

THE TEXAS SF INQUIRER



THE TEXAS UNICORN~

- A FABULOUS ANIMAL GENERALLY
- DEPICTED WITH THE HEAD AND
- BODY OF A QUARTERHORSE, THE
- HIND LEGS OF A JAVELINA, THE
- TAIL OF A MOUNTAIN LION, AND
- A SINGLE LONGHORN IN THE
- MIDDLE OF THE FOREHEAD.

the Texas SF Inquirer

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HUGO
NOMINEE!

SERCON

convention report

SERCON I

January 30 - February 1, 1987
Claremont Resort Hotel,
Oakland, California

report by Howard Coleman

IN FEBRUARY, from where the Claremont Resort Hotel sprawls grandly along the Hayward fault system, you can usually see downtown Oakland, sometimes the Bay, and occasionally, when the winter mist and rain allow, beyond to the shining city and the Golden Gate. Inside the rambling old hotel, there was also a sight rarely seen these days: a science fiction convention concerned almost entirely with words written on paper. Not words in balloons surrounded by brightly-colored comic art, not words uttered by chubby starship captains or pointy-eared logicians of the '60s, not even words dubbed over the heroics of Japanese animations. Just plain old written sf.

Those of us who have attended conventions over the past few (well, not so few) years can have a little trouble coming to grips with this concept. Let me tell you more of what it wasn't. Then I'll tell you some of what it was.

There was no film room. There was no animation/video room. There was no gaming room. There were no hall costumes (except by accident -- I'll come back to that): no Federation personnel, no Klingons, no Hobbits, no wizards, no Imperial stormtroopers, no Princess Leias, no Skywalkers or Solos, no elves, no dragons, no barbarians, and no scan-

dalously clad young ladies dressed as in-pulp covers of days gone by. (I never said it was perfect, did I?)

What there was, was a dealer's room, an art show, and programming. Programming is what Sercon was all about. People went to the convention in order to attend the programming. (This isn't as obvious as I once thought. I've just read a long computer-net discussion of why people go to conventions. A minority of those participating listed programming as any motivation at all, and about as many said they had never attended the programming at any convention they'd been to.)

Sercon's programming was organized in a single track, giving everyone a chance to see everything (or almost). The opportunity was apparently welcome, and audiences were consistently large. Panel topics were carefully thought out, and the participants by and large made better than average attempts at contributing. Discussions ranged from formula fiction and the worst of hackneyed sf ideas to censorship, internal and external, to class issues in sf, and beyond.

Not all the panels were successful, of course. Sometimes the discussions were guided by skillful (or lucky) moderators, sometimes by a panel member who had a special interest in seeing the panel address its topic, sometimes not at all. But the obvious effort which went into planning the sessions and the constant, close attention of the audiences seemed to bring out the best (or at least the better) in panel members.

A very impressive development was the chance for interested participants to present their own programs, ranging beyond the normal run of readings to Ian Watson's impassioned speech "The Author as Torturer," about "how far over the top authors ought to go, or might be rewarded for going, or alternatively oughtn't to go." This persuasive (if not, persuading) presentation was one of the hits of the convention. (It also makes an interesting counterpoint to the reading of Clive Barker's

(continued on last page)

A Short History of ArmadilloCon and A Serious Statement of Philosophy and Management

by Robert Taylor
and Monica Stephens
(reprinted from the ArmadilloCon 8 program book)

An ArmadilloCon I ... I remember it like it was a flashback on the David Letterman Show. So many memories -- the auction, where the original manuscripts for John Varley's The Barbie Murders and The Persistence of Vision were sold after a fierce bidding battle; Jeanne Gomoll showing everyone that a cat with a sock wrapped around its middle can't stand up (try it sometime); the panel on "How I Grew Up in a Small Town and Lived To Tell the Tale," featuring Howard Waldrop, Chad Oliver and Varley speaking from their hearts about discovering SF and how it changed their lives.

It all occurred at the Villa Capri Motor Hotel in Austin, May 11-13 of 1979. Guest of Honor was John Varley, an up-and-coming writer of the time. We've heard he's gone on to bigger things since ... Fan Guest was Jeanne Gomoll, who traveled all the way from her cool, native Wisconsin to "enjoy" Texas weather and "for-real" Mexican food. Toastmastering the whole affair was Howard Waldrop, who provided the highlight of the con with his reading of "The Ugly Chickens" (which brought Howard the Nebula award for best novelette). Attendance was 103. We had only a dealers' room (six tables), a programming room, and a con suite (in Jeanne's room). One of the main pastimes of the con was creating art on the carpeted walls of the programming area. One "drew" by brushing on the carpet. Amazing things were done on those walls.

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ArmadilloCon II? I'm glad you asked. Since we were still so new to running SF cons, this was a time of experimentation. We didn't really know what could or couldn't be done. For example, we didn't know that you don't invite stylistic writers as your Guest of Honor.

Go with a known writer, we were told, someone who likes to filk and masquerade. Since we didn't know, we invited Gardner Dozois -- a very stylistic writer, incredibly talented and a little crazy in a nice way. (He once ran a tag-team wrestling match in the SFWA suite at a Worldcon. The match featured two Tylenols versus a pretzel and a potato chip. The Tylenols won by double-teaming the pretzel in their corner.)

AC II was held at the Quality Inn South on October 3-5, 1980. In addition to Gardner, we had Harry Morris as our Fan Guest and Chad Oliver as Toastmaster. Membership reached 157. Like the first ArmadilloCon, there was only a dealers' room, a programming room, and a con suite. Instead of a traditional banquet, we substituted a pizza pig-out and a chicken pig-out. These informal, inexpensive dinner gatherings allowed folks to socialize without paying \$12 for a hotel rubber-chicken dinner.

Another difference at this con was the GoH speech. Dozois did a hybrid of a speech and a reading. This wasn't the usual "science fiction is taking us to the stars" speech. Instead, in hilarious fashion, he spoke of being a slush-pile reader for Galaxy magazine, and about the brain-damaged stories he received. Imagine receiving (and having to read) stories written on a Big Chief tablet, in crayon, about a super-moose. One came in the mail every two weeks. (And apparently the cover letters were even worse.) His reading, of a piece entitled "Touring" was incredible. Centering on a reunion of Janis Joplin, Elvis and Buddy Holly, it showcased the Dozois wit and flashes of humor. It was a well-written piece that touched the feeling of loss many of us have toward those old rock 'n' rollers.

Interestingly, music and SF were again a feature at the con when Howard Waldrop got into the act by reading

his "Flying Saucer Rock and Roll" short story. Ah, we danced away the night.

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AC III was at the Town Lake Ramada Inn, October 2-4, 1981. The Guest of Honor was the dean of Texas science fiction (and head of UT's anthropology department), Dr. Chad Oliver. Fan Guest was Bob Wayne, owner of the Fantastic Worlds bookstores. Ed Bryant handled the Toastmaster duties. Once again the convention had only a dealers' room, a single programming room and a con suite, but the 212 attendees were well entertained by the programming and the guests.

The film program featured a "bad cinema" festival that brought some very bad movies to the convention. These included Mesa of the Lost Women, Plan Nine from Outer Space, Robot Monster, Invasion of the Bee Girls, and many others. The crowd loved them. (I can assure you that Mesa of the Lost Women is beyond bad. It makes Plan Nine look like King Lear.)

In addition to the films, the programming included a number of panels that got both the audience and the panelists heated. One was "Condos and Fantasy Trilogies -- The End of Western Civilization As We Know It?" People have strong views of fantasy trilogies. Another topic was violence in Star Trek, discussed in the panel "Kiss the Blood Off My Phaser." That was a nasty one, but quite interesting. Also, Kerry O'Quinn, a native Austinite, took time from Starlog magazine to make an appearance and show his magazine's birthday film.

The pizza and chicken pig-outs were quite successful and the con suite seemed never to close. But the highlight of the con was Chad Oliver's GoH speech. After a sparkling introduction by Ed Bryant, Chad gave the best speech I have ever heard. It spoke to that sense of wonder all who enjoy SF share, and touched on his history in the field both as fan and pro. Chad was turning out fanzines in the '30s, and was well known in the letter columns of the major magazines before he began appearing in the fiction section. In the early '50s, he and Walter Miller (A Canticle for Leibowitz) bid for the Worldcon in Dripping Springs, Texas. His speech was both a history lesson and a very personal guide to the field. Chad's warmth and love for the literature were quite evident. It was a beautiful speech from a true giant of the field.

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With AC IV, the convention put on some airs. It was held at the very swank Bradford Hotel (now the Stephen F. Austin) on October 1-3, 1982. George Alec Effinger was Guest of Honor, Joe Pumilia was Fan Guest and once again Ed Bryant was Toastmaster. Despite the opulence of the hotel and its mirrored hallways (folks were bumping into the mirrors all the time), the fans were

Fans -- all 317 of them.

Among the other guests was Ellen Datlow, the fiction editor of Demi, making her first of many visits to ArmadilloCon. Frank Robinson dropped in and George R.R. Martin was there, too, as was a writer from Canada named William Gibson.

Again the con featured a single programming room and a dealers' room, but the con suite was a penthouse room. For the first time, AC members had to deal with elevators.

The film program had a number of hits from the "bad" cinema, and the panels again focused on areas of controversy in SF. Perhaps the highlight of the convention was the "Science Fiction Family Feud," pitting the pros against the fans. This "panel" resembled the TV game show, but the questions and answers dealt with SF -- in a tongue-in-cheek style. You know ... "Name an SF writer whose typewriter you would like to smash." It was a close contest; the pros won on the last question.

Another high point was the masquerade, our first. Well, it wasn't exactly a high point. It may have been one of the worst masquerades ever. Imagine Larry, Curly and Moe in charge. The audience was entertained, but it was torture for the committee. Since then, AC has had masque balls (which are easier and more fun).

Joe Pumilia proved to be a very good fan guest. He kept everyone entertained with his brand of insanity and fannish fervor. You see, Joe makes home movies. These include The Attack of the Killer Frog and Return of the Killer Frog. Most of the SF writers in Texas have appeared in these super-8 wonders. Plus, Joe was riding the crest of the "fans and their cats" debate with his good-humored Kitty Torture zine.

George Alec Effinger gave an eloquent speech describing the struggles of an SF writer. It was filled with irony, both bitter and comical. For all the wonders in the literature, there are very human writers behind the work. A writer has to put food on the table and pay the rent like everyone else. George brought this to our attention in a very moving address. Writing is a difficult way to make a living, but one that he found impossible to give up.

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After winning the bid for the 1985 NASFiC, the ArmadilloCon committee rushed home to run AC 5. This was the first con put on by FACT, Inc.

Howard Waldrop was a most deserving Guest of Honor, Becky Matthews was Fan Guest, and the immortal one, Neal Barrett, Jr., was Toastmaster. The convention gathered, for the second time in its history, at the Villa Capri. The dates were October 7-9, 1983.

For the first time, there was an art show, plus two programming rooms and the dealers' room. A big problem was the con suite; since the Villa Capri is a three-block-long motor hotel, the 413 fans had a good walk

from the programming area to the suite. The Villa Capri's entertainment center (sort of a theater in the half-round) was basically a night club and its cozy atmosphere was very conducive to fannish fun. The masque was a big hit. So were the movies, which included a tribute to Willis O'Brien. Such full-length features as King Kong, Son of Kong and Lost World were shown, as well as a number of O'Brien shorts. The bad flicks were back, including a number of classics like The Tingler and Rocket to the Moon.

"The SF Family Feud" returned, but this time the fans won in a squeaker. It was a busy con, with a meeting of the NASFiC executive committee, a hot tub party, the ever-popular pig-outs, and parties till dawn. The pools were well used.

