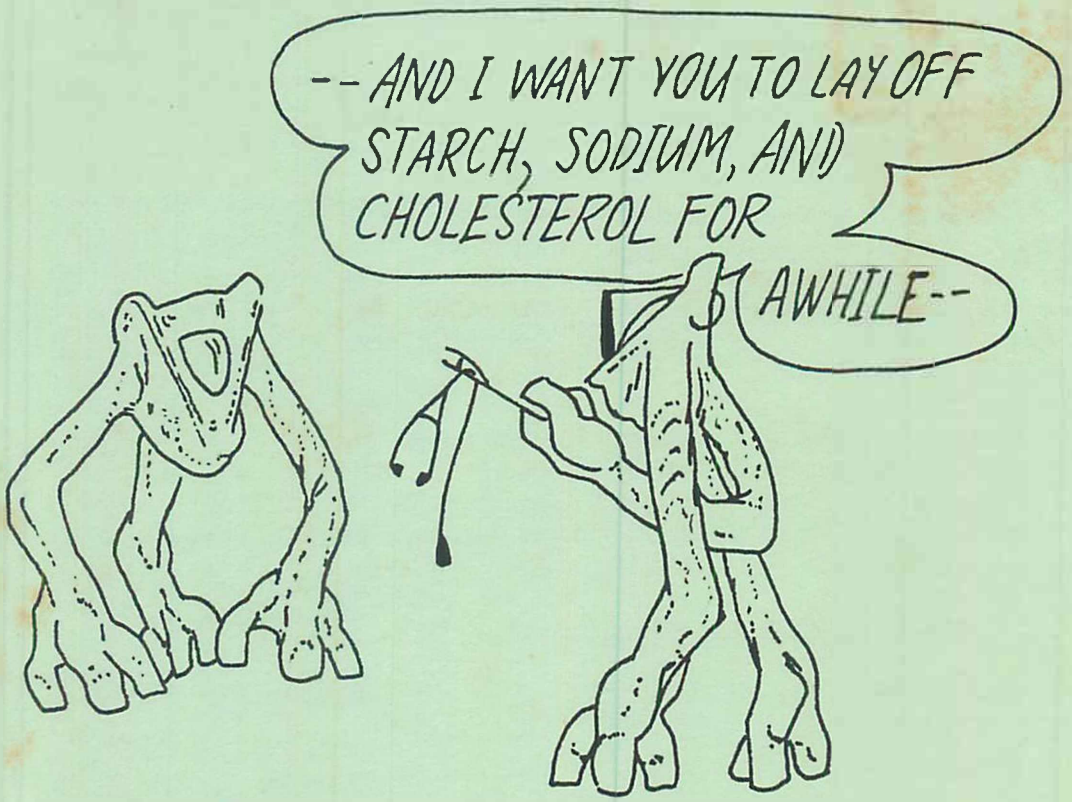
14

QUODLIBET

fourteen



September 1, 1982

QUODLIBET 14

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ART CREDIT:

page 19 -- Robert Prokop

Quodlibet 14 is a "cultural-philosophical fanzine edited and published by Bill Patterson (MLL) and distributed to his friends...Anarchorecipies for the gourmet." Sam Konkin says so, so it must be true. Obtainable for "the usual" or by editorial whim only--and I'm leaning toward accepting only "the usual"--from Bill Patterson, 537 Jones Street, No. 9943, San Francisco CA 94102.

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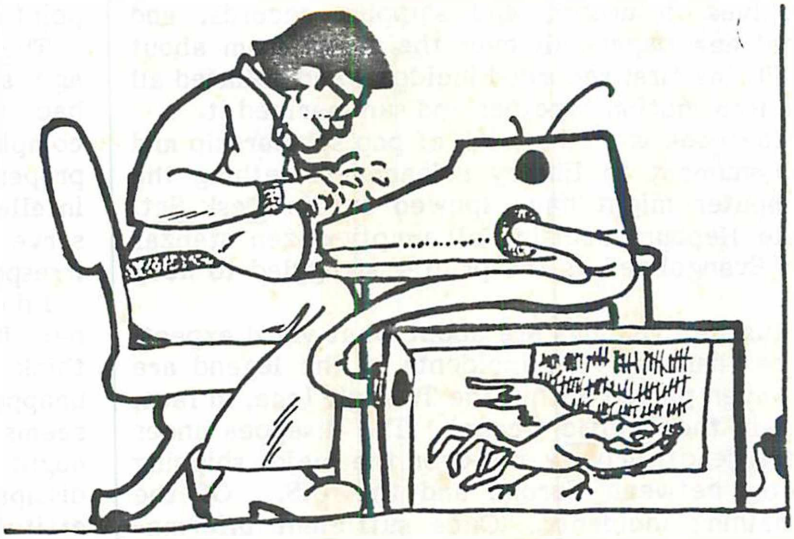


Quodlibet appears today in different format than usual--partly because of the long lapse between this and the last issue, and partly because I've been wanting to move Quodlibet genzineward for some time. This is not quite a genzine, since (a) it is not "general circulation," being available (still) only for "the usual" or by editorial whim, and (b) I wrote well over eighty percent of the material in this issue. So it's an extended perzine.

I originally started Quodlibet in May, 1980, to keep my FAPA application current (in terms of the frequency-of-publication criterion). FAPA (the Fantasy Amateur Press Association) was originally founded, lo these many years ago, to facilitate distribution among the various genzines of the time. I thought it would be appropriate to expand Quodlibet into a genzine for FAPA when my term on the waitlist was up.

Well, that was two years ago. I haven't heard a word back from the FAPA OE, and I see from the latest Telos that Patrick and Teresa, whose applications I submitted at the same time as mine, have made it back in. I've got to write and find out what happened to my application. Real Soon Now...

I've just gone through an expansion of my mailing list (I'm trying valiantly to keep it around forty...), and I now have an eclectic mix of readers. To the fans, I should explain that a number of non-fans (mostly family and mundane friends) receive Quodlibet. To the non-fans, I should probably explain the workings of a fanzine. On the other hand, I've already gone thirteen issues without such explanations. If you haven't caught on by now, tough tush. Suffice it to say that letters of comment ("locs") to Quodlibet are not merely encouraged, they are absolutely essential (do you hear me, Tim? Phil?). People who do not loc get dropped from the mailing list.

And to Francis Towner Laney: a resounding Bronx cheer.

There is a ritual I have to go through every time I add a new group to the mailing list. If I do not, everyone writes in asking what "quodlibet" means. Really, people, we have more interesting things to talk about than that. So, for the benefit of people just joining, I have reprinted on the inside baccover the explanation which appeared in the first and eleventh numbers of Quodlibet.

The "Silly Season" is upon us with a vengeance. We got it full force this morning, as the front page of the June 22 Chronicle attests. Attend, oh Fan:

The banner headline is that John Hinckley is not guilty of attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan by reason of insanity. (A joke begins circulating in San Francisco: Reagan invites Hinckley to the White House for dinner, forgiving him, and introduces him to Tip O'Neil).

Item 2: SF's supervisors okay by one vote a city ordinance to ban handguns from the city. If you follow this article to the back page of the section, you will find directly underneath the end a small article saying that the town of Oroville is getting a mandatory handgun law requiring each household to own a pistol. A week later, the City Council gives this law its mandatory second passage, and it is signed into law. The whole city laughs.

Item 3: Lady Diana (theirs, not ours) is delivered of a boy. Followup on this item will appear for weeks afterwards.

Item 4: In one of the more peculiar rulings since Teapot Dome, the California Supreme Court has remanded the Oakland eminent domain case to a lower court. The case has already been thrown out of both Superior Court and Appeal Court because it is absurd on its face. Lawyers all over the United States laugh hysterically. They will laugh until they stop.

Silly Season. The whole paper is bizarre.

I ran into a rather interesting book recently, titled The Bermuda Triangle Mystery--Solved by Lawrence David Kusche, a librarian at Arizona State University (alma almost mater). Kusche got so many reference calls for information on the Bermuda Triangle (a subject then confined almost exclusively to the more sensational men's magazines) that he became interested himself and started digging around in the records. He compiled, first, the most comprehensive statement of the legend available--every

incident even remotely associated with the area--then went into ship registers, national archives, insurance and shipping records, and local newspapers all over the world from about 1840 (the first recorded incident) and collated all the information together and summarized it.

The book is a fine work of pop scholarship and a monument to library science--something the computer might have spewed out in Desk Set, Kate Hepburn reciting all umpty-dozen stanzas of "Evangeline" as the printer struggled to keep up.

Kusche's findings are about what you'd expect. More than half the incidents in the legend are not even placed within the Triangle (one, in fact, was in the Pacific Ocean). The disappearances are spread fairly evenly over the major shipping routes between Europe and the U.S. Of the remaining incidents, "Once sufficient information was found, logical explanations appeared for most of the incidents. It is difficult, for example, to consider the Rubicon a mystery when it is known that a hurricane struck the harbor where it had been moored....With only a few exceptions, the mishaps that remain unsolved are those for which no information can be found. In several cases important details....are fictional." (Id. at 275).

The thing that was most fascinating to me about the book is that I kept getting echoes of the process by which the Greek hero stories were integrated into the Olympian mythos--stories from one locale got transferred to others; details from one story were adopted into another; associations are forced... Kusche traces the provenance of the some of the stories, and it is apparent that a lot the same process is involved--stories told by firelight repeated endlessly, losing contact with the reality involved at each repetition until they get committed to print and "fixed."

Kusche gives an epitaph to the mystery: "the Legend of the Bermuda Triangle is a manufactured mystery. It began because of careless research and was elaborated upon and perpetuated by writers who either purposely or unknowingly made use of misconceptions, faulty reasoning, and sensationalism. It was repeated so many times that it began to take on the aura of truth. I, like everyone else, like a good mystery, an enigma that stretches the mind. We all seem to have an innate desire to remain in awe of those phenomena for which there appears to be no logical, scientific explanation. Yet we also exult in seeking and finding legitimate answers to these same puzzles. Perhaps we are beginning to grow a bit weary of being constantly bombarded by spectacular unsolved mysteries. It is satisfying to know that we need to remain forever baffled by all phenomena that seem to be beyond explanation." (Id. at 277).

Ha. It's irritating when someone misses the point so badly.

The Bacchae was written nearly 2,500 years ago, and we still haven't learned what Euripides had to say. We need the mystery as a complement to the intellect; we can't function properly without both. Myth serves that basic, intellectual need, and the Bermuda Triangle will serve as a fountain for images a long time, irrespective of the facts involved.

I do tend to be a bit credulous. I can afford to be: it doesn't shake my world view to say or think that there are things--possibilities--unapproached as yet by understanding. And it seems to me that intellectual understanding ought to bring us closer to the mystery, not dissipate it. This is not a terribly uncommon attitude. That most rationalistic of philosophers, Thomas Aquinas, was also the most passionately involved with his faith. That particular door is closed to me, but there are others. I'm more saddened than delighted when Ted Serios, for instance, is debunked. Ah, well...

There's an interesting series on one of the cable channels (I did mention that I'd gotten cable recently, didn't I?) on the history of Rock & Roll. I'm a sucker for that kind of thing, anyway, and I've even been known to tape all forty-eight hours of the radio show that occasionally makes the rounds of the pop stations (I promptly tape over them--most of the material is eminently forgettable). Those radio tapes are a listener's guide to the history--mostly the songs themselves, with very brief topical and explanatory material. The new television series is a cultural historian's overview--mostly topical and historical stuff with a few examples of the songs. Not terribly scholarly, either--they're very lax about setting release dates and so forth. But they do have extensive interviews with the figures involved. It's odd to hear someone speak of Bobby Darin, for instance, as a major force on the field in the early '60s, but apparently people like Paul Anka and Frankie Avalon think so. Again, it's a decent example of pop scholarship. I'm encouraged that such things exist.

The Search for the perfect hamburger continues. The first time I ran across someone as (usually silently) devoted as I to the Search for the Perfect Hamburger I was shocked and delighted...I mean, finding out there are other readers of science fiction or discovering that the dialectic method you invented when you were nine years old was really invented by a guy named Plato 2,500 years ago is one thing, but a comrade in greasy-spoonery, now: that's

something!

Well, I later discovered this to be a commonplace. There are probably millions of us in the silent (mostly silent. There is, after all, the rattle of shaking heads, the rustle of crumpling napkins, the critical mumblings around mouthsful) fellowship, searching, passing like chips in the bite, knowing each other only by the ineradicable grease that spots us about the breast...It is a Proud and Lonely thing to be a Hamburger Fan.

The difficulty about this unceasing quest is that no two hamburgers are ever quite alike--I mean, there are broad families of flavors depending, mostly, on how the meat is handled or the sugar content of the condiments, and so forth. But each burger is an irrepeatable and unique experience.

Another discouraging fact of this quest is that it seems virtually impossible to duplicate the best of the restaurant hamburgers at home, even when one is working with undeniably superior ingredients. This is a paradox reflected also in some of the other institutional foods made with pasteurized processed American cheese. Maybe it's the lactose content in the yellow rubber...

As Thomas rightly says that reflection reaches fruition only when it has been brought out to the public, and as I have been caught in this hopeless quest for nigh onto twenty years, I thought it time to share the fruits of my researches.

*

There is, first of all, The Meat. Unquestionably it must be beef. Turkey, pork, veal, chicken, and soy need not apply. I have, on occasion, gotten a tasty burger with a 60/40 mix of hamburger and bulk pork sausage, but this is mostly done as a remedy for refrozen beef (see below) and is to be considered an Abberation, rather than the Real Thing.

The meat must also be muscle tissue--steak or roast. The principal yukkiness of the plastic fast food chain hamburger is that the meat is "extended" (a polite circumscription if ever I saw one) with ground eyeballs and innards of various kinds. MacDonalds is the world's leading importer of cow's eyes. Think about that next time you sit down to a Big Mac. These "meat byproducts," while undeniably beef, in the sense that they come from the same animal, taste nothing like beefsteak. Try a tasty dish of fried rubber tripe and onion sometime, and you'll see what I mean. The Treu taste of hamburger is that of beefsteak. To get that flavor, you must (surprise!) start with beefsteak (or roast, if that's your pleasure) and grind it with not more than twenty percent suet, the fat that comes either marbled in the beef or as a caul surrounding the tissues. The more tough the cut, the more flavorful the meat, of course, but the fat is needed to add flavor as well as to help bind the patty together. Do not skimp on it. Gristle and sinew are, of course, out.

(Some people insist that the meat be minced finely instead of ground, but I find this an unnecessary and perhaps effete refinement. Why, after all, would one want to cook a perfectly good steak tartare?)

It is not absolutely necessary to grind the meat yourself. In most cases, if you time your shopping properly, and if you have a cooperative butcher, you can induce him to grind the meat to your specifications and before your very eyes. This can even be an Interesting Experience, if you haven't read The Genocides recently. Most grocery stores and butcher shops do carry a selection of preground beef under labels such as "ground beef," "ground chuck," "ground round," and so forth. No matter what anyone may have told you, there is no "industry standard" for what these labels mean. Ask your butcher, and do not be put off by the premium you pay for quality meat. The hamburger you get from the $3.50/lb. ground round will be more than twice as big as the $1.19 suet-with-meat-in-it.

But in any case, the meat must be as fresh as possible. Beef loses flavor every time it is frozen and thawed. Chances are great (99% at least) that your beef reached the butcher frozen at least once, so you're starting out with two strikes against you. Ground beef (a generic name in this case, rather than a cut) also begins to lose its distinctive texture when it is frozen and thawed, becoming more mushy every time. Some people mistake this for "tender." One of these people is born every minute.

Next there is the Preparation. Although there seems to be a fair unanimity of opinion on the above points about meat, each step of Preparation is hotly debated wherever two or three of us are gathered. Some prefer the meat plain; others want onions or other seasonings mixed into the meat (some even want cereal fillers--bleah!); some like their patties thick, others pancake-thin. And, of course, the hottest of all controversies is Baking v. Frying.

The way out of this dilemma is clear: do it as you like. If you like to adulterate the meat, well and good. Do so. Some things I have gotten good results with are (in no particular order): onions minced finely, almost to a paste, green (bell) peppers, worchestershire sauce, soy sauce, barbecue sauce (a whole 'nother disquisition in itself), basil-thyme-oregano (the inseparable trio of beef seasonings), garlic, and, most important, marjoram. Not all at the same time, of course.

It is also possible to perk up the flavor of tired meat with bulk pork sausage, spicy or not, or a little of the powdered (not cubed!) beef bouillon.

As to the thick patty/thin patty, controversy, I

like mine thin. Not only do they cook more quickly, but it's also easier to control the cooking process that way. As to the baked v. fried controversy, I side squarely with the fryees (saute'ees, actually), but will tolerate flame- or charcoal-broiled as well. But the manufacture of flat meatloaves--never!

Fortunately, most hamburger fanatics seem to agree. And, that out of the way, there are a few words to be spoken about the method of cooking: the patties should be dropped on a hot saute pan (or griddle) then cooked on the lowest heat it is possible to achieve.

This sounds very unorthodox, but there are good reasons for it. Like all meats, hamburger is cooked by coagulating the proteins in the tissues. If the cooking temperature is high, the proteins contract unevenly, squeezing out the flavorful juices and toughening in the process. If, however, the temperature is kept low (but over 140 degrees F), the hamburger (or egg or roast or whatever) will cook tenderly and without shrinking. Since shrinkage in high-fat meats can run up to fifty percent on a high fire, one can thus save money on the purchase of the meat and on the cooking fuel (since the calories-per-consumption-unit ratio is not linear) at the same time as one provides himself with a tenderer, juicier, and more flavorful burger. The universe is endlessly elegant...Less is more. That kind of thing. Appropriate Technology and all the other rallying cries of the last decade.

While the burger is cooking, one should begin thinking about condiments, garnishments and, Bread. The bread used to make hamburgers is critical to the enjoyment of the final product. The sesame bun seems to have established itself in eateries across the country as the U.S. Standard, but the difficulty with commercially-made sesame buns is that they are made of pretty bad bread--too sweet and too fluffy to stand up to a juicy burger. The moment you pick it up the top and bottom sink together at an alarming rate, and what looked so appetizing a moment before becomes a sopping mess, tomatoes and onions slithering in all directions. Since it is virtually impossible to duplicate restaurant hamburgers at home, anyway, you might as well settle for a bread you like. For home consumption, the best bet is a hearty, dense whole-grain bread with some texture and resiliency to it (i.e., not pumpernickel), such as those made by the Brannola or Orowheat companies. Honeyed wheats are especially good, and I like mine, also with cracked or partially-sprouted grains left in. Although oatmeal or potato-flour breads tend to be too tender for a really good result, they taste wonderful in combination with a juicy hamburger. Try also a dark (Schwartzwalder) rye if your taste runs that way. Mine don't. Schwartzwalder rye makes a great roast-beef and Jarlsberg sandwich, though. With tomatoes.

The basic condiments are catsup, mustard, and mayonnaise. Perhaps worchestershire sauce or soy sauce or steak sauce, although these seem to me to be gilding the gladiolus. Many people find mayonnaise anathema, but I happen to like it. So, there. A thin scraping of mayonnaise. Maybe no catsup this time. And then the big decision: which mustard?

There are lots and lots and lots of mustards to choose from. I keep three kinds around the house: a German sweet-hot, coarse ground for salads, Guldens Spicy Brown for cooking, and a hot, flavorful Grey Poupon for hamburgers and other sandwiches. Try it. You'll like it. Or, if the mustard heat is a little too heavy, settle for the Gulden's Spicy Brown. The mustard should be spread so that it actually comes into contact with the meat.

Garnishments are another matter entirely. For my tastes, a couple of thin slices of Bermuda onion and, perhaps, at the uttermost realm of possibility, a slice of ripe, beefsteak tomato are about as far as one should take this art. But there are indefatigable exponents of the pickle and the relish out there, and there are even some churls who like lettuce on hamburgers. Visualize a delicate shudder, please. If you are using anything other than tomato and onion, I don't want to know about it. (Confidentially, I once had a quite presentable burger made with a sharp cheddar and Bengal Hot Chutney).

The subsidiary matter of cheese for hamburgers is another great, neglected art. There is, of course, no reason one should keep pateurized, process American cheese around the house, so one is not stuck with it. Swiss cheeses, for some reason, don't seem to go well with hamburgers--most particularly not the raw, domestic varieties. If you must experiment with Swiss-type cheeses, try to limit yourself to Gruyere or Jarlsberg--preferably shredded, as they do not heat uniformly when sliced. Virtually any cheddar from Cheshire to Stilton will go well with a hamburger. Other semisoft cheeses, such as Gouda and Edam or Fontina or Havarti show well, too. Crumbly or very soft cheeses, like Feta, the Grana cheeses of Italy, or Brie and Camembert, do not come off well, although Roquefort and other bleu cheeses, crumbled and mixed into a paste with mayonnaise or sour cream, produce exquisite effects.

