

STARLING

I KNOW IT SEEMS
INSANE, WATSON, BUT I
DEDUCE THAT THE MUR-
DERER WAS A HUGE
CHICKEN ARMED WITH
A FIVE FOOT CARROT!



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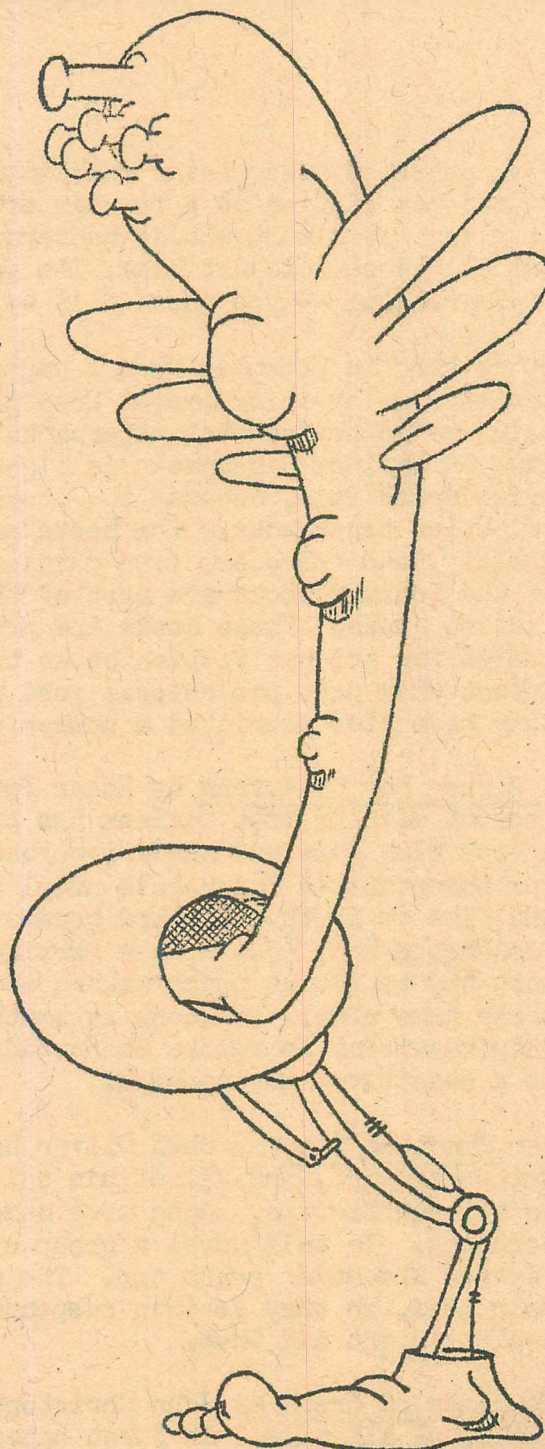
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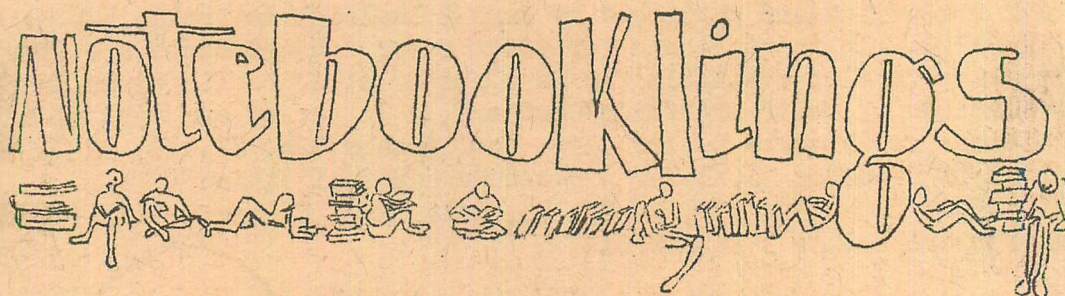
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SCHIRME



+Hank Luttrell+

I've detected a few faint rumblings among the letter writers inquiring about the status of science fiction as a popular art, and also a few reminders about the days when Starling was almost wholly concerned with science fiction. (When was that?) So to set all those folks at ease, I'm going to run through a bunch of notes I've made while reading -- you guessed it -- science fiction. . .

It is hard to remember when a paperback cost 50¢, let alone 25¢. The cost of books hasn't done anything except keep pace with the rest of the economy, but it still pains me to notice that paperbacks start at 95¢ and go up fast from there. Avon's line of Equinox paperbacks is higher than average, most of them \$1.95 -- but the price seems fair, because the books are much nicer, physically than most mass-distribution paperbacks. The books are larger, the print is larger, the paper is high quality, and there are even margins in case you want to scribble while you read. Many of the Equinox books are part of the SF Rediscovery series, reprints of older science fiction books. These books are probably intended to take advantage of the growing market for science fiction books to be used in college courses, but whatever the intent they have put several good books back into print in handsome editions. And they have also reprinted a number of books that don't deserve much attention.

A Mirror For Observers by Edgar Pangborn is probably the book most deserving a good reprint edition that Equinox has published. It had a hardcover edition in 1954 (and a book club edition) and a paperback in 1958, and has been out of print ever since. The Observers in Pangborn's novel are the Martian race, forced to leave their planet and flee to Earth when Mars became uninhabitable about the time of the emergence of Cro-Magnon man. Most of the Martians try not to interfere with humanity but they still must try to act as peace makers occasionally, if only to protect Earth, since it is their home also. Pangborn attempts to create a subtly alien viewpoint, and uses this viewpoint to relate an outsider's perspective of humanity. A Mirror for Observers is a sensitive, moving book.

The Winds of Time by Chad Oliver has also been out of print since 1958. Oliver is an anthropologist, and all of his science fiction has had a biological viewpoint too rare in science fiction, which more commonly deals with technology and the physical sciences. In this novel a group of aliens find themselves shipwrecked on Earth about fifteen thousand years ago. The primitive cultures on Earth at that time can't help them, so they go into suspended animation with the hope that a more advanced Earth society might aid them.

No Blade of Grass by John Christopher may be one of the most reprinted science fiction novels of all time. It first appeared in 1956 as a serial in the Saturday Evening Post. It was a hardcover bestseller, was published by several book clubs, and had a multitude of paperback editions, including a "movie edition" a few years ago. The movie suggested that the world wide death of the grasses was caused by pollution.

The book made no such suggestion, but the image of man dwarfed by an ecological disaster remains pertinent and alarming.

New Worlds #6 edited by Charles Platt and Hilary Bailey is a collection of original short stories. It was published previously in England, but this Equinox edition is its first publication in the US. The cover blurb calls the stories "Taboo-breaking." Some of the stories seem to go to ridiculous lengths trying to be obscure or offensive -- there is probably something here to annoy almost everyone. But there are also a number of effective stories, some of them by new comers. New Worlds has traditionally been a market open to new writers. Particularly interesting were "The Jewel Thief" by Ronald Anthony Cross, sort of a hallucinogenic sword and sorcery tale and "The Warlord of Saturn's Moons" by Eleanor Arnason, a delightful look at what it might mean to be a female science fiction writer.

I can run through a number of the other Equinox books quickly. Ominvore by Piers Anthony is a relatively recent book, and while I can't think of any other science fiction adventure about mushrooms, this might not be enough reason to justify this new edition. The Great Explosion by Eric Frank Russell has been out of print since 1963, and tell a Gulliver's Travels-like story of some visits to a series of Earth Colonies. A modest book, but amusing. Harry Harrison tries a lot harder for laughs in Bill, The Galactic Hero. Very heavy handed, but if you've just read Heinlein's Starship Troopers you might try this as an antidote. Ultimate World by Hugo Gernsback might have had some historical interest when published in hardcover a few years ago, but I don't think we need a paperback. City Under the Sea by Kenneth Bulmer was half an Ace Double the last time it saw light of day, so it is very strange to see it in a fancy Equinox edition.

I did have a nomination for the book I'd most like to see from Equinox, but recently I've heard rumors that Ace is going to reprint it: Little Fuzzy by H. Beam Piper, a delightful and thoughtful study of the human condition which Avon published in 1962. As you collectors may know, it is not only good, but rare. Equinox might have published it in an Equinox edition together with the 1964 sequel, The Other Human Race; both are short novels. If Ace actually does reprint Little Fuzzy, it will mean that Ace is reprinting good Avon books while Avon reprints mediocre Ace Doubles.

* * * * *

Now here is something you don't see so often any more, two brand new underground comix, just like the good old days of flower power and truckin down to your local head shop for the new R. Crumb book. Well, not just like the old days, at that. . .

Take Consumer Comix, for instance. Take a fast look through and the first thing you'll notice is that there doesn't seem to be any kinky sex, or drug references. If you stop to read a few panels you may get a sneaky suspicion that someone is trying to pass on a little useful information, a little education even. It still looks like an underground comix, with duck and bird and toad and turtle characters and carefully drawn Denis Kitchen people with four fingers per hand. But look at the cover; in tiny print near the top it says, "The Wisconsin Department of Justice Presents" and on the inside front cover it says that the comic was funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity, Washington, D.C. Gasp. Obviously a CIA front. The CIA has infiltrated underground comix!

Actually, I think it is about time somebody with some money took an interest in teaching kids something useful with comic books. Most of us probably learned to read from comic books, despite what parents and teachers might have said about them. And anyway, I'm certain that the CIA had nothing to do with this. . .

The stories concern themselves with such things as credit cards, dishonest used car salesmen, door to door salesmen, car repair, "Bait and Switch" advertising, mail

order rip offs and things like that. The art and scripts are all good, and the stories are funny and interesting. The credits go to Denis Kitchen, Peter Loft and Peter Poplaski. For some reason he doesn't get a byline, but I'm sure I recognize the art of Tim Boxell.

The other new underground comix on hand is Barefootz Funnies (both published by Krupp Comic Work, P.O. Box 7, Princeton, WI 54968; the comix are 75¢ each plus 15¢ postage and handling). This comix definitely isn't government funded, and is a little closer to what most people might think of as "underground." There are even some sex and dope jokes, but only if you are willing to count the things that cockroaches do. Howard Cruse's Barefootz stories are sometimes criticized for being too "slick" to be underground, but I'd say that they are weird enough to have to be underground. In the first story Barefootz experiences an eclipse of the ocean by the moon. Barefootz's love of his little cockroach friends is perhaps a little disgusting. I like the frogs better, which Glory (a metaphysical creature who stays under the bed) keeps producing. I must admit that if roaches smoked and watched horror movies I'd get along with them much better.

* * * * *

I promised that I would never again get involved with forming a science fiction club. St. Louis, Columbia, Madison. Why do I always manage to move to a city where a fan group doesn't already exist? I don't remember when I made that promise, but I'm sure I did. But it really almost seems to me that the Madison Science Fiction Group formed itself. Since last summer we've been meeting regularly at the Madison Book Co-op. The Co-op is a venture in co-operative book selling and buying unlike any other I've ever known. Memberships are sold for an exceedingly reasonable amount, and members are allowed a 10% discount on all new books and magazines. Members may also sell unwanted books with 25% going to the Co-op. In addition to being a good alternative to traditional newstand and bookstore operations, the Book Co-op is the closest thing to a science fiction specialty shop in Madison, since most of the managers are science fiction readers and fans.

