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PROPER BOSKONIAN



December 1978

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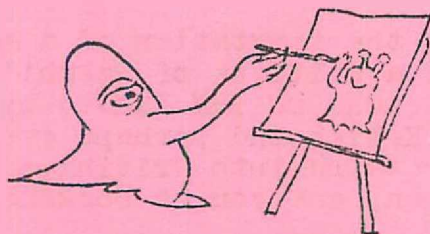
Back Cover

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THE INSTRUMENTALITY SPEAKS

Notes on This Issue's Contributors

HOWARD SMUKLER is a name to be reckoned with in the field of the occult and UFOlogy. Former editor of ANCIENT ASTRONAUTS magazine (with a circulation twice that of most pro sf magazines and reminiscent in content of the current OMNI) and head of the Occult Studies Department of the University of Rhode Island's Evening Extension, his article is a plea for understanding from the intellectual hierarchy of science fiction fandom. Since this article was written he has fled the ultra-rigid east coast scientific community for the more open-minded atmosphere of southern California, where his theories

are warmly received by an environment not so obsessed with dogmatics.

MELISSA DOWD and her family have left behind the cramped four-room apartment mentioned in her article for a house on Uncle Bill's Way in scenic South Dennis on Cape Cod. In this issue she examines children's sf television as broadcast in the season just past. I hope to have an update on the current sf TV scene in an upcoming PB.

MARK KELLER, instructor at Brown and student of life, is responsible more than almost anyone else for the issue of PB you hold. He not only wrote the review piece that is the mainstay of the issue and in some ways sets its theme, but he did headings when electrostencils became unavailable and then ran the whole thing off on his mimeo. Without his generosity PB would not have been possible and he has my deepest thanks.

OTHER PEOPLE to whom thanks must go for their help include Sheila D'Amassa, who bought the paper during her editorship and still stores several cases of it for present and future use, and Sue Anderson, who transported the paper from Point A to Point B among other noble deeds.

NEAT ISSUE should include an examination of the reputation of a major American sf writer inside the Soviet Union, a critique of Bakshi's WIZARDS (and if I can get him to do it, THE LORD OF THE RINGS) by Chip Hitchcock, probably something by Mark Keller and perhaps even a real editorial. And, if I can cajole you readers into writing often and long enough, a letter column. Until then, see you at Boskone...

Mike Blake

THE THIRD ANNUAL P.B. SURVEY OF FRINGE S.F. (1978)

by Mark M. Keller

No question about it, science-fictional ideas are getting into the popular novel realm. Writers of would-be "best sellers" have taken apocalyptic and scientific ideas as backgrounds where formerly they used the auto industry or the film business or the lives of Greek shipowners. Most of these books are not very good. The science is sloppy, the characters cartoons, the development sluggish. Still, they show up in the bookstores with SF style covers and misleading copy on the cover.

There has also been some backflow the other way: SF writers doing novels in best-seller format, SF ideas but mainstream treatment. Observe Marta Randall's Journey, Ben Bova's Colony, and Niven & Pournelle's Lucifer's Hammer. By last report, Hammer was doing quite well in paperback sales, especially among people who would never consciously pick up a science fiction novel. Is it fringe? I may as well include it in the listing just for completeness.

There are more than thirty books on the list here, marginal SF I read during the past year. No doubt you can think of other titles, but I have limited tolerance for junk novels, which most of these are. As a quick check if you're skimming the reviews, I mark the really worthwhile books with an (*), the fun but minor books with (?), and the unredeemed tripe with (-). For the numerically minded, there are 7 good books, 8 fair books, and 20 worthless books. That's the ratio you'd expect: Sturgeon's Law rides again.

- (*) ... read it, read it!
- (?) ... okay if you're not doing anything else
- (-) ... plague spot, don't bother

(*) Richard Adams, The Plague Dogs --- Two dogs have escaped from an animal research station in England's Lake District; an unscrupulous journalist spreads the story that they've been infected with bubonic plague from the germ warfare wing, hoping the resultant scandal will sell lots of newspapers. Adams follows the trek of Rowf the unsocial Labrador and Snitter the visionary terrier as they cross the rugged hills looking for a way back home, then shifts to the corridors of power in London as the Minister tries to explain how such dangerous beasts escaped from his research facility. Soon an army of angry farmers, thrill-seekers and Royal Marines comes swarming over the hills, ready to shoot on sight the innocent canine outlaws.

Adams can make it real. His writing is very strong and under almost complete control. He knows the landscape in detail, and you can follow the long march of the escapees on an Ordnance Map if you so desire, through real places. The dogs are also truly drawn, no small task, especially for Snitter, who has been subject to massive brain surgery and has become as a result a William Blake mystic, constantly confusing the internal compelling vision with the objective smells of the outside world. Rowf is merely surly and aggressive -- the researchers repeatedly half-drowned him in a water tank to test his response to near-drowning -- but Snitter is a shaman or a Mad Prophet, while yet remaining a small dog. Adams may be most effective in depicting the snarling back-biting behavior of the English civil servants, amazed at the fuss the two dogs have caused, and looking desperately for somebody to carry the blame.

Some people may not like the way Adams inserts his own personal comments on every occasion. His bad guys are authentic villains. He really hates the callous researchers, smarmy reporters, mealy-mouthed bureaucrats and nasty relatives who give away a sick man's pet dog to the horrible experimenters. His good guys beam with virtue. He admires honest farmers, nature lovers and men who rescue drowning dogs from the bitter sea. Even someone like me, who thinks that "animal liberationists" are mostly fools, was pulled along by the narrative power into half accepting the premise of the book. That's pretty good.

