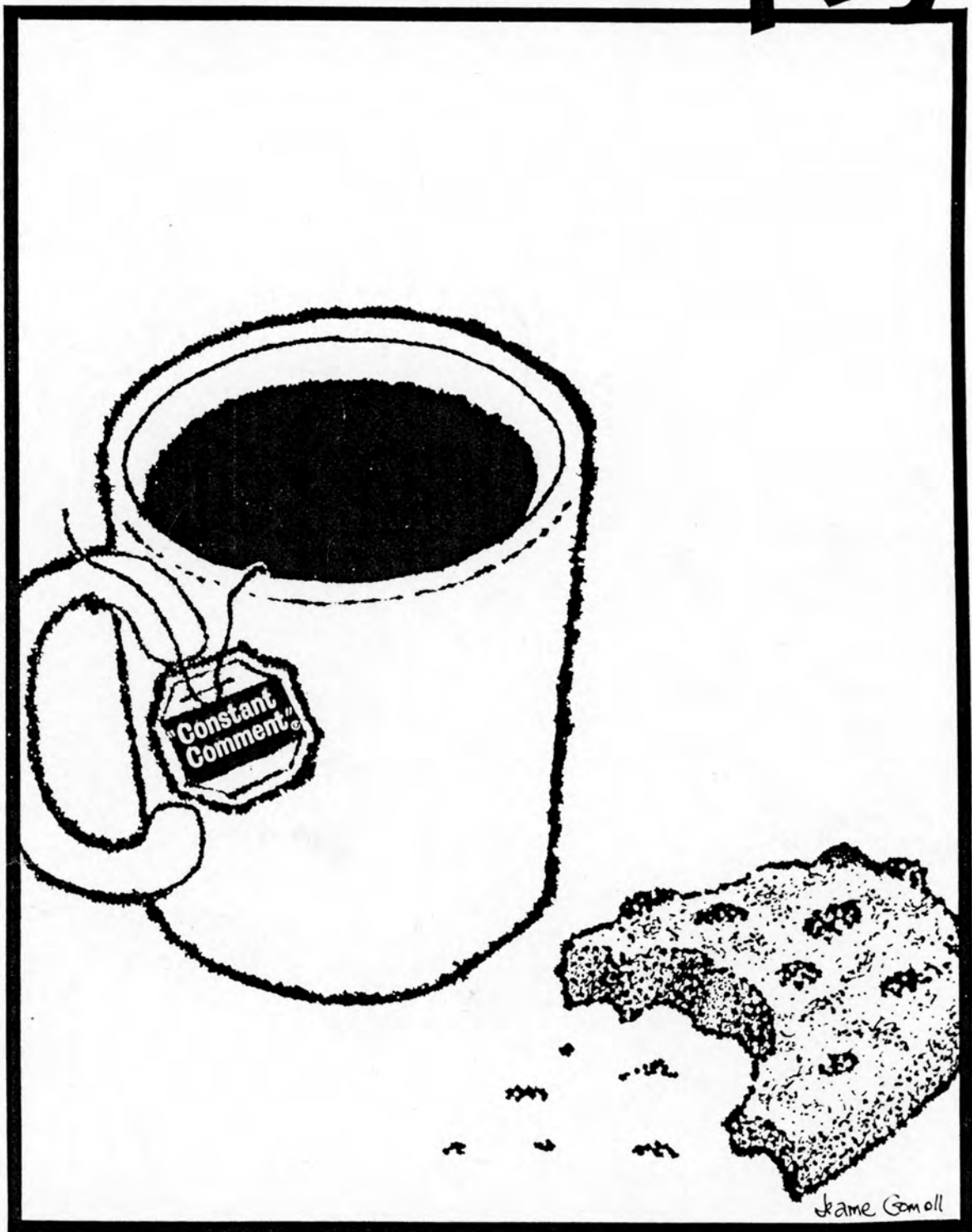


# Whimsy



James G. Groll

number 6



This sixth issue of *Whimsy* attempts to illustrate the proposition that fanzines can contain a great deal more than just small talk, but—just the same—fanzines have a lot in common with a good conversation. So sit down, pour yourself a cup of tea, and welcome to *Whimsy* #6, and Obsessive Press #71, which comes to you from Jeanne Gomoll, Box 1443, Madison, WI 53701-1443 (608-255-9909). Copyright ©, 1987 by Jeanne Gomoll. All rights revert to contributors. All art, except cartoon on page 31 (unknown origin) by me. Proofreading, to an extent, by Spike. (An amusing exercise might be to try to find the point at which Spike had to stop proofreading in order to leave town. There's no connection, I'm sure, between those two events.) All mistakes by me. 4 June 1987.

Table of contents: "I'd like to introduce you to...to...Sorry, what's your name again?", p 1; "Pleased to meet you." p 2; "So...How's the family?", p 4; "What've you been up to lately?", p 8; "...On the other hand—", p 11; "...Which reminds me—", p 14; "You don't say!", p 16; "Read any good books lately?", p 18; "No, I'm waiting to see the movie." p 21; How the movie was made (shop talk), p 24; "Going anyplace special for your vacation this year?", p 27; "oops." p 29; IAHF, p 30; "Nice talking with you." p 30.



*Whimsy* #1's cover featured a cartoonish caricature of my face. The cover of *Whimsy* #2 responded elaborately to Dave Langford's sarcastic comments about cover #1's grinning visage; but it was still me, this time posing as a gun-slinging, cigar-chomping, 19th century character of ill-repute, who looked as though she never grinned. *Whimsy* #3 didn't really have a cover to speak of; nevertheless, the first page included a pen-and-ink drawing of me, which was actually the most recognizable self-portrait so far. Then, *Whimsy* #4 rudely trampled tradition and, instead of my face, it was graced with a stylized, abstract, presents-under-the-christmas-tree drawing. Many *Whimsy* readers were so confused that they tried to "read" the drawing's dark lines (the ribbons on the presents), though no one was so confused as to suggest a cubist, self-portrait interpretation. The mystery was explained in *Whimsy* #5, which returned to the safely traditional, less mysterious portrait cover. This time, Stu Shiffman created the cover artwork, which referred, I suppose, to my obsessive interest in swimming.

In fact, the contents of all five issues of *Whimsy* have practically overflowed with introduction. It's been a bit embarrassing, in fact. Do you remember?—I introduced myself, synopsis fashion, in #1, and

began to tell you something about that irritating number neurosis of mine. Since then, I've expanded on that sketchy resume and have told you about "coming out" as a jock. I even drew the layout of my last house for you, and revealed some mortifying stories about moving and a romantic rendezvous. I've introduced you to my good friend, Spike, and have confided in you my doubts and worries about writing personally. I've publicly humiliated my sister Julie for her sleeping problems, and made you privy to lots of other family secrets, just so that I could explain the painful humor of some of the events surrounding my grandfather's death. I described all the details of the hoax that Spike and Julie perpetrated in the form of a parody-zine called *Whoopsey*, and I've apologized profusely and frequently for misspelling your name. I've told you what I wanted to be when I grew up as opposed to how I'm actually turning out; I've explained some of my fannish biases to you.



EARLY WHIMSEY'S

Spike complains now, that it is impossible to write about me. She claims that I've written up all the good stories already.

I would have thought that most of you would be pretty familiar with the person I am, by now. In fact, I wouldn't have been very surprised to have received a few letters suggesting that an article or two by outside contributors might pleasantly relieve my rather blatantly personal approach to this perzine business.

But no...you people still have questions.

Paul Brazier  
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England

Is that really  
a picture of you on  
the cover? If so,  
and it's an accurate  
representation, then  
you look a lot like

another favorite American of mine, Lisa Tuttle. Do you Reaalllly? Huh? Go on, tell us! And on page 15, there's another one. Is that you or Spike? If it's Spike, how come she looks so much like you?

Maia Cowan  
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How do you  
pronounce your name?  
Is it simply a fancy  
spelling of  
"Jean," or is it  
pronounced "Gee

Anne," or "Genie," or (Frenchly) "Zhan" (Where zh represents the French "j" sound)? At the moment I'm tending to read it as "Gee Anne" by analogy with other female names of the same construction that I'm familiar with (Lisanne, Suzanne, Corinne, Joanne, etc.).

Pardon me, I guess I never did tell you how to pronounce my name.

It's "Jeen," a fancy spelling of Jean.

But it's definitely based upon the French version of "Jeanne"—as in "Jeanne d'Arc"—for reasons having to do with Roman Catholic church rules and regulations.

A Catholic child is expected to bear a saint's name or a derivation thereof. The idea is that the chosen saint will serve as a spiritual role model and protector.

"But 'Wendy' is derived from 'Gwendolyn.' That's a saint's name," the parents protest. "'Wendy' is a name created by Sir James Barrie in the early part of the century when he wrote *Peter Pan*," the priest replies. "Damned Jesuit sophistry," the parents think. "But 'Tammy' is derivative of 'Thomasina.' That's derivative of 'Thomas.' That's a saint's name." "Wrong, simply wrong," Father says emphatically.

Of course no one knows where his name comes from, but parents who would give it to a child obviously don't care where they come from either. "But 'Tab'—" the parents begin. "—is a soft drink," Father finishes, and you should accept his judgement on aesthetic grounds if not religious ones.

(That's a quotation from *Growing Up Catholic*, published by Doubleday/Dolphin.

which I recommend highly to all of you fallen and still-perched Catholics. It's hilarious.

Anyway, so I'm Jeanne. (Actually, I'm Jeanne Marie; a person can't have enough heavenly connections.) One syllable, long "e." I used to be Jean-nie, two syllables, cute, with the "i" dotted by a circle. But that was in second grade, and I lost that tacky habit soon enough. My brother Eric is remarkably cool about people still calling him by his childhood name, Rick, which is something that I still do most of the time. But I tend to correct people when they call me by the two-syllable variant of my own name. It feels silly to me, I guess. Maybe if I hadn't dotted the "i" with a circle, I'd have turned out more tolerant.

I don't look much like Lisa Tuttle at all, and even though Spike doesn't either, neither she nor I think the two of us resemble each other. And, yes, that really is a photo of Spike on page 15.

OK?

Now that we've been properly introduced...



Conversations with new acquaintances are like games of 20-questions, the object being to find overlapping areas of interest and knowledge. After the two game-players have been introduced, the usual, general questions get asked, to focus the field of conversation.

"So, what are you majoring in?" was the stereotypical opener during my college days, though I often heard, "What's your sign?" too. Mostly I just shrugged my shoulders to that irritating question.

I don't hear the question about my major much anymore. Now, it's more likely to be, "So, what do you do for a living?"

It seems that that's what most of you thought I was asking when I used as a comment hook, the experience of seeing the reflection of myself in a shop window and realizing that I'd "turned into" the confident, young professional woman I admired as a 10-year-old. "Who or what did you aspire to be when you grew (grow) up? How far from or how close are you to those high expectations today?" was the question I asked in *Whimsy* #4. And I admit, the question does sound like, "What do you do?"

The letters I received were certainly entertaining. I thought it was fascinating that so many of us have fulfilled at least parts of our early dreams. Not many of the letters I received were from people much dissatisfied with what they were presently doing. It seems that most of us can find a



surprising amount of correspondence between our early hopes and current occupations.

I'm still getting letters responding to that question.

David Thayer/Teddy Harvia says that he wanted to be a mammalogist when he grew up, but gave up on that ambition when he "discovered it involved more than just admiring the outsides of animals." Anyone familiar with Harvia's fantasy-creature cartoons knows that he's fulfilled the essential element of that early ambition in his current avocation.

Ellen Kushner  
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We here around  
the big table in my  
red kitchen recently  
played a game called,  
"What Artistic Media

Event (urk...playing it safe to cover plays, books, movies, etc.) is Your Life? E.g., one of us is definitely What it would be like to be Grown Up and an Artist and living in New York, as written by a teenage girl who didn't really understand about things like money.

That, unfortunately, tells you all you need to know about what I wanted to be when I grew up.

...Well, the conversation, as it's evolved, is fine with me, though it isn't what I expected. I guess I was thinking I'd get more letters from you about childhood idols, role-models, and teachers. That's how I'd been thinking about the comment hook when I talked about the conversation I'd had with Dan Steffan and his confident listing of his artistic "influences." My experience of admiring that exotic woman walking in front of my childhood home—and later—the discovery that I'd internalized and copied so much of that remembered image, made me wonder if any of you had similar memories and insights.

In fact, I would have thought that it was impolite to have out and out asked you, "So, what do you do for a living?" I suppose that those of you who thought it was a rude question simply ignored it.

Banana Republic publishes a catalog of travel books in addition to its clothing catalogs. The travel book catalog is laid out in an almost fannish design. For instance, interlineos are interspersed among the book listings. One of the interlineos, disguised as a notebook entry of advice to the world traveler, recommends:

In most countries, to ask "What do you do?" is very poor manners.

It's always felt to me that the same advice holds true among fans. We do, of course, sometimes volunteer stories about our day-to-day occupations, but seldom are these expositions offered in response to direct queries. This is certainly not to say that we lack curiosity about one another. Conversations in fanzines, apazines, and at conventions cover an amazing range of personal

topics. But the subject of our occupations is seldom one of the first raised. Obviously, I'm not offering an exactly original insight about fannish conversational habits here: many people have described the familiar conversation with a non-fannish friend:

You've just told her a few things about the convention you attended the weekend before, and about someone you met there. "So, what do they do?" your friend asks. And it isn't until that moment that you realize that you have absolutely no idea what the person does outside of the interests you talked about at the convention. The subject simply hadn't come up.

"Oh, probably a computer programmer or a librarian," you answer lamely.

The What-Do-You-Do, standard question translates differently depending on whether it's asked inside or outside of fandom (or any special interest group, for that matter). A fannishly inclined Ms. Manners might say that the only place it's perfectly correct to open a conversation by asking about a person's occupation is among people whose main reason for gathering is the thing they do for a living. (A person you meet at a downtown bar around 5:30 pm might accurately be assumed to be someone who is there for an after-work drink, and here the question would be polite enough.) When the gathering consists of people who get together because of something they do besides work for a living (or instead of it), the question comes out sounding vaguely insulting, especially when it's the first thing that's asked. In fandom, that question might sound like: "Obviously this is all silly stuff. What do you do that really means something?" And as a conversation-opener, that's a real putdown.

Well, I'm probably exaggerating the potential misunderstanding that could stem from such a remark. Maybe we've historically tended to be a little more sensitive about the issue in fandom because so many of us have chosen to put a lot of energy into areas that society at large has designated "spare time" projects, and because, so often, the jobs that support us earn us little status in the "real world." Frequently our so-called spare time projects contain the stuff of our identities and the hopes we nurture for eventual careers. And so, we all cultivate tactful conversational skills that assume that career-related questions may be sensitive ones for those we encounter in fandom.

Still...most of you didn't sound as if you'd been insulted by my question. But neither was my question a conversation-starter. We'd known each other for quite a while already (4 issues of *Whimsy*, at least). I was amazed just the same, at the amount of detailed information on your jobs and careers snagged by my rather more ambiguous comment hook.

Maia Cowan  
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I don't  
remember as-  
piring to be

anything in particular when I grew up—except famous for Something. I expected to get a Ph.D. and be outstanding in my field. I wasn't particular about the field.

Then I got to college, discovered it was no better than high school, had a mild nervous breakdown over the collapse not only of my expectations but of my self-concept ("Well, if that's not what I want, what do I want?"), and settled down to Earn a Living while I thought about what I really wanted to be. Ten years later I went back to college for a B.A. in psychology. I'll receive it in June, 1987. Along that way, I finally admitted that what I really enjoy doing isn't research, but learning about things and then writing about what I learn. So I've expanded into a second major, communications, and will be a technical writer or something like it.

Somewhere in all that, I stopped asking, "What do I want to be when I grow up? and thought to ask, "What do I do when no one expects me to and I'm not getting paid for it?" Since I've been writing since I could hold a pencil—journals, abominable stories, essays, letters-to-the-editor, long letters to friends, school newspapers, ad infinitum—I'd say I really knew what I wanted to be long before I realized it.

And when I write to Suzette Haden Elgin for a copy of The Lonesome Node, I'm going to ask her if Láadan contains a word for "realizing something you 'knew' all along, but didn't really pay attention to until it suddenly developed special significance." Something between "grok" and "click" made famous by Ms. Magazine. My "realizing" I wanted to be a writer is but one example of this experience I have all the time.

