THE PROPER BOSKONIAN

The Proper Boskonian

"Hardly worth the cost of a subscribing membership to NESFA."
--A.D. Wallace

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Table of Contents:

Anderson, Mark: My Words	Mark Anderson	2
"Aftermath"	Ann McCutchen	3
Between Death and Dreams	Don D'Ammassa	9
The NESFA Library	NESFA, et al.	15
"George, the Interstellar Starship"	Karl Eric Friberg	36

The Editor would like to give Special Thanks to: Richard Harter, Robert Weiner, and Rick Katze.

(The following "fill-in" Letter of Comment is presented as a convenience to our readers):

Dear Mark,

I can't tell you how much I enjoyed the latest issue of Proper B_____. My favorite piece was _____. Although it is difficult to differentiate among the many excellent articles you have provided, if I had to choose a second favorite it would probably be _____. Someday you are sure to win a Hugo, and perhaps be the recipient of a _____ Prize. Keep up the _____ good work!

Yours in _____ gratitude,

_____

ANDERSON, MARK: MY WORDS

Welcome to the 19th edition of Proper Boskonian, the journal of the New England Science Fiction Association which, in a monumental act of hubris, attempted to become a quarterly Corporate Report, and only attained an eighth of its goal (whether that fractional amount of success refers to PB's frequency of publication, or its proximity to a Corporate Report, or both, is left to the reader to decide). In any case, I've gradually changed the format of this issue, in order to get it out in a quicker fashion. Gone is the time-consuming offset printing process. Half gone, as you'll see, is the Selectric typography (not time-consuming, per se; it's just that my machine broke). These drastic measures should go a long way to help PB meet its quarterly schedule. The only other obstacle to this lofty goal is in finding material to publish. Believe me, friends (here's where I get sincere), contributions are welcome. Don't be intimidated by the veneer of erudition and sophistication that permeates Proper Boskonian. Permeable veneer can be bought at most corner drugstores for a small amount of my meager budget, but articles, stories, book reviews, movie reviews, art-work, letters of comment, etc., are much harder to find (can you imagine how long it took me to find this editorial? And where?).

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Speaking about LoC's, here's half of the mail I received on the last issue (the other half can be found on the Table of Contents page)...

Karl Hakmiller
University of Connecticut
Storrs, Conn. 06268

Dear Ed:
One Loc, coming at you:

1. Harter sounds like a barely possible person but, on the whole, an interesting one. However, I'd like a little more information about Freckles in some future issue.

(continued on p. 8)

"Aftermath"

Ann A.B. McCutchen

FIRST PRIZE
1979 N.E.S.F.A.
SHORT STORY CONTEST

Again, Alexander lay sleeping among the roots of the giant oak tree. The late afternoon sun splashed through the leaves to sequin the boy's body with light and to wink about his horn-rimmed glasses. The sun eased further down toward the horizon, and tickled his nose.

Alexander sneezed, and jerked his hand towards his nose. The pain stopped him in mid-gesture, a solemn, sturdily-built eleven year old boy with dark hair and hazel eyes. Cautiously, he finished the motion, pinching his nose vigourously. Then he blinked, and flexed his hand, and evaluated his pains.

The cramping in his hand might have come from clenching it, or, as he thought, from gripping a sword. The ache across his shoulder might have come from an awkward sleeping position, or from swinging a sword. But the aches and burns all over his legs could only have come from cuts, dozens upon dozens of cuts.

"It was real," he said firmly. In the afternoon quiet his voice jarred the stillness. He stared at the ground beyond his hand, remembering the climactic battle. Even then it had not struck him as an heroic scene.

He was nearly three times the size of his adversaries, and his allies came up only to his knees. It had been a scrambling, shapeless melee of a fight. At first he had only shoved at the yarthkins with the flat of the old Roman sword. Then, as he realized that the yarthkins had no such qualms about attacking the brownies, he had started to really use his weapon. He chopped and thrust, working his way from one press of yarthkins to the next, trying always to protect as many of the desperate brownies as possible.

He learned to defend his legs with slashes, like scything hay. He learned not to look at the fallen brownies, like broken puppets, whom he had come to know and care about in only a week or two. And he learned how long he could fight after fatigue screamed through his muscles, and after the slashes on his legs merged into a bloody network.

The battle had stretched on, grim and almost silent, from midday until nearly sunset. Then, with unreal suddenness, the yarthkins had dropped their weapons, grabbed their wounded, and fled. At this,

the brownies had given a breathless, squeaky cheer, and had sunk down where they stood. Alexander had collapsed with even more abruptness.

Now he was aware again, and lying under the oak tree from which the brownies had taken him two weeks before. Terror twisted his stomach. His parents would be frantic. To casually limp in would be intolerable. He could not explain what had happened and be believed. His wounds meant that there could be no innocent explanation. He could not even claim loss of memory; anyone would assume that he had been attacked and imprisoned. He was in for a nightmare of shouting adults.

He sighed and rolled into a sitting position. Only then did he notice a limp pile by his side on the grass. The bottom layer was the leather clothes they had given him to wear, now torn and discoloured with blood, most of it his, and on the top was a wilted bouquet of violets.

Tears stung his eyes. The brownies had kidnapped him, taken his clothes, and manuveured him into fighting in a deadly battle, but they had been desperate. Beset by the large and vicious yarthkins, they had needed a champion. Alexander quirked a smile. An eleven year old boy with poor eyesight was what they had gotten, and they had been delighted. He had become accessible to them by falling asleep under the giant oak, and was big enough to wield their ancient treasure, a Roman short sword. They had been so apologetic about his capture, and he had found them so pathetic in their plight that he had agreed to co-operate with their plans for him, and had stayed.

Now it was time to return home. He shoved the leathers and flowers behind the oak and stood up. The pain was less than he had feared, and walking was almost easy. Even at a cautious pace he had, all too soon, crossed the meadow, passed through the lane, and traveled the road that passed near the back of his home. He paused and examined the panorama of cramped house backs and motley gardens. Nothing had changed, and his adventure was behind him. He took a deep breath, and trudged down the hill and along the track that meandered into his yard. At the back door, he hesitated, then gripped the knob and flung himself nto the kitchen.

"Mum! Da'! I'm home!" he shouted.

His mother turned away from the sink. "Don't yell, Alec. I'm right here." She turned back to scrubbing vegetables. "Did you have a nice afternoon?"

Stunned, he could only answer, "Um, sort of." He twisted away only to confront the calendar on the wall. No more days had been marked off since he had seen it such a long time before. His adventure, somehow, had taken no real time. Slowly, thoughtfully, he pulled himself up the stairs to his room.

He shut the door, and sat down on his bed. Something was very wrong. It seemed that no time had passed, and therefore nothing could have happened as he remembered. Therefore he was crazy and had dreamt everything. Therefore the fiery, throbbing pains in his legs were not real. Hesitantly he unfastened his trousers and drew them down.

He gave a choking sob. Seen for the first time, the wounds were horrible. Although not serious for the most part, there were so many of them that the sight almost overcame him. The brownies had tied a band of soft leather around his right thigh, and he hesitated a long time before unfastening it. Underneath the protective wrapping was his most severe wound. He remembered receiving it at the end of the fight from an exceptionally large yarthkin, whom he had barely managed to srrike down.

So his battle had been real, even though the calendar was also real. "Magic," he said aloud, with more firmness than he felt. "Like Elf Hill... only...inside out somehow."

He again turned his attentions to his legs. Carefully he examined each

cut for signs of infection or imbedded dirt. He found very little, and noticed that healing seemed farther along than he would have expected. Nevertheless, he decided that they needed a careful washing, and that the rest of him would have to bathe too. A voluntary bath, and that before supper, would be suspicious, but it was better than smelling as if he had slept on rotting leaves for two weeks.

He sat in the tub, dribbling soapy water onto his knees, and planning his deceptions. He was not happy about hiding things from his parents, but even thinking about the alternative made him choke with fear. He could see no safe way out. School might be easier. There were only a few slashes and bruises on his calves. They would not appear remarkable in the gymnasium or at soccer, and, with luck, no one would notice the ones higher up. The risk came when he changed his clothes. If he changed in the loo he would be called a sissy. The backs of his legs were fairly clean, so perhaps he could just turn his back on the other boys when he changed his pants. Others did it without much ragging.

Back in his bedroom, he changed into his second-best clean clothes, with a vague idea of appearing unquestionably innocent.

As he was tucking in his shirt, his mother opened the door and poked her head into the room. "Don't forget that -- oh! You remembered! Very good," and she was gone again.

Alexander sat down and shook. If she had come in just a minute or two earlier, it would have been all over. He had forgotten how little privacy he had at home either. He would have to change in the bathroom. There, everyone knocked. He put on his socks and shoes with jerky fingers.

He went downstairs slowly, trying to think himself into calmness, and trying to remember what his mother thought he had remembered. Before he reached the bottom of the stairs, he had found out. The doorbell rang, and his father appeared instantly to open the door for their caller. It was the vicar.

The vicar was here for Sunday supper. Now he remembered.

He tensed up at this realization, but a small part of him relaxed. He was always uncomfortable with the vicar, and his parents knew this. They would think this would explain any odd behavior of his. His deception would go well tonight.

Supper was a prolonged but relaxed misery for Alexander. The talk was dull and he was ignored as he quietly struggled through his least favorite vegetables. Finally he heard the vicar say something of interest. "...mischief in the area lately. It's undoubtedly some youth gang that has a late touch of spring fever, although Old Gremble insists that it's the pixies."

"How very peculiar!"

"What sort of mischief?" Alexander's parents spoke at once. He stopped eating, careful to miss nothing.

"Well, there have been sheds broken into, and dust bins turned out. Odd bits of things taken, like empty tins and broken garden shears." Alexander almost nodded; the shears had been turned into very nasty single-edged swords. But the vicar continued. "Of course I don't blame Gremble for being upset. Just this morning he found a dozen milk cans knocked on their sides and all their lids taken! But surely not by pixies."

"Yarthkins," said Alexander, before he could stop himself.

Three pairs of adult eyes were turned upon him. His heart contracted. He tried to think of something to say, anything that would detract from his disasterous error.

It was the vicar who rescued him. "Yarthkins! My goodness! I didn't know that any young people knew about them anymore." He explained parenthetically, "Yarthkins are supposed to be malevolent spirits native to this district. They would make excellent scapegoats for any sort of petty destruction. Yes,

"pixies" sounds most frivilous in comparison."

The conversation now turned easily into other channels, leaving behind a distracted Alexander. Grimly, he ate the remainder of the meal, unable to appreciate even the frosting on the cake. Immediately upon finishing, he excused himself with a half bow and a murmured "[illegible]ork", and retreated to his room.

