSON
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Osceola, Mo. 64776

Thanks for submitting to me PB 13. Unfortunately it is unsuitable for my present needs . . . oops, sorry, I got hung up on the phrasing. I enjoyed it, especially APA-Napkin, the only apa I was ever allowed inside. I always suspected they were like this. Kris's article was fun, and Val Novak's "Benjy" is quite good. --But you wanted comments on D'Ammassa's article.

I'm always at a loss when put on the sopt like this, but a few days after reading the article a few thoughts came. --I'd never thought much about Anderson before; he was always there, like the mountains; and unlike some people, I never felt any compulsion to climb him for that reason. . . .

I can't disagree with anything Don says; in fact, I confirm his opinions with his later stories and books. Most of those he cites I either don't remember or never read.

It's interesting to compare Anderson's opinions with Heinlein's, which they resemble. Heinlein has been characterized as a Nineteenth Century liberal, and Anderson as an Eighteenth Century liberal. I believe it was Anderson himself who made these observations, in a column in the old SFR.

But to me, even more interesting is it to compare the methods of the men. Panshin observes that Heinlein really has but one character --himself-- and all others are but stereotypes and caricatures. Thus, whenever a Wise Old Man appears in a Heinlein story and pontificates, we may be sure that we are hearing what Heinlein himself believes.

Anderson's characters are mostly very similar to each other, and one presumes to Anderson, but he is, it seems to me, less restricted in this way than Heinlein. For instance, his women are more believable than Heinlein's, and his characters generally more varied.

This is astonishing, when you consider it. Anderson is no Shakespeare, but in this respect Heinlein, the master craftsman, is primitive. (It is the only respect in which he is; his styles, techniques, plots exhibit total mastery of his trade.) Heinlein is, I think, the better writer, though Anderson plots more facilely, and his characterization is more sophisticated.

Their opinions are not that much different, but Heinlein's is,

as Panshin puts it, "wolfish". To Heinlein,(according to Panshin), a properly-designed society is one that lets the individual rise or fall to his natural. . . . thus letting what Don D'Ammassa calls the "decision-makers" make and assume the responsibility for making the necessary decisions.

Personally, I don't think Heinlein has many scruples about deciding for the people. See "Gulf", among others. . . .

This help any? --By the way, Anderson's "Un-Man was published when I was five and I read it when I was ten. You have a nerve suggesting that I criticize a critique of him!

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We Also Heard From Maurice Harter, Sam Long, George Flynn, and Jan Howard Finder.

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KEEP AN EYE ON THAT FRINGE STUFF!
continued from page 24.

Lost Race, huh? They may be based on a real people, the marsh Arabs of the Tigris-Euphrates delta, who spend their lives among the reeds. See the book by Gavin Maxwell, People of the Reeds. In any case, there is a murder at the palace, and the zoologist is sent into the marsh to bring back a suspect. If he dies, he was an infidel, anyway. Why risk Arab lives?

Lest I give away the ending, let me stop here... just adding that the chimp is the only witness to the murder. Take it from there.

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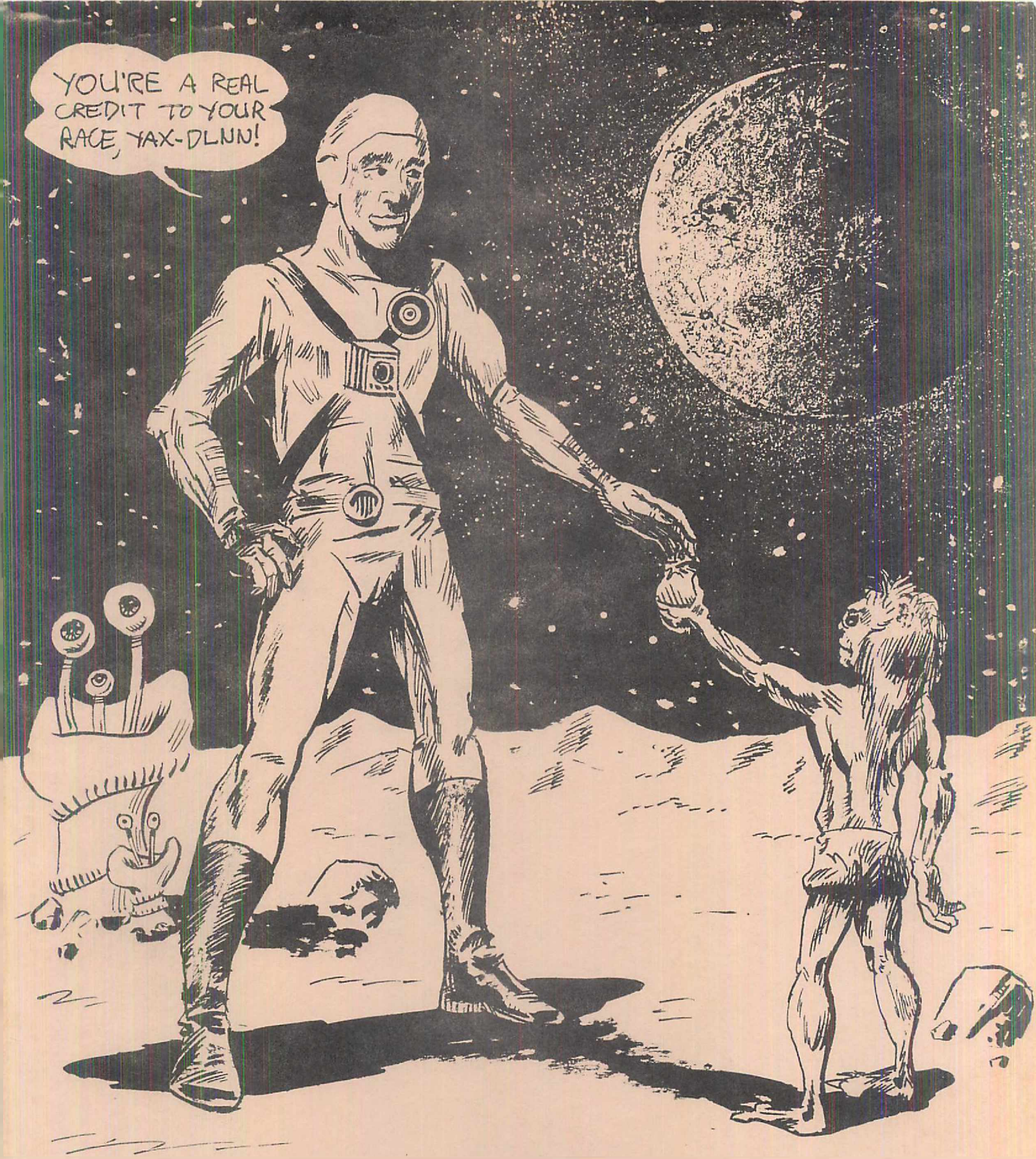

THE QUESTION IS, FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS, NOT SO MUCH ALONG THE LINES OF "WILL WE GET TO THE STARS?", BUT RATHER "ARE WE GOING TO HANG ON TO OUR RACIST & CHAUVINISTIC ATTITUDES WHEN WE GET OUT THERE?"

-SIROIS '76