Luke McGuff  
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When I was eight or ten, I used to think that I would be so famous that parents would put their children into little canisters, and their child would then follow my life, step by step, second by second. The child would live and grow and develop as I did. I can remember standing out on the front porch, looking behind me into the house and imagining a string of such canisters, each at a point slightly behind the others. I looked ahead, and I wondered what the children ahead of me knew about my life that I didn't yet...

...I had no idea what would make me so famous that mothers would put their children into little canisters to follow my life around. It had something to do with saving the world, of course. The very idea of such canisters involved a technological leap from my early childhood (this was between 1965-1967). I never bothered to think about what it was I had done that was so great, just that I had done it and there the canisters were, following me and preceding me. I would relive some treasured eight-year-old moment and think of all the children experiencing that feeling now. I would anticipate future

pleasures and triumphs, and think of all the people who had already lived through them...



The really hard part about telling you the story about my grandfather's death and the jokes that wove the fabric of my family's relationships and endurance of those final months and the funeral week afterward, was that you knew nothing about my family. You didn't know my mother or my aunts or my uncle; you weren't aware of the family history that had rendered relationships fragile and those last few months especially meaningful for the communication that took place during them. Most of all, the humor that buoyed my family during that time couldn't be communicated until you understood some of that.

I found myself in a situation rather like someone making a pun to foreigners, who must first define the two words and explain the sentence structure of the joke before telling the punch line. Over-explaining has smothered many a joke, and I was afraid that I'd destroy the manic humor of the "Gerhardt Story" with all that preliminary background.

The situation contrasts starkly to the telling of a fannish anecdote, where the joke may partially depend, for instance, upon the fact that so many people have written about a given event and the retelling only adds resonance or comic dissonance. Or the story may rely on the fact that the story's protagonist is well known to many readers or listeners. There is a certain amount of background information that can be assumed by the teller of a fannish anecdote which will enrich the story for many members of the audience.

Paul Brazier  
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England

...Regarding  
the piece entitled  
"I'm Over Heeere  
Gerhardt!"—I found  
this truly touching,  
very well written

(by that I mean I didn't notice the writing at all), and disconcerting. Why disconcerting? Very simple. Your zine is beautifully laid out, and follows an interesting style of presentation which interleaves original material, LoC extracts and editorial comments. From the first line, this style means that it is very difficult to leave off because one always has to read the next comment. Commendably tight, this kind of presentation is the most difficult to do well, and you do it very well indeed. Then, after the little cartoon about Spike and the prison library, with no introduction and no warning (like a contents page or anything), we are decanted into a wonderful anecdote

which is just about as different as it is possible to be from what was being said before, both in style and concern. I suspect I'm being a little bit naive here, and that regular readers would recognize that this point is where the anecdote comes, or *somesuch*, but mine is, as it were, an unchattered view. All I remember of your previous efforts is that I enjoyed them.

I think that's fair criticism. That disjointed jump from the stuff on Spike's name, to "I'm Over Heerrre, Gerhardt!" made me nervous too, even as I was pasting up the page. I kept thinking that I should really have written some sort of connecting statement, or should have placed the story somewhere else in the issue where it might weave more naturally in with the other material.

It was left until last in the issue for several reasons, however, one being that I wanted to give my mother a chance to read it over and correct any mistakes I'd made in the telling of the story. In contrast to most of the usual anecdotes I tell, I was trying here to tell the story exactly as it happened, trying to capture the emotions and events as they felt to the family, without embellishments or exaggerations. I suspect that I'll tell parts of this story in the future as part of another, larger story, and will subtract and add details to make it into a different or better tale. But I know from experience that once I start that process, I lose the memory of the way it really happened in the first place. So, this time, with this story, I wanted the actual details, all intact. My mother offered a few minor corrections and from those I realized that my mind had already started to edit the anecdote to better fit my own sense of a pleasing plot. She also requested that I change a name to protect the identity of my grandfather's friend. (Gerhardt, you see, wasn't really his name, though it makes a close fit.) Of course, I made the change, grateful that she didn't seem to mind that this private story would be published in such a public forum as *Whimsy*.

In any case, because of the extra work required, the story ended up last in the issue of *Whimsy* #5, and I discovered that it didn't blend in very well with the material that preceded it. I tried and rejected several connecting paragraphs, but in the end I simply pressed in a border of decorative tape to divide it from the cartoon, and pasted in the story of my grandfather's death.

It crossed my mind at one point that perhaps I'd written this story for private reasons, and so, perhaps, it should have stayed private. But I couldn't bring myself to drop it from the issue. In some weird way it seemed to belong in #5 more than any other article did.

I think now, that the very fact that this sort of private story, which relies upon

no fannish assumptions or mythologies, & which needs to lay all its groundwork within itself, is the very thing that separated it from the rest of the issue and made a bridge so impossible to construct. And yet, because it was about the function of mythologies within a small group, a small-scale version of that same process that creates the texture of the fabric of fandom, the story absolutely belonged in *Whimsy*.

Denys Howard  
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...That's what I've  
done for the past year  
whenever I'm in Portland,  
that remembering  
stuff. The drive down

to Portland, a year ago June, was really hard because I hadn't started to cry yet, which I didn't do really until I had very carefully parked the car in front of my brother's house and put the keys away, but I started to remember just as soon as I finished talking to my sister that morning who called me to say Mom had died suddenly in the night. That evening I went to my Aunt Mae's house and got her to tell stories about when they were all kids, and this summer I did that again at a reunion, and every few months I get out the old family photo albums and tell stories to myself. She escaped the pain that your grandfather experienced, but oh how I wish I'd been able to say goodbye to her. I can't imagine doing what my brother did, who was the first person her husband called and who went over to their apartment and had to be the one who made decisions and talked to people. I just sat and cried, like I'm doing today.

Jeanne M. Mealy  
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What a wonderfully touching  
story about your  
grandfather, and  
the multi-character

ter drama that went on during his final weeks. I understand the caution against laughter that you all felt at the end of the story, yet I also know what a part laughter played in my own family's reaction to my dad's death. I was occasionally shocked by someone laughing when I was feeling quite the opposite, but there were times when I too snapped back to normal and had to laugh at something. Yes, it's all part of the healing—a reminder that the living will go on, and also remember those who are missing.

It wouldn't have been too far from the truth to have read practically the whole of *Whimsy* #5 as mental warm-up exercises for the writing of "Gerhardt." When I decided to get my family's story down exactly as it had happened, that process led to thinking about how different it was from my normal story-telling habits. The scribble drawings were an attempt to explain how most anecdotes are augmented with extra lines and clarifying shadings. As I attempted to reproduce the conversational styles of family members, and to explain about our various traditions and family traits, I discovered the difficulty caused by assuming that you would be able to "hear" these people speak with the same



intonations and meanings as I heard them in my own head. That's where the essay on added emphasis (underlines, italics, explicatives) came from.

Luke McGuff

The first thing that struck me about Whimsy was, of course, the fact that I didn't have to egoscan further than page 1 to see my name mentioned. Holy carreeno! After reading it, I went back to the beginning of the zine. That's when I really cracked up, because there you are, talking about rearranging things to make better anecdotes, immediately following it with a rearranged anecdote! I don't mind being made an example of in this gentle little writing lesson, and in fact, I've taken it to heart. Ultimately, it reminds me of the story of the newspaper editor who got his writers to stop using "very" by having them use "Damn" (back in the 1890's, when "damn" was tres verboten) which was then excised by the proofreader/censor. Yes, I do feel like a better writer if I don't say anyway, whew, yeah!, or any of the other noise expressions I've practically copyrighted.

I enjoyed the rest of the zine more than the one I cribbed from Karen and Garth. There are some writers whom you have to learn how to read; reading one novel is not going to reveal as much to the reader as becoming acquainted with their work over the course of time. Whimsy, too, takes practice in reading. I feel like I got more from it this time, understood the interweaving technique better, saw how it all flowed together.

Sharon Lee  
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I've just spent a lot of time revising and editing a novel. Much of the work consisted of removing underlines (soon to be italics) from the mouths of the characters. I needed that kind of emphasis when I was writing the first draft—the voices were so clear in my head that I recorded them exactly as I "heard" them, without thinking about it. But upon editing, I made the same discovery that you did—if I needed so many italics, it was just possible that I wasn't using the right word; and that my ear is not the ear that future, impartial, readers will bring to the story. Sigh. Word processor notwithstanding, it is PAINful to comb through a manuscript, removing underlines...

Maia Cowan

"It seems to me" you write, "that personal experience makes better references than footnotes and bibliographies. Often, humor works better than earnest argument, and certainly is more sustainable than anger. Clarity is more important than showing off an obscure vocabulary." Many people whose opinions I enjoy have made the point: We try to prove our opinions are valid by citing "expert testimony" from books and scholarly papers—but what real evidence is there that those authors know what they're talking about? "Real life is like that" is, for me, certain-

ly persuasive enough support for an argument.

I've been studying communication theory and technical writing lately. The points about humor and clarity fit right in. The important "side" of a message is not whether it's sent, but whether it's received. If the intended audience doesn't want to listen, or doesn't understand, the message fails no matter how sincere or determined the sender.

Walt Willis  
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Donaghadee  
BT21 OPD  
North Ireland

I thought you were good about emphasis etc. I do so agree with what what you say about humour being often a matter of choosing the exactly right word. My favorite example is Ring Lardner's account of losing his way while driving his young son through New York. "Dad, why are we going along this street again?" "Shut up," I explained.

Harry Warner, Jr.  
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Long ago I decided to renounce completely the exclamation points and underlinings that Jeanne Mealy is trying to break away from. But something curious has happened: I find one fanzine editor after another inserting exclamation points at the ends of this or that sentence in my locs, usually in spots where I've tried to be humorous or at least light-hearted. Maybe fans everywhere think I'm so stodgy and humorless that no one will believe I actually wrote that sentence unless there's an exclamation point to make it clear that it's an exception to the general rule. I don't remember underlinings being edited into my locs, however. My abstention dates all the way back to the era when Hearst newspapers were still prominent in the nation and their editorials, which I detested, and some of their columnists, whom I abhorred, made lavish use of exclamation points and the journalistic equivalent of underlinings, all-caps setting of certain words. I didn't want my writing to resemble in any way what I found in Hearst newspapers.

Sometimes it takes someone else's particularly grievous fault, to recognize the same tendency in oneself, and repent. The Hearst newspapers were your catalyst, Harry, but mine was a co-worker at the office. George seldom ended a sentence without an exclamation point and never, ever, wrote a sentence without underlining at least one or two words. Particularly astonishing information would be proclaimed with two or three exclamation points. Words with extraordinary importance were distinguished from those of merely special importance by a hierarchy of underlines: one, two, or three, depending upon the circumstances. Since I was often the one who copied his stylistic excesses onto maps, brochures, or articles (which I then laid out and illustrated), I would frequently omit some of the underlinings and excess exclamation points. But whenever George caught me at this furtive business, he'd demand that I restore his underlines and exclamation

points. Since George retired, I've been gradually cleaning up the material he originally authored as it gets revised or reprinted. And I've continued to turn a critical eye on underlinings and exclamation points in my own writing. They often function, I think, as the "laugh track" of literature. If your reader isn't astonished or amused without exclamation points, or if a sentence can be read ambiguously without a key word underlined, their use acts more like a cover-up than an aid to communication.

Since working with George, my Selectric IBM typewriter has developed a peculiar habit. The L/1 key occasionally goes berzerk, repeating itself 3 to 8 times, even though it is not one of the "repeating" keys (like the underlining/dash key). I cope by relying on the L/1 key for typing the numeral "1" and cross my fingers and erase, when necessary, whenever the use of the exclamation key is unavoidable. But whenever my typewriter gets hysterical and types the number one over and over again, or makes its multiple exclamations, I sigh and mumble about it having "Georged" me.

Eric Gomoll  
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You wrote about your gradual elimination of typographical accentuation in your writing. That if the words alone don't com-

municate, italics and underlines won't help. Which I agree with. The main character in [the play] Torchsong is a classic New York-style screaming queen named Arnold. He's a stereotype who becomes a very real person in the course of the play. I know that because I've seen the play. I wonder if I would have known that if I just read the play. I wondered the same thing about Tom Stoppard's Travesties. It's a mountain of words that was almost like music in performance. And I think I might simply have been annoyed if I'd just read the script. It's all there in the words but if the reader isn't familiar with the voice he may not hear them as they need to be spoken.

I remember during high school when I tried to read Myra Breckinridge for the first time. I bought it because the cover seemed to indicate it would be a dirty book (even though it was at Woolworths). I didn't find it very exciting, just sort of bizarre and pointless. Then four or five years later I read it again. This was for the class on the novel that you attended once with me. I had been out a year or two then and had met enough gay men that the tone of voice in which Myra speaks was familiar to me. The book was still more than a little bizarre, but now I could hear the words. I could hear the sarcasm and the self-conscious melodrama. "I am Myra Breckinridge whom no man shall possess." She's a drag queen putting on a show—that's the tone of voice. If you don't know that tone of voice the book doesn't work.

Recording a voice accurately is a difficult thing I expect. Not that I've tried.

But even an accurate record demands a knowledgeable reader. I've reread "Over Here Gerhardt" a couple times wondering what in that story communicates and what doesn't. I expect that "laughter in the midst of grief" is not uncommon experience. And the contrast between your easy disagreements with Grandpa and your difficult disagreements with Mom is also widely shared I suppose. What's harder to see is what doesn't communicate. Where is the unique Gomoll experience? What are the patterns that neither you nor I can see? Are there parts of that story that you find readers don't get? Or did you leave any thing out because of an intuition that it wouldn't make sense to outsiders?

Is the pattern of Aunt Charlotte and Grandpa's thirty-year grudge characteristic of us?

It is unspoken within the story how unusual the playacting of an anecdote is within our family. That playacting in and of itself marked this time as special.

My recollection of the time at the funeral home is somewhat different. We had all anticipated the arrival of Gerhardt at the funeral home and the consequent hilarity several times before the funeral even began. By the time of the wake and Gerhardt's actual arrival at the funeral home we were all playing parts in a pre-scripted event. I had the eerie feeling of me and all of us consciously feeling "inappropriate laughter" in order to nurture the feeling of unity that the Gerhardt story had so clearly invoked in the past few days.

One footnote punctuates and illuminates a continuing theme of this anecdote-writing business for me. Rick and I were talking about the story on the phone, soon after I'd sent the issue out, and I mentioned to Rick the reason for our mother's request that I change the name of our grandfather's friend to Gerhardt.

"You forgot to change it," Rick said, surprised at Mom's request, but puzzled because he'd just read the story and hadn't noticed any change.

"Sure, I did. I changed his name to Gerhardt," I said.

"His name is Gerhardt."

"No, it isn't. It's \_\_\_\_\_," I said.

"Noooo."

"Yes, yes."

"..."

"Don't you remember, Rick? 'I'm over heeheeer, \_\_\_\_\_!'"

"Omigod, you're right. Gerhardt feels right. I forgot!" Rick laughed.

And I wondered all over again, how much of our real lives we forget because of the changes we introduce into the stories we tell about our lives.



Every time I recall something, I'm not recalling it really, I'm recalling the last time I recalled it, I'm recalling my last memory of it.

—Jorge Luis Borges

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*The world is always  
subject to change with-  
out notice depending on  
your point of view. I  
saw/was part of/experi-  
enced the infamous*

"Night of the Football Players" at Pghlunge when Patia was named the "Lady of the Night Guest of Honor." I've seen several items in print about that evening, and I doubt that any of them are in complete agreement with what happened to me. The most common adjustment to history is an adjustment which places the tale-teller closer to the action and closer to the punchline: after awhile we believe the adjustments and they become a personal rather than an historical truth; the truth with the most circulation is the one that gets recalled. The Night of the Football Players is an example I use because things that I saw happen have been left out of the "public history" and things that never happened (as far as I could see, hear, or determine) have been added. So go ahead. Pick the phrase that works best and the story lives. Tell the nit-picky truth with reference to all the witnesses and you have a court-case. I prefer the story that lives: after all, I can now write my own version of the "Night of the Football Players" and make it—if well-written enough—the truth.