(*) Richard Ben Sapir, The Far Arena --- The plot is not promising. In fact, it sounds like something out of Marvel Comics. North of Norway an oil-drilling team finds a frozen human body eight meters down in the ice. The naked man is not quite dead, and is revived by a Soviet expert in a Norwegian hospital. He claims to be Eugenianus, a Roman gladiator poisoned by political enemies and dumped into the German Sea during the rule of Domitian. // Ben Sapir is an experienced writer, co-author of the "Destroyer" series. But you wonder what anyone could do with the old cliché of the man from the past frozen in a block of ice and newly revived.

Ben Sapir pulls it off by a lot of careful research. Eugenianus remembers life in Rome - the ever-present spies of the Emperor, the scruffy Christians who were such poor lion bait, the constant struggle to dream up new gimmicks to please the crowds in his arena shows. He was a star attraction gladiator, all comers, any weapon style. The crowds loved it when he slashed open opponents' bellies and let them trip in their own outspilling loops of intestine.

When this naive soul from the past realizes the modern world is real and not a mushroom dream, he craftily decides to hustle the assembled scholars out of piles of cash in exchange for showing off his skills. There's always a demand for good gladiators, that he knows for sure. Some things stay the same. Even the doors in the fabulous hospital (glass walls! iron staircases!) are labeled "he leaves" in clear Latin. And so inevitably he is taken to modern Rome and gets to see just what has happened to the city he knew so well. Well, what do you think an ancient Roman would say to the Victor Emmanuel Monument or the Vatican? How much of the ghost city remains? -- (Seaview, Simon & Shuster)

(?) Ben Bova, Colony --- Set eight years after Millenium, this is in no way fringe but rather a solid traditional SF novel. Earth is desperately overcrowded. The giant corporations are secretly waging weather war to destabilize local governments by crop failures and thus destroy the World Federation. The rich are planning to abandon the sinking Earth and ride out the collapse in their luxurious O'Neill space colonies, far above the struggling mobs. Terrorists are planning to take over the solar power satellites and blackmail the industrial North into submission. This is written in best-seller prose and pacing, and the SF association on the cover is minimal.

(-) Carlos Castaneda, The Second King of Power --- The fifth in a series of clumsy fantasies about a graduate student turned apprentice wizard who meets strange people in a mythic Mexico. Previously it was Don Juan the Yaqui brujo and his buddy Don Genaro. This time it's a family of possessive female witches led by Doña Soledad. The stories are told in first person and have actually fooled many credulous readers into believing they are true accounts of what Carlos experienced. Boring.

(-) David Kaufelt, Spare Parts --- After the clones come the wicked organ transplanters, as in Robin Cook's Coma or Larry Niven's "Jigsaw Man" or John Boyd's Organ Bank Farm. Here's another. Wealthy young Nick Meyer inherits his father's New York City transplant clinic. The trustees press him to take the money and not ask questions. A crusading reporter informs Nick of some odd coincidences: a soldier in the US Army dies in a grenade explosion just when his uncle, a Presidential advisor, needs a new heart; an Arab prince is killed by "PLO" gunmen just when his father needs replacement kidneys; best of all, a young Los Angeles cab driver disappears just when his mother's uncle, Pope John IX, needs retread body parts. All the transplants take place successfully at the Meyer Clinic. // Nick begins to suspect what's going on, so the trustees feed his name and blood type into the clinic computer as a needed donor, thus triggering the hit team to chase him. James Blish did it better in 5000 words twenty years ago; read "The Abbatoir Effect", which involves selective mass murder in a rare-blood center.

(?) Ib Melchior, The Hagerloch Project --- Solidly researched alternate world novel about a successful German atom bomb project in World War Two. Heisenberg's team is neck and neck with the Manhattan District right up through march 1945, with Hitler babbling about the V-4 that will destroy England even if Germany falls. The American agents go in to sabotage the German test detonation and perhaps to keep the hardware from falling to the advancing Russian armies. Epilog at Trinity. --(Bantam)

(?) Malachi Martin, Hostage to the Devil --- Five true case-histories of "demonic possession", treated in novelette fashion. Martin is a Jesuit who taught in Rome and a good word-smith; his priests and victims are convincing. There is the touch of the "insider" novel here, promising to reveal what really goes on, no more guesses by ill-informed sensationalists. Martin describes the stages of exorcism with clarity and in such deadpan serious fashion it begins to sound like the protocol for a standard lube and maintenance procedure. Once he convinces you that the exorcist is working with real materials by real rules, you're hooked. You watch each case like watching a bomb expert defusing an infernal device left in an airport locker. Will he get this one apart or has his luck run out? By now you really begin to feel the danger of Satan's presence. Well done pieces for those who want to see how supernatural menace should be handled. Most fantasy or horror writers could take lessons from Martin on pace and tone.

(?) Malachi Martin, The Final Conclave --- The election of two popes within six weeks led to rush reprints of this book, which is an insider novel of how the College of Cardinals picks the new Bishop of Rome. Martin has been there, as aide to Cardinal Bea who was confidante of John 23. His description of after-hours caucusing and lobbying among the cardinals locked in the Sistine Palace is quite convincing. Martin starts with a hundred page documentary on the decline of Papal authority from 1970 to 1977, the failure of Paul 6 to hold onto the Church's wealth or moral pre-eminence. When Paul 6 dies, the cardinals are split between the "easter-nizers" (France, Germany, Third World) who want an accomodation with Marxism, and the "westernizers" (East Europe, Italy) who are anti-communist and want to tie the Church to the power of the United States. The failing U.S. dollar tilts the balance toward those who want a new Pope who will denounce capitalism and proclaim an alliance with world revolution. Only a miracle can prevent the election of a communist pope. The miracle duly comes to pass.

