S N I C K E R S N E E

V o l u m e O n e N u m b e r F o u r

Published for the Fantasy Amateur Press Association by Bob Silverberg, 5020 Goodridge Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10471. This issue intended for the August 1967 FAPA mailing, if Boyd Raeburn can pull himself away from Forbidden Pleasures long enough to get the Gestetner work done.

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HARRY WARNER PLEASE NOTE I, too, feel the pull of advancing age, Harry, and as the clock ticks inexorably onward I begin to think more and more seriously of retirement. Those of you who know that I'm by no means as stricken in years as the sage of Hagerstown may think it's presumptuous of me to talk about retiring when I'm hardly far into my thirties and still can pass, in a dim light, for a Very Young Man, if not precisely a Beardless Youth. But my idea of "retirement" is not the standard one of going off to Florida to sit in a rocker. Not now, and not ever, but especially not now. I've got a very personal definition for the term.

You see, I've been a pretty diligent worker since I set up shop as a professional writer about a dozen years ago. The schedule I set for myself then was a five-day week, keeping me at the typewriter from nine to three every day, and allowing five or six weeks off during the year for vacations. This system was designed to get me around the bane of any professional writer's existence -- the nagging feeling, at almost any hour of the day or night, that he really ought to be working. I could tell myself, having done my nine-to-three stint, that I was through for the day, and I didn't have to worry about any backtalk from my conscience.

The system worked well for a while. I was writing only fiction, which required no advance preparation other than some sort of planning of the story line, and I found that without much strain I could produce five to seven thousand words of salable copy a day, allowing an hour off for lunch. This added up to a considerable output -- 25,000 to 35,000 words a week, or the equivalent of a novel every ten working days or so. I sold nearly all of what I wrote, bringing in a nice income and allowing me to pursue agreeable leisure-time activities in the hours of the day that fell after three in the afternoon.

But in 1961 things started to change. I had left science fiction, or more accurately it had left me; after the collapse of the market

in 1958 I turned to writing a variety of other things which might well be summed up as mostly garbage: true-crime stuff, men's adventure copy, crime stories, true confessions, and whatnot. I wasn't hurting financially, but it was scarcely a rewarding experience creatively, and after a couple of years in the wilderness I started to create a new career for myself in serious non-fiction -- popularized science and archaeology, mainly. The first of these was my book LOST CITIES AND VANISHED CIVILIZATIONS, which I wrote in the summer of 1961. It went over quite well, and, as I've described in the past, its success led me to similar projects and ultimately to the present delightful situation, where my non-fiction has collected a shelf of awards, is published by such houses as Putnam, Macmillan, Crowell, Lippincott, McGraw-Hill, Holt, Dial, and others, and occupies a gratifying amount of space in every public library in the land.

The trouble was that I was still trying to function on my old mass-production work habits while entering this much more taxing, much more demanding medium. It just isn't possible to bang out 5000 to 7000 words of clear, accurate non-fiction copy between nine and three of a day, just as though one is writing wild and woolly space opera. Yet I didn't admit that it was impossible, and I succeeded in doing it. Then there's the matter of research: daring deeds on the asteroids can be invented as you go along, but accounts of living fossils, Pueblo Indian folkways, or the decipherment of Sumerian cuneiform can't be spun from whole cloth. I made a minor adjustment in my working day: after writing from nine to three, and allowing an hour or so for rest and recuperation, I'd settle down to take notes for some future project. The research at first occupied me for perhaps two hours a day, but, as my books grew more complex and my attitude toward them grew more dedicated, I found myself working far into the night.

Thus I adopted the hundred-hour work week. I wasn't spending any more time than before at my typewriter, but for each hour of writing I did, there was an hour or more of after-hours research. The leisure-time activities of yesteryear now became something to squeeze in between bouts of study. At any given time I would be writing one book, researching the next, ordering the source material for the one after that, and making preliminary inquiries so I could produce an outline for the one after <u>that</u>. Meanwhile Barbara would be reading galleys, preparing indexes, checking outgoing manuscripts for errors and stylistic lapses, and otherwise performing the peripheral jobs I was too swamped to handle.