By the time you have constructed the outer shell of the hamburger sandwich, the heart of the matter will be done. Although most people are content to simply take it out of the pan with a spatula or turner (perhaps draining it a bit),

there is the additional choice of a finish to complement the garnishment. One of the best hamburgers I have ever eaten was finished with a quick flaming in burgundy, and a brandy or cognac flambe adds a wonderful depth to the final product. On the more mundane level, if you have not sullied the garniture with a tomato product, you might want to brush the patty with a spicy barbecue or steak sauce and let it dry for a moment while you begin melting the cheese. De gustibus nil est disputandum.

The best results seem to come from the unornamented combination of good, fresh ingredients, each layer of flavor distinctive, each contributing to the whole without overwhelming it.

And, he said in some confusion, I seem to have run on for two-and-a-half pages talking about hamburgers. Most peculiar.

WALKING DOWN THE STRAND WITH MY MIND ON MY HAND

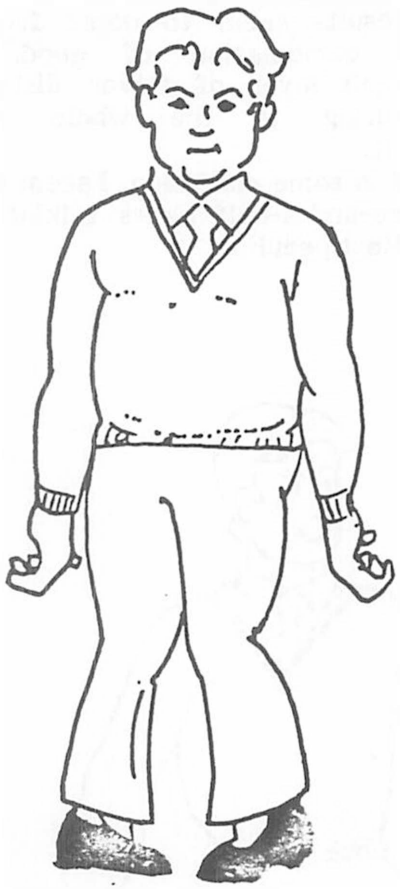
A few days ago I noticed that the heels of my shoes were wearing unevenly--they took a slope and drop-off like the continental shelf on the outside of the heel.

"This is peculiar," I thought. I must be walking on the outside of my feet. Sure enough, when I turned the shoes over, the outer edges of the soles were more worn than the inner. Aha. This is Not Good. This is, in fact, hell on the leather of the soles. So I decided to do something about it.

Since it was a weekday morning, I put the shoes on and decided to practice walking pigeon-toed for awhile--put some wear on the inner edge of the sole for a change. The Things We Do For Good Posture...

Well, it is a pleasant block and half walk from my flat, all downhill, to Mission Street, where I catch the 14 Mission or the 9 Richland or the 12 Whatever (there used to be an 11 Hoffman, but it was such a useful line that Muni cancelled it) every morning around the bend (as we say) of Mission to Third Street. Down the hill I walk, pigeon-toed. I look down. Surprise! My feet are straight. From this angle, the black points come straight up and out, snick, snick, clop, clop--just like John Travolta's in Saturday Night Fever. Oy! I must have been walking like a clodhopper before--feet reaching out (keep on truckin' ✌ for the Missouri furrows my ancestors trod. I am told that some of them may have been Missouri mules, so anything is possible.

"Well, that's not too bad," I remark when I come to rest at the bus stop. Feels strange, but



Good Posture and so forth are Worth The Effort. Yes.

The bus trip is uneventful. This is not a common occurrence. Herb Caen is on vacation, so I must content myself with the doings of Doonesbury and Bloom County and get off at Third Street, two blocks from The Crepe Escape where I have my Standard Breakfast--hot ham and cheese croissant and a cup (one cup only, please) of exceedingly bitter French Roast coffee. This blend is designed to be drunk as cafe au lait, but they haven't caught on to the fact that I drink mine black. Well, the croissant makes up for it and almost makes the rest of the day tolerable. Yes. Hiking time. Not too bad. The arches begin to ache, but my Loins are Girded. I sink into the bistro chairs and fold back the paper. So far, so good.

There is an ordeal waiting for me. I sip my coffee and grimace. I must go around the block through a construction zone. This will be the test. Some test. It is impossible to walk pigeon-toed over the uneven surface--worse than the stretch of uneven paving stones at Boston's civic center (an exercise in the architectural esthetics of Adolph Hitler, as interpreted by Leggo Blocks).

The short stretch of paving after the construction zone is a relief--a flat surface again. But I notice something: my hands have turned inwards all by themselves. No participation on my part. Palms out, fingers curled. The torque in the arms is almost painful. *Zowie* I straighten them out (palm in, palm in!) and walk some more, a few tentative steps at a time. Yup. The hands turn on their own--spooky. Well, I shrug. I'm already late. So I walk into the building at 111 Sutter--an architectural Frankenstein monster compiled from Thirties Gothic, Art Deco, and Thirties Constructivist murals.

Okay. I can buy that. We spend a lot of time as children building up a reflex connection between arms and legs so that the arms swing as we walk, to help keep balance. But I hadn't realized that the connection included torque in the arms as well. Ruminations throughout the day.

As I'm leaving for the day, an idea occurs to me: would the connection extend to sideways torque as well as rotational torque? An intriguing idea.

I carefully avoid the construction area. There is a nice, level stretch on the other side of the building, toward Market. And I turn my feet outward, walking on the inner edge of the soles. I get some stares. I close my eyes.

Open the eyes, Patterson, and look down--no, at the hands.

Wow.

The hands are wrenched up, fingers spread like a palm branch. By now I've collected a crowd. I shoulder my way through and board a bus. When I get home, I try twisting the arms in various positions. If I am very still, and if it is very quiet, I can feel phantom impulses in my toes. Spooky.

It really works, folks. The connection we make as children between legs and hands is not limited to position--it includes torsion along several axes as well. This must have some application...

Well, it may not be the Flying Karamazovs, but if I ever need to draw a crowd, I've at least got something up my...er...sleeve...

Recycled Fanac:

on moorcock

on anarchism

At NorEasCon, when I was living in Boston, Karen Pearlstein approached me to respond to an article Michael Moorcock had written on anarchism and fandom. She was planning a fanzine symposium of responses to the article. So I wrote her a nice, long letter on the subject and sent it off to the wilds of Ontario where Karen was doing various Pearlsteinish things. And that's the last I heard of the whole thing.

Well, I came across my file copy of the letter on one of my archaeological digs into the NH Snakepit (which is what I call my filing cabinet), and reread it. The copy of Moorcock's article has been lost, but my letter makes some interesting (to my mind) points. So, herewith, Recycled Fanac. This has been slightly edited from the original:

Karen,

You asked for my reactions to Moorcock's article on anarchism in the sf community.

Moorcock's central criticisms are hard to grasp because his rhetoric is so torrid, but his basic points seem to be that fans or anarchists or fannish anarchists (pick one. He doesn't seem too clear on which, himself) are either insufficiently radical or radical in ways other than the European left-wing radicalism Moorcock embraces. He also attacks SF in general and Robert Heinlein and Ayn Rand in particular for being politically conservative, noting that it is inappropriate for anarchists to admire politically-conservative SF. He also says that SF has no right to style itself a "literature of ideas."

Taking these points in reverse order,

1. SF is not a literature of ideas

There are more ideas than political ideas, and there are more political ideas than the IWW proposed in the twenties or Bakunin proposed fifty years earlier. The term "literature of ideas" means that science fiction is--or can be--a conceptual literature, dealing more with relationships than with color, excitement, or character portrait.

There are two stories which are almost paradigmatic examples of what science fiction is all about: "The Cold Equations" by Tom Godwin and "Omnilingual" by H. Beam Piper. Together they lay bare the bones of the conceptual technique of SF.

"The Cold Equations" is, formally, a very simple and straightforward short story--a single scene broken by narrative interludes. The situation has a space ship carrying medical supplies in a Hohmann-orbit to a colony undergoing an epidemic. The characters are limited to the pilot and a stowaway--a woman, to increase audience sympathy. There are various walk-ons and spear carriers, but all the interaction takes place between these two. The problem is that the stowaway, because her mass is not calculated into the fuel of the ship, will make delivery of the critical medical supplies impossible. The pilot decides, based on the cold

facts of technical limits, to kill the stowaway by spacing her so that the medical supplies can be delivered and the thousands of people awaiting them could live. Not very sophisticated, but, then, the generally-accepted moral philosophy of most SF writers derives from a kind of naive, mushy, and half-hearted 19th century Positivism.

"The Cold Equations," stripped of the technical impedimenta, is a story about ethics. The point is simply that reality is preeminent and can't be gotten around by wishing things to be otherwise. It's an important point, and one that can't be made too often. In any case, the significance of the story is that it directs the reader to contemplation of an idea, a relationship between man and the external universe, both metaphysical and ethical. It is not, strictly speaking, novel or romance: it is a straightforward, didactic dramatization.

"Omnilingual" is a much more complex novelette organized by the problem of deciphering a dead language for which there are no bilinguals (texts written in two or more languages, one of which is known). A group of areologists are excavating a dead Martian city. Most of the work that goes on is straightforward archaeology of a highly advanced, technical civilization, but one of the aerologists is convinced that she can learn to read the Martian script. She has assigned phonetic values to the characters and has guessed at the meanings of a few words, but her colleagues, some encouraging, some scornful, tell her she will never be able to really "read" it because there are--and can be--no bilinguals for the Martian language. During the dig, the crew uncovers a university building and breaks into the chemistry laboratories where the areologists discover a periodic table. Using human (i.e., English) techniques of word formation on the names of the clearly identified elements, the protagonist begins to break the language into sense-units (roots); she has found her bilingual--except that it is an "omni"-lingual. The point: all technical civilizations must share a number of things in common which will make understanding them easier. Again, reality is preeminent, and there are only so many ways of accommodating it.

There is much more of the novel about "Omnilingual" than about "The Cold Equations." The human progress of the story, told in interwoven subplots, is tied up in the head of the expedition's grab for credit and media attention; the tiredness of the eminent Hittitologist, ready to give up, pressed into service for the expedition, the cameraderie and academic snobbishness of the other crewmembers as they react to the protagonist's passion for recovering the Martian language. It is intricate work, finely done, neatly balanced, wrapping the whole package in an appealing dress. And, again, the point of the story is that it directs the reader to contemplation about a sociological proposition about technical societies--how they differ from pre-technical societies.

These two stories are not unusual: they are the blood and bone of SF. The best writing in the field is this always kind of "conceptual" literature--and even the worst must try to fake it, because it is intrinisic to the methodology of writing sf.

The majority of the conceptual stories which make up the lifeblood of SF deal with what most people in the SF community consider to be the central problem of the 20th century: adjusting to social change made rapid by technical innovation. Most of the "classic" stories from Slan to Ringworld use this to shape some basic element of the story. There is no simple formulation which can express the method, but it is central to modern SF. And it is this which qualifies SF as a literature of ideas, whether one approves of specific ideas or not.

2. It is inappropriate for anarchists to admire politically-conservative SF

First, Moorcock's claims are based on a confusion: SF is a popular literature, and certain writers are popular not on the basis of the affections of the few anarchists and libertarians who read SF. Moorcock's righteous indignation about the popularity of certain writers is not properly addressed to fellow-anarchists.

Second, one may enjoy a work of fiction even if the underlying philosophy expressed is abhorrent. This is particularly true in SF and in the mystery, where the stories may be cast in the form of intellectual puzzles. I greatly admire Heilnein's writing, although his attitude toward women I find infuriating (I know he's trying, but still!), and I think his flirtations with solipsism and genetic determinism are silly. However much these things have annoyed me in the past, only The Number of the Beast was so offensive as to ruin the book for me.

The issues Moorcock raises have occurred to me before. In fact, I suspect that every anarchist must dispose of them now. Fifty years ago, when the only anarchist ideas with any currency were Bakuninist, the dilemma was simpler: a commitment to anarchy was a life-consuming thing, placing one in clear opposition to every aspect of Western Civilization. There were no points of agreement in the life of the anarchist of the '30's, say, with the world around him: his/her life was, in ever respect, an ongoing protest against the world as it is.

In the late '60's, things began to change: a new/old tradition of anarchism--voluntarist anarchism--became a political alternative. An

underground tradition in America which owed more to Thomas Paine and Lysander Spooner than to Bakunin began to dominate the thinking of the new anarchists in this country.

Ironically--how very ironically it is impossible to know--it may well be Ayn Rand who is chiefly responsible for this new anarchism. One line in one essay on the nature of government fragmented her enormous following as much as the blowup over Nathaniel Branden in 1968. In briefly discussing the notion of "competing governments," she said that such an idea would lead to the Hobbesian "war of all against all."

It is now fashionable to refer to Rand's followers as "randroids" because of the dogmatic way they incline to spout her rhetoric and her ideas, but the several million people she had caused to think clearly and consistently realized the contradiction in that line--that Rand's own expressed view of human nature rejected the possibility of a war of all against all.

That single line opened up the possibility of anarchism as a viable political order to people who would probably never have considered the ideas otherwise. The anarchist movement in the U.S. proceeds, at least in part, from that one moment when possibility opened in the minds of minarchists committed to peaceable and equal exchange among equals, and American anarchism starts from entirely different emotional roots than European anarchism. European anarchism is a left-wing revolutionary movement; American anarchism is a reform movement, in a sense--in the sense that the ideas are thought to be part of the bedrock of this society. Where the European anarchist is calling for an overthrow of the established social order, the American anarchist is, at root, calling for what he was promised when he undertook the social contract that includes life, liberty, the pursuit of property, and "when any goverment becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to change it."

This speaks, of course, only to the emotional roots of the movement. In actual, pragmatic fact, the voluntarist is as much a revolutionary, and, as such, as dangerous to the established order, as it is possible to be.

Generally speaking, the American anarchist has a much broader area of contact and agreement between his own life and the external world than has the Bakuninist. This is particularly true in the still-thriving counter-culture. In consequence, voluntarists become adept at a kind of doublethink which permits them to live happy and successful lives--cooperatively where the external world permits cooperative relationships. This ought not to be surprising: no matter how extensively a moderately oppressive state attempts to regulate relationships, far and away the majority of our day-to-day relationships are cooperative in their basic structure. Statists can bring oppression into cooperative relationships, but the solution to that problem is to avoid people who think and live in terms of power relationships--just as one learns to shun people who cannot learn to respect women as humans.

This ability to live in the culture may well be the most important development in anarchist theory and tactics. Anarchists used to form a small, closed society, feared and unfamiliar to the population at large. But now anarchists can act--and are acting--as a leaven, spreading not only the ideas of anarchism, but the example that "normal" people can be anarchists--that anarchism is not morally equivalent to a social disease.

This process has been going on for just over a decade: it may require more than a century to bear fruit. But a small cadre of grim revolutionaries can never bring off "the revolution" and make it stick. That requires the cooperation of a great mass of people who have to be convinced, by the example of exemplary lives, that it is possible to live happy and productive lives without the "protection" of a state.

One aspect of this "doublethink" is that an anarchist can be expected to find points (but

only points) of agreement even with politically-conservative organizations, people, and literature--that is to say, anarchists can be normal human beings, can have friends who are not ideologues, can enjoy art which is not "politically correct." There is nothing inconsistent in this--so long as the anarchist remains clear on the issue of interpersonal power politics.

The question of what an anarchist might find valuable in a work written in a politically-conservative worldview is not susceptible to general analysis, although it is reasonable to suppose that it is not the conservatism he finds attractive.

3. Robert Heinlein and Ayn Rand are politically conservative and inappropriate as reading for anarchists

Both Ayn Rand and Robert Heinlein do appear to be politically conservative. However, anarchists who read Rand do not do so for her political ideology, but for many other reasons, all of them perfectly valid. First, like it or not, Rand has created a fourth tradition of Aristotelian thought, a considerable achievement. Because Rand has rationalized so much of her personal philosophy into Objectivism and has frozen it, it is not now growing. But it still has many valuable insights which can be of use to anyone who takes the trouble to study it critically. And Rand has an important place in many lives. Many of us owe her a debt of gratitude, however we have come to regard her and her political philosophy as warped, because she said things we desperately needed to hear when we were younger. To hear someone possessed of an incisive intellect say that the intellect was valuable and that we were right to value it was an important and sustaining experience for people who were growing up before 1967.

Moorcock's criticism of Heinlein is simply inapt and grotesquely unfair to him as a writer. He cites Starship Troopers as his sole evidence for the claim that Heinlein is a militarist and does not take time to analyze any of his other works for the consistency or truth of his assertion. On evidence of this quality, we can claim, then, that Heinlein is also a technocrat (Beyond This Horizon), a revolutionary (Between Planets), an advocate of "free love" (Stranger in a Strange Land), a repressed transsexual (I Will Fear No Evil), a paranoid megalomaniac ("They"), a Nietzschean egoist ("Gulf"), an actor and xenophile (Double Star), a xenophobe (Puppet Masters), and a voluntarist anarchist (The Moon is a Harsh Mistress). All this simultaneously, of course. I don't think I need to point out how seriously unjust this criticism is--as well as critically reprehensible. No reasonable critic would suppose that all writers write only polemical material, and that the character of the author can be read directly from a single book. And as for the virtual hero-worship of American voluntarists for Robert Heinlein--I would suggest that Moorcock need only read The Moon is a Harsh Mistress to discover why this is so.

Aside from his anarchist's manual and handbook, Heinlein is admired as one of the preeminent storytellers of SF. That is sufficient justification for his acclaim, and nothing further need be said.

Exciting writers will be read--properly--because of the excitement they can generate. It is entirely proper that an anarchist should enjoy good art, wherever it occurs and in whatever guise.

4. Fans, anarchists, or fannish anarchists are insufficiently radical

There is no Uniform International Code of Anarchist Lifestyle and Politically Correct Ideology. The only uniting feature among us is a belief that government ought to be abolished. Diversity of opinion is the first effect of anarchism, and an anarchist who denounces diversity of opinion is denouncing anarchism.

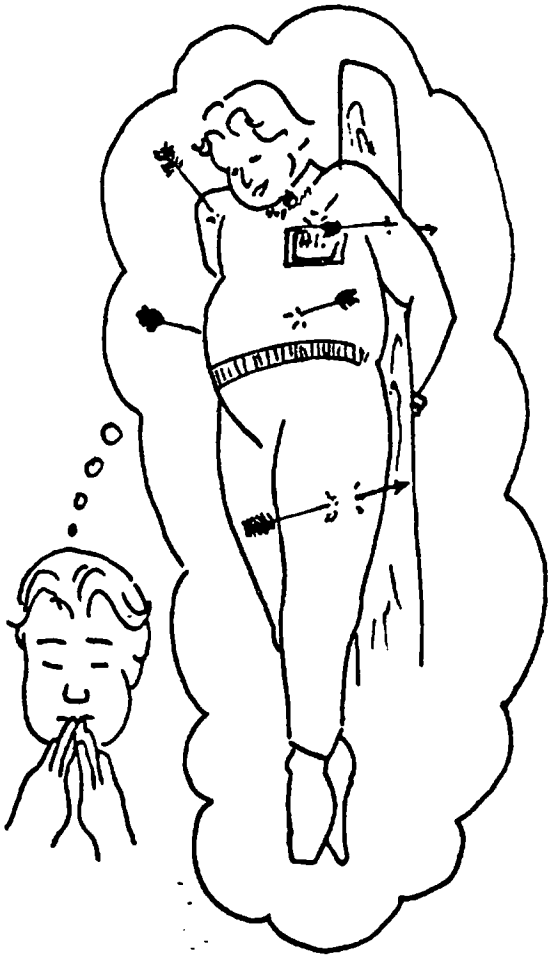
What Moorcock is doing is the moral equivalent of exhorting us to "get the wogs out" of our (intellectual) territory. I do not feel called to support a "keep anarchy pure" movement. I am just as offended when Moorcock says this as when George Wallace says it.

The radicalism of denouncing government is the furthest radicalism, and it is sufficient if it is consistent.

***

"My theory is that when someone goes and does something bizarre, like publishing a fanzine every two weeks...or becoming worldcon chairman...or writing killer fanzine reviews, I should be grateful to that person. I hold that once someone has done something like that I am no longer obliged to find out what would happen if I did it. This enables me to be serene about various fans who are excessively something-or-other...I wave my hand vaguely in their direction and say "I'm glad he's defined that end of the spectrum," and go back to falling asleep on the middle ground." Teresa Nielsen Hayden, "The FIJAGDH Orbit," Telos 5, July, 1982.

How I Spent My Summer Vacation, or *Vision of the Fined as St. Anthony*



How daunting is the prospect of writing a convention report! Do not reproving visions of St. Willis, holding a copy of "The Harp Stateside" disturb the sleep? Does not the spectre of ten thousand massed fans crying in unison "Bor-ing!" strike dread into the heart? The thing is, to Persevere, to Care Naught for the Opinions of the Many, to--Shut Up and Get On With It.

