

STANLEY



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COVER -- James Shull

Notebooklings (Editorial) - Hank	3
Great American Comics, Part III: Basil Wolverton's Powerhouse Pepper - Lesleigh	5
Of Worlds Beyond (Review) - Creath Thorne	9
Words from Readers (Letter Column)	11
Kick In The Jams - Jim Turner	18
Dance to the Music - Juanita Coulson	21
With Malice Toward All (A Column About Books) - Joe Sanders	25
Sgt. Pepper's Starship - Angus Taylor	28

BACKCOVER -- Tom Foster



INTERIOR ARTWORK

Grant Canfield 2, 11, 16
 Tom Foster 10
 Mike Gilbert 28
 Frank Johnson 8
 Doug Lovenstein 3, 13, 15, 26
 Hank Luttrell 5, 6
 James Shull 21
 Lettering & Layout - Hank Luttrell



Notebook
ling

+ Hank Luttrell +

From time to time people have asked Lesleigh when she was going to write about underground comics, as part of her series of articles about comics. Last issue she answered one reader with this question that she was planning an article on "The Father of the Underground Comics," Basil Wolverton. This seems to have confused things a little more, because we have letters this time saying that they were looking forward to our article on underground comics. To say simply that Wolverton is "The Father" of the underground comic isn't quite true -- we used that phrase in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek manner. But Wolverton's influence is unmistakable in Robert Crumb's artwork, and Crumb's influence is felt in almost every underground cartoonist; there might not be any underground comics were it not for Crumb. But for more about Wolverton, you may turn to Lesleigh's article.

For more about underground comics, you can stay right here. I thought I would use the Wolverton article and the above mentioned confusion as an excuse for including some Notebooklings I had on the subject. 1971 must have been the biggest year for the little booklets yet; familiar artists have turned out some of their best work yet while at the same time dozens of brand new artists have emerged with fine work. In particular over the past year I've been interested and amused by the books published by a group of west coast artists including Dan O'Neill, Bobby London, Ted Richards, Gary Hallgren and perhaps a few others. This group, more than most other underground comic book artists, are into the history and fine traditions of the comic strip. So far the books I've seen from them are Air Pirates Funnies #1 & 2, The Dirty Duck Book, Merton of the Movement and Dan O'Neill's Comics and Stories 1, 2 & 3. The Air Pirates book are amazingly thorough parodies of various Disney cartoons and comic strips. Dan O'Neill's Bucky Bug (an old, almost forgotten Disney character) is frustrated because he hasn't touched a woman in fourteen years, but eventually winds up with much more sex than he can handle. That most sinister of Disney characters, The Phantom Blot, makes many appearances, throwing knives with frightening messages attached, and plotting against the heroic mice. In one story by Gary Hallgren the Disney musical cartoon, the Silly Symphony, is parodied, using the words to "Mickey's Son and Daughter." If you'd like to hear this song performed in a wonderful musical approximation of the Disney style, listen to Gorilla by the Bonzo Dog Band. I don't know if this is a real Disney theme (it could pass for one), or if it was written for the Bonzo Dog Band, or what -- but I'd like to know. Non-Disney material in the Air Pirates includes Dirty Duck by Bobby London, about which more will be said later, and Dopin' Dan by Ted Richards, sort of a modernized Sad Sack, with drug-crazed GIs.

Bobby London's Dirty Duck, now with his own book, is an astonishing tribute to that most surreal of all comic strips, also thought by many to be the best comic strip

ever, George Herriman's Krazy Kat. London has absorbed Herriman's style and cartoon-⁴ing technique to an amazing degree; the story takes place in Gnatfucca Flats, very near Coconino County, where Herriman's strip took place. In fact, it is in Coconino County that much of this book takes place, at a certain Rock Palace there run by a bad tempered promoter who at one point says, "I worked hard to give youse dis music an' you're not gonna rip me off!" not unlike a certain promoter who once operated in both New York and San Francisco. While most of the Gnatfucca Flats characters are younger people, Dirty Duck is an oldster. Dirty smokes a cigar and walk leaning forward at a 45 degree angle, rather like Groucho Marx. Near the end of this book, Dirty has an encounter with a Margaret Dumont-like chicken, bringing to mind the Marx Brother's films even more. Dirty Duck is actually a minor Herriman character, however. One strip in which this Herriman duck character appears is reprinted in Stephen Becker's history of the comic strip, Comic Art in America, if you'd like to check it out.

Merton of the Movement is also a London character, this time drawn rather similar to E. C. Segar's brilliant comic strip Popeye -- but the style is less a pastiche than the Dirty Duck stories. At this point it seems important to add that today's Popeye is drawn by people with little understanding of Segar's imaginative creation. Merton is an ordinary sort of freak who sometimes accidentally gets himself locked in trunks, and who just as accidentally finds himself drawn into confrontations with the Establishment. The last story in this book is Bobby London's tongue-in-cheek autobiography, ending with his tale of how he was censored while working as a cartoonist for the underground press.

If London had trouble with the underground press, then Dan O'Neill must have much more with the above ground press. His strip Odd Bodkins was published for a while in the San Francisco Chronicle. In the second issue of Dan O'Neill's C&S he reprints the strip which finally forced him to leave, and perhaps just as well. As anyone who followed the newspaperstrip would testify, it was strange indeed, but O'Neill's comics have been just as strange, considerably less inhibited, and often brilliant.

Like O'Neill's work in Air Pirates, the covers of C&S are Disney-related, showing various Disney characters killing each other off in particularly gruesome ways. The title itself is an obvious relative of Walt Disney's Comics and Stories. Once inside the comics, the story is a mind contorting trip through American thought, touching on religion, ecology, politics, motorcycles, Abe Lincoln, hamburgers and just about everything else. Hugh and Fred, O'Neill's starring characters start the story running scared, paranoid that is, and through the course of the three issues, find out that God is on the side of the atom bomb testers, are almost killed by invaders from Mars who are trying to fill Earth's atmosphere with gasoline so the Martian troops can invade -- Mars' atmosphere is 50% gasoline, you see--actually go to Mars where they are killed, then go to hell where they have to eat Tapioca pudding for 10,000 years, and then eventually return to the real world. These three O'Neill comics contain the longest story ever published in the underground comic field, and I think one of the most ambitious and one of the best. I've been told that not everyone likes O'Neill, but I find that hard to believe.

* * * * *

You will notice two ballots with this Starling. One is the Hugo ballot. Some of you shared the disappointment I expressed last issue about last year's Hugos -- one thing you could do this year would be to use this ballot. If you feel Firesign Theatre's Bozo album, for instance, should be on the ballot, then nominate it! ## The DUFF ballot is self-explanatory. We hope you don't think it is too pushy of us to distribute the ballot like this, but we are very enthusiastic about the project and want to ask your help and support in making it a success and a permanent feature of our fan- community. So please do vote.



Basil Wolverton's

POWERHOUSE PEPPER

In the past, I have written in this column about comics I have been enjoying for years. Now I am going to talk about one that appeared several years before I was born, that had only 5 issues and that I only saw for the first time recently. In its way, Powerhouse Pepper is every bit as good as Little Lulu or Uncle Scrooge but that is only natural since its creator, Basil Wolverton, must be put in the top ranks of comic artists along with John Stanley and Carl Barks. And he must be considered an important artist.

Wolverton appeared regularly as a cartoonist in many books for many different companies between 1938 and 1954. He always worked as a free lancer, which was not always easy to do when one lived on the West Coast, like Wolverton, and worked for East Coast publishers. He is probably best remembered as a caricaturist because several of his many caricatures appeared in Life magazine in the '40s, particularly his winning entry in the Li'l Abner 'draw Lena the Hyena' contest. But he did most of his work for the comics. He did science fiction and fantasy stories, as well as working for 'funny books'. Like Carl Barks, he almost always did all the work on his strips, writing, drawing and lettering. Currently, he works mainly for the Plain Truth people, with occasional appearances in Mad.

Despite his large number of comic creations, Wolverton has said that his favorite, the one he would most like to be remembered for, is Powerhouse Pepper (This fact, and many others in this article, came from Bill Spicer's Graphic Story Magazine, special Wolverton issues #12 and 14 -- take a look at them if you've never seen any of Wolverton's work.) Powerhouse Pepper appeared in stories in several books during the 1940's, particularly in Timely's Joker Comics. He had one issue of his own book in 1943, but it wasn't until 1948 that fans persuaded editor Stan Lee to make Powerhouse Pepper a regular book. It had four more issues in this incarnation.

Powerhouse Pepper, as I've met him in issues number 2, 3 and 4 of Powerhouse Pepper comics, is a very unusual character. He is really something of a superhero; he apparently can't be killed or hurt, at least not by anything he encountered in any of his stories, and he is very strong, particularly his head (which is bald). The only character even vaguely similar to this is Segar's Popeye -- particularly in the fact that they are both fairly unattractive and don't go around wearing a funny suit to point out their superpowers. Also, they both have to work for a living, rather than coasting along on their super powers.