Once there it occured to him that he had forgotten what his homework assignments had been. He found his arithmetic assignment written down, and so did that first. Then he looked through his spelling book, and read over the first unfamiliar section. As usual, he ignored his reading homework; he had read through the entire book at the start of the year. He could find no trace of his geography assignment. After fifteen minutes he had calmed down enough to accept the loss. There would be no test tomorrow. He might not even be called on, or he might know the answer, or he might learn what the work had been and have it ready in time.

At this point he stretched, chasing out the cramps that overlay his other aches. He unfolded himself from his bed. He stood, and flexed his leg muscles. Satisfied, he got out his pyjamas, tiptoed into the bathroom, changed, and hurried back into his room.

He cleared the books off his bed, scooted under the covers, and then started to read his history assignment, meticulously marked with faint pencil ticks. The reading raised one question which continued to gnaw at him even after he had finished reading, and had turned out the light. Soon, however, he fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

* * *

In the morning he probed his legs, and changed into his school clothes under the covers. No one contributed much of anything at the breakfast table. He retrieved his books and set off to school feeling almost optimistic.

His mood changed only a little as he entered the schoolyard. Out of habit he had arrived only a few minutes before classtime, and expected no unusual trouble. There was, however, the usual trouble.

Big Tom spotted him immediately, and began a casual trip with his mates that would intersect Alexander's path. He saw this out of the extreme corner of his eye, and with equal casualness, he shifted his books to his left arm and changed his direction obliquely so that they would not meet until he had almost reached the school entryway. Once there, he turned around to meet Tom's flat grey eyes with apparent indifference.

"Why, it's Smart Alec!" Tom spoke loudly, pretending to be surprised. "I can't think why Smart Alec comes to school at all. He must already know more than all the teachers. Don't you, Smart Alec?" Tom was clearly enjoying his own performance. Alexander said nothing, only shifting his stance for better balance.

Tom began another attack. "Naturally Smart Alec has done all his homework. I'll wager he could do it over again in a jiffy if I took it!" With that Tom lunged for Alexander's notebook.

Without even thinking, Alexander brought his fist down on Tom's forearm, then on the return struck him on the side of the chest. Lastly he raised his fist to smash down on the edge of his tormentor's neck, and froze. He had been acting as if there were a sword in his hand; he had just disabled his opponent, and was now preparing to kill him. He felt poleaxed. He looked into Tom's face and saw his astonishment and horror mirrored. They stared at each other, without moving, for second after long second. No one spoke.

The school bell finally jangled right over their heads. Alexander immediately turned and broke for the security of the classroom.

The incident kept distracting his attention for the rest of the day. He would push it aside to deal with the momentary demands of school, but it always returned. He barely succeeded in dealing with his geography problem. There could be no brooking the question of his moral status.

He had killed, and killed repeatedly. Indeed, he had not wanted to, but had been forced into it, for the defense of others and of himself. Yet today he had been willing to kill, and over a petty, regular annoyance. He had to understand if it was important that it had never been possible for him to seriously harm, let alone kill, Tom.

By the end of the day he had reached some conclusions. The interminable day of killing and maiming had lowered his moral standing. His attack on the school bully was an inadvertant continuation of the battle; he had thought of Tom as being as dangerous as a yarthkin. It changed nothing. Still, he would have to perform a significant number of good works to redress his moral balance, and at age eleven, there were not many opportunities for drastically moral behavior. These conclusions left him unhappy but calm.

As the history lesson drew to a close, he remembered his question of the previous night. As his classmates sprang for freedom, he shyly approached the teacher. Mr. Talmidge smiled in an encouraging fashion as Alexander reached his desk.

"Please sir," he began, "There's something I don't understand about the American Revolution. Why did it take until 1783 to have a peace treaty signed? Surely it didn't take such a very long time to cross the atlantic, did it?"

If Mr. Talmidge found the question unusual, he gave no sign. "Ah, well, Alexander, a peace treaty is not a simple piece of paper that says: 'We surrender. You won.' It has to detail a long list of rights and duties -- on both sides -- and say what will happen under certain conditions. Also, there are frequently monetary payments involved, and that means long bargaining on the exact amount of money involved. Even today, with instantaneous communications, a good peace treaty takes months and months. In fact, the treaty with the Americans was *not* a very good one. It left many issues unsettled, and Britain and the United States had another war, during the Napoleonic Wars, because of that. Um, you'll study that next year."

"Oh, I see. Thank you very much, sir. I'd no idea peace was so complicated. Thank you." Alexander turned and left. He was stunned by this revelation. He had thought that at least the brownies would have peace as a result of their battle, and now he had discovered that he could not be sure of even this comfort.

His feet led him to the library before he noticed his surroundings. Once there he stood staring at bindings for a long time and thinking. At last he turned, and went over to the librarian. "Excuse me, Mrs. Summers, but where would I find books on making peace treaties?"

Her bright eyes flickered as she smiled. "Ah. Diplomacy. Well, dear, I don't really think we have much in the Children's Section. What do you really want to know?"

Alexander gave her a limping explanation involving the American Revolution and the mechanics of peace negotiations. After some mutual cogitation, he emerged from the library with a fat biography of Benjamin Franklin, and his metaphorical eye on his father's copy of Henry Kissinger's memoirs.

He turned for home with an eager step. First he would have tea, then he would borrow the memoirs he needed, and then he would return to the oak tree, this time to become a peacemaker.

******

(continued from page 2)

2. Suford Lewis goes too far in using (if indeed she, not the editor, did) the word "cheats"in the title of her review of The Electric Forest. There's a difference between writing a so-called "closed" mystery and an "open" mystery. Lee was quite fair (perhaps even to a fault) in dropping any number of clues that this was a tale of the closed variety and, therefore, that it was up to the reader to suspect everyone's stated motives, even including the viewpoint character's (Magdala, as I recall -- not Magda -- but perhaps I'm wrong here). I disagree (in a friendly way, of course) with Lewis' point that "SF-world building requires the viewpoint character to be a clear channel for information about the world, or at least to be obvious about the biases introduced...", in this connection. A good deal of the fascination to be found in (to choose one obvious example) any of Asimov's robot mysteries lies precisely in the self-deceptions of the viewpoint characters about the true nature of the worlds with which they are trying to cope. I don't think it would be difficult to list many variations on this theme in the works of a number of authors, either.

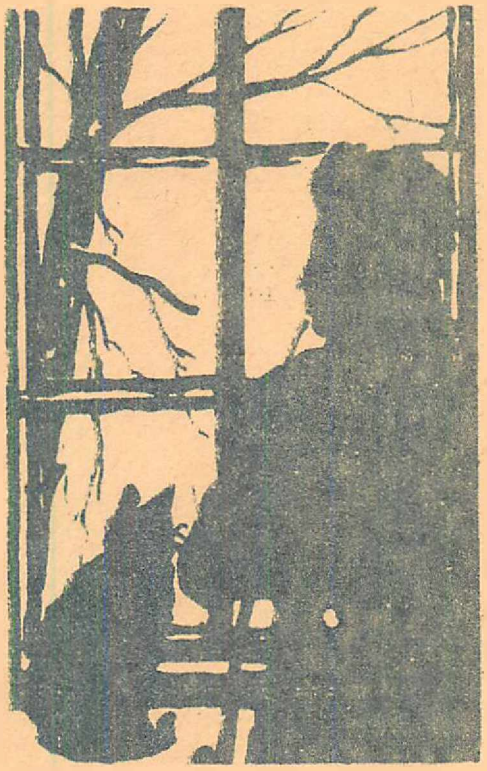
That being said (whether persuasively or not), I come to the "Post-screening Sonogram" in which Lee reveals what she thought was happening all along. Two things bear saying: (1) this device is in the honored tradition of all those great sleuths of the past who regularly gathered all the suspects in one room to reveal who-really-dunnit -- after the reader had had a chance to dope it all out, and (2) just because Lee thinks the epilogue describes what was really going on doesn't mean I'm going to buy it (when I push my suspicion button, I don't trust anyone!).

((The Intrusive Editor here: I suspect Suford's title reflects her frustration with the novel, as opposed to a direct accusation challenging the plot-construction; as Suford states in the article, "If the hidden trick were not so integral a part of the story, I could call it a Deus Ex Machina ... Tanith Lee is doing it on purpose! Not only that, I don't see how else she could do it." I agree (in an equally friendly way) with your point concerning "SF-world building"-- the works of Philip K. Dick spring to mind, although this calls into question what is meant by "SF-world building". The key element necessary to the success of any "world-building" effort, be it a work by Philip K. Dick or Hal Clement, is in its ability to covince the reader to suspend disbelief and accept the author's premises and conclusions as logical, valid, and inevetible. If Lee's epilogue was, in retrospect, logical and plausible, albeit disconcerting and perhaps dissapointing and/or frustrating, then the work has succeeded on its own terms.))

3. On the reviews in THE NESFA LIBRARY: (a) would my biases be showing if I suggested that the dearth of '60s stories in 13 Crimes of Science Fiction has a lot to do with the mystery of why so little that could be called sf was published during that decade, (b) I do hope to live to read the complete Childe Cycle, and (c) I am fascinated (if not informed) by the phrase "that treating feminism at the same level as another sexist genre fiction

(continued on p. 14)

DON D'AMMASSA



Between Death And Dreams

Although few writers may consciously realize it, most tend to have recurring concepts in their work. Barry Malzberg is noted for his insane astronauts, James Branch Cabell for anagrams, Robert Silverberg for his fascination with death, Robert Moore Williams for secret power structures, Ray Bradbury for his stories dealing with children, Keith Laumer for the individual against society, etc. Obviously, this is an oversimplification; these concepts don't appear in every story by this particular writer, and there are usually other recurring themes as well.

Kate Wilhelm, who has been writing genre fiction since 1956, has published some five dozen stories, and a handful of novels. The vast majority of these stories make use of one or another of two such uniting factors. The first is the world of dreams, illusions, and delusions -- often dealing with the nature of reality itself; the second is the concept of death, to include disease and disfigurement. Each has generated a variety of stories, many of which are among the more outstanding of the field.

Death is common in science fiction. A game SF clubs occasionally play is to see how many novels they can name that have no violent deaths in them. It's not as easy as it might sound. But we're not talking here of stories where death is an incidental plot device, but only those stories where death, decay, and the like are the central concept of the story. This includes stories like "The Village", in which a routine "clear and secure" operation is conducted against a small village, but the village is in the United States and the troops are ours as well. The point of the story is obvious; an attempt to relate to our own actions in Vietnam.