*

I was in Phoenix for the Westercon this July. This, I am reliably informed, was a Brave Thing, or, possibly, a Foolish Thing, but A Thing, certainly. The cause of the Thinginess is the publication of The Little Fandom That Could, my memoirs in Phoenix fandom (Phandom, in the idiom) from 1968 to 1978. Some people were U*P*S*E*T about it. Doo dah.

I had spent most of the previous three weeks taking hundreds of coments (no kidding--hundreds! Gary Farber alone gave me 216 by his count, but there were some duplications) on the first draft and working them into the publication draft. Then I ran off a ten-copy edition and took them with me.

The speed with which the edition was put together resulted in my working double shifts for a few weeks. By the time I was ready to leave, the work had gotten to me. I should hastily point the accusing finger myself: there was no real necessity for it to be ready for Westercon--just that the foofooraw in Phoenix dating back to that February had gotten my Irish up. Apparently, a few people had threatened to lynch Randy Rau, chairman of the Westercon, if he published (as he had offered to) the work. He withdrew his offer, as I was more than halfway through the first draft, and that was amusing, in a depressing kind of way. I have had problems with Phoenicians not dealing in good faith before.

Apparently the clique in Phoenix who had so pressured Randy thought that would be the end of that. Haha. Hoho. They ought to have known me better. That determined me to see at least a preliminary edition published for Westercon--a handsome volume of eight-six pages.

Although the reception in Phoenix was to fizzle, I was to be punished anyway. In my weakened condition, I was ready to be felled. My punchy and much-neglected teeth threw the first, retaliatory blow: as I was eating an almond croissant for breakfast on Wednesday, a molar decided to crumble. Just like that. That night I got no sleep at all--no great pain, just enough to keep me awake. And I had to leave for Phoenix the following afternoon. Neither megadoses of aspirin nor topical applications of benzocaine offered much in the way of relief. So I went in early to work and found a dentist willing to take me on an emergency basis.

I am terrified of dentists.

I have good reason to be terrified of dentists: practically the whole of my experience has been with butchers. Remind me to tell you sometime about getting a silver post pounded into a live nerve because the dentist didn't find a second root canal in the x-rays.

But Dr. Okuji was almost a pleasure. After I decided to start a root canal rather than extract the tooth, he sat me down with valium and an antihistamnine, then started me on nitrous oxide until I got a buzz on. Then a topical of benzocaine (very characteristic "taste") and three shots of novocaine. I got through the experience, and he prescribed penicillin (to keep it from infecting while I was out of town) and codeine APC. Woo. Lack of sleep, valium, nitrous oxide, and codeine all at once. Woo-woo. I went back to work and finished up the brief that had to be filed that day and went quietly off to the airport. I slept through the plane trip and was met at Sky Harbor by Elaine Rice, a-crutched. Naturally, we had come in at the new terminal, which is an interminable and intolerable distance away from the baggage claim. Elaine had fractured her pelvic bones through sitting down on her driveway too hard, and she kept referring to herself as "cripple crotch." Elaine is fun. I would be staying with her in East Tempe, about sixteen miles away fro the hotel. We spent some time catching up and went out to dinner at a new Mexican restaurant--Mi Amigos--which is quite good (a little heavy on the cumin, but that's a...er... cumin fault among Mexican restaurants in Phoenix). And then I fell quietly over and slept for ten hours or so. Very uneventful day.

Elaine had originally intended to go to the convention herself, but she had just gotten out of a convalescent hospital and wasn't up to it. But she was getting around (with help), and offered to bring me to the hotel. We arrived about noon on Friday. The convention had opened the night before.

The convention was slow in getting started--there were very few people floating around the lobby or conversation pit. A long, long line at the hotel's registration desk. So I trotted quickly around reacquainting myself with the layout of the hotel. Passed the registration desk up the escalators and was hailed by a woman in a white dashiki. I looked again. By gosh, it was Susan ("Krazy Susan"--she's still wearing that name badge) Roberts! I hadn't seen her since IguanaCon. About thirty pounds lighter, too. Took me a few seconds to recognize her. So we hugged and made kissy-face and went off to the Citrus Grove coffee shop to get reacquainted and get her off the desk she had been holding down since 8:00 a.m.

So I got caught up on a lot of gossip, local and regional, and Susan got a brief break (she is, incidentally, no longer married to Mr. Dewey of ancient memory). That was pleasant, and I had a chance to lay to rest the rumor that I despised her. I had, in fact, asked Randy to forward my comments to him about her in an earlier letter: "I have, incidentally, recently been going over some of the IguanaCon meeting tapes, and I am very impressed with Susan's contribution. If you haven't co-opted her yet, I suspect she will be able to make a valuable contribution in any position of responsibility. In fact, I would go so far as to say both you and she could profit from making her a 'right-hand man' for convention operations." (9/29/81)

(Sorry about the delay in getting these comments to you, Susan.)

I can see that if I started detailing all the conversations I had with all the people I talked with, this would turn into a fruitlessly long (and excessively boring) convention report. Let me summarize. A lot of people were very pleasantly met and re-met. Jim Corrick and I had a long, shop-talkish conversation about writing (and selling). Jim has just successfully opened up shop as a freelance writer. Coincidentally, and while I'm thinking about it, Bernie Zuber has also sold an as-yet unwritten book on the Tolkien phenomenon. And Steve Tymon has begun selling short stories. Goshwow, everybody's selling but poor, pitiful me. *snif*

Let's see. I had a long and *interesting* conversation with Greg Brown after he had bought and read (overnight!) a copy of The Little Fandom That Could. I took a couple pages worth of notes, and the fruits of this personal research will be incorporated in the final version of The Little Fandom That Could. q.v. below. Paula Ann Anthony appeared in the lobby one evening, and we had a pleasant chat. Paula Ann and I go 'way back, to the old PSFS days in 1970 and 1971. In fact, as I recall, the very first time the possibility of a Phoenix Westercon was mentioned was when she and I were talking on the way back from Westercon XXV in Long Beach. Ten years later...

A number of the people on both sides of the IguanaCon controversies were quite cordial (Doreen Webbert surprised me by taking my hand as I was talking to Greg).

I was snubbed by a few people--Bruce Arthurs and Hilde, as a matter of course. Curt Stubbs. Tommie and Mary Williams, also as a matter of course. I was a touch put out by Terry King's aloofness, but we have not been on cordial terms for years, and that has nothing to do with IguanaCon (due to a quite unfortunate accident in 1974, he thinks I stole some of his books from the OSFFA library. Not true, but too late to

remedy). I was a little more surprised at Jim Sieber's coldness, as I have always had a certain amount of affection for him. But, by and large, he was the only "disappointment."

As to The Little Fandom That Could--about the best that could be expected. I managed to get rid of (distribute) nine of the ten copies I had brought with me to the convention, and it seems, so far, to have sunk agreeably into obscurity. That is to say, no one has written me threathening letters, after almost a month, and I haven't seen any stormclouds from the southwest (southeast of here). The vision of myself as St. Anthony goes unfulfilled (as yet). All is well. I've always pretty much regarded what I was doing as relatively insignificant--a footnote to fanhistory with possibly interesting insights about the development of a local fandom. B.D. and others seemed to be threatened by such a thing, particularly as it dealt with IguanaCon. Tough tush. Now if I could only work up some way of getting demographics from fandom, I would undertake a sociological study--Years In The Making, with a Cast of Thousands, u.s.w. (Actually, I'd have a lot more enthusiasm for doing a Fancy III...)

There is actually more to the story of The Little Fandom That Could. I got a little rushed toward the end--I had been out with a severe case of flu in early June, so I had to work doubletime and still didn't get it out the way I wanted it. So instead I settled for calling this a "preliminary" edition with the promise of collating in all the comments I had received and collecting a bunch of photos and fanart from the various periods and fanzines for a final edition to be released (probably) next year. In any case, I'll have a breather from it--and perhaps I'll even get a chance to work on something else. Perhaps Bruce Arthurs will send me his "25,000 words of commentary" referred to in a recent Godless (which, by the by, he did not send me, despite the fact that he is on my mailing list. Then again, perhaps Quodlibet isn't his cup of tea...). And perhaps pigs will fly.

As to the convention itself, it was very quiet, almost dull. Not quite two thousand attending. Neither as small nor as quiet as the Sacramento Westercon last year, but pretty quiet nonetheless. Things came off with laudable timeliness and efficiency. I understand the hotel was putting extra people as backup into the operations staff. They certainly spread themselves for the Phoenix in '84 bidding party (no, I voted for Portland). They had a Margarita Fountain and table of hors d'oeuvres out. The Adams--pardon me, the Hilton. Most Phoenicians, apparently, haven't gotten used to calling it that, yet.) apparently wants the convention bad. Jerry Pournelle afforded us a touch of minor-league excitement early in the convention. Don Markstein spent the next three days' worth of convention newsletters updating us on the True Happenings (said, no doubt, with His Mouth. Incidentally, I think I may have traced that Hoffmanism to its source: "For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.") Since I plan on talking at length about a conversation that started with the incident, perhaps I'd better set forth the outline of the details.

To be brief (much briefer than the newsletter accounts), the Phoenix people had started out with a policy that only the person in whose name a block of memberships was registered could pick up the memberships. Sensible and unexceptionable, one would think. Dr. Pournelle was sleeping when his children wanted to pick up their memberships, which were blocked under his name. They got to the desk, and the registration people wouldn't release them to anyone except Dr. Pournelle. So they woke him, and he told them to go down and tell them he had said to release them. Perhaps Dr. Pournelle was half asleep at the time, but this still strikes me as odd. If they wouldn't release them when they asked for them the first time, why should they be expected to release them if the same people told them it was okay? This presumes, of course, that Greg Hildebrand, who was apparently on the registration desk at the time, didn't know the Little Jerries by sight. No particular reason for him to, of course...

At any rate, Greg naturally wouldn't release the memberships until Dr. Pournelle came down to pick them up himself. Dr. Pournelle came down to pick them up himself, shouting as he came. As this is a familiar sight to thousands of

convention-goers of years past, it hardly bears remarking. (Have you picked up on the fact that I don't like Jerry Pournelle, yet?) At one point in the remonstrances, Greg Hildebrand had the forms for the block of memberships in his hand. Pournelle reached for them and managed to strike Greg on the cheek. Greg is not the calmest of persons in the first place. And Jerry Pournelle goes without saying (except that he never goes without saying something...). Threats of suit. Stürm und Drang. All Fandom Will Be Plunged Into War.

Making, again, a boxer shorts into a briefs, Greg was persuaded by the committee not to sue. Dr. Pournelle apologized, the heavens ~~opened~~ up, and All Was Well. I didn't hear this through the Grapevine. I read it in the newsletter. Apparently a lot of people did the same. That's all there was to it. And now we pass on to matter of more...er...consuming interest.

In other respects, I frankly neither know nor care: I did not attend any of the programming; I did not go into the Huxters Room. I did get to the art show and fell in love with an ink drawing of da Vinci's "Proportions of Man" done with a Spielbergesque alien. But I refuse to go to auctions at conventions--they're handled so badly and so inconveniently--and so didn't get it. Also forgot to write the artist's name down. *Sigh* Could have contacted him through the art show coordinators afterward.

My schedule was made strange by the fact that I was staying with Elaine, two cities away from the hotel, and at the mercy of other peoples' transportation, so I didn't get to any of the room parties, either. But I did walk around the city during the daylight hours (fool that I am) and get reacquainted with the Phoenix Art Museum and other old hangouts. And I did dine out.

Perhaps you have caught the corner of a strange notion I have: my memories of Phoenix are inextricably bound up with food--mostly the excellent Mexican for which Phoenix is capital of a considerable regional cuisine. But other things as well. Caf' Casino. My first croissant. Delicious shudderings. Working on "The Thawed Abstraction," in the mornings at the first Caf' Casino in Tempe--croissant and coffee to start with; an hour later an almond tart; other things throughout the day. *Sigh*

Sharon Maples had come out from Florida for this Westercon, and we had promised each other Caf' Casino and Garcia's by post and by phone. And because of one of her plaintive complaints about my putting visions of dim sum before a dim sumless Floridan (in Quodlibet 9. Really, Sharon, I didn't in the least encourage you to move to Florida...) I hooked into my network of spies and found one (count 'em, one) restaurant that has dim sum on the weekends in Phoenix. (The place is almost getting civilized...). I also had a recommendation from Teny Zuber about the Sand Painter's Sunday brunch. So I was set for Westercon to be a kind of minor-league food convention. It didn't disappoint me in that respect.

My first night out, I had drinks with my half-brother, Mark, and got back to the hotel in time for a late dinner with Harvey Yee, a high school friend who has appeared in these pages before. Harvey decided to put on side, since I was finally to meet his wife of four years, so he took me to what is supposedly the best restaurant in Phoenix. Holding of nose. I worked for a few days for that restaurant as a busboy in, let's see...1971, I think. I wasn't impressed with it then (the chef was inordinately heavy-handed), and it did nothing to improve the impression. Except that the Cherries Jubilee was up to par, and, in any case, the company was delightful.

I've noticed this about other "top-of-the-line" restaurants, as well: Victor's, in San Francisco, has an enormous reputation, but the quality of the food is gar nicht. One gets a much higher quality at a little mom-and-pop restaurant up the street, The Swiss Alps.

Partly, I think, this is due to the reputation--which may be founded on entirely different matters. Victors, for instance, is simply the home of the first European-style-and-quality food in San Francisco. Situated in the Hotel St. Francis, already a watering hole for the upper-

crust of the mercantile district of the '70's, it got an instant trade. And Victor, the chef, was undisputed Lord of Food in SF for many years. People let the quality deteriorate while the restaurant keeps its reputation simply because they can't tell the difference. A classic exemplar of this principle is on television currently--the Folgers Crystal ads done in SF's Blue Fox and New Orleans' Arnaud's, in which the Folger's people replace the restaurant's normal coffee with their instant. All this advert. proves (to me) is that (a) either the Blue Fox uses a terribly nondescript blend to begin with, or (b) most people don't pay attention to what they're drinking anyway. I've had Folger's crystals, and it is a fairly undistinguished coffee--acceptable, but just barely.

Better, anyway, than anything I drank in Boston.

This principle is also at work in a number of seafood restaurants in San Francisco. One walks in the door and is overpowered by the smell of rotting fish. The passers-by and diners I have talked to think this is simply the natural smell of seafood. Now, if you have ever fished for yourself or walked into a fishmarket that deals in genuinely fresh fish and seafood, the odor you encounter is slightly sweet, slightly iodinish, and very wet. The "fishy" odor begins only as the flesh begins to decompose. That smell, aside from being nauseating, is a sure warning sign that the seafood is not fresh, and you'll be playing Russian roulette with ptomaine to eat seafood there. Pure ignorance has led people to accept that as a "normal" sign of the seafood restaurant.

None of which is to impugn Mr. Yee--I just get carried away. Punching of the buttons.

Let's see--Saturday morning, Elaine and I met Bernie and Teny Rule Zuber at the China Doll for dim sum. We were supposed to have met Sharon Maples and Carol Hoag, as well, but they had gotten their directions mixed up and wound up going to the wrong restaurant. By the time we all met again at the hotel, it was too late to straighten things out, and Sharon missed her dim sum.

The China Doll was a pleasant surprise. I hadn't expected much from the restaurant (although it is one of the better Cantonese restaurants in the city, unless you're an unitiated roundeye, in which case you take pot luck among leftovers), but their one dim sum chef is quite good. The selection was a little on the smallish side, but they did have su mai, an excellent har gow, fair kuo teh, and the other mainstays of the genre, all quite capably done. In one respect, they were even better than SF's Asia Gardens--the custards were less overpoweringly sweet, so you could taste the custard instead of just the sugar. Same delicate, flaky pasty. I wonder how they do that...? Bernie was initiated into the mysteries of boiled chicken's feet, which is, apparently, as popular there as it is here.

The China Doll is slightly more expensive than the Asia Garden--which makes it a moderately costly lunch for Phoenix, but still reasonable--about $1.40 per plate instead of the Asia Garden's average $1.25. I understand that when their dim sum chef was ill last year they had to close up dim sum for six weeks.

In the evening, we got up an expedition with Bob Webber, Hope Liebowitz, Sharon Maples, Carol and Warren dePriest, and others, to Caf' Casino--cars were at a premium, but we finally managed to squeeze the eight of us into the cars available. I managed to break Carol's mirror (how the heck was I supposed to know it was on the floor? I was so scrunched up I couldn't see my necktie, let alone anything southward...). I think we overdid the desserts (something I do all too frequently, but it was very enjoyable, after too long an absence. Hope and Bob were, of course, Martha-virgins, so they got initiated. Heh, heh.

Caf' Casino is an odd kind of place--it's a continental-style cafeteria offering decentish, although not fancy, French cuisine. Cafeteria-food. And a slightly better than average patisserie, all at very modest prices. (Croissants in SF are running about eighty-five cents apiece. I think they were fifty cents, or perhaps sixty). It's one of those experiences you have to be there for.

I had recently tried a Boileau '78 cabernet sauvignon and found it horribly tannic, and when I saw the split of Boileau '69 cab, I had to try that. Still unbearably tannic, eleven years later. Bob and Sharon and I took turns making vinegar faces as we tasted it. I suppose it's just that vinyard. I hope so, at least: I just put into storage two bottles of Joseph Phelps '78 cab for drinking in 1989 and 1990.

Sunday morning, I had planned to go with Elaine to Mountain Shadows, scene of many past feastings. But we had a recommendation for the Sunday brunch at the Hilton's Sand Painter, so we wound up going there instead. Teny and Bernie joined us, and we had a most pleasant time eating our way through the seafood salads (and lox and bagels) and juices and pastries and stroganoff and eggs and ham-and-cheese casserole and shiproast of beef and so forth and so forth. The chocolate mousse was not terribly entertaining, but the petit-fours were amusing in their own distinctive way, and the torts bore investigation. Quite worth the $13.00 tab. There is nothing quite so delightful as an excellent meal, taken at leisure, with excellent conversation to stimulate the digestive process.

Well, maybe there are. But the phenomenon is captivating while it is occurring.

Another friend from high school, Don Horton, dropped by en famille to say hello thereafter, so I got ol' cripple-crotch settled into the video room and talked some more. I was particularly charmed and entertained to meet again his daughter, Jenny. I had not seen her in seven years. She is now a gangling ten-year old with a charmingly toothy smile. The last time I saw her she was toilet training (and a particularly messy process too, as she would run around without her diapers and let go on the carpet.) We didn't speak much, Jennifer and I, because of the general conversation, but I rememeber her fondly.

That evening, we had another "expedition," this time to Garcia's.

Garcia's is one of the best Mexican restaurants in the city--moderately priced, with a real flair for serving as well as preparing their food. It was one of the items on Sharon's itinerary, but she was not feeling well, so she dropped out of the party. We even managed enough cars this time, although the doing was a little rough. The exact number of people going was fluctuating wildly right up to the moment of departure, and we finally wound up taking an extra car for the return trip. Neil Shulman's.

It turned out that I was the only "native" going on this expedition, so I had to draw up maps and directions for the other two cars and their assorted navigators. Neil Shulman and Sam Konkin were pressuring me for exact information about who was going with whom and where before I had such information. At one point Neil asked whether his car would be needed. I told him, "yes. Go get it. We'll meet out in front of the hotel," and turned back to giving directions to the people who could figure out where they were going if they had a vague idea of its location. Five minutes later, when I had gotten everybody else ready and gone, Neil was standing behind me asking "I still need to know if you need my car." I collapsed in hysteria. Running IguanaCon wasn't as tough as getting those people on their way.

As it turned out, Elaine planned to go directly home from Garcia's, so Neil's car would be the backup. It was going out empty, except for me (to navigate) and Neil. Carol and Warren had their car, and Elaine had the Zubers, I think. Or maybe they split up. Confusing.

Finally Neil got out of the hotel's garage, and I got in. We got out of downtown Phoenix and on our way to Scottsdale before anything like a conversation got going.

"Well," Neil said. "I see Phoenix fans are still as officious as they were at IguanaCon." This is neither a topic nor a tactic designed to foster the smooth functioning of the social order in that car. I control my blood pressure. "Why, what do you mean?" quoth I, and he proceeded to refer to the Pournelle incident, ending his recitation with. "It's absurd that Dr. Pournelle has to put up with this insolence." I blink several times. This is not the end, however.

It appears to Neil (beginning writer that he is) that fans are vampires sucking the life-blood of the authors, without whom, after all, science fiction fandom would collapse. My beanie begins spinning at 101 rpm. The icon of faanish fandom is raised and absorbed. Neil considers himself a faanish fan. My beanie comes to a full stop. "That's absurd," I say. Every author has a different need for the kind of instant feedback provided by his fans--some need it very little (like Harlan Ellison or J.R.R. Tolkien) and do not want it. Others, like Marion Zimmer Bradley and Gordon Dickson, do wonders with their fandoms. Each may take what he wishes from it. Viewing the artist-percipient/patron relationship as flowing in one direction only is also absurd. It is a cooperative relationship--has to be or it wouldn't work. And as to the economic side of it, I tend to think of the pros qua pros as being a drag at the convention--having to be catered to and shepherded as they do. They are, after all, when they are not acting as fans, using the convention as a business expedient, for personal meetings and contract sessions. Economically, the "lustre" added by pros participating in the program is an even trade for the personal and guild benefits provided, grudgingly because of the ungracious way they are demanded and treated--the comp suites and other bennies.