(-) Thomas Page, Sigmet Active --- A previous book by Page, The Hephaestus Plague, about incendiary cockroaches that crawl out of lava pools, should have warned me. But I read this anyway. Next time I'll know better. Sigmet concerns Jeff holden, a young American scientist working on "Project Windowpane", the scheme to blow a hole in Earth's ozone layer with a giant laser. Resultant "pure lethal solar radiation" will sterilize square miles of land below the hole, in seconds, just like a neutron bomb. The laser is hauled to a remote ocean island and test-fired. Mother Nature is very displeased. The Kirlian aura of every scientist on the island is recorded in the Earth's potential field, and little lightning-storms start to follow the scientists around, trying to restore the balance by zapping the unfortunate men. Jeff is followed back to the mainland by a tornado determined to kill him. Shortly after this the plot gets a bit silly. -- (Quadrangle)

(*) Martin Cruz Smith, Nightwing --- The Painted Desert, not far north of Phoenix and Tucson: an old Hopi shaman angry at encroaching whites and Navahos, expelled from his own medicine society for suspicion of witchcraft, decides to call down the wrath of the primal demons on the whole damned Southwest. He is found next morning dead near his hogan, covered with dozens of razor-slashes and lying in a pool of unclotted blood and foul-smelling ammoniacal urine. The tribal cop can't quite decide what killed the old man, but further victims soon sharpen his search. It's not supernatural. The old man was the first prey of a pack of vampire bats who are extending their range from Mexico into the desert suburbs of Arizona.

The biology sounds apocryphal, but as a matter of fact Smith is sticking quite closely to known natural history. Vampire bats are a health menace in tropical Mexico, where not only do their nocturnal feedings weaken cattle but they are often carriers of rabies. The Mexican government hires bat-killers, who locate the home caves of the flyers and either seal them with dynamite or poison them with lethal gas. The job is a risky one, crawling through dark passages with a backpack full of explosives or cyanide gas tanks, wearing a respirator to keep out the choking powder from waist-deep dry bat guano on the floor. Dust from bat droppings does more than make you cough, although that's bad enough when you're working your way down a vertical rock face. The dust can carry histoplasmosis spores or such a density of rabies virus particles that people have caught hydrophobia just from breathing it and absorbing the virus into tiny sores in the nasal membranes.

Somebody has to find the home cave of the bats called north by the old Hopi, and somebody has to go into that cave to eliminate the bats. Not pleasant. Smith adds a further twist. The bats have been infected by a disease endemic among rodents in New Mexico: bubonic plague. This isn't fantasy either. Each year 6-10 people die in New Mexico from rodent-carried plague, out of 12-16 plague deaths per year in the whole USA. In the novel, reports of plague bats leads to a quarantine of Black Mesa and a sudden desire by half the population of southern Arizona to visit some other part of the country. The Hopi deputy sheriff, the Public Health nurse, and a surly professional bat-killer from Mexico head into the desert looking for the bats. And of course at the same time the hungry bats are out cruising the desert looking for the hunters.

Smith's earlier books also make worthwhile reading - The Indians Won, a uchronia which has European industrialists bankrolling a Sioux-Cheyenne federation after Custer's defeat; a series of "Vatican secret agent" books as "Simon Quinn".

(*) Whitley Streiber, The Wolfen --- The lead characters are a family of big canines of near-human intelligence who can speak to each other telepathically and who hang around human cities picking off the occasional straggler by night. They've been doing this for thousands of years, appearing as innocent dogs by day, emerging as ravenous werewolves after sundown. We zero in on one pack that hangs out in New York's Central Park.

Muggers, rapists, what's a werewolf or two? The Park is unsafe enough as it is. Every other night a derelict or street punk disappears; who pays attention to such people anyway? Then the young wolfen make the mistake of killing two city cops, and the secret of the wolfen is abruptly in big trouble. An investigative team of a Museum of Natural History scientist, a police medical examiner, and two detectives narrow down the suspects to those big shaggy gray animals hiding under the trees there. The wolves have ESP, they can climb buildings. The adults decide to cover for the cubs' mistake by killing the humans who have spotted them, knowing of course that wolfen are vulnerable to human guns. You can cheer for the people or the wolves as they close in on each other. // Despite the unlikely premise, Streiber makes the story work. --(Morrow)

(?) Bob Stickgold and Mark Noble, Gloryhits --- The authors both have PhDs in neurobiology, so you know at least that the science will be tolerable in this story of careless experiments with recombinant DNA. To begin with, somebody distributes a new and super-strong brand of LSD - "gloryhits" - among East Coast acidheads. Turns out the LSD was also laced with a virus containing spliced human genes that double forebrain growth in early embryonic life. Women who drop the new acid and then get pregnant begin to suffer abnormally high rates of first-trimester miscarriage; the modified fetuses are generally inviable. Those few embryos that survive to term have monstrous swollen brains, common in SF films.

Whether the babies are more intelligent than normal isn't clear yet. The real question is, who made the LSD and who is using the drug dropping population of the eastern USA as guinea pigs? A group of biologists and physicians in Cambridge, Massachusetts, sets to work on the problem - one scientist in particular is worried because his pregnant wife may have been exposed to the virus. The US Army is also investigating, secretly. They suspect the Russians did it.

Officials have seen the miscarriage figures but have ignored them. Hell, we all know that LSD causes birth defects. Says so right in the Readers Digest. The threads converge; the lines of investigation point in one direction. Army biologists are told to prepare a warning shot to scare the Russians: influenza viruses that produce botulinus toxin. But if we retaliate against the Russians, and it turns out they weren't the ones after all ... and how infectious is the gloryhits virus anyway? A pint of it just got dumped into the sink and is finding its way to the sewers. // The characters are a bit weak, but as far as I can tell all the organisms are possible. Brr. --(DelRey)

(-) Ingo Swann, Star Fire --- The Russians decide to take ESP weapons seriously and set up Project Tolkien: mind war. The U.S. Army simultaneously sets up Project Tonopah: psychic warfare. We are set for a war of wizards - mass projective hypnosis, teleportation, hex magic. You can trace this back to Charles Fort's idea of using poltergeists as heavy artillery and dumping a mountain and Niagra Falls on top of the enemy troops.