Unsurprisingly, "The Funeral" also deals with death, this time of the matriarch in a decadent future dictatorship. The young protagonist is haunted by the things the dying woman spoke in her waning days, and is disillusioned and driven to clandestine rebellion. In "The Hounds", a woman is haunted by a pair of sinister dogs that...er...dog her footsteps, until she is finally driven to killing them in cold blood, an act that has a strong effect on her composure.

"The Feel of Desperation", like many of Wilhelm's collected stories, is not fantasy in content, but still reflects the same preoccupations. In this case, the hostage of a fleeing bank robber is bound to him against her will and weeps at his death.

Perhaps Wilhelm's best known shorter work is "Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang", which concerns not just the death of an individual, but the potential death of the entire race, and the use of cloning to preserve it. But here we also see the onset of decay as the process begins to deteriorate at each remove. The young protagonist in "When the Moon was Red" is deeply affected following the death of his domineering father, a death engineered by the boy himself.

"Sirloin and White Wine" is perhaps the most obviously death oriented story. Rather than submit to a rest home, an elderly woman poisons herself and her husband, preferring death to decay. As a reversal of "When the Moon was Red", a woman murders her husband after he kills their child in "How Many Miles to Babylon?", and the earlier murder itself results from the man's decaying personality when faced with unexpected hardships.

An entire town is dying of the doldrums in "Somerset Dreams", a story which bridges both themes and which will be discussed further later. Society as a whole is decaying into an overpopulated, inhumane, underserviced mess in "The Chosen", "The Red Canary", "Where Have You Been, Billy Boy, Billy Boy?" and to a lesser extent in "April Fool's Day Forever." In the first, a man attempts to desert the future into a more pastoral time. In the second, a psychotic wife and sick child contribute to the dissolution of man's hope and self esteem as he battles inadequate and uncaring medical facilities. In the last, a group of doctors have perfected

immortality and are systematically wiping out the rest of the race. Emphasizing the theme is a woman whose children are murdered each time they are born, secretly, and whose mind is progressively affected by the deaths.

Faced with a lack of understanding from his wife, the protagonist of "A Cold Dark Night with Snow" commits suicide. Society decays in a different fashion in "The Scream", one of the better stories. A last expedition to Miami is launched, even though it seems a foregone conclusion that they will never return to civilization. "A Brother to Dragons, a Companion to Owls" is set in an empty future where the last few old people are waiting to die amidst the ruins of our civilization, when they encounter a mysterious group of children, and a sort of ghastly warfare eruots. One of Wilhelm's few aliens appears in "Stranger in the House", and this time it is the alien who cannot adjust to a death, that of his mate.

Far more noticeable is Wilhelm's recurrent use of dreams and illusions. The title "Somerset Dreams" comes immediately to mind; it was even chosen as the title story for her most recent collection. The novelette deals specifically with the similarity of dreams experienced by different people in the same town, under similiar circumstances, and how those dreams can take on a sort of reality of their own.

My favorite Wilhelm story falls into this category, in a different fashion. "The Plastic Abyss" plays with the nature of reality itself in a macabre fashion. A woman finds herself periodically existing in two places simultaneously, apparently diverging and merging in such a fashion that it is hard for others to relize her duplicity. "Stranger in the House", mentioned earlier, features the difficulty in communication caused when one is forced to look at the world through alien eyes. The human characters are telepathically touched by the alien, and their reaction to the familiar world is distorted.

Similiar to this is "The Infinity Box", in which a man can mentally control a young woman, seeing the world through her eyes. The exercise of power distorts his view of her and of himself. A pocket watch may or may not have been the cause when an elderly man finds that he can revisit moments of his earlier life, but not change them in "The Time Piece". The ultimate in illusions is in "Man of Letters", during which an author discovers that his characters are real, and that some of his acquaintances are characters in his stories, and is then abruptly written out himself.

"The Encounter" repeats this idea, with a bit better development. Herein a man imagines his own existence. The protagonist is marooned with a woman in a bus station during a snowstorm, but at the conclusion of the story, we find that the woman spent the night there alone. Was the man a figment of her imagination, or of his own?

The greatest illusion of our own time is featured in "Ladies and

Gentlemen, This is Your Crisis". Average people are taken out into a wilderness, and engage in a dangerous race for prizes, all the while being covered day and night by TV cameras. And the viewing audience, bored with their own routine lives, practically lives in front of the television, livening their own lives through vicarious absorption.

The protagonist of "Whatever happened to the Olmecs?" believes himself to be an alien child. Is that the illusion, or has it been his entire life? The entire story "Unbirthday Party" takes place amidst an illusion, as a man wanders into and out of a perpetual apartment party with no purpose, no host, and no ending.

Television as an illusional source reappears in "Baby You Were Great", a story reminiscent of D.G. Compton's novel, *The Continuous Katherine Mortenhoe* (published in the US as *The Unsleeping Eye*). A talented youn woman is wired for continuous TV coverage, and the audience can share the illusion that they are young, beautiful, rich, and vicariously adventurous. A clairvoyant has trouble distinguishing dream from reality in "Perchance to Dream". After "seeing" a bank robbery, he attempts to warn the authorities, and is unwittingly responsible for the robbery in the first place.

The illusory power of her redecorated basement drives a woman mad in "The Downstairs Room". "The Most Beautiful Woman in the World" is imagining the entire thing and is actually extremely ugly. The protagonist of the award winning "The Planners" is prone to wander off into a personal dream world at the slightest provocation. Visions and clairvoyance of a sort figure in "Julian". A psychic practical joker inflicts illusions on a man in "It's a Good Trick If...", and a man disappears when he is dreamed about by a dying girl in "The Last Threshold".

Needless to say, not all of the stories Wilhelm has written fall into the two categories above; not even all of her better ones. The popular "Staras Flonderans", in which the human race is sent into mortal terror at the reappearance of an ancient alien race awakening primitive terrors. But the prevalence of the two themes through such a large proportion of her stories seems indicative of continuing interest in the nature of reality and dreams, and the decay and death of man and his society.

Everyone would choose his own favorites differently, but before closing, I'm going to take the opportunity of pointing out what I think are the best of Wilhelm's short fiction. Chronologically, they are:

"The Last Days of the Captain": This wasn't included in the above discussion, though it might have been. A human colony world is about to be sacrificed to alien invaders as a ploy to open an attack that will, on balance, be of great benefit in the war. The human colonists are to be clandestinely evacuated prior to the attack, but some are in remote areas. Captain Keith Winters gradually loses his contempt for the colonists after he is thrown together with a woman concerned about the fate of her husband and son, camping unconcernedly in the wilderness. Although without the maturity of her later fiction (this was published

in 1962), it is the best of Wilhelm's earlier stories.

"Baby You Were Great": The interface between television and the public is a frequent subject for SF writers, and Wilhelm has examined it more than once. But in this relatively short story, I think she accomplished nearly as much as Compton did in the entire novel, *The Continuous Katherine Mortenhoe*. She develops three separate characters, each with a surprising degree of complexity.

"Stranger in the House": I enjoyed this not only because it is well written, but because Wilhelm avoided the simpleminded fashion in which this idea has been treated in the past. It has been common to write of the problems in communication that result from totally alien viewpoints, and humanity's instinctive repulsion from even intelligent beings that don't measure up to their standards of beauty. But in this story, the alien is *not* depicted as some sort of saint, but as a prejudiced being in his own right. The alien's basic "humanity" is more credible under these circumstances. Wilhelm also avoids the typical, everything works out for the best in the end, conclusion.

"Unbirthday Party": This is a weirdly compelling short fantasy about a perceptual, pointless party that I enjoyed more for the accurate depiction of the atmosphere of such things than for the story itself.

"Windsong": A scientist plans to utilize a cyborg brain in a computerized bomb project.

"The Plastic Abyss": As mentioned above, this is my favorite of Wilhelm's stories. Characterization is far above average, but the compelling factor here is the extremely strong sense of atmosphere. The sense of unreality is constructed in small enough increments to creep up on the reader, sometimes almost subliminally.

"The Infinity Box": Although not entirely convincing, this story of a man utterly perverted by his own power over another person's body contains some first rate characterization.

"Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang": This almost needs no explanation. I thought the novel version petered out a bit at the conclusion, but I had no quarrel with the shorter version at all.

Most of the remaining body of fiction is worth reading as well. The few really bad stories are generally unavailable and have not been collected. Most of these date from the later 1950's. I do not recommend the collection *The Vile Long Spaceship*, but any of the others are likely to be worth your while.

The Downstairs Room and Other Speculative Fiction (1968), *Abyss: Two Novellas* (1971), *The Infinity Box* (1975), *Somerset Dreams* (1978).

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(continued from p. 3)

is an ultimate ideological sin that overrides formal correctness." (Now those are words that would keep out the peepers. Wonderful!)

That said, I liked the section. The cardinal error of reviewing was avoided (mostly) -- most of the evaluative remarks could be construed as constructive (this is A Good Thing) and the plot summaries were not straw constructions (this is A Bad Thing) tailored to the evaluations rather than the other way around.

4. The Voyages of Arthur was funny, funny, funny. Would you believe that I once knew a girl to whom my parents referred as "oh, what's her name ... the serape" (that's sair-op-ay) because she happened to be wearing a very colorful reminder of her last trip to Mexico City on the two occasions (several weeks apart) when she came to our home? I mean, for years and years they referred to her when the occasion demanded in that way. I even began thinking of her that way. I wonder if that accounts for the distance that slowly grew between us? I wonder if that's what my parents had in mind? God, how insidious!

5. The art was of uniformly high quality and clever content. Good Stuff. Congratulations to Friberg, Dwyer, and whomever did the art on pages 11 and 12. The cover art was good, too, but the front cover didn't come off as well as it might have if it had had a white-space background. As it is, the dark background makes the cover just look smudged; compare it with the back cover and you'll see what I mean.

Thanks much for sending us 18. The UConn SF Club is rising from the ashes of inactivity during 1979-80, and is stirring its bones for 1980-81. Our regular meeting night will be Thursday at 8 PM in the Student Union Building in Room 217; visitors are welcome to join the arguments, carvings, and general lie-swapping that goes on. A phone call to me at 486-2363 would result in instant directions here from where ever.

((Thank you for the letter. We borrowed an offset press from Bob Weiner, and the poor cover repro is due more to our inexperience with the printing process than any flaw in the cover's composition -- the "smudged" background was actually several different shades of zipatone, and the original cover (by Karl Friberg) is quite striking./// Good luck with the UConn SF Club... if Boston ever wins the 1989 WorldCon bid, Connecticut can be the overflow state.))

The Least Popular Christian Names:

"The following names were all used between 1838 and 1910, but have now fallen into specatacular neglect:

Abishag, Amorous, Babberley, Brained, Bugless, Clapham, Despair, Dozer, Energetic, Feather, Ham, Lettuce, Minniehaha, Murder, Salmon, Strongitharm, Tram, Uz, Water, Wonderful."