This topic took up the rest of the trip and slopped over into the dinner. Not too far over, I'm glad to say. Else I would not have been able to enjoy the excellent chimichanga machaca and sopapillas.

Well, that evening was the end of Westercon in Phoenix for me. I had gotten through it without a single arrow-pierce. The vision of the faned as St. Anthony collapsed, and I went on to have the rest of Westercon in Long Beach and Pasadena.

Going out of Phoenix Monday morning was a trial--the radar for the entire airport was shut down and they were trying to handle the entire traffic of Sky Harbor on visual. We were an hour late taking off. Fortunately, we did take off eventually, and I wound up at LAX. Andy Thornton met me, and we spend the remainder of the day together. Very pleasant. I had lost track of Andy for about six years, after meeting him at NASFiC in 1975 and again in 1976. He had migrated back to New York for awhile, then returned to the Anarchovillage at Long Beach over the same period I was migrating from Phoenix to San Francisco. And, Andy had

dropped out of fandom during my recouperation period after IguanaCon. So we had lost track of each other.

I've been commuting to LA once a month or so since the beginning of the year, and had re-established contact, but this was to be our first chance really to sit down and talk. So we had lunch and Sat Down and Talked, then went out to a Chuck E. Cheese Pizzatime Theatre nearby and played video games for awhile, then trekked over to Steve Tymon's establishment, arriving just as Steve was getting a call from Bruce Balfour and packing to move to the Anarchovillage and Breaking Up (is hard to do). All with only two hands. Count 'em. Goshwow! We stayed too long, and then Andy and I trekked over to Teny and Bernie's house in Pasadena, singing every scrap of song we could remember. That brought to mind a curious fact: I didn't witness a single episode of filksinging at this westercon--there must have been some: I saw a number of people with recorders and guitars and other filkish devices wandering around, sometimes sitting dazed in the auxiliary filking space downstairs, but not once did I hear a filksong that entire convention. Passing strange. We had gotten about through our reminiscences of the Folkie Period (remember 1961? Hootenanny? The New Christie Minstrels? "Four Strong Winds?" "Hao-o-o-w mini roads must a man walk dao-o-own...?" and "If I had a hammer?") and were segueing into Gilbert and Sullivan when the intersticial conversation turned to other matters and I launched into a ten-minute monologue in my best down-holler accent (which is a kind of deep-Ozarks transplanted from backwoods Tennessee. I never heard nor spoke the stuff routinely, but it seems to come naturally), an extended anecdote my father tells occasionally about his getting bored as an adolescent in rural Missouri and using the molasses pan as a raft on the crick. I haven't done that in years. Must have bored Andy spitless.

The part of westercon that really felt like westercon happened that night in Pasadena. Bernie and Teny and Andy and Victor Koman and a person named Laurie all came over, and we had a party. Talked about everything; Victor sat up his telescope for the eclipse. And as it started to happen, we all trouped outside and stood around for an hour and a half while the Fenris Wolf ate the moon. Bernie's binoculars were nearly as impressive as the telescope view. Teny and Bernie brought out a box of two-year-old fireworks, and set them off. Worked. The Fenris Wolf disgorged the moon.

And then various of us fell to sleeping or leaving, whichever was preferred. Ah, Lifestyles.

The next day Teny took me to Trader Vic's, and I bought a small Westphalian ham and two wedges of double glouster to take home. Stuffed them in my flight bag. Unfortunately the car broke down, and I left the flight bag in the car. The temperature got well into the nineties that day. When I finally got the cheese out, it had reduced somewhat in butterfat content and become hard. My copy of the Lotchin monograph, on the other hand, was well oiled, which may or may not be appropriate, depending on how you look at it.

And that's how I spent my summer vacation.

You know, I've come to the conclusion that convention reports are fully as boring to write as to read.

An I-V of Obsession

By D.S. Black

Since the idea of a "naked year" has already found substance in the writing' of Pil'niak, I will instead remark that the cruelty which came to this calendar year was one month earlier than is tradition

March was a branch of withergreen syringes, pressed on the flesh by daze in mourning. Scarcely a week passed without news of another face plucked from the primal screen, another page drawn empty in the Book of Blood. A tremulous quiet is left where sounds have fled all over the wounds of loss.

Few are without one they favored. For me it was someone I missed the time for meeting; now I'll know only in retrospect. Four months have not grief withdrawn; it's an I-V of obsession.

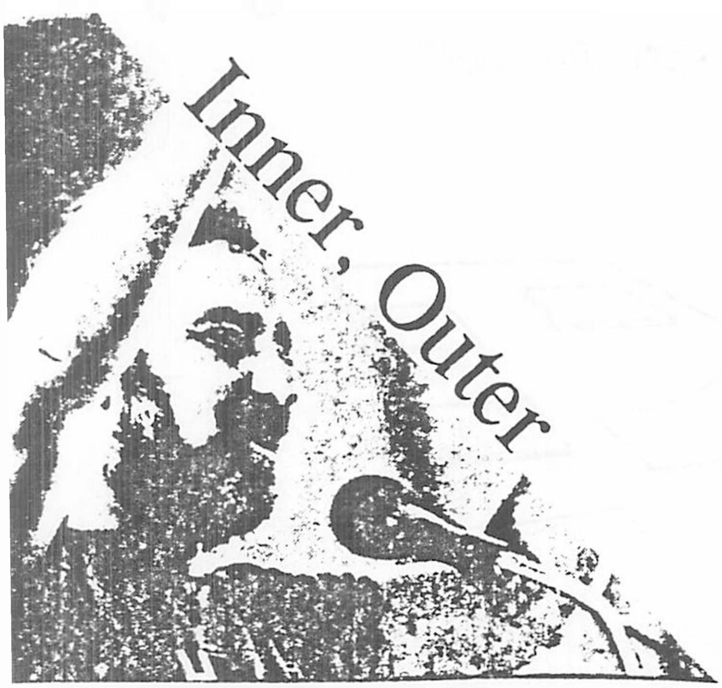
A Train of Thought Derailed by Intuition

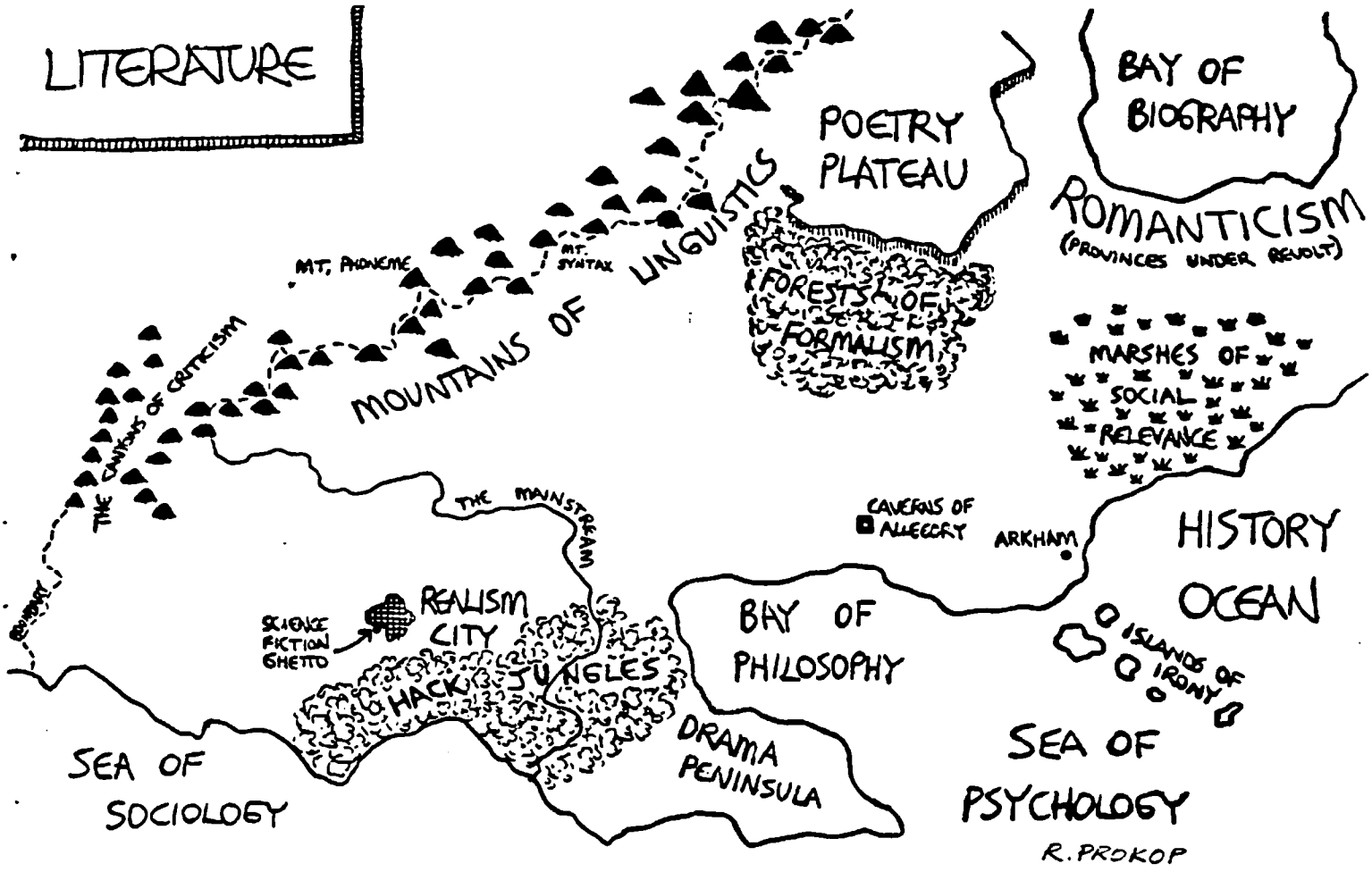
If words were the one proof of works in a person's life, there would be few free of superfluity. Since the scale of reckoning relies more on deed than intent (purpose being the way of ethics: a philosophic adjunct dispensed with en route to sophistication), it would seem validation is in the concrete. Yet that is no immortal guarantee, as historically an unsound buoy on inexorable waves of entropy.

Words betray their meanings; so it comes I say. Smug--rarely to speak in tongues, for high is the inside my mouth piled with stillborn boschian sentimentences. Yes silence costs everything, and is worth only as much as it is without.

So the left hand claps a phantom rite; a side can no longer hold up its end, let alone find the möbius beginning.

July, 1982





florilegium prosodensis

I received a copy of Neil Shulman's Alongside Night at westercon and was asked (not by Neil) to review it. I said I would. Thus I fulfill my commitment.

Alongside Night is Shulman's first novel, and it has more than its share of first-novelitis. The book is overloaded with huge chunks of stolen imagery, undigested bits of Heinlein and Rand floating whole in the broth. The prose is often awkward, stuffed with agrammatic and just-plain-bizzare language. The frequent point-of-view violations and scenes stolen whole from Atlas Shrugged would get the manuscript rejected from a first-year composition class. It should never have been published in this form.

And yet, and yet...

The book has an oddly compelling quality, all the more strange because the protagonist is unappealingly aloof and emotionally cold.

I suppose Alongside Night is a juvenile, of sorts, along the lines laid out by Heinlein's juveniles. The story takes the bones of Heinlein's Between Planets and "If This Goes On--" and stuffs them with a potpourri of other writers' creations. The plot involves a seventeen year-old student, son of an eminent Chicago-school economist, as he is separated from his kidnapped family, just as they are about to escape the economic collapse of the United States. The protagonist fends for himself and runs into the underground cabal--an anarchist coterie whose theory is derived from the Countereconomics theories of Sam Konkin. Coincidentally, he becomes a part of the underground at the same time as the daughter of the director of the F.B.I. They meet and fall in mutual lust. Nature takes its course (this is the only departure from Shulman's models), and it could hardly be called an "original" contribution. During the course of the story, he is reunited with his father and comes along on a raid that will be familiar to readers of Atlas Shrugged, on the detention center in which his mother and sister are being kept.

Shulman switches from Between Planets to "If This Goes On--". The revolution takes place; the U.S. government is replaced by an anarchiate. The female lead assassinates her father. Finis. All's well that ends well.

I suspect that most of the obvious struggling-

with-materials that goes on between the covers of Alongside Night has to do with making the plot contain the various incidents Shulman decided he needed to bulk the story out to novel length. None of the elements of the story ever quite fit together with the wildly improbable premise.

Considered only in respect of itself, the book's overriding problem is Shulman's inability to get inside the head of his protagonist. The boy goes gallumphing about thinking his father is dead and having virtually no emotional reaction to the fact at all. He does wonder at one point why he's not having an emotional reaction to it all, but the action shoves the thought out of his mind. At another point, the story stops abruptly for a shuddering sob and takes up immediately with the next bit of business. When he is reunited with his father, he has, again, no reaction at all. There is no sense of the consistency of the boy's internal life, normal reactions, and so forth. The character is extremely self-alienated, and this makes it difficult to identify with him.

Considering the book in relationship to the rest of the field, however, the most objectionable aspect of the book is the dishonest work Shulman has done, hacking together a novel by lifting materials bodily out of another author's work. A good example of a more proper literary borrowing can be seen in three works of another writer extensively influenced by Heinlein, David Gerrold: When Harlie Was One, Trouble With Tribbles, and The Man Who Folded Himself. In each case, the story plainly grew out of a Heinlein story: The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress, The Rolling Stones, and "All You Zombies," respectively.

When Harlie Was One takes Heinlein's treatment of the character of a sentient computer and its close relationship with a human, and goes on to build an entirely different structure of plot around it, drawing also on the Colossus novels of D.F. Jones and various other sources, and reprocessing the whole with his own experience, into a unique creation. When Harlie Was One, incidentally, was Gerrold's first novel also.

The Trouble With Tribbles derives from the Martian "flat cat" of The Rolling Stones, a minor character(s) which provides an incidental subplot. Gerrold took the flat cat, filed off the serial numbers, and placed it in a new situation which did not derive from Heinlein's work.

The Man Who Folded Himself is a different handling of another writer's materials--in fact, it can hardly be called a "borrowing," inasmuch as it takes nothing directly from "All You Zombies..." or "By His Bootstraps." Rather, it constitutes discourse, taking an idea developed briefly and showing the ultimate consequences of the idea.

In each of these three cases, Gerrold took an idea treated in another work and developed it using his own structures and imagery. This is a legitimate reprocessing of ideas which have become "common coin" in the SF community. Shulman, on the other hand, has not only lifted plot-structures and scene-forms whole, he stoops even to lift specific images out of other peoples' works. The only thing this exercise in "copybook hackwork" lacks is a passage reading "Fire--tamed at man's fingertips" in reference to a cigarette.

Okay. That's what's bad--unforgiveably bad--about Alongside Night. It is also undeniable, though, that the book carries one along with only occasional lapses of "suspension of disbelief" as the contrivances become momentarily too great or the language becomes bizarre. As to why this should be, there are several possibilities. First, it may be due to the fact that he has taken his materials from the best. Heinlein's storytelling ability may override the Frankensteinization Shulman has given it. Or is may be that he is becoming the establishment's tame anarchist. Or, it may even be that he is possessed of some particular talent that defies his prosodic sins. Subsequent work will tell.

Robert A. Heinlein, Friday. Holt, $14.95, 368 pages.

The book has only been out since May, and already I'm tired of the heavings of breasts and relieved and grateful sighs circulating around fandom. "Heinlein," they say, "is back in control of his materials;" "Heinlein is telling a story again;" "Heinlein is writing like he used to in the 'Fifties."

Balderdash.

Stuff and nonsense.

Heinlein is writing as he is and has been for the last fifteen years. With one notable exception, he has never lost control over his materials; he has never ceased to tell stories; and he is not writing as he wrote in the 'Fifties. Not only is the proposition untrue, it's extremely uncomplimentary.

Depending on how old you are, the arbitrary division of Heinlein's corpus into "good" and "bad" periods starts with Stranger in a Strange Land (1961) or with Farnham's Freehold (1964) or with I Will Fear No Evil (1971). People who make those arbitrary divisions tend to see work appearing before That Book as a fairly uniform, if very diverse, corpus with some shifting around of viewpoint and development of new concerns. But the stuff that comes After their arbitrarily-chosen dividing point is plain "bad

writing." Again, stuff and nonsense. The fact that the books between Stranger and I Will Fear No Evil are very highly regarded by the rest of the community makes no impression on those who think Heinlein started to go downhill with Stranger. The astonishing popularity of Heinlein's books beginning with Fear No Evil likewise makes no impression on the "thirties-ish crowd." This is very tiresome.

Most of us grew up with Heinlein--with those marvelous juveniles he published with Scribners. In fact, Starman Jones and Farmer in the Sky were among the first SF books I read (although the very first was S. Fowler Wright's Throne of Saturn). With Starship Troopers, Heinlein turned away from the production of Christmas gifts (I always believed that anecdote because The Rolling Stones, in particular, felt so much like a Christmas book--nothing particularly Christmas-sy about it, but it just feels right, just as the first movement of Chaikovskii's Serenade for Strings always felt like a troika/sleigh ride to me) and started working with the novel form. His books of the '40's were pretty exclusively romances; his books of the fifties were juveniles; and his books since Stranger have been a mixed bag of Menippian satire (Stranger), straightforward romance (Glory Road, The Moon is a Harsh Mistress, Number of the Beast), and novel (I Will Fear No Evil, Time Enough for Love, Friday).

Heinlein's production of the last ten years has concentrated itself in the novel genre, and this suggests a reason for the disaffection of Heinlein's fannish audience. In spite of the periodic "reform" movements which have dotted our history, the backbone of SF is the romance; that's what everyone is used to reading. By comparison with the rest of the field, novels in general seem fussily self-absorbed, over-written, and not entirely comfortable in the milieu. The commonest criticisms of I Will Fear No Evil and Time Enough For Love have to do with the interior monologue (dialogue, in the case of Evil) and the general lack of "action." This seems to me a criticism of the novel genre, of the form of the work, rather than criticism of the work itself. TFEL in particular, contains some of the best work Heinlein has ever done, in terms both of overall structure and of prose-style. Admittedly the form of the work is more reminiscent of the digressive form of the satire, but there is no other, buttressing series of elements one can point to that qualify TFEL as primarily a satire. One is left to the conclusion that Heinlein has paid little attention to the formal criteria of the genre and has instead, created his own form, his own corner within the genre. He has done this before and will no doubt do it again. This is simply the mark of an extraordinarily vital artist at work, pioneering as he goes along.

Perhaps it ought not to be as surprising and disconcerting as I find it that science fiction fans are uncomfortable with the novel genre. They have, after all, been raised exclusively on

romances, and fairly lightweight stuff at that. Lack of exposure to the form could account for a degree of the lack of sophistication that is so distressing. On the other hand, the general morbidness of novels in the last hundred years or so may justify the preference for the romance. It's a problem. *Sigh*

Number of the Beast is a romance in form, pattered directly on E.E. Smith's earliest romances. The trans-universal drive of the ship, allowing Heinlein to touch on all his favorite fictional universes, ought to have made the story delightful, just as Anderson's New Phoenix Inn was a delight--and there are many warm and entertaining passages in the book. The emotional pleasure Heinlein puts into the book is, unfortunately, overshadowed by his extremely tedious and deliberately nonsensical examination of the "lifeboat" problem. In the end, his "heroine" is a castrating bitch, less pleasant to contemplate than Belle Darkin. The final scene, sketched on a gigantic canvas--a convention of all universes--remains just that: a sketch. In terms of Heinlein's obvious aims, The Number of the Beast was a thorough failure--the first in his long and otherwise illustrious career.

It is an interesting coincidence that Blade Runner and Friday were released at about the same time, because both deal with Artificial Persons, albeit in very different ways. Friday, like Time Enough For Love, returns to an earlier work--in this case, "Gulf," one of his oddest and, in some ways, least likeable stories; unlike TEFL, the references to earlier work do not tie the two works together and make them a single, continuous narrative. Rather, Heinlein has called up the earlier work because he intends to make comments on a related subject. "Gulf" was about supermen, Homo novis. Friday turns the subject upside down; it is Heinlein's Kingsblood Royal. The theme of Friday is prejudice--racial prejudice in particular--and what it does to the discriminated-against.

This is a very brave (and possibly foolish) thing for Heinlein to do: we are not as inclined to be forgiving now, as people might have been in 1948, if a honky dips into Harlem and starts trying to convey "the Black experience," whatever that is, to the WASPs in the neighborhood. And, to his credit, Heinlein does not attempt to bring home to his U.S. readers the prejudices he attacks. Thus, Heinlein avoids making himself the target Lewis made of himself. Both the racism of the New Zealander directed against the Tongans and that of the human-born-of-woman against the enhanced Artificial Person are psychologically "safe" and, therefore, quite well hidden. Even Harlan Ellison seems to have missed the subject in his enthusiastic and somewhat insulting jacket-blurb.