Anyway, I remember one afternoon when I was looking around in the Co-op. I meet Tom Murn, who was interested in starting a University Extension course in science fiction. We talked about trying to get it off the ground and Janice Bogstad joined in to offer help. It occurred to us that we had the makings of a club -- a meeting place at the Co-op, and people who might be interested in attending. Madison already had a few fanzine publishers -- like Richard West and Perri Corrick, and now another, Janice Bogstad. Under Jan's leadership, the first issue of Janus (a moon of Saturn, right?) looked very promising, though it isn't hard to tell it is a first issue -- lots of mistakes and sloppy typing. The artwork by Jeanne Gomoll is particularly good.

We call the group MadStf for short -- which is derivative, of course, but very catchy don't you think? We keep asking ourselves when the first Madcon will be, but so far it is definitely a question without an answer. Until then, all I can say is Minneapolis in 73.

* * * * *

Lesleigh and I have been discussing the possibility of publishing another issue before Christmas. Unlikely? Perhaps, but you must admit that the coming postage hike makes the idea an attractive one. We'd even have a little time to do the necessary work -- the main problem would be getting enough material to fill up the issue. Other fanzines (Hugo nominated and otherwise) may have bulging files of material waiting to be published, but not us. Maybe we are too picky. While we don't actually reject large numbers of submissions, I do frequently find them showing up in other fanzines . . . and sometimes Fantastic. Anyway, don't be too surprised if you find another Starling in the mail box this year.

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The Fickle Finger of Foreboding Formula

+Juanita Coulson+



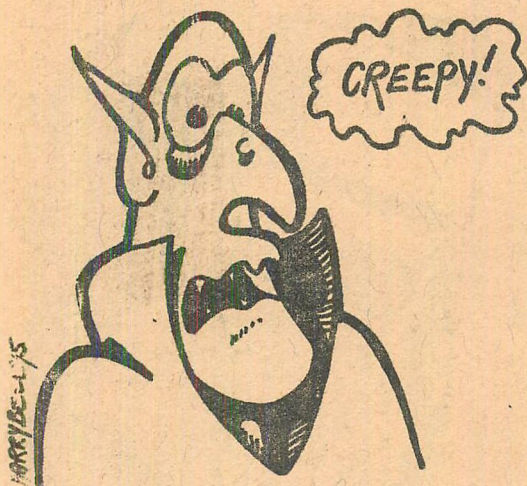
It is but the work of a moment to drape a little moss on the furniture, to borrow a phrase from a popular Midwestern mystery writer. And that's about what gothic-writing amounts to at its worst -- draping moss on the furniture. And on the characters, the landscape, and so forth. No need to drape any on the plot; it came equipped with its own.

I enjoy writing gothics, and I particularly enjoy the money, which is better (sometimes much better) than a neopro can pick up writing sf. Maybe for a male gothic writing is, you should excuse the expression, a drag. (It's certainly obvious to the constant reader, female variety, when a gothic has been written by a man, even if he hides behind a female pen name, The guys just can't quite get the true feminine slant, and it shows.) But ever since I stumbled onto this gold mine I've been reveling in the fun of churning out the things.

To the casual browser all gothics must seem identical, with interchangeable plug-in parts, and to a certain degree that's right. Once in a while a Florence Stevenson will come along and manage to bend the formula completely out of shape -- and both she and her readers will have a hell of a ball as a result. However, very few gothic editors will put up with that sort of nonsense. No tongue in cheek. No pie in the face, no matter how much it would be the logical thing to do at some point in the book.

So...writing gothics becomes a game. Some years ago Marion Zimmer Bradley told me that all writing was a game; if you could get more than a certain percentage of your own private goals past an editor and get paid for them, you won. The contest isn't nearly as serious in gothic writing, but it can be a challenge. Outwitting one's editor for fun and profit.

It goes like this. You're a neopro, so you don't have a name, so you can't pull cuties and hope to get away with them, or sell the results. You see this big fat lucrative gothic market and you think, gee that looks easy and I'm going to get some of that gravy. I started by reading one very atypical "gothic", an Anne McCaffrey novel. Then I skimmed a few gothics by lesser names and hacks to get the general formula--



which is: surly and broody hero, nice-guy villain, some dark and terrible secret, lotsa menace but nothing serious must happen to the heroine, and an upbeat romantic ending. I'd gauge that 90% of all gothics follow that formula. Damned few break out of the mold, and most of those aren't very popular.

The readership (which I'll get to later) wants formula. Not too spooky, not at all sexy. Nice, slightly scary, happy-ending escapism. Believe me, writing for that readership is a challenge.

Your "plot" must fit the formula. You can shuffle around names and make both the hero

and the villain standoffish and mysterious and unfriendly at the book's beginning -- but by the wrapup it must turn out that the nastiest guy was the good 'un and the seeming Mr. Clean is a bounder and maybe crazy to boot.

Setting is a big factor, maybe the only variant you really can play with. When I got into gothic writing the editors were fed to the teeth with New England and traditional moss-draped castlelike mansions. Anything in a different locale was new and fresh and exotic. Don't vary the plot formula, whatever you do, but set it someplace different -- please!

Okay. Write what you know, all the manuals say. And be different and exotic. Well, I figured to a New Yorker bored to tears with New England mansions the Midwest just might prove "exotic". How about Brown County, Indiana? How about an old barn converted into a museum and art gallery? Such things are everyday possibilities in southern Indiana, nothing special. Apparently a New York based gothic editor thought the setting was just too-too, because the manuscript sold practically its first crack out of my agent's mailbox.

Wow. Was that all there was to this gig?

Well, to be honest, having a bit of previous experience at pro writing helped. And sharing an agent with Anne McCaffrey didn't hurt, either; the editor may have hoped if they bought my manuscript the agent would give them first chance at the next McCaffrey gothic.

Nothing daunted and my ego undented I hurriedly looked around for another "exotic" mid-western setting to use in a second gothic. Making sure to stick to the formula, I marooned the heroine on a winter-swept island off the Green Bay peninsula in Lake Michigan. I'd been to Brown County, but I'd never been on an island in that particular part of Lake Michigan. No problem. A National Geographic article and a little research in the encyclopedias gave me all I really needed to create a fictional island and the appropriately cold and shivery isolated setting.

No need to worry about the plot or the characters. As I've explained, those are strictly formula.

But that doesn't mean you can't have a lot of fun with them.

McCaffrey (as tall as I'd always wanted to be) made her gothic heroine a petite, ⁸ li'l bit of a thing. So I stuck my tongue in my cheek and made my first gothic heroine a stately lunk of a female. But that was too much trouble; too hard to get into that skin, since I'm an Amazonian five foot two and a half, myself. So in the second gothic I made my heroine a runt. Much easier to empathize with her.

The third time was not the charm, because the third gothic I wrote didn't sell; still hasn't. I got cocky and bent the formula too much, I think. It was bad enough that I made the nice-guy villain a book publisher, but I couldn't resist making the hero a gun crank (no-no for liberal oriented Easterners, maybe), and I had the heroine saving her own bacon by shooting the villain with the hero's gun. That one and another (too wordy) manuscript are going the rounds interminably and I don't expect them to see daylight. For a while I worried that I'd lost the touch. Then Don Bensen remembered my first two gothics and opened the door for me to get in on a birthstone series Beagle/Dallantine was publishing. Again, they wanted formula, but impurged with the occult significance of a birthstone.

I'm game. And since there was a very tight deadline and I sort of had the editor over a barrel -- I stretched the rules slightly. The hero was still broody and the villain still nicey-nice, but I made my heroine just a bit more talk-back and feisty than the standard pattern. Surprisingly, the editor liked it.

Maybe...just maybe...the formula is wearing thin and we're about due for a teensy variation on the well-worn tracks. Fine by me. Buck says he can usually tell when I remind myself to drape moss. I get interested in developing characters or exploring plot offshoots or peculiarities of setting -- then I grab myself by the scruff of the neck and say "whoa!". Moss draping called for here: Mood. Must keep that aura of menace and foreboding and drear and sinister and shadowy and dismal and eerie and. . .

I collected a whole bunch of gothicky adjectives and adverbs onto handy file cards. Because every so often in writing a gothic you have to drag in that business of impending danger and hidden perils. It's in the rule book.

Danger, but not doom. And not too "spooky". I like to dribble little hints of fantasy through my plots -- suggestion of the supernatural at work here. But only suggestions, and it's best if you half-explain it all away at the end. Ghosts must be banished. You may send shivers up the reader's spine, but disperse them all by the final clinch and cliché.

It's no longer necessary to make the heroine a governess, Jane Eyre style. And she needn't be an imitation second Mrs. De Winter. But with certain exceptions there are two elements which remain constants in gothics -- aloneness and helplessness.

In some manner -- through the machinations of the villain or fate or whatever -- the heroine must be on her own, physically and, far more importantly, emotionally. She's marooned in a sinister mansion and the villain is closing in on her and the phone lines are down. She's out in the middle of nowhere and her car's non compos functionis and all the grim-faced and unfriendly hillbillies won't speak to her or answer her questions or help her. The readers expect it, the editors demand it -- fate, impending menace, and nowhere to turn.

A few editors encourage the writers to give the heroines some spunk and spine. Do a little independent sleuthing and suspecting of the villain. A chin-up attitude is creeping into some of the genre. Sort of an "Okay, I'll change the flat tire myself, you surly, uncommunicative hicks!"



At least until the hero comes along to bail the heroine out of a really critical situation. That part of the formula hasn't changed, yet.

And I think it'll remain the dividing line between gothic fiction and hardline woman-detective fiction.

In a gothic, the heroine is never going to be allowed to fend off all the menaces by herself. She can show a little grit, a soupcon of feminism. But at the climax you know damnwell that her M*A*N will enter the scene and kill the dragons, to the heroine's gasping and heartfelt relief. Now everything's going to be okay, because he's there.

I write that formula -- after growing up watching umpty thousand Hollywood versions of the happy ending in the 40s, no sweat -- but I do wonder about it. I'm in it for the money, and because it's fun to create characters as close to the borderline of the formula as possible, skirt the fringes of the moss-draped plot. But what about the readers? From all the survey results, the editors are right: the readers do want precisely that formula of aloneness, helplessness, and ultimate rescue by a strong and moody man.

The surveys further say most readers of gothics are young women with small children. Hemmed in by boredom and a world full of babbling toddlers and infants and heavy conversations at the laundromat. If they were a different personality type or from a different socio-economic milieu they might break loose in other ways -- a job, part-time college work, self improvement classes, etc. But instead they read gothics.

Understandable, at least in part. Anything to escape the numbing routine of their lives, forget they're trapped by circumstances.