by
LES LEIGH
LUTTRELL



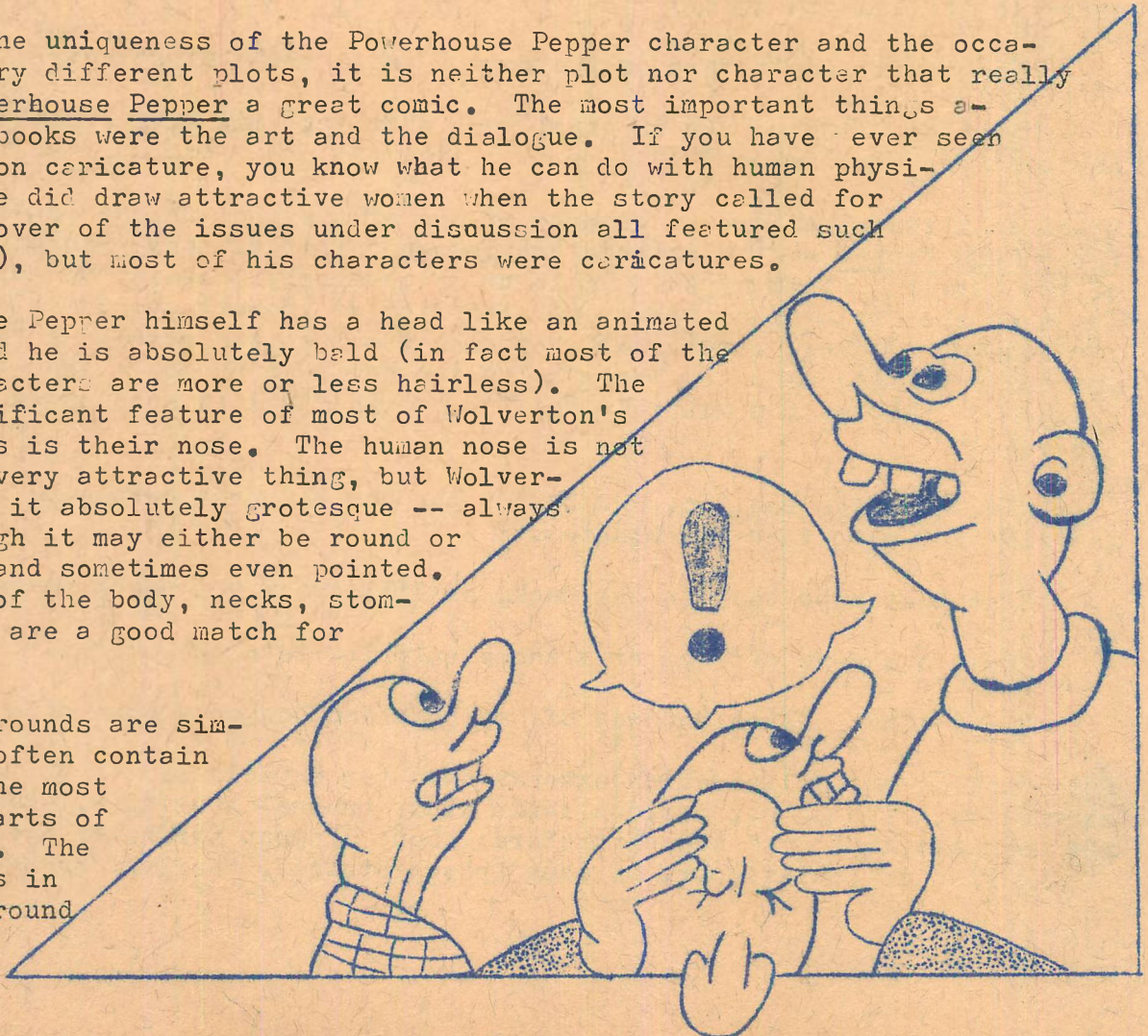
Powerhouse's adventures mainly concern him defeating the 'bad guys' in his 6 various jobs, such as sheriff, prize-fighter, race-car driver, or often just as an innocent bystander (few tough guys can resist trying to see if he is really as tough as they've heard -- and are always surprised -- something like the crooks who are surprised when bullets bounce off of Superman). Usually Pepper first lets the villain do his best to beat him up, shoot him and otherwise get rid of him; and then he does whatever is necessary to defeat him -- win the race or the fight, retrieve the stolen property, put him in jail, etc.

Some of the plots are a bit different though. In one of the strangest, Pepper is sentenced to the electric chair when a bullet fired by a bad guy, bounces off his head and kills a bystander. Fortunately, even 10,000 volts aren't enough to kill him. Pepper finds the real killer, after his time in the 'hot seat' and gets him to confess because the bad guy can't take being punched by the electrified Pepper. In another story, Pepper is knocked out with a jar of ether and dreams he is sailing with the Pilgrims (where his name is Salton Pepper). He is knocked into the water by the villain, but is rescued by a seaplane. However, when he remembers that planes haven't been invented yet, the plane disappears, dropping him on the American shore just before the Pilgrim villain lands. Powerhouse defeats Indians and Pilgrim, rescuing a Pilgrim maiden in the process. When she kisses in gratitude, Pepper says, "Say! You're kissing me! That means we'll have to get married!" Then he wakes up.

Despite the uniqueness of the Powerhouse Pepper character and the occasional very different plots, it is neither plot nor character that really makes Powerhouse Pepper a great comic. The most important things about the books were the art and the dialogue. If you have ever seen a Wolverton caricature, you know what he can do with human physiogamy. He did draw attractive women when the story called for it (the cover of the issues under discussion all featured such a drawing), but most of his characters were caricatures.

Powerhouse Pepper himself has a head like an animated bullet and he is absolutely bald (in fact most of the male characters are more or less hairless). The most significant feature of most of Wolverton's characters is their nose. The human nose is not really a very attractive thing, but Wolverton makes it absolutely grotesque -- always big, though it may either be round or drooping and sometimes even pointed. The rest of the body, necks, stomach, etc. are a good match for the face.

The backgrounds are simple, but often contain some of the most amusing parts of the story. The characters in the background



are often as amusingly and sometimes almost more imaginatively drawn than the main characters. For example; the audience at a prize fight in issue #2 consists of a front row of spectators whose noses rest on the canvas, making them look like Kilroy drawings (or the long-nosed God for some American Indians), two giraffe-necked people and a vast expanse of only the very tops of heads, looking like bubbles or cobblestones.

The background also often features amusing signs. Sometimes they take the form of advertisements, such as the subway sign on the cover of #4 which says; "For Foot Comfort, Don't Wear Shoes." More often, the signs are not disguised at all, but are simply slapped up on buildings and scattered throughout the background. Sometimes they are held up by little disembodied hands, especially the credits. These are usually in the form of Basil _____ Wolverton -- with the blank filled by a phrase which has some relation to the story; West-wit in a western story, Waterwings in a story about a diving exhibition, etc. The other signs generally make little jokes about the story, especially about the objects they are posted on. Examples: "Your choice of AC or DC (on the electric chair in the above mentioned story)

"Prisoners who are in for life will receive same by subscribing to it."
(on prison wall)

"Newcomers! Don't fail to visit California!" (on the North American shore in the Pilgrim story)

"Fighters: Don't mope on the rope." (on a prize fight cover picture)

"Special Itch powder in steel wool chowder. Six bits a bolt." (on a counter in a western bar)

These last two signs are an example of one of the most unique aspects of Powerhouse Pepper -- the internal rhymes and alliterations present in much of the writing. This type of dialogue is seemingly peculiar to Wolverton. It makes the dialogue as worthy of attention as the art -- and it often makes for amusing reading, especially when one gets into the spirit of the thing and tries to find passages where Wolverton keeps it up for a long time. Examples: "Now wait a minute! We'll get goin' just as soon as we gather up our gold!"

"Aw, stow the woe, Bo, and bestow the dough I just earned by staying in the ring for more than two minutes."

"Put that robe back in the hack, or I'll crack you smack on your back!"

"Now to square off and cram those culprits into the cooler!"

"Now! That bullet bounced off my bean and bonked a bozo behind me!"

This rhyming and alliteration extends even (or especially) to the names of characters. The names, besides their other unusual qualities, always reflect the main attributes of the characters: Doug Slugmug (prize fighter), Filch-finger Freddie (thief), Dr. Digdome (psychiatrist), Reargear McSneer (race-

car driver), Loot and Hoot Broot (outlaws) and Ash Splashdash (exhibition di-⁸ver).

All these elements combine to make Powerhouse Pepper a great comic, one well worth reading for itself. But it is also worth looking at because of Wolverton's influence on current 'underground' comic art. Wolverton has never worked for the underground books, but his influence is unmistakable there. Robert Crumb has admitted Wolverton's influence on him and it is easy to see -- Mr. Natural could be a Wolverton character, as could many of the other creatures who haunt the underground books (except that Wolverton characters hadn't discovered trucking). The exaggerated body features of the underground characters, particularly nose and popping eyeballs are very Wolver-tonish, as are the squared and simple backgrounds of the cities in the work of Crumb and other underground cartoonists.

One reading Powerhouse Pepper comics also gets the impression that Wolverton's type of humor is also of a very 'underground' sort. The attempt at meshing the humor of the art and the dialogue is sometimes found in today's underground books. Wolverton sometimes makes fun of establishment figures, such as police and judge (in the electric chair story) and psychiatrists, though Powerhouse is generally a law-abiding criminal-fighter. Also, Wolverton sometimes introduces into his stories the awareness that it is a comic. For example, in a story where Powerhouse is a race-car driver, Reargear McSneer says he looks like something out of a comic book (trying to hassle him), to which Pepper replies, "Oh, so you've seen me in the comic strips, eh?" In the same story, after his car is wrecked, Powerhouse Pepper asks, "Hey! You with the pen and ink! Would you please draw the landscape so it'll tilt toward the stadium?" Sure enough, the next panel is slanted and includes the sign: "Remember: Anything can happen in this comic book!" But most of all, the bizarre humor of Wolverton found in Powerhouse Pepper books is something one would hope to find in our underground comics. And he was doing it 20 years ago.



It won't be
too long be-
fore Dr. Wer-
tham gets
hold of this
zine. Then
you'll get yours,
Luttrell!

OF WORLDS BEYOND

reviewed by + Creath Thorne +

In 1947 Lloyd Arthur Eshbach edited for the small publishing house Fantasy Press a collection of seven short articles by prominent sf writers on the general topic of how to write science fiction. The writers were Doc Smith, John Campbell, Sprague de Camp, Robert Heinlein, Jack Williamson, A.E. Van Vogt and John Taine; the book was called OF WORLDS BEYOND. It was a small edition and was out of print for many years until Advent reissued it in 1964, using a photo-reproduction process that retained the type make-up of the original edition. The only additions are an index and a cover by Joni Stopa.

I don't remember seeing the book given much attention in fanzines in 1964. In a way, this is understandable; it's a slim, antiquarian relic and not of much value today to anyone wanting to sell to professional magazines. But as a musty breath of air from the past it's fascinating for what it reveals of the attitudes and values of its contributors -- the biggest names in sf in 1947.