I've got this funny feeling that there are a whole lot of people on my mailing list saying to themselves right now, "Night of the Football Players"? "Lady of the Night Guest of Honor"? What is he talking about? Rather than attempt to tell you a third-hand account of that Phlunge event, perhaps someone will write in next time and provide a reference, so people can, if they want, find out more about it in some fanthology. In any case, here we are again, at the topic of conversation that began this chapter in the first place.

The next chapter adds some other voices to this same conversation about making mythologies. . . in the guise of a WisCon report.

WisCon 11 happened at the end of February, 1987, and one of our guests of honor was Avedon Carol. (The other guest was Connie Willis.) Avedon and Rob Hansen both traveled across the Atlantic for our late-winter con, and thanks to Wisconsin's freakish weather conditions this year (no winter, to speak of), they enjoyed a relatively pleasant week here. They also tempted a huge number of fans to attend WisCon who wouldn't normally have risked Wisconsin in February, or who had been meaning to try WisCon. . . someday. The result was an unusually fannish WisCon. And a lot of fun.



I wouldn't have given a second thought to the interlinen on the table-of-contents page of the *Science-Fiction Five-Yearly* #8, if it hadn't been for the marathon conversation competition held late into the night, on the last night of WisCon 11.

The interlineo was, "Mimeography recapitulates hagiography."

But let me tell you about that last night of WisCon, first. I would have referred to the "competition" by its more traditional name—i.e., a dead-dog party—but it achieved aspects of a competitive athletic event, due to the presence of such conversational acrobats as Patrick and Teresa Nielsen Hayden, Avedon Carol, and Madison's own Andy Hooper. The rest of us competed in the game too; I don't mean to imply that the stars converted the less limber conversationalists among us into mere spectators, but it sure did mean that we had to try harder. Actually, the non-stop flow of comment and reply, jokes and laughter, statement and argument, question and story-telling, caught everyone in the room in a web of energy and ideas that was all the more remarkable for the fact that it was, after all, very late in the last night of WisCon. None of us had fulfilled anything close to any medically-approved minimum daily requirement of shuteye for a week. Besides, there was a huge, open jug of champagne on the table next to me, and a barrel of beer that seemed to roam around the room, though it could usually be found close to Rob Hansen's hand.

I have one photo of Rob licking some spilled beer from Spike's hair. "Waste not, want not," is apparently a proverb that Brit-fans take quite seriously. I've got another photo of Rob pouring beer directly from the barrel's tap into my sister Julie's mouth, as she bends her head back beneath its spigot. As I said, it was remarkable that the conversation was so interesting and memorable that night. Well at least, I recall it that way.

One of the topics of conversation that came up that night was sparked when Julie walked in and announced that she'd been directed up to this room by some fans in the hospitality suite who were lying around in various stages of unconsciousness, watching video tapes of the convention just finished. This was the room where most of us had been prior to moving up to Avedon's and Rob's room where we had finally gathered. Down in the hospitality suite, Dick Russell had been playing tapes on his TV monitor so that those who'd missed the opening ceremonies, the masquerade, or the interviews with the GoHs,

could see them. Fans sleepily commended this idea but soon realized that the timing of the show converted it into a sort of lullaby for its more than suggestable, mostly prone audience. Before succumbing to the hypnotic effects of the flickering TV screen, a contingent of fans had escaped up to Avedon's and Rob's room. There were Avedon and Rob, of course, and besides them, I remember Carrie Root and Andy Hooper, Teresa and Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Gary Farber, Lise Eisenberg, Spike, Jane Hawkins, Tom Weber, and me. We entrusted the room number to a couple of relatively conscious fans in the hospitality suite, in case anyone wanted to follow us, and indeed, Julie Gomoll and Scott Custis soon knocked on the door and joined the party.

That's when Julie reported that she'd been given the room number and told, "that's where all the BNF's have gone."

...Which immediately prompted a room-wide groan of scornful democracy, (Who... us!?!), and a conversation that, for a while, involved everyone in the room in an intense discussion about the reality of these so-called BNF persons. Avedon's article ("Notes from Inside [Figaro's]" in *Pulp* #2) was cited, and we all agreed with the thrust of her article that the term "BNF" is defined by people who feel they are not Big Name Fans; in other words, that it's a word defined from the outside rather than from the inside. Everyone gets a little uptight when they find themselves being defined as part of a group by others, rather than coining the label for their own group...or at least voluntarily joining it. Unless a group names itself, or accepts a name from outsiders, distorts it, and makes it their own, a label always chafes.

In *Izzard* #9, Patrick Nielsen Hayden recalls that "the term 'BNF' was originally an ironic joke; if it has any serious meaning it applies to only ten or twenty fans worldwide, none of them us." And so we reject the label. The problem is, however, that we don't reject the idea that there is an identifiable group and that we're part of it. We reject the part of the definition that implies superiority, but by talking about ourselves as a separate group, and by trying to discover what it is that makes us feel like a separate group, we uncomfortably dance around the suspicion that our conversation corresponds rather too well with the expectations of those who ironically refer to the "BNFs."

I mumbled something about the Heisenberg Theory of General Fanativity. No fan can believe in BNFs and actually be a BNF at the same time.

Jane Hawkins watched us and listened to the conversation with a cynical tilt to her head. Later she would comment that she thought we'd inflated our egos to the self-destruct point, to even consider the topic of conversation as we were doing.

And someone else—it was either Patrick or Teresa (the conversation competition was going hot and strong at this point; you

couldn't pause for breath without losing the floor)—talked about the way we tell stories about one another in fanzines so that we actually mythologize the personalities of the people we know. This is easy to do. Anyone who really wants this big-fish-in-a-little-pond sort of fame to which public mythologizing leads, has only to tell stories about themselves and other members of their circle of friends. (I doubt, however, whether small-pond fame accounts for much of the motivations of those who actually do play the mythologizing game. They—we—play it, first because it's fun and rewarding in itself.)

I thought about the people downstairs in the hospitality suite and realized that the fans downstairs already know all about mythologizing one another. Earlier in the evening, Dick Russell—standing next to the TV monitor—had asked for a vote from the people in the room as to which WisCon videotape he should play next, and laughter rippled through the crowd when someone suggested that an Australian ballot might be in order. All the out-of-town fans glanced curiously around, wondering what had pricked the giggling consciousness of the crowd. The source of the joke was Dick's penchant for bureaucracy which the Madison group has mythologized in the course of numerous stories about him. "Australian ballot" has turned into a shorthand, Richard Russell punchline. We recall to one another the time that Dick moved, and subsequently sent change-of-address cards out to all of his junk-mail tormenters. And I've frequently told the story of Dick and Diane's holiday party, at which Dick added the wrong cereal to a batch of party mix. (This is the sort of munchies-concoction that contains salted nuts and several cereals.) When Diane tasted it, she noticed that he'd added a different cereal—"Life," as it turned out—and said that it didn't taste as good that way. And so, typically, Dick spent several hours of the party laboriously correcting his mistake: *picking the Life out of the party mix.*

Fandom at large trades around Harlan Ellison stories. We here in Madison trade around Richard Russell stories.

And of course we don't only tell stories about Dick. And of course the Madison group isn't the only group that tells stories about one another. Your family does it and so does mine. We recall apocryphal, typical incidents about our parents and our brothers and sisters, or about our friends, our husbands and wives. These stories, this loving gossip, is the glue which holds a group together from within. From the point of view of an outsider, it is also the thing that defines the group as "other," because the outsider feels excluded from participating in the mythologizing.

Imagine the scene at your family's dinner table when you bring a good friend, for the first time, to meet your family. You tend to assume the role of translator for your family, explaining the odd references,

the joke-less punchlines, the shorthand assumptions about various people and events. Only after the newcomer has gotten acquainted with your family's mythology, do they gradually come to feel comfortable. And only after they begin to contribute to the mythologizing process (by telling stories about themselves or about you, or begin referring to events they know only third-hand) will they actually feel like they've become a part of your family.

The only difference between family or local fan group mythologizing, and the sort done by the so-called BNFs, is a slightly larger pond and the fact that the myths are published. In Madison and in most families, the only format is person-to-person and word-of-mouth. Yes, Madison's got a group newszine now (*Cube*, published for SF<sup>3</sup> by Spike) but the little bits of gossip published in it depend upon the reader's prior knowledge of personal mythologies. You can't read *Cube* in order to get to know individual members of the group. However, you can read some fannish fanzines and do exactly that. By doing their mythologizing partly in the context of fanzines for a large audience, fanzine fans act out their familial interchanges upon a printed stage and invite others to join them there.

At the Fan-O-Rama, a panel held Saturday morning at WisCon, several fanzine writers read pieces that they'd written or that other fans had originally authored. These readers at the Fan-O-Rama were typical of many fanzine fans in that they really love telling the stories about themselves and their family members to a large audience. And I think that's the crucial difference between the kind of mythologizing that fanzine fans do within their group, as opposed to the kind done in small local groups or in families. The fanzine fans are exhibitionists. They thrive on the stage. Rob Hansen not only published a really embarrassing story about himself (by Leroy Kettle) in *Epsilon*, but he sat calmly in the audience while first Stu Shiffman collapsed into giggles while attempting to read it out loud, and then as Patrick rescued the manuscript from the indisposed Stu and carried on with the reading. Moshe Feder read a piece in which he poked fun at his obsessive hobby of collecting Coca-cola memorabilia. Denys Howard read a serious and revealing essay about his feelings and beliefs, ten years past. And I read aloud the story of how I discovered sex.

I can't imagine members of my family standing up in front of a room of people, some strangers, some acquaintances, some friends, and telling long stories about embarrassing moments in their lives. I certainly can't imagine that they would look forward to it. And yet, once we'd started, everyone on that panel was positively eager to read next, to be the next one to relate a part of the mythology of ourselves as fanzine fans.

One woman in the local Madison apa (*The Turbo-Charged Party Animal*, I'm not kidding), reacted adversely to the suggestion by one of

the other members that we all tell a story about an intensely embarrassing moment in our lives. She thought that this was an awful idea. Why should she want to experience that embarrassment again, by sharing it with us? And I was struck by her comment, because I'd never considered her point of view. In that same issue of the apa, I'd happily described a really dumb thing I'd done at the Phoenix worldcon. Indeed, most of my best and funniest writing depends, I think, on the plumbing of those so-called embarrassing moments. (It's another subject altogether, in my opinion, that the process of writing or telling helps to dissolve the pain of embarrassment. My initial reason for telling a funny story has never been to dissolve the pain; it's been to tell a funny story. Acceptance has been only a pleasant side-effect.)

And so: BNFs are just regular folks, doing things that most folks do among friends and families. They just do it a little more publicly.

Where does "Mimeography recapitulates hagiography" come in? Well, "hagiography," of course, means idealizing or idolizing biography. Mimeography, being slang—in some quarters—for fanzine publishing in general, twists the proverb into an equation of fanzine fandom to its own mythologies.

To me, it means that the best fanzine writing contributes to the fannish hagiography.

Like for instance, the contents of the *Science-Fiction Five-Yearly*, in which I found that interlineo.

• • • • •

All the articles in *SFFY* are about, or at least, tangentially about fanzine fandom. Walt Willis diagnoses our neuroses and Robert Bloch and Viné Clarke put *SFFY* and fandom at large into several historical perspectives. Dave Langford tells the story of Hazel's and his pilgrimage to Portmeirion (the site of *The Prisoner* TV series), and Chuch Harris contributes the most original "Why-this-article-was-delayed/not written/changed" article that I've ever read: "Why I Never Write Articles For Fanzines." Ted White's contribution is a transparent allegory of his memories of the recent Unpleasantness, or Topic A. And Linda Pickersgill contributes another story in the continuing wonderful epic of "The Fan Family," the ultimate extension of Fandom as a Way of Life. And finally, art editor, Stu Shiffman, whose on-stencil artwork illustrates most of the issue, recounts a recent dream of his in which the mythos and reality of his fannish life tangle inextricably; Patrick and Teresa discuss a theory on the identity of the ultimate secret master of fandom.

It all fits together nicely. One can read *SFFY* cover-to-cover in one sitting, because there is an underlying, shared assumption in all these articles, and that is that the things we do as fans, within the fannish community, are essential parts of our lives.



These things, these people, these events, are important: they are worth preserving, and worth telling and retelling to one another.

And *SPFY* is mimeographed. It's no wonder that it summarizes its own hagiography.



I criticized the KTF (Kill the Fucker) variety of fanzine reviewing last time for its wasteful, counter-productive effects. KTF reviews, if they predominate, fail to reward and sometimes even discourage the editors of the better fanzines. And with the exception of their occasional entertainment values, they provide little useful information. My main point, however, was that I personally would rather not do KTF reviews because I considered it a waste of my time as a reviewer. (Very selfish of me. I really don't care if a given review wastes a reader's time. Any reader can turn the page easily enough if they're bored.) Why spend more time reviewing a fanzine than I think it's even worth for a single read-through? I don't think I'm alone in feeling that I'd burn out real fast if all I did was read and review bad or poor fanzines. It is to everyone's benefit if fanzine reviewers devote more time to the fanzines that they enjoy, including the people who like to read fanzine reviews, because those reviewers will write more reviews if they're not bored out of their minds by the process.

And so, when Skel asked me what other purpose a fanzine review has, than to entertain, and scornfully rejected the idea that one purpose might be to encourage other fanzine reviews, he ignores my egotistic sense of what fanzines are for: as a forum of expression for the reviewer, who is more productive when the object of discussion is worth discussing.

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The primary purpose of any piece is to entertain. Thus we see the true platform of KTF reviewing. The piece or fanzine being re-

viewed is really of no consequence. This ought to be obvious. What purpose can such a review serve, other than as a piece of entertainment? *Pour encourager les autres?* How? All it can do is discourage anyone who lacks self-confidence. This might be fine if self-confidence and talent were in any way synonymous—but I have seen no evidence for that. Have you? It cannot encourage, merely discourage. Nobody who is stomped is going to be able to stand back and admire the pretty patterns of the stud marks in their ego.

No the truth is that a KTF review is simply a performance. You are meant to applaud the strutting of the critic and the zine being subjected to unnecessary cruelty is of no importance. It's a bit like a bullfight. The zine in question is simply another bull—they usher them in, they carry or drag them out afterwards. All you're really cheering is the performance of the bullfighter and the spectacle presented. There is no compassion involved. Of course it isn't all that much like bullfighting, because unlike the bullfighter the critic knows that there is absolutely no chance of being gored. The bull may not have much of a chance, but at least it does have some chance. The bullfighter at least puts his physical well-being on the line, however much the odds favour him. The KTF critic, however, is more in the business of pulling the wings off butterflies. A despicable act.

But it's easy. It is the easy entertainment. Blood and gore. Lots of car crashes and no real fucking plot. It's *Rambo* as compared to *First Blood*. Putting a proper plot in though takes work. Let us for instance go back to your comments about my review of *Sic Bvlsctv Disintgraf*. First of all you misrepresent it as a "kind but honest" review. That was never the intention, as I felt I made clear. "Honest," yes, but I never set out to be kind, simply not to be deliberately unkind. Could anyone have called that a "kind" review? Surely not. But did it entertain? Was it interesting? As I read your comments I think you felt it was, but that you felt the interest stemmed more from the philosophical context in which I framed the review than from any pyrotechnics contained within the review itself. That is to say it wouldn't have been interesting if I hadn't put in the work on the framework to make it interesting. However, as I did put in that work, this comment is a bit of a non-sequitur. In effect you are saying it would have been shit if it had been shit, but it wasn't shit, so it wasn't shit. Obviously you found it interesting, because there is all that response. You seem to be complaining because, when I realised I couldn't dazzle with the flim-flammy of my performance I put the work in elsewhere, providing the entertainment in the framework of the piece, rather than in the brilliance of the criticism itself. Fine, my point was precisely that—if you don't go for the easy option then you have to put the work in elsewhere. If you can't interest people in the "how," then you have to interest them in the "what" and "why."

Your response surely appreciates this? Your alternative to KTF criticism itself requires work. You put the work in thinking about what you read, developing or rebutting it. You construct a response that takes considerable thought/work. Creativity is always more difficult than destruction. It takes work to synthesize a response. Every response must be unique. That goes the same for your approach as it does for mine. Every time requires a new effort. Ripping the shit out of things is simply an iterative process—the effort is minimal. Do it. Do it again.