-- The Incomplete Book of Failures

THE NESFA LIBRARY

ISLANDS, by [illegible] RANDALL
Pocket Books, 197[illegible], [illegible], [illegible].

Reviewed by Don D'ammassa

This unusual novel was a Nebula nominee back when it first appeared, and has recently been revised and re-issued by a new publisher. It is the story of Tia Hamley, the only mortal in a future where humanity has become immortal. Tia is viewed by the rest of the world as a freak, a throwback to the times before the Shaping, a series of worldwide floods and upheavals that have changed the face of the planet.

Randall uses a very effective combination of short chapters and flights back and forth through chronology. The main story line concerns a diving expedition to explore the ruins of subsided America, but the plot is reinforced and illuminated by incidents from earlier portions of Tia's life. It is clear to the reader (though not to Tia) that the immortals have lost something from their lives that she retains, and it is not certain who has the better lot in life. Her debates with the hunchback Benito emphasize this point.

This is a relatively quiet novel that will not appeal to action oriented readers. Randall makes a concession to this in the final chapters, with a homicidal maniac and a new psychic power, but these concessions weaken rather than strengthen the novel. This is definitely recommended for readers more interested in realistic characters and situations than in thud and blunder.

TAMBU by Robert Lynn Asprin, Ace Books, 197[illegible]

Reviewed by Gail Hormats

Tambu. The misunderstood leader of the ages or a villain beyond compare?

The Nesfa Library

In a series of interviews with a young, rather naive reporter, the protagonist presents a portrait of a man intent on doing right but having most of his actions either go wrong or be misunderstood. The book Robert Asprin has written is a series of vignettes detailing Tambu's rise to power and the formation of a large fleet of space ships dedicated to pirate hunting and planetary protection. Each chapter deals with a different problem and how Tambu faced it, from his introduction to outlawry (due to the accidental murder, by a friend, of the captain of the spaceship they were on), to mutiny within his own fleet. The incidents are related by Tambu to Erickson, a journalist, as illustrations of various points that arise during their conversation and as answers to specific questions. For example, "Once you made that decision [to be a pirate hunter], how soon did you begin encountering difficulties?" "Almost immediately...there was the basic task of outfitting our ship for combat..." . This short exchange leads into the chapter describing Tambu's first contact with pirates and arms dealers.

I could go on explaining the detailed contents of each chapter, but I won't. If you are interested in how to go about forming a "pirate" fleet and how to solve the problems you meet in doing so, read the book. Robert Asprin has an excellent idea in this book, but I feel he fails to carry through with the promise.

Tambu is presented, because of the interview style, in only one light, the light Tambu wishes to be presented in. The reader is told, indirectly, that Tambu is hated and feared, but never really shown why. True, Tambu has taken the credit for at least one city's destruction, but that was already after the people of the fleet were hated.

The planets are vague lumps of rocks, and the economics of the worlds are a total mystery. This is a strong shortcoming because the pirates, for whom Tambu's fleet is formed to oppose, are ubiquitous and represent a strong hinderance to the worlds' development. Furthermore, the whole society that Tambu is operating outside of, but still is a part of, is nonexistent. Had Bob Asprin spent some more time developing the universe background, the rise of Tambu to power and his subsequent actions would make more sense. There are no satisfactory reasons given for the other worlds' antipathy towards Tambu and his fleet.

The other major fault of this book is its lack of characterization. Tambu is a well-developed character, but his supporting cast is not. For example, the other three characters involved in the initial mutiny incident, Egor, Puck and Whitey start out in a well-defined way, but get lost in the author's preoccupation with Tambu's rise to power. Puck starts out as a quick-tempered young kid who grows into being a strong, popular captain, but we are not shown any of this development -- just told about it. Egor is described as being a poor captain, but this too we are never shown and it is a shame, since it is Egor's actions that lead to Tambu's final decisions. Whitey, one of the strongest influences in Tambu's life, also is ignored after her initial actions to help set up the pirate hunters. And then there is Ramona, Tambu's lover and the captain of his flagship. She, more than any of the others, is the reason for Tambu being what he is, but she herself is a paper figure, a shadow of a woman. With none of these four major secondary characters does the reader have any feeling for how they will react to either Tambu's actions or the actions of the leaders of the planets.

Perhaps these faults could have been avoided had the author included a third section interspersed with the other two, consisting of news excerpts or the descriptions of the omniscient narrator, describing the universe in which Tambu operated and why that universe saw Tambu as a villain.

INSECT LUST AND PICKY DETAILS: Reviews of SF books
By Mark M. Keller

First Channel, by Jaqueline Lichtenberg and Jean Lorrah, Doubleday, 1980, $10.00

Back in 1957, a semi-retired dog breeder named Kyle Onstott decided he needed more money to maintain his Virginia cabin than he could get by judging the occasional dog show and writing the occasional article for kennel club magazines. He pounded out a thousand-page manuscript about life on the old slave-breeding plantations, all lust under the magnolias and swooning white belles responding to the awesome masculinity of the sullen African studs who lurk among the shanties.

The book was *Mandingo*. It sold a million copies and launched a new category in paperback publishing: the plantation novel.

Onstott didn't write further novels; he sub-contracted them to a Boston copywriter named Lance Horner (really!) and lightly "edited" the manuscripts Horner turned out -- Drum, *Master of Falconhurst*, *Falconhurst Fancy*, then on to *The Mustee*, *Heir to Falconhurst*, *Flight to Falconhurst*, and finally *Mistress of Falconhurst*. Sales grew with each title. Total sales now run something past 14 million copies.

Falconhurst, as you guessed, is the plantation where the slaves live on miserable scraps and are whipped every other day, but manage the comfort of sneaking into the master's (or mistress') bed for kinky sex scenes at least once a chapter. "Oh, pleasure me, Mandingo!"

Well, there are obviously lots of people out there who want to read about seduction and domination by whips.

As must happen, the plantation novel finally made it into SF. The other categories of pulp fiction all did: the hard-boiled detective, and the western, and the oriental adventure, and the supernatural horror. Even some forms of "best-seller" made it to SF, the family saga for example.

The Kyle Onstott of science fiction is a team of Star Trek fans who honed their art on trekkie fan fiction until they developed a tolerable prose, and then gave us the Universe of the Simes.

I'm not knocking this, particularly. Writing quick-moving action stories is not all that easy. Lichtenberg and Lorrah can pick up a story and run with it, keeping the hero in danger as he dodges one enemy after another, fast enough so the reader won't stop to say, "Wait a minute! That doesn't make sense!" The books are fun to read. Just don't slow down.

The story frame is very simple. Earth's population is divided into two species: the "gens", who profusely sweat a psychic aura consisting of life energy, and the "simes", who are psychic vampires lusting to drain the aura of the gens. The transfer usually kills the gens, but what the hell? That's the vampire business.

Both groups live long after a great war, nuclear and biological. They can interbreed. Children have no aura, but change over at puberty.

Either the kid starts to glow with Kilian aura light, or the kid sprouts red sucking tentacles from wrist to forearm and becomes a hungry vampire.

Earlier books in the series described the travels of a gen and a rebel vampire in the lonely hills near the vampire farmlands. The two had a respectful warm friendship something like ... well, like Kirk and Spock, to be exact. The vampire had a method of drawing aura without killing, a great discovery along the lines of milking cows rather than bashing them on the head to suck their blood.

First Channel tells how this Gandian approach was first proposed by a nice-guy vampire, and how his family and people rejected him. To make things more difficult, the nice guy Farris is the heir to a gen-breeding plantation. His father breeds normal humans for the appetite of finicky coneusseur vampires, and in large numbers, too. Sime-vampires need one victim a month, a total of perhaps 360 in their active blood-sucking life. Simes don't live long, only fifteen or thirty years from puberty to rapid senescence.

Much emotional tension, right? Archetypes all over the place. For the price of admission you get not only *Roots* but *Dracula* as well. These vampires are not ageless like the Count. They burn out too fast, living on a constant high from draining a succession of numb helpless gens.

You may suspect some of the rather blatant symbolism hiding just below the surface. No need to suspect; it's true. There are fan clubs devoted to the Sime World, journals of fan fiction and speculation. Over 90% of active fan-writers in the field are girls or adolescent women.

Considering that SF fandom *in toto* is still about 2/3 male, this high proportion of women in visible Sime fandom indicates they find something in Lichtenberg that is not available in the works of say, Niven and Pournelle. (A Sime fan feels me that thing is readable writing, but I think that's a biased viewpoint.)

What is emotionally grabbing about Simeland?

Ponder a bit: puberty as a time of great anxiety, when you turn into a killer or a victim, no choice and no advance awareness of which you will be. (One third of the children born to gen women become simes; one third of children born to sime women become gens. Nobody knows which it will grow into. Parents can't invest too much emotional care in a child, since odds are 1 in 3 it will turn into an alien monster.)

Think: lust as desire for blood, sublimated of course. The psychic liqueur is called "selyn", as in "saline solution".

Also: simes get uncontrollable lust when in the presence of a prime gen. Some gens can survive being drained, and they can dominate the vampires by threats to withold the flow of selyn. More: some *like* being drained.

Gens produce peak aura once a month, when simes thirst to drain it.

What's that you say? "Selyn Transfer" is just another name for "sex"? Actually, for Simes and gens it's *better* than sex. On page 52, male and female sex: "Then they found each other, and Rimon was lost in feelings. Kadi met his rhythm as if their hearts beat together, surging in a wave of shared pleasure to a euphoric peak ... to fall into sweet contentment in one another's arms."

Nothing special about that: just ordinary garden-variety copulation.

But earlier, on page 48, the same two people had a selyn-transfer, and that was something more glorious: "Helplessly, he accepted the life flowing to him. He was not drawing -- she was giving to him, filling him. As the flow became faster and faster, immeasurably sweet, he sensed her incredulous surprise at the pleasure - pleasure? - she experienced. Then a surge of power as she drove life into him obliterated all individuality between them so that they became one flowing force suspended in time."

Wow! *Mandingo*, meet SF. Sci-fi, honey, say hello to *Mandingo*.

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Cosmic Encounter, by A.E. VanVogt, Doubleday, 1980, $8.95

After plantation SF novels, what next? How about Spanish Main pirate SF novels? So we come to *Cosmic Encounter*.

Van Vogt has recently been rewriting old short stories into novels, mining ideas from the 1940's to build up the wordage to book length. This one has some sparks of the former inventiveness -- learning metals, a primordial atom with charisma -- but the plot line wobbles and falters and the gimmicks just don't have that nutty charm of vintage Weapon Shop or Null-A devices.