Much of the emphasis of the book is on hard-nosed professionalism. It takes the view that the writer is producing a product to be sold; that this is his main goal; that his purpose is to produce his work quickly and efficiently, get the job done, and get his paycheck. Robert Heinlein gives five rules relating to this view and says that they're more important than any other type of advice one can give about writing. The rules are:

- "1. You must write.
- "2. You must finish what you write.
- "3. You must refrain from rewriting except to editorial order.
- "4. You must put it on the market.
- "5. You must keep it on the market until sold."

Heinlein himself seems to have wavered from the path a few times. The first 100 pages of Stranger in a Strange Land were written in the late 1940's, and the book was then put aside until the 1960s -- a clear violation of Rule #2. On the other hand, we have the apocryphal story of how one Heinlein story was bounced thirteen times before it was accepted, and throughout Heinlein in Dimension Alexei Panshin delights in speculating as to which story deserves the honor.

The rules seem straight forward enough, but it seems to me that the real sense of the term "professional" goes a bit deeper. In the 1960s Heinlein started writing what most of us would call unprofessional novels -- Stranger In a Strange Land, Earnham's Freehold, I Will Fear No Evil. Yet he still adhered to his five rules. Professionalism, it seems to me, is largely a matter of discipline -- of working hard at writing, of constantly trying to do the best one can, of trying to develop craft and technique. Heinlein's first two rules play an important part in the disciplining. If you want to be a good writer, it's something you have to work on every day. But you have to do real work -- work where you care about what you're doing. Heinlein's rambling novels of his late phase seem to be quickly tossed off, poorly planned, the constant digressions of an old man.

10

John Campbell in his article seconds Heinlein's third rule, saying, "Relatively few modern authors do successfully work their material over slowly." It seems to me that the syntax of that sentence could have been improved by even a hasty reworking. Campbell also shows great admiration for L. Ron Hubbard who, he reports, could type 3000-4000 words an hour. If we're considering the quality of a finished story this whole question seems irrelevant to me. I suppose we could divide writers up into the fast and the slow, the first-drafters and the revisors, the quick and the dead -- and not prove a thing. In the mainstream of literature today we have Joyce Carol Oates, who can type 40 pages a day, and any number of authors who labor over one or two stories a year. Alexei Panshin and Joanna Russ, who both write considerably better than L. Ron Hubbard ever did, say they write painstakingly slowly. But so what? Of course, this question is important to the individual writer as he forms his own way of writing, but it can hardly be taken beyond this personal state.

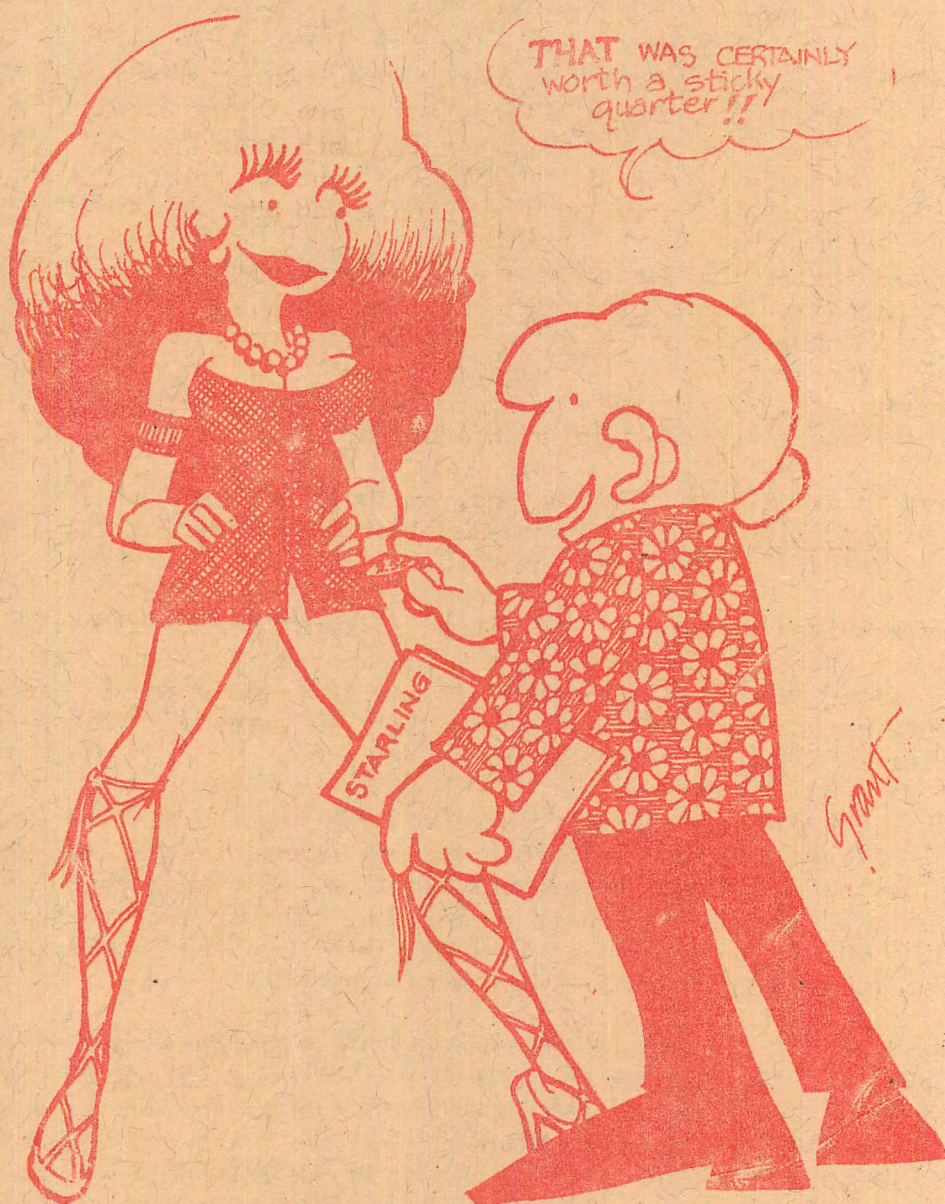
The fourth and fifth rules about marketing are necessarily very general because situations change so much. To them we might add a sixth rule which would be based on the axiom that well-written intelligent work tends to make more money in the long run both because of the general enhancing of the author's reputation and the actual number of times it's chosen to be reprinted.

When it comes to rules that deal with the actual writing of a story we enter more dubious ground. A E Van Vogt advises the writer to think of his story as a collection of 800 word scenes and to have each scene deal with a purpose which is first stated and then accomplished or not accomplished. I suppose there is a grain of truth here in that all short stories are made up of one or more scenes, but to quantify things more than that is putting a straightjacket on the story. This idea of setting up a mechanical device for the churning out of stories appears elsewhere in the book. It overtly appears in John Taine's article and subtly infuses the other articles, such as Campbell's, which put such a stress on the L. Ron Hubbard type of professionalism.

I found Jack Williamson's article to contain straight-forward suggestions that, for the most part, I could accept: in any one sf story, the reader should be asked to assume only one basic premise; you should make the reader want to know before you tell him; plot should be a logical device for proving character; villains are easier to characterize than heros -- therefore, make your hero part villain. But anyone not able to intuitively realize such things will surely never write very good stories.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 27





WORDS FROM READERS

¹³
Creath Thorne, 1022 College Ave., Columbia,
Missouri 65201

In Starling #20 Hank Davis complains about my story of being called a Communist (because of my long hair) by a John Birch member. "Was he really a Bircher, or did Creath just throw in a scare word?" says Davis. The answer is: he really was and is. He publishes his own fanzine for the right-wing world which he fills with articles that typically start out: "Kent State and Cambodia. Things are getting better." That's an actual quote.

So much for the answer, but Davis apparently didn't see any need for waiting for it. "Anyone who is seen as a stereotype gets no sympathy from me when he stereotypes other people," he says from his pedestal. It seems to me the person most guilty of stereotyping here is Hank Davis himself.

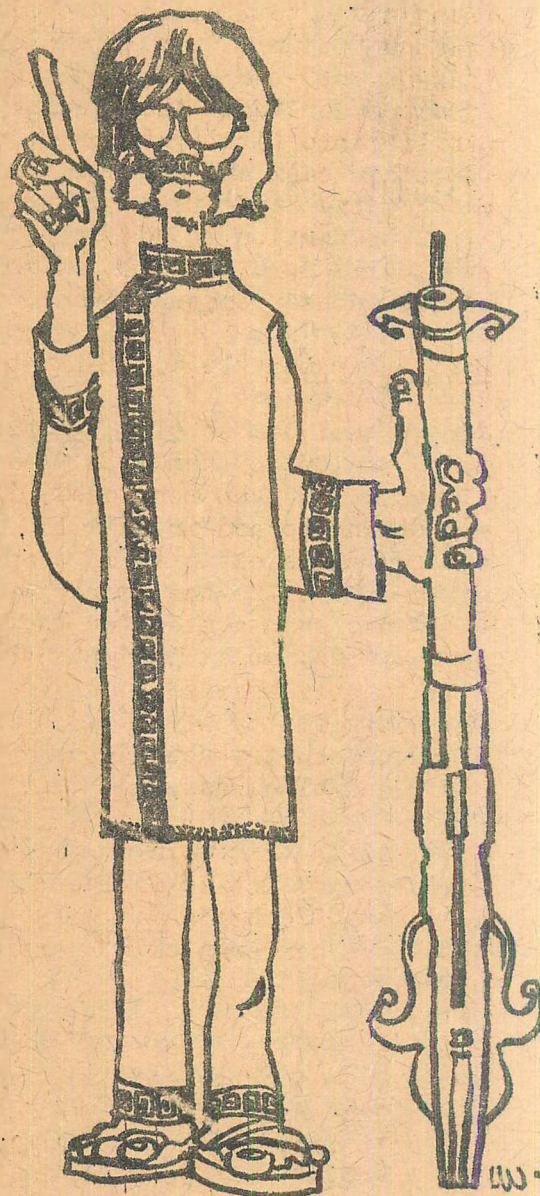
Paul Williams, Galley Bay, Refuge Cave, British Columbia, Canada

Steve Stiles' cover is a masterpiece, reminding me of past Stiles favorites. ("Don't anybody move; you're all under arrest" from Null-F and "He's White, we serve him" from Dafoe, to name two.) Steve Stiles is the world's best Steve Stiles says me, and I love and admire him for it.