There is no real or significant difference.

To extend the simile of the fanzine reviewer as bullfighter, all I've been saying is that the performance would be vastly more entertaining if the bull provided more of a challenge to the bullfighter. As you say, the odds in most KTF reviews are not bullfighter's odds at all, but resemble those of a butterfly that does battle with a sadistic child. The results of the "contest" is usually predictable and the spectacle a rather pathetic one.

You chose to review a bad fanzine and to weave some interesting commentary around it. I enjoyed the framework; it didn't care much about what you had to say about the furnishings. I thought that it might have been a more interesting review if the object of your review had itself been more interesting. And though I was somewhat critical of your review for that reason, I nevertheless was not implying that there were only two ways of reviewing a fanzine, "your" way or "my" way. If you re-read that essay, you will realize, I hope, that I was using your comments to buttress my disagreement with the idea that there are only two ways to review fanzines (according to Leigh Edmonds), those being the boring, dull, positive reviews, and the entertaining KTF reviews. Your review, as I thought I had proven, fell into neither category; nor do the kind of reviews that I prefer to write.

Skel also wonders if (in a part of his letter not included here) the sort of writing-about-and-to-fanzines that I've done here in *Whimsy* should even be called fanzine reviewing. He approves, however. "It is a form of creative synthesis and when it yields delights like *Whimsy* 5, it is a joy to behold." But he describes my essay as being less like a fanzine review than it is like a letter of comment to another fanzine that I publish myself to save the postage. "You are talking about the ideas in fanzines, not the idea of fanzines," Skel says.

Maybe he has a point. But I always thought that fanzine reviews did both things.

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The most interesting section of the zine was the section on KTF reviewing. Skel's comments regarding the usefulness of KTF

hold much truth, but his attitude does presuppose an ideology that many would call wimpishly liberal. Mike Ashley's irate and provocative piece in Steve Higgin's *Stomach Pump* 11 are the essence of the opposing view—if it's bad, say so—loudly—or else consign fanwriting to permanent mediocrity. He can certainly be narrow-minded, but he has a point, and I think it should be recognised that demolition review jobs do not necessarily imply misanthropic reviewers. Plus, in line with your rules, he is definitely not boring.

But might he not be getting bored himself? That was my point.

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I wonder if you aren't criticizing Leigh Edmonds for the sins of Richard Russell

more than for his own. Leigh may say he's reviewing "bad" fanzines, but his first examples, *Holier than Thou* and *The Mentor* are far from being bad fanzines. I seriously doubt whether Leigh would ever bother reviewing something as hopeless as *The Matalin Review*. *HTT* and *The Mentor* are firmly stuck in the middle reaches—large fanzines with active lettercols that aren't better than that. Much can be said, I think, about what could make these zines better, advice useful to any fanzine or faned.

Actually, I sense a note of despair in Leigh's turn to attacking bad fanzines. *Rataplan* was supposed to be a catalyst for a revival of quality fannish fanzines in Australia. Sadly it seems to have inspired no one. I suspect that Leigh, tired of trying to inspire fans to greatness has given in to despair and is trying out *The Whip*. Alas, fans can't be whipped into line either.

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I entirely agree with you from an artistic point of view: writing favorable reviews is a damn sight harder than lambasting, and is prob-

ably more useful in defining the form. If the reviewer should get so exalted. It is also a more pleasant personal choice to keep clear of productions you know in advance to be bad. No need to tell me: back in France I have been a first reader for an SF series, and I learned to stay clear of the slush pile (there were many others to do it) and concentrate on books considered for translation; already published, thus easier to gauge in advance.

And you have not even mentioned the sorry warping of standards that happens in people too long exposed to horrid, hopeless stuff: at the first glimmer to relieve the tedium, they are all ready to herald genius. But it would lead us into quite another debate on the reviewing of genre fiction...

Where I disagree with you is the specific case in point: after all Leigh Edmonds has not been doing so much KTF reviewing in FTT that you can assume that he spends most of his reviewing time doing that; and FTT is not so prevalent a fanzine that you can claim zine editors get their only feedback there. As you well know, the main feedback for faneds comes not from reviews, but from LoCs. So I don't think that those good fanzine editors will so much as notice the neglect.

Finally, I think you should look at the fanzines in point and put Leigh's piece into a, shall we say, political perspective. Which puts me, I am afraid, in the framework of the Village Theory of fandom. I have never seen *The Mentor*, but I suppose it has some rele-

vance to the Australian village. Holier Than Thou, on the other hand, is I think a quite intentional target. Not any rank-and-file crudzine undeserving of the attention, but a Hugo-nominated...large-circulation fanzine, embroiled into, ahem, the controversies of its epoch. Now, if there is any case when reviewing of a bad piece of work appears necessary, it is when that piece of work has attracted a lot of notice for some reason or another. Thus one can review the latest Heinlein, say, or Asimov, even if doubtful about its merits, for the huge fame of the author and the event this book in itself represents. And I think this is the point Leigh takes, when he bemoans the absence of another largish fanzine to showcase "the cream of fannish writing"—to borrow his words. I'll admit that his negative views could have been argued in more detail; but I can't fault him for keeping his article within reasonable proportions.

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Thanks for the  
fine comments on FTT  
1 and on my supposed  
fine intellectual ap-  
preciation of fannish  
matters. I hope that

the reviews of the second issue give you a fair idea of where I'm liable to end up but the ideas in the first issue were an exercise in producing a theory of fanzine reviews. There is also the problem that many of the fanzines which are accused of being good are in fact fairly terrible, so which way do we go in picking on what to review? Perhaps we should give up reviewing fanzines and instead write about the people who produce them, since it is the people who are the central part.

All of us who read and keep track of fanzines, examine any given zine through an auteur lens. Avedon Carol has written reviews specifically organized by fanzine editors rather than fanzine titles, and I suspect that the idea is far from original with her. It's an interesting and usually productive critical approach, especially when you're dealing with a strong and imaginative editor. There's lots to compare and contrast. There are whole conversations, rather than isolated comments, to discuss, and less chance of taking one of those isolated comments out of context and meaning. It's also tremendously rewarding for the fanzine editor who gets this sort of concentrated, in-depth attention.

On a more mundane level, I'm exceedingly grateful that I happened to choose fanzine editor headings to organize my mailing list cards way back when I first got into fandom and started trading zines. The idea of filing individual cards for all of Arthur Hlavaty's zines, for instance, or of figuring out some way of organizing the multi-titled zines that other editors publish, fills the bureaucratic corners of my mind with horror.

Harry Warner, Jr.

I'm in the minori-

ty nowadays when I admit to liking fanzines that aren't particularly well written or well edited. If there is too much stress on quality fanzines, on KTF reviews, on fanzine editors operating to the peak of their potential, I fear the same thing might happen that has destroyed the old tradition of amateur music-making. Less than a century ago, scads of people enjoyed playing and singing music on an amateur basis in their homes or the homes of friends and at informal gatherings. Hardly any of this music-making was very good from the standpoint of musicianship or interpretive qualities but listeners accepted it for what it was. Then the phonograph and the radio and the television brought the best professional music makers into homes and the trend to apartment living made it harder to own a piano or to play a trombone without disturbing the neighbors and the public in general became less ambitious about learning how to read music and to play the more difficult musical instruments. Today hardly anyone makes music on an amateur basis without regimentation (in the case of school orchestras) or dreams of becoming rich and famous (exemplified by all the little rock bands that kids have formed and then peddled around to taverns and other places where they can get exposure). Filk singing in fandom is one of the rare exceptions to this bad trend. So was barber shop singing in the first years of its revival but now it seems as rigid and codified as life in the Third Reich. I'd hate to see the fanzine tradition go the way of music making, with less talented fans and less ambitious fans just sitting there and never publishing anything and leaving only the handful of fanzines whose editors have ambitions of going semi-pro or possess so much talent they get nothing but undiluted praise for their issues. I suspect that the world's fanzine population decline is partly the result of all the warnings that fanzines must be very good fanzines.

It seems to me that fanzine population declines have more to do with the growing expense of publishing and distributing a fanzine, than it does with more rigorous standards (if indeed standards are any more rigorous than they were at any other time in fanzine history). "Whatever worth doing, is worth doing well," didn't just appear on bumper stickers. That proverb contains the essence of the current call for fanzine standards, in my opinion.

Maia Cowan defends apas against the charge that they kidnapped and murdered fanzines...

Maia Cowan

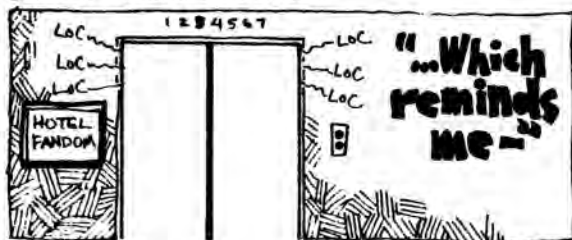
I've often heard the old argument about how apas are killing fanzines. I don't think so. Most of the people in apas have never produced fanzines in the first place, and probably wouldn't if the apas weren't available. There's a certain difference of effort and cost. I'm not so sure fanzines are being killed anyway. I've heard predictions of the imminent death of that artform,



or at least its irreversible slide below minimal standards, since I read my first fanzine over seven years ago. The situation doesn't seem to have changed any in all that time. I suspect dim memories are influencing perceptions of today's output. Nostalgia is a powerful force, and seldom reliable.

*Lan's Lantern*, at least has been finding talented new writers in the ranks of apahacks and "elevating" them to wider audience. Apas are a good training ground as well as a way of communicating among fans that's much less expensive and time-consuming than a full-fledged fanzine.

Madison's own apazine, *The Turbo-Charged Party Animal* (Andy Hooper, OE), certainly fulfills the role you describe—that of nurturing new writers in a sheltered, affordable environment. I was amazed at the hidden talents which bloomed within *Turbo-apa*, so much so that I found myself tempted back into the energy-draining fanatic of apahacking. It's probably a temporary situation, but I'm presently enjoying, once again, interacting with and watching the development of new fan writers. Who knows, Madison may eventually turn into a hotbed of new fannish talent springing forth, wrecking havoc among general interest fanzines.



Luke McGuff

Spike has mentioned that maybe I don't get locs from sci-fi fans [for *Live from the*

*Stagger Cafe*] because I don't have many comment hooks. I had to think about that one for a long time, but what I decided is that saying a zine has comment hooks isn't necessarily a compliment. To make an analogy to pop music, when you say a song has music hooks, you aren't necessarily saying it was good, or original, or that it made you think. All you're saying is that it's hummable. The same thing about sci-fi fanzines: If you say it's full of comment hooks, all you're saying is that it's loccable.

On the other hand, *Whimsy* itself is a refutation of that argument. There is certainly a lot in there that I want to answer to, and a lot I've already responded to. But it has more to do with the quality and skill of your editing than artificial comment hooks.

Some fanzine writers tend towards performance and some tend more towards conversation, that's true enough. My ideal is an elegantly manipulated conversation. *LFTSC*, on the other hand tends toward manic performance, and you seem to be trying to encourage other manic performers to join you on *LFTSC*'s

stage. Neither, I think, is a "better" style of fanzine editing. But neither is mindless humming a very good analogy to the creative act of writing a letter-of-comment, in my opinion. LoCs might be better compared to music that inspires other composers to produce more music.

One can never control the number or kind of LoCs that arrive in the mail, no matter how skillfully designed are one's comment hooks. Take my question about growing up and self-images. That certainly didn't attract the kind of comment I expected. On the other hand, some conversations never die. I'm still getting letters that speculate on the possible sources of Spike's name, and I'm still getting donations to my collection of mis-translations. And, bucking the fannish tendency to ignore illustrations, my scribble art of the last issue drew considerable comment. You never know.

Erik Kosberg  
3013 Holmes Ave.  
Minneapolis, MN  
55408

The origin of  
Spike's name—isn't it  
obvious? She Places  
Innovative Kitsch Every-  
where.

Erik, you cheated! You must have visited Spike's apartment.

Maia Cowan

I'm surprised that I came "closest" to guessing the secret of Spike's name. Maybe I shouldn't be. Upon joining fandom, I chose Maia as an alternative to my ~~imposed~~ given name, Mary. I'd had twelve years of Catholic schools, you see, and was ever so tired of being virtually anonymous because "Mary" was such a common name. (Ten percent of the girls in my graduating class were named Mary.) It doesn't really suit me, anyway. Much too respectable.

I really think that our culture should have a custom that people can choose new names when they reach their 18th birthday. Harsh fines would be imposed on anyone using the abandoned name more than twice after the change. Too many people I know are uncomfortable, at best, with the name that other people thought was suitable for them. (I shed my babyhood nickname by flatly refusing to answer it, but it took many months. Some relatives still insist on using it even though I still don't answer to it.)

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Steve Miller contributes a Portuguese translated instruction brochure for a copper pot of some sort, called a "Cataplana." In it, there's a recipe for "Codfish in the Cataplana."

All the ingredients in layers, by follow order: A lot of tomato and onion, parseley and garlic, some slices potato and 1 red capicum. The Codfish is previously steeped, is coated in pieces, then you put olive oil and some margarine and a 1/4 heat of a good white wine. Close the cataplana and put it on the 15 minutes.

Ellen Kushner sent me a wonderful, franglais "Carmen:"

## Letters\*

One of the pleasures of going to the Opéra in Paris in the old days was reading — and re-reading — the synopses in "English" which they included in the program books for the convenience of British, American, and perhaps even Canadian visitors. What follows is, I swear, an exact copy of parts of the *Carmen* synopsis. This they printed, and many others like it, year in, year out:

"Carmen is a cigar-makeress from a tobago factory who loves with Don José of the mounting guard. Carmen takes a flower from her corsets and lances it to Don José (Duet: 'Talk me of my mother'). There is a noise inside the tobago factory and the revolting cigar-makeresses burst into the stage. Carmen is arrested and Don José is ordered to mounting guard her but Carmen subduces him and he lets her escape.

"ACT 2 The Tavern. Carmen, Frasquita, Mercedes, Zuniga, Morales. Carmen's aria ('The sistrums are tinkling'). Enter Escamillo, a balls-fighter. Enter two smuglers (Duet: 'We have in mind a business') but Carmen refuses to penetrate because Don José has liberated from prison. He just now arrives (Aria: 'Slop, here who comes!') but hear are the bugles singing his retreat. Don José will leave and draws his sword. Called by Carmen shrieks the two smuglers interfere with her but Don José is bound to desert. He will follow into them (Final chorus: 'Open sky wandering life'). . . .

"ACT 4 A Place in Seville. Procession of balls-fighters, the roaring of the balls heard in the arena. Escamillo enters (Aria and chorus: 'Toreador, toreador. All hail the balls of a toreador'). Enter Don José (Aria: 'I do not threaten, I besooch you') but Carmen repels him wants to join with Escamillo now chaired by the crowd. Don José stabs her (Aria: Oh rupture, rupture, you may arrest me, I did kill der') he sings. 'Oh my beautiful Carmen, my subductive Carmen. . . ."

Max Harrison  
London

*Max Harrison is the noted critic, formerly of The Times, who writes articles on both jazz and classical music for various British publications, as well as long and extremely funny letters to friends. He has just completed for the Jazzletter an essay on weird names, of which he is an avid collector. It will start in a forthcoming issue.*

Karen Trego sent along a chop sticks wrapper with this label: Please try you Nice Chinese Food with Chopsticks...the traditional and typical of Chinese glorious history and cultural.

\*\*\*\*\*

Sue Thomason      The first thing I saw  
in your scribble is an angel  
in a bowler hat standing on  
the left of the picture. In his left arm is  
a Christmas tree, with his extended right arm



\*From: Gene Lees'  
Jazzletter  
(March 1986, No 3)

he offers a carrot to E.T. who is standing at the bottom right of the picture. E.T. is so excited by this that he has dropped his telephone (it lies at his feet). Behind E.T. stands an elongated ballerina in tutu and crown, holding an umbrella which has been blown inside out. At bottom left a worried elf is playing with a Slinky. I think I shall call it "The Treaty of Versailles" and sign it Magritte.

You should have been in my grade school class with me, Sue. We could have kept each other company on Sister's troublemakers' list.