(Star Fire) -- But one man has presumably read Kurt Vonnegut's "Report on the Barnhouse Effect" and decides he has enough power all by himself to neutralize the combined psychic armies of Russia and America. He is Dan Merriweather, rock musician, out-of-body traveller and mega-psychic. He meets a general, an arms dealer, and a female psychic researcher. He finds the Russian and American governments, unable to reach him on the astral plane, have determined on a simpler physical method: hit men from the CIA and KGB want to shoot him. Dan is kept pretty busy by all this. // Swann believes mega-psychic war is all too possible. He travels out-of-body quite often, and has done some interesting paintings based on what he saw on his far voyages, such as views of the Milky Way Galaxy from 50,000 light years above the ecliptic. -- (Dell)

(?) Gore Vidal, Kalki --- No, not Kalki the silver stallion of the Cabell books but Kalki the final avatar of Vishnu, the one whose appearance signals the immanent demise of the human race. To Katmandu goes Teddy Oettinger, a reporter and pilot and a very dull woman: narrator of the comedy. There she meets Kelly, the GI and biological warfare expert who thinks he is Kalki and will release the final plague on mankind to prove it. Vidal writes what for him is presumably a happy ending, in which the every last rotten corrupt human dies and the Earth is left clean and fresh for the monkeys to take over. Well written but gloomy, gloomy. -- (Random House)

I wonder if the Jonestown mass murder/suicide will lead to a reissue of Vidal's earlier SF book, Messiah. That book, written in 1954, describes a new religion of death-worship preached by a California undertaker named John Cave. He tells his followers that it is good to die. They kill themselves by thousands after willing all their goods to Cave's Church. Cavesway conquers the United States and ultimately spreads over the whole world. Seems less fantastic now.

(-) Tony Williamson, Technicians of Death --- Northern Burma contains the "Golden Triangle", foremost world source of opium poppies. Williamson takes this known fact, and some good scenic descriptions of a decadent future Maoist Bangkok, and plunges off the deep end into an unlikely secret agent adventure. Chung Li also called "the Scorpion" is the Chinese warlord who runs the Triangle. He bears closer resemblance to the insidious Dr Fu Manchu than to the real Nationalist Chinese generals who ran the opium traffic until 1975. But the hill country is getting too unstable for Chung Li, too many Shan rebels and Maoists about. He makes a deal with a PLO representative to supply the Palestinians with 9½ tons of heroin to sell if they will find him a secure quiet base in the Middle East. Chung Li's voluptuous daughter, Sioo, observes in silence.

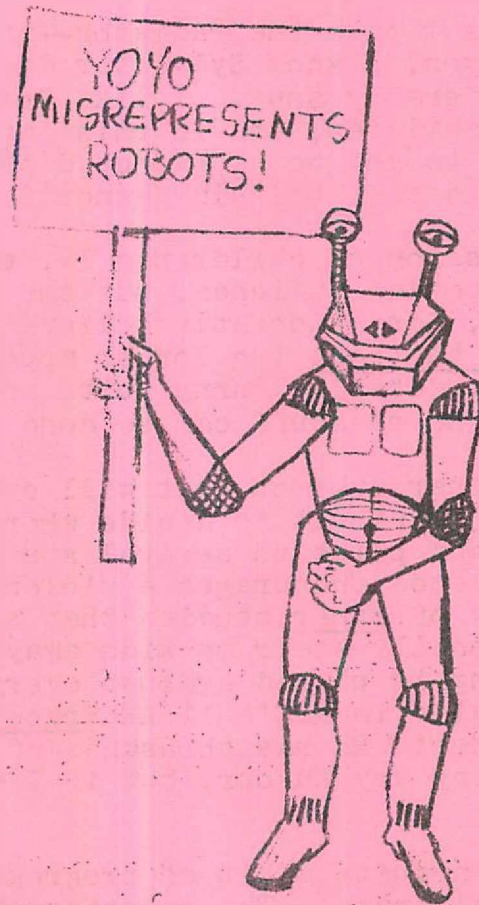
Along comes Carlos, alias the Jackal, to speak for the PLO. (He really exists, as did Chung Li before the Burmese Government caught him in 1977. I wonder how terrorists and Chinese warlords like finding themselves in capitalist adventure novels.) But this isn't the real Carlos; it's FBI agent Lee Corey in disguise. There's a trip on the Kwai River. Sioo tries to seduce agent Corey, as you'd expect from the Daughter of Fu Manchu. The bad guys plan to smuggle out the heroin aboard a hijacked U.S. Navy Guppy class submarine. Apart from some nice scenery, the book doesn't provide much interest, --- (Athenaum)

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LOST IN THE JUNGLE:

CHILDREN'S FANTASY
TELEVISION SERIES

by
Melissa
Dowd



Ah, Saturday morning! Getting up before the old folks, tip-toeing downstairs, and turning on the television- Space Patrol! Commander Corey, and Happy, and what's-her-name...

I haven't seen SP since I was seven years old, so fortunately I don't know how awful it was. My mother does. She made the mistake of watching it with me once, and 7 AM every Saturday morning thereafter, I would appear beside her bedside and hiss, "Come on, it's time, SPACE PATROL'S ON!!!"

It took a couple of weeks before she decided I could watch it by myself--patient woman.

Saturdays are a little different for me these days, what with David getting up at six, and Beth (she likes to sleep in) arising at seven. Somehow, I have lost the savour of the dawn rising. I usually cuff the little ones away from my bed until it's hopeless, then struggle through the mists and stagger to the tea kettle. But, unlike my mother, I can't ultimately rebel against the Saturday morning programs, because we live in a four room apartment. I either watch cartoons (through a tea cup, darkly) or I sit in the kitchen and listen to the radiator.

Some mornings I take the radiator--after Tweety and Sylvester of course. (Yes, yes, I know Sylvester doesn't do justice to cats and Tweety is insufferably smug. I like Granny.) Children's programs are, after all, for children, and in this day of declining workmanship in many crafts, it is not to be expected that many programs can have the appeal for adults that the old Warner Bros. cartoons do.