The references to "Gulf" are not structurally important to the book, but Heinlein does take a certain amount of care to reference it. The story starts in much the same way as "Gulf"--Friday (the heroine of the novel) comes back to earth from an L-5 (instead of the moon) and is being followed by conspirators. She is a courier for the organization run by Hartley ("Kettle Belly") Baldwin--but it is not precisely the same organization as in "Gulf": the supermen have all moved away, to a planet called Olympia. And Baldwin, now a very old man, holds a grudge against them. Apparently there was a falling out--possibly quite a violent one, as he mentions at one point having been jailed about thirty years in Friday's past. Rereading "Gulf" for clues, originally, as to why Heinlein referenced it into the novel, I ran across an interesting statement: "We can't give humanity different genes--we can only watch over them." Baldwin appears to have kept the faith longer than the rest of H. novis--and it also occurs to me that the kind of odyssey Friday went on is doing precisely what H. novis couldn't accomplish--spread the genes of the "enhanced" human into the gene pool. H.novis is thus made obsolete. In a sense, Heinlein has repudiated "Gulf" completely: at one point in the story, he has Baldwin remark that organizations such as his do not collapse when their leaders die. In Friday, Baldwin seems to have realized what was immediately evident to all of Heinlein's readers: insofar as it was good at all, it owed that quality to Baldwin's peculiar self-restraint, and without that, it was an instrument capable of enormous evil. Baldwin dies, and by his instructions, the organization is dismantled the day after.

Aside from these pointed references, Friday is an entirely different work. Friday, herself, is an Artificial Person, genetically engineered in the laboratory by taking genes from divers (human) sources and combining them into one individual with "enhanced" abilities--preternatural strength, speed, endurance, eyesight, and coordination. In my book, this makes her, along with her intellectual training, a superior being. But the public in general has a horror of AP's, partly because of a confusion over the genetically-engineered "Living Artifacts," mostly monstrosities, and partly to the simple "monkey" fear of the (genuine) threat presented by a superior person. Friday has "passed" as an ordinary human for years--ever since joining Baldwin's organization, which is kind of a super-CIA (i.e., not exactly, for they occasionally do useful things). The records and distinguishing marks were removed, and she cannot be told from an ordinary human. We later learn that she had been adopted as a child by Dr. Baldwin. Only the unfortunate coincidence of his

imprisonment kept him from giving Friday a full, human family life. She has grown up scarred by the intimation of her inferiority everywhere in the society of the solar system.

And in the meantime, something peculiar has happened: North America has been balkanized, split up into at least six independent sovereignties: British Canada, Quebec, the Chicago Imperium (where Baldwin is headquartered at the start of the book), Texas, Las Vegas Free State, and the California Confederacy. There may be others. And there are a number of multinational corporations as considerable as territorial states.

As Friday is returning (via orbital elevator) from a successfully-completed mission in an L-5, she otices that she is being followed and kills her tail. She uses his credit cards and various identities to confuse the trail (the credit card is omnipresent in Friday--sometimes tediously so), and reports in. But the headquarters has been raided: she is captured, raped, tortured, and finally recaptured by Baldwin's crew. She recouperates and takes a leave of absence to vacation with her "family" in New Zealand.

As Friday arrives in Christchurch, another crisis is erupting: one of the children has married a Tongan, and the senior wife has disowned her. Agitated by the crisis and, I'm sure, prompted by the very human desire to be fully visible to one's loved ones, she lets the cat out of the bag about her own origins ("my mother was a testtube, my father was a knife," is a common expression for and among AP's) as a way of "disproving" the racist nonsense her family is fostering. She is, at first, not believed, and so demonstrates her enhanced abilities. Three-quarters of Friday's actual blunders involve this kind of "showing off," which seems to me to be an attempt to deny inferiority by asserting superiority. The family divorces her, immediately, and send her packing.

On the rebound, Friday winds up in Winnipeg, in the arms of a Canadian triad-family (Ian, Georges, and, especially, Janet) just as Red Thursday breaks out--assassinations, border incidents, etc.--a world crisis, this time. The border between British Canada and the Chicago Imperium is closed tight, causing her to lose contact with Baldwin's Agency. Compounding her problems, BritCan authorities are trying to pick up her and one of her newfound friends who is nominally a citizen of Quebec (although domiciled in Winnipeg) and therefore an alien. Friday breaks through the cordon and into the California Confederacy where she establishes credit by winning a lottery, the first of the two coincidences in the book which strain credibility, and parlays that into a line of credit independent of Baldwin's agency, with which she has lost contact.

Eventually, Friday makes her way to Vicksburg, Mississippi, where she signs on with a mercenary unit going upriver into the Imperium. The ship is destroyed, but Friday saves herself and tries to re-establish contact with Baldwin. The contact-numbers she has are all monitored. So she border-jumps to Winnipeg, finding her affections locked on the Canadian family and particularly on Janet, and finds that they have jumped, too. But their hidey-hole allows her to rest up and provide for the next leg of her odyssey.

She finally contacts Baldwin's organization and reports in. She is reassigned to general research and is in the middle of research when Baldwin dies and the organization is disbanded. Baldwin's will reveals that he is her adoptive father and encourages her to migrate to one of the colony worlds.

After a short time in Las Vegas Free State, she is commissioned as a courier to take a fertilized ovum to humanity's most distant and wealthiest colony, The Realm, with stopovers on the trip at the other colonies. This, she decides, will give her a chance to look them over.

She discovers once on board the interstellar luxury-liner (Star Man Jones, as seen from the passenger's point of view), that she is being watched by not less than seven people, and that at least two of the ship's officers are in on the game. She further discovers that she is pregnant: the "package" is in her womb, not in her courier's pouch. Things begin to look awfully suspicious, and she decides that if she carries out her contract, she will be killed on The Realm and decides to jump ship at Botany Bay. She recruits those of her "guardians" who are also AP's (not without some difficulty), runs into her erstwhile BritCan "family," offmigrating at the same time (but in steerage, not first class, where Friday has been hanging out) and accomplishes her aim. A short afterward, written twenty years after these events, show Friday a happy and accepted pillar of her world's community, the prejudices of Earth put behind her. She cannot have babies because the colony doesn't have medical technology sufficient to reverse her sterility, but she does have the child she was carrying when she jumped ship.

The whole business about the Realm sending to Earth for the fertilized egg, followed by the coincidence of her meeting her lost BritCan family on her ship as she jumps, is a bit bothersome. Heinlein spends some time in the afterward trying to resolve some of those "coincidences." For example, Janet-Ian-Georges had decided to emigrate after Red Thursday, and Botany Bay was the best world they could afford. The coincidence is still a bit thick.

The matter of the Realm sending to earth for

its biotechnology is more easily resolved if we assume that none of the colony worlds, The Realm included, have sufficiently advanced biological technology to do the job. This would also explain why Friday was impregnated rather than simply carrying the fertilized egg in her pouch: The Realm hospitals wouldn't necessarily have sufficient technology to keep the foetus viable and alive after delivery. This assumption satisfies the most obvious objections, but it raises others: first, why should the Realm bother to kill Friday after she delivers the child? If you didn't need the discretion of an elite courier, anyone would do; second, why not include the host-mother requirement in the contract (possibly because it might narrow the field of candidates for the courier position too much--only, once again, given the assumption that they are planning to kill the courier, an elite is not needed. The Earthside contacts may simply have been overzealous). These questions can be resolved by advancing suppositions and testing them against the other details in the story--but if the answers are present in the text, I haven't been able to find them. They should be there, clear and obvious, to prevent the book from waggling its loose ends after the covers are shut. As it stands, these questions involve one in constructing a network of suppositions for which there is no supporting authority in the text. (Amend: at least, none that I can find). The reader is required to "construct" part of the story--and that's the author's job.

The plot of Friday is deceptively simple: eight incidents, with supporting anecdotes. But the plot is not what Friday is about; the book's theme is reinforced on nearly every page, through all the media capable of carrying it: what Friday thinks about herself; what she says about herself; what she does; what others say about her; and what others do about her. Even the miscellaneous incidents--such as the assignation with another AP that does not come off because he is too sensitive to his inappropriateness for a "human" lover. What binds the story together, more than any sequency of events, is Friday's constant search for a place/situation where she can "belong."

Heinlein normally uses characters which are "types" for his principals, although he has departed from this habit before (e.g., Dora in TEFL, inter alia). In Friday, he departs again from this technique; Friday does not belong to any of his types, but is a unique individual. Perhaps this is because Heinlein is dealing for the first time with a character he knows to be psychologically crippled and, therefore, inappropriate for treatment within the framework of a universal type. But she becomes, if one is sufficiently sensitive to what he is trying to get across, a different kind of type--a symbol for everyone damaged by racism. And she offers the hope that has flagged in our own society that the condition is not hopeless; that it is possible to get away from that damning and damnable condition, both inside a society, by building an enclave, and by going outside it completely. Heinlein's preferred solution is classically American: the frontier is the cure for all social ills. And space is truly the final frontier, the infinite frontier.

Heinlein builds his world by slow accretion of details--we do not have a full picture of Friday's world until nearly halfway through the book. This process is perhaps a touch more "realistic" than most methods of building a conceptual universe for the reader used in SF; and Heinlein certainly makes it work in Friday (but, then, Heinlein has always been particularly talented in that regard. His opening paragraphs in, for example, "It's Great to be Back--" are models of concise introduction of material.) And the world Heinlein builds is rich in detail, a masterful synthesis of elements uniquely and historically his with developments over the past twenty years. I've seen a number of books recently that deal similarly with "big" themes and complex synthesis in exactly the same manner: Joe Haldeman's Worlds; Donald Kingsbury's Courtship Rite, and Octavia Butler's Wild Seed. If this represents a trend in sf writing, it is much to be welcomed. In any case, they represent a lot of fine craftsmanship, which is always to be appreciated, wherever it's found.

Friday is neither a departure from nor a fulfillment of Heinlein's writing of the last fifteen years; it is, instead, a masterwork, in the earliest sense of the term, from an artist who has been growing constantly as long as we've known him and shows every sign of continuing to grow in the future.

And that's why Robert A. Heinlein is the undisputed King of Science Fiction.

One commonly expects a book made from a movie to be badly written. But William Kotzwinkle's adaptation of E.T. (Berkeley, 1982, 246 pp., $2.95) is so uncommonly bad that is deserves more than the dismissive shrug accompanying the legend, "What else did you expect?"

If there is any genre of writing to which the story of E.T. belongs (and it rests comfortably in none), it is that of the fable. An intergalactic castaway (a ten-million year-old botanist) is befriended by a ten-year old boy. He lives in the little boy's closet and builds a microwave transmitter out of common, household objects (among other things, a Speak-n-Spell), with the aid and connivance of the other children in the

household. As E.T. is dying from lack of many things Earth does not have, but most importantly from lack of contact with his compatriots and colleagues (E.T.'s species is telepathically interlinked, but the range of contact is limited), the government's search team finds him and takes him away from the little boy. E.T. dies, but comes back to life as his ship comes to rescue him. The little boy and his older brother steal E.T. back from the government and take him to meet his rescuers.

The story is clearly a fable, similar in many respects to C.S. Lewis' Narnia stories. This cannot be missed by anyone paying the slightest attention to the elements of the story.

William Kotzwinkle managed to miss it. What Kotzwinkle wrote is not a fable, by any stretch of the imagination: it is an attempt to novelize a fable. And a spectacularly unsuccessful attempt, at that.

The novel, in contradistinction to the other genres (satire, fable, verse, romance, etc.), attempts to explore what is loosely called the "human condition" through the study of the psychology and behavior of individuals. Kotzwinkle faithfully adopts the novel's most useful voice, third person omniscient, so enthusiastically that he gives us the interior dialogue of not only E.T. and Elliott, but also of Elliott's mother, miscellaneous spearcarriers, Harvey-the-dog, and even various plants in the neighborhood.

It is a convention of the novel form that the antihero is the most suitable protagonist, so Kotzwinkle gives E.T. an inborn sense of esthetic inferiority. At page 7, E.T. thinks: "No, Earth would have too good a laugh were he to walk up its aisle of world government. Not all the stored intelligence in the universe was enough when people were laughing at your pearish silhouette." Throughout the book, he compares himself esthetically to the Earthlings around him and comes off a poor second in his own mind.

Not content with giving E.T. an inferiority complex, Kotzwinkle gives him a Hopeless Love: E.T. has a romantic passion for Mary, Elliott's mother: "Her hands came tenderly to the extraterrestrial's turtle-shaped head. Within the sheet his cheeks blushed as her fingers touched him. Delicious stream of energy flowed out of her, down his ostrich neck. His heart-light came on and he quickly covered it with his hand." (143) "The willow-creature was asleep, and he watched her for a long time. She was a goddess, the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen. Her radiant hair, spread out upon the pillow, was the moonlight itself; her fine features, so understated in their loveliness, were all that was perfection in nature--her closed eyes like the sleeping butterflies upon the night-blooming narcissus, her lips the petals of the columbine." (134) "Mary leaned in, kissed both boys, and then kissed the space-goblin; his duckish knees buckled and his subcutaneous circuitry fluttered; lights as beautiful as Orion's Nebula went off in his brain....Might he not be happier in the closet, near Mary, for the rest of his days?" (143) "E.T. had decided it was senseless to hide his wisdom from Mary, and that now was the hour to win her with song, story, and cosmic finger signals of the more intimate kind." (198)

E.T. is not alone in his all-too-human foibles: Mary is completely out of touch with her family and yet neurotically absorbed in their "psychological development" Mary becomes a recreation of Mary Hartman: "You couldn't win. If she went in there like a madwoman, if she imprinted them with the image of mature-woman - screaming - in - her - housecoat - somewhere - in - the - night, mightn't it inhibit their sexual development? And give them a complex?" (34) "Mary's mind flashed to previous dinners, those of another period, when Elliott was younger and she and her husband had thrown butter knives at each other...It could not have been good for him." (41). And Mary is sex-starved. Her fantasies lead her from the generalized "tall, dark, and devastating man" to a tv exercise show host.

Nor is even Elliott untouched by Kotzwinkle's tender brush: "Elliott was what is generally called a twerp. He cheated at Parcheesi. He had a shrill, screeching voice that came and went like a genie in a bottle, but always said just the wrong thing, in class or at home during dinner....There were other things, the list was long, including thick eyeglasses that made him feel like a frog in a bottle. All in all, a blossoming neurotic, a twerp." (38-39)

Kotzwinkle makes everything he touches tawdry and steamrolls over the innate magic of the situation. I felt as if I should hold the book gingerly between thumb and forefinger while dropping it into the trashcan. This impression was helped along by the reference to a "secret waterfall on Venus" and the gravitational collapse E.T. goes through as he dies, becoming a black hole, because his body "contains a great atomic secret." No one should be called on to tolerate such ignorance in a writer. And, topping off everything else, Kotzwinkle's prose ranges from the merely serviceable to the nauseatingly sententious.

I read the book before seeing the movie and decided not to go. Fortunately, boredom one night (and my fixed policy of seeing every SF and fantasy film (except of the horror genre) as it is released, got me into the theatre. I'm very glad I have some measure of the "completist" in me, because Spielberg's film was a highly enriching

experience. And that brings us to...

...atque cinemæ

There seems to be no middle ground with Spielberg's E.T. The movie has drawn extravagant praise and an instant cult-following, and at the same time excoriation. No-one, though, seems to be able to take it or leave it.

E.T. is unabashedly sentimental, and yet Spielberg has handled the sentiment so finely, with so much warmth and plain human truth that he brings it off: three-quarters of the audience is choking back sobs near the end (and, incidentally, there is one section where he takes the audience from tears to cheers in thirteen seconds, a considerable achievement). The proof of the craftsmanship is that it works: grown men--macho types, even--cry and shout with joy; gooseflesh flashes on the arm and spine, not with creepies, but with awe and wonder and delight.

The first time I saw it I was reminded of the early Disney--the Good Disney we all grew up with. But the second time I saw very little of it--certainly much less than the deliberate references in Close Encounters. I think perhaps that Spielberg has simply tapped into the same wellspring of imagery that Disney tapped (and created) and spent the rest of his career trying to relocate.

And, of course, E.T. is not a flash-in-the-pan. Spielberg has shown in the past a preternaturally sure and deft touch with his productions. Even though Poltergeist is doing only ordinary business and 1941 bombed at the box office, Spielberg gives every evidence of being capable of much more in the years to come.

--and, incidentally, John Williams' score was not as intrusive or inept as it might have been: the fact that I could remember only the entracte which accompanies the opening and closing scenes is a Good Sign. In his last few scores (particularly Heartbeeps), he seems less inclined to borrow from the classics than in Star Wars or Close Encounters or Superman. And Williams' own material, although derivative, is certainly no less noteworthy than Arnold Bax's or William Walton's. Give him a break, guys.

The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas (opened July 23) was a curiously flat production for all the heaving around and foot-stomping that takes place. Despite occasionally flashy performances by Dolly Parton, who seems to have studied for her part by reviewing every Mae West movie in existence, and Burt Reynolds in his most practiced Good Ol' Boy style, the cast performed about as dully as could be imagined.

Part of the problem is that, while the basic story is interesting, the frippery that fleshes out the story is exceedingly dull--particularly the locker-room dance of the Texas A&M football team. This is not helped by some particularly noxious miscasting. Dom Deluise simply does not make it as the Naderesque muckraker; nor does Paul Sorvino as the shifty governor.

Blade Runner promised to be interesting, and it kept its promise. It was an interesting failure. Directed by Ridley Scott and based on Philip Dick's Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, it was a collage of images and ideas that tried to match Dick's kaleidoscopic approach and didn't even come close.

The film's biggest problem is that it has three strong stories and tells none of them: it could have been a story of a time and a place as compelling as that of Make Room, Make Room/Soylent Green; it could have been a story of a man breaking out of a conceptual mold; and it could have been a political story of oppression and prejudice. Rutger Hauer's character is potentially as compelling as anything on the screen. Instead it is a mishmosh of fragmentary treatments, botched by poor continuity editing from place to place. Vangelis' score was obnoxious, overly loud, and intrusive.

Well, the bones were good, but Scott made a serious mistake in fleshing it out.

Disney Studios has been making a comeback bid for years, with no notable successs until now. Tron is the latest bid in the round, and it comes closer than anything to date.

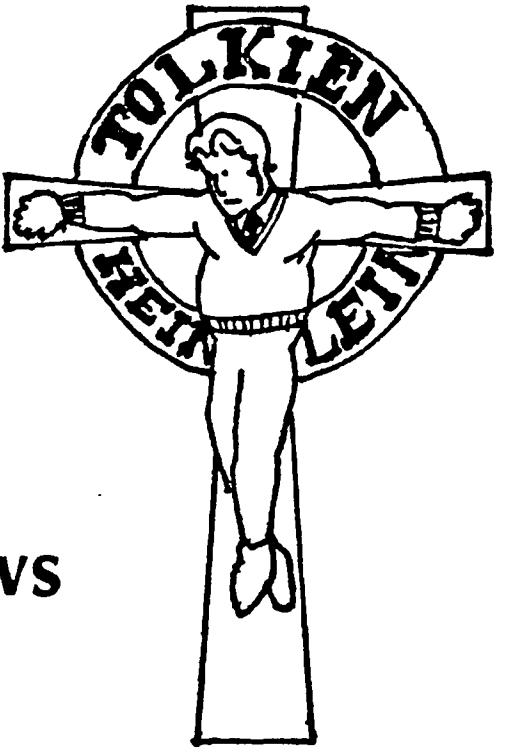
It should be said at the start that the story is a complete and irremediable turkey, involving personification of computer programs and (f'Ghusake!) a love story among the programs. But there are touches of sheer genius--i.e., the method of getting a human being (user) inside the master computer's simulation is magnificent: the computer captures him by putting him in an experimental matter-transporter, thereby reducing him to a compatible "program." Once inside, he leads the revolution to destroy the authoritarian master program and let the other captured programs get out and communicate with their users.

What makes Tron special is that none of this matters. The visual effects are so stunning that they sweep the stupidity under the rug. And it constitutes the first intelligent use I've ever seen of rotoscoping technique to combine human and animated figures in the same picture. Wildly successful in a technical way, even when the drama falls on its face and goes boom.

Go and see this visual equivalent of a tasp. It's worth it.

Slings and ... er ...

uh... Arrows



Dear Bill,

Particular thanks for sending me Quodlibet 13. "Particular" because recently a few people have tried to make me believe I'm one of those boring old farts who only has words of praise for fanzines which either "bow down" to Sixth Fandom or are published by long-term friends; while they have not succeeded in making me believe this, I did not have--until Quodlibet arrived--an example I could easily cite to disprove this. Why, I only recognized the names of two of your LoC writers (Gary Farber and Bernie Zuber), but I enjoyed reading the fanzine from front to back--it was literate, fannish, well-written, thought-provoking, amusing...in short, just what I think more fanzines should attempt to be. (If I'm a BOF, it's probably because I keep harping on my personal belief that more fanzines should at least make the attempt; I've cited some of the better fanzines of Sixth Fandom and/or those published by close and long-term friends because they're examples of what I'm talking about, but now I can just as easily cite Quodlibet).