One effect of this frenzied schedule was the doubling of my income between 1959 and 1962, with a gentler but still appreciable rise year by year since then. Another was the ego-enhancing effect of getting out of the pulps and into a more visible kind of writing. In 1959, when people asked me who I wrote for, I'd be forced into all sorts of evasions; by 1963 I could simply tell them to check

the card catalog of their local public library. That was nice, too. But there was a side effect: I got sick.

The strange thing is that it took me so long to cave in. I worked at full tilt in a fairly inhuman way from 1961 through 1965 with no visible effects on my health. During that time I suppose I was the world's most prolific author; in one year I produced (and sold) two million words of copy. Nor was this hackwork: a good deal of it was serious, fairly technical stuff which was received so kindly by the reviewing media that it would be immodest of me to quote samples. I was tired as hell a good deal of the time during this self-imposed ordeal, but I had a way of snapping quickly back after easing up a little. I credit that to natural stamina, clean living, and the resilience of youth.

In the summer of 1965 we toured Scandinavia and ate well. I came home about eight pounds over my standard weight of 150. I felt sluggish and blubbery, and decided to take the flab off, so I cut down a bit on the food intake. My weight went back to normal in short order. What I didn't realize was that it kept on going down, all through the winter of 1965-66 and the early spring. By April, I weighed about 143. For my slim frame, that isn't bad; I didn't have any fat on me at all, and felt agile and lithe. My friends began observing that I was losing weight, and I said yes, I was in fine trim. In March and April of 1966 I plunged into the longest and most demanding non-fiction project I had ever tackled, a book of about 120,000 words on the quest for El Dorado. For twelve hours a day plus I wrote and read El Dorado. I was too busy to bother checking my weight. Friends still told me I looked thin, but I attributed that to the current bout of hard work. My mother said I was too thin, too, but she's been saying that all my life; like most mothers she believes that Fat Children Are Good.

Late in April I finished El Dorado. I felt pretty lousy. I went out to give the lawn its first spring mowing and had to give up, gasping and panting, after about three shoves. I discovered that a stroll to the corner mailbox left me exhausted. There was one night when it was actually too much trouble to cut the meat on my plate, and I simply sat there staring at it. During this time I discovered that my weight was down to 132 pounds, the lowest it's been in my adult life. Obviously I was sick. I got out my medical books and discovered that the things I might have included leukemia, tuberculosis, cancer, and hyperthyroidism. Opting for the latter, I went off to have my first medical checkup since 1958, when I had gone in for a look-see after Kornbluth and Kuttner were smitten by sudden heart attacks.

The doctor agreed that I looked pretty awful, told me a few of the dire maladies I might have, and started testing. Very quickly he confirmed my own suspicion: my thyroid had gone out of whack. My metabolism was functioning at about 150% of normal, and I was literally burning myself up. The immediate instructions were to eat

like a horse, take tranquilizers, get plenty of rest, and sit tight until the doctors decided on the proper treatment.

The doctors suggested removal of the thyroid, painlessly and non-surgically, by having me swallow a dose of radioactive iodine. I contemplated the carcinogenetic possibilities of the treatment and said no. That startled and angered them; they weren't accustomed to having patients directing their own treatment. Their next suggestion was surgical removal of the gland. But I had done some homework, and I countered with drug therapy. There is a drug called propilthiuracil which stabilized hyperthyroid conditions and in some cases permanently restores the metabolism to normal. How about, I said? And the doctors, annoyed by my hostility to their wisdom, put me on a drug of this sort. Unfortunately, I turned out to be allergic to it; it helped my metabolism, but broke me out all over in hives. I had to get off it. At the Tricon I showed up still fifteen pounds underweight, despite a summer of glorious high-calory eating, and full of hives besides. I went home facing the possibility of surgery, but as the doctors gloated, I tried my last escape route: a second drug similar to the one I was on. Perhaps it had the same metabolism-healing properties, I said, minus the allergens? Nonsense, said the medics. But they humored me. Within a month I was back to normal weight and strength. No hives. No symptoms of exhaustion, either. I'm still on the drug, a greatly reduced dose, and the doctors and I agree that I'm probably going to make a full recovery.