In any discussion of children's TV, one must take into consideration not only the intended audience, but the budget involved. I am striving to be fair here, for I honestly believe that with few exceptions, notably Land of the Lost (no longer appearing), little attention is paid to creative detail. Funny suits and pratfalls are the order of the day; this kind of stuff can be done well, but it generally isn't.

There is another subject that will crop up, and that is violence. Here it is very difficult to decide where lines should be drawn. I could stand up and point to several studies which indicate that watching TV violence encourages a violent reaction in children, but there are plenty of other studies that say the opposite, so I won't bother. I personally steer my kids away from programs that seem grim, where every being is pitted against every other. I can find little of any redeeming value in NBC's 11 AM Space Ghost--but it is not as violent as the Road Runner! RR has thousands of devotees--it has great animation, and a very wry humour, but if I see that coyote fall off one more cliff...

There has been quite a bit of progress in recent years in giving a more multi-racial image. The majority of programs now at least have a token non-white (and lately token women have been cropping up, on The New Adventures of Batman, for example). I think this is a step in the right direction, even though it is often done clumsily.

Now let's run--or hop, skip and jump more appropriately--through some of the shows, and see what the networks have to offer our developing humans:

CBS starts off the space-fantasy with Far Out Space Nuts at 7:30. I happen to like Bob Denver, and in fact both human characters in this show are rather appealing. The non-humans, on the other hand, all have the same voice effects and the plots are designed for the very young. One program involved a race of bird-beings; our two heroes are assigned to watch the royal egg, and the usual mishaps ensue. A tempermental king, an evil minister, and a plot against the humans and the royal ovule...everything turns out ok. This show has all anglo-saxon characters, except for the aliens, of course, and the only women I've seen were villains. Not too bad, and non-violent.

This series, incidentally, premiered last season with another,

similar, series that was more sophisticated--in humor, anyway. I'm referring to the Lost Saucer, which can still be seen if one has the stomach to sit through the rest of The Krofft Super Show, which I haven't. The Lost Saucer starred Jim Nabors and Ruth Buzzi as a couple of pixilated ET androids; their human companions were a white female babysitter and her black charge. All intelligent, articulate, cute, and extremely middle-class, but nobody's perfect. A very amusing show, that managed to sneak in a little social satire. I miss it.

Tarzan at 10 on CBS, and the Jungle Lord is coming across ok this time around. The present producers, Norm Prescott and Lou Scheimer, are being reasonably faithful to the jungle side of ERB's most famous creation, but there is no Lord Greystoke about it (has there ever been, in any depiction since the original?). Tarzan is a bachelor; alas for the nuclear family, it's out of style. This program presents a strong theme of "We can settle our differences". Some attempts at introducing female characters, but so far the majority are evil queens. Could do a lot better with racial depictions; one gets the impression the inhabitants of Africa are mainly from Opar.

At 10:30 we have Batman and the Krofft Super Show on CBS and ABC respectively. I was disappointed in Batman. The caped crusader seems to translate poorly from the comic pages. His heroics seem tired and this Batman is harried, like he wishes Robin were back at school and himself back at the mansion with his feet up. Batgirl is uninteresting, and I will spare you a description of a new addition, Bat-Mite.

The Krofft Super Show revolves around a rock and roll hype bunch (Kaptain Kool and the Kongs) that are manic and annoying--and extremely sexist. I have only watched a program or two--it makes my gorge rise. If I was a qualified witch I would get out my wax and do something hideous to Sid and Marty Krofft. How the same guys could come up with the Lost Saucer and this load of crap is beyond me.

At 11 we have NBC's Space Ghost and Frankenstein Jr. Pardon me while I go kick in my television set. At the same time spot CBS has SHAZAM!/Isis; aimed at preteens or younger, it is too goody-two-shoes to keep the attention of a street-wise city kid. A definite effort is made to present a multi-racial and non-sexist viewpoint--but the heroes are both white males. The plots revolve around personal problems and resolutions, and the action is incidental: troubled girl wanders off by herself and falls down a mine shaft sort of thing. Still, problems generally get solved in a rational fashion, which is a good image to present to tender minds, and the show encourages other uses of the head besides pounding. A for effort.

Last in the Saturday tube intake in the fantasy department is the old Super Friends, which CBS sticks in whenever they have a hole in their programming. I think this is the most successful animated comic book, and the show was a pioneer in stressing ecological themes and in trying to use female characters. Too bad more attention wasn't paid to accuracy in their pseudo-scientific details.

It will have struck you that I favour CBS. I think they are taking the most pains with their children's programming, with an eye to education and not merely entertainment. Judging from my own five year

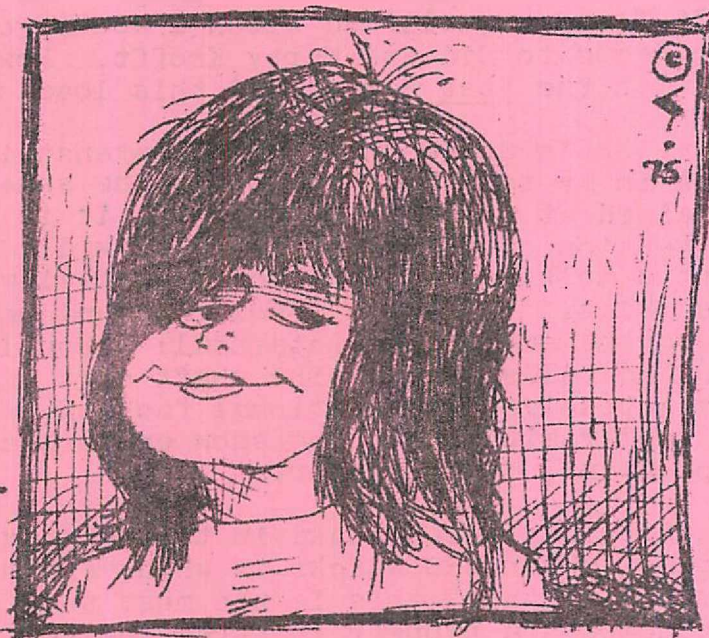
it is not tough to entertain a child with a TV show. Beth will watch anything on the tube and, alas, has already learned to sing commercials. (She's also an insufferable know-it-all. The first day we were watching Tarzan together she nudged me and said, "Want me to tell you which one is Tarzan?" It is impossible to wither a five year old with a glance.) Those of you who have children, or plan to, beware: television may be hazardous to their health. Outside of the violence question, all the important because unresolved, how does TV affect child development in toto? I am an anarchist at heart and doubt the advisability of training children (or allowing the networks to train them) to sit in front of the box and watch six hours of punch, sock and if Mama won't buy it for you ask Grandma. The commercials on the Big Three are atrocious. Candy, sugar-coated cereals and toys that require batteries rather than imagination, Good God, we're already a nation of buffaloe consumers.