Redd Boggs  
PO Box 1111  
Berkeley, CA  
94701

I liked your story about the drawing exercise of scribbling with your eyes shut and then searching the result "for hidden landscapes and creatures." But with these cavils: (1) surely "art" is not just "discovered," but made, with both eyes and brain; and (2) I'm sure that it was possible to guide the hand at least partly, even with your eyes closed, and thereby create something that could easily be coaxed into a coherent picture.

The answer to cavil #2 is yes, of course it's possible to cheat at these scribble exercises, and I cheated shamefully for the scribble I included in *Whimsy* 5. I already knew the chapter headings for which I "guided" the scribbles so that I'd later be able to pull out the drawings I wanted. You don't think I covered my eyes when Sister wasn't around to check on me, do you? So, does that make them "art" according to your definition? On the other hand, in response to cavil #1, I don't think the purpose of the grade school scribble exercises (or even the later, *Whimsy* reincarnation) was to produce art. We were being taught hand-eye coordination at St. Anne's; in *Whimsy* the scribble drawings were intended as a visual allegory for the construction of anecdotes.

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One letter-writer obviously thinks I need some help with this comment-hook generating business.

Karen Trego  
2832 Park Ave., S.  
Minneapolis, MN  
55407

I'm writing this (and I won't bore you with a discussion of the high tech hard and software which enables me to reproduce semi-legible handwriting so closely), I'm writing this while watching *Woodstock* on TV. This is ...an entirely new subject: hippies. I've never seen the movie before and Garth and I were talking about what it must have been like to be there. I'm somewhat surprised that, with all my rock & roll lifestyle (?), I've never met anyone who was at *Woodstock*. Or maybe I have but don't know it? I didn't realize I knew anyone who'd seen the Beatles at the Cavern Club until I read Chris Priest's fanzine article in *Chuch*. And I only know one person who spent the "summer of

love" in San Francisco (Joan Hanke-Woods). Surely there must be more fans of my generation who did the archetypal Sixties thing in the Sixties. My contribution was limited to being tear gassed at a demonstration for the Chicago Seven (I watched the riots on TV) and learning to smoke marijuana on Wells Street in Old Town (both in Chicago).

Hey, isn't this against the rules? Aren't comment hooks supposed to be the job of the editor? Oh well, that's a Sixties-bred fanzine editor for you. Anarchism, and free love and stuff like that all over the place.

Next issue: What were *you* doing during the Sixties?



One comment hook I threw into the fanish waters in the last issue of *Whimsy* had to do with my theory that brothers and sisters compete with one another, or choose careers to avoid that competition. Only one person responded with their own ideas on the subject, and he pooh-poohed the whole thing. Not even my own siblings had anything to say on the matter.

Buck Coulson  
2677-500N  
Hartford City, IN  
47348

Well, I'm sorry to disappoint you, but since I don't have any brothers or sisters, I could hardly mention them as contributing

to my career choices. Of course, I don't really have a career, either, which undoubtedly helped. I suppose you're too young to have read Earl Kemp's statistical proof that nearly all fans are either only children or first-born, and thus can't be influenced by siblings. (Or at least, I've been told that older children look down on younger ones: I haven't of course, experienced it first-hand.) Certainly you're the first person (who I've read, anyway) to mention sibling rivalry as a cause of differing ambitions. Physical ambitions, at least seem to run in families. Several brother duets in pro baseball, particularly pitchers. There's a "golfing family" not far from here, with one man on the pro circuit and the rest of the family winning prizes as amateurs, juniors, etc. In Indiana, having a brother who's a star basketball player seems to invite emulation—Oscar Robertson had two brothers who were stars in high school, though they didn't go as far as he did. Brothers have on occasion both been selected as the #1 high school player in the state, in different years. Now that girls' basketball is booming, one nearby family has had two boys and one girl make it to college on basketball scholarships (the girl is the only one who became a college

star, you'll be happy to know, but both boys made college teams.) There were two Spinks brothers in boxing, though one has dropped out either of boxing or just the headlines. And so on and on and on. In the arts, there are the Fondas, the Barrymores, the Carradines, and more. And the Wyeths, in painting.

When I was young, I would never have described my siblings as particularly competitive with me or with each other, even though something seemed to compel all of us to chose very different interests. Rick, it seemed obvious, would grow up to be the brilliant scientist. Even though he was two years younger than me, I relied on his tutelage to pull me through the hard parts of advanced algebra and statistics classes. He excelled in high school chemistry (which I'd simply skipped altogether), and was awarded scholarships and a trip around the world after graduation. Besides that, he was an incredibly nice person, with a circle of good friends. I admired him the way a little sister is supposed to admire a big brother. We've stayed good friends, but Rick didn't end up saving the world through science as his parents and teachers half expected. He turned to cabinetry and now happily creates beautiful furniture in the shop beneath his house in San Francisco. Rick changed his career goals several years after he'd left home.

My brother Steve is four years younger than me, and while we were growing up, his and my relationship was quite a bit rockier than Rick's and mine. Steve was the "jock," and I thought then that the gap between us was insurmountable. I avoided all things physical; he scorned all things intellectual. During one of his basketball games I sat up in the bleachers reading a book. The local newspaper thought the game was more exciting than I did: "GOMOLL SAVES NEW BERLIN" read the headline the next day. Steve and I have become much better friends since those days. We've both changed a lot. I remember one long telephone call during his college years in which he reported an astounding revelation, that the so-called jocks at his school were boring to talk to. Nowadays, Steve works as a very successful engineer/salesperson and is married to a feminist.

We all started breaking out of the categories that separated us at home, once we left it. I'll never feel as comfortable with numbers as Rick does, and my vacations won't contain quite as many thrills as Steve's white-water rafting trips, but the fact remains that the boundaries started blurring as soon as we left home. I majored in science in college, geography. And I became a jock of sorts myself about 6 years ago when I began weight-lifting, biking and swimming regularly. Rick's work classifies him more as an artist than as a scientist, and the most valuable skill that Steve has developed for his work is an empathy and ability to communicate with people. I love and admire both of them very much, but I see so many more interests that we have in



common now, as opposed to the differences that I saw when we lived together as children.

The roots of our similarities were there to see, but they only seem obvious now, in retrospect. Rick and I traded books we had borrowed from the local library, and Rick worked part-time during the summer, refinishing furniture at an antique shop. He loved that work and now I can see that both of us shared an urge to work with our hands and to create artwork. Steve was learning valuable lessons of cooperation and group dynamics in his sports, even though I discounted that at the time. Through it all, Rick was the scientist. Steve was the Jock. I was the artist. I think that at the time we needed to construct, or at least to believe, those categories. "This is my field; it's the place I will become the expert, the "winner." That's your's, and we'll respect each other's territory.

Julie was born when I was 11, and she easily accepted the system. Julie chose music, or at least that's what the rest of us believed, I think. None of us played an instrument, but Julie played the guitar and talked about eventually playing professionally. Now, I wonder if my brothers and parents and I were a little bit responsible for "enforcing" the system of categories upon Julie. Science, art, and athletics, had all been "taken." When she showed some proficiency in music, we all encouraged that because it fit nicely and didn't conflict with any of our fields. Since then, Julie's interests have gradually gravitated to my own field. She and I have both been working in the printing/graphics fields for several years now.

Danny's the youngest of us, and I don't know if his interest in computers stems from the sort of sibling territoriality that worked for the rest of us. Maybe, maybe not. I've been living on my own for too long to have been influential in the standard Big Sister role. Danny probably relates to me more like a particularly concerned aunt.

However interconnected our skills and interests are nowadays, it felt like the boundaries were unscalable in the days we all lived together in our parents' house. Time and distance has enabled me to see the fiction of the categories, but it's also shown me the competitiveness that mortared the walls.

My friend Scott noticed the extraordinary amount of game playing that goes on in my family. He pointed out to me that right after the supper dishes get cleared away, the board game gets set up, every time we visit. I'm the only one in the family who doesn't like playing cards, and so the games scheduled for my visits are other kinds, like "dictionary (with Mrs. Byrnes' Dictionary, in which players invent definitions for obscure words and compete against the real definition for votes from the other players), Trivial Pursuit, and more recently, Pictionary (which is a sort of graphic, pen-and-paper charades). Until I visited Scott's family, I'd never

seen my own family's game-playing interests as unique. That's what all families do, I might have thought, if I'd ever considered it. They get together. They eat a meal, and they play a game. I never noticed it, but we are a very competitive family.

Now, I'm curious to know if this system of "field territoriality" was something we used to avoid potentially destructive competition. Maybe we knew that if we chose overlapping fields, that one of us would eventually "win" and the other, inevitably, "lose." That seems silly now, but I wonder if we defended one another and ourselves against our competitive tendencies by pretending that impenetrable boundaries divided our interests.

If this truly did happen, I can't imagine that we simply stopped doing it when we left home. I don't mean that I think my brothers and sister and I still compete with one another, but I wonder if I've transferred this same behavior to my relationships with friends, and if my siblings also adjust their interests to compliment those of people close to them.

Maybe behavior like this promotes the myth of "opposites attracting." Perhaps couples who seem so compatible for their dramatic differences, are instead, compatible for their pretended differences. That is, both people defer to the other's area or areas of expertise, and claim personal ignorance or ineptness in the other's "specialty."

"Oh, he's the cook. I can't even boil water."

"She understands machinery. Motors just automatically break down as soon as I touch them."

"My secretary's so good with those little mindless, picky details. I'd go bankrupt if she didn't take care of my schedule."

"He's the social one. I'm very shy."

Granted, those particular examples are cliches, and the speaker in most cases obviously dislikes and probably would prefer to avoid the work they're praising. They may even be trying to trick the other into doing it by flattery. But it seems to me that any friendship or partnership includes a certain amount of respectful deference on both sides and that it doesn't necessarily originate from an urge to manipulate the other person. Rather, this behavior might help create a comfortable stability in a relationship.





I've got another theory on family interactions.

There's a young woman in our local SF group who recently graduated from high school and is looking for a job. She's adamant that she won't go to college or go back for any additional schooling. She just wants to find work. And that's been difficult because she is inexperienced and doesn't have many so-called "salable" skills. She's a bright young woman, but very frustrated. She says that she wants to be like her mother, who quit school when she was young, got married, and had children. After her husband left her, this woman's mother went back to college, earned a degree, and now has a good job. She's also happily remarried. And that's an admirable story. We can all respect the hard work it takes to start over again with a family to take care of. But I was puzzled to think of this woman modeling her life upon the pattern of her mother's life, complete with disasters. (It reminds me of the country in *The Mouse that Roared* which declares war on the US expressly so they could lose that war and receive reparations as other European countries had done after World War 2, and so eventually prosper.) This woman would like to go back to school later, after she's had children (and her husband has left her?). She seems resolved to start over again, before she's really started for the first time.

I know other people whose lives seem to mirror the patterns of their parents' lives in spooky replays. They marry before they know what they want in life, have large families, and never seem to even consider charting a course different from the ones their parents chose. They go to college because their parents did, or they choose an occupation because its similar to one that a parent held. They don't seem to consider other options. And that's what has puzzled me.

There are plenty of other people who do seem to have considered other possibilities. Sometimes my parents probably wish that their children had allowed themselves to be more influenced by them. To the extent that we've chosen different lives, we've often hurt my mother, especially, by those choices.

Anyway, I got to thinking about what gives some people access to other models, other choices, than those offered to them by their family. I think the secret ingredient is reading.

Rick, Julie and I read incessantly, and still do. Steve didn't read as much as we did, and Danny reads very little recrea-

tionally. Rick, Julie and I have also chosen occupations and lifestyles which contrast more dramatically with my parents'.

"Why don't you get your nose out of that book and get outside and play!"—that was a pretty familiar piece of parental advice around the house.

Other times, one of us would be sent to our room for some offense, and an hour later mom or dad would call into our room to end our enforced exile. "You can come out now if you're in a better mood."

"No thanks, I want to finish this chapter."

I don't think it was so much what I was reading as much as the fact that such a huge portion of my conscious life was dominated by fictional and biographical characters, ideas, and plots from thousands of books. I can still remember the plot of a story easier than I can the name of a new, real acquaintance, but in those days, I practically lived within the books I read, worrying about eventually "running out" of books, and always hungry for more. Each book stood for another possibility, and the lives of my parents were only two other, very familiar models.

It would be very interesting, I think, if someone would do a survey of fans—most of whom, it could be assumed, are heavy readers—and compare the results to the population at large. How many heavy readers' lives mirror their parents' lives in important particulars (marriage or not, relationships, career)? How many non-readers mirror their parents' lives?

It seems probable to me that the readers would form a group in which the differences were more obvious than in the non-reading group.

I'm definitely not saying that fans are slans, or anything like that. Choices made that differ from parental choices can be terrible mistakes just as easily as any other. Choices suggested by books can be just as disastrous, or happy, as those made because one has internalized expectations within one's family. Like the woman in *The Female Quixote*, who bases her life upon the passive role of women character in romances, it would be easy to choose the wrong literary model.

What do you think?

• • • • •

If there's one thing I hate, it's coming to the end of a book and finding a cliff-hanger, like the one in Anne Rice's *The Vampire Lestat*. I wouldn't read Burroughs' Tarzan or Mars books because of those cliff-hanger endings, and with series like C. J. Cherryh's Chanur books, I refuse to read them as they are published, but instead let them accumulate on my to-read shelf and wait for the author to finish the series. I almost wish that I hadn't bothered collecting

the Chanur books (*The Pride of Chanur*, *Chanur's Venture*, *The Kif Strike Back*, and *Chanur's Homecoming*).

I suspect that if I went back through all four books and counted paragraphs devoted to the description of the characters' reactions to hyperspace travel—to the strain of months-long semiconsciousness which wore them down physically and emotionally—that the remaining paragraphs would barely add up to one medium-sized book. The reader finds out little more about Human/Hani differences than were revealed in the first book. Instead, Cherryh dwells on how terribly tired the major Hani characters get because they have to experience hyperspace travel too often and with too little rest time in between, as the plot—such as it is—heats up. And if it hadn't been for all that verbiage devoted to the effects of hyperspace on the Hani, the reader probably wouldn't notice the error. But having little else to think about, it's hard not to notice the error. Time after time, Cherryh points out that the Hani (a cat-like race of aliens, one of whom is the starship captain, Chanur) endure hyperspace travel in a semi-conscious trance. Their bodies continue functioning on a low level throughout passage, and afterwards they require immediate refreshment in the form of liquids, food and bathing. Unlike humans, for instance, whose sanity survives passage only with the assistance of drugs, Hani remain conscious in a hazy sort of way throughout the experience.

This really should have played only a minor part in the plot. It is, after all, just background material. And the error shouldn't have seemed like anything more than a minor glitch. We should have learned more about the tantalizing extrapolation Cherryh was developing: The Hani were a mature race of cat-like creatures whose society was based upon the culture of a lion pride. The things we were shown fascinated—especially the manner in which male and female roles were reversed from traditional human models. Females handled family business and governed society because they were considered the more active and civilized sex. Males stayed home and needed to be taken care of by females because of their violent, animal-like natures. I kept waiting for Tully, the captured/escaped human to display a little awareness of the ironic differences between his culture and the Hani's. This never happens. Tully remains a vague, shadowy figure through all four books. Cherryh avoids more explication by stating several times that the Hani were simply not a very curious race. In fact, many comparisons between Hani and Human and the other five races of space-going beings described in the books, remain thin and ambiguous throughout. We stick with the dull and very tired Hani point-of-view—the point of view of beings not at all curious except where their own survival and profit might obviously be at stake.

The glaring error occurs in the last book, *Chanur's Homecoming*, in which the characters zoom in and out of star systems like

a thread stitched by an electric sewing machine. In order for all the plot ends to tie themselves up neatly, so much interstellar hopping is necessary that the physical effects on the Hani crew would certainly be fatal. And so another captain donates a relief crew to Chanur. One crew works on the bridge while the other remains in quarters. No one gets a chance to fall asleep before the jump into hyperspace, the pace is so frenzied, but after the jump, the two groups change positions and immediately make the next jump. Cherryh never explains who or how anyone got any rest, or what good a relief crew does at all, given the suspension effects of hyperspace travel upon the Hani physiology.

Events supposedly move too fast for the reader to notice this error, I quess, but with everyone concentrating on how tired they are in between jumps, I found very little actual plot, to distract me, just a lot of reshuffling of power and alliances.