Hank Davis' comments on the Marx Brother's "Anti-war Statements" and Will Rogers are very well taken -- "shooting down everything in the sky is precisely the function of humor, shooting at a particular target is only funny/necessary when that target is "everything in the sky."

Harry Warner, 423 Summit Ave., Hagerstown, Maryland,
21740

It's wonderful to read a column in Starling about music and discover myself well acquainted with an occasional composition mentioned in it. I fell into the habit of tuning in the all-night show on WWVA, Wheeling, probably the most prominent country music radio station in the East last winter when I was having sleeping trouble because of operation worries. In fact, I found myself staying awake every night until they played "Worried Man Blues," which somehow filled an emotional need. If you've never heard of it, that's the tune that the juke-box in The Neon Ceiling kept playing no matter what the customer wanted. Ever since, I've



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TO BE USED, OF COURSE,
IN THE INTERESTS OF
PEACE..."

been feeling increased interest in country music and have been listening to WYVA in a less stenuous way. ¹⁴

Joe Sanders shares some of my grave misgivings about the fanfare and weight that is being given to Clarion. Nobody knows if Clarion will produce good new writers of science fiction. But it's clear already that some people are convinced of one of two things: that the most promising potential writers in the nation somehow end up at the sessions, or that the faculty has the surefire secret of turning persons of fair promise into first-rate creators. I think educators should be as willing as I am to remain calm and unconvinced until a few years pass and some judgments can be made on what the students do after they get out of this artificial situation and turn out a lot of fiction in the untutored, uncriticized surroundings that all writers must eventually type in. An anthology might be valuable for its egoboo and prestige value but it seems premature from every other standpoint.

David Emerson, 417 W. 118th St., #63, New York, NY 10027

Jim Turner: I'm so glad to see The Dillards getting some recognition. Jerry Kaufman turned me on to them with Wheatstraw Suite, which has become one of my favorite albums. You even mentioned Dillard & Clarke and Gene Clark's solo albums -- leaving me nothing to add in this loc but "Yeah, right, I like 'em too!" BUT -- you left out two prime examples of country-rock: first of all, with seniority in the field, would have to be the Everly Brothers. They were doing country-rock long before there was even a need for the word; they were also one of the bulwarks of rock-n-roll in the '50s, on a par with Elvis. Their stuff in recent years has not changed in spirit, only adapted in style so that it wouldn't be a nostalgia trip. Secondly, is The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band. Their Uncle Charlie and His Dog Teddy is a magnificent blend of country rock, straight melodious Who-type hard rock, Appalachian hillbilly music and bluegrass.

Somewhat in this vein is the reverse phenomenon of rock-country, where a country performer or act is influenced by the rock field. What comes to my mind immediately is Flatt & Scrugg's Nashville Airplane, wherein the venerable bluegrass duo play their own banjer-pickin' version of selected popular rock songs. The effect is indescribable.

I beg to differ with Will Straw's prediction of the death of middle-class radio. Have you listened to an easy listening station recently? They play James Taylor, Carly Simon, and Paul McCartney along with their Andy Williams and Andre Kostelanetz. It won't die, it'll just assimilate the least offensive aspects of rock, and become the haven of soft-rock in the '70's.

One last question: what is a Great Speckled Nird?

+Why, only Starling's most popular typo ever --HL

Greg Shaw, 64 Taylor Dr., Fairfax, CA 94930

Jim Turner's column starts off on the wrong foot by putting down "American Bandstand" and goes on to give a completely inadequate and capricious listing of what he calls "country rock" albums. Hank Williams? A great album, no doubt about it, but putting him in here just destroys the meaning of labels. I agree his influence is important though. But even more offensive is the presence of fuggheaded self-important "folk-singers" like Paul Siebel and David Rea. That aint country rock, man. I think the problem is that he didn't attempt to define country rock before making the list,

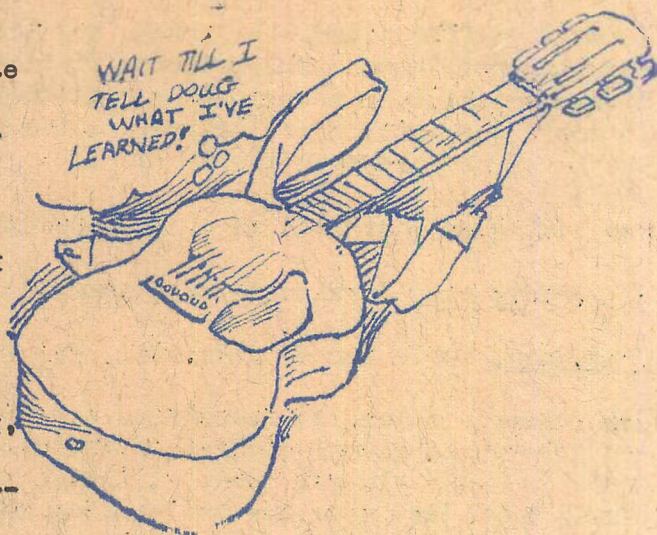
15
because if he had, almost any set of criteria would have excluded many of these albums and provided a more comprehensive survey. What does constitute country rock? A steel guitar? Only the dead, Byrds and Burritos (& Ronstadt I think) have that, on this list. But so do a lot of others that weren't included, many of whom (like Commander Cody) use it to much better effect. But from Jim's derisive comments about hard-core C&W I'd think he wouldn't like the steel guitar sound. This suspicion is borne out by his inclusion of all those foksingers mentioned earlier (hell, Jaan Baez did a country album too, he should've put that in) and seems to indicate that his tastes runs toward the watered down. I hate to see this in critics, even amateur ones, because it tends to downgrade musical standards in the long run. Gee, that sounds rather harsh. I guess I should add I really liked his survey of "Americana."

Alexei Panshin, Open Gate Farm, Star Route, Perkasio, Pa. 18944

Yes, yes to Jim Turner's column. I'm glad that there is somebody besides me who really gets turned on by country-rock. Country-country doesn't do anything for me, but country-rock combines country musicianship and rock freedom to think in something other than cliches. I'd add some records that Jim didn't mention. The first country rock group that I know of -- must have been about 1967 -- was Hearts and Flowers, which made two records and then disappeared. Bernie Leadon, who was in the group, was later in the Dillard & Clarke Expedition and is now (or have they broken up) in the Burritos. The first record in particular, Now is the Time for Hearts and Flowers (Capitol) was truly fine. It featured great rock autoharp. How could Jim omitted (unless he hates Baez) the three Nashville Baez albums, David's Album, Any Day Now, and One Day at a Time, where the backing was led by Grady Martin, and is just exquisite. Country-rock seems to have ties to folk and bluegrass that country-country (did you see the Country Music Awards tv show) has largely chucked.

Will Straw, 303 Niagara Blvd., Fort Erie,
Ont., Canada

I'll agree with Greg Show that Starling is an indispensable fanzine, but I don't think at all that it's one of a few that way, or that the fanzine field is "dull beyond belief." Actually, I've been quite surprised at Greg's attitude towards recent fmz, because he seems to be condemning the fanzine field for a lack of any real excitement, which probably comes from there no longer being a focal point to bring fandom together and make it look like one big mass surging ahead. I think we're getting to the stage these days where individual fans in different areas are just putting out quiet, decent fanzines filled largely with their own writing, with no great Controversies or Issues. Definite fan centers are emerging again -- Columbia for instance, with Starling, Mota and Godfrey Daniel, and the whole New York fannish crowd.



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Worcester, Mass., 01610

16

I find it hard to comment intelligently on Starling because I'm not a popular culture fan. My orientation is more towards appreciating what is good. I realized this at the beginning of this year, when a group of friends and I came back to my room after having had a Shakespeare reading, and were sitting down and drinking spice tea. From next door came the sound of a mediocre rock album being played, and we drowned it out by playing Bach, the Goldberg Variations. It was at this point that I realized that our tastes were somewhat esoteric.

++I don't make it a practice to print stupid letters, but I thought the above was amusing. My, aren't you superior, Jacob. It isn't just everyone who likes Bach and Shakespeare; now -- what was the word? -- esoteric! You should have the historic perspective to realize that Bach and Shakespeare were both "popular culture" to their contemporaries; Shakespeare in particular was considered by many to be rather common and vulgar. --HL



Darrell Schweitzer, 113 Deepdale Rd., Strafford, PA. 19087

I must protest the way you paraphrased my comments on Turner's HPL parody in the letter column of Starling 20. It makes me come off like a reckless braggart, which is definitely not the case. As is known in the fannish circles in which I mostly circulate, humility is one of my most outstanding virtues; I don't want to blow it now. What was intended, and would have been gotten across to the readers if you'd run the letter, was that I don't think Jim used the right aspects of Lovecraft's writing when writing his parody. Racism isn't funny even if blown ridiculously out of proportion. When Jim got off on Lovecraft's attitudes towards sex he produced that brilliant rape scene, but other than that he didn't do very well. In my own parody, I used HPL's verbosity, his elderitch evial monstrosities, his absurd over-foreshadowings and his quaint obsessions with families becoming "degenerate" which is somewhat different from intolerance and bigotry.

As for whether I utilised these elements properly and produced a superior parody is up to the readers to decide.

Lane Lambert, Rt. 2, Bruce Rd., Boaz, AL35957

My favorite characters in the Lulu comics were the Little Men from Mars. I never really liked Lulu or Tubby. Tubby was especially weak and innocuous. The art wasn't great, either. (I'm not usually this savage -- but at the time I encountered Little Lulu I was into others which boasted art of higher quality and style.)

+No doubt you were into comics with different art styles, but I doubt very much if it was higher quality, since the best of the Little Lulu artwork was some of the most perfect cartooning ever to appear in any comic book. The style was very simple and stylized -- almost to the point where the drawings were groups of graphic "codes" rather than representational art. Every line counted -- the body position of the characters, the numerous background details, the incredible

17 variety of facial expressions.-- I suppose it is a matter of personal tastes, but in my opinion there are very few other comic book artists with the same amount of control and imagination in their work.--HL

Dan Goodman, c/o Digby, 330 S. Berendo, LA, CA 90020

Lesleigh, are you implying that Georgette Heyer's mysteries are (although inferior to her historical stuff) superior to other mysteries? As a member of the Dimitrios Makropoulos Society (names after the man whose gallant battles against Communism are chronicled in A Coffin for Dimitrios) I beg to differ. Among currently active writers, I would place Eric Amber first. John D. Macdonald a poor (by comparison) second.