Becky Matthews gave a first-class speech as Fan GoH, even after being roasted by Steve Gould in an SF version of "This Is Your Life". Becky's presentation was filled with visual aids as she poked fun at nearly everyone, including herself. She and Pat Mueller moderated panels on fannish history and artifacts that gave the newer fans a sense of their place in the crazy world of fandom.

Certainly the highlight of the con was Howard Waldrop's speech and reading. He read from his novel Them Bones and described how the novel was constructed. Howard is certainly the best reader in the field -- only Gardner Dozois and Ed Bryant can match him. The only thing better is watching Howard dance -- which he also did. A Waldrop reading is not to be missed, and this one was very special. Howard flowed in and out of characters in his colorful and dramatic style. At the end, Howard was presented with a three-sheet movie poster of his favorite film, Them!

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The sixth AC was again at the Villa Capri, on October 12-14 in 1984. John Sladek was Guest of Honor, Jim Corrick and Gay Miller were the Fan Guests, and Joe Lansdale brought his country charm to the duties of Toastmaster.

The con featured a movie/video room, a panel/reading room, a gaming room, the dealers' room, and a room for the art show. But again the con suite was a long walk from the programming area. That year, the entertainment center was used just for the masque.

Once again the programming proved to be the most interesting aspect of the con. "The SF Family Feud" made its third appearance; the fans destroyed the pros in a lopsided victory. The masque ball served as the con mixer and the pig-outs (egg rolls took the place of chicken that year) were a good place to meet folks while stuffing your face. The hot tub party was also a fun place to get acquainted.

The number of films in the "bad cinema" genre dropped, but the movie schedule was well balanced with

interesting shorts like The Quest and classics like Kwaidan. The videos were varied, but featured a lot of Japanese animation.

Panel topics ranged from a revival in honor of writer Daniel Pinkwater to themes in the horror genre. There were panels on gaming and the history of the gaming business in Texas. One panel was concerned with the value of the Hugo and Nebula awards, and how they can affect a writer's career. For the first time, there was two-track programming -- you couldn't see everything.

During their Fan Guests speech, Jim and Gay gave an interesting history of their lives in fandom and the difference between Texas fandom and their native Arizona. They noted how Texas was a melting pot of fandoms, while their area saw little crossover in the various fandoms.

John Sladek is certainly an unusual writer. His stories are noted for their humorous tone and absurdist qualities. He is often categorized as just a writer of funny SF stories, but he showed a serious side in his GoH address when he touched on the value of satire in the field. Sladek said that parody and the SF element can present insight to the human condition. Speaking in almost self-mocking tones, he discussed the need for SF to explore the fringe areas of the field. It was an almost academic speech, but Sladek's own humor added a nice balance as he presented an interesting challenge to other SF writers.

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Now for the easy one. AC 7 was just a relaxacon held in some cabins in New Braunfels on October 17-19, 1985. There were about 70 very tired fans in attendance -- everyone was catching their breath following Lone Star Con, the Austin NASFiC, four weeks earlier.

It rained all weekend and everyone just sat around talking and visiting. There were some hot dominoes being played in the Houston fans' cabins, eating was a big pastime everywhere, and card games and water balloon battles were popular. Saturday night saw a big party, and Sunday featured a FACT meeting, but overall, laid-back was the motto of the weekend.

It was a weekend for sitting in a rocking chair and if you felt like it -- and had the energy -- well, you must might do some rocking.



ArmadilloCon I 1979

— a report —

written in 1979
by Fan Guest of Honor
Jeanne Gomoll

Dear Pat,

I'm tempted to completely re-write this, or at least to leaven it with lots of little explanations of why this or that is no longer so. Why the reference to the current pope makes no sense if you don't remember the rapid-fire succession of the 1979 papacy. How the relative sizes of Austin and Madison have diverged, making my remark about their similarity seem rather dumb now. And that The Silver Horse actually got published with my illustrations by Bluejay Press, and that Janus was replaced by Aurora (which itself might not go on for much longer). And then there are those hundreds of little awkward phrases and writing irregularities that I wouldn't do anymore. I hope.

But then it wouldn't be a 1979 con report any more, would it?

Best,
Jeanne Gomoll

TEXAS is a sort of a foreign country to a person like me who has lived their entire life in Wisconsin, home of the Green Bay Packers, student unrest, and Schlitz. It appears from my midwestern perspective to be a desert and grassland cowboy reserve, replete with the images of American myths that Texans have so carefully fostered about themselves: bigness, vast -- almost vulgar -- wealth, emptiness, conservative politics and Alamo memories. Texas is to many Americans what America is to a lot of Europeans: an identity shimmering with lots of relevant images, but many mirages as well.

And so Austin surprised me. My hometown, Madison, Wisconsin, shares more with Austin than I would have guessed before ArmadilloCon. One moment before the con had started, in particular, served to drive this point home to me with weird sureness.

It was Thursday morning, the day after I'd flown into town, and I was still only going through the motions of being awake. I had gotten up, yes, showered, drank some juice, yes, yes. But I was not awake yet. We were walking past the U.T. Student Union on the campus in Austin when I did at last wake up. I looked around vaguely and amused Chris Pasanen (one of my hosts those two days before the con) and Scott Cupp, by asking -- a good half hour after we'd embarked -- "Where are we going?" I don't care about such useful things as destination, food or the name of the latest pope until I've woken up. I was told that we were going

to the rare books library in the University of Texas, a visit that turned out to be incredibly interesting and entertaining. I was glad I was awake.

But before we got to the library, we climbed to the top of a hill. As we reached its summit, I commented that the hill, with its tree-lined double sidewalk, looked very much like Bascom Hill on the Madison campus of the University of Wisconsin. If you turned around once you'd climbed to the top of the hill, I said, you could see the state capital building. I turned around as I made this remark, pointing out into the hypothetical distance where Madison's capitol would be had we teleported a thousand miles north. I found myself pointing at a state capital building. And one that looked very much like Wisconsin's. I wondered if I were in the Twilight Zone.

More similarities accumulated as the morning progressed. Not only is Austin a campus/capitol-dominated city as is my hometown, but even the

architecture and atmosphere bear a striking resemblance to Madison's. At this time of the year, even the weather forecasts were interchangeable. Austin's main drag feels comfortably like State Street, with tempting book stores, specialty shops, head shops, lots of restaurants, and the characteristic street people panhandling and playing on the sidewalks. And most importantly, like Madison, Austin is a cultural island of cosmopolitan/academic activity set amid a predominantly rural landscape. Both cities have nearly equivalent population sizes.

... I found myself feeling very much at home.

I was mildly nervous, you see, about traveling to Austin -- a part of the country where I'd never visited before and knew none of the local fans. I knew Chris Pasanen vaguely through our membership in A Women's Apa and I had gotten to know Herb Varley at WisCon in February when he was our Guest of Honor. But basically, this con was going to be very different from the cons I was used to where I knew many of the fans attending. Besides, this was the first time I'd gone to a con as Fan Guest of Honor, and that alone made me apprehensive.

But all my fears were groundless. ArmadilloCon was great fun!

The last time I tried to write about the con for one of the apas I belong to -- that aforementioned A Women's Apa -- I tried valiantly to arrange my recollections in a semblance of chronological order. The

attempt was a disorienting failure. It would be easier to arrange the events in Catch 22 on a single time line. So, rather than again try to figure out how I talked to ten days' worth of people in only four and a half days, I'll take the easy way now, and simply assemble a collage of events as I remember them.

I remember grinning a great deal. The question, "Are you having a good time at the con?" was asked, I suspect, in a rhetorical manner. I can't imagine anyone thinking that I was bluffing! I discovered that not going to a convention in order to be reunited with folks I love dearly but don't get to see except at infrequent cons, was definitely an asset. I had much more time to meet and make friends with the friendly Texas fans this way.

Although half the names listed in the program book as committee members were free of titles, the two main "movers" behind the con's existence were Willie Siros and Christine Pasanen. Willie had coordinated several conventions in his previous hometown, El Paso, and had been involved in programming at the 1979 Worldcon in Phoenix. Now that he'd moved to Austin he was apparently determined to outdo both El Paso's con record and IguanaCon's name. At the con, both Chris and Willie seemed to be everywhere at once: renting films, arranging rooms with the hotel, coordinating expeditions for Herb Varley, Anet Mconel, and myself to the Rare Books Library, scheduling dinners, wrapping Armadillos, driving everyone everywhere, coordinating the programming, auctioning off convention material, and once in a while even pausing to have some fun themselves. I find it miraculous that I still managed to talk to them every now and then, and to get to know them.

I soon realized just why, however, there were no specific positions listed after all the names of the concon members. Everyone pitched in to help with everything. The hucksters' room was organized and staffed by many of the committee; the registration desk was held down at one point by every member of the committee. Even I fell into the spirit and took memberships for an hour or so. Besides willing volunteers, the group even has a guardian angel in the form of one Robert Taylor, teller of the side-splitting "wild lion" tale. Ed Scarbrough was on hand as a dependable trouble-shooter; Scott Cupp orchestrated the dealers' room; and Louis Black chose and projected the popular B&B films which were remarkably attended by nearly the whole con en masse. Other con committee members were Joyce Zimmerschild (publicity) and Sean Summers (parties); Sean was responsible for the delicious coconut-fruit-nut munchies in the con suite. I think the competent cooperativeness of this group is the better part of what gave ArmadilloCon its warm and friendly atmosphere -- and what will probably make ArmadilloCon a continuing high point in the Southern/Southwestern con circuit in years to come.

It was a small con ... around 300 people attending,

which is an average figure from what I know of new conventions. (WisCon 1 had an attendance of about that number.) But it was a most enjoyable size. I remember talking with Herb and Anet the last night of the con and we all agreed that the number of people at ArmadilloCon seemed good in that we felt we had met, or had been able to meet, nearly everyone there ... that it was one party, rather than the many, disjointed parties that larger conventions so often become.

Perhaps my sense that it was one party has to do with the fact that through problems with the hotel, I ended up volunteering my room for the con party room, and so spent most of my time in that one party... One night everyone in the party fired off one joke after another, joke after joke, for more than an hour -- Howard Waldrop and I managing to recall more jokes from our gradeschool days than anyone else there. And one night we played SF charades till dawn (starting at 2:30 or 3 in the morning). It was crazy. We had to fill up the shower with beer and soda because there was no bathtub, but no one cared. Good parties.

One morning Herb Varley was interviewed by a local TV news show host. He balked at answering a personal question and the interviewer only gradually caught on that the growing silence meant that Herb was not going to answer the question. Varley signed an incredibly large number of his books at the con, many of them to members of his family who had met him in Austin for a reunion. He was constantly available and eager to talk to anyone who wanted to know how "Ophiuchi" was pronounced, or what his next novel, Wizard, will be about, or just hear him talk on about their favorite idea or character in his writing. He appeared on a panel with Howard Waldrop and Chad Oliver called "How I Grew Up in a Small Town and Lived to Tell the Tale" (a panel I did not see because it was scheduled only a couple hours after that infamous charades marathon ended).

And Varley also participated on a program item with me: We interviewed one another in an event labeled "On Illustrating and Being Illustrated," which was scheduled immediately following the banquet. Like the film program, the banquet was remarkably attended by a much larger percentage of the con than is usual for the cons I am familiar with. Luckily, ArmadilloCon did not succumb to the temptation of serving their namesake, and dinner was untraditionally very good. Now this mutual interview event, even though it was a less formidable concern to me than a straight speech would have been, was the thing I was most nervous about. Even the friendliness of the people at ArmadilloCon hadn't squelched my jitters about that event. But as all my reservations turned out, this too proved groundless.