So they want ice cream. Cold, shivery ice cream -- that by the end of the book will melt and taste sweet and reassuring. A brief moment of pleasure with a mild shock as the cold first hits the tongue.

Interestingly, they don't want sex. Romance, but not sex. And in a way that may be understandable, too. Sex may lead to thoughts of the real world and real men -- and the real world is what they're trying to forget.

Helplessness and aloneness are emotions these readers know well, but on a much less intense level. Being confined in a crackerbox in suburbia with a couple of squawling diapers that toddle like children. Her husband's the guy who disappears in the morning -- for the "excitement" of the rat race in the big city (at least he doesn't have to contend with yelling kids and dull neighbors, thinks the gothic reader.) At night he comes home, eats, watches tv, grabs a quick lay and sacks out.

Is that all there is?

How much more exciting to imagine oneself a young woman in an exotic and maybe dangerous locale, confronted by villains and mysterious plots and menaces. On her own. Thrillingly, daringly alone against the whole world.

(But the reader has a shaky ego. She can't -- really -- suspend her disbelief indefinitely. She knows how inept and terrified and utterly helpless she'd likely be in

the heroine's situation. But that's all right. Because this is formula, and she knows that in the end a shining knight will rescue the reader/heroine from all perils -- save her from the false young man who promised so much and delivered so little.)

Allegories?

It's too easy to play psychoanalyst, and risky. But it is something to consider.

So. . .I play the game, but with some rules that aren't in the footnotes. A little subliminal conditioning here and there. Carefully, so I don't disturb the escapism. "These things must be done del-i-cate-ly..."

Make the heroine independent, able to think for herself, not so woolly headed she's completely taken in by the villain. Okay. In the end she's trapped in a situation where a strong man's help is certainly appreciated. But it's getting there that's fun, and intriguing. We all know how the formula must wrap up. Let's see how many new trails we can break along the way.

Just a smidge of subtle education for my sisters in chains, hmmm?

Meantime, I keep hunting "exotic" gothic settings and help out the bank account. The nice thing is, with gothics you never need be asked, "where do you get them crazy ideas?" Gothics are like peanuts -- each one you write inspires half a dozen spin-offs while you're writing. I jot them down for use in the next one I'll do. . . and the next. . .and the next.

I only hope the readers are enjoying this shivery and menace-filled ride as much as I am -- moss and all.



WORDS FROM READERS

Harry Warner, Jr., 423 Summit Avenue, Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

Maybe it would be a mortal insult to the contents of this Starling if I said that the cover is the finest thing about it. But that's what I have a secret urge to write. Dan Steffan seems to embody the whole spirit of the comics and pulp fiction and B movies and several other dear things of the past, all on one large piece of paper.

The most useful way to use a video camera at a large convention might be in the masquerade. I kept thinking at Discon while I was trying to see the presentations how fine it would be if there were a closed-circuit tvarrangement that would transmit what was going on to a large screen hanging high in the air, where everyone could see it easily. That would require projection equipment, but it's becoming available. Unless the masquerade hall has a sloping floor, and I don't think many hotels are so equipped, there's little hope for people beyond the first few rows to see clearly. The alternative of a hight, specially rigged up stage wouldn't be too practical as long as contestants do violent things or wear garments that impede their balance; someone might get killed in a fall from a high platform.

+I'd like to see a big screen video projector is some fairly large meeting room +apart from the main program hall. This would provide an alternative for folks +who didn't want to fight the crowds in the masquerade or what-have-you, but +who wanted a better view than those on the smaller hotel room televisions. Or +perhaps some folks would prefer the social contact of a meeting room to the +privacy of their rooms. --HL

Robinson Crusoe and Friday might be an even earlier example of the white-black team that Michael Carlson writes about. For that matter, there are Iago and Othello, although by the time they get on stage the great days of their companionship have just about wound up. In any event, Carlson's article is strong enough to stand on its own even if the reviews of specific creations toward the end were amputated.

The local library bought the Lovecraft biography, surprisingly, and I've been successful so far in an effort to inhibit myself from taking it out and reading it, when there are so many other things to be done. But the reviews have been interesting. I was wondering if a thoroughly successful writer would be prejudiced against the subject of Lovecraft's biography simply because HPL didn't make a lot of money out of his fiction. Lovecraft would have made an even poorer showing in a lengthy biographical work if it had been written before details of his marriage had become known, ending the old assumption that he was too introverted to engage in normal intercourse, and before the French discovery of his fiction had given him a more respectable place in the general literary scheme of things.

I doubt if I could avoid pop culture in the way that Peter Roberts pretends to have done. There's a jukebox in the restaurant where I eat most of my meals, I hear chatter about the latest rages and see the official costume of the young generation in the office where I work, when I listen to a baseball game all the commercials have background music which is supposed to epitomize the kind of music people like today,

and then there are the people who play car radios loudly or walk down the street listening to transistor radios, the up-to-date illustrations and text advertising circulars that come in the mail, and lots of other inescapable environment.

Jon Singer, 167 Vines St., Middletown, CT 06457

A short technical note: TV equipment is now available (I don't know what the prices are like, but I imagine that they aren't too terrible) which will operate very nicely under ordinary room lights, with no need for blinding floods. Another nice thing about the new cameras is that they are very difficult to damage by shining lights at them. The best of them will go blind for only about a quarter of a second if momentarily pointed directly at the sun. (Remember when an Apollo crew destroyed their color camera by accidentally pointing it at the sun?) Moreover, there are now some new goodies just being developed which will really change the field. Imagine a camera appreciably smaller than the lens it is attached to. . . (black and white, of course -- color ones would have to be somewhat larger.)

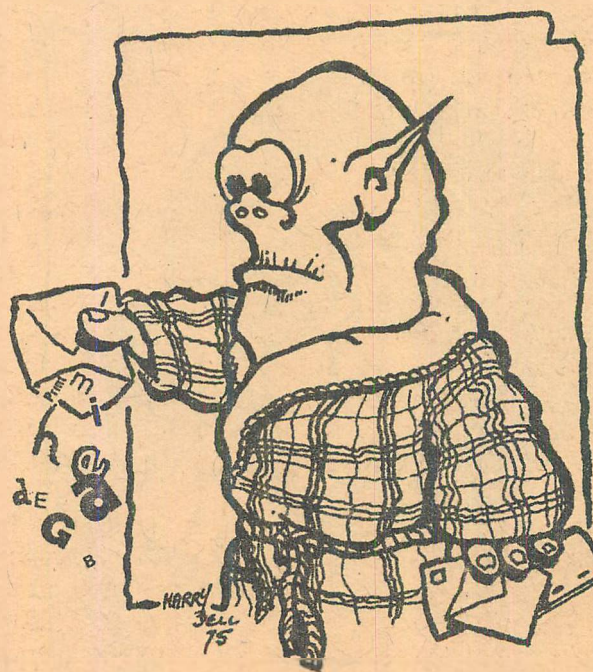
Eric B. Lindsay, 6 Hillcrest Ave., Faulconbridge N.S.W. 2776 AUSTRALIA

I thought it might interest you to know that at Aussiecon there were about 4 video cameras in evidence, and at least one monitor. I'm not sure how many videorecorders the people taping the thing had. It was a fan effort, with equipment presumably borrowed from some library or something similar. As well the ABC (a Government radio network) recorded all the program on tapes, and broadcast extracts on a couple of their radio programs. That was to all states, which was nice. If we get enough people writing to them, they say they'll broadcast some of the other material.

I was really taken by Terry Hughes' letter, about taking away a radio or record player "stunting part of his development." Terry may well be right -- I had a radio first in the last year I was at school, and managed to have it fail within about 6 months. From then, for some 10 years I didn't have a radio at all, and didn't buy my first record player or cassette until about 2 years ago. Now that certainly ensured that my development was totally different to the majority of my contemporaries (and may help explain why much of Starling doesn't reach me at all) but I'd hesitate to say that this difference is really all that adverse. There are plenty of aspects of life apart from music -- by missing one, you find others.

Jay Kinney, 1786 Fell St., San Francisco, CA
95117

As an underground cartoonist and one involved to a degree with both The Funny Papers and Arcade (the latter, by the way, is available from the Print Mint for \$1.50 postpaid and is big-size with good paper) I was interested in Jeffrey Kipper's letter. Comments on the comix are rare enough that when they do pop up I often end up trying to figure out how the comix hit "readers" (i.e. non-cartoonists) from just such highly individual letters. I don't know Kipper from a hole in the wall and don't know how



typical his response is to the current situation, but he seemed to be obliquely implying a thing or two that I feel like puzzling out for your benefit.

If I understand him correctly he seemed to be bemoaning the tendency for the new publications popping up (and popping back down again in most cases) to publish material that is shorter and/or milder than that in Undergrounds in the past. This is true as is the fact that most of these publications have tended to rely upon artists who have already established themselves in the Undergrounds over the past 7 years or so.

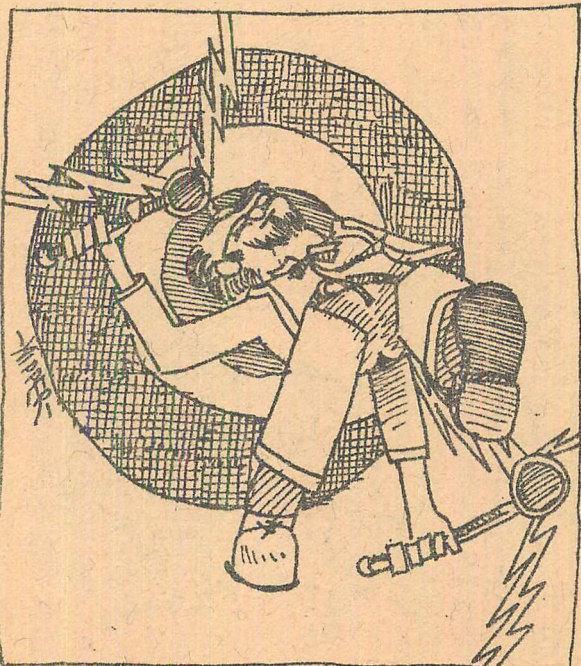
Brevity and mildness are indeed unfortunate bed-fellows of what has been largely an unsuccessful attempt to make comix available nationally and regularly via normal newsstand channels. The alternate distribution system built up in the late 60's has been shrinking with the demise of Head Shops and Alternate Culture oriented outlets. Plus due to any number of hard-to-pin-down factors, sales have been down for almost all of the comix. So, simply put, these new publications are a bizarre wedding of entrepreneurs and frustrated cartoonists who want to be able to keep doing comix without having to end up working in formats totally alien to creativity. But the traditional Mafia-esque distribution channels are not particularly thrilled with comics, much less comix for adults and so the publishers haven't wanted to trod on too many toes all at once at the beginning. All of which is actually a moot point at this time since the suspension of CB and FP. Arcade is a slightly different case and, for the most part, the main restrictions there have been ones of space and pleasing the editor's tastes (which is easier said than done.)