But on the other hand, when the wee tyke goes to school and finds out about all the neat stuff on the tube from friends, there will be tears, recriminations and hatred on both sides if Mama or Papa says no TV. I personally try to strike a happy medium, but I wish I had the strength of character to throw the damn box out the window.

But then I would miss M*A*S*H....

MS
NEO

SAW
ISAAC AT
PHILCON -
HE WAS -
I SAID -
WE -



SCIENCE FICTION

THE VS. SUPERNATURAL

by HOWARD SMUKLER

I have always thought that people who read science fiction would be especially sympathetic to the supernatural and might even have a large number of their own supernatural experiences. Over the last several years I have talked with science fiction buffs, read leading science fiction writers and even used different forms of survey research to arrive at the conclusion that there exists very little relationship between the people who are into science fiction and those into the supernatural. In fact, some of the evidence indicates that if you are interested in the one, you might not be interested, and even hostile to, the other.

The reason this conclusion seems so surprising is that science fiction readers have a very positive image among intellectuals. In the 1940's and 50's, science fiction was on the very fringes of imaginative expression. As a literary style it was distinctively an American contribution and attracted a very capable and inventive group of writers. I'm sure all of us have some memory at the age of fifteen of falling deeply and uncontrollably into a Heinlein novel or Asimov story. Few books could compete with the intensity of feeling that comes with reading science fiction at the right time and the right place.

It could also be fairly said that the people who read science fiction were also a special breed. They were the thinkers who could transcend the here and now, going way into the future, not only to understand radically new forms of technology, but even to imagine new forms of social organization, although the latter was not necessarily the strong point of most of the writers or perhaps even the readers. But in any case one always had the idea that a reader of science fiction was on the very edge of what the human mind was capable of creating. You had to be able to accept bizarre concepts, plots that were outside our frame of reference, and phenomena which had no rational explanation.

When I began teaching courses several years ago in the occult and supernatural, I maintained this science fiction stereotype in the back of my mind. I expected a great number in the class to be science fiction buffs, and although I never specifically asked anyone, I regularly included science fiction on the reading lists and made frequent references to some of the classic stories in the lectures. One night while I was in New York, I had an experience which was to totally change my attitude on the subject.

I was sitting with a group of people discussing some of the more bizarre experiences I had encountered in my classes. I told a story of a woman who had gotten tied up in a combination of circumstances which involved telepathy, spiritualism and even some problems with the space-time continuum. It was a fascinating story and to the best of my knowledge I believed the woman was telling the truth. At this point a fellow named Mike {no relation.--editor} recalled a science fiction story that was very similar to the woman's experiences. We all remarked how interesting and synchronistic it was for the two stories to be so similar. At this point Mike became very critical and a little combative. He was generally skeptical about my student's experience and as the evening progressed it was clear he was very skeptical about the whole world of the supernatural. Unfortunately, a great deal of antagonism developed

between the two of us and the evening was reduced to a shouting match in which he was calling me a liar and a kook, and I was telling him to get his head out of books and become involved in the much more fascinating world of reality.

While Mike and I didn't accomplish much, he did give me a very valuable insight and I decided to do some research to test this new hypothesis. Basically what I wanted to discover was: do people who read science fiction believe in the supernatural, and vice versa, do people who believe in the supernatural read science fiction? Since at that time I had access to about 150 students taking my courses, I thought it would be interesting to test them on the subject and see what kind of correlations I came up with.

As I was preparing the questionnaire, I had an opportunity to run into another science fiction fan and test my hypothesis even more dramatically than in my confrontation in New York. I had been interested for a long time in getting the university to offer credit for my course. There was always the red tape and other academic hassles, but finally I had obtained the approval of several important people. Only one problem remained: I needed the chairman of a department to approve the course and in effect get a sponsor. My background is in political science which obviously wouldn't even consider the course; the philosophy department was very cautious, but I appeared to have an excellent opportunity with the history department. The chairman of the department, a Professor Briggs, had recently taught a successful course called the History of Science Fiction. The course was really more a survey of a great many science fiction books than a history course, but apparently it was enough of the two to fit the History Department's guidelines. I approached Dr. Briggs with my proposal. I told him all the groundwork had been laid and that all that was necessary was a History Department approval. I also redesigned a course to be called the History of the Supernatural, and made it more historical than contemporary or sensational.

I knew from the minute I began to discuss the course with him, that I was not dealing with an overwhelmingly sympathetic person. In all fairness, he did say that he liked the idea of new courses and the imaginative orientation that my course appeared to be taking. He promised to bring it up at the next department meeting and would lend his support to the course. When I left the room, however, I was sure that approval would not be forthcoming. There was a certain amount of reservedness which he seemed to express about the whole supernatural field which I suspect was absent in his feelings about science fiction, his pet avocation.