Varley's latest book, Titan, is illustrated by Freff; and if you haven't seen the art, I recommend it (as well as the wonderful novel, of course) to you. Thus, "On Being Illustrated." I myself am an aspiring

illustrator: I have done some freelance work, lots of brochures, and much of the artwork for the fanzine I co-edit, called Janus, and any other art work I can attract. I have begun work illustrating a children's non-sexist fantasy, The Silver Horse by Elizabeth A. Lynn, and I am profoundly interested in what has been and what can be done in the field of SF illustration. Thus, "On Illustrating." So, after toastmaster Howard Waldrop introduced us (with slanderous cat references in my case), Herb and I talked. The best thing about it was that it did indeed seem more like we were just talking, not doing some stuffy prepared formal interview. I forgot my nervousness as I listened and responded to Herb's ideas as to how he felt about his work being illustrated. And after we were through, I gave him a drawing I'd done based on his Nebula-winning and Hugo-nominated novelette, "The Persistence of Vision." He was enthusiastic about it and I went on an incredible high to know that my visual representation of his ideas pleased him.

I was glad to finally get to talk to Anet Mconel too. Anet, Chris and I did a panel together called "Images of Madwomen in SF," and in conversations stem-

ming from that discussion, and others, I found Anet a remarkable, intriguing woman. She made me comfortable not by helping me to forget that she must travel by wheelchair, but by making me deal with my feelings and assumptions in relating and talking with her. I ended up admiring and liking her a great deal.

Conventions are always people, whether you know them beforehand or not. For me, ArmadilloCon was Chris and Willie and Herb and Anet. And it was Ed Scarbrough with whom Chris and I went dancing at a local disco one night after we could get nothing but songs like "God is gonna get you for that" on the radio and we were frustrated in our attempt to set up an unprogrammed dance. (I thought all American cities had 24-hour disco stations!?)

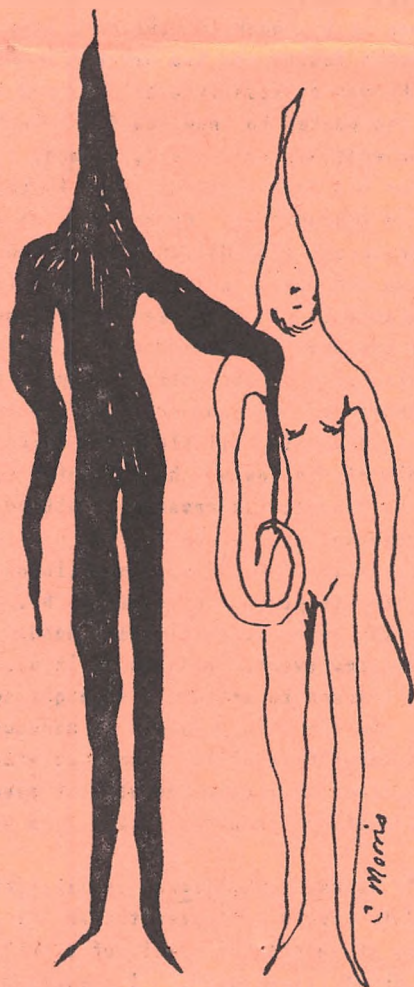
ArmadilloCon was also Scott Cupp who introduced me to the weird phenomenon of bad film fandom (which apparently has many dedicated true believers, Howard Waldrop and Louis Black among them). Their panel on Existentialism and Godzilla was hilarious. The con was Charley Darby as well, with his bizarre, understated sense of humor, and Brian Giza who draws beautiful ballet dancers and moves provocatively... as if any moment he will slide/spin into dance.

ArmadilloCon was author Lisa Tuttle who explained that local fans had recently thrown a party in her honor to celebrate her resignation as a TV reviewer for a local paper, which enabled her to write SF full time. (At the party, Lisa got to stone a TV to death.)

ArmadilloCon was also a series of fascinating conversations at wonderful restaurants, including my first honest-to-gosh-geeze-this-is-just-like-Bonanza!-Barbecue. (The only way I'd had spare ribs before was Wisconsin German Style: with sauerkraut.)

ArmadilloCon was laughing as Howard Waldrop and Louis Black, who, with inspired quips, auctioned off books for the con, some of Brian's con portraits and other art and some of my art as well, and (envy:) some of Herb Varley's original manuscripts. (Next year, however, I hope that ArmadilloCon helps/takes advantage of its many talented local artists, and sets up a separate art show and art auction.)

ArmadilloCon was a heart falling on my head in the middle of the night. Perhaps for the sake of artistic metaphor I should just leave that without explanation, but I fear it comes out more absurdist than metaphorical. To explain, then: A heart, a cardboard heart-shaped box (empty of candy), did indeed fall on my head in the middle of the night while I slept at Chris and Willie's. Since I slept alone, the possible romantic implications of the situation didn't even occur to me until the next day when the con started going full swing, but if my trip to Austin had been a movie, the falling heart might have been quite a heavy-handed dollop of silver screen metaphor. Still, considering the "bad" film emphasis of the movie program, it was appropriate in its own way...





THIS YEAR'S ArmadilloCon is shaping up as one of the most wide-ranging as far as tastes go. Our Guest of Honor is **BRUCE STERLING**, author of Schismatrix and editor of Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology. For Fan Guest of Honor, we've chosen **MARK OLSON**, an Easterner who chaired last year's Boskone, and who is chair of the 1989 Worldcon, Moreascon 3. **PAT CADIGAN** is our Toastmaster -- she's written Mind-players and has contributed to both Mirrorshades and Aces High (the second Wildcards mosaic novel). And our Special Guest this year is **BETH REACHAM**, editor-in-chief at Tor Books. For the first time, we will have an official artist as well -- **J.R. DANIELS** from Oklahoma. We look forward to J.R. helping us increase artist participation in ArmadilloCon.

On the author front, a few notes. You may have noticed on our flyers that Orson Scott Card had committed to coming to this year's ArmadilloCon. Well, Mr. Card may or may not be able to attend this year -- we won't know for a couple of weeks. Anyway, he sends his regrets and hopes we have a good con.

Well, after we got over our disappointment, we got in touch with this year's Philip K. Dick award winner for Homunculus, **JAMES P. BLAYLOCK**. Blaylock belongs to the sub-genre of writers known as "Steam Punks" (a term coined by K.W. Jeter). The term arose from fantasy and science fiction novels set in Victorian England; the most well known of these is probably The Anubis Gates by **TIM POWERS** (also a PKD award winner). We're looking forward to Mr. Blaylock -- as well as Mr. Powers -- adding to the unique flavor of ArmadilloCon.

Late-breaking news: Additional authors who have now confirmed their attendance at ArmadilloCon 9 include **NEAL BARRETT, JR.**, **EDWARD BRYANT**, **GEORGE ALEC EFFINGER**, **WILLIAM GIBSON**, **STEVE GOULD**, **TOM NADDOX**, **RUDY RUCKER**, **LEWIS SHIRER**, **WALTON SIMONS**, **HOWARD WALDROP**, **JOHN KESSEL** (Freedon Beach), **PAT MURPHY** (The Falling Woman), and **RICHARD KADREY**, whose novel Macrophage will appear next spring as one of the New Ace Specials.

Speaking of Ace, ArmadilloCon's reputation as a good, fun, literary convention has prompted two more editors to attend: **SUSAN ALLISON** and **GINJER BUCHANAN** of Ace Books. We welcome them -- as well as our all-time favorite editor guest, **ELLEN DATLOW** of Ogni, and the other authors, with open arms!

Gaming: We've lined up **RICHARD GARRIOTT** (a.k.a. "Lord British" of Ultima fame) as a guest. Besides arranging for gaming programming, we're also coordinating tournament gaming and open gaming.

A note to fans with young children: Babysitting will be available at the convention this year (for a nominal fee, of course!). We're currently negotiating with the hotel on rates and times; details will be available at a later date. We hope that this will allow more fans to attend the convention as the service will be on site.

We've got a fine crop of all-time favorite movies lined up, too -- ones that are fun to watch in a crowd of like-minded friends. Movies like Bladerunner, The Seven Percent Solution, Morons from Outer Space, and Polanski's Macbeth. There'll be more, sure, but those are just the ones we've confirmed at this time.

Of course there'll be the usual ArmadilloCon attractions -- Panel Discussions, Author Readings and Autographings, Dealers' Room, Art Show, Fan Lounge, Con Suite, Masque Ball, Pig-Outs, Video Room -- after all, if we've done something once, it's a tradition and we have to do it again the next year -- right?

We still need volunteers. Tell us how you'd like to help -- or if you don't know, don't worry! We'll put you to work!

Attending memberships in ArmadilloCon 9 are \$25 to October 1, and possibly more at the door. (Supporting memberships are \$8.) Dealers tables are \$75 (includes one membership) until we're sold out. Panels in the art show are \$7 per 3x6 panel (3D art is welcome, too). See you there in October!

-- Fred Duarte, Jr.
ArmadilloCon 9 chair

Rating the Cons?

by Bob Tucker



IT OCCURS to me that fandom (and prodrom) needs a Standard & Poore's guide to conventions. SEP, a New York publishing company of sorts, issues publications rating the stocks and bonds peddled by corporations, municipalities, utilities and the like. Investors read those publications and take heed. If the bonds are rated low, investors turn the other way; if they are rated highly investors rush forward with money clutched in their fists. So powerful are the SEP ratings that cities, when faced with a low rating, admit in print that they will have a difficult time peddling their new bonds and are looking forward to disadvantageous interest rates. They cry and wring their hands, but SEP has them nailed as tatty.

Fandom needs that as a guide to the thousands (well, five hundred) conventions held each year. Fandom needs a guide to the good conventions, and to those that should be avoided at all costs.

This thought comes to mind after reading the June 1986 issue of The Texas SF Inquirer. A reporter who signs herself "Ferk" has seven con reports in that issue, abetted by Kris Sellgren, Fred Duarte, Dennis Virzi, and Daramea Godfrey, who give four more. That particular issue is the nearest thing I've seen to an SEP report on conventions. "Ferk" and Daramea Godfrey are the most outspoken. "Ferk" is the most candid, and she appears to attend a dozen or more conventions a year. In general she liked Boskone XXII (Feb. 14-16, 1986) but discovered that the temperature in the women's restroom hovered at about zero degrees, and that GoH Robert Bloch used "his stable of same old clever answers to the same old pedestrian questions." He "was also passing out well-used wit at the autograph table." Her honesty and candid reporting was refreshing. SEP is at work here.

Moving on to Lunacon (March 7-9, 1986) she is of the opinion that the con should be given a decent burial and forgotten. She said "Lunacon -- a con as dead as the surface of its namesake." She found it sadly disorganized, and the con committee disorganized as well. "Hundreds of people tramping the hallways of the Marriott looking for something to do." Also "The con suite opened at 11 am Saturday -- and closed two hours

for (the) dinner hours, coinciding with the absence of (any) scheduled programming." She found the committee people rude and inconsiderate. A half-dozen people were chased out of the con suite for doing a tarot reading. Members were stopped and challenged before entering the huxter room. But "Ferk's" disappointment came when she met Isaac Asimov. She said the man does not live up to the myth. He leered at her, he leered at her cleavage, but "Asimov seemed a low-key flirt." And later: "So much for grandfather lust." The myth is destroyed.

In all, ten conventions were reported and rated by the respondents -- whether or not they realized they were rating them according to worth. Four were judged to be flops while a fifth teetered on the borderline. Do you begin to realize the value to fandom if we had a fanzine that reported on hundreds of cons across the nation each year? And then rated them according to a clearly established value system? It wouldn't matter if an AAA system were used, or a hotel-star system were used, or someone's percentage point system was the type of grading. (But please, NOT the Australian ballot system!) What would matter would be the adherence to a single grading system, and the absolute honesty of the reporters as well as the editor/publisher of the fanzine. A large number of reporters would be needed to rate five hundred conventions, although "Ferk" herself appears to attend between ten and twenty a year.