Worse, there's a war of time-travelers involved, so every time the hero lands in a real bind, no possible way out ... we skip back a few days and the past is changed so he was never in danger after all.

It begins well. A hot Caribbean day, A.D. 1704, a shipload of English buccaneers cruising past Tortuga looking for Spanish merchantmen. The captain is a young gentleman, not really a pirate at heart but driven from England by treachery and corrupt officials, thirsting for revenge.

So far, Rafael Sabatini. Then, a crippled flying saucer crashes out of the sky and falls into the ocean bare miles from the pirate vessel. Not quite a flying saucer: it's a time-travelling battleship crewed entirely by robots sworn to extinguish all human life, fallen through a temporal warp. (Berserkers? Cylons?) The robots grab the pirate ship, dead bodies from the sea floor are resurrected, and things commence moving.

You know Van Vogt. When in doubt, keep things moving, 800-word scenes with a new peril in each.

The problem is, Van Vogt stops to *explain* things this time, especially the psychology of his minor characters. No, not scientology, thank goodness. He stops the action to describe the mental processes of barely sapient crew-members using the terminology of behaviorism.

Insect Lust and Picky Details

Example: page 1, the saucer falls out of the sky. A lookout spots it.

"For a semi-petrified period of about seven seconds, Figarty watched the tumbling object. By the end of that seven seconds an entire series of stimuli had run their courses through his vicious little brain. The rapid feedback between mid-brain and cerebral cortex, normally useful even to a small mind, in this instance evoked progressively fewer symbols. So swiftly thought ceased. The formless blankness from the lower brain took over."

Ahem.

I will now observe a brief cortico-thalmic pause while I digest the above paragraph.

So the lookout screams and slides down to the deck, hitting at a dead run and scampering for the foc'sl. Van Vogt describes the deck in detail (page 2):

"The deck of the pirate vessel was not in good condition. In the course of weathering in sun and spray, multi-millions of the tracheid cells that made up the planks had lost their firmness. ... As a result, the planks were warped and even sprung in places. ... Each twist in that wood and each pitted, dead tracheid cell offered to passers-by a steady signal: Walk carefully, particularly if barefooted. Here are killer splinters for the unwary, and in addition a crushed toe for the hurried; and for the genuinely impatient even if shod, a destroying slash for those handsome boots."

I get the meesage. The deck is dangerous to run on. But killer *splinters* ? And why the pitted tracheid cells?

I'm a botanist by training. I've spent hours looking through microscopes at wood samples counting tracheids, and fiber tracheids, and transverse rays, and other diverse types of plant cells. Somehow I never thought I'd meet them again in a fast-moving action yarn about pirates and robots.

You see the problem -- Van Vogt's style will stop the reader dead on page two. I finished the book hoping he'd get back to my old friends, the tracheids, but he just drifted further into Captain Fletcher's cosmic destiny, and forty million years of collapsing accordian-pleated time, and the filthy alleys of 1704 London, plus a robot boy and a zealous lifeboat.

Did anyone edit this book before it hit the shelves?

***

Thrice Upon a Time by James R. Hogan, Del Rey Books, 1980, $2.25

Nobody reads a James Hogan novel for the subtlety of character growth, or the vivid depiction of realistic setting. The people in his stories are faceless technical types who think in optimistic 1960's categories and who talk in bland mid-Atlantic sentences that convey sufficient information. The settings are labs and conference rooms, impersonal and unobtrusive.

Hogan books succeed or fail on the stength of the ideas they display.

This is not to say that Hogan writes the old unreadable Hugo Gernsback

type of illustrated lecture. There is a plot, people trying to overcome obstacles or understand puzzles within a narrow time limit.

But the reader-pull in his books is not conflict (Tarzan wrestles the killer ape) or tension (Gordon Dickson's "time-bomb ticking in the back room"). Rather, the draw is curiosity -- whodunit? What was that? Where are they?

The plots of Hogan's books unfold like a traditional mystery story. An anomaly is discovered, investigated. Explanations are proposed, shot down, elaborated and tested again. The reader is invited to solve the problem before the characters figure it out.

This is decidedly "idea as hero" science-fiction.

Thrice Upon a Time plays with the possibilities and limits of information flow backward through time. No Change War, no visits to dinosaur land, just a stream of unusual particles that propagate forward into the past.

So what do you do with them? First you generate particles on Wednesday and send back a pulsed code your detector can pick up last Monday. *Did* pick up, in fact. Surely you now remember that cluster of signals which seemed to come from nowhere and flashed on the computer screen.

Useful, the ability to talk to your week-earlier self. Win lots of money at the races? Clean up at the stock market? Hogan's heroes are a little more ambitious.

Think up paradoxes, and watch how Hogan disposes of them. Hero meets girl, changes past so he never met girl, changes past again. Along the way are clusters of black holes orbiting inside the earth, bio-warfare plagues, committee politics, and messages sent from a future that no longer exists. Will exist? Would have existed? Will have been existing?

The title of the book comes from the rigorous application of temporal logic. Each time the past changes, we start over with chapter one and follow the new track further from the old original. Is there no way home again?

***

The Lure of the Basilisk by Lawrence Watt-Evans, Del-Rey Books, 1980, $1.95

This is a pleasant little fantasy quest, well written and no special strain on the mind. Watt-Evans lists his previous jobs as student and comic-book dealer. Whatever happened to the tradition that a new author had to hold twenty-seven careers including short-order cook?

The story might be a dramatized D&D adventure from an unusually inventive game-master. Protagonist Garth is a superhuman hero, tall and grey and very strong, sent on a quest by the ragged King in Yellow who holds court in a seedy tavern off a dirty back alley in a provincial town. The task set Garth is simple: raid a wizard's castle and bring back the contents of his cellar.

You know the book title. There's a classic basilisk in the cellar, turns intruders to stone, poisonous breath, the usual stuff. Very magical beast: his saliva is used by the wizard to make charms of invisibility. How do you move

a stubborn basilisk 500 miles across country? Why does the Yellow King want a basilisk, anyway? Watt-Evans is worth watching.

***'

Dark is the Sun by Philip Jose Farmer, Del-Rey Books, 1980

Ordinary people in outrageous settings -- that's the Phil Farmer style. Fans remember his huge artificial landscapes vividly, even when plot abd character have faded and blurred.

There are the construct worlds, built by gods or reasonable fascimile: the Riverworld, the Universe of Tiers, Inside Outside. There are parallel Earths that are flat, gigantic Disneyland reconstructions of Tarzan's jungle, allegorical Americas where mythic beings spring to life. There are psychotic post-Apocalypse Earths where Israel and Iceland are superpowers ruled by religious fanatics; where the Tribulation myths of St. John actually happen; where witchcraft rules and the Dying King is yearly sacrificed to fructify the fields.

Few other writers are known specifically for the worlds they create, rather than for the characters who populate them. Jack Vance, maybe, but even in Vance's case, the callous decaying people of his corrupt End-Time empires stand out as sharply as the dying planets.

Farmer has stretched himself on this one, a world that is outre by any standards: a Dying Earth fifteen billion years in the future, more cluttered and more gritty than any by Vance or Stapleton.

And I regret I must add -- the story falls miserably short of the marvelous setting. Some bright and effective spots are not enough to save it.

To the background, then. The Sun has exhausted its hydrogen, flared up into red giant, slumped back to guttering dwarf: white, grey, black. It hangs in Earth's sky, a dark lump without even embers to flicker. But Earth is not cold and barren. It is in fact rather warm, about 290 K at a guess, surfaced with jungles and oceans under the mildly glowing white sky.

Glowing white sky?

Olbers Paradox, you know. The universe has paused in expansion and is beginning to collapse. Galaxies and gas clouds infalling generate heat and light. The sky is filled with blue-shifted starlight, growing more intense as the matter of all space falls in toward the ultimate singularity.

The whole sky is as bright as the surface of a star: a dim star, far away just yet. Half the vault is dark, obscured by a vast cluster of dead suns perhaps a light-year away from Earth. Lit by bright sky, cooled by dark sky, the Earth turns, bearing its cargo of plants and people.

Farmer has tried far future scenes before, though none *this* far. *The Stone God Awakens* jumps a mere 20 million years, to a world where smart cats and squirrels have replaced extinct Man. *The Mind-Whales of Ishmael* (1972)was a billion-year jaunt, dropping Ishmael of *Moby Dick* into an Earth where all oceans have evaporated and the whales are mile-long living blimps of the upper air.

I wondered about that one -- where did all the carbon dioxide go?

Today the oceans of Earth hold a lot of dissolved CO_2, about 50-60 atmospheres worth. If the water goes away, all that carbon dioxide is released into the air. Gasp! Instant geenhouse effect, instant surface of Venus: hot, black, choking calm.

So Wind Whales is really a fantasy. It still has some fine memorable sets -- the shaking earth, the shrunken black salt pools, and of course the great hunt with harpooners in dirigibles closing on their immense prey in the high pink dust-hazed sky, beneath the swollen red sun.

You can tell I'm a Farmer fan. But Dark was disappointing.

The background seems familiar: the shaking earth, the post-metallic technology. Constant earthquakes? Must be star tides, since Earth's core would be long cold in AD Fifteen Billion. No volcanoes, no plate tectonics. The surface would long be worn flat by erosion to that geological ideal, the peneplain -- absolutely level, absolutely wkthout hills or dips.

No more metals? Today metals are gradually being carried from the surface down to the core, by convection currents in the mantle, cycle after slow cycle. Fifteen billion years ... all the iron and copper in the core, all the silica up on the light crust.

Geology, OK. Biology -- well, Farmer has done better. Earth is covered with hungry jungles of Brian Aldiss' Hothouse. Anthropology? Humanity has reverted to tribal societies living among the relics of long-dead empires.

We follow the man Deyv and the woman Vana, plus their companion the vegetable centaur Sloosh, as they wander the roads of Earth looking for their stolen amulets. They meet alien living minerals, hostile tribes, demigod centipede centaurs. Soon the sky will fall as Earth is squashed by falling galaxies.

As I read, a lurking fear began to twitch at my cortex. "Not another one, not another dimension-door-to-escape-the-dying-universe, not another Adam and Eve story." I was sensitized by having recently read J.O. Jeppson's Second Experiment and Last Immortal, all about dragons from another universe who visit ours and then slip back home through black holes; sensitized by watching Disney's The Black Hole, with its incredible gateway to heaven.

Oh, come on, Phil, don't do this to me! Those mysterios glowing doorways hanging in space, they don't by any chance lead to a new young world where Deyv and Vana can set up housekeeping and found a new humanity? Please?

Win some, lose some. I'll wait for the new Riverworld novel.