Like any other area in the recession-ridden economy the Underground Comix field is slowed down to the point where the people who have been at it for a long time are struggling to be able to keep working and eating. With this in mind it isn't too surprising that editors of the hybrid comix haven't been exactly begging for undiscovered talent to fill their pages. There have been more than enough good, dependable nuts around already only too happy to fill up the books.

All of which is to say that no blame can really be affixed for where things are at now. No one would like it better than the cartoonists who are in what Kipper calls "a closed clique" if things were popping enough that lots of comix were coming out and indeed, all sorts of untested talent bursting forth. But things are slow and, in

fact, there are not many would-be cartoonists around who are being undeservably ignored. I've met one or two recently who should see print (and might yet) but

I've also seen quite a few doper hacks who mainly seem to rework cliches invented by Shelton (or Crumb or whoever) back in 1969.



The tone of the last line in Jeffrey's letter confuses me. Yes, Justin and Bill probably wouldn't enjoy the "status" (such as it is) they have now if things weren't looser when they began then they are now. But that goes for everyone (myself included for sure) and proves nothing. Justin and Bill may have gained by a field that was open enough at the time to include strange young men with strange minds and strange notions of anatomy, but it has been thru proving themselves capable

of high-quality work that they've kept doing. In fact Justin's Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary is possibly the single best justification I can think of for the existence of the entire underground comix movement. 14

The whole field has existed more or less as a happy fluke all along, and one that may evaporate into the same mist from whence it came. Such has been the rule rather than the exception with just about any cultural energy grouping you can think of. I wish it could go on forever. It may yet in some form or other -- probably via the individual efforts of each cartoonist to sustain his own personal vision by whatever medium necessary. But what forms this may take remains to be seen.

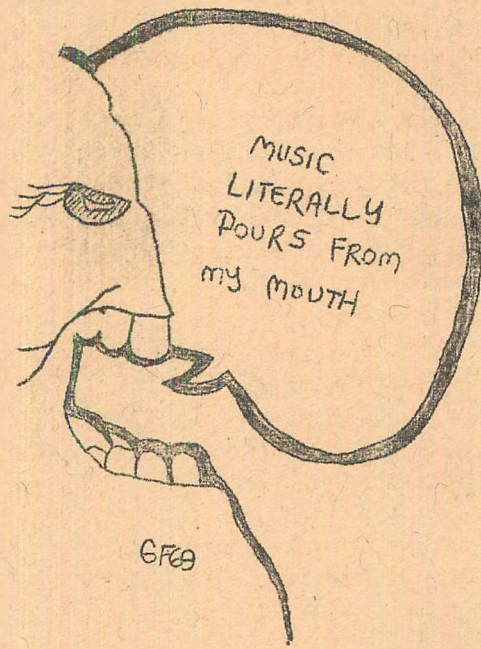


Steve McDonab, 805 Range Line, Columbia, Missouri 65201

Leigh Edmunds seems to have stirred up a murky nest of hornets, with the everlasting, illogically logical debate on synthesized music. As it happens, I have some occasional things to say on music, having played some thirty plus instruments though time. . . on that point, it would be wise to qualify by stating that the more instruments one plays, the more diverse ones thinking becomes, the less able to play those instruments one becomes. I. e., the degree of ability one has on a particular instrument is modified by the others.

I presently play bass and guitar. Lacking strings for said guitar I concentrate for the time on electric bass, and am exploring the ranges of the instrument. . .slide bass, bent notes, multi-string playing and such. I am interested in rhythm, having begun a musical hobby on drums, which are quite complex when approached properly. I have played all manner of percussion, from natural human skin, living, through native conga and bongos and what have you, timbales and kit, timpani, glockenspiel, xylophone, bottles, tubular bells and others, vibes and wood blocks, cymbals and tuned percussion of other types. I went from there to piano, twelve-string guitar, bass, cello, electric guitar, harmonicas, melodica and thence to organ, harpsichord, flute, string bass, slide guitar, voice and others, and finally tape recorders and synthesizers in search of a new phase of musical expression or artistic fulfillment. I used Tevox, Ferrograph and Bang and Olufsen recorders, B&O and other mikes, leads, cables, and some instruments I played myself, and others which I convinced people to play, as with one girl friend who played clarinet and oboe for me and sang some, then modifying same through synthesizer . . .namely the EMS Synthia A which is, I assume from Susan Woods letter, the type that Leigh has. I also experimented with electric guitar a lot, modifying with envelope shapers/ring modulator/reverb/other, to produce strange sounds.

I appreciate the work of Walter Carlos, who extends the work to some extent, using the synthesizer as a musical instrument, rather than as a neatly nifty sound effects machine, or a simple stylistic device, a la mechanical boogie-funk-soul music.



The synthesizer has abilities beyond simple beeps and blips and burps, to modify a particular instrument such as a clarinet. The synthesizer is also a musical source. . . some more than others. EMS Synthi A, AKS, VCS 3, all are practically the same. The differentiation coming in that the A is a suitcase version of the VCS 3, and the AKS being an A with a touch-keyboard and 260 note digital sequencer, and excuse for raising prices. They are all two-source stereo machines. Moogs machines operate up to ten sources, and more, depending on complexity and owner addition. Mini-Moog is two source. ARP is mostly two-source, mixable in the larger machines, and PAIA models are single in most, adaptable to twin and then as complexity raises more and more requiring mixers to stereo/quad.

Knowledge of electronics is not absolutely necessary. Some synthesizers need the knowledge of proper patching. Mainly Moog machines, which are a mess of patch cords and units, taking an hour or more to set up, often. None need a complex knowledge of electronics. . . but of the particular machine, and its capabilities and functions, and what each source/modifier/control module does.

From there, patching, and this variance of sound produced for music, things become more complex. One may use filtered white/pink noise, for example, and work with oscillators, or else multi-controlled oscillators and the filter banks. For a stream of bells, one runs the keyboard oscillator to the ring modulator, and sets one's gaps in the modifier oscillator, then runs the output to the attack/decay and envelope shaper. Attack and decay are set, and an envelope to produce a bell shape and one proceeds to frequency of attack, and the notes one wants. Attack is swift, peaking quickly, decay is slower. For cymbal, one uses white or pink noise with the bottom end cut sharply, and top lowered from above, say, 17,000 Hz and a fast attack, slowish decay. Snare is white noise alone, fast attack fast decay. Bass drum is a low-tuned square wave, fast attack, fast decay. Numerous effects may be produced in combination with reverb and utilization of varied setting on decay and attack. . . a slow decay produces a drawn-out low sound which is particularly odd, and a slow attack will reverse this; also interesting is a sine-wave in place of square, a clean sound most unlike a bass drum. Other drum-tones may be produced by square wave settings above the bass drum one. It is particularly effective when used with keyboard coupled with the control on the square wave oscillator, giving one a range of tuned percussion beneath one's fingers. Sounds wild, but there is, as said, little limit to what one can do on a synthesizer.

Sean Summers, 4201 Avenue C, Austin TX 78705

Personally I like electronic music mainly because of the new and unusual sounds that some of the performers have created. Some of the better uses of electronic are coming from Jazz musicians and progressive rock players. Many of the classical electronic pieces are odious to my ear, but then so is much of today's modern piano music. As to Wayne Macdonald's statement that big band music was small potatoes, I disagree. But it was sometimes stultifying to many of the musicians. There was little room for freedom in performance, and improvisation was sorely limited. The best music of that period came from the smaller groups and the late night jam sessions after all the big band gigs were over. In a similar vein, if I had been around in the fifties, listening to the rock and roll of the period, I would have been condemning it vociferously.

Because it was terrible music! When I listen to it today I am amazed it ever managed to survive.

*Yet some of it has survived, so it must mean something to many people. --HL

Don D'Amassa, 19 Angell Drive, East Providence, Rhode Island 02914

Since I was a mystery fan long before I'd even heard of SF, I wasn't at all unhappy to see the current issue of Starling dedicated to mysteries, although as it happens, I'm of the locked room school myself, so hadn't read many of the actual books mentioned.

Joe Sanders is as excellent as usual, particularly in pointing out that it really doesn't make sense to criticize the characterization in John Dickson Carr, because it really isn't germane to what Carr is trying to do -- i.e. write an intellectual murder puzzle. One of my favorites is Carolyn Wells, who has never appeared in paperback, but who wrote scores of adventures in two different series, Kenneth Carlisle and Fleming Stone. As with Carr's Gideon Fell and Henry Merrivale, the two detectives are virtually interchangeable. Characterization throughout is stereotyped. Her dialogue is stunted and rampant with sentences impossible to speak. But her mysteries fascinate me for the same reason as do Carr's: the mystery itself.

I'm glad to see that someone besides me has read and enjoyed Melville's The Confidence Man. There is hope for Michael Carlson yet, even if he does fail to read much.

Douglas Barbour 10808 - 75th avenue edmonton alberta canada t6e 1k2

enjoyed Grant Canfield's article on Richard Starks work. one of these days, if enough people keep pressing me, i'm going to read some of that stuff. i loved Point Blank as a film, probably the very best thing Boorman has done -- the pace & the tone were so utterly controlled, & the black humor so perfectly, dead-eyedly, on.

Michael Carlson's essay on American archetypes & the detective novel in the early 1970s was a great addition to your journal -- what's the title? Partisan Review Quarterly? -- & will undoubtedly be reprinted in his first large essay collection due out from Wesleyan University Press next year. again, i enjoyed how he deployed a number of important ideas about the american psyche, garnered in those ol' americanlit classes, toward some kind of definition of the context in which the books he was supposed to be talking about could be mentioned. I suspect the books themselves would likely sink under the weight of such an analysis applied page by page; but applied to a subsection of a widely active genre, the points Michael was making seemed not only to float but to soar. always a soar point with any reader.



then there's Susan's firm put down of what is obviously an inferior piece of work. lovely job. i dont know Dorthy Sayer's work;