++No, they're not better than all other mysteries, just most mysteries with a prerequisite love interest. --LML

Alice Sanvito, Apt. 304, 1917 McPherson, St. Louis, Missouri 63108

Steve Stiles' cover brought to mind something that I've spent many idle hours wondering about. . .the whole nostalgia over the fifties bit, particularly over fifties rock and roll. Friends of mine who are in their middle to late twenties who lived through that era have repeatedly told me, "You just had to be there." I can pretty well understand that. What I don't understand is the way hordes of nineteen-year-olds, who would have been about eight years old when the fifties ended, can get nostalgic over a period they never lived through. I can't understand how they can get nostalgic over the Fifties in particular. The whole greaser, malt shop, high school madness trip. Kids who just got finished with complaining over their own high school days, who couldn't stand football players who got drunk every weekend & souped up their cars, who couldn't stand the high school social scene, suddenly getting misty over the fifties and beer and Chuck Berry drivin' around in his automobile. Or going to the hop. Ghod, a year and a half ago no one would be caught dead at a high school dance and I still don't think anyone goes to them.

I don't know. . .Fifties music is fun to lose your head & dance to, but I thought people of the Sixties were supposed to be such cool heads. Other than being crazy, fifties music is (dare I say it?) boring. If one more person tells me that the lyrics to such crap as "You Ain't Nothin But a Hound Dog" is sheer poetry, I'll puke. Admit it, "Teen Angel" is pure schmaltz, and if you're going to be so sophisticated as to reject Love Story and Julie Andrews, how can you overlook "Teen Angel"?

Maybe the children who crusaded for McCarthy, who expanded their minds and tried to convince their parents that they were so much more mature than their parents had been at their age, have gotten tired of being Responsible and have decided to return to the original middle-class American social scene.

Mike Glicksohn, 32 Maynard Ave., Apt. 205, Toronto, 156 Ont., Canada

As for Terry Hughes, what can one say but "ARRGGHHH!!!!" He misquotes my all-time favorite comedian not a mere once, or even twice, but a grand total of twenty-four times! As any Fields aficionado would tell you, the LaFong quote involves the use of the word "small" not "little."

WE ALSO HEARD FROM: Mike Deckinger, Alan Cohn, Loren MacGregor, Dave Hulvey, Aljo Svoboda, E. B. Lindsay, Jonh Ingham, Buck Coulson, Eddy C. Bertin, and Donald G. Keller.

KICK IN THE JAMS

Too much, far out and all that shit, man. Columbia, not content with taking over fandom is about to do the same for mindbending, crotchbiting, heavy metal boogie rock. Don't read any farther till you've toked up a big fat one, put some Zep on the turntable and got your Boone's Farm Strawberry Hill out of the fridge. After that you can do this column up right.

MOSFA had been having one of its usual Tuesday night meetings, everybody fucking up like usual. Lesleigh had baked the blasting caps into cookies because she was strung out on Novocain and Darvon, thinking they were just great big chocolate drops with stars dropping off them. Terry was looking for his feet, Rick and Doug were sharing the last cat and Hank was mopping the Mazola up off the kitchen floor. Me, I was on the couch with some mellow Stillbrook Bourbon and kind of floating.

Somebody had had the radio on but nobody'd been much with that trip till all of a sudden it just ripped our minds out. Black Sabbath. Too much. We just kind of laid around and let it fuck our minds, loud and wild and grinding and savage and sexy and hard. It was better than a hundred jackhammers.

When it was over, Hank said dreamily, "You know that was so heavy I bet we could do just as well. God, think of being in a band, playing farout shit like that. I'd be as happy as Ali McGraw with leukemia."

And so, brothers and sisters, a band was born. We kicked the idea around for a while, trying to think of a name. I came up with Electric Anthrax, but John Cale stole the idea and came out with an album called Church of Anthrax. I think it was Lesleigh who pointed out that we weren't going to be just any heavy band, we were going to be a fannish heavy band and our name ought to have some stfnal orientation so we'd always be in touch with our roots. I remembered then that some clown had been boosting LOVE IS FOREVER -- BUT WE ARE FOR TO-NIGHT for a Nebula and so I suggested that as a name. Everybody thought it was too long and Hank found a compromise: Robert Moore Williams and Robert Moore Williams we are and shall remain.

So here's our lineup: On lead guitar; Jim Turner, wearing his famous kelly green undershorts, beard braided and tied with pink ribbons, smoking a Wolff Brothers Stogie (the cigar that won the west), sporting a psychedelic hardhat, also does vocals and plays electric chainsaw with wahwah pedal. Bass; Hank Luttrell in a transparent nylon bodystocking, red velvet heart over his crotch, eyeballs painted bloodred (tatooed on his forehead in San Francisco art nouveau are the words "Ted Nugent really gets it on"). Drums; Terry Hughes in top hat, Sigma Nu sweatshirt, leopardskin bikini pants, blacknet stockings and combat boots, uses microphones for drumsticks, both he and Hank sing. Chris Couch

JIM TURNER'S
MOST OFFENSIVE
COLUMN YET

19
playing steam callopie and extra percussion (blacksnake whip, ball peen hammer on raw meat, etc.) and vocals in an academic cap and gown and necklace of pigs feet. Lesleigh Luttrell on tapdancing and lead vocals, wearing blackface, white collar and cuffs, tap shoes -- and nothing else. I know that's a lot of vocalists for one band but we can all sing just as well as Lesleigh can and none of us wanted our talents to go to waste. I've also been doubling as lyricist.

I'm sure we'll be recording on Capitol anytime now. Over last weekend I got busy and wrote a couple of songs for our first 45. The "A" side is called "Doctor of Funk" and goes like this right here.

(Begins with Chris beating rythmatically with a rubber mallet on two hams and a gourd full of catshit -- Sung in best Jimi Turner vocal style)

Oh, baby, baby, baby (repeat twice)

When you're down (repeat twice)

I SAY

When you're down

I'll be along

Cause I'm your Doctor of Funk

Your Doctor of Funk

Your funky, funky Doctor of Funk.

Oh, baby, baby, baby (repeat twice)

When you're up (repeat twice)

I SAY

When you're up

I'll bring you down

Cause I'm your Doctor of Funk

Your Doctor of Funk

Your funky, funky, funky Doctor of Funk

Babe, you're goin' down (repeat twice)

Down, down, down (repeat twice)

I SAY

Down, down, down

And I'll never let you up

Cause I'm your Doctor of Funk

Your Doctor of Funk

Your funky, funky, funky Doctor of Funk

You're goin' downdown (Farout speedy drumming for rest of song)

And I'll nevernevernever

Let you up

And this is your deathknell babe

From your Doctor of Funk

Doctor of Funk

Your funky, funky, funky Doctor of funk

(Fades out into manical laughter merging into langorous erotic sighs)
Too much.

(Background vocals come in here -- Edwin Hawkins Singers? -- Mormon Tabernacle Choir? -- anyway, word "down" repeated over and over to fadeout)

I think we should make our feeling for the Revolution obvious firstoff so here's the "B" half. It's really funky too and it's called "Get it together, Children, for Freedom." Lesleigh sings.

Amerika, Amerika I donno 'bout you
 You sell your airplanes to a one-eyed Jew
 You shoot all our brothers
 You jail all their mothers
 You send Marines into the Indian's halls
 Amerika, Amerika, gonna cut off your balls

Amerika, Amerika, I sure hate you
 Ain't there nothin' you don't want to screw
 You bring us all down
 And you talk like a clown
 Amerika, Amerika, you're a big yellow zit
 Red on the end and puffed up with shit

Amerika, Amerika, you vote for Dick Nix
 But you'll soon find he's a third-cut fix
 So you'll shoot some dink babies
 And then you'll shoot up some rabies
 And then you'll go out and cut down our grass
 Amerika, Amerika, please kiss my ass

Amerika, Amerika, you're day'll come soon
 Gø on and sing about your moon and your June
 We'll stomp on your feets
 And fuck in your streets
 Amerika, Amerika, is this what you dig
 To be freedom's bacon, you present-day pig
 SEIG HEIL!