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INSECT LUST AND PICKY DETAILS

The Catalyst, by Charles Harness, Pocket Books, 1980 $1.95

This one has characters you remember, lots of insider information on how big-time patent lawyers work, some nasty office politics, and a plot gimmick that might be either a ghost, or a computer simulacrum, or the protagonist's over-active subconscious. Which one you think it is tells something about you.

It's an expansion of an idea Harness used in his Analog story, "An Ornament to His Profession". A patent lawyer needs the final stages of a complex bit of chemical synthesis to complete his work. Maybe he really knows the answer subconsciously, maybe he requires a bit of additional data to see the pattern.

The search for the formula is linked with memories of of dead loved ones, with practical problems and time-limits.

Harness starts with character, the personality of his players, and the story unfolds with a feeling of inevitability once you know what the people are like. Interwoven with the search for the chemical process is a very believable and very funny conflict with the lab director, who is like every bastard you ever suffered under as a subordinate. He is vain, obstinate, eager to grab credit for success and dump blame for failure. Your boss, right?

Waiting for the director to get his deserved fate alternates with tension as the hero races the deadline to finish the patent application before the rival labs file: a nice mix of drama and farce.

No mind-blowing ideas, but overall a convincing tale of industrial research. It doesn't really have to be SF at all, if you leave out the haunted cumputer.

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The Ringworld Engineers, by Larry Niven, Harcout Brace Jovanovich, $9.95

There were a fair number of flaws, bloopers, and technical errors in Ringworld (1970), many of which were gleefully dissected in long letters to Larry Niven. Oddly enough, the letter-writers liked the book. They wanted it to be more believable and more consistent. The nit-picking was a mark of affection and respect.

Fans show appreciation in different ways. Trek fans, Pern fans, Darkover fans, Sime fans: they write stories set in extensions of their preferred secondary universe. It is recognized as a fictional framework within which the novice writer can practice with character and action.

(Well, it is usually recognized as fictional. I have met trekkies who tried to live by systematized Vulcanian philosophy, and Darkover fans who truly hoped they might develop laran psychic powers by studying self-hypnosis.)

Larry Niven fans seem to be more analytical types. They don't do much with emotional character play, but they will spend hours arguing over details of the background and setting. Like Baker Street Irregulars, they take the contradictions in the story as a challenge: how could we make this fit?

What better fans can a writer have? Even if you make a slip, they rush to find a logical way to prove it wasn't a slip after all.

Ten years of letters, ten years of suggested corrections; Niven had a stack of material thick enough to produce another book. And so he did. The Ringworld is dynamically unstable? Work that into the plot. It takes constant spurts from vernier jets to keep Ringworld from sliding sideways into the sun? There's your story. The reaction jets are no longer working. Fix them fast or the whole structure falls into the primary star in a few years. There's a challenge and a deadline and a puzzle all in one.

Science-fiction stories show the imprint of the decade in which they were written. Ringworld built on the fascination with megastructures and arcologies that flourished in the sixties; Ringworld Engineers brings in some topics well-remembered from the seventies: sociobiology, ancient astronauts.

Theories of history inform and shape the societies of space that Niven writes about, sometimes implicitly, sometimes stated outright. In World Out of Time, we are told maybe a little too clearly that the Earth ruling government has become an ancient Babylonian "water despotism" right out of Wittfogel's hydraulic series. The stage setting is a bit too obvious.

The societies in Ringworld Engineers are also designed in conformity with certain current theories, but more carefully. It is left in part to the reader to puzzle out cause and effect, why rituals and customs follow one or another track.

Niven fans like working out physics backgrounds, explaining possible flaws. Here they can have equal challenge with history and biology.

That's part of the fun in the book. What appear to be gross inconsistencies are sooner or later resolved, by the author or by the working reader.

*

As I said, there are three ideas that permeate the Ringworld universe.

1) megastructure -- very big frameworks built to live in

2) sociobiology -- behavior patterns shaped by heredity and evolution

3) ancient astronauts -- humans designed to live in manufactured worlds

The three interact in surprising ways to produce a future civilization that is both consistant and unpredictable, just like real societies. How the second two themes co-exist is especially interesting -- how can a species be shaped by natural selection, and at the same time be designed by the equivalent of a Creator God?

Niven's answer is slightly boggling: it is the Gods (or equivalent) who are produced by natural selection. They then make humans, or other sapient species, to fit their notions of fitness. These notions are partly logical and partly produced by deep motivations even the Gods do not completely understand.

"What?", says the fan who hasn't yet read Ringworld Engineers. "Gods? Who are they? How did they get in there?"

Since part of the plot involves figuring out exactly who is really in charge of Ringworld, maybe I should refrain from spoiling the solution. It's about who you expected it to be. (Read the book.)

"But...", you say. "Sociobiology? That's a pop psych theory supposed to prove that men are agressive and women natural mothers, isn't it? and why ancient astronauts? Niven doesn't have interstellar DC-3s landing on Inca runways like that nut Van Daniken."

No, it's not that blatant. But it's there. Look again.

The core of sociobiology, as expounded by Prof. E.O. Wilson in 1975, is the concept of "kin selection". It serves to explain the great flaw in Natural Selection Theory, the one thing Darwin feared would bring his whole construction down in ruins.

Altruism.

If selection favors those who have many children to pass on their genes, and eliminates those who fail to have offspring, how to explain the beehive? Worker bees exhaust themselves in six weeks of constant flying and foraging, to collapse with tattered wings outside the hive as autumn approaches. Yet they have no offspring. They are sterile and neutered.

They do all that work, and what do they get in return? Nothing.

No wonder Darwin was worried.

The solution, as it emerged in the 1930s, was kin selection. If the bee dies, but the genes she might have passed along are protected in the offspring of her sister, then it's as if she produced the young herself. The queen is mother or sister to all the hive's workers. The offspring she produces are 3/4 identical to

the offspring the neuter workers would have.

Fine for bees, but how about people?

Says Wilson, imagine a society where certain people have no kids of their own, but take doting care of others' children: say Catholic Europe with many celibate nuns running orphanages. If those kids are related to the celibates, and in small village communities they would be, then they contain copies of the celibates' genes. The genes are preserved to make another generation.

"Would I sacrifice myself for a stranger?", asked J.B.S. Haldane. "Probably not. But for two of my brothers, or eight of my first cousins, it would make biological sense to do so." Counting genes, you see.

Nephews and nieces carry copies of your genes as much as your own kids do.

So, says Wilson, selection allows homosexuals and celibate clergy, as long as their acts favor survival of other people's children. Hence, nepotism. Wilson briefly glimpses a human society in which kin selection was the only selection factor: "one vast hymenopterous intrigue of nepotism and incest". Imagine Renaissance Italian families crossed with a beehive -- brrr.

I'm waiting for an SF writer to explore the ramifications of this.

Niven is clearly intrigued by the concept. In Protector, in Mote in God's Eye, and now in Ringworld Engineers, kin selection shapes whole cultures.

Let's look at Protector more closely for a minute.

There is a species there, biologically Homo sapiens but socially an inverted beehive, a pyramid standing on its tip. In bees, there is one queen (breeder) who is served by 2000 sterile workers. In the protector society, there are 2000 breeders (men and women) who are served by one single sterile worker.

That be some worker, man! The Incredible Hulk with stegosaurus armor, it is, with ingenious brain like Prof. Moriarty or Blackie DuQuesne.

The one worker rules the little bands of humans. He shelters them from harshness of nature, he drives away other bands of humans. If their offspring smell "wrong", he kills the babies, just as lions do on Earth. It produces a very stable, changeless, limited society. Beehive, again.

Somehow the hierarchy of bickering Protectors, the super-workers, achieves space travel and sends a colony of breeders to Pleistocene Earth. They survive, without the aid of super-workers, and become our ancestors.

This, by the way, is where the Ancient Astronaut bits come in. The main idea of Ancient Astronaut theory is that human society did not evolve here but was dropped on us from outside. Do you feel out of place on Earth, as if we really don't belong here? Perfectly logical, say the Ancient Astronaut followers, this is <u>not</u> really our home. We came from a better place out there, and one day we will get back to it: Eden, the Golden Age.

A very old dream, the child's dream -- "I don't belong here with this grubby family. I'm really a royal orphan being raised by peasants, and one day the court messenger will appear and escort me to my real home, the palace."

An editor of flying saucer magazines once explained to me the emotional pull of Ancient Astronaut theories. "I can't accept Darwin, too much waste and chaos. And I can't accept Genesis either, it's just too primitive. So where did humanity come from? It makes sense to believe that a superior race brought us here and continues to watch over us. Their superior technology looked like magic to our ancestors, and that's how all the stories of gods began. But the guardian race isn't godlike, just a few thousand years ahead of us. If they make it, so can we. They give us a goal to work toward."

You see the benefits -- religion and social program all wrapped up in one. The universe is not chaotic but ordered and organized. We have a place in it.

Niven is playing with some very potent archetypes here, and many fans are fascinated by the idea of Protector-designed humanity, although they can't say exactly why the idea strikes such resonance in their minds.

Oh, there is another group that parallels the Ancient Astronaut cult in an odd way. They also feel that Earth is not our home, that the true optimum habitat for human life is out there somewhere else. But they seek not a mythical golden past, but a glorious golden future.

That's right. The Space Colony lobby is another aspect of the Ancient Astronaut belief: "beyond Earth's gates is the realm of true bliss."

Will the L-5 Society admit it is driven by the same vision as the UFOnauts?

Back to sociobiology. I fear the wrath of an angry mob of Space Shuttle buffs.

The protector - breeder scheme is one way of assuring biological survival in a marginal species. The breeders conceive, bear, nurse, and rear the young. Protector workers patrol the borders of tribal territory and supply food. On Earth we do it in a simpler fashion: females take the breeder rolex, males take the protector role. Niven's protectors are outsized super-adults who act as ultimate

males in agression and ultimate females in nurturance.

I suspect that if a primitive human two-sex system ever came up against a primitive human protector-breeder system, the protectors would lose. They have too much responsibility invested in a single individual, no matter how strong and smart that individual may be. If the protector goes, the whole band of breeders is helpless. With a two-sex system, even if half the males or half the females are lost, the group can survive and recover.

The successful biological system is the one most able to adapt to change.

A biologist notices certain quirks in Niven's "known space" universe, particularly the uncanny stability of so many of his biological organizations. The Slaver ecosystem, imposed on many planets a billion years ago, remains essentially unchanged: sunflowers, stage trees, bandersnatchi remain the same.

It doesn't quite ring true. Have the planetary environments been that calm and stable for a thousand million years? No mutations, no selection pressure, no genetic drift, no adaptations ... it is too long. Niven says the bandersnatci were biologically engineered to remain changeless, with giant chromosomes that resist mutagens.