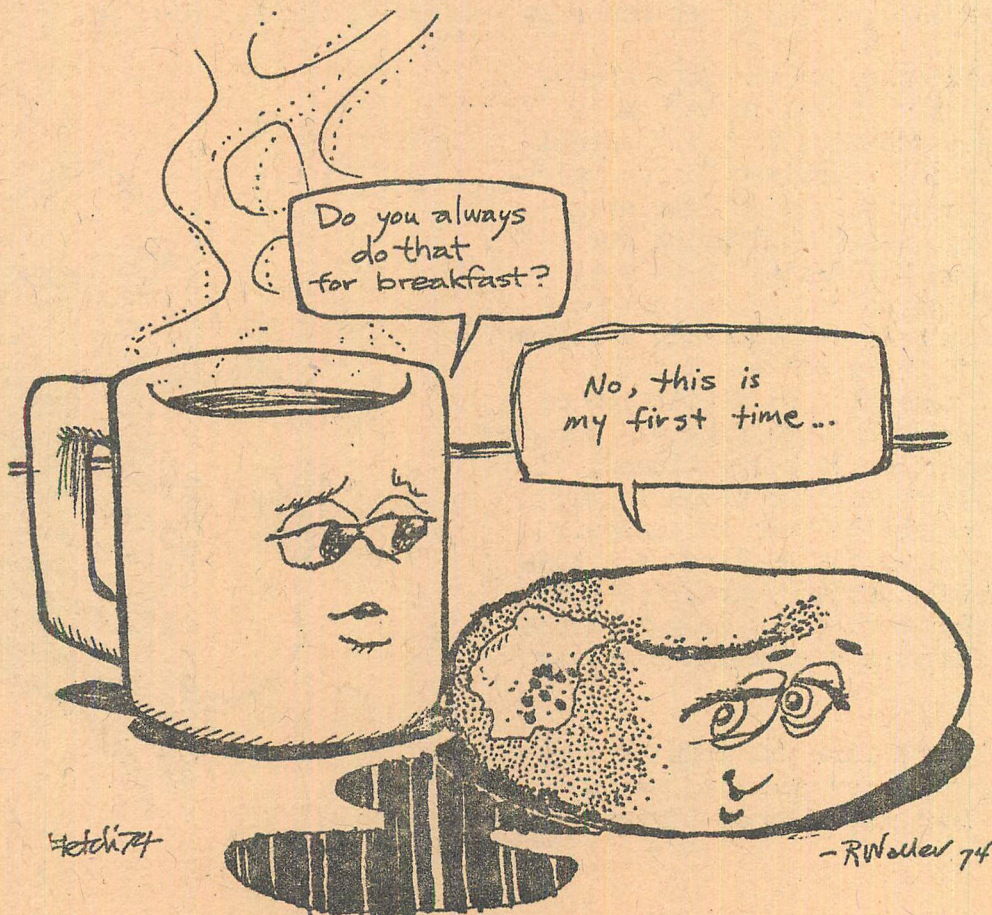
except her translation of The Divine Comedy, which doesn't really count in this context. i suspect that if i really enjoyed mystery fiction that much AND HAD THE TIME TO READ IT, i would read some Sayers; certainly she sounds like an individual woman, a read person, who it would be truly interesting to know more about. Susan gets all that across along with her righteous disgust with Janet Hictchman's silly & Misguided 'speculation.' not that specultion isnt goodclean fun, & even valuable, but it has to be doing something useful; & its obvious Hitchman's isnt.

anyway, i dug the whole issue. but i must ask sometime: isnt sf a part of popular culture too? just wondering.

+Of course! Of course we have frequent pieces on science fiction, and lots of
+other material relates in one way or another with science fiction -- but I agree
+that it would be nice to have a little more about science fiction once in a
+while. -- HL

Grant Canfield, 28 Atalaya Terrace, San Francisco, CA 94117

I have an addendum or correction to my article on Stark. According to Westlake (in a Take One Magazine interview) nine of his books have been made into movies. The ones I missed were: The Score (Killtown), filmed as Mise a sac (Pillaged), 1967, screenplay by Claude Sautet, Alain Cavalier, Oscar Danziger, directed by Cavalier, produced by Danziger, never released in the US; The Jugger, filmed in 1967 by Jean-Luc Godard as Made in USA but never released in US because of a pending intercontinental suit filed by Westlake for various reasons. Incidentally, the "Parker" character in Made in USA was played by Anna Karina, causing Westlake to remark, "A friend of mine, referring to this and Lee Marvin (Point Blank) and Jim Brown(The Split) said, 'So far, Parker has been played by a white man, a black man and a woman. I think the character lacks definition.'"



Furthermore, Westlake reveals in the Take One interview that ten other-of his novels have been sold to the movies, but never produced. Among these are the Grofield novel The Damsel optioned by John Bennett in '66 or '67, option lapsed, and Deadly Edge, from which a screenplay has been written by Don Peterson which everyone hates, so probably it won't be produced.

I hope this clears everything up on the question of Westlake and the movies. I'm sorry about such an error in my reporting, and have therefore decided never to make another one. Everything I say from here on is the absolute Truth, believe me.

Dan Marlowe

I'm enclosing a copy of The Name of the Game is Death, Earl Drake's first appearance, so that you can see how he became what he is. The book was written as a one-shot and it appeared in 1962. When we decided to go for a series ten years later, I had to go back and revise Name slightly, in order to tie it in to the rest of the series, but only slightly. Principally it was a matter of names. The book was re-issued in 1972 when the rest of the series started to come along.

To reply to one discerning point that Joe Sanders raised: in a series Earl Drake's activities are necessarily limited by the motivation I can supply. Drake isn't a cop; he isn't a private detective; he doesn't get paid for what he does, except for what he can scrounge along the way. I can't let him become too successful, because then there is no motive for him to become involved in some episodes. The motivation must be personal, even to the point of extremity. Something must happen to him, or to someone close to him, which sets him off along one of Gardner's Mean Streets.

But there is another factor, at once less obvious but more basic, and that's editors. Before you can sell a reader on a book you have to sell an editor, and quite often that's a much larger problem. Since 1962, when I sold Name to Fawcett, I've worked with four different editors-in-chief, and I would hesitate to guess how many editors. Each had something he wanted to contribute to the series. Call it their job; call it their ego. A change of editors-in-chief contributed greatly to the appearance of Erikson in the series. The next one couldn't stand him, and out he came. All but the latest were fond of Hazel, so she remained in the foreground until very recently.

Between '62 and '71 I sold eleven or twelve one-shots to Fawcett (check that: make it six or seven; I'll explain the others in a minute). Some of these one-shots, I feel, were better books than some of those in the series, because I wasn't so circumscribed in the writing of them by the character of Drake. As I said during a panel discussion in Chicago, writing a series is definitely self-limiting. But it's also profitable.

I did another series in the late '50's and early '60's, for Avon. The character's name was Johnny Killain, and he was the self-starting night manager of a fleabitten Broadway hotel. I literally taught myself to write suspense in doing that series. Tony Boucher liked the last couple and touted them, which helped me along the way. I also did a one-shot for Berkley, Backfire, one of the few third-person books I've done. Killain appeared to be third-person, but that was a cover-up-while-learning device; nothing happened in the books at which he wasn't present in person, so essentially they were first-person stories.

To set the record straight, the next Drake (#12) will be the 25th Marlowe appearance in book-length. Plus about two hundred short stories in mystery, suspense, adventure and girly mags, about 25% under my own name and 75% under the pseudonym, Jaime Sandaval.

Some of the short stories have been anthologized in the Boucher, MNA, and Faber & Faber (England) collections (annuals). I can't get many people to agree with me, but I sometimes feel that at least a few of my short stories are better than anything I've accomplished in book-length.

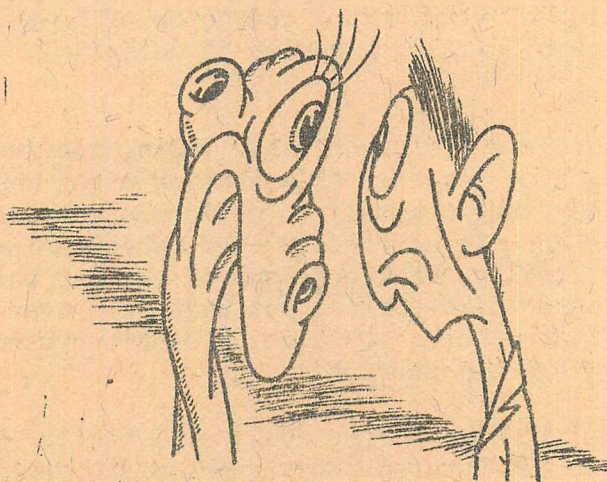
A final point: I never wrote a commercial line until I was 43. Prior to that I had been office manager and credit manager for various wholesale companies. The business background gave me situations the average writer wasn't familiar with, and occasionally I've used them.

Many thanks for your perceptive comments in Starling. You have no idea how encouraging it can be to know that when a book comes out it's not just dropping down a well.

WE ALSO HEARD FROM. . .

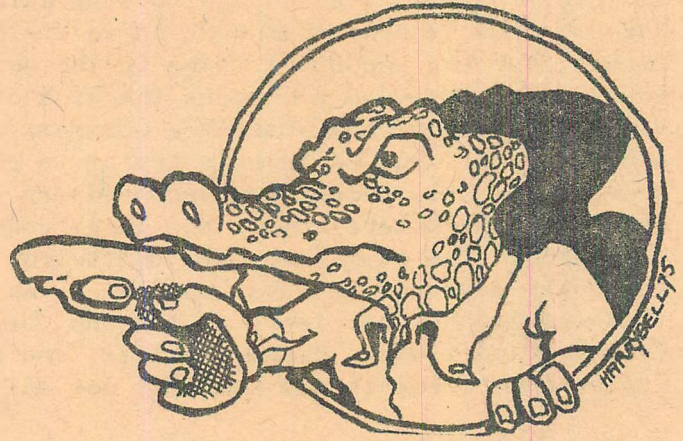
Nick Polak, "In response to Terry Hughes, the captain in Beany and Cecil was indeed Capt Huff 'n' Puff (aka Uncle Capt.)" Rod Snyder "Wow. . .people still talking about Beany and Cecil? Anyone for a talk on Tom Terrific?" ++Well, as a matter of fact, I remember Tom Terrific. Until fairly recently, they were still shown on Captain Kangaroo. As animation they were very limited, and most of the jokes and gags were pretty corny, but I liked them. They had a certain charming imaginative quality untroubled by the ordinary confines of reality. --HL John Carl recommends Trevanian's The Eiger Sanction and The Loo Sanction. L. Sprague de Camp recommends Prof. Merritt's forthcoming book for a more detailed analysis of H. P. Lovecraft's fiction than he was able to include in his book.

And finally: Kim Gibbs, Neil Ballantyne, Brian Earl Brown, Sheryl Birkhead, Martin Wooster, Ralph Alfonso, Wally Stoelting, Paul Skelton, Harry Bell, and R. Alain Everts. In case you were wondering what happens to the letters I don't publish and the many parts of the letters that I do publish which get cut (I'm a hard editor, folks), I always cut them up and forward them to the contributor commented upon. Write soon and often, as the next issue may be sooner than you think.



With Malice Toward all

+Joe Sanders+



NEVER LIVE TWICE by Dan J. Marlowe. Fawcett, 95¢
THE VENGEANCE MAN by Dan J. Marlowe. Fawcett, 95¢
THE NAME OF THE GAME IS DEATH by Dan J. Marlowe. Fawcett, 75¢

Before you read this, check Marlowe's letter in "Words from Readers." Ouch. It's more than a little embarrassing to learn that those changes in the Drake series were not the personal choices that I'd supposed, but were instead the crotchets of various editors. In the words of the immortal Jelly Roll Morton, "One never knows, do one?" I think, however, that I see why I goofed, and perhaps discussing that will explain a bit more of what I admire in Marlowe's work.