But before YOU rush forward and volunteer to publish such a fanzine, beware. You would need to prepare yourself for an onslaught of wounded and outraged con committees. You would be cursed from San Diego to Bangor for poor ratings, and would be accused of sleeping with some committee member in exchange for a good rating. You would be banned from some room parties, but welcomed and lionized at others. You might even be invited to a con now and then, free of charge with all expenses paid, in the expectation that you would give an AAA rating out of sheer gratitude. Sad to say, some travel reports do just that, by accepting free trips to far away places and later writing glowing accounts of their journeys.

But you wouldn't do that, would you?



The Better Books of 1986

— by Willie Siros

WELL, here we are in 1987 already. I'll just bet you're all dying to find out what you should've read last year, right? So how can I ignore such clamorous summons to comment on the best books of 1986?

To begin with, I will make some gratuitously snide comments about the overall disappointing quality of the crop of novels from last year. Oddly enough, I also understand that the overall unit sales of sf were down from 1985... Locus points out that there were more new and reprint, hard and paperback titles last year than ever before. The Sturgeon Law (90% that is, is crap) covered a lot more territory, so due to sheer numbers readers had to be more choosy about what to buy and read. On top of that, there weren't very many strong books to choose (hardly 10% -- maybe 3%).

Well, it can never be a completely bad year when there are three -- count 'em, three -- new Pinkwater books for the year. Now, many people may not appreciate what importance this holds for us. Well, 1984 and 1985 were only two-Pinkwater years, and as I always say, Pinkwater will get you through times of boring sf more than boring sf will get you through times of no Pinkwater. One of the new titles, Moospire (Little, Brown) is even the third adventure of his famous "Blue Moose," and it entails time travel as well. Wow!! And certainly you cannot miss The Frankenbagel Monster (Dutton), all about a terrible monster ... too terrible

almost to eat! Let alone being able to pass up The Muffin Fiend (Lothrop), starring that underrated detective, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (whom Pinkwater introduced to us in 1985's Young Adult (Tor). Speaking of Young Adult, if we find out you've not yet bought it, let alone even read it, you may never get another Inquirer. It is, after all, a FACT tradition to read Pinkwater around the campfire at Glyptocon...

THERE was one -- and only one -- outstanding novel released in 1986. No other novel was as inventive, interesting, engrossing or exciting as Gene Wolfe's Soldier of the Mist (Tor). After his somewhat disappointing Free, Live Free (Zeising), Wolfe returns with another classic to stand proudly with Shadow of the Torturer (SGS). (As an aside I must say that even though Free, Live Free is really quite good, it is a bit weaker in comparison with one of the best all-time sf series, The Book of the New Sun.) Soldier of the Mist is also part of a new series of novels which, like his Book of the New Sun, causes one to rethink definitions of fantasy and science fiction. This should win awards and probably won't. (Wolfe evidently pulled it from consideration for this year's Nebula in favor of the Tor paperback edition of Free, Live Free. So presumably it may be on a later year's ballot. I won't tempt myself to make any editorial comments on such behavior.)

THOUGHT there were four very-good to near-great novels last year. Not the best of the year, but probably all four -- not just two of them -- should have been on this year's Hugo ballot.

Talking Man by Terry Bisson (Arbor House)
Speaker for the Dead by Orson Scott Card (Tor)
Count Zero by William Gibson (Gollancz, Arbor House)
The Magic Wagon by Joe Lansdale (Doubleday)

The Card and Gibson are sequels to Hugo/Nebula winners (Ender's Game and Neuromancer, respectively). While a sequel to a Hugo- or Nebula-winning novel has never won a Hugo or Nebula itself, I'm afraid we'll set the precedent this year. I think that even though they are better than the first in their series, the Wolfe book is that much better. The Bisson was a pleasant surprise. I've not read his first novel, Wyrdmaker (which Hartwell bought for Timescape), but after several people commented favorably on Talking Man I gave it a try and was impressed. Reads like an old Appalachian folk tale. The Lansdale is marketed as a Doubleday Western and was reviewed by the New York Times as mainstream, but is every bit as fantastic as the Bisson and also reads like an old folk tale. Cordwainer Smith was about the last to use that style effectively.



HERE is also a group of novels that are pretty good but not in the same class as the above.

The Warrior's Apprentice by Lois McMaster Bujold (Baen)
Lear's Daughters, Part I: The Wave and The Flame
and Part II: The Reign of Fire by M. Bradley Kellogg and W. Rossow (Signet)
The Hercules Text by Jack McDevitt (Ace sf special)
Master of Paxwax by Philip Mann (Gollancz)
Hardwired by Walter John Williams (Tor)
A Hidden Place by Robert Charles Wilson (Bantam Spectra)

The Kellogg and the McDevitt are quite good hard science novels. I was particularly impressed with the Kellogg since I had enjoyed her earlier novel, A Rumor of Angels (Signet). The McDevitt bothered me due to an

apparent use of a magnet to erase a compact disc CD-ROM. Despite that, it is still well worth reading and deserves its place on the Philip K. Dick Memorial Award ballot -- as does the Wilson (which, like the McDevitt, is a first novel).



HERE ARE also some very good fantasy novels from the year. I don't pay as much attention to fantasy as the sf, but these I found worth reading. While good reads, books as good as Little, Big don't come along every year.

Serpent Mage by Greg Bear (Berkley)
Drinker of Souls by Jo Clayton (DAW)
Fionavar Tapestry, Vol.2: The Wandering Fire and
Vol.3: The Darkest Road by Guy Gavriel Kay (Arbor House)
Wizard of the Pigeons by Megan Lindholm (Ace)
The Falling Woman by Pat Murphy (Tor)

Bear's book is a sequel to his Infinity Concerto and is a fine attempt to tie together music and fantasy. The two by Kay are the final installments of a series begun as The Summer Tree. I found the Kay books much more complex and dark than they might seem, if all you read were the dust jackets or some reviews. Better by far than the Eddings books. I'd tried to read the first few Diadem books by Jo Clayton and wasn't impressed enough to keep going, so when a trusted friend suggested that Clayton's new one was really pretty good I gave it a shot. It is probably her best book so far and shows more skill if not talent than the earlier books. I have an odd problem with the Lindholm. It has one of the better plot premises I've run into recently, but by the end I was wishing that someone more skilled had come up with it. It was an enjoyable read and is worth picking up, but it could have been much better.

I thought the best first novel was A Hidden Place (mentioned above). After The Hercules Text (also mentioned previously), I thought there were two other strong first novels: Shards of Honor by Lois McMaster Bujold (Baen) and Dad's Nuke by Mark Laidlaw (DIFine).

THE MOST disappointing novels of the year (either because I really expected more or I really didn't like it at all) as usual include a new Amber book, a new Foundation book and a Donaldson. I'm not sure

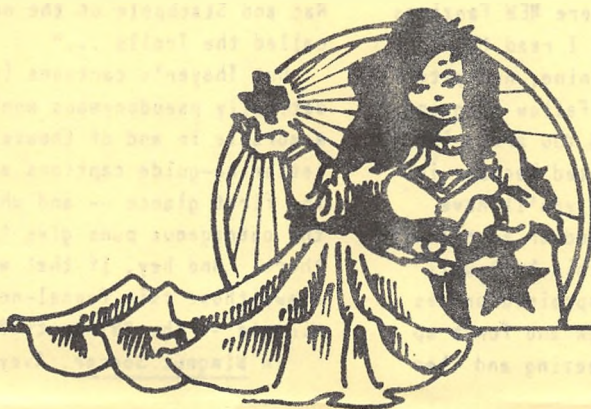
why I keep hoping that they will be worth reading, but I guess I'm an optimist.

Foundation and Earth by Isaac Asimov (Doubleday)
Heart of the Comet by Greg Benford and David Brin
(Bantam Spectra)
Homunculus by James P. Blaylock (Ace)
The Songs of Distant Earth by Arthur C. Clarke
(Del Rey)
The Mirror Of Her Dreams by Stephen R. Donaldson
(Del Rey)
Twisting the Rope by R.A. McAvoy (Bantam Spectra)
This Is The Way The World Ends by James Morrow
(Holt)

Blood of Amber by Roger Zelazny (Arbor House)

BOOKS I haven't read yet either -- because I haven't found a first edition, or haven't gotten around to it yet -- that I think I should, include:

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood (McClelland & Stewart, Houghton Mifflin)
The Moon Goddess and the Son by Donald Kingsbury
(Baen)
The Unconquered Country by Geoff Ryman (Allen&Unwin)
The Shore of Women by Pamela Sargent (Crown)
The Ragged Astronauts by Bob Shaw (Gollancz)



ALWAYS try to list the books by Texas area writers which appeared last year.

When The Gods Returned by Charles Beazer (Del Rey)
The Winter King by Lillian Stewart Carl (Ace)
Dorthea Dreams by Suzy McKee Charnas (Arbor House)
Death Riders of Hel by Asa Drake (Questar)
Werebeasts of Hel by Asa Drake (Questar)
The Mirror Of Her Dreams by Stephen R. Donaldson
(Del Rey)
The Exclusive by Carole Nelson Douglas (Ballantine)
(non-sf)
The Bird of Time by George Alec Effinger (Doubleday)
Faces by Leigh Kennedy (Cape, Atlantic Monthly)
The Journal of Nicholas the American by Leigh
Kennedy (Cape, Atlantic Monthly)
Fire Sanctuary by Katharine Eliska Kimbriel
(Questar)
The Best of The West ed. by Joe R. Lansdale
(Doubleday)
The Dead of The West by Joe R. Lansdale (Space &
Time)

The Magic Wagon by Joe R. Lansdale (Doubleday)
The Sword and The Tower by Justin Leiber (Tor)
Tuf Voyaging by George R.R. Martin (Baen)
Night Visions 3 ed. by George R.R. Martin (Dark
Harvest)
Carrots and Miggle by Ardath Mayhar (Atheneum)
The M.I.A. Ransom by Mike McQuay (Bantam) (non-sf)
The First Book of Lost Swords by Fred Saberhagen
(Tor)
The Frankenstein Papers by Fred Saberhagen (Baen)
Circuit by Melinda Snodgrass (Berkley)
Encyclopedia of Feminism comp. by Lisa Tuttle (Long-
man, Facts on File) (nonfiction)
Nest of Nightmares by Lisa Tuttle (Sphere)
Death's Acolyte by Robert Vardeman and George
Procter (Ace)
Echoes of Chaos by Robert Vardeman (Berkley)
White Fire by Robert Vardeman (Avon)
Blue Champagne by John Varley (Dark Harvest)
Howard Who? by Howard Waldrop (Doubleday)
Hardwired by Walter John Williams (Tor)
Soldier of the Mist by Gene Wolfe (Tor)

WINGNUT SOCCER

BY TEDDY HARVIA

reviewed by Pat Mueller

I'M SORRY, David/Teddy, but I can't remember the first time I saw one of your cartoons... probably in one of those ol' fanzines that were NEW fanzines (or at least they were new to me) when I read them first... No blinding flashes of lightning, no mysterious forebodings of "In ten years this fellow is going to publish a book of his cartoons, and YOU are going to buy one and read it, and get real excited because in six or seven or so years down the line you'll have played a couple of seasons of killer indoor soccer with some friends you don't know yet, and this book will make you nostalgic for those days of sprained ankles and elbows in the ribs and running back and forth up and down the field and panting and wheezing and then