Considering Cherryh's *Faded Sun* trilogy, which developed interactions, analogies and complexities beautifully between aliens and humans, this series really disappoints me.

• • • • •

Even though it's the first book of a trilogy (something I only discovered after reading it), Octavia Butler's new novel, *Dawn* did not disappoint me. At least the book itself didn't; the cover artwork was something else again.

This is one of the only stories I recall—other than *Kindred* and a short story published recently in *Omi*—that doesn't fit into her future history of Patternists and Claysark-diseased humans. In *Dawn*, humans have almost entirely killed themselves off in a thermonuclear war, and an alien race (the Oankali) have rescued/captured some human survivors. The Oankali intend to blend human genes with their own. They are a race of "traders"—trading their own identities for a merger of racial characteristics.

All of Butler's books can be read at least on one level as the forcible, inevitable imposition of one alien species' power upon a weaker one. The process is terrible from one point of view, but for the most part, because it happens only gradually, and assumes every-day reality for the protagonists, the process seems acceptable, even rewarding, at times, for the victims who have no other choice. The victims' very acceptance of their terrible bondage provides the central horror in all of Butler's books.

Butler's hugo-winning short story, "Bloodchild," for example, describes a young boy's noble acceptance of his awful role as an incubator of a monstrous, insectoid alien. There is no escape on this world, just ever more terrible predicaments. The human spaceship is long gone, and outside of the human "reserve," they would be raped/implanted forcibly with alien eggs and left to die when the larvae hatched and fed. Within the reserve, on the other hand, humans are



fed a nutritious narcotic and come to depend upon the more benevolent masters who care for them during the dangerous hatching period. Incredibly, Butler manages to portray this situation as one the humans have learned to accept—at least to the extent that they do not consider suicide.

It reminded me of the image Margaret Atwood employed in *The Handmaid's Tale*, to describe the gradual takeover of a cruel, misogynist theocracy.

*We lived as usual, by ignoring. Ignoring isn't the same as ignorance, you have to work at it.*

*Nothing changes instantaneously: in a gradually heating bathtub you'd be boiled to death before you knew it.*

And in Butler's stories, humans lose their humanity by degrees, and they become enslaved or descend to animal natures with little resistance, because the process is a gradual one.

An enormous plant that the Oankali have altered so that it can safely hold humans in a state of suspended animation, symbolizes that process in Butler's *Dawn*. Within the plant, humans remain healthy and never grow old. They only wait inside until the Oankali want to use them.

*"Before we found these plants," Kahguy-aht said, "they used to capture living animals and keep them alive for a long while, using their carbon dioxide and supplying them with oxygen while slowly digesting nonessential parts of their bodies; limbs, skin, sensory organs. The plants even passed some of their own substance through their prey to nourish the prey and keep it alive as long as possible. And the plants were enriched by the prey's waste products. They gave a very, very long death."*

This long death symbolizes the fate of the humans whom the Oankali have "rescued." Oankali sustain humans and keep them healthy through greatly extended lifetimes. But they forbid such "nonessential" activities as reading and writing. They've altered their prey's hormones to prevent any sexual contact among humans, and in an awful, obscene act, force human survivors to join sexually with themselves in such a way that permanently sterilizes the human race and guarantees a new Oankali/Human hybrid race. As with the woman in Atwood's bathtub, or the unconscious prey of the carnivorous plant, any day-to-day existence, no matter how horrible, can be gradually accepted.

The main character of *Dawn* rejects a chance to commit suicide, as do all the characters in Butler's stories. Each learns to live with the horror of slavery.

These are horrifying, riveting stories. And, as I said, they can be read on that level alone. But all of them can also be read as gut-wrenching, painful allegories of human racism, of one race enslaving and

destroying another. The victimized race comes to accept their plight, and no longer seeks to change it, because there is absolutely no escape.

Octavia Butler is one of the few black SF writers, and she has been drawing upon her experiences and perspective to give us stories about alien contact that teach us more than we might ever want to know about the horror of slavery and the awful potential of racism.

Why are there so few black SF fans? I've encountered that question often enough. So have you. We talk vaguely about the fact that there are so few black writers, and that the literature and the fandom grown up around it, seem to invite so few blacks. But perhaps it would be different if writers like Butler and the themes she writes about were generally acknowledged.

A court case in progress in the Washington D.C. area pits black neighborhood residents against the white owners of a local condominium development. The case against the owners involves a 60-page brochure advertising the condominium, which contains almost 100 pictures of condo residents, living, playing and interacting. Only 1% of the persons portrayed in the brochure is black, even though the area around the new development is populated predominantly with blacks. The prosecution maintains that the brochures act as blatant suggestions to prospective buyers, that the condos will be places where whites live and where blacks are not welcome. The court ruling hasn't been handed down yet.

But the intention of the brochure seems obvious. Whether it will be declared legal or not, is another matter. The scheme would probably work to the extent that prospective buyers respond to the brochure.

SF book jackets are the advertising brochures of the science fiction field. You stand in front of a rack of paperbacks and scan the artwork on the covers. What do you see? You see a lot of white faces, that's what you see. Of course, most of the authors are white and most of their characters are white. That's too bad, but that doesn't explain why books written by blacks, books that contain black characters, blend right into all the other books.

What about Octavia Butler or Chip Delany? What do the covers of their books look like?

I've been looking at Butler's covers today. Her covers disguise the stories that—had they been accurately portrayed by a representative cover—might have stopped a black kid in their eye-tracks. Her covers camouflage the fact that the books contain ideas which would inspire a full-fledged obsession for a black kid who happened to pick them up and read them.

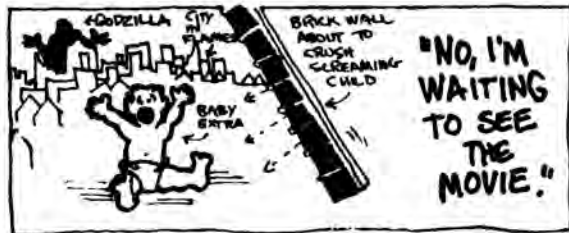
The main character of *Survivor* is a black woman, but she is portrayed as a sexy, auburn-haired, white woman on the

paperback cover. *Wild Seed's* African woman protagonist on the paperback cover might be black, though the cover art is too abstract to say for sure. And Lilith, of *Dawn*, the wife of a Nigerian man, and a woman that Butler describes as a totally opposite type in comparison to a white male character, turns out to be a white, preppy, brunette white woman on the hardcover dust jacket. I guess the publisher or artist deduced that she was the white man's "opposite" because he had light-colored hair... The cover of *Dawn* advertises a pretty, young white woman and an innocuous, plastic tube-like thing. Both Lilith and the carnivorous plant are misrepresented by this artwork.

Just like the misrepresentative condo brochure, this SF book cover misrepresents the story inside, and contributes to the insidious, self-fulfilling prophecy that SF is a literature for white people.

If they reprint the same cover on the paperback edition of *Dawn*, no black kid is going to look twice at this book and say, "Hey, maybe this one is about me," even though it is.

Too bad.



Some people would rank a movie novelization only a tiny step above a *Reader's Digest* condensed novel. They would characterize its readers as only marginally literate and totally bereft of imagination—to be so incapable of visualizing a story without having first seen the film. Some critics dismiss the writers of novelizations as worse than hacks: they are merely typists who transcribe a story from scripted dialog and scene descriptions to paragraphs and novel form. They sit at their typewriters with a script propped open on one side and a thesaurus on the other.

And there's a lot of truth to those criticisms.

A novelization is a conspiracy of creation. No one person is totally responsible. The person who thought up the story plus the scriptwriter(s), and finally the novelization author, whose creative contribution may not be all that large, all cooperate to produce a novelization. And they all get credit on the book jacket. Even with well-known, respected writers, it's difficult to discover characteristic themes or even stylistic signatures in a novelization. At worst and most of the time, a novelization is only script written in paragraph form. At best, however, there is sometimes something more.

For instance, when Isaac Asimov wrote

the novelization of *The Fantastic Voyage*, he approached the task as an opportunity to correct some glaring errors and inaccuracies in the movie's science. Most SF writers who accept movie novelization commissions will at least attempt to mumble something about hyperspace to explain the short interstellar travel times or other cinematic goofs. Allen Dean Foster doesn't bother to do even that in his novelizations of the various *Star Wars* and *Alien* scripts. The only interesting thing about these books are the scenes which were edited out of the final movie that we wouldn't have known about except for the fact that they survived in Foster's novelizations. In *Alien*, for instance, the scene in which the complete lifecycle of the aliens was finally understood by Ripley when she comes upon the captain being converted into an alien egg, was edited out of the final movie version (or not filmed in the first place), although Foster included it in his novelization. By the time *Aliens* was made, the aliens' lifecycles had been re-designed by the movie-makers, and so there are discrepancies between the novelizations, though it hardly matters.

Vonda McIntyre's novelizations are something else again.

I haven't read enough novelizations to know if McIntyre's work is really such an exception to the rule. (I haven't read Joan Vinge's, for example, and I like her original work quite a bit.) Vonda McIntyre's *Star Trek* novelizations add much, much more than plugs for the movie loopholes. They do that too, but after reading one of her novelizations (and she has written all of them with the exception of the one for the first movie)—I have always been relieved that I hadn't read it before seeing the movie. Not because the surprise of some of the plot turns would have been spoiled, but because I would have experienced the same feeling of disappointment after having seen a movie made from a favorite novel; I'd feel cheated out of the complexity, the depth of characterization, the wholeness that comes only with all the words of the novel that are never adequately conveyed in celluloid images.

McIntyre does the usual work of the novelization writer. In the most recent book, for instance, (*Star Trek 4, The Voyage Home*), she avoids the creation of a time-travel paradox that is casually toyed with in the movie. For instance, the man to whom Scotty gives the new chemical technology is named in the book as the person who historically invented it. In the movie, that's not certain and the possibility of paradox is playfully accepted. In another instance, Kirk and the others who rescue Chekov in the 20th century hospital must run and skid down the corridors to an elevator from which they will "beam up" rather than simply do so from the operating room, because, McIntyre explains for the movie, the OR staff would have witnessed the beaming up and history would have been changed.

In a virtuoso explanation, McIntyre

likens the *Bounty's* impossible unpowered "landing" in the ocean, to the manner in which a rock skips across the water's surface when it's thrown at precisely the right angle.

But more: as she did in her other *Star Trek* novelizations, McIntyre tells us much more about the characters than the movie script ever tries to suggest. McIntyre adds considerably more to the substantiality to flesh out relationships and character.

Even though this fourth movie supposedly follows precisely on the heels of the third, the sense of continuity between the two is very much like the sense of continuity between one TV *Star Trek* episode and the next. I.e., not very good at all. A technological innovation that was discovered in one TV episode would be forgotten in the next—a lucky thing too—because if it was remembered, the next episode's problems might be solved a mere ten minutes into the show. Kirk seemed perpetually capable of falling hopelessly (and usually tragically) in love in one episode, only to forget the dead/transformed/departed lover in the next. Her name would never again be mentioned and if the script called for it, the resilient Captain Kirk could always fall in love during the very next episode. Any woman who wished to capture his heart on the rebound would have had to work quickly; he healed from rejection by the end of the show.

Vonda McIntyre will not participate in the callous portrayal of human emotions. Carol Marcus—Kirk's former lover, and it turns out, the mother of his only child—is one of the important characters in the second movie. Although Kirk's and Carol's son dies in the third movie, causing great emotional distress for both of them (in McIntyre's book, at least), the whole trauma seems to have been completely forgotten by Kirk in the fourth movie. McIntyre doesn't treat the issue in the same callous manner: Throughout the book, Kirk often attempts to contact Carol about the death of their son and both are shown to still be deeply affected by the loss.

Other dramatic relationships begun in the last movie are not shunted aside as they are in the movie simply because this is another story. Saavak shows herself to be disappointed and saddened when her old mentor and friend (and possibly, her lover), Spock, doesn't seem to remember her. Dr. McCoy must deal throughout the novelization with the remnants of Spock's *katra* in his mind, whereas in the movie, the experience of sharing another's mind seems as easily forgettable as losing a lover or a son is for the movie Kirk.

As she has in several other *Star Trek* novelizations and novels, McIntyre pays special attention to the character, Sulu, who she has developed in far greater depth than any TV episode or movie has ever treated him. Sulu is, for instance (according to McIntyre), the son of an important poet, and the master of several languages, etc. She points out that of all the officers who followed Kirk

on his illegal rescue mission to save Spock, Sulu had the most to lose. After all, he had been about to take command of the new starship, the *Excelsior* (in movie #3) and of course he lost that post as a result of following Kirk. Rather than skim over that plot strand (as the movie did because Sulu is a minor character), McIntyre inserted some scenes in which Sulu demands that Kirk share with him the responsibilities that they took as a group.

Besides filling in the details of plot and motivation for the major characters, McIntyre makes even the minor "spear carrier" characters into more realistic people. In an amusing enlargement of the scripted conversation between two stereotypical garbage men who witness the *Bounty's* landing in the Golden Gate Bridge Park, McIntyre turns them into very un-typical characters. In the movie, one character is telling the other about an argument he recently had with his wife. In the book, the same conversation is turned into the telling of a novel-in-progress that one of the garbagemen is trying to write. And rather than dismissing the characters when their presence is no longer needed as a plot device, McIntyre follows them and describes how the writer/garbageman's curiosity leads him to finally finish that novel of his.

In the spirit of Arthur Clark's novelization of 2001, we get one possible explanation for the film's mysterious alien artifact, through McIntyre's version of its motivations. She suggests that it originally "seeded" the whales and keeps in contact with all its children throughout the universe by listening to their songs. Its return to earth after the whales stopped singing was for the purpose of sterilizing the earth (through climatic interference and finally, glacial instigation), and re-seeding of aquatic mammals.

Though I suppose that Vonda is getting paid a good amount of money for these very good novelizations, I still wish that she would return to writing original novels and short stories. None of these novelizations, no matter how good, can compare to a story like "Aztecs." But as long as she writes them, I'll keep reading them for the huge amount of "extra" characterization and information with which she leavens the transcribed script.

(This is not—by the way—an invitation to write to me about *Star Trek*. I would be interested, however, in what you think about the booming subgenre of novelizations.)

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But as long as I'm on the subject of movies, and since somebody asked what I thought of it: I think *Aliens* was the best SF movie of 1986, and Sigourney Weaver's performance among the best acting jobs of the year. Some of the reviews of *Aliens* angered me, though.

Roger Ebert (of TV's *At the Movies*) gave *Aliens* only a reluctant "thumbs up," because he was distressed by a couple elements of the film. First, he worried that it might be too



intense for some people. That's fine; no argument here. People who are easily scared by movies deserved to be warned about this one. I did argue with Ebert's second reservation, however.

Ebert complained that *Aliens* used a small, endangered child to generate superficial, "unfair" suspense in the film. I hadn't seen the movie when I heard the review, but I thought I understood what Ebert meant. I'd seen this device used before: Godzilla is thundering through the city, stomping buildings and starting fires. In order to make the city's catastrophe more real to the viewers, the camera zooms in on a terrified infant screeching and howling amid the rubble, her parents nowhere in sight. Of course the hero scrambles past just at the moment a building threatens to fall over and crush the poor little thing, and of course he rushes in and saves her. Adrenalin flows. We are personally involved in the city's terror, but the baby is never seen again.

Infant spear-carriers—their only purpose is to catalyze a sudden jolt of adrenalin in the audience's bloodstreams.

This plot device irritates me not only for the creaky, obvious manipulation of it, but because it trivializes a very basic and important human instinct, the instinct to protect children and helpless victims, no matter what the risk to self. Potentially, this godzilla-threatened child's life could provide a better drama than the inane plot machinations of a typical, Grade B horror flick, and it's aggravating to see a real human drama tossed in to the plot merely to provide a teasing, momentary rush of adrenalin.

From Ebert's review, I expected that *Aliens* was going to cheat like this.

Well, it was a pleasure to discover no plot scams like this one in *Aliens*.

Ripley's dramatic, heroic efforts against the aliens to save the child, Newt, does not merely digress from the main plot. The rescue dominates and drives the whole story. If Ebert thought that Ripley's love and protectiveness of Newt was a side-issue, I really wonder what he thought the main story was about. Or, if he thought that such a motivation was an artificial, adrenalin-stimulator, I really wonder what motivations he thinks would honestly tap our sympathy.