The final result of this process was that the course was turned down because it did not properly fit into the category of history per se. But the clincher came when it was suggested that I try the Psychology Department because it would fit better there. I thought that was a very interesting analysis to be made by a group of historians. How could a student of history seriously suggest that the Psychology Department would be the best place to try an experimental course on the supernatural? Is there anything in the history of either of those subjects that would suggest that one was not dealing with fire and water? Rightly or wrongly I took the rejection as a conspiracy to deny credit to my course and since the person in charge of that decision was so actively involved in science fiction, I added this case to my experience in New York and tended to confirm my developing thesis.

Because my background is in the social sciences, I thought it was best to test my perceptions through a social survey. I formulated a brief questionnaire which I decided to give to about 150 students in several of my classes. First, the students were asked to rank the amount of science fiction they read from Never, Seldom, Sometimes, Frequently, and Always. Then they were asked to rank their belief in the supernatural from None, Doubtful, Undecided, Sympathetic, and Strong Belief. As a

control I also gave the questionnaire to about 40 people in a class that nothing to do with the subject of the supernatural.

The results that came back from the computer were not overwhelming, but tended to show a slight trend favoring my belief that the subjects of the supernatural and science fiction attracted different people. For example I found a negative .11 correlation between belief in the supernatural and reading science fiction. This means that whenever the belief in the supernatural was high, the amount of reading of science fiction went down and conversely whenever science fiction reading was great the belief in the supernatural was low. There was a similar correlation between people who believe in flying saucers and people who read science fiction of negative .13. This again indicated a slight tendency for people who believe in flying saucers to be very light readers of science fiction. Finally in the group of insurance salesmen and engineers I found a .07 correlation between the two factors, implying that the greater the belief in the supernatural the greater the amount of science fiction. I took this to mean that in the general population there is little distinction between what is a supernatural phenomena and what is a science fiction story. However, when a person chose to become interested in one of the areas they began to cut themselves off from the other.

Of course, statistics can be very misleading which is why I am no longer much of a social scientist. Samplings can be inadequate, questions can be worded badly and subjects can lie because they feel certain results are expected from them. In any case I felt the slight correlations I did find were helpful in supporting my position and I have included them for those people who like to make up their minds on the basis of statistics.

At some point I came across a movie entitled *The Unexplained*, narrated by Rod Serling. It was a collection of short documentary sketches about different subjects which were on the edges of our present knowledge, including parapsychology, psychic healing and the like. To my surprise the featured speaker was Arthur Clarke, the noted science fiction writer and author of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. I had at this point never encountered any material by Clarke written on the subject of the supernatural and was very curious as to his position. Early in the film he expressed his interest in all things which were imaginative and new and indicated that one should have an open mind about what was possible.

One of the first segments took place in what I remember was a parapsychology center for a demonstration of some forms of telepathy. A student was brought in and after a hypnotic induction scored a direct hit on a picture sealed in an envelope. If it was accurate it was a very impressive demonstration, but certainly not inconsistent with anything in the present parapsychology literature. This segment was followed by a statement by Clarke that he remained skeptical about results of the experiment we had just witnessed and implied that he was generally skeptical of the results of parapsychology. Both my students and I were quite shocked by this turn of events and I realized that I was going to be adding some additional material to my developing ideas on this subject.

The last scene of the movie was about UFO's and very superficially discussed the subject. Arthur Clarke then appeared to give his analysis. He put his position very concisely when he said, "One who thinks they (UFO's) are spaceships shows a grave lack of imagination. It was a very heavy quote especially coming from someone with his credentials. I visualized flying saucer enthusiasts all over the country, who I am sure had prided themselves on their imaginations, taking great exception to Clarke's opinion. Whether one believes in saucers or not, I don't think you could accuse the many books on the subject of lacking imagination.

Because of the insights of this movie, I decided to research the question a little more and learn of Clarke's writing on the subject. Arthur Clarke is of course a giant in his field and I have frequently used his books, especially *Childhood's End*, in my lectures. I personally feel that in that book he not only presents a very reasonable and believable program for a future landing of extra-terrestrials, but he also describes events which may possibly have taken place in man's early development. I am speaking of the landing of "gods" in ancient times and their attempts, apparently unsuccessful, to influence man's future. It is because of this literary background that I was so surprised to discover his writings on the subject of modern-day supernatural and extra-terrestrial events.

As one of the pioneers in this field, in 1953, Clarke wrote an article for the British Interplanetary Society in which he concluded that "facts prove most conclusively that the largest and most representative class (of UFO's) are not spaceships." He based this belief on the fact that they travel speeds which no material body could withstand and they accelerate at great speeds without breaking the sound barrier. The fact that UFO's operate contrary to many of our strongly-accepted laws of course has been known for years. Why these accepted laws should prove to be a barrier to forces outside our earth is unclear. If anyone should understand this certainly Clarke should, and UFO literature is filled with attempts to describe how saucers are capable of operating in violation of forces such as gravity and outside the space-time continuum.

But Clarke continued to debunk the saucer phenomena with a general philosophy on unexplainable phenomena. He generally felt that when faced with a difficult problem, "it is far simpler and more logical to accept the natural explanation." The reason for this is that "There would never have been any scientific progress if people had always accepted the most complicated and improbable theories to account for events."

There are really two points here. First, why is the existence of UFO's so complicated an explanation compared to all the other far-fetched discussions of swamp gas, chasing Venus and the whole host of Air Force-type explanations? Actually, in Clarke's terms, UFO's are probably the simplest explanation, for if flying saucers do not exist, then we are forced to deal with an enormous problem, and that is that tens of millions of people in the world are crazy. Secondly, scientific progress probably does not owe its success to the technicians who broke problems down into their simplest and most uncomplicated forms. Some of the really great inventors were weird. The Nikolai Teslas and the Wilhelm Reichs operated in unusual worlds of hallucinations, serendipity, psychic impressions and other phenomena frequently associated with madness and even the supernatural. It is surprising that Clarke does not give recognition to this fact. He certainly must be aware that the work of the great innovative scientists are characterized by complexity, and improbable theories which only after many years could be reduced to the practical explanations of today.