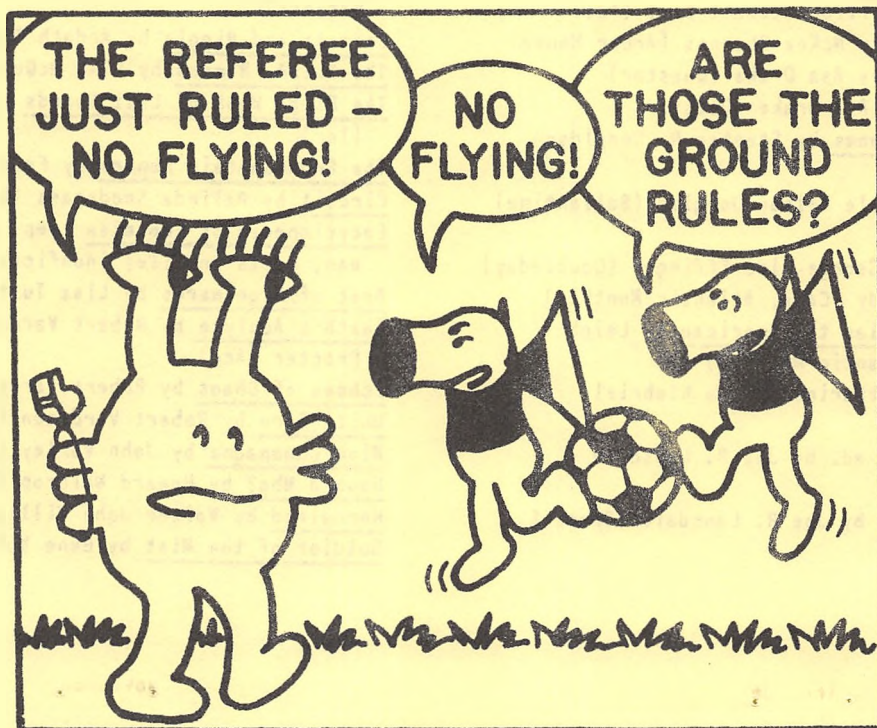
going out and pigging out on pie afterwards, and you'll buy a bunch more and send them off to Bear and Liz and Mac and Stackpole of the now-infamous soccer team called the Trolls ..."

But Thayer's cartoons (published under the anagrammatically pseudonymous moniker, "Teddy Harvia") are memorable in and of themselves. The clean lines and lettering-guide captions are a definite tip-off just on the first glance -- and when you take a closer look, the outrageous puns give the whole show away, right there. And hey, if that wasn't enough -- who else draws those twin funnel-nosed characters, Avery and Wingate -- the "Wingnuts"?

In Wingnut Soccer, Avey and Wingey need "a positive

WINGNUT SOCCER: A SPORTS / SCIENCE FICTION CARTOON BOOK

Paperback, 176 pages, cover price \$4.95. Published by David Thayer, 7209 DeVille, Ft. Worth, TX 76180. Available through the mail for US \$5.75 (includes postage and handling); Canadian orders add 50¢ extra for postage; no other foreign orders. Texas residents add 25¢ sales tax. Allow 4 to 6 weeks for delivery.



outlet for their energy" and join a soccer team. They torment their beleaguered coach with bad jokes, worse puns and juvenile "misunderstandings", and they play soccer in their mother's house -- once. They practice a lot, get their uniforms, Xeno's dog Drazil joins in on the fun, and they finally win a game -- and all too soon, one hundred and seventy-six pages later, you've turned the last page of the book.

Now, professional soccer may seem a mundane sport -- a bunch of sweaty foreigners flailing about at each other with knees, feet and elbows -- but although it's professionally produced, there's nothing mundane about this book. Or sweaty, or flailing, or foreign. A bit alien, perhaps, but that's the fannish touch. That's why it appeals to me, I guess -- it's funny, and it's fannish in its own peculiar fashion.

Professionally produced? Well, yes, it's offset-

printed (in green ink, with a color cover) and perfect-bound, just like those other little books of Kliban and Larson cartoons -- but unlike Kliban and Larson, Thayer chose to publish this book himself. You probably won't be able to find it in your local bookstore; you'll have to send off for it. Maybe that's another reason I like it so much -- repressed envy, that a fan-artist had the gumption and stick-to-it-ive-ness to produce enough funny cartoons for a 176-page book. (And yeah, yeah, I know Brad Foster publishes his own stuff himself too -- and I really like Brad's art ... except his porn, which is about all I've seen lately because that's what Dennis buys... and I'll review some of Brad's better work in a later issue, OK?)

In closing -- buy this book, so David can afford to do another one!



TEDDY HARVIA in person



TEDDY HARVIA is an anagram of David Thayer. David Thayer drew his first cartoons for publication in 1967. One was a sports cartoon (basketball) for his high school newspaper. Another was a science fiction cartoon for a book review flyer. In addition, he sold a number of cartoons to small trade journals. The next year, he drew four for his junior college newspaper.

For the next seven years, he immersed himself in his studies, with a brief two-year stint in the army. He graduated from the University of Tulsa in 1974 with a degree in creative writing.

In 1975, Thayer helped found the local SF club in Norman, Oklahoma. The following year, he attended his first SF convention -- MidAmeriCon. Other conventions Thayer has attended include the first OKon, the 4th world Fantasy Con, Minneapolis' Minicon 15, and Seacon '79. He was fan-artist GoH at the first Norman Con-Quest. This year, he attended Minicon 22 in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

In 1977, Thayer published the first issue of his fanzine, NebulouSFan. Between 1977 and 1979, he published nine issues -- the first seven in Norman, the last two in Fort Worth. The first "Teddy Harvia" Wingnut cartoon appeared in NSFN 3.

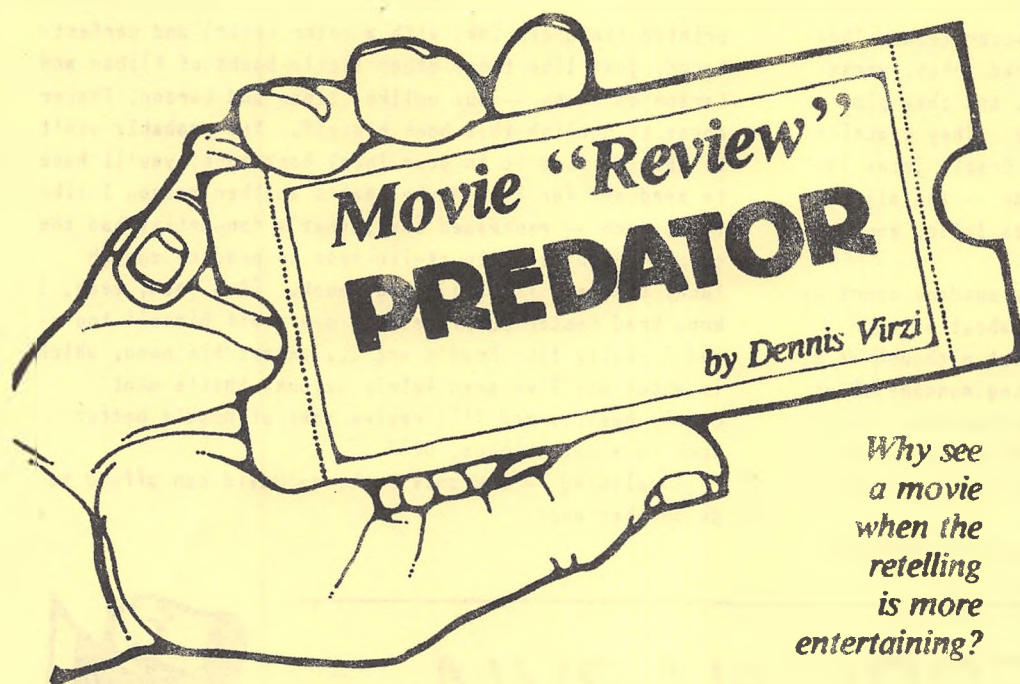
Thayer began to submit cartoons to other 'zines, and in 1979, RUNE, the clubzine of the Minneapolis SF Society, published one. Since then, his cartoons have appeared in fanzines in the U.S., Canada, England, New Zealand, and France. They include Airfoil, The Alpha Centura Communicator, Arecibo, Arkanfandom, Atarantes,

Barroco Clementine, Banqueulu, Brassor, Chat, The Cidereal Times, Compound Fracture, Conventional Fanzine, Cullowhee Comments, CUSFuSsing, The Devil's Advocate, DIO, The Diagonal Relationship, The Dillinger Relic, Digressions, Eclipse, Empire, Fantasy, Fever Pitch, File 770, Francis X. Cheep-Cheep, Hawaii, Holier Than Thou, Kenfusion, Janus (Aurora), Lan's Lantern, Lines of Occurrence, Loki, The Looking Glass, Love Makes the World Go Aury, Lyriphilia, Mad Scientist's Digest, The Monthly Monthly, Multilog, Private Heat, Protostar, Quahog, Red Dust, SF Review, The SF Votary, Sigh, SuperMorn, Systems, Tangent, Tentativity, The Texas SF Inquirer, This House, Thrust, Tightbeam, Uncle Oswald's Journal, Under the Influence, Volta, Wallbanger, The Whole Fanzine Catalog, and Zosma.

He is a past member of VOOTIE (the funny-animal apa), SCAPA FLOW (an LA-based apa), and APA-69. His cartoons have appeared in the apazines of friends in numerous other apas. He is an associate member of the Chimneyville Fantasy & SF Society of Jackson, Mississippi. And he is an active participant in the Dallas First Saturday parties.

WingNut Soccer is his first book. In his spare time, he is working on the sequel, WingNuts Go Hawaiian. Currently, he is drawing cartoons for program books for the Sidekicks, Dallas' professional indoor soccer team.

David Thayer is married, with two children. He was a technical writer for ten years, but presently is a training manager for a telecommunications company. He grew up in Texas. He moved out-of-state once, but has no intention of doing it again.



*Why see
a movie
when the
retelling
is more
entertaining?*

BIG ARNIE'S back after getting a Raw Deal in his last pic. This time he's playing a macho version of Sgt. Rock sent down to some Central American country to rescue some honcho government type.

The first view of ole Big Arnie ain't as neat as the one in Commando where we got to see his parts. This time he sets his face on fire lighting a cigar after the helicopter he's been riding in disgorges his crack troop of stereotype soldiers and before *he* gets out. Effective, if somewhat arty--too much smoke billowing, you know what I mean?

Before he can get on with the mission he's gotta arm wrestle Apollo Creed, who's getting mighty pissed at always losing to white guys. Creed is CIA so of course he ain't telling us the truth when he says they gotta rescue these hostages what got themselves captured when their helicopter strayed into enemy territory. We get some mumbo jumbo about these guys having fought elsewhere in the past that serves to confuse and backfill. Then it's up in the choppers to rock and roll.

When the song's over they all jump out and shinny down on long ropes to the jungle below. Apollo Creed came along too, orders ya see... Next we get some tromping through the vines and more romancing about Southeast

Asia till they come to the downed helicopter, which is stuck in a tree. So a couple of guys shinny up some long ropes to have a look see.

Well, the thing's a mess, ain't nothing left of the electronics or of the passengers. Tonto scouts around and turns up everybody's shoe size and political persuasion. Apollo Creed says he don't know nothin', of course. Tonto takes the lead and starts tracking the autochthones and the guys in Reeboks.

They push around a bit till we get some soundtrack and Tonto does some peering through the bushes. Then it's flutter city as a bunch of buzzards fly off in Dolby stereo. Tonto looks up at what they been eating and it ain't bananas.

The Reeboks have been found, somewhat worse for wear. Apollo then admits that another bunch of guys went out before after all. Big Arnie stares at him while his men cut down what's left (not much) of the Reeboks. Big Arnie's guys are now psyched up for a fight. Finding bodies that have been skinned alive will do that to seasoned veterans.

Pretty soon they find the enemy camp, and yup, they got the hostages. One gets his brains blown out as Big Arnie watches. Cool professionalism takes over as Big Arnie waves his arms and hands to silently position

his men. It's time for Tobe Hooper to meet Lucius Shepard.