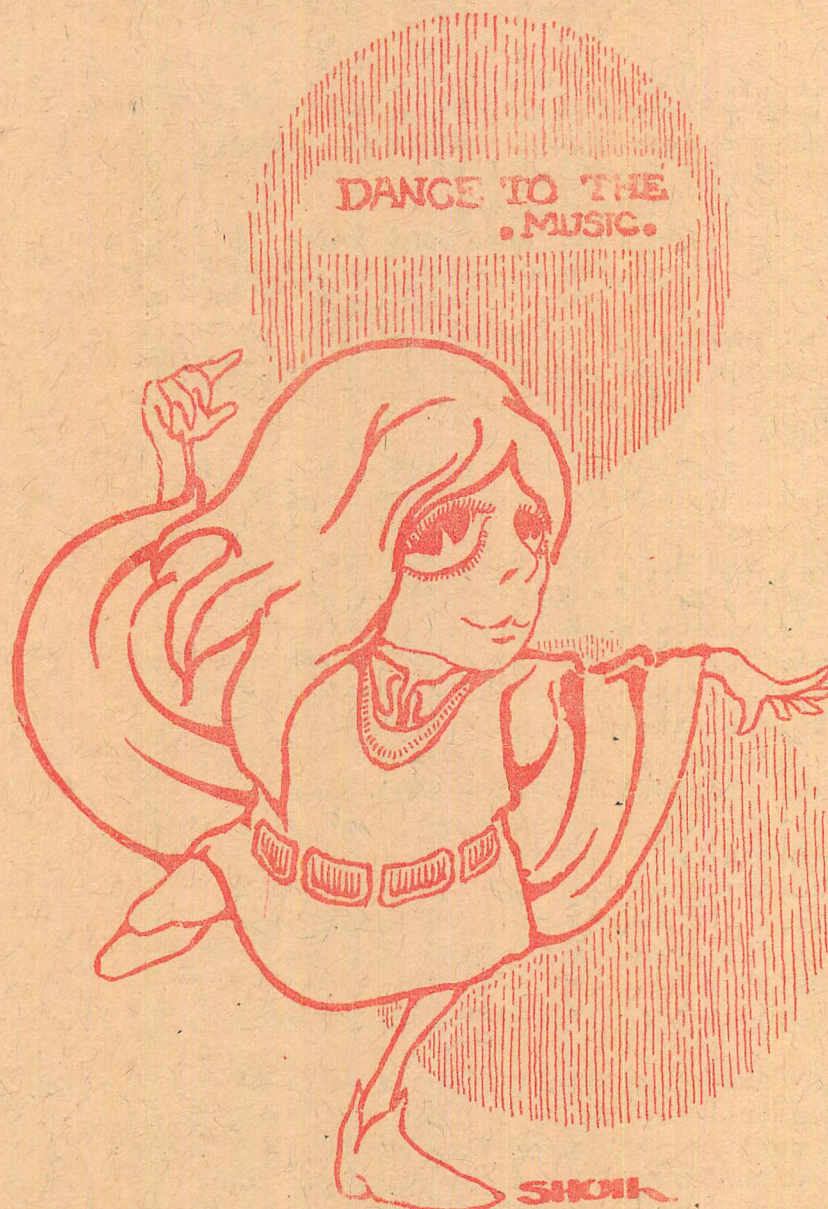
(All songs copyright 1972 by Slit Eyeball-Big Bloody Rag Music)

We want to record our first album live at the big Celebration of Smack in the East St. Louis Municipal Park in the spring, after our premiere in the Ozarkon. Among our other songs, we'll have "Hey Joe" (with Terry's dynamite 45 minute drum solo), and other songs by yr. obdt. svnt. such as "Rock and Roll Hand Job," "Freedom #4," "Speed Thrills," "I'm Your Dictator," "I'd Like to Buy the World Some Coke," and my own arrangement of Mahler's 1st Symphony that'll blow everybody's skull off.

The album's cover will feature me with my electric chainsaw attacking an amplifier which is gushing copious amounts of blood and gore over me and my cat Blackjack (sometimes we wire him for sound and stick him in the base drum) who's lapping it eagerly. A dozen people in blackface will be tapdancing around me with canes and straw hats. At the bottom the blood will be flowing into patterns which spell out the title: BUY THIS RECORD FOR THE COVER. I can't wait for the review in CREAM.

In case you don't know about CREAM, it's a heavy magazine, really swings and is groovy and it likes all us big bands like Grand Funk and Black Sabbath and Sir Lord Baltimore and MC5. I know there's just going to love us cause they're a bunch of heavy old mindless rockers so I wrote a song for them too. Hank will sing it and digitdigitdigit; it's called "HEY, Critic, I Wanna See You Shake Your Ass."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24



+ Juanita Coulson +

Fans accosted me at various cons throughout last year to tell me how they were enjoying this column. This was both flattering and unnerving; it's nice to know one's work is being read and enjoyed -- but it gives me a self-picture of this doddering old woman in her shawl and wheelchair, pontificating on the good old days of rock to the assembled youngsters clustered about her shriveled feet. I'm really not that old, but I'm glad someone out there's reading; if range and variety of the commenters is any indication, I can assure Hank and Lesleigh that STARLING is being very widely read. The comments also warned me to get busy and write so more. Herewith.

Several months ago Bruce and I watched a tv presentation of some rock. I think it was on ABC (appropriately enough -- why appropriately I will explain later), and the title was something like ROCKIN' IN CENTRAL PARK. Now I may have two programs confused here, but I think this one featured among others Sister Kate Taylor, Carly Simon, Ike & Tina Turner and the Beach Boys.

The last I'm sure of, because it's The Beach Boys I wanted to talk about, mainly. Carly Simon has a lovely voice and sexy figger, but I'm getting just a little bored with "That's The Way I've Always Heard It Should Be". And I assume readers know Ike & Tina -- live, not on record -- are really favorites of mine; Tina did "Proud Mary" complete with fringes and grinds in a performance that would never have been seen on tv fifteen years ago. For that matter, I'm not sure it could have been seen on the stage in any of the touring rock shows of that era; even Presley and sax players balling their instruments in front of the footlights were never so explicit and raw-sex as Tina gets. Last and definitely least, Sister Kate Taylor struck me as a flat, in more ways than one, nothing.

The Beach Boys did an assortment of their hits of the past, and I was immediately struck by the stark -- and approvable -- contrast between their performance and that of Bill Haley, mentioned here previously. Both outfits date back a bit, and both are now touring again and doing their old stuff. But the difference is astronomical. Haley is a tired old computer, spewing out "See Ya Later, Alligator", etc., and stepping in prescribed patterns -- as if trying to remember exactly how he used to do it (I wonder if there are little chalked-marked footprints, a la Arthur Murray, on the stage floor so he and the band will remember where to step?). Haley's even gone to some trouble to resurrect the exact look of the era, complete with super spit curl.

On the other hand, the Beach Boys have junked the whole image they used to have and come on very shaggy and ripe and now and entertaining. Complete with a faintly whimsical response to requests for their old stuff in a "you don't want to hear that old moldy garbage, do you?", and then going ahead and doing something like "409" with plenty of that same old push -- as though they hadn't aged but dragged their stuff forward with them into the 70s.

I was reminiscing and approving while watching them and singing along, much to Bruce's bemusement. After all, he's fourteen and hadn't encountered the Beach Boys (out to lunch while I was playing my records) and wondered what I had in common with this bunch of freaks. I dug out an old album and showed him the shorn and shaven and ho-daddied Beach Boys and compared with what was on the screen, pointing out this one there and that one here. I'm not sure the kid believes, even yet, that the transformation actually took place.

The Beach Boys were a bit of a phenomenon even back when. I liked their sound early on, to the confusion of some of the bunch I was running with. "Who cares about surfing songs out here in the Midwest?" My arguments that they should listen to the harmonies and the fun didn't get much of anywhere. There were other surfing groups singing -- copying -- when The Beach Boys started, but none of them lasted, to my knowledge. And certainly none had that particular sound.

It was a sound that took a long time to soak in, but finally did, even, mira-
bile dictu, on the adults of the era. Some time ago Ted White reminisced in print about an event a bunch of us of that time period remembered fondly, and I'd like to go over it again here. There was, for maybe two tv seasons, a program on ABC called SHINDIG. It was imitated, too, and for a while there rock lovers had a couple of prime time sessions plus BANDSTAND to watch. Dear dead days. SHINDIG had some of the elements of the old HIT PARADE; there were regulars in charge of doing weekly donkey work in the song dept. -- one being

23
Bobby Sherman, who was at least impressive for his ability to adapt from week to week, and making one forgive his present teenybopper-idol image, just a trifle; there were also bunches of the most enthusiastic dancers seen for some time to come, the Shindig Girls. Even adults who couldn't stand r&r enjoyed watching the girls, probably half expecting one of them would have a heart attack on camera.

And then weekly a series of guest staracts paraded through, getting their cracks and chances to lip synch or, part of the time, perform live their current hits. It was an eyeopener into the vagaries of the business; which big names were professional enough to perform right there in front of god and everybody without the myriad aids of ampex and engineering and full recording studio and echo chambers and whatnot. (As a bellowing who has had to project into a forty-foot ceiling composed of foam rubber, I sympathize with audio problems; but presumably these people had good mikes and amps, and still some of them couldn't hack it.)

The Beach Boys didn't lip synch, and they didn't limit themselves to their "hits". In fact, for one Christmas program, they rattled a lot of cages by doing a capella "Adeste Fideles". I didn't think anything much about it at the time, but for the next few weeks stunned commentary was appearing in newspaper tv columns -- from non-rock-loving adults -- remarking with admiration and amazement in the vein of: "By Humphrey Gadsfrays, them kids can bigod sing!"

Soo-prize.

I suppose it was ever thus. A certain type of mentality -- and it isn't always an old fogey of an adult -- has made up its mind on what is good and bad in any field, music, art, writing, etc., and doesn't want to be confused with facts. Now and then -- rarely -- by some accident (like having the tv on in the same room while daddykins is reading the sports page) the ossified mind is actually exposed to some facet that cracks the facade. Forcible conversion. Rubbing nose in it. Doesn't work very often, but it's nice to see when it does happen, even if the resultant comment is grudging.

Another thing that impressed me about the new and shaggy Beach Boys was the continuing professionalism. I mean, they've adapted, but they've been around. It doesn't show in any static, set in concrete performance, because they were reacting to the audience, not parroting their old records, ala Haley. But there was none of this just-thrown-it-together attitude that -- in my humble opinion -- a few too many of the younger performers exhibit. It became pretty evident, watching this night in Central Park, that several or all of the outfit had colds. The tone wasn't quite true all the time, and occasionally the eyes would look rheumy; and while soloing Denny had to turn his head from the mike and cough. Which might indicate a contrast of some sort right there -- I've watched a few of the newer groups that would have considered it some sort of fillip to cough into the mike and force their hacking decibels onto the panting audience (maybe their feelings toward the crowd have been rotted by association with too many stupid teenies?)

But the ravages of the flu or not, they gave a good show, and I don't think the call for encores was simply stimulated by young nostalgia-seeking after these relics from the golden days of rock and roll. The crowd call lacked

the faunching-for-the-apes-to-cavort quality that I've seen similarly ²⁴dricked at Haley. Maybe I'm reading it wrong, but the audience seemed to be impressed and enjoying.

I know, maybe they were so zonked out it could have been Betty Boop on stage and they would have screamed for more.

But as a doddering old crock myself, I found it vastly pleasurable to see contemporaries of mine up there still able to give and get jollies in the field of rock. Maybe I'm not such a fossil as I thought.

Maybe music really can save your mortal soul, after all.

But I kinda wish they'd been able to ressurect the Shindig Dancers as well; a playbill featuring them and Tina & the Ikettes would really have made my evening.