Earth organisms that resist mutagens tend to have multiple sets of many small chromosomes -- tetraploid, hexaploid, octaploid. If one strand of DNA is zapped by ionizing radiation, the damage can spread just so far. Weeds that grow on hot, dry soils have multiply redundant chromosome sets.

On the other hand, organisms with only a few large chromosomes (pine trees, fruit flys) are notably vulnerable to mutagen damage. One point mutation on a giant chromosome can reduce the replication chances of every gene present.

Maybe there's an explanation...

You see, I'm doing it too. I find a flaw in Niven's logic, and instrad of dropping the book with a sneer, I start looking for ways to reconcile the inconsistency. There must be something to that appeal.

There are still unanswered questions at the end of Ringworld Engineers. Over 99% of the surface is still unexplored (three million Earths worth of territory!), and a major question remains: why would a society woth star travel build such a structure at all? If you have FTL travel, you don't need Dyson spheres. The delight of anticipating deeper paradoxes remains.

No doubt many letters will be written with further questions and sugestions. This setting has by no means been exhausted. Should I write... ?

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Ghost Story, by Peter Straub, Pocket Books, 1980, $2.95, 567 pp.

Reviewed by Don D'ammassa

Supernatural fiction is rarely the recipient of much attention from hard-core SF fans. For one thing, the supernatural glamorizes illogic and presents events that defy scientific analysis. For another, much of it is rife with an affected archaic style that is really only effective when it is genuine. Finally, perhaps, is that horror fiction is a very conservative field, and it has been only in the last few years that innovative plots and styles have appeared.

This long novel by Peter Straub is, I think, destined to be a classic. It centers on the small town of Milburn and the increasingly numerous and deadly supernatural events that occur there. Comparisons to Stephen King's Salem's Lot are inevetible, so I'll say right here that it does have a great deal in common with that other excellent novel. But it also has a great many differences.

For one thing, King's novel was a very traditional vampire story, executed brilliantly. Straub's novel is equally brilliant, but it employs what almost amounts to a new subject area. The villains are not the traditional ghost, nor werewolves, nor vampires, but, in an occult sort of way, a combination of everything illogical that we have ever feared. I can't say much more than that without being too explicit about the mysteries of the plot.

Straub spends a great deal of effort on character development, as he fleshes in the town, concentrating on the four surviving members og the Chowder Society, an informal club of four elderly men. As a consequence, we feel the menaces more personally as they unfold. Stephen King dominates the field of supernatural horror in this country, but it is clear that his pre-eminence will not go unchallenged.

The Best of Trek, Edited by Walter Irwin & G.B. Love, Signet, $1.75

Reviewed by Suford Lewis

Signet did a poor job with the book. Althcugh the Eddie Jones cover is a nice piece of space-opera, it has nothing to do with Star Trek,and the promised information about "Trek", supposedly a professional magazine devoted to Star Trek (I've never heard of it) never materializes.

If you are a Star Trek fanatic you may find it interesting. I found most of the interpolation/extrapolation articles on the shallow side -- the "explainers" didn't know enough about biology, sociology, physics or whatever to make their explanations hang together. The "character studies" are moderated from the sort of hero-worship that shows up in the fanzines but gets into difficulties when any analysis is attempted.

The factual information articles are the best. These include two on miniatures, seven interviews, articles on the animated shows and the comic books. The continuing interest in exploring the Star Trek universe is clearly very strong and one of the favorite activities of Trekkers. However, if it is one of YOUR favorite games this book will provide you with a number of unsatisfactory examples. For instance, the general nastiness of Klingons is explained by the hypothesis that they ALL have miserable childhoods; in fact their culture deliberately encourages this in order to make them fierce warriors. Thank you, I prefer my Klingons proud, strong and fierce rather than cowardly, sneaky and beastly. Besides, as soon as someone really strong got on top, they would want their own family life to be pleasant, and the whole set-up would change. Not only a weak sociological theory, but unattractive as well.

Of all the alternate universe characteristics in Star Trek as portrayed on TV, the weakest and most inconsistent involves the specific numbers, times, distances, etc. and specific star names. Two attempts to rationalize these into a coherent system lead to the most bizarre explanations. Part of this is caused by a fanatic devotion to the show as "The Perfect Text", a phenomenon more common among fundamentalists persuaded of the literal truth of the Bible. Part of it is due to the theorizer not being able to keep his frames of reference straight when attempting to discuss relativistic effects. Somewhere he got the idea that warp factors are related to velocity by n^3c. Whether or not this is in any script, it is silly. It would also be more scientific to take the various times and distances (allowing them to be approximate, please) and fit a curve to those points. Any curve with any points could be explained as the warp power generating function with convenient points (due to some practical consideration like fuel efficiency, difficulty of getting rid of waste heat, almost anything).

Instead of simple, traditional inertialess drive, we are treated to a baroque theory of wormholes in space and a garbled time dilation effect that slows down things relative to themselves or the reader's expectations.

In summary, in spite of being the best articles from a "professional magazine", the general level of the articles that attempt any world-building is definately below that of the better fan writing on the subject. If you have $1.75 you MUST spend on Star Trek, make sure your run of Spockanalia is complete and you have all the Blish and Foster works, and the new novels that keep coming out., plus all the models, posters and slides. I'm rather addicted to Star Trek and it's peripheral world-building and fanac, but I found a lot of this book over my tolerance threshold for adolescent writing. Stuffin a "professional magazine" (or even a serious fanzine) should meet higher standards than casual speculative matter.

Aliens! edited by Gardner R. Dozois and Jack M Dann, Pocket Books, 1980, $2.25, 305 pp.

THE NESFA LIBRARY

Reviewed by Don D'ammassa

There are basically three kinds of anthologies in the SF genre. There are original collections of new stories, there are collections of rare or overlooked pieces, and there are new assemblages of the old faithful, designed primarily for the new reader. This large theme collection is of the last category, a collection of eleven stories, most of which are going to be very familiar to the long term reader.

The newest in the collection is "Four Vignettes" by Larry Niven, a form he has adopted from time to time. The oldest is, I believe, Edgar Pangborn's "Angel's Egg", an excellent novelet about an alien encounter in Maine.

Most of the stories are characterized by wry humor that is sometimes even painful. James Tiptree Jr.'s "And I Awoke and Found Me Here on the Cold Hill's Side" is one of that author's best, a near classic tale of how not to contact an alien culture. Damon Knight's classic "Golden Rule" can be a powerful weapon if employed literally. Philip K. Dick also forces us to laugh out of the sides of our mouths with "Oh, To Be a Blobel!".

There are six other stories of equal quality. R.A. Lafferty is at his idiosyncratic best in "Guesting Time". The "new" Silverberg is represented by "The Reality Trip". There are familiar stories as well by Fredric Brown, Frederik Pohl, Algis Budrys, and Gordon R. Dickson. Reading Aliens! is a little like attending a small convention; you don't meet anybody new, but you enjoy encountering old familiar friends whose company you thoroughly enjoy.

Star Ka'ats and the Plant People by Andre Norton and Dorothy Madlee, Pocket Archway Books, 1980, $1.75, 122 pp.

Miss Pickerell Takes the Bull By the Horns by Ellen MacGregor and Dora Pantell, Pocket Archway Books, 1980, $1.75, 148 pp.

Miss Pickerell to the Earthquake Rescue by Ellen MacGregor and Dora Pantell, Pocket Archway Books, 1980, $1.75, 149 pp.

Reviewed by Don D'ammassa

Here are three science fiction stories aimed at younger readers, all parts of series issued by Archway. The Norton/Madlee book is the third in its series; the MacGregor/Pantell's are numbers four and five in the new adventures of Miss Pickerell. None of the three has much to offer adult readers, because they are aimed at juvenile audiences. Personally, I think this reflects poorly on the books, because truly good juvenile fiction does in fact appeal to mature readers -- books like Norton Juster's The Phantom Tollbooth, C.S. Lewis' Narnia books, the Dr. Seuss books, and many others.

In Star Ka'ats, Jim and Elly Mae (two children rescued from polluted Earth by intelligent cats) are now out exploring the world of their benefactors. This is a diverse, perplexing world, filled

with machines that the Ka'ats could not have built themselves because of their lack of hands. In their travels, the two youngsters run into a race of intelligent plants who are being depredated by another race that is a sort of combination spider and crab. The children discover that the spider crabs are scared by loud noises, and proceed to the inevitable conclusion.

Miss Pickerell was the creation of Ellen MacGregor, who died in 1954. Although she is credited as co-author (a practice that is increasing despite its falsehood), her sole contribution appears to be the characters. Miss Pickerell is the indomitable little old lady of Square Toe Farm, accompanied by her friens Pumpkin the cat and Nancy Agatha the cow. In these two volumes she confronts and confounds two scientific problems, and lives happily ever after.

In the first, the state has come close to passing a law which makes it illegal to own an animal that has not been cloned. Miss Pickerell can foresee that the next step is to produce cloned people, and she is launched into a campaign to eliminate the law. In due course, despite kidnappings and such, she succeeds. In the second, a series of ever closer earthquakes convinces her she must set out in search of a missing earthquake study group, Project Waterfowl, and force them to do something to prevent another major earthquake. In due course, as might be expected, she [illegible], and singlehandedly finds the means to prevent another disaster.

Although these are not badly written, neither are they particularly plausible. I wonder how naive or young a child has to be to believe in the cloning bill. What does bother me is -- despite the scientific premises of the two books -- the attitude of the books toward science in general. Cloning is depicted as a flawed process, which actually produces abnormal animals. The seismologists in the second book have the solutions to their problems right within their grasp, but cannot see it or summon the courage to test it untill Miss Pickerell applies some common sense and intuition and prods them into it. I'd recommend these for children because they do present in a relatively painless fashion bits and pieces of useful science, but at the same time, a little balance in the presentation would be helpful.

The Amazing Spider-Man by Stan Lee & John Romita, Pocket Books, 1980, $2.50, 159 pp.

Star Trek The Motion Picture -- The Photostory edited by Richard J. Anobile, Pocket Books, $2.95, 1980

Reviewed by Don D'ammassa

More and more books lately rely on photographs and drawings rather than written words. The ever increasing popularity of comics and the rash of photo-novels is indicative of this, as is perhaps the increase in massively illustrated novels from Ace books and others, and even the blend of visual and textual techniques in Alfred Bester's new novel, Golem 100.

Whatever the cause, they are selling in increasing numbers. The two books listed above are certain to be among the most popular of the two categories.

Spider-Man is possibly the single most popular comic book superhero. Shy, alienated Peter Parker is the web-slinging, costumed crimefighter, misunderstood by the authorities, suspect of criminal acts himself. This volume is not, like earlier ones, a collection of comic book episodes; in this case, it is the first installments of the newspaper comic strip. There are two complete adventures here.