Well for the next ten minutes a lot of stuff explodes. One of Big Arnie's guys carries a Gatling gun, while another guy has one of those cute rocket firing revolvers, so in no time at all the camp is a mess. Turns out that the other hostage was already dead which is just as well since nothing could've lived through the barrage Big Arnie's guys laid down.

Now, are you ready for this? Watching all this through the Chroma-key machine is THE PREDATOR. Way back before the credits we got a shot of a space ship making a fly-by of Earth and dropping something off. What it was doing was landing this creature for a little Safari Park holiday. This dude is one bad mother. It was him, see, what hung up the Reeboks to dry, not the Shep-ardites. Now he's got his scanners on Big Arnie's squad, figuring that Big Arnie'd look real good over the mantelpiece back home.

After the usual camp scouring Big Arnie turns up the lone female survivor. Apollo immediately claims her for interrogation, earning him more bad karma from Big Arnie's men, "I'll bleed you," is one of the nicer things they tell him if he messes up. She don't talk much which is okay cause she can't speak English.

Big Arnie wants to leave right away because he feels soiled and used. He looks soiled and used, too. Chroma-key thinks he looks just fine. Tonto is twitchy, there's something out there. He can tell but he can't see it. Everyone starts to sweat and they nervously move through the jungle. Contras and rebels and Predators. Oh my!

Wide World of Sports begins when "the kid" gets his face ripped off. Apollo wants to blame the woman but Big Arnie knows better. There's blood everywhere but she hasn't broken any of her nails. They spread out and look for "signs". She finds some yellow ichor, but doesn't tell anyone -- foreshadowing again. Tonto freaks and announces that everyone is going to die.

They finally figure that something's hunting them and it ain't

made the limit yet. Pretty soon guys are getting squished left and right causing Big Arnie to get more and more pissed. When he finds out it bleeds he concludes that they can kill it. He rings their camp with explosives but when the Predator drops in for dinner anyway, he discovers that it uses the trees! So he has his remaining men build all these neat Tarzan traps.

The net springs up and traps the predator and guess what. It's wearing invisible body armor. The net thrashes about wildly and then the Predator blasts his way out and runs away shimmering with good special effects. Big Arnie's guys run too, but they don't shimmer.

The Predator, being a true sportsman, doesn't hunt unarmed humans so when the commie woman bends down to pick up a weapon, Big Arnie advises her not to. Detente in the jungle, it's beautiful. Well, in the mad dash to make it to the helicopter pick-up site everyone dies 'cept for Big Arnie and the woman. He tells her to keep going -- it's time for mano-a-claw confrontation.

But for a while Big Arnie forgets what movie this is and starts behaving like he was in First Blood, what with him running around without his shirt, getting all muddy and carrying only a knife. But he finally remembers and starts building the Tarzan stuff again.

He lures the Predator into his traps only they don't work so good and the Predator wasn't born yesterday so he ain't about to stick his head underneath that log with all the pointy sticks sticking out of the bottom. He goes around it. Here's where Big Arnie shows fear and he starts babbling about saying the secret word. Well the Predator takes off his helmet and the squid face says something or other which is good enough for Big Arnie so he pulls the rope and drops a huge log on top of its head.

It ain't dead yet, though so Big Arnie is going to brain it with a rock but decides maybe there's time for meaningful dialog yet so he asks him, "What are you?" The answer apparently translates to "pissed" because the Predator sets his wrist

Pac Man thingy to overload.

Big Arnie figures out it ain't healthy to stick around and say, "No, really," so he leaps over a bunch of rocks and tree trunks until the Predator goes nuclear.

Once the mushroom cloud clears the helicopter comes in and picks him up and we get a bunch of credits.

WARNING: This is not a good choice if you like to go see movies while tripping. Otherwise it is.

A Look At PHOTON and STAR LASER

COMBAT WITHOUT DEATH. Action without violence. Weapons. Battles. Smoke. Adrenaline. All that good stuff. Photon is adventure gaming come to life, an attempt, rather successfully, to create a giant video game for humans to play in.

The Photon complex located in Southwest Houston consists of two ten thousand square foot mazes, filled with artificial smoke, flashing light shows, and electronic music, not unlike a disco in the seventies. After strapping on helmet, light weapon, and battery pack, you are sent out to do battle in a seven minute war of attrition. If that sounds short, it isn't. Seven minutes of constant action with sixteen pounds of batteries strapped around your waist will leave you grateful for a break.

The light weapons have a range of about a hundred feet. Sensors in the helmets and packs record each hit and a computer keeps track of individual and team scores. In addition, speakers in the helmets provide a special effect sound that let you know when you've scored a

hit, or been scored upon. Between games you can watch others play from catwalks above the maze.

There is no age limit to Photon, but you must be taller than 4'6" to play. The players range in age from early adolescence to late middle age and are predominantly male. Prices are \$6 for a one year membership plus \$3 per game, but there are specials and happy hours that are cheaper.

Star Laser is the dark side of the force. If Photon is a high-tech disco, Star Laser, with its black wood and wire maze and haunting REB music, gives you the feeling of a street fight in a burned out ghetto. A low budget version of Photon, the weapons in Star Laser do not keep score or let you know when you've scored a hit. However you can see the flash of the weapons, which greatly adds to the realism of the game. (Photon is developing a new weapon which will let you see the flash.)

Photons are located in Houston and Dallas. One is being planned for Austin.

-- John F. Moore

TRIVIA CONTEST!

PRETTY IMPRESSIVE, that list of 61 fanzines that David Thayer has contributed cartoons to (see "Teddy Harvia In Person" on page 15 of this issue). But who edited all those zines? The lucky -- and knowledgeable -- person who correctly names the most of those zines' editors (or, in the case of clubzines, who was editing the zine when David contributed his cartoons), will win an autographed copy of David's book, Mingnut Soccer! Mail your entries, postmarked by October 5, 1987, to TSFI 21 Trivia, 618 Westridge, Duncanville TX 75116 -- or hand-deliver it to Pat Mueller in the Fan Lounge at ArmadilloCon 9 by noon on Saturday, October 10. The trivia contest winner will be announced that day at 3:00!

-- Pat Mueller

BOOK REVIEWS



Clowns to the left of me,
Jokers to my right...

Wild Cards I

Aces High: Wild Cards II

(edited by George R.R. Martin
Bantam-Spectra; mass pb; \$3.95)
reviewed by A.P. McQuiddy

I admit it. Guilty as charged: I was pre-disposed to like these books. I know most of the authors, and enjoy their work. I knew only a little about the concept of the series, but had faith in the talents involved, and that George's editorial prowess could bring the project shape and structure.

And I am happy to discover that that faith was not ill-placed. The literary venture called "Wild Cards" is a success.

Rather than the shared-world anthology it has been compared to, the Wild Cards project embraces a format new to me, and I suspect, new to the realm of fiction as well: the Mosaic Novel.

Take a dozen writers -- a mixed bag of old hands and rapidly rising stars -- who share interests in comic books and science fiction, are all friends, and (for the most part) live in or near Albuquerque, New Mexico; blend in an alternate history setting ("The Secret History Of Our Times Revealed!" trumpets the

book's cover); add two cups of action-adventure, and a pinch of sardonic humor; bring to a boil, simmer, and serve. What you have is a genuinely tasty fiction banquet.

Sounds just like any other shared-world anthology, you say? Not quite. The trick is, the narrative is much more tightly woven than in your standard shared-world anthology. Admittedly, the first volume of "Wild Cards" does not hew so closely to this path, but that's forgivable, as it is laying the foundation upon which the entire series will build.

Just after World War II, an alien virus seaks into Manhattan. On winds and tides, like nuclear fallout, it spreads throughout the world. Once an individual is infected, the virus is not contagious or communicable in any normal way; it becomes, however, an inherited recessive gene. Passed from generation to generation, the virus can remain dormant until some traumatic event triggers its release into the host's system. Because of the randomness of its effects, the contagion is dubbed "the Wild Card virus". The vast majority of those exposed to the virus die in horrible ways -- melting into puddles, organs

bursting within chests, skin splitting open and resealing until exsanguination... it's called "drawing the Black Queen". Approximately ten percent become Jokers (physically deformed), and one in one hundred are imbued with various powers, most often of a psionic nature. These are the "Aces". Extra-human strength and telekinesis are common among Aces, although the level and range fluctuate wildly with each individual. Since the virus affects the DNA, the results it produces are as distinct and unique as a fingerprint.

Wild Cards I essentially lays the groundwork for the series, and is somewhat uneven. That's a minor flaw, however, and not wholly unexpected in the first volume of a series. The authors (Howard Waldrop, Roger Zelazny, Walter Jon Williams, Melinda Snodgrass, George R.R. Martin, Victor Milan, Lewis Shiner, Ed Bryant, Leanne C. Harper, Stephen Leigh, and John J. Miller) combine with relative grace to produce a book that spans more than thirty years of alternate human history.

From 1946, when the virus exploded over Manhattan, raining death and chaos upon the populace; through the McCarthy era, when Aces are tried as Communist sympathizers; the '60s, with Kennedy and Flower Power; the mid-'70s, Carter, and Joker's Rights riots. It's all here, and much more. The writers raise a twisted funhouse mirror to the last few decades of U.S. history, and the final reflection is not one of Jokers, Aces, and aliens -- but rather, it's a reflection upon the human condition, our foibles, our faults, and our virtues.

Aces High is considerably more compact. It covers only two years, 1985-86, with occasional flashbacks to 1979 and 1983. Therefore, the second volume's plot is far more cohesive than its predecessor, and one comes away from it satisfied that something was accomplished. While the first volume examines the effects and reactions to the Wild Card virus over several decades, Aces High presents a threat -- domination of Earth by an alien menace -- and deals with its effect upon different characters. One is tempted to conjure up images of "The Super-Heroes vs. The Aliens", but fortunately the story never degenerates to such drivel. There is a genuine, full-scale War of The Worlds-style alien invasion (at Grovers Mills, New Jersey, even) that is repulsed largely by Aces, but the ultimate destruction of the Swarm Mother (the alien intelligence that launches the invasion as a probe) is achieved by a much more personal and satisfactory means. The thread of the occult society which worships and awaits the Swarm Mother's return to Earth remains intact. Undoubtedly, this organization will figure in the plot of the third book, Jokers Wild, due this fall.

In the second book, the writers (Lewis Shiner, Roger Zelazny, Walter Jon Williams, Melinda Snodgrass, Victor Milan, Pat Cadigan, John J. Miller, Walton Simons and George R.R. Martin) seem to have hit their stride, and reached a comfortable level which allows the work to proceed in a much smoother fashion. Both volumes suffer minor incongru-

ities of style within them, due to multiple points of view and the nuances of the individual authors' talents. However, these same "incongruities" afford the reader a broader perspective of the Wild Cards alternate history: the blue-collar attitudes of Thomas Tudbury, who shields his teke and his identity as "The Great And Powerful Turtle" behind the armored shell of a VW Bug's carcass; Fortunato, high-class, intelligent, an Afro-Oriental pimp who becomes immersed in the sensual world of Kundalini and tantric magick; Dr. Tachyon, the Taki-sian alien prince who came to stop the virus from reaching earth -- the virus his own people developed -- and failed; Croyd, ninth-grade dropout who sleeps for long, undetermined periods, awaking with either unusual Ace powers, or the hideously malformed features of a Joker; Jube, jovial alien walrus and newspaper vendor, who tries to thwart the Swarm Mother's domination of Earth; Brennan, neither Ace nor Joker, but a Vietnam vet who uses his bow and his Zen training to wreak havoc and revenge upon an old enemy; Modular Man, a robot of sixth generation artificial intelligence, created by a whacked-out genius in his boarding house loft, who fights evil alongside the best of the Aces....