Gee, shucks. You may hear the sound of my head bustin' wide open any second now...

You touch on such a variety of topics I'll have to restrain myself from making comments on all of them--a 20 page letter of comment on a twelve page fanzine would otherwise be the likely result. So I think I'll just confine myself to a couple of points which came up in Bernie Zuber's letter.

Before I do that, though, I should say I'll look forward to any extended review you may care to do of Heinlein's Friday. I suspect we will have more than one such on our horizon. The book was touted to me as Heinlein Back In Control and I enjoyed it as such; it had been painful, as a long-time Heinlein fan, to have to force myself through I Will Fear No Evil, to accept the many foibles of Time Enough for Love, to realize I could not stomach The Number of the Beast. Given this, I found Friday to be a much-welcomed relief. On reflection, however, I don't think it was all that good--the joy of finding Heinlein telling a story once more simply punched the "off" button on my critical circuits. There are at least fewer cases of the main characters sitting around Talking So As To Reveal What Splendid Survival-Types They Are, although it still happens too frequently for my tastes. And, typical of the Heinlein whose work I had come to dislike in recent years, he stumbled around searching for an ending, failed to find one and so wrote a denouement instead. The more one examines that denouement, the phonier and more contrived it appears. Why would the Realm send all the way to Earth to have someone carry the child? Even if they didn't have the technology--the world Friday ends up on doesn't have it, but the Realm is supposedly rich and as technologically advanced as Earth--why would they choose Friday, someone who's not only trained to be suspicious but has the cunning and combat skills which ultimately give her the ability to foil their plot? And someone who, since she is sterile, is naturally going to be more than just mildly

curious or suspicious when she finds she's pregnant? Why put all their eggs in one basket--pardon: all their sperm in one egg? Why not hire a good healthy host mother--or two or six or ninety-three of them--and put them on different ships if they believe someone might get wind of their plan and attempt to stop it? Why provide Friday with so much of the truth about the person she's carrying the "package" for that she'll know her life will be forfeit when she discovers the rest (since she's frequently gone on missions for The Boss without the particulars given to her)? Why not tell her--or the host mothers--she's been hired by a wealthy merchant? Why is the doctor--the one person on board who can give her the information she needs to shift gears and act--overlooked as someone to have on the Realm's payroll? Why put nothing in her "pouch" so she can easily verify what the doctor tells her? The only reasonable answer to these questions would, unfortunately, appear to be contained in two words: author contrivance. (I said I'd be looking forward to your review, but here I've practically written one myself. Cheesh.)

I tend to agree with you about the author contrivance matter, but I'm also a little more sympathetic about it than you seem to be. Off-migrating is Friday's obvious solution, but Heinlein can't simply repeat I Will Fear No Evil, now, can he? I've about reached the point of being oblivious to those forced endings of Heinlein's--I just accept them as a convention of his work and don't bother about them until afterwards. I can't say any of them have been so disruptive of my willingness to "suspend disbelief" that they've completely ruined the story for me.

Actually, of the four recent books you mention, I found only The Number of the Beast completely unpalatable. That passage near the beginning when the female lead says something like "all I needed was a good fuck" nearly caused me to rend the book in two and throw the pieces across the room. I was only restrained by the fact that the copy belonged to someone else (it was a British pressing, published before the American edition was released). Even with NOTB, though, I could have a little sympathy with what Heinlein was doing--I mean, here he was retracting--even, in a manner of speaking, apologizing, f'Ghusake, about the "lifeboat" nonsense he's been perpetuating for three decades by consciously making it ridiculous. Heinlein deserves a lot of back-patting and general respect for that. Ain't many writers as would do that.

I suspected we would have a lot of reviews of I Will Fear No Evil, too, but no competent reviews appeared. Same for Time Enough For Love, which contained some of his best writing ever. I suspect that Heinlein is a more highly-skilled technician than anyone is giving him credit for. Certainly most of his readers in fandom don't seem to realize when he's hitting exactly the nail he aimed at. Without being too snide, I would also venture that most of Heinlein's fannish readers are appallingly unsophisticated when it comes to literit.

Getting (finally) to one of those items which came up in Bernie Zuber's letter, I could probably tell you more than you want to know about Coventry, although not all the details about the LASFS/Coventry feud, since I was out of the state during the first part of it and out of the country during the second. My Coventranian name (with titles) was Lord Jommar Lynn, Lord Leader of Lynn, Lord Protector of Mongloidia-Kentonia, Bishop of Southfarthing, Patron Cleric of the Civilzed Man, Number Two of the Upper Twelve of the Amaranth Society.

I'll strive not to tell you more than you want to know, but I think I should point out that Coventry was perhaps not a fantasy world in the same sense that you were talking about them. It started as the Mariposan Empire--a series of childhood war-games indulged in by Paul Stanbery, myself, and a few friends. Paul and I were both sf and fantasy fans, but not the others; they were just kids who, like us, were a little too imaginative to play just "good guys" and "bad guys." We staked out territories, drew maps, wrote up constitutions, declarations of war, our "history," etc. A few years later, when the others were no longer interested, Paul and I laid down a potpourri of sf and fantasy ideas on top of this mundane base--and the resulting mess we called "Coventry," after the Heinlein story of the same name. But we did not make up most of the ideas; we "borrowed" (i.e., stole) liberally from sf and fantasy stories we had read and enjoyed, although we came up with our own science fictional explanation as to how this had all come to be. Coventry was a giant spindizzy (James Blish) of a world, left in the asteroid belt by the Krell (Forbidden Planet), run by an Amaranth Society of immortals (James Gunn); its topmost layer was populated by people who did not know they were on a spindizzy because they were at a level of development roughly equivalent to that portrayed by Fritz Leiber in his Fafhrd and Grey Mouser series. According to the Coventranian mythos, Paul and I (and others who became involved) lead such distinctive mundane lives that, before we died, our personalities and intelligences were recorded; when WWIII almost wiped out the human race, the survivors managed to struggle back up to space travel whereupon they discovered

spindizzy Coventry, placed our personalities in immortal bodies and sent us out to the stars with others who had been "revived" without their memories as a sort of repository, lest the race on Earth succumb to WWIV. I could go on and on--but I suspect I'm coming dangerously close to telling you more than you want to know. My point, which I made at the outset, is that since we took freely from all sorts of published sf and fantasy (I've only scratched the surface in the above), it probably wasn't a fantasy world in the sense you were talking about.

Actually, Coventry came up only in Bernie's discussion of role-playing as an adjunct of creating private universes. But it sounds exactly, to me, like the private universes we were talking about.

As for the blowup at LASFS, details came to me second- or third-hand. Part of it apparently came about because people in LASFS who got interested in Coventry (publishing fanzines and writing stories about their Coventranian personas) tok up a lot of LASFS time discussing Coventry business; some came to LASFS meeting in Coventranian costume. There was apparently some friction because some people wanted to endow their Coventranian personas with powers that did not fit the mythos, although these details were never made too clear to me. "Dr. Destrukto" came into being--someone or perhaps several someones in LASFS who began publishing under that name stories in which either Coventry or Coventry's supporters were destroyed. I know of no one who found this in the least disturbing; perhaps because of this, perhaps for reasons unknown, Dr. Destruckto and/or his supporters "attacked" the Stanbery home--and succeeded in frightening Paul's sister and mother enough that they called the police, although no one was ever caught. Paul withdrew from activities Coventranian and fannish, leaving me the sole aribiter of disputes--but I was in the Air Force, at first in Panama City, Florida, and later in Bitburg, Germany, so I delegated my "authority" to Bruce Pelz, who as Brucifer, Commander of the IX Corps, was also my regent. Somewhere in there--either before or after the "attack" on the Stanbery abode--Bruce had let drop the idea he labeled "flip-back," which also disturbed some LASFS people. As he described it, if threatened with WWIII or if he ever became a basket case, he would use either hypnosis or LSD to help him "flip-back" into his Coventranian persona and live out the rest of his life (whether minutes, weeks, month, years) that way. Not, perhaps, the healthiest attitude. Anyway, these things, and probably others I never heard about, led to a ban on wearing costumes and on discussing non-LASFS business at LASFS, and a few people who had been friends did not speak to each other for a number of years.

This is very peculiar: the subject of Coventry has come up a lot recently. It was mentioned in casual conversation with Bernie when I was visiting the Zubers in April, and again in Bernie's loc. You've written in on the subject (as a response to the loc, to be sure), and the subject came up spontaneously last Saturday when I gave a dinner party for Bob Webber, Hope Liebowitz, Andy Thornton, Simon Agree, and Loren MacGregor. Loren gave a capsule summary of the subject, which I was able to supplement with details from your letter. I keep running into this kind of synchronism from time to time. It's puzzling. One never knows what tiny fragments of passing whimsy will turn into subjects of interest...

The other point in Bernie's letter which I would comment on was your exchange about abortion. I don't think I agree with either of you but, not having seen the comments which sparked the exchange, I can't really be sure.

I knew that was going to get me in trouble...

If your "pro-life" stance is based on religious beliefs (not likely, from what I infer from other writings in this issue, but still possible), then what I have to say is unlikely to convince you. Since it's such an emotional issue, I'm probably unlikely to convince you anyway--but it's considerably less likely if you're say, a staunch Catholic who believes what the Pope has to say may not be assailed by reason. Either way, though, I might as well try...

First, there's the question of whether an impregnated female egg is, in fact, "alive." I'm an agnostic on this question, as I am about the existence of God; I claim my opinion, your opinion, thousands/millions of other opinions, really has no bearing on the fact of the matter. if God exists, atheists do not make God cease to exist by saying "God does not exist." If God does not exist, believers do not make God exist by saying "God exists." I tend to think the atheists are right. But my thinking that does not make it so; it just makes it my opinion. Majority rule does not determine the fact of a matter--if it did, this country would have never been discovered, because the world was flat.

At recent Congressional hearings, the so-called pro-life people trotted out innumerable qualified doctors, life scientists, philosophers and religious authorities who proclaimed that an impregnated female egg was in fact "alive"; the pro-abortion people trotted out an equal number of qualified doctors, life scientists, philosophers and religious authorities who proclaimed it wasn't. Obviously, one side is right and one is wrong--you are more inclined to believe the authorities who sided with the "pro-life" people and I am more inclined to believe those who

sided with the pro-abortion people. But all we can say objectively is that the "fact" is debatable. The sincerity of the people on both sides is not, I hope, in question.

Huh? I wasn't aware the question was even being debated. A fertilized egg (not a "fertilized female egg"--that's redundant) is as surely a living cell as any other living cell. That seems to me to be beyond dispute. The real question is whether it is simply an adjunct of its mother or a separate individual. If it's purely an adjunct of the mother/host, well and good; but if it's a separate individual, then killing it willfully is murder by definition of the term. That's the crux of the matter.

Next, there's a question (frequently raised by feminists) which, not having seen your original article, you may or may not have addressed. It's this: By what right do men, who short of drastic surgery and futuristic technology will never bear a child, make laws which force women to bear unwanted children? It's been said that alimony is a point of law which holds that when two people make a mistake, one person has to pay for it; but unwanted pregnancy may be the other side of that unjust coin. And while some women may be forced to pay alimony to their ex-husbands these days, it's highly unlikely that any man will be forced to bear a child in the foreseeable future. Since I have no idea how rigid your "pro-life" stance is, I don't know whether you believe there are or should be exceptions, but I think there are certain distinctions to be made. Since abortion, in the best of conditions, is a painful operation I sincerely doubt that many non-masochist women indulge in it as a form of contraception--although there might be a few. But what of the 13-year-old, deprived by her parents of information about contraception, who lets her unemployed teenaged boyfriend go all the way in a moment of passion? What of the older woman whose life might be in jeopardy if she bears a child? What of the 59-year-old woman in a mental institution who's been raped by a 298-lb. congenital idiot? Why must these women be forced to bear unwanted children at the expense of their future, their life, their sanity? Would your opinion be likely to change if any of these women were your daughter, wife, mother, friend?

Well, you know me, anarchist to the end. First, I don't think anybody has a right to make laws. But, second, addressing your question, and assuming arguendo that laws will be made, what makes you think that women are particularly fitted for making this kind of law? I mean, if it is a question of fact, then the proper legislator is the person who recognizes the fact; if it's a matter of morality (which is what law is all about--condoning and prohibiting behavior), then the proper legislator is the one who, again, sees most wisely the whole issue, male or female. Third, you've lumped together a bunch of instances that have different answers. I tend to apply a straightforward "human rights" approach to the situation: the life of the mother against that of the child. The first instance you adduce is what might be called "casual fornication." I have exactly as much sympathy with that situation as I have for the adult who is scarred for life because the can of gasoline he flipped his lit cigarette into, goofing off, blew up in his face. I also happen to be of the opinion that people need to develop some sense of responsibility about that kind of thing. I mean, murdering the child seems a little extreme to me as a remedy for losing your head and doing something foolish. (As it happens, incidentally, a sister of mine does have three illegitimate children conceived in approximately that way). There is another idea which ought to be dealt with at the same time--the notion that having an illegitimate child destroys one's future. That's patent nonsense. One's life will surely take a very different course from that point on--but I still find the proposed remedy extreme. I find nothing abhorrent about abortions performed to prevent damage to the life or body of the woman involved. It seems perfectly clear to me that if a choice must be made between killing the child and killing the mother, the choice must be resolved in favor of the one suffering damage rather than inflicting damage. This is, completely coincidentally, also the Catholic church's position. The third instance covers all matters of conception through rape; the proper remedy is from the rapist, not from the child conceived by the act. Talk about the sins of the fathers being visited on the children...(even unto the fourth generation). If rape were treated as a civil matter rather than as a criminal matter, the law might be less confused on the issue.

Lastly, there is something I will present to you as fact--simply because it was a fact before the Supreme Court ruled on abortion and is likely to be unchanged if abortions are made illegal again. It's this: Abortions will not cease simply because they are illegal. Cops (like those you were despising in your comments about Hill Street Blues) will have to enforce "your" law, but if we can judge that future by what happened before the Supreme Court decision, they will be largely unsuccessful. Rich and upper-middle-class women will have their abortions, when they want them, in safe hospitals out of the country, in

places where abortions are still legal. Middle-class women will seek out, and most likely find, doctors who are willing to perform them whether they are legal or nor--some who will charge intolerable fees, some who merely believe their Hypocratic Oath to be in conflict with the law. Lower-class and poor minority women will have abortions performed by quacks with a coat-hanger or knitting needles, and a good number of these women will be left bleeding and dying in alleyways.

This seems to me a moot point. That kind of abortion is still being performed now. It didn't go away when the Supreme Court made that fine, liberal gesture. In any case, I've never advocated legislation of any kind.

I know there are some "pro-life" people who believe all these women--the 13-year-old, the woman in mid-life, the 59-year-old rape victim, your daughter, wife, mother, friend, the rich, middle-class, lower class, minority poor--are just sluts who deserve what they get. But your fanzine gave me a favorable impression of you and I would like to believe you are not among their number. While majority opinion never really settles a matter of fact, I think it's obvious that most of the experts and authorities who testified on the abortion issue would agree that these women are unquestionably "alive." That's why, throughout these comments, I've either put "pro-life" in quotes or designated the position as "so-called" pro-life. These people would seemingly unhesitatingly sacrifice a woman, who is inarguably alive, to a fertilized female egg, a piece of microscopic tissue, where the matter is still open to authoritative debate. For that reason, I think "pro-life" is an unwarranted kindness to the people who hold these views as well as a serious misnomer.

Regards,

Rich Brown
1632 19th St. N.W., No. 2
Washington DC 20009

Well, I still think you've got a straw man argument. There exists a large black market in adoptions. Why not legalize them? That would more than take care of the unwanted child problem. In any case, you can't make the issue go away by trivializing it, by calling a child a "piece of microscopic tissue." That's what it is, you know--a child. At its absolutely most helpless.
I've said all I have to say on the topic; I'm beginning to repeat myself. Perhaps someone else would care to pick up the gantlet--Bernie? Victor?

Doug Woods
1149-B South Sixth Avenue
Yuma AZ 85364

Dear Bill,

Thanks for your last letter and the continuing issues of Quodlibet.

From now until mid-August I will be more than occupied with some graduate classes in Reading Education at NAU--nothing to strain one's mind over, but a ton of make-work is involved. What I'd like to set up for quodlibetal discussion is the role of alienation in school. My viewpoint right now is primarily from the teacher's side of the big oak desk. In Yuma I'm fortunate enough to be working with a small group of very supportive colleagues, but I think that is far from the norm--more's the pity. Most teachers, I'm afraid, are too insecure to admit they have problems, much less share and analyze them together. A mental game of hide and seek develops as they send out cautious feelers, trying to find someone they can identify with and encountering instead loud, jaded denunciations that in any other context than a faculty lounge would sound hysterical. **((Don't look now--they sound just as hysterical in a faculty lounge.))** Meanwhile, the really good teachers, who know they don't have to prove anything, quietly go about their work without drawing attention to themselves. New teachers thus find themselves unsuspectingly setting foot into a quagmire of jealousy and distrust from which few competent instructors emerge.

Of course, intrigues among the faculty is just one facet of alienation in a school. There exists as well the widening rift between teacher and student and the explosive identity crisis children and adolescents encounter among themselves. Much that I find tragic about American schools can be applied to survival in any large organization. How many of us, I wonder, recall our grade and high school years in terms of predators and prey?

That's a good topic, eh? I find that I've come out of my schooling with a fundamentally different experience than most of my friends and colleagues. Going 'way back to grade school, I had close personal relations with many of my instructors and counsellors, which I established anew as I moved into a new institution. These people took me seriously as a person, even when I was less than ten years old. So the in-school and after-school experiences ran together in my mind. I grew up not thinking in terms of an "us" and "them" dichotomy. And, comparing what I hear from friends with my own experience, I didn't run into much of the horror-stories they did. So I

got off pretty lightly on that count. I think that may have had a permanent influence on me.

The first time I ran into the notion that teachers were frustrated and sadistic, I was shocked and angered. Those were half my friends he was talking about! Even now, as I understand what my friends are talking about, I think the only way to integrate my experience with theirs is by the platitude: you get out of the relationship what you put into it. If you view the instructor as jailer, and react to him as such, then small wonder he behaves like one. After all, the school administration wants him to think that way, too.

I've met hundreds of teachers at all levels of education--and the field has its share of time-markers and misplaced people, but on the whole I've found a laudable concern with the business of education—and I don't mean counting the kids so the school can get its proper allotment of ADA funding. They do get ground down, awfully fast, the good ones—picking up everybody in the world's mistakes and trying to straighten things out the first few weeks of semester. I probably benefitted a lot from that futile attempt--after all, they got one of the little monsters that didn't look on them as an automatic enemy. Lavished attention on me.

Ah, well, I hope I've managed to outrage a few people for you, Doug. A few locs on the subject wouldn't hurt...

I've just finished re-reading The Lord of the Rings for the first time in about nine years. By the time I met up with the OSFFA crowd ('72?) I think I had already read the poor thing almost to death. I just about lived in that book for two years, and eventually got to the point where all my favorite passages were about as exciting as re-runs of Gilligan's Island. The more than passing interest I kept in Tolkien over the ensuing years (I've had a photo of him in my wallet ever since he died) rather paralleled Lewis' attempts as a young man to "recapture" his adolescent encounters with joyful longing. The memory of Middle-earth became in time a substitute for LotR's text itself, and under the guidance of the new friends I met at your Slan Shack gatherings new lands and joyful encounters came my way. In fact, The Silmarillion gathered dust on my bookshelves for two years before I could bring myself to read it, and then it was like meeting an author I'd never heard of before. Not until this spring was I able to give it the thorough reading it deserved, and then I found that I could read the original trilogy as a new book as well. Parts of it were like re-reading a poem one has long since memorized and forgotten, one word after another falling into place with a pleasure beyond what simply fine writing can normally deliver.

I get that way with Huckleberry Finn.

Other passages took on new dimensions, and some seemed as if I had never read them before. I can't recall ever having read anything with such deliberate slowness--I knew it would be another decade before I could come again to the ruin of Sammath Naur or the ride of the Rohirrim. Once more, I guess, memory will have to serve its turn.

And what does one say to that? There is nothing one can say or do but to nod sage acquiescence and pass on.

I have an open-text "quiz" to type up this evening--ten questions, the first of which reads, "Design an ideal classroom learning environment. Consider physical conditions, and social, psychological, and academic considerations." That ought to be worth a good paragraph at least, wouldn't you say?

Aristotle got along with a log, a teacher, and a pupil. In a pinch, you can do without the log. Hence the "peripatetic" school.

So it's off to the salt mines again. God, I hate writing for educators--I end up sounding just like them, abstruse and completely removed from reality. I better have a beer first; it'll help if I'm a little incoherent.