It does not appear that Clarke's dislike of the flying saucer phenomena has diminished with time. In fact, it has gotten stronger. In a recent book review for the *New York Times*, Clarke clearly shows a sympathy for the latest books that appear to be explaining the UFO phenomena as primarily lying in the mind of the beholder. But he saves his most vicious attack for the "frauds and psychopaths" which he sees everywhere in the movement. Of them he writes, "Yet perhaps the various Flying Saucer cults provide a harmless hobby for the unstable personalities who otherwise might be out child molesting." analysis coming from a man of Clarke's stature. Either he has become so out of touch with developments in the UFO

movement in Sri Lanka, or there really is a strong antagonism and incompatibility between the science fiction movement and the supernatural movement.

I guess the general direction of this article implies that I sympathize with the latter, and it is only fair to conclude with some type of explanation for this phenomena.

Many years ago I worked for the President's Commission on Pornography. One of the problems the Commission dealt with was the relation between people who read and observe pornography and those people who practiced sexual crimes and perversions. After extensive investigation it was found that people who experience pornography do not practice it in real life. Psychologically pornography was used as a release for built-up frustration and that individuals who could get the release vicariously demonstrated no need to get release in the real world. The results were especially interesting because hardened sexual offenders reported almost no arousal from seeing pornographic movies, while other types of criminals, especially the white-collar type, reported overwhelming stimulation.

I wonder if this type of phenomena exists in the area of science fiction versus the supernatural. Could it be that science fiction readers get so totally into the fantasy of unknown worlds and unseen forces that they dissipate their curiosity for the unexplained events of reality? Could it also be that people who experience supernatural phenomena are so overwhelmed by these events that a fictional story in a book is unsatisfying in comparison to what has really happened to them? If this theory were true, then the two groups of people would be increasingly separated and we would find very little overlapping between the two subjects.

It is also possible that we are dealing with two different types of people. To some the intellectual stimulation of reading is more than sufficient to satisfy their curiosity for unusual things. To them the mind provides the freedom of experimenting with way-out concepts and traveling off into fantasies which really know no boundaries. There are literally no limits in this world especially catered to by science fiction. Other people find the world of the mind empty; they demand the involvement in real situations. To this group the overpowering reality of an actual supernatural experience is everything and many times they are caught up in events which physically are very real and very dramatic. Often these experiences happen to people who have never read a book on the subject or entertain a thought about the matter.

The great majority of people, myself included, probably don't fall into such pure categories. We read because we are unable to have those types of unique experiences which seem to happen infrequently and to a small number of people. I would like to witness a complete table levitation, but failing to do that, I will read about one until my experience with it comes. In addition, my reading on the subject will provide me with a sufficient base to understand the experience and probably enable me to participate in it more fully. Many people have told me about their supernatural experiences and because of their lack of knowledge about it have been unable to make use of the experience. It is of course necessary to combine both the framework supplied by the mind and the experiences provided by the body. Any concentration of one end at the expense of the other is certainly incomplete.

My efforts to view the relationship between science fiction and the supernatural are only as reliable as the information I have available. I find my theory that the two groups are different to be interesting, but falls short of being overwhelmingly convincing. I need information from people who have either combined the two fields in their own lives or have found a separation as I did.

A Short Follow-up Note to Howard Smukler's Article

by Mark M. Keller

I HELPED HOWARD RUN SOME OF THOSE SURVEYS OF SCIENCE FICTION FANS AT THE LAST FEW BOSKONES - AND DO YOU KNOW, HE'S RIGHT? MOST S.F. FANS ARE VERY SKEPTICAL OF THE OCCULT.



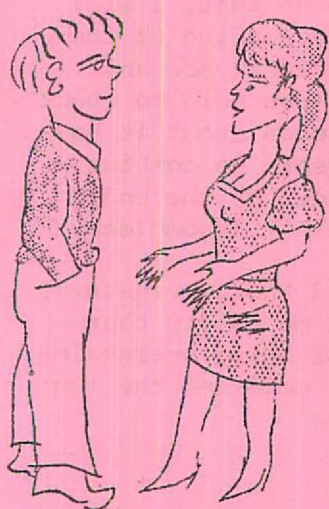
BUT HE PICKED THE WRONG GROUP TO SURVEY. THERE ARE SOME FANS WHO DO BELIEVE IN MAGIC AND IN SUPERNATURAL POWERS. THEY'VE REALLY GROWN IN THE PAST YEAR.



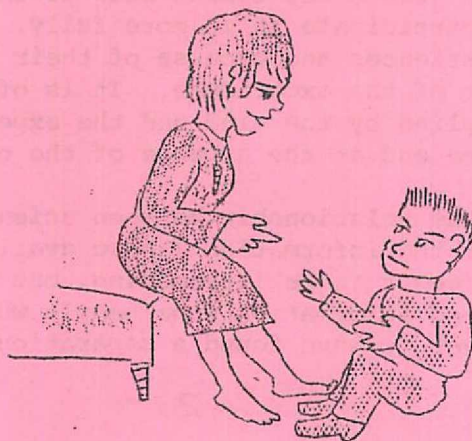
FRINGE FANS!

LAST FALL I HEARD THE FOLLOWING AT A "FRIENDS OF DARKOVER" MEETING----

We could solve the energy crisis by using laran powers to run our technology. Laran is clean and non-polluting and it's not dangerous like nuclear energy.



Now in your last incarnation you were a member of a secret society of Masters of occult knowledge. They're waiting for you to gain enough knowledge in this life so they can ask you to join again, to continue your research from where you left off.



How long do I have to wait?
I'm 17 years old already.

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