* * *

KICK IN THE JAMS

continued from page 20:

Hey, Critic, you're no longer fifteen
You get real nookie and you're s in's real clean
But that's not where it's at
You need more than that
You got to get young
You got to shake ass
You got to drink beer
'N go roll a queer
So I'm poundin' your brain with my dynamite ax an'
If you'll shake your ass
Maybe. . .then. . .you'll get your pimples back
SHAKE IT
SHAKE IT
SHAKE IT
(fadeout)

After each of us makes a million we're going to retire to Woodstock and write a rock opera based on LOVE IS FOREVER -- BUT WE ARE FOR TONIGHT. After that, we'll probably split up and make lousy solo albums. But until then you can expect all kinds of good music out of us.

With MALICE TOWARD ALL

+ Joe Sanders +

This column will primarily be an extension of some things I said last time.

First of all, here's a postscript to my comments on CLARION, which got squeezed off the end of last issue's column:

After I'd written this column, a friend loaned me Terry Carr's UNIVERSE #1 (Ace, 95¢). I was especially interested in stories by Clarion alumni. Effinger, for one, still shows the effects of the Twilight Zone Syndrome: the most obvious possible point conveyed in the least subtle possible manner; but his story in UNIVERSE is much more successful than any of his pieces in CLARION. The point is somewhat less simple-minded and the story is somewhat more restrained. Generally, comparing these stories to those in CLARION by the same writers I was fairly impressed.

I'd also like to modify and amplify my remarks about stf in the colleges. Despite how it sounded, I don't despise all freshman composition texts, and I don't hate everyone in the Modern Language Association as a matter of principle. My mood, these days, is pretty closely connected with my progress toward the Ph. D. and with my estimate of the chances of getting a job for next year. At the moment, my dissertation has just been accepted by two of the four members of my Ph. D. committee, and I've had some vaguely hopeful interviews at the MLA annual convention. Whatever the strength of my opinions, I'd express them more gently today.

As a matter of fact, my opinions are based on a bit more experience now. While at the MLA convention, I attended the seminar on science fiction. I hadn't made it to the science fiction seminar at either of the other MLA conventions I'd attended (too busy, job hunting or working at the Bobbs-Merrill booth) and I wasn't even familiar with EXTRAPOLATION, the critical journal that grew out of the MLA seminars (too broke to subscribe). So I didn't know what to expect, but I went to the seminar with interest and enthusiasm. I came out with some positive and much negative feeling. I'd like to explain why -- it does, eventually connect with the role of stf in the colleges.

My positive feelings, first of all, were for the individual people at the meeting. The people I had a chance to talk with were interesting and friendly. In particular, I enjoyed meeting John Pfeiffer, who's just published an introductory bibliography of stf, and Glen Sadler, who's in charge of next year's seminar on Mervyn Peake. And Tom Clareson, editor of EXTRAPOLATION, seemed very pleasant, what little I saw of him.

It wasn't the individuals but the seminar that left me with negative feelings. "Seminar" is the wrong word, actually, since Clareson immediately announced that we'd hear two papers read. Which we did. Ivor Rogers' essay on stf movie criticism evidently had been written for publication rather than oral delivery, with the result that he had to skip large sections of supporting evidence to keep within his time limit. He always informed his audience of that fact, but

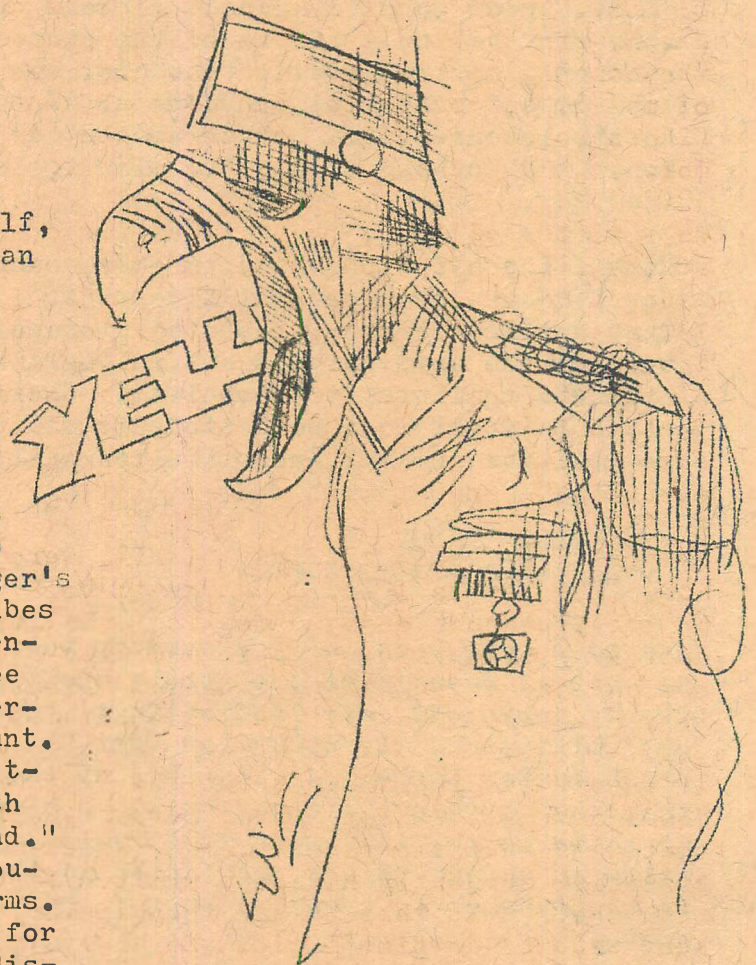
somehow the nixonish statement that "I have all the facts, but I can't give them to you" does not make everything perfectly clear. The other paper, by Patrick Hogan, on the role of stf in the classroom, was better suited for the occasion and formed the basis for what little discussion was permitted later. Hogan had two points to make. First of all, commenting on the recent growth in numbers of college courses in science fiction, he suggested that this might actually lead to the further ghettoization of stf and suggested that stf should be taught as part of other classes -- PAST MASTER to accompany Moore's UTOPIA, for example. Secondly, Hogan worried that putting stf in a classroom situation might kill the enthusiasm that originally led students to sign up for a stf class. He suggested that the best service for stf might be not to teach it in a special class at all. And I thought -- conscious of how little time was left to talk about what we'd heard, or whatever we'd wanted to talk about anyway; looking at the straight rows of chairs, facing a table in the front of the room from which Inspiration was supposed to flow; feeling the familiar student urge to start doodling in the margin of my program -- that he could be right, he could be right. . .

Someone else commented that, by that standard, no course in Charles Dickens should be taught, since it might lessen students' enthusiasm for Dickens. True, but the discussion then rambled to specific problems of teaching. I think the point deserves more discussion. It's obvious that many classes do kill students' enthusiasm, without giving them any more in return than a notebook full of predigested opinions. And it's occurred to me, as it has to all students and honest teachers, that perhaps the things we love most should be kept safe from formal education.

The trouble is that I'm a teacher. It's my profession, what I want to do with my life. And the only way I can consider teaching is with my whole self, whatever that is. My love of stf is an important part of me, and I want to use it in the classroom. But not at the risk of destroying other people's love.

Problems, problems. . .

The problems come, I think, from what formal education does to students who go on to become teachers. Jerry Farber's essay, "Students Are Niggers," describes quite eloquently that process of alienation, as the student is taught to see and care only in terms his teacher permits. Personal enthusiasms don't count. Farber concludes that "the hardest battle isn't with Mr. Charlie. It's with what Mr. Charlie has done to your mind." Yes, After years of training in a routine, it's hard to think in other terms. (Last year, while revising the notes for a class I was about to teach, I was dis-



mayed to discover that I'd described college as "producing" students. Gash: cars are produced, tv sets are produced, tubes of tooth paste are produced -- not people. So I revised my notes: "The college can turn out students.")

Another of the questions raised in the discussion at MLA was what to do when students know more about stf than the teacher. That's a big problem with "teaching", you must always maintain authority. A teacher must always be superior to students in actual knowledge and implied ability. If students don't like being put down, they can resolve subconsciously to take it out on their students when they get the chance.

I'm not accusing the people at the MLA science fiction seminar of bad teaching, nor am I saying that the college system is utterly rotten. But college education suffers from very severe problems, largely unrecognized. I've become increasingly aware of them in the past few years. I feel them in the classroom, and I feel them in myself.

One of the nice things about stf, then, is that it doesn't fit the standard classroom situation easily. Since I'm not satisfied with what happens in the standard classroom, I'm delighted to imagine a quiet revolution of awareness and behavior, sparked by the teaching of stf. It could happen you know. Already, as indicated by the remarks at the MLA meeting, the idea of teaching stf is directing teachers' attention to two crucial points: the relation of classroom work to subject matter. I can't think of another branch of literature in the study of which some students can be expected to come to the classroom on a par with their teachers, nor can I think of one that generates as much honest enthusiasm. Perhaps, if they can accept this difference and adjust to it, teachers will better understand how to teach real classes in Dickens, too. And perhaps if they're slow to learn, students will be able to show them how.

Hmmmm; for all I promised to speak gently, the above sounds like a radical cry for Student Power and all like that. Actually, I'm not a devout believer in free universities or liberated classes. I do believe in getting together to free the universities and in learning how to help build classes that permit students to liberate themselves. Classes in science fiction may be a good place to start, for both students and teachers. Such classes could help us realize that we all are, simultaneously, both students and teachers.

* * *

OF WORLDS BEYOND

continued from page 10:

And so I come back to my statement that the book is fascinating to me because of what it reveals of the people who wrote it. Even the portraits, now over twenty years old, are fascinating: the suave, debonair Heinlein, the farm-boy Williamson, the cocky van Vogt, the studious, old-fashioned Smith, the brash editor Campbell. You pick up these tones and moods from their writing, too, though things are not quite as simplistic as that. But this process, it seems to me, is a more profitable way to study writing: picking up those half- or unsaid things, neglected in the rush for the check, that turn out to be the dynamos of creative energy that run all that superficial machinery above.