Doug Woods

Bernie Zuber
P.O. Box 8853
San Marino CA 91108

Dear Bill,

Received Quodlibet 13 yesterday. Thanks for publishing my letter, but I got a couple o' quibbles ...quibbles on Quod?...When you typed up (or wordprocessed up?) my letter you "corrected" Tolkien and Middle-earth to the way you're probably used to seeing them and therefore assume is correct. It's "i" before "e" in Tolkien's name and he always wrote "Middle-earth," not "Middle Earth." Those two errors, along with referring to LoTR as a triology (which it isn't) are the most common ones, not only from mundanes but also from many fans. No need to correct those in the next Quodlibet

Are you kidding? Me? Give up the Search For Perfection? I'd have to turn in my AR Association button...

Your readers probably don't care.

Ha. I've gotten no less than eight letters or phone calls on the misspelling of Tolkien, as well as a wealth of speculation as to why I did

it. The general consensus seems to be that I'm backforming to "Heinlein." It certainly is a wonderful thing to have such a wealth of friends with Good Insight into my psychology. Goshwow, but I can't imagine how I Got Along Before I Met Them...Actually, I'm just used to making the "German exception" for common nouns (as opposed to the "Jewish exception"), so it just falls more naturally from my fingers. You'll notice I have corrected it in this issue...

But another thing may have puzzled them. Why the question mark in parenthesis after Lee Garig's name? Looks like I had a question about her name, and I didn't.

See you at Westercon!

Bernie Zuber

True. You didn't. I couldn't make out the spelling from your handwriting. I should have put that in double parens. Culpa mea...

Gary S. Mattingly
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San Francisco CA 94101

Hi,

I write terrible LoCs, a forewarning. Mainly I wanted to thank you for all of the Quodlibets and say that I've enjoyed reading them. I don't always agree with your appraisals of films, books, etc. I really liked Montenegro, for instance, and I also always enjoy Hill Street Blues, even the repeats.

As to the Black Partition, my conversational ability is almost always rather lame, but the food sounded very good. Now I wouldn't go to all that trouble. Cooking has almost always seemed to be drudgery to me. Much like chemistry lab.

No, when you're cooking--especially for a large group--you have to concentrate on what you're doing and really get into something like a meditative state--become the process. It can be very relaxing as long as there's something to do--and, of course, the last twenty minutes or so before everything is served is very hectic. But I don't notice that much unless someone's trying to get my attention--which I won't generally give them. Then it's a hassle.

Synchronicity, Proust mentioned in that terrible comic strip, Gordo, this very week. Conan was indeed awful. However, I considered it awful because of its too slow and awful story. It was dull. I didn't even notice that much violence. Hope to see Diva soon, also E.T.

Phil, who has read Howard, tells me that Conan's one great virtue is that it caught both the atmosphere of Howard's books and the bizarreness he (Phil) had just come out of in West Africa. Diva is a surreal trip. Tell me what you think of it. And, of course, E.T. goes without saying.

Um, the zookeeper in Eureka didn't seem to think the new home was specifically for Mama & Papa Bear, although many of Eureka's citizens seemed to have thought so. It doesn't seem that they should have been killed, though.

The ASCAP/Gap decision was dumb.

Ah, there is Fandom in the Bay Area. Their (Little Men's & PennSFA) meetings haven't particularly enthralled me although some good people do go to them. San Francisco fandom does have parties now and then. We're just a little more loosely, um, less formally, knit than most.

You seem to have a talent for understatement. If I said there was no fandom in the Bay Area, I was Wrong. That was dumb. I just meant San Francisco. I still maintain that there is no fandom in San Francisco, only individual fans who may or may not form cliques. That does not a fandom make, at least as I'm used to local fandoms.

I like Taxi a lot too. Barney Miller I only enjoy occasionally. WKRP I watched the first season or two and now rarely.

Um, you don't seem to like cops. I'm not overy fond of them, but a number of them are normal people, even nice people.

I get my prejudices first hand from those I have know as well as those I have only heard about. My question is, if they're such nice people, what are they doing oppressing the powerless?

Well, I can't think of much else to say so I'll go back to Tales of Beatnik Glory by Ed Sanders and say thanks again for keeping me on your mailing list. Have you seen the video game, hmm, I think it's called Dig-Dug, yet? I tried it. It's just fair. I saw one like it in the arcade near Cost Plus. I have to try that one. More later.

Gary Mattingly

Does this mean I have to loc Skug? Shucks. I've been putting it off for, let's see--about eight months now. Real Soon Now... Coincidentally, I just finished up an oral biography of Jack Kerouac. I've played Dig-Dug, and find it fun--bizarre and not a little disgusting, but fun. There's a new game out called "Kangaroo" that I'm trying to master at the moment. You have to be even more precise than in Donkey Kong, but it moves a lot more slowly. Current favorite is Frenzy, a souped-up version of Berzerk. I recently locced Sam Konkin using Qix as a metaphor for a restricted marketplace. Heh, heh.

Robert Prokop
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Bill,

Quodlibet is shaping up beautifully. What really made it catch fire was when the LOC's started coming in. Very lively. I'm sorry to hear that there will be a hiatus. It will be a long, hot summer without my monthly fix of Q.

Oh, well. At least I have Analog. My surprise, admiration, and enjoyment grow with each issue. The hard science/space opera novelette "Rings of Glory" in the July issue was a pure joy. In the last four months, I've had to eat my every word concerning the state of contemporary SF. Let me assure you, it has been a pleasure to do so. I can confidently assert that SF is very much alive and well--in Analog. It's gotten ridiculous. I'm like a kid again--growing increasingly impatient each month as next issue time rolls around. When it arrives, I devour it as fast as I can. I need to be more disciplined--spread the thing out over a month's time so I won't have to wait so long for more.

Or you could subscribe to other magazines... Incidentally, passing Fantasy, Etc. yesterday I saw that the Donald Kingsbury novel I thought so highly of has been published as a hardback--Courtship Rite. Highly recommended.

Stumbling into Analog in the manner that I did was a good object lesson for me. I had so convinced myself that SF had died years ago that I was not around to witness its recovery. When did this happen? I am so involved in "getting current" I now have no time at all for re-reading old favorites.

Well...Truth be told, I haven't really been much impressed with the level of magazine sf since I read the Astoundings of the early forties. A couple of years ago I dipped into Isaac Asimov's and found about one story--sometimes two--in each issue that was worth reading. That's about it. And that's about the ratio I recall from the late '60's, when I started reading F&SF (there were a greater number of puke-worthy stories then, too, though...).

I used to keep close watch on magazine fiction, but I haven't for about eight years now. I really should, though--especially since I'm trying to sell to those markets. Tim just sent a copy of my "Cries of the City" to George Scithers. You may remember that, as it is one I gave as a fragment in a 1975 OSFFA Writers' Circle. I expressed doubt that it was Scithers' type of thing before he sent it (Tim is currently my literary agent, since I can't stand the process of marketing my own work), but, as he said, it couldn't hurt. Scithers bounced it in a week (!), with a note saying "boy, is this ever depressing!," or words to that effect, in tones of utter condemnation. Well, as I said, it wasn't his kind of thing--at all.

As Roseann Rosannadanna used to say, "It's always something. If it's not one thing, it's another." *Sigh*

Another evidence of the field's renewed health is James P. Hogan. I'm in the middle of his Voyage from Yesteryear right now, which is the first thing I've ever read by him. I understand he is a fairly new writer, although he has six novels behind him already. If he keeps up like what I've read so far, then he's definitely a badly-needed shot in the arm for the field. He may be the second Arthur C. Clarke. First impressions only, here.

James P. Hogan? I read his Thrice Upon A Time about two years ago and was utterly appalled and disgusted. Not only was the story-line completely unsophisticated, the quality of the writing was, if anything, worse (if more ambitious) than that in Ralph 124C41+. I would be very surprised if Hogan had developed into a considerable talent. But I've been known to fluff predictions before--I thought "James Tiptree" was going to grow into a major force in the field. Instead, she collapsed in on herself, apparently after her mother died. Oh, well.

I finally got around to reading Tau Zero in June. I remember starting the book when it was first published about twelve years ago--and not finishing it because I thought it was "pornographic" (all that sleeping around on the spaceship--I was fairly strict about such things in those days). What a shame that was, because the novel is otherwise marvelous. Your mentioning of it recently spurred me on to read it. As you said, "gripping, gripping." I do think that the idea of the Earth being ruled by Sweden in kind of stupid, but since that drops out of the book so quickly, it's a minor gripe.

Actually, it's happened before--Sweden was a real force to be contended with in the 17th and 18th centuries.

The book's major strength, of course, is the depiction of relativistic effects at near-light speeds. Too bad more writers don't explore more thoroughly the potentials of slower-than-light star travel.

Actually, I should say that the book's real strength is Anderson's adaptation of the Vandervecken myth.

The only other really good examples I can think of immediately are Heinlein's Universe and Clarke's "Songs of Distant Earth." There are hundreds of others, I know, but darned few where STL is the point of the story.

Larry Niven's slowboat series comes readily to mind--and let us not forget "Far Centaurus,"

where a slowboat is met by a colony brought by FTL and in place for centuries. There are many others.

I've done a lot of thinking about this lately because I've pretty much lost any hope that FTL is possible in the real world. (I've been immersed in astronomy of late). It appears to belong in the same category as Time Travel. But it has an honorable tradition in SF.

Not so, brudda. There are odd quirks in many branches of physics which suggest the possibility, so the door has not yet closed. And inter-dimensional travel, producing the same effect as FTL, is still wide-open. Last thing I heard, the leading speculation on what happened to a black hole was that it created a "wormhole" from this part of the universe to another, and I particularly like the idea that the discontinuity represented in the Fitzgerald equation means that you simply can't exist in the universe any more, so when you hit speed of light, you go to another point in space, where being determined by the energy of the system at the time, the transposition having used enough to bring you under C again. That's an elegant solution, and I haven't seen anything that rules it out.

As a pet peeve, there seems to be a lot of irritating popular misunderstanding about what happens as a ship approaches lightspeed, even among writers in the field.

The most fruitful insight I've had about the subject recently was to look at the problem of a ship approaching C as if it were being inclined relative to normal-space through a fourth spatial direction. The physical descriptions of the phenomenon seem to fit the projective geometry analogy of a two-dimensional object being inclined relative to the two-dimensional plane pretty well--and, of course, nothing is actually happening to the extension of the ship, just as nothing is happening to the two-dimensional figure in the analogy.

I've enjoyed all the attention given to private universes in recent Quodlibets. My Altaj Cluster (yep, that's the name of it--pronounced ăl-tī') is the longest and most ambitious sustained creative effort I've ever undertaken. The name Altaj, by the way, is actually a mountain range in the Soviet Union. I just liked the sound of it (spelled АЛТАИ in Cyrillic), and shamelessly copied it. I'm absurdly proud of myself for sticking with it so long. I didn't think I was capable of it. I usually get bogged down or exceed my attention span long before this much is accomplished.

I don't know which is the cart and which the horse, but making my universe has been accompanied by a full scale effort by me in the past year to catch up with all the latest developments in science--especially in planetology, cosmology, physics, and space technology. I can't get enough, it seems. I've recently subscribed to yet another magazine, Astronomy. It's beautifully illustrated and contains tons of good material on the solar system.

Yeah. A few years ago I went through the same process. Astronomy had just begun publishing at that point. So it and Sky and Telescope were the only popular astronomy magazines on the market. S&T was so devoted to skywatchers that virtually the only real information I could get on the subject came from Astronomy and the astronomy columns of Science News.

In the July issue, an article on the Venera landings pointed out the disgraceful performance of the U.S. congress in cutting out all but one planetary probe for the '80's while the Soviets are launching two more landers to Venus, as well as a Venus flyby and Halley's Comet mission! Don't let me get off on this subject--I only get mad.

You're not the only one.

My critical work on Edmond Hamilton is not ready to be shown as yet. I have about five pages of introduction that I'm fairly satisfied with, and about six more of notes that will eventually form the heart of the paper. I'm working very slowly on this (haven't touched it in weeks), but I'm fairly serious about finishing it. Hamilton is a much-underrated writer who deserves more attention from the critics. I'm not intending this study to be anything like definitive. Rather, I hope it will spark the interest of SF critics far more competent than myself in exploring his work. I would like to publish the study in a wide-circulation fanzine.

There are a number around that would probably welcome such a work when it's finished. Of course, when the study is finished, they probably won't be around--but others will have taken their place, I'm sure. The trouble is, Robert, you're so damned sercon...

I see in the August Analog that Westercon is in Phoenix again this year. It's amazing how things change! I can remember how at my second Westercon (XXIV, in San Francisco), we started lobbying for Phoenix as a convention site. It seemed like a wild fantasy back then. It appears that fandom in Phoenix today bears little resemblance to the old OSFFA days. Your history is definitely needed. It won't be long at all before all that material will have vanished forever unless it's preserved.

Are you sure about your dates? My first Westercon (and my first convention) was in 1972 at Long Beach, and the first time I

remember the idea even coming up was in the car with the Anthonys on the way home. On the other hand, someone had approached Bruce Pelz with the idea before then, as he made a point of being Encouraging when I mentioned the possibility at LACon that year. The first real "lobbying" I know of was at OkLACon in 1975, at the Oakland Leamington. By that time we had decided actually to mount a bid.

I think it's time I point out a consistent spelling error you make. It's TOLKIEN, not TOLKEIN. You're probably thinking of HEINLEIN.

No comment--no comment at all.

I've just finished Heinlein's Friday. Was it you that compared its style to "Gulf"? If so, you are right. The resemblance was especially strong in the manner that details of the novel's setting were introduced one bit at a time into the narrative. In one respect, such a technique is low-key. No flashy buildup or presentation is used to acclimatize the reader to the future world--just a dead-pan narration with minimum embellishment. But, taken as a whole, the overall effect is anything but low-key. The pace seems breathless (when it really isn't) because almost every sentence has some sharp detail filling the reader in on the world as a whole that Heinlein has created here. It gives the book a sense of moving forward at a breathless pace--even when not much is really happening.

Friday is a very "tight" story--it manages to include quite a lot of detail while not rambling. I like it. There was a bit too much of "Perils of Pauline" in the plot in my opinion, and, as usual, Heinlein seems to have written this one as he went along. Characters drop in and out--something or other catches RAH's interest, so he goes into it--for awhile--only to drop it when his attention gets turned somewhere else.

Personally, I find that one of Heinlein's most engaging characteristics. Perhaps it's just that my own mind works that way, too.

But the novel was never boring. I have several complaints about it, but I'll mention only one here--Friday winning the lottery. Too, too contrived. Weak.

My favorite part of the book? Probably the chapter where Friday was doing research with the computer. Heinlein said exactly what I wanted to say about the potentials of a really sophisticated computer network accessible by the private citizen.

That didn't really move me much--the whole thing already exists in the form of library researchers in big libraries. The only difference is the speed and versatility with which the computer can find and organize the information. Also, I don't think that particular information network was available to the private citizen--it was Baldwin's, remember? Our current "home computers" are to what we'll see in our lifetimes what a hot air balloon is to the Space Shuttle.

I've often wondered how the spread of home computers and their increasing sophistication will eventually affect the publishing industry and the media. I know the idea of books eventually disappearing is an old one (Asimov wrote a short story about it decades ago), but a lot of new twists seem to be cropping up recently. I can imagine, for example, computer-based fanzines similar to Azapa springing up. People who know the proper codes could call it up on a CRT and add their own material to it whenever they wanted to. The network evening news shows have already killed off many afternoon newspapers. Maybe we'll live to see all newspapers disappear as services like the Wall Street News Retrieval Service become more widespread.

The computer fanzine network already exists. I don't happen to be hooked into it, though.

Writers could still make a living off their work via computer if an appropriate electronic funds transfer were made to an author's account whenever someone called up one of his stories. It could be like a cable tv network for the printed word.

Yes, there are some advantages--it would get rid of the stranglehold the publishers have over the authors' livelihood. But there are corresponding disadvantages, as well (at least, for the reader. You buy a book once now, and you've got the contents forever. This way you'd constantly be paying for works you frequently re-read. Of course, this is a disadvantage only from the reader-user's viewpoint. I'm sure the writers will love it. On the other hand, without the expense of putting things into hardcopy, the user fee would probably be very small.

I'm quite convinced that we've seen only the merest beginnings of the "computer revolution." That's what makes The City and the Stars such an important work of literature. Clarke has shown in that novel just how thoroughly information processing will ultimately transform human existence. It's fascinating to read the book side-by-side with its earlier version, Against the Fall of Night, and to see how the theme grew in Clarke's mind over the years. In the earlier version (begun in 1934), the idea is way in the background, and so timidly expressed that most of its "wonders" have already been surpassed in the real world. But The City and the Stars (finished in 1955) moves the wonders of information processing to center stage and carries the concept of radical transformation of human existence to its furthest implications. I

don't believe the book has ever been outdone in this regard. That's why it is (and has been for years) my candidate for all-time best SF novel.

TCATS is also, by the way, a good example of what sometimes happens when a really definitive treatment of a theme actually is written. What might be called the "twilight" theme was approached in one way or another by nearly every major SF writer from H.G. Wells to Clarke himself before the publication of TCATS. The most famous examples would be The Time Machine, Last and First Men, "Twilight," Against the Fall of Night, as well as hundreds of lesser works, such as Simak's World of the Red Sun (I was mistaken, by the way. The publishing date for the last mentioned was 1931--not 1932. Sorry.) But after TCATS the theme seems to have disappeared--at least as a factor in major or seminal works. There may have been a feeling that everything worth saying about the subject had already been written. And the twilight theme does not lend itself well to cud-chewing. Any thoughts on this?

Yup. Both the emergence and the disappearance of the twilight theme may have more to do with the state and evolution of the culture than with the fact that there is a "definitive" work. I think, for instance, that the preoccupation with eschautology came about as a result of the late 19th century attitude toward physics. It was widely held before the turn of the century that everything there was to be discovered had been; all that was left for the next generation of physicists was to refine the "next decimal place" in the observations--about as exciting a prospect as figuring out the 6,374th decimal of pi. The attitude took about thirty years to filter down to the popular level, so it was current when Wells was writing "The Chronic Argonauts." When the New Physics came in at the turn of the century, everything was turned upside down. But, again, it took about thirty years for the notions to filter out onto the popular level. So, SF was dealing with the twilight theme in the '30's, just before the optimism of the New Physics had gotten onto the popular level. Cf. the notions in Heinlein's early work, for instance, of the world without end. And NB the fact that Clarke was getting his education just as the ideas were filtering down--the "twilight" of Diaspar is broken abruptly in both versions as the human race becomes free to go out to the stars. The message is that there is no "real" twilight, overall, even though the images and ideas dominate. We had some of that resurfacing in the late '60's, after the Club of Rome report on limits of growth. But that passed rather quickly as the assumptions of the report were shown to be faulty. Note the publication date of Simak's last City story, and his novels dealing with the passing of the humans, by way of contrast to Project Pope, which shows not the faintest breath of eschautology. That's why I referred to it (in our other correspondence) as "autumnal" in feel, rather than "twilight."

I think the problem right now is that nobody is really thinking in terms that long-range. Additionally, SF, as a popular literature, tends to be about five years behind the emergence of popular trends. Right now, the end of the U.S. as we know it is on a lot of people's minds. Vide Friday, Joe Haldeman's recent Worlds, Alexis Gillilands' two Rosinante books, JEM, and so forth. It's going to be awhile before we get that sense of "frontier" back. Besides, there are many "definitive" works around--the presence of Asimov's corpus on robots has not prevented anyone from writing robot stories; the presence of "All You Zombies" and "By His Bootstraps," together unsurpassable delineations of the time-travel paradox, prevented time-travel paradox stories from being written. Neither "How-2" nor Little Fuzzy have obviated the exploration of the question of sapience; nor has "Omni-lingual" (my nomination for the paradigmatic sf story) prevented other writers from looking at the qualitative changes technology brings about and the way technology marks societies.

I like your comments on The City and the Stars. It's amazing you should bring up the affinity between the book's theme and 19th century ideas. Believe it or not, I was thinking that very same thing just yesterday. I was thinking about Percival Lowell and his books on the Martian canals. It occurred to me that the whole notion of the dying Martian race building the canals to stave off extinction fit in very nicely with the "twilight" motive so prevalent in the SF of the early 20th century. The philosophical connection is obvious.

This may seem odd to the ignoranti in the audience--this loc is composed of two letters separated by about a month which include none of the topics or responses I wrote to each of them. Robert is talking (in the second letter) about comments made in the first letter which correspond to my preceding comment on eschautological SF. I have edited the two letters into one, which gives the effect of Robert's response to something I just said.

I also just finished a non-fiction books called Planetary Encounters about the results of unmanned exploration of the Solar System. It was written after the Voyager flybys of Jupiter, but before their arrival at Saturn. So the book was "up to date" concerning the Galilean

Satellites, but lacked the most recent data on Saturn.