Commercial writing is a craft, that Marlowe applied himself mightily to learning. In using Drake, from THE NAME OF THE GAME IS DEATH, as a series hero, Marlowe must have determined what Drake had that the heroes of the other two books, one shots from the mid-60s lacked. Jim Wilson, "hero" of THE VENGEANCE MAN, illustrates one such trait. The series hero must be somehow, however perversely, admirable. He may be admirable on terms that we would publically reject, like Richard Stark's Parker, but he must convince us that his goals or the ways he pursues them are worth following at least vicariously. If we can't accept the man's values we can at least groove on the masterful way he goes after what he wants. Jim Wilson is too actively unpleasant to admire, and his scheming is ultimately, blatantly self-destructive. He is a pride-driven, bullying loser, after a tawdry prize that snatches away the part of his life he really loved. And I'd be willing to bet that Marlowe knows it. The first person narration shows too much objective, unpleasant detail -- including a rather strong hint of repressed homosexuality -- to be accidental. The book is the kind of procedural downfall-of-a-schemer that John D. MacDonald was doing in the late 50s. (SOFT TOUCH, for example.) The social background is vivid, the plotting is clear and the characters are skillfully, if sketchily drawn -- though that fits the dreadfully limited perception of the narrator. Even Jim Wilson is uncomfortably convincing. But there's no place for Jim Wilson to go. He contemplates suicide at the book's end, and it sounds like a fine idea under the circumstances. Wilson is just a violence man, with himself as his last target.

NEVER LIVE TWICE is another interesting book. The hero begins as an amnesiac, trying to figure out just who he is and what happened before his first memory. Readers, however, know a little of his background -- like the fact that he lost his memory during an auto accident planned by his wife and brother-in-law. . . . It's a tricky plot, which must work on two levels; the hero's self-discovery depending on his being

naturally quick-witted enough to stay alive. Marlowe makes it work well. I'm not clear yet on exactly what went on in the hero's past (some sort of dirty work in Korea), but the important thing in the book is the way he takes stock of what he is and what he has -- and changes the kind of life he lives. I'm not altogether convinced by some of the character changes; in particular the wife's conversion seems a bit forced. But Marlowe is trying to show characters who are capable of personal growth, and I'll accept some awkwardness in presenting the causes of that change since the characters are by and large convincing in the tentative and uncertain ways they grow. The characters who don't grow wind up as losers, again, including the nurse who appeared to have been set up as the heroine very early in the story. As the hero watches her leave at the end, he thinks, "She had been the earliest, brightest part of my brand-new life, and here she went, a complete stranger. ## It was enough to convince a man that not all the stories had happy endings." Right.

Marlowe demands a special kind of attention. His heroes can sometimes learn from their experience. I've spoken in Starling #27 and 23 of the series hero's unchanging nature, how he winds up very much the same man he was at the start, ready to take on another case/robbery/planet. Marlowe knows that. He realizes that the hero of NEVER LIVE TWICE would not make a good series hero. He also is aware, though, of the possible consequences for a man who does hold onto a goal with manic determination. And he is interested in the unexpected effects he can get from characters who desert their assigned roles or whose roles prove too large for them. A series written by such a man is likely to be rather unpredictable, perhaps sometimes disappointing but certainly never routine.

Consider any Mickey Spillane novel: once you've found the smartest character in the book, regardless of age or sex, you know who the murderer is; the only suspense is in guessing exactly how Spillane's hero will butcher the villain. Or consider any Ross MacDonald novel: the live questions there are how many ways one generation can victimize the next; how tangled a web of guilt and repression can be woven with the limited number of characters at hand? These writers have slid into a habit of easy repetition. Their readers know not just the mood but a lot of the detailed content they will find in new books by each. Series books tend to be templated, standardized, and evidently that doesn't hurt them with a lot of readers.

But I get tired of the same things done in the same ways. One thing I've liked about the Drake series, then, is that the situation changes from book to book, developing reasonably as it goes along. Marlowe explains that some of the changes were forced on him; it's a tribute to his talent that the changes felt natural, even if I thought some of them were errors. Some of the things Marlowe had Drake doing seemed to me inappropriate and dull, but none seemed so implausible that it was obviously imposed on the books from outside.

What it comes down to, I suppose, is that Marlowe's characters are capable of doing more different, unexpected things than are most series characters. Within, naturally, the limitations of the series format. THE NAME OF THE GAME IS DEATH is a fine crime novel as well as the first book in the Drake series; it shows Drake tracing a missing pal who was keeping the loot from their latest bank robbery. Marlowe has a sharp eye for scenery and a good sense of social setting. But the real interest is in watching Drake at work, arriving in a small town, establishing his cover, and scanning the scene for clues. As this is Drake's first appearance in a novel, Marlowe uses the action to establish Drake as a hero capable of carrying a series. This is very important: Drake doesn't want vengeance, especially -- just the money he worked hard to steal. (When he kills people during the robbery, it's acceptable because they started shooting at him first.) He takes revenge when he finds out what was done to his friend, but again that's acceptable in the circumstances. On the other hand,

Drake isn't looking for personal involvement, though he finds himself taking that²² too. So far, so good. He is a good hero, a good potential series hero. He also is a sometimes convincing character in human terms. In NAME, Marlowe gives enough of Drake's background to help us understand Drake. Not completely--series heroes are born, not made, and to some extent we are eager to accept that the man's that way because he is. But a series of flashbacks shows Drake growing up, much closer to animals than people (his missing friend was amute) and utterly singleminded in getting what he wants, no matter how long it takes or what it costs. Marlowe seems aware, however, that it does cost something.

Speaking of Drake as a person is rather strange. Series heroes don't have to be plausible characters; they're primarily projections of our desires and fears. Yet, at this stage of his game, Drake still is human. He is a less than overpowering lover (Hazel is an interesting character in this book, too), and the limitations of his personality are obviously not simply advantages. In NAME and in the other Drake books I've recommended, Marlowe is giving us more than he really had to--more than Daniel DaCruz's Ape Swain, for example, ever shows... Within, always, the narrow boundaries of the series format. I'm not suggesting that Marlowe should change what he's doing, since he does it so well and since the realistic characterizations do improve the verisimilitude of the action. But I ended that first review of Marlowe's books by suggesting that he could let his characters grow more. I don't know whether this could be done within an action series. I suspect not. But reading these books leaves me with an even higher opinion of Marlowe's abilities to do original, interesting things.

* * * *

Finally, here's a paragraph that got squeezed out of last issue's reply to Moskowitz. I realize it's a little dated by now, but I like kicking a man when he's down.

On the one subject you do consider in detail, Cook's ROUNDTRIP TO THE YEAR 2000, let me explain my interpretation. You mention a passage on page 136, suggesting that the muglugs are kept under control by the Head Center. The passage comes at the end of a discussion that on page 134 introduces the question: "What animates the muglug and makes it subservient to man?" The answer, as Lumley exclaims on the next page, is that "The Head Center furnishes the divergent subconscious rays, and each ray animates a corresponding muglug." I take this to mean that the Head Center is responsible for the muglugs' animation--their active impulse--not simply their purposeful control. In other words, the muglugs have no independent life at all; as the Head Center tires and loses his conscious self control, the muglugs run amok, doing the mischief to which the Head Center's subconscious still directs them. If this is not the case--if the muglugs do have independent consciousness--why will the execution of the renegade Head Center end the muglugs' rampage? You may feel that I am imposing a too-modern psychology on the story; I feel that you are giving too much emphasis to the story's place in the development of stf.

And I think that's about enough about the Hyperion Press reprints. I closed that review, though, with the prophecy that we'd be seeing more such projects soon. Since that column was written I've heard about three other reprint series in the works...

HIS LAST WADDE

+
Jim
Turner
+

It was Lily Rowan who told me. I had started a second plate of Fritz's griddle cakes with green tomato jam when the telephone rang.

She was crying. "Archie," she said, "have you heard the news?"

"There's always news," I said. "Or so Lon Cohen always tells me."

She stopped crying. "This is serious, Archie. Rex Stout died last night."

I very slowly put the fork down on the table and pushed the plate away. It had hit me hard enough for me to be able to ignore Fritz's pained expression. I don't think either he or Wolfe would have willingly permitted the Second Coming to interfere with breakfast.

"How did it happen?" I asked. "Was it somebody trying to get to Wolfe or me through him?"

"Oh Archie...this isn't one of those books. He was a very old man."

I talked to her a while longer and hung up. I took the elevator up to Wolfe's room.

He was considerably more than one-seventh of a ton these days and the expanse of yellow silk pajamas looked more like a circus tent than ever. He took one look at my face. "What has happened, Archie? Is this some flummery to disturb my lucullian ruminations?" His face darkened. "Did the sausage fail to arrive? It had better not have. As Arnold Zeck is no more, Mummari's can have no excuse."

"You sound phonier every year," I said. "I'm surprised you can force words that big past your new teeth."

"Pfui, sir. Come to the point. I will not bandy words with a man who cuts his own breakfast short in order to disrupt another's repast. Out with it."

I told him.

"Alas," he said. "A splendid old fellow, a man of great talent and intellect. This requires beer." He rang twice for Fritz.

"This early? Beer on top of thyme honey and rice cakes? Have you forgotten what Doc Vollmer told you about your liver last month?" I wanted to say that I didn't want to lose him too but I'd be damned if I'd give him the satisfaction. I finished, "I'm glad to see you're bearing up so well."

Fritz came in with the beer and a glass. Wolfe filed the cap on the table by the bed for the start of the daily count. He said, "To starve the living will in no way nourish the dead. Mr. Stout was ever a practical man."

"That's all you can say about him?"

"No, I could say many things. I must confess that when you first began to publish accounts of my more interesting cases, I was not terribly pleased. I recall some of the terrible things that Dr. Watson did in the name of my late father--"

"No more of that!" I said. "Sometimes I really wonder if he was your father or if it's just something that you got from Philip Jose Farmer. I suppose Jules Maigret is your bastard son, eh?"

Wolfe wrinkled his nose, or tried to. On the scale of his face, it looked like a hard wind disturbing a sand dune.

"Mr. Farmer has come late to geneology. I believe it was Mr. Baring-Gould who first revealed my ancestry. But I may be wrong. The years pass. It is sometimes difficult to keep track. Fritz has ordered a ham from Boone County, Missouri. I wonder if by decreasing the amount of vinegar--"

I started for the door. "If I listen to much more of this, it will end with me having to explain it to Inspector Cramer downtown."

Wolfe shrugged, the most work he'd done in years. "But now that Mr. Stout is gone, who, then, will refine your narrative, who will purge it of its flippancy and redundant detail? No, I am not callous. I shall sincerely mourn him. I fear that my activities may now be proofread by a dullard."