In the first, the infamous Dr. Doom has arrived from Latveria to address the U.N. on terrorism. Spidey recognizes the man as a greater menace than even terrorists, and proceeds to thwart his plans. In the second adventure, Dr. Octopus -- the man with four metallic arms accidentally grafted to his body -- uses Peter's unsuspecting Aunt May in a robbery attempt. Spidey triumphs here as well. The book suffers from the necessary redundancy of news strip installments, and doesn't flow smoothly at all. So it goes.

The Star Trek book is the latest by-product of the recent motion picture. The photographs do indeed give a thorough narrative of the entire film. Unfortunately, the special-effects cannot be captured here, and the plot was not original enough to make for captivating reading. Trek fans will undoubtedly buy it by the thousands for their collections of memorabilia, but it is less interesting as a book than many of the earlier photostory versions of various T.V. episodes.

The Hearse by Henry Clement. Pinnacle Books, 1980, $2.25

Reviewed by Don D'ammassa

This is a novelization of a forthcoming movie, apparently, and one which I will miss without a second thought. Jane Hardy travels to the secluded town of Blackford to take possession of her late aunt's estate. Although there is a great deal of animosity from her aunt's attorney, who felt he would inherit the older woman's possessions, Jane is strong minded enough to send him packing. But there is also a mysterious hearse that keeps following her at night.

There is the predictable collection of macabre events, dreams, Jane's face changing in reflections, a disfigured chauffeur, dark rooms and strange sounds, and a demon lover. But none of it is at all gripping or interesting, and if the book is a fair representation of the film, you're better off neither seeing it or reading this.

SPEAKING OF FILMS...

MOVIE CRITIQUES: THE BLACK HOLE AND (BRIEFLY) STAR TREK

Critiqued by Suford Lewis

I'll bet you never expected Disney Studios to make a movie about evil and sin -- not sex and violence, EVIL and SIN.

It's about a man who leads an expedition to the brink of chaos, turns his people into zombies so they won't try to return home, builds himself a small army of sharpshooter robots (which aren't really such good shots) and a demonic second-in-command, jealous of his power, and armed with torture weapons (for no particular reason). Then, enter: a naive scientist, a tough guy sceptic newspaper-man, an intuitive -- strike that -- telepathic female, a Buster Crabbe look-alike and a hard-assed captain. Plus a cute robot, make that two cute robots, who also double as Christ figures - one as savior and the other as sacrifice. Oh, cute.

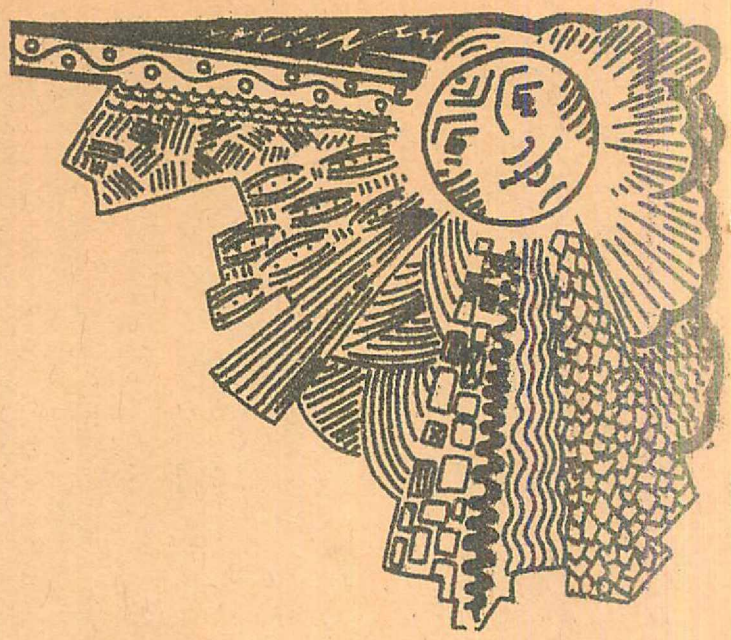
Now, the Faust figure has been orbiting Hell, sorry, the Black Hole for twenty years, refining his calculations. He figures that if he can plunge into it in such a way that he can get out of it again, he will acquire a vision of divine knowledge. Now, the script writer apparently didn't understand much about this part, so the effects of the steep gravitational gradient near a black hole on a large object gets a bit garbled (turbulance rather than tidal forces keeps being mentioned), and so does the difference between passing through a black hole (an event of dubious meaning) and grazing the event horizon. I suppose grazing the event horizon would produce some odd relativistic effects that could be interpreted as visions...

However, we have to suffer through an excruciating melodramatic buildup which includes: an opulent dinner a la 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, a robot shooting match, a funeral in space (20,000 Leagues Under the sea, again), the grisly but quick death of the naive scientist, and an attempt to turn the female into a zombie. Then we get a slam-bang wrap-up in which all the non-essential personnel get killed off and everything goes to Hell. Literally.

I found the movie pretty depressing even if the good guys (well, four out of seven) survive. As if that's not bad enough, the film is anti-science: the only scientists are villains or fools. The good guys don't win by virtue but by luck, and because the cute robots help them. Very Christian. Very depressing.

Well, it WAS exciting, and the special effects were excellent. It just goes to show that movies about evil are more exciting than movies about virtue. The problem with Star Trek - The Movie is that it is about virtue. Oh, there are some difficulties, but Kirk never even socks anyone. The danger is just misunderstood. Instead of evil we have Nomad or the Horta (again), a robot sent out on a mission of knowledge gathering, returned seeking wisdom or ... love? Instead of the damnation of Faust we have the apotheosis of man. In The Black Hole a builder was (at least symbolically) united with his machine and it was hideous. In Star Trek a similar union took place, but because of why the machine had been built, and why the union occured, this time the union was glorious. The whole movie spent a lot of time contemplating niceness -- nice ship, nice Kirk, nice Spock, nice Bones, nice Scotty, nice Etc. Etc. The movie is just a lyrical poem about how very nice Star Trek is. Well, I agree. I think I'll go see the Star Trek movie again.

After The Black Hole, I need it.



George, The Interstellar Spaceship

by Karl Friberg

Once upon a time there lived an interstellar spaceship named George. George lived in the twenty third century, when people lived on almost every planet in the Galaxy. Everyone relied on George and all the other spaceships because in the extreme sub-zero temperatures of interstellar space a man's blood would boil in just a few seconds.

George was a very unique spaceship because George was a cybernaut. A cybernaut was part spaceship and part human being. The reason for making spaceships this way was that very few people had both brains and the ability to pilot a spaceship. And there was a lot of flying to be done. So much, in fact, that those who could would have to spend all their time in space. They would eventually go mad out there, and they would do things that were not very nice.

So the people who built spaceships built spaceships that were controlled by live human brains, kept alive mechanically. That way spaceships could fly themselves and be as smart as people.

Anyway, George flew the bi-weekly shuttle between Beta Antares 3 and the Galactic Center. George liked his job, and everyone liked George, especially the maintenance crew who checked him over once a month at the space station. They would oil him and make sure his engines were running smoothly and make sure that all systems checked out "A-O.K." They also made sure that the radiation level in his reactors did not pass the danger point marked in red.

GEORGE, THE INTERSTELLAR SPACESHIP

One day George was carrying some very important passengers, including Harrison L. Carter, chairman of the powerful Intergalactic Committee on Nuclear Waste Disposal (ICNWD), when suddenly George was caught in the gravitational flux of a Black Hole. George knew that Black Holes were very dangerous, because if you were swept into one you would be crushed out of existence, or perhaps end up in an alternate universe. George had heard of several alternate universes at the space station, and they did not sound very nice.

"Eeeek!" said George, "I must try and save my passengers!"

George pushed and pulled, but the Black Hole's gravitational field was too strong.

"I must break away!" cried George, "I know I can do it if I try!"

George noticed that the Black Hole's gravitational field was fluctuating, due to gaseous matter being swept into it from a nearby star.

"If I time my thrusts of speed to coincide with the fluctuations in the Black Hole's gravitational field, said George, "I might break free. I know I can do it if I try!"

Shutting down all systems except for life support, George took all the power his four thermo-atomic fusion reactors could muster and channeled it into the main thrusters.

"I can do it," said George, "I know I can!"

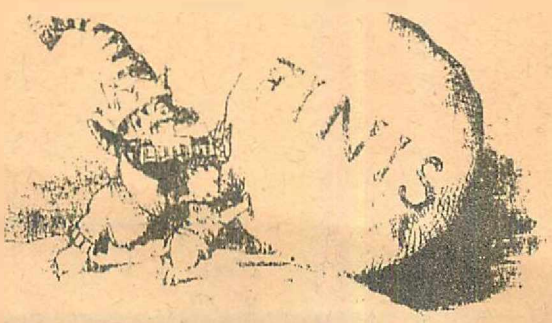
Suddenly, George broke free. The slingshot effect sent them flying for millions of miles, but that didn't matter because the navigational computer could easily get them on course again.

"Yea!" cried George. "I'm free!"

"Yea!" yeaed all the passengers, including even Harrison L. Carter, who usually was very stuffy and did not indulge in any festivities.

"Hooray for George!" they all cried. They were all very happy and they sang all the way home.

George delivered his passengers to Beta Antares 3 and soon became a hero. The President of the Galaxy even pinned a medal on him. George and the Galaxy lived happily ever after.



NATHAN CHILDER'S

advice

To The FanLorn

Dear Nathan:

I am a fat, friendless, repulsive adolescent with unsightly pimples. I am incredibly bright, but I don't do very well in school because I sit around all day reading SF magazines. I have this compulsive urge to reveal my inner self in print. I would like to meet with other people like myself who share my interests. Should I become a Science Fiction Fan?

signed - NEO to be?

Dear NEO to be:

I'm sorry, but you're twenty years out of date. To be a fan nowadays you have to be into Wookies, Unicorns, S&S, D&D, and art shows. Why don't you sell a couple of stories and join SFWA.

Dear Nathan.

I am trying to make it as a BNF but I am not having too much luck. I was kicked off the SUNCON, MidAmeriCon and Iguanacon committees. FAPA has put me on its turn of the century waitlist. NESFA made me a non-subscribing member. The LA in 84 committee wants me to head up the Phoenix in 84 bid. Dick Geis returns my letters unread. What should I do?

signed - Can't Make It.

Dear Can't Make It:

Wake Up and Smell the Coffee.

Dear Nathan:

Where in blazes is the back cover I did for PB?

signed - Mark Keller.

Dear Mark:

Beats me, Mark. I know it's around here somewhere -- I saw it just the other day. Don't worry about it, we'll run it next issue. In the meantime, wake up and smell the coffee.