If the survival of a small child who depends utterly upon Ripley's strength is not enough to convince Ebert that Ripley would have fought the way she did, and if he ignores the fact that Ripley herself is utterly alone in the world (having overslept 57 years), what, I wonder, would Ebert judge a comprehensible motivation?

Revenge for her lost crew?

*Esprit de Corps*?

Romantic love?

These are all certainly familiar motives for modern protagonists like Conan and Rocky, etc.

Perhaps Ebert doesn't see himself or any other man acting for reasons which appear to motivate Ripley. After all, the movie, by all appearances (except the sex of the protagonist) belongs in the heroic, adventure genre of story-telling, and the main character's motivations just don't ring with much masculine familiarity.

...Which reminds me of the first *Wild Card* book, edited by George R. R. Martin. There is a second book, too, but I may decide not to read it.

*Wild Cards* is a multi-author anthology based upon one idea. Stories are presented chronologically and authors share the timeline and certain plot elements and some characters. This innovative, dynamic sort of cooperative writing works well; most of the stories are very good and very entertaining. We learn first about the plague released in New York from an alien spaceship that kills most of its victims. A small number of people survive, however, and the plague turns them into either "jokers" or "aces," (mutants or superheros).

What "given" might be postulated in order to write about comic-book heros and worlds as real, science-fiction, instead of pure fantasy? I can imagine George R. R. Martin asking that, and coming up with the flash of brilliance of the wild card virus. The result was the *Wild Cards* anthology, in which a bunch of writers play around with the idea that superheros might exist in the real world.

I disliked only one story and that was Lewis Shiner's "The Long, Dark Night of Fortunato," because it seemed to me that Shiner had done a quick and dirty re-write of a story written before he'd been contacted about the *Wild Cards* anthology. "Fortunato" is a fantasy written about a black man living in a ghetto, whose politics get radicalized when he learns how to practice tantric magic. Shiner hooks Fortunato's tantric abilities to a latent wild card virus effect—though the amendment wasn't necessary to the story—and changes Fortunato's politics to concerns related to aceism, instead of racism. The switch involves only a few paragraphs of rewriting: Fortunato hears a speech about how aces were sent to Vietnam in overrepresentative numbers. The speech would have made more sense in what I assume must have been the original form—as a speech about the overrepresentation of blacks in Vietnam. Anyway, Fortunato decides to use his tantric powers to help other aces, instead of (in that hypothetical original story) working for for racial political issues.

Martin chose to include this weak story, maybe, because it was the only story with a protagonist who was not a white male. The predominance of white men in all the stories might have been worrying Martin somewhat.

I enjoyed most of the stories, but I was worn down, saddened, and finally irritated

by the fact that there were absolutely no female aces used as protagonists or viewpoint characters. There were only two minor women aces in the entire book, two minor characters in two stories. One of them didn't even act positively as an ace, but was acted upon (a very appropriate sort of ace to be for a woman, I suppose): she absorbed the minds of others, mostly male geniuses, to save them for posterity, and she finally went crazy with so many minds fighting for control inside her head, and died in an asylum. Moreover, the tragedy of her life wasn't portrayed as something that had happened to her, but as something that had happened to a man who—with her insanity and death—lost the only person he'd ever been able to really communicate with (since they were both telepathic). In a later story, the other female ace communicated almost exclusively with animals and experienced great difficulty when she attempted to communicate with other humans. In fact, it was debatable whether the virus had made her into an ace or a joker.

None of these stories with no (or minor) female characters would have bothered me if I'd read any one of them alone. But I gradually felt offended by the cumulative vision of all these writers: that the aces, the "supermen," were almost exclusively seen as men, and mostly white men at that. There are only two black men in *Wild Cards*: Fortunato (a viewpoint character and protagonist), and another minor, non-viewpoint character, who lives nobly is treated shabbily by society, and retires to anonymity, never to be seen again.

I would have liked to have immersed myself in these stories. When I was younger, I could have done so, simply by identifying with the male characters. I can't do that anymore, or I won't do that anymore. That would be like immersing myself in one of those gradually heating bathtubs, I think. I just gradually got the feeling that these stories weren't about me at all, and that the authors all considered this genre—action super-adventure—to be intrinsically about white men, or that none of them thought that women would make very interesting aces. (What would they do, anyway? I suppose if an author doesn't allow his normal, human characters to participate in much positive, plot-moving behavior, the thought of a superwoman would simply frustrate him all the more.)

They tell me that the second collection doesn't improve much upon this record.

Seeing *Aliens*, though, was great. For once, a real, strong, woman got a part as a heroic, active protagonist in the sort of story that has always, traditionally, been about men and macho motivations. Seeing *Aliens* exhilarated me to the same degree that *Wild Cards* finally wore me down.

Karen Trego      *I was distressed to see you refer to certain filmophiles as people who spend "their whole life making sure they see all...*

*products of a minor artform." There, hidden within a level-headed essay about bad movies, is the casual pronouncement that film is a "minor" artform, equivalent perhaps to the shellacked loaves of bread found at non-jurial craft shows on the sidewalk in front of Woolworths. I'm not about to start a name-dropping defense of movies (lucky you) but I will say: that I have a "gut" definition of Art: if it moves me, it's Art. Art speaks without words, uninterested in milieu or culture. It's too early to prove that film will stand that famous test of time; but your relegating it to the minor leagues has driven me to pedantry. So there.*

Well, I meant "SF films" when I said that thing about the "minor artform," but I guess I'd call films minor, too, relative to all the artforms there are in the world. I stand by my statement that it seems a waste to restrict oneself to 100% of any one artform, considering the Sturgeon fact that 90% of it is crud. You miss out on the 10% of all the rest of the artforms that will blow you away...

But hey, I don't want you to think I'm prejudiced against media fans. Why some of my best friends are media fans. I've even helped one of them make a movie!



This was the story: The aliens had arrived. Or maybe they'd been here all along. Hope Kiefer and I hadn't exactly decided about that when we began making the movie. But anyway, the aliens were here.

The aliens had this weird ray, that could make things and people revert to their primeval, archetypal essence, you see. And they were going to turn this ray thingee on everybody and everything on earth. Maybe they just wanted to find out what would happen, or maybe they figured that it would be an original way to take over the planet. We hadn't worked out the alien's motivations yet.

It didn't matter, anyway. Hope's budget was slightly undersize, too small anyway to afford an extended mini-series about an alien invasion. It had been done already, anyway, by that TV series, *v*, and we all know how that turned out. We just concentrated on one little episode in the nightmarish confrontation between humans and aliens.

We would have liked Sigourney Weaver and Dustin Hoffman as the protagonists, but Hope's budget came up a little short for that. Actually, she couldn't even afford Andy Hooper and Bill the Cat, so we had to resort to playdough, which they don't even call playdough anymore; they call it "Pongo."

This stuff comes in strips of colored clay, about 1" x 6" x 1/4". If you want more red Pongo, for instance, you have to buy a whole new package of Pongo, of which red is only one strip's worth. Pongo is so stiff and hard to manipulate, at first, that you've got to knead it until your fingers cramp up in spasms. But once it's soft and you've molded it into something, it tends toward over-enthusiastic placticity, droops wherever you'd rather it didn't, and melts under hot spot-lights. Rather like real life, I guess. Anyway, by the end of the filming, both Hope and I had discovered how that word could be molded into wonderful epitaphs.

"Pongo this stuff," we would say.

Or, "What a load of Pongo!"

So, of course, the cast was made of Pongo. Gracie was constructed of flesh colored clay and wore a grey, clay robe, and blue, cute, rabbit slippers of clay, and yellow, clay hair. Herbert, who was a slightly balding, handsome sort of guy, wore blue clay jeans (a subtle reference to Ursula LeGuin's novel, *Always Coming Home*) and an orange, turtleneck, clay-shirt. They slouch upon a couch stuffing bits of clay popcorn into their mouths, and slurp clayca-cola.

Assisting us were Harlan and Gwen, two real, non-clay grade-school kids, sometimes in residence at Blear House (the site of the so-called studio where we shot our film, better known as "Hope's bedroom"). In fact, Harlan and Gwen spent most of a whole day building clay furniture and spreading clay onto the set walls with us.

"I didn't know that grownups knew how to have fun," Gwen said.

"Yeah, amazing, isn't it?" agreed Harlie.

Another member of the household wasn't as pleased with Hope's and my activities as were Gwen and Harlie that weekend. Hope's three housemates didn't mind much. Andy Hooper wandered through with Carrie Root once or twice, rather glad that we'd involved Carrie's kids in our project. They had errands to run. Carrie bought us chocolate. I never even saw Kim Koenigsburg; her only contact with the film production crew was after it was all over. She found Herbert's clay head stuck onto the bulletin board the morning after we'd finished, a gruesome relic. Hope's cat was the one that resented our activities. Diva was accustomed to having the run of the house, and especially of Hope's bedroom. It tended to be the warmest room of the house anyway, and with the spot-light we'd hooked up to illuminate the set, Hope's bedroom had been converted into the warmest spot in Wisconsin. Diva wanted in, but if we'd let it in, it would no doubt have wanted to sit inside the set, squashing Herbert and Gracie. So we shut Hope's bedroom door firmly (which raised the temperature another 10 degrees or so), and endured the cat's off-key serenade throughout the filming.

It was probably just as well that the cat was exiled—not only for the sake of a

non-catproof set, but simply for the sake of leg-room, which mostly didn't exist. Hope's bedroom has been described as a closet with an attached closet. Since the little room in which she hangs her clothes is a rather large room for a closet, one is never sure which way to interpret that description. Suffice to say, however, Hope's bedroom was small. It was almost impossible to move from the side of the set, around the spotlight on its tripod base, and over to the camera behind which Hope worked, without causing the lamp to wobble and tip precariously. I perspired and sat on a chair beside the set of Gracie's and Herbert's living room, with a corrugated cardboard tray on my lap, on which I constructed clay leaves and vines, and manipulated Gracie and Herbert whenever necessary. Close on all sides were Hope's bed, dresser and TV set. Paints, cups of water, and paint brushes littered the so-called floor space. (We painted the clay television on the set between frames to create the illusion of movement on its screen.) At times, it seemed to take a lot of energy just to maintain friendly relations with one another, but Hope was unsinkable; she kept calling me her "talent" and asking if there was anything she could do for me. I had the impression, at times, that she was afraid I was about to scream, "That's it, that's it! I can't stand it anymore. I quit! Do you hear me? I quit! I quit!"

I'm sure that both of us were quite close to that a couple times, though mercifully, I've forgotten those moments now. My back ached from scrunching up and peering down into Gracie's and Herbert's living room, adding leaf after leaf to the houseplant vines. Hope must have been weary from the tedium of shooting a film two frames at a time, from trying to plan out complex movements, translating frame-by-frame speed into real time. We were both hot, and cranky at times, from lack of sleep. We worked all day Friday and all day Saturday and well into Sunday afternoon. I took the bus home to sleep in between filming sessions, and returned to continue the movie.

Unless you know about animated films, you will probably be as shocked as I still am sometimes, to learn that with all that work, we managed to make a film that lasts only for one, single, solitary minute. (It does, that is, if you count the credits, which Hope and I definitely do.)

The film was projected to last two minutes. Hope figured that out and said that meant we'd have to shoot about 1700+ frames of film. I forget the exact number, which my normal lack of numerical retention might explain, but may also have something to do with an understandable reluctance to think about what exactly that number meant in terms of the weekend, sleeping, and the possibility of getting anything at all done beside the movie during the next 32 hours. Hope was doing the film for a school course in film-making. This was the very last film she had to complete in order to graduate from the University two weeks later.



In a fit of foolish energy several months before, I'd said to Hope, "Hope...? Why don't we do a claymation film for one of your school projects?" I'd love to learn how to do claymation." The deadline was approaching now; we were both committed, and either we finished this movie that weekend or Hope wouldn't graduate.

At the beginning, we had big plans. "It'll be about the end of civilization as we know it," I mused. "Buildings will crumble as the camera looks out the window. A man walking past the window will turn into a cockroach scrambling across the window sill."

Instead, civilization crumbled by this device: Books disappeared off the bookshelf. The Monets metamorphosed into childish drawings of landscapes with suns pressed into the upper right-hand corners. And the house-plants took over.

Actually, the plants' takeover, which had started out as only a minor idea, became the major plot device when we discovered that even with the hot lights focusing their heat upon Gracie and Herbert's bodies, that our clay protagonists' limbs never got very supple.

"You got feet of clay!" we would tell Herbert.

"You got fingers of clay!" I would shout at Gracie, when one of them dropped off as she lifted a can of cola to her lips.

"What a pair of Pongos!" Hope would sneer.

Major moves on Herbert's or Gracie's parts—beyond reaching for popcorn or sipping their sodas—like gross metamorphoses, would have taken weeks and weeks to animate. We would have had to resculpt several versions of Gracie and Herbert, perhaps even several sizes. Now, after having seen the film, *Claymation Festival* at a local theater, I realize that this aspect of claymation would have been considerably easier if we'd built the figures around metal, hinged skeletons. But Hope's wallet wasn't up to the task of purchasing the necessary Pongo for duplicate Gracies and Herberts, much less for steel skeletons, and her hopes for graduation and mine for a normal work week hinged upon producing the film by the end of the weekend. So we abandoned our plans for Herb and Gracie's gradual metamorphoses and let the plants evolve, instead.

Every time Herbert clicked the remote control, several vines would snake out of each of the planters, and in the interim before Herbie clicked again, the vines would fill out with leaves, thousands and thousands of little, green, clay leaves. Herbert would click the remote control and vines would crawl, books would disappear from the bookshelf, and a Monet would turn into a Harlie or a Gwen.

Herbert and Gracie passively stared at the TV screen through all this fecundity. They gulped soda. They chewed their popcorn. They seemed to drown in a sea of twitching,

green plantlife. They became tangled in a vortex of legumes.

When we ran out of green Pongo, and when we ran out of blue and yellow pongo to mix together, and when Hope refused to run out and buy any more Pongo, we cursed, "Pongo!" and then decided to let the plants start to sprout flowers. Pink flowers, red flowers, orange flowers. They popped out one after another, one per frame.

And it was very very late Saturday night.

And we were only 30 or 40 seconds into the movie.

It occurred to us then that the plants' takeover was going to appear a tad explosive when viewed at motion picture speed.

"Pongo!"

Sunday we filmed the punch line. Remember the aliens? Well, finally, Herbert clicks his remote control for the last time, and the television screen suddenly crashes open, and slowly, slowly (well you had to be there, I guess. Actually, it looks more like, "instantaneously...") a big hand and arm, wearing a shirt and jacket sleeve, burst out from the television set. The hand is holding a giant remote control of its own and it is aiming the device directly at poor Herbert and Gracie.

A giant finger presses a button on the giant remote control, Hope overexposes the film for six counts, and when we see the set again in normal light, Herbert and Gracie have been horribly transmuted into two, red, cooking potatoes, their clay arms still recognizable and attached to the spuds, waving wildly in the air.

That's the end, unless you count the credits as I said you really should, because that way, we can say that the film lasts a whole minute.

Herbert and Gracie have turned into couch potatoes, and the title crawls across the frame again: "Remote Control." You see, it's a film with many meanings—an alien invasion film, perhaps. Or, as Hope really intended—an ironic comment on the insidious influence of TV in modern culture.

But you'd have to watch our movie three or four times before you'd have the time to think of multiple interpretations. You might even think it was some sort of weird, horticultural documentary after only one viewing.

Lucky for the aliens, their rays would probably not operate on a frame-by-frame speed, or else they might never attempt an invasion.

After filming the movie, *YPONGOS/HERBERT* "Remote Control," Hope Kiefer fled to England, where she lives, temporarily, to this day. I'm sure there's no connection. She will probably correct me on a few minor points when I see her in Brighton this August. "I only exaggerated a little bit, Hope," I will protest. "Maybe you've forgotten that part, Hope." I will plead.

In any case, I herewith publicly offer you the chance to rebut or embellish, Hope, whichever you prefer...



Funny you should ask.