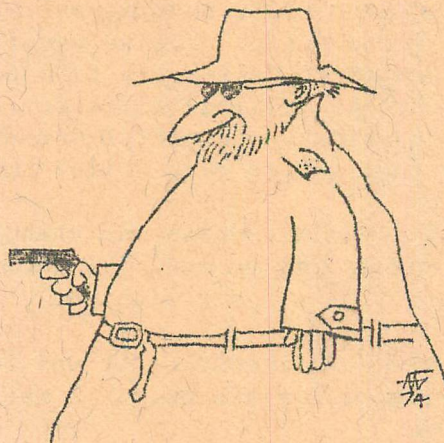
I went to my own room and made some calls. I had some idea of getting everybody together for an evening at Rusterman's Restaurant. Not much luck. Nick and Nora Charles were in France. I hadn't seen them since Sam Spade's funeral. Lew Archer promised to fly right in and it took three calls to Ellery before I could speak to him. His line had been busy because he had been trying to call me with an idea like mine.

I went to the kitchen and got a bottle of beer. Fritz still hadn't forgiven me for not finishing breakfast. I told him I was taking the day off and not to admit anybody to the house.

Then I called Cousin Travis down in Florida. He had heard the news and had been expecting me to call. I made arrangements to join him in a couple of weeks for some serious cruising and drinking. "I wish I could think of something nice and pompous to say," he said before we hung up.

I was still mad at Wolfe. He had always pretended that the publicity he got from the books irked him but he knew as well as I did how good they were for business. He did not know that Stout carefully edited out some unflattering details about Wolfe that I had deliberately inserted into several of the books. I just wish the world had known before now that Nero Wolfe was a charter subscriber to PLAYBOY. He claimed he got it just for the articles on food which, he claimed, were perfect. This hadn't kept him from getting PENTHOUSE too.

I decided I had had it with Wolfe and his pretensions. Travis had been wanting me to move to Florida for years. Lew had offered me a partnership several times. I could always start my own agency with Saul and Fred and Orrie. In fact, I had once, during that summer Wolfe was in hiding.



I decided to wait, then depart with a flourish. I would write up the one case that still irked Wolfe. You've never heard of it. It was in 1939 when Wolfe and I secretly journeyed to California to undertake a case for W. C. Fields. If the word got out about how Fields took Wolfe for every penny that Fields owed him, Wolfe would be a laughing stock. Inspector Cramer could claim that Kojack was modeled on him, but who would they get to play Wolfe? Andy Devine?

All of a sudden, Wolfe was standing over me, a glass of beer in each hand. He sat down and handed me one. "I thought you would need a refill by this time, Archie," he said. "May I sit with you?"

I knew what a sacrifice it was for him to use any chair but the one that was specially designed for his bulk. I was unprepared. For him, this amounted to self-flagellation.

He sat perfectly still for a while. "Archie, this is uncomfortable news. I tried reading STRICTLY SPEAKING by Edwin Newman and I found I could not concentrate. That is a distressing feeling."

"I'm sorry that you have a distressing feeling."

"Archie, we are, none of us, as young as once we were."

That was Wolfe all right. Reading Edwin Newman and losing the ability to strike off a simple declarative sentence, both at the same time. "You have put on a little more weight lately," I offered.

He raised an eyebrow. "Pfui, sir. Your hair is not so thick as it was when we watched Manual Kimball and his father plummet to their mutual doom."

We were both quiet for a while. "Yes," Wolfe said, "I think I will greatly miss Mr. Stout."

"Nice of you."

"It was Mr. Stout who first introduced me to planked steak. It was he who suggested adding marmalade to my favorite hedgehog omelet. Both Fritz and I were dubious at first. But the man was right. Without him, I might have continued in ignorance of file powder."

"It's nice to know that everybody is of some use."

"Perhaps I should send orchids to the widow?"

"Wouldn't that be a lot of work?"

He slammed his beer down on my desk. He was actually mad enough to spill a little of it. Perhaps an ounce or a little more. But certainly not two ounces.

"Confound it, Archie! Do you expect me to weep and wail and take on like an ingenue deprived of frivolity? I am an adult and so are you. You are behaving unreasonably. There is never any excuse for being unreasonable."

I had to laugh a little. "I guess you are your father's son, after all. How close were you with him?"

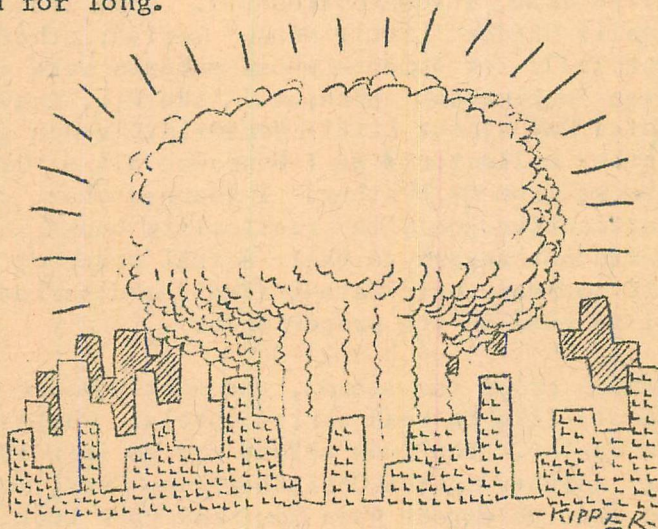
"Not so close as I would have wished. My mother was a formidable woman and her feeling for my father ebbed and flowed. He and I were good friends toward the end. I think he might have liked our late Mr. Stout."

Wolfe had Fritz bring us some more beer. After several sips, he started talking again. "That fine scholar, the late Mr. Vincent Starrett, wrote a sonnet about my father and the Good Doctor which is now in print from Pinnacle Books. In it, he speaks of two men who never lived and so can never die. It is a pleasant work. I recommend it. Are you now ready to go back to work?"

"Yes," I said. "But work of my own for a while. I have to call Rusterman's."

"That reminds me," Wolfe said, "what are your thoughts on chitlins for dinner tomorrow? Mr. King, in Boone County, is shipping some fresh chitlins straightaway along with a ham. It is a humble dish but not to be scorned. Thackery called them chitterlings. I cannot think why."

He got up and waddled out, still muttering to himself about chitlins. The old brownstone is not disrupted for long.



NOTEBOOKLINGS continued from page 5:

Now here is a really fair offer. Those of you who read the contents page have probably noticed an ever shortening list of back issues for sale at \$1 each. I only have one complete set of Starling back issues myself, and we'd like to have more. So I want to offer \$1 each for any Starling which I don't have in stock -- you can check the list on the contents page to see which issues I already have. I'm not expecting to be overwhelmed by offers of Starling back issues, but please do write before you send them to me to see if I still need them -- in the unlikely event that a dozen people offer to sell me the same issue.

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CONTINUED NEXT BOOK:

+Lesleigh Luttrell+

One of the nicest things that can happen to an avid reader is to stumble across a series new to them. Most of us are familiar with that delightful feeling that comes when we learn there are 10, 20, 30 or more books by the same author, about the same character that we haven't read yet. The first time it happened to me was when I realized that there was more than one Bobbsey Twins story. Not being a very experienced reader at that time, I decided that if books were part of a series they had to be read in order, or not at all. As a result, I never read half of the Bobbsey books I so laboriously acquired looking through the piles of childrens' books at the annual book fair. But that experience taught me to be on the lookout for series books.

Other series were easier to find, I soon discovered. Some were in the library in toto, like the Laura Ingalls Wilder 'Little House' series; others were all in print and easy to acquire (especially for someone whose parents were always willing to buy books as Christmas or even 'unbirthday' presents) like P.L. Travers four books about Mary Poppins, or the Louisa May Alcott Little Women-Little Men group. Still others could be borrowed from other collectors, as I borrowed all of Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan and John Carter books from my brother. I learned that, while 'reading all the books in order' was an attractive goal, in practicality books in a series are usually read as you find them, with out regard to their actual order of publication. After all, who can bear to wait to read their latest find? And series are really almost as enjoyable read piecemeal as read in the proper order .

Judging from the books which crowd the stands, the most popular library books and other evidences, most people like to read series novels. What's the attraction? For one thing, it makes life easier. You know before you go into the library or bookstore what you are looking for; another Agatha Christie, Zane Grey, Robert E. Howard or what have you. You know what to expect when you read your book. All of us make the assumption that if we like one book by an author there is a good chance we will like others by the same writer. This applies even more when we know other books by the same author will include the same basic characters, similar situations and, in some cases, the same plot. When it comes to choosing a book to take along on a trip, or to take when we retire to bed with a cold, it's a big help to know more-or-less what's in store for us. Since we all know you can't judge a book by it's cover (or its blurbs) the best way to insure we do choose a puzzle or a space opera or a light romance or a violence trip when we're in that kind of a mood is to select a book from a series we know.

Carry this attitude to the extreme and you get television series. The viewer can be sure of getting just what (s)he expects at the same time each week until the show is replaced. Millions of people tune into the same shows week after week. There must be something very attractive about the series format.

Knowing what to expect and having no difficulty choosing a show to watch or book to read certainly applies to all types of series. But, more than that, people like to have more than the space of one book or one movie to get to know the character(s). To most addicts, series characters become well-known, almost real figures. Certainly

CHARACTERS

CONSTANT AND DIVERSE

the rare author is able to create in one work characters who are painted so clearly that the reader comes to know them well. But I think it is the series characters that the readers (and the viewers, since we've admitted they're part of the phenomenon) come to love.

Has it ever happened to you that while you were reading a book you thought 'this must be part of a series' or 'I bet the author intends to turn this into a series'? Quite often you're right, but how do you know? There's something almost obvious about a work that's part of a good series, but what is it?

One prime characteristic of a series is formula. Books in a series are similar because you know each book will have the same approach: Gideon Fell always solves mysteries in the same way, but it's not at all similar to the way Jules de Grandin or Sam Spade operates. Perhaps that's because each is confronted with different kinds of problems. Each series star will always have the same kinds of costarring and minor characters to deal with in each book, but they may be not at all like the characters who share books with other stars.

Formula is rather like genre. It helps to categorize the book for the reader, and gives the author limits within which to work. Admittedly, they're sometimes rather constraining limits. But that's what the series reader is looking for in the first place -- something that can be defined rather precisely so that they (s)he can tell from a few word description whether or not (s)he's likely to enjoy the book, show, etc. For example. I like to read mysteries, but not all types of mysteries. If a book is described as being about an English detective, written by a female author, preferably during an earlier period of detective fiction history, I begin to think I'll like it.

Such a description suggests to me books by Dorothy Sayers, Ngaio Marsh, Josephine Tey or Margery Allingham. They all worked with a similar format. Describing it in more detail, the main character is a detective, either officially or unofficially, but in either case has close connections with some legal authorities (preferably Scotland Yard people). He is from the upper classes, and can act equally at home with any sort of person from a Duke to a lower class criminal. He relies mainly on a quick intelligence and resourcefulness to solve mysteries, but will sometimes take advantage of police work done "in the usual way". He is often aided in his investigations by an assistant. He takes part physically in the solution of his problems, but seldom has to resort to violence. There are many other similar characteristic of these books; stories are written in the third person, etc. But this formula is not too limiting. Plots, timing, solution aren't predetermined by the formula, and each book by the writers mentioned is an individual treat.