The lesson I drew from this, belatedly, is that I've been working too hard. No one knows what causes the thyroid to flip this way, but overwork is frequently responsible. Hence this talk of retirement, Harry. Since last summer I've been retiring by stages. The first stage was to switch most of my investments into high-yielding blue chips, so that I'd have the economic cushion of the dividends from these conservative stocks, plus the mounting royalties from the books I'd written. The second stage was to drop all the remaining hackwork assignments I was still carrying; there weren't many, but I've come to feel that life is too short to waste any of it writing junk for money, if you don't need the money. The third stage has been the most difficult: to effect a piecemeal withdrawl from my lunatic work schedule.

What I'm doing now is to write mornings, mostly, and do my research after lunch, in the time slot that I used to devote to my afternoon writing output. This frees an equivalent number of hours later in the day. It also cuts my output by about 50%, with effects on my income, but I'm prosperous enough from dividends, royalties, and subsidiary rights sales to be able to withstand even a sharp drop in my day-by-day earnings. I'm also cutting back to a four-day week, the liberated fifth day being spent away from the house in some literary pastime. (Check that: I mean non-literary pastime.)

The result has been a general relaxing of my rigid schedule. Instead of producing a set amount of copy Monday through Friday, the same amouht every day, I find that I may write seven pages on Monday, fifteen on Tuesday, nothing at all on Wednesday, and ten pages apiece on Thursday and Friday. Time that otherwise would have been spent producing salable copy now goes for research or even, if I can clear it with my superego, for loafing. (This FAPAzine is being written in time that previously would have been spent in professional writing. I don't consider this work, you understand.)

It hasn't been easy to adapt. I've often felt restless about not working, and impatient to get upstairs and start typing. My obsessive work compulsion is, of course, the exact opposite of the problem most writers have, but it's a problem all the same, and I'm working hard to lick it. The first few days of the changeover to the new system were rough, but now I'm enjoying the new flexibility, and so far I haven't felt any financial pinch as a result of doing so much less work. My royalty income is still rising, and would continue to do so for another five years or so even if I didn't write a thing, simply because of the backlog of written but still unpublished books that will gradually start bringing in the cash.

When I talk of "retirement," then, I don't mean the rocking-chair bit -- just the withdrawal to a sane working schedule. What I'm looking forward to now is working about three days a week, with plenty of time off for reading, reflection, and planning of future work, and about ten weeks a year of travel instead of the present five or six. A schedule like that should yield about six books a year, which is plenty. I won't starve. And the way I've been working, an output of six books a year seems like retirement.

I'll finally have time to read Tolkien. To catch up on FAPA. (I don't do mailing comments now because I haven't been able to stay current with the mailings; right now I'm reading the early 1966 ones.) To file away the heaps of things that have been urgently awaiting filing for the last ten years. To get the garden back in shape. To study Sanskrit, even. It's a pleasant prospect, and, having crammed about thirty working years into the last ten, I don't feel remotely guilty about becoming a loafer in my mid-thirties while all about me toil on. I feel I've put in as much working time already as most people are going to in their whole lives. This is something I've been talking of for years, as my close friends know -- and they've always nodded sagely and laughed up their sleeves at my talk of cutting down on work. But now I mean it. The thyroid thing was as vivid a warning as I need. I invite you to support me in my retirement, mes amis. You can find my works on your corner newsstand. I have a Ballantine book out just now called THORNS, for example, which I think is pretty good. It costs 75¢. Each copy you buy brings me 3¢ more to keep me solvent as I join the shuffleboard set.

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