Above all, the Wild Cards books evoke feelings of nostalgia. Tributes and homages abound. There are references to H.G. Wells, "Invasion Of The Body-Snatchers," the comic book "Airboy," H.P. Lovecraft, and other ephemera of the comic book, movie, and science fiction fields. For all the aliens, superhuman powers, and preternatural horrors to be found in Wild Cards and Aces High, the prevailing emotions and sensibilities are those of humankind. None of the Aces are "super-heroes" of the garden-variety comic book sort --- they make mistakes, have regrets, love, hate, age, and die, just like the rest of us. Some have meta-human abilities. Some experience moments of heroism. But at the core, all of the characters are human, and display all that is best and worst in each of us. There is no other set of books I could name

that do that so well, and have so much fun doing it.

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Dream a little dream of Lee . . .

Lincoln's Dreams

by Connie Willis

(Bantam-Spectra, 1987; 212 pp.;

\$15.95, hardcover)

reviewed by A.P. McQuiddy

IN A WORD, dreams. Everything about this book is dreamlike.

There's the title, of course, and the subject matter. Even the author's style has a dreamlike quality to it: one floats along in billowy comfort, supported by a firm yet yielding mattress of a plot and characters made from silky down pillows. Lincoln's Dreams is rounded and gentle; there are no rough edges or jarring, pointed corners to be found.

The main characters, Jeff Johnston and a mysterious young woman named Annie, are captured as on a film shot with a soft-focus lens. The reader learns little of Jeff's background (he majored in history at Duke University, where he roomed with one of the book's minor characters (and antagonist), Richard Madison) and virtually nothing of Annie's. The skill with which Ms. Willis avoids disclosing such information is a marvel to behold, and one does not notice its lack until the closing pages are passed. Such paucity of detail in characterization can doom a poorly-structured novel, but Connie Willis is not a careless writer. She places signs and drops hints for the careful reader to discover, and it is a testament to her skill that the style she employs couches them so subtly in the narrative.

The pacing of Lincoln's Dreams puts the characters in bold relief against a background that seems to move in slow motion. In the opening passage, the reader is drawn quickly into Johnston's life, and immediately the mists flow in to buffet him along. The pages fly by, as Jeff takes Annie on a whirlwind ride that

retraces General Lee's war travels to find the origin of the dreams that haunt her sleep. Antietam, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Appomattox -- these and others, all the important steps Lee followed upon his faithful horse, Traveller, are charted in the blink of an eye, and yet in detail. Like a dream, the immediacy of the events, emotions and places are crystalline as they are experienced. Yet unlike one, they are not soon forgotten upon waking. This is no straight reliving of history, however. The two planes of time, Lee's war travails and the modern narrative, are meshed so seamlessly that it is not noticed that they are one and the same until after the book's conclusion.

Annie sweeps into Jeff's life, and he is compelled -- seemingly without justification -- to help her, to search selflessly for the root of her distress. That search is hindered by infrequent dogged intrusions by Dr. Richard Madison, the Freudian psychiatrist Annie goes to for help but who abuses her trust. There is also the matter of the drugs he gives her to suppress the dreams of war and anguish, which she does not want to suppress. The breakneck ride to Appomattox and beyond is as much a character study as it is a tour of famous battles of the Civil War. Johnston, via his role as researcher for best-selling historical novelist Thomas Broun, encounters the traumatized psyches of both Abraham Lincoln and Robert E. Lee, but just whose dreams Annie is experiencing across the gulf of time is the chief riddle of the book. Copious evidence is provided to support both arguments. Perhaps Lee and Lincoln shared the same dreams?

The most telling line in the whole volume occurs on page two: "... there were both too many clues and not enough." Willis seems insufficient to solve the riddle. It is only by hindsight, when the final scenes are played and the curtain falls, that the true answer to the question can be established. Like any good dream, like any fine story, the telling of the tale itself is as satisfying as the conclusion it

reaches. And this is one story you'll want to dream again and again...

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The Soulless Machine of Clive Barker

The Damnation Game

by Clive Barker

(Ace/Putnam, 1987; 379 pp.; \$18.95, hardcover)

reviewed by Lawrence Person

"I have seen the future of horror ... and his name is Clive Barker."

-- Stephen King

ALTHOUGH this is the first American printing of his first novel, Clive Barker has been familiar to a number of American horror fans for many years now. Word of mouth for the British editions of his short story collections (Clive Barker's Books of Blood, I-III) spread across the country so fast that some specialty book stores were hard-pressed to keep them in stock. The reason was that Barker's work was different from anything being published at the time. In the first place (as the title indicates) the Books of Blood were, well, bloodier than just about everything else in the field of serious horror fiction. Secondly, Barker was quite fond of breaking every human taboo known, depicting graphic scenes of infanticide, cannibalism, and necrophilia. In fact, his work was so graphic that it was almost exploitation fiction of the lowest form.

Almost.

But Barker's great skill is in weaving these topics together into a fine tapestry of horror as integral parts of the plot. Instead of going for pure gross-out effects of the Friday the 13th Part XV type, he uses such scenes with the skill of a true master, seeking a deeper level of horror. And, as the quote from King above indicates, he has largely succeeded.

In his first novel, The Damnation Game, Barker follows the same general pattern. The story centers on Marty Strauss, a one-time thief and

gambling addict who is released from jail to work as a bodyguard for Joseph Whithead, a reclusive industrialist and multi-millionaire.

After taking the job, however, a number of complications rear their ugly heads. One is Carys, Whithead's retiring and attractive daughter that he keeps stoked up on heroin most of the time. Another is an odd fellow going by the even odder name of Mamoulia, who seems to have a number of ungodly powers, including the ability to re-animate the dead. One of Mamoulia's primary tools is a man called Breer, whose habits include self-mutilation, swallowing razors, and having very odd tea parties with small children...

From the very first pages of the novel, it is apparent that Barker is a master stylist, and both the texture and richness of his imagery are among the best seen since Anne Rice's The Vampire Lestat. But Rice's mixed images of light and darkness tend toward the more dazzling part of the spectrum, while Barker's all run to midnight black. And Rice manages to maintain her entrancing tone throughout the book -- Barker only shows it in flashes. Still, he is always the consummate craftsman, and his mastery of the artful turn of phrase is present throughout the book.

In The Damnation Game, Barker's horror works at two distinct levels. The first is that of horror and revulsion, a shuddering disgust more intellectual than physical. One of the best ideas that Barker plays with is the results of Mamoulia's grisly power: The corpses doing his bidding are literally rotting before our (and others') eyes, but they don't know they're dead.

The effects are quite chilling, such as the dead woman who can't understand the sticky spots on the couch where she sits, nor the flies that congregate on her body. One especially ghastly scene is that of a reanimated dog rooting about for food and tearing off a hunk of its own rotting flesh. Barker's handling of this topic is actually more successful than King's in Pet Sematary, largely due to the fact that

where King flinches away at the last moment, Barker takes horror to its limit.

The other level of horror that Barker works at is much deeper -- that of a nihilistic, almost philosophical horror. While King's characters are often agents in an almost cosmic battle between good and evil (Salem's Lot, The Stand), there is no such dualism in Barker's universe. In it, the cosmos is utterly cold and indifferent to the struggles of man. It is a bleak and fatalistic view that has a great deal in common with the dark, meaninglessness of life as expressed in the plays of Samuel Beckett. It is a world where, in Barker's own words, "Nothing is essential."

As effective as this view is at evoking despair, it is also a contributing factor to one of the novel's greatest flaws. It is technically brilliant, but the book seems to lack that elusive quality: Heart. Nothing here really manages to get under your skin the way the "baptism" did in Barker's short story "Rawhead Rex." Although a finely crafted nightmare machine, it is a strangely soulless one as well. And here is where Barker suffers most obviously in frequent comparison with King. Whatever their other flaws, King's novels are always intensely and personally gripping. Barker's work, on the other hand, is as sharp as a knife, but just as cold. In short, as good as Barker's novel is, you're able to put it down.

Still, this is as skillful a novel as you're likely to find. It suffers in a couple of other places (the plot is just a touch weak, and the climax is somewhat unsatisfying). Yet its merits far outweigh its flaws. Though Clive Barker's work is not for the faint of heart or the easily-offended, it is some of the best horror being written today -- and The Damnation Game is one of the best first novels to be published in the genre in a long time.

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Lost In Time And Space With Lefty Feep

by Robert Bloch

(Creatures at Large, 258 pages,
\$12.95)

rev. by Robert Whitaker Sirignano

THIS BOOK was edited by John Stanley, who is a brash and brassy Hollywood type and loves hyperbole and surrounds himself with it. The introduction and prefaces and commentaries are surrounded by giant block lettering that screams at you. So it is perhaps consistent that John Stanley's first fiction publication for his little (but immodest) book company are the Lefty Feep stories.

Lefty Feep is a brash, brassy man who talks in the present tense and tells tall tales with a vaudevillian beat at a place called Jack's Shack. He wears a checkered Zoot Suit (probably with a reet pleat -- though that's not mentioned). He is a small man in a large world, and has small interests. He likes to gamble. He likes dames, but the world keeps intruding in the damndest ways -- and that's where the stories spin out.

It's nice to have these stories rescued from the pulps, where most of them have been since their original publication. They are not masterpieces of the short story -- they are gimmicks, they are formula. Seeing nine of them in one place, you can see the screws holding the frame of the stories together. The construction of the tales creak and groan, and they would fall apart in lesser hands. They are full of bad puns, rhyming dialog, malapropisms, and references to another era.

Narrator Bloch meets up with Feep in a bar and Feep has a problem or becomes scared or annoyed by something, whereupon Feep narrates his tale. This is the basic pattern, except for "A Snitch in Time," the story which Bloch wrote specifically for this book, and which does not follow the formula.

As individual stories, they aren't much. They bear the same relationship to literature as the Bowery Boys do to cinematic art. You enjoy this sort of stuff, or you

ignore it. It does no good to hate it, because it's not worth the effort of hating. They are stories that were written quickly in order to make some money. As a fan of bad puns and breezy storytelling, I like this book. As a period piece tapestry, the stories open up a different world not frequently seen and seldom recreated, and enjoyable in spite of the unusual unbelievability of the individual story. (Though there's only one true dud, that being "Jerk the Giant Killer.") It's the small details that I enjoyed, things like describing "Out of Business Oscar", whose store windows have said "Lease Expired -- Going Out Of Business" for twenty years, or Feep's haunt where he mentions encounters with a bookie named Gorilla Gabface. His gambling. His friends. There are constant references to the war effort, so much in the forefront of people's minds then. A couple of stories concern the war at home.

One story in particular is very good, and doesn't really need the other stories around it to help it out, that being "The Weird Doom of Flyod Scrilch" about a man who compulsively answers magazine advertisements, and they actually work for him.

The book has an introduction/interview by John Stanley with Bloch, another introduction by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, and additional interview comments on the individual stories. It's amusing to read the commentaries to the stories, as John Stanley is so overwhelmed by his own sense of hype that his questions to Bloch often verge on the idiotic.

Recommended (sort of).

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Godbody

by Theodore Sturgeon

(published posthumously)

reviewed by C. Keith Ray

GODBODY is a good book. Like many of Sturgeon's later works, it carries a message and a belief that most people should know, but seemingly not enough practice.

In the foreword, Robert A. Hein-

lein warns the potential reader that some people may be offended by the sex and nudity depicted, or feel that it is sacrilegious. My first reaction was, "How can anyone be offended by nudity in printed words?" Then I realized that, with the wrong words, or the wrong attitude on the part of the author (or the reader), nudity could be unpleasant or offensive to read about.