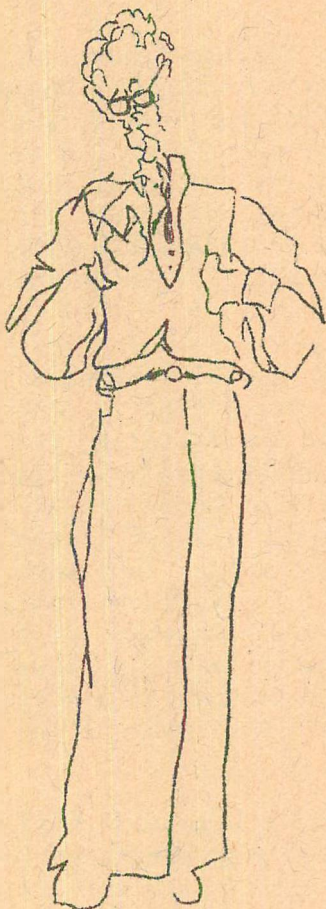
Sometimes formula is everything. Not only are the problems and characters similar from books to book or show to show, but the complications, the atmosphere, the timing, and the the conclusion are almost always the same. Reading a series like this is like eating peanuts; each one tastes pretty much like the last one, and they might even get boring after a while, but you just can't stop eating (reading) them.

It seems the author just doesn't want to mess with a successful formula. Some part of their audience must like this sameness. They like to know exactly what to expect from the next episode of Gunsmoke or volume in The Executioner series. Matt Dillon, Mike Hammer, Nick Carter, Nancy Drew, Perry Mason, Lucky Starr, Clark Kent are pretty much the same from adventure to adventure. It seems that to be successful a series star must be unchanging.

This is true for a good proportion of series. Television series seem particularly guilty of this. Even the tv genre which relies most on crises and changes in the lives of its continuing characters, the soap opera, seems merely to serve as a demonstration of plus ca change...

There is an intimate relation between formula and character in a series. If one stays the same, it seems the other must also. It takes the same kind of detective to solve the same kind of problem over and over, the same kind of superhero to defeat the same kind of enemy over and over. In fact, the plot generally requires that the star be exactly the kind of person they are to get involved in that kind of situation in the first place. Formula and character build on each other until they are locked into a tight little format that usually works, and seldom changes.

This leads one to think that series stars, of necessity, can't change. They must be the same forever and ever. In a way, that's the most attractive thing about a series. It is this unchanging aspect that makes series characters so appealing. They're dependable; they're always the same; they seem immortal.



But this isn't really a fair way to look at series characters. After all, how much do real people change? We are, most of us, the same basic character throughout our lives. I suspect most of us spend our life getting into the same kinds of situations, dealing with the same kind of people, solving problems in the same ways. Perhaps we really like series characters because, in this respect, they're so much more like us that the character who plays out their life in a few brief, dramatic sequences in one novel or movie.

Margery Allingham's character, Albert Campion, for example, has over 20 books in which to live. He begins life in 1929 in The Crime at Black Dudley. This is not the most promising start to a series. Campion is not even the main character; in fact, he's more of an intriguing suggestion, an outline, than a real character. The reader isn't sure just what kind of a character Campion is meant to be. He seems to be a criminal, yet he is obviously part of the upper class. He seems a twit, but in a pinch he's very resourceful. The reader finally realizes it's mostly a front and lurking somewhere underneath is a genuinely interesting character.

Allingham uses the vague, 'silly ass' character assumed by Campion in his work to good advantage. The reader doesn't learn all about Campion at once. Allingham could have left it at that. Some series stars remain fairly mysterious their whole career. But Campion emerges in the early books. His background (wealthy family, excellent schools, much more than meets the eye) is

drawn in. His present situation, bachelor flat, faithful companion Lugg, estrangement from his family, relationship with the police, criminals and other interesting sorts of people is described. His real character is revealed, but he doesn't really change much from book to book.

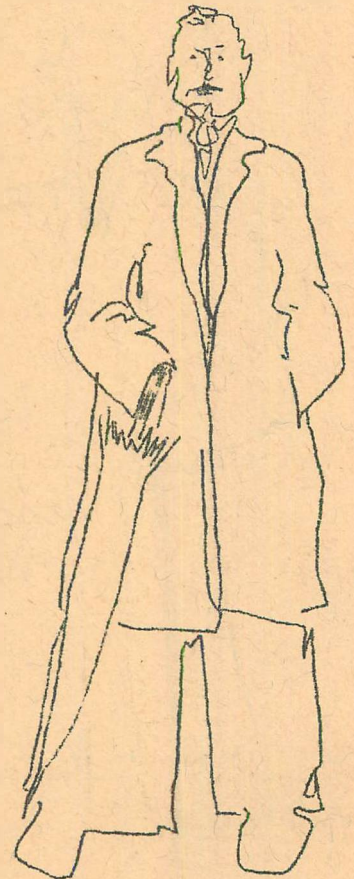
Real people can't help changing in some respects, though. For one thing, they get older. It's true that many series characters never seem to age. Some of them can't because, like Miss Marple, they are born old. Others are so mysterious that it would be difficult to tell if they were getting older. Doc Savage is ageless because of his training regimen; no one can tell if the Lone Ranger is acquiring wrinkles under that mask; and who knows what age lurks behind the mask of the Shadow? Then there are some series characters who may seem to get older, but don't really age. Nero Wolfe admits of change in the world around him, but not in himself. The books he reads and the background events in his adventures reflect the passing years, but he does not. And finally there are series characters who, like their authors and readers, do get older as the series progresses.

Changes in state are another type of change most 'real' people undergo. They change from sick to well, happy to sad; they are single then married; they are in love and out of it. Some series heroes are not subject to such 'weaknesses'. They are fixed points in the events which happen around them; they remain unaffected by the adventures they undertake, or the problems they solve. They may be impersonal thinking machines, or opinionated men of great bulk. In many respects, these are 'unhuman' characters, and their appeal is limited. Most series stars do suffer changes in state. Sometimes these changes are integral parts of the plots of their books. Other times they are part of the background of the character being built up by the author to make their character more real.

Albert Campion eventually undergoes such changes. In Sweet Danger (1933) he meets Amanda Fitton and acquires a new 'lieutenant' and fiancée. But it seems to take series heroes longer than most other people to get around to things, for it's not until 1940 that Campion actually gets around to marrying Amanda. And then it takes a blow on the head to make him do it.

Traitors' Purse starts out with an unnamed character lying in a hospital bed realizing he has lost his memory. The character turns out to be Campion. He spends 2/3s of the book knowing only what he can gather from people around him (who don't realize his condition) about the kind of person Albert Campion is. And he is a bit horrified. Campion can't understand why he hasn't married Amanda. Why does he take her so for granted? What kind of person is he? It all ends well, with Campion regaining his memory in time to save the British economy from a fiendish plot and to incorporate the observations he made about himself while not in his right mind into his character. He marries Amanda. Perhaps Allingham had to go to greater extremes to get her character married than matchmakers usually do, but she accomplished it. And like Roderick Alleyn and Peter Wimsey, Albert Campion does not suffer because he has acquired a wife.

As the books continue, Albert and Amanda have children, everyone grows older (though Lugg cheats a bit and goes

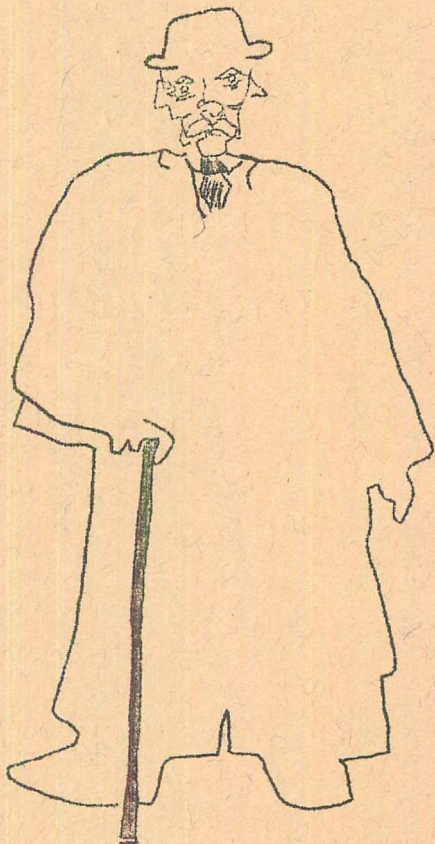


into a second childhood), the children grow up and become themselves involved in the stories. Things do not stay forever and eternally exactly the same for Albert Campion.

Real people sometimes undergo radical changes. They change their way of life drastically, their whole way of thinking changes, they give up an old life and take up a new. Can this happen to a series character? No, not really. Some characters have such a drastic change in their past, as part of their background, to explain why they're the kind of character they are. Perhaps their parents were killed by criminals, or they were forever marked by their war experiences. But a character really can't risk undergoing such a drastic change in the course of his series. They can't change from a character the readers have come to know into a very different sort of person.

If such things did happen, it could be the start of a new series. That opens up a wide range of possibilities. Martin Beck undergoes a sex change operation; Sherlock Holmes gets religion; Tom Swift loses the inventing knack and goes into insurance; Tarl Cabot takes a vow of celibacy. But you're not likely to see these changes. If such drastic changes occurred often in series, the series would lose most of its attraction. The reader would no longer know what to expect in each book of a series. So, in this respect, series characters don't change much.

Finally, real people die. Series people can die too. Sometimes they're not allowed to stay dead; they're called back from Reichenbach Falls by popular demand. Or perhaps, like Perry Rhodan and Nick Carter, the character outlasts many authors. But sometimes series characters do die. Death is an occupational hazard of supporting characters. Major characters, partners, wives, nemeses, aide de camps, comic reliefs who have survived book after book fall prey to the need for a plot turn or a change in the series and die. Even the stars are not immortal. Some die decently at the end of a long career, like Hercule Poirot, others may be wiped out suddenly, even in mid-book, as was the fate of Inspector Van der Valk.



Campion did not die, along with Margery Allingham in 1966, but survived his creator by two books, both written by her husband, Philip Youngman Carter. So he hasn't suffered death in his history. But he has undergone other changes. The reader knows that Campion, like their 'real' friends, can change, while remaining reassuringly, the same basic character.

Perhaps it just seems like our favorite series characters don't change because they form such a constant part of our life. They become, if not friends, at least people we know well. Long after we've finally found and read all of the books in a series, we remember the characters we have come to know. Because so many readers learn to know and discover them long after their first appearances, series characters are, in one sense, immortal and unchanging. For every good series star is constantly being discovered by a new reader, by someone who learns 'hey, that book was part of a series' and thinks to themselves, 'I'll have to read the rest'.

* * * * *

If anyone is interested in a Margery Allingham bibliography, drop us a line. Lesleigh put one together for an apazine, and we have a number of extra copies. --HL