Sunday, March 16, Scott and I drove home from Anamosa, Iowa, where his folks live. March 15th was the TAFF voting deadline and I was tremendously excited about the outcome of the voting, but I figured that nothing could have been officially done until midnight of the 15th. Patrick and Teresa would have called Greg Pickersgill very late...or rather, very early in the morning of March 16th, in order to give any tardy fan the chance to catch a red-eye plane to New York City and personally hand their ballot to a bleary-eyed Teresa or Patrick. Maybe the telephone conference would take place on the dot of midnight, or maybe early the next morning. It would still be cheap rates on Sunday, after all. And it would be easier to count votes after a good night's rest.

Yes, they probably wouldn't know who the winner was until Sunday morning. That's the way I had it figured. Why stick around the house, getting all hyper and jumping out of my skin every time the phone rang?

So we went to dinner and a movie with Scott's brother and sister-in-law, and drove back to Madison Sunday morning. Well, actually it was early afternoon. We got up late.

By the time Patrick managed to get hold of me by phone, every fan in the free world knew the voting outcome except me. And they were all sworn to secrecy and had promised not to contact me before Patrick and Teresa had been able to talk to me. They'd added up the votes Saturday night. And no red-eyed fan flew to New York to upset the voting statistics.

The phone rang 15 minutes after Scott and I stepped through the door.

"Hello?" I said, trying to keep the excited squeak out of my voice.

"Hi, this is Patrick," said Patrick.

Pause. Pregnant pause.

"You were raised a Catholic, weren't you Jeanne?" he continued. Is this the Twilight Zone, I wondered.

"Yes, but..."

"OK." Another pause. "...Three puffs of white smoke."

(There really was a female Pope, you know. Pope Joan. But I'd rather be a TAFF-winner anyway. You don't have to wear a

funny costume.)

And I laughed madly for a minute or so, and mumbled incoherently for a while after that, jumping up and down, and hugging Scott as Patrick told me that he'd been trying to call me over and over again since the night before. Finally, I settled down a bit and copied down the voting statistics as Patrick read them to me, accepted congratulations from both Patrick and Theresa (who yelled, "Congratulations, sucker!"), and promised to write a note to them the next day with a more coherent reaction than I'd been able to muster over the phone. One with a subject and a predicate, say.

And I did, managing not only a subject and a predicate, but finding myself strangely compelled to begin telling a fannish sort of anecdote, as well.

"All they want is a reaction, Jeanne," I told myself. "They didn't ask for a story." So I cut myself off, jotted down a note in case I eventually decided to flesh out the story about the contests I have won in my life, and stuck the aborted anecdote into its envelope.

I won TAFF. Thank you, all of you. I still tend toward giggles and hopping about when I think about it.

Time to get serious, and get ready, I told myself at one point.

"Time to make plane reservations," I told Scott.

So, Scott and I went to South Towne Travel Agency to get some travel brochures. We didn't intend to make reservations right away; we just wanted some information. But we found the Perfect Travel Agent, and everything changed.

My usual experience at travel agencies has generally gone something like this:

"I'd like to leave Friday and return Saturday in the next week. Please find me the cheapest flight." I say.

The travel agent squints into a computer screen and tells me that a round-trip ticket will cost a small fortune. "With tax, that will come to \$450.00."

"Hmmm," I say, puzzled. "I've heard about an Ozark flight for only \$200 this month."

"Do you want me to check on that?"

It always makes me wonder what else I should be asking them to check.

But we found someone at the South Towne agency who seems entirely different. Kathy checked flight information on two screens at one time, and thumbed through some files in her desk to answer a question I'd asked a moment before, and when she noticed that I was craning my neck around to check her nameplate (I'd already decided that this was the travel agent for me and I wanted her name), she handed me her business card. I figured that we'd discovered a bionic travel agent.

By the end of our fact-finding visit to the South Towne travel agency, we'd made our plane reservations and promised to pay for the tickets in a couple weeks.

What a great way to start! We find the Perfect Travel Agent, who will Take Care of Us, and make sure our flight plans work out smoothly and perfectly! We had faith.

"What a good omen!" Scott said. He's always been a little nervous about flying, but he's going to England with me, and there's no way he's going to get out of the fact that we'll have to fly to get there. But Kathy made both of us feel very confident about the arrangements.

Two weeks later, the day before we would have to pay for the plane tickets (or lose them), we happened to be driving past South Towne. Fire trucks were parked next to the travel agency sign. Water was being squirted on what remained of the building. The odor of charcoal hung in the air. Our travel agency had burnt to the ground.

"I don't think this is a very good omen," said Scott.

Since this part of my TAFF report is being written as it happens, I don't know yet whether to portray this ominous event as a forshadowing of events to come, or note happily that it was just like when the plane flew into the side of the house when Garp and his wife were househunting (in *The World According to Garp*). They buy the house. They figure the worst that will ever happen to this house has already happened. The worst is over.

• • • • •

I've gotten a few other tasks completed since that March phone call. Scott and I both applied for our fannish passports, of course. You have to go to the Post Office for those, and they forward your fannish birth certificates to the secret SMOF headquarters. All I needed for proof of fannish birth was my Big Mac nametag. Scott's case was a little more complicated, since he's never attended a worldcon. He brought along a signed statement from the WisCon registrar and I made a xerox of the letter-of-comment he had in *Whimsy*. The clerk seemed a little doubtful about whether this would be adequate proof, but apparently it was enough, because both of us received our fannish passports a few weeks later.

They're really quite impressive. Since I've never traveled outside the US except for a quick trip up into Canada for a convention in Vancouver, and a possible border crossing by canoe on Minnesota's wilderness boundary waters, I've never needed a passport before. I examined it carefully. There's a picture and personal statistics on the first page, of course—a listing of my fannish birth date, SF group affiliation, publications, and even a space for pseudonyms if I had one. The second page holds the English and French version of the passport invocation:

*The secret Master of Fandom of the United States of America hereby requests all whom it may concern to encourage the fan named herein to meet and converse with them, and in case of Coa Distress to remind them of their true fannish home.*

I guess this last part has been added because of the US coa deficit. I hear there is even a chance that fanzine tariffs might be charged if the fan drain isn't controlled.

Neither Scott nor I were looking forward to the shots, but we gritted our teeth and made the appointment. Better to get it over with, we figured.

I knew we'd have to be inoculated for English humor. And it really wasn't all that bad. In fact, after it was over, the doctor made a dry comment about the process. ...I forget exactly what she said, but she didn't laugh or anything when she said it, and it didn't sound like a joke, but I laughed and laughed all the same. The doctor was satisfied. "It's already taken effect," she assured me. I rubbed my arm, which felt like someone had just punched me. But then I made the mistake of mentioning that we might be traveling to Wales, and we had to get another shot for that. Ever since then I keep thinking I understand what dogs are saying.

Scott's got more to do than me. He's been taking a crash course in fannish tradition and fanspeak in preparation for the trip. He stays up late at night listening to the tapes we borrowed from the library.

"When will the trip report be finished?" asks the voice on the tape recorder.

He learns fast. I hear him responding clearly, without hesitation. "Real Soon Now."

• • • • •

First we've got to make the trip.

We leave Madison—well, Chicago, actually—on Sunday, August 23, and return back to the US on Monday, September 14. In between we'll try to see as much as we can in Britain, go to the worldcon, and visit with enormous numbers of Brit fans. I figure I'll take off another couple days for semi-comatose staring-at-the-wall recovery when we get back, but right now, I can hardly wait to make a start. I've accumulated vast stacks of books and brochures describing British sights and events, and have jotted down a short list of "must sees," which only amount to one side of a legal-sized piece of paper. I'm going to have to edit it down some.

• • • • •

It was my intention to finish both this issue of *Whimsy*, and a one-shot with Pam Wells and Linda Pickersgill before the TAFF deadline. Neither happened. I was slow getting my articles to Pam and Linda, and Wiscon derailed my plans for an early-in-the-year *Whimsy*. I do expect the one-shot to

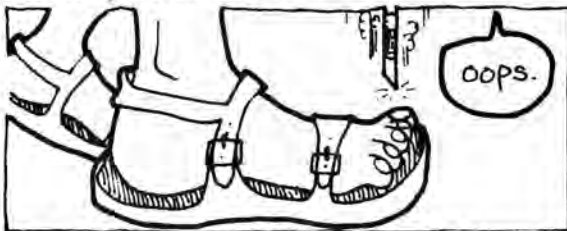


come out eventually, however. The three of us all contribute two articles (in two different styles), which makes six articles all together. We call the zine, *Six-Shooter*, of course.

There are a couple other articles of mine coming out in various fanzines, but I expect that this is the last fanish writing I'll be doing before I return from England. It has been and will continue to be a busy year for me. The TAFF trip of course will take up some time and much more energy. But there are other things going on too. I'll be devoting some time to TAFF administration. Already there's been one auction—at Minicon—and I've been writing to other cons and arranging more. There are, after all, seven boxes of TAFF auctionables that the relieved Patrick and Theresa sent to me from the former TAFF US headquarters in New York. And I'm already sketching out plans for the *J. G. TAFF Catalog*, the first edition of which will come out some time after I return from England.

But even if it weren't for TAFF-related activities, I'd be busy. Things are changing at work for me. Lots of politics and maybe a job change of sorts. And Scott will be moving in with me at the end of July. And we're talking about buying a house within the next year.

I've always kept a do-list. But now I've got lists, plural. I've got a daily do-list. I've got a do-before-England do-list. I've got a do-before-Scott-moves-in list. And before the year is over, I'll probably have a severe personal-gravity list. The leaning tower of Jeanne, they'll call me. But I think it looks like a fun year. I'm sure I'll think of lots of things to write fanzine articles about.



The thing in the picture hasn't happened. . .yet. But it's only a matter of time. I've dropped that exacto-blade so often, and every time so far, I've looked down and seen it quivering back and forth where it's stuck into the floor, inches from my toes. It's only a matter of time.

Typing mistakes and spelling errors happen with a comforting regularity for me. I don't have to worry about them like an exacto-blade through the toes.

For instance, several people, including my mother, asked me to explain why, in the "Gerhardt" story last issue, I kept referring of my mother as "other." They hinted at dark Freudian explanations, but the truth is only mundane. My proofreader pointed out that I'd sometimes capitolyzed the word "mother" and sometimes I'd left the "m" in the lower case.

To be consistant, I whited out the "m"s I wanted to change, and later, went back and retyped them correctly.

Only I missed a few of the corrections. And so some of the "mothers" printed as "others."

Colin Hinz  
1118 College Drive  
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[On the topic of fanzine reviewing]—I try to find some good in every zine I get, even if it be only one article or one follow or something like that. Conversely, if an editor wrecks an otherwise nice illo by using a Jiffy Marker to correct typos, I point this out too...

Who did the illo on page 13 top?? You really should credit these things!

What does SF<sup>3</sup> stand for????...

...You spelled Mr. Ortlieb's name incorrectly. Last time I heard, it was still Marc Ortlieb.

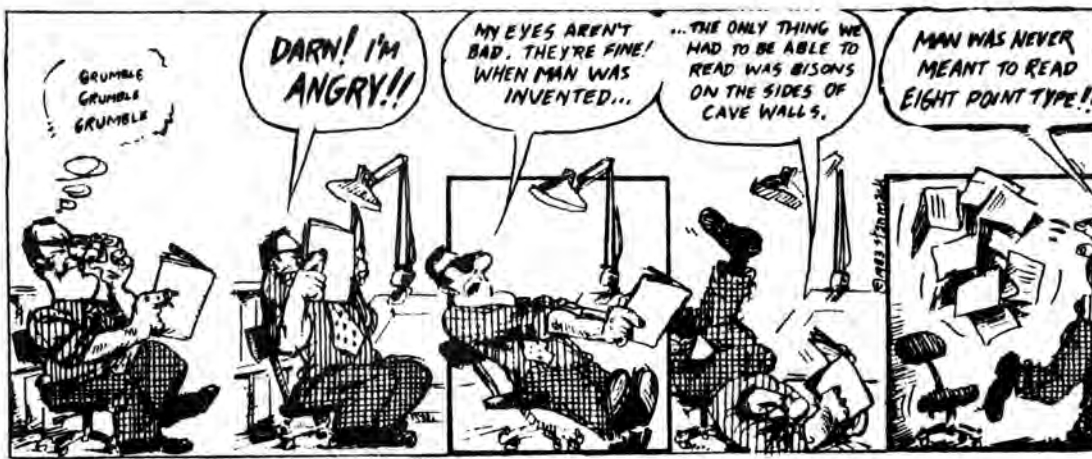
Gosh, what a relief! I almost thought I'd missed an issue. My record stands unblemished, with at least one misspelled name per issue. Sorry, (and congratulations) Marc.

I'm sorry about the felt-tip touch-up. But it was all I could think to do at the time. I'd pasted in the cartoon backwards and the issue was printed before I noticed the mistake. As for the uncredited illo on page 13, I think I covered that in the colophone when I noted that all "uncredited material is mine," etc. It's mine.

SF<sup>3</sup> is the acronym of the Madison SF group's corporate identity. It stands for Society for the Furtherance and Study of Fantasy and Science Fiction. Thus, SFSFSF. Now aren't you glad we abbreviate it?

Red Boggs      Conditional thanks for *Whimsy* #5. I've occasionally grumped that the modern technological wonders, like Selectrics, word-processors, Xeroxes, and photo-reduction have actually reduced legibility of present-day fanzines rather than improved it, and your fanzine is a prime example. The print is small enough to make it a chore to plow through a page or two unrelieved by artwork, as on pages 16 and 17, and then you add to the difficulties by failing to space between paragraphs, to leave adequate margins, and to put running heads on the pages. I think pages 16 and 17 have about twice as much wordage as should appear on an 8½" x 11" page.

I agree, and apologize to you all. I made a mathematical mistake in caculating reduction before I started typing and so had to reduce more than I'd expected. I hope this issue is more readable than #5 was. You might identify with the guy in the cartoon on the next page...



I also heard from T. Kevin Atherton, who was jogged into a nostalgic sigh by my scribble story. "Ah nuns!" he sighed. And Ruth Berman wrote and reported that she was started "to read Steve Miller's letter, beginning 'My grandmother is Dorthea Neale.' I suppose if I'd thought about it, I would have supposed that Dorthea Neale had a family and quite possibly decendants, but I'm so used to thinking of her as the person who sends out the information on the New York Poetry Forum's annual contests and scribbles encouraging notes on the margins, that on some subconscious level, I'd more or less forgotten that she must exist the rest of the year as well." Dave D'Amassa—who sent a form LoC—was spared the fate of Total extinction recently, only by my quick reflexes. A local fan attempted to "correct" his name as I'd recorded it in the SF<sup>3</sup> mailing list—replacing "Dave" with the more familiar "Don." I don't know how long I can guarantee my reflexes, Dave...I would suggest that next time you send a real letter of comment to protect your place on the mailing list. Valerie Eads, who perhaps thought my colophone remark about definitely not liking chain letters was a joke, sent...guess what? Then, Joy Hibbert tried to confuse me with her letter. My aunts and uncles and parents all responded favorably to the Gerhardt piece, but they'd be exceedingly embarrassed to find

their letters reproduced here, so in the interest of fairness, I'm treating them like DNP letters. (My brother Rick is another story. He knows the rules by now.) I also heard from D. M. Sherwood, Rob Jackson, Rob Hansen, Avedon Carol, Dick Lynch, Howard DeVore, Mike Christie, Jim Meadows, Randy Byers, Alexis Gilliland, Pat Mueller, and Lynda Magee. Neil Kvern said, "Picture the exciting gypsy life. Colorful scarves, flashing exotic, nomadic existence...What I'm trying to say is, I've moved again." Not your run-of-the-mill coa notice. Lizzy Lynn wrote, too, saying that she's "still in Berkeley, also still gaffiating," and I heard from Jouni Wääräkan-gas, whose name I'm glad not to have to pronounce; spelling it is enough. Also, Harold B. Bob, Ferk, Karen Schaffer, Steve Glennon, Julie/Crash Gomoll, Irwin Hirsh, Gil Gaier, Steve Johnson, and Joseph G. MacDonald.

Mentioned this issue:

*Science-Fiction Five-Yearly*, edited by Lee Hoffman, with the assistance of Patrick and Teresa Nielsen Hayden, and art editor Stu Shiffman. 3335 Harbor Blvd., Port Charlotte, FL 33952.

Once again, it's your turn.

**30** "Nice Talking with You"