SGT PEPPERS STARSHIP

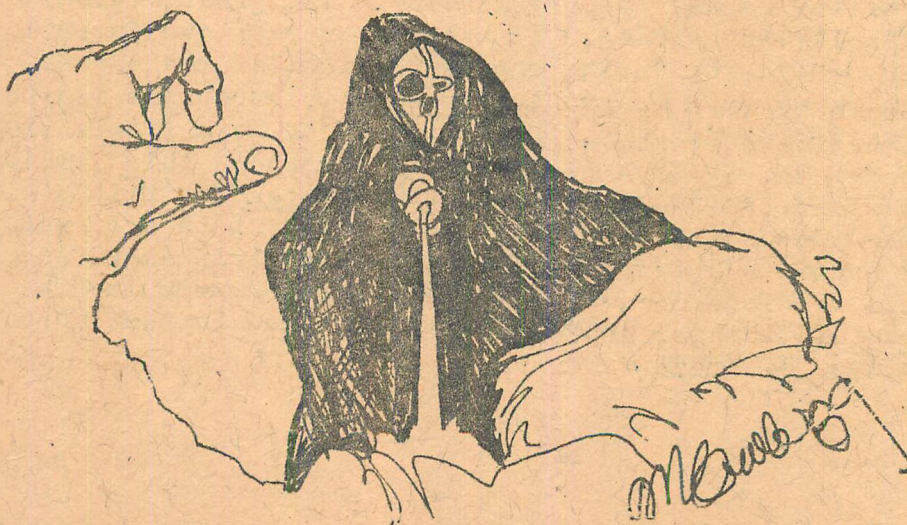
+ Angus Taylor +

I dreamed I saw the silver spaceships lying
 In the yellow haze of the sun
 There were children crying
 And colors flying
 All around the chosen ones
 All in a dream, all in a dream
 The leading had begun--
 Flying Mother Nature's silver seed
 To a new home in the sun

Neil Young, "After the Goldrush"

In Lords of the Starship Mark S. Geston describes the construction of a gigantic starship whose ostensible purpose is to carry humanity away from a doomed world. Those in charge of the construction, however, have an ulterior motive. Realizing that the world no longer possesses the knowledge required for such an undertaking, they nevertheless hope that the very attempt will galvanize the masses into action by giving them a goal for which to live and work; this new energy is to be skillfully rechannelled to revitalize the nation. The new world for which the masses long will be fashioned here on earth instead.

Geston followed Starship with Out of the Mouth of the Dragon, a novel set in the same world but at a later date. If Starship and Dragon are ever issued together in one volume, let me suggest Waiting for the Apocalypse as the title, for I think this phrase fairly accurately summarizes the theme of the two novels. Geston's two books are remarkable for their unrelieved pessimism; in contrast with certain other sf authors who have been accused of excessive gloominess, Geston offers no glimmer of light even within the postulates of his literary worldview. As he puts it:



There is a thing, a strange melancholy that grows on this world and makes the efforts of men as barren as the soil they are founded upon. Now even the armies that are raised by men to defeat evil fall apart and disintegrate before the battle plain is reached.

The cancer seems to have invaded more than earth and the hearts of mere men. The clock-works of creation have shorn their gears; stars do not appear at their appointed times; the seasons fail to conform to their immortal standards; and even the surety of a death of pain and damnation begins to seem favorable to the bleeding perversity of earth.

Perhaps one can also grasp from this short passage that Geston has a poetic bent to his writing, and that he manages more successfully than most of writers to evoke with some power a picture of a world in ruins and haunted by its own past. And I would suggest that because he has had the courage to forego the temptation to inject a spark of hope into his work, he has succeeded in producing something of value.

Now, don't misunderstand. What I mean to say is that Starship and Dragon make valid and thought-provoking statements about certain tendencies in human psychology. Briefly, these two novels are about the human race's drive to self-destruction in the name of self-redemption, and the fallacy and danger in this drive. In an orgy of self-loathing, the human race fights the battle of Armageddon over and over again in desperate efforts to bring an end to the world which humans have corrupted by their very presence. But the world refuses to end; it merely becomes increasingly corrupt and full of despair. Thus is established a particularly vicious kind of circle. The prophets call mankind to Armageddon -- the final battle between Good and Evil -- and both sides are human, it turns out, and both have been called with the same words -- and who then represents Good, and who Evil? "Think of it! The final basis for a million years of theology and a thousand years of philosophy -- nothing more than a useless pile of shit!...Time -- there was a lovely thing for you, ticking like a seven-day clock from beginning to end and then politely making room for eternity -- that didn't stop when it should have."

These are bitter books, and unrelenting. The great starship of the first succeeds finally in nothing. It becomes an enormous funeral pyre for the millions jammed inside during one of the futile Armageddons. Geston involves certain vague Dark Powers in Starship to encourage the human race in its self-destructive tendencies, but by Dragon he is sufficiently confident of humanity's own ingenuity in the matter to abandon this gimmick. Starship may be somewhat more "exciting" to read, but Dragon is written with greater craftsmanship and takes surer aim at its objective. Both are recommended for reading, provided you are prepared for some heavy tripping. An article that should definitely be read in conjunction with Geston's work is "The Apocalypse of Our Time is Over", by Howard Junker, which appeared in the February 18, 1971 edition of Rolling Stone.

Defining science fiction tends to be difficult at the best of times. "Science fiction is what you point your finger at when you name it," is one solution to definition. But even this is not always easy. H. Bruce Franklin has noted that "Because the aims of psychological science and of almost all fiction overlap, it is extremely difficult to separate the science fiction which explores human psychology from any fiction which aims at psychological revelation." A good case in point is Vladimir Nabokov's novel, Ada. The setting of Ada is apparently an alternate earth, one in which North American culture has pronounced Russian elements. The family under study is fluently trilingual -- English, French, and Russian. (Obviously the characters project much of the author himself.) The hero even speculates on the existence of an alternate world (our own, dear readers), thus recalling the speculation of the inhabitants of Philip Dick's alternate German-Japanese world. And yet Ada is not without doubt sf; its alternate-ness arises from the mental elaborations of the hero's later-self as he looks back upon his former-self. The fantastical arises casually from the expected, as when our young hero is exploring an attic. The year is 1884:

Rolled up in its case was an old "jikker" or skimmer, a blue magic rug with Arabian designs, faded but still enchanting, which Uncle Daniel's father had used in his boyhood and later flown when drunk. Because of the many collisions, collapses and other accidents, especially numerous in sunset skies and over idyllic fields, jikkers were banned by the air patrol; but four years later Van who loved that sport bribed a local mechanic to clean the thing, reload its hawking-tubes, and generally bring it back into magic order and many a summer day would they spend, his Ada and he, hanging over grove and river or gliding at a safe ten-foot altitude above the surfaces of roads or roofs.

There is another way in which Ada differs from all sf I have read: it is full of a wonderfully subtle eroticism, reminiscent of the photography of David Hamilton and yet possessing a dynamism which Hamilton's pictures lack.

Also full of the casually fantastical is One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. During a visit to town by gypsies, for example, we find the following: "This time, along with many other artifices, they brought a flying carpet. But they did not offer it as a fundamental contribution to the development of transport, rather as an object of recreation. The people at once dug up their last gold pieces to take advantage of a quick flight over the houses of the village." There is the time too when everyone in town comes down with a disease which prevents one from ever going to sleep -- although no one gets sleepy or tired either. The nasty side effect is that those infected begin also to lose their memories, soon forgetting the names of everyday objects. The citizens solve this problem temporarily by putting labels on things: chair, table, cow, pig, hen, banana. In the main street they erect a sign that proclaims GOD EXISTS -- so they won't forget. The local fortune teller now does business by claiming to be able to read the past in her cards. One of the men begins to build a memory machine -- a "spinning dictionary", operated by a lever, which would contain all the ideas necessary to the functioning of life. It becomes obvious, however, that in time all such devices will become useless, as people gradually forget the meaning of even the letters of the alphabet.

On Sunday, November 28, ABC showed Earth II, a movie made for television. Earth II is the story of a space station which has acquired the status of a sovereign state. The station is put into orbit by the United States, and the President urges the U.S. people to give the station complete independence. The matter is determined by a national referendum, carried out during the early hours of the morning by having those who wish to vote "yes" turn on their lights -- the results being monitored by the station in orbit. The vote, as translated by light meters hooked into computers or something ridiculous, is 71% in favor, 29% against. The station becomes a sovereign state.

Of course, a reasonably sceptical viewer might point out that (1) no U. S. President, unless he were some sort of hippie-pinko-dope-fiend with hair down to his knees, would suggest that the U.S. surrender any of its sovereignty and power; (2) if such a rash course were suggested the matter would never be put to a referendum; it would be decided between the White House and the State Department, and Congress itself would be lucky to even find out about it, much less get a word in edgewise; and (3) if it were by some hideously improbable chance put to a national referendum, the result would more likely be 29% for and 71% against.

Anyway, there the thing is in orbit, when that nasty People's Republic of China puts a nuclear bomb in orbit directly over -- not Washington -- Moscow(!) and threatens to detonate it (and thus set off World War III) if anyone fools with the thing. There's an international treaty on the peaceful uses of outer space, but then what do you expect, says one crew member. After all, "Red China's not in the U.N."

On board is a token (ex-) Russian family. He's clean-cut and handsome, she's blonde and beautiful. He is seriously injured in a heroic attempt to disarm the bomb. (It is interesting to note the parallel with a stereotype situation in the western, where a villain who has seen the light redeems himself by dying heroically in defense of All That is Good and Right. Since we'll need them in the coming war against Evil, it would be unfortunate if the Russians actually had to die while being converted from Bad Guys to Good Guys.) One faction wants to keep the bomb for the usual defense purposes; a woman who disagrees argues, "We cannot carry a big stick and still fight for peace ... We must show there's another way." Now this is certainly a progressive sentiment, but at the same time it is instructive to see how China is gradually replacing the U.S.S.R., a white "have" nation, is a natural ally of the white "have" nations of the West, while China, a colored "have-not" nation, is a natural enemy. Maybe if we get together in time, we can smash them before they smash us.

It looks like the world is heading to Armageddon -- and you wouldn't want to miss that big game, would you?

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