Fortunately, Sturgeon is a master of the "right sound" and the "right words" and has (what I believe) the "right" attitude. The people who most likely would be offended by Godbody's contents are the ones who most need to understand Sturgeon's message, and most likely to miss it when they read this book. In fact, the only part of this book I find sacrilegious is the advertising copy on the back. After reading the book, and then that ad-copy, I'm sure you too would agree.

I don't want to say too much about the details of this novel. I feel that I could spoil things by telling you the plot, or by going too deeply into how he expresses his message. Still, I think you should read it, if you haven't already.

I hope you have read other books by Theodore Sturgeon. I had read only two books and a few stories when I learned that he had died. I almost cried then. People who knew and loved him eulogized him -- among them, Harlan Ellison and Robert

Heinlein. And just this Saturday I saw listed on a public domain disk, a file created by Spider Robinson in Sturgeon's honor and memory.

I wish I had read more of his works, and had met him myself. Since Sturgeon's death, I have bought everything he has written that I could find. His early stories seem minor: technological tricks, pulp plots. There was a long time when he didn't publish, and when he started writing again, the belief/philosophy/message I've already alluded to began to appear. Some of these stories were collected in a book titled (ironically, now) Sturgeon Is Alive And Well. The novel More Than Human won awards. (More Than Human was actually three segments, one of which had been published in magazines separately as "Baby is Three"). The novel Venus Plus X has the same (more emphatic) message as Godbody, but was written in a way that apparently distanced too many people. The short story "Slow Sculpture" has the same message too, and won awards. Other notable stores which I haven't yet read, but which Heinlein says have the same underlying philosophy, are "Bianca's Hands," "The World Well Lost" and "Some of Your Blood". Sturgeon also wrote two of the best Star Trek episodes: "Amok Time" and "Shoreleave".

By now, you probably want to know what this all-fired-up philosophy/

message is. Simply put, it is "Love one another." NOT "Have Sex With Everyone." And not just bible-quoting either -- Sturgeon means it. In fact, he refers in Godbody (and in others) to Christianity as practiced by the original disciples of Christ according to what biblical and historical scholarship has revealed. This is not "New Knowledge" but it is not widely spread about, either. Books dating to 1964 have also used this information, notably Stranger in a Strange Land by Heinlein, and Sturgeon's Venus Plus X.

For those of us who find this philosophy to be obvious, it is still good to read, and it serves to revive our motivation in practicing what we believe. I, personally, needed this reminder.

For a very different angle on philosophy I'd recommend Jonathan Livingston Seagull, Illusions: Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah and (most important) Bridge Across Forever, all by Richard Bach. I take Bach with a grain of salt, but the truth is where you find it; weed out what sounds like nonsense to you.

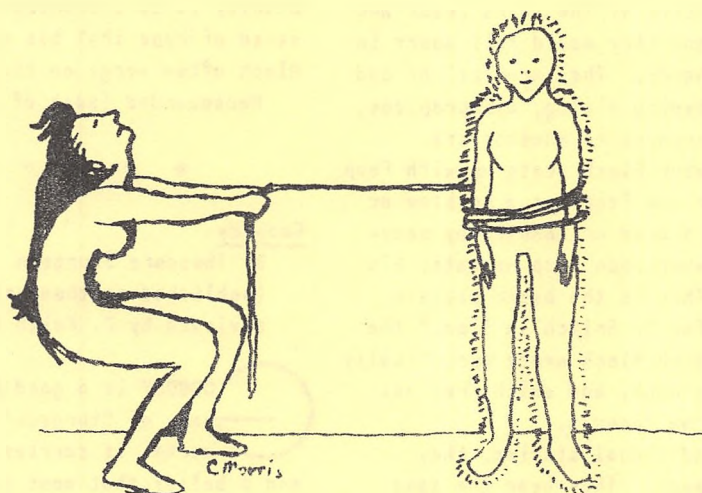
I'd also recommend Stranger in a Strange Land. There are other books by Heinlein that are also relevant, but most people miss the point. (Another good book, not necessarily directly related to these, is Davy by Edgar Pangborn.)

The saddest thing about Godbody is that Sturgeon won't be writing any more. I read it quickly, and wish there were more to read. As I understand it, Sturgeon had been working on Godbody for years (and, according to Harlan Ellison, was almost starving during that time from lack of income), and he was still not quite satisfied with it when he died.

Read it. Read other works by Sturgeon. After reading that, if you are so inclined, re-read the Bible, or the Koran.

I don't think you would regret reading these books, or Godbody in particular.

And if you do regret the experience, I'm sorry for you.



"As A Matter Of Fact..."

— by Gen. Lee Natter, ret. (special correspondent to TSF)

PREFACE:

Wherein The Origin Of One Man's Interest In Comicdom
Is Revealed For All Eyes To See

THEY WERE always here, in the trenches. The men read them voraciously. Officers tolerated it well enough. Some even read the books themselves, either to keep abreast of their company's interests, or (a few) for genuine enjoyment. Most of us looked down on the reading of comic books, citing it as a wasteful pastime and a sign of immaturity, a desire for escape.

I adopted this view myself. Having read them as a youngster, I did not see their place in the adult world. Why would someone rather read "Superman" or "Green Lantern" when he could have Wuthering Heights, Ulysses, or even The Man In The High Castle instead? I felt reading comics was rather childish. It was tolerated under my command, but not encouraged.

All that has changed now.

Always aspiring to be well-liked, yet respected, by my men, I took an active interest in their lives. I instilled the importance of literacy, creativity, and intelligence, without demanding it. Consequently, I developed some of the most well-read, smart, inventive servicemen anywhere.

So, when one of my aides, Corp. Vick ("V for Victory") Eddison (a bright kid, who has great potential), brought me a copy of "Batman: The Dark Knight Returns", assuring me that "it's not like those other comics," I thanked him politely, promised (sincerely) that I would read it soon, and placed it in my desk drawer, behind the files. And there it remained for several weeks, until Lt. Lewis "Bee-Bop" Bock broached the subject at the O.C. one night. Between his rum-and-cokes, Bock echoed Eddison's enthusiasm for "Dark Knight" expounded upon how this book added a dimension long absent from the world of comics. "They aren't just for kids," he told me. "Comics are coming into their own." He spouted off examples: "Elektra", "Watchmen", "Grendel" -- and I made note of them. I was intrigued. Bock is a good man, and not wont to follow the latest fad or fancy. If he was excited about comic books of today, there was bound to be something there.

I read "Dark Knight" as soon as I returned to my quarters. I was amazed. The comics I used to read as a kid were never like this! Dealing head-on with such diverse topics as vigilantes, insanity, death and morality, "Dark Knight" took me by surprise. I asked to borrow Corp. Eddison's copies of the other three volumes of the story. I was hooked.

I checked out other titles, recommended by Eddison, Bock, and a few select others whose opinions on the subject I've learned to respect, and now I look forward

to several titles each month. Primarily, I've found that the quality of limited series is far superior to that of open-ended titles like "Spider-Man" or "The Incredible Hulk". I believe this is due to their having a planned beginning, middle, and end, whereas the long-run titles have to keep re-hashing the same character over and over again. With limited series, storytelling can take the driver's seat, while the need for continuity is ferreted away in the trunk.

There are exceptions, of course. "Miracleman" -- a revamping by Alan Moore of "Marvelman" -- and "Grendel" by Matt Wagner spring to mind. These two titles stand out for their use of serious themes, thoughtful characterization, and rather avant-garde storytelling techniques. "Grendel", like Bill Sinkevitch's work on the recently completed series "Elektra: Assassin", is also noteworthy for the Pander Brothers' stylish art. They blaze new (or at least, seldom-used) trails, instead of conforming to the norms established years ago, and now accepted as gospel to the point of crushing any inkling of individualism or hope for artistic achievement.

Alan Moore and Frank Miller constantly resurface as exceptional comic book writers. Moore's now-complete "Watchmen" series (which also bears striking art by Dave Gibbons), "Miracleman", "Swamp Thing", and "Halo Jones"; Miller's "Elektra" stories, "Dark Knight", "Ronin", and even his "Daredevil" tales -- they all reflect a devotion to quality and caring for their artform. And it is an artform, at least some of it. Like any other field of artistic endeavor, there are the mediocre, technically-skilled craftsmen, and there are the Artists, the Visionaries, who break the boundaries, who leave the flock. Both Miller and Moore have proven their commitment to their singular visions, and fortunately for comicdom, they don't show any signs of compromising those standards.

I am glad for that day Eddison introduced me to modern comics. It is my hope that I can reverse the opinions of some of those who currently ignore or berate comics today, and enlighten them to the quality work being done, even as Bock and Eddison enlightened me. As one man said, ninety percent of everything published is crap. But weeding out that ten percent -- that rare ten percent -- is all the more worthy of the search.

(NEXT TIME: the issue of censorship
and labeling in comics.)

SERCON I report

(continued from page 1)

The Damnation Game, in case

you're wondering what the hell Watson was talking about.) The speech and others like it must have taken more preparation than normal panel participation would require, but the results were fascinating. The spread of this practice to sf cons in general would be a marvelous boon to convention fandom and, who knows, maybe to sf as a whole.

Now, worthwhile panels take place at lots of cons all the time. What was so special about these was that everybody went, and everybody listened, and a lot of people participated. I don't believe I saw a panel with fewer than a third of the convention membership present, and several seemed to have attracted the entire crew. Pro attendance and participation in the audience was, for the convention as a whole, unlike anything I have ever seen.

An example. When the Cyberpunk panel finally surfaced ("Labels,

Movements and Other Hazards") and the inevitable comparison arose between the Movement and the '60s-'70s New Wave, writers like Samuel R. Delany were there in the audience to describe How Things Were Then. This sort of thing could screw up the routine of an inveterate panel dozer.

(Name-dropping time: Some, but not all of the people in attendance were Delany, Watson, Hartwell, Silverberg, Fowler, Anderson, Pournelle, Spinrad, Pohl, Bear, Budrys, Preuss, Kessel, Rucker, Blumlein, Benford, Carr, Niven, Kadrey, and all the important people I have failed to remember. The convention drew well.)

The excellent programming created some problems. If you went to every damned panel, you found yourself trying to sit in the Gaslite Room for more hours in a row than is biologically feasible. Even worse, browsing time for the dedicated huxter room rat could be seriously curtailed. (When there aren't any

bad panels, you begin to realize that they, like the tick and the congressman, have their function.) Intermissions would have served a useful purpose.

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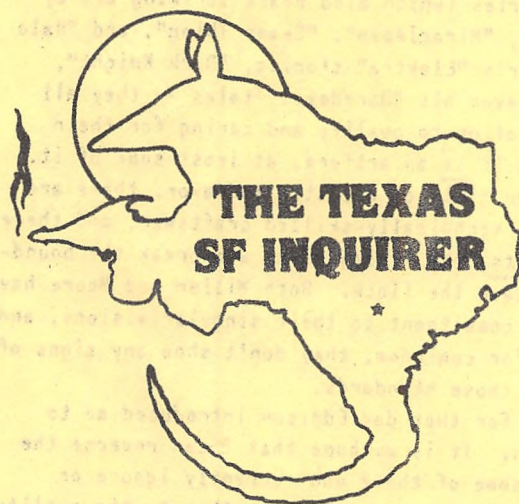
Sercon was a place in which a lot of people got together to discuss sf. The programming was organized around this specific, common interest. Careful consideration was put into that planning, and more than a few program participants put more than a little pre-convention effort into their contributions. The result was entertaining, enlightening, and encouraging.

If this is not your sort of convention, you have a couple hundred alternatives to choose from. But, once in a while, it is still (or at last, or once again) possible for a group of people to get together to talk about science fiction.

And if that interests you, I'll see you at Sercon Two in Austin next winter.

-- Howard Coleman

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