I've noticed that most scientists and writers are assuming (1) that all asteroids are pretty much alike, and (2) that they resemble Phobos and Diemos. I am inclined to be skeptical about this for three reasons. First, our experience so far has been that nothing in the Solar System looks like anything else. Venus was once called "Earth's Twin Sister," but today it's hard to imagine two planets more unlike each other. The moons of Jupiter and Saturn are each unbelievably unique--the most striking case being Ganymede and Callisto. Second, even Phobos and Diemos differ from each other in surface texture and topography to a remarkable extent. And this, there is no real evidence that Phobos and Diemos are themselves captured asteroids--although I must admit I can't imagine how else two such objects would come about.

They were obviously towed into place by the High Martians.

What's all this leading up to? Just that I wouldn't be surprised if we discovered after a few asteroid probes (if we ever launch any) that Ceres is as different from Pallas--or Eros from Icarus--as Io is from Europa. In fact, I rather suspect that such is the case. Think about that, if you ever decide to turn "Cost of Living" into a novel. Didn't you say you were considering including a speaking tour of the asteroids?

I found a copy of Levy and Bonestell's The Conquest of Space (1949) in the library the other day. Boy, did that take me back! I must have read the book thirty times during grade school. The paintings are as beautiful as ever. Several of the originals are on display in the Smithsonian. I always point them out when I take visitors to the Air and Space Museum.

I finally found a Jack Vance book that I don't like--The Dying Earth. I've been struggling through it for well over a month now, and am still nowhere near the end. However, it's not SF, but sword and sorcery.

By the way (and please forgive the incredible disorder of topics and skipping around in this letter), since I've been talking largely about astronomical subjects today, here's another on my mind. You once mentioned that it often takes years for discoveries and advances in science to show up in hard-science SF stories. Well, the same is true regarding popular science books. I have been systematically combing area bookstores and libraries for good books on the solar system. What I find falls into three categories: (1) the extremely technical--way over my head, like a four-volume text on celestial mechaics I found with more numbers than words on each page, (2) the juvenile--you know the type. This is 75% of what's available. Maybe somebody is trying to tell me something--like the solar system is for kids...(3) the out-of-date. Of course, everything before Voyager I and II is now obsolete. Just this morning, new discoveries concerning the moons of Uranus were reported in the Washington Post that completely overturned everything we thought about them before. Like I said a few pages back--expect the unexpected.

I imagine we'll have to wait three or four years before the book racks reflect the newest discoveries--and by that time, they'll be out of date. That's why I've decided to subscribe to Astronomy magazine. Only periodicals can keep up with the pace of discovery today.

You'd do much better to subscribe to Science News or the AAAS' Science, both fine periodicals. The stuff in Astronomy is highly glossed--for the intelligent ten-year old. Science News is aimed, generally, at the intelligent layman, a campfollower of the sciences, while Science is a tad more technical (Sometimes I can't even understand the abstracts). And both are weekly. Those three, together with AvWeek ought to about cover most of the stuff you're interested in. It would be nice to get New Scientist as well, but the post from England is so slow (and the overlap in reportage so great) that it may not be worth your while.

I am reading an excellent book on the discovery of Pluto by Clyde Tombaugh, the astronomer who first saw the planet. The book is titled: Out of the Darkness, and it's quite anecdotal and autobiographical. I usually don't care for this type of book, but this one is really outstanding. It turns what could so easily be a dry account of mathematical calculations and tedious hours at the telescope into an exciting and very human story. It also includes an update by James Christy, who discovered Pluto's moon Charon in 1978.

Robert Prokop

"I feel that lay persons such as myself can interfere in these matters much more successfully if they do not do it too often. To rise up once and lay about one is startling and effective. But when one makes a practice of it, the thing becomes official, and the public only say, 'Oh, poor old Dorothy Sayers has gone religious', and pay no further attention." Dorothy L. Sayers, Letter, 5-14-38

Well, in the way of things, even the U.S. mail passes faster than a three-month delayed Quodlibet. So there are bound to be multiple letters from regular correspondents. After receiving Rich Brown's meaty loc, I sent him Quodlibet 11, and he responded, or perhaps re-responded:

Rich Brown
1632 19th St. N.W., No. 2
Washington, D.C. 20009

Dear Bill,

I turned those comments I made to you about Friday into a full-fledged review which will probably appear in the November issue of SFR. From little acorns, &c. It's one of the marvels of the use of the word-processor I'm sure you're familiar with--being able to save bits and pieces of things under topic headings and then amalgamate them into Something Else. Just thought I should point out that I've done this to help you avoid a deja vu experience when it comes out in SFR and you start reading things you know you've seen before.

Ah, waste not, want not. I've had that deja vu experience before--I asked Gordon Dickson at LACon for a synopsis of the discussion we had in which he outlined the theory underlying the Childe Cycle, since nothing of the sort had been published to date, and he wrote a short article which I included in the second issue of OAFS--the Gordon Dickson special, with bibliography and appreciations, that sort of thing. The next year, Harrison's Analog anthology came out and, lo and behold, substantial portions of Dickson's thing were taken verbatim from the stuff I had printed. And there was no acknowledgement. Pissed me off. Ah, well.

Actually, yes, you do have to "construct" for Heinlein--or you do at least for the Heinlein of the past ten years. But you didn't usta hafta; he was a master story-teller who once gave a lot of thought and attention to avoiding logical and/or motivational inconsistencies. The only "early" Heinlein in which I ever found an even remotely similar fault was "The Roads Must Roll," and the idea of the moving highways. Granted that it's not technically impossible, for military reasons it would never have been allowed--it would be too easy to sabotage for the purpose of disrupting transportation, as demonstrated by the point of the story. (One would have supposed someone with Heinlein's military background would have considered that.)

He might well have done so and discarded the notion. Remember that strategic considerations never made much impact on anybody's life until after the Cold War--and particularly until after Jets and Missiles came along. And the haphazard way in which building codes, etc., operate virtually assures that something of that kind would certainly be tried somewhere, if the energy expense weren't so prohibitive. Actually (and I'm about to enunciate a H*E*R*E*S*Y) I don't much care for "The Roads Must Roll." It's okay, I guess--but terribly dull by comparison to the other things he was doing at the time. The one story for which my credibility meter starts coming into play is Starman Jones, for the incredible bundle of coincidences built into it. Usually Heinlein carries me along with the story just fine, thank you, but toward the end of that, the mind starts boggling at the careless way in which causality is coerced to make the improbable accident happen just in time to push Max into the limelight, where his odd talent can be of conspicuous use. The structure of credibility begins to wobble, top-heavy with coincidence, although Heinlein manages to bring it off (I think) with aplomb. As a parting shot on the question, I don't think peoples' dissatisfaction with Heinlein's work starting with Farnham's Freehold has anything to do with technique. In some instances, he's addressing subjects those highly conservative and relatively unsophisticated fans who cut their teeth on his juveniles don't want to see addressed. In others, he's addressing questions in terms that make no sense in terms of the dialectic developed over the past twenty years. This is particularly true when he starts talking about women. It should hastily be added that the terms in which Heinlein formulates the questions are perfectly valid in and of themselves--and were, fifty years ago, regarded as Progressive and Liberal and all that good stuff. I think he's just internalized his "dialogue" on the issue too much, so that he's trying to fit what Kate Millett is talking about into the rhetorical mold of Havelock Ellis. The problem of the tentative rejection of his long-time readership is more complex than you make it appear.

And it just occurred to me how very odd it must feel for Heinlein to hear people talking about his entire forty-three years' worth of work as if it were all simultaneous. A Good Sign, certainly, because that mean's it's all still very much alive. But aside from the annoyance of people who are always complaining that he doesn't write "like he used to twenty (thirty!) years ago," the idea that the stuff he wrote as a young man (heck, my age) is equally current with his most recent work must be...disconcerting. I hope I will have the opportunity to be so disconcerted...

Well, Quodlibet 11--both by itself and in tandem with things said in your letter--certainly mooted about three-quarters of the points I

made to you about the abortion issue. And, really, even though I may still disagree with you, it was a relief to read your comments; at least yours is a view based on some careful thought, and therefore one I can respect, if not agree with totally.

S'okay. Provided a nice bit of conversation-in-print. About five pages so far, although the loccol is yet young...

I would say in one case the analogy you try to make doesn't hold water, while your other point could be reduced to a logical absurdity. This doesn't make me "right" or you "wrong"--it just means the points you make are open to more than one interpretation.

By me, a logical absurdity makes me "wrong." But, we'll see...

You see a parallel between a coma patient's and a foetus' lack of consciousness, point out the former maintains full human rights irrespective of his state of consciousness, and conclude a foetus' rights may not be impugned simply because it isn't showing evidence of same. But the argument is specious; the coma patient has been conscious, the foetus never has. Those maintained right certainly are "irrespective of his state of consciousness"--they are maintained in spite of, not granted because of, his unconscious state. The fact that he's not conscious does not deprive him of prior rights held when he was conscious; the presumption made in maintaining the human rights of the coma patient is that he is suffering a temporary abatement of consciousness--consciousness necessary to exercise those rights--which may be regained. In contrast, you presumably feel the lack of a conscious state is sufficient reason to grant rights to (rather than maintain rights for) the foetus, since a foetus has no "prior" rights to be maintained. I would also point out that the foetus is not suffering an "abatement," temporary or otherwise, of consciousness, since it has never been conscious; and it cannot regain what it has never had. Whether consciousness exists at a particular moment in time may be irrelevant to individual "rights" but whether or not the individual has been conscious and might be presumed to regain consciousness are relevant questions which you have ignored.

First, I did not draw an analogy and reason from the analogy. This was an example adduced to show that any appeal to "signs" is subject to exceptions. The reason is simply that, as Aristotle noted, we do not apprehend the nature of things directly. We see changes in things and reason back from the changes to the nature, since things change according to and in conformity with their nature. The change from fertilized egg to foetus to baby to child to adolescent to adult to dead is a perfectly apt progression to reason from. The presence or absence of any given sign at any given moment is immaterial when one is attempting to arrive at some conclusion about the nature of the object in question. So that point stands.

Second, the question of whether or not an entity is displaying, has displayed, or someday may display one or the other of the signs is irrelevant to the question of whether it is possessed of rights, except as a description of its potency may determine whether is belongs to a "rights-possessing" species. You're mixing up the appropriate levels of observation and conclusion. "Rights" inhere in human beings because of what they are as a species--which is to say that human beings (indeed, all conscious species) are so constituted that their social interaction is patterned most successfully along the lines suggested by the formulation of the "right to life" and its corollary formulations "right to liberty" and "right to property." Which is to say that "human rights" is a law of nature pertaining to social interaction among volitional beings, in exactly the same way that F=ma applies to mass-energy systems: it is a description (formulation) of a pattern exhibited by concrete entities.

The way volitional beings experience this "law" is fundamentally the same way non-volitional beings experience it: as a range of possibilities grading from completely "unsuccessful" to completely "successful." As a physical fact, if you try to operate societies on principles that do not properly embody those "laws," they will be less successful than societies set up in conformity with those principles--that is, they won't achieve the ends of social living as well.

If rights inhere in the human being, it follows that whatever its state of being at the moment, its rights inhere fully and inalienably at that moment. The notion that rights are "granted" is suspect--and the notion that the level of realization of one's potency somehow affects one's rights is very suspect. Since, other things being equal, a human foetus grows into a human being, and not into, say, a cow, it follows that the human foetus is at all times a human being. The fact that its potency is relatively less realized than yours or mine is, really, irrelevant. You would not, for instance, claim that an old person has more right to have his rights recognized than you do simply because his potency is more completely realized than yours. It seems strange to me that you choose an arbitrary experience (birth) to impose a discontinuity that simply isn't reflected in the reality of the situation. This

is all the more strange because in your second criticism, you seek to ignore a discontinuity that is as real as anything can be.

Your second argument, on first examination, seems unexceptional. If a human is all that a human being might be and all humans have been in the foetal state, then the foetus is ipso facto a human being. A simple backward extension of the timeline seems to "prove" this. The problem, however, is that you have extended it to an arbitrary point, the foetal state or the point of conception, no doubt overwhelmed by the "logic" of your previous argument. There is no good reason for this arbitrary choice beyond the "convenience" of proving your point, since it may just as easily and persuasively be extended even further--back to the components which comprise the foetus, i.e., the sperm and the ovum. If all human beings have been in the foetal state, then they have also been the components which come to comprise the foetus. Thus, logically, a woman who menstruates is guilty, at the very least, of manslaughter--and every time a man makes love to the point of orgasm he becomes the moral equivalent of Adolph Hitler. You may not feel as "comfortable" with this as you do with setting an arbitrary point at conception, but it is the logical extension (as well as the logical absurdity) of your argument.

Conception is hardly an "arbitrary" point of division. Your reductio ad absurdum argument rests on the supposition that there is no particular reason to stop looking at the foetus as an individual human being at conception. This is not at all the case. The question of whether an individual possesses a given right applies to the individual. If you look along the timeline, it is clear that there is a point at which a discrete individual comes into being: fertilization, the moment that the germ plasm of the egg and the sperm combine into a new entity. Before that point there is not one discrete entity, but two: spermatozoon and egg. So the individual in question resides actually in the fertilized egg but not at all in the components. Each component, after all, is equally capable of forming an unlimited number of discrete individuals, depending on what egg or spermatozoon it is paired up with. So stopping consideration of the question at fertilization is not arbitrary; it is, instead, required by the logic of the discourse. Your subsequent points are mooted.

This is, coincidentally (or perhaps not coincidentally), Thomas' position on the matter. The Church decided about a hundred years ago that it is more important to hold that each human soul is a special creation of God, so that the complete human does not come into being until God invests the foetus, some time after conception (as it can't be before, there being no individual to invest with a soul before conception) with a soul. In the seven hundred years since Thomas died, this is one of the three points on which the Church has overruled his position. Doesn't seem sufficient reason to me. Then again, I'm not making policy for the Church. But it seems to me that this is a Bad Idea, because it makes humanity the only species incapable of reproducing its own kind (in the Aristotelian formulation that man is the rational animal; according to the Church, man, separate from the rational soul God invests, is an animal possessed of an animal soul alone). So, although every other species reproduces its own kind, humanity reproduces something else when it reproduces. Only God can make a man. Shaking of the head.

Also, incidentally, if you accept this rebuttal to your second criticism, you have reasoned yourself into a corner (I should say, instead, that you have come face to face with the truth): if you accept the "unexceptionable" (not "unexceptional," I hope) argument that a foetus is ipso facto human from conception (as the argument is modified to take the rebuttal into account), then it follows that abortion is the wilful murder of a human being, which is the point I was trying to prove.

However, almost all of this is considerably mitigated--at least to me--by the fact that you are making your statements from an anarchistic viewpoint. I can only applaud a personal opinion--even one I do not fully agree with--presented in such an anti-authoritarian way. Just kindly forgive the presumptions I made in my previous letter.

Rich Brown

There's nothing to "forgive." I'm passionately fond of the type of brain-stretching argument this kind of issue brings out.

"A romantic, however, recognizes that the movement, the organization, the institution, the revolution, if it comes to that, is merely a backdrop for his or her own personal drama and that--to pretend otherwise is to surrender freedom and will to the totalitarian impulse, is to replace psychological reality with sociological illusion, but such truth never penetrates the Glo-Coat of righteous conviction that surrounds the social idealist when he or she is identifying with the poor or the exploited." Tom Robbins. Still Life With Woodpeckers, 1980. P. 150.

And, finally, because Sam Konkin wouldn't recognize Quodlibet without an "anarchorecipe," I include this I picked up from Simca's Cuisine by Simone Beck.

Le Tallyrand: Cerises en creme meringuee et flambee

For eight:

2 one-pound cans dark pitted cherries
1/4 cup granulated sugar for cherries
1/3 cup kirsch or dark rum
4 egg yolks
3/4 cup granulated sugar
2/3 cups ground almonds
4-1/2 Tablespoons cake flour
2/3 cup heavy cream
5 Tablespoons confectioners' sugar
1-1/4 teaspoons vanilla extract
7 egg whites
pinch of salt
butter for baking dish
3 Tablespoons slivered almonds
4 to 5 Tablespoons confectioners' sugar

Put the cherries into a bowl with 1/4 cup sugar and the kirsch or rum, and 3/4 cup of the juice from one of the cans of cherries, and let them macerate for at least half an hour, stirring once or twice.

Put the 4 egg yolks into an enameled saucepan with 3/4 cup granulated sugar. Save the neatest empty eggshell, trimming its edges neatly with scissors.

Beat the eggyolks with the sugar until they are smooth and a pale, creamy yellow. Strain in the maceration liquid from the cherries and stir to blend well. Stir in the ground almonds and the flour. Set over low heat and stir constantly for five to ten minutes until the mixture forms a thick, smooth custard. Remove from heat and stir for a minute or two to cool; then set the custard over ice cubes to become very cold.

Whip the cream in a bowl set over ice until the beater leaves light traces on the surface of the cream. Beat in 2 tablespoons of the confectioners' sugar and 1/2 teaspoon of the vanilla, and set aside.

Beat the 7 egg whites with a pinch of salt until they are stiff, but not dry. Fold half the egg whites into the whipped cream until thoroughly mixed. Stir 2 or 3 tablespoons of the cream and egg whites into the cold custard to lighten it; then fold all back into the remaining cream and egg whites. Set aside.

Add the remaining confectioners' sugar and the remaining vanilla to the remaining egg whites, and beat to make a kind of meringue.

Butter a baking dish (preferably about 8 x 12" and 2" deep). Spread the cherries on the bottom of the dish and pour the custard over them. Spread the meringue neatly over the custard, leaving a small border all around and making a dome of meringue toward the center. Press the eggshell into the meringue so that it shows only as a well in the center. The dessert can be made 1/2 to one hour in advance to this point, and set aside in the coolest part of the kitchen.

Sprinkle the meringue with the slivered almonds, then the confectioners' sugar. Preheat the oven to 425 degrees F. Set into the oven for about 5 minutes until the meringue is lightly browned. Heat the kirsch or rum.

Remove the dessert from the oven, pour some of the kirsch or rum into the eggshell, letting the rest run over the meringue, and set aflame. Bring flaming to the table, spooning the liqueur over the top of the meringue to caramelize the sugar, until the flames go out.

Voila.

Now, for those of us who prefer a list of ingredients that you don't have to add up as you go along, the ingredients are:

2 16-oz. cans pitted dark cherries
1 cup (8 oz.) granulated sugar
about 1/2 cup (4 oz.) kirsch or dark rum (calvados is good, too)
7 eggs, separated. (use all the whites and reserve 3 yolks for something else--like hollandaise)
8 oz. almonds. Grind to a flour all but 24 almonds; these, blanch and sliver
1/3 cup cake flour
2/3 cup whipping cream
5 oz. confectioners' (powdered) sugar
Vanilla extract, salt, butter

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THE MEANING OF IT ALL...

In the thirteenth century, when Scholasticism was a vital, intellectual force, the universities celebrated each of the most important of the high holy days with a series of debates among the doctors and masters, who posed subtle theological questions, called "quodlibets," for argument. Frequently, these "quodlibetal questions" would be transcribed by the answering doctor and later published. The term translates roughly as "what [one] pleases" or "at will." From the examples I have seen, those professors must have been made of stern stuff, indeed, to take pleasure in the difficulties of quodlibetal questions.

Alternatively, a quodlibet is a whimsical combination of familiar melodies or texts. The quodlibet was a popular musical form of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, antedating but serving the same purpose as the operatic paraphrases of the nineteenth century. The quodlibet has all but disappeared in contemporary music--or all muzak is quodlibetal. You may take your pick.

I recently ran across a passage which amplifies the explanation of the word. It is from Anthony Kenny's very short introduction to St. Thomas' philosophical thought titled simply Aquinas: "The heart of the [University of] Paris education [in the thirteenth century] was the course of lectures. On most days the Professor would lecture from six o'clock in the morning until after eight; the Bachelor would then lecture on the Sentences [of Peter Lombard, the rhetorical and theological text of the Middle Ages] from nine until shortly before noon. On special days the Professor would preside at formal disputations on topics of his choice: a problem was raised and conflicting opinions were stated and argued, the Bachelor had to respond to arguments raised by the audience, and finally judgement [sic] was given by the Master. During Lent and Advent, instead of these Quaestiones Disputatae on set topics, there were more wide-ranging impromptu discussions, Quaestiones Quodlibetales, in which any member of the audience could raise a question on any topic.... [For both Disputed and Quodlibetal questions], each question is itself a set of many individual disputations or 'articles'....To read the text of the article aloud takes about half an hour: if our editions are anything like a verbatim report of the original proceedings, the entire disputation [on truth] must have lasted about five hours." Actually, the published disputations were extensively revised and polished for publication, as were the legal speeches of Demosthenes and Cicero; they probably bear little relationship, organizational or rhetorical, to the verbal disputes. Very frequently, I understand, the questions were proposed one day, and the disputes were resolved the next, allowing the Master time to go over the arguments and assign his students work on the subject.